



Union Springs Academy.  
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# Union Springs Academy

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## BRIAN E. STRAYER

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Before 1922, the state of New York was divided into three Adventist conferences: the Greater New York Conference (1902- ), which encompassed the metropolitan New York City area; the Western New York Conference (1906-1922), which operated a secondary school near Salamanca successively called the Tunesassa School (1906-1907), Tunesassa Intermediate School (1907-1913), Fernwood Intermediate School (1913-1917), and Fernwood Academy (1917-1921); and the Eastern New York Conference (1906-1922), which operated Clinton Academy for one year (1920-1921). After a fire on April 12, 1921, completely demolished the girls' dormitory at Fernwood Academy, the Eastern and Western New York Conferences merged their territories and started a new school at what once was a Quaker school in Union Springs, New York, named Oakwood Seminary (1857-1920). For \$4,000, the Adventist Church acquired the property overlooking Cayuga Lake consisting of 13 buildings and a 429-acre farm. The new school term began on September 4, 1921, with 13 faculty members and 96 students who ate, slept, studied, worshipped, and worked in the red-brick four-story Cooledge Hall on Seminary Street.

## 1920s

During the 1920s, as enrollment grew from 96 to 139, the farm made the school virtually self-sufficient with vegetables, fruits, cows, and chickens, besides horses for labor. Students desiring to witness for their faith joined Harvest Ingathering, Good Samaritan, Christian Help, Foreign Missionary, and Missionary Volunteer programs. The school's brass band was locally famous, and the school paper, the "Academy Forum," told of stereopticon (slide) shows, grand marches, picnics, swimming, ice-skating on the lake, and bobsledding down Seminary Street. The boys formed the Measure of a Man Club in 1925, and the girls joined the Girls' Hour Club (which after 1934 became the Chalice Hour Club). Discipline for disobeying the many rules could be severe; boys were whipped with birch rods, and

girls were fined or sent home for serious infractions. By 1929, the school's \$64,000 debt had been eliminated.

## 1930s

The Depression (1929-1938) saw enrollment fall to 61 as the school's debt rose, cutting its net worth by half. Three principals came and left in 1936-37 alone until Victor Campbell boosted enrollment to 124 students and liquidated the school's debt by 1939. To help students pay their bills, school industries were started. These included a print shop, a bakery, a greenhouse, and the farm, which continued to produce thousands of bushels of wheat, oats, barley, alfalfa, potatoes, apples, pears, tomatoes, peaches, and cherries. Boys' Dean Willis King erected an activities building, where students marched, roller-skated, and held parties. His wife, Astrid King, who was a music teacher, led Boys' and Girls' Glee Clubs in performing cantatas, plays, and concerts for local citizens. In 1933, students Ruth Mohr and Mayfred Rose composed the school song, "Our USA." Unruly boys cleaned out farm hedgerows, and disobedient girls scrubbed floors. Well-behaved students gained "parlor privileges," with which a chaperoned couple could visit for one hour.

## 1940s

The prosperous 1940s saw enrollment climb to 169 as net worth reached \$113,000. During the war years (1941-1945), tractors replaced horses, and electricity replaced kerosene lanterns on the farm. The print shop closed in 1945, but George Shumate opened a bakery on campus. Building projects included a new laundry and Sunset Hall, the girls' dorm, completed with the help of student labor in 1949. The curriculum diversified with biology, algebra, business courses, chemistry, and English IV. Students now took New York State Board of Regents Exams at the end of every school year. Both boys and girls marched, camped, and practiced first aid in the Medical Cadet Corps. A new school paper, "The Echo," appeared in 1941 as the academy's mostly white student body welcomed a handful of African Americans and Hispanics for the first time. Half of the student body participated in musical groups such as choir, cantata, glee clubs, and the Melodia Club, all led by female teachers. Couples could date beginning in 1943 at popular moving picture shows on campus as well as at banquets, parties, and receptions.

## 1950s

The post-war years witnessed tremendous growth as assets quadrupled to \$767,000, and most of the full-time faculty, which doubled from seven to 14, had bachelors or masters degrees. New work opportunities opened for students at the crate shop in 1952 (the school's first gender-integrated industry) making yellow Tag Day flowers for the North American Division. Building projects included the completion of Capman Hall (the boys' dorm) in 1958 and the first faculty homes, a row of one-story bungalows on Burchman Drive, beginning in 1956. State Board of Regents Accreditation in 1951 brought significant changes to the curriculum: social studies, physical education, the 4.00 GPA system, summer study leaves for faculty, and more maps, library books, and periodicals. Among the 155 students were 30 Hispanics, 14 African Americans, and 2 Asian Americans, whose witnessing endeavors included Missionary Volunteer rallies, canvassing institutes, temperance contests, and seminar bands to hold evangelistic meetings.

This decade also marked a cultural high point for music at the academy as Bob Pound and Bob LeBard led robed choirs and uniformed concert bands on bus tours all over New York and New England. Music groups with colorful titles like the Melloettes, Madrigals, Coralettes, Harmonettes, Ambassador Quartet, and the Watchmen Quartet flourished. The sports program also diversified with ping-pong, baseball, basketball, swimming at the YMCA, and weightlifting. Dating at increasingly expensive benefit films, receptions, and open houses grew in popularity. Those who broke their "behavior contracts," however, found themselves social bound (unable to date) or campus bound (unable to attend off-campus events) for infringing one of the school's 23 "General Regulations."

## 1960s

The academy prospered under Principal Oscar Torkelson in the 1960s. Enrollment hit 170, assets doubled to over \$1.4 million, and its 17 faculty members all had bachelors or masters degrees. An increasingly complex operation, the academy required 13 committees to manage its academic and business affairs. New work opportunities included the broom shop (with 30 boys and girls), Marco-Mix cement packaging, and a dress-sewing industry. Building projects included tearing down the old – Cooledge Hall fell in 1961, the broom shop burned in 1969, and the farm herd was auctioned off – and erecting the first gymnasium in 1963 and the Newmyer Hall offices and classroom complex, which was occupied in 1969.

An ethnically integrated campus included Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans who were elected to class and club offices and the Student Association in growing numbers. The curriculum also grew more diverse as Math 12, shorthand, French, youth guidance, and driver's education classes were added. All activities became more gender inclusive. Boys and girls witnessed in the craft and story hours of the Voice of Youth and Friendship Team and in summer canvassing, a dynamic scholarship program pioneered by Don Orsburn and Louis Wagner through the Home Health Education Service of the New York Conference. Students played team sports like softball, flag football, hall hockey, and soccer. The most popular "contact sport" for couples after 1964 was roller-skating in the gym. Couples enjoyed hikes, picnics, bus trips, and movies, and watched amused as the faculty fought

“the battle of the kneecap” with the rising hems on the girls’ dresses.

## 1970s

In the 1970s, as assets topped \$1.5 million, the enrollment shrank to 148. But an increasingly professional faculty gained their first continuous contracts, served on 17 committees, and helped write the school’s first constitution. The 10-member board of trustees now included two or three women. Students assembled Nissen Yo-Yos, manufactured brooms at the new shop on Spring Street, and learned such vocational skills as mechanical drawing, small engine repair, aviation, and drafting in the new industrial arts building (1978). When washers and dryers were installed in the dorms, the old laundry closed. New construction projects included building the last of the faculty homes on Burchman Drive and drilling the first of two gas wells to save on winter heating bills. The student body became more international with immigrants from Latin America and Asia and more gender inclusive as girls now filled more Student Association, class, and club offices than boys did. The school’s first student missionary in 1973, Kathy Tollerton, worked with Dr. Knipple in Honduras. A growing service ethic inspired many to plan Academy Days (for visiting eighth graders), work-a-thons, and village cleanups.

## 1980s

A shrinking enrollment in the 1980s (113 by 1988) required severe budget cuts, increased New York Conference subsidies, and a sharply reduced staff (only 10 by 1989). Teachers did double duty, and the school hired more task force workers (college-age part-time employees). The previously all-white faculty now included four Hispanics and one Native American, and the K-12 Board of Trustees also added four to six women of which one was African American and three were Hispanics. For the first time, girls now worked on the farm milking cows and selling fruits and vegetables for “USA Gardens.” By the end of the decade, Union Springs Academy had become the most racially and ethnically diverse school in the Atlantic Union Conference. New building projects included the first chapel (1981) and Finger Lakes Estates (1989), a retirement center behind Sunset Hall. Math teacher Mike Orsburn and science teacher Joe Hamilton introduced computer programming classes, and the alumni association furnished the old typing room with IBM 386-compatible computers. Witnessing methods became more creative with the Christian Drama group, Clown Ministry, and Adopt-a-Grandparent program. Rather than taking week-long pleasure tours, senior classes now built churches in developing countries such as Mexico and the Dominican Republic through Maranatha Volunteers International. Six graduates served as student missionaries to Pohnpei, Finland, Palau, and Taiwan. The decade also witnessed a vibrant music department directed by Charles and Jeri Zacharias, who hosted music clinics, festivals, and workshops for off-campus teachers and elementary students.

## 1990s

The 1990s were a decade of retrenchment as enrollment fell from 119 to 80 by 1999 and a skeleton staff of dedicated teachers continued doing double duty. To delay imminent closure in 1997, the alumni raised over \$403,000 to keep the school going. As a result of Chuck Castle’s recruiting efforts abroad, students now came to the academy from Canada, Finland, Germany, Russia, Korea, Singapore, and Japan as well as from across the United States. By mid-decade, about 43 percent of the student body arrived from outside the New York Conference. On its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1996, for the first time in its history, all the top-level administrators were women: Principal Bev MacLaughlin, Registrar Charleen Hamilton, Development Director Carol Cabrera, Treasurer Terri Foote, Food Service Director Sue Walter, and Farm Manager Donna Weber. When Judy Hodder became principal (1997-2004), she too hired an all-female administrative staff: Carol Cabrera and Virginia Mills (executive secretaries), Tricia Hicks (registrar), Clarice Coston (development director), Sue Reed (food service director), and Carol Raney, the academy’s first female chaplain.

The Board of Trustees’s 17 members now included five women, two of them Native Americans. Under the Board’s leadership, the school blossomed in many ways. Alumni support for Union Springs Academy ranked eighth out of the 42 academies in the North American Division. New industries such as a bread bakery, fish hooks packaging, and SALL (Students Active in Learning and Labor) brooms and mops manufacturing were established, and all jobs became gender-inclusive: Girls could be seen mowing lawns and milking cows while boys typed letters and baked bread. Disabilities and Multicultural Awareness Weeks; desktop publishing and computer graphics classes; mission trips to Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Germany; and summer canvassing programs made students more sensitive, cultured, and spiritually committed. Their prayer sessions, off-campus volunteering, and foreign mission service increased. On campus, they took 15 cognitive, diagnostic, and standardized tests to gauge their readiness for college, where 80-95 percent of the academy’s graduates continued their studies. Their cultural and social horizons also broadened thanks to national and international music and drama trips as well as the growth of gender-integrated clubs, off-campus parties, and intervarsity sports.

## 2000s

Between 2000 and 2010, per student costs rose from \$9,700 to almost \$13,000 a year, yet enrollment rose steadily from 53 in 2005 to 71 in 2010. The conference, alumni, and other donors gave over \$1.5 million to keep the academy open. In 2004, a budget crisis reduced the full-time staff from 13 to seven, so in 2007, the board hired four to six

college-age task force workers annually to fill empty positions. If 67 percent of conference youth did not attend the academy (some enrolled in its new online home study program), 76 percent of those who did went on to college with either a college-prep or an honors diploma (26.5 credits each). Students could now take State Board of Regents Exams in 15 subjects, usually with 60-95 percent passing rates. Principal John Baker (2004-2012) upgraded the budgeting process, and the faculty introduced individualized project-based instruction with course competencies in each class, including Chinese I and II which were offered for the first time.

A matured trust and New York advance capital improvement funds made it possible to add peaked roofs to the boys' and girls' dorms. In addition to working in the dorms, cafeteria, maintenance, housekeeping, and grounds, 10 students fulfilled their 10-hour per week requirement in the horse program, Lake View Foundation (greenhouse), Puppy Tails (dog biscuits), a bakery, and Lancaster Mops. With a new emphasis on the academy's mission, students who took an evangelism course helped with the Easter Passion Play and the Christmas Walk Through Bethlehem; assisted in off-campus evangelistic meetings; and went on Maranatha trips to Honduras, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, India, Uganda, and Taiwan. The music department sponsored music festivals and started a concert choir and the Frontenac Chime Choir, while the physical education department added the Aeros (gymnastics) team, triathlon, a hockey club, snowboarding, and a climbing wall. The cafeteria began offering vegan and lactose-free selections.

As the times changed, so did the rules. Jean dresses, laptops, CNN News, ESPN Sports, and three-second hugs were approved. While the faculty had struggled with student discipline problems such as obscene language, sexual harassment, drugs, cell phone misuse, and stealing before 2010, such misbehavior markedly declined because the classes of 2011 and 2012 created a more positive spiritual atmosphere that would permeate the campus many years after their graduation.

## 2010s

During the 2010s, enrollment plummeted from 83 (2012) to a historic low of 49 (2017), the full-time faculty shrank to nine (assisted by eight part-time staff and two student contract workers), four treasurers came and went in four years, a full-time development director was added, and per student costs rose from \$13,900 (2012) to \$17,100 (2017) while alumni gave \$67,000 for student aid. Students could now register online at the school's website. Hundreds of volunteers during week-long summers cleaned, repaired, painted, and restored aging structures, adding a peaked roof to the gym, building a greenhouse, and donating tens of thousands of dollars after the disastrous electrical fire in December 2016 gutted Newmyer Hall. While the project-based program ended in 2013, the growing popularity of U-Chooz (practical skills labs) enabled students to take sewing, pottery, knitting, or jam- or pie-making once a week. Changing State laws reduced student labor to five hours a week, raised wages to \$10.25 an hour, and ended the agriculture (chickens, greenhouse, garden) programs at a time when there were no significant off-campus jobs available.

Yet amid hard times, students' spiritual life blossomed: Seniors now taught the youth Sabbath school class, others assisted with the Walk Through Bethlehem and Passion Play that drew hundreds of local citizens to campus, and community service projects (visiting nursing homes, raking leaves, doing housework for the elderly) grew. More students also participated in mission trips to Panama, El Salvador, India, Honduras, and Belize. A cultural awakening also occurred as students now directed the Bell Choir, participated in Atlantic Union music clinics, staged "Four Tickets to Christmas" and Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," and joined art and pottery classes. With two-thirds of the school's students coming from Africa and Asia, soccer became the most popular sport, and after 2014, the basketball teams joined Andrews University's tournament. Due to budget cuts, however, the gymnastics program, trips to Camp Y Owasco and Camp Badger, and winter snow tubing at Alleghany State Park were phased out. As technology advanced, so did the regulations governing its use. Headphones were required in the dorm while using technology. The increased use of iPods, iPads, smart phones, and iBoss filters limited internet access on school computers. While the dress code permitted uniform pants (khakis and polo shirts), three-second hugs were forbidden.

As Union Springs Academy nears its centennial year (2021) in an era when Adventist boarding academies are closing, its alumni continue to generously support it. Some, comparing it to "The Little Engine That Could" of 1950s children's book fame, hope that it might, with God's blessing, solve the problems it faces and grow in the future.

## Principals

Claude A. Shull, 1921-1925

Gerald E. Miles, 1925-1927

Linton G. Sevrens, 1927-1930

Clarence S. Field, 1930-1931

Kenneth A. Wright, 1931-1936

William A. White, September-November 1936

A. F. Ruf, November 1936-March 1937

H. J. Sheldon, March-May 1937  
Victor H. Campbell, 1937-1940  
Elmer A. Robertson, 1940-1943  
Adam Rudy, 1943-1945  
Henry T. Johnson, 1945-1948  
Virgil L. Bartlett, 1948-1951  
Roy M. Mote, 1951-1953  
A. Orville Dunn, 1953-1954  
Merle E. Moore, 1954-1959  
James M. Davis, 1959-1963  
Frederick S. Sanburn, 1963-1965  
Oscar E. Torkelson, 1965-1970  
Nelson E. Evans, 1970-1973  
Raymond H. Hoffmann, 1973-1976  
Robert Hricz, 1976-1978  
Ralph Trecartin, 1978-1981  
Clyde Newmyer, 1981-1987  
John Thomas, 1987-1989  
Orest Roshak, 1989-1993  
Charles Castle, 1993-1995  
Beverly MacLaughlin, 1995-1996  
Bill Hinman, 1996-1997  
Judith Hodder, 1997-2004  
John Baker, 2004-2012  
Wayne Edwards, 2012-2014  
Michael T. Coulter, 2014-2016  
Jere Clayburn, 2016-

## **SOURCES**

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