

Exploring Albion Academy's unique history and legacy

Submitted by Nancy Durgin of the Albion Academy Historical Society

The Albion Academy was started in 1853 with two new three-story brick buildings.

There was no discrimination regarding sex, religion or ethnic group. Female students were housed in rooms in Main Hall with male students in dorm rooms in Chapel Hall. About 100 students could be housed along with teachers and their families. There were also ample accommodations available for room and board with private families.

Classrooms were in both buildings. Chapel Hall had an open third floor used for morning devotions, winter physical

education and performances by speakers, band, vocalists and student plays. Main Hall provided the library, dining hall and laundry as well as the Principal's residence.

Because the Academy was built by the local Seventh Day Baptist Church, the majority of high school-aged students came from their congregations in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota Territory and even New York. But there were also students who did not belong to the Seventh Day church. A notable example is the Frawley family from Black Earth, Wis. They were Irish Catholic immigrants whose parents wanted a good education for their nine children, a group that included both boys and

girls. All the children attended the Academy starting in the 1870s with several actually completing the whole course of instruction to graduate. These students became lawyers in Colorado and Arkansas and teachers and principals in Eau Claire, Wis.!

Apparently, the school had a wonderful reputation which was enhanced by the Albion community. Catalogs advertising the Albion Academy consistently reported the fact that alcohol and tobacco use in any form was not permitted around Academy buildings. Students were only taken to Edgerton to the train at the beginning and end of each trimester of school. By 1858 the school was chartered as a Normal School to educate teachers according to Wisconsin requirements.

Before the Civil War began there were even students enrolled from Kentucky. This created a problem as anti-slavery fervor increased. The Kentucky students tore down the U.S. flag on the campus, and then escaped with their lives when the other students retaliated. The Union League was formed, a secret society supporting anti-slavery, and the students dug a secret room under the 7th Day Baptist Church which was used for their meetings as well as a station on the Underground Railway.



Albion Academy about 1860, with Main/Ladies Hall on left and North/Chapel Hall on right. (Photo courtesy of Albion Academy Historical Society)

During the Civil War, Alexander Campbell, a patriotic veteran and former POW, organized Zouave groups to drill on the campus in preparation for enlisting. Zouave was applied to volunteer regiments that wore their own unique uniforms. With only newspapers and word-of-mouth, how did so many young men turn out to fight the four years of this war? And the first year of the War Between the States (War of Northern Aggression - Southern name) was just 13 years after Wisconsin became a state.

Classes continued despite so many older male students going off to war. Returning veterans finished their education and encouraged students to enlist. One, Ole Johnson, related his escape from Andersonville Prison in

Georgia, and later returned to fight. Big motivation for more enlistments. Another veteran, Knute Nelson, returned to graduate and become the Governor (two terms), then U.S. Senator (five terms) from Minnesota.

Shortly after the War Rasmus Anderson, of Cambridge, Wis., joined the Academy as a student and faculty member. He encouraged many Norwegian immigrants to send their children to the Albion Academy, thus requiring the construction of a third three-story brick building in 1868 called South Hall. The population of the Academy student body swelled to more than 300! This building housed classrooms, more male student rooms, meeting rooms for student literary

societies and an apartment for Anderson and his wife.

Anderson was also instrumental in bringing Thure Kumlien, internationally renowned ornithologist, to Albion as a teacher in 1867. Kumlien stayed even after Anderson left in 1869 and created a collection of stuffed birds and animals for Academy study. He was so popular with the students that South Hall was named Kumlien Hall for him. (Our Museum still carries that name!)

From 1880 to 1883 the Academy was closed because of financial problems, but was able to reopen with a new administration, but the same Board of Trustees. Several musicals, dinners and speakers were offered to

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The Albion Academy Basketball Team in 1911. (Photo courtesy of Albion Academy Historical Society)

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