Finding Faith in Education:
The Birth of the Evangelical Theological Seminary

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Located on the northwest corner of School and Loomis Streets, are a collection of buildings that today comprise the northern end of North Central College. However, these buildings were at one time not a part of North Central College (known until 1926 as North-Western College.) For more than 60 years the students who attended were interested in becoming ministers and leaders in their church, the Evangelical Association. These students came to Naperville to attend the Evangelical Theological Seminary (ETS). For decades the ETS was the most successful of the Evangelical Association seminaries and its graduates became ministers and mission workers. The ETS was established at a time when the United States was experiencing numerous changes, especially education. American higher education was changing. Most higher education institutions were no longer interested in the training of ministers and clergymen. Religious institutions had to find new ways to educate its ministers. The nineteenth century witnessed an unprecedented increase in the establishment of seminaries. The Evangelical Association first established North Central College and, like many other religious denominations, soon saw a need for an institution which focused solely on educating their ministers in the way which respected the beliefs of the church. Its location in Naperville, with the large German-speaking population living in the area and its relationship with North Central College, were some of the important factors which helped to make the Evangelical Theological Seminary a significant institution in the Evangelical Association and later, the Evangelical United Brethren Church (which resulted from the 1946 merger of the Church of the United Brethren of Christ with the Evangelical Association).

Emergence of Seminaries

Early colleges in the United States, like Harvard and Yale, were founded to train and supply clergymen as well as “to provide the youth
education in good letters and morals.”¹ These colonial colleges were meant to provide aspiring clergymen with a more liberal education. However, the nineteenth century brought an educational revolution, a growing interest in the sciences related to the industrial revolution that was taking place. These industrial and scientific developments in the post-Civil War Era were a critical period of change in higher education.

After the Civil War, and with the increase in the new industrial jobs, a new type of education was needed. With the new occupations being created by the industrial revolution, there was a need for specialized training for the new vocations. American society was moving away from an agricultural base to one where men were becoming more focused on achieving success in the newly developing industrial world. Thus, higher education was no longer exclusively for the elite.

In higher education, theological education was sidelined in favor of newer disciplines. In response, many denominations founded seminaries to specifically train young men for the ministry. Most required graduation from a college for admission.² Seminaries were usually headed by a group of appointed trustees who were affiliated in some way with the church or connecting institution. It was thought that having a group of trustees who had some tie to the church would have an “intimate appreciation of the needs of the community in general…”³

German Roots of the Evangelical Theological Seminary

In order to understand how the Evangelical Theological Seminary made its home in Naperville, Illinois, the roots of the Evangelical Association and in hindsight the roots of the ETS must first be understood. The story

³ Ibid., 31.
begins with the German peoples of America known as the Pennsylvania Germans, who became the founding group of the Evangelical Association. By tracing the history of this community we can recover their path as they made their way to Naperville, Illinois.

Pennsylvania Germans emigrated from the Palatinate or the “lower Rhrinish [sic] provinces of Germany.”4 In Germany, there were three possible state religions, Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed, depending on the ruler of the region in which one lived. Those who did not share the ruler’s religious beliefs were persecuted by the Church and State.5 William Penn, a British citizen and founder of the state of Pennsylvania, promised religious and political freedom to any emigrants to his state. Penn had previously traveled through these provinces of Germany and conversed with these people.6 They were intrigued by his offer for an escape from the persecutions they faced in their own home. With that, the first German immigrants arrived in October of 1683 aboard the British ship the Concord and settled in Philadelphia where they founded Germantown7.

The next great wave of immigrants from Germany took place in 1708 and settled first along the Hudson River in the colony of New York. Here they founded the towns Newburg and Rhinebeck, as well as others. Yet these people were harassed by the New York colonial government and many moved away from these towns.8 These Germans eventually made their way to Pennsylvania and found the peace they were looking for under the government of the Penn family. Germans wrote to their families to tell them about their experiences. Many wrote about the treatment they had suffered and warned them to avoid settling in New York and instead urged them to come to

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6 Ibid., 12.
7 Ibid., 12.
8 Ibid., 13.
Pennsylvania. By 1748 there were an estimated number of 100,000 German immigrants living in Pennsylvania. These Germans and their descendants would be the foundation of the Evangelical Association.

The Evangelical Church was founded through one man and his beliefs, Jacob Albright. Jacob Albright was born to John Albright and his wife Anna in 1759. The Albrights, like many Germans, fled their homeland looking for religious freedom, settling in Pennsylvania. For many years the Albright family practiced the Lutheran faith. Jacob married Catherine Cope and had nine children, although sadly only three of his children would survive him. The death of his children led to Albright’s spiritual awakening. At one of the funeral services for his children Albright heard the Reverend Anthony Hautz preach heavily on repentance in his sermon. Hautz was a preacher with the Reformed Church but within that, also part of an independent group that met in the Otterbein home. This group did not intend to completely separate from the Reformed Church, but eventually did become the United Brethren Church. This new evangelical movement influenced Reverend Hautz, making him the catalyst that changed the life of Jacob Albright. After spending time developing his beliefs, Albright attended a Methodist meeting. Feeling that the Methodists were a more zealous and well-disciplined group, Albright joined the Methodist church which allowed him the chance to begin his preaching. Albright preached not only in churches, but to anyone who would listen to him, and despite much opposition, Albright was able to influence a small number of people to his more evangelical focus. The first organization of followers, about twenty members, congregated in Bucks County, PA. Within a year a second congregation emerged in Berks County. The first official large meeting took place in the home of Samuel Liesser in Berks County in 1802, and the First General Assembly of the new Evangelical Association occurred a

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11 Ibid., 30.
year later in 1803.\textsuperscript{12} Influenced by the preaching and teachings of Jacob Albright a new faith emerged.

Members of the new Evangelical Association were also a part of the new westward German movement. As recorded by the Evangelical Association, a man named Daniel Stanger was the first of the denomination to arrive in Illinois.\textsuperscript{13} Stanger arrived in 1834 from Warren, PA. Stanger wrote to his fellow Evangelical members about “the beauty of the west.”\textsuperscript{14} A large number of church members followed in his wake and made their way to Illinois. These Evangelical members settled in three groups around Illinois. One group settled in Des Plaines, a second in the Henry County area and the third group made their way to Naperville.\textsuperscript{15} By 1837 the Evangelical Association established their church in Naperville. As with most emigrant groups in Illinois, they settled together in the same place. By staying together, they were able to maintain their German heritage.\textsuperscript{16} This allowed the Evangelical Association to remain primarily German-speaking in its early days. This close knit community would be the reason why, when the time would come for the Evangelical Association to establish a seminary, Naperville and its German-speaking community would be the right place.

The Founding of North-Western College

Plainfield College was founded by the Illinois and Wisconsin Conferences of the Evangelical Association in 1861.\textsuperscript{17} Augustine A. Smith was appointed president of the new college located in Plainfield Illinois. Plainfield College opened with forty students, two professors and one

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 157.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{History of Illinois Conference: Centennial Edition}, 40
The academic structure of the College was heavily influenced by Oberlin College. A.A. Smith had been both a student and an administrator at Oberlin College and he applied the principles he learned at Oberlin to Plainfield College. Like at Oberlin, which was one of the first institutions to open the door for women, Plainfield College was co-educational from its beginning.

In 1864, the College’s Board of Trustees changed the name to North-Western College. The faculty and trustees of the College had quickly realized that Plainfield was not the best location for a school, with, at best, inconvenient methods for students to travel to the school. The board decided that a new location for the school was necessary. Naperville had just acquired what would become the most crucial part of the success of North-Western College and the Evangelical Theological Seminary and that was the railroad.

Naperville was originally included on the plans for the first railroad out of Chicago. However, plans fell through, the railroad chose a different route, and instead a plank road was erected into town. The travelers who had come through on the stagecoach routes now turned to travel on the railroad systems. Naperville no longer was a stop for stagecoaches and suffered a resulting downfall in the economy. Naperville, in order to bring itself back up, would need to become a part of the railway system. This happened in 1864 when the Burlington and Quincy Railroad made its way through Naperville.

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19 Ibid.
An advertisement for access to Naperville via multiple train lines that appeared in the 1877-1889 College Catalogs.  
*Catalogue of North-Western College and Union Biblical Institute, 1876-1877*
With the addition of the railroad into Naperville, North-Western College knew that this would be the appropriate place for their college to make its home. Access to the railroad would allow students to travel to and from the city for business and pleasure as well as allow more students the ability to commute from different areas and attend North-Western College. After reviewing proposals from several towns, the Board began negotiations with a group of citizens from Naperville. Naperville agreed to raise $25,000 and provide land for a new building in exchange for the relocation of North-Western College to Naperville. On May 17, 1870, the cornerstone of what would become Old Main was laid.

**Founding a Seminary**

The Evangelical Association was very proud of the success its new college. At one of the general conferences the committee had said, “resolved: that we are greatly pleased with the undertaking, because we believe that such an institution will be a great blessing to our church as well as to our land.”

With the success of the College it comes as no surprise that the Evangelical Association would come to choose Naperville as the home of what would be their most successful seminary.

Talks about establishing a seminary began as early at the General Conference of 1867 where it was proposed that an institution for theological learning needed to be established. “The marvelous progress of our age in industry, in commerce, in the arts and sciences, in literature and philosophy makes it all the more urgent that the Christian Church be characterized by a similar aggressive spirit.” At the 1871 General Conference, the decision was made to create a theological educational institution in order to train its ministers in a way that would respect the beliefs of the Evangelical

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22 *History of Evangelical Association*, 132.
Association. The institution was to be named the Union Biblical Institute and be connected to North-Western College.

Some in the Evangelical Association were resistant to establishing a seminary. Although they supported the establishment of North-Western College, when it came to theological education it was an entirely different story. Those who criticized the founding of a seminary thought that these schools were “preacher factories.”

Other members of the Evangelical Association supported the idea of a seminary. They stated that “You need not fear dear friends, less this institution become some high and extravagant thing, or even a “preacher factory” as some have already intimated. No, the making of preachers we will leave to Him…”

This reluctance to forming a theological school by the members of the Evangelical Association made the founding of the Evangelical Theological Seminary different from that of other seminaries that were being established at about the same time. The men, who founded Augustana Theological Seminary, like many of the other men of other denomination seminaries, did so with the positive intention of forming an institution to educate their clergymen.

A.A. Smith, President of North-Western College, was a supporter of opening a seminary. Following the General Conference of 1867, the Evangelical Association decided to try an experiment in theological education at North-Western College in 1868. Overseen by Bishop J.J. Esher, the College’s Professor F.W. Heidner taught a course in theology. Bishop Esher was very pleased by the work of Professor Heidner and thought that “the lord (would) increase Professor Heidner’s small beginnings in theological manners to (become) a flourishing school of the prophets.”

The Trustees at North-
Western College thus began to seriously consider the possibility of opening a seminary in conjunction with the College.

The early years of the Union Biblical Institute were not easy ones. The first obstacle to overcome was funding. The goal was to raise $15,000 dollars. When the newly organized Board of Trustees of the Union Biblical Institute met in Professor Heidner’s office on February 19, 1873, they realized only $9,557 dollars had been raised. Since this amount would not cover the fee to provide a professor of theology, the trustees instead asked Professor Heidner to continue to teach the course on theology. The trustees next turned to the State of Illinois and applied for a charter. According to the by-laws, the Board of Trustees was granted the responsibility of the maintenance and administration of the school, making them essentially responsible for the running of the school. The Union Biblical Institute made its first appearance in the 1873-74 North-Western Course Catalog.

The exact date of the opening of the Union Biblical Institute is not clear. It first appeared in the 1873-74 North-Western Course Catalog. However, during the next several years, only one class was offered and that was the theology class taught by Professor Heidner. By 1877 the Union Biblical Institute was finally able to offer a more complete curriculum and so

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28 Ibid., 20.
29 *Catalogue of North-Western College and Union Biblical Institute*, Naperville, Du Page County, Illinois, 1874-75". (Cleveland: Lauer and Mattill, 1875), 25
the date of August 30, 1877, is often used as the official date the seminary opened its doors.

The seminary was open “to all who believe themselves called to God in the office of Christian ministry.”\(^3\) Since there was no official campus for the Union Biblical Institute, classes were held on the second floor of the College’s building (now called Old Main). By 1877 the seminary had two professors and 13 students.\(^3\) In order to attend the Union Biblical Institute, potential students had to have completed the “common school studies: Arithmetic, Geography, Grammar, U.S. History and Elocution” and a collegiate education was preferred before entering but not required.\(^3\) To be considered for admission, students also were required to know German or take courses in German at North Central College prior to attending the seminary.

In its early days the seminary classes were taught mostly in German because the Evangelical Association was a predominantly German-speaking denomination. In its first few years, education was centered on the three main areas of study: Bible, theology and church history with no electives.\(^3\) As the seminary continued to grow and develop, a broader curriculum began to appear. The new curriculum was taught over a two year course period expanded over

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\(^3\) Catalogue of North-Western College and Union Biblical Institute, Naperville, Du Page County, Illinois, 1876-77 (Cleveland: Lauer and Mattill, 1876),31.

\(^3\) Catalogue of North-Western College and Union Biblical Institute, Naperville, Du Page County, Illinois, 1877-78, (Cleveland: Lauer and Mattill, 1878),31.

\(^3\) Ibid.,32.

\(^3\) Eller, “75th Anniversary Seminary Review” 28.
five terms.\textsuperscript{34} The faculty was easily overwhelmed by the course load and in 1883 they suggested that the curriculum be taught over three years instead of two.\textsuperscript{35} By 1890 the seminary had graduated 175 students.\textsuperscript{36}

The Union Biblical Institute had no place to call home. It paid an annual fee to North-Western College so classes could be held in the College’s building, but by 1900 it had become apparent that the seminary needed a campus of its own. In 1907 the property located on the northwest corner of School and Loomis, formerly the home of College professor G.W. Sindlinger, became available. The property was purchased in 1908 for $8,500. The home was renovated to include a chapel, two classrooms and dormitories for the students.\textsuperscript{37}

It was quickly realized, however, that a new building would be needed altogether. The original building was relocated and in 1912, the cornerstone was laid for a new Seminary building (now known as Kiekhofer Hall). The Evangelical Theological Seminary (the name had changed from Union Biblical Institute in 1908) now had a home of its own, right across the street from North-Western College.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Association: Twentieth Session, Held at Indianapolis, Ind; October 1\textsuperscript{st} to 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1891, (Cleveland: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1891),133.
\textsuperscript{37} Eller,“75\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Seminary Review”, 40.
The Seminary campus continued to grow over the years. By the 1920s, the Seminary needed more room to house students. Students had been living in the previously relocated old Sindlinger home. In 1926 work began on the construction of Seybert Residence Hall with a budget of $60,000. By the early 1940’s, the Seminary needed additional housing for an increased student body and discussion began for a new facility. Many of the incoming students entering the Seminary were married and a different style of housing was needed. But due to the restrictions during World War II, a new building could not be constructed. 38 With the influx of more married seminarians in the 1950s, interest returned to creating a home for married couples. Property was purchased next to Seybert Residence Hall and Kimmel Residence Hall was built in 1958. 39

The College and the Seminary

The relationship between the Evangelical Theological Seminary and North Central College (name changed in 1926 from North-Western College)

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38 Eller, “75th Anniversary Seminary Review”, 90.
39 Ibid., 91.
remained even after the Seminary had its own campus. The relationship between both institutions was unique in the sense that they supported each other. The Evangelical Theological Seminary for some time was struggling. The Seminary was still in the process of building their campus. North Central College seeing this and understanding the struggle, proposed an idea that would help both institutions. The campaign was called the “College-Seminary Project”. The main objective of this project was to raise $500,000 for both North Central College and the Evangelical Theological Seminary. The idea was presented to various religious and educational board and councils and the plan was enacted in 1945.

The relationship between the Evangelical Theological Seminary and North Central College did not stop there. The Seminary and College also shared facilities. Both institutions were in need of a better library. The Seminary only had a small room located in the main building which was used as a library which only held a small collection of books. Both the College and the Seminary decided that a new library, one that could be shared by both institutions, would be both a prudent combining of resources and an additional way to strengthen their connection. Talks began between the Seminary and College. After a period of eight months, an architect, G. Orth, was hired to construct plans for a new shared library. The plans were approved and work began on the new library. $715,246 was raised to construct

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41 Ibid.
42 Eller, “75th Anniversary Seminary Review”, 90.
the new facility.\textsuperscript{43} The new library was finished in 1954. The Seminary was then able to share the library with the College. The relationship was a special one that would last until the Seminary left Naperville in 1974.

Since its opening, the Seminary and its students had many great experiences. From being the host to numerous Evangelical Association conferences to having an award winning basketball team, the Seminary was the place of many great events. However another momentous event was to occur in the Seminary’s story. After the 1968 church merger that formed the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Theological Seminary was now one of two seminaries in the Chicago area. In 1973 discussions began with the purpose of facilitating a merger of the Evangelical Theological Seminary and Garrett Theological Seminary. A Task Force was created consisting of representatives from both institutions with the duty to give recommendations to their respective Boards of Trustees for the union of the two seminaries.\textsuperscript{44} It was decided that the Evangelical Theological Seminary would merge with Garrett Theological Seminary to form the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and relocate to Evanston, Illinois. In January 1974, ETS closed its doors in Naperville.

For the next couple of years the ETS campus buildings were left empty. In 1976, North Central College began the process of acquiring the ETS buildings and was successful in acquiring the old ETS campus buildings. With the acquisition of the buildings the North End of the college campus was established. The college completed some renovations to the buildings,

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\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44} “ETS Links with Garrett at Evanston by 1975” \textit{North Central Chronicle}, April 20, 1973.
\end{itemize}
especially student residence halls, and soon North Central students made the old Seminary campus part of the North Central College family.

The Evangelical Theological Seminary was one of the most successful of the seminaries established by the Evangelical Association. This seminary was different from many of the others that were established in the nineteenth century due to the fact that the many members of the Evangelical Theological Association were resistant to having a theological educational institute. In spite of that, once members of the Evangelical Association supported the idea of creating a religious institution of higher education, it made the establishment of the Evangelical Theological Seminary possible. Yet the Evangelical Theological Seminary was indeed a success despite the hardships it faced during its early years. The Seminary would produce students who would go on to do mission work and to become preachers for the Evangelical Association. Instead it was about creating an institution in which men and women could become successful members of the church. Thanks to the support that was found in the community of Naperville, both the Evangelical Theological Seminary and North Central College found a place where both these institutions were able to grow and thrive. The Evangelical Theological Seminary may no longer be in Naperville, but its memory still lives on in the students and faculty of North Central College who today sit in the old classrooms in the Larrance Academic Center and Kiekohefer Hall and who live in Seybert and Kimmel Residence halls.
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