

Finding Aid

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE RECORD GROUP

NORTHWESTERN CLASSICAL ACADEMY

1882 - 1961

NCRG 1

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Introduction

The Northwestern Classical Academy (NWCA) subgroup of the Northwestern College Record Group (NCRG) documents the life of the earliest NWC institution. The records include various founding documents, catalogs, sermons, addresses, photocopies of newspaper articles, photographs, diplomas, pennants, and other memorabilia. Also included are anniversary materials and histories of the academy in particular. Collectively, these archives provide evidence for the origins and developments of faith-based education in the Dutch American settlements of northwestern Iowa, southwestern Minnesota, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, including the educational vision and commitments of the Dutch Reformed colonists.

Size: 4.4 m.

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Processing Notes: Significant gathering, organizing, and translation of this collection was done in the 1970s by Nelson Nieuwenhuis; further processing in the 1980s-1990s was done by Nella Kennedy. This arrangement and finding aid were completed in July-August 2007 and September-October 2009 by Doug Anderson. Revised September 2015.

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Historical Notes

Dutch settlers from Pella, Iowa purchased land in Sioux County and founded Orange City as the center of a northwest Iowa colony in 1870. By the summer of 1882, the colony was large enough and stable enough to launch a private educational institution. Such an institution had been in view from early on, since the town-site by-laws provided for setting aside one-fifth of the proceeds from the sale of town lots for a “college.”

On July 19, 1882 Northwestern Classical Academy was created. Under the leadership of the Rev. Seine Bolks (retired from the pastorate of First Reformed Church, Orange City) and Henry Hospers (farmer, store and land office proprietor, notary public, county supervisor, newspaper editor, and banker), NWCA was incorporated with a constitution, by-laws, and a Board of Trustees. Hospers donated the land and led in pledging funds on August 1, in words of the formal subscription list, “for the building and maintaining of such Academy.”

The purpose of NWCA was, according to its 1882 constitution, to be “an Institution of learning for the promotion of Science and Literature in harmony with, and Religion as expressed in, the Doctrinal Standards of the Reformed Church in America” (Article II). It was a “Classical” Academy not only because of its curricular emphasis on language and literature, but also because it was “to be under the care of, and subject to, the supervision of the Classis of Iowa of the Reformed Church in America” (Constitution, Article III). This classical supervision was directly expressed in the composition of the Board of Trustees. Originally, the Iowa Classis was to appoint the trustees (Article VII). Later, after jurisdictional reorganization, East Sioux, West Sioux, Dakota, and Germania Classes—particularly the first two—were entitled to elect significant specified proportions of the Academy Board.

While the trustees administered the property and finances of NWCA and oversaw the doctrinal and education integrity of the institution on behalf of the churches, a principal led the daily operations. The first principal was not installed until Jan. 1884; instruction had begun the previous fall under the Rev. J.W. Warnshuis. The principals of NWCA (including interims and *NWJC presidents also operating as principal) were as follows:

The Rev. J. A. De Spelder	1884-1888
Ale Buursma	1888-1889
The Rev. James Zwemer	1890-1898
The Rev. Matthew Kolyn	1898-1901
Philip Soulen	1901-1906
The Rev. J.F. Heemstra	1906-1910
Thomas Welmers	1910-1920
Arthur Visser	1920-1921
Gerrit Timmer	1921-1925
The Rev. J.D. Dykstra	1925-1928
*Dr. Jacob Heemstra	1928-1934
Charles Van Zanten	1934-1936
B. Elwood Fahl	1936-1943
*Dr. Jacob Heemstra	1943-1951
*Dr. F. Wezeman	1951-1953
Clara Van Til	1953-1955
Dale Hubers	1955-1959
Steve Ekdom	1959-1961

The turnover of instructors at the academy was generally high, due to low and sometimes uncertain pay, changing curriculum, and heavy teaching loads. Principals not only served as administrators, they also taught, and, when necessary, went beyond their normal loads in order to fill in curricular gaps.

From its inception, the academy accepted girls as well as boys. Preparation for college and for ministerial studies or mission work was stressed. A Classical Course of studies was designed for those preparing for the ministry. For those not intending to go into the ministry, there was a Modern Classical Course. A Normal Course was in place by 1908 for those intending to teach. Whichever course was chosen, all Academy students took courses in Bible (Old Testament the first two years, New Testament the junior and senior years), 4 years of the Heidelberg Catechism, English, and mathematics, 3 years of history, and 2 years of Latin.

When NWCA opened for instruction in the fall of 1883, at first rooms at First Reformed Church and at the local public school were used. In early 1884, a two-story wood frame building—the Pioneer School—was erected for the Academy. This was replaced by the purchase and remodeling of an abandoned two-story wood plank skating rink (formally named Academy Hall, but informally dubbed the Rink and also Noah’s Ark). Continued growth led to the sale of the Rink and the building of a new Academy Hall, a vertically imposing classroom and administration building opened in 1894. Done in Richardsonian Romanesque style, the three-story red brick structure, trimmed with light tan stone, and with a cornerstone motto DEUS EST LUX (God is light), was renamed Zwemer Hall in 1924, perhaps for the entire Zwemer family, not just Principal James Zwemer. It was added to National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and extensively renovated in 1995-1997.

In 1928, NWCA underwent reorganization. By then, it was suffering from competition with public high schools. The Academy became a department in Northwestern Junior College and Academy (NWJC). When the Academy closed in 1961, NWJC had become Northwestern College (NWC), a 4-year Christian liberal arts institution of higher education.

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Related Materials

The history of Northwestern College is recounted in Gerald F. DeJong, [*From Strength to Strength: A History of Northwestern, 1882-1982*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., [1982]).

The Academy (NWCA) had three successive student publications during its independent institutional life before becoming a department of the College (NWJC):

[*The Northwestern Classic*](#) (1892-1906): [online](#).

[*The Cullings*](#) (1920-1921): Dutch Heritage Room and archives.

[*The Monitor*](#) (1923-1925): archives.

In 1928, when the junior college was launched, [*The Northwestern Beacon*](#) became the student publication during the academic year. Academy news then became a subset within *The Beacon*.

Academy materials can be found throughout the NWJC sub-collection. See also NWC Library, Presidents, Campus, Spiritual Life, Student Life subgroups for related materials.

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Arrangement and Series Description

Series 1, Charter Documents & Histories: This series was created by Nelson Nieuwenhuis when he was curator of the archives in the 1970s. It consists of three sorts of materials. First, it contains the Academy's charter documents (printed constitution and by-laws and two ms. subscription lists). Second, it contains photocopies of Dutch and English newspaper notices, typescript translations, and miscellaneous materials documenting the growth of NWCA largely during its first 4 decades. Included in this are materials on the new Academy Hall/Zwemer Hall (its conception, construction, dedication, and its placement on the National Register for Historic Places). Third, it contains histories of NWCA compiled in the 1970s and 1980s.

Series 2, Catalogues: Catalogues for the Academy run from 1887-1888 through 1926-1927. To date, no catalogue for 1895-1896 or 1927-1928 has been found. After 1928, Academy material is included with that of the Junior College catalogues. Academy catalogues typically contain information about faculty, trustees, students, and course offerings. By 1889-1890, the catalogues are clearly being published in the latter year of dates on the title page (e.g., if 1890-1891 is on the title page, publication was in 1891); thus, the information on students and other people is largely retrospective as the academic year draws to a close. They also usually contain statements of the

mission and purpose of the Academy and its relation to the Reformed Church in America which, over time, get rewritten, reflecting shifting emphases. Frequently, the catalogues contain narratives or chronologies of the history of the Academy. Less regularly, they provide information not only on current students, including home towns, but also on alumni/ae. Further, they sometimes provide local business advertisements (1880s-1890s), pictures (of buildings, of faculty, of students), and information on student groups (1920s).

Series 3, Principals: This series was largely created by Nelson Nieuwenhuis, curator of the archives in the 1970s. The bulk of the folders consist of miscellaneous materials about some of NWCA's principals, especially James Zwemer. The miscellany includes notes, photos, photocopies of newspaper notices, a few programs, and isolated correspondence. Added to this original miscellany are the final two folders. These contain principals' reports to the Board of Trustees, documenting in detail the administrative perspective on Academy life, 1907-1927.

Series 4, Photographs: Academy photographs form their own series, with the exception of a few items in Series 3, Principals. Most of this series is from the 20th century; most are also of groups of students, often with one or more faculty members. The pictures provide evidence for who was at the Academy when. Moreover, they provide documentation for some activities (e.g., athletic and music groups) and for material aspects of the cultural and social context of Academy life (e.g., the campus grounds and changing clothing fashions).

Series 5, Miscellaneous: This series brings together a number of things. For example, one box contains a folder of photocopies of Academy songs and yells with several books used at the Academy. The songs are from the 1890s, while 3 of the 4 books are from the first 3 decades of the 20th century. Religion, sentimentality, and school loyalty and cohesion are well illustrated by the songs and yells (the songs were for graduating seniors). Glimpses of the details of coursework and of piety are provided by the books (*Ancient History—Outlines & Studies* contains some of a student's answers to the text's questions). Other boxes contain things such as a commemorative beer stein, diplomas, scrapbooks, and pennants.

SERIES 1.1, CHARTER DOCUMENTS & HISTORIES			
BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1	1	Constitution & By-Laws. (Booklet, 4 copies.)	1882
	2	Charter subscription list. (Original; typescript copy; photocopy; typescript of newspaper notice about Finley Burke, a subscriber.)	1882
	3	Second subscription list. (Original; photocopy.)	1886
	4	Newspaper reports & notices. (Photocopies & typescripts; Dutch & English.)	1882-1958
	5	General Synod of the RCA—Reports on NWCA. (Photocopies.)	1882-1885
	6	Installation of the First Principal, the Rev. John A. De Spelder. (Typescript translations.)	1884
	7	City Ordinance vacating land for New Academy Hall. (Original typescript; photocopy.)	1891

8	New Academy Hall—Plans, construction, first use. (Photocopies, cursive notes, & typescripts.)	1893-1894
9	Dedication of New Academy Hall (Zwemer). (Ceremonies; Addresses by the Rev. James F. Zwemer, the Rev. Peter Lepeltak, & the Rev. JW. Beardslee, D.D. Photocopies of Dutch language report; English typescripts.)	1894
10	History of Zwemer Hall. (Includes National Register of Historical Places materials, 1974-1975 & 1975 article by Nelson Nieuwenhuis.)	1970s
11	George Pass—Architect of Zwemer Hall. (Correspondence, obituary, photocopies.)	1890s, 1931, 1970s
12	Rapelye Library. (Ms. notes on newspaper notices.)	1894-1901
13	Miscellaneous forms.	1885-1891
14	<i>Why the Academy?</i> by Anthony Te Paske—Address to the Particular Synod at Orange City, May 4, 1916. (Booklet, 3 copies; also a typescript of remarks by Te Paske in Dutch.)	1916
15	Thomas Welmers & NWCA—Miscellaneous.	1917, 1926
16	Amended Articles of Incorporation.	1923
17	NWCA Mortgage Bonds.	1938
18	Histories of NWCA. (Includes chapel talk typescript by Nelson Nieuwenhuis, 1973; 2 NWCA articles by Nella Kennedy, early 1980s; partial slide show script by E.W. Kennedy, 1982; & typescript by Renee Wrzesinske.)	1970s-1980s
19	History of Zwemer Hall—Miscellaneous	
20	NWCA—Dedication of Science Hall (1924)	

SERIES 1.2, CATALOGUES			
BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1	1	Catalogues. (Bound volume.)	1887-1895, 1896-1900
	2	Catalogues. (Bound volume.)	1901-1913
	3	Catalogues. (Bound volume.)	1913-1922, 1923-1927
	4	Catalogues. (Individually bound volumes.)	1892-1893, 1896-1901
2 (half box)	1	Catalogue.	1896-1897
	2	Catalogues.	1901-1903, 1907-1911
	3	Catalogues.	1920-1921, 1922-1927

SERIES 1.3, PRINCIPALS

BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1 (half box)	1	John A. De Spelder, 1884-1888. (Photocopies of newspaper notices—mostly Dutch language—and a photo; notes.)	mostly 1880s
	2	James F. Zwemer & family materials, 1890-1898. (Photocopies of & correspondence about Zwemer & family.)	various dates
	3	James F. Zwemer & family photographs. (Family portrait; Zwemer portrait; portraits of each daughter.)	1890s, 19??.
	4	Philip Soulen, 1901-1906. (Photocopy of a newspaper notice.)	1898
	5	John F. Heemstra, 1906-1910. (Notes.)	20 th cen.
	6	Thomas E. Welmers, 1910-1920. (Copies; program; photocopies; correspondence; notes.)	1910-1967
	7	Gerrit Timmer, 1921-1925. (Program; form; portrait; obituary)	1921-1982
	8	Principals' Reports to the Board of Trustees.	1907-1920
	9	Principals' Reports to the Board of Trustees.	1921-1927

SERIES 1.4, PHOTOGRAPHS			
BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1	1	Founders. (Portraits of Seine Bolks and Henry Hospers)	1880s
	2	Principals.	1880s-1890s, 1950s-1960s
	3	Board of Trustees. (Individuals.)	1880s-1890s
	4	Faculty. (Individuals & groups.)	1890s-1962
	5	Faculty & students. (Groups.)	1890s-1930s
	6	Student groups.	1890s-1948
	7	Students. Graduating classes; full student body	1890-1961
	8	Students. Individuals.	20 th cen.
	9	Classes. (Physics.)	1908, 1910
	10	Music-instrumental.	1921, 1935
	11	Music-vocal.	1920s-1940s
	12	Athletics.	1890s-1940s
	13	Alumni/ae. (Banquet.)	1912-1913
	14	Theatre.	1948
	15	Banquet.	1930s
	16	Buildings.	1880s, 1920s
	17	Guide to centennial photography exhibit. (Photocopy of typed ms.)	1982-1983
	18	Theatre	?
	19	Student photographs	1890, 1895, 1903, 1905

2 (over-size)		Principals John D. Dykstra & Philip Soulen	
		President Friedhelm Radant	
		Zwemer Hall Interior	
		Class pictures	1890, 1912, 1916, 1918, 1919, 1926, 1930, 1931, 1934-1941, 1943-1950, 1952-1961
		NWCA School Picture	1934
		Graduation	1930
		Choir	1941, 1946, 1949, 1951-1953
		Basketball	1918, 1942
	NWCA building before 1894		

SERIES 1.5, MISCELLANEOUS			
BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1		NWCA Beer Stein	1882-1961
2	1	Songs & yells. (Photocopies.)	1890s songs; n.d. yells
	2	<i>Classical Atlas</i> . (Library volume.)	1886
	3	<i>Ancient History—Outlines & Studies</i> . (Textbook of Bert Schut.)	1905
	4	<i>Latin Composition</i> . (Textbook of Edward Ruisch.)	1912
	5	<i>Alleluia</i> . (Hymnbook of Mrs. S. Vande Garde, nee Hester Cleveringa.)	1926?
	6	Commencement Programs & Invitations	1896-1898, 1921
	7	Academy Affairs Committee, Minutes	1948-1950
3	ledger	School Recitation Record(book)	1884
	ledger	High School Register/Attendance & Grade Book	1884-1890
	ledger	NWCA Attendance Record ledger	1928-1929
	1	Academy Graduates (incomplete?)	1882-1939
	2	Academy Non-Graduates	
	3	Miscellaneous Reports	1949-1954
4	ledger	Grade Book and Enrollment	1900-1931
	diploma	NWCA Diploma, Kathryn M. Van der Stoep	1915
5	plaque	Plaque made by NWCA students	ca. 1900
	diploma	NWCA Diploma, Edward Ruisch	1915
	diploma	NWCA Diploma, Anna Mouw	1920

	diploma	NWCA Diploma, Gertrude Louise Dykstra	1952
6	blocks	Negatives (15), <i>The Cullings</i>	1921-1922, 1924
7	clothing	Academy beanie, green & white (Henry Mouw)	n.d.
	clothing	Academy sweater, blue (Henry Mouw)	n.d.
	insignia	Academy letter "N"	n.d.
	Porcelain	NWCA plate	n.d.
8	plaque	"Polishing Papa" play, performed by NWCA seniors. Program laminated onto plaque	1940
	album	NWCA Class of 1929. Photo album of Ollie Starkenburg Bruxvoort.	1929
9	long box	NWCA spoons: 1) 1891? From Eva Te Paske Rutledge, 2) n.d., found in Van Peurse Hall 1993	1891? N.d.
	plastic box	NWCA spoon, 1911, from Geraldine Reinders	1911
	plastic box	NWCA class rings, from Dorothy Wiersma Popma and Alfred Popma	1924
	photo sleeve	NWCA Declamatory First Prize, Dorothy Wiersma	1923
	zip lock baggie	NWCA letters (3, blue), Geraldine Van Wechel Postma?	n.d.
	small folder	NWCA music emblem (blue), letters (2, blue), Harold A. Colenbrander, class of 1937	1930s
	small folder	NWCA emblem (red), from Geraldine Van Wechel Postma	n.d.
	zip lock baggie	NWCA letter (red), from Joey Boor, class of 1926	1920s
	1	Blank NWCA report card, Principal Timmer era	1920s
	2	Report cards, Marie W. Rhynsburger	1891-1893
	3	NWCA Diploma, Hardie Beyer	1892
	4	NWCA Diploma, John F. Heemstra (original & photocopy)	1892
	5	NWCA Diploma, F. Mabel Versteeg	1926
	6	NWCA Diploma, Gertrude Bernice Brink	1935
7	N Club patch (blue), Otto Huizenga	?	
10	folio size	<i>The Monitor</i> , NWCA student newspaper (22 issues)	Jan. 1923-Feb. 1925
	index cards	Subject cards from <i>The Monitor</i>	
11	pennants	NWCA pennants (19)	1911-1927
	gown	NWCA graduation gown (gray)	1929-1961
12	Pennants	NWCA pennants (18)	1928-1952
No box	Frame, against wall	NWCA Diploma, Berta Zwagerman	1925

