A History of
Ayden Seminary and
Eureka College

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Throughout the nineteenth century the Free Will Baptist denomination showed little interest in providing educational opportunity either for its ministers or for those who would enter other vocations. Meanwhile, other denominations in North Carolina and the South generally were busy establishing academies, seminaries, and colleges, for the training of their ablest minds. Even though the Free Will Baptist Churches showed significant gains in membership between 1885 and 1900, their failure to provide schools for the education of young people and to encourage these young people to achieve the highest level of learning available to them may have been one of the greatest mistakes of their entire history.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a few forward-looking men in the Pitt County area began to see that definite steps must be taken to remedy this lack of any educational program among Free Will Baptists. In March, 1896, at a Union Meeting held with the Spring Branch Church, Pitt County, the subject of establishing a school was discussed with much enthusiasm. Someone proposed that a stock company be set up to secure funds for the erection of a building. The Union appointed a committee to draft bylaws and to solicit those who would purchase shares of stock. Several persons present that day subscribed for shares and later the committee set a time and place for the stockholders to meet for the election of officers. At the appointed time they met and chose the following as a Board of Directors: J. M. Barfield, president; T. F. Harrison, secretary; W. F. Hart, treasurer; E. H. Craft, E. E. Dail, A. L. Harrington, and W. H. Harris were also elected to the board. A building committee was appointed consisting of W. F. Hart as foreman, and A. L. Harrington and J. M. Barfield as members. It was decided that the school should be located in the town of Ayden, which had a population of about 1,500 and was served by the Atlantic Coastline Railroad.
Meanwhile, the number of subscribers for shares of stock had increased to eighty-nine by May 27, as reported by The Free Will Baptist (hereafter referred to as the Baptist), and subscribers were urged to pay all or part of what they had subscribed by July 2 and the remainder by January 1, 1897. In that same issue of the Baptist, T. F. Harrison in a brief article on “Education” wrote, “It (the school) should be of great and profound interest to all F.W.B. inasmuch as our future success and advancement depend on an education.” He proceeded to tell how it would especially benefit our preachers who have so often struggled with the disadvantage of having no education. As co-author of the History of North Carolina Free Will Baptists, he died on October 24, 1897, at the age of twenty-four, soon after the manuscript was submitted to the press. Had he lived, he would likely have played an important role in the development of the seminary as a member of the first Board of Directors.

As soon as enough money could be raised through subscriptions for the purchase of stock, the work on the first building was begun. It was built on Lee Street in Ayden, a two-story frame structure containing classrooms, a well-lighted library, and a society hall. Several years later this building was enlarged and an auditorium added. As soon as the original structure, a T-shaped building, was completed early in 1898, the first pupils were enrolled under the principalship of Professor J. E. B. Davis, son of the late Elder Daniel Davis, who had been a leading minister in the Western Conference of Free Will Baptists.

The Board of Directors decided that the school should be named the Free Will Baptist Theological Seminary and that it should have a theological department for the training of ministers. In order to provide instruction of the quality that was desired, they looked outside North Carolina to find the right person. In this search they had the good fortune to obtain the services of a man well advanced in years who was willing to serve as principal of the school and teacher of the theological department, the Reverend Thomas E. Peden, A.M., of Sciotoville, Ohio.

Peden had become known to Free Will Baptists in North Carolina through the pages of the Baptist. As early as 1895 he was serving as clerk of a new conference composed of Free Will Baptist Yearly Meetings of the Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia areas which were no longer represented in the General Conference of Free Will Baptists in the North. In fact, they named their conference the General Conference and numbered its sessions to correspond to the triennial sessions of the larger body. An announcement of the next meeting of the General Conference, to convene in Nashville, Tennessee, on October 7, 1896, appeared in the May 27, 1896, issue of the Baptist and conferences and associations in the South were invited to send representatives.

Whether Reverend Peden came for a visit to Ayden or was contacted by letter and offered the post of principal of the seminary is not recorded, but his decision to accept the position was to have important consequences in shaping the future of the institution.

The records of the General Assembly of North Carolina reveal that on March 4, 1901, an act to incorporate the Free Will Baptist Theological Seminary was ratified by the General Assembly. This granted to the Board of Trustees certain corporate rights and powers, including the right to make such bylaws and regulations as deemed necessary to promote the objects of the seminary and the power to grant diplomas. Since some graduates would seek employment as teachers or continue their education in other institutions of the state, the latter provision gave a certain legal status to their diplomas.

In view of the limited number of schools in Pitt County which offered education at all levels and the general needs of the people who would be served, it was decided that the seminary should provide a primary department and several curricula for students in the “higher branches” (equivalent to high school).

A perusal of some of the early catalogues reveals that the faculty carefully planned various courses of study at the seminary, including English and Normal, Theological, Scientific, and Classical. The emphasis in these curricula was on traditional and classical studies, which probably reflects the kind of education the faculty had received. For instance, courses offered in the first term of the Theological Course included Butler and Dunn Theology, Free Will Baptist Faith, Church History, Greek Testament
(Luke), and Homiletics. As additional years were added to the theological curriculum, various liberal arts courses were required, thus assuring graduates that they had received a sound, liberal education along with their theological studies. It is true that the curricula offered seems too advanced and heavily weighted with classical subject matter for students having a limited educational background by today’s standards of curriculum planning, but the value of this kind of education may be seen in the kind of men and women who completed at least part of their education at the seminary. The role of the faculty as models was also an important ingredient in the experience of these students at the seminary. A man of the stature of Thomas E. Peden was bound to have a salutary influence on his students, who saw in this man the qualities which they aspired to develop in themselves.

Hundreds of young men and women studied at the seminary between 1898 and 1925 when Eureka College first offered college level courses. In 1905, for example, there were a total of 133 enrolled in the various curricula, not counting duplicates. The school was coeducational in every department. A positive Christian atmosphere was provided with an emphasis on character development. Every effort was made to teach the students the rules of good behavior, courtesy, and etiquette, and to help them appreciate certain of the arts, especially music and drama. The study of the Bible with emphasis on its spiritual and moral lessons was a regular feature of the curriculum. Recitations before the entire assembly of students was a frequent requirement. If a student gave a recitation that was too simple or “old hack,” he would be reminded to learn something new. Such experiences taught them to conquer stage fright, to think on their feet, and to appreciate various literary forms. In the early days of the school, a literary society met once each week and literary exercises were required of each student at least four times each term. The meetings of the literary society provided additional opportunities for drill in composition, elocution, and debate.

Most of the primary students lived in Ayden or the vicinity, but many of those enrolled in other departments came from other towns, some as far away as Georgia. These had to find board and lodging in private homes for there were as yet no dormitories. Costs were kept as low as possible in order to attract students from other places. Tuition was $5.00 per term of ten weeks in the Common Branches and $8.00 for Higher Branches. Primary students paid only $2.50 per term. The charge for board in private homes was eight to ten dollars per month.

In later years the Board of Trustees offered free tuition for ministerial students as a means of encouraging Free Will Baptist candidates for the ministry to prepare themselves for their calling. This matter of persuading ministers to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them at Ayden became the concern not only of the leaders at the seminary but also of the various Free Will Baptist Conferences. The Central Conference took the lead in this effort when in 1900 they adopted an Education Committee report which recommended “that the Conference accept the theological course of study at the seminary as a requirement for ordination of future applicants for the ministry.” This was a bold but quite necessary step in lifting the standards of the ministry. While there were many who saw little need of education for the ministry, there were others who argued cogently in behalf of such training. If it seems strange to us that anyone should be opposed to the idea of a more enlightened ministry, we should remember that at the beginning of this century the percentage of high school graduates in the total population of North Carolina was exceedingly low. Education beyond the most rudimentary level was the privilege of the few. Those who wanted to further their education away from home were seldom encouraged to do so because there was little precedent in most Free Will Baptist families for sending children away to school.

Those who saw clearly the educational needs of the denomination were not slack in promoting this cause. Each year in the Central Conference, the Education Committee called attention to the seminary at Ayden and the benefits which it provided for the lasting good of Free Will Baptists. Appeals were made for its support through offerings in the churches. In 1903 the Eastern Conference proposed to raise $100 for Professor Peden’s salary. The Central Conference adopted the same plan that year and the following year. In 1905 they recommended that a collection be taken once each month for educational work. The next year they urged support for the seminary, insisting “that each church send a contribution to each conference as an educational fund to be used in this great work as the Conference thinks best.”

In the May 26, 1906, issue of the Baptist, Professor Peden, now president of the seminary, submitted a brief article in which he advocated
the view that the seminary should be placed under the direct control of the Triennial General Conference. This would give it a larger constituency and enable it to appeal to every state in the Union for both students and financial support. The conference would then put an agent in the field who would spend his entire time in the interest of the seminary. Peden also believed that this would place the institution in the best possible light to attract the attention of millionaires who were inclined to give large sums of money to such enterprises. He was undoubtedly aware that some educational institutions had received significant gifts from business leaders and industrialists and dared to hope that such good fortune might befall the seminary if it could achieve wider recognition. In his opinion, no local conference or state organization was yet strong enough to support a seminary or college and, for these reasons, it seemed best to entrust that responsibility to the General Conference. But an alternative solution to this problem appealed to most stockholders of the seminary. In the same issue of the Baptist, it was announced that the stockholders of the seminary would meet on May 27 to consider a proposal to turn the property of the school over to the various conferences or to the Union Conference. George W. Prescott, Chairman of the Board, stated in this announcement that something like this must be done to give the seminary a larger constituency.

For the first time, in September, 1909, the seminary included a college department with two students enrolled. The catalogue lists them as Walter Morris Alexander and Minnie Luvenia McCasky. It was a move which was welcomed in the September 15, 1909, issue of the Baptist, for it gave friends of the school great hopes for the future of the institution. The writer, who was probably Professor Peden, suggested that it could be the beginning of a time when hundreds of graduates would receive their B.S. and A.B. degrees from the seminary. This was a dream that would later be revived in the founding of Eureka College.

In 1910, Professor Peden resigned his post at the seminary because of his age (77 years) and declining health. He had served long enough to set the tone of the institution and to provide theological training for a number of men who were serving as pastors of churches. The Board of Trustees elected Professor J. E. Sawyer to succeed him as principal. In that same year on July 5, the stockholders of the seminary approved a resolution directing the board to convey the entire property of the Free Will Baptist Theological Seminary to a Board of Trustees elected by the Central, Eastern, Western and Cape Fear Conferences in North Carolina, the Midway and South Georgia Associations in Georgia, and the South Carolina Conference, a total of fifteen trustees. Any vacancies on this board were to be filled at the regular annual sessions of these church bodies.

This move was aimed at providing wider representation on the Board of Trustees while at the same time it gave full proof that the seminary was indeed a Free Will Baptist institution which could justly look to the entire denomination for its support. A charter was granted by the state of North Carolina to the Free Will Baptist Seminary and later publications referred to it as Ayden Seminary or as the Free Will Baptist Seminary at Ayden. E. L. St. Claire was employed for a time in 1909 and 1910 as financial agent or "fund raiser" in order to help pay off an indebtedness at the seminary. His role as an evangelist and his articles in the Baptist were a great help in obtaining much-needed funds. Because there was a definite need for a dormitory for the girls and single women teachers, in the summer of 1911, a two-story structure was erected on the campus. The building would accommodate twenty-five students, two teachers, and a matron, while also providing a living room and a music room. It was connected to the dining hall by a breeze-way and was furnished with all conveniences then available, including electricity for lighting.

Also in 1911, another project was begun, the enlarging of the main building at the seminary. The materials were purchased and the work supervised by W. F. Hart, who had served as a foreman of the original construction. When the new construction was completed in the late summer of that year, it included several spacious rooms fully equipped with modern seating and teachers' desks. One of these rooms was designated as the library, which soon contained a good supply of books and reference materials. The building was now a modern facility with double its former capacity. On the first floor was a spacious auditorium, one of the largest in the area. The stage was large enough for dramatic productions and had rooms on either side which could be used for dressing rooms and for storing stage props.

The seating for the auditorium was a major project for someone who had real determination. Anna Phillips, wife of Elder E. T. Phillips, who was serving as editor of The Free Will Baptist,
asked to take on this challenge. Though an invalid, she was a woman of great courage and great heart. She felt confident that the funds for this project could be raised with God's help. Thus she made appeals through the Baptist, wrote letters to friends, and asked that prayers be offered to God on behalf of the needs of the seminary. She was largely responsible for a drama in four acts, which was presented in the auditorium on April 5, 1912. The entire proceeds were to be applied to the cost of providing seats for the auditorium. The play, entitled Dot, The Miner's Daughter, featured local talent and was described by those who saw it as a great success. The price of admission was twenty-five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children.

Other methods for raising funds to equip the auditorium were also used. Finally, when enough money was available, an order was placed for 487 opera chairs and other furnishings. Because of its size and suitability, the auditorium was later used for many important meetings both by the denomination and by the general public.

Since the seminary was still in debt for the building of the girls' dormitory, Mrs. Anna Phillips decided to help as best she could to pay off this debt. In 1913, she again made appeals through the Baptist, asking pastors to receive offerings in their churches for the seminary. She pointed to the need for a boys' dormitory but urged that contributions be made first to pay the $1,300 still owed on the girls' dormitory.

Anna Phillips was later honored for her unselfish labors in the cause of Christian education when the State Woman's Auxiliary Convention agreed to establish an educational loan fund for needy students. Many Free Will Baptist young people have benefited from the Anna Phillips Loan Fund while pursuing their education at a college of their choice.

In the February 5, 1913, issue of the Baptist, there appeared an announcement of the death of Thomas E. Peden, late president of the seminary. He had lived to see both success and failure in his work among Free Will Baptists in the South. The General Conference which he helped to launch was now faltering. He was in attendance when it met the last time at Florence, Alabama, in 1910, but it would not be convened again until 1921. On the other hand, he had played an important role in bringing the seminary to its present stage of development. His contribution as a minister and educator among Free Will Baptists had assured him a place in the memory of all friends of Christian...
education in the denomination. His funeral was conducted by the Reverend R. F. Pittman, a graduate of the seminary, and now a member of its faculty, and his body was laid to rest in the Ayden Cemetery.

The first session of the North Carolina State Convention of Free Will Baptist Churches was held in September, 1913, at Bailey, North Carolina. Along with other important business there were statements made in support of Ayden Seminary and a resolution was adopted asking all the churches to make generous donations to their respective conferences designated for the seminary. The resolution also asked that a committee of three be appointed in each church to help reach a goal of $8,000 for the school.

According to a statement in the seminary catalogue for 1912-13, the school had a two-fold purpose: "first, to prepare boys and girls for the best colleges in the State and for the duties of life; second, to offer to young men who feel called to preach the gospel a course in practical homiletics and theology." On the character of the institution, the catalogue further stated: "The qualities that we desire to distinguish our school are these: We seek to make it a place where character is nourished, where intellect is stimulated and properly trained, where health is considered and cared for, and where good manners are fostered." As to relations between students and faculty, it added, "It is intended that strong personal sympathy between students and teacher shall be characteristic of the school." During these years, the administration and faculty worked diligently to make the school worthy of the support of its friends and an attractive place of study for serious-minded students. The leadership of the seminary was always mindful of the need to recruit good students, especially young men preparing for the ministry. The "backwardness" of some ministers due to a lack of education was often mentioned in the Baptist during this period and they were urged to use the means available to secure a liberal education. The fact that such an opportunity was provided at the Ayden Seminary was underscored at almost every denominational meeting. At the State Convention in 1914, Principal J. E. Sawyer gave an address on education in which he pointed out the needs of the school and the consequences for Free Will Baptists of the failure to patronize the seminary or of neglecting its support.

A Board of Education presented its report to the State Convention each year. In 1916, their report showed that $3,651.24 had been received for the seminary during the previous year, but there was still a deficit of $750. The number of students enrolled was sixty-nine; there were nine ministerial students, eight graduates. Enrollment in the primary department had decreased because of the rapid growth of public schools in North Carolina with the result that the fifth grade was the lowest grade taught in 1913-14 and by 1917-18 the sixth grade was the lowest with only eight students enrolled in that grade level.
THE BEGINNING OF EUREKA COLLEGE

It was clear to everyone that the seminary might soon have to close its doors unless it could be upgraded and begin to offer college work in addition to its high school program and its curriculum for ministerial students. Therefore, a campaign was launched in September, 1918, by the Board of Trustees to raise a total of $50,000 through the sale of bonds for the development of a new administration building for the school. A resolution was passed at the State Convention that year endorsing the sale of these bonds. The campaign likewise received the endorsement of the various conferences which elected representatives to the Board of Trustees of the seminary. These bonds were to mature in ten years and were to bear interest at the rate of five percent per annum. According to the resolution which authorized the sale of these bonds, the proceeds were to be used to improve the seminary property and to erect new buildings.

In 1918, when the nation was at war, farmers in Eastern North Carolina enjoyed an unprecedented prosperity. When the war ended, many friends of the seminary felt that the time had come to make great strides in the development of the seminary with a view toward its becoming a degree-granting college. They understood that it would require more funds than had been raised to operate the seminary in previous years. J. W. Alford was elected by the board as financial agent in 1919. His task was to canvass the churches, conferences, and union meetings in the interest of the campaign to sell bonds. By September, 1920, he had sold about twenty thousand dollars worth. M. C. Prescott was then employed as financial agent to succeed Mr. Alford. The board decided to drop the sale of bonds and to begin the solicitation of cash contributions and pledges for the school. Mr. Prescott presented a proposal at the 1920 session
of the State Convention to raise $300,000 for the erection of an administration building and two dormitories on the new campus site. (The goal was later reduced to $250,000 by the board.) He pledged to devote his entire time to the campaign, attending conventions, conferences, and union meetings as well as speaking in local churches and canvassing in local areas. At the end of one year, he had raised more than $20,000 in gifts and pledges. During that same year, the new campus site, consisting of fourteen acres on the east side of the city, was purchased. An architect was employed to prepare plans for a new administration building.

In 1920, the board decided to close the seminary in order to concentrate on the effort to raise funds for the new facility to be located on the new campus. Closing the school proved to be a mistake, for many lost interest when they learned that the seminary was not operating and students had to seek admission to other schools or not continue their education at all. In June, 1921, the board arranged for a group of ministerial students to be allowed to attend classes at the Ayden High School while also enrolled in theology courses to be taught by a professor who was employed jointly by the local school board and the seminary board.

Meanwhile, work on the new building was begun under the direction of a building committee chosen by the board which included J. F. Hart, F. R. Pittman, Thomas E. Beaman, W. J. Braxton, M. C. Prescott, B. P. Parks, and Dr. M. Hinnant. A picture of the proposed buildings on the new campus was published in the Baptist and announcements concerning plans to build a college at a cost of not less than $300,000 were sent to the public press. One such announcement which appeared in the Daily News stated that a number of towns had offered sites and pledges of support for the proposed college, including Kenly, Micro, Ayden, and Goldsboro. Ayden had made the most attractive offer as judged by the Board of Trustees, eight of whom had voted for the College to remain there.

It was the hope of many that the first building would soon be ready for use so that Free Will Baptists would at last have their own college, but the progress of construction was soon brought to a standstill because the funds needed to complete this first phase of development were simply not available. One reason for this lack of funds for capital outlay was the economic condition of the farmers in North Carolina and the nation.

In the early 1920's, many Americans, especially farmers, felt the effects of a business slump that was brought on, in part, by overproduction. During the war, farmers had been encouraged to increase their production of certain crops by the increase in market prices, but when the war ended there were no controls imposed on the amount of acreage in production. Thus when the demand fell, the prices began to slide downward. This economic situation affected the success of the campaign for funds to build facilities on the new campus. Nevertheless, enthusiasm was still high on behalf of the school when W. B. Everett was employed as financial agent in September, 1921. He continued in the duties of that office until 1926, promoting interest in the college and soliciting contributions for the completion of the new buildings.

Despite the difficulty of acquiring capital funds, there was no lack of enthusiasm among those who understood the value of education. Professor R. B. Spencer, who was later to be chosen as first president of Eureka College, was invited to address the State Convention on the subject of education at its 1921 session held at Black Jack Church in Pitt County. The State Convention and the various conferences represented on the Board of Trustees endorsed the campaign for funds while friends of Christian education labored diligently to help the board achieve its goals.

College officials planned a public meeting at the site of the new building under construction in November, 1921, when the Central Conference was in session at Elm Grove Church, so that Free Will Baptists and friends could see the work in progress.
On the opening night of the tenth session of the State Convention in 1922, Miss Nancy Dall of Ayden delivered an address on the subject of "Cooperation." With special emphasis, she pointed to the necessity of Free Will Baptists working together to achieve the most important object before them, that of seeing that the college is built and equipped for the prosperity of the denomination. Later in this session, another address on "The Importance of Christian Education" was delivered by the Reverend Cyrus M. Johnson of Goldsboro, who stressed the need of Christian culture in the face of the corrupting influences surrounding the youth in this generation. Such enthusiastic addresses by the advocates of Christian education were not uncommon at the annual sessions of the State Convention during the 1920's.

In the fall of 1922, the Board of Trustees decided to reopen the seminary with Professor R. B. Lee serving as principal. It continued to offer a curriculum for high school students and one for ministerial students. Meanwhile, W. B. Everett was working feverishly to get as many Free Will Baptists as possible involved in raising money for the proposed college. In the fall of 1922, he wrote letters to churches asking for the name of a woman in each church who would take the lead in soliciting gifts for the campaign. Through the pages of the Baptist he appealed to everyone to send a contribution so that the goal of completing the new building might be reached by the fall of 1923. Notwithstanding the patient and diligent work of this noble servant, the response was insufficient to enable his dream of an early use of the new facilities to be realized.

In July, 1924, Mr. C. E. Prescott was elected superintendent of the seminary. During the week of August 4-8, 1924, a "Summer School for Christian Workers" was held at the seminary, featuring courses in Bible, church organization, church music, the Free Will Baptist League, Sunday school, ladies aid societies, and evangelism. A faculty consisting of ministers was assembled for the week. A series of lectures was scheduled each evening with prominent ministers and laymen as speakers. A total of seventy-five persons attended this summer school. It was the first such effort to provide a program of training of churchmanship for laymen as well as ministers in the Free Will Baptist denomination in North Carolina.

In his report to the State Convention in 1925, W. B. Everett, financial agent for the college, brought news of the progress being made on the new administration building. Since the foundation was laid in 1921, work had been interrupted time and again, mainly because of a lack of funds. Now $20,000 had been borrowed to complete the work on the exterior and roof of the building and it was estimated that $50,000 would be needed to finish the interior. It was difficult to obtain the amount needed in contributions, partly because many Free Will Baptists did not yet see the need for a college. Even some of the ministers were indifferent toward the success of this undertaking as shown by the fact that they failed to lead their congregations in supporting the campaign for funds.

During the time Mr. Everett served as financial agent, he raised approximately $80,000 for the college. Almost every week he reported on his activities in the Baptist, pleading earnestly for the support of this effort. After serving almost five years as financial agent, he requested to be relieved of his duties and the board agreed to his request in their annual meeting on May 28, 1926. Probably no other person had worked so hard and so faithfully to help build the facilities needed to launch a college program for the denomination. He traveled many miles across the state as well as outside North Carolina soliciting support for this cause. Although he might have been discouraged by the results in the early stages of the campaign, he never seemed to lose his enthusiasm for it. A small tribute was made to him when his friends decided to contribute six hundred dollars toward furnishing the large dining room in the new building as a memorial to him. (Today a room in the Moye Library at Mount Olive College is dedicated to the memory of this man.)
In the summer of 1925, the board decided to begin offering the first year of college while continuing to offer a four-year high school curriculum. The seminary facilities were to be used until the building on the new campus was completed. These plans were announced in the Baptist and prospective students were encouraged to enroll at the seminary with the understanding that they would be able to begin regular college studies there upon completion of high school. The enrollment that year was small, but the faculty carried on their work, sustained by the hope that they would soon be occupying the new building on the east side of town. R. B. Spencer had been chosen by the board as the new president of the institution and under his able leadership the plans for developing a college were finally being carried out.

It occurred to someone that a new college needed a new name. Therefore, in January, 1926, an official announcement was made in the Baptist and area newspapers that the college would be given a new name and the public was invited to send in suggestions to the board.

By February 10, the final date for submitting names, there were ninety suggestions from which to choose. The board met and after a lengthy discussion and the elimination of several possible choices, the name Eureka was chosen by a unanimous vote of the board and this became the official name of the college.

On September 8, 1926, Eureka College opened for the 1926-27 academic year. Final work on the administrative building was still in progress, but a sufficient number of classrooms had been completed and equipped for use so that the College could operate on the new campus. A suitable front had not been built to give the structure a finished appearance; therefore, an effort was made at the annual session of the State Convention to raise $1,500 to finance the construction of this feature of the building.

A mass meeting and picnic was held on the new campus on September 10 to celebrate the opening of the school year and to generate support for the college campaign. Several hundred people attended and listened to speeches urging them to contribute so that work on the new building might be completed before the end of the year. The names of those who contributed were entered on an honor roll which appeared each week in the Baptist.

A special edition of the Baptist, published on December 15, 1926, was largely devoted to information about Eureka College. It included a historical sketch by President R. B. Spencer which described the founding and development of Ayden Seminary, followed by an account of the beginning of the college. Since the education of the ministry was an important consideration in the establishment of the college, an article outlining the curriculum in the Bible department was included. It was evident that such schools as Moody Bible Institute, where L. R. Ennis, dean of this department, had studied provided a strong influence in shaping the offerings in this department. President Spencer also contributed an article on the aim and the future prospects of the college and those whom it served. L. E. Ballard gave a brief resume of the faculty which was followed by an interview with George W. Prescott concerning patrons in and around Ayden who had made great sacrifices for the school. The people of Ayden and members of the Ayden Free Will Baptist Church were among the most loyal supporters of the College. In this same issue a list of those who had given memorial gifts to finish each of the rooms in the new building was published. The amount of these gifts ranged from one hundred to five hundred dollars. There were also various photographs of men who had played an important role in the founding and support of the institution as well as members of the current faculty and student body. Finally, there were testimonials from various alumni representing conferences which sponsored the school. Altogether it was an upbeat issue aimed at winning the support of every loyal Free Will Baptist for this educational endeavor.

Despite the enthusiasm of the friends of the college during this first year on the new campus there was not a record enrollment which would help to ensure its success. The number of students enrolled at the beginning of the 1926-27 school year was less than fifty in all departments, including the high school. There were not enough students for a sophomore class, so that those who had taken the freshmen courses on the seminary campus the previous year had to transfer to other colleges. President Spencer appealed to readers of the Baptist to enroll their children at the college and thus give the institution a chance to prove its value to everyone. In order to increase the number of books in the library as well as to provide scholarship aid to prospective students, young people were encouraged to gather as many as fifty books in various subject areas and send them to the college. In return they would receive a scholarship valued at seventy-five dollars toward their expenses at Eureka College.
When the administration building was finally completed, it was an attractive and commodious facility with an estimated value of $100,000. Arrangements were made for women students to be housed on the third floor of this building. Later, a dormitory for men was constructed in 1927. There were tennis courts on the new campus and space for an athletic field which provided opportunity for the physical development of students.

President Spencer stated at the 1927 session of the State Convention that the college could take care of an enrollment of 200 students with the present facilities; however, far less than that number had matriculated at the beginning of the 1927-28 school year. An earlier announcement in the Baptist had stated that the curricula for the first two years of college would be offered in music, Bible, mathematics, science, languages, and business. In addition, a state-approved high school curriculum was being offered. Tuition was five dollars per month for high school students and six dollars for college students. There was an additional charge of seventy-five cents per month for students in music. In the past, the seminary had been able to attract a much larger enrollment of secondary students. Now high school students were more likely to opt for the public schools and not enough were making plans for college to assure that enrollment at Eureka would fulfill the expectations of its founders. The administration had recruited a faculty which seemed to be well qualified, but without adequate numbers of students it would be impossible to retain them. Income from tuition and gift support was not equal to the costs of operation; hence, the school could not balance the budget for the 1927-28 school year.

The General Conference of Free Will Baptists, which had been revived in 1921, held its eighth annual session at Eureka College on June 12-15, 1928. It was an opportunity for Free Will Baptists from other states to see the new facilities and to meet more of the North Carolina folks who would attend. The Committee on Education endorsed the college and appealed for contributions “between now and January 1, 1929” in response to a proposed campaign “to relieve the school of its present indebtedness.” The committee urged the entire denomination to stand behind the campaign. The indebtedness against Eureka had by this time become a serious problem, threatening the very continuation of the educational program. In addition to the amount owed on the current budget for operations, there was still a large debt for the construction of new buildings and equipment. The total amount of indebtedness, including principal and interest, as reported to the State Convention in September, 1928, was $67,966.73. The fact that the bonds which had been sold in 1918-19 would soon have to be redeemed was causing some concern among members of the board and friends of the college. There was also disappointment in the fact that enrollment at the college had fallen short of the expectations of everyone. It seems that Free Will Baptists had not yet awakened to the importance of college education, both for the denomination and for the individual students. At this point, some were ready to declare that the college had failed. There were those who thought this had happened because the college had tried to offer a program of general education in addition to the curriculum in the Bible department which was designed primarily to provide training for ministers. What the denomination needed, they felt, was a Bible School which would have as its sole purpose the preparation of ministers. The fact that L. R. Ennis, dean of the Bible department, was asked to serve as head of the institution when it opened in September, 1928, and that the college would now place even more emphasis on the education of ministers, suggests that the board was prepared to abandon the idea of developing a broad-based program to meet the educational needs of all Free Will Baptists as well as those outside the denomination.

A resolution adopted at the 1928 session of the State Convention called for a budget of $35,000 to be raised for the college by January 1, 1929, and for each pastor to be required to spend not less than one week without compensation in soliciting funds for this purpose. One of those who accepted this charge without complaint was J. C. Griffin, who reported what these “six days” had meant to him in the December 19 issue of the Baptist. In this experience he found that there were some people who were greatly interested in this cause and some who were not. The latter, he said, are not to blame for their lack of vision. “I am convinced more than ever that if this work fails that the blame falls on the ministers of our church,” he declared. In the same issue, there was an appeal by L. R. Ennis that Free Will Baptists send a gift for Eureka College this Christmas in order to help raise the amount needed to pay accounts outstanding against the institution. On the front cover of this same issue was a picture of the administration building and a suggestion that gifts of five dollars from each minister and ten dollars from each Sunday
School, as well as special gifts from all friends, would make this a merry Christmas for Eureka.

Many friends of the college among Free Will Baptists as well as outside the denomination felt that a great deal was at stake in the effort to save the college from bankruptcy. In their judgment, the honor of the denomination even possibly its survival, was bound up with this cause. To abandon the college in this time of urgent crisis would be a blow from which the denomination might not recover. To save it would require great sacrifices on the part of many people at a time when they could least afford to give large sums of money.

Following the State Convention in 1928, a letter was sent to each clerk and pastor stating the amounts apportioned to each church and asking the pastor to be responsible for raising the quota from his church to meet the goal of $35,000. Several churches in the Ayden area soon responded with either full or partial payments of their quotas. Those who opposed the campaign or who were indifferent did not respond. In January, 1929, L. R. Ennis was still urging ministers who read the Baptist “to conform speedily and wholeheartedly to the resolution adopted at the last session of the State Convention.” According to his statement, only about fifteen ministers had done so. Because of the lack of funds, the operation of the high school department was suspended indefinitely at the beginning of the year. Ennis himself was providing instruction in the Bible department at no cost to the school in order that all funds contributed to the campaign could be applied to the school’s debt. A total of $6,000 was received between September and January, far short of the amount needed to make the institution solvent. There were frequent appeals in the Baptist from both men and women during the next several months, calling on Free Will Baptists to act now to save the college, but all such efforts failed to keep the doors of the college open.

A problem which may have hindered the success of the campaign to keep the college solvent was the rumor that one college official in the past had misused funds. Such rumors and innuendoes, though never proven, were circulated, for there was an attempt by an alumnus of the school to respond through an article in the Baptist to such rumors, denying that any such thing had happened while he was there. He complained that those who heard such rumors were too willing to repeat them without investigating whether or not they were true.

Another factor which hindered the success of this campaign was the fact that Free Will Baptists had never before this decade been called upon to give large sums of money toward any cause; nor had they been taught to give systematically to the church for local needs or for denominational enterprises. Few churches were supporting full-time pastors and the great majority were giving only nominal amounts to the college, to the orphanage, or to other causes. One reason for this was the lack of stewardship training, a defect for which the ministry and the leadership of the denomination must be held responsible. Once the State Convention had begun to develop programs which required large sums of money, there was not a system in place for garnering that kind of support.

When the State Convention met in 1929, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Eureka College reported that the college was not operating and that they had “thrust the indebtedness upon the endorsers of the Long Term Loan.” (Pilot Life Insurance Company had made a loan of $40,000 to the college in 1926 to complete construction on the administration building.) When asked if the Convention wanted the property, the body then voted to stand behind the endorsers of the loan and to pay off all outstanding obligations, thereby retaining ownership of the college property for the denomination. A committee appointed to devise a plan for accomplishing this recommended a two-stage campaign to raise $50,000, half of this amount by April 1, 1930, and the remainder during the following year.

At a meeting of the ministers in Goldsboro on October 15, 1929, it was decided that the Executive Committee of the State Convention should direct the campaign with the help of committees representing each of the four conferences which sponsored the college—the Central, Eastern, Western, and Cape Fear conferences. Each church would be asked to give a definite amount toward the goal for the first phase of the campaign. For the first time, women were to be more actively involved in the effort to raise funds through the appointment of a lady director, who would in turn designate an auxiliary director in each of the four conferences. The women of each church were asked to raise one-third of their church quota.

Since there was no longer an educational program being offered at Eureka and limited use was being made of the facilities there, the Executive Committee of the college board met on
February 6, 1930, and decided to “offer the property free of debt to the North Carolina State Convention to be used as the home of the Free Will Baptist Orphanage and a Bible School.” This offer was presented to the Executive Committee of the convention on February 11. A committee of three was chosen to investigate the merits of such an offer and to present their findings at a special session of the convention on April 2, 1930, at the Kinston Free Will Baptist Church. When the delegates gathered in Kinston they found it necessary to seek larger accommodations. Permission was granted to meet at the Gordon Street Christian Church. When the committee had made the report of its findings, showing the assets and other advantages of each location for the orphanage (the present location at Middlesex or the proposed offer of the college at Ayden), there was a heated discussion of the matter by the ministers and delegates. The vote was conducted by conferences with the strongest opposition registered by the Western Conference. The final tally revealed that 116 voted to accept the offer and 171 voted against it. The outcome of this proposal may have made it even more difficult for the college to obtain the support needed to meet the goals of the campaign to pay off the indebtedness.

By now the nation was suffering from an economic depression and this was evident in the denominational meetings. When the State Convention met in September, 1930, there was little that could be done to help the college except urge a continuation of the campaign for funds and pledge to stand behind the signers of the long term loan. In spite of the enthusiasm shown by friends of the college at this session, no real steps were taken to remedy the problem.

To complicate matters, a leading minister in the Central Conference, J. C. Moye, had been offended by an earlier remark made by the president of the convention concerning mismanagement of the college. Since Moye was chairman of the board, he regarded the remark as unethical and this led to a breach between the Central Conference and the State Convention, which resulted in almost no representation from the conference in the annual sessions of the State Convention in 1930 and 1931. Finally, a meeting was held on August 17, 1932, which led to a reconciliation of the parties in this controversy. Nevertheless, there was much bitterness expressed before the matter was resolved. Perhaps a part of the problem was a conflict of personalities, but the deeper issue was centered around the fact that some men had questioned the integrity of others in the management of a denominational institution.

Before this controversy had been settled, a tragedy occurred which had even more serious consequences. The main building of Eureka College was completely destroyed by fire. It happened while the Central Conference was in session at Free Union Church on Wednesday night, November 4, 1931. The sad news reached the ministers and delegates on the following day. C. K. Dunn, manager of the Baptist, wrote in an editorial, “This is the greatest and most distinct loss that our people have sustained in our history. We have been doing some educational work for more than thirty years and now this burn has practically destroyed everything that has been done in a material way, in these many years.” He recognized the difficulty that Free Will Baptists would have in rebuilding after such a loss, but he did not hesitate to express his conviction that it could be done by a people willing to toil and sacrifice.

The Ayden Free Will Baptist Church was deprived of a meeting place for worship by the fire which destroyed the administration building, along with fixtures and furniture being used by the church as well as church records. The members of this church had given liberally to the development program of the college, having sold their property when the college moved to its new location, and had been among loyal supporters. Now they had suffered a double loss—the hope that the college could be reopened in the near future and a place for the congregation to meet and carry on its activities.

In spite of the shocking news the ministers and delegates received while attending the 1931 session of the Central Conference, some interest was shown in the establishment of a Bible School at Ayden as indicated by a resolution favoring such an idea and a report by the Education Committee which tried to establish the machinery for carrying out this proposal. However, this project met with failure, for the effects of the great depression made it all but impossible to launch a major undertaking of any kind.

Fortunately, there was some insurance coverage on the building, enough to cover most of the indebtedness against it, so that the signers of the long term loan would not have to sustain the loss. But the greatest damage was the sense of failure felt by those who had labored so hard to develop the college, only to see their dreams partially realized and then reduced to ashes.
Such dreams do not die easily if they arise out of the genuine needs and aspirations of a people who feel that they have a purpose to fulfill. Free Will Baptists of North Carolina have such a purpose. For that reason they have undertaken a new venture in Christian education through the establishment of Mount Olive College. The dream of earlier generations, of a college that would offer Christian higher education for young men and women seeking to prepare themselves for a more useful life, is now being realized. Meanwhile, all friends of the college are supporting its efforts to become a four-year institution, so that it can make an even greater contribution to the Free Will Baptist Church and to the larger constituency of eastern North Carolina.

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<th>Principals or Superintendents of Ayden Seminary</th>
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<td>J. E. B. Davis—1898</td>
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<td>Thomas E. Peden—1898-1910</td>
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<td>J. E. Sawyer—1910-1920</td>
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<td>R. B. Lee—1922-1924</td>
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<th>Presidents of Eureka College</th>
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<td>R. B. Spencer—1925-1928</td>
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<td>L. R. Ennis—1928-1929</td>
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AYDEN SEMINARY-EUREKA
COLLEGE ENDOWMENT FUND

At its June, 1983, meeting the Ayden Seminary-Eureka College Alumni and Historical Association voted to establish an endowment at Mount Olive College that will be known as “The Ayden Seminary-Eureka College Endowment Fund.” The following statement was unanimously approved:

In appreciation of the contribution Ayden Seminary, established in 1897, and Eureka College, a successor institution (1925-1931) made to the educational and religious life of its students, the Free Will Baptist Church and the people of North Carolina, the alumni and their families, members of the Free Will Baptist Church and friends of these institutions have established “The Ayden Seminary-Eureka College Endowment Fund” at Mount Olive College.

The purpose of the Endowment shall be to perpetuate the educational and religious heritage of Ayden Seminary and Eureka College through Mount Olive College, a successor institution chartered in 1991 by the North Carolina State Convention of Original Free Will Baptists.

The Endowment shall consist of gifts made to Mount Olive College for this purpose. The principal of the Endowment shall be invested according to fiduciary policies established by the Mount Olive College Board of Trustees and the earnings of the Endowment shall be used to advance the general purposes of the College.”

AYDEN SEMINARY-EUREKA COLLEGE ALUMNI
AND HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
Leonard Earl Harris, President
Mrs. Mabel Jolly Stokes, Secretary

$100,000 ENDOWMENT GOAL

It is the intention of the alumni of Ayden Seminary and Eureka College, their families and friends, to make the Endowment a worthy tribute to their Alma Mater and a meaningful investment in continuing the work of Christian higher education through Mount Olive College.

The Association is inviting families who were associated with the Seminary and Eureka College to sponsor the names of alumni.

An appropriate plaque that will recognize the gifts of these donors will be placed at Mount Olive College. For more information, alumni, relatives and friends are encouraged to contact:

Dr. W. Burkette Raper, President
Mount Olive College
Mount Olive, North Carolina 28365