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Pleasant Prairie Academy

Douglas Firth Anderson

Northwestern College - Orange City, firth@nwcsiowa.edu

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Finding Aid

Reformed Church in America Record Group

PLEASANT PRAIRIE ACADEMY ARCHIVES

1893 - 1958

RCA 6.1

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Introduction

The Pleasant Prairie Academy Archives document the corporate institutional life of a regional academy (high school) of the Reformed Church in America based in Illinois from the last years of the 19th century through the first half of the 20th. The records include the Articles of Incorporation, deeds, minutes of the faculty, photographs, newspaper clippings, financial materials, student records, historical pamphlets, and correspondence. Collectively, these archives provide evidence for the multigenerational growth and acculturation of a German-speaking, Reformed-affiliated Ostfriesian group of Midwestern settlers.

Size: 35.5 cm

Provenance: Presumably, these records were deposited by one or more classis official.

Restrictions, copying, and permission to publish and citations: Use of these materials, copying, permission to publish and citations are subject to the specifications of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America. Contact Russell Gasero, Reformed Church in America Archives, 21 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, Fax (732) 249-5412, E-mail rgasero@rca.org.

Processing Notes: This arrangement and finding aid were completed in 2015 by Doug Anderson.

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Historical Notes

The [Reformed Church in America](#) traces its beginnings to the celebration of communion in the colony of New Amsterdam in 1628 (the local church begun then exists today as the [Collegiate Reformed Church, New York City](#)). Although the Dutch colony became the British colony of New York later in the 17th century, services in the English language did not begin until the mid-18th century. After the American War of Independence, the Reformed denomination also established its independence from the Netherlands. The denomination was incorporated in 1819 as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church; it became the Reformed Church in America in 1867.

Confessions: Historic statements of belief formally affirmed by the Reformed Church in America include the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belhar Confession.

Polity: Each local Reformed church has a consistory, consisting of lay elders and deacons (elected by the congregation), and ordained minister(s). The clerk of consistory is responsible for the minutes; the consistory itself is responsible for the oversight of the life and order of the local church.

Multiple congregations in a geographic area form a classis. The classis consists of elected lay delegates (elders) and all the ministers enrolled in the classis. It has charge of the process of the training, examination, ordination, and oversight of clergy. It also has charge of overseeing local churches within its geographic bounds, including authorizing new ones and disbanding ones deemed no longer viable.

Multiple classes (plural of classis) form regional synods. (An older terminology is “particular synod.”) Regional synods consist of clergy and lay delegates from classes.

The denomination’s highest body is the General Synod. Minister and lay delegates from classes and regional synods, along with other authorized delegates, together have general superintendence of the whole church.

Pleasant Prairie Academy: Eight Eastfrisians left their coastal region of Germany in 1847 and settled near Freeport, IL. Eastfrisia—Ostfriesland—lay next door to the Netherlands, and Eastfrisians were, like most of their Dutch neighbors, Reformed Protestants. The Illinois colony, centered in German Valley, grew, and it also drew the attention of the Illinois Classis of the then Reformed Dutch Protestant Church (renamed the Reformed Church in America [RCA] in 1867). In 1851, the German-speaking colonists’ church was organized as the Silver Creek Reformed Church. Other Eastfrisian colonists settled in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota. Eleven Eastfrisian RCA congregations formed the Pleasant Prairie Classis in 1892. A year later, the classis organized Pleasant Prairie College as an academy and junior college particularly concerned to encourage young Eastfrisians to enter the ministry.

Pleasant Prairie College offered its first classes in the fall of 1894. By then, eight acres for the school had been donated by the Silver Creek congregation, and a main building had been

erected. However, the supporting churches proved unable to fund the junior college, and the school closed temporarily in 1897. It reopened in 1898 as Pleasant Prairie Academy, and it remained an academy for the rest of its existence.

It was supported not only by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie, but also by the Classis of Germania, formed from Pleasant Prairie in 1915 by sixteen churches in northwestern Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota. The two classes chose the academy's Board of Directors. Acculturation of the Eastfrisians and competition from public schooling led to declining numbers of students and financial support. The academy closed in 1958.

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Related Materials

This collection is closely related to that of the Germania Classis Archives. Comparisons of Pleasant Prairie Academy could also be made to Northwestern Classical Academy (NWCA).

Hope College also has some Pleasant Prairie Academy records, about which you can find a link [here](#).

For background on Pleasant Prairie Classis and Pleasant Prairie Academy, see the following:

Schnucker, George. *The German Element in the Reformed Church in America*. Aplington, IA: n.a., 1928. (Copy in the Pleasant Prairie Academy Archives.)

Schoon, Henry Ernest, comp. *The History of Pleasant Prairie Classis 1892-1942 and Pleasant Prairie Academy, 1893-1943*. N.a.: Pleasant Prairie Classis, 1943. (Copy in the Pleasant Prairie Academy Archives.)

Varney, Kev, Beau Spencer, Cody Cutter, Richard Soseman, Phil Shadid, Roberta Van Briesen, and Dave Nanninga. "Pleasant Prairie Academy (German Valley)." *Illinois High School Glory Days*. Last modified January 30, 2005. Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.illinoishsglorydays.com/id686.html>.

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Arrangement

The Pleasant Prairie Academy Archives are in three boxes and one ledger. The detailed arrangement is as follows:

PLEASANT PRAIRIE ACADEMY, 1893-1958			
BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS	DATES
1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles of Incorporation—Pleasant Prairie College, 1896. Proposed Constitution of Pleasant Prairie Academy, n.d. Ordnungsregeln (Guiding Rules) of Pleasant Prairie, revised 1901. Pleasant Prairie's founding, as recounted in <i>Der Mitarbeiter</i>, Oct. 15 & Dec. 15, 1893. (Photocopies.) 	1896 n.d. 1901 1893
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The German Element in the Reformed Church in America, by George Schnucker, 1928, pamphlet. By Laws, Pleasant Prairie Academy, n.d. (Typescript.) Notes on Schnucker, n.d. (Handwritten.) Correspondence to and from State of Illinois Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1951-1957. High School Annual Report and Application for Recognition, State of Illinois, 1953-1954. 	1928 n.d. 1951-1957 1953-1954
	3	Photographs (2)	Early 20 th century?
	4	Pleasant Prairie Academy and Silver Creek Reformed Church, German Valley, IL. (Clippings, bulletin.)	1893, n.d., n.d., 1954, 1968
	5	Correspondence	1925-1950
	6	Commencement programs	1921, 1955
	7	Annual reports & teachers' records	1948-1953
	8	Miscellaneous (student reports, school bus inspection reports, etc.)	1920-1953
	9	Financial matters	1946-1957
	10	Deeds	1893, 1943, 1953
	11	The German Valley Bulletin. (Photocopies.)	1936
	pamphlet	The History of Pleasant Prairie Classis, 1892-1942 and Pleasant Prairie Academy, 1893-1943.	1943
	binder	Record of Standings of Students of P.P. Academy.	1949-1957
	ledger	Register of Students of P.P. Academy.	1932-1956
	ledger	[Receipts and expenditures].	1944-1951
ledger	Record of the Minutes of the Meetings of the Faculty of P.P. Academy	1931-1958	
2	loose	[Student records.]	1912-1955

3	seal	Pleasant Prairie Academy seal	
4	ledger	[Accounts]	1951-1958