

Augustana Endowment Society
Historical Reflections from Feb 2020
by Janet Moline

Why is there an Augustana College and an Augustana University?

On June 5, 1860, Norwegian and Swedish church leaders met in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, to form the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod. Professor Lars Paul Esbjorn and a group of followers established a completely new institution – the Augustana Seminary. Christened in the basement of a Norwegian Lutheran Church in Chicago, the seminary name was drawn from the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Swedish students more than doubled Norwegians.

Augustana Seminary held its first class on Sept. 1, 1860 a founding date shared by our Augustana and by Augustana University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Today, the two schools are among the oldest of the 40 colleges and universities affiliated with the Lutheran Church.

By 1863, Rev. Tuve Hasselquist, president of the Augustana Synod, lobbied for another move. Hasselquist believed that moving the Seminary to a rural area populated primarily by Scandinavians would be in the best interest of the growing school. After a vote, the Seminary moved from Chicago 100 miles southwest, to Paxton, Illinois, and Hasselquist became the school's second president.

Craving their own identity, the Seminary's Norwegian leaders didn't like their subordinate role in the Augustana Synod and at Augustana College. They were unhappy that Norwegian students were mixing their language with Swedish. According to Dr. Bergendoff, they felt that Swedes were adjusting more easily to American culture. They often accused Swedish men of being "un-Lutheran". So, they made the decision to separate from the Swedes. In 1869 with synod permission Norwegians purchased a building in Marshall, Wisconsin, and in 1869 formed the Augsburg Seminary and Marshall Academy. In 1870 in Andover the Augustana synod officially allowed the Norwegians to leave and form their own school. The Norwegian Augustana Synod was formed in 1875, the same year our Augustana moved from Paxton to Rock Island.

In 1881 leaders of the Norwegian Augustana Synod decided to go to move to Beloit in northwest Iowa. While in Beloit, the school reclaimed the name, Augustana Seminary and Academy. In 1884 with the institution needing more room, a group of Canton, South Dakota, citizens across the Big Sioux River pooled their money and bought the Naylor Hotel and offered the building to the Augustana Synod – with the condition that the school move from Beloit to Canton. The Academy remained in Beloit and the name of the school was changed to Augustana College. By 1903, the College moved into a permanent home, its first in 43 years, on the east side of Canton.

twenty-five miles to the north in Sioux Falls, the Lutheran Normal School opened its doors in 1889. Housed in what is now known as Old Main, the Lutheran Normal School's mission was to prepare teachers.

By 1918, city and business leaders in Sioux Falls lobbied hard for Augustana to relocate. Church leaders decided to merge Augustana College in Canton with the Lutheran Normal School in Sioux Falls under the name Augustana College and Normal School (ACNS). In 1926 "and Normal School" was dropped from the name and the site in Canton eventually became Augustana Academy. Despite the similarities in name, it was no longer affiliated with the college and ultimately closed in 1971.

The 2010-11 academic year marked Augustana College's sesquicentennial. A number of commemorative events were held. On June 5, 2010, Augustana President Rob Oliver and Augustana-Rock Island President Steve Bahls commemorated the 150th anniversary of the formation of the Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod during a ceremony back at the Jefferson Prairie Lutheran Church site. They gathered at a table used by the original founders during the creation of the Augustana Synod's first constitution to sign a Sesquicentennial Compact — a document affirming each school's academic mission and desire to remain committed to Lutheran higher education.

On Sept. 1, 2015 — 155 years to the date of the institution's founding, the name was changed to Augustana University to better reflect the broadening of Augustana's academic mission. I think those of us who graduated from this Augustana still add, Rock Island.