

**A BRIEF HISTORY**  
**OF**  
**UPSALA COLLEGE**

*Vincit Omnia Veritas - Truth Conquers All*

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**“A Living Heritage”**

**The Beginning: Brooklyn (1893-1897)**

The 102-year history of Upsala College began on October 3, 1893, when 16 students gathered in the basement of the Swedish Evangelical Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, NY. The decision to start a fourth college affiliated with the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Synod in North America was made by the Synod at its annual meeting held earlier in the year at Augustana College (1860), Rock Island, Illinois. The other two schools were Gustavus Adolphus College (1862), St. Peter, MN, and Bethany College (1881), Lindsborg, KS. The Rev. Dr. Lars Herman Beck (1859-1935) was called to be the first President of the new college. Beck was a Swedish immigrant who had received a Ph.D. from Yale. He turned down the offer of a teaching position at Yale in order to become the President of Upsala.

The name Upsala was chosen to honor both the University and city of Upsala, Sweden, the seat of the Archbishop of the Church of Sweden and the site of a meeting in 1593 – exactly 300 years before the founding of the college – that firmly established Lutheran orthodoxy in Sweden following attempts by the King to reintroduce Roman Catholic liturgy in the Church of Sweden. It should be noted that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the spelling of Upsala in Sweden was changed to Uppsala, but the college did not make the change and retained the older, original spelling.

Throughout its life, Upsala College remained true to a strict understanding of the Christian faith from an orthodox Lutheran perspective and strove to maintain high academic standards.

It was difficult for the college to grow, but by the end of the first year there were 75 students enrolled. Classes were taught in Swedish because most of the enrollees were Swedish immigrants. During the time the school was in Brooklyn, meeting in a variety of church basements, it harbored the hope of having its own campus, a dream that came true in 1897.

### **Kenilworth (1897-1924)**

Upsala moved to New Orange, NJ (later to be known as Kenilworth) in 1897, renting quarters in a vacant farmhouse on 14 acres

offered by the New Orange Industrial Association. In 1899, the first permanent building was erected. It was called Old Main and it contained classrooms, a chapel, and dormitory space.

For 26 years the college struggled to grow but had only meager success, yet many things happened to make the college a viable institution. In 1902, the Upsala Athletic Association was formed. In 1904, baseball became Upsala's first intercollegiate sport. In 1905, the college newspaper, *The Upsala Gazette*, was published by a student staff. By 1906 there were enough graduates of the school to form an organization for alumni, The Upsala Alumni Association. In 1907 the first May Festival (later to be known as Spring Week) was held. It included a play, concerts and a picnic. In 1908, a Debating Club, the Chapel Choir and a varsity track team were established. Upsala's first basketball team came into being in 1909. By 1910 it was evident that more building space was needed so a structure was purchased and moved to the campus. It became known as Commercial Hall. It is interesting to note that in 1910 college graduates made up only 4% of the U.S. population.

It was in 1910 that Dr. Beck resigned as President. That initiated a two-year search for a successor.

### **The Froeberg Years (1912-1919)**

The Rev. Peter Froeberg (1873-1954) who claimed he was the first student to register in 1893, was chosen to be the second President of Upsala College. He was installed in 1912. 1912 was the same year that a gymnasium was erected on the campus and in 1915, during the First World War, football became a varsity sport.

Froeberg's most important task at Upsala became fund raising. The college's finances were in a desperate condition. During the first few years, Froeberg often borrowed money in his own name to pay the debts. He finally secured a mortgage from Scandia Life Insurance Company in New York, which was large enough to pay off the entire debt and end the foreclosing procedures that had been initiated against the school.

In 1918, President Froeberg announced his resignation, effective 1919. The college honored him with a Doctor of Divinity degree before

he left the school.

In 1919, fraternities, which had up until that time been organized on an informal basis, now received formal authorization by the college.

## **The Erickson Years (1920-1936)**

### **From Kenilworth to East Orange**

A search was begun for the next President of the college who turned out to be The Rev. Carl G. Erickson (1877-1936). He was installed in 1920 and would serve in the position for 16 years until his death at the age of 59.

In 1922, President Erickson received his Ph.D. from Yale University. Erickson was instrumental in reorganizing the curriculum and the faculty and the student body increased from 300 to 1,500 during his tenure. He also led the New York and New England Conferences of the Augustana Synod in raising \$465,000 to redevelop the school.

It was during Erickson's tenure that perhaps the most important turning point in the college's history came about. In 1923, the college purchased three large estates on 45 acres of land in East Orange, NJ, where a new campus was established, and in 1924 moved its 300 students to what would become its main campus. Being nearer to New York City was an attractive prospect. It was felt that being in an affluent community in the metropolitan area would be an asset that would bring more students to the school. East Orange, it was thought, would be far more accessible than rural Kenilworth. Although not a howling success, the move did increase the enrollment on a gradual basis.

One of the mansions purchased was the home of Charles Hathaway, a Wall Street banker. It became a women's residence and was named Kenbrook Hall in honor of the former campuses of Upsala in *Kenilworth* and *Brooklyn*.

For the next 71 years, the school would average 1,300 undergraduate, graduate and part-time students, offer 30 majors, employ 70 fulltime faculty members and feature sports teams carrying the name

Vikings. At its zenith, it had a 150,000-volume library.

Evening sessions were begun in 1925 and the first yearbook, "The Upsala-Lite" (later changed to "Upsalite") was published. One interesting note from 1925 is the report that the women's basketball team defeated the women of NYU 15-12.

In 1936, the first accreditation by the Middle States Association occurred. It was in the same year that President Erickson died. It would take two years to name a new president.

### **The Lawson Years (1938-1965)**

In 1938, the fourth President of the college was installed. The Rev. Dr. Evald Benjamin Lawson (1904-1965), a 1925 graduate of the college, would serve in that office for 27 years. Even though there were quite a few problems faced by the school, in the opinion of many, Dr. Lawson's long tenure is thought to be the high point in the school's history. It was a time when the college expanded physically with many new buildings being built. Enrollment reached its peak of 2,000 students during the Lawson years.

World War II (1941-1945) took many male college students into the armed forces. Most varsity sports were suspended for the duration of the war. Following the war, many veterans attended Upsala under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, signed by President Roosevelt in 1944. It was popularly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights.

In 1948, Bremer Hall, a women's residence was dedicated. It was named in honor of Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865) a Swedish writer and feminist. The next year, 1949, Beck Hall, a new classroom building, was dedicated. It was named to honor the first president of the college, Lars Herman Beck. This was followed in 1951 by the dedication of a new men's residence, Nelsenius Hall, named in honor of The Rev. Dr. Gustaf Nelsenius (1853-1913), a founder of the college and first chairman of the board of trustees.

In 1954, the first unit of the College Chapel opened on what was the site of the old Commons. Although there were no definite plans for the completion of the upper structure of the chapel, it was hoped that in the not-too-distant future it would be accomplished. Two years later, in

1956, a new college gymnasium, Viking Memorial Hall, was dedicated. In another two years, in 1958, a residence complex for 550 students was dedicated. It was named Froeberg Hall in honor of the second president of the college. 1964 witnessed a new college library dedicated in honor of Dr. Carl G. Erickson, the third president of the school.

In 1965, the college was saddened by the death of Dr. Lawson. His successor was named the following year.

### **The Fjellman Years (1966-1976)**

In 1966, Dr. Carl Gustaf Fjellman (1919-2011) was installed as the fifth president of Upsala. He would serve for ten years, during which time many good things happened. In 1967, Puder Hall for the Sciences was dedicated. Old Main was renovated for classrooms and language laboratories. During Fjellman's time the College Center, dedicated in honor of Agnes Wahlstrom (a Swedish-born donor), and a new town house dormitory complex came into being (1970-1971), but there were also new challenges. Multiculturalism and integration became key issues for the administration during Fjellman's presidency. In addition, there was an economic downturn in the urban area of East Orange and the 1967 riots in Newark made the college more sensitive to its social environment. The Timothy J. Still program enrolled hundreds of African-American students. Upsala became the only Lutheran college with a majority of minority students. In 1971, the first Upsala Fellows were named. 1972 saw the initiation of the President's Forum. In the same year, Upsala alumnus Carl Degler (1921-2014, class of 1942) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in history for his book *Neither Black nor White*. In 1974 the Alumni Fund hit the \$100,000 mark. In 1975 the Upsala Sports Hall of Fame was established. In 1976, Upsala instituted its first master's degree program. It was in the same year that Dr. Fjellman offered his resignation.

### **The Felder Years (1977-1986)**

The following year, Dr. Rodney O. Felder (1928-1997), was named the sixth president of Upsala. He had been president of Finch College

and presided over its demise. When he arrived in East Orange, Upsala was faced with the same soaring costs and shrinking pool of applicants that bedeviled many other private colleges in the 1970s. Aware of these problems, Felder hoped to devise a plan that would put the college on a sounder footing. He felt that new marketing strategies might recruit more students. When he retired in 1986, not much had changed and the struggle to stay alive continued.

During Dr. Felder's tenure the college received a gift of 240 acres of farmland in Wantage, NJ, with the intent of establishing a second campus there. The gift was from Wallace Richard "Wally" Wirths (1921-2002) a former Westinghouse executive, politician, author, newspaper columnist and radio commentator. The year was 1978. The Wirths Campus, as it was popularly called, began operation in 1979. Associate degrees were awarded for the first time in 1981 at the satellite campus.

In the same year (1981) a \$12-million Capital Campaign was inaugurated. There were more than 300 students enrolled at the Wirths Campus. The college was considering moving to the Sussex County location in light of the deterioration of East Orange. Severe financial problems and a declining enrollment continued to plague the school. Academic performance suffered with the admission of under-qualified students, and lower-income students unable to pay tuition exacerbated financial problems. The demographics of East Orange had changed in the aftermath of the Newark riots and Upsala was catering to minority students—a move thought to have upset older white alumni and donors. East Orange's tax base and socio-economic conditions continued to deteriorate with an increase in crime statistics, which made the college an unattractive setting for prospective students.

After much discussion and debate, the decision was made to remain in East Orange and serve as a Christian witness to the community and its people. However, declining enrollment and financial difficulties did not abate and for many, the handwriting was on the wall.

### **The Schramm Years (1987-1988)**

In 1987, The Rev. Dr. David Eugene Schramm (1936- ) became the

seventh president of Upsala and served for two years. At the time of his resignation it was reported that the reason “was one of differences of opinion as to how the college could best achieve its goal while preserving its mission.”

### **The Karsten Years (1988-1994)**

The Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar Karsten (1930-2014) was named the eighth president of the school and served for six years until 1994. During that time he valiantly tried to turn things around. Some things did change and there were a few encouraging signs, but it was never enough to make Upsala an enduring and viable entity. Projections made in August 1990 showed that by June 1992 there would be no more money and Upsala College would have to close.

### **The End of the Story (1995)**

In 1995, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools announced that as a result of the decline in academic standards and the school's ongoing financial problems, it would not be renewing the college's accreditation. On May 1, 1995, the college's board of trustees voted to close the school when its accreditation expired on May 31, 1995.

Upsala's ninth and last president, Paul V. DeLomba, a partner and project manager with the financial services and accountancy firm Price, Waterhouse was hired by the board of trustees to close the college and dissolve its assets. The school was \$12.5 million in debt and the Wirths family bought their farm in Wantage back from the college for \$75,000.

### **Subsequently (1995- )**

After the closing of the college, the East Orange campus was sold to the City of East Orange to build a new high school on half of the site constituting the college's East Campus. Several of the college buildings (including Beck Hall, Puder Hall, Viking Memorial Hall and the Agnes Wahlstrom College Center) were incorporated into the new East Orange Campus High School. During this same time, the West Campus



deteriorated and became blighted and its buildings were looted, vandalized and one building lost to arson. This 20-acre section of the campus was slated for residential redevelopment by the city government and demolished in 2006. It is now the site of the Woodlands at Upsala, featuring 48 single family three and four bedroom homes and 16 townhouses.

## FYI

Some enrollment figures:

1893 – 16  
1894 - 75  
1908 - 86  
1924 - 300  
1950s - 2,000  
1969 - 1,600  
1977 - 1,500  
1990 - 475  
1995 - 435

In 1995, the college records were donated to the Swenson Center at Augustana College, Rock Island, IL 61201. There are 508 boxes amounting to 234 linear feet. The records cover much of the life and scope of the College from its founding in 1893 to its closing in 1995. Included are the papers of the Presidents, the records from the Dean's offices, the minutes of the Board of Directors, the comptroller, and other administrative offices. The collection also contains faculty publications, records of student organizations and photographs depicting early campus life. The collection is open for research and a limited amount of copies can be requested via mail.

Student transcripts are in the custody of Felician University, Lodi, NJ. They can be accessed by writing to Upsala Transcripts, PO Box 186, Lodi, NJ 07644. You must include your name at the time you were at Upsala, date of birth, Social Security number, and the approximate dates of attendance. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope along with a \$10 certified bank check or money order (personal checks are not accepted and any request with them will be returned). Allow 6-8 business days for processing.