

Summer 1977

# "Unser Seminar": The Story of Clinton German Seminary

Marley Soper  
*Andrews University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>

Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Soper, Marley, ""Unser Seminar": The Story of Clinton German Seminary" (1977). *Faculty Publications*. 994.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/994>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

# ✻ Anser Seminar ✻

courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room



## The Story of Clinton German Seminary

**Marley Soper**

*In addition to serving on the library staff, Marley Soper is completing an M.A. in history at Andrews University.*

**S**EVENTH-DAY Adventist leaders expressed increasing concern for taking the gospel to the German and Scandinavian Americans as the twentieth century moved toward its second decade. As educator J. F. Simon asserted regarding the Germans, "The burden of carrying to them this message rests largely with those speaking that

# „Unser Seminar“

## School Song of the Clinton Theological Seminary

Text: C. F. Schwedrat

Musik: H. G. Wakeham

Singt ihr jugendlichen Chöre, Bringt ein Loblied dar,

Wie das Brausen stürmischer Meere, Un-ferm Se-mi-nar.

### Chor

Al-ma Ma-ter, dei-ne Min-der, Die Stu-den-ten-schar,

Sin-gen gar fröh-lich: Heil dir, Se-mi-nar!

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 2. Auf nach Clinton, deutsche Jugend:<br>Das ist unser Ort,<br>Wo wir lernen Weisheit, Tugend,<br>Schätze aus dem Wort. | 4. Ja, wir kommen, schlägt die Stunde:<br>Halt' nur treulich Wacht,<br>Dies ist Kunde von dem Munde<br>Der Studentenschaft. |
| 3. Von den Kämpfern in den Reihen<br>Schallt's zum Seminar:<br>Sendet Streiter, die sich weihen<br>Gott auf immerdar.   | 5. Hört das „Echo“ laut erschallen<br>Von den Feldern her:<br>Uns erreicht dein Widerhallen<br>Über Land und Meer.          |

tongue. Germans can be reached best by Germans." He went on to say that while many make use of English in their business affairs, they pray and read their Bibles in German. "The German's religion is German," he stated. A teacher, R. E. Hoen, later explained, "We needed ministers who could conduct the work in those languages and they did not learn the vocabulary of the message in their own tongue in an English speaking milieu. A person's religion, after all, has its roots in the language of his culture." He added that "even though a person may learn to speak English in a commercial way, religiously his message is all in his tongue."

As early as 1883, denominational leaders had begun educational work for the Germans in Battle Creek, Michigan. They continued the effort there until 1898 when they moved it to Union College at College View, Nebraska, where a regular German Department was established, and where the German Adventist youth were educated until 1910. It had become apparent by this time that a German Department in an English-speaking school was inadequate. The students frequently learned to speak the English language more fluently than their mother tongue. As a result they tended to participate in the denomination's efforts for those who spoke English rather than German. Because they desired to reach the German-speaking Americans, denomi-

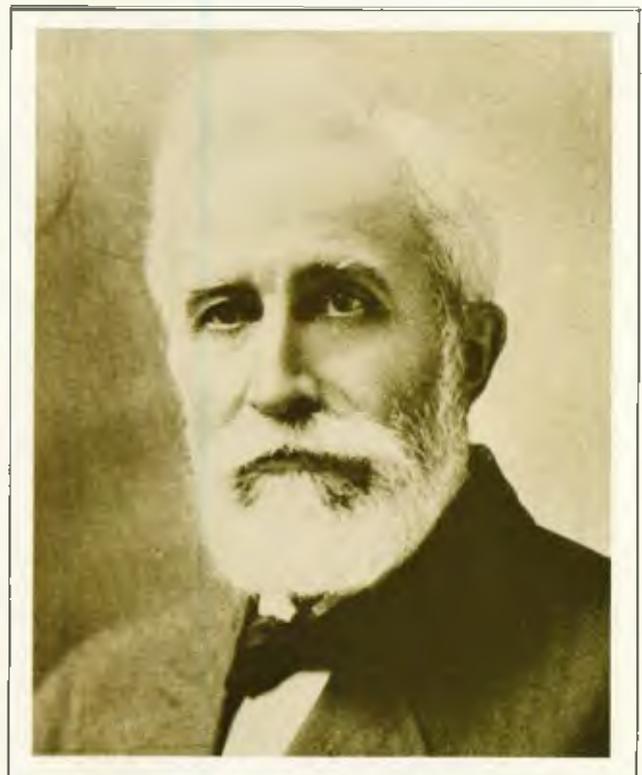
national leaders thought it much easier and more natural to train students for this purpose who already knew German rather than take those who knew nothing about the language.

Problems had also arisen at Union College shortly after its German Department had been established. The major consideration was space. As Union College grew, the English Department took over some of the space provided for the German students. J. W. Loughhead of Union College had reported as early as 1893 that the school was unable to give to the German students all that they expected to have, because "we are obliged to place the young men of the English Department in the portion of the College Home designed for Germans. The best results cannot be obtained under this arrangement, but our German brethren have kindly and willingly yielded some of their interests for the benefits of the English." R. E. Hoen, a Union College student from 1909-1913, recalled similar conditions during his college experience, noting that the German Department at Union was very crowded and for this reason was finally reduced to teaching only Bible and history in the German language. German students had to attend their other classes in English. Furthermore, the Germans felt keenly the antipathy that old-stock American students sometimes held toward them.



courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room

*R. E. Hoen taught science at the Seminary from 1914 to 1923.*



courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room

*J. F. Harder taught Bible at Clinton German Seminary for all but three years of its existence.*

These were problems that caused denominational officers to consider separate schools for the foreign language constituency. They felt that the gospel commission was all-embracing and that an effort must be made to reach all people in the best possible way. Therefore, they believed a school was needed to train workers "for the Advent cause among German people in North America, in particular, ministers, Bible workers, teachers and church officers."

These concerns came to the attention of the General Conference Committee which met on October 13, 1909, at College View, Nebraska, and voted to begin three foreign language schools. The committee suggested that the German school be located somewhere in the Central or Southwestern Union Conferences. It also recommended that a committee be set up to make the final selection of a school site.

**A**MONG THE PLACES that the committee most seriously considered for the new school were Enid, Oklahoma; Clay Center, Kansas; Hamilton and Clinton, Missouri. Other cities and towns also aspired to have the new school, but they could not fulfill their promises when it came to negotiating an agreement.



*A faculty member for two years, Rachel Salisbury later achieved national prominence in the field of English teaching.* courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room

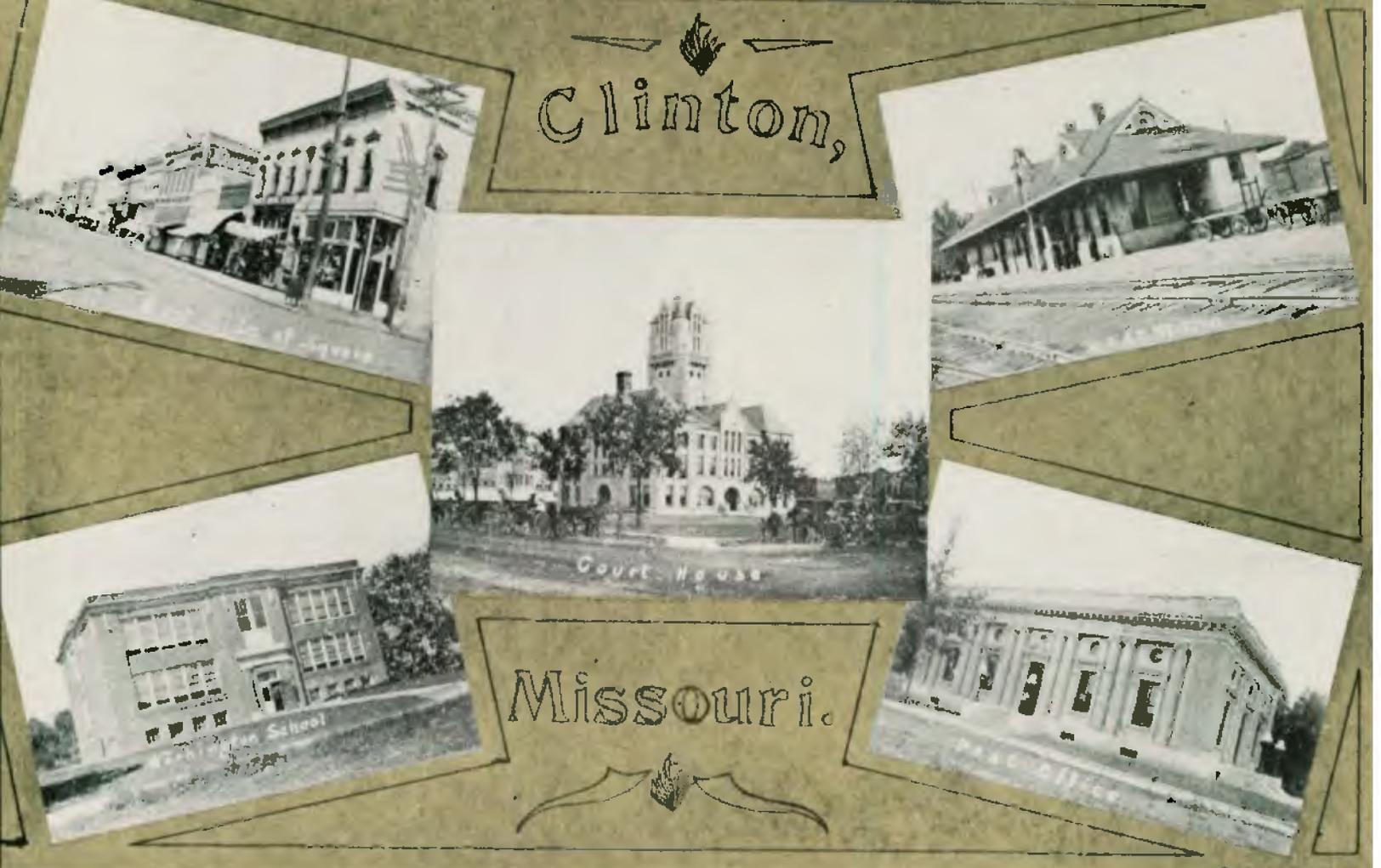
Clinton residents became aware of the committee's interest through their local newspaper, the *Henry County Republican*, under the headline "Looking Over Building." The city appeared to be an ideal place for the new school. It was a banking city, the county seat of Henry County, having a population of seven thousand. It was served by three main railroad companies whose facilities could provide transportation for students and equipment. The city had an adequate system of waterworks and well-equipped gas and electric utility plants. Coal had been discovered nearby and could be purchased by the school for only \$2.50 a ton. And finally, Clinton was eighty-seven miles southeast of Kansas City. The location of the city and its facilities pleased the Adventist leaders.

The committee examined a building known as Baird College. Professor H. T. Baird of Mexico, Missouri, had founded the college for young women in 1885, spending \$75,000 to construct the building. Baird College had closed in 1895, however, and the citizens now considered the large abandoned building an eyesore which could well use the look of habitation. It was an imposing structure three and four stories in height, having a frontage of 185 feet, with commodious veranda; the north wing was 120 feet deep and the south wing 110 feet. The center elevation was four stories high, 75 feet from ground



courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room

*From 1916 to 1921 Frank R. Isaac served as the Seminary's president.*



Clinton,

Missouri.

to pinnacle, and the wings were three stories. The building had 110 rooms, including 55 bedrooms, besides halls and corridors and two large stairways. It was constructed of brick on a dressed stone foundation rising several feet above the ground and presented a substantial and beautiful appearance. Provided with fire escapes, lighted with gas, and supplied with bathrooms on every floor, as well as speaking tubes and electric bells, the practicability of the building and property for a seminary attracted the committee. Having examined the city's offer, they asked the Clinton Commercial Clerk to add an option for a tract of farming land to meet the needs for the agricultural training planned for the institution. The committee left Clinton favorably impressed with the city leaders and the possibilities of Baird College.

By February, 1910, Chairman E. T. Russell told representatives of Clinton that now only Enid, Oklahoma, and Clinton, Missouri, were possible sites for the new school. The chairman of Clinton's Commercial Club, J. H. Kyle, then offered to sell the campus and an adjacent 106 acres of fertile farm land for \$37,000. He promised that he would try to get the citizens of Clinton and Henry County to help raise

part of the money to pay the property owners. George Holliday, who was often active in civic affairs, headed a committee which asked the local citizens to contribute to the campaign to help purchase the school for the Adventists. The campaign was quite successful because the Commercial Club advised the citizens that the new college would bring a vast increase of business and population to Clinton.

By July 14, 1910, the Adventists had decided to purchase the school and had received the deeds to the building and grounds. Clinton citizens had raised \$10,500 toward the total price of \$37,500, a price which included some concessions by the persons owning the land. The citizens understood from their local papers that the school was to be primarily an industrial school although the name for the new school, Clinton German Seminary [CGS], did not suggest the functions they had expected. The name did not matter; the citizens were pleased to have the school located in Clinton. The Adventist committee planned to put an additional \$5,000 into the facilities to put everything in good repair. The total cost to the General Conference, including repairs, was \$32,000. When in appropriate repair, the facility was estimated to be worth from \$75,000 to \$100,000.

**R**EPARATIONS FOR opening the school began in July when a crew of workers arrived to ready the building. The search committee, now in charge of preparation, asked for all the mechanics and laborers available for hire from the community to seek employment temporarily at the school to put on a new roof, build a barn, remove the many chimneys from the main building, build a chapel on the second floor, construct partitions to separate the north and south sides of the building (the latter for the use of women), construct a new furnace house, and install a new boiler.

Clinton citizens not only gained temporary employment, but their local businessmen received numerous orders for materials. In addition to repair supplies, the college management ordered library tables, chairs, office desks and chairs, dining chairs, commodes, and an entire new line of dressers from the Clinton Furniture Company. Two boilers were purchased from the Industrial Iron Works. Not surprisingly, the businessmen of Clinton welcomed the new school.

Attention was also being given to building a faculty and a student body. The Board of Managers for CGS, headed by E. T. Russell, asked G. A. Grauer to be president of the new school. J. F. Harder was asked to teach Bible; he remained with the school for more years than any other teacher. E. C. Kellogg taught mathematics and science; Vinnie P. Hunt, English. J. F. Simon was preceptor; Mrs. C. J. Kunkel, preceptress; and John Miller, business manager. Russell announced to the local newspaper that he had secured for the Music Department the

services of Mr. and Mrs. O. S. Beltz. He praised Mrs. Beltz as a pianist of rare attainment and noted that Mr. Beltz was being called from the Department of Music at California State Normal at Lodi.

The business manager, John Miller, than announced: "Members of the faculty now here, are experiencing great difficulty in finding homes." Asking citizens who had homes for rent to make it known to school officials, he also noted that he expected from 75 to 100 students in the fall and that school would begin on September 28. The poor crops throughout the West due to drought conditions militated against the attendance of some students, but Miller expected increases in enrollment over the years.

The news of the new German seminary quickly spread across the United States and Canada. Ministers urged the German youth to attend CGS and asked their people to support the youth and the school. The denominational magazines featured articles on CGS and appealed to the German constituency to support the institution through their money and the attendance of their youth. "Your sons and daughters should be trained to help spread the message," appealed one such article. "God could make the stones preach, but He has given that privilege to us." A calendar, or catalog as it might be titled today, appeared in the late summer containing detailed information about the school, the courses offered, and the cost of attendance. The calendar mentioned that sixteen passenger trains passed through Clinton every day, and this was how most of the students arrived.

There were 99 students at the beginning and 122



*Preparations in 1910 for opening the school included the building of a furnace house and new boiler.*



*The Seminary's classrooms were plain and functional.*

Pictures courtesy Andrews University Heritage Room.



*The three railroad companies serving Clinton provided most of the student transportation between home and school.*



*Music played a significant role in the Seminary's life.*



*Stocked with few books, the library served primarily as a place to study.*

near the end of the school year. During the first four years CGS was actually a secondary school and junior college combined. Classes were mostly upgraded and students began their studies according to their abilities. Some students took advanced German history and Bible classes, for instance, but at the same time attended courses in elementary English and mathematics. In the early years the level of instruction ranged from seventh grade to junior college, but by 1915 the school was listed as a senior college.

**T**HE SEMINARY wanted the best of the German Adventist youth, those who were talented and promising, to lead the denominational work; however, it applied no religious test. Students from any background were welcomed if they presented a certificate of good moral character and promised to comply with the rules of the Seminary. Most of the students were Adventists and were three to four years older than students of other Adventist institutions. They impressed their teachers as being more serious than the average student elsewhere, partly because many of them came especially to be trained for denominational employment.

The teachers wanted to keep this purpose strong. One student, for example, spoke of his teachers as "inspiring, helpful, and fundamental." Instructors held before the students the needs of the church and told of the satisfaction resulting from dedication to the "cause," as they called the denomination's work. They expressed concern for the students, and the student body was small enough so that each person was known by name. "Especially was I grateful for our Dean of Girls, Frieda Reinmuth-Dinius," one student remembers, "who was truly a Christian 'mother,' not merely a dean. [She took] a special interest in each girl's welfare, both material and spiritual." Similarly, CGS teacher R. E. Hoen encouraged the scientific interest of David C. Gaede who later became a medical doctor. Another teacher called Carl Becker to his office to suggest that he become a minister; the counsel helped Becker to devote his life to denominational work.

This concern for the students arose out of the religious spirit that permeated the institution. "The teachers were wonderful examples of Christian integrity," a student recalls. Although there were daily prayer bands and morning and evening worship and many classes that began with prayer, Friday night and Saturday were the religious climax of the week.

On Friday evening, "we always had a testimony meeting and to that the students looked forward each week," reported a 1917 graduate. "If some had some unfortunate experience during the week, a cloud came between them and the Lord, they looked

forward to Friday night to regain what they had lost. And they were not disappointed." F. R. Isaac, formerly president of CGS, remembered that there were "services where teachers and students plead with God to manifest His power in behalf of the unconverted with [the] result that souls surrendered to the Lord and victories were won. What joy this brought to faculty, students, and parents." After the meeting some students would gather around the piano to sing songs or practice for the missionary activities which took place on Sabbath afternoon.

Many of the religious activities doubled as social affairs. The group visits to the poor house and prison farm offered opportunities that school regulations made too rare. For instance, the bulletin stated:

Unrestricted association of young men and young women is not permitted. Young ladies may receive gentlemen callers in the home parlors with the permission of the preceptor and the preceptress.

*The ladies reception room provided an approved place for courting, although under watchful eyes.*



courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room



*Virtually all the students lived in dormitory rooms.*



courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room



*Professor Hoen had limited facilities with which to teach science.*

courtesy: G. F. Ruf

This privilege is granted not too frequently, and only to students who are sufficiently mature and whose general conduct is satisfactory. It has been demonstrated that unless carefully supervised, social gatherings, skating parties, and other outings become a serious detriment to the intellectual and spiritual welfare of the student; therefore, the permission of the President must be obtained for all such gatherings, and one of the teachers secured as chaperon.

Plans for any such events and names of the participants must be presented not less than twenty-four hours beforehand in order to be considered.

Despite these restrictions, students did find ways to get together. After the Sabbath afternoon missionary service, many students would walk to Artesian Park, an artificial lake fed by artesian wells about a mile to the west. All of the students who recall the lake remember the sulfur smell variously described as "awful," "fowl," or "like rotten eggs." They enjoyed daring each other to drink the water, but only a few became used to its taste.

In 1914, after the Missouri Seventh-day Adventist conference office moved to Clinton, some homes of conference officials and parents of students were located on the road to Artesian Park. Students often stopped at the home of Henry Reinmuth, a CGS

maintenance worker, to sit on the lawn swing, sing songs in the living room, or just talk. The nine Reinmuth children enjoyed these visits, and during the winter, when the lake provided ice skating, the family served warm drinks. Even under watchful eyes, many romances started while ice skating on Artesian Lake or Goose Lake, which also lay near by. Apart from these special activities, student couples would occasionally find their way to Artesian Park during the week, but the school administrators, who did not permit mixed seating at Saturday night programs in the school's early years, frowned on such occurrences.

In addition to classes and religious and social activities, Clinton students presented musical and variety programs for the community, and beginning in 1917 published a school paper titled *The Echo*. They also worked. Although the school never developed the industrial jobs it intended, students did find employment in the farm, kitchen, custodial department, and print shop. Whatever the difficulties and restrictions of their school life, students and teachers generally developed a deep loyalty and love for their institution. Most referred to it as "Unser Seminar" (Our Seminary).

**W**ORLD EVENTS pressed upon them, however. From late in 1915 until the end of World War I in 1918, the German-Americans confronted prejudice and misguided hatred. Such feelings appeared in the Clinton area.

The local newspapers were extremely anti-German during these years. When editorials urged that the German language should no longer be taught in the public schools, some schools stopped teaching German in the middle of a semester. Several newspaper editors applauded when the German Mennonite Church in an adjacent county was ordered to stop preaching in German at its Sunday services, and they claimed that American soldiers thought the German Bible was blasphemous. Such items appeared on the front page of Clinton newspapers.

A German farmer in Cass County (immediately northeast of Henry County) refused to give to the Red Cross when asked for a donation and topped his refusal with a few ill-advised words about the war. That day a group of zealots gathered together five gallons of tar and three bags of feathers and proceeded to tar and feather this farmer. This incident appeared on the front page of the *Henry County Democrat*. Such reporting and editorializing made the seminary students and faculty uncomfortable. Professor Harry E. Hein, CGS science teacher, recalls that yellow paint was smeared on buildings in Clinton, including the Methodist Church and some businesses, to release prejudiced feelings.

The problem of preventing trouble at Clinton German Seminary confronted everyone connected with CGS, but especially President Frank Isaac. He decided that the best policy was to be calm and judicious and asked students not to speak German in public places and to make only business visits to the city.

By 1917 a name change for the school seemed expedient. Although from the beginning the school had been known as Clinton German Seminary, the name did not actually seem appropriate. The seminary was a place to prepare workers for all the world as could be illustrated by a number of alumni who were already serving in South America among Spanish and Portuguese-speaking people. The name Clinton Theological Seminary [CTS] seemed to be a more appropriate and judicious name for the times. Most of the students and faculty welcomed the name change, and the community also approved, thinking such a decision one of loyalty to the United States.



*The ten-member faculty the first year (1910-1911) had about one hundred students in secondary and junior college classes.*

courtesy: G. F. Ruf

President Isaac did not rest with just a name change; he wanted to show that the faculty and students were loyal citizens. On one occasion the faculty and students marched to town to join other citizens at a special rally held to support the war effort. All persons present were urged to buy war bonds. Those who did not have money could borrow from the bank without collateral. There were few excuses permitted for not participating. "The small town of Clinton, prized the school, wanted the school before the War. So they were mildly indulgent during the War," commented one alumnus. "Of course there were some who hated the Germans fervently, but the leadership of the citizens was

strong enough in their support to stem the tide, if indeed it could be called a tide. Maybe it should be called a ripple."

The *Henry County Democrat* covered much of the Seminary's news, both before and after the war. But during the war years almost no news about CTS, as it was now known, appeared in the local papers. Much of the information had been furnished by the school administration, but during the war years the school had minimal contact with the community and in this way drew little attention.

Although the seminary never did stop teaching the German language or cease homiletics in German, the local newspapers discouraged the use of the "enemy language," and many of the other classes were taught in English during the war so that visitors would not cause trouble. In a letter to J. B. Penner, Mrs. Emma L. Simon said: "In later years the school rather 'went English' because during World War I, you recall, we were not supposed to talk German. So a number of classes were taught in English, and it was more difficult to keep the German spirit strong." Students also wanted to be absorbed into the country their parents had adopted, and one of the best ways to do that was to speak English and become Americanized in English-speaking schools.

**R**EASONS FOR closing the school soon became apparent. Many of the German churches began using English to avoid the displeasure of zealots who hated the language of the "enemy." With few children being brought up on the language, as 1925 approached CTS had fulfilled its unique mission. It had become just another Adventist academy and college.

When CTS had thus lost its uniqueness, it seemed to compete with Union College. From the beginning, Union had been distressed at having lost so many of its students to the new school within the Central Union Conference area. When the Seminary began in 1910, Union College enrollment dropped from 476 to 284, a figure next to the lowest in the history of the school. As argued, when CTS closed in 1925 Union College enrollment rose 10% in 1926. Union College needed students to help its sagging finances, and it was quite natural for Union officials to look longingly to CTS where a number of Central Union students had gone. Many of the board members at CTS were also on the board for Union College. "Since the administrators of these conferences were responsible for the financial well-being of Union College, they were ready to say 'yes' to the closing of Clinton when the opportunity presented itself."

The seminary and its students were also having financial troubles. The school had incurred debts during its first three years of operation when enrollment averaged 99, 114, and 141 respectively.



courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room

*Like other school departments, the kitchen operated with the bare necessities.*



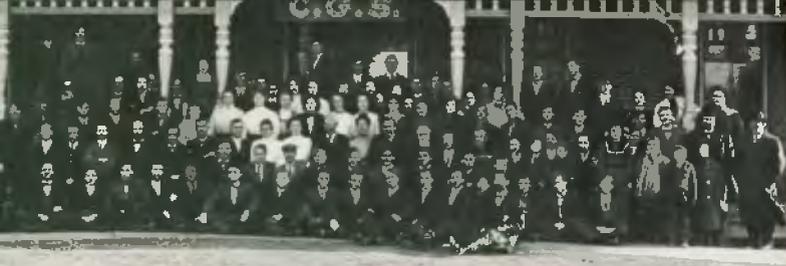
*The kitchen crew the first year was almost evenly divided between boys and girls.*

courtesy: G. F. Ruf



*The dining room provided meals for the boarding students.*

courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room



## Clinton German Seminary 1911-12.

The second year of Clinton German Seminary was the academic year 1911-1912.

courtesy: G. F. Ruf

With subsidies from the General Conference and a record enrollment of 232 students in 1920, the school became free of debts. But by 1925, attendance had fallen to 140 and indebtedness had returned. A fire had destroyed the roof of the powerhouse on December 30, 1924, and another disastrous fire had struck the music studio in January, 1925.

The students were also having trouble earning money for expenses at CTS. The Clinton newspapers learned from President Ochs that CTS had been handicapped by the fact that no provision had been made whereby students could earn money to pay for all or part of their tuition and other expenses. They noted that other Seventh-day Adventist schools maintained industries and small factories which enabled students to earn money while studying. The intentions of CTS to develop industries were similar to those of the more successful Broadview College in Illinois, but these goals never came to fruition. With a plan to make Broadview stronger and solve some of these problems, the General Conference Committee voted to move the work of CTS to Broadview College, a school largely devoted at that time to the education of Seventh-day Adventist youth of Norwegian and Russian parentage.

The last president of CTS, W. B. Ochs, succinctly listed the reasons for closing the school:

Lack of students. Financial problems. There was a feeling that the three foreign schools should be united. Broadview College was chosen because of its location and because of the possibility for students to earn much of their way through school. Then, too, after the first World War, there was a feeling that the school was not needed any more.

Approximately one-third of the student body were members of the colporteur club in 1912. courtesy: G. F. Ruf



The students were sad about the demise of "Unser Seminar" and protested loudly, but finally accepted the decision. Many attended Union College, Broadview College or Emmanuel Missionary College in 1926.

But not everyone left the area. "I think I am the last of the CTS students living here," wrote Alvin L. Ortner in the *Clintonite Letter* of July 25, 1974. "The normal building, converted to apartments, still stands, and looks much as it did when the school closed. The remainder of the school property and farm is built up with homes."

Despite the school's relatively short fifteen years of existence, its students made considerable contribution to both church and society. Of its 213 graduates at least forty-two became ministers, twenty-five teachers, and seventeen missionaries. Eight practiced medicine and nine achieved the Ph.D. Of those who worked outside the denomination, Harold Schilling became Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania, Oscar Reinmuth headed the foreign language department at the University of Texas, and Rachel Salisbury, a CTS teacher, served as director of the National Council of Teachers of English.

As long as the school could fulfill its unique role of educating German-American Seventh-day Adventists in their own language it remained an important part of the church's educational program. But once social change removed the need for such education in the German language, the institution no longer served a useful purpose. Nevertheless, the school's small size, the teachers' dedication, the students' maturity, and the emphasis upon the service of God multiplied its impact beyond expectations.

### SOURCES

#### BOOKS

- Dick, Everett. *Union: College of the Golden Cords*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Union College Press, 1967.  
*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966.  
*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 1911*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966.

#### NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

- Central Union Conference *Bulletin*, First Quarter, 1910.  
*Clintonite Letter*, July 25, 1974.  
*Deutscher Arbeiter*, July 14, 1910.  
*General Conference Bulletin*, 1893-1913.  
*Henry County Democrat*, 1910-1925.  
*Henry County Republican*, 1910.  
*Review and Herald*, July 25, 1910.  
*The Youth's Instructor*, March 16, 1920.

#### UNPUBLISHED AND MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS

- Calendar of Clinton German Seminary, 1910-1911*.  
*Clinton Theological Seminary Bulletin*, First Quarter, 1924.  
Hoen, Rue E. Interview. February 23, 1975.  
*Katalog de Deutschen Seminars zu Clinton, Missouri, 1911-1912*.  
Minutes of the sixty-fifth meeting of the General Conference Committee, October 13, 1909.  
Penner, J.B. "A Short History of the Clinton Theological Seminary."  
Questionnaires sent to students and staff members of CTS. Eighty-two were returned.