

Western College of North Carolina ^[1]

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by William S. Powell, 2006

Western College ^[2] of North Carolina, chartered by the General Assembly ^[3] in 1820, was anticipated to be a degree-granting, nonsectarian institution similar to the state's first university, which had opened in Chapel Hill in 1795 ^[4]. The college was intended for the education of young men living west of the Yadkin River. A board of 25 trustees was named, and certain positions were intended to be filled at the board's initial meeting the following May at the courthouse in Lincolnton. Provisions made for the college's governance included the naming of a president, secretary, and treasurer, while not more than 20 additional trustees might also be named later. Among other specified functions, the trustees were to select a convenient site for the school and appoint professors and tutors.

In Salisbury the recently established Western Carolinian ^[5] published full reports on the trustees' activities and printed an exchange of letters on the proposed college from readers. The majority opinion ultimately did not favor the college; one opponent wrote that those who supported it "must have for their object the baptism of some petty grammar school, or some mushroom academy, with the dignified name of College."

Initial reaction to the idea of Western College had been encouraging enough that three trustees were promptly appointed to examine sites in Burke ^[6], Lincoln ^[7], and Mecklenburg ^[8] Counties. Presbyterian ^[9] minister James McRee ^[10] was named college president and began working to secure financial support for the institution. Impressive sums of money were pledged in the early stages of the campaign, and there were signs of interest in the college from South Carolina and Georgia. After a four-year struggle, however, Western College became a victim of the east-west ^[11] political and cultural conflict that had plagued North Carolina for several generations. Sectional leaders in the state were unable to pull together for the common good, and the projected plans collapsed. The idea of establishing a college in the western part of North Carolina was taken up by Presbyterians ^[9], however, and Davidson College ^[12] was founded in 1837.

References:

Charles L. Coon, ed., *North Carolina Schools and Academies: A Documentary History* (1915).

Cornelia R. Shaw, *Davidson College* (1923).

Additional Resources:

North Carolina Schools and Academies, 1790-1840: A Documentary History by Charles Lee Coon:
<https://archive.org/stream/northcarolinasch00coon#page/685/mode/1up> ^[10]

Laws of North-Carolina [1820], North Carolina Digital Collections <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/laws-of-north-carolina-1820/849835?item=2422458> ^[2]

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

Burke County ^[18]

Lincoln County ^[19]

Mecklenburg County ^[20]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. ^[21]

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