

# Founding Faces & Places



An illustrated history of Wagner Memorial Lutheran College, 1869–1930

by LEE MANCHESTER







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Lutheran College, 1869–1930

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Wagner College  
Staten Island, New York City  
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Founding Faces & Places: An Illustrated History of Wagner Memorial Lutheran College, 1869–1930  
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Front cover illustration: Wagner Memorial Lutheran College, Grymes Hill campus, 1918  
Back cover illustration: Newark State School Administration Building, ca. 1900  
(center building was originally Newark College, aka Newark Lutheran Academy)

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## About this book

This book contains the archival photos and interpretive material prepared for an exhibition shown in the Horrmann Library's Spotlight Gallery from September 12 through October 15, 2008, in observance of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Wagner College in 1883. It covers the period beginning in 1869, during Wagner's "prehistory," and runs through the last major building project to be started before the Great Depression: Main Hall, our Collegiate Gothic architectural signature.

We start with Wagner College's "prehistory" because the moderate German Lutherans of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania had actually made two previous attempts to do what Wagner Memorial Lutheran College finally did: offer young Lutheran men an education that would prepare them for the seminary, with courses taught almost exclusively in German. The urgent need of the time was for thoroughly educated German-American clergy, equally fluent in both languages, who could pastor the rapidly growing number of German Lutheran congregations popping up throughout the northeast and across the nation, cultural centers of the new German immigrant communities arising in America's urban centers in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Note that this is an illustrated history, with emphasis on the word "illustrated." For readers who are interested in a more in-depth treatment of the early history of Wagner Memorial Lutheran College, we suggest "Wagner College: Four Histories," a book prepared during the same period as the archival exhibition that led to the publication of this book. "Four Histories," like this book, can be found on Wagner College's print-on-demand store (<http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/wagnercollegehistory>). Readers can order copies at cost, plus shipping and handling.

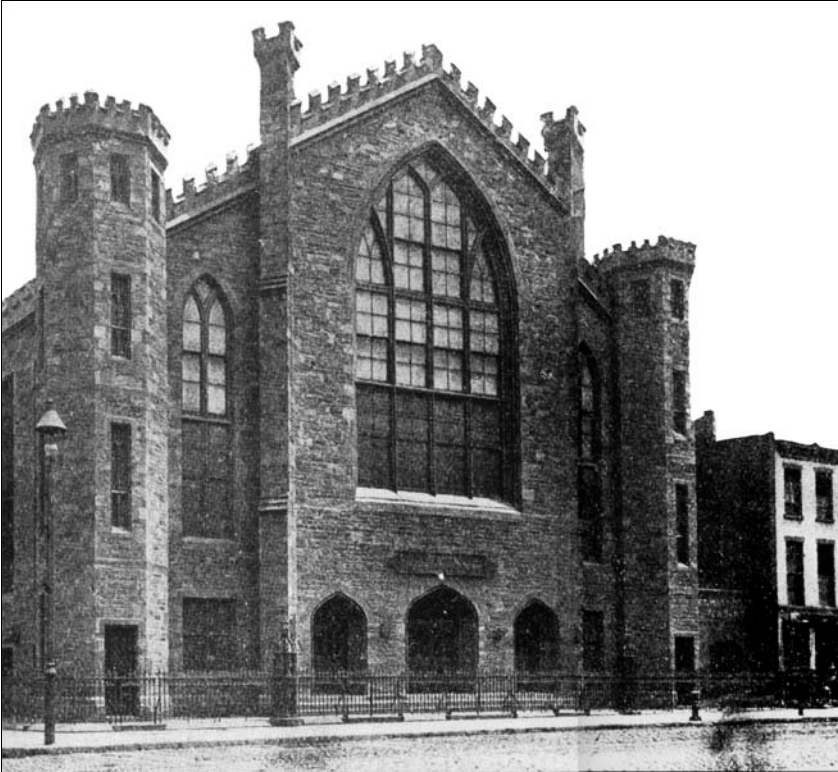
**Lee Manchester**

December 6, 2008

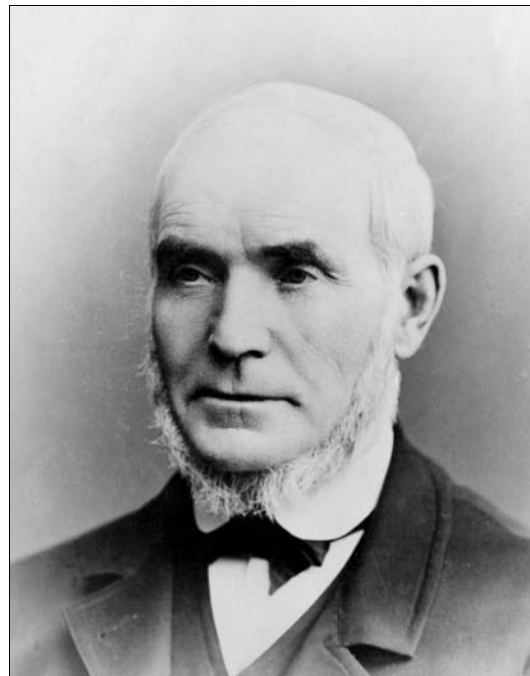
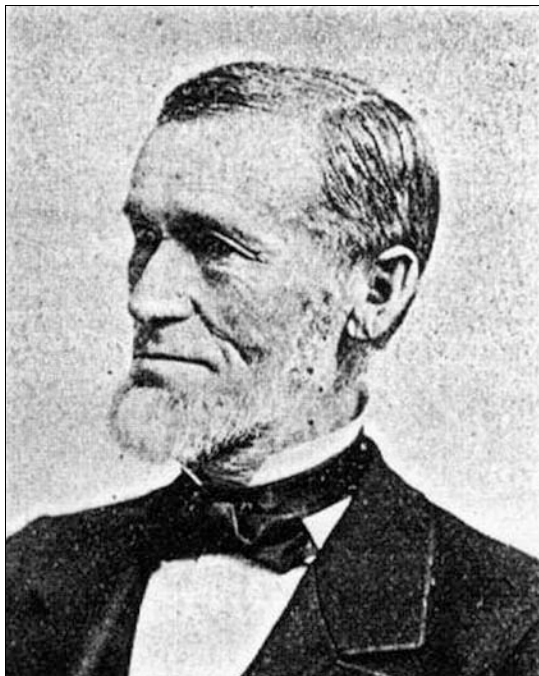


Wagner College 'prehistory'





The first attempt by moderate Lutherans to establish a German-language seminary prep school took place in Manhattan. St. Matthew's Academy, opened in May 1869, was operated by the Lutheran congregation of the same name, then located downtown at the corner of Broome and Elizabeth streets. The academy not only survived, it thrived — but just a few years after its founding, St. Matthew's Academy changed its affiliation, aligning itself with the Missouri Synod, the most conservative of the Lutheran conferences, forcing the moderates to establish a new school of their own.



In 1872, two moderate German Lutheran land speculators — John F. Voshall of Syracuse (above left), and John G. Wagner of Rochester (above right) — combined forces and fortunes to purchase a half-finished Baptist college building on a hilltop in Newark, N.Y., 35 miles east of Rochester. Voshall, who had emigrated from Germany in 1842, was in “the wood business”; his wife had borne him 11 children, but only 2 had survived. Wagner, an 1838 immigrant and successful contractor, had likewise lost 3 of his 5 children — but his surviving son, George, wanted to study for the ministry.





After Voshall and Wagner bought the half-finished building in Newark, a local board was organized for a new, moderate Lutheran pre-seminary school. Money was raised, and construction was resumed. A principal was hired — the Rev. E.F. Giese, former headmaster of St. Matthew's Academy — and teachers were recruited. Finally, on Sept. 3, 1873, Newark College was officially opened for class, with 36 students enrolled for the inaugural quarter. Enrollment increased the next quarter and, for a while, all was well. But over the summer of 1874, the college decided to buy the property from Voshall & Wagner — and that's when the trouble began.



It was customary in the 19th century for mortgage holders to remove a notch of wood from an interior staircase; the notch was returned when the mortgage was paid off. Newark College, however, was overcome by its debt burden, closing in September 1875. A local high school student visited the former Newark College building nearly a century later, shortly before its demolition. She took the photo, above, showing the handrail with its notch still missing. As much as Voshall & Wagner had surely hoped for the school's success, they were unable to return that piece of wood to its rightful place.

The co-founders:  
'It all started under  
an apple tree'



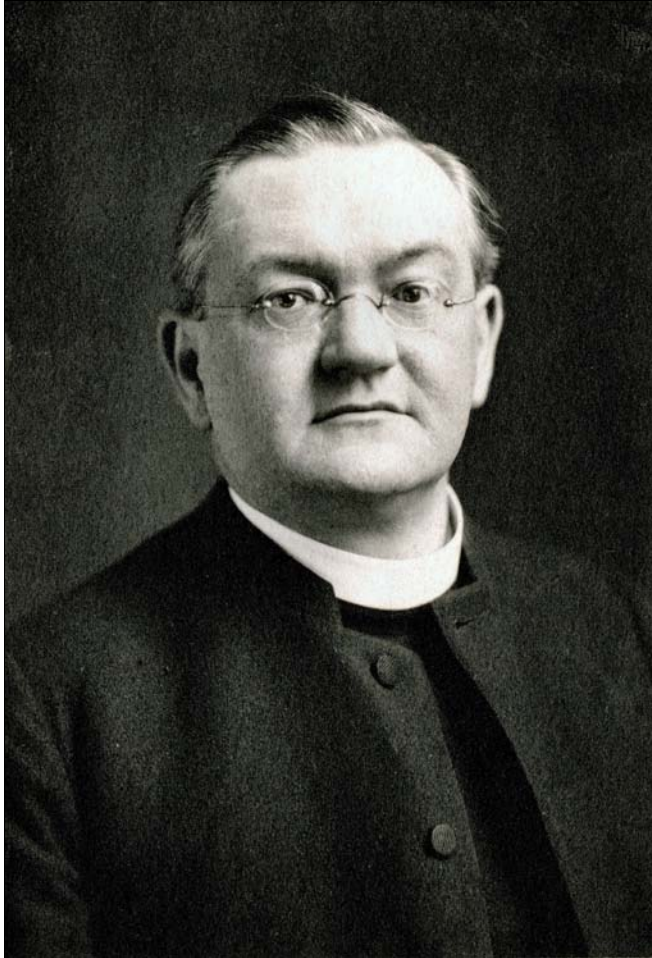


The Rev. George H. Gomph, pastor of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Pittsford, N.Y., just outside Rochester, is considered one of the two co-founders of Wagner College.

Gomph was born in Albany, N.Y. in 1842 to German immigrant parents. Rather than apprentice under his father, who made organs, Gomph chose to study for the ministry. He was called to St. Paul's in Pittsford in 1869, just prior to his seminary graduation and ordination.

In 1883, when Pastor Alexander Richter of Rochester began talking about the need for a school that could train young German-speaking Americans for the Lutheran ministry, it was Gomph who invited Richter to his home to start making plans for the school's opening that fall.





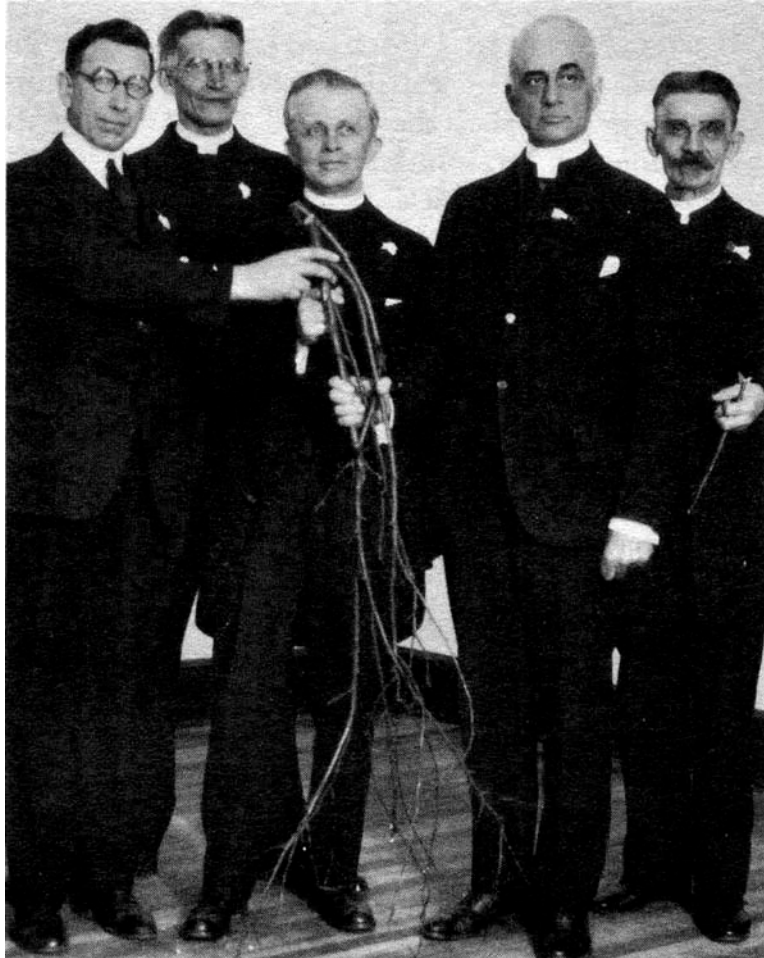
Born in eastern Prussia in 1851, Alexander Richter immigrated to the United States in 1876, when he enrolled in the Philadelphia Lutheran Seminary. He became concerned with the scarcity of ministers able to speak German well enough to pastor America's many German Lutheran congregations. He brought his concern with him to Rochester, N.Y. in 1881 when he was called to become the pastor of that city's oldest and largest German Lutheran congregation. Two years later, his concern led him to begin working with Pastor George Gomph of neighboring Pittsford to organize a new school to prepare German-speaking young men for the seminary. Their school, the Lutheran Proseminary of Rochester, opened in the fall of 1883; it was later renamed Wagner Memorial Lutheran College. Richter served as the first president of Wagner's board of directors, and continued serving on the board until the mid-1890s, even after he had left Rochester for Hoboken, N.J. He died on March 6, 1918, within a few hours of Pastor George Gomph's passing.



THE HISTORIC APPLE TREE

When Wagner oldtimers used to tell the tale of our college's founding, they would usually start by saying, "It all started under an old apple tree in Pittsford, New York."

It was beneath an apple tree (shown in the photo at left) at the Pittsford home of Pastor George Gomph that he and Rev. Alexander Richter met during the summer of 1883 to plan the opening of a new school that later became known as Wagner College.



The Founders Tree was a powerful symbol for early Wagnerians. Several branches of the Founders Tree were sent from Pittsford to Staten Island for the Feb. 27, 1930 dedication of Wagner's new Administration Building (aka Main Hall) as a token of blessing. In this photo, New York Synod President S.G. Trexler (second from right) presents Wagner College Board of Trustees Chairman Frederic Sutter (center) and President Charles F. Dapp (far left) with the symbolic token.

More recently, during the college's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008, modern-day Wagnerians planted a pair of new Founders Trees: one at the home of George Gomph in Pittsford, the other at the Grymes Hill campus of Wagner College. At last report, both were doing well.



The Rochester campuses



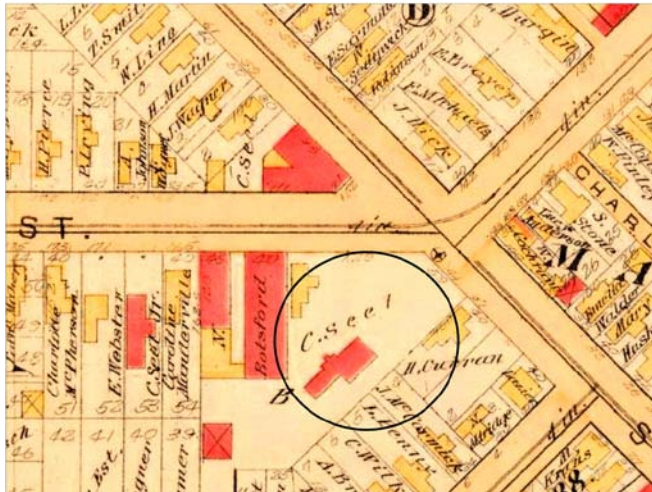
The vision of our co-founders, George Gomph and Alexander Richter, was critical to the creation of Wagner College — but without a schoolhouse, there would have been no school.

That's where Christian Seel came in. A German immigrant, Seel was a self-made man, a grocer who had done very well for himself. He was also a man of faith. An elder in Alexander Richter's church, he had sent his fifth child, George, to Lutheran college and seminary.

In 1883, as Richter and Gomph were seeking a home for their new-school-to-be, Christian Seel was 59 and had been retired from the grocery business for a year. That did not mean, however, that his big house was an empty nest; four of his five adult children, including George the ministerial candidate, were still living at home, in addition to 10-year-old Eduard, the “baby” of the family.

Nonetheless, when Christian Seel and his wife Margaretha heard of the new pre-seminary school their pastor was planning, they decided to offer the second floor of their large Second Empire-style home for use as classroom and living space, at no charge — and their son George, 25, fresh out of seminary, offered to become the school's first “housefather,” or headmaster.





The location of the Seel house was not in question as long as Rochester's streets kept the same names from year to year: All the early college records agreed that it was located on the corner of Jay and Magne streets, the site circled on the 1888 tax map (above left). However, when the nearby Erie Canal was filled in, Magne Street's name was changed. Only recently, by comparing the 1888 map with modern satellite photomaps (like the one above right), was the former Seel house site clearly identified: It stood on the corner of Jay and West Broad streets.

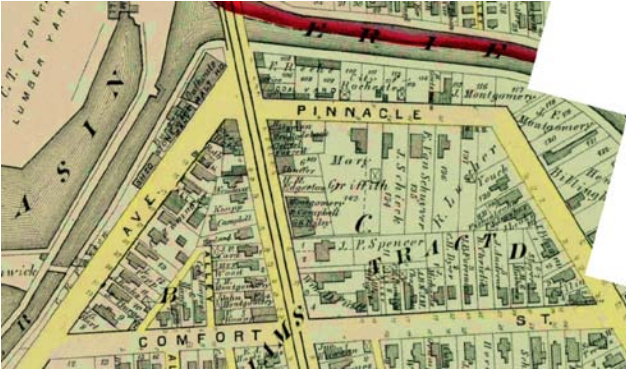


A visit to the site in late 2007 determined that the Seel house had been demolished long ago, replaced by an auto garage (shown above).



At the end of its first academic year, in the spring of 1884, the Lutheran Proseminary of Rochester moved from the Seel house to a three-story, 10-room brick townhouse (second from the right in the photo at left), which school officials referred to as “Reilly’s building.” The school had grown beyond the capacity of the seven rooms available on the second floor of the Seel house, and Mrs. Seel had become ill.

The building was owned by George S. Riley’s real estate company. Its street address at the time of the move was 33 South Ave. — but Rochester street numbers changed once that very summer, and changed again several years later, making it difficult to pinpoint the location.



Accounts in school publications printed just before Wagner's move to Staten Island roughly identified the location of "Reilly's building" as being somewhere on "South Avenue near Byron Street."

Only by comparing the 1882 tax map (above left) with a modern satellite photomap (above right), however, was it possible to determine with certainty the location of our second campus: The modern street address, 448 South Ave., is now the site of a parking lot.

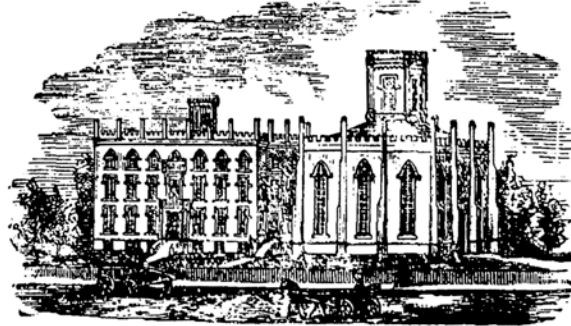
When the Lutheran Proseminary's second academic year drew to a close in the spring of 1885, the board of directors decided to move the school one more time.

A building that had come onto the market was ready-made for use by a school like the Lutheran Proseminary. It stood on Oregon Street at the corner of Central Avenue (the recently renamed Atwater Street). For 20 years, from 1855 to 1875, it had served as the home of the Rochester Collegiate Institute, a "boarding and day school for gentlemen" operated by LeRoy Satterlee. Alexander Richter described the facility as a "valuable and well-situated property ... 120 feet [on each side], upon which a three-story building stands ... which has a four-story dormer tower. ... The building is 90 feet long and 36 feet wide."

The board decided to lease the southern portion of the building — the "four-story dormer tower" — for just a few months.

By the end of September 1885, board member John George Wagner — a well-to-do contractor well-versed in the ways of real estate and mortgage financing — had worked out a deal with the building's owners: The proseminary would get three months to raise a down payment and arrange a mortgage to cover the remainder of the \$12,000 asking price. By January 1886, Wagner himself had raised \$5,700 toward the down payment (almost \$5,400 of which had come out of his own pocket),

## **ROCHESTER COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE,**



**A BOARDING AND DAY SCHOOL FOR GENTLEMEN.**





and he informed the school's board of directors that he would take out a \$7,000 mortgage in his own name to make up the difference.

Memories of the Newark College debacle, however, must have arisen to haunt John George Wagner that spring. The last thing a small, cash-strapped prep school needed was an overwhelming debt burden — in fact, such a mortgage might well spell the end of the young proseminary, as it had for Newark College.

John George, 61, recently retired, decided to change the terms of the RCI purchase. Rather

than finance the mortgage, he would buy the building outright and simply give it to the proseminary. Wagner made this gift, he said, in memory of his late son George who, at the time of his death in 1873, had wanted to become a minister himself.

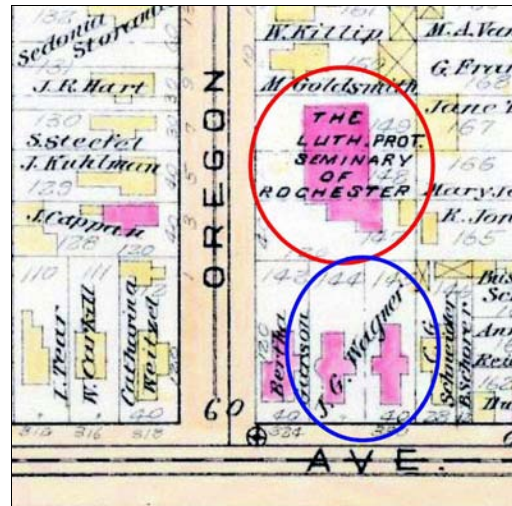
The board was overwhelmed by Wagner's generosity. In gratitude, the directors took a vote:

*"Further resolved, that the institution should from now on be named Wagner Memorial Lutheran College, in the memory of Johann Georg Wagner's son, who has fallen asleep in the Lord."*

In addition to the three-story college building on Oregon Street, Wagner College owned two houses on adjacent lots to the south, fronting on Central Avenue. Sometimes, these houses were rented out to third parties that had no direct ties to the college. At other times, those houses served as homes for Wagner College faculty and directors.

From 1914 to 1918, the house below, left — 326 Central Avenue — was the home of Wagner College’s last Rochester director, the Rev. John A.W. Kirsch. It was known simply as the “Director’s House.”

The house in the middle, below — 330 Central Avenue — was the home of Wagner College Director Jacob Steinhaeuser from 1891 to 1894, when he was ousted from the job. But it was the extended occupation of the Betz family — some of them teachers at the college, some of them students, one a minister, but all male — that gave No. 330 its nickname: “Bachelors’ Hall.”







After Wagner Memorial Lutheran College left its Oregon Street campus in the summer of 1918 for the move to rural Staten Island, the old Rochester building stood abandoned for nearly a decade. The photo on the previous page shows the derelict building as it appeared in the mid-1920s. It was finally razed in 1927.

In 1934, an African-American Episcopal congregation, St. Simon of Cyrene, built a new sanctuary on the site. St. Simon merged in 1987 with another Episcopal congregation and left the site.

Peace Missionary Baptist Church currently meets on the former site of Wagner College. A 1934 archival file photo from the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle newspaper confirms that the Peace Baptist building is the same one built in 1934 for St. Simon's.

At the top left, a modern satellite photo shows the former site of Wagner College on Oregon Street as it appears today.

At the bottom left, the sanctuary of the Peace Missionary Baptist Church as it appeared in early 2008. The church stands on the exact spot where Wagner Memorial Lutheran College made its home for 33 years, from 1885 to 1918.



The Wagners:  
Founding benefactor  
and college namesake





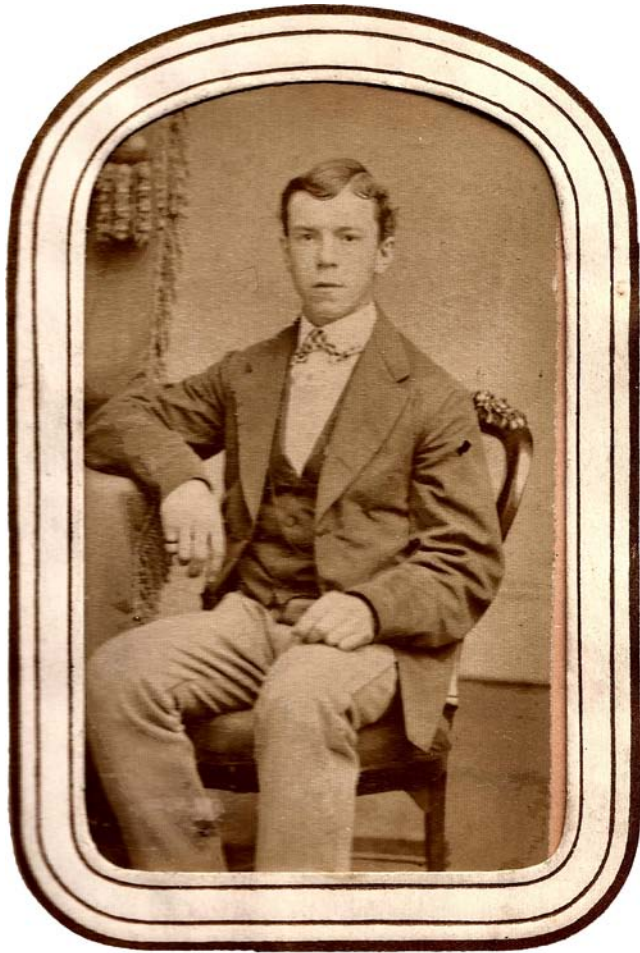


John George Wagner, our founding benefactor, emigrated with his father, mother and two brothers from Germany in 1838, when he was 14 years old.

A successful contractor and generous supporter of Lutheran higher education, Wagner helped bankroll the forerunner of Wagner College, the Newark (N.Y.) Lutheran Academy, which operated from 1873 to 1875.

In 1886, Wagner and his wife bought for the new Lutheran Proseminary of Rochester its first permanent campus. In gratitude, the school was renamed Wagner Memorial Lutheran College in memory of their late son.

The photo at left shows John George, as his family knows him today, bedecked in bathing attire for a humorous family portrait with daughter Caroline Wagner Voshall and granddaughter Hattie Voshall, taken around 1880.



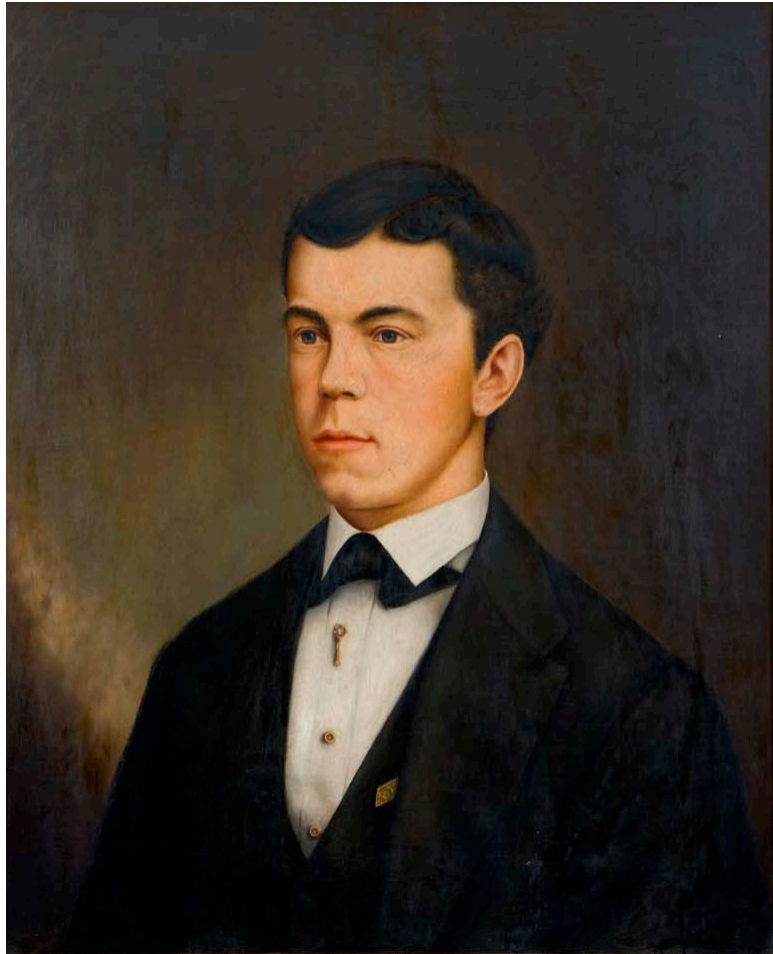
J. George Wagner Jr., the last surviving son of John George Wagner, died on Oct. 15, 1873, just a few weeks after a new school partly financed by his father to educate future Lutheran seminarians was starting up in Newark, N.Y. The school failed in 1875.

When a new pre-seminary college opened in Rochester in 1883, 10 years after George's death, the elder Wagner decided to purchase the school's first permanent home as a gift — in young George's memory. The trustees subsequently renamed the school Wagner Memorial Lutheran College.

This is the only known photo of the man for whom Wagner College is named. Obtained in early 2008 from the Wagner family, it was the first image of George Wagner ever acquired by the college in its 125-year history.



At right is a family oil portrait of J. George Wagner Jr., the young man for whom Wagner College is named. The portrait hangs in the dining room of Susan Carney, George Wagner's great-great-grandniece. So familiar has the portrait become to Carney's children that they have given it a nickname: "Waggie" — although, ever since Wagner College remembered young George on Founders Day 2008 with a posthumous doctor of divinity degree, we understand that the family has begun referring to him as "*Doctor Waggie*"!





Group shots on the  
Rochester campus

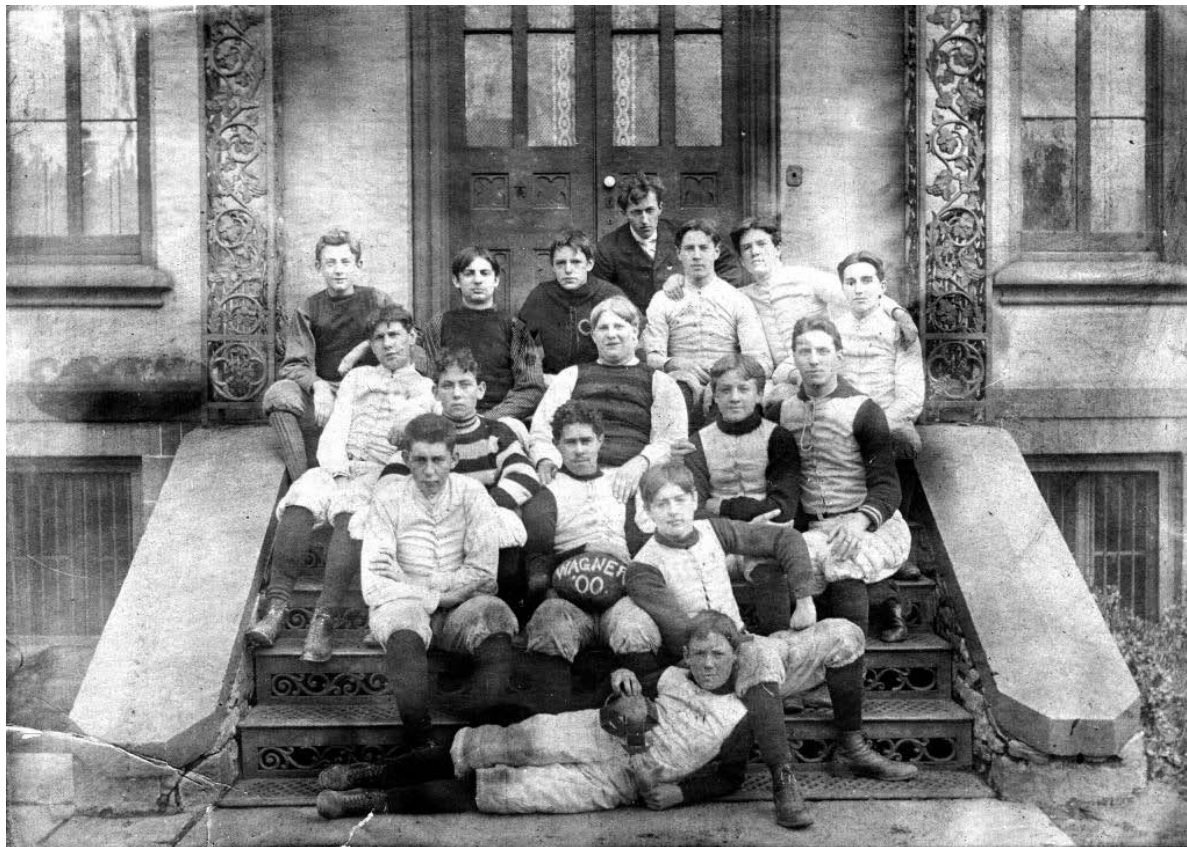




This photo, taken around 1901, shows Wagner students being led in “kalisthenics” on the athletic field behind the college building. This was one of the only kinds of physical activity that could be accommodated by the college’s tiny back yard.



This photo, taken in 1885, shows the entire Wagner College community, seated on the front steps of the new Oregon Street building. Skull caps identify the professors. Housefather Paul Kellner is seated on the lower steps, arms crossed, with his wife and children. The only other woman shown in the photo is Eva Meyer (far left), the school's English instructor.



The members of Wagner College's 1900 football team — all 15 of them — lounge on the front steps, a faculty member seated behind them.





The graduating class of 1893, posed for a studio shot. Standing, from left to right, are J. Christian Krahmer, Alfred Stoekius and Carl Streich. Seated are Julius Reichardt, Henry C. Erbes and Albert Heyd.





Wagner College's 1913-14 basketball team, which played other Rochester squads at the Railroad YMCA. One member recalled the time when his team snuck out one Saturday night to play a game — something strictly *verboten*. The next morning, college Director H.D. Kraeling called the seven boys into his office. “We expected a strong reprimand,” the student recalled, “and we received it — but not the way we expected. Apparently, he did not care much that we had slipped out and played the previous night — but why did we bring disgrace on Wagner College by losing that game?”



A formal shot of the 1916-17 Wagner College orchestra. The tall violinist in the back row, Conrad Reisch, wrote to his brother Otto about the shooting of this photo: “Just had our picture taken ... and I guess they'll come out pretty good too. It took us about three quarters of an hour after we got there.”

Frederic Sutter:  
Wagner College's  
Staten Island founder





The Rev. Frederic Sutter, seen at left in his 1897 graduation photo from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, is universally considered to be the founder of the modern Wagner College on Staten Island. Frederic Sutter's family emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1882, when he was 6 years old. At the age of 12, Frederic was enrolled in a seminary prep school in Rochester, N.Y., called Wagner Memorial Lutheran College, from which he graduated in 1894. Following his seminary graduation and ordination, Sutter pastored two congregations before coming to Staten Island in 1907 to lead Trinity Lutheran Church. In 1917, Sutter was tapped for a position on the board of his alma mater, where he was assigned to a committee responsible for moving Wagner College from Rochester to the New York City area. Sutter secured the former Cunard estate on Grymes Hill, the core of our modern campus. Rev. Sutter served as chairman of our board of trustees for 41 years. The Sutter Oval and the Sutter Gymnasium were named in his honor. Pastor Sutter died in 1971 at the age of 95.



The Wagner College student body, 1892. Frederic Sutter is seated center front.



Frederic Sutter and his wife Emma pose on the new Wagner College campus in front of the former Cunard villa.





The “new” Trinity Lutheran Church sanctuary, built in 1913 and designed by George W. Conable, the same architect who later designed Parker and Main halls on the Wagner College campus.





The Arts and Crafts-style home built for Rev. Sutter in 1922,  
now part of the Stapleton Heights Historic Preservation District.



Rev. Sutter and Wagner College President  
Adolf H. Holthusen laying the cornerstone of  
Parker Hall on October 28, 1922.

# The move to Grymes Hill

The Cunard Estate becomes  
Wagner College's new home (1917-18)



Wagner College purchased the former Cunard Estate on Grymes Hill, Staten Island in September 1917.

The main structure on the property was a three-story, red brick, Italianate villa. It was built around 1852 by Edward Cunard, the son and heir of Canadian shipping magnate Samuel Cunard, whose Loyalist father had fled Philadelphia for Nova Scotia following the American Revolution. Edward, born in Halifax, came to New York around 1840 to represent the Cunard shipping line. In 1849, he married native New Yorker Mary Bache McEvers. The following year, the Cunards bought property on Staten Island, where 2 years later they built their house, which they called Westwood.

Mary Cunard, 38, died in 1866 while giving birth to their eighth child; her husband died just 3 years later at the age of 53. Several of their children stayed on at Westwood for a few years under the care of their maternal grandmother. When they left Staten Island in 1873, emigrating to England, the children put the house up for sale.

The villa and its surrounding property was finally bought in 1889 by Amzi Lorenzo Barber, an Oberlin College graduate and trustee and former Howard University professor who had made his fortune paving the streets of Washington, D.C. Barber used the villa as his summer residence for just four seasons. For several years after that, it was leased out to various parties as a hotel or boarding house, known variously as the Bellevue Club (1894) and the Hotel Belleview (1901). Two summer cottages and a three-story annex were added to the estate during this period. Following Barber's death in 1909, the property passed into the hands of Oberlin College, from which Wagner Memorial Lutheran College purchased it.

When Wagner College bought the property in September 1917, it consisted of 38 wooded acres overlooking New York Harbor. The purchase price was \$63,000; another \$43,000 was spent winterizing the summer cottages and building a new home for the college president.

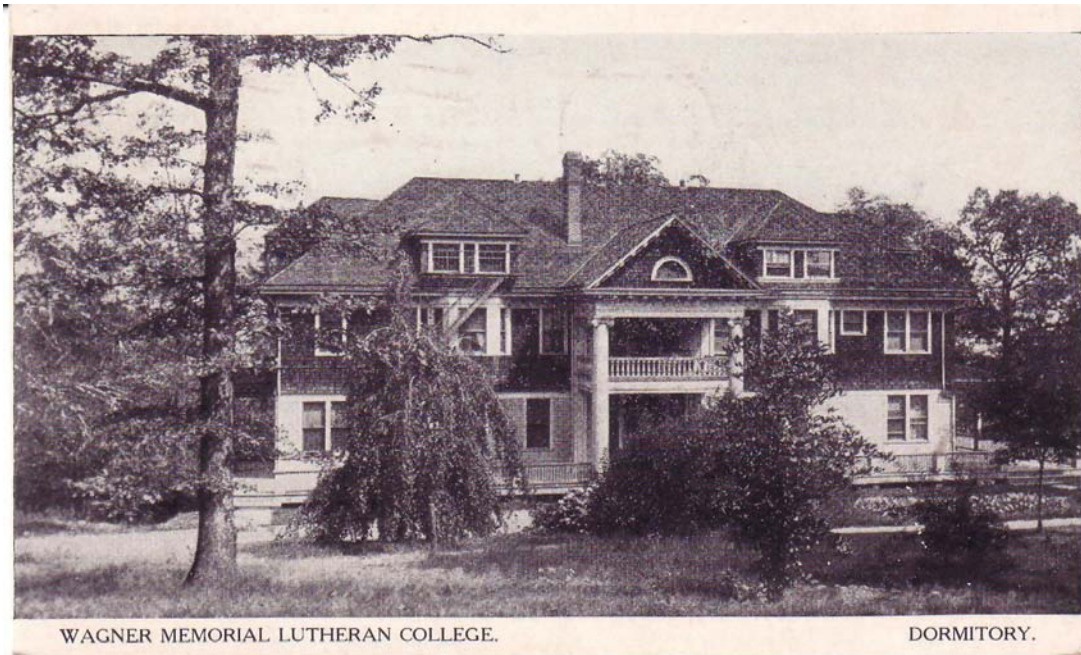


The panoramic photo above shows the central campus of Wagner College as it appeared in the summer of 1918, after the cottages had been refurbished and the president's house completed.





Westwood, known today as Cunard Hall, was referred to simply as the Administration Building by the early Wagnerians on Grymes Hill. Cunard Hall held classrooms, offices, the cafeteria, and — before the construction of new faculty dwellings in the early 1920s — living quarters for several professors.



The building we call Reynolds House was used by the college as a dormitory in the early years of the Staten Island campus. It was built as an annex by the Hotel Belleview operators after a 1904 fire destroyed the mansion on the adjoining Jacob Vanderbilt estate, also owned by Amzi Barber, which had been used for overflow housing. The new annex had the hipped dormers, second-story shingling and first-floor clapboard siding typical of Shingle Style architecture. But its most prominent feature was a two-tiered, full-height entry porch with two-story columns that was emblematic of the Folk Victorian style. The distinctive entry porch was removed in the building's most recent renovation.





The summer cottages, which became faculty residences and offices, are shown here in two views: one from the south (above), and one from the north (on the next page). These photos were taken before the cottages were winterized. Built during the Barber period, the cottages were designed in the earliest form of Prairie Style architecture, called Prairie Box or American Foursquare. Popular from 1900 to 1920, Prairie Style is considered one of the few indigenous American styles of architecture. The two cottages were nearly identical; only the dormers were different — one had gabled dormers, the other



had shed dormers. Plain board siding finished the cottages. After Wagner College bought the Cunard Estate in 1917, the cottages were winterized with a stucco exterior treatment. The southernmost of the two cottages had an extension added to the rear during the winterization; a few years later, in the early 1920s, another addition was built onto the north cottage. The most dramatic transformation of the summer cottages, however, took place in 2002, when they were joined by a “bridge building” to become the Pape House that we know today.



The president's house, shown here in a photo from around 1920, was the only completely new structure built for Wagner College before the school's opening in September 1918. Designed and built in a fashion similar to the college's Craftsman-style faculty cottages that were constructed a few years later, in the early 1920s, the president's house — today called Kairos House — is distinct for its ornate half-timbering highlights and unusual roof lines.

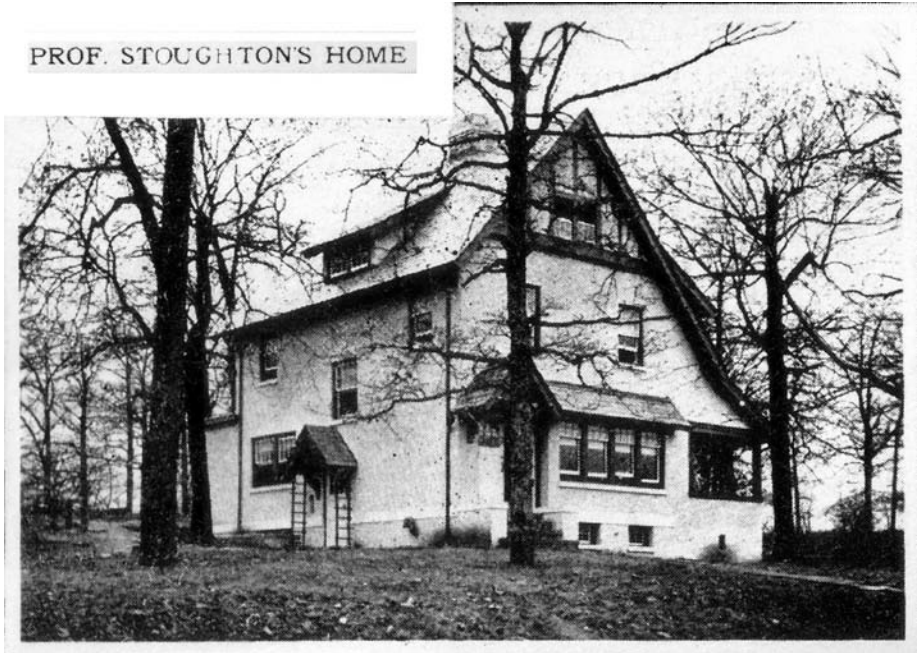


# Wagner College's first building program

Faculty housing, 1921-22



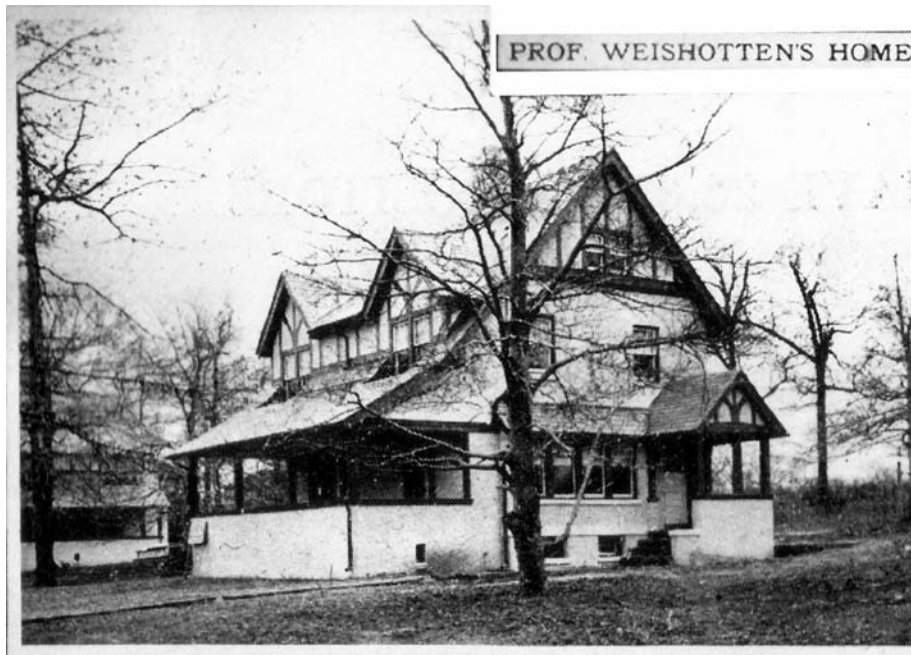
PROF. STOUGHTON'S HOME



After settling in on Grymes Hill following the 1918 move from Rochester, Wagner College's first challenge was to find adequate housing for all the members of its faculty — preferably, on campus.

The first new faculty houses constructed on campus after the move were a pair of Craftsman-style cottages designed somewhat after the fashion of the President's House:

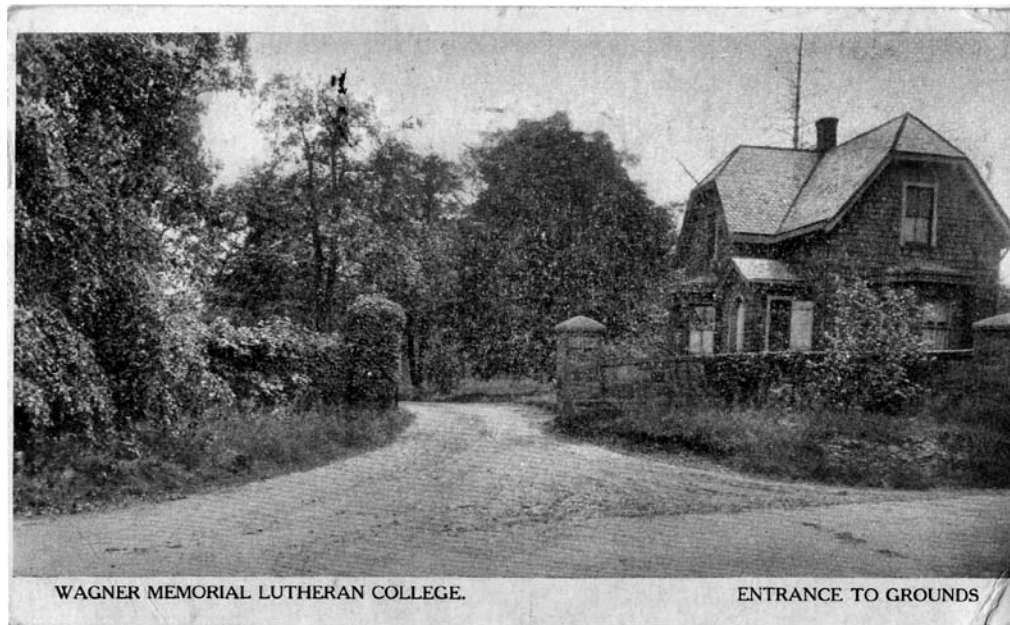
Above, Professor Stoughton's home, which currently houses the college's Public Safety and Human Resources departments; and ...



Above, Professor Weiskotten's home, demolished in preparation for the construction of the Horrmann Library, which was completed in 1961.

It is worth noting that the Weiskotten Cottage is the only early campus building that was demolished in the course of Wagner's major construction drive of the 1950s and 1960s. This is especially fortunate, since one "master plan" submitted to the college by an architectural firm recommended the demolition of almost all the early buildings, including Cunard Hall and Reynolds House, to make way for new high-rise structures.





While construction on the new Stoughton and Weiskotten cottages was in progress, the college decided to build a third new faculty house for Professor George Haas — the cottage that, from the late 1970s until December 2007, was the home of the late Wagner College Chaplain Lyle Guttu.

The Haas Cottage design was distinct from those of the Stoughton and Weiskotten cottages, for one simple reason: Its design was copied from an earlier building on the site, a gatehouse built around 1905 during the Cunard resort period.

The original gatehouse building, shown above, was a very simple example of the Shingle Style, popular in northeastern seaside resort towns between 1880 and the early 1900s.



The gatehouse was part of the original campus when it was purchased in 1917. The trustees had originally planned to move it away from Serpentine Road (now called Howard Avenue), building a new foundation about 50 feet back from the campus entrance. The more they looked at the gatehouse, however, the more work it seemed to need. In the end, they decided to copy its design for an entirely new building that was constructed on the new foundation, shown above, completed in August 1922.



That's why the Haas Cottage has the roof lines, doorways and windows typical of a late 19th century Shingle Style house — but no shingles! The exterior surface of the house is stuccoed, like all the other cottages built or renovated on the Grymes Hill campus. The only feature that may have been added to the Haas Cottage is the three-sided porch on the east side of the house, originally open, with the trellised roof typical of the Craftsman-style homes popular between 1905 and the early 1920s. (That porch was later enclosed.)

**Note:** No documentation has been found on the design and construction of the faculty cottages beyond what was published in the Wagner College Bulletin, so we do not know which architect designed them. The four early cottages all bear certain similarities, however, to the houses along St. Paul's Avenue in the Stapleton neighborhood of Staten Island that were designed by architect Henry G. Otto. Otto was, coincidentally, the architect who designed Pastor Frederic Sutter's Stapleton home in 1922.



The Annex, a large house at 86 Glenwood Ave., down Grymes Hill just one block east of Victory Boulevard, “about a 15 minute walk from the college ground.” This photo was taken around 1921.

It's difficult to know exactly where to place discussion of the Annex. Partly faculty housing, partly dormitory, it was an ad hoc, interim facility of the college. Previously a boarding house, Wagner College purchased the Annex in mid-1921 to provide overflow student housing while the construction of a new dormitory (South Hall, now Parker) got underway.

The June 1922 Wagner College Bulletin reprinted a note copied from the school's "bulletin-board newspaper" describing life at the Annex:

There are ten jolly good fellows who come over the hill every morning. They always try to do those things which are justifiable by keeping things in order and by being sociable with the neighbors. They certainly enjoy the life of the Annex. It is not so disturbing as up on the hill, except when the next door neighbor tries to make the self-commencer on his "fliver" work early in the morning.

This "Lizzie" is not the only thing that disturbs the peace of the Annex. It is the midnight song which Milton fails to mention in his "Solemn Music." Just two cats, maybe three or four, or more, which seem to arouse the professors from their slumber, but the studes sleep through it all.

Nevertheless, these ten boys claim that life at the Annex surpasses that of the Dorm.

According to the October 1922 Bulletin, the Annex had 11 students in residence, with room for four more. At that time, the Annex was also home to Prof. Theodore E. Palleske and his family, plus two single professors, Walter Peterson and George F. Rugar.

According to the June 1923 Bulletin, "The house occupies two building lots of 40 x 125 feet each, and is three-storied with a very high and roomy attic. It contains 22 rooms, 4 bathrooms, 2 kitchens, and 2 heating plants. It could, therefore, without great expense, be arranged as a dwelling for three professors' families. We paid \$18,000 for the property, but with loaned money. Members of the board and friends advanced the money. ... How we should have been able to get along without this house, we do not know."

The Annex is, by the way, still standing, and today looks very much as it did in 1921.

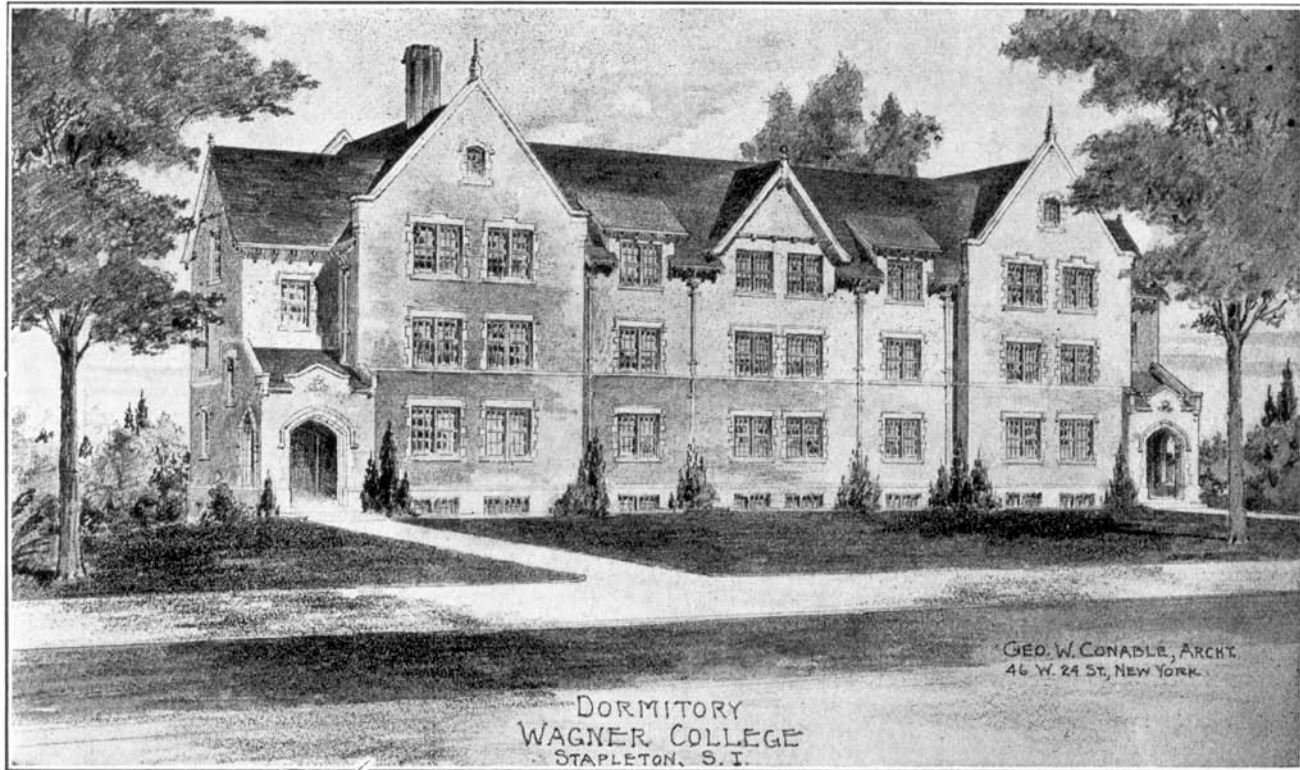
Pre-Depression building  
program, 1922-30





In 1921, the church body that operated Wagner College approved the first major building program for the Staten Island campus. In addition to the faculty cottages, the program called for a new dormitory, complete with a kitchen, dining room, library and laboratories. It would be designed to house up to 66 students.

Pastor Sutter, chairman of the trustees, put architect George W. Conable on the job. Educated at Cornell, Conable had prepared the plans and working drawings on the Singer Building for Ernest Flagg in 1906-07 before starting his own practice. Best known for his hospitals, residences and churches, Conable designed the new sanctuary for Sutter's Trinity Lutheran Church in Stapleton, Staten Island, in 1913.



An architectural rendering of Conable's design for the new dorm, called South Hall (later renamed Parker Hall), was widely distributed in Wagner's fund-raising literature of the early 1920s.



The cornerstone for South Hall was laid on October 28, 1922. A little less than a year later — on Sunday, Sept. 16, 1923 — the Wagner College community gathered to dedicate the finished dorm. The speaker that day was Charles M. Jacobs, a church historian at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.



Conable was also the architect for the last major building raised at Wagner College before World War II, seen here in his architect's rendering. Called the Administration Building at the time, the building is known today as Main Hall. The construction of Main took about 20 months, from the groundbreaking in June 1928 to the dedication ceremony on February 28, 1930.



Contributions for the construction project came from Wagner friends far and wide. The central architectural feature of the building, the Nicum Towers (as seen here in a drawing by Vernon Howe Bailey), were paid for with a gift from the estate of the Rev. John Nicum, director (president) of Wagner College from 1894 to 1902. The amount of that gift, according to one historian, was equal to the sum of his entire salary during his tenure as director in Rochester.

A college myth in wide circulation concerns the “symbolism” of the mismatched towers on Main Hall. A note found in the college archives summarizes it this way:

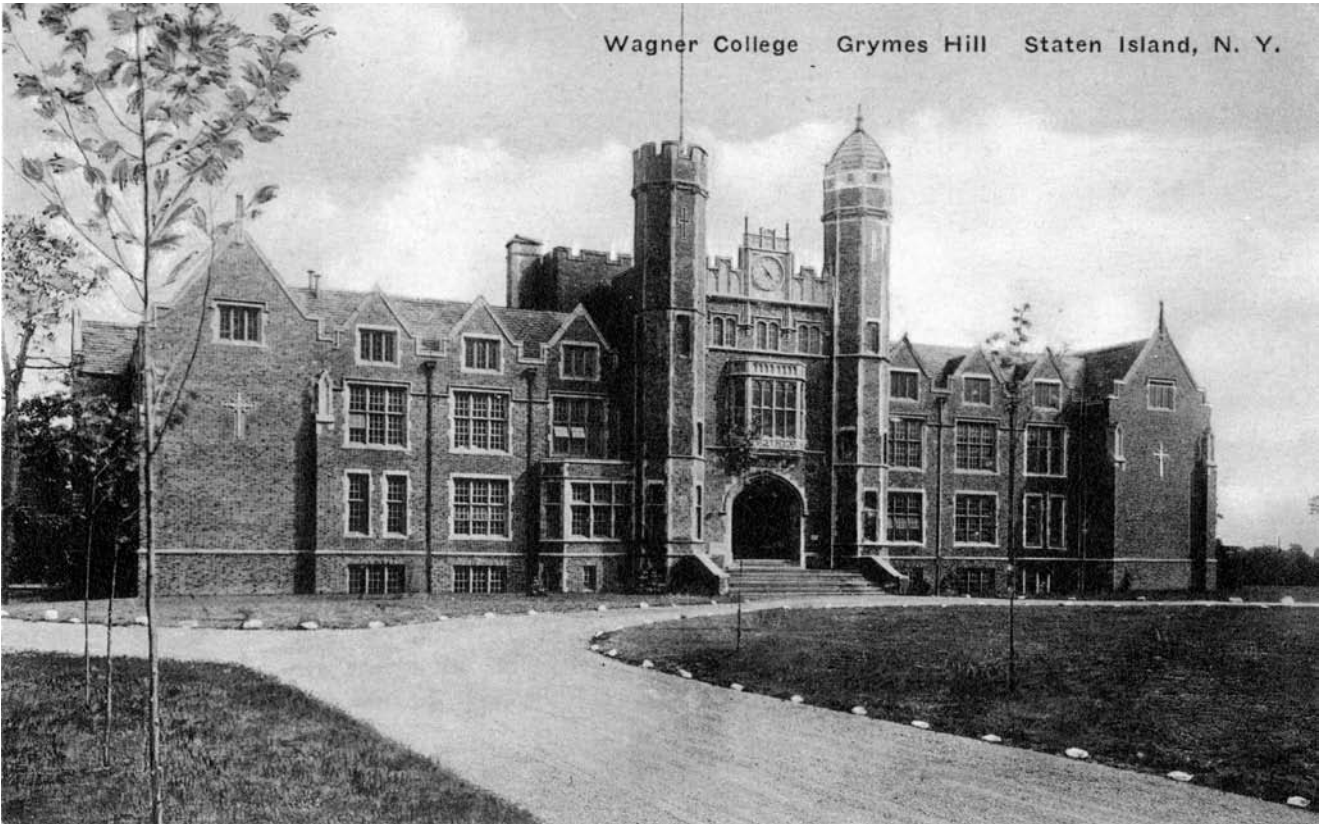
“Ask almost any Wagner old timer the meaning behind the two majestic towers of the Administration Building and you may get as many answers as the number of people asked. One person will tell you that whereas one tower is complete and the other incomplete, the towers contrast the Freshman entering Wagner, and the erudite Seniors at graduation. Another person will say that the two towers indicate the coeducational phase of the College. [Not likely. Main was finished in 1930, while women were not admitted until 1933.]

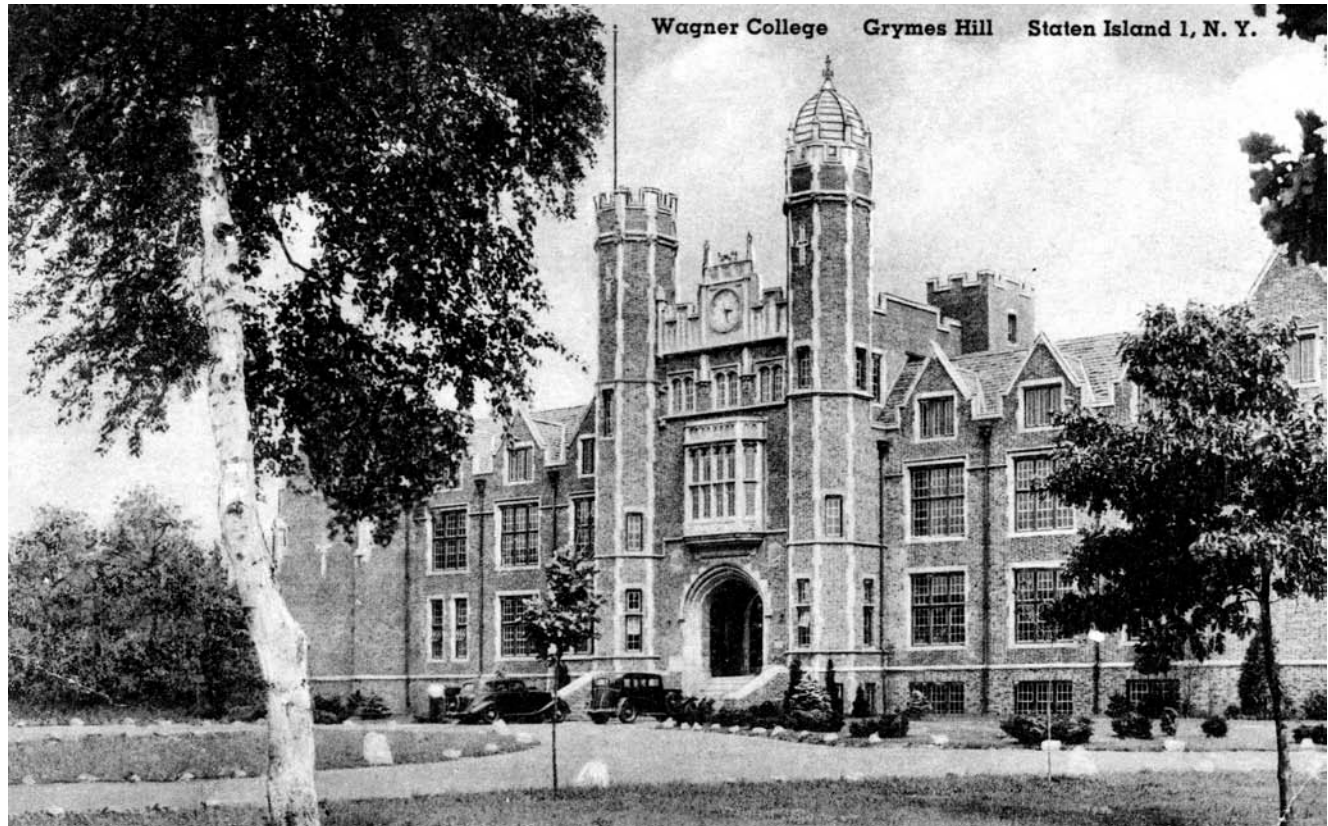
“Probably the true explanation is that given by the Rev. Theodore E. Palleske. Pastor Palleske, an 1898 graduate of Wagner, says that the higher tower, carrying a replica of a Cardinal’s hat and the cross, represents the loyalty of Wagner College to Christian ideals. The other tower, carrying the flag pole, represents loyalty to the United States Government. Thus the towers of Wagner represent the age old significant and symbolic association of church, state, and education.”

Modern readers of this story will notice, first, that today the towers exhibit neither cross nor flagpole. The cross was knocked off the south tower by a direct lightning strike some years ago, and was never replaced. The fate of the flagpole is unknown.

Readers familiar with Lutheranism, a movement characterized by its opposition to Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authority, might question why a Lutheran college would symbolize fealty to the church with a “Cardinal’s hat” (though the south tower looks more like a papal tiara).

And those familiar with architecture will tell you that mismatched towers are typical elements of the Collegiate Gothic style, of which Main Hall is an example. (The next time you visit the campus of Columbia University, look at the towers of Teachers College.) The mismatched towers in Collegiate Gothic architecture have no special symbolic significance at all; they are mismatched simply because architects *like* them that way!









Main Hall in a snowstorm, February 1937.





