

Zion-Parnassus Academy ^[1]

Zion-Parnassus Academy

by Steve Suther, 2006

The Zion-Parnassus Academy was an eighteenth-century classical school located in [Rowan County](#) ^[2] about a mile east of [Thyatira Church](#) ^[3] (believed to be the oldest [Presbyterian](#) ^[4] church in western North Carolina). The school's founder (and Thyatira's minister), [Samuel Eusebuis McCorkle](#) ^[5], hoped to establish a school that would stress religious as well as classical learning. Its name recalled the [Hill of Zion](#) ^[6], the residence of King David and his successors, and [Parnassus](#) ^[7], the Greek mountain sacred to Apollo (god of youth, music, and prophecy) and the Muses (goddesses of poetry, art, and science).

Patterned after [David Caldwell](#) ^[8]'s school in [Guilford County](#) ^[9], Zion-Parnassus added a department for teacher training. For this reason, McCorkle's academy has been referred to as the first normal school in America. Forty-five ministers emerged from Zion-Parnassus before it closed around the beginning of the eighteenth century, as did many lawyers, judges, and state officials. In 1798, when the fledgling [University of North Carolina](#) ^[10] held its first commencement, six of the seven graduates were from Zion-Parnassus.

References:

William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina* (1846).

James Hurley and Julia Goode Engam, *The Prophet of Zion-Parnassus* (1934).

Additional Resources:

The prophet of Zion-Parnassus: Samuel Eusebius McCorkle ^[11] by James Franklin Hurley, Julia Goode Eagan, Presbyterian Church in the U.S. Committee of Publication, Published for the authors by Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1934 - 121 pages: http://books.google.com/books/about/The_prophet_of_Zion_Parnassus.html?id=brLVAAAAMAAJ ^[12]

Sam'l E. McCorkle, NC Highway Historical Marker L-20: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=search&k=Markers&sv=L-20> ^[13]

True and Candid Compositions: The Lives and Writings of Antebellum Students in North Carolina: https://docsouth.unc.edu/global/name_search.html?type=9&projid=9&name=Zion-Parnassus%20Academy,%20Rowan%20County,%20NC&name_id=name0001264 ^[14]

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Authors:

[Suther, Steve](#) ^[20]

Origin - location:

[Rowan County](#) ^[21]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[22]

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