

Randall's Congregational Church at Iowa City

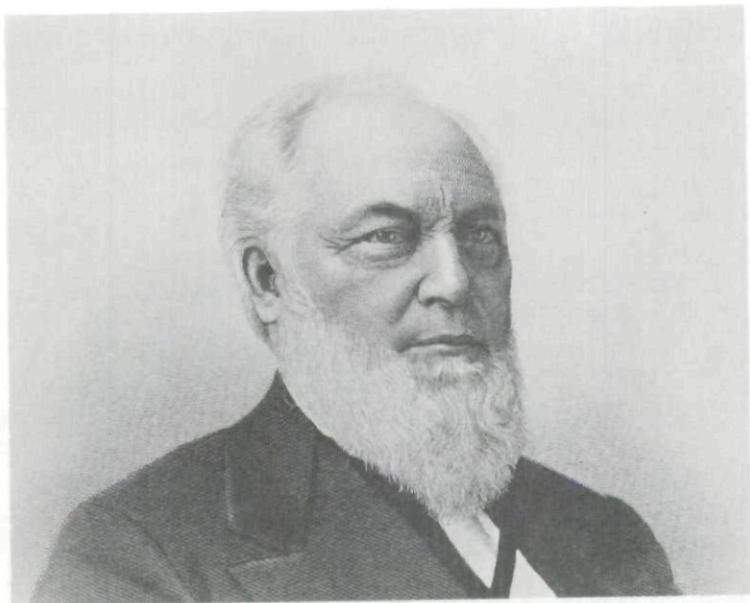
Mabel C. Skjelver

THE CORNERSTONE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL Church at Iowa City, Iowa was laid on June 9, 1868 and the finished church dedicated December 9, 1869. The plan for the Gothic Revival structure was purchased from Gurdon P. Randall, a Chicago architect, known for his church, school, and courthouse designs. Randall had gained considerable recognition for his church designs by 1866. He originated the amphitheatre form in the Union Park Congregational Church (1869) in Chicago, now the First Congregational Church at 44 N. Ashland, which gave him considerable eminence as a church architect.¹

The *Iowa City Republican* of January 2, 1867 reported that the Congregational Society had purchased a corner lot at Clinton and Jefferson Streets, fronting on the University grounds with the purpose of erecting a "neat, tasty building" with a basement, approximately 44 by 76 feet. By fall of that year the Congregational Society had in its possession sketches of a plan drawn by the Chicago architect, Gurdon Randall, which had cost the society \$450. "They were for a Gothic house . . . with a tower upon the corner, which will serve as vestibule corner . . . to be a plain, but very neat and tasty building." The committee-on-plans had been instructed to secure plans for complete scientific ventilation of the new edifice, a sanitary feature that was not included in other public buildings in Iowa City at that time. Randall had gained a reputation early in his career for "sanitary work" in building.² The

¹*Inland Architect and Builder*, Vol. IV, No. 3, October 1884, p. 35. *Iowa City Republican*, December 29, 1869.

²*Inland Architect and Builder*, Vol. III, No. 1, February 1884. *Iowa City Re-*



Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society

G. P. Randall

heating and ventilating system of the Congregational Church was described by the *Iowa City Republican* reporter following the completion and dedication of the church.

The whole building is heated with three of Boynton's portable furnaces, put in by Bixby and Bro., which, with the superior ventilation, warm the house with the greatest ease. This is the only public building in Iowa City that has any scientific ventilation. In the rear of the house is a large ventilating shaft, running up in two sections, one each side of the pulpit recess, uniting above the roof in a single shaft. Within this are boiler plate iron pipes for smoke flues, running up and uniting in the same manner. These smoke pipes heat the ventilating shaft and thus create a very powerful draft, which draws the cold, foul air from the floor of the room, through a perforated riser in front of the pulpit platform, through registers under the pulpit floor, and thus gives place to the warm, fresh air thrown into the room through the furnaces.³

Randall's books and pamphlets of designs in perspective, published between 1861 and 1884, contained instructions for the

publican, January 2, 1867 and October 30, 1867.

³*Iowa City Republican*, December 29, 1869, p. 3.

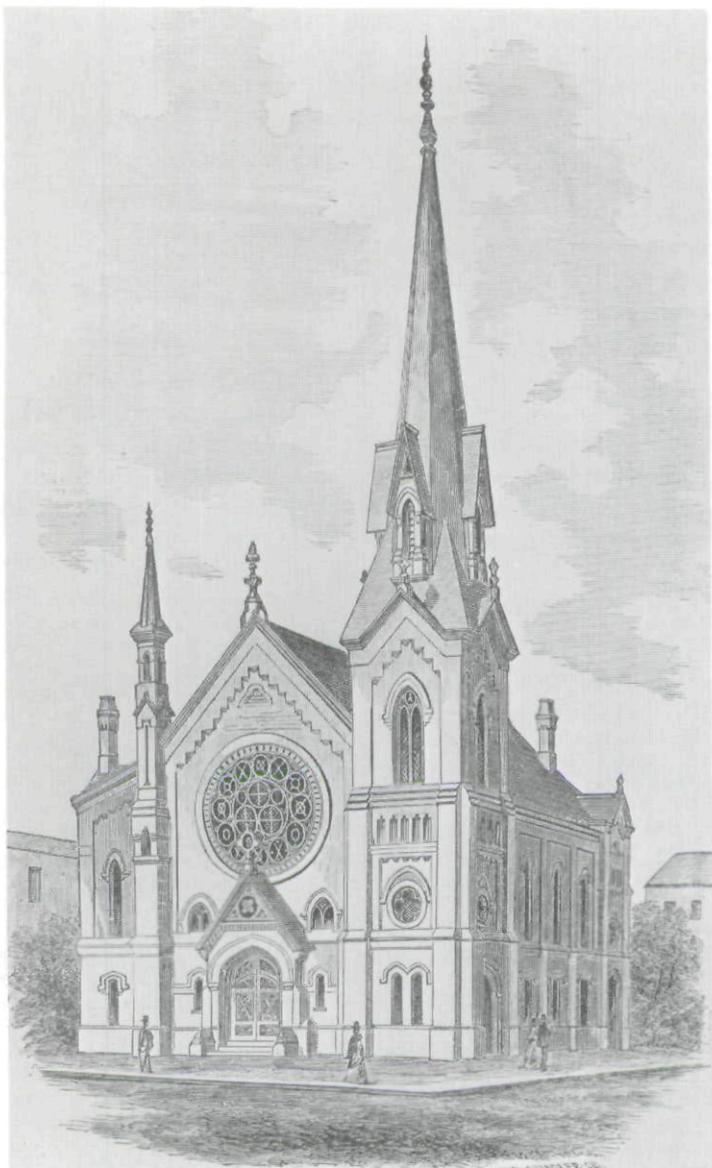
heating and ventilating of buildings, mechanical features for which he was especially well known. His publications were used mainly as a medium of advertising his services.⁴ He presented only the lithographic perspective views in his publications, stating that the "floor plans showing the internal arrangements . . . would be of but little, if any, service to the reader, as they are the property of the architect with which he does not part, without compensation, and those who use them are liable to him for them, to the extent as though the plans were ordered of him."⁵

The Congregational Church at Iowa City was illustrated as design No. 6 (drawing is in reverse to the actual building) in Randall's 1868 publication, *A Handbook of Designs Containing Plans in Perspective for . . . Courthouses, Universities, Academies, Schoolhouses, Churches, Dwellings . . .* Randall stated the Iowa City Congregational Church was a "good brick building with a basement, to cost \$40,000" but added that the design "was afterward modified so as to reduce the cost."⁶ The final cost of

⁴Randall's books listed by Henry-Russel Hitchcock in his *American Architectural Books* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1946, p. 80) are indicated by a single asterick, while those in the collections of the Chicago Historical Society are indicated by a double asterick. **Randall, *Gurdon Architecture. Designs and Illustrations for Residences, Banking Houses, School Houses, Churches Court Houses*. Chicago: Evening Journal, 1861; * ***Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue Containing Plans in Perspective of Colleges, Schoolhouses, Churches and Others Public Buildings . . .* Chicago: Horton and Leonard, 1866; *(2nd ed. rev.) Chicago: Horton & Leonard, 1866; **Supplement . . .* Chicago: Horton & Leonard, 1866; ***Supplement . . .* Chicago: Horton & Leonard, 1867; * ***A Handbook of Designs Containing Plans in Perspective For Courthouses, Universities, Academics, Schoolhouses, Churches, Dwellings . . .* Chicago: Church, Goodman and Donnelley printers, 1868; ***Suggestions to Building Commissioners and Others, Who Are About to Engage in the Construction of Public Buildings or Private Residences*. Chicago: Hazlett and Reed. 1870; **The Great Fire of Chicago and Its Causes. What are and what are not Fireproof Buildings and How to Build Them . . .* Chicago, 1871; ***Initiatory or Preliminary Steps to Building and How to Obtain Plans, Heating and Ventilation of Buildings*. Chicago: Hazlett and Reed Printers, 1872; **How to Build Schoolhouses with Systems of Heating, Lighting and Ventilation*. Chicago: G. K. Hazlett & Co., 1882; *Book of Designs for Schoolhouses and Suggestions as to Obtaining Plans, and How to Heat and Ventilate Schools Buildings*. Chicago: Knight & Leonard, printers, 1884. (notice of publication in *Inland Architect and Builder*, Vol. III, No. 1, February 1884).

⁵Randall, Gurdon; *Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue . . .* 1861, p. 13-14.

⁶Randall, Gurdon; *A Handbook of Designs . . .* Illustration opposite page 10, page 24.



*Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society
The original design for the Congregational Church in Iowa
City was later modified in order to reduce the cost.*

the finished building, including the lot, furnaces and furniture totaled \$29,000.⁷ An indebtedness for the church remained for some years despite liberal contributions by the congregation; eventually the Ladies Benevolent Society assumed the remaining \$1,300 debt paying it off in yearly installments of \$200, retiring the debt in 1882.⁸

The *Iowa City Republican* dutifully reported the progress of the two new church buildings, the Congregational and the Catholic, both in process of erection in the summer of 1868. Their "style of architecture was far superior to anything ever before seen in [Iowa City] and will ornament two prominent corners, adding greatly to the beauty of our now beautiful city."⁹ The foundation of the Congregational Church was considered "the best ever laid . . . being 5 feet wide on the bottom and laid on a bed of broken stone, mixed with mortar and gravel, pounded into the earth. It cannot move while the earth remains stationary."¹⁰

As the Congregational Church's roof timbers were set in place and the brick work finished, the reporter of the *Iowa City Republican* wrote that "it was one of the most tasty and beautiful structures in the State, and reflected great credit on the architect, G. P. Randall of Chicago . . . proving him to be a master of his profession."¹¹

Workmen involved in the building of the Congregational Church included: Finkbine and Lovelace, general supervision; M. Boarts, stone and brick masonry; Adams and Sheets, carpentry; Way and Morrison, plastering; Stagge and Strab, stone steps; M. Ryan, painting; and S. E. Paine, gas fittings. By late summer of 1869 the congregation was using the basement for Sunday services, and the ladies' organizations were giving strawberry and ice cream "sociables" in the basement.¹²

The dedication services occurred December 19, 1869 with Rev. Gulliver, President of Knox College, Illinois, presenting the

⁷*Iowa City Republican*, December 29, 1869.

⁸Shambaugh, Benjamin F., Ed. *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, Vol. 15, 1917, p. 97.

⁹*Iowa City Republican*, August 19, 1868.

¹⁰*Iowa City Republican*, June 17, 1868.

¹¹*Iowa City Republican*, August 19, 1868.

¹²*Iowa City Republican*, June 2, 1869, September 22, 1869, October 6, 1869.

dedicatory address to a packed house: the seating capacity was exhausted, the aisles filled and many stood throughout the hour and a quarter sermon. Total membership of the Congregational Society was a hundred and twenty, a theme, in reference to the early disciples, which Dr. Magoun, President of Iowa College, took for his discourse in the evening.

At the end of December the *Iowa City Republican* reporter described the new church building in detail.

This house stands on the south-east corner of Clinton and Jefferson Streets, fronting on Clinton and also fronting the University Square. Its location is very beautiful. Its front is 56 feet wide, and is composed of the main building, in the center, the tower which projects on the northwest corner, and a corresponding projection on the opposite corner. The extreme length from front to tower to the extreme rear is about 95 feet. The width of the main building is 44 feet. It is built in Gothic style, with very steep roof. The tower is surmounted by a spire 150 feet high. There is a small balancing spire near the opposite corner. Various points are ornamented with finials, all in most excellent taste. The whole structure is most beautifully trimmed with cut stone. The outside woodwork is heavily coated with paint and sand. There are three outside doors. The main entrance to the basement is from Jefferson Street, near the rear of the building, while another is through the base of the tower. The entrance to the principal floor is from Clinton Street, up a flight of massive and beautiful stone steps, into a projection from the main building, which opens into the lower vestibule. Turning here to right or left you pass up a short flight of easy steps and land on the floor of the upper vestibule, on a level with the floor of the main audience room, which is entered through massive folding doors. This room is about 80 by 41 feet on the floor, and about 90 by 41 feet over the choir, and 38 feet from floor to the ceiling in the center, where are placed three of Frink's reflectors, with 20 burners each, which light the room most brilliantly. The walls of the room are beautifully wainscotted to the windows, the balance plastered, and frescoed in a style appropriate to the style of the house. It is by far the finest job of frescoing we ever saw, and was done by Jevne and Almina of Chicago, the best artists of that city.

The choir is over the vestibule, and is finished in front with beautiful and elaborate paneling. The windows are enameled glass, with stained borders and central emblems. The front window is very beautiful. The seating of the room is very superior. The seats are broad, the backs high and both of just the right pitch, the arm rests very broad, beautifully turned black walnut scrolls. The ends of the pews project above the backs, and are trimmed on either side with a black walnut rosette. The backs are capped with heavy black walnut rails, and all are supplied with neat book racks. The pews are so constructed as to admit running a carpet from front to rear, and the whole room is neatly carpeted. The pulpit is a very simple but tasty structure, so constructed as not to conceal the speaker from the audience, and is furnished with Gothic black walnut chairs, appropriate to the house. A recess in the rear of the pulpit is finished into a beautiful alcove, and frescoed in panel, column groined arch work, which is very fine. The basement is en-

tirely above ground, 12 feet in the clear, and is divided into 4 rooms—the main, or lecture and Sabbath school room, two parlors and library. The parlors are connected by folding doors, and the largest parlor is connected with the main room by double folding glazed doors, so that the whole can be thrown together. The main entrance to the basement is into a hall, which opens into either room. The whole basement is wainscotted to the windows, and the balance of the walls and the ceiling are plastered and dressed with a hard finish. The basement is also entered through the base of the tower, from Jefferson Street, and from this vestibule a flight of stairs leads to the upper floor. The basement is seated with settees. The finished lumber of the house is of the very best quality and of unusual thickness. The floors are inch and a quarter, the pew ends 2 inches, the seats inch and a half and the backs inch and a quarter. No color is put upon the wood work, but a coating of shellac and two coats of varnish bring out the shades of the wood with a richness and beauty that no grainer can imitate. The trimmings of the wood work are black walnut stain, which, with the black walnut trimmings of the pews, contrasts finely with the wood color of the principle work.¹³

Additions to the church exterior have occurred, as well as remodeling of the interior. A pipe organ was installed within and in front of the original recess back of the pulpit by the turn of the century. In the mid-1930s remodeling, a filigree screen was added to conceal the organ pipes, the choir space was enlarged to occupy the entire space across the front of the sanctuary, decorative “gothic-styled” beams were applied to the formerly plain ceiling, and new light fixtures installed. During a 1968-69 remodeling by the Hansen Linn Meyer architectural firm of Iowa City, the Clinton Street entrance was lowered to street level and the vestibule and stairs to the main sanctuary rebuilt. At that time the sanctuary was also shortened in order to enlarge the vestibule.¹⁴

Architect Gurdon Paine Randall (1821-1884) commenced his architectural studies in the office of Asher Benjamin of Boston. His father was a contractor-builder and millwright, and young Randall assisted his father in the lumbering and building trade until he was 21 years of age. Upon the completion of his architectural studies, he designed and constructed churches and railroad buildings in the New England States. Many of the Vermont Central, the Rutland and Burlington, the New York Central, Syracuse and Binghamton railroad buildings were designed and

¹³*Iowa City Republican*, December 29, 1869.

¹⁴Rev. Edward Heininger, Pastor, Congregational United Church of Christ, Iowa City.

their construction supervised by Randall prior to his emigration to the West in 1856. Upon his arrival in Chicago, he found some formidable competitors already doing a thriving business in the building trade. Men such as James Mills Van Osdel, Asher Carter, Edward Burling, William W. Boyington and Otis L. Wheelock controlled much of the Chicago architectural field. Randall therefore sought to build his clientele from the trade areas of the expanding Midwest, eventually becoming more widely known throughout the West than any other Chicago architect.¹⁵ He was one of the first signers of the architect's code that antedated the organization of the American Institute of Architects. He and his colleagues early established a fee system based on a percentage of the cost of the structure.¹⁶

In his 1866 publication, Randall set forth this compensation method:

Architects are usually paid for their services by a commission on the outlay or cost of the building, and in addition to this, their necessary traveling expenses in going to and from the building in supervising its construction . . . if it be outside of the town or city in which they reside . . . By general agreement the architects of Chicago have a *grade* of commissions for different kinds of work, but uniform as regards the several offices, and all based upon the entire cost of the building.

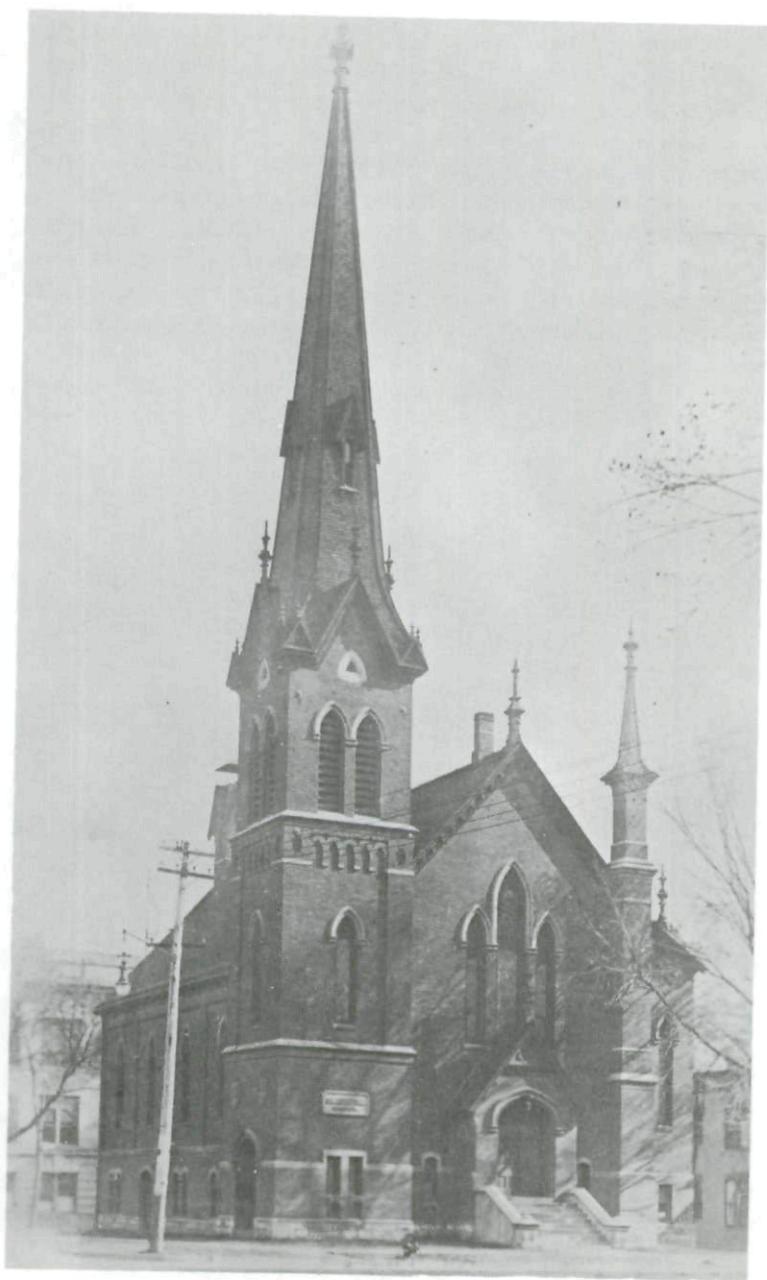
The cost-fee system was set forth as follows: plain wholesale stores, 1½ percent; schools, 2 percent; plain dwellings, ordinary retail stores, courthouses, colleges, universities, seminaries and plain churches, 2½ percent; while elaborate dwellings and churches were 3 percent.¹⁷

¹⁵*United States Biographical Dictionary for Illinois*. New York: American Biographical Publishing Company, 1883, pp. 394-397. *Biographical Sketches of Leading Men of Chicago*. Chicago: Wilson and St. Clair, 1868, pp. 327-330. *Inland Architect and Builder*. Vol. IV, No. 3, October 1884, p. 35.

¹⁶Ericsson, Henry. *Sixty Years a Builder*. Chicago: A Kroch and Sons, 1942, p. 135, 125-127, taken from James M. Van Osdel's record books. Randall's signature leads the list of the eleven architects who entered into an agreement for uniform and equitable compensation for their services (ca. 1857). The other architects in order are: P. A. Nicholson, Robert Schmid, A[ugust] Bauer, Edward Burling, John M. Van Osdel, O[zias] S. Kinney, O[tis] L. Wheelock, W[illiam] W. Boyington, T[heodore] V. Wadskier and A[sher] Carter.

¹⁷Randall, Gurdon. *Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue* . . . 1866, pp. 13-15.

Photograph (opposite) of the Congregational United Church of Christ, Iowa City, was taken ca. 1912.



Courtesy of the University of Iowa Library Archives

According to his own accounts, Randall was responsible for other building designs in Iowa. Those known are: Banking House (Cook & Sargent) [sic], Davenport, Iowa (built 1857); Courthouse (no. 2) Madison County, Winterset, Iowa; Jail at Winterset, Iowa; High school, Charles City; Ward School, Independence; and a Ward School, Osceola.¹⁸ Many of his buildings are in Illinois, but other midwestern states, such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kansas, Michigan, Indiana, Colorado, Nebraska and Missouri have a number of his buildings. The eastern and southern states were not neglected, for Pennsylvania, Ohio, Arkansas, Alabama and Georgia have at least one example.

¹⁸The author's attempt to trace these has yielded the following: The Cook and Sargeant Banking House at Davenport was organized in 1847, occupying a wooden building on the southwest corner of Main and West Second Streets. In 1857 the firm moved into a new limestone building on the same site. It was three stories built at a cost of \$75,000 and described as the most beautiful and ornate building west of New York City. The panic of 1857 brought hard times and Cook and Sargeant suspended operations in 1859. In 1860 the Merchants branch of the State Bank of Iowa opened in the old Cook and Sargeant building, remaining until 1863. Austin Corbin along with George S. C. Dow opened a banking business in March 1863 in the old "Marble Bank" of Cook and Sargeant, Corbin having withdrawn from the banking firm of Macklot and Corbin. Within a few months the Corbin and Dow bank became known as First National Bank of Davenport. For some 44 years the First National Bank and the Davenport Savings Institute (organized in 1864) operated in the same building. In 1880 a fire destroyed part of the interior, but the building was rebuilt. In 1909 the upper portion of the old three-story building was removed and three more stories added, raising the building to six stories. In 1923 this rebuilt structure was gutted by fire and in 1924 a new 10 story building was erected on the site.

The erection of the second Madison County Courthouse was begun in 1868. It was described by Charles A. Tuttle in *An Illustrated History of Iowa* (Chicago: Richard A. Peale & Co., 1876, p. 576) as "built of cut stone from the admirable quarries near, the edifice [is] in the form of a Greek Cross one hundred feet each way, with four fronts of equal beauty. . . ." This building burned in 1875.

The schoolhouses and jail have not been traced, but since the normal life of these is short, there is the likelihood that the Congregational Church of Iowa City may be the only remaining Randall structure in Iowa.

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