

Hail and Farewell!

The Methodist Protestant Church in Iowa

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The passing from view of the Methodist Protestant Church by the Methodist Unification of 1939,¹ which mingled its members with their co-religionists much as our tributaries go to swell the volume of our flanking waterways, calls for some extended notice, especially as no connected account of their doings in Iowa has heretofore appeared in type.

Since this particular corps of the Church Militant was formed prior to the earliest settlement of Iowa, it is only necessary to note here that it was but one of several other denominational separations from the parent Methodist Episcopal Church which took place in the fore and middle part of the nineteenth century. The separation and formation of the Methodist Protestant Church as a distinct denomination was the aftermath of long and strenuous efforts on the part of certain elements, styling themselves "Reformers," to effect modifications of sundry features they considered autocratic in the policy of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the second and third decades of the last century. Failing in their efforts, which were climaxed at the Baltimore General Conference of 1828, the revisionists finally organized themselves as a separate and distinct denomination in November, 1830, under the name of The Methodist Protestant Church.²

That their reforms were not too drastic, and that their attachment to the main tenents of the Methodist faith was strong, is the evidence of the name chosen, a name which likewise indicated a major measure in the reforms adopt-

¹The union of the three branches of the Methodist Church was ratified in a special convention held in Kansas City, in May, 1939. By this act the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church were united again as they had not been since 1830.

All statements of fact concerning the history of Methodist Protestantism in Iowa are based upon the journals and minutes of the Iowa and North Iowa Conferences of that church. Typescript copies of these minutes are in the Iowa Department of History and Archives, while the original long-hand journals are deposited in the library of Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

²Cf. Ancil H. Bassett, *History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, Ch. 22; Mathew Simpson, *Cyclopedia of Methodism embracing sketches of its rise, progress, and present condition*. . . . (Phil. 1880 rev. ed.

ed: the abolition of the episcopacy. Another major objective of the Reform group found in the new constitution adopted by the General Conference of the new church in 1830 was one which had been a bitter point of controversy during the preceding decade: the granting of equal representation to laity and ministry in Annual and General Conferences, the governing bodies of the church. With the elimination of the bishops and the presiding elders as head administrative officers of the church, their places were filled by an officer known as the President of the Annual Conference, who shared the appointive and administrative functions with Stationing and Districting committees. In addition the new constitution invested local Societies—Classes—with great leeway in determining conditions of membership.³

The new denomination attained and maintained considerable strength in the older states of the East, where the controversy first raged. But in Iowa and in many of the western territories a large foothold was never secured. The parent Methodist Episcopal Church, on the other hand, entered the Black Hawk Purchase with the first wave of immigration, followed the advancing tides of settlement and established itself firmly in almost every community. It was possessed of missionary support and outside financial aid, which although scanty at best, supplemented the meagre support derived from struggling pioneer congregations sufficiently to afford the itinerant ministers a living wage. Lacking such financial and numerical aid, and forced to rely almost solely upon its own struggling pioneering membership for support, the younger denomination contended with such adverse conditions that its very existence through a full century bears eloquent testimony to the sacrificial valor of both clergy and laity.⁴

Although the initial entry of the Methodist Protestant

³*Ibid.*

⁴Rev. W. H. Betz. "One Hundred Years of the Methodist Protestant Church in Iowa" (Ms.). The Rev. Betz, of Keswick, Iowa, formerly held offices as President and Secretary of the Methodist Protestant conference, is now a retired minister of the Iowa-Des Moines Conference of The Methodist Church.

The "itinerant" minister was the same as the old "Circuit Rider," one who traveled over a number of appointments in his assigned charge.

Church into Iowa Territory is not exactly known, it is highly probable that the first minister of that faith was the Reverend Oliver Atwood, who located in Muscatine County, near Moscow, in the summer of 1837. Obligated to support himself and family by his own labors, he did not preach extensively during the short period of his sojourn. In September, 1838, while returning home from a summer's employment, he was murdered, as was supposed, by Sauk Indians, in reprisal for the slaying of a brother of Chief Poweshiek by a frontier ruffian. The body of the Reverend Atwood was not found for over a week after his death, which occurred near the village of Downey. As if in poetic recognition of the tragic end of this pioneer clergyman, a flourishing church of the Methodist Protestant denomination subsequently arose there and continues to this day.⁵

The first organized "Class" of this church is claimed by Washington County for a society formed in English River Township in 1842 by Joseph Hamilton, pioneer physician and preacher. But as the vanished town of Winchester, in Van Buren County, laid out February 29, 1840, boasted a Methodist Church from its founding, we may safely assume from the prominence of this place in the early annals of the church that this was of that denomination. There were other societies or classes formed in scattered communities along the eastern borders of Iowa within the next several years, but we have no definite data concerning them save the establishment of the church in Iowa City, the new Capitol of the Territory of Iowa, in 1841.⁶

There, taking advantage of the legislative proffer of a quarter block of lots to each church that would erect thereon a suitable building for religious or educational purposes, the Reverend John Libby organized a Methodist Protestant society, May 4, 1841. The very next day con-

⁵*History of Cedar County* (Western Historical Co., 1878), 370-371.

⁶*History of Washington County* (Union Historical Co., 1880), 591 *History of Van Buren County*, (Western Historical Co., 1878), 503

Winchester, located in the northeastern part of Van Buren County, near the present villages of Long View and Stockport, declined when the railroad was located through Stockport. A church building and a school house bearing the ancient name still stand on the abandoned site.

struction was started on a two story brick building, Iowa City's first church structure. The corner stone of this then pretentious building, was laid May 13, 1841, with Governor Robert Lucas as the principal speaker. Rapidly rushed to completion after this ceremony, the building was said to have had a high basement, "with a long flight of stairs from the avenue." In the subscription lists circulated for the cost of its erection, appeared one—to us—unusual item, conveying legal title to a "Slip," or pew, in the house of worship to each donor of fifty dollars. A twenty-five dollar pledge gave ownership to "half a Slip."⁷

As one of the first public buildings in the new capital, and probably the first brick structure in the city, the new church of the young society served to accommodate in its auditorium most of the large public gatherings of the infant city. Besides these it housed various educational enterprises, such as "Dr. Reynold's Select School," Iowa City's first public school; the academic department of Iowa City College, a project of the rival Methodist Episcopal Church. A free school for the blind, a precursor of our noble institution at Vinton, likewise met within its walls. And surely not least, an ambitious Methodist Protestant enterprise in education had its beginnings there.⁸

The Iowa City church itself was never very strong, indeed was not always able to support a minister. That even the building program was begun upon prospects that only slowly materialized is suggested in the fact that its founder, John Libby, served in 1842 as the pastor of the newly formed Universalist Church in Iowa City.⁹

But the next year, 1843, brought to Iowa City as pastor of the struggling church one of those unsung preacher-teacher heroes who did so much to engraft a universal educational system upon Iowa, the Reverend William K. Talbott. Quickly opening a "Common School" in Me-

⁷Clarence Ray Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County History*, (Western Historical Press, 1912, 2 vols.), 1, 295-297.

⁸*Ibid.*, 278-279.

⁹*Ibid.*; In 1843 the Methodist Episcopal Church of Iowa City reported 300 members. Simpson, *op. cit.*, 430.

chanics Hall, Talbott added thereto a preparatory department from which flowered a college, held in the brick church building. Designed to "afford the youth of Iowa City facilities for completing their education without leaving home," there was attached to this "college" a theological department to assist young men preparing for the ministry. It was the first of such institutions in Iowa.¹⁰

The ambitious enterprise, in a town of less than 1000, had the hearty support of the local church in addition to Mr. Talbott and other Methodist Protestant societies in the Conference. Among the most prominent of the local backers were the Snyder brothers, Thomas and William B. Formerly of Cincinnati, where they had been leading Reformers, they were now merchants of the new capital city. William became not only an instructor in the nascent school of the prophets, but as editor of *The Colporteur*, launched Iowa's first religious periodical. This attractive little monthly, the profits of which were devoted exclusively to religious education, occasions regret, when the only surviving copy is inspected, that due to malnutrition the infant publication survived but half a year.¹¹

That the sponsors of the college and seminary were in earnest is shown in their selection to the headship of their school of an outstanding churchman of the period, a renowned pulpit orator and polemic, Christian author and educator, the Reverend Nicholas Snethen. Snethen first attained distinction as a Methodist Episcopal clergyman, in which church he rose to high rank as legislator and champion of that faith in its obscure and oft derided early days. As a traveling companion of Bishop Francis Asbury, he was often deputed to preside at Conferences which the latter was unable to attend himself. After a quarter of a century of such employments and honors, he sacrificed both position and prestige to espouse the cause of Reform, and gave the remaining years of his life to the advocacy of a more liberal type of church government. As a leading advocate and defender of the reforms

¹⁰Aurner, 278-279.

¹¹*Ibid.*

which produced the schism in the church in 1828-1830, he naturally followed the dissenters into the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church. Now, at the age of seventy-five, with the experience of several previous ventures in denominational education behind him, he threw himself with the ardor of youth into the task of creating a theological seminary in what had been an unexplored wilderness less than ten years before.¹²

The seminary, named in honor of its venerable head, was incorporated with a board of trustees consisting of William Patterson, John N. Coleman, William B. Snyder, E. Metcalf, L. S. Swafford, and John Conn. Its prospectus listed a faculty which included the Reverend Snethen as president, William K. Talbott, J. N. Coleman, Ward D. Talbott, and W. B. Snyder, professors, the last of whom was styled "Professor of Sacred Music." A charter was secured from the territorial legislature.¹³

Immediately accepting the call, Reverend Snethen hastened to Iowa City to survey his field of labor. Remaining but a short time, during which he acted as chaplain at the opening session of the first state constitutional convention, October 7, 1844, he soon departed for his Ohio home, promising to return whenever a class of six theologues could be assembled. Enroute to Ohio he visited the North Illinois Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, in which Conference their co-religionists in Iowa were then included. From this body he secured an endorsement for his seminary, whose objectives, as recorded in the Conference journal, were "to educate gratuitously, the children of itinerant preachers and ministers of the Methodist Protestant Church, as well as young men who are desirous of preparing for the Gospel ministry." The Illinois brethren also enacted a precise set of rules for the government of the seminary's officers, outlined courses of study, and ordered that subscription books in support of the school should be presented at

¹²Cf. Dictionary of American Biography, 17, 382; Simpson, *op. cit.*; Bassett, *op. cit.*, 401-408.

¹³Aurner, 1, 279.

every quarterly conference throughout the district.¹⁴

Nicholas Snethen spent the following winter in his Ohio home, preparing lectures, text books, and other material. In the spring he set out once more for Iowa City, stopping on the way to visit his children in Princeton, Indiana. There he fell sick and there he died, May 30, 1845.¹⁵

Although his loss was a severe blow to the Iowa institution, whether his survival would have insured permanence for the school is problematical. An epidemic of what might be termed "collegitis" swept Iowa City in the first years of the 1840's. Half a dozen academies, seminaries, colleges and universities sprang up where one first class institution of higher learning would have been hard pressed for adequate support. In the rivalries and enmities consequent upon such competition, the entire congeries "fizzled each other out," and from the wreckage there temporarily emerged "Iowa City University." To it Professor Talbott and his staff attached themselves on the demise of Snethen Seminary, which Talbott had kept alive for a year at his own expense.¹⁶

The decline of the educational enterprise had its counterpart in the career of the local church. Its pretentious house of worship was in a very few years sold by creditors¹⁷ under circumstances which led to ecclesiastical and civil litigation that spun out for over thirty years. Long before its conclusion the Society, with a membership reduced to ten, pled inability to support a minister, and vanished from the rolls of the church.

While the enterprise and energy the young denomination displayed in its Iowa City projects deserves nothing but commendation, the wisdom of its venture into denominational education in a territory where the church even two years later had less than six churches and 300 adherents, and no formal church government control, can be gravely questioned.

¹⁴Bassett, *loc. cit.*; In the Methodist Protestant terminology "District" comprised the area in which an Annual Conference functioned. In other branches of the Methodist church, and to-day, it applies to the group of charges served by the Presiding Elder or District Superintendent.

¹⁵See fn. 12.

¹⁶Aurner, I, 280; *Journal of the Iowa Conference, Methodist Protestant Church*, 1846.

¹⁷Among whom the most prominent were Thomas and William Snyder. See

ORGANIZING THE CHURCH

There had been, of course, considerable development in the Methodist Protestant Church in Iowa during the years since 1837.¹⁸ But up to the time of the struggles of the Snethen Seminary and the legal complications involved in the property of the church, each Society or Class in the territory continued to worship and to exercise its religious functions in more or less splendid isolation, although nominally under the administration of the North Illinois Conference.

An important step in the history of the church in Iowa was marked in 1846 in the following long-hand entry made in a huge leather-bound ledger, bearing on its outside cover the pasted legend, "Vol. I, Minutes of the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church."

October 13th, 1846; nine o'clock A. M. By virtue of the action of the General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, held in Cincinnati in May, 1846, A. D., the following named brethren, ministers and lay delegates in the Methodist Protestant Church in the Territory of Iowa, met at the State [sic] House in Iowa City, to organize a Conference in the Methodist Protestant Church, viz: William Patterson, George L. Pierson, Robert Miller, Oliver W. Kellogg and Alexander Caldwell, Ministers: Preston J. Friend and Henry Nesmith, Lay Delegates.

William Patterson and Henry Nesmith were elected temporary chairman and secretary respectively, After being opened by reading a portion of scripture, an address to the throne of grace was offered by the Reverend William H. Collins, of the Illinois Annual Conference District. Apparently acting as a coach from the older established Conference to assist the new organize itself, Collins was first elected "honorary member" of the new Iowa Conference, and served on most of the important committees, besides acting as mediator in a futile effort to untangle the debts and difficulties of the Iowa City church and seminary.

Conference Journal for 1846 for detail of controversy.

Because of an explicit omission in the Discipline of the Church at the time the lot was acquired in 1841, the church compromised its suit in 1879 for \$300.

¹⁸The minutes of the first Conference shows church activities in three circuits for the preceding year. How much longer many groups in these circuits had been formed is unknown.

The numbers of this first conference were swelled the next day by the addition of George Davison, lay delegate from the Burlington Mission, while Professor Talbott was recognized as a ministerial member and Levi Freese was admitted to the itinerancy with deacon's orders.¹⁹ Kellogg and Caldwell were advanced at this time from deacons to elders. On the third day W. H. Barnes was received as a minister, but the application of Robert Douthitt for admission to the itinerancy was rejected. A similar request by I. (or J.) Pardoe was "indefinitely postponed," a parliamentary device by which the matter was shelved for that year. Among the rules of order which this tiny group framed and adopted with the dual object of fencing the dignity of the Chair and expediting conference business, was one which could very profitably be observed today. Although adopted in an epoch of much sectarian controversy, this rule prohibited the utterance of offensive reflections upon any religious body whatsoever.

The Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church was permanently organized with the election of William Patterson as president and Abraham L. Gray secretary. Robert Miller and Henry Nesmith were appointed to the "Stationing Committee" which in conjunction with the president, fixed the appointments of the ministers of the conference. The appointments were ordered read a day previous to adjournment, affording dissatisfied brethren opportunity to adjust matters with the Committee. If they failed in this they had right of

¹⁹The lowest order in the Methodist ministry is the "Local Preacher" who is unordained, but receives a license to preach for two years, during which time he is on trial. After two years of satisfactory trial he is raised to be deacon, in which capacity he must serve at least two years more. Finally, when he has served two years to satisfaction as a deacon he is then ordained an elder.

The difference between the functions is that while the deacon can perform all the services of the regular ministry, baptism, marriage, etc., he is "not authorized to consecrate the elements of the Communion," or the Lord's Supper. See Simpson, *op. cit.*, 279, 603. The deaconate was abolished in the Methodist Protestant Church in 1874, after discussions and debates ranging as far back as 1861.

Local Preachers could also be laymen who did not seek "Conference membership," but were licensed to use their gifts as a pulpit orator, nominally under the direction of the "preacher in charge" of the Circuit. More often, however, he worked in a free lance capacity. These members of the clergy were eligible to ordination after a longer period of service than those received into Conference ranks, and often not required to pursue Conference studies. The Methodist Episcopal Church for a number of years prior to 1939 classified the more talented Local Preachers as "Accepted Supplies," which entitled them to appointment as pastors of minor charges and made them eligible for retirement pensions. This regulation obtains in the united Methodist Church.

appeal to the Conference, which body, after full explanations from both sides should decide the question without debate. Refusal to abide by these decisions carried the penalty of two years suspension from the itinerant rolls.

The scattered nature of the membership of the church, a condition to be expected in a new pioneering country, is accurately shown in the rules for a "system of Government for Home Missions" adopted by the conference: When three or more societies contain "in the aggregate not less than thirty members," they shall be formed into a mission. Whenever any Home Mission shall have forty members "it shall be constituted a Circuit; or if in Town or City, having but one appointment, it shall number thirty Members in order to be entitled to hold quarterly Conferences . . . and when it shall have sixty members it shall become a Station; and when a Home Mission becomes a Circuit or Station, it shall be subject to the Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church. . . ."

The application of this rule in the report of the committee grandiloquently entitled the Committee on Boundaries, Wants and Necessities, likewise revealed the scattered nature of the church:

Iowa City Circuit; a three weeks circuit with sixty members, it embraced Johnson, Washington, Louisa and Iowa Counties, and as much of Cedar County as lay west of the Cedar River. One preacher wanted.

Tipton Circuit; a three weeks circuit also, had sixty members likewise, and included "Muskatine," "Lynn" and that part of Cedar County east of the Cedar River. One preacher wanted.

Winchester (Van Buren County) Circuit, four weeks circuit, eighty-six members, it had no definite boundaries. Two preachers wanted.

Dubuque Mission, no members reported, this mission covered Dubuque, Jackson, and Jones Counties. One preacher wanted.

Oskaloosa Mission, twenty members reported, it comprised Mahaska, Wapello, Davis, Appanoose and Kiskosh [Monroe] counties. One preacher wanted.

Despite the small membership rolls of the church, it must occasion no surprise that this first session of the new Iowa Annual Conference, meeting in Iowa City, undertook to infuse new life into Snethen Seminary. This Seminary, without a home of its own in 1846 because of the disputed sale of the church meeting house to the Methodist Episcopal Church, was suffering from reports that had "gone forth that [it] has ceased to exist." This the Conference took occasion to deny, although admitting that in October, 1845, with all funds depleted, "the operation of the Seminary on this point became embarrassed, and still remains so embarrassed, that comparatively little at this time is done." The Conference adopted a report, however, which vigorously asserted that the seminary still retained its identity or existence, despite the fact that its faculty was associated with "Iowa University." This in no wise impaired, crippled, or defeated the object of the organization it was claimed.

With the appointment of new trustees and the election of W. K. Talbott as Professor, the report of the board of trustees was ordered published in the church journals and all ministers of the conference urged to act as agents of the college to collect donations for the school. The ill success of these earnest efforts was to be seen in the report of the next annual conference in 1847.

The extent of the financial difficulties of the church, which lay behind the troubles of the educational enterprise, was further shown in the first report of the Conference Steward of those circuits in Iowa then under the North Illinois Annual Conference, a report which bears striking testimony to the devotion of the ministry. Four pastors, reporting on salaries fixed at \$200, \$250, \$280, and \$300 respectively, received in the same order, \$50, \$83, \$96.36, and \$41.50.

How did they live and provide for their families on such mere "token" payments? Many farmed, others taught school, worked at trades, or at common labor; some with a little capital at their command speculated in government land at \$1.25 per acre, living on the unearned

increment when they sold their holdings at a later advance in price, which an incoming population rendered inevitable. That ministers could be devoutly pious while so employed goes without saying, since their most godly lay members were likewise so engaged at their trades, professions, and miscellaneous occupations. But that no preacher could possibly serve such wide parishes in a proper manner while so laden with worldly cares also goes without saying. Moreover, it is apparent that the rapid turnover due to inadequate means of supporting an independent clergy was bound to be calamitous in a ministry so handicapped. That so many persevered in their divine calling throughout life despite such adverse conditions is ample proof that they were "not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

This and nearly all succeeding conferences sought to alleviate these almost intolerable conditions, with what success the records of the church too readily show. The usual method adopted was to urge the circuit officials to fix comfortable salaries immediately upon the arrival of the pastor, apportion the amount to the members, and require quarterly payments upon the same. Instructions, sad to say, more frequently ignored than observed.

Another important duty performed at this first conference, and followed regularly at each succeeding session, was the "passage" or "examination" of the character of each itinerant as a prerequisite to his appointment to a charge. This examination consisted of a series of questions put to the minister himself, and others to the lay delegate, relating to the former's conduct, faithfulness, efficiency, and acceptability in his ministerial duties. This was conducted in open Conference, in full hearing of all curious and sometimes critical spectators, which in a small group could not but result at times in strained relations.²⁰

With the announcements of the Stationing Committee, and the allotment of \$130 as annual payment to President

²⁰See Conference Journals for 1854, 1860, and the 1880's. "Admission to the Itinerancy" constituted election to Conference membership, although the writer believes that in the case of unordained preachers, they were regarded as being on trial until ordination.

Patterson for devoting half his time to district visitation, the session closed with a vote of thanks to the secretary, and prayer by the Reverend Collins. The denomination was now fully organized in the Territory of Iowa.²¹

The Second Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church for the Iowa District convened at Winchester, Van Buren County, September 8, 1847. The attendance was small; only four of the six ministers named the year before were in attendance, Patterson, Miller, Caldwell, and Kellogg, while Henry Nesmith of Winchester and John Hollenbeck of Tipton were the sole lay representatives. The economic pressures of family support may explain the listing of four "Unstationed ministers," and the admission of only one new member to the itinerancy.

The lack of success in instilling new life into the Snethen Seminary from the efforts inaugurated the year before is revealed in the Conference journal comment on the question of passing the character of W. K. Talbott, which was "indefinitely postponed," because he had "left the state, and been absent upward of nine months, leaving Snethen Seminary houseless, without professor, teachers, officers or students." In consequence, this institution, never fully launched, now totally and absolutely disappeared, consigned to the same shades of oblivion that engulfed most of its Iowa City rivals in the field of learning.

Nevertheless, spite the small attendance, a growth of the denomination hoped for is indicated in the adjustment of boundaries announced at the second Conference. Scott and Clinton counties were added to the Tipton Circuit; Winchester Circuit was defined as including the five southeastern counties of the state (Henry, Van Buren, Lee, Louisa, Des Moines); and a new field, called the Fort Des Moines Mission, was laid out covering Lucas, Jasper

²¹Pastors of charges were termed "superintendents" in the earlier years of the Methodist Protestant Church, down to the 1870's. "To be supplied" indicates a charge for which the President must find a pastor. This was usually some Local Preacher who could spare the time from business.

The assignments of this first Conference were: Iowa City Circuit, R. Miller, Supt.; Tipton Circuit, O. W. Kellogg, Supt.; Winchester Circuit, A. Caldwell, Supt.; L. Freese, asst.; Dubuque Mission, to be supplied, the same of the Oskaloosa Mission.

and Polk counties on the east and all territory west to the Missouri River, with no limitations whatsoever on the northern boundaries this side of the Arctic ocean!

Financial support of the clergy, a pressing and a constant problem for the denomination, had not improved during the year. President Patterson reported but \$45.91 received on his allotted \$130, and of the three pastors present, each with a salary fixed at \$200 per year, Miller reported \$24, Kellogg \$50, and Caldwell \$149.26 received. The first year of the new Conference could hardly be pronounced a success, for with the Burlington Mission abandoned, and no report from the Dubuque Mission, the total membership of the church reported was 212, only four more than that claimed twelve months before.

Considerable improvement and an encouraging increase in the ranks of the church could be shown a year later, however, when the Conference assembled at Burr Oak Ridge in Cedar County. In addition to receiving two ministerial recruits from outside the denomination, the Reverend John Rice from the Primitive Methodist Connection—a body of English origin—and the Reverend Charles D. Gray from the Baptist Church, four candidates were admitted to the itinerancy, J. J. Martin, J. L. Frost, Joshua Bowman, and John Huntsman.²² Membership increase of 146 over the year before was a very tangible point of encouragement. In keeping with the enlarged pastoral staff and increased membership, three new charges were blocked out, most of which were revisions of previous circuits or missions.²³ That the young church was aggressive and ready to expand is suggested in the appointment of Freeman Smith as agent for the Methodist Protestant Church in Cedar Rapids. William Patterson continued a third year as President of the Conference, and, it is hoped, receive a more proportionate share of his allotted salary.

²²As a young itinerant "boy preacher," the writer met the widow of the Rev. John Huntsman, then very old and totally helpless, but abounding in prideful memories of those heroic days of Protestant Methodism.

²³Davenport Mission took Scott and Clinton counties from the Tipton Circuit; Bloomington (Muscatine) Mission was restricted to the single county of Muscatine; Des Moines Mission included all territory south of the Des Moines River not otherwise provided for.

The church continued the slow growth of membership during the ensuing year, with 470 being reported to the Annual Conference in 1849. At that time five new charges emerged from the Committee on Boundaries, three carved out of older fields, while the Delaware and the Clayton missions carried the work of the church to the southern border of the Territory of Minnesota.²⁴

Fifteen itinerant preachers appear on the roll for this year, among the newcomers were several who in the years to come played prominent parts in the progress of the church. One of the newly listed ministers was J. K. Dawson who was honored at this session of the Conference in being elevated to the presidency, although in his absence the reliable Patterson occupied the chair.

Another favorable sign of the growth of the denomination was the final report of the Stationing Committee which was able to provide preaching services for all but one field, the new Clayton Mission. Only two preachers were without place, J. J. Martin at his own request, and Joshua Bowman, left in the hands of the president. And then in 1849, church property found its first mention, Winchester reporting a brick parsonage of unstated cost or value.

At Winchester again the next year, 1850, the Conference paused to mourn the death of their first colleague, Oliver W. Kellogg, and returned to their first love and elected William Patterson President for the coming year. Strenuous efforts were put forth to better the President's financial support, efforts regularly made and as often regularly disappointing. Whether because of a local growth in numbers, or the hope of regaining lost prestige is uncertain, but Iowa City was separated from the Iowa City Circuit this year and constituted a mission, comprising solely of the town and township. Zenas Covell was assigned for intensive cultivation of this more limited field.

Meeting in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of

²⁴Bloomfield Circuit, comprised Davis County and that part of Wapello south of the Des Moines River; Jasper Mission included that County and Marion, north of the Des Moines River; Marion Mission consisted of that county south of the Des Moines and adjacent regions south and west.

Oskaloosa in 1851, the Conference report showed a lay membership of the Methodist Protestant Church in Iowa after five years of 593. Nearly one-half of this number, however, belonged to the Winchester Circuit, now reduced to Lee and Jefferson counties plus those portions of Van Buren and Henry lying between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers. Whereas but five stations existed five years before, seventeen were listed in 1851, which, however, was only an increase of two in as many years. All the new charges were formed by a division of the older circuits. This demand for better pastoral service the Conference was certainly unable to meet. Only eight charges were furnished with superintendents, an unduly large proportion of the preachers requested to be left without appointments. No explanation is offered for this condition of things, but an earnest appeal was framed and forwarded to the Illinois Conference for the loan of some of their unemployed ministers, suggesting a financial inability to support an independent ministry as a major cause.

SECTIONAL DIVISION

By 1850, the church was confronted with other problems in addition to those of sustaining a scattered membership in rural communities. The rising tide of sectional controversy which arose over the admission of California into the Union and in the debates over the fugitive slave code proposals in the last years of the 1840's was reflected in the minutes of the Iowa Conference for 1849. In the election of delegates to the General Conference, the supreme legislative and executive tribunal of the Church, which was to meet the next spring in Baltimore, Maryland, the Iowa Conference instructed William Patterson and Freeman Smith, its ministerial and lay delegates respectively, to use all their influence to prevent a division of the denomination.²⁵

²⁵The agitation over slavery figured in every General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church from 1838 onward, usually ending in compromise measures which referred the matter to each Annual Conference. By 1850 the issue had become intense. The Methodist Episcopal Church had been rent in twain over this question in 1844. The debates in the Iowa Conference were but extremely faint echoes of the General Conference debates.

The question was not solved then, and it was almost impossible to keep it out of religious discussions that followed. It appeared again in the Iowa Annual Conference of 1851 in a resolution offered by J. K. Dawson that prohibited any test for membership in local classes other than "a knowledge of sins forgiven through the merits of Jesus Christ." This seems aimed at the practice of excluding Negroes from church membership. After much debate, however, the proposal was indefinitely postponed, leaving the problem to grow more acute.

The slavery controversy remained quiescent in the Iowa Conference reports during the two succeeding years, to reappear again three years later, in 1854. At the Winchester meeting of that year the stormy debates of the 1854 General Conference had their echoes in a resolution offered by the Reverend Benn, and adopted by the Iowa Conference: "Resolved that American Slavery is a great moral evil, and that we are determined to use our influence for its Suppression, so far as it does not interfere with the political harmony and union of these States." A conservative opposition which had large support at that time—the time of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill and Squatter Sovereignty.

The next year, when the long desired reinforcements from the North Illinois Conference, headed by the Reverend W. W. Paul, applied for reception by transfer, the subject flared again in a series of drastic resolutions offered by the Reverend Paul the day following his admission into the Iowa Conference. The first proposed to eliminate the word "White" from the constitution of the church, as far as the Iowa Conference was concerned, and the others were fully in keeping therewith. The constitutional proposal was ruled out of order by the president, and the rest were indefinitely postponed. One of Mr. Paul's companions, along with a certain candidate for admission on trial, were rejected for their extreme views, apparently on the slavery issue, since the conference felt constrained to publish a statement that no man was excluded from their ranks on account of anti-slavery

sentiments. But the question of slavery would not lie, as shall be seen in the records of the church for 1858.

In the meantime, other matters of moral or social nature began to appear in the minutes of the Annual Conference. The 1852 Conference session saw the rise of the temperance question. Then as ever afterward, the church was favorably inclined toward a legal prohibitory law regulating the liquor traffic; thus they pledged their unanimous support in "every proper way" to a suppression of the evil in 1852. Another matter which periodically crept into the conference journals also arose in 1852 when the conference very emphatically negatived a proposition to ban the use of tobacco during conference hours.

Despite these disturbing controversies, the church showed progress. In 1854, at Winchester, the conference elevated Francis Kirkpatrick to the presidency, a man who had been received on trial barely five years before, but now was recognized as one of its most prominent ministers. He continued to be such whether in or out of the presidency for the rest of his career. At this 1854 session the vast influx of the Scandinavian peoples into the central west of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois was recognized by the appointment of John G. Schmidt and an assistant as missionaries to the Scandinavian peoples, as he was "able to speak their language." The conference also petitioned the General Board of the church for a missionary to inaugurate work in the fast growing river towns.

Although the state was enjoying lush boom years in emigration, both along the river and inland, the financial problems of the Iowa Conference clergy remained grave. In an effort to once more evolve a plan for a more successful support of the ministry, it was proposed at this Conference that an allowance of \$100 per annum be fixed for single preachers, with room, board, and washing in addition; married preachers were allowed \$200, plus \$20 for each child, besides house rent, table allowance and fuel. Quarterly Conferences were required to furnish Conference with an estimate of the salary for the ensuing

year as a condition for having a preacher appointed. Failure to make prompt provision for the payment of this sum became a lawful excuse for a pastor to leave his circuit.

The virtues of a denominational education were recognized once more in the acceptance of the Conference's second educational enterprise, a two story brick building called Ashland Academy, located at Ashland, Wapello County. The building and 17 lots in that small town had been bought by a group of Methodist Protestants earlier in the year, and believing that "whereas, the M. P. Church needs an institution of learning to promote her religious & education interests, & the interest of education generally," this group of ministers and laymen presented the academy to the Conference, which in accepting the undertaking changed the name to Seminary. Together with improvements and repairs, the conference assumed a debt of \$1287.93.²⁶

The Seminary "was opened on the 10th day of July last, under the Superintendence of Rev. Lewis Dwight, and has continued 8 weeks, half of one session. The sum due the Principal is \$66.66 dollars," was the report of 1854. The Reverend Dwight was formerly an instructor in Asbury Methodist Episcopal College, Greencastle, Indiana. To aid in the financial support of the newly acquired seminary, all pastors were appointed as its collecting agents.

This venture in higher education proved no more successful than had its predecessor, the Snethen Seminary, in 1846. Serious trouble was experienced shortly afterwards due to the defalcation of the Principal of the Ashland Seminary, with unstated, perhaps unknown, sums of tuition receipts. New leadership was shortly found, however, and a leading minister appointed financial agent at a salary of \$300, the money to be paid out of funds collected. But the hope thus engendered soon died.

The strongest increase in church membership yet noted

²⁶Ashland, now an abandoned town, was located on the SE¼ of Sec. 9, Washington Twp., Wapello County. Eldon succeeded to Ashland when the railroad passed through the former place. The seminary building was a brick two story structure, 30x50 feet, and "fitted up for both school and church use." See *History of Wapello County*, 1901, 139; *History of Wapello County* (S. L. Clarke Publ. Co., 1914).

took place in the mid fifties. Although almost stationary in total enrollments during the first five years, the lists showed but 593 in 1851, at the end of the sixth year, but at the end of the next two years 1510 were reported. The Winchester circuit report gave the curious item of forty "male" members, apart from other statistics, probably an attempted emphasis upon the masculine voting prerogative then in force in the Methodist Protestant Church.²⁷

Forty ministerial names appeared on the Conference roll, here first recorded, although four names were stricken out for various reasons and two referred for judicial investigation. Twenty-two lay delegates were in attendance, and pastoral appointments were made for thirty charges. This flourishing condition of the church was most encouraging. The improvement in the church rolls had its influence on the support of the ministry in 1855-1856. At the 1856 conference some reported having been paid in full, and most received fifty per cent or more of the amounts promised.

The East Des Moines charge, for long a special interest of the church, previously begun by the Reverend J. Q. Hammond who went from house to house with his services, was now manned by William Remsburgh. Destined to be an honored and sainted veteran of the church, Remsburgh, received in that year on trial, together with his wife, began the first of many years of valuable service rendered Iowa's capitol city, besides laboring on other important fields in the conference at large.

The debates on the colored question which had appeared in the Annual Conference record since 1849 led finally to a decision in 1857 whereby colored persons were pronounced eligible for Church membership, dependent upon the decision of the individual Classes or Societies. Though the slavery question was thus being settled in Iowa, it was far from being true of the church as a whole. The Iowa Conference selected delegates to attend the Convention called to meet in Springfield, Ohio, in November, 1857,

²⁷Women were granted voting privilege in November, 1862. This change came in the M. P. Church much in advance of some of the more prominent denominations, the church serving in this and in many other ways as a form of an experiment station for the churches in general.

where the slavery question was to be considered. This Convention resulted in another a year later in Cincinnati, where it was practically determined that organic unity with the Conferences in slaveholding territory had become impossible.²⁸

In this divisive movement the Iowa Conference went along with its sister Free States, instructing its delegates to the Cincinnati Convention in 1858 to co-operate in forming an anti-slavery church. Even so, as seen in the debates of the Iowa Conference, there was a color line drawn across the state, for southern Iowa was largely peopled by emigrants from southern and border states, while the northern portions represented eastern and central state populations.

This, plus the difficulties of travel to attend Annual Conference due to the expansion of settlement and the areas served by the Church, and with several circuits in southern Minnesota asking the Iowa Conference to take them into its already wide area, produced a unanimous request addressed to the General Conference asking for a geographical division of the original Conference.

Both the denomination and the conference separations took place in 1858. The Annual Conference session of that year, held at Genoa Bluffs, Johnson County, thus had two questions of division to consider.

With twenty-seven ministers present, and twelve "entirely absent," and with twenty-five lay delegates, the Conference proceeded to divide itself upon an East and West line. Beginning "North of the south line of the first tier of townships south of the first principal correction line, running due east and west across the State, and at the line between Poweshiek and Jasper counties, turning south one tier of townships and thence west to the Missouri River" the division leaves the modern reader somewhat confused. More understandably to modern perception, the boundary started on the Mississippi River on the south side of the town of LeClaire, setting off the southern three tiers of counties in the state, with Musca-

²⁸W. W. Sweet, *Methodism in American History*. Simpson, *op. cit.*; Bassett, *op. cit.*

tine County and the southern tier of townships in Scott, Cedar, Johnson, and Poweshiek counties from the rest of the State. The portion south of this line retained the name Iowa Conference, and that to the north was named North Iowa.

Fifteen pastoral charges remained in the old, and sixteen went to the new unit. Division of material resources was easy, since aside from churches and parsonages, property of societies where located, the only assets consisted of a quantity of song books. Liabilities were confined to the unpaid debts of Ashland Seminary totaling \$587.81, the remainder left in excess of the sums received from the sale of the property. To meet this conference debt an assessment of ten cents per member was levied on all circuits on in both conferences.

At this year of separation, with a number of charges not reporting, the Iowa Conference claimed 1253 lay members, three meeting houses valued at \$10,000, \$1,000, and \$600. The North Iowa Conference reported 614 members, with no real estate, although two years later they had two meeting houses worth \$1800, and a parsonage valued at \$600. This represented not a striking advance, yet nonetheless encouraging for a body that organized just twelve years before with seven clergymen and 288 laity, and with not a dollars worth of property.

Both Conferences likewise adopted a Course of Study for Candidates for the Ministry, covering the whole range of Christian doctrine and ethics, ancient and modern Bible, geography, history, logic, rhetoric and various other subjects with which twentieth century theologians might not be overly familiar. The mastery of such an agenda of studies, barring the dead languages, would have put these Nineteenth Century clerics on a par with the alumni of the most advanced church institutions of the day. What, if any, attempt was made to secure application to these studies does not appear on the records.

The time-tried William Patterson became first President of the new North Iowa Conference, just as he had served the old in the same capacity. The southern body

elected A. A. Keran, a recent importation from those Minnesota fields so desirous of incorporation in the Iowa fold.

With respect to the second, the denominational, separation, both Conferences approved the separation of the Northern wings of the Methodist Protestant Church from the Southern slave-holding sections of the Church.

(To Be Continued)

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