

The Missionary Who Fled Iowa

PHILIP D. JORDAN

A bone-tired, bewildered, discouraged young man sat at a rough-hewn table in a crude cabin among uncouth frontiersmen more interested in buying and selling land and in planting and harvesting crops than in theology. They were only mildly curious about what the Reverend Ebenezer Alden, Jr., their recently arrived pastor, was writing. Had they looked over the shoulder of the slightly built, not too healthy, minister, they would have seen that he was composing his first quarterly report to his superiors—the executive committee of the American Home Missionary Society in New York City.¹

Alden began well enough, writing in flowing script with carefully shaded letters. The place was Solon, Iowa Territory. The date was February 1, 1844. Thoughts and impressions filled his mind faster than his pen could record them in graceful manner, so he soon forgot les-

¹ The acquisition of the quarterly reports by the Reverend Ebenezer Alden to the American Home Missionary Society by Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries, proved valuable in piecing together the life of a young Congregational minister, member of the Iowa Band of missionaries who arrived in Iowa in 1843. To supplement the quarterly relations, collections from other libraries were used: The Iowa State Historical Department, Division of Historical Museum and Archives, Des Moines; Iowa State Historical Department, Division of the State Historical Society, Iowa City; Burling Library, Grinnell College, Iowa; Grimes-Salter Room, Burlington Public Library, Iowa; and manuscript and printed materials from the author's collection. Numerous individuals, including Anne G. Kintner, Joyce Giaquinta, Judith Gildner, Lida L. Greene, and Robert A. McCown, lent aid which was more than generous and most certainly was gracious. No attempt in the narrative is made to footnote every source drawn from the quarterly reports, the letters from Alden to Ephraim Adams, and from Alden to Salter, although an annotated copy is held by the author. Citations are retained for other sources. The standard accounts of the Iowa Band include George F. Magoun, *Asa Turner; A Home Missionary Patriarch* (Boston: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing society, 1899); Ephraim Adams, *The Iowa Band* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, new and rev. ed., 1902); Truman O. Douglass, *The Pilgrims of Iowa* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1911); Philip D. Jordan, *William Salter, Western Torchbearer* (Oxford, Ohio: The Mississippi Valley Press, 1939). Periodical literature is so abundant that it is not feasible to include here even a selective bibliography.

sons learned in school, resorting to scribbling, delineations, and interlineations as he sought to explain why he was on the fringe of the frontier, in a land of the godless where he was sorely tried by tribulations he never believed possible.

"It was the lot of myself," he wrote in that cabin where people constantly came and went through a log door which, in its shutting and opening, blew his papers from the table, "being among the number of 'Iowa Missionaries,' to be stationed in this place." No doubt but that he was feeling a little sorry for himself. "The object I was expected to accomplish," he continued, "were to take charge of a church just formed, to explore Cedar County & also preach a portion of the time in Iowa City."

But the great disadvantage of Iowa City was the lack of a church building for either Congregational or Presbyterian services, although four rival denominations prided themselves on possessing houses of worship. Residents of Iowa City, he said, believed themselves a little superior to those who lived elsewhere. Nevertheless, he gave out the word three times in the territorial capital, "although our numbers were small and our operation feeble I think they are not in vain." Apparently, neither Congregationalists nor Presbyterians urged him to remain, and neither did his small flock of five in Solon, so that within a few months Alden left Solon to begin a pastorate in Tipton. Before arriving in Tipton, county seat of Cedar County, he bought a horse and a dung fork. In addition to the clothes on his back and a spare suit, he owned an umbrella, a valise, and a trunk in which he packed his books.²

He found room and board in the Temperance Tavern which faced a street so muddy that the missionary was obliged to tuck his pantaloons into his boots if he did not want them splashed and soiled from sole to knee. Alden carefully counted the town's houses. There were about 12 or 15 painted white. A frame stable offered feed and stalls to horses. Alden fed Kit prairie hay. Corn, he thought, was cultivated in a haphazard way. "The corn," he observed, "is 'shucked' or husked out in the field with a husking peg & the cattle turned in to eat the stalks." The professional shingles of three lawyers and one physician hung along the main street. Food was reasonable enough—farmers selling a dozen eggs for a picayune, but settlers ate too much. They filled themselves with buckwheat cakes, sausage meat, eggs, thin and

² C. Ray Aurner, *A Topical History of Cedar County, Iowa*, 2 vol. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1910), vol. 1, p. 184; *The History of Cedar County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), "History of Tipton," pp. 458-82.

flat cakes, honey, molasses, and coffee. The amount of coffee drinking and of spitting was a "caution."

Astride Kit, Alden, like a hunter tracking a deer, crisscrossed prairie patches and wooded areas in search of souls to be saved. Everything, including the people, was so much different from his New England background. The Big Grove, stretching from Iowa City to Solon, grew huge trees. He commented upon gently undulating land covered with timber—groves of white and black walnut, oak, hickory, and lin and sugar trees. Wild turkeys gobbled. Prairie wolves, fearful creatures, traveled in packs. Prairie hens scurried through underbrush. Now and again he came upon a small mill situated on one of numerous small streams. Like New Englanders or emigrants from states carved from the Old Northwest, Alden preferred streams and woods to high stands of prairie grass whose roots were so deep and matted that to plow it demanded both excessive determination and toil. For his own part, "The Reverend," as neighbors called him, would gladly have exchanged both prairie and thickets for the majestic mountains and the rocky acres of his boyhood.

Always he was contrasting the place from whence he came to the place where he was. Emigrants, he believed, who moved directly from New England and did not sojourn, "as is usually the case," in Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois, were more sober and industrious than native Buckeyes, Hoosiers, and Illinois Suckers and they proved to be far better settlers than Southerners. Yankees, he said, preferred to settle in towns and along rivers to take up claims and build mills. No New Englander would live even temporarily as did a deacon of his pathetically small congregation—in a shanty constructed of slabs just large enough to hold a bed, a cook stove, and a place to eat.

By inference or implication, Alden, in his letters, gave the impression that a born-and-bred New Englander, even if he were foolish enough to leave home and settle in the Iowa country, was more willing to listen to the holy word and receive God and eventually rest in grace than was the ignorant, superstitious clayfoot from Missouri. Those from the Deep South were apt to be yeoman farmers who, because they were failures in their own states, were predestined to bring forth even less in Iowa. Some, obviously, were beyond redemption.

Such opinions and reactions, snobbish and illogical as they seem, should not be interpreted as those of an inherently prejudiced and intolerant Massachusetts Blue Nose, although family, background, and education plus a sense of "divine purpose" were in part responsible for much of Alden's rigidity. To offset his brittleness, his disdain for the uneducated, and his frequent criticism of men and manners, he was compassionate, sympathetic, and helpful to those he committed him-

self to serve. He was a man of piety, providing that the definition conformed to the criteria of his theological professors and his colleagues, who, as the Iowa Band, arrived in Iowa when he did. Their purpose was to preach the Gospel, harvest souls, save sinners, form temperance societies, and establish schools and colleges. Their ambition was to make the West over in the image and likeness of New England Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. They were to rescue the scapegrace.

These objectives were seldom, if ever, out of mind. Alden's background was seldom out of mind. It was distinguished. Born in Randolph, Massachusetts, in August 1819, he was a lineal descendant of John Alden, a Pilgrim who had arrived on the *Mayflower*. The missionary's father received degrees in medicine from both Dartmouth Medical School and the University of Pennsylvania. Practicing all his life in Randolph, Dr. Ebenezer Alden played an important role in the Massachusetts Medical Society, interested himself in genealogy and the ecclesiastical history of New England, and firmly supported the temperance movement. Young Alden's mother was a gentle, cultivated woman.³

The boy's parents entered him at Randolph Academy, and from there he matriculated at Amherst College, where at age 16 he became a member of the Congregational Church. In 1839, the year he was graduated from Amherst, he was united by letter with the church at Randolph. By then, he had determined he would become a clergyman, so he entered Andover Theological Seminary. He worked hard and was a competent, if not brilliant, student, preparing and presenting papers on subjects such as liberality among learned men and the importance of an acquaintance with mental philosophy to the minister of the Gospel. He spoke, in stilted, formalistic prose, on "Is the Secular Enterprise of New England Subversive to Morals?" Another time his subject was the Jesuits. One student paper charged that canal-boat men and railroad workers were coarse and immoral, and that they broke the peace on Sundays.⁴

Inspiration for essays and orations came from his professors, from classes he was forced to attend, and from assigned readings. Ordained ministers taught classes in Christian theology, ecclesiastical history,

³ For the Alden family, see *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 1, pp. 143-44; *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 1, p. 42; *First Congregational Church, Proceedings At the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Organization of the First Congregational Church, Randolph, Mass., Wednesday, June 8, 1881* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1881), p. 42; Walter L. Burrage, *A History of the Massachusetts Medical Society* (Norwood, Mass.: Plimpton Press, 1923), pp. 57, 137, 468.

⁴ *First Congregational Church, Proceedings*, p. 41; Magoun, *Asa Turner*, p. 238.

and, among others, methods of preaching. Students read such typically nineteenth-century works as *The Old and New Testament Connected* by Humphrey Prideaux and *A Commentary* by Moses Stuart on the *Epistle to the Romans*. At a farewell service in Andover's South Church on Sunday, September 3, 1843, Alden spoke on Hugh Latimer, a controversial English divine. Latimer, an anti-Roman Catholic, was appointed Anglican bishop of Worcester by Henry VIII, served as the king's chaplain, and in 1555 was burned at the stake by the Catholic Mary. The execution of Latimer was only another example to Alden of the perfidy of a religious institution for which he had neither respect nor affection.⁵

Andover students, although steeped in the principles of their faith, were not isolated from at least some of the great, pulsing issues of the day. Without exception, they were opposed to the cup that cheers, they viewed slavery much as if it were an original sin, they seemed to be sympathetic to Jacksonian democracy, and they were fascinated by the expanding West. To them, the frontier was a more fruitful opportunity for proselyting than was any foreign country. Home missions must be supported both to convert "our own people" and to battle the efforts of Methodists, Baptists, Free Thinkers, and Catholics.

Alden decided to join a group of equally devout young men who were bound for the Territory of Iowa. They journeyed from their homes to Albany, New York, to Buffalo, and then by lake boat to Chicago. From there they moved overland to cross the Mississippi River, and make their way to Denmark, a small town in southeast Iowa not far from Burlington.

There they were ordained on November 5, 1843, listening to a sermon preached by the Reverend Julius A. Reed, a missionary who had been in the vicinity since the 1830s. Reed, Alden remembered, took his text from Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Ordained and assigned to parishes in Johnson and Cedar counties, Alden felt he had taken a vow which would keep him in Iowa. He would shepherd his sheep. He would watch over them until the end. The Lord had placed him for life in the most favored of favored fields, for it was written in the Psalms that "man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening."

Yet, not realizing that Fate, in its inscrutable fashion, would thwart his plans and force him to be the first among the Band to leave Iowa,

⁵ Textbook used by Salter and classmates at Andover in the Grimes-Salter Room, Burlington (Iowa) Public Library; see *Order of Exercises at the Thirty-Fifth Anniversary of the Theological Seminary, Sept. 6, 1843*, copy in author's collection.

Alden rode like a knight to a crusade. But he was scarcely settled in Tipton before nagging uncertainties fretted him. He himself could not pinpoint his malaise. It, as his letters show, was loneliness and homesickness. He was psychologically unprepared. In addition, he simply could not identify with those he so desired to serve.

How much the young minister missed and yearned for New England stands out in both relations written to the American Home Missionary Society and in the somewhat more informal letters to his family. "On the South," he wrote from Tipton in March 1844, "my nearest minister brother is 25 miles from me. On the North there is no one nearer than 50 miles. In other directions at the distance of 25, 30 & 35 miles there are those who were here before me, of the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations."

In May, Alden rode a hundred miles to attend a conference at Denmark. Nearing the town, saddle weary and troubled in spirit, he suddenly spied the steeple of Reverend Asa Turner's church. "I do not know," he wrote, "that I have recently seen anything to call up before my mind more vividly the scenes of the East than this unless it be the appearance of the congregation. A person would suppose himself again in New England and its granite hills."

The tidy village of Denmark was so different from what he saw on his journey. He had stopped to rest at a place called Black Hawk at the mouth of the Iowa River where stood the crumbling remains of what he called an ancient fortification, covering, he guessed, some 12 beautiful prairie acres. He walked the fort's walls. It was all so different—so primitive—that he described it in detail.

They [the walls] are constructed as we might suppose [by] civilized men. . . . There was a well inside of the fort and three gateways, leading to springs of water. There are six mounds in which there may have been many buried—something more than single graves. Inside of the fort on the very edge of the bluff are 7 or 8 mounds, either natural or used as burying places or artificial, I hardly know which. I picked up in the fort pieces of crockery, rims of crocks, scalloped, & bones, flints appearing like gun flints; arrowheads are also found. Whether this fortification was the work of the French, 100 or 150 years ago or of a former race of Indians, it is left to conjecture to tell. The present race of Indians can throw no light upon the subject.⁶

On other trips Alden mentioned, although not in much detail, visiting the Dubuque lead mines and being lowered by rope into a cave "a thousand feet" long. A mine owner, he heard, could realize a profit

⁶ Ebenezer Alden, Jr., Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Division of Historical Museum and Archives, Des Moines. Despite diligent search, the author has been unable to learn more about the fort. It may have been on the site of the present Toolesboro Indian Mounds.

of seventy thousand dollars in a single season. As he wended his way under leafy trees, he observed that navigating the rolling prairie was very much like being on water, although, of course, the true prairie was one of tall grasses, but the green inland seas certainly were not tree covered. Alden seems to have observed carelessly or to have written hastily. Numerous accounts seem to confirm that.

Yet, when a local incident occurred—something dramatic—he could use bright, realistic prose. Thus, when a violent tornado struck Tipton and vicinity in July 1844, Alden told of eight houses being blown down, of hickory trees two or three inches thick being twisted about “like a withe,” of cattle and hogs being rolled over and over until they died, and of chickens with feathers stripped off, and “their heads knocked off too.” But, at his best, Alden was not the observer or reporter that other members of the Iowa Band were. He did not even picture his Tipton living quarters, leaving that to the Reverend Ephraim Adams, who visited him:

He has a study, a little ground room right on the street, in a “lean to” of a store, over which lives the family. Horses stand around these hot days, kicking the flies; and when he is out the pigs run in unless he is careful to shut the door. Poor place, I should think, for writing sermons. Partition so thin that all the store talk, especially when the doors are open, is plainly heard.⁷

Adams also let it be known that Alden had no church building, so that at times he conducted services in an abandoned—or little used—jail. In his diary for July 1844, after emphasizing that Alden was anything but smug and gloomy, Adams told how the two of them went searching for a private place in which to hold a prayer meeting. They arrived at the empty jail, went up an outside stairway to an upper room and “there, with the moon sailing over the prairies, had our meeting; prayed for each other, for the brethren, for Iowa, for home.” Afterwards Alden, “looking up in his queer way,” said, “There, I guess that’s the first time that old building ever had a prayer in it.” Adams thought that his companion was “cheerful and funny as ever” and doing a good job and “is becoming quite a bishop of the county.” If ever there was an exaggeration, that was it.⁸

Far from cheerful and most certainly no bishop of the county, Alden was depressed and fully aware that he was drawing few into the church. Within a period of three months only seven persons united by profession with him. He did convert a young man who he said was a sinner, but did not indicate the nature of his depravity. On one particular Sunday, 80 “well-beloved” souls attended service, “but there

⁷ Adams, *Iowa Band*, pp. 41-42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

was a good deal of confusion in the course of the day & our meeting was not attended with the apparent conversion of sinners for which we had hoped." Although he had Sabbath School books worth 50 dollars, youngsters were disinterested in reading them.

Alden's commission from the American Home Missionary Society expired in November 1844. He believed the Tipton congregation would request that he be appointed for a full year, yet he was cautious not to bind himself to accept even if reappointment came through. Indeed, he did not hint, either to the society or his family, that he desired to continue. Instead, he underscored his financial plight, complaining he had received only part of funds due him. In a letter of November 15, addressed jointly to his mother and father, he confessed that he felt it impossible to establish Congregationalism in the West. He seemed to contradict himself in the next sentence. "I am sure we labor under some peculiar disadvantages here, but I hope we shall yet have the Congregational Church."

Desperation prompted him to permit J. A. Gillet, a parishoner, to write the Reverend Asa Turner at Denmark requesting funds, stating that Alden's congregation wished him to remain, and asking that everything possible be done to help build a house for the pastor. Gillet told Turner that Alden's congregation numbered 16 persons, but that attendance at divine services might be as many as 60. Local Congregationalists would attempt to raise 50 dollars, but that from 150 to 200 dollars were needed from the American Home Missionary Society. Alden added a postscript to Gillet's letter, stating that he was uncertain whether he wished to return to the East or remain in Tipton.

Alden alternately blew hot and cold. Steadfastness of purpose, so obvious in the self-denial and sacrifice of his brothers of the Iowa Band, was lacking in Alden. Alden's woes, whether financial or spiritual, were not different from those of his brothers in the Band. All swore to preach the Gospel. At Andover, all had subscribed to a verse from Romans: "How shall they preach except they be sent." Harvey Adams in Farmington, Daniel Lane in Keosauqua, William Salter in Burlington—all these and more faced precisely the same vexations and discouragements as did Alden, but they grumbled less than he did. There was a lightness of spirit in them which Alden lacked.

Even the Reverend W. W. Woods found Iowa City, a rapidly growing political center, something less than a Garden of Eden. "Everything here is at loose ends, unsettled and uncertain," he said, "except on one point, the multitude seem to have agreed to forget God. Sunday," he went on, "is spent in every possible way, by some in hunting,

fishing, carousing, while others, wholly indifferent to such pastimes and pleasures, busily lay brick on the Sabbath Day.”⁹

For years prospective home missionaries were warned repeatedly that their personal life on the frontier would not be easy and that the business of converting the unwashed and of building sturdy congregations would be difficult. The editor of the *Home Missionary and Pastor's Journal* was asked in January 1842, “But are not the trials of the West so severe as to afford just reason for ministers staying away?” He answered:

In reply, our first remark is—the trials in the West are not so severe as to keep emigrants from going thither in crowds; and where *souls* are, ministers ought to be. The trials are not too great to keep physicians and lawyers and merchants from going there. . . . Roman Catholic priests, Mormons, preachers of Universalism, lecturers on Atheism—all these go to the West. They live there and “endure hardness as good soldiers.”

Only unworthy ambassadors of the cross, the editor commented, shrink from the toil and trials of new settlements, although he agreed that clergymen with large families might be justified in refusing wilderness assignments, but

for *young ministers*—such as have small families or none—to make such things as *plain fare*, living in *log cottages*, or any mere privation of physical accommodations and comforts, a reason for refusing to go and preach to those whose souls are perishing—is a burning shame! Any disciple of the MAN of sorrows—of him “who had not where to lay his head”—should blush to detect such a thought in his heart.¹⁰

Alden heard all that, read it, and knew it, but could never quite convince himself of it. Nevertheless, he agreed to remain another year in Cedar County. Turner visited him in November 1844 and wrote Alden's father that his son was well and happy and seemed perfectly consecrated and devoted to his work. He “would be unwilling to exchange places with those who are laboring in the favor of land of New Eng.” Yet the day after Turner ended his visit, Alden wrote his mother in different vein. He said that Turner was disconcerted with the results of Alden's preaching and that neither one of them saw the great results both had anticipated. He expressed a wish that he could go home, but if he did, his vacation should be short.

Despite New Year's resolutions that 1845 would witness his strenuous efforts, Alden exerted himself little more than he had during 1844. He found no special interest in his church. His people were too scattered and did not take him seriously. Methodists were becoming more com-

⁹ *The Home Missionary and Pastor's Journal*, January 1842, vol. 19, p. 209.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, July 1842, vol. 15, p. 53.

petitive. If only he had a house of worship in which to preach! Church membership was about the same, but, praise be, 83 persons belonged to the temperance society. The Sabbath School was almost a failure. Contributions to benevolent causes totaled \$11.50. To conjure up a powerful awakening seemed beyond Alden's talents.

He acknowledged as much during the budding spring of 1845 when he complained that, during the past three months, everything had been against him. Ducks and geese were flying north, but he stayed where he was. He was nursing a cold, his pony was sick with distemper, roads were muddy, creeks too high to ford. But, in his letters, he put on as bold a front as he could muster. "I shall remain here as minister, except absent on visits or at meetings—till the first of next November, & probably 10 years longer if the Lord spares my life. . . . We do not expect to desert the field here yet."

He tinkered, blowing hot and cold, with the idea of spending 20 dollars for a Tipton lot of two acres. Breaking sod would cost 20 dollars. He could fence the place for around 35 or 40 dollars. He would plant a garden and raise corn for his horse. Like his neighbors, he would be a speculator, holding his property until land prices increased and then sell. As both population and agriculture increased, Tipton would grow. After all, the town was not too far from Bloomington (now Muscatine), a flourishing river port. Alden toyed with the idea of building a house and renting it. Perhaps he could room and board with the renters. Yet, as usual, he vacillated, but finally decided to build the house.

In the following paragraph of the same letter, dated April 30, he informed the American Home Missionary Society that he would depart from Tipton in about six weeks and would be away for three months. He offered no reasons. Letters to his parents said that, although it might be better to remain, there were better reasons to leave. The decision could be considered the first tangible evidence of his ultimate defection.

Farewells said, Alden left his parish in late June, attended a church conference in Bloomington, moved on to Burlington to preach, and finally reached Denmark. He backtracked to Fort Madison, where he boarded a steamboat to St. Louis. A stage carried him to Pittsburgh, and from there he traveled to New York City. He lost no time traveling from there to Randolph. How he spent his vacation is poorly documented, but he spent a few days in Amherst, gave a lecture on Iowa, and "looked up" relatives of Tipton residents.

Returning to Cedar County in time to preach on the last Sunday in October, he soon lapsed into melancholia. The weather became cold, disagreeable. Alden went about wearing a fur coat and buffalo-

skin shoes. He suffered from chills and fever and nursed a cold. He could cross the Cedar River neither by team and wagon nor on horseback. His Thanksgiving supper was "made gay by eating a plum cake baked not too far from Boston." He seemed to find slight satisfaction in the fact that his new house was almost raised and that all outside materials were available.

Much of his time—possibly most of it—was devoted to balancing his advantages and disadvantages, yet, again as customary, he teetered, first deciding that the first outweighed the latter and then reversing himself. On December 3, for example, he told his father that his outward circumstances were much more favorable to a profitable and pleasant life than previously. Two days later he added a postscript: "I do not know how long we shall remain in peace in the Tipton church, but I fear not a great many months. The people here are so pressed down with poverty, and there is so much indolence and negligence amongst some, and dishonesty among others that it is difficult to keep peace even in the church."

Alden found himself, as he had since first locating in Tipton, in a financial bind. Once again, he and Gillett pleaded with Reed in Denmark for relief. Their arguments were the ones advanced previously: it was difficult to persuade persons to pledge money. Church members were scattered over too large a territory. The religious "state of thing" had not improved during the past year. Alden added, somewhat brusquely, that he did not think the time had come "to settle a minister or put up a house of worship." The letter brought no tangible assistance.

Not even the spring of the new year—1846—bolstered Alden's flagging spirits. Midsummer was worse. He told the American Home Missionary Society that he was even unsuccessful in organizing a Sabbath School, although he had help from the American Sabbath School Union. The reason? Tipton's Methodist minister would not cooperate, although Alden insisted he always acted in good faith toward Methodists, and "since I have been here have been more liberal and yielding towards them than is usual, though I have not adopted their measures." Incoming settlers, he admitted, preferred Methodism to Congregationalism.

Disinterest obliged him to disband the Walnut Grove Church. There had been "no outpouring of the Holy Spirit." Perhaps, he wrote to the American Home Missionary Society, that was because a plague of sickness and ill-health descended upon the area. July and August were apt to be sickly months. Perhaps a crop failure had something to do with it. Perhaps a hot summer and a dry autumn were responsible for his people's indifference to the word of the Lord. "If God does not pour

out his Spirit upon this village and revive old professors and convert sinners, there will be no church built." Alden appeared dreadfully annoyed and agitated when he learned in November that Catholics laid the foundation of a college at Sinsinawa Mound opposite Dubuque. He wrote his father that "cannons were fired, martial music played, and the Judge of the District was present, and countenanced the whole proceeding." Iowa Congregationalists, he said, must soon organize a college.¹¹

Snow began falling in November 1846, and the prairies were covered by December, and the winter depressed further the state of Alden's parish. He admitted a steady decline in church affairs. Ready money was scarce, and for the third time he and Gillett wrote Reed begging for funds. Reed succeeded in securing 350 dollars from the American Home Missionary Society on the promise that Tipton Congregationalists get up 50, although there were only 50 communicants.

Alden, in reports to the Society and in personal letters to Adams and Reed, always managed to give the impression that he, like his church, lived on the fringe of poverty. That was untrue. From Dr. Alden in Randolph came regularly boxes of books, journals, and clothing. Young Alden had a bank account and owned railroad stock. His father not infrequently sent him drafts in the amount of a hundred dollars. The missionary was not penniless; indeed he could be reckoned as one of Tipton's more affluent residents. The cost of living was not too dear. Potatoes sold at 25 cents a sack and spareribs at 13 cents a pound. The total cost of his completed house was \$775.00. Yet Alden worried that he could not pay for it, and, when it was completed, he owed the plasterer. After the place was built and ready for occupancy, he could not decide whether to move in or rent it. Perhaps he should sell it and move away. Finally, he rented a part of it to settlers from Ohio "who baked good bread" and reserved a room for himself.

All through the winter of 1846 and well into the autumn of 1847, Alden, frequently sick with colds and fevers, labored as best he could. He reiterated his old complaints and added new ones. He was bothered by a rumor that the county seat would be moved from Tipton to Rochester. He asked himself whether or not he should have rented his house. He harbored doubts about the wisdom of establishing Iowa College, forerunner of Grinnell. He wanted to invite his parents to visit him, but "still I have always hoped to be so situated as to

¹¹ For college histories, see M. M. Hoffman, ed., *Centennial History of the Archdiocese of Dubuque* (Dubuque: Columbia College Press, 1937), pp. 561-64, 575-78, 578-83; Adams, *The Iowa Band*, chaps. 14-16; Douglass, *Pilgrims of Iowa*, pp. 84-85.

make your visit a pleasant one . . . so that I do not urge you to come as strenuously as I should in other circumstances." He was unwell, but he insisted that he was no victim of melancholy, using that very term.

Moreover, previous doubts about the wisdom of establishing Iowa College in Davenport disappeared, and Alden enthusiastically supported the project. He wrote Salter in early December 1846 that if Davenport citizens could raise 400 dollars that would be enough to begin, although a building would cost 1,500. In March he informed Salter that the erection of a building had been authorized. "We wish now to be receiving funds as fast as possible." Then he spoke of his own situation, telling Salter that the American Home Missionary Society "have become almost discouraged in respect to Tipton" and "are thinking about removing me somewhere else in Iowa where more can be obtained from the people, & the prospects are more encouraging."

In July 1847, Alden left for the East, "although if there were the most distant gleam of hope before me here, or if I could only set myself to work in earnest . . . I would not think of leaving." He spent his time in Boston and Randolph, attempting to secure insurance on his Tipton residence, raising a little money for Iowa College, calling on Salter's parents, and, in New York, talking with officials of the American Home Missionary Society about his future. He attended a meeting of his Amherst College class. The longer he stayed the stronger became his conviction that he might not be able to return to Tipton in November. He expressed this view to Adams in September and to Salter in October. Alden's father was sick with typhoid fever. His grandfather was feeble. Now and again he preached.

Perhaps, although one cannot be certain, he was courting Mary Louise Dyer of South Albright, the girl he married on April 4, 1848. It is certain that Alden and Mary Louise were engaged by the beginning of 1848, for Alden coyly and indirectly wrote Adams. "And certainly God has placed me in a new situation in life, one which you can understand, but to which you were a stranger until two and a half years ago. Yes, your hopes in regard to me have been realized, and if you see me again in Iowa, you will see me not alone." Mary Louise, he added, was "the object of so many years search." Iowa would be a hard place for a wife, but he intended to lead her into the wilderness.

The Reverend and Mrs. Alden did return to Tipton after their wedding, but not immediately. It may be that Mary Louise stayed only briefly, but she may have remained longer. One thing is certain: Alden's sole purpose in going back was to dispose of his property and resign as pastor. On August 20, 1848, Alden gathered the pathetically few members of his flock to tell them what they already knew, that he

was leaving them to take up residence in the East and to explain why.

He had ministered to them, he said in his farewell sermon, for a little more than four years, yet church membership had grown only from three to twenty-nine souls. He felt it unwise for him and his wife to remain in a sickly climate. But, he continued, even if he remained it could only be for a year or two. He did not explain why. "After a prayerful and deliberate consideration of the whole subject," he had decided it was his "duty" to return to New England. He was going because the Tipton church had not invited him to remain, because the congregation had not raised sufficient funds for his support, and because the American Home Missionary Society had terminated his commission on May 1. Three months had passed since then, "and the church have taken no steps to retain me here." He urged that another minister be secured as quickly as possible. No prayer, no blessing, no kind words concluded his remarks. It is clear that Alden felt the church had failed him rather than that he had failed the church. The church was through with him, and he was finished with it. Alden was a minister manqué. He was a dropout. Fellow members of the Iowa Band were both saddened and disappointed.

In 1850, Alden settled in Marshfield, Massachusetts, incorporated in 1642 and the site of a British garrison during the Revolutionary War, where on October 30 he was installed as pastor of the Congregational Church. Daniel Webster, if not active in the church, at least contributed liberally. When he died in October 1852, Alden preached his funeral sermon, described as "simple and unpretending as had been the inner life of the departed." Some ten thousand attended to view the body lying in an elegant but unpretentious coffin and clad in blue coat with gilt buttons, white cravat, vest, pantaloons, silken hose, and patent-leather shoes.¹²

No sooner was Webster in his grave than controversy arose over his religious convictions. Some suspected he was a Universalist. Others thought him irreligious. It was common knowledge that he was overly fond of food and drink. One November day in 1852, Alden opened a letter written by a Reverend Mr. Foster inquiring what Webster's religious convictions really were. Was he a Universalist, an irreligious individual? Alden sharply denied each, but seemed, as he wrote on, to hedge a little on the first. As for Webster being a believer in the doctrine of Universal salvation, "We may well wait for the proof of a

¹² Charles Lanman, *The Private Life of Daniel Webster* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), pp. 182-83. Lanman, librarian of the War Department, resigned in 1850 to become Webster's private secretary.

statement, which, no doubt, to the vast majority of [the] community, will seem preposterous.”

Then, no doubt feeling that sentence demanded amplification, Alden said that for years Webster had been a member of the congregation, but he also financially supported the Gospel in one or two other places at the same time. “Can this,” asked Alden, “be reconciled with the idea that he was a Universalist?” The next paragraph was more detailed:

The passages of Scripture upon which he fixed his mind on the morning of Sabbath a fortnight before his death, are very expressive, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” This does not seem the feeling of one certain that all men are going to heaven, himself of course included. He felt his weakness and dependence. He seemed to be in doubt and fears, until he caught a glimpse of Christ & then this personal reception of Jesus dispelled the darkness.¹³

With the cruel Iowa years behind him, Alden devoted 49 years to pastoral duties in an environment to which he was accustomed and in which he was comfortable. He published in 1854 a sermon on the theme that unconditional surrender is demanded of the sinner, an “historical discourse” in 1875, and, in 1881, brought out a history of the Sabbath School of Randolph’s First Congregational Church.¹⁴ Now and again he corresponded with Salter and Adams. In November 1854, he sent Adams a donation of ten dollars for Iowa College. “People are kind to me here & harmonious,” he wrote, “in their relations of people to their pastor.” When Salter in 1873 sent Alden a photograph of five members of the Iowa Band, it was acknowledged courteously on a single, small sheet. Alden also wrote the proper remarks when he learned of Mrs. Salter’s death. Years later, in November 1895, Salter again mailed Alden pictures of surviving members of the Band as they looked in old age. By then the scars and wounds of the hard, harsh Tipton days had healed and even some details had been forgotten. Fifty-two years had passed since Alden arrived in Iowa, and he had mellowed, so that, in what possibly was his final letter to Salter, he could write that the two would probably never see one another’s faces until they are glorified. “It is very grateful to me to be remembered by the survivors of the Iowa Band and you may be assured I love to recall the former days and to keep you fresh in mind.” He died January 4, 1899.

¹³ Alden to a Rev. Mr. Foster, Marshfield, November 3, 1852. In *Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City*.

¹⁴ The historical discourse, a newspaper clipping, is in the *American Antiquarian Society*; Oberlin College and the Boston Public Library hold copies of the sermon on unconditional surrender. For the Sabbath School account, see *First Congregational Church, Proceedings*, pp. 50-57. A brief death notice appeared in *Annals of Iowa* (April 1899), 3rd. ser., vol. 4, p. 79.