RELIGION ON THE IOWA FRONTIER TO 1846

By Frederick J. Kuhns

The contest for power and the expansive tendency furnished to the various sects by the existence of a moving frontier must have had important results on the character of religious organizations in the United States. The multiplication of rival churches in the little frontier towns had deep and lasting social effects. The religious aspects of the frontier make a chapter in our history which needs study.[1]

Frederick Jackson Turner

The fascinating story of the growth of religion on the rapidly expanding Iowa frontier merits the most careful and intensive study. The effective transplantation to the land of Iowa of many religious faiths (most of them from the older parts of the nation though some came to Iowa directly from abroad) forms a noteworthy chapter in the history of the Hawkeye State. Today professors of history, teachers of social studies, librarians, church historians, and even ministers, rabbis, and priests see much more clearly than yesterday the closer relationships that exist between religion and culture in America. They now recognize somewhat belatedly the fact of the inseparability of these two aspects of our national life, and are concerned that knowledge bearing on them be widely diffused. If an important phase of state and local history is the life of aspiration for and struggle to attain socially worth-while goals of the people who came to settle a region, then surely the study of the part played by the various character-building agencies and their relation to the life actually achieved by a people becomes a vital concern indeed. An estimate of religion in Iowa at the time that statehood was reached should, therefore, prove helpful in arriving at a fuller understanding of the people of this commonwealth.

The year 1846 — the *terminus ad quem* for the present inquiry — is an arbitrary selection. There is nothing in the context of Iowa's early religious development that would serve as a natural turning-point. It is thought, however, that 1846 — the year that brought statehood to Iowa — would

[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1921), 36.

serve as a convenience to many students.[2] Some justification for the choice of this date may lie in the fact that most of the principal denominations of the time had taken root in Iowa by that year. As further support of 1846 is the fact that the techniques of winning the settlers of Iowa to the various church groups had become standardized. Patterns for future developments had, accordingly, been established by 1846.

If the value be questioned of holding this study to a margin of time narrowed to a scant fourteen years, from the beginning of permanent white settlement in Iowa to the year of statehood, perhaps the reminder that experience itself suggests the need of precisely this type of study may be welcomed by the interested student of the subject.[3] It may also here be emphasized that many of the religious groups dealt with in this study have left but little in the form of original historical source materials.[4]

The Seventh Census[5] credited Iowa with an aggregate population of 192,214 persons in the year 1850. Of this number, 170,620 were natives of the United States and 50,380 had been born in Iowa. The figure for the foreign-born is 21,232, while the origin of 362 persons was stated as unknown. Of the white population, 100,887 were males and 90,994 were females. There were also 333 free colored people in Iowa — 165 males and 168 females. In 1850, the nativity of the Iowa population from the seven states of the Union which had contributed the largest numbers to Iowa was as follows: Ohio, 30,713; Indiana, 19,925; Pennsylvania, 14,744; Kentucky, 8,994; New York, 8,134; Virginia, 7,861; and Illinois, 7,247. Furthermore, the six New England states together had sent out to Iowa no less than 5,535 persons originating as follows: Vermont, 1,645; Massachusetts, 1,251; Connecticut, 1,090; Maine, 713; New Hampshire, 580; Rhode Island, 256. Doubtless, also, many of those who removed to Iowa

[2] The "aggregate population with which Iowa entered the Union" was "presumably 102,388." *Census of Iowa, 1836–1880* (Des Moines, 1883), xiii. It should be possible to show, at least in a general way, the religious aspect of life in Iowa at the time of her admission into the Union as the twenty-ninth state on December 28, 1846.

[3] A careful review that carries the story to the creation of Iowa Territory in 1838 is that by R. E. Harvey, "Faith and Works in the Black Hawk Purchase," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 21:241–82 (April, 1938).

[4] The fullest account written thus far is that by William J. Petersen, *The Story of Iowa: The Progress of an American State* (4 vols.; New York, 1952), noting particularly Ch. XXII, "Religion in Iowa," 2:661–755.

[5] *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, 1853), xxxvi–xxxviii.

from New York and Ohio were of fairly recent New England extraction. It should further be noted that the Iowa population in 1850 included 4,274 from Tennessee, 3,807 from Missouri, and 2,589 from North Carolina. To Iowa the foregoing sixteen states had thus contributed no fewer than 109,823 persons or 57.1 per cent of the 1850 Iowa population. If the study of Iowa's population were to be carried back into the preceding generation doubtless it would appear that many of those who proceeded to Iowa from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were of southern ancestry. Thus, in Iowa, were merged the various colonial and early national American strains which had given the new nation its great religious diversity as well as the type of religious liberty that was and still is unique among the nations of the world, and this same spirit came to be preserved in Iowa. Of the foreign-born in Iowa by 1850, by far the largest number of 7,152 were the Germans, while the Irish ranked second with 4,885. Third place was taken by the English with 3,785. Besides, there were 712 Scotch people in Iowa and 1,758 from British America. The Dutch counted 1,108. Such, then, were the major foreign elements flavoring Iowa's cultural life by 1850.

The above facts suggest the highly composite character of Iowa's population at an early date. The same figures also serve, however, as an additional check on Iowa's social and religious antecedents, and in this role they may well prove indispensable. They do, indeed, re-enforce the fact that by 1850 all the states where the major denominations were solidly established were well represented by the people who were rapidly settling in Iowa. The further fact emerges also, that several groups of the foreign-born whose churches, church schools, church papers, and church traditions have been of such colorful importance in the history of Iowa had not so much as reached American shores by 1850. The consideration of the above statistics leads, further, to the advance generalization that the pattern of religion in Iowa was quite as variegated as was that of the nation as a whole.[6] This consideration may be an important one, therefore, in evaluating the very quality of national patriotism in Iowa. Moreover, it is a striking fact that the settlement of Iowa in the period here defined was taking place precisely at the time when in the nation itself sectional and denominational viewpoints were rapidly replacing more broadly national and interdenomi-

[6] The two best contemporary works that provide an over-all view of religion in the America of this period are those by Robert Baird, *Religion in America* . . . (Glasgow, 1844; New York, 1856), and Joseph Belcher, *The Religious Denominations in the United States* . . . (rev. ed.; Philadelphia, 1861).

national attitudes on the part of people generally. It must here be recalled that the middle period of our American history was one of violent upheaval for the churches, as various newfangled movements brought in their tens of thousands of new members or incited their followers to organize competitively. Some of the older churches were badly split in this period by doctrinal wars or by the slavery issue, while some regrouped themselves with die-hard blocs of reactionaries opposing the more progressive wings. Revivalism, abolitionism, "come-outer-ism," denominational schisms, and sectarian recombinations in the religions of the American people generally were attaining their highest velocity and their widest spread from the 1830's to the 1850's. The more benign influences of the religious revivals were promptly appropriated by the miscellaneous reforms of the day, while democratic trends were observable both in educational circles and in politics. The larger and much better informed participation of laymen in church affairs was another marked characteristic of the period in which the early settlement of Iowa occurred.

Naturally, as the new settlers swarmed into Iowa, the demand for churches and Sunday schools rose sharply. By the impartial historian, Iowa must be considered as a mission field until late in the nineteenth century; indeed, for the major part of the period prior to 1882 Iowa was a frontier dependency of New England in so far as the ability of the American Home Missionary Society, the largest of all such national organizations, to provide for their support was reflected in the supply of pastors for the Iowa congregations. Independence of this type of "control from abroad" was not achieved by the Congregationalists, for example, until that year, 1882. True, the Old School Presbyterians had cast off the American Home Missionary Society as early as 1837, but their New School brethren, on the other hand, clung to it tenaciously until 1861, meanwhile cooperating with the Congregationalists. The Iowa congregations were aided, however, by the Old School's own Board of Missions, while for that matter the New School General Assembly did likewise until 1870. By 1883, however, most of the Presbyterian (U. S. A.) congregations in Iowa were "on their own." During the fifty years that Iowans looked to the American Home Missionary Society for the sustenance of their churches, they themselves were contributing sums of considerable size towards the support of their religious services. It is also important to underscore the fact that, simultaneously, the Iowans were making liberal donations to foreign missionary causes.

Among the Methodists and the Episcopalians, respectively, the infant churches in Iowa were being nursed along as "missions" of longer circuits or as an extension of the regular diocesan work based in other states adjoining Iowa. Protestant Episcopal Missionary Bishop Jackson Kemper, for instance, had a vast field to cover, one that included all of Iowa Territory, and thus the history of the growing Hawkeye State is romantically linked with the name of one of the most vigorous churchmen in the West of that time. The contrast afforded by the rough and ready circuit rider of the Methodists and the usually more punctilious pastor settled over the Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Iowa is a striking one; the considerably more rapid growth of the former denomination has been due very largely to the fact that the Methodist elders and bishops were continuously traveling among the people in the new settlements rather than waiting for the pioneers to look up the ministers. Nevertheless, the other method of settling a pastor over a congregation (the method of the home mission boards) had much to commend it; in this way, very frequently an air of permanency was imparted to the frontier churches almost from the time of their constitution, or as soon as the people had pledged themselves to subscribe to the pastor's support, the erection of a neat edifice, and the building of a parsonage in cooperation with a particular missionary agency.[7]

As already suggested, the financing of the early churches of Iowa was cared for partly by mission societies and partly by the people themselves. In this connection, it is interesting to note that certain European religious organizations also aided the immigrant groups in their facing of the hazards of life on the American frontier. For example, the Roman Catholics settling in the United States owed much to the *Ludwig-Missionsverein* of Munich, the Leopoldine Foundation of Vienna, and the Paris-Lyons Society for the Propagation of the Faith. The need of the Catholics thus to look to Europe for help gave rise to considerable unintelligent criticism in the United States, criticism, some of it scurrilous and unfounded, based on the fear that sooner or later first the Mississippi Valley and ultimately the nation itself would be ruled either by the Hapsburgs or by the pope. On the other hand, there was much genuine concern on the part of Calvinistically-minded home missionaries lest the democratic spirit receive a setback because of the increasing immigration from predominantly Catholic foreign nations.

[7] An excellent recent book that refers broadly to Iowa is that by Colin B. Goodykoontz, *Home Missions on the American Frontier* . . . (Caldwell, Idaho, 1939).

But European Protestants — French, Swiss, and German — also settled in the American Middle West, and their churches came with them — Evangelical, Lutheran, and Reformed. They, too, found assistance coming from organizations in the old countries — at Basel, Barmen, and other European centers of culture and missionary concern.[8] For a brief time (though later than 1846) the American Home Missionary Society likewise subsidized Iowa congregations of the denominational types here noted.

Other denominations followed suit in planting churches of the particular type or form on Iowa's developing frontiers. Thus, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, which had been organized in 1832, soon claimed an interest in the newly-forming Baptist congregations; from scanty evidence the conclusion would seem to be substantiated that anti-mission sentiment made but little headway in Iowa Territory, this fact being in decided contrast to the case in Indiana and Illinois of the time. Other Presbyterian branches such as the Cumberland, Associate, and Associate Reformed, as well as the Reformed Church in America (Dutch), also derived a part of their support from the domestic missionary societies that each had organized. The Methodists and the Episcopalians had missionary societies, too, while the Lutherans of different European national origins raised money for their own churches. Certain of the Lutherans even cooperated with the American Home Missionary Society, particularly following the persuasive labors of the great Lutheran leader in the field of church unity, Dr. Samuel S. Schmucker of the Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, seminary between 1835 and 1840. Occasionally, also, Iowa churches were counted in on the proceeds of the estates of missionary-minded and charitably-disposed individuals. It should here be recalled, too, that the federal government itself wholly supported David Lowry, a Cumberland Presbyterian clergyman, in Iowa, as resident teacher and sub-agent among the Winnebago Indians at the "Old Mission" on the Yellow River in what is now Allamakee County, Iowa.[9] There was Father Pierre Jean De Smet of the Society of Jesus, too, who

[8] During the 1830's, the American Home Missionary Society also subsidized a few Protestant ministers in France and Switzerland. Responsible for bringing the appeals of these French-speaking congregations to America was the Rev. Robert Baird, an American scholar residing and publishing at Geneva, and author of the work cited above. Baird was also the author of the important book containing many contemporary maps, *Views of the Valley of the Mississippi, or the Emigrant's and Traveler's Guide to the West* . . . (2d ed.; Philadelphia, 1834).

[9] Ruth A. Gallaher, "Indian Agents in Iowa," IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, 14:559–96 (October, 1916).

carried on his brief but timely work of conversion among the Potawatomi Indians at the St. Joseph Mission in the vicinity of present-day Council Bluffs, between 1838 and 1840, though he was not remunerated by the United States government.[10]

In planning for worship of the different denominational groups, early Iowa's Christian people used all kinds of places for their assemblies: open fields, banks of streams, woodland enclosures, log cabins, rude barns, and primitive schoolhouses and courthouses. Besides, there were some neat little church edifices designed on good architectural lines. Frequently, the faithful devotees of a particular congregation would be aided in the construction of a house of worship by the elements in the community which a Psalmist centuries earlier might well have spoken of as the "scoffers" and the "scornful." During the lifetime of the first generation of Iowa pioneers few structures were of brick, but the charm of the original log or frame types has been preserved in the few early church buildings that remain.

One of the most colorful events in early Iowa history was the use made of the well-designed Methodist Episcopal church building at Burlington (later called "Old Zion") by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Wisconsin in the year 1837 following the destruction of the territorial capitol by fire. The same structure also served as the capitol for the Iowa Territorial Assembly between 1838 and 1841.

When it came to preaching, for the Methodists in particular, there were the usual "exhorters" (an appointive office in that denomination) in addition to the ordained elders to do the demanding work of preaching, converting, and following up of the people at their farms. The Baptists were forward, too, about letting laymen preach from field to field and from church to church. As a rule, however, such a practice was not adopted by the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists; for bulking large in the thinking of those denominations was the traditional association of the high office of the ruling elder or teacher having "ministerial character." Much freelancing or lay ministerial service was thus forestalled among them. Despite this characteristic, however, laymen were of vital importance in the organization of new congregations, and, together with the clergymen, they governed them. Neither was any limit set on the amount of activity that a layman might perform in connection with the Sabbath schools and youth work.

[10] E. Laveille, *The Life of Father De Smet, S. J.* (New York, 1915), Ch. V, "The Potawatomi Mission," 77–95.

Actual structural operations on the church sanctuary were always carried through by the men, whether church members or not; for the frontier made all hands willing hands, those of the "godly" working freely alongside those of the "ungodly" in the setting of sills and the raising of rafters.

Though but few women were permitted in those times to preach or otherwise lead in religious exercises of the various churches in the western country generally, yet the Universalists came closer to actual equality in that respect than did any other denomination. Historically speaking, they did really encourage ministerial activities on woman's part. Consequently, this denomination in Iowa had more women serving in its ranks as preachers (eloquent ones, too) than had any other.

The ladies of a community usually prepared the new furnishings in taste with the newly-built church edifice put up by their men folks, and they also led off with true farmers' dinners when the time to celebrate its completion and dedication to the Lord had arrived. Frequently the women organized sewing circles and mothers' clubs — "primary groups" in more than one sense on the isolated frontier line. Such a group often became the nucleus of children's activities anticipating the nurseries and kindergartens of a later time. It was perhaps more natural for the women to find their place in their cabins and their fields, and to leave matters of business, traveling, industry, and even the arts largely to the men. Even schoolteaching was generally considered a man's work, though very gradually women were being recognized in the profession and encouraged to enter it. Sometimes help for this work would come from interested Bostonese and others. Yet the women folk fully played their part in the ongoing life of all the churches. Engaged in bazaars, the raising of money for the missionary's salary, and the sewing required to recondition the various castoffs sent to the frontier communities by the more affluent eastern churches, the ladies made possible, among other things, the part-time employment of a minister, the framing of a church edifice, the outfitting of a log-cabin parsonage, and the implementation of the settlers' growing desire to have respectable colleges in their midst as well as common schools and female seminaries. Many such institutions were begun and carried to fame in the cabin of a frontier missionary and his wife, both of whom have long since been forgotten by generations sent to schools on taxpayers' money. A woman's place in the Sabbath schools was also of importance, while the various local and county, sometimes statewide, Bible, temperance, antislavery, and missionary societies could hardly

have been conducted without her powerful attachment, deep devotion, and unfailing inspiration.

In addition to English, which most Iowans of 1846 used in church as well as in familiar intercourse, many foreign languages were employed in churchly observances. These, by contrast, formed an intriguing assortment, lending color, emphasis, and strength to church life, since Iowa congregations, in the year that statehood was achieved, worshipped habitually in no fewer than eight foreign languages, viz., Latin, French, German, Dutch, Scotch, Welsh, Swedish, and even Czech. Moreover, Irish, Italian, and vernacular German were heard in God's praise. Greek and Hebrew tongues also were in constant use by many of the preachers and the college teachers and would be quoted from occasionally in religious gatherings. Nor did many years pass until thousands upon thousands more, chiefly Lutherans, used Norwegian, Danish, and Finnish every day as well as in church. In due course, virtually every nation under Heaven was to contribute its peculiar strains to Iowa speech, thus lending its lingo to Iowa's reverence. Beyond this, the accents gained earlier in every state of the then twenty-eight that formed the United States of America accompanied the settlers who organized Iowa as the nation's twenty-ninth. Nor can it be forgotten that Iowa's worshipping congregations heard repeatedly the hopeful, fervent, sonorous notes of Negro Christians who helped to constitute the earliest congregations. In those frontier times no separated Negro churches had been formed; people of color mingled pleasantly for worshipping with the white congregations at several points in Iowa, among them Dubuque, Davenport, Burlington, Mount Pleasant, Salem, and Farmington.

To provide for more vital association of the people, also to make for closer ministerial fellowship, the various denominations in Iowa, as elsewere in the nation, organized in a number of ecclesiastical bodies (conferences, associations, synods, and the like). Thus, by 1846, the Roman Catholics, Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists had completely organized as larger units. The following also were taking steps eventually leading to similar organization: the Friends, Disciples of Christ, Methodist Protestants, Wesleyan Methodists, Universalists, and Cumberland Presbyterians. Still others, such as the United Brethren, Protestant Episcopalians, German Lutherans, Evangelicals, and the members of the "Christian Connection Church," a body stemming from the revivals of Rev. Barton W. Stone in Kentucky, soon formed these larger patterns. At

least, all the denominations were in adherence to general conferences or associations based in states adjoining Iowa.

One very interesting characteristic of religion in early Iowa was the large amount of space given to Iowa church news in the denominational and interdenominational newspapers and periodicals of the time. The rapid settling of Iowa Territory and the mental habits of the new citizenry filled many columns in such widely circulated papers as the *Western Herald* (Chicago), *Philanthropist* (Cincinnati), *Watchman of the Valley* (Cincinnati), *Home Missionary* (New York), *Biblical Repertory* (Princeton), and *New England Puritan* (Boston). Through these and other media, word was carried to the financial centers of the Union as to the glorious opportunities facing Iowa's new settlers, their trials and difficulties, their educational and religious needs, as well as the large measure of success already experienced by them. Iowa ministers and home missionaries lost no time in giving out to an eager public their impressions of life in Iowa; this was indeed good ground to stand on in appealing for additional settlers and for even larger financial support for the infant churches. To give just one illustration of this: Rev. John C. Holbrook, pastor of the Congregational church in Dubuque, wrote regularly for the *New England Puritan* in 1845 and 1846, as did the Rev. Julius A. Reed of Davenport for the *Western Herald* and *Herald of the Prairies* (Chicago). Even the widely-read antislavery weekly, Chicago's *Western Citizen*, carried much Iowa news matter, particularly as to the progress of abolitionist debate among church people. Iowa clergymen usually signed this as correspondents of the *Western Citizen*. It was customary, also, to find in such reports some reference to the high class type of citizens who were taking up their abode in Iowa.

In the course of examining the literature of Iowa religion, the writer has seen quite a number of Iowa imprints of this period antedating statehood on various library shelves as well as listed in bibliographical compilations. Most of these are in the form of minutes, reports, and records of ecclesiastical conferences of one sort or another. Some bear the name of Burlington, some of Davenport, and others of Dubuque as the place of publication, 1840–1846. Frequently, however, the official scribe of a denomination merely kept the manuscript records of church business in his cabin, publishing them much later if money could be had for the purpose. Unfortunately, this has meant that many such volumes of records have been destroyed, lost, or mislaid. A project of this kind was completed by the

Congregationalists in 1888.[11] Some of the churches, apparently, never published official minutes or transactions, and many of these records are only now being "rediscovered."

The early pastors of Iowa were generally good writers themselves, several of their number contributing excellent books and articles to the fund of basic literature of Iowa history, biography, religion, and culture. So far is this true that only a few of these authors can be mentioned in this place; yet it would be unpardonable to omit the names of Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, Father Pierre Jean De Smet, Rev. David Lowry, Rev. Samuel Storrs Howe, Rev. Bennett Mitchell, Rev. Asa Turner, Jr., Rev. Julius A. Reed, Rev. William Salter, and Rev. Ephraim Adams (the two last being members of the famous "Iowa Band" from Andover, Massachusetts). Through the prodigious efforts of those already named and of many others who wrestled with Iowa's frontier conditions, we have today a vast legacy of books, articles, and other papers, the authentic voices of the early clergy of Iowa together with those of their contemporaries who built the Iowa of territorial days. The secure foundations beneath the future development of the Hawkeye State were laid by these men whose descriptions of early Iowa are rare specimens of historical representation and literary competence.

Another phase of Iowa's religious life in the period before statehood was the service rendered by Iowans on the national and even on the international scene. As surely as Iowa herself had been served by home missionaries, so, in due course, would the people of Iowa also gratefully return this favor with a like service to the peoples of the world. Actually, the growth of the missionary spirit among the citizens of Iowa has been a splendid thing though it was somewhat late in getting under way. In the frontier period, however, Iowans contributed their time and effort toward churchly interests lying beyond the borders of the Hawkeye State. Specifically, the Congregationalists of Iowa took a prominent part in the Western Convention at Michigan City, Indiana, in August, 1846, where the recommendation was passed calling for the repeal of the famous "Plan of Union" with the Presbyterian Church.[12] The members of both of these denominations also took

[11] *Minutes of the General Association of Congregational Churches and Ministers of the State of Iowa from 1840 to 1855 inclusive, also Early History of Iowa College from Unpublished Documents, with such statistics and reports as are attainable* (Hull, Iowa, 1888). Actually, the years covered in this work are 1840–1854 inclusive.

[12] Frederick I. Kuhns, "New Light on the Plan of Union," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, 26:19–43 (March, 1948). In Iowa Territory the Congrega-

part in conventions held for the purpose of discussing frontier missions, temperance, Bible distribution, and Sabbath school methods.

Another way in which Iowa's religious affairs came in for larger consideration and consultative planning was evolved by means of the visitation of each frontier congregation by the home missionary agents. These agents, who were the rough equivalent of today's synodical executives and conference superintendents, reported annually at New York City for the business meeting of the American Home Missionary Society concerning the jurisdictions assigned to them. Meanwhile, a constant stream of letters giving the agents' general points of view kept the home office informed as to local developments.[13] Thus, Iowans truly shared in the extension of a national program of missionary work, a program that kept on expanding until well after the Civil War. The same characteristic was a feature of Iowa Methodism through the medium of General Conference held every four years, while most of the assorted varieties of Iowa Presbyterianism gathered annually in a general assembly.

Doubtless, it would occur to someone to ask concerning the viewpoints of the Iowa clergy of territorial days. Were these men liberal or conservative? Were they well-trained or but carelessly fitted for their pulpit duties? Some of them, of course, had attended neither college nor seminary, though many were graduates of both. Some, like Rev. Peter Cartwright, the two-fisted Methodist presiding elder, frowned upon seminary training for young men, while others, more of the stripe of Rev. William Salter, found their ministry greatly enriched and their circuits enormously widened precisely because they were meticulous about their academic preparation.[14]

Concerning the cultural contributions made to the life of early Iowa by some of the nation's older and more fashionable literary institutions, as well

tionalists sought the formation of a new plan of union with the New School Presbyterians, but these overtures broke down owing to the failure of the Des Moines Presbytery to act favorably upon them. Later, at Albany, N. Y., the Rev. Asa Turner, Jr., of Denmark, Iowa, occupied a prominent seat in the Congregational Convention (October, 1852), where the final renunciation of the Plan of Union was read. Addressing the convention, Turner cited copiously from his twenty years of pastoral experience in Illinois and Iowa.

[13] The editing and publishing of the Iowa agents' letters (1840–1861) would reveal many interesting things about the general cultural life of the Hawkeye State. Many of these are on file among the Papers of the American Home Missionary Society at the Chicago Theological Seminary.

[14] For material bearing on this question, see the fine volume by Philip D. Jordan, *William Salter: Western Torchbearer* (Oxford, Ohio, 1939).

as by some of the newer ones in the West itself, vast gains accrued to the Hawkeye State through the arrival of scores of ministerial graduates hailing from Williams, Union, Yale, Princeton, Middlebury, Wesleyan, Andover, Hamilton, Bangor, Dartmouth, Auburn, Lane, Western Reserve, Illinois, and other colleges and universities east of the Mississippi. Among the Swiss and German Protestants in Iowa, for example, distinguished foreign universities loaned their prestige to the developing culture, while the great Roman Catholic faculties of Louvain, Bruges, Brussels, Paris, and Milan contributed out of their store of learning to the Iowa priesthood.

For the most part conservatively cut, the frontier ministers of the many faiths in Iowa showed a surprising degree of catholicity in their attitudes toward their brethren. Respecting their biblical and theological orientation, the majority, so it would seem, hugged the traditional and more literal interpretations, though not a few were of a more liberal stamp. In fairness to both positions, however, it should be recalled that the seminal influence of powerful German theological scholarship, which worked a revolution in regard to the Life of Christ, biblical exposition, and ecclesiastical historical science, had not penetrated to the Iowa frontier by 1846. On social questions of the day, virtually all Iowa pastors held John Barleycorn largely responsible for the state of affairs. In another area altogether, that of the emancipation of the Negro, most pastors were inclined to be sympathetic, though wide differences obtained as to the means of implementing idealism in action. Thanks to the various Friends' meetings and to the Congregationalists, many pastors and laymen were outspokenly abolitionist and gave their aid and comfort to the Underground Railroad movement. Incidentally, neither the Baptists nor the Methodists, both of whose church organizations were splitting (1844–1846) because of irreconcilable controversies relating to the slavery question, suffered a division of forces over this subject in Iowa. There were, however, a few Wesleyan Methodists to represent the bold abolitionist thought patterns forged by the followers of the Rev. Orange Scott, and Scott himself attended the first meeting of the Wisconsin Conference at Village Point (seven miles west of Burlington, Iowa Territory) in September, 1845.[15] The Presbyterians, who split decisively in 1837, once again in 1846, and still later in 1857 and 1861 over slavery or

[15] Ira F. McLeister, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church* (Syracuse, New York, 1934), 297-8. Iowa was raised to a separate conference in 1852, though the body held no meetings until 1854.

questions closely related to the slavery issue, lined up as Old School and New School partisans, stressing their theological differences. On the question of Sabbath observance, an almost solid front was presented to the indifferent and the infidel fraction of the Iowa population by the Protestant clergy generally. A good deal of discussion took place over this topic, some of it heated and most of it at the expense of the Roman Catholics and the various German Protestants, all of which groups spent Sunday according to European custom, with church-going early in the day and diversions and sports of all kinds (including horse racing) following the services. Iowa's descendants of the Puritans naturally took exception to this.

The recounting of the history of the Iowa (and American) frontier would be woefully distorted if it were to be told without considerable reference to the indispensable part played by all of the churches in the shaping of a distinctly American educational inheritance. In the ecclesiastical origins of numerous of their colleges and universities the American people (and Iowans in particular) have little whereof to feel ashamed.[16] Much the larger share of the credit for bringing this enlightenment to the western mind rightfully belongs to the home missionaries, circuit riders, bishops, and preachers as well as devoted laymen of kindred denominations peopling the frontier. For a hundred years ago and more the states themselves in which the thirty-sixth part of the public land had been reserved for educational purposes did not set the pattern in motion of ministering effectually to the frontiersman's destitution; it was the churches who did this. The churches, acting on the voluntary principle, raised and disbursed thousands of dollars annually for education, and well-trained ministers were commissioned by the hundreds to lay anew the foundations of culture in the western settlements generally. In this effort the cooperation of the American Education Society of Boston (Congregational) kindled a general enthusiasm. The Presbyterians, likewise, had established a Board of Education by 1819. Ministers recruited both faculty and students, societies of inquiry supplied the loftiest of motives among the students themselves, and ladies' missionary societies, newspaper editors, businessmen, and colonies of Chris-

[16] An excellent resume of the founding of these fine frontier institutions is that by Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War: With Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing upon the College Movement* (New York, 1932). Another good work in this field is that by Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (rev. ed.; Boston, 1934).

tian people emigrating into the West carried the torch of this fostering interest in colleges, academies, and seminaries for both young men and young women who sought their schooling in the West. The Panic of 1837 brought temporary reverses to the college movement; but in 1843 the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West was established to help lift the burden of debt from the feeble institutions and to guarantee their year-to-year running expenses. In time this society affected Iowa by partly underwriting the work of Iowa College.

It would seem that the Presbyterians put forth the very first efforts to bring collegiate educational opportunities to Iowa. Proceeding on the constitutional basis laid down by both the Wisconsin and Iowa Territorial Legislative Assemblies, this denomination began (though it was unable to carry through to consummation) the old Des Moines College at West Point. The Presbyterians were more successful with Jefferson Academy, chartered in 1844, which became successively Yellow Spring Collegiate Institute and Yellow Spring College. Both institutions are nonexistent today.

The next effort made in Iowa in behalf of church-sponsored education came through the generous impulses of the Rev. Mathias Loras, Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Dubuque. Shortly after his arrival in Iowa (1839) he gathered students together in his rectory to prepare them for the priesthood. Continuing, these efforts bore cumulatively richer fruitage, and the institution famous today as Loras College is the net result of the firm and farseeing administration of this great see.

It was not long before the Methodists were also in position to sponsor a college. For some reason they did not take the option of operating Iowa City College, incorporated in 1843, but eventually (1849) accepted both the control and the patronage of the Mount Pleasant Literary Institute, which was begun in 1842 and chartered two years later. The Iowa Conference took this fledgling institution under its wing in 1849, and in 1912 the present name — Iowa Wesleyan College — was selected.[17]

As certain New School Presbyterian and Congregational ministers were returning to their charges in Wisconsin and Iowa territories from a convention held at Cleveland in June, 1844, the idea was born of establishing (by joint denominational effort) a number of high-grade literary institutions ("little Yales in the West") in the three rising communities of Illinois,

[17] Ruth A. Gallaher, "The Methodists in Iowa," *The Palimpsest*, 32:110-11 (February, 1951).

Wisconsin, and Iowa. Eventually Beloit, Rockford, and Iowa colleges emerged from this significant conference. Iowa College was founded in the year 1846 and located the following year at Davenport. The "Iowa Educational Association," formed at Yale College, met at Denmark, Iowa Territory, on March 12, 1844, to consider the establishment of a college in the same community where the Rev. Asa Turner, Jr., six years previously, had organized the very first Congregational church in the Territory, and where an academy also had been founded. In April the Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians cooperated in the formation of the "Iowa College Association," adopting the resolution of the Rev. Reuben Gaylord to proceed with college plans at once. Trustees were chosen at Davenport two years later. The college constitution was adopted at Burlington in 1847, and the same year saw the erection at Davenport of the college building measuring 36x55 feet.[18] Instruction began in 1848. Iowa College, however, was sold to the Protestant Episcopalians in 1859, and a merger was consummated at Grinnell in the heart of Iowa with a university which had been started by the Rev. Josiah B. Grinnell.

Other denominations coming to Iowa eventually followed suit in establishing colleges, academies, and even seminaries, particularly the Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Friends. Many of these early institutions (begun in the 1850's and 1860's) are still thriving.

In conclusion, a list will now be given of the denominations occupying the Iowa frontier by 1846, and a few notes appended relative to some of these. Arranged by "families," they include the following: Roman Catholics; Methodists, Methodist Protestants, and Wesleyan Methodists; Presbyterians, both Old School and New School varieties (with German Presbyterians adhering with the latter), Associate Presbyterians, Associate Reformed Presbyterians, and Reformed Presbyterians; Congregationalists; Baptists of German, English, Swedish, and "Hard Shell" varieties; Disciples of Christ ("Campbellites," in frontier parlance); Christians ("Stoneites,"

[18] In the Papers of the American Home Missionary Society at the Charles G. Hammond Library of the Chicago Theological Seminary are to be found several important letters bearing on the establishment of Iowa College. See Julius A. Reed, Fairfield, I. T., June 3, 1844, to Milton Badger, New York; Julius A. Reed, Davenport, I. T., Feb. 10, 1847, to Milton Badger, New York; Ephraim Adams, Davenport, Iowa, May 1, 1847, Nov. 1, 1847, Nov. 10, 1848, to Milton Badger, New York (A. H. M. S. Papers). See also Julius A. Reed, *Reminiscences of Early Congregationalism in Iowa* (Grinnell, Iowa, 1885) 17-18, and Ephraim Adams, *The Iowa Band* (rev. ed.; Boston [1903]), *passim*.

after Barton W. Stone, their leader in Kentucky); Universalists; Evangelicals (*Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenverein des Westens*); Millerites or Adventists; Mormons or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; Friends (Quakers); Protestant Episcopalians; Mennonites or Amish; Swedenborgians (Church of the New Jerusalem); Dunkers or Brethren; United Brethren in Christ (today's Evangelical United Brethren Church); and a few Lutherans of German extraction and constituting the Missouri Synod (at Chicago) in 1847. Other groups came to Iowa later.

The Catholics, whose bishop, Rev. Mathias Loras, was consecrated in 1837 and installed two years later at Dubuque, had visited Iowa in the person of Jesuit missionaries as early as 1673. The Catholic clergy were of several nationalities, namely, French, Belgian, Dutch, German, Austrian, Italian, Irish, and American.

The Methodists erected the first church building in Iowa at Dubuque in 1834. Methodist Protestants and Wesleyan Methodists, both denominations representing "left-wing" tendencies, attained separate structures nationally in 1830 and 1843, respectively. Although few in number in Iowa, these two groups were nevertheless of importance in the advancement of the antislavery movement and the democratic trends that set in among virtually all church bodies. In 1841 the Methodist Protestants achieved the distinction of erecting the first church edifice built in the new capital of Iowa Territory — Iowa City.

As already pointed out, the Cumberland Presbyterians advanced upon Iowa both from Illinois and from Missouri. Operations in Iowa were begun, however, by Rev. David Lowry in 1834 among the Winnebago Indians on the Yellow River, additional work having been performed by this servant during the previous autumn at Prairie du Chien. The number of Cumberland Presbyterians always remained relatively small and virtually no records of their labors in Iowa have survived.

The Old School Presbyterians and the New School Presbyterians commenced their work in Iowa at approximately the same time, in 1837 and 1838 respectively. These dates, it will be noted, coincided with the fateful schism in the Presbyterian General Assembly at Philadelphia. Thus, within the largest branch of American Presbyterianism, there were two opposing groups; but under the "Plan of Union" the New School wing cooperated quite happily with the Congregationalists until the middle forties. Dubuque became the center for the German Presbyterians as they entered Iowa. The

rugged Scotch and Scotch-Irish strains in American Presbyterianism also came to Iowa along with the Reformed, Associate Reformed, and Associate Presbyterian groups, late in the 1830's and early in the 1840's. Washington, Iowa, became a kind of capital for clans of this background.

One of the oldest faiths in America, Congregationalism, had been historically associated with the coming of the "Pilgrim Fathers" of *Mayflower* fame, and originally domiciled at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, where Plymouth Rock still serves as a continual reminder that this denomination has weathered not merely great gusts at sea, but also heavy storms of persecution and adversity. One storm, however, that nearly wrecked American Congregationalism was brewed by some of its own leaders, as this denomination sought to transplant itself onto the western frontiers of the new nation. As a religious force it became powerful, but as a denominational entity it came close to disappearance. By cooperation with the great and aggressive Presbyterian Church hundreds of Congregational churches, possibly five hundred in all, in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin, became Presbyterianized almost overnight under the famous "Plan of Union." This spectacle, however, did not recur in Iowa, and, as a matter of fact, historically, it was here that this movement was thrown into reverse and Presbyterian congregations (about ten in all) elected to become Congregational churches. The Plan was abrogated on two auspicious occasions — 1846 and 1852.

The antecedents of nearly all of Iowa's early Congregationalism were traceable to New England or to centers in the West rich in New England elements and cultural traditions. The first Congregational church to be organized in Iowa Territory was that formed at Denmark in May, 1838, by Rev. Asa Turner, Jr., previously established at Quincy, Illinois, and who became the pastor at Denmark for thirty years. In fairly rapid tempo a number of Congregational churches derived from various national and ecclesiastical antecedents were organized in Iowa, namely, those of French, Swedish, German, and Welsh backgrounds, these being in addition to those formed by the American pioneers themselves. One of the most noteworthy events in Iowa's cultural history was the coming of the "Iowa Band" of ministers from Andover Theological Institution in 1843 and 1844, all of whom served Congregational churches on a widely-flung frontier line.

Two denominational groups, at times difficult to distinguish, and, for the most part, coming from Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, and Illinois, were

the Disciples of Christ and the Christians. The former were all immersionists as were many of the latter though some sprinkling was practiced at baptism by some of the Christians. There may have been more real kinship (there was more tension, too) between the various Baptist groups and the Disciples, since the Baptists likewise practiced immersion exclusively; but they did not hold the Lord's Supper each Sunday as did Alexander Campbell's Disciples.

It seems worth while to say just a word as to the members of the Universalist persuasion, another group settling in Iowa at an early date. In origins an English faith, Universalism became Americanized following the Revolutionary War and more democratic as it rolled westward across Ohio and Indiana toward Iowa late in the 1830's. By 1841 Iowa City had a Universalist congregation, an edifice being completed in 1844 on lands granted by the territorial government.

Previous to 1847 Iowa had but few adherents of the German mystical brethren or Pietistic bodies, though some were making a beginning of settlement and their number was increasing. Among these, in 1846, were the Mennonites of Johnson County, counting the Guengerich and Schwartzendruber families, a few Dunkers (Brethren), a colony of Swedenborgians (Church of the New Jerusalem) in Jasper County, a bare handful of United Brethren in Christ, and numerous albeit inchoate Evangelical representatives arriving from the various principalities of Germany. These last became more numerous than other German church bodies in early Iowa. Perhaps it would here be well to caution the reader against the pitfall of confusing the Evangelical Association (consisting of the followers of Jacob Albright, who merged with the United Brethren of Phillip Otterbein to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946) with the Evangelical Synod of North America (which body merged with the Reformed Church in the United States in 1936 to constitute the Evangelical and Reformed Church). The present writer has been unable to locate any of the former strain of Evangelicals on the early Iowa frontier; on the other hand, Evangelicals of the Prussian Church Union type (1817) formed a number of congregations in Iowa, the first having been established at Burlington in 1843. In 1840, in St. Louis County, Missouri, the ministerial body known as the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenverein des Westens* or German Church Society of the West was formed. The best representative of this

group in Iowa was Rev. Joseph Rieger, much of whose thrilling life-story has been well edited by competent scholars.[19]

At the furthest remove from all other types of churches were the Quakers or Friends, birthright descendants of the seventeenth century English pioneers who followed George Fox and his quaint old teachings. Their first place of settlement in Iowa was made at Salem in present-day Henry County in 1836. From this point further expansion proceeded in proportion to the smaller numbers counted by this denomination.

All of these faiths supplied the Iowa pioneers with the religious resources needed by any and every people in every age. Not merely this; they also kept alive the spark of man's intellect, fortified his faith in the eternal destiny of the human race, and tempered man's judgment of his contemporaries. Life in Iowa was to no small degree humanized, democratized, and energized by the sense of responsibility generated by the religious forces. In turn there was imparted to the new citizenry a spirit of cooperation through its worship as well as its constructive service from the framing of the first houses to the governing of the new state by Christian men. Iowa, land of high ideals, rich in human association, looks to its religious roots as being of the greatest significance in its own significant course of historical development. The flowering of Iowa culture today may be traced to the seeds of Gospel truth that were generously sown during Iowa's territorial period.

[19] See Carl E. Schneider, *The German Church on the American Frontier* (St. Louis, 1939).