

SOME ASPECTS OF CONGREGATIONALISM IN  
RELATION TO THE EARLY CULTURAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF IOWA

In 1788 Julien Dubuque, a Frenchman, settled on the site now named for him, where he made the first attempt to mine the abundant lead on the west side of the Mississippi River. Dubuque died in 1810, however, and after his death various attempts were made to mine the rich ores of lead, but each attempt was thwarted by the United States troops stationed at Fort Crawford. Not till 1832 was the Black Hawk Purchase Treaty concluded, by which a stretch of land lying west of the Mississippi was transferred to the public domain of the United States. The actual transfer, however, did not become effective until June 1, 1833, when the first white settlement of Iowa was permitted although the land was not legally on sale and open to settlement.

White settlers across the river in Galena, Illinois, had for the previous several years been seeking to mine the lead around Dubuque. The Galena settlement was so closely related to Dubuque and the first Iowa settlement on the Upper Mississippi that its story is almost a part of Iowa history. This is especially true in tracing the influence of Congregationalism on the cultural development of Iowa. But this story has its roots further back — in New England.

In 1787, the year before Dubuque settled on the Upper Mississippi, the Reverend Manasseh Cutler, a Connecticut Congregationalist, began active work for the cultural development of the Northwest Territory. Cutler was a typical New England Congregational minister. Born in Connecticut in 1742, he graduated from Yale at the age of twenty-three with the same keen interest in science that had char-

acterized Jonathan Edwards. He early felt a desire to study the unknown west, but delayed his western trip for want of opportunity, and instead studied law and taught school. In 1768 he received the degree of Master of Arts at Yale and spent the next two years studying theology. In 1770 he began his long career as a Congregational minister, at the same time serving in the Revolutionary War, studying medicine, botany, astronomy, and literature.

In the early 1780's "the west" absorbed his attention. He believed, contrary to the opinion of many, that it held a great future. In 1786 he helped form the Ohio Company and the next year helped draft the Ordinance of 1787. This Ordinance marked the beginning of the territorial system of government in the United States and created the great Northwest Territory from which the pioneers were eventually to realize Cutler's dream and go even beyond the Mississippi. Cutler was influential in securing the provision forbidding slavery in the Northwest Territory, the Congregational Church having followed the Quakers in early denunciation of slavery in the United States.

Finally, in 1788, Cutler came as far west as Ohio, where he promoted colonization and made the first archaeological survey of Indian mounds. The next year Yale recognized his pioneer work in science, politics, and religion, bestowing on him the degree of Doctor of Laws. He was thereupon elected to all the learned societies of his day, but he never forgot his main purpose — to promote the cause of religion and education in the west. This double characteristic of Congregationalism should never be lost sight of: it sought to understand the working of God in nature as well as in Biblical revelation.

But Manasseh Cutler was destined to spend his life mainly in Massachusetts. It was his part to inspire and to show the way to others. The New England churches,

awakened by him to the possibilities of the unknown west, early began to lay plans and means for the spread of religion and its handmaid, culture. To this end they formed various societies, which, augmented by the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, together with the Methodist movement, were to prove to be historically and culturally of the first importance. Early in life Manasseh Cutler took from Virgil his motto for life: *Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*. And the first pioneer Presbyterians and Congregationalists who came to Iowa brought a background in both the classics and the Bible. It is partly because of this that Iowa, although her present school system is no better than that of many another State, boasts today that she is the most literate State in the Union.

The New England churches, usually thought of as Congregational, were in part Presbyterian. The difference lay not in doctrine but in government. The Congregational churches exemplified pure democracy, while the Presbyterian form of government was a representative democracy. But the Congregational and Presbyterian churches worked in complete harmony in regard to their responsibility in "the west".

In 1774 the General Association of Congregational Churches of Connecticut began, under Manasseh Cutler's guidance, to plan to send ministers into the "settlements now forming to the westward and northwestward". In 1789 the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America joined its purpose with that already expressed by the Congregational Church. This same year the two churches united their efforts for home missions. In 1801 the Plan of Union brought about coöperative union, whereby these two great religious bodies were not only to extend religion and culture into the whole United States,

but also to prophesy the day when America should have a United Church.

Jonathan Edwards, the younger, founder of Congregational churches and President of Union College, proposed the Plan of Union for the western missionary work, while sitting as a delegate in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. The plan permitted ministers of either denomination to serve as pastors in either Presbyterian or Congregational churches. Aratus Kent, the earliest appointee to reach Iowa under the new plan, was a Presbyterian, but he founded a long list of Congregational churches and Congregational colleges as well as many Presbyterian churches. The exact number, unfortunately, can not be determined, but he was instrumental in forming organizations in practically all the pioneer settlements along the Upper Mississippi. When Manasseh Cutler died in 1823 his aspiration had been fulfilled.

#### CONGREGATIONALISM AND EARLY SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI

By the year 1828 the Galena settlement had reached such proportions that letters asking for church workers were sent to the American Home Missionary Society which had been formed in 1826 with headquarters in Boston.

The first and most important request is contained in the following letter written in 1828 by Christopher R. Robert,<sup>1</sup> a Galena pioneer, to the Reverend Dr. Peters, then secretary of the American Home Missionary Society:

Galena is situated on the west bank of Fever River, (proper name, Riviere au Fievre,) three miles east of the Mississippi, between 42 deg. 30 min. and 43 deg. North latitude. It has not yet been determined whether it is just without the northern boundary of Illinois or not. It is not, however, far from the line. The num-

<sup>1</sup> The writer is indebted to the Reverend Frederick T. Persons for permission to quote this letter.

ber of inhabitants is estimated to be from 1200 to 1500; the former is probably the most accurate.— It is supposed two-thirds of them have emigrated hither from various parts of the U. S. and the remainder from Ireland — the last are mostly Catholics — the others, who profess to be anything, are various; but it is thought that a majority of them would prefer a clergyman of the Presbyterian denomination.

Every steamboat brings large numbers, and it is thought by the month of July the number will be increased to near, if not quite, 1,000.

There are none of the external or public means of grace here, either in town or country. There was at one period a Catholic priest here, and last summer a Methodist clergyman for a short time. I have been much occupied since my arrival, and have not yet been out in the country, and but little about my town. But you can readily imagine what the situation of the people must be, in a moral and religious point of view, from what I have now said. The Sabbath is not much regarded in the village; the miners do not generally work on that day — I fear, not out of regard to it.

The number of families in the village is estimated at 100 to 150; the number of children is small in proportion; I am told, not exceeding fifty. There is no school here at present. There was one last summer of about thirty scholars.

I am informed there are a number of persons in the village who are desirous of having a clergyman settled here. There is no place of public worship yet erected; though the subject of erecting one has been in agitation for some time. But no measures have been taken to accomplish it. There are some few pious persons in the place, and a number of others friendly to religion, who, I have no doubt, if they had a sensible, judicious clergyman, to advise and instruct them, would be disposed to co-operate in any measure calculated to improve the condition of the people.

There is a subscription now in circulation to raise a support for a clergyman. Two names are down for \$125; and as far as I can judge there will be enough raised to support a man one year, at least.

There will be a difficulty in obtaining a proper place for meetings, as the houses are most of them built of logs and very small. But it is thought this difficulty may be overcome by erecting a temporary building, which could be done in a short time.

I need say nothing to impress upon your mind the importance of this field for the preaching of the gospel. The present population is small to what it will be in a few years. The whole country east of the Mississippi, from the mouth of the Rock river to the Ouisconsin, is full of lead ore, and from what I learn, the excavations have but just begun.— You can form some idea of the rapid growth of the country from the fact that two years since the population of this place did not exceed fifty souls.

I am diffident in expressing an opinion as to the requisite qualifications of the minister whom you may send to this field; but from your knowledge of the character of the people, you will doubtless think it desirable to send one of some age and experience in the ministry.

In residing here, a person must undergo much privation for a few years, or until the country becomes more settled. His fare must be plain, much of the time salt provisions, and few or none of the luxuries of life. The climate, in the country, is healthy; and the village cannot be called unhealthy, but, like most newly settled places, is subject to fever and ague, and bilious fever in the autumn.

The first man to respond to the call of Galena was Aratus Kent,<sup>2</sup> a graduate of Yale, and a pupil of the great Timothy Dwight. Dwight, equally famous as theologian, man of letters, and President of Yale, trained his pupils in a theology which could meet infidelity and vulgarity of the frontier. Kent was commissioned in March, 1829, by the American Missionary Society, working under the Plan of Union.

In 1831 the Reverend Asa Turner came from Quincy, Illinois, where he was acting as Congregational missionary, to visit Kent at Galena. Commenting on this visit in 1883 the Reverend Julius A. Reed wrote: "This was before the Black Hawk war, and while the whole country north of Missouri and west of the Mississippi was in the undisturbed possession of the Indians, and what is now known as Iowa was a part of Missouri Territory." Mr. Reed then proceeded to tell of his own introduction to what is now Iowa:

<sup>2</sup> Kent's story has been told in *The Palimpsest*, January, 1937.

“It was about the first day of June, 1833, that I saw the Black Hawk Purchase, as eastern Iowa was then called, for the first, and as I then supposed, the last time, as I rode down the east bank of the Mississippi from Commerce, now Nauvoo, past the store in Montebello where, less than three years afterwards, I preached my first home missionary sermon.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1833, after the Black Hawk Purchase became effective, legal settlement by the white pioneers took place. The Reverend Aratus Kent at once crossed the Mississippi and began work in Dubuque. At this time Dubuque is represented by all contemporary accounts as a peculiarly Godless country. The first settlers came to mine lead, hoping to make quick and easy money.

Kent urged Turner to return to Iowa as a missionary and the latter complied. Fortunately we have his story as told by Reed:

In May, 1836, Mr. Turner, then pastor of the Congregational church at Quincy, Ill., and Rev. William Kirby, pastor of the Congregational church at Mendon, Ill., made a missionary tour in the Black Hawk Purchase. The western line of the Purchase commenced near the southwest corner of Van Buren county, passed through Fairfield, west of Brighton and Washington and east of Iowa City, to a point on the Cedar river about east of Solon, thence near Mt. Vernon, east of Marion and Independence, to the south line of the Neutral Lands at a point about twelve miles due west of Fayette. The northern boundary was nearly a straight line from the last mentioned point to the Painted Rocks on the Mississippi above McGregor. These brethren crossed the river at Ft. Madison, when Mr. Turner preached the first sermon preached in Iowa by a Congregationalist.<sup>4</sup> They went to Farmington by way of West Point. There was at that time scarcely any travel from the Missis-

<sup>3</sup> Reed's *Reminiscences of Early Congregationalism in Iowa* (Grinnell, 1885), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Aratus Kent was a Presbyterian, working for the United Church under the Plan of Union of 1801. The Galena people requested a Presbyterian.

sippi across the country to the Des Moines. Two years later the settlers could tell you that a certain dim track was the territorial road to Farmington, but could tell you nothing about it beyond their own neighborhood. Of course they lost their way, and at nightfall found themselves with no settlement in sight and the road plunging into a wide prairie where, ten years later, there was no house for ten miles. Providentially they saw a single wagon tract [sic] turning into the grass in the direction of a point of timber. This track they followed while they could see it, and afterward pushed their way at a gallop in the same direction. Some animal sprang up almost beneath their horses' feet; they hoped it was a calf, probably it was a wolf, but soon they heard the barking of a dog, which led them to the camp of a Mr. Green, who was living with his family in his wagon and an open shed, while preparing a better shelter. This was at the edge of the timber back of Bonaparte. The corn of which their bread was made was on the cob at their arrival. After preaching at Farmington they passed on their way to Burlington, a mile and a half east of Denmark, past Mr. Conaro's residence, where the roads from Denmark to Ft. Madison and from Burlington to West Point crossed each other. Mr. Turner may have admired the clump of hickories which stood there, but that naked, uninhabited prairie was forgotten as soon as it was passed; but with what an earnest gaze would he have scanned it had he foreknown that he was there to do his life's work, and love it better than any other place on earth. These brethren preached at Burlington and Yellow Springs, and passed through Bloomington, now Muscatine, and Davenport, where two or three thousand Indians were encamped, up to J. B. Chamberlain's on the bank of the Mississippi, eight miles above Davenport, at the mouth of Crow creek, where Mr. Turner preached the second protestant sermon preached in Scott county. On their return they crossed Rock river near Milan at a deep ford, and at sunset found themselves on the south bank, quite wet, and ten miles from the first house on their route. A well-beaten road led to Ft. Edwards at Warsaw, but their road, which branched from it, was dim, and they passed it, unseen in the dark. After riding more than thirty miles they reached, towards morning, a cabin where New Boston now stands. There were sixteen in it already, but a log cabin is never full, and, by pushing and crowding, room was made for our tired travelers. It was now Saturday, and Mr. Turner had promised to preach at



Yellow Springs on the next day. For some reason he could cross the Mississippi only by a canoe, and Yellow Springs was fifteen miles away. With his saddle-bags on his arm he crossed the river and started on foot through the grass in the hot sun. His night's exposure told upon him and he was obliged to leave his saddle-bags hanging on a tree. This was the beginning of Congregational missionary work in the Black Hawk Purchase.

While these brethren were absent on this tour the pioneers of Denmark came to Montebello, Ill. They were Deacon Timothy Fox, Lewis Epps, Curtis Shedd, Samuel Houston and Edward A. Hills. After examining several localities in Adams and Hancock county, Ill., they visited the Purchase and returned in a few days saying they had secured claims about two and a half miles from Augusta. The first name of their settlement was "The Haystack", originating from the large haystack which was the joint property of the colonists. That name had a *reason*, which, I fancy, cannot be said of its present name. [i. e., Denmark] <sup>5</sup>

In October, 1836, Congregationalism took a firm foothold in the southeastern part of Iowa with the coming of the Reverend William P. Apthorp who located first at Fort Madison as a home missionary under the United Board of Home Missions supported by both the Congregational and Presbyterian churches. The "Haystack" pioneers invited him to preach for them and this settlement was added to his other stations. Soon he was preaching in turn at all the pioneer settlements in that part of Iowa. For a short time in 1837 he taught at the Mission Institute at Quincy, Illinois, but soon returned to Fort Madison, Iowa. On his return to Iowa, he again took charge of the congregation at "Haystack" which by that time had changed its name to Denmark.

About this time Denmark began active communication

<sup>5</sup> Reed's *Reminiscences of Early Congregationalism in Iowa*, pp. 3, 4. Reed's account gives perhaps the best picture in existence of the eastern part of Iowa in 1836. It also gives the reason for the earlier name for Denmark, "Big Haystack". The writer is also indebted to the Reverend Frederick T. Persons for material on this subject.

with the Quaker settlement at Salem, some twenty miles to the west. Salem had been founded in 1835 by Friends who had come mainly from the Carolinas, via Ohio and Indiana, because of their pronounced abolitionist convictions. Almost at once they established an Underground Railway, receiving at the Salem station large numbers of fugitive slaves who crossed the Des Moines River from Athens, Missouri, to Croton on the Iowa side. In this movement the Quakers and the New England Congregationalists worked in harmony, Denmark being the next station beyond Salem on the road to Canada and freedom. Apthorp's interest was aroused. He, too, believed slavery to be a great evil, and he believed the west could solve the problem. He accordingly came back to Iowa to supply the Fort Madison community and neighboring settlements that preferred a Congregational minister. Apthorp thus became the first resident Congregational minister in Iowa.

It was the custom of the early pioneer missionaries to report back to Boston the condition of the frontier stations. Fortunately Apthorp's report, written from Fort Madison in March, 1838, has been preserved. This letter is of importance for a student of the early cultural history of Iowa. It gives a vivid picture of the actual conditions and also of the hopes of the pioneer Congregational leaders. This letter, now for the first time published *in toto*, is as follows:

Fort Madison March 7, 1838

Rev. Milton Badger  
Assist<sup>t</sup> Sect. A. H. M. S.  
Rev & dear Sir,

Your letter of Dec. 27 authorising me to draw for the amount pledged me last year, was received a week or two since. The receipt of it gave me much satisfaction, not merely by relieving [sic] me in a most timely, & even unexpected manner, but also as affording evidence that your most useful Society was recovering in a measure at least, from the shock of the times. In accordance with the in-

structions contained in it, I have drawn for \$256. Deducting, as explained in my last, \$24 for board last year, & \$20 promised me at Denmark to be paid as soon as it can be collected. I have not made any application at Madison for money, as under present circumstances, it does not seem to be expedient. If I continue to preach there this year I shall propose to them to say how much they will agree to raise towards my support. A church is to be organized as soon as ministerial help can be obtained, which it is hoped will be in a few weeks. The ministers who were appointed to organise churches in this Territory, did not come on account of a death in the family of one of them. They have been written to to request them to come & form a church if possible. Things are improving here. Our meetings are fuller than they were, and [although the Methodists have the advantage in some respects, yet]<sup>6</sup> I think the prospects of a [Congregational] Presbyterian Church are [full as] favorable. Mr. Edwards, the former editor of the Ill. Patriot, has left Jacksonville, & set up his press in Madison, with fair prospects — he has been an elder, & his coming makes the forming of a church practicable, he & his wife are a great accession to the place — he is our Sab. School Superintendent, & it flourishes well under his care — his wife is very active in promoting female prayer meetings, & every good thing in her sphere. I trust this year will witness the erection of a house for a school house & meetings.

At Denmark, a [Congregational] church is to be organised, with the leave of Providence, the last Sabbath in May, with the help of Br Turner from Quincy. This would have been done in the fall, but for Mr. Turner's being prevented from coming at the time appointed. They have always had a Bible class among themselves, and this spring a Sabbath School for the younger portion will be commenced. They have raised a frame for a meeting & school house, but will not have it covered till some time this Spring. A Friday evening prayer meeting was attempted this winter, which I had to ride 5 miles to attend; but the intense cold, together with some of the people being away at work on a saw mill, after a few meetings rendered it impracticable.

I have not done anything toward applying for a new commission, on account of the present circumstances in both my places. When

<sup>6</sup> The words and phrases of this report given in brackets were written by Rev. W. P. Apthorp but were later for some unknown reason crossed through with a pen.

churches are organised, & things become somewhat settled, it will be easier to decide whether a new commission will be necessary, & if so, for what amount. I consider it very doubtful, in case I continue to preach at these two places [which at present is probable altho it may be otherwise] whether a new commission will be required — at all events, the sum needed will be small. If possible I shall get on without it. Denmark of itself *ought* to support a minister very speedily: & Madison may be expected to do something considerable towards it, altho it is true, that in this country, money can be raised much easier for other objects than for ministers' salaries.

The country on this side the river is rapidly filling up. There are many towns growing up within a small circuit — Burlington, 20 miles up the river, which is the seat of Territorial government, is an important place. The Methodists have chiefly occupied it, yet there are Presbyterians there, who want & need the Gospel for themselves, & to form a new point of influence for those around — there is much vice there of course — but the population is improving in a moral respect as I have heard. A Presbyterian minister would probably find it a hard place to labor but perseverance would be rewarded in the end. (I have heard since that Mr. Bell preaches at Burlington as often as his health permits.) West Point, 10 miles west from Madison, which contended with M. for the county seat, is another important place. There is a Presbyterian Church there of some 15 or more members, & but few of other denominations — they were expecting a minister to come to them from Illinois, but none as yet has gone there. [Nor do I suppose any will come from Illinois]. Augusta 10 miles north from M. is at present small, but being situated on [Skunk or rather] Manitou river, at a fine mill seat, is sure to grow to a large place; it has at present no preaching; [except it be by the Methodist once a month — it is full of all iniquity.] Montrose 10 miles down the river, has a beautiful location, & may not improbably become a considerable place; they have no preaching. Further west are various other towns rising up, as Bentons Port on the Des Moines, New Baltimore on the Manitou, Washington, &c. &c. These are all destitute of the Gospel except so far as occasionally the Methodist circuit preacher visits them. There are quite a number of Campbelites in this neighborhood, but I have not heard of any preachers, except one or two who came over last summer from Illinois & preached a few times. They had a meeting in Madison; where there are sev-

eral of that sect. We have in Madison every variety of characters — Christians, & moral men, & votaries of false doctrine, & unbelievers in any; many who neglect religion altogether, and some who avowedly oppose it — but the number of the better class increases, & the moral prospects of the place I think are very encouraging; the improvement since last year at this time is very great. The people come from all parts.

Denmark is a New England town & has all the characteristics of one. It will be, I trust, an important moral & even literary centre to this Territory. It is much to be hoped that their college may succeed — it is to commence as a common school, & the funds are to be raised from town property given to it. If the town should not grow much, the value of this will of course be small. They are expecting a well qualified teacher to come from N. Hampshire this year, who is also a preacher.

I remain with much respect,

Yours in the Gospel

W<sup>m</sup> P. Apthorp<sup>7</sup>

William P. Apthorp, the writer of this letter, had had the same training as Aratus Kent. He was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, on March 23, 1806, and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Yale in 1829, twelve years after the death of the great Timothy Dwight, who had trained Kent for his pioneer work. But Dwight's spirit yet ruled Yale in the undergraduate years of Apthorp. Dwight, a Congregational minister, had sat in 1793 as a delegate in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. Dwight is today receiving recognition along with Jonathan Edwards, his grandfather. Both were scientists, men of letters, college presidents, and philosophers. Dwight was also a poet and received much praise from his English contemporary, William Cowper. It was in the modified Calvinism of Dwight that Apthorp was trained.

<sup>7</sup> The writer is permitted to quote this letter through the kindness of Professor Matthew Spinka, managing editor of *Church History*. Grateful acknowledgment is here made. The Apthorp letter was addressed to Rev. Milton Badger, at 150 Nassau St., New York.

Filled with a desire to serve on the frontier, Apthorp studied theology at both Andover and Princeton that he might represent faithfully two of the great pioneering churches, the Congregational and the Presbyterian. After being ordained by the Harmony Association in Massachusetts in April, 1836, he set out for the West. His first two years work he summed up in the famous report quoted above but no Congregational church had yet been founded in Iowa.

This came about, however, two months after Apthorp's report had been received at Boston. On May 5, 1838, the Congregational Church at Denmark was organized. The Dubuque church, sponsored by Kent, did not become Congregational till the next year, 1839. The Denmark church at its organization, the result of Apthorp's work, had thirty-two members who represented every New England State except Rhode Island. The latter State was represented in the congregation but the representative apparently held a theory of baptism which made actual membership in the Congregational Church impossible.

The Articles of Faith adopted by the Denmark church represent the theology of Dwight which may today be read in his published *Sermons* and in his famous *Theology Explained and Defended*.

Briefly put, the articles were as follows. The Bible is the inspired word of God; God exists in three persons; man is fallen and can be redeemed only through the death of Jesus Christ; and the work of the Spirit is essential in regeneration. "Satisfying evidence of Christian character" was the condition of membership, and they added, "the use of and traffic in ardent spirits, except for mechanical, chemical, and sacramental purposes, is in our view inconsistent with Christian character."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Reed's *Reminiscences of Early Congregationalism in Iowa*, p. 6. Reed's original report was made available to the writer through Rev. Frederick T. Persons.

Wherever Congregationalism or Presbyterianism went, colleges were founded where the sciences, mathematics, and literature flourished. The story of the Denmark Academy, to which Apthorp alluded in his report, is too well known to bear repetition. As in Salem, the first college at Denmark was organized in the church building and held classes there. The cultural life of the pioneers was especially heightened by the coming of the Iowa Band in 1843, and their founding in 1848 of Iowa College at Davenport which was moved to Grinnell in 1859 and later renamed Grinnell College. Until 1856 there were no high schools in Iowa, and higher education was provided for and financed by the religious bodies of the State. Without the churches, Iowa would have had no early colleges. Timothy Dwight was within the bounds of truth when he declared that infidels and atheists were far less concerned about the moral and social welfare of their respective communities than were the Christians.

#### IOWA CITY CONGREGATIONALISM

In his report of 1838 Rev. W. P. Apthorp refers to "Burlington . . . which is the seat of territorial government". The Territorial law-making body sat at Burlington from 1838 until 1841 when it was transferred to Iowa City. This brought the first Congregational families to the new settlement hewed out of the wilderness the preceding year.

The establishment of the Iowa City Congregational Church and its attendant story may serve to represent the typical Congregational church of early Iowa and its contribution to Iowa's cultural life. The Iowa City church also illustrates the result of the early relationship of the Congregational and Presbyterian bodies resulting from the Plan of Union which began in 1801.

The pioneer commissioners who planned Iowa City built better than they knew. They set aside four half blocks to be used as sites for churches, and this provision was confirmed by the Territorial Legislative Assembly meeting in July, 1840. The fathers wanted the city built without delay, and stipulated that any denomination might claim free one-half a block provided it erected a church building inside of three years. The Methodist Episcopal, Universalist, Roman Catholic, and Methodist Protestant groups accepted, and complied with the provisions of the grant.

During the 1840's pioneer immigrants poured into Iowa in ever increasing numbers. Among these pioneers were many Congregationalists. They found for the most part fellowship with the New School Presbyterian Church, organized in 1841. This church continued the tradition of coöperation with the Congregationalists, although the union of Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the American Missionary Society had been dissolved in 1837. An account of the founding of this Presbyterian Church and the emergence of the Congregational Church was given by Nathan H. Brainerd in a paper which he read in 1881 at the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Congregational Church.

A long time ago the great Presbyterian body split apart, on points of doctrine and phases of the slavery question. The larger and most conservative body took the name of "Old School" while the liberal section took the name of "New School." This latter party was in full accord with the Congregationalists on both of these controverted questions. In 1817 this New School body united with the Congregationalists in forming the American Home Missionary Society, for carrying the gospel to the new settlements extending westward, and thus the work of these two denominations in that society was very closely intermingled. The westward march of these settlements was so rapid that by 1840 they had reached and crossed the Mississippi river, and were flowing over the prairies of



Iowa. Of course these denominations, working together in this society, could not work on distinctly denominational lines, but must organize churches under either form of church polity. The result proved that the denomination with the most elaborate church machinery had a great advantage in securing practical results — that while the Congregationalists furnished far the larger share of the funds the Presbyterians secured far more than their fair share of the organized churches.

But more than this was against our church polity here in the West. The leading Congregationalists of New England distrusted their own polity among the new settlements. They found it all right at home in New England, when they could keep watch and ward over it and lay a hand upon it at any time.

But on the prairies they regarded it as a kind of wild asses' colt, which could not be trusted with its freedom, but must be in ecclesiastical harness that would keep it in proper restraint, and the Presb. brethren had such harness always at hand ready to clap on and land the weakling safe in the fold of Presbytery.

Since our Home Missionary Society became distinctively Congregational it has found the effects of that early folly a mighty barrier to the success of its work in the great North West.

About 1840 the Home Mis. Soc'y. began to take notice of the new Capital of Iowa, and a church was gathered here. Rev. Julius A. Reed, of blessed memory, told me the church here was to have been organized as a Cong. church and the day for the organization fixed and the council called to consummate the work, but just before the time set a great flood came over the country, and as the streams were not bridged it was impossible for the members to get here and so that council was not held, and before any further action was taken Rev. Dr. Woods came here and manipulated it into a New School Presb. church. This was exceedingly unfortunate. . . . The Presb. already had one church here older and stronger than this, which took most of the Presb. who came here, while the Congregationalists, having no church home of their own, scattered among the different churches, and were lost to their denomination. During 1855 & 6 a large number of Congregationalists came from the East to Iowa City. Most of these held aloof from membership with any church in the hope of something better. I came here in May, 1856 . . . and the formation of a Congregational church was discussed among us.

There was one man, J. W. Stow, with considerable means and great energy and rare social qualities, who took the lead in the movement. We held regular prayer meetings at his house Sunday evenings, and gradually developed and consolidated our strength. We called a pastor from Mass., Rev. Thos. Morong,<sup>9</sup> who commenced work with us before our church was organized. Having no house of worship of our own we occupied the Universalist church, and there Nov. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1856, we organized the *1st Cong. Church of Iowa City*, by council. The next day we installed our pastor by the same council.

We saw little prospect of permanent success without a house of worship of our own, but felt unable to erect one by ourselves alone. We sent Mr. Morong east to secure aid from there, but he soon reported the eastern cows were milked dry, and would give down little to him. Having failed in his object he did not wish to return, and we were without a pastor. We secured a Mr. Hutchinson for a time, and then Rev. W. W. Allen, of Keokuk. He had been pastor of a Baptist church there, but had committed the unpardonable sin. While by chance in a Presb. church when communion was served he partook with them, and for this his Baptist brethren cast him out. He was an excellent man and did us good service for nearly three years.

The terrible financial crash of 1857 struck us hard. Our members, being mostly new comers, not well established in business, were gradually leaving the city. Others, seeing no prospect for the success of our church, united with other churches, but a remnant remained, hoping against hope, worshiping with other churches but uniting with none, held together by the ties of the blessed memory of communion and fellowship with the choice spirits of our church, which had so nearly vanished from sight, but still to memory dear.

According to a report by Dr. J. W. Healy in 1876<sup>10</sup> the Iowa City Congregational Church, in 1863, considered itself definitely disbanded. He said, quoting one of the older

<sup>9</sup> The account of Mr. Morong and the struggle of these years of the Congregational Church has been told by Rev. J. S. Heffner in his *History of the Congregational Church of Iowa City* in THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XV (1917), pp. 70-112.

<sup>10</sup> Healy's *History of the Congregational Church in the Iowa City Republican*, August 2, 1876.

members: "After a varied existence of some eight years, it died and was buried. . . . With its bones were buried many hopes, many pleasant anticipations, and *all* its evil associations. There were preserved of it but hallowed memories of the past friendships that will last through this life, and, we trust, run forward into the eternal." Only twelve members were left, and Dr. Healy comments: "Had it not been for their strong and steadfast adherence to the principles of the Mayflower, in all probability, this church would never have been born, or lived its decennial life." Dr. Healy considered that the First Congregational Church had thus ceased to exist. Later, as we shall see, the question was to arise as to the historic continuity of Congregationalism in Iowa City.

Not till July, 1866, was there a definite agitation for a reorganization of the Congregational Church in Iowa City. The records of these years are meager, but a careful search made for the celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the church held on December 13, 1936, has uncovered the following records of "The Congregational Church of Iowa City", some scarcely decipherable:

A number of persons desirous to organize a Congregational Church met July 16, 1866, at N. School Presbyterian Church. It was then and there found that about 80 persons from the New School Presbyterian and from the 1st Congregational Churches of Iowa City were desirous and qualified by certificates to be organized into a new Congregational Church. A committee was appointed to draw up articles for a congregational church and society. This committee consisted of Rev. G. D. A. Hebard — N. H. Brainerd and Dr. John Doe. At a subsequent meeting this committee reeported — (a) A constitution for said society — and also (b) Articles of Faith, Covenant and Rules of the church — which were unanimously adopted [All these are missing].

A more detailed report of the meeting on July 16, 1866, reads as follows:

Monday Evening July 16th 1866

At a meeting called at the First Const Presbyterian<sup>11</sup> church for the purpose of organizing a Congregational Church & Society Mr. Chas E. Borland was elected Chairman and J. H. Branch Secretary. Mr. B. Talbot made a statement in reference to the action taken by the 1st. Const. Pres. Church & Society on the evening of the 9th inst. Mr. N. H. Brainerd informed the meeting in regard to the wishes and purposes of the members of the First Congregational Church of Iowa City. On motion a Committee consisting of G. D. A. Hebard, N. H. Brainerd & John Doe were appointed to draft articles of faith and a plan of organization for a Congregational Church and Society.

The names of those persons who desire to become members of the proposed Congregational Church, were read by Messrs. Talbot and Brainerd. On motion adjourned to meet on Friday Evening the 20th inst.

J. H. Branch  
Secretary

Chas. E. Borland  
Chairman

Friday Evening July 20th 1866

At an adjourned meeting held at the First Const. Pres. Church for the purpose of completing the organization of a Congregational Church and Society. The Prest. Chas. E. Borland Esq being absent the meeting was called to order by the Secretary, J. H. Branch, and on motion Rev B. Talbot was elected Chairman. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved. Mr. Brainerd from the Committee on organization presented a plan for the organization of a Society. Mr. Hebard from the same Committee reported a "form of admission", "Articles of faith", "Covenant," and "Church rules". The reports were on motion accepted. On motion that part of the report referring to the organization of a society was adopted. Report, herewith & marked "B". [Missing].

An invitation was then given to those present who desired to do so, to sign the Constitution; and the Secretary was on motion em-

<sup>11</sup> The New School Presbyterian Church in Iowa City was also known as the First Constitutional Presbyterian Church. The names were interchangeable. Mr. Hebard was pastor of the New School Presbyterian Church at the time of the formation of the new Congregational Church, and was retained by the new church organization.

powered to affix the signatures thereto as the names were called. The names were thereupon called and the signatures affixed as shown on the Constitution reported by the Com. On motion the Society thus organized proceeded to an election of officers. On motion a committee was appointed by the Chairman consisting of John Doe, C. Starr and H. Goodrich to report names of Candidates. On motion a committee consisting of G. D. A. Hebard, N. H. Brainerd and B. Talbot was appointed to cooperate with a similar committee to be appointed by the church in calling a Council for the recognition of this Church and Society. The Committee on Candidates reported the following —

For Prest. N. H. Brainerd

“ Sect’y I. E. Paine (declined)

“ Treasr. B. Talbot “

“ Trustees A. C. Isbell, & Levi Smith (not a member)

Report accepted

On motion the following changes were made in the list of names reported. The name of C. F. Clarke was substituted for that of I. E. Paine, that of C. Starr for that of B. Talbot, and that of John Doe for that of Levi Smith. On motion the report as above amended was adopted. That part of the report of the Committee on organization referring to church organization was taken up and the articles of faith & covenant having been read a second time were on motion adopted. The church rules were taken up, read again, and on motion adopted.

Report herewith and marked “C”. [Missing].

On motion a Committee consisting of B. S. Holmes, C. Starr and Z. M. Griswold was appointed to act in conjunction with a similar Committee appointed by the Society to call a Council for the recognition of this Church and Society.

On motion adjourned

J. H. Branch

Secretary

B. Talbot

Chairman

The records add the following history:

A committee of 3 from both Church and Society was appointed to call a Council of ministers and churches to recognize the organization of the church — the society having been organized by signing the constitution. This committee was as follows — On behalf of Society, Rev. G. D. A. Hebard, Rev. B. Talbot and N. H. Brainerd.

On the part of Church — B. S. Holmes, Z. Griswold and Dr. C. Starr.

Council met July 31, 1866 at the N. S. Presbyterian Church — and, after due examination of all the papers, recognized the church as duly organized. Sermon by Rev. G. F. Magoun. Those persons whose names had been found in order for membership, were, after public service, called upon to come forward and publicly assert to the Articles of Faith & covenant, which they did.

Services closed with Benediction.

Fortunately there has been also found a copy of the account of the proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Council:

An Ecclesiastical Council convened at the Stone Presbyterian Church in Iowa City, July 31st/66. 5 o'clock P. M. in response to letters missive from a number of believers in Iowa City desiring to organize a Congregational Church in that City. President G. F. Magoun called to order and read the letters missive calling the Council. On motion Rev. S. D. Cochran was chosen Moderator and P. Fay Scribe.

Council was opened by prayer by the moderator.

Churches represented in Council were

Dubuque Congregational Church	Bro. C. A. Metcalf,	Delegate
Davenport	“ “	Bro. W. A. Bemis, “
Durant	“ “	Rev. H. S. Bullin, “
Muscatine	“ “	Rev. A. B. Robbins “
“	“ “	P. Fay delegate
Grinnell	“ “	Rev. S. D. Cochran, “
“	“ “	Rev. G. F. Magoun “

The place of organization, documents, papers and proceedings together with the Articles of Faith, Covenant, and By-Laws were read by Prof. B. Talbott and also by request the proceedings had at the church, at the several church meetings of the members of 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational & Presbyterian churches on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of July/66, giving a full and detailed history of the proceedings in the premises towards forming a Congregational Church, 55 names from the Stone Presbyterian Church,<sup>12</sup> with others by letter from other churches, and 20 members by letter from the 1<sup>st</sup> Congrega-

<sup>12</sup> Locally the New School Presbyterian Church was called the Stone Church. The building was erected in 1845, four years after the church was organized.

tional Church of Iowa City, all desiring to unite in forming a Congregational Church of Iowa City, asking advice of the Council and their recognition and fellowship. After due examination of the whole matter in question, and a full investigation by the council, the council consulted by themselves and appointed of a Committee, Rev. H. S. Bullin and Bro. W. A. Bemis, delegate, to inquire if any further information was necessary to a full and complete understanding of the matter in question, who reported back, *no further communication would be offered the council.*

On motion voted that the documents, papers, and proceedings be deemed satisfactory, and the Articles of Faith, Covenant, and By Laws were approved. On motion voted that the Council proceed to comply with the request of letters missive, by appropriate Religious Services (at 8 o'clock P. M.) of Recognition. Services opened by prayer by Rev. H. S. Bullin. Sermon by Pres. G. F. Magoun from Luke, 16c 18v. Rev. S. D. Cochran called the names of those desiring to unite in forming the Congregational Church of Iowa City, and they responded by coming forward and adopting the Articles of Faith, Covenant, and By Laws, as read by the moderator, and were duly recognized as the Congregational Church of Iowa City.

And the Fellowship of the Congregational Church was extended to them by the Rev. A. B. Robbins in behalf of the council, closing with the Doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow", and benediction by Pres. G. F. Magoun. After services council remained for consultation Pres.<sup>dt</sup> G. F. Magoun offered the following resolution Resolved that we commend earnestly and affectionately this newly formed church of Christ, to the sympathy of our churches in this State, and elsewhere, and earnestly request the Congregational Union to consider favorably their application for aid in securing a house of worship, and respond to it with the most liberal appropriation that *can be made.* On motion Pres.<sup>dt</sup> G. F. Magoun, the moderator, and Scribe were appointed a committee to memorialize the Congregational Union in behalf of this Church of Christ. On motion the Scribe was directed to furnish a copy of the proceedings of the Council to the clerk of this church, and the Register of the Davenport Association of Congregational Churches. On motion adjourned.

P. Fay Scribe,

S. D. Cochran  
Moderator.

The importance of these records lies not only in the history of Iowa City Congregationalism, but also in their influence on the cultural history of Iowa. Here one sees clearly the transplanting of New England into the Middle West, and the way it took root and developed.

At the time the union was consummated on July 31, 1866, the Reverend George Diah Alonzo Hebard was pastor of the New School Presbyterian Church. Mr. Hebard was also from New England. Born on September 6, 1831, in Brookfield, Vermont, he graduated from Dartmouth College in 1854, and then attended Union Theological Seminary, receiving his diploma in 1857. Union Theological Seminary had been founded in New York City in 1836 when the Presbyterian Church was dividing into two parties, the Old School and the New School. The founders of the Seminary were New School men, and this accounts for Mr. Hebard's theological position in Iowa City. On September 22, 1858, he was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry at Iowa City. Coming to Iowa City in 1861, he served as pastor of the New School Presbyterian Church till 1866. Upon the union of the New School Presbyterian Church with the remnant of the First Congregational Church in 1866, he was chosen acting pastor and continued in this relationship till 1869, when he accepted a call to Oskaloosa, where he died on December 14, 1870, at the early age of thirty-nine.<sup>13</sup>

The newly organized church of 1866 took the new name "The Congregational Church of Iowa City", omitting the word "First" which had designated the organization of 1856. The new church embodied the New School Presbyterian Church, organized in 1841, and the remnant of the First Congregational Church, organized in 1856. Thus the Congregational Church of the present is continuing the

<sup>13</sup> Grace Raymond Hebard, who died at Laramie, Wyoming, on October 11, 1936, was a daughter of G. D. A. Hebard.



united efforts of two great religious bodies, dating back to the Plan of Union in the early nineteenth century. It is, in reality, the continuation of the New School Presbyterian tradition, which would be ninety-five years old this year.

Regarding the change of name from "First Congregational Church" to "Congregational Church", the Reverend M. A. Bullock, pastor of the church from 1888 to 1889, after making extensive investigation wrote in 1916: "The changing of the name from 'The First Congregational Church' to simply 'Congregational Church' in deference to the New School Presbyterians who came into the present organization July 31<sup>st</sup> 1866 does not invalidate the historic continuity of Congregationalism in Iowa City these sixty years, yet it may be that through a mere technicality we should write fifty years as the age of the present Church." Much more important than the age of the denomination is the age of Christian fellowship and coöperation and, in this respect, the church goes back to 1841.

CHARLES ARTHUR HAWLEY

STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA  
IOWA CITY IOWA