

The Coming of the Quakers

Few movements better illustrate the restless energy of American life than the rapid settlement of the vast region west of the Mississippi River. Under the French and Spanish régimes this land had lain almost untouched by white men — a land of quiet, disturbed only now and then by the passing war cry of the red men of the plains, or the mighty stampede of the bison herds. Then came the Anglo-Saxons — restless, eager, thrifty — looking here and there for homes. As if by magic all was changed within the span of a single century.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the settlement of Iowa was well advanced. By this time also the Quakers were rapidly making a place for themselves in the young Commonwealth. Until about 1850 the busy town of Salem had served as the chief point of entry for the stream of Quakers which poured into the southeastern part of the State and settled in the fertile valleys between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers. While settlements were thus rising one after another in quick succession, a new gateway was opened, and at Bloomington (now Muscatine) the ferrymen became familiar with the Quaker salutations, “thee” and “thou”.

[This account of the beginnings of the Springdale community is adapted for THE PALIMPSEST from Louis T. Jones's *The Quakers of Iowa*.— THE EDITOR.]

The first Friend known to have entered at this new gateway was Brinton Darlington, who bought a farm near Muscatine in 1843. Then came Laurie Tatum in 1844, who pressed on about thirty miles to the northwest and settled beyond the Cedar River in the southwest part of Cedar County. Close upon his coming followed J. H. Painter and family in 1845. Thus, as at Salem, hardly had the waving prairie grass been touched by the first Quaker until it was pressed by the foot of the second. The track then made was soon to become a beaten path across the prairie, then a well defined road, and finally a veritable highway for immigrants.

During the next five years seven or eight Quaker families settled in the community, then called Oakley. Homesteads were established on both sides of the road, now known as the Herbert Hoover Highway, from the west branch of Wapsinonoc Creek to the east branch, between the present site of West Branch and the old Pedee settlement near the Cedar River. Meetings on First-days, that is, Sundays, were held at the homes of various Friends, usually in silence because there was no minister in the settlement. In January, 1850, two Quaker ministers from England, Robert Lindsey and Benjamin Seebohm, visited Oakley. They had arrived at Burlington on the nineteenth and after spending a few days at Salem proceeded across country with Joseph and Amos Hoag to the new settlement of Friends in Cedar County about eighty miles to the north.

Having picked their toilsome way over the hills and dales and intervening plains of Henry and Washington counties and the southern part of Johnson County, the group of Quaker travellers crossed the Iowa River on the morning of January 25th and entered Iowa City, the capital of Iowa. Passing almost directly to the eastward, in the afternoon as they were "within 5 miles of the end" of their journey they suffered the misfortune of a broken axle-tree of the carriage and "had to leave it in the midst of the prairie". Thus discomfited, the two English Quakers were given "Joseph D. Hoag's 1 horse buggy", while he and Amos mounted their friends' horses and so came on to the home of Laurie Tatum. There they were "cordially received & kindly welcomed into their humble dwelling by him & his wife, an agreeable & interesting young woman, who has recently ventured out into this new country to share in the toils of her husband in providing a home on these western prairies."

Two very pleasant and profitable days were spent in the Oakley settlement visiting with the Friends. Of Sunday the twenty-seventh Lindsey records:

"A fine bright winter's morning. The thermometer at 10° above zero. At 10 o'clock attended the usual first day morning meeting at Oakley held at the house of Laurie Tatum. Nearly all their members, & some of their neighbors were present, & it was a satisfactory meeting. At 6 in the evening we had an appointed meeting in a schoolhouse 3 miles

from here, which was very crowded & the forepart of it in consequence thereof a good deal unsettled; but thro' patient waiting a precious calm was mercifully vouchsafed, & dear Benjamin was strengthened to labor among them in right authority, & the meeting concluded to good satisfaction."

A year later in the month of August, William Evans, a Philadelphia Friend, on a religious visit to the meetings in Iowa, came into the Oakley settlement, of which he wrote the following description:

"The residences of the settlers in this place, scattered over prairie land, are chiefly log buildings; the settlement being several miles in extent. In the summer season, while the grass is green, the country, with the cabins and little surrounding improvements dotted over it, has a picturesque appearance; yet to a stranger, it gives a sensation of lonesomeness."

The first collective religious meetings to be held among this new group of Friends began in the "fore part of 1849", and were held as the occasion suited at the homes of Laurie Tatum or J. H. Painter. By the year 1852, however, the community had increased in numbers to such an extent that it became necessary to erect a building for "meeting" purposes; and to that end a "gravel" house with a flat roof was built about one-half mile north of the present village of Springdale. On April 9, 1853, in this the second house erected in Cedar County for religious purposes, was established the Red Cedar

Monthly Meeting. Less than a year later the Quakers who lived west of Yankee Corners organized a meeting and in 1856 the Honey Grove Meeting, four miles north of West Branch, was established.

The composite nature of this new center of Quakerism in Iowa and the rapidity with which it grew are well shown by the records of the Monthly Meeting for the first eight months of its existence. At the time of its organization in April, 1853, the committees appointed show that there were no less than thirty-four men members of the meeting. By the close of the year there had been received by the Red Cedar Monthly Meeting sixty-six certificates of membership, representing three hundred and twenty-two men, women, and children. These certificates show that the new arrivals came from Maine, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Canada. For the next four or five years the movement continued strong. In the year 1854 alone eighty-four certificates of membership were received, likewise from very divergent sources. The Red Cedar Meeting was over-crowded, and then the immigrants moved on to the northwest, settling the region to such an extent that for many years the fertile divide between the Iowa and Cedar rivers to the northwest of Springdale for some miles was known as "Quaker Ridge".

LOUIS T. JONES