

Growth and Development

Unlike most evangelical denominations, Unitarianism was never associated with the circuit riding ministers. It appealed generally to the intellectual and professional men living in the larger cities, where schools, libraries, lyceums, and newspapers flourished. With only a few exceptions, its churches were founded in communities which today are classified as cities of the first class — with populations of 15,000 and upwards. It should be noted, however, that if Unitarians in smaller communities were unable to establish a church, they were from time to time visited by Unitarian ministers who lectured to them.

The organization of the Unitarian Church of Davenport occurred in 1868. The ground had been prepared by earlier sermons. In 1865 the Reverend Thomas L. Eliot had come up from St. Louis for a meeting at which he preached, but there was no follow-up of that meeting. In 1867 the Reverend S. S. Hunting of Quincy, Illinois, came to Davenport at the suggestion of Dr. D. C. Roundy who had been an army comrade of Mr. Hunting during the Civil War. Dr. Roundy and W. H. Holmes had organized a study class, the members of which interested themselves in dis-

cussions of religious questions. In June, 1868, they invited Dr. Robert Laird Collier of the First Unitarian Church of Chicago to come to Davenport. He appeared on Sunday, June 28, for two sermons, using as his subjects "The Creed of the Liberal Church" and "The Nobleness of Truth."

Dr. Collier was no stranger to Davenport. He had been the minister of the First Methodist Church there back in 1858 and 1859. There he had met and fallen in love with Mary Price, daughter of Hiram Price, one of Davenport's most eminent citizens. Collier transferred from the Methodists to the Unitarians during the period of the Civil War, and had been called to the Chicago church in 1866.

His sermons in Davenport on that June Sunday in 1868 had immediate results. Steps toward organization were taken on the following Tuesday evening when twenty-eight persons subscribed to articles of organization. Among them was John W. Guiteau, a lawyer who had become the local agent of the New York Mutual Life Insurance Company, in whose interests he carried on an extensive business in Davenport. In 1869 the company moved Guiteau to Chicago and later to Boston where he was living when his psychopathic brother fired the fatal shot at President Garfield in July, 1881. Another of the original members was Dr. E. H. Barrows who came to Scott County

from Vermont in 1836, and became, in his own words, "the only physician between Dubuque and Burlington north and south and the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean east and west."

Naturally the organization of a liberal religious society stirred up a storm of discussion, both ways. The Davenport *Democrat* for Monday, June 29, in telling the story of Sunday's meetings, wrote:

"There are in this city a large number of our most influential citizens, of Christian character, members of churches and otherwise, who are daring to think for themselves in religious matters, and who will give this movement their hearty support, at least, such were the indications yesterday. There has been a desire on the part of many for some time past to organize a Liberal church, but this is the first well-directed effort that has been made."

The Reverend C. A. Staples, representing the American Unitarian Association, came to Davenport to preach on July 12, and Dr. Collier came back for two later Sundays. The Reverend Nathaniel Seaver of Boston was called to become the first permanent minister of the new congregation in November, 1868. He stayed for five years, during which time the first church building was erected in 1871 — a frame structure on the site of the present church at Tenth and Perry streets.

The earlier meetings had been held in the Burtis Opera House and in the council chamber of the city hall, then at Sixth and Brady streets.

Among the early members and leaders in the congregation were Mr. and Mrs. John L. Mason, whose family has stood strongly by the church all these years. A grandson, W. Keith Mason, acts as the president of the organization at the present time. Another of the early families represented in the church activities was that of Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Valentine, and still another that of J. G. Shorey. Among the active members were Mr. and Mrs. George H. French, natives of Massachusetts, who came to Davenport in 1856, where Mr. French established the extensive French and Hecht manufacturing business. Their son, Judge Nathaniel French, was a leading attorney and philanthropist in Davenport for many years; the Friendly House, a settlement house for young people, is an evidence of his generous understanding. Their daughter Alice became a distinguished figure in literature, writing under the pen name "Octave Thanet." A son Robert, who died in early life, inspired the church door library in the Unitarian Church, which was set up by his parents as a memorial.

The large migration of German liberal thinkers following the revolution of 1848 brought numerous families to Davenport who found the Uni-

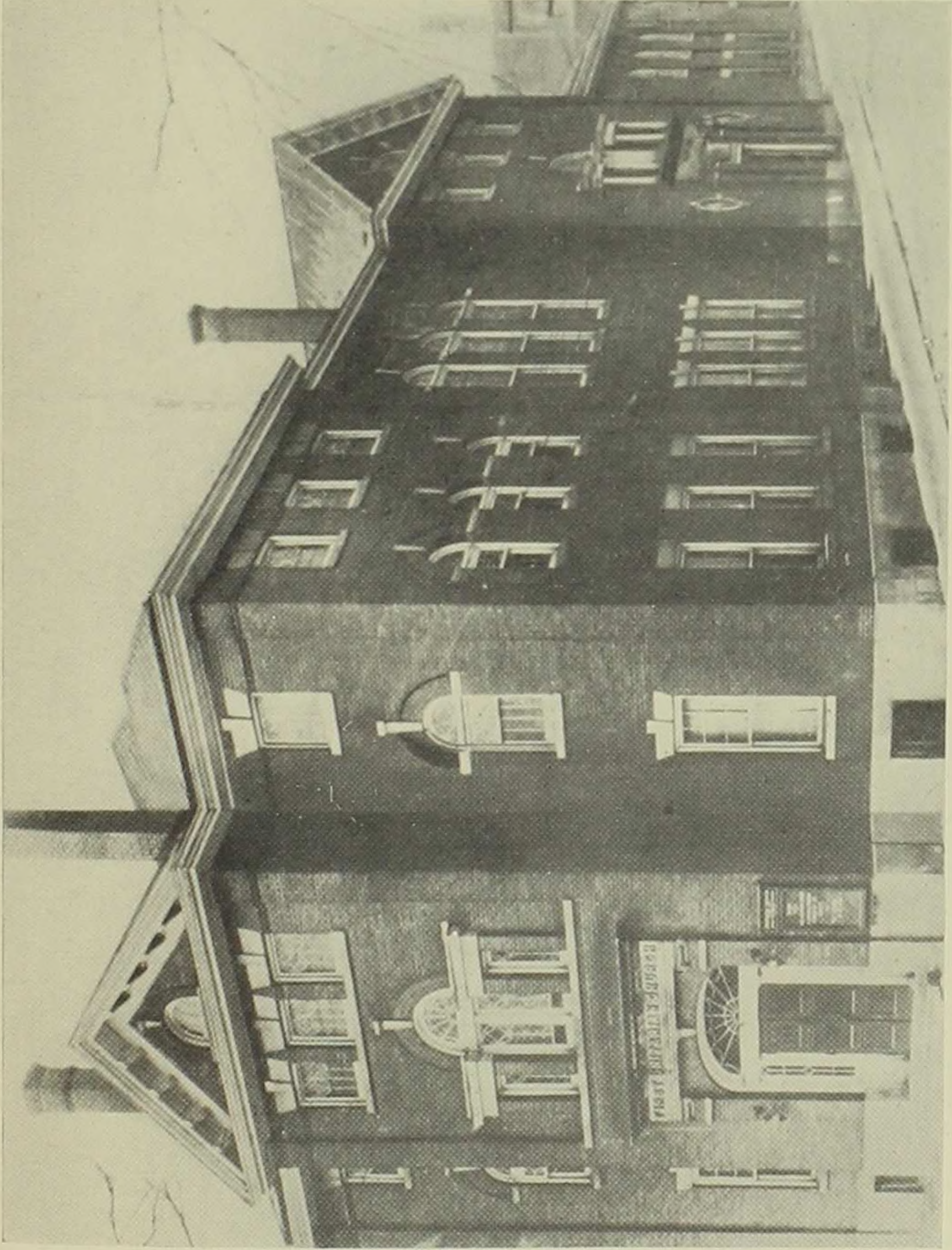
tarian position in religious thinking attractive. Their names soon appeared on the early membership rolls, and many of the latest generation of those families are still active in the church. Those German liberals have had a wide and profound influence on the story of Davenport and its institutions.

Gradually Mr. Seaver established himself and the church in the confidence of the people of Davenport. He was active in numerous good works; among his activities was a term as a member of the school board. When he resigned in 1873, to return to New England, the church was on a firm foundation with the debt on the new building paid off. He was succeeded by the Reverend S. S. Hunting, a product of New Hampshire, already referred to as a visiting preacher in Davenport before the organization of the church. Hunting remained five years and then, following an interim of nearly three years, a young man just out of Harvard Divinity School came to enter upon a pastorate of twenty-six years, years which had immeasurable influence upon the church and the city of Davenport as well as the state of Iowa. His name was Arthur M. Judy. Few activities of an educational or of a civic and social nature in those years were outside the area of his interests. Small of stature but deep of energy and far of vision, Arthur Judy was one of the constructive

influences of the city. The present brick structure replaced the old frame building during his pastorate in 1898.

In Iowa City, Unitarian history goes back to 1840 when a Universalist church was organized which continued for thirty years or more. The members secured a lot and built a church at the corner of Iowa Avenue and Clinton Street opposite the Old Capitol. Their last Universalist minister in Iowa City was the Reverend Augusta Chapin, from 1869-1874. After her departure the work declined badly. In 1878 the Reverend Oscar Clute of the Unitarian Church in Keokuk came to Iowa City to begin organization work there. The remaining Universalists readily cooperated and formed the nucleus of a Unitarian organization which was perfected that same year. The Iowa Unitarian Association purchased the church building and the Unitarians occupied it until 1906 when it was sold to the state for University purposes. The new church building at Iowa Avenue and South Gilbert Street was dedicated in 1908.

This pattern of a Universalist church becoming Unitarian was not uncommon in Iowa or the Middle West. In point of time the Universalists were in the area earlier and by 1870 had twenty-eight churches in Iowa, while the Unitarians, after losing their church at Burlington, had only the one



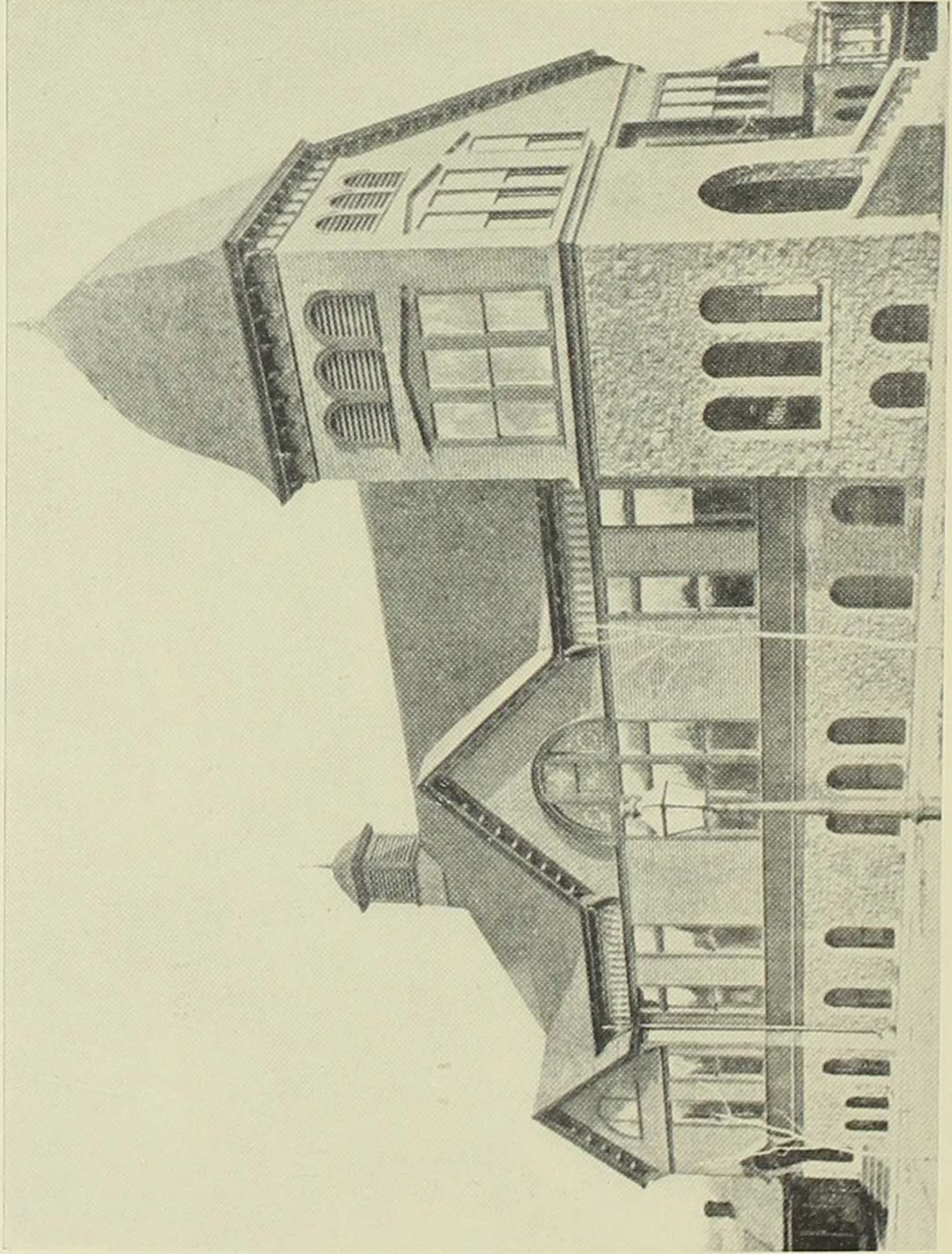
THE UNITARIAN CHURCH AT DAVENPORT



THE FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH AT KEOKUK



THE PEOPLES CHURCH AT CEDAR RAPIDS



FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH AT SIOUX CITY

at Keokuk up to the beginning of the Civil War.

Mr. Clute remained as the minister in Iowa City until 1884. The Reverend Arthur Beavis came next for five years, then the Reverend Charles M. Perkins for four years. The Reverend Eleanor E. Gordon moved over from Sioux City and served the Iowa City church from 1893 until 1900. The old church building was bought from the Universalists in 1898 during her active leadership both in the parish and in the state association. Miss Gordon left the stamp of her vital personality on all of her parishes and on the Unitarian work throughout the state.

The influence of Unitarianism has moved widely from Iowa City through the agency of the uncounted students of the State University who have been associated with the Iowa City church. A large number of members of the University faculty have also added strength and effectiveness to the history of Unitarianism in Iowa, and hence throughout the country.

Another center of Unitarianism in Iowa developed at Humboldt. The Reverend Stephen H. Taft, a native of northern New York, had broken away from paternal sectarian influences and had served as the minister of independent congregations in Jefferson and Lewis counties of that state. Then the lure of the west overtook him and, in 1863, he led a colony of his associates to Iowa and

settled in the county and founded the community which, from his interest in science, he named for the German naturalist, Friedrich von Humboldt. Taft's vision included a collegiate institution which was erected a few years later and given the same name — Humboldt College.

A non-denominational church to be called "The Christian Union Church" was organized and a frame building was erected where Mr. Taft served as the minister. This organization formally affiliated with the Unitarians in 1875, as Unity Church of Humboldt. When Mr. Taft laid down the pastorate in 1880, the church called as its minister a young woman with both remarkable charm of personality and with rare ability in leadership. Miss Mary A. Safford, of Hamilton, Illinois, was ordained as minister by the Humboldt congregation; but on that ordination Sunday none could foresee the position of wide influence she was to create for herself in Unitarian activities and in many other fields in Iowa.

It was largely through the influence of Miss Safford that the word "Unitarian" was reduced to its root, and "Unity" was used to designate churches and their edifices, such as the "Unity Church" in Sioux City. It was also used to name subsidiary organizations such as the "Unity Circle" or "Unity Men's Club."

Miss Safford was in Humboldt five years when

she was succeeded by the Reverend Marion Murdock who also stayed five years. The latter completed a famous pastorate in Cleveland, Ohio, where she was joint minister with the Reverend Florence Buck. While Miss Murdock was at Humboldt, she served as a member of the Board of Curators of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Among the most active members of the Humboldt church over a long series of years were Mr. and Mrs. G. S. Garfield. Mr. Garfield served for a time as president of the Iowa Unitarian Association. His sons are Judge Theodore G. Garfield, a present member of the bench and the Supreme Court of Iowa, and C. F. Garfield, a practicing attorney in Humboldt.

The beginnings of the First Unitarian Church of Sioux City go back to Sunday, February 1, 1885, when the Reverend Oscar Clute came from Iowa City to preach in the Court House. Sioux City was ready for him and his message, and immediate steps were taken to form a Unitarian organization. A provisional board of trustees was chosen and articles of incorporation were adopted at a meeting held March 15. A building which had been used as a skating rink, at Douglas and 6th streets, was purchased and furnished as a meeting hall. Visiting ministers were heard on succeeding Sundays, including Miss Safford of Humboldt, who was called to the pastorate June

15, 1885. She began her long and effective leadership on September 1 of that same year and remained until June, 1899. She brought with her a girlhood friend, Miss Eleanor E. Gordon. Miss Gordon acted as Parish Assistant until her ordination, when she was installed as Associate Minister, May 8, 1889. Between them the two women made a remarkable team and left a deep impression on Sioux City and the surrounding territory for miles around. They overflowed with the missionary spirit as well as with the spirit of civic responsibility and social mindedness. The Unitarian Church became an impressive force in Sioux City. Early in their joint pastorate a new church building was erected and dedicated at Douglas and 10th streets.

Miss Gordon resigned in April, 1896, to go to the Unitarian Church in Iowa City. Miss Marie Jenney, a native of Syracuse, New York, and a graduate of the Meadville Theological School, took her place in June, 1896, and remained until June, 1899, when she and Miss Safford went to the church in Des Moines. In 1904 Miss Jenney became the wife of Frederic C. Howe of New York, a noted leader in political reform movements for many years.

One of the longest pastorates in the history of the Sioux City church was that of the Reverend Charles E. Snyder, from August, 1917, to April 1,

1931, when a severe illness forced his relinquishment of the work.

Among the names of the charter members and of the first board of trustees was that of A. L. Hudson, a young lawyer in Sioux City who, under the preaching of Miss Safford and Miss Gordon, became convinced that the ministry was his calling too. He gave up his law practice, went to a theological school, and spent many useful years as a pastor in New England churches. Dr. William R. Smith is another name that is written large in Sioux City's history, as are those of Judge G. H. Wakefield and of E. H. Buckman, whose descendants are still active in the church.

In 1877 the Reverend John R. Effinger began field work for the newly-organized Iowa Unitarian Association. His first stop to survey the possibilities of a new church organization was in Des Moines. There a small group of people were brought together on Sunday, June 30, 1877; successive meetings were held in a rented hall until on August 5 the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines was organized. Mr. Effinger continued as the minister for two years, when he went to Bloomington, Illinois, and the Reverend S. S. Hunting came from Davenport to take over the work. He stayed until 1886 when he was succeeded by the Reverend Ida C. Hultin. In 1881 a building lot at the corner of Linden and West

15th streets was presented to the church by Mrs. George G. Wright, wife of George G. Wright, former Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court and former United States Senator. A frame church building was erected on this lot and dedicated in December, 1882. This edifice was occupied by the congregation until 1904, when the present church at Eleventh and High streets, built during the pastorate of Miss Safford, was ready for occupancy.

One of the charter members of the Des Moines church and active in its affairs for half a century was Benjamin F. Gue, who served as Lieutenant Governor of Iowa from 1866 to 1868. An able historian, Gue was the author of *History of Iowa from Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, and of numerous shorter articles in *The Annals of Iowa*. His consistent efforts aided the Iowa State Agricultural College at Ames, which owes much of its early progress to Gue's effective work. He also contributed greatly to the early work of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives at Des Moines.

An attempt at a liberal religious movement was undertaken in the little town of Cedar Rapids in the early 1850's, but local opposition was strong indeed and the small group of independently-minded persons found life made fairly unpleasant for them. Then the Civil War came on and reli-

gious differences were forgotten in the common effort. After the grass was again growing on the battlefields, some Cedar Rapids residents turned to the subject of an expression of religion devoid of harshness in creed. The result was the gathering of the First Universalist Church, in 1869, which was incorporated with twenty-three charter members. The charter of purpose in the constitution read:

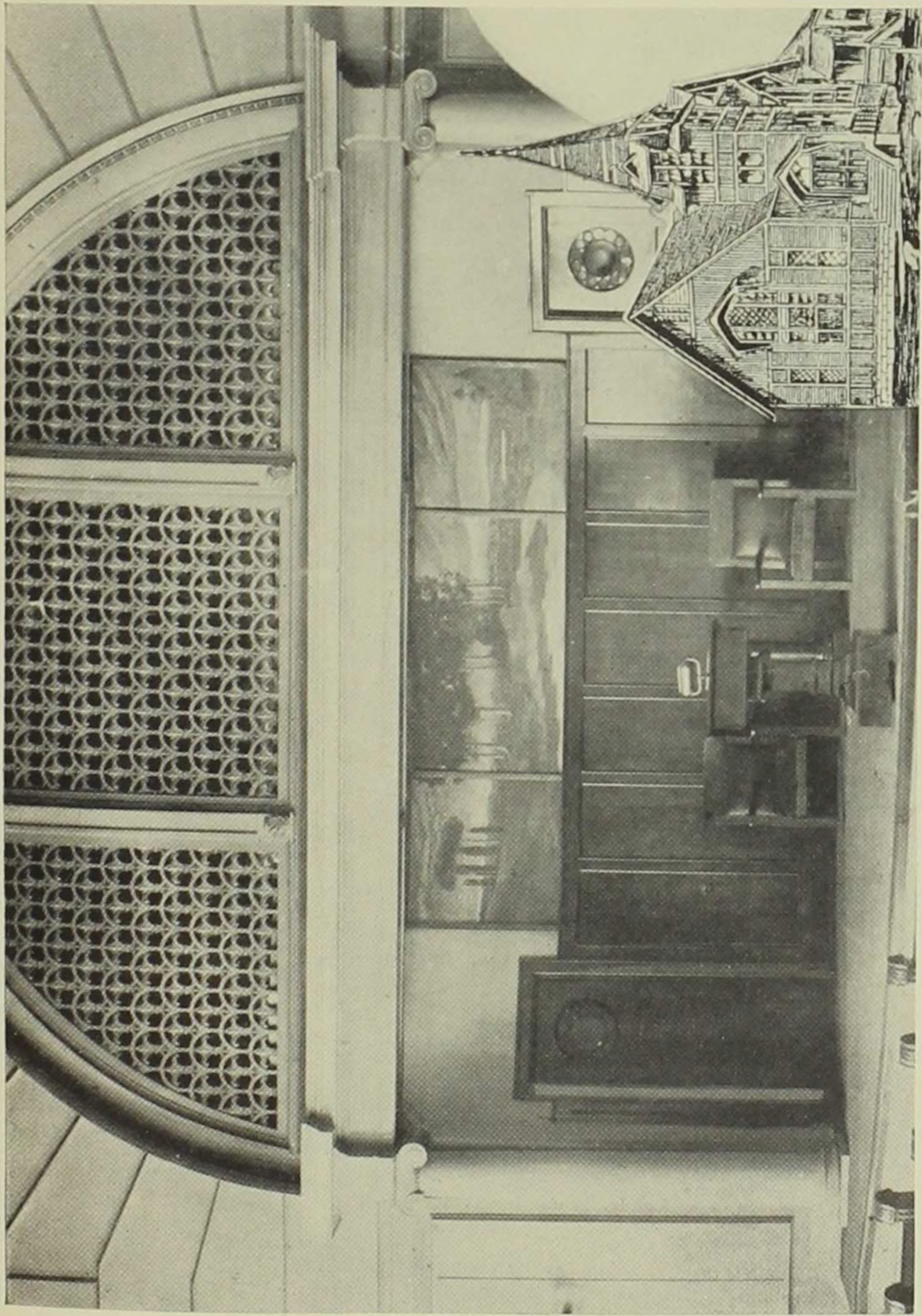
"We, the undersigned, believing in upright life, pure character, and good works, and in the eternal worth and beauty of the morals and ethics exemplified by the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth, hereby associate ourselves with this church as members, thereof."

The first minister, the Reverend W. C. Brooks, held services in an upstairs hall. Other short pastorates followed as the new congregation wrestled with heavy financial problems growing out of the panic of 1873. There was little money available to keep going; there was none available for a home-site or a church building. Finally Mr. F. J. Upton presented a building lot, which continues to be the site of the present church at Third Avenue and 6th Street. With heroic determination the members got enough money to start the erection of a new building. The cornerstone was laid with Masonic ceremonies Sunday, July 1, 1875. It was three years, however, before it was

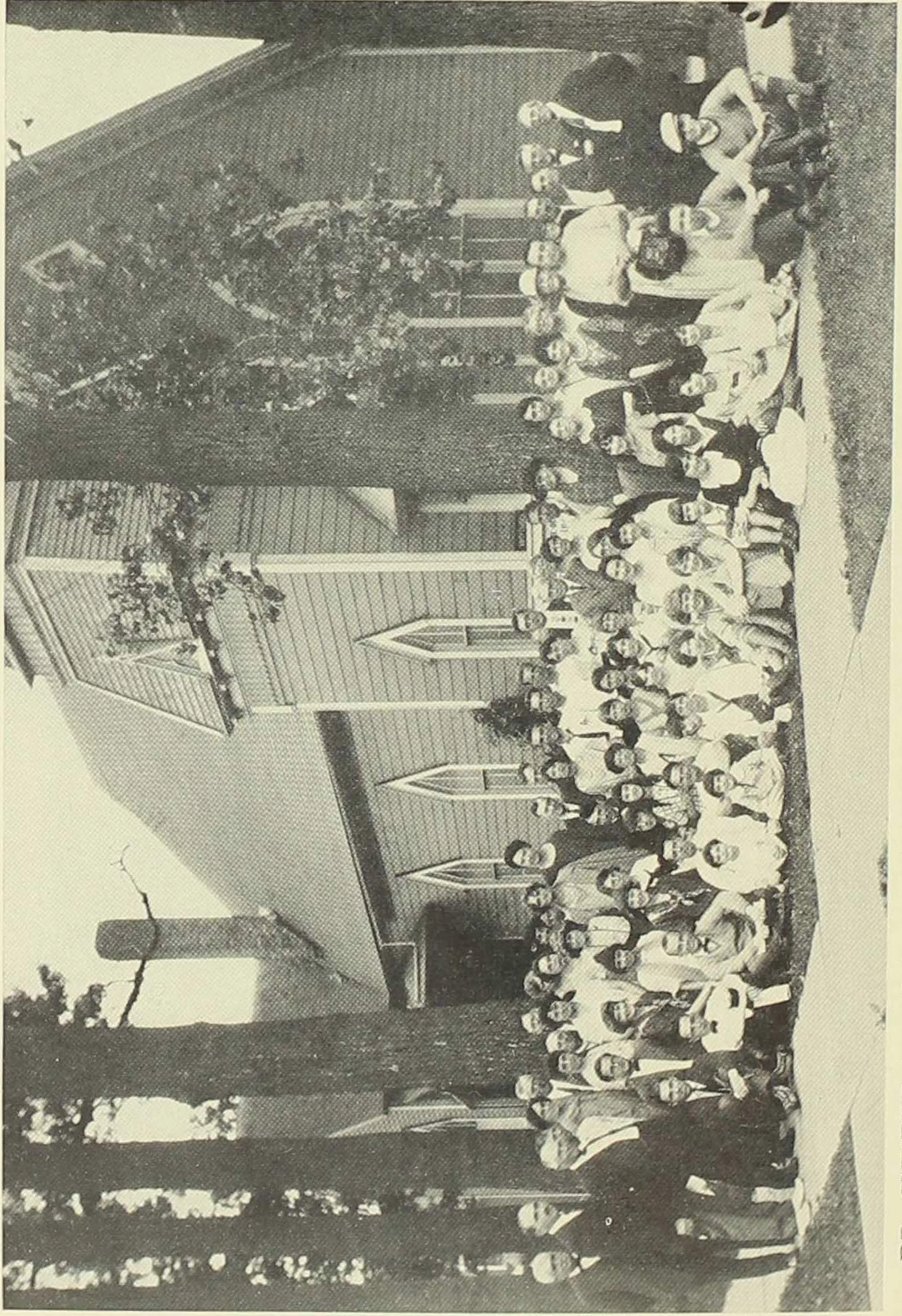
ready for use. The building was dedicated Sunday, July 16, 1878, and with that occasion the cost was met and there was no debt carried along. Still the going was not always easy; a succession of nine preachers came and went from 1869 to 1908. In that latter year the church called the Reverend Joseph Fort Newton, then minister of the Peoples Church, Dixon, Illinois. For nine years Dr. Newton's brilliant platform work put him in the forefront of Iowa ministers. He had brought with him from Dixon the idea of "The Community Church," free from any denominational relationship. Upon his request the First Universalist Church of Cedar Rapids broke away from the Universalists, reorganized as "The Peoples Church" and went on as an independent organization. Dr. Newton resigned in April, 1917, to go to the City Temple, London, England.

In 1921, the congregation called the Reverend W. W. W. Argow from New York to be their minister. During his pastorate of nine notable years, the church found its independent status rather a lonely way of living; and the members voted to affiliate with the Unitarians, thus establishing a relationship which has continued happily for a score of years.

Like the other Iowa churches of its kind, the Peoples Church (which name is retained) has rooted itself deeply in the community where its



INTERIOR OF FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH AT DES MOINES (Insert of Original Church)



DR. SNYDER (second from left) AND HIS HUMBOLDT UNITARIAN INSTITUTE (1924)

influential leadership is felt in numerous civic, social, and educational achievements.

As the Unitarian churches increased in number, it occurred to some of their members that there should be more opportunity for discussion, cooperation, and organized missionary effort among them. Consequently a meeting of representatives of the several churches then organized, and of other individuals, was held June 1, 1877, at Gorham's Hotel in Burlington at which the Iowa Unitarian Association was formed. Officers elected were: Dr. Freeman Knowles of Keokuk, President; Judge Austin Adams of Dubuque, Vice-President; Mrs. C. T. Cole of Mount Pleasant, Secretary; the Reverend W. R. Cole of Mount Pleasant, Treasurer; Mr. Clute of Keokuk, Mr. Hunting of Davenport, and Mrs. Lucretia Effinger of Des Moines, executive committee. The following resolution of purpose was adopted:

"Whereas, Entire freedom is necessary to the growth of religion in the souls of men; and whereas, creed-bound organizations are an obstacle to human progress and happiness;

"Resolved, that we hereby unite ourselves into a permanent society for the purpose of building up free churches, based on practical righteousness, in the State of Iowa."

The Reverend J. R. Effinger had been forced to resign his pulpit in St. Paul because of impaired

health; but it was thought that he could undertake a program of field work in the Iowa Association. To this experiment he addressed himself. At the first annual session of the Association held in Des Moines in May, 1878, Mr. Effinger's report showed that he had traveled over 5,200 miles, which was going some in those pre-gasoline days. His visits had brought into the Association's treasury contributions to the amount of \$1,886.

Clute, Effinger, Hunting, and Cole made an effective team, to which was added in the next decade the inspired and devoted Mary A. Safford. With her for many of these years was her ardent friend, Eleanor E. Gordon. Both of these women threw themselves into the work of the Association, both serving as secretary and as president, at various times.

When Arthur M. Judy brought his enthusiasm and energy to Davenport in 1881, he too joined enthusiastically in the work of the Association, serving for many years as its president. For a quarter of a century these three — Miss Safford, Miss Gordon, and Mr. Judy — constituted a great working team. Their labor resulted in a considerable endowment fund which the Association holds in trust. That original fund has been augmented by other trust funds coming to the Association from the property of defunct churches, as provided by the Iowa statutes. There

is also a trust fund known as the Arthur M. Judy Fund raised by private subscriptions as a memorial to Mr. Judy, the income of which is used to provide eminent speakers for the annual meetings of the Association or for other conventions.

For a number of years the Association published a magazine, known as *Old and New*, with Mr. Judy as editor. The missionary efforts of the Association planted churches in several of the smaller cities of Iowa, churches which flourished briefly for a few years, but which finally found the going too hard in competition with the increasing number of other churches, which became too numerous for the resources of those small communities to support. One of those lesser county seat towns, for example, found itself with fourteen Protestant churches, all struggling to keep alive. Furthermore, the founders of the Unitarian churches often dispersed; their sons and daughters sought greener pastures elsewhere; the migration from New England stopped; and in common with numerous churches of other denominations, Unitarians found their membership dwindling to the point where they had to close up.

A creative energy and leadership was added to the Association in 1907 when Henry H. Griffiths of Des Moines became its treasurer, an office which he held until 1945. With unfailing care and loyalty he has fostered the interests of the

Association and the churches which have composed it for all of those years.

The Iowa Unitarian Association eventually turned its attention to other ventures. In 1924, it organized the first of a series of summer institutes or conferences for young people, which were held for several years in Humboldt, and later at Boone and McGregor. The institutes set a pattern for a wide-spread denominational activity; a series of similar local meetings for young people were held across the country. The Iowa Institute has now merged with one conducted every year by the Western Unitarian Conference at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

The Association has also made an effort toward solution of the problem of isolated Unitarians. These are members living in cities or villages where there have been former churches, or sometimes in areas where there are only one or two families, too few for a church group. These efforts of the Association centered mostly in northwestern Iowa and in nearby communities in adjoining states, and were carried on largely from the Sioux City church as a center. Contacts by visits, correspondence, and printed material were developed; the scattered individuals were absorbed into the membership of the Sioux City church (they were known as district members); and in several instances local groups or "cells"

were organized for regular meetings fostered by the Sioux City minister and church members. This plan has now been adopted by the American Unitarian Association in the development of "The Church of the Larger Fellowship."

Early in the twentieth century the Unitarian societies in Omaha (organized in 1869) and in Lincoln (organized in 1898) were invited to affiliate with the Iowa Unitarian Association. That invitation was accepted and the strength of the two Nebraska churches was added to the Iowa Association. This marriage brought into the Iowa organization numerous men and women whose lively interest is written largely in the record. Particularly reference must be made to the Reverend Arthur L. Weatherly, who was the minister in Lincoln from 1908 to 1919; after an interim of ten years, seven of which were spent with the church in Iowa City, he returned to Lincoln in 1929 for a pastorate of three years. All who knew him are devoted to his memory.

The Reverend Charles E. Snyder became Secretary of the Association in 1919 and continued in that office until 1946, when he declined reelection. The present officers are: President, Roman L. Hruska, Omaha; Vice-President, the Reverend Waldemar Argow, Cedar Rapids; Secretary, the Reverend John W. Brigham, Sioux City; Treasurer, Franklin Brown, Des Moines.