

## At Burlington and Keokuk

The first Unitarian congregation gathered in Iowa was in Burlington. It was organized by a charter voted by the Second Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa meeting in special session at Burlington on July 17, 1840. The act was known as House File No. 184. The incorporators named in the act were George Partridge, S. S. Ransom, John P. Bradstreet, Silas A. Hudson, and William Henry Starr.

The founders of the Burlington Unitarian church were able men. George Partridge was a leader in community affairs; Ransom was an early physician; Hudson was a Kentuckian who arrived at Burlington in 1839 and engaged in the hardware business while busying himself in territorial and state politics. An ardent Whig, Hudson authored the Burlington city charter. As clerk in the territorial and state legislatures, Hudson did much work in revising the laws. John P. Bradstreet was murdered by W. G. Ross in 1842; his death was followed by a meeting of three hundred citizens protesting the dastardly deed.

William Henry Starr was one of two Burlington citizens named W. H. Starr, both of whom were admitted to the practice of law at the first

session of the territorial Supreme Court in 1838. They were Vermonters and cousins, whose like names caused continued confusion with their mail and among their clients. The one attempted to avoid that difficulty by changing his signature to "W. Henry" and then to "Henry W." He practiced in partnership for many years with James W. Grimes, and attained high standing in his profession and was known as an able and forceful speaker.

The Burlington Unitarians bought a lot at the northwest corner of 3rd and Columbia streets. Steps were taken to raise money for a church building. There seem to have been two ministers for short periods, one named Stowe and the other Bridges, although there is no record of their being listed as Unitarian preachers.

In 1843 two brothers came out from New England to settle in Burlington — A. S. Shackford, a merchant, and Charles Chauncey Shackford, an ordained Unitarian minister. The Reverend Theodore Parker preached his famous, much-debated sermon on "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity" at Shackford's ordination in Hawes Place Church in South Boston, on May 19, 1841. When the Reverend Shackford settled among the Burlington Unitarians he found the citizens embroiled in theological controversy.

The Presbyterians at this time were quarreling

among themselves on a national basis which resulted in a split into "Old Style" and "New Style" Presbyterians. The Burlington Presbyterians cracked wide open; the "New Style" faction organized as a Congregationalist society, with the other Starr and A. S. Shackford as leading laymen. This Congregationalist Shackford was deeply agitated by the presence of a Unitarian church in the city and by his brother's leadership in it. In the general debate, he stooped to such impolite designations of his brother's congregation as "The India Rubber Church" and "The Free and Easy Church." S. S. Ransom, one of the Unitarian incorporators, seems to have suffered a change of mind, for in 1843 he was named in a similar capacity for the new Congregational church.

In 1846, the Reverend William Salter became the minister of the Congregationalist church in Burlington. He was a member of the famous "Iowa Band" of Congregational ministers who came to Iowa in 1843 and eventually founded Grinnell College. Salter did not hesitate to speak his mind concerning the Unitarians. In that same year Charles Chauncey Shackford accepted a call from the Unitarian church in Lynn, Massachusetts, thus fulfilling William Salter's expressed wish, "that Shackford might be kept in Massachusetts." Shackford finally wound up his career as a mem-

ber of the faculty of Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

Meanwhile, Salter grew gently more liberal as the years passed. He became a strong voice in the anti-slavery movement which issue largely replaced theology as a vital matter of discussion, and with this he made an appeal to the New Englanders. The result was the demise of the Unitarian church in Burlington and many former Unitarians found themselves in Salter's congregation.

The disappearance of the Burlington church was followed by the organization of a Unitarian congregation in Keokuk in 1853. This church represented a protest against the lurid preaching of a visiting revivalist who pulled out all of the stops on the orthodoxy of the times. The town was ablaze with religious argument. Several persons, who resented the revivalist's insult to their reason and to their sense of good will toward their neighbors, decided that Keokuk should have a more liberal church. As one of the incorporators put it, "Let us build here in Keokuk a church where we will not hear such infernal nonsense as we have heard today."

William Leighton, C. H. Perry, Albert Connable, and Samuel Freeman Miller were among those who wrote the original articles of incorporation of the new organization. The Reverend Leonard L. Whitney was settled as the first minister

SOME PIONEER IOWA UNITARIAN LEADERS



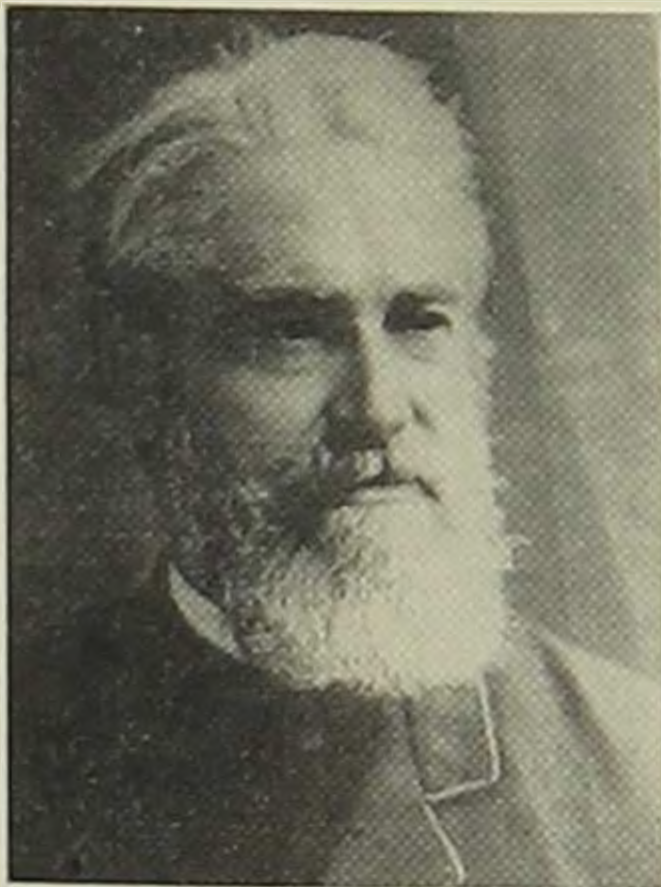
Freeman Knowles



Leonard L. Whitney



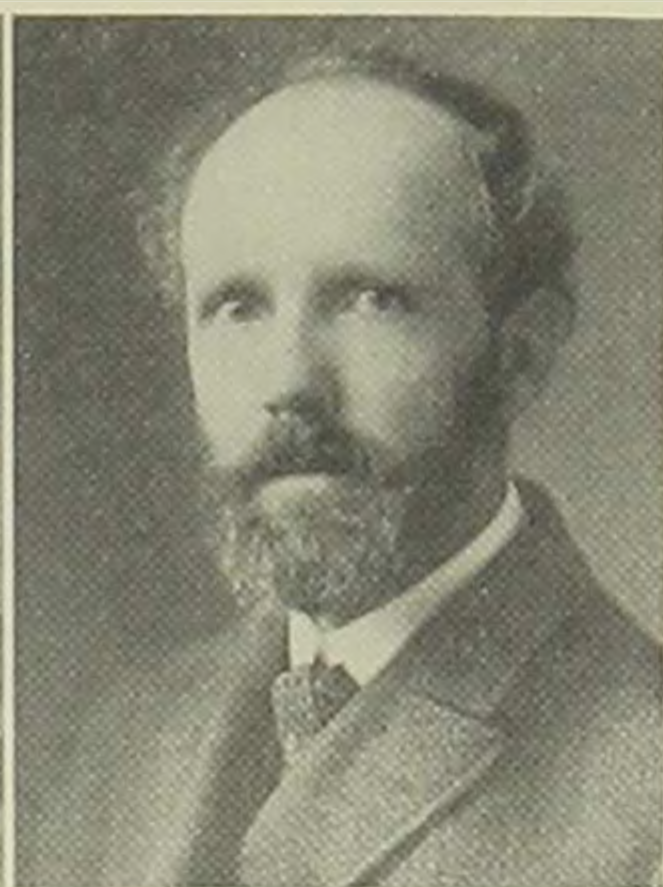
Nathaniel Seaver



S. S. Hunting



Eleanor E. Gordon



Arthur M. Judy



Marion Murdock

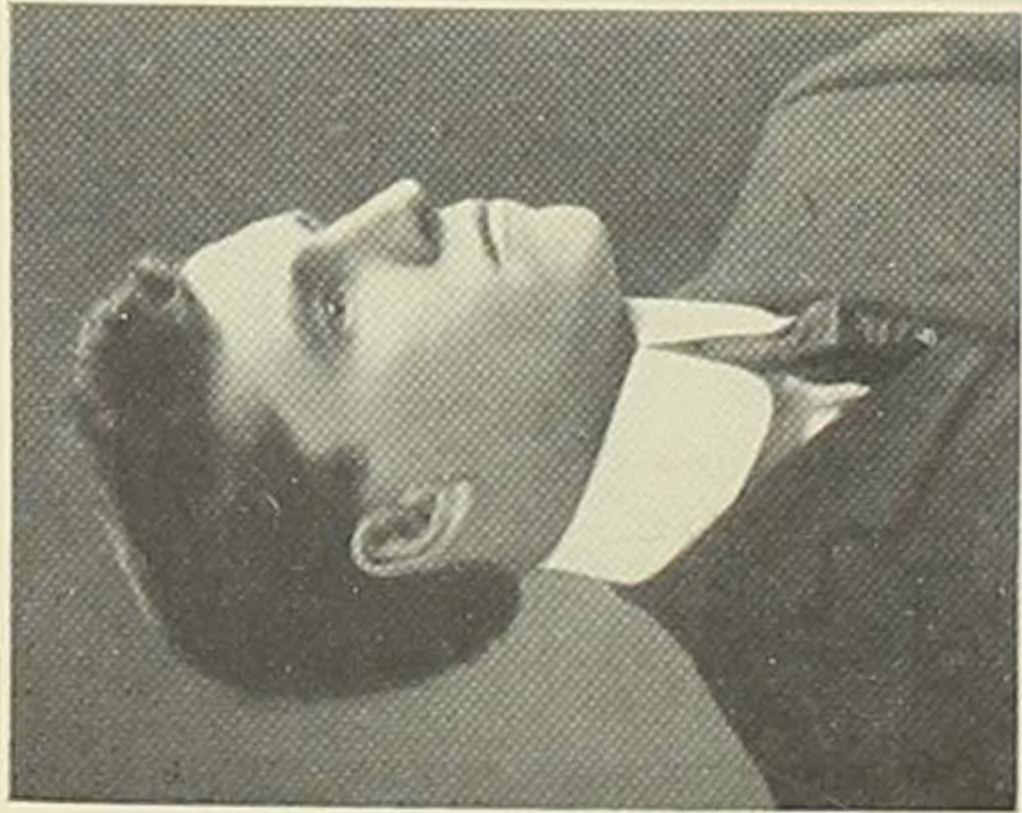


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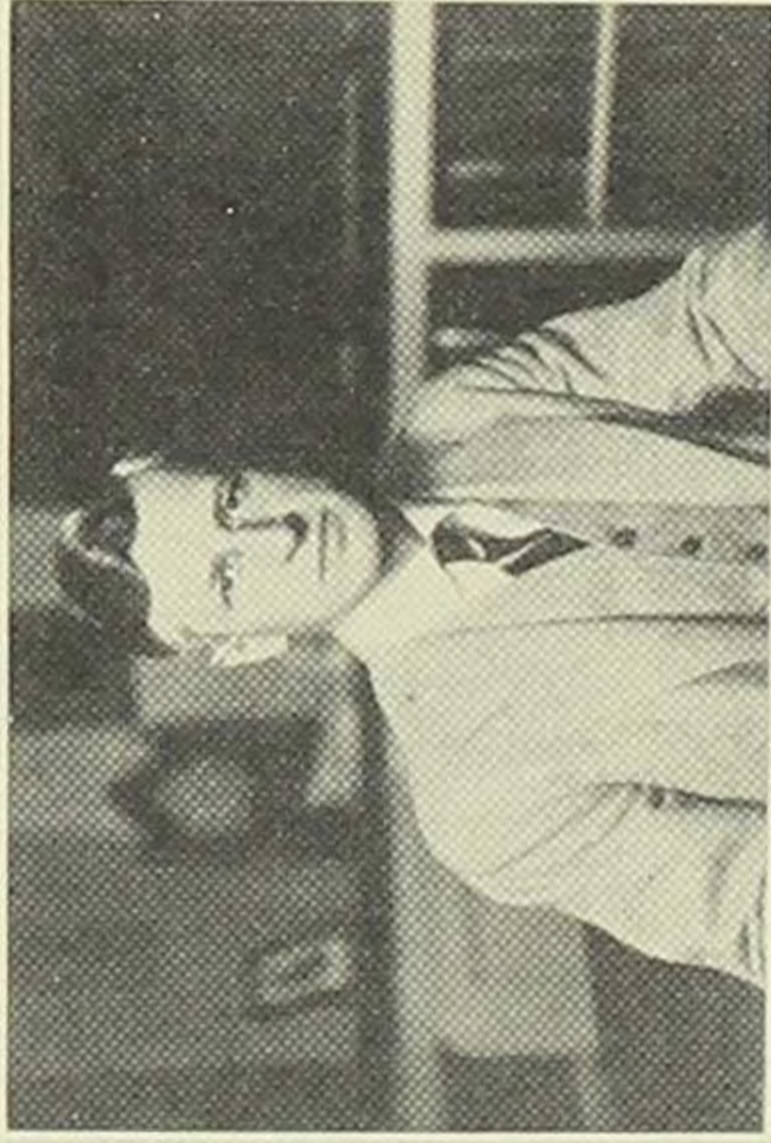


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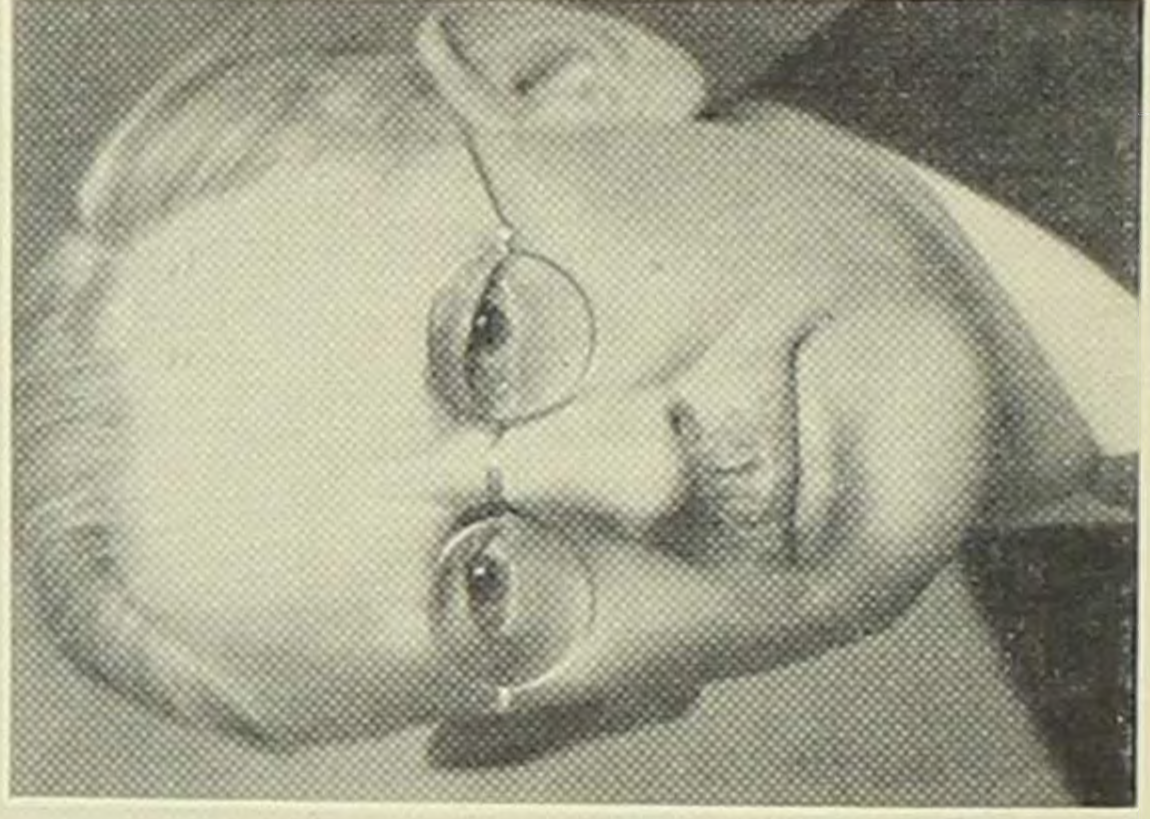
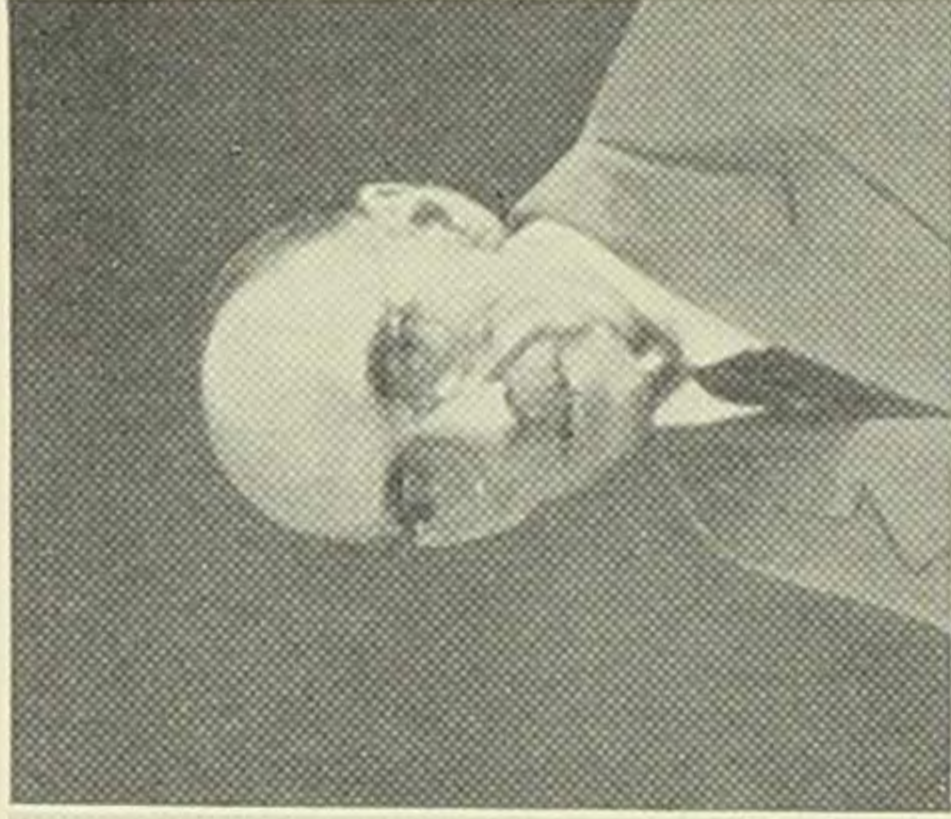
SOME LEADING IOWA UNITARIAN MINISTERS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Joseph Fort Newton  
Waldemar Argow



W. W. W. Argow



Charles E. Snyder  
Evans A. Worthley

in October of 1853. He remained until 1861 when he resigned to become a chaplain in Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll's regiment. Whitney developed an attack of "camp fever" and died in 1868. He was succeeded as the minister of the church in Keokuk by the Reverend Robert Hassall who served in that capacity until 1866.

The most prominent member of the Keokuk church during its near century of existence was Judge Samuel Freeman Miller. Born in Kentucky in 1816, of Pennsylvania-German stock which had migrated into the hills of southeastern Kentucky, Miller first prepared for the practice of medicine at Transylvania University, from which he was graduated when he was twenty. After ten years of country practice he switched to law and was admitted to the bar in 1847. Like numerous other Kentuckians (including a family named Lincoln) Samuel Freeman Miller resented the system of slavery so strongly that he decided to move to a free state. Iowa was his choice and Keokuk the location to which he came in 1850.

At Keokuk, Miller formed a law partnership with Louis A. Reeves and later with John W. Rankin. In 1862 he was designated by President Lincoln as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court where he served with great distinction until his death in 1890 after twenty-eight years on the bench. Chief Justice Chase

once said that Justice Miller was the dominant personality on the bench. He was one of the Supreme Court Justices who was a member of the Electoral Commission following the Presidential election of 1876. For three years he served as President of the National Unitarian Conference. He always retained his membership in the Keokuk church. After a funeral ceremony in Washington his body was returned to the Keokuk church for final services and burial.

Another name that stands out prominently in the early history of the Keokuk church is that of Dr. Freeman Knowles — who brought from his birthplace in Maine a keen New England mind and a brilliant and gracious wife. Dr. Knowles was made the first president of the Iowa Unitarian Association.

With the disappearance of the Burlington church, Keokuk became the senior Unitarian congregation in the state. Its first building was erected in 1856; but it was badly damaged by a storm and was succeeded by a larger and more imposing structure in 1874. The Burlington and Keokuk churches were the only ones established by the Unitarians in Iowa before the Civil War.