

James Gardiner Edwards

James Gardiner Edwards, printer, and Theron Baldwin, preacher, peered after a carriage that was dwindling in the distance over the Illinois prairie. Standing on the river bank with old Saint Louis behind them, they waved to their friends and families. In the hired hack rode the Reverend Julian M. Sturtevant, his wife, and Mrs. Edwards and her sister. The creaking carriage crunching through stiff November grass headed for Jacksonville. Edwards and Baldwin planned to follow a week later.

The story of Edwards's western journey from the Land of the Sacred Cod in 1829 to Jacksonville is long. At his birth, on January 23, 1802, Boston was still shadowed by the Revolution, and Muster Day was an established tradition. The child was baptized in Trinity Church by Dr. John S. Gardiner, after whom he was named. As a lad, Edwards romped among narrow Boston streets and on Bunker Hill. He watched sloops, schooners, and frigates from the Seven Seas come to dock with their fascinating cargoes of herbs and spices, tinware, tobacco, and smoked fish. He attended public school with Charles Francis Adams. When

thirteen he became a printer's apprentice. In 1815 he was working in New York as a typesetter.

On March 20, 1825, Edwards came close to fame by publishing the *New York Courier*. It is called the first Sunday newspaper of the city. The venture was unsuccessful, and Edwards, discouraged, returned to Boston where he was employed by Wells and Lilly, prominent publishers.

A gay blade, Edwards had little interest in religious affairs until 1826 when, as the result of the "prayers and labors of a Christian friend," he made public confession of his faith and became a member of the Old South Church. One bright morning, after Sabbath School, he met Eleanor T. Dunlap. This charming girl, born at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on November 24, 1804, was educated in public and private schools. Intensely religious from childhood, she considered at one time going as a missionary to Palestine. The young couple were married on September 14, 1826. They lived on Piedmont Street for three years while Edwards worked as a proof-reader. Both continued their religious labors, distributing tracts, teaching Sunday School, and contributing to foreign missions.

One evening chance brought them a sermon which was to influence their entire lives and take them to the Iowa frontier. The Reverend J. M.

Ellis, of the American Home Missionary Society, preached on his labors in Jacksonville, Illinois. He urged the claims of the West upon his congregation. "Ten men", said Ellis, quoting a sentiment from Benjamin Franklin, "will do more in fixing the habits and forming the character in the first settlement of a country, than a hundred men coming in at a later period." The appeal found response in the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards.

In the fall of 1829 they were on their way. From New York, they traveled to Pittsburgh where they took passage on an Ohio River boat. At Saint Louis they met the Baldwin and Sturtevant parties. By then the leaves had turned. Plans were soon made. The advance party was to start at once, and Edwards and Baldwin were to follow as soon as possible. Within a week both groups made Jacksonville their home. It was then a village of only four years' growth whose 600 settlers lived in small frame houses and log cabins.

Edwards, inspired by the word of the missionaries and stimulated by an intense pietism, made ready to publish a newspaper. His journal was to promote religion, crusade in the temperance cause, and sponsor the Whig party. He was prepared to make war upon frontier sin. On January 24, 1830, the first number of the *Western Observer* was published. In December, 1831, he changed

the title of his paper to the *Illinois Patriot*. But printers would not stay with him, subscribers did not pay in cash, and a politician sued him for libel. Therefore, Edwards sold his shop and prepared to leave "this Sodom and Gommorah".

His printing venture, however, had not interfered with his religious activities. In 1831, he was an elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Morgan County. In 1836, he established a Sabbath School at Beardstown, twenty-five miles from Jacksonville, and taught there regularly. When a meeting was called to organize the Jacksonville Tract Society, Edwards was named clerk and treasurer. He was also corresponding secretary of the Bible Society, and treasurer of the Illinois Branch of the American Education Society. He contributed generously to all these causes. Yet with his large capacity to serve, he made few friends. Too frequently he sat in judgment upon his fellow men, and for this censure he walked alone.

From Jacksonville, Edwards moved to Fort Madison. There he purchased the printing equipment of Dr. Isaac Galland. The first issue of the Fort Madison *Patriot* came from the press on March 24, 1838, "before the admiring eyes of Chief Black Hawk and other Indians who frequently came to the office to inspect the mechan-

ical part of the plant." His friendship with Black Hawk was cordial and permanent. Upon one occasion, Edwards toasted the famous Iowa chief: "Our illustrious guest, Black Hawk — May his declining years be as calm and serene as his past life has been boisterous and full of warlike incidents!"

But the life of an editor in Fort Madison was no more prosperous or happy than it had been in Jacksonville. True, Edwards was president of the town and an elder in the church. He was also a property owner, having purchased three lots upon one of which stood his home, a substantial two-story dwelling. Yet his New England reserve, his Presbyterian orthodoxy, his antipathy to drink, and his uncompromising attitude alienated him from many of the settlers among whom he lived.

On September 1, 1838, he stopped his Fort Madison paper, loaded his printing press, type, and household goods upon a river boat, and set out for Burlington, the seat of the government. He was thirty-six years old. For eight years he had labored upon the frontier unsuccessfully. In December, he published a specimen number of the Burlington *Patriot* which he hoped would attract subscribers. It died on the day of its birth, however, and constituted the fourth newspaper that Edwards had started since coming West. But

finally, fortune smiled upon him. On June 6, 1839, appeared the first number of the *Iowa Patriot*, the parent of the Burlington *Hawk-Eye*. The *Patriot* was published in a two-story frame house which stood at the corner of Washington and Water streets. There, overlooking the broad Mississippi, Mrs. Edwards set type, James M. Broadwell and George Paul helped, and an Irishman ran the press.

Gathering news, Edwards walked about the busy town of some three thousand inhabitants, watching river boats unload kegs of nails and whisky, boxes of calico and linens, crates of iron stoves and furniture, bags of salt and coffee, and boxes of candles, paper, and books. Doubtless he heard of a recently received letter from Massachusetts whose envelope carried the jingle:

Now Westward ho! make haste and go,
And change your course for no way,
But stop secure, dry, safe, and sure,
At Burlington, Ioway.

A little commercial printing also was done in that frontier community. Edwards, because of his politics, received some official printing grants, including the early revenue laws of the Territory of Wisconsin, and the first *Catalogue of the Iowa Territorial Library*. But he complained, with that querulousness that had become a part of his per-

sonality, that he did not receive the share of Territorial printing which he felt was his due.

In 1845, Edwards, for the second and third time, was sued for libel. He had published an article charging that the stock in Joseph Upham's store was stolen property. Upham, through his attorney, David Rorer, filed suit against Edwards for \$5000 damage. Whereupon the editor republished the original charges with embellishments. The result was the filing of a second suit. Edwards appeared and through his attorneys, Starr and Mills, filed a motion asking the court to require the plaintiff to file a bond for costs, and the court so ordered. Upham, however, failed to appear and comply with the court's ruling. Subsequently, the court dismissed the plaintiff's petition for the failure to file the bond, and gave judgment to Edwards for the costs of the two actions. This was only a paper victory, for it cost Edwards heavily in the loss of public favor.

An article reflecting upon the motives for the election of Augustus Caesar Dodge to Congress in 1840 provoked a street brawl with the General. Edwards, himself, reported that Dodge approached him and said: "You are a —— eternal calumniator, a coward, and a —— rascal, and if you speak to me again, I shall be under the necessity of putting you under my feet, sir." Nei-

ther was Governor John Chambers particularly friendly. When Chambers arrived in Burlington in May, 1841, he was escorted to the National House "leaning upon the arm of Colonel Bennett, while Editor Edwards brought up the rear with a small troop of the gov's negroes."

During the forties Edwards became increasingly introspective and disagreeable. Even his church duties which he scrupulously discharged failed to bring complete satisfaction. Both he and his wife were charter members of the Congregational Church of Burlington when it was organized in 1838. They were present when the church was reorganized on December 28, 1843. The following year Edwards became one of the deacons, and his name is mentioned in the Act of Incorporation. The Edwardses signed the church constitution when it was adopted. In 1843 Edwards met, for the first time, Dr. William Salter who had come west as a member of the Iowa Band.

Mrs. Edwards possessed a loving personality and was of great help to Salter. Her home, open to him from the morning when he first landed in Iowa, for years was the unofficial headquarters of Burlington Congregationalism. She procured, at her own expense, the first Bible and hymn books used in the church and she also secured the first communion service. The sewing circle stitched in

her home more than in any other. When Mississippi steamboats puffed into port, this good woman frequently went aboard to sell purses, made by the church ladies, to passengers, crew, and professional gamblers. And it was she who planned and managed a Fourth of July dinner, the proceeds of which were to be used for carpets and lamps for the church. "Singular", said Salter, "to build a house by eating. Isn't this the West!" Mrs. Edwards, commented Salter, was a "smart housekeeper, given to hospitality, much interested in the church, of quick perception, close observation, large intelligence, and great benevolence."

Edwards left Burlington several times. In 1844, he attended the Nashville Convention where he met his old friend, Stephen A. Douglas. He also called upon Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage. The following year he went to Memphis to attend the Great Western Convention at which John C. Calhoun presided. He also journeyed to New York on one or more occasions. His last trip to the East was made in October, 1850, when he visited the home of Mrs. Salter's father in Charlestown, Massachusetts. "It really seems strange to me," wrote E. P. Mackintire to his daughter, "that Mr. Edwards should have been willing to mortgage his house and spend his last dollar of money in traveling."

Mackintire also wrote that officials of the Home Missionary Society were skeptical of Edwards's influence in the Burlington church. He told one minister that Edwards's paper did not truly represent the religious feeling of Salter's congregation. "If Mr. Edwards sells out," he wrote in January, 1851, "cannot some high-minded, talented, judicious man be found to take it who would take moderate, conservative, Whig grounds in politics, and morals, and make it acceptable to the better portion of the community."

Dogmatic in politics and a fanatic in religion, Edwards lived an uneasy life. He was a grim and taciturn man who smiled behind his eyes. His friends had difficulty in understanding some of his actions. Edwards denounced the Mexican War, editorially thumbed his nose at the Locofoco (Democratic) party, hated the Catholics, and despised the Mormons. He once planned to go as a printer to a foreign mission. Extremely partisan and injudicious in personal relations, Edwards was also unimaginative and devoid of humor. Yet he had ability and "became the most vital editor of early Iowa." He was sincere, honest, and pious. For many years he was superintendent of the Congregational Sunday School. Not generous in tolerance, he gave freely of his meagre income. His donations to the Congregational Church were

consistent and large. In 1840 he sent the American Home Missionary Society a hundred dollars and in his will he remembered Iowa College, the American Home Missionary Society, and the American Tract Society.

The year 1851, long remembered in the annals of Burlington, brought a return of the dreaded Asiatic cholera. Edwards, a diminutive man and never in good health, took ill about July 16th. On the evening of the last day of the month, the disease shook him with "fearful violence". Five days later, about three o'clock in the morning, two ministers stood by his bedside. Dr. Salter and the Reverend L. B. Dennis, pastor of Old Zion, offered prayer. Then the afflicted man looked up, "Brother Dennis," he sighed, "I have been preparing for this a long time, but now it is hard work. What would I do without grace?" The struggle was soon over. Edwards was buried the same day in Aspen Grove.

Dr. Salter, on August 10th, preached a sermon on his death from a favorite text: "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

PHILIP D. JORDAN