

The Iowa Mission

First to work among Iowa Congregationalists was the Rev. William P. Apthorp, who preached at Fort Madison, West Point, and Denmark in 1836 and 1837. Earlier, the Rev. Asa Turner and the Rev. William Kirby had toured over the "Black Hawk Purchase." Following Apthorp's good work, the people at Denmark were ready when Turner, aided by the Rev. Julius A. Reed, came to form a church. On May 5, 1838, thirty-two persons assented to the Articles of Faith at the meeting held in a "shanty sanctuary" measuring 20x24 feet; ten years later this was Iowa's largest Congregational church with 123 members. Soon, other missionaries came, including Reuben Gaylord, Oliver Emerson, Charles Burnham, and John C. Holbrook — all known as the "Iowa patriarchs" — and these organized many additional churches, as well as the Congregational Association of Iowa (on November 6, 1840), the first such body west of the Mississippi River.

The most significant event concerned the coming of the "Iowa Band" for ordination at Denmark on November 5, 1843. Trained at Andover Seminary under the distinguished Professor Leonard Woods, the "Band" included Harvey Adams, Ed-

win B. Turner, Daniel Lane, Erastus Ripley, James J. Hill, Benjamin A. Spaulding, Alden B. Robbins, Horace Hutchinson, Ephraim Adams, Ebenezer Alden, and William Salter, the oldest being thirty-four and the youngest twenty-two. Hutchinson, the organizer, from Sutton, Massachusetts, was the first of the "Band" to die (March 7, 1846) on Iowa soil. "Every thing Christian felt at once the impulse of his sanctified enthusiasm and his kindling powers of speech." His place at Burlington was filled by Salter, who remained on this field until his death in 1910. Together in 1843 the "patriarchs" and the "Band" established Denmark Academy; three years later Iowa College was organized at Davenport, under Ripley's charge.

Until 1882, Iowa, like other western states, depended largely upon New England for her ministers, "missionary barrels," and subsidies for churches and parsonages. Good agents were in the field: Asa Turner, Julius A. Reed, Jesse Guernsey, and Joseph Pickett. Ephraim Adams, one of the "Band," oversaw this work from 1872 to 1882, when Iowa decided to "go it alone." While in office, Adams wrote the notable book, *The Iowa Band* — the first authentic account of Iowa Congregational origins. He was followed by the Rev. Truman O. Douglass, who served most ably until 1907, writing *The Pilgrims of Iowa*, a sweeping account of developments up to 1911. His son, H. Paul Douglass, born at Osage, has been associated

both with the American Missionary Association and with research and survey commissions for the Congregationalists and for the Federal Council of Churches. The grandson, Truman B. Douglass, born at Grinnell, is Executive Vice-President of the Board of Home Missions and (1951) Lyman Beecher lecturer in Yale University. Likewise effectual in securing the independence of Iowa Congregationalism were the Iowa Congregational Home Missionary Society (1872), and the Iowa Branch of the Woman's Board of Missions for the Interior (1876). Later, the Woman's Home Missionary Union (1886) helped to keep it on a self-supporting basis. Since 1883, *Congregational Iowa* has served as an inspirational news medium.

Churches holding centennials during the 1930's include Denmark, Burlington, Clinton (Community), Danville, Davenport (Edwards), and Dubuque (First). Those attaining their hundredth milestone in the 1940's are Farmington, Mount Pleasant, Brighton (Clay), De Witt, Maquoketa, Muscatine (First), Oskaloosa, Keosauqua, Eddyville, Anamosa, Columbus Junction (Welsh), Edgewood, and Specht's Ferry (Durango). Certain German, Swedish, Dano-Norwegian, and Bohemian (Czech) Congregational churches, formed earlier, are now assimilated to English-speaking groups. Still functioning, however, though on a limited basis, are the two Welsh churches of Iowa

City and Columbus Junction, the Swedish church in Ottumwa, and the Czech church at Vining.

The mission period from 1836 to 1882 saw Iowa Congregationalism increasing from 3 churches in 1838 to 234 in 1880, served by 185 ministers, and composed of 15,512 members. When in 1854 the Congregational Association of Iowa held its fifteenth annual session, there were 63 churches, 53 ministers, 2,296 members, and 2,528 Sunday school pupils in the 5 local associations. Between 1840 and 1880, while Iowa's population rose from 43,112 to 1,624,615, many new settlements soon had Congregational churches. Thus, in 1853, the church at Council Bluffs was formed, where the Rev. George G. Rice preached for sixty years. Decorah followed, in 1854, and the "Little Brown Church in the Vale" at Bradford (Nashua) the next year. Others were organized at frontier points, such as Fort Dodge and Algona in 1856; Sioux City, 1857; Osage and Mason City, 1858; Cedar Falls, 1860; Atlantic, 1869; Spencer, 1872; Sibley, 1873; Shenandoah, 1877; Galt, 1883. Denominational advancement came, too, with the planting of the colony and church at the heart of Iowa in 1855. According to the Rev. Josiah B. Grinnell, the founder, there was "not a Christian of any denomination to dispute occupancy with prowling beasts and coiling reptiles."

The churches were also aroused by the slavery controversy, Iowa Congregationalists being active

in the activities of the Underground Railroad, some churches serving as way-stations — from Tabor to Keokuk and up the Mississippi River from Keokuk to Dubuque. They also played the decisive part in 1856 in demanding a change in the policy of the American Home Missionary Society, securing the discontinuance of the subsidies granted to churches whose members were slaveowners.

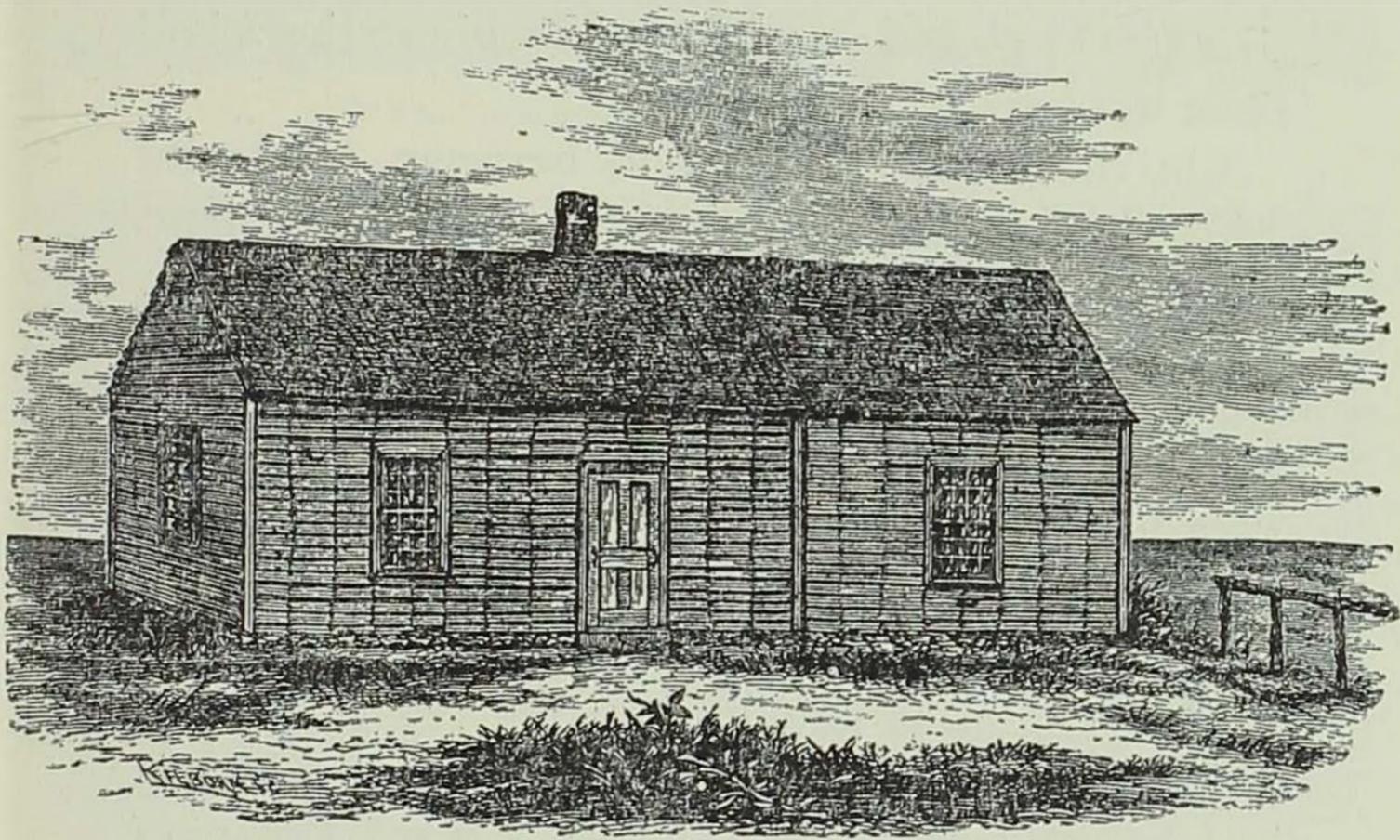
Iowa Congregationalists proposed the church and parsonage building program adopted by the Albany Convention of 1852 and by the American Congregational Union the next year; the firm hand of the Rev. Asa Turner was in both actions. Turner, for thirty years pastor of the Denmark church, also carried a major responsibility in connection with the establishment of the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1855, while other Iowa Congregationalists deliberated over denominational affairs at Boston in 1865, at Chicago in 1870, and at Oberlin College in 1871, where the National Council of Congregational Churches was formed.

The period was likewise one in which serious concern was voiced both for Sabbath observance and for temperance. From 1868 to 1872 Governor Samuel Merrill, a member of Plymouth Congregational Church in Des Moines, held his Puritan ground in the fight for temperance legislation.

Iowa Congregationalists also shared in the work of the American Board of Commissioners for For-

eign Missions; between 1856 and 1910 over sixty Iowa-born men and women served in China, Japan, Ceylon, South Africa, and elsewhere. Many also taught in colleges of the American Missionary Association in the South.

The mission period provides many a precedent for social action and inter-church cooperation. Burlington-born Rev. Thomas B. Keehn serves in this field as Legislative Secretary of the Council for Social Action, at Washington, D.C.



DENMARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH — 1843