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The Founding of Iowa College

The village of Denmark was the center of Iowa Congregationalism in 1844. There Asa Turner and Julius A. Reed had founded in 1838 the first Congregational church in Iowa. There an academy, endowed with one-half of the town lots, was incorporated in 1843 by the Territorial legislature and authorized to instruct the youth of both sexes "in science and literature". And there, in November, 1843, members of the famous Iowa Band were ordained and assigned to their pastorates. Settled chiefly by persons of New England origin, the community from the beginning was characterized by a spirit of piety and culture. Influential church members talked of founding a college.

One of the earliest suggestions of a Congregational college in Iowa was made in a letter written by Reuben Gaylord in March, 1838, to the American Home Missionary Society. A few young men in Yale Theological Seminary, he wrote, "have become deeply interested in that section of

our country lying west of the Mississippi, commonly known as the 'Iowa District' or 'Black Hawk Purchase'. - Seeing its destitute condition, both as respects education and religious institutions, and learning that the District is filling up with a rapidity unparalleled in the history of our country, we feel a strong conviction that, if the way can be opened, it is our duty to plant our feet west of the Father of Waters. We wish to concentrate our influence and bring it to bear upon the future state of Iowa while yet in its infancy. Our object will be two-fold — to preach the gospel, and to open a school at the outset, which can soon be elevated to the rank of a college."

The subject was not allowed to languish. In May, 1838, the Yale men planned a meeting "for consultation of those interested in our Iowa college plan." Money for such an enterprise was hard to get, and they contemplated deferring "the college effort until the pressure is over. But times are getting better. Banks are beginning to pay specie, and things are looking up." Reuben Gaylord began his ministry in Henry County that summer, cherishing his hopes of establishing a college.

Whatever the cultural aspirations of the early settlers may have been, the economic conditions on the frontier in Iowa were not encouraging for

the building of colleges. The pioneers needed all the cash they could get to pay for their land and to improve their own dwellings. But Gaylord and other advocates of higher education conceived of a means of endowment in the form of land. A tract could be secured, it was thought, "with comparative ease in the first settlement of a country, when land is plenty and cheap", worth maybe \$200,000 in ten years. The Home Missionary Board smiled upon this project and "promised to do all in their power to aid in carrying it forward."

On March 4, 1841, after nearly three years in the Territory of Iowa, Reuben Gaylord wrote to the *Hartford Congregational Observer* that the population was increasing rapidly and "the machinery of moral and religious influences must be set in operation. The need of immediate action is becoming daily more and more pressing." He appealed for help. "A system of education is to be projected and carried into execution. To do this, needs the united counsels of men of enlarged and cultivated minds", he declared. "If a dozen faithful ministers, accompanied by a few hundreds of enterprising, pious young men, would now enter Iowa, eternity alone could disclose the blessings that would descend to future generations."

Meanwhile, Asa Turner was laboring in the vicinity of Denmark and organizing churches in

various communities. He, too, was thinking about the educational responsibility of the church. "We must take steps to found a college", he told Julius A. Reed in the summer of 1842. That fall, when the Congregational Association of Iowa met at Brighton, a committee was appointed to report upon the "expediency of taking the incipient steps towards the foundation of a college in this territory." The project was deemed to be premature at that time, though Asa Turner and J. A. Reed were authorized to correspond and take other measures pertaining to this subject.

The population in eastern Iowa was increasing rapidly. More preachers were needed. Asa Turner, like Reuben Gaylord, appealed to the Home Missionary Society. "I have done all I could, privately and publicly, to enlist laborers for this field," he wrote in 1843. A layman, W. W. Hadden of Keosauqua, was reported to have entered a claim to a water-power site on the Wapsipinicon River in Buchanan County which might be devoted to the support of a college. It was assumed, however, that funds and missionaries would have to be secured from the East before much progress could be made either in religion or education.

Just when hope was at low ebb, good news came. Several young men at Andover Theolog-

ical Seminary decided to serve where their ministry was most needed. After much prayer and discussion, they selected Iowa. And so the Iowa Band was formed — twelve earnest men, all college trained and well prepared for religious service. One of them expressed the hope and vision of all when he said: "If each one of us can only plant one good permanent church, and altogether build a college, what a work that would be!" It was the same ideal that Asa Turner, Reuben Gaylord, and the men at Yale had cherished five years earlier. But this purpose, separately formed, became a common one when the two groups united in the Territory of Iowa.

Nine of the Iowa Band arrived at Denmark early in November, 1843. There, in the simple, pioneer church, the young ministers were ordained. The needs of various communities were described, and each one was allowed to choose the place in which to begin his ministry. The two married men were given well settled locations — Daniel Lane went to Keosauqua and A. B. Robbins to Muscatine. Horace Hutchinson preferred Burlington; Harvey Adams decided upon Farmington; B. A. Spaulding volunteered for "rough work" in the new settlements farther west; William Salter selected Maquoketa; Edwin B. Turner favored Cascade; Ebenezer Alden took Solon;

and Ephraim Adams went to Mount Pleasant. In the following spring James J. Hill began his work at Garnavillo and Erastus Ripley located at Bentonsport. Ill health prevented W. B. Hammond from coming.

Although the first services of the new ministers were devoted to the religious welfare of their parishes, the educational feature of their work was not forgotten. Several ministers, including some of the Iowa Band, met at Denmark on March 12, 1844, to discuss church affairs. At the close of the regular business, according to Ephraim Adams, the ministers were "invited to tarry a few moments and listen to plans for founding a college. A little surprised were they, and not a little gratified."

The proposal was to find a tract of land, in some suitable location, and obtain funds for its purchase, and then sell it in small parcels at an advanced price to settlers favorable to the object, "thus securing an endowment for the institution, and a community in which it might prosper." A committee of exploration was appointed, with J. A. Reed as chairman, and authorized to call a meeting when ready to report. March 12, 1844, therefore, is a date to be remembered, for it marks the beginning of the execution of a long-cherished design to found a Congregational college in Iowa.

The committee acted promptly, inspected several locations, particularly the water-power site on the Wapsipinicon River, and called a meeting of Congregational and New School Presbyterian ministers in southern Iowa at Denmark on April 16, 1844. This assembly was apparently well attended and the report of the committee was favorably received. After some discussion Reuben Gaylord offered the following resolution which was unanimously adopted: "*Resolved*, That we deem it expedient without delay to adopt measures preparatory to laying the foundation of an institution of learning in this territory." The ministers forthwith organized as the Iowa College Association with suitable rules and regulations, and named an executive committee to promote the project. Asa Turner was appointed agent for the association to go East and raise \$30,000 to be invested in land for the endowment of the college. The members of the association agreed to defray his expenses out of their own scanty resources.

Thus, the plan recommended by the committee and adopted by the association was the one conceived by Reuben Gaylord and urged by him on various occasions. It was the same in principle as the method adopted by the government of selling lots in county-seat towns to pay for the erection of public buildings. Moreover, the exploring com-

mittee seems to have approved the tract in Buchanan County where the present city of Independence is located, including the water power furnished by the Wapsipinicon River at that point.

Actually the selection must have been made late in 1843, for the *Dubuque Miner's Express* on December 23, 1843, mentioned the fact that twelve Congregational clergymen proposed to establish in Buchanan County a manual labor college, and had purchased therefore the water rights at a certain place on the Wapsipinicon River in order that a mill might form a part of its equipment. That this idea ever became a part of the scheme is not shown in any authoritative review of this period of the college history. How the newspaper which published the item came to infer that a manual labor college was contemplated can only be surmised. That this was the same group which, in the following spring, organized the Iowa College Association seems evident.

The journey of Asa Turner to the East in order to secure capital to purchase the claim in Buchanan County was not successful, though through no fault of his or of his associates who from their thin purses contributed his expenses. It is said that he might have succeeded had not the interests of possible contributors been centered in a new organization, just formed, for the "Pro-

motion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West". It was the opinion of the officers of this organization that the Iowa plan of investing in a large body of land with a view to subsequent sale at a profit involved an element of speculation.

The proceedings in Boston on this occasion are worthy of notice, inasmuch as they reveal not only the reasons for the action, but also the high moral ground on which the refusal to endorse the movement was made. As will be seen, although the practice of investing in land from which to derive a profit for the establishment of an institution of learning has often been recognized since then, it was not believed by these conservative eastern men in 1844 to be the best way. These facts appear in the record of the session at which Asa Turner was present. He had presented the details, as the Iowa organization had authorized, whereupon a committee was named to consider three questions: First, was it expedient to prepare to establish a college in Iowa? Second, was the plan proposed suitable? And third, if not, what plan should be adopted? This action occurred on May 28, 1844, and the next day the conclusions were submitted.

According to the committee, each member of which had concluded separately, prior to their joint report through the secretary, that it was ex-

pedient to establish a college in Iowa but that they should counsel together in regard to available means for that purpose. The plan of endowment through the purchase of a township of land on borrowed money with the expectation of repaying it, principal and interest, in five years along with the provision for a college fund from the profits, involved serious objections. There was the risk of purchasing where the land would be sure to increase in value; and there would be some difficulty also in securing the desired amount just where the interests of college education for years to come would require the location of such an institution. Moreover, there would be great risk in trusting such an undertaking to the financial management of a group of men whose experiences were not in financial affairs, but rather in the intellectual and moral atmosphere. There was some danger that their minds would become occupied with these commercial transactions and great injury be done to their legitimate work; it would afford a good excuse to churches for not contributing to educational support; the character and reputation of the Iowa men in the ministry would be exposed to great danger if any mistake should be made; and finally there was great prejudice in the East against all plans of the kind.

The committee advised, therefore, that a loca-

tion in a desirable environment should be selected and the support be obtained from direct offerings. It would be well to have a site donated — but forty acres was declared to be an abundance of land for that purpose. There would be no objection, however, to taking land as a gift. No debts should be incurred, nor should the college be obligated for any compensation for donations. As early as convenient the trustees should offer instruction on a moderate scale, and extend it as means would permit. Finally, it was shown that under the recently organized society for the promotion of education in the West, aid could not be so readily obtained in the East, since the churches in that section of the country were confiding in it, and only when the "plan and the system of instruction" should be so well matured that "the confidence of the Eastern mind" was secured, could these new institutions obtain aid through this formal arrangement.

Ephraim Adams has said that the "Western brethren, with some reluctance, yet cordially, yielded to the judgment of their Eastern friends, some of whom had had experience in the West." At the same time he reflected on what might have been the results had the scheme been undertaken. As he later observed the prosperous town of Independence, located on one of the chief lines of rail-

road, with water power, and in the midst of a rich country owned by enterprising citizens, he said to himself: "That is where, with a few dollars, we might once have started and endowed" our college. Although no one could have foretold the outcome, had this been tried, it was certain that the plan finally adopted under Eastern advice meant "beginning at the very lowest round of the ladder, whence every step upward was of necessity by the hardest effort."

About two years were spent in the preliminary survey of college possibilities involving the formulation of new plans and seeking a location in some favorable spot, but without any funds whatsoever. The Iowa College Association reluctantly accepted Rev. Asa Turner's report in October, 1844, and appointed a committee consisting of Asa Turner and Ephraim Adams to locate an eligible site for the college. They eventually recommended Davenport as the most desirable place, a city which even then was considered as having no rival "for ease of access and beauty of situation". The judgment of the committee was unanimously approved at a meeting of the Iowa College Association held at Davenport in June, 1846, provided that the citizens of Davenport would donate the land and raise fourteen hundred dollars. Moreover, each member of the association was to raise

a hundred dollars and stimulate general contributions. As James J. Hill observed, "the time had come to give as well as consult," and, asking the privilege of being the first donor to the college, he laid a silver dollar on the table.

At the end of a year the citizens of Davenport had given thirteen lots for the college campus and pledged \$1362 toward the erection of a building. The goal seemed to be in sight. The Iowa College Association authorized fifteen trustees to incorporate under the State law. A few days after the articles of incorporation were recorded, the first board of trustees met, thus giving Iowa College legal and active existence. Their first act was to authorize the erection of "a permanent college-building, in good taste, and which, when enclosed, shall not exceed in cost the sum of two thousand dollars."

In the course of the following year the building was erected and all bills were paid. In November, 1848, instruction was begun by Rev. Erastus Ripley, one of the Iowa Band, who was appointed professor of languages and principal of the preparatory department, with a salary of five hundred dollars a year. In 1850, in addition to those enrolled in the preparatory department, there were twenty-eight students in Latin and eight in Greek.

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