

Baptist Numbers Climb

Of the world's five major religions — Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism — Christianity, though not the oldest, ranks first today numerically. Its geographical spread, considering its main divisions of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox churches, is actually world-wide. Christians of all branches aggregate upwards of 500,000,000. Of this number, more than 80,000,000 are in the United States. Over 45,000,000 of these are Protestants, over 30,000,000 Roman Catholics. Baptists of many kinds number around 15,000,000 members in the United States, and total more than 20,000,000 throughout the world. Counting all varieties, there are probably 50,000 Baptists in Iowa today.

The Iowa Baptist Convention was organized in 1842 with 13 churches sending delegates to the meeting at Iowa City. It was said their membership was about 350. Not more than eight counties were represented at this first "state-wide" gathering. By way of contrast, at the Twenty-fifth Anniversary meeting, held at Independence in 1866, it was reported that there were about 15,000 Baptists then associated with the Convention. This

was one for every 50 persons living in the state compared with one for every 143 in 1842. The Convention's pleasure in pondering this fact led to the expression, "The State of Iowa is the goodly land to dwell in." In a quarter of a century Iowa Baptist work had expanded from 13 churches grouped in three local associations to 278 churches forming 17 associations. The church membership was officially listed as 14,377. The associations could be said to cover the state, with the exception of the northwestern portion. The striking increase in the number of pastors is also an index of consistent growth. In 1846 there were 16 ordained ministers and five licentiates serving Baptist congregations in Iowa. Ten years later 59 ministers were on the rolls, 17 of whom had been ordained in Iowa, while others had come on from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin as well as from Holland and England.

In 1858 the Convention assembled at Iowa City, and heard about the "marked features" of 1857 with its great financial crisis and its religious awakening. "Our State has shared largely in the blessing with which our whole land has been made glad." Strange bedfellows, indeed, were depression and revival; but for America as a whole the years 1857-1858 brought a large perception of spiritual values. In Iowa the Baptists counted 76 new churches organized and 15 new houses of

worship commenced or completed. During those two years alone seven men had been ordained, 12 licensed to preach, and 14 pastors added from other states, while 1,855 persons had accepted baptism.

Iowa's oldest Baptist churches, those formed between 1834 and 1850, are in southeastern Iowa, represented by Danville (1834), Burlington (1839), and Iowa City (1841), as well as in the northeastern portion of the state, of which the church at Dubuque (1840) is a good example.

The 1850's saw the work enlarged in the northeastern quarter as the effect of missionary activity, with the organization of Baptist churches at West Union (1852), Village Creek Swedish Baptist (1853), Cedar Falls (1854), and Charles City (1855). Central and southern Iowa likewise were being rapidly settled in this period, and both were responding to the call of itinerant Baptist preachers to join the forces of the Lord. The churches at Des Moines (1851), Centerville (1851), Corydon (1854), and Webster City (1858) bear witness to efficient laborers.

Southwestern Iowa also began in these years to show the fruits of Baptist outreach through the Home Mission Society. By 1856 when the Red Oak Baptist church was organized, Sidney (1852), Bedford (1854), and Council Bluffs (1854) already had their Baptist churches. Denison Baptists formed a congregation in 1857 and a

Sioux City Baptist congregation was established in 1860.

During the 1860's Baptist churches were organized at Marshalltown in 1863 and Boone in 1866. Among the first Baptist congregations established in northern Iowa were those at Osage in 1861 and Renwick in 1872. In 1867 the church at Spirit Lake became an important Baptist outpost. It was followed by churches in Kiron in 1868, Cherokee in 1870, and Sibley in 1876.

To keep in step with Iowa's physical growth and development, the Baptists in 1869 appointed a Committee on Railroad Town Missions. The record reads as follows:

More aggressiveness is the growing demand of the Convention. As new towns and settlements spring into existence so rapidly, you could find employment for both men and means greatly beyond either at your disposal.

With additional developments enriching Iowa's religious life as the effect of the German, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian immigration, Iowa's Baptist growth throughout the 1870's and 1880's was sure and steady. Towns and cities in every corner of the state were coming under the influence of the Baptist home missionaries.

The funds for the projected expansion were also forthcoming, as the decade 1872-1882 fully proved; despite the Panic of 1873, 166 appointments were made for Iowa by the American Baptist Home Mission Society in this period — an ex-

penditure of \$30,711.73. Average annual salary of an Iowa missionary at this time was \$300-\$400.

The long anticipated Fiftieth Anniversary meeting, held at Marshalltown in 1891, supplied cheer for all in reminiscence, reflection, and new commitment. The reports showed that the Convention was in a healthy condition: there were now 28 local associations, including the Danish, Swedish, and Colored groups. Again, 62 home missionaries, the largest number on the rolls in the history of the Convention, were serving 132 churches and "outstations."

In a notable address, "The Work of the Pioneers," Rev. L. N. Call of Webster City told how one man had walked 75 miles to attend the formation of the Convention at Iowa City in 1842. He further reflected that Rev. Charles E. Brown and his wife of Maquoketa had ridden 40 miles in 1842 to attend the meeting of the new Davenport Association. They rode "in a one horse cart, constructed out of the hind wheels and axle of an old lumber wagon, with a couple of rails for thills, and a bundle of oats for a cushion."

It was interesting to reflect that when Rev. Dexter P. Smith preached at the territorial statehouse in 1845, Iowa City then was actually "*the extreme western outpost*" of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Also dwelt upon in this important Fiftieth Anniversary were the hardships borne by the pioneer Baptist ministers. As an ex-

ample, the younger generation heard the story of Elder Smith, who made a trip on horseback to Dubuque, setting out from Anamosa in a blizzard in 1860. The small boy of Elder T. S. Griffith of Dubuque, possibly fearing for the worst though hoping for the best, added to his nightly prayer: "and, O Lord, bless Brother Smith!"

Further significant addresses were delivered in 1891. Rev. Richard Garton of Cedar Rapids discussed "The Past Fifty Years of Convention Work," and Rev. William M. Haigh of Chicago told of "The Work of the American Baptist Home Mission Society for the Past Fifty Years." Dr. J. A. Smith, also from Chicago, reported on "The Denominational Press in Iowa for Fifty Years."

A good index to the part played by Iowa Baptist women was given by Mrs. E. C. Spinney in her paper on "The History of the Woman's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society of Iowa." Mrs. Spinney recalled how Rev. John Everett Clough had gone out, in 1864, to preach to the Telugu people in South India. Born in 1836 in New York State, Clough came to Iowa in 1850 with his parents, brothers, and sisters, settling on 1,600 acres of land near Strawberry Point. A good farmer and surveyor, Clough entered Burlington University at the age of twenty-one. After his marriage to Miss Harriet Sunderland, recently come to America from England, he was graduated with the Bachelor of Arts degree in June, 1862.

According to Dr. Herbert W. Hines, Iowa Baptists sent Clough to India with "warm hearts," standing by him during his years of "trials and triumphs." Clough's work stands unique in the annals of Iowa foreign missionary service. Although the Telugu field was referred to as the "Forlorn Hope," Clough performed 500 baptisms annually, had a church of over 8,000 members. Shortly before his retirement in 1901 Clough could see "100 missionaries at work, 60,000 church members, and 200,000 adherents inclining to Christ's way of life, to say nothing of the influence of the many schools which he had founded there." Later, the widowed Clough married Miss Emma Rauschenbusch of Rochester, New York, who had served in the Telugu mission. He died at Rochester in 1910 and was buried at Newton Centre, Massachusetts.

Joining Clough at Ongole in 1878 were Professor and Mrs. Albert Loughridge of Iowa City. Sailing later were Dr. and Mrs. Ira J. Stoddard of Pella. Among others going forth to Burma were Drs. Naomi Garton and Marie Cote. In China Dr. Josephine M. Bixby of Iowa City established the "True Doctrine Hospital" in 1907 at Kit Yang, a large walled city forty miles from the coast on the Swatow River. Rev. and Mrs. J. B. Hipps also served at Shanghai College in the first quarter of this century. Certainly, Iowa Baptist churches became veritable beehives for missionary projects as Temple Builders, Little Helpers, Rope Holders,

Mission Bands, and other organizations for every age bracket took up the "yoke of the Kingdom." Thus have the Iowa Baptists thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the far-flung work of Christian missions.

Naturally, all Iowa Baptists looked forward to the Convention's Centennial. As stated in the *Baptist Record* for October 10, 1942, "Certainly one hundred years of history deserves a worthy observance." This issue carried a fine resume of Iowa Baptist history prepared by Rev. G. P. Mitchell of Des Moines, the Convention secretary from 1913 to 1926, with pictures of many pioneers and eminent Iowa leaders. The Centenary was duly held amid great enthusiasm in the First Baptist Church of Cedar Rapids, October 12-15, 1942, and brought to the rostrum many shining figures of nation-wide renown. The Iowa Baptist Convention then had 275 churches with a membership of 48,821. At that time the statistics included the German, Negro, and Swedish associations, since reported separately. In attendance were 90 pastors and 359 delegates representing 102 churches, plus 124 visitors. Communion was received by 470 persons.

One of the real highlights occurred during the opening minutes of the Centenary when Dr. F. G. Codd of Davenport, the Convention president, received from Rev. J. L. Pickett of Keokuk, a wooden gavel made from the very house in which the

first Iowa Baptist church had been organized (near Long Creek) in 1834! A hearty welcome was extended by Rev. Grant F. Anderson, pastor of the entertaining church, and numerous letters from past presidents were read. Dr. Codd's address challenged Iowa Baptists to be up and doing. "The world needs a revival of spiritual life. It is high time for the Church, the Christian people, to wake up and win this world for Jesus Christ. If we do not hurry up, there will be no world to win!"

Iowa's Baptist pioneers were recalled in an impressive memorial conducted by Rev. William Allan of Council Bluffs. A foreign missionary address was made by Miss Alice Thayer of Burma, assisted by ladies in costume depicting the life of the Burmese. Nor was pageantry overlooked. Dr. Marcus Bach of the State University of Iowa wrote and directed a play, "The Path of Faith," which was presented by the Iowa City church. In speaking for Baptist collegiate education, President William G. Spencer of Franklin College (Indiana) forcefully reminded the Convention that it was educated men who brought the churches to America.

The Centennial Convention was held during World War II (1942). The members urged "constant contact with our boys in service," and passed a courageous resolution on war which merits quotation in full lest its challenge be forgotten:

In spite of the fact that Baptists have stood firmly against war as a means of settlement of international disputes, we are forced to recognize that there are certain ideologies and philosophies of government that by organized force have undertaken to undermine and destroy, not alone the liberties of men, but the very right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences. Since these elements of force are opposed to and would destroy the principles of justice and the sacredness of human personality upon which Jesus Christ founded His church, we believe, therefore, that we are justified in supporting our government and its allies in their efforts to destroy these forces, to the end that we may protect and defend the Christian way of life. We desire, however, to go on record as being unalterably opposed to the efforts that are being made to teach us to hate our enemies. We feel rather that we should hate those philosophies and agencies that are attempting to destroy the teachings of Christ.

The spiritual basis for a forward movement was found in the stirring call, delivered by Dr. W. A. Elliott, a past president of the Northern Baptist Convention, "to come back to the great principles of faith." "We ought not to let the flame die down in ashes," Dr. Elliott declared. "There are so many that are flitting through society like butterflies without making any contribution to the life of society. Release spiritual forces into the stricken world!"

Iowa Baptist Convention figures for 1954 show 182 churches having a total membership of 34,096 persons and 22,088 Sunday School students. There were 16 local associations serving all cor-

ners of the state. Total property valuation was reported to be \$7,165,031. For the year ending April 30, 1954, local expenses for all purposes amounted to \$984,686.53, while the large sum of \$256,403.11 was disbursed for missions. It should be observed that the Iowa Baptist Convention statistics today do not include those for the German, Negro, and Swedish Baptists aggregating around 10,000 members in Iowa. These groups previously reported their numbers to the Convention. Since 1942 there has also been some loss of Convention churches to both Conservative and General Association of Regular Baptists in Iowa.

The First Baptist Church of Des Moines is the largest in the Iowa Baptist Convention, with 1,223 members. Second largest is Muscatine, First Baptist, with a membership of 1,049, and there are seven others with better than 600, as follows:

Waterloo, First, 844	Davenport, Calvary, 690
Marshalltown, First, 791	Harlan, Bethel, 676
Keokuk, First, 704	Council Bluffs, First, 647
Boone, First, 701	

There are nine other churches with more than 500 members, as follows:

Cedar Rapids, First, 579	Washington, First, 522
Fort Dodge, First, 577	Burlington, First, 512
Des Moines, Forest Ave., 561	Chariton, First, 507
Mount Pleasant, First, 560	Indianola, First, 502
Bedford, First, 530	

With a total of 12,175 members, these 18 Bap-

tist churches constitute more than one-third of the present membership strength of the Iowa Baptist Convention.

The official publication, the monthly *Baptist Record*, was begun on November 9, 1899. It was published by Rev. R. R. Sadler of Humeston until his death in 1921 at which time other members of his family continued its publication. Until 1953, when the paper was turned over to the Iowa Baptist Convention, cost-free, Hoge H. Sadler of Pella carried it to real heights as a denominational journal. Currently in its fifty-sixth volume, the *Baptist Record* is now edited by Rev. Paul Smith.

For three years Rev. Everett P. Quinton served as Executive Secretary of the Convention, but he resigned in June, 1953, to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. On September 1, 1953, his successor, Rev. Paul Smith, came to Des Moines from his pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Fort Dodge. Rev. Harold B. Bjornson of Waterloo is the Convention president in 1955. J. Russell Veatch of Des Moines is president of Iowa Baptist Men. Baptist Convention headquarters are at 1114 Grand Avenue in Des Moines.

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