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On to Iowa

Frederick I

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On to Iowa

The first organization of Presbyterianism in Iowaland was achieved by Rev. David Lowry of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1834. Lowry had been sent by the War Department to organize a school for the Winnebago Indians in northern Iowa. To do this the missionary had come up the previous fall from Princeton, Kentucky, where he had been editor of his denomination's leading paper. Both Lowry and his wife had established themselves at Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien, where he preached to citizens and soldiers alike while building the "Old Mission" on the Yellow River in present-day Allamakee County.

It was early in 1834 that Lowry constituted his church of military personnel and a few Indians. After six years of heroic labors Lowry was transferred to Fort Atkinson on the Turkey River where he became an Indian agent, and the Old Mission church was disorganized. On the whole, Lowry's efforts to teach the Indian boys were not very successful, though some allowance must be made for the fact that continual clashes occurred between the missionary and the white traders. It was also unfortunate that misunderstandings arose

between Lowry and the Catholic priests serving in the vicinity.

On July 25, 1836, another Cumberland congregation was organized on historic Sugar Creek in what is now Lee County, of which the Rev. Cyrus Haines was the pastor. A number of camp meetings was held there during this church's formal existence of more than eighteen years.

Presbyterians today count the formation of the "nine immortal" congregations in frontier days as the best possible memorial to the Old School ministers and laymen who came to Iowa. These churches in the order of their organization are: West Point and Rockingham, 1837; Fort Madison and Burlington, 1838; Davenport and Round Prairie (Kossuth), 1839; Iowa City, Spring Creek, and Mount Pleasant, 1840.

The first Old School Presbyterian organization was that of West Point, where Revs. Launcelot G. Bell and Samuel Wilson met with a small group on June 24, 1837, and constituted a church with ten charter members. In 1937 appropriate exercises were held at West Point to mark the centennial of formal activities in Iowa of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

The Revs. Salmon Cowles, Michael Hummer, and L. G. Bell were the most active ministers in connection with the organization of the earliest Iowa Presbyterian churches. The Iowa Presbytery was formed at Bloomington (Muscatine) on

November 6, 1840, and was attached to the Synod of Illinois.

Meanwhile, Iowa City, the capital city of the Territory of Iowa, had an Old School church in 1840, the organizers being Revs. L. G. Bell and Michael Hummer. The day chosen for its formation was September 12th. For a year Rev. John Stocker had journeyed every other Sabbath from Bloomington to preach in Iowa City. Late in 1841 Mr. Hummer became pastor and began making collections for a church edifice. Until the completion of the church basement, services were held in the new capitol building, the present-day Old Stone Capitol.

The Presbyterian church building in Iowa City had not been completed when disagreements between Mr. Hummer and the trustees made it necessary for the pastor to leave. And who can forget the story that is told of Mr. Hummer's efforts to recover the bell from the church steeple, in payment of the church's indebtedness to him? With the bell on the way down, the ladder was removed while Mr. Hummer was still in the belfry. It is not known for certain where that bell is today, but, as the story goes, it was first lowered into the Iowa River, then raised by two Mormons, and finally taken to Salt Lake City in 1849. Perhaps it is in Utah. However that may be, the Old School Presbyterians finally completed their beautiful structure only to have it destroyed by fire in 1856.

Happily, a new building was commenced at once.

The New School Presbyterians actually began their work in the lead-mining region at Dubuque, where Rev. Aratus Kent, who served at Galena, Illinois, preached occasionally from 1833. On January 1, 1836, Rev. Cyrus Watson commenced a pastorate of six months at Dubuque for the American Home Missionary Society. Although a Presbyterian church was not actually constituted in Dubuque until 1839, the hardy nucleus of the future church succeeded in laying the cornerstone of their "Old Stone Church" edifice on July 1, 1836, with officials of Wisconsin Territory participating in the service. This early New School Presbyterian congregation voted, however, to become a Congregational church in December, 1844.

Work was continued by the New School with a church formed at Fort Madison in 1838 by Rev. James A. Clark, another appointee of the American Home Missionary Society. The Burlington church also was formed in 1838, functioning as Presbyterian from 1838 to 1843 but as a Congregational church thereafter. Formed in 1840 was the New School church at Yellow Spring (Kosuth), while others were organized at Keosauqua, Troy, Iowa City, and Bloomington in 1840 and 1841. The church at Toolsboro was formed in 1842. Among the New School ministers in early days the following were prominent: Gamaliel C. Beaman, Thompson Bird, Samuel S. Howe, and

William W. Woods. The New School Presbytery of Des Moines was organized at Yellow Spring on April 12, 1842, and was attached to the Illinois Synod.

The Old School Presbyterians constituted an Iowa Synod in 1852, and this was followed by a New School Synod in 1853. As presbyteries were "new-modelled" from time to time, so also were the synods; but the Synod of Iowa (U. S. A.) has followed the state lines since 1882.

Other Presbyterian groups soon came to Iowa, the first congregation of Associate Presbyterians (Seceders) arriving from Illinois in 1836 or 1837 and forming a church at Crooked Creek, later Crawfordsville, under the preaching of Rev. George C. Vincent. At near-by Virginia Grove the Associate Reformed Presbyterians formed a church in 1840, while in 1846 the Reformed Presbyterians (Covenanters) organized the Sharon church near Morning Sun. The United Presbyterians were formally constituted as a denomination at Pittsburgh in 1858, with most of the Associate and Associate Reformed congregations going into this merger. The United Presbyterian Synod of Iowa was formed in 1860. At present four presbyteries are attached to this body.

Presbyterianism in Iowa's present capital city of Des Moines began with the organization of Central (New School) Presbyterian Church in a log cabin, on June 4, 1848, some nine years prior to the

removal of the capital to that city. Rev. Thompson Bird, an antislavery man from North Carolina, served not only as the first pastor of the little church of five members but also as the first mayor of Des Moines in 1851. On his death in 1869, Mr. Bird willed his private library to Maryville College at Maryville, Tennessee, of which institution he was especially fond.

The Old School Presbyterians had lost no time getting to Des Moines, actually forming a church there on the same day as their New School rivals! Rev. Samuel Cowles was the founder of this First Presbyterian Church of Des Moines. In 1875 the property of the First Presbyterian was sold and the congregation joined with Central church. The present First Presbyterian Church in Des Moines was not organized until 1877, however, its charter roll being made up of members demitted from Central.

Several of the Presbyterian churches formed along the Mississippi have already been mentioned. Others formed as the frontier line advanced included, in northeastern Iowa, those at Marion, 1842; Cedar Rapids and Andrew, 1847; Waterloo, 1854; Cedar Falls, 1855, and Waukon, 1856. To the southeast, churches were constituted at Washington in 1841; Mount Vernon, 1843; Oskaloosa, 1845; Centerville, 1849, and Ottumwa, 1854. In addition to those in Des Moines, other churches in central Iowa were those formed at In-

dianola in 1854; Fort Dodge, 1856; Winterset, 1857, and Marshalltown, 1858. On the Missouri River frontier Presbyterian congregations were organized at Council Bluffs in 1856 and at Sioux City in 1858. Also to the southwest were the churches at Clarinda, 1855; Chariton, 1856; Atlantic, 1869, and Woodbine, 1871. In the north and northwest portions of Iowa, Presbyterians organized churches at Algona in 1857; Denison and Spirit Lake, 1871; Ida Grove and Rolfe, 1873, and Sac City, 1874.

Iowans justly recall with pride that the Tranquillity Presbyterian church (near Traer), which was formed in 1854 by Scotch families, was warmly supported by James ("Tama Jim") Wilson, chosen in 1897 by President William McKinley to be Secretary of Agriculture. Wilson held this post for sixteen consecutive years under Presidents McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and William H. Taft. Margaret Wilson's Pulitzer Prize winner, *The Able McLaughlins*, portrays the life of this Iowa church.

Other Presbyterian work of far-reaching significance has been done under the Woman's Society for Missions, organized in 1875. In 1884 the Iowa Woman's Synodical Society for Home Missions was formed, and the first organization became the Iowa Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. The two groups were united in 1923. Foreign missionaries — Iowans — have gone to

many places, among them Brazil, China, Japan, Africa, and the Philippines. The United Presbyterians likewise maintain churches, schools, and hospitals in the Sudan, Egypt, and Pakistan. The Tama Indians of Iowa also have been provided with pastors by the United Presbyterian Church.

High moments in Iowa Presbyterian life have been brought by the sessions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., meeting at Des Moines in 1906 and 1922.

The United Presbyterians have held no less than seven of their General Assemblies on Iowa soil: at Washington in 1865, 1872, and 1905; at Cedar Rapids in 1888, and at Des Moines in 1901, 1930, and 1951.

This chapter opened with Presbyterianism obtaining its foothold in Iowaland among the Winnebago Indians in 1834. It may be closed with the mention of another epic action — the Iowa Forward Movement. The human dynamo in this case was a missionary, Rev. Sheldon Jackson. At Sioux City in 1869 Jackson, in company with Revs. Thomas H. Cleland, Jr., and J. C. Elliott, ascended Prospect Hill. Here the three conversed about the "spiritual desolations" of the regions beyond — Dakota, Nebraska, and all the great West then but thinly settled but soon to be brought into closer touch with the East by the Union Pacific Railroad. Fortunately, the Presbyterian reunion of 1870 provided the needed funds,

SOME LEADERS OF IOWA PRESBYTERIANISM — 1834-1952



George Vincent
Washington
Pioneer Pastor



David Lowry
Allamakee County
Winnebago Mission



Sheldon Jackson
Council Bluffs
Mission Supt.



Thomas Merrill
Wittemberg
Pioneer Educator



E. L. Marousek
Jefferson
Synod Clerk



H. C. Schneider
Des Moines
Synod Executive



Vida F. Rumbaugh
Thailand
Missionary



Willis C. Edson
Storm Lake
College Trustee



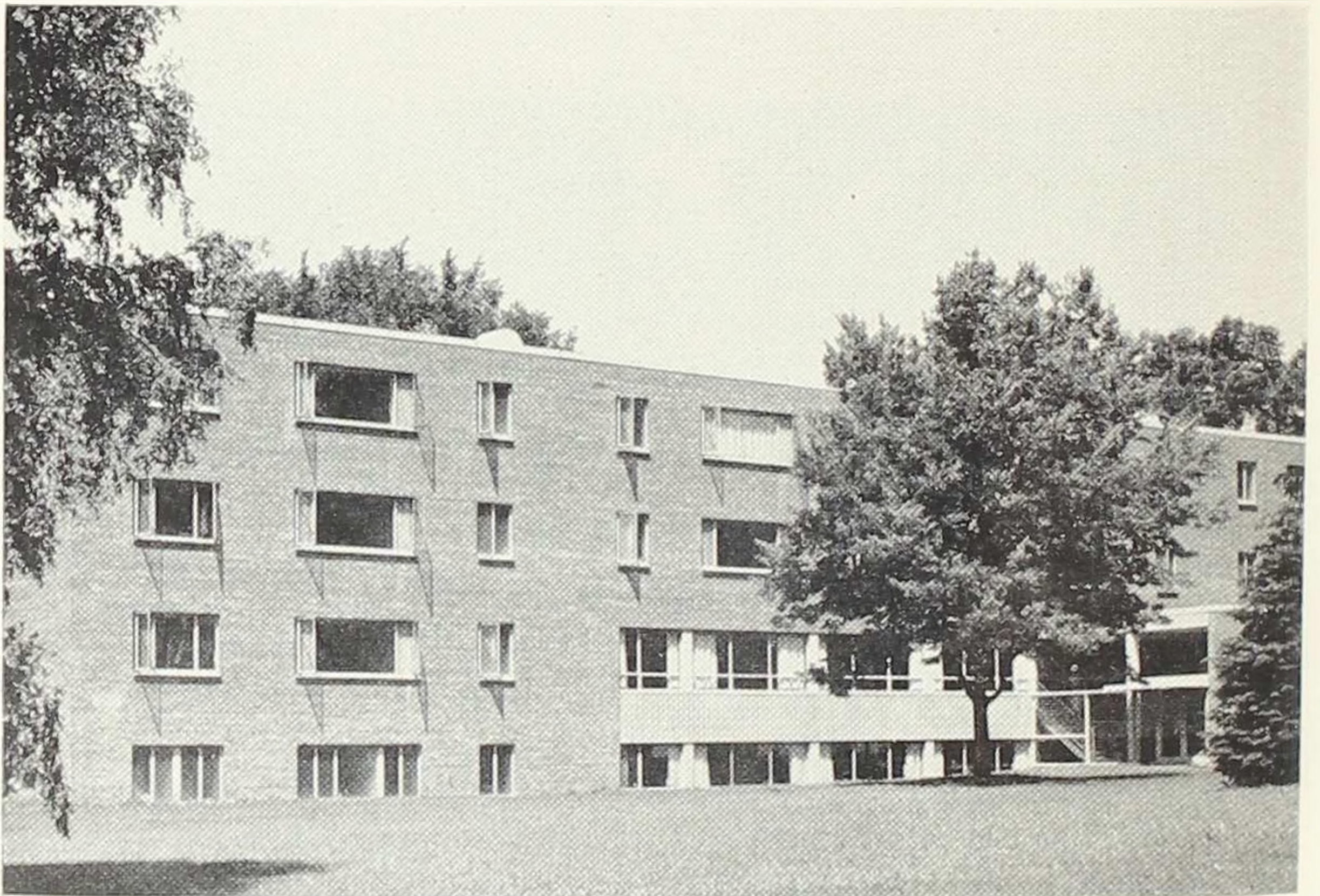
Mabel C. Smith
China
Missionary



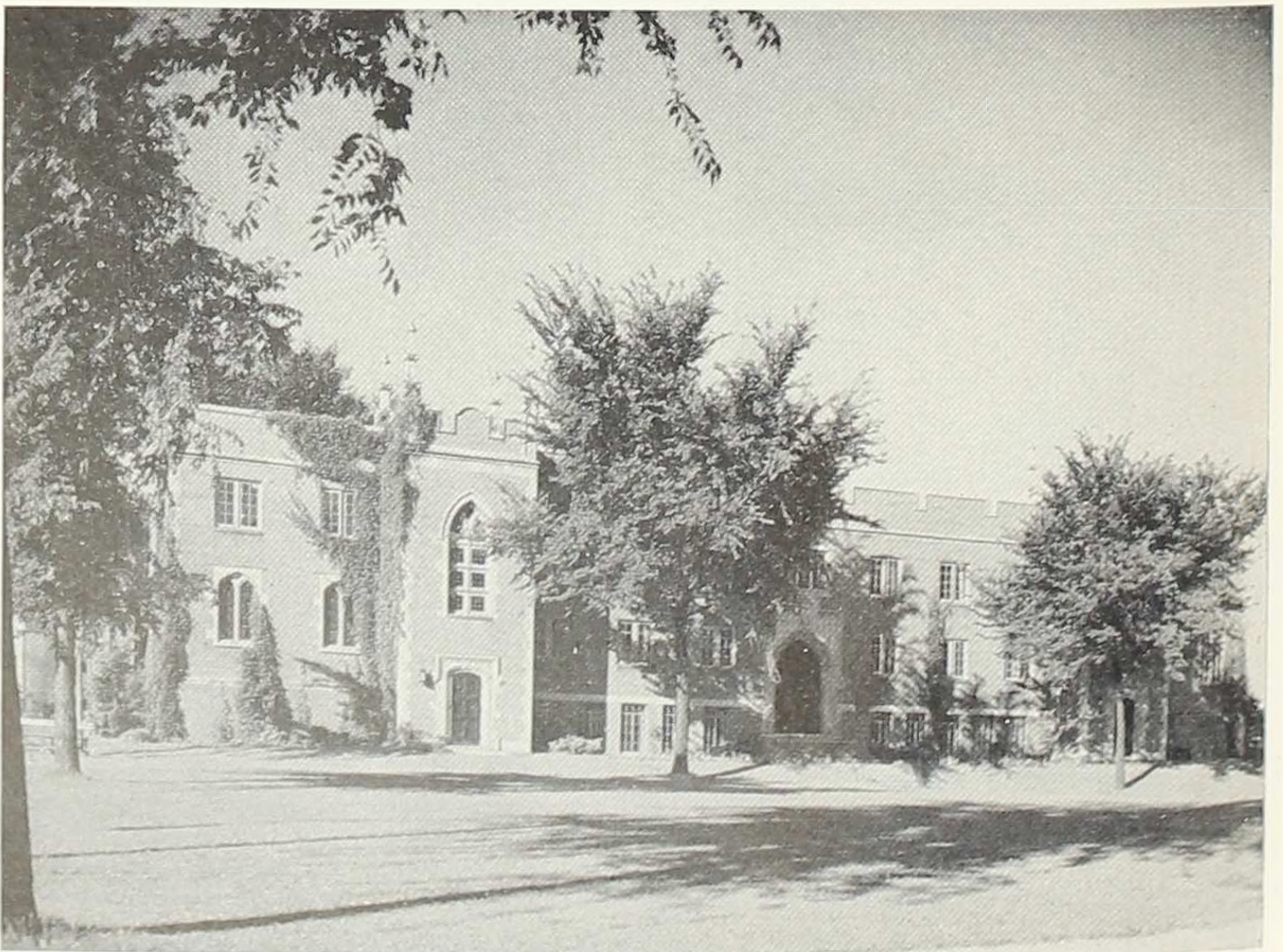
T. J. Campbell
Newton
Moderator

MS

PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGES IN IOWA



Swope Hall — Buena Vista College



Van Vliet Hall — University of Dubuque

PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGES IN IOWA

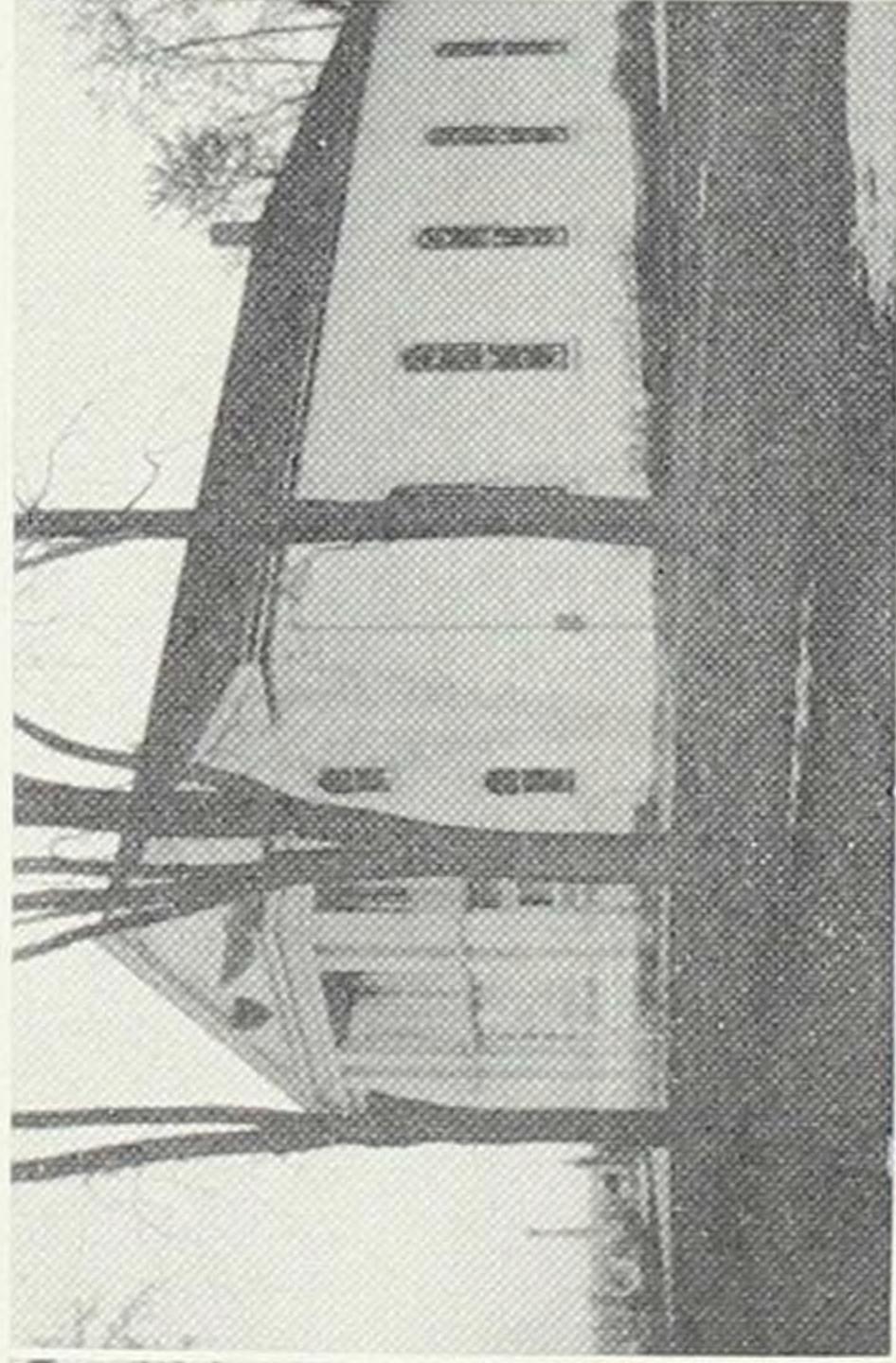
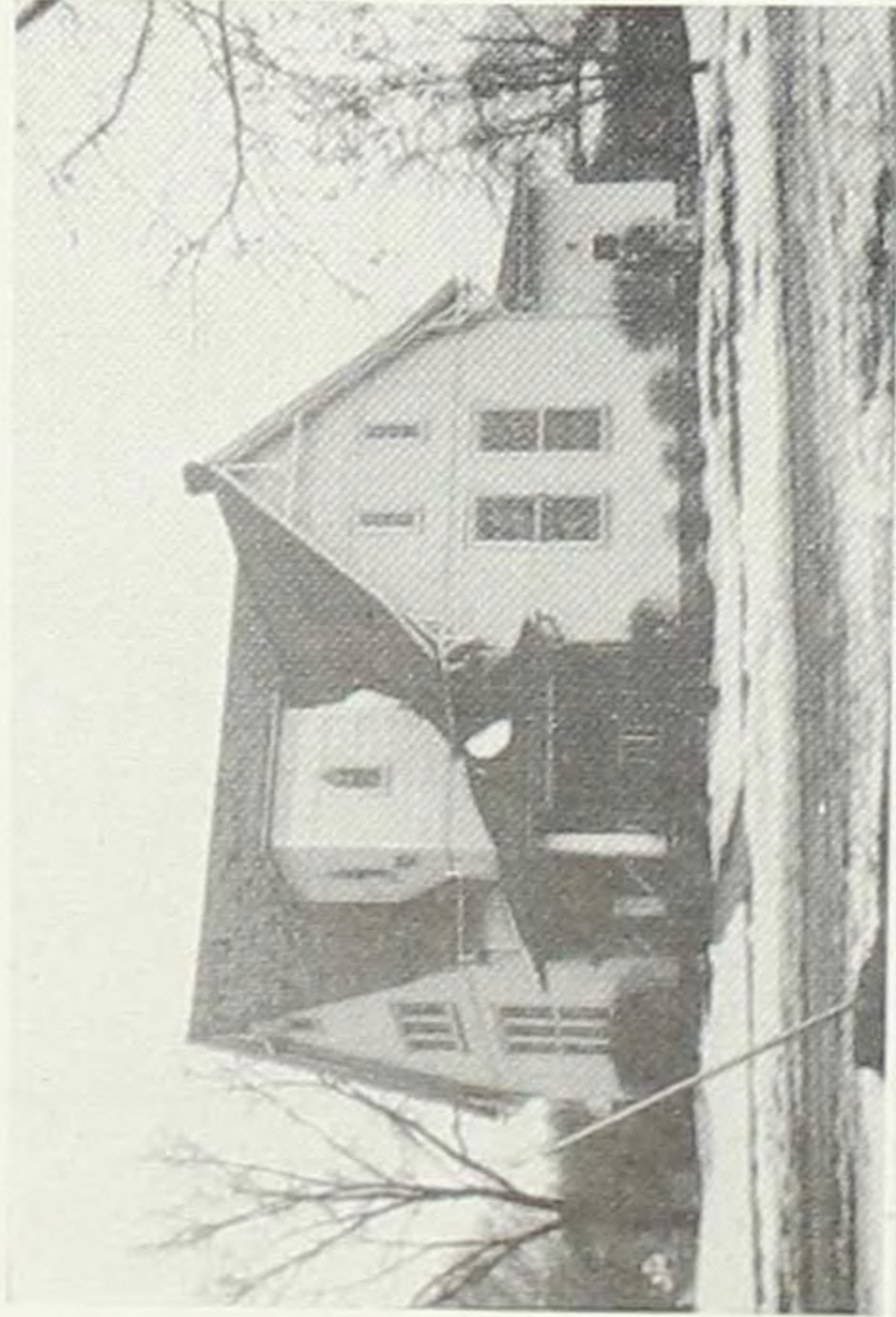


Stewart Library — Coe College



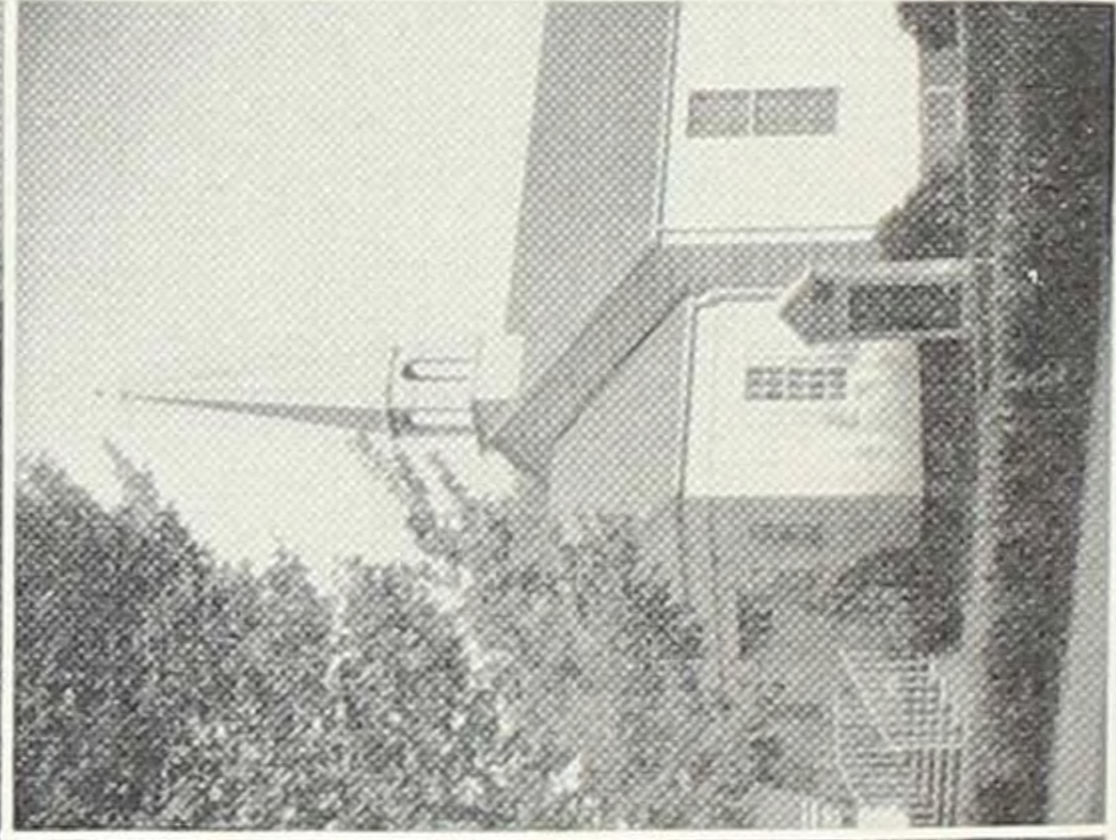
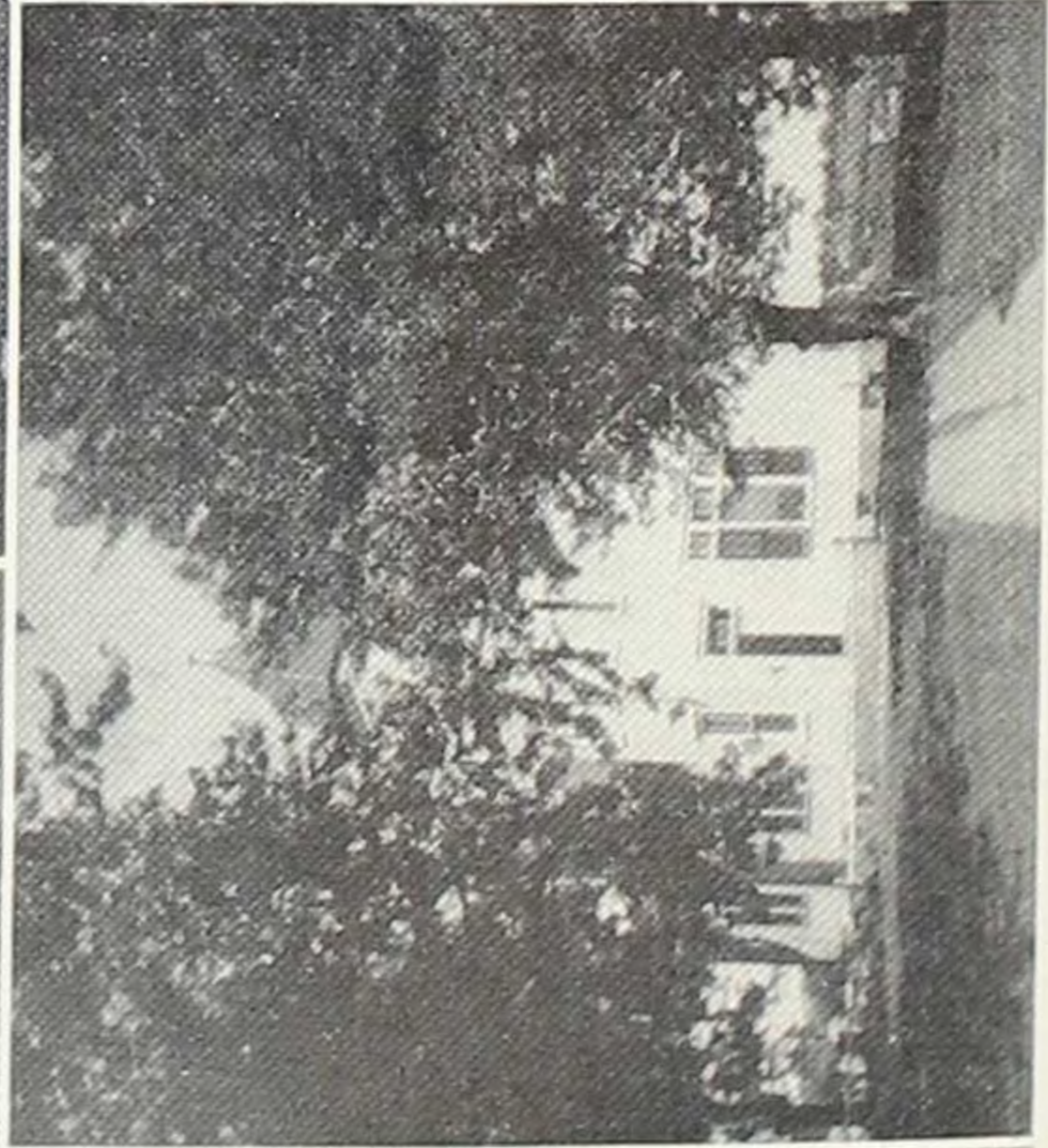
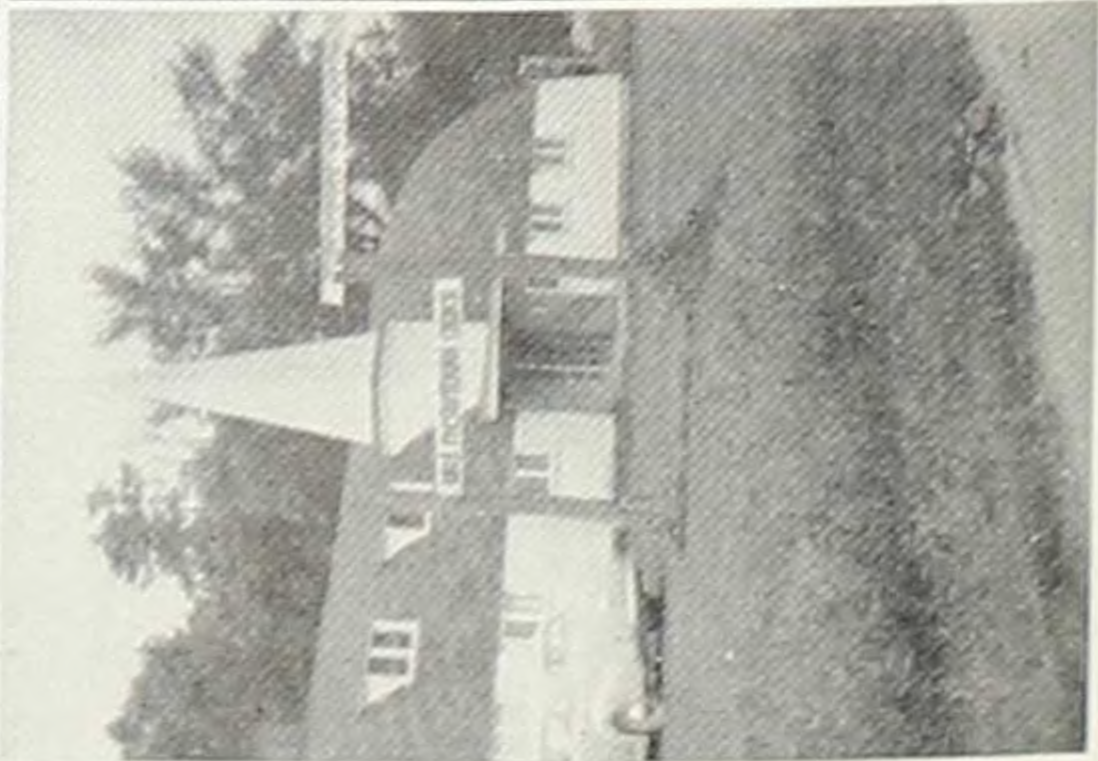
Fairfield Hall — Parsons College

SOME VARIETIES OF IOWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES



Left: Associate Presbyterian at Washington.

Right: "Sharon" Reformed Presbyterian near Morning Sun.



Left: Bible Presbyterian at Cono Center.

Center: "Shinar" Cumberland Presbyterian at Pleasant Grove.

Right: Orthodox Presbyterian at Waterloo.

and Jackson was made missionary superintendent for the whole West. From Council Bluffs in 1870 alone, Jackson traveled more than 29,000 miles — walking, on horseback, and by boat, stage, and rail — to build churches in areas wholly destitute. Within two decades (1870-1890) the vast region west of the Missouri River occupied today by fourteen great states became alive with hustling Presbyterian congregations. The bold exploits of those tireless men of high faith are commemorated in the Prospect Hill monument — a symbol of the world in Iowa and of Iowa in the world.

FREDERICK I. KUHNS