

## Historical Sketch of the Des Moines Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1832-1860

R. E. Harvey

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

Harvey, R. E. "Historical Sketch of the Des Moines Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1832-1860." *The Annals of Iowa* 25 (1944), 192-228.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.6249>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

## REOPENING A CLOSED CHAPTER

---

### HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE DES MOINES CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH 1832-1860.

---

BY THE REV. R. E. HARVEY

#### FOREWORD

During a large portion of its existence the Des Moines Conference exceeded in lay membership and number of local organizations any of its three sister Methodist Episcopal Conferences; yet less fortunate than they, aside from the printed conference journals, no published record of its proceedings ever appeared—a neglect all the more regrettable since its re-union with its parent, the Iowa Conference, and the more recent merger of the principal branches of American Methodism in one larger Church, well nigh erasing from the tablets of memory the Des Moines Conference as a distinct entity.

Today, when none are living who witnessed its inception, and but few surviving who enjoyed any sort of acquaintance with its founding fathers, it is long past the fullness of time when space should be given in historical publications to some account of a body that, by reason of complete occupation and intensive cultivation of its assigned area, ministered to the religious and social life of one-fourth of our State, perhaps as largely as did all other denominations combined.

However, the ensuing narration must needs leave much to be desired, compressing as it does into a magazine article what could well fill a volume of many hundred pages; but let us rest assured that whatever worthy names and worth-while achievements are omitted, all without doubt are written in Heaven, which is far better.

The thanks of all who are interested in the subject are due Curator Williams for the cordial invitation to commemorate this almost forgotten past, and the author has endeavored to express his gratitude to the multitudes, both dead and living, whose assistance has made this contribution possible, by giving full acknowledgement in the footnotes to every source of authority.

## FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

In preparing these references the writer endeavored to give full credit wherever possible to all sources of authority. Statements concerning ministerial appointments and Conference actions being drawn from Conference Journals, it will be only necessary for investigators to consult them for verification of such information. Where reference is made to "local tradition" it means information given to the writer by persons living in the communities affected, most of whom are now deceased. Some items were communicated to the writer by individuals mentioned; all other matters used come from published records which are named in the footnotes.

## I.

## THE FORMATIVE YEARS

The crusading zeal with which the old time itinerants rode the crest of the ever westward-moving wave of civilization was most strikingly displayed in the establishment of the first religious societies of any sort within the bounds of what became the Des Moines Methodist Episcopal Conference.

In the early spring of 1844 the Rev. Allen W. Johnson, junior preacher-assistant pastor on the Birmingham Circuit was given charge of Muchakinock Mission, a vaguely defined field stretching north and west from southern Mahaska county,<sup>1</sup> the pastor of which had gone to assume charge of an embryo—and shortlived—"College" in Iowa City. While surveying his vast parish Mr. Johnson encountered Adam Toole, en route to mill in Washington county from his home at Toole's Point, Jasper county. Learning that preaching would be welcome in that community, he immediately made an appointment for services in the Toole cabin home, at which time or soon after he organized a Methodist class composed of Mrs. Adam Toole and some of her children, Mr. and Mrs. Washington Fleenor, Mr. and Mrs. David Worth and Mrs. Springer.

<sup>1</sup>Names of counties are given as they now appear on the map, although many of them were not even laid out at the date of events described.

The spiritual altar fire then kindled has shed its radiance across those prairies and into homes and hearts ever since, for Toole's Point became at once a regular appointment on the Circuit, until such time as it became head of a circuit of its own, then advanced to a station and probably by the time these lines reach the public, will have duly observed its centennial anniversary.

Now, the Toole's Point settlement was barely a year old when this church was founded, its beginning occurring on May 1, 1843, the day that what was known as "The New Purchase" opened up Central Iowa to the Red Rock line for white occupancy, and on which date Adam Toole and three neighbors from Jefferson county staked out their claims and began erecting the log cabins which served the double purpose of proving possession and housing the families soon to follow their menfolks to this habitation on the very edge of the new frontier.<sup>2</sup>

With the increase of population a town site was laid out on part of Adam Toole's farm, called Toole's Point, which name later was changed to Monroe, in honor of our fifth president, about the time that unrealized hopes of becoming the State Capital got hold of the residents. Preaching and other services were held in private homes and school houses until in 1855, when with the membership grown to seventy-five, a frame chapel thirty by forty feet in size, costing \$1,700.00, was erected. A year later Monroe became the cherishing mother of what from its beginnings has been the largest Methodist church in East Des Moines. The modest frame church of 1855 has been replaced twice at least by more commodious structures, as is befitting the premier congregation of all southwestern Iowa.

And the young missionary who, in the first year of his ministry unfurled the banner of Methodism at the very edge of the Indian country, after ten years of service in

<sup>2</sup>The "Red Rock Line" ran straight north and south through the Red Rocks on the Des Moines river, from Missouri to the southern part of Franklin county, and until October 1845 was the western limit of lands open for white settlement. See "History of Iowa M. E. Conference," by the Rev. E. H. Waring, pp. 11-12; 119. "History of Jasper County" p. 477, etc. by Western Historical Society. "Historical Jasper County" by Iowa Writers Project, W. P. A. and "Past and Present of Jasper County," p. 256, by Gen. James B. Weaver.

the older settled portions of the state, returned to the frontier, the ever fluid border of which had moved two long hard days journey further west, and wrote his name large upon the map by labors extending all the way from Wayne to Guthrie county in the period of preparation for the separate existence of Des Moines Conference.

Giving all honor where it is due, it is only fair to state that there were Methodist beginnings almost a hundred miles to the southward of Monroe, antedating by several years A. W. Johnson's sermon in Adam Toole's cabin.<sup>3</sup> This occurred in the debatable belt that led to near-warfare between Iowa and Missouri, the territory being claimed by both. Into this region came on Nov. 4, 1840 the Rev. Joseph Sullivan, an ordained local preacher from Richmond, Kentucky, to join his son James Sullivan who had moved out to what was considered north-western Missouri the spring before. Obeying his call to preach, about a month after his arrival, Joseph Sullivan announced religious services at his son's home and did the preaching himself. The commencement then made was followed up in all the surrounding country, the services being held in private homes, Joseph Sullivan's house—when he got one—being headquarters to which people resorted for many miles on occasion of meetings being held there.

Other church members moved into the community, and in 1842 or 1843 these, with the converts of this religious movement, were organized into a class, which from 1844 onward met in a school house erected on the state line about one mile east of Lineville, Wayne county, out of which grew the Lineville M. E. Church. Formed before the Methodist disruption of 1844 the Lineville church, like many other border societies, became divided, the element holding with the M. E. Church South forming a class five miles northwest of Lineville, long known as Logan Chapel. The church in the town shared the

<sup>3</sup>"The Early History of Methodism in Wayne County" Pub. 1911; by J. S. Whittaker, Corydon, Iowa; a booklet containing Mr. Whittaker's personal recollections; also letters from the Reverend Hartley Bracewell, A. W. Byrkit, E. L. Briggs and others conversant with events described herein. The pamphlet was found among the papers of the late Rev. A. W. Armstrong, long time historian of Des Moines Conference.

same fate, the rival factions only becoming re-united in the denominational merger of 1939.

This work in and around Lineville, however, does not seem to have been attached to any regular mission or circuit, being a sort of free lance movement, maintained by local preachers, Joseph Sullivan being assisted ably by "Father" Dockery and later on by the Rev. Hartley Bracewell, of Corydon. Whatever regular clerical assistance they received came from Missouri; so that it was not till after the Civil War that Lineville was officially attached to the Annual Conference, a circumstance that would seem to warrant the claim advanced for Monroe at the beginning of this article, as being the first society within the bounds of the Des Moines Conference. However this may be, the record of Lineville bears eloquent testimony to the ardent spirit of evangelism pervading primitive Methodism, even when lacking the leadership of trained ministers.

#### FIRST PREACHING IN POLK COUNTY

Not far from the date of the first sermon at Toole's Point, there appeared in the village of Red Rock, on the Des Moines river, a few miles to the south, but in Marion county, a minister named Pardo, who representing himself as a missionary to the Indians, preaching to both white and red as occasion offered, without winning much favor from either. Extending his field of operations in the summer of 1844, Mr. Pardo preached the first sermon in Polk county, at Apple Grove, at the home of Thomas Mitchell, on Camp creek, in Beaver township, south of the present town of Mitchellville. One historian in reporting this event called Mr. Pardo "travelling M. E. preacher"; but no such name is to be found, either in M. E. Conference Journals, nor any of the three histories of Iowa Methodism treating of this period. Moreover, the Journals of the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church reveal that at its first session, in 1846, a certain the Rev. I.—or J.—Pardo applied for admission to their ranks, and was so admitted a couple of

years later. Hence, lacking proof to the contrary, we credit this pioneer missionary to the younger and at that time rival branch of the Methodist family. His name is associated with a third occurrence in the annals of the time when "the Rev. Mr. Pardo, probably of Marion county," officiated at the wedding of Susan, daughter of Adam Toole, who in February, 1845, was united in the bonds of holy matrimony to Sergeant James Hill, of the Fort Des Moines garrison. Evidently the uniform had its heart lure, even in those unsophisticated days. The family then established was the only lasting contribution made to the public welfare in these parts by this itinerant minister; no other trace of his labors remaining in the three counties visited by him.<sup>4</sup>

August 15, 1844 dates the coming of age of Iowa Methodism, for on that day at Iowa City Bishop Thomas A. Morris convened and organized the Iowa Annual Conference of the M. E. Church, formerly a portion of Rock River Conference, Illinois. The new administrative unit contained 5,504 lay members—including sixty-one local preachers—who were distributed in twenty-nine pastoral charges, with Toole's Point the sole outpost within the bounds we are to consider, a condition which was changed decidedly during the ensuing Conference year.<sup>5</sup>

In the late winter of 1845 a considerable company of home-seekers assembled at the trading post opposite Fort Des Moines, awaiting the removal of the Sac and Fox Indian tribes, and the final opening of the regions west of the river for settlement. Amongst this body of immigrants was a well to do family named Rathburn, from Mt. Pleasant. Rev. Abner Rathburn was a Methodist local preacher who descended from an old American family of mixed Portuguese and French ancestry. His

<sup>4</sup>See "Pioneers of Marion County," by Wm. M. Donner, Pub. 1872. "Marion County and its People" by J. W. Wright and J. W. Young, Pub. 1915. "Early Sketches of Polk County," by Sanford. "Historical Jasper County," Iowa Writers Project of W. P. A.

<sup>5</sup>The "Conference Year" in Methodist parlance comprised the period from one Annual Conference to the next; such meetings in Iowa were held in August or September until very recently. The inclusion of parts of two calendar years in each Conference year probably accounts for some of the confusion in secular county histories concerning dates of Church events, the writers being unfamiliar with the above practice.

father was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and his two sons, Jonathan and Ezra, were also local preachers, the younger being an ordained deacon, a graduate of some Eastern college, and was endowed with a measure of ability, great zeal and a pleasant personality, a combination that made of him a highly acceptable preacher throughout a wide region around Des Moines, where the writer has found traces of his ministrations all the way from Carlisle to Mineral Ridge in Boone county, and covering a period of at least twenty-five years from his first coming hither. It fell to his lot to be called upon to preach the first sermon in Fort Des Moines, being the funeral discourse at the burial of Lieutenant Grier's infant son, first born white child in our city bounds, also first deceased.

Farther reaching in its effects was the starting of a bible class by Father Rathburn amongst his waiting fellow home seekers; for out of this grew the organization of a Methodist class, in the cabin of John Baird, near the present eastern approach to the Rock Island railway bridge. The class consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Rathburn, their two sons, named above, and two daughters, Elizabeth and Mary, William DeFord and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Solenberger, B. F. Hoxie, Mrs. Jewitt and daughter, Mrs. Flint, Gardner Wellman, and Mary Davis.<sup>6</sup> The date of this occurrence was March 4, 1845, which is regarded by the First Methodist Church as its natal day,<sup>7</sup> since this class the following October, when the regions west were opened for settlement and the buildings at the fort offered for sale, transferred itself across the river and re-organized, taking in some additional members, some of whom seemed to have been residents in the fort already.

<sup>6</sup>Authorities for the Rathburn family are too numerous for quotation: See "History of Des Moines" and "Des Moines Beginnings" both by Tacitus Hussy, who knew most of the Rathburns personally. Turrell's "Reminiscences of the City of Des Moines," p. 24, published in 1857. Also "Rathburns Started the Methodist Church" an article taken from the Des Moines Register of unidentified date, found among the Armstrong papers. These authors differ in minor details but agree as to main facts. Some of them spell the name Rathbun, but the majority use the form employed in this article.

<sup>7</sup>See page 3, "History of the First Methodist Church of Des Moines" by Ellis G. Linn, M. D., published in 1942 after some years of painstaking research.

## RACCOON FORKS MISSION CREATED

Recognizing the import of events, Iowa Conference at its second session, August 1845, created Raccoon Forks Mission, comprising the counties of Polk, Warren, Madison, Dallas, Marion north of Des Moines river, and the west half of Jasper. To this ample field was appointed the Rev. Joseph Ockerman. For some unstated reason after Conference relocated at Ottumwa, a more important field, he with Rev. B. H. Russel, newly admitted on trial, was sent to the new Mission. Ockerman was a typical itinerant, traversing his circuit on horseback, carrying his entire equipment in a pair of saddle bags. In one of these was wardrobe and library—clean shirt, socks and underwear, bible and hymn book—the other filled with bacon and cornpone, necessary rations for the all-day rides between houses on his far-flung rounds.

The labors of laying out such a circuit detained Mr. Russel from reaching Fort Des Moines until May, 1846, during which interval the class remained under the efficient care of Ezra Rathburn, who also appears to have assisted the pastor in forming the third society on the circuit, at Elijah Canfield's in Camp township. So acceptable was his work to both pastor and conference, that Iowa Conference advanced him to Elder's Orders<sup>8</sup> at its third session, held at Muscatine, Sept. 2, 1846, at which time Raccoon Forks Mission reported a membership of fifty-nine.

Somewhere along in these years mention should be made of the first religious services held in Taylor county. This was at the home of Matthew Hindman, who settled in the extreme south east corner of the county in 1843, well inside the Iowa-Missouri disputed strip already spoken of. So, it seems probable that the Rev. Mr. Spen-

---

<sup>8</sup>This account of Rev. B. H. Russel is from a printed letter of Ezra Rathburn's, clipped from some unknown newspaper, and found among the Armstrong papers. Some authors have interpreted Ezra Rathburn's relation to the Fort Des Moines Society as that of pastor or missionary, but for this there is no warrant in either Conference records or known Methodist usage. Employing local preachers as assistants on large circuits was a common practice then and long after. Had his labors been objectionable to either pastor or presiding elder, Mr. Rathburn would not have been elected to Elder's Orders, if indeed the strict discipline of the times would not have deposed him from the ministry altogether.

cer, who preached this sermon (and of whom we know nothing more), was from the Missouri Conference. The exact date of this visit is not given by any available authority, and apparently nothing permanent came of this sporadic effort.<sup>9</sup>

No further westward extension of Iowa Conference took place in 1846-47, unless the Whitebreast or Albia Mission may have penetrated northeastern Lucas county. Raccoon Forks Mission enjoyed the labors of two pastors that year, A. G. Pierce and J. Rayner, of whose work we only know that the first Des Moines Sunday school was formed in the summer of 1846, with Ezra Rathburn and B. T. Hoxie, the latter being the superintendent, as chief sponsors; also the membership roll increased to 136, one of whom was listed as "colored." They were followed by J. Q. Hammond for 1847-48, who gave in the first Sunday school statistics showing five schools on the circuit, having fifty-one officers and teachers, and 220 scholars; while the church membership numbered 257 white and three colored persons. The conference of 1848 changed "Raccoon Forks" to "Fort Des Moines," with boundaries reaching far up the river, as will be set forth in the history of Boone county. Mr. Hammond remained a second year on the new named mission, with J. W. B. Hewitt as "Junior Preacher."<sup>10</sup>

The year 1848 also witnessed the Methodist entrance into the southwest corner of Iowa, where immigrants, ascending the Missouri river, began locating long before settlements from the east crossed the intervening prairie country. In that year the Rev. William Rector, from Indiana, entered a claim in Fremont county, near the present hamlet of Knox, and almost immediately formed a society composed of the six members of his own family, Richard Iles and wife and Mrs. Hunsaker.

<sup>9</sup>From "History of Taylor County," pub. 1910.

<sup>10</sup>"Junior Preacher" was the title of an assistant pastor, usually a young man, just admitted on trial for two years, preparatory to full Conference membership. Such would be assisted in his studies, directed in sermon preparation, and instructed in ministerial technique by the "Preacher in Charge" as the senior minister was officially designated. The process was precisely the same as that by which medical and law students received their professional training in that era.

Duplicating the Rathburn story at Raccoon Forks, Mr. Rector carried the gospel to the surrounding country, where we will encounter this good man again, and his son Benjamin, exponent of both law and gospel.<sup>11</sup>

The Conference of 1849 divided Fort Des Moines Mission by setting off Warren and Madison counties with portions of Polk and Marion into "Three Rivers Mission," George W. Teas, Pastor. He erected at Hartford the first parsonage in our area, and in the spring of 1850 organized in a cooper shop, the society that became the germ from whence proceeded the splendid church and college of Indianola. He rendered the same service in the budding village of Winterset, founding there the church that still flourishes in that sightly city; and likewise carried the gospel message all over the territory assigned him. Although George W. Teas did yeoman work in soul winning and church founding, both before and after that year in two States besides Iowa, also contributing to the educational needs of all coming time as a trustee for both Iowa Wesleyan and Northwestern Universities, by the irony of fate actually he is better known by two bits of doggeral poetry, evoked by youthful folly and repentance, than any of his really worth while achievements.

Turning aside from the ministry to law and politics in his younger days, he ran for a seat in the territorial legislature, and was beaten, largely as he thought from the failure of his fellow Methodists to give him their support. In hot resentment he abandoned the Church, announcing his withdrawal by tacking this couplet to his office door in Burlington:

"Know all men from shore to shore, George Teas is a Methodist no more!" A sweeping revival brought him to the mourner's bench as a penitent, and he was gladly welcomed back to the fold, upon which some graceless wag perpetrated the following effusion:

"Know ye from California to Maine, George Teas is a Methodist again!"<sup>12</sup> Being once more licensed to preach,

<sup>11</sup>"History of Fremont County" State Historical Society, pub. 1881.

<sup>12</sup>"History of Iowa Conference," by E. H. Waring, p. 39.

he had in due time his ordination parchments restored and at the Conference of 1849 was readmitted to membership, showing himself a workman that needed not to be ashamed not only along the frontiers, but in some of the leading pulpits of the older portion of the state.

The once appointed and then shifted Joseph Ockerman came to Fort Des Moines Mission in 1849; he had served Ottumwa Circuit two years, and although in impaired health, was two years co-pastor of Whitebreast or Albia Mission, during which time he preached the first sermon in Lucas county, at McDermot's Grove.<sup>13</sup> He found a neat frame chapel at Fort Des Moines, the erection of which on the public race track for the time being broke up the most popular form of gambling then in vogue.<sup>14</sup>

#### FIRST MINISTER'S DEATH IN DES MOINES

Despite the setting off of Three Rivers Mission, the Fort Des Moines charge contained 314 members, and three Sunday schools with 179 attendants. There is little record of Joseph Ockerman's labors this last year of his life. With health already shattered, the toils of the four weeks circuit extending far beyond Boone and covering both sides of the Des Moines river,<sup>15</sup> so depleted his feeble powers that he was barely able to attend Conference at Fairfield the second week in August and by special resolution was left without appointment. On returning to his home in Des Moines, he moved onward to his heavenly home on August 27, 1850, when not yet 34 years of age, the first of many ministers who have gone to their reward from this city. Of his family we only know that he left a widow and child, who were granted assistance from the Conference Necessitous Funds for some years.<sup>16</sup>

Several signs of expansion attended this conference session of 1850. Fort Des Moines Mission was again reduced in area by the setting off of Boone Mission. Joseph

<sup>13</sup>"History of Lucas County" by Des Moines Historical Society, pub. 1881.

<sup>14</sup>See "Turrell's Reminiscences of the City of Des Moines."

<sup>15</sup>Local tradition as given the writer by pioneers of Boone and Dallas counties.

<sup>16</sup>See Joseph Ockerman's obituary in Iowa Conference Journal for 1851.

Ockerman's successor, the Rev. Michael Hare, compensated this loss however by extending operations through Dallas county, where Ezra Rathburn had broken ground in 1846 at the home of John Wright in Boone township, and J. Q. Hammond had organized a class in 1847.<sup>17</sup> Sometime that fall, Mr. Hare delivered the first sermon in Guthrie county, where a congregation of twelve persons met him at the home of Benjamin Kunkle, in Jackson township. This at once became a regular preaching appointment on the circuit, as did another point taken up by Mr. Hare in Cass township at the home of David Bay, where in 1852 a class of twelve was formed which ultimately blossomed into the Methodist Church in Panora.<sup>18</sup>

A class was formed this year at McDermot's Grove, Lucas county, probably by the Rev. J. Q. Hammond, pastor of Albia Mission, 1849-50. This society flourished for over twenty years, boasting at one time a class roll of more than one hundred names, and was disrupted by an unfortunate controversy over the right or wrongfulness of cutting timber on lands belonging to non-residents, mainly of the obnoxious "speculator" type. These contributed nothing to developing the country, their sole interest being the reaping of a harvest from the accretion of values through the labors of bona fide settlers, some of whom held that the movable products of such holdings were fair spoil of war for those who were taming the wilderness. That some condemned the practice as dishonest is evidenced by the strife that dissolved this promising rural church.<sup>19</sup>

Most spectacular action however was that of leaping across a hundred miles of uninhabited country and establishing a mission at Council Bluffs, where William Rector had preached in 1848, without attempting an organiza-

<sup>17</sup>"History of Dallas County" by Union Historical Pub. Co. of Des Moines, where it is said the Van Meter M. E. Class was formed in 1848.

<sup>18</sup>From "Centennial History of Guthrie County," pp. 81 and 147. Pub. 1876; Account by Mrs. S. B. Maxwell. The "History of Guthrie County" by the Historical Dept. of Iowa, pub. 1884, dates the Kunkle service in "The Fall of 1851," but as M. H. Hare ended his pastorate of Fort Des Moines Mission in early September 1851, the former date must be accepted as correct; especially as this same work on p. 494 assigns Mr. Hare's preaching at David Bay's to 1850.

<sup>19</sup>See Note 13 for authority.

tion. Permanent occupation came about from the misfortune of the Rev. William Simpson of Cedar county, who followed the trail of his stolen driving team to Kaneshville—as Council Bluffs was first named—and felt his soul stirred by the spiritual desolation and moral poverty of the place, founded originally by the Mormons in their trek to Utah, and still served as final bridgehead connecting the east with their earthly Zion by Salt Lake. With the California gold rush and the Oregon colonization movement, this became outfitting point for innumerable emigrant parties. Here also assembled all the flotsam, and jetsam of vice, crime, dissipation and godlessness of the whole Upper Missouri valley. From this moral desert William Simpson returned to his conference with a plea that something be done for the perishing souls for whom no man cared, offering himself as a volunteer, for lack of abler candidates. Not to be outdone in generosity, conference and bishop united in accepting the daring offer, and gave him the entire Missouri slope for his parish.<sup>20</sup>

Now the Mormons, whose peculiar views and practices had occasioned their expulsion successively from New York, Ohio, Missouri and Illinois, rather naturally were decidedly opposed to the planting of a rival church, where they alone held religious sway and made their objections known in no uncertain terms. Reacting in kind, after a fashion all too common in those days of sectarian controversy, Mr. Simpson stung them to fury by his long remembered "Frog Sermon"<sup>21</sup> assailing their leaders and doctrines in such vitriolic language that the Mormon bishop in charge of the place ordered him out of the community under pain of summary vengeance. This threat was parried by the bold declaration that the bishop in person would be held responsible by the M. E. Church authorities for any injury inflicted upon the missionary or his family. The menace was promptly withdrawn, but

<sup>20</sup>"History of Iowa Conference," E. H. Waring, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup>So called from Text, Revelations 16:xiii. In Mr. Simpson's discourse the unclean spirits were applied to the Founders and doctrines of Mormonism; rather provocative interpretation for milder days of ecclesiastical strife than were those.

the preacher was so completely boycotted that when death claimed an infant daughter, the grieving parents were left to make the coffin, dig the grave and bury their dead unaided.<sup>22</sup>

Ranging south and east from Council Bluffs, Mr. Simpson foregathered with the rectors, explored the regions beyond, and brought up to the Conference of 1851 a report of 123 Methodist members in the Council Bluffs Mission, and certain recommendations.<sup>23</sup>

#### A "SHOE-STRING" MISSION DISTRICT

By some peculiar administrative quirk, the four fields whose rise we have noted, Fort Des Moines, Three Rivers, Boone and Council Bluffs, were in 1850 attached to Iowa City District, stretched like a shoe string across the state; but wiser counsels in 1851 created the Fort Des Moines District, comprising almost exactly the Annual Conference bounds later so named, saving that it included Newton, Knoxville, Oskaloosa and Albia on the east along with the four circuits named above and three new mission fields whose beginnings we trace.

The first of these was the Red Rock Mission, made up evidently of portions taken from Knoxville and Three Rivers charges. The name appeared but this one year, during which it enjoyed the ministrations of the Rev. Richard Swearingen, just elected and ordained an elder, and destined to become a legendary figure in the Upper Iowa Conference as possessor of a voice of such pitch and compass that an outdoor sermon delivered at Le Claire, on the banks of the Mississippi, was distinctly heard by a large and appreciative audience on the Illinois side, a mile distant!<sup>24</sup>

South of Red Rock Mission lay Chariton Mission, comprising whatever church work had developed in Lucas county. Elias L. Briggs was appointed to this field, who with aggressiveness appropriate to one bearing his Chris-

<sup>22</sup>See Note 20.

<sup>23</sup>"History of Taylor County" Section "The M. E. Church in Taylor Co.," pp. 461-2, Western Historical Society, pub. 1881.

<sup>24</sup>For legend of "Dick" Swearingen's voice and sermon see "History of Upper Iowa Conference," by S. N. Fellows.

tian name, over-ran both Clarke and Decatur counties, and the north part of Wayne; laying out a circuit of fourteen preaching places, Chariton itself being easily the most difficult of all, for his first sermon drew a congregation of but ten, and the clamor of a shooting match on an adjacent lot almost drowned out the voice of prayer and praise. One young lady alone responded to the invitation for professed Christians to unite with the church, and she was claimed in marriage a week later by her fiancée from back East, leaving Chariton church-memberless once more; and only three or four others were gained during the year. Then the tide turned, and in 1854 the congregation was able to move from the court house to a modest frame chapel costing \$1,000.00. This humble sanctuary has been replaced more than once by increasingly pretentious structures, none of which probably have called for a tithe of the self denying sacrifice that went into that primitive tabernacle.<sup>25</sup>

Early in Mr. Briggs' pastorate he received instructions to include Leon in his circuit, where a class had been organized on February 14, 1851, in the home of John Jordan, with Mr. and Mrs. John Brittain, Mr. and Mrs. William Burke, Abner Barbour, Ishmael Barnes and Levi Clark as charter members. These were afterward joined by Mr. and Mrs. Patterson who had located there in November 1850, and who sometime in the summer of 1851 went to a quarterly meeting in Missouri with a request that the presiding elder send them a preacher. In response "The elder told a young preacher by the name of Clepper to come here and organize a church and he would write the Iowa Conference to send us a missionary."

En route to Leon the first time Mr. Briggs received an invitation to preach in Garden Grove on his return trip, but found a dance in progress in the home of the inviter, and pushed on although assured that he might preach after the ball. Subsequently regular preaching was taken up at the Sylvanus Arnold home, a mile east

<sup>25</sup>"History of Lucas County," Des Moines State Historical Co., pub. 1881.

of Garden Grove, where a local preacher named Cary organized a class, which after some years moved into the town and became the Garden Grove M. E. Church.<sup>26</sup>

#### CHARITON MISSION DISTRICT

In a letter to the Rev. E. H. Waring, written years after the events, Mr. Briggs gave a lively account of his first services in Wayne county, at the residence of "Bro. Barclay, on South Chariton," where he arrived late one bleak November night in 1851, to find the family on such short rations pending the return of some grown sons with supplies from Missouri, that supper consisted of "bean meal and bran bread," a well nigh meatless pork rind, and parched wheat coffee. Early morning borrowings from the nearer neighbors mended the breakfast menu considerably, and the cabin was packed with hearers for a forenoon sermon, followed by a rousing class meeting, in the midst of which the long awaited food supplies appeared, so that the visit concluded with a "dinner fit for a king." The letter ends with a list of the Chariton Mission preaching places, covering four counties and lapping into two others:<sup>27</sup>

"1. Chariton; 2. West's, fourteen miles southeast of Chariton; 3. Prather's, fourteen miles east, in the edge of Monroe county; 4. Jenkins, fourteen miles northeast; 5. Ragsdale's, four miles southeast; 6. Mount Carmel, fifteen miles north, on Knoxville road in Marion county; 7. Webster's, eighteen miles west, in Clarke county; 8. Arnold's, just south of Osceola, in Clarke county; 9. Hopeville, Clarke county; 10. Patterson's (now Leon) Decatur county; 11. South Chariton, near Corydon; 12. Barclay's, six miles west of Corydon; 13. Wolf Creek, nine miles south of Chariton; 14. Garden Grove. These appointments filled once in four weeks."

<sup>26</sup>The account of Leon Methodism and Garden Grove is partly from "Biographical and Historical Record of Ringgold and Decatur Counties," pub. 1886; and partly from "Early Recollections of Aunty Patterson," given in 1891 at the Fortieth Anniversary of the Leon M. E. Church, and printed in the Decatur Journal of April 23rd of that year. Found among the Armstrong papers.

<sup>27</sup>From Whittaker's "Early Methodism in Wayne County and Corydon." See Note 3.

From this field he reported in 1852, 148 members and probationers.

The third advance movement was Page and Taylor Mission, marked "To be Supplied" in the Conference roll; the Supply in this case being the Rev. William Rector, thus commissioned to carry the gospel he had introduced in Fremont county to the regions farther east.<sup>28</sup> To complete the tale, the Rev. William Simpson was returned to Council Bluffs for a second years contest with the powers of darkness and with additional instructions to block out a new district on that far off frontier.

The presiding elder appointed to Fort Des Moines District, was the Rev. John Hayden, forward looking church statesman, who in his four years term did much foundation laying for the future Des Moines Conference, before his transfer to the opposite corner of the state by the creation of Upper Iowa Conference in 1856. Under his leadership action was the rule. We have seen how E. L. Briggs promoted the cause on Chariton Mission. D. T. Sweem, pastor of Three Rivers Circuit so wrought that at the years end the charge was divided, the eastern portion becoming Indianola Circuit, the western taking the name Winterset Mission. Monroe, cutting loose from the leading strings of distant centers took a place on the Conference roll in its own right, never surrendered. Fort Des Moines Circuit was further reduced in area by setting off Adel Mission, the Rev. Geo. Clark, pastor; and the Missouri slope, realizing all expectations, blossomed out in the Minutes of 1852 as "Council Bluffs District, Moses F. Shinn, presiding elder and pastor at Kaneshville"; Fremont county became Sidney Mission, Wm. P. Mann, pastor; and William Rector—whose only pay was the meals of corn pone and hog meat, shared with him by needy pioneers—reported having rounded up thirty Methodists in the two counties of his charge, with a class in each. That in Page county was at the Forks of the Nodaway, four miles southeast of where Clarinda now

<sup>28</sup>"The History of Clarinda M. E. Church" in W. J. Kershaw's "History of Page Co.," p. 172, pub. in 1909.

stands, the other at some unspecified place in Taylor county, besides numerous preaching places elsewhere, one of them by local tradition as heard by the writer fifty years ago, being at Boundary Grove a mile or so from the hamlet of Hawleyville.

#### SOUTHWEST IOWA IS OPENED

Page and Taylor Mission received as pastor in 1852 a genuine pioneer circuit rider, with vocal gifts almost rivalling "Dick" Swearingen; one who accumulated a longer list of "First Sermons" in various places, all the way from Independence to Shenandoah than any other minister of the writers knowledge. He was the Rev. Samuel Farlow, who added to other distinctions that from this appointment to the end of his life, his earthly lot was cast in the territory comprised in this study, the old Des Moines Conference.<sup>29</sup> He had already devoted seven years to the ministry along the Mississippi river, and now by a truly pioneer move migrated four hundred miles to the southwest from Andrew in Jackson county, most of the journey lying through country where the few primitive roads furnished transit little less hazardous than the trackless prairie intervening between straggling communities; and where the bridgeless streams presented problems tasking even his powers and resources to their limits. In one such episode he found it necessary to completely unload and dismantle his great mover wagon, swim his horses to the farther shore, carrying a rope by which he drew the running gears through the water; then making a raft of the wagon box, by frequent trips to and fro transported family and possessions over the floods, re-assembled the whole, and with a vociferous, "Praise the Lord! We're on the way again to Page and

<sup>29</sup>See Note immediately above: Also "Page County" in Iowa Writers Program of W. P. A. pub. 1935; and "Histories of Taylor County" and "Page County" both by Western Historical Society of Des Moines, pub. 1881. The story of the Farlow pilgrimage from Andrew to Page County, and many other personal details given in this article, were communicated to the writer by Bro. Farlow in correspondence many years ago. The letters unfortunately were not preserved, but the incidents were deeply impressed upon the pages of memory, and were used in preparing an article for publication in Clarinda newspapers in connection with a Church dedication at Hawleyville, and which was given place among the Armstrong papers.

Taylor Mission!" resumed the onward journey. No wonder they spent a month on the trip, arriving at their destination Nov. 3rd.

The only vacant house was an abandoned claim shanty, so rickety that a snow storm that struck them that first night drove them out to seek shelter in the Davis home a mile distant. Here an unmarried son offered Mr. Farlow the use of a house he was erecting with a view to marriage the next spring, on condition that he complete the building by putting in rafters, floor, chimney and door.

It was the first parsonage in the county, also the first school, for Mrs. Farlow, returning to her pre-marital vocation, gathered in all the rising generation within reach for instructions that would fit them to build their fortunes upon the foundations being laid by adventurous parents.

The only town in the circuit was Hawleyville, where was a store owned by a St. Joseph, Mo. merchant for whom the village was named. Some one else had a mill on the East Nodaway river; a blacksmith shop and school house naturally followed, and the trading center served the community well, for long after railroad stations a few miles away sapped off most of the business. Here Mr. Farlow preached the first sermon, to a congregation clad in backwoods costumes, leather hunting shirts, homespun jeans trousers, rawhide boots, Linsey dresses, sun-bonnets and moccasins. Into this group, all unaware of the religious service in progress, stepped Mr. Hawley, togged out in latest city apparel, beaver hat, swallow tail coat, gilt buttons, nankeen trousers strapped tight under the insteps of patent leather boots, amazing the beholders as greatly as if a giraffe had walked in, their curiosity frazzling the rest of the service out into nothingness, to the mutual embarrassment of both preacher and late arrival. Out of this crude material, Samuel Farlow formed a church, of which he was pastor four different times in the next twenty five years, and which despite marked alterations of high and low tides of spiritual

life, has for more than ninety years distributed the bread of life to all comers.

With spring of 1853 Clarinda was laid out as the county seat, and the first house moved in from Shambaugh's Mills, was occupied by the Farlow's as residence, school and church, making it serve as domestic, educational and religious center for the sprouting county capital. In August malaria prostrated the Farlow's who lay helpless, with none to bring a drink of water, or prepare a meal, until one Peter Bowler—of whom we wish we knew more—discovering their plight, moved them to the only available shelter near folks, a vacant hut at Shambaugh's Mill, next to a grocery-saloon, in plain hearing of the carousings and foul talk of the habitués. Here Attorney Benjamin Rector, son of William, while attending Page county's first court session, found them, nursed them by night, plead law by day, and preached round the circuit on Sunday. As soon as they were able he took them in his own carriage to Sidney, to which charge Mr. Farlow was appointed for the next two conference years and where he buried his good wife.

During his year on Page and Taylor Mission, in spite of deep snows, high waters and sickness, he prospected the entire area from Tarkio creek to West Grand river, preaching wherever a group of hearers could be assembled, organizing classes whenever a few Methodists could be so joined together, and "breaking the sod" for whomsoever should be appointed to cultivate this field after him. He left a membership roll of eighty names as compared with thirty that he found. We will meet this good soldier of the Cross again.

#### WARREN COUNTY A STRONGHOLD

Fort Des Moines District showed no increase of pastoral charges at the 1853 Conference, but there is evidence of much concentrated effort on those existing. E. L. Briggs, appointed to Indianola Circuit in 1852 made such proof of his ministry that he was returned in 1853,<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup>"History of Warren County" by Rev. W. C. Martin, pub. 1908.

during which biennium Methodism was so thoroughly planted in Warren county as to make it a permanent stronghold of the faith. Classes were organized at Linn Grove, in Jefferson township, and at Carlisle in the northeast part of the county. Also at Palmyra, where a layman named John Kitchell seems to have organized a class of a dozen or so members, and called in Mr. Briggs to shepherd the flock. The work so well begun was so successfully continued that in 1854 the society moved from the school house into a building of its own, where grace so abounded that in only a few years the growing band of worshippers replaced this first house of worship by one with a seating capacity of five hundred, for years the largest church in the county. This and other advances so enlarged Indianola Circuit without extending its borders, that in 1854 Hartford Circuit was detached, taking in much of the northeastern part of Warren county, and probably portions of Marion and Polk. Jesse Sherwood was the first pastor of this new charge, and Dec. 2, 1854 the date of its first quarterly meeting. We may note in passing that Ezra Rathburn had much to do with foundation laying in this as in so many other localities.<sup>30</sup>

The Chariton charge carried the title in the 1853 appointments of "Chariton and Decatur," indicating the growing importance of the latter part of the field; John Darrah was pastor for the year 1853-4, with a helper whose name appears to have been Davis, but of whom we know no more; the Osceola M. E. Church was founded that year with fifteen charter members, and the work so enlarged that in 1854 Decatur Mission became a separate charge, with regular class organizations at Leon, Decatur City, Garden Grove, and at Hopeville in Clarke county, of which more later. D. T. Sweem was the pastor for 1854-5, who three years earlier, while traveling Three Rivers Mission, had delivered the first Methodist sermon in Union county, at Pisgah, in the log cabin residence of Norman Dunn. This must have been soon after the Mormons withdrew from this way station of theirs, and no

follow-up appears to have taken place, but we will see Mr. Sweet having part in the permanent occupation of this last frontier in southern Iowa.<sup>31</sup>

Three new missions in Council Bluffs District doubled the number of its parishes in 1853. Glenwood was the first of these, filling the gap between Council Bluffs and Sidney charges. By the printed historical statements of two Glenwood pastors, U. P. Golliday, 1865, and W. M. Welch, 1885, we learn that Methodism entered Mills county in 1849, a class being formed at the home of William Wolf in the Waubonsie region, out of four or five Methodist families, amongst the early emigrants into those hills and hollows: William Rector was the first preacher for this group, and Welch makes him the organizer of the society, but Dr. Golliday, on no less authority than William Simpson's widow—whose letter he quoted—gives the Council Bluffs missionary as the one to give formal status to this little band, with Dr. Scott as leader. Of one of this company a tale is told partaking of the martyr complex manifested so frequently in the early stages of most religious movements. Miss Kitty Troth was converted at the age of fifteen, in Missouri, and endured much persecution by irreligious parents and friends, who finally moved into this new country, to get away from church surroundings. In only a few months however the Methodist preachers found their community, to the great joy of the ill-treated girl, who became one of the most faithful of Dr. Scott's class, walking two miles rain or shine, to every class-meeting. Then in July, 1852 came a severe illness that in a few days released Kitty Troth from earthly trammels; and during her last moments her eyes were permitted to behold visitors thronging the open cabin door unseen by all but her—and exclaiming "Oh! they have come for me!" passed away. About a month after her decease both father and mother were converted, confessing with grief the intense opposition they had offered to their daughter's Christian living.

---

<sup>31</sup>Same authorities as for Note 26.

Mr. Simpson preached at other places in Mills county, of which the McBroom home, and George Liston's on Keg creek were contiguous to where Glenwood was located. At this place he had a discussion—choice outdoor sport for those days—with a Mormon elder named Martindale. After Simpson's departure in September 1852 Mills county doubtless remained in the bounds of Council Bluffs Mission, although one authority dates the coming to Glenwood of its first pastor, the Rev. William Armstrong, in that year. If so, he was sent in the interval between annual conferences as his name appears first in 1853. What membership he found and where we cannot say, but some time that winter he organized the M. E. Church in Glenwood with eleven charter members: William Davis and wife, John Carter and wife, John Byers and wife, George Liston and wife, Azor Richardson and wife, and Milton D. Case; making haste to entrench themselves, action not always taken promptly. The men named purchased of the county a lot in Glenwood, their names being inscribed on the deed which bears date Feb. 7, 1854. On this lot the first place of worship in Mills county was commenced the following summer, for many years the only church in the town and long boasting the only church bell in western Iowa. At the Conference of 1854 Glenwood Circuit reported 140 members, twenty-five probationers and four local preachers. Isaac Kelly came as pastor for the ensuing year, and William Armstrong went three hundred miles north-eastward to assume charge of Marshall Mission.<sup>32</sup>

Harris Grove was the next new field on the 1853 list, covering all of Harrison county and considerable more. The work here started in the home of the Rev. Kirtland Card, a local preacher who subsequently entered conference, but the founder was another local preacher, the Rev. H. A. Tarkington, probably sent as missionary for a few weeks later he formed another class in Magnolia, the county seat, a society which through some unfortu-

<sup>32</sup>The history of Glenwood and Mills County Methodism is contained in articles by the two clergymen Rev's. Welch and Golliday, which were printed in Glenwood newspapers, and faithfully preserved in the Armstrong papers.

nate occurrence collapsed soon after, due to reported "moral lapses" on the part of the minister. Their nature is not related and the local historian characterizes Mr. Tarkington as being "slandered, misguided or injured," leaving readers to infer what they pleased. That the complaints were not well sustained is evident from the fact that Mr. Tarkington was recommended for re-admission to the Conference of 1854, which would never have been done for one under reproach. He was not received by the conference but presiding elders were granted permission to employ him as supply pastor, further evidence that his offense was not considered serious, and in October, 1854 he delivered the first orthodox sermon in Shelby county, at Bowman's Grove, and held the first services in Harlan Dec. 3, 1859. In addition to all of this proof of innocence of intention may be noted the fact that for some years he held the position of county judge of Shelby county, and preached as opportunity offered.

The disrupted class was resuscitated by the Rev. Wm. Scott, and a Magnolia Circuit formed in 1854 that extended northward far enough to add the name Woodbury to its title, and so furnish the germ from whence sprang in process of time three great conferences. Harris Grove continues to the present time, remaining then and for some years after, as head of a circuit taking in southern Harrison county and much more territory beyond, developing as time went by to a degree "far surpassing the hopes of the most sanguine."<sup>33</sup>

Cass Mission, third of Council Bluffs District's new fields in 1853 was marked "to be supplied," the supply being in this case without much question the Rev. James S. Rand, for it was he who in 1854 formed the first religious society in Cass county, at Edna Grove, in the home of William S. Townsend, for whose good wife both grove and township were named, an organization that still flourishes in the Reno Church, Cumberland charge.

<sup>33</sup>"History of Harrison County," Chap. IX. Section "Methodists." By Joe H. Smith, 1888.

It would seem that Cass Mission included part of Adams county, for in considering Montgomery county beginnings, we find the "Rev. Mr. Rand of Adams county" figuring in a most unique episode. Somewhere about this time it must have been that Bowater Bales, another of those ubiquitous local preachers, instituted work in Lewis which attained some strength, for in the late summer of 1855 Presiding Elder Shinn from Council Bluffs conducted a successful camp meeting about a mile north of that place by which the society was so stimulated that a church was built the next year, and a charge formed called Lewis Mission.<sup>34</sup>

The southern part of Adams county must have been attached to Page and Taylor Mission in 1854, since there is a hint to that effect among the Armstrong papers, confirmed by this writers recollections of tales told by the old timers of members of the "Weininger Class" attending quarterly and camp meetings at Quincy; also I have a distinct remembrance of a page in the Quincy Circuit Records devoted to such a class in southern Taylor county. A fuller remembrance of all that old church record contained would permit much more satisfactory accounts of Methodist entry into Adams county, for in it were two or three pages covered with the copper-plate chirography of the Rev. U. P. Golliday, written while he was presiding elder of Quincy—later Corning—District, narrating what he had been able to glean of those initial steps; but memories fifty-six years of age, are uncertain material sources; and what Dr. Golliday found difficult only twenty years subsequent to the event is clearly impossible with seventy more years intervening; so for lack of any Adams county histories available for investigation, the foregoing must suffice for that locality.

#### METHODISM EXTENDS TO NEBRASKA

The 1854 list of appointments bears evidence to an ambitious attempt to extend Iowa Methodism beyond the

<sup>34</sup>Compendium of History and Biography of Cass County" pub. 1912. pp. 56, 96.

"Big Muddy," in the shape of a Nebraska-Kansas Mission District, with two charges in each territory, Omaha and Old Fort Kearney, Wakarusa and Ft. Leavenworth. This action was in accord with General Conference instructions voted in 1852, but Iowa Conference had no preachers to spare for that remote frontier; the entire district was marked "To be supplied," which is probably the reason why the Missouri Conference soon after took over this new field, attached the Kansas part to its own area, and sent a quartet of preachers into Nebraska, who in 1855 manned eight pastoral charges, having a hundred or so members amongst them. General Conference legislation in 1856 created a Kansas-Nebraska Conference, forever removing this territory from Iowa Conference Journals, and leaving us no more to say on the subject.<sup>35</sup>

We now return to Fort Des Moines District, where in 1854 John Hayden was entering upon his last year as presiding elder, which in its outcome was to prove a suitable finale to an expansive quadrennium. The first to mention as an advance without trying to specify exact dates, occurred in Wayne county, where the work had so prospered while attached to Chariton and Decatur Missions, that sometime in the conference year a delegation from near where the town of Clio now stands, waited on Elder Hayden at a Quarterly Meeting of Chariton Circuit with a request for a preacher of their own. Elder Hayden with-held consent to the proposal, pleading insufficiency of missionary funds, until the delegates pledged satisfactory support for a preacher, provided \$75.00 were allowed them in assistance. On this condition the Corydon Circuit was set off, and the Rev. B. F. Williams sent as first pastor in September 1855. The work then or a year or two later covered all of Wayne county and High Point Church in Decatur.<sup>36</sup>

Monroe, for several years a separate "supply" charge,

<sup>35</sup>"History of Iowa Conference," by E. H. Waring, pp. 151, 153.

<sup>36</sup>Letter of Rev. Hartley Bracewell in Whittaker's "Early Methodism in Wayne County and Corydon."

having reached a membership of nearly three hundred, attained the dignity of being entitled to a regular full-fledged conference preacher, the Rev. Eli M. H. Fleming, another like Samuel Farlow, devoted all the remainder of a long and useful life to ministerial labors in what was soon to become Des Moines Conference. To the northward Story county, entered from Newton Mission early in 1854, was that Fall erected into a separate mission, under the care of the Rev. John Anderson, received in trial that session after having proved his metal as a "Supply" by following Samuel Farlow's footprints all over Page and Taylor Mission for a year. This new field with its parent Newton Circuit, and Boone Mission were detached at the 1854 Conference, to make part of a new Montezuma District, under the superintendency of our old acquaintance of "Frog Sermon" fame, William Simpson. One year later, these with a new "Greene County Mission" were set off into still another new District, Janesville, to which John Hayden was transferred from Fort Des Moines District. This was done by way of preparation for a change of conference boundaries.

Wayne county's petition for a preacher of their own was not the only one Presiding Elder Hayden had to consider in that summer of 1855. Already attention has been called to the tendency in early Iowa immigration to follow the navigable rivers, whereby a considerable space of interior remained unoccupied after east and west counties were tolerably well settled; a process which at the date attained left only Ringgold and Union counties intervening between Methodist circuits east and west, as being too sparsely peopled to offer sufficient inducement for even the most venturesome itinerant to spend time amidst solitudes.

We have noted that the Rev. D. T. Sweem while traveling Three Rivers Mission, visited Pisgah in 1852, but there is no account of any further effort in that region until 1855. Some time in the interval there moved into this wilderness area, the Rev. James Wishard, a farmer-preacher, who started his career as such in Indiana,

where in one flaming revival he led to Christ a youth who, as the Rev. Daniel McIntyre, later became one of Des Moines Conference's strong preachers. After a few years in Van Buren county, Mr. Wishard located at Platte Grove, south western Union county, at the forks of Platte River, and began to use his gifts amongst the few neighbors he could find. His first service was at the home of Henry Cloy, near his own claim; it is matter of history that he also preached the first sermon and married the first couple in Platte township, Taylor county, date not given.<sup>37</sup>

What other places he visited and preached at it is now impossible to state, but finding the task of taming a new farm and dispensing the gospel too heavy a load, he in the summer of 1855 journeyed to Hopeville, thirty miles eastward, and at a Quarterly Meeting of Decatur Mission, D. T. Sweem, pastor, petitioned that his neighborhood be taken into the circuit, and a preacher be sent them at the next conference to evangelize both counties. Only after long discussion and practical proof of willingness and ability to support a preacher did he prevail; Mr. Sweem and Elder Hayden both preached at Platte Grove, and the Conference of 1855 sent Rev. William C. Williams, just admitted on trial by recommendation of that same Hopeville Quarterly Meeting. His first sermon was in the Rev. Wishard's cabin, locating in Afton, or rather Petersville, a mile or so from where Afton was later located. On Nov. 3, 1855 he organized a class of ten members, which later on moved into Afton, where a parsonage was built the same conference year. He also formed the first religious society in Ringgold county at Mount Ayr, date not given, and so pushed the work by winning new converts and rounding up immigrating Methodists that the charge was divided in 1856, he returning to the Afton field, while Jesse Sherwood went to Mt. Ayr.<sup>38</sup> That other points in these two counties

<sup>37</sup>"History of Union County" by George Ide, pub. 1898. Article on Churches by Rev. E. E. Flint. For a detailed account of the founding of Union and Ringgold Mission, See ANNALS OF IOWA, July 1939, Article "Local Preacher," pp. 57-62, where this writer gives the tale as he got it from Revs. Wishard and Williams.

<sup>38</sup>From "Early History of Ringgold County" by Mrs. B. M. Leasan, life long

were made preaching places is very certain, but where is now undetermined. Having had Bro. Williams as a parishioner, and Father Wishard as an acquaintance, the writer could at one time have commanded complete information, but history recording was then an undreamed of interest, and it is now far too late to rectify that negligence.

#### NORTHERN COUNTIES NOW REACHED

On the north end of Fort Des Moines District, Adel Circuit was subdivided, the work in Guthrie county going into Panora Circuit, to which came John Anderson, who with characteristic vigor pushed farther north and at Old Rippey, four miles east of the present town of that name, organized the first society in Greene county, that same fall.<sup>39</sup> But the district Elder Hayden turned over to his successor, the Rev. J. B. Hardy, showed little or no results of all this expansion. Going to the Janesville District as already mentioned, Mr. Hayden took with him Boone and Story Circuits and Greene County Mission. On the southern front Fort Des Moines District yielded Chariton, Osceola, LaGrange (Decatur) and the new Corydon Circuits to a new Albia District, while Afton Mission and Panora Circuit went to swell Council Bluffs District which had added three new names to its roll without these; West Nishony—which if named for the Nishnebotna river would locate it in eastern Fremont, Mills and Pottawattamie counties—Quincy, of which the lack of information has been confessed above—and Shelby, Judge Tarkington's self-appointed field of action. Of this field marked in 1855 "To be Supplied" we have no further information. A year subsequently the only statistical item reported was "Twelve Full Members," and the name of the supply nowhere appears. On the other hand Council Bluffs District surrendered the "Woodbury" part of Magnolia's title, and this

resident on p. 185 of which a contribution by B. F. Talley, gives an accurate account of the Class organized in Mt. Ayr by Rev. W. C. Williams and the coming of Rev. Jesse Sherwood to the Ringgold part of the original Mission.

<sup>39</sup>"Biographical and Historical Record of Greene County" pub. 1887.

northwestern extension shows as a Token District, "Sergeant's Bluffs" E. Lathrop, presiding elder, to whose four charges one conference minister was sent, E. Laing, who was spread thin over Monona, Crawford and Carroll counties. The other three, Sergeants Bluffs, Sioux City, Ida & Sac, all "To be Supplied." "Day of small things" indeed, but destined not always to remain small.

Most momentous event of this 1855 Iowa Conference session was the action taken on division, summed up in the following document which was apparently unanimously adopted:

#### REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCE DIVISION

The committee on Conference boundary, having consulted thereon, report the following as the line of division, viz:

Beginning at Davenport on the Mississippi River, thence by the railroad to Iowa City, thence up the Iowa River to the corner of Iowa, Benton, Tama and Poweshiek counties, thence west to the Missouri river, leaving Davenport and Iowa City in the Northern Conference.

David Dickinson, Sec'y.

H. W. REED, Chairman.

As the General Conference of the next May, 1856, approved this line of demarcation, Iowa Conference was left with the northern boundary of the fourth tier of counties, from the south line of the state, as its farthest north; so that the work in Story, Boone, Greene, Carroll and Crawford counties, later part of Des Moines Conference, passed from its jurisdiction; yet since these were finally to be returned to the area of which this article treats, it seems proper to give some account of their beginnings, from the Methodistic stand-point, with some brief glance at the eight years of their separation, for which reason they are here grouped together to await restoration to our attention.

Story county as mentioned above was first entered from Jasper, as part of Newton Mission, the pastor of which charge held services at Iowa Center in February 1854. At the conference of that fall, Story Mission became a separate charge with John Anderson as pastor, and there is record of a Story Mission Quarterly Meet-

ing being held Dec. 9, 1854 at Barker's school house, north part of Jasper county, on the road from Newton to Iowa Center. Another quarterly meeting was held at Iowa Center in February, 1855. The Conference of 1855 witnessed a tremendous shake up of District boundaries, probably in preparation for the coming division, which put Story Mission in Janesville District, John Hayden late of Fort Des Moines District, presiding elder. J. H. Hestwood was appointed to the Mission of which the author of his obituary published in 1908 said "Indian trails enabled him to make the journeys around his circuit, Story Mission, fifty-three miles long and thirty miles wide; the charge allowed him to be at home only thirty-six hours of each week throughout the year." That Mr. Hestwood made a deep impression on his hearers and parishioners as stated by local historians is evident from results, since in May of 1856 an M. E. Church was organized in Nevada in the home of J. W. Cessna, and in 1857 "Story Mission" became Nevada Circuit, a self supporting parish. In 1858 came Loud Speaker Richard Swearingen to Nevada Circuit, holding forth at McCartney's, Applegate's, Mullin's, Bloomington, Smith's and Cambridge, in addition to Nevada, head of the circuit. When attached to Des Moines Conference in 1864, Nevada was still a circuit, its appointments reduced to four viz: Nevada, Bloomington, Iowa Center and Johnson's Grove. The Methodist Church in Ames was founded in 1859 by the Rev. S. F. Gossard.<sup>40</sup> For other developments in Story county Methodism during the two quadrenniums of separation the inquirer is referred to the Minutes and History of the Upper Iowa Conference.

Boone county religious beginnings may be called indigenous; the first gatherings for worship were in the home of George Hull's short distance south from where Boonesboro was laid out some time later. Mrs. Catherine Hull, daughter-in-law of this pioneer, and who herself

---

<sup>40</sup>For good account of Methodist beginnings in Story County, see "Biographical and Historical Record of Story County" by Goodspeed Publishing Co. 1890; "History of Story County, by W. P. Payne, pub. 1911; and "A History of Story County" by William G. Allen, pub. 1887.

came to this locality in 1846, related how a missionary who came to Fort Des Moines to preach to the soldiers, held the first service here in 1847, there being fourteen persons present.<sup>41</sup> Now this would exactly fit the Rev. Ezra Rathburn, since there were no soldiers at the fort after the spring of 1846. There is another item of Boone county history that states Ezra Rathburn located a claim somewhere in the Mineral Ridge vicinity, but gave it up and went to Des Moines. As Boone county was opened for settlement at the same time with Polk, this would preclude any such claim location by Mr. Rathburn prior to his coming to Des Moines as noted formerly; and as it was not the habit of this earnest herald of the Cross to hide his light under a bushel, it would be entirely in keeping with his custom for him to improve any opportunity for preaching while out claim hunting; so until proof to the contrary is presented, we may safely allow him probable credit for this premier gospel service in Boone county.

Mr. Hull appears to have conducted class and prayer meetings in his home subsequent to this date; indeed one Boone county historian attributes to him, the initiative entirely. In 1848 the Rev. H. J. Burleigh passed that way and organized a class of seven at the Hull home. We know nothing more of the Rev. Burleigh, although the Armstrong papers give his first name as "Hiram," and rate him as a supernumerary of some unnamed conference—no one of that name was enrolled in the Iowa Conference, then covering the whole State—so of him also we must record regretfully, "nothing more is known."

With the fall of 1848 we get onto firmer ground, for J. Q. Hammond and J. W. B. Hewitt, appointed to Fort Des Moines Mission, included Boone in their four weeks circuit, over which they alternated, journeying up the west side of Des Moines River, perhaps to Ft. Dodge, and returning down the east side. Mrs. Hull, quoted above, credits Mr. Hewitt with the class organization at

<sup>41</sup>See Chap. 38 "History of Boone County" by N. E. Goldthwait, 1914." "History of Boone County," "Historical Society of Iowa" 1880, and "Boone Mission History" in Armstrong Papers.

George Hull's home, but this more likely was a mere recognition of what had been done formerly, as the Hull home became a regular preaching place on the Mission schedule. Joseph Ockerman succeeded these team workers, and very likely planted the seeds of death in his feeble frame by the strenuous labors and constant exposure attendant upon the care of that vast parish.

#### BOONE COUNTY A NEW MISSION

The Conference of 1850 set Boone off as a separate Mission, "To be supplied," the supply being the Rev. J. B. Montgomery, local preacher, lawyer and (for some time) county judge, who served this people for three years; during his regime Boonesboro was located as the county seat, in which the first building erected, a log hotel, or more correctly as then styled, tavern, was the property of Wesley Williams, a zealous Methodist, who invited the itinerants to hold services in the bar-room, or office, of his wayside inn, which they did until the building of a school house offered more commodious quarters for public gatherings. For the year 1850-51, Boone Mission was allowed \$75.00 missionary assistance; the next year \$40.00, and then seems to have become self supporting. In 1852 reported 133 members and probationers, and \$5.00 raised for missions. 1853 saw Boone graduated out of the supply ranks, Enoch Wood being appointed pastor of a circuit that extended "from Saylorville to Boone river"; at the end of his two year term, Mr. Wood reported 360 members, and was followed by T. D. Boyles, who served one year, at the end of which time Boone passed into Upper Iowa Conference. I. I. Stewart followed, remaining but six months, and at the Conference of 1857 came J. F. Hestwood (the initials J. E. and J. H. are given by different authorities), during whose pastorate the first church in the town and county was commenced, and carried forward to the point of enclosing the building and seating it with "puncheon" benches,<sup>42</sup> in which condition it afforded summer ac-

<sup>42</sup>"Puncheon benches": Puncheons were the slabs sawed off the sides of logs

commodations for the congregation; in winter they resorted to the courthouse, class and prayer meetings being held in private homes. Mr. Hestwood spent two years on the circuit, followed by a quartet of one year pastorates, at the end of which period J. W. Snodgrass became pastor, by whose efforts the church was finally completed and dedicated. The pastoral term being lengthened to three years by the General Conference of 1864—which body likewise restored Boone, and a lot more territory to Des Moines Conference—he remained until 1866, the first three-year minister in that church. Such in brief is the story of the beginnings of Marion Street Methodist Church, in West Boone.

The Methodist beginnings in Greene county are somewhat indefinite. We have seen that the Rev. John Anderson inaugurated work at "Old Rippey" in 1855, and the same year there was a "Greene County Mission" "To be Supplied," but as it passed into Upper Iowa Conference in 1856, we have no statistics or other records available to trace its farther history, and the county historians gave readers very meager information on religious phases of life. One of them states that the Rev. Daniel Lamont pioneered the county in 1872, but this is a mistake, although he may have preached in Greene that year, as he was in the supernumerary relation.<sup>43</sup> However he was Presiding Elder of Ft. Dodge District 1865-69, with charges in adjoining counties to Greene, and may have prospected as promising a field as that most likely was at that time. But Rev. J. Manning organized the M. E. Church in Grand Junction in 1870; and Scranton Circuit was set off in 1871, with the Rev. L. Doran as "Supply" pastor; moreover Jefferson was a regular Conference appointment from 1864 onward, so

---

when sawed into lumber; rounding on one side and flat on the other, they were transformed into benches by boring holes with an augur on the rounding side, into which wooden legs were inserted, the flat side serving as seat; one having the supreme merit, almost its only one, that you couldn't go to sleep while listening to a prosy sermon, for you would surely roll on the floor if you lost consciousness.

<sup>43</sup>A "Supernumerary" Methodist preacher is one who, for reasons satisfactory to himself and his Conference, is not required to take a pastoral charge, although not placed in the "Retired" relation; hence does not receive a pension, and may preach as occasion offers. Many in this capacity serve "supply" charges, or act as Evangelists.

"pioneering" is not the word for what took place in 1872, no matter how much the Rev. Lamont may have been employed there.<sup>44</sup>

#### THE NORTHWEST NEXT REACHED

Carroll and Crawford counties we have seen forming part of the embryotic Sergeant's Bluffs District in 1855, with R. Laing as Missionary. Owing to sparseness of population—not more than 300 in 1860—Carroll furnished the itinerants little more than exercise for themselves and horses until late in the 1860's. Of the earlier years our principal authority,<sup>45</sup> says: "The early settlers were highly religious and their moral pabulum was furnished largely by Methodist circuit riders, who proclaimed a robust theology which denounced all the terrors of the law and final judgment against all manner of vice and crime, with word pictures of future punishment of the most lurid type. A style of preachment that suited the hardy psychology of the rugged frontiersmen, and without doubt deterred many rough characters from lapsing into gross forms of iniquity. The early services were held at first in private homes until the building of school houses, when they were almost automatically transferred to these public centers. Sweeping revivals were quite common, in which almost whole communities were gathered into the fold en masse; no doubt many of the converts backslid during the ensuing summer, but as a rule were reclaimed into active church membership in the next winter's revivals."

Crawford county was settled somewhat earlier than Carroll, but was still so much behind regions farther south, or nearer the Missouri river, that not till its incorporation with Upper Iowa Conference did its formative epoch begin. Landon Taylor, prince of evangelists, was appointed to Sioux City District, in 1856, and William Black to Crawford-Carroll Mission, the latter delivering the first sermon in Crawford county at Hugh Richard-

<sup>44</sup>"Biographical and Historical Record of Greene County," pub. 1887.

<sup>45</sup>"History of Carroll County" by Paul McCleary, pub. 1912. Ch. XIV and XVI.

son's near Mason Grove, east of Deloit. The next record is of a quarterly meeting at Denison, Jan. 17, 1858, at which steps were taken to secure property in Denison for church and parsonage. Denison, Carrollton, Mason's Grove, in Crawford county were appointments at this date besides such places in adjacent counties as Smithland, Mapleton, Ida Grove, Sac City and Lake City. It was the writers privilege to listen to Morris McHenry, one of the founding fathers of Denison Methodism, testify at a Conference Love Feast in glowing terms of the spiritual uplift imparted to church life when reduction of their circuit area permitted "the red-headed Irishman named Richard Mulholland" to make the round of the charge once every four weeks. Landon Taylor in his great autobiography "The Battle Field Reviewed" gives graphic details of the struggles with blizzards, floods, want and deprivation encountered in planting the church in those regions remote from every center of population, for even the Sioux City of his day was but a straggling hamlet, clinging to a narrow strip between bluffs and high waters. One of the most gripping episodes of all was his own narrow escape from an Indian ambush along the winding trail that passed for a road following Boyer river near Denison. This was just after the Spirit Lake Massacre well nigh emptied his entire district of inhabitants, and the preacher enroute from quarterly meeting at Ida Grove to Denison, from the summit of a high knoll spied through the bare boughs of the trees, an Indian sentinel upon a similar elevation half a mile ahead, overlooking the highway. By quick thinking he recalled a deep gully between the two points, but out of sight from either, and with an assumption of calm jogged placidly downward under the watchful gaze of the marauding brave until out of his sight, then wheeled his sulky into the ravine at right angles to the road, and plying whip and voice, gained the open prairie and the tiny village of Denison unmolested.

So slowly did the work advance in those primitive days that in 1864 when these "Lost Provinces" came into Des

Moines Conference, the Crawford county work reported only twenty-eight full members and one probationer; two Sunday Schools with seventy-two enrollment, and a parsonage valued at \$200.00. Yet, with generosity excelled by few, this handful contributed \$31.00 to the benevolences of the Church.

---

### THE WORLD'S "LAST BEST HOPE"

The Iowa Society Sons of the American Revolution joined actively with the national society in securing a general observance of Constitution day in 1943 to the end that the Iowa people strengthen their determination to maintain an unimpaired loyalty to the constitution of the republic. The S. A. R. initiated the movement for Constitution day in 1917. Last year, proclamations were issued by the governors of nearly all the states urging programs to emphasize the importance of adhering to the constitution of the United States and a wider understanding of the principles embodied in that charter of universal rights. In Independence hall, Philadelphia, an outstanding celebration was held and Governor Bricker of Ohio broadcast an address on the Constitution.

The president general of the society, Smith L. Multer, of South Orange, N. J., states in a message that the observance in 1943 was more general than ever before. "It is well that this should be so," he added, "for never did we have a clearer appraisal of the estimable values of the freedoms enshrined in that immortal document, the Constitution of the United States. We know that if we preserve those freedoms, even though all else be lost, we will come back as did our fathers of old. But if our constitutional form of government should go down by attack from abroad or corrosion of neglect at home, then in the words of the immortal Lincoln, there will be lost 'the last best hope of earth.'" The Iowa society, S. A. R., under guidance of the president, William R. Felton, of Sioux City, is ably seconding this worthy movement.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.