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History and Growth of Congregationalism in Rockford, Illinois

Linda J. Anderson '69
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Date

Richard D. Leonard
Project Adviser

History and Growth of Congregationalism in Rockford, Illinois

Linda J. Anderson

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"The history of Congregationalism in Rockford is, in many respects, the history of the city itself."¹ "New England Congregationalism came [to Rockford] with the early settlers."² New England itself owes her success to Congregational foundations which thus affected the development of the middle and far west. New England Congregationalism was the source of the morality and industriousness "which have trained a nation."³ But Congregationalism was not a new belief peculiar to the colonies. Rather, Congregationalism had received its impetus from the religious conditions of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. It was English Separatism which eventually became the New England Congregationalism which molded the attitudes and actions of the American people.

The first actual Separatist church was established in London in 1567, but it is largely forgotten by historians because it was so short-lived. Soon after its inception, the government moved in and broke it up. England was not the place for the religion of the Separatists. The little band, led by Robert Browne, thus set out to find a place where they could worship as they wished. They set up, in 1580, what is remembered far better than the London church, the Norwich church.⁴ It was

¹Second Congregational Church (Rockford, 1960), p. 2.

²Charles A. Church, History of Rockford, 1834-1861 (Rockford: New England Society, 1900), p. 86.

³Mandell Creighton, Historical Lectures and Addresses (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1904), p. 39.

⁴George M. Boynton, The Congregational Way (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1903), p. 28.

here that the term Congregationalism was first applied. Independency was a synonym also attached to the church at this time. These names were assigned "by which is meant that every separate assembly of professing Christians are entirely, in their worship and discipline, independent of all others. . . ." ⁵

It was not easy to believe as the Separatists believed. Cruel and intolerant measures taken by English bishops led to the execution of Elias Thacker and John Copping for "dispersing scheismatical pamphlets" ⁶ of Browne's principles. Barrow, another influential Separatist, was executed after a raid on a secret meeting of the group. It soon became apparent to the band that, in order to develop a church as they saw fit, an immediate and voluntary exile was inevitable. ⁷ But in 1602 it was a dangerous undertaking to attempt to leave England in search of greener and more tolerant pastures. Holland was the destination of the little band. "Holland was one place in Europe which offered what many considered to be the supreme heresy, freedom to worship for all creeds." ⁸ It served as an asylum for the persecuted English. It was here, then, without church buildings or ministers, that English Separatism eventually became Congregationalism. ⁹

The group established their church and religion on the prin-

⁵ Joseph Belcher, Religious Denominations in the United States (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1861), pp. 293-4.

⁶ Ibid., p. 297.

⁷ Ibid., p. 298.

⁸ Marion L. Starkey, The Congregational Way (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 21.

⁹ Gaeius Glenn Atkins and Frederick Fagley, History of American Congregationalism (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1942), p. 26.

ciple that,

The church, planted or gathered, is a company of Christians, who by the willing covenant made with their God are under the government of God and Christ and keep the laws in one holy communion.¹⁰

They believed in "theocracy based on democracy"¹¹ and sought to uphold their belief in every way.

The date of the first church in Holland was 1608. Though the Congregationalists tried to leave England much earlier than this, it was not until 1607-8 that enough had successfully reached Holland to establish a church. The Congregationalists won a measure of prosperity in Holland where tolerance was offered,¹² but at best they enjoyed what was known as "honest poverty."¹³ Holland had a monopoly on the textile industry at the time, and jobs were plentiful for carders and weavers. The Congregationalists eagerly took these positions, but found they could not above a subsistence level in industry. These men had been farmers in England and had an uncontrollable desire to get back to the land.¹⁴ Further, the group saw little future in Holland. The company sought to become a "distinct community, working out their own religious and ecclesiastical beliefs."¹⁵ To this end, they were stymied in Holland. Other factors proved to the Congregationalists that Holland was not the perfect answer as well. They were losing members of their group through marriages

¹⁰ Creighton, Historical Lectures and Addresses, p. 37.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Morton Dexter, "Congregationalism in America," New England Magazine, XXI (September, 1899), 97.

¹³ Starkey, The Congregational Way, p. 24.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁵ Dexter, "Congregationalism in America," p. 97.

with the Dutch. They felt their influence over their children's education to be decreasing. And, in general, they were not appreciated by the Dutch. They feared a war with Spain might make them subserviant to the religious whims of the Spanish, and a ten year truce between Holland and Spain was almost over.¹⁶ The Congregationalists sincerely wished to return to England, but this was a nearly impossible dream. With Holland becoming more than they could bear, the Congregationalists looked towards the New World as a possible answer to their situation.

When King James set aside a petition for toleration in England a few years later, the band of some 300 members resolved to move. The promise of good soil in America and their general dissatisfaction with their life in Holland caused them to seek a new life in the New World. Though the unknown dangers of America frightened the Congregationalists, they agreed on a move to Virginia. They petitioned the Virginia Company and King James. The Company promised ample privileges, and the King added some freedom for their activities but stopped short of general toleration.¹⁷ English Congregationalists were Englishmen through and through, "working within the frame of that which is English."¹⁸ When they crossed the seas, the word Congregationalism took on a new connotation - American Congregationalism.

It took two years to get the voyage planned. When the time came, however, the greater number of Congregationalists were not prepared to leave Holland so they remained with Mr. Robinson. Two ships had been

¹⁶ Belcher, Religious Denominations, p. 295.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Atkins and Fagley, History of American Congregationalism, p. 27.

contracted for the voyage - the Speedwell which was to remain in America for the use of the Congregationalists and the Mayflower which was to return directly to England. In August of 1620, the Speedwell was pronounced unfit for the voyage. It has been speculated that the captain and crew of the ship did not wish to remain in America for the year they had agreed to, thus they misrepresented her condition. Many of the passengers of the Speedwell were taken on the Mayflower, making the total on board 101.¹⁹ The Congregationalists were in the minority of the ship, numbering only about thirty-five because so many remained at Leyden, and others never left Amsterdam after the Speedwell was abandoned.²⁰

The Mayflower sighted land on November 9, 1620, at what is now Cape Cod. The group proceeded south across the bay, finally putting in at Plymouth. Here the group was out of the jurisdiction of the Virginia Company. They thus formed a compact which was to serve them seventy-one years and made John Carver governor. The settlement commenced December 31, 1620.²¹

Church and State were not separated in any colony in the early years. The Congregationalists' greatest interest in these years was the establishment of schools, for the group had a history of respect for the power of education, a history which continues to influence the Congregational Church even today. Harvard College was established in 1636, founded when the settlers had little in the way of their own sustenance. Each colony was supported by a public tax, and only church mem-

¹⁹Belcher, Religious Denominations, p. 295.

²⁰Dexter, "Congregationalism in America," p. 98.

²¹Belcher, Religious Denominations, p. 317-19.

bers voted. This practice was actually not as discriminatory as it may seem, for the communities were made up almost strictly of Congregationalists.²² For the survival of the church it became necessary to limit the activities of rival groups. Perhaps the Congregationalists were intolerant by our standards, "but in comparison with their contemporaries they were in advance of their age."²³ All in all the remainder seventeenth century was characterized by the activity of "digging in rather than spreading out."²⁴

It became necessary as the population of New England increased and diversified for the Congregationalists to adopt what came to be known as the Half-Way Covenant of 1662. The structure of the covenant made it possible for the children of parents who did not desire church membership to be baptized and have the opportunity for membership later in life. The second generation accepted the gospel and promised their faithfulness to the church though, not being members, they had no vote and could not partake of communion. By 1800 the plan had to be abandoned, and the church admitted all persons who had been baptized whether they had been converted or not.²⁵

The eighteenth century saw territorial expansion, and Congregationalism moved the theological belief into new lands. With the growth, however, came material wealth and subsequently "spirituality had been

²²Dexter, "Congregationalism in America," p. 100.

²³Ibid., p. 102.

²⁴Atkins and Tagley, History of American Congregationalism, p. 98.

²⁵Dexter, "Congregationalism in America," p. 102.

succeeded by indifference in many communities."²⁶ One of the early steps taken by Congregationalists to avert the situation was the separation of Church and State. The most striking contribution to offsetting the slump, however, was the Great Awakening of 1734-5. It has been called "one of the most remarkable revivals of religion in Christian History."²⁷ Led by Jónathon Edwards, the period had a significant impact on American religious life.

The nineteenth century in America found the Congregationalists making rapid and diversified progress.²⁸ On May 10, 1826, an interdenominational missionary society was developed for the purpose of supporting territorial expansion. Up to this time settlement had been uncoordinated because of the lack of a Home Missionary Society. The new organization was made up of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Dutch Reform and Associated Reform. Eventually all withdrew until only the Congregationalists remained. They changed the name in 1893 to the Congregational Home Missionary Society.²⁹

The nineteenth century was the century of the Plan of Union, a plan which was designed to further settlement of the West through the mutual agreement of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Adopted in May of 1801, it proved a one-sided affair, more helpful to the Presbyterians than the Congregationalists. The Plan of Union was first conceived in a joint Congregational-Presbyterian convention in 1766. Both factions

²⁶ Ibid., p. 1044.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁹ Atkins and Fagley, History of American Congregationalism, p. 97.

were honest and completely sincere in entering into the agreement.³⁰ During the last part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, "the Congregational and Presbyterian leaders [became] increasingly anxious to come to some agreement that would enable them to co-operate in the expanding west."³¹

The plan provided for each church to retain its own polity, but the Presbyterians prevailed because the Congregationalists, according to one critic, "were indifferent to the maintenance of their own polity as . . . the Presbyterians were active in pushing theirs."³² In essence the provisions of the plan included points which allowed for differences to be settled by mutual agreement of Congregationalists and Presbyterians.³³ The Congregational Church, however, had never imposed itself; and, concludes one author, that is why it is still small.³⁴ Overall the plan resulted in what one historian has called "crippling and almost destroying the growth of Congregationalism in the Middle West and Western states for half a century."³⁵

The Congregationalist doctrine is not easily adaptable to rapid church founding, for it has no central organization for directing its activities as found in the Presbyterian Church. Thus the two began

³⁰ Albert E. Dunning, Congregationalists in America (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1894), p. 320.

³¹ William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. III: The Congregationalists (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), p. 15.

³² Dunning, Congregationalists in America, p. 326.

³³ Sweet, The Congregationalists, p. 15.

³⁴ Charles E. Jefferson, "Why I am a Congregationalist," Forum, LXXVI (August 26, 1934), 237.

³⁵ Dunning, Congregationalists in America, p. 318.

to move from each other within the plan. Almost from the beginning the slavery issue added fuel to the fire and served as a major point of separation between Congregationalists and Presbyterians in Illinois.³⁶ Congregationalists were anti-slavery though not extreme. The Presbyterians were clearly not abolitionists as the New England Congregationalists were. The Albany Convention of 1852 saw the formal abandonment of the Plan of Union, the condemnation of slavery, the endorsement of missions, and the collection of money for western churches.³⁷

In 1829 and 1830 a group of twelve graduates from the Yale Theological Seminary, afterwards known as the "Yale Band" or the "Illinois Band," formed an association to found a college in Illinois. The college was founded at Jacksonville in 1829.³⁸ Rev. Flavel Bascom was considered a founder of Congregationalism in Illinois.³⁹ He found it his unhappy task to prod the American Home Missionary Society for funds for ministers in the territory. In letter after letter in the A.H.M.S. files in Chicago, it is revealed that it was often nearly impossible to secure funds for these ministers. A letter from Pekin, Illinois, dated December 27, 1837, revealed Mr. Bascom's own unhappy state of affairs. It seems he hadn't received any funds for three months from "any source." He owed for numerous things including his wife's funeral. He had raised \$70 for the Bible and Tract Society which he had to use for his necessity, a situation which "pained" him. He closed his letter with a request of

³⁶ Sweet, The Congregationalists, p. 28-9.

³⁷ Dexter, "Congregationalism in America," p. 111.

³⁸ Sweet, The Congregationalists, p. 15.

³⁹ Starkey, The Congregational Way, p. 256.

Milton Badger, then secretary of the Society, "Now, dear sir, for the sake of friends, do not publish these facts. I would rather suffer in silence without refute."⁴⁰

A history of Illinois Congregationalism is best understood once viewed in the proper perspective. Illinois was settled in two sections -- the North was settled by New Englanders and the South by men from Kentucky and Tennessee. The character of the settlers is an important factor in the types of settlements which were established. New Englanders had a respect for education that was in the least a sympathy for the cause of education. The southern group were generally poorly educated and had not the same appreciation for educational institutions as the New Englanders.⁴¹

Theron Baldwin, one of the original members of the "Illinois Band," gave up his pledge to the group to go east to form a society which would collect funds to support colleges in the Midwest. The society was known officially as the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education of the West, but was referred to as the Western College Society. Mr. Baldwin became the principle instigator of a plan to establish a college in Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois when he shared his progress in the Western College Society with seven delegates returning from the Convention of Congregational and New School Presbyterian Ministers and Churches of the Northwest which had been held at Cleveland in June of 1844. Once the group was made aware of the availability of funds for collegiate institutions, little remained to get the project underway.⁴²

⁴⁰Letter, Flavel Bascom to Milton Badger, December 27, 1837, Chicago Theological Seminary, Archives, A.H.M.S. letter file.

⁴¹Mrs. Robert K. Richardson, interview at Beloit College Library Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin, July 20, 1968.

⁴²Ibid.

The idea of a college in Northern Illinois-Southern Wisconsin was not a new one; one of the early resolutions regarding education in this region was made at the Mineral Point District Convention held at Platteville, Wisconsin, September 6, 1842. It read as follows,

Resolved that in the opinion of this Convention in order to secure success in the enterprise, the influence and interest of our whole determination should be concentrated upon the establishment of one collegiate institution in this territory. Resolved that such an institution in our opinion should be located in the neighborhood of Rock River and that a situation near the southern boundary of the territory would promote the interests of the institution, by securing the co-operation of the people of Northern Illinois.⁴³

The informal meeting of the eight ministers resulted in a call to the "friends of education," a meeting of interested ministers from Northern Illinois, Southern Wisconsin and Iowa.⁴⁴ Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois were one unit as they went forward with plans for establishing institutions of higher learning. In all it took four founding conventions - August and October of 1844 and May and October of 1845 - to put the institutions together. August 7, 1844, was the date attached to two resolutions important to the founding of the institutions,

Resolved that in the opinion of this convention measures ought to be taken for the establishment of two⁴⁵ collegiate institutions in Northern Illinois, Southern Wisconsin and Iowa.

Resolved that the Collegiate Institution⁴⁶ be located in the vicinity of Beloit and that a Female Seminary of a high order

⁴³Beloit College Library Archives, "Resolutions of Mineral Point Convention on College," September 6, 1842.

⁴⁴Later Iowa was dropped; it was thought Iowa could best handle its educational institutions independently.

⁴⁵The exact number was added after the original proposal was passed.

⁴⁶Collegiate Institution here refers to a male college.

be established at some point in Northern Illinois and that a committee of ten be appointed to select locations and to take measures⁴⁷ for carrying out the object and report at a later convention.

Out of these two resolutions came Beloit College and Rockford Female Seminary.

I am getting slightly ahead of myself here, for the settlement of Rockford naturally preceded any college. It was Rev. Aratus Kent who requested a field of labor from the American Home Missionary Society secretary. His destination was Galena; but traveling from Chicago to that city, it is chronicled in one account, he crossed a rocky ford and was so charmed by the beauty and fertility of the spot that he decided to stay. He called his brother Germanicus, and together they laid the foundation of Midway, later known as Rockford.⁴⁸

The year was 1834. In less than three years, on May 5, 1837, the First Congregational Church of Rockford was organized with nine members. Rev. John Morrill led the congregation of German B. Potter, Israel Morrill, Richard Morrill, Minerva Potter, Elizabeth P. Morrill, Mary J. Morrill, Sophia N. Morrill and Eunice Brown. On May 19, five more members were added to the roll - Edward Cating, Charles Works, Asa Crosby, Mary Crosby and Mary Banforth. The total membership after the first year was twenty. Israel Morrill and H. B. Potter served as the First Congregational's first deacons."⁴⁹

During the first year of the church's organization, the Rock

⁴⁷Beloit College Library Archives, "Resolution for the Establishment of College," August 7, 1844.

⁴⁸Theodore Clifton, Fiftieth Anniversary of the First Congregational Church (Rockford, 1887), p. 6.

⁴⁹Church, History of Rockford, p. 87-88.

River Congregational Association was founded. It adopted the articles of faith and covenant for the church. Previously the Congregationalists had used the Watertown Presbytery confession. Now they were truly independent, for they had their own creed to rely upon. The pledge of membership at this time included a provision requiring "total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks as a beverage."⁵⁰

The issue of slavery which had presented such a formidable obstacle to the harmonious dealings of Presbyterians and Congregationalists was dealt with rather lightly in the First Church. On August 11, 1837, a resolution dealing with the question was evidently presented to the assembly, but the action was delayed. As Charles Church states it, "the resolution touching the slavery question being agitated, it was resolved that for the present the subject be postponed to receive the attention and action of the church at some future time."⁵¹ No other record upon the subject, however, has been found.

Rev. John Morrill was the first pastor of the congregation though he received no formal call to the pastorate. He came from New York as a home missionary. His brother Israel had previously settled in Rockford, probably during the time it was known as Midway. It was at Israel Morrill's home that the first services of the church were conducted. Mr. Morrill served the pastorate from May of 1837 to May of 1838. From Rockford he went to Belvidere where he helped to found and organize the Presbyterians. His church there dates from March 17, 1839. Mrs. Eunice Brown Lyon was the source of Mr. Church's informa-

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

tion concerning Mr. Morrill's calling. He helped to organize the congregation at First Church and merely assumed the pastorate for a time. The pastor's salary, it was noted by Church, was not always paid; but the ladies of the church somehow managed to secure pledges to sustain the minister. Mr. Morrill died at Pecatonica on February 16, 1874.⁵²

As the congregation increased, the Morrill home became too small for the weekly meetings. The church was therefore moved to the barn of Daniel S. Haight. The barn was a stage barn near State and Third Streets on the east side of the river and served forty-three members. It was somewhat inconvenient, however, for "those who lived on the west side of the river were ferried across in a small boat."⁵³ The summer of 1838 saw definite progress towards alleviating the situation - the beginnings of a frame near North First were built by the trustees. After the shingling and enclosing were finished, it was learned that Germanicus Kent and a man named Brinkerhoff had secured \$800 from New York "friends"⁵⁴ for the same purpose. But, "instead of turning the money over to the society to complete the church, these gentlemen built an edifice on their own side of the river."⁵⁵ This building, when completed in the summer of 1838, was turned over to the First Church and served the congregation from 1838-1845. Later it served the Second Congregational Church from 1849-1858. The other building erected by the

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³First Congregational Church Manual - 1837-1890 (Rockford, 1890), p. 6.

⁵⁴The "friends" were the American Home Missionary Society.

⁵⁵Church, History of Rockford, p. 88. Church refers to the west side of the river.

trustees was never used for the church.⁵⁶

The church which Kent and Brinkerhoff built was the first church edifice in Rockford. It stood at the corner of Church and Green Streets and was built in the Doric style. (See Plate I) The front porch was especially admired for its impressiveness. The bell which sounded the Sunday services was brought by Rev. Cyrus Watson, second pastor of the First Church. Mr. Watson took the bell with him when he left the pastorate. The church had two doors which entered into the main sanctuary with two aisles extending the length of the church from each, thus four rows of pews were built. A "singer's gallery" was formed by raised pews at one end of the church. "This structure was plain but neat and substantial and its pure white exterior with a background of oak trees in the surrounding forest, made it beautiful for situation and the joy of its friends."⁵⁷

The second year of the church's history was an important one in terms of growth and outreach. The First Congregational Church moved into the world through the establishment of the Ladies' Foreign Missionary Society in 1838. Their resolution was stated as follows,

In view of the deplorable conditions of millions in this and foreign lands, who are destitute of the word of life and esteeming it a duty and privilege to aid by prayer, contributions, and influence the great work of evangelizing the world, we, the ladies of Rockford, feeling that united influence is by far the most powerful agree to form ourselves into a society for the promotion of this object.⁵⁸

The ladies were successful, for they list some sixty-three contributors the first year. Episcopalians, Baptists and Unitarians added their efforts to

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

the ladies', and the whole undertaking was a success. May of 1838 saw a sizeable appropriation made to a girls' school in Dindigul, India.⁵⁹

The church to which Cyrus L. Watson accepted the call in November of 1838 was indeed a growing and prosperous one. The movement to establish a Sunday School program was being undertaken and came to fruition in the Spring of 1839. The pastor, who was characterized by a generally genial manner, was remembered as a rather elderly man when he accepted the placement. He served the First Church until May of 1841.⁶⁰

Succeeding Mr. Watson was William S. Curtis who served the congregation only a short time from November of 1841 to August of 1842. Later in his life Mr. Curtis assumed the pastorate of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Rockford which had been established from the First Congregational Church. He served that church approximately six years.⁶¹

Oliver W. Norton served the pastorate for a very short time from September of 1842 to some time in 1843.⁶² Like Cyrus Watson, Mr. Norton provided a bell for the church, but it left when he left. He was a minister of the "old school."⁶³ Following his service, a call was extended to Lansing Porter in February of 1844. Mr. Porter came from Buffalo with his young wife. He had been educated at Hamilton and Wesleyan and took his seminary courses at Yale. His post graduate work

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 91-92.

⁶⁰ Clifton, Fiftieth Anniversary, p. 12.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The exact month was not quoted in any of the references which were available.

⁶³ Church, History of Rockford, p. 90.

was done at Auburn. He came west to Chicago, but "hearing about Rockford, he made his way hither."⁶⁴ The First Church was his first pastorate. In the Spring of 1846, at the close of Mr. Porter's pastorate, the church at South First and Walnut on the east side of the river became the growing congregation's new home.⁶⁵ (No picture of this building remains.) The church had been dedicated April 4, 1845.⁶⁶ The building was a brick structure estimated at \$8,000 and seated 350 members. The choir gallery was overhead. The church itself served the congregation until 1870.⁶⁷

Soon after the congregation moved into their new home, W. A. Dickerman, an influential and active member of the congregation, went to New York for the purpose of purchasing a bell for the church. He acquired a 640-pound Meneely bell; and when it arrived in Rockford, the entire town turned out to welcome it.⁶⁸

When Mr. Porter left the congregation and Rockford in 1846, a call was extended to Lewis H. Loss in August of that year. Mr. Loss was a fine and well-educated minister, and during his pastorate many important changes were made in the congregation and the church. A pipe organ was added to the service. It was built by H. H. Silsley and his brother; and the first organist was Rufus Hatch, a dry goods merchant.

⁶⁴Fifty Years of History and Manual of the Second Congregational Church - 1849-1899 (Rockford, 1900), p. 75.

⁶⁵Church, History of Rockford, p. 91.

⁶⁶"Church Starts," Rockford Morning Star, April 9/10, 1964, n.p. (Hereafter n.p. used in reference to a newspaper article will mean no page number given.)

⁶⁷Church, History of Rockford, p. 91.

⁶⁸Ibid.

It was also during Mr. Loss' service to the church that the Second Congregational Church was formed. In the autumn of 1849, forty-seven members of the First Church resolved,

We, whose names are underwritten, believing we shall be serving the cause of Christ by doing so, propose to form ourselves . . . into a Congregational Church to be styled the Second Congregational Church of Rockford.⁶⁹

The reason Charles Church gives for the separation is "none other than the one stated. A vacant church building and a growing population on the west side seemed to justify a separation."⁷⁰ However, after further investigation, it was discovered that some animosity existed concerning the split. Mr. Loss was dismissed from the First Church soon after the separation. In an address in August of 1870, Henry M. Goodwin, pastor of the First Church, reflected, "when I first came to Rockford [extreme] jealousy existed. The two sides of the river were in fact rival encampments." The division was evidently deemed necessary but was thought by many to be premature.⁷¹ Lansing Porter recalled a "very graceful act of the charter members of the new church." Seeing that withdrawal of so many would seriously hamper the First Congregational and its activities, many of the advocates of the split, "renewed their subscription to the old church, for the full amount for the year."⁷²

After Mr. Loss' abrupt dismissal at which time he went to Joliet to serve another church, Rev. Joseph Emerson assumed the pulpit of First Church in November of 1849 to serve in the interim between Mr.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 306.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Henry M. Goodwin, Commemorative Discourse (Rockford, 1870), p. 7.

⁷²Fifty Years of History, p. 76.

Loss and Henry M. Goodwin. Mr. Emerson was from Beloit College.⁷³

During his stay in Rockford, Mr. Emerson apparently was offered an agency in the West from the American Home Missionary Society through its secretary Milton Badger. His reply is found in the Chicago Theological Seminary files. Mr. Emerson regretted to refuse the appointment, but he felt he could not leave his congregation because he didn't want to divert them from commencing what he termed to be a "revival in religion." The state of his wife's health prevented his acceptance as well. It seems she was dying of consumption and was not expected to live through the winter. His own health would not have permitted the strenuous trip to the post either. He recommended a Mr. Hammond from Grand Rapids whom he described as the "right cut for an agent."⁷⁴

Following the service of Mr. Emerson, Dr. Henry M. Goodwin received the call in August of 1850. He was from Hartford, Connecticut, a graduate of Yale. Rockford was his first parish. A letter written by Dr. Goodwin in 1857 described a Rev. Isaac Russell; his description provides an insight into his own generous and liberal attitude. In Dr. Goodwin's words, "I esteem him very highly as a man, a gentleman, a friend, a Christian and a minister of Jesus Christ." Goodwin supported Russell in his dismissal from the Associate Reform Presbyterian Church. It seems some vague insinuation caused support to be withdrawn from Mr. Russell. The trouble was caused by an "old Scotch gentleman who kept a grocery not altogether dry." He was evidently angered because Russell married the daughter of another man. The letter of description was

⁷³Goodwin, Commemorative Discourse, p. 7.

⁷⁴Letter, Joseph Emerson to Milton Badger, November 17, 1856, Chicago Theological Seminary, A.H.M.S. letter file.

addressed to Rev. J. Guerney and dated December 14, 1857.⁷⁵ A subsequent letter written in 1858 revealed that a commission which had been the reason for Mr. Guerney's inquiry was awarded to Mr. Russell. Mr. Goodwin wrote the second letter because there was no money coming to Mr. Russell who could not and would not ask his congregation for funds. Mr. Goodwin presented a good case for Mr. Russell and ended his letter by requesting that Russell be the first to receive support from the Missionary Society.⁷⁶

Mr. Goodwin admitted in his memorial address that his acceptance of the pastorate of the First Church was a difficult decision to make. For example, he remarked, "it required a boldness amounting to audacity for me to exchange pulpits with the minister of the West Side Church⁷⁷ who had formerly been the minister of this church before the division, and who in addition to the provocation given to some by the manner of his leaving had the presumption a year or two later to accept a call from the Second Congregational Church."⁷⁸

Mr. Goodwin was a bit ahead of his time for the church. He believed in a liberal approach to religion and invited Unitarian ministers to participate in revival services planned by the First Congregational Church, a move not at all appreciated by the congregation.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Letter, Henry M. Goodwin to Rev. J. Guerney, December 14, 1857, Chicago Theological Seminary, Archives, A.H.M.S. letter file.

⁷⁶ Letter, Henry M. Goodwin to Rev. J. Guerney, April 20, 1858, Chicago Theological Seminary, Archives, A.H.M.S. letter file.

⁷⁷ Goodwin is probably referring to Lansing Porter who left First Congregational Church in 1846 and returned to Second Congregational as its first pastor in 1849.

⁷⁸ Goodwin, Commemorative Discourse, p. 7.

⁷⁹ C. Hal Nelson, ed., Sinnissippi Saga (Mendota, Illinois: Wayside Press, 1968), p. 215.

On the occasion, Mr. Church relates, "The censure thus incurred was not measured or unspoken." But Mr. Goodwin merely quieted the indignant members with a poem "Abou Ben Adhem." When he had finished, says Church, "the moral was obvious, and the silence that followed his recital was of that quality that could be felt."⁸⁰ Dr. Goodwin sponsored all charitable causes. During his pastorate, the Lincoln Missionary Sunday School was established in 1867. It was designated to benefit the Negro population independently of the church.⁸¹

Mrs. E. P. Catlin reminisced for Charles A. Church about the young people during Mr. Goodwin's pastorate. "The social life of the church was a very sedate and discreet quality in those days . . . In comparing this with the present⁸² nothing is more marked than the absence of young people in the church membership as well as in its relations."⁸³

In December of 1855, fourteen⁸⁴ members of the congregation took letters of transfer to form the Westminster Presbyterian Church. Originally the church was called Second Presbyterian, but the name was changed to Westminster to avoid confusion.⁸⁵

Near the close of Mr. Goodwin's ministry in 1870, the First

⁸⁰ Church, History of Rockford, p. 95.

⁸¹ First Congregational Church Manual, p. 8.

⁸² Mrs. Catlin is referring to the period about 1900.

⁸³ Church, History of Rockford, p. 94.

⁸⁴ Fourteen is the number related to the formation of the church as dated December 30, 1855, by Clifton, Fiftieth Anniversary, p. 6. Twenty-two is the number related if the date January 3, 1856, is used as given in "Church Merger is Under Way," Rockford Morning Star, May 17, 1917, n.p.

⁸⁵ "Church Merger is Under Way," n.p.

Church erected a massive \$60,000 Gothic church at Kishwaukee and Third Streets. (See Plate II) Today the building serves the Fraternal Order of Masons.⁸⁶ Mr. Goodwin ended his pastorate in January of 1872, a service of twenty-two years. Though his death in 1893 came in Massachusetts, his body was brought to Rockford for burial in Cedar Bluff Cemetery. Rev. Wilder Smith succeeded him and served First Congregational from July of 1872 to October of 1883.⁸⁷ Little is recorded of the pastorate of Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith was succeeded by Rev. Theodore Clifton in July of 1884. It is from Mr. Clifton that we receive an interesting picture of the state of Rockford and Illinois at this time. Mr. Clifton begins his address on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the First Congregational Church with these words,

To note the progress of state and nation is impossible, the machinery invented, the discoveries made, the schools established, the population multiplied. The nation has grown in this time from mere childhood to a wonderfully vigorous young manhood and has become a very giant in strength and stature. The state has sprung from almost nothing but prairie and woodland to be one of the very first in the union.⁸⁸

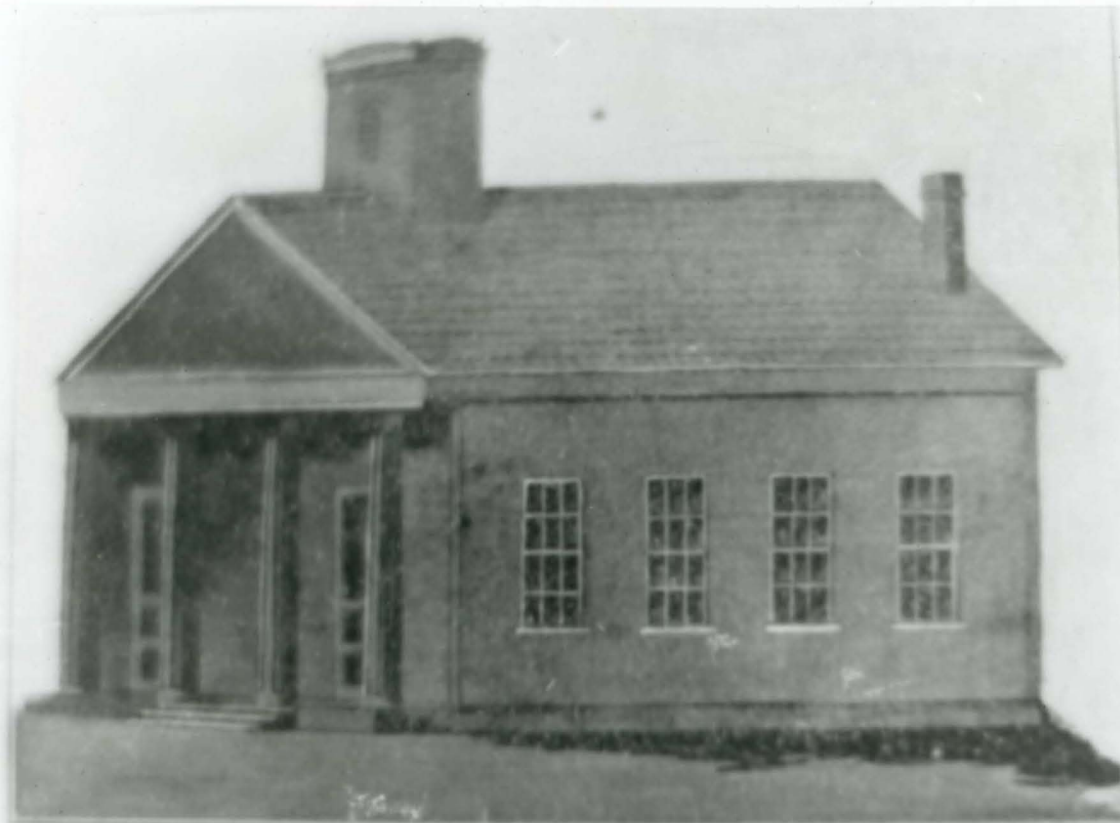
Mr. Clifton served the congregation until January of 1888. During this time, the Second Congregational Church was growing and expanding. Evidently the discontent had passed, for Mr. Clifton reflected, "suffice it to say that mothers and daughters live together in harmony and peace. Whatever may have been the little differences in the early days, time is a great healer and the Grace of God works wonders."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Nelson, Sinnissippi Saga, p. 218.

⁸⁷ Church, History of Rockford, p. 96.

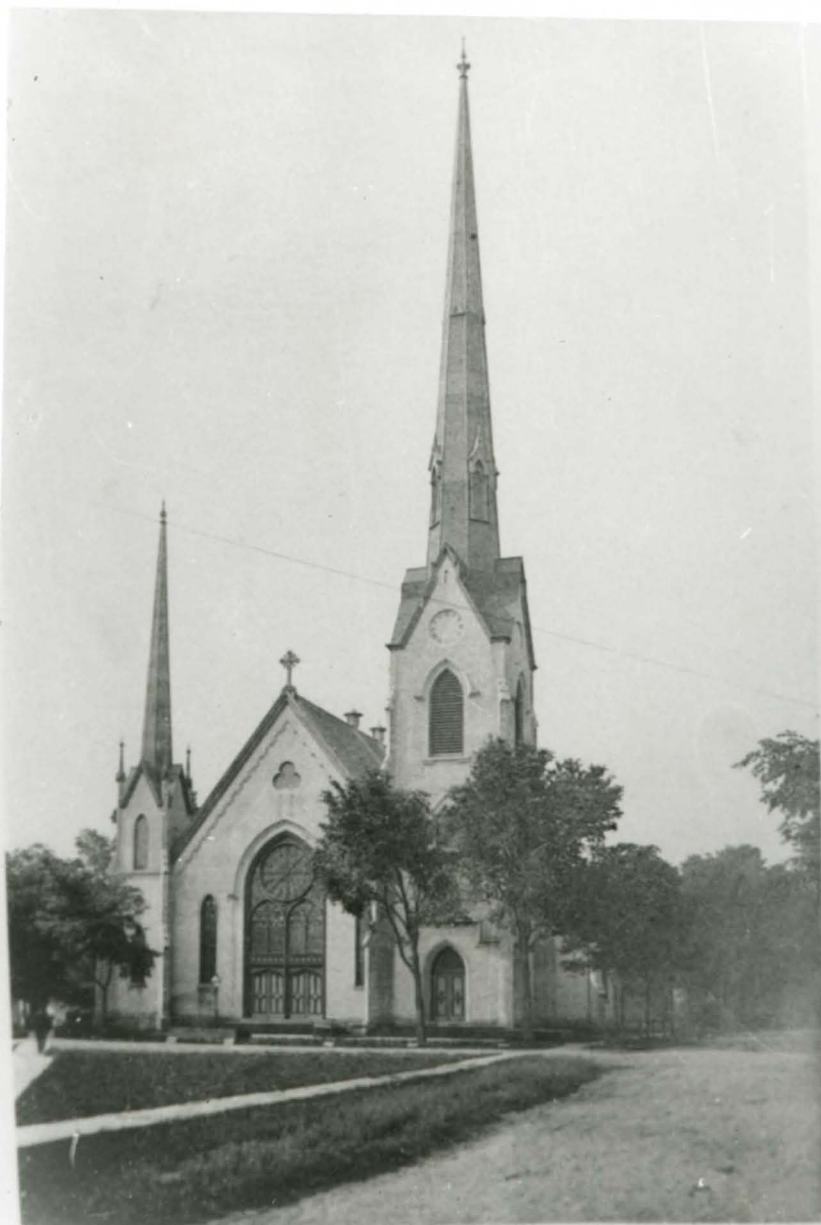
⁸⁸ Clifton, Fiftieth Anniversary, p. 55.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 10.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

First Congregational Church
1838-1845
Plate I
Second Congregational Church
1849-1858



First Congregational Church
1870-1917
Plate II

The forty-seven members who separated themselves earlier from the First Congregational Church had held their organizational meeting in a schoolhouse on October 30, 1849. They appointed a committee of three to work out the articles of faith, covenant and rules of government to be formally presented at a later meeting. The committee consisted of Benjamin A. Rose, Dexter G. Clark and Thomas D. Robertson. Lansing Porter, first pastor of the Second Church presided at all meetings. On November 7, 1849, Thomas D. Robertson presented the committee of three's reports on the articles of faith, covenant and rules of government. The Congregational Creed is composed of nine articles. Following are three of the articles as adopted and phrased by the members of the Second Congregational Church.⁹⁰

Concerning the Fall of Man - Article IV

We believe that our first parents were created holy; that they fell from that state of holiness by transgressing a divine command and that in consequence of their apostasy, all men, unless redeemed by the Holy Ghost are enemies of God and under the curse of the divine law.

Concerning Atonement - Article V

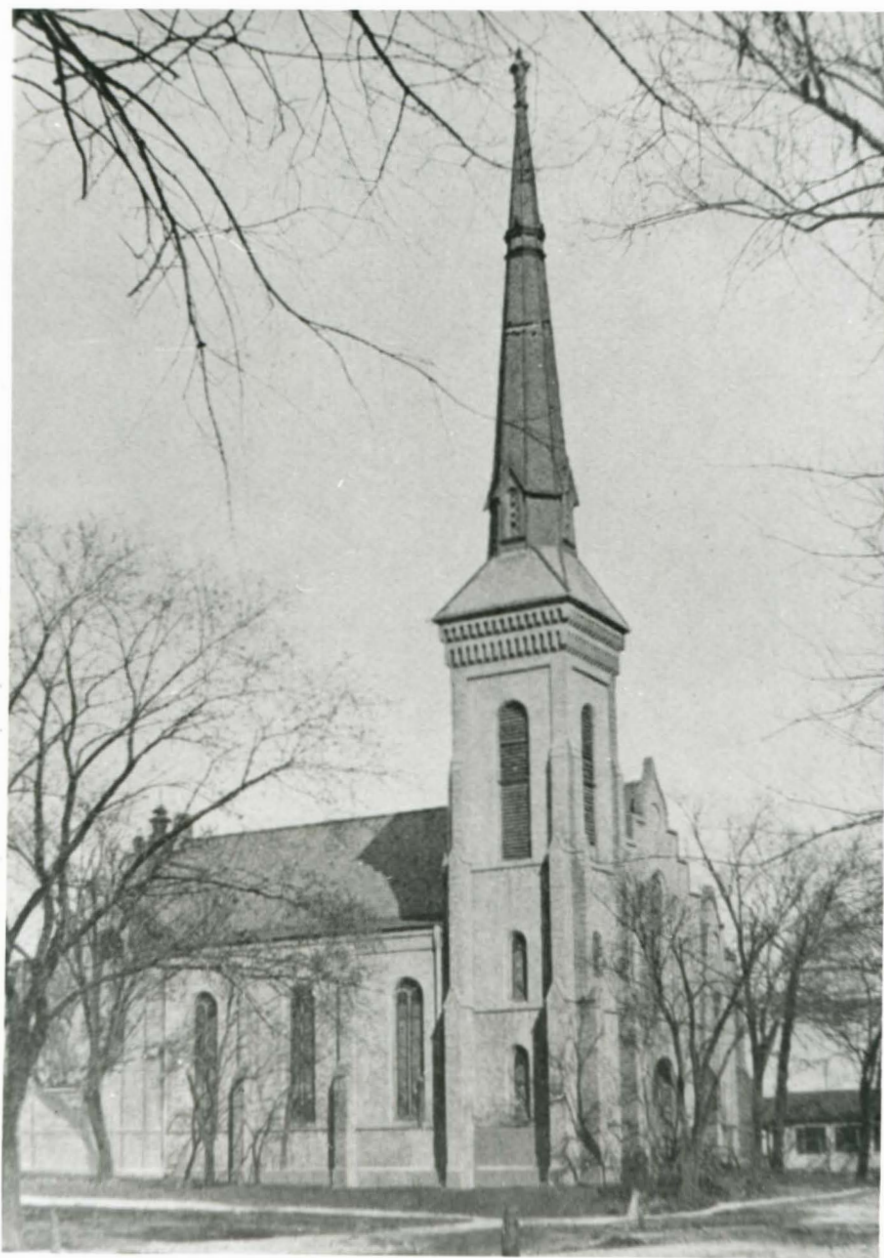
Christ, our mediator, is truly God and truly man, and by his suffering and death on the cross, he atoned for the sins of the world, so that the offer of salvation is sincerely made to all men and all who repent and believe in him will be pardoned and saved.

Concerning Eschatology - Article IX

We believe that Jesus Christ will appear at the end of time to raise the dead and judge the world; that the righteous will be received into life eternal, and the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment.

The meetings continued and the organization of the church was made public on November 14, 1849. The Congregational Council of Illinois

⁹⁰ Church, History of Rockford, p. 307.



Second Congregational Church
1858-1892
plate III

declared the Second Congregational Church to be organized in 1849. It received members by letters of dismissal from the First Church rather than letters of transfer.⁹¹ As the West Side increased in population, the Second Church's congregation moved into the abandoned edifice at Church and Green Streets, which had so well served the First Church before them.⁹² (See Plate I)

Lansing Porter was the first pastor of the church though he received no formal call. He served the congregation from November of 1849 to 1853. He had returned to Rockford to help "nourish the infant West Side organization when it was deemed that better work could be done by two Congregational Churches, one on each side of the river."⁹³ Mr. Porter's pastorate was a "period of formation and organization."⁹⁴ In a letter to Mr. William Taft years after his service, Rev. Porter wrote, "I am pardonably proud of the Second Congregational Church of Rockford . . . Fifty years ago, in the enthusiasm of early manhood, with uplifted hands and with unfaltering faith, I evoked the blessing of the Great Head of the Church upon the united and consecrated little band that brought it into being."⁹⁵

In 1851 the Second Church had outgrown its home, but rather than build an entirely new building, the congregation voted to make an addition to the church. Once completed, it served the purpose seven years. In the meantime, a larger structure was planned. The location

⁹¹Perhaps this detail implies the animosity between the churches at this date.

⁹²Church, History of Rockford, p. 308.

⁹³Fifty Years of History, p. 75.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 77.

of the church was the subject of some controversy. Many of the church members felt that a spot north of State Street would be ideal. This location would have placed the church somewhere in the present heart of Rockford. In 1855 a vote of 11 to 2 of the board, however, resulted in the decision to build on the corner of South Church at Chestnut,⁹⁶ a little to the south of the city.⁹⁷ The contract for the building of the church was awarded to James Keyt of Ohio for a very precise sum - \$23, 478.78. The architects were Renwick and Auchmetz of New York. In the autumn of 1858 the building was completed on a lot purchased from H. L. Rood for \$3,000.⁹⁸ (See Plate III)

During the time of the planning and preparation for a new church building, a change in the pastorate was made. When Mr. Porter left in 1853, the church was without a pastor for a year. In December a day of fasting and prayer was set aside by the congregation "that the Divine guidance may be given in any steps that may be taken in relation to the calling of a pastor."⁹⁹ Two weeks later, the church extended a call to Rev. Joseph Emerson, former pastor of the First Congregational Church. Mr. Emerson was a graduate of Yale in 1839 and the Andover Seminary in 1835.¹⁰⁰ He had in his early years been associated with the

⁹⁶ It is of special interest to me personally that the location of the second edifice of the church should have been South Church at Chestnut, for my grandfather's business has been located at that site for some fifty years, since 1910.

⁹⁷ Diamond Jubilee - Second Congregational Church and Society (Rockford, 1924), p. 28.

⁹⁸ Church, History of Rockford, p. 310.

⁹⁹ Fifty Years of History, p. 77.

¹⁰⁰ Church, History of Rockford, p. 310.

Western College Society.¹⁰¹ He served part of his five-year pastorate in the new South Church Street building after his installation in 1854.¹⁰²

The building did not progress as rapidly as was hoped. Money was tight, and many of the members of the congregation took it upon themselves to mortgage private property to provide money for the endeavor.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the building was interrupted in 1857 by a panic which sent Rockford merchants into a frenzy. In spite of conditions, the building committee secured a sizeable loan of \$6,000 from a man in New Jersey, again on the personal mortgages of land owned by them.¹⁰⁴ The building was completed in 1858 and was dedicated on December 2 of that year. The congregation continued to use it until the Spring of 1892, a service of thirty-four years.¹⁰⁵

Along with the completion of the church and the subsequent change in church homes came the extension of a new call to Rev. Jeremiah Walton in 1859. He was from the Williams College and Hartford Seminary and came to Rockford from Troy, New York. He served the church until 1863 with a "theology of the heart, rather than the dry teachings of theological schools."¹⁰⁶ When he left his post, he was sought out by bishops of the Episcopal Church who eventually "induced him to take orders as a priest."¹⁰⁷ The War Between the States began during Mr. Walton's

¹⁰¹ Fifty Years of History, p. 77.

¹⁰² Diamond Jubilee, p. 31.

¹⁰³ Church, History of Rockford, p. 311.

¹⁰⁴ Diamond Jubilee, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Church, History of Rockford, p. 311.

¹⁰⁶ Fifty Years of History, p. 78.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 79.

pastorate, and it is recalled that "the church was a rallying point when the first company was mustered into the service. They marched into the church to the sound of the drum."¹⁰⁸

In 1863 a new pipe organ was purchased for the use of the congregation. The price was somewhere around \$2500.¹⁰⁹ A slight problem arose in the church when the organ was purchased. It was located at the east end of the building, opposite the pulpit. When the congregation rose to sing, they were forced to "turn [their] backs to the minister to praise the Lord." It then became necessary to change the location of the organ to the west end of the church incurring an additional expense of \$1,000.¹¹⁰ The fifties had been years of tremendous growth for the Second Congregational Church. Figures placed new members entering at a rate of about twenty a year. When the decade ended, 190 members had been added to the roll.¹¹¹

The history of the First Congregational Church becomes rather difficult to follow at this point. The accounts of the rapidly growing Second Church overshadow the activities of the First Church. To recap briefly, Henry M. Goodwin was serving the congregation from 1850 to 1872. His pastorate was succeeded by Rev. Wilder Smith. Theodore Clifton followed Mr. Smith. In 1888 William W. Leete succeeded Mr. Clifton. It was Mr. Leete who delivered the dedication sermon of the Second Church's third building.¹¹² There is little factual information existing on the remain-

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰⁹ Church History of Rockford, p. 312.

¹¹⁰ Fifty Years of History, pp. 772.

¹¹¹ Church History of Rockford, p. 310.

¹¹² Diamond Jubilee, p. 30.

ing ministers. Only their names have survived; Frederick Bodman who sent greetings from First Congregational Church on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Second Church,¹¹³ Frank M. Sheldon, Thomas Barney Thompson, A. R. Fiske and Earl J. Sellard.¹¹⁴

The Second Congregational Church continued to thrive in Rockford. Following the pastorate of Jeremiah Walton, Rev. M. P. Kinney became the pastor of Second Church in 1864.¹¹⁵ A letter written by Mr. Kinney to the American Home Missionary Society and dated November 7, 1864, requested that his address be changed from Janesville to Rockford.¹¹⁶ Mr. Kinney remained with the church until 1870. Mr. Ralph Emerson spoke of the last year of Mr. Kinney's service as the "golden year."¹¹⁷ Mr. Kinney was a revivalist and his pastorate "was distinguished by the most aggressive evangelical work." It is reported that large numbers were brought into the church during his service. Mr. Kinney's "high pressure" technique in the pulpit took its toll on him physically. But when it was known that he only had a few months to live, he did not give up. He relinquished some of his duties to associates and slowed his pace. In June of 1870, he tendered his resignation. He then moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin, knowing that he hadn't long to live. Time proved the medical prediction correct, but Mr. Kinney "died . . . in the pulpit."¹¹⁸

¹¹³Fifty Years of History, p. 51.

¹¹⁴"Congregational Church has Longest Activity," Rockford Morning Star, July 15, 1928, n.p.

¹¹⁵Fifty Years of History, p. 64.

¹¹⁶Letter, M. P. Kinney to A.H.M.S., November 7, 1864, Chicago Theological Seminary, Archives, A.H.M.S. letter file.

¹¹⁷Fifty Years of History, p. 64.

¹¹⁸Ibid, p. 79.

Mr. Kinney was succeeded by Dr. Frank P. Woodbury of Beverly, Massachusetts. He had been schooled at Williams College, Union Theological Seminary and Andover. Dr. Woodbury originated the observation of Children's Day in the church. It is now celebrated yearly at the time of Confirmation by churches the world over. Dr. Woodbury is remembered as "more than anything else, tactful."¹¹⁹ He served the Rockford Board of Education and Rockford College. When he left Rockford, he assumed a pastorate in Minnesota for two years, but then accepted the secretariat of the American Home Missionary Association in New York.¹²⁰

In 1879 the year-end report of the church showed that the organization would soon be entirely free from debt through the generous support of the congregation. The report further showed that collections from organizations of the church to the present date for missions, poor and miscellaneous projects totalled \$32, 855. The Sunday School had seven teachers and fifty students. According to W. A. Dickerman, the church maintained a choir at all times even though accompaniment was sometimes only a tuning fork "excepting when B. Houghton came down with his bass viol."¹²¹

During Dr. Woodbury's service to Second Congregational, repairs were made on the church at a cost of \$12,000. In 1885 a memorial building was dedicated at the rear of the church for the permanent use of the Sunday School. A tablet commemorating the dedication of a similar room in the third building to Fanny Talcott, infant daughter of

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 80.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 81.

¹²¹"Anniversary Services," Rockford Morning Star, October, 1879, n.p.

Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Talcott, survived the disastrous fire of 1894.¹²²

In May of 1885, the First Congregational Church was the site of the first meeting of the Illinois Women's Home Missionary Society. At the first meeting, Miss Anna P. Sill, founder of the Rockford Female Seminary, was Rockford's representative. She was elected to the executive committee at the time.¹²³ Miss Sill had been a very busy woman in the years preceding the meeting. Her work in education formed the nucleus for the Rockford Female Seminary, the school envisioned earlier by Theron Baldwin and the friends of education. The founding convention of August of 1844 was attended by many distinguished gentlemen from Rockford, Illinois. Members of First Congregational Church, the delegates included J. B. Potter, E. H. Potter, A. Thomas, P. B. Johnson, Jaeson Marsh, V. A. Marsh, C. S. Horseman, A. S. Miller. Aratus Kent was the chairman of the convention.¹²⁴ The convention of October of that year was attended by Lansing Porter, pastor of the First Church, and Aratus Kent then of Galena. The resolutions to make known the proposal of a college and a seminary already discussed¹²⁵ were adopted at the August meeting. The conventions took place at the First Congregational Church, Beloit, Wisconsin.¹²⁶

The May 27, 1845, meeting of the "friends of education" was attended by Lansing Porter and C. Foster from Rockford. At that meeting

¹²²Diamond Jubilee, p. 28.

¹²³Mrs. J. A. Dixon, "Illinois Women's Home Missionary Union," Homeland Tidings, (September, 1910), n.p.

¹²⁴Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of Founding Conventions," August, 1844.

¹²⁵See pages 11-12.

¹²⁶Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of Founding Conventions," October, 1844.

it was resolved that

The exigencies of Northern Illinois and Wisconsin require that there be a college and a Female Seminary of the highest order located in this region, one to be located in Northern Illinois contiguous to Wisconsin and the other in Wisconsin contiguous to Illinois.¹²⁷

This resolution was most likely made to restate the aim of the group and to put forth their united purpose clearly after the seven-month separation. The convention of October of 1844 was thought to have been ready to adopt a resolution concerning the location of the college and seminary as has been evidenced in the resolutions of that convention. Discussion developed, however, and the decision was set aside.¹²⁸ In October of 1845, the Rockford delegate was again Mr. Porter of First Church, and the name of Aratus Kent was recognized from Galena. The minutes of that meeting reveal that the "convention then proceeded to the consideration of said report on a motion to locate said seminary at Rockford." The report was laid aside, however, and a Board of Trustees was appointed to take up the matter of the location of the Seminary. The business of establishing a charter was referred to them as well.¹²⁹

The Board of Trustees served the interests of both colleges. The sixteen trustees included Flavel Bascom of Chicago, Aratus Kent of Galena who was elected President, E. H. Potter from First Congregational Church in Rockford. The Board lost no time in making preparations for establishing the colleges. The Minutes of the Board dated October 23, 1845,

¹²⁷ Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of Founding Conventions," May 27, 1845.

¹²⁸ Mrs. Robert K. Richardson, interview at Beloit College Library Archives, Beloit, Wisconsin, November 29, 1968.

¹²⁹ Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of Founding Conventions," October, 1845.

contained an adjournment to meet in Rockford.¹³⁰ The meeting of November 18, 1845, saw a proposal presented by Jaeson Marsh from the citizens of Rockford to have the Seminary located in that city. Familiar names attached to the proposal were E. H. Potter, Daniel Haight and Jaeson Marsh, all of the First Congregational Church. Pecatonica, Illinois, was also suggested as a possible site. When the vote was taken, however, Rockford received eight ballots, and Pecatonica received only two.¹³¹

The following day another meeting of the Trustees was held. At that time, the following proposal was presented,

The undersigned hereby pledge to the trustees of the Female Seminary connected with Beloit College, the sum of \$3500 to be appropriated to the erection of a building . . .¹³²

The charter of the college was issued in February, 1847.¹³³ The minutes of the Waterbury meeting of October, 1847, revealed that no progress had been made toward the establishment of the college. "The fact was that a series of untoward events transpired at Rockford . . . the repeated destruction of the hydraulic works of the town which resulted in the crippling of its improvements." This unfortunate situation prompted proposals from other cities for the location of the Seminary. Rockford came through with a proposal of its own to the extent of \$6215. The sum was made possible by the mortgaging of the homes of C. H. Spafford, E. H. Potter and

¹³⁰ Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of the Board of Trustees," October 23, 1845.

¹³¹ Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of the Board of Trustees," November 18, 1845.

¹³² Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of the Board of Trustees," November 19, 1845.

¹³³ Nelson, Sinnissippi Saga, p. 186.

Dr. Lucius Clark.¹³⁴

The executive committee of the Board of Trustees was authorized to "recognize the school already established in this place¹³⁵ under the charge of Miss Sill . . ." From that point, the school developed through the persevering efforts of E. Hubble Potter and Miss Sill. It opened its doors to female students in 1852.¹³⁶ Rev. Aratus Kent, the man who had been responsible for the very foundation of Rockford, served as chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Seminary until 1869. It has been said that "no man has lived in the Northwest who has so left the impress of his life and influence on so many minds."¹³⁷ Rockford Female Seminary has now grown into a coeducational Liberal Arts College whose original buildings have given way to a new \$17 million campus.¹³⁸ The movement was a direct result of the fact that Rock River Valley settlers from New England or New York State "cherished the spiritual and intellectual values of an older culture and wished to provide their daughters as well as their sons with the opportunity for education."¹³⁹

On June 20, 1888, Dr. Walter Manning Barrows accepted the call of the Second Congregational Church. Mr. Barrows had been the secretary of the American Home Missionary Society.¹⁴⁰ On October 1, he and Mrs.

¹³⁴ Beloit College Library Archives, "Minutes of the Waterbury Conference," October 13, 1847.

¹³⁵ Rockford, Illinois.

¹³⁶ Mrs. Robert K. Richardson, interview, November 29, 1968.

¹³⁷ Horatio Newhall, "Sketch of the Life and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Aratus Kent," Galena Gazette, November 23, 1869, n.p.

¹³⁸ Nelson, Sinnissippi Saga, p. 186.

¹³⁹ Mrs. Robert K. Richardson, interview, November 29, 1968.

¹⁴⁰ Manual of Second Congregational Church - 1889 (Rockford, 1889), p. 7.

Barrows took residence in the newly purchased parsonage at 806 N. Main Street. On accepting the post, Dr. Barrows paid tribute to his predecessor and gave one of the most distinguished descriptions of the pastorate of Mr. Woodbury, "I esteem it an honor and a privilege to be the successor of such a man as Mr. Woodbury and in a church as yours, and yet it is with great diffidence that I think of following a leader so efficient and so beloved in a church so important."¹⁴¹

Dr. Barrows was presiding when the Second Congregational Church celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 1889. On that occasion, Dr. Barrows disclosed plans for the creation of a new and larger church building to meet the demands of the growing congregation. In the following week, a formal adoption of the plan was made; a sum of \$80,000 was needed. The location of the new church was decided on as South Church at Green, and the lot was purchased. After a few of the small houses were removed, construction was begun. In the cornerstone of the building was placed a copy of the Register-Gazette of the day containing a full account of the ceremonies and speeches, complete with pictures of all buildings occupied by the congregation. Other documents concerning the work and records of the church were also included. The dedication ceremonies were May 20, 1892. The major sermon was delivered by the pastor of the First Church, William Leete.¹⁴²

The joy of the new church home was relatively short-lived, for on February 20, 1894, fire broke out and gutted the building. The contents were completely destroyed, and only the stone wall partially remained. "Just how the blaze originated was never definitely settled, although the

¹⁴¹Diamond Jubilee, p. 29.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 30.

supposition has always been that it started from a defective electrical wire."¹⁴³ Speculations followed which centered around the furnace which was kept going night and day. The janitor said that the fire was low when he examined it shortly before the fire started. He remembered it because he had worried for Mrs. Chandler Starr who was practicing on the organ. He was afraid she would become chilled. Mrs. Starr left the church at approximately 12:30; the fire started about 1:00, and by 1:30 the building was destroyed. The cause was at last attributed almost conclusively to the motor of the pipe organ. It evidently became overheated, and sparks ignited the wood.¹⁴⁴

The fire was one of the most spectacular events Rockford had witnessed in its history. Firemen fought the blaze courageously, but icy weather and intense cold severely hampered their efforts. One account recalls how two spectators found a scrap of paper in the ruins. Upon examining it, they found it to be a hymn with the words,

My God, how wonderful thou art,
Thy Majesty how bright,
How beautiful Thy mercy seat
In depths of burning light.¹⁴⁵

Dr. Barrows, it was remembered by his congregation, stood in the rubble of the church and without a faint word or faltering voice said, "Brethren, let us arise and build on this spot a yet more beautiful temple to our Lord."¹⁴⁶ (See Plate IV)

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ "New Second Congregational Burns Down," Rockford Morning Star, February 20, 1894, n.p.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Fifty Years of History, p. 82.



Second Congregational Church in Flames
February 20, 1894
Plate IV

The old edifice at South Church and Chestnut, known as Central Hall, was again utilized for Sunday worship, even though other churches in Rockford offered their houses for services. The congregation lost no time in planning the reconstruction. The total expenditures of the first church on the South Church at Green location had been \$114,000. Insurance covered only \$42,000 of the cost. Still the church members were willing to put their time, energy and money into the new project. Donations were received from members of the congregation, and the Mendelssohn Club sponsored a benefit concert to raise funds. The concert was hailed a great success.¹⁴⁷ Building proceeded, and the new church was rededicated on December 2, 1895.¹⁴⁸ The new church was built on the old plan with some changes to protect more adequately against fires.¹⁴⁹ (See Plate V)

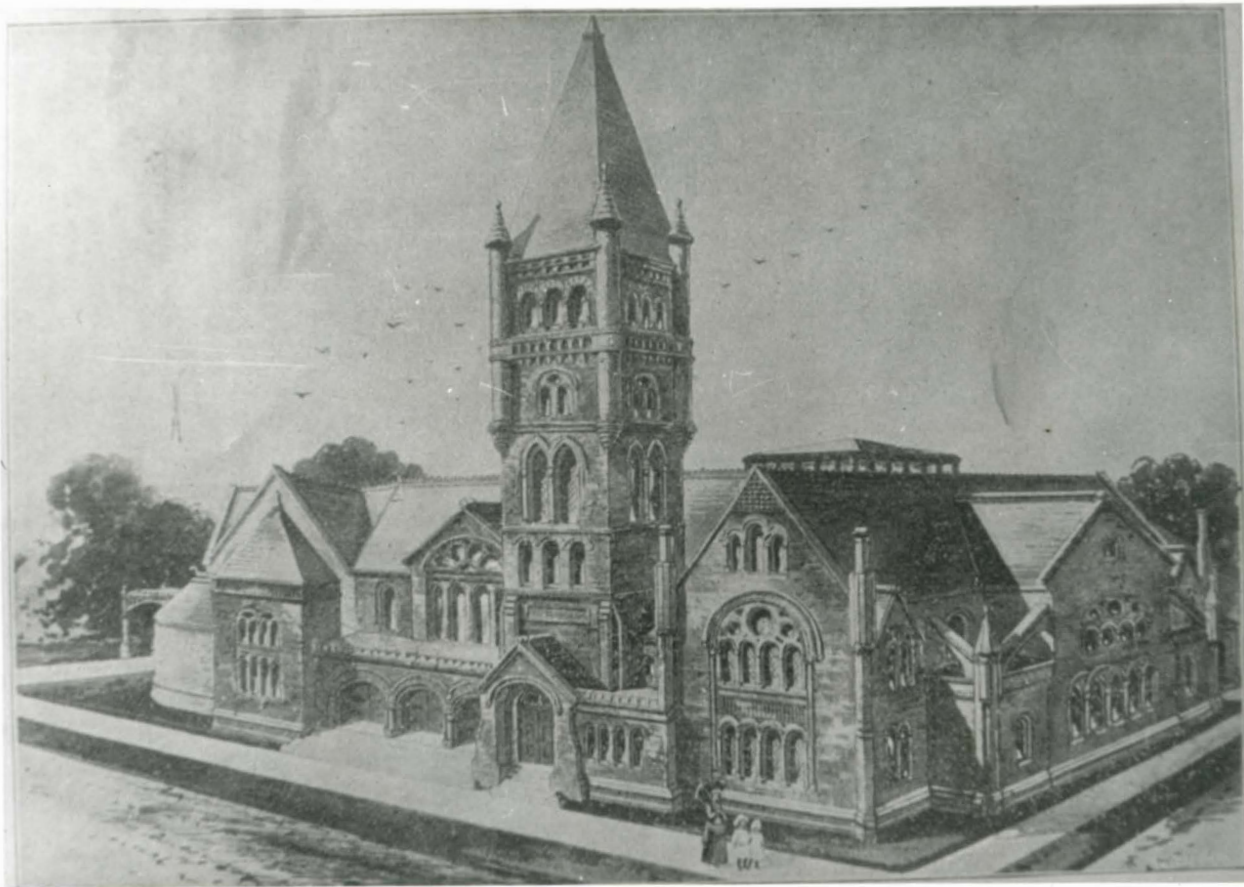
In April of 1898 Dr. Barrows resigned to take the pastorate of the Second Congregational Church of Greenwich, Connecticut. On February 20, 1899, the call was extended to Rev. W. C. Haskell. Mr. Haskell was a bachelor from Maine. Son of a Methodist minister, Mr. Haskell had put himself through college and Seminary. He spent five years with a Baptist church in Rhode Island before coming west. His first stop was Chicago, then Peoria where he served the First Congregational Church. A friend described Mr. Haskell as a man who refused "to be called liberal or orthodox . . . I consider him conservative."¹⁵⁰ The major event of his pastorate was the Fiftieth Anniversary celebration of Second Church.

¹⁴⁷ Diamond Jubilee, p. 30.

¹⁴⁸ Fifty Years of History, p. 73.

¹⁴⁹ Diamond Jubilee, p. 30.

¹⁵⁰ "Our Present Pastor," Rockford Morning Star, November, 1899, n.p.



Second Congregational Church
1895-
Plate V

J. B. Whitehead was in charge of the arrangements. There is nothing but praise for Mr. Whitehead throughout the history of the church. He never hesitated to give of himself or his resources where the church was concerned. He was described at the time of the anniversary as the man "who has rendered such efficient service and who has been a tower of strength for many years."¹⁵¹

In an anniversary report made by William Taft, the following summation was made of the preceding pastorates,

The foundation was laid deep and wide and strong by sturdy Mr. Porter; the framework of benevolence was raised and set by sagacious and charitable Joseph Emerson; windows to let in the light and cheer the souls by their beauty were set by Walton and Kinney; the organ to make melody in the heart was placed by Dr. Woodbury; the great trusses that hold the structure together and strengthen the fireproof walls, the roof that shelters and protects the whole were laid by Dr. Barrows.¹⁵²

Further, a memorial address was delivered at the anniversary in honor of the late W. M. Barrows by Dr. John Barrows.¹⁵³

Mr. Haskell did not stay in Rockford very long. In 1900 the call of the church was extended to Dr. P. Miles Snyder who remained at the church twelve years. Dr. Snyder was a man of "strong Christian character and one of the leading preachers in [the] denomination."¹⁵⁴ Dr. Snyder was from Burlington, Vermont. He not only served as a leader of Congregationalism locally, but led in the state and national organization.¹⁵⁵ During his service another rather spectacular fire occurred in

¹⁵¹Diamond Jubilee, p. 31.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁵⁵"Congregational Holds Diamond Jubilee," Rockford Morning Star, November 1, 1924, n.p.

Rockford which again affected the members of the Congregational Church. On January 13, 1906, after an existence of fifty years, the spire of the old second edifice of Second Church was destroyed. W. H. Cook, the new owner of the building at South Church and Chestnut, accidentally set the cobwebs of the bell tower ablaze with his candle as he explored his property. The spire burned three hours. In the tower on one of the beams was found the name of Louis Breasted and the date November 4, 1863.¹⁵⁶

The 1891 consensus of churches in Rockford listed three Congregational institutions in the city. The First Congregational Church was still functioning at Kishwaukee and First Avenue and was estimated at \$60,000. Its minister was W. W. Leete. Second Congregational Church was located at Church and North Streets with Walter Manning Barrows as its minister. That church, the newly built structure, was estimated at \$150,000. In addition to these two, however, the index listed a third Congregational Church. No other information was available on the name or location of the church, but the listing might have been in reference to the Baptist organization which used the building of Second Church for its services temporarily at that time.¹⁵⁷

When Mr. Snyder left Second Congregational in 1912 to take a position in East Hartford, Connecticut, he was succeeded by a man who caused Second Congregational Church to embark upon a new era in its religious history. The man was John B. Gordon, who delivered his first sermon on November 10, 1912. Dr. Gordon was a source of renewed inspiration

¹⁵⁶"Old Church Steeple Burns," Rockford Morning Star, January 13, 1906, n.p.

¹⁵⁷Eugene Browne and F. Ford Rowe, Industrial and Picturesque Rockford (Rockford, Forest City Publishing, 1891), p. 35.

for the congregation of Second Church. Early in his pastorate an important change took place in the history of First Congregational Church. An article in the morning paper of May 17, 1917, disclosed a planned merger between the First Church and Westminster Presbyterian, one of its "daughters." The account suggested that "harmony prevails in discussion." It was planned that the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian parsonage be used jointly by the two congregations. The final paragraph explained that the construction of the merger would be Presbyterian.¹⁵⁸ On May 21, Earl J. Sellard, then pastor of the First Church, preached at a joint service of the two congregations. A mid-week meeting was proposed to take formal action on the plan.¹⁵⁹ There is no further account of that merger. In an article of October 30, 1917, the church offered its building for the use of the YMCA. The church was joining, as a majority, the Second Congregational Church "making a strong Congregational body." It seems the indebtedness of the church, the mortgage on the parsonage of \$2,500 and other expenses totalling \$4,000 forced the church to take such an action. "In view of all conditions, it was thought best not to open the church again this fall, but to make this change."¹⁶⁰ It is likely that the merger between First Congregational Church and Westminster Presbyterian failed because the Congregationalists would have had to become Presbyterians.¹⁶¹ The First Church's building did not go to the YMCA; in

¹⁵⁸ "Church Merger is Under Way," n.p.

¹⁵⁹ "First Church had Two Large Services for Union Sunday," Rockford Morning Star, May 21, 1917, n.p.

¹⁶⁰ "First Church is Gift to YMCA," Rockford Morning Star, October 30, 1917, n.p.

¹⁶¹ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview at Second Congregational Church, Rockford, Illinois, June 26, 1968.

November of 1917, the Masonic Lodge purchased it and remains its owner today.¹⁶²

Dr. Gordon was sought out by the Second Congregational Church whose congregation expressed the desire to have a minister who would be "a powerful speaker, a civic-minded leader, and a moulder of opinion."¹⁶³ At Ravenswood Congregational Church in Chicago was just such a man. John Gordon was an immediate success that first morning. He spoke without notes in a powerful and dramatic voice. In his thirty-five years of service to Second Congregational, Dr. Gordon became noted as a "philosopher, civic leader and speaker."¹⁶⁴ In a little book of meditations collected by Arthur Fisher, Dr. Gordon's words are forever preserved to be treasured. The following selection is a part of that book.

Along with the gifts which are priced there are some that are priceless. A thought for someone that needs it, praise to someone who deserves it, sympathy to someone who craves it, kindness to someone whom the world has overlooked, affection to someone who is starving for it.¹⁶⁵

The Second Congregational Church grew during Dr. Gordon's pastorate from slightly over 200 members to 3500 members to be the third largest Congregational Church in the United States.¹⁶⁶

Dr. Gordon had spent four years at Ravenswood Congregational Church and four years in Grand Rapids before coming to Rockford.¹⁶⁷ Born

¹⁶²"Lodge Decides to Buy Church," Rockford Morning Star, November 16, 1917, n.p.

¹⁶³Nelson, Sinnissippi Saga, p. 230.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁶⁵"Thoughts for Everyday Living," Rockford Morning Star, reprinted in Meditation, n.d., n.p.

¹⁶⁶Nelson, Sinnissippi Saga, p. 231.

¹⁶⁷"Pastor to Recall Much of Interest in City's History," Rockford Morning Star, October 25, 1924, n.p.

in Canada,¹⁶⁸ he graduated from the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1905. The school awarded him the Doctor of Divinity degree in 1919. While in Rockford, Dr. Gordon received numerous calls to accept the pastorate of other churches. These he turned down by saying, "I have felt that my work here is not done. The church has always been appreciative and has anticipated every want of the pastor. I have the highest affection for the church and the city and like to feel that I am a permanent fixture here."¹⁶⁹ Dr. Gordon served as acting president of Rockford College during his pastorate in Rockford. He was very active in numerous civic affairs, clubs and organizations. It was recalled by Dr. Wilfred Rowell, a close friend of Dr. Gordon that, throughout his pastorate, "Dr. Gordon [was] a popular preacher to college students. He [was] a great friend and advisor to young people."¹⁷⁰

Dr. Gordon was the pastor of the church when it celebrated its Seventy-Fifth Anniversary in 1924. Several of the church's former ministers and members returned to help the congregation celebrate the day. Rev. P. Miles Snyder delivered the Anniversary sermon on November 9, 1924. Dr. Frank Woodbury and his wife were to have attended but due to medical reasons neither was able to attend. Mrs. Walter Manning Barrows returned to represent the pastorate of her late husband. Again, as with the Fiftieth Anniversary celebration, J. E. Whitehead was in charge of arrangements.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸"Second Church Pastor and His Wife," Rockford Morning Star, November 5, 1933, n.p.

¹⁶⁹"Congregational Holds Diamond Jubilee, " n.p.

¹⁷⁰" 'Farewell? I just can't say it,' Dr. Gordon Tells Congregation," Rockford Morning Star, February 3, 1947, n.p.

¹⁷¹Diamond Jubilee, p. 11.

Dr. Gordon reflected in his remarks on the anniversary, "one of the outstanding characteristics in all our history has been the spirit of unity and the bond of peace which has always bound us together, in fact I never knew a church so harmonious and so free from dissension." Dr. Gordon went on to explain the tremendous democracy of the church. Its growth had been remarkable in the twelve years he had been with the congregation. The total membership was near 1300, and the Sunday School enrollment was between five and six hundred. New developments in the work of the church were the addition of a kindergarten class during worship services, making it ~~easier~~ for parents of small children to attend services, and the Boy Scout Troup.¹⁷² Throughout the pastorate of Dr. Gordon, Second Congregational was noted for its liberal attitudes toward other churches.¹⁷³

On March 26, 1933, a life pastorate was awarded to John Gordon who had served the church for twenty-one years. A service which was "unique in the annals of Congregationalism"¹⁷⁴ was planned for November. At that time, Dr. Graham Taylor, co-founder of Hull House in Chicago, gave the charge to Dr. Gordon.¹⁷⁵ The date was November 7 and had a two-fold significance for the church. Not only was it the anniversary of Dr. Gordon's installation in the church, but it was the anniversary

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁷³ Royal Brunson Way, ed., The Rock River Valley (3 vols.; Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1926), I, 256.

¹⁷⁴ "Unique Church Tribute Paid to Dr. Gordon," Rockford Morning Star, July 19, 1933, n.p.

¹⁷⁵ "Church Leaders Here for Gordon Installation Ceremonies," Rockford Morning Star, November 11, 1933, n.p.

of the church itself.¹⁷⁶

The annual meeting of the church in 1939 reported a total membership of 2,048 and receipts of \$26,000.¹⁷⁷ By the end of 1945, the membership had increased to 2,692, and the income was \$150,000. In that same year, plans were disclosed for a new chapel which would be used for weddings, funerals and daily prayers.¹⁷⁸ In the following year Dr. Gordon asked for a co-pastor who would eventually succeed him in the church.¹⁷⁹ During his total service the basement of the church was redecorated to include Sunday School rooms. Estimated cost was \$12,000. New lighting was installed as well, and the Ladies' Aid Society redecorated the West Parlor for informal meetings.¹⁸⁰

In December of 1946, Joseph C. Cleveland was called to join Dr. Gordon at Second Congregational. Dr. Cleveland came from the Park Congregational Church in Greeley, Colorado. He is the son of a Methodist minister in Iowa and graduated from Garrett Theological Seminary and the Congregational Theological Seminary in 1932. He had been ordained in 1933 in Kansas City, Kansas. He received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Park College.¹⁸¹ Dr. Cleveland served with Dr. Gordon until February of

¹⁷⁶"Life Pastorate Here is Voted to Dr. Gordon," Rockford Morning Star, March 26, 1933, n.p.

¹⁷⁷"Second Congregational Holds Annual Meeting," Rockford Morning Star, January 13, 1939, n.p.

¹⁷⁸"Second Church to Build Chapel," Rockford Morning Star, May 14, 1945, n.p.

¹⁷⁹"Dr. Gordon Asks for Co-Pastor to be His Eventual Successor," Rockford Morning Star, February 4, 1946, n.p.

¹⁸⁰"Congregational Holds Diamond Jubilee," n.p.

¹⁸¹"Greeley, Colorado, Pastor Accepts Call to Succeed Dr. John Gordon," Rockford Morning Star, December 24, 1946, n.p.

1947, when, after thirty-four years of service to the Second Congregational Church, Dr. Gordon retired. His retirement was not the end of his career, however. Dr. Gordon used the time during his retirement to travel extensively, "many of his trips for international goodwill."¹⁸² He served twenty-five years as Director of the Congregational Theological Seminary.¹⁸³ In 1949 the chapel which he had helped to plan was dedicated in his honor.¹⁸⁴ The \$250,000 Gordon Chapel was formally dedicated in 1951. At that time Dr. Cleveland announced that the chapel "would remain open 'forever' to all comers for 'meditation, worship and prayers'."¹⁸⁵ In 1956 during surgery on a broken hip, Dr. John Gordon died.¹⁸⁶

Dr. Cleveland received his first assistant in 1949, Gene van Kranenburgh. Mr. van Kranenburgh had received his degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary the previous summer and had attended Washington University at St. Louis before that. He came to Rockford directly from Mazon, Illinois.¹⁸⁷ Mr. van Kranenburgh served the church as education and youth director. In 1950 he helped to organize a church on the North Second Street property of the church. A donor had purchased the property from the Canfield family; it had been their home. He gave it to Second Congregational which held the deed. A house to house canvas of the area had shown

¹⁸² Nelson, Sinmissippi Saga, p. 231.

¹⁸³ "Greeley, Colorado, Pastor Accepts Call to Succeed Dr. John Gordon," n.p.

¹⁸⁴ "Name Chapel for Dr. Gordon," Rockford Morning Star, November 8, 1949, n.p.

¹⁸⁵ "Pastor, Wife Given Tribute," Rockford Morning Star, January 22, 1951, n.p.

¹⁸⁶ "Local Pastor, Civic Leader is Summoned," Rockford Morning Star, January 27, 1956, n.p.

¹⁸⁷ "Pastor Joins Staff of Second Congregational Church," Rockford Morning Star, July 6, 1949, n.p.

that the need for a Sunday School in the area was great. The church eventually became known as Riverside Community Church.¹⁸⁸

In 1949 Second Congregational Church celebrated its One Hundredth Anniversary. The celebration touched off a new expansion project which included the Gordon Chapel. Administration offices, a choir room and a lecture room were all part of the new structure to be built adjacent to the church.¹⁸⁹

In 1951 an endowment of \$18,000 was made by Mrs. Julia Lathrop to the project of a Youth Center to be named Emerson Hall and dedicated to the memory of her father Ralph Waldo Emerson.¹⁹⁰ May 19, 1951, was the formal dedication of that room.¹⁹¹ A census taken in 1951 showed 3,253 members in the Second Church.¹⁹²

A new minister of education for the church was called in 1951. Rev. Melvin C. Dorsett from First Plymouth Congregational Church, Denver, Colorado, where he had served six years was the church's first official minister of education. He was extensively involved with the development of the youth program there. An ordained Congregationalist, Mr. Dorsett was educated at Southwestern University and received his theological degree at Drew and Eliff. He attended graduate school at Stanford.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

¹⁸⁹ "Congregational Church Launches Celebration," Rockford Morning Star, November 4, 1949, n.p.

¹⁹⁰ "Makes \$18,000 Gift to Church," Rockford Morning Star, February 26, 1951, n.p.

¹⁹¹ "Dedicate New Hall in Church," Rockford Morning Star, May 19, 1951, n.p.

¹⁹² "Second Church Lists 3252 as Members," Rockford Morning Star, January 12, 1951, n.p.

¹⁹³ "New Minister of Education," Rockford Morning Star, October 6, 1951, n.p.

In 1952 Rev. Oscar Bollman joined the staff succeeding Mr. Dorsett. A graduate of Depauw and Yale, Mr. Bollman came to Rockford from the Westchester Community Church, Westchester, Illinois. Preceding his service there, he had been pastor of First Congregational Church, Detroit, Michigan, and Plymouth Congregational Church, Des Moines, Iowa.¹⁹⁴ Also in 1952, a new and larger organ was purchased for the church at a cost of \$15,000.¹⁹⁵

Second Congregational, like its predecessor the First Congregational Church, takes an interest in mission work. A collection is taken twice a month expressly for the purpose of foreign missions. The church pays toward the support of Dr. Paul Nilsen in a boys' school in Turkey. In 1956 the church experienced the "mission in reverse" when the American Board brought Rev. K. J. Mills and his family from Ceylon. He served on the staff of the church in almost all capacities. His wife often took part in the ladies' societies, and his children attended Sunday School.¹⁹⁶ The reciprocation of knowledge and the general attitude of fellowship and friendship that the church membership enjoyed during Mr. Mills' stay made the undertaking most rewarding. When Mr. Mills returned to Ceylon in 1957,¹⁹⁷ he became the head of the evangelism movement there.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴"Rev. Bollman Accepts Post at Second Church," Rockford Morning Star, September 14, 1952, n.p.

¹⁹⁵"Second Cong Dedicates Organ Rebuilt at \$15,000 Cost," Rockford Morning Star, November 30, 1952, n.p.

¹⁹⁶Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

¹⁹⁷"Ceylon's First 'Missionary' Leaves Rockford for Home," Rockford Morning Star, July 12, 1957, n.p.

¹⁹⁸Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

In 1955 a new appointment was made to the staff in Rev. Myron Meckel. Mr. Meckel served the church as assistant to the minister, succeeding Gene van Kramenburg who had accepted a pastorate to the Kirk of Bonnie Brae in Denver.¹⁹⁹ Mr. Meckel was the son of a Congregational minister and received his education at Chicago Theological Seminary. Originally from St. Paul, Minnesota, Mr. Meckel attended Macalaster College before entering the Seminary. He had served congregations in Steger, Illinois, and Watertown, South Dakota, before coming to Rockford.²⁰⁰ In 1955 the parsonage at 806 N. Main which had served pastors and their families for sixty-seven years, since the time of Walter Manning Barrows, was sold; and now the large brick building has been converted into a fashionable floral and gift shop.²⁰¹

In September of 1957 Rev. Fred K. Swett from Boston was secured to set up the educational facilities of the church. He succeeded Rev. Oscar Bollman who had resigned in June of that year to accept a post in Elmhurst.²⁰² Mr. Swett was in charge of the Sunday School and Confirmation classes. He was specifically called to develop the family life program of the church. He had been educated at Clark University, Gordon College and Andover and had been serving as pastor of the Community Church, Custer, South Dakota.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview at Second Congregational Church, Rockford, Illinois, February 15, 1969.

²⁰⁰"New Pastor Assumes Duties, Continues Family Tradition," Rockford Morning Star, April 23, 1955, n.p.

²⁰¹"Parsonage to be Sold," Rockford Morning Star, May 29, 1955, n.p..

²⁰²"Rev. Bollman Resigns Post," Rockford Morning Star, June 12, 1957, n.p..

²⁰³"Rev. Fred Swett to Direct Education," Rockford Morning Star, September 7, 1957, n.p.

Two more additions were made to the staff at Second Cong in the next two years. Roderick J. Wagner was called in 1958 to minister specifically to the youth of the church. From Hagarstown, Maryland, Mr. Wagner was studying at Chicago Theological Seminary at the time. He commuted from Chicago to serve the church on weekends.²⁰⁴ Richard W. Litterst became the first minister of music of the church in 1959. Originally from Decatur, Mr. Litterst had been educated at the University of Louisville and the University of Illinois. He also graduated from Union Theological Seminary.²⁰⁵ He came directly from Omaha, Nebraska. Under Mr. Litterst the church choirs increased in size, and three completely new bell choirs have been added.

In 1957 a great undertaking was begun. The Evangelical and Reform Churches proposed a union with the Congregational - Christian Churches to be known as the United Church of Christ. The Congregational - Christian Union had been consummated in 1931.²⁰⁶ On June 26, 1934, the Reformed Church of the United States and the Evangelical Synod of North America had merged to become the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The two existed separately for a time before they merged with the Congregational - Christian Churches. The two had existed in Europe, and their histories had been "touched by German pietism that developed out of the Protestant Reformation."²⁰⁷ In America, Evangelical and Reformed Churches

²⁰⁴"New Youth Director," Rockford Morning Star, September 28, 1958, n.p.

²⁰⁵"Church Gets Minister of Music," Rockford Morning Star, September 7, 1957, n.p.

²⁰⁶Hartzell Spence, "The Congregationalists," Look XXIII (December 8, 1959), p. 89.

²⁰⁷Ben Herbst, History of the United Church of Christ, (Philadelphia: Division of Publication, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1962), p. 18.

had been strong in areas not Presbyterian in government.²⁰⁸

The history of the merger had actually begun in 1942. In the minutes of the General Council of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches of that year were reports of the successful conversations between that Church and the Congregational - Christian Churches. The path was made to the union. In 1944 the first basis for the union was prepared. Five revisions and a series of interpretations later, the plan was ready to be approved.²⁰⁹ Unsuccessful attempts were made to prevent the union, but the advocates of the move won out. The basis for dissent was a feeling on the part of many Congregationalists that a merger of this kind would be traitorous to the principles of Congregationalism.²¹⁰ The argument for the merger relied on the principle, "independence in individual concern, co-operation in common concern"²¹¹ which had marked and guided all mergers of the Church since the beginning. But, freedom and autonomy can be interpreted at will; it is a flexible principle even when applied by the church.²¹² Congregationalists have always sought a union of all churches on the basis of freedom and fellowship.²¹³ Although the church was for many years independent, it has ~~never~~ been isolated. Its history has been written by co-operation among all churches of the denomination. Its Councils meet to share and confer, not to legislate. They have never

²⁰⁸ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

²⁰⁹ Herbster, History of the United Church, p. 34.

²¹⁰ "What are the Principles of Congregationalism?" Christian Century LXVII (June 7, 1950), 695-696.

²¹¹ Jefferson, "Why I am a Congregationalist," p. 232.

²¹² "What are the Principles of Congregationalism?" p. 695.

²¹³ Jefferson, "Why I am a Congregationalist," p. 232.

handed down decisions.²¹⁴ They can make suggestions, but no church is bound to act on them.²¹⁵

Upon the declaration of union, various committees were set up to prepare a constitution and a statement of faith.²¹⁶ At Oberlin in 1959, the first draft of the constitution was presented along with a statement of faith which was not only readily adopted by the United Church but adopted by "other parts of the Christian Community"²¹⁷ as well. At the Third General Synod in Philadelphia in 1961, the constitution and bylaws were adopted, and the United Church of Christ was born. Under the construction of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches all local churches were immediately members of the United Church. But the congregationalists, in their very structure, had the choice of joining or not joining the union. In Rockford, the Second Congregational Church and all other Congregational affiliations chose to unite with the United Church of Christ.²¹⁸

In spite of the Union, the Congregational Churches of America have maintained their autonomy. The merger was one of mission boards and funds for service work, rather than government or worship. There were no policy changes made as a result of the merger.²¹⁹ The United Church has been responsible for changes in the structuring of business of the church outside of the immediate worship service. The United Church, for example,

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

²¹⁵ Rev. Frank Goodwin, "Eleventh Triennial Council," Portland, Maine, " Outlook LXIX (October 26, 1901), 493.

²¹⁶ Herbster, History of the United Church, p. 33-34.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

²¹⁸ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

has introduced a "package" of materials for Christian Education. The curriculum is consistent throughout the churches of the United Church of Christ.²²⁰ In the opinion of ministers with whom I spoke, the United Church of Christ has been a great benefit to all involved.

About the same time the United Church of Christ was taking shape nationally, changes were made in the staff of Second Congregational Church. Rev. Robert D. Bradbury, a young and personable minister, became assistant to Dr. Cleveland in 1960.²²¹ Mr. Bradbury's service to the church included much youth work. He helped to organize the youth fellowship which Mr. Meckel had started. Mr. Bradbury came from Edgebrook Community Church, Skokie, Illinois, and succeeded Rev. Myron Meckel who had left Rockford after serving the congregation five years.²²² Mr. Meckel had accepted a call from the Church of the Lighted Window, LaCanada, California,²²³ which he still serves today. When Mr. Bradbury left Rockford, he took over a congregation on the South Side of Chicago and from there went to Washington State. He now serves as assistant minister in a church in Oregon.²²⁴

In January of 1960 Rev. Richard Nielson was sent from the Illinois Conference of Congregational Churches to help establish two new churches in Rockford. The conference had decided that with the increase

²²⁰Rev. Kenneth Press, interview at Woodside Congregational Church parsonage, Rockford, Illinois, February 15, 1969.

²²¹"Church Issues Call," Rockford Morning Star, November 1, 1960, n.p.

²²²Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

²²³"Pastor Leaves to Take California Post," Rockford Morning Star, October 2, 1960, n.p.

²²⁴Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

in population in Rockford there was a growing need for a new Congregational Church. As Dr. Cleveland put it, "we are assigned to establish these two churches after a recent survey conducted by the Rockford Ministerial Association."²²⁵ Mr. Nielson was known as an organizing minister.²²⁶ There were two probable sites for the new churches available in Rockford, one on Seward Street to the Southeast of the city and one at Spring Creek and Alpine Roads on the Northeast side.²²⁷

Mr. Nielson co-ordinated a group of interested Congregationalists who lived in these areas. These men and women were interested in chartering a new church. There were to function as a steering committee. It was up to the organizing minister, such as Mr. Nielson, to make contacts with these people, meet with them, set times for worship and then organize the entire church.²²⁸

In the organization of Spring Creek Cpngregational Church, the first service of worship was held in Spring Creek School on Palm Sunday, 1960.²²⁹ Mr. Nielson was called to take the pastorate of Spring Creek Congregational in January of 1961.²³⁰ He stayed with the congregation

²²⁵"Two Churches to be Built on the East Side," Rockford Morning Star, January 22, 1960, n.p.

²²⁶Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview at Spring Creek Congregational Church, Rockford, Illinois, July 3, 1968.

²²⁷"Second Cong Church; Growing Since 1849," Rockford Morning Star, January 29, 1960, n.p.

²²⁸Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

²²⁹
Ibid.

²³⁰"Spring Creek Church Calls First Pastor," Rockford Morning Star, January 11, 1961, n.p.

until September of 1964.²³¹ Dr. Joseph Cleveland of Second Congregational delivered the sermon on the occasion of the installation.²³² When Mr. Nielson accepted the pastorate of the First Congregational Church, Elkhart, Indiana,²³³ Dr. Charles Cooley was invited to serve as interim minister. Dr. Cooley was a retired Congregational minister from the Chicago area. He had been the interim minister at Second Congregational Church and the summer pastor there while Dr. Cleveland had been on a tour of the Middle East. He took over the position of Spring Creek right after Dr. Cleveland's return. In both churches he was warmly received. His kind and gentle manner combined with timely sermons made a lasting impression on those who heard him speak.²³⁴

Spring Creek Congregational began to make plans for establishing a permanent house of worship. Funds were granted from the Illinois Conference, and loans were made from various sources. Reports were made semi-annually to the Board of Homeland Missions which was formerly the American Home Missionary Society. These reports, however, were not basic to gaining funds for the church. The land purchased for the new church was bought by the Conference and the Board which also paid Mr. Nielson's salary. The land was a five-acre tract at Spring Creek and Alpine Roads. Later an additional three and a half acres were purchased from the Greek Orthodox Church which lay to the north of the first site. As churches

²³¹Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

²³²"Installs Pastor Sunday," Rockford Morning Star, May 20, 1961, n.p.

²³³"New Pastor Called for Spring Creek," Rockford Morning Star, November 20, 1965, n.p.

²³⁴Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

become established, they need to rely less and less on the "parent organizations." In 1964 Spring Creek Congregational Church declared itself completely self-sufficient.²³⁵

The Spring Creek School served as the home base for the congregation until one hundred members had been added to the roll. On the church's first anniversary in 1961, the records showed a growth of membership from forty to 172.²³⁶ At that time, the chapel-education unit was planned.²³⁷ The \$95,000 building was dedicated in August of 1962.²³⁸ In 1964 the educational wing was approved at a cost of \$55,000.²³⁹ On April 7, 1963, the first service was conducted in the church building. At present the congregation worships in what will eventually simply be the chapel. (See Plate VI) The congregation plans to build a sanctuary when the need, growth and funds demand and allow it. The chapel seats 240 including both the congregation and the choir. The membership of the church at this time is approximately 400 of which there is an average attendance of 260. A yearly expected growth of ninety new members is offset by members moving out of the city. Very few deaths claim members because the congregation on the whole is a youthful one.²⁴⁰

In November of 1965 Spring Creek Congregational Church called

²³⁵ Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

²³⁶ "Church Marks Anniversary," Rockford Morning Star, April 8, 1961, n.p.

²³⁷ Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

²³⁸ "Dedicate New Church Here," Rockford Morning Star, May 21, 1963, n.p.

²³⁹ "Educational Wing Plan Approved," Rockford Morning Star, February 14, 1964, n.p.

²⁴⁰ Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.



Spring Creek Congregational Church
1963-
Plate VI

Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew to become its second pastor. Mr. Bartholomew came from the Community Congregational Church, New Hyde Park.²⁴¹ He had been educated at Westchester State and Temple Universities and Union Seminary.²⁴² He remains the pastor of the church today.

The choirs of Spring Creek Congregational Church date from the beginning of the church. In 1964 the church added a children's choir to the adult choir program. In 1965 two more choirs were developed - the youth and cherub choirs. About 100 persons are currently involved in the four choirs. The church school has grown too. The church has two separate church schools and two staffs, totalling approximately twenty teachers. Its enrollment is 150 to 200 students plus a nursery. The church also provides a two week summer Bible school for children. The women of the church can serve in any one of three circles.²⁴³

Spring Creek gives partial support (about \$500) to two missionaries - an agricultural missionary in India and a medical missionary in Ghana. It also supports Protestant Welfare and the Washington Park projects in Rockford. The church sponsors events rather than clubs for its members to attend. It plans no special programs, but beginning in September of 1968, many of the members became involved in a program to relieve the illiteracy problem in Rockford. A place has been provided by the Amerock Corporation where teachers and students can meet on a one-to-one relationship.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹"New Pastor Called for Spring Creek," n.p.

²⁴²"Spring Creek Congregational Church," Rockford Morning Star, March 23, 1968, n.p.

²⁴³Rev. Wilbur H. Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

²⁴⁴Ibid.

The church enters into the community in other areas as well. It supports two baseball teams, a mite team and an adult men's team. Plans have been developed to establish a Girl Scout Troup in September of 1968. Confirmation classes are held for two years, and two classes are organized simultaneously.²⁴⁵

The Congregational meeting of the church has recently approved the calling of a minister for the youth of the church. The authorization came as the result of a compromise. It was decided that the building of the sanctuary be set aside in favor of the minister who is so badly needed at this time. Ninety members attended the annual meeting, a good turnout for the size of the congregation as a whole. At most meetings there are sixty-three or sixty-four members present.²⁴⁶

The future of the church is thus secure. The plans for the coming year are increased growth and expansion as well as extension of the outreach of the congregation's program, at the same time the debt of the church is reduced. Plans are being made for the eventual building of the sanctuary.²⁴⁷

Mr. Nielson also served to establish the Woodside Congregational Church on Seward Street. The first service was Palm Sunday, 1960, in Buckbee School. The object of establishing a church at each end of Alpine Road as the planned locations allowed was based on the projected growth of Rockford. It was felt that Alpine would one day in the not too distant future be the center of Rockford. The growth of the city is

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

definitely in an easterly direction. The Spring Creek church, however, began to develop more rapidly than the Woodside Church. A combined steering committee had been organized for the convenience of the minister. The participation by members of the Spring Creek group often overshadowed the contributions of the Woodside organization. Thus the little group felt depressed in their efforts. Mr. Nielson's acceptance of the call to Spring Creek further reinforced the growing feeling of inferiority of the Woodside band. Mr. Nielson had only been with the church six months. Little substantial progress had been made.²⁴⁸

There were those in the congregation who were ready to discontinue what appeared to them a futile cause after Mr. Nielson left. There were others, however, that would not abandon the project. These voices were somehow louder, and the church decided to continue. The Congregational Conference of Illinois placed a new minister in the congregation in 1960.²⁴⁹ Rev. Robert Bond assumed the pastorate in December of 1960²⁵⁰ and served until September of 1961.²⁵¹ The congregation of thirteen or fourteen met at Buckbee School at that time.²⁵² Mr. Bond had been educated at Wayne State University and Oberlin Seminary. He cited the church's problems as "money is our biggest problem, we've tackled several projects financially over our heads, but each has proved its worth. We're now oper-

²⁴⁸Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁴⁹Ibid.

²⁵⁰"Pastor in New Job Here," Rockford Morning Star, December 3, 1960, n.p.

²⁵¹"Rev. Bond Accepts Post," Rockford Morning Star, September 9, 1961, n.p.

²⁵²"Woodside Congregational to Erect First Building," Rockford Morning Star, March 9, 1968, n.p.

ating on a nearly balanced budget."²⁵³ Not having a building of its own was the church's second problem. The congregation grew in the year of Mr. Bond's pastorate from fourteen to twenty-one members. During his service a lot on Alpine Road was purchased.²⁵⁴ Woodside Congregational received its charter in 1961, and took a vote on the calling of Mr. Bond. A three-fourths vote was necessary; Mr. Bond lacked one vote. Thus he left the church to accept a position in Lake Mills, Wisconsin.²⁵⁵

On November 30, 1961, Victor Keiser was called to the pastorate.²⁵⁶ He came from Iowa where he had been Director of Christian Education and Youth for the state for ten years. He had been educated at Nebraska Wesleyan and Chicago Theological Seminary. It was during his pastorate that the location of the church meetings was changed from Buckbee School to Jefferson Junior High.²⁵⁷ Mr. Keiser healed the wounds which had plagued the development of the church. Still the church grew slowly. Some members wanted to get a building program underway. Mr. Keiser, however, was close to retirement age and felt the job was too demanding.²⁵⁸ He moved to Downer's Grove as an associate pastor in October of 1964.²⁵⁹

When Mr. Keiser left, the church obtained the services of Mrs.

²⁵³"Woodside Pastor Assumes Duties," Rockford Morning Star, December 3, 1960, n.p.

²⁵⁴"Pastor in New Job Here," n.p.

²⁵⁵"Rev. Bond Accepts Post," n.p.

²⁵⁶Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁵⁷"New Pastor Here Sunday," Rockford Morning Star, December 2, 1961.

²⁵⁸Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁵⁹"Alice Snow Ends Term as Pastor," Rockford Morning Star, February 26, 1965, n.p.

Alice Snow, an ordained minister in her own right and wife of the pastor of Beloit Congregational Church.²⁶⁰ Mrs. Snow was originally to serve as interim minister only for the month of November, but her service extended into June of 1965. Mrs. Snow was a source of renewed life in the church. The first Sunday of her pastorate the attendance was approximately nine adults and ten children. After that week, attendance hovered around sixty through June. Again, as after the loss of Mr. Nielson, Mr. Keiser's leaving brought discussion of whether or not the church should continue. Dr. Snow came down from Beloit to help. Again, it was decided to continue the efforts.²⁶¹

In July of 1965 the church called Rev. Kenneth Press to be its permanent pastor. Mr. Press came to Rockford from a summer ministry in Grafton, Wisconsin. He had graduated from Eden's Seminary, Webster Grove, Missouri. He and his family moved into the parsonage on Seward Street.²⁶² Rockford was his first pastorate.²⁶³ At this time in the development of the church, the congregation was meeting in the Woodside Branch of the YMCA.²⁶⁴ The congregation moved into it as a result of the congregation of Our Master's Methodist church moving into their own church. The direction of the church has been directly up since the calling of Mr. Press. He described his pastorate's success as "riding on the crest Mrs.

²⁶⁰"Alice Snow Ends Term as Pastor," n.p. Again we see the link between Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin and the subsequent influence and fellowship between them.

²⁶¹Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁶²"Woodside Pulpit has New Pastor," Rockford Morning Star, July 3, 1965, n.p.

²⁶³Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁶⁴"Woodside Pulpit has New Pastor," n.p..

Snow built," There have been ups and downs, but never a thought of stopping.²⁶⁵

In the Spring of 1966 the church was not really strong enough to think of undertaking construction of a permanent building, but it was thought that it would be well to make a beginning toward such a project. The church had a membership of seventy-eight. They voted to go forward and set up a study program. They worked all summer and in the Fall of 1966, the church was organized into committees. All aspects of the church - its education, worship, administration, building - were considered. The study involved the church through the Spring of 1967. At that time a survey of the property on Alpine Road was made. A building committee was elected in the Summer of 1967. They drew up a list of architects. In the Fall of 1967 Keys and Hestrus of Oaklawn were selected. By the Spring of 1968 plans were well along.²⁶⁶ In March of 1968, when the church reached a membership of 100, ground was broken for a \$70,000 unit of South Alpine at Upland Drive. (See Plate VII) At that time no date was released for its completion.²⁶⁷

Indeed the congregation didn't know when the church would be ready for occupancy. In January of 1969 the church undertook a capital fund drive. The goal was \$20,000 over a two year period. When the Sunday arrived for the pledges, the congregation found that they had raised \$20,500 in that one day. Mr. Press calls the event one of the "high marks" in the church history, "not just because we raised the money, but because those who had thought it was just a dream were convinced. The question

²⁶⁵ Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ "Woodside Congregational to Erect First Building," n.p.



Woodside Congregational Church
Proposed Plan
plate VII

was no longer if, but when." The \$20,000 was raised through equal pledges of the congregation; there were no exceptionally large contributions. The church thus sought out bids. They had difficulty getting them in line with their price, and they ultimately had to accept one over their budget. But a gift from Second Congregational Church helped them to meet the figure.²⁶⁸

Woodside Congregational Church is now made up of 129 members. Most of the congregation are in their thirties, a youthful group as is found in Spring Creek Congregational. The congregation is about 25% of a Congregational - Christian background, 25% of an Evangelical and Reformed background and 50% of varied backgrounds. Of these, very few had a previous church affiliation in Rockford.²⁶⁹

The worship of the church is divided between Sunday School classes and services. The Sunday School is made up of nine classes and meets Sunday mornings at 9:15. The regular worship service follows at 10:30. There are presently eighty members enrolled in the Sunday School program. A choir was organized in the Fall of 1965 and currently has seventeen members.²⁷⁰

As yet the church has been unable to enter into the community as far as service projects are concerned. The United Church of Christ and the Illinois Conference continue to pay some of the expenses of the church, but the amount is decreasing yearly. This year the appropriation was \$3500 which was a \$500 decrease from last year. The church had voted to enter into the United Church of Christ at the time of its chartering in 1961.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Rev. Kenneth Press, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

Riverside Community Church has had an interesting growth since its inception in 1949-50. The property which was designated as the new church included a parsonage, a church building and a building for education which had once been a factory building and a seven-room one-family dwelling. The three buildings all line Rock River and are set on a three-acre lot worth \$25,000. The \$100,000 property lends itself to a different kind of worship service. "Instead of stained glass in the sanctuary, a Cinerama-like clear window provides worshipers with an inspirational view of the river, trees and sky."²⁷² (See Plate VIII) The worship center itself was constructed by the men of the church.²⁷³

The church was organized by Gene van Kranenburgh, associate pastor of Second Congregational Church. Mr. van Kranenburgh outlined his plan of action as, "it appears that we must get together a group of interested citizens who will act as a Christian education committee. The task of this group will be to make inquiries as to the needs of the people of this area and then set up a program to help meet these needs. The property is adapted especially to outdoor activities and we are going to set up a Christian day camp to run this summer. It is our goal that by September of 1950, a regular Sunday School will be established for the children of this area. This is the first step toward the establishment of a community church."²⁷⁴

The first service of the church was held in the living room

²⁷² Jack Nelson, "Nine Acres has Ball Diamond," Rockford Morning Star, October 20, 1961, n.p.

²⁷³ Riverside Congregational Recognition Service (Rockford, 1952), n.p.

²⁷⁴ "Suburb Church Plan Disclosed," Rockford Morning Star, March 22, 1950, n.p.



Riverside Community Church
1950-
Plate VIII

of what had been the Canfield home on Easter Sunday, 1950. Mr. van Kranenburgh conducted the service, but he was assisted by James Dietz, an Evangelical and Reformed student. Mr. Dietz served the church further by conducting a survey of the neighborhood to find out the needs of the area. He served the church during the summer of 1950.²⁷⁵

On November 1, 1950, Dr. Marvin R. Brandt took charge of the services. A graduate of the Yale Divinity School, Dr. Brandt served both Riverside Community and a church in Caledonia during 1950 and much of 1951. He was a resident of Beloit, Wisconsin. Membership of the church was aided by the visit of Dr. Ira Black of the Board of Homeland Missions in 1950. Dr. Black set up a camp which largely centered upon evangelism.²⁷⁶

Dr. Brandt was called to become the first official pastor of the church on September 1, 1951. The charter of the church had been issued in January of 1951. The roll was left open until Easter of that year. The charter list eventually numbered seventy-two members.²⁷⁷

On October 5, 1952, the church voted to seek membership with the churches of the Congregational - Christian Union. Application was made on October 12, 1952, and the recognition service was conducted on November 16, 1952.²⁷⁸ Officers of the church had been elected in January of 1952.²⁷⁹ The membership at the time of the recognition service had reached 130 with a Sunday School enrollment of 100.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁵ Rev. Ralph Fry, interview, Riverside Community Church, Rockford, Illinois, February 15, 1969.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Riverside Congregational Recognition Service, n.p.

²⁷⁹ Rev. Ralph Fry, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁸⁰ Riverside Congregational Recognition Service, n.p.

As early as January of 1952, Riverside Community Church had established a nursery service for parents of small children who wished to attend services. Confirmation classes had also been organized. In February, a Young Peoples' organization was being set up. During Dr. Brandt's service to the church, summer ministers were secured to direct the youth recreation program. One such minister was Leslie Allen who was a student at the Chicago Theological Seminary. He served Riverside Church during the summer of 1952.²⁸¹

In January of 1954, Dr. Brandt retired. He had come out of retirement to serve the church, and once it was well on its way, he felt he could re-retire. He became pastor emeritus of the church. Louis Taylor from the Chicago Theological Seminary had been associate pastor under Dr. Brandt during his undergraduate work in Chicago. In January of 1954, he assumed the pastorate full time. He had to commute from Chicago until his graduation in June.²⁸²

When Mr. Taylor left Riverside Church for Plymouth Congregational Church in Moline, Illinois, the church was without a pastor for several months. Several ministers occupied the pulpit during the months in 1955 before a new minister was called. Dr. Marvin Brandt returned, as did Rev. Leslie Allen. When Mr. Allen left, he assumed a pastorate at the Roscoe Community Church, Roscoe, Illinois. Robert Clark was another of the interim ministers from the Congregational and Christian conference.²⁸³

In August of 1955, a former Army chaplain from Avon, Illinois came to the pulpit of Riverside Community Church. Rev. Marvin Maris, who

²⁸¹Rev. Ralph Fry, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁸²Ibid.

²⁸³Ibid.

had been ordained in Montana, came to Rockford from the Avon Federated Church where he had served four years. Mr. Maris was subsequently called to assume the pastorate of Riverside Church. During his service the church began to grow and expand. The total membership in January of 1956 was 183. A Children's Choir was formed in the same month. The choir included children in grades one through three. Children in grades four through six were already involved in a choir.²⁸⁴

The youth program of the church was making good progress. The summer recreation program lasted ten to eleven weeks. A principal or school athletic director was employed each summer to help organize the program. A new building was in the church's future plans. The conference was lending some financial support, but the church was generally self-supporting.²⁸⁵

On October 31, 1957, Rev. Marvin E. Maris resigned to accept a call to Bethany Congregational Church, West Terre Haute, Indiana. A familiar pastor, Rev. Louis R. Taylor returned to fill the pulpit in the interim. In January of 1958 a new pastor was called. Rev. J. Robert Zinn from a rural parish in central Illinois accepted the pastorate of Riverside Church. Mr. Zinn had graduated from Alma College, Alma, Michigan. Though he was not yet ordained, he was allowed to serve as minister under contract with the local Congregationalist Board. He served until 1960.²⁸⁶

During Mr. Zinn's pastorate, the church listed 200 members and about ninety enrolled in the Sunday School program. In May of 1959, the

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

church gained property from Industrialist Irl Martin. The house which was obtained served as a parsonage, but it is no longer used as such. Also in May of 1959 Five Circles in the Women's Guild were formed.²⁸⁷

On April 7, 1960, Mr. Zinn resigned to complete his studies at Chicago Theological Seminary and to get his Doctor of Divinity degree. An interim minister was obtained in Rev. E. George Krause. He served until mid-summer when he resigned to serve students at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. Rev. Bruce Carlson was then secured to serve the congregation through Christmas. He was assistant professor of theology at Beloit at the time.²⁸⁸

Rev. Hayes White from the First Presbyterian Church of Belton, Texas, was called to take over the pastorate on July 1, 1961. Interim ministers were secured to fill in between Christmas and July.²⁸⁹ It was noted at the time Mr. White was called that Robert Zinn had accepted a position in Richmond.²⁹⁰ Mr. White came originally from Pennsylvania and received his education from the University of Texas and the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, Texas. When he accepted the pastorate at Riverside Church, he became the chaplain of Woodward Governor, a manufacturing plant in nearby Loves Park.²⁹¹ Mr. Meckel of Second Congregational Church had previously served as chaplain of the company.²⁹²

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ "Riverside Church Pastor to be Installed Sunday," Rockford Morning Star, November 4, 1961, n.p.

²⁹¹ "Rev. White New Pastor at Riverside," Rockford Morning Star, July 1, 1961, n.p.

²⁹² "Pastor Leaves to Take California Post," n.p.

Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland delivered the sermon at the installation ceremonies for the Reverend Mr. White.²⁹³

In April of 1968, Rev. Ralph Fry who had served the church as interim pastor since July of 1967 was called to the pastorate. Mr. Fry had been a teacher at Haskell School. Originally a graduate of Manchester College in Indiana and Bethany Theological Seminary in Chicago, he assumed the pastorate of a congregation of 180 members.²⁹⁴ Dr. Cleveland was again called upon to deliver the sermon at the installation service.²⁹⁵

Riverside Church has a nine acre lot which, as Mr. van Kranenburgh suggested, is perfectly adapted for an outdoor program.²⁹⁶ The summer recreation program was officially undertaken in 1957. Dennis L. Hill was the first recreation director. The program, which includes baseball, tumbling, acrobatics, baton twirling, arts, crafts and other skills, tries to build sportsmanship and character among boys and girls. It is designed to attract "un-churched" boys and girls of the community.²⁹⁷ The church is involved in men's softball and Little League baseball.²⁹⁸ It did sponsor a Cub Scout Pack, but the troupe is no longer active.²⁹⁹

The Community Church is organized in response to a need in the neighborhood. It is not a nationally organized institution. As has been

²⁹³"Riverside Church Pastor to be Installed Sunday," n.p.

²⁹⁴"Riverside Church Calls Rev. Fry," Rockford Morning Star, April 6, 1968, n.p.

²⁹⁵"Rev. Fry Installed," Rockford Morning Star, June 29, 1968, n.p.

²⁹⁶"Riverside Community Church," Rockford Morning Star, August 8, 1966, n.p.

²⁹⁷Rev. Ralph Fry, interview, February 15, 1969.

²⁹⁸"Riverside Community Church," n.p.

²⁹⁹Rev. Ralph Fry, interview, February 15, 1969.

pointed out, it was Second Congregational Church which provided the necessary impetus to organize the church. The present membership is about 200. Some of this group is from Second Congregational Church, and some come from other communions. The church members have voted to become part of the United Church of Christ. Two choirs serve the worship service; an adult choir serves regularly, and a children's choir is organized periodically.³⁰⁰

The Second Congregational Church has made some changes recently in its ministerial staff. In 1963 Rev. John Hilficker succeeded Rev. Fred Swett as minister of education. Mr. Hilficker had come to Rockford from the Church of the Brethren, Oaklawn, Illinois. He now serves as assistant minister of First Congregational Church, Evanston, Illinois.³⁰¹ He served until 1966 at which time Dale R. Beaman became the minister of the education department of the church. Mr. Beaman was a Baptist ordained minister, who had previously served Ft. Wayne, Indiana's First Baptist Church.³⁰² In 1969 Mr. Beaman resigned from his position to assume the post of assistant minister to a church in Short Hills, New Jersey.³⁰³

In 1962 Mr. Litterst, the minister of music of Second Congregational, ended a long and exhausting search for a new organ for the worship services. He found a four manual Skinner in Dayton, Ohio, which was subsequently purchased for approximately \$30,000.³⁰⁴ It was introduced and

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

³⁰² "Baptist to Assume Position at Second Congregational," Rockford Morning Star, October 2, 1965, n.p.

³⁰³ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, February 15, 1969.

³⁰⁴ Campbell Titchener, "Intensive Search Leads to Elusive Church Organ," Rockford Morning Star, May 6, 1962, n.p.

dedicated on Easter Sunday, 1962. At that time a key stuck in the early part of the service, and a portion of the volume had to be turned off.

In 1964 when Rev. Robert Bradbury left the church, Dr. Charles Cooley was secured to serve as interim minister. In 1965 a new assistant minister was called. Rev. Grafton Thomas came to Rockford from the pastorate of First Congregational Church, Chicago. Originally Mr. Thomas was from Hinsdale with a Congregational background and ordination.³⁰⁵ At present, he still serves in the capacity of assistant minister, but the church is without a minister of education.³⁰⁶

On Saturday, August 10, 1968, Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland announced that he plans to relinquish his position as pastor of the Second Church after twenty-two years of service. He requested that the church "locate and call a new senior minister for the 2800-member church." Dr. Cleveland will retire when a satisfactory new leader can be called. He and Mrs. Cleveland plan to remain in Rockford after his retirement.³⁰⁷

In the church's annual report of 1968, Dr. Cleveland reviewed his years of service. He attributed the success of his ministry to the fact that "no man works alone. Whatever gains may have been made in the life of the church are a result of the cooperative endeavors of the church staff, the officers, and the membership as a whole."³⁰⁸

In gathering together the statistics of the service of Dr. Cleveland, it was noted that there were 943 young people confirmed, 3,199

³⁰⁵ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

³⁰⁶ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, February 15, 1969.

³⁰⁷ "Dr. Cleveland to Retire from Second Congregational," Rockford Morning Star, August 10, 1968, n.p.

³⁰⁸ Annual Report of Second Congregational Church (Rockford, Illinois, 1968), n.p.

new members received, 1,387 children baptized, 1,087 marriages and 1,613 funerals conducted. The church undertook several projects which were the first of their kind in Rockford. These included Lenten breakfasts, Midnight Christmas Eve services, Handbell Choirs, Rhythm Choir, Tower Players, the first ecumenical Thanksgiving service, the first televised Protestant worship service (Easter), Early Sunday Communion.³⁰⁹

Dr. Cleveland referred to the outreach ministry of the church as was exemplified in the service of Rev. K. J. Mills. Most recently the church has financed a Neighborhood Day Nursery School.³¹⁰ The school serves children in and around the vicinity of the church. Three paid teachers supervise in two sessions of sixteen children. Volunteer drivers transport children to and from the church.³¹¹ The church has established a church library which is centered in Mead Library in the church Building. A radio ministry has been in operation for sixteen years.³¹²

The physical situation of the church has been affected during the pastorate of Dr. Cleveland as well. Gordon Chapel, Emerson Hall, already mentioned, and redecoration of the Main Sanctuary have all been accomplished during his service. A remodeling of the entire north section of the church for educational, social and fellowship needs has also been completed. Most recently the church has sought to acquire downtown property adjacent to the church itself for parking and "expansion" purposes. Total expenditures toward the endeavor have come to approximately \$750,000.³¹³

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, interview, June 26, 1968.

³¹² Annual Report, n.p.

³¹³ Ibid.

Dr. Cleveland listed twelve goals which he termed "unrealized." These included the selection of a new pastor, the filling of the vacancy left by Mr. Beaman, the establishment of a significant youth ministry, the securing of pledges to cover "expansion" projects, the fulfilling of a promise of aid to Woodside Congregational Church, development of a Community Service committee and completion of the Vellore mission project. This last goal refers to the Vellore Medical College in India which has been established in co-operation with Dr. Hugh Johnson.³¹⁴

These unrealized goals will owe their completion to the work of the new pastor of the church. As of June 1, 1969, Dr. Cleveland will retire after his twenty-three years of service. On March 16, 1969, Rev. Robert H. Midgley of Madison, Wisconsin, received the call of the Second Congregational Church. He will assume his duties at the end of the summer. Mr. Midgley has been pastor of the Lake Edge Congregational Church in Madison for seven years. Before that he served pastorates in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Vermillion, South Dakota, Green River, Wyoming and Framingham, Massachusetts. He was ordained in Framingham in 1947 after attending Northwestern University and Andover-Newton Seminary. He is originally from Worcester, Massachusetts. The minister was called as a result of a unanimous vote of the congregation after hearing him speak.³¹⁵

It is perhaps as true today as it was in 1924, when the following summation was made about the Second Congregational Church,

The Second Congregational Church of Rockford is needed in just the place where it is. The story of its life is an inspiring one, but its greatest work lies in the future, not in the past. We feel that it is not a monument to departed glories. Its work is in the

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ "Congregational Pastor Appointed," Rockford Morning Star, March 16, 1969, n.p.

the living present, its thoughts must be of tomorrow.³¹⁶

Congregationalism in America has been characterized in the last century by the same three principles which have fashioned Congregationalism for the last nine generations - belief in the Bible as the sole authority of God's will in all matters of faith, practice and government; religious truth can be learned in any acquisition of facts in any department of knowledge; and Congregationalism is pre-eminently a layman's type of religion. Congregationalism affirms the doctrine of separation of church and state, but recognizes that the church still has a responsibility to maintain a social standard.³¹⁷ As Second Congregational states it, "We hold no creed as binding but uphold the right of individual conscience. Our statements of faith are testimonies rather than tests. The spirit of Christ is our authority. Commitment to the Christ-spirit unites people of diverse doctrine in love and power."³¹⁸

In the years since the Mayflower the Congregationalists have had to revise or at least become flexible in their interpretation of the creed - the original idea of one church and one minister has become recognized as a needless waste of talent. That is, to work a minister to death just to stay true to the principles of Congregationalism has become outdated. The church itself can be far more efficient when it provides itself with a ministerial staff equal to the jobs of the church. "Twice one is more than two."³¹⁹ This belief is evidenced in the expanded staff

³¹⁶ Diamond Jubilee, p. 10.

³¹⁷ Goodwin, "Eleventh Triennial Council," p. 493.

³¹⁸ Second Congregational Church (Rockford, 1968), p. 11.

³¹⁹ B. Paul Newman, "Weaknesses of Congregationalism," Nineteenth Century XVIII (October, 1890), 638.

of Second Congregational Church where a minister of education, minister of music, and assistant minister all serve the pastor.³²⁰ It is evidenced in Spring Creek Congregational's desire to secure a minister for the youth of the church to take some of the load off the shoulders of the pastor.³²¹

Congregationalism offers liberty while it retains the beliefs and traditions which are necessary for a church to have. The stress is on the spiritual rather than the formal in Congregationalism. The church does not rely heavily on ceremony. Each church chooses its own pastor and completely plans its own worship. No higher body directs its affairs as in the Presbyterian Church. "Each Congregational Church answers directly to God for the use it makes of its talent."³²² Second Congregational states its church covenant as follows,

When entering into the covenant of our church you affirm yourself to be a follower of Jesus Christ. You declare your purpose "to lead an honest, unselfish, benevolent, amiable, and useful life, cherishing toward all, even its enemies, the loving spirit of Christ." You covenant with the church "according to your opportunities to render those services which membership in it enjoins, and to give sympathy and cooperation, as far as permitted, to the church universal."³²³

Of primary importance to the faith of the Congregationalists is the "supreme confidence in the common man."³²⁴ Congregationalism is a religion of the layman as Frank Goodwin suggests. It gives each member the opportunity to take part in the organization and functioning of the church. Congregationalism is based largely on two fundamental principles -

³²⁰Second Congregational Church (1968), p. 8..

³²¹Rev. Wilbur Bartholomew, interview, July 3, 1968.

³²²Jefferson, "Why I am a Congregationalist," p. 225.

³²³Second Congregational Church (1968), p. 7.

³²⁴Jefferson, "Why I am a Congregationalist," p. 237.

independence and fellowship, which takes the place of government. They are equally basic and necessary to the success of the religion.³²⁵ Both, however, make it difficult for large areas to be "converted" to the faith. It is an individual's commitment to the Congregational Way of life which makes the church. A commitment such as this is developed slowly. It cannot be hurried or forced. But when and if it does come, it means the difference between an apathetic or complacent church and a dynamic, actively involved one.

The research I have done in the area of Congregationalism in Rockford has not only been interesting and educational in the strict sense of the word history, but it has opened to me an area of appreciation which I had not known before. I believe it was after I spent the afternoon in the records of the American Home Missionary Society at the Chicago Theological Seminary that I discovered a whole new perspective on history. If I gained little in the way of factual information from the letters of the AHMS, I at least gained an insight into the truth of a point made by Crane Brinton in his Shaping of the Modern Mind. What we today call history was once present fact. Men like Joseph Emerson, Henry Goodwin and Walter Manning Barrows, pastors of the Congregational Church in Rockford, are not just names in a book, entries in the lists of Congregational ministers. They were once living, feeling, acting human beings. And their problems were not so unlike our own. Any of their sermons could as easily be delivered in tact today as they could have been when written. For, in the final analysis, man does not change significantly from age to age; he merely changes his outward appearance.

And so the Congregationalists in Rockford are continuing to

³²⁵ Boynton, The Congregational Way, p. 25.

take part in the growth of the city. As they did in 1837, so they will continue to do in the future. The history of Rockford will not be written without a chapter on the role of the Congregationalists. The character and attitudes of those men and women have shaped the city of Rockford. They have proved the truth of the reflection, "they [the Congregationalists] always acted with a view to the whole of their existence, and as remembering that what they did, bore its results on millions yet unborn."³²⁶

³²⁶ Belcher, Religious Denominations, p. 319.

Appendix

Major Events in the History of the First Congregational Church

May 5, 1837	First Congregational Church is organized in the home of Israel Morrill.
May of 1837 - May of 1838	Mr. John Morrill, pastor.
Summer of 1838 - Spring of 1846	First Congregational located at Church and Green Streets.
November of 1838 - May of 1841	Mr. Cyrus Watson, pastor.
November of 1841 - August of 1842	Mr. William S. Curtis, pastor.
September of 1842 - 1843	Mr. Oliver W. Norton, pastor.
February of 1844 - Spring of 1846	Mr. Lansing Porter, pastor.
Spring of 1846 - 1870	First Congregational located at South First at Walnut Streets.
August of 1846 - Autumn of 1849	Mr. Lewis Loss, pastor.
November 7, 1849	Second Congregational Church is organized.
November of 1849 - 1850	Mr. Joseph Emerson, interim pastor.
August of 1850 - January of 1872	Dr. Henry M. Goodwin, pastor.
December 30, 1855	Westminster Presbyterian Church is organized from the First Congregational Church.
1870 - November of 1917	First Congregational located at Kishwaukee and Third Streets.
July of 1872 - October of 1883	Mr. Wilder Smith, pastor.
July of 1884 - January of 1888	Mr. Theodore Clifton, pastor.
Between 1888 and 1917	Mr. William W. Leete, Mr. Frank Sheldon, Mr. Thomas B. Thompson, Mr. A. R. Fiske, Mr. Earl J. Sellard, successive pastors.
October 30, 1917	First Congregational Church joins Second Congregational Church.

Major Events in the History of the
Second Congregational Church

October 30, 1849	Second Congregational Church is organized.
1849 - 1858	Second Congregational located at Church and Green Streets.
November of 1849 - 1853	Mr. Lansing Porter, pastor.
December of 1854 - 1859	Mr. Joseph Emerson, pastor.
Autumn of 1858 - 1892	Second Congregational located at South Church at Chestnut Streets.
1859 - 1863	Mr. Jeremiah Walton, pastor.
1864 - 1870	Mr. M. P. Kinney, pastor.
1870 - 1888	Dr. Frank P. Woodbury, pastor.
June of 1888 - April of 1898	Dr. Walter Manning Barrows, pastor.
May 20, 1892	Dedication of Second Congregational Church at South Church and Green Streets.
February 20, 1894	Fire destroys two-year old edifice.
December 2, 1895	Rededication of Second Congregational at South Church and Green Streets.
February of 1899 - 1900	Mr. W. C. Haskell, pastor.
1900 - 1912	Dr. P. Miles Snyder, pastor.
January 13, 1906	Fire destroys spire of South Church at Chestnut edifice.
November of 1912 - February of 1947	Dr. John B. Gordon, pastor.
March 26, 1933	Life pastorate awarded to Dr. Gordon.
December of 1946	Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, assistant to Dr. Gordon.
February of 1947 - June of 1969	Dr. Joseph C. Cleveland, pastor.
1949 - 1955	Mr. Gene van Kranenburg, assistant pastor.
October of 1951 - 1952	Mr. Melvin C. Dorsett, minister of education.
January 22, 1951	Gordon Chapel dedicated.
September of 1952 - June of 1957	Mr. Oscar Bollman, minister of education.
1956 - July of 1957	Mr. R. K. Mills, "missionary" from Ceylon.

April of 1955 - October of 1960	Mr. Myron Meckel, assistant pastor.
September of 1957 - 1963	Mr. Fred K. Swett, minister of education.
September of 1958 - 1959	Mr. Roderick J. Wagner, minister of youth.
September of 1959 -	Mr. Richard W. Litterst, minister of music.
November of 1960 - 1964	Mr. Robert D. Bradbury, assistant minister.
1961	United Church of Christ is formed by the Union of Congregational - Christian Churches and Evangelical and Reformed Churches.
1963 - 1966	Mr. John Hilficker, minister of education.
Summer of 1964	Dr. Charles Cooley, interim assistant minister.
1965 -	Mr. Grafton Thomas, assistant minister.
March 16, 1969	Church call extended to Mr. Robert Midgley to succeed Dr. Cleveland.

Major Events in the History of the
Riverside Congregational Community Church

Easter Sunday, 1950	Riverside Community Church holds first service, Gene van Kranenburgh directing.
November, of 1950 - January of 1954	Dr. Marvin R. Brandt, pastor.
January of 1954 - 1955	Mr. Louis Taylor, pastor.
August of 1955 - October of 1957	Mr. Marvin E. Maris, pastor.
Summer of 1957	Recreation program undertaken, Dennis Hill director.
January of 1958 - April of 1960	Mr. J. Robert Zinn, pastor.
1960 - 1961	Mr. E. George Krause, Mr. Bruce Carlson successive interim pastors.
July of 1961 - 1968	Mr. Hayes White, pastor.
April of 1968 -	Mr. Ralph Fry, pastor

Major Events in the History of the
Spring Creek Congregational Church

January of 1960	Mr. Richard Nielson began to organize two new Congregational Churches in Rockford.
Palm Sunday, 1960	Spring Creek Congregational Church holds first service.
1960 - 1963	Spring Creek Congregational located in Spring Creek Grade School.
January of 1961 - September of 1964	Mr. Nielson, pastor.
April 7, 1963	Services conducted in Spring Creek Congregational located at Spring Creek and Alpine Roads.
September of 1964 - 1965	Mr. Charles Cooley, interim pastor.
November of 1965 -	Mr. Wilbur Bartholomew, pastor.

Major Events in the History of the
Woodside Congregational Church

January of 1960	Mr. Richard Nielson began to organize two new Congregational Churches in Rockford.
Palm Sunday, 1960	Woodside Congregational Church holds first service.
1960 - 1961	Woodside Congregational located in Buckbee School.
December of 1960 - September of 1961	Mr. Robert Bond, pastor.
November of 1961 - October of 1964	Mr. Victor Keiser, pastor.
1961 - 1964	Woodside Congregational located in Jefferson Junior High School.
November of 1964 - June of 1965	Mrs. Alice Snow, interim pastor.
July of 1965 -	Mr. Kenneth Press, pastor.
1965 -	Woodside Congregational located in Woodside Branch of YMCA.
Spring of 1966	Building program undertaken.
March of 1968	Ground broken for church at South Alpine at Upland Drive.

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