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Robert J. Voss
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, robert.voss@huskers.unl.edu

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REDEEMING THE TIME:

PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES AND THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL NEBRASKA

By

Robert J. Voss

A THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May of 1854 formally opened a new region of the United States to settlers. Hundreds came with news of the creation of Nebraska Territory, but not in comparable numbers to the major western migrations that would follow after the Civil War. Instead, the initial small waves of Nebraska settlers would cling to the Missouri River and its settlements establishing communities on the eastern edges in the newly opened territory. These first settlers set the foundations for culture and society in Nebraska.

From 1854 until 1860, pioneers claimed lands near the Missouri, with few towns founded in the territorial interior. The initial settlements of Nebraska Territory also grouped around areas previously inhabited by whites such as the Indian mission and fur traders at Bellevue, the old Fort Kearney (Nebraska City), and the Mormon Winter Quarters near Florence. Coming mostly from northern states, these new settlers included a variety of farmers, merchants and laborers.

It was into this area that "home" missionaries and ministers were sent. Men went to the frontier or white civilization to bring the gospel message to their fellow American citizens in an effort to "save the West," and thus Nebraska, from what easterners believed to be barbarism. Men came to Nebraska Territory from Protestant churches to win over the unconverted and to maintain a Victorian way of life for the good of the nation in a grand patriotic gesture. This cohort of missionaries came from

several distinct denominations, but instead of competing, as was the tendency in the East, they cooperated. Instead of choosing to squabble interdenominationally, they rallied against the threat of irreligion, and what they considered to be sects – Campbellism and Mormonism. Campbellites, as the followers of Thomas and Alexander Campbell were sometimes derisively called by mainstream Protestant denominations, began with strong antidenominationalism and relied heavily on the theology of Alexander Campbell. He insisted on the maxim, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent," which led to and estrangement with other denominations and the foundation of a denomination for "Christians," "Reformers," or simply "Disciples." Mormons, following the teachings of Joseph Smith and the leadership of Brigham Young, had traveled through pre-territorial Nebraska on their way to settling by 1850 in the Great Salt Lake Valley and were sending missionaries elsewhere to draw more people into their church. The Campbellites and Mormons were self-identified outsiders, alienating themselves by insisting that their interpretations of religion were correct and all others were wrong. Thus, to Protestants ministers were needed to win over and shape the American frontier and maintain an American national identity they defined to embody morality and civilization. These men worked to build the moral and social groundings upon which Protestants believed "good" people needed in order to establish themselves within the new territory.

The era of settlement from the opening of Nebraska Territory until the Civil War has not attracted much historical attention.[1] It might be assumed from reading

[1] Many historical texts on Nebraska do not investigate the development of society and culture, instead relying heavily on political formation and migration after the Civil War. James C. Olson, Addison E.

various texts on the history of the American West that nothing occurred in Nebraska until statehood and the railroad. Instead considerable settlement occurred with a new social foundation. In particular, several Protestant ministers entered Nebraska from 1854 until 1860, and they quickly secured a presence and influence on the development of Nebraska's frontier culture and society.

Three ministers represent this important development. Reuben Gaylord, a Congregationalist minister, settled in Omaha, Nebraska Territory, after working in Iowa Territory. Henry T. Davis, a Methodist circuit rider who traveled through Nebraska on his way to the gold fields of California as a young man, returned to Nebraska as a minister once he personally "found religion." And Amos Billingsley, an Old School Presbyterian minister, initially settled in Florence and then later moved to Brownville, where he established a church only to move on to the Colorado mines in 1861.

These home missionaries revealed their concern for how they spent their time. All three missionaries expressed the need to account for their time, of which the most bold was Rev. Amos Billingsley. On the title page of his diary, in large, bold print is "Redeem the Time."[2] More than a simple Victorian preoccupation with time management, these ministers felt responsible to God for how they spent their time.

Each of these men recorded their personal accounts and recollections in some form: Billingsley left a diary, Gaylord wrote letters to his sponsoring agency, and Davis wrote an autobiography of his ministry in Nebraska. They recorded their

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Sheldon and Harrison Johnson mention but do not elaborate on the social and cultural establishment of settlers when discussing the territorial era in their respective histories of Nebraska.

[2] Amos S. Billingsley, Diary, title page, no date, Nebraska State Historical Society Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

temporal investments as a way to "redeem the time." The similar experiences that these men shared despite being from different denominations in a time of notorious national denominational strife are startling. Personal accounts of difficulties, both physical and mental are common in their writings, but each of the ministers took on a spiritual burden unique to their profession, bringing out a depth of personal character. Unlike the many men who came west in an extractive effort, these ministers sought to invest in the lives of the men and women leading the immigrant vanguard and to become spiritual anchors by which to hold back the rambunctious nature of a frontier people, all the while revealing their spiritual needs.

Seeking souls for conversion, the ministers set out for Nebraska Territory along different routes, each with a similar destination. These ministers preceded a call for ministers following the Civil War that resulted in large Protestant migrations. Instead of Lutherans and Baptists, these men were Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist. Their churches did not gain large numbers – at least during this period – so their actual influence is difficult to quantify. Choosing the professional ministry, these men did not supplement their incomes through farming or other labors, but instead they relied on the donations of local church members and those with whom they had contact. Rather than proselytizing or recruiting members from similar competing denominations to join their churches, these Protestant ministers worked together to strengthen inter-church bonds and to convince the unconvinced of, as they called it, the need to "get

religion."[3] When closely investigated, these early Nebraska Protestant ministers defy common assumptions about churches and missionaries in the West.

* * *

This thesis is composed of four chapters. Chapter one investigates the first Protestant churches in Nebraska Territory, revealing that the systematic planned efforts of coherent denominations brought Protestantism in an organized fashion to Nebraska Territory. Chapter two uncovers how in a time of national denominational strife, the various denominations cooperated in Nebraska Territory to work together for the propagation of the Gospel. Chapter three reveals the relationship between the dominant Victorian culture and the missionaries' efforts to resolve cultural conflict in church building. Chapter four discusses the changes in the ministers as Nebraska Territory continued to be a destination for immigrants and as it shifted away from frontier settlement to established society and culture. A brief conclusion then completes the thesis.

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[3] Henry T. Davis, *Solitary Places Made Glad: Being Observations and Experiences for thirty-two years in Nebraska; With Sketches and Incidents Touching the Discovery, Early Settlement and Development of the States* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), 265.

I

PLANTING THE STANDARD: THE FOUNDING OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN NEBRASKA TERRITORY

> Let the standard of the Cross be planted in every vale, and upon every mountain summit, till a "chain of living voices" from sea to sea shall unite in the loud acclaim, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" – Rev. William Goode, Methodist minister[4]

In the summer of 1854, thousands of individuals crossed into Nebraska Territory to make claims on the newly opened land. Responding to the opportunity presented to settle in the region and crossing the Missouri River by a rickety ferryboat with their earthly possessions onboard, individuals and families risked all they had for what was hoped would be a better life in Nebraska. Lives were changed forever as these pioneers struck out across the Plains to build a new life.

Encountering the Great Plains and open land, many settlers did not move very far inland, instead preferring to remain close to the river and other inhabitants. Contrary to the western ideal of individualism and self-reliance, many early migrants actively sought community, choosing to be located in the sphere of influence of towns and in contact with others. The mythical western ideal of total personal independence was rarely sought. Instead, it was understood that these farmers would need a market town every few miles to sell produce, thus linking buyers and sellers in an interchange

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[4] William H. Goode, *Outposts of Zion with Limnings of Mission Life* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1864), 459-60.

that grew to encompass more than commercial interests.[5] These towns acted as agents for cohesion for the territory, both physically and demographically, bringing individuals and families together from all walks of life in new ways and for new purposes. It was within these small market towns that community was fostered, dreams grew, and upon which speculation flourished in Nebraska Territory.

One early speculator at the location of old Fort Kearney near present day Nebraska City was the ferry operator himself, Major Hiram Downs. Located in the southern region of Nebraska Territory at the confluence of Table Creek and the Missouri River, the U.S. Army had figured that this was a logical place to station troops. It was directionally closest to where the Independence-St. Joseph Road reached the Platte.[6] While the fort was moved west in 1848, some speculative individuals remained behind; and believing that he could develop a town once the fort had moved, Downs plotted a town out into city blocks and hung a proposed map on the wall of his cabin to allow those interested in purchasing land from him to choose their plots.

Understanding that settlers would look for transportation across the Missouri, Major Downs operated a flue steam ferry, hoping to attract both overland and river traffic. While operating his ferry in some of the earliest days of the territory, he encountered Rev. William H. Goode, a circuit rider for the Methodist Episcopal Church, sent by his organization to scout the territory for its potential need of ministers. Downs understood the value that an established church would bring, so this speculator gave several plots to the Methodist Episcopal Church if they would establish a

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[5] Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1954), 3.
[6] Merrill J. Mattes, "The Jumping-Off Places on the Overland Trail," in John Francis McDermott ed., *The Frontier Re-examined* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 32.

permanent church for a congregation in what Downs called Nebraska City.[7] The interaction of two individuals planning for the religious needs of a speculated city is one example of the variety of modes of church establishment in Nebraska Territory.

Ministers were drawn to the West for the potential that lay there, not in agriculture, but in souls. According to historian Colin Goodykoontz, ministers were also pushed west out of fear that the migration would be unsaved and without a refining influence, they worried an unchurched population might lead to the downfall of the United States.[8] Instead of an ordered society, unified around a set of common ideals, the West was functional and future oriented. Fear of what would become of the West without Christianity was profound. Writing in 1854, lawyer Stephen Colwell revealed the importance of Christianity to settlers: "It is the very atmosphere in which our institutions exist; it is the cement by which they are bound together; it is the sanction of our penal laws; it is in most cases, the security to which appeal is made by oath for official faithfulness; it is the guardian of judicial evidence; it is the basis of our morality and the mould in which our civilization has been cast."[9] Lacking the element of cohesiveness that Christianity might bring would have been detrimental to the country, a number of Americans believed. It was therefore out of patriotic duty that many missionaries went west.

Often working to gain converts through extemporaneous preaching, Home Missionaries also labored alongside frontier folks to erect some semblance of civilized

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[7] Goode, 264.
[8] Colin B. Goodykoontz, *Home Missions on the American Frontier: with Particular Reference to the American Home Missionary Society* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd. 1939).
[9] Stephen Colwell, "From *The Position of Christianity in the United States,*" in David Brion Davis, ed., *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 219.

life in the West through physical labor and general improvement of the settlements. These ministers brought with them different cultural baggage and expectations than other pioneers, leading to a very different frontier experience. Working in part to establish permanent churches, the main efforts of pioneer ministers were directed at the spiritual improvement of fellow settlers.

Founding Churches

The founding of Protestant churches during the territorial period of Nebraska is more nuanced than that given in most historical accounts of Nebraska Territory. [10] Rather than as an outside force acting on the settlers, or as a distinct process, religious activities among the settlers were a part of their regular lives. Rather than investigating the process of how churches in Nebraska were formed, many historians are content to give credit to first sermons and buildings while bypassing the whole of the effort of church establishment. It was largely through the planned, intentional work of organized denominations, most of whom adhered to an Arminian theology of personal spiritual responsibility, from which many Protestant churches in Nebraska were formed in the late antebellum era. Settlers gave notably favorable response to the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist churches. Ministers of the "Christian" church, the Episcopal Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, and the Baptists also worked toward evangelism and proselytizing within Nebraska Territory, but they

[10] James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 100. This, and other information was removed from the third edition; hence, the usage of both editions of *History of Nebraska* is appropriate. See also *Nebraska: A Guide to the Cornhusker State* (New York: Hastings House, 1939; reprint, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 116-119 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

had fewer initial results. Reactions of pioneers to these churches and ministers were varied, as one might expect, but the impression of the "pioneer evangel" proved lasting.

The establishment of Protestant Christian churches in Nebraska dates from before the organized settlement of the territory. Responding to numerous revivals in the East, beginning with the Second Great Awakening and continuing through the 1850s, many denominations were searching for places in need of missionaries. Heeding calls for missions, "foreign missionaries" were sent in record numbers overseas and throughout the continent to convert Indians of the western frontier to Christianity. Conversion to Christianity was of course only part of Protestant efforts with Native groups; a conversion to a "civilized" life was also "encouraged." Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and Henry and Eliza Spaulding, all Presbyterians, went to the Pacific Northwest to bring Christianity and civilization to the Indians in 1835.[11] Isaac McCoy, a Baptist missionary to the Indians, worked for the creation of an Indian Territory in the West to provide some protection from encroaching whites.[12] William H. Goode, Methodist scout, was sent as a missionary to the Choctaws in Arkansas to be superintendent of the Fort Coffee Academy in an effort to support the education of the Indians along with their conversion before being sent to Nebraska.[13]

The first missionary permanently located in Nebraska was Moses P. Merrill. Sent by the Baptist Missionary Union, Merrill was to minister to Indians in the vicinity of the American Fur Company outpost at what became Bellevue. The Baptist Missionary Union had responded to an apparent desire for Christianity by all Indian

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[11] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People,* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2004), 862.
[12] Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh E. Schmidt, *The Religious History of America,* rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 168.
[13] Goode, 26-27.

tribes – a biblical Macedonian cry – due to the appearance of the delegation of Nez Perces in St. Louis in 1831 seeking "black books."[14] Since one group of Natives requested Christianity, it followed that all Indians would appreciate its benefits. Baptists sending missionaries to the West was only one of the multiple responses to the Nez Perce request. Whether or not the Nez Perces actually appeared in St. Louis is open to debate, but whether the delegation of Indians were there does not matter as much as the immediate response of eastern churches sending missionaries west.

The missionary zeal of American churches was prodded by an ambitious missionary press, encouraging many people to serve in the mission field, whether home or abroad. Pushed by the publication of periodicals by groups such as the American Tract Society, the American Bible Society and the American Sunday School Union, missionaries went out from their eastern conclaves to bring the message of Christ to the world. It was part of this effort that brought clergy to Nebraska Territory. John Dunbar and Samuel Allis, representing the Presbyterian Church, established a mission to the Pawnees in Nebraska in October of 1834, as part of the mission movement from the East.[15] Along with Dunbar, Allis and Merrill, continuously occupied missions at Bellevue were established and maintained by Baptists and Presbyterians, working for the conversion of Poncas and Omahas.[16] However, these first explicitly foreign missionary efforts in Nebraska would soon be superseded by the home missionary movement.

The perceived need for ministers to the settlers of the newly opened territory was not the same as establishing foreign missions to the Indian tribes in the same

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[14] James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 50.
[15] Ibid., 51.
[16] Ibid., 52.

region. As a result of the Nez Perce visit to St. Louis, foreign missionaries desired conversion of Indian communities en masse instead of reigniting fires of belief within stagnant Christians like "home missionaries" were to do. Missionaries to the diverse Indian groups in the West understood the hardships of not only conversion, but also communication. Conveying the social and cultural constructions of Christianity as missionaries saw them was known to be difficult at best, as was the experience of John Roberts, an Episcopalian missionary who worked to bring Protestant Christianity to the Indians of Wyoming with mixed results.[17] Attempting to bring "civilization" to the Wind River Valley, Roberts occasionally sent Indian police to bring in students to the school. He also encountered difficulty with translating unknown concepts of "sin" and "forgiveness" into the Arapaho language.[18] When combined with harsh living conditions and scarce financial support, foreign missionaries often had a very difficult ordeal.

Rather than attempting to convert an alien culture to Christianity, home missionaries labored to maintain what they perceived was Protestantism's tenuous hold on the West. A missionary who worked with Native American groups was often faced with language barriers that needed to be surmounted before being able to communicate the gospel. However, by working with mainly English speaking people, home missionaries were not faced with the primary obstacle of language. Instead they had to deal with other challenges that sometimes seemed just as daunting. The destitute situation of life on the fringes of civilization was difficult for many individuals to comprehend, both before coming to the Plains as well as once they arrived. Worries

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[17] William Harding Onken, Jr. "Pioneer Missionary: The Life of John Roberts, 1853-1949," M.A. Thesis, University of Wyoming, 1977, 19.
[18] Ibid., 26.

over Indians, food, weather and all other sorts of concerns plagued settlers on the Plains.[19] Missionaries' worries were compounded by concerns over the spiritual well-being of themselves and their fellow Americans to whom the missionaries were sent to minister.

Missionaries who worked with Indian communities often had a superiority complex about them, enabling missionaries to distance themselves from the plight of Native groups because of what they perceived as the Indians' "naturally" low position.[20] Those who worked on the American frontier with pioneers did not have the luxury of racism to use to separate themselves and instead had pity and unexpected grief for those affected by life on the frontier.[21]

Home missionaries laboring in Nebraska Territory were drawn for various reasons, some overt and some covert. Ranging from returning to a land that was once passed through or anti-slavery motivations to simple desires for evangelism, home missionaries came to Nebraska Territory.

The opening of the Oregon Trail and the California gold fields brought thousands of immigrants over the Great Platte River Road. Beginning from various points on the Missouri River, the Great Platte River Road was used mainly by transcontinental travelers between the mid 1830s and the mid 1850s. It led through the middle of what would become Nebraska. The exposure to the bountiful potential of Nebraska's land was not forgotten by numerous Argonauts, so by the time the

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[19] "Journey to Nebraska," *Home Missionary,* April 1856, 390.
[20] Onken, 5.
[21] Amos S. Billingsley, Diary, 15 August 1857, Nebraska State Historical Society Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. Referred to henceforth as Billingsley Diary.

California gold fields had closed and Nebraska Territory opened for settlement, some pastors were ready to return to the land they traveled over years ago.[22]

Ministers were ready to respond to the need of settling Nebraska for anti-slavery reasons as much as for the gospel as soon as the territory was open for settlement. Under the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, it was up to popular sovereignty whether slavery would be allowed in the new territories, and settlers representing a northern persuasion were needed to relocate to maintain Nebraska Territory as a free region. Frightened by the problems in Kansas, as revealed through the Emigrant Aid Society in the northeastern press, settlement of Nebraska by northerners was viewed as vital to Nebraska becoming a free state.[23] To continue abolitionist momentum once Nebraska became a state, moral influences were needed in the form of pastors for the region. Kansas' plight over slavery was well publicized, and fear of physical violence accompanied the plea to the East for prayer and missionaries.[24] Colin B. Goodykoontz, in his foundational book, *Home Missions on the American Frontier,* suggests that "Antislavery feeling was also stronger among Congregationalists and New School Presbyterians than among their Old School [Presbyterian] brethren," which would have brought more Congregationalists and New School Presbyterian ministers to Nebraska in the name of anti-slavery than other denominations. [25] The efforts of opponents of

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[22] Henry T. Davis, *Solitary Places Made Glad: Being Observations and Experiences for Thirty-two years in Nebraska with Sketches and Incidents Touching the Discovery, Early Settlement, and Development of the State* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), 54.
[23] William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 68.
[24] "The Invasion," *The Home Missionary,* March 1856, 364-365.
[25] Goodykoontz, 239.

slavery, these ministers held, were important to the success of progress in the West along moral and spiritual lines.[26]

The intentional habitation of Nebraska Territory by Protestant Christian ministers in part reflected their responses to a general Christian call to missions. Jesus Christ's Biblical call to "Go and make disciples of all the nations" propelled many into the mission field, both foreign and domestic.[27] Along with the general call to missions, the West was of particular interest to many ministers due to prodding by religious authorities on the progress and potential of missions in the region. The importance of the West to the moral foundations of the country was not lost on ministers, especially Lyman Beecher. According to Sydney Ahlstrom, Lyman Beecher's *Plea For the West,* "anticipates Frederick Jackson Turner's belief in the force of the West in determining the future cast of the emerging nation."[28] Concerns for the West were evident as published in periodicals such as the *Evangelical Intelligencer* and *Western Christian Advocate*, to which pioneer minister Henry Davis responded by his coming to Nebraska.[29]

Not only did missionaries serve a religious purpose, but their moralizing influence was greatly desired on the frontier. What churches represented to potential settlers made the church desirable for governmental leaders. Acting as a calming agent for tumultuous life on the frontier, the Protestant church was also sought by societal leaders. Responding to calls by governmental leaders, Protestant ministers traveled to the frontier of Nebraska Territory.

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[26] Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 2.
[27] Matthew 28.18 (New Living Translation)
[28] Ahlstrom, 459.
[29] Davis, 123.

It was widely understood that churches in a settlement reflected territorial development because they represented a town's stability. Of course, churches ostensibly existed for reasons other than financial improvement. Governor Mark W. Izard's remarks to the Nebraska Territory Legislature in 1857, a mere three years after the Territory was formed, revealed his perception of churches as part of a greater prosperity he hoped for in Nebraska, an "unexampled degree of prosperity which has crowned the efforts of our infancy . . . of flourishing towns and prosperous cities, with their handsome church edifices, well regulated school, and busy streets."[30] For Governor Izard, churches represented and encouraged morality, an important factor in Nebraska's settlement that went along with commercial interests and an educated citizenry.

Churches were also to be used to calm the turbulent social life on the frontier. According to historian Lewis Atherton, churches served as "focal points of organized social life" on the fringes of society.[31] Through this organized social life and the evangelical work of churches, it was believed that a town's character could be molded, "where 'indolent primitivism' could be restrained by denominational organization and supervision."[32] In continuing the Victorian sentimentality of the eastern cities, there was "no more cherished social distinction . . . than regular church attendance."[33] Churches were a requirement to fulfill this Victorian ideal. Church establishments in Nebraska also benefited from a rise in organized denominations from the late 1830s

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[30] As quoted in Olson, 2nd ed., 93.
[31] Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1954), 186.
[32] C. Robert Haywood, *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 92.
[33] Ibid., 91.

until the mid-1850s. They felt it necessary to propagate their version of the gospel message in competition with other versions of Christianity.

Effective Methods

The creation of Protestant churches in Nebraska Territory was mostly the result of planning and implementing an established methodology by denominations and missionary organizations from the East. The effect of advance scouting to the Territory allowed for orderly and, hopefully for the missionaries, a more effective ministry to occur. For Methodists and Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, their respective denomination's centrality and clarity of leadership provided an influential ministerial population for Nebraska Territory. After an organizational meeting on the prospects of the new territory of Nebraska, Methodist Bishop E. R. Ames sent Rev. William Goode to "visit and explore the country . . . for the purpose of collecting information on these points."[34] The provision for Goode to investigate the prospects of Nebraska was made a mere four days after the signing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.[35]

Congregationalists, under the American Home Mission Society, sent numerous home missionaries to the frontier, including Iowa. The American Home Missionary Society explicitly used advance investigators, Local Agents as they were called, "whose special duty it is, 'by correspondence and personal visitation, to ascertain the wants of the destitute, and assist them to obtain the preaching of the Gospel.'"[36] Reporting from Council Bluffs in the spring of 1854, an unnamed missionary sought

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[34] Davis, 134.; Letter from E. R. Ames to Rev. Goode as quoted by David Marquette, *A History of Nebraska Methodism: First Half-Century, 1854-1904* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1904), 27.
[35] Marquette, 31.
[36] "Scope of the Home Missionary Society," *The Home Missionary*, December, 1855, 283.

more ministers as he reported in *The Home Missionary* that "four or five towns have been laid off along the river . . . [and] two or three of them will yet be towns of considerable importance."[37] Beyond the general call for missionaries for frontier Nebraska, a plea for a Congregationalist minister by Territorial Governor William Richardson in 1855 reveals the longing for former social establishments and familiar surroundings. Rev. Reuben Gaylord was able to fulfill this need in part through the founding of a Congregationalist Church.[38]

Methodists owed much of their organizational increase in Nebraska Territory to their legendary circuit riders. By dividing a new territory into various circuits and preaching stations, a minister could travel between settled places in a circular route, providing adequate ministry to frontier settlements. The circuit rider was managed by a superintendent in a strictly disciplined manner. Assisting the circuit riding preacher was a lay leader, a non-ordained person from the local gathering who led meetings when the circuit rider was absent. This essentially autocratic system of evangelization was especially effective for frontier populations without the means to support a local pastor.[39]

Like the Methodists, Presbyterians benefited from a strong central organization. The hierarchical polity, while not established to govern individual churches, facilitated a well-organized missions program. Initially combining with the Congregationalists in their home missions, Presbyterians preferred local control over church affairs. Presbyterians did not enjoy the freedom to establish churches at will and were initially

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[37] "Prospects of Kansas and Nebraska," *The Home Missionary*, October 1854, 152.
[38] William A. Richardson to Secretary of the American Home Missionary Society, 18 October 1855, American Home Missionary Society Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
[39] Ahlstrom, 437.

hindered by the traditions of strong educational requirements for Presbyterian clerics, thus limiting the number of ministers who could be sent to the field. However, Presbyterianism often modified its message to fit the frontier, continuing a process of shifting to more of an Arminian theology of personal response in conversion from a strict Calvinist message of predestination that began with the Second Great Awakening.[40] Presbyterianism in Nebraska was benefited also by easily established presbyteries, allowing for local control to flow to the immediate region.

From relatively early in the mission movement of the 1800s, Congregationalists also benefited from strong central missions leadership. Beginning with the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) as their sending organization, Congregationalists presented an organized effort to evangelize frontier regions. Formed in 1826 by cooperating Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed and Associate Reformed churches in different parts of the United States, according to Colin B. Goodykoontz, the American Home Missionary Society, "assist[ed] in the development of churches in the West by subsidizing them to the extent necessary to enable them to engage a full-time or even a part-time pastor."[41] To support their missionaries, the AHMS intended to send around $400 per year to each of their home missionaries. The AHMS published *The Home Missionary,* a periodical of the home mission work intended to garner more donations and volunteers for the society's efforts. The AHMS operated under a guise of inter-denominational cooperation through the incorporation of Presbyterian

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[40] Ibid., 444. Calvinism emphasized that God predestined individuals based on God's sovereignty, removing the actions of people in their ultimate salvation; personal response to the Gospel message did not matter since ultimate destination was predetermined. As a reaction to strict Calvinism, Arminianism emphasized the roles of individuals in choosing or rejecting salvation; personal response to the Gospel message mattered.
[41] Goodykoontz, 181.

Churches, yet the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church continued to maintain its own Board of Missions and worked independently to send out home missionaries.[42]

Other denominational groups could be found in Nebraska during the territorial era. Amos Billingsley recorded in his diary that a Bishop Lee, an Episcopalian from Iowa, preached in Nebraska Territory as of 1857, but had not yet founded a church.[43] The Baptists, although very successful in spreading throughout the Mississippi Valley, were not centrally organized, insisting instead on churches being responsible only to themselves, and therefore not having an organizational plan once Nebraska Territory opened. Until at least 1857, Baptists were sharing facilities with other denominations. Campbellites, of the Christian Church had established a congregation in Brownville as of 1857.[44]

Speculating Ministers

Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists alike operated similarly in Nebraska Territory. Following the sending of church scouts to the region, all three denominations sent ministers on behalf of the parent organizations to frontier regions in a similar manner as land speculators chose town sites. Mission organizations listened to the speculators of new regions for information on where to locate their prospective churches. Rev. W. P. Apthorp, minister to Iowa for the AHMS in 1850, spoke of the intentions and aspirations of towns to locate churches in the future, hoping his scouting would produce a minister and church.[45] Similarly, after the initial church locations

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[42] Goodykoontz, 179.
[43] Billingsley Diary, 26 July 1857.
[44] James M. Woolworth, *Nebraska in 1857*, (New York: C.C. Woolworth, 1857), 31.
[45] W.P. Apthorp, "The Outskirts," *The Home Missionary*, September 1850, 114.

were established, Reuben Gaylord listed several locations that were in need of ministers when he wrote to his superiors in the American Home Missions Society: "There are other places up the river . . . that are growing and ought to be visited occasionally [by a minister]. . . . We must have *more ministers*, very soon, or much ground will be lost."[46] Hoping that efforts for spiritual conversion would be fruitful, missionaries labored continuously in Nebraska Territory.

Like land speculators, the initial ministers hoped for the future of towns. Missionaries traveled into areas with no established churches in an effort to win converts and to establish a spiritual foothold in newly settled areas. David Marquette remarked on the patience Methodist ministers had while working toward establishing a church, "W. D. Gage was sent to Nebraska City nine months before a class was formed," wrote Marquette, and "Isaac Collins was in Omaha six months before an organization could be effected."[47] And as mentioned above, Rev. William Goode promised to establish a Methodist Episcopal Church in the fledgling Nebraska City, when the territory had only been opened several months. Even when the prospect for a location was bleak, home missionaries labored where they felt they were needed. Churches depended on town development for congregants as much as town development depended on churches to attract new immigrants in a symbiotic growth relationship.

The national ideal of improvement ranged from personal improvement to betterment of the nation in general. Many Americans believed in "manifest destiny," and the frontier of Nebraska was thought to be destined for greatness. Of course, this

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[46] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary,* February 1857, 241.
[47] Marquette, 41.

greatness would conform to the religious inheritance of its initial settlers. Albert Barnes, in his 1848 *Plea in Behalf of Western Colleges,* praised the religious inheritance of the settlers coming to the West. He did not fear an irreligious West, but did worry about a West that was full of what he considered erroneous versions of Christianity.[48] It was never thought that the West, and hence Nebraska, would be non-Christian but rather Protestant leaders anxiously wondered only what version of Christianity to which it would adhere. Numerous competitive calls, such as Lyman Beecher's famous *Plea for the West* in 1835, went out for ministers to fill the West, to realize the promise that it held. Protestant Easterners looked west and saw a shifting population of people in need of refined religion.

Even within the doubts of the East was found a prevalent hope for the future of the West. Throughout this era, a general optimism for what was to come was maintained. Some were looking for improvement of the region in general, while occasionally being blinded by its possibilities. As J. Sterling Morton put it, "In my opinion, we felt richer, better and more millionarish than any poor deluded mortals ever did on the same amount of moonshine and pluck."[49] It was with this hope and delusion that ministers came to Nebraska, a combination of a patriotic response to manifest destiny and a desire to improve.

Similar to the method used to begin churches in cities, ministers first planted para-church organizations, such as Sabbath Schools or Union Sunday Schools, in loosely tied together neophyte settlements. They hoped for religious interest in the community to be drawn from them to a church. This method of "spiritual speculation"

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[48] Goodykoontz, 34n.
[49] As quoted by Olson, 3rd ed., 92.

was less risky for both the missionary and sending organization, providing spiritual influence in marginal settlements with a low initial investment.

Presbyterians and other denominations used Sabbath Schools to draw people together around a common religious interest. Amos Billingsley, an early Presbyterian minister to Nebraska Territory, continued the practice of "Missionary Tours," visiting as an itinerant minister those locations outside of his normal reach, ostensibly to bring the gospel message to unreached people nearby. While working in Florence in 1857, he traveled down the Missouri River, preaching where he could and ministering where he was able. Although he did not make specific mention of it, Billingsley established long-term relationships of some sort from this trip since he eventually settled down the Missouri River in Brownville. Later, in April of 1859, while working in Brownville he traveled with Brother Samuel Collins, a Baptist minister, to several cities. They eventually established Union Sabbath Schools for two congregations of people, so loosely organized that their only location was posted as gathered in a "log school house," and the other near Falls City.[50] These Sabbath Schools were meant to be opportunities for the "scattered sheep" to congregate for Biblical instruction, if not from an ordained minister, then from religious sources. They were also to be the basic foundations upon which a church could later be built, serving as an initial gathering point for similarly inclined people.

Billingsley's usage of Missionary Tours continued a long established practice of the American Protestant church of sending ministers into frontier settlements without intentions of personally remaining there. Instead, these Missionary Tours were hoped to be sufficient to ignite fires of belief. Eventually, the American Home Missionary

[50] Billingsley Diary, 4 April 1859.

Society determined that Missionary Tours were ineffective in bringing change and true conversion to the frontier. Colin Goodykoontz passes on the analogy of the Missionary Tour being like attempting "to burn a pile of green buckeye logs by setting fire to a bunch of shavings under them. When the missionary left the fire was burning brightly, but he was scarcely out of sight before the fire had burned up and the logs were about as before."[51] Although the American Home Missionary Society advocated the permanent relocation of ministers instead of the itinerant minister arriving and departing with much effort, little permanency resulted.

Ministers would often go anywhere they felt they might have an audience, even if they had not seen it. Still advanced scouting could not address all the needs of the neophyte hamlets. New settlements presented ripe ground to establish churches on, hoping to reap the harvest of souls. Occasionally, the new settlements were even newer than the minister was led to believe, as was the case for Methodist minister Rev. Henry Davis, upon traveling from his first appointment in Bellevue:

> I shall never forget the first trip I made to Fairview. I was told it was a town eight miles west of Bellevue. I sent out an appointment, and on Sunday morning, started on horseback. We had been told it was beautifully located on an elevation, overlooking the whole surrounding country. . . . I saw a little shanty. I reined up my horse, rode out toward the shanty, but before reaching it was met by the man of the house. I said to him: "Will you be so kind as to tell me the way to Fairview"
>
> "O, yes," said he. "Which way did you come?
>
> "From Bellevue."
>
> "You came the main traveled road from the east, I suppose ?"
>
> "Yes, sir."
>
> "Well, sir, you passed through Fairview two miles east of this."
>
> "How is that?" said I; "I have not seen a house for miles until I saw yours."
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> "O," said the gentleman, "there are no houses in Fairview yet. It was only laid out a few months ago."[52]

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[51] Goodykoontz, 181.
[52] Davis, 156.

The territorial phase of Nebraska presented many such new cities as Fairview. Just like speculators, ministers did not know what their efforts would produce. Amos Billingsley's first appointment in Nebraska Territory in 1857 was to Florence, the farthest inland Nebraska settlement at the time. His location in this pastorate was in response to the potential that Florence represented to Billingsley for growth. While in Florence, he regularly traveled to minister in the towns of DeSoto and Calhoun.[53] Like a speculator, he preached occasionally in different places, searching for more of a positive response than he was already receiving. Rarely did Billingsley record receiving a negative response, but he did often record indifferent responses to his preaching and ministry that would suggest better opportunities lay elsewhere.[54]

Eventually, Billingsley felt that a better opportunity and more positive responses lay south in Brownville, so he moved there, founding its First Presbyterian Church. Amos Billingsley in Florence represents the failed religious speculator: while receiving a profit from his effort in converts in one location, he felt a better opportunity presented itself, so he followed it. But in other ways, Billingsley also was a successful religious speculator. After not receiving the responses that he sought in Florence, his Brownville church was formed as a result of a Missionary Tour. First traveling to Brownville in the spring of 1858, he founded the First Presbyterian Church of Brownville later that same year, October 31, 1858. There he organized a Union Sabbath School in Brownville two weeks later on November 15. These institutions

[53] Bilingsley Diary, 22 August 1857.
[54] For examples, see entries for 31 July 1857 and 17 September 1857.

remained in the town after Billingsley moved out of the city in 1860, representing Billingsley's successful speculative efforts for the Presbyterian Church.

Reuben Gaylord did not choose Nebraska Territory in the same way Billingsley did. While taking life risks on his personal location on the frontier, Gaylord's choice of Omaha City for his residency as a response to the call for missionaries from Governor Richardson gave Gaylord the assurance of a pre-established flock. His persistence in his residence provided many ministry opportunities. The location of Omaha, across from the city of Council Bluffs, allowed for Gaylord's continued communication with the eastern press, calling for more missionaries to his region.[55] Gaylord speculated in his church planting to "Plattford" and to DeCatur, in an effort to secure help on the Nebraska frontier.[56] Gaylord also participated in the founding of a Congregational college in Fontanelle for the training of more ministers. So instead of simply adding converts, Gaylord was essentially working to expand the church in an exponential manner through the training of more ministers and through the planting of more churches in various locales, even though his original mission location never changed. Gaylord's establishment of his Congregational Church in Omaha was successful, persisting long after Gaylord departed.

Many pioneer settlers were accepting and encouraged by the presence of ministers. Early town builders recognized the positive influence that these "Men of God" represented for their new territory. As cited before, the opportunity to establish a church in Nebraska City was seized by Major Hiram Downs when Rev. William Goode

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[55] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary*, February 1857, 241.
[56] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary*, June 1859, 32.

appeared in the vicinity.[57] Whether or not Major Downs was of a similar denomination was of no concern, but town developers understood that a church building would be an ostentatious display of a town's stability. Representing established order that needed to be maintained on the frontier, churches were seen as foundational for civilization.[58]

Along with the church facility, ministers themselves were important. Historian Ferenc Szasz suggests that Protestant clergy "represented stability, decorum, and morality in the context of a harsh and shifting world," which would have been of importance for town founders who understood the value of stability.[59] One settler wrote to the AHMS: "The influence of a minister will not be confined to that point but other important themes are springing up after which he could look," suggesting that ministers were valued for more than simply a religious purpose.[60] Following his recital of the evidence of intelligent men in Omaha City in 1857, resident James M. Woolworth expanded on the religious influences of the Methodist and Congregationalist ministers in the city as evidence of the burgeoning prosperity of the city.[61] When viewed for the potential that they held for a developing city, ministers were vital. Pastors were also viewed by some settlers as restricting agents on the freedom that lay in the West, which led to the rejection of some ministers' efforts.

Rejection of Clergy

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[57] Goode, 264.
[58] Haywood, 90.
[59] Szasz, 29.
[60] Letter to AHMS from Gen. G. Rice, 22 October 1855, American Home Missionary Society Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.
[61] Woolworth, 95.

Pioneer settlers who rejected clergy on the frontier opted for the unrestrained individualism of the West. They possibly saw the preacher as representative of oppression. They would have also seen ministers as part of the hegemonic power of the Christian church, removing freedom. One pioneer went as far as to include advice in his reminiscences of the frontier era a section on "The Way to Get Rid of Ministers:"

> Once a minister came, and after addressing the few settlers, all dispersed without having inviting him to dine. Perhaps they all felt like ourselves, too poor and proud to offer the man of God what would hold soul and body together. At all events, I invited him home, all the while pondering over in my mind what we could set before him; the clouds were somewhat removed when I thought of the plate of butter in the root house, which was a great luxury those days. I felt easy until the table was being set, when, alas! vain hopes. Our dog "Trusty," so untrue to his title, had stolen the butter, and sorrowfully we watched the preacher wash down the dry corn bread with the familiar beverage, corn coffee; and that was the last Camp Creek ever saw of Mr. Preacher.[62]

This selection reveals that this pioneer felt that ministers would not easily adjust to the harsh life in the wilds of Nebraska and that their refined tastes were too delicate for life on the frontier. No doubt this was true for some pioneer ministers; and yet others were willing to endure the difficult realities of frontier life.

Whether or not it was intentional, possibly the most effective way to get rid of preachers was not to oppose them, but to show indifference to their efforts. On October 4, 1857, Amos Billingsley experienced what he called a "new thing under the sun:" two ministers went to preach in the city of Florence – but no hearers came, apparently due to the wet streets. Billingsley responded with calling it a shame and a sin. "I don't like these dry weather Christians. If I had no more love for the cause than to be kept home

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[62] James Fitche, "The Way to Get Rid of Ministers," *Nebraska State Historical Society Transactions and Reports* Vol. 1., (January 1885), 31.

by a little rain, I would fear I had none at all."[63] The following spring, despite strong church attendance of twenty-eight during the legislature's meeting in January, his church attendance had dwindled to only three. That the entire settlement of Florence actively sought to get rid of Billingsley is doubtful, yet the indifference shown to Billingsley led in part to his eventual departure for what he felt was a more favorable location in Brownville.

Billingsley's relocation would have been a painful move for the community of Florence. Losing a minister meant the loss of moral stability, a social outlet through Sunday services, a refining influence and educational opportunities. Presbyterian ministers were college educated, possibly the only college educated individuals in a town. In one of their many capacities, ministers often served as school teachers, though there is no evidence that Billingsley ever did. Billingsley's relocation meant the removal of more than a minister.

Conclusion

The presence of a vibrant, effective Protestant church signaled strong foundations in a town and promoted the recruitment and residency of individuals with similar beliefs. Church development then would have been vital because of what the local Protestant congregation meant for a town's development. The churches' role as promoter of "good" society was important to speculators who would have advertised for immigrants in eastern papers. According to C. Robert Haywood, clearly defined congregations and permanent leadership of a congregation were important for both

[63] Billingsley Diary, 4 October 1857.

spiritual survival and community "enthusiasm."[64] It was apparent that people would look out for their material wants and needs, but their moral needs fell to the duties of the church. Social needs of community were also satisfied by the congregation meeting regularly. The loss of these positive influences on a society would have been terribly missed.

As has been demonstrated, churches did not spontaneously "arise" as many historians have alluded to, but instead were the conscious result of specific individuals and organizations working to bring organized religion to places facing a dearth of Christian influence. Ministers sought new converts and attendees to their churches. These churches were the result of planning and scouting, such as through the efforts of the Methodist William H. Goode and the Presbyterian Amos Billingsley. The intentional work of centrally organized Protestant groups is apparent in the efforts of Henry Davis, Reuben Gaylord and Billingsley.

Individuals went out in response to calls to the ministry in Nebraska Territory. Rev. Davis responded to an advertisement in the *Western Christian Advocate* to go to the newly opened territory of Nebraska. Rev. Goode was sent by his Methodist Episcopal superiors to Nebraska Territory as soon as it was opened. Rev. Gaylord went to Nebraska in response to calls by Governor Richardson and by Gaylord's Congregational superiors. The initial prompting of each man was different, but the immediate result was the same: they all went to Nebraska Territory to form churches.

These ministers to territorial Nebraska represent a cohort of ministerial speculators. Coming from various backgrounds under different denominations, these men worked to maintain the religiosity of the first settlers in Nebraska. Following the

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[64] Haywood, 104.

leadership of the initial scouts, they ventured forth to establish churches in sparsely populated frontier towns. They brought into frontier Nebraska Protestant religion in an organized and effective manner while overcoming divisive denominationalism as they tread between a rugged frontier culture and the refined society of Victorian America. These men shared similar goals while working for different Protestant denominations. As ministers, this group struggled in different ways than the majority of settlers, bearing spiritual weight for the pioneers of the frontier.

II

UNCOMMON BROTHERHOOD: SECTARIANISM AND COOPERATION IN NEBRASKA TERRITORY

> But I long to be in the work – the blessed work of preaching the Gospel of Christ to the destitute. – Reuben Gaylord[65]

Reuben Gaylord sought to bring his version of Christianity to those he considered to be destitute of the gospel. When he wrote this to Sarah Burton, his future wife, he was just beginning his career as a minister and was investigating moving to the new western territory of Iowa. Seeking to secure the West for Christ, Congregationalist ministers went to Illinois and Iowa as part of a larger effort. After refining their western efforts in Iowa and Illinois, Congregationalists turned their labors further west to the Missouri River Valley and Nebraska Territory.[66]

At a time of increasing cultural complexity in the United States, Protestant churches worked to secure their hold on the religious status of the expanding nation. Pushed and prodded by multiple sources, ministers went west. Encountering a combination of warnings by local ministers over losing the West to irreligion and encouragement through the Christian press to pursue new conversions, ministers moved to Nebraska Territory with the initial settlement push. They came from diverse, and often competing, versions of Christianity laboring to win souls for Christ.

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[65] Reuben Gaylord to Sarah Burton as quoted in Mary Welles Gaylord, *The Life and Labors of Rev. Reuben Gaylord, Home Missionary for Iowa and Nebraska and superintendent for A. H. M. S. for Nebraska and Western Iowa* (Omaha, Rees Printing Company, 1889), 77.

[66] John Von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism, 1620-1957* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 267.

Protestant churches in Nebraska Territory were established through the efforts of individuals to bring their versions of Christianity to the region. In a time of rigid denominationalism in the East, the ministers that worked in Nebraska Territory often labored together, blurring some lines of distinction. Still, other denominational lines were drawn so sharp as to be sectarian, and the frontier made them even more distinct.[67] Some ministers cooperated in ways that would have been unacceptable in eastern churches, while others decided to remain separate. Understanding why some worked together and others did not requires a brief foundation of theology and history of these religious groups. Once their foundations are understood, then the interactions of these uncommon brothers can be understood for the rarity that they represented. Of the many denominations to come to Nebraska Territory, six versions of Protestantism will be explored: Congregationalists, the "Christians," Baptists, Mormons, Presbyterians, and Methodists.

The Congregationalists

The denomination with the deepest roots in America, Congregationalism, could trace its direct ancestors to the Puritans who emigrated from England in an effort to purify the Anglican Church. The name "Congregational" began to be used interchangeably for the Puritans as early as the times of John Winthrop (1588-1649) and John Cotton (1584-1652). Congregationalism was a term that described the actual

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[67] The terms "denomination" and "sect" are used for this paper in their traditional meanings and not interchangeably. That is, denomination is taken to mean smaller parts of a whole. Sect is taken to mean "a movement, . . . small at the outset, which secedes from or forms the periphery of a more stable, socially adjusted and often culturally dominant religious group. . . . Sect formation is a movement of people who are spiritually, socially, economically, educationally, or in other ways 'disinherited.'" From Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People,* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 473.

organization of the church polity. The church was construed to be of the people, and according to Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh E. Schmidt, "Cotton declared that the authority of the church should be congregational, not Episcopal; the highest human authority is neither king nor archbishop but the local minister and congregants themselves," as opposed to the Church of England in which the King was the head of the church under God.[68] The Congregational Church believed that each individual congregation was a complete church and was not accountable to any other human agency, only to God.

In its beginnings, the denomination was a loose grouping of churches at best, but the interactions of Puritans and Pilgrims in New England resulted in a theocratic state church with a common Calvinistic confession of faith and a rigid discipline. With a strong start in America, the Congregational Church continued its fervent Calvinistic belief that God calls some individuals and not others. Those "elect" of God were saved for all eternity because of Divine grace, not because of the efforts of individuals. The Congregational Church continued the usage of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, basic statements of faith for the Puritans that emphasized Calvinstic theology and the covenants God makes with people.[69] They insisted on the strict orthodoxy that was a continuance of that of the seventeenth century, reflecting Congregationalist conservativism.[70]

The Congregational Church was unprepared for the effects of the Revolution and of migration into the newly opened western regions of North America. By 1800, at

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[68] Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh E. Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: Revised Edition* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 53.
[69] Von Rohr, 90-91.
[70] Philip Schaff, *America: A Sketch of Its Political, Social and Religious Character*, Perry Miller, Ed., (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), 106-114.

a time when ministers were needed most to shape the American frontier and to maintain the Puritan vision of America as God's chosen place, the Congregational Church was not ready. While being strong in New England, the Congregationalists lacked a strong means to disseminate to their views, especially to the West. They were ill-equipped to export their version of Christianity to the West. "At the same time that an unprecedented number of new settlements were springing up on the fringes of New England," Nathan Hatch says, "fewer young men from upstanding families were entering the ministry, and graduates of Harvard and Yale were less willing to opt for the hardship and poor pay of a backcountry parish."[71] Combined with the continued opening of new western lands, the Second Great Awakening pushed the Congregationalists into action in the West. Leaders such as Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), president of Yale; Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), the founder of Lane Theological Seminary; and Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858), professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, led the Congregational interest in the West. It took the continued opening of new lands and the efforts of dissident preachers like Beecher and Charles Finney to push the Congregational Church into action.

The Presbyterians

The Congregationalists were not alone in the struggle for the frontier. Many other denominations were involved in the evangelization of the West. The Presbyterian Church in America was working out how to maintain what they perceived was a

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[71] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), 59.

Christian nation. Although the Presbyterian Church was imported from Scotland before the American Revolution, the number of Scots-Irish who had migrated to the West and claimed Presbyterian heritage necessitated the Presbyterian Church to move west as well.

Theologically similar to the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians also believed in a Calvinist theology. The largest difference between Presbyterians and Congregationalists was their method of church leadership. Congregationalists felt individual churches should decide their own leadership and not be imposed upon by an outside church hierarchy. Presbyterian churches placed a greater importance on the form of church government that tied congregations together in presbyteries to which congregations were to be subject. They also paradoxically insisted on the parity of all clergy. Grouped together in successively larger and larger tiers of leadership, Presbyterian churches took part in regular meetings to reinforce and regulate theological understandings. Presbyterian churches also relied on the laity, but they preferred clerical leadership and training of its pastors. Where Congregationalists might call a lay pastor, Presbyterians relied more on seminary-educated clergy.

All this is to say that there was not much difference separating the Congregationalists from the Presbyterians, either theologically or ministerially. The need for local religious leadership in the West was felt so greatly by both Congregationalists and Presbyterians that in 1801, the ingenious Plan of Union was established. This meant the two denominations would send out missionaries to the West to preach a common gospel message. Instead of creating Congregationalist or Presbyterian churches at the will of the missionary, it would be up to the will of the

gathering of believers in the new church that would decide whether it would be a Presbyterian or Congregationalist church. While designed as a blending of equals, the Plan of Union favored the Presbyterians and their church organization. The tight Presbyterian system of church government favored the creation of Presbyterian churches. In the agreement it took a majority of Congregationalists to leave their affiliation and become Presbyterian, but a unanimous vote of a Presbyterian Church was required before approval of the presbytery for a Presbyterian Church to convert to Congregationalism.[72] For an interesting example, take the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago which was founded by a Congregationalist minister educated in a Congregationalist college ministering to 27 people, of whom 26 were Congregationalists, but the church was organized as Presbyterian.[73] The Plan of Union effectively established churches throughout the West until its dissolution in 1852.

The struggle for Presbyterian churches was not with other denominations, but more from within their own. By 1810, the Presbyterians had experienced the secession of two groups, the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Christian movement who would become the Campbellites.[74] Then in 1837, the Presbyterian Church split into what they termed Old School and New School. The New School Presbyterians closely aligned with their Congregationalist brethren, emphasizing moral reform, interdenominational cooperation and evangelical piety. The Old School was highly suspicious of what they felt was a reliance on revivals and camp meetings and not on intellectually sound instruction by ministers. Old School theologians felt that the New School relied too

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[72] Von Rohr, 264.
[73] Willaim Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 211.
[74] George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience, A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 14.

much on man's ability, dignity, and freedom, while neglecting the depravity of man and man's need for God.[75] The New School was essentially more theologically liberal than the Old School. Also at this time a staunch discussion on slavery split the church to which the New School opposed slavery while the Old School did not feel it warranted a denominational stand.

The split within the Presbyterian Church left nearly equal numbers of congregants on both sides. Because it was so contentious, the two halves worked even more fervently to win converts, matching creation of churches and the establishment of colleges. The opposing sides of this struggle within the Presbyterian Church labored vigorously against each other during their split. Members of the Presbyterian Church also reflected upon the other groups who had seceded previously, the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Christian movement, marking the middle of the nineteenth century as a time of vigorous interdenominational rivalry.

The Methodists

The Congregationalists and Presbyterians were, at this time generally speaking, more conservative in their approach to ministering to congregations. Methodists in contrast were more liberal in who was accepted into their church and who could preach. While all three churches ascribed to a set theology with little variations, there were key variations, not in the theology, but in the practices of the churches. Methodism differed in important ways from Congregationalism and Presbyterianism through its practices.

Methodists, long part of the Anglican Church before the American Revolution, was the first religious body in America to form a national organization. During their

[75] Ibid., 58.

early occupancy in America, Methodists saw themselves as simply, according to W.W. Sweet, "groups of pious people within the Church of England, formed into societies for the promotion of holiness."[76] At the close of the American Revolution, Methodists were still dependent on Anglican ministers for administration of the sacraments since American ministers were unordained men. John Wesley, leader of the Methodists in Britain, ordained Thomas Coke as minister for America. Wesley believed he had the duty as a presbyter of the Anglican Church to ordain ministers. Although they numbered only 15,000 and they lacked educated leadership, the Methodists in America were organized by John Wesley in 1784 at a Christmas Conference in Baltimore.[77] While Wesley was officially in control until his death, the American Methodist church practically severed ties with the convening of the Christmas Conference.

The American Methodist Church was established to bring the ministration of the gospel and the sacraments to those who had been without under the Anglican Church. Therefore, it was intended as an evangelical organization from its beginnings. The acceptance of uneducated men as ministers under the direction of John Wesley continued after the disassociation with the British Methodist Church, but it was in stark contrast to the policies of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches of only ordaining educated ministers. The Methodist Church also differed through their usage of the circuit rider to bring religious teaching to as many people as possible. Using an ordained minister on a rotating basis through a set region, it was possible to reach many more people than setting up a stationary church. So effective was the Methodist circuit riders that one rival Presbyterian complained:

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[76] William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1933), 100.
[77] Sweet, *Religion in America,* 195.

> I at length became ambitious to find a family whose cabin had not been entered by a Methodist. In several days I traveled from settlement to settlement on my errand of good, but in every hovel I entered, I learned that the Methodist missionary had been there before me.[78]

The Methodists also succeeded in their use of camp meetings to reach unconverted and recalcitrant adherents of Christianity. Francis Asbury, champion of American Methodism, claimed three to four million Americans came together through camp meetings by 1811.[79]

The Baptists

The American public had a wide regard for Baptists. By the end of the American Revolution, Baptists had continually pushed for the baptism of only those who could prove their regeneration in Christ. Although they only baptized a select few, their numbers grew from around 1000 before the American Revolution to over 100,000 by 1800. This rise was mostly due to the frontier missionary efforts of early American Baptist ministers. Also, the Baptist church's use of democratic politics was appealing to many new Americans, especially those in the West. Baptist ministers used the farmer-preacher model, understanding the difficulties of supporting a minister on the frontier. It appeared that the Baptists were posed to possess the West more so than any other religious group.

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[78] William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture 1765-1840* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 116.
[79] Hatch, 49.

Baptists did enjoy great success in the early part of the nineteenth century, but by the opening of Nebraska Territory, they were recovering from a divisive split in their church. In 1830, what became known as antimission statements were approved by western Baptist churches. Baptist churches, especially in the West were against what they perceived as hierarchical sentiments by missionaries coming to their region. The eastern missionaries coming to regions inhabited by Baptists assumed that the region lacked religion and needed to be converted. The Baptists already in of the region took exception to these attitudes and actions of fellow Baptists. While the antimission issue was largely resolved by 1849, the effect of the sentiment of some western churches was felt in the Baptist missions movement. Few missionary involvement and few missionaries from the Baptists moved to the Nebraska frontier.[80]

The "Christian" Movement

In the beginning half of the nineteenth century, many Christian groups sought a return to what they saw as the "primitive" church. Beset by what they felt was subjugation by eastern elites and influenced by various ideas circulating in the post-revolutionary United States, specifically the right of ordinary persons to seek their own destiny, ministers led secessionist movements in an effort to restore the Christian Church. Seeking to unite all Christian churches under the same basic gospel message, several ministers eventually brought their flocks together to form a new denomination.

Barton W. Stone, one of the initial ministers at the Cane Ridge camp meetings in 1801, believed in the power of the revivals to free people from oppressive control by denominational leaders. He became increasingly disenfranchised with the Presbyterian

[80] Sweet, *Religion in America*, 256.

Church of which he was a part, breaking wholly from them in 1803. He continued to head his church in Kentucky in a way that he felt was truer to the original intentions of the bible. He specifically emphasized reading the bible as if mortal eyes had never seen it.[81]

One of the major proponents of the antimission effort in the Baptist denomination came to lead his own version of Christianity. Alexander Campbell was a Baptist minister who believed in a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible. He therefore opposed mission societies that eastern churches supported because they were not expressly biblical. Campbell also opposed Sunday Schools, missionary societies, synods, conferences, bishops and reverends. Campbell sought to restore the Christian church to the true church, like Stone and others were attempting to do. Campbell led his church in Pennsylvania until 1832. By 1832, the followers of Barton Stone who had determined that scripture ordained a "decisively Arminian theology, a radically congregational polity and a contractual conception of the ministry," were combined with Campbell's group and others sought a return to a "primitive gospel."[82]

Campbell sought to restore what he felt was a truer form of the church. Instead of giving his group a name such as Presbyterian or Congregational (for their organizational style), or Baptist (for their reliance on immersion), Campbell and his followers chose the simple name "Christian." While originally begun as a protest against the number of divided churches, the "Disciples," as they were also known, became another part of the divided church. Since they saw differences with other versions of Christianity as irresolvable, the "Campbellites" became outsiders in the

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[81] Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life, A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 214-215.
[82] Ahlstrom, 446.

religious world. While Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists opposed the new group, Campbell's version of Christianity was very successful in the West mostly due to his energetic leadership.[83] The missionary movement that was opposed at first by Campbell was only openly opposed to the societies, not to the notion of evangelism. Many Campbellite ministers went west to influence those on the frontier of the need of their version of Christianity. Openly sectarian and proselytizing, Campbellite clergy proceeded to established themselves in positions that would allow them to be ready for people who were interested in religion. At the opening of Nebraska Territory, there were Campbellite ministers in Iowa, ready to journey westward for their church.

The Mormons

While Alexander Campbell was leading the "Campbellites" in his own interpretation of the bible, a unique religion formed in the "burned over district" in New York. In an era of uncertainty, an era of stark democracy, even to the point where, as Gordon Wood says, "truth itself became democratized, and the borders of the eighteenth century had painstakingly worked out between science and superstition, naturalism and supernaturalism, were now blurred," the time was right for the appearance of Joseph Smith.[84] Smith's religious career flourished when he claimed to have new revelations from God through the angel Moroni in the form of golden tablets. A young man from a family fraught with economic difficulties, Smith had been

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[83] Ibid., 452; Sweet, *Religion in America,* 236.
[84] Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," in *Religion in American History, A Reader*, eds. Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 190.

convicted of being a "disorderly person and an imposter" for using a "seer stone."[85] Several years later, Smith claimed to have found a set of golden plates written in "reformed Egyptian" and set about translating them with his wife. Within a month of the publication of the *Book of Mormon*, Smith baptized six members into a church. Within two months there were forty people who acknowledged Smith as their spiritual leader and his revelations as authority.[86]

Taking many original leaders from unheralded backgrounds, including Brigham Young, Smith made strong appeals to those who had been disenfranchised by the Congregational and Presbyterian notions of earthly success as a reflection of divine favor. Instead, Smith claimed the direct opposite, that God despised the rich and would exalt those who were downtrodden.[87] By this sentiment, the persecution of his church and their miserable financial status was proof of God's favor, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The appearance of a new book of God's revelations directly opposed what many other churches had proclaimed and individuals believed. Coupled with peculiarities of beliefs compared to many other antebellum Americans, Mormons were a unique religion in America. In the time that they appeared, the Mormons would not have been seen as that different, but according to R. Laurence Moore in his study of religious outsiders, "Mormons were different because they said they were different and because their claims, frequently advanced in the most obnoxious way possible, prompted others to agree and to treat them as such."[88] Moving at first westward into Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831, then onto Missouri and later into Illinois, the fledgling church faced opposition at

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[85] Hatch, 114.
[86] Ahlstrom, 505.
[87] Hatch, 122.
[88] R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31.

every location. After the assassination of Joseph Smith in 1844, and facing persecution for their peculiar beliefs, the Mormons trekked to their eventual home they called "Deseret." Having to stop for the winter in 1846-47, the first migration of Mormons inhabited what they called Winter Quarters, the eventual city of Florence, Nebraska. Led by Brigham Young, they settled in the Salt Lake Valley.[89]

One of the many things that set Mormons apart from other religious groups was their extensive sectarianism. Reflectively seen as set apart, Mormons continually proselytized members of other churches. They sent out missionaries throughout the United States and overseas. Many early converts sought to migrate to Salt Lake City, often traveling through Nebraska Territory. By the opening of the territory in 1854, most of the Mormons had gone through the region, while some traversed the region until at least 1857. There was a remnant of Mormons throughout Nebraska Territory making their way west into Utah.

Ministerial Cooperation in Nebraska

This brief summary of several religious groups on the frontier reveals a variety of Christian perspectives. Their differences are apparent both theologically and methodologically. Denominationalism was rampant to the point where people identified first with their variety of Christianity, (i.e. Congregationalist or Methodist) rather than simply as Christian. Denominations also split over the issue of slavery with divisions beginning to erupt as early as the 1830s. Given the democratic tendencies of American Protestantism, schism within churches often erupted in the name of an

[89] Ahlstrom, 507.

individuals' freedom of belief. Within the layers of cleavage in churches, the Protestant ministerial experience of Nebraska Territory seemed exceptional with a tendency toward unity. Ministers came to Nebraska Territory as representatives of their distinct groups, but interdenominational ministerial cooperation prevailed within Nebraska Territory.

Faced with a vast frontier region, it was quickly apparent that denominationalism could not work. New bonds and relationships were fostered on the frontier of Nebraska between former religious competitors in ways that would not have been able to be predicted in the East. Ministers sought both people of their same denominations as well as ministers of different denominations whose beliefs were compatible with their own. A winnowing of religious issues took place, forcing religious adherents to decide what issues were important enough to be divisive about when faced with life on the frontier. Ministers publicly worked for Christian improvement and interdenominational cooperation, but they did not abandon all distinctions. Instead, animosity and differences were harbored privately, only to be written about in personal journals and private communications. These journals leave glimpses of personal interactions and the undercurrents of social religious life in Nebraska Territory.

Religious cooperation in Nebraska Territory was fostered based on beliefs. There were self-described outsiders, those who chose not to fit within the social norms or beliefs of mainstream society. There were also insiders, those who fit together on some level whether that is socially, religiously, or some other way. Groups of believers

fit together in different ways, and still occasionally chose to emphasize their difference instead of their similarity.

Democratizing influences in American religious history have been strongest in areas where there is a selection of religions or even denominations to adhere to. When people moved to the frontier, they brought with them their religious heritage, but with limited religious resources save that which they brought, religious expression was constrained. Of those who would call themselves religious, some were pious people, maintaining their faith despite a lack of a formal religious organization. Others were nominally religious, attending meetings without making bold professions of faith. Of course, there were non-religious people who migrated to Nebraska Territory as well.

When ministers, no matter the denomination, came to an area, the minister acted like a magnet for religiously inclined individuals. Calling for "hearers," ministers often did not care if the individuals who came were originally from another denomination, or sect, or even Christian. Instead, they sought hearers of any sort as long as they were willing to listen. Ministers sought to establish a "conference," or "class" of hearers, a small base of operations that would eventually develop into a church.[90] These ministers were often content to preach in any conditions, faithfully recording the numbers of attendees as a way to monitor progress. Minister to Nebraska Territory, Amos Billingsley often referred to the numbers of hearers he had in attendance whether he was preaching in the sitting room of his boarding house or in his church.[91] Once a sufficient number of hearers could be maintained in a settlement, a church was established.

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[90] Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 148.
[91] Billingsley Diary, November 7, 1857.

How these groups fit together, or more precisely, came from the same root, is the subject of several of Sidney Mead's influential articles on American church history.[92] Mead uses the terms "Left Wing" and "Right Wing" to designate the historical tendencies of Christian religious groups in the United States. Among the right-wing adherents he includes Lutheranism, Anglicanism and the Reformed churches, while the left-wing is made up of the more inclusive strains, such as the Universalism and Unitarianism. While Mead implies that Christian churches are either left-wing or right-wing, they can be better described as residing in a continuum of religiosity that leans either to the left or to the right. Similarities between the churches of similar branches brought them together for common causes. In Nebraska Territory, the ministers representing right-wing churches, although feeling strains of competition, banded together to stress their commonalities and to work together toward common goals.

Ministers from different denominations in the East, South, and Midwest working together was an anomaly during the antebellum era. The sense of sectionalism and division within churches was more pronounced than unity. Scholars suggest that the democratic notions that seized the nation's churches after the American Revolution continued until they were replaced by church divisions along regional lines at the time of the Civil War.[93] C.C. Goen's important *Broken Churches, Broken Nation* reveals the relative value small groups of church members placed on their own interpretations of

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[92] Sidney E. Mead, "Denominationalism: The Shape of Protestantism in America," *Church History 23*, no. 4 (December, 1954): 291-320 and see also "From Coercion to Persuasion: Another Look at the Rise of Religious Liberty and the Emergence of Denominationalism," reprinted in *Church History 57,* Supplement: Centennial Issue (1988), 68-88.

[93] Benjamin G. Rader, *American Ways: A History of American Cultures 1500-1865* Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Belmont, California: Thompson Wadsworth, 2006), 159-163.

what the Bible says on slavery, prodding major denominations into splitting. Goen states that an overlooked indicator of the coming of the Civil War was the schisms within the various denominations in the years leading up to Fort Sumter.[94] Democratizing sentiment persisted within the churches in Nebraska Territory until the Civil War, but the ministers recognized the folly of needless competition when facing the Frontier.

The cohort of Protestant ministers who went to Nebraska Territory remained with their denominations. Most ministers did not change denominations once on the frontier. Congregationalist Reuben Gaylord stayed committed to his denomination even though he was encouraged to change to Presbyterianism. Ministers interacted with co-laborers who professed sufficiently similar beliefs. In Nebraska Territory's Protestant churches, commonality was stressed rather than distinctions. For example, Presbyterian minister Amos Billingsley sought out the residence of Reuben Gaylord when Billingsley was passing through Omaha on his way to Denver even though there was another Presbyterian minister in the vicinity. Not only did Billingsley stay with Gaylord and his family for about a week, Billingsley also preached for Gaylord, "a very good cong[regation] at Omaha."[95] Theological differences between the doctrines of Presbyterians and Congregationalists were minimalized and did not stand in the way of Gaylord entertaining Billingsley in his home, or even having him fill in for his pulpit. Methodist minister William Goode preached at the Presbyterian Mission at Bellevue in

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[94] C.C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 3.
[95] Billingsley Diary, April 14, April 17 and April 21, 1861.

the early days of Nebraska Territory, happy to assist others laboring for Christ on the frontier.[96]

What is more striking than ministers of different denominations hosting each other during a time of rampant denominationalism is the active cooperation that transpired among ministers of increasingly distinctive denominations. Billingsley preached at Brownville with "Brother Collins," presumably S. Collins, Baptist minister when Billingsley was pastor in Florence, Nebraska Territory. Again in Brownville, Billingsley went on a missionary tour with Brother Collins to the Falls City area. As a member of the Nemaha County Bible Society, Collins distributed Bibles throughout the county in 1859 while Billingsley was the president of the society.[97] Interactions between Baptists and Presbyterians would have been increasingly uncommon in the East, but when facing the western frontier, new teamwork developed. Also as mentioned above, Billingsley filled in for Gaylord in the Omaha Congregational Church.

Rev. Reuben Gaylord experienced several examples of interdenominational cooperation. When he was in his first year of his initial appointment in Iowa, Gaylord heard Methodist ministers and even attended their quarterly meeting.[98] Later, after moving to Omaha, while Gaylord was visiting family in the East, his congregation was "kept together during [his] absence, by the labors of a *Baptist* brother, a man of excellent spirit."[99] Who the Baptist minister was is unclear, but for a Yale-educated Congregationalist minister to rely on a presumably uneducated Baptist minister to

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[96] Goode, 271.
[97] Nemaha County Bible Society Minutes, March 8 and 13, 1859, Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, Lincoln, Nebraska.
[98] Mary Welles Gaylord, 101.
[99] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary,* February 1860, 235.

maintain a church over an extended absence reveals the extent that ministers were willing to cooperate in Nebraska Territory.

More than personal dependence for filling a pulpit, ministers in Nebraska Territory cooperated during times of revival, attending and participating in camp meetings. Revivals were actively encouraged by Methodist ministers Francis Asbury and Charles Grandison Finney, but were not a part of the Presbyterian or Congregationalist methods actively employed to win converts. Some Congregationalist missionaries wrote to *The Home Missionary* complaining about the usage of "big meetings" by other churches in their region to draw people away into competing churches.[100] Yet in Nebraska Territory, both Amos Billingsley and Reuben Gaylord participated in camp meetings that actively sought out and let to revivals. "Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists all mingled in the work and the Spirit of God rested on the people. It is the first revival in Nebraska," according to Reuben Gaylord in 1857, "and was truly a time of refreshing."[101]

However, there was by no means a unified movement to bring Protestantism to the western frontier. Each minister saw an opening that he felt needed to be filled by his own version of Protestantism. Reuben Gaylord professed his allegiance to the Congregational Church even if Presbyterian might be better suited for the frontier.[102] Gaylord regretted the lack of Congregationalist ministers and having to turn over churches that he had organized to the Presbyterians, consistently expressing the desire

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[100] "Iowa," *The Home Missionary,* October 1859, 143.
[101] Reuben Gaylord to A.H.M.S. quoted in *Life and Labors of Rev. Reuben Gaylord, Home Missionary for Iowa and Nebraska and Superintendent for A. H. M. S. for Nebraska and Western Iowa* by Mary M. Welles Gaylord, (Omaha, Rees Printing Company, 1889), 196.
[102] Mary Welles Gaylord, 92.

for more Congregationalist ministers to come to Nebraska.[103] While Gaylord was in Omaha, other competing churches were established, including Lutheran and Baptist without apparent increase in the city's population. Gaylord also expressed regrets that, "We now have four of the six congregations meeting at the same time."[104] This statement reveals the extent that ministers were convinced of the persuasion of their version of Christianity. By meeting at the same time, those who might have attended more than one church were forced to decide which service to attend. Assuming the intentions of churches were to reach the unconverted, the unintended consequences included some proselytizing, affecting the number of attendees overall. This competition over attendees was not preferred by many ministers since there were so many obviously unconverted people, but denominationalism prevailed.

During a time of intense denominationalism throughout the country, protestant ministers who ministered in Nebraska Territory stood apart. Cooperating in uncommon ways, the brotherhood of protestant ministers worked to bring the unconverted to Christ. The frontier experience drew ministers into cooperation, minimizing differences and emphasizing grace for each other. While coming from strong denominational backgrounds, ministers in Nebraska Territory overcame personal obstacles to interdenominational unity. They worked toward common goals, and while not removing all disagreements, the ministers made significant temporary changes in the interactions between denominations.

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[103] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary,* February 1857, 241; also Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska Territory," *The Home Missionary,* December 1858, 200.
[104] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary,* March 1860, 262.

III

TREADING BETWEEN CULTURES: VICTORIANISM AND CULTURAL CONFLICT IN NEBRASKA TERRITORY

> The work to be done is to lay the foundation of society and of gospel institutions for what is soon to become a place where multitudes will form their characters for eternity. - Reuben Gaylord[105]

In the emerging social realm of Territorial Nebraska, missionaries existed as links between a socially structured culture of the East and the developing culture and society of the frontier. Part of the Victorian culture in America, missionaries faced both internal and societal conflicts and struggles of competing cultural visions from that which was burgeoning in the rough culture of the West and what they saw as proper culture, reflecting that of the East. Culture was important to many people. They believed that by providing rules and standards to live by, society became more stable, and the overall quality of life would improve. Yet, standards of society that were important to missionaries and others of the East were not universally important to the inhabitants of Nebraska Territory.

The evangelical intentions of Protestant missionaries were subtly conflicting. Difficulties over fostering societal development to better administer the gospel message conflicted with the basic intentions of the missionaries to bring Protestant Christianity to those without it. Missionaries also were uncertain as to their own position in society, where they fit in the social continuum of class as Victorian standards of gentility were

[105] Undated letter, probably from 1855, Congregationalist Home Missionary Society papers 1855-1899, NSHS Collections; MFilm; MS2659

emerging. Missionaries struggled with the inherent tension brought by preaching to the destitute and whom they often felt most drawn to, and appealing to the wealthy portion of society, those who could afford to donate funds to the church. Missionaries struggled with giving proper attention to existing church members and searching out the unchurched. Along with the dilemma of who to preach to, missionaries debated over how to reach the unconverted, whether to go to where the people were or to establish a church building and open the doors, hoping for attendees. As Nebraska Territory evolved from a tumultuous frontier society into an established matrix of class and culture, missionaries resolved their conflicts, resulting in an imperfect transmission of eastern society and culture to Nebraska's frontier.

Beyond the conflicts that faced Protestant missionaries, other issues compounded societal-cultural construction, among which includes the obstacle of constant immigration on the swiftly changing frontier. Ministers sought to stabilize society, thereby limiting the societal effects of constant immigration, while confronted with a steady flow of congregants. On the fluid frontier, it was feared that the cultural ideal of the self-made man might be warped in the manner of the confidence man, plaguing frontier society with issues of authenticity.[106] Frontier missionaries therefore needed to negotiate a high-wire act of expectations, balancing the distant expectations of the sending agency and the local expectations of their congregants, while not losing influence within their communities.

Protestant missionaries to Nebraska territory negotiated within this muddied eddy of conflicting socio-cultural currents. This chapter will assess efforts of three

[106] The self-made man was the person who had brought himself up to the upper levels of society by his own efforts. He was genuinely elevated and therefore belonged above the lower classes. The confidence man presented himself as a member of good society, but was simply a charlatan.

missionaries who imparted what they viewed as social and cultural standards in Territorial Nebraska and investigate the conflicts of an emerging society and culture that both affected Protestant missionaries and was changed by them.

Victorian Culture and the Conflict of Refinement

The men that came to Nebraska Territory as missionaries were part of an emerging Victorian culture in America. Victorianism in America was partially derived from its counterpart in Britain, but according to Daniel Walker Howe in America instead of existing at the periphery of polite society and political power, the people who most identified with Victorianism dominated it.[107] The root of Victorian culture of America during the previous antebellum era was in the intellectual cultural hearth of the Northeast.

Victorian culture can be defined with the term "self-control." Replacing older cultural regulations such as shame, the concept of guilt was pushed as a means of self-regulation in a constantly changing society. Under the umbrella concept of self-control, many different aspects of life can be described. Part of Victorianism was displayed through proper actions, other aspects were obviously displayed in wealth. This correct culture was assumed to be demonstrated by the refined actions of individuals as defined by countless etiquette manuals.[108]

Cultured Victorians displayed their refinement through their wealth as much as their actions. The conspicuous display of wealth was important for many Victorians

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[107] Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America" in *Victorian America,* ed. Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 4.
[108] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 99.

who aspired to be part of the developing middle class. The importance of wealth developed more in what Eric Hobsbawm defined as the "age of capital" when men of distinction flourished with wives whose social role was to display their husband's economic prowess.[109] Proper dress such as that found in *Godey's Lady Book* defined correct attire for individual situations so that outward displays of appropriate dress would match the social aspirations of those so attired.[110] Properly constructed houses later signaled Victorian influences from the cultural hearth of New England to what was perceived by the East as the edge of civilization: the Kansas cattletowns of Wichita, Caldwell and Dodge, even if their location placed them outside the traditional realms of Victorian culture.[111] Defined standards of gentility through published manuals as part of the Victorian culture provided social anchors for people who were set adrift in the socially confusing nineteenth century.[112] Outward displays of Victorianism marked inward refinement and right thinking.

Cultural ideals were set by a profusion of advice books. "One could learn," as John F. Kasson suggests, "to act, build, calculate, carve, cook, dance, draw, dye, and so forth through an alphabet of attainments; so too one could through etiquette acquire the habits and knowledge that would lead to a better life."[113] Overall, conceptual streams of punctuality, steady work, compulsive behavior, postponement of gratification in favor of eternal rewards, and self-improvement run through the landscape of

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[109] See generally, Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975).
[110] Halttunen, 65-91.
[111] C. Robert Haywood, *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991), *xii.*
[112] Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 404.
[113] John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and King, 1990), 43.

Victorianism. Combined, these streams made what was known as "character," an aspect of personal improvement that was widely sought after during this time. Shaping one's character in specific manners to attain cultural ideals was advocated as a way to improve society as a whole.

American Victorianism was seen as an ideal to be promoted, especially by those who benefited most: the entrepreneurs, investors, capitalist employers, and their progeny. The promoters of Victorianism came from a select group of bourgeoisie that self-consciously sought to retain cultural standards that reflected north eastern culture.[114] Through the establishment of culturally and socially influential institutions, such as volunteer societies, churches, lyceums, colleges, and fraternal organizations, it was hoped that Victorianism would be advanced. The most lasting promotion of Victorianism in America was in the form of advice literature which proliferated through the Victorian age. Victorian culture was also promoted in the industrialized cities of the East through the usage of voluntary associations that bonded individuals together as an antidote to social disorder.[115] Voluntary associations ranging from Sunday schools or lyceums to lodges all fused individuals together around common goals in a nation lacking established hierarchies and long-standing traditions.[116] These voluntary associations were key to the establishment of a stable society, forging links between people who might not have been associated with one another in any other manner. However, the realization of Victorian ideals as promoted by its advocates relied on

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[114] Howe, 12.
[115] John S. Gilkeson, Jr., *Middle Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 56.
[116] Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 2.

several factors that lay beyond their reach. Actual responses of communities to social change then resulted in an imperfect reflection of eastern Victorianism to the West.

At the core of Victorian culture was American Protestantism. American Protestantism was essentially, according to T. Scott Miyakawa, "A voluntary association of believers seeking inward perfection and Christian fellowship."[117] If seen as individual voluntary associations, the Protestant church as a whole might have been the most wide ranging association with the most members and the widest affiliations in what can be called an age of "voluntaryism." Electing to participate in religious activities partially marked individuals as Victorians, suggesting their mannerisms during the various meetings might correspond to social standards. Church manners, once thought to be an outpouring from the heart in the form of piety, were by the 1850s seen as an aspect of social courtesy. In this age of advice literature, even church mannerisms were dictated so that people could be informed of the correct manners to display while attending services.[118]

Through the prevalence of Victorianism as evidenced in mid-nineteenth century advice manuals, novels, and books about polite society, one is seduced into thinking that Victorianism was a force overwhelming America. Yet Victorianism was but one socio-cultural force Americans experienced. Moreover, numerous other cultures existed during this same era that interacted with Victorianism which shaped a variety of regional effects.[119]

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[117] T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 81.
[118] Haltunnen, 165.
[119] Howe, 5.

What was to become of society in Nebraska Territory was dependent on those who settled there and the cultural baggage they brought. No matter what the intentions of those who remained in the East were, immigrants who actually made the move into the territory shaped its culture. Victorians were very culturally aware, knowing that their actions and ideals would influence others and that their own outward appearance might be interpreted by others.[120] It was thus important for Protestant ministers who saw themselves as culturally astute to cultivate an appropriate cultural appearance and in turn, influence that culture's evolution.

With this national cultural background, Reuben Gaylord, Amos Billingsley and Henry Davis, all part of this Victorian culture, acted on the cultural ideals that influenced them overtly or inadvertently. Ministers, as potential conveyors of culture, acted on their beliefs about society. They sought ways to consummate their Christian denomination and their personal beliefs, and they demonstrated their belief not only in the pulpit but outside in as moral influencers in society.

This is not to say that all three missionaries acted from the same cultural blueprint. Their individual backgrounds and various denominations revealed differences. To a varying degree, ministers sought to reconcile Victorian ideals with their own which, for these three ministers, corresponds to that of their chosen denominations.

Reuben Gaylord's Victorian Heritage

Reuben Gaylord was thoroughly Victorian, revealing many traditionally Victorian values throughout his life, and maintaining them even when he faced

[120] Haltunnen, 64-65.

uncertainty and a tumultuous frontier life. Gaylord consistently displayed Victorian values of time-consciousness, education, temperance, cultural awareness, hard work, and self-improvement. Born in Norfolk, Connecticut, in April, 1812, to a long line of Puritan ancestry, Reuben maintained ties to his hometown throughout his life. These ties reinforced for him the correct ways of life from New England that should be promoted in the wilds of the West.

Beginning public school at the age of four, he continued his education until he graduated from Yale in 1834.[121] Gaylord displayed his interest in education by accepting a call to teach at the new Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois, promoting the establishment of a Congregationalist college in Davenport, Iowa, and establishing Fontanelle University in Fontanelle, Nebraska Territory, in 1858.[122] Gaylord encouraged his fiancé, Sarah Burton, to continue her studies at Litchfield Female Academy in Connecticut, anxious for the time when they could study at home together and discuss their readings.[123] He believed a major influence on society and culture was education and was part of the major cross-denominational push for higher education.

Gaylord dutifully recorded his daily and weekly schedule. He in turn communicated his schedule with Sarah Burton.[124] By carefully planning his schedule, he was able to make the most of his time. As a minister, he was constantly confronted with death, and in turn this reminded him of the importance of making the most of one's life. He reflected on his time in Jacksonville and pondered his effectiveness after

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[121] Mary Welles Gaylord, *The Life and Labors of Rev. Reuben Gaylord, Home Missionary for Iowa and Nebraska and superintendent for A. H. M. S. for Nebraska and Western Iowa* (Omaha, Rees Printing Company, 1889), 34.
[122] James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska*, 2nd Ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 99.
[123] Mary Welles Gaylord, 42.
[124] Ibid., 58, 101.

two and a half years as a preparatory tutor. His had a grave sense of urgency, his greatest concern, according to his second wife, was in "redeeming the time;" in other words, making the most of his time on earth.[125]

Gaylord best displayed his Victorianism through his advancement of New England society and culture. According to Mary Welles Gaylord, Reuben "helped to lay the foundations of . . . schools, academies, of temperance and anti-slavery reforms, and whatever would promote the well-being and highest goal of what was to be a great and noble state."[126] As a New Englander of Puritan roots, he knew what would be best and that was a replication of his home. Since he believed there were no standards for society in Nebraska Territory, he needed to set some. Gaylord explicated his views on the direction that church should go when confronted with life on the frontier in a letter addressed to the secretary of the American Home Missionary Society. "The work to be done," Gaylord wrote assuredly, "is to lay the foundation of society and of gospel institutions for what is soon to become a place where multitudes will form their characters for eternity."[127] He was not simply following Congregational intentions (although many other Congregationalists shared his views); he was extending his culture to what he saw as the edge of civilization.

An example of his extension of cultural ideals beyond Congregational bounds is through his advancement of anti-slavery reforms. The American Home Missionary Society did not take a formal stand on slavery until the middle of the 1850s and then

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[125] Ibid., 58.
[126] Ibid., 34.
[127] Undated letter, probably from 1855, Congregationalist Home Missionary Society papers 1855-1899, NSHS Collections; MFilm; MS2659

with little commitment.[128] Gaylord stepped beyond his bounds as a missionary from the American Home Missionary Society by advocating anti-slavery reforms in the border territory of Iowa and promoting moral reform.

Gaylord remained tied to his cultural roots in New England. A string of immigrants from Connecticut stretched into Illinois and Iowa and later into Nebraska, intent on maintaining their cultural standards on the Plains.[129] By visiting these frontiering individuals and families that shared cultural ideals, Gaylord was able to reinforce his own standards and encourage settlers to maintain their heritage. Upon receiving his ordination as a Congregationalist minister, his license to preach, and funding from the American Home Missionary Society, he immediately set out for Iowa, visiting fellow transplanted New Englanders along the way. He joined his friend from Illinois College, Asa Turner, and established numerous churches.[130] Once there, he saw the dispersed Congregationalists who lacked churches as his charges, and "frequently rode long distances to preach and to look after scattered sheep."[131] He remained in Iowa for fifteen years, preaching to various churches from his home church in Da

It was after graduating from Yale, teaching at Illinois College, pastoring in numerous towns and traveling through the northern states that Gaylord came to Nebraska Territory. Now married, with children and domestic help, Gaylord symbolized stability in an unstable place. With an extensive personal collection of experiences in the West and fourteen years in Iowa, Gaylord brought age and

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[128] Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 20.
[129] Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 92.
[130] William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1950), 251.
[131] Gaylord, 103.

experience to a new area that was generally lacking in both. It was hoped that by calling Gaylord to minister in Nebraska Territory, he would implant New England cultural norms in an uncertain soil.

Amos Billingsley's Uncertainty

Amos Billingsley represented a different cultural and social legacy from Reuben Gaylord and sought to fulfill the perceived needs of Nebraska Territory in another manner. Amos Billingsley represented Old School Presbyterianism in a time of denominational cleavage. The Old School was the more conservative of two segments of the Presbyterian Church, and as such it was not known for its interdenominational cooperation. That said, not all of its adherents reflected each aspect of church policy, and Billingsley chose to cooperate with other denominations extensively. Culturally speaking, Billingsley's heritage was from New England, but he was born in the Midwest and the influence of Victorianism on him was more diffused than that of Gaylord.

Amos Billingsley was born November 14, 1818, near East Palestine, Ohio, to Robert and Jemima Austin Billingsley. According to his obituary, he displayed an early love for learning. He attended "a select school at Calcutta [Ohio] . . . New Athens College, then to Jefferson College, Pennsylvania . . . and finally to Allegheny Theological Seminary."[132] He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister on January 10,

[132] *Statesville Christian Herald* (Statesville, North Carolina), October 19, 1897.

1854, pastoring with the Slippery Rock Presbyterian Church until 1857 when he moved west to become pastor of the Florence, Nebraska Territory, Presbyterian Church.[133]

Although Billingsley was not as immersed in Victorianism as Gaylord, Billingsley did promote what he considered to be culturally important. While ministering in his second church in Nebraska Territory in Brownville, Billingsley founded the Nemaha County Bible Society that promoted Bible reading in the county. Billingsley was also a member of the "American Messenger Club" which was interested in distributing Biblical tracts throughout the country.[134] He gave lectures on temperance apart from his regular preaching to his congregation.[135] In essence, the most important part of Victorianism that Billingsley represented was Protestant Christianity. Billingsley did what he felt was right to promote Protestant Christianity where it was needed most, and for him that was first in Florence, Nebraska Territory, and later Brownville.

While in Brownville, Billingsley remarked "If there is any class of society for which I care more than another, it is for the young men of this place."[136] It was unusual for a minister to select a group of individuals as his focus, but owing to his own bachelorhood and the dominant male population of border towns, it is not surprising. Billingsley participated in both local and national evangelical efforts including the

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[133] Julius F. Schwarz, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Nebraska, Golden Anniversary Edition*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: E.R. Mockett, 1924), 142. Terri A. Brown, Walter Brown and Associates, "Amos S. Billingsley," *Men of the Cloth and a few women: Pastors, Preachers & Priests in Western PA*; available from http://www.rootsweb.com/~papastor/2a/amos_s_billingsley.htm; Internet; accessed 29 June 2005.
[134] Amos S. Billingsley, Diary, 24 February 1860, Nebraska State Historical Society Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. Referred to henceforth as Billingsley Diary.
[135] Ibid., 28 May 1860.
[136] Ibid., 26 November 1860.

National Fast called for by President James Buchanan on January 4, 1861; the World's Prayer Meeting, and local camp meetings and revivals.[137]

Billingsley reflected Victorian values in his personal journal extensively. He shared Gaylord's concern with time and how he spent it on earth. He regularly noted passing months and lamented how he had spent them, characteristically remarking "O how little have I done!"[138] Billingsley also made mention of important anniversaries, such as of his arrival in Brownville, his departure from Slippery Rock, and the deaths of his parents. Billingsley expressed great displeasure when the church bell did not ring for church on 30 September, 1860, prompting tardy arrivals and low attendance.[139] The beginning page of his journal carries the bold notation, "Redeem the Time," revealing the overall importance that Billingsley placed on his expenditure of time.[140]

As a minister, Billingsley saw self-improvement as an attainable goal for each member of his congregation and for himself personally. While the official Old School Presbyterian doctrine relied heavily on a Calvinistic tradition, Billingsley displayed instances of pleasure at people lifting up their religious station in life, signaling Billingsley's Victorian belief in self-improvement. One such account is of a Mr. S. Belden, presumably Seymore Belden, a lawyer originally from New York.[141] In the fall of 1860, after meeting several times with Billingsley, Belden began expressing interest in religion, gave up alcohol, and became a member of the Methodist church, much to Billingsley's delight even though Billingsley was Presbyterian.[142] The merchant David

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[137] Ibid., 4 January 1861, 13 January 1861, 8 September 1860, and 31 October 1860.
[138] Ibid., 20 January 1861.
[139] Ibid., 30 September 1860.
[140] Ibid., title page, no date.
[141] Manuscript U.S. Census, Federal Territorial Census, Nebraska Territory, Nemaha County, 1860.
[142] Billingsley Diary, 4 November 1860.

J. Martin was also much in the prayers and notes of Billingsley, hoping that he would continue to reconsider his ways.[143] Self-improvement was possible, and with God's blessing it was realistic.

Old School Presbyterianism did not fit neatly with life on the frontier. Old School Presbyterianism in general relied on older models of society to provide stability and a sense of history within the community through which their denomination could flourish. On the frontier of Territorial Nebraska, there was only few years of history by the time that Billingsley arrived in 1857. By helping to establish the foundations of a community and society upon which future generations might properly grow, Billingsley felt successful. One can understand his feeling of improvement through his journal entry in February of 1861:

> Our prayer meetings are increasing in interest. We have two singing classes, two public schools, tow papers, two weekly prayer meetings, two billiard tables, three houses of ilr[epute], 3 drinking Saloons, 6 stores, 1 Bank 1 land office, 4 preachers Several Lawyers etc in town.
>
> We have one Bible Society and one Un[ion] Sab[bath] School and Literary association.[144]

Shortly after this entry, Billingsley moved to Denver, Colorado Territory to minister to the young men there and presumably continue his work toward self-improvement.

Reuben Gaylord represented the staunchly Victorian culture of New England, and Gaylord displayed Victorian values throughout his time in Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska. Amos Billingsley was not as entrenched in Victorian values and culture, but he did see value in building a society that resembled the established culture and beliefs of the East.

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[143] Ibid., 18 November 1860.
[144] Ibid., 27 February 1861.

Henry Davis' Cultural Liberality

Henry Davis, as a minister represented Victorian values, but to the least degree of these three ministers. Henry T. Davis was born in 1833 in South Bend, Indiana, the most western start of the three Nebraska ministers. At the age of seventeen, Davis went to California as part of the gold rush migration. After returning home, he felt the call of religion on his heart. He purchased a Bible and became a Christian on the night of 4 March, 1853, and soon after his conversion he felt the call to the ministry.[145] He took the unusual step and entered Indiana Asbury University with the aid of a scholarship secured by his minister, James C. Reid.[146]

This university experience was a significant influence on Henry Davis. The university, known now as DePauw, in Greencastle, Indiana, was founded in the liberal tradition of providing the most benefit to the community in general. Davis' later interaction with other denominations in the name of Christ reveals some of the influence of the university. Although Davis decided to enter Asbury University, that decision did not mark him as part of the social elite as might have happened had the university been Yale or Harvard. Asbury was a small western college designed just for educating Methodist ministers in reaction to the proliferation of educated Congregationalists and Presbyterians coming from the East Coast. Asbury had only graduated its first alumnus in 1848, and that graduate had been demoted by presiding

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[145] Henry T. Davis, *Solitary Places Made Glad: Being Observations and Experiences for Thirty-Two years in Nebraska; With Sketches and Incidents Touching the Discovery, Early Settlement and Development of the State* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), 110.
[146] Ibid., 117.

elders of his first church who were afraid of favoring a college man.[147] In Sydney Ahlstrom's words, "[Methodist ministers] were by no means a social elite. With little formal training to divorce them from the common idiom, they reduced the Christian message and its implications for life to the simplest possible terms, and preached it simply, directly, and forcefully."[148] Davis continued his education and received his license to preach from the Greencastle Station in June of 1855.[149] He apprenticed in the Russellville Methodist Circuit and was later appointed to the Stanford Circuit in Indiana.

Davis provided only glimpses of Victorianism's impact on his life. He appeared to be singularly focused on evangelization wherever he was at. He met followers in homes and in churches, borrowing buildings from other church groups if they were available. Davis did not mention participation in societies or associations. He was not even interested in making land claims for himself or for a church or in being involved in claims clubs like some other ministers were.[150]

Davis' interest was in people's lives, not in whether they were part of an established society or what culture they were a part of. In his first year of 1856-57, he makes mention of the generosity of Baptists living nearby, but no similar remarks about other Methodists. The official records of the Methodist conference state that the church grew throughout Davis' tenure in Nebraska. One of Davis' contemporaries, Rev. David Marquette, remarked, "H.T. Davis was always seen to be a man so preeminently

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[147] Miyakawa, 92.
[148] Ahlstrom, 438.
[149] Davis, 118.
[150] While serving in Belleview, Davis received an inquiry about the town of "Platonia" from a Methodist minister in Ohio who was ready to move. Unfortunately, there was no such town and the minister's savings of $300 were wasted. Ibid.

of one work, and that work the salvation of souls, that few ever thought to inquire after his political predilection, though his private convictions were well defined."[151] Davis' interest in others of different versions of Protestantism reveals his acceptance of others unlike him in a true interdenominational spirit.

Although Henry Davis focused on his mission and was willing to meet anyone anywhere to achieve it, he maintained a level of personal appearance that was in keeping with Victorian standards for Methodist ministers. In keeping with instructions of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, Davis would have been what Wesley called "cleanly" in all aspects of his personal habits.[152] Davis probably was more respectable than many other frontier settlers in appearance. He depended on his appearance as part of his influence to the communities in which he ministered.

On the other hand Davis appeared to forsake Victorianism because he lacked self-control. While self-control was the overriding theme throughout Victorianism, Henry Davis consistently displayed impulsiveness. Rarely in one location for more than three years, Henry Davis did not attempt to establish a structured society. His concern was with the religiosity of the people. Davis was impulsive in his relocation to California and he continued his impulsiveness in his move into the ministry and later relocations between settlements once in Nebraska Territory. Although Davis' intention did not include stability, his actions as a minister nevertheless left a foundation of Methodism and permanent impressions on the inhabitants of Nebraska Territory.

All three ministers in Nebraska Territory held differing views of the importance of culture, but all three were impacted by the culture that was in Nebraska. The

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[151] David Marquette, *A History of Nebraska Methodism: First Half-Century 1854-1904* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Congress Press, 1904), 62.
[152] Miyakawa, 55-56.

establishment of churches was daunting to many people. Several times, each minister remarked on the difficulty of the task that lay before them. The unsettled culture of Nebraska Territory interacted with the missionaries who came to the region in an effort to impact the people in specific religious ways, influencing the actions of the missionaries.

Conflict of Purpose and Practice

Missionaries brought their message of Protestantism to Nebraska Territory to varying degrees of effectiveness. As settlers, missionaries had intentions for Nebraska Territory but the reasons that the missionaries gave for their migrations differed from many other settlers. Most settlers came for economic purposes, either to enrich themselves and return to their place of origin or to build a place for their future generations to inherit. Missionaries who came did not come for the same purpose. Instead they came to Nebraska Territory to bring the gospel message of Christ, so that the West would not be lost to some other religion.

What the most effective way to take this message to the people was up to the missionaries themselves. As the gospel message brought to a new area, there was considerable debate over the effectiveness of the message. What would be the best way to bring the message of Christ to the needy? Who would come to a church with no other hearers? Who would listen to someone from the East, imposing their religion? What was the most effective way to bring the message of Christ to those without it? The three missionaries of this study utilized three different techniques to resolve this dilemma.

Whether to preach to those who already had religion and were secure in their eternal destiny, or to preach to those who were not already members of a church before coming to Nebraska Territory and thus in danger of eternal punishment constituted the basic challenge to Nebraska's ministers. It represented the challenge of purpose and practice. Their overriding intention was to bring the gospel of Christ out, but the most effective way was open to debate. The practice of preaching to those already partaking in Christianity did not fulfill the desires of the missionary, but it might better fill a congregation. The practice of preaching to those without Christianity was difficult if they did not want to hear, leading to all sorts of complicating issues. This dilemma proved perplexing to the missionaries.

Henry Davis solved this problem by being driven solely by his purpose. His records all indicate that Davis never aspired to be a leading figure in society nor take a prominent place in the public eye. His desire was in keeping with the early Methodist circuit rider tradition of bringing the gospel to those without it, especially those on the fringes of society and what they considered civilization. Davis worked in the style of ministers like the famous Methodist Peter Cartwright, who went out to wherever the people were despite the tendency of educated ministers to remain in more settled areas.[153] Davis made his appeal to all persons, but especially to those on the fringes of society and settlement. As a traveling minister, Davis was experienced in his method of visiting people on a rotating basis, while searching for those without regular preaching. As evidenced above, Davis was willing to go where there was even the rumor of a town. The legacy of an established meeting house for worship was not

[153] Ahlstrom, 438.

important to him. Often he was content to meet in homes and preach to whoever was present.

Reuben Gaylord confronted this problem, however, in the opposite manner. During his time in Nebraska Territory, Gaylord was persuaded to preach to those who had gathered and were calling for a minister. Gaylord's initial visit to Nebraska to preach was followed by a "call" from Governor William A. Richardson to minister to the few Congregationalists who were already in the town. Similarly, the town of Fontanelle, which was home to the new Congregationalist university, was initially settled by people from a Congregationalist church from Quincy, Illinois who had moved to Nebraska Territory together, and who then asked Gaylord for a minister.[154] It is likely that these Congregational ministers who came did go out to the surrounding areas to preach, but the intentions of the call cannot be denied.

Amos Billingsley practiced both methods, preaching to those with religion and those without. Billingsley began his time in Nebraska Territory much like Gaylord did, preaching to those who had already gathered. Billingsley was the second minister to come to the Presbyterian Church of Florence.[155] Waiting for hearers to come for Sunday service, he was frustrated when they did not arrive. There was one instance of a Sunday morning when Billingsley hosted two preachers, but no parishioners joined them. Thus, to balance his efforts within the town, Billingsley often went on missionary tours throughout the area, preaching to those who would listen. When he moved to Brownville, Billingsley continued to preach to those who were outside the

[154] Gaylord, 188.
[155] Schwartz, 142.

bounds of the normal congregation, even preaching at Methodist Camp Meetings on occasion.

Conflict of Method and Mission

While each minister dealt with the conflict of purpose and practice, there were other ministerial difficulties. One of the most difficult proved to be funding.

Funding in fact was a major issue for all American churches in the middle of the nineteenth century, whether they were in the established East or the newly settled West. Propelled by the messages of Lyman Beecher and by the fear of other religions corrupting the West, missionary societies formed in the early nineteenth century. Payment of ministers in older ecclesiastical systems were based on tithe taxes, but in most American churches, ministers were paid by donation. Acquiring donations for local pastors was difficult, but funding for missionaries was nearly impossible to obtain. Despite the obstacle of actually securing funding, the American Home Missionary Society sent out many missionaries to the West.

Ministers in the mid-nineteenth century worked full time, even on the frontier. Funded initially by donations of direct appeal, missionaries were able to get to their location of future ministry. To most effectively reach the people, a meeting place was needed and that required money. How to obtain the elusive church building was always a struggle for missionaries on the frontier.

Fundraising for building a church in an area that was not ecumenically-based was very difficult. The people who needed a ministry the most were usually the "destitute," as Gaylord referred to them, in his letters. They did not have the resources

or will to donate to a church. Not coming from a religious background, it would be difficult to convince people to give to a church building, and people who were destitute themselves were hesitant to donate to a building. In the first several years, most living in Nebraska Territory practiced subsistence agriculture and thus there was little money for settlers looking to make a profit.

Successful appeals to eastern sources for money was difficult for the erection of a building, but that was what was needed in some instances. When appeals to eastern sources were not successful, money could be borrowed, often at high interest rates. The Depression of 1857 was disastrous for the Methodists in Florence. The Methodist Church of Florence could not maintain its building and was forced to give it to creditors.[156] High interest rates combined with a bleak outlook sent many back home who had intended on settling permanently in Nebraska Territory following the depression of 1857.

The other choice for ministers in Nebraska Territory was to preach for those who had the money to donate. While ministering to those who would have needed it most might be religiously profitable by winning the most souls, it could be economically devastating since these same people would remain without a building. By preaching to those who had money to donate, the minister faced other problems such as the effectiveness of the ministers' efforts and the independence of the church once established.

Again, each of the three missionaries dealt with these issues in different ways. The best evidence of these complications comes from Amos Billingsley who recorded several approaches to the dilemma. Billingsley, in his first pastorate in Florence, noted

[156] Marquette, 90.

the general lack of money in the community. Not many people came to services, and therefore not much money was donated. The town felt the Depression of 1857 severely. As a result, many people left. Eventually Billingsley left, but, at the next town he went to, Brownville, Billingsley appealed to the wealthy of the town, especially Luther Hoadley, the former mayor. A man with considerable funds and influence, Hoadley served with Billingsley in the Lyceum Society and the Bible Society of Nemaha County. Hoadley also was a major donor for the Presbyterian Church, personally funding the purchase of church bells. When the church bells did not ring for a service, Billingsley wrote in his diary that he immediately suspected Hoadley as authorizing the bell not to ring.[157] Hoadley was the wealthiest man in town and would have benefited in his business the more stable society was. It probably is no surprise that within four months of this incident, Billingsley decided to move to Denver.

Billingsley as representative of the church in Nebraska Territory and Hoadley as the businessman better benefited from stability. The ultimate designation of stability, however, did not come through the creation of a church building or through examples of Victorian culture, but instead through the impartation of refinement on the unruly frontier.

Conclusion

Investigating the societal developments of territorial Nebraska, quickly uncovers the full attention and intertwining with society with Protestant churches. In the Victorian culture of America, aspirations of Victorians were concurrent with the

[157] Billingsley Diary, 30 September 1860.

social goals of most Protestant churches. Victorianism was not the sole culture in Nebraska Territory, nor did everyone care to emulate its standards as the life of Henry T. Davis shows. Some individuals were staunchly Victorian, working to give Nebraska Territory a familiar established culture that reflected proper values like Reuben Gaylord. Reflecting the variety of ministers who made their way to Nebraska Territory, Victorian variety in the establishment of culture and society coincided with Protestant evangelicalism in Nebraska Territory.

IV

A FRAGILE WEB OF INTERACTIONS: PASTORAL CHANGES IN TERRITORIAL NEBRASKA

> At sight of my brothers name in a news paper my thots (sic) went home. Home! What a word! No place like home. – Amos S. Billingsley[158]

As the frontier moved farther west, pastoral "callings" changed. Intending to help with the establishment of society and culture, missionaries were confronted with a constantly changing population. The men who were originally sent to be missionaries, to bring the gospel message and build churches needed to become ministers serving a local church (or churches) and fully supported by local funding. This transition was difficult for all missionaries involved, having to shift their focus from broadcasting the gospel message to raising funds from their own locality. If they were not able to raise funds, their efforts would eventually falter since the establishment of a church building signaled spiritual success. Not only was a church building sought, but a regular amount of funds needed to be given by the local congregations to support their full-time pastors. Fundraising affected pastoral longevity as did several other factors.

Missionaries reacted in various ways to their changing callings. Reuben Gaylord chose to remain in Omaha and work to build the local church from his original congregation of thirteen people. Henry Davis did not feel any major change in his calling since Methodist circuit riders were expected to experience harsh conditions and

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[158] Amos S. Billingsley, Diary, 22 July 1857, Nebraska State Historical Society Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. Referred to henceforth as Billingsley Diary.

preach to a variable number of listeners. Amos Billingsley decided to move to locations where he felt that he was needed most. Populations shifted to the settlements along the intersections of migration routes, both North and West. When most of the population was coming in from the Missouri River, he relocated to Brownville in southern Nebraska along the Missouri to reach more people, especially young men.

More than the changes in the calling affected the missionaries and their effectiveness. Many factors determined the length of time that ministers remained in the region. Whether or not they were the first ministers to a settlement, the level of support received versus the amount expected, and the fragile web of interactions all helped to determine the time spent in ministry in Nebraska Territory.

It could be said that some ministers gave up on working on improving Nebraska Territory. Like many other migrants, some did return to the East. Some ministers had specific callings that requested movement. Some were called to a specific region while others to a distinct group. Ministers who remained in Nebraska Territory through their struggles have been praised, especially by those who came later.[159] But for all of the praise given to the "persisters," ministers generally worked for relatively short lengths of time in Nebraska Territory. It is important to note that ministers who attempted to build society and culture during the territorial phase of Nebraska made valid efforts toward their goals and should not necessarily discredited for their emigration from Nebraska.

Hidden beneath the migration process was a fragile web of interaction that disguised the ambivalences of migration decisions. These uncertainties remained long

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[159] See Davis' *Solitary Places Made Glad,* Schwarz' *History of the Presbyterian Church in Nebraska*, and Marquette's *History of the Methodist Church in Nebraska* for examples.

after initial immigration to remain a factor in continued migration decisions. Migration separated loved ones, and the long term results of migration rested more on established ties of interaction between individuals and less on a sense of responsibility. While initially spurned to action by a spiritual responsibility, long term location was determined significantly by strength of connection and proximity to loved ones.

Changing callings proved challenging for many people, yet what they saw as "progress" in society was welcome. This progress in the form of established society and standards was hailed at every opportunity, giving reason to celebrate results while acknowledging sacrifices that had been made. Investigating the target audiences of three missionaries, their local familial bonds, and denominational support provided as well as outside factors will reveal how each helped to determine the length of ministry of each missionary and the web of interactions that bound each pastor.

Target Audience

Each minister, as representative of their respective denomination sought to convert the world for Christ, but their focus of their ministry differed from one another. Different target audiences made missionaries change their tactics to become as successful as they could. Target audiences affected the missionary's success as much as other influences did.

Henry Davis, Methodist circuit rider, had the widest target audience. Heeding the call from *Western Christian Advocate* in 1858, Davis and his wife felt that they were needed in Nebraska Territory. They sought a "wider sphere for action" than they

had in Illinois and received more than they asked for in Nebraska.[160] Davis eventually ministered in Bellevue, Nebraska City, York, Omaha, and Lincoln as his home residences. He also was the head of the Methodist Conference in Nebraska at various points in his pastoral career, making all of Nebraska his "sphere for action."[161] With a wide target audience, and a willingness to bring his message directly to the people, it was relatively simple to be successful.

Rueben Gaylord's target was more specific than that of Davis. Gaylord sought to not only bring people to Christ, but to build society. The people who Gaylord was most interested in were those in Omaha and the surrounding areas. He particularly sought after those originally from New England to bring them back to their religious heritage. In turn, by bringing those who he felt were of importance in the community to religion, Gaylord hoped to have a greater influence among the people. For example, when a lawyer and prominent citizen was sick and near death, Gaylord ministered to him for two months. When the man recognized the folly of his prior ways, Gaylord wrote, "I hope and earnestly pray that this admonition of the uncertainties of life may not be lost upon his former associates, and this its influence will be felt for good by this community."[162] Gaylord ventured out to nearby areas, but not to the same degree as other ministers did, such as Davis. In 1858-1859, Gaylord established two churches outside of Omaha, only to preach there three times since their founding.[163] Gaylord recognized the needs of surrounding areas and continually called for more ministers to

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[160] Henry T. Davis, *Solitary Places Made Glad: Being Observations and Experiences for Thirty-two years in Nebraska with Sketches and Incidents Touching the Discovery, Early Settlement, and Development of the State* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), 124.
[161] Ibid., 123.
[162] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary,* June 1859, 45.
[163] Ibid., 46.

the region, but he made every effort to concentrate on being Omaha's minister. Gaylord's primary interest lay in building society and culture to greater influence in the region.

Not every minister felt their target audiences were tied to a place. Amos Billingsley was drawn to the needs of young men on the frontier. In all three of his ministry locations found in his records, Billingsley remarks on the needs of young men. Billingsley ministered to other people, but his constant comments were for the souls of young men of the area.[164] In Florence, Billingsley remarked on the number of young men going to the mines. After establishing a church in Brownville and working there for twenty-seven months, Billingsley eventually followed the young men to Denver in an effort to continue to minister to them.[165] As settlements on the border of the Nebraska Territory filled up, it was not with young men but with families. Hence, the location of Billingsley's call changed.

The target audience for Davis was broad, consisting of anyone who was without Christianity. For Gaylord, his audience was local, made up of the community around him, and specifically those who were from the same origin as he was. While there was obviously fluctuating population in Omaha, there was also an element of stability there since the town was the territorial capital. For Billingsley, his target group was not stable, but constantly changing. He attempted to provide stability in the establishment of societal institutions such as a Sabbath school and regular preaching, but while these were part of the expectations for a Presbyterian minister, they would not have been appealing to many young men of the frontier.

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[164] See for example Billingsley Diary, 26 November 1860.
[165] Billingsley Diary, 16 September 1858.

Denominational Social Support

By the time Nebraska Territory was filled, the American Protestant church had been sending missionaries for over fifty years. Many support strategies had evolved for those apart from denominational strongholds. These included tract printing, and interpersonal communications.

The ease of printing in the United States allowed for the publication of many denominational newspapers and magazines throughout the antebellum period. The influence of the *Western Christian Advocate* was felt by Henry Davis when he responded to the call to come to Nebraska. Reuben Davis was a regular contributor to *The Home Missionary,* the official publication of the American Home Missionary Society. Amos Billingsley received the *New York Observer*, a Presbyterian paper, while he was in Nebraska and paid for it in corresponding.[166] News of the trials of other missionaries and ministers provided Billingsley with a sense of the national religious picture, enough so that he understood the revivals occurring in New York in the 1850s.

As informational as these papers might have been, they were not a substitute for interpersonal encouragement. The political orientation of each denomination, as stated previously, designated the amount of interaction and interdependence. Methodists met regularly as a regional body to reaffirm and encourage each other. Presbyterians met occasionally, but not as local bodies. Congregationalists believed strongly in the independence of each local organization, meeting for the first time nationally in 1852

[166] Billingsley Diary, 11 August 1858.

since 1648 and did not meet again until 1864.[167] The closest Congregational meeting would be through local ministers meeting together informally, rather than in an organization.

Reuben Gaylord had been on the frontier for seventeen years by the time that he went to Nebraska Territory. He understood the distances between himself and others. Of course he asked for help in the rapidly filling territory, but he was accustomed to the challenges of new settlements. When Governor William A. Richardson requested a person accustomed to life on the frontier, it was an observant request, understanding the distances and needs for the new settlement. So while Gaylord did not have much support from his denomination in the form of inter-ministerial contact, given his experience in the ministry, he probably anticipated the difficulties that might arise.

The Methodist system of support for its circuit riders was unprecedented. Not only did circuit riders minister to as many people as they could, supporting pioneers in their religious lives, but they also were supported at least once a quarter through denominational meetings. Held at different locations in the region, the district meetings of Methodist clergy offered community for ministers isolated on the frontier. Both William Goode and Henry Davis served, at various points in their careers, as regional leaders for quarterly and annual meetings in Nebraska. As the region was occupied by more settlers, the denomination established more circuits to be ridden and more districts of circuits. The segmentation of the territory allowed ministers to travel smaller distances to the regular meetings, ensuring better attendance and thus better support.

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[167] John Von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism, 1620-1957* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 275.

Amos Billingsley on the other hand had little support. As one of the Old School Presbyterians, there was little in the form of denominational association nearby. Suffering from a denominational split in 1847, Presbyterians at the time of the settlement of Nebraska Territory were weakened. The Old School Presbyterian Church had only one other ministers in the territory, in Omaha, but Billingsley makes no mention of meeting with him or ministers of the same denomination. Consequently, Billingsley often went to hear other preachers, including Rev. William Goode, at a Methodist camp meeting and the Episcopalian Bishop Lee of Iowa.[168] While all three ministers went to hear others, Billingsley's only interpersonal Christian support came from ministers of other denominations.

Denominational support was helpful for ministers suffering in the same circumstances as their parishioners. Methodists assured a consistency in their circuit riders through constant support and meeting together. Congregationalists did not expect support, but were better situated within their communities that maintained the ministers. Old School Presbyterians offered no support in the form of regular meetings, leaving Billingsley to depend on other ministers outside of his denomination for spiritual verification.

Familiar Investments

What was possibly the most influential on the length of stay of a minister was where he felt his allegiance lay. If asked, ministers would most likely say that their allegiance was to the mission that God had given them. Their allegiance also lay in

[168] Billingsley Diary, 30 August 1858.

their family. If the minister's family was invested in the community where he ministered, the length of his stay was considerably longer.

Life on the fringes of society and established culture was difficult for many. Food was scarce, disease was rampant, and death was familiar. When the wives and families of missionaries were brought out to what they saw as the frontier, efforts of the missionary needed to be increased. His efforts determined the culture and society to which his wife and children would be exposed. Even if he were in some way content with the rough life, many missionaries sought to reduce the hardships on their family.

Reuben Gaylord experienced intense hardships several times while on the frontier. While in Iowa, his first wife Sarah died of bilious fever in 1840. He was left with raising their young daughter. In their initial time in Nebraska, their great work was to keep from freezing. He delivered the child to her grandparents and continued his efforts on the frontier. After moving to Nebraska Territory with his second wife Mary, she fell ill with "a very serious illness." Gaylord could not leave her side for several months. Also during that time, their youngest child was so sick Rev. Gaylord feared for his life.[169] These hardships were taxing on Gaylord, so much so that he remarked to *The Home Missionary,* "I have felt most keenly for my companion and children in these trying circumstances."[170]

Much time and energy was spent by Gaylord in the initial months that he was in Omaha on the establishment of Congregationalism in Nebraska. Coming to an already gathering group of believers, he felt he should have a building for them to meet in built. During the first year, he needed to raise the funds and supervise the building itself.

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[169] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary,* February 1857, 240.
[170] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary*, April 1856, 389.

Owing to the Congregational Assembly of 1852, Congregationalists established standards for church buildings to send a welcoming message to refined worshippers. Their leaders reasoned that creating a building that was pleasing to the eye, as well as uniform, people would be able to recognize the Congregationalist Church.[171] This effort was supported by the raising of sixty-two thousand dollars for Western churches by 1853.[172] Apparently little or none of that money was given to Gaylord for the church in Omaha, but he was still able to build a brick building.[173] In the first year, he established along with a church, a "Sabbath school, with a good library, a prayer meeting, and a house built expressly for the worship of God, where we can bring to bear all the appliances of the Gospel."[174] By the end of the third year, Gaylord was fully invested in what he saw as the development of Nebraska:

> We see a thriving embryo city, with its intelligent and thriving population, surrounded with the dwellings of the husbandmen, who are already beginning, by their toil and culture, to develop the agricultural resources of this section of the country. . . . sure indications of future wealth and prosperity. . . Why this deep feeling of interest? Because it is regarded as the germ of a mighty agency for good, as the first link in a chain of influence that is to reach far into the future.[175]

By the census of 1860, Gaylord's household consisted of six people, including three children and a young man, to help in the house when Reuben was gone.[176] With so much invested in the community and so many people relying on him, Gaylord allowed his ministry in Omaha to become permanent, eventually lasting for over twenty-five years.

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[171] Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 404.
[172] Von Rohr, 276.
[173] *The Home Missionary,* February 1857.
[174] Ibid.
[175] "Nebraska Territory," *The Home Missionary,* December 1858.
[176] Manuscript U.S. Census, Federal Territorial Census, Nebraska Territory, Cass County, 1860, and Gaylord, 118.

Henry Davis decided to move with his wife to Nebraska Territory. Through reading advertisements in the *Western Christian Advocate*, they made the choice to address the spiritual needs they perceived in Nebraska. He did not make the decision alone and instruct her to follow, nor did he go to Nebraska Territory alone. By allowing her to influence the familial decision, wrote Henry, both he and his wife were invested in Nebraska. Davis does not mention his children in his records, but his commitment to the work in Nebraska Territory was lasting. While the Davis family was invested in the work in Nebraska, the town in which they lived was unstable. Davis' ties to the community through his family were superseded by his commitment to the Methodist denomination that regulated the movement of their ministers, so while the Davis' expected to move to Nebraska, they came with the knowledge of the requirement of constant relocation

Billingsley's commitment was through his sending organization, the Board of Domestic Missions of the Old School Presbyterian Church, which is never mentioned in his diary.[177] Without a family to take care of or provide stability for, Billingsley moved often. He changed boarding houses several times in each city. He ministered for several weeks at a time at distant locations. In October of 1858, he was called to Wyandot, Kansas, to preach while he was in Florence. Other times, he went on missionary tours to preach to those without regular preaching in surrounding areas. Billingsley, an itinerant, bachelor minister who sometimes lived with local family maintained ties only to his prior churches located in East Palestine, Ohio, and Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania. The tie to Slippery Rock was through the letters of Emily

[177] Andreas' History of Nebraska – Nemaha County

Hamilton, whom he married some twelve years after he received her letters in Nebraska Territory.[178]

Local Support

Churches rely on donations for their operations. In the case of frontier Nebraska, the funds for church operations needed to come fully from outside the region. This was not to continue beyond several years since the area was expected to be settled quickly. The region was settled expeditiously, but the funds for churches from local congregations were slow in coming.

Several situations outside of local control contributed to this situation. Expenses in the region were higher than those in the East. The influx of new immigrants was, according to Reuben Gaylord, "so large that the productions of this region will not be sufficient to meet their wants."[179] The Depression of 1857 was felt especially hard by the inhabitants of frontier settlements. Beginning in the fall of 1857, banks in New York, and then in the rest of the country began closing and people lost many investments.[180] In Nebraska, this meant that many settlers who had pledged to donate funds when they had them defaulted. The total contributions to the American Home Missionary Society by the members in the seven Congregationalist churches amounted to $38 in 1859, hardly enough for a partial ministerial salary.[181] Ministers noticed the changes and hard times that were befalling their communities. Many

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[178] Billingsley Diary, 5 August 1857; *Statesville Christian Herald* (Statesville, North Carolina), October 19, 1897.
[179] Reuben Gaylord, "Nebraska," *The Home Missionary*, February 1857, 240.
[180] Billingsley Diary, 23 September 1857.
[181] *The Home Missionary,* July 1859, 73.

churches felt the economic pressure when mortgages could not be paid and some families in the community were becoming destitute.

Because of the hard times, ministers had difficulty asking for funds. When a locality was destitute, the missionary hoped that his sending agency would provide what was needed. It was so rough that the agent of the American Home Missionary Society for Iowa in 1859 commented:

> The missionaries have, many of them, suffered quite serious embarrassment. In many cases, they have felt that their people were unable to fulfill their pledges; and that it would be wrong in them to demand it. In repeated instances, I have heard them say in relation to one and another in their congregations, that they would much rather do without the amounts these individuals had subscribed than receive them from persons so poorly able to spare *any thing* from the support required by their families.[182]

With a bleak economic outlook, many settlers in Nebraska decided to move to the gold mines. Rumors and the trail of gold was enough for many young men to seek their luck in the mines of Colorado. After all, those mines were closer to Nebraska than California had been the decade before and the prospects did not look good for Nebraska Territory. In the fall of 1857, many people began to leave Florence, including the presiding elder of Billingsley's church.[183] A similar bleak outlook in Brownville reflected the usage of Nebraska City as an outfitting post to get to the Colorado mines, as well as the better physical situation of the city, since it was difficult for wagons to climb the hills surrounding Brownville. Economic instability proved too much of a factor for many people in Florence as it soon became a small town of only five hundred people. Without local economic support, missionaries could not make the transition to ministers.

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[182] J. Guernsey, "Iowa," *The Home Missionary,* October 1859, 141.
[183] Billingsley Diary, 2 October 1857.

Outside Factors

The decisions to remain or change locations for a minister were affected also by other significant factors. Of course, it is impossible to ascertain the importance of every interaction, but there are some events that had long lasting personal effects on ministers on the frontier.

Reuben Gaylord, before his time in Nebraska, was impacted drastically by the death of his first wife. Due to her death, he returned to Connecticut for nearly six months.[184] This time reestablished his ties to Connecticut and his home. He does not leave records of this trip, but the emotional bonds made must have been understandably significant.

For Amos Billingsley, a flurry of events in the spring of 1861 led him to relocate to Denver City. In January, he had his teeth extracted, and he was unable to preach for several weeks. During that time, he read other preachers' writings and vowed to become closer to God. Immediately after the ordeal of having his teeth pulled (without painkiller), there was what he called a "missionary concert of prayer." Although Billingsley's diary does not mention the specifics of this meeting, it can be safely assumed that the prayers were organized outside the normal bounds of his domestic church. Three days later, he "concluded to go to Denver City, C[olorado].T[erritory]. near the Rocky Mountains, to labor as a Missionary."[185]

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[184] Mary Welles Gaylord, *The Life and Labors of Rev. Reuben Gaylord, Home Missionary for Iowa and Nebraska and superintendent for A. H. M. S. for Nebraska and Western Iowa* (Omaha, Rees Printing Company, 1889), 110.
[185] Billingsley Diary, 14 February 1861.

Settlements on what the residents perceived to be on the edge of society and their version of civilization longed for ties. For many people, community on the frontier was established in a great part through religious ties.[186] As the territory continued to draw immigrants, the callings of missionaries changed from working to establish a society and culture to ministering to those who were now part of the society and culture that had emerged. The ministers to the frontier worked to establish community, but instead of simply establishing a culture and society, they too needed support from others to continue their work. Yet, for the ministers on the edges of frontier society, their stability relied on a fragile web of interactions and commitment that existed in and apart from frontier settlements. As a result of this network of contacts and support, ministers' fulfilled needs of others while continuing their efforts to shape society and culture in territorial Nebraska.

[186] Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 365.

CONCLUSION

Protestant home missionaries sought to improve the frontier lives of those in need of the gospel message. Missionaries worked to create stable societies that reflected the patterns of life in the East. Never fully replicating the society of the East, missionaries used their meager tools to build what communities they could and hopefully have what they perceived to be a positive influence. Missionaries sat by sick individuals and prayed for those in need. They built the "handsome church edifices" that Nebraska Territorial Governor Mark Izard observed in 1857. Missionaries organized literary societies and reading groups, as well as gave lectures on temperance. Providing services that many migrants were accustomed to, such as marriages and funerals, missionaries were present in the lives of many people in territorial Nebraska.

In a time of increasing competition for souls, home missionaries in Nebraska Territory cooperated with each other. Instead of allowing the national trend toward denominationalism to grow in their region, missionaries developed an unusual relationship of mutual aid that reached beyond denominational differences. When faced with the vast frontier, denominationalism also receded from importance, allowing ministers of various groups to cooperate. Ministers cooperatively assisted each other particularly in times of need in Nebraska Territory. While ministers did cooperate in Nebraska Territory, they still remained with their sending organizations. Never sent as

a unit, Protestant ministers saw individual openings that needed to be filled by the gospel.

Working to provide stability to the "fluid" frontier, ministers established social structures of churches, Sabbath schools, lyceum societies, libraries, and sewing societies. As part of American Victorian culture, ministers sought to establish consistent Victorian ideals in Nebraska Territory, and they worked to establish character in their congregations. Propelling American Victorian culture, American Protestantism reflected many of the aspirations of good Victorians, including those in Nebraska Territory.

Territorial Nebraska filled up with immigrants seeking to improve their lives. Society and culture stabilized and the callings of missionaries changed. In response to these changes, missionaries either became ministers or they moved to other locations to remain missionaries. These home missionaries worked to improve what they saw as deficiencies in the society they were confronted with on the frontier. Some results of their efforts were long lasting, but most were rather short lived.

Missionaries themselves had diverse long-term results. Reuben Gaylord remained in Omaha, serving the Congregational Church his entire life. He became known as the "Father of Congregationalism in Nebraska." His church in Omaha became one of the most influential congregations in the state, possibly due to its membership including one of the first governors in the territory. The Congregational college in Fontanelle did not last, but other Congregational schools were later built in its stead, including Doane College in Crete.

Henry Davis continued to minister until 1901, a total service of forty-four years in Nebraska. He continued his interest in frontier churches, preferring to be part of the establishment of nascent congregations in rural areas. He maintained a regular circuit of churches in eastern Nebraska, eventually being assigned the settlements along the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad from Lincoln to Kearney.[187] Davis was a founder of several Methodist churches in eastern Nebraska, including what was to become St. Paul's Methodist Church in Lincoln.

Amos Billingsley stayed only four years in Nebraska, moving to Colorado in 1861. He joined the Union Army as a chaplain to the 101st Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers and was later captured and spent time in Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. While in prison, he wrote *From the Flag to the Cross*, a collection of testimonials from men in the prison hospital. After the war, he married Emily Hamilton, of Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, on 26 September 1865, and then he served as a missionary to the Freedmen of Statesville, North Carolina, until his death 12 October 1897.[188]

The efforts of these men produced results in the numbers of members in their churches. The Congregationalists, of whom Reuben Gaylord was a part, rose in membership to 3000 by 1880. By the same time, Presbyterians in Nebraska increased their membership to 3500. Methodists grew to over 8000 members.[189]

Each man did all he could to account for what he felt he had been given. Working to "redeem the time" was not easy and often times required great patience

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[187] David Marquette, *A History of Nebraska Methodism: First Half-Century 1854-1904* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Congress Press, 1904), 229.
[188] *Statesville Christian Record* (Statesville, North Carolina), 21 October 1897.
[189] Harrison Johnson, *Johnson's History of Nebraska*, (Omaha: Herald Printing House, 1880), 146-147.

with the occasional complaints. Even though all three men faced hardship in their ministries from floodwaters to fires, from no listeners to no more room for hearers, they all continued in their ministries until their deaths, “redeeming the time” for the social and cultural development of Nebraska Territory.

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