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THE PLASTIC HAND OF PATRIOTIC AND CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE:
THE WORK OF THE AMERICAN HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY
IN ILLINOIS AND INDIANA, 1826-1837

BY
ARNOLD W. PETERSON

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IN
HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

The American Home Missionary Society represented an evangelical Protestant, interdenominational, voluntary effort to plant churches and related cultural institutions in developing communities on the American frontier. Growing out of the missionary, revivalistic, and social reform concerns of participants in the Second Great Awakening, the Society sought to perpetuate social reform, inculcate individual "virtue," fill the perceived void left by legal disestablishment, and, preeminently, gain converts to evangelical Christianity.

In the first decade of its institutional life the American Home Missionary Society focused its attention on the frontier communities of the Old Northwest and the Mississippi Valley. During the 1820's and 1830's, the recently admitted states of Illinois and Indiana occupied a potentially crucial position in the commercial and social development of the United States, and the American Home Missionary Society appeared to have the resources and internal unity to carry out its self-appointed mission in those states. However, denominational in-fighting and concurrent financial hardship in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837 undermined the strength of the Society. As constituent denominations asserted their independence, the founding principles of the Society were compromised and

the character of the Society was altered.

Using the papers of the Society and concentrating on the activities of its missionaries in Illinois and Indiana, I have attempted to trace the growth, maturation, and decay of the founding principles of the Society in the two frontier states. Since the work of the Society issued from a theologically and institutionally creative response to a re-defined relationship between church and state, I have discussed the shaping forces of the American Home Missionary Society before examining the missionaries' distinctive perception of frontier society and implementation of their task. Finally, I have endeavored to follow the effects of economic depression and doctrinal dissension on the work of the Society in Illinois and Indiana.

Although the papers of the American Home Missionary Society reflect the missionaries' overriding religious concerns, the correspondence provides insight into the development of certain aspects of American Protestantism and society in the first third of the nineteenth century. The introduction of voluntary association in churches and societies of social reform, the extent of interdenominational co-operation, the uses of revivalism, and the application of popular doctrine that linked the nation to a coming millennium form recurring themes in the

papers. Although the correspondents ignore many important issues of their day, their papers display a significant effort to weave the religious beliefs and values of eastern evangelical Protestants into the social fabric of the west.

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As I began to write in December of 1985, my brother-in-law, David Bruce Glenn, died. At the time of his death he was studying for the ministry. Although he may not have claimed the missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society as his spiritual ancestors, this thesis bears the impress of his life and is dedicated to his memory.

PREFACE

On January 25, 1828, John Ellis, a missionary of the American Home Missionary Society in Illinois, wrote to the Corresponding Secretary of the American Home Missionary Society in New York City:

the new free states are before you as lively material to be molded by the plastic hand of Patriotic and Christian benevolence. Let this be done and soon you will regard the new free states in the same class with the old, as possessing the moral strength of the nation and the resources for the conversion of the world.¹

The American Home Missionary Society represented an evangelical Protestant, interdenominational, voluntary effort to plant churches and related cultural institutions (schools, colleges, Sunday schools, and tract, temperance, and Bible societies) in developing communities on the American frontier. Growing out of the missionary, revivalistic, and social reform concerns of participants in the Second Great Awakening, the American Home Missionary Society sought to perpetuate social reforms, inculcate individual "virtue", fill the perceived void left by legal disestablishment, and, preeminently, gain converts to evangelical Christianity.

In the first decade of its institutional life the

American Home Missionary Society explicitly channeled its resources and energies into the transmission of evangelical faith and values to the frontier communities of the Old Northwest and the Mississippi Valley. Popular tracts and sermons depicted "the Valley" as a mythic battleground, in which a Babel of religious and ethnic groups was destined to contend with a "benevolent phalanx" of evangelical Protestants for the soul of the nation. In 1827 the American Home Missionary Society resolved:

That the rapid increase in population, and the alarming deficiency of ministers of the Gospel in the Western and Southern states, and the dependence of our civil liberties upon the institutions of religion, call for more united, vigorous, extended efforts to establish Christian ordinances in every destitute portion of this nation.²

In the 1820's and 1830's the recently admitted states of Illinois and Indiana formed a suitable theater for the operations of the American Home Missionary Society. Occupying a potentially crucial geographic position in the commercial life of the expanding nation, buffeted by a cross current of immigrants from the south, from New England, and (increasingly) from abroad, and dangling promises of instant wealth springing from soil that seemed to produce crops "spontaneously," the two states provided "lively material" for the eager social sculptors of the American Home Missionary Society.

In their correspondence the pioneering missionaries to Illinois and Indiana revealed their distinctive perception of the frontier and documented their efforts to translate doctrines and principles of moral reform into social action. Between 1826 and 1837 the American Home Missionary Society appeared to have the resources and internal co-operation of constituent denominations to fulfill their self-appointed mission. However, because concerted interdenominational effort terminated in 1837 and concurrent financial hardship led to measures of austerity and a reduced roster of missionaries, the character of the American Home Missionary Society became altered after that date.

Using the papers of the American Home Missionary Society and focusing on the activities of its missionaries in Illinois and Indiana, I have attempted to trace the growth, maturation, and decay of the founding principles of the Society in the two frontier states. Since the vision for American society and the mode of operations of the Society issued from a theologically and institutionally creative response to the re-defined relationship between church and state in the early national period of United States history, I have devoted the first chapter to a discussion of the confluence of social forces, theological doctrines, religious practices

and interdenominational organizations which gave impetus to the work of the American Home Missionary Society in Illinois and Indiana. In the second chapter I have tried to delineate the missionaries' perception of frontier society in Illinois and Indiana and to re-construct a social history based on their expectations and experiences. Consideration of how the missionaries attempted to implement their work through the vehicles of revivals, educational establishments, churches, and voluntary associations on behalf of moral reform directed my efforts in chapter three. Finally, in chapter four I have endeavored to follow the effects of the financial panic of 1837 and of doctrinal dissension on the missionaries of the Society in Illinois and Indiana. With the dissolution of the original interdenominational consensus and the rapid social development of the two states, the initial raison d'etre of the Society stood in need of revision by 1837.

A study of the motivating forces and original intent of the American Home Missionary Society in Illinois and Indiana in the 1820's and 1830's casts light on the development of both American Protestantism and American society in the first third of the nineteenth century. The contours of American disestablishment, denominationalism, and voluntary association in churches and societies of

social reform were fashioned then. Revivalism in varying forms was refined and solidified into a vital and enduring feature of evangelical Protestantism; the consequent drift toward pragmatic Arminianism in denominations with a Calvinist heritage threatened to rip some churches apart. For a brief period the American Home Missionary Society managed to subdue internal doctrinal dissension and helped exert a nationalizing influence on the youthful and expanding United States. Popular doctrine tied the destiny of the nation to the coming millennium. The more mundane operations of the American Home Missionary Society missionaries in Illinois and Indiana wove the religious beliefs and values of the eastern evangelical Protestants into the social fabric of the west.

However, the presence of a multiplicity of themes in the correspondence of the missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society in Illinois and Indiana should not be construed as evidence that the papers constitute a comprehensive source on frontier society or American religious life. For example, two highly pertinent themes in a comprehensive study of the social and religious milieu of the period--the tightening link between evangelical Protestantism and anti-slavery agitation and the contributions of women to American churches and frontier society--received scant attention from the

missionaries. In spite of a growing conviction that the "free states" were best suited to the shaping force of the "plastic hand of Patriotic and Christian benevolence," most Society missionaries in Illinois and Indiana seemed reluctant to alienate Southern supporters in the 1820's and 1830's and consequently remained silent or resorted to elliptical statements of their own views on slavery. Although women formed auxiliary societies to the American Home Missionary Society, apparently constituted the majority of church members in Illinois and Indiana, and collaborated in missionary work, their considerable efforts received only passing mention from the exclusively male correspondents.

By omitting any extensive discussion of the foregoing themes, I did not intend to overlook crucial historical issues or to perpetuate injustice. Rather, it has been my intention to highlight the missionaries' own view of their work in Illinois and Indiana. Both animated and circumscribed by their convictions and culture, their work and sense of mission carved out an admittedly narrow but fruitful passage into the broader vistas of American history. Notwithstanding the limits of the correspondence, I have allowed it to dictate my principle of selection, for I have endeavored, first, to examine the work and point of view of the missionaries and, second, to

provide a resource for students who might wish to utilize the correspondence. In order to pass on a sense of the religiously conventional language of the missionaries and to suggest implicitly the range of recurrent themes in the papers, I have quoted freely from the correspondence.

The primary sources for this study of the operations of the American Home Missionary Society in Illinois and Indiana were readily available at the University of Rhode Island Library in Kingston, Rhode Island. The papers of the American Home Missionary Society (housed at the Chicago Theological Seminary earlier in the twentieth century) were filmed in 1975. The papers most relevant to my study include:

1. Series I, Incoming Corresponding from Illinois 1826-1837, reels 15, 16, 17
2. Series I, Incoming Correspondance from Indiana 1824-1837, reel 53, 54, 55
3. Series II, Outgoing Correspondence 1826-1837, reels 278-282
4. Series III, Administrative Material, (which has been largely destroyed), reel 372
5. Series IV, Annual Reports, 1826-1856, reel 373 (Statistical tables showing the name and location of each missionary, the date of commission, number of conversions reported annually, the size of congregations, temperance pledge subscribers, and miscellaneous comments have been extracted from the annual reports and compiled chronologically on reel one.)
6. Series V, The Home Missionary, volumes I-XV, 1828-1842, reel 378 (index on reel 377).

My interest in the papers of the American Home Missionary Society grew out of my work in Professor James Findlay's course in the history of religion in America and

in Professor Teresa Murphy's course in the early national period of the United States. Extended acquaintance with the correspondence from Illinois and Indiana in the 1820's and 1830's has confirmed my belief that, notwithstanding the bias and limits of the papers, the letters cast light on the role of evangelical Protestants in the United States during a crucial period of national development.

NOTES TO PREFACE

¹John Ellis to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS,
25 January 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

²First Annual Report of the American Home Missionary
Society (New York: n.p., 1827), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE.....	v
I. THE SELF-APPOINTED MISSION.....	1
II. "LIVELY MATERIAL TO BE MOLDED".....	29
III. "THE PLASTIC HAND" OF BENEVOLENCE.....	62
IV. THE CRUMBLING FOUNDATION.....	99
V. CONCLUSION.....	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	139

CHAPTER ONE

During the Revolutionary era (1765-1793) Protestant church membership declined precipitously in the face of political and theological quarrels, ecclesiastical disarray, and apparent apathy. While some congregations waded through closely reasoned debates between the advocates of the "New Divinity" (who were willing to come to theological terms with the revivalism of the First Great Awakening) and the defenders of the "Old Divinity", others felt besieged by Enlightenment rationalism and deism. But although the challenge to revealed religion surfaced institutionally with the Unitarian and Universalist movements, Enlightenment-influenced political thought more insidiously undermined the foundation of traditional church-state co-operation. Such conspicuous Revolutionary leaders as Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, John Adams, and Washington were, to varying degrees, religious skeptics. The Declaration of Independence elevated Lockean principles of natural law over any traditional colonial understanding of a divinely sanctioned covenant between church and state. In his popular polemic, Common Sense, Thomas Paine utilized the Old Testament, not as a scriptural authority, but as a

political history that tended to excoriate the divine right of kings.¹ The United States Constitution and Bill of Rights forbade the national establishment of religion and guaranteed religious liberty. In the 1790's American readers encountered the rabid republicanism and religious skepticism of Joel Barlow, Philip Freneau, Ethan Allen, and Thomas Paine.

But in spite of the connection between Enlightenment-influenced political thought and religious skepticism, it would be misleading to equate religious beliefs and political stances in the Revolutionary period. The twentieth century historian of American religions, Sydney Ahlstrom, pointed out that:

The conservative Patriot heroes, Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams, showed more than average political radicalism. Daniel Shay's rebels of 1786 were probably more orthodox than their opposition. In Massachusetts generally, the more orthodox west stood opposed to the emerging Unitarianism of the Boston area where the ultra-Federalists would later make their last stand.²

The clergymen of most Protestant groups fell victim to similarly unpredictable political partisanship: both Tories and Whigs solicited the support of chaplains and combatant clergymen while forcing other clergy to flee from the wrath of political zealotry.³ Major church groups also benefited unevenly from the victory of the American rebels. The decimated Church of England, laboring at best under a cloud of suspicion and lacking immediate means of ordaining new clergy, did not begin to

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reorganize and recover until the late 1780's. Notwithstanding founder John Wesley's British patriotism, the Methodists flourished in America and were organized into a denomination at the "Christmas conference" of 1784. The revival-espousing Baptists also emerged strongly from the Revolution: in New England, Baptist congregations increased from twenty-five in 1740 to two hundred sixty-six in 1790.⁴

Serving frequently as veritable hothouses of revolutionary fervor, both the Presbyterians and Congregationalists outwardly appeared to be unharmed by the events of the era.⁵ Presbyterians facilely formed a post-war General Assembly, four synods, and sixteen presbyteries. Inwardly, however, both groups harbored potentially explosive conflict. Concentrated in New England, Congregationalists uneasily yoked Arminians with Calvinists and Enlightenment deists with orthodox Puritans; in the middle states, Presbyterians attempted to balance the diverging theologies of New England and Scotch-Irish descendents.⁶

For most American Protestant churches, however, the shortage of communicants in the Revolutionary period was acute and obvious. It has been estimated that only four to seven percent of Americans were affiliated with a church in the early 1790's.⁷ Whether people stayed away in droves because of political partisanship, lack of ready

access to frontier churches, skepticism, or displeasure with the theological leanings of their local clergy, churches faced a dauntingly apathetic public.

The gloomy prospect of "bare, ruined choirs" was exacerbated by a fundamental crisis of ecclesiastical reorganization. A bewildering mosaic of established, multiply established, and non-established churches had existed in the colonies.⁸ Any governmental attempt to enlarge one of the variegated religious pieces would only dash the hope of national harmony. Also, the United States Constitution was informed by an Enlightenment-derived suspicion of established religion: in 1784 Madison published his Remonstrances Against Religious Assessments, which advocated disestablishment. Article 6 of the Constitution called for separation of church and state and the First Amendment guaranteed religious liberty.

For the overwhelmingly Protestant churches of America in 1790, religious liberty was, potentially, a mixed blessing. No church received special status: the European system of an established church and sects was not duplicated in the United States; all groups were regarded as "denominations." But the denominational settlement forced the true believer into the position of simultaneously participating in a free market of truth claims and asserting that her or his denomination

represented the most Biblically pristine form of Christianity. Competing denominations depended exclusively upon converts to sustain their church rolls. The voluntary association of church members and the enforced institutional self-sufficiency of denominations enhanced the attractiveness of the "conversion experience". If one could not be enrolled in a state church at birth, one could be "re-born" (in a revivalistic adaptation of the Biblical concept) and choose to join an evangelical denomination. While the voluntary principle of church membership encouraged (at least in theory) a more deeply committed congregation, it also spawned relentless insecurity; without a steady stream of converts, one's denomination would collapse.⁹

The institutional impetus to revivalism was augmented by the churches' gradual reconsideration of their civic role. In spite of the ecclesiastical disturbances of the era, the clergy, especially in New England, tended to identify Revolutionary success with God's approval. In his essay, "From the Covenant to the Revival", Perry Miller took note of a deep-seated Protestant "conception of a people standing in direct daily relation to God upon covenantal terms" ¹⁰ Such a conception of society and individual moral responsibility harmonized with the belief that personal transgressions or virtues could bring down upon the nation the wrath or the special favor of

the Lord. Examining the correspondence, sermons, and printed works of New England clergy, Miller found that while political events of the era were given an increasingly secular reading, belief in the need for individual repentance abided and was re-integrated into a cultural critique of the republic. Consequently, although "fast days" called by John Adams and James Madison were often regarded as mere political ploys, the cry for individual repentance continued to be earnest.¹¹ The New England clergy saw the aggregate repentance of individuals as a guarantor of cultural unity and a reservoir of virtue for the republic.

The new civic responsibility of Protestant denominations addressed a perceived moral need in the early republic. To many, the large scale experiment in republican government was not only unprecedented, but fraught with peril. In the analysis of Franklin, Madison, and Jefferson, only continuous westward expansion could forestall decline into the pattern of Old World inequality of wealth, overpopulation, and frivolous manufacturing.¹² But a spreading republican social order based on checks and balances was untested. Although an established American church seemed untenable and undesirable, the absence of a tangible moral authority to buttress the social hierarchy broke with the well worn order of Constantine. The success of a republican social order was

believed to be dependent upon the voluntary cooperation of an informed electorate and its leaders. Nevertheless, the deserving candidates of the didactic 1780's play, The Candidates, or Humours of a Virginia Election triumphed somewhat perfunctorily, notwithstanding a fictional landscape that woefully depicted

The state of things . . . in former times
'Ere wicked kings were punish'd for their crimes:
When strove the candidates to gain their seats
Most heartily, with drinking bouts, and treats;
The meanest vices all the people stain'd
And drunkenness, and monarchy both reign'd..¹³

Amid the mundane workings of a republic which retained similar vices, there was little prospect of happy social co-operation. However, with the assistance of religiously revived, morally reformed, and voluntarily associated individuals, denominations could ideally present the republic with informed, responsible citizens and leaders. Sustained by the incentive and self-control of their members, the denominational system implicitly served as a useful and suitably republican means of social control.

To suggest, however, that the denominational settlement of the period functioned as an overt mechanism for social control would be at once an excessive and restrictive claim. Even during the most heated debates over the French Revolution and War of 1812, the ultra-Federalist clerical leaders of the Second Great Awakening were preeminently interested in the conversion of

sinners.¹⁴ Far from merely serving the national interest, they regarded the new nation as a vehicle for worldwide religious awakening. As James Maclear pointed out in his essay, "The Republic and the Millennium", the "articulate spokesmen of middle-class Protestant denominations--often ministers, professors, or college presidents of Presbyterian, Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, or Baptist background" identified the furtherance of the national purpose with nothing less than the coming millennium.¹⁵ Historian Nathan Hatch has concluded that the New England Federalist clergy of the 1790's believed that

. . . two revolutions were necessary to initiate the millennium, the first of worldwide expansion of those principles of liberty realized in America, the second a proclamation throughout the world of the pure Christianity embodied in American churches.¹⁶

By placing the national destiny in the vanguard of preparations for the reign of Christ, the clergy wedded the republic to Christian eschatology and intensified the urgent call for Christian converts.

In this charged atmosphere the Second Great Awakening took place in New England. Although the specific causes, origins, and full significance to participants has remained a subject for historical debate, there has been little dispute that the Second Great Awakening represented a conjunction of "revivalism, evangelism, and reform" for a generation of New England church members who had

experienced the post-Revolutionary denominational settlement, had grown up with the renewed impetus to revivalism, and had heard about the millennial mission of the republic.¹⁷ During the "first phase" (1797-1801) of the Second Great Awakening, the preaching of settled "New Divinity" clergy (operating in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards' theology) led to numerous revivals in the Congregational churches of Connecticut and New Hampshire and at Yale College. Notable leaders of the Second Great Awakening included Timothy Dwight, president of Yale from 1795 to 1817; Nathaniel William Taylor, who first assisted Dwight and later became professor of theology at Yale from 1822 until his death in 1858; Bennet Tyler, president of Dartmouth from 1822 to 1828 and, as president of the Theological Institute of Connecticut from 1833 to 1858, an outspoken opponent of Taylor's "New Haven" theology; Asahel Nettleton, who in spite of his restrained preaching seemed to induce revivals; and Lyman Beecher, who spent his formative years under the influence of Dwight at Yale and the remainder of his long life crusading for temperance and the evangelization of the west, presiding over Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, and alternately affiliating with Congregationalists and Presbyterians.¹⁸

Although many leaders favored the "New Divinity" and subsequently the New Haven theology, they remained within

the broad boundaries of traditional Calvinism and continued to stress "God's absolute sovereignty, man's total depravity, and Christ's atoning love."¹⁹ The proponents of the New Haven theology did, however, make some significant readjustments within the Calvinist framework: for Nathaniel Taylor, human depravity was the universal and inevitable result of a person's actions, and not the result of a pre-determined attribute of human nature.²⁰ The New Haven theologians reasoned that if one was not merely the passive captive of sin, it followed that one had the "power" to respond to the message of salvation.²¹ Although to their critics the New Haven theologians seemed to play fast and loose with Calvinist predestination and total depravity, the assertion that sinners exercised a measure of free will effectively placed a heavy responsibility on the individual and heightened the urgency of preachers' calls for repentance. In addition, the implicit elevation of free will in the individual conversion experience tended to foster the willful evangelization of American culture.

Voluntary, interdenominational "benevolent associations" both directed and issued from the Second Great Awakening. Historian Richard Shiels has demonstrated that founders and active members of the Connecticut Missionary Society conducted most of the New England revivals between 1790 and 1820 and that voluntary

associations and missionary efforts became an acceptable outlet for the political and social endeavors of denominational leaders.²² In 1798 the General Association of Connecticut (Congregationalist) gave the freshly organized Connecticut Missionary Society a mandate to "Christianize the Heathen in North America, and to support and promote Christian Knowledge in the new settlements within the United States."²³ In 1799 the Massachusetts Missionary Society received a similar charter. Both societies took up collections in local churches for the support of missionaries on the frontier; both printed magazines to promote public interest in their work; and in 1812 the neighboring societies jointly dispatched Samuel J. Mills (Congregationalist) and John F. Schermerhorn (Dutch Reformed) on a religious fact-finding tour of Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and the lower Mississippi River.²⁴

The Mills-Schermerhorn investigation of missionary prospects in the west dramatized both the rapid growth of the state missionary societies and a willingness to cross denominational boundaries. In 1798 the Connecticut society sent out itinerant preachers for four to eight week terms in New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont.²⁵ But by 1801, Connecticut missionary Joseph Badger undertook a thirteen month tour of the Western Reserve and subsequently returned with his family to plant churches

under society auspices in Ohio. Mass distribution of religious literature also displayed the energetic growth of the Connecticut Missionary Society: by 1818 the small state society had distributed 42,000 tracts, Bibles, and devotional volumes in the west.²⁶

On a grander scale, the movement toward national societies for the promotion of missions, tract and Bible distribution, education, and social reform displayed an interdenominational effort to evangelize American culture. The American Bible Society, organized in 1816, incorporated the Philadelphia (founded in 1808 and patterned after a British Bible society), Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New York, and smaller Bible societies.²⁷ The American Tract Society, founded in Boston in 1823, became truly national when it merged with a New York society of the same name. Seeking to underwrite the cost of ministerial education for the expanding nation, the American Education Society (1824) supplanted the Boston based American Society For Educating Pious Youth (1814). The American Society For The Promotion of Temperance (1826) served a favorite evangelical cause throughout the nation.²⁸ In 1826 the American Home Missionary Society linked the domestic missionary thrust of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

The Presbyterian-Congregationalist Plan of Union of

1801 had ambitiously allied home missionary efforts of the two denominations. Both groups acknowledged doctrinal similarities and a common heritage and both recognized that their respective missionary ventures in the west suffered from either duplicated effort or neglect.²⁹ Since Congregationalists were concentrated in New England and Presbyterians in the Middle-Atlantic region, neither denomination possessed the truly national base or distribution of their chief competitors in the west, the Baptists and Methodists. The Calvinist denominations had, however, displayed a spirit of fellowship and good feeling. In 1799 the Presbyterian General Assembly, the Reformed Dutch, the Associate Reformed Church and Congregational association in New England had exchanged delegates. The delegates who approved the Plan of Union at the 1801 Presbyterian General Assembly and the General Association of Connecticut (Congregationalist) envisioned the founding of Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and mixed Congregationalist-Presbyterian congregations on the frontier.³⁰

Under the Plan of Union, missionaries were urged to encourage good relations between the Congregational and Presbyterian settlers in the west. Since a church might have either a Congregational or Presbyterian minister, disputes between members and ministers could come before either the minister's denominational authorities, or

before a joint Presbyterian-Congregationalist council. A committee of Presbyterian and Congregationalist members governed the internal affairs of "Presbygational" churches. Presbyterian members could appeal committee decisions to their presbytery and Congregationalists to a meeting of the male members of the church.

The Plan of Union did not immediately inspire the formation of an interdenominational home missionary society. As noted above, the Congregational state missionary societies grew rapidly during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The Presbyterian General Assembly also sponsored missionaries. In 1802 a Standing Committee on Missions was established, books and tracts were distributed in the west, and Presbyterian pastors or licentiates were sent out on preaching tours of one to six months. By 1816 a Board of Missions, with a full-time staff, superseded the Standing Committee on Missions. But the efforts of the Presbyterian General Assembly were not equal to the needs of the expanding western population. After twenty-six years of Presbyterian home missionary endeavors, the Secretary of the General Assembly Board of Missions, Rev. E.S. Ely, told the Executive Committee of the recently formed American Home Missionary Society that:

. . . at this moment there are 636 vacant churches connected with but 90 Presbyteries; which have no ministrations of the gospel but from itinerant preachers; and 502 more of our churches have only 226 pastors or stated supplies among them; so that 276 of the churches said to be supplied might with propriety be added to those which are denominated vacant.³¹

In addition to laying bare the shortcomings of the Presbyterian missionary effort, Ely proposed that the American Home Missionary Society and the Presbyterian denomination co-ordinate their efforts more closely:

To prevent all interference in appointments, and to let you know the affairs of your brethren, we shall communicate to you, from time to time, our proceedings; and beg leave to assure you, that we shall not intentionally authorize any encroachment upon ground pre-occupied by yourselves³²

In response to Ely's letter, American Home Missionary Society Corresponding Secretary Absalom Peters reiterated the Society's commitments to "promote the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in this country"; to seek "the co-operation of other denominations, who agree with us in essential doctrines"; to serve as "an office of general intelligence on the subject of Home Missions"; and to bring "the cry of the needy to the door of the American churches and open a channel, through which the charities of the older states may be conveyed to the new and comparatively destitute communities of the West and South."³³ Peters was willing to extend denominational co-operation to the point of consolidating American Home

Missionary Society and Presbyterian home missionary efforts.³⁴ Although Peters and Ely worked out and published a plan of union in 1828-29, the Presbyterian Board of Missions rejected the plan and the American Home Missionary Society remained faithful to its interdenominational origins.³⁵

The United Domestic Missionary Society had immediately preceded the American Home Missionary Society. Founded in New York City, the United Domestic Missionary Society absorbed several small eastern missionary societies. The founders of the United Domestic Missionary Society reasoned that such small societies as the Young Men's Missionary Society of New York (founded in 1815) and the New York Evangelical Society (founded in 1816) possessed neither the numerical strength nor the administrative efficiency to establish churches and settle clergy in the west.³⁶ (By 1822 the two societies employed a total of only nineteen clergy; their appeals for funds also overlapped.) Receiving the support of the Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Associate Reformed denominations and creating auxiliaries out of the smaller societies, the United Domestic Missionary Society sponsored 127 missionaries by 1826--with one hundred concentrated in central and western New York and the balance distributed along the Atlantic coast, in lower Canada, and in Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri.³⁷

The call for the formation of the American Home Missionary Society came from a group of Congregationalist-dominated Andover Theological Seminary students in 1825. In January an Andover student named Nathaniel Bouton conceived of a "national domestic missionary society"; in April, his classmate, John Maltby, urged a society of inquiry to recommend a missionary society:

which shall bring the most remote parts of our nation into cordial cooperation, awaken mutual interest in the same grand and harmonious design, produce a new feeling of brotherhood, and thus bind us all together by new cord of union . . . [a society in which]. . . philanthropy, patriotism, and Christian sympathy throughout our country [will flow] into one vast reservoir . . . fertilizing every barren spot and causing our whole country to flourish like the garden of the Lord.³⁸

While attending the September 1825 ordination of four Andover graduates and prospective missionaries, a group of New England clergy formed a committee and planned a January 1826 meeting to consider the establishment of a national home missionary society.³⁹ In January the committee agreed to organize a society that would embrace all interested denominations and would co-exist with contemporary missionary efforts. At the request of the committee, the United Domestic Missionary Society called for a constitutional convention in New York City in May. On May 10, 1826, one hundred twenty-six delegates from thirteen states and from the Presbyterian, Congregational, Dutch Reformed, and Associate Reformed denominations

agreed that:

The great object of this Society shall be to assist congregations that are unable to support the Gospel Ministry, and to send the Gospel to the destitute, within the United States.⁴⁰

The United Domestic Missionary Society resolved to merge with the new American Home Missionary Society; United Domestic Missionary Society president Stephen Van Rensselaer and the executive committee retained their positions in the American Home Missionary Society.

Although the American Home Missionary Society did not accede to denominational controls, the Executive Committee co-operated with local presbyteries or Congregational associations. All prospective missionaries and requests for aid had to carry the recommendation of the presbytery or Congregational association that governed the anticipated mission field.⁴¹ In 1826 the American Home Missionary Society estimated that a western missionary could live on an annual salary of four hundred dollars. The society generally granted one hundred dollars to needy missionaries and insisted that the assisted congregation provide the balance of the salary.⁴² Local churches submitted annual applications for aid: missionaries were paid quarterly upon submission of a written report.

In general, the American Home Missionary Society preferred to support settled ministers, but because of the shortage of western clergy, many ministers were compelled to pastor two or more churches simultaneously. Unlike

Methodist or Baptist clergy, American Home Missionary Society ministers were expected to refrain from farming, business, or trade. Occasionally, the American Home Missionary Society dispatched missionaries who had no certain prospect of a settled ministry. All American Home Missionary Society missionaries in the west were supervised by their denomination and by an American Home Missionary Society state or district agent. As missionaries at large, agents visited and organized churches, kept track of "destitute" congregations (those without a pastor), advised missionaries, reported regularly to the society headquarters in New York City, and raised money.⁴³

In addition to supplying the public worship needs of frontier congregations, American Home Missionary Society missionaries were encouraged to distribute Bibles and tracts, to organize Sabbath schools and Bible classes, and to promote the "sanctification of the Sabbath," interest in foreign missions, and the cause of temperance.⁴⁴ Missionaries fervently sought and eagerly reported "revivals of religion." American Home Missionary Society members were urged to co-operate with their counterparts in the American Sunday School Union, the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and national, state, and local temperance societies.⁴⁵

In the first three years of its existence the

American Home Missionary Society showed considerable success. In 1829 the Executive Committee reported that expenditures, number of missionaries, and assisted congregations had virtually doubled.⁴⁶ Because the American Home Missionary Society stood in constant need of public support, Society officials valued publicity. From 1826 to 1828 a religious newspaper, The New York Observer, provided space for American Home Missionary Society reports.⁴⁷ In 1828, however, the American Home Missionary Society began to publish its own monthly magazine. The Home Missionary and Pastor's Journal contained news from Society headquarters, edited reports of missionaries, appeals for funds, triumphant stories of conversion experiences, and harrowing accounts of the "wages of sin."

As a voluntary association that cut across denominational boundaries and depended annually upon the financial support and spiritual solidarity of its sympathizers, the American Home Missionary Society sought to create what historian Sandra Sizer has called "a community of feeling"

. . . in which individuals underwent similar experiences (centering on conversion) and would thenceforth unite with others in matters of moral decision and social behavior.⁴⁸

Religious liberty, denominationalism, and the voluntary principle gave impetus to a revivalism that was predicated upon persuasive rhetoric and the common experience of

conversion. By admitting a measure of free will into the Calvinist scheme, the "New Divinity" and the New Haven theology sanctioned the efficacy of pastoral persuasion.

Evangelism and patriotism mingled in the rhetoric of the American Home Missionary correspondents. Retaining the Puritan "conception of a people standing in direct daily relation to God upon covenantal terms," missionary William Kirby extolled his own role in American history:

The pilgrim fathers were driven from their native shores by the cruel hand of persecution; but Christians at this day, stimulated by a sense of duty and a regard for Christ's kingdom, cheerfully leave the favoured scenes of older states to exert their influence in forming the character of the infant portions of our country.⁴⁹

For supporters of the American Home Missionary Society, the western states represented a providential opportunity to seek converts and to exercise a controlling interest in "infant" social institutions.

In the conjunction of evangelism and patriotism, the "Redeemer's Kingdom" and the "value of immortal souls" preceded the patriotic desire "to see the virtue, peace, union, and happiness of the country established."⁵⁰

The conventional religious language that pervades American Home Missionary Society correspondence and publications not only reveals the motives of the Society, but also elevates the efforts of its officials. Loneliness, fear, death, and penury were all rhetorically glorified. To William Kirby, an eight member church in

Blackstone's Grove, Illinois represented a "little branch of Zion."⁵¹ Biblical images of discipleship helped Theron Baldwin overcome his anxieties about accepting an appointment in 1830 as agent in Illinois.⁵² Reports of the death in a steamboat explosion of Recording Secretary Stephen Lockwood were couched in Biblical symbolism:

. . . he has ceased under heaven. A voice out of the fire commanded him to rest from his labours⁵³

To the editor of the Home Missionary, the seeking of converts and "promoting the spirit of entire and permanent consecration to God" superseded the "immediate collection of money."⁵⁴ In 1839, as the repercussions of the Panic of 1837 threatened to undo the American Home Missionary Society, Chicago based missionary Flavel Bascom sought solace in the "God of Zion" who

. . . has carried the Society through trials and perils and has even made its very trials a means of its increased prosperity and enlarged usefulness.⁵⁵

The missionaries and their supporters seemed to draw sustenance from a rhetoric that expressed the hopes and fears of people who believed that they stood in daily relation to God and enjoyed providential favor. In a study of how the American Home Missionary Society perceived frontier society in Illinois and Indiana, planted churches, and attempted to shape "infant" social institutions, it is important to recognize from the outset

that the rhetoric of Society correspondents unfolds their vision for American culture. But it is equally important to probe the underlying tensions that grew within the organization and to examine the conflicts that existed between the putative molders of society and the often intractable inhabitants and between the grand design and the actual achievements of the missionaries. The records of the American Home Missionary Society reveal an historically distinctive attempt to translate lofty aspirations into action. Thomas Aquinas observed that Christians partake simultaneously of time and of eternity; operating within a peculiarly American religious tradition, missionary John Ellis shared that bifocal vision when he wrote to American Home Missionary Society headquarters in 1826:

You have espoused the cause of the church in the West and there is joy on earth and in heaven for it and from what I see and hear--and when I think of unborn generations--and when I think of my destined country, my heart is full and I feel that that joy is to be eternal 56

NOTES

¹Thomas Paine, Common Sense, edited with an introduction by Isaac Krammick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 71-80.

²Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 363-364.

³Ibid., p. 365.

⁴Ahlstrom discusses the re-organization of the Episcopal Church, the founding of the Methodist denomination, and the growth of the Baptists on pp. 374-376.

⁵Ibid., pp. 374-375.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Martin Marty, Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience In America (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 37.

⁸Ahlstrom, p. 380.

⁹Ahlstrom, pp. 379-384; Marty, pp. 67-77.

¹⁰Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in The Shaping of American Religion, eds. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 325.

¹¹Ibid., Miller discusses the changing response to "fast days," pp. 354-360: for the full argument of his essay, see pp. 322-368.

¹²Drew R. Mc Coy, The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982), pp. 51-67 focuses on Franklin's analysis; pp. 124-143, on Madison's; pp. 185-228, on Jefferson's; pp. 7-49 contain a discussion of the fears that surrounded republicanism in America.

¹³Prologue to The Candidates, or Humours of a Virginia Election, photocopied script in Prof. T. Murphy's course "Early National Period (USA)", Department of History, U.R.I.

¹⁴See especially, Richard D. Shiels, "The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut: Critique of the Traditional Interpretation," Church History 49 (December 1980): 401-416; also, Richard D. Birdsall, "The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order," Church History 39 (September 1970) 3: 345-364 and Donald Matthews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," American Quarterly 21 (1969):23-43. Matthews emphasizes "an ideology of personal 'salvation' and moral responsibility" in affected local churches and supra-local agencies that "provided common standards for evaluating and enforcing behavior." While recognizing the importance of contemporary political tensions in New England, Birdsall emphasizes a "revolt of individuality" and a revolt of experiential religion against "orthodox religion." Shiels subordinates political influences to a broadly based embracing of experiential religion. For Shiels, voluntary evangelical societies " . . . were an accomodation to the steadily increasing separation of church and state rather than a strategy to resist it."

¹⁵James F. Maclear, "The Republic and the Millennium," in The Religion of the Republic, ed. Elwyn A. Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 183-216; the quote is from p. 184.

¹⁶Nathan O. Hatch, The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 17.

¹⁷Ahlstrom, pp. 415-417.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 418-422.

¹⁹George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth Century America (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 45-50 and Ahlstrom, pp. 419-420.

²⁰Ibid..

²¹Marsden, pp. 49-50 and Ahlstrom, p. 420.

²²Shiels, Church History 49 (1980): 401-416. Shiels collates the efforts of several generations of Connecticut clergy from 1790-1820.

²³Colin Brummitt Goodykoontz, Home Missions On The American Frontier: With Particular Reference to the American Home Missionary Society reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 130. Goodykoontz cites the Constitution of the Missionary Society of Connecticut . . . (Hartford, 1800), p. 4.

²⁴Goodykoontz, pp. 130-131; 136-137; 139-143.

²⁵Ibid., p. 132.

²⁶Ibid., p. 134.

²⁷Goodykoontz, pp. 172-173; pp. 365-366; and Ahlstrom, pp. 422-428.

²⁸Goodykoontz, pp. 146-149.

²⁹Ibid., p. 149.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 197-200.

³¹Goodykoontz, p. 199, citing E.S. Ely to Executive Committee, American Home Missionary Society, 4 July 1828, AHMS Papers, Congregational Home Missionary Society, New York. Goodykoontz notes that he found the full manuscript in an unnumbered box, Bundle 16., No. 170 while doing research at the Society in 1917. An incomplete copy of the letter is in Papers of the American Home Missionary Society, Microfilm edition, University of Rhode Island Library, reel 372; hereinafter cited as AHMS Papers.

³²E.S. Ely to Executive Committee, AHMS, 4 July 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 372. This portion of the letter has been photocopied on reel 372.

³³Absalom Peters to Board of Missions, Presbyterian General Assembly, AHMS Papers, reel 372.

³⁴Ibid..

³⁵The Ely-Peters plan was published in Home Missionary I (1829): 206-211, AHMS Papers, reel 378. Goodykoontz relates the fate of the plan, p. 199.

³⁶Fourth Annual Report of the United Domestic Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1826), AHMS Papers reel 373 and Goodykoontz, pp. 173-175; the AHMS papers include the constitution of the St. Petersburg Missionary Society, a small society that was absorbed by the UDMS in 1822, reel 372.

³⁷Goodykoontz, p. 176. See also Fourth Annual Report of the United Domestic Missionary Society, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

³⁸Goodykoontz, p. 177 cites John Maltby, "Connexion [sic] between Domestic Missions and the Political Prospects of our Country," MS. in Congregational Home Missionary Society, New York, and alludes to a "torn copy" in the collection. A microfilmed fragment of an untitled address, dated 1825, may be a partial manuscript of Maltby's address, AHMS Papers, reel 372.

³⁹"Proceedings Resulting in the Formation of the AHMS, Circular", Fourth Annual Report of the United Domestic Missionary Society, pp. 4-7, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁴⁰Article 2 of Constitution of the American Home Missionary Society, Fourth Annual Report of the United Domestic Missionary Society, pp. 4-7, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁴¹Goodykoontz, p. 179 f.

⁴²First Annual Report of The American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1827), pp. 44-46, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁴³Goodykoontz, pp. 182-183.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 182-184.

⁴⁵Third Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1829), pp. 57-61, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁷Editor of New York Observer to Absalom Peters, 25 December 1825, AHMS Papers, reel 372; the founding and purposes of the Home Missionary and Pastor's Journal were announced in a circular appended to the Second Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1828), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁴⁸Sandra Sizer, Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth Century Revivalism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 52. In his discussion of charismatic Second Great Awakening leaders and the subsequent "routinization of charisma" Donald Matthews (see note 13 above) also noted the importance of a "common world of experience" that was engendered by the revivals and shared nationally by evangelicals.

⁴⁹William Kirby, Union Grove, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, Home Missionary VI (March 1834), p. 198, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁰Samuel Miller and A. Alexander, Princeton, New Jersey, 6 March 1826 to Absalom Peters, Fourth Annual Report of the United Domestic Missionary Society, pp. 10-11, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁵¹William Kirby, Blackstone's Grove, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of AHMS, 7 August 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁵²Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, April 1830 [?], AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁵³First Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: 1827), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁵⁴Unsigned editorial comment, Home Missionary VI (June 1833), p. 29, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁵Flavel Bascom, Chicago, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS Papers, 10 December 1839, AHMS Papers, reel 17.

⁵⁶John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 AUGUST 1827, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

CHAPTER TWO

The earliest American Home Missionary Society missionaries to Illinois and Indiana sought not only to propagate the gospel according to evangelical doctrine and Presbyterian-Congregational polity but also to shape the character and institutions of a frontier society that they perceived to be simultaneously hostile and promising. The tension between their expectations and their experiences in Illinois and Indiana forged their distinctive perception of frontier society. The physical obstacles to their mission were starkly apparent. Travel to and within the new states was almost unbearably primitive. The threat of sudden death and disease lurked in roads and waterways, in prairies and villages. Nevertheless, the fertility of the land augured well for future material prosperity. But if physical obstacles were superseded by mere material prosperity--without the salutary presence of the American Home Missionary Society in every community--the mission of the Society would flounder and the physical wilderness would give way to a spiritual wilderness. Thus, the high expectations of the missionaries collided with the dreadful prospect of an entrenched spiritual waste land, inhabited by members of rival religious

denominations or by the blatantly irreligious. To the first wave of American Home Missionary Society missionaries in Illinois and Indiana, confidence in the impending conquest of a physical wilderness was clouded by anxiety over the religious and cultural condition of their territory. But before they could multiply and attend to the spiritual life of the settlers in Illinois and Indiana the missionaries had to help subdue a daunting physical wilderness.

Caught between his lofty aspirations and physical hardship, the Rev. John Ellis's "eternal" joy was tempered by the rigors of frontier travel. En route to Illinois in October 1825 Ellis hoped that his work would promote mutual interest and support between the Sunday School children of the east and the offspring of the pioneer families of Illinois. He was optimistic that a common sympathy could be "planted deep in the heart of the rising generations."¹ But the journey between New England and New York and Illinois and Indiana was arduous and portended the physical rigors of frontier missionary life.

Ellis's first letter to American Home Missionary Society headquarters was penned by a shaking hand on a steamboat; he admitted that he was battling the "constant jars of the boat" and "fatigue".² In his second letter Ellis reported that his trip had been delayed by low waters on the Ohio River. His first letter had been

postmarked in Schenectady, New York, on October 21, 1825; he arrived in St. Louis on December 7.³

The itinerary of Eldridge Howe, a young graduate of Brown and Andover Seminary, combined water with overland travel. Howe set out for the Indiana-Illinois border on the twenty-seventh of September, 1825. He followed the recently opened Erie Canal. But because of low waters on the Ohio River, he was forced to travel by land through Ohio to Louisville. Although he lacked credit, friendly clergy near Louisville helped Howe to secure a horse and wagon for his trip through Indiana. Unfortunately, Howe's horse proved unequal to the strain and the missionary was forced to change horses in Indiana. He did not arrive until December 6.⁴

Throughout the first decade of American Home Missionary Society activity, the trip west remained tortuous. In spite of the advantages of an established correspondence with Ellis and favorable health and weather, the Rev. John G. Bergen of New Jersey took forty days to reach Rock Spring, Illinois.⁵ Writing from southwestern Illinois in 1829, Ellis advised missionaries to bring their shoes, bedding, and clothes and to send other possessions by way of St. Louis.⁶ Water routes proved, however, to be only slight improvements over the land route. The Rev. J.H. Prentiss, who left Syracuse, New York, on the fifteenth of May 1835 and traveled

exclusively by the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes, encountered a violent three-day storm on Lake Michigan, which prevented his landing at Chicago until June 21.⁷ Setting out from Connecticut in the autumn of 1835, the Rev. Daniel Jones took two weeks to travel from New York City to Buffalo and ten days to sail from Buffalo to Toledo. Jones discovered that the ten day river trip between Toledo and his mission post in Fort Wayne was:

attended with more vexation and expense . . . than . . . in traveling a thousand miles in another direction when the river is low, the only conveyance to be obtained is a perogue, which is a boat hewn out of a single log, and pushed along with poles.⁸

Curiously, the missionaries' accounts of their journeys west generally omit reference to a providential God and fail to invoke the characteristic evangelical rhetoric. Writing to the Society's headquarters or eying publication in the Home Missionary, the pioneer missionaries neither embellished nor glorified their westward journeys. Although some may have cast themselves as latter-day Pilgrims, there was little evidence that they reprised Bradford's thanksgiving in Illinois and Indiana.⁹

For such ambitious missionaries as John Ellis, the rigors of the trip west were subsumed by contemplation of their prospective missionary work. Throughout his fatiguing voyage, Ellis designed a pragmatic scheme for

the exchange of books, tracts, and Bibles between the Sunday School children of the east and his prospective pupils in Illinois.¹⁰ But fatigue did not seem to stimulate the imaginations of Howe, Bergen, Prentiss, or Jones. Undoubtedly the missionaries were aware from the outset that the new routes west were incomplete, rough hewn, and in little need of dramatization. Perhaps to the highly motivated and single-minded early missionaries the journey west, whether stimulating or enervating, was regarded as merely an arduous prologue to significant labor.

Travel within the western states was equally daunting in the 1820's and 1830's. Villages were spaced thirty to forty miles apart; because few roads or bridges existed, missionaries, judges, lawyers and businessmen were forced to ford streams and camp out in all seasons.¹¹ Because of these austere circumstances, missionaries could become easily isolated. Rev. Solomon Hardy of Greenville, Illinois, failed to contact the New York City office for nine months in 1830, because he was unsure that his commission was still in effect until he saw his name listed in the Home Missionary.¹² But for Illinois agents Theron Baldwin and Albert Hale the isolation of the frontier could serve as a backdrop for accounts of dramatic and sympathy-inducing adventure. Reporting on a missionary tour in 1833, Baldwin noted that he and Hale

had spent two or three hours trying to ford a rain swollen creek in Hancock County, Illinois:

[Hale and his horse] were driven [by the current] together towards a large drift of wood that hung some distance below. This, brother Hale with some difficulty succeeded in mounting and even then found the bridle around one arm. He extricated himself and the horses, by powerful struggles, wheeled and swam out at the place of entrance.¹³

In the incoming correspondence of the American Home Missionary Society providential rescues could follow rugged adventure. On the same missionary tour, Baldwin and Hale lost their way across a twelve mile unmarked prairie and, by nightfall, unexpectedly " . . . arrived at the house of a gentleman recently arrived from Connecticut, whose wife and sister are members of the Presbyterian church."¹⁴ While Baldwin's and Hale's wanderings were justified by the fortuitous presence of previously unreached and receptive settlers, reports of the physical beauty of the landscape were dangled before eastern evangelicals. Baldwin painted an inviting verbal picture of the DuPage River in northeastern Illinois:

The prairie rises into gentle swells from either shore and the traveller approaches very near, before he even suspects its existence, when, to his surprise and delight, he discovers the silvery stream, a number of rods in width, flowing peacefully along through the willows, grass, and flowers that crown its banks.¹⁵

However benign or enticing the landscape, however exhilarating the travel adventures of agents and missionaries, the wilderness presented undeniable

obstacles. To Eldridge Howe the barren landscape accentuated the formidable magnitude of his task. He found no trace of inhabitants "except for a few deserted wigwams" on a seventy mile stretch of new road between Springfield, Illinois, and New Harmony, Indiana.¹⁶ On the older road between Springfield and New Harmony, he saw neither inhabitants nor timber for forty-five miles. On the third day of his journey he recalled:

I could perceive nought but the brown grassy plain terminated in every direction by the blue sky resting upon it, as upon the waters of the ocean I had today new feelings of the desoluteness and the sublimity of the prospect about me.¹⁷

In this rugged landscape debilitating and incapacitating illnesses constantly threatened missionary endeavors. Partly because of poor health, Rev. Ellis exchanged his original station at Kaskaskia, Illinois, for Jacksonville, Illinois. In a letter relating the reasons for his move to Jacksonville, Ellis also recounted the plight of a minister in St. Charles who had no solid food, fuel, protection against winter wind on the prairie, or credit at the store.¹⁸ The inevitability of contracting illness under such circumstances was sealed by epidemics. From Galena, Illinois, Rev. Aratus Kent observed that the seasonal flooding of the Mississippi River led to almost universal sickness among the inhabitants of the river banks and bottom lands.¹⁹ Cholera, "ague", and the

"bilious fever" struck low-lying, mosquito-infested regions of Illinois and Indiana regularly.²⁰

The aborted career of Rev. Eldridge Howe demonstrated the devastation of illness. In October 1827, less than two years after his arrival, Howe complained that his whole family had been ill for two months; he had been unable to preach and had been forced to abandon his open roofed log cabin and "hire" his board.²¹ Because of his incapacities, the church refused to support him. After a desperate winter he returned home to Massachusetts where, in September 1828, he remained too feeble to work regularly.²²

Although Howe survived (and returned to the west in 1839), epidemics wiped out several missionary families. After losing his wife and infant child in July 1830, a grieving Rev. C. L. Watson of Schuyler County, Illinois, appropriated Biblical imagery to communicate his grief and his renewed determination to continue his missionary work:

I feel now that I am indeed "a stranger" on earth, and that mine is "a solitary pilgrimage in a weary land" . . . my thoughts often dwell upon that "rest which remains for the people of God." By seeing my beloved friends fall into the grave, I am admonished that I too am mortal and am thereby enabled to preach as "a dying man to fellow dying men" and my labours have not been in vain for the Lord.²³

That the incentive to continue issued from personal tragedy revealed both the intensity of the missionaries' faith and the sustenance that it afforded them. But to

the evangelical temperament, disease and death were also regarded as shifting manifestations of divine judgment. For those within the evangelical fold, the death of family or friends could be interpreted as both a vehicle for "the loving-kindness" of God when one found oneself "in the furnace of affliction" and as an example of the deathbed consolations of the conversion experience.²⁴ In contrast to these glorifications of grief, the visitation of disease and death upon an unchurched community provided the evangelical missionaries with harsh images of divine retribution. On October 1, 1833 the Rev. Thomas Lippincott of Carrolltown, Illinois thundered:

In July 1832, the Lord visited the place with great power and glory; drew many rebels to the Saviour. In July 1833, He came again in awful majesty, but it was to sweep the inhabitants of our guilty town to the grave.²⁵

In spite of the isolation, the hardship of travel, and the persistent threat of disease and death, the long-term prospects of the land itself evoked widespread optimism. Eldridge Howe, surveying central Illinois and Indiana, marvelled, "The soil here produces almost spontaneously."²⁶ From Jacksonville, John Ellis reported that "improvable land" with soil one and one-half to three feet deep sold for between two and seven dollars an acre.²⁷ Rev. Cyrus L. Watson aggressively touted the Schuyler County, Illinois, region. After dwelling upon the "navigable stream", the "abundant brooks", the rich

soil, the "well-proportioned groves and prairies" and the "healthy climate", Watson advised the readers of the Home Missionary that:

- Lands can be purchased on good terms, but they are constantly rising in value. Now is the time to make advantageous purchases.²⁸

For a missionary society that sought to place settled, full-time clergy on the frontier, the promise of readily improvable land, inhabited by spiritually receptive settlers from the east, augured well. Hoping to persuade the American Home Missionary Society to send more missionaries and encourage settlement by evangelical Christians, William Pusey, the ruling elder of the First Presbyterian Church in Morgan County, Illinois, exulted over the fertility of the land and the inevitability of instant wealth following the completion of a canal between the Illinois River and Lake Michigan.²⁹ Another layman who hoped to attract Christian laymen and ministers, H.G. Taylor of Jacksonville, noted that the population of Morgan, Green, and Sangamon counties in Illinois had doubled to 25,000 in three and one-half years. Taylor asserted that the fertility of the region exceeded that of the prosperous Genesee area of New York.

Missionaries in the field often showed amazement at the rapid growth of the population. In 1830 James Carnahan described Lafayette, Indiana, as a thriving (if somewhat far-flung) community with a sixty-three member

Presbyterian church: in 1825, the area had been an uninhabited wilderness.³⁰ In 1835, Samual Gregg of Jefferson County, Indiana, expressed astonishment at the daily "swelling" of the population and Lemuel Foster of Bloomington, Indiana, estimated that by 1836 the local population had increased fourfold in three years.

Although travel remained dangerous, the population, by the mid-1830's, was emigrating on better roads and canals. In spite of the added strain upon their work, the American Home Missionary Society missionaries believed that the influx of population was desirable. Indeed, the missionaries were caught up in the ambient--and rather secular--excitement over material progress on the frontier and national expansion. For Rev. Edward O. Hovey, the impending construction of the "Wabash and Erie Canal" increased the importance of his post in Fountain County, Indiana, and, writing in 1835, Rev. R.W. Gridley also expected Ottawa, Illinois, to gain commercial stature after the completion of the Illinois River-Lake Michigan canal.³¹ On his tour of Illinois in 1833, agent Theron Baldwin proposed that the water power along the Fox River north of the Illinois River rapids would make an ideal site for manufacturing ventures.³² Baldwin also foresaw the importance of Chicago ("Especially, when the canal or railroad is opened") and added:

It [construction in Chicago] has increased with astonishing rapidity the present season. I was

told that since the opening of the spring, not far from seventy buildings of all sorts had been erected or were under way.³³

Although the rapid social and economic growth of Illinois and Indiana both stimulated and confirmed the importance of western missionary endeavor, American Home Missionary Society correspondents were not altogether uncritical of material progress. For Baldwin, the "astonishing" development of Chicago was marred by the presence of twenty new stores which "trafficked [sic] in ardent spirits."³⁴ When Rev. Samuel Lowry toured northern Indiana and southern sections of the Michigan Territory in 1834, he praised the oak forests, the well-stocked lakes and ponds, the prospect of a railroad and canal system that would bind the area to Chicago and the completed section of canal between Logansport and Fort Wayne. For Lowry, however, a benign landscape and a transportation network served as vehicles for missionary activities. Implicitly soliciting future support, he concluded:

Such a country, so favorably situated, cannot fail to exert an important influence on the religious interest of a great part of the state.³⁵

The persistent notion that the west represented a spiritual wilderness haunted the otherwise exultant recognition of national growth and prosperity. For the missionaries, descriptions of a promised land of plenty were consciously directed toward the cultivation of what Lyman Beecher called "an homogeneous character" in the

national population. In a popular tract of the 1820's Beecher stated that nothing less than the "integrity of the Union" depended upon ministerial "special exertions to . . . bind the nation together by firmer bonds."³⁶ In Beecher's analysis:

The consolidation of the State Governments [sic] would make a despotism. But the prevalence of pious, intelligent, enterprising ministers through[out] the nation, at the ratio of one for 1,000 would establish schools, and academies, and colleges, and habits, and institutions of homogeneous influence. These would produce a sameness of views, and feelings, and interests, which would lay the foundation of our empire upon a rock.³⁷

When American Home Missionary Society correspondents dangled the commercial potential of their developing territory before their eastern readers, they were not merely extolling the landscape: they were seeking to attract an active laity. Letters to the American Home Missionary Society from such concerned lay people as H.G. Taylor and William Pusey indicated that the evangelically disposed settlers of Illinois and Indiana shared an interest in attracting and building up a "homogeneous" culture. Success for such early missionaries as Rev. John Ellis depended upon the ability to tap the support of a receptive population. Originally stationed in the Mississippi River village of Kaskaskia, Illinois, Ellis found that his station was not only less significant than he had been led to believe, but also surrounded by a

religiously apathetic population and entrenched "French Catholics" [sic].³⁸ Removal to Jacksonville, where settlers from New England were planning to establish "a seminary of learning" (Illinois College), provided Ellis with a larger and more productive forum for his ambitions and talents.

While western missionaries tried to attract settlers from New England and New York to teach schools, form and construct churches, and support a settled ministry, former New Englanders and the descendants of New Englanders from the "burned over district" in New York State were often willing to serve the evangelical cause and to migrate to the west.³⁹ For New Englanders, the already longstanding social upheaval that resulted from the inroads of manufacturing, the exhaustion of family farms, and the relative overpopulation of their region, made westward migration in the 1830's an attractive option.

The first generation of American Home Missionary Society missionaries were also easterners and frequently shared the New England heritage of their lay supporters of the frontier. Beecher's call for a "homogeneous culture" informed the strategy of Theron Baldwin:

The missionary stations . . . are taken in the very infancy of the settlements. Moral and religious influence may grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength.⁴⁰

In an 1835 letter to Charles Butler of the Young Men's Home Missionary Society of New York City (an auxiliary of

the American Home Missioanry Society), Baldwin optimistically foresaw a time when "the current of benevolence should set the other way, and the West be called upon to help the East to the blessings of education and the Gospel!"⁴¹ But the optimistic projection of an evangelically induced homogeneous national culture was somewhat handicapped by the changing role of the clergy in American society.

The clergy in New England in the late eighteenth century had become transformed into a "profession" -- educated in the proliferating eastern seminaries and subjected to repeated pastoral change in the course of a career.⁴² The move toward professionalism in the clergy had been attended by changes in the perception of where the clergy stood in relation to the community. Prior to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, New England clergy had characteristically enjoyed a lifelong tenure in a community church and had been regarded as local office holders who were not subject to the vagaries of popular opinion. With the movement toward national disestablishment (and the loosening of and eventual move to disestablishment in Connecticut and Massachusetts), clergy were not only forced to become more mobile but also were made dependent upon the voluntary principle of church membership.

As a result of these developments, Presbyterian and

Congregationalist ministers in the American Home Missionary Society were compelled to develop affinity with their audience. To be successful (as Rev. R.W. Gridley of Ottawa, Illinois, stated) "in doing something towards forming the character and saving the souls of the immense population that must shortly be spread over this most fertile and beautiful country," one had to be deemed acceptable, not only by the American Home Missionary Society and one's denominational authorities, but also by a core of lay leaders.⁴³

Consequently, American Home Missionary Society missionaries fostered a "community of feeling" on the frontier. A "large", "solemn" and "silent" gathering in Vandalia, Illinois in 1830 reminded Theron Baldwin of "scenes which he so frequently witnessed in New England" and prompted him to "indulge in fond expectation that the Lord was about to pour down . . . a copious effusion of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ Other more mundane but determindly poignant (to sympathetic readers) reports of evangelical easterners on the frontier filtered back to American Home Missionary Society supporters. Rev. Calvin Babbitt of Pekin, Illinois, wrote:

after preaching in a neighborhood about eighteen miles distant, a young man, a native of Massachusetts, who is engaged in teaching a school . . . said, "While you were preaching, I almost forgot where I was, and fancied myself again in the land of my nativity, and enjoying those blessed privileges in which I once

delighted, but of which, for several months past, I have been totally deprived.⁴⁵

In spite of the presence of empathetic pioneers from the east and the unfolding transformation of the wilderness into a network of settlements, Illinois and Indiana remained, in the perception of the missionaries of the 1830's, a spiritual wilderness. The "educated" laity (evangelicals with training in Presbyterian or Congregationalist doctrine) remained widely diffused. On his travels through Indiana, Rev. Ulrie Maynard encountered Presbyterians who had been deprived of communion for up to thirty years.⁴⁶ In both thickly and sparsely settled areas missionaries felt overextended. As late as 1836, Rev. Nathaniel Clark referred to the developed areas around the DesPlaines and Fox Rivers as a "moral wilderness."⁴⁷ Rev. Edward O. Hovey complained that only one part-time missionary represented the American Home Missionary Society to ten thousand inhabitants of Tippecanoe County, Indiana.⁴⁸ Pleading for more assistance in 1834, Rev. Robert Stuart of Canton, Illinois, informed New York City headquarters that the nearest American Home Missionary Society clergy were eighty miles north, one hundred miles west, and fifty miles south of his field.⁴⁹ In the same letter he observed that Rev. Aratus Kent of Galena, Illinois, was stationed "so far to the north that he seldom sees his brethren in the ministry."

Since early settlers were preoccupied with physical survival, the presence of an American Home Missionary Society minister did not necessarily accelerate the process of religious education or church construction. The passage west had often forced missionaries to jettison their books: for prospective farmers and tradespeople the transportation of a personal library represented an even rarer luxury. In 1831, Eliphalet Kent of Shelby County, Illinois, found that only half of the families in his missionary field had brought a copy of the Bible to the west.⁵⁰ Rev. John Ellis discovered an "educated" eastern family near Kaskaskia with an illiterate twelve-year-old son.⁵¹

Families that could not find the time to educate their children could hardly be expected to erect churchbuildings. Lack of minimal financial support caused some American Home Missionary Society clergy to defy Society recommendations and seek supplementary "secular" employment. Rev. Aratus Kent supported himself by opening a day school for the children of lead miners in Galena. Compelled by illness and the lukewarm reception of his ministry, Eldridge Howe taught school, preached, and tried subsistence farming.⁵²

More fortunate missionaries found that their church members were "able and willing to support" a minister, but "unable to support" a minister "and erect a church house

at the same time."⁵³ In Vincennes, Indiana, Rev. Samuel R. Alexander's congregation met in the courthouse. Noting similar makeshift arrangements in Crawfordsville, Indiana, Rev. James Thomson complained that " . . . we lose more [potential members] for the want of suitable houses of public worship than, perhaps, from any other source."⁵⁴

Beyond serving as a base of operations, church buildings represented the presence of a moral influence among the "infant" social institutions of a western community. To the American Home Missionary Society correspondents, the absence of a public house of worship symbolized the ascendancy of secular obsessions among the settlers. From his "destitute" station the Rev. John F. Brooks commented:

With some [settlers], if their present temporal wants are supplied, they have not anxiety about the future, either in this world or the next. With others, the supreme good in prospect is to become rich. What human means can break this apathy is yet difficult to tell.⁵⁵

Theron Baldwin observed that many people who had come west with the hope of being "useful" to the church failed to carry out their intentions.⁵⁶ When religious apathy prevailed, courthouses, homes, log shelters, and groves sufficed for public worship.

To a Society bent on spreading evangelical Christianity and implementing Beecher's call for a "homogeneous culture", "worldliness" and rival religious

beliefs compounded the problem of apathy in the "moral wilderness". The Sabbath-breaking operators of canal and river boats turned the pathways of immigration into "grand highways of corruption" where "even professors of religion waxed cold." Projected canals and railroads distracted church members from the "advancement of Zion" in the west. And the "universal desire to get land" claimed the thoughts and earnings of self-sufficient settlers and kept them from turning their attention to the "support of the Gospel."⁵⁷

American Home Missionary Society correspondents keenly felt the wrath of the irreligious and non-evangelical settlers. Gun shots and circus parades disrupted services. For a Society pledged to support the cause of temperance, an "influx of foreigners" who neither abstained from the use of alcoholic beverages nor refrained from the pursuit of non-religious recreation on the Sabbath, represented a formidable challenge.⁵⁸

The presence on the frontier of rival interpretations of Christianity also evoked the lamentations of the Presbyterian and Congregational ministers of the American Home Missionary Society. Writing in the decade of Maria Monk's lurid tales and the convent burning in Charlestown, Massachusetts, American Home Missionary Society correspondents tended to see the Catholic influence in Indiana and along the Mississippi River as the vanguard of

a "papist plot" to establish a worldwide "dominion of anti-Christ."⁵⁹ In the absence of common schools, evangelical correspondents also feared the educational attractiveness of convent schools. While Catholic German immigrants were classified as "aliens," Lutheran Germans were regarded as a "promising class of people" for American Home Missionary Society endeavors.⁶⁰

American Home Missionary Society missionaries also feared and competed against Universalists in Illinois and Indiana. Rev. Samuel Gregg claimed that Ripley County, Indiana, was equally divided between Universalists and "the professors of all the evangelical denominations together."⁶¹ The central Universalist doctrine that "it is the purpose of God, through the grace revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, to save every member of the human race from sin" ran counter to Calvinist orthodoxy.⁶² Moreover, the Universalists' stress on the goodness of people and benevolence of God undermined the revivalists' calls for the repentance of guilty sinners. That the Universalists of the 1830's were conscientious and independent students of the Bible who incorporated evangelical practices, supported over five hundred ministers and appealed to the "common person" on the frontier magnified their prominence and their perceived threat to the American Home Missionary Society.

Although Baptists and Methodists also opposed

"worldliness" and non-evangelical Christianity, the evangelicals did not form a united front. Baptists and Methodists allegedly spread the "common slander" that the interdenominational benevolent associations hid the self-serving financial speculations of wealthy easterners.⁶³ At a Baptist meeting in Crawfordsville, Indiana in 1832 nine churches voted to "discipline" members who participated in temperance, missionary, Bible and tract societies.⁶⁴ Unlike the Presbyterians and Congregationalists of the American Home Misssionary Society, Baptist and Methodist clergy often lacked formal education, farmed or engaged in business, and pursued (by choice) an itinerant ministry. In the perception of many Baptists and Methodists on the frontier, the American Home Missionary Society ministers were effete easterners who wrangled over obscure doctrine and eschewed the tedious manual labor of their fellow pioneers.

Baptist and Methodist preachers appealed to settlers who believed that a minister was set apart, not by formal study, but by a "natural gift" for preaching and a "calling" from the Lord.⁶⁵ At rural camp meetings Baptist and Methodist preachers employed the homely language of their peers to critique Calvin's theology. One jaundiced American Home Missionary Society correspondent preserved the sermon of an Indiana Methodist:

let John Calvin burn, torture, and roast, but he
[God] never foreordained babies, as Calvin says,

to damnation! . . . Hallelujah! 'tis a free salvation! Glory! Glory! a free salvation . . . No ho! 'tis a free, a free, a free salvation! -- away with Calvin!⁶⁶

The Presbyterian and Congregational clergy of the American Home Missionary Society launched a spirited and articulate counterattack. Rev. Albert Hale of Bond County, Illinois, advised readers of the Home Missionary that the character of local Baptist critics was subject to reproach. In New Harmony, Indiana, Eldridge Howe savored the shortcomings of the Methodist rival who proved to be "a profane swearer, a liar, and a thief."⁶⁷ But at times internecine evangelical warfare erupted within a American Home Missionary Society sponsored church. Rev. Solomon Hardy found that some members of his small Shoal Creek congregation cultivated the Cane Ridge exercises of religious enthusiasm ("dancing", "jerking", "falling"), while others were "great sticklers for the doctrine, discipline, and order of the Presbyterian church."⁶⁸ Obviously unable to please his diverse congregation, Hardy resigned and explained to American Home Missionary Society headquarters:

Some thought I was too much of a Methodist inviting all sinners to repent and insisting that all Christians should be careful to maintain good works. Others thought I was too much of a Presbyterian in doctrine and practice, and that I had not sufficient lungs to carry the gospel with saving efficacy to the hearts of sinners.⁶⁹

In the perception of American Home Missionary Society

correspondents tensions within evangelicalism radiated out to the larger community. Within the balkanized evangelical empire Baptists and Methodists contended with Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society denigrated non-evangelical Christians and competed with Roman Catholics and Universalists. Evangelical commitments to such behavioral manifestations of piety as temperance and Sabbatarianism stimulated much breast beating over the influx of religiously apathetic, unabashedly materialistic, or determinedly irreligious settlers. By separating the sheep from the goats in frontier society, American Home Missionary Society representatives clarified their task. To spread the gospel (according to the revivalists of the Second Great Awakening) and a homogeneous national culture, American Home Missionary Society representatives in the west needed to address first the tangible problems that were presented by the physical wilderness and the undesirable seeds of cultural pluralism.

These obstacles not only influenced the operational efforts of the American Home Missionary Society, but also helped to sustain the missionaries. The dramatization of a chronic social and religious crisis in the west justified and impelled the efforts of the missionaries. The evangelically perceived crisis in society paralleled the

crisis in the individual conversion experience. The poignancy and excitation of the "anxious" moment, when the sinner wavered between salvation and perdition, was projected onto the physical and moral wilderness of frontier society.

But the tension that compelled the grafting of churches and moral reform societies onto a blossoming nation was also somewhat artificially sustained. As the transportation network improved and settlers snatched up land and tossed up buildings, the missionaries found that their anxieties were confirmed. As the land fulfilled its promise, the American Home Missionary Society's diagnosis of social ills and religious malaise became a self-fulfilling prophecy that demanded redoubled efforts.

In the wake of the Revolutionary era and the Second Great Awakening the dramatization of crisis on the frontier became a vital means of religious persuasion. As a voluntary society, the American Home Missionary Society needed to tap public support by eliciting the sympathies and financial support of subscribers. But the officials of the American Home Missionary Society were not the calculating speculators that their Baptist and Methodist critics often made them out to be. Rather, like Lyman Beecher, they were driven by religious scruples. They paradoxically feared the breakdown of established ecclesiastical authority and welcomed the opportunity to

point an infant society toward the coming "Redeemer's Kingdom." In this context, fearful obstacles were transformed into urgent cries for religious revival and useful moral reform. Transformation of society from the individual out depended upon the missionaries' abilities to plant churches and nurture a cluster of voluntarily and piously accepted behavioral standards.

The tension between the expectations and experiences of the missionaries not only forged their distinctive perspective but also tempered their resolve to re-cast the spiritual wilderness in the image of a homogeneous, national, evangelical Protestant culture striding boldly toward the millennium. The lofty expectations of the earliest missionaries to Illinois and Indiana mingled with harsh experiences to stoke up a creative tension. How that creative tension was released in the forms of revivals, church-building, educational institutions, and voluntary associations, as the American Home Missionary Society attempted to impose its will on the physical and moral wilderness, becomes our next subject.

NOTES

¹John Ellis to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 21 October 1825, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.; John Ellis to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 29 December 1825, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁴Eldridge Howe to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, February 1826, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁵John G. Bergen, Springfield, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 23 December 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁶John Ellis, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 13 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁷J.H. Prentiss, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII (September 1835), p. 80, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁸Daniel Jones, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Home Missionary VIII (January 1836), p. 155, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁹See William Kirby, Union Grove, Illinois, Home Missionary VI (March 1834), p. 198, AHMS Papers, reel 378 and William Kirby, Blackstone's Grove, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 August 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

¹⁰John Ellis to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 21 October 1825, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

¹¹John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 March 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

¹²Solomon Hardy, Greenville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 20 July 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

¹³Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 September 1833, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Eldridge Howe, Paris, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 28 February 1827, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸John Ellis, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 30 July 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

¹⁹Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 13 November 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

²⁰L.C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 12-14.

²¹Eldridge Howe, Edgar Co., Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 6 March 1828, and Howe, Paxton, Massachusetts, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 2 September 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

²²For other reports of death and extended illness, see Theron Baldwin, 1 September 1833, Jacksonville, Illinois; R.W. Gridley, Ottawa, Illinois, 1 March 1835; both to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, reel 16; James Crawford, Delphi, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 January, 1829, Home Missionary (February 1829), p. 185, AHMS Papers, reel 378; Daniel Jones, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Home Missionary VIII (January 1836), p. 155, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²³C.L. Watson, Rushville, Schuyler County, Illinois, Home Missionary III (December 1830), pp. 157-158, AHMS Papers, reel 378. Compare Watson's experience with Theron Baldwin's report of the experiences of Lucius Farnum and John Ellis: "After the death of Mrs. Farnum (from cholera), a number of us accompanied Brother Ellis to the graves of his family. The scene was altogether overwhelming. Two or three months before, he had left them in perfect health and the first item of intelligence from them during his absence, he received about one week before he reached Jacksonville... 'they are all dead'. As he reached the spot where side by side were deposited those objects of his intense affection, he did literally bend under the load of anguish, but after a few struggles of feeling, he appeared to rise and triumph in God." Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

²⁴Reporting the death of his wife, Flavel Bascom, wrote: "Trials I had met before, and thought I had learned to bear them, but the man whose affectionate family is unbroken knows not what trials are. But God has been good to me, and I never felt under greater obligation to him for his loving kindness than in the furnace of affliction." Flavel Bascom, Pekin Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 27 December 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17. For reports of the deathbed consolations of faith, see H. Herrick, Greene County, Illinois, Home Missionary IV (February 1832), p. 175 and Albert Hale, Bond County, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII (October 1835), p. 99, AHMS Papers, reel 372.

²⁵Thomas Lippincott, Carrolltown, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 October 1833, AHMS Papers, reel 16. Lippincott's apparent harshness must be understood in the context of his grief: in the letter, he also reports the death of his ten year old child. For similar sentiments, often expressed more subtly, see Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII (October 1835), p. 97; B.C. Cressy, Salem, Indiana, Home Missionary, III, (February 1832), p. 175, reel 378; Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, 1 September 1833, Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS Papers, reel 16.

²⁶Eldridge Howe, Springfield, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 23 May, 1826, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

²⁷John Ellis, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 13 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

²⁸Cyrus L. Watson, Rushville, Schuyler County, Illinois, Home Missionary III (December 1830), pp. 157-158, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²⁹William Pusey, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 5 August 1828 and H.G. Taylor, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 August 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

³⁰James A. Carnahan, Lafayette, Indiana, Home Missionary III (July 1830), p. 61, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³¹Edward O. Hovey, Fountain County, Indiana, Home Missionary V (July 1832), p. 141, AHMS Papers, reel 378; R.W. Gridley, Ottawa, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 March 1835, AHMS Papers reel 16.

³²Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 September 1822, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Samuel Lowry, Indiana, Home Missionary VII (November 1834), pp. 121-122, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³⁶Lyman Beecher, quoted by The Reformer, Philadelphia, I (October 1820): 236-37, cited by Richard L. Power, "A Crusade to Extreme Yankee Culture, 1820-1865," New England Quarterly, 13 (December 1940): 638-654. Power and Goodykoontz are among the first twentieth century historians to make extensive use of the AHMS Papers.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸John Ellis to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, letters of 29 December 1825, 4 April 1829 and 31 January 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 15. For information on Illinois College and the "Yale Band" see Goodykoontz, pp. 195-197.

³⁹Thomas Dublin, ed. Farm To Factory: Women's Letters 1830-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). See especially the introductory essay by Dublin.

⁴⁰Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 September 1833, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁴¹Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Charles Butler, 23 March 1835, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴²Donald M. Scott, From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), pp. 36-76.

⁴³R. W. Gridley, Ottawa, Illinois, Home Missionary VII (February 1835), p. 173, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴⁴Theron Baldwin, Vandalia, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, July 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁴⁵Calvin Babbitt, Pekin, Illinois, Home Missionary V (April 1833), p. 191, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴⁶Ulrie Maynard, Liberty, Union County, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

⁴⁷Nathaniel Clark, Du Page County, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (June 1836), pp. 34-35, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴⁸Edward O. Hovey, Fountain County, Indiana, Home Missionary V (July 1832), p. 42; Calvin Butler, Evansville, Indiana, Home Missionary VII (November 1834, p. 122, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴⁹Robert Stuart, Canton, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII (December 1834), pp. 137-138, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁰Eliphalet Kant, Shelby County, Illinois, Home Missionary (July 1831), p. 56, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵¹John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 August 1826, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁵²Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, 9 February 1830 and Eldridge Howe, Springfield, Illinois, 4 July 1827, See also Samuel Nance Clark, Edgar County, Illinois, 4 July 1827; Solomon Hardy, Greenville, Illinois, 28 May 1828; Nathaniel Jones and William Proctor, Louiston, Illinois, 17 September 1828; H.G. Taylor, Jacksonville, Illinois, 7 August 1828; all of the above were addressed to the Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, AHMS Papers, reel 15. For a discussion of the AHMS relation to education in Indiana see L.C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion (New Haven and London; Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 158-176.

⁵³Samuel R. Alexander, Vincennes, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 18 May 1829, Home Missionary II (July 1829), p. 45, and Calvin Butler, Princeton, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 20 February 1830, Home Missionary II (April 1830), pp. 195-196, AHMS Papers, reel 378: Butler describes a church that meets in a log cabin in a heavily wooded and sparsely settled area.

⁵⁴James Thomson, Crawfordsville, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 19 June 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 54.

⁵⁵John F. Brooks, Collinsville, Illinois, Home Missionary V (July 1832), p. 38, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁶Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 September 1833, AHMS Papers, reel 16. In the letter Baldwin singled out a laymen who, virtually unaided, had started a Sunday School and has "sustained a religious meeting every Sabbath." Baldwin concluded: "Now these are the laymen that we need, and if they were scattered throughout our settlements, no mortal can form a conception of the blessings that would be called down upon this land through their instrumentality."

⁵⁷Lucius Farnum, Putnam County, Illinois, Home Missionary VII (April 1835), p. 209; H.S. Colton, Hennepin County, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (December 1836) p. 141; J.H. Prentiss, Joliet, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII, (September 1836), p. 38; William W. Woods, Greencastle and Putnamsville, Indiana, Home Missionary IX (December, 1836) p. 144, AHMS Papers, reel 378. Colton complained, "The population of this country is composed of people from all parts of the Union, as well as from foreign lands, with all their diversity of habits, views, feelings, education, mental and religious. Of course, they are not bound together by those common ties which cement society in older portions of our country."

⁵⁸Anonymous "Missionary in Indiana", Home Missionary II, p. 82; AHMS Papers, reel 378; John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, 7 August, 1827, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, AHMS Papers, reel 15; Robert Blake, Collinsville, Illinois, 30 September 1837, Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, AHMS Papers, reel 17.

⁵⁹Eliphalet Kent, Charlestown, Indiana, Home Missionary VIII (October 1835), p. 99; Samuel Lowry, "Town of Northern Indiana," Home Missionary VII (November 1834), p. 121; J.F. Brooks, Belleville, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII (November 1835), p. 119; AHMS Papers, reel 378; John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 August 1827, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶⁰John F. Brooks, Belleville, Illinois Home Missionary VI (September 1833), pp. 82-83, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁶¹Ahlstrom, A Religious History of The American People, p. 482.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 481-483. See also Eldridge Howe, Paris, Illinois and New Hope, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 28 February 1827; AHMS Papers, reel 15; James P. Scott and Horace Blair, Tazewell County, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary, 8 November 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17; Samuel Gregg, Ripley County, Indiana, Home Missionary VIII (August 1835), p. 66, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶³Ulrie Maynard, Liberty, Union County, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 53. For descriptions of similar criticisms of AHMS sponsored clergy see J.R. Wheelock, Greenburg, Decatur County, Indiana, Home Missionary IV (November 1831), p. 126; Albert Hale, Bethel, Bond County, Illinois, Home Missionary V (February 1833), p. 159; Calvin Babbitt, Pekin, Illinois, Home Missionary, V (April 1833), p. 191; B.C. Cressy, Salem, Indiana, Home Missionary, III (August 1834), p. 84; AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶⁴Edward O. Hovey, Fountain County, Indiana, Home Missionary VII (November 1834), p. 121, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶⁵L.C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion, pp. 21-27.

⁶⁶L.C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion, pp. 25-26, citing Baynard Hall, The New Purchase: or Seven and a Half Years in the Far West by Robert Arlton, esq. (pseud.), ed., James A. Woodburn, Indiana Centennial Edition, Princeton University Press, 1916, pp. 364-389.

⁶⁷Eldridge Howe, Paris, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 28 February 1827, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁶⁸Solomon Hardy, Greenville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 28 May 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

⁶⁹Solomon Hardy, Greenville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 20 December 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

CHAPTER THREE

Religiously transformed individuals formed the core of American Home Missionary Society-sponsored churches and the foundation of the projected "homogeneous" culture on the frontier. Historian Leonard Sweet has pointed out that the "new measures" revivalism of Charles Finney in the 1820's and 1830's both engendered "benevolent phalanxes" and subordinated social reform to the salvation of the individual. According to Sweet, Finney's

millennial strategy called for the building of the kingdom from the bottom up--brick by brick, soul by soul. . . . While an army of Finney's converts went out from his revivals to form benevolent phalanxes which waged war against the sins of man, Finney persisted in fighting his battle against the man of sin.¹

Although American Home Missionary Society officials and correspondents insisted that individual salvation was a necessary prerequisite to social reform, they simultaneously battled "against the man of sin" and "waged war against the sins of man." Theron Baldwin advised Charles Butler of the American Home Missionary Society auxiliary Young Men's Missionary Society of New York that "there is perpetually going on in the Christian world, what perhaps might be called religious radiation" ² In Baldwin's analysis, missionary societies dispatched

missionaries and agents not only to preach the gospel, but also to found institutions "of popular and Christian education."³ In a "land filled with Christian teachers as well as preachers", "religious radiation" could be at once pervasive and unobtrusive. An infant society could be nurtured from the outset by evangelical Christian institutions. Ideally, evangelical values could become so deeply rooted in the consciousness of the "rising west", that future generations would assimilate and carry the message of the impending "Redeemer's kingdom" around the world.

In the more immediate struggle to evangelize the western frontier the American Home Missionary Society pledged in 1830 to undertake the formation of "a thousand Sabbath schools in the Valley of the Mississippi within two years."⁴ Writing from Salem, Indiana, in 1831, Rev. B.C. Cressy argued that:

Sabbath schools and bible [sic] classes must go hand in hand . . . the people will be profited by preaching in the same degree as these two institutions prevail. In those sections of the country where general information prevails only to a limited extent, it is of unspeakable importance that these methods of instruction be prosecuted with untiring zeal.⁵

For Cressy and other American Home Missionary Society missionaries, the Sunday schools conveniently offered both a religious and a secular elementary education to young and old. Educational institutions not only enhanced the efficacy of preaching but also served as instruments of

"useful" voluntary individual reform.

Although the salvation of the individual was always of paramount importance to the American Home Missionary Society missionaries, the educational and benevolent associations that were affiliated with the church represented the fruits of aggregate individual piety and helped satisfy the implicit revivalistic "demand that the common man become worthy and dignified."⁶ As Leonard Sweet has observed, during the Jacksonian period the ongoing and troubling issue of social control in a democracy rested upon "a defense of the ability of the common man to rise, "rather than upon a simple "defense of the rising common man."⁷ As a result, egalitarian rhetoric co-existed with the "reality of a stratified society." The revivalistic emphasis upon pervasive individual perdition, coupled with the call for repentance and the promise of readily available salvation, fit neatly into the larger social vision of the common person's capacity to rise.

The American Home Missionary Society message of salvation and social reform addressed the need for individual self-government in a developing nation that was breaking loose from the implicit consensus of traditional colonial and republican community government. At the same time, the American Home Missionary Society message was eagerly directed toward potential community leaders. On

January 12, 1830, Rev. B.C. Cressy of Salem, Indiana, informed American Home Missionary Society officials that revivals in September 1829 had resulted in the addition of thirty-seven new members of the Presbyterian church. He added:

Of the number above stated, we are happy to say that some of them are among the first in society, in point of information, respectability, and income.⁸

In the "moral wilderness" of Illinois and Indiana, the American Home Missionary Society missionaries were faced with the need to locate receptive settlers, impress committed evangelicals with the imperative of religious re-dedication, and attract converts. For the Presbyterian American Home Missionary Society clergy, the "sacramental occasion" or "protracted meeting" became an acceptable means of organizing churches and adding church members. In addition to bringing the American Home Missionary Society message to the "first in society", the protracted meetings often countered general religious apathy in frontier communities. Rev. John F. Brooks of Belleville, Illinois, observed that the whole community became involved in the "big meetings" and that non-Presbyterians tended to become more interested in religious matters during sacramental occasions. The church of Rev. Ashabel Wells of New Albany, Indiana, became self-supporting after "1,500 to 2,000" attended a protracted meeting in a nearby

grove.⁹

Imported from Scotland, the protracted meeting followed a conventional, semi-liturgical pattern. In his book, The Christian Traveller (published in 1828), Isaac Reed, an observer of and participant in early Presbyterian missions in Indiana, provided a detailed description of the revivalistic sacramental meeting:

The meeting begins either Friday or Saturday, and closes Monday;--Sabbath is the communion. Preaching each day is at the same place, which is either a meeting-house or a stand in some piece of woods; and often where there is a meeting-house, the house is so small, and the assembly so large, that they have to go to the woods. The congregation consists of the people of the congregation where the meeting is held and numbers from others round about. One of two sermons is preached before communion, called the "action sermon". Then the other minister rises and introduces the communion service . . . He then gives out the institutional hymns; and as they are singing that, the ministers go to the table; and the other gives thanks and breaks and gives out the bread and the cup. The ruling elders serve at the table. When all have received [communion] another hymn is sung; and while singing, these withdraw and the table fills again.¹⁰

Although preachers at the protracted meeting emphasized the conversion experience, the American Home Missionary Society missionaries tended to proceed more cautiously than the more whole-heartedly revivalistic Methodists and Baptists. In the morphology of conversion at American Home Missionary Society protracted meetings, "conviction of sin" and "anxiety" concerning the state of one's soul was followed by a doctrinal examination by the

ministers and elders and, pending the outcome of the examination, full admission into the church.¹¹ The individual's characteristic three steps to conversion were usually spread over several sacramental occasions. The letters of Presbyterian American Home Missionary Society ministers also indicate that some clergy tended to go beyond the traditional Presbyterian catechism and demanded a public commitment to the social reform causes of benevolent associations. Rev. John F. Brooks, for example, called upon his prospective church members to renew publicly their "solemn covenant vows."¹² But Rev. R. W. Gridley required that his new members pledge themselves additionally to total abstinence "from all intoxicating drinks" and to "avow their love of the Sabbath."¹³

Those who were on the periphery of the Presbyterian church or who showed susceptibility to feelings of "conviction" or "anxiety" concerning the state of their souls found that the protracted meeting was designed to heighten their spiritual crisis. Typically, before the multiple meetings and sermons on Saturday and Sunday, participants fasted and spent at least one day in public prayer meetings. Prior to the Sabbath communion, preachers implored the wavering and impenitent to "come forward to be prayed for during the meeting or [to stay] for conversation [with the ministers and elders] after the

audience had retired."¹⁴ During the Sabbath sermon American Home Missionary Society Presbyterians made use of the "anxious bench" and encouraged church members to urge the convicted sinners to accept God's merciful offer of salvation. In the course of guiding the anxious toward salvation, preachers did not shrink from exploiting family pressures. Rev. B.Y. Messinger reported that at Edwardsville, Illinois, in May 1832, 120 people "over twelve years of age" came forward for prayer and "conversation." Apparently the conversation among relatives was far from subdued:

Parents, brothers, and sisters hung upon the necks of their repenting relatives, while tears of soul-thrilling joy flowed in copious streams.¹⁵

Frequently, the converts were drawn from evangelical families. At times, "conversion" seemed to be little more than a public display of confession and religious enthusiasm by church "members who had been living in a cold and formal state."¹⁶ Rev. James A. Carnahan of Lafayette, Indiana, told the readers of the Home Missionary that the new-found ardor of one church member had led the young man to embark upon studies for the ministry at Wabash College.¹⁷ Deeply committed parents pressured their children towards conversion. When American Home Missionary Society agent in Illinois, Rev. Albert Hale (assisted by missionaries Lippincott, Brooks, Messenger, Spilman, Watson, and Ewing), conducted a

protracted meeting in Bethel, Bond County, Illinois, he witnessed an intensely emotional family conflict:

One young man, who was sitting on the seat which we requested should be cleared for inquirers, a son of one of my elders, after waiting to hear the invitation and while burthened [sic] with deep feelings, arose and left the house. Others occupied his seat and . . . his father was called upon to pray. He poured out his soul in prayer and when he mentioned the case of children with pious parents, it was overwhelming. He could not utter his feelings and it was the pouring forth of groanings which could not be uttered. The son stood without, weeping.¹⁸

American Home Missionary Society missionaries were required to keep a record of the number of people converted under their ministry, but their records did not distinguish between the conversions within church families and those of the unchurched in the "whole community." As a result, it is difficult to determine whether conversion experiences at protracted meeting were primarily rites of passage, comparable to confirmation, or whether American Home Missionary Society preaching genuinely affected large numbers of the religiously apathetic or the non-evangelicals. Although letters contain scattered reports of the conversion of prominent Universalists, the missionaries generally emphasized the social prominence of cherished converts from "liberal" denominations. In their conscious attempt to inculcate evangelical piety in the frontier communities, American Home Missionary Society missionaries enjoined the "heads of households" to

implement daily prayers.¹⁹

Evangelical women were also urged to train their children in religious matters and to instill in them the habit of daily prayer.²⁰ Although the American Home Missionary Society correspondents of the 1820's and 1830's were exclusively male and rarely commented extensively on the work of women in American Home Missionary Society endeavors, they acknowledged the potential power of women within the home. Correspondents occasionally extolled the influence of an evangelical wife. Rev. J. R. Wheelock of Clinton, Indiana, wrote in the aftermath of a protracted meeting:

Another of the hopeful subjects of this work is our principal physician, who has been very successful in his practice, although he has been heretofore very indifferent as to the interest of his soul. His wife is a member of our church; and she has agonized in prayer for her husband and has found that "praying breath has not been spent in vain."²¹

Although correspondents relegated women to the "domestic sphere" and failed to acknowledge fully the religious contributions of women on the frontier, the protracted meetings tended to upset--at least for a "communion season"--the social hierarchy in a frontier community. Prominent physicians, lawyers, and tradespeople could be transformed into the humbled objects of the religious concern of backwoods people and subsistence farmers. At times also, the whole community

was caught up in the revival spirit. Writing from Carrollton, Illinois, in 1832, Rev. Thomas Lippincott reported that a protracted meeting had led to the conversion of sixty local residents:

During the week, the village seemed spontaneously to observe a Sabbath. Few were seen employed in secular business--few seemed to think of the world. . . . Public and melting confession was made: the church became one 22

In the meeting the American Home Missionary Society preachers seemed to make significant inroads among the skeptical. A collective guilt or "conviction" of sin was exorcised in the course of the meeting. Evangelicals who were engaged in relatively humble occupations ministered to the spiritual needs of their local secular leaders. Indeed, Lippincott and local American Home Missionary Jenney appeared to translate ably the American Home Missionary Society ideals into substantive action in the frontier community. Their preaching not only led to the conversion of prominent citizens, but also therapeutically served as a means of releasing community tensions and healing disputes. Lippincott commented:

It was affecting in the early part of the meeting to see such persons [the "leading and influential members of society"] coming forward to ask the counsel and prayer of Christians. In the progress of the meeting there were differences of serious character between prominent individuals settled in the prayer meeting and on their knees; the parties becoming reconciled to God and to each other at the same time. Men who stood high at the bar, merchants, mechanics, and others, whose influence had

previously been more or less injurious, came cheerfully forward and declared publicly their sense of sin, their hope in Christ, and their determination to serve him.²³

As a result of Lippincott's and Jenney's preaching, thirteen joined the Presbyterian church, approximately twelve affiliated with the Baptists, and "several" entered the Methodist church.²⁴ In spite of interdenominational rivalries, Presbyterian protracted meetings and Baptist and Methodist revivals often proved to be mutually beneficial. Presbyterian clergyman John G. Bergen of Springfield, Illinois, observed that a Methodist camp meeting had resulted in substantial and nearly equal additions to both denominations; Rev. John F. Brooks of Belleville, Illinois, and Rev. Nathaniel C. Clarke of Dupage County, Illinois, were both able to exploit and extend the general enthusiasm that had commenced during Baptist revivals.²⁵ In 1834, Baptists in Carrollton, Illinois, offered their meeting house to participants in an American Home Missionary Society protracted meeting.²⁶

In remote areas the principal evangelical denominations often shared facilities and pooled members. In 1830 Rev. Asa Turner of Quincy, Illinois, established a church that gathered together small groups of Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists.²⁷ Rev. Edward O. Hovey of Indiana and Rev. Aratus Kent of Galena, Illinois, both occasionally supplied the pulpits of local Methodist churches.²⁸ Kent,

whose mission field in the 1820's and 1830's was considered especially remote and geographically rugged, was especially well-disposed toward interdenominational co-operation. In addition to helping the Methodists, he supervised a Baptist schoolmaster and showed warm regard for an Episcopalian who intended to run a "Sabbath-keeping boat on the Mississippi."²⁹ From the comparative ease of his post in Jacksonville, Illinois, the energetic Rev. John Ellis was also willing to recognize the overriding common cause of evangelical groups on the frontier. As a founder of the State Home Missionary Society in 1829, he wrote that the "Society table was sweetened by communicants from three denominations."³⁰ In 1830 he argued that Baptist and Methodist representatives at the founding of a Presbyterian church in Schuyler County demonstrated that "better feelings of harmony among different denominations of evangelical Christians are gaining ground in this state."³¹

In 1834, Rev. Lucius Farnum of Putnam County, Illinois, rapturously reported the harmony among:

Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, etc. sitting "together in the heavenly place" . . . and declaring their faith in a crucified Jesus by partaking of the sacred emblems of his crucifixion was a sight upon which angels might look with delight; it was a little semblance of heaven.³²

But Farnum's idealized reflections upon such co-operation were somewhat belied by his desire to distance the

American Home Missionary Society Presbyterians and Congregationalists from the more extravagant revivalistic practices of the popular western denominations. In 1836, Farnum was careful to advise readers of the Home Missionary that an American Home Missionary Society protracted meeting was a dignified occasion:

The work has been attended with no noise, no extravagance, but marked by great solemnity, a deep sense of guilt and of obligation to repent now, and clear views of Jesus Christ as the only hope of sinners.³³

Farnum also carefully affirmed orthodox nineteenth-century Calvinist doctrines:

The doctrines preached [at the protracted meeting] were the entire depravity of the sinner; the necessity of the Holy Spirit in regeneration; the rectitude of God's claim upon the sinner, and his obligation to an immediate and unconditional compliance with those claims; the justice of God in the sinner's condemnation; the nature and extent of the atonement; the fulness and freeness of the offers of mercy; and the fearfully aggravated doom of Gospel rejectors.³⁴

Although the American Home Missionary Society-sponsored protracted meetings incorporated the revival practices of other evangelical denominations and often elicited the co-operation of rival evangelical denominations, the missionaries were not altogether comfortable with the flamboyance and implicit (and perhaps, unwitting) Arminianism that attended the revival mechanism of conversion. Conditions on the frontier, however, mandated ad hoc co-operation among evangelicals

and an improvisational borrowing of Methodist and Baptist organizational techniques. In a letter from Kaskaskia, Illinois, on May 23, 1827, Rev. John Ellis perceived that the thinly settled region was best suited to the ministry of Methodist circuit-riders and that ". . . the people expect that the preachers or the office seekers will come to them. . . ." ³⁵ Although he admitted that only settled or "location" churches were ultimately tenable within the Presbyterian-Congregationalist framework, the practical exigencies of the region demanded a generation of missionaries who would be willing to spend part of their careers as itinerants.

In spite of the American Home Missionary Society desire to continue the United Domestic Missionary Society commitment to support settled ministers, a modified form of itinerancy was necessary on the frontier. Because American Home Missionary Society missionaries were discouraged from pursuing income-supplementing secular vocations, they had the opportunity to "ride out" on weekdays and preach to isolated settlers in surrounding communities. Their efforts were often strenuous. Rev. Ulrie Maynard, for example, estimated that he had preached four or five times a week at six different locations within a radius of three to six miles from Liberty, Indiana. ³⁶ In 1836 Rev. Samuel Newbury spent three-fourths of his Sundays in Peru, Indiana and one-fourth,

sixteen miles away in Wabashtown; he also preached each Sunday night in "a neighborhood adjacent to Peru," which was seven miles from his primary station.³⁷

In addition to serving several small churches, particularly at the outset of their missionary work, American Home Missionary Society clergy often embarked upon ambitious door-to-door preaching campaigns. Unable to establish a church in Universalist-dominated Ripley County, Indiana, Samuel Gregg toured Jefferson and Ripley Counties and preached publicly wherever he could gather a small audience.³⁸ After concluding his Sunday morning service, William Kirby travelled twelve miles from his congregation in Blackstone's Grove and repeated his sermon in a log cabin.³⁹ The peripatetic Ulrie Maynard undertook a "systematic course of family visitation." Maynard justified his itinerancy to American Home Missionary Society headquarters by arguing:

I am not alone in thinking it one of the most effective means of coming at the conscience and the heart and of answering the objections and excuses offered for neglect of religion. It has enabled me to be specific and practical in my preaching beyond what I could have been without it.⁴⁰

American Home Missionary Society clergy regarded circuit-riding and home visitation as preliminary steps to the gathering and building of churches. In 1834, after two years in Fountain County, Rev. Edward O. Hovey reported that the eighty-eight member Coal Creek church

had "erected a small but comfortable house of worship" at the cost of \$375.00.⁴¹ In 1836 Robert Stuart of Canton, Illinois, announced that his church had resolved to build a meeting-house, "either brick or frame, sixty by forty-eight [feet], and high enough to admit of a gallery at some future period, if it be needed."⁴² In his two years at Joliet, Illinois, Rev. J.H. Prentiss saw the town grow from thirteen to one hundred thirty buildings: the fifty Presbyterians and their sympathizers in a population of one thousand had pledged two thousand dollars toward the building of a church.

Although some American Home Missionary Society clergy found it relatively easy to induce congregations to erect churches, other missionaries lacked the necessities of life. While travelling from Ohio to Missouri in 1833, a concerned Illinois agent of the American Home Missionary Society, Theron Baldwin, outlined a plan of support for ministers that was, he believed, within the means of "feeble churches."⁴³ Baldwin argued that a church should provide a parsonage with enough land for a garden and a pasture for a horse and a cow. In addition to providing the American Home Missionary Society missionary with a "comfortable" home, Baldwin suggested that each church supply their minister with such necessities as wood, flour, bacon, corn, and wheat. According to Baldwin, payment in services would virtually support a frontier

missionary family. Although it does not appear that Baldwin's plan was fully implemented within the American Home Missionary Society, Robert Stuart's congregation in Canton, Illinois, seemed to adopt Baldwin's suggestions. On January 6, 1836, Stuart wrote:

Our organization is such as to place it in the power of every one to do something, by paying into the hands of a committee any article of produce. Some paid corn, some wheat, some potatoes; one man four dozen brooms. Females contribute stockings, etc., subscriptions from one to twelve dollars.⁴⁴

As the principal American Home Missionary Society agents in Illinois during the 1830's, Theron Baldwin and Albert Hale undertook a hectic schedule of travel, correspondence, preaching, and fund-raising. Agents were responsible for recommending mission fields, adjudicating disputes between missionaries and congregations, and meting out American Home Missionary Society financial support to local missionaries. As field representatives of a voluntary association, Baldwin and Hale had to represent, simultaneously and reciprocally, the interests of the churches of Illinois and of the Society officials in New York City. Baldwin was a prolific correspondent. His September 1, 1833, report on a survey of Illinois mission fields furnished the American Home Missionary Society officials in New York City with an extended, if not exhaustive, account of the geographic, social, and spiritual problems of frontier life. When Baldwin became

ill in 1835, he continued to "plead the cause of the West" through a series of public letters to Charles Butler of the Young Men's Missionary Society of New York City. Upon his return to Illinois in 1836, Baldwin continued to travel in the summer and to winter at Illinois College in Jacksonville, where he edited the Common School Advocate.

While Baldwin primarily handled correspondence, administrative duties, and fund-raising, Hale virtually took on the role of a travelling evangelist and lent his apparently noteworthy revival preaching to protracted meetings throughout the state. On April 19, 1837 Baldwin summarized their agency:

My travel during the year ending April 11, 1837 amounted to 3,600 miles. Sermons and public addresses delivered, 86--letters written, more than 200--subscriptions obtained, say from \$1,800 to \$2,000--money raised from two individuals to build meeting houses in destitute places, \$700. Brother Hale has travelled very extensively--attended nine Protracted meetings and preached 120 sermons.⁴⁵

Theron Baldwin's editing of the Common School Advocate and close personal association with Illinois College illustrated American Home Missionary Society concern with education on the frontier. Philosophically committed to the creation of a homogeneous national culture, the American Home Missionary Society regarded teaching and preaching as virtually equal vehicles for their work. As a voluntary, interdenominational institution, the American Home Missionary Society also

found common cause with other major national benevolent associations. In the 1829 Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society, Corresponding Secretary Absalom Peters noted that the American Sunday School Union supplied many of the American Home Missionary Society-sponsored Sabbath schools with libraries. The Executive Committee of the American Home Missionary Society believed that the work of the American Sunday School Union complemented the work of their Society. They reasoned that in the "nurseries of piety", "pious teachers" and "carefully selected juvenile books" both stimulated revivals and "happily prepared" pupils "to receive a life-giving influence from the preaching of the gospel."⁴⁶

American Home Missionary Society missionaries in Illinois and Indiana almost invariably set out to organize Sunday schools. In many instances, Sunday schools preceded the formation of churches. Rev. James Crawford, an early missionary in Delphi, Indiana, organized two Sunday schools with a total of fifty "scholars" in 1829: in 1830 he began a third Sunday school six miles outside of Delphi. In Shelby County, Illinois, Rev. Eliphalet Kent added four new Sunday schools to a flourishing older Sunday school which boasted two hundred students and a small library.⁴⁷ Five years later, in Charlestown, Indiana, Eliphalet Kent's Sunday school of immigrants necessarily emphasized adult education and reading and

writing in English.⁴⁸

Although emphasis on primary education and a mingling of old and young students were not unusual in frontier Sunday schools, the schools were theoretically directed toward the education of children and adolescents.⁴⁹ Sunday schools took up collections for American Sunday School Union libraries of "juvenile" religious literature and required extensive memorization of the Bible. Classes were structured around standardized American Sunday School Union questions, which teachers and the American Home Missionary Society minister discussed in advance. In general, the American Home Missionary Society clergy served as Sunday school superintendents. They depended upon their wives and other trained laypeople to teach classes. As superintendents the missionaries periodically examined the young people in public. In 1831, Rev. Aratus Kent of Galina, Illinois wrote:

In my next tour I expect to hear from 40 to 60 [Sunday school students] repeat the twenty-third Psalm Every child who commits the ten commandments becomes a preacher to the whole family This exercise brings the children to meeting and creates an attachment to that kind friend [the missionary] who treats them as his friends. Their eagerness to obtain books [which the missionary distributes] makes them anxious for his next visit . . . the books are so beautiful, so entertaining and instructive, even to adults, that the missionary should count on every book thus given as an auxiliary worth a dollar in furtherance of his object.⁵⁰

In Aratus Kent's perception the Sunday school

movement "gave direction to the energies of unborn millions."⁵¹ In the generation of the early American Home Missionary Society missionaries in Illinois and Indiana, agents from benevolent societies preached and raised funds among the evangelical population. American Sunday School Union agents spoke in American Home Missionary Society supported churches and at Presbyterian synods. At one synod in 1830 American Home Missionary Society missionary Thomas Lippincott listened to several speeches by agents of "benevolent societies, whose errands to the west were such as to awaken thrilling emotions in our breasts."⁵² In 1835 Lippincott left the American Home Missionary Society to become an agent for the American Sunday School Union.⁵³

Interchange of agents among benevolent societies was not uncommon. Rev. Henry Herrick left the American Sunday School Union in 1830 to take up a post in Greene County, Illinois, with the American Home Missionary Society. In 1833, Rev. Moses Wilder simultaneously worked for the American Tract Society and the American Home Missionary Society in Indiana. Rev. John Ellis left the American Home Missionary Society in 1832 to become an agent for the American Education Society. In 1836 he re-joined the American Home Missionary Society as a missionary in the Michigan Territory.⁵⁴ The easy flow of agents between benevolent associations reflected the interrelated

endeavors of the societies. Sunday morning and weekday adult Bible classes were allied with the Sunday school movement.⁵⁵ Often segregated into male and female groups, the Bible classes were taught by the American Home Missionary Society missionary and in some instances by his wife. The Bible classes did not follow a set, nationally distributed lesson plan or promote memorization of Bible passages. But in common with the Sunday schools, the classes provided religious education, served as a preliminary to church organization in remote areas, and, when necessary, supplied incidental reading and writing instruction to the semi-literate.

In their attempt to permeate frontier society with evangelical culture and Christian education, the American Home Missionary Society missionaries also reached outside of the congregated church. In co-operation with the American Tract Society and American Bible Society, American Home Missionary Society missionaries and church members distributed free Bibles and religious literature to the homes of evangelical and non-evangelical settlers.⁵⁶ American Home Missionary Society officials intended to supply every family on the frontier with a Bible. Individual lay evangelicals in the American Home Missionary Society churches aided this effort by pledging money to the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society. Within relatively prosperous and thriving

American Home Missionary Society churches, members formed tract and Bible societies and joined state and local auxiliaries of the national organizations.⁵⁷

The American Home Missionary Society evangelicals also promoted the cause of temperance. Individual Society missionaries frequently took a leading role in the formation of temperance societies. Society clergy enlisted the help of American Temperance Union agents and accompanied them as they solicited support among the settlers.⁵⁸ Often, American Home Missionary Society clergy found prospective church members among the ranks of local temperance societies. Although the American Home Missionary Society clergy railed against the "men of influence", the "grocers", and the "boat operators" who profited from the "traffic in ardent spirits", the battle for temperance was more effectively waged against individual consumers. Drawing upon individuals from the principal evangelical denominations, local temperance societies expanded in most western communities in the 1830's. From the outset, American Home Missionary Society clergy had demanded that church members refrain from the use of distilled spirits. But as the American Temperance Union moved toward teetotalism in the 1830's, the American Home Missionary Society clergy also began to take a more aggressive stance against the use of alcoholic beverages.⁵⁹

Although the American Home Missionary Society shift toward teetotalism reflected and coincided with the sentiments of the national temperance movement in the 1830's, the increasingly bold demands upon church members in Illinois and Indiana also displayed the increasing viability of the American Home Missioary Society endeavors on the frontier. In 1830, Rev. Thomas A. Spilman of Montgomery County, Illinois, announced that he was "preparing the way for a temperance society" and derived some comfort from a non-alcoholic barn raising:

A barn was raised today. . . without the aid of ardent spirits, and there is not only an expression of general satisfaction, but also many seemed to be highly gratified in witnessing the fact.⁶⁰

Six years later, in DuPage County, Illinois, Rev. Nathaniel C. Clarke informed the American Home Missionary Society that

The pledge of our societies has been total abstinence from distilled spirits only. Soon after our annual meeting in February, we began to discuss the propriety of changing our pledge to that of "total abstinence from all that intoxicates."⁶¹

In contrast to Spilman's tentative hopes of 1830, Clarke reported that twenty members had joined the new total abstinence society in June 1836, and that after three lectures by an agent of the Illinois Temperance Society, one hundred fifty had pledged themselves to the cause of total abstinence.⁶²

While Sunday schools, Bible classes, and temperance,

tract, and Bible societies structured individual moral reform, the American Home Missionary Society missionaries also perceived a need to contribute to the establishment of institutions of higher education. Lyman Beecher, who in the 1830's had remained a major influence upon the western evangelical missionary movement, was militantly concerned about the training of clergy and laity in the west. As president of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, Beecher wrote:

The religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West. . . [the struggle will be]. . . a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of superstition or evangelical light: of despotism or liberty.⁶³

Sharing Beecher's sense of urgency, representatives of the American Home Missionary Society hastened to establish Wabash College in Indiana and Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois. American Home Missionary Society missionaries John Thomson, John Steele Thomson, Edward O. Hovey, James Carnahan and Caleb Mills founded Wabash College in 1833.⁶⁴ Mills, who served as professor of religious studies at Wabash College, regarded the school as a missionary endeavor:

We can build the Institution [sic] only by the aid of men who possess a missionary spirit and are willing to live on a missionary's salary, for we have not the funds to pay the customary salary of Professors in the old eastern Institutions.⁶⁵

In 1828, the correspondence of John Ellis captured

the imagination of a group of seven missionary minded students at Yale Divinity School and led directly to the founding of Illinois College.⁶⁶ After reading of Ellis' plans for the establishment of a college in the December 1828 issue of the Home Missionary and subsequently corresponding with him, the seven students agreed in February 1829, to go to Illinois, establish a "Seminary of learning", and divide among themselves the tasks of teaching and preaching at the "important stations in the surrounding country."⁶⁷ Ellis and the Yale students raised \$10,000.00 in the east toward the establishment of Illinois College. The graduating students, beginning with Theron Baldwin and Julian Sturtevant, received commissions and personal financial support from the American Home Missionary Society and the college commenced operations on January 4, 1830.⁶⁸

Reflecting on the underlying purpose of their western move in 1830, Mason Grosvenor and Julian Sturtevant of the "Illinois College Band" wrote in 1855:

The band was organized on the principle that education and religion must go hand in hand to the world's conversion. It had been noticed too that individual missionaries often went West, and by being compelled to labor single-handed, found themselves at last borne down by adverse influences and instead of maintaining an elevated standard as ministers, and lifting the community, they were cut off from the means of improvement and gradually sank down as intellectual men. The philosophy of this movement was to serve such a combination and set in motion such agencies as would enable them to

create a literary atmosphere whose vital power
all should feel. Hence a college was to be at
the center of the system.⁶⁹

The retrospectively stated philosophy of the Illinois College Band echoes some of the principal institutional and doctrinal concerns of the American Home Missionary Society. The Society sought to formalize educational and financial support for clergy who were charged with the responsibility for planting churches and inculcating piety on the frontier. In a broad sense, the benevolent associations and the evangelicals' theology of the church were themselves based upon faith in the efficacy of moral education. For the American Home Missionary Society missionaries, the conversion experience was predicated upon adequate doctrinal preparation and upon at least some measure of individual capacity to submit to the will of God and to assume responsibility for one's self-reformation. Ideally, evangelical conversion and education enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. The voluntary benevolent associations both prepared people for conversion and served as instruments of "religious radiation" for "phalanxes" of insatiable evangelicals. Although the problems of the frontier in Indiana and Illinois occupied the immediate attention of missionaries and agents of the benevolent associations, their vision was fixed upon the coming millennium. Success in the west represented a step toward the conversion of the world.

The pioneering colleges of the American Home Missionary Society and other evangelicals in the 1820's and 1830's displayed the optimism and long range commitment of the evangelical associations. Writing in 1906, Frederick Jackson Turner noted that:

The West in the 1830's was too new a section to have developed educational facilities to any large extent. The pioneers' poverty . . . discouraged extensive expenditures for public schools.⁷⁰

Public education did flounder in Indiana between 1816 and 1852 and in Illinois between 1825 and 1855, but the American Home Missionary Society and other evangelicals persistently planted colleges and seized upon the blurry contemporary distinction between religious and secular education. In the course of religious instruction, Sunday schools and Bible classes provided primary education. For some American Home Missionary Society missionaries, the pursuit of religious education led naturally to common schools and academies. Rev. J.R. Wheelock of Decatur County, Indiana, recommended Sunday schools "as a means of teaching the children to read--and as a substitute for the common school."⁷¹ In 1837 Nahum Gould reported that his Sunday school was thriving at Union Grove, Illinois; he looked forward to the establishment of a common school and a "female academy."

The American Home Missionary Society regarded the formal education that was provided by Sunday schools,

Bible classes, common schools and colleges and the moral education that was structured by tract, Bible and temperance societies as means of disseminating evangelical values in Illinois and Indiana. By the end of the first decade of American Home Missionary Society operation, it appeared that the Society was succeeding. In 1836-37 the American Home Missionary society sponsored 786 missionaries and raised \$101,000.⁷³ As a benevolent society working in co-operation with other benevolent societies, the American Home Missionary Society seemed to be materially fulfilling the goal of superimposing their notion of an evangelical and nationally homogeneous culture upon a moral wilderness. But the American Home Missionary Society success was fragile. Founded upon the conversion of individuals and the voluntary association of evangelically minded social reformers, American Home Missionary Society success rested upon persuasion, interdenominational unity among evangelicals, and the financial support of concerned church members. As students of Biblical parables, American Home Missionary Society missionaries were undoubtedly aware that a successful sowing did not guarantee an abundant harvest.

In spite of apparent success, cracks were proliferating in the facade of an "evangelical united front". Debate over the theology of revivalism was shattering the Presbyterian denomination. The "Old

School" Presbyterians suspected the doctrinal purity of the largely "New School" Presbyterian and Congregational supported American Home Missionary Society. Leaders of the Old School questioned the wisdom of effectively subordinating denominational missionary endeavors to an umbrella organization that upheld the functional necessity of a doctrinal common denominator. For the sake of building the "Redeemer's kingdom" New School leaders were willing to skirt questions about the relationship between free will and the sovereignty of God in the dynamics of the conversion experience. Questions of doctrine and polity were exacerbated by the Panic of 1837, which cut contributions to voluntary societies. By 1837 the energetic attempt to implement the vision of an evangelical, nationally homogeneous culture was beset by critical crises. We now turn to a brief examination of that crisis, the causes of it, and the long-term results.

NOTES

¹Leonard I. Sweet, "The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism," Church History 45 (June 1976): 219.

²Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Charles Butler, 23 March 1835, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³Ibid.

⁴Fourth Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1830), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁵B.C. Cressy, Salem, Indiana, Home Missionary IV (August 1831), pp. 68-69, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶Leonard I. Sweet, p. 221.

⁷Ibid.

⁸B.C. Cressy, Salem, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 12 January 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

⁹John F. Brooks, Belleville, Illinois, Home Missionary VI, (September 1833), p. 82, AHMS Papers, reel 378 and Ashabel Wells, New Albany, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 16 November 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

¹⁰Isaac Reed, The Christian Traveller (New York: Harper, 1828), pp. 228-230, cited by L. C. Rudolph, Hoosier Zion, pp. 94-95.

¹¹L.C. Rudolph, pp. 97-98.

¹²John F. Brooks, Collersville, Illinois. Home Missionary V (April 1833), p. 189, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

¹³R.W. Gridley, Ottawa, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 12 August 1835, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

¹⁴L.C. Rudolph, pp. 97-98.

¹⁵B.Y. Messinger, Edwardsville, Illinois, Home Missionary V (July 1832) p. 39, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

¹⁶James A. Carnahan, Lafayette, Indiana, Home Missionary VII (March 1835), p. 191, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Albert Hale, Bethel, Bond County, Illinois, Home Missionary V (August 1832), p. 55, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

¹⁹Calvin Butler, Evansville, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 October 1833, AHMS Papers, reel 54.

²⁰John W. Parsons, Indiana, Home Missionary V (July 1832), p. 40, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²¹J.R. Wheelock, Clinton, Indiana, Home Missionary VII (April 1835), p. 211, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²²Thomas Lippincott (postmarked) Alton, Illinois, Home Missionary IV (February 1832), p. 171, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵John G. Bergen, Springfield, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 23 August 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 16; John F. Brooks, Belleville, Illinois, Home Missionary VI (July 1837), p. 47; Nathaniel C. Clarke, Dupage County, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (June 1836), p. 34, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²⁶Thomas Lippincott, Carrollton, Illinois, Home Missionary VII (November 1834), p. 118, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²⁷In 1834 Turner recalled his early work in Quincy, Illinois: "When I came here, three years ago last fall, there were in the town and vicinity Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, in all nine, who would co-operate with us, and unite with five others in forming a church. When I left, in the spring of 1832, for the east, our church numbered forty; since that time the germ of two other churches [one of which was, according to his December 1833 report to the AHMS, a Baptist church that was organized in the summer of 1833] has been set off." Asa Turner, Quincy, Illinois, Home Missionary VII (May 1834), p. 5, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

²⁸Edward Hovey, Fountain County, Indiana Home Missionary V (November 1832), p. 111; Hovey also joined with a Methodist preacher to organize a temperance society in Covington, Indiana; see also, Aratus Kent Galena, Illinois, Home Missionary VIII (October 1835), p. 97, AHMS papers, reel 378.

²⁹Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (May 1836), p. 6, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³⁰John Ellis, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 4 April 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

³¹John Ellis, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 31 January 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

³²Lucius Farnum, Putnam County, Illinois, Home Missionary VII (May 1834), p. 6, AHMS Papers, reel 378

³³Lucius Farnum Home Missionary VIII (January 1836), p. 152, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 23 May 1827, AHMS Papers, reel 15.

³⁶Ulrie Maynard, Liberty, Union County, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

³⁷Samuel Newbury, Peru, Indiana, Home Missionary IX (September 1836), p. 90, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³⁸Samuel Gregg, Versailles, Indiana, Home Missionary VII (August 1835), p. 66, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

³⁹William Kirby, Blackstone's Grove, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 August 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁴⁰Ulrie Maynard, Liberty, Union County, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

⁴¹Edward O. Hovey, Fountain County, Indiana, Home Missionary VI (March 1834), p. 199, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴²Robert Stuart, Canton, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (July 1836), p. 52; J.H. Prentiss, Joliet, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (April 1837), p. 213, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴³Theron Baldwin to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 5 November 1833, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁴⁴Robert Stuart, Canton, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 6 January 1836, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁴⁵Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 12 April 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17. Baldwin's letters to Charles Butler of the New York Young Men's Missionary Society were published in the Home Missionary VIII, (1835) numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; portions of Albert Hales' correspondence were published in the Home Missionary V (August 1832, December 1832, February 1833); VI (August 1833); VII (September 1834, November 1834); VIII (October 1835); IX (December 1836), AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴⁶Third Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1829), Absalom Peters of the Executive Committee of the AHMS, AHMS Papers, reel, 373

⁴⁷James Crawford, Delphi, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 15 June 1829, Home Missionary III (November 1830), p. 134, AHMS Papers, reel 378. In the March 1830 issue of the Home Missionary Crawford reported (p. 176) that his original fifty member Sunday School now served two hundred children in Delphi; see also Eliphalet Kent, Shelby County, Illinois, Home Missionary III (November 1830), p. 134, AHMS Papers, reel 378; in spite of his succes, Eliphalet Kent complained of a "powerful tide" that existed against Sunday schools in the west.

⁴⁸Eliphalet Kent, Charlestown, Indiana, Home Missionary VIII (October 1835), p. 99; Kent's work among Germans was perhaps further stimulated by his fear of "a neighborhood which is being increased in population by the addition of a number of French Papists, who wish and intend to lay a foundation there for the dominion of anti-Christ." AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁴⁹ Missionary in Illinois (anonymous), Home Missionary III (1829), p. 82; James Crawford, Delphi, Indiana, Home Missionary II (March 1830), p. 176; B.C. Cressy, Salem, Indiana, Home Missionary IV (August 1831), p. 68, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁰ Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, Home Missionary IV (November 1831), p. 124. Many of Aratus Kent's examinations were conducted in the course of a 140 mile Summer circuit, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Thomas Lippincott, Edwardsville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 6 December 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁵³ Thomas Lippincott, Carrollton, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 18 March 1835, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁵⁴ Henry Herrick, Greene County, Illinois, Home Missionary III (December 1830), p. 159 (Herrick had also worked for the Massachusetts Missionary Society); Moses Wilder, China, Indiana, Home Missionary VI (November 1833), p. 129; John Ellis, Gram Lake, Michigan, Home Missionary IX, p. 216, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁵ Leander Cobb, Charlestown, Indiana, Home Missionary I (August 1828), p. 63; William Lewis, Indiana, Home Missionary IV (August 1831), p. 68; James Crawford, Delphi, Indiana, Home Missionary II (March 1830), p. 176 commented on the structure and conduct of Bible classes. Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, Home Missionary IV (July 1832), p. 82 and Thomas Lippincott, Edwardsville, Illinois, Home Missionary III (August 1830), p. 82-83 mentioned the work of women in Sunday Schools and Bible classes. Baldwin describes the activities in Sunday Schools and benevolent associations of his wife and the wife of John F. Brooks, AHMS missionary at Belleville, Illinois. Lippincott noted that the widow of AHMS missionary Giddings taught Bible classes and Sunday school at Collinsville. She "has returned from St. Louis to her former home, and engages, as she is wont, in those labours of love, with a zeal and spirit worthy of the relict of that faithful servant of the Cross." AHMS Papers, reel, 378.

⁵⁶Ulrie Maynard, Liberty, Union County, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 7 February 1829, AHMS Papers, reel 53; Stephen Bliss, Wabash, Indiana, Home Missionary II (January 1830), p. 140-141; Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, Home Missionary III (October 1830), p. 117; J.R. Wheelock, Greensburg, Decatur County, Indiana, Home Missionary IV (April 1832), p. 217; R.W. Gridley, Big Grove, Illinois, August 23, 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁵⁷Ashbel Wells, New Albany, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 18 November 1828, AHMS Papers, reel 53; Leander Cobb, Charlestown, Indiana, Home Missionary II (January 1830), p. 141; B.C. Cressy, Salem, Indiana, Home Missionary III (January 1831), p. 177; John F. Brooks, Belleville, Illinois, Home Missionary V (July 1832), p. 38; Calvin Butler, Evansville, Indiana, Home Missionary VI (May 1833), p. 6, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁸Ransom Hawley, Washington, Davis County, Indiana, Home Missionary II (November 1829), p. 112; Thomas A. Spilman, Montgomery County, Illinois, Home Missionary III (July 1830), p. 59; Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (September 1836), p. 87, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁵⁹Third Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1829), AHMS Papers, reel 373; Leander Cobb, Charlestown, Indiana, Home Missionary II (January 1830), p. 141; H.S. Colton, Hennepin, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (May 1836), p. 8; Daniel Jones, Kosciusko County, Indiana, Home Missionary IX (April 1837), p. 213, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶⁰Thomas A. Spilman, Montgomery County, Illinois, Home Missionary III (July 1830), p. 59, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶¹Nathaniel C. Clark, Dupage County, Illinois, Home Missionary IX (September 1836), p. 88, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Lyman Beecher, Plea For the West (Cincinnati, 1835), pp. 11-12, cited by Goodykoontz, p. 373.

⁶⁴L.C. Rudolph, pp. 183-185 and Goodykoontz, pp. 382-383.

⁶⁵Goodykoontz, p. 383 cites Caleb Mills, Crawfordsville, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 10 May 1834, AHMS Papers.

⁶⁶Goodykoontz, pp. 195-197. See also the letters of John Ellis to the Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1828-30, AHMS Papers, reel 15 and the Home Missionary III (May 1830), p. 14-15, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 195-197 and 381-382; see also J.M. Sturtevant, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 5 February 1830, AHMS Papers, reel 16.

⁶⁹Goodykoontz, pp. 381-382, cites M. Grosvenor, "Summary of Addresses," in J.M. Sturtevant, Historical Discourse (Jacksonville, Illinois: n.p., 1855), pp. 42-43.

⁷⁰Frederick Jackson Turner, "Colonization of the West," American Historical Review IX (1906): 326.

⁷¹J.R. Wheelock, Decatur County, Indiana, Home Missionary IV (November 1831), p. 126, AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁷²P.S. Cleland, Jeffersonville, Indiana, Home Missionary IX (March 1837), AHMS Papers, reel 378.

⁷³Eleventh Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1837), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

CHAPTER FOUR

Although the American Home Missionary Society survived the Panic of 1837 and the withdrawal of Old School Presbyterian support in 1837-38, the halcyon days of the Society had ended. Between 1826 and 1837 the American Home Missionary Society had served as an institutional conduit for the revival efforts and social causes of evangelicals. Although the Society had received financial support from the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, it had neither labored under the direct control of a denominational board of missions nor absorbed the missionary boards of its denominational sponsors. Rather, the American Home Missionary Society represented the common interests of evangelical individuals (especially those who were affiliated with the Presbyterians or Congregationalists) who were willing to set aside sectarian concerns for the sake of promoting the "Redeemer's kingdom" in the west.

The interdenominational character of the American Home Missionary Society rendered it especially vulnerable to economic depression and doctrinal dissension. Because church members owed their primary allegiance to their denomination, loyalty therein took precedence over contributions to interdenominational societies.¹ Disputes

over the distinguishing doctrines of the denomination tended to divide church bodies between those who rooted their faith in a particular catechism and those who spread their faith over an evangelical consensus on essential doctrines.²

Ironically, the success of the American Home Missionary Society and other interdenominational societies of the evangelical "united front" had somewhat diminished their importance by the late 1830's.³ At their inception, the voluntary societies had virtually assumed the functions of the weakened (if not inchoate) missionary boards of the principal evangelical denominations. But after more than a decade of channeling members into evangelical denominations, the interdenominational societies faced competition from re-invigorated denominations.⁴ As strengthened evangelical denominations assumed greater responsibility for their own advancement, the cacophony of appeals by the agents of interdenominational societies seemed redundant and intrusive.⁵

In the first decade of its existence the American Home Missionary Society had tried to avoid conflict with its sponsoring denominations. Transcending sectarian differences, the Society had promoted Protestant unity, linked the destiny of the nation to the millennial hopes and behavioral norms of evangelicals, and upheld the

primacy of the conversion experience. Tapping the joint energies of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, the Society had conducted revivals, established churches on the frontier, built schools and colleges, and joined with other interdenominational societies to promote the cause of temperance, tract and Bible distribution, and Sabbath schools. The simultaneous development of the Panic of 1837 and the loss of full Presbyterian support threatened to alter or abolish the American Home Missionary Society. The depression compounded the physical hardships of missionaries in Illinois and Indiana and brought the Society to the verge of insolvency. The Old School walkout posed a challenge that cut to the heart of the American Home Missionary Society: if the united front could not be sustained, even within one of the principal evangelical denominations, how could the "Redeemer's kingdom" and the national, homogeneous culture be advanced?

Confronted with a clear threat to its founding principles, the voluntary Society could not command the support of the Old School Presbyterians. In the Annual Report of 1838, frustrated Society officials could only elliptically rebuke the Old School party for its ingratitude toward the American Home Missionary Society and for its desertion of mission fields:

. . . resolutions were passed in an important church judicatory discountenancing the Society from receiving the support, and relieving the needy churches of a large denomination of

Christians, whose ministry it had sustained, and whose waste places it had cultivated in their time of need.⁶

The loss of Old School support forced Society officials to face the limits of their power, but the financial depression represented a potentially manageable crisis. In the Annual Report of 1838 officials referred to the Panic as a "tempest of commercial embarrassment" that "fill [ed] the hearts of all with fear of the things which should come upon the earth."⁷ The new Corresponding Secretaries of the American Home Missionary Society, Milton Badger and Charles Hall, asserted that "the results of the Panic have been felt much less than they were feared," but the actions of the Executive Committee in 1837 suggested that the Society came close to collapse.⁸ Early in 1837 the Executive Committee issued a "Circular to Missionaries" which requested that field workers "defer their drafts upon the treasury until the receipts should warrant their payment."⁹ Later in the year, a second circular re-opened the treasury to missionaries.

In the course of proclaiming victory over the financial crisis, the Executive Committee boasted of grass roots support of the truncated and marginally solvent Society. According to the Committee, the American Home Missionary Society had survived on the strength of numerous small contributions:

from the widow's mite, the savings of the domestic, and industry of the mechanic -- from the collected offerings of God's people in the country, rather than in the cities.¹⁰

But immediate survival did not guarantee freedom from the long and debilitating repercussions of the Panic of 1837. Faced with continuing loss of receipts in 1839-40 (the Society received \$86,542.45 in 1837-38; \$82,564.63 in 1838-39; and \$78,345.20 in 1839-40), the Executive Committee explained that they

felt themselves compelled, in renewing commissions, to reduce the amount appropriated 25, in some instances, 50 per cent; although the pressure was upon the feeble churches and upon others, and they actually needed, in many cases, more assistance rather than less.¹¹

Missionaries in Illinois and Indiana keenly felt the effects of Andrew Jackson's war on the Bank of the United States. Prior to the Panic, the loosening of restraints upon state bank loans and the concurrent mania for land speculation in the west had nurtured ambitious schemes to develop roads, railroads, and canals in Illinois and Indiana. In anticipation of sudden wealth, settlers and eastern and southern businessmen bought up large tracts of land in both states.¹² In 1836, the Indiana Assembly approved bills for eight major internal improvement projects.¹³ In 1836-37 the Illinois state government borrowed money to begin work on the Illinois and Michigan Canal and launched plans to improve rivers for navigation, build local roads throughout the state, and construct

three major railroads.¹⁴ But when Jackson issued his Specie Circular in 1836, building projects in both states were aborted. The state governments were plunged into debt and internal improvements were abandoned until a semblance of recovery emerged in the mid-1840's.¹⁵

Putative investors and real estate tycoons were not the only casualties of the depression in Illinois. Isolated from markets and devoid of currency, many towns and villages adopted a barter economy. Pioneering families, who had scrambled for inexpensive land in northern Illinois after the conclusion of the Blackhawk War in 1833, were hard-pressed to sustain their small claims.¹⁶

In the judgment of many Society missionaries, the desire for land had diverted local support from missionary efforts. In 1837, the Rev. Hugh Barr deplored a "spirit of worldliness and speculation" which seemed to "paralyze the energies of Christians."¹⁷ Rev. Samuel Newbury of Peru, Indiana complained that:

. . . the rage for speculation in this section of country, and the consequent worldliness of ministers and church members seems almost to preclude the hope of a protracted work of grace.¹⁸

The spiritual malaise that attended land speculation in the west between 1835 and 1837 also seemed to affect devout and well-intentioned church members. Lucius Farnum told Society officials that, although his church had

largely "escaped the influence of the spirit of speculation," he and his congregation had had

. . . to encounter the reproach which is brought upon religion by Christians, and, in some cases, by ministers who come from the East, professedly to do good, and when they get here, forget their object, give themselves up to the world, and instead of aiding, hinder the cause.¹⁹

But apparently not all of the clergy had lost sight of their mission. Theron Baldwin's recommendation in 1837 that a Rev. Gumball receive aid from the Society indicated that some of the originally well-intentioned clergy from the east had been duped, rather than seduced, by the promises of worldly land speculators. According to Baldwin, Gumball had been waylaid en route to Illinois and persuaded to invest in land for a church building in St. Joseph, Michigan. Although Gumball seized the opportunity, which he regarded as a "voice from heaven" and a guiding "finger of providence", he soon discovered that he had been the victim of a fraudulent scheme. Thoroughly chastened by his worldly failure, Gumball proceeded to Chicago, where he commenced a ministry among German immigrants.²⁰

Although the evils of land speculation seemingly presented missionaries with the opportunity to portray their field as a "moral wilderness" in need of taming by the Society, the ministers seemed too beleaguered by the depression to make examples of fallen speculators. The end to easy credit for overextended state banks led to the

"embarrassment" of the agents and missionaries of the Society.

Because of the shortage of currency in the west, a defaulted loan had far-reaching consequences. Agent Theron Baldwin discovered to his chagrin in January 1838 that Rev. Hugh Barr's quarterly salary had vanished.²¹ Baldwin had deposited Barr's salary with the treasurer of Illinois College, who in turn loaned the money that Baldwin had earmarked for Barr. Although "some of the best men" in the state capital received Barr's money (for an undisclosed purpose), they were unable to re-pay the treasurer.²² Undoubtedly, Hugh Barr found cold comfort in Baldwin's apology:

To collect a debt at the present in this country is well-nigh an impossibility.²³

Penury on the mission field in late 1837 was commonplace. At the end of 1837 missionary Romulus Barnes of Tazewell County, Illinois, helplessly reported that he was "in debt at the stores and for borrowed money to an amount greater than is due me from your society."²⁴ Barnes informed officials of the American Home Missionary Society that the members of the ruling committee of his church could not alleviate his burden, for they had been "obliged to borrow money to save their own property from being sold."²⁵ Complaining that "money is almost banished from these regions," Rev. George Blackburn was compelled

to interrupt the construction of a seminary at Collinsville, Illinois.²⁶ The Panic also stunted the growth of Rev. J.H. Prentiss' day school in Fulton, Illinois, and left the missionary with a motley congregation of indigent evangelicals from several denominations.²⁷ When the Executive Committee of the American Home Missionary Society suggested that Prentiss move on to a more promising field of labor, the missionary expressed disappointment over the Society's descent to mercenary considerations.²⁸

Notwithstanding the noble sentiments of Prentiss, the Panic led many missionaries in the American Home Missionary Society to urge the adoption of more Draconian measures. In August 1837, Rev. A.J. Norton found it appalling that "the Society should appoint new missionaries, while it is unable to pay the old."²⁹ In February 1838, Robert Blake proposed that the American Home Missionary Society raise and set aside a fund to support, for up to two years, missionaries who were currently in the field. Blake suggested that it would be "prudent" to deny all new applications until the existing missionaries had received full support.³⁰ The Panic moved co-agent Albert Hale of Illinois to counsel strict enforcement of existing Society policy. In November 1838, Hale insisted that C.L. Watson "not be sustained while hunting a place to preach."³¹ In November 1839 Rev.

Flavel Bascom of Chicago rather coldly observed that:

The better class of your missionaries naturally falls into places where they are soon supported without your aid. This sifts out the wheat and leaves a commodity on the hands of the society that is "unsaleable". Yet these are the men who absorb most of the society's funds, because they remain so long under your patronage.³²

Although Bascom stopped short of suggesting that the American Home Missionary Society sever relations with the "chaff" of their missionary population, he did confidentially recommend that the Society weed out less promising applicants.

In spite of the tangible suffering that the Panic of 1837 inflicted upon the missionaries, officials of the American Home Missionary Society put up a bold front. By their reasoning, the maintenance of operations in the face of "pecuniary embarrassments" gave evidence of a continuing providential sustenance. In 1838 the Executive Committee pointed to encouraging "revivals of religion" and argued that the reduced roster of missionaries had actually had a greater proportional effect on the population than the earlier complement of field workers.³³ Although it threatened operations, the financial panic was perceived as a transient crisis in the grand design of effecting a homogeneous national culture in preparation for the millennium.

The interdenominational character of the Society had, to a great extent, dictated the nature of its appeal to

evangelical supporters. Just as the Society had supplied a "supra-structure" for the efforts of evangelicals, it had sought, from its inception, theoretical justification in sweeping interpretations of history. Ideally, the Society transcended local and denominational concerns and owed its existence to individuals who regarded the nation as a potential vehicle for the coming "Redeemer's kingdom." Not surprisingly, perhaps, the financial crisis and the loss of Old School support inspired Society officials to new peaks of stridency.

At the outset of the Panic of 1837, Absalom Peters, the Corresponding Secretary, sidestepped the impending crisis and announced that the "Anglo-American" culture was destined to convey the gospel to the world in the nineteenth century. Peters announced to the annual convention of the American Home Missionary Society:

Our [American] institutions possess the freshness of youth, are accordant with the spirit of the times, and highly adapted to the condition of the new state of society which here exists. In addition to these advantages, we have access to all the riches of literature, science and religion, which are possessed by our elder brethren [the British] across the Atlantic.³⁴

Four years later, in the midst of the grinding depression, Peters' successors challenged the struggling supporters of the American Home Missionary Society "to make our own land Immanuel's!" and asked:

. . . shall the cause of Missions at Home be retarded -- shall it fail to be prosecuted, on the scale which the dearest interests of our

fellow countrymen, and the honor of our God and Redeemer demand . . . ? ³⁵

For a body of Christian believers with an elevated spiritual vision, the temporal problem of financial depression appeared manageable. Less manageable and consequently more threatening to the Society was the overt opposition of evangelicals from within. Although the Panic of 1837 posed a formidable threat to Society operations, it could be catalogued as an external danger that had originated in a "moral wilderness" of greedy and backbiting bankers and speculators. But the contemporaneous division within the Presbyterian church issued from theological and social issues that called into question the validity of interdenominational voluntary societies. Missionaries could endure physical hardship, but doctrinal dissension did not yield to temporizing.

In the 1830's the fear of submerging denominational integrity in a roiling sea of interdenominational societies found expression not only within the Presbyterian denomination, but also among Episcopalians, Methodists, and Baptists.³⁶ While evangelical (or "low church") Episcopalians participated in revivals, permitted extemporaneous prayer, and waxed enthusiastic over interdenominational missions, "high church" adherents emphasized the authority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and insisted upon strict observance of the church calendar and Angelical liturgy. Ostensibly seeking to free their

hierarchy from onerous material concerns, a substantial group of "republican Methodists" demanded local lay control over church property and church government and often linked their efforts with those of voluntary societies. Anti-mission Baptists dismissed missionary activity, an educated ministry, and voluntary associations as "inventions of man" that merely concealed the machinations of covetous "speculators". Opposing New School Baptists advocated the formal education of ministers, the establishment of colleges, and participation in domestic missionary endeavors.³⁷

The conflict within Presbyterianism paralleled the vitriolic debates over doctrine and polity in the other principal evangelical Protestant denominations of the period. Throughout the 1830's Presbyterians aired their disputes in synods, ecclesiastical trials, and the annual General Assembly. The shifting fortunes of the contending parties culminated in the schism of 1837, when the Old School, by a vote of 143 to 110 in the General Assembly, abrogated the Plan of Union of 1801 and excluded the 28 presbyteries, 509 ministers, and 60,000 members who had entered the denomination under the terms of the Plan.³⁸ In reaction to the Old School victory, banished delegates of the New School gathered in the excinded presbytery of Auburn, New York, declared the vote of the General Assembly "null and void", and asserted their legitimacy as

Presbyterians.

Any hope of reconciliation was trampled to the floor of the General Assembly in 1838, where, before deciding to hold separate conventions, New School and Old School delegates stooped to such uncharitable and unruly acts as packing the balcony with sympathizers, locking out the opposing faction, and shouting each other down. When the delegates of the New School crossed Philadelphia to open their own General Assembly, they carried with them the depleted body of the American Home Missionary Society. As an institutional offspring of the Plan of Union, the Society in 1837-38 found itself bereft of the financial support of approximately 60% of Presbyterians and of 126 missionaries.³⁹

To Old School Presbyterians, the Society was the incarnation of a reprehensible theological and judicial slackness. For conservative Presbyterians, doctrine and polity were inseparable; the Presbyterian system of church government safeguarded the Westminster Confession of Faith and certified the orthodoxy of contemporary interpretations of Calvinist doctrine.⁴⁰ When missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society casually transferred their allegiance from the Congregationalists to the Presbyterians, boldly taught that the "Confession of Faith . . . is not the Bible, nor a substitute for the Bible," or followed Yale professor

Nathaniel Taylor's qualified acceptance of original sin, Old School Presbyterians felt that the foundation of their faith was crumbling.⁴¹

The relationship between human free will and the sovereignty of God lay at the heart of the theological dispute between Old School and New School Presbyterians.⁴² In the daily operations of nineteenth century evangelical churches, one's perception of the delicate balance between free will and predestination had a direct bearing upon how one regarded revivals. In the dynamics of the conversion experience, the Old School held that Adam's sin was imputed to all succeeding generations at birth, that a preacher should outline the implications of the atonement of Christ, but that God alone chose who would be saved; sinners could not be induced by human means to heed the call for repentance.⁴³ Nathaniel Taylor and his New School followers seemed to factor out of the scheme of salvation a measure of free will. Taylor depicted original sin as an irresistible tendency of human nature ("such is [human] nature, that in all the appropriate circumstances of being [people] will sin and only sin") and argued that, although only the Holy Spirit had the power to effect a "change of heart" and "regeneration", people had the capacity to respond to the revivalist's exhortation to "choose you this day whom you will serve."⁴⁴ To the Old School, the suggestion of any

element of free will, however qualified or ambiguous, represented doctrinal error.

The conservative position of the Old School ran counter to the exigencies of American Home Missionary Society operations. As an interdenominational association, the Society needed to cultivate common theological ground among evangelical Protestants in the Reformed tradition. Revivals constituted a primary means of outreach in frontier communities. A Society that anticipated the millennium and assiduously tallied both new church members and "number of rivivals held by missionaries" was hardly disposed to forsake productive activity for the arcane pleasures of scholasticism. Although both Presbyterian parties conducted superficially indistinguishable revivals, feared outright Arminianism, and shrank from emotional displays, the Society joined with the New School in upholding the instrumentality of revivals.⁴⁵ With Lyman Beecher, (a New School Presbyterian and ex-Congregationalist) the Society was willing to let the results of revivals justify the somewhat questionable practices of revivalists. In response to critics of "New Measures" revivalism Beecher wrote:

. . . though some revivals may be so badly managed as to be worse than none, there may, to a certain extent, be great imperfections in them, and yet they be on the whole, blessings of Christ.⁴⁶

Apparently sharing Beecher's willingness to let

divine ends justify imperfect human means, Society missionary James R. Wheelock of Greensburg, Indiana, took refuge in the hope that "the commotions and divisions" among the Presbyterians would serve as "the precursor of the Divine influence which He means to send down ere long."⁴⁷ Yet surely one would be hard-pressed to detect any divinely ironic blessing among the reverberating anathemas of Wheelock's heresy trial. Foreshadowing the schism of 1837, Wheelock's trial before the Indianapolis presbytery in 1833 bared internal disputes over right doctrine and the proper relationship of interdenominational societies to Presbyterian church government.⁴⁸ Although Wheelock's ministry survived the trial, the American Home Missionary Society was left with a Pyrrhic victory; lingering animosity in the aftermath of the trial effectively circumscribed the operations of the Society in Indianapolis during the mid-1830's.

In the early 1830's Wheelock had been an aggressive representative of the American Home Missionary Society and an outspoken preacher of New School theology. Prior to requesting recognition by the Indianapolis presbytery, Wheelock took it upon himself to commence preaching in eight churches in Decatur County and to organize a revival that was attended by eight hundred people.⁴⁹ By plunging into missionary work before securing the formal approval of his local presbytery, Wheelock seemed to be playing

fast and loose with traditional Presbyterian government and, perhaps unnecessarily, risking the wrath of Old School Presbyterians. Nevertheless, because the New School enjoyed a tenuous majority within the Indianapolis presbytery, Wheelock's work gained formal recognition in the spring of 1832.⁵⁰ But Wheelock's persistent and uncompromising advocacy of New School theology angered an Old School sympathizer in the church at Greensburg and the missionary found himself accused of heresy in the summer of 1832.

Wheelock's abrasive personality may well have inflamed the local intra-denominational war of attrition that resulted from his case. The missionary's explanation of his ordeal to Society officials in New York City and his actions in Indiana suggest that he was either too impolitic or too dogmatic to avoid a bitter confrontation with the Indianapolis presbytery. Although the balance of power in the presbytery had shifted to the Old School in 1832, Wheelock refused to tone down his theological assertions or to pay homage to traditional channels of Presbyterian jurisprudence. When the accused missionary rallied evangelical Protestant church members to a public show of support in the county courthouse, he seemed to be flaunting the conventions of his denomination and seeking the approbation of denominationally unaffiliated supporters of interdenominational societies.⁵¹ Wheelock's

letter to officials of the American Home Missionary Society indicated that he had reserved no face-saving quarter for his Old School church members. According to Wheelock, he had forcibly taught that:

the Holy Spirit is not granted to give men any new powers or capability as moral agents but to convince them of sin and to make them willing to do what they before had power to do but would not. [Wheelock was paraphrasing Nathaniel Taylor.] These and kindred doctrines I believe under God will prove the salvation of the Presbyterian Church--and, that the opposite system [the Old School] has been sitting like the nightmare upon her vitals, antinomianizing her professors, and prostrating her energy.⁵²

After the Old School majority of the Indianapolis presbytery found Wheelock guilty of heresy, the New School minority boycotted deliberations on the sentencing of the missionary.⁵³ Lacking a quorum, the hamstrung presbytery deferred to the Synod, which rebuked all of the involved parties for their reckless remarks and charges. James R. Wheelock was mildly admonished for failing to use "good and acceptable words" in his ministry.⁵⁴

The work of the Presbyterian denomination and of the American Home Missionary Society in Indiana were the real victims of the trial. By denying entry to churches founded by the Society and forbidding existing churches from receiving the aid of the Society, the Old School Presbyterians tightened their hold on the Indianapolis presbytery and effectively excluded partisans of the New School and the American Home Missionary Society. After

four years of Old School domination, the Indianapolis presbytery rubber-stamped the decision of the General Assembly to abrogate the Plan of Union.⁵⁵

While Wheelock's trial rendered in high relief the tensions between Old School and New School Presbyterians, the heresy trial of three members of the faculty of Illinois College in 1833 foreshadowed the disruptive rise of Congregational self-consciousness. In accordance with the Plan of Union, the predominantly Congregational members of the Illinois College Band had been rather casually accepted by the presbyteries of Illinois.⁵⁶ But as the reservations of Julian Sturtevant (a member of the Illinois College Band and a defendant in the heresy trial) displayed, acceptance of the "government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States" by avowed Congregationalists did not necessarily represent assimilation into the Presbyterian denomination.⁵⁷ In his eighty-third year the former president of Illinois College recalled his pre-ordination apprehensions:

. . . it became evident that I could not answer in the affirmative without violating my conscience. Mr. Ellis, who was my trusted counselor, bode me fear not, as . . . no person [from a Congregational body] was expected . . . to imply his belief in the every proposition contained in the Confession of Faith and the Catechism. They were to be accepted only "for substance of doctrine." This statement was not altogether novel, but to this day it has never given me any satisfaction. It has always seemed to me an indefensible violation of good faith for a man formally to accept a doctrinal statement

which he can only make his own by doing violence to the obvious meaning of some of its phrases.⁵⁸

In spite of Sturtevant's scruples, he, along with other Congregational missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society, became nominally affiliated with the New School Presbyterian party in Illinois. However, Sturtevant's nominal affiliation did not prevent him from engaging in private, freewheeling theological discussions with the faculty and president of Illinois College.⁵⁹ Both President Edward Beecher (a Congregationalist) and Sturtevant stood firmly in the theological camp of Nathaniel Taylor, and Edward Beecher, who later came to espouse publicly the unorthodox doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, may well have been entertaining that doctrine behind the closed door discussions at Illinois College.⁶⁰ The "liberal" Congregational proclivities of the faculty aroused the ire of William Frazier, an Old School missionary who had apparently been dispatched by the Presbyterian General Assembly in order to assess the doctrinal purity of American Home Missionary Society operations at Illinois college.⁶¹ Frazier pressed charges of heresy against Edward Beecher, William Kirby, and Julian Sturtevant.

Although the defendants were easily acquitted by the synod, the trial dramatized the vulnerability of Congregationalists under the Plan of Union. In retrospect, Julian Sturtevant concluded that the Plan of

Union had handicapped the growth of Congregationalism in the west while serving the interests of New School Presbyterians.⁶² Although Sturtevant deplored the friction between denominations and within the Presbyterian church and remained committed in principle to interdenominational endeavors, he came to cherish the distinctiveness of his Congregational heritage:

The more I thought upon [the discord of the 1830's] the more evident it seemed to me that the divided condition of our religious community was the result of man's assumption of authority over the Church But words cannot express my surprise and delight when further study showed me that the simple forms which seemed to be wholly Scriptural and practical were really identical with those already described in the teachings of our Congregationalist forefathers.⁶³

Sturtevant's dawning denominational self-consciousness apparently reflected the feelings of Congregationalists throughout Illinois. Prior to the heresy trial in Jacksonville, all Congregationalists had submitted to the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian church.⁶⁴ But soon after the trial a group of unreconciled Congregationalists in Jacksonville formed a church and called Theron Baldwin to their pulpit. Unsure of how to handle the Congregationalists' open defiance of the Plan of Union, Baldwin asked the advice of Society officials in New York City.⁶⁵ Although Baldwin was instructed to spurn the offer, the awakening denominational self-consciousness of Congregationalists in

Illinois could not be contained.⁶⁶ By 1840, forty-eight Congregational churches were scattered throughout the state.⁶⁷ In spite of the efforts of the American Home Missionary Society to uphold the Plan of Union, Society officials were forced to accept missionary William Carter's observation that "the people will be congregationalists [sic] if they choose and we cannot help it."⁶⁸

The splintering of the Presbyterian denomination in 1837 had not only undermined the interdenominational base of support of the American Home Missionary Society but also had set an ominous precedent for the future breakdown of interdenominational co-operation within the Society. In the 1840's both the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians chafed under the Plan of Union. The irenic commitment and caution of the American Home Missionary Society rendered it a stationary target for interdenominational and denominational crossfire.

As a historically regional denomination, issuing from New England and geographically circumscribed by the Plan of Union in the early nineteenth century, the Congregationalists were not saddled with the need to appease a national constituency of slaveholding and abolitionist members in the 1840's. Free to focus on the moral evil of slavery, the Congregationalists embraced the issue of anti-slavery and came to regard abolitionist

sentiments as an essential denominational trait.⁶⁹

Abolitionist sentiments were fully incorporated into the denominational character of Congregationalists in Illinois and Indiana. In Illinois the Congregational Association banished slaveholders from the "pulpits and communion tables" of Congregational churches in 1836.⁷⁰ The lynching of abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy at Alton in 1837 galvanized the missionaries associated with Illinois College into public declarations of their anti-slavery sentiments.⁷¹ Under the presidencies of Edward Beecher and Julian Sturtevant in the 1840's, Illinois College became an important stop on the Congregationalist-engineered Illinois branch of the underground railway.⁷² In both Illinois and Indiana during the 1840's Congregationalists unsuccessfully petitioned the American Home Missionary Society to abandon operations in slave states.⁷³

The fading but deeply ingrained national aspirations of the Society, coupled with its refusal to tread on the disciplinary jurisdiction of a denomination, prevented the American Home Missionary Society from deferring to the anti-slavery wishes of its Congregational constituents.⁷⁴ Throughout the 1840's and 1850's the Society avoided confrontation with the "peculiar institution." The movement toward the equivocal statement in 1857 that the Society would deny aid to churches with slaveholding

members "unless evidence be furnished that the relation [of slaveholders to the church] is such as, in the judgment of the Committee [the Executive Committee of the Society], is justifiable, for the time being, in the peculiar circumstances in which it exists" had proceeded at a glacial pace: in 1847 the American Home Missionary Society had conceded that slavery represented an evil; in 1850 the Society had defended the right of preachers in the South to speak against slavery; and in 1853 the Society had cut off commissions to slaveholding missionaries.⁷⁵

In addition to their principled refusal to interfere in denominational polity the temporizing statements of the Society were motivated by the practical need to hold on to the support of New School Presbyterians. In spite of the schism of 1837 the New School Presbyterians still included a southern minority and denominational officials seemed to share the anxiety of officers of the Society over the need to preserve the appearance of a national religious body.⁷⁶ Beset by the impossible task of trying to harmonize the interests of abolitionists, colonizers, and filibustering slaveholders, delegates to the General Assembly of the New School in 1846 resolved to condemn the institution of slavery but not the slaveholder.⁷⁷

By the late 1840's Congregationalists lost patience with the reluctant anti-slavery of New School

Presbyterians and charged that "the Presbyterian church is deeply implicated in the guilt of upholding slavery."⁷⁸ However, the Congregationalists, who tended to hold an abiding faith in the efficacy of interdenominational societies, adopted a more benign view of the refractory pace toward anti-slavery of the Society. In 1852 the Congregationalists convened at Albany, New York, abrogated the remnants of the Plan of Union with the New School Presbyterians, and commended the work of the American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society.⁷⁹

The Congregationalists' antagonism toward New School Presbyterianism issued not only from their divergence over abolition but also from a sharpening of ecclesiastical differences in the 1840's. Stung by the Old School attacks of the 1830's, the New School Presbyterians struggled to assert their legitimacy as a Presbyterian body.⁸⁰ In such publications as the American Biblical Repository prominent members of the denomination re-examined the historic doctrines and polity of the Presbyterian church in the light of contemporary issues. New School restiveness under the relatively latitudinarian doctrinal positions of interdenominational organizations manifested itself in public attacks on the American Tract Society in the mid-1840's. In the course of the decade such notable champions of interdenominational efforts as Absalom Peters, Edward Beecher, and Julian Sturtevant

returned to their Congregationalist roots.⁸¹

In the late 1840's and 1850's the New School Presbyterians drifted away from the American Home Missionary Society. The establishment of a Standing Committee on Home Missions in 1847 led to a recommendation in 1850 that the denomination-- not the American Home Missionary Society-- sponsor new Presbyterian churches. By 1855 the General Assembly of the New School Presbyterians had established a permanent Committee on Church Extension. On the road toward rapprochement with the Old School Presbyterians (which was achieved in 1869) the New School Presbyterians withdrew from the American Home Missionary Society in 1861.⁸² Although the Society retained its title until 1893 any claim to interdenominational endeavor was a legal fiction. The Society had become an arm of the Congregational denomination.

Although the tempests of 1837 did not shipwreck the American Home Missionary Society, the Society had been thrown off its chartered course. The panic of 1837 posed an immediate and critical threat to the operations of the Society, but the dissolution of interdenominational co-operation inflicted an ultimately mortal wound upon the founding principles of the American Home Missionary Society. The hopes of sustaining a truly national and interdenominational evangelical Protestant society had

been compromised by interdenominational dissension over doctrine and polity and by the rising tide of sectional conflict, which eroded the Plan of Union and shored up the denominational self-consciousness of the Congregationalists and the New School Presbyterians.

The unravelling of the original purposes of the American Home Missionary Society between 1837 and 1861 displayed the limits of interdenominational co-operation and deflated the grand design to superimpose a homogeneous culture on the frontier society in Illinois and Indiana. By the standards of their founders, perhaps the exalted mission of the American Home Missionary had fallen short. But the great expectations attached to a meta-historical point of view are seldom, if ever, borne out in the ambiguous experiences of history. As we review the motivation, efforts, and accomplishments of the Society in Illinois and Indiana between 1826 and 1837, we shall also suggest briefly, in conclusion, the cultural legacy of the pioneering members of the American Home Missionary Society.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹ Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 249-251.

² T. Scott Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1864), pp. 123-143; and Foster, pp. 251-258.

³ Ibid., pp. 250-251.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 249-257.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Twelfth Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1838), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Receipts are compared from statements in the Annual Reports of the AHMS of 1837, 1838, 1839, 1840, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

¹² Theodore Calvin Pease, The Frontier State 1818-1848 (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1922), pp. 174-193, see table of land sales on pp. 176-177; Howard H. Peckham, Indiana: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton and Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1978), pp. 62-64; Richard J. Jensen, Illinois: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton and Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1978), pp. 44-46.

¹³ Peckham, pp. 62-64.

¹⁴ Pease, pp. 212-215.

¹⁵ Don Harrison Doyle, The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-1870 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 68-79; Peckham, pp. 62-64; Pease, pp. 216-235.

- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Bugh Barr, Carrollton, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 25 January 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 18 Samuel Newbury, Peru, Indiana, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, Home Missionary IX (April 1837), p. 215, AHMS Papers, reel 378.
- 19 Lucius Farnum, Princeton, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, Home Missionary IX (December 1836), p. 142, AHMS Papers, reel 378.
- 20 Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 2 February 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 21 Theron Baldwin, Monticello, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 19 January 1838, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Romulus Barnes, Tazewell County, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 January 1838; see also the letter by Barnes' elders, James P. Scott and Horace Blair to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 8 November 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 25 Romulus Barnes to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 January 1838, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 26 George Blackburn, Collinsville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 6 December 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 27 J.H. Prentiss, Fulton, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 1 July 1839, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 28 J.H. Prentiss, Fulton, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 22 November 1839, AHMS Papers, reel 17.
- 29 A.J. Norton, Pike County, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 3 August 1837, AHMS Papers, reel 17.

30 Robert Blake to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, February 1838, AHMS Papers, reel 17.

31 Albert Hale, Bond County, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 29 November 1838, AHMS Papers, reel 17.

32 Flavel Bascom, Chicago, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 28 November 1839, AHMS Papers, reel 17.

33 Twelfth Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1838), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

34 Eleventh Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1837), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

35 Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: n.p., 1841), AHMS Papers, reel 373.

36 Foster, pp. 251-255.

37 Ibid.; see also, Miyakawa, pp. 145-158.

38 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 and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 66; Goodykoontz, p. 242.

39 Ibid.; Marsden, pp. 63-64; 60-66; Twelfth Annual Report of the American Home Missionary Society, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

40 Foster, pp. 254-265; Marsden, pp. 67-71.

41 Ibid., p. 68.

42 Ibid., pp. 66-67; according to Marsden, p. 67: "The theological issue . . . was integrally bound up with several other important factors contributing to the division." Marsden distinguishes six causes of the schism; "(1) the meaning of confessionalism, (2) Presbyterian polity, (3) the relation of the church to the voluntary societies of the 'Evangelical united front', (4) methods of revivalism, (5) theology itself, and (6) slavery."

43 Ibid., pp. 75-82.

44 Marsden, p. 49, citing Nathaniel W. Taylor, "Concio ad Clerum, A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of Yale College, September 10, 1828" (New Haven, 1828).

45 Marsden, pp. 79-80.

46 Marsden, pp. 77-78, cites Lyman Beecher to Asahel Nettleton, 28 May 1828, in Lyman Beecher, Autobiography, Correspondence, etc., of Lyman Beecher, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: 1865), 2: 106; contrast Beecher's view of revivals with of that Old School sympathizer Samuel Baird: "Uncommitted persons, who were of a susceptible disposition and tender conscience, have been wrought up to an intense state of excitement. This, according to a well-known law of the human mind, which refuses, permanently, to sustain excessive emotion of any kind, has given place to apathy. The subject of it is 'broken down', and a transition is realized, which is supposed to be a change of heart." Marsden, p. 76, citing Samuel J. Baird, A History of the New School (Philadelphia, 1868), pp. 233-234.

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54 Ibid., pp. 126, 146.

55 Ibid., pp. 128-131; p. 127.

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61 Rammelkamp, p. 120; Doyle, pp. 49-50; Sturtevant, pp. 183-184.

62 Ibid., pp. 192-194.

63 Ibid., p. 194.

64 Samuel C. Pearson, Jr., "From Church to Denomination: American Congregationalism in the Nineteenth Century," Church History 38 (1969): 73.

65 Theron Baldwin, Jacksonville, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 10 February 1834, AHMS Papers, reel 16; William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier 1783-1850, vol. III: The Congregationalists; A Collection of Source Materials (New York: Cooper Square, 1964), p. 158 f.

66 Ibid.

67 Pearson, p. 73.

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70 Ibid., p. 73.

71 Ibid., pp. 73-74; Rammelkamp, pp. 101-118; Meredith, pp. 91-92; Doyle, pp. 52-53.

72 Ibid., pp. 52-58; Rammelkamp, pp. 101-118; Pearson, p. 74.

73 Ibid., p. 74, 85.

74 Goodykoontz, pp. 289-291.

75 Ibid., pp. 289-290.

76 Pearson, p. 74; Marsden, p. 119.

77 Ibid.

78 Pearson, p. 84, citing Minority Report of a Committee of the General Association of Connecticut on the Sin of Slavery, Presented June, 1849 at a Meeting of the Association (n. p., n.d.)

79 Pearson, pp. 85-86; Goodykoontz, pp. 299-301.

80 Marsden, p. 116; pp. 117-127 passim.

81 Ibid., p. 118.

82 Ibid., p. 125, 130; Goodykoontz, p. 301.

CONCLUSION

By mid-century Illinois and Indiana were no longer physical frontiers. With gradual recovery from the effects of the Panic of 1837, internal improvements resumed in both states in the late 1840's.¹ European immigrants poured in to build the canals and railroads of northern Illinois and Indiana. In the view of the American Home Missionary Society the potential benefits of material prosperity were somewhat offset by the unsalubrious effects of cultural and religious heterogeneity. Eastern leaders of the Society freely contributed to the nativist hysteria of the 1840's.²

In spite of the outspoken nativist fears of their superiors, field missionaries in Illinois and Indiana generally assumed a more moderate (although clearly anti-Catholic) tone.³ However grand their initial expectations, the field missionaries had been forced to adapt to what John Ellis had called "the lively material" of western society. By the 1840's the inroads of cultural heterogeneity were irreversible. The city of Chicago, for example, which Theron Baldwin had seen as a village in the summer of 1833 and had recognized as a potentially mighty commercial center, had begun to fulfill that potential by

1842. Notwithstanding the depression, in less than ten years Chicago had grown from a settlement of 150 people to a regional market center, a home for Irish and German immigrants, and a major port.⁴

Although the missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society could not create an unalloyed evangelical Protestant national culture, their efforts were by no means unrecompensed. By 1850 in Indiana the Presbyterians (Old School and New School) had erected 282 churches with "accommodations" for 105,582 worshipers among a state population of 988,416.⁵ Largely because of the efforts of evangelical Protestants and the interdenominational societies, Indiana in 1850 could claim one church per 530 settlers: Massachusetts, by contrast, had only one church per 720 inhabitants.⁶

What the Society had perceived as a "moral wilderness" had been subdued by the presence of churches or showed promise of taming through the acculturating effects of schools, colleges, and voluntary associations for social reform. In the 1840's and 1850's the interchange between eastern evangelicals and western missionary efforts, which John Ellis had envisioned on his journey to Kaskaskia, Illinois, began to bear fruit. The "Yankee Protestant" values of material progress, individual independence, self-discipline, and personal responsibility for one's character had been disseminated

in the west. Educational institutions and voluntary associations formed a network that fostered those values throughout the nation and translated individual piety into aggregate social reform movements. The schools and voluntary associations that the missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society had planted subsequently provided avenues of social mobility, courses of leadership, and paths of righteousness for a migratory and uprooted people.

The American Home Missionary Society issued from the peculiar conditions of American religious life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The religious malaise of the Revolutionary era, the move toward national disestablishment and the denominational settlement, with its emphasis upon voluntary church membership, had spawned both lofty expectations and heightened anxiety. The Society represented an institutionally creative response to a unique experiment in church-state relations. The creative response grew out of an intrinsic tension in the religious life of the United States: in order to ensure denominational survival, individual piety had to be translated into a material measure of success. Eagerly incorporating the national destiny into the doctrine of a coming millennium, missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society attempted to mold the frontier culture of Illinois and Indiana through revivals and the planting

of churches, educational institutions, and voluntary associations for social reform. But the high expectations and doctrines of the American Home Missionary Society met the harsh realities of frontier experience. Although physical hardship and the apathy of settlers could be reduced to the anticipated obstacles of a noble quest, interdenominational unity was more elusive. When faced with a common task, such as building up the frontier or reaching those who remained outside the pale of evangelical beliefs and practices, the evangelicals tended to acknowledge their essential unity. Yet denominations remained autonomous. When the commonly perceived crises of religious apathy and social construction on the frontier faded, doctrinal tensions surfaced and the constituent denominations of the American Home Missionary Society reappraised their common endeavor.

However fragile or ad hoc the interdenominational relationships in the founding era of the American Home Missionary Society, the Society had helped lay the foundation of a distinctive evangelical Protestant presence in American culture. At the end of the nineteenth century the Congregationalist-controlled American Home Missionary Society met the familiar diagnosis of a spiritual frontier of immigrants and "heathens" with reflexes that had been conditioned by the work of the first generation of home missionaries. In

1893 the World's Columbian Exposition offered officials of the American Home Missionary Society an opportunity to:

review . . . what has been accomplished--a candid inquiry into the present condition of the world-- a presentation of the attitude of the churches as the marshalling of equipment and efficiency of evangelistic agencies--and a broad outlook as to the world's evangelization in this generation will be attempted.⁷

Participation in the World's Missionary Congress represented a material fulfillment of the hopes of Ellis and his colleagues in the 1820's. The state of Illinois in 1893 was certainly "in the same class with" the eastern states; Illinois society clearly "possessed" as much "moral strength" as the rest of the nation and unquestionably Illinois was contributing "resources for the conversion of the world." In terms of "efficiency and equipment" the American Home Missionary Society delegates to the Columbian Exposition were unimaginably distant from their ancestors of the 1820's. Instead of traveling by canal barge, steamboat and broken down horse and wagon, the American Home Missionary Society delegates of 1893 rode the train (and enjoyed a special 20% discount on the round trip fare).⁸ But they did not have to bring their own bedding or camp out. On the back of an envelope an anonymous American Home Missionary Society official scrawled:

This is a good hotel--quiet resort [,] extra good beds [,] fairly good table and cheaper than any other I could find and right on the Lake Shore.⁹

Notes

¹Pease, pp. 316-326; Peckham, pp. 63-65.

²Goodykoontz, pp. 221-234; see also Annual Reports of the American Home Missionary Society throughout the 1840's in which "nativist" sentiments from a dominant and recurring theme, for example, Seventeenth Annual Report . . . (1843), pp. 100-105; Eighteenth Annual Report . . . (1844), pp. 94-95; Nineteenth Annual Report . . . (1845), p. 108 and pp. 110-114; Twenty-Second Annual Report . . . (1848), pp. 97-100; and, in the aftermath of the Mexican War, Twenty-Third Annual Report . . . (1849), p. 92, AHMS Papers, reel 373.

³Goodykoontz, p. 234; see especially footnote 59 on p. 234, in which Goodykoontz estimates that 6-8% of the 940 letters that were written by missionaries in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and Kentucky during the years of 1840, 1842, 1844, and 1846 contained "unfavorable comments on Catholic activities or manifested alarm." In spite of the relative lack of concern of field correspondents, Goodykoontz notes that the Home Missionary "played up the Catholic menace" in the 1840's and that editors of the Home Missionary were not above lifting apparently anti-Catholic comments out of the context of missionaries' letters.

⁴Pease, pp. 387-389 and p. 392-397.

⁵Rudolph, pp. 190-191.

⁶Peckham, p. 888.

⁷"The World's Congress, Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893," (Chicago: n.p., January 1893) AHMS Papers, reel 53.

⁸Bernard F. Knapp to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, 23 May 1893, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

⁹Anonymous, back of letter from George A. Hood, Chicago, Illinois, to Corresponding Secretary of the AHMS, May 1893, AHMS Papers, reel 53.

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A. Primary Sources

Early in the twentieth century, the Papers of the American Home Missionary Society were housed in the library of the Chicago Theological Seminary and were utilized by students of Frederick Jackson Turner and William Warren Sweet. In 1975 the papers were microfilmed by the Microfilming Corporation of America, Glen Rock, New Jersey (the Microfilming Corporation of America has published A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Papers of the American Home Missionary Society 1816 (1826-1894) 1936, edited by David G. Horvath, 1975). The University of Rhode Island Library at Kingston owns the complete microfilm collection. The 385 reels of microfilm have been catalogued into five series, which include incoming and outgoing correspondence, administrative material, annual reports, and the publications of the Society (The Home Missionary and the Pastor's Journal). Relevant reels to this study have been specified in the preface.

The incoming correspondence and the published letters of the missionaries in The Home Missionary have been cited extensively in this study. Incoming correspondence from Illinois and Indiana focused on the religious work of the missionaries, and in the course of their quarterly reports to the Corresponding Secretary the missionaries discussed social conditions, which they frequently cast as obstacles to the success of their work. Incoming correspondence also included requests for aid from settlers and reports of agents and auxiliaries of the Society. Although occasionally damaged, the bulk of the incoming correspondence is readable. Outgoing correspondence generally acknowledged the commissions of missionaries and occasionally relayed instructions from Society headquarters. Because the outgoing correspondence was filmed from bound letterpress books, the letters are often difficult to read. Although much administrative material has been destroyed, fragments concerning the formation of the Society and the early deliberations of the Executive Committee have been preserved. Annual Reports, including news from the mission fields and the Executive Committee, were published at the close of the Society's fiscal year in May. Since The Home Missionary was addressed to the public, printed letters were selected and edited to elicit the sympathies and financial support of evangelical Protestants.

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