

**PURITAN INFLUENCES IN
THE FORMATIVE YEARS
OF ILLINOIS HISTORY**

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Puritan Influences in the Formative Years of Illinois History by Carrie Prudence Kofoid

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CHAPTER I*.

A PURITAN VILLAGE IN ILLINOIS.

In the north central part of the State of Illinois, a hundred miles above Springfield, lies a little village in the midst of the rich prairie country. The town itself is on a slight rise of land so that it overlooks the country for miles around. On every side stretch the well kept farms. On a bright fall day it is a particularly pleasant scene; everywhere the great fields of corn, golden brown in the sunlight, and moving slowly here and there the huge wagons laden with the golden cars. The expanse of field is broken by orchards, a little woodland where some prairie stream makes its way toward the Illinois river, or a clump of trees or a windmill which indicates the location of some well-kept farm house. There is little going on in the tiny town itself; a few stores, dispersing points for necessary supplies, a large school house with its ebb and flow of noise and silence. The roads are good, the trees abundant and large, the houses neat and comfortable and all pervaded by an air of quiet and repose that calls at once to mind the old New England village off the line of the railroad. Not until 1900 did a railroad reach this village. No mines, no large industries have ever been started in its vicinity. Everything has conspired to keep the community, aside from the slow progress and material improvement that comes with years, in the same social condition with the same ideals and ideas that were stamped on it in the first thirty years of its existence. It is a town typical of many that have arisen in northern Illinois, but owing to its comparative isolation it has preserved longer than many its independence of the bustling activities of the world. Yet this little town and others like it have stood for much in the development of the great State. What has been the central organization, the central force to hold it together and make it count for something both for its own community and the world at large? Where, to borrow a term from silence, has been the dynamic center?

All the week the ordinary busy routine of life goes on, each family working to and for itself. When Sunday comes there is a change.

From practically every house in the village the people take their way to that modest, ample church, so centrally and conspicuously placed. From away out over the prairie the teams come with whole families. About the church the wagons stand thick; and inside, the large and handsome audience room is well filled. They are all there,

* This paper was accepted by the University of Illinois as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.—[Ed.]

men, women and children, the aged people and the young men and women. After the morning service apparently a large part of the congregation remain for Sunday School or gather about the building and talk in little groups. On every face is an aspect of deep satisfaction with the course of the day's procedure. Perhaps today this scene cannot be witnessed in many places in Illinois, a community where the church lays her hand on the whole population and where willing and glad, even if somewhat conventional, allegiance is granted to her claims.

But in this town for some sixty years this scene has been renewed from week to week and it is the only power, the only organization in the community, which has so brought its people together. This phenomenon, if one pleases so to call it, so remarkably preserved to us today, is but the working of an organization which in earlier years deliberately entered Illinois to have its part in moulding its future. It has worked hard and long. It has accomplished much.

The history of this one church of the New England faith is typical of many others. Some two miles out of town where the pioneer settlement began was the pioneer church, a rude building twenty by forty feet, at first built of logs, but gathering a congregation of two or three hundred on Sunday. This log church was followed in time by a large brick building, the pride of all the region around. Today its plain Doric outline, softened by ivy, deserted and crumbling, is pleasing and satisfying to the eye. In the 40s it was called one of the most flourishing churches in the State. It gathered into its ample fold both Northerner and Southerner. It was in the church that their conflicting opinions were worked over and, not without suffering on both sides, the New England ideal maintained. To this region also came in the 40s and 50s, the thrifty Germans, Danes and Swedes from the old country, seeking earnestly freedom and enlightenment. There was power in the church to adapt itself to the needs of these. All were made one in the house of God. Today you trace their fair hair and blue eyes in the congregation and the children of the foreigner are at home in the teachings of the Puritans.

This community had its theological difficulties; organized as a Presbyterian church, divided by Old School and New School doctrines, it emerged in the 50s as a Congregational church. Within its walls its chief talk was of personal righteousness; but there was a firm belief that next to righteousness the success of the community and of the state and nation of which this community was so conspicuous a part, rested on education. So under the fostering care of the church grew up the public school, the village academy, which might, if circumstances favored, grow even into a college, and the young ladies' seminary. They sent east for teachers that their youth might have the best. The special glory of the little town is, that here first gathered kindred souls to talk over a form of education which should be the crown of all the State's work for her children, plans that finally led to the State universities which are doing so much for the west.

With this one record in mind, we turn to conditions in New England for the starting point.

CHAPTER II.

HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETIES IN NEW ENGLAND.

Efforts for the propagation of the Gospel characterized the early settlers of New England and have always had a place in the activities of their descendants. Opportunities and methods have changed, but under such form such work has gone on from the beginning of New England's history. In the eighteenth century the General Association of the churches superintended such work, sending out settled pastors from their home churches for periods of missionary work in new settlements and among the Indians. Toward the end of the century special societies began to come into existence, the New York Missionary Society in 1796, the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society in 1799. The work of these societies advanced to the west with the settlements; at first, limited to the region of the Mohawk and Genesee rivers in New York, then extending to "New Connecticut" in Ohio and reaching Illinois for the first time in 1812.* The most active of these societies in western frontier work was the Missionary Society of Connecticut which, with some help from the Missionary Society of Massachusetts, carried on most of the work in Illinois till the formation of a national society in 1826. This society was organized June 19, 1796, at Hebron, Connecticut, at the regular meeting of the General Association of Connecticut, with the following constitution: †

CONSTITUTION OF THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF CONNECTICUT.

The General Association of the State of Connecticut, impressed with the obligation on all the friends of Christianity to propagate a knowledge of its gracious and holy doctrines, also encouraged by the late zealous exertions for this end, in sundry Christian bodies, cannot but hope the time is near in which God will spread his truth through the earth. They also consider it a thing of great importance that some charitable assistance be extended to new Christian settlements in various parts of the United States. The salvation of these souls is precious. The happiness of the rising generation and the order and stability of civil government are most effectually advanced by the

* E. P. Parker, *Historical Discourse on Missionary Society of Connecticut*. (Hartford, 1888.) Parker, *Historical Discourse*, 13.