



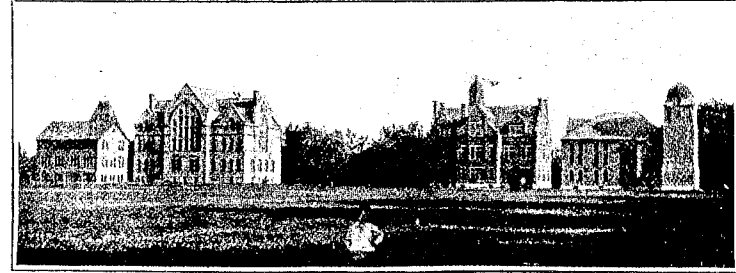
George A. Gates, 1887-1900



George Frederick Magoun, 1865-1884

PRESIDENTS OF IOWA COLLEGE

CHAPTER XIV



IOWA COLLEGE

THE home missionary is not only bold in his plans, but it is curious to see how, as by instinct, his plans run in certain directions. Given a Puritan descent, a Yankee training and a sanctified culture in New England institutions, and one may know beforehand, as to certain things, at least, what he will be doing when first put into a new and Western field.

“If each one of us can only plant one good permanent church, and all together build a college, what a work that would be!” So said one of the Band, as they were contemplating their Western work. So, too, those already in the field had been thinking; for, at the close of one of the first meetings held at Denmark after the arrival of the Band, they were invited

to tarry a few moments to listen to plans for founding a college. A little surprised were they, and not a little gratified.

Here was the beginning of Iowa College. Thus far back in home missions in Iowa must we go for its inception.²⁵ This mere seed, as it germinates, takes root, springs up and grows, will develop still further workers, workings and results. Like many another Western college that is now a power and glory in the land, it took its start out of prayer and toil in the days of pioneer missionary labor. It strikes its roots back into the faith and self-denial of the early churches, taught by the ministers to water it with their prayers and their gifts; of its early teachers and professors, too, who consented to nurture it as a part of mission work, and one involving in those days no less of self-denial and toil than any other. These are features in this institution, which, thank God, have not yet died out. To present a true view of this college, especially of its earlier history, will help to bind it anew to the affections of its friends and may recommend it to the confidence of those whom God has enabled, and who love, to endow such institutions. It may inspire the feeling that an institution so planted and nurtured must have the blessing of the Lord within it.

But to draw the picture with each color and shading true to facts and experience is another of those things that by no human possibility can ever be done.

²⁵ Note No. 11.

From recollection and records a few things only can be given. After the meeting alluded to, nothing was done till the following spring.

March 12, 1844, a meeting of ministers and others "interested in founding a college" was held at Denmark, of course, for this was at that day the center of all things. The plan proposed and approved was to find a tract of land subject to entry, in some good location, obtain funds for its purchase, and then sell it out in parcels at an advanced price to settlers favorable to the object; thus securing an endowment for the institution and a community in which it might prosper. A suitable location, therefore, was the first object. A committee²⁶ of exploration was appointed, with power, when ready to report, to call another meeting. The call was issued for April 16, 1844, and embraced the Congregational and New School Presbyterian ministers in the territory, the most of whom were in attendance. So favorable was the report of the committee, and so unanimously were all previous plans approved, that the brethren resolved themselves at once into an association, under the title of "Iowa College Association," with suitable rules and regulations, and appointed Asa Turner as agent to go immediately to the East to obtain the necessary funds with which to pay for the land, agreeing by formal resolution to defray his expenses from their own scanty resources.

²⁶ I. A. Reed, chairman.

It would not be of interest to mention in detail the precise date and circumstances of each successive meeting in respect to the enterprise thus started. It is sufficient to say that this College Association took charge of it, until, in due time, it was committed to a board of Trustees empowered to fill its own vacancies, and add to its own number. The two denominations named were represented in due proportion in this board, and continued to be so represented, until, in process of time, from causes affecting their relations to each other in the country at large, the practical interest of the Presbyterian brethren in the institution diminished, and they gradually withdrew from its councils. Thus the college came to be exclusively, as in point of interest and support it mainly had been from the first, the foster-child of the Congregationalists: and as such its history will be given.

The agent, of whose appointment we have spoken, repaired at once to the East, going directly to Boston. But he was not to succeed. The College Society, so called for the sake of brevity, had just been formed, with a view to systematizing and regulating appeals at the East in behalf of Western colleges.

Its friends, at a called meeting,²⁷ disapproved of the plans of the agent, and recommended that a good location should be first secured, the best for a college, irrespective of other considerations: that donations should be called for outright, a beginning be made,

²⁷ For minutes of that meeting see Appendix II.

and that the institution trust to the patronage of the Society and of friends whose liberal endowments could eventually be secured. It seemed like losing a grand opportunity, but the agent returned. The Western brethren, with some reluctance, yet cordially, yielded to the judgment of their Eastern friends, some of whom had had experience in the West.

What the result would have been had their own plans been carried out, it is impossible, of course, to tell; but, as they look now at one of the most flourishing inland towns of the state, upon one of our principal railroads, with its water-power, its timber, and its prairie, filled and surrounded by an enterprising population, right where it was proposed to purchase the college lands, they are wont to say to each other, "That is where we talked of starting our college; that is where, with a few dollars, we might once have started and endowed it."²⁸ What would have been the outcome of a beginning there on the plan proposed, we do not know. There might have been success; there might have been failure. One thing is certain: the plan actually adopted involved beginning at the very lowest round of the ladder, whence every step upward was of necessity by the hardest."

The thing was first to get a location — a location for a college, without a dime besides, a cent even, or a promise, save as there was faith in prayer and toil. In a year or two, the minds of all were agreed upon

²⁸ Independence, Buchanan Co.

a point, which, at that day, for ease of access and beauty of situation, stood forth without a rival. In 1846 it was voted to locate at Davenport, "provided the citizens would raise fourteen hundred dollars, and provide certain specified grounds for a location." Each individual, moreover, was to raise, if possible, one hundred dollars among his Eastern friends, or elsewhere. A board of trustees was at this time elected.

This was the beginning of work, and much hard work, with slow progress. The next year, in 1847, it was found that the citizens of Davenport had pledged thirteen hundred and sixty-two dollars and thirteen lots: otherwise little had been accomplished. The proposed location was secured, and instructions given "to plan and erect a building, which shall be a permanent college building, in good taste, and which, when enclosed, shall not exceed in cost the sum of two thousand dollars."

One may smile at the idea of a permanent college building in good taste, within the cost, when enclosed, of two thousand dollars: but that was a day of small things; and where even this amount was to come from, none could tell. The trustees and members of the College Association pledged themselves to make up any deficiency there might be, not over six hundred dollars, — a resolution to this effect having been unanimously adopted, and signed by each one present. Such was the care taken that all liabilities



Preserved Wood Carter,
First large Donor



Prof. Erastus Ripley,
First Principal and Professor



Prof. Leonard Fletcher Parker,
Professor since 1856



Josiah Bushnell Grinnell,
Founder of Grinnell

IOWA COLLEGE PIONEER HELPERS

should be seasonably provided for, and no debts incurred. The building was erected, and the bills paid.

In November, 1848, a school was opened, under the charge of the Rev. E. Ripley, elected as professor of languages, with a salary of five hundred dollars a year. There were appropriate opening exercises, including an address and dedicatory prayer. It was a windy, wintry day. Not many were present, but a few were there, with hearts full of gratitude to God for all success hitherto in the enterprise wherein by faith was seen a college for Iowa. As the brethren met together in their homes, as they came to their annual association, they began to say "our college." They had need to say it; for contingent expenses, salary, etc., far exceeded the amounts received for tuition. Besides, improvements must be made, and more teachers employed.

Here began the years of anxiety and labor — teachers toiling, trustees planning, and the executive committee trying to execute, meeting often, with much to be done, but never able to do it. When they could do nothing else, they could at least pray. So they worked and prayed and worked. Every year, as the churches came together in their annual association, the story of the college was told, its wants rehearsed, and their prayers and alms besought. This was not without response.²⁹

In 1849 there were subscribed for it four hundred

²⁹ Note 12.

and forty-two dollars and sixty-five cents — all but four of the subscribers being ministers; and the minutes of that year show the whole number of ministers to have been twenty-one. In 1850, at the meeting of the association in Dubuque, there were reported, besides the preparatory department, twenty-eight students in Latin, eight in Greek. There, too, it was told how the baptism of the Spirit had been sent down upon the infant college as the seal of God's approval. There, also, was reported the first noonday prayer-meeting of the students — a meeting, which, with little interruption, has been kept up to this day, while many succeeding revivals have been enjoyed. As the old tale of pecuniary embarrassment was there told, hearts were opened for relief, and four hundred and fifty dollars were pledged. In the minutes of that meeting it stands recorded that "the wives, also, of the ministers, anxious to share in the enterprise of founding this college, resolved to raise a hundred dollars out of their own resources; and seventy dollars were subscribed by fourteen persons who were present." "It was a great sum then," said one of them, years afterwards; "it was a great sum then, five dollars, but I managed to pay it."

So it went on for years afterwards. In 1852 a hundred and fifty-three dollars were raised; in 1853, seven hundred and eleven dollars. In this year came the first decided help from abroad — the donation from Deacon P. W. Carter of Waterbury, Connecti-

cut, of five thousand and eighty dollars. It seemed a great sum. The interest of this, and the aid which the College Society began to give, together with the avails of our own efforts, would have given relief, only that increasing wants kept pace with increasing means.⁸⁰

New professorships were established from time to time, till, in 1855, there were four professors.⁸¹ By this time the original site had been abandoned, a new one of ten acres secured, and an elegant stone building, with a boarding-house, erected upon it. This change was caused by the persistence of the city authorities of Davenport in thrusting a street through the grounds first occupied. The second site chosen was divided and injured in the same way. About this time the institution was unfortunate in trusts reposed in one of its officers. As the state settled up, there were prejudices in the interior against a river location for an institution of learning; and the feeling began to prevail that, among the people of the place, it did not have so congenial a home as it ought.

As the result of these combined circumstances, it was decided, in 1858, to sell out, and seek for a new site. God, in his providence, had one in preparation. A few years previous, in the heart of the state, a colony had settled with the express purpose of establishing, and at the outset had made provision for,

⁸⁰ Note 13.

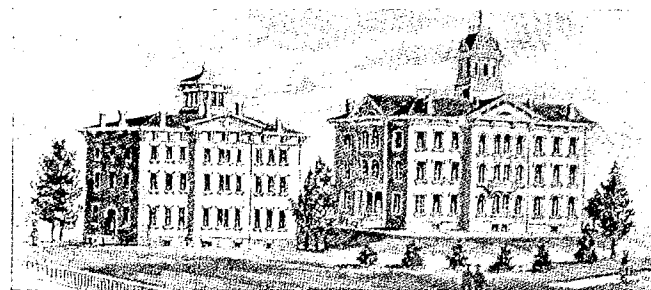
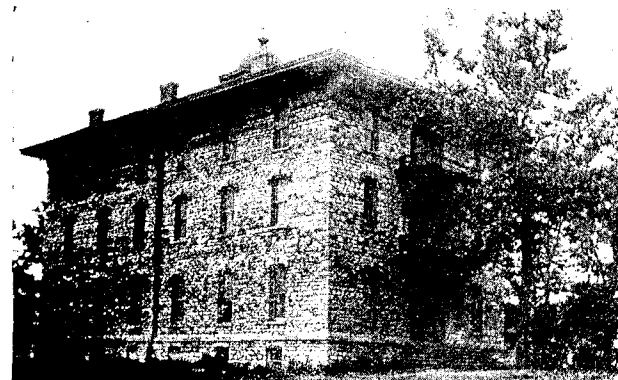
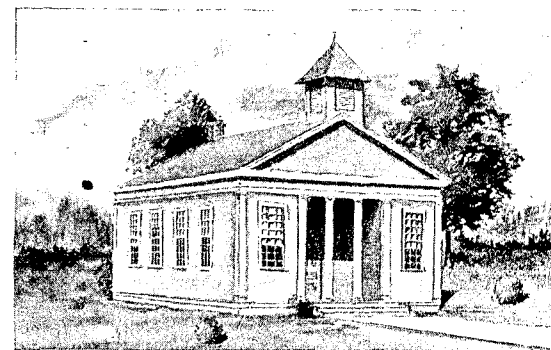
⁸¹ Note 14.

an institution of learning. Here a school had already been commenced. After due thought and much prayer, it was concluded, with the general approval of all parties interested, that the fountain opened by the Father of Waters should be united with the rill of the prairies. Accordingly, from 1859, Grinnell, Iowa, has been the seat of Iowa College.

We will not follow its history in detail for the next ten years. There are two noble college buildings in an area of twenty-two acres, to which the verdure of growing shade-trees adds increasing beauty from year to year. The location is on the border of a village whose pride is the college. The intelligence, morality and affectionate good will of the people make it a fit place for the education of the sons and daughters of Iowa.³² The names of two hundred and ninety of them are found enroled as members of the institution during the past year, more than half of whom are in the collegiate and preparatory departments.

There are eight instructors — the president, four professors, a principal of the preparatory department, a principal of the ladies' department, and one tutor. In the library there are over four thousand volumes, besides the smaller libraries of the literary societies of the college. The apparatus, though far from what it should be, is yet sufficient to illustrate the principles of natural philosophy, chemistry and astronomy;

³² In it there has never been a saloon, and, if title deeds can prevent, there never can be,



First College Building at Davenport
Second College Building at Davenport
Iowa College, Grinnell, before the Cyclone in 1882
BEGINNINGS OF IOWA COLLEGE

while admirable collections have already been made in mineralogy, zoology, botany, etc., which are arranged in a cabinet of rare attraction and taste. On the walls of the college library are the portraits of Carter and Williston, as among the chief donors to the college. The names of Grimes, Ames, Dodge, Richards, Merrill, Butler and Barstow may be fitly recorded here, as of those who have largely contributed to its funds; and perhaps others not known to the writer are equally deserving of mention.

The college property, in the aggregate, now amounts to one hundred and sixty thousand dollars, more than half of which is productive. The list of graduates is not long; but they are already scattered over the land, occupying honorable positions in the various professions. The resources of the institution are as yet by no means ample. Its facilities must increase from year to year, to meet the growing demands upon it; but beholding it now, and calling to mind how hard it was to get together the two thousand dollars for the first humble building, remembering how the seed was sown, and by the nurture of what prayer and toil it has grown, the contrast is indeed pleasing. Grateful always is the memory of labors past, where results in the form of abounding fruits are seen.

Before closing this pleasing review, another reference may not be amiss to him in whose first endowment, in part, of the Carter professorship there was

such courage and cheer. It was the pleasing privilege of the writer to receive a portion of that gift at his own hands, and in his own home. He was a plain man, and his home of the olden stamp, somewhat old-fashioned in its air, but ample in comfort, without extravagance or display. Riding about the village one afternoon, in the old family carriage, he reined up his horse where a townsman was building a residence of great elegance and cost. Surveying it for a moment, "There," said he, "I might take my money, and build me a house just like that; but then, if I should, I should not have it to give to Iowa College." It showed that he had considered the question, and made his choice. Who will say, as he looks at Iowa College to-day, and thinks of him as having passed from earth, that the choice was not a good one?

O ye whom God has blessed with fortunes that are ample, now is the time of your choosing. If you wish to turn a portion of your means into some permanent, mighty power, that shall work for Christ in this and the ages to come, how more surely or better can you do it than to help to build in this Western land some Christian college? The tongues of missionaries and pastors sooner or later shall be silent in death; teachers change; but endowments in these Christian colleges will work on, work ever.