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"THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN ELLIS  
ON EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS"

RAWLS











THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN ELLIS

ON EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS

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BY

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## PREFACE

To the frontier state of Illinois in 1825 came a young missionary from New Hampshire. He had pledged his life to the task of bringing the word of God and the light of education to a people far removed from the established institutions and the cultural amenities taken for granted in the East. Largely ignored by the older states east of the Alleghenies, unaware of their growing importance to the nation as their numbers increased, these people struggled to build their homes and raise their children in a vast and often cruel country, with little money or incentive for personal improvement. To make these citizens of the United States cognizant of their responsibilities, to persuade them to abandon the crude frontier existence for a more civilized, settled, and enlightened way of life, was the task of John Ellis.

The intent of this paper is twofold: first, to demonstrate, by using John Ellis as an example, that a sincere, dedicated, visionary man can have a lasting influence upon a community and can help to determine its shape, the thing it will become; and second, to enable the reader to glimpse, through the writings of Ellis and his associates, a little of their hopes and aspirations, and something of the life of that time. The author has attempted to use, in so far as possible, letters and manuscripts written by the men who aided Ellis in his undertaking or who knew him and his character. Background information, and some details of Ellis's difficulties and accomplishments, had to



be taken from secondary accounts because of the lack of available primary material.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Donald Tingley, my advisor, for his interest, encouragement, and suggestions. May I also thank Mrs. Marguerite Pease and her staff of the Illinois State Historical Survey, and the personnel of Illinois College, all of whom gave generously of their time to aid me in my research. Mr. Robert Wiseman of Eastern Illinois University helped me with the technical aspects of the research. The major part of my gratitude, however, I reserve for my husband, without whose understanding, assistance, prodding, and above all, infinite patience, this paper never would have been written.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On the evening of September 29, 1825, in Old South Church, Boston, three recent graduates of Andover Theological Seminary were ordained as ministers in the Congregational church. One of these new ministers was John Millot Ellis, who was to play a major role in the cause of education and religion in the frontier state of Illinois.<sup>1</sup>

The ordination ceremony had an even greater consequence than permitting John Ellis to take his place among the missionaries laboring in the West. Several of the guests attending the ceremony formed a committee to consider the advisability of expanding their organization, the United Domestic Missionary Society (under whose auspices Ellis began his missionary work), into a national structure which could more effectively minister to the frontier settlements. The committee's favorable report resulted in the formation of the American Home Missionary Society, composed of representatives from the Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and Associate Reformed churches, with Congregational and Presbyterian members predominating. The new organization determined to operate in the same manner as had

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<sup>1</sup>David Dimond, "Mémoir of the Rev. John M. Ellis" (n.p., ca. 1859, in the files of the Illinois State Historical Society Library, Springfield, Illinois), p. 2; Colin Brumitt Goodykoontz, Home Missions on the American Frontier (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1939), p. 177.





its predecessor, which had given financial aid to new and struggling pioneer churches in order that each church could have its own full-time or part-time minister. This method was considered superior to sending out missionaries on tour, because it was felt that whatever good effect the itinerant missionary produced was lost before his next visit could occur. The Presbyterians and Congregationalists, being less emotional than many of the other Protestant denominations, believed that a religious declaration of faith made under the emotional stress of a preacher's exhortation might not be genuine; the settled pastor, ministering quietly but continually to his flock, would create a more lasting and authentic belief.<sup>2</sup>

The American Home Missionary Society received its support through affiliates in the New England and North Atlantic states. The idea of its founders had been to coordinate and make more efficient the efforts of several local groups of missionary aid societies; while it did not mean to supplant the smaller groups, it did hope that the money collected by them, over and above their local needs, would be submitted to the A. H. M. S. for distribution to men in the field. Not only was this the more practical procedure, they felt, but such a united effort would increase the public's interest in home missions and result in increased donations.<sup>3</sup> In this assumption the directors were correct. Within eight years

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<sup>2</sup>Jerald C. Brauer, Protestantism in America (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 140-141; Coodykoontz, pp. 177-178 and 181-182.

<sup>3</sup>Coodykoontz, p. 179.



after its founding the Society had 606 missionaries placed in 801 congregations and districts.<sup>4</sup> Much of the enthusiasm for home mission aid by people in the East, demonstrated in their generous support of the Society, can be attributed to a growing awareness of the importance of the frontier country, the rapidity with which its population was increasing, and the magnitude of the task of getting Christian influence (particularly of their own denominations) into so many new communities.<sup>5</sup>

The primary purpose of the American Home Missionary Society, stated in its first report, was "to send out well qualified ministers to our frontier settlements, with instructions to gather new congregations, and labour as they may find opportunity, until with the choice and cooperation of the people, they may become permanently established . . . ."<sup>6</sup> A western church desiring assistance made application to the Society, giving facts about its location, financial ability, and qualifications of the minister it wanted to engage. The local church was expected to contribute as much as three-fourths of its pastor's salary, with the Society making up the balance. The usually salary for a man with a family in a western community was \$400, but the churches often failed to contribute their share of this sum, with the result that the Society either

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<sup>4</sup>Brauer, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup>J. M. Sturtevant, Theron Baldwin (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1875), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Coodykoontz, p. 181.



had to increase its portion or the ministers had to reduce their standard of living. The Society was strict in its requirement that the local church meet its pledge unless good reason for the default could be shown; however, since much of the salary the minister received from his church was in produce or goods of some kind, a strict accounting was often impossible, and the Society, by one means or another, was called upon to supplement its one-fourth share.<sup>7</sup>

Each missionary in the field was required by the Society to submit a quarterly report, dealing with his activities, membership growth in his church, the religious attitude of the people in the community, and the prospects for establishing new churches in the area or increasing the size of those already formed. When the report was received by the home office, a draft was issued which permitted the missionary to draw upon funds placed to his credit for services rendered.<sup>8</sup> The activities expected of each missionary were many and varied. The A. H. M. S. instructions to them stated, "Although the preaching of the gospel holds the first and highest

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<sup>7</sup>Letters from John Ellis to the Corresponding Secretary, American Home Missionary Society Papers, originals in the Library of the Congregational Theological Seminary, now attached to the University of Chicago, photostats in the Illinois State Historical Survey, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois (hereafter referred to as A. H. M. S. MSS). A. H. M. S. papers referred to in this paper are reports from missionaries to the officers of the Society; hence only the name of the writer and the place and date of writing will be given. See also Goodykoontz, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup>Josephine Alice McCinty, "Some Social and Economic Conditions in Illinois, 1840-1845, as Shown in the Correspondence of the American Home Missionary Society" (unpublished Master's thesis, Graduate School, University of Illinois, 1935), p. ii; letters from John Ellis, A. H. M. S. MSS.



place in . . . the ministerial office, yet there are a variety of subordinate measures, which . . . require the diligent attention of every pastor and every missionary." The ministers were urged to organize Sabbath Schools and Bible classes, to encourage education, to promote interest in foreign and home missions, and to foster the temperance movement.<sup>9</sup>

Upon one matter the Society was adamant; no missionary could engage in secular activities in order to earn money. As this restriction applied even to farming, it served to work a great hardship upon many ministers whose congregations did not fulfill their pledges or who lived in an area where the cost of food and goods was higher than average. The Society, however, felt that the missionary's dignity would be lessened and his pastoral duties made less effective were he to devote part of his time to other than church activities.<sup>10</sup> Many of the western settlers obviously did not agree with this practice. John Brich, a Presbyterian missionary serving near Jacksonville, Illinois, wrote to the A. H. M. S. that it was especially difficult for Presbyterian ministers to collect money from their parishioners, because the prevalent belief was that these pastors would "do nothing for Religion, . . . the benefit of the Souls of men, except they . . . receive the best part of the Fleece, or their mouths are opened by a Silver Leaver [sic] . . ."; and should the missionary receive some aid from a society in the East in order to

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<sup>9</sup>Brauer, p. 142.

<sup>10</sup>Goodykoontz, p. 185.





perform his duties, then the people considered that he was "making Merchandise of the Gospel."<sup>11</sup>

Although the men employed by the A. H. M. S. were on the whole well educated, and although the Society was cognizant of the need for education on the frontier and wanted its agents to promote this cause, the missionaries were discouraged even from teaching in addition to their pastoral duties, except insofar as the teaching directly related to the proclaiming of the gospel. In spite of many complaints about the hardships suffered by the ministers because of these restrictions, the Society did not change its policy, and urged its men not only to make their own churches self-supporting, but to collect money for foreign missions and for the support of other area churches.<sup>12</sup>

Disregarding in their zeal for service the many hardships, both physical and mental, which they were to suffer, many young eastern ministers journeyed to the west with commissions from the A. H. M. S. in the years following its formation. One of the most important of these men, in his effect upon the introduction of education into Illinois, was John Ellis.

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<sup>11</sup>John Brich, near Jacksonville, February 6, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>12</sup>Goodykoontz, pp. 183, 186; letters from John Ellis, A. H. M. S. MSS.



## CHAPTER II

### EARLY LIFE

John Millot Ellis was born in Keene, New Hampshire, on July 14, 1793. His grandfather, Colonel Timothy Ellis, had helped to settle that part of New Hampshire and had been an active participant in the Revolution. John's father, Millot, was a relatively prosperous farmer and a pious man much interested in religion. John's mother was equally religious, and the children were raised strictly and with much attention to their moral welfare. Not until he was fourteen, however, did John become a professed Christian, one of the few boys his age or older in the community who openly accepted church membership and discipline. From that time on John evidenced a great interest in religious matters, spending much of his free time with adults discussing Biblical passages and theological interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

After some preliminary schooling in the town of Keene, Ellis hired out as a tanner's apprentice. He bought out the last year of his apprenticeship in order to go into the tanner's business for himself and became moderately successful, with prospects for an even more profitable future. After spending only a short time in business, however, he determined that he was wasting his life, and that his

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Henry Rammelkamp, Illinois College: A Centennial History, 1829-1929 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), p. 1; "Ellis, (Rev.) John Millot," Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois, ed. Newton Bateman and Paul Selby (Chicago: Mansell Publishing Company, 1906), p. 157; and Diamond, p. 1.



real vocation was the ministry. His decision to prepare for the ministry meant that he had to return to school for many more years of training. He first attended Meriden Academy in New Hampshire, then went on to Dartmouth College, from which he was graduated in 1822 and where he made a good, if not spectacular, record. He received his theological training at Andover Seminary, an orthodox Congregationalist school which had been established in 1805.<sup>2</sup>

During his senior year at Andover he became acquainted with a group of ministerial students who were advancing the idea of a national missionary society, one which would "have no sectional interests,--no local prejudices,--no party animosities,--no sectarian views . . . ." and which would "produce a new feeling of brotherhood, and thus bind us all together by a new cord of union." Another purpose of the new society would be to place educated and cultured men in new settlements where their influence could make a lasting impression upon the development of the area.<sup>3</sup> Ellis, whose first inclination had been to go into the foreign mission service, now began to question where his life and effort could be spent most profitably for the advancement of the church. Near the end of his theological training he wrote his father regarding this problem, saying, "The question is, now and where can I spend the short period of my life most for the good of the Church, most for the glory of Him who

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<sup>2</sup>Franklin D. Scott, "The Organization of the First Presbyterian Church in Morgan County," Illinois State Historical Society Journal, XVIII (April, 1925), p. 22; Diamond, p. 2; and Ramselkamp, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>John Maltby, "Connection between Domestic Missions and the Political Prospects of Our Country," in Congregational Home Missionary Society papers, quoted in Coodykoontz, p. 177.



redeemest God?" After much deliberation Ellis decided that he could be more effective by serving as a home missionary. A later letter to his father explains this decision as well as illustrating Ellis' thinking on the importance of the western country:

Our western country, with a population of three million and increasing so fast that it shall double in four years, is very destitute of established institutions of the Gospel, and yet it will, in a very few years, have a governing voice in our national councils; and then what will become of our happy country--this heritage left to us by our pious ancestry, and which piety alone can preserve . . . . but increase the moral power of America, and we shall do much for effecting the conversion of the heathen. I am persuaded that I have the prospect of contributing to the Gospel in India more effectively by laboring in this country, and this partly in view of my own situation and partly in view of America's moral power, and raise up friends to missions, for the conversion of the world."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly before his graduation from Andover Ellis applied to the United Domestic Missionary Society for a commission as one of their missionaries. He was accepted, and following his ordination on September 29, 1825, he was given one hundred dollars for his expenses and sent to the Mississippi River area near St. Louis. Ellis was not assigned a definite location, but the Society expected him to find a place where he could be almost completely supported by contributions from his congregation.<sup>5</sup> He arrived in the St. Louis area after a six-weeks journey and immediately contacted the Rev. Salmon Giddings, a Presbyterian minister who was based in St. Louis

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<sup>4</sup>Dimond, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Dimond, p. 3.





but had been instrumental in founding several churches on both sides of the Mississippi. Mr. Giddings was most anxious that Ellis take over a faltering congregation in Kaskaskia, an old French town on the Illinois side of the Mississippi across from St. Louis, and it was in this territory that Ellis labored for the next eighteen months.<sup>6</sup>

When Ellis arrived in Kaskaskia in December of 1825, Illinois had been a state just seven years. Although Americans had been settling in the territory since shortly after George Rogers Clark captured it from the British in 1778, the state's population in 1825 probably numbered not more than 100,000 persons.<sup>7</sup> Most of these had settled along the rivers in the southern part of the state and were composed mainly of immigrants from Kentucky, Tennessee, or the southwestern states. A large majority of these newcomers were small farmers whose land in the South had been purchased to enlarge the prosperous plantations after the cotton gin made raising cotton more profitable. Unable to compete with slave labor, they sold their farms and emigrated northward. These people, for the most part, were not only hostile to the "Yankees" who were beginning to settle the

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<sup>6</sup>Donald Fred Tingley, "Religion in Frontier Illinois 1787-1828" (unpublished Master's thesis, Graduate School, University of Illinois, 1947), pp. 78-79; John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, December 29, 1825, in A. H. M. S. MSS. In this letter, the first from his new station, Ellis remarked upon the difficulties he had encountered in recrossing the Mississippi River from Missouri to Illinois. An early cold spell had resulted in choking the river with "immense" quantities of ice, "which were born irresistibly along its rapid current," forcing Ellis to travel far downstream in order to make the crossing to Kaskaskia.

<sup>7</sup>Edward P. Kirby, "The Organization and History of Illinois College," Illinois State Historical Library Publication, VII (1902), p. 41.



central and northern parts of Illinois, but were suspicious of anything which was related to "'book-learning,' 'pay preachers,' 'Bible schools,' 'written sermons,'" and "education for the masses." New England missionaries, who were outspoken in their anti-slavery sentiments and who advocated the establishment of colleges and theological seminaries, were universally disliked and their religious views mistrusted.<sup>8</sup>

Ellis commented about the people in the Mississippi Valley area, "None are rich--few can be said to be independent [sic]. The people widely scattered over a vast surface--few villages and of these scarcely one is flourishing--many decaying and decayed." Some of the new settlements in the upper part of the state were more prosperous, he stated, but the established towns showed no signs of progress. To the south of Kaskaskia one could perceive "little or nothing delightful, or hopeful to the eye of the philanthropist, the Christian, or the patriot, nor will in all probability for many years to come."<sup>9</sup>

Many of the immigrants, both from the South and from the Northeast, remained in one location only long enough to get money to move on to another place. This migratory tendency of the popu-

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<sup>8</sup>Frank J. Heintz, "Congregationalism in Jacksonville and Earl, Illinois," Illinois State Historical Society Journal, XXVII, pp. 381-382, quoted in William Irvine Blair, The Presbyterian Synods of Illinois (Mattoon, Illinois: Mattoon Presbytery, 1952), p. 24; Everts Boutell Greene, Pioneers of Civilization in Illinois (n.p.: Illinois State Reformatory Print., n.d.), p. 7; and McGinty, pp. 3-4.

<sup>9</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, June 21, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



lation made the missionary's work doubly difficult, both from the standpoint of getting to know the people in the area and trying to establish a more or less permanent congregation. As the influx of immigration increased after 1825 and the population became more stable, these particular problems of the man of God lessened, but he still had to battle the materialistic attitude of most of the settlers, together with their innate distrust of Eastern organizations and their proneness to view the missionary as a "symbol of unpleasant ideas and institutions."<sup>10</sup>

Ellis was the fourth Presbyterian minister to settle in Illinois, (the others being located in Morgan, Wabash, and Gallatin counties), although by 1825 thirteen Presbyterian churches had been established within the borders of the state.<sup>11</sup> The Methodists, with their system of circuit riders, lay preachers, and camp meetings, were much more successful in gaining members and establishing congregations before 1825 than were the Presbyterians. This was a matter of much chagrin to Ellis, who acknowledged that the Methodist ministers were exceedingly popular and industrious, but accused them of being more "intent on making Methodists than Christians" and attributed their popularity to the fact that they were deeply involved with state politics. Ellis bitterly denounced what he considered the

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<sup>10</sup>Goodykoontz, pp. 23-24.

<sup>11</sup>Augustus Theodore Norton, History of the Presbyterian Church in Illinois (St. Louis: W. S. Bryan, Publisher, 1873), pp. 18-136, passim, quoted in Blair, pp. 9-10; Kirby, p. 41.



Methodist circuit riders' concern for secular matters, accusing them of spending more time on electioneering than on their rightful business. "It would distress your heart to witness the . . . religion of Jesus made the mere underworker of political men and measures. Yet there is here no corrected public sentiment to set against this sacrilegious custom."<sup>12</sup>

The Baptists, like the Presbyterians, attempted to establish permanent congregations, each with its own pastor. The fact that they gained in numbers more rapidly than the Presbyterians can probably be attributed to the fact that they did not insist upon a trained and educated ministry, but made extensive use of lay preachers whose ministry was more of an avocation than a vocation. Until the arrival in Illinois in 1822 of John Mason Peck,<sup>13</sup> the founder of Rock Spring Academy which later became Shurtleff College, the Baptist ministers were unschooled and their congregations unconnected, which led to some bizarre beliefs in the individual groups and schisms among the Illinois Baptists as a whole. As the level of educational background rose with the later immigrants, the lay Baptist preachers were forced to move into more sparsely settled regions, making way

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<sup>12</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, Illinois, June 21, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>13</sup>Peck is supposed to have remarked of all the early missionaries, "About one-third were men of strong character and native ability and did efficient service; another third were ignorant and untrained, men of whom the most that could be said was that they did no harm; but the remaining third were a positive injury to the cause of religion." Thomas D. Logan, Historical Sermon on the Occasion of the First Presbyterian Church at Springfield, Illinois (n.p.: n.d., in the files of the First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois), p. 5.





for an educated, less emotional cadre of baptist professional personnel.<sup>14</sup>

The Presbyterians had begun organized missionary activities in 1799, spreading their efforts among frontier communities, older regions without established churches, Indians, and Negroes.<sup>15</sup> A Presbyterian minister, John Evans Finley, spent a short time in Illinois as early as 1797, and in 1812 and 1814 Presbyterian missionary organizations sent out representatives on a sort of census tour through the entire western country. The report from 1812 stated that although many Presbyterians had settled in the Illinois country, there was not a single Presbyterian or Congregational minister in the territory. The resident Presbyterians, the report said, were anxious to get ministers of their own denomination, and also wanted to be sent literature from the Bible and tract societies. The 1814 exploration group carried with them hundreds of Bibles and tract publications (some in French), which they distributed with the aid of Governor Edwards.<sup>16</sup> The Presbyterians were less successful in establishing churches than in disseminating literature, no doubt because of their total attitude toward missionary work. Not only did they insist upon an educated ministry serving an established church

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<sup>14</sup>Theodore Calvin Pease, The Frontier State, 1818-1848 ("The Centennial History of Illinois," vol. II; Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1919), pp. 92-93; Randall Parrish, Historic Illinois; The Romance of the Earlier Days (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1906), p. 396; and Hingley, pp. 59, 74.

<sup>15</sup>William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religions in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), pp. 353-354.

<sup>16</sup>Goodykoontz, pp. 139-142; Logan, p. 6; Blair, pp. 7-8; and Parrish, p. 397.



and administering the sacraments regularly, but they followed the practice of forming churches in areas where Presbyterians had already settled. The Methodists and Baptists, on the other hand, preached to any and all alike, and did not restrict their activities to members of their own denominations.<sup>17</sup>

By determining to conduct his ministry in the West rather than in the East, John Ellis changed his religious affiliation from Congregational to Presbyterian. In 1801 a Plan of Union had been adopted by these two denominations, which, in order to eliminate competition and waste in the home mission field, provided that Congregational and Presbyterian settlers could combine to form a new church, engaging a minister of either denomination and determining their affiliation according to the wishes of a majority of the congregation. In practice the Plan worked to the advantage of the Presbyterians, whose denominational spirit was more assertive than that of the Congregationalists, and whose system of presbyteries provided fellowship and communion with like-minded men for the lonely missionary. In addition, many Congregationalists felt that their type of organization was not adaptable to frontier communities, a belief which led the American Home Missionary Society to suggest to its agents that they receive Presbyterian ordination before leaving for the West.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence of the Plan, all the churches in

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<sup>17</sup>Blair, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup>Sweet, pp. 397-309; Goodykoontz, pp. 149-151; and Pease, p. 94.



early Illinois receiving aid from the American Home Missionary Society were Presbyterian in organization and were affiliated with local presbyteries.

In his letters from Kaskaskia Ellis continually stressed the need for more Presbyterian missionaries in the area, together with aid for the struggling frontier churches from the wealthier churches in the East. He explained that by the time the settlers had financed their journeys to Illinois, and had purchased property and had built their homes, little cash remained for extras such as public buildings, school, places of worship, or the support of a minister. "O much indulged Churches in the land of altars and Sabbaths," he pleaded, "Freely have ye received, freely give!"<sup>19</sup> Although he claimed not to regret having "withdrawn our eyes from the comfortable settlements & salaries & consecrated altars & well regulated churches of the East," he was shocked and disappointed by the conditions which he found in the Kaskaskia region. The church which he was sent to take over had almost completely disintegrated; what little remnant remained was torn by political animosities. Ellis found little Christian influence in the area; "wealth & public offices are the reigning deities of the West." He was lonely without the fellowship of other ministers, and felt that the people had no conception of the especial needs of a minister. The conduct of the population on the Sabbath horrified him; as soon as mass or church services were over, the people occupied the rest of the day with "riding, fishing, visiting,

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<sup>19</sup>Dimond, p. 4.



dining, dancing, card playing, parties, and billiards."<sup>20</sup> He was particularly irritated on the two Sabbaths when the circus was playing in town. The owner of the circus had boasted that he would attract attention by blowing a bugle just at the conclusion of church services. "He did so, and succeeded. O, never bugle sounded like that bugle; I was preaching within hearing to my little congregation." Even the people from New England had been corrupted by the Sabbath conduct of the older residents, Ellis lamented. "Brothers, we have no Sabbath at the West. It is all lost in coming here. If anything of it remains it quickly falls off in the easy current of degeneracy-- a wide and sweeping stream overflowing all its banks."<sup>21</sup>

As early as January, 1827, Ellis suggested to the A. H. M. S. that they use the itinerant missionary system, similar to the Methodist circuit rider plan, at least temporarily. Missionaries were needed to visit regularly the little churches which had no minister of their own, to set up Sunday Schools, and to acquaint the people with the advantages of Presbyterianism. The three permanently settled ministers could not handle this additional labor,<sup>22</sup> but without attention of some kind Ellis feared that many of the more distant churches would be visited rarely, if at all, and many new settlements would never see a Presbyterian minister. Itinerating would be of special advantage to a new

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<sup>21</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, December 29, 1825, January 10, 1827, and August 7, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>22</sup>Ellis listed his regular duties as conducting services twice on each Sabbath, holding adult and female Bible classes on Monday, attending concert Wednesday evening, offering youth Bible classes on Saturday, and approximately once each week preaching from five to twenty miles out in the country. He added, "And yet I have calls from abroad which would, if attended to, occupy my whole time and much more." John Ellis, Kaskaskia, May 23, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.





missionary, Ellis claimed, in that he would become acquainted with the people and the country and use this experience when he became permanently located. New locations for churches could be discovered by the itinerating agent, but of primary importance would be the opportunity to organize Sabbath Schools. When Sabbath Schools were properly supervised and directed, Ellis stated, they became "the redeeming angel of the western country." He and many others felt that only Sunday Schools could save the country, because they were the most influential way of acting upon the entire community. But Sunday Schools could not be promoted without the use of itinerant labor. "Old Mass.," Ellis pointed out, "with all her 1,000 ministers is about to employ from 10 to 20 Sunday School Missionaries within her own limits. & Illinois & Missouri not one!" The Methodists had recently organized a Sunday School union, and Ellis argued that they were exerting great efforts to gain control of all the Sunday Schools in the state and to put into use their own literature. If the A. H. M. S. policy could not be modified to permit the use of itinerant missionaries, he pleaded, could they not affiliate with some other organization which would be permitted to make use of this system? The Society, however, decided to maintain its policy of placing men in just one or two communities; it did promise to increase the number of missionaries sent to Illinois.<sup>23</sup>

Toward the end of 1827 Ellis became severely ill and found it impossible to carry on his regular duties. Securing a Brother

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<sup>23</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, January 10, 1827 and May 23, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



Harvy to take his place in the Kaskaskia area, he made a tour of three of the upper counties, Greene, Morgan, and Sangamon. In this area, as in the southern part of the state, he found the need for missionaries imperative, but he was encouraged by the intelligence of the people and by their interest in education. While on this tour he stopped in Springfield and found there a small group of people anxious to form a Presbyterian church. With Ellis's help the Sangamo Presbyterian Church, consisting of twenty members, was organized; this church later became the first Presbyterian Church of Springfield and credits Ellis with its founding, although he never served as its pastor.<sup>24</sup> He mentioned that in the course of his return journey he was forced to swim two creeks with his horse, but he maintained that this was no greater a hardship than all professional men on the frontier were exposed to and pointed out that such hardships were decreasing as the population of the state increased and the roads and bridges were improved. In the spring of 1828 he visited two destitute churches in the Kaskaskia area, and again begged the Society to send more missionaries into the region. The churches without pastors were like "sheep without a shepherd," he claimed, and his occasional visits could do little more than strengthen what lagging interest had managed to survive. The members of these small churches had been praying for aid, he

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<sup>24</sup>Ellis was instrumental in securing for the Sangamo Church its first pastor, the Rev. John G. Bergen, a highly qualified minister from New Jersey, whose strong leadership greatly helped the church's growth. Roger E. Chapin, Ten Ministers; A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, 1828-1953 (n.p.: n.d., in the files of the First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois), p. 10.



wrote, for without a pastor they would "crumble away and perish. What shall we tell these brethren, these bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh? . . ." he cautioned, "send humble unambitious men, or they will do hurt instead of good. Men of apostolic spirit in self-denying labor and suffering." His health, he reported in April, 1828, was still impaired, but he would not consider giving up his work in Illinois. Even if he knew he would be able to labor just half as long in the West as in the East, he said, he would remain in the field.<sup>25</sup>

In July of 1828 Ellis accepted a conditional pastorate at the Presbyterian church in Jacksonville, Illinois. He left Kaskaskia, he explained to the A. H. M. S., partly because of his health and partly because he despaired of the church in Kaskaskia ever being able to support him completely. All the old French river towns, with the exception of St. Louis, were declining, he reported, and the only service a missionary could render there would be to attempt to salvage one or two families from the constantly changing population, "as one would stand upon the bank of the river to save what he could of a wreck which was floating swiftly down the current." In the upper counties (specifically Sangamon, Greene, and Morgan), however, the prospect for worthwhile service was much greater. Their population had doubled in three years and now totaled about 25,000; the climate was far superior to that of the southern part of the state, the soil was rich and the crops bountiful, and the immigrants from the

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<sup>25</sup>John Ellis, Springfield, January 25, 1828 and Kaskaskia, April 1, 1826, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



northeastern states were industrious and enterprising. Steamboats plied the Illinois River, and Ellis was convinced that this section of the state would become one of the most prosperous regions in the whole United States in the near future. With much more enthusiasm than he had ever evidenced during his stay in Kaskaskia, Ellis and his new bride moved to Jacksonville to begin a new and different sort of life.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, July 31, 1828, in A. H. M. S. MSS; Scott, p. 139.





## CHAPTER III

### THE STATE OF EDUCATION

Public education was almost non-existent in Illinois during the time Ellis labored there. The ordinance of 1787, which established the Northwest Territory, had stated a guiding principle: "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Later Congress had provided that one section of land in each township in the Territory be set aside for the support of a public school system, and in addition one or two entire townships in each state were set aside for the support of an institution of higher learning. The Illinois Enabling Act of 1818 had directed that from three to five per cent of the proceeds from the sale of federal land should be utilized "for the encouragement of learning."<sup>1</sup>

Until 1825 the state took no action to establish a public school system. In that year a comprehensive free school law was passed, providing for the creation of school districts and their administration, the levying of taxes upon the inhabitants of the districts, and the allocation of certain state funds to aid these districts which operated their schools at least three months out

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<sup>1</sup>Rammelkamp, p. 4.



of the year. Before this enlightened system could be in operation, however, the legislature crippled it with a modifying act passed in 1827. This later act allowed the voters in a district to require that one-half of the amount necessary to operate the schools be raised by charging fees of those who enrolled pupils; furthermore, no person could be taxed for even one-half the support of the schools unless he first gave his consent. In 1829 the legislature permitted the townships to sell the sections which had been put aside for the use of education, and the rent from which was supposed to be distributed as refund or bonus to the taxpayers. The money raised from the sale of these sections, plus the land which had been allocated for the use of colleges, was to be invested and the interest used to help support the township schools. The state legislature also repealed the section of the 1825 act which had provided that two dollars of every hundred dollars paid the state as taxes be distributed as educational aid.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the acts of 1827 and 1829, free public education in Illinois under state direction and with state aid did not become effective until 1855.<sup>3</sup> A few incorporated communities prior to that time established their own school systems, but the vast majority of those parents who desired educational advantages for their children had to hire tutors or find a private school which

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<sup>2</sup>Ninian W. Edwards, History of Illinois from 1778 to 1833; and Life and Times of Ninian Edwards (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Journal Company, 1870), pp. 195-198.

<sup>3</sup>Centennial Commission, The Centennial of the State of Illinois, A Report Compiled by the Secretary of the Commission (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Journal Company, 1829), p. 214.



could accommodate them. Often several parents in the same locality combined to hire someone with a little learning to instruct their children during the winter season. This "teacher" would draw up a contract, obliging himself to teach a few basic subjects and prescribing the fee he would charge for each student.<sup>4</sup> As the "teacher" was often a man between employments, or a traveler who paused only long enough to earn some money, scarcely any of the schools were permanent in nature, and the education received by the children was not only crude, but spasmodic.<sup>5</sup> Julian M. Sturtevant, the first professor of Illinois College, and later its president for several years, commented that in 1830 probably not one young man in the whole state was qualified to enter the freshman class at Yale College. Under the existing conditions at that time, he foresaw nothing but "ever-multiplying ignorance," with the majority of the children in the state never receiving even the "rudiments of an education." The more enlightened people who were aware of the terrible implications of this situation, Sturtevant said, were too few and too scattered to make any cooperative effort toward an overall improvement and were for the most part extremely discouraged

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<sup>4</sup>The subjects usually taught were spelling, reading, writing, and "arithmetic as far as the double rule of three," and each student was charged between two dollars and three dollars a quarter. The teacher conducted school by having all the students study their lessons aloud at the same time while he heard the recitations of each in turn. Robert W. Patterson, Early Society in Southern Illinois, Lecture read before the Chicago Historical Society, October 19, 1880, pp. 23-24, quoted in Rammekamp, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Julian M. Sturtevant, Julian M. Sturtevant; An Autobiography, ed. J. M. Sturtevant, Jr. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1896), p. 167; Patterson, pp. 23-24, quoted in Rammekamp, pp. 5-6.



that the future would bring a betterment of conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly before departing for Illinois Ellis had a last interview with a respected and devoted friend, Dr. Elias Cornelius. Dr. Cornelius charged the young missionary to "devote your energies to the cause of education in the great valley." This admonition made a great impression upon Ellis, and no sooner had he started his missionary service than he began to emphasize the importance and practicality of a local "seminary of learning."<sup>7</sup> Such a grandiose scheme seemed out of the question for the time being, however, and Ellis devoted as much of his time as possible to promoting education by other means. He was pleased to find more intelligence in the Kaskaskia area than he had anticipated. A Sunday School consisting of "seventy or eighty scholars" had been organized, and a plan for importing Eastern newspapers was greeted with much enthusiasm. Ellis suggested to the American Home Missionary Society that they send newspapers regularly, perhaps placing the matter in the hands of "a committee of ladies." Not only would the newspapers aid in general education, but they would combat the "fatal influences" of a group of Universalists who had a settlement about forty miles away, and who were becoming very successful in making converts through the distribution of their own literature. Ellis firmly believed that if the people were properly informed, the Universalist doctrine would

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<sup>6</sup>Sturtevant, Theron Baldwin, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas A. Lippincott, "Sketch of the Origin and Foundation of Illinois College" (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection, placed on file July 6, 1852; handwritten), p. 3.





not make an impression on them. "Error will not be so dangerous when the mind is properly furnished it with truth; but let the mind be preoccupied with error; let the enemy be established in the citidel [sic], & who can tell how hard it will be to dispossess him."<sup>6</sup>

As he became better acquainted with conditions in the West, Ellis grew more convinced that education was a necessary prerequisite to the elimination of sin among the people and their wholehearted acceptance of the way of life taught by the missionaries. In a letter dated August 7, 1826, he stated:

You can have little hope of seeing a radical, permanent change in the character of the people . . . without giving them a taste for reading and the means of improving it. This you know cannot be done without books--but books they have not. All or most that is done for several years in the way of . . . furnishing the opportunity of reading must be done by the beneficence of our eastern friends--for I have before said that though there is corn enough & meat enough, yet there is almost no money among the people generally. Thus their children do not learn to read . . . .<sup>9</sup>

By various means Ellis attempted to persuade the A. H. M. S. to channel funds more directly to educational projects. In June, 1827, he declared that Presbyterianism in the West would never progress unless it actively allied itself with education; in August of that same year he argued that the most effective way the A. H. M. S. missionaries could serve the Society would be to aid directly instructional enterprises. In the states between Illinois and the Atlantic states, he pointed out, where Presbyterianism had been more successful than in

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<sup>6</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, December 29, 1825, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>9</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, August 7, 1826, Letter in the files of the Congregational Home Missionary Society, quoted in Coadykoontz, p. 557.



Illinois and Missouri, this denomination had been introduced and firmly established through the medium of education. Because of the lack of educational facilities anywhere in the area, and because few families had money enough to send their children to Eastern schools, parents who desired classical training for their children were forced to send them to Catholic seminaries where the students, according to the people with whom Ellis discussed the subject, were forced to follow Catholic usages and forms and were strongly influenced by Catholic beliefs. The establishment of good schools under Protestant influence would not only give Protestants the chance for a good education, Ellis claimed, but would no doubt draw some persons whose connection with the Catholic church was nebulous and who would prefer training in a Protestant school for their children if they had the choice. Above all, Protestant schools would heighten the cultural level of the people by introducing them to more worthwhile reading than the trash which so many read, that is, those who could read at all. Reading in the area around Kaskaskia was not a very popular pastime, Ellis commented, and in consequence the people engaged themselves in "vain amusement" in an attempt to occupy their leisure time. These "vain amusements" made for a lively group, he admitted, "but Oh, the moral death--the dry bones!"<sup>10</sup>

The lack of schools was also responsible for another condition which Ellis deplored and which he termed the "foolish rage for early

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<sup>10</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, June 21, 1827, and August 7, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



marriages." Many of the girls married when they were just thirteen or fourteen, he wrote, and at this young age were entirely unsuited to raise families, so that the children grew up spoiled and insubordinate, with no desire to improve themselves. Almost every effort he made to try to improve the morals and habits of the people was in vain. "Without the aid of education I despair."<sup>11</sup>

Ellis and the other missionaries did what they could to supplement the meager educational facilities available. Ellis ordered books and Bibles, which he sold on a commission basis or used to stock his own library, and he complained that his postage bill was the greatest in the county because of the freight he had paid on donated Sunday School books, tracts, and supplies in connection with his efforts "to advance the welfare of the west." He added, "I have obtained but very partial remuneration."<sup>12</sup>

The most important contribution which the missionaries of all denominations were able to make toward the advancement of education was their work with Sunday Schools. This type of religious instruction had been introduced into the United States by the Methodists shortly after the Revolutionary War and had grown very popular, especially in communities which could not sustain public schools. Although their primary purpose apparently was to see who in the

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<sup>11</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, August 7, 1827, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>12</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, December 18, 1828, and April 15, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS. Actually, Ellis felt that tract and Bible distribution was an almost worthless effort in a country where so few people could read, and that the proponents of this cause were "a little preposterous perhaps in their expectations . . . ." Letter from John Ellis to Mason Grosvenor, Jacksonville, January 7, 1829 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letters Collection; handwritten).



schools could memorize the greatest number of Bible verses, their lasting importance resulted from the teaching of such basic knowledge as reading and writing. The schools also attempted to instill moral behavior, induce a proper respect for the Sabbath, and provide suitable reading material for the children and adults who comprised their membership. The Sunday Schools on the frontier were non-denominational in that the scholars did not have to be members of the sponsoring church; often two or more denominations in the same area would cooperate in the forming of a class open to all the residents of the community. A general Sunday School Union was organized for Illinois in 1826, which by the end of 1828 claimed to have a membership of 2, 546 scholars and a teaching staff of 340 in 77 schools.<sup>13</sup>

Ellis considered the Sunday School the most significant institution in the West. He realized its importance in serving as a substitute for public schools, "the only medium of instruction of every kind," and believed it to be almost the only possible method to prevent many sections of the country from declining to a state of barbarism. Upon his arrival in Kaskaskia he found an established Sunday School of some seventy or eighty members, and within a month had organized a female class which he believed "promises good." The school in Jacksonville in 1830 enlisted "the harmonious cooperation of all evangelical Christians among us."<sup>14</sup> By

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<sup>13</sup>Pease, pp. 29-30; Brauer, pp. 146-147.

<sup>14</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, May 23, 1827, and January 10, 1827, and Jacksonville, April 15, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS.





February, 1831, Ellis was able to report that the Sabbath School movement was rapidly gaining in popularity among the people. Through the winter they had had between 100 and 250 members in attendance, and in the spring they were planning to further the policies of the A. H. M. S. by establishing a school in every settlement in the county. The intellectual and moral changes brought about by the Sunday Schools were striking, he said, and he praised the friends in the East whose lavish generosity had made the Sunday School possible.

Education, otherwise, must, from the inevitable circumstances of a new country, have been neglected for many years. How dark a cloud would hang over our prospects, and over the prospects of these children who, arrived to manhood, will control the destinies of the nation. Now, this heaven born institution promises to bring its blessings to every village and to every cabin throughout this vast valley, unlocking the treasures of wisdom and knowledge to enrich the intellect of our youth & make it as fertile as the land they inherit . . . O what a privilege, to contribute to this work . . . .

A collection for the local school's library had produced \$36, of which \$6 had been donated by one man only because he approved of the school's benefit to education. Ellis emphasized to the A. H. M. S. that contributions to Sabbath Schools for this reason alone were becoming common, and concluded that "education is seen to be in the train of its influence." 15

The Sunday School movement had its opposition. A group of

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15 John Ellis, Jacksonville, February 12, 1831, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



Baptists, the majority of whom were in the West, argued vehemently against Sunday Schools, as well as against missions of all kinds, Bible and tract societies, and educated preachers.<sup>16</sup> Ellis complained that the Catholic priests in the Kaskaskia area had almost destroyed one Sunday School by prohibiting fifty French children who were members from attending in the future. These children, he claimed, had been "progressing with very pleasing success and now they are doomed to ignorance and vice again." Later, from Jacksonville, Ellis quoted an important public official of a large settlement, who was convinced that the Sunday School movement had been conceived to destroy the people's liberties. As proof he cited an incident in New Orleans, where an enormous supply of arms, he said, had been uncovered, evidently for the use of Negroes in an insurrection. This had come about because of Sunday School instruction and missionary work to the Negroes, he claimed, and demonstrated how dangerous Sunday Schools could be. In addition, the Sunday School literature was subversive because it talked about a king, and even though the king referred to was King Jesus, the idea of a monarchy was thus implanted in the minds of the children. The public official was certain that when the opportune moment came, the Sunday School men "will force the yoke of bondage upon us."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Sweet, p. 369.

<sup>17</sup>John Ellis, Kaskaskia, June 21, 1827, and Jacksonville, July 13, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE FOUNDING OF ILLINOIS COLLEGE

Ellis had not abandoned his idea of a "seminary of learning." Early in 1827 he published a series of articles in the Illinois Reporter of Kaskaskia entitled, "Education at the West"; in one of these articles he outlined his plan for an institution of higher learning. The general belief is that a personal friend of Ellis's and a fervent advocate of education submitted this article to the newspaper. This man, Joseph Duncan, had served as a state senator in 1824 and had introduced the first bill for a free public school system; later, as Illinois' fifth governor, he urged the passage of a similar act. His interest in education has been attributed to Ellis's influence and inspiration.<sup>1</sup> According to the plan, the school would board students, who could pay in produce if they desired. A large garden would be maintained in which the students could maintain their health by exercise while raising crops to be sold or utilized in the kitchen;<sup>2</sup> in addition each student would be allotted his own plot from which he could keep the proceeds. The college would operate a savings bank in which the student could then deposit

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<sup>1</sup>Kirby, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>As soon as possible this garden would cultivate, in addition to common food products, cotton, tobacco, hemp, fruit trees, and "silks & the vine." [John Ellis] "Education at the West," Illinois Reporter (Kaskaskia, Illinois), January 3, 1827.



these proceeds, "so as to give the best encouragement to the spirit of industry." The course of instruction contemplated was extensive, including practical as well as theoretical and classical studies, and planned so that the college would qualify as a university in the near future. After the seminary was in operation, a department for the instruction of females, "with suitable regulations," might be established also.

After presenting the plans for the college, Ellis continued with an argument listing the advantages of such an institution in Illinois. Every man, he said, could educate his children even if he were poor or lived a considerable distance away, for the tuition and board would be so nominal that all could afford it, and traveling even two hundred miles, if necessary, to reach the school would not handicap the determined student. Ellis estimated that well-qualified instructors could be obtained without having to charge more than five dollars a year tuition for each student, since the Lancasterian system of instruction would be employed. The college would teach agriculture, particularly the raising of tobacco, cotton, and hemp, because Ellis was convinced that corn would never become a profitable crop in Illinois. An institution of this type would train teachers for elementary schools in the communities of the state as soon as public schools could be organized. Moral as well as intellectual training would be provided, partly through the allotting to each student of his own garden plot. Ellis considered working in these plots a "useful and interesting occupation" which not only would engage leisure hours that otherwise might be spent in mischief or





dissipation, but would also teach the student habits of thrift and industry and educate him in the handling of his own affairs. The students could handle both their studies and this sort of work, Ellis maintained, without danger either to their education or to their health; and the funds received from the sale of extra produce would enable the college to meet its expenses, purchase new equipment, and provide an extensive library whose volumes could be loaned to the students during their summer vacations. One of the main purposes and advantages of the seminary would lie in the opportunities presented to the youth of the area to become acquainted with the democracy in which they lived and ways to maintain and improve it. "It should give to them all such characters and qualifications as to fit them to live here in the affections of their country and hereafter in the gratitude of posterity." In concluding the article Ellis asked for suggestions and advice from anyone who had observed similar institutions in operation. He acknowledged that many individual families had done well in educating their children, but, "The great thing to be desired is to bring the advantages of Education within the reach of all the people."<sup>3</sup>

In June of 1827 Ellis visited the Rev. John Peck, a prominent, well-educated Baptist minister who was in the process of building a seminary building. The following conversation occurred:

Ellis - "What are you doing here?"

P - "Building a College-(the term college designed as a joke)

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<sup>3</sup>"Education at the West," Illinois Reporter, January 3, 1827.



E. - "why-how-where do you get the money?"

P - "Of the Baptists-where you think"

Peck wrote that he then explained his plans to Ellis and jokingly observed, "'you see the Baptists have gotten ahead of the Presbyterians this time.'" Ellis is supposed to have been thoughtful during the dinner which followed this conversation. Then he declared that the Presbyterians must have something of that kind. Mr. Peck told him to go ahead, that there was room enough for both of them. In a second letter to Lippincott, Peck explained that he had not meant to imply that he alone was responsible for giving Ellis the idea to build a college. Their acquaintance, he said, dated from late 1825 when Ellis had first arrived in St. Louis. At that time they had discussed the importance of education, but Peck could recall no mention of a seminary. The conversation referred to in his first letter, he reiterated, had been jocular, and he had taken Ellis's remark about a Presbyterian seminary as just repartee to his own joking statement that his seminary was to be a college.

Peck also explained in this second letter that he had thought about forming a union seminary, one in which all the prominent Protestant denominations in the area would cooperate, as he did not think any single denomination could succeed alone. This idea was visionary, he admitted, but he planned to lay the foundation, then propose to the Methodists and Presbyterians that they all cooperate in its operation. Peck did not say why he had never made the proposal to the other denominations; perhaps it was because both the Methodists and Presbyterians established seminaries of their own



shortly after his Rock Spring Seminary went into operation.<sup>4</sup>

A group of people in several settlements along Shoal Creek, in Bond County, had evidenced great interest in Ellis's plans. In fact, part of his incentive might have arisen because he had been approached for advice by several young men in the area who were anxious to obtain an education so that they could enter the ministry, but who could not afford to attend one of the eastern schools.<sup>5</sup> In the late summer and early fall of 1827 Ellis met with the people of the Shoal Creek Meeting House; a plan for a seminary (following closely the outline in the Illinois Reporter article) was drawn up, and contributions were solicited and some money immediately pledged. Because the plans called for a department of theology to be connected with the seminary, and because they hoped for Presbyterian financial help (and also, according to Lippincott, because they were "good and true" Presbyterians), they decided to present the plan for the "Fairfield Literary and Theological Seminary" to the fall meeting of presbytery, held in Edwardsville, Illinois.<sup>6</sup> At this time Illinois had no presbytery of its own. The Presbyterian churches in the western part of the state belonged to the presbytery of Missouri, and the churches in the remainder of the state belonged to presbyteries centered in either Kentucky or Indiana.<sup>7</sup> Presbytery appointed a

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<sup>4</sup>Letters from John Peck to Thomas Lippincott, Rock Spring, Illinois, January 18, 1844 and January 26, 1844 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letters Collection; handwritten).

<sup>5</sup>Kirby, p. 41

<sup>6</sup>Lippincott, p. 5; Rammelkamp, p. 10; and Kirby, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup>Blair, pp. 11-12.



committee consisting of Ellis, the Rev. Salmon Giddings of St. Louis, the Rev. Hiram Chamberlain (who had been a classmate of Ellis at Andover and had come west at the same time), and a prominent citizen and elder in the Edwardsville Presbyterian church, Thomas Lippincott. These men were to meet with the trustees of the Fairfield Seminary and report to presbytery at its spring meeting.<sup>8</sup>

Up until this time it had been assumed by everyone that the proposed institution would be located near Shoal Creek. Now Ellis was approached by several friends, including the Honorable Samuel D. Lockwood, a justice of the state supreme court, and Dr. John Todd, a physician living in Springfield. They suggested that an institution such as he had in mind might receive better support if it were located farther north, in one of what were termed at that time the "upper counties."<sup>9</sup> Before definitely committing himself to a location, they said, he should investigate these counties to determine if a site there might better guarantee the prosperity and permanency of the seminary. Ellis decided to take this advice, and in January, 1828, he and Thomas Lippincott began a tour through Morgan, Greene, and Sangamon counties. The Rev. Salmon Giddings had died shortly after the fall presbytery meeting, and the fourth member of the committee,

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<sup>8</sup>Rammalkamp, p. 10; Kirby, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup>Ellis had told Lippincott, "I designed, not only a college, but a university," and explained that he used the word "seminary" because this word was more popular, and because at first the institution could be nothing more than a seminary. Thomas Lippincott, "A Tribute to the Memory of John M. Ellis," Daily Journal (Jacksonville, Illinois), June 23, 1878.





Hiram Chamberlain, had been ill when the committee met.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Lippincott, who accompanied Ellis on the tour, had settled in Illinois in 1818. He had been a clerk, a store owner, and the clerk of the state senate in its second session in 1822, when the controversy regarding an amendment to the state constitution to make Illinois a slave state had occurred. In 1825 Lippincott edited the Edwardsville Spectator, an influential anti-slavery newspaper.<sup>11</sup> He had been instrumental in holding together the Edwardsville Presbyterian church, and later became minister associated with the American Home Missionary Society.

Ellis and Lippincott did not find any location worth considering until they approached Jacksonville, where Ellis had promised to preach the next day to the small Presbyterian congregation organized the year before by the Rev. John Brich and served by him on a part-time basis. They started for the meeting place shortly after dawn on a bright Sunday morning. A freezing rain the night before had coated every branch and blade of grass with a covering of ice, and the riders were much impressed with the beauty of the scene when as "the rising sun threw his clear rays athwart the plain, myriads of gems sparkled with living light, and Diamond grove [sic] might almost have been fancied a vast crystal chandelier."<sup>12</sup> The two men, according to Lippincott's account of the journey, were warmly received by the

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<sup>10</sup>Rammelkamp, pp. 10-11; Kirby, pp. 42-43; and Lippincott, "Sketch of the Origin . . .", p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Rammelkamp, pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Lippincott, quoted in Kirby, p. 43.



residents of Jacksonville, and at the public meeting held two days later considerable enthusiasm was expressed for the idea of a seminary in that location. Ellis and Lippincott traveled around the surrounding countryside, examining sites which might be suitable and becoming more encouraged each day by the interest shown in their undertaking.<sup>13</sup> Lippincott wrote to his wife from Jacksonville on January 14, 1828, to report on their progress. He regretted that the trip was taking longer than they had anticipated, he said, and he missed her greatly, but "if by a few weeks labor I could [succeed] in laying the foundation of an institution which should enlighten the generations yet to come in this state, how happy would be the reflection." He was pleased, he wrote, by the interest displayed "by the intelligent and influential part of the community." Although Ellis had not been feeling well, Lippincott commented, he had conducted church services twice in Jacksonville and was to preach on the following Sabbath in Springfield.<sup>14</sup>

The committee next visited Springfield and were encouraged by their talks with several prominent citizens of that village. The sites around Springfield did not appeal as much to Ellis as those in the Jacksonville vicinity, however, and he returned to that town, where he made arrangements to purchase eighty acres of land for the site of the seminary, secured some pledges for its support, and revised

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<sup>13</sup>Kirby, pp. 43-44; Rammelkamp, pp. 13-14; Lippincott, "Sketch of the Origin . . .", p. 8.

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Thomas Lippincott to his wife, Jacksonville, Illinois, January 14, 1828 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letters Collection; handwritten).



his plan to allow for the changed location.<sup>15</sup> The site which Ellis chose for the location of the college was about one mile west of the village and one mile north of the Diamond Grove mentioned by Lippincott, in what Ellis considered "the most delightful spot I have ever seen." The actual spot chosen for the campus was part way down the slope of a gentle hill. A grove of trees rose behind and above the place, while below lay the town of Jacksonville, with unbroken prairie visible for several miles on either side.<sup>16</sup>

At the spring meeting of presbytery in St. Louis, Ellis and Lippincott reported on their activities and presented the revised plan for the seminary. Even though the Shoal Creek supporters of the plan approved of the changed location, presbytery adamantly refused to sanction it. Lippincott related that the alleged cause for the refusal was the magnitude of the enterprise, presbytery declining to take charge of the theological department "on the grounds that the plan, if carried out to its ultimate intention, would comprise a University."<sup>17</sup> Lippincott and Ellis were shocked and disappointed by presbytery's attitude. Later they came to the conclusion that the refusal of support had been a blessing, for if the college had been organized under church sponsorship it "would have been shackled [sic] with ecclesiastical domination and gasping for existence,"

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<sup>15</sup>Lippincott, "Sketch of the Origin . . .", p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, September 25, 1828 in A. H. M. S. MSS; Kirby pp. 43-44.

<sup>17</sup>Rammelkamp and Kirby state that support was denied by the presbytery because the seminary would be located "on the wrong side of the river"; i.e., the Missouri Presbytery did not want to support a college on the periphery of its boundaries. Charles Henry Rammelkamp, Speech Regarding the Founding of Illinois College, delivered on March 13, 1906 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection; typewritten); Kirby, p. 45.



and such as they had hoped for the support of that "learned and pious body of men," they would never "purchase it at the expense of submitting a literary or theological institution to ecclesiastical control."<sup>18</sup>

Ellis, having committed himself to a site, revised his plans again, inserting a provision that the institution definitely would be located within five miles of Jacksonville; he next proceeded to get pledges so that a building might be started. Subscriptions in the amount of \$1,913, either in cash or materials, and two tracts of land were secured, the amounts ranging from \$400 for two members of the Collins family to \$5 in trade pledged by an Elias Williams, and including such items as "315 in smith work, \$10 in wheat, \$10 in carpenter work, \$30 in hauling or produce, and \$80 in books."<sup>19</sup> Although the nineteen hundred dollars pledged was not nearly sufficient to enable the seminary to operate, the trustees, at their November meeting, decided to begin erection of the first building. They specified that the building was to be of brick, not larger than fifty by thirty-six feet, two story, and with a stone foundation. At the same meeting the trustees authorized one of their members, who was planning a trip to the East, to collect donations; in order to aid him in this project, they requested Ellis to write a general letter setting forth the aims and design of the college.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Lippincott, "Sketch of the Origin . . .", p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>Rammelkamp, pp. 15-16; Sturtevant, Theron Baldwin, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>Minutes of a Meeting of the Trustees of the Morgan County Seminary, November 27, 1828, Springfield, Illinois (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection; handwritten).





The letter which Ellis composed is a combination of appeals to Christianity, patriotism, pride, and pity. He termed their enterprise a "noble design . . . in the great cause of education," but warned that their success depended upon the generosity of friends in the East. He implied that it was only just that they receive a share of the substantial contributions given to the established colleges, and pointed out that because of the circumstances of the western country, they actually should have particular claims to donations. Much of the prosperity and security in the East resulted from the foresight of the early settlers there, who had established institutions of education and religion, "which, if anything can, must be the landmarks to guide posterity down the current of time without making shipwreck of their civil and religious liberties." In the West, however, many of the Indian tribes made more systematic efforts in educating their young than had been made in either Illinois or Missouri. The western country was so fertile, Ellis stated, that a man needed to spend only half his time in labor; he could employ his leisure time either in indolence and vice, to the detriment of the country as well as himself, or he could use it for moral and intellectual advancement. The latter course could enable Illinois to become one of the noblest states in the Union--but which course was chosen depended upon men of concern in the East. Ellis was amazed, he said, that eastern people could view with such unconcern the increase in population, and consequently in political power, of the western states, knowing as they did the imperfect means for educating the western people in the methods and desirability of preserving democracy. If they would only pause and reflect, he claimed, they would see that the "tide of



population . . . [is] bearing along the frail bark which contains all our republican hopes, now just gliding into the rapids and becoming unmanageable among the breakers." The proposed institution was to be of the highest order, Ellis continued, fitting its students for advanced work at any of the eastern colleges or offering a complete college education to those who chose to do their entire studying there. Ellis briefly discussed the courses of instruction to be offered, and concluded by saying that the trustees would accept not only cash, but also "materials for building, books, land, wheat etc., bedding, furniture, and whatever else may be rendered available . . . ."21

As part of a letter written September 25, 1828, to the A. H. M. S., Ellis had mentioned the proposed seminary and had described its location. He thought this a splendid opportunity, "for any one who desire it, to bestow a few thousand dollars in the cause of education & of missions." He then added, "what can be done should be done quickly---"22 This letter was probably the most fortunate one Ellis ever wrote, for the A. H. M. S. published it in their magazine, the Home Missionary, where it was seen by a group of young theological students at Yale College. For some time these students had been contemplating forming an organization whose purpose would be to combine religion and education by establishing a school under Christian influence in one of the new western states. Some of the members would serve as instructors in the school, the others would engage themselves as ministers in surrounding communities, where in addition to their regular duties they

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<sup>21</sup>Minutes of a Meeting of the Trustees, November 27, 1828.

<sup>22</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, September 25, 1828, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



would enlist support for the college and watch for suitable young men who might enroll there.<sup>23</sup> The college they envisioned would furnish the opportunity for both discipline and culture, would have classes for all ages and both sexes, and in general provide "whatever was necessary for promotion of the moral and spiritual welfare of a great people, such as the churches, founded by the religious fathers of our country, had provided on the shores of the Atlantic."<sup>24</sup> This college, they hoped, would become to the western states what their Alma Mater was to New England, a center of learning "which should shed its light on coming and distant generations."<sup>25</sup> The plan for the organization, according to Rammelkamp, was well-conceived for two primary reasons; it would consolidate the efforts of missionaries to promote both education and religion, and it would attract men who might hesitate to set off alone for the West, but who would be enthusiastic about joining a group enterprise in which they would be assured of fellowship and support.<sup>26</sup>

One of the members of the group of students, Mason Grosvenor, came across Ellis's September letter in the Home Missionary. He and his fellow students decided that this might be the very situation

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<sup>23</sup>Letter from Mason Grosvenor to John Ellis, New Haven, December 5, 1826 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letter Collection; handwritten); Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup>Sturtevant, Theron Baldwin, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup>Julian M. Sturtevant, Address Delivered at the Morgan County Old Settlers' Reunion (n.p.: n. d., in the files of Illinois College Library, Jacksonville, Illinois), pp. 13-14; J. M. Sturtevant, An Address in Behalf of the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West (New York: John F. Trow, 1853), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup>Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 19.



for which they were looking. Because the college Ellis mentioned had not been put into operation and because the population of the area evidently supported the enterprise, they might be able to implement their plans by combining with Ellis's embryo project. The students authorized Grosvenor to make inquiry about the possibility of a union between the two groups.<sup>27</sup> Looking back upon this decision twenty-five years later, Grosvenor marveled at their audacity. Not only was the contemplated college on the edge of civilization, a thousand miles away from any similar institution, but these young men were so few, so young, and so inexperienced, none of them more than a year along in their theological studies, and none in possession of the wealth or power usually thought necessary to undertake an endeavor of this sort.<sup>28</sup>

On December 5, 1828, Grosvenor wrote to Ellis, explaining the ideas of his group regarding a college and asking for further details. The Yale students wanted to know, he wrote, how tightly the present trustees controlled the seminary--if the Yale group were able to raise considerable funds (and they had little doubt that this could easily be done), would the present trustees allow them to put their own plan into effect? They were anxious to learn the seminary's exact location - was it too far north to be desirable? What were

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<sup>27</sup>Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup>Mason Grosvenor, "Remarks," Address given at the Quarter Centennial Celebration of Illinois College, Jacksonville, Illinois, July 11, 1855 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection; handwritten).





Ellis's views regarding this factor? What type of climate did this section of Illinois have compared with the southern part of the state, what were the winters like, and what diseases were prevalent? Which season of the year would be the best for traveling, and what were the prospects of the churches in the area? The group at Yale would appreciate any facts which Ellis could supply them, but they preferred that he not discuss the inquiry until he had heard more definitely from them.<sup>29</sup>

Ellis ignored the admonition in the last sentence of Grosvenor's letter and immediately told the good news to the college trustees. One of them, William C. Posey, related how the news affected them: "You can't imagine how much it encouraged and animated us. It seemed to come to us from the Lord in answer to prayer. We received it as such."<sup>30</sup>

Ellis quickly sent a reply to the inquiry from the Yale group in which he attempted to answer all their questions and assuage the doubts they had expressed. First he assured them that they could have as much control over the institution as they wanted, providing they would furnish the funds. As to their queries regarding location, Jacksonville, he wrote, was located near the center of the county, about 20 miles from the Illinois River, a distance quite suitable for one's health. He assured them that in the northern part of the state "everything is better," that more people were settling in the northern part because of the "better land, water, climate,

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<sup>29</sup>Grosvenor, letter to John Ellis, December 5, 1828.

<sup>30</sup>Thomas Lippincott, "History of the Early Movement for the Founding of Illinois College," quoted in Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 22.



everything." Furthermore, Jacksonville was in the geographical center of the wealthiest and most densely populated portion of the state, a condition which was not likely to change. Not only were the people of Morgan County the best in Illinois, but they far surpassed the people of Missouri.

In the event that these facts were not sufficiently convincing, Ellis added that this county, because of its advantageous geographical position between St. Louis, the Fever River mines, and the rapids of the Illinois River, was destined to become one of the most important spots in the entire western country. St. Louis would decline because its growth had been dependent upon the fur trade and because the Missouri River was so terrible to navigate with its constantly changing channel, its sand which wore out engines, and the swiftness of its current. The Illinois River, on the other hand, was superior even to the Ohio; and because Morgan County was located near the point where the Illinois River rapids were to be bypassed by the Illinois and Michigan canal, it had not only a commercial advantage but unlimited water power. Every market in the United States and Canada could be reached easily from this point; the products of its soil, "not exceeded in fertility by any in the world," combined with the availability of water power for industry, made this location unequalled for growth and future prosperity.

In summing up his arguments, Ellis pointed out that the Baptist seminary in the southern part of the state was failing, that the northern section was far more conducive to good health than the area farther south ("diseases mostly of a bilious class, rarely fatal, few consumption, many come here mere skeletons and soon become healthy"),



and even that the Morgan County landscape of rolling prairies was more attractive than the flat plains farther south. He promised to forward to the Yale group the plan for the seminary, and wished for them "the blessing and direction of heaven."<sup>31</sup>

Ellis's letter was evidently quite convincing, for soon after it was received the group at Yale drew up a constitution for the Illinois Association and signed a compact, part of which read as follows:

. . . we the undersigned hereby express our readiness to go to the state of Illinois for the purpose of establishing a seminary of learning such as shall be best adapted to the exigencies of that country--a part of us to engage as instructors in the seminary--the others to occupy--as preachers--important stations in the surrounding country--provided the undertaking be deemed practicable, and the location approved by intelligent men--and provided also the Providence of God permit us to engage in it.

The compact was dated February 21, 1829, and signed by seven of the theological students. An endorsement signed by two of the Yale divinity professors and the president of Yale College was attached to the compact. The proposed plan of the Illinois Association, the endorsement read, had the signers' full approval. They believed it vital to the civil and religious welfare of the western country, and considered the gentlemen involved highly qualified in all respects for such an undertaking.<sup>32</sup>

A formal agreement was drawn up by the Illinois Association and sent to the Illinois trustees of the college for their consideration. The Association proposed that the institution be governed by a fifteen-man board of trustees, ten of whom would be appointed immedi-

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<sup>31</sup>Ellis, letter to Grosvenor, January 7, 1829.

<sup>32</sup>Barrelkamp, Illinois College, pp. 23-25.



ately. Of the ten, three would be elected by the Illinois stockholders and the remaining seven would be the original members of the Illinois Association. This board must be independent of any outside influence and would be self-perpetuating. In return for these concessions from the stockholders, the Association pledged the raising of ten thousand dollars, two thousand of which they would pay when the agreement was ratified, the remaining eight thousand within two years. The Association was anxious to determine if any of the stockholders had the least objection to the terms of the contract, for they would rather forego the entire enterprise than have dissension between the two groups.<sup>33</sup>

The original trustees could find no fault with the Association contract; on the contrary, they considered the terms unselfish and liberal. Two other events had occurred which had added to their encouragement. The A. H. M. S. had promised to partially support the Illinois Association project and to add their influence in its behalf; and the new Presbytery of Illinois, recently created from part of the Missouri presbytery, had also endorsed the endeavor. As Ellis was planning a trip to the East as representative to the Presbyterian General Assembly meeting, the trustees appointed him to meet with the Yale group and work out the last details of an agreement; he was also authorized to solicit and collect donations from eastern churches and friends.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Kirby, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, April 4, 1829, in A. H. M. S. MSS; Rammelkamp, Illinois College, pp. 29-30; and Kirby, p. 46.





The Illinois Association and Ellis had no difficulty in arranging a satisfactory agreement. Tours were made through the New England States and New York during the summer and fall of 1829 resulting in collections and donations "beyond what we had hoped to anticipate in so short a time." The ten thousand dollars was raised without much difficulty; the next step in the Association plan was ready to be taken. Two members of the group, Julian Sturtevant and Theron Baldwin, received their ordination and were selected as the first representatives of the Association to begin its work in Illinois. Sturtevant was designated as a teacher in the seminary, with instructions to begin instruction as soon after his arrival as possible; Baldwin was to engage himself as a minister in one of the pastorless churches in the state. The two men, together with Sturtevant's wife of a few weeks and the promised two thousand dollars, began their journey westward in September.<sup>35</sup>

After a tedious journey by stage, canalboat, steamboat, and hired wagon, the party reached Jacksonville on November 15, 1829. The beauty of the surrounding country, stretches of virgin forest and endless vistas of rolling prairie, with cultivation and clearings restricted to a narrow strip along the timber growth, impressed them favorably. They were quite disappointed, however, with Jacksonville itself, a fast-growing town which in four years had increased its

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<sup>35</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, January 31, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS; Letter from Theron Baldwin to William Thompson, Vandalia, Illinois, April 15, 1830 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letters Collection; handwritten); Rammelkamp, Illinois College, pp. 30-31.



population from one family to almost 500 people. Because of the scarcity of suitable building lumber, almost every house was constructed from rough oak boards, nailed together without any attempt at fitting or finishing, or of chinked logs. Only one public building of any kind, a small log schoolhouse about twenty-five feet square, had been erected; streets and lanes were a mass of mud. Sturtevant commented in his autobiography that the poor appearance of the town could be attributed to the lack of capital for improvements, yet very few of the inhabitants made any effort toward thrift.<sup>36</sup>

Because Ellis had remained in the East for awhile longer, Sturtevant was asked to substitute for him as pastor of the Jacksonville Presbyterian Church. On the morning of their arrival he preached his first sermon in the West. The Presbyterians met in the log schoolhouse. Sturtevant found no pulpit, table, or stand of any kind for his use, but the preacher did have the distinction of being able to sit in a split-bottomed chair--the congregation either perched on fence rails, laid across logs or saw horses, or stood around the walls of the room. The eastern-trained, educated ministers had been taught to read their sermons from manuscripts; the lack of a table or stand greatly handicapped Sturtevant in this practice, and he soon learned to memorize his sermon. The congregation evidently was not too taken with him, because, he commented, the next Sabbath not even the split-bottomed

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<sup>36</sup>Sturtevant, Autobiography, p. 157; Sturtevant, Address Delivered at . . . Reunion, p. 6.



chair was available for his use.<sup>37</sup>

Sturtevant was quite disturbed by the evident discord among the Christians in the community. He realized that many of the inhabitants, having immigrated from the South, held views and opinions different from those of New England, and that the introduction of New England ideas regarding education and theology could not be undertaken without provoking some sharp conflicts. The intensity of the feeling between peoples of different origin and those of different religious denominations astonished as well as troubled him. He told of inadvertently attending a Methodist service led by the well-known Methodist minister, Peter Cartwright. Both the Methodists and the Presbyterians, not knowing of the other's plans, had scheduled their Sabbath services in the same building. The Methodists had begun by the time the Presbyterians arrived, and so the Presbyterians decided to join them in worship. Although Cartwright knew that many Presbyterians were in the congregation, he made a bitter attack on "a caricature of Calvinism," then proceeded to ridicule higher education, saying, "I have never spent four years rubbing my back against the walls of a college."<sup>38</sup> Sturtevant found rivalries not only between denominations but also within them. The Cumberland Presbyterians, for example, who originated in Kentucky, would have nothing to do with Presbyterians outside their own sect. Sturtevant felt that "every man's hand was

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<sup>37</sup>Sturtevant, Address Delivered at . . . Reunion, p. 6. Ellis's first sermon in Edwardsville was a failure because, like Sturtevant, he read from a manuscript. Lippincott, "Tribute . . .".

<sup>38</sup>Sturtevant, Autobiography, pp. 161-162. Sturtevant pointed out that many years later Cartwright "gladly accepted" an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.



against his brother," and that there was no cooperation "except within the little cliques into which the body of Christ was divided." The result of this dissension, he believed, was a weakening of the church at the very time its good influence was most needed.<sup>39</sup>

On December 18, 1829, the original stockholders of the college held a meeting, at which four resolutions were adopted. The first resolution ratified the agreement between the stockholders and the Illinois Association which Ellis and the Association had perfected in June. The second extended a cordial welcome to the members of the Association and expressed the stockholders' confidence in their "motives, talents, and acquirements . . ."; it also gratefully accepted the donations which the Association had raised in the East. The third resolution voiced their gratitude to the benevolent friends who had contributed to "an institution devoted to elegant literature and sound learning." The fourth briefly thanked Ellis for his successful efforts in behalf of the seminary, and the fifth thanked the absentee owners of land in Illinois who had offered to contribute to the enterprise an amount equal to one cent for each acre of land they owned. Part of the preamble to the resolutions read:

What an enlivening prospect dawns upon Illinois!  
In a part of our country, where the first log cabin was  
erected but nine years ago, and among the prairies and  
groves which at that time were tenanted only by the wild

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<sup>39</sup>Sturtevant, Autobiography, pp. 160-164.





deer and the wolf, a College has sprung into existence, as if by enchantment, which promises to be an honor to science and to our State. We hail it to be an omen of brighter days, and look forward with hope and pride to the time when the genial light of education shall be brought to every door in Illinois. The influence of this College will be felt. Its direct operations will do much; its example will do much more. Other schools will now grow up; our children will be educated; and the moral character of our State will rise with the increase of its physical strength.<sup>40</sup>

At this same meeting the three trustees who were to represent the local stockholders were elected. Ellis was not one of them. For a while he held the position of recording secretary, with the privilege of attending the meetings but not the right to vote. The reason why he was never elected to the board of trustees is not known.<sup>41</sup>

Illinois College opened its doors for instruction on January 4, 1830. Nine students were present, none of whom, according to Sturtevant, were actually qualified to begin the freshman year.<sup>42</sup> They met in the unfinished building which the original trustees had authorized in April of the preceding year. Although the floors and outside walls were completed, the teacher and pupils found the interior quite bare; not even a desk for Sturtevant was ready, and only a few seats for the pupils. Before they could begin they had to install a stove, a task which took two hours to complete and in which everyone--students, teacher, and carpenters working on the building--cooperated. Following a few

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<sup>40</sup>Proceedings of a Meeting of Stockholders, Illinois College, January 31, 1830, Jacksonville, Illinois (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection; typewritten copy).

<sup>41</sup>Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup>None had ever studied English grammar or geography, only a few had received instruction in basic arithmetic, and just two had any knowledge (and that scant) of Latin. Letter from J. M. Sturtevant to Thomas Lippincott, Jacksonville, February 22, 1844, quoted in Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 39.



brief remarks by Sturtevant and a prayer, instruction began. John Ellis's dream had become a reality.<sup>43</sup>

By the time Ellis wrote his January report to the A. H. M. S., the number of students in attendance at the college had increased to seventeen, and Ellis reported that several more were making plans to begin. Their only cause for concern, he stated, was the fear of being overwhelmed with students before they could complete facilities to house them. The only building, which contained a large classroom on its lower floor, had just four rooms upstairs in which the students lived. Local public opinion toward the idea of the seminary had improved during the six months he had been in the East, Ellis continued; prejudice and opposition to it and other like efforts was decreasing rapidly, and for this factor he thanked Providence.<sup>44</sup> By the middle of April an addition approximately the same size as the original building (thirty-three feet by thirty-six feet) had been authorized. Theron Baldwin, the other member of the Illinois Association who had accompanied Sturtevant to Illinois the previous fall, commented that because other colleges had been inaugurated in the West but had failed, because their founders had no knowledge of the business, people in the area were skeptical regarding the existence of Illinois College. Even after the building was completed "credible witnesses who would swear under oath to the fact of its existence would at first scarcely be

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<sup>43</sup>Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, January 31, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



believed. They wanted ocular demonstration."<sup>45</sup>

Although the trustees of the college first applied to the state legislature for a charter in 1830, they were refused until 1835, when four denominational colleges, along with the Jacksonville Female Academy, were granted articles of incorporation.<sup>46</sup> Several arguments had been advanced against granting charters to any denominational institution of learning. One argument directed specifically against Illinois College accused the Presbyterians of "planning to gain undue influence in our politics and . . . to control the government of the state in the interest of Presbyterianism," this in spite of the fact that the total number of Presbyterians in Illinois at that time was relatively few.<sup>47</sup> Theron Baldwin, who ministered to a church in the state capitol of Vandalia during the time the charter battle was waged, said he believed Illinois College was refused incorporation because the Baptist seminary at Rock Spring also wanted a charter, but was not yet ready to make application.<sup>48</sup> Baldwin later was instrumental in securing the granting of the charter. He prepared a draft to be used by a special committee of the state senate arguing for incorporation, in which he stated that the trustees of Illinois College were requesting nothing inconsistent with the state constitution or laws, nor anything that would interfere with the rights of any citizen or any other institution. "They simply ask us to afford

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<sup>45</sup>Letter from Baldwin to Thompson, April 15, 1830.

<sup>46</sup>Kirby, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup>Sturtevant, Autobiography, p. 178.

<sup>48</sup>Letter from Theron Baldwin to M. Grosvenor, Vandalia, Illinois, January 15, 1831 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letters Collection; handwritten).



them such facilities as shall enable them to prosecute their  
work . . . .<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Theron Baldwin, "First Draft of Report of Committee on Charter of Illinois College in the Senate of the General Assembly of Illinois" (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection; handwritten).





## CHAPTER V

### LATER LIFE

John Ellis's connection with Illinois College became only indirect after the institution began operating. He served for a short time as recording secretary of the Board of Trustees, but for the most part his only concern with the college was to promote it financially through his church and the churches in the surrounding area. His interest in education had not declined, however. For some time his wife had conducted a school for girls, which enrolled students from as far away as St. Louis, Naskaskia, and Prairie du Rocher. Although the house which the Jacksonville church had built for them measured only eighteen by twenty-six feet, the Ellises boarded some of her students.<sup>1</sup> Lippincott characterized Mrs. Ellis as "worthy and extraordinary." Her influence over her students, he said, was "gentle but powerful, firm."<sup>2</sup> Sturtevant found her a woman of "unaffected piety, great vivacity, with an excellent education." Expressing his admiration that she could teach school, board students, and enter into her husband's work, as well as maintain a household and take care of two small children, he said, "Such women accomplished in the frontier settlements what would have been

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<sup>1</sup>Rammalkamp, Illinois College, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Lippincott, "Tribute . . .".



considered impossible elsewhere."<sup>3</sup>

Ellis had met his wife in Kaskaskia, where they were married shortly before he accepted the pastorate in Jacksonville. Frances Ellis was French by birth, her parents having been residents of St. Domingo before the insurrection there forced their flight to the United States. When her parents later left the United States to make their home on St. Thomas Island, Frances was placed in a school in Philadelphia. Upon the death of her mother she went to live with a married sister in Kaskaskia. Although she had been raised a Catholic, she had been converted to Protestantism and was a member of the Presbyterian congregation of which Ellis became pastor.<sup>4</sup>

Ellis had planned a department for female students in conjunction with his seminary. In the fall of 1830 he met with three of the trustees of Illinois College, and was appointed to a committee to draft plans for a separate female academy to be located in Jacksonville. At later meetings the committee, meeting in Ellis's home, drew up resolutions for the new institution and began securing funds and land for its building. Although this institution, like Illinois College, was not granted a charter until 1835, it offered instruction beginning in 1833, making it the first academy of its kind in Illinois. The school which Mrs. Ellis conducted had no direct relationship with the Female Academy, but is considered to have been its forerunner.

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<sup>3</sup>Sturtevant, Autobiography, pp. 155-156.

<sup>4</sup>Rammelkamp, Illinois College, pp. 71-72.



Ellis served on its board of trustees until his departure from Jacksonville early in 1832.<sup>5</sup>

In several of his letters to the American Home Missionary Society, Ellis mentioned the financial difficulties which many of the missionaries incurred. Often they had unexpected expenses from sickness or extensive travels; frequently their congregations failed to meet the pledged salary, and Ellis was forced to plead to the A. H. M. S. on his own or their behalf for supplemental funds. After Thomas Lippincott became a minister, he applied to the A. H. M. S. for a second year's commission, as they had sponsored him during his first year's ministry. The commission failed to arrive, and Lippincott was without funds. Ellis wrote to the A. H. M. S., telling them that if Lippincott did not receive a commission dated from the close of his first year's work (thus entitling him to draw salary for the period between commissions), "his family . . . will be in distress. He will have nothing to buy food with, & will be in debt, & have nothing to pay." If Lippincott should suffer because of the failure of the A. H. M. S. to re-commission him or to allow him salary for the interim period, Ellis warned, "it cannot fail to provoke a very unfavorable impression."<sup>6</sup>

Ellis had severe financial difficulties of his own, especially following his six-months trip to the East in 1829 as delegate to the

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<sup>5</sup>L. M. Glover, Historical Address Delivered at the Semi-Centennial & Anniversary Exercises of the Jacksonville Female Academy (Jacksonville, Illinois: Daily Journal, 1880), pp. 10-13; Diamond, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, February 23, 1831, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



General Assembly and as agent for Illinois College. In June of the following year he evidently received a notice from the A. H. M. S. informing him that he had not been entitled to their support during the time he had been away from Illinois. Ellis wrote back a long letter of explanation. No provision had been made for the expenses of his journey, he stated; "I was poore [sic] and indet [sic]." He had drawn fifty dollars from funds on deposit with the A. H. M. S., "relying for the deficiency for the support of my family during my absence, on the little remains of my wife's patrimony." Only because he felt he was engaged in God's cause, and He would provide, did Ellis undertake the journey under such circumstances, he added. When he reached New York he was granted an appropriation of two hundred dollars by an agent of the A. H. M. S., in spite of the fact that by this time he was receiving ten dollars a week from the Illinois Association for his expenses. But the ten dollars, Ellis claimed, did little more than pay the increased costs for clothing, postage, and travel back to Illinois; the A. H. M. S., he felt, should not think he was drawing a double salary during his journey. He had already drawn on the two hundred dollar appropriation to make payments on his college tuition, a debt which had been outstanding for nine years and upon which he was paying compound interest. Ellis had previously written to the man from whom he had borrowed money for his tuition to advise them of the supposed payment.

What they will think of my veracity in this business when their patience has been tried by 9 years unavoidable delay I know not. My situation is a very painful and perplexing one. Often have I





felt that if parting with a limb would pay my debts,  
most gladly would I do it.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps he should have not started for the West until his debts were repaid, he reflected in this same letter, but if he had waited that long, he probably never would have become a missionary. There had been a time, Ellis wanted the A. H. M. S. to know, when he could have obtained enough money to repay his debts and have some left over, just by engaging in a little land speculation. The opportunity had arisen just before he was to leave for the East, but the only money which they had was the one hundred and fifty dollars from his wife's patrimony; if he were to make the trip as planned, this sum would be needed to sustain his family until his return. Ellis quoted his wife as saying, "It is indeed all that we have, but the interest of the seminary, at this crisis is of more consequence than our own private concern--take the money and we will not fear to trust God with respect to the future." The land which they could have purchased at that time had, in little more than a year, increased five times in value.<sup>8</sup>

The prospect before him, he continued, was "decidually [sic] oppressive" to his feelings when he realized that in spite of all his efforts, no provision might be allowed for the support of his family during the time he had been absent on church and college business. He had trusted that his hard work would somehow enable him to

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<sup>7</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, November 2, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>8</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, November 2, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



repay his debts, "but the encouragement to hope has been well nigh extinguished."<sup>9</sup> A later letter mentioned that he was credited with the sum of \$230.50 in the A. H. M. S. books, but it is not known if part of this money was payment for the time he spent in the East, or if it was for his labors during 1830.<sup>10</sup>

Ellis was formally installed as pastor of the Jacksonville church in April, 1830, with a salary of four hundred dollars, one hundred fifty of which was supplied from the A. H. M. S., the remainder pledged by the local congregation in cash or produce.<sup>11</sup> The Ellises found Jacksonville much more to their liking than Kaskaskia, and soon were "as permanently & as pleasantly [*sic*] situated . . . as the circumstances of the West can admit of."<sup>12</sup> Prior to his accepting the pastorate the church had had a membership of fourteen; on the Communion Sunday following his arrival the membership doubled. Even more would have joined at this time, Ellis wrote the A. H. M. S., but they were unable to attend because of bad weather. He stressed the importance of this section of the state, saying that Sangamon, Greene, and Morgan counties were nearly the largest counties in Illinois, having doubled their number of inhabitants within the previous three years. Their population of twenty-five thousand, combined with the five thousand people in the five surrounding counties

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<sup>9</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, November 2, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>10</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, March 8, 1831, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>11</sup>Scott, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, July 31, 1828, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



of Adams, Schuyler, Fulton, Taswell, and Pike, led Ellis to believe that this area was and would remain the most populous and wealthy in the state.<sup>13</sup>

Ellis found the Jacksonville church's method of paying his salary "well suited to the circumstances of the western country and certainly very convenient to me." When the Ellises required something from the local store, they just sent a note to the steward, a position occupied by members of the church in rotation. He had the article sent to them, they signed a receipt, and the amount the article cost was credited against the account of the church member who had supplied it. The church was building them a parsonage because of the high rent charged in the town, "a heavy burden," Ellis said, "with all their other pressing business (where everything is to be begun anew)."<sup>14</sup>

By the middle of July, 1831, a year after his arrival in Jacksonville, Ellis was able to report that the church membership would soon exceed one hundred people. He took great pride in the fact that his church has built its own meeting house, measuring thirty by forty feet, and the only Protestant church in the state "which is regularly finised [*sic*] with pews." More than one-third of the money used to erect the building had been donated by people in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, "who live and act for future generations. Their memory will be precious in the west."<sup>15</sup> The rest of the money needed

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<sup>13</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, July 31, 1828, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>14</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, September 25, 1828, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>15</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, July 13, 1831, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



had been raised by subscription, the donors giving labor, money, or produce. Although the building was owned and controlled by the Presbyterian Church of Jacksonville, it was available for use by other denominations and for public meetings.<sup>16</sup>

Ellis evidently got along better with the other Protestant denominations in the area than did Sturtevant. He wrote about a Sabbath service held during the meeting in April, 1829, of the newly established Presbytery of Illinois. The congregation was so large, he said, that they found it necessary to move some of the people to a private home for a concurrent service. Members of three different denominations attended the services and gathered around the Communion table. "They mingled their prayers & praises & hearts together at the table of their common Lord, and I trust with acceptance in heaven."<sup>17</sup> In January of 1830 he aided in the establishing of a church in the Military District. Although the day was severely cold, he wrote, the service (held in the courthouse) was crowded with worshipers of different denominations. One Baptist and two Methodist ministers aided in the procedures, and all three denominations were represented at the Communion table. Ellis believed he could safely say that hostility among the different denominations had decreased considerably in Illinois; the current sentiment among them was that enough room and work existed for all to "exert their resources and influences unitedly in the common cause."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Resolution and Subscription List of a Meeting Held to Consider the Building of a Meeting House, March 15, 1830, Jacksonville, Illinois (Illinois College Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection; typewritten copy).

<sup>17</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, April 4, 1829, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>18</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, January 31, 1830, in A. H. M. S. MSS.





Although Ellis continued to see progress resulting from the church's work, he had to acknowledge that "the progress of vice . . . is also but too manifold--especially that of intemperance and its usual attendants, profane swearing, & Sabbath breaking." These evils were not approved of nor generally indulged in by the town people, he hastened to add, but several "dram shops" had recently opened in the vicinity which "afford a harbor for idle, intemperate persons for 20 or 30 miles around." A small amount of good had been accomplished by the distribution of temperance tracts, he thought, but the proper moral attitude which existed in the community and among many excellent men in the state needed to be enunciated more effectively.<sup>19</sup>

In January, 1832, Ellis announced to the A. H. M. S. that he was discontinuing his relationship with them in order to accept an agency with the American Education Society. He would continue to "cherish undiminished attachment" to the A. H. M. S., he wrote, and would be glad to serve them again "when ever [sic] called in providence to do so."<sup>20</sup> The real reason for his leaving the church in Jacksonville was never stated. Dimond quotes one of the ministers who followed him in this pastorate, "'His people parted lightly and causelessly with him, as is too often the case in the West.'" Another man, whom Dimond considered well-informed and judicious, commented that he believed the church "'did wrong'" in dissolving the relationship, and that it had suffered because of its action.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, April 4, 1829, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>20</sup>John Ellis, Jacksonville, January, 1832, in A. H. M. S. MSS.

<sup>21</sup>Dimond, p. 8.



In February, 1832, Ellis sent the A. H. M. S. a copy of part of the minutes of the December, 1831, presbytery meeting, at which his resignation from the Jacksonville church had been discussed. The committee to which the matter had been referred reported that both Ellis and the church had submitted the request for a dissolution of the pastoral relationship, in order that Ellis might "enter on a field of greater usefulness than that in which he is now engaged." The committee recommended that the presbytery express its appreciation to Ellis for his "extensive usefulness" and said they were gratified that the pastoral relationship had been terminated "with kindly feelings in each of the parties concerned." In his letter accompanying the copy of the minutes Ellis advised the A. H. M. S. to fill his vacancy with a man "of first talents" and one who had had "several years experience in the ministry"--and whose talents are of the popular cast." He realized that a man with these qualifications would probably demand a higher salary than was usually paid in the West, but warned that if his advice were not taken, "it will, at some future period, . . . be a matter of serious regret."<sup>22</sup>

During early 1832 Ellis worked with the American Education Society, both in Illinois and Indiana. He then transferred to the Indiana Branch of the Presbyterian Education Society of New York. During the time he served as secretary of this organization he chaired a meeting which discussed the establishing of Wabash College

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<sup>22</sup>John Ellis, Hillsboro, February 25, 1832, in A. H. M. S. MSS.



in Crawfordsville, Indiana, and was appointed to the committee which made preliminary arrangements for purchasing grounds and raising funds to organize this institution.<sup>23</sup>

In July of 1833 Ellis was in Indiana on business. His home was still in Jacksonville, and his wife and two small children were living there when the dreadful cholera epidemic raged through Illinois, striking particularly in the Mississippi Valley area and spreading to the higher towns, including Jacksonville. At that time the town's population was about eighteen hundred; of these over one hundred died and nearly one half left the town in panic.<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Baldwin Turner, one of the professors at Illinois College during this time, wrote a graphic letter to his fiance in the East, describing the suffering and the horror of the epidemic.

To meet a man at night and attend his funeral in the morning has ceased to alarm, much less to surprise. Some die in three hours, seldom do they live twelve and very rarely twenty-four. As I have walked through the streets in the evening, I have seen through the windows and doors, the sick and the dying, sometimes four or five in the same room in a log hut, some on the bed, others on the floor, and perhaps one or two sorrow-smitten beings crawling from bed to bed to give a cup of water or to brush away the flies.<sup>25</sup>

Mrs. Ellis was one of the first in Jacksonville to succumb to the disease. She became ill one afternoon toward the end of July, 1833, and before eight o'clock that evening was dead. One of her children

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<sup>23</sup>"John Millet Ellis," Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, ed. Alfred Nevin (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1884), p. 402; Dimond, p. 8; and Scott, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup>Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup>Letter from Jonathan Baldwin Turner to Miss Rhodolphia Kibbe, Jacksonville, August 28, 1833 (Illinois College Miscellaneous Letters Collection; handwritten).



died early the next morning; the other child and a niece who was living with them died soon after. Professor Turner wrote that the people of the town were so frightened that no one would care for the Ellis family during their illness. Students from the College, with the help of an aunt who was ill herself, gave what nursing care they could, and as a result many of them contracted the disease. Ellis did not reach Jacksonville until after his wife and children had been buried. Turner reported that he was "now a broken hearted man tho' he bears his trouble better than I should think he could."<sup>26</sup>

Information on the remainder of Ellis's life is scant. In 1834 he returned to New England, where he served the Presbyterian Education Society by preaching and soliciting funds. In 1836 he married the daughter of a minister; they had two children, but both of these died in childhood. About 1836 Ellis and his wife moved to Michigan, where he spent most of his time working for the Education Society. He also organized a Presbyterian church in Grass Lake, Michigan, and aided in establishing Marshall College (which had become extinct by 1928). In 1840 he returned to New England because the Michigan climate did not agree with his wife. From 1840 until some time in 1842 he was pastor of a church in East Hanover, New Hampshire, but in 1842 he contracted an illness which caused him to lose his voice and he never really recovered from this illness. For awhile he was an agent for his Alma Mater, Dartmouth College, and in 1844 he joined the Society for Promoting Collegiate and Theological

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<sup>26</sup>Turner, letter to Rhodolphia Kibbe, August 28, 1833.





Education at the West. Theron Baldwin, one of the original Illinois Association members, had been instrumental in the founding of this society, and it was he who urged Ellis to join.<sup>27</sup>

Ellis had one last dream which he did not live to see realized. He envisioned a western colony settled by a group of New Englanders, a community which would, from its beginning, have schools, hospitals, and churches, and in which everyone would live together in Christian harmony. In July of 1855 he traveled to Nebraska to make preliminary plans for the colony. Enroute he stopped in Jacksonville for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of Illinois College, where he was an honored guest. Soon after his return from Nebraska he became ill; he died on August 6, 1855. In his will he bequeathed thirty-three hundred dollars to Illinois, Wabash, and Wittenberg Colleges for scholarship endowments.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Dimond, pp. 9-10; Scott, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup>Dimond, p. 11; Rammelkamp, Illinois College, p. 181.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Lyman Beecher, in his famous address, "Plea for the West," stated:

If this nation is, in the providence of God, destined to lead the way in moral and political emancipation of the world, it is time she understood her high calling, and were harnessed for the work. . . . it is equally plain that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the west. There is the territory, and there will soon be the population, the wealth, and the political power. It is equally clear that the conflict which is to decide the destiny of the west will be a conflict for the education of her sons, for the purpose of superstition or evangelical light, of despotism or liberty.<sup>1</sup>

These words express the philosophy of John Millot Ellis, and explain his purpose in leaving the comfort and security of his eastern home to labor in the West for the realization of his purpose. John Ellis was not unique; other dedicated, idealistic men preceded and joined him in his cause. He was unusual, however, in his tenacity, in his determination, in his optimism, and in his faith in mankind. Lesser men would have been dismayed by the physical hardships which he endured; they would have become discouraged by the obstacles he faced; they would have weakened when encountered

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<sup>1</sup>Lyman Beecher, A Plea for the West (n.p.: Truman & Smith, 1836), quoted in Brauer, p. 142.

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by the indifference and prejudice he fought.

John Ellis was important to the cause of education in Illinois because he was aware of the significance of the West to the nation, and because of his determined belief that only through education could this section of the country assume its responsibilities and judiciously exercise its growing power. By his letters to the American Home Missionary Society and his speeches in the Atlantic states, he was instrumental in arousing the interest and concern of the older states in this problem. By his writings and his conversations with acquaintances in the West, he was able to impart his enthusiasm for the necessity of education there, and was successful in securing support and cooperation for his projects. By implementing his vision of educational opportunities and beginning his seminary in spite of rebuffs and the obvious impracticality of the scheme, he was responsible for bring<sup>ing</sup> ~~men~~ men of learning and culture to Illinois.

We cannot measure intangibles. To place the influence of John Ellis upon education in Illinois on a scale and weigh it is impossible. We can only view his efforts and the relatively small results which he obtained during his work in Illinois, then turn our glance to the educational institutions which exist in our state today, and be grateful to him and to men like him for their vision, their sacrifices, and their devotion. Julian Sturtevant said that John Ellis was "poor in this world, but rich in faith, and caring for the welfare of this great people with self-sacrificing solicitude for generations yet to be. Such men are the true founders of states and empires."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Sturtevant, Address Delivered at . . . Reunion, pp. 14-15.



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