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CHAPTER

I.

BEGINNINGS

Before the coming of the families responsible for the beginning of the First Evangelical Church in DuPage County, Naper Settlement was already a pioneer community. In the early 1830's, Bailey Hobson and Joseph and John Naper had built their first rude cabins of logs and mud, with a single high-up window covered in winter time with a gunny-sack or lard-greased paper. By 1835 they and their Yankee and New England neighbors had set up trading posts with the Indians and built saw mills and grist mills, first run by horse power, later by water power. (The river here at that time carried much more water than now, and was rightly called the "Roaring DuPage".) The trouble with the Indians already had been peaceably settled after the Black Hawk War, in another one of those "Christian" treaties which drove the Red Man to the barren lands west of the Mississippi!

Among these early immigrants came several Evangelical families in 1836, followed a year later by a number of others from Warren County, Pennsylvania. These were the first German-speaking people in this part of the country.

Like many of the other pioneers, they must have been intrigued with the beauty of the Northeast Illinois prairie and the potentialities for making a good living. One early pioneer in a letter declared that this was "the best country he had ever seen for a rich man or a poor one, a lazy or industrious one." Some of these early settlers couldn't understand why this fertile prairie land had been neglected for so many years, when they remembered that Marquette and Joliet had discovered these grass plains and wide rivers as long ago as 1673—nearly 160 years earlier! Little blue stem, big blue stem, and Indian grass, from three to nine feet high, rolled on for mile after mile. As much of the timber land already had been "preempted" before 1837, these German families settled on the prairies, not knowing at that time they had the best of the bargain.

In 1837 a group of fifteen Evangelicals organized and met in the homes of the members or in a school-house built earlier on Scott's Hill (now corner of Franklin and Washington). Strong feelings of neighborliness and hospitality existed among the various religious groups of the time—Congregationalists, Evangelicals, and Methodists.

All were served at first by itinerant preachers or missionaries. Sermons were often more effective than elegant. One man, in defending one of these preachers for "slaughtering the King's English", remarked, "Thank God, he slaughtered sin also!" The story is told of one of these preachers who had the "thirdly" part of his sermon blown away by the wind, and his ideas were so confused thereby that he abruptly came to a full stop. If people wouldn't come to church, the "exhorter" followed them home from the stores or mills and earnestly tried to bring about their salvation.

Jacob Boas preached the first sermon to the Evangelicals in 1837. He was sent as a mission minister, a circuit rider, from Ohio. The small congregation received Reverend Boas with great joy and happiness. He stayed for six months, riding or walking courageously through inclement weather over unbroken terrain at times to cover a territory of 400 miles. Even then he was not satisfied with the distance covered, for at the end of that same year he wrote to friends in Pennsylvania: "I could not, however, travel far about, because my horse was sick nearly all the time since I came here, consequently I could not make the circuit as large as I wished to do."* When he was called back to Ohio, he promised to send someone in his place: but it was eight months before another circuit rider, Reverend M. Hauert, appeared. At this time all churches were finding it very difficult to recruit new ministers. In the course of his duties, Reverend Hauert, in this wide territory, preached as often as he could to the group here in Naperville, who had become quite discouraged at being left so long without a minister. Some even talked of going back to Pennsylvania, so much did they miss their regular church services. A reporter on "The Naperville Clarion" writing in 1900 of these early times said, "We can easily see that the people in those days did not hear so many sermons as we do today, but they prayed more." Since it was thought at that time desirable to make an annual change of ministers, Reverend Hauert stayed only a year, as did many succeeding pastors.

One of the most indefatigable preachers in these early times was John Seybert, elected bishop by the General Conference in 1839, meeting near Millheim, Pennsylvania. For the next twenty years he worked continuously for the Evangelical Association and for the God whom he served with humility and with his uttermost strength and somewhat limited talents. A recent authority on the history of the church writes: "None did more in molding the expansion and character of the Evangelical Church in the midwest than Bishop John Seybert."

There were more travelling preachers than local preachers in 1850. A preacher could be "located" because of personal or family reasons if his request seemed plausible to the conference members. He might beg off because of bodily infirmities if he could no longer withstand the rigors of horseback locomotion.

Because of the failure of the revolution in Germany in 1830 against tyranny, many refugees fled to America. Here they were enticed by the tales coming from Illinois, and numbers of them joined their countrymen just west of the lake village of Chicago. By 1840 this Evan-

*Letter translated from the German.

gelical congregation was large enough to undertake the building of the first church to be constructed in DuPage County. The people had very little money to contribute, but they donated lumber and labor. They cut down logs in the Big Woods west of town in the fall, and in the spring hauled them by ox-teams to the local sawmill. From this lumber and a load purchased and hauled from Chicago by the only man among them with a team of horses, they erected in 1841 the walls and roof of a small building on a lot given them by Captain Joseph Naper. As he was not a member of their group, this gift was another evidence of community cooperation.

At the camp grounds east of Naper Settlement one Sunday morning in early summer of 1849, Bishop Seybert was conducting Sunday Services for a large crowd attending the Illinois Conference of the Evangelical Association. As no building in the village was large enough to accommodate them, they were holding a "bush meeting." This was the same year when the 49'ers were going by on the plank road headed for the gold rush in California! What a contrast in motives for trekking!

This Zion Evangelical Church faced the south on Van Buren, halfway between Eagle and Webster streets. Two doors led from it, with two or three steps in front of each, the east side for the men and the west for the women. Inside, a few steps led up to the low pulpit—from the *east* side, of course! (See sketch by Hannah Ditzler Alspaugh.) There was an aisle on each side and a division down the center of the plain unvarnished, unpainted seats separating the men from the women. A very small and humble structure, but these forefathers regarded it with pride and reverence. Happily they found the membership increasing so fast that four years later they had to build an addition. At this time a visit from Bishop Seybert was a great encouragement to the congregation. After the good bishop had given an inspiring missionary sermon in the fine newly-made-over church, $60.00 was presented in offering, and a "Missionary Aid Society was organized in which the members pledged themselves to give at least a dollar a year for missions besides the regular missionary collections." The rapid increase in members was augmented later by the coming of many more German families from eastern Pennsylvania, largely Evangelicals.

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The next fifteen years were busy and progressive ones for the community in which this sturdy congregation was developing. Members of other religious groups, some already organized in the 1830's, built their own churches during the 40's and early 50's—Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics. The Lutherans and

Episcopalians found church homes a few years later. Representatives of most churches were interested in the project of a DuPage County Bible Society, established in 1841 with Reverend John H. Prentiss as president. This organization handled more than $15,000 worth of Bibles in a period of forty years—selling some, giving away others.

Successful revival meetings were held in the various churches. After one particularly outstanding series in the winter of 1848 in Zion Evangelical Church, even unbelievers talking on the street corners remarked, "That little church up here is a blessing to the town after all." People walked for miles to attend these meetings every evening and on Sunday too. One lady, Mrs. Kailer, used to serve food to the people who walked in from the country.

The reading material found in the homes of these pioneer families consisted nearly always of the Bible and an almanac, with a few scattered copies of Fox's "Book of Martyrs", "Lives of the Apostles", "Pilgrim's Progress", Rollin's "American History", and Weem's "Life of George Washington." With the establishment of more schools, including the Catholic Parochial School and several other private schools; with the printing of the first newspaper in Naperville ("The DuPage County Recorder"); and with the incorporation of "The Naperville Library" in 1845, with its thirty subscribers—much greater opportunities for reading became available to the people. Even though "The DuPage County Recorder" lasted less than a year, several other attempts were made to publish a better newspaper until finally one came out in 1856 that showed a big improvement over its predecessors—"The DuPage County Journal." Gradually in the homes of the Evangelicals had begun to appear "Der Christliche Botschafter", first published in 1836, and a little later the English paper, "The Evangelical Messenger", appearing first in 1848.

As to physical comforts, even from the beginning these people were lucky as far as climate and food were concerned. Though the winters were sometimes severe, with huge drifts of snow making communication almost impossible, there was plenty of sunshine to make the climate as a whole a healthful one. From the first there was no danger of starvation, with wild ducks and geese on the banks and in the water of the DuPage and many kinds of fish waiting to be caught. Raccoons, rabbits, and deer roamed the woods. Quail, prairie chickens, and wild turkeys scattered through the tall grasses.

As soon as the men could make plowshares that would break the tough matted roots of this virgin prairie land, they raised luxuriant crops of corn, wheat, rye, oats, buckwheat, and potatoes. In the autumn between chores with their cattle and sheep and the harvesting of their crops, they roamed through the trees for walnuts, butternuts, and hickorynuts to store away for the winter before the chipmunks and squirrels beat them to it. In the spring and early summer the women hunted along the edges of the Big Woods for wild blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, and cherries.

In 1853 Naperville was a town of 1200 inhabitants. Even then the ladies were an enterprising group. Before many of the swamps were drained, they fought the ague year after year with Soppington's pills.

As there were practically no doctors, the women had much to do with nursing the community back to health after a severe epidemic of cholera in 1849 that took the lives of many people. They even got up fairs to earn funds for building plank walks for all the principal streets of the little town. Of the four district schools organized by this time, three of them were taught by women.

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As more and more people moved into Naperville and the surrounding territory, there was an increased attendance at the various churches. In spite of the addition made to the Evangelical Church in 1845, it again became too small to accommodate all the people who wished to attend services. The congregation erected a new church in 1858-59 on the corner of Franklin and Center Streets, where the present church now stands. Jonathan Ditzler was the master-mind in this construction—its architect, carpenter, and financier.

A visitor after one of the serial camp meetings in 1846 urged that two improvements be made: "There ought to be more light to enable one to see the preacher's face at night; in addition, while it is a commendable thing to have a picket fence separating the brethren from the sisters during the meeting, why must the brethren use the fence as a hat rack?" It is the qualifying clause of concession beginning with "while" that we find most amusing today!

Men hauled the bricks for building the walls of the forty-four by sixty-six foot structure from the old Buck place east of town where they had been made. As the Naperville quarries had not yet been opened, they brought the stone for the foundation from Lockport. The lumber came from Chicago and Lockport, including some "imported" white pine from which the pews and pulpit were made by hand by Jonathan Ditzler. This particular kind of wood had probably been shipped to Chicago from farther north. There were no indigenous evergreens in the Big Woods, where hickory, oak, maple, and walnut trees grew in abundance. The black walnut altar rail made a striking contrast with the white pine wood.

The entrance to the church was through a door into the basement facing west, from which led two winding stairways to the auditorium overhead, the south for the women and the north for the men. In later years there were times of friendly rivalry between the two sides as to collection and attendance. This custom of separation was observed even into the next century. Mrs. Thomas Finkbeiner tells of her indignation at going to this Zion Church and finding herself and infant son sitting in one part of the church, her tall professor husband leaving her, to sit with the rest of the men. She says she had a big notion at that time never to go back!

As the 1841 building had already been sold to the Lutherans, regular services were held in the Methodist Church just across the corner until the basement for the new church was completed. (Many years later this kindness was returned when the Methodist Church suffered from a disastrous fire.) As there were no sidewalks on this corner at that time, straw was used in the aisles to keep mud from being tracked in, then shoveled away in the morning. Finally, in spite of a severe winter, the Zion Church, that was to stand for half a century, was completed at a cost of $7,000 and was dedicated by Reverend J. J. Esher in the spring of 1859. (For a long time this was the only church in town not made of wood; consequently it was later referred to, often affectionately, as the "Old Brick Church.") Eight years later, in 1867, a large, tuneful bell was hung in the tall steeple imperiously summoning the villagers and farmers to come to their beautiful new church home to sing and to pray. (In 1900 the steeple was lowered for safety's sake, since many people had reported seeing it shake while the big bell was ringing.)

During the first years in the life of the new church, several series of revivals and protracted meetings were held. Some of these people have written candid reports of the amount of time and energy necessary to bring about their conversion! Often strange incidents enlivened the hours. Hannah Ditzler Alspaugh's parents told of a "rowdy" who exhausted the patience of the sexton whose job it was to keep order. He forcibly tried to eject from the church this willful "disturber of the peace" and had his thumb nearly bitten off! One good Evangelical sister, after living here for awhile, wrote back to her family about what she called "distracted" meetings. And so no doubt they sometimes were!

According to a reporter in "The Clarion," however, writing of these times several decades later: "These brethren had glorious meetings. . . . Zion Church grew strong in faith and influence in this town. . . . Indeed it seemed as if the Lord took special pleasure in showering upon these people his richest blessings." (Maybe an Evangelical reporter!) However, an historian of the county of that time says: "No other church of the county met with such a degree of prosperity as Zion Church of Naperville." (Historian not an Evangelical!)

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Both the Abolitionist and the Temperance Causes had strong advocates in Naperville as early as 1850. Much earlier in the century the Evangelical Discipline had first exhorted, then commanded, its members against participating in the sale of men and women as slaves. A. A. Smith (who later became the first president of North-Western College) was an ardent abolitionist as early at 1839. In 1847 the General Conference drafted a strong statement against this traffic in human lives "under any pretext whatever."

The first temperance organization was formed in the fall of 1850, and at a later period "included among its more than 300 members every prominent business and professional man in Naperville." As early as 1839, the Evangelical Association forbade its members to participate in the sale and use of intoxicating liquors. Several other

organizations were established at varying periods of time, the strongest of which was "The Blue Ribbon Club" in 1879, succeeded two years later by "The Naperville Temperance Alliance," with Professor H. H. Rassweiler of North-Western College as its first president.

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But these Germans in this new territory were more than frugal, hardworking farmers and shopkeepers, interested in religion and temperance and freedom for all in America. They were also concerning themselves with other aspects of culture and education. This was in some ways a revolutionary attitude, as they had to overcome a strong pioneer opposition to formal education. They also had to oppose an attitude within the church itself that the untrained minister stood in closer relationship to God and received greater blessings from him than the educated person. When a vote was taken throughout the Evangelical Association on the desirability of establishing an institution of learning connected with the church, the proposition was roundly voted down.

Mrs. Bertha Finkbeiner remembers distinctly seeing couples walking out to the "protracted meetings" at the Camp Grounds one mile east of Naperville, with the man stalking on ahead and the woman meekly following behind. And this in the first decade of the 20th century!

Shortly after this, individual conferences began working in their own localities, and in 1850 the Illinois and Wisconsin Conferences began discussing the possibility of establishing a college here in the Middle West, closely related to the Evangelical churches but definitely not to be a "preacher factory." This prejudice against the special education of ministers prevailed for another decade, with statements such as the following appearing in some of the church papers: "There is danger that the 'feed' will be placed so high the lambs can't get it." Ministers so trained were designated as "puny debilitated creatures with full heads and very empty hearts who can talk fluently about the stars but have never adored the God who made them." (Shades of Milton's 'Lycidas'!)

In Des Plaines in the Spring of 1861, at a second meeting of members from the two conferences, together with representatives from Indiana and Iowa, Plainfield won out above other towns for the location of the new college. A Board of Trustees was appointed, with Reverend Esher as financial agent. The faculty was to consist of a president and a small corps of professors "who should be competent to teach the Ancient and Modern Languages, Mathematics, and the Moral and Natural Sciences." And so on the eve of the Civil War was brought into being an institution with a lofty vision of uniting a liberal arts education with religious teaching. Through sheer courage and perse-

verance this college lived and flourished. Others with the same ideals, established near the same time, have reluctantly closed their doors.

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At the time of the Civil War, the state of Illinois was proud to have her sons enter a conflict against slavery, a conflict which she, among the western states, had been the first to support. An early historian tells of the noble record of the soldiers from here who "took part in the most decisive campaigns and battles of the war, and those who have returned and are now living are among our most highly-esteemed citizens—efficient in the arts of peace as they were formidable on the field of battle." A glance through the records of the Infantry and Cavalry Regiments shows the names of many Evangelical families.

As was mentioned before, the Evangelical Association was ardent in its stand against slavery. The Illinois Conference of 1863 passed resolutions supporting the Union Cause and commending President Lincoln's proclamation for freeing of slaves. Likewise the General Conference in the same year expressed the support of the Evangelical Association in five lengthy resolutions, a copy of which was sent to President Lincoln. Two years later when the Illinois Conference met in February, 1865, resolutions of sympathy and thankfulness were written and mailed to Washington. By that time the conference members could say, "The Great Director of all things has of late given our armies such decided victories, and consequently secured to the cause of right the ultimate triumph."

In that same year the General Conference decided not to continue with its plans for sending two young men as medical missionaries to India because of the war crises and financial difficulties resulting therefrom. One of these young men, Frederich Heidner, became Professor of German at North-Western College, where he served for fifty years—perhaps laboring with young apostates here in an equally challenging situation!

Within a few weeks after the joyful ringing of church bells announcing the end of the Civil War and the coming of the remaining soldiers to their homes, the whole town was thrown into shock and mourning for Abraham Lincoln. Church pulpits were draped in black and a special Day of Prayer was observed. The picture of the great Emancipator, draped with flags, was placed in front of the pulpit in the Zion Evangelical Church.

Big revivals were held in several of the churches in the year following the war. In the Brick Church a series of meetings lasted twelve weeks, some of the sessions continuing until midnight, "and in those clear and frosty winter nights the beautiful singing of the large congregation could be heard all over town." An interesting story is told in the diary of a young man who for several weeks resisted the exhortations of the minister: "I sought all sorts of excuses. Finally, to head him off I said, 'I do not believe in sham shouting, such as is going on in your meeting'. 'What do you mean?' he asked. I replied, 'There is L.....; she shouts to order. She always takes off her bonnet, nicely folds her shawl, lays them back where they will not be

crushed and then steps in front like a theatrical performer and shouts. I hate shams and always will'. 'So do I', the minister said, 'That shall never occur again'. And it never did.'' Later the young man became a strong leader in the church.

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The year 1870 is a very important date: first, in the history of Naperville; second, in the history of North Central College; and third, in the history of the Evangelical Association. The following is taken from Editor David Givler's ''Naperville Clarion'' at that time: ''Every careful observer will not fail to take cognizance of the vast difference in the status of Naperville now and two years ago. The fall of '68 was the darkest period in the history of this village, arising out of our county seat troubles and intertestine strife. In those days . . . arrests, trials, indictments, and other annoyances were resorted to . . . The public offices were ransacked and the public records carried off to Wheaton; public officers were tormented, threatened, cajoled, frightened, and persecuted in various ways, and an unpleasant, unhealthy state of things existed. . . . *Now* the 'Wheaton Illinoian' and the 'Naperville Clarion' agree to drop all differences that have kept the people of this county in a state of unfriendliness the past six years.''

If the bell in the steeple of First Evangelical Church should start ringing some bright sunny day in 1967 and peal one hundred times, don't be alarmed. It will only be celebrating a century of calling people to worship at this particular corner in Naperville.

In the same year North-Western College was moved from Plainfield to Naperville, partly because since 1864 this village could be reached by the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad—a much more direct route of transportation from Chicago than Plainfield could claim. Of course the idea of extending a railroad all the way across the country to the Pacific was regarded as anything but practicable, as was expressed a few years earlier in a letter written from California by Robert Naper: ''I consider it one of the wildest and most foolish schemes that ever was seriously entertained by an intelligent people.'' The coming of the college to Naperville is important both for the college and for Naperville. The townspeople gave generously of land and money for the new college. All the stores and business houses were closed on May 17 at the laying of the cornerstone for the new building. As many as thirty or even forty workmen were busy many days during the summer and early fall with the stone foundation, the carpentering, and the plastering, to get the building ready for the opening of school in the autumn of that year. An editorial in the Clarion later in the summer declared ''The workmen on the college are so anxious to get the building completed by the 4th of

October (date set for opening) that they would gladly work Sundays if it wasn't contrary to the law and prophets." (No unions or eight-hour work days then!)

Of equal importance is the close relationship which immediately strengthened between the college and the church. As the services were still being held in German at the Zion Church in 1870, some of the college faculty and students, as well as townspeople, organized an English-speaking congregation which met in the college chapel, now Smith Hall of Old Main. At this time in Evangelical conferences all over the country, references were frequently being made to the difficulties involved in various congregations in which the people worshiped in both the German and the English languages. This English Mission five years later was incorporated as "The Second Evangelical Church of Naperville", but was generally referred to as the "College Chapel Church."

The story is told that soon after this many of the Evangelical farmers' sons in Zion Church began going to the Methodist Church to get even with some of the local girls who showed more interest in dating college men than in going out with them!

One of the interesting innovations in this College Chapel Church is expressed in the rather amusing resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees that same year: "Resolved that we will recognize and accept it as our duty to use every proper measure to maintain good order in our congregation during public worship; but we will not assume the responsibility of separating, as to their sitting, families, ladies and gentlemen, who may come together, except in cases of misbehavior." (An awkwardly phrased sentence, but the meaning is unmistakable!)

This resolution was entirely in line with the emphasis upon co-education which was being stressed at North-Western College. A reporter from a Chicago paper upon visiting the campus shortly after that time came out with a long column stating that here the ladies were even *urged* to take part in exercises of all kinds, both academic and physical.

Another institution that has been closely associated with both college and church all through the years is the Evangelical Theological Seminary. Chartered in 1873 as the "Union Biblical Institute," it held its first classes in rooms at North-Western College in 1876 and its first commencement in 1878. The two-year term was not lengthened to its present three-year period until fifty years later.