Nothing
manifested Himself to me, and I was born again in an instant! yea passed from death unto life....In an instant I had power over sin, which I had not before....I felt a love to all mankind; and my desire was that friends and enemies and all the world, if possible, might be saved.²

The next year his business as a carpenter-contractor took him to the Mow Cop area of north Staffordshire. Here his evangelistic zeal made him the recognized leader of groups of new converts.

Five years later William Clowes, the second in importance of the four founders of Primitive Methodism, was converted on January 20, 1805. The night before this boisterous ceramics craftsman had been admitted by mistake to a lovefeast at Burslem. The next morning he went to the prayer service. There he became conscious of inward change and concluded:

This is what the Methodists mean by being converted; yes, this is it. God is converting my soul. In an agony of soul I believed God would save me—then I believed He was saving me—then I believed he had saved me; and it was so.³

In 1809 he was on the Methodist Plan of the Burslem Circuit as a local preacher.

The two other men credited with being founders of Primitive Methodism are James Steele and James Nixon. Both were converted and participated as leaders in this early nineteenth century revival.

For our purpose, the reason for the separation which gave rise to Primitive Methodism will be reduced to a simple sequence of events. Spurred by what he and his colleagues regarded as good and sufficient reasons, Hugh Bourne initiated a series of day’s meetings, called camp meetings, beginning at Mow Cop on May 31, 1807. Disturbed by these unauthorized and irregular assemblies under lay leadership, the Wesleyan Methodist preachers of the Burslem and Macclesfield circuits disclaimed any connection with the camp meetings. The Liverpool Conference of 1807 sustained their position by adopting this resolution:

It is our judgment that, even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be

² H. B. Kendall, The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church, p. 12.
³ Joseph Ritson, The Romance of Primitive Methodism, 1909, p. 44.
Nevertheless, under a compulsion to evangelize the region, and convinced of the effectiveness of the camp meetings as a means of evangelism, the leaders continued the practice. For several years the controversy smouldered, only to be fanned into a rupture by a sequence of incidents. Hugh Bourne was expelled from the Burslem Society on June 27, 1808. The Standley Society of ten members, organized by Hugh Bourne, was not accepted into the Wesleyan Connexion in 1810. And, in June of the same year, William Clowes' name was dropped as a local preacher. Through these, and other acts, a situation developed in which there were sheep without pastors and shepherds who were unauthorized to tend their flocks. Until this time Hugh Bourne and William Clowes had been laymen succoring new converts who looked to them for Christian sustenance, but on March 30, 1811 the two streamlets, known as the Clowesites and Camp Meeting Methodists, merged through the simple expedient of issuing joint society meeting tickets. By February 1812, the first printed preaching plan was issued which designated the new organization as Primitive Methodist.

Born as a revival movement, Primitive Methodism spread throughout the British Isles. Within a decade the reawakening swept up the dales of the Wear and Tees in County Durham. One to be purged at a lovefeast at Westgate in 1824 was Joseph Grieves, formerly a profane miner and poacher. Continuing the account, H. B. Kendall writes:

Our mention of the name of Joseph Grieves, leads us to mark yet another sweep of the revival movement, which resulted in planting our Church in Upper Teesdale and the Eden Valley....He established a series of house prayer-meetings, to which the people flocked, curious to learn how these former ring-leaders in wickedness would pray. Under this humble agency a revival began, and one of its earliest gains was Mr. John Leekley, afterwards the founder of Primitive Methodism in the Western States of America. Now a recognized exhorter, Mr. Grieves, along with Messrs. Leekley, Rain, and Collinson, missioned Bowlees, Harwood, Forest, and other places in Upper Teesdale.5

5. Ibid., p. 148.
Proving his worth, John Leekley was soon granted a local preacher's license and was made a trustee of the Middleton-in-Teesdale Chapel. In about 1826 he accepted an appointment as an itinerant preacher in the Connexion, but due to poor health and other personal reasons he resigned after a few months of service. Returning to his home, he continued as a lay leader until he emigrated to the United States.

**Transplanted Among the Diggings**

In the summer of 1842, the revival flame leaped the Atlantic and half a continent to ignite a fire in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Here in a region of Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory lead was king and the rolling hills were pock-marked with diggings accentuated by gaunt clusters of shanties. But, here and there, settlements became towns—Galena, New Diggings, Shullsburg, Platteville, Mineral Point, villages of more prosperous houses between which snaked a rutted road flanked with grogeries, saloons and gambling parlors. Throughout the country the morning silence was broken by the clang of gad and pick only to be displaced at evening, and through the weekends, by the raucous dissonance of revelry and dance. But religion was beginning to penetrate to the frontier where more discerning eyes could detect the shape of a church in the clutter of buildings and more discriminating ears could isolate from the din the melodies of the gospel. First to enter the country was the indefatigable Father Mazzuchelli, but close behind were the Methodists, Episcopalians and Primitives.

It was in the northwestern section of Illinois that John Leekley and a band of Primitive Methodists settled. Preference for this area had already been insured when a younger brother, Thomas B. Leekley, had established a mine and a smelter. To this region he had brought his mother, Mary Leekley. The men, miners by occupation, had come to wrest a better living from the ground with pick and shovel. There is no indication that they anticipated roles as religious pioneers. But, settling in a community without a church, they organized a society according to the Primitive Methodist model, with John Leekley as their leader. Of the ten charter members, four were local preachers.

The lead region was a frontier and virtually untouched by
Protestantism at the middle of the nineteenth century. Consumed by a passion to win men and women to Christ according to the pattern learned at the time of his conversion, Mr. Leekley trudged over the hills to another mining settlement, Vinegar Hill, and established a second society. Preaching first to only four persons, he persuaded them to become a class of Primitive Methodists. And here, in what must have been a more prosperous community, the band expanded and erected the first Primitive Methodist Church in the Midwest in the summer of 1843.

Across the line in the Wisconsin Territory were the boom towns of New Diggings and Shullsburg. Father Samuel Mazuchelli had moved across this territory and the Presbyterians and Methodists would establish missions, but at the moment these were essentially churchless communities in need of the gospel. Accepting the challenge, the Primitive Methodists moved in to form their third and fourth societies.

Meanwhile, to the north at Platteville a Methodist Episcopal church had been firmly established. In the church there were two Primitive Methodists, John Chapman and Henry Snowden, who had vowed that if a society of their persuasion should be formed, they would transfer their allegiance to it. Through their mining-smelting interests in the Grant Hill region, they learned about the Primitive Methodist development and petitioned the founders to organize a class in Platteville. This was done during the winter of 1842-43 at the home of Robert Chapman. A description of a typical house meeting has been preserved. The speaker is unknown.

When I first made my entrance to you in 1844, I preached in Robert Chapman's house. The room was not overly large, and the people crowded into it, so that there was scarcely room to turn around, but the fire fell on us that day, as it did on the disciples in the Upper Room at Jerusalem, and it has never ceased to burn.6

Here at Platteville the second church of the denomination was built in 1844.

During this time, preaching appointments were being established in homes and schoolhouses as out-points from the

five major societies. As yet there was no formal organization of
the movement and no general supervision of the activities
beyond that which we suppose was provided by John Leekley.
The preaching was done by local preachers. Nor were there
societies under the jurisdiction of any denomination, although
the leaders thought of themselves as being bound by the doc-
trines and procedures of the English Primitive Methodist
Connexion. In the years ahead, John Leekley tried to persuade
the parent body to accept the societies of the Mississippi Valley
as a mission branch but his entreaties were politely declined.
Furthermore, even though the Hull and Tunstall Circuits in
England had missioned churches on the Atlantic seacoast with
meager success, there was no disposition to extend this
paternalism to the West. What happened, then, was a
recapitulation of the original pattern where laymen, incited by
Christian conviction in a region devoid of an effective gospel
ministry, spontaneously merged into societies which needed
only to be united into an ecclesiastical organization.

A Denomination Emerging

The 1871 book of *Doctrines and Discipline of the Primitive
Meth. Connection* brings the situation into perspective:

...to establish the cause of Christianity, under the name of *Primitive
Methodism*....

As soon as our design became known, invitations came from various
places to give them preaching. In the name of our Lord we raised the
Gospel Banner. God working with us, and sending salvation among the
people, our calls became very numerous, and on the 25th of February,
A.D. 1843, we held our first quarterly conference at Grant Hill, near
Galena, engaged an itinerant preacher, and made suitable regulations for
carrying forward the work of God.7

At the Grant Hill convention, the churches were united
within the Rocky Ford Circuit. One of the four local preachers
from the charter membership at Grant Hill, Christopher
Lazemby, was chosen by his peers. Among his several solid
qualifications was the utilitarian consideration that he was

unmarried and could live on a salary of $100 per year and his board. So successful was the venture that soon another local preacher was put in the field, Frederick Dobson of Grant Hill. These two men were charged to preach each day and several times on Sunday. Their journeys compelled them to travel in all kinds of weather, braving rain and snow, fording streams, and seeking from settlers along the way their meager food and primitive accommodations.

In this same year, 1843, the first Preachers' Plan was printed. From it comes the information that there were fourteen preaching points spread from Galena to Platteville and from Sinsinawa, near Dubuque, to Apple River, Illinois. Assigned to travel this circuit were two itinerant preachers and eleven local preachers. There were "about" sixty members.

The first day's meeting, equivalent to the English camp meeting, was held at Grant Hill on June 4, 1843. According to the traditional arrangement, the company was divided into two groups, one on either side of the preacher's stand. The program consisted of two short sermons followed by a twenty-minute prayer session. The whole circuit was represented in the congregation, together with preachers from several other denominations.

In December 1843 Frederick Dobson resigned, leaving one itinerant preacher, Christopher Lazemby. To replace Mr. Dobson, Richard Hodgson, another charter member and local preacher from Grant Hill, was appointed.

Here the 1871 Discipline carries the account a step further:

At our quarterly conference held at Shullsburg, W. T., August 24th, A.D. 1844, finding great inconvenience to arise from the vast distance between us and the Conference with which we stood connected: the cause here rising, and peace dwelling within our borders, it was unanimously agreed that we should hold a convention to deliberate on the utility of forming a "Western Conference," and adopt such a form of church government as would be most conducive to the welfare of the Connection in this western country; which convention was held at Platteville, W. T., September 7th, A.D. 1844, when an annual conference was appointed, and a discipline adopted, the result of which must be left to the blessing of God, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Amen. 8

8. Ibid., p. 4.
In addition to the items alluded to in the *Discipline*, the Platteville convention adopted the hymnbook prepared by the Primitive Methodists at New Haven, authorized the enlargement of the Book Concern, and the publication of a monthly magazine.

The first Annual Conference was held at Platteville, Wisconsin, in May 1845. A third preacher was called out and Christopher Lazemby was assigned to the western part of the circuit, including Potosi, British Hollow, and Bee Town.

The doctrinal position conformed to that of the English church. It was based upon the assumption that the Bible is the inspired word of God for faith and practice and that its declarations are final. In an indenture for the Vinegar Hill Church dated December 20, 1847, the doctrines are listed:

> It is the intent of this deed that the aforesaid premises shall be held as aforesaid and remain for the use of the aforesaid Primitive Methodist Society, for the support of and inculcation of its present doctrines as now held by it, and all Primitive Methodist Churches and no other or different doctrines and to remove all controversy now and hereafter in regard to what said doctrines are, it is hereby declared that the doctrines now held by the Primitive Methodist Church and preached in all Primitive Methodist Churches by all legally authorized Primitive Methodist Ministers and which shall hereafter and forever be held and preached in the aforesaid Primitive Methodist Society to entitle itself to the benefit hereof, are, as contained in the Primitive Methodist Discipline, page 45, Section 15 as the Innocency of Man in his first estate, the Fall of Man and consequent depravity of human nature, the general full and free redemption of Man by Jesus Christ, Repentance, Justification by faith of the ungodly in their turning to God, the Witness of the Spirit, Sanctification by the Holy Spirit, producing inward and outward holiness, the doctrine of a Triune God, the real and proper Godhead of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the general Judgment, and eternal rewards and punishments. 9

To become a member of a society, a person would be on probation for three months during which time he should demonstrate his sincere wish to “flee from the wrath to come,” walk uprightly before God and man, and be strict in attendance to the means of grace. If a member should deviate from the General Rules of the Societies, he would be dropped from membership.

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The rules of the Connexion required plain and austere living of all members. In the 1852 *Discipline* the itinerant preacher was limited to seven hours of sleep each night and a minimum of time for his meals. He was to spend six hours in study and devote the remainder of the day to family visiting and other pastoral duties. He was required to make at least twenty family visits each week. If he failed to keep this schedule, there was to be an appropriate deduction from his salary and the assessment of a fine. Later, such legalistic demands were dropped from the written rules defining the minister's role.

The first severe reversal of the cause came at the August Quarterly Conference, 1846. It was learned that one of the itinerant preachers, Richard Hodgson, had become a Free Mason. This was ruled to be a violation of the discipline of the church and he was compelled to resign. Christopher Lazemby supported the right of his colleague to affiliate with the order and he, too, was asked to give up his itinerant assignment. Only one full-time preacher remained and he was confronted by a circuit which was growing in size and membership. Had it not been for the extended effort of the local preachers, the cause would have foundered in the heavy seas.

However, the severity of the set-back was modified by an opportunity which launched Primitive Methodism in a region of Wisconsin where agriculture was the primary occupation. In 1844 eight families emigrated from Derbyshire and Yorkshire to Albion. Arriving in a community without a church, they established their own Christian fellowship according to the Primitive Methodist pattern. Samuel Marsden, one of four local preachers among the newcomers, preached the first sermon. Unlike the Grant Hill society, their local preachers did not establish an aggressive mission program. Yet, when they learned of the activities at Rocky Ford, they dispatched a request that officials be sent to establish their society as a congregation of the connexion. Thus, early in the winter of 1846, missions were begun at Albion and Janesville.

Even though English Primitive Methodism would not extend its jurisdiction to the Middlewest, it did publish news of the American work and gave tacit encouragement to any of its own preachers who wanted to transfer their credentials to the Western Conference. About July 1, 1848 the first of these
ministers arrived in the person of the Rev. Joseph Hewitt. Here is his view of one of the American stations:

At length we reached our station, called *Platteville*, which should be named *Mount Pleasant*. It has a population of about two thousand, stands on a delightful hill, is surrounded with the most beautiful prairies, covered with grass, flowers, and evergreens, refreshed with delightful streams....Our church here adjoins my residence, and will accommodate three or four hundred hearers; but often there is as large a congregation outside as within....We have three Connexional churches, and many public school rooms, lent to us, rent-free; and the congregations are large and respectable. I was pleasingly astonished to see the people in the midst of harvest, come at three or four o'clock on a week-day afternoon, to hear a feeble preacher like me....When I visit the people, whether our members or not, they cheerfully accommodate me and my horse, and are more ready to entertain us for a night than to allow our departure.10

Mr. Hewitt proved to be an able preacher and was honored in later years with the title "Father" Hewitt. Within the year, 1848, another preacher chose to transfer to the United States. John Sharpe demonstrated that he had competencies needed in the aspiring connexion and filled significant roles at periods of critical opportunity. However, due to a temperament which on occasions could be abrasive, he was not held in such high esteem by his colleagues as was Joseph Hewitt. These were the first of a stream of English preachers who were to occupy the pulpits of the denomination.

It is evident that at some points the two Methodisms, Primitive and Episcopal, would be competitors for the allegiance of potential members, yet conflicts were minimal. The most significant of the confrontations occurred in Mineral Point, Wisconsin, yet it rated only a notation in the Minutes of the Wisconsin Conference (Methodist Episcopal). By this time Mineral Point was a substantial village (population of 2,110 in 1850) with a predominantly English citizenry, many of whom were Cornish. There were two or three established Protestant churches and one Catholic. In December 1848, John Sharpe and James Alderson went to Mineral Point with the intent of opening a Primitive Methodist mission. A meeting was held in a church belonging to the Wesleyan Methodists. The congregation was small but the service was impressive. Even so, no en-

Courage was given to open a work and the two preachers left with the remark that they would return in the spring if there were an opportunity. Meanwhile, a smouldering dissatisfaction with the way in which the Methodist Episcopal society was governed broke into open dissent when a dispute arose over the choir and the use of the organ. About half of the membership peaceably withdrew and petitioned to be received as a Primitive Methodist society. On February 25, 1849, James Alderson preached to a large crowd in the courthouse, and on the next evening a church was organized. This congregation eventually became the largest in the Western Conference and the head of the strongest circuit.

The report of the Conference held in Mineral Point in 1851 will bring into focus the progress of the connexion. During the preceding year there had been an increase of 154 members, bringing the enrollment to 770. There were seven chapels and fifty-two other preaching places. The number of classes was forty-eight, with thirty-nine leaders. The Sabbath schools had an enrollment of 496.

For a decade the original society at Grant Hill had been a small struggling congregation without a church in which to worship. Yet it was this band which had inspired the expansion of Primitive Methodism and supplied the earliest itinerant preachers. But now, following a successful revival, and with financial support from other societies, a stone church was erected. Above the door a marble slab carried the name:

CLOWES
PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHURCH
1853

When the corner stone was laid on June 11, 1853, John Leekley was one of those who delivered a short address. This must have been a high moment for him but unfortunately it was one of his last public appearances. He died at New Diggings, Wisconsin, on February 27, 1854.

A full portrait of the valiant pioneer, John Leekley, cannot be sketched since only fragmentary materials remain from his writings and the observations of others. Within a year after his arrival in America, the crippling effects of rheumatism began to
work until, when he preached, he had to be carried to the pulpit and supported himself by sitting on a stool. Soon after arriving in the United States, Joseph Hewitt wrote of him:

Brother J. Leekley answers to the character you gave him in your Magazine: he is a fine, open, straightforward, sensible Christian, and deeply attached to Primitive Methodism. Affliction has deprived him of the use of his limbs; but his loss appears to be the church's gain, for he is chiefly occupied in promoting her interests.11

And the writer of his Memoirs, John Sharpe, gives this tribute:

He preached occasionally, with good effect; but he had to be carried into the pulpit, and sit while there. He held, from the commencement of the Connexion to the time of his death, the office of Corresponding Secretary, and satisfactorily and efficiently discharged its duties. He was also Book Steward for the Connexion, and a member of the Connexional Committee. These offices, indeed, he desired at several Conferences to resign, but the brethren feeling assured of his competence to fill them, re-elected him from time to time. This he viewed as a kind of forbearance on the part of his brethren, and a sense of it frequently affected him to tears. That he should inspire them with confidence, and grow in their esteem, notwithstanding his increasing bodily infirmities, was to him a source of pleasure. But they in truth found him wise in counsel; steady in attachment; judicious in advice; tender in sympathy; firm in principle, and ever disposed to do all he could to further the cause he loved so much.12

At the time of his death, John Leekley was missed in the courts of the church. How well he had served the denomination to which he had dedicated his life is evident from the fact that the corporate body was sufficiently established to insure the perpetuation of the infant cause. For the next two decades the church was to register a slow but steady growth. The Grant Hill Society of ten members had grown to become a Conference confident of its potential to serve the cause of Christ in the Middlewest.

Struggle to Expand

Within narrow limits the Western Conference did expand during the second half of the nineteenth century. It is reported

that there were 169 appointments in 1865. Many of these, however, were in private homes and school houses, the names of which have been lost from memory. According to the custom of the period, the denomination depended upon two programs to maintain and expand its membership. It encouraged the organization of a Sunday school at each church. But the theological position of the Connexion was based upon the indispensibility of the revival, to which even the Sunday school was an adjunct program. Weather permitting, every annual conference scheduled a grove meeting. The Rev. John Sharpe describes a procession used to advertise such a service.

The singing, praying, and exhortation in the streets of Shullsburgh, in moving in procession towards the grove, were very impressive.13

The Rev. William Tomkins underscores the fundamental place of the revival in the following news story:

In December last, we commenced a protracted meeting at Benton, a place noted around this section of the country for the degraded character of the people...Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, and gambling. We had a small society there, which had suffered considerably from difficulties and disagreements among the lead miners. We had wept and prayed, and laboured....But on the third evening of our protracted meeting, the Spirit of the Lord was poured out on the members of the Church....Night after night for about seven weeks sinners were converted, backsliders reclaimed and believers were made happy in the love of God...and upwards to sixty souls professed to find the pearl of great price.14

The major extension of the Conference was in southern Wisconsin. The original Rocky Ford Circuit extended into Lafayette County. In time two more circuits were developed in this county, Benton and Pleasant View in the open country. In Grant County, Platteville was the largest center but there were also the circuits of British Hollow and Little Grant. Iowa County held Mineral Point, Dodgeville, Ridgeway, Mifflin, and Floyd's Schoolhouse. Mazomanie was in Dane County, Albion in Jefferson County, and Janesville in Rock County. To the north were Oxford in Marquette County and Waukesha in Waukesha County. In broad strokes, these were the boundaries of the heartland of Primitive Methodism in the Middlewest.

 Except for the Chicago missions, the extensions into Illinois were in the coal towns in the north. When coal became an essential fuel, English Primitive Methodists migrated and established societies in such places as Kewanee in 1865, Coal Valley in 1868, Braidwood in 1871, and Streator in 1874. Altogether there were nine churches established; only Streator continues today.

As early as 1834, Mrs. Elizabeth Atkinson, a Primitive Methodist preacher licensed by the English Church, preached frequently at the Methodist Episcopal mission in Duhuque. However, it was not until 1871 that Primitive Methodism crossed the river into Iowa. The opportunity came when Richard Waller, an Englishman who had established smelters in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa, purchased the Centenary Methodist Church of Dubuque. Even though he was a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, it was

the purpose of brother Waller, as we understand, to repair the building in plain Primitive Methodist fashion and rededicate it to divine worship for the benefit of such of his brethren as do not take kindly to cushioned pews and organs, but who yearn to go back to first principles, and cherish piety more than popularity.\textsuperscript{15}

The Rev. James Alderson, one of the most eloquent and aggressive preachers in the conference, was assigned to this pulpit. The early prospects were bright and fifteen converts united with the church in a city-wide revival held in 1872. However, in spite of glowing prospects a substantial foundation was not acquired and the project was abandoned in 1875 because $6,000 could not be raised by the denomination to purchase the building.

At the close of the century an effort with more permanent consequences was projected in central Iowa. William A. Morris, lay preacher and an English emigrant, moved from the mines and the Primitive Methodist Church at Coal Valley, Illinois, to the coal town of Angus, Iowa in 1883. This town, with a population of over 6,000, had fourteen saloons and no churches. Beginning with prayer services in the homes of interested lay persons, societies were formed here and in surrounding settlements so that by 1887 one hundred forty members were

\textsuperscript{15} D\textit{ubuque Daily Herald}, Sunday, July 2, 1871.
reported to the Conference. But when the mines closed, the church was marked as a dying society. However, a church was opened in Fraser in the 1890's and in 1924 the Primitive Methodists purchased a Presbyterian mission in Boone. Both of these societies continue today as active stations.

Before citing other ventures, it would be profitable to hazard some opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of Primitive Methodism. Unfortunately, most of its societies were small groups organized in mining communities with transient populations. When the mines closed the villages died, and the churches with them. The most incisive observation is that this was an ethnic movement. William Tomkins put the issue in focus:

We are looked upon as foreigners; and there is a very strong national prejudice against foreign organizations and teachings.\(^{16}\)

Cultural predilections were a strength in that they provided the initial incentive for the establishment of Primitive Methodist societies. They were homogenous centers where people could speak in their own vernacular about the sentiments of the past and the common problems of the present. Furthermore, they were united by a religious imperative which was couched in the simple, plain forms to which they were accustomed. But, likewise, this very strength was a weakness. The English Primitive Methodist character of the movement failed to attract many who did not have that heritage. Also, except for differences in polity, the Americanized Methodist Episcopal churches and, in some communities, the Congregational churches offered Englishmen important advantages due to the size and affluence of their congregations.

From the start, Primitive Methodism in the Mississippi Valley accepted its role as a missionary venture. In 1856 William Tomkins described the situation in these words:

Though our Connexion in this western country is small, we have five missionaries in what might be called the home missionary field, who are supported partly from our missionary funds.

Then after giving credit to women who had collected sums of from twenty to twenty-five dollars among the members of

\(^{16}\) *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (English), vol. 38, 1857, p. 119.
several societies, he concluded:

At the missionary meeting already held, we have raised 400 dollars; but we are in want of more men and more means. 17

Later, another wrote:

If you will take up our Minutes for 1865, you will find that out of twenty-four fields of gospel labors, nine of them are Missionary fields, and besides these, eight out of the fifteen so-called Circuits are more or less dependent upon the Missionary Fund. 18

The missionary efforts only emphasize the impediment to the expansion of the Western Conference which was inherent in the poverty of the Conference. The constituency of miners and farmers were not able to fund extensive mission projects, nor was there a strong central board in the East to finance such endeavors. It was this factor which thwarted every effort to move into new fields and take advantage of opportunities in the cities. The failure of the Dubuque program is a case in point. But there were others. Declined was the petition of Primitive Methodists from the Lake Superior copper region to open a mission in 1862. In the 1870's at least two missions were begun in Michigan, Wellsville and Ridgeway, but they survived only two or three years. In the next decade miners from Streator organized a Primitive Methodist society in Erie, Colorado, but it, too, was soon closed. A similar fate doomed the venture in Blossburg, New Mexico.

It was recognized that if the Western Conference intended to grow, it must organize churches in the cities. In 1888 a mission was started in Des Moines, Iowa. From this a cluster of churches emerged and continued for two decades but then were dropped from the list of stations. As early as 1881, the Connexional Committee was charged to investigate ways to mission Chicago, but it was not until 1889 that a station was opened in Pullman, Illinois. The choice of this location was unfortunate due to labor unrest which precipitated a strike in 1894. Two or three other missions were opened on the east side of the city at an inopportune time since a sound financial base could not be

17. Ibid., p. 120.
established before the depression of 1893. By about 1904 all efforts to continue the work in Chicago were abandoned.

As the Western Conference used its best efforts to extend its borders, it recognized the importance of maintaining its solidarity. From the Platteville convention in 1844 onward, the leaders were aware of the need of a denominational magazine which would encourage cohesiveness by providing a bulletin featuring the activities of the societies together with a means of publicizing connexional views and programs. Unfortunately, copies of most of the publications of the nineteenth century have been lost except the complete four volumes of the American Primitive Methodist Magazine, 1861-65, which are preserved by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The reading of this publication will indicate that it was an organ of literary quality and exhibited the depth and breadth of the interest of the denomination.

Since in the last decade of the nineteenth century the Western Conference entered its valiant struggle for survival, it would be helpful to review its status in 1889. In this year there were twenty-four stations listed in the conference yearbook. Most of these stations were circuit headquarters with one or more other preaching appointments. There were twenty-one ministers assigned at this conference. In this year the total membership was 1,960 persons.

**Conflict and Survival**

While the western churches had known a comparative degree of prosperity during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the eastern churches, which theoretically were under the jurisdiction of the Western Conference, struggled to keep alive. Their plight reached a climax in 1871 when a number of the ministers and members withdrew to join other churches. In 1872 the remaining churches, which had been strengthened by the struggle, petitioned to become an indigenous body. Permission was granted and the Eastern Conference held its first session at Plymouth, Pennsylvania, in May 1873. Six years later the two bodies organized a General Conference which met for the first time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in September 1889. From this point the eastern churches grew in strength and
importance.

The "Numerical and Spiritual State of the Connexion" report for the Western Conference in 1889 was optimistic:

We feel much encouraged with the present and future prospects of our connexion... (which) should urge us to greater activity and zeal in the extension of our borders, and upbuilding of Christ's Kingdom.19

The reporters were not able to discern that this was a calm before the storm. But by looking back, it is possible to see certain intimations of trouble. There were congregations which were growing restive and were encouraged in this by their misconception of the polity of the denomination. They assumed that the form of government was congregational. In reality it was nearer to the presbyterian concept. The local congregation was not sovereign and independent but subject to the guidance of the conference. While every circuit was free to invite any minister ordained by the denomination to serve as its pastor, the conference had the final voice in making the appointment. Furthermore, the conference had the power to assign ministers to churches which had failed to secure a man by invitation. The court system of the denomination provided for graduated jurisdictions and decisions.

Another sensitive spot was the preparation of ministers. As a lay movement, it served the purpose of the denomination in its early years to raise up preachers from the ranks who were akin in thought and language with the miners and farmers of their congregations. As late as the Discipline of 1871, ministers were encouraged to be studious, but no formal courses of study were required beyond being conversant with the doctrines and usages of the Church. All too slowly this was to change by the introduction of a prescribed home-study curriculum and, well into the twentieth century, the requirement of education at the college level. In a word, while the need for formal education was recognized, practical considerations hindered any effort to enlist preachers who were sufficiently advanced beyond the rising educational level of the general public.

An even more critical problem was the enlistment of men for the ministry. Primitive Methodism in the Middlewest did produce some ministers from its own stock. It was likewise

19. Proceedings of the...Primitive Methodist Church, 1889, p. 58.
fortunate to receive from England preachers of the denomination who wanted to put down roots in the New World. However, there was an interchange of ministers between the Primitive Methodist and other denominations, particularly the Congregational, which led to disaffection and the ultimate withdrawal of some congregations from the Connexion. What saved the conference from dissolution was a loyal core of ministers and laymen who refused to capitulate.

The question of continuing the Western Conference was put before the churches and on February 11, 1896, the results were considered by the Connexional Committee. The overwhelming number of twelve circuits voted to continue the work of the denomination and only three voted for dissolution. However, since two of the largest churches turned in negative votes, the per capita return was much closer, 986 against dissolution and 744 for it. The General Committee recommended that the voice of the majority be seriously considered and yet phrased the recommendation in the form of a challenge.

Resolved, That, as a test of their earnestness and fidelity to the connexion, we hereby ask them to confirm their words by their deeds in the coming year, by contributing to the mission fund at least 50 cents per member...; that they show loyalty to the ministry by cheerfully and promptly paying them their salaries:...

Resolved, That if any charge or circuit shall have decided to withdraw from the connexion we bid them God speed.20

The resolution, adopted at the 1896 Conference but rescinded at the 1897 meeting, provoked irreparable damage. A majority of the members of one of the dissenting congregations took the last “resolve” literally and notified the Conference that it was withdrawing from the Connexion. This group became the Plymouth Congregational Church of Dodgeville, Wisconsin. However, the minority of the congregation continued as Primitive Methodists and, by court order, were given the property rights covering the land and building. One year later the membership at Hazel Green became a Congregational Church, although years later they returned to Primitive Methodism. Gradually the congregation at Mineral Point

asserted its independence and in 1913 affiliated with the Congregational Church.

Leveling Off

The tempestuous years had passed, and with them the drive to expand. The Western Conference settled down in its role as a union of small churches until it merged with the stronger Pennsylvania Conference in 1927. In 1948 the Eastern Conference united with the Pennsylvania Conference to combine all Primitive Methodist churches in the United States under the name “Primitive Methodist Church in the United States.” Now at the last quarter of the twentieth century the churches in the Midwest number seventeen stations with a total membership of about 1,100 persons.

In a day when bigness is the accepted criteria of prestige and effectiveness, it is significant that some small institutions can accept their place with dignity and an intention to serve in the name of their own identity. Most Primitive Methodist churches in the Midwest have their ministry in non-competitive locations, usually in towns or the open country where otherwise there would be no Christian centers. In a day when there is a search for cohesive forces to bind small communities, Primitive Methodist churches make their contribution.

More by default than by deliberate choice the smaller churches of the Midwest have become the in-service training centers for many of the Primitive Methodist ministers during their four years of probation. These men, elevated from the ranks of their peers, generally continue through the years of their ministry to serve within the bounds of their own denomination as ministers or missionaries. But there are those of more restless inclinations who have stepped from the churches in the West to distinguish themselves in other denominations through the ministry, education, and administration.

Now the last word returns full circle to underscore the missionary zeal of Midwestern Primitive Methodism. The Midwest Conference began as a self-sufficient home missionary enterprise and it was not until it joined in forming a General Conference that it gave its support to the foreign
mission program of the English Church in Africa. This effort continued until 1921, when a United States mission of Primitive Methodism was opened in Guatamala. Through the years it has been expanded beyond evangelism to include medical clinics, educational centers, and translation. Today the total membership of the denomination of 11,000 persons, in eighty-two churches, contributes about $25 per member to home and international missions. The contribution of the Western District is slightly higher, totalling about $30 per member for all mission causes.

Through most of its history the question has been raised periodically about the wisdom of uniting with some other denomination. To date this has not been regarded as feasible, and in its own right the Primitive Methodist Church continues. Concurring in this decision, a small membership remains dedicated to the task of preserving the cause and fulfilling its mission. Now, well into the first half of the second century of its history, the Western District of the Primitive Methodist Church continues to work toward the attainment of the role defined for it by John Leekley and his associates at Grant Hill.