

JOHN WESLEY ILIFF, AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE WEST

J. ALTON TEMPLIN

When we discuss The Iliff School of Theology, we are often asked about the meaning of the name. Because the name is not common in most parts of the country, there are many mispronunciations as well as misspellings. The name "Iliff" is actually a family name, associated with the earliest history of the Colorado Territory. It is possible that it was originally spelled "Oeliff" or "Ayloff," and was derived from that part of England controlled by the Vikings in the ninth century. At any rate, the origin of the name seems to have been in eastern England, according to all the family traditions that have been located.¹ To document these assumptions will take more detailed research. The memory and the name of the original Iliff forebear in Colorado are preserved in a town in northeastern Colorado, in an Avenue in Denver, and in the United Methodist theological school which bears his name.

Since this theological school plays a significant role in the development of the church, and especially Methodism, in the western part of our nation, we need to see how the vision of Mr. Iliff came to be a reality. Who were the leaders of the school at the beginning? We shall note five major personalities: John Wesley Iliff; his second wife, Elizabeth Iliff; Bishop Henry White Warren; William Seward Iliff; and Miss Louise Iliff.

Early years and Education

John Wesley Iliff was born December 18, 1831, the third child, but the first son among the ten children of Thomas Iliff and Salome Reed.² Their prosperous farm home was at McLuney, in Perry County, Ohio, near Crooksville just south of Zanesville.³ Thomas Iliff was evidently a strong supporter of Methodism, and in 1847 he built a Methodist church

¹This reflects the research of Alberta Iliff Shattuck, in her lecture, "Singer comes to Colorado," (1976). The spelling of "Ayloff" is from *Portrait and Biographical Record of the State of Colorado*. (Chicago: Chapman, 1899), p. 28.

²Shattuck, *Ibid*.

³A newspaper clipping "Perry County Native is 'Great Westerner,'" from an Ohio newspaper of recent years, otherwise unidentified. It is filed with the Iliff family papers, in the Rocky Mountain Conference archives.

in his home town. The church is still standing and has an active congregation. The older Iliff's grave is in the cemetery adjoining the church.⁴ The Methodist connections were further evident when the family named their first son after the founder of Methodism. John Wesley Iliff was sent to the nearby Methodist college, Ohio Wesleyan, when it had been an institution only approximately twenty years. From 1853 to 1856 Iliff studied there, but did not follow his father's wishes completely. Thomas Iliff wanted his son to become a minister, but young John left school after only three years and did not take a degree although many sources say he "graduated."⁵ He studied science instead, and developed other plans.

Soon thereafter the father promised to buy the farm next to his, and said he would let young John have \$7,500 interest in the land if he would stay and farm it. The younger man refused this offer and asked instead for only \$500.⁶ He hoped to make his fortune in the West, and he joined a group of migrants. They went to eastern Kansas where several of them founded Ohio City (now Princeton, in Franklin County, thirty miles south of Lawrence, or five miles south of Ottawa).⁷

By the spring of 1857 Iliff had established a store in the new settlement. The lumber for it had been hauled from Kansas City, and the Iliff store was one of the first buildings in the area.⁸ He had also acquired two quarter sections of land in the developing area.⁹ We note that this was only two years after Kansas was organized as a territory, and raids by the Kiowa Indians were prevalent in the sparsely settled area. On February 9, 1859, the new town of Ohio City was incorporated, and Iliff's name is on the deed as one of the incorporators.¹⁰ The new situation did not satisfy him, however, for he soon sold his property, and with two partners, began a migration farther west. It was the time when news of gold discoveries in the Rocky Mountains gave added reason for going west, to strike it rich if possible.

Just when the party arrived in the Denver area is not clear, but by August, 1859, an advertisement stated that Fenton, Auld and Iliff were dealers in grocers and provision, and in clothing in Denver City, as it was called.¹¹ The store was on the east side of Cherry Creek, slightly north

⁴The *Sunday Times Recorder* (Section D), Zanesville, Ohio, November 12, 1972. This gives not only a photograph of Iliff as an adult, but also a photograph of the white church near Crooksville, Ohio. The Iliff papers include personal correspondence from members of the church on the occasion of the celebration of the 112th anniversary of the church in 1959.

⁵Letter from the registrar of Ohio Wesleyan University, 1961, among the Iliff papers in the archives.

⁶This is reflected in Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*. (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 9. The same story is repeated by most sources old or recent.

⁷O. L. Baskin, *History of the City of Denver*. (Chicago: Baskin and Company, 1880), p. 472.

⁸"Reflections of Franklin County," (Kansas), (1861), the Iliff papers.

⁹Iliff's land deeds are filed in the Archives with the Iliff papers.

¹⁰The legal papers showing Iliff as one of the incorporators are filed with the Iliff papers.

¹¹*Denver City and Auraria Directory*, 1859, p. 40.

of the present Larimer Square. On the west side of Cherry Creek at that time was the rival town of Auraria. In April, 1860 the two small settlements merged into one, taking the name Denver.¹² This name had come with earliest settlers from eastern Kansas who remembered a former Governor of the Kansas Territory, James W. Denver. Iliff also purchased two lots in the new town when it was not yet one year old. There are some traditions suggesting he first went up the creeks to the mining fields to try his luck, but this cannot be substantiated, and probably is not accurate.

Development of the Cattle Industry

Within one year Iliff decided to expand his interest once again, perhaps because in April, 1861, President Buchanan had signed the bill creating the Colorado Territory.¹³ He bought some land approximately thirty miles down the river from Denver, between where Platteville and Fort Lupton are now located.¹⁴ The river beds had lush grass, and he saw potential in the cattle business. At first he bought weak or gaunt oxen which had pulled freight wagons across the plains from Omaha or St. Louis.¹⁵ It is estimated that in May, 1859, there were eleven thousand wagons on the road toward Denver.¹⁶ Iliff found that the natural grassland produced sufficient nourishment for these animals, and in a few months they would fatten up, and then they were sold again or butchered. He provided beef first of all for the expanding population of Denver, and for the mining camps.

Gradually he expanded his operations. He bought more land farther northeast along the river, and arranged to drive large herds of Texas longhorn cattle overland to northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. In 1863, for example, he bought 1300 steers and hired the men to drive them north from central Texas, across Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and across the corner of Kansas into Colorado.¹⁷ There were always three problems associated with these activities, however. *First*, with such large herds there was always the danger of stampedes which would disperse the herds and many animals would ultimately be lost. *Second*, cattle rustlers were

¹²Denver and Auraria joined into one town on April 3, 1860. W. B. Vickers, *History of the City of Denver, Arapahoe County and Colorado*. (Chicago: O. L. Baskin and Company, 1880), p. 196. Also Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Queen City: A History of Denver*. (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishers, 1977), p. 6.

¹³Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, Duane A. Smith, *A Colorado History*. (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1976), p. 100.

¹⁴Agnes Spring, "A Genius for Handling Cattle: John Wesley Iliff." Maurice Fink, W. Turretine Jackson and Agnes Spring, eds. *When Grass Was King*. (Boulder, Colorado: The University of Colorado Press, 1956), pp. 138-139.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 347. This is corroborated by Martin Rist, "John Wesley Iliff: The Squarest Man who ever rode the Plains."

¹⁶This often-repeated estimate appears in Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans*, p. 9.

¹⁷Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 353.

often lurking around for an easy steal, and had to be fought off. *Third*, Indian Territory and western Kansas were patrolled by Comanche Indians, and raids were almost guaranteed from the Kiowa or Cheyenne as well. Somehow, however, the cattle got into Colorado, and passed several miles east of Denver on their way north.

Several other times he had cattle driven from Texas, but a new route was proposed in 1866. This was to come from western Texas up the Pecos River Valley through New Mexico, where Carlsbad, Roswell, Fort Sumner are located today, and avoid the Indian Territory.¹⁸ The lack of pure water in a great portion of eastern New Mexico, however, took its toll on the cattle instead. The two pioneers in driving cattle on this route were Oliver Loving and Charles Goodnight. This became known as the Goodnight-Loving trail, and these two drovers made similar trips regularly for over a decade.¹⁹

With increasing herds, Iliff needed more grassland. He bought property on Crow Creek, east of Greeley, stretching northward toward the Wyoming border.²⁰ Then Iliff developed one more strategy. In 1862 the Homestead Act was passed.²¹ This provided that a head of household, over age 21, could obtain title to 160 acres if he promised to develop it and stay five years. The farming in arid Colorado, however, was much different from that in other parts of the country, and very few families could make a decent living on only 160 acres. This is especially true since in the northeastern part of Colorado water was scarce. In this portion of the state there are very few areas where there was sufficient rainfall to grow even dry-land crops. Irrigation was not yet developed but even so the river water could be diverted only a certain number of miles from the river, and the range we are describing was too rolling and uneven to make this possible. Part of this area today is set aside as the Pawnee National Grassland region, to preserve it in its natural state. In this triangle we have described, north of the South Platte River to the Wyoming border, no towns of any size ever developed and it is sparsely settled even today.

John Wesley Iliff was an opportunist, however, and began to buy up land along the South Platte River from Greeley and Fort Morgan to the northeastern corner of the state near Julesburg, and across the plains to where Cheyenne, Wyoming, would soon be developed. Time and again homesteaders lost most if not all of their investment and left the region for the developing cities, or to return to their homes in the east. Iliff bought up many of these tracts of land, scattered along the river for 100 miles, and to the Wyoming border.²² Thus, the unsuccessful had some meager

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 355-356.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, This is further substantiated in Boorstin, p. 11.

²⁰Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 349.

²¹Ubbelohde, *et al.*, *A Colorado History*, p. 193.

²²Jim French, "Cattle King from Ohio," *The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch Magazine*, March 29, 1959, p. 10.

income for their labors, and Iliff had the land he needed for his cattle empire—indeed, he was called “the Cattle King.” Evidently there were some plots of land that were homesteaded by Iliff’s employees so he could buy them in time.²³ These were some of the abuses of the Homestead Act, but the idea was unworkable for many sections of Colorado from the very first. Historians agree that Iliff always proceeded perfectly legally, but took advantage of the unforeseen problems and loop holes in the original legislation.

Ultimately he had 105 or 107 plots of land along the river or creeks of northeastern Colorado, for a total of many thousands of acres.²⁴ Each plot had water for the cattle, and was supervised by one of his many foremen. In addition to these acres the cattle could graze widely over unclaimed areas because there were no fences. One headquarters was in northeastern Colorado at the town now known as Iliff, Colorado, northeast of Sterling. Another headquarters was in Cheyenne, while the third was in Denver. The herds expanded continually, although the severe winter of 1871-1872 took its toll. It was reported that he lost 5,000 head in that period.²⁵

We must realize that the region he was developing in the 1860s and 1870s was still the hunting ground of the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe Indians and although the buffalo herds were diminishing, they were still hunted by the Indians. Iliff made peace with them, however, and often smoked the peace pipe at their meetings (he never smoked otherwise except a big cigar on occasion). A major helper was Elbridge Gerry, an early fur trader who had married a daughter of the chief of the Ogalala Sioux tribe and adopted two sets of twin Indian daughters.²⁶ Gerry could speak the language, and interpret for the Native Americans so that Iliff estab-

²³*Ibid.*,

²⁴The usual number is given at “105 parcels” of land, as in Agnes Spring, “A Genius for Handling Cattle,” p. 383. The Iliff papers includes the original report of the assessor in 1878, listing the land piece by piece, section, range, township, with acres in each. There are 107 different pieces of land indicated. Some are 160 acres each, many are 80, many are 40, and one is as small as 14 acres. The latter showed he had a one-third interest in a 40 acre plot, or one third of one fourth of one quarter. With the detailed figures in six columns covering more than five pages, we are not surprised that the assessor stated that he had worked one whole day and a half sorting out the land details. He apologized to the courts because he thought he would need to charge \$5.00 for his labor!

²⁵Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 373.

²⁶Elbridge Gerry “the first white man in Weld County,” was a grandson of the Elbridge Gerry who signed the Declaration of Independence and who was Vice President under Madison. A sketch of Elbridge Gerry (1818-1875) and his relation with his Sioux wife, and his two sets of adopted Indian twins is in Robert B. Rogerson, *The Last of the Rogersons*, publishing date not given (late 1960s), no publisher. In Western History Department, Denver Public Library. It was a disgrace for an Indian family to have more girls than boys, so it was even more a sign of disgrace to have two sets of female twins! Because they were being neglected by their parents, Gerry adopted all four of them and three survived to adulthood. See also, note 20, above.

lished good relations with the original landowners he was dispossessing. One strategem was his promise to the Indians that since the buffalo herds were declining, if they needed food they could take one of his steers providing they ate all of it.²⁷ Iliff regularly rode over his vast acres and never carried firearms, nor used them. His relations with the Indians were cordial enough that he was in no danger. It was said that he could ride for a week and eat and sleep every night on his own property.²⁸

Iliff Marries

While he was establishing his cattle empire, late in 1863, John Wesley Iliff returned to Ohio City (Princeton), Kansas where on January 11, 1864, he married Sarah (Sadie) Elizabeth Smith.²⁹ She lived with her parents near the town, and had come to Kansas from Ohio about the same time as Iliff. Perhaps it was with the same group. At any rate, they had known each other for a few years. He brought his bride back to Colorado. In the fall of 1865 he took her back to her parents' home in Kansas where their son, William Seward Iliff, was born on October 20, 1865. The mother survived the birth only one month, and John Wesley Iliff left the baby with the grandparents for two or more years until he thought he could care for the small child in Colorado.

In 1866 a report was issued that the Union Pacific railway would be built across southern Wyoming.³⁰ This route was preferred to one that came through Denver because the mountains in Wyoming would be much easier to negotiate than the continental divide to the west of Denver. For many early settlers this news brought despair to the thriving town of Denver, for without a railroad, they surely could not develop as rapidly as other areas would. Iliff saw the potential again, and obtained the contract to supply beef to the crews building the railway. He was so confident of the growth potential of the new railroad town called Cheyenne—or as others called it “Hell on Wheels”—that he moved from Denver to Cheyenne in 1867.³¹ He continued to ride the range and to oversee his stock, but he also secured a manager to assist in his operations—Edward F. Bishop.³² This manager was responsible for as many as 40,000 cattle, and the con-

²⁷Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 381.

²⁸*Sketches of Colorado in four volumes: being a history of the state as portrayed in the lives of the pioneers, founders, builders, statesmen, et al.* (Denver: The Western Press Bureau Company, 1911), I, 283. Also, *Portrait and Biographical Record of the State of Colorado.* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1899), p. 27.

²⁹Iliff papers and clippings.

³⁰Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 356.

³¹E. W. Milligan, in his “John Wesley Iliff,” attributes this title to Duncan Aikman in his *Taming the Frontier*, (1925), no page given.

³²Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 361. This is elaborated on by Alberta Shattuck in her “Singer comes to Colorado.”

tracts to supply beef to the army, the railroad, and beginning shipment of beef to Omaha and Chicago packed in ice in the new rail cars.

Not to be outdone by the change in railway plans, a group of Denver businessmen planned the Denver Pacific railway which would go from Denver north to Cheyenne.³³ This group was headed by John Evans, second territorial governor of Colorado, and a founder of the University of Denver. In 1869 Iliff won the contract to provide beef for these workmen as well.³⁴ In 1870 the rail from Cheyenne to Denver was completed, although the new line ultimately became part of the Union Pacific line.

In about 1868 Iliff returned to Kansas to bring his son to live in Colorado, and thereafter to ride the range with him in a wagon. In this same year another major figure arrived on the scene in Denver. She was Elizabeth Sarah Fraser, a Canadian from Fitzroy, Ontario, who was setting up the Denver office of the Singer Sewing Machine Company.³⁵ She and a companion had been sent from the Chicago office. The newspaper announced their coming with these words:

They came on Saturday's coach and propose to set an example worthy of their sex by proceeding at once to business and sticking to it. Their goods, seventy to a hundred sewing machines, some baby wagons and fancy fixings will be on in about a week. Meanwhile they wish to rent a first class room, ground floor if possible, in neither too public nor too retired a locality and fit it up in regular Eastern singing—we mean sewing machine style.³⁸

At the time she was sent as a saleswoman to Denver "Lizzie" Fraser was only twenty-four years old. She became a successful businesswoman in the wild frontier town before Denver was even ten years old. In her early travels in Denver she met John Wesley Iliff. There is a story (possibly apocryphal) that as she was walking from cabin to cabin, Iliff came along and offered her a ride in his buggy.³⁷ At first she hesitated, but then accepted. A more plausible story is that they met at the Planter's Hotel where Iliff stayed on his numerous trips to Denver, and where Miss Fraser also lived.³⁸

Two years later when she returned to the home office in Chicago for a promotion, Iliff followed her. They were married in Chicago on March 3, 1870.³⁹ As a wedding gift the Singer Company gave her a mother-of-pearl inlaid sewing machine. It is still in working order and is in the Bloom House museum in Trinidad, Colorado.⁴⁰ It is interesting that Iliff's first

³³Ubbelohde, *et al.*, *A Colorado History*, p. 122.

³⁴Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

³⁵Iliff papers.

³⁶*Rocky Mountain News*, July 20, 1868, as quoted by Alberta Shattuck in her "Singer Comes to Colorado." p. 1.

³⁷Alberta Shattuck, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁹Iliff papers, newspaper clipping.

⁴⁰Alberta Shattuck, *Ibid.*, p.3.

wife was Sarah Elizabeth, and his second wife Elizabeth Sarah. They returned to his headquarters in Cheyenne. John Jay Fraser, brother of the bride, was soon hired as one of the foremen in the Iliff cattle empire.

John Wesley Iliff and Elizabeth Sarah had three children, and Iliff's son, who was four and one-half years old when they were married, was also with them. The eldest of these children was Edna, born in Cheyenne on September 19, 1871. She later married Arthur Hyslop Briggs, dean of the Iliff School of Theology at the turn of the century. The second daughter was Miss Louise, born August 15, 1875. The third child was a son named John Wesley Iliff, Jr., born on December 13, 1877.⁴¹

The family lived in Cheyenne until the Wyoming Territorial legislature approved legislation concerning women's suffrage. This included such women's rights as jury duty. Mrs. Iliff feared that this meant she could be sequestered in a jury that included gamblers, saloon keepers or dancehall girls. Neither of the Iliffs looked forward to this possibility, so they planned to move back to Denver late in 1871.⁴² They lived first in a small house until they arranged to purchase the "Shaffenburg" Mansion at 18th and Curtis for \$15,000.⁴³ The latter had been built by a United States marshal who was convicted of fraud. It was once suggested that if Wyoming had not passed the women's suffrage act, the Iliffs might not have moved back to Denver, and the Iliff School of Theology might have been organized in Cheyenne instead!

In the years after the Iliffs returned to Denver there were many changes. For example, Iliff was one of the first to experiment with mixed breed cattle. He bought Shorthorn bulls (they called them Durham) and some Herefords in the midwest, especially Illinois, and crossed them with the Texas longhorns. While the cross produced a smaller animal, the beef was superior, and the animals often withstood the winter, and prospered better on the wild grass.

It is estimated that during the decade 1866-1876 Charles Goodnight delivered about 30,000 cattle to the Iliff ranches.⁴⁴ They were bought for \$10 to \$15 a head, and weighed between 600 and 800 pounds. In two years on the grass they averaged 1000 pounds, and sold for \$30 to \$35 a head. This was a net gain of 200 or more pounds and an increase of \$20 or more per head. The only expense involved was the wages of the cowboys who tended them, because the pasture was free. It averaged out to a cost of

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴³Iliff Family papers.

⁴⁴*Denver Post*, January 8, 1967. This seems like an estimate that is too low, when considering the individual purchases that are recorded. This may indicate these cattle came by way of the Loving-Goodnight trail, but there are at least that many purchased through other auspices. Undoubtedly an accurate count is not possible, because the cowboys of that day did not have an accurate account to record.

65¢ to 75¢ a head.⁴⁵ Using these figures, the 30,000 head made a profit over ten years of \$600,000. Iliff had many more cattle than those driven from Texas, largely from natural increase.

Iliff was not the only one who was engaged in the cattle business, for there were other "cattle kings" in eastern Colorado, in Wyoming, Kansas and Nebraska. During the 1870s there were enough other ranchers who let their cattle roam freely for miles, that brands became necessary to tell who owned the stock. One of the first registered brands was developed by Iliff, the "reversed L, F connected," or LF⁴⁶ They usually held a "round-up" approximately once a year to sort the different brands and to make a careful count. Furthermore, to administer the growing cattle industry several Cattle Growers' Associations developed.⁴⁷ Iliff was a member of, and often also an officer of, the following: The Wyoming State Graziers' Association; The Colorado Stock Growers' Association; The Laramie County, Wyoming Territory, Stock Growers' Association; and the Weld County Cattlemen's Association. The Colorado organization published the following in 1877:

The past year has seen all the grounds of Colorado east of the mountains fully occupied and today our cattle intermingle with those of Wyoming, Nebraska and Kansas. We represent now nearly 600,000 cattle with capital of fully \$10,000,000 giving employment to 2,000 men.⁴⁸

Iliff's Death

The business acumen, and the daring adventuresomeness of Iliff were thwarted, however, by health considerations. In December, 1877, he became ill with what the physicians stated was "obstructive jaundice." This liver and/or gall bladder infection was thought to have been caused by hard alkali water he had drunk for years on the prairies. Three days after the onset of this illness little John Wesley Iliff, Jr., was born, as noted above. Despite a rally, Iliff did not recover, but died on February 9, 1878, just seven weeks beyond his forty-sixth birthday.⁴⁹ Fourteen months later (April 9, 1879) little John Wesley Iliff, Jr., died of diphtheria. He was almost sixteen months old.

A statement was written by one of his colleagues in the Wyoming Stockmen's organization a few days after Iliff's death: "He was the squarest man that ever rode over these plains."⁵⁰

⁴⁵Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 401-403.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 374-376.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 421.

⁴⁹Many obituary clippings are in the Iliff family papers, summarizing many other aspects of his life as well.

⁵⁰Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 426.

Although reared in a Methodist home, and carrying the name of John Wesley, Iliff never had affiliated with any church. At the funeral on February 14, a cousin, the Rev. Thomas Corwin Iliff, longtime minister and missionary in Utah, gave a hint about the reason. He stated that John Wesley Iliff had "no tolerance for *pretended* Christian character" and had noted "inexcusable inconsistencies of many professed Christians betrayed in their business transactions."⁵¹ Evidently Iliff had some experiences which he never recorded which caused him to question the organized church, or what he called "professed" religion. Despite this, he had expressed the hope that some day there might be a theological school to train ministers for the western area. The nearest school at that time was in the Chicago area. Although he was not able to act on this dream, the surviving family members remembered this vision.⁵²

Iliff died without a will, which complicated matters.⁵³ His widow was named one of the executors of the business along with J. S. Brown who had worked with Iliff for a number of years. They obtained permission from the courts to continue the business for three years from the date of filing, or to March 2, 1881.⁵⁴ A list of all property was prepared, personal property, land, cattle, horses, wagons, fence and other interests. The listing of property was one interesting entry, showing something of the way of life on the range. "The deceased was possessed of a certain herd of Texas and grade cattle ranging in Weld County: said herd has not been counted as far as we know for several years, and the number cannot at this time be certainly ascertained. We estimate it at 25,000 of all ages, valued at \$250,000."⁵⁵ The 105 or 107 plots of land added up to 7908 acres assessed at \$2.00 per acre or \$14,816. The total assessed valuation of land, cattle and personal property was \$463,345.⁵⁶ Within three years the administrators made their report, and the estate was incorporated as "The Iliff Land Company" and a few years later as "The Iliff Cattle

⁵¹*Rocky Mountain News*, February 15, 1878; as quoted in Agnes Spring, "A Genius for Handling Cattle," p. 424.

⁵²Although this "dream" is referred to by all family records, I have been unable to locate any documentation.

⁵³The legal documents which are in the Iliff family papers concerning his dying intestate are sufficient witness to the complications this caused for his family and close associates.

⁵⁴Iliff family papers.

⁵⁵Assessor's record, 1878, in Iliff family papers.

⁵⁶The assessor's record for 1878 is filed with the Iliff family papers. There are some discrepancies if certain entries are two separate plots of land, or two contiguous acreages. The taxation records seem to indicate it is 107 plots instead of the usually accepted 105. This is a difference of only perhaps 320 acres, as measured against almost 8,000. The assessor's record indicates that Iliff actually owned 7,908 acres. This does not count that land on which he had taken options, or had made promises. It also does not count the land which was public land on which his cattle grazed, but on which he did not have title, nor did he pay taxes. We can easily double the 8,000 acres with reference to the land *used* by Iliff, to arrive at the 15,000 estimate of his acreage.

Company." The last of the herd was dispersed and passed into other hands only in 1898.⁵⁷ Even at this later date with only a portion of the property intact, it brought almost a quarter of a million dollars. In the period the *Cheyenne Daily Leader* stated that Mrs. Iliff was "the wealthiest woman in Colorado," and "there is no better business woman in all its stretch of prairies and mountains."⁵⁸

Elizabeth Iliff and Bishop Warren

Let us now follow the career of Elizabeth Iliff, who was the administrator of the estate and was caring for her step-son, William Seward Iliff, and her two daughters, Edna and Louise. It was evidently the next year (1879) that she chanced to meet a Methodist minister from Philadelphia who had come to Colorado to practice his avocation of mountain climbing. His name was Henry White Warren who had served churches in Massachusetts, New York and Philadelphia for twenty-five years. The next year (1880) he would be elected a bishop. The new bishop came to Colorado in 1880 where he conducted the Methodist Annual Conference at Georgetown, although his residence was in Atlanta. While in Atlanta he participated in establishing the Gammon Theological Seminary, meant to be interracial from the beginning. On December 27, 1883, Bishop Warren was married to Mrs. Iliff in the Evans Chapel, then at its original location in downtown Denver, one block south of where the City and County Building now stands.⁶⁰ This marriage brought a financial leader in the city and state and the religious leader of the largest Protestant denomination together. Following the General Conference of 1884, Denver was chosen to become the center of another Episcopal area, and Bishop Warren was assigned to Denver.

Warren was a native of Massachusetts, a graduate of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. He was a widower with three children ranging in age from twenty-two to twenty-seven at the time of his re-marriage. His three children attended their father's wedding as did the three Iliff children. Warren's three children were Carrie (born June 2, 1856), who later married a Methodist Minister, J. Wellington Frizelle; Henry Mather Warren (born October 15, 1848), a lawyer in Philadelphia;

⁵⁷Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, pp. 434-441.

⁵⁸The Warren papers are filed in the Rocky Mountain Conference archives. The only biography of Warren is: J. Alton Templin, "A Short Biography of Bishop Henry White Warren," *The Iliff Review*, Spring, 1956, pp. 21-35.

⁵⁹*The Denver Times*, January 7, 1984; also summarized from *The Cheyenne Daily Leader*, April 11, 1883, in Agnes Spring, *Ibid.*, p. 440.

⁶⁰Corroborated in both the Iliff family papers, and the papers of Bishop Warren. There are also newspaper accounts of the fashionable wedding "at high noon" in Evans Chapel. Bishop Matthew Simpson officiated. There were 600 guests invited to the reception which was held at the Iliff mansion, the Schaffenburg Castle, at 18th and Curtis.

and Ellen or "Nellie" (born April 2, 1860), who married John R. VanPelt, an early Iliff professor of historical theology.

The new bishop in Denver was a scholarly minister as well as an effective administrator. He had published a half dozen books, lectured widely, and wrote countless Bible study lessons and meditations which were published in church periodicals as well as local newspapers. One lecture he gave in Philadelphia in 1871 was entitled "The Duty of the Church to the Intellect."⁶¹ He was a great lover of nature, studied science seriously, and had published a book on astronomy. He began his lecture, "It is the relation of Christianity to mind which we wish to consider this evening." Only twelve years after Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published, and when many church leaders were condemning it, Warren said in his lecture:

Among the millions that look to our church for instruction in mind and inspiration of spirit may be the future Newtons, Kirchoffs, Tyndalls and Darwins of our future science—a science that shall be so sublime that we are incapable of reading the very primer of it today. Let these men know that the church is the source of development; it is not merely friendly to knowledge, but the inspiration of it, and they will learn that all science and religion are one, and both of God.

With this open-minded and liberal attitude for his day, he was immediately interested in the Iliff hope to found a school for ministers. It would be associated with the Methodist-related University of Denver. The latter institution had been organized as the Colorado Seminary in 1864, but for financial reasons was forced to close three years later. Only in 1880 was new support found that it could be re-opened as the University of Denver with Dr. David H. Moore (later bishop) as its head.⁶² The institution existed in one building in the center of downtown Denver.

On June 18, 1884, Mrs. Elizabeth Iliff Warren offered a gift of \$100,000 to endow a school of theology as a graduate department of the University of Denver. There were two stipulations in her gift, however.⁶³ *First*, the school should select a more suitable and permanent location for the campus; and *second*, that another \$50,000 be raised beyond her gift. Chancellor Moore was successful in raising the needed \$50,000, but the question of a new location took more time. Several locations were considered, but were rejected for various reasons. The possibility of a new campus became a reality with the gift of forty acres from a non-Methodist layman approximately five miles south of the city limits in a new area to be called "University Park." A plea was made to many people to move to the new area, but most believed it was too far outside the city, and there were no improvements, not even streets. Bishop and Mrs. Warren believed in the dream and they built their own home in the new settle-

⁶¹This lecture is filed with the Warren papers, in the Rocky Mountain Conference archives.

⁶²Isaac H. Beardsley, *Echoes from Peak and Plain*. (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1898), p. 256.

⁶³The Iliff family papers.

ment and moved in in 1889. This home ("Gray Gables") still stands five blocks east of the campus. This same year Mrs. Warren presented to Chancellor Moore her check for \$100,000.⁶⁴ A few years later the Warrens began to build an even larger home, named Fitzroy Place after Mrs. Warren's birthplace in Canada. This was eight blocks east of the campus and still stands alone on a city block.

This vote of confidence by the bishop encouraged others to do the same, and a growing suburb came into being. Furthermore, the foundation for the new "Old Main" building of the new campus was dug in 1889, and on April 3, 1890, the cornerstone was laid with Bishop Warren as main speaker. University Hall was completed in 1891, and the Chamberlin Observatory of the University in 1892.⁶⁵ The graduate department for theology could become a reality. Mr. William Seward Iliff, now twenty-five years of age, agreed to provide a building for the theology department, to be named after his father. The cost was to be "not less than \$50,000."⁶⁶ Actually the Iliff Hall, built out of red sandstone, cost \$62,500, and still houses many offices and classrooms of the school.

The cornerstone of the Iliff building was laid on June 8, 1892, with Bishop Warren as main speaker. On that occasion his theological vision again came to the fore. He said, "The Iliff School of Theology has been established to promote progress in doctrine and experience. In doctrine it fears no criticism, courts always an advance."⁶⁷ The first student body consisted of six full-time and five part-time students gathered in 1892, although the building was not completed and occupied until 1893. The new building did not assure success, however, because in 1893 the great silver crash affected Denver and the nation. Silver was an important product of Colorado, so the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act affected all walks of life, not the least of which was financial support for higher education. The reports of the years up to the turn of the century were marked by financial uncertainty and debts.

The Iliff family, and Bishop Warren as well, were concerned that their endowment would be swallowed up in the debts of the University and be finally lost to theological education. As a hedge against such a possibility, they requested that the Iliff School of Theology be closed in 1900 until they could make further financial plans.⁶⁸ The "temporary" closing lasted for a decade. In the meantime, the Iliff endowment was saved, and the school of theology was incorporated separately from the University in

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷This statement has appeared in The Iliff School of Theology catalogs for many years.

⁶⁸This controversy is thoroughly summarized by the following: May Lee Tom, *The Founding and Incorporation of The Iliff School of Theology*, a research paper completed at the University of Denver, February, 1984. It is on file in the Rocky Mountain Conference Archives.

August 1903. The original investment was intact, and it grew during the decade the school was closed to more than \$150,000. In September 1910 the problems were solved and the school was reopened with a new charter, new faculty, new President (Harris Franklin Rall), and an added \$50,000 endowment from Mrs. Warren. William Seward Iliff gave the pipe organ which is still in use in the chapel.

The year 1910 and beyond

The date 1910 is a significant turning point in many ways. The school of theology which Iliff envisioned was reorganized and independently incorporated; but other changes were soon to come. In 1912 Bishop Warren attended the General Conference in Minneapolis and presided part of the time. He was past eighty-one but had no plans for slowing down. The Conference decided, however, to consider mandatory retirement for bishops at the Conference nearest their seventy-third birthday, effective in 1916. They also voted immediate retirement for the two other bishops who were almost Warren's age, and for Warren himself. After he knew that this would be his last Conference he made a retirement speech. His disappointment shows even in the printed page.⁶⁹ Francis J. McConnell was elected to succeed Warren in Denver. Little did anyone know that in two and one-half months Bishop McConnell would be participating in the funeral of his predecessor. When Warren died July 23, 1912, the Iliff School of Theology had lost one of its most loyal advocates.

Mrs. Elizabeth Iliff Warren, the Singer sewing machine saleswoman in the frontier town, the wife of the cattle king and then of the bishop, lived until 1920, always concerned about the school. William Seward Iliff, who was born in Kansas, and whose mother died when he was only a few weeks old, lived until 1946. He died of a heart attack at a football game at the University of Denver. The last remaining link with John Wesley Iliff was his daughter, Louise, who was not yet three years old when her father died. She lived until 1966 when she was almost ninety-one. I can remember her in my student days as she came to the school in her chauffeured limousine to survey the operation. Up to her last year she used to ask Dr. Harvey Potthoff about every new faculty appointment: "Is he sufficiently liberal to teach at Iliff?"

Had John Wesley Iliff lived to 1910, almost to his 80th birthday, I wonder if he would have thought that his dream was adequately fulfilled. Since then not only has the Iliff School trained ministers for the West in Methodism, but in many other denominations as well. Even more importantly, its graduates are in many other parts of the world. Not only do we now have a much larger student body than might have been envisioned

⁶⁹*Minutes of the General Conference of the Methodist Church*, Minneapolis, 1912, p. 445.

back then, but we have students from both coasts and from most of the states in between. Miss Louise would undoubtedly have agreed that Iliff is still sufficiently liberal. For these many reasons, I should like to think that John Wesley Iliff, the "Cattle King," would have been very pleased.