The CHURCH and the CITY

Congregationalism in Minneapolis, 1850–1890

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THE ROLE of the religious congregation in the transformation of the American city in the late nineteenth century and, conversely, the impact of urbanization upon congregational life are familiar topics to American historians. Aaron I. Abell, Henry May, and Charles Hopkins have documented the responses of Protestant churches to urbanization and industrialization, while Robert D. Cross has ably discussed the urban wing of Roman Catholicism. Similar broadly based studies of urban Judaism do not exist, but valuable insights may be obtained from the more localized studies of Hyman B. Grinstein and Moses Rischin.

No scholar would argue that our understanding of the relationship of churches and cities is complete. This is especially true of the Protestant churches which have garnered the most attention. Too much of our knowledge of urban Protestantism is colored by a desire to analyze its importance as an agent for, or critic of, social reform. Too little attention has been given to changing patterns of congregational order and what relationship, if any, existed between a church’s role in the city and the nature and vitality of its congregational life. Moreover, most of the generalizations about urban Protestantism tend to emphasize clerical and academic thinking while minimizing the attitudes and practices of laymen. Although this study does not presume to fill these gaps, it does offer some suggestions based on the experience of three important churches of a largely overlooked Protestant denomination in an often ignored Midwestern urban center.

Late nineteenth-century Minneapolis presents unusual opportunities for research. First, it grew in some four decades from a remote frontier community of 300 people in 1854 to a bustling industrial and commercial center with a population of 164,738 in 1890. By the latter date its major industries—lumbering and milling—made the city important to the nation’s economy. Thus, to study Minneapolis in the second half of the nineteenth century enables the student to view not only a community undergoing rapid growth but also one whose urban status proceeded directly from frontier conditions.

A second research opportunity stems from the fact that, although Minneapolis experienced a great influx of immigrants from Europe after 1880, most of them differed markedly from those settling in other urban centers. The majority were Scandinavian and...
Protestant — moving into a Protestant community where they were confronted by an old guard of transplanted New Englanders. Many of the latter had arrived directly from New England while others had followed a more circuitous route, settling initially in northern Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois before pushing on to Minnesota. Predominantly Congregationalist, they grew increasingly well-to-do as Minneapolis expanded. They dominated lumbering and milling — the major industries of Minneapolis and the old village of St. Anthony — just as they formed the core of the Congregational churches of the city. By probing the responses of those churches to rapid urbanization and immigration it is possible to study not only the reactions of an old elite to aspiring newcomers, and the leaders of commerce and industry to the workers, but also the attitudes of the descendants of the oldest white, Protestant Americans to the first generation of the newest.

In the transformation of the American city in the late nineteenth century, urban Congregationalism has received little attention. Its members are characterized as the first to move when immigrants dominated the landscape and the last to react to the problems of urban life. Some Congregational clergy are associated with social reform movements such as the Social Gospel, but Congregational churches generally have not been considered as successful as Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians in meeting the problems of industrialization and urbanization.

Congregationalism in Minneapolis provides a good test of some traditional hypotheses about the nature of urban Protestantism. Because that city moved so quickly from frontier community to urban center, and because each of the three Congregational churches to be discussed in this article — First, Plymouth, and Second — originated in the frontier period, it is possible to suggest what effect, if any, urbanization had on the life and structure of particular congregations and what relationship, if any, existed between the internal structure of the congregation and the church’s perception of its role in the community and the world.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, one of the oldest religious congregations in Minneapolis, was organized in 1851 in the frontier village of St. Anthony near the great falls of that name. The availability of water power enabled the tiny village to become a lumbering center and within a few years surpass neighboring Stillwater in production of board feet. By 1870 the little community consisted of a continuous line of sawmills interspersed with the tall structures of a newer industry — grain milling.

The early primacy of lumbering attracted men skilled in clearing the forests: Yankees from Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire. To satisfy the spiritual needs of these people, most of whom were either Congregationalists or Presbyterians, the American Home Missionary Society, the nonsectarian agency for frontier evangelism, sent Congregationalist and Presbyterian missionaries to tend the transplanted New Englanders and to establish churches among them. First Church was a product of that effort. It was founded by Charles Sec-

^ There is no outstanding comprehensive history of Minneapolis. The author's comments on the city's early growth are taken largely from Lucile Kane's excellent study, The Waterfall That Built a City: The Falls of St. Anthony in Minneapolis (St. Paul, 1966). All population figures and other estimates of city growth in the late nineteenth century are based on Miss Kane's research. The best treatment of Congregationalism in the state, and the work on which the author relied heavily for general observations, is Warren Upham's collection of essays, Congregational Work of Minnesota, 1832-1920 (Minneapolis, 1921). Though eulogistic, the book contains a great deal of useful information.
combe, a young Dartmouth-trained Congregationalist missionary whom the AMHS sent into Minnesota Territory in 1850.4

Seccombe served the church from 1851 until 1866 and was easily the central figure in its early development. His views on theological, ecclesiastical, political, and social affairs dominated the church’s records and its early outlook. He took pride in what he called his “rigid” Calvinism and helped organize First Church in the same exclusive manner as New England churches of old, complete with a binding covenant and a public narrative of conversion experience for prospective members. As the church grew slowly it maintained its distinct Yankee character with new arrivals from Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, and Connecticut. Many joined as a result of Seccombe’s numerous religious revivals, especially before the Civil War. His diary is full of references to revivals, both successful and unsuccessful, and he watched his flock continually for signs of the working of the Holy Spirit.5

Seccombe’s records indicate he never forgot his missionary training or dedication. Home and foreign missions, for which he worked among his people to obtain support, dominated the church’s benevolence giving in the early years. Not content with frequent special collections, Seccombe persuaded his congregation to sponsor special suppers and concerts to raise money for either

4 See Upham, Congregational Work, 47–50. The problems of Congregationalist and Presbyterian missionaries in Minnesota are outlined in their letters and reports to society secretaries for the 1850–56 period in the American Home Missionary Society Papers in the Hammond Library, Chicago Theological Seminary. The Minnesota Historical Society has microfilm copies in twenty-four reels.

5 By his own account, Seccombe’s most successful revival was in 1856 and resulted in many new members. See entry of March 7, 1856, in his manuscript diary, “The History and Records of the First Congregational Church of St. Anthony,” in the Minnesota Historical Society. The diary covers the years 1851–68. For an account of Seccombe’s early difficulties with Minnesota Presbyterians, especially Edward D. Neil, see Donald B. Marti, “The Puritan Tradition in a ‘New England of the West,’” in Minnesota History, 40:1–11 (Spring, 1966).

6 See especially Seccombe Diary entries for April 3, 1853, February 3, 1856, and December 27, 1857.

7 Seccombe Diary, October 12, 1856, and other entries, including those for 1861.

8 Minutes for October 25, 1855, in the Congregational Association of Central Minnesota Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society. Seccombe later changed his mind about Carleton and even served on its board of trustees.

9 Seccombe’s problems with his church were accentuated in March, 1865, when he demanded a salary raise and yearly vacation. Although these were granted, the church, on May 11, 1866, voted to sever its relations with him. A council of elders of neighboring churches, making an inquiry into the affair a month later, decided that the source of the dispute was the church’s failure to “cooperate” with the minister. See Seccombe Diary entries for 1865 and 1866.

home or foreign missions. Indeed, such fund-raising events were apparently the only occasions when the congregation assembled in any form other than the traditional worship services or prayer meetings. Special organizations for women or children were unknown, as were social gatherings not connected with a benevolence project.6

Seccombe and First Congregational Church showed little interest in the problems or growth of the community. The pastor’s two principal areas of concern were Christianizing the frontier and abolishing slavery. He succeeded in persuading his people to give for home missions, particularly when he pointed out that most of the money would be used in Minnesota. In addition, he was such a staunch abolitionist that he expected his people to be, too. In 1856 the church severed its relationship with the AHMS, partly as a result of a desire for financial independence and partly because Seccombe felt that the AHMS was in error in not taking a stronger stand on the great issue of the day. When the Civil War began, Seccombe preached a sermon interpreting the war’s advent as a moral good and exhorting his people to support the Union cause. Unfortunately, his records do not record his feelings in 1865.7

By 1866 Seccombe found much that he neither liked nor understood in his church, denomination, and community. He bitterly opposed the formation of Carleton College in Northfield, standing almost alone in his opposition. As early as 1855 he stated that a “literary institution” would be an unnecessary expenditure of money and effort. What was really needed was a theological seminary. However, if the people wanted a literary institution, he argued, let the state finance it, for “he did not feel afraid that Congregationalists would forsake the faith of their fathers, by putting their heads into a literary state institution.”8

Seccombe’s journal also indicates that he was ill at ease in the world he found after the Civil War and especially in a growing and prosperous Minneapolis/St. Anthony. His parishioners had similar feelings about their pastor. Issues such as temperance, frontier and foreign missions, church purity, and Calvinist theology bored a congregation no longer situated in a true frontier settlement. As a result, in 1866 Seccombe was dismissed and with his departure the character of First Church, and particularly its relationship to the community, began to change.9

After 1870 Minneapolis grew quickly while St. Anthony languished. Railroads opened up the rich farmlands to the south, west, and northwest and allowed Minneapolis to challenge and surpass St. Louis, Missouri, as the milling capital of the country. Industry created jobs, and by the mid-1880s thousands of migrants and foreign immigrants, primarily Scandinavians and Germans, had settled in the Mill City. Its popula-
tion increased from 13,066 in 1870 to 164,738 in 1890. St. Anthony’s population, however, grew by only 324 between 1857 and 1870, leveling off at about 5,000 after 1870. That was the death knell of its hopes of becoming a great city, and, in April, 1872, it quietly became a part of neighboring Minneapolis. 10

While the area around it grew, First Church moved several times between 1850 and 1890 but never very far from its present location at 500 Eighth Avenue South­east. From 1853 to 1874 it was located at Fourth Street Southeast and East Hennepin Avenue. In 1874 a new building was constructed at Fifth Street Southeast and Third Avenue. That building burned in 1886 and was replaced by the present structure.11

First Church quickly learned of the problems produced by Minneapolis’s rapid growth. A few blocks from the church lay the sprawling sawmills, grain mill firms, and assorted other industries using the power generated by St. Anthony Falls. Near that complex was the center of Scandinavian settlement in the 1880s. A few blocks north and east was another area of immigrant settlement in the 1880s and 1890s, and directly east lay a slum ghetto of Scandinavians and others. It was known as East Side Flats. Moreover, the existence of the still young University of Minnesota presented another challenge to the church’s traditional outlook.

The problem of reaching the unchurched and combating sin in the city dominated the thought and action of Congregationalists in the 1870s. Revivalism lost its importance as a means of filling the pews. The Minnesota General Conference, meeting in 1868 and 1869, cited the growing numbers of the unchurched in the cities and on the frontier and the failure of Congregationalists and the other denominations to stem the tide. Two methods were suggested as remedies for the deteriorating situation. One was simply spending more funds for churches and ministers on the frontier. The other was called “Home Evangelization” (or Evangelism) and was meant for towns and cities.

Given the blessing of the denomination at a national council held at Oberlin, Ohio, in 1871, Home Evangelism was endorsed by the Minnesota Conference in 1862 and again in 1869. “The work aimed at,” wrote Reverend Henry Willard, secretary of the Committee for Home Evangelism in Minnesota in 1869, “is the developing in all the churches of their highest possible efficiency, so that the complete christianization of the communities where they are placed may be speedily looked for. No church, however prosperous in other directions, has attained the objects for which it exists as a church, till it has done all that it can, to secure the salvation and sanctification of every person who can be better reached by influences from it, than any other church.” 12

Home Evangelism, obviously meant to replace revivalism as the principal means of filling the churches, embodied a number of different methods for approaching the unchurched. As its name implied, it was designed to take religion into the home. Each church was urged to form an “evangelization” committee which would be subdivided further into other committees responsible for specific projects. The essence of Home Evangelism was Christian education, a fact attested to by the 1869 conference’s outline of the work of Home Evangelism committees. They were to be organized for “Work, Benevolent Visitation, Religious Conversation, Tracts and Religious Publications, Social Visitation, Sabbath Schools, Statistics, and Religious Meetings.” 13

FIRST Church pursued Home Evangelism with fervor. Revivals disappeared from the records as the quest for new members became the responsibility of the evangelization committees. According to the church’s historian, Guy Stanton Ford, the change in tactics represented the heart of the congregation’s plan to become a true “city” church during the 1870s and 1880s. Long known for its exclusive and highly restricted membership, First Church forsook its New England heritage as part of its new enthusiasm for Christianizing the city. Few rents, for example, were dropped, and by 1890 the church advertised that seats were free for all services and strangers were welcome. A simple profession of faith became sufficient for admission, and the old public narrative of religious experience was quietly dropped. The church covenant was retained, but its discipline was relaxed. Save for its recitation by new members, it ceased to play a vital role in the life of the congregation. 14

First Church conducted Home Evangelism in several ways. In the 1860s, for example, it opened among immigrants in northeast Minneapolis a series of neighborhood Sunday schools that were staffed by young women of the church who also carried out weekly visitations to the homes of nonmembers. Prayer meetings also were utilized to reach people, as were “socials,” suppers, concerts, and lectures — all sponsored by the church members and directed toward the unchurched.

In addition to the Sunday schools, inhabitants of the

10 Kane, Waterfall That Built a City, 57, 60, 77, 147.
11 Guy Stanton Ford and Dora V. Smith, The First Congregational Church of Minnesota: A Century of Service, 3-8 (Minneapolis, 1951).
12 Minutes of the Annual Sessions of the General Conference of Congregational Churches of Minnesota, 1856 to 1875 is a bound volume of annual pamphlets in the Minnesota Historical Society. The Willard quote is on page 23 of the 1869 minutes.
13 The foregoing quote is on page 18 of the 1869 minutes. Manuscript versions of the minutes are also in the Minnesota Historical Society.
14 Ford and Smith, First Congregational Church, 3-20. See also various records of the church in the manuscripts division of the Minnesota Historical Society.
parish were amply supplied with religious literature by the church's "tract" committee. Home Evangelism also counted benevolence within its sphere, and for the first time the church's benevolence giving began to be dominated by donations to local charities and poor relief rather than foreign missions or frontier churches.

Home Evangelism encouraged the proliferation of organizations within the congregation, especially among women. The Ladies and Young Ladies Benevolence Societies, for example, handled benevolence giving; a women's society was responsible for tract dissemination and for Sunday schools; women of the Flower Mission cared for sick members of poor families; and the Young Ladies Union, among others, conducted home visitations and performed various public services. Not the least of the latter was an 1893 "Chicago World's Fair" complete with a seventeen-foot mock Eiffel Tower and revolving beacon. The "fair," described in a Minneapolis paper as "by far the most elaborate entertainment the ladies have yet attempted," sought to raise money for charitable purposes. 15

In addition to evangelization and its associated benevolence, the church showed further awareness of the growing city — and especially of the immigrant poor — through the establishment of city missions. First Church began several missions, most of which were meant to serve as the source of future Congregational churches, in northeast Minneapolis. One that occupied much of the church's time and energy (and was begun in conjunction with Plymouth Congregational Church) was Emmanuel Mission at Twelfth Avenue and Broadway Northeast. Another was a smaller mission located on the East Side Flats. Each originated around 1880 as a Sunday school but soon developed into much more. Religious education was supplemented by secular education, and courses were offered in sewing, cooking, manners, and housekeeping for women and bookkeeping and industrial crafts for men. The Flats school, located in one of the poorest and roughest sections of the community, was staffed almost entirely by the young men of the church. 16

Mission work represented only one level of the church's contact with the poor. The members also gave generously to private charitable and relief agencies throughout the city, worked closely with the YMCA, and formed numerous societies designed to meet specific needs of poor families. The Flower Mission, for example, worked with the sick and indigent while the Ladies and Young Ladies Benevolent Societies sponsored money-making projects for poor relief. Yet, save for those staffing the mission schools, few church members ever had direct contact with the poor, and the church's impact on the surrounding community suffered accordingly. 17

One church organization that dealt actively with immigrant families was the "Kitchen Garden." Composed mainly of young women, it evolved from the Young Women's Christian Temperance Union which was purposely kept outside the auspices of the church. Kitchen Garden members worked with the children of poor Scandinavians and attempted to impress upon them the customs and values of an alien culture — order, industry, and efficiency. Members sought "to take children from the poorest homes and teach them the best way of doing the most common things, from bed-making to the care of the broom in the kitchen; through the child to bring a little order and cleanliness into homes that lack them; to fit the girls for domestic service, so solving one of the burning and constant questions of the hour, and most of all to elevate their idea of such work from drudgery to a divine service." 18

First Congregational Church's involvement with the city did not last. Guy Stanton Ford has argued that after 1890 the church gave up the ideal of the "city" church for the more comfortable role of a university church, and the records support his contention. The congregation discontinued much of its work in the surrounding community. Women's benevolence societies and educational societies like Kitchen Garden either disbanded or were reorganized to perform other functions. The reasons for this sudden change in worldly concern are not difficult to find. One was the church's location. Dedicated in 1888, its new building was too far from the poor and the immigrants to sustain a sense of mission and involvement in their problems. More important, however, was the cost. The missions and the Sunday schools were very expensive and seemed to be enjoying only marginal success. Sunday school enrollments failed to increase, few churches developed from mission activities, and immigrants did not avail themselves of the services of organizations like the Kitchen Garden. Thus, despite optimistic pronouncements in yearly reports, many of the church's activities were curtailed drastically by 1890. Moreover, despite the general growth of the

15 The quote is from an undated and unidentified newspaper clipping in the First Congregational Church records in the Minnesota Historical Society. The society also has several church Manuals from which the information on Home Evangelism and the role of women in that activity has been taken. The Manual for 1887, for example, lists each organization and explains its function.

16 George R. Merrill, Pastor's Report (1887), vii—xxi, in the pamphlet collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. See also Isaac Atwater, ed., History of the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota, 188–89 (New York, 1893).

17 Pastor's Report (1887).

church resulting from Home Evangelism (membership increased from ninety in 1870 to around 400 by 1890). New members did not come from immigrant ranks but tended to be of the same cultural, social, and economic backgrounds as older members. But the most crushing blow came from within the congregation. As Ford points out, the church persisted in its attempts to minister to the city until around 1890, when a number of wealthier families moved to south Minneapolis and Plymouth Congregational Church. That weakened First Church’s financial base and forced it to abandon many of its remaining charitable and educational activities.

The attempt to build a “city” church did have an effect on the internal structure of the congregation. In 1867, when Charles Seccombe departed, First Church was a small, exclusive, covenanted congregation of saints. Aside from the minister and the regularly elected church officers, the congregation of about ninety members lacked any bureaucratic structure of societies or committees. The entire membership conducted the activities of the church, and its worldly concerns, though pursued with vigor, were few. The records suggest that the primary objective of the church was the satisfaction of the temporal and spiritual needs of the members, not concern for the needs of others. However, two decades of trying to meet the problems of immigration and urbanization brought important structural changes. The church threw open its doors to all who cared to enter, and the congregation quickly became too large and unwieldy to act effectively as a collective body. Moreover, the church’s blossoming projects in the city — benevolence, Sunday schools, missions, and the like — demanded far more supervision and administration than either the church officers or the minister could provide.

During the 1870s and 1880s the church’s response to its expanding membership and newly assumed role in the community was to subdivide the congregation into smaller groups, societies, and committees. In general these subdivisions fell under two headings: those designed for work in the community and those intended to satisfy the needs of the congregation. Women’s groups tended to dominate this substructure. Of ten organizations listed in the church bulletin in 1887, for example, eight were for women and differed not only in stated purposes but also in the age of members. By 1890 the church listed twelve different societies as well as several groups whose functions were associated with church government. AMONG ORGANIZATIONS created to serve the needs of members, one of the largest was the Heart and Hand Society for young men. Formed in 1883 at the instigation of the minister, the society stated in its constitution a number of purposes that were remarkably similar to those espoused by the old church covenant. The society’s mission was to “promote Christian fellowship and cooperation among its members to advance the spiritual, social and general interests of the church and to assist in the prayer meetings.” Any young man “willing to lend his heart and hand, in fraternal love, to advance the ends of this society” was allowed to join.

Soon Heart and Hand began to expand its activities and its role within the church, just as it was expanding its membership. From a group of young men who came together for fellowship and worship it became an organization performing a dual role: education and courtship.

These figures are based on First Church membership records and on Ford and Smith, First Congregational Church, especially page 9. Ford and Smith, First Congregational Church, 18-20; Upham, Congregational Work, 519-23; miscellaneous records in the First Congregational Church Papers. For some of the activities dropped by the church in the late 1880s and early 1890s, see also the records (kept at the church) of the Society of First Congregational Church for the same period which show the steady rise in the cost of missions and other activities and the church’s growing inability to support them.

For lists of organizations see the Pastor’s Report (1887), especially xi-xii, and the church Manual for 1890. Announcement of free seats is made in the church bulletin for Easter Sunday, 1890 [?], in the First Congregational Church Papers. Minutes of the Heart and Hand Society, 1883-91, in the First Congregational Church Papers. The constitution was adopted November 28, 1883.

60 Minnesota History
In April, 1884, for example, the society offered a program which included a devotion, a cello solo, a zither solo, a violin solo, a violin, flute, and cornet trio, and a paper by one of the members on the "Socialistic Tendencies of Modern Society." In addition, the meeting was attended by the young men and their "dates," a departure from traditional practice.

Heart and Hand members began doing more for the church than simply helping at prayer meetings. The group held "socials" and concerts to raise money for church projects. Members took it upon themselves to suggest to the deacons that they obtain a substitute minister — "the best to be had" — for the summer months of 1885 and began to supply ushers for all church meetings, including Sunday worship. In 1887 they conducted a canvass of the parish and took over teaching responsibilities in the East Side Flats mission. Moreover, like the parent congregation, the Heart and Hand Society grew too large and unwieldy and itself spawned new societies like the Young People's Movement for boys and girls. By 1887 Heart and Hand members were so involved in church work they no longer had time for socials or entertainment during meetings.23

Development of the Heart and Hand Society was typical of organizations designed to serve the membership. Created initially for religious fellowship, Heart and Hand was soon performing important social functions as well. Moreover, as the society grew numerically it was given additional duties pertaining to the church's role in the city. When First Church retreated from its role as a city church after 1890, Heart and Hand lost some of its older functions, though it did not, like Kitchen Garden, cease to exist. Instead, it merely assumed functions conforming to the church's new status as a university church by concentrating on the needs of young men attending the University of Minnesota.

Heart and Hand also demonstrated the method whereby First Church sought to adapt to a rapidly growing membership while retaining the intimacy and security of a small congregation of earlier days. Heart and Hand was symbolic of the fragmentation of the congregation in the 1880s and 1890s. Yet it was a fragmentation consciously sought by a membership and clergy frankly recognizing an individual's need to be a member of a small group. Heart and Hand was but a single organization for young men in a church of many such organizations; yet it provided all of the services for the individual once provided by the entire First Church congregation: worship, fellowship, education, and service.24

Nothing illustrated better the changing nature of Congregational life in First Church resulting from the pressures of size and urban situation than the men who filled the pulpit in the 1880s and 1890s and their relationship to their congregations. Charles Seccombe was a father to his people, a good shepherd tending his sheep, protecting them from harm and asking only obedience in return. He was a frontier missionary whose concern lay in saving souls, and he preached an old Calvinism re-emphasizing God's wrath and the necessity for personal piety. It was a doctrine ideally suited to the cruelties of a wilderness Minnesota of the 1850s. The members of First Church in the 1880s and later, however, showed little interest in soul winners or fire-breathing prophets. Instead they sought sophisticated, urbane, "city" men who could co-ordinate the church and its diverse groups and activities much like leaders who operated the great business conglomerates. They wanted men who could mix with the affluent and convince them to contribute to the church and support its causes. They wanted "personalities" who could titillate them with polished rhetoric, enlighten them with erudite wisdom, or amuse them with subtle wit. They wanted men who combined organizational talent with public presence. They did not want another Seccombe.

Among such men who came to First Church was Reverend John L. Scudder, who served from 1882 to 1886. Like most of the other ministers of the church during the period, he was a New Englander who was educated in the East and served for a time in a Massachusetts church before traveling to Minneapolis. He was young, and so were other ministers who followed him. First Church was, after all, relatively small, but it paid an ample salary and had little difficulty attracting talented ministers, if only for a short time.25

DESPITE CONSIDERABLE EFFORT, First Church could not match Plymouth Congregational's commitment to the growth, welfare, and problems of the city. Founded in 1857 by former members of First Church, Plymouth quickly became the largest Congregational church in the area. It remained in its original location almost in the heart of Minneapolis until the mid-1870s when a burgeoning membership forced it to move to a larger structure at Eighth Street and Nicollet Avenue. As the city grew around it, then far beyond, and even as some of Plymouth's wealthier members moved south to find shelter from the immigrants, the church ministered to the needs of the residents of the inner city and made a concerted attempt to bring immigrant Scandinavians into its fold.

Plymouth's early history paralleled that of First Church. The first members were sturdy products of Maine forests and Massachusetts farms, while the ministers were AHMS missionaries. The issues that affected

23 Minutes of the Heart and Hand Society, 1883-87.
24 Minutes of the Heart and Hand Society, 1883-91, especially the constitution dated November 28, 1883.
25 Brief biographies of many of the early ministers may be found in Ford and Smith, First Congregational Church, and Upham's Congregational Work.
Plymouth were the great ones of the day: frontier and foreign missions, slavery, and temperance. Initially, the concerns of the members and pastors were survival and soul-winning among frontier sinners. Early church records contain many references to frontier conditions and the desperate need to Christianize the inhabitants, both Indian and white. Early ministers frequently used revivals as means of filling the pews. In addition, benevolence was a mandatory feature of the frontier congregation. Ministerial letters to the American Home Missionary Society often mentioned the necessity of "conditioning" the people to give money on a regular basis for benevolence projects.

As in First Church, however, even benevolence and soul-winning tended to be overshadowed by the more pressing issues of slavery, the great social evil of the time, and temperance. Nearly all of Plymouth's clergy and members opposed slavery, and temperance prompted even greater concern because there appeared to be no greater source of sin on the frontier than liquor. Thus the members of Plymouth Church led the fight for the removal of liquor from Minneapolis.

Especially active in the temperance movement was Plymouth's second minister, Henry M. Nichols, who served the church from 1859 until the summer of 1860 when he, his wife, and one son drowned while swimming in Lake Calhoun. Nichols, a Presbyterian turned Congregationalist, organized the war on "demon rum," and his troops included the women of his church as well as those of other concerned congregations. In April, 1860, Nichols was present when a young man died either from excessive drinking or bad liquor. Nichols ordered his forces into action and the next Sunday morning the people of Plymouth were surprised when cleaning up the town," taking their cue from Nichols' sermon, organized "and on Tuesday visited all the Rumsellers, requesting them to relinquish the traffic or leave the place. The liquor dealers were like infuriated mad-hounds."

At midnight the following evening Plymouth Church was consumed by a mysterious fire that everyone, including Nichols, assumed the liquor sellers were responsible for. An "indignation mass meeting" was held on Thursday evening "and a vigilance committee of 50 appointed to act." The committee did act, the saloons were closed, and Minneapolis was dry, at least for a time. Nichols, however, did not dare walk the streets alone, so onerous had he become in the eyes of the town's thirstier citizens.

Plymouth survived both the counterattack of the liquor interests and Henry Nichols' temperance crusade. It grew rapidly after the Civil War, by 1870 was several times its size of 1860, and by 1876 claimed a membership of nearly 500. This growth prompted Plymouth's congregation to begin to subdivide into organizations and societies nearly two decades before similar changes started in First Church. The initial organization, a women's sewing circle, was formed in 1857. A women's missionary society and a women's temperance league developed in the 1860s. By 1876 the church included at least eight different societies, and by 1890 the number had grown to eighteen.

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26 An exception among the clergy was Plymouth's first pastor, Norman McLeod, who served the church from 1857 to 1859 and was forced to resign because he did not take a strong stand against slavery. See Plymouth Congregational Church, The Centennial Record, 14 (Minneapolis, 1957).


28 The style in the quotes conforms with the printed version of the letter in American Missionary.

29 Nancy Nichols to her parents, April 29, 1860, Nichols Papers. Nichols reported on his congregation's post-fire meetings at other churches (Free Will Baptist Church and Methodist Church) in American Missionary, 4:161 (July, 1860). On July 5, 1860, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols and one son (plus Mrs. Nichols' brother-in-law and two children) were drowned while swimming in Lake Calhoun. An account of the "terrible calamity" appeared in American Missionary, 4:179 (August, 1860). Nichols' career is covered in two articles by his grandson, Charles W. Nichols — "Henry Martyn Nichols and the Northampton Colony," in Minnesota History, 19:129-147 (June, 1938), and "Henry M. Nichols and Frontier Minnesota," in Minnesota History, 19:247-270 (September, 1938).

30 Plymouth's membership growth is covered in the "Ministers" section of Centennial Record, 14-18. See also Atwater, History of Minneapolis, 190.

31 Centennial Record, 33-36, 40-52. Manual of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, Minn., 39, 41 (Minneapolis, 1876). See also WPA Historic Records Survey: Churches, Hennepin County. Box 293, Plymouth Congregational Church, in the Minnesota Historical Society.
The ministers changed as well. Like Charles Secomb of First Church, Henry Nichols was an AFMS missionary who tried to Christianize the frontier and fight sin. However, a decade after Nichols’ death, Plymouth hired urban-oriented Henry A. Stimson as minister. An easterner educated at Yale University and Andover Theological Seminary, Stimson came to Plymouth in late 1869 with a reputation as a fund raiser. And in Minneapolis he lived up to his reputation, especially when he found little difficulty in financing the church’s new building, erected in 1874 at the corner of Eighth Street and Nicollet. He seemed at ease among Minneapolis’ elite, especially the millowners, and claimed partial credit for wooing several important families away from First Church. Stimson involved Plymouth in the problems of a growing city by starting numerous charitable and relief programs among the poor and launching city missions and Sunday schools. Also, he convinced his parishioners to start a school and to provide aid for the families of Scandinavian immigrants.

With the tremendous growth of the church and the city after the Civil War, the role of Plymouth in Minneapolis changed rapidly. Among Plymouth benevolences listed for 1866, home and foreign missions received the most money, and the American Congregational Union — the organization responsible for providing funds for the building of frontier churches — took a considerable portion. The American Tract Society also received a large donation, while an item marked “for the poor” received only a pittance by comparison. In addition, the Plymouth Manual noted the passage of a temperance resolution indicating that “this church regards as immoral, the manufacture, use or sale of intoxicating liquors, as a beverage.”

By 1876 concern had shifted to the city. Contributions for home and foreign missions lessened at the same time that local poor relief climbed to 20 per cent of all the church’s benevolence giving. Women interested in working among nonmembers of the parish formed a Home Missionary Society. Moreover, the church sponsored two Sunday schools and a “Scandinavian Sabbath School” — obvious signs of growing interest in its new immigrant neighbors. Finally, no religious “revivals” were even mentioned in the Manual, their function having been fulfilled by home missionary work and by the city mission.

Among Minneapolis churches Plymouth was conspicuous for the speed and ease with which it adapted to its new role as a city church. Located on the southeast corner of the business district, it was ideally suited to be both a neighborhood and a parish church, and it used three institutions — the Sunday school, the mission, and the chapel — to reach the unchurched. By 1880 Plymouth was supporting four or five Sunday schools and an equal number of chapels (both types of institutions were intended to become new churches). Though progress often was slow and some projects ended in failure, Plymouth people did not become discouraged but continued to promote the establishment of chapels and Sunday schools well into the twentieth century. The congregation claimed responsibility for the formation of at least 75 per cent of all Congregational churches in Minneapolis and its suburban area before 1910. In the 1880s and 1890s, the decades of Minneapolis’ fastest growth, Plymouth created fourteen new churches, while First founded one and one was disputed. Of Plymouth’s fourteen, two were Swedish churches: First Scandinavian (founded in 1891) and Temple Church (1894).

Plymouth introduced an example of the other avenue of approach to the unchurched — the city mission — in 1869 with creation of Bethel Mission at Second Street and Third Avenue South. Bethel was a center for worship and the agency through which the church dispensed money and performed other needed services among poor families in the neighborhood. In addition, the mission conducted a Sunday school which in 1880 developed into Minneapolis’ first free kindergarten.

Bethel’s success encouraged the church to start other missions in similar neighborhoods. Of those, however, few survived, probably because of their distance from the church and the reluctance of some members to go into strange neighborhoods to work. The most ambitious project was Emmanuel Mission, begun in northeast Minneapolis as a joint venture with First Church. Never adequately funded or staffed, it was eventually abandoned by both churches.

DESPITE THE church’s concern for the poor, the immigrants, and the ever growing number of sinners in the city, Plymouth by 1880 believed it was in danger of losing the battle with the debilitating effects of city life. That, at least, was the theme of Henry Stimson’s letter of resignation and farewell sermon on August 8, 1880. Concerned about the moral future of Minneapolis as well as Plymouth’s role in that future, Stimson accused the 550 members of laziness. In his letter of resignation he

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32 Stimson had a long and distinguished career in urban churches. He served Plymouth from 1869 to 1890; Union Church, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1880–56; Pilgrim Church, St. Louis, Missouri, 1886–93; Broadway Tabernacle, New York, 1893–96; and Manhattan Church, New York, 1896–1917. He also was secretary of the American Board of Foreign Missions from 1880 to 1915. See Upham, Congregational Work, 271–77, 393, 408, 441, 473.

33 “Benevolent contributions” for 1866 and other years from 1864 to 1875 are listed in the Manual for 1876, p. 9. The quote is from the Manual for 1866, p. 11.

34 Manual for 1876, especially 8, 9, 33, 39.


36 Early missions are covered in Centennial Record, 51–53.
PLYMOUTH CHURCH was first located at Fourth Street and Nicollet Avenue (above is the second church building, erected in the same location as the first, which was burned in 1858). Above right is the building that served Plymouth at Eighth Street and Nicollet from early 1875 to 1907. At right is the present church, dedicated in 1909, at 1900 Nicollet Avenue South.

argued that, while it had been possible to lean on the pastor in earlier years, the work of the church had grown so great that it now required the full commitment of every member. "Or the tide of worldliness, of vice, and of greed that surges around you, will rise beyond your control."  

Stimson was especially disturbed by the greed of his people, a spirit he attributed to the growth of the city and the wealth of its factories, mills, and office buildings. "The whole country," he warned in his farewell sermon, "is possessed by the same spirit. We are all engaged in the headlong rush for supremacy. We would each be bigger, more potent, more famous than every other. . . . You are in a great danger of idolizing 'smartness.' The lust for gain grows apace. . . . You have not time for anything but money getting — 'business' you call it."

The new spirit, he continued, produced a gross materialism — "a materialism that exalts money, that delights in display, that loves power, that ignores education and sneers at refinement." It caused people to ignore the sin and misery existing all around them: the vice and corruption of the city and the poverty and need of its inhabitants. Unless change came soon, he lamented, "it is not difficult to foretell what will be the end. Where is life more utterly profitless than where money reigns and where, in the fat soil of rapid prosperity, self-sufficiency becomes complete?"

Having admonished his listeners for their materialism and their blindness to the world around them, Stimson told them that their great mission, the conversion of the city's masses, was hardly begun. He congratulated them on their past efforts: the Sunday schools, the chapels, the Bethel Mission, and their willingness to provide money for such enterprises. But, he cautioned, their task was to

37 Henry A. Stimson, Letter of Resignation and Farewell Sermon (Minneapolis, 1880). This quote is on page 5 of the published version.
"cover your whole field" and that work was barely
started. "There are many of the Lord's lost sheep in the
back streets and alleys," he thundered. "In every
department, Kindergarten, Sabbath school, Industrial
school, Mothers' meetings that work should be
pushed, for your own sake, for the city's sake, for
Christ's sake, no less than for the sake of the poor and
needy themselves."

Stimson saw the future of the city, and of the church,
in the resolution of the problems of the poor and of the
Scandinavians. Whether the lives of those people were
uplifted, whether they were Christianized, or, in the
case of the Scandinavians, Christianized and
Americanized, would determine whether the future
Minneapolis would be a great and Christian city or a
center of evil and corruption. "Unless you mean to have
a class grow up in your midst," he continued, that is
"strong, energetic, with undeveloped possibilities, ag­
gressive either for good or evil, and wholly outside of
your churches, you must do something, and that
promptly and effectively, to reach these young Scan­
dinavians." The initiative lay with the church, he em­
phasized. Members could not sit back and wait for the
immigrants to clamor at the door, for they would not.
The church must go to them, ministering to their needs
in whatever ways were possible and practical.

Finally, Stimson urged his people to work for the suc­
cess of the city in quite another way — through its cul­
tural and intellectual development. It was not enough to
win souls, or alleviate poverty, or ease the shock of a
people in an alien culture. The people of Plymouth had a
responsibility to ensure a high level of civilization in
Minneapolis by supporting cultural refinement and edu­
cation. Minneapolis desperately needed a public library,
Stimson argued, and the people of Plymouth, as the
community's leaders, were the logical ones to bring it
about. The city also needed more and better schools,
and, again, the people of Plymouth were in an excellent
position to accomplish improvements in public educa­

IN THE 1880s the church answered Stimson's call to
provide for the temporal as well as the spiritual needs of
the city's poor and immigrants. The new effort was di­
rected primarily toward the Scandinavians and resulted
in a dramatic expansion of the activities of Bethel Mis­
sion (later to become Pillsbury Settlement House). A
new and much larger building soon housed Bethel and,
in 1883, the mission's name was changed to the
Plymouth Kindergarten and Industrial Association. The
new name more adequately reflected the mission's al­
tered status.

At the same time, Plymouth expanded its activities in
the area of neighborhood Sunday schools and chapels.
Home evangelism also increased. Between 1880 and
1890 Plymouth witnessed an incredible proliferation of
women's organizations designed to bring Christ into the
homes of poor immigrants. In addition, Plymouth be­
came a free church in the hope that immigrants would be
encouraged to attend services. Finally, the benevolence
budget soared. Besides sponsoring various agencies, the
church met the needs of the poor by direct charity and
by supporting numerous public and private charitable
and benevolence organizations.

But the Kindergarten and Industrial Association be­
came the heart of Plymouth's involvement with the city.
Located on the southern edge of the business district in
the center of the Scandinavian area, the association pro­
vided services which were essentially nonspiritual.
Clubs were organized for the intellectual, cultural, and
physical development of the young, and, to that end,
recreational facilities were an integral part of the new
building completed in 1883 on Second Street South be­
tween Fourteenth and Fifteenth avenues. The old Sun­
day school gave way to a daily kindergarten or nursery
where religious education formed only a small part of
more general activities for youngsters.

For adults and particularly for the wives of the Scan­
dinavian men, the association offered a complete por­
tfolio of services. Baby-sitting was provided free of charge
to working mothers. Industrial classes were conducted
to train men and boys in skills useful to Minneapolis
industry. Sewing and homemaking classes were offered
to women and girls to teach them, among other things,
how to stretch modest budgets and operate efficient
households. Cleanliness, efficiency, and industry were
the virtues imparted to the immigrants by association
members. By means of boys' clubs, sewing classes,
woodworking classes, and the like, the newcomers were
taught that success in America awaited anyone willing to
work hard enough for it. But even success through hard
work could be elusive unless the work was efficiently
organized. Thus, wasted effort was discouraged and
idleness abhorred. Above all, the association taught the
immigrant to focus his sights on a goal, to organize his
efforts to achieve that goal, and to do nothing that could
not be justified according to the end sought.

In their 1892 report to the church, the twelve women
comprising the board of directors of the Kindergarten

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38 Stimson, Farewell Sermon, 9-16.
39 Centennial Record, 51-52.
40 See Centennial Record, 32-37, for brief descriptions of
organizations, missions, Sunday schools, budgets, and other
information for the 1875-1890 period. See also the WPA survey
of Plymouth records for lists of church organizations for the same
time, sometimes with explanatory remarks.
41 The activities of the expanded Kindergarten and Industrial
Association are listed in Centennial Record, 52. Its goals are
stated in Annual Report of the Plymouth Kindergarten and
Industrial Association (Minneapolis, 1892).
and Industrial Association wrote in glowing terms of the success of their work. The kindergarten, for example, included 105 families. The average daily attendance was fifty-one, and thirty-two children had been promoted into the public schools in that year. Various committees of the association had made 160 visits, had distributed 175 garments to needy families, and had placed one child in a children's home and one in a hospital. In addition, all of the destitute families in the area had been visited, aid rendered, and sympathetic ears lent to "the recounted wrongs of neglected and abused wives, and disheartened mothers." Moreover, the report continued, the day nursery was flourishing and was patronized by thirty-six mothers.

One of the most interesting parts of the report concerned the industrial school with its average daily attendance of ninety-seven pupils. Prizes were awarded, the directors noted, for "punctuality, attendance, cleanliness, deportment, and improvement." Further, "the pupils are working on a better basis than when the completion of the garment insured its possession. It is apparent that the object of the school is instruction and, with only earnest effort rewarded, the effect is felt in primary classes, intermediate grades and honor classes." The report concluded: "There are plans in embryo for the boys, also, embracing a carpenter's bench and tools, object lessons with a microscope, and summer excursions with map-talks."43

Female dominance of the board of directors of the Kindergarten and Industrial Association typified the dominant role of women in the work of Plymouth. As in First Church, the proliferation of societies and organizations within the Plymouth congregation between 1875 and 1895 was largely the growth of women's organizations. Although more men's groups existed in Plymouth than in First Church, and although men doubtless provided the money for most of Plymouth's efforts in the city, the work was administered by women. Women handled the collection and dispersal of benevolence. Women directed and conducted home evangelism and various other forms of visitation. Women ran the Kindergarten and Industrial Association's settlement house. Women taught in the neighborhood Sunday schools and did much of the work in the chapels and missions. Plymouth's women, in fact, shouldered the burden of both aspects of the church's role in the city — the winning of souls and the cultivation of minds and bodies.44

ONE OF PLYMOUTH'S earliest Sunday schools quickly developed into Second Congregational Church of Minneapolis, first known as Vine Street Church and later called Park Avenue Congregational. Founded in 1867 among an enclave of New Englanders on Minneapolis' near south side (Fourth Street and Fifteenth Avenue), Second Church showed less concern about the city or its problems than the parent church did. Instead, Second's members tended to withdraw from the surrounding community, finding consolation in one another. Minneapolis' spectacular growth in later years only accelerated the process. Moreover, the church's indifference to urbanization quickly turned to hostility when nearby neighborhoods began to fill with Scandinavians. Eventually Second's members sought to escape from the immigrants by moving farther south, but the retreat produced, in the main, a crippling financial debt.45

42 Annual Report, 1892, p. 3.
43 Annual Report, 1892, p. 4-5.
44 Centennial Record, 32-57; Manuals for 1866, 1876, and 1887.
45 Atwater, History of Minneapolis, 190-91.
From its inception the church revealed an outlook foreign to either First or Plymouth. The members used their meager resources to beautify their sanctuary and to create some of the life and culture of New England, not to found Sunday schools or city missions. On a number of occasions the church expended large sums for concerts or lectures by New England artists or persons of national importance. For example, Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass appeared in 1872 and was followed a year later by the "Mendelssohn Quintet Club" of Boston.\(^46\)

The thirst for culture and refinement was matched only by the religious zeal of the members. Revivals were frequent in the 1870s and were conducted with an intensity which shocked some of the clergy. In 1876, for instance, a new minister — Edwin S. Williams — noted that his arrival had sparked a great wave of religious enthusiasm. Never, he wrote, had he witnessed as much interest in prayer meetings: "Six weeks ago a brother broke out with 'Why can't this church ever have a prayer meeting over an hour.' The parish seems like a garden of the Lord," the amazed minister concluded.\(^47\)

Nor did the congregation shrink from the quest for new members. Williams noted that all seats were free and every third one remained reserved for a visitor. Moreover, at each communion two or three new families joined the church. Many more were expected, too, as migrants from New England continued to arrive as well as people from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and even Minnesota.\(^48\)

But that healthy picture quickly changed in the 1870s when the first Scandinavian immigrants arrived in Minneapolis and settled within and around the parish of Second Church. At once, members began moving farther south, demanding that the church accompany them. The church responded by selling its building to the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Society for $2,400 and erecting a new edifice six blocks away at Eighty Street South and Thirteenth Avenue. The new church, an imposing structure costing between $15,000 and $20,000, proved a crushing burden to the small parish. Hence Bumstead, the minister, made an earnest appeal to the American Home Missionary Society in New York for a grant of $8,000 to $10,000 to defray some of the costs, but he said nothing about the incoming Norwegians. Instead, he wrote that his parishioners found their old building "unattractive" and that the new location "is pleasant and convenient and . . . in the line of the future growth of the city."\(^49\)

The new church building, completed in late 1874 or early 1875, was Bumstead's undoing. Unnerved by the rapid process of events, he resigned and returned to his native New England. His replacement, the ebullient Williams, viewed the economic plight of his church with horror. In another letter to the AHMS in 1876, he described how the members had built more church than they needed. "I would have preferred a crowded modern Chapel to the finest Cathedral," he lamented, for the church was hopelessly in debt and he feared for its future.\(^50\)

Williams' eight years as minister proved neither happy nor productive, because no sooner had the members escaped the Norwegians than they were confronted by a new rush of immigration from Sweden. The Swedes arrived in the early 1880s and settled south of the Norwegians in the new parish of Second Congregational. Moreover, they came just as the minister, who was nicknamed "Everlasting Sunshine" Williams, appeared to be turning the church's interest toward city problems. Under his direction Second had started a Sunday school among the Norwegians and had organized a church among persons living on the southern outskirts of Minneapolis. In 1881 the church voted to provide lumber and $300 for the construction of a chapel for the same group. Furthermore, Williams, who possessed a keen interest in urban problems, convinced his church to support nondenominational efforts such as the YMCA and to give to various charitable and relief organizations even if they would not support and conduct such endeavors themselves. Then came the Swedes.\(^51\)

Again the membership began to move south and again pressure was applied to move the building as well. Williams fought the proposed move, urging his people to stay and meet the challenge, but his arguments only helped bring about his demise. In 1883 he was dismissed. A year or so later the church sold its building, furnishings, and grounds to the "Scandinavian society" for $13,000, several thousand less than the initial cost of the building alone. To make the move possible, the church took a second mortgage on the property for $10,000 in order to buy three lots at the corner of Park and Franklin avenues. Thus the church, already in a tight financial situation, moved toward bankruptcy. In the Manual for 1886, members gave their own version of the main reason underlying their decision to move: "We opened our doors wide to our foreign brethren. . . . Finally,\(^52\)

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\(^{46}\) Minutes of meetings of the Society of Second Congregational Church, especially entries of October 9, 1872, and April 9 and June 23, 1873, in the Second Congregational Church Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society.

\(^{47}\) Edwin S. Williams to secretary of the American Home Missionary Society, New York, January 15, 1876, in AHMS Papers.

\(^{48}\) Williams to AHMS secretary, January 15, 1876, AHMS Papers.

\(^{49}\) Horace Bumstead to secretaries of the AHMS, January 3, 1873, AHMS Papers; Minutes of Second Church, June 23, 1874.

\(^{50}\) Williams to secretary of AHMS, August, 1876, AHMS Papers.

\(^{51}\) Minutes of Second Church, December 21, 1881, Manual of the Second Congregational Church, in Minneapolis, Minn., 3–6 (Minneapolis, 1886).
yielding to the force of circumstances, we sold our church building to the Swedish Baptists, at a heavy sacrifice. As for Williams, the "force of circumstances" took him out of the Congregational ministry and into a position as superintendent of all church missions in the city of Minneapolis.52

Despite their debts the members of Second Congregational were determined to make their new church a structure to be envied by all. Costing $60,000, it was built of Lake Superior brown sandstone and included a tall spire and bell to mark its presence. Nothing was spared, either, to make the interior grand. Stained-glass windows were everywhere, and in a city specializing in wood and wood products special lumber was imported for the pews. Several thousands of dollars were spent on an altar and choir loft as well as $4,100 for a "Felgermacher" organ from Germany. In 1887 a mortgage of $25,000 was placed on the structure, leaving the church so poor that, when one of its wealthier members asked for a letter of dismissal to a new church in south Minneapolis, the board of trustees refused on the grounds that his loss would seriously weaken the church's financial position.54

And still the Swedes came. Soon the Park and Franklin location was surrounded on the north, east, and west by Scandinavians, and again the exodus began. The membership records of the 1890s attest eloquently to the race to keep ahead of Scandinavia. In 1890 most of the members were clustered between the 1600 and 2000 blocks of such avenues as Portland, Oakland, Fremont, and Blaisdell. Ten years later the same people lived fifteen to twenty-five blocks farther south.55

But the church maintained its location, and the decision had a tremendous impact on its future development. During the years of retreat, the congregation saw its vitality dissipate. Revivals ended, and new members were sought less avidly. The old ties with New England were forgotten along with the concerts and lectures. Debt plagued the members. Then, in 1888, a forceful new minister, Frank P. Woodbury of Rockford, Illinois, began to revitalize the church, and societies and organizations of all sorts sprouted within. By 1893, by which time it was known as Park Avenue Congregational, the church had sixteen different organizations and committees. They included a Ladies Missionary Society, a Ladies Benevolent and Social Union, King's Daughters for young women, several other youth groups, and various committees to visit the sick and the poor.

The upsurge in organizations coincided with a great period of membership growth. By 1900 the church had nearly 1,000 members, second only to Plymouth in that respect among Minneapolis' Congregational churches. Much of that growth, however, was unsolicited. After Swedish immigration tapered off, migrants poured into the city from rural areas of the Upper Midwest, swelling the ranks of the church. Moreover, the new people appeared to support the church's traditional attitudes to—

52 Manual of Second Church for 1886, p. 5 (quote). See also the minutes of Second Church for 1883 for entries relating to Williams' dismissal.
53 For a brief summary of Williams' career, see Upham, Congregational Work, 301-303.
54 Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Second Congregational Church, 1887-93, especially for May-June, 1888, in Second Congregational Church Papers; Atwater, History of Minneapolis, 191.
55 Membership lists, 1890-1900, in Second Congregational Church Papers.
DESPITE SIMILAR ORIGINS and early development, as well as remarkably homogeneous congregations, First, Second, and Plymouth churches displayed surprisingly diverse reactions to growth and change in Minneapolis in the late nineteenth century. First Church attempted to make the transition from frontier congregation to urban church but found it both painful and unrewarding and eventually opted for a more comfortable alignment with the University of Minnesota. Second Church nearly went bankrupt in a desperate attempt to escape the Norwegians and Swedes. Plymouth, however, moved smoothly from a frontier congregation to an urban church intent upon Christianizing the urban wilderness while caring for the temporal needs of those in the city not able to participate in its great economic opportunities — the poor and the immigrants. In this transformation Plymouth went far beyond her sister churches. Perhaps this was largely due to the important businessmen among its members. Not only did they possess considerable resources but it was within their economic self interest to ameliorate poverty and destroy the seeds of social upheaval by transforming the confused immigrants into a working class capable of satisfying the demands made by a constantly growing industrial system.

Only Second’s members showed any hostility to the society emerging in late nineteenth-century America, and their opposition was neither to materialism nor industrial expansion. It was to the city itself and especially its immigrants. Conversely, there were few social reformers in any of Minneapolis’ Congregational churches, though a few ministers denounced the “Gilded Age.” Henry Stimson’s charge to his church was symbolic of a segment of opinion among the ministry: a hatred for the vulgar materialism — the “conspicuous consumption” of the laity — and a sense of alienation from a civilization which fostered that materialism. But, in general, most Congregationalists benefited daily from the great economic bonanza and found nothing wrong with a system promising unlimited progress. Their work with the poor reflected that optimism as well as the belief that there was sufficient economic opportunity for everyone. Poverty, they argued, resulted either from a character deficiency or from a lack of practical knowledge needed to bring economic success. Most Minneapolis Congregationalists equated poverty with sin, assuming that urban vice grew from poverty and that poverty signified a degenerate individual. Thus, to the Congregationalists, social reform meant the reformation of a person’s character by convincing him that poverty was a fault that he could escape by adopting a few simple virtues like thrift, cleanliness, efficiency, and industry.

In analyzing the plight of the Scandinavians, however, the Congregationalists were more charitable. The Scandinavians were poor, but, perhaps because they were Protestants, they were virtuous poor. Their poverty, it was argued, stemmed not so much from wickedness as from their transference into an alien culture and their unpreparedness for a productive life in a highly industrialized economy. They were not considered inherently evil. If their poverty persisted, however, it was believed that they would become evil and their children would develop the same character deficiencies common to all poor. The solution to this cycle was, of course, to accustom them as quickly as possible to the criteria for success in a business society so that they might escape poverty. Cleanliness, efficiency, industry, thrift, optimism — these virtues were taught the immigrant along with such skills as sewing, woodworking, homemaking, and “map reading” as part of the ongoing process of Americanization.

If the activities of Plymouth and First churches among the poor and immigrants had a single purpose, it was not so much to transform the society as it was to transform the people. The churches aimed to teach them the nature of the society in which they lived, to give them the values and the skills necessary for success, and to convince them that the rewards merited the effort. In these efforts the Congregationalists showed real compassion and humanity. Yet, at the same time, they believed that the demands of their society were fair. Success was a just reward for the industrious and failure a fitting end for the lazy and the indolent. That was the social salvation offered by a segment of Minneapolis’ Congregationalists to the poor and to the immigrants in the late nineteenth century. It was a salvation which promised no reform of the system. Instead, it was designed to reform the individual, not by a transformation of his soul but by a transformation of his values.