

**Bibles and Ballots: The Formation of Conscience and Popular  
Expressions of Anti-Slavery Sentiments in Early Warren  
County, Iowa.**

by Adam Naughton

## Special Thanks

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The culture of the state of Iowa before the Civil War was deeply rooted along the banks of the Mississippi River. Economic activity among the river settlements of Dubuque, Davenport, Muscatine, Burlington and Keokuk increased in earnest during the 1830s and these towns quickly became well-established communities. In 1843, the local Sauk and Fox Indian tribes agreed to sell their lands in central and southern Iowa to the federal government and moved further west across the Missouri River. This exodus of the native inhabitants opened more land for settlement by white pioneers, who continued to drive across the Hawkeye state into the unsettled hinterlands of central Iowa and beyond after 1845. Fueled by the prospects of fertile, inexpensive land, the scattered farm settlements in central Iowa rapidly grew into measurable towns and villages. Situated less than fifteen miles south of Fort Des Moines, Warren County emerged as a hotbed of expansion along the Western frontier of antebellum Iowa.

Understandably, the cultural trends of the cities flanking the Mississippi River and the early state capital at Iowa City dominate the historical literature of this era. Surveys on local attitudes of the times, including Iowan's outlooks on slavery, are taken primarily from social and political records from these easternmost communities. Historians have written much less analysis specifically on the point of view of Central Iowans. Examination of the available local records during the period indicates that while most citizens of Warren County were anti-slavery in their thoughts, these citizens sought to avoid the slavery question altogether. These pioneers saw Iowa as a utopia where they could avoid or even escape the socially and economically destabilizing institution of slavery and build a life for themselves in relative peace.

As the turbulent 1850s progressed, these early settlers soon discovered that the Hawkeye state lay along the very fault line of the slavery issue. The violence resulting from the Kansas-Nebraska controversy and outrage stemming from the U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision agitated the scruples of the county's citizenry. No longer able to avoid the national conflict at their doorstep, the true attitudes of the people of Warren County against slavery came to the fore. Engrained with an anti-slavery conscience through their religious experiences, many citizens of Warren County articulated these attitudes with their voting patterns. A few expressed themselves through more radical means, including, by some accounts, running a branch of the Underground Railroad through the middle of the county.

Two lines of thought dominate the historical debate on the nature of Iowans' position on slavery during the early years of its settlement. Some historians--most recently, Joel Silbey--argued that Iowa's attitudes toward slavery largely mimicked the attitudes of the settlers' states of origin. In the 1830s, river traffic provided the least expensive means of trade and travel between the established Eastern states and the lands of the Louisiana Purchase. Many southerners sailed along the Ohio River and up the Mississippi and created the settlements along Iowa's western banks north of Missouri. Silbey reasoned that these early settlers, accustomed to slavery and "quite willing to accept it as properly belonging wherever they were,"<sup>1</sup> gave Iowa more of a Southern influence. Bolstered by a strong Southern background, Iowa voted more Democratic during its formative years, electing a governor (Stephen P. Hempstead) and two U.S. Senators (Augustus C. Dodge and George W. Jones) with strong southern ties.

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<sup>1</sup> Silbey, Joel H. "Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa, 1838-1861". Iowa Journal of History, October 1957. Vol. 55. No. 4. p. 290.

During the 1840s, various groups established land routes across the southern Iowa prairies. Mormons traveled across the southern third of Iowa, settling at Kanesville (now Council Bluffs) in the late 1830s. As the gold rush struck the nation in 1848, thousands of pioneers crossed the Hawkeye state on their way south to California or the northwest along the Oregon Trail. These routes made Iowa more accessible to immigrants from the Middle Atlantic States and the Ohio Country. As a result, more Northern anti-slavery influences found their way into the Iowa mainstream, slowly watering down the pro-slavery establishment before finally breaking it with the election of 1854.<sup>2</sup>

James Connor questioned Sibley's argument directly, contending that being a Southerner did not necessarily correlate to a personal acceptance of slavery. His research on the matter revealed that significant numbers of Iowans left Southern states to escape a slave culture they found morally offensive or economically limiting. Early Iowa laws that limited blacks' freedom of movement and social and political freedoms were certainly racist, but not pro-slavery, in his view. And while some had interpreted the voting records of Iowa's Democrat U.S. senators during the 1850s as pro-slavery, Connor maintained that Dodge's and Jones' voting records reflected attitudes of conciliation: acceptance of slavery where it currently stood with an unwillingness to allow further expansion--especially into the state of Iowa.<sup>3</sup> Connor contended that Iowans at heart were always an anti-slavery people, but valued peace and national unity as well. Iowans considered the slavery question as settled law under the Compromise of 1850 and took efforts to avoid letting the subject agitate its peaceable population into a frenzy. Only after 1854, when the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its subsequent turmoil threatened their

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> Connor, James. "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa (Part I)". Annals of Iowa. Summer 1970. Vol. 40. No. 5. p. 351.

land with a potential slave state on Iowa's western border, did Iowans throw aside their attitude of national conciliation and reveal a staunch anti-slavery position.<sup>4</sup>

Connor's thesis seems to better explain the feelings Iowans had about slavery before the Civil War, but it still makes sense to begin with an investigation of the origins of the people who settled Warren County. The U.S. Army established Fort Des Moines at the confluence of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers in 1843 under the command of Captain James Allen. The fort's mission was to maintain peace between local white traders and settlers and the Fox and Sauk Indian tribes during the agreed upon migration in 1845. John D. Parmalee, an Indian trader from Indiana, is widely regarded as the first white settler in Warren County.<sup>5</sup> Knowing that his Indian trading partners would soon move away, Parmalee gave up his trading career and set up a sawmill ten miles south of the fort near present day Hartford, IA, and supplied the fort with needed wood. The next half decade saw several mills for both wood and grain open and the establishment of many farmsteads in the surrounding areas. Barely six years after John Parmalee erected his wood mill south of Fort Des Moines, the surrounding area numbered nearly 650 people, making the area large enough to establish a new county in 1849, with Indianola incorporated as its county seat.

When the federal government counted Iowans in the 1850 census, 958 people had settled in Warren County. Of these people, only 27% hailed from states that would later become part of the confederacy. Although Warren County lay a scant 60 miles from the Missouri border, only 5% of the county's population emigrated from Iowa's southern neighbor. The majority of Warren County's non-Iowa settlers (over 58%) came from the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 371.

<sup>5</sup> The Union Historical Company. History of Warren County, IA. Des Moines, IA. 1879. p.282-4.

Middle Atlantic States and the Ohio Country—especially the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.<sup>6</sup> So, even if Sibley's thesis is given some credence, the baseline for Southern influence in Warren County was already very low in 1850. Sibley's proponents might argue that the newly available land in Central Iowa enticed more traffic along the established east-west overland routes in the 1840s, prompting more settlement from the east and northeast rather than the south.

In the next federal census of 1860, records show that the county grew over ten fold. By this time, less than 15% of Warren County's population hailed from southern states. Again, the majority of the remaining settlers (over 58%) came from Middle Atlantic States as well as the Ohio Country. In fact, less than one half of one percent of the people of Warren emigrated from extreme Southern states that would have a well established slave culture (South Carolina and Georgia). New Englanders, considered traditionally abolitionist by historical standards, also composed a remarkably small section of the county's people—just shy of one percent.<sup>7</sup> So, a snapshot of Warren County in 1860 shows a population with a deteriorating influence of southern culture. Considering a wider scope, there does not seem to be a significant pro-slavery or abolitionist representation among the states of origins for the original settlers of Warren County.

Even more revealing in the census data is the distinct absence of a significant black population in Warren County during this era. By 1850, only 333 blacks lived in the

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<sup>6</sup> US Genweb Archives Census Project. *IA Warren County 1850 Federal Census*, transcribed by Mary Thompson, 1999. <http://www.usgwcensus.org/cenfiles/ia/warren/1850/index.txt> (accessed August 2, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> US Genweb Archives Census Project. *IA Warren County 1850 Federal Census*, transcribed by Sheryl Fisher, 2001. <http://www.usgwcensus.org/cenfiles/ia/warren/1860/index/> (accessed August 2, 2010).

entire state of Iowa. By the decade's end, that number had slightly more than tripled.<sup>8</sup> The 1850 Census listed no blacks in Warren County. By 1860, there were at most 16 blacks, mulattos, or light-skinned blacks out of over 10,200 total people in the county. Warren's black population would continue to remain fairly insignificant through the Reconstruction Era. Even in 1883, the census counted 63 blacks in a county of over 19,500 people.<sup>9</sup> These records clearly indicate that the predominately white people of Warren County had a very limited experience with blacks during the 1850s. This fact might lead a majority of its citizens to hold a theoretical view of black social relations that is uninformed by routine personal exposure to black people.

Understandably, the narrative of the black experience in Warren County amounts to the fragmentary record of a celebrated few. Sam Scott was "a friendly, jolly type of negro" who was captured, along with a local white man, while trying to help his wife and family escape slavery in northern Missouri during the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> The man's brother followed the Scotts to Marysville, MO, with a retinue of federal troops that freed the group and brought them back to Iowa.<sup>11</sup> Andy Flummer was another well-liked freeborn black man who married a slave and bought his wife's freedom before coming to Indianola.<sup>12</sup> So, insulated from any significant Southern influence and containing at most a scant trace of a black population, the people of early Warren County lived in a community as free from the every day social effects of slavery as one could be in the 1850s.

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<sup>8</sup> Iowa Historical and Comparative Census, 1836-1880. Prepared by John A.T. Hull, Secretary of State. Des Moines, 1883. p. 17-19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 192.

<sup>10</sup> "Sam Scott, Slave, Was Released by Warren Co. Man." *The Indianola Record*, August 1941.

<sup>11</sup> Elton Hadley to Editor of *The Indianola Record*. September 30, 1941.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, Don L. "Rowen." *The Indianola Herald*. September 17, 1964.



In the Central Iowa hinterlands, the everyday struggle for survival dominated the attention of its pioneers. Only after settlers built their homes and established their farmstead could their thoughts turn to the wider community. Many put their trust in a higher power when committing to resettle their lives on the Iowa prairies, so it comes as little surprise that religion often became the first expression of social unity on the Iowa frontier. Many times, the local church was the first community building in a frontier society. These churches were the focal point of the village and often served both civic and religious functions.

Christianity had undergone a transformation during the Early Republican period in American history. The democratic spirit instilled in Americans during the revolution had seeped into the young nation's religious communities. Religious denominations splintered along class lines in the early 1800s, as rank and file Americans found their preaching voices and generated a wide spectrum of religious views for their fellow working class congregations.<sup>13</sup> The successful religious sects were those that would best adapt to frontier life—the ones who would strive to find settlers and preach in a manner that would lead to their conversion. Warren County, Iowa would become home to several sects, most remarkably, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Society of Friends. These denominations would encounter further challenges in these frontier societies as the issue of slavery created tension in the churches along regional lines and in some cases broke these national congregations apart.

No religious denomination in Warren County possessed a more deeply-rooted anti-slavery tradition than the Society of Friends—the Quakers. Founded by George Fox

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<sup>13</sup> Hatch, Nathan O. The Democratization of American Christianity. Yale University Press. New Haven, CT. 1989. p. 225-6.

during the English Reformation in the 1640s, the Quakers believed that each person had an inherent ability to develop a deeply personal, spiritual relationship with God. They believed that by quieting his or her heart during long periods of silence, God would reveal Himself to the individual.<sup>14</sup> Early Quaker worship meetings were often characterized by long periods of silence sometimes interrupted by an individual's spontaneous prayer or witness. Having been persecuted for their beliefs by Puritans in Massachusetts in the 1650s, the Friends finally established a safe haven in the American colonies when William Penn settled a family debt with the English king and chartered the Pennsylvania colony in 1681. While in Pennsylvania, four Friends from Germantown petitioned their monthly meeting to adopt a moral position against slavery in 1688.<sup>15</sup> This act became the first official white protest against slavery in the United States and the basis for the anti-slavery culture within American Quakerism.

From their base in Pennsylvania, Friends dispersed throughout the American colonies, heading first south in the early 1700s, then to Kentucky and Tennessee in the 1760s and finally into Ohio Country in the 1780s. During this period, the Quakers saw the effects of slavery first hand, but could not convince Southern slaveholders of the institution's moral failings. Unwilling to use slave labor or even purchase goods produced by slaves, Quakers soon found that they could not survive in regions with an entrenched culture of slavery. Quakers left the South in droves at the beginning of the 1800s and headed for the Ohio Country. These peaceful, contemplative people soon saw Iowa as a potential haven from the slave power of the South. Drawn by the prospects of

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<sup>14</sup> Jones, Thomas L. The Quakers of Iowa. The State Historical Society of Iowa. Iowa City, IA. 1918. p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> "1688 Protest Against Slavery." <http://www.quakerinfo.org/history/slavery.html>. Accessed August 22, 2010.

Free Soil and inexpensive farmland, the first Quakers settled in southeastern Iowa near the town of Salem in 1835.<sup>16</sup>

Salem quickly became the epicenter for anti-slavery sentiment in Iowa. Spurned by Southerners for their views, Quakers soon found that Iowa would not be the escape from slavery that they had originally anticipated. Situated less than forty miles from the Missouri border, the citizens of Salem would often have everyday life interrupted by searches from slave catchers from Missouri, igniting their ire and crystallizing their anti-slavery attitudes toward those of outright abolition. By 1838, a more activist anti-slavery faction took root within the Indiana Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends. Within five years, these more liberal Friends, including Thomas Frazier of Salem, Iowa, eventually split off to form a parallel Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends, with a subordinate Quarterly Meeting held in Salem.<sup>17</sup> This shift in anti-slavery sentiment in Salem would prove important in the formation of future Monthly Meetings of Friends in Iowa. Salem was the gateway for Quaker traffic in Iowa<sup>18</sup> and any Friend settling in Iowa's southern half would certainly find Salem's influence in their Quaker community.

The Friends moved quickly westward and in 1846 a contingent from Ohio and Virginia led by David Lair settled near Ackworth, four miles east of present day Indianola, in Warren County. These first Quaker families were soon joined by Tennesseans Samuel and Dillon Haworth and the Hightower families from North Carolina.<sup>19</sup> In 1847, the most influential man of any faith in early Warren County

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<sup>16</sup> Jones, p. 33-9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.134-6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.54.

<sup>19</sup> The Union Historical Society (1879). p. 288.

history, Paris P. Henderson, from Union County, Indiana, arrived. Henderson would later serve many civic functions for Warren County during its establishment in the 1850s, including sheriff and county judge. In a few years' time, the Society of Friends would create five Monthly Meetings in mainly eastern Warren County, ensuring that the eastern half of the county would be firmly grounded in a Quaker anti-slavery culture.

Not surprisingly, a majority of the citizens of Warren County during this era professed the Methodist Episcopal faith. Rooted in the teachings of John and Charles Wesley in Oxford, England during the 1720s, Methodism became popular in America during the 1770s as Bishop Francis Asbury nurtured a Methodist enclave in Catholic Maryland. Methodism enjoyed great success in the early American republic, in large part because their leadership hierarchy and method of evangelization fit in well with the new country's democratic ideals. All authority in the Methodist Episcopal Church rested in the General Conference, a national congregation of delegates that met every four years. Methodist preachers were a common sort and garnered considerable appeal in frontier societies.<sup>20</sup> These itinerant circuit riders emphasized the individual's freedom to determine the doctrines that fit his or her particular conscience or path to salvation. Many converted to Methodism by way of camp revivals characterized by physical and emotional outpourings of spirituality. Methodism would quickly spread west through the Ohio Country in the early 1800s and finally reached Iowa when Barton Randle of the Illinois Conference preached in the Dubuque area around 1833<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Moats, Francis I. "The Rise of Methodism in the Middle West." Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 15, No. 1, June 1928. p. 69-71.

<sup>21</sup> Nye, Rev. John. Between the Rivers: A History of the United Methodist Church in Iowa. The Archives and History Commission of Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. 1986. p. 1.

When Captain Allen established Fort Des Moines in 1843, itinerant Methodist circuit preachers soon followed. Reverend George W. Teas figured prominently in the early history of the area as an on-again off-again preacher stationed near the Fort, with his parsonage built at Hartford.<sup>22</sup> Also included in the history of the region was the Reverend Abner Rathbun, who would venture south into Warren County during the late 1840s.<sup>23</sup> Rev. Ezra Rathbun was also known to preach among the people of Warren County as early as 1847.<sup>24</sup> Soon, Methodists established small congregations in Hartford (1849), Palmyra (1853), New Virginia (1855), Norwalk (1856), and Indianola (1856). The speed and depth of organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Warren County certainly rivaled that of the Quakers. Initial members of the Methodist Episcopal church in Indianola included Mr. and Mrs. Zebulon Hockett of North Carolina and Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Liston of Ohio. P. Gad Bryant, local attorney and possibly Indianola's most celebrated Democrat, also professed the Methodist faith along with Hezekiah Fish from Indiana.

Even though John Wesley prohibited slave trading in the church's General Rules as early as 1743, American Methodists soon found that their church's democratic structure and diverse national membership prevented its taking a hard line against slavery. The General Conference of the Methodist Church bore a striking resemblance to the United States Congress, with a broad spectrum of religious opinions on this surprisingly political issue. Anti-slavery directives handed out in the General Conference of Baltimore in 1784 did not ring true with a Southern culture deeply engrained with

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<sup>22</sup>Harvey, Rev. R.E. *Historical Sketch of the Des Moines Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1832-1860. Annals of Iowa*, January 1944. Vol. 25, No. 3. p. 197-8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 201.

<sup>24</sup> Union Historical Society (1879) p. 393.

slavery from its very beginning. Both sides of the debate faced each other across the Mason Dixon line, each quoting scripture to justify its position equally convincingly. Faced with the precarious balance of staying true to its Christian principles and remaining a united national congregation, the Methodist church chose to fight this battle against slavery where it could (in the North) and compromised where it could not (in the South). By 1844, slavery's tension finally broke the Methodist Church apart along the Mason Dixon line in a schism that would not completely heal until 1939.

The national tension over slavery in the 1840s colored the early development of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Iowa. The Iowa Conference (which included Warren County) was organized in 1844, the same year as the schism emerged within the Methodist Church. However, from the beginning, circuit riders had preached against slavery, and as churches sprung up in Central Iowa, "[n]owhere was anti-slavery sentiment so determined as in the pulpits."<sup>25</sup> Yet even in Iowa, the official stance against slavery was not without its critics from within. As the effects of the violence in "bleeding Kansas" rippled through the state in 1856, the Iowa Conference passed a resolution noted for its majority position against the spread of slavery and called for fellow Methodists to pray for God to emancipate the slaves. Such a tepid position on slavery provoked a retort from its more radical minority which reaffirmed an "uncompromising opposition to slavery" and called for the church to remove members who owned slaves.<sup>26</sup> As war approached three years later, the Iowa Conference church leadership took a much harder stance against slavery, calling for "increased efforts and concert of action for the extirpation of the great evil of slavery" and requiring members to

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<sup>25</sup> Nye, p.177.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 177-178.

emancipate their slaves when state law allowed.<sup>27</sup> Without question, as the 1850s progressed, the leadership of Methodist Episcopal Church in Warren County became decidedly anti-slavery.

Presbyterians also figured prominently in the early history of Warren County. This Christian denomination originated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century British Isles and Central Europe through the teachings of the “four Johns”: Wycliffe, Huss, Calvin, and Knox.<sup>28</sup> After two centuries of ferment in Britain, Presbyterianism came to America as Puritanism and was known as more of a common faith. Presbyterians displayed a great distaste for hierarchy and the priestly class—the sort of down to earth, democratic religious thought that thrived along the frontier in the young American republic. The first Presbyterian churches in Iowa were established in Lee and Des Moines Counties in Southeast Iowa by the Reverends Samuel Wilson and Launcelot Bell in June 1837.<sup>29</sup>

Presbyterian churches would spread north and west and by 1850, Presbyterianism had come to Warren County. A United Presbyterian Church was established in Lacona, IA, where Reverend Joseph Howard preached the first sermon in 1847. David Wills and Reverend G.M. Swan, a wealthy farmer from Connecticut, organized the Presbyterian Church of Indianola in November 1853. The initial congregation included members from Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. In the same year, a group of mostly Scottish immigrants established another Presbyterian church in the area known as Scotch Ridge, halfway between Fort Des Moines and Indianola. This was a Scottish Free Presbyterian Church and its members were known as "seceders".

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<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the Sixteenth Session of the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Mills Brothers. Des Moines. 1859. p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Blanchard, Charles. “Religion in Iowa—The Presbyterians”. Annals of Iowa. Fall 1962. Vol. 36. No. 6. p. 401.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 401-2.

The Presbyterian Church also struggled with the new democratic diversity of opinions among its rank and file during the early republic. In 1837 and 1838, the Presbyterian Church also broke apart--initially, as a more liberal "New School" faction began to partner with denominations outside the Presbyterian Church to promote social justice against the wishes of the conservative "Old School". Soon the topics of social justice turned to slavery. The Presbyterian Church had originally denounced slavery when its national General Assembly convened in 1818. Old School Presbyterians assumed the mantle of central ecclesiastical authority. Northeastern conservatives and Southerners constituted this group and collaborated to remain silent on the matter of slavery. Formation of this coalition implicitly reaffirmed the church's original position against slavery and simultaneously placated the Southern presbyteries--maintaining a tenuous national unity in the church. New Schoolers, much like Methodists and the Quakers, believed in the primacy of the individual's conscience and his or her personal relationship with God. Many of these individuals felt a moral obligation to speak out against slavery, much to the ire of the Old School. Tensions between the two factions came to a head at the 1837 Assembly in Philadelphia where the Old School establishment effectively expelled the New School from its organization, creating a rift in the Presbyterian Church. The approach of the Civil War intensified this rift, dissolving the alliance of Northeastern and Southern Old School Churches. As with the Methodist schism, the rift in the Presbyterian Church ran deep and would not heal until the twentieth century (1983).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Adams, Elizabeth T. "Divided Nation, Divided Church: The Presbyterian Schism, 1837-1838." <http://ehis.ebscohost.com.cowles-proxy.drake.edu/ehost/delivery>. Accessed August 6, 2010.



Despite the turmoil over slavery that polarized the major Churches of the United States at this time, the religious institutions of the area contributed to the anti-slavery conscience of the people of Warren County. These people then expressed their collective conscience and their views on slavery through their votes. During the 1850s, Iowans had several opportunities to express themselves on the topic of the day--both through their representation in assemblies or through referendums on specific slavery issues. These votes revealed that the people of Warren County aligned themselves with the anti-slavery cause on local, state, and national levels. They also reveal, however, that the citizens were not ready to allow blacks full equality of civil rights with the white majority.

The earliest county historian hit the mark when he wrote, "There is not, perhaps, another county in Iowa whose political experiences have been less varied than those of Warren county."<sup>31</sup> The watershed election of 1854 saw an alliance of anti-slavery Whigs, Free Soilers, and Know Nothings break the Democratic hold on the state and foreshadow Iowa's domination by the Republican Party for the rest of the century. In this election, Warren County elected James Grimes as governor with 62% of the vote. Beginning in 1856, the county also elected a succession of Republicans to the state Senate (M.L. McPherson and Paris P. Henderson) and the state House of Representatives (C.B. Jones, Charles E. Millard, and J.E. Williamson). In national elections, Warren County acquitted itself as a reliably Republican area. After 1852, the county voted for Republican candidates with significant majorities, delivering 58% of the vote for both John Fremont in 1856 and Abraham Lincoln in 1860.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The Union Historical Company (1879), p. 355.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 357.

The people of Iowa were given another opportunity to express their views on slavery on a statewide level in 1857. The previous year, the Iowa assembly called a convention to write a new state constitution. By this time, Warren County had grown to a total population of 8,000. At the general election held in August 1856, Warren County chose Lewis Todhunter as its delegate to the constitutional convention, giving him 56% of the 1350 votes cast. Todhunter was a thirty-nine year old former carpenter from Fayette County, Ohio. Mainly a self-taught man, he also made a living as a merchant before passing the bar in Ohio and becoming an attorney. Todhunter moved to Indianola in 1854 and quickly became a prominent citizen, serving as county treasurer, auditor, and prosecuting attorney. A member of the Methodist Episcopal faith, Todhunter was heavily involved in the temperance movement and would later serve as a quartermaster of the 40<sup>th</sup> Iowa infantry during the Civil War.<sup>33</sup> Todhunter easily outdistanced Jacob Kern, a doctor from Virginia, and P. Gad Bryan, the young Democrat physician from Ohio.

At the outset of the convention, Todhunter headed the Committee on the Executive Department, which was responsible for writing the section of the constitution regarding the governor's duties. Oddly enough, Todhunter took ill toward the end of the convention and was never able to give the report on his assigned committee. Before his illness, he was able to voice his position on several sections of the constitution, especially those with regard to the document's recognition of the civil rights of blacks. Todhunter argued in favor of providing for the schooling of blacks and mulattoes.<sup>34</sup> He also voted to allow Negroes the ability to offer testimony in court and to give blacks and mulattoes

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<sup>33</sup> Union Historical Company (1879), p 360.

Pioneer Law Makers Association of Iowa. Reunion (of 1892), p. 126.

<sup>34</sup> The Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Iowa, Assembled at Iowa City. Luse, Lane and Co. Davenport, IA. 1857. p. 63.

access to property rights.<sup>35</sup> Todhunter took a decidedly legalistic approach to the question, noticing that the authorities of the day defined citizenship by ownership of property and voting rights. While other delegates argued that the constitution already implied that a black person had property rights under the law, Todhunter insisted that the state should specifically regulate this aspect of the law. As it turns out, Todhunter's position on civil rights might be considered liberal when compared to the constituents that he represented.

The article in the constitution regarding black voting rights was one political tightrope the convention delegates were unwilling to walk. Not wanting to seem pro-slavery and yet not fully accepting of black equality, the convention shrewdly placed this measure as a separate item on the ballot when Iowans voted on the new constitution in August 1857. As expected, Iowans voted in favor of the new constitution by a wide margin. Equally as predictable, the measure to remove the word "white" from the suffrage section of the document was defeated by a sizable margin statewide.

In Warren County, the people voted in favor of the constitution in about the same proportion as the rest of the state. Knowing that it would move the capital just 15 miles north of Indianola, over 70% of the county's voters approved the new constitution. Not surprisingly, the measure to remove the word "white" from the suffrage section of the constitution—an act that would have essentially given blacks the right to vote—fell miserably short in the referendum. The state of Iowa rejected the measure with 85% of the vote. In Warren County, its citizens rejected black suffrage with a vote of 90%

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

against,<sup>36</sup> a result surprisingly higher than the rest of the state. The lack of exposure to blacks appears to have had no effect on the county's strident anti-slavery position; however, it may have successfully insulated the citizenry against feelings of political equality for blacks at this time.

A remarkably telling indication of Warren County attitudes on slavery can be found in the results of early local elections during the formation of the county in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Known mostly for their austerity and humility, Quakers quickly became leaders in this mostly Methodist Episcopal county. Paris P. Henderson, from Indiana, was appointed organizing sheriff of Warren County by Judge Olney in the Marion County district court in 1849. Records of early elections reveal that Quakers held many positions of authority during the formation of Warren County. Alexander Ginder was elected county commissioner in 1849 as well. Paris Henderson was elected county judge in 1851, realistically making him the county's foremost political and governmental authority. David Lair was the county's first coroner and also served as prosecuting attorney in 1852. The next year, Samuel Haworth was elected County Supervisor and School Fund Commissioner, a position he would hold several times throughout the decade. Samuel Haworth also frequently sat on the Grand Jury when it convened annually in September to settle the county's legal disputes.<sup>37</sup>

Having Quakers at such high levels of county government would prove advantageous to the anti-slavery cause as a section of the Underground Railroad would cut through the middle of Warren County and roll up north to the Des Moines River on the county's eastern border. Although not officially recognized by the Underground

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<sup>36</sup> Martin, Reverend W.C. History of Warren County, Iowa From Its Earliest Settlement to 1908, The SJ Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago IL, 1908. p. 123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.121-122.

Railroad Association, reports of railroad activity in the Warren County area emerged in local papers in 1906.<sup>38</sup>

From these reports published years after the purported deeds, slaves typically continued east from Winterset to Indianola, the heart of Warren County. There is one recorded instance where an escaped slave references Warren County in the route of his escape. John Ross Miller recalled his flight along the route of the Underground Railroad from his master in Nodaway County, MO. Starting in Winterset and moving mostly at night, he “traveled by the north star and landed in Indianola” one October morning in 1861.<sup>39</sup>

Many escaped slaves probably took shelter at the house of Mahlon Haworth, an affluent Quaker farmer who lived near the dead center of Warren County. In 1929, his former home at the intersection of Highways 92 and 65 was torn down to make way for a gas station. This demolition revealed a secret room in his basement, which locals said was purportedly used to shelter runaway slaves. News reports also related how Haworth’s home was frequently raided, but no slaves were ever found<sup>40</sup>—possibly a testament to the pains taken by Haworth to ensure the secret entrance remained undisturbed, but also of the persistent presence of federal enforcers of the Fugitive Slave Law and “slave catchers” from Missouri. The slave catchers never found any signs of aiding escaped slaves, but the frequent raids makes it seem like law enforcement knew that something was going on in this community run by so many Quakers.

From Haworth’s home, the runaway slaves could have found shelter in the home of Dr. M.A. DaShiell, a physician from Dearborn County, Indiana who would also help

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<sup>38</sup> Epps, George A. “History of Warren County.” *Indianola Advocate Tribune*. January 11, 1906.

<sup>39</sup> Stiles, C.C. “John Ross Miller.” *Annals of Iowa*. July 1934, Vol. 19, No. 5. p. 385-6.

<sup>40</sup> Shane, George. “Iowa ‘Railway’ Helped Slaves to Freedom.” *Des Moines Register*. August 4, 1929.

organize the county's Republican Party. Although he professed no faith, DaShiell purportedly aided more than 100 Negroes along the road from Palmyra to Hartford. At Hartford, John Wasson, a wealthy merchant from Ohio, was also noted for helping the escaped slaves. Wasson would guide the slaves to Ford, a small town not far from the Des Moines River. There slaves would gain the services of Boston I. Taylor, the devout Presbyterian blacksmith and carpenter and owner of one of the largest farms in the county. From Ford, slaves would follow the river north to Des Moines before they continued their path to the east.<sup>41</sup> The lifestyles of affluent farmers and country merchants and physicians required frequent travel and provided excellent cover for their underground deliveries.

Physical and written evidence of these terminals off the main Underground Railroad are hard to uncover. Since these activities violated federal law, conductors along the Underground Railroad did not keep written records of their exploits. Reports of the consistent presence of federal slave patrols in the vicinity required that knowledge of the Railroad be kept to a minimum. While conclusive proof of a Warren County connection to the Underground Railroad cannot be found, given the significant Quaker influence in the area, a specific mention of Indianola by name in a former slave's recollections, and the revelation of a secret room in a prominent Quaker's former home, a strong circumstantial case can be made for the Underground Railroad's existence in Warren County. The existence of a branch of the Underground Railroad would certainly reveal a limited, but radical response of Warren County's citizenry against slavery.

Drawn to the Central Iowa frontier with visions of agricultural prosperity far from the crucible of slavery, pioneers from the Ohio Country and Middle Atlantic States

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

quickly settled Warren County in the 1850s. The county built up a vibrant religious culture in a short time as churches of Quaker, Presbyterian, and Methodist Episcopal faiths sprouted in the fledgling towns and throughout the countryside. Buttressed by their faith, the people of Warren County formed a collective conscience that privately abhorred the existence of slavery. As the decade progressed and the political structure of the county developed, Warren County's citizens expressed these anti-slavery sentiments in national, state, and local elections and referendums. The county gained a reputation as a reliably anti-slavery, Republican enclave with a significant Quaker presence in its local leadership. This Quaker influence in the county, from its beginnings, helped provide an anti-slavery focus and may have created an environment that would nurture a branch of the Underground Railroad. In time, the people of Warren County would finally express their commitment to slavery's demise with their guns. Between 1861 and 1865, a thousand of her sons would march off under the Stars and Stripes to restore the Union and cast out slavery from our nation's history.

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