

Church Life in Rural, Small-Town America:

A Case Study of Park Rapids, Minnesota

By

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Gem of Minnesota.

PARK RAPIDS is the name of a thriving new town, situated in Cass County, NORTHERN MINNESOTA, on Park River, centrally located on the

Beautiful Shell Prairies.

These prairies are slightly rolling forming part of a high plateau. The soil is made up of a rich fertile loam, of a carboniferous character with a fine subsoil, capable of raising the very finest quality of grains, with as large an average as the best of prairie countries can boast.

Park Rapids

Is situated on the right bank of Park River, a clear swift running stream. Fed as it is by the waters of a beautiful chain of lakes, which form a natural reservoir inexhaustible in its very nature, the stream keeps at about the same level throughout the year.

From *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, August 3, 1882

Driving through Park Rapids, Minnesota, is an experience very similar to passing through the other towns that dot the northern portion of the state along Highway 71. Though large enough that you'll not miss it if you should happen to blink, the surroundings still carry the atmosphere of a small town community. Cars parked directly in the middle of Main Street during normal business hours still warrant a second, curious look from newcomers and many buildings of the downtown area still appear to be from a different era. While the passage of time and the growth and development of the twentieth century have significantly changed Park Rapids, the town was anything but a substantial community in the early 1880's. First settlements in the area began in 1879 and the town was officially named at a Fourth of July celebration in 1881.¹ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, a newspaper that remains the primary news publication for the town, came onto the scene in 1882, published by Henry R. Cobb, a local figure that played a key role in the later development of Park Rapids. By 1894, a road to Bemidji had been cut, connecting Park Rapids to greater northern Minnesota. One of the most pivotal events, however, came in 1891 with the completion of a railroad line to Park Rapids from Wadena, a town to the south.² As with many communities growing up in the nineteenth century, a railroad represented a connection to the outside world that directly affected the success of communities such as Park Rapids.

“The Enterprise would like to see...Religious services more frequent in Park Rapids.”³ This appeal was part of a list that ran in a late 1882 edition of the *Park Rapids Enterprise*. The article represents a look to the future and what Henry Cobb, at the very

¹ Hubbard County Historical Society, *Lest We Forget: History of Park Rapids Commemorating our Centennial*

² Ibid

³ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Nov. 16, 1882

least, desired his community to become. Interestingly enough, Park Rapids eventually developed a wide denominational representation, one surprising for a community of its relatively small size and influence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 1942 Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Minnesota, a listing compiled by the Minnesota Historical Records Survey, shows representation in Park Rapids from Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist, and Assemblies of God (then Park Rapids Gospel Mission) churches.⁴ That these churches existed by 1942 is not altogether that unusual but the fact that many of these denominational organizations were present within twenty years of the town's founding is evidence of a community that held the Christian church in high esteem.⁵

The latter portion of the nineteenth century was a phenomenal growth period for American churches that cut across denominational lines. Though Christianity and Christian churches had been long established in America by the middle of the century, these churches would experience both a surge in growth and changes in church structure and ministry. As the nation was shaped by the events and phenomena of the 1800's, so was the church influenced by many of these same factors. Immigration and ethnicity, social issues, more streamlined education, and changes in evangelism methods affected the church in all denominations. New idealisms such as the social gospel and a new (or revisited) approach to the way that Christianity should relate to society at large would be a factor in these new developments. In all this, the churches in Park Rapids were no exception. Though a rural community somewhat out of the way of mainstream

⁴ MN Historical Records Survey, *Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Minnesota* (St. Paul, 1942)

⁵ It should be noted that while it is not specifically discussed in this paper, there was representation from both Episcopal and Assemblies of God church organizations during this period.

evangelical America, it reflected many aspects of the national scene. Sunday schools, parochial education, revival meetings, a church-related temperance movement, community involvement by area churches, and a heavy influence along cultural and ethnic lines gave Park Rapids a connection to what was going on at the national scene both denominationally and in regards to Christianity in general. The story of the development of Park Rapids reveals a history in which churches were not only highly valued but a significant part of society.

Coming to America- The Influence of Immigration

One of the hallmarks of a developing America in the nineteenth century was the influx of heavy immigration during this period. As westward expansion began to define America more broadly than simply the eastern seaboard many of those who came to settle this land came with a foreign heritage. The infusion of immigrants from Ireland, Germany, the Scandinavian nations, and others of foreign ethnicity caused the American church to not only increase in size but to develop denominationally as well. Though not always fitting the stereotypical pattern, immigrants with strong cultural ties to a denomination influenced the growth and development of that denomination in America. As a state newly admitted to the union, Minnesota was no exception when it came to immigration. Clifton Olmstead estimates that by 1880 there were 6,680,000 immigrants in the United States with major representation from German, Irish, Canadian, English, and Scandinavian ethnicities, and that by the same year, the Upper Mississippi Valley had attracted more foreign-born peoples than any other US region.⁶ This statistic put Park Rapids, just being settled during this time, right at the point of development. Of the three

⁶ Olmstead, Clifton E. *History of Religion in the United States* (Prentice-Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1960), p. 419

most heavily influenced denominations by this phenomenon (Catholic, Lutheran, and Eastern Orthodox), two prospered in Park Rapids, both Catholic (St. Peter's Catholic Church) and Lutheran (St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church).⁷

Though virtually all of the major denominations experienced growth in the late nineteenth Century, one of the most profoundly influenced was the Catholic Church in its relationship to immigration. Irish immigration in the years preceding the Civil War provided the initial thrust for Catholics in America.⁸ In the period just following the war, the greatest numbers had begun to come from Germany.⁹ Though more recent research shows that certain figures pertaining to Catholic immigration were substantially overestimated based on the faulty assumption that immigrants from traditionally Catholic nations (such as Ireland) consistently remained within Catholicism, the Catholic church still managed to double in size during the decade of 1850 to 1860.¹⁰ Through the coming of immigrants, Minnesota had become the fourth most Catholic state by 1860 (14.8 percent of the total population) due mainly to heavy German concentration in St. Paul.¹¹ In the wake of rapid, immigration-related growth, the Catholic Church in the US began to take shape as distinctly American.

St. Peter's Catholic Church, built during the years of 1886-1887, was the first church building constructed in Park Rapids, not too far from its present location at the corner of Fifth and Pleasant.¹² As early as the previous winter, a Catholic society had been formed, and in March of 1886, a building committee began the process of

⁷ Ibid, p. 421

⁸ Ibid, p. 426

⁹ Handy, Robert T. *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1977) p. 314

¹⁰ Finke, Rodger. Stark, Rodney. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey: 1992) p. 110-112

¹¹ Ibid, p. 114

¹² *History of St. Peter's Parish*

construction.¹³ As with many of the churches that developed during Park Rapids' early period, the organization of the church preceded the completion of a church building. Most were started as the result of preaching by a circuit preacher or denominational representative who took the initiative to fill the pulpit. Early Catholicism in Park Rapids witnessed this development through the work of two priests: Father Gunkel, who had conducted services in private homes, and Father Ignatius Tomazin who, though based elsewhere, became one of the first clergy members to work with the Park Rapids congregation.¹⁴ By 1891, ten years after the founding of the town, St. Peter's had a resident pastor. Father Ignatius Balluff served until his transfer to Red Lake Falls in 1883.¹⁵ While technically established, St. Peter's, like the other denominations, grew through ups and downs in membership and active clergy. Priests came and went and absences in the pulpit became a reality for the congregation. By the twentieth century, however, St. Peter's had become a fixture in Park Rapids, responsible for several key improvements to the community.

Immigration was also a key factor in the development of the Lutheran church in America and particularly in Minnesota. Anyone who has ever been to a Lutheran potluck or lived in northern Minnesota for a long period of time most likely is familiar with Scandinavian and German Lutheran tradition. Lutheranism experienced a rapid growth period from about 1870 on due to high immigration numbers from both Germany and later the Scandinavian nations with a major portion of these immigrants settling in rural,

¹³ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, March 19 and 26, 1886

¹⁴ *History of St. Peter's Parish*. Park Rapids was still considered a mission at this point and Father Tomazin's main congregation was in Wadena. By 1888, Mass was conducted once each month by Tomazin in Park Rapids.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

northern states.¹⁶ Numbers as high as three million from Germany, and one and a quarter million from Scandinavia top the list, a high percentage of these being identified with some sort of Lutheran background.¹⁷

Immigration from these nations affected the Lutheran church in America not only in terms of numbers, but also in the development of various denominations as many ethnic groups aligned themselves with one synod or another. Indeed, the mergers and creations of different factions of the Lutheran church created a complex history. Additionally, several of the synods that grew up during this period were structured around a particular ethnic group. The Wisconsin Synod was one of the first German-associated Lutheran groups to have influence in some of the northern states.¹⁸ The year 1847 marked the beginning of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, destined to become the largest single synod by the time of World War I.¹⁹ The synod was represented in Park Rapids and Akeley by St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in the early twentieth century. The Swedish Lutheran church had its largest presence in Minnesota as it too developed over this period due again to a large influx of immigrants from Sweden.²⁰ Though Swedish immigration and related Lutheran branches were a large influence on Minnesota Lutheranism as a whole, Park Rapids and the surrounding region was most impacted by denominations associated with Finnish and German Lutheranism.

The towns of Menahga and Wolf Lake, both in the immediate vicinity of Park Rapids and heavily Scandinavian, had a significant representation from Finnish Lutheran

¹⁶ Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada*, p. 331

¹⁷ Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People* (Yale University Press, New Haven and New London: 1972), p. 759

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 759

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 757

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 760

denominations. By the early 1940's, a survey of Minnesota churches conducted by the Minnesota Historical Records Survey, Division of Community Service Programs, and Work Projects Administration showed churches belonging to two separate divisions of Finnish churches. The *Menahgan Evangelis Lutherilainen Seurakunta* in Menahga, part of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran National Church of America (Headquarters in Ohio) was led by S. A. Krahkala, a resident of nearby Sebeka.²¹ The Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church (founded in 1873) found representation in 1914 with the *Wolf Lake Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church* (also known as the *Komulainen Church*), pastored by lay preacher John H. Alajoki.²²

Though the Finnish Churches took root to the south, the Missouri Synod and German Culture had the most immediate impact in Park Rapids. Early representation of the Lutheran church in Park Rapids was associated primarily with the German Lutheran Church. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church stemmed from the merger of two congregations. An article in the *Park Rapids Enterprise* recorded Lutheran services in the town as early as 1888. A German Lutheran church met at the time in the home of an August Retsloff with a membership of about 25 families and the same article noted "talk of their building a church."²³ Though no officially designated church building was built until the twentieth century, this marked early strides for Park Rapids Lutherans. A Lutheran community in nearby Dorset functioned as early as 1884 and established a connection with Park Rapids.²⁴ A school building five miles northwest of Park Rapids

²¹ MN Historical Records Survey, *Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Minnesota*, p. 306. Pastor Krahkala also pastored the *Snellman Evangelical Lutheran Church* in the hamlet of Snellman, near Osage

²² Ibid.

²³ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Feb. 2, 1888

²⁴ *The Story of St. John's Lutheran Church: Park Rapids, Hubbard County, Minnesota*

served as place of meeting for the Park Rapids congregation.²⁵ Also present in Park Rapids was the St. John's Evangelical Church. The unification of this congregation with the Lutheran congregation in Park Rapids in 1906 resulted in the official formation of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. A resolution passed by the two congregations on March 22, 1908, united the "German Evangelical Lutherans of Todd Township and the Evangelicals of Park Rapids" into the "Evangelical Lutheran Peace Congregation of Park Rapids, Minnesota."²⁶ During this period, the pastor received a salary of \$150.00 per year with total expenses coming to \$190.26 in 1909.²⁷ Later, the church changed both its name and synodical association. In 1922, the Evangelical Lutheran Peace Congregation officially incorporated and joined "The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States" (better known as the Missouri Synod) under the name "St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church."²⁸ The original constitution of the church was translated from German to English in 1923.²⁹

Congregational Representation and other Evangelical Denominations

The increasing drive to plant churches in new and developing territories by evangelicals during this period is perhaps one of the key reasons for the establishment of several of these denominations in Park Rapids. By the 1880's, precisely the period in which the town was beginning to develop, Protestant denominations had raised four million dollars to assist in church planting for new territories such as Park Rapids.³⁰

Often these churches were established by the Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational,

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada*, p. 274

Baptist, and Disciple denominations.³¹ Certainly this was the case in Park Rapids. Less than ten years after the founding of the town, Park Rapids had representation from the Congregational, Methodist, and Baptist churches. Even offshoots of these denominations appeared later in the history of the town. Though not specifically discussed in this paper, the Assemblies of God denomination, which began in association with the Holiness movements (in loose connection with the Methodist church), existed in Park Rapids by at least the 1940's.³² The mainline evangelical denominations in Park Rapids developed almost simultaneously with the early establishment of the Congregational church and the Methodists and Baptists following soon after. These denominations, seemingly more than any other, crossed lines of division in various ways. The Methodist church not only used Baptist facilities early in their history, but coordinated services with the Congregational church so that the Methodist preacher preached one week and the congregational representative the next.³³

Before, and even for a short period after official church organization in Park Rapids, church services were sporadic at best. Like many developing parts of America's frontier territories, preaching was done in large part either by laypersons or circuit preachers that covered substantial amounts of territory. The call for religious serves found in Park Rapids' local newspaper reflected this trend. Several figures in the history of Park Rapids' early development are key to the proliferation not only of religious services but to the development of denominational diversity.

³¹ Ibid, p. 274

³² The Park Rapids Gospel Mission, located at 405 S. Main was an outreach of the North Central District out of Minneapolis. MN Historical Records Survey, *Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Minnesota*, p. 17

³³ *Riverside United Methodist Church: Ninetieth Anniversary*

Early records of the *Park Rapids Enterprise* reveal the foundational figures in the religious life of the town. Reverend C. P. Wilson was one of the earliest recorded preachers in Park Rapids history. In November of 1882, almost a year and a half after the founding of Park Rapids as a community, he preached a sermon on two occasions, one at the residence of a Mr. Rice.³⁴ This was probably Gilbert Rice, a foundational figure both of the town and the Park Rapids Baptist church. By all indications, the meetings were well attended. Wilson, however, disappeared from the map after this record. It is at this point that we are introduced to a “Mr. Carter”, who immediately picked up where Wilson left off. William Carter appears to be an extremely motivated lay preacher who served off and on within the evangelical tradition between times when Park Rapids had an official pastor.³⁵ He was also instrumental in the administration of the local Sunday school chapter.³⁶ Other figures to preach temporarily or on a one-time basis in Park Rapids included Rev. William Rice (of Cottage, NY, father of Charles Rice), and H. C. McKnight, a student from Yale University that served Park Rapids for a summer until his return to educational pursuits.³⁷ The ministry of McKnight is significant in that his term represents the work of the Congregational Church. Previous to his visit the vacancy in Park Rapids had attracted the attention of Reverend Montgomery, Superintendent Of Home Missions for Minnesota, a ministry of the Congregational church.³⁸ The result was not only the visit of McKnight but the future establishment of a Congregational church in Park Rapids. Other churches witnessed the same story played out in their own history.

³⁴ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Nov. 23 and 30, 1882.

³⁵ *Ibid*, Aug. 29, 1884. The Riverside Methodist church history also records a description from an early settler referring to a William Carter in this role.

³⁶ *Ibid*, May 10, 1883

³⁷ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, July 20, 1883 and Aug. 29, 1884

³⁸ *Ibid*, Aug. 29, 1884

Establishment of these churches was often the direct result of the efforts of a denominational representative from outside but working in the area.

Mid 1884 marks the arrival of Reverend C. H. Patton and the decision to create an official church of the Congregationalist denomination. Patton was another delegate of the Congregational Church and was instrumental in the founding of the church in Park Rapids. A committee appointed to look into organization included not only Patton but also H. R. Cobb, publisher of the Park Rapids Enterprise at the time.³⁹ In the absence of a church building, Patton preached the first sermon and held the first service of the new Congregational church at the Park Rapids school house, a location used by many of the church organizations and societies.⁴⁰ Though an established church was now present, the difficulty of maintaining a resident preacher was still a reality. As before, various persons would continue to fill the pulpit from time to time. Other methods could also be substituted for “live preaching. Sermons from leading ministers of the time such as “Spurgeon, Talmage, and other divines” were sometimes read in place of a minister.⁴¹ Though the absence of a regular minister continued through the years of 1886 and 1887, the Congregational Church enclosed a new building in August of 1888.⁴²

Much like the establishment of the Congregational church in Park Rapids, the Methodist denomination was also begun by representatives of the denomination. In fact, the development of both these churches, and additionally the Baptist church, was often intertwined. Though Methodist services were held in Park Rapids as early as 1885, the denomination did not have an official minister until a year later with the arrival of Edwin

³⁹ Ibid, Aug. 29, 1884

⁴⁰ Ibid, Aug. 29, 1884. This usage of state facilities by church organizations would not become an issue until much later with the re-definition of the “separation of church and state”.

⁴¹ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Mar, 26, 1886

⁴² Ibid, Aug. 3, 1888

Hines, a student minister who, like McKnight of the congregational church, served in Park Rapids for the summer.⁴³ During this period when both the Congregational and Methodist churches were developing there was mutual assistance. Not only did the Methodist church use a building that belonged to the Baptist society but Hines alternated services with the Congregational minister.⁴⁴ As was the case for many rural ministers of the time, Hines also served the community at nearby Osage, preaching there once every two weeks.⁴⁵ Mr. Carter was also instrumental in the development of the Methodist church, much as he had been before formal denominations were officially present in Park Rapids.⁴⁶ The church officially organized in 1888 with 31 members and plans for a building project that was built in 1891 at a cost of \$1750.00.⁴⁷ Of particular note is Reverend William Dawson, another of the Methodist church's early ministers, who picked up where Hines had left off. A native of England, he served the Park Rapids church for a year.⁴⁸ William Rice would succeed Dawson as the resident minister. After arriving in October of 1887 Rice became the only resident minister for the winter of 1887-88.⁴⁹ This William Rice was possibly the same Rice that preached in Park Rapids in 1883; he was a member of the Methodist conference at that time and the father of Charles F. Rice, a key member of Methodist leadership in the Park Rapids church.⁵⁰

Like the Congregationalists and the Methodists before them, the Baptist church was started in large part due to the influence of denominational representatives from outside the town. Though incorporation would not come until 1890, there was Baptist

⁴³ *Riverside United Methodist Church: Ninetieth Anniversary*

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Mar. 26, 1886

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ *Riverside United Methodist Church: Ninetieth Anniversary*

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Mar. 23, 1888.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, July 20, 1883. See also Aug. 25 article for info on Charles Rice

representation previous to that time. At least as early as 1886, five years after the founding of the town, there were those in Park Rapids affiliated with the Baptist church.⁵¹ The church was officially organized in June of 1890 by a Reverend T. R. Peters, a representative of the Baptist denomination, along with ten members from Park Rapids.⁵² As previously noted, the Baptist church, like both the Congregational and Methodist churches, used the school house prior to their getting a building.⁵³ The congregation built it's first building during the years 1906-07 at a cost of \$10,000.00.⁵⁴

Among the list of names of those who organized the Baptist church in 1890 was Gilbert H. Rice, a founding father both of Park Rapids and the Baptist church..⁵⁵ "He was a man who united sound sense with strong moral convictions and a candid, outspoken temper, eminently fitted to mould the rude elements of pioneer society into form and consistency and aid in raising a high standard of citizenship in this new country."⁵⁶

**HE DID MUCH
FOR OUR TOWN**

**Gilbert H. Rice, A Pioneer Who
Built For That Which
Was Best.**

IMPRESSIVE FUNERAL SERVICE

**His Was a Life Worthy of Emu-
lation, For He Lived As
He Believed.**

In the death of Gilbert H. Rice, Park Rapids has lost one of the men, if not the man, who has contributed most towards the building up of the town and the establishment of those influences which have contributed to the moral, the spiritual and the material welfare of the community. He was a man who united sound sense with strong moral convictions and a candid, outspoken temper, eminently fitted to mould the rude elements of pioneer society into form and consistency and aid in raising a high standard of citizenship in this new country. How much this community owes to him, and such as he, it is hard to estimate, though it would be a grateful task to trace his influence thru some of the more direct channels; to hold him up in his various characters as husband and father, neighbor and friend, and speak of the virtues he

⁵¹ Ibid, p. Mar. 26 1886

⁵² Ibid, June 13, 1890

⁵³ *Great is Thy Faithfulness: 100 Years of Teaching, Preaching, and Soul Winning, History of the First Baptist Church*

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ *Great is Thy Faithfulness: 100 Years of Teaching, Preaching, and Soul Winning, History of the First Baptist Church*

⁵⁶ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, April 30, 1908

These words come from Rice's 1908 obituary that made the front page of *The Park Rapids Enterprise*. His life before moving to Park Rapids in the early 1880's reveals many interesting details. His occupational background was intertwined with the milling industry. He had jointly owned two different milling operations in Iowa (he later bought out his partners and sold both of these operations) before establishing mills in South Dakota and eventually Park Rapids.⁵⁷ The town of Riceville, Iowa, was laid out in 1857 by him and his family on land given by the government in exchange for Rice's father's participation in the war of 1812.⁵⁸ Both of these experiences helped him to become a foundational figure in the establishment of Park Rapids (which he also helped to lay out). Perhaps it was Rice's seminary background that was responsible for his dedication to Christianity in Park Rapids, perhaps it was simple conviction. Regardless, Rice became a central figure in the development of Park Rapids' religious community from his role in the establishment of the Baptist church to his activity with the local Sunday school chapter.

Revivalism

If immigration was the fundamental factor for the development of the Lutheran and Catholic churches, the major phenomenon of evangelicalism during this period was revivalism. Revivals were the successor of camp meetings and the events of the second great awakening, though in many ways they were a unique phenomenon.⁵⁹ Whatever descriptions may apply, the revival was a method of mass evangelism that cut across evangelical denominations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Classic

⁵⁷ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, April 30, 1908

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ *Evangelicalism, Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond*. Edited by Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (Oxford University Press, New York: 1994) p. 280

nineteenth century revivalism in the tradition of Moody and Sankey combined the sensational oratory of a main speaker with music and a song-leader in a setting that reached many at once with the gospel message. The goal was always to preach the word and allow for a response. This trend became a tremendous source of growth for evangelical churches as well as a source of renewal for the American church and Christian spiritualism as a whole. What is known as “modern revivalism” has become descriptive of the revival movement that captivated American Christianity for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is particularly interesting to note is the prevalence of revivalism in northern states. While southern revivals most certainly happened and there were key revivalists that focused on the South, the impact of industrialization in the north allowed it to have a greater impact.⁶⁰ In fact, many major revivalists of this period would make their name preaching to large numbers in the sprawling metropolises present in the North. Minnesota became one such state affected by this phenomenon. Though Park Rapids never saw a visit from any of the grandiose names associated with the religious phenomenon of the period, revivals happened on a smaller scale as other preachers were influenced by those such as Charles Finney and Billy Sunday. These started their own revival trend that had a presence even in a rural Minnesota town such as Park Rapids.

Of the names synonymous with nineteenth century revivalism, none is more well-known than Dwight L. Moody. Though he was not the only, and certainly not the first, his style and methods influenced many future revivalists both great and small.⁶¹ Once

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 280. Two factors are important. Concentrated population and business efficiency (two key factors in a successful revival) allowed northern states the edge over the south.

⁶¹ Additionally, Moody would play a significant role in the establishment of the Sunday School movement in America.

again it was the big city, initially Chicago, Illinois, in which this trend was most visible. When one speaks of “modern revivalism,” the definition rests, at least in part, on the shoulders of Moody.⁶² Moody was a layman whose ministry began small. A shoe salesman in Chicago, he began by reaching out to the disenfranchised of the community, eventually forsaking his trade for larger involvement in ministry including YMCA president.⁶³ It was not long before Moody began preaching. His heart, however, did not lay with the organized church but with those outside. Revivals based on Moody’s preaching soon became a phenomenon in Britain and the United States beginning with a tour of the British Isles from 1873-75.⁶⁴

The style that characterized the Moody revival that swept across America combined several crucial elements. First, Moody’s message was both basic and cross-denominational.⁶⁵ “Dwight Moody’s message was a simple and relatively innocuous blend of American optimism and evangelical Arminianism,” writes historian Sydney Ahlstrom, “Holding aloft his Bible, he assured his hearers that eternal life was theirs for the asking, that they had only to ‘come forward and t-a-k-e, TAKE!’ This done, his follow-up instruction was short and to the point: ‘Join some church at once.’ Which church did not matter.”⁶⁶ While Moody’s preaching was definitely the foundational element in his revivals, he was only one part of a team. His partnership with song leader and writer Ira Sankey also had a key influence on the movement. Later Revivalists

⁶² *Evangelicalism, Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond*, p. 279

⁶³ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 744

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 744

⁶⁵ Though it is true that Catholicism embraced a certain form of the revival (see Finke and Stark, p. 118-119), the revivals of Moody’s day remained decidedly non-denominational in association. Moody himself had a Congregationalist background (Olmstead, p. 454). It should be noted that while revivals were non-denominational, the greatest impact was with the Methodist-Baptist tradition.

⁶⁶ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 745

embraced this approach as music became an integral part of the revival atmosphere. Billy Sunday, a former baseball star turned revival preacher, joined forces with musician Homer A. Rodeheaver.⁶⁷ The fact that an entire genre of music (gospel songs) grew up, due in large part to the efforts of revival-associated musicians and song writers, testifies to its impact. Ira Sankey became one of the most influential figures in gospel music, having personally written many of today's traditional gospel songs. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the revival experience is the fact that it involved large numbers of people. By the time of Billy Sunday, who preached well into the 20th century, both attendance and commitments were high. A ten day revival campaign in New York in 1917 turned out 1,443,000 with conversions reaching 98,264.⁶⁸

The town of Park Rapids was just beginning to develop during this period of intense revivalism in the nation. Not even a decade had passed since Moody's initial campaigns and many more followed in his footsteps. Though a rural, northern Minnesota community obviously is no metropolis, the impact of revivalism was felt even here. True, Park Rapids would never be visited by any of the big names that make it into the history books, local revivalism was a phenomenon that worked much the same way but at a scaled down rate. Though events in Park Rapids never produced the large crowds associated with big city revivalism, revivals in the town still reflected the desire to reach a large audience at one time. Area churches, relied upon for sponsorship of these events, would also be affected by this phenomenon.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 747 Sunday's own preaching style, characteristically antic-driven and emotional, would also be the defining factor for his revivals. Interestingly enough, Sunday also came into full time ministry through involvement in the Chicago YMCA.

⁶⁸ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 747

As such, the history of revivalism in Park Rapids is somewhat sporadic. There is, however, a record of revival meetings in Park Rapids as early as 1885, not yet a full year after the founding of the Congregationalist Church. “As has been announced,” reported the local newspaper, “a series of revival meetings began last Wednesday evening at the school-house under the direction of Rev. E. E. Rodgers, the evangelist. Mr. Rodgers came here after having closed a very successful series of meetings at Farribault, Minn., in which many were converted.”⁶⁹ Additionally, a 1907 record lists a revival at the Baptist church in nearby Osage.⁷⁰

One of the most significant revivals to come to Park Rapids, however, occurred in March of 1907. “The Evangelistic meetings conducted in the Baptist Church by Rev. W. A. Dunnett have been productive of much good,” records *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, “Mr. Dunnett is entirely free from sensationalism, and is a strong preacher, and a man of rare good sense. This is the first time in seven years in

MEETINGS WELL ATTENDED.

**Dunnett, the Canadian Evangelist,
Doing A Great Work In
Park Rapids.**

The Evangelistic meetings that have been in progress at the Baptist church for the past two weeks will close on Sunday evening. On Tuesday evening Rev. W. A. Dunnett, the Evangelist, will begin services in the First Baptist church, Fargo, N. D., from which place he will go to Duluth Minn., and from there to St. Paul.

The present has been the most successful series ever held in the Baptist church in this village. Up to date over one hundred cards have been signed by persons desirous of living



W. A. DUNNETT

⁶⁹ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, May 1, 1885

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, July 4, 1907

which he has gone outside the larger cities to a smaller town, and Park Rapids is to be congratulated in securing his services.”⁷¹ W. A. Dunnet was a Canadian evangelist with ties to the Congregational Church who led revival meetings in Park Rapids for over two weeks. Several things about this Park Rapids event reflected the national scene in terms of the revival movement. Park Rapids was chosen as site for a revival campaign that included much larger cities in Minnesota, among them Fargo, Duluth, and St. Paul. The above excerpt states that small towns were not Dunnet’s usual fare yet Park Rapids still made the grade.⁷² Additionally, Dunnett’s ministry reflects the cross denominational characteristics of modern American revivalism. “In Massachuetts [sic], where he lives, all denominations, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalists, are glad to welcome him to their pulpit to hold evangelistic meetings.”⁷³ Again, with Dunnet, the preaching seems to be the main aspect of the revival. Dunnett’s visit, however, proved to be significant in the development of the Baptist Church in Park Rapids. An early article reads “Though he has been with the First Baptist church here for but one week the greatest work ever accomplished in the history of the church has already been done. Over one hundred, among them several of the prominent citizens of the town, have acknowledged their indebtedness to Christ, and their determination to consider the affairs of the other life while dealing with matters that pertain to this.”⁷⁴

Christian Education

One of the traditional hallmarks of America since the time of it’s founding is an emphasis on personal education. As the American public education system developed in

⁷¹ Ibid, March 14, 1907

⁷² This may reflect either a developing Park Rapids or more of a rural focus for Minnesota revivalism

⁷³ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, March 14, 1907. Notice again that the cross-denominational aspect is limited only to mainline evangelical denominations.

⁷⁴ Ibid, March 14, 1907

form and scope, the nation's Christian community responded. The desire for Christian education, mainly for grade-school aged children but also others, became a major driving force in the development of outreach programs in the nineteenth century. Protestantism would embrace the Sunday school as the primary method of reaching young people. While branching into various forms of youth ministry since, the American Sunday school has become a prominent fixture ever since its inception during this period. While the Protestants embraced the Sunday school tradition, the Catholic Church took Christian education to a whole new level with the parochial school, effecting a distancing from public, government-run education.

According to church historian Clifton Olmstead, the rise of the Sunday school represents "the overthrow of the catechetical method of Bible Study."⁷⁵ Especially important in a society recently spurred on to historically critical bible scholarship, old forms of Christian education were replaced with new ones. The move to a Sunday school format represents a desire for a more organized and efficient system. A major step was made in 1872 at the Fifth National Sunday School Convention at which a uniform lesson plan was approved, thus setting an across-the-board standard churches could use to implement the program.⁷⁶ Though this would later be revised due to denominational differences, it represents precisely this step to a more streamlined education system. In 1908 the Twelfth International Sunday School Convention would create a graded lesson plan with subject matter and material geared toward different age levels rather than a one-size-fit's-all approach.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*, p. 457

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 457

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 458 In many ways this reflects the path of secular education in producing a more tailored approach to education.

In many ways, the Sunday school movement shared several characteristics with the revival movement. Both had developed during the same period and sometimes involved the same figures. Moody had been the driving force behind a non-denominational Sunday school in Chicago as part of his initial ministry.⁷⁸ Aside from a more business like administration, two other traits of the Sunday school movement were important. Like the revivals of the nineteenth century, Sunday schools were geared to reach across denominational lines. It should be noted that once again, this applies largely to the evangelical tradition. As we will see, churches outside this grouping followed a different path for education. Additionally, the Sunday school movement placed a heavy emphasis on lay workers. Not only did this increase participation in church functions, but had a reciprocal affect of creating a need for training. This phenomenon eventually made Sunday Schools “not only the principle training ground of the Protestant laity but also a major recruiting ground.”⁷⁹ John H. Vincint, a leader in the movement associated with the Methodist church, encouraged both the adoption of the uniform lesson plan and the establishment of training institutes to further the movement.

The community of Park Rapids did not go unaffected by this new methodology in Christian education. What makes the connection seem so natural is the grass-roots character of the movement. So strong was the appeal for education of a Christian nature that Sunday School in Park Rapids actually predates not only the establishment of any organized church but also the founding of the town. The earliest announcement of a Sunday school occurred on November 23, 1882, but a later article puts the date back even

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 454

⁷⁹ Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada*, p. 282

further.⁸⁰ According to *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, the first Sunday school meeting was held a week before the official naming of the town, putting the origins of the Park Rapids Sunday school in mid 1881.⁸¹ Significantly, Park Rapids also made the Sunday School an organization of lay persons. These initial meetings were held for a year in the home of Gilbert H. Rice, founding member of the Baptist church, who also served as Sunday school superintendent for the span of ten years.⁸² Though the school later moved to the school house, blending the tradition of secular education with the church, it continued to be administered by members of the laity. Additionally, Park Rapids saw involvement in various outgrowths of this form of Christian education. The early forerunners of youth groups and education programs geared to younger audiences also saw representation through the Baptist Young People, Epworth League (Methodist), Walther League (Lutheran) and other related ministries.⁸³

While evangelical forms of Christian education witnessed a good share of the limelight, other denominations developed their own methods. Confirmation classes were a part of the Lutheran tradition

Parochial School To Open With 100 Students

New Catholic Educational Institution to Have Faculty of Five

Approximately one hundred pupils will be enrolled in St. Peter's parochial school when the term opens September 7, according to information received from Father Baskerville, superintendent of the new educational institution here. The school building, which is still under construction, will not be ready for use for a short time, but classes will be conducted in temporary quarters in the church edifice.

The school will be staffed by a faculty of five Sisters, all from Crookston. Sister Felicia will be Sister Superior and in addition to her duties as principal of the school will teach the seventh and eighth grades. Sister Madeleine will teach the sixth and fifth grades, Sister Ernesta the fourth and third grades, and Sister Amata the second and first grades. Sister Gertrude will have charge of the music department of the school, giving instruction in piano and violin as well as vocal music. Sister Caninia will serve as house-keeper for the faculty members.

Religious instruction will be under the direct supervision of Father Francis Baskerville, parish priest, who will also have general oversight of the school in the capacity of superintendent.

The regular course of study as prescribed by the Minnesota Department of Education will be followed through all of the grades, with the addition of religious instruction in the Catholic faith. Graduates of the eighth grade will be ready to step into the first year of high school in the public schools, Sister Felicia says.

The new school structure is rapidly nearing completion, and will be a worthy addition to the village of Park Rapids. It will be three stories in height, and 56x72 feet in size. Built on lots lower than the street level, little excavation was necessary for the basement, which will contain two large recreation rooms, a chapel, a kitchen and

(Continued on page 5)

⁸⁰ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Nov. 23, 1882

⁸¹ *Ibid*, April 30, 1908

⁸² *Ibid*, April 30, 1908

⁸³ *Ibid*, Jan. 14, 1937

in Park Rapids from its inception, and the Catholic church also made strides with the parochial school system. While the parochial school system was destined to remain separated from public education, initial strides were made to integrate the two. The Faribault Plan, originally exercised in Faribault, Minnesota, attempted to integrate “religious instruction only after school hours.”⁸⁴ This gesture ended in controversy with a conservative backlash that opposed the plan as simply another part of John Ireland’s Americanization of the church.⁸⁵ The Third Plenary Council in 1884 handed down the decision that all existing churches must establish a parochial school within the span of two years.⁸⁶ Though this goal was a bit overzealous and the majority of congregations found it impossible to attain, it represented a growing concern for Christian education and a response by the church. The Parochial school in Park Rapids, maintained by St. Peter’s Catholic Church, was established in 1937, due in large part to the ambitions of Father Francis Baskerville.⁸⁷ While Baskerville supervised, a vital contribution was provided by nuns from Crookston. “The American nun”, according to historians Rodger Finke and Rodney Stark, “initially made the parish school possible.”⁸⁸ This certainly was the case in Park Rapids. Education at the school was administered by a faculty of five nuns teaching eight grades and providing musical instruction.⁸⁹ As such, the parochial school system in Park Rapids, but also as a whole, represented a demand for an alternative to traditional education. The Park Rapids School felt the reality of this demand early on, opening with an enrolment of 100 new students.

⁸⁴ Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*, p. 433

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 433

⁸⁶ Finke, Rodger. Stark, Rodney. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, p. 132

⁸⁷ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Aug. 26, 1937

⁸⁸ Finke, Rodger and Stark, Rodney. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, p. 134

⁸⁹ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Aug. 26, 1937

Prohibition and Temperance

While the constitutional amendment instituting prohibition against alcohol was not effected until the twentieth century, a drive to ban or at least marginalize the liquor industry was alive and well throughout the 1800's. The Civil War pulled the nation away from this movement only for a short period of time. The post-war period, with contributions from leading figures in both the religious and secular worlds became an active time for temperance leagues and anti-alcohol groups. Though temperance cannot be described as a purely religious movement, the churches of America and American Christianity as a whole were a vital component. "Though the churches had not accomplished it alone," quotes historian Robert Handy, in regards to Prohibition, "it could never have been done without them."⁹⁰ Often church groups and temperance leagues, especially in a small community such as Park Rapids, were one and the same. Prominent figures in the church were also prominent figures for the temperance cause. An integral part of the preaching of revivalist Billy Sunday was a crusade against the evils of his society including the use of alcohol and "booze traffic".⁹¹

Though there are many groups, organizations, or conferences that are exemplary of the temperance movement in association with churches before 1895, the Anti-Saloon League provides a good case study.⁹² Like many groups at the time, the League sought to further it's goals through the political sphere, specifically in the area of a constitutional amendment. The nature of the organization, however, is what really sets it apart. "Beginning as a coalition of temperance groups," writes Handy, "the League soon

⁹⁰ Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada*, p. 285

⁹¹ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 748

⁹² Groups such as the Prohibition Party and Women's Christian Temperance Union (significant in Park Rapids) would also play key roles in the campaign against alcohol. See Handy, p. 284

developed an efficient national structure of it's own, broadly based on church constituencies. In 1905 nearly 20,000 congregations were operating with the League; in ten years the number doubled. Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches were in the forefront."⁹³ Thus the Anti-Saloon League had managed to take a variety of different groups working toward the same goal and unify them. What is most interesting for our purposes is the large church representation found in the membership of the League. It should be noted that once again, representation seems to come largely from the evangelical denominations.

"Beer and anarchy are natural allies."⁹⁴ This proverb ran in a late 1887 copy of the *Park Rapids Enterprise*, just one representation of how Park Rapids embraced temperance and spread the word.⁹⁵ Response to the national trend in the form of organization took place in Park Rapids in 1886. A January 8th article in the *Enterprise* lists the creation of a "Citizen's Temperance Union." Also put into effect is a ladies "Temperance Union" or "Women's Christian Temperance Union" meeting at the home Mrs. Charles Rice.⁹⁶ The presence of key figures, including H. R. Cobb as president of the "Citizen's Temperance Union" and publisher of the *Park Rapids Enterprise*, certainly helped to further the cause in Park Rapids. From this point on, Park Rapids took, at least in the pages of the *Enterprise*, a decidedly pro-prohibition stance. The temperance societies sponsored events such as lectures, dramas, and social gatherings to promote awareness. The years immediately following the establishment of temperance in Park

⁹³ Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada*, p. 285

⁹⁴ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Dec. 9, 1987

⁹⁵ News publications and the power of the press would be a key factor for the Prohibition movement. An advertisement for *The Voice*, a prohibition paper out of New York lists a cost of \$1.00 per year or 3¢ an issue. See Ibid, Aug. 6, 1886 article

⁹⁶ Ibid, Jan. 8, 1886

Rapids were especially active. A play with a temperance theme was given in May of 1886 and a representative of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Minnesota held a lecture a year later.⁹⁷ The newspaper also served as a mouthpiece for the movement with pro-temperance articles, news, and promotion of political awareness. The Prohibition ticket for the 1886 election was printed with a statement of favoritism.⁹⁸ Perhaps one of the most significant moments for the history of temperance in Park Rapids was the achievement of "Practical Prohibition" in June of 1888, merely two years after the beginnings of temperance in the town. When attempts at regulating the liquor industry through legislation or law were unsuccessful, the anti-alcohol community often turned to other means. To discourage the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in Park Rapids the price for a liquor license was set at one thousand dollars, a tremendous and discouraging sum.⁹⁹

One of the more significant events for Park

ANTI-SALOON MASS MEETING

To be held in Park Rapids Tuesday Jan. 7th. One of the things that is attracting universal attention is the great progress that is being made in temperance reform all over the country. Large sections of the south are already dry. Within the last few months three states have declared for absolute prohibition while several others seem to be about ready to follow their example.

This same wave of reform is sweeping over the North. Its force has been felt in Minnesota. Today our liquor laws are being enforced all over this state as they never have been before, and every thing indicates that the temperance forces will win important legislative victories in the near future.

The Anti-Saloon League of this state has launched a campaign for county option. The temperance forces of every county are to be organized preparatory to the struggle in the primaries and general election for the choice of men for the legislature, irrespective of party affiliations, who favor county option and other temperance laws.



N. A. PALMER.

⁹⁷ See *Enterprise* articles from May 28, 1886 and Nov. 4, 1887

⁹⁸ See *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Aug. 20, 1886

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, Jan. 6, 1888

Rapids occurred much later, in January of 1908. By this time, the Anti-Saloon League was at the top of it's game, this time showing up in Park Rapids, Minnesota. Dr. N. A. Palmer, State Superintendent made an address at a large meeting called to further organize temperance work in Minnesota. "There is trouble ahead for the booze dispensers in Minnesota once that the opposing forces can get together," reads a related article "and Supt. Palmer seems to be especially gifted along that line."¹⁰⁰ What is further significant is church involvement related to this outreach of the Anti-Saloon League. The meeting to organize along county lines was held at the Baptist church in Park Rapids.¹⁰¹

Community Involvement

How did churches in a rural, Minnesota town affect the community? We have seen what aspects of the national scene and church history at large are reflected in Park Rapids but what role did the churches play in everyday life? Certainly some of the aspects mentioned above were instrumental in the way people of the town lived. The Parochial school at St. Peter's Catholic Church, revivals, and the simple presence of places of worship were undoubtedly significant factors in the lives of many. The church would go beyond just this, however, and shape the community in various other ways. The establishment of men's and women's groups associated with different churches impacted the community through not only their outreach but opportunity for involvement. Even simple events such as dinners and potlucks, easy functions to overlook but nevertheless important, represent the presence of these churches as pillars of society that extended beyond the religious to include social and even recreational aspects as well. Additionally, the churches would provide for the needs of the community. The establishment of St.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, Jan. 2, 1908

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Interestingly enough, Park Rapids seems to have taken the lead in this area for Hubbard County.

Joseph's Hospital in Park Rapids, due to the efforts of St. Peter's Catholic Church,

EXPERIENCE MEETING.

The Baptist Ladies Hold Annual Meeting—Novel Ways of Raising Money.

The Baptist ladies sewing circle held their annual meeting Friday afternoon at the pleasant home of Mrs. A. Kerr, and as usual was the occasion of much happiness over the success that had crowned the work of the year just past, and the bright outlook for the future. The old officers were re-elected this being their fourth term.

President, Mrs. F. A. Vanderpoel.
Vice Pres., Mrs. P. T. Devereaux.
Secretary, Mrs. F. W. Rossman.
Treasurer, Mrs. Alex. Kerr.

As a result of the past six months money raising contest between the two divisions of the circle, the winning side, of which Mrs. Rossman was leader, was banquetted by the losing side. Altogether the circle netted the neat sum of \$230 as a result of the many and varied "experiences" which were related in the evening.

Some sold eggs, others sold baking, one is fattening a cow for market, one lady charged for shaving the back of her husband's neck each week, another blackened stoves and did ironings, a few were paid for doing the family washing, and one "cooked husband" was obliged to pay a penalty of a cent, nickel or dime each time he soiled the table cloth, the price paid varying according to the size of the spot made, thus furnishing his wife several dimes. The supper was excellent and very daintily served, and the winners congratulate the defeated ones on their success as cooks, if not as money earners.

The leaders selected for the next six months are Mrs. Tennis and Mrs. Mc Night. The past year has been the most successful as to increase in members, interest and financially, of its history.

represents a significant contribution to the welfare of the community at large.

The development of societies and groups within church life is an interesting phenomenon in itself. Anyone who has had any church background has probably come into contact with a "Ladies Aid" or some other group that has arisen to better serve some aspect of either the church or society. The progressivism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries no doubt inspired much of this sentiment. Often these groups would perform such vital functions as fundraising or assistance to those within or outside of the church. In November of 1907 the Ladies of the Baptist Church held a "Chicken Pie Supper" to pay for new dishes, the cost of the meal was twenty-five cents.¹⁰² Indeed, functions such as this were commonplace, but for a small community these events were fundamental aspects of society. They represented the chance to socialize and the opportunity for fellowship within a community of believers. Far from being a

denominational phenomenon, aid societies representing other denominations were also

¹⁰² *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Nov. 14, 1907

present in Park Rapids.¹⁰³ Bake sales and dinners were not left strictly to the ladies. “Men Of Baptist Church Out To Make A Reputation As Caterers” read the headline of the March 19, 1908, edition of the *Park Rapids Enterprise*. What followed was a description of a dinner event held by the First Baptist church including a listing of participant and dishes to be served.¹⁰⁴ The Men’s club at the Baptist church had been started almost one year previous with a Dr. Stone. “It is the purpose of the club to consider questions of social, moral, and religious interest” read an article pertaining to it’s creation.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps one of the most wide-reaching aspects of community involvement comes from St. Peter’s Catholic Church. St. Joseph’s Hospital in Park Rapids recently received honors for the quality of it’s health care service when compared to national hospitals in it’s class.¹⁰⁶ The origins of this tradition, however, go back much further. 1946 marks the year that St. Joseph’s opened it’s doors to the public.

“A ruptured appendix was the break that brought about the premature opening of the new \$300,000 St. Joseph’s Hospital here last week. The structure was not wholly completed, and part of the necessary equipment had not been installed, but young Eugene Carl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Carl of Hubbard couldn’t wait to have his appendix removed, and his family doctor couldn’t find another place to perform the operation quickly enough. Mother Madelaine, whose untiring work has brought about a miracle in Park Rapids, opened her heart and her hospital to take in the young patient. The operation was successful and Eugene made such rapid recovery that he was able to be taken home Tuesday morning of this week.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See *Enterprise* article on Mar 21 and April 11, 1907 for mention of a “Catholic Ladies” group

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, March 19, 1908

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, July 4, 1907

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, June 16, 2007

¹⁰⁷ *The Park Rapids Enterprise*, Sept. 19, 1946

Thus due to an early emergency, St. Joseph's began its history a bit premature. As with many of the outreach programs of the Catholic Church (including the parochial school system), nuns continued to be the vital link. Members of St. Joseph's order would initially make health care of this caliber a reality in Park Rapids. The hospital radically changed (and presently continues to) the lives of community residents.

“Doctors and surgeons from other states and other summer visitors who have inspected the hospital have expressed surprise in finding such an exceptionally fine and well equipped hospital in a community the size of Park Rapids. One man who is qualified to speak said St. Joseph's Hospital would be a credit to a community of a million population.”¹⁰⁸

A History of Influence

While churches already had a long history in America by the nineteenth century, this period and the early stages of the twentieth century represented a new field of growth and development. Not only did denominations grow, they changed and solidified. Other factors would be important as well. Though not specifically addressed in this paper, the intellectual currents of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy would also have a profound impact on the development of denominations as they leaned toward one school of thought or the other. The role of higher education in seminary and the roles of key intellectual figures in American and abroad would also have a significant influence. Often these trends in intellectualism go hand-in-hand with the other factors discussed.

What is perhaps most interesting is the level at which each of these trends affected the Park Rapids churches. Immigration played a key role specifically in the development of area Lutheran churches aligned either towards Finnish or German derived

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, Sept. 19, 1946

Lutheranism. Christian education found representation both in evangelical based Sunday schools and the Catholic parochial school system. Even though a small, rural community, Park Rapids was even reflective of revivalism. While all these things certainly form a significant historical study, what is most surprising is the denominational diversity itself. By the early twentieth century, Park Rapids had representation from a wide variety of these denominations. This is perhaps reflective not only of a strong missionary drive by American churches during this period but also a natural development. As the town developed, the need for Christian houses of worship reflecting different denominational influence was a priority for the early community in Park Rapids. Involvement and initiative by key figures in the histories of the Park Rapids churches were undeniably a vital like to the vitality of the religious community and it's relationship to the town. A coupling of these two influences is likely the reason for not only the multiplicity of denominations, but the speed in which societies and churches were started and began to develop. Out of this came the connections to the national stage as seen with trends in Christian education, outreach programs, political demands, and community involvement. It is in these ways that the Christian community in Park Rapids influenced the development of the town. That the churches were an integral part of the community, regardless of denomination, reveals their affect on daily life in rural Minnesota.

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The Park Rapids Enterprise, July 25, 1882-September 19, 1946, All illustrations taken from *The Park Rapids Enterprise*.

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