

## CHAPTER 1

## PIETY ON THE PLAINS

THE STORY of how Kansas came to be known as a bastion of Protestant Republican conservatism begins in the 1850s when statehood was at issue, and when that issue was central in national politics. This period just prior to the Civil War saw the first alliances between Republicans and Methodists in Kansas. The relationship of religion to politics that emerged in those years continued through the end of the nineteenth century—and shaped much of what happened in the twentieth century. Many parts of eastern Kansas were settled immediately after the Civil War, and counties farther west were inhabited by the mid-1870s. How churches were established in those communities, why town leaders were so eager to have churches, and which religious groups were most successful are important questions for understanding that period of settlement. These were the years in which Methodism and Catholicism became the dominant religious institutions, and in which smaller denominations found ways to have a continuing presence. Towns competed to attract churches. Buildings went up with support from denominations and local donors. At times, it appeared that politicians and church leaders were working hand in hand to pass laws, promote temperance, and start schools. And yet the relationships between churches and public affairs were complicated.

The complications arose from the fact that Kansans were divided about the state being free or having slavery. Republicans' views won out, although not without conflict. Democrats emerged as the weaker party, but with strength in Catholic communities. There were tensions between different Republican factions. Residents naturally brought ideas from their home communities in

other states. From the start, there were strong sentiments about how much or how little political discussions should be included in places of worship. Nearly all these complications were evident as Kansas moved toward statehood.

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN KANSAS

The first presidential candidate to campaign in Kansas was Lincoln, who visited in 1859, fourteen months before the territory became a state. Having spoken so often about Kansas and having heard so much about its struggle for free state sovereignty, Lincoln was eager to see it firsthand. Taking the train across Missouri from Hannibal to Saint Joseph, where he arrived on Wednesday, November 30, he crossed the river to Elwood, Kansas, and gave a brief speech in the Great Western Hotel dining room that evening. The next day, which turned bitterly cold, Lincoln traveled fifteen miles by horse and buggy to Troy, where he gave a speech to a small crowd at the courthouse, and then eleven miles to Doniphan, where the turnout was again sparse and the speech short. On December 2, the reception in Atchison was more enthusiastic. At the Methodist Church that evening, Lincoln lectured to a packed house for two hours and twenty minutes after being escorted there by a brass band. The next day he journeyed on to Leavenworth, where he gave three more lectures, departing for home on December 7.<sup>1</sup>

On the surface, Lincoln's December 2 address at the Atchison Methodist Church merged faith and politics in ways that would be repeated time and again in Kansas history. Methodists had been active in Kansas since 1830, when Reverend Thomas Johnson and his wife, Sarah, established the Shawnee Methodist Mission on the Kansas River approximately fifty miles south of the eventual location of Atchison. In 1839, Johnson opened a school on two thousand acres of prime land. He constructed three large buildings over the next six years that housed as many as two hundred Indian boys and girls, who learned farming, milling, sewing, boot making, and



1.1 Kansas Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Atchison, where Abraham Lincoln spoke on December 2, 1859. Courtesy of KansasMemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society, Copy and Reuse Restrictions Apply.

other manual skills. James Wheeler from Ohio founded a Methodist mission in 1843 near present-day Kansas City among the Wyandot Indians. In 1846, when the Methodist Episcopal Church split into northern and southern branches over slavery, the southern wing took control of the Indian missions, including the one run by Johnson, who favored slavery. The Methodist Episcopal Church South

secured government funding to establish a Kaw mission at Council Grove in 1849, but the school did not succeed and closed in 1854. Four years later, the northern Methodists successfully established Baker University in Baldwin City, twenty miles south of Lawrence.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the Shawnee Mission school served as the Kansas Territorial Legislature's headquarters from mid-1855 through the following spring. When the Kansas constitutional convention met at Wyandotte on July 5, 1859, the one clergyman present was a Methodist.<sup>3</sup> The federal census conducted a few months after Lincoln's Atchison visit identified thirty-six Methodist churches in Kansas with property valued at more than forty-five thousand dollars. That was more than the number and total property value of Baptist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic churches combined. There were five Methodist churches in Doniphan County, where Lincoln's journey began, and seven in Leavenworth County. Reports from the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church showed even more activity. All told, Methodist services were being held in fifty-one locations throughout eastern Kansas.<sup>4</sup>

The Methodists in Atchison had a fine new building, dedicated on March 8, 1859, at a cost of \$3,075. The structure, conveniently located across the street from the courthouse, measured fifty-eight feet long and thirty-two feet wide, and could seat 350 people.<sup>5</sup> Its presiding elder, Reverend James Shaw, had been a prominent Methodist leader in Detroit before coming to Kansas in 1856. Shaw strongly supported the free state cause, and another free state supporter, Reverend Hugh D. Fisher, from Leavenworth, assisted him at the dedication service. The current pastor, Isaac F. Collins, would undoubtedly have been honored to introduce Lincoln and may have expected the oration to reference the divine.

Atchison itself was a "fine growing place," Lincoln wrote to a friend a few months after his visit.<sup>6</sup> With a population of more than twenty-five hundred, Atchison was the second-largest city in Kansas, exceeded only by Leavenworth, twenty-four miles to the south.<sup>7</sup> Atchison served as an outfitting point for ox trains to Salt Lake City and California, taking advantage of its location on a western bend of the Missouri River that reduced overland freight

costs.<sup>8</sup> It received freight and passengers from steamboats traveling between Saint Louis and Saint Joseph, had telegraph service, was making plans to be the terminus of the Atchison and Saint Joe Railroad, was well represented in territorial politics, and would soon send one of its citizens to the U.S. Senate.

Interest in politics had been growing since Atchison's incorporation in 1855. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and allowed people in those territories to decide for themselves about slavery. Atchison was founded by proslavery settlers and took its name from David R. Atchison, the Democratic U.S. senator from Missouri who was a champion of popular sovereignty and the slavery cause. Proslavery forces controlled the town, which became the location of frequent border skirmishes until 1857 when free state leaders who opposed slavery gained the upper hand. When the Kansas Republican Party was organized in May 1859, John A. Martin, the twenty-year-old editor of Atchison's free state newspaper, *Freedom's Champion*, was present, and in July of that year Martin served as secretary of the Wyandotte convention, which produced the free state constitution that was ratified in October.

On the day Lincoln spoke in Atchison, John Brown was hanged at Charlestown, Virginia, for murder and insurrection. During the trial *Freedom's Champion* and its rival, *Atchison Union*, carried story after story recounting the slaughter of Brown's men in southern Kansas and his attack on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. Brown was a person of faith who believed that he was engaged in a holy war. A proslavery preacher killed Brown's son. "The shot that struck the child's heart," abolitionist Reverend Henry Ward Beecher wrote two weeks before Lincoln's speech, "crazed the father's brain." The following May, Lincoln was nominated at the Republican convention in Chicago to run for president. John J. Ingalls, an Atchison lawyer who was a delegate to the Wyandotte convention, served as secretary of the Kansas Senate in 1861 and was later elected to the U.S. Senate on the Republican ticket, succeeding Samuel C. Pomeroy, also of Atchison. Martin went on to become a Republican governor of Kansas. "We have formed a Republican

Constitution,” Martin noted a few weeks after Lincoln’s visit in 1859, “adopted it by Republican votes, sent a Republican delegate to bear it to the National Capitol, [and] elected Republican State Officers and a Republican State Legislature.” No place in the country, he added, was “as thoroughly Republican” as Kansas.<sup>9</sup>

Lincoln’s visit to Kansas became standard fare in the state’s legends of its origin and political culture. Newspapers periodically commemorated the Wyandotte convention with accounts of what Lincoln said on his visit in 1859 and explanations of why he had not attended the convention itself. Historians recalled the visit as evidence that Kansas had been the recipient, as one wrote, “of much flattering attention from the great men of the country.”<sup>10</sup> In 1902, the Kansas State Historical Society collected and reprinted all the accounts it could find of Lincoln’s visit from national newspapers, letters, and diaries. Historian Fred W. Brinkerhoff delivered a presidential address in 1945 to the Kansas State Historical Society on the topic of Lincoln’s Kansas tour. In the 1950s, textbooks about the state’s history included accounts of the visit, and the tour was revisited and extensively reexamined on the occasion of its centennial in 1959. In subsequent decades, standard histories of Kansas continued to describe the famous tour. On the sesquicentennial of the visit in 2009, the state’s historical museum in Topeka mounted a special exhibit in its honor.<sup>11</sup> Many of the accounts mentioned the speech at the Methodist Church and some included an image of the church. Kansans’ loyalty to the Republican Party had become legendary over the years, and Methodism had become its most popular religion. By all appearances, Lincoln’s lecture, which historians agreed was a warm-up for his influential address two months later at Cooper Institute in New York City, symbolized the emerging ties between Kansas religion and partisan politics.

But appearances in this instance are deceiving. A closer look at Lincoln’s Atchison visit reveals a more tenuous mingling of faith and politics, and foreshadows the ongoing complexities in this relationship. Although nearly every aspect of Lincoln’s tour has been scrutinized, even a stop at the barbershop before leaving Saint Joseph as well as how long each leg of his journey may have taken

over muddy or icy roads, the question of what his visit may have said about religion and politics in territorial Kansas has not been sufficiently considered. On the surface, there was little significance to the fact that the lecture occurred at the Methodist Church. It was the only suitable location. The other church that could have accommodated the crowd, a spacious Baptist church of Gothic brick construction, was not quite finished, and there was no public building large enough. Had there been, Lincoln probably would have spoken there, as he did the following evening in Leavenworth. It is important, though, to ask whether Lincoln's visit struck an enthusiastic chord with Atchison's churchgoers or whether it evoked ambivalence.<sup>12</sup>

Had the Baptist Church been ready in time, there is a good chance that its leaders would have in any case been reluctant to host Lincoln. They were as much on the free state side as anyone else, but had reasons to be cautious about Lincoln. Unlike the Methodist denomination, which had a separate congregation in Atchison to which southern Methodists could go, the Baptist Church drew members from both the South and North, and may well have discouraged discussions of politics for this reason. The pastor, Reverend L. A. Alderson from Virginia, had tried unsuccessfully to start a church in Kansas a few years earlier, and had preached again in Virginia for four years before coming to Atchison. Three of the prominent members were sons of the distinguished New Jersey Baptist preacher James M. Challiss, and a fourth son lived in Atchison for several years before returning to the East. William L. Challiss was a doctor and one of the church's most generous donors. George T. Challiss operated Atchison's first dry goods and grocery store, and Luther C. Challiss was in business with George. Luther was a member of Atchison's free state town council at the time of Lincoln's visit and had donated the land on which the Baptist Church stood.<sup>13</sup> Their father encouraged his sons to organize the church in Atchison, and he and his congregation in New Jersey provided funds for the building. Reverend Challis did not favor slavery, but according to his biographer, was "cautious and reserved in his opposition" to it, "greatly deprecated the agitation of this question in

religious bodies,” and “was disposed to lose his personal responsibility in this matter by regarding the whole question as purely political; with which ministers, as such, had nothing to do.”<sup>14</sup> His sons and others in the congregation may have shared his views.

The other influential member of the Baptist Church was Benjamin F. Stringfellow. The Stringfellows were longtime Baptists from Culpeper County, Virginia.<sup>15</sup> Benjamin grew up on his father’s plantation, attended the University of Virginia, earned a reputation in Missouri as a fiery proslavery lawyer, served in the Missouri state legislature, and became the state’s attorney general. In 1852 he and his younger brother, Dr. John Stringfellow, moved to Weston, Missouri, eighteen miles from Atchison, where they purchased land and encouraged proslavery settlers to move to Kansas. John relocated to Atchison in 1854, and a few months later cofounded the proslavery *Squatter Sovereign* newspaper.<sup>16</sup> On several occasions, the brothers were accused of encouraging violent confrontations with abolitionists.<sup>17</sup> In 1858, John returned to Virginia to settle his father’s estate and when war broke out joined the Confederate Army. Benjamin moved to Atchison in 1859 and became a promoter of the new railroad to Topeka. With real estate valued at fifty thousand dollars, he was the richest person in the county and one of the most generous donors to the Baptist Church. He attended Lincoln’s speech and after the war became a Republican himself, but at the time was known in the community as a proslavery advocate.<sup>18</sup>

If Baptists may have had mixed sentiments about hosting Lincoln, Methodists did too. Franklin G. Adams, one of the lawyers in charge of arranging the visit, recalled having “considerable difficulty in gaining consent to have a political meeting in a church.” He reported that he and his colleague, Judge P. P. Wilcox, “met with such a rebuff and refusal” from the trustees at the Methodist Church that they nearly “lost patience” and used every means of persuasion to gain the trustees’ cooperation.<sup>19</sup> One person who may have helped was Colonel Peter T. Abell, on whose donated land the church was constructed. Abell had grown up in Kentucky, converted to the Methodist Church as a young man, and was one of Atchison’s founders and leading citizens. In 1855 Abell opposed

free staters, but by 1859 his views appear to have moderated.<sup>20</sup> According to Adams, Abell and Lincoln struck up a lively conversation at the hotel the afternoon of Lincoln's arrival, and shared pleasant memories of Kentucky. A second source of support may have been O. F. Short, a free state advocate who was a member of the school board and one of the church's founders. The other person who may have assisted in securing the venue was Pomeroy, Atchison's mayor, a collaborator with Short and Martin in founding Atchison's anti-slavery newspaper, and a leader of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, which supported free state settlers in Kansas. Pomeroy had been a founding trustee of the Plymouth Church in Lawrence in 1854. He introduced Lincoln that evening.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Methodists may have been more favorable toward Lincoln than the Baptists, it would have been mistaken to regard the two churches simply as rivals. Churches in frontier Kansas were civic organizations that town boosters promoted because they were deemed to be good for the community's economic and social well-being. That necessitated cooperation more than it led to competition. The Baptist Church, for example, received small donations from contributors who were not Baptists.<sup>22</sup> Four of the eight founding members of the Methodist Church were not Methodists and participated with the understanding that they would join their own churches when the opportunity arose.<sup>23</sup> Cooperation was necessary when buildings and pastors were in short supply. It also caused free state sentiments to cross-denominational lines. Before Reverend L. A. Alderson arrived to conduct the inaugural meeting at the Baptist Church, the Methodists' Reverend Shaw had been invited to preach the service. At the Methodist Church, Reverend J. H. Byrd of the Congregationalists, whose church remained unfinished until 1865, preached on alternate Sundays. Pomeroy and his wife, Lucy Gaylord Pomeroy, were Congregationalists, as was Ingalls.<sup>24</sup> Congregationalists were the strongest supporters of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Another Atchison pastor with Congregationalist roots was Pardee Butler, who affiliated loosely with the Disciples of Christ and failed to launch a church of his own, but became a local hero after a confrontation with proslavery leaders.<sup>25</sup>

Although the different denominations would compete in coming years for members and on theological grounds, it was often the interpersonal bonds and sharing of scarce resources in small towns that brought them together in common cause.

A second complication illustrated by Lincoln's visit was that religious and political loyalties were always conditioned by economic circumstances as well as aspirations. Slavery and states' rights were divisive enough to lead a nation to war, and yet men like Abell and Benjamin Stringfellow—who happened to be law partners—not only shared in schemes to get rich but also changed ideological positions and political affiliations. Whatever their views may have been on slavery and religion, Abell and Luther Challiss invited proslavery advocate John Stringfellow to join as a director of the Atchison and Topeka Railroad Company.<sup>26</sup> Economic incentives were at work with Pomeroy as well. Pomeroy the idealist supported free states emigrating from the East to Kansas. Pomeroy the realist was in business with investor Theodore Hyatt of New York to develop property on both sides of the Missouri River, gained wealth from land speculation and investing in railroads, and in 1873 was found guilty of bribery and corruption. Pomeroy's funder in the 1850s, Theodore Hyatt, was the brother of Thaddeus Hyatt, who was jailed for refusing to testify against Brown. Theodore was critical of his brother's idealism. Thaddeus the realist, after his release, worked with Pomeroy to solicit food and clothing from churches in the East, and send them to starving pioneers during the harsh winter of 1860 and 1861.<sup>27</sup>

The third point that Lincoln's visit illustrated was that Kansans might become overwhelmingly Republican, but that did not preclude disagreements within the party. In December 1859, it was not that Kansas Republicans opposed Lincoln but rather that they favored William Henry Seward more. Seward had championed the free state cause in Kansas as a leader in the U.S. Senate and was favored to win the Republican Party's nomination for president in 1860. The Kansas territorial delegation pledged its courtesy votes to Seward before the convention, and even when Lincoln triumphed on the third ballot, loyalties to Seward remained strong.

The welcome that Seward received in Atchison when he visited that fall could not have contrasted more with Lincoln's. Martin made no mention of Lincoln's visit in *Freedom's Champion*, yet introduced Seward as the "foremost Statesman of the Age." While Lincoln's audience at the Methodist Church was cordial enough, Seward was escorted not only by the town's brass band but also by a reception committee on horseback, ladies in carriages, three free state committees, and visiting delegations from neighboring towns. Seward's lecture could not have been held in any church. He addressed an audience of four thousand from the balcony of his hotel.<sup>28</sup> He and Lincoln did not differ substantially on the issues. Seward was simply more popular. Leaders like Martin, Pomeroy, and Ingalls came around, serving Lincoln and the Union. But there would always be differences among Kansas Republicans, even though Kansas would long be almost a single-party state.

Never far in the background was a remaining aspect of faith and politics: the tension that would surface again and again between Protestants and Catholics, and that often took on political overtones. After Leavenworth, Atchison was the second-largest Catholic community in Kansas at the time of Lincoln's visit. Overlooking the Missouri River on a ridge just north of town was St. Benedict's Abbey, Church, and school. The land had been donated by Benjamin Stringfellow, presumably not because of any particular religious affinities but instead because he saw the project as a way to enhance the town.<sup>29</sup> Catholics settled in Atchison from Ireland and Germany as well as the eastern states, usually coming to Saint Louis by way of the Mississippi River and then to Saint Joseph by steamboat. In 1860, Atchison's residents included 309 born in Ireland and 184 born in Germany. Most of the residents were in their twenties or thirties. William Shannon, the territorial governor of Kansas in 1855 and 1856, was a Catholic Democrat from Ohio. Republicans were often skeptical of Catholics, figuring them to be in the pocket of Democratic candidates, and in 1854 and 1856 the Know-Nothing movement exploited these fears.<sup>30</sup> But the picture in Atchison was different from partisan politics elsewhere, just as it was among Protestants. St. Benedict's founders were German

monks from Pennsylvania. They had little sympathy for the pro-slavery cause.<sup>31</sup>

What did separate many of Atchison's Catholics from Protestants was social class. The Germans were carpenters, stonemasons, butchers, saddlers, blacksmiths, and farmers, putting them on a par with Protestant shopkeepers and farmers, but German Catholics were largely absent from the community's elite. With only a few exceptions, the Irish men worked as unskilled laborers. Many of the wealthier Protestants employed Irish girls as domestics. When class was not an issue, there was evidence of social interaction across religious and ethnic lines, at least if business dealings and employment counted. One of the community's first and most successful residents was Michael C. Finney, who arrived in 1856 from Saint Louis, having immigrated as a young man to New York City from Ireland. Finney was the wharfmaster, owned a general merchandise store, supplied grain and produce to pioneers passing through Atchison, and served on the city council.<sup>32</sup> He and his wife, Katherine Kathrens Finney, raised three children, one of whom, Charles C. Finney, became a doctor and was elected mayor. Her brother, R. D. Kathrens, was a wholesale merchant in Atchison. Her best friend was the wife of Baptist businessperson George Challiss.<sup>33</sup> Another member of the Catholic community was Tom Murphy, known as the "genial Irishman," who ran the Massasoit House, the town's leading hotel, where Lincoln stayed the night of his visit.

But there were also instances of tension and misunderstanding. Several of Atchison's saloons were run by Germans and Irish, and undoubtedly did their share of business with the town's unmarried male population. The temperance movement came later, but churchwomen were already beginning to complain that something needed to be done.<sup>34</sup> *Freedom's Champion* periodically carried stories about Irishmen who were notoriously stupid, poor, or laughable. On one occasion the newspaper reprinted a long story about a girl in another state who disappeared, only to be tracked down by her father, who located her at a convent. The story implied that Catholics and kidnapping went hand in hand.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, the reality of living and working together in a small town moderated the tensions between Catholics and

Protestants. One episode suggested the potential for getting along. About a year after Lincoln's visit a column appeared in the Atchison *Union*, the town's proslavery paper, praising Benjamin Stringfellow (though not by name) for donating land to St. Benedict's, and thus assisting the "humble order" of Germans and Irish. In reply, an anonymous reader sent a letter to *Freedom's Champion* arguing that the Germans and Irish were in fact "foremost in improving and advancing our city." They were, the letter continued, responsible for "miracles of improvement, of invention, and of boundless development," as opposed to the "bloated aristocracy" who held them in low esteem. Martin published the lengthy letter in full.<sup>36</sup>

Characteristically, Lincoln's visit to Atchison fulfilled only a few of his hosts' expectations. He failed to convert any of Seward's supporters. Ungainly rustic that he was, he nevertheless got along well with the town's gentry and even drew favorable comments from proslavery advocates. If any of the Methodists hoped that he would talk about God, he did not.<sup>37</sup> Tension may have been present between Atchison's Protestants and Catholics, but if any of Lincoln's hosts voiced anti-Catholic sentiments, Lincoln would have disapproved. He strongly disliked the anti-Catholicism of the Know-Nothing Party, expressing this sentiment in an 1855 letter that registered his view of Benjamin Stringfellow as a representative of an "odious and detested class" of slave traders, and then turned to the broader topic of bigotry: "When the Know-Nothings get control, [the national creed] will read 'all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics.'" Lincoln added, "When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty."<sup>38</sup>

#### ESTABLISHING A CIVIC ORDER

The context in which Lincoln's Kansas visit occurred was one of enormous opportunity for settlers, speculators, and entrepreneurs—opportunity to acquire land and make homes, start towns and businesses, launch churches, and for some, bend the law and exploit

their neighbors. The fifty million acres that made up Kansas in 1861 constituted approximately a tenth of the territory that Thomas Jefferson acquired from the French in 1803. Missouri was the first of that territory to be settled, gaining statehood in 1821, growing to a population of 140,000 by 1830, and becoming the most populous state in the region by 1860 with nearly 1.2 million residents. Missouri's population in 1860 included 115,000 slaves, more than the entire population of Kansas. Arkansas became a state in 1836, and by 1860 had a population of 435,000, including 111,000 slaves. The other Middle West states that preceded Kansas were Iowa in 1846 and Minnesota in 1858. Iowa was the second most populous state in the region in 1860 with 675,000 residents, while Minnesota remained much smaller with a population of only 172,000. Nebraska entered the union in 1867, North and South Dakota followed in 1889, and Oklahoma in 1907. Although much of Kansas territory was set aside for Indians from eastern states, white settlers began staking claims in 1854 and 1855, and by 1860 the white population increased to more than 107,000.

The challenges facing ordinary settlers, officials, and church leaders were immense. Laws were difficult to enforce, and elections were uncertain. Popular sovereignty as the basis on which Kansas was to become a free state or embrace slavery resulted in fraudulent elections along with border violence. The decision's significance for the country's future drew Kansas into the national political debate, and made it a topic of profound interest in places as remote as Springfield, Charleston, New York, Boston, and the nation's capital. Horace Greeley, who stopped in Atchison on May 15, 1859 (declaring, "I have long been looking for the West, and here it is at last"), published hundreds of articles in the *New York Daily Tribune* about the struggles in Kansas and the Republicans' efforts to make it a free state.<sup>39</sup> Three days after visiting Atchison, Greeley addressed the Kansas Republican convention in Osawatimie. The Democratic Party, he said, was a "whited sepulchre," a "grinning death's head," the "den of all abominations."<sup>40</sup>

That Kansas should be a free state was both a plank of the Republican Party and a constant refrain from abolitionist pulpits.

Beecher, the Connecticut preacher who sent Bibles and rifles to Kansas plus helped organize the New Haven colony that settled in Wabaunsee near Topeka, declared on the colony's departure, "You are the seed of Christianity" and civilization. "To go there determined to transplant to its soil that tree of liberty which under God has in older states borne and shook down from its boughs all the fruits of an unparalleled prosperity requires heroic courage." To defend themselves and their liberties, Beecher counseled, "is a duty from which you cannot shrink without leaving your honor, your manhood, your Christian fidelity behind you."<sup>41</sup> On behalf of the colony, C. B. Lines expressed his conviction that "from this settlement there will go out an influence for good over the state that shall be to some extent felt in promoting civil order, just and equal laws, a correct idea of the rights of man, and the value of free institutions."<sup>42</sup>

In towns like Atchison, Lawrence, and Leavenworth, it was not at all certain that the free state cause would prevail. Martin's exuberance at Republicans' triumph in December 1859 was conditioned by the fact that Atchison had participated in three ballots that fall, all of them close, and with Democrats winning in November.<sup>43</sup> In Lawrence a few months earlier, a free state resident wrote to a friend, "The democratic party is a power in this territory, [and] the indications are that it will receive a victory next fall in the elections. The Republicans will be defeated and a democrat to Congress."<sup>44</sup> His prediction was wrong, and Lawrence itself remained a free state stronghold, but it had been plundered by proslavery forces in 1856 and would be again in a few years. On August 20, 1863, Lawrence was sacked and burned by William Quantrill's raiders, who also killed 150 residents. Arriving from Atchison four days later, General Ingalls wrote, "Absolutely nothing remained. Not a yard of calico, a pound of flour or sugar, a nail or a pan or pair of shoes could be purchased in a town where stocks of not less value than a million and a half of dollars were exposed two days before."<sup>45</sup> Leavenworth, in contrast, was known as a proslavery town from its inception in 1855, and in 1857 was the location of some of the most violent attacks against free state residents in the

territory. By the time of Lincoln's visit in 1859 Republicans held six of the town's twelve council seats, but Democrats hung on to the office of mayor, and rancor between the two parties resulted in at least one melee with paving stones thrown and shots fired. All of Leavenworth's delegates to the Wyandotte convention were Democrats.<sup>46</sup>

Smaller towns were drawn into the partisan conflicts as well. Residents near Doniphan, where Lincoln spoke in 1859, remembered Benjamin Stringfellow arriving during an election in 1855 with a band of proslavery Missourians and threatening anyone who voted for a free state candidate.<sup>47</sup> Although Doniphan was a free state town in 1859, its delegate to the Wyandotte convention was a Democrat. One of Troy's delegates was a Democrat, and the other an independent. Near Shawnee Mission, Greeley's stagecoach took him through Olathe—a "smart village," he wrote, "destined to become a place of considerable size and importance."<sup>48</sup> Olathe sent a Republican to the Wyandotte convention and a Democrat, who left soon after and served in the Confederate Army. Fifteen miles from Lawrence, Leecompton flourished from 1855 to 1859 as the territorial capital, but quickly declined when Republicans rose to power and relocated the legislature to Topeka.<sup>49</sup>

When Kansas adopted a free state constitution and soon after entered the union on the side of the North, the Republican Party became almost synonymous with righteous virtue, while anyone who opposed it was considered a lawless ruffian most likely from Missouri. Such "ruffians" were responsible for Kansans' travail and would be forever held in disrepute. Thoroughly armed Missourians, Greeley declared, "swarmed across the unmarked border whenever an election was impending, camping in the vicinity of most of the polls, whereof they took unceremonious possession, and voting till they were sure that no more votes were needed, when they decamped, and returned to their Missouri homes."<sup>50</sup> Democrats, others complained, were a sham party, engaged in pettifoggery, and repugnant, conniving, and fraudulent.<sup>51</sup> The first meeting of the Kansas state legislature, a delegate recalled, "killed everything that had a pro-slavery, Democratic, tinge to it." The free state

Republicans, he observed, “came to Kansas for a holy purpose and were not to be balked in their intentions.”<sup>52</sup> Kansas Republicans won every race for the U.S. Senate and every gubernatorial election except one for the next thirty years.

But the task of creating towns as well as establishing farms and homes was a matter of creating a civic order that went well beyond the immediate conflicts separating free state and slavery proponents. As government agents negotiated treaties with Indians, surveyors mapped counties, townships, and sections. Town companies formulated charters, sold shares, elected officers, and purchased property. Lots were platted and advertised to attract settlers. Land offices opened to record claims. Courthouses, stores, and churches had to be built, town councils elected, school boards established, and schools constructed. Within a year of its founding, a promising town usually had a law officer, revenue for developing and maintaining streets, a jail, a post office, a hotel, a school, and several stores. One of Atchison’s first tasks was to construct a “lockup” of sturdy cottonwood logs. Another was to decree that tipping shops would remain closed on Sundays.

The resources that settlers brought with them included not only the rugged entrepreneurial spirit about which so much would be written but also their knowledge of social institutions. Like the rest of the Louisiana Purchase, Kansas benefited from being settled well after the nation’s basic laws and patterns of government were established. The Land Ordinance of 1785 created the system of counties and townships that the Middle West territories and states later adopted. Iowa modeled its effective system of public schools on Ohio’s, and Kansas and Minnesota modeled theirs on Iowa’s. Schooling and literacy rates were high in the northern states from which a large number of Kansans came, especially Illinois, Indiana, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Literacy was also high among the English, Canadian, and German immigrants who made up a majority of Kansas’ foreign-born population.<sup>53</sup>

Notorious as it was for border violence, Kansas was led by citizens with experience in passing laws and creating civic organizations. Men like Pomeroy and Father Henry Lemke in Atchison were

examples. Pomeroy was a schoolteacher, merchant, and antislavery lecturer, and served a term in the Massachusetts legislature prior to becoming an agent for the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Lemke arrived in Kansas at the age of sixty, almost destitute and ready to sink into semiretirement, but having bought and sold land in significant quantities as well as founded the town of Carrolltown, Pennsylvania. Lemke knew surveyors and merchants, and secured the initial funding for St. Benedict's Abbey.<sup>54</sup> Other examples included the Stringfellow and Challis brothers, who brought experience in law, medicine, and business.

A year before it became a state, Kansas included more than eight hundred residents working as lawyers, public officials, and teachers. Another thousand were merchants or doctors. These occupations represented a small fraction of the total labor force composed mostly of farmers, farm laborers, craftspeople, and artisans. Yet compared with other parts of the Middle West, the rate of involvement in these professions was high. The rate of lawyers in the labor force, for example, was more than twice as high in Kansas as in Missouri or Arkansas, both of which had been states for several decades. It was also higher than in Minnesota and Iowa. The rate of merchants and public officials was higher in Kansas than in any of these states. Kansas ranked second among the five states in having the highest rate of physicians and second in the rate employed as printers. Overall, Kansas was significantly above the five-state average for six of the seven professions.<sup>55</sup>

The churches contributed to establishing civic order in the region's towns and farming communities. As in Atchison, churches provided a public space in which lectures could be given and visiting dignitaries hosted. Church functions included sermons, classes, social gatherings, and business meetings. The one that clergy and lay members themselves would have placed first was serving as a public expression of their faith. Clergy embodied the faith as its most visible specialists. Church leaders in eastern states sent clergy to the Middle West to preach, perform the sacraments, preside at weddings and funerals, organize congregations, solicit funds, and erect buildings. Nationwide there was 1 pastor for every 838 people

in 1860. In Kansas the ratio was considerably better: a pastor for every 518 people, or almost 40 percent better than the national average. Iowa was the only other Middle West state that came close.

Clergy gravitated to Iowa and Kansas for the same reasons that lawyers and doctors did, although with far less hope of earning a decent living. Newly available land meant a growing population, which in turn created opportunities to preach, start churches, and minister to the needy. These opportunities were also present in Missouri, where the population increased by four hundred thousand in the 1850s. And yet it was interesting that the ratio of clergy to population in Kansas (and Iowa) was significantly better than in Missouri. The difference was partly that Missouri was already more settled. In smaller measure, Kansas and Iowa also benefited from the impending struggle over slavery. Congregationalists, for example, established eight churches in Kansas and seventy-one in Iowa by 1860, but none in Missouri. Northern Methodists in Missouri lost property and pulpits to southern Methodists when the denomination split in 1846, forcing some deposed clergy to relocate to Kansas and Iowa, and later to Nebraska. In 1860, approximately 40 percent of the clergy in Kansas were Methodists.<sup>56</sup>

## PUBLIC RELIGION

Church buildings provided the other public expression of piety in plains communities. Small or large, churches served as sanctified space, set apart for worship and governed by concerns that sometimes restricted their use—as the Atchison Methodist trustees' reluctance to host Lincoln illustrated. Tall steeples were far less common in the Middle West than in New England, not only because they were expensive, but also because fire and cyclones destroyed them. Churches nevertheless were architecturally distinct, often resembling one another from town to town and across denominations. An edifice demonstrated both a financial commitment and the congregation's expectation that its presence would continue.

Buildings went up quickly when donors could be found, but in many instances were delayed by high costs, scarce materials, poor crops, and uncertain population flows. The comparison of Kansas with Missouri and Iowa in this regard is instructive. By 1850 Missouri had a church building on average for every 750 people, and that rate held steady in 1860. Iowa had one church building for every 996 people in 1850, and the ratio improved to one building for every 711 people in 1860. In contrast, Kansas had only one building for every 1,105 people in 1860.

Even in prosperous towns like Atchison, Leavenworth, and Topeka the difficulties were evident. Nine churches were constructed in Atchison between 1858 and 1868, with five years elapsing on average after a congregation organized until its building was finished and in use. Among the eleven churches constructed in Leavenworth between 1857 and 1873, the average was 4.7 years, and in Topeka where the population rose rapidly as a result of the state capital locating there, the average was 3.3 years among the eleven churches built by congregations organized between 1855 and 1870. Of the thirty churches in the three towns, only eight were completed within a year of the congregation being organized. Eleven took at least five years.

In no instance was a building completed without one or more pastors being intimately involved. Delays occurred when congregations failed to grow, when finances fell short, and from adverse weather. The First Congregational Church in Topeka highlighted the difficulties. Organized with a membership of sixteen in 1856, the congregation raised seven hundred dollars and laid a foundation nine months later. A year after that, the walls were up yet funds were lacking to add a roof. In June 1859, a storm demolished the rear and side walls. The American Congregational Union provided three hundred dollars that fall and rebuilding began the following spring, only to be halted by another violent storm that caused the south wall to collapse. The building was finally dedicated on January 1, 1861. Three months later it hosted the first meeting of the Kansas state legislature.<sup>57</sup>

Although drought, the harsh winter of 1860–61, and the Civil War slowed population growth, the Homestead Act in 1862 and a series of treaties with Indian leaders facilitated new immigration at the close of the war. The population of Kansas tripled from 107,000 in 1860 to 364,000 in 1870.<sup>58</sup> As new land attracted streams of migrant settlers, the rise in the number of clergy could not keep pace. Nationally, the balance of population to clergy edged up from 838 persons per pastor in 1860 to 858 in 1870, but in the Middle West the shift was more dramatic. The number of people to pastors rose in Kansas from 518 to 676, in Iowa from 532 to 746, and in Missouri from 926 to 990. But if the ratio of clergy to population mattered, it was not yet the case, at least not in Kansas and Nebraska, that there was an actual shortage of clergy relative to the number of congregations. In 1870 there were 578 clergy in Kansas, 530 organized congregations, and 301 church buildings. In Nebraska there were 183 clergy, 181 organized congregations, and 108 buildings. That did not mean that every congregation had its own pastor. Many did not. It did, however, set Kansas and Nebraska apart from Missouri, where churches outnumbered clergy by a ratio of 5 to 4; Minnesota, with a ratio of 4 to 3; and Iowa, where the ratio was almost 2 to 1.<sup>59</sup>

With immigrants arriving from nearly every state as well as many ethnic and national backgrounds, Kansas was denominationally diverse from the start. The ninety-seven established churches in 1860 included thirty-six Methodist, thirteen Baptist, eleven Episcopal, eight Congregational, seven Presbyterian, seven Union (interdenominational), six Christian (Disciples of Christ), and six Roman Catholic congregations. In addition there was one Lutheran church, one Cumberland Presbyterian church, and one Friends meeting house. By the time the next official tally was taken in 1870, census officials decided that the previous count may have been misleading because some churches were included only if they had buildings, while others were counted simply because they claimed to be organized. Thus, the new census takers were instructed that a church “to deserve notice in the census must have something of the character

of an institution,” adding that it “must be known in the community in which it is located,” and should have “something permanent and tangible to substantiate its title to recognition.”<sup>60</sup>

Acknowledging that churches having these qualifications might or might not have buildings, the 1870 census counted church organizations and edifices separately, included the seating capacity and value of the latter, and hedged its numbers by stating that the results would differ from those reported by denominations—which frequently was the case. The 1870 figures suggested that churches in Kansas were three to five times more numerous than in 1860, and had become more diverse. Besides the denominations represented in 1860 there were two synagogues, a Unitarian church, a Universalist church, and a Mormon congregation. Not fully captured in the census were further distinctions such as those between German and Swedish Lutherans, German and Irish Catholics, and African American and white Baptists.

Besides the fact that denominational diversity was a reality, the freedom to practice a religion of one’s choosing was officially recognized. The state’s constitution adopted at Wyandotte in 1859 specified that “the right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience shall never be infringed; nor shall any person be compelled to attend or support any form of worship; nor shall any control of or interference with the rights of conscience be permitted, nor any preference be given by law to any religious establishment or mode of worship.” The constitution further declared that “no religious test or property qualification shall be required for any office of public trust, nor for any vote at any election, nor shall any person be incompetent to testify on account of religious belief.”<sup>61</sup> These clauses followed the section of the constitution that decreed Kansas free of slavery, and were preceded by the statement that the people of Kansas were “grateful to Almighty God for our civil and religious privileges.” The wording was similar to that of Ohio’s constitution of 1850, which the delegates adopted as their model, and closely resembled phrases in the Minnesota and Iowa constitutions of 1857.<sup>62</sup>

In practice, religious freedom was the minimal condition for multiple denominations to establish churches in Kansas, but it is important to understand that much more was involved than a so-called free market of religious competitors. Where competition could plausibly be said to have mattered was in church construction: in town after town, church leaders broke ground for church buildings within a few months of one another. But there was no indication that each successive structure was an attempt to outlavish local rivals. Faced with rapid population growth or the hope thereof, church leaders had little reason to imagine themselves competing for scarce resources. The challenge was rather to make enough congregations available to attract settlers and provide them with worship facilities when they came. The competition was with rival towns more so than among denominations. This was the reason that church leaders so often cooperated in launching new congregations, and why land speculators like Luther Challiss and Benjamin Stringfellow could be persuaded to donate property.

With 166 organized congregations and 74 buildings valued at \$316,000, Methodists were the largest denomination in 1870, just as they had been in 1860. When the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met at Paola in 1871, its leaders reported having 243 preachers among their number and Sunday school classes involving 10,683 children.<sup>63</sup> Baptists were second in size, with ninety-two congregations and fifty-six buildings valued at \$247,000, and Presbyterians third with eighty-four congregations and fifty-five buildings valued at \$277,000. There were forty-three Congregationalist churches with twenty-six buildings and thirty-five Christian churches with sixteen buildings. Episcopalians had only fourteen parishes and nine buildings, but on average had structures valued at more than \$6,300 each, compared to edifices averaging between \$4,000 and \$4,500 among the other denominations.

Roman Catholics were listed as having thirty-seven parishes and thirty-four buildings valued at \$513,000. That included the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Leavenworth completed in 1868 at a cost of \$200,000 under the direction of Bishop John B.

Miege and assisted by Santa Fe bishop John B. Lamy, who in 1927 was to become the inspiration for Willa Cather's acclaimed novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. The cathedral's location was an instance of church leaders understanding the value of competition among rival towns. Bishop Miege initially approached the Wyandotte Town Company for a donation of land near the future site of Kansas City, Kansas, and when offered a small unattractive lot went on to Leavenworth, where he was given five acres in a desirable part of town. Father Anton Kuhls of Kansas City later lamented, "All the grand ecclesiastical buildings of Leavenworth would be [here], and the fate of our town would have been different today, if our land company had taken another view of this matter."<sup>64</sup>

Methodists' success in launching new congregations during the 1860s in greater number than any other denomination owed much to the famed circuit-rider system, in which itinerant clergy traveled from village to village holding meetings in homes, stores, and when weather permitted outdoors. Even with clergy as abundant as they were in Kansas, the circuit system facilitated planting churches in new locations. Especially as the population spread to central and western Kansas, clergy traveled long distances by horse or on foot, and organized congregations by conducting services wherever they could find interested settlers. But it is crucial not to associate itinerancy only with Methodism. Itinerant clergy from western Missouri performed Episcopal services in eastern Kansas. Baptists used itinerancy too, and although quite different in many other respects, so did Catholics. By 1860, the monks at Atchison Priory had developed three circuits involving twenty-three mission stations, which they visited at least once a month. Like their Protestant counterparts, the monks rode forty or fifty miles a day, and relied on networks among the faithful to provide lodgings and host meetings.

An 1862 letter to a Catholic circuit rider between Atchison and Omaha illustrated the details and character of the networks involved. "Go from here to Rockbluff about eighteen miles from Nebraska City and ask after Mr. Haskins the owner of the flouring mill," it instructed. "If you find him he will invite you to say Mass on Saturday. From Rockbluff go to Plattsmouth and ask after



1.2 Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception at Leavenworth during construction in 1867. Courtesy of KansasMemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society, Copy and Reuse Restrictions Apply

Mr. Gottfried Fickler, a German butcher. He will tell you what you have to do. You can say Mass and preach there on Sunday.” The itinerant was to visit the bishop in Omaha the next day to inquire about a German settlement at Helfna, then travel to West Point and Fontanelle, where a Mr. Hancock would be able to give directions to another settlement across a river near a sawmill, and so on.<sup>65</sup> The circuit riders were known for weathering hardship and holding meetings in drafty barns, but as this letter reveals, their work also depended on careful planning and strategic contacts.

Unlike colonial churches that benefited from government funding, congregations in the Middle West were voluntary organizations supported by tithes, pledges, and subscriptions. As civic

organizations, churches nevertheless engaged in activities that had political implications, and church leaders looked to government to implement and enforce laws deemed favorable to church teachings and ideals. In 1868, under the governorship of Methodist reverend Nehemiah Green, the Kansas legislature passed a series of laws defining “crimes against public morals and decency,” including bigamy, incest, adultery, removing or receiving a dead body from its place of interment, and gambling. The laws further stipulated that performing any work other than acts of necessity or charity on the first day of the week was a misdemeanor carrying a fine of up to twenty-five dollars, and that selling merchandise or operating a tippling shop on Sunday was punishable by up to fifty dollars. Highlighting an issue posed by religious meetings, the statute most directly concerned with religion specified that selling or disposing of “any spirituous or other liquors,” or “any article of traffic whatever,” within one mile of “the place where any religious society or assembly of people are collected or collecting together for religious worship in any camp or field meeting” was a misdemeanor carrying a fine of up to one hundred dollars. Finding the wording overly restrictive, the legislature amended the law in 1876 to exempt tavern keepers operating at their regular places of business and anyone having a written permit from the managers of the religious assembly to sell provisions to the persons attending.<sup>66</sup>

### SERVING THE COMMUNITY

The issues that brought church leaders and politics together most often were abolition and temperance. Abolition was pressed by Congregationalist leaders such as Pomeroy of Atchison and John Ritchie, the colorful Topekan who assisted John Brown on at least one occasion and was active in the Underground Railroad. It was a principal reason for the New England Emigrant Aid Association’s efforts to assist settlers, many of whom were Congregationalists. It was also the official position of the Kansas Methodist Conference.

Consistent with the stance of the northern branch of the denomination, Kansas Methodists deemed slavery a great evil, and declared in a resolution drafted by Atchison's Isaac F. Collins and adopted by the conference in 1858 that no slaveholder was to be admitted to the church's membership.

Intemperance, the same conference decreed, was "one of the most formidable and widely extended evils with which the Church and society have to contend." Ministers and members were encouraged to work toward passing and sustaining "a prohibitory liquor law in our Territories."<sup>67</sup> At the Wyandotte convention, Congregationalist Ritchie proposed unsuccessfully to include a Prohibition clause in the constitution.<sup>68</sup> Prohibition was also attempted with varying success through local legislation. In Lawrence, for example, the town's constitution included a provision against the sale of intoxicating drinks, and the statute was stiffened by popular referendum in 1855. Two years of failed enforcement, however, during which seven saloons were established, persuaded the churchwomen who felt most deeply about the issue to take matters into their own hands. In 1857 they formed the Temperance Vigilance Committee, a citizens' organization seeking to influence local elections and law enforcement.<sup>69</sup>

Besides abolition and temperance, churches' efforts in the areas of education and social welfare brought them into the political sphere. At the primary level, public school curricula typically included Bible reading and prayer. The churches were also active in initiating institutions of higher education, such as Baker University in Baldwin and Bluemont Central College, the predecessor of Kansas State University in Manhattan. Relief assistance from public funds was supplemented through the efforts of Pomeroy, Thaddeus Hyatt, and others to solicit support from eastern churches. Joint religious and governmental efforts were also made to assist the needs of the blind and deaf. For instance, in 1871 the state of Kansas contributed five thousand dollars to "Protestant and Catholic asylums" in Leavenworth. That was small compared with the state's nearly fifty-four thousand dollar budget for insane asylums, but not insignificant relative to the six thousand dollars that the state

spent establishing a normal school in Leavenworth or the twenty-seven hundred dollars it provided for the new agricultural college in Manhattan.<sup>70</sup>

With faith and politics so intertwined, it was thus crucial that the two domains remained as separate as they did. Delegates to the Wyandotte constitutional convention decided to include the clauses guaranteeing the separation of church and state with no dissent, and apparently little discussion. Clergy could scarcely refrain from preaching about slavery, but it was preaching that the Methodists' conference called for, not clergy involvement in legislation. Despite an appeal from Lyman Beecher in 1855 for clergy to participate more actively in the New England Emigrant Aid Society, only four embarked on the journey to Kansas, and one returned immediately, leaving the work of settlement and antislavery agitation almost entirely in the hands of lay leaders. The reluctance in Atchison to host a political speaker in the Lord's house probably was not atypical. Church members were certainly among those who voted for the free state constitution, but churches themselves were segregated, and proposals were made to prevent African Americans from settling at all in Kansas.

If race complicated the connection of faith and politics, schooling and relief attempts followed simpler lines of delineation. Unlike Missouri and Arkansas where private schools organized by churches and funded through subscriptions became popular in the 1850s, schooling in Kansas and Nebraska followed the pattern in Ohio, Iowa, and Minnesota of public support through revenue from land and taxes, and supervision by elected county and township officials. Protestant churches focused their educational efforts on Sunday school programs, and were content that Bible reading and prayer were a regular part of public school activities. The Catholic schools in Atchison and Leavenworth offered training for a small number of younger scholars, but were oriented chiefly toward higher learning in preparation for the priesthood and careers in business. Higher learning was the aim of institutions like Baker University and Bluemont Central College as well. Relief efforts looked to churches for support in times of emergency, but poor

farms, insane asylums, and institutions for the blind and deaf were established and operated by the state and county governments.

Notwithstanding the fact that Kansas was overwhelmingly Republican and Protestant, and that Methodists were the largest group of Protestants, there were demarcations then that separated faith from politics, and caused the two to mingle through shared convictions more than from organized electoral or legislative efforts. The issue that deviated from this pattern was temperance. Although it would be two decades before the state adopted Prohibition, settlers struggled to restrict saloons and intoxicating liquor from the start. If the intent was to limit Catholic influences and foreign immigration, as historians would argue, those were not yet the issue. It was rather that Kansas was truly the frontier where lawlessness often prevailed and was deemed by citizens to be aggravated by drunkenness. Settlers associated drunkenness with danger from Indians and border ruffians, and saw it as a threat to their families and towns.

Frank A. Root was a boarder at the rooming house in Atchison run by John Martin's parents. He worked among the drivers who ran ox teams to California and wrote later of life in frontier Kansas. "Frequently I saw drivers while sitting on the box and riding with them," he remarked, "when they were so drunk that the wonder to me was how they ever kept from tumbling off the seat." Root especially remembered a dinner at which Paul Coburn, the stage company's agent, became "gloriously drunk," proceeding to paint the place red with his six-shooters, destroy the chandelier, and leave the room in shambles. Not much later Coburn killed a man in a Denver saloon.<sup>71</sup> On her journey to Atchison in 1857, Lucy Gaylord Pomeroy spent the Sabbath in Quindaro, a free state town on the Missouri River, where she observed the ladies circulating a petition to stop the sale of intoxicating drinks and rejoiced that a public meeting was initiated on the subject.<sup>72</sup> It was not surprising that towns like Quindaro, Lawrence, and Topeka looked favorably at temperance efforts.

But it would be misleading to conclude that piety in those early years of Kansas settlement was primarily about temperance, abolition, or even church building. Faith was fundamentally a part of

settlers' struggle to survive, face illness and bereavement, and make sense of why they had come to a land of unrelenting hardship. Scarlet fever and typhoid wiped out entire families. Women routinely died giving birth. Men who got lost in blinding snowstorms froze on the open prairie. With death so near, faith offered assurance of eternal life. It was the same piety that soldiers wrote of from their encampments during the Civil War, and that pioneer women in Nebraska and Minnesota described as they wrote of loneliness and illness on the treeless plains. They prayed, questioned God, and hoped to meet their departed loved ones in heaven. A church meeting at a settler's cabin was an opportunity to socialize and exchange news. The traveling pastor or priest brought people together, performed weddings, visited the sick and dying, and buried the dead. Church connections facilitated courtships and helped when the unexpected happened.

An episode that illustrated the value of church connections occurred in Leavenworth in 1859. Maria Maher, a young unmarried Catholic woman working as a domestic servant, became pregnant. The father was a young man in the community whose identity and intentions were apparently unknown to her employer, Thomas Ewing Jr., a lawyer and landowner who served in the territorial legislature and was destined to become a general in the Union army. In keeping with customs of the day, the bishop arranged for Maher to go to Saint Louis, where she would be able to live in confinement and receive help from one of the Catholic charitable institutions. Ewing offered his assistance as well, inviting her to write if she needed financial aid and giving her the name of an attorney who would work with her in negotiating with the young man in question. Further, Ewing suggested that if the young man was Catholic, it would be advisable to consult with the sisters or a priest before involving an attorney. Ewing himself was not Catholic, but his mother and three of his siblings were, which probably explained his knowledge of how best to handle the situation.<sup>73</sup>

The role of faith in sustaining early settlers was particularly evident in women's diaries and letters. Julia Hardy Lovejoy kept a diary from 1854 to 1856, chronicling her departure from New

Hampshire at the age of forty-two with her husband and daughter as well as her life as a pioneer in Kansas. Like many women, she found it difficult to leave home and family. Her loneliness was compounded by the fact that her husband was a Methodist preacher who spent months at a time traveling and serving in other stations. On the journey the Lovejoys' five-year-old daughter, Edith, contracted measles and died. Julia was pregnant and nearly died giving birth to a son. She confided often to her diary that she was heartbroken, alone, ill, weeping, and praying. Her prayers were for strength and understanding, the health of her son, and her own desire to be with God in heaven.

In 1859, after three years of writing nothing, Lovejoy resumed her diary. Her husband was still away, her house half finished, and she was sometimes too sick to stand up, but her son was alive and healthy. She was thankful. God was with her and indeed, she felt, had been revealed to her in a special way. "I shouted from a full soul," she wrote, "and even at a late hour in the night, with none but my little boy with me, I feared the neighbors might hear my shouts of praise—God has saved me from sin—the witness is clear with not one doubt—glory to His blessed Name!" She felt confident about her ability to face the trials before her. "His grace will help me to overcome, and vanquish all thro' Jesus' Name." Lovejoy was filled with praise. "To Him, I commit my interests, for time and for eternity," she stated, "and subscribe with my own hand, to His faithfulness. Amen, and Amen."<sup>74</sup>

## CHURCH EXPANSION

A century and a half after Lovejoy wrote those words, scholars and church planners were fervently engaged in debating the sources of church expansion. One interpretation held that churches grew best when sparked by denominational competition. Another argued that strictness in doctrine and morality encouraged growth. Yet another emphasized the importance of sheer demographic expansion

through frequent childbearing. Some earlier contentions were still in play, such as churches growing because of revival meetings, or from people moving to towns where transportation was easier and chores were lighter. All of these interpretations held some merit. The fact was that church expansion occurred for differing reasons under differing circumstances, though. Between 1870 and 1890, the rapid population growth that took place in Kansas provided opportunities for churches to expand, but it was also challenging to start congregations on treeless prairies where cyclones and blizzards prevailed. Competition may have encouraged growth, yet some rivalries ran deep in the bones while others hardly mattered at all. Certainly it was critical for church leaders to invest scarce resources wisely.<sup>75</sup>

By the end of the Civil War, church construction in Kansas had ground almost to a halt. Quantrill's raiders destroyed churches in Lawrence and Wakarusa. Young men who might otherwise have gone to the seminary became army volunteers. The Kansas Methodist Conference reported only sixty-eight clergy in 1863, down from seventy-four in 1861, after having increased from forty-seven in 1858 to eighty-five in 1860. Having doubled its membership between 1858 and 1860, the church grew only from 3,932 members in 1861 to 4,184 in 1863. For all denominations, the war delayed church building. Fort Scott near the Missouri border was typical. Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Catholic congregations organized there in 1859 and 1860, but they did not complete buildings until after the war, and Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational churches failed to be constructed until 1870. As the war ended, denominational leaders in the East were conflicted about sending additional funds to Kansas versus putting them to use in rebuilding war-damaged churches in other parts of the country. In 1865 Pomeroy, now a U.S. senator, told a national meeting of the Congregational Union that churches in Kansas would likely succeed on their own and that sending ministers to the South should be a higher priority.<sup>76</sup> Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians were already sending northern pastors to fill southern pulpits.<sup>77</sup> Under these

circumstances, it was impressive that the religious census of 1870 counted as many churches in Kansas as it did.

The 530 congregations and 301 church buildings recorded in the 1870 census were scattered among the forty-five counties that made up the eastern half of the state and accounted for 97 percent of its population. County for county, the number of congregations, edifices, sittings, and value of church property reflected population size more than anything else.<sup>78</sup> Leavenworth County, with more than thirty-two thousand residents, was the most populous, and had sixty congregations and forty church buildings. Douglas County, where Lawrence was located, was second with more than twenty thousand residents, forty-two congregations, and twenty-one church buildings. Atchison County's growth had slowed as trade crossed increasingly into Kansas from Kansas City, Missouri, but the county still ranked third with more than fifteen thousand residents, eleven congregations, and ten church buildings.

The three counties that had significantly more congregations than would have been expected on the basis of population alone were Linn, Coffey, and Anderson, all in eastern Kansas about fifty miles south of Lawrence. There were twenty-nine congregations in Linn County, nineteen in Coffey County, and fifteen in Anderson County. These three counties were denominationally diverse, suggesting that competition may have driven church growth. There was a simpler explanation, however. These were counties lacking a central town of any notable size, such as Atchison or Lawrence, but with populations scattered among smaller towns, such as Mound City, La Cygne, Pleasanton, Burlington, Le Roy, Colony, Greeley, and Garnett. As a consequence, each of the major denominations launched several congregations in the same county.

Over the next two decades, the most important factors accounting for new congregations continued to be population growth and the number of towns founded in each county. There were 4,920 organized congregations and 2,854 church edifices in Kansas in 1890, nearly ten times as many as in 1870. Unlike the earlier census, the one taken in 1890 also attempted to tally church members, which

were reported as 335,575 or an average of 68 per congregation.<sup>79</sup> Between 1870 and 1890, the total population of Kansas increased from 364,390 to 1,427,095. Counties with larger populations had the highest number of organized congregations, and when population was taken into account, counties with more towns had a larger number of congregations than counties with fewer towns.<sup>80</sup>

Keeping up with a population that was growing at the rate of more than 50,000 new residents a year was no small task. Settlements remained small and scattered. Farm families lived miles from town. It helped that settlers were eager to have churches, and that town companies and railroad officials were often willing to donate land. It was also important that denominational bodies headquartered in eastern states were able to train and send pastors as well as provide loans for buildings. But church leaders had to be careful about investing scarce resources wisely. Many more towns were started than survived. By 1890 more than 1,800 towns were in existence, but as many as 6,000 had been attempted, and fewer than 400 had the required number of 250 residents to legally incorporate.<sup>81</sup> It was risky to build a church in a town that might die a few years later and expect a pastor to exist on the donations of a handful of members. It was equally difficult to know how large a church to build, and it was sometimes necessary to discipline pastors whose work was ineffective.

Churches affiliated with small denominations frequently began within ethnically distinct settlements. Abundant land made Kansas an attractive location for these settlements. Purchasing or homesteading farms on adjacent tracts enabled settlers to assist one another, gave them a common identity, ensured that they would speak the same language, and greatly increased the chances of being able to initiate their own church and support its pastor. In 1868, the Chicago Swedish Company purchased land in McPherson County in central Kansas and established the town of Lindsborg. The population grew to six hundred by 1880, and the town was home to a Swedish Lutheran church, three other Lutheran churches, a Swedish Methodist church, and a Swedish mission church. McPherson along with neighboring Marion and Harvey counties became the

location of Russian immigrants, who arrived in 1874 and formed Mennonite churches. Other settlements that established distinct ethnic churches included Bohemian colonies in Marion and Ellsworth counties, Dunkard colonies in Norton and Gove counties, and Quaker settlements in Lawrence, Haviland, and Wichita. One of the more unusual religious settlements was a colony founded in 1877 in Delphos, Ottawa County, by spiritualists from Wisconsin. Another was a settlement in western Kansas along the recently completed Kansas Pacific Railroad that named itself Collyer in honor of Chicago Unitarian reverend Robert Collyer. Not all the colonies formed churches or survived. One that did not was a vegetarian settlement that arrived in Allen County in 1855 and lasted for only a year.

Jewish settlements in Kansas included some of the characteristics that distinguished other ethnic enclaves, including distinctive customs and origins. The 1890 census identified approximately 300 Jews living in Leavenworth, 100 in Wichita, and 50 in Topeka. Another 150 lived in Kansas City, Missouri, and approximately 500 in Omaha. Newspapers of the day carried routine stories about Hebrew Harvest Fairs, plays featuring Jewish themes, and Jewish weddings and charitable activities. An informed non-Jewish reader would have gained the impression that U.S. Jews mostly lived in New York City, Jews in other countries were frequent victims of persecution, and local Jews were hardworking and generous. There were suggestions, too, that Jews were rich, greedy, bigoted, or superstitious. Kansans expressed their sense of being exploited by eastern banks in anti-Semitic references to Shylocks, bloodsuckers, Judases, and hawk-billed Jews. At the same time, religious misgivings of the kind separating Protestants and Catholics were remarkably infrequent, at least in published accounts. The rabbi in Leavenworth was described as a liberal-minded person who got along well with non-Jewish leaders. Congregations were less often referred to as synagogues than as Hebrew churches.<sup>82</sup>

Racial barriers created enclaves of a different sort. Segregated congregations that were known at the time as “colored” churches were organized in Leavenworth in 1861, Lawrence and Wyandotte

in 1862, Atchison in 1867, and Topeka in 1868. During the 1870s, the state's African American population increased from seventeen thousand to forty-three thousand. Growth was especially rapid between 1877 and 1879 as "Exodusters" fled Reconstruction in the South on steamboats bound for Missouri and Kansas. African Methodist Episcopal churches in the East held services at which donations for the cause were solicited while audiences sang "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave." Churches and freedmen's associations in Kansas also provided assistance, but white residents were at best ambivalent about the new arrivals. In 1879, the governor organized an effort to raise voluntary relief funds and relocate African Americans from Wyandotte, where many were arriving, to Lawrence and Topeka. By 1882 there were colored Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, and Catholic congregations in Lawrence, and colored Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and independent churches in Topeka. Exodusters settled in western Kansas as well, organizing communities in Morris and Graham counties, including Nicodemus, where an African Methodist Episcopal congregation began in 1885 and continued until the 1950s.<sup>83</sup> In 1890, approximately 2.5 percent of the state's church members belonged to African American churches.

Among white settlers, Methodists continued to outnumber all other adherents. In 1890, 37 percent of white Protestants statewide were Methodists, and 92 percent of them were affiliated with the northern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Baptists were a distant second with 14 percent of the white Protestant membership. Presbyterians and Disciples of Christ each made up 10 percent of white Protestants. Six percent of white Protestants were Lutherans, divided among eight different conferences. Another 6 percent were United Brethren, and 5 percent were Congregationalists. The remaining 12 percent of white Protestants were scattered among more than a dozen smaller denominations, including the Episcopal, Seventh-Day Adventist, Mennonite, and Moravian churches along with the Church of God and the Reformed Church of America.<sup>84</sup>

The sizable number of Methodists reflected the religious composition of the states from which the majority of Kansans came. In

1880, three-fourths of non-foreign-born Kansans from other parts of the country had been born in just seven states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Methodists were by far the largest denomination in each of these states, accounting for 32 percent of their churches.<sup>85</sup> That elevated the likelihood that in any Kansas community, a sufficient number of people willing to start a church would already be Methodists. It also increased the chances that new congregations could secure funding from eastern Methodist conferences. In 1879, for example, the secretary of the church extension board of the New York Methodist Conference wrote with satisfaction that more than a million people had crossed the Missouri River in the past eighteen months, churches seating three to four hundred people could be built there for a thousand dollars, loans were being repaid on schedule, and the board had enough cash on hand “to secure the erection of a hundred houses of worship every year for all time.”<sup>86</sup>

Seemingly inexhaustible resources did not deter Methodist leaders from employing strategies aimed at maximizing success in establishing churches. Churches built with borrowed money gave borrowers and lenders an incentive to plan well. Applicants were required to file information about current and expected membership, the size of their town and its anticipated population increase, and their plans for repaying the loan. Starting as so many did with fewer than a dozen members, fledgling congregations were able to construct buildings sooner and less expensively by borrowing and securing funds from church conferences than from eastern banks. In 1890, four-fifths of congregations in eastern Kansas where towns were better settled had buildings, while in the remainder of the state the proportion was fewer than half.<sup>87</sup> The interval between organizing a congregation and putting up a building was protection against investing assets in the wrong place when towns flourished and died as often as they did. Despite the fact that organized congregations typically had fewer than seventy members when buildings were dedicated, the buildings were usually constructed to hold two or three times that many, which added to the cost, but anticipated and encouraged growth.

Most buildings were constructed of wood, and many used a standard floor plan and architectural design. The signature of Methodism became its square churches with a bell tower and entry in one corner, a pulpit in the opposite corner, and convertible space at the rear of the sanctuary for a single classroom. In later years, more substantial brick buildings would replace many of these churches, but for now John Wesley's admonition a century earlier that churches "be built plain and decent" was the order of the day. Like so many of Wesley's practices, plain churches helped ensure that Methodism would be the faith of common people. If churches were too expensive, "the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us," Wesley wrote. "And then farewell to Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too."<sup>88</sup>

It was not true in Kansas, as was sometimes claimed elsewhere, that there were more Methodist churches than post offices. But Methodists came closer than any other denomination to having a church in every town. Each district had at least one pastor assigned to hold meetings at gatherings too small to support their own pastor, and it was not uncommon for the pastor of an established congregation to be responsible for a second one. Towns that became county seats had the best chances of surviving. Nearly every county seat had a Methodist church by 1890—and the five that did not were in western counties with sparse populations. Inevitably, churches failed when rail lines went in unexpected locations, when grasshoppers and cyclones wreaked havoc, and when towns lost population. But the result of this winnowing process was to locate surviving churches where they were most likely to succeed. In 1890, incorporated Kansas towns that had a Methodist church averaged 1,172 residents, or almost three times as many as towns without a Methodist church. Larger towns were in a better position than smaller towns to not only grow but also serve as regional markets for area farmers and maintain a population sufficient to keep a church in business. By 1940, the towns where Methodist churches were located in 1890 had become four times the size of towns where Methodist churches were absent in 1890. It



1.3 Bucklin Methodist Church, an example of the church buildings that were constructed in small Kansas towns between 1870 and 1910. From the author's collection.

was not that growth was caused by the presence of a church; rather, churches were well located to benefit from this growth.<sup>89</sup>

Although population had an impact on them, churches' survival and success depended especially on the presence as well as work of qualified clergy. The ratio of clergy (across all denominations) to the population improved in Kansas from one for every 675 people in 1870 to one for every 535 people in 1890, and that ratio was better than in any of Kansas's neighboring states or the nation as a whole.<sup>90</sup> The 2,665 clergy in Kansas nearly equaled the number of churches with buildings, but fell far short of the number of organized congregations, accentuating the need to utilize scarce personnel wisely. Methodists enlisted volunteer exhorters and untrained local preachers when necessary, and deployed licensed pastors as widely as possible. A listing of 125 Methodist posts spanning a large portion of northern Kansas in 1893 showed that 80 percent were filled with licensed pastors and the remainder were to be supplied

by the presiding elder. Seven pastors were serving in circuit posts, and four others held appointments in more than one congregation. In keeping with the itinerancy system, two out of three pastors were serving a different congregation a year later. The conference was also adapting to wider change. Twenty-one of the pastors in 1893 were no longer in the conference in 1894, and forty-three pastors were new. By 1897, forty-two of the pastors serving in 1894 were gone, and forty newcomers were present.<sup>91</sup>

Itinerancy was based on the principle that pastors relinquished the right to decide on the location of their labor and a congregation surrendered its claim to that decision as well. It granted the bishop or presiding elder the authority to place pastors in positions that best served the conference or district. Pulpits were filled that would otherwise have remained vacant, and a pastor's performance in one position could become the basis for a better or worse assignment in the next. The hierarchy of rewards was suggested by the pattern of assignments. Congregations in small, unincorporated towns were likely to be filled with pastors serving in a provisional or temporary capacity. Pastors with regular appointments in small towns hoped eventually to receive appointments in larger towns. Having attained a congregation in a larger town, pastors anticipated being able to move to a town of similar size. There were, however, limits to how well a presiding elder could satisfy these expectations. Small towns greatly outnumbered larger ones. Some pastors were more deserving than others. Effective pastors were also needed to start new ministries.

It was not surprising that pastors awaited the announcement of appointments at annual meetings with more than casual interest. Pastors routinely faced hardship caused by the large circuits that they were expected to cover and the meager support their charges were able to contribute. Many were determined to make converts and establish churches if they were permitted to stay another year, while others desperately wished to relocate.<sup>92</sup> "The room became very quiet," an observer at an annual meeting in 1891 wrote. "The brethren were interested, very; some tried to look unconcerned; some smiled in a gruesome way; some looked very anxious, for

preachers are but human, anyway.” They would soon know if they “would remain where they were already pleasantly situated or go again among strangers and perhaps to a hard and tollful circuit.” As the bishop read the list of appointments, the observer noted that “a good many faces changed their expressions.”<sup>93</sup>

The Southwest Kansas Methodist Episcopal Conference illustrated how itinerancy worked in practice. The conference covered approximately 36,000 square miles, and extended from east of Wichita west to the Colorado line and from north of McPherson south to the Oklahoma Territory line. A total of 249 pastors served in the conference at one time or another between 1883 and 1903. Although the maximum time that a pastor was permitted to serve at a particular church was three years, the average time served was only two years. Of the 897 moves these pastors made, 48 percent involved going to a town in which the population was larger than that of the town in which the pastor presently served, 42 percent involved relocating to a smaller town, and 10 percent involved no change in the town size. Fortunately for pastors serving in the smallest towns there was a good chance of moving to a slightly larger one. For example, among pastors in towns with only 100 people, the next church these pastors served was in a town averaging 562 people, and among pastors in towns averaging about 300 people, their next church was in a town averaging almost 700 people. There were fewer chances of moving up among pastors in larger towns because most towns were small. The chances of at least staying in a town of a similar size were improved by the fact that for every pastor, three others retired, died, or left the conference after five years.<sup>94</sup>

#### COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

While differences of doctrine and styles of worship separated Protestant denominations from one another, there were numerous instances of imitation, sharing, and mutual endeavor. A popular way

of promoting church involvement was through revival services held on successive weekday evenings and featuring a guest preacher. Methodists used them to good effect throughout Kansas, drawing on the initiative of circuit preachers and presiding elders, and sometimes working with larger organizations. One such organization was the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness, which began in 1867 in Philadelphia, met in Vineland, New Jersey, a year later, and in 1870, produced a spin-off that established permanent facilities in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. Preachers from Ocean Grove traveled to Kansas that summer, and held meetings in Kansas City, Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Oswego. The ten-day meeting in Oswego was so successful that the Methodist Church there followed it with a series of revivals, at which it was reported that “hundreds were brought to Jesus and the work of holiness.”<sup>95</sup>

But other denominations also held revival meetings of their own, and local churches often joined forces in sponsoring them. Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Mennonites, Quakers, and Presbyterians all held revivals. The years following the grasshopper invasion of 1874, as large-scale immigration to Kansas resumed, seem to have been especially favorable for revivals. Evangelical revivals swept through Friends meetings in eastern Kansas in 1876, causing dissent between those who favored them and those who were opposed.<sup>96</sup> In Republic County, revivals that same year led to new churches being formed among Swedish immigrants, while in McPherson County revivals were being conducted among Russian Mennonite immigrants.<sup>97</sup> Similar meetings were spreading through Cowley County among Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists.<sup>98</sup>

Revivals continued in the 1880s, bringing to the Midwest itinerant preachers with success in organizing large-scale crusades in eastern cities. One of the largest revivals occurred in Kansas City in 1888 under the leadership of evangelist Samuel Porter Jones, a Methodist preacher from Georgia who was later said to have been the inspiration for much of the wit of Will Rogers. The two-week crusade drew nightly audiences of five thousand from eastern Kansas and western Missouri as well as from Kansas City itself, and

was widely supported by churches of several denominations. Taking Jesus's invitation to "Come unto me" as his text, Jones pointedly argued that the call transcended doctrines and creeds. "I'm glad it does not say 'Whosoever believeth in the Methodist creed . . . the Presbyterian creed [or] the Baptist creed.' It is faith which saves souls." At the conclusion of each lengthy service, Jones appealed to the masses to join their respective churches. "I want every man or woman who'll say, 'I'll join the Christian church, or the Baptist church, or the Methodist church, to come forward and give me their hands.' We'll have the Presbyterians first. Now, all who agree to join [come forward]."<sup>99</sup>

In quieter ways, Protestants worked across denominational lines to provide space for new congregations, hold community meetings, and organize special programs. These activities were well illustrated in southeastern Kansas among the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians of Winfield, a town of 472 residents in 1870 that grew to more than 5,000 by 1890. Church buildings were used for public meetings about schools and railroads as well as for Masonic suppers and installation ceremonies. The Presbyterian minister occasionally preached at the Baptist Church, and the Baptist minister returned the favor. Dedication services of new buildings typically included brief addresses by all the community's clergy. Each year the churches cooperated in holding a union service on Thanksgiving. During the Christmas holidays, Presbyterians and Methodists each held festivals to which the entire community was invited. The Presbyterian festival, at least one time, was held at the Methodist Church. That was the year an intoxicated man disrupted the event, causing the women of both churches to increase their participation in the temperance movement.<sup>100</sup> By 1886, the Methodist and Presbyterian women were hosting capacity crowds at lectures of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The Winfield churches had also formed a YMCA, were hosting literary lectures and concerts at the Opera Hall, and were holding joint meetings among Sunday school children.<sup>101</sup>

In other locations, cooperative Sunday school efforts ranged from small congregations holding joint classes or hosting programs

at schools when church buildings were lacking, to enlisting children for larger purposes. The former was evident in Rosedale, a small town in Wyandotte County where nearly three hundred youngsters were involved in the Union Sunday School in 1882, and Lincoln Center, where seventy-five children met every Sunday at the Presbyterian Church for a Union Sabbath School sponsored by the town's Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist churches. Cooperation was often evident in newly settled communities in western Kansas. In Garden City, for example, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and United Brethren initiated a Union Sabbath School that drew children from the entire community, and resulted in the formation of a union church. Larger cooperative programs were illustrated in 1872 when churches in Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Topeka held mass meetings in each town to which Sunday school children were invited, and then deployed to scour the streets for vagrants, gamblers, and hardened individuals who they could invite to church. In Lawrence, nearly two thousand children and adults attended the meetings, and in Topeka, the afternoon sessions at public schools were canceled for four days to allow children to participate.<sup>102</sup>

The formal cooperation and interchange that was so frequently evident among Protestant denominations seldom extended to Catholics. The Kansas State Census of 1875 estimated membership in the Roman Catholic Church at approximately thirty-seven thousand, making it the largest religious body in the state. Catholics outnumbered Methodists by almost fifteen thousand. The difference was partly because Catholic membership included children while Methodist membership did not. That was considerable at a time when approximately 28 percent of the state's population were children age thirteen or younger. And yet, if children were subtracted, Catholics still outnumbered Methodists by more than four thousand members. Insofar as numbers mattered, Catholics were in the best position to counter Methodists' influence and pursue an alternative pattern of church growth.<sup>103</sup>

In several respects Catholics and Methodists were quite similar. Both were organized under the authority of a bishop, who was

responsible for assigning pastors and approving plans for church expansion. Both were engaged in mission work among Indians well before Kansas became a state, and both had been among the first to found colleges in territorial Kansas. Both sought to be the faith of the common people and provide for the spiritual needs of a rapidly expanding settler population. And both employed circuit pastors to start and minister to new congregations as well as carefully plan where to construct buildings. By 1875, there was at least one organized Catholic congregation in 88 percent of the state's counties, and at least one organized Methodist congregation in 83 percent of the counties. The most expensive structures of both denominations were in Leavenworth. For the state as a whole, there also was a significant positive correlation between the value of Catholic and Methodist churches in each county, the number of Catholic and Methodist congregations, and the number of Catholic and Methodist members.<sup>104</sup>

By 1890, Catholics were still the Methodists' closest competitors in terms of size and influence, counting 67,000 members and making up 21 percent of the state's total church membership. Both were highly successful in organizing new congregations and constructing new buildings. But Methodists were more successful. In fifteen years, Catholics founded 165 new congregations, built more than 200 churches, and added 30,000 members. In the same period, Methodists started more than 600 congregations, constructed 638 buildings, and increased their total membership by more than 60,000. Methodists averaged twelve congregations per county, while Catholics averaged only three congregations per county.<sup>105</sup>

The growth patterns of the two denominations reflected different strategies that in turn could be traced to differences in location, resources, and ethnic origin. Methodist clergy were appointed to stations where they served alone or in the company of a spouse; Catholic clergy, in contrast, were more often assigned to locations served by fellow priests or monks. Atchison, where three monks were in residence by 1859, and where the number grew to four priests, a deacon, four clerics, and five monks by 1864, was an early example.<sup>106</sup> Clustering was advantageous not only for the company

it provided celibate clergy but also for dividing labor, maintaining discipline, founding schools, and attracting Catholic settlers. It worked especially well in eastern Kansas, where settlements were closer, counties more populous, and schools and missions better established.

In 1875, the ratio of Catholics to Methodists was highest in Leavenworth, the seat of the bishop and the location of an estimated four thousand Catholic residents, the majority of whom were Irish and German.<sup>107</sup> Catholics were also well represented in Wyandotte, Neosho, and Pottawatomie counties, where missions among Indians had been present since the 1840s. St. Mary's in Pottawatomie County developed a cluster of Catholic organizations that included its Indian mission, the Sacred Heart Convent, and a large church capable of seating a thousand people. Between 1875 and 1890, the Catholic population of Pottawatomie County doubled to more than four thousand and was served by seven parishes. A further advantage of clustering was enabling funds to be raised from donors interested in establishing prominent Catholic institutions, such as in Atchison, where the priory was funded largely by King Ludwig I of Bavaria. For a well-educated priest or monk interested in teaching, or a prior aiming to become an abbot, serving in a well-funded institution was clearly a desirable choice.

Clustering took on added importance as settlements spread west. Besides continuing to create locations in which schools could be established, it became a way to attract and minister to ethnically distinct immigrant populations. Early westward migration followed the Kansas Pacific and Santa Fe rail lines, and resulted in settlements in railroad towns and at forts. In 1890, the ratio of Catholics to Methodists was still highest in Leavenworth County (better than ten to one), but the second-highest ratio (almost ten to one) was in Ellis County in western Kansas, where almost two thousand Catholics lived. Forty-two percent of Ellis County's population in 1870 was foreign born, one of the highest percentages in the state, and it remained one of the highest two decades later with 26 percent foreign born. Nearly all the foreign-born residents were from Russia. The Russian immigration began in 1875, following

the drought of 1874 that reduced Ellis County's population to less than a thousand, and over the next two years brought more than twelve hundred settlers who established five separate farming communities. Nearly all were Volga Germans fleeing the conscription of their sons into the Russian army. By 1890, five Catholic churches and a monastery had been built. St. Fidelis Church in Victoria, begun in 1881, became the location of a later structure, which at the time of its dedication in 1911 was the largest church west of the Mississippi River.<sup>108</sup>

Two other counties with high ratios of Catholics to Methodists were Cloud in north-central Kansas and Barton in west-central Kansas. Cloud's population included more than 1,000 residents born in Canada, the largest of any county in the state. Barton's population was largely native born, but included nearly 2,000 residents of German and Austrian origin. By 1875, the Catholic population of Cloud County was estimated at about 1,000, and that number increased to more than 2,400 by 1890. Barton County's Catholic population grew from 250 in 1875 to more than 1,500 in 1890. Cloud County was the location of the Sisters of St. Joseph motherhouse founded in 1884 in Concordia by four sisters of the French order that made its way to the United States in the 1830s. Within a few years the motherhouse was staffing schools, hospitals, and orphanages in Kansas. In 1887, Concordia became the administrative center of the northwestern Kansas diocese. Barton County's Catholic population was served in Ellinwood by a small network of itinerant priests, who founded churches in Ellinwood, Great Bend, Odin, Claflin, Dubuque, and Olmitz between 1877 and 1882.<sup>109</sup>

The clustering pattern in which the Catholic population developed had two potential implications for the relationships between Catholics and Methodists, or with other Protestants. On the one hand, clustering amounted to geographic segregation, which reduced the likelihood of tensions arising in local communities. The extent of this segregation was evident in the fact that in 1890, 26 of the state's 105 counties did not include a single Catholic church building, and in ten others with a single building the number of Catholics was fewer than one hundred, lowering the chances that

a priest was in residence. Although there were Catholic families in many of these locations, these were counties in which there was little visible presence of the Catholic community, either in the form of a building or in the person of a resident priest. Moreover, nearly all these counties were in the western half of the state. On the other hand, clustering reduced opportunities for positive face-to-face interreligious contact, and raised the likelihood of Protestants and Catholics viewing one another, as it were, from a distance. This was perhaps especially true in western Kansas, where travelers could view Catholic churches from miles away while identifying communities such as Ellis and Ellinwood as Catholic enclaves.<sup>110</sup>

Tensions between Methodists or other Protestants and Catholics seldom flared into the kind of violence that erupted in Axtell in 1889. The traveling Methodist minister in Axtell who preached on “Romanism is not of God” probably would not have been heckled had he not lectured again the next evening on the evils of Catholicism, and the melee may not have led to the militia setting up artillery around the church had the Catholic hecklers not been arrested.<sup>111</sup> But state law since 1876 mandated that anyone who “shall disquiet or disturb any congregation or assembly of people met for religious worship” was guilty of a misdemeanor, and subject to a hundred dollar fine or three months in jail.<sup>112</sup> It was also the case that every Methodist preacher would have been familiar with their denomination’s stance toward basic Catholic teachings and practices. “The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshipping, and adoration, as well of images as of reliques, and also invocation of saints,” the *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* explained, “is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of scripture, but repugnant to the word of God.” *Doctrines and Discipline* further taught that preaching in a “tongue not understood” by the people was “plainly repugnant to the word of God,” and that five of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments were merely the work of a “most corrupt priesthood, whose only aim was to enrich and aggrandize themselves.”<sup>113</sup>

Misgivings between Protestants and Catholics usually surfaced in quieter ways than they did in Axtell. In 1872, Methodist pastor D. P. Mitchell—an organizer of the mass Sunday school rally in Topeka—became concerned that a Catholic legislator was petitioning to give Catholic prisoners at the state penitentiary the right to attend Catholic religious services. The idea, Mitchell wrote to the editor of the *Topeka Commonwealth*, smacked of Brigham Young's religious right to have fifty wives and would surely divide the prison into twenty factions. Catholics "first attacked the common schools in this country," he added, and then "abandoned the schools on the ground they were Godless." In his view, this was simply another instance of "Romanism" pitting itself against an "open Bible and a free education."<sup>114</sup> Whether that was true or not, the issue of schools was indeed a bone of contention among Catholics as well. Writing from Leavenworth in 1871, Father Thomas Butler praised nearly everything about Kansas, but noted an "ignorance of religion" and "carelessness in the great affair of the salvation of the soul," which he attributed to the public schools. "From one end of the year to the other the name of Almighty God is never uttered by the teachers," he wrote. And yet Catholics were required to support "the schools to which they are opposed." He considered this to be a great injustice.<sup>115</sup>

In the years since Lincoln's visit to Atchison, Kansas had entered the union as a free state and a bloody war had cost the lives of thousands of young people. After the war, settlers flocked to Kansas, populating its fledgling towns and creating opportunities for hundreds of new churches to form. Denominational diversity and freedom of religion prevailed. Church leaders and public officials worked to establish a system of government that encouraged public morality as well as upheld law and order. Methodists were clearly in the majority in religion, and Republicans dominated state politics. But if the die that would shape later relations between religion and politics was being cast, it was not by any means fixed. What was to follow would be the work of a generation of institution builders who had strong opinions about what their churches and

government should and should not do. Among the clearest fault lines were the divisions between Methodists and Catholics. Each had leaders who questioned the theology of the other, and who sometimes used their influence in local politics to get their way.

It was not that Catholics and Protestants were unable to get along. Just as they did in Atchison, they mingled at public meetings and did business together. Sometimes they married across religious lines, as Thomas Ewing's parents did. But it did not help that Catholics and Protestants so often hailed from different national backgrounds, spoke different languages, lived in different communities, sent their children to different schools, and buried their dead in different cemeteries. Nor was it the case that misgivings occurred only when such differences were present. In the small German community of Alma, thirty miles west of Topeka, Catholics completed a fine church of native limestone in 1877. A year later the German Lutherans constructed theirs a half block away, facing the structure north despite the fact that south would have been the more logical direction. A legend that persisted more than a century later was that north was selected so the Lutherans could exit the church on Sundays without having to "see the damned Catholics."<sup>116</sup> In other instances, religious differences mapped onto painful memories of troubles in the past. William James Milliken staked a claim in southeastern Kansas near Edna in 1871, and served as a teacher and superintendent at several Methodist schools. Years later he wrote in his autobiography that his grandfather, an Orangeman, had been beaten by a Catholic mob and was unable to do much work afterward. The bitterness in his family remained strong.<sup>117</sup>