

Return → Dorothy Sanghvi

# George W. Gray

by Rev. G.  
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The year from August 1891 to the summer of 1892 was both a great disappointment and a great personal triumph for George Gray. At the beginning of that period he had been a member of the Arkansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for about ten years. He had been received by that conference at its 10th Session in February of 1882 when it met in Waldron, Arkansas.

He began his work there in Arkansas with the Freedman's Aid Society and was associated with the Little Rock University, both of them based in Little Rock, Arkansas. The FAS had been organized as a group to raise funds for the educational advancement of the "colored people" (as they were called then) of the South. A notation in the Minutes of that first meeting for Gray said, "We most cordially welcome Rev. G.W. Gray to our conference, and pledge a hearty cooperation with him in securing students to fill its halls..." Later in the meeting Gray made a plea for ministerial support of the school & said that they endorsed the purchase of a site for the University. The report was signed with Gray as Secretary. On the back cover of the Conference Minutes was a full page ad for the school with Gray's name at the bottom as the President.

Gray's life & career were characterized by a number of unusual features. In the Conference of 1882 the Minutes record that he went from Secretary to Chairman, and then to President in just one day. During his ten year ministry in Arkansas his job description changed frequently. He worked for both the Freedman's Aid Society and the Little Rock University, though it wasn't clear just what being the president involved. In some descriptions it seemed as if the school was for black students at a college level, but in his obituary it said that it was a school for white students. In November 1891 he wrote to a friend in Davenport, Iowa about coming to Missouri because there "are nearly 200,000 colored people in Missouri & there is not a Christian school in the state where they can attend..."

Each year he was listed in the appointment lists of the Conference Minutes, and he was variously mentioned as President of LRU, western agent for FAS, agent for the Society & member of the Ebenezer Quarterly Conference, Assist. Corresponding Secretary for the FA & Southern Education, and member of the Main Street Quarterly Conference, and President of the FAS.

Copies of his letters beginning August 1891 are still available which give us an insight into his personal concerns and anxieties. These letters were made as carbon copies because of "a difficulty in my right hand which makes it almost impossible to write" said Gray in a letter of January 1892. The booklet of letters ends with the following spring. The letters revolve around two important events which were significant to George Gray within the next two years. The first was the quadrennial meeting of the General Conference of the Methodist Church scheduled to meet in Omaha, Nebraska in May of 1892. The second was the Columbian Exposition (originally scheduled for 1892) which actually opened, by President Grover Cleveland, on Monday, May 1, 1893 in Chicago, Illinois.

By November 1891 the letters of Gray show his anxiety about the coming meeting of the General Conference scheduled for the following May in Omaha. Each regional conference (Gray was in the Arkansas Annual Conference) sent representatives who were elected by the "home folks", and it was a great honor to be selected. A November letter contained Gray's feeling that the efforts to elect a man named Curl were lead by a "Brother Cunningham" who opposed Gray.

At the end of January 1892 (27-Feb 1) the 20th Session of the Arkansas Conference met at Little Rock. Gray was listed in attendance, though his address was recorded as Cincinnati, Ohio. He addressed the meeting and spoke on the work of



the Freedman's Aid Society & Southern Education. Later in the meeting an election was held to choose the delegate to the General Conference. Three men were nominated: M.L. Curl, W.C. Evans, and George Gray. On the first ballot the vote was: Curl 14, Gray 10, & Evans 9. The vote on the second ballot was very similar with Curl 17, Gray 10, & Evans 8. Ordinarily, this meant a deadlock unless someone conceded. On the third ballot it was still Curl 17, Gray had increased to 17, with Evans a far third with 3. For some reason, not mentioned, Curl was declared the winner. A vote for the alternate delegate was then taken. In this ballot Evans received 21 votes and was declared the winner.

It must have been a great disappointment for Gray to lose the election for the delegate to the General Conference, especially the way the voting went. In another letter he said that he wouldn't have much chance to win because he had refused to be a politician and campaign for the honor. On two occasions in the month just before the election he wrote rather bitterly about his disappointment that his colleagues did not appreciate his work in the Conference, but preferred a man with much less experience. He was able to take some consolation in an appointment he was not expecting.

In a December 1892 letter he wrote that he was offered the job of Editor of the General Conference daily newspaper called the "Daily Christian Advocate". That meant that he could still attend the General Conference, but was not now obliged to the Arkansas group. There was a bitersweet tone in a rather curious letter he wrote to a minister in Des Moines, Iowa in February after he had been defeated in the election. At one point he wrote, "...I cannot consent to take any steps that would look like striving in the matter (of going to the General Conference) as I should have a feeling that possibly I might be attempting to force Providence in the matter and I am very much afraid of getting out of lines of providential leadings." He finished the letter by saying that "I should certainly fail if I did as I am so much given to feeling that I am a flat failure along all lines of work that I need the constant inward conviction that I am in the lines of providence and doing the work that God intends..."

From these expressions of disappointment he changes his mood to such an extent that he himself becomes a "politician" for Dr. Hartzell, with whom he works, for the election of Hartzell as Bishop at the General Conference. Also, once Gray passes through the ordeal of his own election defeat and his acceptance of the job of editor of the conference newspaper, he begins to actively recruit writers for the paper. He hopes to have it become the best one ever printed. It was to be the size of the Chicago "Inter-Ocean" newspaper and "different from anything attempted heretofore". He said.

A copy of the "Daily Christian Advocate" with George Gray as the Editor contained articles and news about the Methodist Church's work & interest in every field. The subscription rate for the whole conference was \$1.25 for 23 issues. In a note to the subscribers on the front page Gray sympathizes who had difficulty getting their papers on time. He adds that the reason lies with the great size and quantity of the printing job. It had become a 17"x 23" paper by publication time. In fact, he had written before that the paper would be twice the size of the one for the 1888 Conference. "We believe we are correct in stating that the (paper) has the largest mail circulation of any daily paper in the United States..." wrote Gray in the paper. On the first day, May 2nd, reading "Westward Ho" he wrote that this (Omaha) is the furthest west that the Conference has met in one hundred years as a "quadrenial body".



In another article in the paper the plans for the delegates attending the Presbyterian General Assembly in Portland, Oregon was described. The Methodists had hoped that the train schedule would permit the Presbyterians to have a stop-over in Omaha long enough to meet with them. But none of their plans worked, and the meeting was never held. In a telegram sent to the Methodists it said, "The General Assembly of the Presby. Church in session at Portland, Oregon, receives with much pleasure your fraternal greetings, sent through the Honorable Elliot F. Shedherd. See Ephesians 4:4-6". It was signed Rev. William C. Young, Presbytery of Transylvania, Moderator. On the last day of the Conference a "vote of thanks" was extended to the Editor of the paper.

The "home base" for Gray during the Arkansas period was confusing. He regularly attended the annual meetings of the Arkansas Conference, but the minutes list his office as Chicago, although a December letter notes that his office is changed to Cincinnati, Ohio. At the same time his wife, Sarah, lives in Evanston, Illinois. During the seven month period from August 1891 to March 1892 he made business trips to a dozen states---Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, North & South Carolina, Georgia, Missouri, Nebraska. Apparently all his traveling was done by railroad (in the middle of this period he passed his 57th birthday). In a number of areas he could have used the Inter-Urban trains, but he doesn't say so. In an August letter to a Mr. Williams he wrote that they accidentally picked up each others valises at St. Louis. Gray chides Williams on his foolishness in sending Gray's valise on to Chicago "via Sedalia". Gray then wrote that he had engaged a detective to forward the bag to Eureka Springs, Arkansas in "care of Governor Clayton". In another letter (November) he wrote to a friend in Little Rock that he had again forgotten his valise.

In March 1892 Gray wrote to an Isaac Boyes (probably from his wife's family) of Metamora, Illinois about selling some land that Gray owned. This was the town that Gray was appointed "pastor" in 1860 when he was received into the Central Illinois Conference as a new minister. In his letter to Boyes he told of an extended trip through the East that he expected to take shortly. The letter ended with the words, "you want to now plan to be present at the dedication of the World's Fair in the first of October. It will be a great event & you ought not any of you to miss it". Two months earlier he had written to a woman in Oregon about her coming "east for the world's fair".

The World's Fair that Gray referred to was the Columbian Exposition. But it didn't open in October, but the following summer. At a meeting in New York City to decide the site of the fair the delegates from Chicago had apparently presented such an overblown performance that they were called "windy". It gave rise to the title of "windy city" to Chicago. The Fair was nicknamed the "white city", though it represented only one extreme of the economic tetter-totter. The other end was weighted down by the great majority of the working-class of Chicago. They had been trapped by one of the worst depressions of the century. During the latter part of the 19th century large numbers of peoples immigrated from Europe to Chicago seeking better work, and better life for themselves and their families. They became the work force for the heavy industries: steel mills, railroads, stock yards, & slaughter houses. They also became the menial laborers, the wagon drivers, carriers, & lifters---in fact, anything that needed to be pushed, pulled, lifted, cleared, emptied or filled, raised or lowered; the immigrants did it. They also opened the shops, markets, brewries, & bakeries which supplied services or goods. Many of the people coming here possessed skills from the "old country", but here in Chicago they needed work, while those who did work labored under conditions that lead to feelings of discontent and anger.



These feelings of unrest did erupt in Chicago. The Haymarket Square violence had exploded in 1886. In 1894 the Pullman Strike took place with disastrous results for the workers. Many men had been attracted to Chicago by the possibility of work on construction of the Columbian Exposition--- George Gray's "world's fair". When the fair was over all those laborers were suddenly out of work. It was into this kind of economic environment that George Gray became a "city missionary". And it was here that he opened a Settlement House on South Halsted Street in 1894. One source claimed that Gray opened his work in a basement beneath a saloon on the corner of Halsted and Harrison streets, just up the street from Jane Adams' Hull House. Today the Hull House Museum has a building-by-building map of their area of concern, but it stops south of Harrison. Nowhere is there any mention of George Gray's efforts or the Forward Movement in either the Hull House files or the Chicago Circle Campus archives.

On Monday, December 22, 1913 two of the Chicago newspapers---Daily Tribune and the Evening Post--- printed articles about Gray on the occasion of his death the day before. They re-told the story of his founding of the settlement house. They claimed that it began when Gray found "two ragged boys" on Blue Island Street in 1893. Gray housed the boys in the basement of a saloon on Halsted Street. That corner is now the northeast corner of the Chicago Circle Campus, and Blue Island used to run diagonally through the campus itself. Out of that chance encounter came the Forward Movement Association in 1896.

## BIRTH & EARLY YEARS

## EARLY YEARS

George Gray was born on December 6, 1834 near the south central Ohio town of Piqua, about 35 miles northwest of Dayton. His father, Amos Gray was born on June 13, 1789 in New Jersey. His mother, Sophia Christian, was born on June 5, 1792 in North Carolina. She was the daughter of a German Presbyterian minister, but beyond that we have no other information about her. His father, though, at the age of eighteen walked from his home in Newark, New Jersey to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1807.

The Cumberland Gap, at the border of Virginia and Kentucky, was discovered in 1750. Until then most of the colonial settlement was east of the mountains, but the discovery of the Gap opened the middle west to settlers. In 1802 Congress passed the Enabling Act authorizing a National Road going west from Baltimore, although plans for its construction were not ready for another five years. By the time that Amos Gray was ready to head west there were already over 200,000 settlers in Kentucky, and hundreds more were going down the Ohio River. The account of his trip says that Amos had only ten dollars with him. No account of his route still exists, but he probably headed for Pittsburg and then took a raft down the Ohio River. Amos Gray was described as a man of industry and integrity. He married Sophia on March 15, 1811 somewhere in Ohio. By hard work and some good luck he purchased a farm near Piqua, and together he and Sophia raised a family of eleven children, of which George was the youngest.

The US Census of 1850 lists the Gray family with father, mother, and four children. They ranged in age from twenty-two to George who was then sixteen. Three of their children died by the age of sixteen; a girl died at age three, a son at ten, and another son at sixteen.

A curious account of the early life of George is recorded in the United States Biographical Dictionary of 1876. He was 42 years old at the time and a Methodist Minister at the church in Lincoln, Illinois. Lincoln was founded in 1853, and was said to be the only town named "Lincoln" to which Abe Lincoln himself consented to. It was claimed that he helped in its organization and christened the town with the juice of a watermelon. In the account about Gray's childhood the fact that he was



the youngest in the family apparently contributed to his being a very shy boy. When he began school at the age of seven his teacher (described as an "Irish bachelor") ridiculed his shyness so badly that George considered himself a "semi-idiot" until he was thirty-five years old. Though the writer doesn't say what happened to change that idea for George. For, by the time that he was thirty-five he had been the pastor of two churches, the superintendent of Grand Prairie Seminary, and a professor at Quincy College, in Quincy, Illinois. The town of Quincy was a Mississippi River town only sixty miles south from where Gray had been a student at Wesleyan College.

George Gray left home in 1854 at the age of twenty to attend Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. It was just thirty miles west of the Mississippi River in southeastern Iowa. The obituary notice in the Minutes of the Central Illinois Conference for September 1914 says that he also went to Ohio Wesleyan College, but no further information about that has been discovered.

Although there is no information about how Gray got from his home in Piqua, Ohio to the college in Iowa the following is possible. The Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati Railroad was built in 1850. By 1852 both the Michigan Southern and the Michigan Southern routes were completed to Chicago. The Chicago and Burlington branch of the C, B, & Q railroad went to Burlington. In 1851 a wooden plank road was built from Mount Pleasant, Iowa to Burlington. The first rail locomotive crossed the Mississippi River at Rock Island in April 1856 on the Chicago & Rock Island line. Along with that, Nebraska became a territory in 1854. Gray could have taken the train to Cleveland, then west to Chicago and on to Quincy, been ferried across the Mississippi, and taken the stage coach to Mount Pleasant.

In an August 1891 letter he described how he worked his way through college. He writes, "I worked my way through college at a great deal of sacrifice by sweeping rooms, ringing bells, and living on very cheap food; boarding myself part of the time on 25¢ a week; living on boiled potatoes...rice, bread & milk, with the milk made half water..."

He graduated from Wesleyan on June 20, 1858 after delivering the salutatory address to his class. It was just ten years before the little village of Saugatuck, Michigan was to become incorporated. It didn't mean anything to him then, but it would become important to him during the last fourteen years of his life.

After graduation from Iowa Wesleyan there is a two year gap until he was received into the Central Illinois Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1860 with a group of sixteen other candidates. He was assigned as a provisional pastor at Hamilton, Illinois. Hamilton is town near the Mississippi River, directly south of Mount Pleasant, Iowa where he went to school. He stayed there two years. During that time he married Sarah Boyes of Metamora, a town just northeast of Peoria, in 1862. He must have known Sarah while at college because the Northwest Christian Advocate newspaper account of the 50th wedding anniversary mentions a "delightful personal tribute" to Mrs. Gray from a "fellow student with Mrs. Gray in the early days of Iowa Wesleyan..."

During the same year that he was married he was assigned to the pastorate of the Methodist Church in Onarga, Illinois. Onarga was almost as far east in the state as Hamilton was west. The farmers of the neighboring villages of that part of Illinois brought with them the conviction that a reasonable education was essential for their children. So, in early 1863 a group of people under the leadership of neighboring Methodist clergy and laymen met at Onarga to discuss



education. Out of those meeting grew the Grand Prairie Seminary & Commercial College. On July 18, 1863 it was incorporated as an educational institution. It began as an interdenominational boarding school for high school & college students, and had its first classes that October.

#### PASTOR at ONARGA & GRAND PRAIRIE SEMINARY

The school first met in the local Methodist where Gray was pastor. He soon became the school's first principal, and his wife a teacher in Latin & Greek. A student could attend the school at a cost of from \$2.00 to \$12.00 a term. That first year there was only one teacher, but by the following year the student body had increased to 136, the faculty was up to eight, and they now had a new building.

While at Onarga one of the most mysterious items of Gray's life surfaced. The annual Conference of 1865 met at Onarga during September. At the time the Conference was only ten years old. A two line entry in the Minutes stated that Gray was convicted of "unChristian conduct" and reprimanded by the Bishop and suspended for one year. No further reason or details were given, but at the end of the Minutes there was a note saying that the papers relating to the charges against Gray were never delivered to the secretary. There was no other reference to this matter in any other source known to this writer.

Speculation as to the probable cause of the reprimand is difficult at this late date. It was during the height of the Civil War and feelings in Illinois were highly charged on both sides. The Union Club had been formed in the summer of 1862 in Pekin, Illinois to secure allegiance to the unity of the states. Gray later became a member of the Chicago chapter of the Union League Club. During the 1880's he was active in the work for the welfare of the colored people of the South, so that he could have made unseemly remarks about slavery or the war, though the northern stance of the Methodist Church makes that seem unlikely. The article in the US Biographical Dictionary on Gray makes the chances of a moral "slip" just as unbelievable. There it is recorded that "even at the age of forty-one he (Gray) testifies to never having learned the name of a card, used an oath, tasted liquor (except as medicine), tasted tobacco, or smoked a cigar..." So, unless additional information turns up it will remain a mystery.

#### GRAY at QUINCY COLLEGE

## QUINCY

In the western Illinois town of Quincy the Methodists started a school in 1853 which they called the "English & German Seminary", though it was popularly called the "Methodist College". Quincy was settled in 1822 and named after the current President of the United States: John Quincy Adams. It is the seat of Adams County. During the mid-1880's it was for some twenty years the second largest city in Illinois, but it declined in importance with the increase of steamboat travel on the Mississippi River. The school in Quincy is presently called the "Chaddock Boys School", but though the years it has had a number of names, depending on who is financing it. In 1866 Gray came to the school as a professor in Mathematics. On the Mississippi River the town was just 120 miles southeast of Pekin on the Illinois River, where just four years before the Union League Club of America was formed. The club came into being as a result of the unrest & distrust of the Civil War feelings, and was meant to be an organized way of pledging one's allegiance to the Union. Sentiment & support for the movement and the organization spread throughout the country, and in 1880 the Union League Club of Chicago was formed. Later, when he moved to Chicago, Gray would become a member and celebrate his 50th wedding anniversary at the Club.

Unfortunately, there is no information available either about his arrival at the school or his qualifications as a teacher, but this step was to become the second in



a long journey in the interest of education for him. He seemed to instill confidence in himself right from the beginning, for the Minutes of the Illinois Conference for September 1867 record that "we learn that this Institution under the care of Rev. G.W. Gray AM, has opened more favorably than last year..." The record continued by saying that "the Faculty is composed of ten experienced teachers". In his second year Gray became the President of the school. When he first arrived at the school it was apparently in some financial difficulty, for there was a listed debt of about \$26,000 of which the Trustees said they would assume \$10,000 of it. The Minutes of that year continued with the ominous reminder that if the remaining sum of the debt was not raised by January 1, 1868 the school would "pass out of our hands".

The remaining part of the debt was actually not raised, nor did the school pass out of their hands. The next year the Conference met in Quincy and the Minutes still recorded a debt of \$7,000. But it also included these words of praise for Gray's work. "This Institution under the efficient management of President Gary, assisted by a full & competent Board of Instruction, is rapidly rising in importance & usefulness. We trust & believe that its days of darkness are past, and that a bright future is before it..." Gray seemed to have the knack of having the Conference meet in his home town at the crucial moment. The school now had 175 students. The Minutes of 1869, when they met in Lincoln, was equally enthusiastic about his success at the school. It was now recorded that the debt had been so reduced "so as no longer to be a question of special anxiety". More praise was included in several resolutions, and then the report ended with these words about the school..It is the "only one of our institutions that has adopted the system of mixed education, it affords peculiar attraction to those who prefer that the sexes should be educated together".

It is ironic that this school which Gray helped climb out of a serious debt problem, and who worked for "mixed" education in a day when the mixing of the sexes (outside of matrimonial arrangements) was resisted at all cost, would change its position completely. An 1872 report was made saying that the school should be sold to the Illinois Wesleyan University. At the present time it is known as the "Chaddock Boys School" after Charles Chaddock who gave some money in 1880.

#### GRAY AS A PASTOR

In 1872 Gray was appointed as the pastor of the church in Lincoln, Illinois. He remained there for three years. The church, at the time, had a membership of 234.

In the year of the country's Centennial, 1876, he was appointed the pastor of the church in Clinton. That church had a membership of 283 members and a probable value of \$30,000. He stayed there three years, when he was appointed to the church in Mattoon. The town was founded in 1854 and named after the railroad official who built the Big Four Railroad from St Louis to Indianapolis. Gray was at this church only one year 1878-9, but at the same time he was a professor at Illinois Wesleyan University. Mrs. Horace Champion of Mattoon wrote in 1975, at the age of 81, that Gray's ministry was "characterized by the greatest spiritual awakening of the period". The earliest yearbook for the church was prepared by Gray. In it, says Mrs. Champion, was a note that the pastor's salary was \$1,200 and the value of the church was \$10,000. The total membership was 463-- an increase of 130 over the previous year.



For one year Gray was assigned as the pastor of the church at Rushville, Illinois in 1880. Then, without any further comment, the Minutes of the Illinois Annual Conference of 1881 noted, in response to the question "Have any been transferred & to what conference?" Gray had transferred to the Arkansas Conference.

#### GRAY IN ARKANSAS

Once again there is a gap of a year this time before Gray is listed as a member of the Arkansas Conference of the records of 1882. He stayed in Arkansas for the next ten years, in one capacity or another. Apparently he came to work in the Freedman's Aid Society, though no hint of any experience or interest in this field had surfaced in any of the previous records or accounts of his work. The Freedman's Aid Society was the financial arm of the Methodist Church's educational ministry to the colored people of the South. The church had a number of schools for the recently freed slaves, and it was the responsibility of the FAS to raise the money to operate those schools. Perhaps it was George Gray's apparent ability for administration that prompted his change to this work.

At the Tenth Session of the Arkansas Conference in February 1882 the Minutes report that Gray was the Secretary of the Conference's Board of Church Extension, the President of Central University in Little Rock, Secretary of the Committee on Education, and Chairman of the FAS's report. As usual, there is no information as to either how or why he was in all these positions in his first year in the conference, and himself only 48 years of age. His rapid beginning is all the more mysterious in view of his disappointing experience just ten years away.

In the appointment listings for the next nine years Gray is reported as the Western Agent for the Freedman's Aid Society. But in 1888 it lists his port office address as Chicago, though by 1892 his address has changed to Cincinnati, Ohio. Then the following year, after his trip to Ohama as Editor of the General Conference newspaper, he transferred back to the Central Illinois Conference with an address in Galesburg.

#### GRAY IS BACK IN ILLINOIS

In 1893 he was received back into the Central Illinois Conference as the Secretary of the Methodist City Evangelism. At this time his address is listed as Galesburg. But in the following year he is now the Secretary of the "American City Evangelization Society" and his address is Epworth House in Chicago. His titles change from year to year, as they did in Arkansas, but his address remains "Chicago" though his home is still in Evanston, Illinois.



## Gray and Chicago

By far the most exciting event in Chicago in 1893 was the Columbian Exposition. The Minutes of the 21st Session of the Arkansas Annual Conference meeting at Fort Smith the first of February noted that "G.W. Gray was announced as transferred to the Central Illinois Conference". At the 38th Session of the Central Illinois Conference meeting in September of that year Gray is mentioned five times. He is listed in his appointment as "Secretary Methodist City Evangelism Society" and also as a member of the "Committee on Education" for the Conference. The Bishop listed him as the "alternate preacher" for the Missionary Sermon the following year. The only "listed contribution" that Gray made to the meeting had to do with the report of the "committee on Book Accounts" when the Minutes say, "Gray moved to amend section 4 by inserting the word 'among', it was passed".

Throughout the 19th century and the early 20th, there were a number of world's fairs or exhibitions. The early ones were in England, but by the middle of the century they came to America. In 1876 the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia was the occasion for Alexander Graham Bell to display his telephone for the first time to the public. The Columbian Exposition became the occasion for the first public display of the practical use of electricity.

The Exposition's design was directed by the famous Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham. He had been a partner of John Root and together they had formed a very successful impact on the city. During the Panic of 1873, though, Root had to supplement his income by playing the organ at the First Presbyterian Church. Together they designed the gate of the Union Stock Yards and the Armour Mission building-- called by some the largest non-sectarian religious and educational institute (1887). It later became the Illinois Institute of Technology.

The fair was a great success, even though it opened a year late, with an attendance of some 21 million persons. Some artists looked on it as an architectural calamity, and sociologists contrasted the pretty facade with the bleak reality of despair and unemployment in the city nearby. It was into this kind of an environment that Gray began his final stage of achievement.

## GRAY AND THE SETTLEMENT HOUSE

There is no first hand account of how Gray began his work in Chicago, although a letter of his dated December 12, 1911 recorded that the settlement house began on January 8, 1894 and that "in a year and a half we opened our hall for the men who were left over from the world's fair". In the Minutes of the Central Illinois Conference for September 1914 the Obituary for Gray stated that he "rented a hall over a saloon on South Halsted Street where he held evangelistic meetings in the evening, and the floor was filled with men asleep at night... He sheltered 84,000 men & boys that winter, and 1,657 professed conversions. This beginning grew to be the first settlement house on the line between the 18th & 19th wards."

The Chicago Evening Post for Monday, December 22, 1913, in response to Gray's death, wrote that the settlement work was the result of Gray's "passing through the tenement district of Blue Island Avenue". On the same day the Chicago Daily Tribune wrote, under the headline "Dr. George W. Gray, Boy's Friend, Dead", that



the city work began with Gray "finding two ragged boys in Blue Island... (and that) he installed them in a basement room under a saloon at Halsted and Harrison Streets."

If the location of Gray's first settlement house work is correct it was within eyesight of Hull House, begun by Jane Addams. Unfortunately, personal inquiry at the Hull House Museum lists no mention of Gray's work there. In 1894 his address was listed as 49 Pearce Ave (although no modern Chicago map records it) in one account, but as still at 229 1/2 South Halsted in the Chicago Directory. The Pearce address is not listed in the Directory until 1896-7. From then on there seem to be a number of moves. The Obituary states that the encroachment of factories forced the move from Halsted. In 1896 he moved to 219 South Sangamon and remained there about four years.

GRAY AND THE FORWARD MOVEMENT ASSOCIATION

## Forward Movement Park

During February and March 1899 a young man living in Oak Park, Illinois, wrote some letters back home to his mother in Saugatuck, Michigan. His stationary had these words, "Edwin H. House, Real Estate, 708 Steinway Hall...Michigan Summer resort property a specialty". At that time he was a student with an interest in dramatics. In the letters he mentions that he has a part in a play, perhaps a comedy (he calls it a "farce"), which lasts thirty minutes.

The first letter was dated February 8th, and in it he gives his mother a hint of "something likely to happen that will be as good as a Rail Road for Saugatuck". Then he describes his efforts to persuade a "George Gray" and his Forward Movement Association to settle their summer operation near Saugatuck. This group, he writes, is "backed by the best people of Chicago" and then adds, that they are to form a "kind of Chautauqua for the poor class of the city". They have been looking at places along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, but House thinks that arrangements will soon be decided in favor of Saugatuck. He closes the letter with the advice that his mother not say anything about this outside the family.

In a letter to his sister, dated February 13th, he casually mentioned that they have had a "cold spell" but dismisses it as nothing unusual. The Chicago Sun-Times newspaper of January 17, 1977 gave front page coverage to the weather, which on that day was 13° below zero. It was the coldest weather since February 9, 1899 when it was 14° below zero. In this letter House again refers to George Gray. He wrote that he had been present at a meeting of the Forward Movement and heard a number of speakers address the question, "What shall we do with the boys?" At the meeting he was introduced to David C. Cook (later to become famous in Sunday School curriculum circles) by Major W.S. Harbert, a member of the Forward Movement board. Harbert is a lawyer who has been working on the property title situation with House. House wrote of his efforts to get the area "from Thompson's clear through to the lake which would be about 200 acres".

In a March letter (15th) to his mother he wrote of another meeting with Gray and Harbert. Gray had just returned from a trip to Big Rapids, Michigan and stayed in the home of Professor W.N. Ferris (in the conversation with Ferris, Gray learned that the Ferris family were closely related to the House family). House continued by saying that Gray had completed his arrangements to purchase property in Saugatuck, and expects to be ready by June 17-18. He also listed some of the plans for opening day. Professor Ferris is to be there, also Dr. Gunsaulus (Methodist minister from Chicago), Luther Laflin Mills (Chicago lawyer) as speakers. Then House writes about getting a ticket to see the Libby Prison Museum. It was a Confederate military prison in Richmond, Virginia during the Civil War. It was completely dismantled, transported to Chicago, and rebuilt. It was then torn-down and the Coliseum built on the site.



Another source of information about George Gray and the Forward Movement Park was the local Saugatuck newspaper, then called the Lake Shore Commercial (and now titled the Commercial Record). The February 17, 1899 issue of the paper tells of the visit of "agents of the Forward Movement Company to Saugatuck to meet with E.H. House". It concludes by saying that the final decision to settle in Saugatuck was due to the efforts of Edwin House.

Additional articles about Gray appear in the paper during the months of February and March. In June there is extensive coverage of the work being done to get ready for the opening in July. There is a description of a building which was called "Swift Cottage" for the first few years, but which may be what was called "Swift Villa" in later years. It contained both eating and sleeping facilities. It was given by Mrs G.F. Swift (of meat packing fame in Chicago) in memory of her husband. In a letter of April 6, 1912 Gray says that Mrs. Swift is still giving money for improvements.

The formal dedication was planned for the weekend of July 15-16, 1899. Gray wanted the people of Saugatuck/Douglas to participate, and formed a committee to do the planning. On Saturday evening there was to be an "illuminated excursion on the river" with a decorated boat parade, and there was to be "plenty of fireworks". A later account mentioned that the boat parade had been fogged-out. There is the question as to whether or not this plan was an early germ of a idea that later became the late-July-weekend now called "Ventian Festival".

On Sunday the activities began at 5:00 AM with a sunrise concert, with the music appropriately called, "The Birds". At 10 o'clock there was a children's meeting at Swift Cottage, while a Public Meeting was to be held in the "hill-side amphitheater". It was an outdoor, bowl-shaped depression directly to the east of the Vesta Putnam cottages. These cottages were given by J.B. McPatrich, one of the original members of the Board of Trustees of the Forward Movement. They were torn down by 1969 (Hawthorn, Bittersweet, Elms, Cedarcrest, and Pines) to make room for the all-weather cabins (Ponderosa, Elms, Glen, and Cedar) built in 1970. An early camp brochure described the area as "one of the finest natural amphitheatres in the world". An early photograph shows a wooden platform with a piano. It is now completely overgrown with trees.

The morning speakers for that dedication Sunday were a Judge from Chicago and Professor Graham Taylor of Chicago Commons. In the afternoon there were Professor Ferris and Major William S. Harbert (he was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Forward Movement). That evening there was "stereoptican entertainment". The Chicago newspaper the "Inter-Ocean" also carried a review of the weekend's celebration.

The Saugatuck newspaper of August announced that there was to be a "grand rally" at the Park the following week. The speaker for the occasion was to be Luther Laflin Mills, the "eloquent lawyer" from Chicago. There was also to be an address by a specialist in sociological study and several choirs.

In September David C. Cook from Elgin, Illinois was at the Park with a group of 60 Sunday School workers. They may have been the last event of the season. But after digesting all the activities and persons of the summer it would be difficult to have any more distinguished guests for the coming year unless they invited President William McKinley or Queen Victoria.



During February and March of 1900 Gray, Harbert, and a surveyor worked on plans for completing a road from the river road to the lake. A description of their plans appeared in the paper, where it said that the biggest cut in the dunes was to be made just behind the Pokagon Inn. They had expected to start work immediately but heavy snow slowed down the workmen.

The Forward Movement magazine in its early issue of 1900 was to give wide coverage to the Saugatuck/Douglas area and was to have some 25,000 copies.

Not as much newspaper coverage was written about the 1900 summer season, but apparently it was successful for the management. But two articles were written which ought to have left some readers shaking their heads in wonderment or relief.

During July about 50 boys were in Swift Cottage for dinner when an electrical storm blew in off the lake. A bolt of lightning struck the building, with part of it hitting the chimney. One of the camp staff was knocked down by it but not injured.

The second item would probably only be noticed by another camp director. In August the David C. Cook group of Sunday School workers had "100 tents pitched on the beach and in the woods" with 500 people. In this, the second year of operation, and only a dining hall completed one has to wonder just what they did for sanitary facilities. Even today with state and county inspectors regulating the operation the camp is only licensed for 250 capacity. In a newspaper account of March 1901 they said that they hoped to have an even larger Sunday School convention than last year.

Three newspaper accounts in 1901 mentioned additional work on the road into the Park. Six to eight teams of horses worked on getting the road ready, and the final notice said that it was 2,950 feet long. The next year another account noted that a road was to be made in the Park to connect the "present road" from the ferry to the Lake Shore Drive. This road may have been the south end of Vine Street. In 1910 work was being done on Vine and Maple Streets, and also a road just south of "Mrs. Chase's" to Swift Villa.

In another account there was a description of a change in the use of Swift Villa. The building could accomodate 100 people. The new plan would apply only to young women who wished to come to the Park, but who could not pay more than \$2.50 per week room & board. Each woman was to bring a letter of recommendation from the pastor of her church or the principal of her school. This requirement was to be a "guarantee" to her mother that the daughter would be protected.

As hard and as honorably as George Gray worked he was still subjected to criticism, though there are no existing examples of the nature of that harassment. We do have letters in his defense from friends who knew both the operation of the Forward Movement Settlement House in the city and the Park. In May 1905 a letter in the Saugatuck paper by the Rev. Fred Millar said that Gray had worked for "eleven years" without pay to assure the success of the Park, and that many important people supported his work. Two existing letters of October 1911 defended Gray's work. One was addressed to George Lytton (of Chicago's Lytton Department Store) and complained about attacks on the Forward Movement Park. The second was written by H. Augustine Smith (Director of the choir of the First Congregational Church of Chicago) who defended the work that was being done at the Park. A third letter also defended Gray's work, and was written by F.B. Ornbly (Principal of the Perkins Bar Public School of Chicago). It is still a mystery as to just what the commotion was all about.



An article in the Saugatuck newspaper during August 1910 noted that there was "much excitement" at the Park on Wednesday when one of the young ladies failed to appear at dinner. The village authorities were informed, but before a search could be made she was discovered "dancing the two-step at the Big Pavillion".

The first account about electric lights at the Park was made in December 1910; when Gray was in Chicago making arrangements for it. There was not even electric lights in the village yet. Nothing was done about it during the summer of 1911, but in October of that year it was reported that the machinery for an "electric light plant" was at the Park. It was to be a 50 horsepower engine to pump water and generate electricity to power over 500 light bulbs. Gray's plan was to light the road from town to Swift Villa and to light all the buildings. (This seemed to be the first use of the title "Swift Villa", previously the building had been called Swift "Cottage"). In another account the plan was to tear down the "water works house" and build a two-story building in its place.

At about this time two men were employed to care for the Park: Lee Repp and Jim McCarthy. Repp was married and notices about him and his family appear in the Saugatuck paper after he leaves the Park. McCarthy was single and apparently not too successful in working with Repp. One of them sent weekly reports by letter to Gray in Chicago during the winter months. In December 1911 one letter said that the Boiler room was finished and a "house built over it". In another there were complaints that they'd had trouble with the boiler all fall and winter. The complaints continued on into January, and there is reason to believe that their plans to generate their own electricity never did work out. Or if they did, it was never as successful as Gray had hoped. A letter in March of that year from Gray conceded that the village of Saugatuck may provide electricity to the Park, but then he said that they have always been slow to provide them with water or electricity.

A July 1912 notice in the local paper advised people living in Saugatuck to remind their friends of the village ordinance prohibiting the wearing of bathing suits on the streets. Then they warned them that some arrests would be made.

Within a twelve-month period from the fall of 1911 through 1912 there was mention of three groups in the area, but with no details. Two camps were listed: "Camp Bromo Seltzer" was apparently owned by George Cole, and "Camp Kelley" was situated at the mouth of the river. The third was the "Lexington Pleasure Club" of Chicago which has been meeting every summer below Mt. Baldhead for the last 15 years. Nothing else was found about them.

A personal interest story about the camp was noted in August 1911. One of the horses from the Park (used to pull wagons) bit a man on the arm while he was lowering the crossbar at the ferry. The wound became so painful that he had to consult a doctor because his arm began to turn black.

The summer program at the Park included a number of rather important speakers, seminars and courses, and musical concerts. Some were listed as the "Summer School of Science" in its fifth year with Professor Edward G. Howe, who personally led classes in botany, stars, and "normal work". Miss Cora Mel Patton, described as a "distinguished lecturer and reader", led a "Summer School of Expression". She had done this for many years. During July 1912 a notice said that she was writing a play about the early history of Saugatuck with the intention that persons from the Park would act in it.



Letters from the caretakers at the Park (Repp & McCarthy) during the winter of 1912 tell of cold weather and so much snow that cutting on the river and wood in the woods is hampered. For many years ice was cut in the winter and stored in an ice house at the Park for summer use. The letters noted that finances were low. Repp wrote to Gray that he was also low on food. During this time there were a number of letters from Gray to others asking for contributions. In a letter to a friend in West Palm Beach, Florida Gray described his financial difficulties. The electrical plant he bought was to have cost about \$500. but would probably be closer to \$1,500. In reply to Repp's requests for funds Gray said he was having a hard time getting money, and hoped that some of the cut wood could be sold. In another letter he said that March was the worst month financially.

But financial difficulties were not only Gray's problems. There were ordinary annoyances. In May 1911 he wrote to the Graham & Morton Shipping Company to complain about the lack of heat in his cabin on the trip from Chicago to Saugatuck. During the early years of the Park it was customary for "guests" or campers to come to camp by boat. They could board one in downtown Chicago and come directly to the village of Saugatuck. They could also take one to Holland and then take the Interurban train to Saugatuck.

In that same year Gray wrote to George Lytton that he take care about endorsing any "movement". He continued by saying that he (Gray) had made inquiries about a Miss Gaston and her "cigarette movement". It is possible that she had wanted the Forward Movement to support her stand against smoking. In February Gray wrote about a family that he had let live in one of the buildings during the summer, and who then had sued him for an "unkown bill". The next month he wrote to General Young, a member of the Board, because the Women's Club of Young's church had not paid their pledge for over a year. Gray felt that they had been influenced against him by a "woman from Moddy Institute who said that his boys and girls, though growing up good, were not saved". In May 1912 he wrote to a friend about a trial where he had to pay something as a compromise. Then he wrote, "About once a year for the past 18 years I have been sold out by the very people I have tried to help...the next man who comes to have me take care of a team in order to help him through the winter, I will probably tell him to drive on, but the next fellow will have some other scheme that I will not be on to".

## Golden Anniversary

The highlight for George and Sarah Gray for 1912 must have been the celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary held at the Union League Club of Chicago on March 3rd. With them was their daughter, Mrs. Charles Segar, and son, Dr. Edwin Gray. The party was recorded in three Chicago newspapers: the Record Herald, the Evening Post, and the Examiner. There were 150 guests at the Club with a reception at 4:00 PM and a dinner at 6:00. It was a celebration of both the Gray's anniversary and his work. The speakers and their titled speeches sounded impressive on the program though Gray later wrote that there was a great deal of exaggeration. The toastmaster was Dr. Charles Stuart, editor of the Northwestern Christian Advocate (a Methodist periodical). The general theme of the evening centered around the "great social awakening in this country, and the forward movement in the last fifty years" as the Examiner described it.

A probably unintended spot of humor accompanied the announcement of the Record Herald when it stated that Adjutant General Edward Young had planned to speak on "How the Social Awakening Affects Business" but who said, when he rose to speak, that he preferred to honor Dr. Gray. The Director of the Art Institute, W.M.R. French, spoke about "How the Social Awakening Affects Art". Dr. H.M. Skinner of Lincoln-Jefferson University spoke on the "Social Awakening and Education". Two women honored Mrs. Gray. Mrs. O. Denslow read a poem she had composed for the occasion, and Mrs. B.P. Unsolt, a college class-mate recalled their days at school.



In a letter of March 6, 1912 Gray wrote of his observations of the Golden Wedding Anniversary celebration. He wrote, "So many complimentary things were said that I have been a little dizzy ever since and yet I know that more than half of them were not true nor were they intended to be. You know how important it is to put soft soap on the elevator that goes to the cellar in order to make it go, and so I suppose that that was the idea".

The summer of 1913 was an active one at Saugatuck and the Park. Plans were made to build a wooden stairway up to Mt. Baldhead. The Interurban trains brought guests from Holland to the Big Pavillion in Saugatuck where the Tango Contest was the highlight of the season. Trains also took people into Holland to visit the many recreational parks.

At the Forward Movement Park the classes, entertainment, and concerts which guests had grown to expect were again offered. Members of the "Prairie Club" of Chicago stayed at the Park for a few days. They were described as "business men & college professors who take long walks through the country each Saturday while they are home". One family of guests had a campfire for roasting marshmallows on Mt. Baldhead so big that it could be seen from town. And the editor of the local paper climbed the hill to see it. He wrote that the "light of the hundred or more cattail torches stuck in the sand was a sight never to be forgotten..." Today it would give a modern camp director a fit to have campfires so big.

This was also a time of more building; at least in the planning stage. Plans were announced of a concret walk from the ferry to the cottages on the lakeshore, but they were never built. Henry Lytton did give money to improve the walks near Lytton Hall. A chi ding remark in a September issue said that the sand dumped on the Forward Movement dock at the Kalamazoo River was not to be for a warehouse nearby, but was to be for a concret walk near Swift Villa. Work was also begun on the Helen Leet Walk going from the Office building across the ravine to the Vesta Putnam Cottages and then on down near the lake.

Gray and the Head Resident of the settlement house in Chicago, Miss Mary Dix, were at the Park in May, but in an article of July Gray was said to have not felt well for the last few days and stayed in his room most of the time. This was the first account of any weakening of Gray's physical health.

William S. Harbert, a Board member, had a cottage called "Oak Openings" on the west side of the river, "directly north from the end of Butler Street across the river". James Fenimore Cooper wrote a book called "Oak Openings" and ever since then it had been a popular name for things in the area. It was the story of a bee keeper on the American side who lived in the Saugatuck area during the War of 1812. An Oak opening was a natural meadow clearing in the forests of southern Michigan.



# DEATH of GRAY

page 16

On December 11, 1913 the Head Resident of the Forward Movement settlement house in Chicago, Miss Mary Dix wrote that the doctor (Gray) was ill and that he "seemed to have lost courage". The next day a letter from the "Ass't Supt" was sent to the new caretaker, J.W. Schreckengust of Saugatuck, that "Dr. Gray was sick and it will be some time before it will be possible for him to come to the Park".

Gray died on December 21, 1913 "after 16 days illness". He was 79 years old. A funeral service for him was held in the First Methodist Church according to the Minutes of the 59th Annual Session of the Central Illinois Conference which met at Kenwaukee, Illinois on September 16, 1914. The funeral service was conducted by Dr. T.B. Frost with the assistance of Dr. Frank W. Gunsaulus. Some accounts say that Gray was an "Associate Pastor" with Gunsaulus at Central Methodist Church.

It is ironic that a letter was written to Gray in October by a friend of his in Miami, Florida who said, "...I am confident that if Mrs. Gray and yourself would spend the severe part of the winter here it would prolong your life for many years, which I know it has done for me..."

The Executive Committee of the Forward Movement met at the office of Edward G. Pauling (a real estate agent & member of 4th Presbyterian Church) on December 26, 1913. Six men were present. The Minutes of that meeting begin, "Absent, Dr. George Gray..." Then they continue with, "The eloquence of sadness is expressed by the rollcall. At no previous meeting of the Executive Committee, Board of Directors, or Membership of the Forward Movement, during the 17 years since the Forward Movement was started, has the beloved founder and incomparable leader of the Forward Movement been recorded as absent. The General Superintendent has obeyed a final call, forward and upward..." Then followed a summary of the work and devotion of Gray for the past twenty years.

When the annual meeting of the Forward Movement was held at their settlement house location at 1356 West Monroe Street on March 9, 1914 the minutes read as follows. "One thought brought all present into sympathetic relation as all missed the grasp of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still. Lack of the physical presence (of Gray) was felt by each as a personal loss. He was present in the picture on the wall that revealed his kindly face and in the heroic bust upon the mantel".

In the 1912-13 copy of the Evanston residence directory George and Sarah Gray are recorded as living at 1639 Hinman Avenue. In the 1914 copy there is no listing, not even of Mrs. Gray.

*This account of the life of George Gray was written by the Rev. G. William Lankton, the current Director of the Presbyterian Camps of Saugatuck, Michigan, which was begun by Mr. Gray. Mr. Lankton is a staff member of the Presbytery of Chicago (1966-). He is a former pastor of churches in Mountainview, Wyoming & Holly, Michigan.*