

## Many Paths of Faith: An Introduction to Kansas Religious History

by Timothy Miller

Other pioneers have had a great task of making a state out of a wilderness, but Kansas pioneers had another great task, that of making a free state in the face of a most determined opposition. They came to Kansas as the Puritans came to America, in the name of liberty. They were stern, unyielding, purposeful men and women, sure of the presence of divine leadership, and their character has deeply influenced the Kansas people. This influence has made them hate oppression; it has made them demand justice and fair play; it has made them value people for their personal worth; it has made them believe in the equality of human rights, and in the ability of the people to govern themselves. These are the characteristics of every true Kansan and the qualities that make the Kansas spirit.

--Anna E. Arnold, *A History of Kansas* (1915)

Religion has long had a strong presence in Kansas. The earliest inhabitants, American Indians of several tribes, shared with Indians elsewhere in the western hemisphere a religiosity that permeated and dominated their lives so completely that it could not be separated from any other part of their being. The first Europeans to tread Kansas soil, the Spanish explorers, had in their number several priests. As the United States frontier reached the Great Plains missionaries came to serve the soldiers at the scattered forts and to try to convert the Indians. The settlers who swarmed into the territory when Kansas was opened to general nonindian settlement in 1854

established churches as an early order of business. And so things have remained. Kansas continues to have a strong and relatively diverse religious population.

The thousands of years of the American Indian presence in Kansas witnessed the development of a rich and varied group of religious traditions. Here as elsewhere in Native American culture generalizations are hazardous; the various tribes evolved independently over millennia and often had little in common with other tribes and nations scattered around the vast North American continent. It may be safely asserted that most tribes had a pervasive sense of the sacred and had well developed beliefs and rituals that included tales about their origins and history, myths involving divine-human interaction, and rituals connected to the calendar and life cycle. But generalizations must be held to a minimum, for each tribe had lifeways, including religious beliefs and practices, that were uniquely its own.

The Indians of Kansas suffered wrenching dislocation in the first half of the nineteenth century as a result of federal Indian-removal policy. Eastern tribes, especially, were moved to the Trans-Mississippi West; tribes already in the West were often relocated far from their ancestral homes. Of the Native Americans indigenous to Kansas some were moved from the state, while others saw their cultures virtually dissolve and their bodies and spirits decay as a result of the encounter with Euroamerican culture. Some indigenous tribes, such as the eponymous Kanza, have nearly vanished; the tribes now most prominent in the state were forcibly resettled here from homelands farther east.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the main nonindian religious presence in the state was that of missionaries sent to evangelize the Indians or, in a few cases, to serve the

soldiers at the military forts in the region. Indian missions were important to the Catholic Church and to several Protestant denominations; as the following chapters demonstrate, Baptists, Methodists, and other denominations had an early missionary presence in what is now Kansas.

Catholics were always prominent among missionaries in the West, and they were as active on the Kansas frontier as anywhere. Catholics sent missionaries into what is now Kansas as early as 1822 and opened a number of mission outposts during subsequent decades, reaching out to the Kaw, Osage, Kickapoo, and Pottawatomi tribes. Missionary Bishop John Baptist Miege was present to oversee the work by 1851, and by the time Kansas Territory was formally opened to nonindian settlement the Catholic Church was already well established there.

Among Protestants one of the earliest missionary pioneers was the Baptist Isaac McCoy, who with several white and Indian associates made two exploratory trips to the largely uncharted territory in 1828, and the following year received authorization from the Baptist Triennial Convention to establish a permanent Baptist mission there, a project finally realized in 1831 with the opening of the Shawnee Baptist Mission in what is now Johnson County. At just about the same time the Methodists also laid plans to conduct missions among the Kansas (Kaw) and Shawnee tribes, and soon (a year or so ahead of the Baptists) established the Shawnee Methodist Mission. These pioneering efforts live on in a prominent Kansas place name, Shawnee Mission.

When Kansas was opened to nonindian settlement in 1854 the religious complexion of the territory changed rapidly and dramatically. The issue of slavery in the soon-to-be state was to be decided by majority vote, and supporters of both sides of the issue streamed into the territory to claim it for their antithetical causes. The free-state contingent, particularly, had a moral fervor that was inextricably related to its partisans' religious commitments, and thus the

establishment of churches was integral to their settlement of the land. Some denominations were more attached to the anti-slavery cause than others; the Congregationalists, whose roots were solidly in New England, the hotbed of abolitionism, and who had never had much strength in the American South, were the staunchest antislavers of all of the denominations entering the state. The Unitarians and Universalists, liberals with some affinity with the Congregationalists, were similarly opposed to slavery, although perhaps less ardently than their spiritual cousins. Other denominations were less unanimous for the cause, but major anti-slavery activity could be found among the Disciples, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Northern Methodists, Northern Baptists, and several other denominations, including the few Jews in territorial Kansas.

The anti-slavery settlers were rewarded for their efforts when Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state in 1861, on the eve of the Civil War. Although the war was not substantially fought on Kansas soil, it deeply affected every part of the country with its huge drain on human resources, money, and the American psyche. In its wake, however, Kansas was free to seek its destiny, and it soon became known as perhaps the nation's pre-eminent center of social and intellectual experimentation and innovation, a status that it retained until the early twentieth century. Prohibition, the cause that dominated the social-reform agenda of post-Civil War America, had its moral center in Kansas, which was widely admired for having a strong and relatively effective prohibitory law. Several experiments in communal living were inaugurated at various places around the state. Radical Kansas politicians developed national reputations. Populism had no stronger following anywhere than in Kansas, and the People's Party controlled the legislature and the federal congressional delegation briefly. The small city of Girard became the country's leading socialist publishing center. Freethinkers, prominent among them Moses

Harman and Etta Semple, outraged the pious from coast to coast with their antireligious rants. And devout believers as well were among the Kansans nationally prominent for their incisive ideas; for some years the best known religious figure in Kansas was Charles M. Sheldon, a social gospel reformer who gained his greatest renown from his inspirational writings, notably the sentimental devotional novel *In His Steps*, which became one of the best-selling books of all time. At about the same time the Presbyterian Menninger family was establishing a world-renowned mental hospital that has ever since been known for its innovative approaches to the study of the human mind. Kansas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, in short, a radical place, a world away from the mainstream, conservative Kansas of a century later, and much of its reformist gusto had a strong religious component.

Radical Kansas evolved into conservative Kansas in the early to middle twentieth century as the exuberance of the frontier waned and modern transportation and communication homogenized the nation, weakening regional distinctions. The state that once sent William Peffer and "Sockless" Jerry Simpson to Washington now produced as its politicians Dwight Eisenhower and Robert Dole. Such distinctiveness as Kansas religious groups may have once embodied--preeminently, one supposes, widespread dedication to the cause of Prohibition--tailed off as well. The most important new religion of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism, had its beginning in Topeka just as the new century opened, but its spectacular development over the next several decades took place largely elsewhere, and Pentecostal prophet Charles Parham was largely without honor in his own country.

Kansas may have become religiously less remarkable (or less eccentric) as the twentieth century wore on, but the religiosity that always characterized the state remained. The mainline

denominations have remained relatively prosperous, and the evangelical movement that has burgeoned nationally in the second half of the century has earned several chairs at the table of Kansas religions. Perhaps the largest identifiable element of the evangelical surge has been the rise of the Southern Baptists, who at the beginning of the century were virtually nonexistent in Kansas but now have a strong presence, one especially boosted by the migration of many southerners to Wichita to work in the aircraft factories during World War II.

The diversification that has characterized American religion as a whole has also been present in Kansas. Once the strong Protestant majority and Catholic minority dominated religious Kansas, but other religions (spiritual alternatives have actually been here all along, if fairly quietly) have in recent decades become accepted on the scene as well. Smaller Protestant groups once regarded as well outside the mainstream--Mennonites, Quakers, Christian Scientists, and many others--are now well situated in Kansas culture. Eastern Orthodox Christians and Jews have expanded their presence in the state. A Hindu temple now graces the Kansas suburbs of Kansas City. Muslims and Bahais have increased their numbers steadily. Reorganized Latter-day Saints and their spiritual cousins the Mormons occupy respected and growing portions of the religious spectrum. Several Buddhist groups are present, and not only among Asian immigrant populations. Moreover, with the explosion of alternative religions in the 1960s and 1970s, Kansans joined such diverse groups as Eckankar, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Unification Church, and the Divine Light Mission. The religious bodies of Kansas are more diverse than ever before, but they continue to be pillars of the state's culture.

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This book is a survey history of religion in Kansas. Chapters have been devoted to the

major, well-established denominations and to special topics that help flesh out the story. The story begins, chronologically, with the original dwellers in the land, especially the Pawnee, Osage, Kanza, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa and Comanche peoples, all of whom were indigenous to what is now Kansas. The first chapter of this volume does not attempt, in its few pages, to describe all of the religious beliefs and practices of these diverse tribes and nations, but instead takes a sampling approach, looking at certain parts of the religions of selected bands of the Pawnee and Osage. It then examines the religious history of the Kickapoo, another important Kansas tribe but one whose history in the state goes back only to the 1830s, when its members were resettled here by federal fiat as a part of the massive relocation of Eastern native peoples to remote lands generally regarded as agriculturally and commercially worthless. Of special note here is the story of Kenekuk, the "Kickapoo prophet" who was the founder of one of the most important of the new religions that sprang up in various tribes in the nineteenth century as the beleaguered Indians tried to cope with the severe dislocations they were facing as the rapidly expanding Euroamerican presence devastated their culture.

The story of American Indian religions in Kansas does not stop with ancient tribal ways or nineteenth-century prophets. In the twentieth century the most important new current in Indian religion has been the rapid expansion of the Native American Church, a religion that has spread from a small base in the Southwest to virtually every tribe in the United States. Controversial because of its ritual use of peyote, a psychoactive cactus, the Native American Church has become an important rallying point for contemporary Indians intent on preserving their culture and their identity. Kansas, incidentally, played a major role in the spreading of peyote religion because of the location of Haskell Indian Nations University and its predecessor

institutions in Lawrence. Young Indians came from all over the country to study at Haskell, and in many cases after being exposed to the Native American Church joined it and then upon returning to their homelands introduced their various tribes to the new religion.

Catholics were the first nonindians to establish any kind of presence in Kansas, priests being present on the very earliest journeys of exploration. Indeed, the first Catholic martyr in what is now the United States met his fate in Kansas: Juan de Padilla, a Spanish Franciscan priest, was killed by hostile Indians in 1542 after leaving the pioneering exploratory party of Coronado to do missionary work among the Native Americans. The chapter on Catholicism in this book begins with those early missionary efforts, tracks the longer-lasting and more organized missions that were brought to the state in 1827, and then traces the subsequent history of the church as Euroamerican immigration swelled its ranks, soon making it the largest single religious body in Kansas, a status it has enjoyed for many years. The early, decentralized missionary activities of Jesuits and members of other religious communities were consolidated in 1850 with the appointment of John Baptist Miege as Vicar Apostolic, or missionary bishop. His work took a new turn when Kansas was opened to nonindian settlement in 1854 and Catholic settlers settled in scattered fashion that defied easy pastoral care. The most substantial Catholic population in those early years was in the northeast corner of the state, and Catholic institutions followed the flock: Bishop Miege located his cathedral in Leavenworth, and the first Catholic college in Kansas was opened by Benedictines at Atchison in 1859. Gradually new mission stations, and then parishes, spread throughout the state, especially during the boom years of Kansas immigration that followed the Civil War.

Many of the settlers in Kansas during those busy years were recent European immigrants.



Volga Germans, for example, moved to Ellis County in 1876 and established a strong presence in the area that still endures, one marked by the building at Victoria of St. Fidelis Church, such a marvel at the time of its construction that it was soon dubbed the "Cathedral of the Plains." By the late 1870s Kansas had many such strong Catholic communities, along with a good variety of support institutions--parochial schools, religious communities, a hospital, and an orphanage among them. By 1887 the Catholic population was substantial enough to merit the division of the Leavenworth Diocese into three dioceses, the new ones being headquartered at Wichita and Concordia.

Immigration continued to fuel the growth of Kansas Catholicism until some years into the twentieth century. One notable wave of immigration of Croatians led to the development of one of the best-known ethnic Catholic enclaves in Kansas, the Strawberry Hill area of Kansas City, Kansas. Croatian language and culture dominated the area and its St. John the Baptist Church at least until the 1950s, when the suburbanization of the population and then a major freeway project took a major toll on the neighborhood. The 1950s also marked the transition of Catholic diocesan geography into its current format, with the creation of a fourth diocese based in Dodge City and the elevation of Leavenworth to archdiocesan status and the transfer of its headquarters to Kansas City, Kansas.

Protestants lagged only slightly behind the Catholics in taking missions to the unorganized Kansas Territory. Methodists were on the scene with Indian missions by 1831, and their dominant presence has remained ever since; today the United Methodist Church is the largest single Protestant denomination in Kansas, with around a quarter of a million members--about ten percent of the population of the state. Conflict filled the early years of the Methodists,

whose denomination had split into northern and southern halves before the Civil War, but the dominant (northern) Methodist Episcopal Church surged forward after the war, experiencing rapid growth in membership and influence. The total number of Methodists in Kansas was augmented by the migration of former slaves to Kansas and other parts of the West, persons who for the most part became members of separate black Methodist churches, especially the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

There were other ethnic varieties of Methodism as well, notably German, which entered the territory in 1855, and various smaller Methodist denominations, such as the Methodist Protestant Church, many of which eventually merged with the larger denomination. The big merger that put a single Methodist church front and center in Kansas, however, was the national reunion of Northern and Southern Methodist churches in 1939. Yet another consolidation came in 1968, when the Methodists merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form the United Methodist Church.

On the other hand, there were decentralizing tendencies as well, notably the spread of the holiness movement, which started as a revitalization movement that sought to restore the early Methodist concern with "holy" or "perfected" behavior (usually defined in negative terms: no use of cosmetics, no viewing of movies, no use of alcohol or tobacco, and the like) and ended up devolving into a group of separate denominations. Some holiness groups, notably the Church of the Nazarene, have become substantial denominations in their own right over the last century. Nevertheless, the mainline Methodists have maintained a largely unified and prominent presence in Protestant Kansas.

Pentecostalism grew out of the holiness movement in the early years of the twentieth

century, and it has been by far the most significant Kansas contribution to religion, at least in the sense of its impact on the larger religious scene: tens of millions of Americans, and hundreds of millions of believers around the world, now adhere to this innovation that historically may eventually be reckoned the most important development in Western Christianity since the Protestant Reformation. Charles Parham sparked the first Pentecostal revival when the students at his Bethel Bible College in Topeka began speaking in tongues on the last day of 1900, having earlier become convinced that such activity would constitute the tangible, outward proof of their salvation that they had never had before. In their early years the Pentecostal believers were ridiculed as "holy rollers" and worse for their strongly emotional religion and especially for its most renowned characteristic, speaking in tongues, and for their first few years they were the most marginal of religious bodies. The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, however, brought thousands of Christians into the new and expressive version of the faith, and they fanned out worldwide preaching the Pentecostal message. Over several decades the numbers of Pentecostal Kansans increased substantially, and they slowly but surely became respected members of the larger religious community. Today such major national denominations as the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ are well represented in Kansas, along with many smaller Pentecostal (now often called "charismatic") denominations and a large sprinkling of independent churches.

Not far behind the Methodists in establishing missions and then a presence within the nonindian population were the Baptists, whose first missionary scouts arrived in the late 1820s and had mission stations, one of which housed what was reportedly the first printing press in the territory, operating early in the following decade. The Baptists are a diverse lot, with dozens of

separate denominations, several of which are represented in Kansas. The first missionary endeavors and the first churches of Euroamericans were all American Baptist undertakings, but in due course the Southern, National, and other Baptist denominations arrived as well. As early as 1860 there was a state organization of (American) Baptists functioning--the Kansas Baptist Convention. Thereafter came decades of steady growth as settlers poured into the state; the Baptists expanded with the population, doubling their numbers in the 1870s and again in the 1880s, meanwhile building not only churches but also colleges and, a few years later, a retirement home and a theological seminary.

There was a small African American Baptist presence in Kansas as early as 1859, but many years would pass before the black Baptists were present in large numbers. The overall African American population of Kansas has never been large, and religious demographics reflect that fact. A larger challenge to American Baptist domination of the Kansas Baptist scene came around 1910 with the first major inroads of the Southern Baptists along the Kansas-Oklahoma border. Not until the end of World War II, however, was the Southern presence strong enough to support a statewide organization. The Kansas Southern Baptist Fellowship was finally organized late in 1945, and in subsequent years the Southern presence has expanded rapidly, just as it has in much of the rest of the United States outside the old South. Meanwhile, several independent Baptist churches have grown up in the state; in the 1990s probably the most prominent of them has been the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, whose prominence stems from the flamboyant political activism--especially anti-homosexual activism--of its pastor and patriarch, Fred Phelps.

Congregationalists, although never terribly numerous in the Midwest, were among the most prominent denominations during the Kansas Territory's early years due to their stalwart

opposition to slavery. They were leaders among the early settlers of 1854, founding Plymouth Church in Lawrence as soon as they arrived and taking the leadership in the sometimes-bloody war to make sure that Kansas would enter the Union as a free state. Several Congregational missionary preachers also arrived in the 1850s and established additional churches in Manhattan, Topeka, and many other cities and towns, dozens of them in all by the time statehood arrived in 1861 and hundreds by the end of the century. Although some of those pioneer churches do not survive today, the denomination remains well established in the state. Today most are members of the United Church of Christ, a new denomination formed when a majority of the Congregational churches merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the 1950s.

Predominantly liberal in theology and social outlook, Congregationalists have long been in the front ranks of Kansas social reformers. They were prominent in the biggest reform cause of the post-Civil War years, the temperance movement. They provided social services to the poor and were unusually dedicated, in an era of pervasive discrimination, to serving freed slaves and other African Americans, founding black Congregational churches and providing assistance to the destitute refugees from the post-slavery South after the end of Reconstruction in 1877. Congregationalists were also prominent in Kansas as elsewhere in the field of education, founding, most prominently, the institutions that are now Washburn and Wichita State Universities.

Unitarianism arose largely as an offshoot of Congregationalism in New England around the turn of the nineteenth century, and like its parent denomination it arrived in Kansas relatively early. The first Unitarian missionary reached Kansas in 1855, and the first church was founded in Lawrence the following year. The building the Lawrence Unitarians constructed was the first

permanent church structure in the state. Other congregations were subsequently founded, but in Kansas as virtually everywhere else in the country outside New England the numbers of Unitarians remained small.

Presbyterians, like so many other mainline denominations, established their first presence in Kansas with missions to Native Americans in the 1820s, especially among the Osage and the Iowa, Sac and Fox. With the opening of Kansas Territory to nonindian settlement Presbyterians, like other believers, began to stake out spheres of influence. Presbyterianism was hardly unified at the time; a deep liberal-conservative struggle had divided the denomination, and various splinter groups as well as the two large factions known as the Old and New Schools all jockeyed for position on the new missionary frontier. Perhaps the competition was healthy; in any event the Presbyterians soon established themselves as solid contenders for the allegiance of religious Kansans, and especially following the rapprochement of the Old and New Schools in 1870 the Presbyterians experienced steady and substantial growth. From the beginning the Presbyterians were devoted to outreach enterprises, founding important early colleges in Kansas and, later, campus ministry programs for students at the state's secular universities. In more recent years the emphasis on outreach and social service has continued, notably with the creation of the network of Presbyterian Manors, the assisted-living retirement homes that have been opened to Presbyterians and nonpresbyterians alike. Although controversies over a variety of divisive social issues have plagued the denomination for many years--recently, for example, a heated debate over the acceptance of avowed homosexuals into the denomination's ministry--the Presbyterians rank as pillars of the Protestant establishment in Kansas today.

Episcopalians, like the Baptists and Methodists, were present in Kansas before the

territory was opened to nonindian settlement, but their earliest work was in chaplaincy to personnel at the military forts in the territory, not in Indian missions. Once the territory was formally opened the church moved to plant itself in many locations, opening several churches in the 1850s and organizing the Diocese of Kansas in 1859. For decades afterwards the church experienced steady growth, opening not only new parishes but schools, hospitals, and other service institutions around in the state. In the 1970s the threat of serious schism loomed when many members denounced the national church's decision to permit the ordination of women as priests. Both nationally and in Kansas, however, the threat turned out not to be devastating; some Episcopalians did form small splinter groups, and some joined Eastern Orthodox or Catholic churches, where males still held the priesthood exclusively, but among the majority the presence of women in leadership roles came to be generally accepted fairly quickly.

The Lutherans were later on the scene than some of their peers in other major denominations; they did not participate in early Indian missions and arrived to open their first church in 1855, a year after the opening of the territory. Their numbers began to swell in the following decade, largely as a result of immigration of northern Europeans to the Kansas prairies. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod began working among the German-speaking immigrants as early as 1860, and given the large ethnic pool from which it was able to draw, it managed to become the largest Lutheran body in Kansas, a distinction it still holds. Other ethnic Lutherans were not far behind the Germans, however; Swedish immigrants founded their first church and town, Mariadahl, in 1863, and Finns and others were soon here as well, although their numbers were generally small. With the passage of generations the once-intense ethnicity of Kansas (and other American) Lutherans has waned, and as a result several of the formerly

ethnically distinct denominations have merged. After several generations of such mergers the largest Lutheran church in the United States is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; in Kansas it ranks second in population to the Missouri Synod church.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and associated smaller groups growing out of the Campbellite restoration movement of the early nineteenth century represent the first of the major denominations born and bred in the United States. The first Christian Church minister, Pardee Butler, arrived early in the territorial period and began preaching to early settlers. Several local congregations were soon organized, and a statewide Disciples organization was operating by 1858. The second half of the nineteenth century was a time of enormous growth for the Disciples nationwide, and Kansas Disciples participated in that expansion. Growth continued in the twentieth century, a time that saw Disciples become influential in Kansas politics and social activism. Along with most of the other evangelical Protestant denominations the Disciples were major activists in the campaign for national prohibition, and a milestone of sorts was reached in 1930, when Harry H. Woodring was the first Kansas Disciple to be elected governor.

But like all other ecclesiastical organizations, the Disciples have occasionally encountered stumbling blocks. Perhaps the most important of them was the program of internal restructure that came to fruition in the 1960s. The Disciples historically had had a strong tradition of local church autonomy, and the restructuring that involved a certain amount of centralization was deeply divisive. Exercising their autonomy, more than one hundred congregations withdrew from the state organization to keep their full independence intact. The independent churches, as they are still known, have become a major component of the restorationist presence in Kansas. A third major wing of the movement is also well represented



in Kansas, the churches of Christ, which separated from the other Disciples and Christians early in the twentieth century.

In all, despite such occasional setbacks to unity and progress, the various Christian churches have been pillars of Kansas religious society, standing for their distinctively American brand of the faith and supporting education, a variety of charities, and other good works. One might say they epitomize the ethos of Kansas as well as any single major component of society could.

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This volume does not quit with the large Catholic and Protestant denominations that statistically dominate the Kansas religious scene just as they do the national landscape. One family of denominations farther from the center of the American religious mainstream but crucially important to the religious and agricultural history of Kansas is the Anabaptists--the Mennonites and their cousins the Amish, the descendants of the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Anabaptists suffered some of the most severe persecution in Christian history, and as a result have migrated often; many Kansas Mennonites were refugees from Russia, where they had migrated under the protection of Catherine the Great in the 1770s but where their special status had been revoked by a less enlightened czar a century later. A few Anabaptists appeared in Kansas in the late 1860s, but the real wave of immigration came with the arrival of the Russians and some others throughout the 1870s. Perhaps the most famous contribution of the Mennonites to Kansas life is not religious, but agricultural: Kansas tradition has it that in 1874 one or more families of immigrants brought with them Turkey Red wheat, an unusually durable strain that was well suited to surviving cold winters. Turkey Red, further

developed to make it even better suited to Kansas growing conditions, became sensationally popular, displacing other strains of wheat and other grains from cultivation and becoming the state's most important crop for over a century.

Nevertheless, the Mennonites have not always been the most popular of Kansans. Their historic pacifism has been unpopular in wartime, and persecution of Mennonites has often accompanied upsurges in American patriotic fervor. But the nonresistant Mennonites have survived and prospered. Their charitable works have blunted criticism of their disinclination to enter military service, and although the Mennonites remain predominantly agricultural, increasing numbers of them have moved to urban areas where they have made important contributions to education, government, and business.

Other groups have also made their distinctive impacts, although their numbers have not been large. Jews, for example, have never been very numerous in Kansas, but their presence has been long and influential. The first Jewish congregation was established in Leavenworth in 1854, just after Kansas Territory was opened to general settlement. Larger numbers came in the 1880s, when the severe persecutions of Jews in Eastern Europe led to massive Jewish immigration to the United States. Many of the immigrants who ended up in Kansas were settled by their sponsors in a series of agricultural communes, the largest and longest enduring of which was Beersheba, in southwest Kansas. But the communes did not last long, and their residents largely drifted to towns and cities. Today Kansas Judaism remains largely urban, with its largest population located in the Kansas City metropolitan area and smaller communities in the other major cities.

Still other groups and movements have played their parts in the religious history of

Kansas as well, groups such as the various Latter Day Saints, Swedenborgians, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, and a cascade of others. The chapter on alternative religions in this volume surveys several such smaller movements, but inevitably cannot track them all. Kansas has never been overwhelmingly dominated by any one religious group; instead, it has been a locus of real religious pluralism, a place where many distinctive groups engage in the free exercise of religion.

Although this volume is primarily devoted to providing chronicles of the main religious groups that have been active in Kansas, it concludes by examining phenomena pertinent to religion but not contained within denominational histories. One chapter examines the history and impact of the African American churches in Kansas from their beginnings in the post-Civil War era to the present. Religious bodies have long been critically important social institutions for members of this minority group who seek identity and peace of mind in a world not always hospitable to them. But the history of black religion in Kansas is vibrant, from the story of the Exodusters and the founding of Nicodemus and other colonies of refugee ex-slaves down to and beyond the story of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Topeka-based case that changed the direction of race relations in America. There are other highlights as well: the first of many black Jewish movements in the United States was born in downtown Lawrence in the 1890s, and Kansas was and is the home of a number of members of the Moorish Science Temple, one of the early forms of what is often called Black Islam, a tide born of oppression and rising black aspirations that has given birth to several new religious organizations.

Revivals get a chapter here, since they have made a prominent impact on the religiosity of the state but fit neatly into no denominational category. Revivalism is one of America's

historic contributions to religion; this enthusiastic seeking to firm up the faith of believers and to bring new souls into the Christian fold has been a persistent American theme since colonial days, and Kansans have been as fascinated with the genre as anyone. Traveling revivalists provide several fascinating case studies of nineteenth century religion in Kansas, as do such twentieth-century stars as Aimee Semple McPherson, Billy Sunday, and Oral Roberts. The story here is not over; revivals are now a part of the religious landscape, and on any given day one could find some kind of revival in one church or another in Kansas.

A chapter is devoted to social reform, long a passion of religious Kansans. Kansas was founded, in fact, by social reformers whose passion was religiously based, the abolitionists who gave up their comfortable homes in the East to head to the frontier and keep the state safe from the scourge of slavery. Many of them paid for the boldness with their lives, but Kansas did indeed remain free. Once the slavery issue had been decided the focus of Protestant reformers, in particular, turned toward what was called temperance, the campaign to outlaw beverage alcohol. The battle lasted for decades, and the reformers for much of that time prevailed: Kansas was long one of the driest states in the Union, and the efforts of masses of Kansans, including eminent Protestant ministers, helped secure the passage of national prohibition in 1918. Although prohibitionism has largely passed from the scene in the late twentieth century, other social activism is fully alive and well: witness the powerful religiously-based movement to end legal abortion as well as the activism by the controversial Topeka Baptist preacher Fred Phelps and others to eradicate homosexual conduct.

Finally, although this volume is a survey of Kansas religious history, it seems fair to include voices from the other side of the street, voices of antireligion, especially the variety of it

more commonly known as freethought. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Kansas was the capital of American radicalism, and among the many strains of radical thought that were expressed vigorously here were several of antagonism toward organized religion in all its forms. Among the prominent Kansas freethinkers were Moses Harman, the publisher of *Lucifer the Light-Bearer*, a paper widely regarded in its home state as blasphemous (perhaps as much for its forthright advocacy of equal rights for women as for its attacks on organized religion); Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, the atheist in Girard who became a fabulously successful propagandist for iconoclastic causes and publisher of the widely distributed Little Blue Books; Lois Waisbrooker, an associate of Harman's who suffered greatly because of her advocacy of open discussion of sexuality as well as her freethought inclinations; and Etta Semple, the Ottawa osteopathic physician whose devotion to skepticism and socialism won her at least a few friends and certainly not a few enemies. The stories of these and other notable Kansas freethinkers are recounted to round out this volume.

Kansas has an amazingly rich religious history. What is contained within the pages of this volume but scratches the surface of a great trove of testimony to the power of the human religious spirit. The authors and editor of this volume hope that its publication serves as a spur to others to bring into public view much more of the fascinating history of religious Kansas.