The Influence of Turner's Frontier Thesis Upon American Religious Historiography

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THE INFLUENCE OF TURNER'S FRONTIER THESIS UPON
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Frederick Jackson Turner exercised considerable influence among American religious historians during the first four decades of the twentieth century, especially at the University of Chicago's Divinity School. William Warren Sweet, the father of American church history, became the major religious popularizer and adherent of Turner's frontier thesis. Sweet's professional secular training and adaptation of the frontier thesis in historiography allowed him to make church history a respectable academic study among American secular historians. After the Second World War American historiography underwent a shaking of its progressive foundations, and a similar parallel was found in religious historiography. The New Church History advanced considerably beyond Sweet's adaptation of the frontier thesis, especially in the writings of Sidney E. Mead, a Sweet student. By the 1950's consensus assumptions in historiography dominated both religious and secular American historiography. A flourishing of religious history about minority and ethnic groupings was another indicator of historians going beyond the frontier thesis. Such an advancement exemplified the shedding of Turner's Anglo-Saxon bias, and in Sweet's case an Anglo-Saxon-Protestant bias by American religious historians.
PREFACE

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in religion. Mary Howley in her dissertation has noted that writers of American textbooks gave the greatest attention to religion as they wrote during the first half of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, such writers gave the least attention to religion as they wrote during the first half of the twentieth century. Since 1945, however, interest in religion has been demonstrated on the popular level with the neo-evangelical impulse, the Billy Graham crusades, a flourishing of religious magazines, books, films, and television specials.

Moreover, among higher educational institutions a similar interest has occurred. An example is in the field of dissertations. Since 1945 there have been at least nine doctoral dissertations with religion as a theme in the field of education. These dissertations have originated from such institutions as Yale University, Columbia University, The American University, and the University of Pittsburgh. Religious leaders and their institutions have attracted dissertation themes as well. In 1969 Vanderbilt University sponsored a symposium on "The Forging of an


2Ibid., 5.
CORRECTION

PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN
REFILMED
TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO
CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR
American Theological Tradition: The Chicago School" which was attended by religious scholars throughout the nation. This renewed interest in religious schools and institutions can be seen from the fact that two doctoral dissertations have recently been done on the Chicago School. Moreover, four dissertations have been completed on Shailer Mathews, a prominent church historian of the Chicago School, since 1957.3

In accounting for this renewed interest in religion Edwin S. Gaustad has pointed to five factors.4 First, historians have turned to other areas of interest instead of confining themselves to strictly political and economic themes. "Scholars particularly since World War II are less inclined to treat political history as the whole of history or to assume that economic forces are inevitably the prime movers and moulders of men." Subsequently, social, institutional, and intellectual areas of history have flourished as subjects for historians. Secondly, since religion has been faced with a secularized and pluralistic society, Gaustad noted that it has become less defensive. Thirdly, with an increase of American self-examination of its purposes in recent years, the search assumes that the study of religious heritage is relevant. The fourth factor, Gaustad stated, was the reaction to an increasing secularization of society. Religion has had to make adjustments in "creative tension." Finally, perhaps unfortunately, there has

3 The number and list of dissertations are given by Stephen H. Wurster, "The 'Modernism' of Shailer Mathews: A Study in American Religious Progressivism, 1894-1924" (doctoral dissertation, The University of Iowa, 1972), 1, 5-6.

been a search for "propaganda missiles to be launched in an ideological war."

With Gaustad's remarks in mind, attention is turned now to the subject of this thesis, "The Influence of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis Upon American Religious Historiography." This writer hopes that the readers of this thesis will enjoy its presentation and be stimulated in their own interest for a further study in the area.

A number of people have made this thesis possible; without their help and assistance the work could not have been done. Among the scholars and teachers who helped me in my effort were Dr. James Bennett, Dr. Lowell Harrison, and Dr. Carlton Jackson of the History Department, Western Kentucky University. Dr. Donald Tuck of the Religion Department at Western has given me a great deal of aid as a teacher and friend. In addition, the library staff at the University of Chicago gave me quick and helpful assistance while researching the Sweet Papers. Mr. Paul V. Kramer of the History Department at Western deserves credit for first suggesting to me the Black Legend and its consequences upon historiography. In addition the Library Staff at Western should be praised for their contributing efforts. Finally, I must mention the patience and encouragement my wife, Nataomi V. Riley, has shown throughout my work on this thesis.
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CHAPTER I

BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the seventeenth century the Puritan interpretation of history prevailed in colonial America. Professional historians were unknown, and colonial writers such as William Bradford, Edward Johnson, and Cotton Mather held respectable positions in Calvinistic society. They practiced the Protestant Ethic and were preoccupied with contemporary local or colony histories of their immediate times.

This "immediate history" motif was due in large part to their Puritan interpretation of history coupled with Calvinist tenets. Their main object "was to prove that God, in spite of occasional severe chastenings, had a very special interest in New England as a holy experiment in Christian living."¹ This motive or object was illustrated in titles of colonial writings. Nathaniel Morton of Plymouth, for example, labeled his work New Englands Memoriall; or, A Brief Relation of the Most Memorable and Remarkable Passages of the Providenc of God, manifested to the Planters of New England in America; with special References to the first Colony thereof, Called New-Plymouth. Morton's work, published in 1669, was the first history printed by a native New Engander.

The "holy experiment" that Morton suggested was indicated also by

Edward Johnson. Born in England, he arrived in Massachusetts at an early age. In reference to a portion of colonial society he declared, "Know this is the place [New England] where the Lord will create a new Heaven, and a new Earth in new Churches, and a new Common-wealth together." Although Johnson wrote in the mid-seventeenth century, by the end of the century the theme continued in colonial histories.

In 1702 Cotton Mather published his Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England. At the beginning of the work John Higginson asserted that Morton, Johnson, and Mather believed "a plain scriptural duty of recording the works of God unto after-times, . . . ." Mather set out to record God's favor as shown in the affairs of New England and its acceptance by Providence among the Elect. He wrote, "I WRITE THE WONDERS of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION, flying from the depravations of Europe, to the American Strand; and, assisted by the Holy Author of that Religion, I do with all conscience of Truth, required therein by Him, who is the Truth itself, report the wonderful displays of His infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and Faithfulness, wherewith His Divine Providence hath irradiated an Indian Wilderness." Mather's

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6 Ibid., 25.
belief and principles were typical of ecclesiastical histories until the 1800's.

During the first four decades of the 1800's American ecclesiastical historians wrote about their own denominations and used church histories as instruments of denominational policy. There were exceptions, however, such as Andrew Reed and James Matheson's *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation From the Congregational Union of England and Wales* (1835). Their work is considered the earliest survey of American Christianity.

In addition to the early beginnings of general surveys of American religion there was the trend set forth by the introduction of German idealism and rationalism in historiography. German church historians Johann Mosheim and August Neander had revived an interest in church history. Americans who were interested in church history were dependent upon German church historians such as Emile Schurer, Karl Hase, Eric Casper, and Adolph Harnack. Moreover, secular German historians such as Immanuel Kant, Georg W. F. Hegel, Johann G. von Herder, Johann G. Fichte, Arnold H. Ludwig, and Leopold von Ranke emphasized Providence through rationalism. Unlike earlier colonial Puritan ecclesiastical historians

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7 George H. Williams, "Church History," in Arnold S. Nash, ed., *Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1951), 147. William Given Andrews in 1899 found only 12 volumes of ecclesiastical history written during the period 1800 to 1819, 28 for 1820 to 1829, and 54 for 1830 to 1839. See his "A Recent Service of Church History to the Church," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1899* (Washington, 1900), I, 416. Hereafter cited as AHA Annual Report.

8 Peter G. Mode, *Sourcebook and Bibliographical Guide for American Church History* (Menasha, Wisc., 1921), 3.

writers, von Ranke and others viewed Providence in a universal historical sense in which the underlying spirit of reason affected human affairs.  

The adaptation of nationalistic tones appeared in the works of such American secular historians as George Bancroft, Francis Parkman, and Richard Hildreth. The theme of Providence selecting America as the elect among all nations controlled most of their histories.  

Bancroft declared, "It is the object of the present work to explain how the change in the condition of our land has been accomplished; and, as the fortunes of a nation are not under the control of blind destiny, to follow the steps by which a favoring Providence, calling our institutions into being, has conducted the country to its present happiness and glory."  

Like Bancroft, Parkman believed that Providence favored America, especially Protestant America. His reason stemmed from a conviction that "The Germanic race, and especially the Anglo-Saxon branch of it, is peculiarly masculine, and therefore, peculiarly fitted for self-government. It submits its action to the guidance of reason, and has the judicial faculty of seeing both sides of a question." With such traits, Protestant England emerged victorious over Catholic France in the New World.  

Unlike Bancroft and Parkman, Hildreth extended his rationalist outlook to the point of separating ethics from religion. He demonstrated an anti-clerical attitude in his handling of the Great Awakening. In

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 79.
13 Ibid., 99.
his utilitarianism Hildreth declared, "Utility in action, not theological axioms, was the pragmatic test of right motives."14 American religious historians were dependent upon Hildreth and other secular historians for national interpretations of American history.

A popular theme for secular and religious historians alike was the "City on a Hill" concept. America was the land of prosperity, the land of plenty. When European travelers made their journeys across the American soil they noticed desire and hope. Edouard de Montule, for instance, wrote of the hope of prosperity which was "seemingly shared by all American cities, ..."15 Another foreign observer noted a characteristic of the American man:

His only means, like his only thought, is to subdue the material world . . . his means is industry in its various branches, business, speculation, work, action. Everything in American society, from religion . . . to domestic usages . . . is bent in the direction of this one aim.16

If America was not the "City on a Hill," a large number of Europeans did not know it.

The Jacksonian Era reiterated the American Dream of progress, perfectability, and the fulfillment of a new and better life in America. It contained the ideal of progress in terms of democracy, and the powerful conviction that the dream could only come true in America. The dream called for a quest through a pragmatic spirit highlighted by an

14 Ibid., 69, 63.
15 Edouard de Montule, Travels in America, 1816-1817 (Bloomington, 1951; first published 1821), 121.
16 Michel Chevalier, Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (Garden City, New York, 1961; first published 1839), 262.
nonhistorical spirit which characterized religious thought at the time.

The nonhistorical spirit articulated itself elsewhere in the field of academic curriculum of seminaries. The oldest theological seminary had been founded in Andover, Massachusetts, by the Congregationalists in 1807. Little ecclesiastical history, however, was taught. The seminary at Princeton, for example, had its first church history class in 1812. From 1840 to 1880 Princeton added a few additional church history courses. Moreover, at Union Theological Seminary, New York, founded in 1836, a chair in church history was not established until 1850. A major event occurred for American religious historiography in 1844 with the arrival of religious historian and theologian Philip Schaff from Germany.

Plans for his arrival originated the previous year when the American German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania sent two of its clergymen to Berlin in order to find an academic theologian suitable for a professorship at the Reformed Church's seminary at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. Several Berlin professors recommended Schaff for such a position, and he was accepted by the two clergymen. Upon his arrival in America as professor of Church History and Biblical Literature at the Mercersburg seminary, he became involved in controversy with Joseph Berg, president of the Synod of the German Reformed Church in America.

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18 Andover was the oldest in the sense that it maintained the first continuously located faculty.

Berg argued that "Scripture and traditional theology was [sic] sufficient ground for doctrine and church organization; history had nothing valuable to add to transcendental truth." In the following year Berg and other Protestants were disturbed further when they read Schaff's assertion that Protestantism was not only the legitimate child of the Roman Catholic Church, but its greatest manifestation. The concept that Protestants and Catholics held a common historical trunk was viewed by many Protestants with repugnance. This may explain why so many American religious figures rejected church history as a significant object of study in the nineteenth century.

Schaff was almost alone in his position on the value of church history in the 1840's. He followed a pattern that accepted the Puritan Providence scheme modified by rationalism, a scheme that pointed to America as the place and its people the instruments of God's elect for all nations to admire and imitate. His "vision" prophesied that the American church would be the great product of the historical process for all the world. The American melting pot of Christianity's best beliefs and practices would "come together, consolidate, concentrate themselves and out of the phoenix-ashes of all Christian denominations and sects, rise glorified, as the truly universal, evangelical Catholic Bride of the Lord, adorned with the fairest


flowers of the church history of all centuries."

In addition to his view of ecumenism for the "Catholic Bride of the Lord in America," Schaff believed that an all-out battle of Armegeddon, pitting Christianity against the forces of evil, would occur on American soil. For him the American land and people would be "the theatre of the last decisive conflict between faith and infidelity, ... of the greatest collision between the various Christian nations and confessions and also their final reconciliation." By his statements, Schaff popularized church history and the vision of ecumenism.

A recipient of Schaff's contribution of popularizing church history was Robert Baird, a Presbyterian minister and writer. In 1856 he described American religion in terms of an evangelical and non-evangelical dichotomy. The model served as a standard in religious historiography until the 1920's. Baird declared that voluntaryism was the central motif which made American religions great among nations. It was, Baird argued, the principle of separation of church and state, the equality of all religious bodies before the law, that made religious America unique from her European religious friends. Since there was not

22 Philip Schaff, America, A Sketch of the Political, Social, And Religious Character of the United States of North America (New York, 1855), 263.

23 Ibid., 272.


an established church in America such as existed in Europe, membership in American churches depended upon voluntary association. According to Baird, voluntary association accounted for subsequent revivalism and activism of religious bodies. As he directed his book toward Europeans, he reminded Europeans that American religions could be divided into a two-group typology. 26

The dichotomy encompassed the two groupings of evangelical and nonevangelical. For a religious group to be placed in the evangelical classification, assent to the basic doctrines of the Trinity and salvation through Christ alone by faith was necessary. Most Protestant bodies were included. The Roman Catholic Church, however, presented a special category for Baird because of what he called its "distortions" of basic Christian doctrines. 27 Furthermore, he allowed only two pages for it. Among his non-evangelical groupings were Jews, Deists, Universalists, Atheists, Socialists, and Unitarians. Baird's stress upon the uniqueness of American religion prepared the way for acceptance of the frontier thesis among later church historians. His work tried to describe what made America and her religion great.

As the Puritan interpretation of history and the rationalistic theme of American uniqueness of the elect for all nations continued from the earlier years, another notable development transpired in the 1880's. Religious historians of the decade utilized approaches which later would be identified with prominence among Turnerian concepts:

26 Ibid., v.
27 Ibid., 540.
the use of census data, a continuance of the methodology, and an increasing feeling of awareness that the nation was at a unique moment of transition at the end of the nineteenth century.

Methodist Daniel Dorchester utilized census data in 1887 in his book, Christianity in the United States. His title suggested an ecumenical theme as contrasted with earlier denominational histories. He followed the Baird framework but gave a far more generous treatment of the Roman Catholic Church. A consequence of his work was that it stimulated a national consciousness among church historians. His significance was in his transmission of the Providential "City on a Hill" theme as applied to American Christianity and his extensive use and analysis of census statistics. Five years later Frederick Jackson Turner would use similar data in making his famous study about the frontier.

Along with census data historians wrote on the "uniqueness of America" theme in religious history. Samuel D. McConnell, for example, in the 1880's stressed the uniqueness factor in his denominational history:

It has been frequently noticed that the Christianity of America possesses characteristics of its own. It is not only different in many regards from that which subsisted in Europe at the time of settlement of the colonies; but it is different from that which subsists in any other portion of Christendom now. Christianity here wears a garment of American weaving and American adornment.

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28 Daniel Dorchester, Christianity in the United States (New York, 1888).

The statement reflected McConnell's thoughts for a future moment of glory, still in the making. His stated reason for writing a denominational history was that conditions of sectarian and denominational bitterness made it impossible to write a history of a united American religion.

McConnell wrote at a time when American academicians had adapted natural science methodology to the field of history. The "City on a Hill" now had been secularized by the rise of scientific history. Proponents of the scientific school established in 1884 a professional organization, the American Historical Association, in the "time of great awakening." In response to this Schaff and other church historians in March, 1888, organized the American Society of Church History. Although both groups emphasized the use of primary sources guided by textual and literary criticism, discontent with the secular historians' approach of exclusive naturalism initiated the response of Schaff and other church historians. "The main point about Schaff's thinking vis-a-vis the scientific historians was not that he opposed naturalism, but that, in the post-Darwinian era, he continued to speak about God in the natural world at all."  

The scientific methodology attached to Darwinian postulates was applied, however, by church historians. Baird and Dorchester had reached conclusions about American religion from census data; in the 1890's the

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31 Bowden, "Studies in Church Historiography," 58.
technique was applied to the massive data from the 1890 census. The 13 volume *The American Church History Series* had been undertaken from 1891 to 1897. In order to integrate the work of various denominations into a general framework of American culture, Professor Charles J. Little in 1893 supplied further evidence of church historians' use of scientific methodology when he urged that in the religious aspects of history, historians should use the scientific, methodological approach. The object of such writing, he maintained, should be "the discovery and verbal communication of the necessary antecedent phases of existing social phenomena." The statement indicated a distinct move among some religious historians toward social religious history, separate and apart from theological assumptions.

Another factor in the development of the application of scientific methods to religious historiography took place in the early 1890's. After Schaff's death in 1893, the presidency of the American Society of Church History, which Schaff had held from its inception in 1888, passed to John Fletcher Hurst who reacted against scientific history and showed little skill in his use of historical criticism. In 1895, however, his successor, George Park Fisher, displayed a loyalty to scientific methodology. He had been Yale's first professor of Church History and in 1898 was elected president of the American Historical Association. As one student observed, "He represented a

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33 Bowden, "Studies in Church Historiography," 86.
number of faithful churchmen who tried to balance the new sciences with traditional conceptions of revealed religion." The list of "faithful churchmen" included other historians such as Ephraim Emerton, Williston Walker, and John Franklin Jameson. Their influence extended to the point that in 1896 the American Society of Church History was dissolved and church historians worked within the framework of the American Historical Association and its publication, the American Historical Review. This move prepared the way for Turner's frontier thesis to be assimilated by church historians. As the church historians were now part of the Association, they would be more easily influenced by controlling historiographical trends.

Earlier, Bancroft and Parkman had written sparingly about religion in America. Generally, when the subject was mentioned it was to show a belief in Providence and to glorify the Germanic race and the Protestant beliefs. Furthermore, they dealt with a portion of the American period prior to the Revolution. In the latter nineteenth century, John Bach McMaster initiated a new trend in historiography by emphasizing social history of the people but he, too, neglected the theme of religion as a definite chapter in his history. Such neglect helped to bring about the final significant factor concerning pre-Turnerian religious historiography.

It developed in the 1890's and early 1900's when an increasing

34 Ibid., 99.
35 McMaster's connection with William Warren Sweet is covered more in depth in chapter 4.
awareness of a nation at the crossroads meant a unique moment in the minds of church historians. Turner had popularized such a crossroads concept with his famous essay of 1893 at Chicago. The closing of the frontier meant "the closing of a great historic moment." It meant a new direction was in the making for the American people. Turner gave his essay in July, 1893. In September the World's Parliament of Religions met at Chicago in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition. The seventeen-day meeting inspired many to see a vision of ecumenical unity existing among the various religious groups and church historians. The ecumenical spirit impressed Leonard Woolsey Bacon, American church historian, and showed to him "great providential preparations as for some 'divine event' still hidden behind the curtain that is about to rise on the new century."

While Bacon wrote of his anticipation of "a hidden event," church historians who worked within the framework of the American Historical Association concurrently expressed continued dissatisfaction with the trend that neglected religious themes in general history. Turner in his 1893 essay had stated, "The multiplication of rival churches in the little frontier towns had deep and lasting social effects." Moreover, "The religious aspects of the frontier make a

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37 Leonard Woolsey Bacon, History of American Christianity (New York, 1897), 212, 419. See also John Henry Barrows, The World's Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893), 3-17, 185.
chapter in our history which needs study.  

During the 1890's and early 1900's church historians felt that Turner's suggestion had not been implemented in an adequate manner by the Association. Their discontent was articulated in articles by James H. Robinson, George J. Bayles, Shailer Mathews, Simeon E. Baldwin, and John Franklin Jameson.

In 1899 Robinson expressed his conviction that the neglect of the church in historical writing was "the most conspicuous defect in our instruction in general history." He deplored the historians who allowed the principle of separation of church and state to guide them in writing general history which excluded religious themes. Although he made it clear that he did not have in mind a special field of research (it would be up to the University of Chicago Divinity School in the 1920's to initiate that), he urged a "rational reconstruction of our conception of what should be included in a general view of Europe's past."

In common with Robinson, Bayles and Mathews sounded the same type of complaint.

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38 Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 27.


40 Robinson, "Sacred and Profane History," 533.

41 Ibid., 534.
Bayles lamented in 1900 the neglect of proper historical research and suggested that historians had a problem with denominational bias. He declared, "... the historian of the ecclesiastical elements in the history of our people who is able to get away from his denominational self has not yet appeared." In 1904 Shailer Mathews of the University of Chicago advocated a "systematic undertaking" of collecting American church history documents. Such a work, he suggested, could be done by instructors and those students advanced in graduate study.

Mathews' statement was one of the first recorded in a national publication calling for the editing and publishing of primary sources of American church history. Moreover, the phrase, "American church history," manifested nationalistic overtones of the American experience which Turner had earlier used in his essay. During most of the eighteenth century American theological seminaries had offered church history courses in areas prior to the American experience both in chronology and in subject matter. Finally, Mathews' statement was a prelude to what was to come at the University of Chicago during the twenties.

Three years after Mathews' statement in 1907 Simeon Baldwin's presidential address to the American Historical Association indicated the value of religious sources for social history. He reminded the Association that McMaster had suggested a study of standards of public

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morality and the factors that worked to change them. He maintained that the historian's task was not to determine whether religions originated in "mere illusions" (that was the task of the theologian or psychologist), but rather to study religion as a motivating force in history. The historian should not forget, he declared, that religion was the main foundation of public opinion. Baldwin felt that his historical task was to interpret religion, not condemn it; to understand religion, not to preach and revile it. Other historians shared his view.

J. Franklin Jameson echoed Baldwin's pleas but on different grounds. Jameson had completed his doctorate under Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins University in 1882. Prior to his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1908 Jameson attended the University of Chicago where he completed a historiography course. He was pleased and impressed with the modern medievalists' use of religious literature known as the acta sanctorum. This body of material provided a concrete case for religious sources as social data.

The acta sanctorum supplied a wealth of European material from the Middle Ages concerning everyday living, the lower and inarticulate elements of society, disease, medicine, and everyday use of language.

44 Baldwin, "Religion Still the Key to History," 29-43.

45 More recent studies have supported Baldwin's assertion: see President's Research Committee on Social Trends, Recent Social Trends in the United States (2 vols., Westport, Conn., 1933), II, 1017-18, 1032; and Ralph Carey, "Best Selling Religion," 1-15.

46 Charles M. Andrews, "These Forty Years," 342.

Jameson indicated that the study of religious literature could throw valuable light upon other aspects of history. With historians needing social historical data, Jameson encouraged students to study such areas as the Great Awakening, early nineteenth century religious revivals, Mormonism, and the growth of Christian Science. He said that one who would seek to understand the American present and past "would provide himself with data representing all classes, all periods, and all religions, . . . ." Moreover, the searcher would "find in the history of American religion the closest approach to the continuous record he desires." Jameson concluded his argument for religious history by saying:

Not that all or even most Americans have been religious, but there have been religious men and women in every class, every period, every subdivision of America, and multitudes of them have left individual or collective records of their thoughts and ways and feelings. Millions have felt an interest in religion where thousands have felt an interest in literature or philosophy, in music, or art.49

Jameson's comments certainly did not suggest that religious documents were the only sources to use or that religious sources rated a higher priority than data from other areas of social history. He did point out, however, an alternative for historians who chose to escape the "well-worn grooves" of American constitution and political history.

Not only was church historians' discontent articulated in articles by Robinson, Bayles, Mathews, Baldwin, and Jameson, but a further

48 Ibid., 298.
49 Ibid., 299.
indication of discontent by some historians was made known on December 27, 1906. On that date several members of the American Historical Association, under the leadership of Samuel Macauley Jackson, Schaff's former personal secretary and confidant, re-established the American Society of Church History. Motives for the action stemmed in part from the American Historical Association's neglect in publishing religious articles.

In order to substantiate their claim of neglect by the American Historical Association, members of the reorganized American Society of Church History pointed to an act signed by President Grover Cleveland in January, 1889. With his signature Cleveland gave official recognition to the American Historical Association as a national organization. It was declared a corporation with its main office in the District of Columbia and allowed to print its annual report at government expense. Consequently all material for publication passed through the office of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute. At the time, American Society of Church History members complained that Smithsonian Assistant Secretary Cyrus Adler "took pains" to delete

50 Bowden, "Studies in Church Historiography," 240-47.

51 A study by the writer of this thesis of the frequency of publication of articles having a religious theme indicated some validity to their claim. Articles were sparsely scattered vis-a-vis other subject areas. One should remember that the action did not always mean members completely severed their connection with the American Historical Association. Many held memberships in both organizations.

religion from the Association's publications.

In such a mood, church historians were looking for a unifying interpretation of American history which would explain the American experience and would fit the role of religion into American cultural history. The answer for such an interpretation seemingly came in the appearance of Frederick Jackson Turner's writings. Turner's early life in Wisconsin, his education at Johns Hopkins, and his scientific methodology were influential factors which led to the formulation of his thesis of the frontier process.
CHAPTER II

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER AND THE FRONTIER THESIS

In the early twentieth century Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis was used as a unifying interpretation of American history. A foundation for Turner's interpretation began in his early life and his formal education at the University of Wisconsin and at Johns Hopkins University. Moreover, Turner the historian and his thesis provide information for understanding his attachment to the frontier and his subsequent influence on American historiography. Then, too, Turner's early life influenced his significant contributions to American history.

Born on November 14, 1861, at Portage, Wisconsin, Turner was the son of Andrew Jackson Turner and Mary Hanford Turner. His father worked as a newspaper editor in addition to being active in politics. In childhood experiences at Portage, young Frederick still found images of the frontier surrounding him as he grew into adulthood. In later years he reflected upon the reminders of Indian tepees, trading furs, and trinkets on this portion of his life and added:

I rode on the first railroad into the pine forests of northern Wisconsin and fished along rivers and lakes in the virgin pine woods, where French names made real the earlier frontier,
and followed Indian trails . . . Is it strange that I saw the frontier as a real thing and experienced its changes?  

In 1878 he was graduated from Portage High School after receiving honors for a graduation oration, "Power of the Press." For the next two years his father's newspaper office employed him as a typesetter. In 1880 he became convinced of a need for higher education and entered the University of Wisconsin. Here he was introduced to Professor William F. Allen, a leading influence in Turner's historical training.  

Allen's medieval institutions course taught Turner "to recognize the reactions between a people in the gristle, and their environment . . . the interplay of economic, social, and geographic factors in the politics, institutions, ideals and life of a nation and its relations with its neighbors." During this time in his studies, Turner was given an opportunity in research that affected his later emphasis upon the frontier. 

The opportunity came in the form of a request by Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins University to Allen. Adams asked him for information concerning early land holdings in Wisconsin which might be incorporated into Adams' study of the origins of New England towns. Allen replied to Adams that a student of his (Turner) was investigating


3 Frederick Jackson Turner to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., April 18, 1922, in Jacobs, Historical World, 155. See also Turner to Skinner, March 15, 1922, ibid., 60; Billington, Turner, 27.
land tenure among the original French settlers of Portage where an old French land claim filed by Augustin Grignon existed. In his research, Turner found material which later became a basis for his Master's thesis. Furthermore, through the project Turner deepened his love for history, acquired additional skills in historiography, and ripened his desire to teach history.

However, when he received his bachelor's degree in 1884 at the University of Wisconsin teaching positions in history were unavailable, and Turner became a journalist. In the turn of events in the spring of 1885 Turner the journalist became Turner the historian. His friend and former professor, Allen, was granted by the University a leave of absence to study in Europe. Turner was offered the substitute post of teaching Allen's courses for the spring term of 1885. He gladly accepted.

When Allen returned to teach in the fall of 1885 Turner hoped that he could remain in the history department. Unfortunately, the department had no need for additional staff. Instead, Turner had to settle for an assistantship with Professor David B. Frankenburger in rhetoric and oratory. When the fall term actually started, however, the situation changed.

Allen's student class enrollment increased to the point that almost half of his students were forced to sit on the floor of the lecture hall. Because of Allen's and students' complaints, the Board of Regents decided to divide Allen's dynastic history courses into two

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4 Billington, Turner, 29-30.
sections. The Board's decision provided Allen the opportunity to offer Turner the role of teaching Allen's American history courses.5

During the year Turner taught both history and oratory. He immersed himself in the former; he grew cold toward the latter. In 1886 the University embarked upon its first Master of Arts program in history under the leadership of Allen. Turner decided to enter the program and received his degree in 1888. After considerable discussion, the University's president, Thomas C. Chamberlin, granted Turner a year's leave of absence to do doctoral study at Johns Hopkins University.6

Turner arrived in Baltimore in September, 1888. At Johns Hopkins his studies included work in church history, international law, history of politics, principles of economics, and economic thought. His teachers who influenced him greatly included Albion W. Small,7 Richard T. Ely, Woodrow Wilson, and Herbert Baxter Adams.8

When Turner returned to Madison in June, 1889, he was appointed assistant professor of history with the understanding that in a few years he would be elevated to a professorship in charge of the work in American history. In the following year, with Herbert Baxter Adams

5Ibid., 37.

6Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner, 57.

7Small criticized historians who narrated political events but neglected social forces. He stressed interrelationships in the whole area of the social sciences. See Wilbur R. Jacobs, ed., Frederick Jackson Turner's Legacy (San Marino, Calif., 1965), 17.

as his director, Turner offered an expansion of his Master's thesis as a doctoral dissertation at Johns Hopkins. The dissertation was entitled "The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin." It was accepted and Turner became professor of American history at the University of Wisconsin in 1892.

Four years later Turner, in addition to his duties at Madison, accepted a position on the executive council of the American Historical Association. It demonstrated his "arrival" upon the national level as an historian. Moreover, it brought him into contact with leading members of the American Historical Association's "inner circle" of historians which included J. Franklin Jameson, William P. Trent, James Bain, Jr., and Talcott Williams. Catapulted to fame and prestige among his peers in the late 1890's, he served as president of the American Historical Association during the years 1909-10, and as a member of the board of editors of the American Historical Review from 1910 to 1915.

Along with his connection in the Association's "inner circle," Turner's general reputation brought continuous offers from universities to teach. Such institutions as Princeton University, University of Chicago, Stanford University, Western Reserve University, and the University of California tried to lure him away from Madison without success. Finally, in 1910, he accepted a professorship at Harvard University. Rather than enthusiasm for Harvard, Turner based his

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9 James D. Bennett, "Frederick Jackson Turner; American Historian," 58-9. This manuscript in possession of its author, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, is to appear as a book.
decision on the belief that "the regents of the University of Wisconsin would halt their attacks on pure research if they lost one of their most eminent faculty members."  

He retired from Harvard in 1924 and died on March 14, 1932, while working as Senior Associate at the Henry C. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.

In his lifetime the frontier thesis became the most famous statement in American historiography. Moreover, as late as 1969 a writer could report that Turner's sectional theory still shaped most history courses in the coming of the Civil War.  

Few historians enjoyed such a scholarly reputation as Turner. Turner enjoyed a scholarly reputation rarely attained by other historians.

While German academicians such as von Ranke influenced American historians in the nineteenth century, the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 was a monumental mark in scientific history. Henry Adams wrote in the 1890's that it was only after

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12 Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner, 282-287, 444-453. For further reading of Turner's esteem among historians in the late 1940's and early 1950's see John Walton Caughey, "Historians' Choice: Results of a Poll on Recently Published American History and Biography," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (Sept. 1952), 298-99. Hereafter cited as MVHR.

13 For the purposes of this thesis, its writer has decided not to deal extensively with the von Rankean type of historiography, despite its importance.
American historians had read Darwin's work that they began to feel that a "science of history" would arise with the comparable goals and methods of the natural scientist. 14 By 1889 a famous historian stated that "even as the chemist and physicist, we [historians] talk of practice in the laboratory." 15

Turner adapted the methodology of the natural sciences because it met the need for explaining "a connected and unified account of the progress of civilization across the continent." 16 Turner declared that history, both objective and subjective, was ever becoming, never completed. He felt that within the unfolding of the centuries one found more and more the meaning of past time. Thus, within history itself there was a unity and a continuity. 17 For the sake of discovering this unity and continuity in history, Turner became a strong adherent of the comparative method.

Such a method had been a favorite device of Cuvier in zoology, Lyell in geology, and Muller in philology. Turner had learned the device from his earlier course of medieval institutions with Allen. It allowed Turner to concern himself with reactions of people and their environment, stressing the "interplay of economic, social, and

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17 Turner, Early Writings, 52, 55-6, 57.
geographic factors in the politics, institutions, ideals and life of a nation and its neighbors."¹⁸ For this reason he seemed unique to many of his students and his peers.

They observed his use of statistics and maps in comparing various aspects of American culture. One student later recalled that in leaving Turner's classes, a pupil felt overwhelmed by Turner's use of countless maps, plotting of votes by counties, and geological maps with racial maps, and cultural maps. He also noted, "Turner gave the United States census maps a new place in the historian's equipment."¹⁹

The comparative method further enabled Turner to be a multiple causationist. "No single factor," he wrote, "is determinative."²⁰ Geographical factors such as climate, soils, and economic interests should be balanced, according to Turner, by inherited ideals, spiritual factors, and personality factors. His remarks to a former student are illuminating and precise on this point:

When I came back to Wisconsin I started a formal seminary in the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and began to study by periods, the social foundations of American history. The Frontier and the Section were aspects of these interests. I recognized them as parts of Am. history--only parts, but very important ones. However, I have not conceived of myself as the student of a region, or of any particularly

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²⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, The Significance of Sections in American History (New York, 1932), 337.
exclusive "key" to American history. I have tried to make some changes in the perspective, and as a pioneer, with others, I have found it necessary to talk a good deal upon these aspects. But it is in American processes I have been interested.  

Also, Turner strongly believed in interdisciplinary methods and approaches. "No satisfactory understanding of the evolution of this people," he declared, "is possible without calling into cooperation many sciences and methods hitherto but little used by the American historian." For Turner the practice of drawing data from all fields—literature, art, biology, psychology, sociology, politics, economics, and physiography—was absolutely essential. He stated his reasons for this emphasis in a presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1908.

Turner felt, first of all, that social forces were continually changing and adjusting the conditions of a nation in its environment. Because of the passing of the frontier and the new conditions of an industrial order Turner felt that his observations could give "assistance to our study of the past." Each historian possessed bias from the spirit of his own times, but he also brought new approaches and new understanding. The historian could learn a lesson from the scientist.

The scientist had found new areas of investigation, new hypotheses, and visions through his interdisciplinary efforts. The geologist,

21 Turner to Skinner, March 15, 1922, in Jacobs, Historical World, 60.
22 Turner, Significance of Sections, 20.
for example, had learned that "a geological area is too complex a thing to be reduced to a single explanation. . . . [Therefore he] abandoned the single hypothesis for the multiple hypothesis. . . . [He created] a whole family of possible explanations of a given problem and thus . . . [avoided] the warping influence of partiality of a simple theory."24 The "simple theory" Turner had in mind was particularism.

Particularism was the attempt, asserted Turner, by an economist, political scientist, psychologist, sociologist, geographer, student of art and literature, or a student of religion to project his own field as the only significant one. Turner warned historians of this danger:

[He] is exposed to the danger of dealing with the complex and interacting social forces of a period or of a country, from some single point of view to which his special training or interest inclines him. . . . He must see in American society with its vast spaces, . . . its institutions, culture, ideals, social psychology, and even its religions, forming and changing almost under his eyes, one of the richest fields ever offered for the preliminary recognition and study of the forces that operate and interplay in the making of society.25

The warning Turner spoke of demonstrated his own value of the comparative method.

Turner applied his methodology to his frontier thesis. His frontier themes of free land and democracy, the American experience, successive frontiers, and primitivism remain today in seminars, research, and textbooks. In religious historiography the themes were successfully incorporated by Peter G. Mode and William Warren Sweet at the Divinity School, University of Chicago. Turner had announced his frontier thesis

24 Ibid., 231.
25 Ibid., 232-33.
at a special meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago
in July, 1893.  

Earlier Turner had prepared a paper, "Problems in American
History," which so impressed Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins
that Adams asked him to prepare another "such paper" for the special
Chicago meeting being held in connection with the World's Columbian
Exposition. The Wisconsin professor before its delivery had pre-
viewed the essay to his close friend Woodrow Wilson, who showed sym-
pathy toward Turner's position that historians had paid too much atten-
tion to New England and too little to the significance of the fron-
tier. "The true point of view," Turner stated, "in the history of
this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West."  

When Turner penned these words he reacted against two prominent
historical schools. The first school propagated the "germ theory," as
manifested by Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins, which maintained
that American institutions had risen out of institutions in the ancient

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26 Turner's essay was entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."


City, N.Y., 1927-39), II, 125. Because of Turner's close association
with Wilson, some had thought Wilson was the originator of the thesis
ideas. Wilson wrote Professor William E. Dodd, "All I ever wrote on
the subject came from him. No, it was in no sense a discovery of mine,"
ibid., [no date]. See also H. Hale Bellot, American History and American
Historians (Norman, Okla., 1952), 20.

Teutonic forests of Germany. The theory had been popular with German historians such as von Ranke. Turner felt that the early history of America was the study of European germs developing in an American environment, that "too exclusive attention has been paid by institutional students to the Germanic origins, too little to the American factors."30

The second school, headed by C. Rhodes and Hermann Von Holst, was preoccupied with the North-South slavery controversy. Turner answered them by saying, "Even the slavery struggle ... occupies its important place in American history because of its relation to westward expansion."31 In later reflection upon the motives of his essay, Turner wrote:

The Frontier paper was a programme, and in some degree a protest against eastern neglect, and at the same time, of institutional study of the West, and against western antiquarian spirit in dealing with their own history.32

In defense of his thesis against both schools of thought, Turner maintained that it was the process of democratization in westward expansion that made America unique.33 Furthermore, the hither edge of free land was a peculiar mark of American institutions in their frontier setting when contrasted with the European frontier.34

30 Ibid., 5.
31 Ibid., 4.
34 Turner, Early Writings, 279.
stressed the adaptation of the early settlers as they moved in successive stages further away from European influence. As the pioneers were "compelled to adapt themselves to the changes" the "frontier modified older forms and infused into them the spirit of democracy."\[^{35}\]

In the essay Turner explained the successive stages of the frontier advance, reminding his peers of the "return to primitive conditions" and a "perennial rebirth" of American social development. He spoke of "Americanization" and a "new product that is American."\[^{36}\]

The first frontier had been the Atlantic coast, the frontier of Europe. Then followed the tidewater region and "the fall line." Subsequently the frontier became the Piedmont region of the Carolinas and the western portion of Virginia, followed by a crossing into Kentucky through the Alleghenies. The Great Lakes and the Mississippi River regions were the next frontiers, and by the middle of the 1800's the distinctive frontier of the period was California and then the Great Plains.\[^{37}\] Turner explained that each successive frontier was characterized by different occupations: the Indian trader's frontier, the rancher's frontier, the miner's frontier, and the farmer's frontier.\[^{38}\]

Turner also believed that the environment played a primary role along each of the frontiers. His geographic determinism was evidenced by statements that the natural environment "forced" a change in all

\[^{35}\] Ibid., 73.

\[^{36}\] Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 4-5.

\[^{37}\] Ibid., 6-8.

\[^{38}\] Ibid., 8-15.
aspects of the American people. Such a change consisted of "simplicity of primitive conditions," "social evolution," "evolution of each [frontier] into a higher stage," "rugged qualities of the frontiersman," and "a new order of Americanism."\(^{39}\) A part of the new order was American democracy.

Turner believed democracy to be the most important effect of the frontier. The promotion of democracy in America and in Europe was the "democracy born of free land."\(^{40}\) Perhaps Turner's most famous statement about democracy was supplied by him in another work:

American democracy was born of no theorist's dreams; it was not carried in the Sarah Constant to Virginia, nor in the Mayflower to Plymouth. It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier. Not the constitution, but free land and an abundance of natural resources open to a fit people, made the democratic society in America for three centuries while it occupied its empire.\(^{41}\)

Turner's essay elicited little immediate response. Only one local newspaper mentioned the essay, and even Turner's parents, who were at the exposition, failed to attend the session in which Turner read the paper.\(^{42}\) One reason for this general lack of attention may have been the fact that frontier themes were not new to the nation.

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\(^{39}\) *Ibid.*, 8-10, 12, 14. See also Persons, *American Minds*, 319-324, for comments on Turner's geographic determinism.


Two major historians, George Bancroft and Francis Parkman, had popularized the glamour of the frontier. Bancroft noted the differences between the American people in their isolation surrounded by the New World's wilderness and their European friends in the Old World. Parkman pointed toward the transforming effects of the frontier upon Americans, but emphasized that the origins of democracy came from the forests in Germany. 43

Another reason for a lack of immediate response was the time factor. The essay would have to be printed and read by scholars and historians. Then a process of popularization would be needed in order to reach the masses. Within a few years, however, the thesis won acceptance and enjoyed widespread popularity and respectability.

The Turner thesis won its acceptance and popularity through historians who applied it in their discipline, and through reprints of the 1893 essay and the appearance of other Turner essays. A section, for instance, entitled "Frontier" appeared in the new edition of Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia. An 1896 issue of Atlantic Monthly published Turner's "The Problem of the West" which enjoyed wide popularity. The article was reprinted in Public Opinion and won praise from the Chicago Tribune and the Boston Herald. 44 Furthermore, the thesis seemed to give insights and answers to the problems of transition that the nation endured in the 1890's.

Turner in 1920 wrote of the transition and observed:

43 Wish, American Historian, 82-3, 99, 106, 139.
44 Bennett, "Frederick Jackson Turner," 56, 57, 59.
The dramatic outcome of the Chicago Convention of 1896 marked the rise into power of the representatives of Populistic change. Two years later came the battle of Manila, which broke down the old isolation of the nation and started it on a path the goal of which no man can foretell. . . . 45

The spirit of nationalism was embodied in the nation at a time when its people read and heard about riots and violence during labor strikes. The Panic of 1893 manifested economic problems. Its people responded to an "awakening [of] a real national self-consciousness and patriotism" that Turner had written about earlier. 46

Other factors explaining the acceptance of the frontier thesis were an increased interest in history during the 1890's and the migration of Turner's students to different geographic areas. 47 History enjoyed widespread popularity at the grass-roots level during the period. State historical societies, museums, libraries, and an increasing interest in genealogy received popular support by the American people. All were signs indicating a conditioned intellectual climate conducive to Turnerian themes. Moreover, Turner's students exercised an important role. They often went toward the West in order to teach. "Joseph Schafer was at Oregon, Edmond Meany at Oklahoma, Clark at Texas, Hibbard at Ames, Libby at North Dakota, Becker at Kansas." 48 Turner's influence as a teacher upon his students can hardly be over-emphasized.

With the basic theme of democratization growing out of free land,

Turner pointed his students to areas of immigration, internal improvements, railroad building, rent laws, interstate migration in the West, sectional studies, population distribution, census maps, location of cities, and effects of Indians on American political institutions as areas for study. 49 Students Orin G. Libby, Carl Becker, Benjamin Hibbard, Wendell H. Stephenson, Constance L. Skinner, Thomas P. Abernathy, Avery Craven, Frederick Merk, and Merle Curti were stimulated by Turner in their graduate study to endeavor in such fields as the Revolution, early national period, land policy, Southern history, Western history, and American intellectual history. 50 From the 1890's through the 1920's Turner's students spread throughout the nation, going to places where they often were the first trained historians in the locale. 51

With the acceptance of Turner's thesis and its subsequent dominance, Turner made some significant contributions to American historiography. One was a methodology inductive in nature, adapted from the natural sciences. Another was a frontier thesis which pointed to the frontier as a central theme in the American experience. 52 His thesis called for the revision and reappraisal of American history, a process which

49 Howard Lamar, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in Cunliffe and Winks, eds., Pastmasters, 94.
50 Ibid.
52 Dixon Ryan Fox, ed., Sources of Culture in the Middle West (New York, 1934), 4.
is still sustained. Then, too, he made the study of American history respectable and popular. Writers and lecturers of the 1910-1930 period often elevated the frontier concept as the central theme of American history. Even textbook writers had a respectable theme which could "enliven their writing with exciting stories of life on the frontier." 

Turner made another major contribution to history through his progressive historiography. He was interested not so much in the similarities of institutions as in their differences. Progressive historians viewed past American society in terms of abrupt changes and sharp differences, revolution, class or sectional conflicts, clashing ideologies, and discontinuity. The crises in American history brought forth lasting, significant social progress. "Change takes place through struggle, and progress occurs when the more popular and democratic forces overcome the resistance to change offered by vested interests." As a progressive, Turner held to an underlying assumption that evolutionary social progress was continually undergirding

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54 Bennett, "Turner," 151.


56 For a description of progressive methodology see John Higham, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus,'" Commentary, 27 (Feb. 1959), 93-4; Allen F. Davis and Harold D. Woodman, eds., Conflict or Consensus in American History (Boston, 1966), 1-2.

American society, and only in struggle and conflict could any real social progress be achieved. Turner made use of the method which allowed him to speak and stress the uniqueness of the American experience. The method allowed him to speak to his own times, to combine a descriptive and prescriptive interpretation concerning the national experience of the frontier, urbanism, and industrialism.
CHAPTER III

TURNER'S INFLUENCE UPON THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Turner's ideas spread throughout American secular historiography. The impact was felt also in religious historiography. A direct influence first occurred during the second decade of the twentieth century in the form of "the Chicago School." The phrase, "Chicago School," referred to three things. First, it meant an institution, the University of Chicago. Secondly, it meant a particular school of thinking. The University of Chicago placed emphasis upon the scientific methodology of empiricism and fact-gathering synthesized with interpretation. Thirdly, it meant, for the purposes of American religious historiography, the adaptation and popularization of Turner's methodology and frontier thesis as applied to the field of American Church History. It is these three elements that this chapter is concerned with in order to understand the influence of Turner's ideas upon religious history.

The original "University of Chicago" had been a small Baptist college founded in 1855. Due to a lack of finance the college ceased operations in 1886 because of a life insurance company's actions to which the school was indebted. Prominent Baptist theologians in the

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1 George Hodges, "The University of Chicago," The Outlook, LXXX (May 6, 1905), 87.
Chicago area, dismayed at the closing of the college, sought additional funds to re-establish the school. Their number included a young professor of Hebrew, William Rainey Harper, who had achieved scholarly prestige at the Morgan Park Seminary located in the Chicago suburbs. While at Morgan Park he developed also a close association with John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller, himself a Baptist, took an active interest in the theologians' goal to re-establish the Baptist college. In 1888 Rockefeller wrote to Harper: "I am ready to put several hundred thousand dollars into an institution in Chicago."\(^2\)

Rockefeller was faithful to his word. In the following year he contributed $600,000 to the project. A friend of Rockefeller, Marshall Field, donated $100,000 to the effort, and on July 1, 1891, Harper took office as the University of Chicago's first president.\(^3\)
Throughout the university's early existence, Rockefeller continued to be a leading donor. In 1890 he gave to the university one million dollars; in 1892, he gave another million. By 1905 his gifts had exceeded 20 millions.\(^4\)

From its inception, the University of Chicago flourished and by the late 1920's had become extremely influential. By its thirteenth year it could boast of 300 professors, 4,500 students and more than

\(^2\)Ibid. For a detailed account of Rockefeller's role in the founding of the University of Chicago, see Richard J. Storr, Harper's University: The Beginning (Chicago, 1966), 7-52.

\(^3\)The New York Times, June 2, 1941.

\(^4\)Hodges, "University of Chicago," 87, 89.
By 1914 its Divinity School was considered as rivaling Harvard in drawing denominational divinity schools into co-operative affiliation. In that year the Divinity School had about 250 separate courses which it offered to students. The School's professors were reported to stand "in the front rank of scholars"; consequently, they supplied many denominational seminaries with faculty. Several factors were responsible for the phenomenal growth of this "new" institution.

For one thing, the university had a central geographical location. The fact that Chicago was the center of a large concentration of population meant easy accessibility for many desiring higher education. The United States census of 1920, for example, showed that 30 per cent of the total population of college age (18-22) lived within 500 miles of Chicago. A second factor was the generosity of such donors as Rockefeller. Thirdly, its faculty stood for the highest ideals in scholarship. And finally, the university had outstanding leadership in its board of trustees and administration.

From its beginning, the Divinity School shared with the university a sense of spirit which has been classified as a "frontier movement." The Chicago School, though based upon intellectual scientific inquiry, exhibited "the romance of a popular movement among the people of the

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5 Ibid., 86.
6 "Theological Co-operation," The Outlook, CVII (July 25, 1914), 689.
7 Ibid.
8 Floyd W. Reeves and others, The University of Chicago Survey (12 vols., Chicago, 1933), I, 1-2.
churches in the Midwest. . . ." In an 1889 editorial Harper declared that "the cry of our times is for application of scientific methods in the study of the Bible. . . ." Under his leadership in those early years, the Divinity School attempted to identify itself with scientific-historical methods.

In the decade 1890 to 1900 the Divinity School started with modest beginnings. When Rockefeller gave his first one million dollars to the university, part of the stipulation was that the Chicago Theological Seminary would become the Divinity School of the University. On April 25, 1892, George W. Northrup resigned as president of the Seminary and Eri B. Hulbert was elected Dean of the Divinity School. In 1892 the Divinity School's faculty who offered courses in church history included William R. Harper, Eri B. Hulbert, and Arthur C. McGiffert.

The Divinity School increased from 16 instructors and 204 students in 1892 to 22 instructors and 382 students ten years later. After its first decade of existence the Divinity School had a larger average

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10 Ibid.


14 Ibid., 161, 164.
enrollment than 11 of the leading seminaries in the nation. Measured by geographical distribution these students came mostly from Illinois and Iowa. The total number and their geographical distribution for the first decade were: Illinois (387), Iowa (119), Ohio (84), Michigan (75), Indiana (75), Wisconsin (69), Minnesota (67), and Rhode Island (66).


In 1898 the University of Chicago began negotiations with Frederick J. Turner to persuade him to accept the headship of its

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15 Ibid., 166.
16 Ibid., 177-78.
17 Mathews, President's Report, I, 181, 207-08.
18 One of the basic principles which Rockefeller approved was that the institution should be under the control of Baptists. Agreements provided that the president and two-thirds of the trustees should always be of that religious faith. See Hodges, "University of Chicago," 88.
history department. Earlier the university had secured Hermann von Holst who had a popular, vigorous lecturing style and held forthright opinions for the position. Six years later, however, due to poor health, he retired. 19 Seeking a replacement, the university turned its attention to Turner. His prestige and reputation had led several universities to seek his services, among them Princeton, Johns Hopkins, Amherst, Chicago, California, Pennsylvania, Stanford, and Harvard.

After Turner declined Princeton's offer in 1896 President Harper invited him to teach in Chicago's 1898 summer term at a salary of $500 for the session. In 1899 he was brought back to teach a Saturday seminar. 20 The seminar provided Turner a further opportunity to observe the university's faculty and operations. On March 10, 1900, Harper made another offer for Turner's services: "headship of the Department of History, with a half-time teaching load and a salary of $4,000 for the first two years, with a full-time salary of $5,000 thereafter." 21 Later, Turner returned to Madison to resume his teaching duties.

Harper was not finished; the President arranged for Turner to receive "a barrage of letters" from leading members of Chicago's faculty urging him to accept the Harper offer. In addition, the President of Chicago told Turner that $30,000 had recently become available for library books in American history. Moreover, Turner's

20 Bennett, "Frederick Jackson Turner," 90.
21 Ibid., 92.
close friend and colleague, Charles Homer Haskins, would be offered an appointment at $3,000 a year salary. 22 Finally, the History Department would be increased "to include four professors, two instructors, and at least four assistants..." 23 The whole maneuver failed largely because Wisconsin's president Charles K. Adams and the Regents agreed to fulfill most of Turner's requests. 24

When Turner rejected Chicago's offer, the University of Chicago showed steady growth in the decade and continued expanding through the 1920's. For example, the 1919 annual rate of increase in student enrollment was 5.8 per cent more than the 1904 figures. From the years 1919 through 1926 the average annual rate of increase in student enrollment climbed to 18.3 per cent beyond the 1904 figures. 25 Faculty membership of the Divinity School during the corresponding period declined from 15 to 8, and declining credit hours revealed irregular conditions. While the total university credit hours increased from 29,000 in 1909 to 35,000 in 1919, the Divinity School's credit hours dropped from 700 to 600 for the same period. 27

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22 Billington, "Frederick Jackson Turner Comes to Harvard," 57.
23 Ibid.
24 Bennett, "Frederick Jackson Turner," 92.
25 Reeves, University of Chicago Survey, 1, 5-7.
26 Ibid., 118.
27 A credit hour meant one student enrolled in a course for which one hour of credit was received. The typical student took three credits per quarter or nine during a regular academic year. Concerning this irregular period, Reeves attributed such changes to internal and external factors. The internal factors included changes in admission, regulations for degrees, and tuition fees; while external factors included general economic conditions, growth and decline of institutions in the territory, and the number of high-school graduates. Ibid., 44.
However, the next decade brought unprecedented growth for the Divinity School.

Credit hours, for example, more than doubled for the years 1919 through 1927 (585 to 1,661) as compared with the total university's increase from 35,513 to 58,266. 28 The university granted a total of 812 degrees (bachelor, master, and doctorates) in 1919 as compared to Divinity's 44 degrees. Seven years later the university conferred 1,697 degrees and the Divinity School 485 degrees. 29

Further indicators of success and growth were apparent. By the 1930 academic year, the university could claim 170 professors listed in Who's Who in America, seven of whom were part of the Divinity School. Also, the Divinity School had seven faculty members who held professional degrees in addition to their doctorates. 30 Another attestation of growth and professionalism was shown by the university's publishing record. For the years 1924 through 1929, the Divinity School had 84.6 per cent of their staff contributing articles to professional journals as against the total university record of 74.9 per cent. 31 Such growth had its beginnings in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

In those years the liberal arts manifested trends radically different from the previous century. Subjects such as history of

28 Reeves, University of Chicago Survey, I, 55.
29 Ibid., 70, 81.
30 Ibid., II, 287, 291.
31 Ibid., 293.
art, musicology, Far East, and Africa became popular with the academic community. World events such as the Boxer Rebellion (1900), the Russo-Japanese War (1904), and changes in the arts reflected growing concerns for the American people. The Ashcan School, impressionism in the Armory Show of 1913, and "Dadaism" manifested a new and experimental attitude away from the old ways. The older assumption that man was separate from nature injured scholarly ideals of earlier centuries: "The assumption that man is a part of nature led to the concept of culture, one of the most important and emancipating of all twentieth-century contributions to knowledge in the social field." 32

In the midst of this transition, the University of Chicago represented a particular school of thinking. It heralded a scientific methodology, which in its application to history (the scientific spirit) included an iconoclastic frame of mind which insisted upon revision of all areas of historical knowledge. Then, too, there was an emphasis upon empirical procedures. Its proponents, like Turner, insisted that natural phenomena, observable evidence, was the only source on which scientific history could be based. This method, for the Divinity School, was unlike the earlier Schaff methodology which included providential acts of God and theologically controlled assumptions. 33


The Divinity School, in its emphasis on scientific methodology, stressed theological empiricism under the umbrella of a larger context set by Chicago's William James' radical empiricism, and by the pragmatism of John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Pierce. There was George B. Foster in functional analysis to Christian doctrine, Gerald B. Smith in interpretation of modernism, and Henry W. Wieman in Christian philosophy. Moreover, the faculty expressed an inclination toward "modernism," often dealt with in a "socio-historical" methodology. They relied upon the higher criticism form of abstracted social contexts and values, rather than the earlier theological dogmatism. Shailer Mathews, a leader in church history at Chicago, illustrated this spirit and direction that motivated the Divinity School.

Born on May 26, 1863, at Portland, Maine, Mathews grew up in a city dominated by what he later called "Mid-Victorian Evangelism." The city experienced technological transition in his early years: in 1864, gas lights were erected for the first time, its first telephone was installed during his first year in high school in 1878, and five years later electricity was first used for illuminating purposes.

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34 Williams, "Traditions and Experience," 459-560.
37 Ibid., 11-12.
His early education in higher learning was conservative, and he entered Colby College in 1880.

At Colby, he became acquainted with Albion Small who had studied at the University of Berlin and at the University of Leipzig. Small's personality as a teacher overshadowed his student, Mathews, greatly. However, it would be some years later before his teacher's methodology would make any significant impact upon Mathews' thinking. After his graduation from Colby in 1884 Mathews entered Newton Theological Seminary, a Baptist seminary in Newton Center, Massachusetts. Shortly after completing his degree in 1887 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Instructor of Elocution at Colby. The appointment originated largely through the efforts of his friend and teacher Small. 38

As a member of the Colby faculty, Mathews first came into contact with a young Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins, William S. Bayley, who brought to Colby "a conception of independent research and scientific method such as the institution had never known." 39 And in 1889 a turning point came in Mathews' life when Small was elected president of Colby. Mathews tested Bayley's methodology in a unique way.

President Small appointed Mathews to his old position of teaching history and political economy, and arranged for him to take a year's leave of absence to study at the University of Berlin. In 1890

38 Ibid., 25, 27, 28, 48, 49.
39 Ibid., 39. Bayley was professor of Geology and Mineralogy and one of Colby's first teachers to take an active interest in student affairs. See Ernest C. Marriner, The History of Colby College (Waterville, Maine, 1963), 241-51.
Mathews, newly married, began advanced graduate study at Berlin under such men as Hans Delbruk, Paul Scheffer-Boichorst, and Ignaz Jastrow, all of whom taught Ranke's concepts of history. Ranke himself had died only four years before Mathews' arrival and his influence was still strong. 40

A significant difference in Mathews' training from most American religious liberals in Germany was that he was not attracted to teachers such as Adolph Harnack or Wilhelm Dilthey. Instead, he pursued the secular fields of history and political economy. He later reflected: "So far removed was I from the field of theology that I never heard even so distinguished a man as Harnack lecture." 41 Further evidence of his liberal socialization became apparent when he returned to Colby. Mathews replaced General Francis A. Walker's Principles of Political Economy (1883) with Richard T. Ely's Outlines of Economics (1889) as a textbook for his students. Ely had given Mathews a new "social conception of economic problems." 42

In 1892 Mathews' friend and former teacher Small went to the University of Chicago to head the department of sociology at the newly established institution. Due to Small's efforts and much wooing by Ernst DeWitt Burton of the Divinity School, in October, 1893, Mathews decided to join the university faculty at Chicago. 43 From his

40 Wurster, "'Modernism' of Shailer Mathews," 56, 57.
41 Mathews, New Faith for Old, 42.
42 Ibid., 45, 48.
arrival at Chicago in August, 1894, Mathews felt the enthusiasm, business-like efficiency, sense of unity, and co-operation generated by Harper and the faculty. At the University's first faculty meeting Harper had stated: "The question before us is how to become one in spirit, though not necessarily in opinions." And again: "The university is one family, socially considered. . ." The university found in Mathews an exemplification of the Chicago spirit, especially in his methodology.

It was three-fold: inductive, critical, and scientific. By "inductive" he meant based on "facts and not theories as to facts." By "critical" he meant the type of higher criticism reflected in German training. And by "scientific" he mostly meant evolution: "Evolution as a general theory is one of the axioms of science." The first element was projected by him in his speech, "The Stimulation of Research," in 1904. The last two elements brought continued conflict for the Divinity School in the modernist controversy of Science versus the Bible. In a Divinity School student's notes, a further illustration of this kind of methodology was furnished.

44 Storr, Harper's University, 99, 166.
45 Mathews, "What Has the Higher Criticism Accomplished?" Divinity School Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 9, in Wurster, "'Modernism' of Shailer Mathews," 97.
46 Ibid.
47 Mathews to Prof. Edwin O. Jordan, March 28, 1905, Divinity School Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 9, in ibid.
48 See pages 15-16.
November 20, 1900. Every man is busy . . . We have to dig our material from the original sources . . . Neither textbooks nor lectures are the basis of the work, they are but helps or outlines . . .

May 6, 1901 . . . This is the most advanced work in Biblical study I have ever done. What I have gained is a method of work, which has compelled me to get my material first hand and given me more knowledge of the methods of the great German scholars who are our chief authorities in the work here. 49

Mathews embodied the empirical, fact-gathering, scientific spirit of the Chicago School.

A third meaning of the Chicago School was its adaptation and popularization of Turner's methodology and frontier thesis as applied to American Church History. Along with Mathews on the Divinity Church History staff was William Warren Sweet's predecessor, Peter G. Mode. Next to Sweet, Mode was the foremost representative of the church historians who adapted Turner's ideas. In 1917 Mode had offered a seminar in church history dealing with the church in frontier situations. 50 Four years later he published a sourcebook on church history that remained a standard text through the 1960's, and he applied Turnerian themes in a popular book published in 1923. 51 He asserted, like Turner, the neglect of the frontier

49 Clarence R. Williams, notes during the scholastic year 1900-1901, in Storr, Harper's University, 161-2.


51 Mode, Sourcebook and Bibliographical Guide. A more complete work was authored by Robert T. Handy and others, American Christianity: An Historical Introduction with Representative Documents (2 vols., New York, 1960-63).
in American Christianity: "... nor has any interpretation of American Christianity taken serious cognizance of the influence of the frontier in giving it its distinctive characteristics."  

Mode further stated that Turner's 1893 essay prepared good soil for preparation. In his chapter on "The Americanizing of Christianity" Mode raised the question of outstanding factors in American life that induced such an Americanization. Could it have been racial homogeneity, he asked rhetorically. No. (Here he is writing against the Teutonic theory.) Or nationalism? No. Or the free church idea? No. (Baird and others earlier had believed that the voluntary system was the key to American Christianity.) Mode answered his question by stating that Americanization had been the product of the frontier:

A much clearer insight into what constitutes the Americanizing of Christianity is to be gained by realizing that our civilization thus far has been largely the civilization of a frontier. ... It is the one unifying feature in all the vicissitudes of our national development.

In these words Mode relayed the emphasis on the uniqueness of the American experience, elevated it with a nationalistic tone, and used the "process" method rather than the old Baird dualism. Dynamic, rather than static, constituted a proper description of the American and frontier experience.

Mode's historical sources for The Frontier Spirit in American Christianity originated, for the most part, from Turner's Frontier

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52 Peter G. Mode, The Frontier Spirit in American Christianity (New York, 1923), ix.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 6, 8.

55 Ibid., 11.
in American History and his The Rise of the New West. Mode articulated the Chicago spirit and superimposed the frontier thesis as the key to American national development. He encouraged his students toward the same area and pattern. His two works mentioned remain a significant part in the study of religious historiography.

In the late 1920's the frontier thesis became a major method of carrying out a project about American Christianity for the Divinity School. Increased financial contributions made such a project possible. During the period 1920-29 the university received 30 millions in gifts. However, only four and a quarter millions had not been limited to some specific purpose. However, in 1925 Rockefeller contributed another million to the Divinity School. In making the announcement of the Rockefeller gift, Shailer Mathews stated the desire and plans of the Divinity School, plans which later would culminate in a program which would change American religious historiography. Mathews stated:

Our plans have comprehended not only improving the situation of present members of the Divinity faculty but the addition of new members to the staff. We have been ambitious to carry the spirit and pursuit of research into the field of religious education . . . .

It appeared to Mathews at the time that at last his suggestion of 1904 would materialize. A primary addition to the staff and head of an ambitious project for utilizing the frontier thesis was Warren Sweet.

56 "Report on the Work of the University of Chicago," School and Society, 48 (July 16, 1938), 73.

57 "The Divinity School of the University of Chicago," School and Society, 22 (August 1, 1925), 137.

58 See page 16.
Trained in secular historiography, Sweet's arrival at Chicago in 1927 would begin an endeavor which had its zenith of success in the years up to the Second World War.
CHAPTER IV

WILLIAM WARREN SWEET AND THE FRONTIER THESIS

William Warren Sweet has been designated the "father of American Church History." Sweet's early life had parallels with Turner's early life. Born on February 15, 1881, in Baldwin, Kansas, Sweet, like Turner, had a close identification with the frontier. Unfortunately, little has been published about Sweet's early life. However, he must have been aware of Populism and the agricultural plight of hard-times in Kansas during the 1880's. Like Turner, Sweet went east for his higher education.

In 1902 Sweet received his Bachelor of Arts degree at Ohio Wesleyan. Four years later he obtained a Bachelor of Divinity degree at Drew Theological School. Sweet then resumed his secular education, and in 1907 he obtained a Master of Arts degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Five years later, the University of Pennsylvania conferred the doctoral degree in history upon Sweet. From 1906 to 1912 in Pennsylvania Sweet served as a parish minister in two areas, Willow Grove and Langhorne. After he became instructor

1"Father of American Church History Dies," The Christian Century, LXXVI (Jan. 21, 1959), 71.

in History at Ohio Wesleyan in 1911, Sweet devoted the rest of his life to the academic world. His academic career spanned almost 50 years. This career can be divided into two parts—Sweet's early career (1902-1926) and his later career (1927-1952).

At the University of Pennsylvania Sweet completed his doctorate under John Bach McMaster. His dissertation, "The Methodist Episcopal Church And the Civil War," in 1912 was one of the first written in American Church History. The McMaster influence upon Sweet is so evident in his early works that a look at McMaster is useful.

McMaster, born in Brooklyn, New York, on June 2, 1952, graduated from the College of the City of New York in June, 1872. He "burst into the historiographical firmament as a star of the first magnitude." In 1883 following publication of the first volume of A History of the People of the United States McMaster accepted the call to the newly established chair in American History at the University of Pennsylvania (one of three existing chairs at the time) and held it until his retirement in 1920. During his academic career at the University of Pennsylvania, McMaster taught reputable seminars on the graduate level. Many of his students

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attending the sessions graduated and became well-known historians. Among them were Herbert E. Bolton, Ellis P. Oberholtzer, Frederick L. Paxson, Claude H. Van Tyne, and William Warren Sweet. In his seminars, McMaster held to at least three controlling assumptions as a historian.

The first assumption was nationalism. McMaster was "an ardent nationalist, given to Manifest Destiny statements," an attitude quite common to the times. He supported enthusiastically American justification for its war with Mexico and the annexation of Texas. In the late 1890's McMaster "used his lecture-room to exhort students to fight for Cuba. . . ." Nationalism was prevalent to such an extent among McMaster and other historians that a contemporary scholar-historian of McMaster had looked upon the historical scene and had concluded that there was little hope for the scholar who desired to specialize in the history of any country other than the United States. Over fifty years later, in the 1940's, a historian agreed by calling the period one of a "Babylonian Captivity" because of the movement away from European history to purely American themes.

In addition to nationalism, Sweet's professor equated progress with democracy, a second controlling assumption. As Theodore Roosevelt

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6 Wish, American Historians, 139.
7 Ibid.
8 Andrew D. White, in Herman Ausubel, Historians and Their Craft (New York, 1950), 19.
and Turner wrote about the frontier, he too described it but said little of the religious developments of the period from the American Revolution to the beginning of the Civil War. He "struck a new note in American historiography, suggesting the growth of democracy and the importance of the common man." In reference to the common man, McMaster had a firm conviction in the "hard common sense of the people, who in their own good time and way have hitherto adjusted difficulties wisely." As McMaster wrote of the common man, he manifested his third controlling assumption, the Anglo-Saxon bias.

The Anglo-Saxon people, McMaster felt, were to be admired for their values of thrift, love for law and order, and sobriety. "They were descended from the most persevering, the most energetic, the most thrifty of races. They enjoyed the highest form of civilization .... The consequence has been such a moral and social advancement as the world has never seen before." McMaster, in writing of such people, belonged to the school of writing which believed in adding facts upon facts with little, if any, interpretive elements in their writings. McMaster's major contributions toward American historiography are twofold, a stress on the common man and social history and the use of newspapers as sources.

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11 Hutchinson, "John Bach McMaster," 125.
13 Ibid., 137.
14 Hutchinson, "John Bach McMaster," 143.
Sweet also shared attitudes and assumptions that McMaster possessed, such as the Black Legend bias commonly held by historians of the period. The Black Legend, an Anglo-Saxon-Protestant tradition had been stated clearly earlier by Joseph F. Hurst:

In the great advance of modern peoples the Latin is inferior to the Saxon in all spiritual upbuilding. The sad moral condition of South America, Mexico, Spain, Italy, and the Jesuit missions in Indian and other Eastern countries, is a striking proof of what the world would be today had not the Saxon been at the head of the world's greatest affairs. . . . Every triumph of religion and liberty in the England of modern times can be traced back to the Teutonic element in the English race. 15

Sweet expressed the same Black Legend bias in his early works of Latin American history and writings of Roman Catholic-controlled areas.

For example, Sweet wrote that Latin America during the colonial period was characterized by methods used by Roman Catholic missionaries from Spain or Portugal. Added to this statement was Sweet's contention that the missionaries had not "... served [in converting the Indians] to make them real Christians." 16

Sweet, with his Protestant theological bias, accused the missionaries of being concerned only


with "nominal Christianity" and as a result "the Indian in South America
today [1919] is a nominal Christian only, while at heart he is still
a pagan." 17 He called the present Indians' religion medieval rather
than modern and cited examples. It was what he failed to cite,
rather than what was cited, that showed his bias.

When Sweet dealt with Roman Catholicism in writing American
history, the Catholics rarely fared better than their Latin American
brothers under his pen. An example can be found in a 1924 work in
which he called the destruction of monasteries and confiscation of
church properties an "unmitigated blessing." 18 The bias evidently
never left Sweet and his writings. 19 It carried over toward the
Negro: "Apart from their music, however, they have made, so far,
no notable contribution to the religious life in America." 20 The
positive contributions Sweet made to religious historiography, however,
far outweighed the negative ones. The fact that other writings about
Sweet do not mention Sweet's Black Legend bias may reflect later
writers' tendencies to "glorify" him.

17 Ibid., 235.

18 William Warren Sweet, Our American Churches (New York, 1924),
19, 24, 62, 68, 69.

19 Sweet, Religion in American Culture, 124. See also Lindsey,

20 Sweet, "Significant Factors," 15. Other historians have dealt
with the positive contributions of the Negro more adequately than
Sweet. See Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church (Washington,
1921), and Leonard L. Haynes, Jr., The Negro Community Within
American Protestantism 1619-1844 (Boston, 1953). For a more recent
handling of the subject, see Sidney Ahlstrom, A Religious History
of the American People (New Haven, 1972).
Most students of history are acquainted with the later career of Sweet and his identity with the Chicago School. Sweet's association with the University of Chicago began in 1926 when Shirley Jackson Case of the University's history department approached Sweet for the first time and within 15 minutes offered him a professorship in American Church History at the Divinity School.21 Sweet's teaching duties had been confined largely to undergraduate European and American history courses and he thought it strange for him to be called to work with theological students on the graduate level. At that time, too, "... American church history as a field of teaching and research was ... non-existent."22 His chief interest was not training preachers; "Rather I came because there was offered me here a chance of helping to develop an entirely new field of history."23 The groundwork for such a field at Chicago had been laid before Sweet's arrival by Professors William E. Dodd and Marcus M. Jernegan. Sweet also noted that "Everywhere else, with one or two notable exceptions, Doctor's theses in the field of American church history were discouraged by the history departments on the ground that such subjects could not be treated with sufficient objectivity."24

21 William Warren Sweet, "Every Dog Has His Day and I've Had Mine," The Divinity School News, XIII (Aug. 1, 1946), 4-5. Although Sweet does not state why Case was chosen to approach him, Case did work extensively both in the history and church history areas. Later Case became Dean of the Divinity School.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 5, 6.

24 Ibid., 6.
Although Sweet at the time did not realize the confidence Chicago placed in him, others did. Case, who offered him the job, wanted to make Chicago "the world center for the graduate training of research scholars in church history." Sweet had not been called primarily to teach American Christianity. Rather, he was to "concentrate upon the scientific study of Christianity in America. . . . he was placed in charge . . . to locate, collect, and eventually publish primary source material for the study of American Christianity." In 1934, when Case became aware that Drew University had offered Sweet an enviable teaching position, he wrote Sweet: "The President [of the University of Chicago] said, in almost these words, 'If Professor Sweet leaves go out and get the best research scholar for the job.' When I told him you were that person, then he said to keep you." The research Case mentioned to Sweet was massive in scope and quite an undertaking. The undertaking called first for a collection of original sources in geographical areas east of the Mississippi River. Then a similar task would be accomplished for the areas west of the Mississippi.

Upon completion of these two tasks, a search would be conducted for original sources of Christianity in Canada. Sweet also suggested

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27 Shirley J. Case to Sweet, Nov. 10, 1934, Box 1, Folder 9, William Warren Sweet Papers (Ellis Regenstein Library, University of Chicago).
gathering material from Mexico and South America, but Case pointed out the difficulty of making English translations of the Spanish documents. \(^{28}\) By the end of the first year of the project, $1,500 had been allocated for the project.

By 1931 massive amounts of material had been received from several historical societies: the Minnesota Historical Society, the Maryland Historical Society, the Western Reserve Historical Society, and the Missouri Historical Society. \(^{29}\) With Case, the guiding spirit behind the project, and Sweet, the collector and editor, some three thousand information cards had been filed. The next year Case declared: "[We have spent over] . . . $12,000 for research in discovery of materials, and publishing, copying, and cataloguing and the like." \(^{30}\) The result of the endeavor was a four volume production on the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, and the Methodists. \(^{31}\) The second part of the project, that of collecting sources west of the Mississippi, never was completed. There were several reasons for the failure.

The Depression years found the university in financial difficulty. \(^{32}\) Then, too, there was a loss of sustaining interest in the

\(^{28}\) Case to Dean S. Mathews, Feb. 19, 1929, Sweet Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.

\(^{29}\) Many of the societies had material available due to Turner's earlier influence.

\(^{30}\) S. Mathews to Sweet, Oct. 11, 1932, Sweet Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.


\(^{32}\) The New York Times, Jan. 12, 1941.
project. Moreover, the Turner theme of the frontier as a major emphasis in historiography declined as historians became involved in controversy over its validity. Finally, there was increased attention to the urban-industrial America of the years 1875 through the 1930's. The Depression helped to stimulate historians toward contemporary problems and solutions.

When Sweet left the university in 1946 he turned his attention more toward the interpretative elements of church history. At Chicago most of his time had been taken up with the research and editing tasks. However, the interpretative elements were apparent in some of his earlier writings. In these writings, he never hesitated to acknowledge his dependence upon Turner's frontier thesis, although he carefully noted that his acceptance was with some modification. 33 He felt that Turner and his disciples had been economic determinists and that "in their stress upon the economic they . . . overlooked those forces which had to do with the mind and the spirit." 34 This applied more to Turner's disciples than to Turner: ". . . [Turner] never disparaged or belittled the influence of religion as a factor in American society . . . Turner by-passed religion because he did not have sufficient knowledge of it to put it in its rightful place." 35 It should be noted that Sweet


34 Sweet, Religion in Development of American Culture, 160.

35 Ibid., 314. Sweet's esteem for Turner can be seen also from his letter to Professor Roland H. Blainton, Yale Divinity School, Dec. 16, 1941, concerning a paper read on the statistics of frontier churches. Sweet commented: "It seems to me the best thing Mr. Ellsworth could do would be to listen in on the discussion of Professor Turner's thesis, . . . ." Sweet Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.
recognized the value of the frontier thesis only for the American period he wrote about, that is, up to the Civil War. 36

While still at DePauw University, shortly before going to Chicago, Sweet set down four significant factors in American church history from which he rarely departed in his writings. The themes reflected the Turner emphasis on American uniqueness through westward expansion, interdependence of social forces in American history, and the distinctive changes of American institutions initiated from their adaptation to the frontier environment. A foundation for the four themes was: "The things typically American today, whether in politics or in religion, have been largely the product of frontier influences." 37 Throughout his career Sweet sought more insight into these four themes.

In the first theme, Sweet believed that religious radicals had established the colonial churches. He also found parallels between American political and religious history, Sweet's second theme. Moreover, he pointed to a lack of both secular and religious historians to integrate all these themes. In Sweet's third theme, he declared the significance of the frontier in American church history. Frontier institutions such as the camp-meeting and small denominational colleges supplied "that appeal to the heroic which has been the driving force of much of the missionary enterprise." 38 In Sweet's fourth theme,

36 Sweet, Religion in Development of American Culture, 313.
37 Sweet, "Significant Factors," 11, 1, 6-8, 13; Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York, 1945), 42.
he felt that Negro slavery was responsible for the largest and most significant schisms in denominations. 39

Perhaps the best over-all statement of these factors is found in an essay he published in the late 1930's. Sweet's purpose in the essay was "to trace in broad outline the ways in which organized Christianity accommodated itself to the peculiar conditions prevailing on the American frontier and to try to understand both what the Christian church meant to the West and what the West meant to the church." 40

Sweet, like Turner, believed that a distinctively American culture did not evolve until the eighteenth century. "It was not," Sweet asserted, "until population began to move away from the Atlantic seaboard and, as a consequence, to turn its back more and more upon European influence, that a distinctively American religious scene begins to appear." 41 During the colonial period, Sweet felt that the Baptists were a primary feature of the Tidewater region "frontier." Largely through their efforts and those of similar minority religious bodies, the principle of separation of church and state was established. And because "the Baptists had no Old World connections, they went forward more reapidly than perhaps any other American Colonial religious body in developing distinctive American characteristics." 42

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39 In Sidney Mead's phraseology, this is Sweet wearing a "Turner mantle over a McMaster frame." See Sidney E. Mead, "Prof. Sweet's Religion and Culture in America: A Review Article," Church History, XXII (March 1953), 35. Hereafter cited as CH.
40 Ibid., 380.
41 Ibid., 381.
42 Ibid., 383.
The first clear indicator of frontier American influence in American Christianity, according to Sweet, was the rise of revivalism during the early eighteenth century. Revivalism was a natural development for newly settled areas. Colonial revivalism, for Sweet, "bore the stamp of the frontier." Sweet applied a Turnerian concept to revivalism in his writings. For example, he stated: "It is significant that revivalism had its largest success in the colonies in the newer sections rather than in the older regions where church life had firmer roots. It is also significant that Colonial revivalism found its principal opposition in the older settled sections." 43 Revivalism in the first and second Great Awakenings, Sweet noted, brought forth constructive fruits such as moral betterment, reform, and educational improvements through the college movement. 44

A second indicator of the frontier was its role as a testing ground for determining which churches would become the largest and most numerous. Sweet stressed tendencies of "bigness" among successful frontier churches. Again, Sweet followed in the steps of Turner. "The greatest accomplishment of the American people has been the conquest of the continent; and sharing in that conquest were the religious and cultural forces of the nation." 45 In the testing process of the frontier, Sweet declared, the Congregationalists in the New England area and the Episcopalians in southern Pennsylvania remained relatively small bodies in the West.

43 Ibid., 384-85.
44 Ibid., 385-87, 391.
because "neither of these bodies developed any adequate method of following population westward." The principal frontier denominations such as the Baptist, the Methodist, the Presbyterian, and the Disciples of Christ, on the other hand, "developed frontier methods of . . . [their] own and achieved success in the West just in proportion to the adequacy with which . . . [they] met the peculiar problems which the new West presented." 46

A third indicator of the frontier was the degree of democracy in the successful frontier churches. Frontier Presbyterians, for example, adapted Arminian tenets and discarded much of their older Calvinistic traits. Other large religious groups on the frontier possessed a common strand of democracy in their church polity. 47 This democratic element stemmed from the environmental conditions of frontier life which created a distinctive American character, the fourth feature of Sweet's essay.

Sweet wrote of a "race of pioneers" who often lived in "raw, rough, and often blasphemous communities of the great new West." The pioneer was always an individualist, but the individualism of the frontier was "one of achievement, not eccentricity." 48 In the early West, the pioneer had little interest in theology; "There, the emphasis was upon the practical application of Christianity." 49 Thus, Sweet pictured

46 Ibid., 391.
47 Ibid., 395-96.
48 Scholars have questioned the uniqueness of frontier traits in recent years. See Gressley, "The Turner Thesis," 238-39.
49 Sweet, "Frontier in American Christianity," 396.
uneducated preachers with their "practical" gospel saving the new West "from sinking into semibarbarism."\textsuperscript{50}

The fifth and last indicator of Sweet's essay concerned the question of unity in American Christianity. In terms of "unity" the churches of the American frontier lacked a "sense of the Church as the one transcendent body of Christ." This lack was due to a "lack of unity from the beginning and the rapid increase of new religious bodies as a result of revivalism and frontier individualism."\textsuperscript{51} Although Sweet believed that this feature should be deplored, "yet it was after all a natural development where there has been complete freedom of thought, speech, and of religion."\textsuperscript{52} He maintained that it was better to have freedom of the human spirit than to have a uniformity of religious expression.

Finally, in his essay Sweet used Turnerian terminology in setting forth a criterion for judging the American experience. "American Christianity," he declared, "cannot be judged by Old World criteria, for the New World demanded a new spirit as well as a new method." He closed his essay by chiding European leadership in the New World of his own times. "I fully believe, in the not too distant future, our European brethren will be awakened . . . to the fact that the future of Protestant Christianity, just as the future of democracy, does not lie with them but with the vigorous new churches across the western ocean, born of the American frontier."\textsuperscript{53} Sweet stands as a transitory figure

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 397.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 396-97.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 397-98.
between the older Schaff methodology and the "New Church History."

In addition to his transitory role, Sweet made a major contribution to American religious historiography by popularizing and making respectable American Church history. He wrote upon a variety of subjects: interpretation of American religion, American culture, the circuit riders, specific American denominations, Latin American history, university history, revivalism, cultural pluralism, medieval church history, John Wesley, religion in politics, Negro churches, and natural religion. He was the author of 25 books, 30 articles in professional periodicals, 23 essays and articles in collections, and 79 book reviews published in such respectable journals as the American Historical Review, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Church History, and Journal of Religion. In addition, Sweet wrote 17 biographical articles in the Dictionary of American Biography.\(^{54}\) As a teacher he "was a godfather to more than thirty Ph.D. dissertations on aspects of American Church History."\(^{55}\)

The esteem in which Sweet was held by secular historians is evidenced by a letter from a well-known scholar in Western history. It shows how effective Sweet was in his popularizing and in his attempt to make the discipline respectable. The historian complimented Sweet on his Story of Religions in America and wrote:

[It] has been helpful to such an extent in my work that I hope this treatment of a minor phase of our history may be

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\(^{54}\) See Lindsey's bibliographical list, "Critical Evaluation of Sweet," 170-183.

\(^{55}\) Sidney Mead, "Prof. Sweet's Religion and Culture In America," CH, XXII (March 1953), 33.
of some use to you. I am now preparing a book on the development of nativistic sentiment in this country in the period before the Civil War and hope to continue my studies in the important field of church history which you have done so much to develop.56

However, those who praised Sweet and his contributions were aware of his limitations. This was especially true of those in the next generation. They would go beyond the Turner frontier thesis.

56 Ray A. Billington to Sweet, Dec. 30, 1935, Sweet Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.
CHAPTER V

GOING BEYOND TURNER AND THE FRONTIER THESIS

Turner's thesis came under heavy attack by many historians during the 1930's.\(^1\) Church historians expressed similar discontent which accelerated to major confrontations during the post-Second World War years. A result of the confrontations was the rise of the New Church History. The works of Sidney Mead, a major critic of Sweet, showed what many church historians felt, a desire to go beyond the frontier thesis as adapted by Sweet.

"Today [1969] the frontier thesis, with its stress on environmental determinism is no longer considered an adequate or accurate explanation of the American past, . . . ."\(^2\) Lamar's statement is generally accurate, but over three decades were required to settle the validity of Turner's thesis.\(^3\) Major historians were drawn into the controversy, professional journals were filled with arguments pro and con, and finally a new concept of consensus history prevailed in historiography. However, beginning criticisms of the thesis were sparsely scattered throughout

\(^1\)For the purposes of this thesis, this writer has chosen not to deal at length or in detail with Turner's critics. Since the thesis deals with religious historiography, the secular controversy of the Turner debates will be mentioned only briefly.


\(^3\)See Billington, Turner: Historian, Scholar, 444-71.
professional journals.

The first published statement criticizing any aspect of the thesis came from one of Turner's students, Edmond S. Meany, 16 years after the 1893 essay was delivered in Chicago. However, the thesis held such strength among historians that the criticism made little impact. The next published attack was in 1921 by Charles Beard and again by him in 1928. Despite his respect for the value of the thesis, Beard felt it was time to go beyond it. By the 1930's attacks increased against the thesis.

Their point [Turner's critics] is that the forest environment does not create the essential institutions upon which democracy rests, and that these institutions are far more effective than the wilderness or the new lands in establishing the preconditions of democracy.

The Great Depression and immediate factors of the last two decades brought a shift in Turnerian historiography.

With the Great Depression, the undergirding postulates of the Turner thesis appeared out of touch with the realities of the times. The older


intellectual isolationism had been belittled and degraded, and Marxist interpretations of history overshadowed many other ideas. Furthermore, out of the Depression a new group of historians emerged from the "big-city" background and from ethnic minorities. For them, the "mystique" of rural America appeared more like something out of a storybook than reality. 9

Furthermore, during the Great Depression, many historians focused their attention toward historical relativism. 10 A major exponent of revisionism was Carl Becker, a former student of Turner. Although Becker allowed an absolute truth in history, it could be known only in parts. History was subjective, a product of man. Becker illustrated his point by using the analogy of the movie.

The past is a kind of screen upon which we project our vision of the future; and it is indeed a moving picture, borrowing much of its form and color from our fears and aspirations. 11 The debate over the validity of such a view touched off a controversy which lingers to the present.

In addition to the controversy over historical relativism, in the 1930's historians increased their attacks upon Turner's thesis. More and more historians were drawn into the arena. Among the critics of the thesis were Louis M. Hacker, Benjamin F. Wright, Jr., and Carlton

9 Hofstadter, The Progressive Historians, 130.


11 Carl Becker, "What are Historical Facts?" Western Political Quarterly, VIII (Sept. 1955), 337.
J. H. Hayes. The list of defenders included Avery Craven and Joseph Schafer. Moreover, the decade saw more specific aspects such as mobility, comparative frontier studies, immigration, land speculation, and various economic aspects of the thesis coming under fire. But the safety-valve controversy dominated over all. 12

By the 1940's the attack broadened both in subject area and participants with Murray Kane, James C. Malin, and George W. Pierson as key writers. Consensus history gained strength among historians. Whereas the Progressive historians had emphasized differences, consensus historians emphasized likenesses. 13 The consensus school brought with it a "new conservative" outlook, a high regard for "the enduring uniformities of American life, the stability of institutions, the persistence of a national character." 14 A trend of revision set in among their adherents.

With revision, iconoclastic articles appeared. In 1941 Mody C. Boatwright wrote of the myth of frontier individualism, in 1949 Hofstadter of the agrarian myth, and in 1950 Henry Nash Smith of the myth and symbol of the frontier. 15 Their writings proclaimed a common

12 Ray Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York, 1966), 289. For additional readings, see his Westward Expansion (New York, 1957), 760-63.


factor: the frontier thesis was inadequate, and false images had been written and superimposed upon the history of the national period. Concurrently, however, a major alternative interpretation of American history came to the forefront, an urban thesis.

Turner had earlier written Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., that he felt there would be an urban interpretation of American history even as his frontier thesis had been put forth. Schlesinger first issued his urban thesis in 1933, and the theme gained more attention with his article of 1940. W. Stull Holt, a sympathetic scholar, endorsed the urban thesis and declared that "it explains important facts not otherwise fully understood . . . no more fruitful interpretation exists than the significance of the urban movement." However, he warned students not to make it the only interpretation. Holt illustrated one use of the urban thesis.

Another use utilized another postulate. It declared that an urban factor had existed continuously side by side with the frontier phenomenon and that the nation's development could not be explained without considering both sides of these theses. Richard Wade applied the urban theme from the colonial period to the Jacksonian era. Both applications

16. Wish, American Historians, 149.
appeared to give new insights into the American experience, to initiate hitherto untouched aspects of the nation's heritage, and to stimulate additional monographs.

Meanwhile a parallel reaction to Turner's thesis occurred among American religious historiographers. As the 1930's began the alternatives of fundamentalism and dominant liberal Protestantism seemed of little value to many erudite church historians.20 Dissatisfaction with the frontier thesis in Sweet's writings existed in a dormant state. One possible exception to these writings was church historian H. Richard Niebuhr, who applied Max Weber's and Ernst Troeltsch's sociological insights to American religion along side the frontier thesis.21

Niebuhr still used the thesis partially to explain the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He felt, like Sweet, that those who failed to adapt to frontier conditions failed in large part to succeed.22 "The frontier, in each period, developed a higher appreciation of 'natural rights' and a more democratic type of local government than the older settlements possessed."23 He used the dichotomy of the religion of an urban, commercial East versus the religion of the West.24 A random


21 H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York, 1929). For another example of the sociological approach to religion during this period see The President's Research Committee on Social Trends, Recent Social Trends, 1010.

22 Niebuhr, Social Sources, 154.

23 Ibid., 139, 136-7.

24 Ibid., 141.
sampling of sources he used for one of his chapters, made by this writer, showed a heavy reliance on such secondary sources as Turner, Beard, Paxson, and Mode.  

Unlike Niebuhr, a significant exponent of going beyond the Turner thesis as embodied in Sweet's approach was a former student of Sweet, Sidney E. Mead. Born in Champlin, Minnesota, on August 2, 1904, Mead went to the University of Chicago for most of his graduate work, earning an M.A. in 1938 and a Ph.D. in American Church History under Sweet in 1940. Mead served on the Divinity School faculty from 1941 through 1954, the last seven years as chairman of the church history department. In a 1954 article published in Church History Mead listed four main limitations of Sweet's works. First, Sweet's style and fashion of writing tended to obscure the continuity one expected in church history. Secondly, Sweet's neglect of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran bodies left out the largest and fourth largest religious groups, respectively, in America. Third, Sweet's inclination toward equating numerical size and geographical distribution with "typically American" and "most influential" was an inadequate view when one considered such movements as the Universalists. And, finally, Sweet's thesis was inadequate for the post-1870 decades. Mead noted, however, the positive contributions of Sweet's total work in the context of the time in which he wrote.

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25 Ibid., "Sectionalism and Denominationalism in America," 135-199. Here he used 24 sources of which only two were primary.


27 Ibid., 44-47.
Furthermore, Mead recognized the shift in secular historiography. It would indeed be one of the ironies of American Church history if, when this tendency is becoming obvious among secular historians, American Church historians should continue to pour their efforts into the mould of limiting and frustrating 'secular' interpretative theses. Rather [church historians should reassert] that 'since "religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion"' the center of the history of the West in general and of all aspects of American history in particular is the history of Christianity.  

Mead's observation illustrated the discontent and unrest among church historians during the 1950's. The Chicago School, including Robert T. Handy, Gerald C. Brauer, James H. Nichols, Winthrop Hudson, and Martin E. Marty, continued to influence church historians. Few of these, according to one writer, were fundamentally critical of the mainstream trends of the consensus school. 29 Others, such as Timothy Smith, rebuked adherents of Sweet's reliance upon the frontier thesis:

It is strange that long after historians with other special interests have sharply revised Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis that the frontier was the matrix of American ideals, students of church history are still absorbed with it. 30 Meanwhile the urban theme gained supporters among church historians.

28 Ibid., 46-7. His definition of culture and religion is from Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era (Chicago, 1948), 57.

29 Ahlstrom, Religious History of American People, 10.

30 Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform; American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War (New York, 1957), 9. The trend was hard to break. Even in 1939 Mead showed a "typical" progressive criticism in a letter to Sweet commenting on Niebuhr's Kingdom of God in America: "I was somewhat surprised, for example, at the way he grouped Edwards, Wesley and Finney together several times. Of course they were all revivalists, but that does not seem to me the significant thing about them--it is like grouping potatoes, beans, and radishes, they are all vegetables, but the significant thing about them is their differences." Mead to Sweet, Oct. 23, 1939, Sweet Papers, Box 1, Folder 16.
Professor Schlesinger's urban thesis became a favorite for casual explanations as Mead's work showed.\textsuperscript{31}

One should bear in mind that major contributions faced church historians during the post-Second World War years. The secular recovery of religious history, according to May, had begun in the 1930's, under the leadership of "the only people in a position to undertake it, the immensely energetic secular scholars of the day."\textsuperscript{32}

Another problem facing religious historians was the Supreme Court decisions of the post-Second World War years. In 1947 the Court ruled in \textit{Everson vs. Board of Education for the Township of Ewing} that public funds could be used for the transfer of children to parochial schools for religious instruction. During the next year in \textit{McCollum vs. Board of Education}, the Court stated that the use of tax-supported property for religious education was in violation of the First Amendment. In 1952 in \textit{Zorach vs. Clauson} the Court said that public schools could grant students the opportunity to go to a religious center for religious instruction. While the Court occupied a pivotal role in shaping public policy in the decisions, a "revolution" in religious education occurred with further historic rulings.

These rulings were declared by the Court during the 1960's. In \textit{Engel vs. Vitale} the Court banned the use of prayers prescribed by the state. Next, in \textit{School District of Abington vs. Schempp} and \textit{Murray vs. Curlett}, prescribed Bible reading was held as a violation of the

\textsuperscript{31} Smith, \textit{Revivalism and Social Reform}, 10.

\textsuperscript{32} May, "Recovery of American Religious History," 82.
First Amendment. A significant point in these decisions, one which much of the public failed to note, was that the teaching of religion could have a legitimate usefulness in public education. As one Supreme Court justice stated about the matter,

"It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion in its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study from its literary and historical qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as a part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment."

As church historians reflected upon these implications in their own field, changes of values and attitudes were noticed by other writings in public school textbooks concerning religion.

One such study was conducted by John Roney Bell who compared five popular senior high school American history textbooks of the 1930's with five from the 1960's. The 1930's textbooks included information on the beliefs of religious sects, avoided the religious issues of the 1928 Presidential election, and supplied attention to the religious awakening of the early 1800's. On the other hand, the 1960's textbooks included material on colonial religion with special emphasis upon toleration, furnished data concerning the religious issues of the 1960 Presidential election, emphasized religion as an aspect in foreign policy,

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and made no mention of the religious awakening of the early 1800's.

In addition to the Supreme Court decisions and changes in textbooks on the high school level, there was a revival of the theological interpretation of history. The "recovery" had started in the 1930's with such publications as Paul Tillich's *The Interpretation of History* and John Macmurray's *The Clue to History*. The works of Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Butterfield gained popularity during the 1940's. As theology moved into a concern for a theology of the Word, church historians became interested in redefining the nature of the Church.

Serious questions were raised over the function of the church historian and the secular religious historian.

If most of the writing on church history subjects is now being done in history departments, why bother with departments of church history? Perhaps church historians should admit that they are like all other historians, save in one respect--they study religious institutions and ideas rather than political, social, or economic institutions and ideas.

While the debate continued the search for a new definition of the church demonstrated there was a quest for a new church history built upon different structures from those used by Schaff and Sweet. The result has been called "the New Church History." In its methodological stance,

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36 Brauer, "Shifting Perspectives," 9. Brauer felt that it was the kind of an interest Sweet could never understand.

37 Ibid., 19. See also Bowden, "Studies in Church Historiography," 248. For a defense of a Christian viewpoint in historiography, see William A. Speck, "Role of the Christian Historian as Seen in the Writings of Kenneth Scott Latourette, Christopher Dawson, and Herbert Butterfield" (doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, 1965), 269-75.
three features have been noted. A first feature was its "post-secular" approach to church history. With theological assumptions, it sought to go beyond the older, purely secular approach as exemplified in the writings of Sweet and Mathews. Moreover, the older sociological interpretation of church history alone as used by Troeltsch and Niebuhr was recognized as insufficient.

Holcomb has noted that its second feature consisted of "ecumenical historiography." Their high value on ecumenical concerns led the new church historians to place an emphasis upon universality, unity, and continuity. By universality was meant universal in scope with emphasis upon the laity's role in history. The new church historians felt that the common people had been neglected in previous church histories with too much emphasis placed upon the articulate, learned elements of the church. The new church history called for a record of the whole experience of the church in every period and in every area.

Its third feature, epistemologically, has been described as "meta-critical" or "post-critical." The new church historian attempted to synthesize subjective and objective sources of knowledge. He recognized that the church was in the midst of Weltgeschichte as well as Heilsgeschichte. This consciousness was necessary for him in order to avoid reducing history to an exclusive theological interpretation. Furthermore, he also recognized a dialogue with the past.

38 Holcomb, "The New Church History," 12.
39 Ibid., 32.
40 Ibid., 12.
41 Ibid., 173.
but, unlike his predecessors, he did not see himself as a detached spectator studying facts. Instead he acknowledged that he was an active participant in dialogue. 42

Among the New Church History adherents were John Dillenberger, Franklin Littel, Albert C. Outler, Robert Paul, Jaroslav Pelikan, and Leonard J. Trinterud. Among their controlling assumptions were consensus, theological interpretation, and ecumenical vision. As Turner had emphasized the significance of the frontier while later disciples emphasized the frontier, the new church historians emphasized the church factor in church history rather than history. Trinterud noted this church factor among church historians' "assumption that the Church is a community of people redeemed by God in history through Jesus Christ." Trinterud declared, "Apart from this assumption there would be no church history, but rather the history of Christian religion." 43

It was in the context of the New Church History that Mead made a major contribution to American Church History in 1963. He redefined four areas of American churches. The first area was a redefinition of the church in its American context. 44 Mead noticed that the basic uniqueness of American churches was not in theology, but in their institutional forms. A foundation for such a structure was the free church idea. The "free" referred to a context in which the churches

42 Ibid., 145-59.
44 Mead, Lively Experiment, 103-34.
were independent of the state and autonomous in relation to it. The institutional form of denominationalism had evolved during the complex period from the Revolution to the Civil War. Mead declared that, unlike traditional forms of churches, denominational forms of free churches were bound not primarily by confessionals, nor by territory, but rather by voluntary association. 45

A second area Mead redefined was a more comprehensive view of voluntaryism. Voluntaryism was based upon the belief that consent was the essence of all cooperative human endeavors. The hope of progress existed only insofar as men could be morally persuaded. Mead maintained that one could not say unequivocally that in the American minds of the National Period inevitable progress prevailed. Later generations, he stated,

by mingling traditional Christian views of Providence with conceptions of evolutionary developmentalism, produced a comforting belief in inevitable progress which is sometimes read back into the earlier era. 46

Moreover, it was the principle of voluntaryism that shaped the formation of all the humanitarian movements and reform groups of the day. Even the denominations themselves "were little else than great voluntary societies of persuaded and convinced Christians with missionary and educational ends in view." 47

Voluntaryism was one of what Mead called the six formative elements of denominations. 48 The other five were historylessness, mission

46 Ibid., 96.
47 Ibid., 97.
48 Ibid., 108-33.
enterprise, revivalism, rivalry among denominations, and the churches' general flight from reason and the concomitant triumph of pietism. In the churches' general flight from reason, Mead also redefined the role of the Enlightenment and its relation to Christianity in America. 49

It was commonly held, Mead asserted, that rationalism and pietism of the eighteenth century were separate movements. Such a separation originated from the historians' stress upon differences. In actuality, the two were "obverse sides of a single movement" which swept in religious freedom and the principle of separation of church and state. 50 Opposition to the movement came from the traditional orthodoxy in churches. Mead believed the point was significant.

Only after this momentous achievement did pietism discover its latent incompatibility with rationalism and arrange a hasty divorce in order to remarry traditional orthodoxy. 51 On this point Mead discounted a major postulate of Sweet, who had declared that "it was the triumph of left-wing Protestantism in eighteenth century colonial America which underlay the final achievement of the separation of church and state." The chief problem with Sweet's statement, for Mead, was that left-wing Protestantism never triumphed in colonial America; colonial revivalism was largely a right-wing affair. 52

A fourth and final area Mead redefined in American Church history was the role of the frontier. In its formative years America had space--

49 Ibid., 38-54.
50 Ibid., 38.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 33.
a space of action. In Mead's mind, "... perhaps this made the real difference in the formation of 'this new man.'" Other nations were limited by geographical space and the closely related boundaries of tradition and custom, but

The story of America is the story of uprooted emigrant and immigrant people, ever moving rapidly onward through space so vast that space came to take precedence over time in the formation of their most cherished ideals, ... The 'story of religion in America' must be reinterpreted in this general context. ...

Mead acknowledged Sweet's contributions in the area of the frontier and suggested that Turner's frontier thesis was not totally useless if modified.

Mead noted that a theme commonly held by some frontier churches was the idea of rebuilding upon true and ancient foundations in the American wilderness. A notable example, for Mead, was the Disciples of Christ. They desired not to build on new insights of the times, but upon "restoration principles." Mead felt this was typically American. He suggested further work by historians on the theme.

There was in America, in this sense, a widespread reversion to 'primitive Christianity,' somewhat defined by Ernst Troeltsch, which has suggested to me the possibility of adapting the 'frontier thesis' of Frederick Jackson Turner to the interpretation of Christianity in America in a more profound way than that of Peter Mode and W. W. Sweet.

Along with Mead in the quest for redefining church history was a professor

53 Ibid., 5.
54 Ibid., 14-15.
55 Ibid., 62, 111, 200.
56 Ibid., 111.
57 Ibid., 200.
of Yale University Divinity School, Sidney E. Ahlstrom. As his book title suggested, Ahlstrom had McMaster's concern for the people, rather than articulate, learned groups alone. He called for a "renovation of American church history," based not so much on a totally new methodology as upon experience, and asserted the need for a "paradigm of restoration." He lamented the neglect of the black religious experience. Church history, for Ahlstrom, should include the traditions of Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, and others. In addition, historians should include large non-ecclesiastical religious movements such as New Thought, Theosophy, and Rosicrucianism. Moreover, he found little value for the current church historians' use of Turner's frontier thesis or Sweet's adaptations. Finally, he often worked within a Troeltschian framework updated by current sociological methodology.

Ahlstrom's work has been one of the latest attempts to be beyond Turner's thesis and Sweet's interpretations. Furthermore, a consensus methodology has prevailed with the New Church History since the Second World War. To this writer's knowledge, only Sidney Mead has suggested in any way a significant remodification of Sweet's adaptation of the frontier thesis. Thus, it may be that this chapter in American religious historiography has not yet been completed.

58 Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People.
59 Ibid., 13.
60 Ibid. This writer found that Ahlstrom devoted seven specific chapters out of sixty-three exclusively to Roman Catholics.
61 Ibid., 232, 453.
62 Ibid., 476, 480.
In conclusion, six tentative statements are offered. First of all, it has been shown that the peak of Turner's influence in religious history prevailed at the University of Chicago and its Divinity School during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, William Warren Sweet can be seen as a major popularizer and adherent of Turner's Frontier Thesis. It is doubtful if a theologian or church historian, on that basis alone, could have transmitted Turner's ideas as effectively as Sweet. His secular background in American History certainly played an important role in his influence.

Secondly, Turner's influence is still seen in religious history today. The major difference in its use today, however, is that historians recognize it as only a part, not the whole, of American religious history. This was the fallacy of so many of Turner's disciples. It still can be said that no student can afford to neglect in his studies the Turner Thesis nor its significance in American religious historiography.

Thirdly, Mead and the New Church History advanced considerably beyond the Frontier Thesis. The historical home-front of the post-Second World War years underwent a shaking of the foundations concerning scientific history and the Frontier Thesis. It now appears that the early 1940's was a watershed for Turnerian influence in the fields of secular and religious historiography.
Fourthly, the consensus approach was indispensable in breaking away from Turner's progressive methodology and Thesis. No doubt, consensus history as an approach will be only tentative in terms of continuing historiography. Hofstadter expressed a "cooling off" for this view in 1968. He admitted that others associated him with the consensus approach. He stated, "I trust it will be clear that while I still find use for insights derived from consensus history, it no longer seems as satisfactory to me as it did ten or twenty years ago."¹

It appears that at the present consensus history is at its peak. No doubt, as in Turner's case, major modifications will come with future events, and new historical data will require such a revision.

This brings attention to another point. This writer has recognized his own subjectivity in handling this thesis. This was true especially in his covering the post-Second World War years in historiography. Because of his "closeness" to the events, he recognized the dangers of contemporary history writing and the unpredictability of the human factor in history. He has left it up to the reader in determining the extent of the author's bias and subjectivity.

Fifthly, no doubt there will continue to be a flourishing of histories on minority and ethnic religious groups. Greater cooperation will exist between different historians in writing the histories. This already has been a major departure from such a statement as Sweet:

I am, of course, leaving out of account the Roman Catholic and the newer Lutheran churches which arose as a result

¹Hofstadter, Progressive Historians, 444.
of nineteenth century immigration because neither were important factors during the early years of the last century.  

Ahlstrom's book published in 1972 has dispelled this notion of Sweet's. More work will be done in the future as church historians display common controlling theological assumptions and a common methodology with other secular historians.

The sixth and final conclusion of this writer points to a more adequate handling of American Roman Catholicism in terms of religious history. He has recognized a serious defect on his part in considering Catholic historiography in this thesis. He has justified this on the grounds that Turner's influence has been more discernible in American Protestant religious historiography. He has felt that it has been only in the last fifteen years or so that American Catholic theologians and their fellow church historians have reached popularity beyond their own denomination.

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2 Sweet, "Frontier in American Christianity," 391.

General trends of religious historiography from colonial times

In addition to colonial religious history, the "City on a Hill" theme became popular with American historians during the early nineteenth century. Two foreign observers to the American way of life have left their records: Edouard de Montule, Travels in America, 1816-1817 (Bloomington, Ind., 1951; first published in 1821), and Michel Chevalier, Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America (Garden City, 1961), first published in 1839. John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, The Architecture of America (Boston, 1966), have useful comments on the "City on a Hill" theme as well.

During the period of the "City on a Hill" theme, European historiography influenced American historians. Wish, American Historians, has covered this adequately in writing about historians such as George Bancroft and Francis Parkman. However, Wish is limited in his treatment of religious historiography after the Puritan period. Harry E. Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (New York, 1963), has excellent accounts of European historiography drafted from his vast
knowledge of the nineteenth century, but Barnes is mostly concerned with European historiography rather than American religious church history.


In the 1890's, religious historians united with the members of the


Frederick Jackson Turner also gained prestige and fame as historian and scholar during the period. In 1961 the Henry C. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California, opened the Turner Collection to scholars. The most able Turner historian is Ray Allen Billington. In 1963, he accepted the position of Senior Research Associate at the Huntington Library. He has authored several books about Turner. His best and most recent is *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York, 1973). Other significant works by Billington related to Turner are *Frontier and Sections* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1961); *Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American*

In addition to the works of Billington, Turner's writings include The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner (Madison, 1938); The Significance of Sections in American History (New York, 1932); "Social Forces in American History," AHR, XVI (Jan. 1911), 217-233; and "Review of Theodore Roosevelt, The Winning of the West," The Dial, X (Aug. 1889), 71-73. Wilbur R. Jacobs had two works which contain personal correspondence of Turner with various persons. They are Frederick Jackson Turner's Legacy (San Marino, Calif., 1965), and The Historical World of Frederick Jackson Turner (New Haven, 1968).

In Early Writings Fulmer Mood has an excellent essay on the formative years of Turner. Moreover, the work has Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in America," which was his famous 1893 essay, and the footnotes to the essay. Later reprints of the essay did not include the footnotes. Significance of Sections has useful material by Max Farrand concerning Turner's significance in American historiography.

Turner lived at a time when the evolutionary hypothesis was applied and accepted by scholarship in the social sciences. Helpful foundation sources for this area were Henry Adams, "The Tendency of History," AHA Annual Report, 1894 (Washington 1895), 17-23, and James F. Rhodes, "History," AHA Annual Report, 1899 (2 vols., Washington 1900), I, 45-63. Also, Stow Persons, American Minds: A History of Ideas (New York, 1958), contains useful material on Turner's geographic determinism. Henry N. Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol
and Myth (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), gives decisive insights into the concept of two frontiers.


Part of the controversy concerning the thesis has been the progressive methodology upon which it is based. Richard Hofstadter, The Progressive Historians, Turner, Beard, and Parrington (New York, 1968), is an important source for understanding the progressive approach. Other sources for progressive historiography are Ray A. Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York, 1966); Allen F. Davis and Harold D. Woodman, eds., Conflict or Consensus in American History (Boston, 1966); John Higham, "The Cult of the 'American Consensus,'" Commentary, 27 (Feb. 1959), 93-100; and John Higham, "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic," AHR, LXVII (Aug. 1962), 609-625.

In other aspects of Turner's life and work, the Turner-Woodrow Wilson relationship can be seen briefly in Ray S. Baker, Woodrow Wilson; Life and Letters (Garden City, 1927-1939), 8 vols. Furthermore,

Turner's frontier thesis was well received by church historians at the University of Chicago. The most important source for statistics and conclusions on a quantitative basis for the early years of the university is Floyd W. Reeves and others, *The University of Chicago Survey* (Chicago, 1933), 12 vols. A similar work is Shailer Mathews and others, *The President's Report* (Chicago, 1903-04), 3 vols. Perhaps the most important literary description of the early beginnings of the university is Richard J. Storr, *Harper's University: The Beginnings* (Chicago, 1966). Useful material concerning Albion Small and Mathews is also found in Ernest C. Marriner, *The History of Colby College* (Waterville, Maine, 1963). Magazines and newspapers which provide useful insights into the early life of the university are George Hodges, "The University of Chicago," *The Outlook*, LXXX (May 6, 1905), 86-91; "Theological


In the 1890's, William R. Harper tried unsuccessfully to obtain Turner to head the university's history department to replace Hermann Von Holst. The account is best covered in Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner and Bennett, "Frederick Jackson Turner," but see also Eric F. Goldman, "Hermann E. Von Holst," MVHR, XXIII (March 1937), 511-32, and Wish, American Historians.

Although Turner had never been retained as a permanent professor at the University of Chicago, he strongly influenced the university and its Divinity School. Shailer Mathews and Peter G. Mode were the most prominent church historians who adapted the frontier thesis to religious historiography. Mathews wrote about his own life in New Faith for Old: An Autobiography (New York, 1936), and his progressivism and scientific spicit is handled in a scholarly

The most important sources for Sweet are his own writings that he produced over a period of almost fifty years. In "Every Dog Has His Day And I've Had Mine," The Divinity School News, XIII (Aug. 1, 1946), 4-8, Sweet described his arrival at the Divinity School. Further useful insights into Sweet's extensive use of the frontier thesis can be found in his "Some Significant Factors in American Church History," The Journal of Religion, VII (Jan. 1927), 1-15; Sweet, "The Frontier in American Christianity," in McNeill, Environmental Factors, 380-98; Sweet, Our American Churches (New York, 1924); Sweet, The American Churches: An Interpretation (New York, 1948); Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840 (New York, 1952); and Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York, 1945).

The William Warren Sweet Papers, housed at the Ellis Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, include letters from various scholars to Sweet as well as additional correspondence. Moreover, useful material is contained in the Sweet Papers concerning the frontier project of the Divinity School during the 1920's. The results can be found in W. W. Sweet, ed., Religion on the American Frontier (Chicago, 1931-1946), 4 vols.
CORRECTION

PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN REFILMED TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR
Next to the writings of Sweet and the Sweet Papers the most valuable analysis of Sweet's works is Jonathan A. Lindsey, "A Critical Evaluation of William Warren Sweet As A Writer of American Church History" (doctoral dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968). Lindsey presented excellent critical comments, but he failed to present adequately the historical conditions of historiography during the 1920's to the present. Other useful sources for understanding Sweet's general framework of writing American religious history were "Father of American Church History Dies," The Christian Century, LXXVI (Jan. 21, 1959), 71; Carlton J. H. Hayes, "The American Frontier--Frontier of What?" AHR, LI (Jan. 1946), 199-216; Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church (Washington, 1921); and Leonard L. Haynes, The Negro Community Within American Protestantism, 1619-1844 (Boston, 1953).

Sweet displayed the Black Legend bias in his writings. One example is in Sweet, A History of Latin America (New York, 1919). To help in understanding the Black Legend, the following sources are useful: Charles Gibson, Spain in America (New York, 1966); Lewis Hanke, ed., Do the Americas Have A Common History? (New York, 1964); Salvador de Madariaga, The Rise of the Spanish American Empire (New York, 1947); Hubert Herring, A History of Latin America (New York, 1961); and James E. Watson, "Bernard Moses: Pioneer in Latin American Scholarship," Hispanic American Historical Review, XLII (June 1962), 212-216.

John Bach McMaster at the University of Pennsylvania exercised considerable influence upon Sweet. McMaster's literary style is dealt with in William T. Hutchinson, "John Bach McMaster," in Hutchinson, Essays in American Historiography, 122-143. Other useful sources


A great deal of material on the conflict can be found in terms of general surveys of the period. One scholarly work is Henry May, "Shifting Perspectives on the 1920s," *MVHR*, XLIII (Dec. 1956), 405-27. Another indispensable article pointing out the changes in religious historiography at the time is Henry May, "The Recovery of American Religious History," *AHR*, LXX (Oct. 1964), 79-92.

In addition to the urban thesis, the subject of historical relativism entered into controversy. Two major historians who supported relativism were Carl Becker and Charles Beard. They set forth their views in the following works: Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *AHR*, XXXVII (Jan. 1932), 221-36; Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" *Western Political Quarterly*, VIII (Sept. 1955), 327-40; Beard, "Written History As An Act of Faith," *AHR*, XXXIX (Jan. 1934), 219-31; and Beard, "That Noble Dream," *AHR*, XLI (Oct. 1935), 74-87. An excellent description of historical relativism is found in Cushing Strout, *The Pragmatic Revolt in American History: Carl Becker and Charles Beard* (New Haven, 1958). However, Strout's work does have polemical portions against Beard's approach.


For the sociological approach to church history, H. Richard Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, 1929), is still a classic and oft-quoted work. One of the first major challenges to
Sweet's adaptation of the frontier thesis came from Sidney Mead. Mead's major work, *The Lively Experiment; The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, 1963), is a scholarly well-documented work. Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People*, is more comprehensive in scope than Mead's work, but Ahlstrom lacks the interpretative skills that Mead possessed. However, Ahlstrom has presented themes within a total context of society more accurately than previous church historians.
