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The Life of Jesse W. Fell

FRANCES MILTON I. MOREHOUSE, A.M.



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FOREWORD

There are few men in any generation who see their lives in relation to the accomplishment of that generation. Few realize, altho all profess to believe, that appraisal of worth must be according to the proportion of a man's part in the advance of his day; and that all honors and distinctions fall away from men when they stand before the bar of years, to be judged in the stark light of truth as to character and service. All men acknowledge this true, but the men are rare indeed who apply it to their own lives, and make it the basis of their individual schedule of values. Many men assert the immortality of the soul, but few can conceive themselves in any scheme of time which transcends the limits of their own lives; or content themselves to labor without reward, because they believe that in the fulness of time all souls must find full compensation.

In writing the story of a man whose part in the life of his generation might in itself bring him some meed of remembrance, I am nevertheless most anxious that his rare quality of indifference to such rewards as men might give, of steadfastness to ideals not generally held in his day, of faith in ultimate things, should stand out as the true reason for his being brought as fully as possible before men. Here was one who steadily ignored or refused honor and fame, who despised no quiet and unrecognized labor, who was not turned aside from his steady aim by the pressure of circumstance; in short, whose belief in the future was interpreted in all the doings of his busy life. This is the sufficient reason for writing a life of Jesse W. Fell.

FRANCES M. MOREHOUSE.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS, 1808-1836

The Fell farm in New Garden Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania, lay mainly upon a high ridge, which was known by the Indian name of Toughkenamon, or Fire Brand Hill. It is a region rich in historical associations, not far from Brandywine battlefield. The house was built of stone, and in later years was remodeled into a handsome country residence. Here Jesse W. Fell was born, November 10, 1808. His parents were Friends, of ancient and honorable English lineage, but of limited means and simple tastes. His father was a hatter, his mother a preacher of the Hicksites. Because he had much skill in song, his father, when he later united with the Methodists, became a choir leader; and he sometimes turned his resonant speaking voice to account in crying sales. There was a large family; Jesse, named for his father, was the third child.

When he was eight years old, the family moved to another town in New Britain Township, and subsequently to Downingtown. In the country Jesse attended, with his brothers and sisters, the neighborhood subscription schools maintained among the Friends of Pennsylvania; for there were then no public schools in the state. These schools, within the limited scope of their courses of study, were usually good, and the Fell children received a solid foundation in the elementary subjects. The elder brothers were apprenticed, upon reaching the proper age, to a blacksmith and a wheelwright respectively. As Jesse was not a robust lad, the parents and other relatives thought it best to apprentice him to a tailor, and cast about for a skilful master who might teach him this trade. But the boy himself objected so strenuously that the plan was abandoned. He "would learn a better business," he declared; and his parents, not wishing to coerce him, waited for some definite talent or liking to appear, which might guide their son in deciding upon his vocation. As yet the boy had no plan, save that of becoming wiser than he was. He wanted to go to some school that would teach him more than the country subscription schools offered.

Joshua Hoopes conducted a boarding school for boys in Downingtown at the time, which was the best school in that part of Pennsylvania. It was remarkable in that, at a time when the classics formed the core of instruction in almost all secondary schools, it emphasized the natural sciences. The master was an enthusiastic botanist, a popular lecturer on astronomy, and sufficiently adept at mathematics to win the admiration of his community. These subjects he had mastered by dint of systematic application of his really brilliant mind to printed treatises, and by giving rein to an originality which the higher schools of those days did not greatly encourage. Free from the traditions of schools, this village schoolmaster gave to his boys a type of education destined to become popular afterward, but in other places practically unknown to his own day. He taught of plants and animals, of husbandry and astronomy, of literature and mathematics, with a wealth of practical application which linked books with life and study with pleasure.

Jesse Fell wanted to attend this school but lacked funds. He applied for admission, however, offering to pay for his tuition by any kind of work that he could do. An arrangement was made by which Jesse was to work in the master's kitchen-garden and help about the house in return for his board and tuition. The work was hard, but not unpleasant. His master introduced him to the joy of intelligent gardening, took him for long tramps in the woods, and allowed him the freedom of his library. The books were a mine of riches to the boy, and Joshua Hoopes' enthusiastic love of plant life stirred to response a kindred feeling in the heart of his pupil. There grew out of this pleasant period in the life of the boy that love of trees which, in the man grown, was to give so richly to the prairies of the West.¹

That West continually called him. The idea of going into the new country beyond the mountains grew in him during the two years of his stay at Joshua Hoopes' school. When he had finished the course of study, Friend Hoopes wished him to enter into a partnership with him in a vineyard enterprise which he was then planning. Jesse Fell declined, not being willing to relinquish his dreams of a larger career in a new country; and Friend Hoopes abandoned the scheme "for want of a suitable partner." To further his plan of going west, Fell taught school for a period of about two years, from 1826 to 1828. The schools

¹Richard Edwards, *Jesse W. Fell*, 3.

he taught were near his home, at Buckingham, Colerain, Brown's, and Little Britain. As he understood surveying and other branches of higher mathematics, he was able to command a higher salary than the customary one of two dollars per quarter in cash. In the intervals of teaching he "kept store" for Issachar Price of Callaghersville, while that country merchant was away crying sales; and in all his spare time he was reading diligently.

The two years of teaching were a time of growth and development for the slim, blue-eyed Quaker boy. He tested his powers, enlarged his knowledge, broadened his interests. Altho he later considered himself "but an indifferent pedagogue," he was thought very efficient by those who employed him, except at Colerain. This was an extremely rigid Presbyterian community, with a school in which the New Testament had been the sole text in reading for a long time. Mr. Fell suggested that his pupils bring other books that the reading might be varied, whereupon he was denounced from the local pulpit as a Hick-site who had "expelled the Bible from his school." Without denying the first part of this charge, which was true, Jesse Fell asked that the second accusation might be inquired into officially, and when it was repeated without investigation, he closed the school, very hurt and very indignant.

It was while teaching that he had his first great lesson in the uses of force and diplomacy. A school bully, larger than himself, had defied him and had been whipped. After the whipping he administered a lecture, so tinctured with kindness and well-directed flattery—"what all men like if skilfully applied," said Mr. Fell in telling afterward of this experience—that the boy resolved to reform his ways. He became later a Methodist Episcopal minister of fine character and widespread influence.

At this time, also, Fell began to speak in public, and especially to debate whenever opportunity offered. At the little country school-houses there were held political debates, as well as other neighborhood meetings; and at these debates Fell, when he was only seventeen years of age, made for himself a name as a speaker, particularly upon the tariff, that subject so dear to the Pennsylvanian.²

²The principal source of information for Fell's early life is the unfinished manuscript biography begun by Richard Edwards from notes dictated by Mr. Fell, and already noted. It is among the *Fell MSS.*, as are all papers, not otherwise placed, in the following pages.

In the fall of 1828, having saved a little money and borrowed more from his brother Joshua, Jesse Fell started for the West. He was twenty years of age, still slight and rather frail in physique, and unacquainted with the world. He was going to seek his fortune in an unknown country, with no definite trade or profession as an asset. His family, with a helpful confidence in his ability to do what he wished to do, bade him godspeed. He spent the last night before starting for the West with a dear friend, R. Henry Carter, with whom he talked far into the night, of old days and days to come. In the morning he set out for Pittsburg. A young man by the name of Drummond, from Washington, started with him, but soon became discouraged and returned to his home.³

This first stage of the journey was accomplished on foot, except for a few miles at the end, when, very footsore, Fell wavered in his resolve not to spend his money until he was started upon the farther pilgrimage. He entered Pittsburg upon the deck of a little canal boat. This city was then the clearing house of all western enterprise, the gateway to the new land, and a center for securing employment. Here Jesse Fell met a Mr. Reese, who employed him as a book agent. He was to take orders for Malte Brun's *Geography*, Rollin's *Ancient History*, Josephus' works, and one other book, the name of which Mr. Fell afterward forgot. Armed with this means of defraying expenses, he boarded a steamer for Wheeling, where he soon fell in with a certain Mr. Howell, the publisher of the *Eclectic Observer*. Mr. Howell conceived a fancy for the young Quaker, and wished to interest him in his paper. This was a journal of protest against slavery, capital punishment, and any other institution which, in the eyes of the editor, deserved censure. Jesse Fell again decided against the half-gods; he was bound for the newer and greater West.

While canvassing Wheeling, however, he found time to write his first contribution to a periodical. The subject was one upon which he had often grown eloquent in the country school debates of Chester County: "The Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt." Howell was delighted with its force and fervor. Here was material worth the working—what an abolitionist he

³R. Henry Carter to E. J. Lewis, Mar. 8, 1887. Grace Hurwood to Fannie Fell, Mar. 16, 1913. The latter includes notes of facts related to Miss Hurwood by Mr. Fell. Franklin Price in the *Fell Memorial* (MS.), 9-10.

would make! He offered him an assistant editorship. But Fell declined, and went on with his own plans. They carried him, with his books, over the National Road, opened at that time as far as Zanesville. He met interesting people on the road, notably the Honorable Benjamin Ruggles, United States senator from Ohio from 1815 to 1833.

But the people along the National Road, being busily engaged in making homes in the wilderness, had no great thirst for Josephus and Rollin. Mr. Fell perceived that the business of selling books would give him no very speedy or considerable help in winning his way to the West. An illness took his small savings. Consequently, as the winter of 1829-30 drew near, he made his way back to Wheeling, where he spent the cold months in Mr. Howell's office, setting type, writing for the *Eclectic Observer*, and learning the tricks of a literary trade. At this time he asked his father for money to invest in a part interest in the *Amulet*, for which he had been agent. Very fortunately, as he himself said afterward, his father was not able to help him at that time, and the idea of this partnership was given up.

When the spring returned, he set off again with his books under his arm, up the Ohio and toward the north, through the counties of Jefferson and Columbiana (where were people of his own religious faith, upon whose friendly interest he might confidently depend), and back to Pittsburg, the headquarters of his book house. Throughout the journey he had kept a notebook, which was later lost. The uncertain fortunes of a traveling agent, his illness of the year before, and the knowledge of the world which his experience was giving him, crystallized what had before been but a vague ambition into a settled determination. He would prepare himself for a profession, which in those days even more generally than at the present time, led to honor, influence and power. He would be a lawyer.⁴

With this resolution in mind, but with his agent's paraphernalia still in hand, he turned his face westward again in the spring of 1830. He had gone as far as Steubenville when the event occurred which was to prove the means of accomplishing his desire. Walking along the sidewalk with an agent's ready eye for a possible buyer, he espied a young man busily

⁴Elwood Brown to Jesse W. Fell, Dec. 20, 1829. Jesse Fell to Jesse W. Fell, Jan. 16, 1830. Hannah Fell (an aunt) and Rebecca Fell (his mother) to Fell, Feb. 6, 1830.

chopping wood. He looked not averse to good reading, and the agent approached him in the interests of Josephus, Rollin, and Fell. But the woodchopper was as poor as Fell himself, and the two, finding a common interest in their common situation, fell to discussing ways, means, and prospects. The woodchopper was studying law, he said, in the office of a local firm of excellent reputation. He would like to buy books, but needed every cent he could make for bare living expenses. After he had been admitted to the bar, he was to pay for his tuition; and then he would need all surplus funds for his law library. There was a place for one more student with Stokeley and Marsh, and he would introduce Fell to the firm.⁵

Fell soon made arrangements for his law course. He was to pay his way in part by doing office work for the firm, and partly by such odd jobs as he might find to do in that frontier community, where there was usually work for all. His two elder brothers helped him from time to time as their limited means permitted. Stokeley and Marsh soon came to value him very highly, while he regarded both the partners with the greatest affection. About a year after beginning his studies in their office, he made a visit to his old home, and was present at the wedding of his brother Joshua, on January 16, 1831. On the return journey his father brought him as far as Shippensburg, a point some forty miles west of Harrisburg.

For another year the law lessons in the office of Stokeley and Marsh went on. The young men in the office had practice in public speaking, for they were eligible to membership in The Forum, a society whose object was the improvement of its members "in speaking and general culture". Jesse Fell made his first speech before this body upon his old theme of the abolition of imprisonment for debt. The presiding officer, a Mr. Wright, who had been a congressman and was later a judge, praised his speech; and Fell tried again. Mr. Stokeley was a local leader in the ranks of the Whigs, who were at that time actively opposing Jackson. There were innumerable stump

⁵Fell to Jesse Fell, June 26, 1830. The story as told by Edwards implies that the idea of becoming a lawyer did not occur to Fell until the time of his interview with the woodchopper. But a letter to his parents, dated June 6, 1830, indicates that the idea had been with him for some time; while Franklin Price states (*Fell Memorial*, 9) that he had read Blackstone while still in Chester County.

speeches to be made, and Mr. Stokeley gave to Jesse Fell his share in the work. The younger man conceived a great admiration for Henry Clay, which guided his political opinions and activities while Clay lived. A youth working in Trumbull's bookstore, and at that time a Clay enthusiast with the rest, became his friend. This boy was Edwin M. Stanton, afterward secretary of war under Lincoln.

The autumn of 1832, when Jesse Fell was preparing for his bar examination, was an especially busy season. He took these examinations, with three other aspirants, on the first of October, passed them successfully, was admitted, and started on foot for the West about a fortnight later.⁶ It was a somewhat risky enterprise, for the payment of his debts took most of his money, leaving very little for the outfit and for traveling expenses. His family helped him as they could, but this was not much. Mr. Marsh, regretting to lose a youth who gave so great promise, had offered him a partnership if he would stay with him, his own partnership with Mr. Stokeley having recently been dissolved. Again Fell chose to answer the call of the ultimate mission. His plan was to travel through parts of Ohio which he had not yet visited and through Indiana and Illinois. He seems not to have thought of settling at once, as he suggested to his father at the time that he "might return by steamboat from St. Louis, as this may be done with little expense." He seems also to have left with Mr. Marsh the idea of possibly returning to enter into a partnership at a later time.

Traveling on foot through Ohio and Indiana, Mr. Fell came to Eastern Illinois in November, 1832. The presidential election had been held the day before he entered the state. At Danville he met Judge McRoberts, a prominent citizen of those days, who told him of a village then but lately founded, named Bloomington. Its location Judge McRoberts thought good; it was a "coming" town. In Decatur, the next considerable place which Fell visited, this report of Bloomington was repeated. At Jacksonville, Judges Lockwood and Smith made out for him his certificate of admission to the bar of Illinois.⁷

In Springfield Fell was to talk to John T. Stuart, to whom he had letters of introduction, and whose advice he wished be-

⁶Certificate of admission to Ohio Bar (James Ross Wells, clerk), dated Oct. 13, 1832. Fell to some member of his family, Sept. 23, 1832. Jesse or Rebecca Fell to Fell, Sept. 2, 1832.

⁷Nov. 1, 1832. This certificate is also among the *Fell MSS.*

fore deciding upon a location. At sunset of a warm day in late November, he arrived in the city which was afterward to be the capital of Illinois. John Todd Stuart was sitting before the door of his house when Fell approached, carrying the stout stick and carpet-bag which were his worldly possessions. Many young men so accoutred trod the streets of the new cities of the West in those days, and Stuart with a characteristic friendliness spoke cordially to this newcomer and asked him what he might do for him. Fell answered that he was looking for John T. Stuart, and would like to be directed to his house. Upon learning that he was speaking to Mr. Stuart, Fell produced a letter from one of Stuart's clients in Philadelphia, introducing the Pennsylvanian and asking the favor of advice and help for him. The two men sat down then and there to discuss the question of location and opportunity.⁸

Mr. Stuart spoke especially, as had Fell's previous advisors, of the new county of McLean, lately created by the legislature, and its county seat of Bloomington. It was, he said, a very new town, and he was quite sure that there was no lawyer there as yet. With the quick decision which was one of his characteristics, Fell determined to go at once to Bloomington, and rose to depart. Stuart invited him to stay the night, but so eager was Fell to reach his destination, that he declined the proffered rest and entertainment, and trudged that night many miles on his way to Bloomington. At New Salem, pausing for food and rest, he first heard the name of Abraham Lincoln, when the townspeople told him of the company they had sent to the Black Hawk War. From there he went to Pekin, and then sixteen miles farther to Dillon, since called Delavan, in Tazewell County. Here he stopped to visit at the home of William Brown, members of whose family he had known in Pennsylvania. He was almost without money, but came "carrying a knapsack and feeling as big as King Solomon in all his glory," and full of that buoyancy and faith in the future which made him both representative and leader in his day and place.⁹

William Evans built the first house in Bloomington in 1826. Four years later, on the twenty-fifth of December, 1830, McLean County was created. The first sale of town lots was on July 4,

⁸These facts were related to the writer by Judge James Ewing of Bloomington, Dec. 4, 1912. Mr. Stuart had himself told them to Judge Ewing. See also Fell to David Davis, Dec. 16, 1885.

⁹Joshua Brown to E. J. Lewis, Dec., 1896.

1831. At the close of 1832 the town numbered about one hundred people, while the neighboring settlement of Blooming Grove had fully two hundred and fifty. General Gridley, lately returned from the Black Hawk War, was the leading citizen. When Jesse Fell arrived, William Evans had but lately sold his house to James Allin, who opened a store in it, and laid out the town in lots. There was no resident clergyman at that time, no newspaper, and no lawyer.

Fell's survey of the situation satisfied him that there existed a favorable opening for him, and he returned to Delavan, where William Brown offered him employment for the winter as a tutor to his children. Mr. Brown was the great man of his locality—a man who had glass panes in the windows of his cabin, whose family had “come west” in a carriage, and who employed a teacher to instruct his children. He had brought his family from Pennsylvania in 1828. Later, he became known in central Illinois as “Joseph,” because in a year of crop-failure he had sold his good crop of corn for a dollar a bushel, the normal price of grain in early days in Illinois. People for many miles around came to him for food and seed. His home was a social center. From it the young people started on long rides to lectures or parties at Pekin or at distant farmhouses and settlements. The eldest son, Joshua, was the leading spirit among the younger men. Eliza, the eldest of the sisters, was a girl of rare loveliness and ability, whose early death a few years later brought great sorrow to the whole neighborhood. The children of two other families attended Jesse Fell's classes that winter. In the Brown home he found congenial friends, encouragement, and good counsel, as well as the material help he needed.¹⁰

When the spring came he went back to Bloomington, and opened his office in a small brick building at the northeast corner of Main and Front streets. The small legal library, which Mr. Marsh had agreed to send him when he was located, to be paid for when practice gave him means, arrived during the spring, after a long journey down the Ohio and up the Mississippi and the Illinois to Pekin, whence it was carted overland to Bloomington. Fell boarded with James Allin, who, in addition to his other activities, kept the only inn of that locality, at what came afterward to be known as “the old Stipp place.”

With the growth of population and the inevitable troubles

¹⁰E. M. Prince, “Hester Vernon (Brown) Fell”, in *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of McLean County*, II, 1024-27.

in adjusting titles and claims to lands, there came legal business in plenty to Bloomington's first lawyer.¹¹ On the second of May, 1833, he made his initial appearance in an Illinois courtroom. This was at the third session of the Circuit Court in McLean County, which sat for three days, and disposed of several cases. Fell was attorney in two of these cases, securing favorable judgment in both by default. At the next session, in September, he had a number of cases, which he managed so well that his position and clientele were henceforth assured.¹²

John T. Stuart continued to be his friend, furnishing him letters of introduction and recommending him to clients. He became known as a good judge of land, and located innumerable farms for his clients, making the entries at the land office in Danville. Before long he began to acquire land for himself, and to exhibit the outward and visible signs of prosperity. He bought

¹¹John T. Stuart told Judge James Ewing that when he attended court in Bloomington six months after Fell had settled there, Fell told him he was worth about \$60,000 above all debts. The statement is manifestly inaccurate, as to the time of the occurrence; but it gives some idea of the rapidity with which fortunes were built up in the prosperous days of the early land-exchange. Fell was "worth \$60,000" in 1837.

The first professional card used by Mr. Fell gives as references the following lawyers: Richard Dorsey, Baltimore; William Dorsey, Richard Sturgeon and Amos Jeans, Philadelphia; William P. Dixon, New York; Willis Hall, Albany, New York; D. B. Leight and Company, Louisville; Hon. John C. Wright and Hon. Samuel Stokeley, Ohio; and Hon. John T. Stuart, Illinois.

¹²The first session of Circuit Court in McLean County was held Sept. 22, 1831, at Mr. Allin's house, but with no docket; at the second, held Sept. 27, 1832, the jury tried one appealed case, dismissed several on the docket, and continued one. Record 1, Circuit Court, McLean County, 1-14. Fell to his parents, Nov. 17, 1833.

An incident related by Fell to Miss Grace Hurwood, and repeated from her notes in the letter of March 16, 1913, referred to elsewhere, goes to show that although a Quaker, Fell was not averse to defending himself in traditional ways. He and another young lawyer became engaged in an altercation in which his opponent accused him of lying. "I told him that would have to be settled outside the courtroom, so when court adjourned, we promptly went out to settle it in the time-honored way. Neither of us gained much advantage over the other, as while he was the stronger, I was the quicker, and we were parted before we could finish. We had fought hard enough however to be willing to shake hands. In the morning we were indicted for fighting 'to the disturbance and alarm of the people'. My defense was that nobody was at all alarmed, much to Lincoln's amusement, and the indictment was quashed."

his first horse, McLean, on which he took those long night rides to Danville, Springfield, Urbana and Vandalia, that soon began to tell sadly upon his health. His restless energy responded to the insistent demands of a growing, changing, developing country. Some prophetic idea of its possibilities, and much boyish eagerness to realize his dreams speedily, urged him to an activity which was the continual wonder of all his friends. He was interested in everything that promised to help the country of his adoption, and developed early that loyalty to Bloomington and McLean county which characterized him in so much that he did.

An instance of this loyalty to Bloomington occurred early in his career. In 1834 an effort was made to take from McLean County its territory west of the third principal meridian, and add it to Tazewell County. This would have made the western boundary line of McLean County scarce eight miles from Bloomington, thus changing its central location to a western one, and so furnishing a possible reason for removing the county seat to another town at some future time. Mr. Fell opposed the movement valiantly from the first. Fearing that its friends might push the measure through the legislature if that body were left unguarded, he spent most of the winter of 1834-35 in Vandalia, where his efforts and influence were such that the project failed of realization. McLean County owes to him, consequently, and to those who worked with him, the distinction of being the largest county in the state.¹³

The winter in Vandalia had results other than the preservation of the territorial integrity of McLean County. John T. Stuart of Springfield and Abraham Lincoln of New Salem were both at that time members of the legislature from Sangamon County. The two men roomed together, and Jesse Fell lived in the same house. These men were very interesting to the easterner, who noted the sharp contrast between Stuart's attractive person and polished manners and Lincoln's big-boned, angular, wrinkled face and direct ways. Stuart introduced Fell to Lincoln, and the two became almost at once great friends, for there was in them a fundamental likeness which transcended all differences of creed, training or destiny. The friendship of the trio lasted to the death of the president in 1865, and was cemented by much mutual service. In 1838, when Stuart was a candidate for Congress against Stephen A. Douglas, both Fell

¹³Fell to David Davis, Dec. 15, 1885. Lewis, *Life*, 3. Lawrence Weldon, "Memorial of Jesse W. Fell" in *Fell Memorial*.

and Lincoln exerted themselves to the utmost to insure his election. Douglas and Fell also, in spite of the vigorous opposition of the latter on this and other occasions, were good friends, serving each other in many ways with the greatest cordiality.¹⁴

Mr. Fell almost immediately, in spite of his youth and inexperience, seems to have become a leading citizen. This was partly due, of course, to the fact that he was Bloomington's first regularly trained and capable lawyer; but it must also have been largely owing to innate qualities of leadership and to that singular charm and adaptability to which many of his generation have borne witness. In 1833, Benjamin Mills wrote to him asking for support for his candidacy to represent the third congressional district in the next Congress. He interested himself in securing a mail route from Bloomington to Springfield, concerning which Governor Joseph Duncan wrote encouragingly in the spring of 1834. He was in requisition for Fourth of July orations, citizens' mass meetings, and debating-clubs. In 1834 he became, by appointment, commissioner of school lands for McLean County. The county records of that and the succeeding year show many mortgages which he drew up with the school money, both for town lots and for farms. The last of these was made in October of 1835.¹⁵

Early in that year the state legislature chartered the State Bank of Illinois, of which Mr. Fell became an agent. This institution consisted of a "parent bank" at Springfield, with branches scattered over the state, and had a capital of one and a half million dollars. During 1835 and 1836 the bank made seventy-seven mortgages in the city and vicinity of Bloomington, to most of which Fell's name is signed as witness to instrument. The bank passed out of existence in February, 1842, having sus-

¹⁴Fell to Lincoln, July 20, 1838. Lincoln to Fell, undated, about July 25, 1838. Douglas to Fell, March 21, 1844.

¹⁵School money in Illinois was at this time unappropriated to its ultimate use. Benjamin Mills to Fell, Feb. 22, 1833. (Mills was opposed in this election by W. L. May, another personal friend of Fell.) Joseph Duncan to Fell, Apr. 4, 1834. The manuscript of a Fourth of July oration, delivered in 1833 or 1834, is interesting in that it contains, besides the usual congratulatory and patriotic sentiments, a strong plea for free public schools. Fell delivered this same oration again in Clinton many years later, at which time he noted the presence of two or three Revolutionary soldiers.

pendent specie payment in May, 1837, with its bills at fifteen per cent discount.¹⁶

The records of these and other enterprises show that by 1840 Fell had become a man of position and prominence in Central Illinois. He was known chiefly for his dealings in real estate, and of these it is meet to speak more fully.

¹⁶N. H. Ridgley to Fell, Oct. 30, Nov. 2, Nov. 6, Nov. 13, 1835; May 3, 1836. E. J. Phillips to Fell, May 10, 1836. Ridgley to Fell, Oct. 11, Oct. 29, Nov. 18, 1836. Phillips to Fell, Nov. 26; Ridgley to Fell, Oct. 26 and 29, 1836. See Thompson, "A Study of the Administration of Governor Thomas Ford," in *Governors' Letter-Books, 1840-1853*, xii-1, (*Ill. Hist. Col.* VII); Ford, *History of Illinois*, 191 ff.

CHAPTER II

BUSINESS VENTURES AND HOME LIFE, 1834-1856

The preëmption law of 1830, practically reënacted in 1834, provided that when two men settled on the same quarter-section of government land, each of them might preëempt an additional eighty acres anywhere in the same land district.¹ These claims were called "floats." Many poor men were induced by capitalists to lend their names for floats, later to sell the claims so acquired for enough to pay for the land they lived on. In this way many hard-pressed pioneers were enabled to gain a title to their farms, while such land-buyers as were shrewd enough and had the requisite ready money, secured much fine land in Illinois during the '30's. Mr. Fell, who first visited the village of Chicago late in 1833, afterward remarked to friends that land in that locality might be secured in this way, and that it would be a paying investment, as a great city would eventually stand on the lake-front at that point. His friends laughed at him, as much of the land for which he prophesied immense future values was covered with water during most of the year.

But one man in Bloomington, William Durley, declared that he believed Fell right in his estimate of Chicago's future, and loaned him money for real-estate operations there. He demanded a high rate of interest as compensation, or if he preferred it when the time of settlement came, half of the land. With this money Fell secured four floats in the fall of 1834, the land being within the limits of the present city. When the notes were due, Mr. Durley chose half the land as his share. Part of the two "eighties" which came to him, Fell laid out in town lots.² The rest of the land he sold to David Davis, Dr. John An-

¹21st Cong. Sess. I., *Acts of the United States*, Chap. 209, § 2. (May 29, 1830.) 23rd Cong. Sess. I., *Acts of the United States*, Chap. 54, §§ 2-3. (June 19, 1834.) Treat, *The National Land System, 1785-1820*, 306, 386. Fell to his parents, Nov. 17, 1833.

²Lewis states (*Life*, 26) that they comprised "Fell's addition to Canalport". The property lies between 26th and 31st streets, and west of the tracks of the former Pittsburg, Fort Wayne and Chicago R. R. (now part of the Pennsylvania System).

derson, James Allin, M. L. Covell and O. Covell for eight thousand dollars, taking their notes for the amount. After the crash of 1837 he took back the land and surrendered the notes at the earnest entreaty of the purchasers. His purpose was to hold the land for the advance which he knew would follow when better times had restored confidence. But altho he held out against the storm longer than many, his liabilities were such finally that he had to sacrifice even this resource. He mortgaged the "eighties" for eight hundred dollars each, the mortgages being foreclosed by David Davis and others.³

While he owned land in and around Milwaukee, Fell was much interested in the development of that city and of the state of Wisconsin. Governor John Reynolds, writing to him from Washington in 1836, sent the pleasant news of assured federal aid for a lighthouse in Milwaukee harbor, a survey of the harbor, and a "road to start from that point running west to the Mississippi." William L. May, having been elected to the National House of Representatives, attempted at Fell's earnest solicitation to secure a post-office at Chippewa, but failed, because Chippewa was then still in the Indian country. Fell owned lands "up the river from Cassville" in Wisconsin, in 1837, and made an inspecting tour among the Indians in "the pine country" in the autumn of that year.⁴

But these operations in real estate in places far distant from his own home, were insignificant when compared with Fell's part in the development of Central Illinois. Gaining a reputation as a judge of land in connection with his business of locating tracts for settlement and investment, and becoming thoroughly acquainted with the topography of the country and with land values, through his work of loaning school funds and State Bank funds, he entered early into extensive operations in Illinois lands for himself and others. He had great faith in land. When a boy, spending unhappy hours picking the stones from the rocky farm in Pennsylvania, he had dreamed of the prairie, and

³Lewis, *Life*, 25-27. Fell was at this time unable to borrow money of Eastern capitalists, while Davis had friends from whom he secured the funds. William L. May to Fell, Feb. 28, 1838.

⁴John Reynolds to Fell, June 28 and July 6, 1836. (Reynolds was financially interested in the lands dealt in by Durley and Fell.) Fell to Hester Vernon Brown, July 30, 1837: "from the Plain River, Cook County, Wisconsin." Fell to Wm. Brown, Aug. 24, 1837.

wished that he might own farms in the land where, travelers said, there were no stones in the fields. He was in a position, during those halcyon years between his arrival in Illinois and the great panic of 1837, to satisfy this early ambition. He did so on a scale which only the low land values and the easy speculation of the day made possible. He was one of a generation of men of large faith and far vision, who believed in their states, who foresaw the empire of the West that was to be, and who supported their faith by generous investments. There were, besides men of such a stripe, any number of mere adventurers, wildcat speculators, who also contributed to the false feeling of security and prosperity that preceded the panic of 1837. The General Assembly, in 1836 and 1837, entered into an ambitious series of internal improvements, which while it saddled the state with a debt of more than fourteen million dollars, was nevertheless a strong stimulant to progress. The period was one of rapid development. Merely to have been upon the market, to have been bought and sold, to have a price, gave value and prominence to the western lands and to western enterprise. When in addition to this towns were founded and eastern people settled upon the prairie farms, when mail routes and railroads were projected and built across the wastes that separated the frontier cities, when schools and churches and shops gave to western life an approximation of conditions "back East," the goal of the builders of the West seemed in sight.⁵

In this work of nation-building Jesse Fell had no small part in that region which he adopted for his home. He worked mainly in Central Illinois, with Bloomington as a center, but branched out wherever opportunity offered. Clinton was among the first towns in which he became interested. He founded the town, with James Allin, in 1835, naming it for DeWitt Clinton. Mr. Fell had entered a goodly amount of land about the site of his proposed town before laying it out, and made a handsome profit from the sale of town lots. The town owes to him, as did all the places where he had a chance to plant, its early growth of trees.

Fell did not escape paying the price for what he accomplished. His restless energy led him to overwork, and in June,

⁵Mail routes were established by Congress in response to petitions from citizens of the localities to be served. In 1838, for instance, the people of McLean and Tazewell counties asked for a mail route from Bloomington to Lacon. It was not granted at once, but came after some delay. Richard M. Young to Fell, Feb. 21, 1839.

1835, he became very seriously ill. He was in Chicago at the time of his seizure, on the twenty-third of the month, and started on the next day for Bloomington, hoping to reach his friends before the malady developed into one requiring constant care. He succeeded in reaching the home of Dr. Gaylord at Oxbow Prairie in Putnam County, where he was taken in and cared for while he lay helplessly ill for three weeks. At the end of that time he was placed in a carriage and taken to Bloomington, not without further injury to his health, and was unable to attend to his usual duties until about the end of July. Early in August, however, he made a long trip to St. Louis, stopping at the Brown home in Delavan on the way. He himself attributed his illness to exposure and overwork, explaining to his family that in the six months preceding it he had ridden not less than five thousand miles, going sixty, seventy, eighty, and even eighty-five miles a day. These journeys, he further pointed out, he had made in every kind of weather, hot and cold, wet and dry, swimming his horse through streams and afterward riding in wet clothes for hours, and making long rides at night. But the end for which he had endured these hardships was by that time gained, and he registered a vow never again to abuse his health and strength in this manner. He had made, he said, not only what he himself needed, but also a surplus with which to aid those who had long aided him.⁶

Having thus earned a rest, in the autumn of that year he went back to his old home for the first time since settling in the West, stopping on the way for a visit at the home of his brother Thomas in Lancaster, Ohio. In Pennsylvania he suffered a return of his former illness, lying ill at his brother Robert's in Little Britain for over a month. In the spring of 1836, however, he was back in Bloomington, not only looking after his own interests, but planning for his brother Kersey. He had entered land for his brother Joshua during the preceding year, and this was deeded to him in May, 1836. Kersey Fell, after a period of clerkship for Covell and Gridley, was made clerk of the newly erected DeWitt County with power to organize it. He was later admitted to the McLean County bar and practised for many years in Bloomington. Thomas left Ohio for the same place after his brother's visit in the autumn of 1835. Rebecca Fell, a

⁶Fell to some member of his family, Aug. 3, 1835. When Kersey Fell arrived in Bloomington the next spring, he was told that his brother was "one of the richest men in town". Lewis, *Life*, 25.

favorite sister, was being educated at Kimberton Boarding School, and later became a teacher in McLean County.⁷ In 1837 all of Fell's family who were not already in the West came to Bloomington, where they made their home subsequently.

Two years after his family had followed him to Illinois, Mr. Fell married Hester Vernon Brown, a daughter of that home which had first welcomed him to the West. She had been "finished" at a boarding school in Springfield since the days when Fell had been tutor in the Brown home. Rev. Nathaniel Wright of Tremont, a Universalist clergyman, performed the marriage ceremony, for both bride and bridegroom had become somewhat liberal as to Quaker ways and Quaker customs.⁸ The wedding day was January 26, 1838. Mr. Fell's parents were not present, but his sister Rebecca and his brother Kersey attended, and his close friend David Davis was best man. Joshua Brown, brother of Hester, who was also a friend much valued, came to the wedding from his home in Edwards County, and afterwards helped to move the household goods into the cottage that Mr. Fell had built in Bloomington. This cottage, later enlarged by many additions, was on the land which Fell subsequently sold to David Davis. In the accomplishments of Jesse Fell his wife had no small part. She was a notable "manager," in the comprehensive sense in which that word is used in speaking of housewives. She was courageous, capable, and independent. In her own home and in the community she seconded the efforts of her husband with sympathy and ability. Outliving him by twenty years, she was privileged to carry out some of the plans which he himself had left unfinished; and in the same time she demonstrated the force of her own personality, which for so many years she had chosen to make second to his.

After the first few years in Bloomington Fell neglected his law practice in favor of the more congenial work of buying and

⁷*McLean County Historical Society Transactions*, II, 35. Fell to Hester V. Brown, Feb. 28, 1837. Rebecca Fell to Fell, Nov. 20, 1836. In this letter Fell's sister expresses the greatest love for and gratitude to him. It is finely written and quaintly composed, but unbends in places to a degree of childish carelessness and even to one faint suspicion of slang. Other letters, models of an art carefully taught in girls' boarding schools of that day and showing both strength of character and an irrepressible sense of humor, are dated June 10, Sept. 25, Oct. 23, and Christmas, 1836.

⁸Rachel Sharpless (a great-aunt) to Hester Brown. Undated, but about 1836.

selling land. In 1836 he sold out both books and practice to David Davis, altho he continued to use the same office with him for some time. Davis had come from Maryland in the autumn of 1835, and settled in Pekin. The chills and fever of the early prairie days so sapped his strength that he had about decided to leave Illinois, when Jesse Fell, alert for a good lawyer to whom he might turn over his now burdensome practice, persuaded him to go to Bloomington. He offered his own books, office and whatever financial aid might be necessary, as an inducement; and kept through a long life his promise of friendship and help. With the practice and office, Fell sold him several hundred acres of land, at the prevalent price of eight dollars per acre, and this land became the nucleus of Davis' subsequently considerable fortune.⁹

His real estate and other business took Fell frequently to the eastern cities. In 1841 he made such a trip, of which interesting details are to be found in various letters. Bidding his wife good-bye at Pekin, whence she went to her father's home with her son Henry, to stay until her husband's return, he boarded the *Glaugus* for St. Louis. There he waited from Monday until Wednesday for a boat to Cincinnati, taking then the *Goddess of Liberty*, which he declared "a splendid boat," and which reached the city on Sunday evening. On Monday morning he took passage in the *Tioga* for Wheeling, thence by stage to Baltimore, where he arrived June 20, 1841. Two days later he was in Washington.

In that city he met, in the House of Representatives, his old preceptor and friend, General Stokeley of Steubenville. He interested Stokeley in the manuscript of a book he had with him, which had been copyrighted in March; and the two men arranged for its publication. It was a digest of laws and forms relative to real estate, evidently intended to be used as a reference or text book. No further reference is made to it after 1841, and it was never published. Fell wrote to his wife at the time that he had secured favorable attention from some of the best

⁹The *Bloomington Observer and M'Lean County Advocate* of April 22, 1837, contains the professional card of "David Davis, Attorney and Counsellor at Law. . . Office on Front street, with J. W. Fell, Esq. . ." The same newspaper contains the card of Thomas Fell, *vendue crier*. Fell in the *Pantagraph*, June 29, 1886.

lawyers in the country concerning it. "We think we shall be able to make some money out of it," he added.¹⁰

Jeremiah Brown, a member of the House, was another old friend whom it was a pleasure to greet. The Westerner found much entertainment in visiting sessions of Congress, and wrote his wife faithful accounts of what he saw there. Clay had introduced his bank bill, which many thought would pass, "although some fear." Fell heard him make a strong plea for it, which, he wrote home, was "a great effort;" he still thought Clay a very great man, but had decided that noted men are in general like others—"distance lends enchantment . . ." "I yesterday visited the President and Post Office Department—and had a couple of local postmasters dismissed. The President [Tyler] is a clean, good sort of man—but 'ugly as sin.' " He predicted the creation of a national bank, the repeal of the sub-treasury law, the distribution of the proceeds of the sale of public lands, a slight modification of the tariff—events that any loyal Whig might easily persuade himself that he saw upon the political horizon.

From Washington he returned to Baltimore, and took passage in a steamboat down Chesapeake Bay to the eastern shore of Maryland, where he visited Frank Brattan, an old Bloomington friend. Returning to Baltimore, he went the next day to Philadelphia, noting the fact that it required but five hours to go a hundred miles. In Philadelphia he was most impressed, to judge by the space given to the matter in one of his punctiliously frequent letters to his wife, by a new "bonnett" being worn by the Quaker girls of that city. "I have concluded," he wrote her, "when I get ready to start home to buy thee a Bonnett, if I can muster money enough to spare—of a very pretty fashion lately introduced. If I get one I will get the *materials* to make some more of the same kind. . . . I have almost fallen in love with the Quaker bells of Chestnut Street on account of their pretty bonnetts. Not perhaps entirely on account of their bonnetts either—but because they are in the *first place* in *themselves* very pretty—and *secondly* because their dress and deportment is so

¹⁰The complete title: *Digest of the Statute Laws of the States and Territories of the United States concerning the promissory notes and bills of exchange—the limitations of actions—the conveyance of real estate and the appropriate modes of authenticating deeds, devises, letters of attorney, etc.* Copyright Office Records, U. S. D. C. MISC., March 6, 1841; District of Illinois. Fell to his wife, June 22 and July 6, 1841.

neat and modest. Of all the city girls in the world commend me to the Philadelphians." He promised his son Henry books and toys in the same letter.

During his stay in Philadelphia, besides attending to the business which had taken him to the East, he visited a close friend, Joseph J. Lewis, at Westchester. The return trip was made by way of New York City and the Great Lakes. Fell expected to reach his home by the first of August or thereabouts; there is no record of the exact date of his return. The details of this trip to the East have been given with some degree of fullness, not only because they serve to illustrate many of Fell's interests, but because this was the first of many similar journeys; for until old age forced him to limit his activities, he made one or two trips to the Atlantic seaboard each year.

The real estate business, indeed, entailed far more absence from home than suited Fell, but it also took him much into the open, which was with him a strong consideration. Its financial returns were greater than those of law practice, and it brought him into constant contact with many men, and with the very heart and spirit of the growth of the West. But the panic of 1837 put a stop to real estate operations, as to all other business. Fell lost all that he had gathered together, and was compelled to take benefit of the bankruptcy law of 1841. Surrendering all his lands, he was discharged from his indebtedness (which was later entirely repaid), and began again, as penniless as when he first came to Illinois in 1832. As the bankruptcy court offered much business for lawyers, he took up his old profession again, reluctantly but with marked success. The sessions were held in the United States court at Springfield, and the work brought Fell again into his old strenuous habits. He invariably prepared his cases in Bloomington, that he might be with or near his family as much as possible; then leaving his home at sunset, he would appear in court the next morning, ready after his all-night drive to prosecute the business of the day.¹¹

¹¹Certificate of admission to the Illinois District Court, Feb. 10, 1842. In an interview with Richard Edwards long afterwards, Fell explained his dislike of law by saying that he wished to be able to use his powers of persuasion where conviction urged, and not for money from clients; and that he disliked to live indoors. "A few years later, having accumulated some property, he voluntarily paid all his indebtedness, although not legally liable." E. M. Prince, "Jesse W. Fell;" Lewis, *Life*, 34.

But the practice of law was as irksome to him as it had been before, and he planned to escape from it as soon as possible. Since real estate offered no means at that time, he resolved to try farming, and for that purpose moved in 1844 to a new home, which was known then and for many years after as Fort Jesse. Some people, appalled at its distance of four miles from the town, called it Fell's Folly. It had been entered for Joseph J. Lewis, and was far from any other habitation, having but one house between it and Bloomington. There was a stream upon the place, which in rainy seasons of the year became too swollen to be forded. Here Fell made a cabin, and broke the virgin prairie in very real pioneer fashion. He rejoiced in the opportunity to plant trees, and put out many of the black locusts which were regarded at that time as particularly well fitted to Illinois conditions, since they grew rapidly and produced a very hard and durable wood. The borer, which makes the black locust an enemy to all other trees and a nuisance in a community, had not then appeared.¹²

The life of the Fells at Fort Jesse was the life of a typical pioneer family. Nightly there burned in their window the candle which pioneer custom prescribed as a guide for travelers; and nightly, there howled around it the prairie wolves. Henry Clay Fell relates an incident which illustrates the conditions under which the prairie farm became a home. Mr. Fell and his wife had gone to Bloomington, and while they were absent a storm had swollen the stream so that it became impassable. Two children, Henry and Eliza, had been left at the farm, and at the coming of the storm they became much frightened. While they crouched in a corner, a big grey wolf thrust in his head at the window, where a pane of glass had been broken out. Henry, altho then but seven years of age, had the courage of pioneer children, and threw a footstool at the wolf's head, which frightened him away. The pet deer, which the children had brought into the cabin, and which attracted the wolves, was later given to a son of General Gridley.¹³

In 1845 Fell bought a farm of one hundred acres near Payson, Adams County, to which he moved from Fort Jesse that autumn. About forty acres of the farm were in timber; and thirty acres of that under cultivation were set out to trees, Fell's intention being to establish a nursery which should cater to the mar-

¹²Jacob Spawr in *Pantagraph*, July 1, 1881. Lewis, *Life*, 35.

¹³Lewis, *Life*, 35. Interview with Henry Fell, May 31, 1913.

ket afforded by the increasing settlements in the neighborhood of Quincy. The nursery business did not meet his expectations, altho he sold enough fruit to make the venture a paying one. The farm, which was about a mile and a quarter northwest of the village, was known as Fruit Hill. As Quincy afforded him his nearest large market, Fell set to work to have a good road made to that town. He succeeded, largely through his own exertions, in securing a straight road of twelve miles which passed through his farm.¹⁴

During this period he found time to take an interest in various public affairs, and particularly in education. He spoke at teachers' institutes,¹⁵ and was much concerned for the welfare of the local Methodist church, of which he became a member. When he moved to Fruit Farm there was only a private school at Payson, but during his residence a "seminary," kept in such a way as more fully to serve the needs of the community, was opened. Farming did not prevent an active interest in state and national affairs, as a letter from Lincoln at this time shows. As an orthodox Whig, he strongly disapproved the management of the Mexican War, and wrote to Lincoln, then serving his state in Washington, to ask him to present a petition for a speedy peace. Lincoln promised to do so at the proper time, but added that there was in Washington a feeling that the war was over and that the treaty sent in would be endorsed.¹⁶

In 1849 a number of the citizens of Quincy, led by John Wood, afterward governor, resolved to go to California, where the gold fields were attracting people from all parts of the world. Fell was asked to join the party, and made preparations to go, altho it was necessary to borrow money for the expedition. He went to Bloomington and bade his friends good-bye, but at the last minute failed to raise the funds necessary for an outfit, and gave up the project.

In 1851 he arranged to return to Bloomington by trading his Payson farm to his brother Robert for a farm of two hundred forty acres near Bloomington. Robert Fell disposed of his nursery stock to F. K. Phoenix, who came to Bloomington from Delavan, Wisconsin, at Jesse Fell's earnest solicitation. Starting with Robert Fell's stock of trees, Phoenix in time developed

¹⁴Lewis, *Life*, 37. Fell to Rachel Brown, Oct. 1, 1848.

¹⁵The report of one such address, given before the Adams County Institute, is in the *Western Whig* of July 20, 1850. Lewis, *Life*, 36.

¹⁶Lincoln to Fell, Mar. 1, 1848.

one of the most famous of the nurseries for which Normal was later notable.

Upon his return to Bloomington Fell first engaged in newspaper work, of which mention is made elsewhere more particularly. He soon gave that up, however, to reënter the field of real estate, which was again becoming a source of profit. Having little money of his own, he made a trip to New York and Boston in the autumn of 1852, for the purpose of interesting eastern capitalists in Illinois land.¹⁷ In this he was very successful, and during the decade following he bought and sold great tracts of land throughout Central Illinois, founded several towns, and enlarged others. Pontiac, Lexington, Towanda, Clinton, LeRoy, El Paso and other towns were among those in which he was largely interested. He made additions to Bloomington and Decatur, and dealt in town lots in Joliet and Dwight. North Bloomington, later Normal, was first planned in 1854.¹⁸

With the founding of these towns came the need of means of communication and transportation. In road-building of the primitive sort which served Illinois for years, Fell did his part. He secured, for instance, the surveying of a wagon-road parallel to the railroad, from Bloomington to Towanda, altho he did not succeed in having it extended to Lexington. He was active in making a similar road from Lincoln to Minonk. Early in his life he had learned surveying, and this stood him in hand later in many ways. His ability to measure land and determine lines saved time and money in numberless instances.¹⁹

¹⁷Fell to his wife, Sept. 26, 1852.

¹⁸*Pantagraph*, Sept. 1, 1899, Nov. 28, 29, and Dec. 1, 1902. *Bloomington Intelligencer*, Aug. 10, 1853. The first plats of North Bloomington (undated, probably 1854) were lithographed by Latimer Brothers and Seymour, 15 Nassau st., corner of Pine, N. Y. Mr. Fell's interests in Pontiac came very near ending disastrously. An addition to the original town was made on land bought from a youth whose father sold it as his guardian. Later, the Supreme Court made a decision in a similar case which would have invalidated the Fell title and all subsequent titles, had not an astute lawyer of Pontiac, R. E. Williams, been able to prove that the young man had accepted his guardian's arrangements and receipted him. The Supreme Court upheld the Fell title.

For an account of an unsuccessful attempt at town-founding, see J. O. Cunningham, *History of Champaign County*, 672 ff. Judge Cunningham quotes Peck's *Gazetteer* (1837), which mentions "Byron, a town-site in Champaign County", on page 168. *Bloomington Observer*, Nov. 17, 1838. *Pantagraph*, Aug. 24, 1901, and Nov. 29, 1902.

¹⁹Interview, Henry Fell, May 31, 1913.

Going farther afield, in 1855 he bought timber lands in Southern Illinois, and built a lumber mill at Ullin, where the Illinois Central railroad crosses the Cache River about twenty miles north of Cairo. Lyman Blakeslee was his partner in this mill, and his brother Kersey in another at Valley Forge, which was operated by Elijah Depew, an old neighbor in Bloomington. E. J. Lewis, who was employed by Fell for about six months at Ullin, records that the winter of 1855-56 was an unusually cold one in Southern Illinois, the thermometer often falling to eighteen degrees below zero. Armed with stout sticks and a compass, Fell and Lewis tramped over the frozen swamps, personally inspecting the low lands. The growth was cypress for the most part, and the strange "knees" (root protuberances) greatly impressed the two Pennsylvanians, to whom growths so fantastic were entirely new. The mill at Ullin was kept busy sawing out logs, for the unusual amount of ice in the rivers did great damage to the steamboats on the Mississippi and the Ohio, breaking wheels and injuring hulls. Putting into Cairo, they secured oak and other lumber for repairs from Ullin by rail.

The brisk business of that winter led Fell to put great faith in the Ullin venture, and in the autumn of 1856 he moved his family to that place. But the normal demand for lumber in Southern Illinois was not sufficient to guarantee a prosperous business, and in the spring the family returned to North Bloomington. The mills not having fulfilled their initial promise, Fell again turned his attention chiefly to real estate, which had not been neglected during his residence at Ullin.²⁰ In 1856 he advertised for sale "about 5000 acres of land" in Livingston, McLean, and Vermillion counties, and about three hundred fifty town lots in various parts of Illinois.²¹ In the autumn of that year he conducted at least one auction sale of lots (at Towanda) and this method of sale was repeated on a considerable scale in the fall of 1857. Late in the decade his holdings became very large, while records in the abstract offices show that he drove a lively business in transferring property.

It was during the summers of 1856 and 1857 that Fell built the house at Fell Park in North Bloomington, which became afterward one of the landmarks of Normal. The house still stands (1916), altho removed from its original site. It was a roomy square wooden structure, with a cupola atop, and verandas built

²⁰Lewis, *Life*, 44.

²¹*Pantagraph*, July 2, 1856. Tax list, May 14, 1859.

around three sides. It stood upon a knoll which Mr. Fell had selected more than twenty years before as a good place for his final residence.²² Here he secured about eighteen acres on the edge of the town, and planted the land to trees and shrubs according to the plans of William Saunders of Philadelphia, a landscape gardener of reputation. A herd of deer was added later, and the park was frequently opened to the public.²³ Men great in the history of Illinois and the nation were entertained there; it became a famous meeting-place of notable people. Lovejoy, Bryant, Lincoln, Davis, Swett, and other leaders were frequent visitors. The Fell children entertained their friends there freely; it was a center of social life. The master of the house, himself usually absorbed in business, liked to have people about him enjoy themselves. In the town's first years, this was the only private house in Normal in which dancing was permitted.

The years at Fell Park were so full and so pleasant that one likes to linger upon the story of its life. There Mr. Fell's children grew to maturity, busy with many tasks and very happy. Here his elder daughters Eliza and Clara were married, the former to W. O. Davis, for many years editor of the *Pantagraph*, and the latter to Lieutenant James R. Fyffe, an officer of the Thirty-third Illinois Volunteer regiment. Here the older children went to school, with their cousins and neighbors, in a small building used temporarily as a carpenter shop during the building of the house. This was a district school, but as it failed to meet all requirements, Mr. Fell employed Miss Mary Daniels, lately graduated from Mt. Holyoke, to teach his own children, their cousins, and the McCambridge children in his own home. This private school was continued until the "model school" at the Normal School opened.²⁴

The master of the house, who never grew away from the simple ways of living in which he had been bred, directed the industries of the home group. He was himself a man busy with his

²²In 1833, when riding over the prairie with a neighbor named Kimler, Mr. Fell remarked that the roll in the prairie would be an ideal place for a home; whereupon Kimler had replied that probably no one would be fool enough to build so far from the timber. Grace Hurwood to Fannie Fell, Mar. 16, 1913. Captain J. H. Burnham, in his "Our Duty to Future Generations," an Arbor Day address delivered at the I. S. N. U. on April 21, 1905, relates the same incident.

²³J. D. Catb'n to Fell, Aug. 9, 1866.

²⁴William McCambridge, *My Remembrances of Jesse W. Fell*. (MS.)

hands, where other men of his interests would have had manual labor done by others. He pruned his own trees and supervised personally the planting of shrubs or the erection of new buildings. All this workaday enterprise was not conducive to an appearance of immaculate grooming. His wife, and more especially his daughters, tried to look after him to keep him fresh and trig. His friends, driving to Fell Park to consult him on business or politics, found him perspiringly industrious on the warmest summer days. Distinguished company, received in the parlor, waited while Mr. Fell was being hunted through field and orchard. "The girls" waylaid his path with the paraphernalia of refreshment. Somewhere between the back porch and the front parlor, a hasty scrub, a brushing and a clean collar must be administered. He submitted to this loving supervision good-naturedly; he loved to be "fussed over" by his daughters, and he himself was a man of fastidious personal habits. "It's all right, girls, it's all right," he would say. No amount of feminine emphasis, however, could persuade him that one's personal appearance was a matter of great moment; he was interested in bigger things. The happiness of generations to come was the enterprise of men such as he, and in view of that a dusty coat or work-soiled hands could matter little.²⁵

²⁵Mrs. L. B. Merwin (a grand-daughter), interview, Nov. 29, 1912. Dr. Sweney, the family physician, related a story which shows Fell's indefatigable energy. A refractory horse had kicked him until he was a mass of bruises, and the doctor, being called to repair the damage, had swathed him in bandages and soaked him in liniment and left strict orders that he was to be kept quiet. The next day, calling to redress the bruises, the distressed and apologetic family had to "chase after father" down to the edge of the place, about a quarter of a mile, and bring him up for examination and admonition.—John Dodge, "Concerning Jesse W. Fell," in the *Fell Memorial*.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNALIST, 1836-1858

In the very early days of Bloomington, General Gridley made a yearly trip to the East to buy stock for his general store. In the autumn of 1836, Jesse Fell and James Allin intrusted to him the important commission of purchasing the equipment of a printing establishment, and of finding a man to edit and print a newspaper for McLean County. Gridley induced two men, natives of Philadelphia, to return with him: William Hill and W. B. Brittain. Hill had been employed for some time upon the *St. Louis Democrat*, and was acquainted with Western ways and conditions. Brittain came directly from Philadelphia, having shipped the press and type by way of New Orleans. The two men arrived in October, but Brittain became discouraged and went back to Pennsylvania before the coming of the outfit. Hill stayed, and setting up his press in a room in the court house, brought out on January 14, 1837, the first number of the *Bloomington Observer*. About twenty numbers were printed before the paper suspended publication. It was well edited and well printed, for a frontier paper; but in the little struggling town it found insufficient support, despite its spirited interest in all that concerned the welfare of the place.¹

Fell and Allin were sadly disappointed at the fiasco. Altho his finances were then at a low ebb,—or possibly because of that—Fell bought what he did not already own of the suspended *Observer*, and began to edit it himself in January, 1838. This venture was somewhat more successful than the first one, as the paper continued to appear for over a year, until conditions caused by the hard times forced Fell again to stop its publication. The last number appeared in June, 1839, after which time Bloomington had no paper for several years. Fell sold the printing outfit, which tradition says was moved to Peoria.²

The recovery from the severe depression of 1837 seems to have been especially slow in McLean County, where land specu-

¹*Pantagraph*, Jan. 14, 1857. Interview with Henry Fell, May 31, 1913. Scott, *Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois*, 27.

²The *Democratic Press* was established there in February, 1840. Scott, *Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois*, 278.

lation had been very brisk. Not until 1845 was there found a man who had the courage to undertake to publish a newspaper there. In that year R. B. Mitchell started the *McLean County Register*, but shortly gave it up to Charles P. Merriman, who established a weekly, the *Western Whig*. He associated R. H. Johnson with him late in 1849, and early in 1850 Johnson and I. N. Underwood became proprietors and editors. They associated Merriman with them again somewhat later for about six months. This arrangement terminated on November 19, 1851, at the end of the fifth volume of the *Western Whig*, when Mr. Fell and Mr. Merriman undertook the joint management and editorship of the paper. A new outfit of type, brought up the Illinois River and carted over from Pekin, was purchased and the name of the publication changed to the *Bloomington Intelligencer*. This partnership was in turn dissolved on March 17, 1852, when Mr. Fell became sole editor and publisher. He managed the paper until the end of that volume, November 17, 1852, and then retired, being succeeded by Mr. Merriman as sole owner. Mr. Merriman was a classical scholar of some repute, and changed the name again to the *Pantagraph*, a name under which it has become well known and very influential throughout Central Illinois.³

Fell's connection with the *Pantagraph* did not cease with the termination of his official editorship. His name appeared as late as February 9, 1853, as contributing editor of the *Intelligencer*. As a medium for moulding public opinion, he found it a useful ally, and wrote for it often. Its editors and managers found him a constant source of helpful suggestions, and seem to have consulted with him on questions of business policy.

For many years after disposing of his partnership in the *Intelligencer*, his newspaper work was of this occasional and unofficial nature. During the Civil War, his interest in reform centered in the struggle then waging, but after its close he cherished the hope of establishing at Normal some kind of journal which might become the mouthpiece of various reform movements then more or less before the public. Interesting some of his friends, he purchased an outfit for publishing a paper, and was rapidly completing plans for its appearance when he learned

³Lewis, *Life*, 38. The issue of the *Western Whig* for Dec. 11, 1847, is No. 6, Vol. II. It was published at No. 3 Brick Row, Front street. The inventory of the printing outfit of the *Western Whig* (no date, probably Nov., 1851), is among the *Fell MSS.*

that Scibird and Waters, then proprietors of the *Pantagraph*, were seeking a buyer for their paper. He had already carried negotiations for an editor for his proposed paper, through correspondence with Greeley and others, almost to the point of engaging a certain Dr. Weil.⁴ But as the *Pantagraph* had already a wide circulation and a considerable influence, it was far more valuable to a man with a propaganda than any newly established sheet could be, and Mr. Fell, with James P. Taylor and his son-in-law William O. Davis, made haste to secure it. This was in August, 1868.

The *Pantagraph* was a Republican organ of moderate partisanship. Mr. Fell abandoned the idea of making Mr. Weil editor, deciding to fill that post himself. He entered into editorial duties with zest, perhaps remembering his experience with the ultra-ethical *Eclectic Observer*. Mr. Davis became business manager. Fell was, however, a somewhat impractical chief, by far too idealistic for the environment of a newspaper office. Moreover, the confinement of office life was as irksome as ever. After a few months, he gave up the editorial management, which was taken over by his old friend Dr. E. R. Roe, in June of 1869.⁵ Mr. Fell retained his connection with the paper until late October, 1870, when he sold out his entire interest to his son-in-law. Mr. Taylor also disposed of his share to Mr. Davis, leaving the latter entirely responsible. Mr. Fell thereafter confined his newspaper work to occasional editorials and to special articles upon the subjects which engaged his interest.

⁴T. Tilton to Fell, Nov. 24, 1868. In this letter Dr. Weil, "long . . . known to Mr. Bungay and Mr. Greeley," is recommended for the editorship.

⁵Dr. Roe had entered the Federal army as "a bitter Jackson Democrat," but came back "a Black Republican." He was in every way the man to carry on Fell's dream of a popular newspaper advocating reform. He was very popular, having been advanced to a colonelcy in the army from the ranks. Upon his return to civil life he was elected a deputy in the circuit clerk's office to follow Luman Burr. Luman Burr in the *Daily Bulletin*, July 6, 1913. *Bloomington Democrat*, Sept. 30, 1864; *Pantagraph*, Oct. 1, 3, 1864; Aug. 12, 1868; Nov. 1, 1870; Mar. 13, Oct. 23, 1871.

CHAPTER IV

FOUNDING THE NORMAL SCHOOL, 1853-1860

The advocates of free public schools in Illinois secured a law authorizing but not establishing them, as early as 1825. This law was so amended as practically to annul it two years later, which means that Illinois had no public school system until 1855. The desire for an effective public school law took definite form after an impromptu conference at Bloomington of three men who realized the need of the state and were disposed to take measures to relieve it. These men were J. A. Hawley of Dixon, H. H. Lee of Chicago, and Daniel Wilkins of Bloomington. They issued a call to all friends of free schools for a meeting to be held at Bloomington on December 26-28, 1853. The call was signed by the secretary of state, who had charge of all educational affairs in those days, by the presidents and faculties of two of the leading colleges of the state—Shurtleff and Illinois Wesleyan—by the clergymen of Bloomington, and by others who were interested. E. W. Brewster of Elgin was made president of the conference, which was large and enthusiastic. Every man who had a solution to offer for the educational problems of the state was there with his resolutions, his friends, and his arguments.¹

Several of the principles embodied in the resolutions passed at that meeting were afterward incorporated in the state law, and have been largely instrumental in shaping the educational policy of Illinois. They included a plan for a State Teachers' Institute, afterward the State Teachers' Association, which was carried out immediately and has been in operation ever since. Another called for a state superintendent of schools, who should devote all his time to the interests of education. Authorized

¹State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, I, 127-138. *Illinois Teacher*, I, 321-328. The convention here mentioned was not the first of an educational nature in the state, but the first that concerned itself especially with the common school system. *Illinois Teacher*, I, 328-336. J. H. Burnham, "Educational Convention of 1853" in *School Record of McLean County* (McLean County Historical Society; *Transactions*, II), 118-127.

by a new state law, Governor Matteson appointed, on February 9, 1854, Ninian W. Edwards as the first superintendent of schools in Illinois. A third resolution was in favor of a journal devoted to education. This periodical, called the *Illinois Teacher*, was started after the Peoria meeting of 1854, with a curious scheme of editorial management by which a different man was made responsible for its contents each month. The result of this division of labor was an uncertain quality of content and financial disaster. After a year's trial of the plan Mr. Charles E. Hovey of Peoria, one of a valiant group of New Englanders who were then the educational leaders of the state, was made editor and manager. He was vigorous and able, and put the publication speedily and effectively upon its feet.²

Then there came up a question which was bound to cause a discussion, for it involved the fundamental differences of men whose training and ideals gave them widely diverging conceptions of the needs and the consequent policies of the state. This was the question of the establishment of some institution for the better training of teachers. All were agreed that such a school was a vital need; scarcely any two were agreed as to just what type of school could, in this new and growing country, accomplish the end sought in the best way. Jonathan B. Turner, from whose fertile brain came the vast and comprehensive scheme resulting finally in the founding of the great state universities of the Middle and Far West,³ was trying to awaken enthusiasm for a combination school to include agricultural, industrial, and normal school departments. The friends of the already established denominational colleges, who feared the results of separating education and religion by the founding of state schools, wished to add normal departments to Shurtleff, McKendrie, Knox, and Wesleyan. A third group, armed with the record of the normal schools of Massachusetts, strongly advocated a separate and "untrammeled" training-school exclusively for teachers.⁴

Jonathan Turner had organized the State Industrial League, a society working for a state industrial college, and numbered Mr. Fell, who was director of the McLean County division,⁵

²State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, I, 146. *Illinois Teacher*, I, 8-18.

³E. J. James, *Origin of the Land Grant Act of 1862*, 25-27 (*University of Illinois Studies*, IV, No. 1).

⁴Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, II, 52.

⁵Organized Feb. 9, 1854.

among his sympathizers and helpers. Fell was eager to see the industrial college founded, but knowing that a normal school was both more popular and more immediately needed, was willing to wait for the realization of the more comprehensive plan. With Turner he bent his energies toward uniting educational forces for the accomplishment of some one definite object.

The various schemes were further discussed and worked over at a meeting held in Peoria in December of 1854. At the third meeting in Springfield it became plain that the advocates of a separate normal school were strongly in the majority, and the next year in Chicago they secured the passage of a resolution to the effect that the Association did not wish "to discuss any university question, but occupy themselves with the interests of common schools and Normal schools." Mr. Turner, whose visions of the future did not blind him to immediate demands and practical methods, yielded his own larger plan with a grace made possible by his great faith in its ultimate realization: and the Association passed a resolution which called for an appropriation for "the immediate establishment of a State Normal School for the education of teachers."⁶

The legislature, which had already (in 1855) established a free school system, passed the desired law, and Governor Bissell signed it on February 18, 1857. The law designated the members of the state board of education, who were in charge of the affairs of the school, but did not state its location, which was to be decided by competitive bids.

It was after the passing of this law that Fell's interest in the normal school became intensified by the hope of securing it for Bloomington. Long before this he had hoped to see an institution of learning, the exact nature of which was not then clear to himself, in the town of North Bloomington. Upon his return from Payson he had become a member of the first incorporated board of trustees of the Wesleyan University, serving until 1857.⁷ Now he saw in the projected normal school an opportunity of realizing quickly his dream of making North Bloomington a school town, and so attracting to it the class of citizens he wanted

⁶Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, II, 53ff. *Illinois Teacher*, I, 254.

⁷His greatest service to the institution lay in his influence in changing its location from Seminary Avenue near the present Chicago and Alton shops, in the outskirts of Bloomington, to the central site which it occupies. James Shaw in *Fell Memorial*, 4; John F. Eberhart, *ibid.* 19.

it to have. The block for the "Seminary" had long been selected, but he abandoned it in favor of a larger tract farther removed from Bloomington. Other people had other ideas as to what was the best site. Five, besides the one favored, were offered. The other five, however, had less in the way of subscription attached than the one he advocated. This was part of the Parkinson farm of three hundred fifty acres, owned at that time by Dr. Joseph Payne and Meshac Pike, who had recently bought it. David Davis and E. W. Bakewell each added about forty acres, which made the tract about a quarter-section.

Mr. Fell carried on the work of securing subscriptions, aided by others who reported to him regularly. The amount of the subscription was kept out of the newspapers, and very little said of the matter where rival towns might hear of it. Anything that could be used was solicited; and land, cash, notes, even nursery stock and freight donations, were given. Friends of popular education outside the state were appealed to by some, altho few if any responded.⁸ As is often the case, many of the offers were saddled with embarrassing conditions. One set of offers stipulated that the site should be within a mile of Bloomington; another, that it must be within three-fourths of a mile of the railroad crossing at North Bloomington; still another, within three miles of Bloomington. Mr. Fell's site satisfied all these conditions.

Meantime other towns had not been idle. Batavia offered a ready-made plant in the grounds and buildings of the Batavia Institute and fifteen thousand dollars in cash. Washington, in Tazewell County, offered the buildings and grounds of Washington Academy and cash to the amount of twelve hundred dollars. Peoria was known to be piling up a large subscription, but no one in Bloomington could find out just how formidable this rival was.⁹

It was at this point that John F. Eberhart gave substantial help. He was a teacher who had been forced by ill-health to give up regular classroom work, and who spent much time in holding

⁸Among these was Alexander Campbell, the founder of the Church of the Disciples. He seems to have been favorable to the project at first, but later declined to help. Thirty years after, Fell attributed this to Campbell's statement that "Mr. Bakewell and wife had done enough." Bakewell had married Campbell's daughter. Campbell (Bethany, Va.) to Fell, 1857.

⁹Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, II, 286-291.

institutes throughout the state. This gave him an opportunity to know conditions thoroly, and his knowledge of conditions made him greatly interested in the projected normal school. He met Mr. Fell first when attending an educational meeting in 1855 or 1856, when he was entertained at the Fell home. The two men became fast friends, and when Eberhart found out how keenly Fell wanted the normal school for his own town, he was minded to give all possible aid. This resolution was strengthened by his own dislike for Peoria, which he considered undesirable because it was "a river town and a whiskey town." He entered into the contest for Fell and Bloomington, even as Simeon W. Wright was entering it as a champion of Hovey and Peoria. For about three months he worked with Fell in McLean County, a guest at his home and party to all his plans.¹⁰

About a week before the final decision was to be made, Eberhart made a trip to Peoria to see clearly just what the situation there might be; and chanced, fortunately for his purpose, upon a friend, a teacher, who in his enthusiasm told him the amount of the subscription already secured. Returning at once to Bloomington, he told Fell that it would be necessary to raise the Bloomington subscription. Fell asked him if a ten thousand dollar advance would be sufficient, and Eberhart replied that it would have to be more than that. Fell suggested fifteen thousand, but Eberhart repeated that it must be still more. Fell inquired if twenty thousand would do, and received the same reply. But when he was asked if twenty-five thousand would cap Peoria's bid, Eberhart replied that such a bid would secure the normal school. Fell vowed that Bloomington would raise the money.

But he wanted to see for himself just how things were at Peoria, since Eberhart's sense of honor prevented him from telling details. He knew that a powerful stimulus, combined with knowledge of the real situation, would be necessary if his townsmen were to be persuaded to raise their already generous bid. Eberhart had brought him the news from Peoria on Friday, May 3, 1857. At Fell's request, he set off at once for Chicago, to interview the three members of the board resident there, in the interests of the Bloomington location. If these men were at all unfriendly, they were effectively won over by Eberhart during the week-end he spent in Chicago.

Meantime, having seen Eberhart off, Fell harnessed Tom to the buggy and set off for Peoria, where he knew there was to be

¹⁰John Eberhart, in *Fell Memorial*, 23.

a citizens' mass meeting that night. He covered the forty-five miles in time to attend the meeting, and was observed in the audience by Hovey. No attempt, however, was made to keep secret the amount of the subscription at this meeting. The jubilant committee, sure that in the short time left no competitor could equal their offerings, were not alarmed even at the sight of their rival's appearance—an apparition that would have meant more to them had they know him better.

It was late when the meeting adjourned, but early the next morning Fell was back in Bloomington, briskly presenting to the leading citizens the somewhat appalling dictum that an additional twenty-five thousand dollars must be subscribed. He began by raising his own cash subscription to two thousand dollars, with seventy-five hundred dollars in Jackson County lands, worth about five dollars an acre. Others caught his enthusiasm and added to their subscriptions until the individual pledges, already totalling fifty thousand dollars, amounted to seventy-one thousand. The county commissioners, who had before subscribed for the county a sum equal to the private subscriptions, now added to the swamp lands already promised, enough to bring the whole amount raised to one hundred forty-one thousand dollars.¹¹

The meeting of the board was to be in Peoria on the seventh of May. A tour of inspection to the proposed site at "the Junction," as Normal was commonly called then, preceded the meeting. The weather had been very rainy and the bare prairie about Bloomington was a hopeless swamp, not liable to make a favorable impression upon critical visitors. Mr. Fell went over the ground carefully the night before, found every mud-hole and every dry ridge, and mapped out a course for the carriages intended to minimize the danger of being mired in a bottomless pit of Illinois mud. When the board made its tour of inspection, Fell rode in the first carriage, and personally directed the driver over the uncharted, soggy ground. The drivers of the other carriages had orders to follow the first undeviatingly on pain of losing life and wages, and on no account to allow the horses to become mired. So conducted, the board made a safe trip and

¹¹The three county commissioners who risked their popularity and tenure of office to secure the normal school (for the pledge had to be made without recourse to a vote) were A. J. Merriman, Milton Smith, and Hiram Buck. They were reelected that fall, but were superseded by a board of supervisors which ratified their action in May. Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, II, Appendix 22, 371ff.

was returned to the station without accident. The young trees planted along the streets of North Bloomington made a good impression upon the members, it is recorded. From the proposed site they went to the station, where they were to board the train for Peoria. Some half a dozen Bloomingtonians and a reporter accompanied them.¹²

At Peoria there was a similar inspection of the site offered, after which the board sat publicly at the court house. The Bloomington bid was accepted, with conditions attached to secure the somewhat precarious county subscription, which had to be guaranteed by citizens.¹³ Over eighty prominent Bloomingtonians signed this guarantee, Abraham Lincoln drew up the bond, and the pledges were all met.¹⁴

Bloomington was exultant when Fell and his friends brought back to them the news that they had won the new school, and plans for the town that would in time grow up around it were rampant. Ground for the building was broken promptly, the cornerstone being laid on the twenty-fifth of September with all due ceremony. Fell's address on that occasion revealed his own conception of the future of the school. He hoped in time it might become what, for reasons of financial expediency, it was then called: a university. Especially, he hoped that an agricultural school with an experiment farm would eventually become part of the school, and that courses in mechanical studies might be added as opportunity offered.¹⁵

The question of the principalship was a lively issue. Fell, who was a warm personal friend of Horace Mann, had long cherished in his heart the hope of securing his services for the needful West. When planning the "seminary" which was to have been located on the east side of the present Broadway in Nor-

¹²This reporter was Edward J. Lewis, later editor of the *Pantagraph*, and Fell's lifelong friend. The account given, with many incidents not here noted, is found in his manuscript *Life of Fell. Weekly Pantagraph*, May 27, 1857. Lincoln Weldon, interview, July 12, 1913.

¹³Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, II, 359-364.

¹⁴*Ibid*, II, 373-378.

¹⁵The new school was to be financed from the income of the college and seminary fund, then about ten thousand dollars per year, which was permanently diverted for this purpose. Many, not without good ground, objected to this diversion, and it was to answer their representations that the singularly inappropriate name of the Illinois State Normal "University" was used, a name which has been retained even after the founding of the state university. State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, I, 123; II, 276; *Illinois Teacher*, III, 395.

mal, he had corresponded with Mann and others relative to its constitution, scope and curriculum. He now asked the great educator if he would consider the presidency of the proposed normal school. Mr. Mann was favorably disposed, and before the location of the school had been actually secured, a subscription list signed by Bloomington citizens promised material aid in raising the salary of Horace Mann were he to become the head of the new institution.¹⁶

The meeting of the board at which a "principal" was to be elected was held in Bloomington. Shortly before the time of meeting, a prominent friend of the Peoria faction came to John F. Eberhart, who with Fell led the pro-Mann party, and told him that it was a matter of political necessity that an Illinois man be elected to the position. "If you elect Mann we'll kill him," said this advocate of local sovereignty; and he further intimated that nothing but the appointment of a Peorian could satisfy the disappointed politicians of that city. When the situation became known to Horace Mann, he telegraphed to Eberhart that he would not be a candidate for the place if there were to be any fight connected with it. Since Fell was equally opposed to dissensions at this critical time and realized thoroly the need of united support for the principal of the struggling institution, the plan of securing Horace Mann was reluctantly given up by his friends, and the Middle West lost the strength which might have accrued to this school through the leadership of the greatest educator of his day.¹⁷ After Mann, Mr. Charles Hovey was gener-

¹⁶The subscription list, dated May 1, 1857, was signed by Jesse W. Fell, K. H. Fell, W. H. Allin, C. W. Holder, Jos. Payne, John Magoun, F. K. Phoenix, John Dietrich, E. Thomas, McCann Davis, and amounted to \$750. Mr. Mann had agreed to accept the presidency at \$2500. John F. Eberhart, in *Fell Memorial*, 24, and interview, June 20, 1913. Mann to Fell, June 23, 1856. President F. Wayland of Brown University to Fell, Jan. 29, 1853. *Illinois Teacher*, III, 107.

¹⁷It has been said that the liberal religious views of Mann were largely responsible for that disapproval which resulted in the vigorous opposition to his presidency, the powerful Methodist faction in the state considering him a dangerous leader of the young in spite of his ability. Certain it is that his abolitionist leanings aroused antipathy among that large number who sympathized with slavery or feared to have the question agitated. Pro-slavery advocates especially remembered a speech of Mr. Mann in which he had vigorously assailed Daniel Webster and the Compromise of 1850. These considerations, combined with the fact that Hovey was able to command powerful forces in support of his own candidacy, were quite sufficient to defeat the large-visioned plan of Fell.

ally considered the best man for the position, although Eberhart, who declined the nomination, and a Mr. Phelps were also considered. On the final vote, Hovey was elected by a bare majority.

Once elected, Hovey set to work with great energy and ability to make the normal school a success. The task was a hard one. School opened in the historic Major's Hall, perched atop a grocery store on Front street in Bloomington. There were twenty-nine pupils on the opening day, October 5, 1857, and more followed soon, the total enrollment for the year being one hundred twenty-seven. There were two assistants, and a "model school" for observation and practice.

The troubles of the normal school began with the panic of 1857. Many of the men who had led in the subscriptions found themselves unable to pay what they had promised, and the commissioners were unable to sell the swamp lands that had been counted upon so confidently. Even the title to these lands was found to be uncertain, and Fell made a trip to Washington to secure the complete and formal deed, in order that the lands might be available in case buyers appeared.¹⁸ He returned early in November, with word that the official confirmation would be sent to Springfield. New complications arose, however, after he had left Washington, and the patents for the thirty thousand acres were not issued until January, 1858. The last payment on the pledge from the county lands was paid in October, 1864.

The uncertainty of realizing money from the county grant, with the scarcity of money in general and the unwillingness of one or two of the wealthy land-owners to turn over their promised acres at the time when they were most needed, made it impossible to make the first payment to the contractors, and work was suspended in December of 1857. Of all the thousands subscribed, not even six or seven could be collected for immediate use. The ingenious expedients of Charles Hovey during the dark days that ensued included every possible scheme for making something out of nothing. The school was without money, without established credit, and without that public support which comes with the tradition of success. Some of its opponents began to suggest that a failure so apparent be abandoned. A few stanch

¹⁸In August, 1855, being himself unable to go, Fell had sent his son Henry, now grown to manhood, to Washington to look after the school warrants for Illinois, W. F. M. Arny being then in the patent office. He (Henry Fell) remained until the last of October, and was moderately successful in his mission.

friends upheld the hands of the determined president at this time, risking their own property by signing the notes it was necessary to make. These men were Charles and Richard Holder, and Jesse and Kersey Fell. Dr. George P. Rex and S. W. Moulton also helped by giving personal notes. The merchants of Bloomington stood loyally by the school, furnishing materials on credit upon the basis of the faith of the friends and guarantors that the next legislature would make appropriations to cover all debts. This was done at the next session, and work upon the building was resumed in the spring of 1859. The school moved into its new quarters in the autumn of 1860, and on October 5 of that year the last brick was laid, with short speeches, cheers, and a free picnic lunch for all.¹⁹

It seemed to Fell and to other friends of the normal school, that a formal dedication of the building would call attention to the institution, and gain it friends and influence. It was a time of great anxiety and uncertainty, and there were some who hesitated to take time and expense for such an occasion during a period of national peril. The dedication, however, which was on January 30, 1861, not only gained the end for which it was planned, but afforded a relief from the tense anxiety of the time, a comforting assurance of at least one great good accomplished, which gave heart and encouragement to all who attended it. Mr. Fell worked indefatigably to make the occasion successful. Invitations were sent to all the prominent men in the state, and great crowds attended from Bloomington and the nearby towns. It was one of the first normal schools built west of the Alleghanies, and the first state-endowed educational institution in Illinois. Governor Yates and Ex-Governor Bebb of Ohio were there, and many lesser stars. The speeches were given in the great hall of the new building, and the feast which crowned the occasion was in Royce's Hall in Bloomington. Mrs. Fell and her cousin, Mrs. Holder, planned and managed the banquet, at which the mayor presided and Mr. Fell was toastmaster.²⁰

Fell's interest in the school continued always, and for many years was actively shown. He attended the public meetings, encouraged the literary societies, and while a member of the board of education superintended the planting of the campus, of which

¹⁹Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Reports*, II, 99-103.

²⁰Newspaper clippings, undated, in the *Scrapbook. Illinois Teacher*, VII, 78.

more in another chapter.²¹ Through the years of its gradual growth and establishment he was regularly the man who secured the necessary appropriations at Springfield.

²¹G. B. Robinson, secretary of the Wrightonian Society, to Fell, April 30, 1861. Mr. Fell became an honorary member of this society,

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, 1840-1860

The strong admiration which Fell had for Henry Clay led him to take a prominent part in local politics during the first three years of his residence in Bloomington. He was never of those who consider politics so inherently and ineradicably evil that honest men can have no part in them. Politics interested him in an absorbing way at times. He used the machinery of government as a means of securing good ends, and also probably with a keen appreciation of the fun of the game. And he was one of the few men who do not ask or receive material compensation for their participation in public affairs.¹

Until 1840, his political activities seem to have been mainly along the line of securing various favors for the districts in which he was interested, and in urging the election of men who favored internal improvements. In that year he was much in demand for stump speeches throughout Central Illinois, where the campaign lacked none of that picturesqueness which characterized it in the country as a whole. On one occasion a monster procession was organized in Bloomington, to go to Peoria, forty miles away. The *chef-d'œuvre* of the expedition was a great cannon—Black Betty—drawn by twelve horses, and with twelve veterans of the War of 1812 upon it. The procession stopped at Mackinaw, Tremont, Washington, and other towns on the way for meetings. At Washington, after Fell and others had spoken, General Gridley was called upon for a speech, and responded acceptably. The possibility of entering political life appealed to General Gridley, and that fall he was nominated and elected to the lower house at Springfield. Fell advised him the next year to study law, and had afterward the pleasure of seeing him very successful in this profession. The friendship between these two men was cemented by mutual service and sacrifice, for part of the debts for which General Gridley filed a petition in bankruptcy in 1842 were contracted as security for Fell and others in enter-

¹James Ewing, *Memorial Address to Bloomington Bar Association*, 1887. Manuscript in *Fell Papers*.

prises in which both were interested.² Fell was able later amply to compensate his friend for his devotion, but he never forgot the service rendered at the time of the great panic.

Besides the stump speaking, Fell reached the people by means of a circular letter, dated January 20, 1840, which set forth the evils of the Jackson regime and the necessity for reform in the person and under the leadership of General Harrison. This document is couched in somewhat pompous phraseology, but direct, pointed, and dignified—the latter a characteristic rare enough to be appreciated in the Western campaign literature of that day.

Fell's position on the question of repudiation is worthy of comment. The financial panic of 1837 was of unequaled severity throughout the Middle West, and its effects lasted well into the next decade. Men who were able to weather the first months of the long depression went under after brave resistance, when the depression had continued until their hoarded resources were exhausted. One after another, they took benefit of the bankruptcy law passed by a special session of Congress called by Harrison. Land depreciated in value until the best tracts were sold for a song, and then were offered vainly to buyers at any price.³ Not only were individuals ruined by the panic and hard times; it was many years before the state of Illinois recovered from the effects of 1837. The State Bank, as has been noted, suspended payment in 1837, and failed in 1842. The state's internal improvement scheme did not collapse until about 1840, when the legislature repealed the law. The construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal had stopped in 1839, and was not resumed for some years. Interest on the state debt was paid regularly, however, until 1841, when payments were suspended until July, 1846. The state became so seriously involved that many recommended the extreme means of practical repudiation of the state debt. This proposal aroused the more thoughtful of the men of Illinois to a strong protest, and none opposed the suggestion more vigorously than Jesse Fell. He published, in 1845, an open letter to the Senate and House of Illinois, which was widely copied and

²The petition was made under the law of 1841, and bears date of Feb. 10, 1842. The schedule of debts amounts to \$52,999.42. See Fell's sketch of Gridley in Duis, *Good Old Times in McLean County*, 262-276.

³So late as 1848, Robert Fell was offered eighty acres near the farm of his brother close to Bloomington for \$3 per acre. Lewis, *Life*, 27.

probably had a considerable influence upon the public opinion of the day regarding repudiation. He recommended the imposition of a slight tax, which he said the people would gladly pay, and which would recognize the moral obligation of the state. In addition to the primary motive of common honesty, he urged that the passage of such a law would relieve the state of the responsibility for the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which the bondholders would then take off its hands.⁴

During these years Fell remained a loyal Whig, working in the party councils when occasion required, but steadily refusing to accept office. In 1850 the Whigs of the neighborhood of Quincy—it will be remembered that this was while he lived at Payson—urged him to stand for representative. “[Your views] on the really important question of the times—the non-extension of slavery, will not only meet the approval of the entire Whigs

⁴*Copy of a Letter upon State Repudiation, Jesse W. Fell to the Senate and House of Illinois, 1845.* The following quotations will serve to show his position, which was that of the more conservative thinkers in the state generally:

“ . . . We stand as on the verge of a precipice, and one false step may precipitate us to a depth of dishonor and infamy from which we may never recover. . . . In such a contingency [practical repudiation] our credit and reputation as a state will not only be gone but, it is feared, past redemption; practical repudiation will have received your sanction, and, in return, will consign the State to a depth of infamy from which she can never hope to emerge; . . . Where, let me ask, is the distinction, in morals or common honesty, between the man who boldly proclaims he will not pay a debt, which he alleges was illegally contracted, though based on a valuable consideration, and him who acknowledges that he justly owes, has the means of making restitution, but refuses to make the first effort to do so? . . .

“Let us inquire, in the next place, what will be the practical effect,—what the objects to be attained by this tax, light tho’ it be. If no other object was attainable, that of merely paying the amount of what we justly owe would of itself be all-sufficient, and should impel us to a prompt and cheerful performance of the act. But this is not all. By so doing you will practically extinguish,—you will relieve the people of \$6,000,000 of their public indebtedness. Our bond holders stand pledged, in the event of the passage through your bodies of a revenue law, imposing a light tax for the purpose of paying a part of the accruing interest on our debt, to take the Michigan and Illinois Canal, with its attendant burdens, off our hands, and prosecute it to completion within a given period. Thus relieving us of about one half of our immense State debt.”

of the county, but will I believe tend to secure a strong vote from the free-soilers, who probably in this county and certainly in the congressional district, hold the balance of power," wrote a local Whig leader to him at the time.⁵ Fell refused the nomination.

A little later he found in the columns of the *Intelligencer* a means of influencing public opinion which was practicable even when his private affairs kept him busiest.⁶ He was untiring in his efforts for his friends, and seems in all cases to have given advice which subsequent events justified. Again in 1854 there was a demand that he be a candidate for the legislature, and another refusal. He was wont to remark to his friends, indeed, that after 1852 his interest in politics was buried in the grave of Henry Clay. That interest experienced a prompt and complete resuscitation, however, upon the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In common with most Friends, the Fell family had long been abolitionists, and when it became clear that the new Republican party was to be organized about the central idea of opposition to the extension of slavery, they united with it eagerly.⁷

The party was organized in Illinois on the 29th of May, 1856, in Major's Hall in Bloomington, altho several preliminary meetings had been held and the leaders were already well

⁵N. Bushnell to Fell, Aug. 23, 1850.

⁶For instance, Richard Yates, in a letter dated Nov. 17, 1852, explains his methods of winning the election of 1852, and thanks Fell for his defense of him in the *Intelligencer*, and for his help for several years past. Yates' account of the campaign is very interesting. He wrote letters, of which he had 150 copies made, to send to Whigs of influence, both known and unknown to him. After ten days he went through each county in the district, "had a little night meeting in each (this is what the *Register* called my still hunt) and at the end of that time I commenced speaking at the various county seats *on a run*, and in twenty days the whole Whig columns from center to circumference were moving in solid phalanx and shouting victory all along the line—Calhoun was cowed—his friends alarmed—Judge Douglas and Shields and Gregg and Harris &c were brought to the rescue—lying handbills and malignant falsehoods were brought in requisition, but in vain—I went to bed the night of the election conscious of victory."

⁷Jesse Fell to his son, Jesse W. Fell, June 16, 1832. In this letter Fell's father tells of his mother's activity and interest in meetings held to express sympathy for the colored people. Mrs. Fell the elder was an admirer of Mrs. Mott and coöperated with her in her efforts. E. M. Prince states in the *Fell Memorial* that the senior Fell operated a station of the Underground Railroad.

united.⁸ The convention held at that time was supposed to be composed of one delegate for each six thousand people, which gave three delegates to McLean County; but others besides delegates participated freely in its business, especially as there seems to have been practical unanimity concerning what was to be done. People came in crowds from all parts of the state, and there was great enthusiasm, which reached its highest pitch when Lincoln gave the famous "Lost Speech." Local tradition places Fell among the many speakers whose efforts were entirely lost sight of in the splendor of that matchless oration; but his characteristic activity at such times, it may be remarked in passing, was rather the framing of resolutions and the urging of progressive measures privately among his friends, than the making of speeches.

By 1856, Illinois people had come thoroly to realize that the Whig party had ceased to be; but the character and policy of its successor was not altogether clear. In no state, perhaps, was the Republican party made up of elements more diverse than composed it in Illinois. The third congressional district, for instance, comprised in 1856 thirteen counties.⁹ The southern counties, still largely influenced by their southern antecedents, abominated abolitionists. The northern counties had been settled mainly by New England and Ohio people, who brought with them very decided anti-slavery views. Fifty-five delegates, representing the thirteen counties, met in convention July 2, 1856, and nominated Owen Lovejoy, altho McLean and all the southern counties had been instructed for Leonard Swett. Lovejoy was known to be an abolitionist, an ex-member of the Liberty party. Moreover, the southern counties had long yielded the nomination to those of the north, and thought that a sense of fairness should have granted them the nomination when they urged so able a candidate as Leonard Swett. Because of these things, the disgruntled counties held another convention on the sixteenth of

⁸Major's Hall was the third story, now demolished, of a building still (1916) standing on Front street in Bloomington. *Pantagraph*, June 4, 1856. Joseph Medill, "Lincoln's Lost Speech," in *McClure's Magazine*, Sept., 1896. For an account of attempts at Republican organization before 1856, see J. H. Burnham, *History of Bloomington and Normal*, 109-114.

⁹Kendall, Will, Grundy, La Salle, Bureau, Putnam, Kankakee, Iroquois, McLean, DeWitt, Champaign, and Vermillion, of which the present Ford County then formed a part.

July at Bloomington, and nominated Judge T. L. Dickey of Ottawa.¹⁰

Fell had been in the East during the first convention, at Ottawa, but he was known to be strongly in favor of Swett. He had gone on private business, but hoping to attend the latter part of the Republican convention at Philadelphia, a hope which was frustrated by delay in his business affairs. He returned, however, in time to attend the great ratification meeting in the square in Bloomington, on the evening of the convention day. After the "bolters" had spoken, some one called on Lovejoy, who had appeared upon the scene. He came to the front and delivered a speech so powerful that he won the unfriendly crowd completely. It was a wonderful victory for the abolitionist, and for the principles of freedom and equality which he advocated.¹¹

On the second evening after, another mass meeting was held on the square, at which Fell offered resolutions in favor of Lovejoy. The crowd was again carried away with enthusiasm, and readily adopted them. Lovejoy sentiment grew from day to day. Judge Dickey later withdrew from the contest, and Lovejoy was elected by a large majority. It was during this campaign that there sprang up the warm friendship between Fell and Lovejoy, which was to last until the death of the latter in 1864.

During the campaign that followed Mr. Fell made many speeches. The Republican organization in Illinois was rapidly completed, and the party pushed its campaign so energetically that it won the governorship, altho the Democrats were successful in the general elections. During the summer the Bloomington Democratic and Republican clubs exchanged speakers, Mr. Fell being invited to represent his party before the Democratic Club.¹² He was active in the county nominating convention in September. Throughout the summer, however, he seems studiously to have confined himself to local activities.

Among the forces that were powerful in shaping public opinion in Illinois after 1853, were the Kansas Aid Committee

¹⁰*Pantagraph*, June 11, July 2, 9, 23, 1856; April 11, 1868.

¹¹Brush, *The Political Career of Owen Lovejoy* (manuscript thesis, University of Illinois), 12. Prince says (*Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of McLean County*, 1029) that this appearance of Lovejoy had been planned by Mr. Fell, who thought it the best way of reconciling discordant elements in the party. Burnham, *History of Bloomington and Normal*, 114.

¹²Adlai Stevenson in *Fell Memorial*, 49ff.

and its allies. General W. F. M. Army, a West Virginian who lived in North Bloomington, was a leader in the work of helping Northern men in Kansas.¹³ The big barn at his home was a depot of supplies for Kansas families sent in by sympathizers from far and near. The town was a recruiting station for immigrants bound for Kansas. The Fells, being anti-slavery people, helped in the work. In 1856, at the national convention of the society held in Buffalo, Abraham Lincoln was appointed on the National Kansas Aid Committee. He declined to serve, however, alleging other pressing duties, and recommended Fell as a substitute. General Army wrote at once to Fell offering him membership, as representative for Illinois, and asking him to attend the meeting in Chicago on July 30. Fell in turn declined, recommending Army himself for the post, to which in due time he was appointed, and served with marked ability.¹⁴

After 1856 Fell's interest in politics did not flag. His map of Illinois, with the senatorial districts carefully inked in, and the party vote for each district for 1858 written in the margin, shows how closely he kept track of conditions and tendencies. He was close to the people, and knew their ideas and their heroes. He was close to the leaders, knowing their ambitions and their motives. He was interested in all public affairs, concerned with the growth of the country, solicitous for the right solution to national problems.¹⁵ In 1857 he was commissioned by the state central committee as corresponding secretary to visit different parts of Illinois for conferences with leaders. He knew the pulse of the state as no one else could.

As has been noted, Fell met Lincoln in 1834-5, when Lincoln and Stuart were serving in the state legislature. At circuit court sessions they were more or less closely associated while Fell continued to ride the circuit, and after he had given up law for real estate their friendship continued. In the campaigns of 1840 and 1844 they were active and friendly Whig partisans. They called each other by their Christian names, and it was noted with

¹³Wm. M. McCambridge, "My Remembrances of Jesse W. Fell," manuscript. *Pantagraph*, June 25, July 2 and 23, 1856.

¹⁴Army to Fell, July 22, 1856. *Chicago Tribune*, same date. The *Pantagraph* of July 23, 1856, says that "A. Lincoln is a member of the national committee." The facts were related by Fell himself in a letter to a newspaper, Oct. 3, 1881; *Scrapbook*.

¹⁵Dept. of Interior to Owen Lovejoy, May 25, 1858. Lovejoy to Fell, undated.

amusement by their common acquaintances that Fell never called Lincoln "Abe" after the easy fashion of most Illinoisans. It was one of the Quaker characteristics which gave him a gentle dignity which all men respected, that he did not use nicknames. Lincoln was often at the Fell home in Bloomington, and the two men seem to have carried on a friendly correspondence whenever there was public business upon which they might coöperate.

John F. Eberhart says that Jesse W. Fell and his brother Kersey were the first men to suggest Mr. Lincoln as presidential timber.¹⁶ Be this as it may, there is no question that the idea of joint debates between Lincoln and Douglas originated with Jesse Fell and was repeatedly suggested until the debates became a reality. They were first proposed by Mr. Fell in September of 1854 on the occasion of a speech by Senator Douglas in Bloomington. Mr. Fell's request was then based on a general desire of people to hear the two together. Douglas declined to debate, and Lincoln goodnaturedly agreed to postpone his own talk until "candlelight".¹⁷

There was no doubt among the Republicans of Illinois as to their choice for senator in 1858. They wished to make the nomination at the state convention, a proceeding until then unheard-of. In the McLean County convention, held June 5, Fell offered resolutions "that Lincoln is our first, last and only choice for the vacancy soon to occur in the United States Senate; and that despite all influences at home or abroad, domestic or foreign, the Republicans of Illinois, as with the voice of one man, are unalterably so resolved; to the end that we may have a *big man*, with a *big mind*, and a *big heart*, to represent our *big state*."¹⁸ The resolutions were read amid shouts of approval, and were adopted with rounds of applause. Throughout the state the feeling was the same. At the state convention, held in Springfield on the 16th, practically the same resolutions were adopted.¹⁹ It was at

¹⁶*Fell Memorial*, 26. J. R. Rowell in *ibid*.

¹⁷Stevenson, *Something of Men I Have Known*, 8. Lawrence Weldon, "New Lincoln Stories" in *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 9 and *Pantagraph*, Feb. 10, 1902. Fell's own account is in Oldroyd, *Lincoln Memorial Album*, 468-472. James T. Ewing tells it in his contribution to the *Fell Memorial*.

¹⁸*Pantagraph*, June 1 and 7, 1858.

¹⁹The comment in the Democratic organ, the *Illinois Statesman*, of June 3, 1858, besides furnishing a typical example of the attitude of non-Republicans toward Lincoln, refers to a "secret caucus" of the night before. Probably the presentation of the resolutions was carefully planned by the leaders at this meeting.

the evening session of this convention that Lincoln delivered his "House Divided" speech. To trace the courses of speeches and replies that followed, as Lincoln and Douglas pushed their rivalry, would be to repeat a story that has already been well and fully told. Of especial interest here is the journey of Fell through the states north and east of Illinois, during the time when the debates were taking place in Illinois, and later. He visited all the New England states but Maine, and New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana. Everywhere he found Republicans who were interested in the debates, and who were eager to hear about the man who was successfully defying and answering Stephen A. Douglas. As he sounded the praises of his friend, the conviction grew in him that in a still larger field Lincoln might become the successful rival of the great Douglas.²⁰

When he returned to Bloomington, Fell proposed to Lincoln that he should be the next Republican candidate for president. This was in his brother Kersey's law office. The story of that conversation, which Mr. Fell afterward substantially reproduced, is well known. Lincoln professed to think it a very foolish idea, and declined to write the autobiography for which his friend asked, that he might acquaint people in the East with Lincoln's personal history.²¹ Nevertheless Fell quietly pursued the realization of his "big idea," which other foresighted Republicans shared with him, through 1859. He was secretary of the state central committee for his party, and in that capacity he kept a sensitive finger on the pulse of the state. He found occasion, moreover, in perfecting the state organization, to visit most of the counties, where the people as a rule were eager to see "Abe" Lincoln a presidential candidate. There was no need, apparently, to urge Lincoln's name to Illinoisans. It was in other states that the Lincoln propaganda must be pushed.

Lincoln himself began to think seriously of running for president during the summer, and especially after visiting Kansas and Ohio in the fall. On December 20, when Fell repeated his request, Lincoln gave him the famous autobiography. Without waiting to copy the paper, Fell sent it at once to his friend, Joseph J. Lewis, in Westchester, Pennsylvania. Mr. Lewis' use

²⁰Lewis, *Life*, 64; Oldroyd, *Lincoln Memorial Album*, 472-478.

²¹Oldroyd, *Lincoln Memorial Album*, 477 (Fell's own account). Arnold, *Life of Lincoln*, 155. Tarbell, *Life of Lincoln*, II, 128-130. *Bloomington Eye*, March 6, 1887.

of it forms one of the most interesting chapters in the story of Lincoln's rise to the presidency.²²

During all the years since leaving Pennsylvania, Fell had never suffered himself to lose touch with public affairs in his native state. Through correspondence and through many return visits, even after all his family had removed to Illinois, he kept himself well informed of tendencies and opinions in Pennsylvania.²³ He knew that that state had already, in 1859, become a stronghold of the new party, with opposition to slavery extension and high tariff for the backbone of its platform. He knew that Seward, who held the unswerving allegiance of New York, was not popular in Pennsylvania. He knew that Lincoln, popular in the West, needed the support of the East also, if he were to win from Seward the Republican nomination in 1860; and that the influence of Pennsylvania, direct and indirect, would be an important factor in the coming national convention. Pennsylvania, if won for Lincoln, must know about him.

²²Arnold, *Life of Lincoln*, 14. Joseph J. Lewis to Fell, Mar. 28, 1872. Lewis to J. R. Osgood, same date. This autobiography, with the letter from Lincoln which accompanied it (dated Dec. 20, 1859, and now in the Oldroyd collection), was later the subject of a prolonged controversy between Mr. Fell and his family and Mr. Oldroyd, who made a notable collection of Lincolniana. The manuscript was returned by Lewis to Fell, and was later loaned, with the letter, to Mr. Oldroyd. Mr. Oldroyd returned the autobiography, but has never returned the letter. Memoranda among the Fell Papers, and letters; from O. H. Oldroyd to Fell, April 3, 1882; Shelby M. Cullom to Lawrence Weldon, Aug. 30, 1887. A facsimile of the autobiography was published in 1872 with an introduction by Mr. Fell.

²³Issachar Price to Fell, Downingtown, Pa., Sept. 24, 1838. In this letter, one of the most interesting in the Fell collection, Mr. Price gives a rather pessimistic view of political conditions in Van Buren's administration. "Ritner cannot be elected; he is the most prevaricating shuffling tool that ever *set on a throne*," he says; "promise one thing today and go right to the contrary tomorrow; this he has done in 20 instances to my own knowledge & his great drill Sargeant Thad Stevens is the most barefaced impudent scoundrel now unchained and running at large in the state." This estimate, from which doubtless Fell deduced his own more charitable conclusions, is followed by a prophecy of the vote in the coming election. Speaking of national politics, this Pennsylvania village postmaster predicts: "Abolition will entirely swallow up antiism in fact anti-masonry is defunct—abolitionism takes its place & the party that adopts it as a *test* is destined to *growl* in a *glorious minority* for many a year to come & this will be the end of the great and talented Whig party in the U States."

Joseph J. Lewis was a prominent Republican who wrote persuasively, and who was personally influential in Eastern Pennsylvania. He took care to inform himself rather minutely concerning the Westerner before he prepared, from the autobiography and from other material which Fell furnished, an article which introduced Lincoln to the people of his part of the state. This article appeared first in the *Chester County Times* of February 11, 1860. It was widely copied throughout the state and beyond it, and together with the personal work and speeches of Lewis and others whom he interested, served to acquaint the Pennsylvanians with the career and character of Abraham Lincoln.²⁴

It is interesting to note how the two men who planned Lincoln's introduction to Pennsylvania selected from the material at hand those elements which they knew would count for most with the people with whom they dealt. He was "certainly not of the first families," said Mr. Lewis. His ancestors were Friends—a circumstance with which, it is safe to say, very few Illinoisans were acquainted. They had gone from Berks County, Pennsylvania; but in Illinois no one traced the Lincoln family back of its Virginia antecedents. Descendants of the same stock, Mr. Lewis continued, still lived in Eastern Pennsylvania. He had been a strong Whig leader, a friend of Henry Clay, a great worker in the campaign of 1844, and was master of "the principles of political economy that underlie the tariff" question. Pennsylvania was especially assured that: "Mr. Lincoln has been a consistent and earnest tariff man from the first hour of his entering public life. He is such from principle, and from a deeply rooted conviction of the wisdom of the protective policy; and what ever influence he may hereafter exert upon the government will be in favor of that policy."²⁵ Lewis' account of Lincoln's sacrifice of his own chances of election to the Senate in 1854, when he asked his friends to vote for Trumbull rather than risk the election of Governor Matteson, a Nebraska Democrat, must have had its intended effect with the anti-slavery Republicans of Pennsylvania. He attributed Douglas' success after the debates of 1858 to an "old and grossly unequal apportionment of the districts."

As the time for the national Republican convention drew

²⁴J. J. Lewis to Fell, Jan. 30, 1860. Vickers Fell to E. J. Lewis, June 3, 1896. *Daily Local News* (Westchester, Pa.), Apr. 9, 1883.

²⁵Blaine, *Twenty Years in Congress*, I, 196-207.

near Lincoln's friends realized that, barring the chance of one of those tricks of fate which sometimes change the course of events at political meetings, his only serious rival was Seward. Cameron and Bates had only local support, and were not greatly feared. Leonard Swett, David Davis, and Jesse Fell were the three Illinoisans most active in their efforts for Lincoln. Fell had declined to be secretary of the Republican state committee again, that he might have more time for field work. In the spring of 1860 he had endeavored to secure full lists of names from the entire state for the documents sent out by the Republican national committee. Nothing that could aid in preparing Illinois to play her part in the coming drama was omitted.²⁶ Financial support was assured through a well-organized system of county assessments, collected in 1859 to be ready for campaign purposes. It was planned that a great delegation should go from Central Illinois to Chicago to support Lincoln.²⁷

²⁶Fell, in Duis, *Good Old Times in McLean County*, 280. Circular letter of the Republican State Central Committee, June 23, 1860. This letter was issued by the secretary, Horace White, who succeeded Fell. Circular letter from Fell to chairmen of county central committees, May 8, 1860. Both of these latter circulars show the methodical business administration by which Fell secured an unusual degree of unity and assured resources for the great campaign.

²⁷The account of the convention has been told many times. There is a story of the events of the meeting which because of its connection with Mr. Fell may be repeated here. It is unsupported by any sort of documentary evidence but persists among the older citizens of Bloomington to an extent which at least warrants its repetition. It is to the effect that the Illinois leaders discovered that the tickets of admission issued to delegates and visitors to the convention were almost monopolized by the large delegations from the East which supported Seward. The Lincoln contingent, having gathered with great enthusiasm, was suddenly reduced to the depths of despair by the announcement, on the morning of May 18, that all the tickets had been given out, and that they would therefore have to content themselves with standing outside the Wigwam. The Western leaders gathered quickly for a conference, because the popular enthusiasm for Lincoln of the delegations from Indiana and Illinois was an asset upon which they definitely counted in the session to come. Fell promised a solution, and made good his promise by securing another set of tickets, similar to the first, which he had hastily printed. These were fairly distributed to the leaders of the various delegations, including the Seward men, who distributed them to their adherents. During the morning the Seward men, feeling secure of their seats in the Wigwam because of the tickets they held, organized a monster parade for Seward, led by

Joseph Lewis, with other delegates from Pennsylvania, did valiant work for Lincoln, and nominated Lewis' old friend, John Hickman, for the vice-presidency. General Stokely was a delegate from Ohio who gave substantial aid.²⁸ The Pennsylvania contingent, returning full of enthusiasm to its own state, pushed the campaign vigorously, Lewis keeping in close touch with Lincoln through his correspondence with Fell. In order to bring to Pennsylvania some of the enthusiasm of the Western men, Lewis tried to secure Davis and Swett as campaign speakers for his state, but failed to convince the central committee of the advisability of this plan. Davis and Swett, of course, were well occupied in Illinois. Owen Lovejoy, candidate for the House, conducted a lively campaign, guided in his methods by the advice of Fell, who had become his close friend and hearty supporter. Fell's own campaign notebook, filled with newspaper clippings and notes for comment and reply, has been preserved, and shows a collection of indictments of slavery, Southern commendations of Buchanan (with caustic comment very belligerent for a Quaker) and clippings about "Bully" Brooks. The summer and autumn were for him, as for many Illinoisans, one long effort to make Lincoln the head of the nation.²⁹

the band which had come with them from New York. Returning to the hall, they found the Western men already admitted in large numbers, and ready to shout for Lincoln, while other crowds filled the streets for blocks in every direction.—Henry Fell in the *Fell Memorial*, 12. Horace White considers the story improbable. Horace White to the writer, April 30, 1914. A good account of the convention from the standpoint of an Illinoisan is found in a letter by Leonard Swett to the Hon. Josiah H. Drummond of Portland, Maine, and dated May 27, 1860. Published in the *Moline (Ill.) Mail*, and later in the *Pantagraph* of Jan. 8, 1909.

²⁸J. J. Lewis to Fell, May 28, 1860. Gen. Stokely to Fell, Dec. 21, 1860.

²⁹Concerning the campaign in Pennsylvania: Lewis to Fell, May 28, June 17, July 9, Sept. 1, Sept. 25, Oct. 1, Oct. 21, 1860; John G. Nicolay to Fell, July 19, 1860; Lincoln to Fell, Oct. 5, 1860. Concerning Owen Lovejoy: Lovejoy to Fell, May 28, June 27, July 21, Sept. 11, 1860.

CHAPTER VI

THE YEARS OF THE CIVIL WAR

Following his election Lincoln stood the fire of a brisk siege of office-seekers. Joseph J. Lewis was actively corresponding with him and Fell during this time, not only because he hoped to receive some sort of reward for his services in Pennsylvania, but also because a man whom he had cordially disliked, and of whose loyalty to Lincoln during the campaign he had the strongest doubts, seemed destined to receive a cabinet appointment. This man was Simon Cameron. Stimulated by Lewis' representations concerning the character and ability of Cameron, Fell visited the president-elect and told him what Lewis had written him.¹ Lyman Trumbull and others also told Lincoln of Camer-

¹Lewis to Fell, Dec. 17, 1860; Jan. 15, 1861. In view of Cameron's subsequent record as secretary of war it is interesting to note Lewis' unqualified condemnation. "At Harrisburg I found but one sentiment prevalent, and that was, of extreme satisfaction that the incarnation of the idea of public corruption was not to enter the cabinet. Men spoke out who had before been restrained by fear, and the feeling was one of great relief. When we were informed that the place of secretary of the treasury was offered to Cameron, and accepted by him, the information produced grief, and mortification. I felt mortified and humbled. I happened to enter a few nights after a room where a number of leading Republicans were assembled discussing the subject. 'Is this the man,' said one of them to me, 'that you promised us, had such an instinctive horror of corruption that it could not be suffered to come near him? What will you say when you find all the banality of Albany and Harrisburg combined transferred to Washington and pervading all the highest places in the government?' I was urged to undertake in company of Henry C. Casey a mission to Springfield to disabuse the mind of the president-elect, and relieve it from its delusion. I had but to answer that Mr. Lincoln had but to know that he had been imposed upon & he would certainly retrace his steps—that it was hard for a man in his position to resist the pressure upon him from unexpected quarters and from men who possessed his confidence and that it was our duty to make the truth perfectly clear and apparent to his mind so that he might discover it even through the mist which the hopes of personal favor or the fears of personal resentment had raised to obscure it. When the news came that Mr. Lincoln had become informed and had acted on that information the joy

on's reputation and record. The president-elect seems to have given up the idea of appointing him to the portfolio of war by early January, but afterward again altered his plans; and Cameron's name appeared with the other appointments in March.

In the case of Norman B. Judd, who made the nomination of Lincoln for the Illinoisans, Lincoln was more effectively counseled. No paper left by Mr. Fell illustrates better his sound political judgment than the letter of January 2, 1861, in which he discusses with Lincoln the possibility of a cabinet appointment for Judd or Davis. After speaking of his own high regard for Judd, he said that in the state there was much bitterness toward him, particularly in the Whig element of the party. The causes of this included his opposition to Lincoln in his first contest for the senatorship, which was still remembered in a way to make his appointment "a bitter pill to many of your old and tried friends." The Republicans of Whig antecedents wanted to see David Davis in the cabinet; and of his loyalty and devotion there could be no question. But Fell thought it unwise, since Illinois had the presidency, to make any first-class appointments there. He begged Lincoln not to increase the feud between the two elements of the party (just then at its height because of the imminence of the slavery conflict) by appointing the leader of either. Indiana and Pennsylvania should be given cabinet appointments, but by avoiding the gift of any in Illinois friction could be allayed. Davis had agreed with these sentiments in October; nor did Fell add, what was probably patent to him, that Davis might have changed his mind since then. He expressed a strong hope that his friend might be given a "first-rate second class appointment."

Joseph Lewis would gladly have accepted a foreign post. But this was not forthcoming, nor was any other federal appointment until March, 1863, when he was appointed commissioner of internal revenue, a position for which Lincoln had been considering him for about a year.² Fell's friends confidently expected to see him appointed to some place of importance, but such an appointment was as distasteful to him then as at any other time in his life. The circumstances of Lincoln's elevation did not alter his own fixed plans, principles, and preferences,

was great. Many felt that a step had been taken which would save the nation from disgrace and the Republican party in Penna from shame and confusion . . ." See White, *Life of Lyman Trumbull*, 142-152.

²Lewis to Fell, Mar. 1 and 27, 1862; Mar. 13, 1863.

which seem to have been to bring about what he considered desirable events and results, through personal influence rather than by personal administration. At the outbreak of the war he was offered a place as assistant quartermaster, with rank of captain. This, with probably other similar offers, he declined, and continued for a time to carry on his regular business as usual.³

When the certainty of war was clear to everyone, at the fall of Sumter, men who felt the responsibility of leading public opinion bent their energies toward uniting the country in support of the government. The friends of Lincoln in Central Illinois wished especially to hold up the hands of the president by assuring him of popular support. On the day after the fall of Fort Sumter, Mr. Fell hurriedly gathered together a group of the leading men of Bloomington, both Republicans and Democrats, in an upper room on Washington street. He had resolutions ready as usual, which were voted for by everyone except Mr. Snow, who sympathized with secession and had the courage to say so in an overwhelmingly loyal community. Being united among themselves these local leaders next turned their attention to building up popular union sentiment. They had handbills printed and distributed announcing a mass-meeting to be held in Phoenix Hall that night; and before separating, agreed upon a long program of speakers upon whose sentiments they could rely, that there might be no time for possible dissenting volunteers from the audience.⁴ Mr. Spencer presided that evening, and one prominent man after another addressed the people. A great flag draped across the platform gave the keynote of loyalty. The people cheered it enthusiastically, and sang patriotic songs. The resolutions were presented by Rev. C. G. Ames, who called upon those "who in their hearts swore to the sentiments therein expressed" to hold up their right hands in voting. "A response like thunder came up from the densely packed audience,

³Fell to Richard Yates, Aug. 21, 1861. This letter has been lost, but is on record.

⁴Among those who attended were C. P. Merriman and Dr. David Brier, Republicans; Hamilton Spencer, T. P. Rogers, Allen Withers, Dr. E. R. Roe, and H. P. Merriman, Democrats—the last two of the Democratic *Statesman*; and D. J. Snow of the *Times*. The speakers of the evening meeting included James S. Ewing, Col. W. P. Boyd, Dr. T. P. Rogers, Dr. E. R. Roe, Rev. C. G. Ames, Harvey Hogg, and E. M. Prince. The resolutions are given in the *Lewis Life*, 68, and in the *Pantagraph*, Apr. 17, 1861. Dr. Roe's account of the meeting is in the *Pantagraph* for July 29, 1871.

and a thousand hands flashed in the light above the sea of heads, like the drawing of myriad swords." This meeting, the first of its kind in Illinois, was followed by many in other towns all over the region, and is a type of the means by which the people were stirred to loyal support of the administration.

As the friend of Lincoln, Mr. Fell found himself more in demand as a political power than he had ever been. His old friends found him responsive as formerly; new friends, called to his attention by the circumstances of the times, found him ready and anxious to help where help was needed. Owen Lovejoy called upon him freely for aid and advice; Governor Yates and Lyman Trumbull asked and received suggestions from him. He united with Lovejoy to urge Davis' appointment to the supreme bench.⁵ Yates, who met determined and influential opposition, largely upon personal grounds, especially appreciated his loyal support. Opposition to the governor, at a time when every element in Illinois should have been united in support of the administration, seemed very foolish and wrong to Jesse Fell, and he used his pen and his personal influence to gain better co-operation for the governor.⁶

Fell's relations to Owen Lovejoy, whom he greatly admired,

⁵Owen Lovejoy to Fell, Apr. 1, 1861; Fell to Yates, Apr. 8, June 12, 1861; Lyman Trumbull to Fell, Feb. 1, June 7, 1861; Yates to Fell, Aug. 13, 1864.

Among the letters of this period is one from Fell to Governor Yates, dated Aug. 18, 1864. It called Yates' attention to the fact that there was no practical farmer among those appointed to suggest an application of the funds accruing to Illinois under the Morrill Act, and suggested George W. Minier of Tazewell County, a successful farmer and a forcible writer, as a member of this committee. Letters concerning the appointment of Davis are not now available, but Fell's article in the *Pantagraph* of Apr. 11, 1868, contains a statement of his agency.

An undated petition to Lincoln in behalf of Jesse Bishop of Marion, Ill., who had suffered at the hands of secession sympathizers, belongs to this period. It is signed by Thomas I. Turner, Jesse W. Fell, Richard Yates, W. Bushnell, Richard Oglesby, S. M. Cullom, and others. Kersey Fell seems especially to have interested himself in helping those upon whom the burdens of the war were heavy. A set of letters from him to Governor Yates, dated from Sept. 21, 1861, to Dec. 27, 1864, are filled with requests for passes, money, or permits to all sorts of folk who needed help. (*Yates MSS.*)

⁶Richard Yates to Fell, June 7, 1862.

were especially close during the war.⁷ Lovejoy at Washington and Fell in Illinois and other states of the Middle West found many ways of helping each other; and they liked to compare notes and opinions. Writing to his friend early in October, 1862, Fell said: "Can it be possible that the Almighty, (who will pardon my presumption) is so poor a general as to suffer this war to come to a close without sweeping, as with the besom of destruction, that damning sin that has thus culminated in civil war. We will trust not—and will pray not; at least till the 'old cuss' shall be 'placed'—as Honest Old Abe expressed it—'in process of final' and may we justly add 'speedy extinction.' " Lovejoy replied, "My trust is in God for the nation."⁸

Among the friends of Mr. Fell who by no means shared his own Quaker aversion to war, was the "Fighting Schoolmaster," Charles E. Hovey, the normal school president who led the Thirty-third Illinois out of the schoolroom into the field. Without having had technical training in tactics he proved an able commander. But he was never able to qualify his outspoken New England anti-slavery sentiments, nor did he find any common ground with the West Point officers with whom he was associated, and who were able to understand the point of view of Southern men. He asked and received Mr. Fell's aid in enterprises for which he needed an agent in civil life, while Fell appreciated the opportunity of keeping in close touch with field operations through a man whom he knew to be trustworthy.

His own participation in the war, until now delayed by the pressure of private business and a distaste for military life, began in 1862. He had gone with Hovey to Washington in late June, 1861, to see Lincoln about the organization of the normal school regiment, and to observe the situation there for himself. With Hovey he went out with the crowds which followed the army to the disastrous battle of Bull Run. After the battle,

⁷Lovejoy to Fell, Dec. 7, 1862; Fell to his brother Vickers Fell, Oct. 7, 1862.

⁸Lovejoy selected Fell to prepare, after his death, such a memoir as might seem suitable. In April, 1864, therefore, his daughter wrote to Fell asking him to do this last service for his friend. Fell was also among those who raised money for the erection of a monument, and he seems to have secured payment to Lovejoy's heirs of money owed him. Lucy I. Lovejoy to Fell, Apr. 6, 1864. Circular letter from Princeton, signed by John H. Bryant, C. C. Mason, and F. Bascom, May 10, 1864; Bryant to Fell, Nov. 18, 1865.

while Hovey surveyed the field and interviewed spectators, Fell found congenial employment in helping about the hospitals which had been hastily improvised. He found there a certain Captain McCook lying mortally wounded. He was able to help many, and remained with Captain McCook and his father until the death of the former. Returning from Washington impressed with the magnitude of the coming struggle, the sense of his own obligation to bear a part in it grew as time passed. In the second year of the war he arranged his nursery and real estate businesses for a long absence, and offered his services to the president. Knowing that his talents were not military, and that he had passed the age when he might have been trained into a fighting man, he accepted gladly the position of paymaster, to which the rank of major was attached. The appointment seems to have been a pet project of Lincoln, as his letters on the subject attest.⁹

He accepted the appointment on the 19th of July, 1862, and began his duties soon afterward at Louisville, Kentucky. He took with him as a clerk William O. Davis, who was betrothed to his daughter Eliza.¹⁰ As a friend of the president, he was received among his colleagues with unusual interest, which gave place soon, as Rodney Smith bears witness, to deep respect and admiration. His habit of going about unarmed—the expression of a fixed principle of trusting men—was regarded as a foolhardy concession to these ideals by his colleagues; but there is no record of any attack upon him during the entire time of his service. He employed himself first in mastering the intricate red-tape of the service, after which in August he was sent to Indianapolis to pay the Sixty-ninth Indiana Infantry. From there he went to Springfield, Illinois, which was his headquarters while he paid the Illinois troops then being hurried to the front. Major William Smith, a more experienced paymaster, took Mr. Da-

⁹Lincoln to the secretary of war, Dec. 23, 1861, Mar. 29, 1862. "I really wish Jesse W. Fell, of Illinois, to be appointed a Paymaster in the Regular Army, at farthest, as early as the 1st of July, 1862. I wish nothing to interfere with this; and I have so written as much as two months ago, I think."—Adjutant General's Office, War Department, Washington, File No. F-290-C.B. 1863. See also O. H. Browning to Fell, June 26, June 30, 1862.

¹⁰Rodney Smith to Captain E. J. Lewis, July 15, 1897. The letter is copied in full on pages 73-78 of Lewis' *Life*. Mr. Davis was later transferred to the office of Internal Revenue at Washington, there to serve under Fell's old friend J. J. Lewis. Davis to Fell, Oct. 18, 1863.

vis into his personal employ, giving Fell Rodney Smith, an experienced clerk, who had been in the service for some time. Smith remained with him during the time of his service, and at his request then became his successor.

The official records of Mr. Fell's service, which lasted about eighteen months, show that he remained in Illinois until late in September, when he made a trip to Fort Donelson to pay the Eighty-third Illinois Infantry. After returning to Illinois, he went to Camp Morton in Indiana in November, then spent six months in Kentucky and Tennessee, going from Paducah to Cincinnati about the first of August, 1863. In the spring of that year he had a short leave of absence. Remaining in Ohio after his return to work but a short time, he returned to Kentucky, to Covington and Camp Wild Cat. His last payment was made to the Forty-eighth Pennsylvania near London, Kentucky, on September 18, 1863. The condition of his private affairs was such at that time as imperatively to demand his attention, and knowing that there were others who were capable of doing the work without loss to the service, he resigned at Christmas time. The resignation was accepted, and Fell hurried from Washington to Normal, to look after an accumulation of both private and public business.¹¹

Scarcely had he arrived at home when his friends began to urge him to enter politics. The first public request was a "suggestion" in the *Pantagraph* of December 26, 1863, that he be sent to the next Congress as representative for the eighth district. In an editorial on January 26 his name was suggested again, with a repetition of the arguments in the first article. He replied at once that the public work he had already done had entailed a sacrifice of personal interests which he felt he could ill afford to make, and added, "while the district can boast of a Leonard Swett, my consent to be placed in such a position would indicate a recklessness of the public weal, not to say vanity, that I trust I cannot be capable of." Some of his friends refused to consider this answer final, and made out a petition, signed by a long roll of names, begging him to accept the nomination.¹² Al-

¹¹Major William Cumback to Fell, Feb. 4, 1864. Fell to his wife, Oct. 19, 1862, Feb. 23, 1863. Receipts, 1863.

¹²Mr. Fell, in his endorsement upon this paper, says he declined it "as incompatible with proper attention to my private affairs . . . & for the further reason that I had solicited another and a better man to become a candidate—To wit Leonard Swett." No date; about Feb. 1, 1864.

exander Campbell paused in his advocacy of the "True American System of Finance" long enough to urge Fell to run for Congress; John H. Bryant, probably feeling with Campbell that Fell might take the place of the sadly missed Lovejoy, begged him not to decline. But Fell was firm in his determination not again to enter public life. Shelby M. Cullom was nominated at the convention, and elected over John T. Stuart by a large majority. It may be mentioned here that Fell was again asked to stand for Congress in 1866, and once more refused.¹³

Throughout the war his support of Lincoln, with that of many other of the president's old friends in the West, was unswerving and practical. The partial emancipation message of March 6, 1862, drew from him a burst of loyal and affectionate congratulation, which reveals the whole-heartedness of his faith in Lincoln, at a time when even Illinois was rife with criticism. He took the stump again in the campaign of 1864, speaking with E. M. Prince at a series of meetings in country schoolhouses and village halls. But he declined the post of secretary of the state central committee.¹⁴

The news of the assassination of Lincoln came with a peculiar shock to the Illinois towns in which he had been a familiar figure, and in which there were scores of his personal friends. Fell heard of it as he returned from a business trip. Hurrying home, but not stopping to have old Tom unharnessed from the buggy, he told his wife the sad news, and then started back to Bloomington to verify the report and have further particulars. On the way he met his son Henry, took him into the buggy with him, and begged for details.¹⁵ The day after, the McLean County people expressed their sorrow at a great public meeting

¹³Alexander Campbell to Fell, Apr. 2, 1864. Bryant to Fell, May 14, 1864. Fell in the *Pantagraph*, Apr. 11, 1868.

¹⁴The *Pantagraph* of May 23, 1862, has an account of a public meeting held the night before, at which Fell spoke warmly in defense of the presidential policy, then much criticized. In August another great meeting of the same sort was held. Fell to Lincoln, Mar. 17, 1862. *Pantagraph*, Oct. 5 and Oct. 11, 1864. Lewis, *Life*, 80. Telegram from Thomas J. Turner to Fell, July 11, 1864. Lincoln to Fell, Oct. 5, 1860.

¹⁵Henry C. Fell, "When Lincoln Visited Normal," in *Normalite*, June 7, 1913.

held in the court house square, at which Fell presided and spoke.¹⁶

A very dramatic episode gave to the days that followed a lively interest, and may be related here because it illustrates a prominent trait of Fell's character. Rev. Charles Ellis, the pastor of the Free Congregational Church, was a New Englander of strongly abolitionist views. In his sermon of April 23, 1865, he essayed to speak upon the subject of the assassination and its causes. His audience, which numbered many personal friends of the dead president, was perhaps as keenly sensitive to the estimate placed upon Lincoln as any audience could have been. Mr. Ellis began by saying that he believed that before God Adams, Jefferson and Washington were more to blame for the murder than Booth, for they had admitted slavery at the time when the constitution was made. He then blamed Lincoln for so long supporting a constitution which protected slavery, and said that "he had not the moral courage to step forth like a strong man in his might and do what his better nature told him was his highest duty. He sacrificed the demands of God that he might not offend a political party in the land," with much more to the same effect.

In attributing the murder of Lincoln to his own fault in no uncertain terms, Mr. Ellis aroused the indignation of the Bloomington people to fever heat. Members of the congregation were so angered that they were scarcely restrained from creating a disturbance in the church. Mob violence was not unknown in Bloomington during the war, as the Snow brothers could testify.¹⁷ A meeting of the members of the church was held a few days later, for the purpose of demanding the immediate resignation of the pastor. Mr. Fell, however, spoke so forcibly of the

¹⁶On the day after the assassination President Edwards called a meeting to be held in the assembly hall of the normal school, at which Fell presided and spoke, it is said, with singular eloquence of his old friend.

¹⁷These two brothers, with their sister, the president of the Bloomington Ladies' Library Board, were considered to be among the finest people in the town, but were extremely unpopular because of their frank sympathy with the South. On one occasion, when recent recruiting had aroused patriotic feeling to fever heat, a crowd of men and boys bombarded the office of the *Times*, and destroyed it. They were not satisfied until "the crude little press and all the types were scattered on the street below." The Snows sued for damages, but could get no conviction. Luman Burr, interview in *Bloomington Bulletin*, July 6, 1913.

fundamental principle upon which that church had been founded—the principle of free speech—that he dissuaded the congregation from a step which would have denied it. The Congregationalists adopted instead a set of resolutions which he offered, in which they refused to censure the sermon, asserting the right of any man to express his ideas untrammelled in their church; and reproved the “mob” which had caused the disturbance on the Sunday before.¹⁸ Although thus formally vindicated, Mr. Ellis found public opinion so against him that his usefulness in the community seemed at an end, and he resigned within a few days.

¹⁸*Pantagraph*, May 6, 1865. It is said that Dr. McCann Dunn paid for printing of the sermon, that all might know exactly what was said, since highly colored reports concerning Dr. Ellis' words were promptly circulated. John W. Cook says of this occurrence: “This community has often had occasion to feel a sense of pride in the citizenship of Mr. Fell, but on this occasion he illustrated a degree of fidelity to a cherished principle that lifted him to the serene heights of supreme manhood. His heart was heavy because of the national calamity and he mourned the loss of his honored friend, but the principle of free speech could not be violated without his indignant protest.” *A Western Pioneer* (MS).

CHAPTER VII

PUBLIC SERVICE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Altho keenly interested in national affairs, it was always for the concerns of his community that Mr. Fell found deepest pleasure in planning and execution. In 1864 the people of the township in which he lived resolved to correct an old wrong that had caused great confusion and expense for many years. The corner marks usually set up by government surveyors could not be located in Normal township, and people came finally to the conclusion that only the outside boundaries had ever been properly run. Judge Davis, C. R. Overman, and Mr. Fell addressed a meeting on the first of October, 1864, and Mr. Fell secured the adoption of a set of resolutions, which, after reciting the conditions, recommended legislative action to secure a resurvey and an adjustment of all difficulties between those whose boundary lines conflicted. A petition was signed, a committee appointed to circulate it, and Mr. Fell was commissioned to present it at Springfield. He did this effectively, and the necessary bill was passed on February 16, 1865. A case in chancery was instituted accordingly, the next September, and a decree for the resurvey secured, the commissioners' report being confirmed by both lower and supreme courts.¹ The decisions which were thus reached in the most friendly and united spirit, doubtless saved endless expensive law suits and hard feelings. Perhaps no service of Mr. Fell to his community required more tact, foresight, and hard work to accomplish than this achievement of the resurvey of the township, or meant more to the people among whom he lived and worked.

On the same day on which he signed the resurvey bill, Governor Oglesby also approved a bill changing the name of North Bloomington to Normal. Under that name it was incorporated February 25, 1867, with a charter which embodied a perpetual

¹Samuel Colvin et al vs. Kersey H. Fell et al., 40 *Illinois Reports* 418. The petition signed at the meeting is among the *Fell MSS.* It contains about twenty-five names, with subscriptions for the expense involved, of from twenty to twenty-five dollars. *Pantagraph*, Oct. 6, 1864. *Private Laws of Illinois*, 1867, III, 628-631.

no-saloon clause.² In making the deeds of sale to lots in Normal (and there is little land in the town which was not at some time owned by Mr. Fell) he had always stipulated that no intoxicating liquors should be sold upon the premises. Others who owned land were in sympathy with his ideas, and it was understood from the first that Normal should always be, as Bloomington was in 1854 and 1855, a prohibition town. In 1866 the growing town required a charter and its people wished it to include a clause guaranteeing the continuance of this policy. The legislature of Illinois was not so ardently temperate as Normal; and interests which hoped to gain advantage from the change, tried to induce it to omit the prohibition clause from the proposed charter. Hearing of this, Mr. Fell called a citizens' meeting at the Baptist Church on November 22, 1866, at which the people discussed the situation and adopted a set of resolutions, ready to hand as usual.³ At the suggestion of John Dodge, a close friend of Fell and a man thoroly in sympathy with his ideas, the people present signed the resolutions, and other signatures were secured before an adjourned meeting held on December 6. At this subsequent meeting a thoro canvass was reported, in which President Edwards of the Normal School had coöperated by securing the signatures of the students. Over nine hundred names appeared on the petition, the names it is said of every man, woman and child of six or over in the town. William A. Pennell was appointed to go with Mr. Fell to present it to the legislature, which granted the charter with the desired clause.⁴

Mr. Fell had been able by careful attention to his affairs largely to free himself of debt by this time, and so felt free to give some time to furthering the political prospects of his friends, and to take a rest which he felt that several years of unremitting labor had earned. Early in July of 1865 he received an invitation from General Thomas Osborn, who was in charge of the Twenty-fourth Army Corps at Richmond, to visit that city as the guest of the corps. He accepted this invitation, and while in the East went to New York and had an interview with Henry Ward Beecher. Upon his return he was busied with the test case

²*Private Laws*, 1867, III, 321-336. The seal was affixed to the charter Mar. 4, 1867.

³The resolutions are given, with an account of the meeting, in the *Pantagraph*, Dec. 19, 1866. Fell, letter published in the *Normalite*, Mar. 26, 1908.

⁴Lewis, *Life*, 57.

for securing the resurvey, spoken of before, and with efforts to facilitate the discharge of certain Illinois regiments.⁵

During the years following the close of the war Mr. Fell devoted much time and effort to the building up of Bloomington and Normal. He planted trees indefatigably, procured grants that improved and enlarged the normal school, and encouraged every enterprise which could bring desirable citizens or increased wealth to the sections in which he was interested. No public enterprise asked his aid in vain, it is said; certainly the list of his interests is a long one. During the first few years of his residence in North Bloomington, he planned to develop the new town as a manufacturing place as well as a school town. In 1857 he was much interested in the production of sorghum, for which people then predicted a great future. He planted it generously, set up a mill, with press, vats and reducing pans, and put his product upon the market. There was not, however, an encouraging demand for it, and farmers generally declined to trouble themselves with the crop, which required an outlay of labor incommensurate with returns. Mr. Fell after a time abandoned the experiment.⁶

At about the same time he secured the location of a foundry at North Bloomington,⁷ but this enterprise, after a career of

⁵C. Macalester to Fell, Nov. 7, 1864. Thomas O. Osborn to Fell, July 1, 1865. J. H. Bryant to Fell, Nov. 18, 1865. Lyman Trumbull to Fell, Dec. 27, 1866. Stephen A. Douglas to Fell, Mar. 21, 1866. Gov. Oglesby to Fell, Sept. 16, 1865. Fell to E. J. Lewis, July 26, 1865, quoting a letter from himself to Secretary Stanton. (Lewis letters, in MSS of the McLean County Historical Association.) These last letters referred to one published substantially in the *Pantagraph* of July 13, 1865, from Lewis, in which he complained of being compelled to lie idly in camp with all his men, after all action had ceased. Lewis could have been relieved at any time, but did not like to leave camp (at Meridian, Miss.) without his men.

⁶In 1842 and 1843, he had been interested in some experiments looking toward the making of sugar from Indian corn. No written account of these experiments remains. His conclusion was that the thing was possible, but not commercially profitable. Interview with Henry Fell, May 31, 1913.

⁷One Blakesly, his partner in this enterprise, built the foundry, and also the huge boarding-house which was to accommodate the workmen. Addison Reeder, a skilled mechanic and inventor, was brought from Laytown to be foreman and manager. Some cast iron fixtures, used in the construction of the normal school buildings, were turned out before the enterprise had to be given up, largely because of the impossibility of find-

many vicissitudes, was also given up, Mr. Fell deciding that Normal was destined not to become a manufacturing town. This was in spite of the fact that in 1867 two coal-shafts had been sunk, and had found coal, in or near Bloomington. Mr. Fell was financially interested in that one which was located near the Chicago and Alton tracks, and which has been operated successfully to the present time. One business venture which was a success from every point of view was the large hotel in Normal which he built in partnership with William A. Pennell. It was a four-story Mansard-roofed structure, with spacious rooms and wide verandas, and a ballroom that made it the social center of both towns. Good hostelries were rare, and this one became a landmark. It was burned in 1872, some time after Mr. Fell had disposed of his share in the ownership.

No enterprise upon which the state entered after the close of the war was of greater importance than the establishing of the state university. It has been noted that from the first efforts, sidetracked for the normal school and later deferred during the struggle between North and South, its friends hoped to have eventually one many-sided institution, wherein training of many kinds might be had. No sooner was the war well over, than the project was again urged upon Illinois. In Bloomington interest was especially keen, for there people thought that now the time was come for the expansion of the normal school into a real university. The funds made available by the Morrill Act would provide for the industrial university of which Turner and Fell had long dreamed.⁸

ing efficient workmen; and Mr. Fell became liable for the greater part of the loss of the venture. The plant was used about 1877 for the manufacture of a patent furnace, by one Ruttan, a Canadian, who was the inventor of a once-popular ventilating system. Neither the furnace nor the stoves, which then and later were turned out of the same factory, found a very good market. William McCambridge in the *Pantagraph*, Mar. 16, 1910.

⁸John F. Eberhart, in his contribution to the *Fell Memorial*, tells of an interesting but unsuccessful attempt to establish a great state university, early in the decade following the passage of the Morrill Act. There was to be a central school in Chicago, "with affiliated institutions throughout the state, especially at Normal. . . . Our plan was to get donations of \$100,000 from each of ten different men in the state and to have incorporated into the constitution of the state at the constitutional convention in 1870, a provision for the maintenance of the university. The \$1,000,000 had been duly pledged. Mr. Fell, himself, pledged \$100,000, and

The first legislative action for the school was a bill authorizing its establishment, and throwing open its location to bids. The bill was introduced in 1865, but was defeated. A similar bill was introduced two years later, providing for elections in counties or cities upon the question of raising money wherewith to make a bid for the location of a state university. This bill passed, and was approved by Governor Oglesby on January 25, 1867.⁹ In the meantime, however, other forces were at work to locate the school definitely at Urbana. After President Buchanan had vetoed the Morrill Bill in 1859 and before Lincoln approved it in 1862, Dr. Charles A. Hunt of Urbana conceived the idea of securing a state school for his own town. A "seminary" building was being erected then at the north end of what is now Illinois Field, and Dr. Hunt's plan was to use it for a larger and better endowed school than could be had by merely local support. He therefore wrote a memorial, which was signed by a large number of Urbana citizens, and which was presented to the legislature in January, 1861. This memorial pleaded for agricultural education on the two-fold basis of the elevation of labor and of public economy. The time was unpropitious for such an enterprise, however, and the memorial came to no immediate success.¹⁰

No sooner was peace restored than the citizens of Urbana set themselves anew to secure the industrial university, as it was then called. Jonathan Turner, long the leader of the movement, hoped that when it materialized this school would be at Jacksonville. Jesse Fell wanted it at Bloomington, a rounding out of the university which had been begun with the normal school ten years before. Several other communities in the state hoped to gain it, and made generous offers for it. But the Urbana people were both earliest in the field, and most resourceful in expedi-

had found six other men in the state who pledged \$100,000 each. I also pledged \$100,000 and found two other men besides myself . . . " John Wentworth, upon whom the two leaders had relied to push the project in the convention, grew cold in the cause, however, and it was given up. Probably Turner's plan to put the state university upon a constitutional basis appealed to Fell as a better idea.

⁹*Public Laws*, 1867, 122.

¹⁰The "Urbana and Champaign Institute" was incorporated by an act approved Feb. 21, 1861. *Private Laws*, 1861, 24-26.

Dr. Hunt entered the army as a surgeon and died at the hospital at Mound City in July, 1863. Joseph O. Cunningham, in the *Times* (Champaign, Ill.) of May 21, 1910.

ents. They introduced a bill definitely locating the institution at Urbana, providing the offer—therein recited—of the people of Champaign County were made good.¹¹ Other towns were indignant at this method, since it gave them no chance to compete. Bloomington felt especially aggrieved, for the success of the Urbana bill meant for them the death of a hope long cherished; and Jacksonville was hardly less angry, because it had supported Turner through the long years of his unsuccessful efforts. Not a little heroic sacrifice had entered into the generous donation of Bloomington in 1857, made when hard times were threatening and war seemed imminent. One of the arguments most used by those who had raised the money then was that in time other schools might be added until a real university were founded.¹²

Mr. Fell's own conception of the educational system of the state was a comprehensive one, involving a university comprising every necessary technical and cultural school, at the head of a system of common schools which included industrial training in their curriculum. Teachers, he said, would profit by the breadth gained by coming into contact with those who were in turn training for other kinds of work; and as education was a field as dignified as that of any other calling, it was practicable to make the normal school one of the colleges in the university. To supplement this theoretical justification, he set to work to raise a subscription which should rival, if not exceed, that of Urbana.

His efforts were now even more earnest, if that were possible, than they had been ten years before. He wrote a memorial presenting the claims of Bloomington, which was received by the legislature about the first of February, 1867. He and a number of others went to Springfield to use what influence they might to assure the acceptance, or at least the consideration, of the bid. The decision hung fire during the greater part of February, while the lobbies of Champaign, McLean, Morgan and Logan Counties pushed their respective claims. The people of Champaign County, knowing the manner of men they had to deal with in Turner and Fell, had elected to the legislature, especially for the purpose of pleading their cause, a man who was almost if not quite Fell's equal in powers of persuasion. This was Clark

¹¹*Public Laws of Illinois*, 1867, 123-129.

¹²*Illinois Industrial University: Report of the Committee* (pamphlet, no date); circular letter, Jan. 25, 1866; J. B. Turner, "Industrial University" in *Jacksonville Journal*, Feb. 8, 1866; subscription lists. All in the Turner Manuscripts.

R. Griggs.¹³ He was successful in his mission; Champaign County won the Industrial University. An inconsequential sop was thrown to the defeated parties in the shape of a supplementary bill, passed March 8, which provided that the trustees might locate the school in McLean, Logan or Morgan Counties if Champaign County failed to fulfill its contract, a contingency which, of course, never arose.

The new institution was, at first, scarcely more of a university than the normal school had been. It was small, poorly endowed, limited in curriculum and service. Its friends wanted to see it really fulfill the purpose for which it had been created. The Northern Illinois Horticultural Society, meeting in Bloomington on March 2, 1870, besides criticizing the struggling institution roundly, passed a resolution which showed its kindlier at-

¹³Petition to the legislature, signed by Jesse W. Fell and fifteen others of Bloomington and vicinity. *Illinois State Journal*, Jan. 17, 1867. The subscription as given in the petition was \$500,000; the *Pantagraph* put it at \$550,000. (Lewis, *Life*, 89). Mr. Fell gave \$15,000 of this, the largest single subscription except that of Judge Davis. There was a site of 140 acres, and many smaller cash subscriptions. Both this and the offer of Jacksonville exceeded that of Champaign County.

No shadow of reproach attaches to the methods used by Clark R. Griggs in winning friends for the Urbana location. There were open accusations of bribery at the time, however, which involved some members of the Urbana lobby. E. M. Prince, in his contribution to the *Fell Memorial* (p. 42) tells the story of the proposal of a bribe to the Bloomington men. He went one morning, he says, to Mr. Fell's room, where Fell was making plans for the day for the Bloomington contingent. He went over the names of the members of the legislature, speaking of the characteristics of each and of the kind of argument that would probably prove effective in each case. One man "said that Urbana had contributed quite a large amount of money to influence the members of the Legislature, but said that he thought a few hundred dollars from McLean County would give it to them, as the members preferred McLean to Champaign. Mr. Fell immediately spoke up and said, 'I am willing to procure a subscription that will be conceded to be the greatest of any of the towns, but I will not contribute a dollar to influence any member of the Legislature to vote for us. I will throw the whole thing up before I will have anything of the kind.'" See Prince's article in the *Pantagraph* of June 7, 1907.

See also affidavits, Jan. 25, 1867; G. W. Minier to Turner, Feb. 10, 1867; *History of the Champaign "Elephant" by One of the Ring*, broadside, dated in pencil, Mar. 21, 1867; certificate of expenditure by Henry E. Danner, Apr. 2, 1867. All in the Turner Manuscripts.

titude toward it. This was that the constitutional convention then in session should endow it by a constitutional provision.¹⁴

But Fell had anticipated this action. Representing the State Teachers' Association, he had addressed a memorial to the convention on the last day of January preceding, which expressed his ideas of possible means and measures. It did not dictate an exact scheme of support and management for the university, altho it suggested several. It appealed to state pride, urging that eight surrounding states had already established universities. It contained also a vivid prophecy of the service now actually rendered the state in the study of soils, entomology, engineering, agriculture, chemistry, mining methods, and the use of waste by-products. But he adds: "To accomplish these grand results, however, we must have, not a university in name—another pretentious high school—but what has not yet been fully organized upon this continent, a University in fact; a grand and comprehensive school, equal in its scope and power of development to our present and future greatness, and in harmony with the advancing civilization of the age. Anything that falls short of this, at least in its scope and constitution, is alike unworthy of us as a people, and of the age in which it is our privilege to live. The day of small endeavors in enterprises of this kind, and with people like ours, has passed away, never to return. WE WANT THIS OR NOTHING."¹⁵ Then follows a very

¹⁴Both Turner and Gregory were at this meeting. The latter invited the members to visit Champaign and see for themselves what was being done at the university. Turner's acceptance marked the beginning of his personal friendship for Gregory, and his hearty coöperation with him in building up the institution. Carriel, *Life of Jonathan Baldwin Turner*, 227-231. Joseph O. Cunningham, interview, May 10, 1914.

¹⁵Saying that its friends were not urging any special plan for providing it with funds, Fell mentions that fact that "some" propose to use for the university the five per cent of the Illinois Central; but another plan, if more acceptable, would be considered by the university party. "In view of the general desire to perpetuate the present relations of the State with the Illinois Central Railroad, in regard to the fund referred to, and of a morbid sensibility in the public mind in reference thereto, whenever any measure affecting the same, however remotely, is proposed, it may be wise, should you determine to provide for such an institution, to abstain from making even any allusion to that fund, and in lieu thereof, to provide that the one-tenth part of the two mill tax, or its equivalent one-fifth of one mill, shall be set apart to that object, after the extinguishment of our present state indebtedness. . . . By the im-

earnest reply to the chief argument being urged against such a plan—that the state was too poor to afford it. The plea was an eloquent one, but it failed to gain its point with the constitution-makers, who declined to saddle the state with any such “burden”.

Besides writing this plea for the teachers of the state, Fell traveled much in the interests of the effort, and wrote many letters. A draft of the proposed constitutional provision is found in a set of resolutions passed by the State Teachers' Association.¹⁶

sition, in this or some other way, of a slight tax, equal to the fiftieth part of one per cent and by deferring the collection of even that till our present bonded indebtedness is fully paid off, would seem to obviate all reasonable objections; and though it postponed for a few years a work already too long delayed, the friends of this measure hope by this concession, as to time, to receive not only your approval, but that of the people to whom your work is soon to be submitted.

. . . “We not only have nothing of this kind within our limits, but we are surrounded by six states, to wit: Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, to say nothing of two still younger States, Minnesota and Kansas—all of which have State Universities. True, Ann Arbor only has at present any just claims to this high rank; but may we not reasonably hope and expect, . . . that in time some, possibly *all*, of the States referred to may have their Universities in *fact* as well as in *name*? . . .”

. . . “What we mean by the term ‘University’, in that broad and comprehensive sense used to designate these the highest institutions of learning known in the world, is, in the language of Webster, ‘An assemblage of colleges established at any place, with professors for instructing students in the sciences and other branches of learning, and where degrees are conferred. It is properly,’ he continues, ‘a universal school, in which are taught all branches of learning, including the four professions of Theology, Medicine, Law, and the Arts and Sciences.’ To Americanize such an institution we should, perhaps, in present condition, at least, and acting for the State, have to drop the first of the professions above named, and incorporate, more thoroughly than is usually done, what is known as the *elective* principle—a principle largely adopted at Cornell and elsewhere, and which enables the student to strike out in any given direction he may desire, and thus fit himself for the active duties of life. . . .”

¹⁶Notes indorsed by Fell upon an envelope containing a copy of the Memorial. Henry Wing to Fell, Jan. 3, 1870; *Pantagraph*, Feb. 1, 1871; “‘State University’—To the Members of the Illinois Constitutional Convention”, reprint from the *Pantagraph* and the *Illinois State Journal*, in *Illinois Teacher*, XVI, 65.

In connection with the constitutional convention of 1870 one other occurrence is worthy of mention. Joseph Medill, a member of the convention, wishing to procure the strong influence of Governor Palmer in favor of the proposed change, asked Fell to call on the governor for an expression of opinion. This Fell did, in a letter published in May. About a month later the governor answered in a long letter which was a strong plea for the new constitution. This reply was widely published, and doubtless had much to do with the subsequent vote of the people.¹⁷

Altho his efforts for the location and endowment of the university failed, in another direction Fell succeeded better. The legislature in 1865 authorized the erection of a soldiers' orphans' home, which was to be located by a commission. Fell, deeply disappointed at the failure to build up the longed-for university at Normal, set briskly at work to secure this smaller institution for his own community. There was an initial appropriation of a hundred thousand dollars made by the state, to which he secured an addition of fifty thousand in local subscriptions, heading the list with a generous donation. Rock Island, Decatur, Irvington, and Springfield competed for the home, but the Normal subscription was the largest and the commissioners decided unanimously in its favor, May 5, 1867.¹⁸

Mr. Fell's connection with the Soldiers' Orphans' Home did not end with its location at Normal. Saying that, as homeless and almost friendless children, they would have mainly to depend upon their own exertions for a livelihood after their dismissal from the Home, he claimed that it was both wisdom and obligation in the state to give to its charges not only a shelter, but a training that would make them self-supporting upon reaching maturity. In other words, he wanted the school which was conducted at the Home to be a trade-school. But vocational education was at that time almost unknown in the United States, and was looked upon with disfavor as a dangerously paternal institution. No trades were taught at the Soldiers' Orphans' Home,

¹⁷Palmer to Fell, June 18, 1870.

¹⁸A characteristic story is told of this canvass, concerning Fell and Davis. Seeing his friend as he approached the office, Judge Davis declared to Lawrence Weldon, who tells the story (*Fell Memorial*, p. 40)—“There's Fell. I reckon he wants me to subscribe more money. I won't do it. I won't do it. Reckon I'll have to, though.” Fell did indeed induce him to increase his already generous subscription.

and Mr. Fell was thereat much disappointed. "Don't call it my school," he is said to have rejoined when a friend asked him how "his school" prospered. "It is not what I wanted it to be." Thirty years after its founding, those features which he had sought in vain to incorporate, were added to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home school.¹⁹

A somewhat similar project under private management failed to materialize. This was the "College for Soldiers and their Sons" which was to occupy the buildings of Western Union College and Military Academy at Fulton, Illinois. Mr. Fell held some stock in the company advocating this scheme, but seems never actively to have pushed it.

Shortly after the dedication of the Soldiers' Orphans' Home, a competition for a state reform school was opened. Mr. Fell started a subscription in Bloomington, which reached a total of over sixty thousand dollars.²⁰ There was at that time, however, a strong opposition to the policy of concentration which he advocated. The state was still imperfectly unified, and state institutions were regarded as the perquisites of citizenship, to be distributed as equally as possible. The interests of the institution were a secondary consideration. The prejudice against the policy of concentration was so strong, in fact, as to persuade Mr. Fell of the wisdom of abandoning his efforts to locate the new institution in Normal. He did this the more willingly, perhaps, because the people of another town in which he was interested began to hope that they might win it. This town was Pontiac, where Mr. Fell had owned land for many years. He found enthusiastic response when he started to raise a subscription there, and was able to induce the township to vote bonds to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars, to which the board of supervisors added twice as much in county bonds. He and his brother Kersey offered the site for the buildings, sixty-four acres lying close to the town. The total subscription of over ninety thousand dollars won the location of the school.²¹

¹⁹E. M. Prince in *Fell Memorial*, 41.

²⁰Based on the "Classification of the Normal Bids for the State Industrial Reform School" among the *Fell MSS*, and exclusive of five subscriptions dependent upon a particular location. Lewis says (*Life*, 99) that the subscription was \$35,567.

²¹*Pantagraph*, July 8, 1869. The Fell Papers include the subscription list and map used in the campaign. Comments by Mr. Fell are to the effect that "we did not regard such an institution as a *junior penitentiary*,

The last state institution for which Fell and the Bloomington community made a strong effort, was the Eastern Illinois Insane Asylum. The location of this institution was before the people in 1877. Mr. Fell, chairman of the committee appointed to direct the efforts of the Bloomington people, made a report of the advantages of location there, which was printed in the *Pantagraph* of August 3, 1877. Its chief interest for us lies in its advocacy of advantage to the state as a whole rather than to any one region—his old argument of “concentration versus scattering.” Modern ideas of efficient and economical management counted for so little at the time, however, when opposed to sectional jealousy and local ambition, that the really excellent inducements offered by Normal were declined in favor of the town of Kankakee. Probably the same reasons accounted for the fact that a committee composed of Jesse Fell, Lawrence Weldon, and Hamilton Spencer, appointed in 1885 to investigate the chances of Bloomington for securing the projected home for the feeble-minded, did not make a campaign for the institution.

but, as the name implies, as a *reformatory institution*.” Fell presented to Pontiac the land for a city park, which was named for him in 1915. *Pantagraph*, June 7, 1915, quoting from *Pontiac Leader*.

In 1871 occurred one of those movements for changing the capital which often take place in states in which the center of population is still shifting and uncertain. In March of that year, Peoria made an effort to have the capital moved to that place. The discussion evoked many statements of the shortcomings of Springfield, and when it became evident that the idea was to be thought of seriously, Bloomington people had a meeting in their court house “to consider the question of making an effort to have the capital brought here”. After the explanatory speeches a committee, of which Mr. Fell was a member, was appointed to prepare an appeal to the legislature. The committee probably made inquiries before doing the bidding of the townspeople, for nothing further came of it. Lewis, *Life*, 101.

No account of Mr. Fell's service to his community could be complete without mention of his unrelenting efforts for the colored people of Normal. He secured work for them, employing many himself, and then showed them how to save and invest their earnings in homes, encouraging them to educate themselves and their children, and constituting himself advisor and friend in their struggle for betterment. Largely as a result of his interest in them, the colored people of that community have become as a class self-respecting and property-owning citizens. Notes on interview with George Brown, May 15, 1916.

CHAPTER VIII

RAILROADS

Mr. Fell's active efforts in behalf of railroads for Central Illinois seem to have begun in 1835, when General William L. D. Ewing sent a number of Bloomington men a request for their coöperation in building the Illinois Central Railroad. This document was addressed to the leading men of Bloomington, "Gen. Covell, J. W. Fell Esq., Jno. W. S. Moon, Esq., Doct. Miller &c."¹ It apprised them that General Ewing proposed to present at "the called session of our General Assembly" a bill for a railroad from "Ottawa, or some other suitable point on the Illinois river, through Bloomington, Decatur, Shelbyville, Vandalia, and thence to the mouth (or near it) of the Ohio river on the most practicable and convenient route." He asked their opinions on the matter, and indicated a willingness to appreciate the coöperation of McLean County people. Nothing came of this early project. A little later Fell became one of the incorporators of the Pekin, Bloomington, and Wabash Railroad, which was to unite the Illinois and Wabash rivers.²

The Illinois Central Railroad became the backbone of the elaborate internal improvement bill of 1837, was taken up by the Great Western Railway Company in 1843, and was the especial care of Senator Sidney Breese during 1843-1850. Senator Douglas finally succeeded in endowing it by a grant of public lands, in September, 1850, and construction began December 23, 1851.³ In the congressional grant, the termini of Galena and Cairo were stipulated, but the course of the road between these two points was left open. Powerful influences were endeavoring to change it from Ewing's proposed route eastward and westward, and particularly to Peoria and to Springfield. Fell's candidate, General Gridley, elected to the state senate in 1850, worked untiringly to maintain the original route through Bloomington, and finally succeeded in securing a clause in the act of incorporation with this provision. This was in February, 1851. The railroad

¹Oct. 20, 1835.

²*Private Laws of Illinois*, 1836, 8-12. E. M. Prince in *Fell Memorial*, 43.

³Brownson, *History of the Illinois Central Railroad*, 18-48.

was to pass through Clinton and Decatur, towns in which Mr. Fell was much interested, as well as through Bloomington. In the spring of 1852 the road was started northward from Bloomington to meet the line already begun from LaSalle southward. Regular traffic on the completed road began May 23, 1853.⁴

On the day when ground was broken near David Davis' home for the Illinois Central Railroad,⁵ engineers were locating an extension of the Chicago and Alton (then called the Alton and Sangamon) from Springfield to Bloomington. Work progressed so rapidly that trains were running on this road just five months from the date of location. Passengers from St. Louis could change at Bloomington to the Illinois Central and again at LaSalle to the Rock Island route, and so to Chicago. At Bloomington there was no direct connection for many years between the Chicago and Mississippi, of which the Alton and Sangamon was a branch, and the Illinois Central. The transfer was by cabs and omnibuses.

In 1853 Fell secured the right of way for the Chicago and Mississippi from Bloomington to Joliet, and work began promptly. Fell, who had lands along this route from which he hoped to reap a profit, also secured from O. H. Lee, who had charge of the building of the extension, a contract for himself and his brother Thomas, to furnish ties and cord-wood. The sale of lands in and around Pontiac, Lexington, Towanda, Normal, and Joliet, of course netted him handsome returns for the investment of time and money for the Chicago and Alton. Indeed, the dove-tailing of enterprises, the working-together-for-good of all the forces that made for prosperity, was an accomplishment for which he had a peculiar talent.⁶

In the meantime, ten and a quarter acres of ground had been conveyed to the Chicago and Mississippi for the depots and shops which have since helped to make Bloomington in a small way an industrial center. Many citizens wanted the station-house of the new road built close to that of the Illinois Central, with the point of intersection near the present site of the Wesleyan University. But Fell, with an eye to the founding of a suburban town at the intersection of the two roads, at a point farther west where he and others had secured land, stood for its location at a considerable distance. The Bloomington station

⁴*Bloomington Intelligencer*, May 25, 1853.

⁵May 15, 1852.

⁶O. H. Lee to Fell, July 4, 1853. *Pantagraph*, Apr. 18, 1908.

was located about a mile from the Illinois Central station, and the intersection formed a center for the new town of North Bloomington.⁷ On August 4, 1854, the *Pantagraph* announced that trains were running from Alton to Joliet, the full length of the Chicago and Mississippi.⁸

Central Illinois needed in addition an east-and-west road. In 1853 Fell and others organized a company to realize a projected "Wabash and Warsaw" railroad.⁹ On the third of May he addressed a meeting at Carthage favoring a proposed road from LaFayette, Indiana, through Bloomington, Pekin, and other Illinois towns to Warsaw. Bloomington citizens subscribed fifty thousand dollars to the stock by the middle of June, and the county court ordered a vote on a county subscription of a hundred thousand. The fifty thousand dollars, however, were rejected later on technical grounds, and the order of the court was revoked accordingly. The enthusiasm that had been so general died out suddenly at this rebuff, and was reawakened later with some difficulty.

Mr. Fell had much opposition during this period from those who would not be served by a road of the proposed route. A Pekin paper questioned his motives in advocating a road through towns in which he had holdings. The *Bloomington Times* also attacked him vigorously, but was answered by Mr. Fell himself in the *Intelligencer*.¹⁰ He had by this time become the local director of the proposed road. In September he urged the subscription of the fifty thousand dollars at a meeting at the court house, and the subscription of a like amount to another proposed road, the Quincy and Bloomington. He then entered into an ac-

⁷John H. Burnham, *Our Duty to Future Generations*. An address delivered Apr. 21, 1905, at the I. S. N. U.

⁸The tracks of the Chicago and Rock Island were used from Joliet to Chicago until March 18, 1858, when the road transferred to its own tracks. Lewis, *Life*, 42.

⁹The *Intelligencer* of Mar. 23, 1853, gives the names of the corporators of "The Bloomington and Wabash Valley R. R. Company" as follows: David Davis, Isaac Funk, James Miller, A. Gridley, E. H. Didlake, R. O. Warriner, John W. Ewing, W. H. Temple, Wm. T. Major, John Moore, John E. McClun, Jesse W. Fell, J. H. Robinson, A. Withers, Wm. T. Flagg, W. H. Holmes. The issue of April 27 has an account of the meeting at which Mr. Fell was sent "to the western part of the route" to interest people in the venture. See also issues of May 18, July 20, Aug. 10, Aug. 24, 1853; *Pantagraph*, Apr. 26 and June 28, 1853.

¹⁰*Intelligencer*, Aug. 3, Aug. 24, Sept. 12, 1853.

tive personal campaign to secure the money. The city voted it almost unanimously on October 15. Large subscriptions had been made in Tazewell County, Keokuk, and LaFayette, so that the total amount by December 14 was over a million dollars.¹¹

Despite all these efforts the road was not built. In March, 1854, it was announced that steps had been taken to let the contract of construction; but construction did not follow.¹² In the winter and spring of 1855-56 more meetings were held in the towns along the proposed route, and Mr. Fell with others again circulated the ready subscription-list. But people were tiring of the subject, and there was little success. A new company was incorporated in 1855, for the building of the Bloomington, Kankakee, and Indiana State Line Railroad, with Mr. Fell as a leading stockholder and worker.¹³ It also failed to secure popular support. Then in 1857, when the panic had added to the usual chariness in giving to public enterprises, a futile attempt was made. At the November election, a proposal that the county should subscribe a hundred thousand dollars was defeated by a vote of 1570 to 1166.

The east-and-west road was not again actively advocated until 1866, when a number of Danville people began to push the project. There were several groups, each urging a different route, as usual; but those who proposed a road from Danville to Bloomington through Urbana and LeRoy were most active. Another projected road passed directly from Bloomington to LaFayette, through Cheney's Grove. The Tonica and Petersburg line of the Chicago and Alton, already partly constructed, might be deflected, urged Mr. Fell and others, to Bloomington. Fell spoke in favor of this scheme at a meeting on December 29, 1866, using a map—a favorite device—to show his meaning.¹⁴ The resolutions he offered at the close of his speech were adopted. They endorsed the idea of the road and appointed a committee to sound the community concerning the hundred thousand dollar subscription. It proved to be very difficult to secure pledges, partly because many people believed that the road would come in any case, and the spending of so much money was therefore use-

¹¹*Intelligencer*, Dec. 14, 1853.

¹²*Pantagraph*, Mar. 15, 1854.

¹³*Private Laws of Illinois*, 1853, 342-346. At about the same time Mr. Fell and others incorporated the Bloomington Gas Light and Coke Company. *Ibid.*, 1855, 650.

¹⁴*Pantagraph*, Dec. 29 and 31, 1866.

less. An accusation was made against Fell and Gridley, touching their disinterestedness in the matter, to which Fell replied by publishing a letter from T. B. Blackstone, the president of the Chicago and Alton; and the canvass went on. President Blackstone convinced Mr. Fell that the new road would be built through Washington were the money not subscribed at Bloomington.¹⁵ In April, Fell succeeded in securing a joint appropriation of seventy-five thousand dollars from the township and the city. In June the township voted a hundred thousand dollars each to the "LaFayette, Bloomington and Mississippi" and to the "Danville, Urbana and Pekin" roads.

Then followed busy days in Bloomington, for there were three railroads being built. The one from Jacksonville was completed for traffic on August 14, 1867.¹⁶ The Danville road from Bloomington to Pekin was completed in 1869, and to Covington on September 2, 1870, giving railroad communication between Indianapolis and Peoria. The other east-and-west road, of which General Gridley was president and Fell an active director, was less fortunate. Financial support was hard to find, but work began in spite of this in October, 1869. The contractors, Howard and Weston, had promised to finish the road to the Indiana line by January 1, 1871; but the company failed early in 1870. A new contract was let, but it was only partly fulfilled. The Wabash company finally finished the road, which established regular service on July 13, 1872. So at last, after efforts extending over twenty years, east-and-west communication by rail was realized. It was not in a form so direct as Mr. Fell and his colleagues had hoped to have it, but it has proved practicable and helpful.

It has been noted that the Chicago and Alton Railroad established shops at Bloomington soon after entering the town. These shops were largely destroyed by fire on November 1, 1867. Almost at once, it was proposed to rebuild them in Chicago, or some other city where labor might more easily be had. The loss to Bloomington would have been very great, and Mr. Fell with some friends set himself to find the means of making their retention sure. Judge David Davis, General Gridley and Mr. Fell induced R. E. Williams, then local attorney for the road, to go with them to Chicago for an interview with President Blackstone. The latter assured the trio that, altho feeling for re-

¹⁵Blackstone to Fell, Dec. 13 and 28, 1866, Jan. 1, 1867.

¹⁶This road was leased to the Chicago and Alton for 99 years in June, 1868.

moval was strong in the company, he himself favored the retention of the shops where they had been, if only additional land for needed extension could be secured. This reasonable request surprised the Bloomington men, who had expected to be asked for a bonus in money. Returning to Bloomington, the matter was presented to the people at a mass-meeting on November 26. General Gridley and Mr. Fell spoke; the latter had, as usual, resolutions to be adopted and a definite plan for raising the money. Many in the audience signed the guarantee that night, and within a few days the number of guarantors reached 740. After much negotiation, the citizens agreed to give about thirty acres of land, some of which had to be gotten by condemnation proceedings. The railroad company advanced the money to pay for it, at the usual rate of ten per cent. The new shops were larger and better than the old, and correspondingly more valuable to Bloomington.¹⁷

One other enterprise of a similar nature remains to be recorded. In 1867 a number of people began to discuss the building of a street railway from Bloomington to Normal. A member of the board of education who lived in southern Illinois objected that the noise of cars would disturb the scholastic quiet of the community, but people in general thought it a good idea.¹⁸ A company was incorporated, to which was given a franchise to build the railway through Bloomington, Normal, and the campus. It was operated at first by a dummy engine, later by horse and mule power. The cars ran every forty minutes until nine o'clock at night.

The purpose of presenting the somewhat detailed accounts of enterprises in which Jesse Fell was interested, which have filled the pages of this chapter and the preceding one, has been to show by what means the leaders of the era of settlement in the Middle West managed to achieve results which appear marvelous in whatever light they may be seen. Fell was but one of a host

¹⁷To raise the money required, the Bloomington constituency framed a bill authorizing an issue of bonds. It passed the General Assembly, but was vetoed by Governor Palmer on grounds of unconstitutionality. A committee from Bloomington visited Palmer, and after explaining the situation to him, received his promise not further to oppose the bill. They worked to secure a repassage, succeeding only after much lobbying in the senate. The bonds were paid duly, with no question of their validity.

¹⁸P. G. Roots to Messrs. Hatch and Fell, May 23, 1867.

of workers who changed the wilderness into a land of settled institutions within the measure of a generation. Few men, perhaps, united so many qualities of leadership as he possessed; but the difference between him and other men in this respect was one of degree rather than of kind. It was a period rich in social service, altho "social service" had not then become so much of a conscious slogan as it has been since. It was a period when people were closer to the government than they are now, when living was simpler, when the machinery of civilization was formed by popular effort, in a more direct way than has been the case in later years; when men of limited means and many interests laid the foundation for economic and political achievement carefully and solidly, knowing what structure they reared and conscious that what they wrought would shape in great measure the future of their commonwealth. It is as a type of such men that Jesse Fell has real significance for the people of the Middle West.

CHAPTER IX

THE RELIGIOUS LIBERAL

The Unitarian movement in New England had its parallel among the Quakers in the Hicksite schism, begun in 1827 by Elias Hicks, a brilliant and influential Friend. He denied the deity of Christ and the special inspiration of the Scriptures, tenets held by the orthodox Friends. Rebecca Fell, Jesse W. Fell's mother, was a warm friend and admirer of Elias Hicks, and followed him into the sect which he established. The father, however, while he left the orthodox meeting at the same time, did not become a Hicksite, but united with the Methodists, whose creed agreed more nearly with his own personal belief.¹ The father became an exhorter in his new church home, the mother a preacher among the Hicksites. The harmony of the family was in no wise disturbed, for both parents were tolerant and not disposed to exaggerate differences. Some of the children followed the father, some the mother in their religious faith. Jesse, whose special privilege it was to accompany his mother to meeting on First Days and Fourth Days, came closely to sympathize with her in her religious ideas; and his activity as a leader of liberal religious thought in his community in after years, may largely be attributed to the influence of his mother's teaching and example. She was a woman of vigorous mentality, altho of but rudimentary education, as were most of the women of her time. With her husband, she centered the training of her children about the necessity of uncompromising honesty, universal freedom, and fidelity to conviction.²

After removing to Bloomington in 1837, the Fell family continued to hold meetings after the fashion of Friends, altho

¹At this time, the simplicity of dress and manners of the Methodists was very like that of the Friends, and such a transition was easily made, entailing little change of accepted doctrine or custom.

²Jesse Fell to Fell, Sept. 2, 1832. This letter shows the intensely religious nature of Jesse W. Fell's father. It describes a camp-meeting in which he had taken part with great pleasure and profit, and expresses the tenderest wishes for his son's spiritual welfare. Another letter of Fell's father, dated Jan. 6, 1835, shows similar characteristics.

there were few of their faith in the town. The meetings were held on Sunday afternoons at the house, and the attendance was such as often to crowd the rooms. John Magoun, beloved by everyone who knew him and an especial friend of the Fells, came to these Quaker gatherings. The elder Mrs. Fell's voice was often heard in admonition, and her husband's, altho he was totally blind, in song. In his youth Jesse Fell the elder had been a famous singer in his community, and in his old age his voice was still sweet.

Under such influence, it was inevitable that Mr. Fell's religious faith should be both simple and strong. Wherever he was, at appropriate times and places he joined people of many denominations and shades of belief in their worship; and in all his life there appears no word of intolerance for the beliefs of others. His temporary connection with the Methodist Episcopal church at Payson has been mentioned on another page. Upon his return to Bloomington he did not unite with any church, altho he attended the "West Charge" Methodist church, then under the care of James Shaw.³

It is significant of the character of the people of Bloomington that there were in the town a great many of differing views but tolerant dispositions, who during the early years were drawn together for purposes of worship. Westerners were usually affiliated, when they had religious affiliations at all, with the more radically evangelical denominations. In Bloomington there had been a Congregational church of abolitionist leanings for many years, and Baptist and Methodist churches which, altho they contained many families from the South, were for the most part opposed to the extension of slavery. In 1855 the more radical element in the Presbyterian church had separated itself from the mother church, and formed the Second Presbyterian church. Thus clearly, during the decade, the political and sectional prejudices held by people generally affected their church affiliations.⁴

On the evening of the tenth of July, 1859, a group of people who were interested in forming a religious organization to which Christians of differing creeds might belong, met in the office of Kersey Fell. There were about twenty in attendance. Eliel Barber was chairman, Jesse Fell secretary. The result of the

³James Shaw in *Fell Memorial*, 4.

⁴Dr. John W. Cook, *A Western Pioneer*. Address at the semi-centennial of the founding of the Unitarian Church in Bloomington, Oct. 3, 1909. (Manuscript in possession of the author.)

conference was that the secretary was directed to write to Rev. Charles G. Ames, of Boston, asking him to come to Bloomington to look the field over. He came, preached a series of eight sermons, and visited the people who were interested in the possibility of forming a new church. He made his home with the Fells while in Bloomington, and became a very dear friend of that household.⁵

A church, known at first as the Free Congregational Society, was organized on the seventh and eighth of August. Many shades of Protestant belief were included. There were Universalists, Friends, Campbellites, Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists and Spiritualists among the members.⁶ The resident clergymen of Bloomington were invited to preach for them until the new pastor, Mr. Ames, could take up his work.

Phoenix Hall was used for the services of the new church for almost ten years. Here the pastors, for the most part New England men, nurtured anti-slavery sentiments and fostered devotion to the federal union. Rev. Ichabod Coddington, the fourth pastor, was a fearless abolitionist, and spoke boldly his progressive views. During his pastorate, which like those of most Western pastors was a short one, the society dedicated its house of worship, on March 15, 1868. Other ministers succeeded Mr. Coddington—free and fearless speakers and thinkers for the most part, reformers rather than pastors, intellectual guides whose brief stay in the community served to waken thought and to deepen religious faith. Two of them, Rev. C. C. Burleigh and Rev. J. F. Thompson, a New Englander and an Englishman, became strong friends of Mr. Fell. Mr. Burleigh, a friend of the poet Whittier, was a quiet man of great spiritual force, but a man who gained no de-

⁵Ames to Fell, July 15, 1859. Ames to E. M. Prince, Sept. 23, 1899. Vickers Fell to Fell, Mar. 4, 1862. J. J. Lewis to Fell, Mar. 2, 1862. It was Mr. Ames, a radical New England abolitionist, who preached the famous sermon known as "the funeral sermon of John Brown". It was delivered on Sunday, Dec. 4, 1859, was printed in the local press, and afterward in a pamphlet which had wide distribution. His personal estimate of Mr. Fell is given in the letter to Mr. Prince just cited. C. G. Ames, in the *Christian Register*, Mar. 18, 1909.

⁶At a meeting held at the close of the regular service on the seventh of August, attended by about fifty people, Fell presented a set of resolutions looking toward the organization of the church. He and Kersey Fell, Mr. Phoenix, Mr. Stillwell, and others talked, after which the resolutions were adopted. Thirty-two people entered the society the next night, twenty more on August 14. Dr. J. W. Cook, *A Western Pioneer*.

gree of popularity in the hustling Western town in which his lot was for a short time cast.⁷ Mr. Thompson, who followed him, was on the other hand most acceptable to Bloomington, and later became immensely popular in Los Angeles. In speaking of the friendships which came to Fell through his church relations, it is meet here to mention Robert Collyer, with whom he often consulted and who became a valued personal friend.⁸

During the years after its founding the church gradually lost its composite congregational character, and became more homogeneous in belief. Unitarian doctrines came to be the prevailing opinion of the congregation. The name was therefore changed on December 9, 1885, to that of the "Unitarian Church of Bloomington." Mr. Fell remained an active member and constant attendant of this organization as long as he lived.

⁷"Give him," wrote Robert Collyer to Fell in 1873, in introducing an English clergyman who was viewing the sights of America, "if you can, a chance to meet Charles Burleigh. He may not otherwise see one of the Old Ironsides." Rev. Burleigh had preached in Pennsylvania many years before upon the subject of slavery, and the Fells had known of him then. "... last third-day evening we all (a few excepted) repaired to the Meeting-house where we heard a very interesting and eloquent speech delivered by Charles Burleigh on the subject of immediate emancipation. He is employed by the anti-slavery society of Philadelphia to deliver lectures on that subject; he is the most profound reasoner I ever heard. And if dignity of manners, eloquence, and sound reason can do anything to promote the cause, he is well adapted to the office." Rebecca Fell to Fell, Christmas, 1836.

⁸Robert Collyer to Fell, July 3, Sept. 18, Nov. 8, 1866; June 7, 1870; Sept. 15, 1873. A spirited letter upon "Broad-Gauge Theology", containing a clear defense of his liberal beliefs, appeared in the *Pantagraph* of February 15, 1868.

CHAPTER X

LATER POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The congressional campaign of 1868 was one of especial interest to Mr. Fell. In March, an editorial in the *Pantagraph* had again proposed his name as a candidate for Congress, a proposal which received the usual short shrift from him.¹ The public request was repeated, and again declined. The Republicans of McLean then asked General Giles A. Smith to be their candidate, and he accepted. Fell, however, thought this a false and foolish move, inasmuch as Shelby M. Cullom, the member then sitting, was a tried and proved man. There followed a lively controversy between the Cullom-Fell party and the Smith adherents, waged both in the newspapers and in all public and private places where Republicans gathered for council. The county committee called a mass-meeting for the purpose of selecting and instructing delegates to the district convention. It met on the eleventh of April, but was so tumultuous a gathering that little business could be transacted. General Smith seems to have had control of the party machinery, but the machine was so powerfully opposed by Fell and his colleague Gridley, that none of the routine business decided upon could be forced through. A delegate county convention was therefore called, to meet on the twenty-seventh; and the war between Smith and Fell continued. The friends of Smith published a vigorous attack entitled "The Other Side," to which Fell replied as vigorously.² When it met, the second county convention proved more tractable than the first had been, and nominated Smith as McLean's candidate. Fell continued his exertions throughout the district, however, and on the fourth of May the friends of Cullom were gratified by a vote of five counties to two in his favor, at the district convention. He was elected by a large majority in November.

The story of this congressional struggle in McLean County illustrates a condition of division which was fairly typical of the

¹Lewis, *Life*, 92.

²*Pantagraph*, Apr. 9, 10, 11 for the notice of the mass convention; Apr. 11, article by Fell answering attack in "The Other Side"; other interesting matter in issues of Mar. 25-30, 1868.

situation of the Republican party in Illinois after the war. The unity which only a great common purpose can give, had passed away with the coming of peace. Discontent with the extreme congressional reconstruction policy, altho not then so decided as later, had begun to appear; Johnson's foolish blunders had complicated the situation. Locally, many men aspired to the honors which the Republicans had to distribute. The struggle for the nomination to the governorship, for instance, was unusually sharp. Robert G. Ingersoll, who had expected to be a candidate for attorney general, upon the report of the withdrawal of Palmer decided to try for this higher office.³ In the convention, however, Palmer took the nomination away from him and also from Jesse K. Dubois and S. W. Moulton. Governor Palmer's advocacy of states' rights divided the Republican ranks to some extent, and finally resulted in his leaving the party in 1872, with some adherents.

In 1870 a bitter quarrel arose between Mr. Cullom and Mr. Fell, which resulted in Cullom's defeat in his race for reëlection. The cause of this difference was Cullom's appointment of John F. Scibird as Bloomington's postmaster. It will be remembered that the firm of Scibird and Waters sold the *Pantagraph* to Davis and Fell in August, 1868. Scarcely was the sale made, when Scibird and Waters began to plan the publication of a rival Republican paper, which appeared, under the name of *The Leader*, the next December. Fell and Davis regarded this as a breach of faith in their rivals, inasmuch as they had purchased the *Pantagraph* with the understanding that they were buying the Republican paper of Bloomington; and the two newspapers soon worked up a rivalry as spirited as usually develops under such circumstances. Added to this circumstance were other considerations which gave Fell a much stronger reason for resenting Cullom's appointment.

³Ingersoll to Fell, Mar. 25, 1868. Another letter, dated four days later, establishes Fell's position as favoring first Moulton, then Corwin, and last Ingersoll himself. "In the meantime," says the irrepressible Peorian, "dear friend, stick to your tree planting. There is nothing like agriculture and horticulture. Stay in the beautiful fields. Hear the birds sing praises to Corwin and Moulton. I would rather the birds would do it than to have you. I know that you will enjoy yourself a great deal more working in the garden than meddling about the governor question." There is more of the same tenor, and finally this postscript: "Now is the time to plant trees. All should be planted before the 6th of May."

General Gridley had asked in return for the assistance he had given Fell in supporting Cullom in 1868, Fell's influence in favor of the retention of Gridley's brother-in-law, Dr. Cromwell, as postmaster. Dr. Cromwell was a good postmaster, but his appointment by Andrew Johnson was with difficulty confirmed by the senate, as were many other appointments by that unpopular president. Mr. Fell, seeing no good reason for opposing his re-appointment, urged it upon Cullom, and received what Fell understood to be his promise that he would retain him. But for some reason Cullom changed his mind, and after Grant's election Scibird was given the appointment. Added to this was the fact that Fell had urged Cullom's renomination in 1868 with the understanding that he was not to run again. These considerations put Fell in the position of a man who must either vindicate his own honor or impeach that of others, and he took a course calculated to clear himself of suspicion.

Cullom repeatedly acknowledged at the time that he owed his nomination in 1868 to the efforts of Fell and Gridley. The equally vigorous opposition which the *Pantagraph* and its guiding spirit evinced two years later, made his prospects hopeless in McLean County, and doubtful throughout the district. McLean declared for General John McNulta, but the district, after a bitter struggle lasting through the summer, nominated Colonel Jonathan Merriam of Tazewell. Mr. Merriam was a man of fine character but comparatively unknown, and was defeated in November by the Democratic candidate, James C. Robinson. The fact that the division among the Republicans had resulted in Republican defeat did not tend promptly to heal the wounds among the factions. Nevertheless Fell and Cullom found that mutual explanations removed the cause of their personal differences, and they became again the best of friends.⁴

Although his informal and unadvised ways of doing things were distinctively Western and might have been expected to win a degree of approval in that section of the country, the four years of Grant's first administration seem to have aroused as much criticism in his own state as in any other. There was in Illinois a strong Southern element which, altho it had not made the state disloyal during the great struggle, still felt much sympathy for the subdued states, subjected to the indignities of military

⁴Mr. Fell's own account of the controversy to that date is in the *Pantagraph* of July 22, 1870. Shelby M. Cullom to the writer, Mar. 15, 1912.

and carpet-bag rule. Sumner, toward whom Grant had behaved with what most people considered inexcusable injustice, was nowhere more beloved than in the Middle West, where he had long been a popular hero. And the best men everywhere were dissatisfied with the position of the party leaders upon the civil service question.

Carl Schurz was the guiding spirit of the Liberal Republican movement of 1872, and its strongest adherents were in those states where his influence, and that of his friends, was strong. His election to the senate in 1869 was the first sign of the triumph of a new set of ideas in the Republican party. Tariff-reform Republicans joined hands with the reconstruction-reform men, but as tariff-reform men were comparatively few in most of the states where the insurgents hoped to gain a following, this issue was kept in the background. The passage of the Ku-Klux bill in 1871 was so actively opposed by Schurz and Trumbull as to cause these two leaders to draw together and to gather around them the more liberal elements in the party; and this group was further unified by the New York Custom House affair. Nevertheless, as late as in December of 1871 neither Trumbull nor Schurz had openly planned to oppose Grant's reelection.⁵

Early in January the movement, which as yet had appeared only as a division in Congress, began to take on a more popular aspect. In Missouri and in Southern Illinois, where the Southern element was strong, there was a great deal of fighting among the people in support of Schurz, Trumbull, and Sumner. The Missouri Liberal Republicans held a convention in January, and issued a call for a national mass convention in May. Preconvention speculation as to the presidential candidate of this seceding Republican gathering centered at that time about two men, Lyman Trumbull and Charles Francis Adams. The people of the southern third of Illinois, as well as many throughout the state who remembered Trumbull's service, were very hopeful concerning his chances. Governor Palmer and the influential Jesse K. Dubois were his leading supporters. Adams was probably better known in the nation than Trumbull, and had proved his ability in

⁵Horace White, *Life of Lyman Trumbull*, 269-271, quoting an interview published in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Dec. 3, 1871, and *New York Times*, Dec. 6. A letter from Trumbull to W. C. Flagg, among the *Flagg MSS*, dated Jan. 10, 1872, however, shows that at that date Trumbull was contemplating open opposition to Grant in the Republican party. Flagg was, according to his own statement, Trumbull's only confidant at this time.

the difficult position of minister to England during the Civil War.

Just when Trumbull's prospects were brightest, Judge David Davis decided that he would be a candidate for the nomination. Leonard Swett, the famous criminal lawyer, long an associate and close personal friend of Judge Davis, became his manager, and enlisted the services of Fell in arousing the people of McLean County and Central Illinois to the support of a citizen of their own community for the nomination. Fell, from the first an advocate of a milder reconstruction policy and for that reason thoroly in sympathy with the Liberals, had been a Trumbull adherent until Davis made his decision, when he changed to support an old and dear friend.⁶ By the first of April, then, he was being consulted as to the plans for the Davis campaign at Cincinnati. Swett, ingenious and indefatigable, estimated the strength of the Trumbull faction, and proposed that to counteract it a train load of Davis supporters should go to Cincinnati, that they might influence the nomination there as the Illinois delegations had in 1860. McLean, Tazewell, Livingston, Logan, DeWitt, Champaign, Ford, Iroquois and Vermillion counties were strongly in favor of Davis, and from these counties Swett drew the delegations upon which he mainly depended.⁷ Peoria County, and especially the German population (the strength of

⁶Fell to Lyman Trumbull, Mar. 4, Apr. 11, 1872. (*Trumbull MSS*, Library of Congress.) Trumbull to Fell, Mar. 9, 1872. Mr. Fell's sympathy for the once oppressed black man did not blind him to the shame of the existing oppression of white men in the South. A letter to James G. Blaine, written Mar. 3, 1885, but possibly never sent, shows plainly his ideas upon the subject, and contains some very entertaining comments. After referring to the failure of Republican reconstruction, he says: "Unfortunately the Democracy of this country neither learns nor forgets much, and without outside aid, I have slender hopes in that direction." He thinks reform must come through some liberal leader. "As possibly you may know, I was quite intimately acquainted with Abm. Lincoln, & in a feeble way did something in 1858, 9 and 60 in bringing him before the people as a presidential candidate. In the enclosed I have ventured to say what were some of his views touching the matter in hand—reconstruction. Had he lived doubtless they would have been modified. . . . Whilst you are not where many of us would have you, are you not in a position where you can be almost as influential? Your 2nd vol., in which you will discuss this very question, is yet to be published. Why not give this matter your *patient, very best thought*?"

⁷Swett to Fell, Apr. 1, 1872.

the Republican party there), would accept any man who might be nominated, in the opinion of Robert Ingersoll.⁸

Early in April a number of disaffected Republicans met at the home of Horace White in Chicago, and agreed to issue a call for the Cincinnati meeting, signed by as many influential men as might be induced to join the movement. As this followed the one already issued by Missouri (and was copied from the one issued in New York), it was called a "Response." It appeared first in the *Chicago Times*, April 17, 1872. Thirty-eight men, including Gustav K rner and Horace White, Dubois, Miner, Jayne, and Fell, signed the call as first published, and within a few days a longer list appeared, comprising the names of hundreds of Illinois Republicans.⁹ Palmer, at first inclined to favor the Regulars, decided in March to espouse the new cause, and declined the Regular Republican nomination for the governorship, which was accepted by Oglesby.¹⁰

Trumbull kept Fell informed of the trend of affairs in Washington, while Fell wrote him of the local situation.¹¹ Trumbull

⁸The letter from Robert Ingersoll to Mr. Fell, dated Peoria, Apr. 6, 1872, expresses with remarkable frankness that would-be statesman's resentment of his rejection by the people of Illinois. "You must not expect me to make a speech at Cincinnati," he says. "I am done. I can conceive of no circumstances under which I would make a political speech. If ever in this world a man was thoroughly sick of political speaking, I am that man. Understand me, I am an admirer and a friend of Judge Davis. I want to see him president of the United States and I believe he will be. And what little I do will be done for him. I am going to take no active part for anybody. For some reason, the leaders in politics are not my friends, and never have been. My only ambition is to get a living and to take good care of my family. The American people have lost the power to confer honor. . . . Leonard Swett wrote me upon the subject of going to Cincinnati. I wrote him that I was sick of politics. By the way, if his letter had been about one-tenth as long, it would have been infinitely better. His letter is good; but too much of it. All his points could have been made in one column. A letter never should be so long as to require an index."

⁹White to Fell, Apr. 10, 1872. Fell to Trumbull, Apr. 8. *Chicago Times*, Apr. 17, and *Pantagraph*, Apr. 19, 20.

¹⁰*Carlinville Democrat*, Apr. 17. *Pantagraph*, Apr. 18. On the 23d of April, Palmer delivered a very influential anti-Grant speech at Springfield, which served greatly to strengthen the forces of the Liberals.

¹¹Fell to Trumbull, Apr. 8, 11, 1872. (*Trumbull MSS*, Library of Congress.) Trumbull to Fell, Apr. 11, 16, 1872. Trumbull's letter of April 11 spoke of the Cooper Union meeting, at which Trumbull and

would give no formal consent to the use of his name before the convention until late in April, apparently with an unselfish desire not to hamper the success of the reform wave by introducing personal factions. Indeed, he tried to impose on other leaders an entirely impracticable policy of entire silence with regard to candidates until the meeting at Cincinnati.

Meantime the Davis group was vigorously pushing its candidate in the only region in which he could command much support; for, being a jurist and not a political leader, and being but little known throughout the country, his strongest claim to recognition lay in his having been the personal friend and appointee of Lincoln,—a claim that amounted to little except in Illinois. Since men with even less fame have succeeded in winning nominations from the lottery of convention chance, Swett and Fell had lively hopes that with a good delegation of local supporters they might carry the day in Cincinnati. The Democrats, strong in Illinois, were rallying to his support. Among these was Adlai Stevenson, a man of considerable influence and a neighbor of Judge Davis, who with his adherents formed part of the Davis party at the convention. Swett was a skilful manager, and by convention time had gained half the Illinois forces for Davis. The Labor Reform party had already nominated him for president in February.¹²

Returning from a tree-planting expedition to his Iowa lands just before the convention, Fell preceded by a few days the delegation which started from Bloomington at five o'clock on April 29. Judge Davis' generosity in providing facilities for the attendance of his supporters made the following a large one; contemporary accounts say it was also a very noisy and confident one. About 550 men from Bloomington and vicinity went to Cincinnati; the entire Illinois contingent numbered over a thousand.¹³

The Davis party, ensconcing itself early at headquarters and marshalling its forces in well-organized companies which gave a strong impression of confidence and success, seemed to lead all others before the convention opened.¹⁴ There was an under-

Schurz both spoke to an immense audience, and said that the movement had attained such proportions that no one faction could then control it.

¹²Stanwood, *History of the Presidency*, 336.

¹³*Pantagraph*, Apr. 10, 13, 17, 19, 27, 30, and later issues.

¹⁴"It is obvious that the Davis crowd is the calmest, the most confident, and the best organized and disciplined. They pitched their tents

standing—in which it is natural to suspect the old combination of Lewis and Fell—that Davis should have first place, and Governor Curtin of Pennsylvania second; an arrangement which Curtin's own ambition to head the ticket brought to naught. Adams, by far the most able and best prepared of all possible candidates, was unpopular in the West because of the very qualities which made his strength—his distinguished ancestry, his long and successful diplomatic service, his thoro education and statesmanlike qualities. His opponents reviled him as an "aristocrat;" to which his friends answered by inquiring with asperity if it were in the Constitution that the president had to come from Illinois?

The "hordes" from that state had but a fictitious strength, for they were divided into three factions, supporting Palmer, Trumbull and Davis respectively. On the twenty-ninth of April there was waged an all-day fight among the Illinois leaders, who could arrive at no kind of agreement. Swett and Fell found themselves pitted against White and Bryant, the capable Trumbull managers. On the thirtieth—Tuesday—the leaders decided to divide the Illinois vote among the three candidates. They called a meeting at three o'clock in Greenwood Hall. Dr. Jayne of Springfield, a Trumbull supporter, issued the call. Fell presided, and the secretary was a Palmer man. About a thousand

the earliest, and have worked up in detail all the strong points of their candidate and all the weak points of his rivals.

"It is claimed that Davis is the only man in the crowd who is personally popular. Adams is aristocratic, Brown belongs to the 'hurrah' school, but has few warm friends; Trumbull is cold as a fish; Cox is phlegmatic and Greeley is pudgy and eccentric. 'But Davis,' says Jesse Fell, 'is a man who is beloved by those who know him. I have known him personally and intimately for thirty years, as I knew Lincoln, and he is just such an honest, faithful, straightforward, incorruptible man; and he possesses the same personal magnetism. He would give us the same enthusiastic campaign and the same overwhelming victory. All of those who were old Abe's associates before 1860 are now asking Davis' nomination. He now lives in Central Illinois, and has made two million dollars in fair dealing, and he hasn't an enemy in all that region, nor in the world. The last two times he was elected Judge without a single dissenting vote from either party.['] This is the way his friends talk; and Fell is one of the sincerest of men, and his moderation gives weight to his words. Davis seems ahead at this hour. Curtin is to get the second place, in consideration of giving Pennsylvania's vote to Davis for the first."—*Chicago Post* of Apr. 28, quoted in *Pantagraph*.

Illinoisans attended the meeting, and came to an agreement concerning the division of the votes.¹⁵ There was a street procession for Davis after the meeting, and great enthusiasm. In the evening an adjourned meeting was addressed by Judge Wentworth and John Hickman, the latter from Pennsylvania.

In spite of all these well-laid plans Davis was foredoomed to failure, the leaders in the party being uncertain both of his ability to attract the popular vote and of his interest in the particular reforms they advocated.¹⁶ Starting with a vote of ninety-two and a half, he lost steadily, retaining only six in the final ballot. His supporters were scarcely less disappointed than was Schurz at the failure to nominate Adams or Trumbull, both men far more likely to carry the Liberal banner to victory. The "Gratz Brown trick" by which Greeley won the nomination in spite of his eccentricities, his extreme views, and the lack of confidence of his colleagues, seemed to stun the party leaders everywhere.

Governor Palmer was among the first to recover from the shock and to shape a definite program. Assuming that despite personal disappointment the Davis supporters would rally to the ticket, he wrote to Fell asking for a survey of the field in his county and estimates of Liberal strength, and asking his support for Greeley.¹⁷ Palmer was personally much attached to Greeley, who had befriended him in the *Tribune* the winter before, and was therefore the more willing to urge the disgruntled into self-forgetting efforts for the cause. A state convention was to be arranged for, and strong efforts would be necessary to popularize the erratic editor of the *Tribune*, against whom the Middle West still remembered his harsh criticisms of Lincoln. With Adlai Stevenson, leader of the Democrats, Fell arranged a mass-meeting to ratify the nomination. This was held on May 12. Fell

¹⁵Twenty-one were to go to Davis, eleven to Trumbull, and ten to Palmer. *Cincinnati Commercial*, May 1; *Chicago Times*, May 1; *Pantagraph*, May 2.

¹⁶Horace White attributes the failure of Davis to "the editorial fraternity, who, at a dinner at Murat Halstead's house, resolved that they would not support him if nominated, and caused that fact to be made known." *Lyman Trumbull*, 380-381. A letter from one of the McLean County delegates to the *Pantagraph* of May 3 says that "It is believed, and is doubtless true, that Belmont's visit here resulted in buying every Cincinnati paper as well as those of Louisville, to oppose Davis at all hazards." This letter is dated 1:30 p. m., Thursday.

¹⁷Palmer to Fell, May 8, 1872.

presented the ratification resolutions with a speech, which was followed by speeches by Adlai Stevenson, General Gridley, Major Sterlein (speaking for the Germans), Dr. Rogers, and others. A letter from Governor Palmer was read. By the end of the meeting, it is fair to assume that the leaders themselves were almost persuaded that they wanted Horace Greeley to be president.¹⁸

Horace White of the *Chicago Tribune*, staunch Trumbull man that he was, entered heartily into the Greeley campaign through loyalty to a cause which he did not feel justified in abandoning because of poor leadership. He wrote to Fell in late May to tell him that it had been agreed at the state convention (which Fell did not attend) that the Illinois member of the national executive committee was to be Jesse Fell. This appointment was declined, Mr. Fell doubtless feeling that he could not effectively serve a man of whose fitness for the presidency he was not sure.¹⁹

Nevertheless his personal relations with Greeley during the summer and autumn of 1872 continued to be friendly, and while in New York late in November, he was granted one of the last interviews which that sadly disappointed and broken man could have given to any of his friends.²⁰ Fell himself gradually withdrew from active participation in politics after the Cincinnati meeting, feeling that the day of his service in that field was past.

¹⁸*Panagraph*, May 7, 1872, for Fell's declaration in favor of Greeley; May 9, call for a ratification meeting; May 13, account of the meeting.

¹⁹White to Fell, May 28, 1872.

²⁰Greeley to Fell, Nov. 23, 1872. The note, in Greeley's altogether inimitable scrawl, is very characteristic:

Dear Sir:

Call at the Tribune office at 4 P. M. (Sunday,) second floor on the south side. Knock and it shall be opened.

Yours,

Horace Greeley.

Mr. Fell, of Illinois, Astor House, city.

CHAPTER XI

THE TREE-PLANTER

It was J. A. Sewall who, when the etherialized earthiness of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *Gates Ajar* had set every-one to discussing his idea of heaven, replied to a young woman who had asked him if he thought there were trees in heaven: "I really don't know, but if Jesse Fell gets there and finds none, he will hunt around and find some somewhere and plant them."¹

The remark shows the extent to which Mr. Fell and tree-planting were associated in the minds of those who knew him. It was his great passion, perhaps more than anything else his life-work, to set trees in the bare prairie and watch them make of it a garden. From his first months in the new land, when the bleakness of its prairie struck his eyes with especial force, used as they were to the rolling wooded stretches of Pennsylvania and Ohio, he looked forward to the planting of trees. That there were no trees except along the streams was, to him, the one disadvantage of the prairie.² Therefore he planted trees in the towns in which he owned land. He lined the streets of Lexington, Clinton, Pontiac, and other places with rows of maples and elms. Wherever he held a block of lots, there clumps or rows of trees marked the land that Fell owned.

But at no other place did Mr. Fell plant trees with quite the loving enthusiasm which he gave to that work in Bloomington and Normal. In the summer of 1856, when visiting in West Philadelphia and Germantown, he was especially impressed with the beauty of the streets there. Germantown was shaded by stately old trees, but West Philadelphia was a new town, already beautified by careful and extensive planting. Vowing that he would make his own town in Illinois as lovely as West Phil-

¹J. A. Sewall to Fannie Fell, March 15, 1909.

²Fell to his parents, Nov. 17, 1833. The settlements were built in the edges of the groves, he says, in some places extending two miles into the plain. "As the settlements move out into the prairie, people will turn their attention to the cultivation of the forest trees. This in some neighborhoods has already been done." A. W. Kellogg in *Pontiac Sentinel*, Aug. 29, 1889.

adelphia, Fell planned a comprehensive planting campaign, which he began to put into effect the next year.³

His first move was to secure a special act from the legislature to permit the fencing of young trees planted in open streets, for their temporary protection.⁴ His desire was to plant double rows along all the streets, with something like the spacious prodigality of Hadley, Massachusetts. But North Bloomington streets were not surveyed upon so generous a scale, and so only a few streets could have double rows. Even so, twelve thousand trees were set out in Normal before a single house was erected.⁵ The stimulus and example so given, together with the ease of acquisition afforded by the nurseries, made planting a fashion. People vied with each other in making their private grounds beautiful. They quoted Mr. Fell's version of an old couplet—

"He who plants a tree (*and cares for it*)
Does something for posterity,"

and acted upon its suggestion. Bloomington had already become known as the "Evergreen City," and Normal came to share in the name. But evergreens do not attain a permanent growth in prairie soil, and of late years the greater part of the conifers so enthusiastically planted by that generation, have given way to the more adaptable maples and elms.⁶

Many of the trees planted were from Mr. Fell's own nurseries. Unsold lots were utilized as branch nurseries, and the noble Fell Park, with its groves, lawns, drives and gardens, set an example of beauty and gave Normal a place of recreation. Mr. Fell personally supervised all planting, and it is due to his great and loving care that of the trees suited to Illinois conditions, scarcely one has died in the half century since their planting. The original twelve thousand trees were increased to thirty-five thousand before many years. It is to be noted that long before the transplanting of large trees became a common feat, Fell invented a variety of huge cart which could be used for this pur-

³Lewis, who tells this anecdote of Mr. Fell (*Life*, 54), was with him during the drive through West Philadelphia when this resolution took form.

⁴*Laws of Illinois*, 1857, I, 509. Approved Feb. 13, 1857.

⁵*Pantagraph*, May 27, 1857; July 26, 1865. Raymond Buchan in *Pantagraph*, Mar. 16, 1898.

⁶Henry Shaw, "Evergreens," in *Pantagraph*, July 19, 1854.

pose, and full-grown trees were transplanted in Normal to beautify the homes of those who wanted results quickly.⁷

From the first, Mr. Fell assumed the responsibility of looking after the grounds of the Normal School. He wanted to have planted upon its campus every tree that would flourish in Central Illinois, that the studies of botany and forestry might be pursued there to advantage. He insisted, at a time when expert advice upon æsthetic matters was not highly valued, that the grounds should be planned by a professional landscape gardener, and secured the services of William Saunders of Philadelphia, who had planned his own grounds at Fell Park, for this purpose.⁸

The rather elaborate plans of Saunders were not carried out by the board of education during the first hard years, when the school was struggling for life. Year after year passed indeed, and the campus remained almost as bare as in the beginning. Finally, to secure the realization of his hopes and plans, Mr. Fell became a member of the board of education in 1866, continuing until 1872. He secured, with the coöperation of interested friends, the passage of a law which went into effect February 28, 1867, relative to the planting of the campus.⁹ This act included an appropriation of three thousand dollars, and with the prospect of this cash assistance he set to work. The entire campus was subsoiled and plowed during the spring and summer of 1867. Before his official work had begun, Mr. Fell had planted some trees upon the grounds; in 1868 he set out 1740, and 107 more the next year. Saunders' plan was followed as closely as circumstances permitted. In 1870, patches of oats and potatoes yielded a small income for use in defraying the expense of this planting. Even with this help, the appropriation was insufficient, and the work had to be completed at Fell's own expense. Having finished as nearly as was then possible the work which he regarded as peculiarly his own, he resigned from the board.

⁷Lewis, *Life*, 55. Raymond Buchan, of Osman, Illinois, set out most of the trees under Fell's direction. "He was the best man I ever knew," said Buchan of him. *Pantagraph*, May 27, 1857. John Dodge, "Concerning Jesse W. Fell," in *Fell Memorial*.

⁸Saunders to Fell, Oct. 15 and 29, 1858. Saunders advised that a nursery be started upon the grounds, a plan which was carried out in a small way. The planting plans (for which Saunders charged \$65) are among the Fell papers.

⁹*Public Laws of Illinois*, 1867, 21.

In 1885 he became interested in the efforts of Dr. Stennett of the Northwestern Railroad to induce railroad companies to plant trees for ties. The more scientific control of the supply of wood for railroads had been, years before, a hobby of his own.¹⁰ Mr. M. G. Kerr of St. Louis, also interested in the project, asked him to write for the forthcoming report of the bureau of forestry, which Kerr hoped to make of commercial value. So far as known, this article was never written, probably on account of the condition of Mr. Fell's health.¹¹

His interest in trees led to his friendship with Henry Shaw of St. Louis. For Jesse Fell alone, it was said, would this rigid Presbyterian Puritan open his famous garden on the Sabbath. Then the two men would walk around together, admiring new or particularly fine specimens, and discussing varieties and culture. Sometimes Mr. Fell took his son Henry with him on these week-end trips to St. Louis.¹²

Mr. Fell's last extensive venture in real estate was so essentially a tree-planting enterprise that it may best be related here. In 1869 a number of Bloomington men became interested in Iowa lands. As the representative of this group of men, Mr. Fell went to Iowa that summer, and selected a tract of about forty sections—more than twenty-five thousand acres—in Lyon County in the northwestern corner of the state. Even in its unimproved state this section of the country was exceedingly attractive. "In thirty-two of the thirty-seven states comprising our union," said Mr. Fell in describing it, "I have never beheld so large a body of surpassingly beautiful prairie as is here to be found. There is absolutely no waste land, and scarce a quarter-section not affording an admirable building-site."

The plan of the proprietors was to survey a town in the center of their holdings, and to start the work of improvement on each farm by breaking a few acres of land, and by planting trees and willow hedge.¹³ The town was named Larchwood, and the

¹⁰O. H. Lee to Fell, July 4, 1853.

¹¹M. G. Kerr to Fell, Sept. 22, 1885. The letter is accompanied by "A Circular addressed to presidents of Railways, with the request that you may express to me your views and experience on the uphill road of interesting Railroad men in matters of Forest Culture," a set of "Inquiries addressed to Railway Managers," and a circular from the Department of Agriculture.

¹²Henry Fell, interview, May 31, 1913.

¹³Lewis, *Life*, 104. The original company included, besides Mr. Fell, Charles W. Holder, John Magoun, R. E. Williams, A. Burr, E. H. Rood,

settlement came to be known as the Larchwood Colony. For many years Mr. Fell devoted much time each spring and fall to personal supervision of the improvements there. As in Normal and other places in Illinois, he did not trust the work to employees, but superintended the setting of the trees himself, sometimes helping with the actual labor. The improvements accomplished were unusual. In May, 1873, Fell set out a hundred thousand trees and cuttings, distributed through eight sections of land. At that time a hundred fifty thousand trees had already been set out, and a tract of forty acres in the center of a number of sections insured a "start" of ten acres of broken ground to every immigrant who bought a quarter-section. Larchwood farms at that time were selling at from four to six dollars the acre.¹⁴

The history of Larchwood serves to illustrate one of Jesse Fell's notable characteristics. General Gridley, who knew him well, was wont to say of him that he was never mistaken in his estimate of the ultimate value of a piece of land, but that his eager nature greatly discounted the length of time which would elapse before that value was realized. Imaginative and enthusiastic, full of faith in the development of the West, he calculated upon an increase in value far more rapid than the actual rate of settlement justified. What he thought would be an accomplished fact in ten years, the slow moving forces of development realized, perhaps, after thirty or forty. Larchwood, with its unusual advantages, did not grow as its promoters hoped it would, and about 1880 the Illinois owners decided to sell what was left of the tract.¹⁵ An Englishman, Richard Sykes, who dealt exten-

Richard Edwards, Milner Brown, and Daniel Brown. The willow hedge was planted because it would grow quickly, and later furnish fuel. Fell, *To Hon. George D. Perkins, Commissioner of Immigration for the State of Iowa*, June 27, 1880. (A printed letter.)

¹⁴An account of a settler appeared in the *Pantagraph*, Apr. 12, 1872. One by a settler in a neighboring vicinity, *ibid.*, Apr. 25, 1872.

¹⁵At that time, there were about fifty miles of willow hedge outlining the farms, and many of the trees were from twenty to thirty feet high. White willow, box elder, white maple, white ash, cottonwood, basswood, black walnut, honey locust, chestnut, European and American larch, white and Scotch pines, osage orange, arbor vitæ, Norway and native spruces, were among the trees and shrubs then growing. The *catalpa speciosa*, Mr. Fell's favorite protégé, was a feature of the village planting. See Dr. John A. Warder, *American Journal of Forestry* for Oct., 1882. (Also reprinted as a circular.)

Captain Henry Augustine, long a prominent nurseryman of Normal,

sively in American lands, purchased the Larchwood farms, and came to America with his brother and a party of friends in April, 1882, to see the estate that he had acquired.¹⁶ He had previously brought out a pamphlet concerning Larchwood, and after inspecting the farms took up the work of further development with enthusiasm. He sent George E. Brown, an experienced forester from Scotland, to take charge of the groves, and sent saplings for planting. Delighted to find a successor so in sympathy with his ideas, Fell long kept up friendly relations with Mr. Sykes and various Larchwood residents.¹⁷

has told of his first meeting with Mr. Fell and of his championing of the *Speciosa*. A shy, awkward German boy, seeking his fortune in the new country, Mr. Fell called him in from the road one day, and had a long talk with him in his office. Finding that he loved trees, Mr. Fell explained to him the difference between the worthless and harmful varieties of the catalpa, and the useful *Speciosa*. He showed him the slight difference in the seed which is the only distinguishing mark in appearance. Mr. Augustine in later years himself became an extensive grower and dealer in the *Speciosa*. Henry Augustine, interviews. Fell in the *Pantagraph*, Dec. 30, 1882.

¹⁶The sale took place in 1881. Sykes to Fell, Nov. 26, 1881; March 10, 19, 1882; March 10, 1884; Aug. 4, 1886. Close Brothers to Fell, Jan. 26, 1882. Newspaper clipping of Jan. 19, 1881, in *Scrap Book*.

¹⁷As late as 1886, Fell was still corresponding concerning titles to Larchwood property. Sykes to Fell, Aug. 4, 1886.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST YEARS

His unsuccessful efforts for David Davis were, as has been said, Fell's last important active participation in politics. After that, altho still interested in the issues of the day, he did no campaigning, save for some local projects in which he was interested. He continued to correspond with men who were in the field, and occasionally, upon request, expressed his opinions in the press.¹ Logan, engaged in 1874 with the formulation and passage of the Resumption Act, wrote to him upon finance; Wentworth and Murray discussed the election of 1876 with him.² As the faithful friend of Judge Davis, he seems to have arranged for his election to the Senate in 1877. He induced Palmer, the incumbent at that time, to withdraw from the race, and to throw the weight of his influence to the side of Davis. Logan was defeated, and Cullom became governor of Illinois.³ Any injustice still called forth a spirited defense of the person wronged, as in the case of S. W. Moulton, who was accused by political enemies of having had secession sympathies; and in the campaign against severe corporal punishment at the Soldiers' Orphans' Home, waged in 1877.⁴ With his brother Kersey, he induced William

¹Note, for example, the undated newspaper clipping, quoting a letter of Fell's dated Sept. 20, 1880, at Larchwood, giving reasons for supporting Garfield.

²Logan to Fell, Feb. 16, 1874; Jan. 11, 1875. Wentworth to Fell, July 3, 1876. Bronson Murray to Fell, Dec. 18, 1876.

³Fell to Palmer, Jan. 15, 1877. Endorsement by Fell. Later, Fell was active in a movement for erecting a bust to Judge Davis. H. C. Whitney to Fell, Jan. 23, 1887.

⁴Moulton to Fell, Jan. 9, 1884. Davis to Fell, Feb. 4, 1882; Jan. 22, 1885. Oglesby to Fell, Mar. 17, 1884; Sept. 18, 1886. J. B. Foraker to Fell, Jan. 26, 1887. This last letter is in reference to an abortive attempt to secure the nomination of Robert T. Lincoln for president in 1888. *Pantagraph*, Jan. 4, 1884. Fell, "Oglesby and Logan," in *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1879. *Bloomington Leader*, July 23, 1877.

A. Allin and David Davis to give Franklin Park to the city of Bloomington.⁵

Business was not by any means given up. Altho he had always made money easily, he had lost as well, and had given much away. He was no hoarder; money in itself was nothing to him.⁶ Withdrawing from the larger enterprises of his prime, in his old age Mr. Fell bent his energies toward securing property which might be depended upon to yield an income to his family after his death. Some land he owned in the outskirts of Normal was planted to strawberries and larger fruit, and from this he derived an incalculable amount of pleasure and a satisfactory return in money. Fell Park was sold to a syndicate, which after his death divided it up into city lots. Its great beauty became but a memory to the people of Normal, altho some of the fine trees still shade that part of the town.⁷

He kept in close touch with friends, among whom Jonathan Turner, Richard Edwards, Lawrence Weldon, John H. Bryant, and Charles G. Ames were perhaps nearest to him.⁸ His grandchildren, who lived very close to his home, were a source of great pleasure to him, and he took the keenest interest in their education. When not in school, these children were usually at their grandfather's, "keeping store" in the playhouse he had built years before for his own children, or listening to him as he sang to them or told them stories, working as he did so among his trees and shrubs. They took long drives with him into the country, and planned with him wonderful things to do in the future; for when he was an old man, Jesse Fell retained that fresh and buoyant forward-looking which had made him strong to accomplish in his youth, and passed it on to those who had their lives still before them. And with these family ties he kept up, later than any secular activity, his church work and church attendance. A new movement to which he gave some

⁵Franklin Price in *Pantagraph*, May 10, 1900, and *Normal Advocate*, Apr. 21, 1894.

⁶He told Eberhart once that he liked to make it, and enjoyed spending it for the benefit of other people, many of whom didn't know how to take care of themselves. The remark shows his somewhat paternal attitude toward society, and explains many of his projects.

⁷*Pantagraph*, Mar. 18, 25, 1888. Thomas Slade in *Bloomington Leader*, Mar. 2, 1877. *Bloomington Eye*, Mar. 25, 1888.

⁸Turner to Fell, Jan. 1, 1879. Bryant to Fell, Feb. 25, 1885. Ames to Fell, Mar. 20, 1883.

time and attention and his unqualified assent, was that of woman suffrage, then in the days of its greatest struggle for a hearing. When Susan B. Anthony debated with President Hewitt of the normal school, it was he who introduced the pioneer suffrage advocate, and in his home she was entertained.⁹

Some time was spent in travel. In 1872 he made his first trip to the Pacific coast.¹⁰ In 1873 he paid a visit to his old home in Pennsylvania, and treasured until his death the memory of drinking water again at the spring in the milk-house, sitting by the fire-side, and having tea with the hospitable people who had bought his father's old farm. He spent the night with R. Henry Carter, as he had the last night before starting for the West in 1828. In later years he took, with various members of his family, trips through the farther West, which seemed to him a wonderful new world. He was planning a winter in California when overtaken by his last illness.¹¹

In ripening years a keen sense of humor, which during his more strenuous days was either subordinated to more important things, or forgotten by others in the memory of accomplishment, found frequent expression. It crept into conversation, brightened letters, even led to gentle Quaker jokes. These he could take as well as give, as two newspaper notices, quoted by Mr. Lewis, prove.¹² The first appeared on January 28, 1874, and read—"J. W. Fell mourns the loss of an umbrella, left in the court room yesterday. He would be pleased if the finder would leave it at the *Pantagraph* office." The sequel came the next day: "J. W. Fell desires to return thanks for the generous supply of umbrellas left for him at the *Pantagraph* office yesterday in answer to his advertisement of one lost. Altho most of these offerings are better adapted to dry weather than wet, Mr. Fell is not disposed to look a gift horse in the mouth, but accepts the varied assortment with the feeling that it is pleasant to be remembered in the hour of one's distress."

⁹Fell to Sarah E. Raymond (Mrs. S. R. Fitzwilliam), Nov. 22, 1886.

¹⁰Leonard Swett to Thomas A. Scott, Sept. 6, 1872.

¹¹Newspaper clipping in the *Scrap Book*, Sept. 8, 1884. *Bloomington Leader*, Feb. 18, 1887.

¹²Lewis, *Life*, 104.

It was a few years later that a young girl invited him to a dance. The reply was as follows:¹³

Miss Florence Richardson:

The fair invites! and so, you bet,
Your invitation I'll accept.
But I must tell you in advance
My Quaker foot it will not dance.
A thousand times I have lamented
That Fox and Penn were so demented
As to proscribe what all can see
With half an eye, is poetry;
If not in words, in what is better,—
In motion, life, spirit, letter.
Yes, if I could, I'd skip and prance
In all the ecstasy of dance;
For I am young, and supple too,
I'm not quite three-score ten and two.
But what's the use? My education's
So neglected I'd scare the nation!
So goodbye dance, it's not for me,
As you and all can plainly see.

But, what of that? I shall propose
To play a game of dominoes;
And if perchance you're so inclined
Will play a game of mind with mind,
Holding to each other's view
The things of life, both old and new;
The ups and downs, the weals and woes
That follow man, where'er he goes.

Meet at the hotel? Very well,
There you'll find Yours,

J. W. Fell.

These instances will suffice to show the quality of the humor in which he met the days of declining strength. His last years were happy as they were busy. "I was glad to know," wrote John H. Bryant to him in 1885, "that you had got beyond all fears of the future, that terrible burden that weighs down with gloom, misery, and wretched forebodings so many of our race, and especially innocent children who are reared under orthodox instruction."¹⁴

In the winter of 1885-86 he suffered a severe illness, beginning with an attack of pneumonia in December, from which his

¹³Jan. 24, 1880. Newspaper clipping in *Scrap Book*, and manuscript.
Normal, Jan., 1880.

¹⁴Bryant to Fell, Feb. 25, 1885.

convalescence was very slow. At times his family despaired of his recovery. He did rally, however, and grew stronger during the summer, so that people hoped he might be spared for several years. But when cold weather came again, there was a relapse. He became really ill in January, but refused to stay closely at home. In February he spent two days in Chicago, attending to business for the Normal School which urgently demanded attention. He returned to his home in a very serious condition, made worse perhaps by worry over school affairs, then at a most critical juncture. The family physician, in consultation with others, pronounced it a case of anæmia of the brain. For a week he lay in a comatose sleep. Rousing himself finally, he spoke to members of the family, repeated Pope's "Universal Prayer", a favorite poem, and the "Now I Lay me" which he had said since boyhood. His death occurred on February 25, 1887.¹⁵

The usual marks of respect and regret at the death of a prominent and beloved citizen were paid him. Telegrams, letters, and flowers were sent from far and near. Newspapers printed eulogies and reviewed his life and work. Town councils, the Bloomington Bar Association, churches, schools, passed resolutions of respect.¹⁶ The funeral, on the twenty-eighth of February, was held in the large assembly hall of the Normal School; no church could have held the crowds that attended. The public schools were closed. Business in Normal was suspended.¹⁷ Special cars were run from Bloomington to Normal, to accommodate the people who wished to pay the last honors to Jesse Fell. The aisles, corridors, and stairs, and the steps of the building were filled with silent mourners who could not find room in the hall. Rev. Richard Edwards, his old friend and neighbor, preached the funeral sermon. Mr. Fell had selected him for this duty, pledging him to the briefest possible account of his accomplishment, a pledge which Dr. Edwards kept at the cost of some criticism from those who did not understand the circumstances.

¹⁵*Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1887. *Pantagraph*, Mar. 7, 15, 19, 1887. Richard Edwards to Fell, Feb. 4, 1887.

¹⁶A lodge of Knights of Pythias, shortly after organized in Bloomington, was named for him, altho he himself was never a member of any such organization.

¹⁷*Bloomington Leader*, Feb. 26, 1887. *California (Missouri) Democrat*, Mar. 3, 1887, quoting from *St. Louis Republican* of Feb. 26, 1887.

The service over, the procession formed for the long drive to the cemetery at Bloomington. No tribute could have been more eloquent than the appearance of the funeral procession. The country roads were as bad as Illinois country roads can be in spring, but carriages, carts and heavy farm wagons had come in from all the surrounding country. Shabby and smart vehicles alternated in the line that followed the hearse; and the procession was so long that when the last mourners were leaving the Normal School, the first ones had reached the court house in Bloomington. The Bloomington school children joined those of Normal at this point.¹⁸

There was sincere mourning, for in death men pay eager tribute to qualities which are accepted without appreciation, or quite ignored, in life. Mr. Fell had not been unappreciated in life. He had won from men the only thing he asked of them, a trust and goodwill answering to that he bore them. It is doubtful if those among whom he lived had any adequate idea of the part he had played in public affairs for many years, and few of them understood the magnitude of the work of development which he, and others like him, accomplished for the Middle West. But those personal qualities which distinguished him among men, all men saw and honored. "It is a good thing," said Judge James Ewing of him, in voicing this appreciation, "to have known one man whose life was without spot or blemish; against whose honor no man ever spoke; who had no skeleton in his closet; whose life was open as the day and whose death comes to a whole community as a personal sorrow." And John W. Cook, who knew him well, said of him at the memorial service held in his own church on the sixth of March:¹⁹

"In that picture gallery of the soul that we call memory, there will always be a gracious presence. The personality is vivid; the outlines are sharply defined; the face is full of earnest purpose; every line is suggestive of tireless energy and the radiance of hope. A simple, honest, unostentatious man; yet wherever he has gone good deeds have marked his footsteps. As if by magic, stately trees have sprung from the path over which

¹⁸The telephone was then just coming into use, and the one connecting the court house with the Normal School was used on this occasion by Henry Augustine, who had charge of arrangements, and who related the details given to the writer.

¹⁹James S. Ewing in the *Fell Memorial*. *Pantagraph*, Mar. 7, 1887; Mar. 27, 1890; June 20, 1892.

he has walked. In their gracious shade generations yet unborn shall mention his name with gratitude. Institutions whose only aim is helpfulness to man record his generosity and public spirit."

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