

One of the Early Universities in Iowa

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

One of the marked characteristics of the early pioneers was their intense desire to secure adequate educational advantages for their children. The Baptists of Iowa did not wait until the state had been admitted to the Union, but early in the fifties took preliminary action that finally led to a meeting which was held in Oskaloosa on the 10th day of November, 1852. At this meeting a commission of fifteen was appointed to consider various offers made by towns and cities in Iowa, among which were those made by Oskaloosa and Pella. This commission met at Pella, June 4, 1853, and decided in favor of locating the school at Pella.

We believe every intelligent citizen of Pella will heartily agree with us when we say that nothing in the history of this community had a more far-reaching effect for good to Pella than the establishing of "Central" here.

In gathering the data for this history, we have been impressed with the fact that some of the best, the most cultured and devout citizens who located in Pella, came here because of Central College. So many American families came here as soon as the school had been established, that by 1860 about one-half of the citizens were native Americans. Not only did this mean much for the moral and intellectual development of the community, but among those who became citizens because of "Central" there were a number of business men who did much to build up the commercial and industrial part of the city.

The work of erecting a suitable building was begun immediately. An executive committee was appointed, consisting of Rev. H. P. Scholte, Rev. I. C. Curtis, Rev. Edward O. Towne, Rev. E. Boekenoogen and Dr. Putnam. The land for the campus was donated by Rev. Scholte, who did not stop there, but gave liberally of his means; besides furnishing much of the building material. Of money there was but very little; this made the progress of building slow, but many who could not give money, volunteered work, others gave building material, some hauled this material free of charge, and so, by the united efforts of many, the three-story brick building was erected, to stand for almost seventy years as the visible token of the interest our people had in the higher education of our youth. So great was the desire of the pioneers to provide adequate educational advantages for the community that they did not wait for the completion of the college building, but a two-story brick building was leased, and the work of the Academic Department was commenced. This was in the brick residence building on West Washington street, known to the present generation as the H. De Booy residence.

At this time Rev. Edward O. Towne presented the name of Dr. Emmanuel H. Scarff to the college board as a man suitable for the position of principal of the new school. Dr. Scarff held the pastorate in the Baptist Church at Delphi, Ind. Being afflicted with a type of malaria, quite prevalent in the pioneer days, he found it necessary to seek a change of climate. The board elected Dr. Scarff to the position and it soon became evident that no better choice could have been made. Dr. Scarff has been described by one who knew him intimately, as "a character shining with Christian graces."