

BUILT FOR BONDURANT

**A History of the Town
Through Its Early Architecture**



**By Graduate Students
in English 6765
at the University of Iowa**

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Hometown History: A Retelling of Main Street

Written By: Catherine McCourt

A Note From the Author

While much of this history is based on actual businesses in Bondurant, Iowa over the last 140 years, some of it is based on careful research of what kinds of businesses existed on Main Streets in small-town America during these time periods. I did, along with my peers, my absolute best to portray Bondurant in the truest and most honest light I could, given the resources and research that I was able to find.

Further, locations labeled with a letter, such as 14 Main Street **(C)**, coincide with either the Bondurant Historical Society map that Deborah Harwood provided to my classmates and me or the story map that my peers created. A picture of the map will be available for viewing at the end of this document and the story map will also be made available.

Growing Up in Growing Towns:

Hometowns differ across the state, country, and world. From happy memories in high rises to waking up to salty sea air coming in through the costal window to snowy mountain tops and ski lessons. But what does hometown become when it finds itself in a smalltown in the plains? I can say that the experiences themselves are probably universal. Numerous experiences within the same four blocks, memories of the high school football team holding up the state trophy, a picnic table under that one tree by the local park that you and your friends ate lunch at every day for a whole summer, a friend's parents' basement that hosted game night after game night. Houses that weren't yours, but always offered you comfort. School playgrounds and swinging for the fences, family get togethers and favorite meals, cornstalks and that sweet, spicy smell of bonfire smoke in autumn air.

You'll come back and visit or perhaps you've lived there your entire life, regardless, that hometown will begin to change. The hallmarks that you used to point to will be something

different when you get back from college or when your daughter has her first baby or when you and your spouse celebrate fifty years of marriage. Things will change; it's a requirement of evolution, it has to be, but those memories will stay the same. Because in every hometown, there's a rich history, velvety and smooth like the most decadent dessert. Moments of the past stacked together in books whose spines were snapped and broken long ago. Storefronts that no longer exist, but the remnants of red paint are still there under the shiny new sign outside because it just couldn't be scraped away. Children on fieldtrips will continue to jot down notes about how there used to be a multitude of sugar grades that people could buy from the General Store and the parents that go along on those school trips will *ooh* and *ahh* at the original oak exposed beams that support the weight of the ceiling, saying things like "if only we could have those in our home." The past will always fascinate the curious mind, but it is rare that we realize how important it is to know.

1884 Onward: The Beginning

Life was different back then; the railroad was expanding rapidly and was quickly becoming one of the biggest industries in America. Small towns along the tracks were popping up like wildfire across the Midwest. The entire state of Iowa is a curious example of this. From Council Bluffs in the west to Villisca and Bondurant in the middle and all the way to Burlington in the east, these small towns were quickly becoming booming parts of the railroad and would go on to become major players in the farming industry. In 1883, Bondurant would start its journey down this exact path, building and creating its own lore and legends that would be passed down through newspaper clippings to the great-great grandchildren of the first settlers.

In 1884, the first General Store was finished in Bondurant, all thanks to A.C. Bondurant and W.T. Hudson, they built their store in the center of town on the corner of First and Main **(A)**.

Imagine, for just a second, how amazing it would have seemed. A store that had everything you needed: sugar and flour for cakes and pies and sweet tea. Fabrics

and hats and hair products to create the style of the era. Cigars, cigarettes, and coffee. Groceries, cleaning supplies, and fishing poles. Everything you might have needed or wanted was there, housed in giant wooden barrels and rolls of cloth and tin cans. And while that was sure to impress, general stores of the 1800s were a place full of life. Customers were milling about, picking up what they needed for dinner that night or grabbing a few yards of cloth to mend the dress that their daughter ripped while playing out in the yard and they would run into a neighbor or member of their church, and they would talk. From local news to county gossip, the general



Figure 1 J.R. Jones General Store featuring large grocery department and cigar case (The Henry Ford Organization)



Figure 2 A View of Main Street, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 13

store would have been a hub for socialization and not just for the adults. As soon as the store was finished in 1884, Sunday School began being held in the space above the store and during the week the children would use the

space for school lessons. The building, most likely made of brick with wood millwork for doors, windows, and support, was the most important and inviting building in town (Jackson 2). Of course, at the time, it was the only building. But this centralized location of the general store paved the way for what Main Street would eventually become. Sadly, this building would burn down in 1910.



Figure 3 14 Main Street at the turn of the century.
Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 10

(C) Luckily, for the residents of Bondurant, 14 Main Street was built in 1908. This two-story brick storefront was just up the street from the original general store and at the time, it was a grocery store, so no one went without access to fresh produce, sugar, flour, or protein in the wake of the fire in 1910. As the years progressed it would become the local bank as well as the post office and a few other things along the way.

As business was booming in Bondurant and the economy was reaching new heights, more and visitors were beginning to come and go. In 1911, Dr. Porter bought the lot caddy corner to the original general store **(G.2)**. He built a hotel on the lot, and it was finished and opened for business in 1913. The first floor contained his own offices and rooms were upstairs, providing some comfort and quiet to the traveling businessmen and out of town family members



Figure 4 The Renaud Hotel, *Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 54*

visiting their relatives.



Figure 5 Bondurant Hotel Ad, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 20

Baby Boom in Bondurant: 1940s-50s

As America shifted and changed once again, so did small towns, their residents, and their stores. You can guess that the 1940s version of Bondurant was wildly different than the town it had started as in 1884. Men were going to war, leaving the women to do the day-to-day chores on the farm, running errands, caring for the children, and running businesses that their husbands, brothers, and even fathers had left behind. Not only that, but commercialism was changing, too.

Stores were still locally owned and operated, but the days of a singular general store on Main Street were gone. Now, businesses lined the streets.

Bakeries with fresh pastries would have filled the air with the smell of freshly baked bread.

Customers leaving with purchases wrapped in brown paper and twine would have been coming



Figure 6 Butler's Service Center, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 43

out of the pharmacy to walk down to the next store on their list (Businesses on Main Street: The Pharmacy.)



Figure 8 Bondurant Post Office, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 53

With the owning and use of automobiles on the rise, the railroad had not been forgotten, but was certainly not the symbol of a booming town that it had once been. A town that was built and founded on the railroad and centered around working on it and for it, had to evolve as the interstate and highway systems cut across the state. Businesses no longer needed to be centralized within a town, although many still were,

but quick shops and gas stations were built on the outskirts to make it easy for travelers to stop and get back on the road quickly. Because of this, gas stations would have been a necessity and while the gas station wasn't located downtown, it was located about a mile east of Main Street. Butler's Service Center was more than just a Phillip's 66 that customers could fill their cars up at and grab new oil or fluid, they carried a selection of groceries and meats as well as Armstrong and Dunlap Tires. By this time in Bondurant's history, the locals would no longer be picking their mail up at the General Store. Instead, a post office would have taken up a store front of its own, in fact, it was located on 103 Main Street **(K)**. However, this wasn't always the post office. Long before it was a post office it was home to a barber shop in the 1910s and 20s and in the 60s it became Lewis Tool



Figure 7 Lewis Tool & Die, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 49

and Die, a hardware store for the many handymen and carpenters in need of nuts and bolts and screws.

In a similar fashion, the Bondurant Christian Church had found a home in its own building years before and the public schools had done the same. Main Street retained its reputation of a social hub where the townspeople would have caught up with friends, shared news and exciting moments over drinks, and joined in conversation about the ways of the world, but it had also become the center of commercialized business in Bondurant.

After the war and with the economy and baby boom skyrocketing America into new heights, Main Street would have continued in its evolution. The nuclear family and the American Dream were advertised at every given chance. A belief that *everyone* could achieve a version of success meant more and more locally owned businesses, new neighbors moving into town, and a renewed hope for families welcoming back their loved ones. The end of the Second World War brought money and prosperity, but those loved ones who were returning home from battle were in need of a community of support. The American Legion in Bondurant did just that. It gave those who served a place to gather, share stories, grieve, and get the support that they deserved.

The Rise of Pop Culture: The 1970s-80s

The era of love, slasher films, and hairspray in American history certainly doesn't disappoint, and it's safe to say that Bondurant, along with many other small towns in Iowa, was keeping up with the times. Telephones and televisions were a commonality from household to household, which meant socializing on Main Street may not have been as prominent as it used to be. But you can picture the excited conversations about the hits of the day: *M*A*S*H*, *Dallas*, *Cheers*, *The Golden Girls*, and *All in the Family*. Community was key to the 70s and 80s and as

the draft for the Vietnam War continued, Bondurant saw the community come together in a different way.

Lloyd Elson, a member of the Bondurant community who lived on his family farm with



Figure 9 103 Main Street, the original library, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 50

his wife Margaret and their children, wanted to support the people he had known and grown up with. In 1976, he donated the funds for the first ever library. So, 103 Main Street (K), which had been a barber shop, a post office, and a hardware store was transformed into a hub of education and entertainment. Not only did this new and lively business

allow easier access to knowledge and facts, it also opened up the small town to media and entertainment and gave a glimpse into the goings on in much larger metropolitan areas and cities. Pop culture was becoming bigger and bigger with blockbuster movies, top selling books, and supermodels influencing a new kind of style. And the new library became home to all of it. Encyclopedias, magazines, thrilling books, and fairytales that the children and the adults cherished. Presumably, this first library also had movies on VHS tapes that the library goers could borrow to watch at home.

Jaws and *The Shining* and *Architectural Digest* would have been borrowed and brought back along with books for school papers and dictionaries. Of course, you can't have a library without somewhere to sit and read all those books over a good cup of coffee or tea, maybe a

muffin or two. Luckily, 14 Main Street (C) was now a lively and thriving café that was always open to the locals and visiting out of towners.

Even though there was easier access to the media and commercialization, the locals continued supporting each other and their local businesses just as they had always done in their hundred-year history. And hair, being a staple of the times, meant that more barber shops and salons were opening their doors, including

Eileen's Beauty Shop on Main Street and the Bondurant Barber Shop also on Main Street. In addition to beauty supplies, the people were beginning to get more and more involved in their communities and Bondurant was no exception.

The Lion's Club, an organization that strives to give their support to humanitarian services and grants, was located just down the block on Main.

And while the General Store had long since burnt down, a new business had opened in its place.



Figure 10 Inside the General Store, Bondurant Centennial Book, pg. 30

The Bondurant Hardware Store was alive and well in the same spot that was once the first ever store front in the town.

In 1985, the loyal citizens of the Bondurant, put on an amazing celebration for their one-hundred-year anniversary at the local church. Farmers, teachers, pastors, and businessmen gathered at the Bondurant Christian Church to share in a potluck, entertainment, and years of history. Scrapbooks, mementos, and stories. The centennial motto was “100 years of faith and service”, which if you asked anyone in town, was the undeniable truth.

Modernity and Memories in Modern Bondurant

Today, Bondurant, Iowa continues to expand rapidly. It's changed immensely, but it's hard to deny some of the similarities. The new Amazon warehouse **(D)** on the outskirts of town is a shiny new version of the town's first ever store—the General Store. From the convenience of being able to get everything a person could need in one place to the job opportunities that both have provided to the community that was built and continues to grow around them, it's easy to see how closely they resemble one another.

Along with Amazon, the new housing developments and the wonderful school districts are bringing more and more people into the community. And there's a few places downtown that someone from the past just might recognize. The American Legion is alive and well, but they're now located on 2nd Street. Their old building is now being used by Reclaimed Rails Brewing Company. The Lion's Club is also doing well, just in a new location. They meet once a month at the American Legion which rents space out for events. And 14 Main Street **(C)** which was once home to grocery stores, hardware stores, a café, a bank, and much more is now the Farm Financial Bureau. For all intents and purposes, Main Street is still a buzzing place. Home Slice Handmade Pies, Sky Kone Ice Cream, Off the Rails Quilting, Founders Irish Pub, Little House on Main, and Somewhere in the Middle Coffee Shop have all taken over the storefronts of the past, each with unique stories that will only add to the history of Main Street.

The cityscape has changed *a lot* over the last one hundred and forty years. There are new businesses and new families and new people, but Main Street is still filled with the lively ambiance of a town that's small enough to know everyone and close enough to stop and chat. There are people shopping for the holidays at the Little House on Main, kids lining up and laughing about school playground pranks at Sky Kone, and while Home Slice has only been

open for a year, they're receiving calls daily from customers who just can't get enough of their homemade pies. So, yes, everything is different from when it all began, but the heart of it all, the people, aren't.

The history of the Main Street in America is complicated and ever changing, but it's supposed to be. Conversations over selecting sugar grades in the General Store have turned into conversations in aisle nine at the grocery store, newsworthy events are talked about over dinner rather than at the post office, and exciting life events are shared on Facebook. And who knows what a Main Street in small town Iowa will look like in another fifty years? Maybe it will go right back to the way it was when it first began, history has a funny way of repeating itself.

As we keep growing and adding to our histories, hold on to these things. The memories of laughter and friendship and the communities that you call home are the type of history that your children will ask about one day. Or your significant other who grew up halfway across the country will ask you to go for a drive when you're home for the holidays and tell them all about the place where you grew up. You'll point out the picnic table and the library where you once spilled tea on a book that wasn't yours and the church where you and your family spent every Sunday morning in the same pew for as long as you can remember. The schoolyard wouldn't be *your* schoolyard if it wasn't for the first time you played tag with your childhood best friend. The shop downtown with the amazing coffee wouldn't be that without the smell of shared vanilla lattes on a cold day with your mom while you're out shopping. And the restaurant that you and your best friends are constantly telling everyone about wouldn't be the same if it weren't for your weekly dinner in the same booth catching up with each other. Hold on to those things, tell the stories over and over again. Community only comes when we have people to share it with and while hometowns may shift and change as the years and decades go by, we have to

remember what they used to be in order to allow them to become everything we always knew they could be.

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The Interconnected Home:

A Speculative Reconstruction of Bondurant's Home Interiors

By Adelina Pineda Canganelli



1 A.C. Bondurant's home, courtesy of the Bondurant Historical Society

In 1857, Alexander Conley Bondurant moved from Illinois to Polk County, IA, purchasing 320 acres in preparation for his newfound home. Oxen-carted wood was soon morphed into an Italianate home, beautiful in its modest ornamentation. Though the home may seem typical of the period at a first glance, a close study reveals an almost endearing

respect on Bondurant's part for a tactful aestheticism; black walnut siding rather than a cheaper pine, delicately carved gable vents and stately Grecian porch pillars both surely laboriously carted from Chicago in place of readily available utilitarian alternatives, and harmoniously contrasted shutters all point to an appreciation for the decorative art of architecture, reigned in from the ostentatious homes in more established trade cities further east.

It's fascinating to imagine Bondurant's founder carefully choosing the pieces of his new home's exterior, unaware of his future influence as a benevolent community leader in what would become a lively hometown to generations of families. So much is revealed from the sepia pictures we have of the exterior of this house- Bondurant's decorative tastes, his adherence to architectural trends of the period that reveal the unavoidable ties to commercial cities like Chicago, even in a yet-to-be-busted prairie. The truly fascinating elements, however, the interior pieces that would make this house a home to the Bondurant family were lost to a fire in 1917, with no records to even hint at the contents of the rooms. But, with the period-typicality of the exterior, and with the knowledge it reveals of Alexander's willingness to lean on bigger cities for decoration- to splurge in one area and remain modest in another- surely a few educated guesses can be made.

But how does one reconstruct an interior lost to time? How can we look back across nearly 200 years to envision the careful choices made by an enterprising pioneer and his family? What choices were available to a modestly wealthy Midwesterner of the 1850s? Cross-referencing the work of decorative and architectural historians, particularly the invaluable work of Sharon Darling through the Chicago Historical Society, I've sought to begin to answer these questions, and hopefully provide a glimpse into the domestic life of a foundational figure in Iowa history.

Alexander C. Bondurant was one of many settlers moving westward in the mid-19th century, a demographic that was steadily supplying the previously sparse prairie settlement of Chicago with an active and widespread customer base in every avenue of life. While most settlers passed through Chicago on the way to establish their own farmsteads would send to the city later for imported items through the railway system, many stayed to establish the booming commercial districts of the now bustling city, perfectly located at key water and railway routes. In 1848, Chicago established itself as the terminus of the Illinois & Michigan canal, and in the same year the first railroad tracks were laid westward (Darling, p. 10) Chicago quickly became the busiest transportation hub of the area, easily connected to well-established markets of the East Coast.

Regardless of their agricultural aspirations or familial situations, every settler required shelter, preferably obtained at the lowest price possible, and easily transported to their newfound location. The transportation of furniture relied on the ever-expanding railway systems, and swarms of settlers into Chicago made for droves of skilled craftsmen ready to fulfill orders for furniture. The 1830s and 1840s economic state of Chicago in relation to cabinetmakers was

highly fluid, with sporadic and unprecedented opportunities for an east coast workman to quickly make a name for himself in a new region.

Many of these men were migrating due to the increasing limitations on economic opportunities in the East brought on by mechanization, migrating to the Midwest in hopes of escaping the need to adopt factory systems of production and remain independent artisans. In the 1830s, transportation of bulky furniture from the east allowed for a controlled market wherein the artisan cabinetmaker was able to produce competitively priced furniture and make a decent income. (Darling, p. 9) However, by the time that Bondurant would have been seeking to furnish his new home in Polk County, both labor-saving machines and importation of Eastern furniture would have been the norm in the highly efficient commercial district of Chicago. Division of labor within the furniture making process became a key development in the access to reasonably priced furniture by pioneers; "...this meant that rather than one man making a piece of furniture from start to finish, workers with specialized skills concentrated on particular aspects of cabinetmaking and decorating, such as woodturning, ornamental painting, upholstering, carving, or gilding" (Darling, p. 9) With a population of over 20,000 in 1848, work had to be provided for these specialists even during "slack times," and as such, there was a ready supply of furniture both assembled and ready to be assembled and even customized on short notice, providing even further price cuts for the consumer.

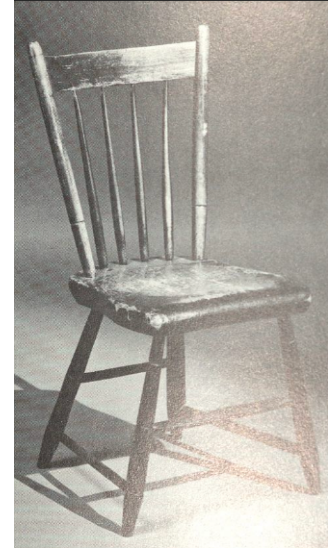
According to advertisements of the time, Chicago furnituremakers prided themselves on specializing in the same styles most popular in Paris and New York, meaning Classical Revival pieces with ornate pillar designs. Unless commissioned by a highly wealthy client, these pieces

would likely be made of a base of cheap local wood, such as pine, and then covered with a veneer of mahogany or rosewood. *Chicago Democrat* advertisements of the period likewise boasted upholstery businesses that could provide mattresses, spring beds, and sofas in the same cosmopolitan styles at nationally competitive prices (Darling, p. 11) While these Grecian styles of furniture and upholstery were produced in large quantities, many cabinetmakers likewise maintained simplistic styles of cabinetmaking were likewise still in high circulation, exemplified in most of the city's hotels and boardinghouses, which were often furnished with the most basic of locally produced furniture (Darling, p. 11) All of this is to say that, while Bondurant indeed could have lavishly decorated his home with the most recent styles of cosmopolitan and fashionable furniture, he likely furnished his home mostly with "joiner" furniture that could be shipped and assembled with rapid ease, especially considering the fact that the Chicago Great Western Railway was not built until 1892, and the man was likely relying on more laborious transportation of furniture.

"Suites" of furniture all produced with the same style and upholstery were not available from Chicago producers until the 1860s (Darling, p. 33) so, at least in his initial furnishing efforts, Bondurant would have taken advantage of the more basic items widely available in Chicago warehouses, as the price point was much lower than specialty pieces, and there would be little concern for trying to match together eclectic styles and production qualities.

However, Bondurant would not have had to have given up on decoration entirely in favor of efficiency- a product that exemplifies the ability of Chicago furnituremakers to provide cheap yet

stylish furniture is the Windsor chair, a simple style carried over from the 18th century. The industrial census taker in 1850 noted that one chair manufacturer in Chicago produced “500 Winsor” chairs (Roberts qtd in Darling, p.14,) which were often painted or carved with embellishments according to the customer’s taste.



2 Example of a Chicago Windsor chair available in the mid-19th century, purchased by William J. Kemper in 1843 (Chicago Historical Society gift of Albert J. Freese, 1925. Cited in Darling, page 14.)

If A.C. Bondurant did want to invest in a more luxurious item, he could have very easily invested in a melodeon, an instrument similar to a pianoforte that was efficiently produced in Chicago for as little as \$100 (Darling, p. 26) As he is remembered to have furnished



3 - Example of Rococo style furniture available in Chicago in the later 19th century. Purchased by Mr. and Mrs. George Hanselman in 1871. (Chicago Historical Society, gift of June Hanselman, 1975. Cited in Darling, p. 31)

his home “...with all the environments of luxury and comfort which wealth, good taste and refinement could suggest,” (Andrews) it’s likely that Alexander would have invested in key pieces like this that required expensive, specialized craftsmanship, leaving the maximalist rococo styles popular in New York and Paris aside in favor of investing in his community.

Although Bondurant undoubtedly fitted his home with kerosene lamps within the next decade or so, upon building the home he would not have had access to gas or indoor plumbing. Pinpointing the likely style of interior décor in the Bondurant home can be difficult, as the actual tendencies of mid-19th century Americans are

not well documented in regard to paint, wallpaper, and flooring choices. Although one would assume that the proliferating industry of home advice columns would provide insight into the

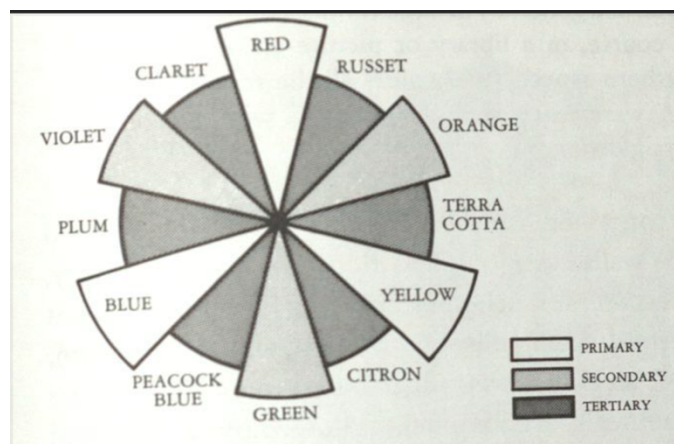
décor choices of the Midwesterner of the 1850s, these sources are not entirely straightforward, as the authors are often very clearly criticizing the common tendency of Americans in their promotion of a stylistic ideal. This can be seen in William H. Ranlett's *The Architect* (1849) where the author notes;

“Cheerfulness and amiability could hardly be compatible with a dark blue ceiling and dingy brown walls, yet it is very common in country houses to see sitting-rooms and bed-chambers so colored that they impart a sensation of oppressed solemnity to the feelings.”
(Ranlett, qtd. in Winkler and Moss, p. 65)

Therefore, it's likely safer to assume that Bondurant adhered to this commonality of muted, dark painted walls in his parlors and bedrooms, rather than the emerging ideals of architectural design critics of the time.

If he was truly fashionable, Bondurant may have opted for wallpaper accents in his home, a product that was

becoming quite popular even among settler communities of the 1850s. This wallpaper would have still likely been of a muted color scheme, not ostentatious or utilizing any chemically generated hues. If choosing a wallpaper with embellishing designs, Bondurant likely had simple geometric or trellised floral patterns. Choices in decoration were often very practical in the Midwest American home of this period, and one could expect a tactfully placed paper of small,



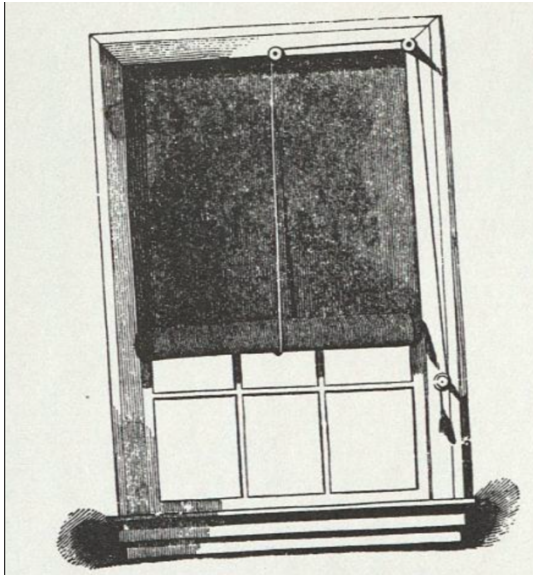
4 Color wheel depicting primary, secondary, and tertiary colors-contrasting colors (opposite one another on the wheel) would have created "harmony by contrast." Drawing by Richard A. Votta, cited in Winkler and Moss, p. 67

gently complicated geometric patterns in a parlor or hall to better hide stains from high traffic (Winkler and Moss, p. 74)

A set of principles that seems to have been accepted as the standard for color schemes in the American home of the 19th century is determined by David Ramsay Hay in *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring* (1828.) Hay's work appears to have become common knowledge in the United States by the 1850s and 60s, and any first-time decorator would have likely been guided by his advice, even in Polk County. Hay's work was formative for house painting in its pioneering use of the color wheel to determine the appropriate choices of color for a given room; Hay recommends "harmony by contrast" in color choices, essentially using colors opposite one another on the color wheel (i.e., red-green, violet-yellow) (Winkler and Moss, p. 67) This advice, however, was not likely to be interpreted to encourage bold uses of analogously contrasting shades- as the architect John Bullock is quoted saying in relation to Hays and usage of the color wheel that it is "less evil to be unable to find excitement, than to be unable to find repose" in the color scheme of the home (Bullock, qtd. in Winkler and Moss, p. 67) Architects often encouraged that the room be colored from the ground up, with the darkest shades at the bottom (likely a veneered wood) and the lightest at the top.

Woodwork in the home would have been of a "national" character, which would have been both cheaper and perceived as patriotically responsible at the time. Floors would have been made of a softwood such as pine, and assembled out of interlocking planks (Winkler and Moss, p. 78.) Oil clothes would have been used to protect the soft pinewood floors in areas of high traffic, such as kitchens and parlors, and carpeting would have been made of stitched matting that could be disassembled and resewn together in order to clean in the spring (Winkler and Moss, p. 83) The most likely style of carpeting would have been ingrained 3-ply, likely a spot of bright

color with floral patterns, as critics at the time were angrily renouncing this stylistic choice in rural homes of the period (Winkler and Moss, p. 91)



5 A typical window shade of the time, illustrated in "The Unexpected Visitor" in a 1859 issue of Godey's Lady's Book. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, cited by Winkler and Moss, p. 99)

Images of the Bondurant home show exterior shutters fitting with the Italianate style of the architecture- Bondurant likely also had interior shutters, or perhaps even paper roller blinds. Contrary to popular perceptions, it's highly unlikely that the home had drapes, as the amount and quality of common fabrics for this product were an unnecessary luxury. Curtains are not even a certainty in the home, although they were becoming popular at the time, and would have been made of simple materials such as

cotton, linen, or wool, in solid colors. Given the rurality of the setting of the Bondurant home as well as the weather of the area, it's unlikely that Bondurant was an early investor in curtains and may have even been seen as ill-mannered and solitary if he used them- curtains and drapes were most popular in cities to keep out prying eyes of passerby. Indeed, in accordance with his noted practicality, Bondurant's window furnishings would have been chosen with weather rather than style in mind.

Throughout my research, I've worked with the caveat in mind that, despite his wealth, Alexander Bondurant was well-known for his charitable contributions that built a solid foundation for the Bondurant of today. Though not destitute from these investments in his community, it is likely that his admirably philanthropic acts combined with his devout and temperance-minded personality necessitated a modest restraint that I have sought to account for.

Through this sort of speculative aesthetic analysis, I hope to have revealed the deep and interconnected histories of commerce, transportation, and movement that can be traced through the Midwestern prairies, and to have shed some light on aspects of the Bondurant legacy that have been lost to time. Stories of Alexander Bondurant's influence, however, live on, and my colleagues have undertaken similar projects to mine in relation to the Bondurant Christian Church, the historic downtown, and the home of Thomas Anderson. We hope that our careful analysis of this research reflects our intention to celebrate the unique architectural history of Bondurant, and provides connection to the foundations of the hometown feeling found in the town today.

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A Magnet on the Prairie:

**An Architectural and Ecclesiastical History of The Bondurant Christian
Church**

By Cary Stough

Introduction: A Magnet on the Prairie

A church is a magnet on the prairie. White-sided or brick, or both, a church is sometimes cubed or triangular, though typically in some combination. So simple and timeless in form, a child could make one out of blocks, or out of two hands clasped together, as if in prayer. *Here is the steeple / Open it up and here's all the...* In other words, a church is what gathers people together. It is often beautiful and pure, kept immaculately clean. It is a place to be seen, to be together with others, and be seen together. One finds family in a church and, as it has often been the case, one begins a family in one, too. If one is lucky, one spends more than one afternoon on the grounds of worship: picnics, holidays, community bazaars. Iowa Summer: a blanket of light laid out over the distance, punctuated by a few trees and, yes, a steeple. Through the humidity, the chime of a distant track being beaten, through the years by foot traffic, hoof, and wheel. Howsoever one comes upon a church, stepping inside, one arrives. Why not be drawn? Like a museum, a church is what gets left inside of it: long lives of joys and sorrows, triumphs and hard-fought redemptions. Hallelujahs. Hellos. Hands gathered, tithes offered, tongues lifted up. One imagines all the salutary embraces at the threshold of the transomed door, upon the lawn. Service ends and one leaves the church. Called home, as they say.

One leaves a church and, at the end, one leaves *in* a church, too. One leaves behind one's family, the farm that bears one's name, the town that bears one's name, and one's church, one's body surrounded by generations of members of the greater body, one's fellow congregants, one's beloved friends. Not far down 2nd St from the site of the Bondurant Church of Christ is the Bondurant City Cemetery (see Aidan Kendrick's "History Through the Window: Myth and the Construction of Community"). Even on a cloudy day, back-when, you would have been able to see its little stone monuments from the churchyard. That the cemetery was built where it was at a

distance from the church tells us a lot about the importance of ceremony to those initial Bondurant residents. In a frontier American context, did the eastward procession toward the cemetery signify—rather than a trod toward the inevitable—a return to an origin?

Bending down to read the names of those who came before. And bending back up, turning around. The church. It attracts the eye, and the spirit through the eye.



(the church, circa 1885, before it had a basement, before it burned down, before it split)

A.C.'s Churches

Reconstructing the church that burned in 1932, takes some archeological heaving. Of the three pictures included above and below, the former is oldest, probably taken shortly after the church was built. The latter two provide similar exterior perspectives of the church. According to the church's own documentation¹, a basement was built in 1917, dug by volunteers, and given a brick foundation. An overheated furnace caused the church to set fire, on Valentine's Day—of all

days—in 1932. Churches of the era would have used whatever timber was close at hand. To my eye, the trees below look like hickory trees. One of the best woods for firewood: burns hot and lasts long.



The building originally erected as the Bondurant Christian Church in 1885 gathered many people together over the years it stood. We can assume that the names of its first congregants

match those of the first townsfolk. Given the distance between towns during the period, we can assume many members came from the unincorporated territories, as well. In just twenty years, the congregation grew sixfold, from 19 members to 130². Considering the town was not incorporated until 1897, any story of the church's growth is a story of the town itself growing. This growth, however, mimicked an attendant growth in participants of a global religious movement, the Restoration, and more locally regarded as in step with the Stone/Campbell movement, named after Kentucky Presbyterian minister Barton Warren Stone and in Pennsylvania father-son duo, Thomas and Alexander Campbell. They advocated for a return to the New Testament doctrine, a return to a straightforward path to salvation and worship. Rather than denominational differences, the focus was on Christ. Because it was a relatively decentralized movement (like much of what American expansion would entail), church name practices took on a number of configurations: Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, and Church of Christ.

Iowa's new residents aligned themselves with the churches associated with Christian unity due to the tireless efforts of missionaries and evangelizers. Henry E. Webb lays it out in democratic terms in *In Search of Christian Unity*:

“The decades prior to the Civil War were restless times and Americans were on the move westward. Countless congregations of Christians-only were gathered by the initiative of common laymen who convinced their neighbors of the folly of reproducing the often meaningless schisms of their old communities in the virgin territory of mid-America” (159).

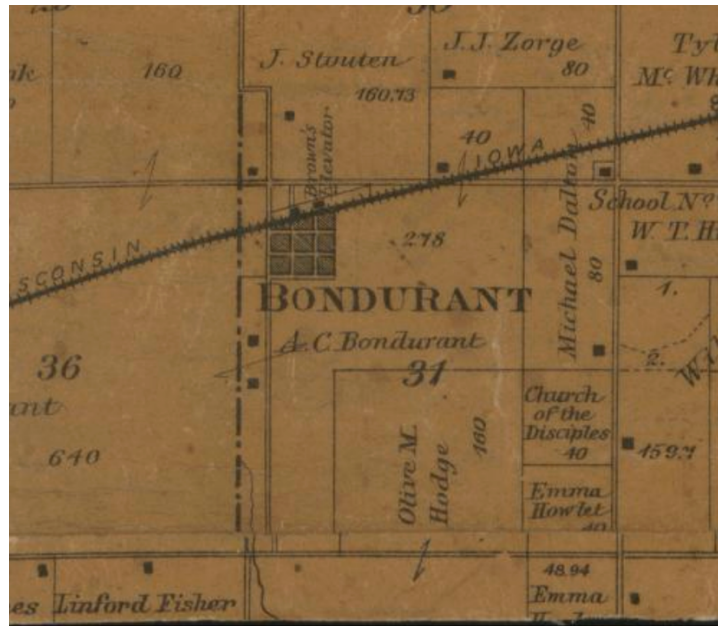
As Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot report in their volume *The Disciples of Christ: A History*, “The state convention of 1859 received reports of ninety-one churches with 4,859 members, but Chatterton [Aaron Chatterton of the Iowa State Home Missionary Society] told the assembly that he was confident there were 150 congregations and 9,000 members.” The Bondurant Christian Church was just one in a hard-won multitude of churches built with the distinctly American charge. We can surmise that the Iowa State Home Missionary Society worked so intensely because there was not only a missionary need to spread the gospel, but a fire already present that needed feeding. As quoted in John T. Brown’s *Churches of Christ*: “In 1836, ten years before Iowa became a state, the plea for primitive Christianity was proclaimed within its borders” (222). It is not incorrect, then, to characterize the church, its architectural appearance, and its style of worship as typical manifestations of Christian institutional fervor.

One fact should be kept in mind: the church came before the town. It even came before many other buildings. For a long while, the town with the church was Altoona, due south of Bondurant, and to this day a commercial and cultural center for multiple communities outside Des Moines proper. A.C. Bondurant had helped establish a church there in 1870 in a building that served, as well, as a schoolhouse. Education and religious affiliation were two passions of the benefactor. He donated money to several churches and schools throughout his life, and acted on the Board of Trustees for the Christian Church-aligned Drake University. When the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad extended itself through Altoona, Bondurant donated 40 acres for a [church](#).



(from the Altoona Christian Church website)

Alexander Conley Bondurant was a ceaseless promoter of religion and schooling. He believed wholeheartedly in a free enterprise of both spiritual understanding and livelihood. Doing good business continued the task God gave to Adam in the garden, to work and take care. Religion necessitated business, work to be done; and business would build a town.



(from Map of Polk County, Iowa, Warner & Foot, Library of Congress)

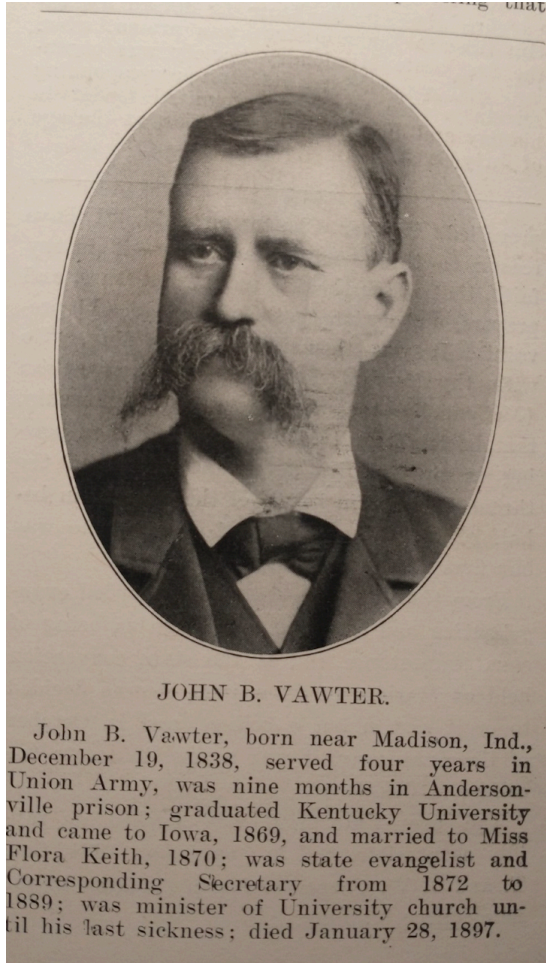
A decade after establishing the church in Altoona, Bondurant gave the Chicago & Great Western railroad permission to survey and later carve through the land (the railway was eventually built in 1892). He then donated the land on which would be built the general store (see Catherine McCourt’s “Hometown History: A Retelling of Main Street”) and 40 acres on which there would be built a church, right in his own backyard (link to Adelina Pineda-Canganelli’s *title*). 40 acres—the number of years the Israelites spent in the desert, number of days of the great rain, 40 days between resurrection and ascension. A church cannot take up 40 acres, but a congregation can put it to use, and that is exactly what A.C. Bondurant intended. Fundraising efforts, flea markets, veggie stalls selling crops grown on the property, as well as “rallies and revivals.” As it is recounted in the Bondurant Centennial booklet: “On hot summer evenings, services were often held in the grove of trees just north of the church. Men would carry the piano or pump organ out under the trees so they could have music at their service.”

The original church, however, took place above the general store. Like the upper room of the original apostles, whose mouths brought all the languages together and whose foreheads caught fire on the day of Pentecost, members of the nascent incorporation of Bondurant joined together to hear the good news of the gospel.

2 AND when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ²And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing might wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:2-3

When equipped with the Word, one needs no denominative affiliation, therefore this joining would probably not have been referred to as the first Christian Church of Bondurant, but simply “church,” a place where church was practiced. By 1884, the building had been built and on March 23, 1885 Altoona pastor J.B. Vawter officially organized the church, bringing some of his own members over for fellowship, transferring others, and introducing newcomers.



JOHN B. VAWTER.

John B. Vawter, born near Madison, Ind., December 19, 1838, served four years in Union Army, was nine months in Andersonville prison; graduated Kentucky University and came to Iowa, 1869, and married to Miss Flora Keith, 1870; was state evangelist and Corresponding Secretary from 1872 to 1889; was minister of University church until his last sickness; died January 28, 1897.

(from John T. Brown's *Churches of Christ*)

The first official pastor, James Henry Painter, according to one account, knew every single pastor and missionary in the state of Iowa (Wilson 201-202). A Kentuckian, he would not stay long after establishing a church. In 1902, he was still living in Iowa, in Eddyville, preaching when he could: as tireless a prairie minister as there were tireless prairie men and women.

Its Untypically Typical Architecture

During the 1852 General Congregational Convention, several religious leaders and architects gathered to present *A Book of Plans for Churches and Parsonages* that included both

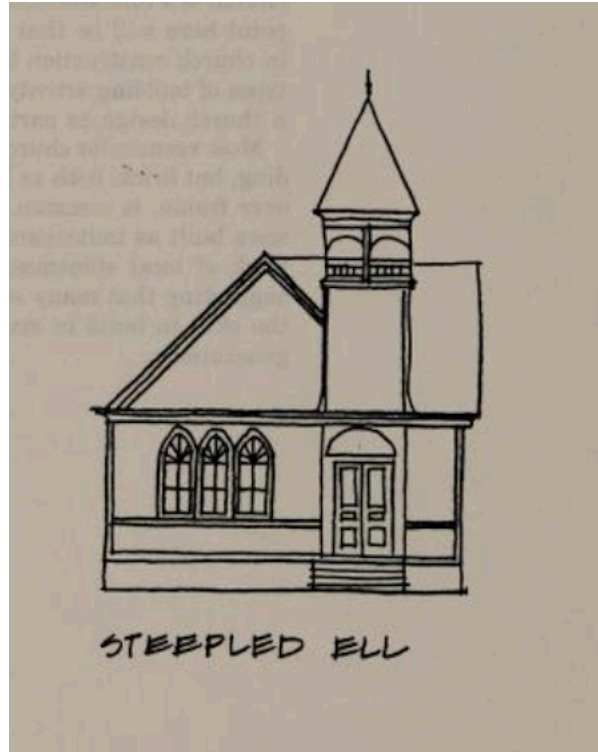
the theoretical and architectural guidelines for establishing churches on the frontier. Although there is scant evidence regarding to what limit or how frequently the document would have been used, the abundance of vernacular churches in Iowa that seem to follow the aesthetic parameters presented in the document, assumes its importance, at least, as a general attentiveness among church leaders. Churches of the Restoration movement were distinctly not part of the Congregationalist Movement, though they shared a mission of reform and return to a more direct spiritual experience within organized religious collectivity. Both, also believed in congregational autonomy in dictating the procession of services and preaching particularities. However, Congregationalists retained the sacramental practices of stayed denominations, particularly infant baptisms. The eventual merger between the organizations in 1931, forming the Congregational Christian Church, might allow us to presume theoretical similarities in the decades prior.

edifices. The shape, and size, and general arrangement of such structures are at once determined. Of course, any thing like a cathedral, as that term is generally understood, is out of the question. Any structure so large that all cannot see and be seen, and hear and be heard in it, is excluded. Any such thing, as many of the so-called churches in papal countries, is ruled out by our definition. Our churches must be of simpler style of architecture, of smaller size, and constructed on different acoustic principles. The walls must not be so wide asunder that the voice of the preacher is lost before it strikes them. Nor must the architectural display of column on column and arch on arch be allowed to baffle the efforts of the speaker, and make both seeing and hearing as though in a forest. We do not mean to say that columns and arches should not be admitted in the structure of churches, but only that they should be used in a way to promote, as they certainly may, or at least not to impair, the primary purpose of such buildings. Nor do we sympathize with that unreasonable and unreasoning dislike of supporting columns in churches which either excludes them altogether, or in substituting iron for wood, so reduces their size as to destroy the harmony and proportion of the whole edifice. Architectural effects are admissible, and even desirable, so far as they do not come in the way of and prove an impediment to, the grand object of worship. But when God is lost sight of in the building, when that is made a marvel of architectural science and skill, and voice and sight are lost amid the labyrinthine intricacies of clustered pillars and groined arches, leading hither and thither, then the great purpose of a house of worship is lost, and the place becomes a temple of taste rather than of religion, a place where an Angelo or a Wren is adored rather than the Great Jehovah.

(from *A Book of Plans for Churches and Parsonages*, pg 7)

For church leaders assembled at the Convention, breaking away from stultified religious values of the continent required an attendant reordering of visual and aesthetic principles, as well. “Our churches must be of simpler style of architecture,” they write, “of smaller size, and constructed on different acoustic principles” (7). Despite a number of exterior design particularities, the relative modesty of the Bondurant Christian Church would most likely have been purposeful and ideological. The simplicity, or supposed simplicity, of this architecture had not only a practical, but a theoretical justification. Vernacular churches of the era stood ideologically between the heights of Anglican architectural sublime and the humility of the upper room. It would not, therefore, have been out of necessary poverty of materials or building know-how.³

The churches in Des Moines, no matter the denomination, were built in the prevailing styles of the time. The Richardsonian (named after the famed architect H.H. Richardson), a style for which the Trinity Church in Boston serves exemplary, is characterized by its gargantuan Romanesque stonework, always brown in color, keystone arches, ornate statues, and roof-ornamentation. The sum of its parts is dizzying. It would likely have sent the prairie spinning. The Queen Anne style was similarly ornate, distinctly Victorian. Rounded spires, pyramidal hip roofing, porches: the contours of any Queen Anne structure could only be truly appreciated by a full walk-around, each corner hinting at what it conceals. Many houses in Des Moines were built in this style, in fact, many of which still stand. The style thrives in an urban context; curves, cones and arches leap the distance between buildings as if someone had set up a large Rube Goldberg machine named “The City of Des Moines: Where the People Live.”



(from Jennings and Gottfried's *American Vernacular Interior Architecture: 1870-1940*)

The church was built in a vernacular style known as the steepled ell, characterized by Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried in their two books *American Vernacular Interior Architecture, 1870-1940: An Illustrated Guide*, by “its two broad wings, creating a large interior space” (392), its ell shape, and its offset steeple. The gables in such a church are broad, allowing for multiple window configurations, and in the case of our church, allowed for gable finishing, a collar beam and porthole window, as depicted below.



The one for purely aesthetic, non-structural reasons, and the other most likely allowing light to permeate the high-ceilinged reaches, upon the interior cross beams where dust gathered. In the same light, one images the dust also floated in swerves during the long Sunday services, down to the notice of children and noses prone to sneezing.

The General Congregational Convention document states that no churches should be “temples of taste” (6), and that “a first and controlling principle, then, in the building of churches, should be *Convenience*” (10), and yet just by paying heed to the outside appearance of the Bondurant Christian Church, we notice a few liberties, perhaps poetic licenses. The windows (only half of which are visible in the oldest surviving photograph) are undeniably gothic, five-paned lancets with the recognizable branching frame. British writer John Ruskin would liken the rural gothic style to plant forms. Even without the metaphor, the lancet shape is visually dynamic. Though enclosed, it draws the eye to its pointed top only to send it immediately back down on the journey of its parabolic motion.



Walter Scott, one of the Restoration’s most emphatic leaders, developed a five-finger mnemonic detailing the gospel plan of salvation which entailed faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins,

gift of the holy spirit (Foster). What better way to consider the five panes of Western architecture's innovations than as a unity of those principles. Whether one is on the inside looking out, or vice versa—faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, gift of the holy spirit.

In accord with *A Book for Plans*, the Bondurant Christian Church had a steepled tower, “the recognized sign of religion” (11), although, as is immediately noticeable, the Bondurant spire stands not at the front face of the building but set back from the entrance gable. As was common, the tower upon which the steeple sat was also an entrance. I presume, though, that the main entrance would have been the door on the right, since it would appear that the door in the tower opens directly upon the sanctuary. This was most likely, then, used as an exit. Regardless, both doors had gothic transom windows.



The steeple of the Bondurant Christian Church is equally particular. As is seen below in detail, the dark trimming running along the tower's lantern and framing the window vents (or louvres), exceeds the lantern into the spire. This ornamentation of line strikes me as Richardsonian. It also strikes me that its shelf would have attracted birds.

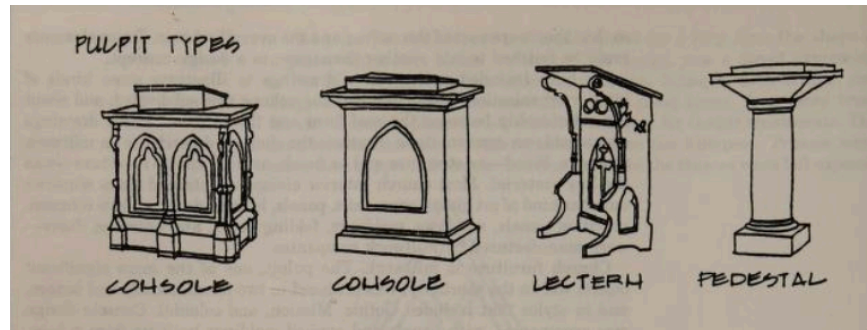


<- Spire

<- Lantern

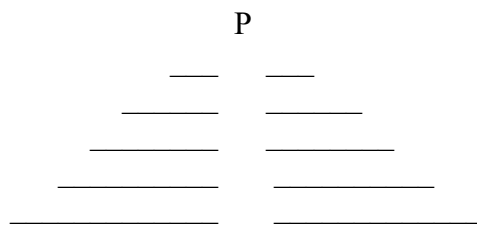
A floorplan is just as much tied to ritual as the arrangement of such ecclesiastical accoutrements as candles, windows, and carpets and cushions. No plans in the volume match exactly those of the original Bondurant Christian Church, although it is probable that it would have followed similar layout instructions. “The place of worship does not demand a profusion of ornament,” the authors of *A Book of Plans* write. Although, if the people are accustomed to carpets and lounges, then the church should follow aesthetic suit. Refer to Adelina’s [\[link\]](#) speculative recreation of the Bondurant home interiors for a survey of these stylings.

We cannot, after all, stand with this congregation in worship, but we can surmise at least the appearance of many of their rituals. Protestants during the period of Christian unity set many of the standards familiar today. The Christian Church followed the conduct advised by its most outspoken founder, Alexander Campbell. Entrance into the holy family through salvation could happen at any time in one’s life (and perhaps multiple times if need be), required that one ask forgiveness. At the front of the church’s sanctuary there was one pulpit for one preacher, a few feet away from the front row of pews. No more spectacle of incense and bell ringing upon a recessed stage, the Word would be given *among* the people.



(from *American Vernacular Interiors, 1870-1940* by Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried)

According to Jan Jennings and Herbert Gottfried, seating plans could either have entailed “two-aisle configuration with the seats arranged in graduated segments, short rows in the front and long in the back” or “a rectangular plan with the rows of seats at a right angle to the wall” (392). I would like to imagine the church had the graduated arrangement, because it is prettier, mimics a siphoning of prayer and song to the single pulpit up front. And one can imagine the Bondurant first couples sitting in those early pews, their progeny expanding behind them.



Baptisms, done in the way prescribed by the church leaders, entailed the immersion of the whole body in water (Webb 155). One of the ordained would assist in the benediction and dunking, bringing the body up again, into the shared air of the congregation, changed. Perhaps such rituals were performed in Mud Creek.

The Altoona Christian Church, as well as similar churches like the [Maple Grove Methodist Church in West Des Moines](#) built in 1900 and [The Swedish Evangelical Mission](#)

[Church](#) in Odebolt, Iowa, built in 1888, seem to have followed exterior Design II from *A Book of Plans for Churches and Parsonages*, with their straightforward gabled rectangular frame and center steeple. Center steeple is, perhaps, the most typical vernacular or rural church style.



I make mention of these churches not in contrast, but in communion with the Bondurant Christian Church. Each church is unique in its design, and yet, instantly recognizable as a place of worship from a distinct era of American expansion.

A Magnet, Split

A magnet cannot repel itself unless it is ripped in half and folded, forced together. Though it pains me to write it again, on February 14, 1932 the Bondurant Christian Church burned down. The members of the church, churchless for the first time in nearly half a century, merged with the Congregationalist Church, though it was not a perfect fit for many. Still yet, in 1937, the two

congregations joined the to form the Bondurant Federated Church. However, assets were said to have been unlawfully seized by the new organization. Original members of the Christian Church led a charge to reacquire their stake and build a new church, but the ruling went in the other party's direction. Those members began to meet in the parsonage, then, gaining members, took over the old Congregational building. Back and forth, back and forth. In 1951, a new Christian Church was constructed, upon the site where the old one had burned. Bondurant the town, in a sense, was coming home again. Its magnetic core never entirely dispersed.

Though does not the steepled tower of the original building take on a particular significance in this context? Only the God who watched over the original congregation could have envisioned it. Placed between the church's two wings, it becomes a symbol not only of the rail that would bisect the town, not only of Highway 65 which would split the town again, but the split among believers. Birth to death, farmland to town, upper room to church—there was a plan.

1. Bondurant Christian Church website, <https://bondurantchristianchurch.com/church-history.html>
2. from *Brief Historical Sketch of the Bondurant Christian Church*, provided by Jan Johnson of the Bondurant Historical Society
3. However desperately I tried to find evidence that churches in Iowa were built cheaply using kits from Sears Modern Home catalogs, I could not substantiate it. There is a steepled-ell home, known as the The San Jose (Model No. P3268),

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With special thanks to Jan Johnson of Bondurant, IA for her assistance in providing documents and photographs from the Bondurant Christian Church Archives, as well as contextual information regarding the church's history.

**History Through The Window:
Myth and the Construction of Community
By Aidan Kendrick**

Bondurant is a town with a history, one layered and nuanced by the personal experiences of its members throughout generations. Stories of love, heartbreak, grief, fortune, destitution, and all possible emotions. Men leaving for war and some returning, others founding themselves in a new place after traveling halfway across the world. Homes built, ruined, and rebuilt. All these stories, still vibrant and palpable but only kept alive through anecdotes and minimal traces in the few pieces of print media left from the times before now.

This sentiment is what my peers before me have so eloquently and painstakingly proven through rigorous historical research and speculation, charting patterns of church movements, home decor, and downtown businesses to cultivate what the collective project of the University of Iowa's initiative in Bondurant is tasked to do: to help construct an ever elusive "Hometown Feel".

To put this into context, much of the underlying pathos of every contingent of this initiative is to produce some tangible product which will in some way cultivate this type of atmosphere. From designing walkways that allow for easy travel to different areas of the town to collecting oral histories to constructing an interactive story map, all are in the aim of constructing this feeling.

However, one would rightly ask: what is a "Hometown Feel"? The issue with such a statement is necessarily its ambiguity as the two words which compose it are inherently personal. "Hometown" not only denotes the literal space one grew up in but in some regard an ineffaceable sense of place, of belonging, which, no matter how far one moves away from said place or how long it has been since they have returned, can never truly leave the individual, for better or for worse. "Feel" on the other hand hits on the notion of affect or emotions. While we all "feel" we do not all feel in the same way, such an experience is individual and subjective. Even if two

people both report feeling both happy or sad, those moments of happiness or sadness will be felt in different, incomparable ways.

However, this phrase has to mean something generally. Despite its personal invocations, it is still an intent that many understand implicitly as a sense of place, a sense of *home*, with all the emotive connotations therein. Even back in my own hometown, Cohoes, NY, this idea of fostering a “Hometown Feel” was present, if stated directly rather infrequently. In all elements of community building, in every action we take to improve our towns and neighborhoods, there is the implicit desire to strengthen this feeling, veering even on the utopian sometimes.

I wish to say something potentially provocative: the “Hometown Feel” is a myth, *Bondurant is a myth.*

I do not mean this pejoratively or in the way that the concept of myth is often slandered and made synonymous with notions of baseless superstitions and mistruths. Myth is nothing more than a special form of communicating, a special type of language.

Myth, according to well-renowned French thinker Roland Barthes, is what is called a sign. A sign is essentially any object which denotes a meaning. A sign can be anything from a literal sign like the sign for the Home Slice Pie Store currently on Main St. to a single word like “Go”. This sign, according to Barthes, is composed of two elements: the signifier and the signified. Barthes describes the relationship between these three terms thusly:

We must here be on our guard, for despite common parlance, which simply says that the signifier *expresses* the signified, we are dealing, in any semiological system, not with two, but with three different terms. For what we grasp is not at all one term after the other, but the correlation which unites them: there are, therefore, the signifier, the signified and the sign, which is the associative total of the first two terms. Take a bunch

of roses: I use it to *signify* my passion. Do we have here, then, only a signifier and a signified, the roses and my passion? Not even that: to put it accurately, there are here only 'passionified' roses. But on the plane of analysis, we do have three terms; for these roses weighted with passion perfectly and correctly allow themselves to be decomposed into roses and passion: the former and the latter existed before uniting and forming this third object, which is the sign. It is as true to say that on the plane of experience I cannot dissociate the roses from the message they carry, as to say that on the plane of analysis I cannot confuse the roses as signifier and the roses as sign: the signifier is empty, the sign is full, it is a meaning. (Barthes 221)

To cut through Barthes's jargon, essentially the signifier is the object which refers to the signified which is the message. The roses signify Barthes's passion. When combined together they form a sign.

Barthes claims that the sign is the basic foundation of language, the communication of meanings through different objects. A photograph, a word, a sign, a place. Different signs create different types of speech. The warm colors of the Home Slice sign make it inviting. The plaques at the old railroad stop (now community space on the walking trail) communicate parts of Bondurant's history.

The myth for Barthes is a special kind of speech. It's an iterative sign in the sense that a new sign is made by using an old sign and applying a new meaning. The warm colors of the Home Slice sign make it inviting and mean that it is a good place for people in the community to congregate and socialize. The stop sign tells me to stop which means the town wants the roadways to be organized and safe. Myths are essentially pervasive meanings and ideas, general conceptual associations with specific signs.

When I say that Bondurant is a myth, what I mean is that the town and the town's history are a series of ideas being written into the traces of historical materials we have and the current making of history through the actions of the residents living there now. We take the signs from what we have, ledgers, letters, photographs, scrapbooks, anecdotes, events, community meetups, scrapbooks, clubs, city plans, etc. and we associate them with meanings and emotions, grief, joy, love, sorrow, economics, politics. These are then used to construct what it means to be a Bondurantian. This is the "Hometown Feel", not an entity which can be summoned, but an air that Bondurant produces through its citizens past, present, and future.

The "Hometown Feel" of Bondurant isn't just a nice new park or arts festival or the construction of a civic campus, but it is one's investment in constructing the narrative and language of one's home in Bondurant, of interpreting the traces of history through both material and oral preservations of history.

One must be resistant then to constructing this feeling on abstract notions such as economy as such ideas only tell a very limited and almost non-specific part of the story. This resistance to the abstract is of double importance in this context for both myself and the developers of Bondurant.

In regards to the author of this piece, I am an English PhD Student, my entire career is founded on modes of analysis which rely on abstract generalizations. I love this kind of work, however, it does strip one of the groundlevel feelings of the issues they examine. A good example of this is a book I read for a class, *Nature's Metropolis* by William Cronon which attempts to understand the environmental developments of nineteenth century America and the ways in which different communities are forcefully tied into the developments of major cities like Chicago. There is one section where he maps which bankrupt businesses in Chicago owed

money to different counties in multiple states in order to display the “geography of capital” (Cronon 273) or essentially how different places can be economically linked through commercial transport infrastructure (like the old railroads in Bondurant). These models have some value, they can be good tools, but they do have problems. Cronon admits to this, perhaps unintentionally: “Sad as such narratives may be [bankrupt businesses], however, their pathos is of less interest here than what they reveal about the geography of capital (Cronon 273). Essentially, what Cronon is saying is that those personal stories, those intimate stories of people’s lives, aren’t of much value for his analysis and this can sometimes be a prevalent theme with the kinds of analysis we do.

When concerning the leadership and developers of Bondurant, they must also heed the warning of not forgetting the personal in their decisions. The development of Bondurant in recent years has been nothing less than a marvel and the projected results of this initiative are staggeringly wonderful as well. Fleshed out developments of public infrastructure, housing, etc. will be great additions to the community and I have full faith and confidence in my peers in both my own discipline and others. However, in the rapid rise of housing developments and new economic infrastructure such as the Amazon Fulfillment Center, there is a risk that the motivating factors behind large decisions may fall purely into the abstract, into actions motivated exclusively by the economic or political. These types of inciting ideas could destabilize and disassemble the “Hometown Feel” every member of this town is trying to construct. *You must allow people the resources not just to invest monetarily into their town, but they must also have the resources to invest into the production of history and community for their town. That is the hometown feel, the construction of a sign system born from the lived experiences of all residents, of a myth.*

I write this not as an indictment or condemnation, I write this to display that this tendency for the purely abstract runs strong through many of us. We are inundated with the abstract daily, money, politics, social media, what have you. Our culture produces us to think in generalized terms, to think not through the eyes of a human being but as a surveyor. I am guilty of this as I tried to show with the discussion on Cronon and how many like myself are trained and I need not explain how many are prone to these ways of thinking such as those who make generalized claims on social media or in politics. It is an urge we must all fight, it is the bane of the “Hometown Feel”.

That is why for the remainder of this piece, I wish to highlight a particular home and family from Bondurant’s early history, the impetus of this essay and one which continues to strike a chord with me. It is the story of the Andersons, one the earliest families in the town, and the love and tragedy that surrounds the construction of their house.

It was on one of my class’s research trips to Bondurant where I had first heard about the house. The members of the Historical Society toured us around the downtown, dropping pieces of history and anecdotes along the walk. Doctor’s office in the old hotel which has been torn down, the American Legion Outpost now a brewery. I believe someone said there was a dance there in the 1980s. One home intrigued me. It was quite pretty, probably one of the taller houses in the town, decorated with nice pieces, one of which designated that the inhabitants had been married within the past decade or so.

Someone walked up to me and informed me who had built it.

Thomas Anderson is believed to have arrived in the United States in 1880 from Ireland when he was about twenty years old. In approximately 1882 he was married to Mirriam “Minnie” Currough and soon they had a child together in 1886 named for his father.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck little under two years later in 1888 when Thomas Anderson Jr. passed away from Measles complications. The Bondurant Cemetery was established soon after when Thomas Anderson Sr. asked Alexander Bondurant to allow him a plot to bury Jr.. Jr. was the first individual buried in the cemetery. It is held as town legend in Bondurant that Anderson then constructed a home near the cemetery with a window facing directly toward Jr's grave so that Minne could see it. It was built with Anderson's signature three window motif in the attic, a motif carried by all the homes he built in Bondurant, many of which were for his other children (DeFazio 88).



The house has since been remodeled and the three windows no longer remain. I had searched for them until someone from the Historical Society had noted this.

The Anderson Home, 17
Lincoln St

The reason this story so enraptures me is that it is the crystallization of everything I have discussed previously up to this point. The Bondurant Cemetery wasn't created or placed where it is because of economic, political, or social reasons, it was created because of the unimaginable pain two parents must have felt at the too early death of their first child. Their home wasn't destined to be built where it was because Anderson could easily transport the wood from the store or other logistical reasons (at least not solely), it could be explained by the horrific grief they felt and for the desire that everyday they could see their son just out of the window despite him being departed. The city wasn't exclusively planned on economic or political lines, much of it was planned by individuals with their own stories and motivations now only available through speculation.

The idea that the Anderson home was built for the express purpose of allowing Minnie to view her son's grave is a legend, a mythical story that persists among the residents of Bondurant who know the story of the Andersons. It is extremely plausible that such a motivation was the leading factor behind the home's construction, however, it is impossible to currently verify it seems with lacking historical documentation. Even the County Home Assessor's official documents state that the house was built in 1900 which doesn't line up with the story and potentially contradicts it. However, the Assessor may be incorrect due to the lack of historical documentation surrounding the home that is currently available publicly.

It is in this mixture of emotions and speculation which truly defines the "Hometown Feel", this feeling isn't anomalous or general, but personal, both because of the intimate experiences of the living and an intimate recounting of the dead. Those moments of pain, grief, and unending love that the Andersons had toward Thomas Anderson Jr. are the feelings on which towns are quite literally built. People move to Bondurant for numerous reasons but they stay because they *live* here, they construct intimate memories and associations with this space, they build their homes for their children, for their families, for reasons which are solely their own, *beautifully their own*.

It is also the mythical qualities of the Anderson story which display the other element of the feeling; communitarian investment. The fact that the Anderson story is fully unknowable but infinitely speculatable provides the resources for investigation, for an investment in constructing a personal and specific history of Bondurant which in turn creates a sense of place and belonging. The Anderson house is a myth of grief and love which could have scores of novels, poems, dramas, etc. written about it and all of those would only bring the people of

Bondurant closer together through a shared sense of constructing and displaying these additions to their history.

If there was ever an overriding sentiment to be found in this essay and the other essays of my peers found in this collection, it would be the joy and necessity of speculation in history.

Adelina's essay on the now non-existent home of Alexander Bondurant pulls from home construction and decor guides from around the time of construction to give a beautiful glimpse into what it looked like for Bondurant to build and live in his home. Catherine's narrative on the Main Street constructed through vague pieces of historical information gives a peek into what life could have looked like in Bondurant at multiple different points in the absence of videos and photos. Cary's analysis of the church and the religious communities of the time of Bondurant's founding give great insights into how fundamental community organizations could have formed, ones vital in helping to constitute this "Hometown Feel" even now. History is a myth we can all help construct, one that ties us together and gives us a sense of home, of investment.

I think back to my home, to Cohoes now. I think about what the myth of Cohoes looks like and how, if I ever return, I can help craft it.

I want to leave off with the poem that is inscribed onto Thomas Anderson Jr.'s grave. If there was anything to epitomize the emotions that informed this essay and its claims, it would be these words:

Dear Parents, do not mourn.

Remember what our Saviour says:

Suffer the little children to come unto me,



For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

He has taken me to himself,

And I am blessed, happy and rich.

2023

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