

Historical Information

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The writer of this short history of Alden knows that it is very incomplete but he has endeavored to tell something of what he thinks were the main things contributing to the early growth of Alden's first hundred years. To really tell the history of Alden to date would take a lot of research to reconstruct records that were not adequately kept and would make quite a volume.

This booklet was compiled from what records the writer has of his own and from stories which he heard many times as youngster. Alden has always been considered a friendly town and to our former residents and the present ones, the slogan which originated when the present dam was built still holds true — "The Best Town in Iowa by a Dam Site."

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Henry Alden, a direct descendant of John and Priscilla Alden, of the Mayflower, left western Massachusetts to seek a new home in the West. In the spring of 1854 he was joined by a young man named Sumner Kemp and together they left Napierville, Ill. by ox team.

Mr. Alden was looking for a mill site. When they reached the Cedar River near Waterloo, they turned north along the Cedar River, then west reaching the Iowa river near Belmond. There they met Tom Bailey who told them he owned some land down the river where there was a good place for a mill.

On arrival at this location in June 1884, they were pleased with the prospects and Mr. Alden purchased about 20 acres of land and the mill site from Mr. Bailey for \$125.00.

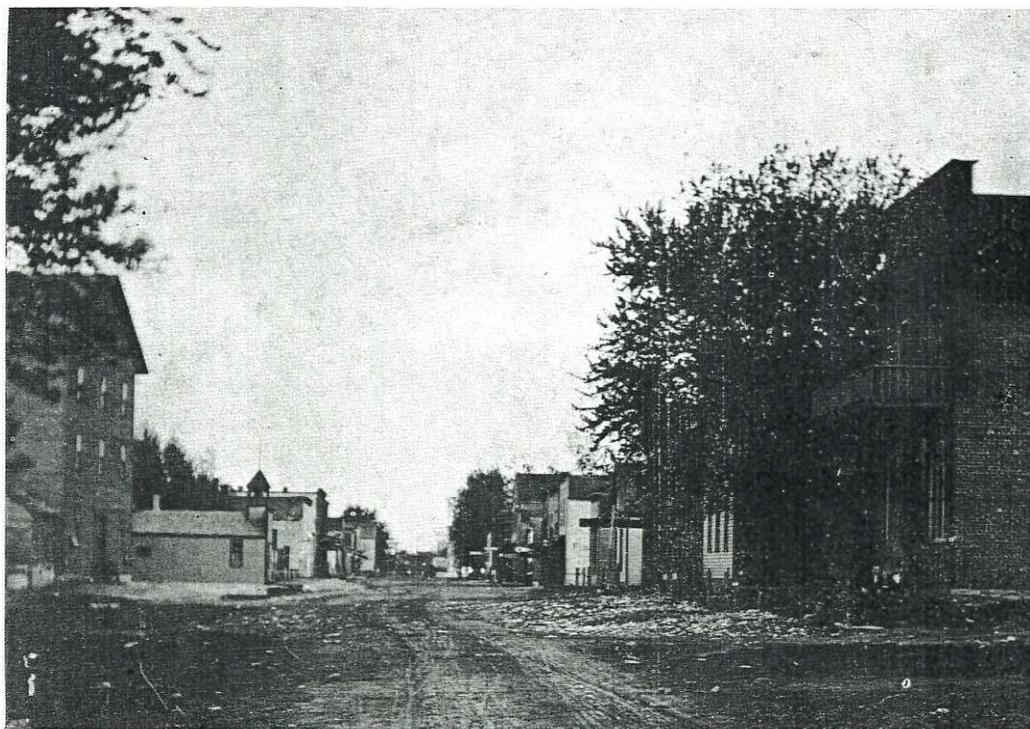
A few days after their arrival here Mr. Kemp and Ira Plummer, who was living near here at this time, started for Fort Des Moines walking both ways. There Mr. Kemp entered 120 acres of land from the government for himself and 80 acres of what is now part of the town of Alden for Mr. Alden. During that summer they built a rude dam of trees with the butts downstream and the branches filled with stones and dirt. Also that year Mr. Alden laid out what is known as "Original Town of

Alden", naming it for himself and later the Township took his name also.

The first settler in Alden Township was Dr. John Crawford in 1851. Other settlers already here were Asher Boldon, a short distance down the river, Tom Bailey, Pleasant Jones, J. L. Hitt, and William Meyers lived about 2½ miles up the river. Philemon Plummer, his wife and 19 children, lived on the hill across the river. All settled near springs. Three other families lived within a few miles of here.

In 1856, Clover's Addition, or Lower Town, was laid out down the river. In between the two additions Central Addition was laid out by Raymond, Peabody, and Hawes in 1857, they having purchased the land from Henry Alden for \$100.00 per acre. Later there was Duane, near the Illinois Central Railroad, Schoenhalls' Addition, River Addition, Pritchard's Addition and South Side Addition.

At an election held on Feb. 11, 1879 for the purpose of voting on incorporation for the town of Alden, there were 61 votes cast for incorporation and 19 against. It embraced the village of Alden proper, Central Addition, Clover's Addition, South Alden, and Duane. The first annual election was held March 17, 1879 and M. J. Davis was elected mayor.



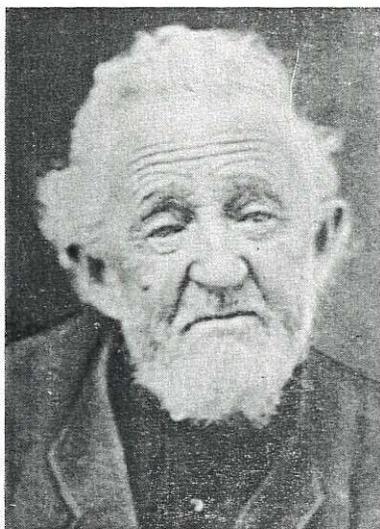
First picture of main street of Alden taken from the west end in 1890 shows mill house at left and Pecks drug store at right.

As the railroad progressed westward the distance lessened. In 1868 the Iowa Falls and Sioux City Railroad, now the Illinois Central Railroad, reached Alden. The Chicago, Iowa and Dakota Railroad, called the "Slippery Elm" slipped into Alden in 1884. It was later purchased by the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad.

Alden enjoyed a very wide trade territory in the early days. On weekly or even monthly shopping days, whole families would load into the old lumber wagon and come to Alden from as far away as Belmond.

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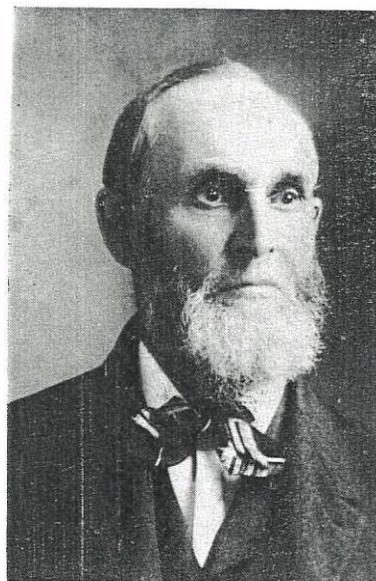
Henry Alden



Henry Alden, the founder of the town which bears his name, was born in Ashfield, Massachusetts, on May 5, 1801. He was sixth in line of descent from John and Priscilla Alden of the Mayflower. While in Massachusetts he was engaged in farming. Coming west in 1853 and 1854 with the true spirit of his ancestors to make a new home in a new country he came to this vicinity in June 1854 and decided this was the place to locate. He entered the land where Alden now stands, began the erection of a mill and dam and laid out what is known as the original, or upper Town of Alden.

He was a public spirited citizen and did all he could to induce a settlement of this place. He gave a lot of money and property to others that they might be benefitted thereby. His favorite quotation was, "An honest man is the noblest work of God" and it was his aim in life to live up to that. He died Sept. 6, 1877. The picture was taken in the late years of his life.

Sumner Kemp



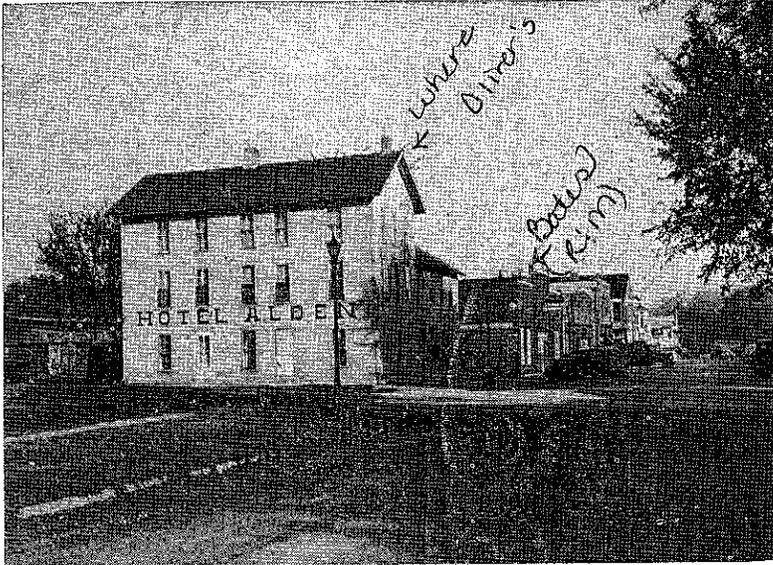
Sumner Kemp was born in Shelburne, Franklin County, Massachusetts, Feb. 6, 1833. He was raised on a farm and had a good common education. In April 1854 he joined his friend, Henry Alden, at Napierville, Illinois. Together they purchased an ox team and started west and stopped here on their intended westward trek to the new village of Sioux City.

He enlisted in September 1861, in Company A, Twelfth Iowa Infantry, serving the entire four years of the war in several of the major battles and expeditions.

As a young man he played the fiddle for the dances around Alden, even walking as far as Steamboat Rock, playing all night and walking back the next day. He was an extremely good natured man and the swimming hole was in back of his barn. On their way swimming the boys would fill their pockets with apples. In the winter they skated every night at this same spot and when wood was not available for a bon fire, they would take some of his oak posts to burn. Kemp merely laughed about it.

"Sum" as he was known served as township trustee for several terms, also was on the town council and served in other public capacities.

His son, John, is still living on the original farm, making two generations, and one hundred years, for one family on the same farm.



Hotel Alden was built in 1869 and was in use until 1943.

Hotels

The first hotel, the American House, was built in 1855 and stood where the telephone office is now. The upstairs, or sleeping room, was all one room. The beds were straw ticks on the floor with the bedding on them. There was no heat in the winter and in the summer there was no ventilation. The story is told that one hot night the transients wanted some air in the room so they all slid over, put their feet against the siding and pushed it out.

The next hotel was the Alden House built on lot 2, block 5 original town. In 1857, at a cost of \$6,000.00, what was known as the Spencer House was built half a block north of the present school house.

Another of the old hotels was the Ulsher House at the east end of the main street. "Squire" M. J. Davis in 1869 built Central House, later called Hotel Alden, on lot 1, block 2 of original town. This was a fine hotel for its time having 30 rooms, a sample room where traveling men could display their wares for the merchants to order from, and other necessary rooms. There was no heating system in this hotel either. This hotel was in use until it was torn down in June 1943.

In the history of Alden there have been several Fraternal organizations that have not survived. At present there is a Masonic Lodge which was organized December 11, 1875 and their sister lodge, the Order of the Eastern Star. The Royal Neighbors also has a charter here. The Collins-Dunning Post no. 201 American Legion was organized Sept. 24, 1919, and the Legion Auxilliary.

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The first lamps, known as "Sluts", had a rag with a knot in one end put in some lard in a dish and then the knot was lit. Before long each family was making its own candles and they became the standard light. In the early 1860's the first coal oil (kerosene) lamps came to town. They held about a cup of oil and cost 60 cents complete and 60 cents for a gallon of oil. Two youngsters bought the first one that was sold, paying for it with a mink skin. This lamp was such a curiosity that people came 30 miles to see it. They were the chief means of lighting until electricity came to Alden in 1905.

The Old Mill

The first mill was built at the upper end of the mill race and was made of squared logs. It didn't have a roof the first winter but by the next summer the saw mill was in operation and sawed the boards for the roof. The mill was operated by a "Flutter mill", which was four paddles attached to an upright wooden shaft, all home made. The saw was a "one way saw" operating very similar to a hand saw.

In 1858 a grist mill was built at the spot where the mill buildings were built later.

During the spring of 1862 an ice gorge formed above the dam and as it went out a big cake of ice took out half of the saw mill and the next cake took out the rest. It was never rebuilt. The grist mill which was further downstream wasn't touched.

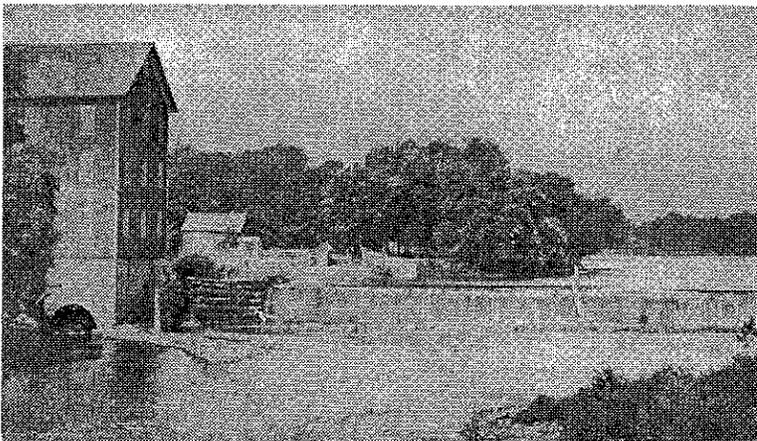
The mill burned in 1881 and Mr. Pagel rebuilt it with a building housing five floors of machinery. He also changed it from a grist mill to a roller mill. About 1895 Mr. Brown, the owner, added a steam engine to operate it because sometimes the water wasn't sufficient for 24 hour a day operation.

H. E. Schultz purchased the property in August 1897 and that summer the dam went out and was rebuilt with a crib type dam with the logs having been cut up the river. This dam went out in 1914 and was never rebuilt. The property was sold to Welden Bros. on March 27, 1924 and they wrecked the building. In 1931 they built the present dam and sold it to the Town of Alden with all water rights.

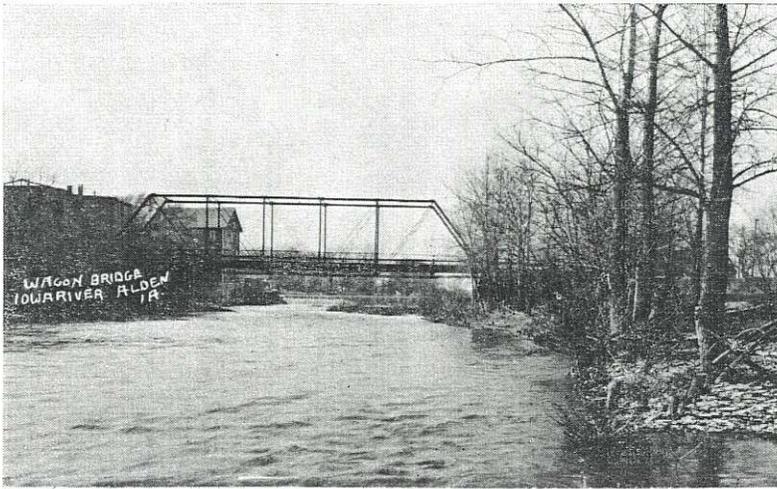
In 1869 Mr. Winch built a dam and a two story grist mill a mile and a half below Alden. It operated for 14 years but in the spring of 1884 a great gorge of ice destroyed the dam and took out part of the mill so it was abandoned and the machinery removed.

A steam saw mill was brought here in October 1856 by Taylor Bros. and Potter and McClure and Co. and located on the Iowa River in the east part of town. This mill supplied most of the lumber for the surrounding country for fifteen years. It was sold and moved to Webster City in 1873.

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The Mill built in 1881.



This bridge built in 1894 was in use until 1935.

The Bridge

The first bridge in Alden was at the east end of Water Street and crossed the river diagonally. It was wooden structure supported by wooden piling at the ends and about three supports between the ends. They were made from 12 inch by 4 inch oak timbers mortised into sills of about the same size sunk into rock. These supports were sloped on the upstream side so if ice hit them it would slide up and fall off. The bridge proper was constructed on top of these supports. This bridge served until Feb. 24, 1871 when an ice gorge formed upstream and it broke it off a section at a time.

By this time the upper town had more stores and business than the lower end so when the bridge was rebuilt it was built in the present location. It was a steel bridge with an abutment at each end, the steel support being in the shape of a part of a circle. This bridge was used until 1894 when it was moved away.

The next bridge was similar in design but had steeper end supports and was straight across the top. These steeper ends made it more difficult for the barefoot boys to climb up and over than the former style did. It had a plank roadbed and there was a separate sidewalk for pedestrians.

Traffic was getting pretty heavy for this old

bridge so in 1935 it was torn down and moved away to make room for the present bridge. At the time it was built it was the only bridge in Iowa with this type of arch construction and it was the first in the United States to be built by W.P.A. labor.

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A Cemetery

The first cemetery was in section 12 just south of the buildings on Ray Olsen's farm. Later the township established what is now the back part of our present cemetery. The bodies that were in the first burying grounds were removed to the new one except one which could not be found. The new cemetery wasn't taken care of and became anything but a credit to the community. To remedy this a Cemetery Association was set up in 1874. They purchased five acres of land at \$60.00 an acre and platted the grounds and landscaped them according to their own plans.

Through the years the Association has prevailed upon the township and town to levy taxes toward the maintenance of the cemetery and by the dint of much labor and money raising they have built up our cemetery until it is one of the most beautiful of any in small towns.



Alden Park purchased in 1888.

The Park

One of the first buildings in town was a log cabin about 16 feet square having one door and two windows. It was located in what is now the park and that is where Mr. Alden's daughter, Luanna, her husband Orra Bigelow, and their two children, Janett and George, lived when he brought them from Massachussetts when he came back in 1855. They made all of their own furniture.

In July 1882 the Town Council appointed

a committee to purchase a park and several locations were considered. On May 9, 1888 the present park was bought from William Pagel for \$400.00.

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A water works system was installed in 1898. In 1914 a sewer system was built at a cost of \$13,496.49 and a disposal plant costing \$2,793.50. A municipal building costing \$6,835.84 was built in 1917. The first streets were paved in 1924.



Alden main street in 1920. Shows but few building changes. Sidewalks are now of cement but street still unpaved.

Early Industry. . .

Limestone Quarry

One of the earlier industries was the quarrying of the limestone rock which is abundant here. The rock served many purposes for all the foundations and many of the buildings were constructed of it. Those who first dug wells used it for the linings and the limestone was also used for curbs and gutters and crossings on the main street.

In one week there were 21 carloads of the rock shipped out. At one time there was a lime kiln just below our present bridge which was used to burn the rock to make the lime for the mortar.

Originally the Hale Roberts Stone company, it is now the Iowa Limestone Company and has its plant on the north side of the river. It started crushing rock in August 1914 mainly for road and concrete purposes reaching a peak of 2600 tons of road rock a day. In the early '20's it started making agricultural lime and later feeding lime, which is its entire production today. This rock is one of the purest forms of lime rock and tests 99.9 percent pure.

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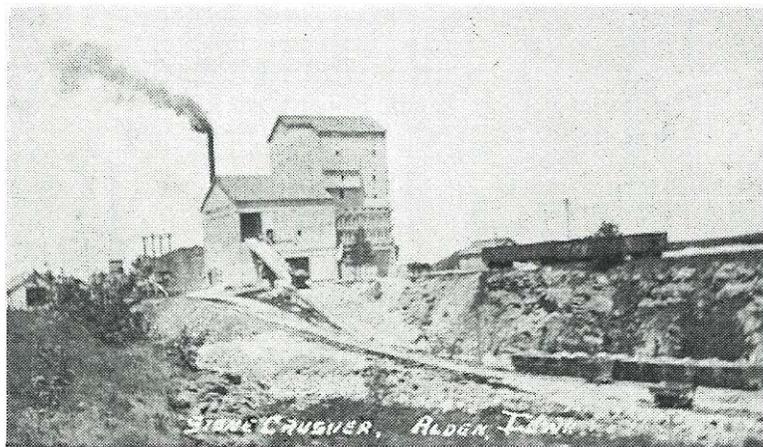
Post Office

The Post Office was established in 1855 with Lott Clover as the first postmaster. It was made a special office in that the Post Office Department didn't supply the office with the mail but donated the proceeds to the office to pay a carrier. The sum probably amounted to two or three dollars per quarter.

The first mail came from Eldora. There was no regular mail service until 1859 when the road to Webster City was opened and the Webster Stage Co. commenced running a tri-weekly stage, later daily, until 1869 when the railroad came through.

There have been 18 postmasters to date. It became a second class post office in July 1950.

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Alden Stone Crusher was one of the earlier industries in Alden.

Early Buildings . . .

The two buildings where the Shoe Shop and Jurgensen's Store are located were built in the late 1850's or early 1860's. The old stone blacksmith shop just east of the library was built in 1869. The building occupied by Jake's Feed Store was the old bank building and was probably built in the 1860's because the bank opened it's doors in 1873. The present bank building was built in 1896.

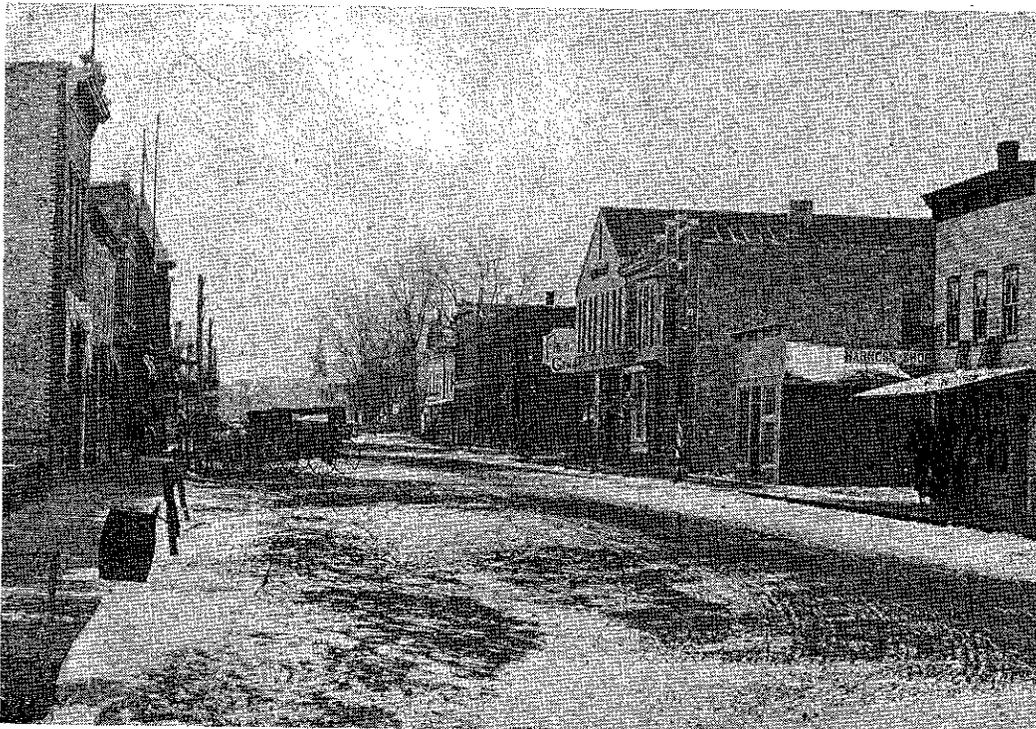
The Shamrock Cafe Building was built in 1868 and the two adjoining buildings in the spring of 1870. The buildings occupied by the Alden Advertiser and the Barber Shop were erected in the 60's. The Idso Market building was probably built a short time later as there was more brick used in its construction. No doubt this brick came from the brickyard a short distance up the river from town. It was in operation in the late 60's and the 70's. The

building housing Scott's Furniture and Bessmans' and Cary Grocery was built in 1890; Nelson's Hardware in 1898; and the Telephone Building in 1900.

The main part of the house that Mabel and Charlie Whitney live in was built by their father in 1857 and the two generations of their family are the only ones who have lived there. The house that Lottie Bucy lived in was built in 1857 and was used for a hardware store.

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The merchants who operated the first stores in Alden had to go to Cedar Falls to get their stock of merchandise. This trip took five days.



Alden main street in 1900. Note the number of new buildings added and also the wooden sidewalks.

A Public Library

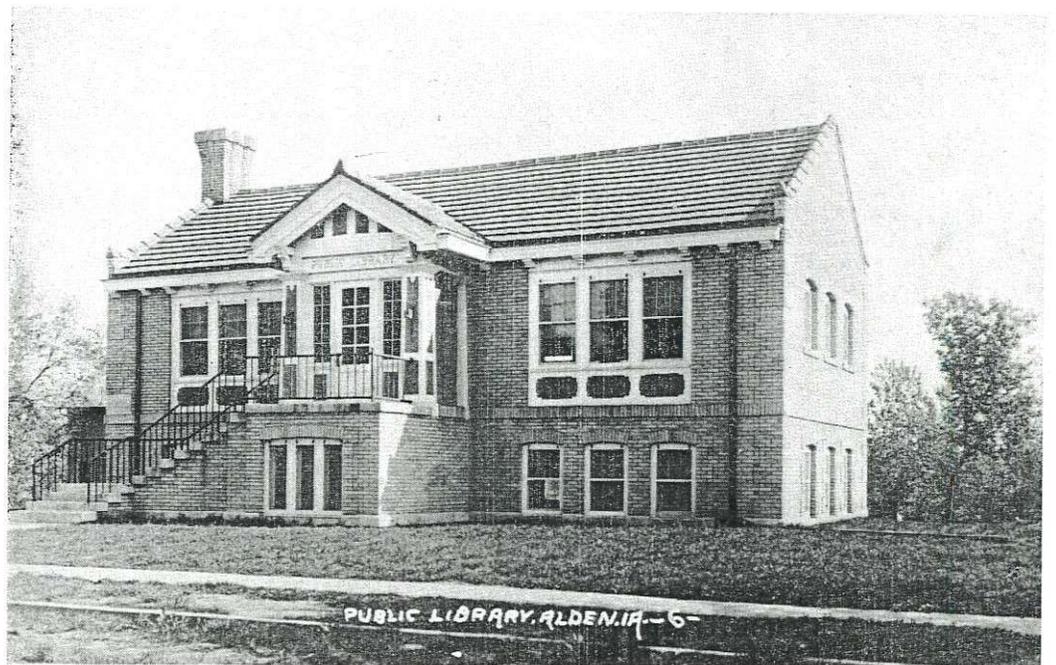
Alden is one of the few small towns that has a free public library and as far as is known it is the smallest town in the world with a Carnegie Library.

In February 1882 a group of Aldenites met to form a library organization and asked for donations of books, 300 books besides periodicals were received. Hard times came and on April 10, 1885, a call was made for reorganization and it was incorporated later that year. The books had been stored in the Times office and now they were moved to the Raymond building east of the bank. The librarians had been volunteers but now Mrs. Babcock had her dressmaking establishment in the room and took care of the books.

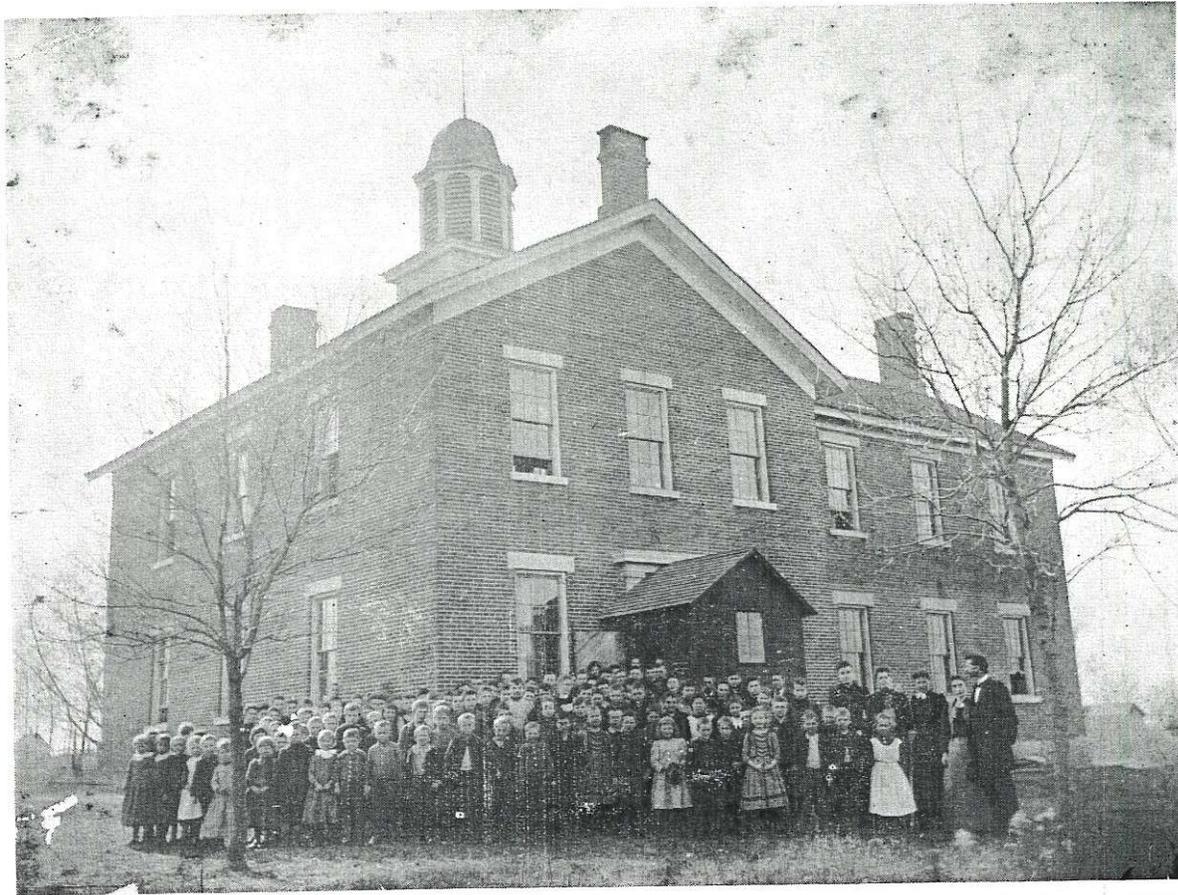
After much effort the society built a building which was completed in November 1891 costing \$750.00 including the lot. After moving into this building the rear rooms were used by the librarian as payment for her services. In 1903 the library occupied the whole building and had a paid librarian. At that time there were 2,000 volumes in the library and subscriptions to seventeen magazines. They also made use of the traveling library.

In February 1910 the library and building were formally presented to the town of Alden. In April 1911 the new board appointed by the mayor took charge and the last meeting of the Association was held May 11th to disband. During all this time the Library Association did valiant and noble service in maintaining the library through prosperous and difficult times and much credit should be given them for keeping alive a source of knowledge for the town and community.

Mr. H. E. Button corresponded with the Carnegie Corporation of New York for several months endeavoring to get a gift from them for constructing a library. On November 7, 1913 they wrote him that if the Council would agree by resolution to maintain a free Public Library at a cost of \$900.00 a year and provide a suitable site for the building, they would give \$9,000.00 to cover the complete cost of the Library building ready for occupancy. The cornerstone of the new building was laid April 27, 1914 by the Masonic Grand Lodge of Iowa with impressive ceremonies and on August 26, 1914 the building was dedicated. There are now 6,850 books in the Library and 56 magazines and papers are subscribed to.



Alden Public Library built in 1914 by funds from the Carnegie Corporation. Believed to be the smallest town in the world with Carnegie endowed library.



Alden Public School taken in 1891.

The Schoolhouse

One of the first buildings to be built in the town was the inevitable schoolhouse which was erected in 1856. It now is a part of the house Howard Calkins lives in and was originally erected on the southeast corner of block 14, Original town. Martin Pritchard was the first teacher. It was the center of all community activities and church services.

As the town grew this building became too small so in 1866 a two room brick building was built. The brick for this building and the next addition were made about a half mile up the river from Alden.

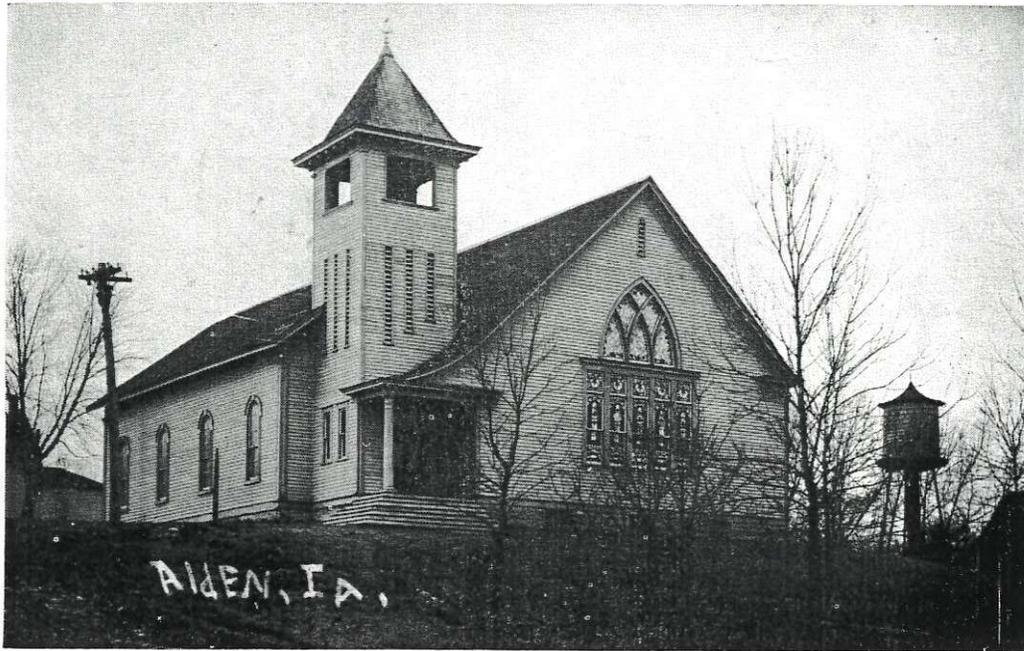
This building was a part of the township school district until March 27, 1869 when at a special election held for the purpose there were nineteen ballots cast for and none against creating the independent school district comprising the same amount of land it did until

consolidation last year.

During the fall of 1877 an additional two rooms were built at a cost of \$1,739.00. The first graduation class was in 1892, the class having finished an eleven year course. The twelfth year was added in 1895.

The last addition to this school building was added in 1896 at a cost of \$5,500.00. The present school was built at a different location in 1924 at a cost of about \$70,000.00.

In 1953 by a vote of the people the Independent School District of Alden and the Alden Township School District were united into the Consolidated School District of Alden. There being so many additional pupils brought into the town schools that it became necessary to rebuild the gymnasium and auditorium including other instruction rooms. A bond issue of \$225,000.00 was voted for this purpose.



Congregational Church built in 1867 (auditorium at right added in 1900).

The Pioneers Of Faith

Wherever settlers went the Bible went along, or even preceded, the settlements. That was true in Alden. Philemon Plummer, one of the earlier settlers in the vicinity, was a preacher of the Christian Church. He held services in the various homes around the country.

The Congregational Church

The Congregational Church had its beginning in the Alden and Buckeye Congregational Society which was organized July 4, 1866 by 25 members who received their letters of dismissal from the Iowa Falls church. The first resident minister was Rev. W. J. Smith who served the church from 1868 to 1873. Their first church was built at a cost of \$3,002.29 and was dedicated in the fall of 1867. As the Congregational Society grew and prospered the old church became too small so an auditorium was added to the original structure at a cost of \$4,877.99 and was dedicated on Nov. 25, 1900. In 1916 the basement was enlarged to make room for a dining room and kitchen. This building served their needs well until it was destroyed by fire on Sunday, Jan. 4, 1942. This old building was on a side hill where it was difficult for the older persons to attend services in the winter time so a new location was secured in the west part of town for the new church. This sanctuary was dedicated December 20, 1942. The building cost nearly \$18,000 and was furnished by nearly \$5,000.00 in in-

terior memorials donated by former members and friends.

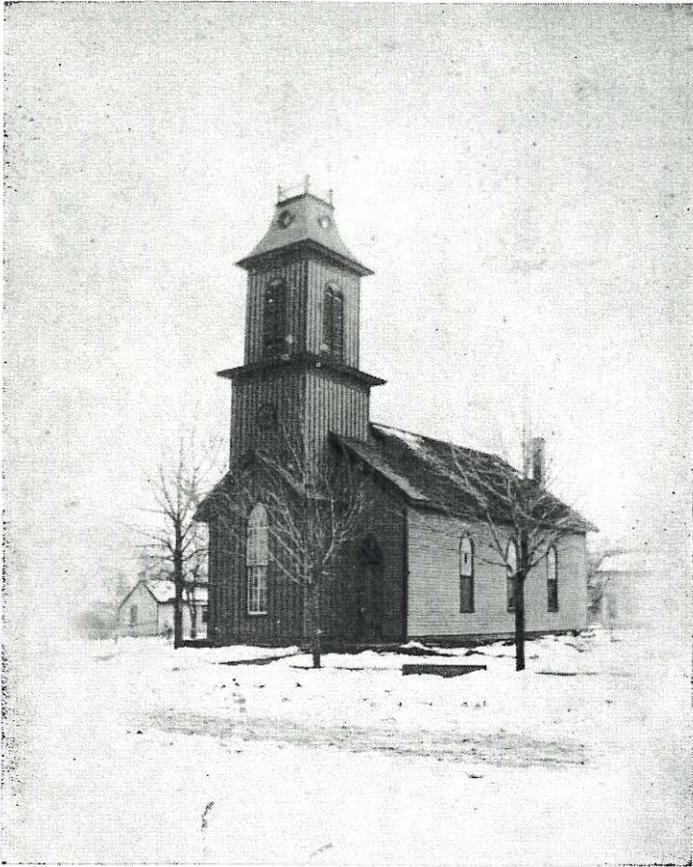
The Immanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church is an outgrowth of meetings held by residents of the vicinity and was organized into a society on April 1, 1880. The original church was dedicated for services on Nov. 27, 1881. In 1910 the church building was lengthened by an addition of 12 feet and a new school room was added on the west side.

The Memorial Congregational and Immanuel Evangelical Reformed Church members voted to unite into one body in March of 1952 and at present are holding their meetings in the Memorial Congregational Church.

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The Methodist Church

The Methodist Episcopal Church of Alden was first organized in Ellis Township in 1857. The Alden class was organized soon after that. The first resident preacher was Reverend Smith Knickerbocker who came in 1858. He had charge of the Alden, Iowa Falls and Ellis classes. Services were held in homes, the schoolhouse, and the Congregational Church until



Methodist Episcopal Church erected in 1871.

their own church was built in 1871 at a cost of \$3,100.00. This building was sold to become the mill house. A new brick building was built in 1903 at a cost of \$7,846.00. This building was destroyed by fire March 15, 1919. Plans were made immediately for the construction of a new edifice and the present building was dedicated for service May 15, 1920. The cost was approximately \$46,000.00.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

The early history of St. Paul's Lutheran Church is vague as no records have been found telling its early years. However, it is known that a mission was established in Alden in early 1908. In July of that year Rev. H. Koepke took charge of the Alden Mission and soon af-

ter organized the Church with five charter members. Their first meetings were held in the schoolhouse one mile west of town on the present highway 20. In 1921 they affiliated with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

They later rented a hall in town and had their meetings there until they acquired in 1923 the property of the former German Methodist Church. This building was used until they built their present \$123,000 structure which was dedicated on May 13, 1951.

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Athens of the West

The Alden Union Lyceum and Literary Society was organized in 1867 for the purpose of furnishing entertainment and diffusing knowledge to the community. The programs included essays, discussions, music and recitations. Some of the debates were more humorous than intellectual but most of them were serious discussions on vital topics of the times. Famous lecturers were here such as Will Carleton, the poet, Bill Nye, the humorist, Theodore Tilton, one of the most famous lecturers of his day, Mary Livermore and others. Their weekly Saturday night meetings were usually attended by 200 to 300 people, some coming from as far as Belmond. The high level of their programs gave Alden the name of "The Athens of the West."

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Liberty Pole

It took quite a while for the news of the day to reach out to Alden and no matter what it was the whole community was interested. The eastern newspapers were passed from family to family and were literally read to pieces.

During the Civil War a Liberty Pole was erected on the hillside north of the present water tower and when good news arrived a flag was run to the top of the pole but when bad news came the flag was flown at half mast. Whenever the signal was given the community gathered at the pole to learn news.