



## 17. How Did the Episcopal Church get to Wisconsin?

As is the case with most things historical there is not one simple answer to this question, because there were many people who shaped events that lead to the church we see today. So for simplicity's sake I am going to focus on the lives of six people and the work that they did in Wisconsin. Some of it overlaps. Those six people were all priests or bishops. They are Richard Fish Cadle, Jackson Kemper, James Lloyd Breck, William Adams, John Henry Hobart Jr. and Charles Chapman Grafton. I realize that in this approach much will be missed but hopefully it will give something of the flavor of what happened.

### Richard Fish Cadle

Cadle was born in 1796 in New York. He was educated at Columbia and graduated at the age of 17 in 1813. At that time you had to wait until the age of 21 to be ordained, so he did and began serving St. John's Church in Salem, New Jersey. On May 20, 1824, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society appointed its first three domestic missionaries, one of whom was Cadle. He was sent to Detroit where he organized the first Episcopal Church in the area, St. Paul's Church on Nov. 22, 1824. Fortunately things got better for him and he was able to come to the Promised Land (Wisconsin) in 1829. He was made superintendent of an Indian mission school in Green Bay, which focused on the Oneida (many of whom are still Episcopal and worship at Church of the Holy Apostles in Oneida, WI). He worked in that position for four years before resuming missionary work. His work was so impressive Jackson Kemper called him, "the real pioneer in the west." Kemper knowing of his abilities in 1841 named him to be superior of the religious brotherhood that James Lloyd Breck proposed. This religious brotherhood is what became Nashotah House. However wanting to keep his sanity, he resigned from this position and resumed his missionary work. He would do this until 1844 when he returned to the east, serving churches in New York, Vermont and Delaware. A sample from his diary suggests what his days were like working in the frontier of Wisconsin. "I have been pretty busy since I arrived here. Last Sunday at Green Bay (3 miles below there) I preached, administered the holy communion and confirmed-----of whom two were from this school, a Menominee girl and an Oneida young Man, both of whom participated of the Lord's Supper the same morning. In the afternoon I preached at Depere a village 3 miles above the Mission, confirmed a lady Tuesday was devoted to the Oneidas on Duck Creek 12 Miles from here. I preached, confirmed the wife of the Missionary (a very interesting lady) and administered the Lord's Supper. It was delightful to see the females come up to the chancel, wrapt in their long blue cloth mantles, extending from the crown of the head to the feet. They looked so humble and reverential. I afterwards laid the corner stone of Hobart Church for them."

### Jackson Kemper

When one thinks about the Episcopal Church coming to Wisconsin the first person to come to mind is probably Jackson Kemper, especially at St. John Chrysostom since we still have a seat reserved for him. He was born on Christmas Eve 1789 in New York State. He came from a very prominent family as evidenced by the fact that his father served as George Washington's aide-de-camp (a personal assistant or secretary to a person of high rank, usually a senior military, police or government officer) during the Revolutionary War. He attended Columbia College and graduated as Valedictorian in 1809. He was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church in 1811 and a priest in 1814. He served in three parishes in Philadelphia, but kept a deep interest in evangelism, even founding a parish in Wheeling, West Virginia. In 1834 he took a journey west for the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church to check on our old friend Richard Fish Cadle. His journal of that trip survives and in it we learn things like, "Mr. Cadle this morning submitted to our perusal many papers relative to his trials & duties. He has been with a meek & devoted spirit most faithful to all his duties." He returned to Pennsylvania, but in 1835 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church elected him Missionary Bishop and his territory was the "Northwest" or what we today call Missouri, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. His headquarters were initially in St. Louis but he would move to Wisconsin in 1844 and purchased land adjacent to Nashotah House (currently known as 153 W. Oakwood Dr., Delafield, Wisconsin). Kemper was very dedicated to the native population

and urged outreach to them. In his time as Bishop he founded three institutes of higher learning, Racine College, Nashotah House and a training school in St. Louis. Beginning in 1847 he became provisional bishop and in 1854 just the regular bishop of Wisconsin. He served in this position until his death in 1870 and is buried at Nashotah House.

### **James Lloyd Breck, William Adams and John Henry Hobart**

We have already heard a bit about Nashotah House and the desire of Bishop Kemper to have institutes of higher learning in the “west.” The three people who would be most responsible for this vision in Wisconsin were James Lloyd Breck, William Adams and John Henry Hobart. These three had just completed seminary at the General Seminary in New York. And in the summer of 1841 they headed to Wisconsin. Their goal was to establish an Associate Mission somewhere among the settlers of what was then the Far West. Their first year out they did not have a permanent base but they reported that they “had held service ninety-seven times during the quarter, at thirteen places, besides thirty-nine services, held by four lay readers licensed by the Bishop. Twenty-one persons had been baptized, including five adults: two hundred and sixteen baptized Church members had been found and registered, of whom eighty-eight had been confirmed and fifty-eight were communicants”<sup>1</sup> On September 1, 1842 they took possession of the land that would be Nashotah House (although it was a lot more land back then). On this land they built a residence and a church and began to educate students. The first graduate was a Swedish immigrant named Gustav Unonius who graduated in 1845 and was ordained by Bishop Kemper. In 1847 the Rev. Kip (later the first Bishop of California) visited and reported, “The missionaries had made one hundred and fifty-eight parochial visits, and had traveled 1580 miles, partly on foot and partly on horseback.”<sup>2</sup> The three founders would stay in Wisconsin for various lengths of time. Breck stayed until 1850 when he moved onto Minnesota (he eventually ended up in California where he died). Hobart lasted about a year and Adams stayed on and taught for over fifty years and for job security married Bishop Kemper’s daughter.

### **Charles Chapman Grafton**

This last one may seem an odd choice because he did not get to Wisconsin until 1888 when he was elected as Bishop of Fond du Lac, but he was deeply influential and is one of the reasons that this area is sometimes referred to as the biretta belt. He was born in Boston in 1830. He served many churches before coming to Fond du Lac including Church of the Advent in Boston. He became one of the biggest American proponents of the Oxford Movement (sometimes called the Anglo-Catholic movement). He brought these sensibilities to Fond du Lac and also to Nashotah House. He was from a very wealthy family and spent most of his families’ money on the church. His brother once said that he hesitated to give him money because, “Charles gives it away at once.” Bishop Webb in a tribute said, “Many and many a vocation to the priesthood and religious life he aroused and fostered; many and many a soul he has won for our Blessed Lord. I think it is safe to say, that his life will stand out as the life of one of the great ecclesiastics of the American Church.”

### Questions

1. How important do you think it is to remember those who came before?
2. Do you think modern clergy would have the stamina that the early pioneering clergy had?
3. A number of those who came west were from very prominent families, do you think that sense of sacrifice is still with us today?
4. The Episcopal Church was certainly in Wisconsin at an early date but is not very large today. Why do you think this happened?

---

<sup>1</sup> Eggar, John. “The Story of Nashotah.” Anglican History. 1873. <http://anglicanhistory.org/nashotah/story.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.