

Lewis Bodwell, circular to the Home Missionary Church

Lewis Bodwell was a Congregational minister located in Topeka, Kansas Territory. He reported that his activities to organize a Congregational Church in Topeka had resulted in 24 members. Apparently, he was working under the auspices of the Home Missionary Church. He wrote that he only held one service a month in a "public hall," as it was also used by three or four other denominations. He indicated that he had preached "in the open air, in ball-rooms and bar-rooms and kitchens." He implied that there was a great need to form a permanent church to aid the congregation by having its own center of activity but also to take the financial burden off the Home Missionary Society. This item is undated and the years 1856 and 1860 are both written on it in pencil.

Creator: Bodwell, Lewis, 1827-1894

Date: 1856

Callnumber: Port Vault K 285.8 B633d 1856

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 5429

Item Identifier: 5429

www.kansasmemory.org/item/5429

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HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Lewis Bodwell, circular to the Home Missionary Church

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Congregational churches
1856?
[1860?]

DEAR SIR AND BRETHREN:

As your laborer in the far west, it would be esteemed by me a privilege to visit you in person and tell you of the progress of your work and the wants of your workmen. As this may not be, may I hope that *this* way of doing the work now assigned me, if not as pleasant, may at least be as effectual for the end in view.

At Topeka,—in March last, a village of several hundreds of inhabitants,—your Home Missionary had a little Church of 24 members, equalling that at Lawrence, and larger than any other of the eight already organized in the territory. It is the *only* Home Missionary Church in a district of country, extending along the Kansas river 70 miles, from near Lawrence to Wabonsa; and from Council City to Nebraska; more than 100 miles from south to north. This portion of the territory contains several thousands of inhabitants, from ten to fifteen hundreds of whom, come directly within our reach at Topeka. Our only place of meeting at this important point is one public hall; the use of which is claimed by preachers of three or four other sects, at least three-fourths of the time on Sabbaths; while during the week the same room is in use for political gatherings, dancing, &c. Thus, I can only preach here once each month, unless after crossing and re-crossing the Kansas, walking several miles to other appointments, and preaching twice; I as sometimes I feel constrained to, return to perform a third service at Topeka. The hindrances and losses of the many months past, in which all have suffered; the small pecuniary ability of my people; the indifference or opposing interests of other sects; with the great cost of material and labor, place it beyond our power to do what we feel the good of our cause and of souls demands should *now* be done. As those sent out by you to care for those in whose temporal and spiritual welfare you still have an interest, may we not come back to you with confidence in your *will- ingness* to aid as God hath prospered you. We are obliged to preach in the open air, in ball-rooms and bar-rooms and kitchens, as we may, and where we may. Nor would we by any means neglect such places and opportunities; but you can well understand why we *cannot* do all our work thus and hope to do it *well*.

The workman of the churches must have *some* place, in which to *bring together* those whom he must now reach in little companies of 5, or 10, or 20, at an expenditure of time and strength in travelling and preaching, multiplied by the miles he must go and the places he must visit.

He must be able to offer to your in-coming children and fellow Christians, a common centre; that uniting them around that centre he may save many from an indifference and coldness full of danger, and from a falling away fatal to their happiness and their influence for good; a fall felt in time and more deeply in eternity.

Thus kept, and thus united they become more immediately and powerfully effective for good.

With them thus united are brought in as hearers, helpers, givers, those who came not to the small, unpleasant rooms where *now* we meet; those whose presence, whose help, is lost now, and with them, as we fear, their souls also.

Giving to your workman this means of good, experience shows that the time is hastened, when his people will not only relieve the Home Missionary Society, and thus relieve you from the burden of their minister's support—two hundred to five hundred dollars annually—but will pour back into the common treasury that which *now* they only ask as a *loan* from you. Doing a work in which as men and citizens, and above all, as Christians, you have an interest; our little churches willing to do *their* part, ask *help* to raise the burden. Great things are not asked, nor assistance to do aught but *necessary* things. Our plan, our hope—the *most* we expect to accomplish this year, is the rearing and enclosing of a small church, of which we may partition off a portion to use as a sort of lecture room until able to finish for ourselves. We trust that our plan will not seem extravagant; nor our work unworthy of a place among your "occasional" calls.

The language of the Annual Report of American Home Missionary Society in its article on "Kansas," speaking of the work which we are now doing, applies well and powerfully to that which we now seek your help to do: "It is for most substantial reasons, that we esteem the early planting of churches in Kansas of very great importance. A loss occasioned by delay is always a double loss; since obstacles increase, while the facilities diminish and opportunities come but once. In Kansas all losses by delay must be unusually great. No pains or cost should be spared, that we may be in season with the swarming population of this important frontier."

BRETHREN:—your fellow Christians come for help; your workmen for tools. Do we ask too much? or in vain?

LEWIS BODWELL,

For Cong'l Church,
of TOPEKA, KANSAS.