

Rev. James H. Baldwin

James H. Baldwin was born in Spencertown, New York, in 1814. Receiving his preliminary training for college at Stockbridge, Mass., he came west for his collegiate and theological courses at Oberlin, Ohio, and still farther west to begin his ministry. He commenced preaching as a licentiate in the Virginia settlement in McHenry county, Illinois, and after a year, became the minister of what is now the Presbyterian church of Ridgefield, Illinois. There he was ordained by the Ottawa Presbytery February 10, 1847. He remained here seven years, when failing health compelled him to give up preaching for a time. On regaining health he went to Wisconsin, where he worked at Baldwin, Black River Falls, Prescott and other places.

In the winter of 1878-1879, after correspondence with Rev. Mr. Stevens, pastor of the Presbyterian church of Fargo, Mr. Baldwin came to North Dakota as an exploring and organizing missionary between Fargo and Jamestown. With one exception Mr. Baldwin was the only English speaking preacher there. At that time Mapleton, Casselton, Wheatland, Valley City and Jamestown were small villages. Jamestown was then a little old dilapidated shanty town, formerly a temporary terminus of the railroad, and which had received supplies for Fort Totten. He began preaching at Mapleton, Wheatland and Jamestown on Sunday and at Valley City during the week. The railroad furnished him a free pass, which continued for several years.

On Mr. Baldwin's first visit to Jamestown he secured the use of a small tarpaper covered shanty belonging to a young man who was teaching a subscription school for his first service, on condition of his furnishing his own fuel and light. He hired a boy to draw some wood and borrowed some lamps of neighbors. In the morning he had eight hearers, in the evening thirteen. The second service was held in the depot, and afterwards in a small room vacant for the winter. In the spring a small building just sheeted up, with not even the cracks battened, was used. Here the first Sunday school was organized. Mr. Baldwin organized Presbyterian churches at Jamestown, Wheatland (which contained a settlement of Scotch and Scotch-Irish from Canada), Tower City, Mapleton, Casselton and Buffalo. Sunday schools were organized at all these places. No organization was made at Valley City. The Congregationalists contested every Presbyterian organization.

After state supplies and pastors were secured for the towns on the main line, Mr. Baldwin established Presbyterian churches at Ayr, Page, Volgate, Broadlawn, Galesburg and Erie. In his work in Dakota Mr. Baldwin traveled over 50,000 miles, mostly on wheels and runners. In his travels he had several experiences in getting lost on the trackless prairies in winter.

During the last few years of his life he organized a church at Hannaford and at Baldwin, a place named in his honor. He preached at Mardell, and also at Riverside, but in neither of these places did he make a church organization. Mr. Baldwin died in Cooperstown May 7, 1902, in his eighty-eighth year.