

When first constructed, "Lindenwood Hall" was the only large building on the Lindenwood campus when completed in 1857. The college expanded the present-day Sibley Hall at least two times over the next three decades, adding wings on each side and a chapel; the large neo-classical porch was added in the 1920s. (Image: Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)

Conflict and Division within the Presbyterian Church

BY KATHERINE BAVA

The case of *Samuel S. Watson v. Robert P. Farris, et al. (six members of the Board of Directors of Linden Wood Female College)*¹ reveals the political, cultural, and religious conditions of Missouri after the Civil War, and it is additionally important in understanding the history of the Presbyterian Church. Between 1816 and 1861, the Missouri Presbyterian Church split three times, leaving behind four separate but similar branches. Some of the issues that caused division were also questions that afflicted the whole nation: slavery and political loyalties. Like the United States, divisions within the Presbyterian Church did not resolve these matters, but instead led to growing resentment and hostilities between the Northern and Southern branches of the denomination. In the case of *Watson v. Farris*, the St. Charles Circuit Court had to determine whether Linden Wood Female College's charter and deed allowed a Southern Presbyterian Church member

to hold a position or make decisions within the school. This case exemplifies many of the tensions that faced the Presbyterian Church as a whole, the problems that plagued it, and the causes behind the numerous church divisions. Additionally, *Watson v. Farris* illustrates how the fight over Linden Wood Female College between the Northern and Southern branches of the Presbyterian Church mirrored the struggle for the nation in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Watson v. Farris took place between May 1867 and December 1869 in St. Charles, Missouri. The plaintiff, President of the College Board Samuel S. Watson, argued that the defendants, Robert P. Farris and five other Linden Wood Female College Board members (Samuel J.P. Anderson, James H. Brooks, Joseph H. Alexander, John Jay Johns, and Andrew King) failed to follow Linden Wood Female College's charter and deed established by

George and Mary Sibley along with the Presbytery of St. Louis, also called the Old School Presbyterian Church. Watson wanted an injunction to prevent these six board members from continuing their plan to hire French Strother as Linden Wood's president on the basis that they all (Strother included) had broken away from the Northern Presbyterian Church and refused to take the Test Oath to the Federal government.

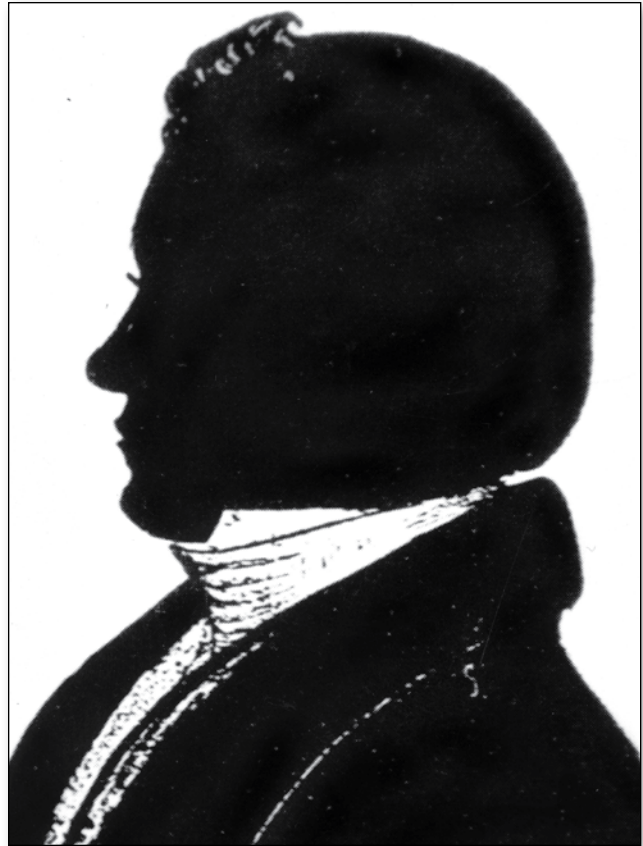
The founders of the college, George and Mary Sibley, incorporated Linden Wood Female College into the Presbyterian Church on February 24, 1853, because they wished the school to be a place of Christian education for young women. George Sibley's last will and testament, written on March 11, 1853, that Linden Wood shall "always [be] under the general control and supervision of the Presbytery of St. Louis of the Old School of the Presbyterian Church."² The charter between the two parties stated that the church was responsible for the care and supervision of the college, and that the officers of the school must continue to be a part of the Presbyterian Church. Watson argued that the specific purpose for which the charter was obtained and granted was the

establishment and perpetual support of said Linden Wood, of a college or seminary of high order for the Christian education of young women, to be carried on by the corporation so created under the care and supervision of the Presbytery of St. Louis herein mentioned: that it was expressly intended that said college should be directly and at all times controlled as to the causes of study therein pursued, the religious and intellectual instruction therein imparted, the person, who should from time to time be employed as teacher therein and the constant encouragement and regulation thereof by directors who should therein represent and carry out the religious and educational views of the said Presbytery of St. Louis.³

The Sibleys required the college's leaders to have the same religious and educational views as the church, so they set up the school's charter and their personal wills to reflect this desire. The college's charter was used as evidence by Watson because he believed that the six board members did not adhere to the agreement since they refused to join the Northern branch of the Presbyterian Church; as a result, they had to resign and any decisions they made in office (especially the appointment of Strother as president, who had served for the last nine years) was void.

The defendants disputed the idea that they were rebelling against the school's character. As members of the College's board of directors, they had the power under the charter to fill vacancies, even the position of president, as they saw fit. The "defendants further aver that they, together with the said French Strother, do in fact 'represent and carry out' and fully concur in the 'religious and educational views' of the said Presbytery and persons,

so far as the same were ever made known to defendants."⁴ Farris and the other five board members were trying to confirm the Sibleys' original idea of trying to distinguish between the Old and New Schools. Throughout the rest of their answer, the defendants argued that the Presbyterian Church should not be biased in political and social issues and therefore should not take issue with their decisions.



Elijah Parish Lovejoy (1802-1837), a Presbyterian minister and newspaper editor, is sometimes called the "first martyr of abolition." Lovejoy published *The Observer* (first in St. Louis, then in Alton, Illinois), which was both anti-Catholic and, later, antislavery. Less than two months before he was murdered in Alton while trying to keep a proslavery mob from destroying his new printing press, Lovejoy escaped another such mob in St. Charles; the Sibleys helped him escape. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

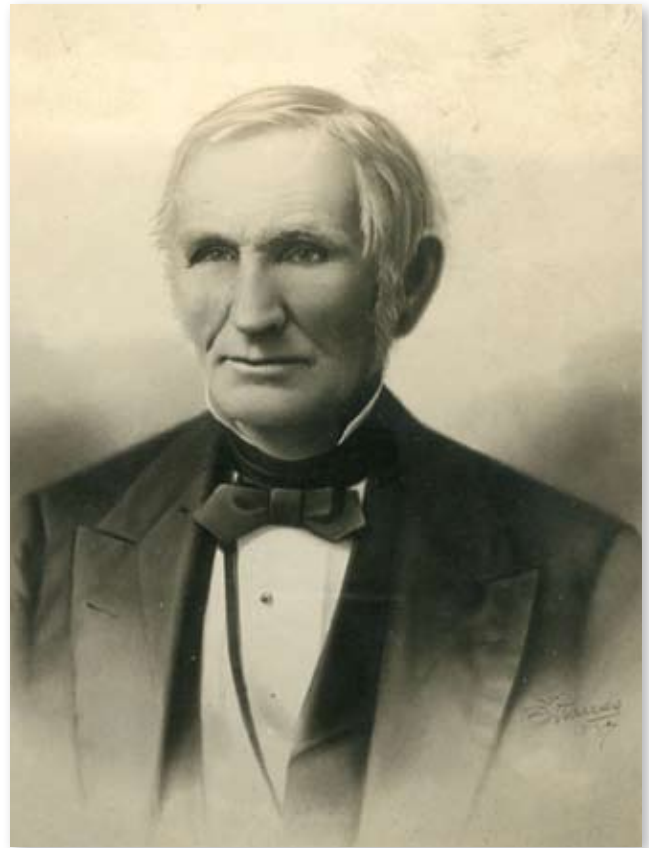
Watson was the minority (out of twelve board members, he was the only plaintiff), but he felt the majority's beliefs at Linden Wood Female College were counter to those of the official Presbyterian Church. Many of the students at the college came from the South and most likely supported the Confederacy throughout the Civil War. In 1846, a student newspaper clearly illustrated the majority's positions. "Wanted—one half pint of sense in the northern part of the country. Whoever will furnish the destitute with the desired articles shall forever inherit their gratitude."⁵

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Who Were the Key Figures?

This court case involved many members of the St. Charles community and Linden Wood Female College. Although the two main participants were Samuel S. Watson and Robert P. Farris, many others played important roles. The plaintiff, Judge Samuel S. Watson, was the president of Linden Wood's Board of Directors when the case began in 1867, but his career as a public figure started long before that. He was born in Pennsylvania on February 18, 1804, and early on became connected with the Presbyterian Church. In 1817, Watson moved to St. Charles, Missouri, quickly getting involved in the First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles, where he was elected an elder in 1832. Governor Hamilton Gamble of Missouri appointed Watson a St. Charles County Court Judge in 1865, a position Watson held for many years. During the Civil War, Watson strongly opposed secession, while still pursuing his liberal educational ideas. He was involved with the incorporation of Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, and the founding of Linden Wood Female College. In 1853, Watson became the president of Linden Wood's Board of Directors and remained an important donor to the college during his life. He contributed \$5,000 to the construction of Sibley Hall and left a large amount of property to the school after his death in 1878.¹ Watson was one of the most influential men of St. Charles County and an important character in Linden Wood's history.

The history of the defendant, Robert P. Farris, is not as clear as Watson's. Born September 6, 1826, in St. Louis, Farris studied law under St. Louis' Honorable Trusten Polk. Not satisfied with law, Farris decided to study theology and in 1852 was ordained by the Presbytery of St. Louis. In 1866, he helped create *The Missouri Presbyterian* (*The Old School Presbyterian* or the *St. Louis Presbyterian*) journal.² He continued to be its editor until 1895. Farris was a prominent member of the Presbyterian Church and the St. Charles community, leading to his becoming part of the Board of Directors of Linden Wood Female College in 1853. He continued



Samuel Watson (1804-1878) was a major benefactor to Lindenwood Female College starting in the 1850s. When some of the College's property was forcibly sold at a sheriff's auction in 1862, Watson purchased it and returned the property to the college; he was president of Lindenwood's Board of Directors for more than twenty years. (Image: Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)

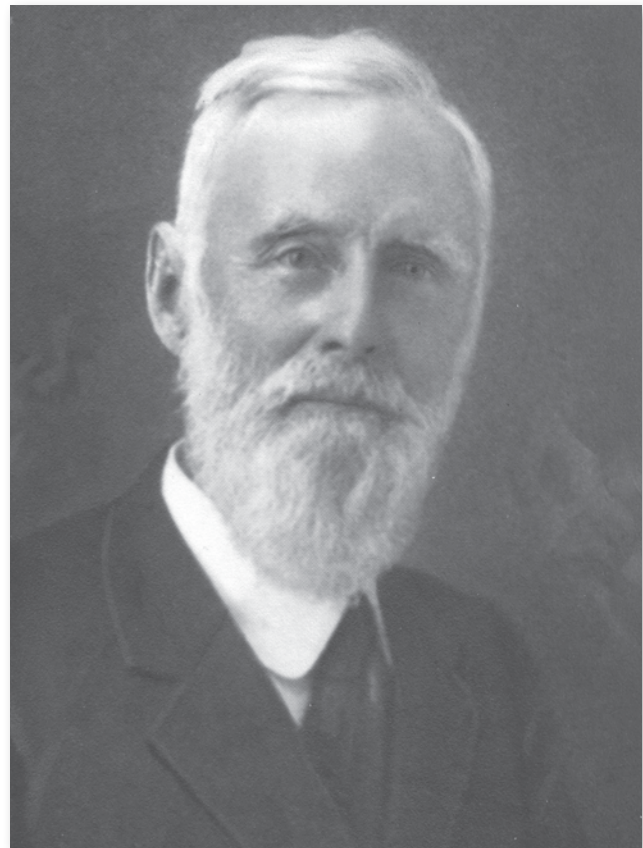
in this position during the Civil War, when he was also the pastor of St. Charles Presbyterian Church. As pastor, Farris strongly believed that no civil issues should intrude with the church.³ But some of his congregation disagreed, leading to a demand for him to take Missouri's Oath of Alliance and to post a \$2,000 bond. He refused, was found guilty of general disobedience, and was put into St. Louis' military prison. Released after six weeks due to a handwritten letter from President Abraham Lincoln, Farris was banished from the state by the provost marshal of Missouri. Farris again received a letter from President Lincoln releasing him from all custody and banishment. Farris continued to oppose the federal government's

influence in the Church, signing “The Declaration and Testimony Action” in 1865.⁴ This document affirmed the Southern Presbyterian Church’s resolution to not take any oaths claimed necessary by the civil or military authority to qualify for sitting in church court. It was unclear what happened to Farris after the 1867 case with Linden Wood Female College, but it is apparent that Farris had a big impact on St. Charles.

Although not technically one of the members of this case file, French Strother nevertheless played a major role in Linden Wood Female College. Born in Virginia on January 14, 1825, Strother graduated from the University of Virginia and became a teacher on a Virginia plantation and later taught in several Alabama country schools. He moved to Missouri in 1855, creating and running Glasgow Ladies Seminary in 1857. He continued teaching there throughout the Civil War (among his students were the daughters of Confederate general Sterling Price), finally moving to St. Charles in 1865 where he leased Linden Wood Female College. He was the president of the school from 1866 to around 1870. This is the time period that Strother became caught up in the 1867 *Watson vs. Farris* court case. Although Watson claimed that Strother was a “stranger to said corporation [Linden Wood] and as your petitioner believes, hostile to the views and principles held by the said Presbytery of St. Louis and the powers composing the same,” most of Linden Wood’s students and other faculty members considered him an excellent and admirable president.⁵ According to several personal accounts of Strother, his strong appreciation of and love for education caused him to attempt to always provide his students with a godly and beneficial education. Strother’s sympathies were with the South (Susan A. Strother, the head of the music department at Linden Wood during

her husband’s presidency, actually composed a musical piece dedicated to General Robert E. Lee in 1866), and he refused to take Missouri’s loyalty oath.⁶ After the *Watson v. Farris* case, Strother left St. Charles. He continued teaching and managing schools in Independence, Missouri, and then in Monroe County, Missouri.

French Strother (1825-1916) was president of Lindenwood College after the Civil War, but lost his lease in 1870 as a result of this court case. A mathematics and chemistry instructor, Strother came to Missouri in 1855; two years later, he was at the Glasgow Ladies Seminary in Glasgow, Missouri, where he stayed until war’s end. (Image: Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)



NOTES

¹ Lucinda de Leftwich Templin, *Reminiscences of Lindenwood College*, 58.

² Howard Louis Conard, *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri* (New York: Nabu Press, 2010), 421.

³ Joseph H. Hall, *Presbyterian Conflict and Resolution on the Missouri Frontier* (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1987), 134.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵ *Samuel S. Watson vs. Robert P. Farris, et. al.*, St. Charles Historical Archives, St. Charles, Missouri.

⁶ Templin, *Reminiscences of Lindenwood College*, 64.

But Watson made it apparent that he saw the defendants as rebelling against the established church and would not be satisfied unless the court ruled against the Southern Presbyterian Church.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States traces its origins to the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, as the Pilgrims held similar principles and beliefs as the later Presbyterian Church. As the North American colonies grew, so did the influence of the Presbyterians; they soon had a scattering of churches around the colonies. Reverend Francis Makemie, “Father of American Presbyterianism,” organized the first official Presbytery, the General Presbytery of Philadelphia, in 1706. This is significant because “the General Presbytery was the first denominational organization on American soil free from European church control.”⁶

Over time, the Presbyterian Church started expanding to other areas of the country. The biggest area of concern was the West—the frontier—which included Missouri. The Presbyterian Church, based on the East Coast, saw the frontier of Missouri, with its abundance of resources, fertile land, and established fur trade, as an excellent opportunity to spread its beliefs.

Problems occurred because of the Presbyterians’ strict conviction that only trained and skilled ministers should be sent to establish churches. Along with the Congregational denomination, “they (the Presbyterians) insisted on sending only fully educated pastors who represented not only the gospel, but also the best in Christian civilization” who “would function in a community as a teacher as well as a pastor.”⁷ In order to overcome this shortage of trained ministers, the Presbyterian Church joined together with the Congregationalists to form the Plan of Union in 1801. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the General Association of Connecticut set up this Plan of Union with the idea that as churches started in the frontier, they could call on the closest pastor, either a Presbyterian or Congregationalist. This allowed scarcely populated areas to have a church and a trained pastor.

The first Presbyterian Church in Missouri started in Washington County in 1816 and a year later in St. Louis. The First Presbyterian Church of St. Louis claims to be the oldest extant Protestant Church west of the Mississippi River. The first Presbyterian worship services in the St. Charles region were held in 1816, but the church was not officially organized until August 30, 1818.⁸ Salmon Giddings, co-founder of the churches in Washington County and St. Louis, also helped form this church, along with John Matthews. The Old Blue Church, the earliest building of the First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles, was built in 1833 and named after its sky-blue glass windows. The Old Blue Church, which is no longer standing, achieved national significance when Elijah P. Lovejoy, the Presbyterian abolitionist publisher, preached two sermons here in 1837, less than two months before he was murdered by a mob in Alton, Illinois. By the time of the Civil War, the Presbyterian Church was well established and thriving in Missouri and the St. Louis area. By 1860, there was at least one church denomination

in every Missouri county, 127 of which were strictly Protestant.⁹ However, by 1861 the Presbyterian Church had divided three times over conflicts in church doctrine, slavery, and political matters.

When the Presbyterian Church was first created in the 1700s, it was under the control of one head General Assembly. The Presbyterian Church participated in the Plan of Union with the Congregationalists and claimed unity in major issues. The Congregationalist denomination had mixed well with the Presbyterians, leading to some of the Congregational minority disappearing within the Presbyterian majority. By 1834, the Presbyterian membership had risen to 248,000 from only 18,000 in 1807.¹⁰ Yet this large denomination did not always agree on church doctrine and often interpreted Scripture differently, giving way to growing tensions within the Presbyterian General Assembly. The disputes within the Presbyterian Church were so well known in the nineteenth century that some joked that “if members of the Old School party tried to enter heaven, St. Peter would reject them on the grounds that they would get up a synod and ‘turn all heaven upside down with [their] doctrinal disputations.’”¹¹

By 1837, the Presbyterian Church was separated into two camps: the New School and the Old School. Gaining strength through the Second Great Awakening in the second quarter of the 1800s, the New School, also known as the New Light Churches (formed by Charles Grandison Finney’s branch of the church), was most similar to the Congregationalists. They supported progressive views of Christian doctrine and elements of free will and were known as revivalists. The Old School, recognized as the anti-revivalists, was more orthodox in nature, holding on to the Westminster Confession and the traditional Calvinist belief of God’s complete sovereignty. The controversy arose between the Old and New Schools over many of these issues. As a result, the General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in 1837 brought up these concerns over differences in church doctrine in the *Testimony and Memorial*, leading to the first Presbyterian schism.

The issues between the New and Old School churches were not only doctrinal. “On the surface this was made to appear as purely a theological and practical argument, but slavery also played its role.”¹² The Old School attempted to keep the issue of slavery out of the controversy, but it is clear that the New School held most of the Presbyterian antislavery supporters, while the Old School contained many proslavery members. This is not to say that each side was strictly proslavery or antislavery, but it is important to notice this divide as the issue returned in later years. Some clergy believed that the divide of the Presbyterian Church represented future troubles in the United States, not only because of a difference in theology, but because it signified a future division over the issues of slavery and religion.¹³

The Old School and New School churches continued to operate as separate churches, with the New School having churches in every state, while the Old School was more limited to the southeast portion of the United States.¹⁴ In



The "Blue Church" in St. Charles, Missouri, where Elijah Lovejoy delivered an antislavery sermon just weeks before his death in Alton, Illinois. (Image: St. Charles Historical Society)

Missouri, the Presbyterian churches were also divided into New and Old School affiliations. For example, the First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles was part of the Old School, but the First Presbyterian Church of St. Louis belonged to the New School Assembly. Throughout the next few decades, the issue of slavery rose up again, this time in the New School. The denomination had been known for its strong antislavery stand, while others (including the Old School) stayed away from this sensitive topic. From 1846 through 1857, the New School Assembly declared the evilness of slavery, the church's disapproval of the system and anyone participating in it, and advocated all New School synods and individual churches assist in the complete destruction of slavery.¹⁵

Not all members agreed with this position; in 1857, some 10,000 Southern members left the church and created the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. This was the first Northern and Southern sectional divide in the Presbyterian Church, but it was not the last one. In 1861, the Old School Presbyterian Church had its own division, leaving it separated into Northern and Southern branches. In the early part of 1861, the Old School, both North and South, still held to the position that Scripture did not condemn slavery as evil.¹⁶ The real reason behind the split of the Old School was not slavery, but divisions over church power and political

loyalties caused by tensions between the North and the South.

At the 1861 General Assembly of the Old School Church, two resolutions were discussed: the Spring Resolution proposed by the New York pastor Gardiner Spring, and the Hodge Resolution offered by Charles Hodge, principal of Princeton Theological Seminary. Both resolutions intended to state the Old School position of loyalty to the Federal government and to the union of the nation. Interestingly though, the resolutions were quite different. Hodge's resolution, which had majority support, pledged church members' allegiance to the United States *Constitution*, along with their support for the union of the country. The Spring Resolution, having only the minority backing, resolved that the Old School General Assembly would declare complete loyalty to the United States *Federal government*, and swore "to strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government."¹⁷

These two resolutions divided the Old School General Assembly. Some members, like Hodge, declared it outside the church's domain to tell its members who to side with politically. These objections did not originate from any proslavery or pro-secessionist sentiments. In fact, it was quite the opposite with many of the leaders of the Old School. For example, Charles Hodge was pro-union and antislavery, although he was similar to other church

leaders in the nineteenth century and did not openly condemn the institution of slavery. The real concern here was whether the church was overstepping its bounds of jurisdiction. Most of the Southern churches of the Old School Assembly believed it was. When the Spring Resolution passed, creating a “Court of Jesus Christ,” the Southern portion of the Old School left and formed the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America in December 1861. They wanted no part of the Northern branches’ political loyalties and did not approve of the qualifications now placed on members in order to be part of the denomination. The Presbyterian Church had begun in 1706 as a large and powerful denomination but had faded into four separate and sectional denominations by 1861.

The Presbyterian schisms in 1837, 1857, and 1861 did not just occur on a national level. These political and doctrinal separations also resulted in individual church divisions. Some of the best examples would be here in the St. Louis area. As already mentioned, the First Presbyterian Churches of St. Louis and St. Charles affiliated themselves with either the New School or Old School branches of the Presbyterian Church. However, after the 1857 and 1861 schisms, these churches also separated themselves into Northern and Southern branches. Henry Nelson was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of St. Louis from 1856 through 1868. He grew up in the Congregationalist churches around Massachusetts and became known around the country as a New School pastor. When Nelson came to St. Louis in 1856, he had already formed strong opinions about the Union and slavery. During the Civil War, Nelson openly stated his loyalties to the Federal government and flew a Union flag over the church.¹⁸ Although not uncommon in his loyalties, some St. Louis members did not approve of his position and his public declarations. Even before the Civil War, Nelson had also declared his antislavery sentiments from the pulpit, which alienated Southern members. Nelson continued to publicly ally himself with the Union and gained Federal support in his church because of his loyalties. Although these Northern and Southern arguments had already been boiling beneath the surface for decades, Nelson’s actions finally caused the congregation to choose sides.

Until 1867, the First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles had similar conflicts, but was content to leave civic matters out of its worship. For the majority of the time, this Old School church agreed to avoid the topic of slavery and to continue to be unified even in turbulent times, as exemplified by the church’s relationship with Elijah P. Lovejoy, the famous abolitionist newspaper editor. Lovejoy met his wife, Celia Ann French, at the Old Blue Church, or First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles, and married her on August 4, 1833.¹⁹ By 1837, Lovejoy had been run out of St. Louis for his abolitionist beliefs and was living in Alton, Illinois. In October of 1837, he returned to St. Charles on the invitation of the Old Blue Church’s pastor, Reverend William Campell. On the night of October 1, Lovejoy preached two sermons at the



George Sibley (1782-1863) moved to Missouri as a government agent in the fur trade, but had settled in St. Charles by 1827, where his wife Mary was teaching girls. By 1831, he built a log structure on the present site of Lindenwood University as a residence for students. When the Sibleys gave the college to the Presbyterian Church in 1853, George Sibley was already an invalid; he lived until January 1863. (Image: Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)

church, one in the morning and one in the evening, both regarding slavery. Lovejoy’s antislavery sentiments were well known and his sermons did not please everyone in St. Charles. He stated later that “after the audience was dismissed at night. . . . a young man came in, and passing by me, slipped the following note into my hands: ‘Mr. Lovejoy, Be watchful as you come home from church to-night, A friend.’”²⁰ That night, while visiting a friend’s home in St. Charles, Lovejoy was attacked by a mob. Campell and another member of the church, Thomas P. Copes, assisted Lovejoy in escaping the mob. Two other members of the church aided Lovejoy that night: George Sibley from Linden Wood Female College in St. Charles lent Lovejoy one of his horses, and Lovejoy spent the rest of the night at Samuel S. Watson’s home, four miles outside of town.²¹ Although not everyone inside the church agreed on contemporary matters (Sibley owned slaves and was not a supporter of Lovejoy’s newspaper, *The St. Louis Observer*), they were still willing to cooperate and be unified as one church body.



Mary Easton Sibley (1800-1878) spent much of her life as an educator, including founding Lindenwood Female College with her husband, George. Mary was a more strident opponent of slavery than her husband, although both were acquaintances of Elijah Parish Lovejoy. (Image: Mary Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University)

The First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles' unification and cooperation would not last forever. The Civil War brought to light many deep-seated resentments between the Northern and Southern members. As one source stated, "Those were the days in this border city, resounding with the tramp of one army and threatened by the other, when patriotism and religion were so well mixed that you couldn't tell where one ended and the other began."²² In 1867, the Old Blue Church divided into Northern and Southern branches. The Old Blue Church was abandoned, and two separate buildings were formed: the New Southern Presbyterian Church on Fifth and Madison streets, and the Northern Presbyterian Church on Jefferson Street (also known as the Jefferson Street Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Northern).²³

The issues concerning this divide were once again a difference in political loyalties. The Reverend Robert P. Farris, the pastor of the Old Blue Church from 1860 through 1868 and one of the main defendants in the Linden Wood court case, explained it as "a crisis occasioned by the General Assembly's departures from the Constitution of the Church and the Word of God."²⁴ One third of the

members withdrew from the First Presbyterian Church in St. Charles because of their differences with Farris' and the majority's beliefs.

The two branches of this church were involved in a circuit court case involving the property of the Old Blue Church in May 1868.²⁵ Again, Robert Farris was one of the defendants, while Samuel S. Watson was one of the plaintiffs. The Missouri Supreme Court's ruling that the Southern branch owned the Old Blue Church and property resulted in continued tension between these two branches for many years to come. Not until 1949 did the First Presbyterian Church of St. Charles reunite.

After examining the history of the Presbyterian Church on a national and local level, it is easier to understand the court file of *Watson v. Farris* and realize why this was such an important case in 1867. Not only did this case involve valuable property (as did the case concerning the Old Blue Church), but it also pitted the Northern and Southern branches of the Presbyterian Church against each other, representing the national conflict at that time. Reconstruction was still occurring in the United States, separating many people and political parties. While the Radical Republicans controlled the Federal government and many state governments, their control in Missouri was especially strong. The constitution passed during the Missouri Constitutional Convention in 1865, and the laws passed throughout the next several years, reflect this Radical Republican domination and illustrate the political context in which this case took place. The Reconstruction amendments, the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth amendments, were adopted in 1865 and 1868, leading to the national abolition of slavery and a new definition of citizenship that included African Americans. On January 11, 1865, Missouri passed immediate emancipation for all the state's slaves. This led to an increase in resentment, for under the new constitution many people who saw themselves as full citizens were denied certain constitutional rights, while ex-slaves gained privileges throughout the state and country.

As a result, Missouri's laws changed drastically with the 1865 Missouri Constitution. A state convention led by Charles Drake met on January 6, 1865, to discuss what would happen after the Civil War. It was decided that a new constitution was needed. Drake, a Radical Republican, pressed for limitations on former rebels and anyone who had supported the South during the war. The convention's intentions were "to erect a wall and a barrier, in the shape of a constitution that would be as high as the eternal heavens, deep down as the very center of the earth, so that they [Conservatives] shall neither climb over it nor dig under it, and as thick as the whole territory of Missouri so that they shall never batter it down nor pierce through it."²⁶ Consequently, the convention created a test oath that required citizens to swear that they had never committed any of 86 different acts of disloyalty against Missouri or the United States. These acts included armed hostility, aid and comfort to the "rebels," and providing money or goods to the enemy in any manner.²⁷ Since Missouri had divided loyalties throughout the Civil War, and many citizens

had been supportive of the Confederacy or had “assisted” them in some way (even if that meant just giving a family member a meal and a place to stay for the night), they were considered rebels and refused many basic rights of citizens. A previous loyalty oath had already existed in Missouri, but this new test oath extended to public and political offices, including schools and churches.

A group of moderate Republicans argued for a wording change on the test oath, insisting that the oath be changed so that people would be swearing that they had been loyal since December 17, 1861, when Missouri’s Governor Hamilton Gamble promised peace and reconciliation to any disloyal person who wanted to return to the Union. The alteration was denied, though, and the test oath became law along with the 1865 Constitution, also known as the Drake Constitution. This directly affected the court case of *Watson v. Farris*, as the test oath required that no one could teach in a private or public school or preach in any religious denomination unless he or she had taken the test oath by September 2, 1865. Even the Old School Presbyterian Church’s General Assembly made it very clear that it would exclude any member who would not take the oath. For Watson, this was the point of contention with some members of the Linden Wood Board of Directors and the school’s president, French Strother.

The 1865 Missouri Constitution was submitted to the people of the state, but only those who had already taken the test oath were allowed to vote. It passed with only a 1,800-vote majority on June 6, 1865.²⁸ The Radical Republicans now completely controlled the state. Over the next couple of years, several other huge political controversies arose in Missouri. The Missouri Constitution Convention in 1865 also passed an “Ousting Ordinance” removing all (loyal or not) previous state judges, circuit attorneys, sheriffs, and county recorders. All together there were some 800 officeholders pushed out, and their positions were filled by Radical Republicans.²⁹ Then in 1868, a session within the state’s legislature proclaimed that the governor would have the power to appoint the

superintendents of voting registration in each senatorial district. These men would then have the right to appoint three registrars in each county. The registrars would each create a list of all legal voters, meaning only those who had taken the loyalty oath. This became a main issue in the 1868 election campaign.



Hamilton Gamble (1798-1864) supported antislavery even when a justice on the Missouri Supreme Court; he wrote the dissenting opinion in the Dred Scott decision in 1852, in which he supported the “once free always free” doctrine. He was elected governor by a constitutional convention after Union forces took control of Jefferson City in 1861. (Image: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

There are many examples of court cases that arose to challenge the different loyalty oaths in Missouri, especially those denying clergymen the right to act in their profession. One example is Dr. Samuel McPheeters of St. Louis’ Pine Street Church. As the pastor of this church, McPheeters “cautioned moderation and Christian forbearance” and advised his congregation to “stand aloof from all factions and only know Jesus Christ.”³⁰ In 1861, one of the elders of the church, G.P. Strong, demanded that McPheeters announce his loyalty to the Federal government. When McPheeters refused to do so, the elder arranged for his arrest and banishment from Missouri. This same elder gained control over Pine Street Church soon after McPheeters’ banishment. In 1866, a Catholic priest named A. Cummings rejected the oath and was arrested for illegal preaching. Cummings appealed the Missouri ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court which, on January 14, 1867,

in the case *Cummings v. Missouri*, declared that the test oath in Missouri was *ex post facto* legislation. This law was illegally punishing people for past actions and therefore ruled unconstitutional.³¹ As a result, the test law became less enforced against clergymen, but unfortunately it was still often used to determine one’s eligibility for a profession as demonstrated in the *Watson v. Farris* case. It was not until 1870 under the Repeal of Proscription Tests that the test oath was completely revoked.

Cases continued to come before the courts over Missouri’s test oath, demonstrating the majority’s dissatisfaction with this 1865 Constitution. Even loyal supporters of the Union were not spared. Francis Preston Blair, Jr., a major general for the Union army, did not agree with Missouri’s Radical Republicans or the 1865 Constitution, and because of this he refused to take the

loyalty oath.³² He claimed that the election offices had no right to question his actions before 1865. Consequently, he was not allowed to vote. Blair sued, but lost. Blair's case was an exception, since he was known as a Union man, but there were many other court cases surrounding the test oath; most of them concerned clergy and churches. The Radical Republicans' belief that it was necessary to implement strict laws to keep Missouri stable after so much turmoil throughout the Civil War restricted the legal rights of a large percentage of the population and increased resentment against the Radical Republicans. Missouri's test oath continued to cause problems for many religious denominations across the state, leading to much conflict and division within the population.

The tension caused by the Presbyterian Schisms and the Drake Constitution resulted in court cases such as *Watson v. Farris*. Although some judges ruled against the test oath, not all saw the Drake Constitution as unconstitutional. The specific court case, *Watson v. Farris*, was one of those incidences. By the end of the case in 1870, several attempts had been made by the defendants to dissolve the injunction and retain their choice of Strother as president. From the evidence in the case file, it is apparent that the judge, the Honorable David Wagner, ruled in favor of the plaintiff. Since Strother also declined to join the Northern Presbyterian Church, he was not allowed to continue as president and was forced to leave his position. Watson believed that the defendants deliberately broke from the Northern Branch of the Presbyterian Church and their decision to appoint someone he believed was a Southern sympathizer was a rebellious act. Thus, according to Watson, the defendants were breaking their contracts with the Old School Presbyterian Church and unfit to be officers of Linden Wood Female College. They were forced to submit to the Circuit Court's decision, thus resulting in a \$1,000 fine and the removal of French Strother as president.

Clearly, the political situation in Missouri and the conflict within the Presbyterian Church affected the outcome of this case. Watson, as a member of the Northern Presbyterian Church and a strong supporter of the Federal government, sought to rid Linden Wood of the Southern Presbyterian Church's influence. He accomplished this by winning the court case, leaving Linden Wood under the control of the Northern Presbyterian Church. Interestingly, the outcome of the case might have been different if property had been involved. In 1872, Reverend Samuel S. Laws wrote a detailed letter to the Synod of Missouri in which he mentions the *Watson v. Farris* court case. During the nineteenth century, the court system decided that the Presbyterian Church General Assembly had "unlimited control 'legislative judicial and executive,' over 'the concerns of the whole Church,' and no civil court can revise, modify, or impair its action in a matter of *merely ecclesiastical concern*."³³ Cases concerning religious matters would be determined by the General Assembly, not secular courts. Unlike the Old Blue Church court case over the church's property, *Watson v. Farris* was deemed an ecclesiastical case. This is why Watson declared that the

real issue was the defendants' separation from the "true" Presbyterian Church, or the Northern Branch of the Old School; Farris and the other board members argued that they were able to carry out the terms of the college's charter, a secular issue. Laws continues in his letter to say that "if the title to the property had been in question, the rule would be different. '*In matters of litigation, where the title to property comes in contest, the rule would be different.*'"³⁴ The Northern branch, clearly having more power after the Civil War, controlled Missouri's Presbyterian Church, allowing the Northern branch of the Old School Presbyterian Church to win.

By looking through the history of the Presbyterian Church throughout the nineteenth century, it is easily understood why the Northern and Southern branches of both of the New and Old Schools had such a conflicted and divided relationship. Not only did they disagree theologically, but also politically and socially. Their relationship was very similar to the one between the two regions of the country after the Civil War, especially in the state of Missouri. The Northern Presbyterian Church believed allegiance to the Federal government to be extremely important, while the Southern Presbyterian Church attempted to prevent any civil issues from interfering with its religious worship. Clergymen like Farris believed that the government did not have the right to dictate who was preaching, for ecclesiastical matters should be separate from the state. In this specific court case, the defendants' eligibility to be teachers, board members, or school officials should not be determined by religious views. Yet, according to Watson and many other Northern Presbyterians, political loyalties meant a great deal to one's religious views, and thus demonstrated whether they were suitable or not for a position.

Like the conflict between the North and South, the Presbyterian Church was divided over the rights each citizen had. In *Watson v. Farris*, the defendants argued that it was their right to appoint the president; Watson sought to have men politically aligned with the North and federal government in that position. In various incidences of division within the Presbyterian Church, the Southern or the Northern branches formed their own denominations because they no longer agreed with the majority of the church. They separated themselves peacefully, for they believed they had the right to leave whenever they wished. The differences in theology, slavery, or political loyalties should have been enough to demonstrate that the two branches' dissimilarities were irreconcilable. Many of these issues caused problems that often resulted in court cases. Watson himself was involved in three separate court cases, all involving suing the Southern branch of the Presbyterian Church. So not only was Missouri conflicted in political and social issues after the Civil War, but also in religious matters.

NOTES

- ¹ *Samuel S. Watson vs. Robert P. Farris, et. al.* (six members of the Board of Directors of Lindenwood Female College), May 1867, St. Charles Circuit Court Case File-Civil, St. Charles Historical Archives, St. Charles, Missouri.
- ² Lucinda de Leftwich Templin, *Reminiscences of Lindenwood College, May 24-27, 1920*, Mary E. Ambler Archives, Lindenwood University, Missouri, 50.
- ³ *Watson vs. Farris*, St. Charles Circuit Court Case File-Civil.
- ⁴ *Watson vs. Farris*, St. Charles Historical Archives, St. Charles Circuit Court Case File-Civil.
- ⁵ *Lindenwood Violet* from 1846, Lindenwood University, St. Charles, Missouri, P:\PHuffman\Archive- Public Folder\Lindenwood Publications_Digital Format\Student Newspapers (1846) (accessed on December 20, 2010).
- ⁶ "The Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 3, (June, 1906): 255.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.
- ⁸ "Edna McElhiney Olsen, "Historical Series-First Presbyterian Church," *St. Charles Journal*, May 1, 1969.
- ⁹ Duane Meyer, *The Heritage of Missouri: A History* (St. Louis: State Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), 284. Paul Hollrah states in his *History of St. Charles County* that there were 146 Presbyterian Churches by 1860, but as his is an older source, so this paper will use the statistics taken from William Parrish, Charles T. Jones, Jr., and Lawrence O. Christensen, *Missouri: the Heart of the Nation* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2004).
- ¹⁰ George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 11.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 179.
- ¹³ James Hutchinson Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Geneva : Geneva Press, 1996), 80.
- ¹⁴ St. Charles Presbyterian History, St. Charles Historic Society Archives, St. Charles, Missouri.
- ¹⁵ Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Experience*, 188.
- ¹⁶ Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 79.
- ¹⁷ John Halsley Wood, Jr., "The 1861 Spring Resolutions: Charles Hodge, the American Union, and the Dissolution of the Old School Church," *Journal of Church and State*, 47 (Spring 2005): 380.
- ¹⁸ "The Centennial of the City of St. Louis," 8.
- ¹⁹ St. Charles Presbyterian History, St. Charles Historic Society Archives, St. Charles, Missouri.
- ²⁰ Paul Simson, "Elijah Lovejoy: Minister, Editor, and Martyr," *Presbyterian Life* (November 1, 1965): 10.
- ²¹ "Edna McElhiney Olsen, "Historical Series-the Old Blue Church," *St. Charles Journal*, September 22, 1960.
- ²² "The Centennial of the City of St. Louis," 8.
- ²³ Olsen, "Historical Series-the Old Blue Church."
- ²⁴ Rev. Robert P. Farris Letter, May 15, 1867, St. Charles Presbyterian Church Papers, St. Charles Historical Society Archives, St. Charles, Missouri.
- ²⁵ Presbyterian Churches-St. Charles Presbyterian [Suit in Circuit Court], St. Charles Historic Society Archives, St. Charles, Missouri.
- ²⁶ Meyer, *The Heritage of Missouri*, 409.
- ²⁷ William E. Parrish, *Missouri Under Radical Rule* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1965), 27-29.
- ²⁸ *Civil Government and the History of Missouri* (Columbia: Press of E. W. Stephens, 1898), 357.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.
- ³⁰ Witherspoon, *Westminster Presbyterian Church*, 8.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ Samuel S. Laws, *A letter by the Rev. S.S. Laws, LL. D., to the Synod of Missouri (O.S.): Which Met at Columbia, Missouri, October 8, 1872* (Columbia: S. Angell, 1873), 34.
- ³⁴ Samuel S. Laws, *A letter by the Rev. S. S. Laws, LL.D., to the Synod of Missouri (O.S.): Which Met at Columbia, Missouri, October 8, 1872* (Columbia: S. Angell, 1873), 34.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*