

### Small Town Social Life

The church and its influence were felt in every home in small-town, Protestant Southern Illinois. Our town, of Goreville, had three. The Baptist, which was sometimes referred to as the 'once in Gracers', the Methodist, which was otherwise known as the 'backsliders', and the Presbyterians. You'll notice that the first two got their vulgar names from the tenets of their faith, which distinguishes them. The Presbyterians were so strict and sophisticated that somehow, a nickname seemed unbecoming.

Southern Illinois' first religion with Christian emphasis came when the missionaries introduced Catholicism two hundred years earlier. Now, few Catholics, comparatively, lived in Southern Illinois. I remember when a native local boy who'd married a Catholic and had accepted Catholicism himself, returned to Goreville to live. A Protestant minister from our fair city paid them a welcoming visit, and invited them to his church. The newcomers advised him that they were not the least bit interested in attending his church. Word of their curt behavior spread like wildfire. Since I'd never even seen a Catholic, I made it my business to look the family over carefully to see if there were any identifying characteristics I should be aware of.

Singing Conventions were in their hey-day in the '20s. Each church seemed to compete with the others to see who could have the most successful one. Besides, they'd inadvertently hit upon a gold mine. People came from miles around, brought their dinner, and had 'fellowship singing God's praise'. Often the host minister lead in devotions. At the end of the service a collection was taken. This paid the cost of the imported singers and helped with other expenses the church had accumulated.