

ANNALS OF IOWA
JULY, 1870.

ROBERT LUCAS, THE FIRST GOVERNOR OF IOWA

(Conclusion.)

Concerning the boundary difficulty between Iowa and Missouri, Governor Lucas, on the 3d of October, 1839, wrote to the secretary of state, saying it seemed to be his misfortune to be drawn irresistibly into a controversy with the authorities of the state of Missouri, and inclosing copies of his own proclamations and the proclamation of Governor Boggs, of Missouri, together with copies of acts of the Missouri legislature touching the matter, and complaints of the county commissioners of Van Buren county, Iowa.

In those days the mails traveled in slow and uncertain coaches, and the governor, therefore, determined to dispatch to Washington a discreet and intelligent special messenger, who, besides bearing his communications with safety and celerity, would be able to explain satisfactorily the condition of affairs to the authorities at Washington. James M. Morgan, or, as he was nicknamed, on account of his rather small stature and vermilion hair, "Little Red," who was afterwards editor of the *Burlington Gazette*, was selected for this responsible duty; and on the 9th of December started from Burlington for Washington, with a detailed statement of the condition of affairs in writing by the governor. But "Little Red" was only four days on his journey, when the situation having become suddenly more threatening, the governor, on the 13th of December, forwarded another communication to Washington, giving additional information, requesting instructions how to act, and inclosing the affidavit of Stephen Whitcher, Jr., a lawyer residing in Muscatine, who had just returned from a visit to the scene of difficulty, setting forth the fact that the state of Missouri had actually embodied an armed force for the invasion of Iowa.

The legislature of Iowa, perhaps intending to pour oil upon the troubled waters, passed a preamble and resolutions of so conciliatory a temper that in effect they surrendered the point at issue to the Missouri authorities. They were entitled "Preamble and Resolutions relative to the difficulty between the territory of Iowa and the state of Missouri." The governor, whose message to the legislature vetoing them, was dated December 6th, 1839, had no further to look than to their title for a reason for withholding his signature from them; for he said that he recognized no difficulty between *Iowa* and Missouri, but that the controversy was between that state and the *United States*. The Governor of Missouri, nevertheless, seems to have taken advantage of their passage by the legislature by publishing them, and leaving the inference to be drawn that they embraced the sense of the territorial government of Iowa on the subject; whereas they had no such significance without the sanction of the governor.

However, the Missouri authorities, seeing the firm stand taken by Governor Lucas, soon after began to relax their grasp, and the result of the whole proceedings, which had kept both Iowa and Missouri in a state of turmoil for more than a year, was that Sheriff Heffleman, of Clark county, Missouri, was arrested by the sheriff of Van Buren county, Iowa; and, to avoid excitement and the possibility of an attempt at rescue by the Missouri partizans, was brought to Burlington, where he had an interview with Governor Lucas. The governor extended to him kind words and a conciliatory manner, promising, so far as he could in his executive capacity, to

shield him from the consequences of his attempt, in obedience to the mad-cap acts passed by the Missouri legislature, to discharge official duties in Iowa that should have been confined to Missouri. Heffleman declined to enter into recognizances, as suggested by the Iowa authorities; but, notwithstanding this, was not imprisoned, but was nominally in the custody of the sheriff of Muscatine county, and boarded with Josiah Parvin (father of Prof. T. S. Parvin), and, as his host, like others of a later generation of the same name, was distinguished, among other commendable qualities, for hospitality and generous fare, no tears need be shed at this present writing over his captivity. The excitement resulting from his arrest gradually subsided, till on the 3d of November, 1840, Governor Lucas had the satisfaction to formally and officially announce that it had ceased altogether, and that the cordial and fraternal feeling which should ever mark the intercourse of the citizens of the several states was fully restored between the people of Iowa and Missouri.

The arrest of Heffleman was the culmination of the controversy. Missouri, having followed bad councils, and with much pomp and bluster precipitated a state of affairs bordering on civil war, like all braggarts, was in the end most completely defeated and deeply humiliated, and the judgment and conduct of Governor Lucas was signally, though tardily, vindicated in the end, by a decision of the supreme court of the United States, rendered in December, 1848, giving to Iowa all the territory ever claimed for her by her first governor.

Governor Lucas announced in his message of November 5th, 1839, to the legislative assembly, that the territory of Iowa had advanced since its organization in improvement, wealth, and population (which latter was estimated at fifty thousand), without a parallel in history, and recommended the necessary legislation preparatory to the formation of a state government. The governor's recommendation was followed by the legislature, but the proposition to form a state government for Iowa was overruled by the people, and only consummated in 1846.

Among the latest of Governor Lucas's official acts in his capacity of executive, was a proclamation, dated the 30th of April, 1841, calling the legislature to assemble, for the first time, at Iowa City, the new capital, on the first Monday of December succeeding, in accordance with a legislative act passed at the previous session, changing the time for the meeting of the legislature, and authorizing the governor to proclaim Iowa City the capital as soon as the new state house should be in a sufficient state of completion to give shelter to the assembly, or suitable buildings for its meetings could be procured here.

The democratic administration of Van Buren having given place to the whig government of Harrison, on the 25th of March, 1841, John Chambers was appointed territorial governor of Iowa, to succeed Governor Lucas, whose term would have at any rate come to a close by limitation on the 4th of July succeeding. The letter of Governor Lucas to Daniel Webster, then secretary of state under Tyler (who by this time had become president), is dated June 18th, 1841, and informs the administration that he had turned over his office to his successor, and also contains a pretty sharp side thrust at Chambers for the apparently discourteous manner in which he had taken possession of the executive office in Lucas's temporary absence, and without calling on, or in any way notifying him of his presence or authority. This ought, however, to have been overlooked and excused by Lucas, as it was no doubt attributable to ignorance of official etiquette on the part of Chambers; for it was long since the whigs had had a chance at office, and they had lost the knack of taking hold, like a half-weaned child that retains the old thirst, but has awkwardly forgotten the manner of gratifying it.

After retiring from the office of governor of Iowa, Governor Lucas removed to the land, adjoining Iowa City on the southeast, which he had purchased from the government when it was

first brought into market, where he spent the most of his remaining days in the management of his farm, the care of his family, and the education of his children. From these grateful employments he was to some extent withdrawn for a time by the people of Johnson and Iowa counties, who elected him as one of their members of the first state constitutional convention; Hon. S. H. McCrory and Hon. Henry Felkner (the latter now a resident of Muscatine county, and the former still living in Johnson county), being his colleagues from this district. He was also a member of the first board of trustees of the state university.

From early youth, Governor Lucas had been a devoted and consistent member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and consecrated much time to the composition of hymns and verses of a religious character, many of which are by no means destitute of true poetical merit.

In looking back upon the vista of a long and useful life, there were no material points in his eventful career to be regretted. Starting on the errand of life in the dense forests of Ohio, with the surveyor's chain and compass in his hands, these instruments seem to have suggested the high resolve, never once relaxed, to direct his private steps and official walks in straight lines, regardless of personal consequences.

He had a clear insight into the future, and predicted, on account of slavery, the civil war, which since his death has steeped the land in blood. Of a truly courageous and independent spirit, although warmly attached to the political party whose principles he had espoused in youth he did not hesitate to sever his connection with it when he conceived its course reprehensible, as he did when he withdrew his support from the presidential nominee of his party in 1852. This trait of his character is also well demonstrated in his calm devotion to the dictates of duty during the boundary difficulties with Missouri, while the legislative assembly was petitioning the president for his removal, and the secretary of the territory was intriguing for his displacement.

His abnegation and heroism are evinced by an episode in his military services, while attached to Hull's army. In a retreat, after a disastrous engagement with the British and Indians, one Stockton, a mounted man, had his horse badly wounded in the head, which caused the animal to plunge about till he had covered his rider with blood and then thrown him off. Governor Lucas, who at the time was acting in the capacity of a brigadier general, and with a few brave militia was covering the retreat and keeping the enemy in check, seeing the horseman rise stunned and bleeding, uncertain what to do and unable to proceed, and apparently badly wounded, without hesitation instantly dismounted and helping Stockton into his own saddle, pointed the way, and told him to make his escape as fast as his horse could carry him. This delay left Governor Lucas on foot and the very last man on the retreat, exposed to the deadly fire of the pressing Indian enemy, from whose showers of rifle balls he was only miraculously protected.

Thus, at the hazard of his own life, he saved that of a fellow-soldier, though an entire stranger to him.

In person, Governor Lucas was tall, being six feet in stature, active and wiry. His complexion presented that combination of colors rarely blended—black hair, a fair skin, and blue eyes. His aquiline nose was long and thin. Though stern in camp and council, in private life he was exceedingly gentle, pleasant and kind, the companion of children and the friend of boys, though his daughters contend that he loved his girl the best, while all agree that he was the best of play-fellows. It is therefore unnecessary to add that he was an indulgent father as well as an affectionate husband. All men who knew him, even those who differed from him on questions of public polity, accord to him native ability of a high order, incorruptible honesty of purpose, and

unswerving patriotism.

In habits, Governor Lucas bordered on the ascetic, abstaining from alcohol in all its forms, from hard cider to modern whiskey, and was a member of the first temperance society organized in the United States. Though not rich in humor or wit, he was an exceedingly eloquent and popular stump speaker. Leaving the field of anecdote and pleasantries to others, he dealt in sledge-hammer facts and argument, pressed in a fluent and earnest manner, which carried the crowd.

His death was not the result of disease, but from exhaustion and the weight of years. His physicians, M. J. Morsman, M. D., and Henry Murray, M. D., of Iowa City, were assiduous in their attentions to him. But only "seventy years are allotted to man," and he had already exceeded this term by nearly two years. On the 7th of February, 1853, full of years and honors, gray-haired and venerable, in the presence of all the members of his family save one, without regrets, struggles, or objections, he quietly passed earth's boundary line, more unchangeably fixed for us all than that of Missouri or Michigan, to the confines of immortality.

On the following day his body was consigned to the cemetery adjoining Iowa City on the northeast, where he awaits the resurrection, and where the place of his rest is marked by a four-sided marble shaft, bearing on the west side, besides the keystone and other emblems of masonic mysteries, illegible except to exalted members of that benevolent order this inscription:

ROBERT LUCAS,

DIED

Feb. 7. 1853,

AGED

71 ys. 10 ms. and 6 ds.

HE SERVED HIS COUNTRY IN
THE WAR OF 1812,
WAS ELECTED TWICE GOVERNOR OF OHIO,
AND WAS THE ORGANIC GOVERNOR OF IOWA TERRITORY.

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE;
HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE.

His death occurred just as the Sabbath night had worn into the morn of Monday. Charles Cartwright and Col. Trowbridge composed his body for the grave. The funeral took place the succeeding Tuesday, and was numerously attended—the religious services being conducted at the Methodist church, on the corner of Dubuque and Jefferson streets, by the pastor, the Rev. Thomas E. Corkhill, and at the grave by the masonic order, of which he was a member of high rank under the superintendence of Hon. E. Clark; and Col. S. C. Trowbridge. The procession from the church to the cemetery was one of genuine mourners, who had no need of black crape or other factitious signs of woe, to indicate their grief, as they followed the dead governor, on whose coffin lay the sword so gallantly won and worn in the second war for independence, and which he had bequeathed to whichever of his grandsons should first bear arms in defense of his

country.

As the future qualities of organic matter, animal or vegetable, are foreshadowed in the germ, so is it with states. Who will say that many of the qualities which have made citizens of Iowa pre-eminent in camp or cabinet may not be due, remotely, to the impulse given the young territory by her first governor? He earnestly advocated the common school system, and to-day our prairies are decked with school houses, dotted with colleges, and crowned with two universities. He laid it down as an inflexible rule for his official action that no gambler or drunkard should receive an executive appointment during his term, and Iowa was among the first of the states to enact a prohibitory liquor law by the popular voice, and the worst forms of gambling are, to a great extent, banished from the State. He strongly advised an early and thorough organization of the militia, and though parade has been dispensed with, the latent martial spirit was such that scarcely a great feat of the late tremendous struggle can be recounted by the historical without recording the transcendent valor of some Iowa corps.

It only remains to be added that, as an indication of the appreciation in which his services are held, and the future interest to be taken in his memory, the Historical Society, aside from this brief and very imperfect sketch of Governor Lucas, and his portrait published in the January number of the ANNALS (copies of which are already being sought by those who hold his memory dear in other states), possesses a life-like and life-size portrait of him, painted by an Iowa artist Mr. George E. Yewell, which adorns the library room of the society.