

ANNALS OF IOWA

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ROBERT LUCAS, THE FIRST GOVERNOR OF IOWA

We publish as a frontispiece to this number of the Annals, a steel-engraved portrait of Robert Lucas, the first governor of Iowa. To those of our readers who settled in Iowa in her territorial days, this bare announcement will be sufficient to recall the romance of pioneer life as it existed thirty years ago, before railroads and telegraphs were in requisition to maintain magnetic sympathy between the western squatter and his eastern kin. Frontier life, such as it was then, is past and gone forever,—swept away by modern ingenuity and innovation. The log-heap blazing in the clearing, the ax-man's strokes re-echoing in the forest, the yoke-galled ox straining before the unhewn log which, "like a wounded snake, draws its slow length along," to form the settler's cabin, the log house in the grove, the variegated prairie scene of fire, flower or flock, the lazy Indian strolling over the trail or plying the canoe, the prairie sod-house,—these and the like, indeed still have a transitory existence, but are so soon erased by the encroachments of impatient civilization, that all the spice of primitive life, depending so much for its charms on the romance of danger and long-supported privation, has taken unto itself wings and fled forever.

Robert Lucas, the subject of this very imperfect sketch, was the fourth son and ninth child of William and Susannah Lucas, and was born April 1st, 1781, in Jefferson valley, at Shepherdstown, Jefferson county, Virginia, a few miles from Harper's Ferry, where his ancestors settled more than a hundred years ago. His father, who was descended from William Penn, was born January 18th, 1743, and his mother, of Scotch extraction, October 8th, 1745. They were married about the year 1760, and reared a family of six sons and six daughters. His father, who had served as a captain in the continental army during the revolutionary war, and had distinguished himself at the battle of Bloody Run, emigrated with his family to Scioto county, Ohio, at the very beginning of the present century. In leaving the slave state of Virginia for the free embryo commonwealth of Ohio, which had not as yet been admitted into the Union, the elder Lucas performed one of those noble and generous acts so characteristic of the better class of those who were bred under the patriarchal system in the olden time. He freed every one of his adult slaves who wished to remain in Virginia, and provided for the younger ones, most of whom he took with him to Ohio, till they became of legal age and able to support themselves.

The early education of Gov. Lucas was obtained chiefly before leaving Virginia, from an old Scotch schoolmaster named McMullen, who taught him mathematics and surveying, the latter affording him remunerative employment immediately upon his entrance into the new and unchained country of Ohio.

On the 3d of April, 1810, Gov. Lucas was married at Portsmouth, the county seat of Scioto county, to Elizabeth Brown, who died Oct. 18th, 1812, leaving an infant daughter, who still survives in the person of Mrs. Minerva E. B. Sumner, of West Liberty, Muscatine county, Iowa. After remaining a widower more than three years, he gracefully complied with the admonition, "It is not good for man to be alone," by forming, March 7th, 1816, a second matrimonial alliance;—this time with Friendly

A. Sumner, then a captivating young lady of twenty years, a native of Vermont, but who had recently immigrated to Ohio with her father's family from Haverhill, Coos county, New Hampshire, and who still survives him,—a courtly, portly, well-preserved, hospitable lady of seventy-four. Of this marriage, there were four sons and three daughters, of whom two sons and two daughters are living, namely Edward W. Lucas, late lieutenant colonel of the 14th Iowa volunteers, Robert Lucas, Mrs. Susannah F. Smith and Miss Mary Lucas, the former of whom, with a history similar to that of the early experience of his father, was taken prisoner with his regiment by the confederates, at the battle of Shiloh.

The first public office held by Gov. Lucas was that of county surveyor of Scioto county, the commission from Gov. Edward Tiffin, of Ohio, appointing him such (which is now before us) being dated December 26th, 1803, when Gov. Lucas was in his twenty-third year, and the certificate of the associate judge of the court of common pleas, Joseph Lucas, an elder brother, and which is dated January 3d, 1804, shows that more than one member of the Lucas family were people of standing there in that day. On the 16th of December, 1805, Gov. Lucas was commissioned by Gov. Tiffin, a justice of the peace for Union township, Scioto county, for three years.

His first military appointment was that of lieutenant of militia, also from Gov. Tiffin, and dated at the then capital of Ohio, Chillicothe, Nov. 14th, 1803, authorizing him to raise twenty men to assist in filling Ohio's quota of five hundred volunteers called for by the president to meet an expected emergency in the anticipated refusal of the Spanish officers at New Orleans to give up to the United States the country of Louisiana, ceded to them by the French republic, and which congress had authorized the president to take possession of. His commission, issued subsequently, was as lieutenant of the third company of militia in the county of Scioto, first brigade second division, and was dated the 24th of May, 1804. He was subsequently promoted through all the military grades to major general of Ohio militia, which latter promotion was conferred on him in 1818.

The breaking out of the war of 1812 found Robert Lucas a brigadier general of Ohio militia, and as such he had much to do with raising troops and encouraging enlistments for Gen. Hull's northwestern army, then organizing for its disastrous march to Detroit and Canada. About the same time he received notice of his appointment as captain in the regular army, and afterwards (July 6th, 1812) was commissioned and assigned to the nineteenth infantry, but before orders or assignment reached him from Washington, he had obeyed the command of Gov. Meigs, of Ohio, to turn out of his brigade twelve hundred men to march to Detroit, and for himself, with a company of men, to repair to Greenville to watch the movements of the Indians, and subsequently to visit Detroit previous to the army marching. Having volunteered his services in the dangerous capacity of a scout, he started with minute instructions from Gov. Meigs and Gen. Hull, on the 25th of May, 1812, for Detroit, where he arrived on the 3d of June, and returning met the army in the wilderness, to pilot it back to Detroit. Gov. Lucas's elder brother Joseph, whom we have before noticed as figuring as an associate judge, was captain of company I, in Col. McArthur's regiment, which formed a part of Hull's army, and Gov. Lucas was enrolled as a member of this company, though he was a captain, unassigned, in the regular army. But his chief employment was that of a spy, though

we find him acting, during this campaign, in various capacities, scouting, spying, carrying a musket, heading the rangers, making assaults, reconnoitering, bringing up trains, piloting the army, &c. On the 12th of July, 1812, the main part of Hull's army, with Col. Lewis Cass at their head, crossed the Detroit river into Canada opposite Detroit, and with them Gov. Lucas, who was one of the first of the invading army to land on the enemy's soil. From July 16th to July 21st, there was constant skirmishing between the American and British forces, especially at a bridge over the river Canaan, five miles from Malden, Canada, where a lively fight occurred, and much confusion taking place in the American ranks, many of the men called on Gov. Lucas to take the command, which he was obliged to decline, as their own officers were present.

On the 5th of August of the same year, while with a party which was escorting the mail, and going to meet an expected train of provisions, when thirteen miles from Detroit, an attack from treble their number of Indians occurring, and a bloody battle ensuing, Gov. Lucas, who was on this occasion mounted and in command of a part of the force, had his horse shot under him.

On the 7th and 8th of August Hull's army recrossed the river, and on the 16th was surrendered to the British. Previous to the army recrossing the strait, Gov. Lucas had received orders from his proper superior, Col. Miller, of the regular army, to repair to Chilicothe and engage in recruiting for the regular army, but Gen. Hull took the responsibility of countermanding the order, saying he could not spare him. After the capitulation was signed, and the troops ordered into the Garrison to stack arms, and previous to the British taking possession, Lucas learned by the terms of the capitulation that the regulars would be sent by their captors to Quebec, while the volunteers would be paroled and sent home. He was therefore apprehensive he might be classified as a regular and sent to Quebec, and desired to make his escape, which he did by putting his sword into his brother's trunk, exchanging his uniform for a citizen's dress, and going into the town before the British, who marched past him, but without recognizing him, on their way to the garrison, took possession. He walked about the town taking notes of what was transpiring, for some time, and then stepped aboard the Maria, which he learned from his friend Maj. Denny, was to convey the volunteers to Cleveland, and which he found by a suffocating odor was ballasted with hides and furs. After lying at anchor opposite Detroit two days, and a dangerous passage of four days, Lucas landed at Cleveland on the 23d, and immediately donned his sword and uniform, which he found safe in his brother's trunk, that had come along with the rest of the baggage, and made his way to his home at Portsmouth, where he found his wife lying sick.

This ended his connection with Gen. Hull, except to appear as a witness against him, by order of the president, when he was arraigned before a general court martial which convened at Philadelphia February 25th, 1813, Brig. Gen. Wade Hampton acting as president, and Alex. James Dallas as judge advocate.

By the terms of his commission as captain in the regular army, he took rank from the 6th of July, 1812, and resigned his commission as such January 2d, 1813, because of its accompanying duties being incompatible with affairs he had undertaken as a military officer of Ohio, in which capacity he thought he could render the country better service than in the contracted sphere of a company officer.

His resignation was accepted, but he was very soon afterwards appointed a lieutenant colonel, and subsequently colonel, in the regular army, but again receiving orders which he conceived to be inconsistent with higher duties, he again resigned.

The civil employments to which Gov. Lucas was called by the executive or the people of the State of Ohio were many and some of them the highest in the gift of that commonwealth We have already referred to his appointment by the Governor to the offices of justice of the peace and county surveyor. At the time of his second marriage in 1816, he was and had been for some time a member of the Ohio legislature, serving successively for nineteen years in one or the other branch of Ohio's general assembly, and in the course of his legislative career presiding over first one and then the other branch. In 1820 and again in 1828, he was elected one of the presidential electors of Ohio. In May 1832, at Baltimore, Maryland, he presided over the first democratic national convention,-that which nominated Andrew Jackson for his second term as president, and Martin Van Buren for vice president. In 1832 he was elected Governor of Ohio, and re-elected in 1834 (defeating Darius Lyman, who ran on the anti-masonic ticket), and declined a third nomination for the same office.

It was while he filled the executive chair that the perplexing and angry controversy arose between Ohio and Michigan concerning the boundary line between these states, and it is a singular coincidence that during Gov. Lucas's administration as Governor of Iowa, the very same controversy, as we shall hereafter see, should have arisen between Iowa and Missouri, to be settled finally, as was that between Ohio and Michigan, according to the claims and views of Gov. Lucas.

Gov. Lucas's early residence, as we have before mentioned, was at Portsmouth, Scioto county. From here, in 1816, he removed to Piketon, Pike county, which continued to be his home till his removal to Iowa in 1838.

(To be continued.)