

Annals of Iowa
Volume 1, No. 10 April, 1865

SKETCH OF IOWA TERRITORY, 1838-40.

EDITOR ANNALS:-So rapid has been the growth of Iowa, that comparatively few of the present population of our State, it is presumed, are conversant with our early history. With your permission, I propose to give a brief account of the organization of the Territory of Iowa, and some of the actors in that important event. I shall not go into our history while constituting a part of Wisconsin Territory, or say any thing of the Legislative Assembly which met at Belmont, Wis., or Burlington, Iowa, under the administration of Gov. Dodge, of Wisconsin, before the division. Hon. George W. Jones, the delegate in Congress, from Wisconsin, succeeded on the 12th day of June, 1838, in getting an act passed, entitled "an act to divide the Territory of Wisconsin, and to establish the Territorial Government of Iowa." This act took effect on the 3d day of July following. In accordance with the provisions of the act, Ex Gov.. Robert Lucas, of Ohio, was appointed Gov. of the Territory, by Mr. Van Buren, then President of the United States. Gov. Lucas, on his arrival in the Territory immediately issued a Proclamation (1) for an election of members to the first Legislative Assembly, and dividing the Territory into suitable districts for that purpose.

The election was held on the 10th day of September, 1838, and the Legislature, in accordance with the Proclamation, met at Burlington, on the 1st day of November, of the same year. The Assembly was composed of a Council of thirteen members, and a House of Representatives of twenty-six members. One of the members returned elected, Cyrus S. Jacobs, of Des Moines county, was killed in an unfortunate encounter in Burlington, before the meeting of the Legislature, and George H. Beeler was elected to fill the vacancy. Samuel R. Murray, of Comanche, Clinton county, was returned as elected from the District composed of the counties of Scott and Clinton, but whose seat was successfully contested by J. A. Birchard, Jr., of Scott county. With these two exceptions, the members returned elected, and proclaimed as such by the Governor, held their seats during the session. At that day, national politics were little thought of in the Territory.

Notwithstanding a large majority of the members of both branches of the Legislature were Democrats, yet Gen. Jesse B. Brown, of Lee county, Whig, was elected President of the Council, and Hon. William H. Wallace, Whig, of Henry county, was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. The former unanimously, and the latter with but little opposition. Nevertheless, the session, in many respects, was a stormy one. Under the provisions of the Organic law, the Governor had an unqualified veto, if he chose to exercise it, of all bills passed by the Legislature. The members thought he used the power rather too freely, and an exciting controversy was the result. The Seat of Governments question, also, gave rise to much excitement. The friends of a central location favored the plan of the Governor, as recommended in his message; namely the appointment of Commissioners with a view of making a central location. While the southern members were in favor of Burlington; but finally succeeded, however, and Robert Rolston, of Des Moines county; John Ronalds of Louisa county; and Chauncy Swan, of Dubuque county, were appointed Commissioners, under the law, who met at Napoleon, in Johnson county, the following spring, and located the Capital at Iowa City.

The law provided that the Seat of Government should remain at Burlington till suitable

buildings could be erected at the new location.

At the election in September for members of the Legislature, a Delegate to Congress was, also, elected. There were four candidates in the field for this office, viz: William W. Chapman, and David Rorer of Des Moines county; B. F. Wallace, of Henry county; and Peter Hill Engle of Dubuque county. Mr. Chapman was elected, having beaten P. H. Engle by 36 majority.

The Federal appointments in the Territory, in addition to the Governor were as follows, viz.: Charles Mason, of Burlington; Joseph Williams, of Pennsylvania; and Thomas S. Wilson, of Dubuque, Judges of the Supreme and District Courts—Mr. Van Allen, of New York, U. S. Attorney; Frances Gehon, of Dubuque, U. S. Marshal; William B. Conway, of Pittsburg, Secretary of the Territory, A. C. Dodge, of Burlington, Register; and V. P. Van Antwerp, of Terra-Haute, In., Receiver, of the Land Office, at Burlington—Thomas Mcknight, Receiver; and Register of the Land Office, at Dubuque. Mr. Van Allen, the Attorney, died at Rockingham, Scott county, soon after his appointment, and Col. Charles Weston was appointed in his place. Mr. Conway, the Secretary, also died at Burlington, during the second session of the Legislature, and James Clarke, editor of the Gazette was appointed to fill the vacancy. The first Register of the Land Office at Dubuque, whose name I have forgotten, served but a short time and resigned, and B. Rush Petrikin, of Penn., was appointed in his place. Many of these names are yet familiar to the people of Iowa, having since then filled many stations of trust and Honor.

It is believed that only four of the thirteen members of the first Legislative Council of Iowa, now reside in the State, viz: Ex-Gov. Stephen Hempstead, and Gen. Warner Lewis, of Dubuque county; Gen. E. A. M. Swasey, of Van Buren County, and Lawson B. Hughes, of Henry county, (now a resident of Madison county.) Of the twenty-six members of the House of Representatives of the Assembly, eleven, at least, are still residents of Iowa, viz: Col. William Patterson, and *Hawkins Taylor*, of Lee county; Dr. G. S. Bailey, of Van Buren county; Col. William G. Coop, of Jefferson county; *Col. A. B. Porter*, of Henry County; *James W. Grimes*, and George Temple, of Des Moines county; *William L. Toole*, of Louisa county; Jabez A. Birchard, Jr., and Laurel Summers, of Scott county; and Hardin Howlan, of Dubuque county. Those in *italics* were Whigs in politics, the others Democrats. I have seen all of the above named gentlemen, within a few years past, and though on the shady side of life, they generally look hale and hearty, as of yore.

As I said above, party politics did not enter into our elections till 1840. In that year, the Whigs and Democrats both held Territorial Conventions, at Bloomington, (Muscatine,) and nominated candidates for Delegates to Congress. The Whigs nominated Alfred Rich of Lee county, and the Democrats Gen. A. C. Dodge of Des Moines county, both popular and talented men. The contest was spirited on both sides, each party being thoroughly united. Gen. Dodge was elected.

The first newspaper published in what is now the State of Iowa, was the "Dubuque Visitor," by John King, in 1836. Judge King is still a worthy citizen of Dubuque. The "Visitor" was soon followed by the "Iowa News" at Dubuque, by King Coriel and Russell. The "Iowa Territorial Gazette," at Burlington, by James Clarke & Co. The "Iowa Patriot," Fort Madison, by James G. Edwards. The "Western Adventurer" at Montrose, by Dr. Galland, and the "Iowa Sun," at Davenport, by Andrew Logan. All started prior to 1840.

I should have stated in the proper place, that General Talliaferro, of St. Peters, (now St. Paul,) was also a candidate for Delegate to Congress, at the election in September, 1838. At that time it will be remembered, the Territory of Iowa extended North to the British Possessions. Gen. T. received all the votes at St. Peters, but got but a scattering vote in other portions of the Territory.

I have, Mr. Editor, very briefly alluded to some of the most important events in the infancy of our growing State. In subsequent numbers of the Annals I may, with your permission, continue this subject further.

OLD SETTLER.