

As Robert Lucas Became Iowa's Territorial Governor

BY T. S. PARVIN*

Governor Lucas received his commission on the 17th of July, 1838, and, on the 25th departed for the distant Territory by way of the Ohio river. Stopping at Cincinnati to purchase a library for the Territory for which congress had appropriated \$5,000, he made the acquaintance of a young college graduate, Theodore S. Parvin. The governor was favorably impressed with the young man and tendered him the position of private secretary, which Mr. Parvin accepted. They reached Burlington on the 13th of August, the governor having selected that city for the capital of the new territory.—B. F. Gue's "History of Iowa."

As I walked the plank to reach the western bank of the mighty river, I was met by one of the pioneers who had preceded me, my former college classmate, Henry W. Starr, a name endeared to the memory of the pioneers and old settlers, and all later comers as well, and has become the synonym of eloquence and profound learning in his chosen profession, the law. We, for I was in the governor's (Lucas') suite, were escorted to the hotel, the old Burlington House, by (A. C.) Dodge and (V. P.) Van Antwerp, of the United States land office, (James) Clarke and (John H.) McKenney, of the *Iowa Territorial Gazette*, (James W.) Grimes, (E. C.) Chapman, (H. O.) Browning and many others, whose hearty welcome and cordial greeting made us feel "at home" in a new and strange land.

During the evening of our first day in Iowa, among

*Theodore S. Parvin (b. 1817, d. 1901); graduated in 1833 at Woodworth college, Ohio, and from the Cincinnati Law School in 1838, when he became private secretary to Governor Lucas, serving two years; was first librarian of the Iowa territorial Library est. in 1840; served as district attorney and three terms as probate judge, 10 years as clerk of the U.S. district court; elected Register of the state land office in 1857, and then served another 10 years as professor of natural science in the University of Iowa; editor ANNALS OF IOWA 1864-5, and for more than 30 years regarded one of Iowa's most valued historical writers, his later life spent as librarian of the state Masonic library at Cedar Rapids.

our callers were two young men—all were young then—who later became governors of Iowa, Clarke of the territory (third and last, 1845) and Grimes of the state (the third, 1854); two who became United States senators, Dodge (1848) and Grimes (1858); three members of congress, Chapman, first delegate (1838) succeeded by Dodge (1840-46), and Leffler, first congressman (1846); and several others who in later years won deserved fame in their several callings—Starr and others in the law, Lowe and others in medicine, Edwards of the *Patriot* later *Hawkeye*, and McKenney, of the *Gazette*, in journalism; H. W. Moore and others, leading merchants in earlier and later years; still others who became at an early day legislators and members of the first two constitutional conventions (1844 and 1846), who, like St. John in the wilderness, were to prepare the way for the coming of the state.

IMMIGRANT TRAINS FROM EAST

The pioneers and early settlers came from sturdy stock. I have seen many and many an immigrant train which had come all the way from Connecticut and Pennsylvania and Ohio in the canvas-back wagons in which the families were housed, with only enough furniture to enable them to cook their evening and morning meals and chairs for the older members of the family to sit upon, with extra horses, the milk cows and the dogs following in the rear. When night came, they camped by the side of some stream where water was abundant, and beneath the shade of some wide-spread oak.

One of the largest and most beautiful I ever saw in Iowa grew upon my own homestead, a mile from the river, at Muscatine, under which for years, in territorial days, the immigrants camped, while my humble home sheltered the women and the children of the party, and around the fireside did my wife, an early settler, lend a hand in cooking the evening meal. This was the way the pioneers and the old settlers came, and when they reached the claim which the husband

and father had made in the preceding year, there they camped again until the cabin, the log cabin, could be raised to shelter them.

TOUR THROUGH THE TERRITORY

It was the mid-summer of 1838, when Governor Lucas set out on his tour of visitation to spy out the land and meet the people whose government he was to administer. It was my pleasure to accompany him as his secretary. We set out by steamer for Dubuque, stopping at all the little way stations long enough to go ashore and greet the crowd that came to welcome the steamer.

As we neared a little town up north in Jackson county (if it has an existence now, it has changed its old name, which no longer appears upon the map), seeing a crowd of twenty or more gathered in front of a small low building on the river's bank, we asked the captain "the cause of the assemblage." "This is election day," said the captain, "and the people are to vote for a delegate to congress and members of the territorial legislature; would you gentlemen care to vote?" The governor said, "Yes," and of course I said, "Amen," as it was a joyous privilege going forth from the steamer that afternoon a boy and returning to her decks a full-fledged man, after having deposited my first ballot. Not being residents of the county, we were permitted to vote only for the delegate.

Dubuque we reached in due season, and tarried several days, making many pleasant acquaintances. At the hotel at which we stopped there was a young man of some twenty-five years of age, who had a table in the public room of the house, upon which he had spread maps, charts and diagrams with manuscript notes, and a published pamphlet descriptive of a railroad from the lakes at Chicago to the Pacific ocean. (It must be borne in mind that this was ten years before California became a part of the United States, and twenty years before the project of a continental railway had received such conception in the brain

of eastern engineers as to lead them to put upon paper their crude ideas, if any they had formed.)

It was said by the villagers that "the young man was crazy," and I remember the governor thought "he was visionary," while I did not give much thought to the subject, but did admire the young man's enthusiasm in the cause he had espoused. The nearest railroads to the Mississippi river at that time had their termini at Buffalo and Pittsburg, and when, thirty years later, upon the completion of the great railway system, practically and substantially over the line mapped out by that young man, I recalled those days as I crossed the mountain and hastened to gaze upon the setting sun beneath the waves of the Pacific.

PLUMBE'S PIONEERING OF PACIFIC ROUTE

That young man's name was John Plumbe, Jr., and he, and he alone, is the author, the promulgator and the advocate of a transcontinental line from the lakes to the ocean. You never hear his name, and I doubt very much whether one of my auditors today ever heard it, while the names of the men who twenty years later surveyed the route he had foreshadowed, and constructed the railway, have their names emblazoned upon monuments erected upon the highest mountain peaks and embalmed in the history of railways and of the nation.

Upon our return we traveled by wagon, escorted by the farmers, through and over the country, stopping at Bellevue, in Jackson county, Lyons and Camanche, in Clinton county (the town of Clinton had not then a being, was not even a germ in the womb of time).

We made a considerable stay at Davenport, where we met the celebrated Antoine LeClaire, the founder of the city, the owner of a section of land at the foot of the Upper Rapids, given him by congress for services as an interpreter of the Sac and Fox nations, who in the treaty a few years previous (1832) had ceded the Black Hawk purchase of the Iowa district to the national government. It was Mr. LeClaire's

boast that he was the "first white man" who had ever had his home in Iowa, even antedating Julien Dubuque; he called himself a "white man"—his mother was a full half-blooded Sac Indian, his father a Frenchman, so one-fourth of the blood that coursed through his veins was aboriginal blood.

During this visit, a little country boy from a neighboring farm came in and said he "would like to see the governor." He had never seen a governor and wanted to know how such a man looked. The governor took quite an interest in the little fellow, and I well remember the incident, and have oftentimes since with the grown lad laughed over it. His name was John F. Dillon, so well known to our citizens as the first United States circuit judge for the circuit of which Iowa constitutes an integral part. It was of such farmer boys we made men and judges in those days.

We also tarried at Muscatine a little later. A gentleman of much notoriety and worth, Judge Rorer of this city (Burlington), had preceded us and written a description of the village over the signature of "Wolverine Among the Hawkeyes," although he never had seen Michigan, the state of the "Wolverines." He described the lots of the embryo town as "standing on end," and his description was not far out of the way, for it has as many hills and more valleys than the ancient city of Rome, and at that day there was not a single block within its limits around which you could drive a country wagon—there were no buggies in the country at that early day.

MEETING OF LUCAS AND KEOKUK

At Agency, we were met by Keokuk, the grandest specimen of the physical man I have ever seen; a man of great natural ability, fine oratorical talent, eloquent as Cicero, logical as Webster, and the beautiful metaphors he used in his speeches he borrowed from nature, ready on all hands to bestow upon him her

gifts; he did not steal them from some orator more eloquent though less renowned than himself.

Black Hawk, who had led in the war of his name, had been defeated at the battle of Bad-axe, in Wisconsin. The Sac and Fox Indians ceded in the treaty of 1832 the "Black Hawk Purchase," a strip of about thirty miles in width bordering the Mississippi river on the west, and which constituted the Iowa of 1833-40. Black Hawk had taken part in the celebration of Fourth of July of this year, 1838, at Fort Madison, and his speech has been published in our county histories and in the ANNALS OF IOWA. He died the 3d of October, 1838, and was buried in the northeast corner of Davis county, north of the Des Moines river, near where he lived at the time of his death.

If we traveled in primitive style, it must be borne in mind that those were primitive days, and that we were plain people, the governor himself a farmer all his life. What would you think today, after more than fifty years, to see Governor Drake, our illustrious chief magistrate, coming from Des Moines, a much less distance, and journeying all the way in an open farm wagon to witness and participate in this grand celebration?

GOVERNOR IN A FARM WAGON

The last of our state governors ever known to travel in a country wagon over the highway was Governor Grimes, who in 1854 set out on an electioneering tour; he traveled on foot, a wise and shrewd scheme of his own to win the country vote, in which he was remarkably successful.

Having an appointment to speak at Andrew, in Jackson county, he was overtaken some miles distant from it by a countryman with a load of his neighbors journeying in their farm wagon to the county seat; they asked the stranger if he would ride. Weary of travel and sore of foot, he gladly accepted the invitation and took a seat beside the driver, who was a lively, talkative man, quite well informed upon

general subjects. He said that he and his companions were going to the neighboring town to hear a candidate who was running for governor, his name was, he said, Grimes, and they wondered whether he wore a coat like "old Grimes, all buttoned down before." Grimes never let on, but said he, too, was bound for the same place and the same purpose and, like them, had quite a curiosity to hear the gentleman of whom he had heard a great deal, and in whose canvass he felt a very considerable interest, a personal interest.

The speaker and candidate was not known to the good people he was about to visit, and so was not met by a committee, as is usual in these later days. Arriving at the place, he found quite a goodly number assembled around the speaker's stand. Making himself known to some of those who appeared to be officious, he was escorted to the platform (temporized for the occasion), and commenced his address to "the dear people."

Grimes, while the brainiest and ablest man that Iowa has produced, was withal, a man of eloquence, also possessed great tact, with a large knowledge of human nature. He made a telling speech, as he always did, and when through, the first man to greet him (this story I have from Grimes' own lips) was the farmer who had so kindly borne him on his journey, with the remark, "I will vote for you, governor, and so will my neighbors, though we are all Democrats; we like you, a plain man like ourselves, and we like your speech." He emphasized in a peculiar way the force of his declaration; I will not use his language, but as he was a true follower of General Jackson, I may venture the assertion that he swore, as General Jackson always swore, "by the eternal." It was the votes of those yeomen of the land that made Grimes governor and later senator in the service of the state and nation, and no abler or better man ever received the votes of the people.

FOUND HIGH TYPE OF CITIZENS

Of the character of pioneers, I will quote from our

pioneer governor, who was most competent to affirm whereof he knew. At the banquet given him by the citizens of Burlington the first year of the arrival of Governor Lucas, and after his first tour through the territory, in his response to an address of welcome he said that he had "supposed that the population of the territory was the same as is generally found in frontier settlements—hospitable, yet rude. In this he was agreeably disappointed," he said; "for in intelligence and enterprise it was his firm conviction, based upon extensive observation since his arrival, that the people of the territory would compare with any of the western, aye, and some of the eastern states. With a people of this character it would be," he said, "his great pleasure to cooperate in the framing of its laws and in laying the foundation upon which the future state of Iowa should stand."

And who were the people of whom he spoke? They were the early immigrants, the pioneers who came from the New England states, the younger generation directly, the older having emigrated from the East at an earlier date, and located for a time in either of the Middle States of that period, and there remained long enough to become somewhat westernized. They were from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Then there was an element of chivalry, descendants of the old cavaliers of Virginia, some of whom had come through "the dark and bloody ground" experience of Kentucky and Tennessee; these were found mostly in the southern portion of the territory. There were in the northern portion of the territory a few of the sons of the Emerald Isle, who brought with them the patriotic inheritance, love of liberty of the Grattans, the Emmetts and others of that ill-fated land.

There were in those days none of the hardy followers of the Norsemen who conquered England and first discovered America; nor yet the descendants of Arminius and his brave followers of the black forests of

Germany, who conquered Rome; or the descendants of Huss, of Prague, the first one of the reformers. It was when the state had been builded that these men came from Germany, Scandinavia, Bohemia and Northern Europe, worthy descendants of noble ancestors, and they have united in beautifying the state builded for them, and have ever been recognized as among our best, most enterprising and conservative citizens.

Old Des Moines River Beds

It is hard to think of the Des Moines river, with its wooded banks and clear waters, as having ever been a small edition of the muddy Missouri; but that is what it was many years ago—at least not many years ago as geological time is measured. Not only was it muddy and dirty and ugly to the sight, but its channel was as shiftly as that of the “Big Muddy.” The mound-builder who went to bed at night on the bank of the Des Moines didn’t have the least assurance that the river would be anywhere in the neighborhood when he woke up in the morning.

The fact is that the river wandered around over pretty much the whole surface of Polk county, at one time or another in the last 8,000 years; and the geological evidences are that the channel now occupied is almost entirely different from the original one that was formed when the glacier melted. In Polk county there are many miles of old river bed, and it is believed, although the geological evidences have not been so carefully examined in other counties, that the same is true in the counties to the north and south.

The state geological survey long ago made report on the geology of Polk county, and it was issued about 1898. The work was done by H. F. Bain, associate geologist, and represented one of the most complete and careful examinations that has been made of any county in the state.

Comparatively speaking, the Des Moines is a new

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