

HOW BURLINGTON BECAME THE SECOND CAPITAL OF WISCONSIN TERRITORY AND THE FIRST CAPITAL OF IOWA TERRITORY.

The Black Hawk war of 1832 was followed by treaties with the Winnebagoes, the Sacs and Foxes, and the Pottawattamies, which threw open to settlement the next year the fair regions of what is now Northern Illinois, Southern Wisconsin and Eastern Iowa. In 1836 the State of Illinois created a number of new counties in Northern Illinois. The same year Congress created the Territory of Wisconsin with limits extending on the west to the Missouri river. In this Territory there then existed six counties which had been constituted by the Territorial Legislature of Michigan. Two of these six counties were west of the Mississippi river, and of the whole six Des Moines county, by the census of August, 1836, had the largest population, and was apportioned by the Governor, Henry Dodge, the largest number of members in the first Legislative Assembly, viz.: three in the Council, which was composed of thirteen members, and seven in the House of Representatives, which was composed of twenty-six members. At the first session of the Assembly, October 25-December 9, 1836, at Belmont, the most exciting question was the location of the seat of government.

It was thought by some that the Territory of Wisconsin would continue with the same boundaries as originally constituted for a number of years, and that the capital would be located about midway between Lake Michigan and the Missouri river, viz.: on the banks of the Mississippi. Confident in this expectation a town had been laid out on the east bank of the Mississippi twenty-five miles below Prairie du Chien, which was named Cassville, in honor of Lewis Cass, who had been for many years Governor of Michigan Territory, and a large hotel was built there. Dubuque set up rival claims; also Bellevue and Peru, on the west bank of the Mississippi.

At the same time other persons perceived that the increasing population on the west side of the Mississippi would call for an early division of the territory, and they concluded that the location of the capital should be determined with reference to that fact. In the final settlement of the question all the members from Des Moines county voted for Madison, and aided in giving to Wisconsin for its capital one of the most beautiful sites in all the states. All the members from Dubuque county voted against Madison. There were sixteen other places which contended for the honor, and which were voted upon in the Council, with one uniform result—ayes 6, noes 7. Three of those places were on the west side of the Mississippi river.

The larger representation from Des Moines county naturally gave its members a preponderant influence, and they secured a provision in the law that the sessions of the Legislative Assembly should be held at Burlington until March 4, 1839, unless the public buildings at Madison should be sooner completed.

Accordingly, the second and third sessions of the First Legislature of Wisconsin Territory convened at Burlington in 1837 and 1838.

By Act of Congress, June 12, 1838, a separate territorial government by the name of Iowa was constituted for the west side of the Mississippi. That act assigned to the governor the duty of appointing the place of meeting of the Legislative Assembly, and Governor Lucas appointed Burlington.

A fuller account of the matter as relates to Wisconsin is given in Strong's History of Wisconsin Territory, pp. 227-9, and in Iowa Historical Record, Vol. VIII, pp. 305-7.

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