

“Hawkeye” the Nickname for Iowans

The individual originally called “Hawkeye” was a white man, not an Indian, either brave or chief, although so credited by some. It was a nickname applied to early settlers of the Iowa district long after its first appearance in American literature as that of a heroic character given imperishable renown by J. Fenimore Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans*, the most popular of his “Leather Stocking Tales.” They were published in America beginning in 1826, and later in England, and created a furor in British and French literary circles, where the character of the American Indian was a novelty.

According to Cooper’s story, the Delaware Indians bestowed the name of “Hawkeye” upon a white scout and trapper, who lived and hunted with them, who also braved their perils in war against the Iroquois and Hurons. The incidents related by Cooper “occurred during the third year of the war which England and France last waged for the possession of a country that neither was destined to retain.” Of himself the scout said: “I am the man that got the name Nathaniel from my kin; the compliment of ‘Hawkeye’ from the Delawares, and whom the Iroquois have presumed to style ‘Long Rifle.’”

Twelve years after the publication of Cooper’s book, Iowa and its people, in 1838, acquired the sobriquet “Hawkeye,” through suggestion and publicity by Judge David Rorer of Burlington, a scholarly and cultured man of literary attainments, assisted by James G. Edwards, the talented and alert editor of the *Fort Madison Patriot*, who in 1843 moved his paper to Burlington and changed its name to the *Burlington Hawk-eye*. Subsequently frequent references to Iowa as the “Hawkeye State” were made in the paper at the suggestion of Judge Rorer. This was done to popularize the nickname and to prevent citizens of other states giving Iowa a more opprobrious title, similar to that

by which the people of Missouri are frequently designated even to this day. The judge wrote a series of lively letters to other Iowa papers signed "A Wolverine Among the Hawkeyes," referring Iowans thus, which were widely read, quoted and commented upon.

The nickname received formal approval at a meeting of prominent state officials and others who gathered at the rooms of Governor Lucas in the Burlington House in the fall of 1838. Among those present besides Lucas were: W. B. Conway, territorial secretary; Ver Planck Van Antwerp, receiver of public moneys; Joseph Williams, supreme court justice; T. S. Parvin and Jesse Williams, secretaries and aides of the governor, and James G. Edwards. The matter of perpetuating a nickname for Iowa was discussed. After various sobriquets were mentioned, "Hawkeye" was proposed and all agreed upon its appropriateness.

Burlington Rated Several "Firsts"

The city of Burlington has a distinguished place, not only in the early history of the state of Iowa, but also in the history of the settlement of the Middle West as a whole. Long before it became a white man's town, it had been an Indian center and for that reason became at a very early time an important trading-post.

After the Middle West began to be organized, the area in which Burlington stood belonged to the vast territory of Michigan; and when a large portion of the latter was cut off to form the territory of Wisconsin the whole of Iowa was included in it.

Wisconsin held its first territorial legislature in 1836, at Belmont, and during its sessions Madison was selected as the first capital. But the necessary public buildings at Madison were not completed—they could not be until 1839—therefore the new legislature met at Burlington, the first meeting on November 6, 1837, the second on June 11, 1838. Thus it was that Burlington became for a brief period the capital of a territory,

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