



Yours Truly
O. M. Casady

THE NAMING OF IOWA COUNTIES.*

BY HON. P. M. CASADY.

In 1834 the territory west of the Mississippi river was attached to Michigan Territory. In the acts of the Territorial Legislature we find the following:

AN ACT to lay off and organize Counties west of the Mississippi river.

SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan, That all that district of country which was attached to the Territory of Michigan, by the act of Congress, entitled "An act to attach the territory of the United States west of the Mississippi river, and north of the the State of Missouri to the territory of Michigan," approved June 28, 1834, and to which the Indian title has been extinguished, which is situated to the north of a line to be drawn due west from the lower end of Rock Island to the Missouri river, shall constitute a county, and be called Dubuque. The said county shall constitute a township, which shall be called Julien. The seat of justice shall be established at the village of Dubuque until the same shall be changed by the judges of the county court of said county.

SEC. 2. All that part of the district aforesaid, which was attached as aforesaid to the territory of Michigan, and which is situated south of said line to be drawn west from the lower end of Rock Island, shall constitute a county, and be called Demoiné. The said county shall constitute a township, and be called Flint Hill. The seat of justice of said county shall be in such place therein, as shall be designated by the judges of the county court of said county.

Approved September 6, 1834.

The act included five other sections referring to local matters, as elections, courts, etc. The territory included in the boundaries of the county of Dubuque contained all of the northern half of the present State of Iowa, all of the State of Minnesota west of the Mississippi river, and all the territory of the States of Dakota east of the

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Missouri river, being the largest territory ever included in the boundaries of one county. The county of Des Moines included all the territory of the south half of the present State of Iowa, now numbering forty-four counties. The members of the Territorial legislature of Michigan, in session in the city of Detroit, I presume, did not think it would be necessary to name and define the boundaries of any other counties west of the Mississippi river for many years to come, as at that time it was supposed and generally believed that "the Great American Desert" included the greater part of the country and would not and could not be successfully cultivated during the present century.

At the first session of the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature, held at the town of Belmont, the large territory of Des Moines county was divided into six counties as follows, to-wit: Lee, Van Buren, Henry, Louisa, Musquitine and Cook. The act was approved December 7, 1836.

The next session of the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature was held at Burlington in 1837. The county of Cook became extinct, and the following counties were created and taken from the original county of Dubuque, to wit: Scott, Clinton, Jackson, Clayton and Delaware.

What called my attention to the necessity of having a number of new counties named and boundaries defined, was an agent offering maps for sale showing the boundaries of the fifty counties named and organized, and all the balance of the State *an entire blank*—the territory lying in the west and northwest portions of the State not being laid off in counties.

December 10, 1850, being the eighth day of the General Assembly which commenced at Iowa City on the 2nd day of December, 1850, the Senate Journal states that Mr. Casady gave notice that he would, on to-morrow or some future day, introduce a bill for an act defining the boundaries of twenty-five new counties.

On the 11th day of December the Journal states that Mr. Casady, in pursuance of notice, introduced Senate File No. 5, a bill for an act to establish new counties and define their boundaries, which was read a first and second time, and on his motion referred to the Committee on New Counties.

The Committee on New Counties consisted of Messrs. Hendershott, Cook, Alger, Lewis and Casady. On December 16, Mr. Hendershott, chairman of the Committee on New Counties, to whom was referred Senate File No. 5, reported a substitute therefor. On the same day Senate File No. 5 was read a second time. Mr. Espy moved to lay the bill on the table, which motion did not prevail.

On motion of Mr. Casady, the Senate resolved itself into committee of the whole for the consideration of the bill, Mr. Leffingwell in the chair. After some time spent therein, the committee rose and by their chairman reported the same back to the Senate with one amendment, asking leave to sit again on Saturday next at two o'clock P. M., which was granted.

On the 21st of December the bill was read a third time, passed, and the title agreed to. Prior to the passage of the bill, Mr. Morton, "with the unanimous consent of the Senate," moved to strike out the name of "Mason" in the first section and insert the word "Union," which was carried.

On January 2d, 1851, the bill was returned from the House with sundry amendments. The Senate disagreed to the amendments made to the bill by the House. The House refused to recede from its amendments and asked a conference thereon, Messrs. Summers, Allender and Crawford having been appointed managers to conduct said conference on the part of the House. The president appointed Messrs. Casady, Everson and Lowe, a committee to manage the conference on the disagreeing

votes of the two houses on "Senate File No. 5, a bill for an act to establish new counties and define their boundaries."

The committee was called together as soon as practicable. Messrs. Everson and Lowe, two of the managers on the part of the Senate, refused to attend, stating they had given the matter but little attention and that they could not aid in the conference. The managers attending on the part of the House were Messrs. Summers, Allender and Crawford. The report of the conference committee was promptly agreed to except as to the name of Buncombe. The managers on the part of the House said the members were opposed to the name; but after the statement that it was suggested in honor of Colonel Buncombe, a soldier of the Revolutionary War, and that North Carolina had named one county Buncombe, the only one in the United States; that the county was the most elevated one in that state; that it would be appropriate to name the northern part of Iowa Buncombe, being the most elevated part of Iowa, the managers yielded, the report was agreed to, written out and submitted to the different houses and adopted January 6, 1851.

The reason of the change of the name of "Mason" in the first section of the bill, which name had been placed there in honor of Charles Mason, formerly Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Territory, and at that time the principal Code Commissioner, was that it would be considered an injustice to other men occupying prominent positions in the State about the age of Mason—such as Governor Hempstead, Senators A. C. Dodge and George W. Jones, James W. Grimes, Henry W. Starr and others. The name of "Union" being suggested by Senator Morton from Henry county, met with approval. Judge Mason was deservedly popular, but for the reason stated the name was dropped.

The county of Floyd was named in honor of William

Floyd, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, a delegate from New York, and the first name mentioned in the delegation from that State. In the original bill the name "Floyd" was suggested in honor of Sergeant Floyd, who was a member of the Lewis and Clarke expedition and had died in camp and was buried on the east bank of the Missouri river south of Sioux City. At his grave a cedar post in form of a cross was erected. The remains and cross were removed after the settlement was made at Sioux City, in order to keep them from falling into the river. At the time, the river emptying into the Missouri river at Sioux City was named Floyd river, to commemorate the sad death of Sergeant Floyd. The proposed county had the same boundaries of the present county of Woodbury. The house amended the bill by striking out Floyd and inserting Waukaw. The name was retained to please the members who wanted a few Indian names.

The reason for reference to the committee of the whole Senate was to give members an opportunity to suggest names. When the committee was ready for business I remarked to the chairman that I had a list of Indian names, some of which might meet the approval of senators. A number were read, but none seemed to meet the views of those who desired Indian names. The committee, after spending a short time, and after suggesting an immaterial amendment, rose and asked leave to sit again.

The county of Wright was named in honor of Joseph A. Wright, then Governor of the State of Indiana, one of the most popular men in the State at that time. He had served as Governor seven years, a longer time than any other man. The last time he was elected, I believe he ran about twenty thousand ahead of his party. Two members of the committee on new counties were former residents of the State of Indiana, to-wit: Senator Freeman Alger and myself, and all were of the same political faith

as Governor Wright, except Senator John P. Cook. While the bill was pending before the Senate, Senator W. E. Leffingwell moved to strike out the name of Wright, stating that the name had been suggested in honor of Senator George G. Wright, who was still a young man and that we did not know what he might yet be guilty of! One Senator suggested that it was named for Silas Wright of New York; a member of the committee stated that the county was named for Gov. Joseph A. Wright of Indiana. Mr. Leffingwell then remarked that he would withdraw his motion, that he understood the county would not be settled for fifty years!

Senator Leffingwell was regarded as the leader on the Democratic side, and Senator Wright was the actual leader of the Whig side and so recognized by all.

It was determined by Dr. Clark (then a resident of Andrew, Jackson county), Andrew J. Stevens (a citizen of Fort Des Moines), and myself, to recommend that three names should be given of three colonels who fell at the battle of Buena Vista. The names selected were as follows, to-wit: John J. Hardin, of Illinois; Archibald Yell, of Arkansas, and Henry Clay, Jr., of Kentucky, the talented son of Henry Clay. Three battlefields should be commemorated by the names of counties—Cerro Gordo, Buena Vista and Palo Alto. Three names we deemed proper to give to the Irish patriots, Mitchell, O'Brien and Emmet. We also asked that the following names should be honored: Major Frederick Mills, who was a leading lawyer of the city of Burlington, member of the law firm of Mills & Stockton, before he was commissioned. He fell at the battle of Churubusco, near the City of Mexico. It is said that the spirited animal he was riding got the advantage of him, ran with him, leaped the ditch and into the ranks of the Mexican army where he was killed. Captain Edwin Guthrie, an early pioneer of the Territory of Iowa, was a resident of Fort Madison before his appoint-

ment as captain of the only company enlisted in Iowa Territory for service in the war. He was a Whig in politics, had served as warden of the penitentiary, and had been frequently spoken of as a suitable man to represent Lee county in the legislature. He died from wounds received in Mexico, before the close of the war. Our worthy and genial member of this Association, Captain I. W. Griffith, of Des Moines, a member of Captain Guthrie's company in the battalion commanded by Major Mills, was in the battle of Churubusco, where he lost his right arm. General William O. Butler, a distinguished citizen of Kentucky, who was a major-general of volunteers in the war with Mexico, and in 1848 a candidate for Vice-President on the Democratic ticket. William J. Worth, a major-general who distinguished himself in that war. He died at San Antonio in 1849 while in command of the United States Army in the Department of the Southwest. These recommendations were all adopted.

The territorial legislative assemblies having failed to honor the distinguished names of Adams and Harrison, statesmen, and Franklin the statesman and philosopher, all so illustrious, and so largely identified with the history of the Nation, it was deemed most fitting that a county should be named for each, and this was accordingly done. Buncombe retained its name until after the battle of Wilson's Creek in Missouri. In this battle the First Iowa Volunteers were engaged and it was the first in which Iowa troops were under fire. Brigadier-General Nathaniel Lyon was in command, and was killed. Lieutenant-Colonel Merritt of the First Iowa distinguished himself in this battle, taking command of the Union forces after the fall of General Lyon. The General Assembly, wishing to honor General Lyon, looked over the counties for the purpose of seeing what one might be changed, and still having some prejudice against the name of Buncombe, decided that Lyon should take the place of that name in the list of counties.

Audubon county was named in honor of the illustrious ornithologist, John James Audubon, who died in New York City, January 27, 1851, a few days after the passage of the bill. Audubon visited the Republic of Texas in 1837 and called on the president, General Sam Houston. He found the capitol building without a roof, the president's house consisting of two rooms made of logs. The cabinet treated him very civilly, inviting him to a grog-shop where he and they drank together; afterwards he drank with the president. The capital was then at the village of Houston, a very uninviting place.

Bremer, named in honor of Frederika Bremer, the Swedish traveler and author, was the second county named in honor of a woman; Louisa was the first, named at the session at Belmont, in 1836, in honor of Louisa Massey, a lady of Dubuque, who a short time before the passage of the act creating the county had shot a ruffian who had threatened the life of her brother. She was a heroine, and among the early pioneers heroes and heroines were highly respected and honored whenever an opportunity was presented. The name Bremer was suggested by Honorable A. K. Eaton, then a member for Delaware and other counties, now a resident of Osage, Mitchell county. Mr. Eaton at the last meeting of our Society delivered an interesting address on "Recollections of the Third General Assembly," particularly the part the house took in that session. I am of the opinion that the societies managed and controlled by women should give the early Pioneer Law-makers some recognition and credit for honoring two of their number in such a manner.

Kossuth county was named in honor of the Hungarian patriot and leader, who was then making a tour of the United States. When he visited St. Louis, our distinguished townsman, Honorable John A. Kasson, then a resident of that city, made the welcoming speech to him on behalf of the city.

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