

THE QUARREL BETWEEN GOVERNOR LUCAS  
AND SECRETARY CONWAY.

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CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA, JUNE 1, 1895.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—I am in receipt of your favor of the 30th ult., and as I leave this evening for Marshalltown to attend the session of the Grand Lodge (52d) I write you at once.

You ask the following questions:

(1) What do you (I) know about William B. Conway? (2) When was he appointed Secretary of the Territory of Iowa? (3) Why did he call himself "Acting Governor?" (4) When did he die? (5) Is there any portrait of him extant?

In reply I would say (1) that I know something about the late William B. Conway, the first Secretary of the Territory of Iowa.

Prior to his appointment he was editing a small political paper in the city of Pittsburg, which supported General Jackson during his candidacy for the Presidency. It was a rabid, violent, partisan paper, quite in accord with many of the personal traits of the editor.

(2) By reason of the earnestness of his advocacy of the election of Gen. Jackson, and of his successor Martin Van Buren, he was appointed, by the latter, Secretary of the Territory of Iowa in June, 1838, a few days after the approval of the act separating Iowa from Wisconsin and creating it into an independent territorial district—the act to take effect July 4th following, from which period we date our territorial existence.

Mr. Conway had never held a political office and had had no experience in public affairs, but was an enthusiast

of his own kind, and immediately left Pittsburg for the new territory, landing at Davenport in the month of July. He was an Irishman and a member of the Catholic church, and very naturally made the acquaintance of the Honorable Antoine Le Claire, one of the founders of the city of Davenport, and also of Colonel Davenport, then residing on the island of Rock Island. They made him believe that Davenport was the greatest town in the territory and the coming city of the west, and that it was the only proper place for the capital of the new territory. The organic act provided that the *Governor* should "designate the temporary capital of the territory to continue as such until the legislature should establish the territorial capital." The organic act also provided that the Governor should "divide the territory into three judicial districts" and assign one of the three judges, appointed at the same time with Conway, to each of said districts. It also provided that he, the Governor, should issue a proclamation "ordering an election of members for the territorial legislature, and designate the time of its convening."

The Honorable Robert Lucas, (twice Governor of the State of Ohio and President of the National Convention which nominated Martin Van Buren for the presidency) appointed Governor of the new territory, had not yet arrived.

(3) Mr. Conway's new friends persuaded him into the belief that he was "Acting Governor" of the territory. The organic act provided that "in the *absence* or *death* of the Governor, the Secretary of the Territory should act as Governor."

In this belief Wm. B. Conway, Secretary of the Territory, issued his three proclamations, naming Davenport as the Territorial Capital, ordering an election of members of the legislature, and districting the territory for the judges.

A few weeks later Governor Lucas, who had been de-

tained by reason of low water in the Ohio, arrived at Burlington and was confronted with these proclamations. He became very indignant, declaring that "all the acts of the Secretary, as 'Acting Governor' were null and void, inasmuch as *no vacancy had been created*, either by his death or absence, as he had not yet entered upon the discharge of his official duties." He, however, affirmed the action of the Secretary in relation to the districting of the territory into three districts and the assignment of the judges—Mason to the first district, a resident of Burlington; Wilson to the third, a resident of Dubuque; and Judge Joseph Williams of Pennsylvania (like the Secretary) to the second district. Upon his arrival in October following, however, he selected Bloomington, now Muscatine, as his residence.

These acts of Governor Lucas created in the breast of the Secretary (Conway) unkindly feelings, which were never wholly healed.

Gov. Lucas, being a man of great experience in public life and familiar with the administration of public affairs, looked upon the acts of his younger associate, ignorant in these matters, as an offensive usurpation of authority. It was in the issuing these papers that the Secretary signed himself "acting governor."

Later, the Secretary again came into collision with the Governor in relation to the administration of the affairs of his office; and upon the convening of the legislative assembly, by his indiscreet acts, he came into serious collision with that body, from which he was extricated only through the good offices of his friend and fellow statesman, Judge Williams.

(4.) He died at Burlington, November 6, 1838, some four months after his arrival in the Territory and after a brief illness of typhus fever, and was succeeded in office by James Clarke, at that time editor of *The Burlington Gazette*, who became the last of the three territorial governors of Iowa.

(5.) There is no portrait of Conway extant, at least I never saw or heard of one, as he died some eleven years before daguerreotyping was invented.

Mr. Conway was a small man, very wiry and active, warm in his friendships and bitter in his enmities. He was *sarcastic* as a writer, and it was this bitter sarcasm that gave his paper, during the political campaigns into which he entered, considerable notoriety. He was yet a man of genial parts, and had he lived would have learned from experience, no doubt, and improved in his ways and manners.

It was unfortunate for the early history of Iowa Territory that this antagonism should have arisen between the Governor and Secretary of the Territory, but somewhat natural, as on the one hand there existed sound judgment, great and long experience in public affairs and in the knowledge of men; on the contrary the other had had no experience, and his judgment, both of public affairs and of men, was sadly defective, and possessing violent passions, with the quickness of action of his countrymen he often got himself into trouble from which, but for the aid of his friends, he would not have fared as well as he did.

I know nothing about his family, and his memory soon faded away, and but for the position he held and the personal troubles into which he involved himself, there would have been very little or no record left of his actions at that early date.

Very truly,

T. S. PARVIN.

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Each generation gathers together the imperishable children of the past, and increases them by new sons of light, alike radiant with immortality.—*Bancroft*.

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