

## THE REMOVAL OF THE CAPITAL FROM IOWA CITY TO DES MOINES

The first settlements in Iowa clustered along the Mississippi River. Dubuque, Davenport, Bloomington (now Muscatine), Burlington, and Fort Madison sprang up from mining camp, private land reserve, boat landing, trading-post, or military garrison into bustling frontier towns. But it was not long before the fertile prairie to the west began to lure the pioneers away from the hills along the river. In August, 1836, the population of the two counties in the Iowa country was 10,531. Twenty-one months later the census showed an increase of one hundred and seventeen percent. Of the 22,859 persons then in Iowa, 7755, or over 33.9 percent, were living in counties not washed by the Mississippi; and after two more years, out of a total population of 43,112, over 44.1 percent, or 19,041 people, were inhabitants of inland counties.<sup>1</sup>

This rapid shifting of the center of population westward brought with it the need of roads, mail routes, and other conveniences. By no means the least persistent of the demands of the people was for the location of the capital of the Territory near the center of population. Travel in those days was not the negligible consideration it now is. Indeed, the problem of accessibility led to the opinion that the seat of government should occupy a central position geographically as well as with respect to the mass of population.

The First Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa, having in mind the future development of the Territory,

<sup>1</sup> Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa*, pp. 114, 115, 120, 122, 123, 129, 130, 132, 247, 248; *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census*, 1880, p. 196.



made provision for the establishment of the permanent seat of government at some point within Johnson County; and Governor Robert Lucas approved the act on January 21, 1839.<sup>2</sup> For three years, or until the public buildings at Iowa City — for such was to be the name of the capital of Iowa — were declared ready for occupancy, the Legislative Assembly was to continue to hold its meetings at Burlington.<sup>3</sup> A supplementary act authorized the Governor to “apply to Congress for a donation of, or a pre-emption to, four sections of land on which to locate the seat of government”; while a joint resolution instructed William W. Chapman, Territorial Delegate to Congress, to ask for a donation of “at least four sections of land, on which to locate the seat of government of the Territory of Iowa”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Johnson County had been created only thirteen months before, on December 21, 1837.— Garver's *History of the Establishment of Counties in Iowa* in THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. VI, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> A matter bearing upon the location of the capital, but having only incidental significance, was the location of the executive offices. The Organic Act establishing the Territorial government of Iowa contained no provision requiring the Governor or Secretary to keep offices at the seat of government. Thus when the capital was removed to Iowa City it did not include the removal of the executive offices. Governor John Chambers took an aversion to Iowa City, declaring that he would reside in Burlington. It appears that he had an office at Iowa City only during sessions of the Legislative Assembly. In 1844 a memorial was addressed to Congress asking that the Governor and Secretary be required to keep their offices at Iowa City. It was introduced in the Council, passed both houses, and was presented to the Governor for his approval.

This question was raised again in 1848 when a resolution was offered in the Senate to inquire into the expediency of reporting a bill which would require the Governor of the State to reside and keep his office at the seat of government, but nothing came of it.

Not until 1864, indeed, was an act of such a character passed. Then a law requiring the Governor to “keep the Executive Office at Des Moines, in which shall be transacted the business of the Executive Department of the State government” was placed upon the statute books.— Parish's *John Chambers*, p. 125; Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 251-311; *Council Journal*, 1843-1844, pp. 125, 129, 133, 163, 168, 174, 192; *House Journal*, 1843-1844, pp. 174, 176, 183, 184, 210, 230; *Senate Journal*, 1848, p. 68; *Laws of Iowa*, 1864, pp. 95, 96.

<sup>4</sup> *Laws of the Territory of Iowa, 1838-1839*, pp. 435-438, 519; Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 107-112.



Congress, on March 3, 1839, acting upon these recommendations, directed that one section of land should be selected and that if, at the time of its selection, the "contiguous sections thereto have not been made subject to public sale, or being so subject have not been sold at public sale or by private entry, then each and every section contiguous to said selected section, and not so sold, shall be thereafter reserved and withheld from sale in any manner, until the further order of Congress thereon."<sup>5</sup>

Chauncey Swan, John Ronalds, and Robert Ralston, who had been appointed commissioners for that purpose, chose the permanent site for the capital on May 4, 1839,<sup>6</sup> indicating the place by a slab driven into the ground about where the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City now stands. In October of the same year official notice of the selection was returned to the Register of the Land Office at Dubuque.<sup>7</sup>

After two years it was seen that the capitol building at Iowa City would not be ready for occupancy at the end of the three years allotted for the work of construction. In view of this fact an act was passed in January, 1841, declaring that the following Legislative Assembly would meet on the first Monday in December, 1841, at Iowa City, if "other sufficient buildings shall be furnished for the accommodation of the Legislative Assembly, rent free". Such accommodations were provided and in conformity with a proclamation of Governor Robert Lucas, the fourth regular session of the Legislative Assembly convened on December

<sup>5</sup> *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 330.

The clause requiring the sections contiguous to the one selected for the capital to be withheld from sale was repealed on August 1, 1842.—*United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. VI, p. 846.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Ralston was not present at the time the location was made, but he arrived on May 6th and agreed to the proceedings of the other two commissioners.—*House Journal*, 1839-1840, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Shambaugh's *Iowa City: A Contribution to the Early History of Iowa*, pp. 22, 23, 24; *House Journal*, 1839-1840, p. 92.



6, 1841, in the new capital city. On that day Iowa City became the capital of Iowa in fact as well as in name.<sup>8</sup>

For sixteen years the seat of government remained at Iowa City. That thriving town beheld fourteen sessions of the legislature and three constitutional conventions convene, accomplish their work, and adjourn. It witnessed also, during those sixteen years, a constant stream of settlers who came to push the frontier farther and farther toward the west. At each of the constitutional conventions and at all but two sessions of the Legislative Assembly or General Assembly the question of re-locating the capital arose in one connection or another.

When the citizens of Iowa City learned that the Legislative Assembly would meet there on December 6, 1841, if suitable quarters should be afforded, they were filled with enthusiasm. Walter Butler, one of the most public-spirited of the inhabitants of the little town, erected a two-story frame structure. This building, however, proved to be more or less unsatisfactory and, as it appeared that the permanent capitol would not be completed in time for the following session of the Legislative Assembly, toward the end of the first session held in "Butler's Capitol" three resolutions for removal were introduced in the House of Representatives. The first provided for the removal of the seat of government to Mount Pleasant until the capitol at Iowa City should be finished. After being amended to the effect that the citizens of Mount Pleasant should "furnish buildings, rent free", the resolution was tabled until the following Saturday: the Assembly adjourned on Friday. An attempt was made to fix the next meeting of the Legislative Assembly at Davenport, but again the resolution was laid on the table. A few minutes later another resolution was

<sup>8</sup> *Laws of the Territory of Iowa, 1840-1841*, pp. 41, 42; *Shambaugh's Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa, Vol. I*, pp. 245, 246; *House Journal, 1841-1842*, p. 3.



introduced, fixing Iowa City as the meeting-place of the succeeding Legislative Assembly. A motion was made to substitute Burlington for Iowa City, which was lost by a small majority. Fort Madison was then proposed. This motion was decided in the affirmative, requiring the "Legislative Assembly to meet at said place, at their next session, and until the public buildings are finished at Iowa City", but the resolution was finally postponed indefinitely. Thus nothing came of the first efforts to remove the capital from Iowa City.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Butler had agreed to erect the temporary capitol building in Iowa City on the condition that the citizens of the town would guarantee to pay him the difference between the cost of the building and the price it would command when no longer required by the government. For some reason these pledges were not fulfilled when the time came. Mr. Butler then asked aid from the legislature of the Territory. He presented a bill for rent to the second Legislative Assembly that convened at Iowa City during the winter of 1842-1843. The former Assembly, however, had met at Iowa City under the express provision that it should be housed rent free, as a guarantee of which agreement Mr. Butler and nineteen other citizens of Iowa City had signed a bond, binding themselves in the penal sum of \$15,000. When the account for rent came before the Council, therefore, no favorable action was taken upon it. A bill for the relief of Mr. Butler was introduced in the House, but that body was also loath to allow rent for the use of the building.

An amendment was offered, however, that "unless the citizens of Iowa City pay to Walter Butler the sum of five hundred dollars, before the first day of September next, for the rent of his house occupied by the Legislature for the

<sup>9</sup> Shambaugh's *Iowa City: A Contribution to the Early History of Iowa*, pp. 57, 58; *House Journal*, 1841-1842, pp. 264, 265, 267-269.



year 1841-'42, it shall be the duty of his Excellency, the Governor, to convene the next General Assembly at Mount Pleasant in Henry county, Iowa Territory, and there to remain until the above sum of five hundred dollars is paid." This amendment may have been an attempt, out of sympathy for Mr. Butler, to force the citizens of Iowa City who had signed the bond with him to share his loss; but a more plausible explanation appears in the fact that Mr. Paton Wilson who offered the amendment was one of the representatives of Henry County and had seized this opportunity in the hope of winning the capital for Mount Pleasant.<sup>10</sup> Mr. David J. Sales of Des Moines County succeeded in having Burlington (Des Moines County) inserted in place of Mount Pleasant, but when the amendment came to a vote it was overwhelmingly lost.<sup>11</sup>

The only action of the Legislative Assembly of 1843-1844 which could be construed to indicate a desire for the removal of the capital from Iowa City was in connection with the choice of the place at which the constitutional convention of 1844 should be held. A bill to provide for the expression of the opinion of the people of the Territory upon the subject of the formation of a State government, which contained a section designating the meeting-place of the convention to frame the constitution, being before the Coun-

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, earlier in the session Mr. Paton Wilson had introduced a joint resolution for the removal of the capital to Mount Pleasant, which, after being considered once in the committee of the whole and progress being reported, was not heard of again, probably because in the meantime a better opportunity seemed to be afforded by the rent controversy.—*House Journal*, 1842-1843, pp. 110, 114, 175.

<sup>11</sup> *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, p. 192; *Council Journal*, 1842-1843, pp. 25, 26, 27, 31, 85, 87, 122, 125, 128, 129, 141, 142, 157; *House Journal*, 1842-1843, pp. 81, 87, 90, 104, 108, 127, 138, 139, 142-145, 149, 161, 277, 292, 299.

While three hundred and twenty-five dollars was voted for other services of Mr. Butler to the government, he received no rent for housing the Legislative Assembly.—*Laws of Iowa*, 1842-1843 (Local), p. 49.



cil, no less than eight different towns were suggested. After Mount Pleasant, Iowa City, Jacksonville (Clayton County), Davenport, Pittsburg (Van Buren County), Burlington, and Dubuque had been proposed and rejected, Fort Madison was finally agreed upon. When the bill came into the House of Representatives, Mount Pleasant, Burlington, and Davenport were again proposed to no avail. Fort Madison was struck out and Iowa City inserted as the place for holding the convention; and in this form the bill finally passed.<sup>12</sup>

The delegates to the first constitutional convention in Iowa were called to order on October 7, 1844. When the report of the committee on schedule — that is, the article of the constitution providing for the transition from Territorial to State government — came before the assembly on the twenty-sixth day of the same month, Mr. George Hobson of Henry County proposed as an amendment to the section fixing the time for the first meeting of the General Assembly that Iowa City “shall be the seat of Government of the State of Iowa until the year eighteen hundred and sixty-five, and until removed by law.” The proposition was agreed to by a vote of forty-one to twenty-seven.<sup>13</sup>

The *Burlington Hawk-Eye* pronounced this amendment to be no essential part of a Constitution, claiming that it had been inserted by an accidental whim without regard to principle or right. Iowa City, it was asserted, would by virtue of such a provision have a monopoly on the seat of government, and a monopoly of any kind was a thing to be discouraged. Some people thought that the location of the capital at Iowa City by the Constitution had been accomplished by clever politicians for the promotion of private and local interests.

<sup>12</sup> *Council Journal*, 1843-1844, pp. 68, 69, 93, 94, 95, 99, 137, 140, 143, 144, 152, 159, 171, 175; *House Journal*, 1843-1844, pp. 162, 163; *Laws of Iowa*, 1843-1844, pp. 13-16.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of 1844*, pp. 3, 138, 139, 205.



All this was stoutly denied in Iowa City, where it was maintained that the criticism of the clause locating the capital at Iowa City for twenty-one years was only a clever ruse to provoke opposition to the Constitution, in the northern part of the Territory by the argument of sectional interest and in the southern portion by arousing the jealousies of other towns which aspired to the honor of being selected as the seat of government. Whatever may have been the merits of these accusations, the clause on the location of the capital became one of the main points of controversy in the campaign for the adoption of the Constitution of 1844. Indeed, it has been offered as one of the two or three chief causes for the rejection of that instrument by the people.<sup>14</sup>

During the eighth and last session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa (1845-1846) resolutions to adjourn the Assembly to Mount Pleasant were introduced both in the Council and in the House of Representatives on December 31st. In the Council, Bloomington, Burlington, and Dubuque were also proposed in this connection, but in both houses the resolutions were tabled without any favorable action.<sup>15</sup>

The Constitution of 1846, under which Iowa became a State, contained a provision that Iowa City "shall be the Seat of Government of the State of Iowa, until removed by law." The failure to incorporate a clause locating the capital at that place for any definite period, as the Constitution of 1844 had done, was probably a concession to the southern and western portions of the Territory, where a strong sentiment was developing in favor of removing the capital farther west at no remote time. In fact, it was immediately pointed out by those opposed to the Constitution that this was a subtle method of accomplishing the immediate re-

<sup>14</sup> *Iowa Capital Reporter* (Iowa City), July 30, August 27, 1845.

<sup>15</sup> *Council Journal*, 1845-1846, pp. 94, 95; *House Journal*, 1845-1846, pp. 87, 88.



location of the capital; for in the General Assembly, under the new Constitution, there would be a majority of eighteen members from the south and southwest who would be inclined to vote for the establishment of the capital at the Raccoon Forks of the Des Moines River, the location of Fort Des Moines.<sup>16</sup>

The Constitution of 1844 had been wrecked largely upon the question of boundaries. Congress had refused to accept the "Lucas Boundaries", as those prescribed in the Constitution were called, and had substituted what were known as the "Nicollet Boundaries", thereby reducing the area of the proposed State.<sup>17</sup> The Constitution so modified was twice rejected by the people of Iowa. When it became necessary to decide the boundary question in the constitutional convention of 1846 a compromise providing for the present boundaries was adopted, whereby the size of the State was reduced to 55,964 square miles or about six thousand square miles less than the "Lucas Boundaries" had included, the loss of territory being entirely on the north. Immediately those jealous of keeping the capital at Iowa City saw in this compromise the work of the delegates from the southern counties who, it was believed, had sacrificed the question of territory to obtain possession of the capital, for the new boundaries were "so formed as to throw the Raccoon Forks into the center of population for the next fifty years".<sup>18</sup>

As proof of this claim the history of the boundary ques-

<sup>16</sup> *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of 1846*, pp. xx, 92, 98; Shambaugh's *Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846*, p. 363.

<sup>17</sup> For the "Lucas Boundaries" and the "Nicollet Boundaries" see Maps III and IV in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. II, pp. 379, 380.

<sup>18</sup> Shambaugh's *History of the Constitutions of Iowa*, pp. 255, 271, 283; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 1st Session, 29th Congress, pp. 668, 669; Shambaugh's *Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846*, pp. 362, 363; *Iowa Official Register*, 1915-1916, pp. 884, 885.



tion in the constitutional convention was cited. At first the "Lucas Boundaries" had been determined upon by a vote of twenty-two to eight. But no sooner had that fact become known than "a certain General Government officer . . . . came post-haste to the city to represent the South on this question, and regulate the representatives of the people." It is true that six days after the adoption of the "Lucas Boundaries" William Steele of Van Buren County proposed the compromise boundaries, which passed by a vote of eighteen to twelve. Only two of the ten delegates who might have been supposed to represent the northern interests of the Territory, and therefore to be opposed to capital removal, voted for the amendment; while only four of the twenty from the south voted against it. The conclusion was that the southern delegates, by curtailing the territory on the north, hoped to throw the center of population, as well as the geographical center of the State, toward the southwest, thereby insuring the early removal of the capital to some point advantageous to the southern counties.

Further evidence shows, however, that the report of the Congressional Committee on Territories, proposing the compromise boundaries, reached the constitutional convention after the first decision on the boundary question and before the amendment was made. This fact would seem sufficient to account for the reconsideration of the boundary question in the convention. But the enemies of capital removal explained that the report of the Committee on Territories had resulted from the suggestion of Augustus Caesar Dodge, the Iowa Delegate to Congress, who wanted to effect the re-location of the capital by including it as a part of his program in connection with the solution of the boundary question. The fact of the sacrifice of territory to obtain the capital remained the same, it was contended, whether ac-



complished by the southern interests directly in the convention or through a representative at Washington.<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Dodge, in truth, had always been an ardent advocate of the development of the West by internal improvements and had put forth every possible effort for the advancement of the Des Moines Valley. In a speech delivered on the floor of the House of Representatives on June 8, 1846, about three weeks after the adoption of the compromise boundaries in the convention, while urging the justice of making the Missouri River the boundary on the west, he pointed out that an artificial line farther east<sup>20</sup> would "cut in twain our greatest interior river, the Des Moines — a stream which, rising in the northwest portion of our contemplated State, courses to the southeast, running for many miles almost equidistant between the Missouri and Mississippi, into which it discharges itself. The Des Moines is now navigable for a considerable portion of the year, and is susceptible, with the greatest facility and slightest expenditure, of being made so for many hundred miles, at all seasons of the year, when not obstructed by ice. The country through which it runs is one of unsurpassed fertility, and is now becoming densely inhabited. From the central position of this river, and its other advantages, there are a very large portion of the people of Iowa who believe and desire that their ultimate seat of government should be upon it."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Shambaugh's *Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846*, pp. 361, 362, 363; *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of 1846*, pp. 39, 40, 48, 87, 88, 102; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 1st Session, 29th Congress, p. 668.

<sup>20</sup> The "Nicollet Boundaries", those proposed by Congress in the act of March 3, 1845, admitting Iowa to the Union, provided that the State should be bounded on the west "by a meridian line, seventeen degrees and thirty minutes west of the meridian of Washington city." This line passes two or three miles west of the eastern boundary of Taylor County.—*United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 742.

<sup>21</sup> Pelzer's *Augustus Caesar Dodge*, pp. 103-106; *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 1st Session, 29th Congress, p. 669.



This remark of Mr. Dodge in Congress relative to the ultimate location of the capital on the Des Moines River brought down upon him a torrent of criticism from the eastern part of the Territory. The intimate association of the question of capital removal and the adoption of the State Constitution was so obvious that the *Iowa City Standard* sarcastically informed its readers that "the good people have now nothing more to do than to ratify the Constitution, and instruct the Legislature to remove the Seat of Government from *Iowa City* to the Desmoines river, agreeably to the suggestions of Gen. Dodge." Arguing, in the interest of the eastern part of the Territory, that the movement was as yet premature, the same paper continued: "the citizens residing in that portion of the Territory which is watered by the Iowa and Cedar rivers, will not thank their Delegate for wandering from the path of legitimate discussion, to indicate a relocation of the Seat of Government. When Iowa shall become a State, and her whole territory pretty well settled, it will be time enough to talk about this matter. The first Convention, with great unanimity [forty-one to twenty-seven], located the seat of government in this city for twenty years; and the last one declared it should be the capital until removed by law. And here it should remain for at least a quarter of a century." The matter of expense was then brought forward as a reason for keeping the capital at Iowa City. "Some eighty thousand dollars have been expended on the State House, and we presume the people will not, to gratify the wishes of a few land and town-lot speculators, or the whims of a few sticklers for locating the capital in the geographical center, be disposed to tax themselves some hundred thousand dollars to erect another, upon the banks of the great Desmoines, 'now navigable for a considerable portion of the year.'"<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Shambaugh's *Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846*, pp. 346, 347, reprinted from *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), July 15, 1846.



The *Bloomington Herald*, sharing the fears of the Iowa City paper, proclaimed the question to be "whether we shall adopt the present constitution, and by adopting it, say, by our votes, that the Seat of Government shall be removed to the Des Moines river. This is no imaginary thing. The fact has been shadowed forth . . . in a speech delivered in the House of Representatives of the United States, June 8th. If there be any who are not interested in retaining the Seat of Government at Iowa City, we suppose they will vote for the constitution."<sup>23</sup>

The arguments of those who favored removal in the near future were outlined by Wm. Penn Clarke in a speech to the electors of Muscatine, Johnson, and Iowa counties. "It will be said", he predicted, "that the present building is unfinished; that to complete it, will cost as much as would erect a smaller and less expensive one at the rival point; that it would be folly to expend money on this work, and subsequently remove the seat of government elsewhere; and thus many persons in other portions of the State, who are indifferent to the subject, and unadvised as to the injustice which will be done us, may be induced to vote for candidates who will carry out this scheme. To quiet the center, we shall probably be promised a State University, or something of that character, and then be cheated in the end; for the State will not locate such an institution in the same place where there are already one or two chartered institutions of learning in operation. Those, then, who vote for the ratification of the Constitution, do so with the almost moral certainty that the removal of the seat of government from this point, will be one of the first consequences of its adoption."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Shambaugh's *Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846*, p. 399, reprinted from *The Bloomington Herald*, July 17, 1846.

<sup>24</sup> Shambaugh's *Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846*, p. 364, reprinted from *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), July 22, 1846.



The Constitution of 1846 was ratified by the people and Iowa became a State. The population in 1847 numbered 116,454, an increase of 73,342 over that of 1840. Of this increase, 25,034 people lived in counties where no count was made in 1840, all but three of which lay to the west and southwest of the area enumerated in 1840. In 1847 the population of the counties west, southwest, and south of Iowa, Johnson, and Muscatine counties totaled 79,748, while that of all the others, or what might have been called the northern part of the State, amounted to only 36,706. From these figures it is obvious that the center of population was still shifting rapidly to the west and southwest, although it had not yet passed Iowa City. The geographical center of the State, as bounded by the Constitution of 1846, was, however, about one hundred miles farther west and some twenty-five miles north of Iowa City.

The anxiety felt by those who wished to retain the capital at Iowa City that the representatives of southern and western sections of the State in the First General Assembly would be disposed to take advantage of the opportunity for removal afforded by the Constitution was indeed justified. A memorial to Congress representing that "in view of the extended limits of the State, and the rapid increase of our population, the public mind is beginning to look forward to an ultimate change in the location of our Seat of Government"; that the "selection of a new site, with a view to its permanent location, at as early a day as practicable is believed to be important"; and that an "additional grant of five sections of land, to be selected under the direction of the General Assembly" was desired, passed both houses of the General Assembly and was approved by Governor Ansel Briggs on February 8, 1847. Nothing, however, came of this



memorial: indeed it does not appear that it ever reached Congress.<sup>25</sup>

On February 2, 1847, Evan Jay of Henry County introduced in the Iowa Senate a bill to provide for the location of the seat of government and for the selection of the land granted by Congress on March 3, 1845, to aid in erecting public buildings.<sup>26</sup> The bill passed the Senate on February 12th, but in the House of Representatives several attempts at amendment were made. Elijah Sells of Muscatine County proposed that after a new site for the capital had been selected the question of whether this new location or Iowa City should be the permanent seat of government should be decided by a vote of the people at a general election. This amendment having failed Mr. Sells made a motion calling for the appointment of a select committee whose duty it should be to report three distinct sites from which the people should choose one as the permanent capital. Stewart Goodrell of Washington County submitted the proposition that Iowa City should remain the capital until 1858. Motions were made to locate the seat of government at Burlington and at Mount Pleasant, all of which failed. Finally, William E. Leffingwell of Clinton County thoroughly exasperated with the persistence of the advocates of capital removal, moved to divert the appropriation of Congress of March 3, 1845 "from the purpose for which it was originally

<sup>25</sup> *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census*, 1880, pp. 196, 198; *Senate Journal*, 1846-1847, pp. 125, 160, 161, 167, 169, 185, 191, 195, 198; *House Journal*, 1846-1847, pp. 217, 222, 232, 238, 256; *Laws of Iowa*, 1846-1847, p. 204.

<sup>26</sup> In an act supplementary to the first act admitting Iowa and Florida to the Union, Congress granted five sections of any unappropriated United States land within Iowa "for the purpose of completing the public buildings of the said State, or for the erection of public buildings at the seat of government", the land to be selected and located and the use to be determined as the State legislature should direct. All of the provisions of this act remained in force when Iowa was finally admitted to the Union on December 28, 1846.—*United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 790; Vol. IX, p. 117.



intended', and use it to build a "city in the Republic of the valley of the Desmoines."<sup>27</sup>

The bitter fight ended at last in a compromise whereby the State University was to be located at Iowa City upon the removal of the capital farther west. The strong argument for the central location of the capital finally prevailed, but the opposition was doubtless right in the contention that immediate removal was premature. It was asked in derision what the word permanent meant in Iowa legislation. In the case of the location of the capital at Iowa City it had meant about eight years. The *Iowa City Standard* regretted "exceedingly to see a premature agitation of the question of a permanent location of the Capital, and the University of Iowa. No good can result from it in our opinion. We have no doubt that the seat of government will some day be removed from Iowa City; and when the weight of population on the west shall require it, we shall have nothing to say against it. But Iowa City now occupies a

<sup>27</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1846-1847, pp. 176, 177, 192, 197, 202, 203, 207, 208, 210, 211, 212, 217, 218, 244, 247, 255, 256; *House Journal*, 1846-1847, pp. 301, 311, 319-324, 333-336, 342; *Laws of Iowa*, 1846-1847, pp. 85-87.

So imbued with the spirit of capital removal did one member of the First General Assembly become that he introduced a joint resolution to move the seat of government of the United States to the Raccoon Forks of the Des Moines River. The motion was tabled indefinitely, but the committee on agriculture, in reporting on a petition presented by numerous citizens of Iowa City and Johnson County who were exasperated by their unavailing efforts to retain the capital, and begged "among other novelties, that the General Assembly permit the citizens of said county to enjoy reasonable health and abundant crops, together with other blessings denied them by nature and their own energies", ventured the opinion with an air of badinage that when "your Committee takes into consideration the growing importance of the country about the Raccoon Forks of the Desmoines river, and compare the same with the District of Columbia, they cannot refrain from expressing their belief that, although our Representatives may not be able to remove said Seat of Government 'immediately,' the day is nevertheless, not far distant, when this great object will have been accomplished, thus bringing the Seat of the Federal Government in juxtaposition with your petitioners; thereby affording them a more favorable opportunity to press their claims upon that august Body, the Congress of the United States."

— *House Journal*, 1846-1847, pp. 324, 343, 388, 435, 436.



central position to the population of the State, and will for a long time to come." It was believed in 1847 that "a very large portion of the country lying west of the Des Moines and its tributaries, is a barren waste, destitute of timber, made up of lakes, marshes, and sand hills, incapable of being inhabited, so that the weight of population for a long time to come, at least, if not forever, must preponderate in favor of that portion of the State in the more immediate vicinity of the Mississippi river, which is now, and must always be by far the most important portion of the State of Iowa."<sup>28</sup>

Another argument advanced to confound the friends of capital removal was to the effect that the five sections of land for the completion and erection of public buildings had been granted by Congress under the Constitution of 1844, which declared Iowa City to be the capital until 1865, and had been revived under the Constitution of 1846, which also declared Iowa City to be the seat of government. The land, it was asserted, was therefore intended to be used only for the benefit of the public buildings at Iowa City, and the grant was not in the nature of a trust fund to be reserved to erect buildings at a new seat of government. Consequently, if any use was to be made of this land it must be for the purpose of completing the public buildings at Iowa City; while the funds for buildings at a new seat of government would have to come as private donations, unless Congress could be prevailed upon to grant more land. These arguments seem to have had but little weight, however, being based on the interpretation of an exceedingly slender technicality of the act of Congress.<sup>29</sup>

After the bill providing for the appointment of commis-

<sup>28</sup> *Laws of Iowa, 1846-1847*, pp. 188, 189; *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), February 10, September 29, 1847.

<sup>29</sup> *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), February 17, September 29, 1847.



sioners to locate a new capital had actually become a law the people opposed to it consoled themselves with the thought that further legislation would be required to move the capital from Iowa City, for the location made by the commissioners would be only prospective. They believed that the matter of expense would deter the people from permitting the actual re-location of the seat of government for many years to come, since they would not be willing to tax themselves a hundred thousand dollars to erect another capitol building so soon. Citizens of Iowa City were appeased by the promise of the University, feeling "very thankful that we have made so good an exchange. We would greatly prefer the University to the seat of government; and we now regard real estate in this city, as worth fifty per cent more than it was before the meeting of the General Assembly."<sup>30</sup>

The act of February 22, 1847, appointed as commissioners John Brown of Lee County, Joseph D. Hoag of Henry County, and John Taylor of Jones County, who were to meet during May of that year, examine such parts of the State as were deemed suitable, select the amount of land appropriated by Congress, and locate the permanent seat of government "as near the geographical centre as, in the opinion of the commissioners, may be consistent with an eligible and healthy site, the general features of the surrounding country and the interest of the State generally". After selecting the land and locating the capital, the commissioners were to have the town platted, causing a square to be laid off, containing not less than five acres, upon which to erect the capitol. Provision was made for a public sale of lots, the proceeds from which were to be used to defray expenses and erect public buildings. The commissioners

<sup>30</sup> *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), February 10, March 3, September 29, 1847.



were allowed three dollars a day and expenses for their services.<sup>31</sup>

As directed by law the commissioners met and proceeded to examine some of the settled as well as unsettled parts of the State. Indeed, the entire summer and autumn were spent in the work, so that each of the commissioners was actually employed approximately one hundred and forty days, and thus their services alone cost the State over \$1250. First a thorough examination of the Des Moines Valley was made without a suitable location being found. In August it was reported that the commissioners were to explore the country along the upper part of the Iowa River, near the geographical center of the State. There was a rumor that if they met with no better success here, the whole project of capital removal might be again thrown before the General Assembly. Later, however, public opinion seems to have settled upon Oskaloosa and Tool's Point,<sup>32</sup> as the places most likely to be chosen for the capital. About the middle of September the site was agreed upon, consisting of sections four, five, eight, nine, the west half of section three and the west half of section ten in township number seventy-eight, of range twenty west of the fifth principal meridian. It was described as "a point unrivaled in natural beauty", situated "on a beautiful prairie in Jasper county, between the Desmoines and Skunk rivers, about six miles from the

<sup>31</sup> *Laws of Iowa, 1846-1847*, pp. 85-87.

The public buildings at Iowa City and the ten acres of land on which they were situated were granted to the State University of Iowa, but the sessions of the General Assembly were to be held and the offices of the State officials were to remain there until otherwise provided for by law.—*Laws of Iowa, 1846-1847*, p. 188.

<sup>32</sup> In the summer of 1843 Adam Tool, in company with a few other pioneers, made the first settlement in Jasper County, staking out their claims in Fairview Township. Mr. Tool's house, being large and on the trail from Oskaloosa to Fort Des Moines, soon earned the title of "Tool's Tavern". As the settlement grew a town was platted which was called Tool's Point. A few years later the name was changed to Monroe.—*Weaver's Past and Present of Jasper County, Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 54, 55, 57, 291.



former and five from the latter, in the most beautiful and fertile section of country in Iowa''. Excellent timber extended to within a short distance on either side, while there was an abundance of stone and coal in the immediate vicinity. Monroe City, as the place was named by the commissioners,<sup>33</sup> was some twenty-five miles east of the present city of Des Moines, thirty-three miles from Oskaloosa, and eighty-four miles west of Iowa City. It was about two miles southeast of the present town of Prairie City.<sup>34</sup>

In August, 1847, five or six hundred Hollanders established a colony at Pella, about fifteen miles southeast of Monroe City. This event, in connection with the location of the new capital, led to a general rush of speculators to that region. It was said that the country for a considerable distance above Tool's Point was literally all staked off. The sale of lots in Monroe City lasted six days, beginning on October 28, 1847,<sup>35</sup> and four hundred and fifteen lots were sold at prices ranging all the way from one to three hundred and one dollars. The amount received from the first payment was \$1797.43 — a sum which lacked \$409.14 of being enough to pay the expenses and salaries of the commissioners. John Brown and Joseph D. Hoag, it seems, felt so much confidence in the new city that they invested heavily in lots and adjacent land; and thus they cherished dreams of even more ample remuneration for their services.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Apropos of the name of the future capital of Iowa one newspaper had this to say: "Among the thousands of beautiful Indian names — indigenous to the soil — we think that they might have selected a more appropriate and handsome name than 'Monroe City'." — *The Bloomington Herald*, October 2, 1847.

<sup>34</sup> *House Journal*, 1848-1849, pp. 199, 210; *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), August 4, September 22, 1847; *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. IX, p. 570.

<sup>35</sup> October 31, 1847, was Sunday, but the report of the commissioners states that the sales were continued from day to day until November 2nd, inclusive. — *House Journal*, 1848-1849, p. 199.

<sup>36</sup> Van der Zee's *The Hollanders of Iowa*, pp. 66, 67; *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. IX, p. 570; *House Journal*, 1848-1849, pp. 199-210.



The capital city had not been located at the much-talked-of Raccoon Forks of the Des Moines River, neither was it within thirty-five miles of the geographical center of the State. Yet, aside from an opportunity for speculation, the action of the commissioners in choosing such a location caused little comment. Even the people in Iowa City felt "but little interest in this movement at present, being satisfied that the legislature will not remove the seat of government from this place, until the population shall have so increased in the west as to render it an act of justice to do so." Everyone seemed content to hope that the act for relocating the capital passed by the First General Assembly in 1846-1847 would be repealed at the following session.<sup>37</sup>

In January, 1848, an extra session of the First General Assembly was called chiefly for the purpose of revising the school laws and electing United States Senators. Immediately one hundred and twenty-two citizens of the State seized the opportunity to encourage the repeal of the law of the previous session providing for the re-location of the capital. A bill to that effect was introduced in the Senate on January 22nd and passed that body two days later, but failed to come to a vote in the House of Representatives. A joint resolution relative to the seat of government (probably being concerned in some way with the location or plat of Monroe City, since it was referred to the committee on county and township organization) also passed the Senate, but came to naught in the House. A resolution instructing the committee on county and township organization to inquire into the expediency of accepting Monroe City as the location for the new capital was tabled. The report of the commissioners was submitted to the Senate and ordered to be filed in the office of the Secretary of State.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), August 4, September 8, 1847.

<sup>38</sup> Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 370-378; *Senate Journal*, 1848 (Extra Session), pp. 33, 51, 60, 61, 66, 107, 111, 112, 115; *House Journal*, 1848 (Extra Session), pp. 48, 116, 123, 142, 175, 193.



The Second General Assembly had been in session only eight days when a resolution to investigate the propriety of vacating Monroe City was adopted by the Senate. At the request of the House of Representatives the Governor transmitted the report of the Monroe City commissioners to that body on December 15, 1848. After being read the report was referred to a select committee with instructions to report "how much of said city of Monroe was under water and how much was burned up." On the eighteenth of December Mr. Joseph F. Harrison, the Representative from Muscatine, Johnson, and Iowa counties and a member of the select committee, introduced a bill to repeal the act of the First General Assembly providing for the re-location of the seat of government. Mr. L. W. Babbitt, representing Marion, Polk, Dallas, and Jasper counties wanted to amend the bill so as to locate the capital at Fort Des Moines, provided the citizens of Polk County should refund to the purchasers of lots in Monroe City all money paid thereon. When this amendment failed Babbitt suggested that the citizens of Iowa City refund the money paid by owners of lots in Monroe City if they wished to retain the capital. The bill finally passed the House unaltered. The Senate, however, referred the measure to the committee on public buildings which reported a substitute that was passed by the Senate and agreed to by the House of Representatives.<sup>39</sup>

By the terms of this law the Treasurer of the State was instructed to refund all money paid by purchasers of lots in Monroe City, except to the commissioners who had in-

<sup>39</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1848-1849, pp. 34, 45, 98, 107, 218, 231, 232, 240, 259; *House Journal*, 1848-1849, pp. 183, 211, 218, 224, 238, 242-244, 410, 427, 428, 432; Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 415, 416.

Once during the session of the Second General Assembly a bill to locate the capital and the State University, and to donate the public buildings at Iowa City to the Latter-day Saints was introduced but was soon withdrawn.—*House Journal*, 1848-1849, p. 271.



vested there,<sup>40</sup> and the site of the proposed future capital of Iowa was declared vacated, being relegated once more to the rattle-snakes, gophers, and prairie dogs.<sup>41</sup>

No sooner had it become known that Monroe City had been vacated and that the permanent location of the seat of government was again an open question than the hopes and aspirations of each locality that was in the slightest way fitted for becoming the capital soared to the sky. Capital re-location was such a constantly recurring topic in the Third General Assembly that a Representative offered a resolution one day that the removal of the seat of govern-

<sup>40</sup> John Taylor, who had purchased no lots in Monroe City, was allowed the balance of his salary, \$204.40, by the Second General Assembly, but John Brown and Joseph D. Hoag experienced much difficulty, not only in securing reimbursement of the money spent in purchasing lots, but in securing their salaries as commissioners. Time and again they petitioned the General Assembly without success: that body took the attitude that they had been governed more by private considerations than by a determination to advance the interests of the State, and that therefore they deserved no relief. Finally, in 1855, the Fifth General Assembly allowed John Brown the sum of \$292.70 as payment in full for his services as a commissioner to locate the seat of government and as a return of all money paid by him for lots at Monroe City. On his part he was to relinquish to the State all claim to the lots purchased by him. Joseph D. Hoag, however, was less fortunate. Until 1860 he continued to petition one house or the other of the General Assembly. The committee on claims in the House of Representatives of the Eighth General Assembly (1860) reported favorably on his claim and recommended the passage of a bill allowing him the balance of his salary, the \$80.18 he had invested in Monroe City lots, and interest at six percent on the whole amount from the time the report of the commissioners had been filed in 1847. The bill was tabled, however, and Hoag, discouraged in his long and futile efforts, seems to have given up in despair.—*Senate Journal*, 1848–1849, pp. 88, 199, 221, 236, 241, 254, 260, 263; 1850–1851, p. 207; 1852–1853, pp. 96, 142, 257, 293, 294, 297; 1854–1855, pp. 36, 123, 156, 164, 165, 177, 187, 188, 227, 234, 237, 246, 247, 318, 319; 1858, pp. 77, 390; *House Journal*, 1848–1849, p. 408; 1850–1851, pp. 40, 192, 238, 239, 248; 1852–1853, pp. 159, 302, 315, 347; 1854–1855, pp. 58, 277, 289, 310, 311, 312, 325, 326, 345, 448; 1856–1857, pp. 145, 154, 167, 204, 205, 230, 231, 360, 378, 395, 396, 412, 413, 458; 1860, pp. 120, 436, 437, 653; *Laws of Iowa*, 1848–1849, p. 193; *Laws of Iowa*, 1854–1855, pp. 272, 273.

<sup>41</sup> *Laws of Iowa*, 1848–1849, p. 147. The proceeds from the sale of the five sections of land selected by the commissioners in Jasper County for the capital was appropriated by the Seventh General Assembly for the benefit of the State Agricultural College established at that time.—*Laws of Iowa*, 1858, p. 174.



ment be postponed until after the storm. Seventy-four petitions, signed by practically four thousand three hundred citizens, all of them from the southern counties, were presented — sixty-two in the House and twelve in the Senate.

Thirty-eight of these petitions favored Fort Des Moines as the site for the capital, thirty-one were for Oskaloosa, eleven for Pella, two for Red Rock, and two others simply asked that the seat of government be moved. While the number of petitions would seem to indicate that Fort Des Moines was the favorite location for the capital, Oskaloosa was probably the choice of the greatest number of petitioners. In the petitions presented to the House 1662 signers asked that the capital be located at Oskaloosa, 204 were in favor of Pella, while only 155 could be mustered for Fort Des Moines. Furthermore, three remonstrances were received from Marion County against removing the seat of government to Fort Des Moines, probably with the hope of improving the chances of Oskaloosa, Pella, or Red Rock (now Cordova).<sup>42</sup>

The Hollanders at Pella were particularly anxious to win the capital of the State for their town. Henry P. Scholte, one of the leaders in the colony, offered to donate land sufficient for a site. The committee on federal relations, to which his memorial was referred, reported in the following reassuring words: "We are of the opinion, that the petitioner has no reason to fear that Pella will be overlooked or in anywise neglected, whenever the legislature may deem it necessary to relocate the seat of government, from the fact that a majority of the citizens of that place were from Holland, we make no distinction between our own native citizens and those of any foreign country".<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *House Journal*, 1850-1851, pp. 69, 72, 113, 160, 161, 166, 173, 177, 178, 185, 207, 208, 216, 220, 235, 244, 249, 350; *Senate Journal*, 1850-1851, pp. 59, 66, 67, 113, 119, 120, 125, 143, 144, 170, 218, 307.

<sup>43</sup> *House Journal*, 1850-1851, pp. 69, 160, 168.



Two bills — one locating the permanent capital at Fort Des Moines and the other at Pella — were introduced in the House of Representatives during the Third General Assembly in 1850–1851. They were referred to a select committee which reported as follows:

The select committee to whom was referred H. R. file No. 128, a bill for “an act to locate the seat of government of the state of Iowa at Fort Des Moines;” and H. R. file No. 161, a bill for “an act to provide for the location of the permanent seat of government of the state of Iowa at Pella,” together with sundry petitions upon the same subject, report that they find that Fort Des Moines has a majority of the petitioners in its favor for the future seat of government over all other places petitioned for.

Your committee taking into consideration the probable increase of population in the western portion of the state, are of opinion that the seat of government cannot in justice to that portion of the state remain but a few years at Iowa City.

Your committee entertain no doubt that when the seat of government is removed that it will be re-located at the town of Fort Des Moines.

Your committee are of opinion that the time for said removal as fixed in H. R. file No. 128 is just and equitable, and that the seat of government ought to be removed at that time.

Your committee therefore recommend the passage of H. R. file No. 128, and that H. R. file No. 161 be indefinitely postponed.

One Representative thought the matter ought to be decided by a vote of the people at the next general election, but the majority of the members were of another mind. The bill to remove the capital to Fort Des Moines being under consideration, Cedar Falls, Pella, and Davenport were offered as substitutes to no avail; and finally the bill was dropped. A bill of the same character was introduced in the Senate, but never came to a vote.<sup>44</sup>

The whole situation was well summarized by the com-

<sup>44</sup> *House Journal*, 1850–1851, pp. 221, 236, 289, 326–330; *Senate Journal*, pp. 175, 186, 187, 224, 238, 250, 288.



mittee on public buildings in the House of Representatives which reported as follows:

The first thing that your committee considered with reference to the prayer of your petitioners was, should the capital be removed at all, from Iowa City? To this proposition there are many weighty objections, some of which it may be necessary to notice in this report.

Your committee are of the opinion that removing the capital of a state is of too much importance to be acted upon without due consideration, and weighing well the consequences to the state and the justice and injustice to individuals.

To remove the capital before public opinion has settled upon the site of the future seat of government would not have the effect of allaying public excitement on that subject but on the contrary would increase it. Although a large majority of the petitioners ask that the capital be located at Oskaloosa, yet to grant their prayer would only increase petitions from other quarters for the simple reason that public opinion has not settled upon any place in preference to all others. This should cause us to pause. There is too much at stake to act hastily.

But there are reasons of a pecuniary character which ought to have their due influence in controlling the vote of the general assembly on this important question.

We have at the present seat of government a state house built at great expense, and if the capital be removed the state must build another house at an expense of probably one hundred thousand dollars. This is a matter of some consequence to the state of Iowa without a dime in the treasury, and in debt to an amount of near the maximum that we are allowed to go in debt under our constitution. How is the house to be built? It must be by taxation. Those towns which are petitioning for the capital offer lands, &c., to aid in building the state house, but your committee have but little confidence in the state realising much from such offers. Different places have made bids of this kind. While your committee would not recommend the selling of the capital to the highest bidder, yet, other things being equal, money or lands sufficient to build a good state house, might with propriety be taken by the state, and would remove one great objection to the removing at this time.

But then another objection to removing the capital, which your



committee think claims notice and demands the calm consideration of the House.

Many persons have located in and near Iowa City *because it was the Capital of the State*, and as we have reason to suppose they expected it to remain so. With this expectation they paid more for their property than they otherwise would have done. Under this belief, they have built houses, commenced merchandising and invested their funds in many ways, on the faith of the state permitting the Capital to remain. These persons, if the Capital be removed, must be the sufferers to some considerable extent. Perhaps to the ruin of many. The interest therefore of the state, and the interest of individuals, stand against the removal of the seat of government; and these objections are of themselves sufficient to cause the legislature to act with much caution. People are to[o] apt to act from selfish and local feelings on subjects of this nature. No such feelings should ever actuate any one, much less any member of the State Legislature. With feelings of impartiality, and for the good of the whole State, should we consider such a question.

It then became the duty of your committee to examine the reasons which your petitioners urge for the removal. They are, principally, that Iowa City being on one side of the state, (within thirty miles of the state line) is too far remote from the centre of population, and from the geographical center of the state, to remain the seat of government much longer, that the convenience of the citizens of Iowa demand that the Capital be somewhere in the valley of the Des Moines river.

Your committee are well aware that this is an argument of much force and difficult to answer, when the present Capital is so far from the centre of population now, and every year becoming more and more so, in consequence of the middle and western part of the state increasing faster in population than the eastern. The justice of having the Capital near the centre of population, no one will attempt to deny.

At the time the present seat of government was located, Iowa City was on the extreme west of the settlements; but settlements have constantly been increasing westwardly, until they have reached the Missouri river, (the western boundary of Iowa.)

Under these circumstances, in justice to the *whole* state, is it right and proper that Iowa City should be the future Capital? Can we,



in looking at the geography of Iowa, say the Capital shall never go any further west? Your committee are unable to come to any such conclusion.

While they think it impolitic and premature, to pass any law removing the Capital, at this time, yet they think that in a few years the Capital must, and of right ought to be located further west.

As your committee think it premature to remove the Capital at this time, therefore, they do not see proper to recommend any site for it to be placed. The three places petitioned for, viz: Pella, Oskaloosa and Fort Des Moines, are either of them, considered near enough the centre of prospective population; and, also the geographical centre, for the future capitol. So far as your committee know, they all, and each, possess many advantages which would recommend them, as a proper place for a site on which to locate the new capital. But your committee will not recommend either in preference to the other, believing that the question should be fairly and openly discussed before the people, and that public opinion will fix upon some place and justice be done to all.

Your committee in conclusion, beg leave to submit the following resolutions:

Resolved, That justice to the citizens in the western part of the state, will in a few years, demand that the Capital be removed westwardly.

Resolved, That it is inexpedient to legislate on the subject of removing the Capital at this time.<sup>45</sup>

The experience of the Third General Assembly on the capital removal question was repeated at the succeeding legislative session. Thirty-one petitions were sent to the Senate and eight to the House of Representatives. Twenty-eight of them favored the establishment of the State capital at Fort Des Moines. On the petitions read in the Senate alone there were 1642 signatures, of which 1209 were for the Des Moines location, 146 for Pella, 131 for Oskaloosa, and 105 for Tool's Point. All of the petitions presented in the House favored Fort Des Moines.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *House Journal*, 1850-1851, pp. 350-353.

<sup>46</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1852-1853, pp. 35, 68, 69, 80, 85, 96, 97, 102, 108, 117, 119, 120, 126, 132, 141, 197; *House Journal*, 1852-1853, pp. 91, 177, 191, 263, 276, 308.



As testimonials of the good faith of the petitioners and as added inducements to the government, various propositions were offered. Certain citizens of Mahaska County presented a bond of \$50,000 contingent upon the removal of the seat of government to Oskaloosa, while citizens of Fort Des Moines and Polk County gave a bond guaranteeing to save the State any expense incurred in removing the capital to Fort Des Moines. Henry P. Scholte again offered to donate land to the State if the capital should be located at Pella. His proposition was duplicated by Adam M. Tool and other citizens of Jasper County, while another group of Jasper County citizens proposed to give either land or money, provided the seat of government should be established at Tool's Point.<sup>47</sup>

A bill to locate the capital at Pella and another to establish it at Fort Des Moines were introduced in the Senate during the Fourth General Assembly in 1852-1853; but neither bill was passed. There was also presented a resolution requesting that the difference in the amount of mileage of State officers in going to and from the various points suggested as capitals be estimated in order to aid in determining upon the re-location of the seat of government, but the resolution was not adopted.<sup>48</sup>

It was during the session of the Fourth General Assembly that Senator A. Y. Hull of Polk County did his utmost to win the capital for Fort Des Moines. In a speech delivered on December 31, 1852, he deplored the local jealousies engendered between citizens of the same Commonwealth, urging that the people act together for the ultimate welfare of the State. Fort Des Moines he regarded as the only eligible site for the capital, "situated in the center of the state, at the head of the proposed navigation, on a beautiful eleva-

<sup>47</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1852-1853, pp. 51, 52, 97, 102, 108, 117, 136, 159, 214.

<sup>48</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1852-1853, pp. 25, 26, 35, 40, 41, 48, 94, 95, 97, 114, 118, 124, 129-131, 135-139, 141, 144, 145.



tion between the two rivers, far above the contingency of high water, in a region of unsurpassed fertility, surrounded by timber, the region roundabout underlaid with coal, with extensive mines of gypsum, tributary thereto, and with an abundance of pure water." A strong reason, he thought, for the immediate re-location of the seat of government was the great system of internal improvements which was being developed. It was deemed important that the location of the permanent capital be effected before the railroad lines were established. "Give us the Capital at Fort Des Moines," he said, "railroads checquering our entire State bringing us in connection with the cities of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers — the Des Moines river on the South — [and] we will grow up a great and prosperous inland city which, in point of commercial importance, will be second to no city in the west."<sup>49</sup>

When the Fifth General Assembly (1854–1855) met it was generally understood that the removal of the capital could not be postponed much longer. From 1847 to 1854 the population of Iowa grew from 116,454 to 326,500; while in the two years following there was an increase of 191,375. Whereas in 1847 the census had been taken in only thirty-two counties, in 1854 the enumeration covered sixty-seven counties and in 1856 fourteen more were added, all but one of the latter being north or northwest of Fort Des Moines.<sup>50</sup> It had been discovered that the western part of the State was by no means the barren area it had been supposed to be. Settlements were being made in the farthest corners, and it was evident that it would be only a short time until

<sup>49</sup> Brigham's *History of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 137, 138.

<sup>50</sup> *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census*, 1880, pp. 196–198. The next census was not taken until 1859, two years after the capital had been established at Des Moines. Then the population of the State was 642,578 and there were only seven of the present counties which the count did not include.



the western part of the State would equal, if not surpass, the eastern section in importance. As time went on the citizens of eastern Iowa had become reconciled to the inevitable removal of the seat of government. The very first bill introduced in the House of Representatives of the Fifth General Assembly, in which fifty of the sixty-four Representatives were from the east and southeast, was to re-locate the capital, although few petitions on the subject were presented. In both houses resolutions were offered to remove the seat of government nearer the center of the State, urging that it was the duty of the Assembly to act at once. Public opinion seems to have quite generally settled upon Fort Des Moines as the logical place for the future State capital, strategically situated as it was on the greatest interior waterway of Iowa and at a point approximating the center of the Commonwealth.<sup>51</sup>

The fight in the General Assembly for the adoption of an act authorizing the removal of the capital to Des Moines was, however, by no means tame or uneventful. General James A. Williamson, who was prominent among those who secured the legislation for removal, when asked by an investigating committee what influences he had used, replied that he had employed "all lawful and legal means . . . including Chesapeake and Sardinian appliances, and any quantity of whiskey." Furthermore, Robert Gower declared in the constitutional convention of 1857 that the capital had been moved to Des Moines to satisfy the "selfishness of the few", that the means used were "money, town lots, and oyster suppers", openly maintaining that the passage of the act had been procured by fraud and bribery. He produced correspondence to show that a big lobby from Fort Des Moines had been present during a large portion of

<sup>51</sup> *House Journal*, 1854-1855, pp. 55, 56, 60, 139-142, 200, 234; *Senate Journal*, 1854-1855, pp. 94, 117; *Iowa City Republican*, June 5, 1856; *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. VI, p. 381.



the session and that members of the General Assembly had been offered many inducements to vote for the removal of the capital to that place. It seems that certain citizens of Des Moines even appropriated some land to defray the expenses of persons kept at Iowa City to lobby the bill through the legislature.

Bills were introduced in both houses, the one originating in the Senate finally gaining enactment. An attempt was made to have the act read Oskaloosa in place of a point within two miles of the junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers; several efforts were made to extend the scope of the area within which the site could be selected; and in both houses amendments were offered referring the whole matter to a vote of the people; but the bill finally escaped unscathed.<sup>52</sup>

The Governor was to appoint five commissioners to determine upon the exact site. They were to meet during the following April, take an oath for the faithful and impartial discharge of their duties, and proceed to locate the seat of government "within two miles of the junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers". In making the selection it was their duty to obtain at least enough land for the capitol and other necessary buildings without charge to the State, and all other grants and donations within their power. Suitable buildings were to be erected without expense to the State,

<sup>52</sup> *Report on Alleged Frauds in the Location of the Capitol*, pp. 37-44; *Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1857*, Vol. II, pp. 923, 924; *Senate Journal*, 1854-1855, pp. 32, 51, 59, 128, 134, 135, 144, 145-149, 157, 160, 237, 260, 288; *House Journal*, 1854-1855, pp. 91, 120, 264-266, 293-302, 311, 333, 334, 397.

Those who favored Mount Pleasant for the seat of government were probably pacified by the tacit understanding that the State insane asylum would be located there, although Fairfield and Oskaloosa were also mentioned in that connection. Indeed, it appears that an extensive building was begun at Mount Pleasant without authority of law. Actual establishment did not occur until 1858.—*Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1857*, Vol. II, pp. 925, 926; *Laws of Iowa*, 1858, p. 264.



the General Assembly meeting and the State officers retaining their offices at Iowa City until accommodations were provided at the new seat of government.<sup>53</sup>

Governor James W. Grimes appointed Joseph H. D. Street, Stewart Goodrell, Benjamin R. Pegram, Guy Wells, and John A. L. Crookham as the locating commission.<sup>54</sup> They met at Fort Des Moines on April 18, 1856, were duly qualified, and proceeded with their work. Great excitement prevailed at the Raccoon Forks of the Des Moines River. The fort and settlement on the west side of the Des Moines River afforded many advantages, but large tracts of land were owned by speculators east of the river. The people on the west side accused those on the east of offering personal bribes to the commissioners; while the citizens to the east of the river replied that similar inducements had already been used by parties on the west side. The feeling was intense, sometimes vituperative. A donation of twenty acres of land worth nearly \$100,000, to be used as the location of the capitol, and real estate worth approximately \$200,000 offered to the State at a fair price, were the inducements presented by citizens on the west side for the location of the capitol in

<sup>53</sup> *Laws of Iowa*, 1854-1855, pp. 105-107.

A Democratic senatorial convention for the twenty-sixth district held at Marshall (now Marshalltown), on June 28, 1856, adopted the following resolution: "Resolved, That the Democracy of the 26th Senatorial District of the State of Iowa, are opposed to the location and removal of the State Capital, from Iowa City to Ft. Des Moines or Des Moines City, and that we will use our endeavors by every consistent and legitimate means to retain the same where it now is." A similar resolution was adopted by the Republican convention held at Toledo. An attempt to repeal the act to locate the capital at Des Moines during the extra session of the General Assembly in 1856 was indefinitely postponed.—*Daily Evening Reporter* (Iowa City), July 12, 1856; *House Journal*, 1856 (Extra Session), p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> A contemporary account gives Lincoln Clark as one of the commissioners in place of Joseph H. D. Street. His name does not appear in the official records, however. Mr. Street was president of the commission and Mr. Crookham, secretary.—*The Daily Gate City* (Keokuk), March 15, 1856; *Report on Alleged Frauds in the Location of the Capitol*, pp. 30, 69.



what is now West Des Moines. It appears, however, that all but one of the commissioners (Mr. Goodrell) became privately interested in property east of the Des Moines River, which fact offers about the only apparent reason why they should have accepted a smaller bonus to the State and chosen the location which is the present site of the capitol building.<sup>55</sup> A tract of land containing a little over ten acres, donated by W. A. Scott and Harrison Lyon, was selected on April 21st for the location of the state-house. The site was described by Governor Grimes as "a gentle swell of land about three quarters of a mile east of Fort Des Moines, and on the east side of the river. It commands a good prospect and seems to be well adapted to the purpose for which it has been selected."<sup>56</sup>

To fulfill the further requirements of the law that a suitable building must be erected without cost to the State, a

<sup>55</sup> In 1858 a committee was appointed by the House of Representatives to investigate charges of alleged frauds in the location of the capitol in 1856, made by the citizens of Polk County who probably still entertained hopes of disturbing the location of the capitol if not causing its removal to the west side of the river in Des Moines. Two charges were entered against the commissioners: that they had not acted with a "strict regard to the interests of the entire State" and that they had suffered themselves to be influenced by personal bribes. While enough evidence was produced to convince the majority of the committee of the truth of the indictment, nothing definite could be ascertained because the chief witnesses refused to testify.—*House Journal*, 1858, pp. 711-717; *Report on Alleged Frauds in the Location of the Capitol*, pp. 28, 29.

<sup>56</sup> *House Journal*, 1858, pp. 712-716; Brigham's *History of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 141; *Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. IV, p. 110; Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 36; *The Daily Gate City* (Keokuk), April 30, 1856; *The Washington Press*, May 7, 1856; *The Register and Leader* (Des Moines), July 4, 1909; *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association of Iowa*, 1902, pp. 77, 78.

The city of Des Moines, consisting of seven wards, three on the east side of the Des Moines River and four on the west, was incorporated by an act approved on January 28, 1857, which took effect on February 16, 1857. The word "Fort" was now dropped from the name.—*Laws of Iowa, 1856-1857*, pp. 281-296.

Aside from the tract of land upon which the capitol is located two other important conveyances were made to the State in 1856. James A. Williamson and Thomas A. Walker gave about two and one-fifth acres, known as State



Capitol Building Association was organized, consisting of the citizens of Des Moines, among whom the most prominent were Thomas K. Brooks, W. A. Scott, James A. Williamson, Joseph M. Griffith, Harry H. Griffith, J. D. Cavenor, Alexander Shaw, and Harrison Lyon.<sup>57</sup> During the summer of 1856 work upon the three-story structure known as the Old Brick Capitol, located on lots eleven and twelve in block six of Scott's Addition where the Soldiers' Monument now stands, was pushed with energy, the masonry work being finished by October. It was impossible, however, to have the building ready for the use of the Sixth General Assembly during the winter of 1856-1857. Following the location of the capital, trade and speculation had been rampant in Des Moines, but in the fall there came hard times; and the capitol and other large buildings were only partially completed. An Iowa City newspaper, still clinging to the idea that the removal of the capital was premature, thought it would be "the part of wisdom to keep the Capital where it is, until permanent buildings are erected; in view of the accessibility of Iowa City and the unquestioned fact that it is the centre of the more populous part of the State."<sup>58</sup>

Square, bounded on the west by Thirteenth Street, on the east by C Street, on the north by Walker Street, and on the south by Maple Street. This tract of land was sold by the State for \$8500 in accordance with an act of the Thirtieth General Assembly. Governor's Square, containing a little over five and one-half acres, bounded by Walnut, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Streets and block eleven of Brooks and Co.'s Addition was donated by Thomas K. Brooks and Wilson A. Scott. In accordance with the contemplated extension of the State capitol grounds provision was made by the legislature in 1913 to sell Governor's Square.—*Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association of Iowa*, 1902, pp. 78, 79; *Laws of Iowa*, 1913, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> Accounts differ as to the exact personnel of the Association but practically agree on those mentioned.—*Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. IV, p. 111; *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association of Iowa*, 1902, p. 77; *Laws of Iowa*, 1864, p. 106.

<sup>58</sup> *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association of Iowa*, 1902, p. 77; *Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. IV, p. 111; *Daily Evening Reporter* (Iowa City),



There was indeed some agitation in the Sixth General Assembly (1856-1857) for the repeal of the act of 1855 locating the capital at Des Moines. A petition to that effect was presented in the House of Representatives, while a public meeting at Washington, Iowa, sent to the State Senate the following resolution:

WHEREAS, a proposition is now submitted, or is about to be submitted to the present General Assembly of the State of Iowa, to repeal the law passed by the 5th General Assembly, entitled "an act to relocate the seat of Government," therefore,

RESOLVED That our Senator and Representatives in the present General Assembly be instructed to vote for, and favor in every legitimate way, a law having that object in view.<sup>59</sup>

Such an act was introduced in the House of Representatives on January 12, 1857, but it was tabled on the following day. The whole agitation for repeal seems to have arisen from a misunderstanding of conditions in regard to the land and buildings at Des Moines, many people becoming greatly excited when they learned that the temporary capitol build-

September 12, October 8, 1856; *The Washington Press*, October 8, 1856; *Iowa City Republican*, June 5, 1856.

A contemporary account describes the Old Brick Capitol as follows:

"It is situated on a fine eminence on the east side of the Desmoines River, overlooking the entire city. It is composed of brick, with the sills of the windows and foundations made of cut stone. The dimensions of the Capitol are one hundred feet long, and fifty-six feet wide. The first story is eleven feet between floor and ceiling; the second is eleven and a half; the third is eighteen feet. The Senate Chamber is fifty-six long, and thirty-four wide. The Representative Hall is fifty-six feet long, by fifty wide. The Supreme Court Room is fifty feet long by twenty-four wide. The State Library Room is thirty-four by twenty-four, and the State Office Rooms, each, are twenty-four by twenty-three feet. The building is roofed with tin, and the style of Architecture is Ionic. The entire height of the Dome is eighty-five feet. A bell has been contracted for, weighing fifteen hundred pounds. There is also a fire vault, the dimensions of which are nine feet by eleven. The Building fronts the Public Square on the north, and the city on the west, and will be completed by the 1st. of May, 1857."—*The Washington Press*, March 25, 1857.

<sup>59</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1856-1857, p. 316; *House Journal*, 1856-1857, pp. 289, 290; *The Washington Press*, January 14, 1857.



ing was being erected by private funds on private ground and was not to be owned by the State.<sup>60</sup> For a time it was thought that the repeal would carry, but the building committee explained that a lease had been executed whereby the State would have free use of the building for any number of years. This explanation seemed to satisfy the critics.<sup>61</sup>

The question of the permanent location of the capital came before the constitutional convention of 1857 in connection with the location of the State University. During the second week of the convention a resolution was offered to inquire into the expediency of permanently locating the seat of government, the State University, and the asylums for the blind and the deaf and dumb. The location of the University caused the greatest amount of discussion and it was largely in that connection that the capital was mentioned. The inclusion in the new Constitution of the compromise of 1847, whereby the State University was to be located at Iowa City whenever the capital should be removed was persistently insisted upon, in spite of proposals to establish the

<sup>60</sup> As a matter of fact the erection of the Old Brick Capitol was financed mainly with money borrowed from the school fund. When, on account of divided public sentiment in Des Moines in regard to the site the local pledge to provide a suitable building without cost to the State was not fulfilled by the community, members of the Capitol Building Association found themselves unable to meet their financial obligations. The Seventh General Assembly was, therefore, petitioned to purchase the building. Not until 1864, however, did the State pay for the Old Brick Capitol, redeem the diverted school fund, and relieve the men who had undertaken to provide the temporary capitol.—Brigham's *History of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 149; *Senate Journal*, 1858, p. 241; *Laws of Iowa*, 1864, pp. 106-109.

<sup>61</sup> *House Journal*, 1856-1857, pp. 255, 256, 273; *Senate Journal*, 1856-1857, pp. 202, 235; *The Washington Press*, January 28, February 4, 1857. The Sixth General Assembly still refused to transfer the public buildings at Iowa City to the State University, in spite of the prospect of the succeeding legislative session being held in Des Moines.—*House Journal*, 1856-1857, p. 215.

A resolution to inquire into the expediency of locating the State University, the capital, and the asylums for the blind and the deaf and dumb on the five sections selected for Monroe City was entertained in the Senate, but was immediately tabled.—*Senate Journal*, 1856-1857, p. 408.



University at the former site of Monroe City, to leave the matter to a vote of the people, or to rest the decision with the legislature. It was objected that such clauses would overload the Constitution with affairs of local interest. But the judgment of those who wished permanently to settle the question finally prevailed, and the convention incorporated in the Constitution of 1857 the following section: "The seat of Government is hereby permanently established, as now fixed by law, at the City of Des Moines, in the County of Polk; and the State University at Iowa City, in the County of Johnson."<sup>62</sup>

In order to validify the acts of State officers and to fulfill his duty prescribed by the act of 1855 re-locating the seat of government, Governor James W. Grimes on October 19, 1857, officially declared "the Capital of the State of Iowa to be established under the constitution and laws of the State at Des Moines in Polk County".<sup>63</sup> Although the new capitol building at Des Moines was still unfinished, the State officers had begun packing and moving the contents of their several offices by the first of October. Snow flew before the task was completed. The following description from the pen of a contemporary is illustrative of the difficulties encountered in removing the records and other necessary equipment of the various State offices from Iowa City to Des Moines:

The removal of the state offices and the archives belonging to the state was a matter of no ordinary undertaking. There were no rail-

<sup>62</sup> *Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1857*, Vol. I, p. 88; Vol. II, pp. 648, 770, 771, 801, 811, 824, 838-841, 877, 922-934, 1017, 1092; *Constitution of Iowa*, Art. XI, Sec. 8.

<sup>63</sup> In spite of the seemingly irrevocable action of the General Assembly, the constitutional convention, and the Governor, there were nevertheless some resolutions introduced in the House of Representatives during the session of the Seventh General Assembly to remove the capital from Des Moines to Marshall, in Marshall County. A bill was even introduced providing for the re-location of the seat of government, but it was declared to be unconstitutional by the committee on the judiciary.—*House Journal*, 1858, pp. 566, 578, 708.



roads in the state, and the public highways were but dimly outlined in our wide extended prairies. Skunk river had to be crossed to reach Des Moines. This stream had a bad reputation that extended from Maine to California as to its habit of spreading itself. Several of the small streams had no bridges. Therefore, teamsters and contractors were not anxious to undertake the job of removal. The citizens and teamsters of Des Moines, however, solved the problem by sending men and teams from Des Moines to assist in the removal. Among the men sent was the Rev. Ezra Rathburn one of Des Moines' pioneer ministers.

The removal of the four safes, consisting of one each for the secretary of state, the treasurer of state, the auditor of state, and the superintendent of public instruction, was let to Dr. Jesse Bowen of Iowa City, who delivered them safely in the new capitol after many days of hard and tedious work. The state treasurer's safe was much the largest and very heavy. During the journey it was left in the open prairie near Little Four Mile creek in Polk county for several days and nights, until the storm abated and the ground was frozen sufficient so that it could be hauled on a large bob-sled. When it arrived in Des Moines it was drawn by ten yoke of oxen. Its arrival was hailed with great delight, not only by the citizens of Des Moines, but by the state officers and their deputies, for in it was the gold and silver coin that was to pay them their last month's salary.<sup>64</sup>

Almost twenty years elapsed from the time when Iowa was organized as a Territory until the capital of the State was permanently located at Des Moines. During that period there were seventeen sessions of the General Assembly. Although Des Moines has been the seat of government of Iowa for fifty-eight years it is only within the last thirty-two years that a permanent capitol building has been afforded by the State. From the time when the Old Brick Capitol became the home of the government, in October, 1857, it continued to house the State offices and the General Assembly for twenty-six years, witnessing sixteen sessions of the legislature.

<sup>64</sup> Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. II, p. 110; *The Washington Press*, November 4, 1857; *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association of Iowa*, 1902, pp. 79, 80.



In 1909 a commission was appointed to locate and erect a memorial to the memory of William B. Allison. In the work of this commission the movement for the expansion of the capitol grounds had its inception, although the improvement of the grounds has been urged by every Governor since 1900. Now it appears that Iowa is to surround its capitol by improvements that will do honor to the chief edifice of the Commonwealth.

JOHN E. BRIGGS

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