

The Governor's Tour

Three enterprising towns — Burlington, Davenport, and Dubuque — contended for the seat of government of the Territory of Iowa in 1838. Although the first settlement in each of these pioneer villages had been made after June 1, 1833, they were all equally strong contenders for an honor that could prove to be a real political plum. Burlington had been the capital of the Territory of Wisconsin. More accessible to a majority of the legislators, this metropolis of southern Iowa was the choice of many of the politicians, who appreciated good food and lodging as well as traveling convenience. Although Davenport admitted that hotels and boarding houses and all the "pomp and circumstances" connected with "eating, drinking, and sleeping" should not be overlooked, the *Iowa Sun* urged the selection of that centrally located "lovely little town" by the Governor. Dubuque, the metropolis of northern Iowa, rejoiced in her manifest destiny but remembered that she had once missed becoming the capital of Wisconsin Territory by the collusion of Burlington with the proponents of Madison. The *Iowa News* hoped the Governor would "pay a visit to all the

prominent points in the Territory" before setting the wheels of government in motion. Informed of the jealous rivalry the moment he arrived, Governor Robert Lucas determined to make a tour of the Territory at once.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of August 18th, Robert Lucas boarded the steamboat *Knickerbocker* for Dubuque. He was accompanied by T. S. Parvin and Jesse Williams, the two young aides who had joined him at Cincinnati. Lucas found his quarters aboard the brand-new *Knickerbocker* very comfortable, for the boat had fifty "handsomely furnished" staterooms off the gentlemen's cabin. Captain Van Houton was described as a "fine chap" whose "energy and activity" matched his "urbanity and courteous deportment".

The *Knickerbocker* arrived at Muscatine at ten o'clock that evening, too late for Lucas to see much of the place. When the three tourists awakened the following morning the boat had left Davenport and was proceeding cautiously up the Rock Island Rapids, a "very difficult" stretch of river to navigate during low water. About noon Peter H. Engle, a candidate for Territorial Delegate to Congress, came aboard. Lucas and his companions formed a favorable opinion of Engle.

Puffing steadily upstream against the current, the *Knickerbocker* threaded her way through a

river pock-marked with sandbars. On the site of Clinton a few optimistic settlers were trying to start a town called New York. Bellevue was a flourishing village perched high on the river bank, well-protected from floods. Dusk was falling as they approached the grave of Julien Dubuque on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi. The *Knickerbocker* reached Dubuque at night and Lucas took lodgings at the Washington Hotel, a temperance house operated by Richard Plumbe.

In the morning the three tourists walked about Dubuque. The town had been beautifully plotted but the "poor landing" did not escape their attention. After returning to the hotel, Lucas interviewed many citizens, including Judge Thomas S. Wilson of the Territorial Supreme Court. That afternoon one of the Langworthys drove Lucas and his companions through the country in his carriage. All were delighted with the view from the bluffs which Parvin noted were covered with grain on the outside and contained lead ore within. That night Parvin sorrowfully recorded: "The Gov. accepted (we refused) an invitation to take tea with Judge [John] King. Said he regretted his 'aids' did not accompany him as there were 3 very fine young ladies — one apiece, so did we!"

On Tuesday morning, August 21st, Lucas and Parvin accompanied R. Farwell to see some speci-

mens of "tiff" or crystalized quartz that had been obtained from the caves in the neighborhood of his diggings. In the afternoon they looked at T. C. Fassitt's fine collection of minerals, petrifications, and Indian curiosities. That evening they took tea with Judge Wilson and were delighted to learn that all present were from Ohio. "Hurrah for the Buckeye land", Parvin recorded in his journal.

Lucas spent two more days in Dubuque, meeting citizens, attending teas, studying the character, needs, and future prospects of the country. At seven o'clock on Friday morning, August 24th, he ferried across the Mississippi with his companions and took the stage for Galena. After the Governor's departure the editor of the *Iowa News* asserted that Dubuque citizens were "unanimously pleased" with Lucas and declared he was "just the man" for the new Territory.

The triumvirate had gone but a few miles when they met George W. Jones, Delegate to Congress, from the Territory of Wisconsin, who was on his way to Dubuque to visit Lucas. After a short chat they continued on their way, having received a hearty invitation to call at the Jones residence on Mount Sinsinawa. All at once their stage broke down and they had to "foot it" till the driver caught up with a wagon. From Jones's home they

secured a fine view of the surrounding country. After a short visit they set out once more for Galena, stopping at Water Melon Hollow long enough to be hoaxed into buying a green melon. It was three o'clock in the afternoon before they reached Galena which Parvin described as "a place of great business and built in opposition to nature".

At 7:30 the next morning they left Galena on the steamboat *Irene*. As they proceeded cautiously down the Fever (Galena) River the pilot rope broke and the *Irene* swooshed into the soft bank. Fortunately no damage was done. Soon they reached the Mississippi and churned rapidly downstream, reaching Davenport that evening. They were met on the bank by Secretary Conway.

Early the following morning, which was Sunday, Lucas and his aides walked about the town and along the river. During the remainder of the forenoon they read religious books, the table of their landlord being well supplied with them. That afternoon they ferried across the Mississippi to Stephenson and heard a New School Presbyterian preach a "plain old sermon". They were accompanied by J. W. Parker and Dr. A. C. Donaldson. Since both Lucas and Parvin had been on the Ohio and Mississippi for three Sabbaths in a row it was a pleasure to once more get "within

the gospel sound". Sunday evening was spent at the home of D. C. Eldridge, an enterprising Davenport merchant.

On the following day Parvin and Williams paid a visit to Antoine Le Claire, who was described as "an intelligent & shrewd fellow" of immense size. Meanwhile, Governor Lucas was busy interviewing many Davenport citizens who received him with "polite attention". The *Iowa Sun* did not know whether Lucas was "pestered with any vexatious enquiries" concerning the place where the legislature would be convened but believed that "justice and propriety" would result in the selection of Davenport.

On Tuesday, August 28th, Lucas set out overland for Rockingham four miles down the river. The stage broke down before they reached their destination but they were soon on their way again. While Lucas conversed with the citizens of Rockingham, Parvin and Williams accompanied Dr. E. S. Barrows back to the hills surrounding the town and secured a fine view of Rock River, Stephenson, and Davenport. On their return they came upon a melon patch and "feasted" to their hearts' content. Meanwhile, the citizens of Rockingham gave a public dinner for Governor Lucas at which nothing stronger than cold water was served. After all had drunk to his health, the Gov-

ernor made a short speech. They spent the evening with John H. Sullivan of Zanesville, Ohio, who was a leading citizen in this community of forty-five buildings, including homes, stores, and workshops.

On the following morning the gubernatorial party set out for Bloomington in a rude conveyance, being accompanied a short distance by J. H. Sullivan, E. S. Barrows, and A. H. Davenport. At noon they stopped at the home of a Mr. Viele, a gentleman from Troy, New York. Their hospitable host had three "grown up" daughters who quickly caught the eye of young Parvin. No where in the Territory had the weary travelers found any one living in finer style. Leaving the pleasant surroundings of the Viele home, they hastened onward along the bank of the Mississippi, rumbling into Muscatine at night. Parvin again noted that they could not see much of the town. Apparently, however, Lucas had no intention of selecting Muscatine as the capital, for when a steamboat came along a few hours later they took passage for Burlington.

At daybreak they arrived at "home sweet home" after a twelve-day tour of the Territory of Iowa. "Our object", Parvin recorded, "had been to view the country with the view of examining the claims of various parts for the seat of temporary

government and came to the conclusion that for the present that Burlington is the *place*."

Governor Lucas promptly rented an office and prepared for business. A few days later he attended a banquet given in his honor by the citizens of Burlington. In response to a toast the veteran statesman revealed that his tour had yielded much information about the Territory. When he received his commission, Lucas declared, he knew little about Iowa, "but supposed that her population was the same as is generally found in frontier settlements — hospitable, yet rude. In this, he was most agreeably disappointed. For intelligence and enterprise, he expressed his firm conviction, based on actual observation since his arrival, Iowa Territory would compare with any of the western, aye, and some of the eastern states, too. With a people of this character, it would be his greatest pleasure to co-operate, in the forming of laws calculated to secure them in the exercise of their political rights, to develop the resources of their country, and secure the prompt and easy administration of justice."

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