

Comment by the Editor

TRIANGLES

The modern world knows triangles as geometrical or marital problems, but history presents many other kinds, beginning, perhaps, with Adam and Eve and the serpent. Iowa history has also had its triangles. In 1845 the Iowa area lay at the apex of a geographical right angle. From the mouth of the Des Moines River one side ran north to the Canadian border; the other side lay along the Missouri Compromise line. Iowa was knocking at the door of the Union of States, the first to be admitted in the area included in this right angle. Political leaders looked beyond the apex and coveted the Senators who might represent the States to be.

Here appeared a political triangle. On one side was the North, industrial, favoring a protective tariff, believing in free labor. On another side was the South, agricultural, advocating free trade and slave labor. The third side was the West, agricultural but industrially ambitious, divided by the Ohio River and the Missouri Compromise line into free and slave territory, undecided on the tariff issue. Each group had its aims and ambi-

tions, and new States often held the balance of power.

Although the lines were not always clearly drawn, the debates over the boundaries of Iowa show that many northern lawmakers wanted as many small States as possible in the angle spearheaded by Iowa, for small States meant more free-soil Senators. The South, on the other hand, wanted fewer States in this area, hoping thereby to keep control of the Senate.

The North and the South, representing the original thirteen States, looked with some suspicion on the upstart West, the third side of the triangle. It was the age of Know-nothingism and the West was the alien group in the community of States. There were men from the East who wanted as few States — slave or free — in the West as possible, purely on the basis of East against West.

And so the debate over the size of Iowa waxed hot in Congress and within the Territory of Iowa. But the pioneers had their own ideas on the subject of boundaries and they stuck to them through endless debates and two elections. In the end, Iowa was admitted with the Missouri River as its western boundary as the people had determined it should be.