

THE PALIMPSEST

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Iowa in the Louisiana Purchase

"We have lived long, but this is the noblest work of our whole lives," declared Robert Livingston, rising and shaking hands with James Monroe and Barbé-Marbois, Napoleon's minister of finance. The United States had just acquired an empire of 827,897 square miles at a total cost of five cents an acre. Livingston believed the treaty of April 30, 1803, would "change vast solitudes into flourishing districts" which would cause the United States to take its place "among the powers of the first rank." In his opinion the Louisiana Purchase was destined to "prepare ages of happiness for innumerable" people who would multiply "in the bosom of equality, under just laws, freed from the errors of superstition and the scourges of bad government."

Since Iowa forms a part of the Louisiana Purchase we may well pause in respectful appreciation of the manifold blessings accruing from the treaty of April 30, 1803. The amazing transformation of a wilderness into a garden is manifest

on every hand. In 1950 a total of 2,621,073 people dwelt in Iowa, or nearly half the whole number inhabiting the United States in 1800. The population of Des Moines in 1950 was 177,965, or more than the combined population of Greater New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston — the four largest cities at the opening of the nineteenth century. Philadelphia in 1800, then the second largest city in the country with 41,220 inhabitants, is surpassed by seven Iowa cities.

But the negotiation of the treaty in Paris did not conclude the acquisition, for Spain had not yet surrendered Louisiana to France. It was not until November 30, 1803, that the French prefect, Pierre Clément de Laussat, received the province from Spain in New Orleans. Twenty days later, on December 20, 1803, de Laussat formally handed over the province to W. C. C. Claiborne and James Wilkinson, the American agents, amidst a thunderous salute of cannon that shook the Cabildo in the Crescent City. As the French tri-color was presented to de Laussat, he accepted with the simple benediction: "May the prosperity of Louisiana be eternal!"

Upper Louisiana still remained in Spanish hands and de Laussat, in order to save Napoleon the expense, commissioned Captain Amos Stoddard, an American artillery officer, to receive the territory from Lieutenant Governor Dehault de Lassus at St. Louis in the name of France. Captain Stod-

dard was also empowered to take possession of the country for the United States and serve as civil and military commandant. On March 9, 1804, he crossed the Mississippi from Cahokia to St. Louis, the capital of Upper Louisiana, with a small force of American troops. Colonel de Lassus received him cordially at the government house and promptly issued the following proclamation:

"Inhabitants of Upper Louisiana: By the King's command, I am about to deliver up his post and its dependencies. The flag under which you have been protected for a period of nearly thirty-six years is to be withdrawn. From this moment you are released from the oath of fidelity you took to support it. The fidelity and courage with which you have guarded and defended it will never be forgotten."

He then delivered to Captain Stoddard "the full possession, sovereignty, and government of Upper Louisiana" with all its "military posts, quarters and fortifications." The official record of the transfer was signed by de Lassus and Stoddard, with Meriwether Lewis, Antoine Souldard, and Charles Gratiot acting as witnesses. On the following day, March 10, 1804, acting as commissioner for France, Captain Stoddard transferred Upper Louisiana to himself as representative of the United States. It was by this act that the land that is now Iowa became officially a part of the United States.

Some of the inhabitants of Upper Louisiana regretted the change of government. Daniel Boone did not enjoy the prospects, for he and other pioneers of his type had become Spanish subjects "to avoid crowds, to get and keep cheap land, to avoid taxes, to hunt big game and to live a simple Arcadian life." Others welcomed the transfer, and Auguste Chouteau called for cheers when the Stars and Stripes were unfurled. Captain Stoddard assured the inhabitants that they would have "popular suffrage, trial by jury, a confirmation of their land titles, a territorial government, to be succeeded by their admission as a State into the Federal Union; and he indulged the hope that Upper Louisiana would become a star of no inconsiderable magnitude in the American constellation." The lustrous star of Iowa, shining in the galaxy of states carved from the Louisiana Purchase, must eclipse the wildest imagination of this first American "civil Commandant" of Upper Louisiana and of Iowa.

The principal event during the brief administration of Captain Stoddard was the departure of Lewis and Clark on May 14, 1804, upon their epoch-making journey to the Pacific Coast. The expedition passed along the western border of Iowa to the mouth of the Big Sioux between July 18th and August 21st. The only tragedy on the entire trip — the death of Sergeant Charles Floyd — occurred just below present-day Sioux City.

A fortnight after Captain Stoddard took possession of Upper Louisiana, on March 26, 1804, President Jefferson approved an act providing for the government of the Territory of Orleans and the District of Louisiana. The Territory of Orleans, embracing approximately the area now included in the State of Louisiana, was given a special and almost despotic government over which William C. C. Claiborne was to preside as Governor. The District of Louisiana was placed under the jurisdiction of William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, because the western boundary of Indiana Territory was contiguous with the eastern boundary of the District of Louisiana. It was given scarcely a "vestige of self-government" since Harrison wielded all the powers of the executive. In addition he and the three judges of Indiana Territory had authority to make all laws which they deemed conducive to the good government of the inhabitants, and not inconsistent with the constitution and laws of the United States. The civil government of Upper Louisiana was thus founded upon the Ordinance of 1787.

Governor Harrison arrived at St. Louis on October 1, 1804. Upper Louisiana had been divided into five districts — New Madrid, Ste. Genevieve, Cape Girardeau, St. Louis, and St. Charles — and Harrison appointed administrators over each. The District of St. Charles embraced all the country north of the Missouri River including

what is now Iowa. This vast hinterland, stretching northward to the British possessions and westward to the Rocky Mountains, contained 765 inhabitants, including 55 slaves. For the administration of this empire Governor Harrison appointed Colonel Return J. Meigs as Lieutenant Governor or Commandant of the District of St. Charles. Francois Saucier was named Presiding Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions, and Daniel Morgan Boone, Francois Duquette, and Robert Spencer were appointed associate justices. Rufus Easton was designated Attorney General and Edward Hempstead, Clerk.

The most remote settlers in the District of St. Charles might be denominated Iowans, for they lived north of the mouth of the Des Moines River. Louis Honoré Tesson was situated two hundred miles from St. Charles, a tedious journey for Sheriff Mackey Wherry if he had been ordered to evict the father of Iowa horticulture. When Julien Dubuque sold 72,324 arpents of his land to Auguste Chouteau of the District of St. Louis on October 20, 1804, he found it necessary to journey over four hundred miles down the Mississippi in order to transact his business. Basil Giard held a Spanish land grant opposite the village of Prairie du Chien, five hundred miles from St. Louis. Giard had received his grant on November 20, 1800, almost two months after the signing of the treaty whereby Spain retroceded Louisiana to

France. There were no white men living along the Missouri slope of Iowa in 1804; indeed, Lewis and Clark met very few above St. Charles.

On November 3, 1804, Governor Harrison made a treaty with five drunken, irresponsible representatives of the Sauk and Fox Indians whereby all the land between the Mississippi and the Illinois and Fox rivers as far north as the Wisconsin was ceded to the United States. It was Jefferson's plan to extinguish Indian titles to land east of the Mississippi and to remove the red men westward across the Father of Waters. Millions of acres of land were thus relinquished by a few Indians, with no instructions to negotiate a treaty, for \$2234 in presents and an annuity of \$1000. This incident provoked the enmity of Black Hawk and his Sauk Indians toward the United States during the War of 1812, and was a remote cause of the Black Hawk War.

Although Harrison was a popular man, the people of the District of Louisiana thought the capital at Vincennes was too far away. Accordingly, on March 3, 1805, President Jefferson approved a bill whereby the District of Louisiana was to be "known and designated" after July 4th as the "Territory of Louisiana" with officers residing in the Territory. General James Wilkinson was named Governor of the new Territory.

It was Governor Wilkinson who dispatched Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike to the headwaters of

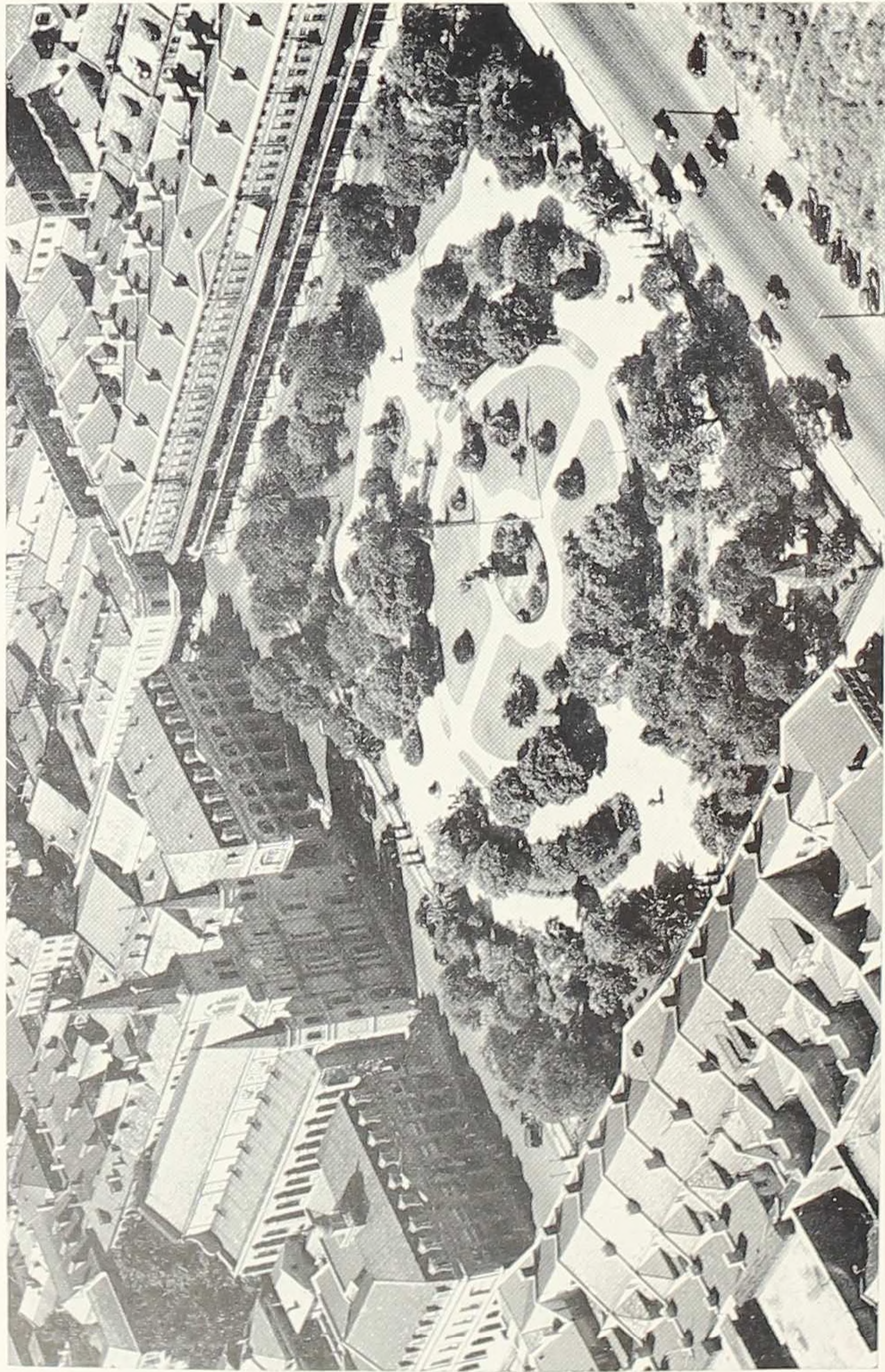
the Mississippi with instructions to explore the Mississippi River from St. Louis to its source, select sites for military posts, treat with the Indians, and find out what he could about the British traders in the Iowa country. Pike recommended the hilly country about Burlington and McGregor as suitable for the erection of forts. Tesson's apple orchard, Dubuque's lead mines, and Giard's farm were the only evidences of white settlers in Iowa. Pike estimated the Sauk and Fox Indians at 4600 souls and the Iowas at 1400. He considered the prairies incapable of being cultivated and suggested that they be left to the wandering savages who then occupied them.

Governor Wilkinson aroused such bitter antagonism in the Territory that Jefferson finally removed him from office on March 3, 1807. Meriwether Lewis succeeded to the governorship, but his untimely death on October 11, 1809, was followed by the appointment of Benjamin Howard as Governor in April, 1810. When the Territory of Orleans was admitted as the State of Louisiana in 1811, Congress changed the name of the Territory of Louisiana to the Territory of Missouri. At that time the population of the whole enormous region numbered about 22,000. Howard continued as chief executive. On March 12, 1813, however, Governor Howard resigned his post and William Clark was appointed Governor. Clark had served as brigadier-general of the Missouri



Courtesy State Historical Society of Missouri

Bas Relief of the Signing of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty (April 30, 1803) by sculptor Karl Bitter. It is located on the bank of the Missouri River at Jefferson City.



Courtesy New Orleans Chamber of Commerce

The Place d'Armes (known as Jackson Square since 1856) showing the Cabildo (*left*), St. Louis Cathedral (*center*), and the Presbytere (*right*). Scene of the transfer of Lower Louisiana to the United States on December 20, 1803.

militia and Indian Agent for the entire Territory following his return with Lewis from the Far West. During the War of 1812 he established Fort Shelby at Prairie du Chien. It was Clark also who dispatched two expeditions up the Mississippi which were repulsed at Rock Island. At the conclusion of the war he conducted a series of councils with the various Indian tribes, among others, the Sauk and Fox, who signed important treaties in 1815 and in 1816. It was during 1816 that John C. Sullivan surveyed the northern boundary of Missouri, a line which ultimately became the southern boundary of Iowa.

William Clark continued as Governor of the Territory until 1821. By that time the importance of the Louisiana Purchase was established, although some of the old Federalist arguments could still be heard deprecating its value. Thoughtful Americans today, however, are ready to admit the Louisiana Purchase was one of the most significant episodes in American history. The reasons are quite apparent. It more than doubled the area of the United States. It formed a precedent for subsequent expansion. It gave rise to party wrangling in the United States. It led to sectionalism on even a greater scale than at that time existed in the country. It kept England out and it virtually eliminated both France and Spain from North America. Finally, from this immense area was carved all of the states of Iowa, Missouri,

Arkansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, and parts of the states of Minnesota, Kansas, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

The Louisiana Purchase was equally significant in Iowa history. It assured us that the future history of Iowa would be American — rather than French or Spanish. It led to the immediate exploration of Iowa — Lewis and Clark up the Missouri in 1804 and Zebulon Pike up the Mississippi in 1805. It led to the establishment of military posts — the erection of Fort Madison in 1808 followed hard on the heels of the Pike expedition. It led to the sending of Indian Agents to this region and it greatly expanded the American fur trade in Iowaland.

In the space of a century and a half the paltry sum of \$15,000,000 (\$27,000,000 counting interest) paid Napoleon has multiplied many times in value. Thus, the value of farm lands and buildings in any one of the ninety-nine Iowa counties in 1950 eclipses the total cost of the Louisiana Purchase — both principal and interest. The same would be true for the real estate value in most of the larger cities in Iowa! The industrial output of a single firm — the Maytag Company in Newton — exceeds in a single year the entire cost of the Louisiana Purchase, and washing machines form a small fraction of our industrial output. The value of the land and buildings on which the State

University of Iowa is located actually surpasses the total price that was paid Napoleon. Thus, counties, cities, industrial plants, and educational institutions which today form mere pinpricks in the Louisiana Purchase, far exceed the expenditure over which the Federalists groaned so loudly in 1803.

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