

Iowa Delegates to Congress

At the present time each State in the Union is represented in Washington by two United States Senators and its representation in the House is based upon population. Under this rule Iowa has two Senators and eight members of the House of Representatives. In Territorial days it was not so.

By the act of June 12, 1838, Iowa became a separate Territory. The Organic Act provided that a "delegate to the House of Representatives" should be elected to serve for a period of two years, and that he should "be entitled to the same rights and privileges as have been granted to the delegates from the several Territories of the United States." Thus at the outset Iowa had but a single representative in Congress — a Delegate who sat in the House of Representatives, with the privilege of debate, but without authority to vote or serve on committees.

Prior to the passage of the law making Iowa a separate Territory, William W. Chapman of Burlington had announced his candidacy for the office of Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Wisconsin — the office then held by George Wallace Jones. When the Territory of Iowa was

created, Chapman transferred his candidacy to the new Territory west of the Mississippi. Several men competed with Chapman for the office. One of the most prominent of the men suggested was Thomas S. Wilson, but he preferred an appointment to the Territorial Supreme Court. Thereupon Peter H. Engle of Dubuque, "a ripe scholar and good lawyer" and a former Speaker of the House of Representatives of Wisconsin, became a candidate. David Rorer of Burlington and William Henry Wallace of Mt. Pleasant were also candidates.

The four candidates in the field were all good speakers. They did not campaign on party lines, but each spoke for himself. Because of pioneer conditions of travel and the difficulties of obtaining an audience, the four men often traveled together and frequently addressed the same audience — "taking turn about in speaking first".

Each of the candidates, of course, became familiar with the arguments and speeches presented by his opponents. On one occasion Rorer, Engle, and Wallace agreed that Rorer, who was to speak first, should give the argument usually presented by Chapman. This he did in such an able manner that Chapman acknowledged authorship of the speech. Rorer then hastened to add, "It was the poorest speech that I ever made."

Near the close of the campaign an unfortunate accident befell Mr. Engle. While endeavoring to fill appointments that had been made for him to speak in the southern counties it became necessary for him to ford the Maquoketa River. The river was unusually high and swift and Engle was washed from his horse and carried downstream. Some Indians rescued him from the river, but he was not able to fill his appointments, and was reported to have drowned. This "Maquoketa Bath" may have cost Engle the office. The election, held on September 10, 1838, was so close that Chapman at first thought that he was defeated and "retired to his corn-field, near Burlington". Later returns revealed that he had won by the narrow margin of thirty-six votes.

Chapman was born in Marion County, Virginia, on August 11, 1808. Aided by a widowed mother and a faithful brother he obtained a common school education. He then obtained employment in a clerk's office, where he worked during the day and read law at night. In due time he was admitted to the bar and in the spring of 1835 he removed to Burlington, in the "Black Hawk Purchase".

At that time the Iowa District was a part of the Territory of Michigan, and in the fall of 1835 acting Governor John S. Horner appointed Chap-

man prosecuting attorney. When the Territory of Wisconsin was created, President Andrew Jackson commissioned Chapman as United States District Attorney for that Territory. In 1836 Chapman moved to Dubuque, but the following year he returned to Burlington, where he operated a farm and practiced law.

Chapman represented the largest Territory formed in the West, with an area including the present States of Iowa, Minnesota, and parts of North and South Dakota. Thousands of settlers from all parts of the Union were crossing the Mississippi each year. Many of them were farmers and the business of their Delegate in Congress was concerned chiefly with land claims, preëmption rights, surveys, and appropriations for roads, bridges, and public buildings, and grants of the public domain for educational and local government purposes.

The tenure of the Iowa Delegate to Congress developed into a comedy of errors. Chapman had been elected for two years. In January, 1839, the Territorial Assembly provided for the election of a Delegate on the first Monday of August, 1840, and every second year thereafter. The following March Congress passed a law ending Chapman's term on October 27, 1840, and directing that a Delegate be elected for the period from that date

down to March 4, 1841. In January, 1840, the Legislative Assembly provided that a Delegate be elected in August, 1840, for the short term and that regular elections should be held on the first Monday in August, 1841, and every second year thereafter. To add to the confusion one faction in Iowa contended that the Iowa law of 1839 should have read "on the first Monday of August next — and forty, and on the same day in every second year thereafter." Under this interpretation Francis Gehon was actually elected as Delegate in August, 1839, but was never recognized.

It was during Chapman's term that the Iowa-Missouri boundary dispute became critical. He was anxious to obtain an amicable settlement and to this end he "industriously bombarded both House and Senate committees". The question was not finally settled, however, until a decade later and then by court action.

Mr. Chapman is reported to have introduced into Congress the first preëmption bill. And, among other things, he secured a grant of \$20,000 for the building of a military road from Dubuque to the Missouri boundary line, and \$5,000 for a road from Burlington through the counties of Des Moines, Henry, and Van Buren to the Indian agency in Wapello County. He was not a candidate for the short term.

In 1843 Chapman moved to Agency City (now Agency) in Wapello County. From that county he was elected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1844, and became chairman of the committee on boundaries. In the convention, too, he was one of those who helped to formulate plans whereby Iowa's share in the 500,000-acre land grant by Congress in 1841 should be devoted to educational purposes. In 1847 Mr. Chapman moved to Oregon where he became one of the founders of Portland and a member of the Oregon State legislature. He was later appointed Surveyor General of the United States.

Augustus Caesar Dodge, the second Iowa Delegate to Congress, had an even more colorful career than that of Mr. Chapman. He was born at Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, on January 2, 1812 — the son of Henry Dodge, Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Wisconsin, Governor of the Territory of Wisconsin, and later United States Senator from Wisconsin. At the age of fifteen Augustus Caesar Dodge removed with his parents to the lead-mine area of what is now southwestern Wisconsin. From 1838 to 1840 he was registrar of public lands at Burlington in the Territory of Iowa. While serving in this capacity he was nominated by the Democratic Party in the summer of 1840 as a candidate for the office of Delegate to

Congress at the election to be held on August third.

The Whig candidate for that office was Alfred Rich. Dodge's popularity won the election for him, and on December 8, 1840, he took his seat in Congress. The short term for which Dodge was elected expired on March 4, 1841. The election for a successor did not take place until August 2, 1841, and when the Twenty-seventh Congress met in special session on May 31, 1841, Iowa was not represented. In the summer of 1841 Dodge and Rich were again nominated and again Dodge was elected. Soon after he took his seat in Congress he welcomed his father, Henry Dodge, who had been elected Delegate to Congress from Wisconsin. The two Dodges were able to command the attention and respect of members of the House of Representatives, sometimes gaining the advantage over the Florida Delegate, David Levy, a shrewd politician.

In the debate upon the civil and diplomatic appropriation bill, Augustus Caesar Dodge offered an amendment appropriating some thirteen thousand dollars for arrearage in Iowa legislative expenses. The measure was opposed on the ground that the Iowa legislature had been extravagant. Dodge admitted this, but tactfully urged passage as a matter of present necessity. The amendment

passed the House, but was held up in the Senate for several sessions.

During the discussion on the tariff, when a proposition was made to reduce the import duty on lead, both Augustus Caesar Dodge and his father spoke authoritatively and effectively upon the subject. During the Twenty-seventh Congress, too, attempts were made to reach a final decision in the Iowa-Missouri boundary dispute, but final settlement was again postponed.

The two-year term of Delegate Dodge terminated in March, 1843, but again, under the Iowa law, the election of a Delegate was not held until that summer. In June he was renominated by the Democrats in convention at Iowa City. William Henry Wallace of Mt. Pleasant was the Whig candidate. Together these men "stumped the Territory". Dodge was criticized for not obtaining more appropriations, but there were no real political issues. Dodge was again the more popular candidate and he was reelected.

By 1844 the population of Iowa had increased to 75,152, and there was a growing interest in statehood. Early in the year the Iowa Legislative Assembly passed a law calling for a constitutional convention. The convention, which met in October, formulated a constitution for a new State, with boundaries extending from the Mississippi to

the Missouri River, and from the northern boundary of Missouri to the St. Peter's River.

In December, 1844, Delegate Dodge presented the constitution to Congress and urged its acceptance. Amendments were presented to reduce the size of the State to about two-thirds the size outlined in the original constitution. Mr. Dodge vigorously opposed such amendments, but despite his protest, the amendments were passed. Dodge then felt that since Congress had spoken in the matter it would be better for the people of Iowa to accept its proposal and come into the Union with the smaller boundaries. To this end he addressed a letter to his constituents saying that regardless of how they might vote they could not expect "one square mile more" for the new State.

The people of Iowa disagreed with Mr. Dodge and rejected the constitution. Moreover, when Mr. Dodge came up for reelection again, he was criticized for not standing firmly for the Missouri River boundary. Whereupon he addressed another communication to his constituents saying that if he were reelected he would insist upon the larger boundaries.

True to this promise he presented the Constitution of 1846 to Congress and again made a plea for the larger boundaries. He declared that if the members of Congress insisted on the smaller area,

“they might as well pass an act for our perpetual exclusion from the Union.” His arguments were successful and the new lines were accepted. With the coming of statehood, the Delegate to Congress was out of office.

In 1848 Dodge was named as one of the first two United States Senators from Iowa. He served for a second period of six years, again with his father who was then Senator from Wisconsin. At the expiration of his term in the Senate, he was appointed by President Franklin Pierce as minister to Spain. Retiring from this office he returned to Iowa to become a candidate for Governor in 1859, but was defeated by Samuel J. Kirkwood. In the following year he was defeated by James Harlan for the United States Senate. Meanwhile Republican politics had come into power in Iowa and Dodge — always a staunch Democrat — was permanently retired from political office.

It is of interest to note that the prestige and influence of Delegates to Congress increased during the Iowa Territorial period. At first the bills which the Delegates sponsored were usually introduced through committees and Delegates were not appointed to committees, but both Chapman and Dodge occasionally introduced unimportant bills on the floor. On one occasion Chapman attempted

to have a bill transferred from one committee to another, but the request was denied. When he objected to this ruling, he was also denied the privilege of debating this particular question.

Dodge not only introduced measures independently of committees, but on one occasion he even offered an amendment which was adopted. In 1845 his prestige was further increased when President James K. Polk asked him to make recommendations for Federal appointments in Iowa, thus giving him a patronage status.

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