

Comment by the Editor

THE DEFINITION OF A TERRITORY

And what, an inquisitive student might ask, was the original Territory of Wisconsin?

That, a cautious professor would answer, depends upon various factors. Definition is a process of careful description: each aspect of the subject deserves attention.

The Territory of Wisconsin, as the name implies, was a region. Bounded mainly by great rivers and lakes, it formed a geographical unit as large as Texas. Three States and parts of two others were carved from this vast domain. Forests, prairies, and plains were included, and natural resources far beyond the dreams of the fur traders. Rich deposits of lead and coal and iron were surpassed in value by the fertile soil. Though rainfall and temperature varied widely, the seasons were neither too long nor too short. The climate was described as salubrious. For the benefit of the people who occupied it, the valley of the upper Mississippi offered a generous endowment of natural advantages.

In 1836 the Indians still possessed most of the country that was called Wisconsin. Clustered

along the west bank of the Mississippi River in the Iowa country between Keokuk and Davenport were nearly 6300 settlers; 9500 more lived in the lead-mine region around Dubuque; and 5600 clung to the shores of Lake Michigan and Green Bay. Young men they were for the most part — ambitious, resourceful, confident, industrious, just. Conscious of the necessity of law and accustomed to the responsibilities of self-government, they sought political unity. And so the Territory was created. These frontiersmen became the body politic of a wilderness empire: in a political sense they were Wisconsin Territory.

If the truth were known, a patriot might suggest, the original Territory of Wisconsin was an episode in the progress of the nation. For a moment of two years these particular elements of place, area, resources, inhabitants, and government formed a tableau. Then time resolved them into other shapes.

J. E. B.