

Territorial Governors

During Iowa Territorial days the Governors were appointed by the President of the United States. The three men who held the office of chief executive of the Territory of Iowa were Robert Lucas, John Chambers, and James Clarke. The first two of these men were sons of Revolutionary soldiers, and were themselves soldiers in the War of 1812. Lucas and Clarke were Democrats while John Chambers was a Whig.

Militant, impulsive, aggressive, Robert Lucas, the first Governor of Iowa, was a leader of power and influence among the pioneers. Born among the independent planters of Virginia, the son of a Revolutionary soldier of wealth and prestige, educated by a private tutor, trained in the militia, and experienced in military affairs, he was not one to be swayed by changing fads and fashions of the hour, or to be blown about by every wind of political doctrine that swept across his path. He was slender in stature, with pronounced physical features, and a prominent chin that presaged a man of resolution and power.

Before coming to Iowa, Lucas had served for nineteen years in the legislature of Ohio, and had

been twice elected Governor of that State. He had played an important rôle in the Michigan-Ohio boundary dispute and was credited with having been victorious in the so-called "Toledo War". He was a staunch Democrat, having served as chairman of the National Democratic Convention that met at Baltimore in 1832 and nominated Andrew Jackson for President.

Having been appointed by President Martin Van Buren to the office of Governor of the Territory, Lucas came to Iowa in 1838 only to find that the Secretary of the Territory, the young and ambitious William B. Conway, had already arrived and assumed much authority that was intended to be vested in the Governor. The early period of his Governorship was stormy because of the attitude of Conway and the opposition of a youthful and spirited Territorial legislature which chafed at the limitations imposed by the absolute veto power frequently exercised by the Governor.

In Iowa, as in Ohio a few years before, Lucas soon found himself involved in a boundary dispute — the location of the line between the State of Missouri and the Territory of Iowa being the issue. Here again, as in Ohio, he emerged from the controversy with credit to himself and victory in the cause for which he contended. The dispute was not finally settled for many years, but in the

end the views presented by Governor Lucas were adopted. Meanwhile Lucas was retired from office before his term of three years expired and was replaced by a Whig in March, 1841. In the Constitutional Convention of 1844 he rendered eminent service. It was he who suggested the boundaries outlined in that constitution, which if adopted, would have given Iowa a larger area.

In 1844 Lucas retired to Plum Grove farm near Iowa City to spend his remaining years in peace and quiet. He had experienced much of the stress and strain of political life, and had been the storm center in many a vigorous campaign. But the fire of youth had burned out. Even the vigor of manhood was passing. His declining days were spent in quiet meditation, in writing verse on the margin of newspaper pages, and in leafing through a well-worn Methodist hymnal.

John Chambers, the second Territorial Governor of Iowa, was a native of New Jersey and for many years a resident of Kentucky. Like Robert Lucas, Chambers was the son of a Revolutionary soldier and was himself a soldier in the War of 1812, having served with distinction on the staff of General William Henry Harrison. He was four times elected to the legislature of Kentucky and three times elected to Congress before he came to Iowa.

On March 25, 1841, Chambers was commissioned Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Territory of Iowa. Despite the predominance of members of the Democratic party in Iowa at that time, Chambers, a Whig, succeeded in administering affairs with skill and approbation. He gave much attention to Indian affairs and as Commissioner for the United States government, concluded a treaty with the Sauks and Foxes in 1842 whereby these Indians agreed to give up the remainder of their land in Iowa and go to Kansas. In 1844 he was reappointed to the office of Governor by President John Tyler, but the following year he was removed by President James K. Polk.

White-haired, bowed with the weight of more than three score years, and with health impaired, he retired to his "Grouseland" farm near Burlington — so called because of the abundance of grouse in that vicinity. Shortly afterward, however, he returned to Kentucky where efforts were made to nominate him for the State Senate. Indeed, he feared that a public declaration would be necessary in order to prevent his nomination. In June, 1851, however, in a letter to his daughter he said: "I believe I have got out of my political difficulty, for I have positively refused to suffer myself to be used as a candidate and after the meeting of the County convention (day after tomorrow) I

suppose there will be no more said about it. Your excuse for me that I am upwards of 70 years seemed to have no effect, for every body insisted that I was just as able to do service as ever I was — fools, they don't know how a man of seventy years old feels".

His declaration was final. He was not nominated and in the following year, 1852, his career was ended. No monument marks his final resting place, but the symbol of his rich and wholesome life is found in the straight and stately pines at Cedar Hill nearby.

While the War of 1812 was in progress and Robert Lucas and John Chambers were active soldiers in the field, James Clarke, who was to become the third Governor of Iowa, was in his infancy, having been born in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, in July, 1812. At an early age Clarke learned the printing trade, which prepared him well for his later public career and served as a stepping stone to political preferment.

In the spring of 1836 young Clarke joined the westward movement, coming first to Saint Louis where he found employment in the office of the *Missouri Republican*. When the Territory of Wisconsin was organized, Clarke, in partnership with John B. Russell, engaged in the publication of a newspaper at Belmont, Wisconsin, where the

First Legislative Assembly was convened in the fall of 1836. The paper was called the *Belmont Gazette*, and its publishers were appointed as printers for the First Legislative Assembly.

In 1837 the capital of Wisconsin Territory was moved to Burlington where the second session of the Legislative Assembly was convened in the fall of that year. In anticipation of this meeting Clarke established the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser* at Burlington, where he was again employed as printer of the public laws. He was also named by Governor Henry Dodge as Librarian for the Territory of Wisconsin. In 1838 Iowa was organized as a Territory, and, upon the death of William B. Conway the following year, Clarke was appointed by President Martin Van Buren as Secretary of the newly organized Territory.

In political affairs Clarke was frequently associated with the leading personalities on the frontier. Young in years and youthful in spirit he came to be prominent in social as well as political affairs. He fell in love with Christiana H. Dodge, who was the daughter of Henry Dodge, the Governor of Wisconsin Territory. They were married on September 27, 1840, by Father Samuel Mazzuchelli.

During the same fall Clarke called together the

Free and Accepted Masons who were living in the vicinity of Burlington, and on November 10, 1840, he helped organize the first Masonic lodge to be established in Iowa. Clarke served as mayor of Burlington and was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1844 before he was appointed Governor of the Territory at the age of thirty-three. In the office of Governor, Clarke advocated principles of economy and efficiency. He recommended the abolition of certain offices, the reduction of fees, and a more centralized governmental organization. He was also instrumental in securing treaties with the Winnebago and Pottawattamie Indians by which all the land owned by these tribes was ceded to the United States.

After Iowa became a State, Clarke resumed his connection with the *Burlington Gazette* of which he was the founder. In the summer of 1850, Burlington was stricken with a virulent epidemic of cholera. Ex-Governor Clarke was one of the victims, passing from the activities of a busy life at the early age of thirty-eight. What might have been his place in Iowa history had he survived can only be surmised.

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