

The Naming of Iowa

The name "Iowa" as applied to the State which was admitted into the Union on December 28, 1846, was derived from or suggested by the use of the name in the expression, "Territory of Iowa" — the Territory of Iowa being the direct and immediate precursor of the "State of Iowa".

As the name "Iowa" in the expression "State of Iowa" was derived from or suggested by its use in the earlier expression "Territory of Iowa", so the name "Iowa" in the expression "Territory of Iowa" was derived from or suggested by its use in the still earlier unofficial expression "Iowa District" — the "Iowa District" being the direct and immediate precursor of the "Territory of Iowa".

It is generally conceded that the expression "Iowa District", as applicable to the country that was eventually included in the Territory and then the State of Iowa, came into general and recognized use through the publication, in 1836, of a small book entitled, *Notes on Wisconsin Territory, With a Map*, by Lieutenant Albert M. Lea. It can not be said with absolute certainty that the name "Iowa District" was used for the first time in this little book: on the contrary, it is probable that

the name was applied to the Iowa country before Lea's book was published. Since, however, the name "Iowa" was fixed upon this country and popularized through the publication of Lea's *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, it may be said that this was the book that gave to Iowa its name.

Thus the problem of the origin of the name "Iowa" as applied to the Iowa country is resolved into the question, How came Lieutenant Lea to use the name "Iowa District" in his book?

In the year 1834 the country that was to be called Iowa was, by act of Congress, attached to and made a part of the Territory of Michigan. Thereupon the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan, assembled in extra session in September of the same year, passed an act relative to the establishment of local government in the recently attached country. By this act the region west of the Mississippi was divided into two parts by a line drawn due west from the lower end of Rock Island to the Missouri River. All the territory north of this line, to which the Indian title had been extinguished, was to constitute the county of Dubuque; and all south of the line was to constitute the county of Des Moines. Furthermore, it was provided by the same act that all laws in force in the "County of Iowa" (Michigan Territory) should extend to and be in force in the counties of

Dubuque and Demoine, and that process civil and criminal and writs of error should lie from the Circuit Court of the United States for the County of Iowa to the county courts of Dubuque and Demoine. The "County of Iowa", with which the original counties of Dubuque and Demoine were thus associated, had been established by the Legislative Council of Michigan in 1829, within that part of the Territory which afterwards became the State of Wisconsin.

Some writers on Iowa history have said (in answer to the question, How came Lieutenant Lea by the name "Iowa" as used in the expression "Iowa District") that the name was derived from or suggested by its use in the expression "County of Iowa". This explanation of the origin of the name "Iowa" may be called the "Iowa County Explanation". And it must be admitted that this explanation was plausible, since the original counties of Dubuque and Demoine were directly associated with the County of Iowa through the Michigan statute of 1834.

More recent investigations, however, have led to the rejection of the "Iowa County Explanation", and to the general acceptance of what may be called the "Iowa River Explanation". This explanation asserts that the name "Iowa" in the expression "Iowa District" as used in Lea's book

was derived from or suggested by the use of the name as applied to a river that flowed through the country in question. The evidence upon which this explanation of the origin of the name "Iowa" is based appears to be adequate and convincing.

In the first place there is the direct testimony of Lieutenant Lea, who says in Chapter I of his *Notes on Wisconsin Territory* that "the District under review has been often called 'Scott's Purchase,' and it is sometimes called the 'Black-Hawk Purchase;' but from the extent and beauty of the Iowa river which runs centrally through the District, and gives character to most of it, the name of that stream being both euphonic and appropriate, has been given to the District itself."

A year after Lea had described the Black Hawk Purchase as the "Iowa District", the citizens living in that country started a movement for the creation of a new Territory west of the Mississippi River. Meetings were held in each county and delegates were chosen to meet at Burlington in October, 1837. Several names were proposed, the most prominent being Washington, Jefferson, and Iowa. After considerable debating and log-rolling, however, the convention petitioned Congress to form the Territory of Iowa. Apparently the name which Albert Lea had applied to this region was in general use in 1837. At least the

people adopted that indigenous name in preference to honoring the memory of the Author of the Declaration of Independence or the Father of His Country.

That the evidence from Lieutenant Lea's book was influential in the naming of Iowa is supported by the testimony of Joseph N. Nicollet. About the time that Lea's book and map were published in the summer of 1836, Nicollet was engaged in making a thorough exploration of the sources of the Mississippi River. In 1838 and 1839 he conducted two extensive expeditions in the northern portion of the Territory of Iowa. As a result of his work, Nicollet constructed a geographical and topographical map of the upper Mississippi basin. This map, together with a "report intended to illustrate" the same, was published by the government of the United States in 1843.

It is in this report that Nicollet refers to the naming of Iowa. In speaking of the lands acquired from the Indians by the treaty of 1832, he says: "It was often called 'Scott's Purchase;' as also the 'Black Hawk Purchase,' after the name of the Indian leader during the outbreak alluded to. But, in 1836, my friend Albert M. Lea, Esq., then a lieutenant of dragoons, published a map and description of the country, which he called the 'Iowa District' — a name both euphonious and appropri-

ate, being derived from the Iowa river, the extent, beauty, and importance of which were then first made known to the public."

As to the use of the name "Iowa" or "Ioway" as applied to the river, it need only be observed in this connection that maps of the western country show that for at least a century before Lieutenant Lea published his map, a river that "runs centrally" through the country between the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers was generally indicated by the name "Ioway" or "Iowa".

It seems, however, that Lea pronounced Iowa with a long a. Many years later he spoke with pride of "the State *which I* named, Iowa". When the organization of the Territory was proposed, he wrote to George W. Jones, then Delegate to Congress, urging that the spelling be "put back" to "Ioway", as "it ought to have been". The use of "Iowa" in his *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, however, had apparently settled that question. And so, he declared in 1890, Congress "stuck to my error."

Ioway or *Iowa* River; the *Iowa* District; Territory of *Iowa*; State of *Iowa* — these are the chapters in the story of the naming of Iowa.

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