

THE PALIMPSEST

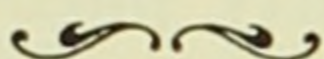
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Frontier Democracy

In harmony with conditions of equality on the frontier and the democratic spirit of the times, the Organic Act for the Territory of Iowa provided for the popular election of most of the public officials. The thirteen members of the Council were to be elected for two years, and the twenty-six members of the House of Representatives were to be elected every year. Besides the Legislative Assembly, "all township officers, and all county officers, except judicial officers, justices of the peace, sheriffs, and clerks of courts", were to be elected by the citizens in the Territory.

Iowa pioneers were vitally interested in their government. The maintenance of order, the protection of claims, the construction of roads, the establishment of schools, the maintenance of health, and national politics concerned them tremendously. Long before August 15, 1838, when Governor Robert Lucas fixed the election districts and apportioned the seats in the legislature, a

large number of citizens had announced their candidacy for both local and Territorial offices.

The campaign was theoretically non-partisan. Wherever men contend for office and political power, however, differences of opinion develop, issues arise, and party phenomena occur. The first election in the Territory of Iowa was no exception. Though everybody professed to put community interests above personal advantage, candidates differed over objects and methods. National politics influenced local attitudes.

The simplest method of becoming a candidate is self-announcement. Office seekers in abundance followed this procedure. The list of announcements in the newspapers grew steadily all summer, some in response to promises of support from "Many Voters". Early in the year W. W. Chapman announced his candidacy for Delegate to Congress, and by the time the fall election was held there were five candidates for Congress, thirty-one seeking seats in the Territorial Council, and seventy-four political aspirants for the Territorial House of Representatives. The *Iowa News* on July 14, 1838, thought that the number of candidates gave "the appearance of great thirst for office". Politicians seemed to be most numerous in Des Moines County.

The campaign through the hot summer of 1838

revolved around several issues. Candidates for Congress debated provisions of the preëmption law, the Iowa-Missouri boundary question, and internal improvements. Local office seekers were interested in establishing county seats and county lines, the location of the Territorial capital, education, and formulating a code of laws.

Mass meetings endorsed some candidates and ignored others. Citizen gatherings in Dubuque and Jackson counties enthusiastically nominated Thomas S. Wilson for Congressional Delegate. Another Dubuque meeting "respectfully requested" Warner Lewis "to become a candidate for the next Legislative Council". Small meetings were sometimes held in the home of a neighbor. For example, a group of citizens of Clayton County met at Henry Holtzbecker's house to nominate candidates for the Delegation and for the Territorial House of Representatives. A committee of five drafted resolutions appropriate to the occasion. James W. Woods was thoroughly exasperated when, after he had announced his candidacy, a Burlington caucus nominated Robert Ralston for the legislature. Not partisan in the usual political sense, these early gatherings were nevertheless sensitive to local needs and aware of party rivalry.

Sectionalism was pronounced. In Lee County there were two factions. One group wanted the

county divided into two sections — the Half-breed Tract and the northern portion. Another faction wanted to move the county seat from Fort Madison to West Point. In general there was a feeling of enmity between town and country. Editor Clarke of the *Burlington Gazette* on July 21, 1838, deplored such sectionalism and reminded his readers that "every blow inflicted on the country is felt by the town" and that "every wound received by the town is also a wound to the country". Considerable hostility was generated between the northern and southern portions of the Territory regarding the election of a Congressional Delegate. "Des Moines" pointed out in the *Gazette* that to arouse sectional interests in the first election would be disastrous in the future. Chapman actually carried the southern half of the Territory in the election while Engle, his strongest opponent, polled a majority of votes in the northern counties.

The first campaign was conducted largely by the method of stump speaking throughout the Territory. Chapman once complained that the columns of the newspapers were closed against him and as a consequence "he had no means of communicating with the people, except seeing them face to face". Several of the candidates would visit a town at the same time and a holiday

was made of the event. Usually each office seeker addressed the crowd and explained his views. The *Gazette* reported that the candidates succeeded at one meeting in "keeping the voters up until 10 o'clock". Chapman, it was said, used only one speech in the entire campaign.

Because regulations had not yet been established by the Territory of Iowa, the first election was held in accordance with the law of the Territory of Wisconsin. Only free white male citizens who had reached the age of twenty-one and resided in Iowa six months were eligible to vote. Balloting was at places designated by the county sheriffs. Some of the polls, open from nine in the morning until six in the evening, were in private homes while others were in public places. Three judges, appointed by the county commissioners, were in charge of each voting place. There were no official ballots. Any candidate could have tickets printed, and apparently voters could write their choices for the different offices on a slip of paper. Voting was secret, however. Electors, "approaching the bar in the election room", presented their "ticket" folded in such a manner that no names were visible to the judges who deposited it immediately in a general ballot box, and the clerk recorded the names of all voters.

After the results were tabulated and the suc-

cessful candidates were certified, complaints came to the attention of the first legislature. One precinct kept the polls open longer than the legally prescribed hour; the judges allowed the ballot boxes to stand unlocked all night in a public place; and it was charged that a large number of people who cast ballots were not qualified electors. One candidate (J. A. Burchard) won a contested seat in the legislature because J. A. Burchard and J. A. Burchard, Jr. had been erroneously counted as two persons by the election judges.

On September 15, 1838, while the election returns were dribbling in, the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* reported that the "vote throughout the Territory has been much smaller than was anticipated. Probably not more than 4,500 have been cast, although there must be between six and seven thousand votes in the Territory". Farmers were busy in their fields, and many aliens who were old settlers and had voted in previous elections, especially in Dubuque County, were excluded because they had not been naturalized.

Frontier democracy was, perhaps, best expressed in the composition of the legislature. A contemporary statistician, Allen M. Scott, compiled most of the following information, except party affiliation.

COUNCIL

MEMBERS AND DISTRICTS	POLITICAL PARTY	NATIVITY	OCCUPATION	AGE	WEIGHT	HEIGHT
<i>Lee County</i>						
Jesse B. Browne	Whig	Ky.	Merchant	40	190	6'7"
<i>Van Buren County</i>						
E. A. M. Swazy	Whig	Vt.	Farmer	28	167	5'11½"
J. Keith	Whig	Va.	Gunsmith	52	145	5'10½"
<i>Henry County</i>						
Lawson B. Hughes	Demo	Va.	Merchant	34	160	5'7"
Jesse D. Payne	Demo	Tenn.	Physician	35	149	6'2¼"
<i>Des Moines County</i>						
Arthur Inghram		Pa.	Farmer	60	224	5'10"
Robert Ralston	Whig	Ohio	Merchant	31	137	5'7"
George Hepner	Demo	Ky.	Farmer	33	170	5'11½"
<i>Muscatine, Louisa, Slaughter Counties</i>						
James M. Clarke	Whig	N. Y.	Farmer	25	150	5'8"
<i>Scott, Clinton Counties</i>						
Jonathan W. Parker	Demo	Vt.	Lawyer	28	160	5'10½"
<i>Cedar, Jones, Linn, Johnson Counties</i>						
Charles Whittlesey	Whig	N. Y.	Merchant	31	156	5'9"
<i>Dubuque, Jackson, Clayton Counties</i>						
Warner Lewis	Demo	Va.	Surveyor	32	140	5'10"
Stephen Hempstead	Demo	Conn.	Lawyer	26	140	6'

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

<i>Lee County</i>						
William Patterson	Demo	Va.	Farmer	37	170	6'
Hawkins Taylor	Whig	Ky.	Farmer	27	160	5'10"
Calvin J. Price	Demo	N. C.	Farmer	37	160	5'11"
James Brierly	Demo	Ohio	Farmer	29	136	5'7"

MEMBERS AND DISTRICTS	POLITICAL PARTY	NATIVITY	OCCUPATION	AGE	WEIGHT	HEIGHT
<i>Van Buren County</i>						
James Hall	Whig	Md.	Merchant	27	150	6'1"
Gideon S. Bailey	Demo	Ky.	Physician	27	150	6'
Samuel Parker	Demo	Va.	Farmer	34	152	5'8"
<i>Henry County</i>						
William G. Coop	Demo	Va.	Farmer	33	170	5'10"
William H. Wallace	Whig	Ohio	Farmer	27	130	5'8"
A. B. Porter	Whig	Ky.	Farmer	30	155	5'8"
<i>Des Moines County</i>						
George Temple	Demo	N. H.	Tailor	34	170	5'9½"
Van B. Delashmutt	Demo	Va.	Farmer	37	188	6'1"
James W. Grimes	Whig	N. H.	Lawyer	22	170	6'
Thomas Blair		Ky.	Farmer	49	175	5'8"
Cyrus Jacobs*	Demo		Lawyer			
George H. Beeler	Whig	Va.	Merchant	39	160	5'10"
<i>Muscatine, Louisa, Slaughter Counties</i>						
John Frierson		Ohio	Surveyor	34	175	5'10"
W. L. Toole	Whig	Va.	Farmer	35	145	5'8"
Levi Thornton	Whig	Penn.	Farmer	42	196	6'
S. C. Hastings	Demo	N. Y.	Lawyer	24	175	6'1"
<i>Johnson, Cedar, Jones, Linn Counties</i>						
Robert G. Roberts	Whig	Penn.	Farmer	42	150	5'8"
<i>Scott, Clinton Counties</i>						
Laurel Summers	Demo.	Ky.	Farmer	24	145	5'10"
Samuel R. Murry**						
Jabez A. Burchard	Demo	Pa.	Farmer	34	165	5'11"
<i>Jackson, DuBuque, Clayton Counties</i>						
Chauncey Swan	Demo	N. Y.	Miner	39	140	5'8"
Andrew Bankson		N. C.	Farmer	51	160	5'9"
Thomas Cox	Demo	Ky.	Farmer	51	250	6'1"
Hardin Nowlin	Demo	Ill.	Farmer	34	175	5'10"

* Killed in duel. Place taken by George H. Beeler.

** Seat successfully contested by Jabez A. Burchard.

The First Legislative Assembly of Iowa was composed of young men who were predominantly farmers. Among these pioneer law makers, some were destined to write their names again and again in the book of Iowa history. Several had seen service in the legislature of the Territory of Wisconsin. Others were young men just beginning their careers. James W. Grimes, fresh from Dartmouth College, was the youngest of them all, and Arthur Inghram was the oldest. Twenty came from the South and nineteen from northern States. For some, it was their first venture into politics; for others, it was a continuation of public service commenced elsewhere. Though political parties were not well organized locally, and the campaign was largely personal, most of the legislators eventually revealed their partisan identity.

JACK T. JOHNSON