

Pioneer and Politician

"The aspect of affairs has been materially changed since our last", reported the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* on October 6, 1838. "At that time, the election of Col. Engle was looked upon as certain; but the very heavy majority against him in Van Buren, and his diminished vote in Cedar, have in all probability, thrown him behind Chapman from forty to fifty votes. There now seems to be but little doubt of the election of the latter." Twelve days later, on October 18th, Governor Robert Lucas proclaimed William W. Chapman, first Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa.

The importance of the Delegacy was overshadowed only by the election of the Territorial legislature. "The delegate to Congress", the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* informed its readers on August 25, 1838, "will have much influence to exert, and as he may exert it so will it have its weight upon our destiny. But the works of our first legislature are far more important to us. With them lies the duty of laying the foundation stone of our laws and prosperity."

The election of a Delegate, nevertheless, at-

tracted general attention. Candidates were numerous and energetic. Their rivalry was keen and the decision of the voters was close. Sectional interests were pronounced. Chapman who was "a professed Democrat" carried the southern half of the Territory with the exception of Lee and Henry counties, which were won by Benjamin F. Wallace, a Whig. The northern portion went to Peter Hill Engle, who was a Democrat, a friend of George W. Jones, and a former member of the Wisconsin Territorial legislature.

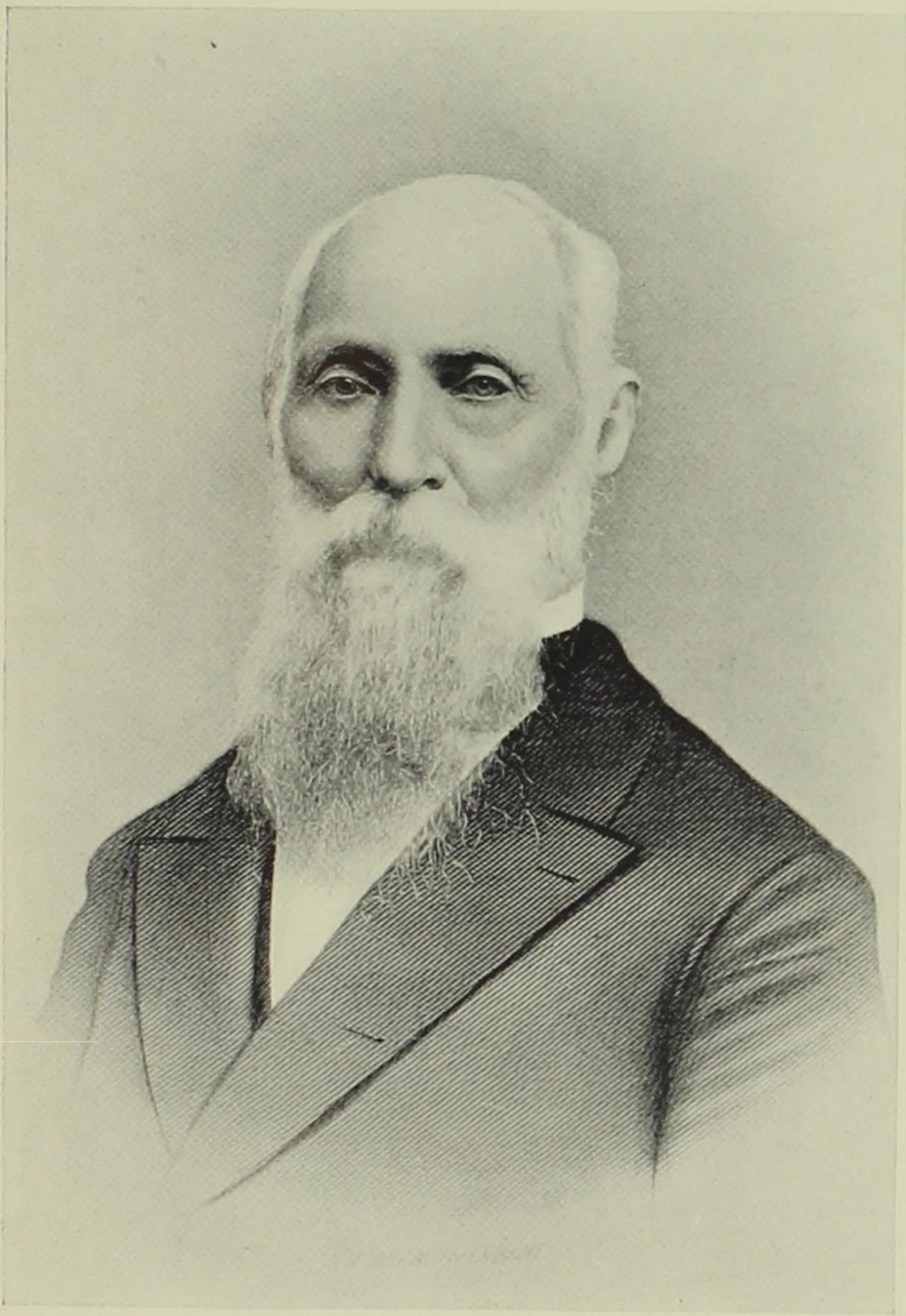
The campaign for Congress in Iowa Territory in 1838 was long and marked with significant political phenomena. Early in the year (February 24, 1838) the Burlington *Territorial Gazette* announced the candidacy of Chapman for Delegate to Congress from Wisconsin Territory. When the Territory was divided, Chapman simply continued to run for Congress, with the object of representing Iowa where he lived instead of the remnant of Wisconsin east of the river. By July mass meetings and self-announcements had named Chapman's competitors — Lawrence Taliaferro of St. Peters, Peter H. Engle and M. H. Prentice of Dubuque, Benjamin F. Wallace of Mount Pleasant, and James Davis and David Rorer of Des Moines County. Thomas S. Wilson of Dubuque had withdrawn his candidacy upon being named

Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. And by election time Davis and Prentice had also withdrawn. The final returns gave the following results:

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| Chapman | 1490 |
| Engle | 1454 |
| Wallace | 913 |
| Rorer | 605 |
| Taliaferro | 30 ? |

Chapman and Engle undertook the most systematic campaign of the Territory, though Wallace, Rorer, and Davis made many speeches. Taliaferro and Prentice were not very active. On September 1st the editor of the *Fort Madison Patriot* thought that the aspirants "all seemed jaded down with hard riding and much speaking". The *Iowa News*, speaking for the northern half of the Territory, said on July 28th: "In the Southern part of the Territory, the Candidates for Delegate to Congress and for both Houses of the Legislative Assembly are stump-speeching, and have so stirred the people that the discussion of their merits already seems to form the leading topic. We are not quite so rapid in preparing for the contest, but as soon as dog days have passed, it is expected to commence."

Besides being politically astute and an active campaigner, Chapman profited by an accident to



WILLIAM W. CHAPMAN

his chief opponent. While Engle was on a speaking tour about the middle of August, he fell into the Wapsipinicon River and nearly drowned. Saved by a passing Indian, the candidate was ill for a fortnight and unable to fulfill his engagements. A rumor of his death spread through the Territory. Possibly this accident cost Engle the seat in Congress.

On November 6th Chapman left his farm near Burlington for Washington. The third session of the Twenty-fifth Congress was meeting and Chapman took his place among the Representatives. During the months that followed Iowa's Delegate presented numerous petitions and offered many resolutions. Proposals for the building of canals and the improvement of roads, requests for grants of land for a seat of government and for the benefit of education, resolutions relative to the preëmption law, boundaries, and the improvement of the rapids in the Mississippi River were the major work of Chapman in his first session in Congress.

The Iowa Delegate took his seat amidst the debate over the tenure of Delegate George W. Jones. The question also concerned Chapman. Was he elected for the term of a particular Congress or was he elected for two years? Within the Territory the assumption was that the term of

Chapman was concomitant with that of Representatives and a new election was to be held in the fall of 1839. Congress, however, specifically provided that the term of "the present Delegate for said Territory of Iowa shall expire on the twenty-seventh day of October, eighteen hundred and forty".

The issue caused a political flurry in the Territory. Francis Gehon in the summer of 1839 gave notice in the *Dubuque News* that if he should be "voted for generally throughout the Territory, as a Delegate to Congress, and should receive the highest vote, he will conceive it his duty to go to Washington and ask his seat". The *Patriot* on July 4, 1839, stated that "the Hon. T. S. Wilson has declined being a candidate for Delegate to Congress, on the ground of a pressure of public duties which renders it inconsistent for him to make an electioneering tour through the Territory, and the probable illegality of an election at the present time." Nevertheless, many ballots were cast for the office of Delegate. Gehon received 843 votes, Chapman 24, and Joseph M. Robinson 13. Governor Lucas proclaimed that Gehon had been elected Delegate to Congress from Iowa Territory. The election was illegal. On October 24th the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* reported that "Mr. Chapman, we think, stands on solid ground

according to the law, and he knows it. He seems as 'calm as a summer's morning'."

Chapman's second session in Congress was spent in drafting resolutions governing land sales and in protecting the interests of his Territory in the Iowa-Missouri dispute. He also urged action on the Des Moines River improvement project. On February 6, 1840, the *Hawk-Eye* felt that "delegate, Col. Chapman, is wide awake to the interests of Iowa".

As the time for reëlection drew near, political parties in Iowa were taking shape. Suspicions were spread that Chapman was not a good Democrat. On June 13, 1838, Henry Dodge had written to George W. Jones that "it would be a great misfortune if Chapman should succeed in being elected to Congress from Iowa." And Dodge wrote to Jones again on March 3, 1840, that James Doty had been elected from Wisconsin and William Chapman from Iowa "because the people of the Territories they represent were not acquainted with their true character, for at heart they were Whigs and opposed to the measures of the present administration."

Aware of this partisan opposition, Chapman addressed an open letter to his constituents on March 27, 1840. From Washington, he wrote: "If nothing but a convention in May will satisfy

the craving appetite of party spirit, it becomes my duty as your representative here to say, that I cannot permit my name to be submitted to any Convention of a partizan character . . . I would prefer success in our present measures coupled with retirement from office under a conscientious belief of having rendered service to my constituents, and done some good for my country to a nomination by a partizan convention, with defeat of measures important to the prosperity of the Territory staring me in the face."

If any doubt of Chapman's lack of party fealty had lingered in the minds of his constituents, this letter dispelled it. On April 11, 1840, the *Burlington Gazette* issued a call for a Democratic Territorial Convention to unite the party on one candidate to insure the election of "*A Democratic Delegate*". As a result, Augustus C. Dodge was nominated, and on October 5, 1840, he was elected the second Delegate to Congress from Iowa Territory. Chapman was not a candidate. He temporarily retired from politics.

Born at Clarksburg, Virginia, now West Virginia, on August 11, 1808, William Williams Chapman at an early age caught the spirit of the pioneer and of the politician. Under the influence of his mother (his father died when he was fourteen), he received a common school education

and showed an interest in the profession of law. While serving as clerk of the district court and studying in the office of the well-known Virginia lawyer, Henry St. George Tucker, Chapman gained the training which secured for him an admission to the bar in 1831.

Marrying Margaret F. Inghram a year later, he migrated with his wife and father-in-law to Monmouth, Illinois, in the fall of 1834. Sometime in the following March, the family crossed the Mississippi into Iowa at Burlington.

Chapman was soon attracted to politics. On April 13, 1835, William Morgan and Young L. Hughes, judges of the first court in Des Moines County, "for reasons appearing to the satisfaction of the Court" ordered that William W. Chapman "be and he is hereby appointed to prosecute on the part of the United States". Chapman appeared and took the oath of office.

A year later, on April 1, 1836, the Governor of Michigan Territory appointed Chapman district attorney. In June of that year he moved to Dubuque, anticipating that this town would become the seat of government for the newly created Wisconsin Territory. There, Chapman established himself as one of the town's leading citizens. Before leaving Burlington, he had been appointed United States Attorney on May 6, 1836.

Undoubtedly his position added much to the prestige he acquired in Dubuque. Recommended for a place on the Territorial Supreme Court, elected colonel of the fourth regiment of the Wisconsin militia, and recognized as a capable attorney, Chapman gained a wide acquaintance with prominent men of the Territory.

Late in 1836, Chapman took a flyer into journalism. From December 28, 1836, until February 9, 1837, he was one of the publishers of the *Du Buque Visitor*. The paper during his ownership seems to have continued to be ardently in favor of Jackson and the Democratic party.

When Chapman sold his interest in the *Visitor*, he formed a law partnership with Stephen Hempstead. This association continued more than a year. But when the capital was changed from Belmont to Burlington, Chapman followed the seat of government to his former home. Sometime in the winter of 1837-1838 he joined the brilliant young James W. Grimes in a new law firm.

When Chapman was not a candidate for a second term as Congressional Delegate because of his Whig inclinations, he did not abandon his pioneering habits or lose his instinct for politics. Having moved to Agency City, an Indian village in Wapello County, Chapman was chosen dele-

gate to the Iowa Constitutional Convention of 1844. In 1847 he crossed the plains to Oregon: in 1848 he went to California. Returning to Oregon, he was chosen a member of the House of Representatives. He helped found the *Oregonian*, the first newspaper established in the Territory. And in 1858 he was named Surveyor General.

During the years of the agitation for a Pacific railroad, Chapman was an active advocate of the interests of Oregon. In December, 1867, he suggested a meeting in Portland to promote a Northern Pacific railroad from Lake Superior to Puget Sound; and an Oregon connection with the advancing Union Pacific. Chapman's proposal may have had some effect because the Northern Pacific and the Oregon Short line were later constructed.

Motivated by the adventurous spirit of the pioneer and the public service idea of the politician, Chapman moved west with the covered wagon and served as a law maker when the country was young. Suffering from a paralytic stroke in his last years, William W. Chapman, pioneer and politician, and first Delegate to Congress from Iowa Territory, died in Portland, Oregon, on October 18, 1892.

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