

Comment by the Editor

THE ORIGIN OF IOWA GOVERNMENT

Iowa was born in anarchy. For a whole year after the Black Hawk Purchase was opened for settlement, no civil government was provided for the Iowa country. During the summer of 1833 several hundred people had established little communities on the west side of the Mississippi. Though the Indian title to the land had been extinguished and settlement was no longer prohibited, the settlers were without the protection of law. Neither person nor property was safe against miscreants. Individual morality was the sole standard of public conduct.

The highest tribute to the character of the first pioneers in Iowa is the condition of peace and order that prevailed. By June, 1834, there must have been nearly two thousand people in the vicinity of the Dubuque lead mines. Most of them were reckless frontiersmen unrestrained by the responsibilities of family life. Yet it was reported that theft was extremely rare and violence almost entirely confined to the influence of liquor. A government agent supervised mining activities, but he had no police power. Disputes had to be

settled by mutual agreement of the parties involved, for the courts across the river refused to accept jurisdiction. In that plight the settlers in some communities organized clubs to administer law directly without benefit of attorneys. The squatters had an instinct for self-government.

The fact that the pioneers were law-abiding made the establishment of civil government all the more imperative. They found anarchy intolerable. Voluntary associations might be able to preserve a semblance of order temporarily, but they had neither the purpose nor authority to perform the general functions of government. When a murderer claimed immunity from punishment, the people demanded a government of laws in place of personal volition and optional control. And so, at the end of the first year, on June 28, 1834, the application of political authority transformed anarchistic freedom into civil liberty.

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