

## Agitation for Statehood

The early agitation for the establishment of a State government can not rightly be interpreted as disaffection with the Territorial government. On the contrary, it was altogether natural for the people who settled in the new Territory west of the Mississippi to look forward to the early establishment of a State government. In fact it was everywhere understood that the Territorial organization was at most a temporary arrangement which in time would give way to the more perfect Constitution of the Commonwealth. Then, too, in the case of Iowa there was such a rapid growth of population that admission into the Union could not long be delayed under any circumstance.

The movement for the establishment of a State government was inaugurated by Robert Lucas as early as November 4, 1839. The Governor was of the opinion that in view of the "rapidly increasing population, and advancing prosperity of the Territory" the Legislative Assembly might "with propriety proceed to measures preparatory to the formation of a Constitution and State Government". He knew that some would object to such measures as premature, "inasmuch as our ex-

penses are defrayed by the United States", while the financial burdens of a State government would all have to be borne by the people.

He earnestly recommended to the Legislative Assembly "the early passage of a memorial to Congress, respectfully asking of that body the passage of an Act, at their ensuing session, granting to the inhabitants of Iowa Territory, the right to form a Constitution and State Government, and to provide for their admission into the Union upon an equal footing with the original States." Furthermore, the Governor recommended "the passage of a law to provide for the calling a convention to form a state constitution, so soon as Congress may grant by law the privilege to do so." He was seriously in earnest.

But the Legislative Assembly was more conservative. At the regular session of 1839-40 it neither memorialized Congress on admission into the Union nor passed a law providing for the calling of a Convention to form a Constitution. In opposition to the recommendations of the Governor and the views of a minority in the Assembly, it was argued (1) that the establishment of State government would increase the burdens of taxation "which must render the new State Government burthensome as well as odious to the people", (2) that "it could not add to the

prosperity of the agriculturalist, the merchant, the miner, or the mechanic; nor could it render any more fruitful the sources of profit which are open to honest industry and application", and (3) that the people of the Territory enjoy under the acts of Congress ample liberty and freedom in self-government. The second Legislative Assembly of the Territory was not willing to assume the responsibility of measures looking toward so radical a change in the political status of the people of Iowa.

The Assembly was willing, however, to allow the people to decide the question at the annual August elections of 1840. All who favored the calling of a Convention were required to write "Convention" on their ballots; while all who opposed the proposition were required to write "No Convention". When the official returns were counted the Governor in a proclamation declared the result to be 937 votes for and 2,907 votes against a Convention. The defeat, which was decisive, indicated that the squatters had not yet paid for their claims. And so the Organic Act of 1838 continued to serve the people of Iowa as the code of fundamental law.

When Governor Chambers sent his first message to the Legislative Assembly in December, 1841, he thought a vote on the question of a Con-

vention would demonstrate a marked change in sentiment among the people. First, the population of the Territory had increased phenomenally since August, 1840. Secondly, Congress had passed the "Distribution Act" which provided (a) that Iowa should participate in the *pro rata* distribution, along with the twenty-six States and three Territories, and the District of Columbia, of the net proceeds of the sales of public lands, and (b) that five hundred thousand acres of land for internal improvements should be granted to every new State that should be admitted into the Union. John Chambers thought the liberal provisions of the Distribution Act would remove the grounds of all objections based upon the argument that State organization would be followed by burdensome taxes. In the light of these considerations he recommended that the question of a Convention be again submitted to the people. Following this recommendation, the third Legislative Assembly passed "An Act to provide for the expression of the opinion of the people of the Territory of Iowa, upon the subject of the formation of a State Constitution and Government".

As to the propriety and wisdom of calling a Constitutional Convention there was from the beginning a decided difference of opinion. In favor of a Constitutional Convention it was urged

that the admission of Iowa into the Union would result in a more rapid increase in the population by immigration, since immigrants as a rule preferred States to Territories. Again, admission into the Union would give Iowa more influence at Washington, which would probably mean generous appropriations by Congress for the improvement of the rapids of the Mississippi. Politically the change would place the new Commonwealth on an equal footing with the other States, give the people a voice in the election of a President in 1844, and secure to them the long desired privilege of choosing their own Governor. It was even claimed that Statehood would promote character, foster independence, engender State pride, and inspire dignity. Finally, it was suggested that if Iowa did not hasten to make application for admission into the Union, Florida, the slave Territory which was then ready to be admitted, would be paired with Wisconsin.

On the other hand, the opponents of State organization were quite willing "to let good enough alone." They were satisfied with Territorial government and saw no good reasons for a change. They were not unmindful of the fact that under the existing arrangement the expenses of the Territorial government were paid out of the Treasury of the United States. Then, too,

the Whigs thought that the whole movement in favor of a State government savored of "jobs" and party aggrandizement.

Furthermore, some declared that Iowa was too young for Statehood, her resources were too limited, and the people were hardly prepared for the adoption of State government. Ralph P. Lowe, a future Governor, argued that the change would be undesirable because there really were no eminent men in the Territory fitted for the tasks of State government. This was intimating that the pioneers of Iowa were incapable of self-government.

But the vital argument against this or any measure looking toward the establishment of a State government was the one which appealed directly to the people as tax-payers. Salaries of Territorial officers, the expense of printing the laws, the erection of public buildings, and other incidental expenses were all paid out of the Treasury of the United States. A change from Territorial to State organization meant that in the future these public expenditures would have to be met by warrants drawn on the Treasury of the State, the coffers of which must be supplied through local taxation. The people protested. The men who were industriously breaking the prairies, clearing the forests, and raising corn pre-

ferred to invest their small earnings in lands and plows and live stock.

Under the circumstances a majority of the voters were not willing to abandon the Territorial organization for the "dignity" of a Commonwealth government. At the general elections in August, 1842, every county in the Territory returned a majority *against* a Convention.

Again in 1844 the Legislative Assembly responded to the Governor's suggestion that the people of the Territory be given another opportunity to express an opinion on what had come to be the most interesting question in local politics. In many respects the campaign of the spring of 1844 was a repetition of the campaign of 1842. On the main issue the political parties were divided as before, that is, the Democrats favored and the Whigs opposed the calling of a Convention. In the public speeches and in the utterances of the press all the old arguments of 1840 and 1842 were again paraded. But two years of growth and reflection had wrought a change in sentiment. The public mind had evidently settled down in favor of State organization. At the elections in April, 1844, the people returned a large majority in favor of calling a Constitutional Convention.