

Selection of a Beautiful Site

Turning to the *Journal of the Proceedings* of the commissioners one may read that on May 2nd "the board met pursuant to adjournment, appointed John Frierson clerk to the board", and in the afternoon "went to examine the Country on the Iowa river above Napoleon."

About two miles north of Napoleon, the commissioners paused to contemplate the view. It was mid-afternoon. From an elevation which rose from thirty to fifty feet above the river and extended a half mile due north and south, Chauncey Swan and John Ronalds calmly viewed the scene. Below they saw the Iowa River, "a clear, limpid stream, with sand and gravel bottom", flowing almost directly south in a channel about two hundred and forty feet wide. On the opposite side of the river they saw banks that rose abruptly for about fifty feet above the water's edge "to the level of a smooth prairie, which approaches the bank of the river at this place, and then sweeps off westward in beautiful undulations" of low rolling hills.

The eminence on the east bank of the river was for the most part covered with large bur oaks between which were small open spaces. Looking

east and south from the elevation on the Iowa, the commissioners saw an area of about six hundred acres carved into a vast amphitheater covered with hazel shrubbery and scattered growth of oak and hickory trees. When the two commissioners had completed their work that day they were convinced that "the most eligible point" for the capital had been discovered.

As recorded in their *Journal* the commissioners went out on the morning of May third to examine the quarry on the banks of the Iowa River that was supposed to contain "marble", and to ascertain the section on which it was located. In order to report the exact location of the "eligible point" and the "marble" quarry in the language of land descriptions, the commissioners found it necessary to make an unofficial survey, since the United States surveys had not been extended to this part of Johnson County. This unofficial survey (which was probably conducted by John Frierson, "clerk to the board" and an experienced surveyor) disclosed the fact that the "eligible point" and the "marble" quarry were located on Section 10 of Township 79 North in Range 6 West of the Fifth Principal Meridian.

It was on the fourth day of May, 1839, that the commissioners officially located the permanent seat of the government of the Territory of Iowa

on *Section Ten of Township Seventy-nine North in Range Six West of the Fifth Principal Meridian* by "placing a stake in the center of the proposed site". That the stranger might be informed, the site was marked by a post or slab of wood placed on the eminence about where the Old Stone Capitol now stands. Charles Negus, an early writer on Iowa history, is the authority for the information that the slab erected by the commissioners bore the inscription:

SEAT OF GOVERNMENT
CITY OF IOWA
May 4th 1839

On Monday, May 6th, the commissioners met at the house of Wheaten Chase. There Robert Ralston, commissioner from the first judicial district, "appeared, took the oath prescribed by law, and entered on the discharge of his official duties. The proceedings of the majority of the commissioners were exhibited and fully explained to Mr. Ralston all of which he approved."

Finally, on May 7th, the story of locating the seat of government of the Territory of Iowa on the banks of the Iowa River ended with the appointment of Chauncey Swan as Acting Commissioner.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH