

## Leaders in Early Days

The lives of the men who shaped the destinies of Iowa in territorial days and those of early statehood display a common pattern, as revealed in their biographies. They were — of necessity, under the circumstances of settlement and development delayed by the Indian barrier and then occurring very rapidly — men who had achieved maturity and gained experience on other and older frontiers and had then come on westward to share in the founding of a new commonwealth. Though their birthplaces ranged from New England to the South, these men were alike in having distinguished themselves as lawyers, legislators, soldiers and social leaders in the earlier frontiers of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois before they made their contributions to the formation of Iowa.

First in order of these "founding fathers" as presented in the field of biography was Henry Dodge, a frontiersman all his life, for he was born at Old Vincennes in 1782. He is the subject of one of the earlier volumes in the Iowa Biographical Series, written by Dr. Louis Pelzer and published in 1911. Having demonstrated his abilities both as a leader of men and as an Indian fighter, Dodge was appointed at the age of thirty to the



post of marshal of the newly created Missouri Territory, by President James Madison. In the ensuing years of the War of 1812 he served as brigadier general of the territorial forces of Missouri, and was associated with Daniel Boone.

Dodge was one of those who developed the lead mines in the Galena region in the late 1820's. Extinguishment of Indian claims to these mines was one of the immediate causes of the Black Hawk War. Dodge was one of those who forced that extinguishment by erecting a fort for the protection of miners and disregarding the orders of federal Indian agents to leave. He was active both in the Black Hawk War and in the "uprisings" which preceded it.

This frontier military experience in fighting Indians justified the appointment of Dodge, by President Andrew Jackson in 1833, as Colonel of the First Regiment of Dragoons of the United States Army. In this capacity he led important expeditions as far as the Rocky Mountains, which did much to prepare the way for later westward expansion. His achievement in this and earlier aspects of the empire-building of the period led to his appointment as Governor of the newly-formed Territory of Wisconsin, 1836-1838, decisive years in Iowa history.

A fact which may be new to other readers, as it was to me, is that this "Wisconsin Territory" was in the beginning largely Iowa, so far as popula-



tion was concerned. This is demonstrated by the fact that the first legislative assembly of the territory was called by Governor Dodge at Belmont in Iowa County, and the second at Burlington. The separate Iowa Territory was created in 1838. In his biography, Dr. Pelzer sums up admirably the significance of the Dodge regime in Iowa history: "The first two years of the administration of Henry Dodge represent the connecting link between Iowa and the Old Northwest. During this time the aegis of the Ordinance of 1787 extended over the Iowa country, bringing with it a mass of precedents, conventions, and traditions. . . ."

Dr. Pelzer's study also illustrates the admirable concreteness in significant detail which marks most of the volumes of the Iowa Biographical Series. "Prairie chicken, venison, duck, goose, and fish" were on the menu of the banquet given by the citizens of Burlington to the territorial legislators — with a "cotillion" to add to the festivities. The homely facts of everyday frontier living come home to us in the reminiscence of Henry Dodge's son Augustus: "I have frequently seen my father go to a blacksmith shop with a bag of silver dollars, and then cut them up into halves, quarters, and eighths, for small change. My mother made buckskin pockets in his clothes to carry this fractional currency."

This son, Augustus Caesar Dodge, is the subject of an earlier volume in the Iowa Biographical



Series — also by Dr. Louis Pelzer — published in 1908. While his father's career was, after 1838, chiefly associated with Wisconsin — where he served as territorial delegate to Congress, two additional terms as Governor, and finally as United States Senator from 1848 to 1857 — Augustus Caesar Dodge stayed in Iowa and played an important part in government during the territorial days and the earliest years of statehood. Not quite the leader of men that his father was, and never in the first rank of prominence, Augustus Caesar Dodge is one of those less obvious but indispensable figures in our history which the Historical Society has done well to recognize and include in the Iowa Biographical Series.

Born in Missouri in 1812, young Dodge was only twenty-six when he was appointed by President Martin Van Buren as register of the Land Office at Burlington in the newly created Territory of Iowa. In this capacity he figured in the dramatic land sale, when bona fide settlers protected their land claims against speculators, which is brilliantly and amusingly narrated in one of Phil Stong's novels.

The most important service of Augustus Caesar Dodge was rendered as Iowa's territorial delegate to Congress for six years. He was nominated by the Democrats in 1840, and participated in the famous "log cabin and hard cider" campaign of that year, with special features accounted for by the



frontier conditions in Iowa. His opponent for the election was the Whig, Alfred Rich. Pelzer describes their campaign in one of the most valuable passages in the book for its down-to-earth rendering of frontier reality:

The two candidates stumped the Territory, holding joint debates, traveling together, and sharing common hardships and hospitalities. Across the prairie they rode on their horses, eating at the same table, and generally sleeping in the same bed. Sharp rejoinders would be given and taken in their discussions; but off the stump they knew no party and were friends. At the present site of Brighton (Iowa) they found a village of less than a dozen cabins. There was scarcely a bridge in the Territory, and owing to the unusual rains the smallest streams were overflowing. Brighton was finally reached by fording and swimming the swollen streams, and both candidates were forced to leave the little village in the same way.

Skunk River in Washington County was also booming and was more than a quarter of a mile in width. The candidates entered a small skiff and while one of them rowed the other held the reins of the horses as they swam behind. Crooked Creek with its swollen waters also confronted them. This was passed on a log — the one candidate driving in the horses while his opponent caught them when they landed on the other bank.

Finally the weary candidates with their bedrabbled horses reached Washington, the county seat, where they hoped to secure rest and food for themselves and their horses. But Bloomer Thompson, the respectable and accommodating tavern-keeper of the only hotel in town, had gone to Moffet's mill, near Burlington, for flour. For five or six days he had been detained by the swollen streams,



and his good wife had neither bread nor meat in the house. Without any dinner the two men supped on tea and onions, and retired to forget campaigns, votes, and election.

As territorial delegate, Augustus Caesar Dodge helped to iron out the persistent boundary dispute with Missouri, and labored for appropriations to aid and stimulate the development of the Territory. He must have felt a keen personal interest in a petition which he presented to Congress on April 14, 1842, for an appropriation of \$6,000 to build a bridge and another of \$5,000 for road improvement!

For two years after Iowa's admission to statehood, partisan politics delayed the selection of United States senators; but in 1848 Augustus Caesar Dodge became the first senator from Iowa, and the first man born west of the Mississippi to be elected to the Senate. His father, Henry Dodge, became a senator, from Wisconsin, at the same time. In the Senate Dodge participated in the great debates of the period — the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law, and the Homestead Act of 1853. Defeated for re-election by James Harlan in 1854, he was appointed by President Franklin Pierce as Minister to Spain, and conducted negotiations for acquisition of Cuba which reflected the tensions ultimately responsible for the Spanish-American War. Back in Iowa in 1859, he became the Democratic candidate for the governorship, and was defeated by Samuel J. Kirk-



wood in a hard-fought campaign. His remaining years were uneventful.

The two territorial governors of Iowa are the subjects of biographies by John C. Parish, both published by the State Historical Society of Iowa in the Iowa Biographical Series: *Robert Lucas* (1907) and *John Chambers* (1909). These two men exemplify most clearly the pattern of distinguished achievement on older frontiers before they played their part in the history of Iowa. Robert Lucas is described by his biographer as a man of "aggressive strength of character." Born in Virginia, and of the traditionally fiery Virginian disposition in spite of Quaker ancestry, his early distinction was largely military. As an admired leader of the frontier militia, he came on one occasion into collision with the civil authorities, and the sheriff of Scioto County, Ohio, where Lucas had emigrated from Virginia, attempted to arrest him. Lucas objected effectively, however; and the sheriff, in Parish's phrase, "rather than endanger his life, resigned his office. His duties then devolving upon the Coroner, he also resigned. Then Lucas swore vengeance upon the Clerk who had issued the writ, and he too resigned." Others came forward to enforce the law, however, and Lucas was eventually placed under arrest by the new sheriff, one Glover. Lucas had married the daughter of an innkeeper named John Brown, who, says Parish, "though insignificant in stature,



was a man of fiery disposition. In his wrath he followed them [the sheriff and his posse] from his tavern and made some demonstration as if to rescue his son-in-law from the long arm of justice. But he reckoned without his host; for Nathan Glover, a man of enormous frame, picked the little man up bodily and rudely threw him into a clump of jimson weed. No more resistance came from the father-in-law." The peculiar indignity of being thrown into a "clump of jimson weed" will be appreciated by Iowans who are familiar with the plant.

Lucas established his reputation through the part he played in the War of 1812. Particularly interesting to me is the fact, discovered by Dr. Parish, that the account of the Hull campaign and the surrender of Detroit by the then Colonel Lewis Cass — a document well known to all historians of the period — is in large and essential part a transcription (unacknowledged) from the personal journal of Robert Lucas.

After the War of 1812 Lucas played an increasingly important part in Ohio politics, and in 1832 and again in 1834, as a Jacksonian Democrat, he was elected Governor of Ohio. Moreover, in 1832 he gained, in Parish's words, "the distinguished honor of presiding over the first national convention ever held by the Democratic party of the United States." This convention, in Baltimore, was — like others of more recent mem-



ory — distinctly a Vice-Presidential convention. The candidacy of Jackson for President was not a matter of debate;" and Martin Van Buren received the Vice-Presidential nomination on the first ballot. During Lucas' two terms as Governor of Ohio the bitter boundary dispute with Michigan was settled in Ohio's favor. His hope of a seat in the United States Senate, following his terms as Governor, was shattered; and he was even defeated by a Whig in 1837 in a contest for a seat in the Ohio State Senate. From the obscurity to which these reverses seemed to doom him, Lucas was rescued by appointment by President Van Buren, in 1838, to the Governorship of the newly created Territory of Iowa. He was in his fifty-seventh year when he journeyed to Iowa to assume his new duties.

Lucas' two years as the first territorial Governor of Iowa were stormy ones. Another boundary dispute (with Missouri) was on his hands; but his chief troubles were with the territorial legislature, and these, as Parish shows, were in part the result of defects in the organic act creating the Territory, but more largely the products of the mind and actions of the secretary of the Territory, one William B. Conway, of whom Parish remarks, with effective understatement, that he was one who "could serve the public best by refraining from any participation in politics." Following the exercise by Lucas of the unqualified power of



veto conferred on him by the original organic act, and his attempts to curb reckless appropriations, he was denounced by a legislative resolution affirming that "Robert Lucas is 'unfit to be the ruler of a free people,' " and demanding his removal from office, a demand not heeded in Washington. A contemporary diarist noted that this first Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa "adjourned in confusion. All drunk with few exceptions." Parish suggests that the positive stand which Lucas had taken against gambling and intemperance played a part in his conflict with the legislators. The sudden death of Conway in the fall of 1839 removed the chief source of trouble, however, and the two remaining years of Lucas' Governorship were less contentious. Harrison's election in 1840 meant the appointment of a Whig to the post, and Lucas' public service was over except for his rather important part in the first Constitutional Convention of 1844. He lived out his life quietly on his farm south of Iowa City. He died in 1853.

Iowa's second territorial Governor, John Chambers, was known in his Iowa days as "the old Kentuckian." Born in Massachusetts, he moved with his family to Kentucky at the age of fourteen. At seventeen he became a law clerk, and at twenty was licensed to practice law. A fateful action of his early years was his volunteering in 1813 as an aid-de-camp to General William Henry Harrison.



He was with Harrison at the Battle of the Thames, where the British commander, Proctor, fled and the Indian leader, Tecumseh, was killed; and he was especially commended by Harrison after the campaign. It was the result of this early friendship, supported by his record of ability and integrity as a lawyer and as congressman from Kentucky, that Chambers was named by Harrison to the Iowa post. The part he played in Harrison's successful "log cabin" campaign no doubt had its effect as well. Parish quotes a contemporary account of Chambers' speech at the great "Miami Valley convention," at Dayton, before a crowd of 100,000 cheering enthusiasts: "he took hold of the great 'petticoat hero,' Senator Allen, and held him up before the searching fire of his sarcasm and rebuke, turning him first this way and then that, basting him now here and now there, as the blisters were seen to rise on his epidermis, very much as a log-cabin housewife manages a roasting goose, till everyone present must have had a feeling of pity for the Ajax of locofocracy in Ohio."

He played important parts both in the continuing boundary dispute with Missouri and the efforts toward statehood, but his highest distinction, according to Parish, was his persistent and often thwarted effort to obtain some degree of justice and humanity in the treatment of the Indians of the Iowa region. As Superintendent of Indian Affairs in addition to his duties as Governor, like



many other frontier leaders he was caught in the pressure between the irresistible westward expansion of the white race and the reluctance of the Indians to be exiled from their homes and hunting grounds. Superimposed on this basic problem was the need for regulation of traffic with the Indians, too often marked by extremes of exploitation. I have found few men, in my study of this aspect of American history, for whom I can feel so much respect for their convictions and conduct as I do for the old Kentuckian, John Chambers, as the second territorial Governor of Iowa. It seems probable that his conscientious devotion to this aspect of his public duty contributed to the fact that he left office broken in health. He returned to Kentucky, where he died in 1852.

Though Parish's style is occasionally marked by what some modern biographers might consider a "purple patch," these two studies of territorial governors are eminently readable, and seem to me to achieve sharply lined and convincing human portraits, somehow suggestive of fine daguerreotypes.

Studies of two less prominent figures round out the group of books published by the State Historical Society of Iowa which deal with the lives of men chiefly associated with territorial days and those of early statehood. Of these, *George Wallace Jones*, by John Carl Parish (1912), is primarily a volume of autobiography, though it in-



cludes a biographical sketch. For this reason I shall reserve it for later treatment. On the subject of *Thomas Cox*, by Harvey Reid (1909), Dr. Benjamin F. Shambaugh wrote in his introduction to the volume: "Measured by the careers of eminent men, Thomas Cox would not be classed among the great characters of his time. Nor does he occupy a conspicuous place in the history of Iowa. . . . He was an active, capable local leader, always identified with the social forces of the community whose movements he was often the most influential in directing. . . ." I hold it to be one of the distinctions of the Iowa Biographical Series, as conceived by Dr. Shambaugh, that "local leaders" have not been ignored, but have even been included in preference over men of wider fame: the result is a far truer and fuller record than would otherwise be possible.

Thomas Cox eminently justifies inclusion. He was a vigorous, colorful figure. Born in Kentucky, he moved to Illinois before it became a state, served as a member of its first state legislature, and distinguished himself as an Indian fighter before coming to Iowa — first as a federal surveyor in the Maquoketa River country, and then as a permanent settler in 1838. Elected to the first Legislative Assembly of Iowa Territory, he was prominent in the struggle with Governor Lucas over the veto power. He served also in the second, the third — in which he was speaker of the



House of Representatives — the fifth, and the sixth Legislative Assemblies. He died in 1844, before Iowa became a state. In the opinion of his biographer, he might have become its first Governor.

Some forty pages of Reid's study are devoted to a detailed and considered account of "the Bellevue war" — between bona fide settlers and an organized gang of outlaws preying upon them. Colonel Cox played an active part in this dramatic frontier incident. Though Reid's style is eminently pedestrian, the story makes good reading and the social atmosphere of that early frontier is perhaps more fully apparent than in any other of these books about the leaders of the early days.

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