

Surveying the Capital Site

Three days after the approval of the legislation which provided for the location of the seat of government in Johnson County, Governor Lucas sent a memorial to Congress soliciting the donation of four sections of land upon which to locate the capital. At the same time the Legislative Assembly passed a joint resolution instructing W. W. Chapman (Iowa's Delegate to Congress) to ask for a grant of "at least four sections".

In response to the Governor's memorial and the request of the Legislative Assembly presented through Delegate Chapman, Congress, by an act approved on March 3, 1839, "appropriated and granted to the Territory of Iowa, one entire section of land, of any of the surveyed public lands in said Territory, for the purpose of erecting thereon the public buildings for the use of the Executive and Legislative departments of the Government of the said Territory". The act also provided that if the sections contiguous to the section granted had not been sold, or had not been offered for sale, they should be withheld from sale until further orders from Congress.

Fully realizing that in locating the seat of gov-

ernment on unsurveyed lands they had not complied with the provisions of the act of Congress, the commissioners immediately after marking the site prepared a memorial which "respectfully requested of the President a special survey of two Townships in Johnson county, embracing the seat of Government, the object of which was to enable the commissioners to make the location as perfect as possible under the act of Congress as well as that of the Territory."

It was in response to the memorial from the capital commissioners of the Territory of Iowa that Commissioner James Whitcomb of the General Land Office at Washington sent, on June 15, 1839, instructions to Surveyor General A. G. Ellis of the Wisconsin-Iowa district to survey two townships, in one of which the seat of government of the Territory of Iowa had been located.

In the meantime two of the commissioners (Chauncey Swan and John Ronalds) meeting at the home of John Ronalds in Louisa County on June 27, 1839, "ordered that Thomas Cox and John Frierson be employed to survey the town [of Iowa City] and L. Judson to draw the necessary plats." Presumably, Acting Commissioner Chauncey Swan immediately proceeded to Iowa City, where the survey of the townsite was begun in real earnest on the first of July, 1839. By July

4th, L. Judson had completed his draft of the first map of Iowa City. Later a revised copy of this map was lithographed and distributed among the members of the Legislative Assembly and throughout the Territory.

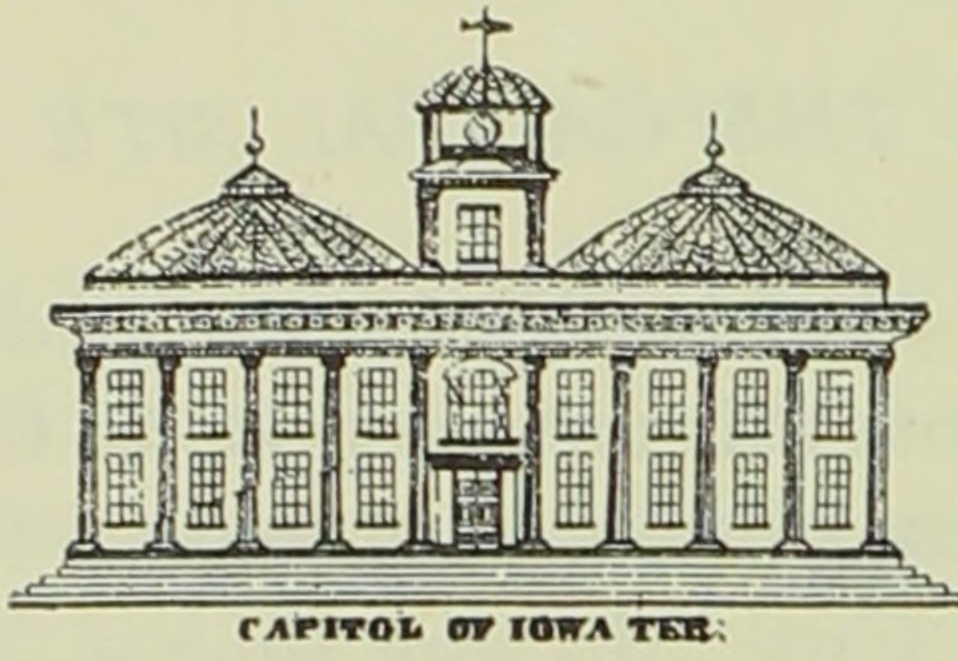
On the Fourth of July work on the survey of the townsite was suspended in order that all men might take part in the celebration of Independence Day on Capitol Square. The only contemporary record of the occasion is in the diary of Cyrus Sanders, which records that "about one hundred persons partook" of the dinner which was served "on the ground where the capitol of Iowa is to stand"; and that "the festivities of the day were enjoyed with the greatest hilarity and good feeling by all that were present and nothing occurred throughout the day to mar their enjoyment." A more complete account of the celebration, illuminated by tradition, was published by Mr. Sanders many years later in the columns of the *Iowa City Weekly Republican* for September 22, 1880. The story is worth the telling.

Plans for the holding of "a good old-fashioned celebration" had been made by a group of "patriotic citizens, in conjunction with Mr. Swan and his men". On the morning of the "auspicious day . . . the stars and stripes were unfurled to the breeze by attaching the flagstaff to the top of a

tall young oak tree" that had been stripped of its branches. It was from this unique pole on Capitol Square that the United States flag waved for the first time over Iowa City. In due time a "cavalcade" of pioneer settlers arrived with the dinner which had been prepared at "the Indian trading house, four miles down the river".

After dinner a program of toasts and speeches was carried through with Colonel Thomas Cox, "a noble and portly specimen of the old school gentlemen", presiding. Luke Douglass read the Declaration of Independence. Then came the orator of the day, Gen. John Frierson, who "mounted the rostrum to deliver the oration". The rostrum, it seems, consisted of the wagon that was used in bringing the dinner up from the trading house, and in the back part of which was a barrel of Cincinnati whisky and a tin cup. "With one foot elevated upon the barrel of whiskey", the orator, who was described as a man with sandy complexion, "tall, square, raw-boned, hard-featured, stoop-shouldered, knock-kneed, and pigeon-toed", made an eloquent speech.

What Thomas Cox, John Frierson, and the other speakers said that day may never be known, since in regard to their spoken words both history and tradition are silent. The only living witness of the celebration that took place on Capitol



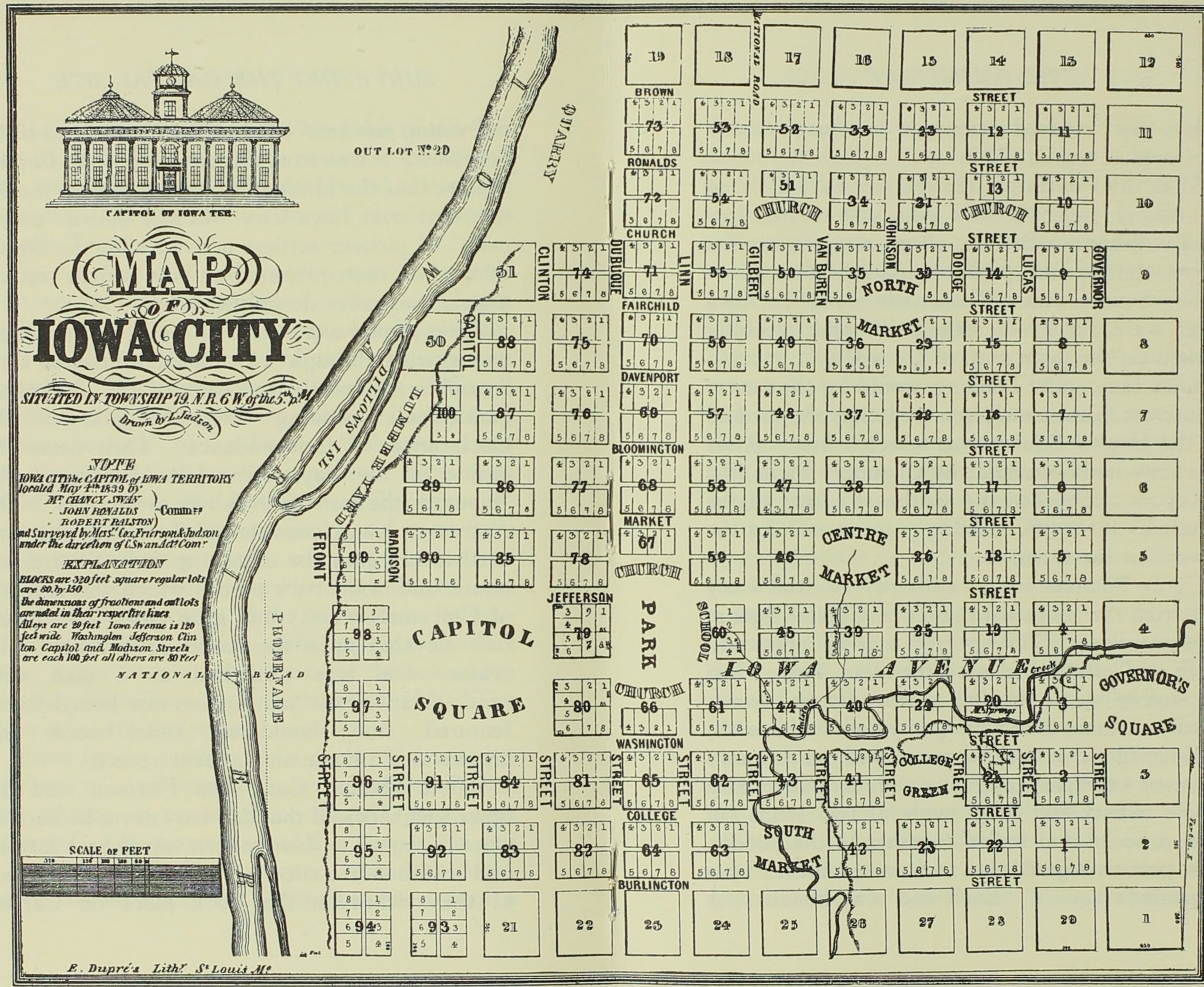
MAP
OF
IOWA CITY
SITUATED IN TOWNSHIP 19 N. R. 6 W. of the 5. P. M.
Drawn by L. Judson

NOTE
IOWA CITY the CAPITAL of IOWA TERRITORY
located May 4th 1839 by
M^r. CHEVY SWAY
JOHN RONALDS Comm^r
ROBERT RALSTON
and Surveyed by Mess^{rs}. Cox, Friserson & Judson
under the direction of U.S. an Act Com^r.

EXPLANATION
BLOCKS are 520 feet square regular lots
are 80 by 150.
The dimensions of fractions and out lots
are noted in their respective lines.
Alleys are 20 feet Iowa Avenue is 120
feet wide Washington Jefferson Clin-
ton Capitol and Madison Streets
are each 100 feet all others are 80 feet



E. Dupre's Lith. St. Louis Mo



THE ORIGINAL LITHOGRAPH MAP OF IOWA CITY DRAWN BY L. JUDSON IN 1839

Square one hundred years ago is a massive oak tree—and it, too, is silent.

After the Fourth of July the survey, following the lines on Judson's town plat, was carried forward with vigor. Streets, alleys, out lots, market places, church sites, parks, Capitol Square, Governor's Square, and a Promenade along the Iowa River were surveyed, staked off, and carefully marked on the town map of Iowa City.

Since the capitol building would be the center of interest in the newly planned city, the ground for the Capitol Square was selected first. After the choice had been made by Chauncey Swan, the surveyors established the southeast corner of the Square as the initial starting point in making the surveys of the townsite.

Cyrus Sanders is the authority for the story that from the southeast corner of Capitol Square "the west line of Clinton Street was run north and south and established as a meridian line. Then the survey was extended eastwardly and westwardly, without ever having any definite base line established. The lines were run with an ordinary surveyor's compass; and they were measured with a pole twenty feet long, made of two strips cut from a board and nailed together in the middle. This pole was graduated to feet and inches by a carpenter's square. Each end was bound with

hoop iron. In measuring the ground tally pins of about one eighth of an inch in diameter were used—which added about three-sixteenths of an inch to every twenty feet in the survey. This fact, taken in connection with Carley's measurement, accounts for the surplus found to exist by the surveys of subsequent city engineers."

John Frierson was commissioned United States Deputy Surveyor to survey townships seventy-nine in ranges five and six. This was done in order to bring the townsite of Iowa City within the bounds of the surveyed lands of the United States and thus legitimize the location of the seat of government according to the provisions of the act of Congress of March 3, 1839. Frierson operated under the orders of the Surveyor General for Wisconsin and Iowa.

Leaving Thomas Cox to finish the survey of the townsite of Iowa City, John Frierson entered upon the execution of his assigned task in July. Employing the necessary help, he was able to complete the survey of the two townships in record time. Years later Cyrus Sanders, who served on Frierson's staff, illuminated the official report of the survey with this bit of tradition. "He [Frierson] ran all his lines without the aid of a flag-man; when on the prairie he would take a weed or a gopher-hill for a sight; when in the timber, a tree

or a bush, or any other object that was convenient. As a consequence, he often lost sight of his object before he got to it". But, being expert at making up field notes, he made a report that "was received at the office of the Surveyor-General without question."

As surveyed and shown on the map drawn by L. Judson, the townsite of Iowa City was divided into blocks 320 feet square with lots 80 by 150 feet. With six exceptions the streets, which ran east and west and north and south according to the compass, were all 80 feet wide and named rather than numbered. The exceptions were Iowa Avenue, which was 120 feet wide, and Washington, Jefferson, Clinton, Capitol, and Madison streets which were each 100 feet wide.

Reservations were clearly marked. Capitol Square included four blocks; Governor's Square consisted of one block; the Park included one block; College Green, one block; North Market, Center Market, and South Market, one block each; four church reservations, one-half block each; and one school reservation, half a block.

That was Iowa City in July, 1839, one hundred years ago—a map, a paper plat, recorded in the office of I. P. Hamilton, the recorder of Johnson County.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH