

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1944

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## Methodists in Conference

It was nine o'clock on the morning of August 14, 1844, when Bishop Thomas A. Morris called the Iowa Conference to order. Seated in the small brick church which had just been completed at Iowa City were members of the newly created Iowa Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was a small group of men who faced the bishop that August morning, sitting on the hard, straight-backed pews. Roughly dressed, some perhaps still dusty and travel-stained, these frontier preachers turned their bronzed faces to the pulpit in the north end of the church. There was no organ, no stained-glass window, no choir. The rotund bishop opened his Bible to the fifth chapter of First Peter and began to read — "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder".

And while the bishop completes the reading of the message from Peter, let us turn back the pages of his life for some essential facts. Thomas A.



Morris was born in April, 1794, in what is now West Virginia, and was therefore fifty years of age, just ten years younger than the Methodist Episcopal Church. Converted at a camp-meeting at the age of nineteen, he had begun preaching in 1814. After twenty years of service as an itinerant preacher, he became editor of the *Western Christian Advocate*, one of the Methodist papers, and two years later was elected a bishop. Genial, witty, and dignified, familiar with the problems of the frontier churches, Bishop Morris had insisted on the creation of the Iowa District as part of the Illinois Conference in 1839. "We must have a district in Iowa", he had asserted, "I have passed people enough between this and Cincinnati, bound for Iowa, to form a district."

And so the Iowa District was established and Rev. Henry Summers became the presiding elder (now the district superintendent). In the following year the Illinois Conference was divided and the Iowa District, divided into the Iowa and Burlington districts, was made a part of the Rock River Conference. The Rock River Conference held the first conference in Iowa, meeting in the Centenary Church at Dubuque on August 30, 1843. The Iowa City quarterly conference invited the Rock River Conference to meet at the capital in 1844, but events changed these arrangements.



The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in New York in May, 1844. Although much of its attention was given to the schism over the slavery question, this General Conference took time to consider the needs of the western churches. Among the changes made was the creation of the Iowa Conference to include all the area within the jurisdiction of the Territory of Iowa. And here in this frontier capital Bishop Morris was presiding over its first meeting. He was to preside over three additional sessions of the Iowa Conference and over one session of the Upper Iowa Conference which was separated from the Iowa Conference in 1856.

Bishop Morris closed his Bible and announced a hymn. There was no musical accompaniment but frontier preachers were accustomed to furnishing their own music. As the singing died away, there was a scraping of heavy shoes on the uncarpeted floor as the members knelt while the bishop led in prayer, his petition no doubt accented by fervent amens.

Then came the first business of the session. Bishop Morris handed a list of the members of the Iowa Conference to Rev. Henry W. Reed (Brother Reed no doubt to that group) and asked him to call the roll. Of the seventeen members of the Rock River Conference who had charges



within the boundaries of the Iowa Conference, eleven answered "present" — Henry W. Reed, George B. Bowman, James G. Whitford, William Simpson, Isaac I. Stewart, Joseph L. Kirkpatrick, Thomas M. Kirkpatrick, Andrew Colman, David Worthington, Moses F. Shinn, and Bartholomew Weed. Fourteen younger men, their faces questioning, waited for admission to the elect circle.

Henry W. Reed was named secretary and while he was assembling materials for his records, a bar was placed across the north end of the church separating the first three rows of seats and the "amen corners" from the rest of the sanctuary which was open to visitors. It was agreed that the Conference should open each morning at nine and close at noon. Committees were appointed — one on worship, one on post offices, and a third on Sabbath schools. Isaac I. Stewart, Moses F. Shinn, and David Worthington were named Conference stewards and made up the committee on "necessitous cases". Eight men, two for each class, were named to examine candidates for ordination, but there is no record of the questions or replies.

At the second session, on August 15th, "Brother" Mitchell, agent for the Western Book Concern, a publishing subsidiary of the Methodist Church, gave his report on sales. One feature of



this session was the appointment of a committee on education, one member from each of the three districts — Burlington, Dubuque, and Des Moines. There was work for such a committee since two colleges, the Iowa City College and the Mount Pleasant Literary Institute, were already asking to be adopted. The Iowa City institution had been sponsored by the local quarterly conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, under the direction of Rev. G. B. Bowman, and had already been recognized by the Rock River Conference. The little group of preachers, counting \$100 as riches, had little to offer any college except encouragement.

At the meeting on Friday three men — Joshua B. Hardy, John Hayden, and Uriah Ferree — were examined in the presence of the members and received in full connection by the bishop who admonished them not to speak "too long or too loud". A request of George W. Teas that his church membership and license to preach be restored was rejected. Teas had been angered earlier by the refusal of some of his fellow Methodists to support him in the legislature and had announced his withdrawal from the church by the following rhyme in the *Burlington Gazette*:

Be it known from shore to shore,  
That I'm a Methodist no more.



Lest the Methodist authorities appear too hard-hearted, it may be said that two years later Teas was restored to favor and became a successful preacher.

Saturday morning was devoted chiefly to finances. The assets on hand were \$1012, one thousand of which had been turned in by the Western Book Concern. The sum had to be divided into infinitesimal parts — \$8.33 for each of five bishops, including Bishop Morris, and \$9.76 for each of the other two. The remainder was divided among the preachers to supplement unpaid salaries, the allotments varying from \$92.00 paid to Rev. J. L. Kirkpatrick to \$2.56 given to "Widow Roberts".

Membership statistics indicated the growth of Methodist Episcopal Church in Iowa since the first log church was built at Dubuque in 1834. The Dubuque District, including towns as far south as Davenport and Cedar Rapids, reported 1522 white and six colored members. The Burlington District, including Iowa City and towns to the south, reported 2343 white and six colored Methodists, while the Des Moines District with charges from Farmington to Fort Des Moines, added another 1566 persons to the roll, all white. This made a total membership of 5443. In addition there were sixty-one local preachers.



There was no session on the Sabbath. No doubt the members were busy preaching in nearby communities. Monday, however, was a busy as well as a fateful day. Seven men were ordained as deacons and thereby given authority not only to preach but to perform marriage ceremonies, baptize, and assist in the administration of the Lord's Supper. Three were ordained as elders and thus received into the inner circle of the clergy. The stewards reported that they had \$3.31 on hand after paying the allocated sums and the Conference decided to use this money to buy a "book and trunk" for keeping the records. One wonders what happened to this book.

Linking the Iowa Conference to the larger and threatening issues of the time was an amendment, proposed at the General Conference in May, 1844, providing for the division of the capital of the Methodist Episcopal Church, derived largely from the publishing auxiliary, with the newly organized Methodist Episcopal Church South. The Iowa Conference approved the amendment but expressed opposition to the division of the Church.

Resolutions were adopted expressing the thanks of the members of the Conference for the hospitality of the people of Iowa City and the vicinity. Then the bishop rose for the final service, closing the Conference "in the usual way". It is probable



that this included words of admonition and counsel, followed by a prayer. It also included a song and the voices of the frontier preachers were heard in an old hymn written by Charles Wesley.

And let our bodies part,  
To different climes repair;  
Inseparably join'd in heart,  
The friends of Jesus are.

Thus ran the first of the twelve quatrains which may be read in an old hymnal published by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1838, the year the Territory of Iowa was created. There is no music and the twelve stanzas occupy only a page and a half in a book which is three inches tall and about two inches in width. The music, it was explained, could be found in the *Methodist Harmonist*. Both the words and the tune, however, must have been familiar to the older pioneer preachers. They had sung it many times as they parted at the end of conference sessions to move on from one charge to another and from one conference to another.

As the words of the hymn died away, there was an air of expectancy as Bishop Morris rose to read the list of appointments — three presiding elders to have charge of the three districts and thirty-five preachers to shepherd the thirty-two charges. Of these, nine were classed as missions.

Bartholomew Weed was assigned the Burling-



ton District, H. W. Reed the Dubuque District, and Milton Jamison the Des Moines District. The preachers were dispersed far and wide. Calvin E. Farnsworth was assigned to the Turkey River Mission far to the north. Isaac I. Stewart was sent to Fort Madison, and Joshua B. Hardy to Farmington in the Des Moines Valley. On the east, Joseph T. Lewis was to have charge at Davenport, while on the west, Thomas M. Kirkpatrick was assigned the Des Moines Mission (around Ottumwa) and Allen W. Johnson that at Eddyville. Joseph Steinhouser was given charge of the Lead Mines German Mission and George B. Bowman was stationed at Dubuque.

So ran the list as Bishop Morris read on. Some of these charges are not now recorded on a map. One wonders how newly appointed men knew where to go. But pioneer preachers knew the lay of the land. They noted their assignments, said "good-bye" and "God bless you" to their associates, and mounting their horses were soon on their way to their new charges. So the first meeting of the Iowa Conference became history; a new unit of Methodism had begun to function.

RUTH A. GALLAHER



## Robert Lucas in Verse

Few associates of Robert Lucas suspected that the hawk-eyed Indian fighter and uncompromising Governor of Ohio and Iowa was a poet at heart. Among his personal papers, however, over a hundred and fifty pages of manuscript verse testify to a latent vein of artistry in his character. A few of these poems were written in early manhood, but most were the work of his leisured years between 1851 and 1853. All were painstakingly copied by the old man into two commonplace books which he had thriftily contrived by filling the blank pages of his great leather-bound Copy Book of Executive Letters and those of a much smaller book in which he had recorded in journal form his adventures with the British and Indians in the War of 1812.

In crabbed handwriting which, as he passed into his seventy-third year, became more and more difficult to read, he preserved a few of his early poems. Then, as he composed his later verses — pious meditations and musings — he copied them into these two books. Apparently he entertained a lurking hope that posterity might be interested in these effusions, for he signed most of them with his full name or else with the initials R. L. and



added the exact date of composition. Many also included as a superscription or footnote the occasion for composition and a few identify places or personal names to which allusion had been made in the poems.

The last years of his life were spent in his comfortable farmstead home at Plum Grove on the outskirts of Iowa City, in sight of the Stone Capitol which had been planned and begun while he was Governor. There, in the enforced leisure of age, he meditated upon life, perused his Methodist Hymnal, and diligently read his Bible.

What else he read is difficult to ascertain, but very probably he knew the seventeenth-century writers of religious verse, for his numerous acrostics, meditations, epigrams, hymns, and even his attempts to write vision literature, resemble those of Francis Quarles, Richard Crashaw, and George Wither, particularly the last of these. The works of these poets and those of other writers of pietistic verse were readily available to him in the fifty volumes of *British Poets* listed among the books chosen by Lucas himself and "his literary friends" for the Territorial library of Iowa.

Robert Lucas wrote much pietistic verse but seldom, if ever, did he achieve the blending of thought, emotion, and artistry which characterizes true poetry. His use of this medium was unskill-



ful, but his religious verse, written with simplicity and sincerity, must have given him considerable personal satisfaction.

Not long ago Stephen Vincent Benet discovered a similar vein in the doughty Confederate general, Stonewall Jackson. Benet's characterization might as well have been written about Robert Lucas, for it exactly describes the poetic vein which lay deep in the nature of the Iowa warrior.

Hard on his followers, harder on his foes,  
An iron sabre vowed to an iron Lord,  
And yet the only man of those men who pass  
With a strange, secretive grain of harsh poetry  
Hidden so deep in the stony sides of his heart  
That it shines by flashes only and then is gone.  
It glitters in his last words.

Like the Confederate general, Robert Lucas was hard on himself, hard on his friends, and harder on his foes whether they were Indians, British soldiers, or political enemies. Throughout his life he disciplined himself to meet the tasks which the frontier had demanded of him. Yet truly beneath his stern exterior lay "a strange, secretive grain of harsh poetry" of which his contemporaries knew little. Probably none of his poetical writing, which revealed his inner nature, was printed in his lifetime.



In spite of the imperfection of his poetry, its lapses into doggerel, and its limited range, the verses of Robert Lucas do possess significance. Hidden "deep in the stony sides of his heart", they both vivify and verify the character traits which his biographers have ascribed to him — firmness of conviction, loyalty to his family, and a deep concern for the integrity of his beliefs. Although crises in his early life had found expression in short poems, most of his verses show his belief in his "iron Lord" and in the principles inherent in the Methodist Discipline, the Methodist Hymnal, and in the Old and New Testament. These truly "glitter in his last words", for nine-tenths of his verses were written at his walnut secretary near the fireplace at Plum Grove where, as an old man, he viewed life in the perspective of his own past.

In 1851 at the age of seventy, Robert Lucas began to collect his verses and continued to write them almost up to the day of his death in February, 1853. The earliest was composed in 1806 when he had been commissioned to muster a company of militia. He gave this poem no title but when he copied it he noted that it had been set to the music of the "Soldier's Return" and sung by the volunteers who had rallied to his call. It is obvious from the first stanza that the spirit of patriotism rises above its musical qualities.



Come on ye heroes never pause  
So our fathers died so let us  
Defend our Country's righteous cause  
Against all who dare oppose us.  
Let us resolve that we'll march on  
And when in Canada landed  
Our injured rights we'll think upon  
And pull down the British standard.

Much of Lucas's manuscript verse reveals an aspect of his life which did not appear in the newspapers of his day. In dealing with Ohio politicians and with the first Iowa Territorial Secretary, Governor Robert Lucas showed little humility, yet this trait is revealed in many of his poems. A "short time before" he joined the Methodist Church at the age of thirty-eight, he wrote "Robert Lucas's Constant Prayer" in which he expressed his humbleness before God. It was composed in his favorite octosyllabic quatrain with alternate lines rhyming and presented a theme which continually recurred in his verses — his desire to conduct his life on earth so that he could reach heaven. Two stanzas are typical.

Oh Lord, my soul from sin relieve,  
And from a mind extremely blind,  
Oh that the truth, I could believe,  
With all my heart, and soul, and mind.  
Prepare me Lord, to meet the day,  
When death's appointed time is come,



And with a faithful heart to say,  
*Oh Lord*, thy gracious will be done.

In the Methodist Church a hundred years ago the class meeting was an important part of worship. Men and women assembled in separate places for the study of the Scriptures, for discipline, if necessary, for exhortation, for testimony, and, more important than these, for confession. Once a quarter they met together in a "love feast". From the confessional meetings, Robert Lucas received much inspiration. Several of the "vision poems" which he wrote in old age contain vivid memories of his experiences at class meetings. The second poem in the Lucas collection is entitled, "Reflections at Class Meetings and Love Feasts". In a pencilled note Lucas said he had composed it to the tune of "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing". The final stanza read:

Lord, send down thy holy spirit,  
Search and cleanse our every heart;  
And thy sanctifying spirit  
Through thy grace to each impart.  
Make us humble, make us holy,  
Fill our souls with perfect love,  
Rule and reign within us wholly  
Till we are called to thee above.

In the decades of the eighteen-forties and fifties, the vogue of the autograph album was in full



swing. Members of the family and friends, both young and old, wrote above their autographs anything from nonsense verses to proverbial wisdom. Neither nonsense nor personal compliments flowed from the pen of Robert Lucas. Instead, he displayed his ingenuity with the popular acrostic, little realizing perhaps that the necessity of beginning each new line with a letter prescribed by the accident of a name necessarily inhibited his small poetic gift.

As he penned his acrostics and laboriously copied each into his commonplace book, he dedicated them individually to friends and relatives, dating each, and adding his signature. A prayer for the Lucas family, for instance, which he wrote on March 7, 1851, was entitled, "An Acrostic Robert Lucas, to his Wife, Children, and Grandchildren. Amen". The initial letters in the first stanza, it may be noted, are the first four letters of Robert and those of stanza twelve spell Amen.

Regard us thine, Father above.  
On each heart, stamp thy pardoning love;  
Beneath the cross may we all fall,  
Ever listening to the gospel call.

And this, oh Lord, our prayer shall be;  
Meekly, we all may live in thee,  
Exalted at death, to heaven above,  
Never more to part from them we love.



He dedicated another to his wife, "Friendly Ashley Lucas", two to his sisters, Lavisia Steanburgen and Rhoda Boynton, and three to his sons. One, written on February 20, 1851, was inspired by the memory of his son, Robert, who had died almost a quarter of a century earlier at the age of ten months. His daughters were the subjects of their share, and not less than seven granddaughters were recipients of these pious acrostics.

Only in the verses which he wrote for his grandchildren and very possibly copied into their albums, did he include any Christian names. Even more than in the acrostics which he formulated for adults, these poems fall into a type of moralistic verse, known as *Advices*, which had been very popular in the preceding century. In America the tradition of expressing moral precepts in verse began with the *New England Primer*, and was perpetuated in the publications of the American Tract Society, which supplied the Sunday School reading material on the frontier, and in denatured form was popularized in the early editions of the McGuffey readers.

One acrostic is brief enough to be quoted in full since the acrostic letters number only nine. In this case Lucas again showed his preference for the quatrain and filled out his third stanza with three extra lines.



Meekness, patience, truth and love  
Are ways that lead to peace above;  
Remove all sin, for Christ was slain,  
Your soul to save from endless pain,

Lo, his grace now is free to all.  
Unto you his spirit now doth call.  
Come unreserved by faith to me  
And you shall from your sin be free.

Saviour I come; thy grace bestow,  
To guide me through the world below.  
May my soul be sunk in Thee,  
Prepare me, Lord, thy face to see.

After 1851, although Robert Lucas remained in constant touch with schemes for future railroads, lent his influence to the promotion of temperance in Iowa and to the advancement of education, his verses reflect none of these interests. In addition to his predilection for acrostics, he filled page after page with imitations of the seventeenth-century "vision literature", and more with meditations and hymns.

A group of four poems suggests a trace of mystical experience in his remembrance of various dreams of his youth which continued to live vividly in his memory as moments of exaltation during his earliest connection with the Methodist Church. His use of these visions somewhat resembles the allegorical treatment employed by Henry Vaughan



and John Bunyan. In "Thoughts on a Future State", he began by saying that many years before in a vision he had seen Christ who gave him a Book and an angel for a guide. This celestial being had led him into a "spacious Hall" and "bade him view the paintings on the wall."

I turned to the wall, saw clearly painted there  
Every act of my life, conspicuous and clear.  
The dangers I had passed through I trembled to see  
God's Mercy and Goodness did much astonish me.

Humble in view of his sins, he was returned to Christ and then awoke. With the vision clearly in mind he closed the poem with a petition to God and the hope that other sinners might profit by his experience.

In thee I live, to thee my all I give  
As ransomed son grant me to live  
In strict obedience to thy heavenly will  
That I my duties while living may fulfill.

Lord, if these written thoughts are pleasing to thee  
Grant that those who read may be led to see  
That the cross of Christ is the only way given  
That leads from death up to the joys of heaven.

Though he frequently commented on his own code of life and the evils of the "carnal world", meditations with Lucas usually took the form of reflections on such topics as "Man's Creation, his



Fall and Redemption by Christ". This particular poem runs through fifty-two didactic stanzas which review his evangelical belief in the fall of man and his faith in the atonement. Though Lucas would not have recognized the present meaning of the term, he was wholly fundamentalistic in his attitude toward the Scriptures. In 1851 he wrote a meditative poem which he called "Christ's Sufferings". In the following year he enlarged upon this theme and made it into his most ambitious attempt to trace the events of Passion Week. This long poem included the agony in Gethsemane, the trial before Pilate, the death on the cross, and closed with the ascension of Christ.

As might be expected in this collection of pietistic verses, hymns held a prominent place. For the most part they followed the themes and were written to the tunes of the evangelical hymnals of a century ago. The meter of each hymn was meticulously indicated by the abbreviations L. M. and S. M. which stand respectively for long and short meter. Long meter referred to a quatrain written in tetrameter verse, with four accents to the line. Short meter differed in that the first, second, and fourth lines were shortened to trimeter verse with three beats to the line.

In an experimental mood, Lucas often wrote several religious songs in one meter and then



transposed them wholly or in part to another. One of these which he called "A Class Leader's Hymn" was written first under the date of February 10, 1852. On April 1, 1852, by way of celebrating his seventy-second birthday, he completed the revised version, "Class Leader's Hymn, Changed to Suit the Love-Feast". The first stanza of each version will indicate as well as any his efforts at conscious artistry and his desire to perfect his medium of expression. In general he preferred the iambic form, but here he employed the anapestic measure.

We now in class meet — Jesus' praise to repeat  
And implore him to meet with us here,  
To inspire us with love — and our thought raise above  
This world its attractions and fears.

The revised stanza was altered to:

In Love-Feast we meet — Lord thy praise to repeat  
Implore thee to meet with us here  
Inspire us with love — and our minds raise above  
This world its allurements and fear.

During the last few months of his life he composed many hymns, some of which indicate that he was preoccupied with the theme of death. He entertained few doubts that personal immortality awaited him. While he spoke of bodies dissolving in clay and of "death's gate" and "the Valley of



Death", he dwelt much more on his hopes of heaven. To him heaven was a very real destination where friends and relatives could meet and converse, a place both spiritual and beautiful. In "Gospel News" he wrote:

Cities have pearly gates  
The streets are paved with gold  
With seas of glass, with crystal lakes  
And beauties yet untold.

There is perpetual day  
No darkness of the night  
And all who gospel truth obey  
Have a pre-emption right.

On his last Christmas Day, in 1852 when he was in his seventy-second year, he completed a "Christmas Hymn" which in the next few weeks he revised at least three times. In its dozen stanzas the narrative is carried from the birth of the Christ child to the crucifixion. The first three stanzas tell the nativity story very simply.

Look to the east, behold that Star,  
God's glorious gift, to man 'twas given.  
Its light exceeds the sun by far;  
It lights the way for man to heaven.

Angels from heaven in glory bright,  
They first proclaimed the gospel morn.  
Shepherds led by the holy light,  
Sought the Saviour there, frail, new born.



They found him in a manger laid.  
He's been excluded from the inn —  
God's son, by whom the world was made,  
An infant lay, with God within.

On that same Christmas Day, six weeks before his death on February 7, 1853, he wrote a nine-stanza poem called "Contentment" which expressed much of his philosophy of life.

What restless creatures we mortals be!  
Can never be content,  
We envy others' prosperity,  
Our own hard fates lament.

But true contentment cannot be found  
In wealth or armour; no,  
In palaces or royal ground  
Contentment does not go.

It can't be found in worldly joys  
Nor in the courts of kings;  
The whole world with its glitt'ring toys  
Contentment never brings.

Lord, let us see our actual case;  
May truth in us advance  
And guide us to the only place  
Contentment may be found.

The significance of this manuscript collection of Robert Lucas's verses does not lie in the literary merit of his utterances. The hymns, reflections, and visions do indicate to some extent the charac-



ter of the spiritual foundations of the midwest Bible belt, and particularly reveal the steadying faith which served as a center for what Robert Lucas in manhood and old age considered wholly worthwhile in life. It was his inner calm which had enabled him to integrate the various forces in his life, to formulate his own code of behavior, and to meet friends and foes with fairness and yet with uncompromising sternness.

LUELLA M. WRIGHT



## Politics in 1844

The two major political parties in 1844 were the Whigs and the Democrats. The Whigs had won the national contest in 1840 with the election of Harrison and Tyler. In 1844, the Democrats were prepared for an all-out effort to stage a comeback campaign with James K. Polk as the Presidential candidate. The Whig candidate was Henry Clay.

The national campaign of 1840 had been one of unparalleled enthusiasm. It found expression "in great mass meetings, barbecues, and in the processions and parades to which the people came, not to be instructed, but to listen to violent political declamation, to indulge in hard cider and to sing campaign doggerel about 'Tippecanoe and Tyler too'." The campaign of 1844 promised to follow a similar pattern.

Iowa was at that time still a Territory and had no voice in the selection of national officers. There was much interest, however, in party politics. Party lines were clearly drawn and partisan speeches were the order of the day.

The chief political issue in Iowa in 1844 was the question of Statehood. This had been an issue



since 1840 and, with increased migration from the eastern States, it was becoming more and more prominent. Members of the Democratic party argued that Territorial government was at best a temporary arrangement, and that Statehood was inevitable. They believed that a new State government would give political stability and add to Iowa prestige. Admission to the Union would stimulate more rapid settlement, facilitate the development of internal improvements, and promote prosperity.

Members of the Whig party presented the view that Statehood would increase taxes without bringing a corresponding benefit. They argued that there was a large measure of freedom and prosperity under the existing Territorial government, and they were not convinced that conditions would be improved by State government. Moreover, the Whigs were stimulated to more aggressive opposition by virtue of the fact that the Democrats had a majority in the Territorial Legislative Assembly and were therefore in a position to determine the procedure in acquiring Statehood.

In view of the increasing political interest in the admission of Iowa into the Union, the Sixth Legislative Assembly provided on February 12, 1844, that at the following April election an expression of opinion of the people of the Territory should be



taken upon the subject of drafting a State constitution. If a majority of votes should be cast in favor of Statehood, another election would be held on the first Monday of August to select delegates to a convention which would meet in the Capitol at Iowa City on the first Monday of October for the purpose of drafting a State constitution. According to another act of this Legislative Assembly, the first Monday of August was fixed as the date of the regular annual election of Territorial and county officers. In June, 1844, however, another statute provided that members of the Legislative Assembly should be elected in April. Thus, the August election in 1844 was confined to candidates for county offices and the constitutional convention.

With the program of elections thus definitely outlined by law, political interests developed rapidly. Within a week after the law was passed relative to a vote on the question of Statehood, the Whig viewpoint was clearly stated in an editorial presumably from the pen of Stephen Whicher. "We declare without fear of contradiction," he wrote in the *Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), "that the people are not prepared, and cannot be prepared, at so early a period as the first day of April to decide the momentous question of State government or no State government, and we say



further, that until Congress now in session shall have completed its business, and the decisions that it may make upon some questions concerning the interests of this Territory that it has before it, shall be generally made known, the people cannot make a proper and satisfactory determination of the question of State government."

As the April election day approached, both the Whigs and the Democrats were solicitous of support, and apparently both were reasonably confident of success. When the votes were counted, however, it was clearly a Democratic victory — a large majority in favor of a constitutional convention. Returns from twenty-one counties showed that only eight counties voted against Statehood. The *Iowa Standard*, a Whig newspaper, conceded the loss of the election and ventured the prophecy that the people would regret the decision before five years had elapsed. "Mark it, ye tax payers!"

Once it had been decided that a majority of the voters desired Statehood and that a constitutional convention would be called, political interests centered upon the election of the members of the convention. Delegates were to be elected by counties, and the national campaign had the effect of making party affiliation a matter of first consideration. The primary issue was Whig versus Democrat. Said the *Iowa Standard*: "Each party ex-



pects, in the event of its obtaining a majority in the Convention, that the Constitution of the State of Iowa will be modeled in a manner consistent with the principles it professes." Nominating conventions were held in each county by both parties in July.

The *Davenport Gazette* referred to the August election as more important than previous ones in the Territory. "Upon the nature of the Constitution drafted," it said, "depends the rapid settlement of Iowa, the availability of its resources, and the hidden treasures of its prolific soil." It also criticized the Democrats for their opposition to banks. "If elected they will unanimously advocate the insertion of a clause into the Constitution forever prohibiting the citizens of the State of Iowa from engaging in banking privileges. This is a subject that should be left just where the Whig candidates for delegacy propose leaving it, that is, to the good sense of the people of the State, and this we fervently maintain to be true republican principle."

Despite the political activities of the Whigs and their critical newspaper comments, the election resulted in a Democratic victory. In only six counties were the Whigs in a majority. Louisa, Jones, and Keokuk counties chose none but Whigs. In Henry County four of the five dele-



gates selected were Whigs, and in Muscatine and Washington counties, two out of three delegates in each were Whigs. But in the other counties all or a majority of the delegates were Democrats. Of the seventy-two delegates elected to the convention, only twenty-one were Whigs. The only comfort for the Whigs was in the election of important county officials.

Although the people of Iowa were not permitted to vote for national officers in the campaign of 1844, they were nevertheless interested in the candidates and issues. Democratic newspapers carried at the head of the editorial columns the names of James K. Polk and George M. Dallas. In like manner the Whig newspapers displayed the names of Henry Clay and Theodore Frelinghuysen. Moreover, public meetings and newspaper comments kept the national issues before the residents of the Territory of Iowa. Clay Clubs were organized in Iowa City and Burlington, and a large, enthusiastic political meeting at Burlington adjourned with "three rousing cheers for Clay and Freylinghuysen".

A glance at the party platforms of one hundred years ago reveals interesting contrasts and similarities with those of the present campaign. The Whig platform of 1844 was very brief — consisting of but four paragraphs, three of which were



devoted to eulogies of the party and its candidates. The platform advocated "a well-regulated currency", "a tariff for revenue", "a single term for the presidency", "a reform of executive usurpations", and administration of the public service with "the greatest practicable efficiency" and "wise economy".

The Democratic platform did not mention the candidates by name, but extolled the "liberal principles embodied by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, and sanctioned in the Constitution". It declared that "Congress has no power to charter a United States Bank", nor did the Constitution "confer upon the General Government the power to commence or carry on a general system of internal improvements". The Federal Government, declared the Democrats in 1844, "is one of limited powers, derived solely from the Constitution", and "it is inexpedient and dangerous to exercise doubtful constitutional powers." It may be noted, too, that the Democratic party, even a hundred years ago, was not in favor of a single term for the President.

The Democratic *Iowa Capitol Reporter* challenged the Whigs to defend Clay against "the just and merited indignation of an insulted and abused class of American citizens, who have been by him denounced as a 'lawless band' or as no



better than 'highway robbers'." To such thrusts the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* replied, "If Mr. Clay is hostile to the settlers of the public lands, why did he vote for the preemption law of 1841, which let it be remembered, is the only permanent prospective law, ever passed by Congress? Why did he vote large and liberal grants of lands to the new States, and why has he devoted the best years of his life, to his favorite policy of distribution?"

But the weight of opinion in 1844 tipped the balance in favor of the Democratic party, both in Iowa and in the nation. As the policy of that party had prevailed in the matter of seeking Statehood, and as the Democrats had won a majority of seats in the constitutional convention, so also Polk and Dallas were successful in the national campaign. Although Iowans did not participate in the Presidential election, their votes would have contributed to the same result.

J. A. SWISHER



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