

Iowa in the Days of Lucas

The State of Iowa to-day covers an area of about 55,000 square miles. In 1838 when Robert Lucas came out to Burlington as Governor he found the Territory of Iowa spread over a tract of land approximately three times that size. It included besides the present Iowa, all of modern Minnesota lying west of the Mississippi River, and all of what is now North and South Dakota east of the Missouri. On the north the Canadian line was the boundary and on the northwest in the faraway land of the Sioux the line followed the White Earth River southward from Canada until it joined the Missouri.

But if the area was large the population was exceedingly small. In 1838 there were 22,859 persons in the Territory and this is less than one per cent of the present population of the State. Furthermore over half of these had come in within two years.

These people lived almost entirely in the Black Hawk Purchase which extended back from the river not more than fifty miles. The chief centers of population were a half dozen or more towns on the west bank of the Mississippi; but in 1838 the counties which ranked second and third in point of numbers were two interior counties — Van Buren and Henry.

Iowa City in that year was not yet thought of; Des Moines was merely the name of a river and a county;

and the western part of the Territory was an unpeopled wilderness save for bands of Indians. It is true that near Council Bluffs Father De Smet had a mission post; on the Red River of the North in the present Minnesota was the group of Selkirk colonists; and west of the Mississippi near Fort Snelling were a few white squatters. But it is doubtful if Lucas or any other officer of the Territory realized their existence.

Before Lucas went out of office in 1841, the population had no doubt doubled itself for it had almost done so when the census of 1840 was taken. This survey showed 43,112 persons in the Territory. As might be expected in a pioneer Commonwealth, the men greatly out-numbered the women, the proportion being roughly 4 to 3. Scattered throughout the various counties were 188 colored persons. Most of these were free of course, but the United States census returns list 16 as slaves — all from the county of Dubuque. This same county is credited by the census taker as possessing among its inhabitants a woman over one hundred years old. This must have been the mother of Alexander Butterworth of Dubuque, who was reported to have danced at her son's wedding in 1837, despite her 107 years.

The presence of so large a number of free colored persons and especially of the sixteen slaves is in line with the fact that Iowa in the time of Lucas had been peopled to a considerable extent from the Southern States. Lucas himself was a native of

Virginia and his successor came to Iowa after nearly a half century of life in Kentucky. The first legislative assembly which Lucas faced in 1838 included in its membership twenty, or more than one-half, whose birthplace was south of the Mason and Dixon Line. New Englanders there were in abundance but they did not predominate as has so often been claimed. — As the Civil War approached, the southern influx weakened while that from the northeast increased, but in the years of the early Territorial period, the migration from Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas — sometimes with a few years stop-over in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois — was large. Kentucky and Tennessee sent many young men into this new and promising Territory. And the contributions of Missouri to this upstream migration included such men as George Wallace Jones and Augustus Caesar Dodge, the first two United States Senators from Iowa, and Stephen Hempstead, the second Governor of the State.

In the early days they had come to trade in furs and to mine lead but by 1840 they came to farm. Over 10,000 in that year were listed as farmers while all the other occupations together gave employment to less than 3000. They were men of little wealth, but of sturdy ways. They were democratic and independent, accustomed to labor and frontier hardships, but unaccustomed to restraint. They were intelligent but not many of them were highly educated. Only 365 in 1840 practised the learned professions.

The steamboat *Tempest* from Cincinnati brought Lucas to the landing at Burlington. This was the leading town of the Territory, proud of the honor of having been the Territorial capital of Wisconsin and eager to continue its position as the seat of the government. Dubuque was a strong rival, while Davenport, Fort Madison, and Bloomington (later taking the name Muscatine) were smaller but were growing rapidly. In the interior, settlements had sprung up at Salem, the Quaker village, at Mt. Pleasant, Keosauqua, and a dozen other places but they could not hope to rival the river towns. Iowa City was laid out in 1839 and grew with a rapidity due largely to the fact that it had been founded as the seat of government.

Dubuque was still essentially a miner's town, Burlington a lawyer's town, while Iowa City became the dream town of the politicians. And each of the other smaller towns had its own ambitions and characteristics. Some of the ambitions came to naught, as in the case of Ivanhoe which died a natural death, and Rockingham, which, after fighting a valiant contest for supremacy in the county with Davenport four miles away, was worsted and finally engulfed by its rival. But most of the settlements persevered and grew into thriving and permanent towns.

When Lucas arrived the great highway was the river. Steamers shuttled back and forth between Dubuque and Burlington and brought increasing numbers of settlers from the East and South by way

of the Ohio River and St. Louis. But the overland immigrants also were numerous. They came to the river and crossed on ferries at Dubuque or Davenport or Burlington, and then proceeded to roll their wagon wheels inland.

Trails developed into roads; ferry crossings and fords at the small streams caught the moving tide of migration into little knots of settlement. A military road was laid out in 1839 from Dubuque to Iowa City, and in 1841 Burlington boasted four tri-weekly mails, "one to Peoria, Illinois, with splendid Troy post-coaches; one to Dubuque, via Bloomington and Davenport; one to Fort Madison, Montrose, and St. Francisville, Missouri, continuing to St. Louis; one to Macomb, Rushville, and Springfield, Illinois, continuing east; and one is shortly to be established to Iowa City."

The census of 1840 tells us that fifteen men in Iowa were employed in the turning out of newspapers. Weekly sheets were issued in Dubuque, Davenport, and Burlington, the latter town enjoying the luxury and excitement of two rival papers, the *Hawk-Eye and Iowa Patriot* published by James G. Edwards, a Whig, and the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* published by James Clarke, a Democrat who became Governor of the Territory in 1845.

The columns of these newspapers reflect a virile but heterogeneous population. There were good men and horse-thieves in most of the communities. The settlers built churches soon after they had

founded their towns, and schools came not much later. But the tavern was even an earlier institution. Gambling and intemperance were common vices, the carrying of firearms was prevalent, and organized bands such as the "Linn County bogus gang", and the group that brought on the Bellevue War in 1840, did not hesitate now and then to add murder to the crimes of counterfeiting and horse-stealing.

The better element, however, was strongly in the ascendant, the incoming migration held a constantly larger proportion of law-abiding citizens, and the vigorous administration of Robert Lucas did much to establish peace and order in the frontier Territory. It was still the edge of civilization, with wilderness and the Indian close at hand; but the Indian was more often a victim than an aggressor, and the forces that were to conquer the wilderness had crossed the Mississippi and established themselves invincibly on the western side.

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