

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of State government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## **Examining the Firsts: A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846**

This year, the 91st Iowa General Assembly begins. Some of this year's *Pieces of Iowa's Past* articles will briefly examine the work of the First, Eleventh, Twenty-first, Thirty-first, Forty-first, Fifty-first, Sixty-first, Seventy-first and Eighty-first General Assemblies or observe interesting events that happened during those years.

The First General Assembly convened November 30, 1846, and adjourned February 25, 1847, a 57-day session. The First General Assembly had a total of 58 members.



**Lieutenant Governor**  
[Thomas N. Baker](#)

Among the Senate members were 12 Democrats and 6 Whigs. Lieutenant Governor Thomas N. Baker of Polk County presided over the Senate. He moved to Polk County in 1845 and the following year was elected to the Senate for the First General Assembly from the district composed of the counties of Polk, Dallas, Jasper, and Marion. Upon the organization of the Senate, Baker was chosen President, becoming the first presiding officer of that body.

The House of Representatives had 23 Whig members and 17 Democrat members. Speaker Jesse B. Browne presided over the House of Representatives. The legislative website reads: "After Iowa became a State, Captain Browne was elected to the First General Assembly and was chosen Speaker of the House, serving



**Speaker of the House**  
[Jesse B. Browne](#)

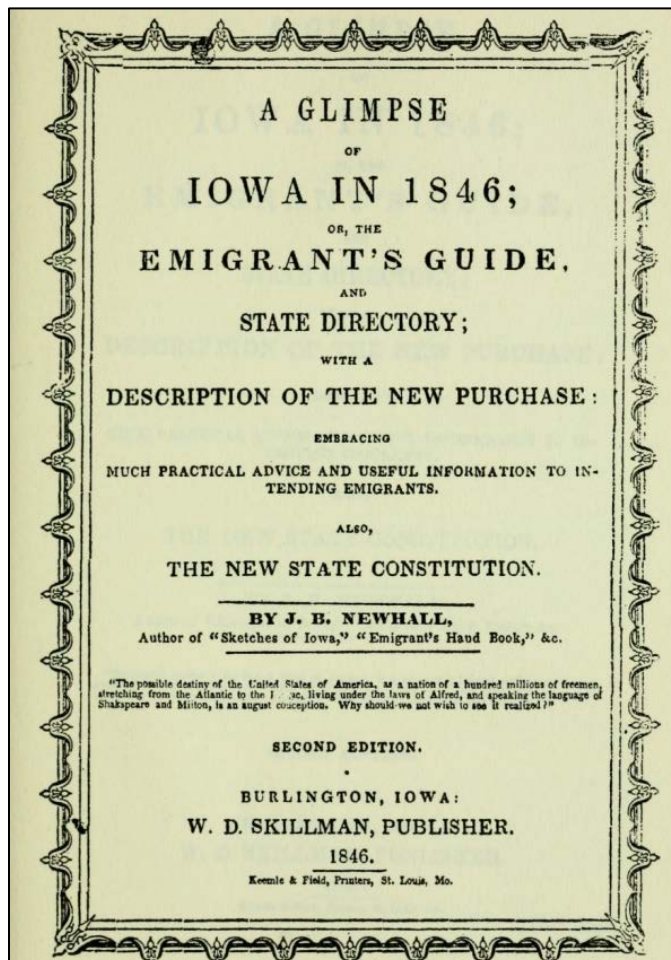
at a regular and extra session ... He was a man six feet seven inches tall, of commanding presence, polished manners and popular. Two traits of character made the people his friends: he was always faithful to all trusts given him, and he never gave excuses for his faults, but acknowledged them and asked to be forgiven."

Governor Ansel Briggs was elected governor of the newly admitted state of Iowa in 1846, serving until 1850. In 1846, Iowa's population of 96,088 was heavily concentrated in the eastern third of the state. The First General Assembly met in the Old Capitol in Iowa City.



[Governor Ansel Briggs](#)

## A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846



A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846 written by John B. Newhall provides a look at Iowa in the year of its admission to the Union.

It was intended as a guidebook as its full title suggests: The emigrant's guide and state directory; with a description of the new purchase: embracing much practical advice and useful information to intending emigrants. Also, the new state constitution.

The following excerpts by Newhall give a description of the nation's newest state.

Excerpts from [A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846 by John B. Newhall](#)

***FACE OF THE COUNTRY***

"The predominant features in the landscape of Iowa are prairie and timber; the face of the country is beautiful in the extreme. It is what may be termed moderately undulating, no part of the territory being traversed by mountains, or even high hills (if we except the northern or mineral region, where the hills are of considerable magnitude); on the margin of the rivers there are frequent ranges of 'bluffs,' or calcareous strata of lime rock, intersected with ravines. The southern portion of the territory may be termed the most picturesque, abounding with grassy lawns and verdant vales, interspersed with groves and meandering rivulets. - The northern part presents more bold and rugged features in its scenery. It is a rare and singular feature in the mineral region of Iowa, that the country abounding in the richest ore is frequently in the neighborhood of the most fertile fields of grain. This territory is remarkably well watered by beautiful rivers and creeks, the margins of which are skirted with woodlands and groves. A striking characteristic of Iowa and Wisconsin over many prairie countries, is the admirable distribution of prairie and woodland to the wants and convenience of the husbandman.

"Although probably nearly three fourths of the territory is without trees, yet so happily and conveniently are the waters and timber arranged throughout, that nature appears to have made an effort to arrange them in the most desirable manner possible."

***PRODUCTIONS***

"All the grains, fruits and plants of the temperate regions of the earth grow luxuriantly in Iowa. The agricultural productions consist principally of corn, wheat, rye, oats, buckwheat, potatoes, turnips, beans, melons; all kinds of garden vegetables. Clover, timothy, and every description of tame grass grows luxuriantly, and well repays the labor of the husbandman. No country can excel this in its adaptation for rearing all the choicest fruits and fruit-bearing shrubbery. Wild fruit, crab-apples, wild plums, berries, strawberries are remarkably fine and plenty and are very convenient for the judicious

wife in spreading her board with excellent preserves. Corn may be considered a staple production, and the comparative ease with which it is cultivated would astonish a New Englander."

### ***CLIMATE***

"In short, there is, almost every day, in the elevated portions of the country, a breeze from some quarter as refreshing as that from the ocean. ... A vast number of people in emigrating to a new country, get sick from exposure, by living in damp uncomfortable houses, change of diet, water and attribute it all to the climate."

### ***PERSONS BEST QUALIFIED TO EMIGRATE. ADVICE, ETC.***

"It is undoubtedly true that some descriptions of emigrants will succeed better in a new country than others. Those who have been accustomed to a country life, and to the labor of a farm, are, of course, better fitted to cultivate land and endure hardships, at first attendant upon a residence in a frontier country, than artisans, traders and people whose habits of life have become somewhat delicate by a long residence in cities and work-shops. But every individual who, to health and vigor of manhood joins perseverance and industry, will ultimately prosper. Mechanics, of all kinds, cannot fail to do well in Iowa, for, when not employed in cultivating their farms, (if they choose to make one,) they will find it quite easy and convenient to gain a little money by working at their various trades; they will likewise have the advantage of being able to improve their dwellings and repair their farming utensils, without expense. Married persons are generally more comfortable, and succeed better, in a frontier country, than single men; for a wife and family, so far from being a burden to a western farmer, may always prove a source of pecuniary advantage in the domestic economy of his household, independently of heightening the enjoyments of domestic happiness. Of course, the reader will understand that I speak of country life, and not that of the large towns, where artificial distinctions and "conventionalisms" have crept in, and, too frequently, destroy that simplicity and frankness of character which is the charm of social life.

"Many is the wife, whose cheerful countenance now gladdens the fireside of the 'Iowa farmer,' that once beamed brightly in the gay saloons of the crowded city. I believe every candid traveller will concur in the foregoing views. In fine, it must be the settler's own fault if he does not enjoy, in large

abundance, every substantial comfort and enjoyment of life, and rear around his frugal board all the choice blessings of a land flowing with 'milk and honey.'"

CONTENTS.	
PAGE.	PAGE.
General description of the Valley	44
of the Mississippi, -----	45
Iowa — situation, boundaries, &c., --	46
General Description, -----	48
Face of the Country, -----	48
Soil, -----	49
Productions, -----	49
Timber, -----	49
Rivers, -----	50
Prairies, -----	50
Climate, -----	55
Public Lands, -----	56
Counties — Lee County, -----	58
Des Moines County, -----	59
Louisa, -----	60
Muscatine, -----	60
Scott, -----	60
Clinton, -----	60
Jackson, -----	60
Dubuque, -----	60
Clayton, -----	61
Buchanan, Fayette and Delaware, --	62
Jones and Cedar, -----	63
Linn, -----	63
Johnson, -----	64
Henry, -----	65
Jefferson, -----	67
Washington, -----	67
Van Buren, -----	72
The Turkey River Country — Ft.	79
Atkinson, &c., -----	81
Winnebago School, -----	83
The New Purchase, -----	85
Counties in' the New Purchase, ----	87
Wapello, -----	88
Ottumwa, -----	89
Davis County, -----	90
Appanoose County, -----	93
Keokuk County, -----	
Mahaska County, -----	
Statistics of do., -----	
Polk County, -----	
Fort Des Moines, -----	
Monroe County, -----	
Iowa " -----	
Poweshiek County -----	
Black Hawk " -----	
What productions are most profi-	
table to cultivate, -----	
Remarks upon Wool Growing,	
&c., -----	
Statistics of the Lead Region, ----	
Zinc Ore, -----	
Iron Ore, -----	
Average Prices of Cattle, Cows,	
Sheep, &c., -----	
Prices of Articles of Family	
Consumption at retail, -----	
Prospects for Mechanics and La-	
borers, -----	
Persons best qualified to emi-	
grate, -----	
Government, -----	
Judiciary, -----	
District Prosecutors, -----	
Time of holding Courts, -----	
Chief Towns, -----	
Burlington, -----	
Dubuque, -----	
Fort Madison, -----	
Bloomington, -----	
Davenport, -----	
Keosauqua Directory, -----	
Mt. Pleasant " -----	
Fairfield " -----	
Keokuk " -----	
Iowa City " -----	
The Constitution of Iowa, -----	

There were two printings of Newhall's guidebook. The first volume had some printing and editing issues, leaving out a few cities, etc. The second run corrected those issues and added some additional resources. Pictured here is the index for the second edition.

**More Information:**

[Sketches of Iowa, the Emigrant's Guide, Legislative Services Agency, Pieces of Iowa's Past, May 4, 2022](#)

[John B. Newhall, Pieces of Iowa's Past, Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides, March 30, 2011](#)