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**April 16, 2014**

**THIS WEEK:**

**The Story of Iowa**

**BACKGROUND:**

*The Story of Iowa: The Progress of an American State* by William J. Petersen, Volume I, Chapter IX, "Territorial Status 1803-1846" Published by Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., Copyright 1952

## **The Story of Iowa**

### **The Lucas-Conway Quarrel**

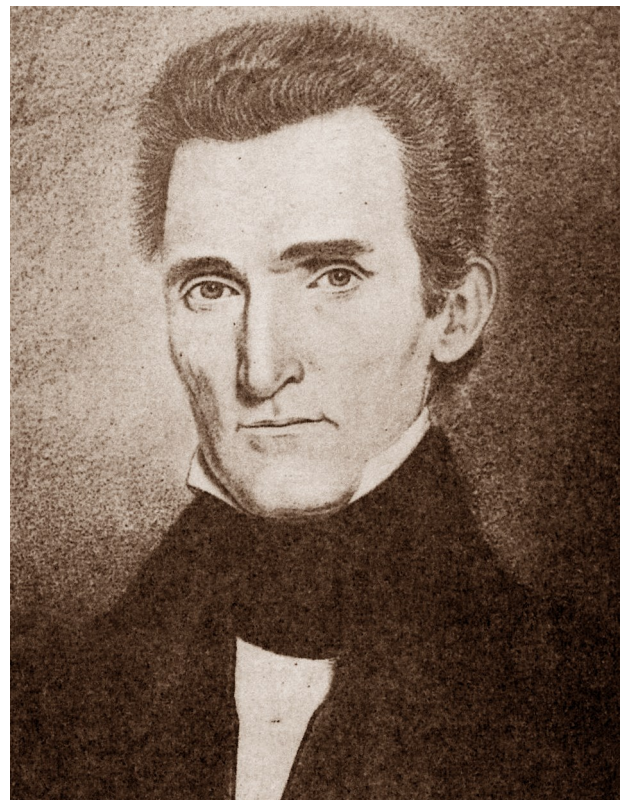
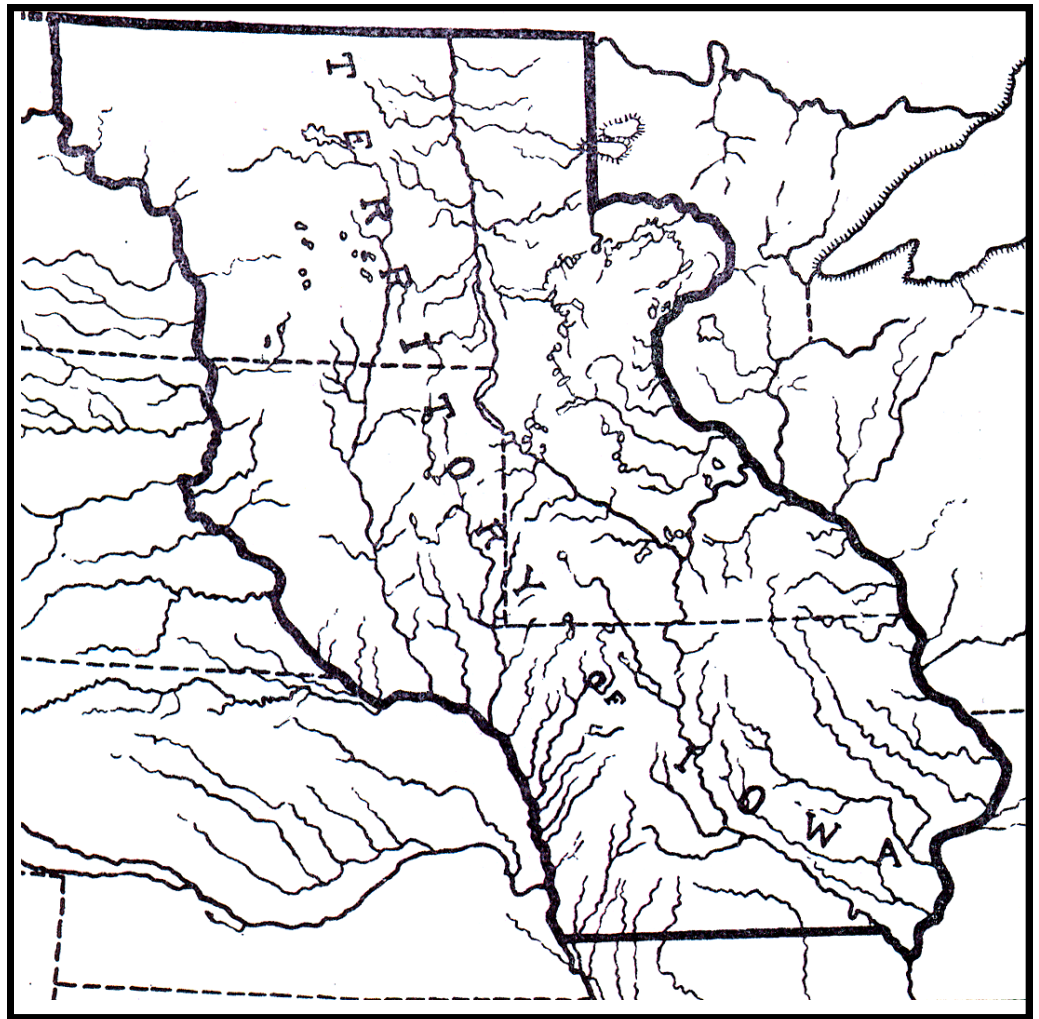
On June 12, 1838, President Van Buren approved the establishment of the Territory of Iowa and the Organic Act became effective on July 4, 1838. The Act was based largely on the form used for the Territory of Wisconsin but was more democratic in its general provisions. The Governor, however, remained the really powerful figure for, as a presidential appointee, he enforced the laws, served as commander-in-chief of the militia, was superintendent of Indian affairs, commissioned military officers, granted pardons, held an absolute veto over the legislature, and appointed all inferior judicial officers, justices, sheriffs, and surveyors.



**President Martin Van Buren**

President Van Buren asked General Henry Atkinson to serve as Governor of the new Territory of Iowa but the General refused the proffer and the appointment was given to Robert Lucas of Ohio. Lucas, who was born in what is now Shepherdstown, Virginia (now West Virginia), on April 1, 1781, moved to the Northwest Territory in 1800 and lived in the Scioto Valley of Ohio. After service in the War of 1812, he served in both houses of the Ohio legislature and then served two terms as governor of Ohio. . . . Appointed Governor of the Territory of Iowa by Van Buren in July of 1838, he served until he was removed from office by President Harrison in 1841.

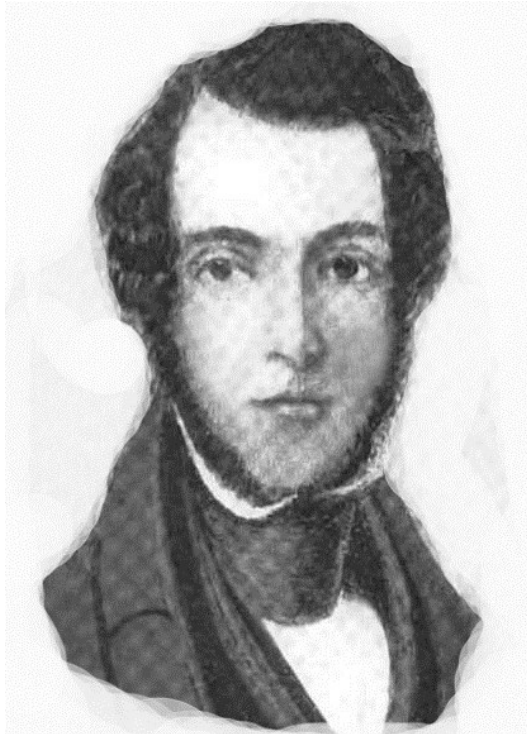
Because of the delay in his appointment, Lucas did not reach Burlington until August 15, 1838, and in the meantime William B. Conway, who had been appointed Secretary of the Territory by the President, had discharged the duties of Governor from the time he arrived on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, as was provided in the Organic Act. Conway, a native of Pennsylvania, was a practical and ambitious politician. When Governor Lucas arrived, he found Conway had already divided Iowa



**Iowa Territorial Governor  
Robert Lucas**

into three sections, to each of which he had assigned one of the three Justices named by the President—Charles Mason, Joseph Williams, and Thomas S. Wilson. Lucas felt Conway had been too officious and friction developed.

One of the most valuable services that Lucas contributed to Iowa was his bringing



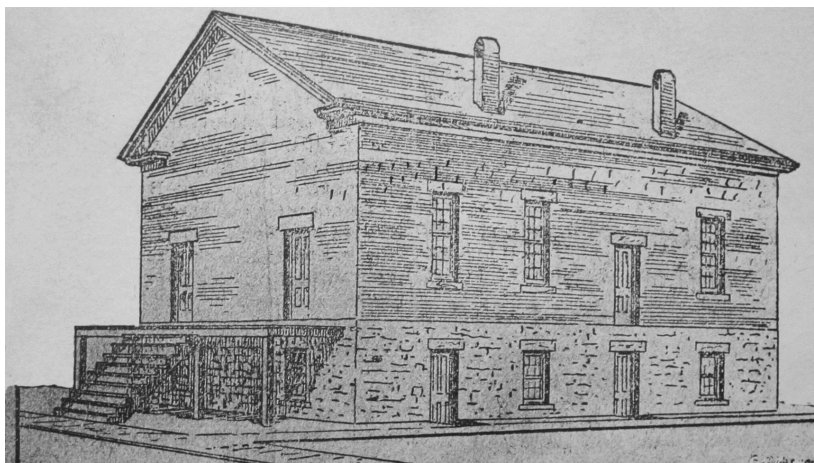
**Theodore S. Parvin**

with him a young man, Theodore S. Parvin, whom he appointed his unofficial private secretary. Parvin, without any official status, soon made himself one of the most important men in the Territory of Iowa and in the future State. He selected the books for which Congress had appropriated money and this collection became the nucleus of the State Library of Iowa.

The First Legislative Assembly of Iowa met at Burlington on November 12<sup>th</sup> and in his first message the 57-year old, richly experienced and highly opinionated Governor adopted an unfortunate tone that revealed his intense convictions as well as his positive methods. Lucas seemed somewhat paternal and proprietary—as if he regarded the legislators as young and inexperienced men who needed the

leadership and wisdom of an older and wiser man—himself.

At first Secretary Conway had a similar attitude toward the Iowa legislators,



**The first General Assembly met in Burlington, Iowa, in 1837 in a wooden structure donated by Jeremiah Smith. When the structure burned down, the legislature was moved to the Zion Methodist Church (sketch shown above).**

finding means of quarreling with them at almost every turn. On one occasion his sarcastic remarks about a request by legislators for pen knives etc., brought upon him a sharp rebuke, the members of the Council asserting they would not “tamely submit to the insults and derision of any officer of this Territory.” But when the Assembly censured Lucas (who had also acidly censured Conway previously) Conway changed his attitude.

Winning the favor of the legislators by doing many small favors and by new

friendliness, Conway adroitly manipulated the developing differences between the Governor and the Assembly. He belittled Parvin, who was Lucas's "right-hand-man," spelling his name with a small "p" instead of the proper capital "P".

Eventually the petty quarrels between Robert Lucas on the one hand and the members of the legislature on the other assumed sufficient importance to enable Secretary Conway to inform President Van Buren that Lucas was unfit for his job, being "old and irritable." Conway specifically stated that Lucas was guilty of "vexatious, ungraceful, petulant, ill-natured and dogmatic interferences." The Assembly itself passed a resolution that Lucas was "unfit to be the ruler of a free people."

Undoubtedly Conway's spiteful remarks and the Assembly's violent statements were far from the truth. Lucas was an experienced and dynamic officer, impatient of inefficiency and graft, straightlaced and honest. His deals were set far above the accomplishment of ordinary men, particularly of politicians, and he would not bend to opposition but rode right over it in the firm conviction that he was acting in the best interests of the Territory and the United States—which was probably true.

President Van Buren, himself one of the most astute politicians of the many who have occupied the White House, undoubtedly knew the situation in Iowa and he may have smiled in sympathy with Lucas but publicly it was necessary for the best interests of his political party to make some concessions. So, probably at his instigation, Congress made a few changes in the Iowa Organic Act, limited the veto power of the Governor, and made some of the minor officers elective.

In the midst of the turmoil Secretary Conway died and one source of friction was eliminated. His influence might have continued important for a time after his death but his office was discovered to be in a worse than chaotic condition and he was speedily forgotten. Peace was further aided by the appointment of a new Secretary, James Clarke, a newspaperman of Burlington, who was a man of exemplary character and a good politician.