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April 27, 2016

THIS WEEK:

The Deeds of an Iowa Pioneer and Legislator

BACKGROUND:

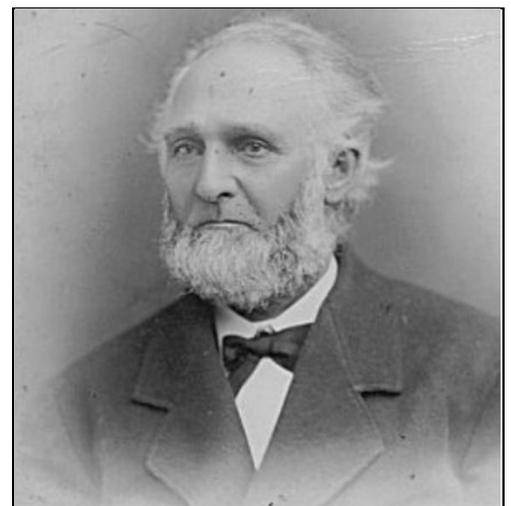
Six years before he became an Iowa Legislator, Lysander Babbitt predicted where Iowa's Capital City would ultimately be located. Later, as a legislator, he pushed for the Capital City move from Iowa City to Des Moines.

The Deeds of an Iowa Pioneer and Legislator

Lysander W. Babbitt

Babbitt was one of the pioneers of Iowa. He was born in Seneca County, New York, January 31, 1812, and came to the Mississippi Valley in 1836, locating at Burlington, which was then in the Michigan Territory. In 1838, he was appointed by General Henry Dodge, adjutant of a regiment organized to protect the frontier.

In 1842, Babbitt explored the upper valley of the Des Moines River and while camped at the mouth of the Raccoon River, predicted that the future capital of the state would be located in that vicinity.



Lysander W. Babbitt
(1812-1885)
State Representative
Second and Third
Iowa General Assembly
1848-1852

In 1844, he journeyed with an ox team to Knoxville, where he built a mill and opened a store. In 1848, he was elected Representative in the Legislature for the district composed of Marion, Jasper, Polk, and Dallas counties, and all of the counties in that tier to the Missouri River. He served two terms in the House.

While a member of the House, Babbitt introduced and urged the passage of a bill to move the capital from Iowa City to Des Moines—then a new town laid out upon the spot where he had camped six years before. In 1853, he was appointed Register of the United States Land Office at Council Bluffs and moved to that location.

In 1857, he purchased the “Council Bluffs Bugle,” one of the leading journals of his party in the state. In 1859, he was the Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor but was defeated. In 1867, he was again elected to the Legislature.

He moved to Arkansas in 1881, where he died October 4, 1885.

From:

History of Iowa: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

By Benjamin F. Gue

Vol. IV

1903

The Knoxville, Iowa, Name Change

There was at least one citizen who did not like the name of Knoxville and that was Lysander W. Babbitt. At the time Iowa was admitted as a state in 1846, Babbitt was postmaster at Knoxville, and he came to the conclusion that Knoxville, Iowa, might become confused with Knoxville, Tennessee, or other towns of the same name, in the handling of the mail.

During the session of the first State Legislature, in January 1847, Babbitt happened to have business in Iowa City—then the capital of the state. While there, Babbitt took it upon himself to secure the passage of a bill* changing the name of the town to Oceola [sic].

Upon his return home, he informed David T. Durham, whom he had left in charge of the post office, of what had been done. It was in this way that the "news got out." The indignation at Babbitt's presumption and officiousness was universal. A petition was hurriedly circulated and was signed by nearly everybody in the town, asking for the repeal of the obnoxious act. It was then sent to Iowa City, by a special messenger, who turned it over to Iowa State Representative Simeon Reynolds, of Marion County.

Representative Reynolds, who had introduced the bill for the name change, lost no time in drafting and introducing a new bill to repeal the Act changing the name, and his influence, supported by the petition, was sufficient to bring about its passage.

A peculiar situation soon was discovered. Since both the petition and repealing bill didn't request the restoration of the original name of Knoxville, Marion County, technically, had a nameless seat of justice. However, after the joke had run for a few days, the Legislature amended the bill and the name of Knoxville was restored.

From:

History of Marion County, Iowa and its People

John W. Wright, Supervising Editor

W. A. Young, Associate

Vol. II

The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., Chicago 1915



Iowa State Capitol, Iowa City

***Bill reference from the January 1847 journal of the Iowa House of Representatives:**

House of Representatives

OF THE

General Assembly of the State of Iowa,

**BEGUN AND HELD AT THE CAPITOL, IN IOWA CITY, ON MONDAY, THE
THIRTIETH DAY OF NOVEMBER, A. D. 1846 ;**

Being the First Session under the Constitution of Government of the

State of Iowa.



BURLINGTON:

Printed at the Hawk-Eye Office.

—
1847.

Mr Reynolds, in pursuance of previous notice, asked, obtained leave, and introduced,

H. R. file, No. 66, A Bill for an act to change the name of Knoxville to that of Oceola,

The said bill was read the first time, and

On motion of Mr Reynolds,

Ordered, That the 42d rule be suspended, and that the bill be read a second and third time now;

The said bill was accordingly read a second and third time, passed and its title agreed to.

Ordered, That the Chief Clerk request the concurrence of the Senate in the said bill.

To view the biography of Representative Babbitt on the Iowa General Assembly website, click here:

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/legislator/legislatorAllYears?personID=5213>