

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE  
ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT OF  
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF  
IOWA, JUNE 21ST, 1867, PP. 3-95**

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An Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement of the State University of Iowa, June 21st, 1867, pp. 3-95 by Jr. Benton

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**JR. BENTON**

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

OF THE

STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA,

JUNE 21st, 1867,

BY

THOS. H. BENTON, JR.

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DAVENPORT:  
GAZETTE COMPANY, PRINTERS.  
1877.

A resolution, adopted by the Board of Trustees, June 21st, 1867 :

*Resolved*, That the thanks of this Board be tendered to Col. THOMAS H. BENTON, Jr., for his address this day delivered, on the history of the State University of Iowa, and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the same for the use of the Institution.

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The Board having decided at its last annual meeting to print the address, it has been carefully revised, and submitted to the criticism of several gentlemen, who are most familiar with the subject matter, and it is believed to be as nearly authentic as the sources of information, for the period it embraces, will admit. The accompanying map has been prepared from the United States surveys of *that date*, and is furnished free of expense to the Board.

THE AUTHOR.

September, 1876.

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Resolution adopted by the Board of Regents, June 20th, 1876 :

*Resolved*, That Messrs. RICHARDSON and CAMPBELL be appointed a committee to have printed the "Address of Col. Thos. H. Benton," now furnished the Board, in the hands of Prof. Parvin, being a "HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY," [1840-'67,] and to include with said publication the "Catalogue of former officers and graduates," [1855-'76,] by Prof. Leonard, and now in his hands: *Provided*, in the judgment of such committee, said publication can be made within the present means of the treasury for payment, and the number of copies and style of printing be in the discretion of said committee.

Said committee are also hereby authorized in their discretion to have reprinted the "old catalogues" (of the University,) [1855-'60,] now in the hands of Prof. Parvin, for the purpose of preserving the connected catalogue history of the University.

## ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND FACULTY, AND  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

By invitation of the Executive Committee and Faculty, the task devolves on me of presenting on the present occasion a Historical Sketch of the State University of Iowa. The subject furnishes no material for the gratification of classical aspirations, and is therefore the more compatible with my wishes and inclinations. It simply calls for well authenticated facts, and though these have been sought with more than ordinary care, some inaccuracies will doubtless be observed.

The history of governments, states and communities is seldom written while it is progressing, and often becomes so far obliterated by the lapse of time as to render it difficult for the historian, with any degree of accuracy, to recall it. Many interesting events are confided solely to memory, and a written narrative, derived from such a source, is as liable to mislead as to instruct posterity. In the preparation of this sketch written data has been used when it could be obtained, and information from other sources has been closely scrutinized.

Iowa was detached from Wisconsin by an act of Congress, approved June 12th, 1838, and constituted a separate Territorial Government. It was bounded on the north by the British Possessions; east by the Mississippi river to its source, and from thence by a line drawn due north to the northern boundary of the United States; south by the State of Missouri; and west by the White Earth and Missouri rivers. The sum of \$20,000 was appropriated from the national treasury, to be applied by the Governor and Legislative As-

sembly, for the erection of the necessary public buildings at such place as they might subsequently select for the seat of government.

Robert Lucas—ex-Governor of Ohio—was appointed first Governor of the Territory thus formed. He entered upon his official duties at Burlington, in the county of DesMoines, on the 15th day of August, 1838, and on the same day he issued a proclamation for an election of members of the Legislative Assembly, to be held on the second Monday in September, 1838.

The first Legislative Assembly of the Territory convened at Burlington, on the 12th day of November, 1838. They passed an act, approved January 21st, 1839, appointing Chauncy Swan, John Ronolds, and Robert Ralston, Commissioners to locate the permanent seat of government at the most eligible point within the limits of Johnson county, and to lay out a town on the ground selected, to be called "Iowa City." By the same act the Governor was authorized to apply to the general government for a donation of four sections of land on which to make the location, and by an act of Congress, approved March 3d, 1839, one section, instead of four, was donated for the purpose, to be selected by the Commissioners above named.

Johnson county was formed by an act of the Legislative Assembly of Wisconsin, approved December 21st, 1837, and was *organized* by an act passed during the special session held at Burlington, approved June 22d, 1838, the organization to date from July 4th, 1838, and Napoleon, on the Iowa river a few miles below Iowa City, was made the temporary county seat.

There was a reason for restricting the location of the seat of government to this county. It was the geographical center, from north to south, of the territory ceded to the United States by the confederated tribes of the Sac and Fox Indians of the Mississippi, under the treaties of September 21st, 1832, and October 21st, 1837, and as near the east and west geographical center of the future *State* of Iowa as the location could then be made—the boundary line established by



the treaty last named, between the inhabitants of the Territory and the indians, being immediately west of the county limits, where it remained until October 11th, 1842.

By the terms of the treaty first named, the indians made a reservation of four hundred square miles, to be located in equal portions on each bank of the Iowa river, extending from a point a few miles above its mouth to the boundary line of the ceded territory. This reservation, embracing a portion of the future county of Johnson, was relinquished by the treaty of September 28th, 1836, made by Henry Dodge, of Wisconsin, James W. Grimes officiating as Secretary. The Iowas had an undivided interest in a portion of the territory occupied by the Sacs and Foxes, which they claimed extended to this reservation; but by a general treaty made with them October 19th, 1838, they relinquished all right to their former possessions between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

The Commissioners met on the first day of May, 1839, at Napoleon, the place designated for their first meeting, and after a thorough examination, selected section 10, in township 79 north, of range 6 west of the fifth principal meridian, and subsequently subdivided it into town lots, as required by the law by which they were appointed. The plan of the survey, for its adaptation to health and convenience, is worthy of note.

A little west of the geographical center of the section, on the elevated grounds which overlook the Iowa river on the west, a square of ten acres, formed by lines running east and west, and north and south, and embracing quite a number of the original forest trees, was selected for the public buildings. Contiguous to the square, on either side, and parallel to it, is a street 100 feet wide extending through the section. Between the two streets running east and west, and equi-distant from them, is Iowa Avenue, 120 feet wide, extending from the square to the eastern extremity of the section, and west to the river. In like manner between the two streets running north and south, is Capitol street, 100 feet wide, extending from the square to the northern and southern limits of

the section respectively. From these streets as a basis, the survey is extended on a uniform scale, all the other streets being 80, and the alleys 20 feet wide, and intersecting each other at right angles. The lots are 80 feet front, by 150 feet in depth.

The capitol was located in the center of the square, and on the 4th day of July, 1840, the corner stone of the edifice was laid with appropriate ceremonies under the personal supervision of Gov. Lucas, who delivered an address on the occasion, Samuel C. Trowbridge officiating as Marshal of the day. The proceeds arising from the sale of the lots, and the appropriation made by Congress, were subsequently expended in its construction. Thus we have before us the "State University of Iowa," in embryo.

The act of Congress, of July 20th, 1840, making the University grant, provided:

"That the Secretary of the Treasury be, and he is hereby, authorized to set apart and reserve from sale, out of any of the public lands within the Territory of Iowa, to which the Indian title has been or may be extinguished, and not otherwise appropriated, a quantity of land, not exceeding two entire townships, for the use and support of a university within the said Territory, when it becomes a State, and for no other use or purpose whatsoever, to be located in tracts of not less than an entire section, corresponding with any of the legal divisions into which the public lands are authorized to be surveyed."

The Secretary of the Treasury appointed William W. Dodge, of Scott county, agent to make the selections. He selected section 5, in township 78 north, of range 3 east of the fifth principal meridian, and then removed from the Territory. The Legislative Assembly, impressed with the importance of having the selections completed while the choice lands remained vacant, adopted, February 15th, 1844, a series of resolutions on the subject, and requested our delegate in Congress, Augustus C. Dodge, to lay them before the Secretary of the Treasury, and ask the appointment of "two suitable persons, residing within the Territory, to select said lands at as early a day as practicable." Among the resolutions was the following:

"Resolved, That our delegate in Congress be requested to use his influence to have a law passed, to allow the Secretary of the Treasury to select the following tract of government land for the benefit of said University, to-wit: The south west quarter of section 25; the east half, and the south-west quarter of the south-east quarter of section 26; the north half of section 35; and the north-west quarter of section 36; all in township 72 north, of range 13 west of the fifth principal meridian, and in the cession made to the United States, under the treaty of October 11th, 1842, by the Sac and Fox Indians, within which tract of 640 acres the "Pattern Farm," near the old agency, cultivated for the benefit of the indians, is included."

This choice tract of land, then valuable, but now much more so, is in the immediate vicinity of the present town of Agency City, in Wapello county. The matter was fully presented and urged by our delegate at Washington, but none of the requests embodied in the resolutions were granted. The Assembly renewed their request for the appointment of an agent, by a joint resolution approved January 2d, 1846, which resulted in the appointment of John M. Whitaker, of Van Buren county, who selected the remainder of the grant, with the exception of 122 6-100 acres. In the early settlement of the country *timbered* lands were the great desideratum, which by more recent observation proved to be far less valuable than the upland prairie. Governed by this theory, then so generally prevalent, agents appointed to select University and school lands, made some selections which proved less valuable than they might otherwise have been.

An act was passed by the Legislative Assembly, approved February 12th, 1844, submitting to the people of the Territory the question of the formation of a State constitution, and providing for the election of delegates to a convention for that purpose, at the township elections in April following. The vote was in favor of the formation of a constitution, and the convention assembled at Iowa City, October 7th, 1844, and adopted the first State constitution on the first day of November, 1844. The schedule provided that a certified copy of it should be transmitted by the President of the convention to our Delegate in Congress, to be submitted by him to that body at as early a day as practicable, and also that it should be submitted, together with any conditions made by