

## Robert Lucas

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## NEW PUBLICATIONS.

*Robert Lucas, by John C. Parish in the Iowa Biographical Series, edited by Professor Benjamin F. Shambaugh and published by the Iowa State Historical Society. pp. 356.*

The author and editor have placed the State under lasting obligation by the presentation of this volume. The materials used are a large collection of private letters, happily preserved, extending over half a century, together with speeches, military orders and public records in Ohio, as well as in Iowa. The character of the work proves that these materials have been faithfully and intelligently used.

It would be difficult to select a man whose life more fitly and accurately represents and typifies the process of state-building in the Northwest. Born in Virginia in 1782, he begins public life in Ohio in 1803; an active member of the State militia previous to the war of 1812, he was a soldier throughout the war, holding the ranks of private, lieutenant, colonel, and brigadier-general. He was a candidate for Congress and was several times elected to the State Legislature, where he held the position of speaker in the upper House. Twice he was chosen Governor of Ohio. By a narrow margin he was defeated in his candidacy for the United States Senate at the close of his career as Governor in 1836. It was this disappointment in a cherished ambition which caused him to seek and obtain the position of Governor of the newly organized Territory of Iowa in 1837.

Robert Lucas was a member of the party of Jefferson and as such formed the habit of calling himself a Republican, a practice to which he adhered throughout his public career long after the name Democrat was generally substituted. He was chairman of the first national convention of his party held at Baltimore in 1832. Like Jefferson he was opposed to slavery and at the same time was opposed to the agitation of the subject. Yet when attention to the subject was forced upon the country by the events of the war with Mexico, Lucas with many other Democrats took the free-soil side and his last public act was to oppose the election of Franklin Pierce. To this end he allied himself with the Whig party in Iowa, and had he lived one year longer he would again have been a "Republican" in name. Thus in his own person he would have bridged over the gap between the Jeffersonian Republicanism and the new Republicanism which its enemies stigmatized as "black."

But Lucas was in many ways much closer to Jackson than to Jefferson. He strikingly resembled Jackson in personal appearance, in the set of his hair, in his orthography, and in many qualities of character. The stern, homely traits which contributed so much to the founding of civil institutions in the West were similar in the two men. It was natural that Lucas should be an ardent admirer and supporter of Jackson. His four years' tenure as Governor of Ohio coincides with the last four years of Jackson's Presidency. He supported the President in his opposition to nullification and to a national bank.

Robert Lucas's chief occupation and purpose in life was the service of the public in official and political relations. It would be difficult to name a life which more fittingly represents the elevating influence of politics during that stage of society when there was little surplus wealth and few vested interests. In the days of his youth Lucas was something of an anarchist. When the sheriff proposed to arrest him for reasons which he did not approve he resisted and so frightened the officer that he resigned. Another officer was appointed

and he also resigned. Finally, when officers were found with nerve enough to incarcerate the young culprit, he sought to stir up his friends to come to his rescue by means of a letter in which he described the officers of the law as "The dam raskels that mobbed me." These youthful conflicts laid the foundation for lifelong resentments which lent a personal zest to his political conflicts. Yet it is interesting to observe that the responsibilities of office overcame the spirit of anarchy and that through many trying positions Lucas exhibited remarkable judgment and self-control while strictly maintaining law and order. Political responsibility developed the true man.

Among the vices prevalent in the settlements of the West were intemperance and gambling. Lucas's father-in-law was a tavernkeeper, and, according to the customs of the day, a dispenser of intoxicants. Our future Governor had, therefore, abundant opportunities to familiarize himself with the evils associated with the business. As a supporter of the law he was habitually arrayed against intemperance and gambling. He identified himself with the early temperance movements in Ohio, and when he became Governor of the Territory of Iowa he was already a veteran in the cause. In his first message to the Legislature of the Territory he stigmatizes intemperance and gambling as the two vices which may be considered the source of almost all others. "They have produced more murders, robberies and individual distress than all other crimes put together. . . . Could you in your wisdom devise ways and means to check the progress of gambling and intemperance in the Territory, you will perform an act which would immortalize your names and entitle you to the gratitude of posterity." The Governor followed up this recommendation by declaring that he would not knowingly appoint to office one who was addicted to these practices. Iowa doubtless owes not a little to its first Governor for its continuous high moral stand in respect to temperance.

Equally significant and important is the relation of Governor Lucas to the cause of education. Having been himself deprived the benefits of school training, he was as Governor, both in Ohio and in Iowa, insistent in his demands for a liberal provision for a system of free public schools. This was indeed but the carrying into effect of the principles outlined in the ordinances for the government of the Northwest Territory; but had it not been for men like Lucas, who with persistence and determination insisted upon practical steps for the creation of a public school system, the provisions of the ordinance would have remained a dead letter.

Interesting episodes in the life of Governor Lucas are found in two notable boundary disputes between a State and a Territory of the United States. While he was Governor of Ohio the long-standing disagreement between the State and the Territory of Michigan assumed a belligerent form and was finally terminated by an act of Congress which involved the recognition of the State of Michigan. In this dispute Lucas upheld the dignity of the State against a resisting Territory. The controversy involved the district of the city of Toledo and a suitable lake harbor for the terminus of the Ohio canal. Ohio made good its claim and secured the city.

The dispute between the State of Missouri and the Territory of Iowa was strikingly similar in many of its details. In both cases the difference arose on account of inaccurate surveys and ambiguous language used in describing the boundaries of the State at the time of its admission to the Union. There was no serious conflict until years afterwards when the waste lands became occupied, and the two governments began to exercise authority over the same ground. In 1838,

during the second year of Mr. Lucas's tenure as Governor of Iowa, the quarrel with Missouri assumed an acute form. It now became his duty to maintain the rights of a Territory against the claims of a State. In the case of Michigan the people of the Territory for a time repudiated the authority of the United States and set up an independent government of their own. Mr. Lucas was careful not to make this mistake. He secured the aid of the co-operation and authority of the general government at every stage in the excited controversy, so that the quarrel should at no time appear as an affair of the Territory, but rather as that of the United States itself. The Iowa dispute was not finally settled until a State government had displaced the Territorial organization and suit was brought in the Supreme Court of the United States. That court supported the claim of Iowa. In both disputes, therefore, our Governor made good his position.

It would be difficult to find a book which more aptly illustrates than does this one the close relation of history to biography. The history of the life of Robert Lucas involves the political history of the State of Ohio from the beginning of the century to 1837, and the history of Iowa to the middle of the century or to the death of Lucas in 1853. Every chapter is full of interest in that it adds the personal touch to the interesting and important facts entering into the process of state-building in the West.

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JESSE MACY.

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*A History of the County of Montgomery, from the Earliest Days to 1905. By W. W. Merritt, Sr. Published by the Express Publishing Company, Red Oak, Iowa. 1905.*

Those who have in any way been interested in the history of localities in this State have doubtless learned something of the faulty character of most of our county histories. They have been extremely slipshod affairs, which few would purchase for their libraries. True, there are exceptions, but out of the entire number, the works of real merit may be counted on the fingers of one hand. A large part of many volumes is taken up with general history of some sort, having no reference to any particular county. This matter is used as a preface to all the volumes issued by one publishing house. The biographical matter, often accompanied by portraits of the local magnates, is usually compiled by illiterate fellows who are out of a job and are hired to procure answers to a certain set of questions because they will work for very low wages. A price is set upon each sketch and portrait and only those who pay liberally are thus honored. One of these peripatetic biographers once called upon Senator James Harlan with a proposition to immortalize him with a portrait and sketch of his life. "Do you propose to include Presley Saunders in your book?" queried the Senator. "No, Sir!" responded the biographer. "He is dead, and there seems to be no one to pay for these things." "Then," said the Senator, "please leave me out. I do not wish to appear in any history of Henry county which omits the name of Presley Saunders," and the biographer went his way. Presley Saunders was one of the earliest settlers and merchants of Henry county, a good man whose memory is revered by all the aged people of that region, and a brother of Alvin Saunders who was later on Governor and United States Senator from Nebraska. He was one of the most important factors in settling Henry county.

But a better day has arrived touching the qualities of Iowa county histories. This work on the rich and beautiful county of Montgomery

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