

10-1-1924

The Naming of Iowa

Benjamin F. Shambaugh

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)



This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](#).

Recommended Citation

Shambaugh, Benjamin F. "The Naming of Iowa." *The Palimpsest* 5 (1924), 370-372.

Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol5/iss10/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

The Naming of Iowa

The Commonwealth of Iowa was named some ten years before it was born. On this point the records are clear and the story simple.

It was in 1836 that a lieutenant of United States dragoons, by the name of Albert M. Lea, published a small book entitled *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory*. In the pages of this book and on the map which accompanied it the author designated that part of the original Territory of Wisconsin which lay west of the Mississippi River as the "Iowa District". Two years later, when the original Territory of Wisconsin was divided, the Iowa District was erected into an independent Territory and christened the "Territory of Iowa". And when in 1846 a State was carved out of the Territory of Iowa, it too was called "Iowa". Thus the line of descent of the name Iowa as originally proposed by Lieutenant Lea is clear and direct — from the Iowa District, through the Territory of Iowa, to the State of Iowa.

But where did Lieutenant Lea get the name "Iowa" and how did he come to apply it to the area that was later to become the Commonwealth of Iowa? The answer to this question is of peculiar interest since prior to the publication of *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory* the country immediately

west of the Mississippi River had been called "Scott's Purchase" or the "Black Hawk Purchase". In the opening chapter of his book Lieutenant Lea tells us in language that is unmistakable that the name "Iowa" was taken from the Iowa River which on account of its "extent and beauty" seemed to him to give "character" to most of the country through which it passed.

When and how the river flowing into the Mississippi from the west came to be designated as Iowa or Ioway is unknown: that the name of this river was taken from the Ioway tribe of Indians who had inhabited portions of the Iowa country is in the light of present historical knowledge simply one possible explanation.

It is interesting to recall that in later years Lieutenant Lea was much concerned about the spelling of the name Iowa: mature reflection had led him to the conviction that the letter "y" should be added. And so he expressed regret that the name was spelled Iowa instead of Ioway.

HAWKEYE

The cognomen (sobriquet or nickname) "Hawkeye" or "Hawkeyes" as applied to Iowa or Iowans was first formally suggested by James G. Edwards in the Fort Madison *Patriot*, a newspaper issued under date of March 24, 1838. David Rorer, a pioneer lawyer of Lee County, claimed to have made the suggestion to Mr. Edwards. Later this cogno-

men was approved by such prominent men of the Territory as Robert Lucas, Joseph Williams, William B. Conway, Theodore S. Parvin, Ver Planck Van Antwerp, and Jesse Williams. In 1839 it was used in a series of letters published in the newspapers of the Territory, and by common consent it came to be accepted without formal adoption.

The significance of the cognomen "Hawkeye" is not so clear as its origin. Mr. Edwards thought its adoption would "rescue from oblivion a memento, at least, of the name of the old chief [Black Hawk]." Popularly, the name as applied to the people of Iowa suggests the vigilance, watchfulness, and keenness of vision of the hawk — a bird found everywhere in the Iowa country.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH