

PLUM GROVE



**Home of Iowa's First
Territorial Governor
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PLUM GROVE

HOME OF ROBERT LUCAS

FIRST GOVERNOR OF THE TERRITORY OF IOWA

Plum Grove, one of Iowa's most significant historical sites, was the home of Robert Lucas, first governor of the Territory of Iowa from 1838 to 1841. It was built by Lucas in 1844, and remained his home until his death on February 7, 1853. Plum Grove may well be called the "Mount Vernon of Iowa" in honor of the able and always colorful Robert Lucas.

Robert Lucas was born of Quaker ancestors who settled in Pennsylvania in 1679. His father was born in the wilds of western Virginia, where young Lucas first saw the light of day at Shepherdstown on April 1, 1781. His early schooling consisted largely of mathematics and surveying, and proved invaluable when he moved to the Northwest Territory in 1800.

Despite his Quaker ancestry, Robert Lucas was distinctly a military man. In 1803, he received a commission from the governor of Ohio to enlist volunteers for the Ohio militia. From that beginning, he rose in rank until he became a major general in the militia and a colonel in the United States Army.

When the War of 1812 broke out, Lucas helped organize a battalion of volunteers from his militia. He served as a detached officer in General Hull's disastrous campaign around Detroit. His daily journal of that disgraceful fiasco reveals his courage and resourcefulness, whether employed as a scout or in the heat of battle.

Lucas was also schooled in the ways of politics. In 1805, he was appointed justice of the peace for Union Township in Scioto County. In 1808, he was elected to the lower house of the Ohio Legislature. Between 1814 and 1830, he served all but two years as state senator. Nominated for governor by the democrats in 1830, he was defeated but, having served meanwhile in the House of Representatives, he was again nominated for Governor of Ohio in 1832. This time he emerged triumphant.

A more significant partisan honor for Lucas was his selection as temporary and permanent chairman of the National Democratic Convention at Baltimore. He was re-elected Governor of Ohio in 1834 - an unusual tribute in the Buckeye State. His most notable service to Ohio during his four years as chief executive was his victory in the Ohio-Michigan boundary dispute.

Lucas was appointed governor of the Iowa Territory by President Martin Van Buren in 1838. On November 12, he read his first message to the Territorial Legislature recommending such things as legislation on education, the compilation of a criminal code, the suppression of gambling and intemperance, the organization of an efficient militia, and strict economy in financial matters. Subsequent messages followed the same pattern.

During his first two years in office, Lucas courageously faced many foes. The first year was marred by bitter internal controversy with the Legislative Assembly. The second produced a stormy battle with Missouri over the southern boundary of the Iowa Territory. Lucas won this so-called Missouri Boundary War (or Honey War) just as he had won the Michigan-Ohio Boundary War.

His last year as governor of the Iowa Territory was comparatively calm, marked by only one memorable event, the laying of the cornerstone of the new Stone Capitol at Iowa City on July 4, 1840. The election of a whig president led to the removal of Lucas in 1841. Many Iowans regretted the loss of his strong hand from the pilot wheel.

Governor Lucas was married twice - to Elizabeth Brown in 1810 and, on her death, to Friendly Sumner in 1816. His home in Ohio was named Friendly Grove in honor of his second wife. When Robert and Friendly decided to spend the remainder of their lives in Iowa, Mr. Lucas purchased 80 acres in March of 1844, an area lying just a little south of the southern boundary of Iowa City, now Court Street. Here, Governor and Mrs. Lucas built a home patterned after their old residence of Friendly Grove. The new house was surrounded by a thicket of plum trees, so the place was appropriately named Plum Grove.

The Lucas house was constructed of soft red brick manufactured locally at Iowa City. The main part of the house consisted of a two-story structure about 30 x 30 feet in dimensions, with a one-story kitchen 14 x 14 feet in size projected on the south. Plum Grove had seven main rooms, four downstairs and three upstairs, each with a fireplace. The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Iowa assisted in furnishing the house with furniture appropriate to the period when Governor Lucas lived there.

In this home, Robert and Friendly Lucas lived for almost a decade. With them lived a daughter, Mary, who remained unmarried, and two sons, Edward W. and Robert S. Governor Lucas died at Plum Grove in February 1853 and was buried in Oakland Cemetery in Iowa City.

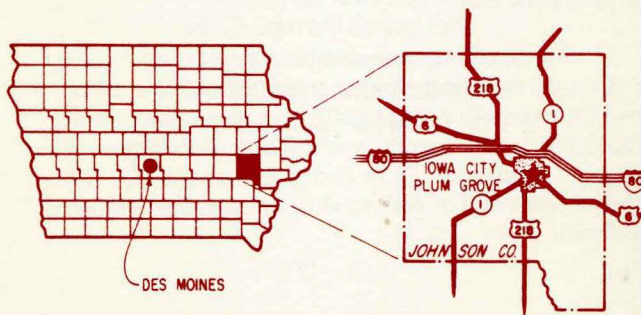
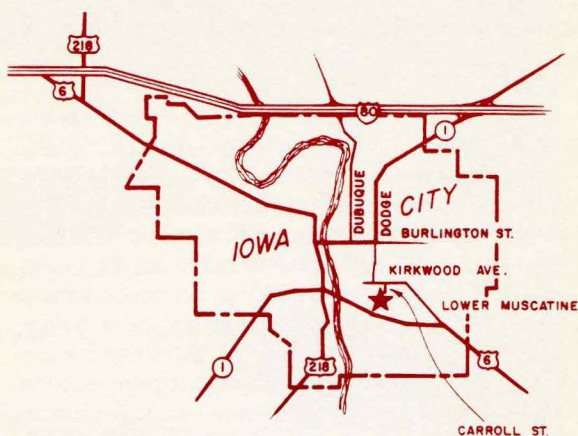
Plum Grove passed through several owners before Mr. and Mrs. William Hughes bought it in 1925. In 1940, George D. Koser and William J. Petersen conferred with the owner's relative to a proposed purchase of the property and acquired, for the nominal sum of one dollar, a 90-day option to purchase the Lucas house and four acres for \$3,600, or the house and 10 acres for \$4,500. Mr. Petersen then appeared before the Interim Committee and urged the purchase of Plum Grove. The Interim Committee agreed to purchase the home, but unfortunately limited the land acquired to only 4.2 acres. The property was then turned over to the Iowa Conservation Commission (now the Department of Natural Resources.) Restoration proceeded slowly, hindered by World War II, but on November 2, 1946, the Governor Lucas Home, or Plum Grove, was dedicated as a Historic Site.

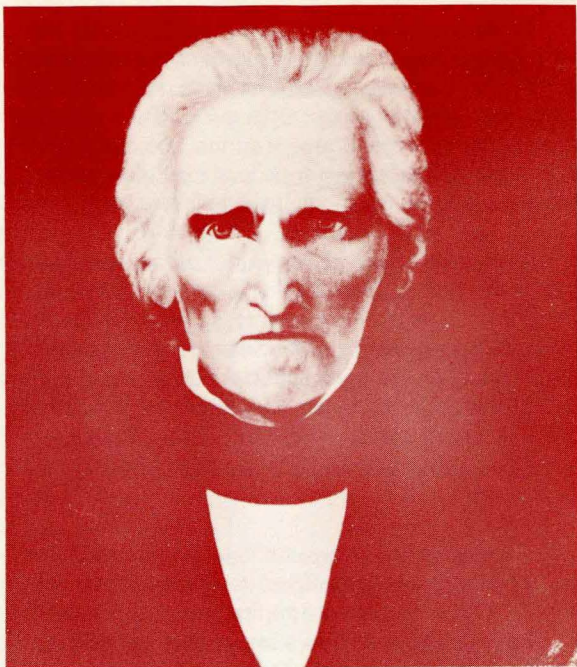
The authentic furnishings of the Lucas house have been contributed by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA) in the state of Iowa, the Lucas family, friends, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Plum Grove is managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in cooperation with NSCDA.

Information furnished by Mr. William J. Petersen.

Plum Grove is open from mid-April through October, Wednesday through Sunday. Tours are given from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. No tours after 4:30 p.m.

For special group appointments, call Plum Grove (319)337-6846.





Robert Lucas served as the first governor of the Territory of Iowa from 1838 to 1841.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources offers equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, or handicap. If you feel you have been discriminated against, please contact us.

A Park User Permit is not required at Plum Grove.