

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

**February 29, 2012**

**THIS WEEK:**

**TERRITORIAL STATUS 1803-1846**

**BACKGROUND:**

Congress finally decided that Iowa might be admitted as a state, but only if the boundaries were changed. These new boundaries were usually called the Nicollet boundaries, after a famous surveyor.

The people of Iowa did not like the new boundaries. They voted on the constitution twice, but would not accept it. Then on May 4, 1846, another convention met at Iowa City. This convention debated a long time about what they should put in the constitution.

After they had drawn up a constitution, it was sent to Washington. Congress changed the boundaries to those Iowa now has. The people of Iowa accepted the constitution with the new boundaries and began their state government. On December 28, 1846, President James K. Polk signed the bill which admitted Iowa as the twenty-ninth state in the Union. (Excerpt from *Stories of Iowa for Boys and Girls*, Chapter XXXIV, "How Iowa Became a State," 1931.)

# Territorial Status 1803-1846

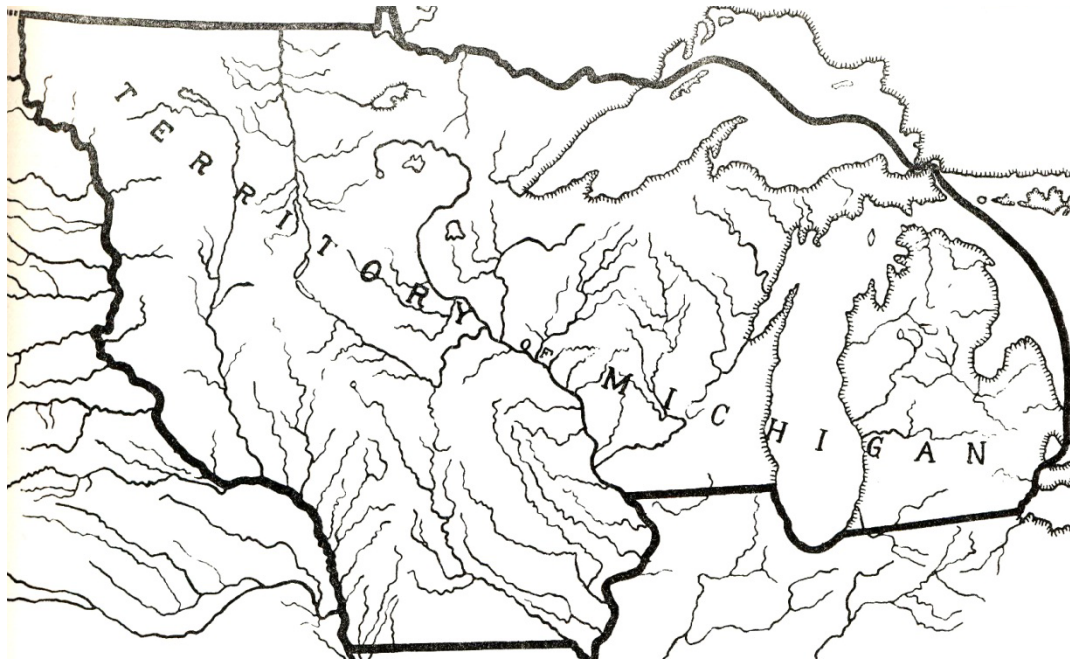
(Verbatim from *The Story of Iowa, the Progress of an American State*, Volume 1, by William J. Petersen)

The development of Iowa from a wilderness peopled only by a few thousand nomadic Indians, to a State in 1846, required nine steps or territorial periods. These territorial steps may be listed briefly as follows:

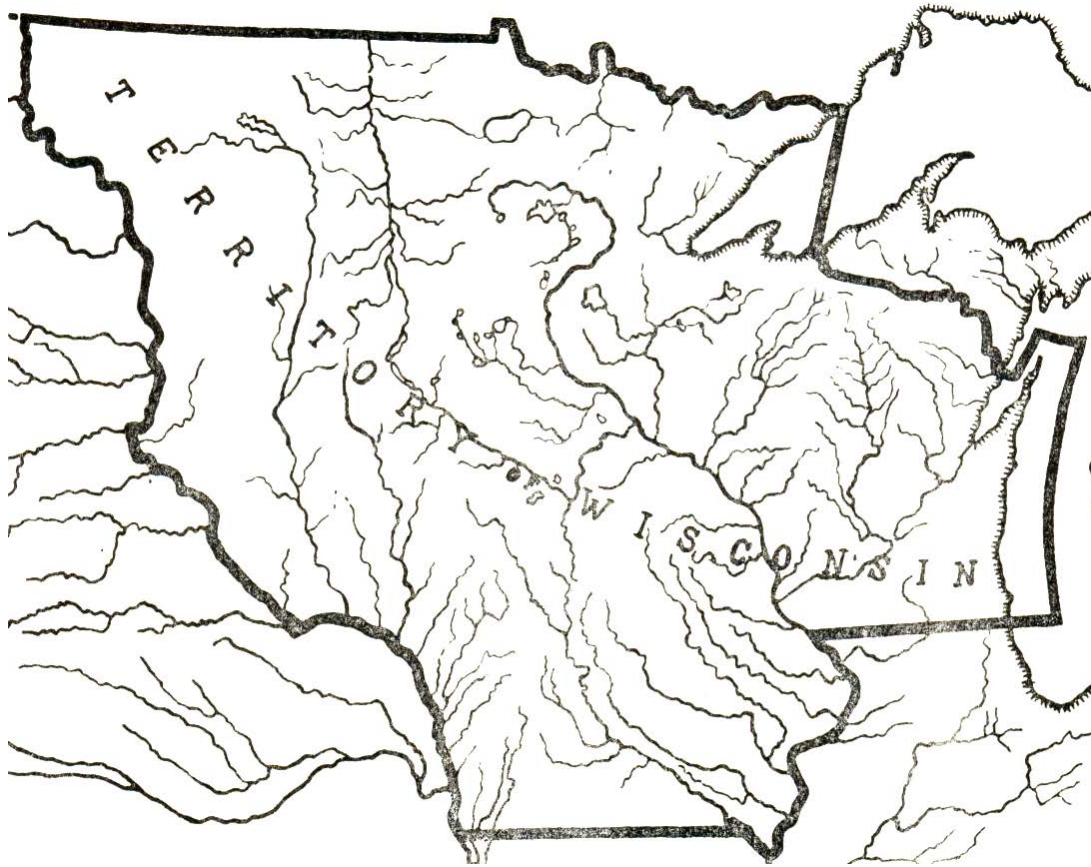
- Iowa in the Louisiana Purchase—1803-1804.
- Iowa in the District of Louisiana—1804-1805.  
(Under the Governor and Judges of Indiana Territory.)
- Iowa in the Territory of Louisiana—1805-1812.
- Iowa in the Territory of Missouri—1812-1821.
- Iowa a political orphan (No governmental jurisdiction)—1821-1834.
- Iowa in the Territory of Michigan—1834-1836.
- Iowa in the Territory of Wisconsin—1836-1838.
- Territory of Iowa—1838-1846.
- Iowa becomes a State—1846.

## Iowa in Territory of Michigan

The Territory of Michigan had three governors—William Hull, 1805-1813; Lewis Cass, a man distinguished for his very broad statesmanship in a most difficult time, 1813-1832; and Steven T. Mason, 1832-1837. It was under Mason that the Iowa country was attached to Michigan Territory, and became known as the Iowa District. During the Michigan period the Iowa District was divided into two counties, Dubuque and Demoiné. Courts were established in these counties and members were chosen for the Michigan Legislative Council in October of 1835.



**Michigan Territory**  
(State Historical Society of Iowa)

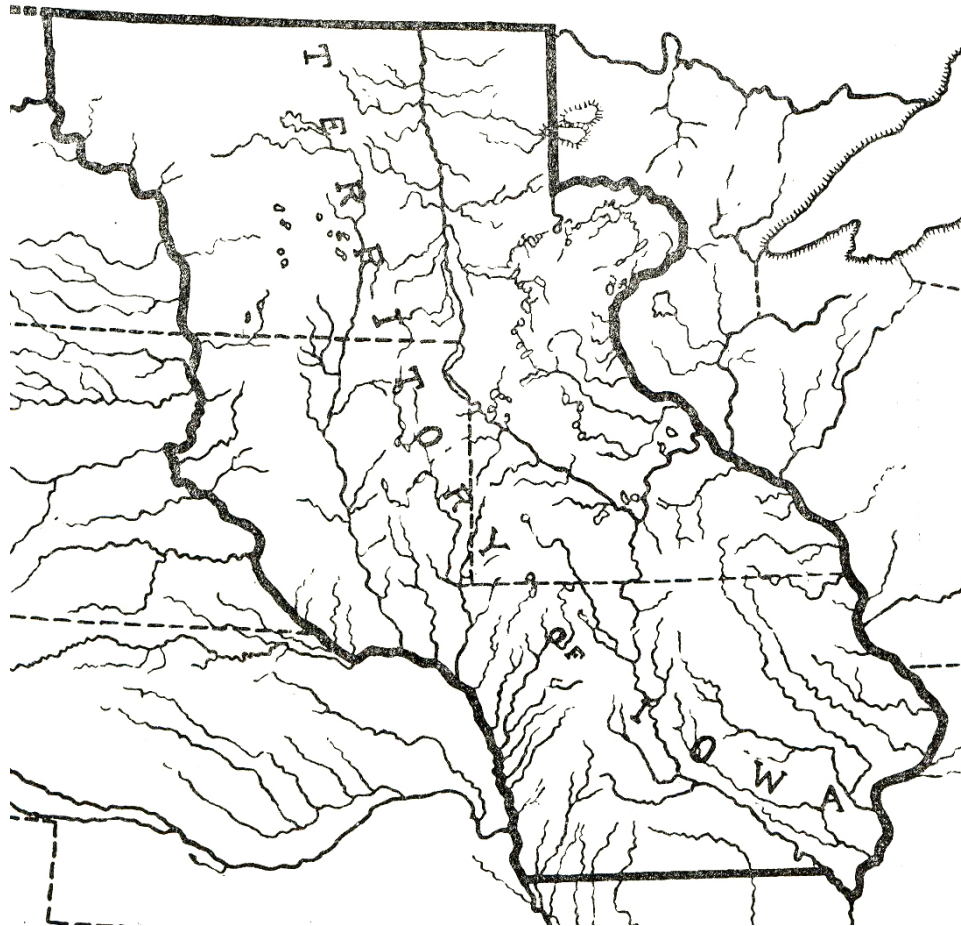


**Wisconsin Territory**  
(State Historical Society of Iowa)

### **Iowa in Wisconsin Territory**

On April 2, 1836, a bill was introduced into Congress to establish the Territory of Wisconsin. Michigan was seeking statehood and provision must be made for the government of the remainder of the sprawling territory outside the new state. New territorial organization was welcome.

Representatives from the remote parts of Michigan Territory lived as much as five hundred miles from Detroit, the capital, and frequently, it was impossible in the winter for them to attend sessions of the legislature. Laws were sometimes passed at Detroit and put into effect months before copies of them were received in the extremities of the Territory. Everyone realized that Michigan Territory must be broken up. The crisis came in the autumn of 1835 when the people of that part of Michigan which is now the present state formed a state government and adopted a state constitution. Congress did not at once act to admit Michigan and legally the old Territory remained in existence, but the citizens of Michigan went ahead and put their State government into operation, abandoning the rest of the Territory. The citizens of the area outside of the boundaries claimed by Michigan soon clamored for a Territorial government of their own, to be named Wisconsin. The State of Michigan was formally admitted in January, 1837.



**Iowa Territory**  
(State Historical Society of Iowa)

### **Van Buren Signs Bill Creating Territory of Iowa**

On June 12, 1838, President Van Buren approved the establishment of the Territory of Iowa and the Organic Act became effective on July 4, 1838. The Act was based largely on the form used for the Territory of Wisconsin but was more democratic in its general provisions. The Governor, however, remained the really powerful figure for, as a presidential appointee, he enforced the laws, served as commander-in-chief of the militia, was superintendent of Indian affairs, commissioned military officers, granted pardons, held an absolute veto over the legislature, and appointed all inferior judicial officers, justices, sheriffs, and surveyors.

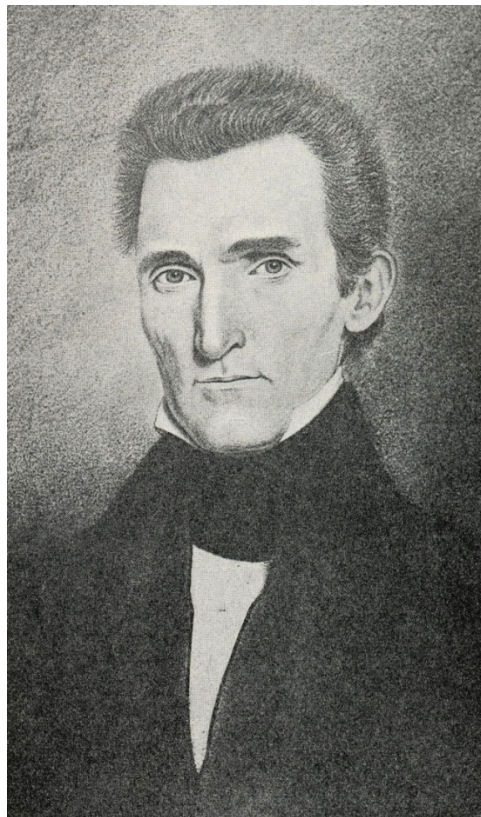
The legislative power was vested in the Governor and the Legislative Assembly, consisting of a Council of thirteen members elected biennially, and a House of Representatives with twenty-six members elected annually. The Assembly met annually but no session was to exceed seventy-five days. The members were to be elected from districts by qualified voters. This legislature had the right to treat all "rightful subjects." Specifically, it acted on the establishment of local governments, created business and public corporations, maintained the institution of private property, ruled on the fulfilment of contracts, and guaranteed personal security. Its acts were restricted by a short bill of rights, which conferred upon the residents of

Iowa all the rights and immunities heretofore granted to inhabitants of Wisconsin Territory which in turn came from the Northwest Ordinance. The other major officers of the Territory resembled those of Wisconsin Territory and suffrage was given to "every free white male citizen of the United States above the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been an inhabitant of said Territory at the time of organization."

This Organic Act not only provided better government for Iowa and hence hastened its development, but it established precedents which influenced the development of other States west of the Mississippi.

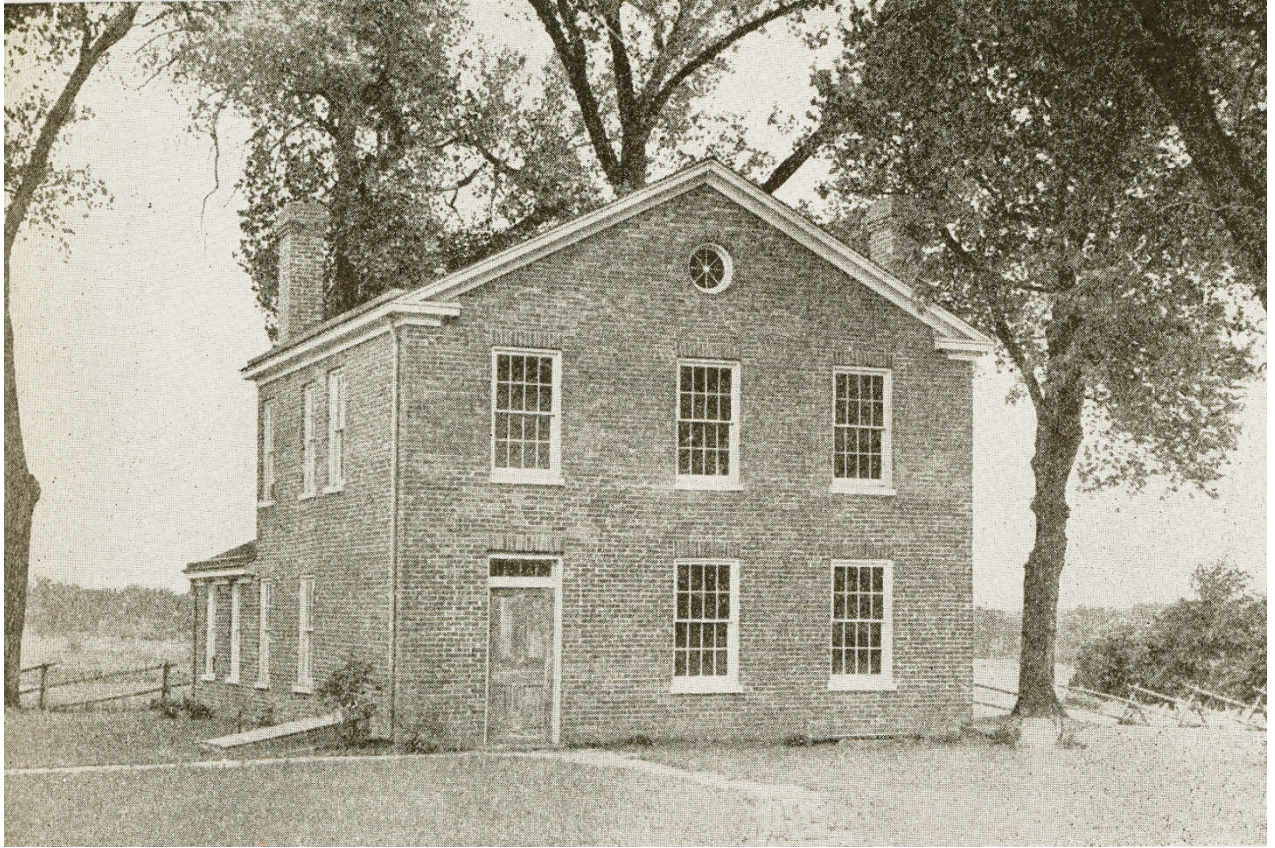
### **Robert Lucas Named First Governor**

President Van Buren asked General Henry Atkinson to serve as Governor of the new Territory of Iowa but the general refused the proffer and the appointment was given to Robert Lucas of Ohio. Lucas, who was born in what is now Shepherdstown, Virginia [now West Virginia], on April 1, 1781, moved to the Northwest Territory in 1800 and lived in the Scioto Valley of Ohio. After service in the War of 1812, he served in both houses of the Ohio legislature and then served two terms as governor of Ohio. Appointed Governor of the Territory of Iowa by Van Buren in July of 1838, he served until he was removed from office by President Harrison in 1841. He made his home at Plum Grove near Iowa City. . . .



**Robert Lucas**

(State Historical Society of Iowa)  
(Iowa Territorial Governor – 1838-1841)  
(b. April 1, 1781 – d. February 7, 1853)



**Plum Grove (Iowa City)**  
(State Historical Society of Iowa)