

**HISTORY OF TOWNSHIP  
GOVERNMENT  
IN IOWA. 1914**

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History of Township Government in Iowa. 1914 by Clarence Ray Aurner

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**TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT IN IOWA**



**HISTORY OF  
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IN IOWA**

**BY  
CLARENCE RAY AURNER**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IOWA CITY IOWA  
1914**

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### AUTHOR'S PREFACE

To discover the sources of the laws under which the township in Iowa was organized, to trace the changes in these township laws, to sketch the scope and character of township administration from its inception down to the present time, and to indicate some of the conceptions concerning the functions of the township that appear to have prevailed in Iowa, constitute the aim of the pages that follow.

In order to accomplish the objects of this research reference has necessarily been made to the original jurisdictions in which the township was first recognized as well as to those having an immediate connection with Iowa. Some reference has also been made to other jurisdictions in which a modified form of township organization has appeared. A survey of the laws from the establishment of the Territory of the Northwest in 1787 to the present time, in so far as they appear to relate directly to the history of local government in Iowa, has been undertaken; and incidentally the various types of township organization have been mentioned.

In the present study it seems necessary (1) to connect historically the township as established in Iowa with the primitive New England group forming an independent congregation where boundaries were not only indefinite

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but decidedly irregular as contrasted with the regularity of the government survey; (2) to indicate the beginnings of the New York system in which the township governed by a selected body was superior to the county organization; (3) to point out the plan of Pennsylvania in which the township powers were very limited, the county being superior; and finally, to illustrate the mixed type of the western States. Again, the government survey of 1785 is recognized as determining the "geographic", or "congressional", or "original surveyed" township, which is fundamental in establishing all future limits in land description and is generally the basis of the civil township, with which the school township usually coincides. Each of these three kinds of townships — the civil township, the congressional township, and the school township — has a history of its own to which some reference is necessarily made.

In assembling the data from the various sources that only has been retained which appeared to have a direct bearing upon the subject. At the same time it has been necessary in some instances to make prominent mention of the county in order to make clearer the relation of the township to the higher units of government. The overlapping activities of these two administrative areas are such that a complete separation is both impracticable and undesirable.

It is from the original acts of legislative bodies and from the original records of local administrative agencies in Iowa that the greater part of the data for this study

has been secured. The citations in the *Notes and References* will indicate specifically the sources, which include chiefly the laws of the Territory of the Northwest, the statutes of Ohio and of the Territories of Michigan and Wisconsin, and the laws of Iowa from the organization of the Territory in 1838 to the present time. The county records in six of the earlier counties of Iowa have been examined; while secondary material has been used to some extent for illustrative purposes. Practically all of the sources, except local records, have been found in the library of The State Historical Society of Iowa.

It was at the suggestion of Dr. Benjamin F. Shambaugh, Superintendent of The State Historical Society of Iowa, that this research on the Iowa township was undertaken. For his personal direction and suggestions during the time occupied in research and for his critical reading and editing of the manuscript grateful acknowledgments are due. The index was compiled by Mr. Jacob Van der Zee.

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