

now sent members—Walworth, Waukesha, Rock and Racine, all in the southeastern part of the territory. The southeast had outdistanced the lead region, and its population was predominantly transplanted Yankee, with an increasing assortment of Germans and Irish. As in 1836, not one member of the Legislature was a native of Wisconsin, and it was still predominantly Democratic in political allegiance. The building in which it met had also changed. The entrance was embellished with an eight-column piazza and a balustrade. The basement, long the domicile of the village's hogs, was deepened for the storage of firewood and later for offices. Workers had mowed the hazel brush and grubbed the oak stumps, replacing them with maples and elms.

Through the early 1840s Governor Doty had lobbied for statehood, but his had been a lonely voice. So long as Congress paid the territory's debts and financed its road and harbor improvements, the citizenry had little use for the responsibilities of state sovereignty. The Democrats' return to national power in 1845 changed all that, however. President Polk, reviving the Jacksonian tradition of limited federal involvement in the economy, vetoed bills for inter-



*A prairie oak opening south of Madison, 1832. Pencil drawing by Adolph Hoeffler.*

nal improvements, and the money for Wisconsin's roads and harbors dried up. Statehood, which entailed a bonus from Congress of 500,000 acres in federal lands, as well as a section in each township for the maintenance of schools, suddenly seemed more inviting. Congress was more receptive as well. The outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846 exacerbated sectional tensions, and Northerners were eager to add another free state to balance the recent admissions of Florida and Texas.

In the spring of 1846 the Legislature authorized a popular referendum on statehood, which was overwhelmingly approved. That summer Congress obligingly passed an Enabling Act, which permitted Wisconsin to hold a convention and draft a state constitution. The act set the western boundary at a line drawn due south from the western end of Lake Superior to the St. Croix River and thence along the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers, the present boundary with Minnesota.

The convention that met in the fall of 1846 to draft a constitution for the new state was heavily Democratic, and it reflected that party's Jacksonian biases. A draft submitted by Moses Strong prohibited banks and extended the suffrage to white males only. However, it did allow immigrants who had applied for citizenship to vote, and it granted married women a right to own property independently of their husbands, a reform that was far in advance of most other states. These provisions excited spirited debate, but all were retained, although the question of Negro suffrage was submitted to the voters separately. Each region of the territory reacted differently to these liberal/democratic issues, but enough opposition surfaced to defeat the constitution, 14,000 in favor to 20,000 against. Negro suffrage went down to defeat by a similar margin.

A second convention in 1848 was more discreet. Its constitution omitted any mention of women or blacks, and it left the question of voting rights to the Legislature, subject to public approval. The Legislature was also allowed to charter banks, subject to popular referendum, but it was prohibited from incurring debts for the construction of roads or canals. On the other hand, the constitution did embrace the concept of state-supported public education, a reform



that had only recently been introduced among the states of the Northeast. Voters approved the new document by an overwhelming majority. The principal opposition came from an antislavery party, born of the Mexican War, which objected to the "white male" restriction on voting.

1848, the year in which Wisconsin entered the Union, was a momentous one in world history. It was a year of revolutions in Europe that sent a stream of political refugees to the United States and to Wisconsin. It was the year in which Karl Marx published the Communist Manifesto, inaugurating a century and a half of ideological warfare between capitalism and communism. The treaty signed that year that ended the War with Mexico brought into the American orbit the Southwest from Texas to California, and completed the republic's march to the Pacific. The discovery of gold in California triggered a rush of "forty-niners" that populated California and breathed new life into the sectional struggle between North and South. The pace of events in 1848 was truly dizzying, and the new state would soon be swept into the maelstrom.



## Travelers' Guide

### Early Settlement

**Blackhawk Ridge Recreation Area**, Highway 78 northwest of Madison. Historic site on the hilltop from which Chief Black Hawk directed the 1832 battle.

**City of Prairie du Chien**, Highway 35/18; (608) 326-8555. Site of an important Indian settlement and outpost for the American Fur Trading Co. Historic markers identify the town's old homes and other historic buildings.

**Doty Cabin**, 701 Lincoln St., Neenah; (414) 751-4744. Reconstruction of the home of James Duane Doty, Wisconsin's second territorial governor.

**First Capitol State Park**, County G north of Belmont; (608) 987-2122. Site of the 1836 capital of the Wisconsin Territory, with the original Council House and Supreme Court buildings.