

2. *The Clarksville Conventions, 1785, 1787.*

The Anglo-Saxon instinct for government has often been commented upon. Nowhere has it shown itself more strongly than in the progress of the settlement of the United States. Frontier communities, far removed from other settlements, have adopted sufficient governmental organization to suppress disorder and to protect the rights of their citizens. One of the most noteworthy efforts of this kind occurred in Clarksville. This was a settlement formed in southern Indiana, near the falls of the Ohio. I am indebted to Col. Reuben T. Durrett, Louisville, Kentucky, for a sketch of its history. The town was incorporated by the legislature of Virginia in October, 1783, and provision was made for laying out its lots and giving it governing trustees. (Hening, *Statutes at Large*, XI. 336.) The first meeting of the trustees was held at Louisville, August 7, 1784. George Rogers Clark was chairman of the meeting. The act of the Virginia legislature was accepted by the trustees' assigning lots in the town in accordance with its provisions. The town is still in existence and consists of about one thousand acres of land. General Clark believed that it would become a great city, but it has never been of much importance. The convention which framed the accompanying constitution contained twelve members; the convention which amended it contained nine. As the records of the meeting state that these were a majority of all the inhabitants of the town, the population could not have exceeded twenty-three in 1785 and seventeen in 1787. A convention quite similar to the one in Clarksville is discussed in Burnet, *Notes on the Early Settlement of the Northwestern Territory*, 57.¹ The following papers are from the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Draper MSS., Wm. Clark Papers, I. 103, 105.

CARL EVANS BOYD.

Resolves of a Convention, held at Clarksville on thursday the 27th day of January 1785

At a Convention held at Clarksville on thursday the 27th of January 1785, by the Inhabitants of the Town for the purpose of forming some Laws or regulations to remedy sundry grievances which the said Inhabitants have hitherto lain under. Present, Valentine Thomas Dalton, John Jackson, John Vaughn, Robert George, William Barget, Jonas Scoggin, John McFerson, Francis Holland, John Nelson, Christopher Hunt, Mordecai Richards and William Clark, being a majority of those actually settled in the said Town of Clarksville,—

¹ See also Professor Turner's remarks, *AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*, I. 78.

The House proceeds to the election of a Chairman when Mr. W^m Clark was elected,—

1st Resolved, that whereas the Honb^{le} the Congress of the united States have not as yet adopted any mode or plan for the Regulation and Government of this our infant Settlement, and it is become necessary to form certain Regulations for the better security of our Lives and property ; The Inhabitants of this Town have a right to assemble from time to time and enact suitable Laws to maintain peace and tranquility among the People ; and which may not be incompatible with the Constitution of the united States, or the Resolutions of Congress.—

2^d Resolved that some Tribunal be established, with power to summon parties, and hear and Determine all matters of Controversy and award punishment ; and whose judgment shall be final.—

3^d Resolved that whereas this Convention, for want of time and the assistance of able men, cannot at present form such and so many Laws as may be necessary to direct the Tribunal to be established by this Convention, in their proceedings in every particular ; The said Tribunal so established shall in giving Judgment, govern themselves as near as circumstances will admit, by the Laws of Virginia though they shall not be obliged to empanel Juries and regulate their proceedings by the sundry forms there laid down which would be attended with difficulty and trouble, but shall proceed and determine Controversies, and regulate their proceedings in such a manner, as to them seem best and most likely to maintain peace and good order among the Inhabitants and the number of people going to and from this place, other than in such cases where a Convention of the Inhabitants shall make particular provision,—

4^h Resolved that William Clark, Robert George, John McFerson, and Valentine Thomas Dalton be appointed to exercise the Judiciary authority, shall take the oath of Office to do equal right and Justice to all Men without favour, affection or partiality to the best of their Judgment, and to be styled Magistrates ; and they, or any three of them shall constitute a Court, with power to summon parties, and hear and determine all matters of Controversy whatsoever.—

5th Resolved that on Complaint made to any one of the Magistrates, he shall direct the Sheriff, to be appointed by this Convention, to summon the defendant to appear at a certain time and place to be appointed to answer the Complaint ; and if the Complaint shall be for debt, and above the sum of twenty Shillings or the value, the Sheriff shall also by the direction of the Magistrate, summon the other members to attend and constitute a Court to determine the Controversy and give judgment, which shall be executed by the Sheriff as they may direct.—And in case the complaint shall not be for more than twenty Shillings, any one Magistrate may summon the defendant as aforesaid and hear and determine the matter, and give Judgment accordingly—

6th Resolved that when Judgment shall be given against any person for money, the Sheriff shall by warrant from the Court take so much of the Goods and Chattels of the Delinquent as will be sufficient to satisfy the

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same, and after giving Eight days public notice shall sell such Goods at public auction to satisfy the Judgment.—

7th Resolved that John Jackson be appointed Sheriff who shall take an oath of office, and have power to call on persons to assist him in the execution of his duty in cases of necessity.

By order of the House

W. CLARK, Chⁿ

At a Convention held at Clarksville on monday the 12th of November 1787, Present Robert George John Jackson Buckner Pittman John Martin, William Thompson, John Reagh, William Thompson jr John Cleghorn and William Clark, being a majority of the Inhabitants of the Town aforesaid.—

1st Resolved, that whereas the Sixth Resolution of a Convention held in this Town the 27th of January 1785, directing the Goods of a Debtor to be sold at a Short period after Judgment obtained against them, is found to be oppressive, the same is hereby repealed and made void.

3. Documents Relating to the Shays Rebellion, 1787.

One of the most important events during the Shays Rebellion was the defense of the Continental arsenal at Springfield against the attack of the insurgents on January 25, 1787. The capture of the magazine with its stores of arms would have raised immensely both the actual strength of the insurgents and their reputation in the eyes of the community. Again, we see on this occasion state militia as the only defense of national property against a rebellion within a state. Says Jeremy Belknap, writing on February 2, 1787, to Ebenezer Hazard: "Is not their attack on the Arsenal a declaration of war against the United States? and ought not Congress to take them in hand, if this government should fail of their duty?"¹ Recent events in our national history give a new interest to the Shays Rebellion.

The protection of the Springfield arsenal was intrusted to Major-General William Shepard. In the first of the letters printed below he reports to Governor Bowdoin his successful defense of the magazine on January 25.

Shepard was facing a body of insurgents much superior to his own force, and was anxiously awaiting the arrival of General Lincoln with troops from the eastern counties. On January 27 Lincoln reached Springfield, and proceeded at once to drive the insurgents from their positions. The second letter is his account of his operations.

¹Belknap Papers, I. 456.