

## The Honey War of 1839

“Lapland” is the nickname for this part of Iowa, not because of any Scandinavian immigrants, but because of a border dispute. It is said that this is where Missouri laps over into Iowa or visa versa, depending on your point of view. In fact, at one point the **dispute became so intense in 1839**, it has been called the “**Honey War of 1839**”. The Honey-Walnut Classic honors the **Iowa-Missouri Honey War**.

The border dispute took place before statehood when Iowa was a territory. In 1816 a surveyor by the name of *Sullivan* established the northern boundary of Missouri, but the line was only marked with dirt mounds and a written description. In 1837 the Missouri legislature commissioned *J. C. Brown* to make another survey to establish and mark the boundary with Iowa. *Brown's* survey gave a 13-mile wide strip of Iowa land to Missouri.

A dispute arose over the phrase “rapids of the River Des Moines” which was used as a reference point to draw the east-west line. Iowans living in the area at the time always understood this to mean the rapids on the Mississippi river just above the confluence with the Des Moines River. The Missouri surveyor, not being familiar with the local geography, looked on the Des Moines River for the rapids. He found a small ripple in the Des Moines River just above the present day site of Keosauqua, Iowa. The line ran east and west through this site about 13 miles north of the original *Sullivan* line.

Missouri sent a sheriff to collect Missouri taxes from Iowans. After this sheriff was kidnapped by Iowans, *Governor Boggs* of Missouri called out the militia. Additionally, remember that slavery was a big issue in these pre-Civil War days. An Iowan living in a free territory wanted nothing to do with Missouri, a slave state. However, the incident that almost precipitated armed combat was the cutting of **three Iowa bee trees** by Missourians. Early settlers depended on wild honey for their “sweetnin”. Sugar was almost unknown as an item of merchandise and sorghum cane was equally rare. The wild honey stored in the hollow trees was prized as a special luxury.

Iowa settlers petitioned Iowa's territorial *Governor Lucas* to do something about the situation. *Governor Lucas* called out the Iowa militia for the first time in history. This was a somewhat informal and impromptu gathering of volunteers. Some had old “blunderbuss” swords from the War of 1812, while others came with pitchforks, old flintlock squirrel rifles and even an old fashioned sausage stuffer. By the time Iowa militia men got organized and headed for the disputed border area, the Missouri militia had gone home. The whole matter ended up being settled finally by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1848, thus settling the boundary to its original more southern location.