

ORGANIC ACT

(March 3, 1849)

9 U. S. Statutes at Large, 403-9; 30 Congress, II sess., ch. 121.

Chap. CXXL—An Act to establish the Territorial Government of Minnesota.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the passage of this act, all that part of the territory of the United States which lies within the following limits, to wit: Beginning in the Mississippi River, at the point where the line of forty-three degrees and thirty minutes of north latitude crosses the same, thence running due west on said line, which is the northern boundary of the state of Iowa, to the north-west corner of the said state of Iowa, thence southerly along the western boundary of said state to the point where said boundary strikes the Missouri River, thence up the middle of the main channel of the Missouri River to the mouth of the White Earth River, thence up the middle of the main channel of the White Earth River to the boundary line between the possessions of the United States and Great Britain; thence east and south of east along the boundary line between the possessions of the United States and Great Britain to Lake Superior; thence in a straight line to the northernmost point of the state of Wisconsin in Lake Superior; thence along the western boundary line of said state of Wisconsin to the Mississippi River; thence down the main channel of said river to the place of beginning, be, and the same is hereby, erected into a temporary government by the name of the territory of Minnesota: Provided, That nothing in this act contained shall be construed to inhibit the government of the United States from dividing said territory into two or more territories, in such manner and at such times as congress shall deem convenient and proper, or from attaching any portion of said territory to any other state or territory of the United States.

Sec. 2. And be it further enacted, That the executive power and authority in and over said territory of Minnesota shall be vested in a governor, who shall hold his office for four years, and until his successor shall be

appointed and qualified, unless sooner removed by the president of the United States. The governor shall reside within said territory, shall be commander-in-chief of the militia thereof, shall perform the duties and receive the emoluments of superintendent of Indian affairs; he may grant pardons for offences against the laws of said territory, and reprieves for offences against the laws of the United States until the decision of the president can be made known thereon; he shall commission all officers who shall be appointed to office under the laws of the said territory, and shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed.

Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, That there shall be a secretary of said territory, who shall reside therein, and hold his office for four years; unless sooner removed by the president of the United States; he shall record and preserve all the laws and proceedings of the legislative assembly hereinafter constituted, and all the acts and proceedings of the governor in his executive department; he shall transmit one copy of the laws and one copy of the executive proceedings, on or before the first day of December in each year, to the president of the United States, and, at the same time, two copies of the laws to the speaker of the house of representatives, and the president of the senate, for the use of congress. And in case of the death, removal, resignation, or necessary absence of the governor from the territory, the secretary shall be, and he is hereby, authorized and required to execute and perform all the powers and duties of the governor during such vacancy or necessary absence, or until another governor shall be duly appointed to fill such vacancy.

Sec. 4. And be it further enacted, That the legislative power and authority of said territory shall be vested in the governor and a legislative assembly. The legislative assembly shall consist of a council and house of representatives. The council shall consist of nine members, having the qualifications of voters, as hereinafter prescribed, whose term of service shall continue two years. The house of representatives shall, at its first session, consist of eighteen members, possessing the same qualifications as prescribed for members of the council, and whose term of service shall continue one year. The number of councillors and representatives may be increased by the legislative assembly, from time to time, in proportion to the increase of population: Provided, That the whole number shall never

exceed fifteen councillors and thirty-nine representatives. An apportionment shall be made, as nearly equal as practicable, among the several counties or districts, for the election of the council and representatives, giving to each section of the territory representation in the ratio of its population, Indians excepted, as nearly as may be. And the members of the council and of the house of representatives shall reside in, and be inhabitants of, the district for which they may be elected respectively. Previous to the first election, the governor shall cause a census or enumeration of the inhabitants of the several counties and districts of the territory to be taken, and the first election shall be held at such time and places, and be conducted in such manner, as the governor shall appoint and direct; and he shall, at the same time, declare the number of members of the council and house of representatives to which each of the counties or districts shall be entitled under this act. The number of persons authorized to be elected having the highest number of votes in each of said council districts for members of the council shall be declared by the governor to be duly elected to the council; and the person or persons authorized to be elected having the greatest number of votes for the house of representatives, equal to the number to which each county or district shall be entitled, shall be declared by the governor to be duly elected members of the house of representatives: Provided, That in case of a tie between two or more persons voted for, the governor shall order a new election to supply the vacancy made by such a tie. And the persons thus elected to the legislative assembly shall meet at such a place, and on such day, as the governor shall appoint; but thereafter, the time, place, and manner of holding and conducting all elections by the people, and the apportioning the representation in the several counties or districts to the council and house of representatives according to the population, shall be prescribed by law, as well as the day of the commencement of the regular sessions of the legislative assembly: Provided, that no one session shall exceed the term of sixty days.

Sec. 5. And be it further enacted, That every free white male inhabitant above the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been a resident of said territory at the time of the passage of this act, shall be entitled to vote at the first election, and shall be eligible to any office within the said territory; but the qualifications of voters and of holding office, at all subsequent

elections, shall be such as shall be prescribed by the legislative assembly: Provided, That the right of suffrage and of holding office shall be exercised only by citizens of the United States, and those who shall have declared, on oath, their intention to become such, and shall have taken an oath to support the constitution of the United States and the provisions of this act.

Sec. 6. And be it further enacted, That the legislative power of the territory shall extend to all rightful subjects of legislation, consistent with the constitution of the United States and the provisions of this act; but no law shall be passed interfering with the primary disposal of the soil; no tax shall be imposed upon the property of the United States; nor shall the lands or other property of non-residents be taxed higher than the lands or other property of residents. All the laws passed by the legislative assembly and governor shall be submitted to the congress of the United States, and, if disapproved, shall be null and of no effect.

Sec. 7. And be it further enacted, That all township, district, and county officers, not herein otherwise provided for, shall be appointed or elected, as the case may be, in such manner as shall be provided by the governor and legislative assembly of the territory of Minnesota. The governor shall nominate, and, by and with the advice and consent of the legislative council, appoint, all officers not herein otherwise provided for; and in the first instance the governor alone may appoint all said officers, who shall hold their offices until the end of the next session of the legislative assembly.

Sec. 8. And be it further enacted, That no member of the legislative assembly shall hold or be appointed to any office which shall have been created, or the salary or emoluments of which shall have been increased, while he was a member, during the term for which he was elected, and for one year after the expiration of such term; and no person holding a commission or appointment under the United States, except postmasters, shall be a member of the legislative assembly, or shall hold any office under the government of said territory.

Sec. 9. And be it further enacted, That the judicial power of said territory shall be vested in a supreme court, district courts, probate courts, and in

justices of the peace. The supreme court shall consist of a chief justice and two associate justices, any two of whom shall constitute a quorum, and who shall hold a term at the seat of government of said territory annually, and they shall hold their offices during the period of four years. The said territory shall be divided into three judicial districts, and a district court shall be held in each of said districts by one of the justices of the supreme court, at such times and places as may be prescribed by law; and the said judges shall, after their appointments, respectively, reside in the districts which shall be assigned them. The jurisdiction of the several courts herein provided for, both appellate and original, and that of the probate courts and of justices of the peace, shall be as limited by law: Provided, That the justices of the peace shall not have jurisdiction of any matter in controversy when the title or boundaries of land may be in dispute, or where the debt or sum claimed shall exceed one hundred dollars; and the said supreme and district courts, respectively, shall possess chancery as well as common law jurisdiction. Each district court, or the judge thereof, shall appoint its clerk, who shall also be the register in chancery, and shall keep his office at the place where the court may be held. Writs of error, bills of exception and appeals, shall be allowed in all cases from the final decisions of said district courts to the supreme court, under such regulations as may be prescribed by law, but in no case removed to the supreme court shall trial by jury be allowed in said court. The supreme court, or the justices thereof, shall appoint its own clerk, and every clerk shall hold his office at the pleasure of the court for which he shall have been appointed. Writs of error and appeals from the final decisions of said supreme court shall be allowed, and may be taken to the supreme court of the United States, in the same manner and under the same regulations as from the circuit courts of the United States, where the value of the property, or the amount in controversy, to be ascertained by the oath or affirmation of either party, or other competent witness, shall exceed one thousand dollars; and each of the said district courts shall have and exercise the same jurisdiction, in all cases arising under the constitution and laws of the United States, as is vested in the circuit and district courts of the United States; and the first six days of every term of said courts, or so much thereof as shall be necessary, shall be appropriated to the trial of causes arising under the said constitution and laws; and writs of error and appeal in all such cases shall be made to the supreme court of said territory, the same as in other cases. The said clerk

shall receive, in all such cases, the same fees which the clerks of the district courts of the late Wisconsin territory received for similar services.

Sec: 10. And be it further enacted, That there shall be appointed an attorney for said territory, who shall continue in office for four years, unless sooner removed by the president, and who shall receive the same fees and salary as the attorney of the United States for the late territory of Wisconsin received. There shall also be a marshal for the territory appointed, who shall hold his office for four years, unless sooner removed by the president, and who shall execute all processes issuing from the said courts, when exercising their jurisdiction as circuit and district courts of the United States; he shall perform the duties, be subject to the same regulations and penalties, and be entitled to the same fees, as the marshal of the district court of the United States for the late territory of Wisconsin; and shall, in addition, be paid two hundred dollars annually as a compensation for extra services.

Sec. 11. And be it further enacted, That the governor, secretary, chief justice, and associate justices, attorney, and marshal, shall be nominated, and, by and with the advice and consent of the senate, appointed by the president of the United States. The governor and secretary, to be appointed as aforesaid, shall, before they act as such, respectively take an oath or affirmation, before the district judge, or some justice of the peace in the limits of said territory, duly authorized to administer oaths and affirmations by the laws now in force therein, or before the chief justice or some associate justice of the supreme court of the United States, to support the constitution of the United States, and faithfully to discharge the duties of their respective offices; which said oaths, when so taken, shall be certified by the person by whom the same shall have been taken, and such certificates shall be received and recorded by the said secretary among the executive proceedings; and the chief justice and associate justices, and all other civil officers in said territory, before they act as such, shall take a like oath or affirmation, before the said governor or secretary, or some judge or justice of the peace of the territory, who may be duly commissioned and qualified, which said oath or affirmation shall be certified and transmitted, by the person taking the same, to the secretary, to be by him recorded as aforesaid; and afterwards, the like oath or affirmation shall be taken,

certified, and recorded in such manner and form as may be prescribed by law. The governor shall receive an annual salary of fifteen hundred dollars as governor, and one thousand dollars as superintendent of Indian affairs. The chief justice and associate justices shall each receive an annual salary of eighteen hundred dollars. The secretary shall receive an annual salary of eighteen hundred dollars. The said salaries shall be paid quarter-yearly, at the treasury of the United States. The members of the legislative assembly shall be entitled to receive three dollars each per day during their attendance at the sessions thereof and three dollars each for every twenty miles travel in going to and returning from the said sessions, estimated according to the nearest usually traveled route. There shall be appropriated, annually, the sum of one thousand dollars, to be expended by the governor to defray the contingent expenses of the territory; and there shall also be appropriated, annually, a sufficient sum, to be expended by the secretary of the territory, and upon an estimate to be made by the secretary of the treasury of the United States, to defray the expenses of the legislative assembly, the printing of the laws, and other incidental expenses; and the secretary of the territory shall annually account to the secretary of the treasury of the United States for the manner in which the aforesaid sum shall have been expended.

Sec. 12. And be it further enacted, That the inhabitants of the said territory shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities heretofore secured to the territory of Wisconsin and to its inhabitants; and the laws in force in the territory of Wisconsin at the date of the admission of the state of Wisconsin shall continue to be valid and operative therein, so far as the same be not incompatible with the provisions of this act, subject, nevertheless, to be altered, modified, or repealed by the governor and legislative assembly of the said territory of Minnesota and the laws of the United States are hereby extended over and declared to be in force in said territory, so far as the same, or any provision thereof may be applicable.

Sec. 13. And be it further enacted, That the legislative assembly of the territory of Minnesota shall hold its first session at St. Paul; and at said first session the governor and legislative assembly shall locate and establish a temporary seat of government for said territory at such place as they may deem eligible; and shall, at such time as they shall see proper, prescribe by

law the manner of locating the permanent seat of government of said territory by a vote of the people. And the sum of twenty thousand dollars, out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, is hereby appropriated and granted to said territory of Minnesota, to be applied, by the governor and legislative assembly, to the erection of suitable public buildings at the seat of government.

Sec. 14. And be it further enacted, That a delegate to the house of representatives of the United States, to serve for the term of two years, may be elected by the voters qualified to elect members of the legislative assembly, who shall be entitled to the same rights and privileges as are exercised and enjoyed by the delegates from the several other territories of the United States to the said house of representatives. The first election shall be held at such times and places, and be conducted in such manner, as the governor shall appoint and direct; and at all subsequent elections, the times, places, and manner of holding the elections shall be prescribed by law. The person having the greatest number of votes shall be declared by the governor to be duly elected, and a certificate thereof shall be given accordingly.

Sec. 15. And be it further enacted, That all suits, process, and proceedings, civil and criminal, at law and in chancery, and all indictments and informations, which shall be pending and undetermined in the courts of the territory of Wisconsin, within the limits of said territory of Minnesota, when this act shall take effect, shall be transferred to be heard, tried, prosecuted, and determined in the district courts hereby established, which may include the counties or districts where any such proceedings may be pending. All bonds, recognizances, and obligations of every kind whatsoever, valid under the existing laws within the limits of said territory, shall be valid under this act; and all crimes and misdemeanors against the laws in force within said limits may be prosecuted, tried, and punished in the courts established by this act; and all penalties, forfeitures, actions, and causes of actions, may be recovered under this act, the same as they would have been under the laws in force within the limits composing said territory at the time this act shall go into operation.

Sec. 16. And be it further enacted, That all justices of the peace, constables, sheriffs, and all other judicial and ministerial officers, who shall be in office within the limits of said territory when this act shall take effect, shall be, and they are hereby, authorized and required to continue to exercise and perform the duties of their respective offices as officers of the territory of Minnesota, temporarily, and until they, or others, shall be duly appointed and qualified to fill their places in the manner herein directed, or until their offices shall be abolished.

Sec. 17. And be it further enacted, That the sum of five thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby appropriated, out of any moneys in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be expended by and under the direction of the said governor of the territory of Minnesota, in the purchase of a library, to be kept at the seat of government, for the use of the governor, legislative assembly, judges of the supreme court, secretary, marshal, and attorney of said territory, and such other persons and under such regulations as shall be prescribed by law.

Sec. 18. And be it further enacted, That when the lands in the said territory shall be surveyed under the direction of the government of the United States, preparatory to bringing the same into market, sections numbered sixteen and thirty-six in each township in said territory shall be, and the same are hereby, reserved for the purpose of being applied to schools in said territory, and in the states and territories hereafter to be erected out of the same.

Sec. 19. And be it further enacted, That temporarily, and until otherwise provided by law, the governor of said territory may define the judicial districts of said territory, and assign the judges who may be appointed for said territory to the several districts, and also appoint the times and places for holding courts in the several counties or subdivisions in each of said judicial districts, by proclamation to be issued by him; but the legislative assembly, at their first or any subsequent session, may organize, alter, or modify such judicial districts, and assign the judges, and alter the times and the places of holding the courts, as to them shall seem proper and convenient.

Sec. 20. And be it further enacted, That every bill which shall or may pass the council and house of representatives shall, before it becomes a law, be presented to the governor of the territory; if he approve, he shall sign it, but if not, he shall return it, with his objections to be entered at large upon their journal, and proceed to reconsider. If, after such reconsideration, two-thirds of that house shall agree to pass the bill, it shall be sent, together with the objections, to the other house, by which it shall also be reconsidered, and if approved by two-thirds of that house, it shall become a law; but in all such cases the votes of both houses shall be determined by yeas and nays, and the names of the persons voting for and against the bill shall be entered on the journal of each house, respectively. If any bill shall not be returned by the governor within three days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the same shall be a law, in like manner as if he had signed it, unless the legislative assembly, by adjournment prevent it; in which case it shall not become a law. ■

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Article II, §1, of the 1857 Constitution:

ARTICLE II. NAME AND BOUNDARIES

SECTION 1. NAME AND BOUNDARIES; ACCEPTANCE OF ORGANIC ACT

This state shall be called the state of Minnesota and shall consist of and have jurisdiction over the territory embraced in the act of Congress entitled, “An act to authorize the people of the Territory of Minnesota to form a constitution and state government, preparatory to their admission into the Union on equal footing with the original states,” and the propositions contained in that act are hereby accepted, ratified and confirmed, and remain irrevocable without the consent of the United States. ■

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