Dec. 12, 1839

*This Date in Missouri Senate History*

On *This Date in Missouri Senate History*, the date was Dec. 12, 1839, the day a truce ended the “Honey War” between Missouri and Iowa.

At issue is a nine and half mile tract of land that runs along the border between the Show-Me State and what was, at the time, the Iowa Territory. Also, this is not a “war” in the traditional sense of the word; rather, just a stalemate.

The 1820 Missouri Constitution mentions the Des Moines River rapids, which don’t exist, but rapids along the Mississippi River *at* the Des Moines *do*. This is where the confusion lies. The boundary used in the first state constitution comes from surveying done four years’ prior.

By 1837, the Legislature would ask for another survey. The person who does the survey itself believes the state line should be about nine and a half miles farther to the north. This leads to Missouri tax collectors going to what are now Van Buren and Davis counties in Iowa. Iowans, not happy about this, chase them away. As the story goes, these residents then cut down three honey bee trees to use the honey to pay the taxes.

This leads to Missouri Gov. Lilburn Boggs sending 11 members of the state militia’s 14th Division to protect the tax collector. Iowa, then, sends militia members as well. This lasts seven days, at a cost of $46 to Missouri.

Both governors agree to a truce, which settles nothing, and they believe Congress should decide the answer.

In 1849, the U.S. Supreme Court would uphold Congress’ decision.

Disputes would continue for decades. In 2005, Missouri would have the land surveyed again, only to find the markers had been accurate since 1850.

December 12, 1839, the date marking the truce that would end the “Honey War,” on *This Date in Missouri Senate History*.

(Sources: *The American Surveyor*; *State of Missouri v. State of Iowa*; *Laws of Missouri, First Session of the Twelfth General Assembly*, 1843, page 89)