

THE GOLDFINCH

Vol. 5, No. 2

Margaret Atherton Bonney, Editor

November 1983

Railroads . . .



The Iowa History Magazine for Young People

Railroads in Iowa

There was a time, not long ago, when the sound of engine whistles wailed across the Iowa farmlands. People could tell the time of day by the trains that chugged through the countryside. Before dirt roads were paved and widened so cars and trucks could easily travel over a smooth and fast surface, railroads provided the fastest transportation for both people and goods.

Iowa's earliest settlers came before the railroads did. They traveled by horse or oxen-drawn wagons, on foot, by stagecoach, or by steamboat. Wagon and stage travelers may have traveled as many as twenty miles a day. Steamboat passengers traveled sixty to one hundred miles a day, although sandbars, low water, or snags often caused long delays.

For the first twenty years of

settlement, rivers and streams were the main highways in Iowa. Farm people hauled their grain in wagons or on animals to the nearest market center along a river. Small boats then carried the grain to Mississippi or Missouri River market towns. From those points it was loaded on large boats and carried to St. Louis or New Orleans.

Farmers with hogs or cattle to sell drove their livestock to market—a trip that might take several days. After reaching the market a meat packer bought and slaughtered the animals, then packed and pickled the meat in barrels for shipment down the river.

In winter the rivers froze and the boats had to stop. To travel overland was not much easier. Snow often covered the dirt roads, making it hard for teams of horses to pull heavy loads.

While this weather lasted, people, goods, and news could not easily get in or out of the state.

Most people came to Iowa to take up farming. As Iowa and other midwest areas filled with farmers, a whole new region of the United States began to produce food. About the same time industries began to grow in the East, and manufacturers in cities hired people to work in factories. Cities grew larger as people moved there to work. Most of the people in the cities did not raise their own food, so they bought food brought to the city in wagons from nearby farms. City people began to depend more and more on the food grown by farmers.

It was not long before the steam engine that powered factory machinery provided the power for railroad trains to bring food to the cities. The trains then returned to the countryside with manufactured goods for people to buy. Gradually train tracks pushed into the great farm regions of the South and Midwest.

In 1854 the first train reached the Mississippi River at Rock Island, Illinois. Soon other railroad lines from Chicago reached the great river. Ferryboats carried the freight and passengers across the river from the railroad cars to the cities in Iowa.

On the Iowa side of the river, short railroad line construction began, and in 1855 the first engine was ferried across the Mississippi from Illinois. Just one year later a wooden bridge



Das Illustrate Mississippithal

This drawing of Bellevue, Iowa shows the modes of transportation before the railroads came. A Mississippi River steamer churns up the river, a ferryboat carries people, animals, and goods across the river, and a horse-drawn wagon moves around the bend of the dirt road.

spanned the wide river so freight and passenger cars could travel right on across. By then one railroad line reached as far west as the state capital at Iowa City.

For a long time people had talked of a railroad to link the western and eastern states from coast to coast. This would provide a better way to transport goods between distant cities. Goods usually had to travel by ship around the tip of South America. Iowa's location in the central part of the nation meant railroads from east to west would pass through the state.

Building railroads cost a lot of money. The railroad from Davenport to Iowa City cost \$15,000 per mile. To encourage railroad companies to build, the United States Congress passed laws that gave land to companies that promised to build railroads. In 1856 the Congress gave public land in Iowa to build four east to west railroads. These railroads would eventually become part of the **transcontinental** railroad. Four railroad companies had just begun to build across the state when the Civil War interrupted progress.

After the war the builders raced across the state. Smaller railroad companies soon linked the towns and cities of Iowa with the main-line railroads. The parts of Iowa where only a few settlers had been living began to fill with people as the railroad arrived. Railroads became the key to the growth and success of towns and cities. The places the

transcontinental *adj.* — going across a continent.



A winter journey in 1830.



A winter journey in 1864.

railroads bypassed remained small or sometimes faded away.

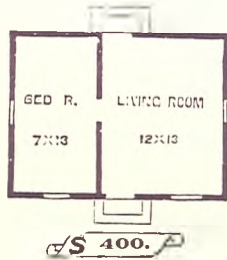
Railroads carried Iowa butter, meat products, and grain to cities. They hauled Iowa coal. They brought back farm implements, salt, and ready-made clothes. Railroads brought settlers seeking a new home in Iowa. The railroads took people almost anywhere they wanted to go.

In this issue of the *Goldfinch*, we will learn about the changes railroads brought to the lives of people in Iowa.

Iowa—For Sale



BRIDGES' READY-MADE HOUSES.



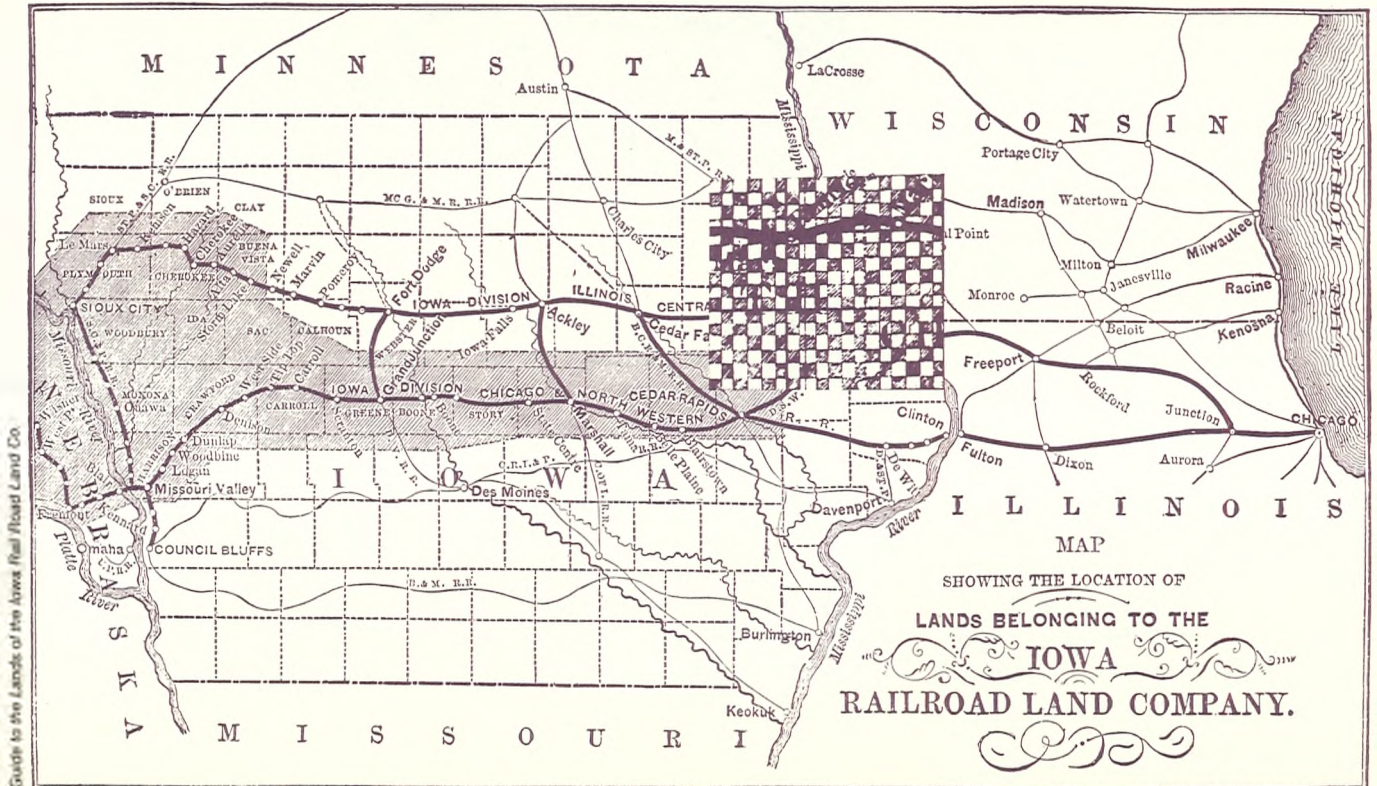
The Iowa Railroad Land Company sold the lands granted to the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railroad Company. The land company printed a guidebook for immigrants. The company officials realized the new settlers needed housing and made arrangements with a Chicago builder to sell ready-made houses. These houses came as kits, with all the materials ready to be put together. Designs of the houses appeared in the guidebook.

After the Civil War, railroad companies began selling their land grants to get the money needed for rail construction. Most of the land was sold to farmers who would be using the railroad to ship their grain and livestock to market.

Railroad companies advertised their lands in the East and in Europe. The Burlington and Missouri River Rail Road (B & M) advised newcomers to take the train to Burlington, where the immigrants would find

the brick B & M Land Office. On the lower floor of the building there was an "Emigrant" home where the travelers could stay overnight or longer. Railroad officials were there to advise about transportation west so purchasers could look at land before buying it. Between 1870 and 1880 the Burlington and Missouri River Rail Road sold almost all of its grant, 320,678 acres. In all, over four million acres of Iowa land were sold by railroad companies.

The government gave no more than six acres of land for every mile of railroad track built. Only every other section of land was given to the railroad companies. When possible this land was on either side of the railroad line, forming a checkerboard pattern when marked on a map.



Guide to the Lands of the Iowa Railroad Land Co.

Chugging into Cherokee

The people of Cherokee waited in 1869. They waited for the railroad to come. There were only thirty-nine families on the lonely northwestern Iowa prairie at Cherokee. Sioux City was the nearest place, sixty miles and an eight day round-trip away. There would never be very many people at Cherokee without a railroad—but the railroad was coming!

A man bought twenty acres of land in the little settlement and marked it off for town lots. He opened a general store and planned to have his town ready

when the railroad came. Soon there was a newspaper, livery stable, and blacksmith. An attorney and physician set up practice. Cherokee was ready.

Finally the railroad owners decided exactly where the railroad route would go. The track curved in and out of the beautiful Little Sioux Valley, making a horseshoe bend. When the rails were laid they were one mile south-west of the town! The business people decided it was better to be as close as possible to the railroad depot, so they moved their

businesses over one mile to be nearer to it.

The town of Cherokee grew rapidly after the railroad arrived. More homes and businesses sprang up, built with lumber brought in on railroad cars. In just one year over two thousand people arrived to live in Cherokee County. Farm people settled on the surrounding prairie and began shipping their produce to market on the railroad. The first people of Cherokee had been right. The railroad had helped their town to grow.



A general store in Cherokee, two years after the town moved to be next to the railroad.

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On Track With the Burlington

Several large railroad companies built successful lines across Iowa. This is the story of one of those railroads. The Burlington story is similar to that of the others and can be used as an example of large railroad company growth in Iowa.

Railroad fever spread across the West in the 1850s. Burlington, Iowa was then a part of the West and the people of Burlington caught railroad fever. The city was never the same. The people wanted a better means of transportation—something faster and less likely to break down than a horse and buggy.

Railroads had already been built in the East and had often replaced stagecoaches and freight wagons. Now the people of Burlington wanted a railroad for themselves. On a railroad they could ship their crops and livestock to the Chicago market, they could order their goods from a mail-order house like Montgomery Ward & Company, and they could visit friends and relatives who lived too far away to travel by horse and buggy. On January 15, 1852 the city leaders of Burlington took action. Among these leaders were William F. Coolbaugh and James W. Grimes, the men who organized the Burlington and Missouri River Rail Road. They did not have the money to build the railroad, but they found businessmen in the East who could. A group of them from Boston was willing to invest in the Burlington and Missouri River Rail Road. These men were already building a railroad from Detroit, Michigan to Chicago, Illinois. They also were

prosperous adj. — successful.

buying other railroads in Illinois that would lead to Burlington. Their plan was to build a **prosperous** railroad across Iowa to the Missouri River. When it was finished the B & M was not the first railroad to cross the state, but it was a prosperous one.

One reason for the success of the B & M was that it received a federal land grant. The B & M was given land in Iowa, which could then be sold. The money the B & M received from selling this land was used to construct the railroad. Some land was sold to settlers who would be doing business with the railroad, thus the railroad created its own market. Another important source of income for the B & M was building towns. Town lots sold for more money than did farmland.

Investors bought land in areas that would become towns on the

B & M rail line. They knew the town lots would increase in value once the railroad arrived, and then they could sell their land at a good profit. The B & M platted towns along the main rail line from Creston to East Plattsmouth. Some of the towns were named for rail company officials or stockholders, such as Corning, Russell, Murray, Thayer, and Prescott. Most were built to serve as depots for the growing agricultural area. Creston, however, was more than a depot. There the company located a large railroad shop and roundhouse. Locomotive repairmen and mechanics worked in the shops and kept the engines and railroad cars in good running condition. Construction crews replaced worn rails and broken ties along the rail line to make sure the trains could travel safely. Creston became a division office

Farms and Homes in the West!

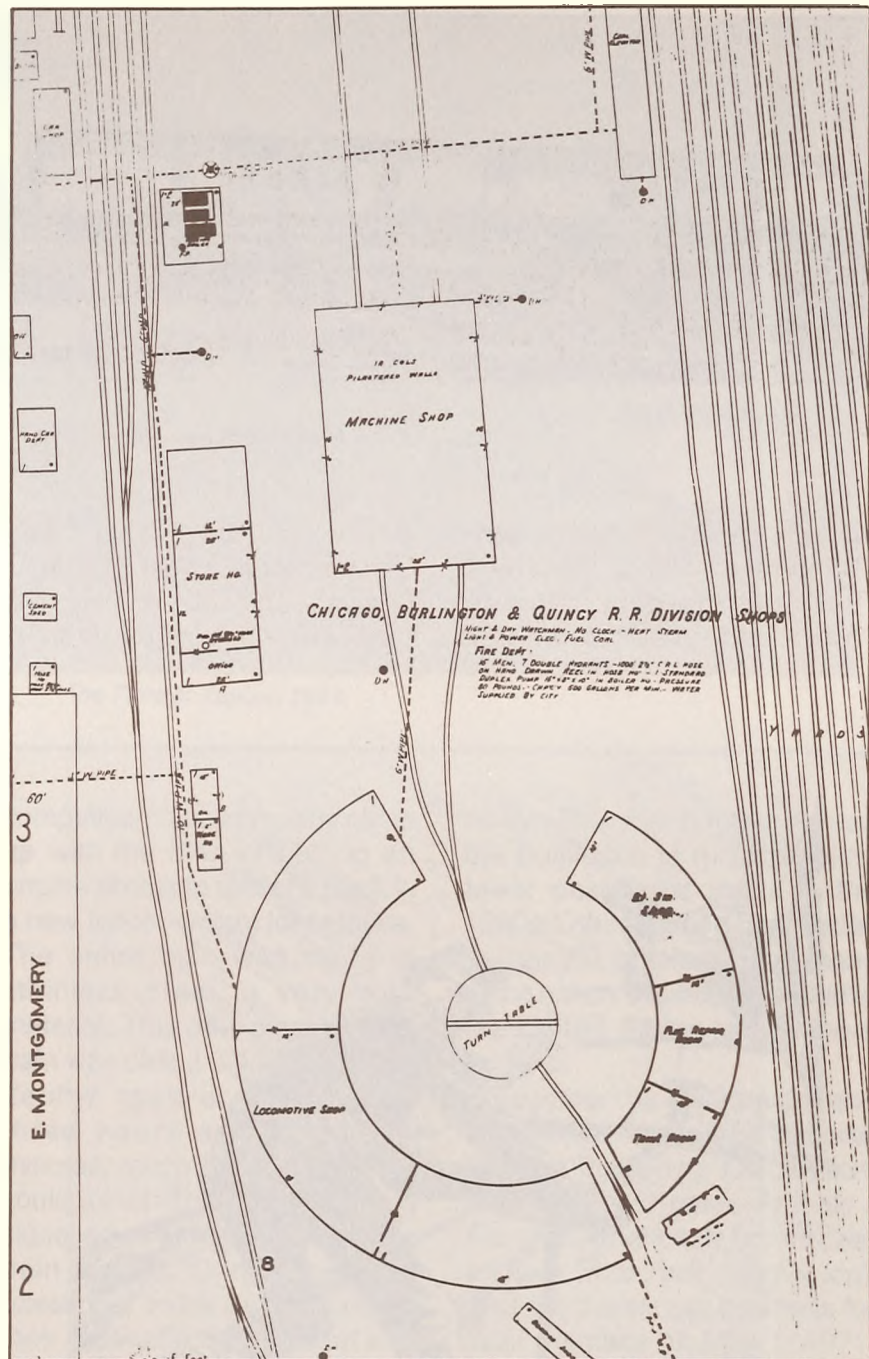
HOMES AND A WELCOME TO ALL!
GOOD FARMS FOR LITTLE MONEY!
Burlington and Missouri River
Railroad Company
LAND DEPARTMENT!
CHOICE
PRAIRIE LANDS
IN EXCELLENT LOCATIONS, IN
IOWA AND NEBRASKA!
—AT—
LOW PRICES
ON 10 YEARS' CREDIT,
AT 6 PER CENT. INTEREST.
GEO. S. HARRIS,
Land Commissioner.
At BURLINGTON, IOWA, for Iowa Lands,
At LINCOLN, NEBRASKA, for Nebraska Lands.

on the Burlington, and many more people came to live in Creston and work on the railroad. Creston became a true railroad town. By the 1890s over one thousand men worked on the trains, in the roundhouse, in the yards, or in the shop. The B & M donated land for city buildings and the Catholic church. The company also provided a public library.

The railroad workers and their families became part of the Creston town life. They held annual dances and voted in elections. Many were members of the volunteer fire department. In the 1890s the payroll for Creston railroad workers totaled about \$40,000. Much of this money was spent in Creston on rent, food, supplies, and entertainment. All of this helped the town to grow.

Although Creston was built with the railroad as the major industry, farming became the major activity of the surrounding area. This helped Creston survive when the diesel engines replaced steam engines in the 1930s.

The Creston shops and roundhouse were all designed for work on steam engines. When the steam engines were replaced, the amount of work in the shops declined and the number of men employed was reduced. Agriculture became the main industry of the town. In recent years the railroad has managed to increase the amount of freight it carries on the line through Creston. Since 1970, between five and six hundred Crestonians have been employed by the railroad. The B & M built a railroad town, and while it is no longer the town's major industry, the railroad still



plays an active role in Creston. Through the hard work of many lowans, including the railroad workers in Creston, the Burlington, which the B & M came to be called, was admired for its speedy and reliable service. The United States Postal Service noticed how reliable the Burlington was. In 1884 an official asked the vice-president of the railroad, Thomas Potter, if the Burlington

would be interested in carrying the U.S. mail from Chicago, through Iowa, to Council Bluffs. The problem was the mail train had to leave Chicago at 3:00 A.M. and arrive in Council Bluffs in time to meet the next mail train west. Could the Burlington do it? Thomas Potter believed it could, and when the Postmaster General signed the mail contract with the Burlington, he asked Potter when the first mail train



The Fast Mail at Burlington, 1884.

would be ready. Potter replied, "Tomorrow morning, General." That next morning Thomas Potter and the Postmaster

General boarded the Burlington's first *Fast Mail* train. Leaving Chicago on time, the train arrived in Burlington at

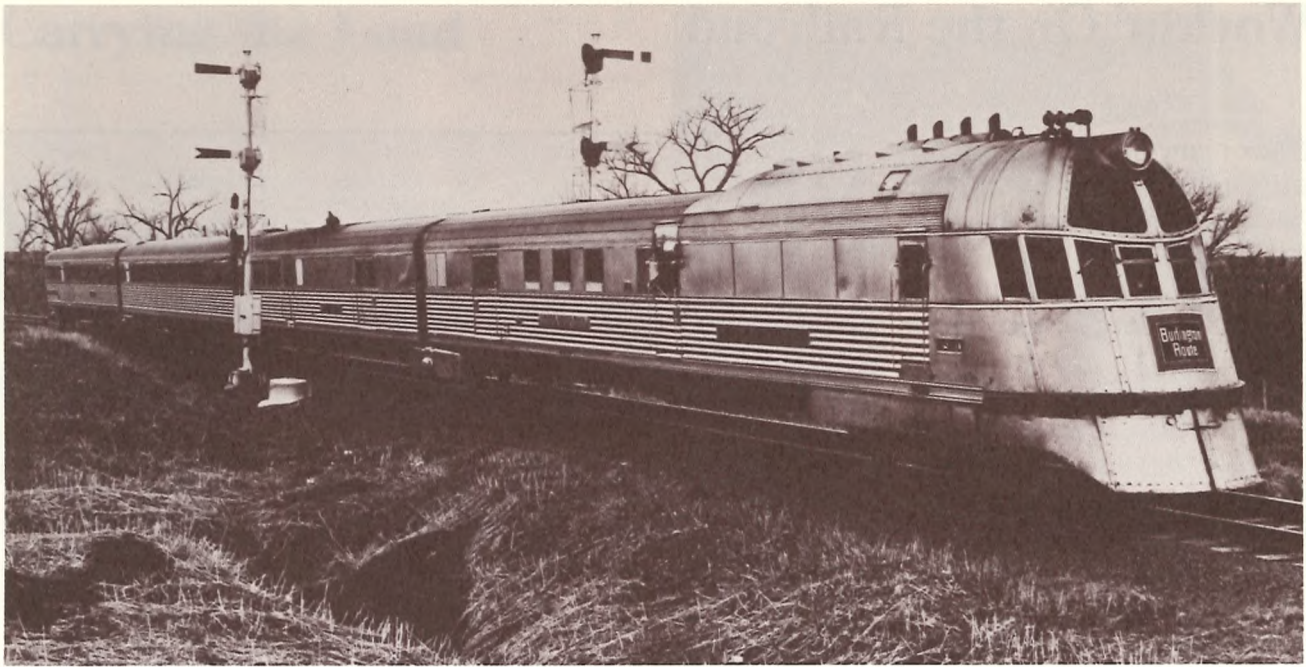
7:40 A.M. Following a stop there, the train sped across Iowa and made it to Council Bluffs in time! With the success of this venture, the Burlington would keep the *Fast Mail* train for eighty-three years, despite two unsuccessful attempts by competing railroads to beat the *Fast Mail* train's time and take the contract away from the Burlington. No railroad was ever able to do that. It took the speed of flight to deprive the Burlington of its mail contract in 1967.

The Burlington was not only a leading railroad as far as reliability and service were concerned, but it was also a leader in technology. Both the railroad and the city of Burlington played an important role in the development of air brakes for freight trains. George Westinghouse had developed a series of air brakes for trains, each one an improvement over the one before it. The brakes for freight trains, however, were still unsatisfactory in 1886. In the summer of that year Westinghouse agreed to test his latest air brakes for freight trains on the West Burlington hill. Testing continued throughout that summer and by the end of the next summer, Westinghouse and the Burlington had



Scudder's Monthly, 1873

Before the invention of air-brakes, brakemen rode atop the freight cars, ready to turn the crank that would apply brakes to the railroad car wheels. It was a dangerous job, especially during bad weather, jumping from one car to another to set each brake.



The Pioneer Zephyr, 1944.

developed a successful air brake for freight trains.

After 1900 the Burlington officials took a special interest in some of their important customers, the farmers. The Burlington agriculture department sponsored several special trains designed to teach new farming techniques. One of these trains was the "Burlington Pig Crop Special," which traveled through southern Iowa in September of 1929. Iowa State College created many of the exhibits that showed farmers how to protect their pigs from disease. One of the exhibits was Susie, the talking sow. Susie sat beside a graveyard of baby pigs and explained to farmers how their lives could have been saved with proper care. Many school children visited this educational train, and it was very popular everywhere it stopped.

When automobiles and trucks began to carry both people and freight, in the 1930s, the Burlington people knew they had

competition. The company came up with the idea of putting an engine similar to that of a truck in a new lighter-weight locomotive. The entire train was made of stainless steel, a very light material. This new diesel-fueled train was called the *Zephyr*. The *Zephyr* sped across Iowa in three hours and thirty-two minutes, much faster than a car could travel. This speeding train signalled a new era in passenger train service. During this time passenger trains took Iowans to their destinations in comfort and luxury. After service was extended as far as California on the *California Zephyr*, vista domes, passenger trains with glass tops, provided travelers with an exciting view of the countryside.

Even with the luxury of the *Zephyrs* people usually preferred the **convenience** of their own cars. By the 1950s fast airplanes attracted those in a

convenience n. — ease in using.

hurry. This competition forced the Burlington to run fewer and fewer passenger trains in the 1960s. Other railroad companies had similar problems, and many of the nation's railroads looked to the United States government for help.

Together the government and the railroads formed the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, which took the name Amtrak—**Am** from America, **tr** from travel, and **ack** from track. Amtrak took over the passenger business for most railroads on May 1, 1971. The Burlington was one of the first railroads to become part of Amtrak. Amtrak changed passenger service all over the nation. Amtrak trains run on routes where there are enough passengers to pay for the cost of the trip. Through Amtrak, passenger train service is still available to many Iowans. All aboard!

— Joan L. Flinspach

Workin' On the Railroad

It took many people to keep the railroads running smoothly. Railroad workers lived in towns along the railroad lines in Iowa. Locomotive engineers and firemen, passenger and freight conductors, porters and brakemen worked on the moving trains. Many more people worked in railroad shops, roundhouses, or depots. Mechanics, carpenters, blacksmiths, painters, and machinists worked in shops keeping cars and locomotives in good repair. To keep things on the tracks and in the railyard running safely, there were watchmen, section hands, switchmen, and gatekeepers. Agents, clerks, and telegraph operators worked at the busy railway depot selling tickets, keeping records, and sending messages.

courtesy Grout Museum of History and Science, Waterloo



Workers at the Illinois Central Railroad's Waterloo shop, 1915.

IOWA TOWNS CONTAINING MORE THAN 100 RAILROAD WORKERS, 1895

Belle Plaine	Eagle Grove
Boone	Fort Dodge
Burlington	Fort Madison
Cedar Rapids	Keokuk
Charles City	Lake City
Clinton	Marion
Creston	Marshalltown
Council Bluffs	Mason City
Davenport	Missouri Valley
Des Moines	Ottumwa
Dubuque	Perry
	Sioux City
	Waterloo

Bettendorf Box Car

CAPACITY OF PLANT:
 Complete Freight Cars.....12,000 Per Year
 Underframes 30,000 Per Year
 Truck and Bolsters.....320,000 Side Frames and Bolsters

THERE ARE OVER ONE AND ONE-HALF MILLION BETTENDORF TRUCK SIDE FRAMES IN USE TODAY

BETTENDORF MAKES BETTER CARS AND TRUCKS AND UNDERFRAMES

THE BETTENDORF COMPANY

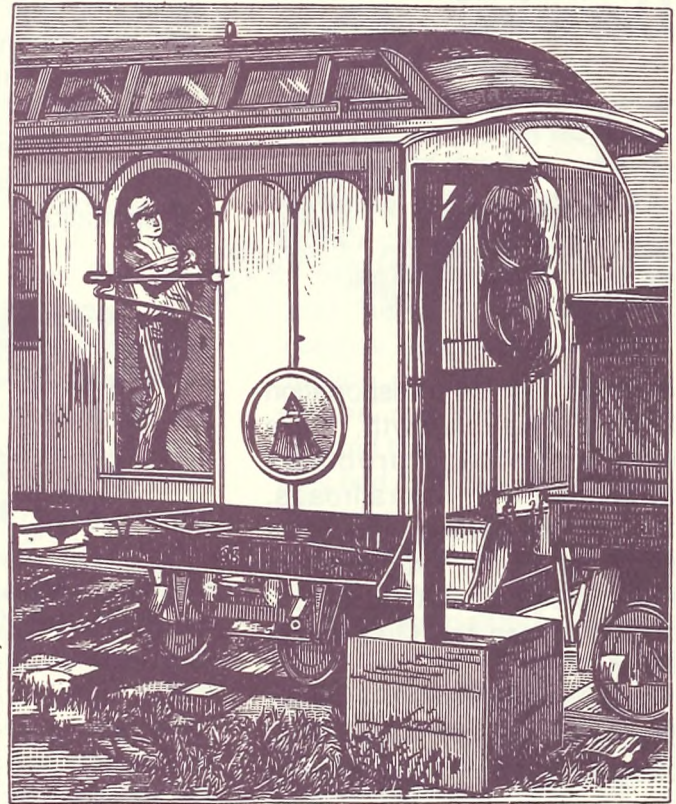
BETTENDORF, IOWA

A railroad equipment factory was built at Bettendorf. In 1920 three thousand people worked at the Bettendorf Company. The factory continued to manufacture high quality equipment until the Great Depression forced it to close in 1930.

Carrying the Load

As soon as railway lines began running, express companies quickly switched from stagecoaches to the faster, more reliable railroad cars. With such good transportation available for shipping goods, a new way to buy things developed. Stores in large cities began to sell their goods through a mail-order business. Large picture-filled catalogs became "wish books" for people who did not get to the cities. It was exciting to choose from the many wonderful things in the catalog and receive packages from far away at the nearest railway depot. This new way of shopping created competition for merchants in towns that could not be ignored.

Railroads replaced stagecoaches in another way. The United States Post Office officials decided mail should travel by rail instead of the slower stagecoach. The mail was sorted and sacked at post offices and placed on the railroad for delivery to another point. As the number of letters increased, delays occurred at the sorting centers. To solve this problem, a special car was built for use as a traveling post office. Mail clerks sorted the mail as the train raced through the countryside. The first regular railway post office began on the Chicago & Northwestern road from Chicago to Clinton, Iowa in 1864. The railway postal car system grew rapidly in the West. But even the railway postal cars were eventually replaced. In the 1960s the post office officials decided to use trucks and airplanes to move the mail.



The American Railway

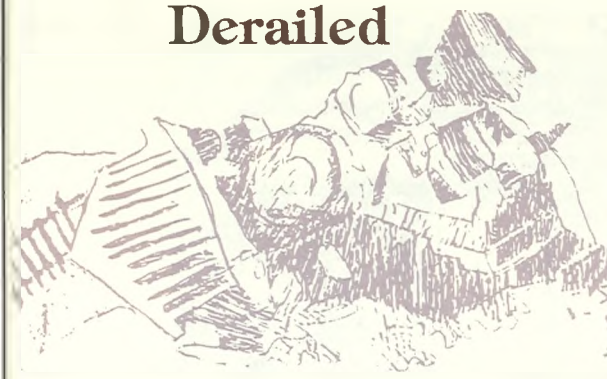
Railroad trains did not always stop at stations to pick up the mail. Catching posts at small stations held mail pouches that were caught by postal clerks as the train passed by.



Harpur's Weekly, 2 January 1875

Clerks sort mail inside a railway postal car.

Derailed

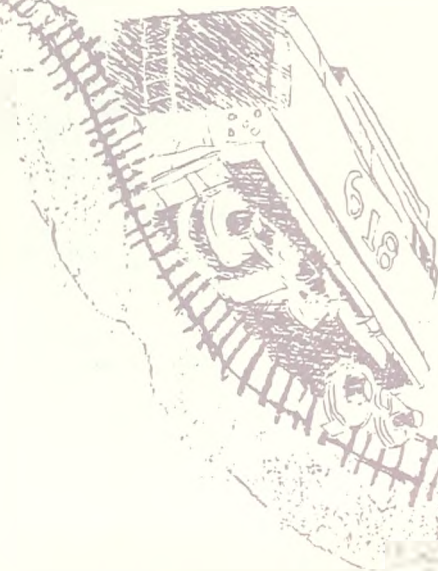


Although railroad transportation helped Iowa's growth, there were sometimes problems connected with the railroads. One of the earliest problems arose when the Chicago and Rock Island Rail Road built a bridge across the Mississippi River.

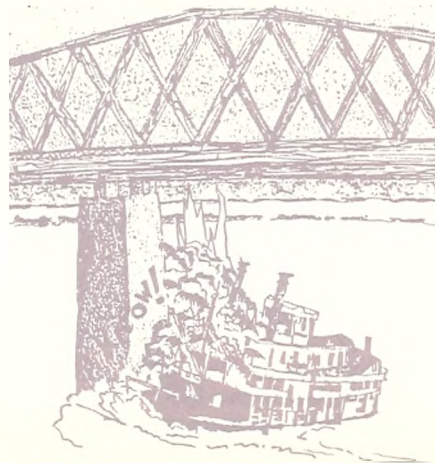
The first railroad bridge across the Mississippi River was completed in April 1856. It linked the Chicago and Rock Island Rail Road in Illinois with the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad in Iowa. This bridge, which spanned the river between Rock Island and Davenport was very important for a number of reasons.

It was the first bridge ever built across the Mississippi River—the greatest river in North America. The bridge was also important in the growth of the United States' railroad system. A bridge across the Mississippi was necessary for the future transcontinental railroad. Finally, the bridge was important because of the controversy surrounding it. The legal questions it brought forth gained national attention and forced the courts to make lasting decisions about bridge building. In the 1850s when the bridge was built, steamboats were the main means of transportation for passengers and cargo along the Mississippi. Trains, however, could go places a steamboat

could not, and the steamboat owners knew this gave trains a big advantage. If trains could get across the Mississippi, they could, in time, replace the steamboat as the main means of transportation.



On May 6, 1856 a steamboat named the *Effie Afton* was destroyed when it ran into the bridge. The owners of the *Effie Afton* decided to take the railroad companies that had built the bridge to court. They wanted the railroad companies to pay for damages to the *Effie Afton* and its cargo. They also wanted the court to declare the bridge a danger to river travel and order its removal. The case went to court in Chicago in September of 1857.



The lawyers for the steamboat owners said the bridge was a hazard to boat travel on the Mississippi River. They said the bridge should be torn down before more boats ran into it and before anybody was killed in an accident like the *Effie Afton's*. The lawyer for the railroads, Abraham Lincoln, said the bridge was not a hazard to navigation on the river if steamboat pilots were careful. He said it was the *Effie Afton's* fault it had run into the bridge, not the bridge's fault. Lincoln pointed out that railroads were just as important for transportation as the steamboats, maybe more important. For three to four months of the year steamboats could not travel the northern part of the Mississippi River because

it was frozen over or filled with ice. Trains, on the other hand, could operate year-round. The railroad companies had just as much legal right to build a bridge across the Mississippi as the steamboats had to use the river.

The jury on the case voted nine to three against the bridge. The case went next to the United States Congress. Congress decided the bridge was a hazard to navigation and should be removed, but left it to the courts to decide the bridge's fate. The case was finally settled in December of 1862 by the Supreme Court of the United States. The bridge was allowed to stand. By the time the case was settled, Abraham Lincoln, lawyer for the railroads in the first trial, was President of the United States.

— Hugh Swarts

After working hard to bring the railroads to almost every part of the state, farmers found railroad companies were not as wonderful as they had thought. The goal for the railroads was to make as much money as possible. Rates were set unfairly. Some railroad companies charged more for short hauls within the state than they did for freight going all the way to Chicago. Competition between railroads on similar routes should have meant lower fares, but companies often made agreements to charge the same price, or to pool their earnings and split the profits.

As railroads grew in size they also grew in power. Legislators were unwilling to make laws affecting railroads. For many years they had received free railroad passes. Legislators thought they might lose this special treatment if they passed laws the railroad owners did not like. The problem came to a head in 1888. Were railroads meant to serve the public welfare, or their owners?

Iowa Governor William Larrabee considered the railroad question very important. He believed there should be some controls over the prices railroads charged. He led a campaign to control railroad rates and told the public about the way railroad companies did business. The campaign succeeded and the legislature passed a law that controlled freight rates. A commission of three was organized to review the rates.

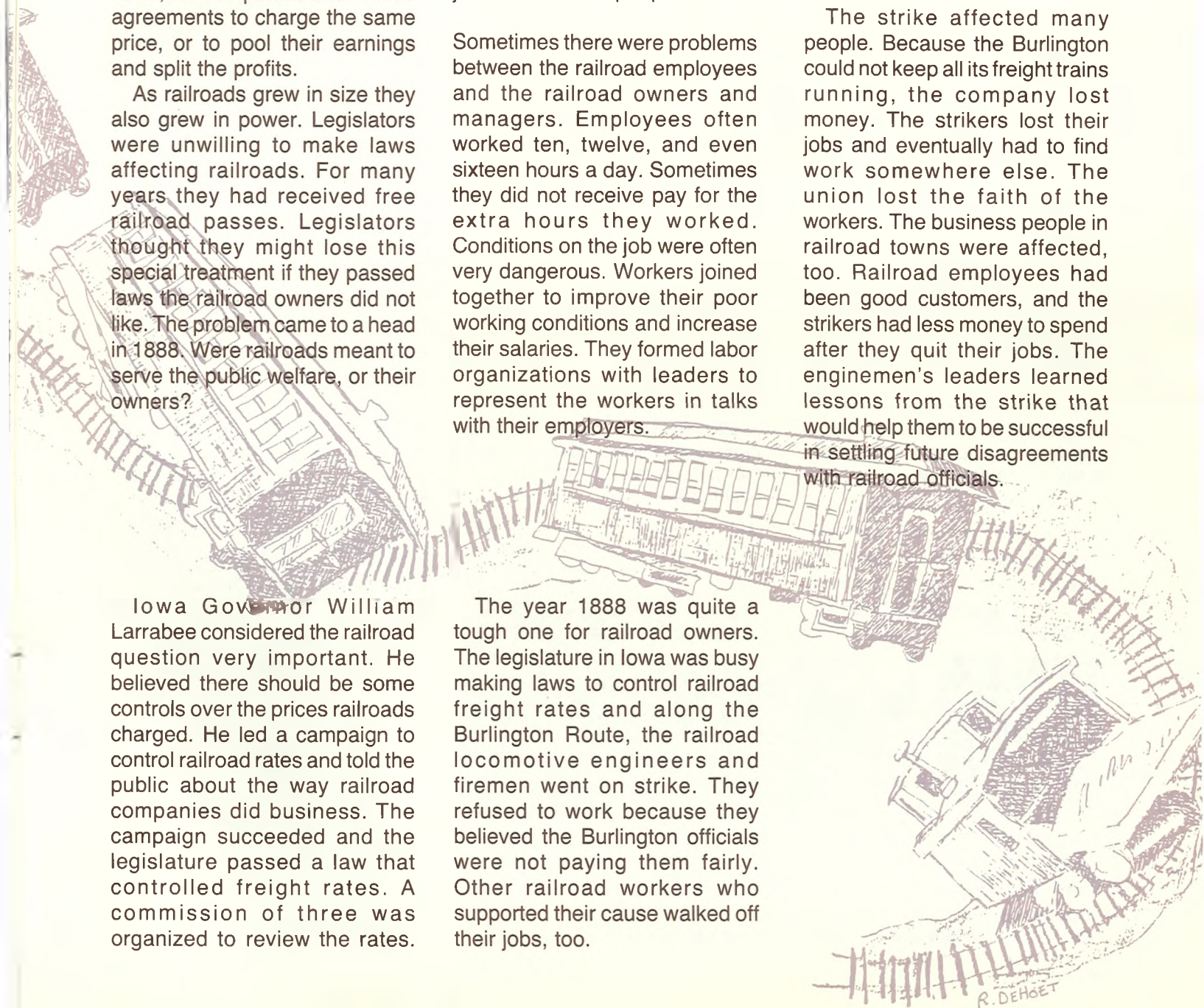
They were to decide on a fair charge to the customer and a fair rate of profit for the railroad. At first, the railroad companies tried to find a way to block the law. After their failure to win in court, the companies' leaders decided to adopt the Iowa commissioners' rates. The Iowa railroads continued to grow in size and earnings. Lower rates encouraged new manufacturers to build factories in Iowa, and the railroads had more business. Governor Larrabee had done his job well for all the people of Iowa.

Sometimes there were problems between the railroad employees and the railroad owners and managers. Employees often worked ten, twelve, and even sixteen hours a day. Sometimes they did not receive pay for the extra hours they worked. Conditions on the job were often very dangerous. Workers joined together to improve their poor working conditions and increase their salaries. They formed labor organizations with leaders to represent the workers in talks with their employers.

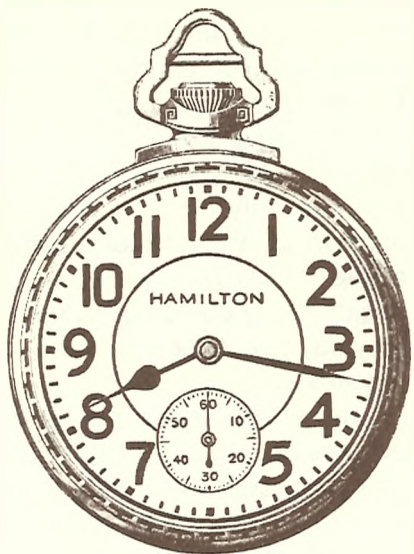
The year 1888 was quite a tough one for railroad owners. The legislature in Iowa was busy making laws to control railroad freight rates and along the Burlington Route, the railroad locomotive engineers and firemen went on strike. They refused to work because they believed the Burlington officials were not paying them fairly. Other railroad workers who supported their cause walked off their jobs, too.

The Burlington officials hired other men to work the strikers' jobs and announced the passenger trains would run on schedule. As the weeks passed with the Burlington officials standing firm, some strikers turned to violence. Dynamite charges exploded at Creston near the railroad shops. The violence only hurt the public's opinion of the strikers. After eleven months the workers decided they could not get what they had asked for and called off the strike.

The strike affected many people. Because the Burlington could not keep all its freight trains running, the company lost money. The strikers lost their jobs and eventually had to find work somewhere else. The union lost the faith of the workers. The business people in railroad towns were affected, too. Railroad employees had been good customers, and the strikers had less money to spend after they quit their jobs. The enginemen's leaders learned lessons from the strike that would help them to be successful in settling future disagreements with railroad officials.



What Time Is It?



Before the railroads stretched iron rails across the nation, each city or town kept its own local time. Clocks in each place were set at twelve noon when the sun reached the highest point in the sky. This local time, or sun time, depended on the **longitude** or

longitude n. — distance east or west of the prime meridian, measured in degrees.

meridian of the town. For every degree of longitude there is a four-minute difference. This worked very well when people traveled from one place to another only at the slow-moving pace of steamboats or horse-drawn wagons.

When railroads came, the differences in time caused problems. Each railroad used the local sun time of its major city. When it was noon solar time in Chicago, it was 12:07 in Indianapolis, Indiana, 11:50 in St. Louis, Missouri, 11:48 in Dubuque, Iowa, 11:41 in St. Paul, Minnesota, and 11:27 in Omaha, Nebraska. The solution to this problem was to divide the world into twenty-four standard time zones. On November 18, 1883, at twelve noon the United States railroads adopted a system for standard time zones. Cities, too, began to use standard time. Eventually standard time zones were adopted by nations of the world. Iowa is in the Central Time Zone.

meridian n. — lines on a map representing either half of the circle that passes through the north and south poles.

courtesy of Robert J. Dietrich



Twenty-five steam whistles sound off in the Creston yards to announce the adoption of standard time at 12:00 noon, November 18, 1883.

The Jewelers Will Change Time

At present the jewelers of Burlington are using almost exclusively Chicago time but on Sunday will adopt standard time. Among the jewelers visited by an Hawkeye representative yesterday was Mr. G.H. Waldin, who stated he would change his time to conform to the new schedule of time just formulated for the use of the railroads by the railroad time convention recently held in Chicago. He further said: "Burlington time is now fourteen minutes slower than Chicago time. According to the new standard it will be five minutes slower than Chicago time. According to the new standard it will be five minutes faster than present city time. We get the correct time from Chicago every morning at 2 minutes past 10 o'clock and we receive it here in the store, being connected by wire. Next Sunday we will adopt the new time. We have always used railroad time; the public demands it and we must supply the demand. Very few people in Burlington use the city time."

Upon a request for determining the accurate time in Burlington, the following reply came from the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.,

Dear Sir — In reply to your letter of June 7, I would state that the longitude of Burlington, Iowa, is 91°07', and that of Chicago, Illinois is 87°38'; the difference therefore is 3°29'. At 4 minutes to 1°, or 4 seconds to 1', this gives a time difference of 13 minutes and 56 seconds. It is proper to observe that as 1' of longitude at this latitude is more than half a mile, different points in the two cities, would differ by several seconds.

Yours very respectfully,
Spencer W. Baird,
Secretary,
Smithsonian Institute

It is very probable the city will adopt the new standard time, as it will be generally used in Burlington anyway. So Sunday at noon, if you have correct Chicago time, set back your clock nine minutes, and you will have standard time.

—The Daily Hawkeye
15 November 1883

Getting Away From It All



Spirit Lake and the Okobojs

Children play in the sand on the shore of Spirit Lake in 1901.

Railroad companies looked for ways to encourage people to use trains. Sometimes they built resort hotels and then built railroad lines for people to use to get there. The railroad companies advertised their resorts and the special train service for vacationers.

The Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway built a resort hotel at Spirit Lake in 1883. The following year the company opened the beautiful Hotel Orleans at the lake. Some said it was the finest hotel in the upper Midwest. The hotel had two hundred rooms, bowling alley, billiard hall, tackle shop, and boat house. Soon another railroad company, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, ran a line near Lake Okobojs. The lakes quickly became a favorite summer resort with campgrounds, cottages, and hotels on the beautiful shores of

the lakes.

Railroad travel was certainly a big improvement over travel by wagon or stagecoach, yet it was not always pleasant. In 1893 Carrie Carson wrote about the train trip home from her vacation in a summer cottage at Lake Okobojs:

We boarded the train for Des Moines at twelve o'clock; at one-thirty we reached Ruthven, where we had dinner. The ride was very hot and dusty and before we had been on the train an hour, we had breathed in more dust than we had seen in a month. We ate once more at Des Moines. We had expected to leave Des Moines on a train which would get us home about one o'clock, but found that it did not stop at Marengo, so we had to wait for a train which left at one o'clock. We

were so tired that we went to Munger's, [a hotel] and went to bed. We rested and were called in time for our train. Just before reaching Newton we ran into a derailed freight car, and had to wait until it was removed. We had to wait a long time and grew very cold, but at last we started on and reached home an hour and a half late. It was between four and five in the morning when we reached Marengo.

The trip had taken about fifteen hours.

In the 1890s train travel may not always have been pleasant or fast—trains averaged about 25 miles per hour with all the stops to let off or take on passengers. Railroad passenger service, however, made it possible for Iowans to travel places they would not have been able to visit before.

One Step Further . . .

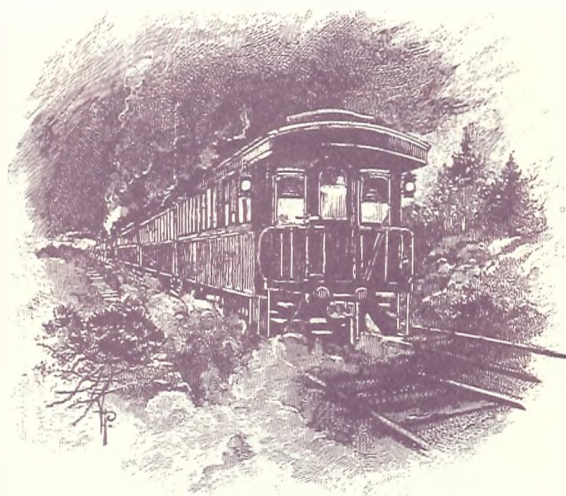
1. Make a list of the changes that occurred as a result of railroad transportation.
2. On a map of Iowa, locate Lake Okoboji and Spirit Lake. Find the railway route Carrie Carson used between the lakes and Marengo. How many miles did she travel? What was the average rate of speed?
3. On a map of Iowa, locate the towns in which over one hundred railroad workers lived. How would the success or failure of a railroad company affect towns where that railroad was the main industry?
4. Through the years, the post office has replaced slower forms of transportation for new, faster ones to move the mail. What do you think might replace our present mail transportation methods?
5. Does the newspaper article about standard time seem confusing? Think of a similar sort of confusion about time that happens twice a year in Iowa and the United States.

MORE ABOUT IOWA RAILROADS:

Iowa Railway Guide
Growth of the Iowa Railroad Network
The Iron Horse Game

Available from: Explorations in Iowa
PLS Publications
Price Laboratory School
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613

From Here to There. A film about the history of Iowa transportation. Teacher's guide available. Produced by the Iowa Public Broadcasting Network. Consult your Area Education Agency or local school district media center.



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