

IOWA REPUBLICANS AND THE RAILROADS, 1856-1860

*By David S. Sparks**

After its defeat in the national campaign of 1852, the Whig party seemed to come apart at the seams. The disparate elements which had made up the party began to search for new leaders and new issues which might make possible the creation of a new coalition with the power to challenge the hegemony of the Democrats. In the North that coalition appeared in 1854 in response to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Douglas' bill to repeal the Missouri Compromise prohibition on slavery north of 36° 30' brought "Independents," "Whigs," "Americans or Know-Nothings," and "Fusionists" together under an "Anti-Nebraska" banner. Under a variety of names these angry men campaigned to defeat the Democracy which had dared to open to slavery those territories solemnly declared "forever free" only thirty-four years before.

In one state after another in the Old Northwest the Democrats were ousted and replaced by "Anti-Nebraska" factions of one kind or another. Many of these new factions disappeared within a year or so, but in some states they survived to become the Republican party. In Iowa, James W. Grimes was elected governor in 1854 on an "Opposition" ticket and an "Anti-Nebraska" platform. Within two years he had adopted the name "Republican" and was extending a welcome to discontented Democrats as well as to all the other splinter groups, urging them to join the only party dedicated to the single issue of resistance to the extension of slavery.

Grimes was aided in his task by the continued strife in Kansas between the free-state and slave-state forces, which were seeking to win the allegiance of the future state. To the accounts of occasional battles between the two groups the newspapers of Iowa added lurid descriptions of individual murders, street brawls, plain robbery, and fancy horse theft, and treated the whole as "bleeding Kansas," as was the fashion in the Republican press throughout the North. The mixture of fact and fancy was blamed upon

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the insatiable appetite of southern slaveholders for more territory and their callous disregard for the lives or rights of free men.

The careful exploitation of "bleeding Kansas" and the demoralization of the divided Democracy¹ combined to give Grimes and his Republicans an astonishing victory in the state races and to carry Iowa for the Republicans in the national contest of 1856. In their first campaign as an organized party the Republicans won both of Iowa's House seats, all contested state offices, and gave Fremont a substantial margin over Buchanan in the presidential race. But even in the flush of victory, Grimes and his friends saw that the future of the party depended upon finding new and more permanent issues. It was obvious that Kansas would not continue to "bleed," and even if it did, the anger of Iowa voters was bound to fade. Equally dangerous to Republican hopes was the possibility that the Democrats might find either a leader or an issue which would reunite them. Therefore, the Republicans had little opportunity to sit back and savor the fruits of victory. They were forced, instead, to seek out an issue which might take the place of rapidly healing Kansas.

Since few politicians are blessed with an emotion-packed issue like Kansas once in a lifetime, Iowa Republicans could scarcely hope for two in a single decade. Consequently they sought for new issues not connected with slavery but reflecting the more pressing needs of a frontier state. In this respect, Republicans gave timorous support to the old Whig demand for the protective tariff; the frontier demand for cheap or free land was given hearty endorsement by promises to work for the adoption of the homestead idea; encouragement to corporate enterprise and banking was extended, in efforts to delete and revise the constitutional restrictions and prohibitions on corporations and banks; federal grants for post roads and river improvement were called for. But Republicans reserved their special concern for railroads, and great emphasis was placed on promises of aid and support to railroad builders and promoters. This was wise, for the railroad was fast becoming the universal panacea for the American farmer. The lines reaching out along the Great Lakes were bringing prices and products that prairie farmers had never dreamed of seeing in their lifetime. The railroad was also providing new outlets for speculation which assured the interest and support of merchants, land agents, and small bankers.

¹ See David S. Sparks, "The Decline of the Democratic Party in Iowa, 1850-1860," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 53:1-30 (January, 1955).

Iowa was a perfect illustration of the special place railroad builders and promoters usually achieved in frontier communities. The mid-1850's saw one Iowa county after another emerge from the subsistence farming stage of development and begin to produce a surplus to be sold outside the home market. Thus the genuine need for improved transportation was coupled with hopes and energies of speculators. As a special fillip to an already exciting prospect there was the dream of becoming a way station on the great Pacific railway everyone was talking about. The result was a veritable mania for railroads in Iowa in the 1850's. Year after year the press was flooded with notices of railroad meetings and conventions. Every tier of counties had its favorite project, and there was hardly a self-respecting town in the state that did not boast at least one railroad company organized by the merchants and bankers of the community. Of course the Democrats and Whigs had long recognized and sought to promote so popular a dream, but the demise of the Whigs and the steadfast opposition of the national leadership of the Democrats to northern railroad plans left the way open for Iowa Republicans to become the champions of the railroads. A very considerable portion of the Republican success in the years between 1856 and 1860 in Iowa stems from a successful exploitation of the state's need for railroads.

Making political capital out of the western demand for railroads was not a simple task, however, for the popularity of railroad promoters and builders fluctuated wildly. The difficulty was rooted in the railroads' search for construction money. Two possible sources of capital existed. The first was the proceeds from the sale of lands. The principle of granting lands to aid in railroad construction had been firmly established by the Illinois Central Bill in 1850. The second possible source of construction capital was direct borrowing. Money might be raised by the sale of railroad bonds, but the speculative character of so many of these enterprises had given railroad bonds a shady character in many money markets. The practice quickly developed of asking a county or town to issue its own bonds, which were then exchanged for railroad bonds or stock. The town or county bonds were then sold in eastern or European money markets for the necessary construction capital. The taxing power of Iowa's towns and counties was considered a better collateral than the earning power of the projected but unfinished railroads. As we shall see, the railroad promoters also cast hungry eyes on the credit of the state itself, but the Iowa constitution forbade the

state to loan money to "any individual or corporation," or to become a stockholder in any corporation. When times were good and construction was moving ahead, the attitude of the public was enthusiastic, and at such times the popularity of the railroads rubbed off on their political friends. But when panic struck and prices fell, the public was quick to remember the mounting debt and the threat of monopoly which the railroads frequently brought in their wake. What had been a political asset then very quickly became a serious liability.

Republican strategists were naturally reluctant to step into so tricky a situation, but they had little choice; no other issue promised one-tenth the political dividends the railroads did. The policy which finally appeared was clearly a compromise. Stated quite simply, it showed the Republicans ready at all times to assist in the winning of federal land grants for Iowa railroads, but determined to resist railroad efforts to use the credit of the state in furthering construction. This policy governed the attitude of the Republican party in Iowa toward the railroads during the critical years between 1856 and 1860. It was admittedly a rather ambivalent program, but it had one supreme political virtue — it accurately reflected the attitude of the majority of Iowans.

The friendship for railroads called for by the Republican strategy came quite naturally to the young organization. Many of the leaders of the new party were closely connected with various railroad enterprises. Grimes himself was identified as a railroad man almost from the moment he arrived in Iowa. As early as 1838 he was urging a memorial to Congress seeking a land grant for a railroad in Iowa.² In 1851 he was a director of the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad which was to be built eastward from a point on the Mississippi River opposite Burlington.³ In the fall of that year he was busy in the state legislature pushing railroad plans. He wrote to his wife: "I have succeeded in the principal object for which I came here, viz., upon the subject of railroads, and, I am told, have elevated the character of your husband as a tactician and parliamentary leader."⁴

In addition to Grimes there were men such as Samuel Ryan Curtis, James Harlan, William Penn Clarke, and Josiah B. Grinnell who were closely iden-

² Fred B. Lewellen, "Political Ideas of James W. Grimes," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 42:348 (October, 1944).

³ Cited in William Salter, *The Life of James W. Grimes* (New York, 1876), 27.

⁴ James W. Grimes to Mrs. Grimes, Dec. 18, 1851, *ibid.*, 32.

tified with railroad building or promotion in Iowa during the years the Republican party was being formed. Samuel R. Curtis was an engineer by profession and a West Point graduate. He moved to Iowa after the Mexican War and soon turned to railroading. In 1853 he had led a surveying party across Iowa to locate the right-of-way for the "Lyons Road."⁵ By 1856 he had been elected mayor of Keokuk and in 1858 was the first Republican to go to Congress from the First (southern) Congressional District.⁶

James Harlan, Iowa's first Republican Senator, appears to have been intimately connected with railroad promoters in the state. In November of 1856 he wrote to Ebenezer Clark, banker of Iowa City:

You will remember, that in a conversation with me last winter, you remarked that if an opportunity should be presented of investing twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars in such a manner as to afford inducements you could furnish the "material aid," etc. The R. R. from [Mount Pleasant] to Keokuk will be permanently located between this and Jan. 1st, '57. It will be built rapidly and completed speedily. I can know *in advance* where the road will be established, and also the location of every *depot*. If this will afford such an inducement as you desire I would be glad to see you this week. I leave for Washington next Monday. This, if embraced, will cost you *one half* of the *clear profits* growing out of the investment. For your security the purchases may be made in *your name* — you giving a bond as per agreement. Please write immediately or come down — the latter if convenient. Should it be impracticable for you to come down previous to my departure, Mrs. Harlan will be able to refer you to a gentleman here with whom all the preliminaries may be arranged, and in whom you can confide with perfect safety. . . .⁷

William Penn Clarke, a Republican prominent in the constitutional convention of 1857, was a staunch defender of the railroads before that body.⁸ Josiah B. Grinnell, Underground Railroad operator, town and college found-

⁵ J. R. Perkins, *Trails, Rails and War: The Life of General G. M. Dodge* (Indianapolis, 1929), 25. (Hereafter listed as Perkins, *Dodge*.)

⁶ Ruth A. Gallaher, "Samuel Ryan Curtis," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 25:331-7 (July, 1929).

⁷ James Harlan to E. Clark, Nov. 17, 1856, *James Harlan Papers* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City). This letter is a copy, probably made by Harlan's biographer, Johnson Brigham, from the family papers he used during the preparation of his biography of Harlan which was published in 1913.

⁸ His defense included a scathing denunciation of the many minor attempts made to curb the railroads. Erik M. Eriksson, "William Penn Clarke," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 22:26-7 (January, 1927).

er, friend of John Brown, and prominent Republican, located his town on a site he had been assured by officials of the Mississippi & Missouri Railroad would be on their line. Grinnell soon became a director for the road and remembered "nearly a hundred stage and hack trips to bring the Rock Island [successor to the Mississippi & Missouri] west."⁹ Grinnell was even more closely identified with the Iowa Central Railroad which he headed for several years before it failed.

The major Republican politicians were not the only party men engaged in railroad activities, however. There were many lesser figures who did yeoman service for both the party and the railroads. Some were young men who would rise to positions of great power in party councils and railroad board rooms. Such a man was Grenville M. Dodge of Council Bluffs. Young Dodge had started out as a surveyor for the Mississippi & Missouri in 1852. When the 1854 panic stopped railroading, Dodge went to Elkhorn, Nebraska, where he pioneered for a year. From there he made independent surveys into the Indian country, becoming an early advocate of the Platte River route to the west. With the revival of railroading in 1855, Dodge went back to work for the M. & M. and was kept busy in the field as a surveyor as well as serving as a liaison man between the railroad promoters and the Republican leadership. It was Dodge who handled the interests of Abraham Lincoln in the Riddle tract in Council Bluffs until that tract was neatly bisected by the railroad.¹⁰

By the end of the decade the group of men identified with both the railroads and the Republican party included men like Hiram Price, H. M. Hoxie, and John A. Kasson. All three were members of the State Central Committee during the early years of the party, and Kasson guided it through the critical campaigns of 1859 and 1860. Hiram Price was for several years connected with the M. & M. and after 1857 was a member of its board of directors.¹¹ Hoxie was close to "Doctor" Durant during the 1850's and followed Durant from the M. & M. into the Union Pacific promotion a few years later,¹² while Kasson became an attorney and lobbyist for the M. & M. in Des Moines.¹³

⁹ Josiah B. Grinnell, *Men and Events of Forty Years* (Boston, 1891), 298-300.

¹⁰ Frank I. Herriott, *Iowa and Abraham Lincoln* (Des Moines, 1911), 89-92.

¹¹ Peter A. Dey to G. M. Dodge, June 9, 1857, *Grenville M. Dodge Papers*, Vol. I (State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa).

¹² Jack T. Johnson, *Peter Anthony Dey* (Iowa City, 1939), 117-18.

¹³ Perkins, *Dodge*, 57. See Edward Younger, *John A. Kasson* (Iowa City, 1955).

The Republicans labored under a severe handicap in their early efforts to become the sole political champions of the railroads in Iowa; the Democrats, in power until the upset of 1854, had fought hard for Iowa railroads, and their campaign was not forgotten. Both Senators Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones had devoted a large percentage of their time in Washington in search of the coveted land grants. Iowa's Democratic Representatives had been equally diligent. Moreover, Democrats appeared in railroad circles in Iowa with almost the same regularity as Republicans. Eventually the Republicans found two ways of overcoming the initial Democratic advantage. The first was to make a greater public display of their railroad proclivities than the Democrats did; the second was to pound away at the manner in which the national leadership of the Democracy, under Southern control, killed every effort by Iowa's representatives to win a grant.

A splendid example of the first technique came in 1856. After six years of persistent labor, the Democrats had managed to force through the Congress a bill granting over three million acres of land to the state of Iowa for railroad construction. The Republicans, now in control of the governorship and the legislature, had a field day. Governor Grimes called a special session of the legislature which, after two weeks of oratory ringing the changes on Republican friendship for the railroads, graciously agreed to accept the federal grant. The work of the Democrats in winning the grant for Iowa was neatly obscured.

The second technique used by the Republicans had far greater justification. Even Senators Dodge and Jones admitted that their efforts in behalf of Iowa railroads were regularly thwarted by their Southern Democratic colleagues in the Senate.¹⁴ In both the Thirty-fourth and Thirty-fifth Congresses they had devoted a goodly portion of their time to working for additional grants, but without success. Even as a lame duck, Senator Jones carried on the fight.¹⁵ Iowans applauded the Democratic effort but listened to the Republicans who promoted the idea that further grants would come only when Republicans held a majority in Congress and control of the White House. Republican efforts to become the champions of railroads in Iowa were so successful that when the party asserted its independence or antago-

¹⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess. (1855-1856), 1166-70.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35 Cong., 1 Sess. (1857-1858), 1580.

nized a company, it came as something of a surprise to the voters as well as to the railroads.

Nevertheless, the bonds of friendship between the party and one or more of the railroads were occasionally strained. Two things seem to have caused difficulty. The first was that the railroads were often desperate in their search for construction capital and tried to push the party too far or too fast. Railroad promoters, faced with the prospect of halting construction, sometimes forgot the necessity for the Republican leaders remaining free of the charge of railroad domination. A second source of trouble between the railroads and the party is illustrated by the controversy over the Des Moines River Navigation Company which resulted in catching the party between the crossfire of two rail groups. Briefly, the Navigation Company trouble centered around lands which had originally been granted by the federal government to the state upon its admission to the Union in 1846. The lands, to aid in the improvement of the Des Moines River, had been transferred to the Des Moines River Navigation Company which contracted to do the actual construction.¹⁶ By 1857 it had become apparent that the railroads rather than the river would carry the freight in the future, so efforts were begun to divert the land grant to railroad construction.

The major emphasis in railroad promotion and building in Iowa up to 1857 had naturally centered upon east-west lines which were pushed as possible links in the anticipated transcontinental line as well as for the direct connection they gave with eastern markets. There remained, however, a very considerable interest in a north-south route which would bypass the Des Moines and Rock River Rapids in the Mississippi and bring the goods of the upper river valley down through Iowa. Naturally this interest was concentrated in towns along the line of the projected road as well as in Keokuk, which hoped to regain in this way some of its former importance as the "Gate City" to Iowa and the upper Northwest. The expected liquidation of the Des Moines River Navigation Company introduced the question of whether its lands would be diverted to an east-west or a north-south railroad.¹⁷ Specifically it became an attempt by the Dubuque & Pacific and

¹⁶ The best general discussion of the project is to be found in Jacob A. Swisher, "The Des Moines River Improvement Project," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 35:142-80 (April, 1937).

¹⁷ For a full discussion of the way this issue became involved in politics see Mildred Throne, "C. C. Carpenter in the 1858 Iowa Legislature," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 52:34-9 (January, 1954).

the Mississippi & Missouri railroads to keep the lands from being diverted to the Keokuk, Fort Des Moines & Minnesota Railroad which was reaching northwestward from Keokuk along the Des Moines River. Apparently the Dubuque & Pacific was ready to throw its weight behind Democratic candidates for the state legislature in an effort to halt the diversion to this north-south line.¹⁸ In spite of considerable pressure, both Governor Grimes and his successor, Governor Ralph P. Lowe, stuck to their guns and moved to divert the lands over the protests of the powerful east-west groups.¹⁹

Even though the Republicans were occasionally caught between competing railroads, the problem was not nearly as serious for the party as the one posed by the concerted attack upon the credit of the state made by the builders and promoters during 1858 and 1859. The story grew out of the panic of 1857, which seriously curtailed railroad construction in Iowa. Only 90 miles of track were laid in that year as compared with 186 miles laid down in the previous year. As the depression deepened, construction dropped to a mere 35 miles in 1858. The shortage of construction money was not alleviated by the federal land grants of 1856, for the government was slow in certifying the lands to be granted to the railroads.²⁰ Furthermore, certification depended on the number of miles built each year, and the Iowa roads were behind schedule. Even when they did acquire title, the railroads found it impossible to sell the lands at a good price. The problem of the railroads was further aggravated by the general money stringency which made sale of the bonds voted by the towns and counties both uncertain and expensive.²¹ In the hope that state bonds might find a market where county and municipal bonds had not, the promoters of several Iowa roads began a campaign for this form of state aid, in spite of the constitutional provision against it.

By December of 1858 the railroads had whipped up enough enthusiasm to risk holding a state aid convention in Iowa City. The first resolution adopted by the group summarized the purpose of the gathering. It declared the convention "in favor of a judicious system of State aid to such Railroads

¹⁸ James W. Grimes to C. C. Carpenter, Nov. 11, 1857, *Cyrus Clay Carpenter Papers* (State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa).

¹⁹ James W. Grimes to C. C. Carpenter, Nov. 30, 1857, *ibid.*

²⁰ John C. Parish, *George Wallace Jones* (Iowa City, 1912), 206-209.

²¹ For an excellent discussion of the entire problem of town and county bonds as a source of railroad construction capital, see Earl S. Beard, "Local Aid to Railroads in Iowa," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 50:1-34 (January, 1952).

as are of State importance to an amount not exceeding eight millions of dollars," and asked the governor to call a special session of the legislature to consider the proposition.²²

Immediately there was Republican opposition to the scheme. Samuel Jordan Kirkwood, who was to be elected governor on the Republican ticket within a year, signed a minority committee report declaring that the credit of the state could not be abandoned to the railroad companies without a constitutional amendment. Later, he again attempted to head off the movement by suggesting that if the state was to assume a large debt for railroad building it ought first to assume the outstanding local and county debts.²³ Senator James Harlan joined the fray with an appeal to his fellow Republican, Governor Lowe, that no special session of the legislature be called. Harlan feared that if the state aid movement was successful the Republicans would be held responsible and the angry reaction would certainly defeat the party in the critical campaign of 1859. He wrote the governor:

On the supposition that you should favor their wishes, and that the Legislature when convened, would authorize the Bonds to be issued, would it not almost certainly defeat the Republican ticket next summer? Independent of the cry of *extravagance*, which demagogues would be certain to raise, would it not give our opponents, the *voters* along the lines of these roads, sufficient to swamp our small majority in the state at large, — and, also, enable them to so distribute them as to carry the Senate and the House? And if so, would all the good growing out of the *more rapid* completion of these public works, compensate for the loss of the control of the State Government, and our position in the Ranks of *Republican States* in 1860, when our vote, as a State, may elect a President of the United States?²⁴

The Republican press seconded the sentiments of the party leadership. A typical reaction appeared in the *Oskaloosa Herald*, which hoped it had seen the end of ". . . this scheme of personal and corporation aggrandizement at the expense of the State. . . . The land speculators and railroad harpies of Dubuque, Davenport, and other places will have to try some more plausible plan in order to involve the credit of the State in their schemes for enriching a few individuals at the expense of the many."²⁵

²² *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, Dec. 10, 1858.

²³ Dan Elbert Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1917), 120-21.

²⁴ Harlan to Ralph P. Lowe, Nov. 11, 1858, *Harlan Papers*.

²⁵ *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, Dec. 10, 1858.

The Republicans were on firm political ground. What had happened in Iowa had happened in most of the Old Northwest in the preceding few years. A tremendous demand for railroads had produced conditions approaching hysteria. Newly organized counties vied with more wealthy communities in endorsing railroad bonds or buying railroad stock on credit. Unscrupulous promoters, as well as honest builders, made extravagant promises. Gradually the people became disillusioned. While their need and desire for railroads had not abated one bit, the growing power of the railroad companies over the future of individual communities began to frighten the people. Railroad builders, recently hailed as public benefactors, began to appear to be no more than selfish stock-jobbers. Some counties rescinded the bond issues they had voted for the benefit of the railroads. Since federal land grants did not involve the shadow of debt, such grants were favored in direct proportion to the growing distrust of local and state aid programs. The Republicans had found a solid middle ground when they advocated land grants and fought state aid for railroads in Iowa.

The feeling against the railroad builders and promoters was definitely on the increase during 1859 and 1860, and the Republican party reflected this antagonism in private as well as in public. In the race for the nomination for governor and lieutenant governor, men like W. W. Hamilton of Dubuque and Hiram Price of Davenport were rejected because of their open connection with the Dubuque & Pacific Railroad and the M. & M. line.²⁶ In early 1860 there was even an effort to deprive the roads of some of the lands already granted to them by the federal government. Based on the fact that several of the roads that had received federal grants had not been able to build within the specified time limits, there were apparently several members of the state legislature willing to entertain legislation calling for reversion of the lands to the state. While directors of the roads do not appear to have feared for their lands, they were afraid of the effect such a move might have on their bond sales in the East.²⁷ As a result of this fear, the M. & M. sent G. M. Dodge to do a little lobbying in the legislature in order to prevent the passage of reversion legislation.²⁸

The 1859 gubernatorial campaign revealed the Republican position per-

²⁶ Grimes to Kirkwood, Apr. 24, 1859, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood Papers* (State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines, Iowa).

²⁷ John A. Dix to Peter A. Dey, Feb. 4, 1860, *Dodge Papers*, Vol. I.

²⁸ Henry Farnam to Dodge, March 17, 1860, *ibid.*, Vol. I.

fectly. It gave the party ample opportunity to display its friendship for railroads by its support of grand plans like the Pacific railway, while retaining its freedom of action to deal with local railroad people or not, as circumstances dictated. The old ambivalence was thereby continued. The contest over the Pacific railroad also allowed the Republicans to recall their antislavery and anti-Southern beginnings, for the transcontinental plan had long been involved in sectional politics. Senator Harlan and Representative Curtis carried the burden of this phase of the campaign. Pointing to the united Southern and Democratic opposition to a northern route to the Pacific, Harlan appealed to "New England to stand by us in our appeal to Congress for aid in the construction of this great national road. The united votes of her Senators, with those from New York and Pennsylvania, will render our success certain."²⁹ Representative Curtis worked day and night, both on the floor and off, to further Iowa's hopes of getting on the line of the Pacific road.³⁰ Many of his speeches were extensively circulated in Iowa, and he was a prolific letter writer. In fact, he appears to have spent most of his time off the floor in writing to prominent Republicans throughout the state. In May of 1860 he was offering his work on the Pacific railroad bill as the chief reason he should be renominated.³¹

Curtis was persuasive, for he won his renomination and was re-elected. His victory, however, was the result of an unusual rescue operation by Henry Farnam and the M. & M. Railroad. The Irish workers on the Keokuk & Fort Des Moines line apparently held the balance of power in Curtis' First Congressional District. At least the Curtis camp feared that they did. If the Irish workers voted Democratic, C. C. Cole seemed a certain winner. In order to forestall any such calamity, H. M. Hoxie of the Republican State Central Committee wrote to his old friend G. M. Dodge for assistance. It developed that the Keokuk road was in financial difficulties and on the verge of laying off the workers in question. Dodge passed the word to Farnam, with the result that about one hundred Irish railroad workers were hired by the M. & M. just in time to get them out of the close First District and into the solidly Republican Second District before the election.³² Even though the election returns indicate that Curtis did not need the assistance

²⁹ *Cong. Globe*, 35 Cong., 2 Sess. (1858-1859), 310-11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Appendix, 250-55.

³¹ Samuel R. Curtis to John T. Baldwin, May 24, 1860, *Dodge Papers*, Vol. I.

³² H. M. Hoxie to Dodge, Oct. 3, 26, 1860, *ibid.*

from the M. & M., it remains an interesting sidelight on the relations between the Republicans and the railroads in Iowa.

The final chapter of the story of the early Iowa Republicans and the railroads centered in the interest of local party leaders in Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's early popularity among Iowa Republicans stemmed from his debates with Stephen A. Douglas, his Cooper Union speech, and the possibility of sending a northwestern man to the White House. There was, in addition, however, considerable interest in Lincoln because of his connections with various railroads. As early as 1857 Grimes, who prided himself on being a good judge of speakers and politicians, requested Lincoln to make a few speeches in Iowa during the constitutional ratification contest.³³ Lincoln had not been able to come, being involved in the famous Rock Island Bridge case that ultimately brought him into closer contact with Iowa Republicans. A short time later Lincoln, in the course of litigation involving the Illinois Central Railroad, arrived in Dubuque with an official party of company men. At that time the Illinois Central was trying to obtain rights for a crossing and a terminal at Dubuque. Lincoln's arrival in the company of important railroad officials impressed local party leaders.³⁴

Lincoln was again in Iowa in 1859, this time on a combined business and pleasure trip to Council Bluffs. While there he met G. M. Dodge who had recently returned from a railroad surveying trip up the Platte Valley to the west. The two men talked for over an hour on the porch of the old Pacific House, during which Lincoln pumped Dodge for information about railroad matters. As Dodge remembered it, ". . . he proceeded to find out all about the country we had been through, and all about our railroad surveys, the character of the country, particularly its adaptability to settlement, its topographical features, in fact he extracted from me the information I had gathered for my employers, and virtually shelled my woods most thoroughly."³⁵

In addition to shelling Dodge's woods, Lincoln wanted to look over some lots in the Riddle tract in Council Bluffs, which Norman Judd, an attorney for the Rock Island Railroad, had bought in 1857 and was now offering as security for a loan from Lincoln. Lincoln took the lots and, as we have seen, Dodge became his agent in taking care of the property.

³³ Herriott, *Iowa and Abraham Lincoln*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89-92.

³⁵ As told to Frank I. Herriott by G. M. Dodge in 1908. *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 12:451 (October, 1920).

During the Republican convention in the Wigwam in 1860, which he attended at Judd's request, G. M. Dodge was one of Lincoln's most active supporters. Dodge was then still young and not too influential, but he acted as a sort of runner for Judd and stirred up all the enthusiasm he could for Lincoln, whom he admired.

The interest of Iowa Republicans in Abraham Lincoln displays the same curious ambivalence which always appeared when the early Republican party of Iowa was faced with the problem of railroads. The party and the individual leaders were eager to see railroads built, they were frequently close to railroad promoters or were active promoters themselves, and yet they did not want to — and could not afford to — be too closely identified with the railroads. Public enthusiasm for railroads and railroad men was too variable to provide a solid foundation upon which to build a political party. A flexible policy for changing conditions was the only possible program for the early Republican party in Iowa. Friendly, but not too friendly, was the strategy, and it paid off handsomely as the Republicans successfully made the transition from a one-idea party opposed to the extension of slavery to a complex party with a wide range of economic programs to offer the electorate.