

B. C. R. & N.

The Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern (incorporated in Iowa on June 27, 1876) had as its heritage a strategic 368-mile railroad — all in Iowa. When the property was purchased outright by the Rock Island in 1903, it had grown to be a 1,310-mile system, located in three states. Its main stem ran from Burlington through Cedar Rapids and Waterloo to Albert Lea, Minnesota. Another line ran northwest through Emmetsburg and Sibley, thence crossing the corner of Minnesota to Watertown, South Dakota. Branches veered off the main line at various points, serving Iowa City and Montezuma on the south, Clinton on the east, Decorah up in the northeast corner, and Estherville in northwestern Iowa.

First president of the road was Fred Taylor of New York, who represented Eastern financial interests. But the man "on location" who ran the railroad was General Edward F. Winslow, who had formerly been appointed receiver of the old BCR&M when he was only 38. Irked when he was not made president of the new company, the Civil War veteran gave up his post as vice president and general superintendent to head the expanding St. Louis-San Francisco Railroad in

1880. That year, too, Judge Joshua Tracy of Burlington, general solicitor of the BCR&N, replaced Taylor as chief executive. The people of Cedar Rapids breathed a sigh of relief when their home road was once again run by Iowans.

It was Charles J. Ives, however, who provided the continuity of leadership and sound business judgment which made "The Iowa Route" an outstanding railroad in the Midwest. From 1884 to its sale in 1903, Ives shaped the destiny of the carrier as its president and general superintendent. A strict disciplinarian with a somewhat austere exterior, he was highly respected for his honesty and fairness. Reared a New Englander, there was always a trace of Green Mountain reserve in his makeup.

Born in Rutland County, Vermont, October 4, 1831, Ives came west and entered railroad service as a clerk on what is now the Burlington Railroad. After working in stations at Mt. Pleasant and Ottumwa, he was sent to Burlington. There he saw the rapid progress being made on Judge Greene's new railroad and sensed greater opportunities for advancement in that company. In July, 1870, Ives was clerking for Greene. Ives' knowledge of traffic and station accounting led to steady promotion. He soon became general freight agent, then general passenger and freight agent and, in 1875, superintendent. By 1879 he was general superintendent; five years later, president.

While Ives elected to remain with the BCR&N, others found the road a valuable training school leading to railroad advancement elsewhere. Most notable was A. L. Mohler, whose background in clerking on the North Western and the Burlington closely resembled that of Ives. Mohler likewise changed from the Burlington to the old BCR&M, being with the latter from 1871 to 1882. He rose from traveling auditor to general freight agent, when he left to go with a forerunner of the Great Northern. Other roads followed, including a stint as general manager of the Minneapolis & St. Louis, until he changed to the Union Pacific and subsequently became its president. To have worked on the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern was generally considered to be the hallmark of a good railroader.

The late 1870's saw new construction, although it was not until the next decade that vigorous expansion ensued. The most important item on the earlier agenda was the opening of the famous Albert Lea Route in 1877. By building a 5-mile extension from Plymouth Junction to Manly Junction, the BCR&N hooked up with the Iowa Central Railway. From Manly, trackage rights were had over the latter road to Northwood; and from Northwood the BCR&N built its own track to the Minnesota border, where it connected with the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad for Albert Lea and the Twin Cities.

Here was the beginning of a new through line from the Twin Cities, via Albert Lea, Cedar Rapids and Burlington, to St. Louis. South of Burlington the train ran over the present Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad to the Missouri metropolis. For years the *St. Louis Special* was a popular train, having Pullmans, dining cars and coaches on the 587-mile run. Another Limited, known as the *Cannon Ball*, ran between the Twin cities and Chicago, operating over the Rock Island from West Liberty to the Windy City. Despite its circuitous route, it competed with five other railroads, all having more direct lines between the same destinations.

Travelers and the connecting roads could depend on the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern to keep its trains on time. Punctuality was a fetish with the Old Man in Cedar Rapids. It was not by chance that Charles Ives had the dual position of president and general superintendent. He was as well-posted on train operation as he was on finance.

Whereas the Burlington-Albert Lea line was distinctly "high iron" and the pride of the BCR&N, the branch from Clinton through Elmira to Iowa City was "hojack," shabby as a poor relation. It had little economic importance, probably never earned its keep, and was abandoned in sections between 1928 and 1943. The Elmira-Iowa City segment was opened in 1877; and the re-

mainder of the route to Clinton, in 1883. The road, like many other branches, was constructed by separate companies later absorbed by the BCR&N. (For details see chart at end of chapter giving names of individual companies, dates of construction and name sequence.)

Another secondary line, built by the Iowa City & Western, ran south from Iowa City to Iowa Jct., thence west to Montezuma. A short branch from Thornburg to What Cheer was also part of the road. It was on the IC&W that a young man of 19, fresh out of the State University of Iowa, got his first railroad job as a rodman. He was John M. Brown, who later surveyed many more miles of the BCR&N before retiring after 50 years of service in 1929. Brown afterward became division engineer of the system, and after it was purchased by the Rock Island, he was made assistant to the president of the latter company.

The bulk of new construction in the 1880's was done under the auspices of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Railway, incorporated in Iowa on June 4, 1880. It was affiliated with the BCR&N, although not absorbed by the bigger company until 1902. We have seen that the BCR&N had a branch from Vinton to Traer, which was extended to Holland in 1877. From Holland the CRIF&NW took over and built in a general northwesterly direction through Iowa Falls to Clarion in 1880. The next year rails led

to Emmetsburg, and by 1882 trains were running through Livermore, Estherville and Lake Park to Worthington, Minnesota.

In 1884 the biggest jump of all was made when a 174-mile extension was opened from Lake Park through Sibley to Watertown, South Dakota. A branch was also built from Worthington to connect with the Watertown line at Hardwick, Minnesota. To tap the packing center of Sioux Falls, a road was run eastward from that city through Rock Rapids, Iowa, thence to Ellsworth, Minnesota, on the Watertown line. It was completed in 1886.

Meanwhile, in central Iowa, a branch was slowly extending up from the Watertown line at Dows through Belmond, Garner and Forest City to Armstrong. An extension was built by an affiliated road from Garner to Titonka (in Kossuth County), crossing the Des Moines & Fort Dodge Railroad at Hayfield. For a time trains ran over the DM&FtD until the Garner-Forest City segment was completed in 1895. Service from Dows to Armstrong (including running rights over the DM&FtD) was in operation by 1892.

Incidentally, the last track built by the BCR&N was the branch from Albert Lea to Estherville. This line went westward to Lakota, then over the already constructed road to Armstrong, from whence it was extended to Estherville in 1900.

To round out the picture, mention should be made of the Postville Junction-Decorah branch

completed in 1884; the 6-mile stub from Waverly Junction to Waverly, opened in 1886; and the ill-fated Davenport-Bennett line finished in 1890. The last mentioned road was built by the Davenport, Iowa & Dakota Railroad, long in name and short in expectation. About half of the 28-mile diagonal route was abandoned in 1925; and the remainder, which was mostly in Cedar County, was scrapped in 1943. The only other abandonments associated with the BCR&N are the Muscatine-Riverside branch, which ceased operation (except for the short Nichols-Lone Tree sector) in 1938; and the little Thornburg-What Cheer feeder which gave up in 1957. By 1958 the Nichols-Lone Tree segment had passed into history.

In reviewing the extensive expansion between 1880 and 1890, the Watertown line stands out as a somewhat incongruous extension for a basic Iowa railroad. It seemed out of character and in many ways it was. What is the explanation? The answer is found in the Rock Island, and especially in the overlordship of its aggressive president Ransom R. Cable.

Since the late 1870's the Rock Island had had a substantial interest in the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern. This was increased until by 1885 it had a majority of the BCR&N's outstanding capital stock and, accordingly, dictated the road's policies. Cable, in the meantime, had embarked on a bold policy of expanding the Rock Island and

its associated roads. During this period the Rock Island also controlled the Minneapolis & St. Louis, and for several years Cable headed the Mill City road. Cable had the M&StL built westward to Watertown. Cable strengthened the Albert Lea Route by closely integrating the BCR&N with the M&StL. In short, Cable wanted to make the M&StL a strong arm of his growing Rock Island. By extending the BCR&N into Watertown, it would further coordinate the M&StL with the Rock Island and give the latter a short cut to the grain country of the Northwest. The M&StL later went bankrupt, and Cable's aim to bring it into the Rock Island fold never materialized.

Notwithstanding this sortie into Dakota, the BCR&N was primarily an Iowa railroad; and few had more affection for it than the people of its home state. Herbert Hoover had fond memories of that road as a boy in West Branch. He says in his *Memoirs*:

I have mentioned the Burlington track. It was an inspiring place. It was ballasted with glacial gravels where, by hard search, you discovered gems of agate and fossil coral which could, with infinite backaches, be polished on the grindstone.

When Hoover's reminiscences appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, one reader took exception to the name "Burlington," averring that the distinguished ex-president had confused the local line with the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, generally

referred to as the Burlington Railroad. Since the CB&Q did not go anywhere near West Branch, Hoover seemingly was in error. Then along came another letter from a railway mail clerk who had serviced West Branch on his run. He said that Hoover was right and his critic wrong. The Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern was, indeed, locally referred to as "The Burlington."

An almost forgotten phase of BCR&N history is the role it played in making the Lake Okoboji-Spirit Lake region a popular vacation resort. It built to the lake area in 1882, and the Milwaukee Road came the following year. While the promotional activities of the two roads overlapped, the BCR&N stressed Spirit Lake because it followed that body of water for several miles. The Milwaukee, on the other hand, confined its efforts more to Okoboji on the south, which its line bisected.

Hardly had the cars arrived at Orleans, located near the isthmus between the two lakes, when the BCR&N began to exploit the region. It brought the steamboat *Alpha* up from Burlington and promptly put it in service on Spirit Lake. Having a capacity of 40 passengers, the boat soon did a thriving business. On hot summer days excursionists came from all along the line to disembark at Orleans, where they boarded the *Alpha* for a refreshing cruise on the big lake.

So successful was the undertaking that the rail-

road built an ornate three-story hotel to accommodate the tourists. Called the *Orleans*, it had two hundred guest rooms with one door leading to the corridor and another door opening onto the spacious veranda. The latter afforded "a grand promenade three thousand feet long and sixteen feet wide." The hotel had nine towers, in keeping with the "gingerbread" architecture of the period. It was opened with an elaborate ceremony on June 16, 1883, over which S. L. Dows was the presiding officer.

To provide lake cruises in keeping with the luxurious hotel, the BCR&N launched a new boat in 1884. Appropriately named the *Queen*, it was built by Iowa Iron Works in Dubuque and sent to Orleans for assembly. Much of the woodwork was milled in the road's own passenger car shops in Cedar Rapids. The *Queen* was the first steel-hulled vessel on the lakes. She was a beautiful smooth running craft, equalled (but not excelled) by the Milwaukee's *Ben Lennox*, launched the same year on Lake Okoboji. Both boats had a capacity of about 250 passengers.

The commodious hotel, however, proved to be too expensive for most tourists; and the steamboats had difficulty in navigating the isthmus between the lakes, due to water receding nearly every year. By 1898 the lakes were about eight feet lower than the high-water mark of 1882. As the water dropped so did the patronage of the

hotel and the boats. Other factors, such as the depression of 1893, militated against costly vacations and fashionable hotels.

The day of special trains to the state's most exclusive watering place had run its course. The hotel was razed in 1899, and the *Queen* was sold to outside interests two years afterward. The *Queen*, however, has continued to blow her whistle for over sixty years; a pleasant reminder of a glorious era that was, and can never be again.

Time was running out also on the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern as a separate entity. In 1902 the Rock Island leased the road and the next year purchased it. Charles Ives, who had been with the railroad almost from its inception, signed the papers conveying the entire property to the Rock Island. Now in his seventies, alert of mind and able of body, he presented a commanding appearance. A trim, close cropped beard added dignity to the occasion as he laid down his pen, ending his long career on Iowa's last major independent railroad.

Table A BURLINGTON, CEDAR RAPIDS & NORTHERN RY.

<i>Completion Date</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Company Constructing Line</i>
1870	Burlington to Columbus Jct.		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Ry.
1871	Columbus Jct. to Cedar Falls		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Ry.
1872	Cedar Falls to Plymouth Jct.		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Ry.
1877	Plymouth Jct. to Manly Jct.		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
1877	Northwood to Iowa-Minn. State Line		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
		DAVENPORT BRANCH	
1890	Davenport to Bennett		Davenport, Iowa & Dakota RR
		ESTHERVILLE BRANCH	
1898	Armstrong to Estherville		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
1900	Germania (Lakota) to Albert Lea, Minn.		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
		MILWAUKEE DIVISION	
1872	Linn to Postville		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Ry.
1884	Postville Jct. to Decorah		Chicago, Decorah & Minnesota Ry.
		MUSCATINE DIVISION	
1872	Muscatine to Riverside		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Ry.
		PACIFIC DIVISION	
1873	Vinton to Traer		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Ry.
1877	Traer to Holland		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
		TITONKA BRANCH	
1898	Hayfield to Titonka		Cedar Rapids, Garner & Northwestern Ry.
		WAVERLY BRANCH	
1886	Waverly Jct. to Waverly		Waverly Short Line

Table B

CEDAR RAPIDS & CLINTON RY.

Completion Date	From	To	Company Constructing Line
1877	Elmira to Iowa City		Chicago, Clinton & Western RR
1877	Clinton westward (18 miles)		Chicago, Clinton & Western RR
1879-1883	Elmira to 18 miles west of Clinton		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA FALLS & NORTHWESTERN RY.			
1880	Holland to Clarion		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
1881	Clarion to Emmetsburg		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
1882	Emmetsburg to Lake Park		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
1884	Lake Park to Watertown, S. Dak., via Sibley		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
ARMSTRONG BRANCH			
1884	Dows to Hayfield		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
1895	Hayfield to Forest City		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
1892	Forest City to Armstrong		Chicago & Iowa Western Ry.
SIOUX FALLS BRANCH			
1886	Ellsworth, Minn., via Rock Rapids to Sioux Falls, S. Dak.		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
WORTHINGTON BRANCH			
1882	Lake Park to Worthington, Minn.		Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Ry.
1900	Worthington, Minn., to Hardwick, Minn.		Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Ry.
IOWA CITY & WESTERN RY.			
1880	Iowa City to Montezuma		Iowa City & Western Ry.
1880	Thornburg to What Cheer		Iowa City & Western Ry.

Table C

NAME SEQUENCE OF RAILROADS MAKING
UP THE BURLINGTON, CEDAR RAPIDS
& NORTHERN RAILWAY

Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railway conveyed
to Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway in
1876

Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway conveyed
to Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway in 1903

Cedar Rapids and Clinton Railway conveyed to Burling-
ton, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway in 1902

Cedar Rapids, Garner & Northwestern Railway conveyed
to Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway in
1902

Cedar Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Railway con-
veyed to Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway
in 1902

Chicago & Iowa Western Railway conveyed to Cedar
Rapids, Iowa Falls & Northwestern Railway in 1894

Chicago, Clinton & Western Rail Road conveyed to Burl-
ington, Cedar Rapids & Northern in 1879, thence to
Cedar Rapids & Clinton Railway in 1883

Chicago, Decorah & Minnesota Railway conveyed to
Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway in 1902

Iowa City & Western Railway conveyed to Burlington,
Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway in 1902

Davenport, Iowa & Dakota Rail Road conveyed to Burl-
ington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway in 1892

Waverly Short Line conveyed to Burlington, Cedar Rap-
ids & Northern Railway in 1902
