

The "K&D"

The line which reached Des Moines first and received all the glory was the Des Moines Valley Rail Road, better known in after years as the Keokuk & Des Moines. Later to become a part of the Rock Island system, the "K&D" captured the imagination of the citizens of the new capital probably more than any other event before or since.

In the words of a contemporary paper, the people of Des Moines ". . . waited for its coming! They prayed for its coming! They talked of its coming until their tongues grew eloquent with the theme!" And when the road did come they madly proclaimed: "All doubts have fled! The great triumph has been achieved! The promised train is here today! The sun shines in a clear firmament! The day, yea, the hour of final victory has come!"

Such was the exuberance which greeted the Des Moines Valley Rail Road on August 29, 1866. The irony of the matter was that the "K&D" was a secondary line, and it played only a relatively minor role in the development of the city. Why, then, all the excitement?

Part of it may be ascribed to the "railroad fever" of the day. It must be remembered that the line was to connect Keokuk with Des Moines.

Keokuk at that time was the "Gate City" for supplies and commerce to Des Moines. Before the arrival of the railroad, boats on the Des Moines River linked these two communities, when navigation was feasible; or wagons were driven over the wild prairie.

Then, too, Des Moines was growing rapidly. It sought to have the state capital moved from Iowa City to Des Moines. To do so, however, it would have to be assured of enough votes throughout the state to adopt the Constitution of 1857 which transferred the capital from Iowa City to Des Moines. So Polk County, in which Des Moines is located, made an agreement with Lee County, where Keokuk is situated. If Lee voters would back the new Constitution, Polk in turn would materially aid the Des Moines Valley Rail Road. On the strength of this agreement Polk County subscribed to the extent of \$100,000 in the railroad, and the voters of Lee County swung the election so the capital could be moved. The result was, the people of Keokuk saw their railroad off to a good start; and Des Moines not only rejoiced in getting the state capital but also in seeing its first train.

The line started its corporate existence as the Keokuk, Fort Des Moines & Minnesota Rail Road, organized September 1, 1853. Grading began in 1855. When 4,000 ton of rail arrived by boat from New Orleans the following year, track-laying commenced. Under the supervision of

Chief Engineer Col. J. W. Otley, an Englishman, whose father, Richard Otley, held a similar post on the historic Stockton & Darlington Railway, the line made moderate progress.

In 1857 Bentonsport heard the whistle of the locomotive, and by 1861 trains were running through Ottumwa to Eddyville. The Civil War halted construction at the latter town until 1864, when the road's name was changed to the Des Moines Valley Rail Road, and track laying continued. In 1866, as we have seen, it reached Des Moines, where it was accorded one of the most elaborate and enthusiastic receptions of any railroad in Iowa.

Apparently, the Des Moines Valley exhausted its resources after reaching Iowa's capital. At any rate, nothing was done to extend the road to the Minnesota border, as outlined in the charter. Fort Dodge was particularly incensed at the inaction, for it was anxious to secure a direct line to Des Moines. Land was promised, a tax was voted to aid the road, and still the Des Moines Valley refused to build. As a last resort, the people of Fort Dodge backed rival roads, which failed to materialize, and also sought to have the Des Moines Valley land grant invalidated, to no avail.

When the road finally came to Fort Dodge, it took a circuitous course through Perry, Grand Junction, Gowrie and Tara instead of the more direct route along the Des Moines River valley.

Perhaps it was thought construction costs would be less through "Frog ponds, sloughs, muskrat houses, etc." as the Fort Dodge contingent put it, rather than along the hilly terrain adjacent to the river. But the road did come into Fort Dodge over its own rails by December, 1870.

In 1873 the road became bankrupt, and it was split in two at Des Moines and sold in parcels. The southern section went to John E. Henry of New York City, and it was soon reorganized under the name of the Keokuk & Des Moines Railway. The northern part was sold to Col. C. H. Perry to emerge as The Des Moines & Fort Dodge Railroad.

"The K&D," as it was called, proved to be the more valuable of the two, for it served as a short cut from central Iowa to Keokuk with direct connections to St. Louis. The expanding Rock Island was very much aware of its role, as was the Burlington. Rather than see it fall into the hands of its aggressive competitor, the Rock Island leased the road in 1878. As an independent line the K&D was at the mercy of its connections, but when integrated into the Rock Island its future was secure.