

On to Council Bluffs

If it had not been for the Congressional Land Grant Act of 1856, there is no telling when the Mississippi & Missouri Rail Road would have reached Council Bluffs. The act called for alternate sections designated by odd numbers, six sections in width on each side of the track, to be owned by the railroad and developed for settlement. As it was, progress in building was so slow there was grave danger the road would have to forfeit its claim to these lands. It took the M&M over six years to build the thirty miles from Iowa City to Marengo, which it reached in 1862. The following year trains ran into Brooklyn, and in 1864 into Kellogg. By this time the company was so heavily in debt foreclosure was inevitable.

To safeguard the Federal Land Grants, assigned by Iowa, a new company was incorporated in the Hawkeye State called the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad. Known as Pacific No. 1, the new firm purchased the bankrupt M&M on July 9, 1866. It was empowered to build from Kellogg to Des Moines. Now having a clear title, which included the valuable land grants, the next step was to amalgamate the line in Illinois with that in Iowa. This was effected on August 20,

1866, by the consolidation of the Chicago & Rock Island Rail Road of Illinois with the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad, referred to as Pacific No. 2, to designate it from the previous road with the same name. Incidentally, Pacific No. 2 was chartered to construct the railroad from Des Moines to Council Bluffs. Inasmuch as this was a legal matter to insure full title to land grants, no differentiation will hereafter be made between the two companies with identical names.

When the Rock Island finally ran its first passenger train into Des Moines on September 9, 1867, it was given only a modest welcome. The city had posted a \$10,000 bonus for an early arrival, but the railroad never made it in time to collect the money. Furthermore, another line, which will be discussed later, had reached Des Moines first and had been given a lavish ovation.

In Council Bluffs, too, the Rock Island came out second best. The North Western had reached that Missouri River town two-and-a-half years earlier and consequently had hauled much of the material for building the Union Pacific. But the Rock Island hammered down its final rail in Council Bluffs on May 11, 1869, the day after the last spike was driven at Promontory Point, Utah, on the Nation's first transcontinental railroad.

To celebrate the Rock Island's arrival, John F. Tracy, who became president of the railroad after the consolidation of 1866, selected a burnished,

German silver engine to lead the procession. This was the locomotive *America*, outshopped by the Grant Works of Paterson, New Jersey, for the Paris Exposition in 1867. It had attracted so much attention the Rock Island purchased it for its new road to the West. So, when the official opening of the Council Bluffs line occurred on May 12, the resplendent *America* was out front. It, coupled to four other locomotives, pulled a train of crowded coaches and once again became the center of attraction.

While the Council Bluffs line was being built, the branch to the southwest was being extended beyond Muscatine. On September 1, 1858, the first train reached Washington, thirty-six miles from Muscatine. Washington accorded the thirteen-car special, carrying over 700 people, one of the best organized receptions in Iowa's railroad history. For over a dozen years thereafter that thriving community was end-of-track.

When the strong hand of Tracy took over the guidance of the Rock Island, its decade of indecision, mismanagement and divided control was over. He looked afar to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, a military post of considerable importance and a gateway to the great southwest. He foresaw another main line, second only to the Council Bluffs route, as the backbone of the Rock Island System. With the formation of the Chicago & South Western Railway in 1869, Tracy and his associates de-

terminated to extend the Rock Island rails to Leavenworth.

Construction in both Iowa and Missouri was pushed with such speed as to rival Farnam's record in driving the pioneer Rock Island across Illinois. The new road veered through southeastern Iowa to Lineville, whence it crossed the border to Missouri and thence to Stillings Junction, opposite Leavenworth. It took only two years to build the line, which commenced regular operation in October, 1871. With the completion of the bridge across the Missouri River in 1872 train service to Leavenworth was inaugurated. The Rock Island not only vigorously competed for business through the Omaha gateway; it also had what was to become a strategic and powerful line to the South West as well.