

The Santa Fe in Iowa

The reason for the Santa Fe's coming to Iowa is explained in the road's annual report of 1886. It stated in part: ". . . your Directors unanimously came to the conclusion that the interests of this Company required that it should have under its control an independent line to Chicago." Had the Missouri River remained the western terminus of its connecting lines to the Windy City, the Santa Fe would not have considered building into Chicago at that time. But the Burlington and the Rock Island had extended into Santa Fe territory west of the Missouri; and the Gould lines had their own rails from Lake Michigan to the Southwest.

While the Santa Fe boasted of a 6,500-mile system of owned or controlled lines extending from Kansas City to Los Angeles and San Diego, it was never sure of its eastern connections. All too often its Chicago links would expand beyond the Missouri, and overnight a new competitor would be born. Such a situation jeopardized the continued growth and stability of the far-flung railroad.

To gain entry into Chicago the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe had three alternatives: it could buy the Chicago & Alton; build its own direct line; or purchase the ailing Chicago & St. Louis, use

about a hundred miles of that Illinois railroad, and construct its own line the remainder of the way. The latter plan was adopted as the most feasible.

It is said that in planning the eastern extension Chief Engineer Albert A. Robinson took a ruler and drew a straight line between Kansas City and Chicago. Such an airline would cut across the southeastern corner of Iowa. While the road actually constructed is not entirely ruler-straight, there are few curves and none of a degree to impede fast running.

At first the Santa Fe considered crossing the Mississippi River at Keokuk; and, with great secrecy, a crew of surveyors made their headquarters in that town. Later, when Fort Madison learned of the surveys, its citizens agreed to furnish some 80 acres of land for railroad purposes. They also proposed to pay one-fourth of the right-of-way costs through Lee County. Because of these inducements and other factors, the Santa Fe agreed to go through Fort Madison rather than Keokuk in making the Mississippi River crossing. Subsequent events show that Fort Madison profited a great deal from the transaction because of increased property values due to the coming of the Santa Fe.

To build the new line, a company called the Chicago, Santa Fe & California Railway was incorporated in Illinois on December 3, 1886. A separate Iowa charter was obtained for construc-

tion in Iowa and Missouri. Early in 1887 construction was begun, and by the end of the year the entire line was completed from Chicago to Kansas City except for a bridge across the Missouri River. Also, because of settling track, through service was not begun until the following year. The new extension was about 40 miles shorter than any other route linking Chicago and Kansas City. It was single track laid with steel rails, ranging from 67 to 71 pounds, on good ballast. Designed for high-speed operation, it soon saw crack transcontinental trains highballing from Chicago to the West Coast.

One of the most expensive parts of the new road proved to be the bridge across the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River Railroad & Toll Bridge Company was chartered October 23, 1886. This firm was empowered to cross the waterway at Fort Madison. The bridge consisted of seven truss spans and an east approach of about 350 yards. A draw span 400 feet long permitted boats to pass through the structure. As its corporate name suggested, highway traffic was accommodated by a roadway on either side of the truss spans. The bridge, which was started in March 1887, was ready for traffic on December 7 of that year. The bridge company was soon absorbed by the Santa Fe, as was the Chicago, Santa Fe & California, although the latter was not officially merged until 1900.

The old wrought iron structure was superseded by a \$5 million double track bridge in 1927. Like its predecessor, it has a highway component. The bridge has deck girders at either end with four large through truss spans in the central portion. About half way up between the tracks and the top of the truss was the highway. On the Illinois side motor vehicles descended to the south of the right-of-way and on the Iowa side to the north. At the time the bridge was built, its 525-foot draw span, near the Iowa shore, was said to be the longest in the world.

Although the Santa Fe has only 19 miles of line in Iowa the state is of singular importance to the railroad because it has been headquarters of the Illinois Division since 1956. Company records also indicate that division headquarters were likewise located there from 1901 to 1903. The first division superintendent was Frank T. Dolan, whose jurisdiction was then known as the Chicago Division. He later became general superintendent, Southwestern District, of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway.

Today, as in the past, all passenger trains make two stops in Iowa. One is at Fort Madison, and the other is at Shopton, 1.7 miles westward. The latter stop is so named because it was the locale for extensive shop facilities. Train crews change here, and freight engines are refueled.

Shop construction started in 1888 along with

the erection of a hospital for railroad employees. A planing mill and bridge and building maintenance facilities were the chief features of the shops. Later a blacksmith shop was included and the roundhouse quarters greatly enlarged for bigger steam locomotives. In 1917 a new power plant was built. The same year saw the completion of a two-story brick structure providing dormitory facilities and a well-stocked reading room for employees. Heretofore, crude bunkhouses and cheap hotels often characterized lodging quarters available at division points.

Throughout the years, this railroader's "home away from home" has been modernized with radio and television to supplement books and periodicals. Pool tables, pianos, showers, and a lunch counter make Shopton a pleasant place for trainmen on their layovers in Iowa.

Modern railroading, especially the use of Diesel power, has tended to consolidate shop facilities and to do away with many points formerly needed for car and engine repair. For this reason the Fort Madison shops were closed in 1951. Similarly, the Santa Fe Hospital was discontinued and the building, together with five acres of land, given to Fort Madison to be administered by a trust fund.

Shopton, nevertheless, continues to have a busy yard, whose tracks total 39 miles. Passenger train icing facilities, stock pens, and a "piggy-back" ramp for trailer-on-flat-car equipment are some of

the adjuncts in yard operation. Then, too, Fort Madison's industries, including a multi-million dollar fertilizer plant, provide considerable freight for many points on the Santa Fe system.

Instead of a single track railroad equipped with light rails, the Santa Fe's main line through Lee County is now double track "high iron" of 131 and 132-pound rail protected by efficient Traffic Control Signalling. Every day a dozen crack passenger trains go through the southeastern tip of Iowa as they speed to and from the Southwest or Pacific Coast points and Chicago. Notwithstanding the fact that the *Super Chief*, the *Chief*, and other famous streamliners do not stay long in the state, they all stop at the historic town of Fort Madison—a site of the old fort on the Mississippi named after the fourth president of the United States.