

From B&M to CB&Q

As early as 1859, B&M treasurer Charles Russell Lowell had come to the conclusion that "he who buildeth a railroad west of the Mississippi must also find a population and build up business." Thus, in 1870, with the road completed across the state, the next big task was to "find a population." The advertising and selling of the B&M's 300,000 acres began, officially, on April 1, 1870, although some 10,000 acres had been sold during 1866-1869 by Colonel John W. Ames, land agent for the company. Ames did yeoman work in laying the foundation for the land department, but the real development of the Burlington land grant came when George S. Harris, formerly of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad, took over the job of selling Iowa lands to farmers.

The land grant railroads either disposed of their holdings in great blocks to land companies or to individuals — often men directly or indirectly connected with the roads — or, as in the case of the Illinois Central and the Hannibal and St. Jo, they endeavored to sell only to *bona fide* settlers who would develop the region. The B&M subscribed to the latter policy. Rather than turn over their grants to speculators, who might hold the

land out of the market for years waiting for a rise in prices, southern Iowa's railroad preferred to bring actual farmers and businessmen to their area. By following this policy, the B&M could boast of doing its share in building up the state. They stated their position in April, 1869:

There is certainly no individual, or corporation of individuals, more directly and deeply interested in the welfare, and advancement of Southern Iowa, than is the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company. They are aware that that which conduces to the benefit of the State, will necessarily redound to their own especial advantage. They believe that the great advantages of Southern Iowa, have only to be fairly and fully understood to be eagerly grasped by thousands desirous of finding homes in the west.

The farmers and townsmen of Iowa were ready to welcome the type of settler that the B&M brought in. They did not share in the modern romantic admiration for "pioneers." To them, the pathbreaking pioneers were bad farmers. They "flee from *rats* and Railroads," wrote one Wapello County farmer. What Iowa wanted was a "better class of farmers" who would "build fine houses, and erect substantial improvements, designing to pass a lifetime here." And since the B&M's ten-year-payment contracts stipulated that a certain amount of improvements must be made each year, the men who bought railroad land did prove to be a "better class of farmers." As a result, southern

Iowa began to "blossom as the rose," in the words of one enthusiastic observer.

The wisdom of the B&M's land policy was soon evident. Population increased, the products of the farm increased, and freight tonnage increased — all to the profit of Iowa and the railroad. New towns sprang up along the line of the B&M, many of them sponsored by townsite companies founded by the directors of the railroad, particularly in the counties west of Ottumwa. Creston, for example, was founded in 1869 by a group of B&M officials as a division point for the railroad. These townsite companies usually donated lots to churches, schools, courthouses, mills, or stores. Anyone who could guarantee to develop the business or cultural activities of the embryo town would receive aid from the founders. Perkins contributed 1,000 volumes to help found the Creston public library, while Forbes and Nathaniel Thayer took liberal shares of stock and also made donations of books for the enterprise. Other towns which owed their existence to the railroad promoters were Russell, Lucas, Woodburn, Murray, and Elliott.

Meanwhile, farmers from the East and from Europe were coming to Iowa in response to the advertising and promotional work of the B&M land department. Having established a purchase plan, Harris set out to "find a population." Every inducement was offered to make it easy for pros-

pective buyers to travel throughout the area. A circular issued in about 1872 advised the immigrant on procedure:

After the cars have crossed the Mississippi Bridge, into Burlington, look out of the left side windows. You will see the north side of the brick building nearest the track inscribed, "*B. & M. R. Land Office*," and its front covered with the following words:

IOWA AND NEBRASKA LANDS. B. & M. R. R.

English	Deutsche	Scandinavsk
Emigrants'	Auswanderer	Emigrants'

Go thither as soon as you leave the cars.

In this "Emigrant" home officials would advise on sites; the traveler could stop overnight or as long as necessary; here, also, he could buy "land exploring" tickets, the purchase price of which would be deducted from his first payment. He could then travel from one point on the railroad to another, until he found the land which suited him. The cost of travel was moderate. From Chicago, the purchaser could buy a ticket to Burlington for \$7.25. From Burlington, a ticket over the 279 miles to the Missouri River would cost him only \$12.25. The railroad advised their prospective customers not to hurry in selecting a site: "This is a great country, and it takes some time to see it thoroughly."

Under Harris' direction, the business of the land office boomed. In the decade 1870-1880, practically all of the grant in Iowa went into the

hands of individual purchasers: a total of 5,604 sales of 320,678.67 acres brought \$3,881,712.10 into the railroad's pockets. The average price paid per acre was just over \$12.00. Most of the Burlington grant was in middle and western Iowa, since the eastern counties were practically all settled by 1856 when the first grant was made. Only scattering sections or quarter-sections were sold by the B&M in the counties east of the Des Moines River. In 1874 when Harris resigned because of ill health, his job was taken over by A. E. Touzalin, a former ticket agent at Burlington who had done much in the earlier days to further the company's advertising.

Just as the railroad had found an unoccupied prairie and peopled it with farmers and dotted it with little market towns, so it changed the type of agriculture of the area. Grains, heretofore a drug on the market, now found a ready sale in the East. Cattle, formerly driven to market over long distances, with an inevitable loss of weight on the way, could now be shipped on cattle cars to slaughter houses in Ottumwa, Burlington, or Chicago. "Prior to the time of the railroads," reported "Uncle Henry" Wallace, "the hog that could not walk to market was of no use. . . . The railroad has shortened the nose, shortened the legs, done away with the bristles, and put a more lovely kink in the tail."

With rising prices and more available markets

for his surplus, the Iowa farmer became a businessman. Commercial farming came with the railroad. Many of these advantages were lost sight of in the seventies, during the agitation for decreased freight rates and railroad regulation; but even while he fought the railroads, the Iowa farmer knew he could never get along without them. One reason for the strong anti-railroad sentiment of this decade might have been that by that time Iowa's biggest roads had lost their local character. They were no longer "our" roads; men in Chicago, in Boston, and in New York decided the destinies of the railroads for which Iowans had laid the groundwork.

Such was certainly the case with the B&M. All of the original forty-six founders had disappeared from the directory of the road. In 1872, of the nine directors, six were also on the eleven-man CB&Q board: Nathaniel Thayer, J. M. Forbes, J. M. Brooks, R. S. Watson, Erastus Corning, and James F. Joy. Only one resident of Burlington was a board member — E. D. Rand, lumberman and banker. Ever since its founding in 1852 the B&M had drawn closer to the CB&Q. By 1872 the latter road held large blocks of stock in the Iowa line; the Burlington's president, Joy, was a member of the B&M board, while the B&M president, Brooks, was a member of the CB&Q board. Therefore, on December 31, 1872, the two roads took the step which was inevitable: the Iowa road

was leased "in perpetuity" to the Illinois road. Although a final deed was not negotiated until July 31, 1875, after January 1, 1873, the B&M no longer existed as a separate entity.

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad had been an independent corporation for just over twenty years. In that time it had built a railroad from the Mississippi to the Missouri, and had built or leased three branch lines: from Red Oak to Hamburg, opened on August 1, 1870; from Creston to Hopkins, Missouri, opened January 21, 1872; and from Chariton to Leon, completed August 21, 1872. Its total mileage in 1872 was 332.75 miles, and the total cost of its property, \$12,992,931.91. Fifty-three locomotives and 1,100 cars made up its rolling stock. It had received, and was in the process of selling, a total of 359,185.92 acres of land in Iowa. As such, it was a valuable addition to the Burlington System.

Today the Burlington Route through Iowa covers 1,011.66 miles of road; counting second tracks and yard and siding tracks, the total comes to 1,550.29 miles. For one hundred years the Burlington has dominated the transportation system of southern Iowa. The forty-six who met in Burlington on January 15, 1852, "builded better than they knew." Their centennial, on January 15, 1952, is a landmark in Iowa railroad history.