

## The Wabash Today

Tall switch stands (about the height of a locomotive headlight), short freights, and a profusion of motive power ranging from American Standards, Ten Wheelers, Atlantics and Pacifics, to Moguls, Prairies, and Mikados, all of which once characterized Wabash operation. They have gone along with nearly all passenger trains in Iowa. But a heritage of fast running and highly competent dispatching is still a Wabash tradition. On the Wabash an operating man must know how to "highball." This is just as true today for freights as for the more colorful limiteds of yesteryear.

In Iowa the road's fastest "Cannon Ball" freights are the hotshots to and from Council Bluffs. Carded as No. 211 westward and 214 eastward, they run at passenger-train speed. The former departs from St. Louis at 6:30 p.m. and arrives in Council Bluffs at 8:10 the next morning. Its eastern counterpart leaves the Bluffs at 8:45 at night and pulls into St. Louis at 8:55 a.m. There is also a tri-weekly time freight operating in each direction between Moberly, Missouri, and Council Bluffs. The light 56-pound rails of the original line in Iowa have been replaced by 90-pounders laid on gravel ballast.

The Des Moines line has always had time freights, even when trackage rights were over the Rock Island for part of the way. The road bravely advertised "fast freights" when they were routed via Harvey, Givin, and Ottumwa. The best time on this circuitous route from Moberly to Des Moines appears to have been about sixteen hours. When the Wabash built its short cut from Moulton to Albia, the service was greatly accelerated. Today, with its modern diesel power, the Moberly-Des Moines "Red Ball" freights make the run in six and one-half hours. The branch has been upgraded to what the Wabash calls a "secondary main line."

The Ottumwa branch is serviced by way freights, as is the mile of track of the Keokuk line in Iowa. The latter comes into the state from Illinois on a bridge spanning the Mississippi River, over which it has trackage rights. It was built under the name of The Toledo, Wabash & Western Railroad.

In the pre-automobile era numerous short lines funnelled a modest amount of traffic to the Iowa lines of the Wabash. This was particularly true of the Council Bluffs branch. At Neoga, about five miles southeast of Council Bluffs, it interchanged with the Iowa & Omaha Short Line Railroad. This company built a 12-mile road from Treynor, with trackage rights over the Wabash into Council Bluffs. The little carrier never showed

a profit, and it quit in 1916 after operating only five years.

Another short-lived feeder was the Iowa & Southwestern Railway. It was built to connect Clarinda and College Springs with the Wabash at Blanchard, near the Missouri state line. Although Clarinda was on a branch of the Burlington, the town wanted another railroad. In the late 1870's it had hoped the Wabash's line to Council Bluffs would pass through Clarinda. Instead, the Wabash veered to the west through Shenandoah whereupon the citizens of Clarinda helped finance the old Clarinda & St. Louis Railway, which was built from Roseberry, Missouri, under Wabash auspices. But after a decade of checkered existence the track was taken up in 1890.

Still hoping for an outlet on the Wabash, the people of Clarinda, aided by subscriptions from College Springs, financed the Iowa & Southwestern. The 17-mile line, opened in 1912, soon went bankrupt. Operation ceased in 1916, and the road was subsequently abandoned.

A shorter connection but one having a much longer life-span was the Tabor & Northern Railway. It interchanged with the Wabash at Malvern and ran in a southwestern direction to Tabor, a distance of 8.79 miles. The road was organized late in 1887 and opened in 1889. Never a money-maker, the line managed to keep operating for some forty-five years. With the closing of Tabor

College in 1927, and the completion of a paved highway paralleling its line two years later, the handwriting was on the wall. When the shortline sought permission to quit in 1934, no opposition was voiced and the Interstate Commerce Commission promptly gave its approval. Such is the doleful history of feeder lines which mushroomed along the Wabash in southwestern Iowa.

The Wabash proper has had only one shortline abandoned but no curtailment of service in the state. This concerns the Des Moines branch and its peculiar relationship to a parallel line of the Burlington. Both the Wabash and the Burlington ran almost adjacent to each other for a score of miles on their Albia-Des Moines lines. This duplication vexed the United States Railroad Administration when it operated the roads during World War I. According to veteran employees, the United States Railroad Administration ordered that the Wabash run its trains over the Burlington from Albia to the Monroe County line just north of Lovilia. The Burlington, on the other hand, shunted its trains over Wabash rails from the county line to Tracy.

After the conflict both roads returned to their respective lines. Then came the depression of 1929; and in the interest of economy, the two roads took a hard look at their parallel tracks. They decided to revert to the wartime practice of using parts of each other's lines to the best advan-

tage. Thus, in a 50-50 change-over, the Wabash took up its 11-mile segment between Albia and the Monroe County line; and the Burlington dismantled its eleven miles of track north of the county line to Tracy.

Another change is imminent when the Red Rock Dam is slated to be completed about 1967 on the Des Moines River above Harvey. It is expected the Wabash will use the Burlington rails between Harvey and Swan. At Swan a bridge is to be constructed across the Des Moines River, which will take the Burlington to the Wabash's current line on the east side of the waterway to a point below Runnells. Both the Wabash and the Burlington would use this partly relocated line as a joint route into Des Moines. The Wabash, of course, would then abandon that part of its branch between the new bridge and Harvey. The Burlington for its part would take out its line from Swan to Des Moines.

The Wabash has now purchased all its Iowa lines outright, and they have been completely integrated into its system. The parent company, like its components, has been in and out of receivership, emerging with a change of name each time. It is not necessary to go into details here except to say that the Wabash, St. Louis & Pacific was reorganized in 1889 as The Wabash Railroad. In a 1915 reorganization, the "Railroad" was changed to "Railway." Following insolvency during the

Great Depression of the 1930's the road came back on a firm financial footing in 1942 as the Wabash Railroad, which it is today.

The story of the Wabash in Iowa is not complete without some mention of the Des Moines Union Railway, which furnishes terminal facilities in the Capital City. The Union Railway is a joint facility of the Wabash and the Milwaukee railroads, and it has forty-two miles of valuable industry and terminal tracks. The Union was incorporated in 1884 by the railroads now embodied in the Wabash and the Milwaukee railroad systems which served Des Moines and vicinity. Frederick M. Hubbell, Jefferson S. Polk, and Grenville M. Dodge were the leading promoters of the enterprise. The Union purchased that portion of the Wabash's branch within the city to Chesterfield (also known as Wabash Junction), a distance of 2.40 miles.

The Union was part of a little railroad dynasty created by Fred Hubbell during this period. He likewise was instrumental in building the narrow gauge lines from Des Moines to Boone, and Des Moines to Panora which, as we have seen, were once a part of the Wabash system. He also helped build the 3-foot gauge line from Des Moines to Ames and Jewell, which afterward became the Des Moines branch of the great North Western Railroad.

In addition, Hubbell formed the Des Moines

Terminal Company in 1902. This tiny carrier, which has ten miles of track in the factory district, is really a railroad within a railroad. It is operated by the Des Moines Union and is essentially a part of that line. For years the Tom Thumb road assessed a fee of \$1.00 for every loaded car it interchanged with the Union. This and other factors led to protracted litigation which lasted over a period of twenty-five years. In 1932, however, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that the rate of compensation must be negotiated. Thus, the long court fight between the Hubbell estate, representing the Terminal Company, and the Union Railway, backed by the Wabash and Milwaukee railroads, ended.

The Des Moines Union performs practically all the terminal work for the Wabash (as well as the Milwaukee) in Des Moines, and it is an important adjunct to the system. Its diesel switchers are constantly shunting freight cars to and from 160 industries in Iowa's largest city. Currently its motive power consists of a 660-horsepower Alco, which it owns, a 1000-HP EMD leased from the Wabash, and a 1000-HP Alco plus a 1200-HP EMD leased from the Milwaukee.

In Council Bluffs the Wabash has its own freight house, whereas in Ottumwa it is a joint facility with the Milwaukee. South Ottumwa, however, is served exclusively by Wabash tracks. In Keokuk the road's traffic is handled at the Rock

Island's freight house. But no matter what arrangement is made to expedite freight, the Wabash lines in Council Bluffs, Des Moines, Ottumwa, and Keokuk are as essential to the railroad as a whole as they are to the communities they serve. Iowa shippers will continue to "Follow the Flag" in the future as they have in the past.