

"Follow The Flag"

For years the Wabash Railroad has had a banner with the inscription "Wabash" emblazoned on it and the catch line "Follow the Flag" written above it. Passengers were urged to "follow the flag" when it came to traveling in Wabash territory. The banner came to be regarded as a colophon for speedy, dependable service.

In bygone days the Wabash featured luxurious name-trains from St. Louis through Council Bluffs and Omaha to West Coast points. Although Omaha never had the stature of Kansas City as the Wabash's western gateway, Omaha was still very important to the railroad.

During the latter part of Jay Gould's domination of the Union Pacific he had a merry time shunting passengers and freight to the Wabash at Council Bluffs. When engaged in his classic rate wars with the Union Pacific's other Omaha connections, Gould suddenly, and often without warning, shifted traffic to the all-Wabash route to Toledo and other eastern points. Being outside the Iowa Pool until the last few years of ineffective existence, Gould used the Wabash as a tool to outwit his federated rivals.

Since it originated less traffic than other roads

of comparable size, the Wabash management aggressively sought inter-line traffic. From time to time it boasted of through sleepers to San Francisco on its Omaha line in conjunction with the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific. Then, too, when the old Wabash, St. Louis & Pacific had its first diner, this luxurious car was used exclusively on the "fast train" to and from St. Louis and run in and out of Council Bluffs.

In the late 1940's one could take the *Omaha Limited*, which carried a sleeper for San Francisco, from St. Louis at 7:50 p.m. The train arrived in Council Bluffs at 8:01 the next morning and 20 minutes later pulled into Omaha. Here the West Coast pullman was set out and recoupled to the historic *Overland Limited* of the Union Pacific. Two mornings afterward the *Overland Limited* arrived at the Southern Pacific's Oakland pier, where an awaiting ferry took it to the foot of Market Street in San Francisco.

The Wabash train stopped at all stations in Iowa. A citizen of Strahan (population 50), for example, could board the sleeper for the Golden Gate as readily as a passenger from a big city. Rural communities appreciated the Wabash's readiness to stop the limited "on flag," whereas most other roads would not deign to call at such a tiny community.

Better known to Iowans, however, was the service to Des Moines. To reach the Capital City

from St. Louis was quite an undertaking. We have seen the Wabash line built from Des Moines to Albia in 1882. From the latter town the south-bound train for St. Louis was shunted over the uncertain rails of the affiliated Centerville, Moravia & Albia to Centerville. Here it was again switched, this time to the Wabash-controlled Missouri, Iowa & Nebraska road for a 21-mile run to Glenwood Junction, Missouri. At the Junction the cars were finally returned to Wabash rails for the rest of the way to St. Louis.

The trip between Des Moines and St. Louis was something of an adventure, or an ordeal, depending on how one looked at it. By the time a passenger experienced traveling over the 56-pound rails of the unballasted Centerville, Moravia & Albia road, he was conditioned to branch-line railroading at its worst.

When, at a later date, through trains were detoured via the Rock Island between Harvey and Ottumwa, this lengthened the mileage of the Des Moines-St. Louis route. Although the track may have been a shade better than the Albia route, no one boasted of the amenities of riding this line. When the Wabash completed its short cut between Albia and Moulton, however, the new all-Wabash route became increasingly popular.

Passengerwise, the Des Moines branch reached its zenith after through coach and pullman service was inaugurated between St. Louis and the Twin

Cities in 1902. This was in connection with the Minneapolis & St. Louis-Iowa Central route by way of Albia and Albert Lea, Minnesota.

Always on the alert for more traffic, the Wabash was eager to join hands with the Minneapolis & St. Louis, which controlled the Iowa Central, in fostering joint through service. For its part, the Minneapolis & St. Louis wanted to continue its St. Louis service, and the road conducted a spirited contest for the best name for a new train to operate in conjunction with the Wabash. Out of about a thousand entries L. F. Day, vice president of the Minneapolis & St. Louis and A. B. Cutts, its general passenger agent, selected the *North Star Limited*. For over three decades the *North Star* proved to be a popular train in the Midwest.

It proudly began operation with "electrically-lighted sleepers and chair cars" and high caliber "dining car service" by way of Albia. As late as 1932 the dinner menu included a wide variety of selections at moderate cost. Passengers had the choice of chicken á la king, broiled steak, fried chicken, grilled lamb chops on toast, loin pork chops sauté with fried apple, omelette with bacon or chopped ham, and ham or bacon with eggs. Two fresh vegetables were included along with a salad, bread and butter, a beverage; and for dessert, lemon cream pie, apple pie, or ice cream. The tab: \$1.50.

To advertise the *North Star* as well as to pro-

vide a new insignia for the railroad, the Minneapolis & St. Louis had a caricature of a man running. His head, arms, and legs protruded from a large circle. Within the circle-bands was the name of the railroad, and, serving as a spoke was a rectangular block on which was inscribed: "Albert Lea Route." Underneath the feet of the little fellow was the legend "The Road that Runs." The comical insignia was designed by the well-known Minneapolis caricaturist, Charles L. Bartholomew, generally known as "Bart." It was widely used and served to identify the Minneapolis & St. Louis

ST. PAUL
MINNEAPOLIS
Chaska
Waterville
Waseca
ALBERT LEA
Mason City
Sheffield
Hampton
Marshalltown
Pickering
Grinnell
Oskaloosa
ALBIA
Moulton
Glenwood
Kirksville
Mason
MOBERLY
Mexico
Gilmere
ST. LOUIS

The "North Star Limited"

A NEW TRAIN
BETWEEN

St. Paul - Minneapolis

AND

St. Louis

ELECTRIC LIGHTED SLEEPERS AND CHAIR CARS.
DINING CAR SERVICE

to the traveling public, as did the more orthodox flag of the Wabash.

The *North Star Limited*, in addition to its St. Louis-Twin Cities consist, provided sleepers and

coaches between St. Louis and Des Moines. At one time it also had a Des Moines-Kansas City sleeper. The *North Star* was finally withdrawn in 1938, but Wabash continued its Des Moines sleeper until the late 1950's. Then, when the Wabash dropped its coach service on the branch September 30, 1959, it marked the final Wabash passenger train out of the Des Moines Union Station. Mr. R. E. Hughes, who called the first train from that station in 1898, came out of retirement to call the last.

The imposing block-long, two-story stone and brick building was jointly owned by the Wabash and the Milwaukee railroads. Besides the owning lines, it had the Burlington and the Great Western as tenants. In 1905 fifty trains used the station weekdays. One by one, however, its users gave up passenger service into Des Moines or moved their facilities elsewhere. The Great Western erected its own depot in the 1950's (and later abandoned passenger service), and around the same period the Milwaukee and the Burlington withdrew their branch-line passenger runs into the city.

With the closing of Union Station only the nearby Rock Island depot was left to sell tickets on that road — the sole passenger line operating trains in or out of Des Moines. Incidentally, about two-thirds of the Union Station Building has been razed. What is left is occupied by the local offices

of the Wabash and Milwaukee railroads, Western Weighing & Inspection Bureau, and the headquarters of the Des Moines Union Railway.

It may be appropriate to add that the Wabash passenger trains which once served Ottumwa and Keokuk have long since made their final runs. They were early casualties of automobile and motor bus competition.

The Wabash, however, still continues to carry coaches on its fast freights between St. Louis and Council Bluffs. Equipped with reclining seats and air-conditioned, they are perhaps the fastest and most comfortable "mixed trains" in the country.