

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## McGregor Gets a Railroad

The Milwaukee Road first came to Iowa when it cut across the northeastern part of the state to complete its pioneer line between Milwaukee and the Twin Cities. It also had aspirations to cross Iowa, but these did not materialize until after other railroads had achieved that end. When it really got under way, however, the Milwaukee built two horizontal routes across Iowa; and it remains today the only railroad having dual lines. Although a latecomer to Omaha, it soon played a major role in handling freight through that gateway. Then, in 1955, when the Milwaukee took over the operation of transcontinental passenger trains in conjunction with the Union Pacific, the main line across central Iowa became much more important.

The orange passenger trains and reddish-yellow cabooses have long been a distinguishing feature of the railroad. While the color has since been changed to yellow, the Milwaukee is still distinctive in livery and in service as a dominant line in the Hawkeye State. The story of the Milwau-



kee Road in Iowa begins at McGregor, where it originally came into the state.

In the late 1850's, McGregor was a thriving Mississippi port opposite Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. When the Milwaukee & Mississippi Rail Road arrived in Prairie du Chien in 1857, it caused an influx of settlers to McGregor by ferry. Soon McGregor became the marketing entrepot for northeast Iowa and a logical place from which to extend the new railroad to the Twin Cities. Moreover, the incentive to push due west was enhanced by the prospects of land grants in Iowa.

Like many alert communities in eastern Iowa, McGregor was agog with railroad plans. Projected roads were organized to go in all directions, one of which was to be a horse-propelled line to Fort Atkinson! The earliest company to operate trains, however, was the McGregor Western, which was incorporated February 12, 1863. Its first locomotive reached McGregor in October; and by March, 1864, the cars were running into Monona, fifteen miles westward.

Among the prominent men active in promoting the little road were William B. Ogden, the "Father of the North Western System;" George Greene, the versatile Cedar Rapids jurist, railroad builder, and public-spirited citizen; and William Larrabee, later governor of Iowa. It was Larrabee who did much to secure land grants and to expedite railroad construction across the northern part







Twin Cities. By this time, the struggling McGregor Western had been purchased by the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, which had already acquired the M&M and other roads, forming a pioneer through-route from Milwaukee to the Twin Cities.

Heretofore, several of the important lines which had reached Iowa from the East affiliated themselves with steamboat companies operating from St. Louis to St. Paul. But the newly formed Milwaukee & St. Paul was the first road to provide the Twin Cities with an all-rail link with the East. What had formerly been a loosely knit assortment of individual railroads was shaping up into a strong trunk line. Under the leadership of Alexander Mitchell, ably assisted by S. S. Merrill, his general manager, railroads had been purchased and consolidated at an amazing rate.