

Des Moines & Central Iowa

The Des Moines & Central Iowa Railway was incorporated on November 28, 1899, as the Inter-Urban Railway. Its first road was a 24-mile electric line from Des Moines to Colfax opened early in 1903. H. H. Polk, of Des Moines, was president and general manager; A. W. Harris, of Chicago, was vice-president; and two Des Moines men, G. B. Hippee and W. I. Haskit, filled the offices of treasurer and secretary, respectively.

Coal mines along the route provided considerable freight, while Colfax, then a popular health resort, accounted for a relatively heavy passenger business. Freight came into the north side of Des Moines on the interurban's own rails, but passenger cars used the local street railway's Douglas Avenue line passing the State Fair Grounds. Later, when the road built its new passenger terminal, all cars entered from the north side.

The Inter-Urban Railway did not become important until it built the so-called Beaver Valley Division. This 34-mile road, opened in 1906, veered northwest upon leaving Des Moines, running through Herrold and Granger to Perry. About the same time a 3-mile branch was built from Moran to Woodward.

When eight interurban cars with arched windows and heavy pilots came on their own wheels from the American Car Company in St. Louis, they presaged a new era in transportation. Several units of the big wooden vehicles operated in trains carrying passengers, baggage, United States mail, and Wells Fargo express. The road also had electric locomotives. In its heyday the Inter-Urban built up a flourishing freight business. A. B. Stickney, the farsighted head of the Chicago Great Western, encouraged freight interchange and saw to it that cattle cars originating on the Inter-Urban were highballed over his road to the Chicago stockyards. There were also shipments of bituminous coal and of ice and milk, the milk being shipped in cans from way stations.

For a time the Inter-Urban served what was locally called "the third largest 'city' in Iowa" — Camp Dodge — which was said to have had a population of from 40,000 to 50,000 during World War I. Camp Dodge served as the cantonment for the 13th Division of the United States conscript army. Many a graying father in Iowa and adjacent states recalls being shipped to Camp Dodge over the interurban line upon being mustered into service. It is said the road once moved 3,500 men and their baggage from a connecting railroad to camp, twenty-five miles distant, in five hours. Whole trains of a dozen Pullmans or more were shunted by the Inter-Urban's electric loco-

motives from interchange points to the busy Army post.

Camp Dodge reopened for inductees during World War II but on a smaller scale. Even so, the Inter-Urban had to borrow cars from the Cedar Rapids & Iowa City Railway to handle the extra movements. Like most Iowa interurbans, the carrier had "boomer" equipment: that is, cars purchased from other railroads.

When this writer rode the line in 1944, its steel passenger cars had a familiar look — like that of an old friend. Having ridden the now defunct Lake Shore Electric Railway between Cleveland and Toledo almost a decade earlier, he quickly recognized these 60-foot cars as having come from that Ohio interurban. The same feeling was experienced on the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City road. It was a peculiar quirk of fate to be a passenger bowling along "The Crandic Route" on cars of the abandoned Cincinnati & Lake Erie's *Daniel Boone* from Toledo to the Queen City, and the old Indiana Railroad. Iowa, in short, is a haven for interurban cars and locomotives from all over the nation!

Getting back to "the Perry and Colfax interurban," its days as an electric road were numbered. In 1922 it was renamed the Des Moines & Central Iowa Railway. Unfortunately, declining revenues continued between the two World Wars, and in 1946 the Colfax line was scrapped.

Five years earlier the short Moran-Woodward stub had ceased operations. In November, 1946, the Des Moines & Central Iowa Railway went bankrupt. Three years later it was purchased by Murray M. Salzberg, a New York scrap-iron dealer, who continued operations under the old name. Salzberg managed to make both ends meet by dieselizing the property in 1949 and discontinuing passenger service. The little-used section from Perry to Granger was abandoned in 1953. Previous to 1952, freight service to Fort Des Moines and to Urbandale, operated in conjunction with the Des Moines Railway, was withdrawn.

For many years the DM&CI was affiliated with the Des Moines Railway, but when the latter converted to buses it cut off all rail service to the suburban points of Fort Des Moines and Urbandale. There are still some valuable industries along the road between Des Moines and Granger and on the 3-mile segment of the "Colfax Division" to Highland Transfer. By pruning unprofitable branches the remainder of the system may operate indefinitely.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.