

## Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern

No Iowa interurban is better built than the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern Railroad. This line has been called "a steam railroad with a trolley wire over it" because of the substantial manner of its construction. When Westinghouse wanted an outstanding example of electric freight haulage in the heyday of the interurban it chose the WCF&N. As a result the manufacturing concern published an attractive 84-page book titled *The Story of the Cedar Valley Road* to show what could be done to build up a lucrative freight business. Later *Electric Traction* conducted speed contests to stimulate faster running. A score of electric roads were listed each year, but only one appeared from Iowa. That was the "Cedar Valley Road." It ranked ninth in 1929 and in 1930. The average speed for both years was 45.9 m.p.h. on the 64-mile Cedar Rapids-Waterloo run.

In the vital matter of keeping on the black side of the ledger, the WCF&N has paid modest dividends each year since its reorganization in 1944. In the ten-year period, the railroad has paid out \$551,884.02 in dividends, and has reduced its bonded indebtedness from \$2,273,200 to \$827,700, a reduction of \$1,445,500, or about 64 per



cent. Because of its strategic location and good management the 99-mile-long road takes in enough revenue to rank as a Class I carrier.

The story of the railroad is largely that of three brothers: Louis S. Cass, Claude D. Cass, and Joseph F. Cass. Louis and Joseph Cass formed the Waterloo & Cedar Falls Rapid Transit Company, the forerunner of the present system. The Rapid Transit was incorporated in 1895 to connect the two cities in its name. Louis S. Cass, or "L.S." as he was called, for railroaders habitually use initials, headed the newly formed road. In 1896 he bought the Waterloo Street Railway, a horse-car line with two miles of track. This was electrified, and four miles were added. The next year the Rapid Transit reached Cedar Falls but could not get a franchise to operate downtown. To overcome this obstacle the "interurban" ran a short distance over the tracks of the friendly Chicago Great Western Railway. Through the purchase of the Cedar Falls street railway in 1898, access was had to the heart of the city, and operation over the CGW was given up. Meanwhile the local line was converted to electricity, having formerly been operated with Patton gasoline cars.

Constructed with 56-pound rails on private right of way, the intercity line was more or less of an interurban. As the century drew to a close, it even hauled some freight. This consisted of bricks shipped from a plant near Cedar Falls to



Waterloo by a regular interurban unit pulling a flat car. The operation was conducted between midnight and early morning, and delivery was made in the city streets. In 1900 the first electric locomotive was purchased, and the following year another was added. The pioneer engines had the task of taking coal cars up a 2 per cent grade to the normal school—now Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls.

In 1901 the road was extended thirteen miles north to Denver, Iowa. At the same time a 22,000-volt transmission line was built along the route to supply power to the new railroad. It is reputed to be the first high-tension line in Iowa. A year later the road reached Denver Junction, where it connected with the Chicago Great Western. From the Junction the interurban secured track-age rights over the CGW to Sumner via Waverly, 31 miles. In fact the trolley company operated the Waverly-Sumner branch of the Great Western with steam trains in both freight and passenger service. In 1904 the name was changed to the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern Railway.

What may seem a bizarre alliance between electric and steam roads is not so strange when analyzed in detail. The farsighted A. B. Stickney, head of the CGW, saw the interurban as a short cut for cars going from Waterloo to points on his Omaha line, instead of by the roundabout route via Oelwein. Moreover the "juice" road tapped



some busy industries in Waterloo which the Great Western did not.

Two of the Cass brothers learned to "railroad" on Stickney's system. The Casses liked Stickney personally, and he liked them.

A few biographical notes on the Cass family might be in order. Louis S. Cass was in between his brothers in age, but he always headed the inter-urban. Born in Wisconsin in 1865, he received his higher education at Iowa State Teachers College. "L.S." entered railroading as freight brakeman on the Minnesota & Northwestern, earliest predecessor of the Great Western. Later he switched to "braking" on the Milwaukee Road, then went as telegraph operator for the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern (now Rock Island), and finally with the Dubuque & Dakota (CGW) as conductor. His association with the "Maple Leaf" was renewed when he combined his stewardship of the WCF&N with the vice-presidency of the Great Western from 1905 to 1908, and became chief executive for the receivers, 1908-1909. He also served for many years as vice-president of the American Short Line Railroad Association under the strong leadership of Bird M. Robinson. A man of varied interests, "L.S." had other irons in the fire, including banking, real estate, and lumbering.

Claude D. Cass, youngest of the trio, was born in Sumner in 1879. He likewise went to Iowa



State Teachers College and later to the Iowa College of Law at Drake University. He "conducted" on his brothers' trolley line during vacations and then became permanently identified with the traction company. He became superintendent, general passenger agent and, in 1905, general manager. In later years he served as vice-president.

The third brother, Joseph F. Cass, like "L.S.," was born in Wisconsin, and was two years his senior. After a public school education he went with the Dubuque & Dakota Railroad. Biographical material on him is scant, but he served for many years as vice-president of the WCF&N. He differed from his brothers in physical make-up, being rather tall, whereas Louis was stocky and Claude portly.

The Cedar Valley Road had an amazing variety of rolling stock from open-bench, single-truck streetcars to four-wheel "convertibles" — a type of trolley in which the panels could be removed for summer operation; they bore little if any resemblance to the streamlined "convertibles" of today's automobiles. Closed city cars were featured along with large monitor-roof interurbans. For a time a motor bus on flanged wheels was operated on the Sumner branch.

Shortly after the Great Western went into receivership the Cedar Valley Road ceased operating over it from Denver Junction to Sumner. The



interurban thereafter built its own all-electric line from the junction to Waverly. It subsequently built south from Waterloo to Cedar Rapids. This extension had catenary construction of overhead wires, 85-pound rails, easy curves, and no grades over 1 per cent. Originally of 650-volt current, it changed to 1,300-volt in 1915.

The southern extension (completed in 1914) boasted of all-steel passenger cars, three of which were parlor-observation units. The parlor facilities had such niceties as buffet service operated from a Tom Thumb kitchenette, 6 ft. by 3 ft. 2 in., and built-in writing desks supplied with stationary bearing the "Cedar Valley Road" emblem. Finally, in the grand tradition, they had the company's herald on the brass railing at the observation end. The observation cars are still in service.

The railroad was poorly maintained during government operation in World War I. This condition, combined with a recession, put the company in precarious financial shape after its return to private ownership. In 1923, Cass retired from his long term as president and was succeeded by C. M. Cheney, who ran the railroad for a Protective Committee of first mortgage bondholders, since the company was unable to pay its first mortgage bonds. In 1940, as the first step in reorganization, Cheney was made receiver. Four years later, the reorganization was completed and the name changed to Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern



Railroad, with Cheney as president and general manager. Thus, in its whole lifetime, the Cedar Valley Road has had only two presidents.

Like his predecessor, Cheney began his railroad career on the Great Western, where he had worked as station agent and telegrapher from December, 1892, to October, 1904, leaving the Great Western at that time to become general freight and passenger agent for the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern Railway, in which position he remained until September, 1920, when he severed his connections with the Waterloo road to become vice-president and general manager of the Des Moines & Central Iowa Railroad. He remained in this position until October, 1923, when he returned to the WCF&N as president and general manager.

Mr. Cheney was born in Illinois but came to Iowa as a small boy, spending his childhood in Marshalltown. The little hamlet of "Cheney," on the Cedar Rapids line, is named after him.

Today the Cedar Valley Road is a heavy-duty carrier with three daily time freights between Cedar Rapids and Waterloo. Fifty-car trains are common, and 70-car double-headers are not unusual. For passengers the road valiantly runs a daily train each way between Cedar Rapids and Waterloo with an additional run "Dly. Ex. Mon. Tue. Wed. Thur.," as the working timetable quaintly puts it. Cars no longer go into downtown



Cedar Rapids over the local streetcar lines (discontinued in 1940) but they do terminate at the road's smart Tudor-type depot on the north side of town. Daily round-trip service is also provided between Waterloo and Waverly.

Some types of operation, like that on the Waterloo Belt Line serving the John Deere plant and the Rath Packing Company, have been profitable. Local streetcar service in Waterloo and Cedar Falls ceased over a decade ago. In 1952 the railroad sold the bus line that supplemented interurban cars in the Cedar Rapids-Waterloo service, and relinquished its local bus rights in Waterloo and Cedar Falls the following year. On the other hand, service continues between the two cities with lightweight trolleys formerly operated by Knoxville Transit. The low-level vehicles still have the United States mail slots peculiar to the Tennessee system. They are the last streetcars (as distinguished from interurbans) in Iowa.

Some dozen electric locomotives busily pulling road freights and yard cuts are indicative of the type of service for which the road is best fitted. More changes may be in order. And yet, barring a depression, the Cedar Valley Road will probably continue to pay modest dividends in the future.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.