The Palimpsest

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH
Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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From Coast to Coast

The age of telegraphic communication began in 1844 with the completion of a line between Washington and Baltimore, forty miles in length. Within three years, men of enterprise and vision like Henry O'Reilly and Ezra Cornell had built lines down the Atlantic seaboard and across the mountains to the Mississippi River. Extending northward from St. Louis through Alton, Jacksonville, and Quincy, Illinois, the telegraph first reached Iowa in the fall of 1848. Keokuk, Burlington, and Bloomington (Muscatine), being placed in direct communication by wire with eastern and southern cities, began to assume a metropolitan aspect. About the same time another branch through Springfield, Peoria, Peru, and Galena, Illinois, terminated at Dubuque. By 1850 these lines were tied in with the lake lines and thus the States were "fenced in" by wire.

Telegraph building had begun with a rush but the

decade of the fifties brought a lull, especially in the west. Business depression and political uncertainty probably had their influence, although indifference and prejudice on the part of the public, and poor service, mismanagement, and inefficiency on the part of the telegraph companies afford a more plausible explanation. Even though the wires were often down, just when rapid communication was most desired, and though the system deserved the abuse as well as the praise intermittently heaped upon it, nevertheless the enormous value of the new invention was generally recognized. The early telegraph, with all its irregularity of operation, was a boon to the newspapers, while the railroads were not slow to utilize the wire for train dispatching. With the unification of several independent lines in the hands of the Western Union Telegraph Company in 1856, the service began to improve and the way was opened for systematic progress.

But while the network of lines continued to spread in the east, only haphazard and insignificant progress was made west of the Mississippi. In 1853 a make-shift line was pushed up the river from Muscatine to Davenport, reaching the latter city at about the same time as a line which was constructed westward from Peru to Rock Island. A similar line may have been built to Iowa City from Muscatine as early as 1852, and it is altogether probable that the telegraph reached Mount Pleasant upon the completion of the Burlington and Missouri River Rail-

road to that point in the autumn of 1856. Farther south, in Missouri, the construction of lines radiating from St. Louis proved more energetic. Telegraphic communication was opened to Cape Girardeau on March 21, 1850, completing a direct circuit to New Orleans, and during the following year a wire was strung up the Missouri River by Tal O. Shaffner through Jefferson City to Weston on the western border of the State, where a station was opened on October 4th. It was not until March, 1853, however, that a telegraph office was first opened in St. Joseph. This line along the Missouri River was supplemented in 1859 by a second across northern Missouri following the route of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad.

For several years the St. Joseph office served western Iowa with telegraphic news, being much closer than any other station. St. Joseph was also the principal point from which intelligence was relayed by pony express across the plains, and later the St. Joseph line was destined to form an important link in the proposed transcontinental telegraph.

Talk of connecting the Atlantic and Pacific seaboards by wire had begun during the first years of telegraph building. The agitation gradually increased and, there being small promise of sufficient immediate revenue to warrant so great an outlay of private capital as would be necessary to construct the line, pressure was brought to bear upon Congress for a subsidy sufficient to build and maintain

a line across the continent. On June 16, 1860, Congress passed an act "to facilitate Communication between the Atlantic and Pacific States by Electric Telegraph." The government proposed to contract for the use of a telegraph line to be built within two years from western Missouri to San Francisco. For such service as much as forty thousand dollars annually during a period of ten years was to be available, though the contract would be awarded to the lowest bidder — on the assumption that more than one line might be built.

That previous work had already been done, however, looking toward telegraphic communication across the plains is evident from a paragraph in the *Scientific American* of December 24, 1859, which reads: "Parties are now engaged in constructing the line on the mail route between St. Louis (in Missouri) and San Francisco (in California), and about 300 miles are completed at each end." The wires were to be connected through to New York by way of St. Louis and Buffalo. It was hoped that this line would eventually become an important connecting link in the proposed transmundane telegraph, passing up the Pacific Coast and across Bering Strait to Russia, where it would connect with a line being built by the Russian government westward across northern Asia. The practicability of establishing telegraphic communication between Europe and America by means of a submarine cable across the Atlantic seemed doubtful at that time.

Meanwhile the people of western Iowa and Nebraska had watched the progress of the telegraph with keen interest. On April 26, 1860, the Pacific City *Herald* reported that the Missouri and Western Telegraph Company had been organized at St. Louis on April 16th and that active steps had "already been taken by the company to secure subscriptions for the extension of lines to Omaha, Nebraska City, Council Bluffs, and Fort Kearney." Omaha contributed five thousand dollars.

Instrumental in the organization of the new company were men of wealth and wide experience in telegraph construction, enthusiastically confident of the future for communication by wire. Edward Creighton of Omaha, who had built hundreds of miles of telegraph in the east, was elected general agent, and R. C. Clowry, destined to become president of the Western Union Telegraph Company forty-two years later, was chosen secretary and superintendent. The Missouri and Western Telegraph Company absorbed the old Missouri River Telegraph Line extending from St. Louis to Kansas City and the Kansas Telegraph Line running from Kansas City through Leavenworth and Atchison to St. Joseph.

Toward the end of June the work on the extension from St. Joseph to Nebraska City was progressing rapidly. The ground had been marked for the poles as far as Brownville, Nebraska, "and a lot of fixtures for the line" had arrived at Nebraska City.

"What efforts are being, or have been made, to secure an extension of this line to Council Bluffs?" queried the *Nonpareil.* "If we don't watch the corners we shall soon be behind all the towns on the Missouri River."

It was thought that the telegraph would be completed to Omaha by the middle of August and from thence it would be "built directly west towards the gold fields of Kansas" [Pike's Peak] and would "reach Fort Kearney — nearly two hundred miles from the States, on the route of the Pony Express and California Mail — by the first of November." But it was September 1st before the poles were all up between Omaha and St. Joseph, while the wire was not strung and the line put in working condition until ten days later. Whereupon the Omaha *Nebraskian* became a daily paper.

Work on the line westward from Omaha continued with energy. A telegraphic dispatch from Omaha on September 20th reported that the poles "are set within ninety miles of Fort Kearney, and although they have to be hauled fifty miles on the western portion of the line, the company is putting up five and six miles per day. The poles will be up to Fort Kearney by the middle of October, and the wire about the first of November. The company has pushed the construction thus rapidly in order to have the line ready to transmit the November election news by pony express from Kearney, which insures a gain of nearly two days upon the present

time.'' This construction schedule was successfully maintained and the line completed by the first of November so that the news of the election of Abraham Lincoln reached Fort Kearney by wire.

Nor could the people of central Iowa become accustomed to the anomaly of receiving Washington and New York news on the east-bound stage from Council Bluffs. When the telegraphic report of President Buchanan's last annual message to Congress was received in Des Moines by stage from Omaha, the editor of the *Register* could not refrain from saying, ''This thing of getting eastern news from the west in advance of any other source of information, is a striking satire on the neglect of our people to establish telegraphic lines from the Mississippi river to the interior.'' Scarcely more than a year later the world had been put to rights in Iowa so that east was east and west was west again.

Meanwhile Edward Creighton was active in interesting eastern capitalists in the organization of the Pacific Telegraph Company to fill the gap in the transcontinental line between Julesburg, Colorado, the western terminus of the Missouri and Western, and Salt Lake City, the eastern end of a projected California line. When this work should be completed the whole line west of Omaha was to become the Pacific Telegraph and secure the government subsidy. Mr. Creighton himself undertook the work of construction between Julesburg and Salt Lake City.

"Ere the spring months of 1861 pass over our heads," commented the editor of the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* on November 3, 1860, "the line will be completed to Denver City, and ere the close of the coming year, to Salt Lake City, where it will meet the line now extending eastward from San Francisco." The *Scientific American* for July 13, 1861, contained the following statement of progress on the western end of the transcontinental telegraph: "A train of twenty-five wagons, 228 oxen, eighteen mules and horses, and fifty men, left Sacramento on the 27th of May, with materials to build a line of telegraph from Fort Churchill to Salt Lake City — a distance of 500 miles. They hope to have it done by the 1st of December, and by that time the line from the Mississippi to Salt Lake will be finished." This prediction was too sanguine, however. Although the wire was up east of Salt Lake City early in 1862, the western section was not ready until several months later.

While building in the vicinity of Salt Lake City, Mr. Creighton was somewhat concerned as to the attitude which might be assumed by Brigham Young toward the intrusion of the telegraph into his domain. As chief elder of the Mormons his authority was supreme, and at that time his word amounted to almost absolute law throughout the Mormon empire. In order to win the friendship of Brigham Young the construction company asked his son, who happened to be in the lumber business, to furnish

the telegraph poles in that section. His price, which appeared reasonable, was promptly accepted and a contract was drawn accordingly. Some time later the son informed the contractors that his bid on the poles was too low, and that he was losing money on the job. A new contract was at once made at a higher figure. Not long after the drawing of the new contract a messenger came saying that Brigham Young wished to see the telegraph contractor. With much apprehension Mr. Creighton went to the home of the Mormon leader. Upon being ushered into the library he introduced himself as the representative of the telegraph company.

"Is it true that my son entered into a contract with you to furnish poles for the telegraph?" inquired Mr. Young.

"Yes, sir", replied Mr. Creighton.

"Is it also true that the price agreed upon in this contract was subsequently raised?"

Mr. Creighton nodded his assent.

"Let me see those contracts", said Brigham.

Whereupon Mr. Creighton took the documents from his pocket and handed them over. After scrutinizing the two contracts for a moment Brigham Young crushed the new one in his hand and threw it into the fire. "The poles will be furnished by my son in accordance with the terms of the original contract", he said.

The telegraph line from coast to coast was completed and placed in operation on October 22, 1862.

Symbolical of the achievement of bringing the opposite ends of the country into contact by means of the longest electric circuit in the world, the first continuous message to be flashed over the wire from San Francisco to New York was a pledge of national unity. "The Pacific to the Atlantic sends greetings; and may both oceans be dry before a foot of all the land that lies between them shall belong to any other than one United Country."

BEN HUR WILSON

Across the Prairies of Iowa

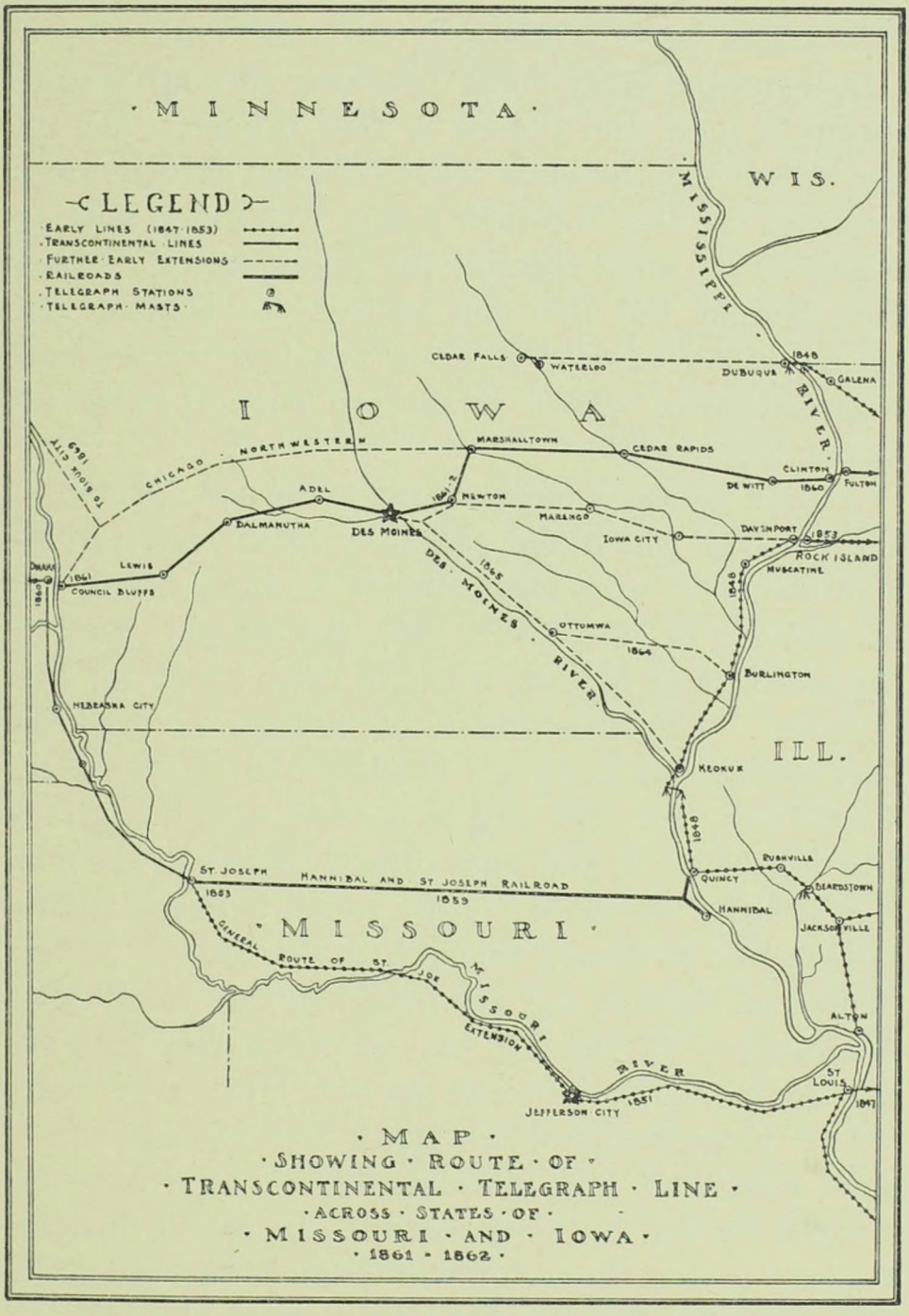
On June 15, 1861, before the completion of the transcontinental line, came the startling announcement that the "Telegraph line through Jefferson City, Mo., has been torn down by order of Gov. Claib. Jackson." Thus war swept across the path of progress. R. C. Clowry, superintendent of the Missouri and Western Telegraph Company, immediately issued a statement that "telegraph dispatches would come through from St. Joseph uninterrupted." Apparently, however, the service was intermittent, for in October there was a rumor that the Missouri and Western Telegraph Company had decided to put up a line across Iowa from Council Bluffs to the Mississippi River. "Rebellion in Missouri has rendered telegraphing across that State uncertain if not impracticable, hence the change from Missouri to Iowa."

In November an agent of the Illinois and Mississippi Telegraph Company spent several days in Council Bluffs "making preparations to commence the construction of the line from this side of the State eastwards." The newspaper carried an advertisement for laborers to work on the new line, from which it is evident that the company meant business. Thus the transcontinental line was to be rerouted across the prairies of Iowa, connecting

with eastern lines at Chicago, so as to be entirely in loyal territory. The Pacific Telegraph Company was to be given exclusive use of the wire, however, so that the addition of a second wire would be necessary to accommodate way messages of Iowa stations. The cost of this local wire would have to be borne in part by the several communities to be served. Council Bluffs was asked for fifteen hundred dollars to defray the expense of an office there, while other cities were expected to make similar donations or do without telegraphic service.

Since this was an emergency line, to be constructed as quickly as possible with the least expense, the shortest route across Iowa was sought. At that time Cedar Rapids, the terminus of a line building westward from Clinton, was apparently the most available point in Iowa at which to make contact with an established line. Early in 1860 the telegraph had reached Clinton from Fulton, Illinois, and from there had been extended through DeWitt to Cedar Rapids. The plan was to build on westward to Marshalltown along the route of the projected Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railroad and at the same time work east from Council Bluffs.

The route from Council Bluffs followed the Mormon Trail as far east as Lewis. There the road forked into three branches: one taking a southeasterly direction through the lower tiers of counties; the middle trail, and the shortest way, known as the Fontanelle road, leading to Des Moines through



FROM A MANUSCRIPT MAP DRAWN BY BEN HUR WILSON

Fontanelle and Winterset; and the northern, or "Dalmanutha stage road", passing through Dalmanutha to Adel and thence to Des Moines. The latter, which was the most travelled road and the route followed by the Western Stage Company, was selected as the most feasible for the telegraph. From Des Moines the line ran on east to Newton and thence across country in a northeasterly direction to Marshalltown, where it was to connect with the Cedar Rapids line.

At Des Moines a controversy arose over providing the subsidy which the company demanded for the establishment of a local station in the capital. At an election in November, 1861, the people voted on the question of levying a tax to raise $3000 for that purpose. The newspaper, of course, favored the proposition, warning its readers that if the issue should fail "no office will be opened, and, though the line will be built, and pass directly through the city, it will be of no more benefit to the citizens than a clothes line stretched through the streets." Nevertheless on election day the proposal was voted down decisively — 127 to 178, and on November 13th the Des Moines *Register* commented, "We may sadly err in judgment, but we think Des Moines would have consulted her interests better by voting affirmatively on the proposition. If, as we believe, the vote of last Saturday will delay for an indefinite time Telegraphic communication with this city, it will probably be conceded after awhile by the ene-

mies of the loan, that they didn't see into a millstone any farther than the law requires."

Work on the telegraph line went forward rapidly. By Thanksgiving the editor of the *Register* wrote: "If we are unable on account of impecuniosity (Thunder! what a word!) to go and see the Elephant, the elephant has concluded to come and see us. In other words, the telegraph is about to visit this obscure locality to give us an opportunity to look at pole and wire, and guess at the balance. The poles have all been set up between this place and Council Bluffs, and also as far eastward as Sternberg's, 14 miles from Des Moines. From Newton the line will pass to Marshalltown, and thence to Cedar Rapids. Wire stringing was commenced in this vicinity yesterday under the supervision of Mr. [J. W.] Morse, a gentleman highly skilled as a Telegraph operator. The line will have been completed from the Missouri to the Mississippi river against the 1st of January, giving somebody, but not us, the benefit of a streak of intelligent lightning, which reaches from the Atlantic seaboard through Salt Lake City to California. The Telegraph, so far as this State is concerned, is a *Sweet* operation [E. D. L. Sweet was superintendent], but so far as the short-sighted action of our own people is concerned, it is a fit subject for re-*Morse!* We never indulge in puns. Too small a business."

Something must have been done to remedy this sad state of affairs, however, for on December 18th

messages were exchanged between Newton and Des Moines newspapers. "Compliments of the *Free Press,* and congratulations upon the opening of telegraph communications through our State", wired H. S. Winslow from Newton, and added the query, "What do you think of Old England?" In response, Frank W. Palmer of the *Register* flashed back, "Des Moines takes great pleasure in being connected by 'linked lightning' with Newton, and hopes the bond thus formed may never be sundered. As to Old England — let her 'bile.' "

Telegraph communication had also been opened between Des Moines and Omaha, "and a spirited conversation was held the other day between Mr. Morse, the operator at this point, and the operator at Salt Lake City." The line worked "extraordinarily well, requiring but 12 cups for 190 miles," which signified excellent insulation. In Des Moines the office was located on Third Street, and it is recorded that one day a cow, overcome with curiosity, walked up and stuck her head in the south window.

The first regular telegraphic news column carried in the *Register* appeared on January 14, 1862, being "War Dispatches" from Washington dated January 12th and from Cincinnati dated January 13th. The editor was delighted and, being in a jubilant mood, expressed his opinion of the occasion in his gayest manner. "Ever since Adam was an infant," he wrote, "the City of Des Moines, or the site whereon it is located, has been cut off from the exterior

world. We have had no Railroads. We have had no Telegraph. We have been excluded from the activities of commerce. Situated midway between the two great rivers of the continent, without anything but coaches and stage roads to connect us with the rest of mankind, our condition has not been the most pleasant in the world.

"Today our situation is immensely improved. We have the privilege of reading the latest dispatches in our own paper. The lightning and telegraph company have at length made us even with the Mississippi cities; and, blessed be the stars of our destiny, we are even also with the Capital of Nebraska Territory, which although two hundred miles West of us in the land of the aborigines, has been favored with dispatches for the past year. We are a proud people — we are proud that the capital of Iowa has, in a lightning sense, overtaken Omaha, and Brigham Young, in the race of civilization! (That's sarkasstikal). Sound the hewgag and rejoice."

The work of construction progressed rapidly all along the line. Within a fortnight after negotiations began in Council Bluffs, the Marshall County *Times* reported that "arrangements had been completed for the construction of a telegraph line to this place; and for its completion the present year." And this good news was "no humbug", continued the editor. "The probabilities of its failure are not among the possibilities. We are bound to have a

telegraph to this place, and that too within the next forty days. Then, Marshalltown, situated in the center of Iowa, where less than fifteen years ago, only one broad prairie met the view, will be able to receive the news of any great event from Washington, but a few seconds behind its reception at New York. No longer will our river friends be able to enjoy early news, three days before it can be got to this place. Farewell then to tri-weekly mails for our medium of latest intelligence, and for the current prices. But in place of these antiquated institutions, we can hail with joy the lightning-winged messenger, and the rugged rolling roaring rattling rapid rail road iron horse. All hail the Telegraph and the Rail Road."

On November 26th, the agent of the Pacific Telegraph Company, J. L. Smith of Des Moines, was in Marshalltown contracting for telegraph poles to be used between Newton and Cedar Rapids. The holes would all be dug by Thanksgiving. The line between Council Bluffs and Newton was reported to be ready for the wires, and it was hoped that within two weeks the telegraph would be in operation through Marshalltown.

Those were exciting times. In the midst of war, when rapid communication with all parts of the country was needed as never before, a gap in the transcontinental line of electric communication was being closed. The danger of continual interference by guerrilla warriors in Missouri would be over.

Here was history in the making, obvious to everybody. The completion of the first trans-Iowa telegraph, a span in the long line from coast to coast, was awaited anxiously.

About the first of December, however, progress on the section between Cedar Rapids and Marshalltown seems to have faltered. The contract for building that portion of the line was to be executed by the railroad company, and there were some hints that the telegraph would not be completed ahead of the railroad. "But we think our doubting Thomases had now as well soothe their fears in that direction," wrote the editor of the Marshalltown *Times* on December 10th, "for we are not only to have two wires here, but a third to devote exclusively to local business. The fact that we are to have an office as soon as the wires are put up to here, is not only a sure fact, but it is a fixed and sealed one."

A week later five tons of wire had arrived and the poles were all set between Marshalltown and Newton. Eastward, however, progress was not so rapid, though the work was by no means standing still. Just before Christmas the instruments for the Marshalltown station arrived and were installed in G. M. Woodbury's office. The line was completed to the west by the end of December, and on January 7, 1862, the *Times* contained the following item:

"The telegraph, which six weeks ago no one had the remotest idea would ever see this place before

the railroad did, is now in working order with all points either east or west on any telegraph line. We are now able to send or receive intelligence from California, New York or Boston, as easily and as quick, as we could two months ago hear from any point three miles distant. But such in fact is the case. Dispatches have already been received from Cedar Rapids, Chicago, and from Newton."

Thus the trans-Iowa telegraph began regular operation at all points along the line on the same day. On January 14, 1862, the Marshalltown *Times,* like the Des Moines *Register,* published the first telegraphic news received directly. "The Iowa City, Davenport, and Chicago papers, arriving two and three days after our paper was issued," declared the Marshalltown editor proudly, "brought only the same news our patrons had read in the *Times.*"

At first the new wires worked beautifully. On February 7, 1862, says the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil,* "the telegraph lines between Salt Lake, U. T. and Boston, Mass., were connected and direct communication between those two points established,—thus placing Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago, Council Bluffs and Salt Lake in instantaneous communication with each other. Boston and Salt Lake exchanged congratulations and the time of night, the difference being about four hours." This immediate intercourse over a distance of twenty-five hundred miles was considered marvelous.

On account of the great haste with which the line was built across western Iowa, the wire was sometimes stretched between buildings in the towns, and from tree to tree or even along fences in the country. One woman objected to having the wire strung over the house, for, she said, when she wanted to lick the kids she did not propose to have the whole world hearing her.

Curiosity concerning the mechanics of the telegraph was universal among the people along the line. "But how can messages be carried over wires?" was one of the questions most frequently asked. To be honest, to answer this query briefly and yet in a manner to dispel skepticism was a puzzle. A common reply was, "Suppose there was a cat with a tail long enough to reach from Council Bluffs to Cedar Rapids. If you stepped on the tail at Council Bluffs the cat would certainly yowl in Cedar Rapids." Not a bad analogy. Ignorance as to the use of the telegraph was nevertheless wide-spread. On one occasion a man of some education refused to receive a telegram from a friend whom he knew well, because he did not recognize the handwriting.

Haphazardly built as it was, the line proved entirely unable to withstand the ravages of the weather, and during the first winter it went out again and again. "We are somewhat disappointed this morning", says the *Nonpareil* on January 28, 1862, "in not being able to give our readers more extended telegraphic reports. A snow storm was raging in

the eastern part of Iowa all day yesterday, in consequence of which the lines were not in good working order." That the Iowa line left much to be desired as a medium for the dissemination of news may be gleaned from the following complaint which appeared in the Omaha *Republican* of March 26th. "The telegraph line across the State of Iowa, shabbily constructed in the beginning, and always unreliable, is rapidly subsiding into a sort of chronic nuisance. An inferior article of low priced wire, suspended upon bean poles and corn stalks, it is down with every breath of the wind, and just when it is most needed it is utterly worthless. We have had but one 'live' report from that quarter for almost a fortnight, and that was on yesterday afternoon. The effort was too much for it, however, and it collapsed. The Hannibal and St. Joseph line, in the palmiest days of secessionism in Missouri, when the rebel raids were most frequent was a paragon of perfection and reliability compared with this miserable abortion — this humiliating failure. We sincerely hope that its management may pass into other hands, and that speedily, or that it may be abated by proper authorities."

The service was gradually improved, however, the weak places being strengthened, and the line across the prairies of western Iowa along the Dalmanutha stage road remained in operation, playing an important rôle in the transaction of the nation's business until the completion of the Rock Island Rail-

road to Council Bluffs in 1869. This railroad paralleled the telegraph west of Newton, and it was not long until a new and better line constructed along the railroad displaced the pioneer telegraph. The old, historic line was thereupon torn down, and the poles were sold by the mile to the farmers residing along the route.

Barton Garvin purchased two miles of these poles, which he removed to his farm seven miles south of Lewis, using them for fence posts and for joists in sheds and barns. Some are said to be still in a fair state of preservation. One extra-long pine pole served for some time as a tavern sign-post at the Seven Mile House on the road south from Lewis, operated by Robert Mackrill. But this relic was eventually chopped down lest a venturesome English traveller, who wagered a two-bit piece that he could climb the pole, should fall and injure himself.

Thus passed the first trans-Iowa telegraph, having served its purpose and prepared the way for more and better lines.

Ben Hur Wilson

In Line with Progress

Few further extensions were added to the telegraph service in Iowa in advance of the railroads that were creeping slowly westward. In some instances, it is said, even after the railroads were built the wire did not follow immediately. The right of way of a train was determined by the kind of a flag it carried, while meeting places were arranged according to the time tables. While the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad, now the Illinois Central, reached Cedar Falls on April 1, 1861, it was not until December 9, 1863, that the telegraph was completed to that city. But as a rule the railroad and the telegraph came together.

Work on the telegraph line between Burlington and Ottumwa was commenced in April, 1863. The Ottumwa *Courier* was of the opinion that the job would be completed by the latter part of May. But it was not until the spring of 1864 that the lightning messenger arrived, and not long afterward Eddyville was "connected with the world and the rest of man-kind by the telegraph." This line was built in conjunction with the Des Moines Valley Railroad, which was then pushing towards the State capital from Keokuk.

But the new line was very slow in reaching Des Moines. Meanwhile telegraphic news service was

rather unsatisfactory. "That dyspeptic telegraph running to Des Moines, is still declining in usefulness", commented the Winterset *Hawkeye Flag*. "It needs rest, and is getting it." In November, 1865, the local wire between Chicago and Des Moines, by way of Davenport, Iowa City, Grinnell, and Newton, was taken, in part at least, for use on the new Des Moines Valley line, leaving the *Register* at the mercy of the old transcontinental line which was monopolized by private dispatches.

Some of the railroad companies undertook to operate public telegraph lines in conjunction with their own business. For example the Chicago and North Western Railroad Telegraph Company built a line from Missouri Valley to Sioux City in 1867 along with the construction of the North Western Railroad. "Many of our people may not be aware that we are soon to have a telegraph in Sioux City, — or rather with one end in Sioux City and the other extending nearly all over creation", announced the Sioux City *Journal* on December 14th. By January 4, 1868, the telegraph posts along the railroad had been put up and the wires strung ready for the battery, which was to be put in position as soon as the depot building was ready, which would be but a few days longer.

During the great railroad-building epoch in Iowa, the railroad and telegraph came hand in hand. Perhaps it might be said that the "iron horse" was driven by the "iron cord", for the operation of

trains by telegraphic dispatch had become almost universal by 1870. Stringing the wire often preceded the laying of the rails. Contractors building grades and bridges needed to be in constant contact with their source of supplies. An operator was usually available along the advancing line, who, being equipped with a portable outfit, was enabled to "cut in", make ground connections, and establish immediate communication with headquarters. Telegraph offices were located at practically every way station, the depot agent being both station master and operator, and thus every railroad community, large or small, enjoyed the advantages of the "electric telegraph".

Of all who welcomed the advent of the telegraph the newspaper editors were the most enthusiastic. Fresher news meant wider circulation. The Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* began publishing a daily edition early in 1862 and well-established journals in other cities did likewise almost as soon as the telegraph line was in regular operation. The *Nonpareil* contracted to receive all of the dispatches of the Associated Press from New York, for which it had "to pay a good round sum." In April, 1866, the Des Moines *Register* announced that it had perfected arrangements to receive midnight telegraphic dispatches, which was a boon to the country papers of central Iowa as most of them relied upon the *Register* for the latest telegraphic news.

Telegraph offices were opened so rapidly that

there were not enough trained operators to fill the positions. The fascination of the wire attracted young men, offering a profession both congenial and remunerative. Many were self taught, learning telegraphy in their own homes by the assistance of a simple code and such crude instruments as a case-knife inserted between the tines of a table fork. Boy chums often pooled their meager funds, purchased a beginner's outfit, and built a line with broom wire running from house to house.

Business colleges added a course in telegraphy to their curriculum. In January, 1865, the school of Pratt, Worthington and Warner of Davenport introduced and successfully taught the subject of telegraphy, being one of the first schools in the country to do so. That same year a "telegraph department" was added to the Baylies Commercial College at Dubuque, the outfit consisting of three tape machines, costing fifty dollars each, five sounders, several relays, and other equipment. Similar courses soon became a part of every well-regulated business college, and for many years, until they were opposed by the Telegraphers Union, they attracted much patronage.

The telegraph operators were men of absolute dependability, for in the operation of trains where life and property were always at stake, only men of high character, keen minds, and meticulous accuracy could be employed. Many of them advanced rapidly, being promoted to positions of greatest

responsibility in the railroad and business world, for which their early training at the key had fitted them.

And now the telegraph, like other great institutions of service, has become universal. The world-wide transmission of ideas has been made easy and almost instantaneous. In the means of communication and understanding, the world is a unit. Supplemented first by the telephone, the radio has now come into general use for broadcasting entertainment, news, and culture. Yet the telegraph continues to fulfill the particular functions for which it is best adapted — and there is no dearth of business. Even the radio provides revenue, as recently when over two hundred and eighteen thousand congratulatory messages were received at Shenandoah as a result of Henry Field's radio anniversary party — a world's record by telegraph.

BEN HUR WILSON

Comment by the Editor

PROCESSES OF PEACE

The scheme of nature seems to be founded on strife. Forces of good and evil, of advancement and decline are ever at work. Creation and disintegration proceed simultaneously, and the one is simply antecedent to the other — complementary parts of the same process. Death treads on the heels of life. Yet destruction may contribute to ultimate progress. Old houses, once useful and elegant, are torn down to make room for more valuable buildings. New governments arise out of the ruins of decadent dynasties. The earth is constantly at odds with the air and water. Wind, rain, and streams tear down the hills and carry the soil away to the ocean; but eventually, by this very process, the land will emerge triumphant from the sea.

Finality is abhorrent to nature. Time and space are without end and life itself, though expressed in innumerable cycles, goes on through endless generations. Creatures come into being, pass on their heritage of life, and return to the clay from whence they sprang. The sparrow dies, but his life flows on forever in his countless progeny. Seasons come and go in their yearly cycle; the tide follows the moon

around the world; vapor returns to the earth as rain; and day succeeds night — all in regular sequence, perpetually.

Thus progress runs in cycles like the seasons. In the eternal quest for solutions we are forever travelling in circles, not always spiral or concentric, so that the course of progress becomes a maze of endless digressions. History repeats itself indeed: the experiences of the race occur in series. Peace follows war; prosperity and hard times alternate; and governments rise and fall in the Aristotelian order.

New species develop from the accumulation of chance variations transmitted from parents to offspring, but there are many reversions to type in the tedious process. Through millions of canine lives the wolf became a shepherd dog. Even in the realm of conscious human endeavor achievement is seldom direct or sudden. It is a far cry from the signal fire to the radio and a devious route from ox cart to airplane, with many false starts and returns in the process. Telegraphic recording instruments, once displaced by sounders, have now come into use again. As river packets and wagon trains gave way to the railroads, so now the railroads must stand aside for motor traffic on the highways and barges on the water. The end of one era is only the beginning of another, whether in commerce or science or art, for nothing is ever so utterly finished that no further progress is possible. Nevertheless this constant groping for improvement through incessant

trials and numerous errors promotes the civilization of the world. Railroads, rivers, and highways all have their place in the system of transportation but the kind of service they render has changed.

THE ELEMENT OF SPEED

Civilization, which is the cumulation of human progress, seems to have become lately a matter of diminishing space and saving time. Speed is the criterion of the age. Not how well a task is done but how quickly is the basis of praise or blame. Children in school must first of all think rapidly: accuracy and thorough consideration are secondary. In defiance of the old adage that haste makes waste, every one seems to be in a hurry. In accordance with the prevalent mood, literary style has changed from the leisurely grace of Victorian novelists to the sharp staccato of a motor epoch. Writers present their rambling thoughts in scraps of sentences. People even play intensely, as though the principal object were to finish the game. Bridge players have no time for conversation and golfers are too intent upon reaching the next green to notice the fresh air or the charming vistas. Only the hills and the birds seem to remain calm and serene.

In commercial relations also progress is measured in terms of speed. Distance has lost its meaning. Less than seventy-five years ago a trip from New York to Oregon would probably have consumed a year or more, while now men fly from coast to coast

in less than a day and a half. The official report of the discovery of gold in California, sent on April 1st by a special messenger to Washington, did not arrive until the middle of September; but fifteen years later, thanks to the telegraph, the capture of Vicksburg was known in San Francisco as soon as it was in Boston.

The remarkable conquest of time and space has unified the world, so that the people at the ends of the earth are neighbors. Next to the printing press, the telegraph as a means for the dissemination of news, has contributed most to the general enlightenment of man. Proximity and common knowledge form a basis for better understanding among the nations.

And it seems significant that two of the pioneers in the development of telegraphy in America became founders of institutions for learning. Creighton University was the culmination of the lifelong desire of Edward Creighton to contribute to the means of education, while Ezra Cornell established Cornell University as a school where "any person can find instruction in any study."

J. E. B.

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