

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Milwaukee Comes

Solomon Juneau was the founder of Milwaukee. In 1835 he preëmpted land where he had lived for seventeen years, platted the town, and began selling lots to the throngs of settlers and speculators who were attracted by the establishment of a land office at Green Bay. Rude buildings were flung up hastily and by 1836 the merchants were all doing a "land office business". The country westward to the Mississippi, however, was still a vast wilderness unsettled save for a crop of squatters around Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien and the straggling, unkempt communities that clustered about Galena.

The creation of the Territory of Wisconsin on April 20, 1836, was heralded with delight. Andrew Jackson promptly appointed Henry Dodge as Governor, and a census was taken of this princely domain from which Wisconsin, Iowa,

Minnesota, and a generous share of the Dakotas were carved. The census that year revealed a population of 22,218, divided almost equally between those living west of the Mississippi in what is now Iowa, and the inhabitants of present-day Wisconsin. Four of the six counties east of the Mississippi — Milwaukee, Iowa, Crawford, and Brown — contained only 11,683 people, one-half of whom hailed from Iowa County which embraced the mineral region. An election was held and Governor Dodge ordered the legislators to meet at Belmont pending the selection of a capital.

Meanwhile, a number of men in the mushroom village of Milwaukee met in a "hotel" on September 17, 1836, to "exchange views and adopt measures" for building a railroad from Milwaukee to the Mississippi River. After several hours of solemn deliberation a committee consisting of Solomon Juneau, Byron Kilbourn, Hans Crocker, Benjamin H. Edgerton, and eleven others was appointed to correspond with citizens throughout the Territory, to circulate petitions, and to take steps to carry out the objects of the meeting.

The seeds sown at this rather inauspicious railroad caucus sprouted quickly and began to take root. When the legislators assembled at Belmont, Governor Dodge spoke at some length on the need for internal improvements and recommended the

construction of a railroad commencing from some "suitable point" on the Mississippi and passing through the mining country to the Rock River, and thence directly to Lake Michigan. A memorial was sent to Congress which resulted in an appropriation of \$2000 for a survey, but the plan was nipped in the bud by a topographical engineer who turned in an adverse report after surveying twenty miles of the proposed railroad.

During the ensuing years a number of factors combined to cause the railroad question to be dormant. The paralyzing effect of the panic of 1837 was attested by the slow growth of population — by 1840 the Territory of Wisconsin contained only 30,945 people compared with 43,112 in the Territory of Iowa. Moreover, heated arguments had arisen over the respective merits of waterway improvements and the construction of highways, plank roads, and railroads. The bellicose attitude of the Jacksonian democrats toward "monster" corporations and monopolies had alligned public sentiment against railroads. Bitter rivalry and petty jealousy also combined to make the selection of a route utterly impossible during the early forties. Thus, after outstripping Green Bay and Sheboygan, Milwaukee found her efforts to become the eastern terminus of the projected line frustrated by the aspirations of Kenosha and Ra-

cine. At the same time the bickering among Potosi, Cassville, and Prairie du Chien prevented the determination of a western terminus.

During the forties the Territory of Wisconsin made a phenomenal growth in population. The number of inhabitants in 1846 was five times as many as in 1840 — a total of 155,678. By 1850 this number had increased to 305,391 compared with 192,214 for Iowa. Meanwhile, shipments eastward by way of the Great Lakes and Erie Canal rose steadily during the forties. As the population pushed westward over southern Wisconsin, Milwaukee realized more and more that the construction of a railroad would tap a commerce which otherwise would find its way eastward by the circuitous all-water route down the Mississippi and through the Gulf of Mexico. Although intensely jealous of Chicago, Milwaukee was forced to take up the cudgels with her sister city on Lake Michigan against Saint Louis and New Orleans.

It seems to have been Asa Whitney, who struck the spark that kindled the spirit of Wisconsin railroad enthusiasts. During the summer of 1845 Whitney journeyed westward from Milwaukee with a party of surveyors in quest of a practical route for a transcontinental railroad from Lake Michigan to the mouth of the Columbia River.

Whitney found "many good routes" between Milwaukee and the Mississippi and in a letter from Prairie du Chien declared that he was "perfectly satisfied" with the feasibility of such a project.

News of Whitney's plan spread like fire throughout Wisconsin and Iowa. "Once let the iron horse slake his thirst in the Mississippi," an Iowa memorial to the Wisconsin legislature declared, and "Congress will send him on to the ocean." A Lancaster editor believed a railroad should speedily unite the Father of Waters with Lake Michigan, even though "Sin and Death" got the contract. The laws of trade and the geographic position of Iowa, combined with her "boundless resources", asserted the *Grant County Herald*, "must and will force a channel of trade eastward" to the Great Lakes.

In 1847 the legislature of the Territory of Wisconsin was "flooded" with petitions from Milwaukee, Waukesha, Iowa, Grant, and other counties for the incorporation of a railroad from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi. But opposition to the scheme was still strong enough to defer the project. Finally, at the "urgent solicitation" of citizens of Waukesha on "behalf of the people of the interior", Governor Henry Dodge approved a bill on February 11, 1847, incorporating the "Milwaukee and Waukesha Rail Road Com-

pany". This organization was granted the right to "locate and construct a single or double track railroad" from Milwaukee to Waukesha with power to "transport, take and carry property, and persons upon the same, by the power and force of steam, of animals, or of any mechanical or other power, or of any combination of them". The capital stock was set at \$100,000. Byron Kilbourn, William A. Barstow, Alexander W. Randall, Lemuel W. Weeks, and five others were appointed commissioners to receive subscriptions.

The commissioners met at the City Hotel in Milwaukee on November 23, 1847, and elected L. W. Weeks president and A. W. Randall secretary. The subscription books were opened on February 7, 1848, but despite the enthusiasm and fanfare a year slipped by before the \$100,000 was subscribed and the requisite five per cent paid thereon. Meanwhile, on March 11, 1848, the company had been granted the right to extend its road from Waukesha to the "village of Madison" and thence to some point on the Mississippi in Grant County. The capital stock could be increased to three million dollars whenever the company decided to extend its road. Byron Kilbourn was chosen president of the Milwaukee and Waukesha company, Benjamin H. Edgerton, secretary, and Walter P. Flanders treasurer. Lem-

uel W. Weeks, Edward D. Holton, Alexander Mitchell, Erastus B. Wolcott, Anson Eldred, James Kneeland, John H. Tweedy, and E. D. Clinton served with Kilbourn on the first board of directors.

The company lost no time in beginning its surveys. On June 4, 1849, Kilbourn was appointed chief engineer with power to employ assistants and laborers to conduct the field surveys and prepare the line for construction. Benjamin H. Edgerton and Jesper Vliet commenced the surveys three days later and were soon joined by Richard P. Morgan, an experienced engineer. These men conducted their work with such "ability and untiring industry" that a line of "almost unrivalled excellence" was selected without a deep cut or high embankment, without a yard of rock excavation, and with only a few bridges of small dimensions. Contracts for grubbing and grading were offered for public bids in September, 1849.

Despite the failure of inexperienced contractors, construction work was prosecuted with energy throughout 1850, the company functioning under the more appropriate title of Milwaukee & Mississippi Rail Road Company. Lake boats were constantly discharging tons of heavy H rails at the port of Milwaukee for the line of laborers toiling between that city and Waukesha. By No-

vember the track had been laid as far as Wauwatosa, a distance of five miles, and the mayor and council of Milwaukee, together with legislators and prominent citizens, enjoyed a trip to the end of track. Among the "pleasing incidents" of the excursion was the presence of Solomon Juneau, who had never before seen a locomotive. Within the scant space of fifteen years, Juneau had seen Milwaukee grow from a cluster of Indian huts to a thriving city with "massive buildings" and 20,000 inhabitants.

A shrill blast from the iron horse announced the formal opening of the road to Waukesha on February 25, 1851. The event was celebrated with "great eclat" at Waukesha. Thousands lined the track as the locomotive glided majestically by with its coaches jammed with happy excursionists from Milwaukee. The raucous cheers of the backwoods farmers mingled strangely with the blaring band. A complimentary dinner was served in the "new and spacious Car House" of the Milwaukee & Mississippi, and a toast was drunk to the "first link in the great railway from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi."

The financial woes which beset the M. & M. were many and trying. Since neither Federal nor State aid was forthcoming, President Kilbourn called upon the farmers and merchants of Wis-



consin to support the project in order to keep out the dreaded bogy of eastern monopoly. By the spring of 1851, Secretary William Taintor placed the total subscription at \$967,900, the city of Milwaukee alone having contributed \$16,000 in cash and pledged its credit to the amount of \$234,000. Individual stockholders had subscribed \$435,600, of which \$62,338.26 had been paid in cash and \$282,300 in mortgages. The mortgages were on improved farm lands double the value of the subscription, and such securities were offered as collateral for the bonds of the company. During 1851 President Kilbourn issued \$1,900,000 of stock in the company to Jacob L. Bean of Waukesha, receiving only "one mill on the dollar" in return. But on January 7, 1852, the board of directors removed President Kilbourn from office for his "illegal" conduct; for refusing to report the transaction; and for "withholding all information on the subject". The company declared "all stock null and void not reported to the Board."

A new era in the company's history was inaugurated when John Catlin of Madison was elected president. The need of outside assistance was fully appreciated by Catlin, who floated bonds "to extend the road far enough into the country" to make the revenue "sufficient to pay the interest" on the cost of the road. At the same time Catlin

appointed Edward M. Brodhead chief engineer and superintendent at a salary of \$3500 plus \$1000 for expenses. The "prudent and cautious management" of this skillful engineer proved of immense value to the company. In addition to a considerable freight business in 1852, three con-



THE ROUTE OF THE MILWAUKEE AND MISSISSIPPI

struction trains were "continually employed transporting iron, ties and gravel", without a single collision or the loss of life by any act of negligence.

On January 22, 1852, two weeks after Kilbourn had been removed from office, the track of the M. & M. was completed to Eagle. During the ensuing months the company was rigorously reorganized and Brodhead pushed construction rapidly. The road was completed to Palmyra, forty-two miles from Milwaukee, on August 3, 1852. Whitewater was reached on September 24th and on December 1st the first train steamed

noisily into Milton, sixty-two miles from Milwaukee.

An inventory of the rolling stock in January, 1853, listed 8 locomotives, 6 passenger cars, 35 eight-wheel box cars, 43 eight-wheel platform cars, 67 four-wheel gravel cars, and 7 hand cars. An additional locomotive, the *Madison*, was branded as "worthless" except for old iron. The company had spent \$141,402.54 on this equipment which Brodhead considered would be sufficient to meet the needs of the company in 1853 if 2 locomotives, 15 box cars, and 2 first class passenger cars were added.

The M. & M. carried 25,544 tons of freight during 1852 — 12,639 tons westward and 12,905 tons eastward. Its richest harvest was reaped from transportation of grain. The 236,649 bushels of wheat carried eastward was more than double the amount of the total shipment of corn, oats, potatoes, barley, and rye. In addition to grain the trains rumbled into Milwaukee with wool, flour, butter, pork, livestock, flax, lumber, stone, and potash. Westbound trains bore the basic necessities of an ever expanding frontier community — lumber, laths, shingles, brick, furniture, stoves, coal, salt, merchandise and whisky. Immense quantities of iron were hauled for construction purposes. The revenue from the 41,093 passengers carried in

1852 totalled \$31,997.09, compared with \$43,343.81 from freight receipts.

Even before Milton was reached, the directors of the M. & M. had determined to extend their line to Janesville. Since the charter did not provide for such a road, the Southern Wisconsin Rail Road Company was incorporated. This company let the contract for construction to Walter P. Flanders and others. Flanders, the treasurer of the Milwaukee & Mississippi, was in a position to enter into a contract with the M. & M., giving it the "right to run and operate the road for the term of fifteen years". This eight mile stub was completed to Janesville on January 6, 1853, at a cost of \$98,969.18, and before the end of that year the "necessary enactments" were obtained from the legislature to consolidate the two roads. Brodhead urged the extension of the Southern Wisconsin line to the Mississippi in order to secure the business of the "most important agricultural and mineral portion" of Wisconsin as well as a "large portion" of the business of Dubuque and northeastern Iowa. The track was laid to Monroe by December 31, 1857, and a rich tribute was soon pouring into the coffers of the company.

Meanwhile, the contract for grading, masonry, bridging, and laying the superstructure of the road from the Rock River to Madison was let on April

4, 1853. The contractors agreed to complete the thirty miles to Madison by January 1, 1854, but the "unprecedented amount of public works" and the delay of four hundred tons of iron at Buffalo by the close of navigation hindered construction and the road did not reach Stoughton until January 2, 1854. During 1853 the M. & M. transported 67,000 tons of freight in addition to construction material. Brodhead was proud to report that 75,975 passengers had been carried without injury, and observed that the "only damage worthy of notice occurred when the train was thrown off the track in October, by running over a bull, which was repaired and all the loss of property connected with it satisfied for about \$1,200."

Madison turned out in gala attire to celebrate the advent of the railroad on May 24, 1854. Thousands flocked in from the country and the streets of the capital were jammed. Many of the farmers had never seen a locomotive and waited impatiently on the banks of Lake Monona for their first glimpse of the awe-inspiring spectacle of an iron horse "with breath of smoke and flame". They were doubly rewarded, for the long train of thirty-two cars was drawn by two locomotives. More than two thousand visitors alighted from the cars, including the Milwaukee fire companies nattily attired in brilliant red uniforms and drawing their

"glistening engines". The excursionists paraded to the capitol grounds, where dinner was served. Speeches and toasts were interspersed with music and general merriment.

While the road was still in progress of construction to Madison, chief engineer Brodhead had sent out surveyors to determine the route from Madison to the Mississippi. Prairie du Chien was selected as the western terminus and during 1854 engineer B. H. Edgerton precisely located and staked out the line which ran in a northwesterly direction down the Black Earth Valley to the Wisconsin River whence it continued down the valley of that historic waterway to the Mississippi. Construction was again delayed, however. Late in the autumn of 1856 the railroad was still twenty-two miles from Prairie du Chien.

The "neigh of the iron horse" of the M. & M. on the banks of the Father of Waters was hailed with delight throughout northeastern Iowa. Acclaimed by railroad officials as the "Gateway of Trade — the Thermopylae of North Iowa Commerce", McGregor was particularly enthusiastic. "Be it remembered", warned the editors of the *North Iowa Times*, "that on Wednesday, April 15, 1857, at 5 o'clock in the evening, the cars of the Milwaukee & Mississippi railroad anchored on the banks of the great river. The shriek of the Lake Michi-

gan locomotive was echoed by the bluffs and responded to by a shrill whistle of welcome from a Mississippi steamer just coming into port. Hundreds of persons were in attendance to witness the arrival of the first passenger train, and when the smoke of the engine became visible in the distance there was such an expression of anxiety as we have seen when a new and great actor is expected on the stage. As the train came in view, and the flags with which it was decorated were seen waving in the breeze, a shout of welcome broke forth from the gazers that told how many hopes of friendly reunions were awakened in the contemplation of an easy and speedy return to their eastern homes. One large banner carried on its silken folds the busy emblem of 'Wisconsin, the Badger'."

The arrival of the Milwaukee & Mississippi opposite McGregor was accomplished at no small cost. By the close of the year 1857 the total valuation of the company was placed at \$8,235,512.11. The cost of constructing the 235 miles of main line and 28 miles of side-track, including such particulars as right of way, fencing, depot grounds and buildings, water stations, and machine shops, was placed at \$6,841,627.11. The rolling stock consisted of 44 locomotives, 33 passenger cars, 13 baggage and post-office cars, 411 house cars, 107

platform cars, 40 gravel cars, 39 hand cars, and 22 iron cars, valued at \$808,980. The smallest item listed was the telegraph line between Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien which was valued at \$7,600.

The company could take heart, however, in the report of \$882,817.89 earnings for the year — passenger receipts totalling \$399,089.65, freight \$469,019.76, and mails and rent \$13,808.48. An immense debt had been incurred and bonds would soon be due, but optimism was one resource with which the empire builders of the Milwaukee & Mississippi were richly endowed. The placid waters of the Mississippi, constituted no magic crystal to foretell the heavy shoals which lay dead ahead. When the panic of 1857 had subsided the Milwaukee & Mississippi Company was no more. But the line associated with such names as Solomon Juneau, Asa Whitney, Byron Kilbourn, John Catlin, and John H. Brodhead, is to-day a segment of a greater system — the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN