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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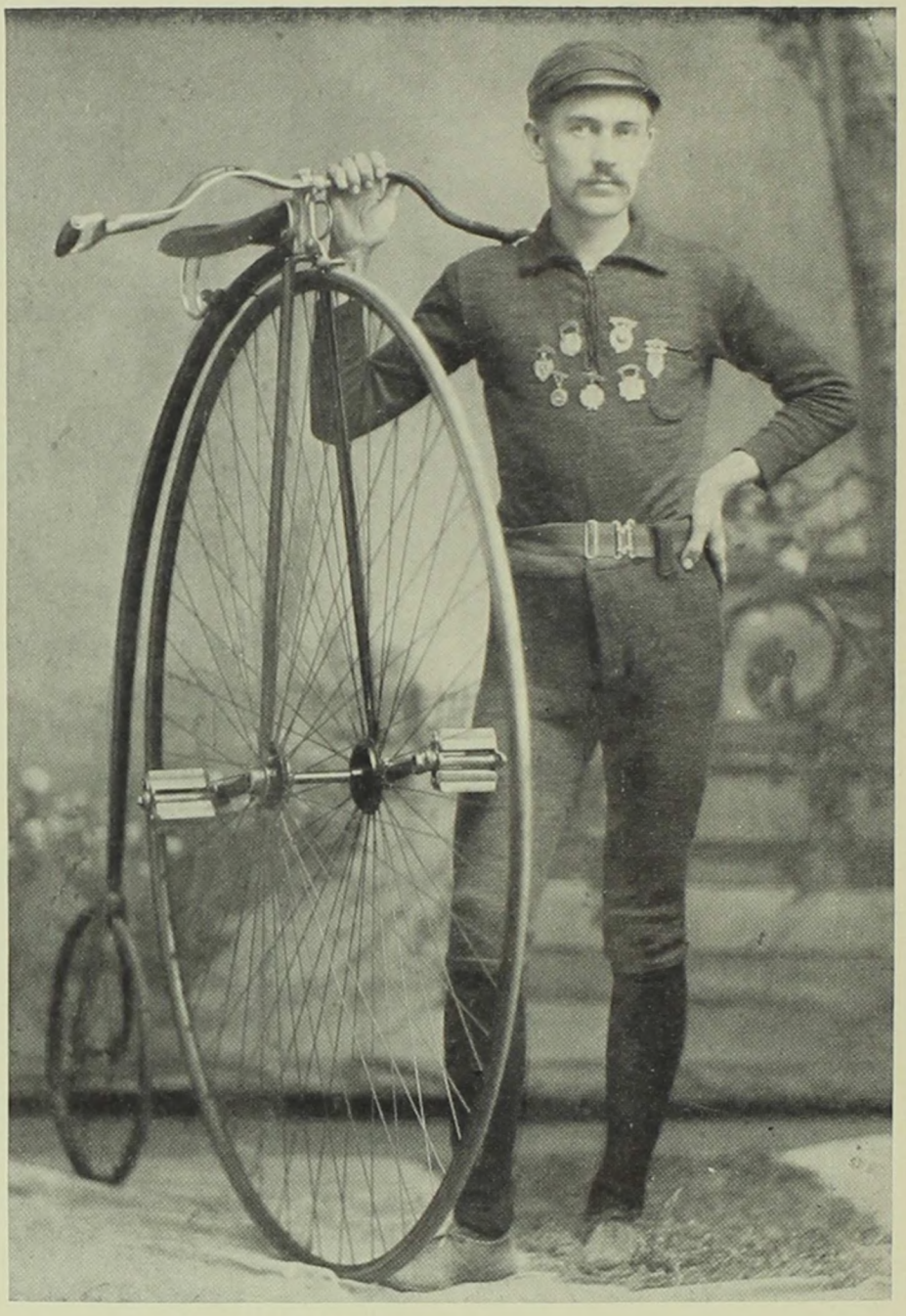

EMIL KOSTOMLATSKY, WHEELMAN, IN 1890

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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In the Bicycle Era

"We have become a race of Mercurys", wrote an ardent bicycling enthusiast in the *Forum* in 1896, "and the joy which is felt over the new power amounts to a passion. Nobody realizes the force of this passion till he rides a wheel himself." At that time it did not seem probable that, having once possessed such a power, the human race would be likely to abandon it. "As well might we expect it to abandon railways, and gas, and electricity!" Certainly the bicycle had already become "a permanent factor" in transportation.

The unequivocal finality of the author's conclusions was undoubtedly inspired by the spirit of the age in which he wrote, for the decade of the nineties was truly the "bicycle era", although the first real bicycle was brought to this country in 1876, being exhibited at the Centennial Exposition. Two years after that, "wheels" began to be manufactured in the United States, but the first models

were designed with one large wheel to which were attached cranks and pedals, and one small wheel connected with the first by a curved "backbone" surmounted by a saddle. This style of bicycle was so difficult and dangerous to ride that bicycling did not become really popular until 1889, when the "safety bike", with two wheels of the same size and equipped with pneumatic tires, was introduced.

In addition to improvements in the design of the machine itself, another factor which played an important part in popularizing the bicycle was the activity of the League of American Wheelmen, an organization formed in 1880. Several hundred cyclists from all over the country met at Newport, New York, on May 30th of that year, and organized a League "to promote the general interests of bicycling, to ascertain, defend, and protect the rights of wheelmen, and to encourage and facilitate touring". The membership of the League grew steadily each year until in 1886 it totaled more than 10,000.

Wheelmen in Iowa were among the most energetic members, and the Iowa Division of the League was one of the largest. League clubs were organized all over the State. If seventy-five per cent of the members of a wheeling club were members of the League, such a club might become

a "League club" by paying annual dues of two dollars, and thus be "entitled to all the privileges accorded League clubs under the constitution."

There was much work for these first clubs to do. Roads were rough and in muddy weather impassable for all sorts of travel, but especially were they undesirable for bicycling. Punctures and upsets were the order of the day and the bicyclist found his path far from smooth. In addition to this natural barrier to carefree touring, there were still other trials which the early cyclist encountered. The law of the road afforded no privileges to the bicycle rider. If he met a team or horse and buggy, he had to dismount and go off to the side of the road, so that the horses would not be frightened by the strange sight of a machine humanly propelled.

In the latter part of October, 1889, three Iowa City bicyclists were riding along the Muscatine road on their wheels when they met a farmer named W. J. Hall. The boys dismounted when they saw that the horses were frightened, but the horses kept on jumping and rearing until finally they broke the wagon tongue and ran into a barbed wire fence. Mr. Hall told the boys that he really had suffered damages to the extent of $100, but if they would pay him two dollars he would say no more about it. The boys demurred: they

had used all proper care and furthermore had as much right to the road as any one else. But Farmer Hall was obdurate. Have his two dollars he would or he might resort to physical violence. Since by that time several farmers had gathered at the scene and all were of the same mind as Hall, the boys decided it would be the better part of valor to pay the two dollars, which they did and received a receipt for the money.

But the matter did not end there. On the following Monday, one of the boys filed a complaint against Hall, charging him with assault. After Hall had conferred with attorneys and was informed that by extorting payment under threat he had laid himself liable to a fine of $500 or two years in the penitentiary, he was glad to refund the two dollars and pay all costs. Thus, in at least one instance the rights of Iowa wheelmen were vindicated.

The legal division of the League of American Wheelmen was always ready to lend counsel and aid to members whenever necessary. Largely through its efforts, the bicycle finally was recognized as a vehicle all over the United States and made subject to the same regulations and privileges possessed by other vehicles.

Working in the direction of highway improvement, the Iowa Division of the League of Amer-

ican Wheelmen, in conjunction with the Iowa road improvement committee, published and distributed road maps of Iowa and an Iowa edition of "Good Roads". League members urged delegates to national and state political conventions to support a plank "having for its object a general endorsement of the GOOD ROADS movement", and pressure was brought to bear upon members of the Iowa General Assembly to promote good roads legislation. The League was convinced that "Iowa, the most progressive and enterprising state in the country, with its large area of fertile and productive lands, should certainly be able to excel in securing good permanent highways if only a conscientious effort be made".

As a part of the League's campaign for good roads, a number of bicycle paths were laid out, usually on the grass-grown roadside parallel with the highway. As a rule the grass was cut close to the ground, after which soft coal, cinders, or screened gravel was put on in a thin layer and so shaped and packed as to slope downward from the center to each side. Under favorable conditions, cycling paths cost from $75 to $150 per mile and usually were between four and seven feet wide. "A cycle path is a protest against bad roads" was the opinion of a writer in the *Century Magazine* in 1896. Iowa, then, with its many and

varied bicycle routes must indeed have been the very center of organized objection to poor roads. At any rate, the consensus of opinion seems to have been that the bicycle was "the most important factor in the encouragement of good highway construction since the advent of the railway".

But the attention of the Iowa wheelmen was by no means confined exclusively to such serious matters as legal rights and the improvement of highways. Races, bicycle meets, tours, pleasure jaunts into the country, or just a casual ride — all promised joy to the participant. And women, too, joined with the men in all of these activities except racing. The rules of the League stated most explicitly that "no race meeting will receive official sanction if it is to be held on Sunday, or has upon its schedule any event which is open to women competitors". However, the *Handbook* also declared that the League made "no distinction on account of sex. We have a great many ladies on our rolls, and they pay like dues and are entitled to the same privileges as the gentlemen." Apparently racing was not considered a privilege — at least for women.

There was nothing to prohibit the attendance of ladies as spectators though, and, dressed in their gala best, they cheered for their favorites. Those who were seated in top buggies of course

needed no additional protection from the sun, but those who viewed the races from hotel busses usually found it advisable to carry daintily be-ruffled parasols, lest they acquire a dreaded sun-tan.

Doubtless the young ladies from Oskaloosa waved their parasols in high glee when, on July 4, 1895, in the State L. A. W. meet at Jefferson, Iowa, Emil Kostomlotsky broke the State record of 26:52 for the ten-mile run by nearly a minute — his time being twenty-five minutes and fifty-five seconds. Moreover, at the same time, he lowered the two, three, and five mile records, and established records for the intervening miles. Small wonder that the crowd "applauded lustily" and cheered for "Kostomlotsky of Oskaloosa". Later in the same season he lowered his ten-mile record twenty seconds and set a new world's record of 11:50 for the five-mile run. He used a Syracuse wheel, eighty gear, and Morgan and Wright racing tires.

Mr. Kostomlotsky's achievement was a fitting climax to a thrilling day at Jefferson. Even the weather had seemed in a sporting mood, for though it was drizzly and rainy at nine in the morning, and even the most optimistic observers had opined that "it looks as though it would keep it up all day", the sun came out shortly thereafter

with a torrid heat which hastily dried the track and made conditions ideal for racing.

The mile novice race came first. In accordance with the rules of the L. A. W. it was "open only to those who have never won a prize in a track race" and had to be "the first race of the meet". The twelve entries remained well bunched until the last quarter "when there was a terrific scramble and from there to the tape it was a fight to the death. Joseph Barrels of Sioux City won the race by a foot in 2:36."

Following the novice race were half mile, quarter mile, and mile events, all exciting the enthusiasm of the audience, although perhaps the "hottest event of the day was the final of the quarter mile state championship, run by nine men representing the three winners in each of the section races. Storm, of Grinnell, led from the start and the balance of the crowd never saw him after that. He won in 33 2/5 seconds, with McNeill of Oskaloosa, second, and Spaulding of Grinnell, third. The time was very fast considering that the wind blew a gale up the stretch."

Between races the "fancy riding by Mr. Nicolet was a revelation to wheelmen and non-wheelmen". Especially thrilling was his riding with the front wheel of the bicycle in the air. He "gave a marvelous performance which was, alone, worth

the price of admission". Undoubtedly all of the five thousand people who attended the first day's races were "thoroughly pleased and had their money's worth", for the second day of the meet proved to be a record breaker — eight thousand people being in attendance. Several state records were broken and others established.

The races at Jefferson were not exceptional in the enthusiasm they aroused. When Cedar Rapids secured the privilege of entertaining the thirteenth annual State meet in 1896, the city counted it an important event. From ten to twenty thousand visitors were expected. A Cedar Rapids paper judged the L. A. W. meet to be "one of the most important sporting gatherings of the year", pointing out that "last year bicycle races attracted more people, probably five times as many, as all the races in the state".

Bicycling had indeed become a favorite sport. Iowa had "more bicycle riders than any state west of the Mississippi river", there being in 1895 "between 800 and 1000" L. A. W. members, which was "three times as many as Indiana, one and a half as many as Kentucky, three times as many as Nebraska and a few more than Colorado and California". In 1897, the chief consul's report showed that the Iowa Division had 1404 members — "an increase of 670 in the year".

No particular locality seemed to have a monopoly on the sport and the smaller towns were represented as well as the larger. The records tell alike of meets held at Oskaloosa or Sigourney, Des Moines or Jefferson, Centerville or Ottumwa, Hedrick or Cedar Rapids. Since the rules of the League governing races applied equally to all clubs, the same conditions prevailed everywhere. Thus the value of a prize "must in no case exceed $35 in an amateur race and $100 in a professional race", professionals being classified as "any rider other than an amateur". Amateurs sacrificed that status if they rode a race "for a money prize, for a wager, or for gate money" or if there were "professional competitors" or if they made "pace for professionals in public". Furthermore, all contestants were required to wear a shirt that "shall not bare shoulders", and breeches that "must reach the knee". Boys under fifteen years were not permitted in regular track events and no competition at all was allowed for boys less than twelve years of age. Besides general rules governing suspension, entries, championships, records, and tracks, the League set forth specific rules relating to such things as position in an event, starts, finish, riding, pacemaking, track privileges and decorum, fines, and conduct. Little was left to local discretion — even interpretation of the

League rules — for every point which might prove at all controversial was fully explained.

The official L. A. W. uniform consisted of a single-breasted sacque coat, "square front, to button up close to the chin with six L. A. W. Buttons"; knee breeches with a "reinforced seat" and three small L. A. W. buttons; a single-breasted vest; a flat-topped cap with "falling visor, L. A. W. buttons" and "four ventilators" in the top; ribbed woolen hose of a color to match the suit; and a gray flannel shirt "to button in front". The color adopted by the League was royal purple, and Browning, King & Company of New York City were the official tailors. They supplied coats for $8 and breeches for $4, or, if a member preferred, he could buy cloth at $1.75 a yard and have a uniform made by his own tailor.

Though the League's *Handbook* described to the last button the proper outfit for men cyclists, it made no attempt to set forth an official costume for women. As early as 1888 a woman's wheel was first used on the road, but seven years later "the question of the proper dress for bicycling" was "still in doubt". In Chicago and Boston, notably, the bloomer costume was generally used; elsewhere the tendency was toward the short skirt. While the short-skirt advocates admitted that the bloomer was "a slight gain in conveni-

ence", they felt that this gain was more than offset by "an enormous loss of the gracefulness which every woman should religiously consider". However, if the short skirt costume were adopted, gaiters should be worn with it "as the rider would seem to herself and to her spectators not to be sufficiently dressed without them".

But whether the woman cyclist chose the short skirt, the long skirt, or the "knockabout bloomer costume" was immaterial — the important thing was that she should ride. A physician expressed the opinion that "the lower extremity of the human female has great latent possibilities, but time must be allowed and opportunity for practice given". In fact, one woman who had long been a semi-invalid and who had previously been exhausted by a half-mile walk, took up bicycling and could ride "five miles out and five miles back and return refreshed and invigorated. This surely was a most gratifying expansion of the lady's horizon."

Riding a bicycle was to prove a boon to women in more ways than one, according to Mrs. Mary Sargent Hopkins of Boston, who, in a lecture at a meeting of the Professional Woman's League in New York, prescribed bicycling as "the greatest cure for insomnia ever known". Furthermore, "as a soother of nerves unstrung", it had no equal, and "as a banisher of wrinkles and a rejuvenator"

it was "wonderfully efficacious". Who then can rightly criticize the woman who inserted the following advertisement in a Buffalo paper: "Will exchange folding-bed, child's white crib, or writing desk for lady's bicycle"? Yet, an enemy of the wheel cited this as certain proof of a bicycle "craze", because it disclosed "a mother who appears willing to sleep on the floor or hang her baby on a hook in order to be in the charmed circle of cyclers". But, as an observer notes, "this is a forced interpretation. The mother might have had other sleeping accommodations both for herself and baby."

Of course, all comment regarding the bicycle was not favorable by any means. Dr. Andrew Wilson believed that there was "real danger to health and development in the prevailing mania for bicycling". He did not consider it pleasant to contemplate "the prospect of the evolution of a round-shouldered, hunch-backed race in the near future", yet he felt that this result was "approximately what the bicycle mania" was tending to produce.

Evidently the Iowa belles of the nineties did not fear this dire prediction, for many an Iowa girl was the proud owner of a "bike". One of the favorite picnic trips of the young folks around Cedar Rapids was a ride on their wheels to the Amanas

where chicken dinners were served. In the fall especially, bicycle parties were quite the thing, and after a ride to some nearby town an oyster supper would be served. A tandem bicycle was very useful to the ladies as "a means of riding without exertion" when they became a little weary.

Perhaps, then, it is true that "of no other form of popular exercise, or excursion, can it be said that it is so conducive to good manners, simple conduct, and kindly intercourse as bicycle-riding". And if this be so, then it is cause for rejoicing that the bicycle, which in the early twentieth century was forced to abdicate in favor of the automobile, is again making a bid for favor in many cities and towns. It may prove to be a "permanent factor" after all.

DOROTHY WAGNER REGUR

The Illinois Central Comes

It was a crucial moment in the life of Stephen A. Douglas. The House of Representatives was in solemn session, pondering over his bill to make "a Grant of Land to the States of Illinois, Mississippi, and Alabama, in Aid of the Construction of a Railroad from Chicago to Mobile". The measure had already passed the Senate but a strong undertow of opposition had developed in the House. A similar bill applicable to Illinois exclusively had been defeated two years before because of the opposition of the South and East.

A skillful lobbyist, an adroit politician, Douglas had toiled day and night in behalf of his bill for aid in constructing the Illinois Central Railroad. He had won the support of the Gulf States by extending the line from Cairo to Mobile, a plan that had captured the imagination of the entire Mississippi Valley. He had even made sure of the support of Iowa by accepting Senator George Wallace Jones's amendment to extend the road from Galena to the Mississippi opposite Dubuque. His activity among his own constituents was attested by the petitions and memorials that poured in from Illinois. It was September 17, 1850, when the

vote was taken and the proponents breathlessly awaited the results. The bill passed the House by a slim majority and was signed by President Fillmore on September 20, 1850. It was a brilliant victory for the stocky politician from Illinois.

The land grant bill of 1850 was the initial step in a benevolent policy of government aid to western railroads. It granted to the State of Illinois alternate sections of land for six miles on each side of a railroad that was to extend from "the southern terminus of the Illinois and Michigan Canal to a point at or near the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, with a branch of the same to Chicago, on Lake Michigan, and another via the town of Galena in said State, to Dubuque in the State of Iowa". The bill also granted a right of way through the public lands with permission to take all the earth, stone, and timber necessary for construction purposes. Land already sold or preëmpted was not to be disturbed, other land being substituted. All unsold government land remaining within six miles of the road was not to be sold for less than $2.50 an acre, or double the minimum price of ordinary public land. In case the railroad was not completed within ten years all money arising from the sale of the land, together with the unsold land, was to revert to the United States. Government troops and property

were to be carried "free from toll" and mail was to be carried at such rates as Congress might prescribe. The same "rights, privileges, and liabilities" were granted Alabama and Mississippi. The Illinois Central was the first land grant railroad in the United States.

The Illinois Central had its inception about the time of the Black Hawk War. It was Lieutenant Governor A. M. Jenkins who first proposed a survey for the building of a railroad through central Illinois from Cairo to Peru. The project kindled the imagination of many far-sighted men and by 1835 it was the center of an animated political discussion. The scheme crystallized on January 18, 1836, when the Illinois legislature passed a bill authorizing the construction of a railroad from the "mouth of the Ohio . . . to a point on the Illinois river, at or near the termination of the Illinois and Michigan Canal". A group of fifty-nine men comprised the corporation, the most prominent of whom were Governor John Reynolds, A. M. Jenkins, Pierre Menard, Sidney Breese, and Darius B. Holbrook. The capital stock of the company was set at $2,500,000.

Nothing was done under the charter of 1836 but it served as the backbone of a similar project in the Internal Improvement Act of 1837. Stephen A. Douglas was a Democratic member of this

"most memorable, and least creditable" of Illinois legislatures. Among the Whigs was one, Abraham Lincoln, who headed the "Long Nine" from Sangamon County. Both men favored the Internal Improvement Act whereby millions were appropriated in this hectic legislative saturnalia. The largest single appropriation was $3,500,000 for a railroad running from Cairo via Vandalia, Shelbyville, Decatur, and Bloomington, to some point near the southern terminus of the Illinois and Michigan Canal from whence the road was to be continued by way of Savanna to Galena. The wild orgy of spending was cut short by the panic of 1837 with little to show for the millions spent.

Still another attempt was made to construct a central railroad through Illinois. On March 6, 1843, the legislature incorporated the Great Western Railway Company, commonly known as the Holbrook Company after its president, Darius B. Holbrook. Large sums were expended but conditions were not favorable and the whole scheme ended with heavy losses to the promoters and nothing gained by the State.

The failure of the Holbrook Company demonstrated the need of federal aid and from 1843 to 1850 all efforts had been bent in this direction. Sidney Breese, sometimes called the "Father of the Illinois Central", introduced the first land

grant bill but it was left to Stephen A. Douglas, who entered the Senate in 1847, to steer his bill successfully through both houses of Congress.

The grant of 1850 injected new life into the project for a great central railroad through Illinois. When the legislature assembled at Springfield in January, 1851, Darius Holbrook and Sidney Breese attempted to revive the Great Western Railway, but their proposition was frowned upon by most of the legislators. Charges of bribery and fraud filled the air, the leading citizens of Illinois were maligned, and a malicious political fight boded no good for the bill.

Suddenly, in the midst of the debate, a business-like memorial was presented by Robert Rantoul in behalf of a group of wealthy New York and Boston capitalists. These men proposed to build a railroad "equal in all respects" to the one running between Boston and Albany and in return would pay the State a fixed percentage of the gross receipts in return for the land. It was an excellent, clear-cut proposition that met with the hearty approval of the legislators, and on February 10, 1851, Governor Augustus C. French signed a bill incorporating the present-day Illinois Central Railroad Company.

The company was granted a perpetual charter, and was exempted from all property taxes. The

remains of the old State surveys and gradings, together with the federal land grant and right of way, was also conferred upon it. In return, the company was to complete the main line in four years and the branches in six. It was to build a first-class road and release the State from any responsibility connected with the grant. Finally, it was to pay Illinois seven per cent of the gross earnings of the company.

On March 19, 1851, a few eastern capitalists met in a dimly lighted room in New York City and formally organized the Illinois Central by designating themselves as directors, by accepting the articles of incorporation and making provision for the various requirements contained therein, and by electing Robert Schuyler as president. Schuyler was most active in organizing the corporation and guiding it through its formative years. He was an experienced railroad executive, controlling or directing such companies as the New York and New Haven, the Boston and Albany, the Alton and Sangamon, and the Great Western.

Equally important was Robert Rantoul, a leading Massachusetts lawyer, who succeeded Daniel Webster in the Senate. Rantoul was most influential in securing the charter from the Illinois legislature, and shaped the financial policy of the company. Prominent among the other directors

were Gouverneur Morris, Jonathan Sturgis, David A. Neal, Joseph W. Alsop, Franklin Haven, John F. A. Sanford, and Thomas W. Ludlow. All of these founders were men who "lived and moved in the healthy atmosphere of commercial probity and stood high in the estimation of their fellowmen. The enterprise upon which they pinned their faith they promoted and sustained to a large extent with their private fortunes."

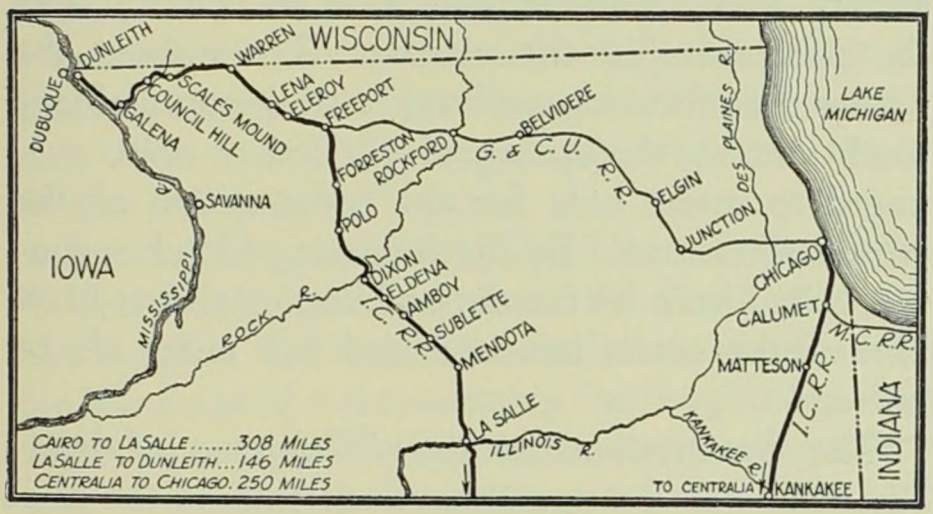
The charter stipulated that work on the main line must commence by January 1, 1852, and must be completed within four years from the date of incorporation. Six years were allowed for completing the branch lines. Within three days after the organization of the company, Roswell B. Mason was appointed chief engineer. Mason was a man of action, skilled in engineering and in railroad construction. He had proved his worth working under Schuyler as superintendent of the New York and New Haven. Several of the engineers who found employment under him in the building of the Illinois Central distinguished themselves in later life. Thus Timothy B. Blackstone built the Chicago and Alton Railway system and was for thirty-five years its president; Henry B. Plant founded what is now the Atlantic Coast Line System and the Plant System of hotels and steamship lines in the South; Grenville M. Dodge

became a major-general in the Civil War and the chief engineer of the Union Pacific.

The company was given considerable latitude in locating the road, for only five specific points — Dubuque, Galena, Chicago, Cairo, and the southern terminus of the Illinois-Michigan Canal — were specified in the charter. Mason divided the territory to be surveyed into seven districts and appointed division engineers over each. Timothy Blackstone was stationed at La Salle and B. B. Provoost was quartered at Freeport to supervise the survey from Dunleith to Eldena. The other engineers were placed at Chicago, Urbana, Vandalia, Jonesboro, and Decatur. Throughout the summer and fall Mason visited the various locations, consulted with his engineers, and late in the fall had "substantially" completed the profiles and maps of the route.

During the survey and throughout the construction of the road, the company was confronted with bitter contests and sectional rivalries all along the route. Savanna and Freeport were intensely jealous and each took active measures to secure the railroad, even going so far as to institute legal proceedings to force the company to choose the one instead of the other. Galena was hostile to the extension of the road to Dunleith, realizing it would mean the end of her commercial greatness.

Despite such opposition and bickering, the route was selected entirely on its economic and engineering merits. The main line from Cairo to La Salle was quite straight, only slight variations being made to include such important towns as



THE ROUTE OF THE ILLINOIS CENTRAL

Vandalia, Decatur, and Bloomington. One stretch of track south of La Salle extended sixty miles without a curve. On the Galena branch, the route via Freeport was finally selected and an arrangement made with the Galena and Chicago Union whereby the Illinois Central would build the road to Dunleith and both would enjoy a joint use of the track into Chicago. The location of the Chicago branch, now the main line, was selected in preference to one farther east, and Centralia was designated the junction point.

The formal construction of the Illinois Central was begun on December 23, 1851, when ground was broken at both Cairo and Chicago "amidst elaborate ceremonies, the salutes of cannon, and the ringing of bells". These proceedings were merely perfunctory in character to comply with the provisions of the charter. Throughout the winter the officers were busy with the preliminary work and by the spring of 1852 they were prepared to invite bids for the construction of the various divisions. By the following October contracts had been let for the building of all but fifty-two of the seven hundred and five miles of the railroad.

The construction of this "Colossus of Rail-Rhodes" was a stupendous undertaking, the proposed road being more than twice the length of the New York and Erie — at that time the longest railroad in the United States. The latter road, moreover, ran through a thickly populated region while the Illinois Central was surveyed through a virtually uninhabited wilderness.

Such sparsely populated country afforded few laborers — a serious problem in any such undertaking. The company was obliged to establish recruiting stations at New York and New Orleans. It also sent labor agents to Montreal, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louis-

ville, and Saint Louis. Agents for rival companies lurked about the I. C. construction camps to entice workers away with offers of better pay. Unskilled laborers received one dollar a day, and in 1853 the workers between Galena and Dunleith struck for $1.25 a day and regular hours. About one hundred men marched through the streets of Galena to present their demands to the contractors. The standard working day was from ten to twelve and one-half hours.

A noted Iowan, Henry Clay Dean, declared the Illinois Central workers were the "real builders" of the road. Such men, he declared, would enjoy the blessings of a free country "as long as the wild shriek of the iron horse mingles its reverberations with the majestic murmurings of the father of floods."

Cholera spread a withering hand over the Mississippi Valley during the building of the road. Men at work one day were in their graves the next, one hundred and thirty dying at Peru within the space of ten days. Men who were not stricken "scattered like frightened sheep". The prevalence of fever and ague, and the fact that it was dangerous during the summer months to eat either beef or butter, or to drink milk because of the "milk sickness", alarmed the workmen and added to the difficulties.

Still another foe to construction was the presence of numerous saloons and the sale of whisky to the workmen. Drunken brawls and riots were not uncommon and in December, 1853, State troops were called into La Salle following a riot in which a contractor was murdered, another man killed, and several others wounded. At Cairo a citizen was killed following a drunken riot and one hundred and fifty laborers left in a body. The company made every effort to drive out the whisky dispensers, according to Mason, but they continued to "menace the work, and every new construction camp that was established was followed by the location of one or more of these disreputable groggeries."

Despite such handicaps the work proceeded with astonishing rapidity. The first section of track to be opened on the Illinois Central was the fourteen mile stretch between Chicago and Calumet. Opened on May 15, 1852, it formed a junction with the Michigan Central which ran the first passenger train from Detroit to Chicago over this Illinois Central track on May 21st. The Michigan Southern and Northern Indiana had previously entered Chicago from Toledo via Englewood over the Rock Island tracks on April 22, 1852. This company had insisted that the Illinois Central must build a viaduct to cross its track. Clashes

had occurred between the workmen of the two roads, but the Illinois Central finally sent laborers to build the crossing under cover of darkness. The watchmen of the M. S. & N. I. were taken by surprise and overpowered, and by dawn the crossing had been effected. Thus another link had been welded in the chain of railroads that were shackling the Mississippi Valley with the Atlantic seaboard.

The opening of the track to Kankakee on July 11, 1853, was hailed with enthusiasm by the Chicago *Democratic Press,* which declared the "magnificent thoroughfare" through central Illinois was "greater far than the Appian Way". "It will be the beginning of a proud era in the history of our city and State", the paper declared, "when the fiery courser first turns his head in the direction of his predestined track over the prairies of Illinois, the rivers and plains and gorges of Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama."

The main trunk of the road, extending from Cairo to La Salle and embracing 308 miles of track, had to be completed within four years from February 10, 1851. The first sixty miles between La Salle and Bloomington were opened for business on May 16, 1853, and a week later the first passenger train was operated over the route. Spurred by promises of a liberal bonus, the con-

tractors engaged extra tracklayers and teams to cart iron a few miles in advance of the regular party where the extra party would commence work. When the regular party reached this point they in turn would go on a few miles in advance and continue their labor. The main track was completed and officially opened by January 1, 1855. "What more need be said", queried the Chicago *Democratic Press* on December 23, 1854, "of the energy and skill of those who have achieved this work? They need no eulogy from us — they have written one for themselves — written it in broad lines across our State — lines that are as immovable as the everlasting hills!"

Next to be completed was the Galena branch, which extended from La Salle through Mendota, Dixon, Freeport, Warren, and Galena, to Dunleith opposite Dubuque. The track between La Salle and Mendota was opened on November 14, 1853. During the year 1854 the road was completed between Freeport and Galena, the Galena and Chicago Union assisting the I. C. by transporting its rails and equipment from Chicago. The road was opened to Warren on January 9th, to Scales Mound on September 11th, and to Galena on October 30th. The leading citizens of the surly mining town were invited to participate in a free excursion to Rockford, a treat which the

Galena *Advertiser* believed would put a "final extinguisher" to Galena's old notions of travel by rail. The track from Mendota to Freeport was opened on February 1, 1855, leaving only one more link to be forged to cement Iowa with Chicago on the east and Cairo on the south.

It was a scant seventeen miles from Galena to the Mississippi and Iowa where the arrival of the railroad had been anxiously awaited. In the five years between 1850 and 1855, little Dunleith across the river from Dubuque had leaped from a population of five to 700. An engine house with a capacity of twelve locomotives was almost completed; a splendid freight house of "Dubuque Marble" graced the bank of the Mississippi; and the Argyle House was said to be one of the finest hostelries in the West.

The track was finished to Dunleith early in June, 1855, and some Pottawattamie Indians were given a ride on a construction car. An eye-witness declared the Indians "whooped and hallooed until they rivalled the neigh of the iron steed. But the shriek of that animal evidently took them down for one poor Indian jumped nearly three feet in the air when the engineer let his 'critter' loose." It was on June 12th that the railroad was officially opened to the Mississippi and another outlet provided for the resources of Iowa.

Dubuque turned out in gala attire on July 18, 1855, to celebrate. Cannons roared, bands blared out martial music, and the people sweltered in the hot sun. It was fitting that George Wallace Jones should be the president of the day. It was even more fitting that the speaker of the day, Senator Stephen A. Douglas, should reply to the toast: "*The Illinois Central Railroad.* — The great work of the age. Its roots firmly planted in the fertile soil of Kentucky and Missouri, its trunk and branches nourished by the genial climate of Illinois, and the heavy dews of Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota descending on its head, how can it but flourish?"

Meanwhile the Chicago branch remained unfinished. The track had been opened to Urbana on July 24, 1854, and to Mattoon on June 25, 1855, a week after the Dubuque celebration, and construction work was concentrated on the 77 mile stretch between Mattoon and Centralia. The last spike was formally driven on September 26, 1856. At that time the company owned 83 locomotives, 52 passenger cars and 1249 freight cars. The 705 miles of the "best built railroad in the West" had cost $26,568,017, or $37,600 a mile.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Comment by the Editor

HISTORICAL ADJECTIVES

He who writes the history of his own times should be temperate in the use of adjectives. Not that such a useful part of speech should be proscribed entirely, but merely confined to the positive and comparative degrees. The superlative is likely to make a rare herb out of a common weed, or convert a private achievement into a national triumph. Words like first and last, local and universal, best and worst, forever and never have no place in a true chronicle, for they will be proved false by the next generation.

Contemporary events assume an importance of the moment far beyond their permanent significance. When people were buying a million bicycles a year during the hard times of the nineties, some writers hazarded the opinion that horses would soon disappear from the highways, that public health would improve, and that standards of morality would be distinctly elevated. What was at first supposed to be a popular fad promised to become a prominent factor in the economic system. Time-honored industries, like sewing machine and carriage works, were transformed into

bicycle factories. While the saloon-keepers complained about the decline of liquor sales, a preacher, confronted by empty pews, suspected that certain members of his congregation were coasting downhill to a "place where there is no mud on the streets because of the high temperature." In their enthusiasm for bicycle riding, men neglected to go to the barber, and so that business suffered because a shave omitted for a day is lost forever.

A close view of events, no less than of persons, is apt to magnify some of the features. Many of the observations concerning the social and economic consequences of bicycling were greatly exaggerated. The superlatives of the nineties have diminished in the perspective of higher powered times.

J. E. B.

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