

The  
**PALIMPSEST**  
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THE EDITOR

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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*

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### 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

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## The Burlington Comes

A triumvirate of men — a lawyer, a financier, and an engineer — brought the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad to Iowa. The lawyer, James Frederick Joy, was destined to see his name become a synonym for the entire Burlington System. The financier, John Murray Forbes, gave to the Burlington a "character and stability" which distinguished it sharply from most other roads of that day. The engineer, John W. Brooks, served as a director of the Burlington for a score of years and as president of the Iowa and Nebraska divisions. Constantly confronted by almost insuperable odds, Brooks proved himself "a perfect Napoleon" as a manager and engineer and was a vital element in the history of the road.

The coming of the Burlington to Iowa is replete with thrilling incidents. Although its corporate history began in Illinois, the prologue had its inception in the law office of James F. Joy in Detroit

in 1845. New Hampshire born, a graduate of Dartmouth College and the Harvard Law School, Joy had come west to Detroit in 1836 to practice law. Within a few months he saw the Michigan legislature appropriate millions for railroad construction across the State. During the ensuing years the Michigan Central was constructed from Detroit to Kalamazoo while the Michigan Southern was built from Toledo, Ohio, to Hillsdale. The panic of 1837 paralyzed further construction, whereupon a loud clamor arose for early completion of the roads by private capital.

Joy was among those who urged the sale of the property to a private company. He found an ardent supporter in John W. Brooks, a twenty-six-year-old engineer and former superintendent of the Auburn and Rochester Railroad. Although the Michigan Central was in "shabby" condition, Brooks and Joy felt it would be a profitable investment if it were rebuilt and completed to Lake Michigan. Brooks accordingly went east in the fall of 1845 in search of financial support.

Fortune led Brooks to the counting-room of John Murray Forbes, a wealthy Bostonian who had won a considerable fortune in China. Fascinated by the prospect of sponsoring a railroad through the Michigan wilderness, the young financier agreed to support the project, and

straightway hired Daniel Webster to draft a charter that would be acceptable to eastern capital.

When Brooks returned to secure the approval of the Michigan legislature, he found the State had placed its railroads on the bargain counter. The Michigan Central Railroad Company agreed to buy the Detroit-Kalamazoo road for \$2,000,000, but the successful consummation of this act rested on Forbes's ability to raise sufficient funds in six months to pay for the property.

Forbes pitched into his task with enthusiasm. His good judgment and integrity quickly won the support of eastern capital and on September 23, 1846, the Michigan Central took possession of its property. Forbes was elected the first president and Brooks was appointed superintendent. By the spring of 1849 the old road had been rebuilt and extended to New Buffalo on Lake Michigan. More than six million dollars were required in the purchase, construction, and equipment of this line which still serves as a main artery of travel to Iowa by way of Chicago.

Both Forbes and Brooks realized that the rapidly expanding traffic was bound to invite competition. Some New York financiers had purchased the Michigan Southern road and commenced building around Lake Michigan. At the same time a railroad was projected along the southern shore

of Lake Erie to connect Toledo with Buffalo, New York. The completion of these two projects would give the Michigan Southern an all-rail connection between the Atlantic seaboard and Chicago, thus relegating the Michigan Central to the position of a purely local road. The directors of the Michigan Central promptly accepted the challenge by granting their officers unlimited powers to cope with this new and dangerous rival.

It was Joy who struck the first blow. Trained to detect loopholes in legal documents, he found the charter of the New Albany and Salem "conveniently vague" to allow that southern Indiana road to build a "branch" around Lake Michigan. While Brooks was engaged in racing the Northern Indiana construction force around Lake Michigan, Joy sought to procure an entrance into Chicago over the Illinois Central track. In the litigation that followed he obtained the services of Abraham Lincoln and an agreement was reached whereby the Michigan Central purchased \$600,000 in Illinois Central bonds as the price for the privilege of using that track. Finally, the Michigan Central stockholders invested heavily in the Great Western of Canada in order to obtain direct access to the east by way of Ontario.

The first through train from Lake Erie entered Chicago on May 21, 1852, over the track of the

Illinois Central. It was a brilliant victory for the Michigan Central. The Michigan Southern had been running trains from Indiana into Chicago as early as April 22, 1852. A thirteen mile gap in Indiana, however, prevented it from beginning through service from Toledo until a day after the first through train of the Michigan Central.

But the rivalry between the two roads did not stop at Chicago. The smoke of battle had hardly cleared on this front when the Michigan Central found the rival company subsidizing and building the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad to the Mississippi. Would the Michigan Central accept the challenge? Did the ultimate returns on the capital invested justify the continuance of such devastating competition? The Michigan Central men looked to their financier for the answer.

Forbes realized that the gold rush to California was "the direct cause of the construction of four-fifths of the Western railways" begun after 1849. And while he did not minimize the economic, political, and military value of a transcontinental railroad, he was convinced that the rich prairies of Illinois and Iowa would yield the railroad investor his richest harvest. In 1852 Forbes wrote Edward Everett Hale that "the strong hands and empty stomachs of Europe, and the rich *Dollar-an-acre* Prairies of the West" must be

brought together by business methods and philanthropy. "California", he asserted, "is a cypher in comparison, a mere producer of the *measure* of value, not of value itself." Heartened by such glowing prospects, the Michigan Central directors determined to extend their line westward.

As chief counsel for the Michigan Central, Joy was delegated to rummage through the Illinois railroad charters to find an outlet to Iowa. Since the Rock Island was already under construction and the Illinois Central and the Galena and Chicago Union were extending their lines into northwestern Illinois, Joy scrutinized the charters leading to the southwest. Unable to find a road that stretched clear across the State, the resourceful Joy hit upon the idea of combining four roads that sprawled aimlessly in a southwesterly direction between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. Three of these — the Aurora Branch, the Northern Cross, and the Peoria and Oquawka — had been incorporated in February, 1849, by local capitalists. The Central Military Tract Railroad had been chartered by irate citizens of Galesburg on February 15, 1851, when the Peoria and Oquawka was surveyed. If the charters of these companies could be amended to permit the welding of the terminals together so as to give the Michigan Central a direct run into Chicago, the company



would have little to fear from its chief competitor.

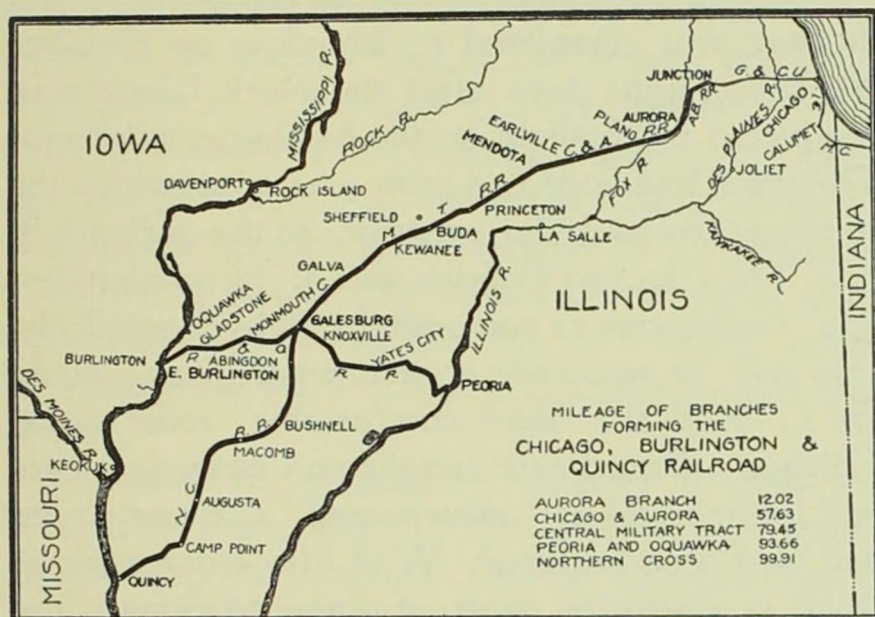
The Michigan Central managers lost no time in opening negotiations. Fortunately, they found each road in a receptive mood, for local capital had proven utterly inadequate. Indeed, three of the companies had already made overtures for aid in the East through such men as Chauncey S. Colton of the Central Military Tract Railroad and James W. Grimes, a director of the Peoria and Oquawka. By agreeing to furnish the required capital, the Michigan Central secured amendments to their charters at a special session of the Illinois legislature in June, 1852, which included the desired changes and made the project acceptable to conservative eastern investors. Forbes immediately set to work raising funds to push active construction. He had acted none too soon, for some of the companies were already on the verge of being connected with the Rock Island and would thus have been absorbed by the Michigan Southern interests.

The nucleus from which the present-day Burlington System developed was the Aurora Branch Railroad, a company that had been incorporated to build a single or double track railroad from the "town of Aurora" northward to some "eligible and convenient" point of connection with the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad. Contracts on the

Aurora Branch were let late in 1849 and on September 2, 1850, the road was opened for business to Junction (West Chicago), twelve miles directly north of Aurora. On October 21, 1850, through train service was inaugurated between Aurora and Chicago over the crude second-hand strap rail tracks of the Aurora Branch and the G. & C. U. Passengers paid \$1.25 for this forty-two mile trip; potatoes, wheat, and shelled corn were transported for five cents a bushel; oats and buckwheat for three and a half cents; and barley at four and a half cents. The tariff on flour and salt was sixteen cents a barrel, while lumber could be shipped for \$1.50 per thousand. The equipment of the Aurora Branch at that time consisted of a second-hand locomotive and passenger car together with two freight cars borrowed from the Galena company. In 1933 the equipment of the Burlington, which traces its corporate beginnings to the Aurora Branch, included 1300 locomotives, 1200 passenger cars, and 60,000 freight cars.

A number of changes were made in the Aurora Branch charter by Joy. First, the name of the corporation was changed to the Chicago and Aurora Railroad Company. Next, the new organization was permitted to increase its capital stock to a sum not exceeding two million dollars. Finally, the C. & A. was to extend in a southwest-

erly direction from Aurora to a point at least fifteen miles north of La Salle where it was to intersect the Illinois Central and also form a junction with the Central Military Tract Railroad. The



point selected, an uninhabited prairie in 1850, grew in a twinkling. Organized as a town in 1853, Mendota had 1800 inhabitants by 1855.

The first meeting of the Chicago and Aurora stockholders was held in Chicago on July 6, 1852. The directors and officers of the Aurora Branch were retained in office, but the presence of Joy and Brooks on the directorate signified the influence of eastern capital. The stock of the company was promptly over-subscribed, the *Chicago Democrat*

observing that the road was controlled by a "stronger and wealthier" group of capitalists than any other company. In the following year, 1853, Joy became president of the road.

Construction began at Aurora during 1852 and the line was completed to Mendota on October 20, 1853, eight days after the Rock Island was completed to Sheffield by the Michigan Southern. The track had been laid with a new rail which the company deemed "far superior" to the ordinary T rail. The *Chicago Tribune* was of the opinion that this "continuous or compound rail, over which the cars roll, as smoothly as if it were glass", made the C. & A. the "most comfortable" road out of Chicago. Brand new freight and passenger cars and locomotives of "unsurpassed" size and power had also been acquired. With fifty-eight miles of track in operation west of Lake Michigan, the Michigan Central was prepared to throw the full force of its energy into the development of the Central Military Tract Railroad.

This company had originally planned a connection with the old Rock Island and La Salle Railroad. The amendment to its charter dated June 19, 1852, authorized the C. M. T. to construct a road from Galesburg "in a northeasterly direction, on the most direct and eligible route towards the City of Chicago, to a point . . . on or near

the line of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, or on or near the line of any other railroad or railroads connecting with or extending to the said City of Chicago". The route from Galesburg to Mendota was selected for its beauty and fertility. "If Illinois is the garden spot of the West," the *Chicago Tribune* of January 4, 1854, asserted, "the Central Military Tract is more certainly the garden spot of Illinois, and when this road is finished, piercing the 'garden spot' through its very centre, it will bring to our city an amount of trade and travel greater than all that we now derive from the various railroads connecting Chicago with the interior."

A preliminary estimate by engineer William P. Whittle on December 1, 1851, had put the cost of constructing the proposed Central Military Tract Railroad at \$13,224.80 per mile. A passenger and freight depot at Galesburg costing \$2500 and some first class passenger coaches costing \$2000 attest the modesty of Whittle's estimates. Yet without more than local support, the progenitors of the C. M. T. did "not expect to carry the enterprise to a successful issue".

The entrance of the Michigan Central into the C. M. T. was followed by the election of John W. Brooks to the presidency. Under his able direction the road was completed and placed in

operation to Galesburg on December 7, 1854. In his report to the stockholders on April 2, 1855, Brooks listed the sources from which construction funds had been derived. A total of \$727,111.80 had been raised on the 9861 shares of stock. Of this amount eastern capitalists had paid \$541,925 on 7225 shares while western subscribers had advanced \$185,186.80 on 2636 shares. Although the road had been "so far completed as to be open to public use", only seventy-five dollars had been called on each one hundred dollar share. Despite this fact one-sixth of the western shareholders had been able to contribute an average of only  $42\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on the amount called. A total of \$1,491,000 in first and second mortgage bonds bearing seven and eight per cent interest had been sold at a discount. Smaller items listed by Brooks brought the total receipts to \$2,413,955.52. Against this sum the company had spent \$2,299,786.25 or \$28,747.32 a mile for construction and equipment.

The C. M. T. earned \$451,895.49 in its first year of operation ending April 30, 1856. The rolling stock consisted of 19 locomotives, 6 first-class passenger cars and 2 baggage cars, 50 coal and 51 platform cars, and 116 house freight cars. The company had experimented successfully with a rebuilt coal-burning locomotive and had accordingly

ordered four new coal-burning engines. These were "so constructed as to burn the smoke", thus avoiding one "serious objection" to coal as a fuel.

The Peoria and Oquawka, which had been authorized to build a railroad from Peoria to the "town of Oquawka", served as the means of closing the final gap in the line to the Mississippi. On July 1, 1853, the C. M. T. had arranged to have this company locate its road within the southern limits of Galesburg in order to provide a connection to Burlington. On October 3, 1854, the P. & O. made a joint contract with the C. & A. and the C. M. T. leasing its road between Galesburg and the Mississippi for three years following its completion. The track to East Burlington was opened for traffic on March 17, 1855.

The arrival of the iron horse on the banks of the Mississippi opposite Burlington was a proud event in the history of that city. A grand celebration was held on May 31st at which the "beauty and fashion" and "chivalry and power" of Ottumwa, Agency City, Fairfield, Mount Pleasant, New London, Keokuk, Davenport, and other Iowa towns mingled with the "selected" elegance and talent of the East. Arriving in ten "superb" passenger cars drawn by the "huge and gallant iron horse", the guests, among whom were Lewis Cass, Stephen A. Douglas, and Mayor Boone of

Chicago, received a warm greeting by the reception committee headed by Governor James W. Grimes. The evening was delightfully spent in music and dancing, speeches and feasting.

Only one segment, the Northern Cross Railroad, remained unfinished. Originally included in the Internal Improvement Act of 1837, the old Northern Cross was planned to traverse central Illinois by way of Quincy and Springfield. The first locomotive in Illinois was alleged to have been put in service on the eight mile track running eastward from Meredosia on November 8, 1838. During the ensuing years, however, the road had rotted away and on February 10, 1849, citizens of Quincy and vicinity had revived the title and in 1851 this company was authorized to construct a branch line "through the Military Bounty Tract, and terminating at the most convenient and eligible point at or near the southern termination of the Illinois and Michigan Canal". This act had been amended in 1852 to allow the Northern Cross to connect with a railroad leading into Chicago. Only twenty miles had been completed north of Quincy by January 19, 1855, when the Michigan Central took charge. The remaining eighty miles were completed by January 31, 1856.

It was not until 1864 that the web of steel, upon which the Joy-Forbes-Brooks triumvirate had been



spinning for a dozen years, was completed. By 1855 Joy had become president of both the Chicago and Aurora and the Central Military Tract Railroads. Two years previously the *Chicago Democrat* had expressed a hope that the Michigan Central would consolidate the names as well as the roads so that the editors could "with a single scratch of the pen" let the people know what they were talking about. The Chicago and Aurora was incorporated as the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company on February 14, 1855. This company absorbed the Central Military Tract Railroad on July 9, 1856, under the caption The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Rail Road Company. On April 28, 1864, this company purchased at foreclosure the Northern Cross which had been previously named the Quincy and Chicago. That portion of the old P. & O. which had been built between Peoria and East Burlington was acquired in the grand consolidation of June 24, 1864, when the company assumed its present-day title: Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

## A Scientific Tour

Asa Gray, one of the greatest scientists of the nineteenth century, had "cultivated the field of North American botany, with some assiduity, for more than forty years". He had reviewed the vegetable hosts, and assigned to no small number of them their names and their places in the botanical world, but so far as the West and the Middle West were concerned, he had been to a great extent a "closet botanist". Not until he was sixty-one had he seen the Mississippi River or "set foot upon a prairie". Then he journeyed westward across the Mississippi and across the continent to marvel at the gigantic redwoods of California and to study the botanical beauties and wonders of the region west of the Father of Waters.

It was autumn 1872 when Professor Gray returned. The American Association for the Advancement of Science was meeting at Dubuque. As president of the Association and fired with a new zeal for scientific field work, he stopped in Iowa to address the annual meeting and to inspire his fellow scientists to renewed and extended activities in the field of botanical research.

In addressing this meeting Gray borrowed a

simile from his own profession and likened his office to a biennial plant. The president, he said, "flourishes for the year in which he comes into existence as presiding officer. When the second year comes round, he is expected to blossom out in an address and disappear." Those who heard him were quick to catch his meaning, but they were aware that the fruit of a flower perpetuates its kind. It does not completely disappear. In like manner, they resolved that the flowering fruit of so great a scholar — the inspiration of the central figure in the galaxy of scientists — should not be lost.

At the close of the meeting, interest in scientific research and in excursions for botanical study had received a tremendous impulse. Nor was there a lack of aggressive action. When it was suggested that Iowa afforded a rich field of study and that a pilgrimage across the fertile prairies would pay high dividends in scientific knowledge, there was a quick response. Almost immediately a scientific excursion was arranged to cross the State from Dubuque to Sioux City and return.

The exploring party consisted of about fifty persons including many prominent and active members of the Association, though Gray apparently was not among the number, and several ladies who had been attending the meeting at Dubuque.

There were five or six state geologists, as well as several eminent botanists, in the group — all interested in the study of natural history and in the pursuits of science. Transportation was provided by the Illinois Central Railroad, and many inducements were presented to make the excursion both interesting and profitable to members of the party.

The expedition was under the direction of Dr. C. A. White, State Geologist and Professor of Geology at the State University of Iowa. Familiar with the geography and geology of the State, its rivers, lakes, mines, quarries, and prairies, he was able to give to members of the party valuable information upon a wide variety of subjects. Indeed, it is reported that "in point of fact, Dr. White *lectured* to his attentive and interested audience during the entire journey of two days across the State", and upon the return trip as far as Fort Dodge, where he left the party.

No unusual occurrences or incidents of travel were reported during the first part of the journey. Members of the party were impressed, however, with the wide expanse of unbroken prairie. William W. Wheildon in writing upon this subject referred to "this new and peculiar country" as being destitute of hills and vales, and forests and rocks — "those features which in New England characterize the landscape".

Fort Dodge and the surrounding country afforded to the explorers "an extremely interesting region, both historically and scientifically". The citizens of Fort Dodge were "most generous and hospitable" in receiving and entertaining the visiting scientists. In the evening a reception was held, and the following morning was devoted to a scientific exploration of the vicinity. Mines and quarries, the forest and prairie and river were all examined. Carriages were provided by local residents for all members of the expedition and some of the more interested accompanied the party on its explorations. Among the places visited were the limestone quarries and kilns, the coal mines, the banks of the Des Moines River, Lizard Creek, and "chiefest of all" the famous gypsum quarries, widely known as "the birthplace of that audacious imposition, the Cardiff Giant".

While in this vicinity, Dr. White interested the party in a description of the gypsum fields which were recognized as the largest and most valuable in the country, and the only beds of any economic value in this or the adjoining States. Fort Dodge gypsum even in those early days was known for "its remarkable purity and freedom from grit". Members of the party who were not familiar with the properties and characteristics of gypsum were interested in the fact that this peculiar Iowa prod-

uct may be hewn with an axe or a hatchet, sawed with a common wood-saw, and that blasting holes, when necessary, may be made in it with a carpenter's auger. Their interest was increased to amazement when they were told that as a building material gypsum displays qualities of great endurance, for "though it may be cut and defaced with a penknife, it retains its beauty of coloring and its durability nearly as well as marble".

Returning from the gypsum quarries, the party proceeded on its way to Sioux City. The route taken led the explorers "over the open and apparently boundless prairie, unbroken by an elevation and almost unrelieved by tree or shrub, save the rank weeds of the prairie". For more than fifty miles the railroad track "was as straight as an arrow". The prairie was not entirely new to the party "excepting in its apparent boundlessness; but still it seemed strange to those in whose minds 'the idea of a wilderness was indissolubly connected with that of a forest'".

The party, interested in the scenery and in the events and incidents of the trip, arrived at Sioux City at 10:15 P. M., only to learn that they were more than six hours behind schedule. A public reception had been planned for members of the group at four o'clock in the afternoon, and a public meeting was scheduled for the evening. Both

of these, with whatever benefits might have accrued, were lost both to the members of the party and to the citizens who planned the meetings.

Accommodations for the night were provided at the Hubbard House — “a large and princely hotel”. On the following morning members of the party were divided. Various groups “sallied out in different directions around the city, and the whole neighborhood was visited”. One group crossed the Big Sioux River into the Territory of Dakota, another crossed the Missouri into Nebraska. Some of the party crossed the Floyd River and looked in the distance upon the bluff below the city where Sergeant Floyd was buried, although they did not visit that point. Much interest was shown in viewing the bluffs along the river. The geologists spent some time visiting the cretaceous formation in that region, while the ichthyologists obtained from the river a number of specimens of small fish, and captured not a few moths and bugs.

In the evening members of the party assembled in the drawing rooms of the Hubbard House, compared notes of the day's exploits, and received callers from about the city. At an early hour the company was called to order by Dr. White for a business session. A resolution was adopted thanking officials of the Illinois Central Railroad

for free tickets from Dubuque to Sioux City and return. Thanks were also expressed to the citizens of Sioux City "for the attention and kindness" bestowed upon members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and their friends and associates. After the conclusion of the business session the remainder of the evening was spent in a social way.

Upon the return trip, the scientists stopped again at Fort Dodge. The two following days were devoted to a side trip to Dakota City and Springvale (now Humboldt). At Springvale the scientists visited Humboldt College and in the evening were edified and entertained by a lecture on "Fishes". The speaker presented his subject in a popular and interesting manner — telling many "fish stories" and illustrating his talk "with living specimens" taken from the Des Moines River.

While the party was at Dakota City members of the group visited quarries and lime kilns, and in the evening attended a lecture on the "Origin of the Races of Men". The speaker supported the biblical account of creation and expressed views which were adverse to the Darwinian speculations of that day. From Dakota City the party returned to Dubuque where the expedition ended.

Thus, in a little more than a week of travel and entertainment, a group of prominent scientists had



studied the open book of nature as they crossed and recrossed a great prairie State. They had visited many localities of historical and scientific interest. They had measured, as far as the eye could reach, "the almost boundless beauties of the prairies", and had not infrequently marvelled at the richness of the soil.

The journey had sprung from the influence of Asa Gray. Like a biennial plant he had "blossomed out" in an address, and, like the fragrance of the flower, the inspiration of his example had spread to others, teaching what some of them had scarcely dreamed before. Iowa is not a wide wilderness, but a great and growing agricultural State — a veritable laboratory for the scientist, where, in the flowers and the trees, on the prairies and among the hills, the lessons of nature are written so clearly that "he who runs may read".

J. A. SWISHER

## Restless Farmers

*This statement of the conditions of agricultural depressions fifty years ago, prepared for the PALIMPSEST by Geo. F. Robeson, has been derived mainly from H. C. Nixon's "Populist Movement in Iowa" in The Iowa Journal of History and Politics, Vol. 26, published in January, 1926. — The Editor.*

The "plight of the farmers" is a common phenomenon in the social history of America. Agricultural depressions have occurred with increasing frequency since the passing of the frontier, and of course the locale of the problem has been chiefly in the Middle West—the great food laboratory of the nation.

During the years preceding 1880 the production of wheat and corn "almost doubled" in Iowa. This situation, however, was not entirely local. Both at home and abroad the increased competition for markets inevitably caused the price of grains to fall.

As a result there was in the eighties a noticeable agricultural transformation. During the decade following 1880, wheat production "declined

by nearly three-fourths", and "hundreds of thousands of wheat acres" in Iowa were devoted to hay as "cattle herding gave way to cattle feeding". In some regions dairying supplanted wheat production, while in others hog, cattle, and horse raising became primary. "The hog followed corn in the westward movement", and Iowa was taking the lead in the production of both.

Not only were the prices of agricultural produce adversely affected by the rapid increase in marketing grain and animals, but by a new competition in the field of science. The price of hogs was affected by the development of commercial substitutes for lard and the dairy industry was injured by the production of oleomargarine. Yet despite these factors Iowa farms "were increasing in value". Indeed, it may be said that farming in Iowa was becoming more and more a "matter of capital, business, and scientific method." Farm machinery alone had by 1890 reached an estimated value of over \$136,000,000.

This development was accompanied rather naturally by an increase in farm tenancy and indebtedness. By 1890 tenants constituted almost thirty per cent of Iowa's farm families. Furthermore, farmers "occupying encumbered farms in their own name made up an additional 37.53 per cent". That farm indebtedness was mounting is also evi-

denced by the fact that during the decade prior to 1890 a half million mortgages were executed to an amount of more than one-fifth of the estimated value of the land, including improvements. One estimate in 1890 was that forty-seven per cent of the taxed land in the State was under mortgage. And debts of course mean an especially burdensome fixed charge of interest.

Meanwhile produce prices during the decade ending in 1890 seemed to sag with each passing year; corn dropping from forty-four to nineteen cents, wheat from one dollar and six cents to sixty-three, cattle declined over thirty per cent from 1885 to 1890, while hogs sold lower than at any time since 1879.

Clearly the Iowa farmer was in something of a "plight" during those years. Everything seemed against him and his interests. The decrease in farm produce prices meant an increase in the "commodity value" of debts and wages, since these did not fluctuate with prices.

The decline in agricultural commodity prices was not due entirely to over-production. That would have been bad enough. But the belief was current that the depression was due in a large part to "combinations on the part of those who handled agricultural products or provided important items for the farmer". Chief among these "combina-

tions" were said to be the "big four" — meat packers, the union stock yards, the line elevator companies, and the railroads. Thus was the farmer affected as a seller. As a buyer the farmer had to contend with the barbed wire "syndicate", the binder twine "trust", and the farm machinery "combine". In addition he believed that the insurance "interests" also discriminated against him.

But above all the farmers felt aggrieved toward the railroads. For this view there were several reasons. In the first place the railroads were alleged to have been the recipients of "donations and exemptions" to the extent of fifty million dollars in Iowa alone and that tracts of land amounting "to more than one-eighth of the area of the State" had been allotted to them. Then, too, it was felt that the railroads were not paying their just share of taxes — having "one valuation for income and another for taxation". Moreover, some counties "were struggling under heavy loads of bond taxes, levied twenty-five years ago, to aid railways, of which not one foot" had been built.

The people were convinced that they were being exploited by the railroads through escape of taxation and exorbitant rates. In 1887, a year of drouth in Iowa, the net income of the railroads in this State, amounting to \$13,000,000, was one-third of the value of the corn crop and three mil-

lion dollars more than the value of the whole wheat crop.

But the Iowa farmer was not only incensed that rates were such that "he had to give one car of corn to pay for the transportation of another to Chicago", but he complained bitterly of the charge of "from \$60 to \$80 from Western Iowa, when it is understood that cars from points still farther west" were taken right by his door to some eastern point for considerably less.

It was common knowledge that the railroad interests were playing a prominent part in the politics of the State as well as in its economic development. The power of the railroads was further augmented by close relations with the press. "Free passes and mileage contracts for advertising were important items with newspaper men in those days, as were passes for important shippers, politicians, and office-holders in general." The plight of the farmers seemed hopeless indeed.

And still the pressure of declining agricultural prices went on, intensified by corporate dictatorship, an unreliable press, and political parties deaf to the pleas of the depressed. Taxation was constantly increasing, the aggregate amount raised for State and local purposes having risen from eleven million dollars in 1881 to fifteen million in 1889, two-thirds of which fell upon farms.

All through this critical period of Iowa history — the eighties and early nineties — rural wealth was increasing. Still the feeling persisted among Iowa farmers that they were not getting what they really deserved. As expressed in one newspaper of the time the Iowa farmer "is about the only man that is in competition. Nearly everything else is in combination."

To cope with these disheartening conditions, the farmers of Iowa and the Middle West during the eighties launched various coöperative organizations. The Grange was revived and the eight locals of 1885 increased to fifty-two by 1890. Some of the old grange spirit was also carried over into the new organizations, one of which was the Iowa Farmers' Alliance, formed in Des Moines on January 12, 1881, to protect the farmers against "class legislation, monopoly, and swindling".

This State Farmers' Alliance was officially interlocked with the Farmers' Protective Association which was organized three months later for the purpose of fighting the barbed wire trust. A. B. Cummins became chief attorney for the Association, and a "free factory" was established in Des Moines to manufacture wire "for sale at reasonable prices."

Out of the Farmers' Alliance also grew farm-

ers' mutual insurance organizations. By 1886 "about half of the counties" had such organizations, and three years later there were "one hundred and sixteen mutual fire and tornado insurance companies, composed largely of farmers", handling one-seventeenth of the total non-life insurance business of the State. Farmers' cooperative elevators and stores were also set up.

That rural dissatisfaction would turn into political channels was natural and inevitable. The Iowa Greenback party had become the "partial heir" of the Anti-Monopoly party of the Granger period. Indeed, there was some continuity of leadership and personnel "from the Anti-Monopoly party through the Greenback party to the Populist party — the real political organ of the disaffected rural regions which reached a climax in the early nineties. Many remedies for the economic ills were proposed — inflation of the currency, free coinage of silver, withdrawal of privileges from corporations, income taxation, government loans to liquidate mortgages, and above all more political control by the people. The list, with the exception of the last item, seems remarkably familiar.



## Comment by the Editor

### *THE CONQUERING RAILROADS*

Railroad building during the third quarter of the last century was a glorious adventure. Men of vision saw an opportunity to transform a vast wilderness into productive Commonwealths. Great cities, teeming with population and hustling with industry, sprang up at the crossroads of commerce; while from north to south and east to west across the broad valley of the Mississippi spread the checkered fields of cotton, corn, and other grain. Men of wealth perceived unminted fortunes in constructing continental transportation systems. Here was a chance for men of courage to stake their money, skill, and reputation on the conquest of the prairies, and win an empire.

There can be no doubt of the tremendous influence of the railroads upon the development of the West. It took a hundred and fifty years for settlement to reach the Appalachians. Another half century was consumed in pushing the frontier to the Mississippi, even though the rivers flowed in the right direction to provide convenient routes of travel. But within the next fifty years, in spite of mountain barriers and desert spaces, the frontier

was eliminated entirely. Under the leadership of the railroad builders, the deliberate advance of the settlers became a headlong rush of speculators. The locomotive outdistanced the covered wagon. Towns were planned before the inhabitants arrived; and the means of marketing agricultural produce were provided before the prairie sod was broken.

But the rapid growth of the West was not, perhaps, an unmitigated benefit. It was great sport while it lasted; and as an example of business foresight, indomitable purpose, and tireless energy it is unparalleled in human achievement. Yet students of western history suggest that the prairie States were populated too fast to permit social and economic adjustments. The bewildered people, confronted with strange problems that they did not fully comprehend, sought relief from their distress in political action. The various agrarian movements in the seventies, eighties, and nineties were the inevitable consequences of the process by which the West was reduced to cultivation.

J. E. B.

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