

THE PALIMPSEST

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The North Western Comes

On June 2, 1859, Samuel J. Tilden, then a young New York lawyer, appeared with Ossian D. Ashley in Janesville, Wisconsin, and purchased at auction the bankrupt Chicago, St. Paul & Fond du Lac Railroad Company as agents for another company. The price paid was \$10,849,-938 in stocks and bonds of the new organization. This was the Chicago & North Western Railway Company which had been organized on June 6, 1859. In 1930 this road operated over sixteen hundred miles of track in Iowa, almost one-fifth of its total track mileage, and poured into the coffers of the State treasury a larger sum in taxes than any other single railroad.

The North Western had its actual beginning on January 16, 1836, when the Illinois legislature incorporated the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad Company. This company was granted the right to construct and maintain a single or double

track railroad from the "town of Galena" to the most "eligible, proper, direct and convenient" point in the "town of Chicago". The capital stock was fixed at \$100,000, and seven commissioners were appointed to secure subscriptions.

The charter of the Galena & Chicago Union provided for a board of seven directors and Theophilus W. Smith, Edmund D. Taylor, Josiah C. Goodhue, John T. Temple, Gregory Smith, Ebenezer Peck, and James H. Collins constituted the first board, with Theophilus Smith as president. Because of the uncertainty of railroad projects, the directors were empowered, if they deemed it advisable, to "make and establish a good permanent turnpike road, upon any portion of the route" and collect tolls thereon. The company was allowed three years to begin construction on its railroad and turnpike and ten years to complete it. Failure to do so would result in the forfeiture of its privileges.

The original charter was amended on March 4, 1837, when the time for "final completion" was extended to fifteen years. The capital stock was increased to a sum not exceeding one million dollars in addition to the amount already subscribed. In case it appeared "impracticable" to construct the road the whole distance to Galena, or "more advantageous" to the company or public interest

not to do so, the road might be connected with the Illinois Central at the most practicable point.

Born in the midst of the Panic of 1837, the G. & C. U. was paralyzed by the economic depression that swept Illinois and the nation during the ensuing years. Elijah K. Hubbard was elected president in 1837, and although he held this office until 1846, he was unable to resuscitate this almost still-born corporation, but managed to keep the charter alive until an aroused public sentiment caused men to muster up courage and renew their efforts in behalf of the almost forgotten railroad.

The initial impetus in this resuscitation began on January 7, 1846, when three hundred and nineteen delegates from northern Illinois assembled at Rockford. William B. Ogden, the first mayor of Chicago, was prominent among the Chicago delegates. The convention felt that the wants of the "farmers and business men of Northern Illinois" required the "immediate construction" of a railroad from Chicago to Galena, and considered it "indispensably necessary" that property owners along the line of the road subscribe to the stock. The route was "entirely practicable" and could be built at "little expense" so the delegates felt "no hesitation" in declaring the project would produce "ample and rich returns upon the money invested". A Central Committee of seven was appointed to

take the "most active and energetic means" to carry into effect the objects of the convention and receive subscriptions to stock. Since the road passed through public lands, the committee was urged to memorialize Congress to grant the G. & C. U. the right of way and alternate sections of land as a "fair equivalent for the enhanced value" imparted to the lands retained by the government.

Shortly after the Rockford convention William B. Ogden was elected president of the company. A year later, on February 24, 1847, the charter was amended to allow the election of as many as thirteen directors. The company was also granted the right of way through such portions of the public lands belonging to Illinois as remained unsold. Such lands were not to exceed one hundred feet in breadth and were to be "designated and marked" by plain landmarks within twelve months. A copy of the notes of survey and plat, with a description of the marks, was to be transmitted to the State Auditor within ninety days after the survey was completed.

The new board of thirteen directors was quickly elected. William B. Ogden, John B. Turner, Walter L. Newberry, Charles Walker, James H. Collins, J. Young Scammon, William H. Brown, Thomas Dyer, and Benjamin W. Raymond represented Chicago; Charles S. Hempstead and

Thomas Drummond came from Galena; William N. Davis resided at Au Sable Grove, Illinois; and Allen Robbins lived in New York. William B. Ogden was reëlected president and Francis Howe was chosen secretary and treasurer.

On August 10, 1847, the stock books were opened at Galena, Chicago, and intermediate points. The company was able to dispose of \$250,000 worth of stock, Ogden himself raising \$20,000 in one day on the streets of Chicago from farmers who were selling wheat. He declared the feelings manifested along the line were "so ardent, and so universal that it was quite apparent the country and the people immediately interested in the construction of the road, were able to, and would increase their subscriptions to an amount sufficient" to build it from Chicago to Elgin and own it themselves.

A corps of engineers under the direction of Richard P. Morgan commenced to "survey and locate" the line from Chicago to the Fox River in September. Morgan, a former engineer on the Hudson River Railroad, estimated the cost of the railroad at \$2,648,000, or an average of \$14,553 per mile. He reckoned the freight from the west would bring \$166,000 the first year, while that from the east would produce \$47,000. Passenger receipts he put at \$150,000, mail at \$30,000.

Morgan was convinced the success of the road was "entirely independent" of receipts along the line for if the country between the Mississippi and Lake Michigan were a "perfect desert" there would be enough business in a few years concentrated at Galena from Iowa alone to give ample support to the railroad.

Several factors existed to lend support to his contentions. During the forties Dubuque and other Upper Mississippi towns had gradually become convinced that a combination of St. Louis steamboat interests wished to "extort" large revenues from them. It was quite natural that these cities should feel resentful and welcome a railroad. Morgan believed the causes then operating to "draw off the products of the West" from the South would continue to exist and the great "natural superiority" of the route from Galena to Chicago would enable it to compete successfully with a navigation in which risk was "greater, and climate, in some instances, destructive".

It was not merely the building of a railroad to the Mississippi which presented its problems to the G. & C. U. An outlet for freight and passengers must be made to the Atlantic seaboard. The original plan contemplated a line of steamers across Lake Michigan to connect with the Michigan Central at its proposed terminus at New Buf-

falo, Michigan. Morgan favored extending the G. & C. U. around the southern tip of the lake to New Buffalo in case the Michigan Central failed to build its line to Chicago and estimated the cost of such a project at \$328,000. President Ogden told the directors on April 5, 1848, that such a road would secure to the country through which it passed "*the great North-Western railroad thoroughfare for all time to come*". The Michigan Central quickly decided to continue its track around the lake and the G. & C. U. accordingly reverted to its original plan pending the arrival of the Michigan road in Chicago.

The preliminary surveys completed, the company appointed John Van Nortwick chief engineer of the road. Van Nortwick found the "ruinous financial" situation in England had served to "tighten the money market" and the company accordingly decided to use the strap rail instead of the more expensive T rail, since "the eastern roads were abandoning the use of the strap rail, and hence would sell them and the locomotive engines adapted thereto very cheap". In his report to the directors Van Nortwick described the strap rail superstructure as a series of "cross-ties nine feet long and six inches thick, which are to be laid thirty inches from center to center; on these are to be placed longitudinal rails of Norway, or yel-

low, pine, a portion six inches square and a portion seven inches square, secured in place by triangular blocks or knees of scantling, firmly spiked to the ties on each side. Upon the longitudinal rails is an oak ribbon one and a quarter by three inches square, and on this ribbon an iron plate rail two and a half by three-fourths or seven-eighths inches, and weighing about thirty tons to the mile." The road between Chicago and Elgin was laid with this type of superstructure but was replaced by regular T rails during 1852-1853. Engineer Jenks D. Perkins was "borrowed" from the Syracuse and Utica Railroad to lay the new track.

It required approximately five years for the G. & C. U. to construct its line from Chicago to Freeport, a distance of 121 miles. Work was begun in the spring of 1848 and the Des Plaines River was reached on December 15th. This segment of the G. & C. U., scarcely ten miles in length, has the distinction of being the first track built and operated west from Chicago. In honor of the event the directors enjoyed a ride out to "end of track". While returning to Chicago they overtook a farmer and bargained with him to carry his wheat into Chicago, a city which was to become the leading wheat market of the United States.

The track was opened to Junction, 30 miles west of Chicago (now known as West Chicago), the

following year. Here the road swung almost due north to Elgin, a distance of 12 miles. From Junction, another road was later extended westward through Dixon to Fulton on the Mississippi River, a distance of 105 miles. Junction served as the northern terminus of the Aurora Branch Railroad and for a number of years the trains of that road and its successor, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, ran from this point over the line of the G. & C. U. into Chicago.

Goaded by the activity of Galena, the Dubuque *Miners' Express* of December 12, 1849, sent out the following clarion call for action: "The whole country — North, South, East, and West — cities, towns, hamlets, and villages, are crying out 'Railroads! Let us have railroads!!' This cry is approaching us from all directions, while here we are in Dubuque as unconcerned as if 'Whiskey Hill' and 'Dirty Hollow' were ever to be the only thoroughfares from and to Dubuque. Our neighbors of Galena are making arrangements to go and meet the Chicago road; Milwaukee and her sister towns are engaged in a vigorous effort to connect themselves to the Mississippi a few miles above us; while here we are asleep in a kind of dreamy-drowsy-stupid lethargy. We should make immediate provision to unite ourselves to the Chicago and Galena road at the latter place. . . .

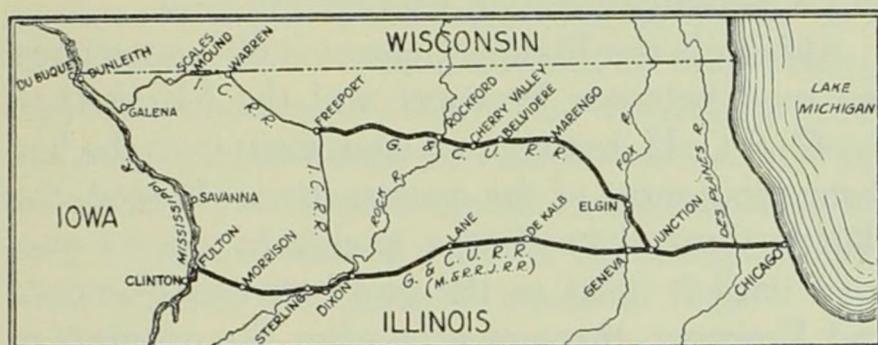
When in the future the road is extended to the Mississippi where is the guaranty that Dubuque will be the point reached?"

Elgin staged a "grand celebration" following the arrival of its first railroad on January 22, 1850. Belvidere was reached on December 3, 1851. At this time the building of a railroad during the winter was considered a wonderful feat and Jenks D. Perkins was highly praised for finishing the track to Cherry Valley on March 10, 1852.

The first train of the G. & C. U. puffed into Rockford "amid the firing of cannon and ringing of bells" on August 2, 1852. Heretofore stage-coaches had jolted their way over the rough prairies to Rockford and on through the hilly mineral region about Galena and Dubuque. The arrival of the railroad dispensed with stage coaches east of that city and the G. & C. U. advertised stage connections at Rockford for Galena and Dubuque; for Beloit, Janesville, and Madison; and for Dixon and Rock Island.

Two routes lay open between Freeport and Galena: one to the northwest by way of Warren and Scales Mound; the other to the southwest by way of Savanna. The Galena branch of the Illinois Central would occupy one of the routes for about fifty miles and Van Nortwick feared the country would not support two competing roads running

nearly parallel. "There can be no doubt", he declared, "that the true policy of both companies is to form a connection at such point as shall be found most practicable, east of Galena, and construct but one road to that place. It is understood that both companies favor and contemplate such



THE G. & C. U. FORERUNNER OF THE NORTH WESTERN arrangement." Freeport was agreed upon by the two roads as the point of junction.

The entry of the G. & C. U. into Freeport on September 1., 1853, ended the westward march of that company. The Illinois Central promptly took up construction on the Freeport-Galena division and by January 9, 1854, the track had been laid to Warren. Scales Mound was reached on September 11th, and the "iron horse" steamed noisily into Galena on October 30, 1854.

As early as 1852, Galena had stoutly opposed the extension of the road to the Mississippi, hoping to become the terminus and thereby the me-

tropolis of the entire region. Despite this opposition, the joint track of the I. C. and G. & C. U. was opened to Dunleith, opposite Dubuque, on June 12, 1855. A party of twenty Dubuque "ladies and gentlemen" had enjoyed a trip from Dunleith to Galena on the construction train the previous day and a grand celebration was held in July.

Although the Illinois Central built and owned the road between Freeport and the Mississippi, the G. & C. U. ran its own equipment over the line throughout most of the construction. Indeed, the Illinois Central itself was unable to use its own road until it filled in the gap between Mendota and Freeport, three months after the opening of the Freeport-Galena road.

The first locomotive of the G. & C. U. and the first to draw a train out of Chicago or west of Lake Michigan was the *Pioneer*. Built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia, the *Pioneer* had been placed on the tracks on October 24, 1848. It had a pair of driving-wheels, four and one-half feet in diameter, and weighed only ten tons. It had cylinders ten inches in diameter and an eighteen-inch stroke. Although the *Pioneer* was a second-hand locomotive, chief engineer Van Nortwick considered it to be in "good order" and capable of answering "all purposes" connected with the construction.

It was customary to name all the early locomotives. The nine locomotives to appear for service following the *Pioneer* were the *Chicago*, the *Elgin*, the *Illinois*, the *Belvidere*, the *Rockford*, the *J. B. Turner*, the *Marengo*, the *Minnesota*, and the *Iowa*. The *J. B. Turner* and the *Marengo* were twelve ton engines, the former rebuilt by the G. & C. U. and the latter manufactured by the Schenectady Locomotive Works. The remaining seven locomotives were built by Norris & Bros. of Philadelphia. The largest engine on the line weighed only 24 tons compared with the 409 ton Class "H" locomotive of the North Western in 1933.

Wood was used for fuel and the average cost per cord in 1850 was \$2.13. Prices rose steadily as the G. & C. U. cut the timber off its right-of-way and in 1854 the company purchased two coal burning locomotives on trial with the understanding that they were not to be paid for unless they were "successful" with Illinois soft coal.

A large proportion of the rolling stock of the G. & C. U. consisted of construction cars. In 1850 the company owned 4 locomotives; 3 single and 13 double covered freight cars; 6 single and 16 double platform cars; 11 gravel cars, 4 hand cars, and 2 new passenger cars of 56 and 60 seats respectively. The rising tide of immigration and general freight and passenger traffic is reflected

in the company's rolling stock in 1855. The chief engineer itemized the following equipment in the eighth annual report: 44 locomotives; 27 passenger cars; 3 second class and 9 emigrant cars; 7 mail and baggage cars; 397 "house" freight cars; 121 platform cars; 68 hand cars; and 98 gravel cars. This was the approximate equipment of the G. & C. U. when it reached the Mississippi at Dunleith.

To indemnify itself, perhaps, for its failure to gain a monopoly of the road from Freeport to the Mississippi, the directors of the G. & C. U. ordered their chief engineer to locate a line from Junction to a suitable point of connection with the Rockford and Rock Island Railroad from which point it would continue through Dixon to Fulton on the Mississippi. Van Nortwick was enthusiastic about the prospects of such a road. "There can be no doubt", he declared, "that this route must form the great trunk line west from Chicago to Council Bluffs and even west of that point, and that this is the one upon which Chicago must rely to secure the business of Central and Western Iowa rather than upon other western lines having eastern connections south of that city".

In 1854, the G. & C. U. was authorized to increase its capital stock to a sum not exceeding five million dollars and "to extend the Dixon and Cen-

tral Iowa Route to Dixon, and, if they should deem it expedient, to the Mississippi river; or, to unite or consolidate with any other road on that route". President Turner soon reported a "lease and agreement with the Mississippi and Rock River Junction Railroad Company by which a continuous and complete line of railroad will be made and operated, under the control and management of this company" from Chicago to Fulton. The lease provided that the M. & R. R. J. should "prepare the road-way for the superstructure" and that the G. & C. U. should "complete, stock, operate and manage it in perpetuity", paying the M. & R. R. J. seven per cent annually on their expenditures. As a reward for his faithful services chief engineer John Van Nortwick was made "President and Engineer" of the company with complete supervision of the "work and expenditures".

The construction of the road from Junction to Fulton was accomplished with unparalleled rapidity. By January 10, 1854, the track was opened to Lane, forty-five miles from Junction. Heavy snows made necessary "extraordinary" expenditures for labor, fuel, and repairs, but the road was completed to Dixon by December 4, 1854. Additional work the following spring brought the total cost of this division — Junction to Dixon — to \$468,536.81.

Meanwhile Van Nortwick, following the consolidation of the M. & R. R. J. with the G. & C. U. on January 9, 1855, set about forging the last link in the road. The track was opened to Sterling on July 22, 1855. Two months later, on September 23rd, the train rolled triumphantly into Morrison, and on December 16, 1855, the iron horse puffed proudly to the banks of the Mississippi and slaked its thirst in the icy waters of the Father of Waters. The arrival at Fulton gave the G. & C. U. two points of contact with the Mississippi and Iowa in the same year, a feat accomplished by no other railroad. By May 1, 1855, the company had expended \$5,866,263.06 on its roads and it was estimated that \$1,375,000 would be required to complete and stock the two roads, including the double track between Chicago and Junction.

The merger of the Galena & Chicago Union and the North Western on June 2, 1864 — exactly five years after Samuel J. Tilden had purchased the bankrupt Chicago, St. Paul & Fond du Lac — was talked about “from the Atlantic to the slopes of the Missouri”. It was generally conceded that the Galena road was the more desirable investment for it consistently paid rich dividends to its stockholders. It brought to the consolidation a total of 545 miles of owned or leased roads compared with 315 miles of the absorbing line. Prior

to the Civil War it had gained a reputation as the "leading railroad of the west" while the North Western "was so nearly bankrupt that it could hardly pay the wages of its employes, and could not pay the interest on its bonds".

Following the union of the companies the directors of the consolidated road issued an explanatory circular. "The union", they declared, "gives greater strength and power, favoring more advantageous and extended connections, and better relations with other railroads built and to be built, and will aid to prevent the construction of such roads as would only serve to create injurious competition, without any adequate increase of the aggregate earnings of the roads competing. Decided economy, material reduction of expenses, and increased and more profitable service on engines and cars will also be the result of coöperation in the place of competition, and of one management of both roads."

The pioneer name of the Galena & Chicago Union was dropped because "no portion of the consolidated roads" touched Galena. The name of the Chicago & North Western Railway Company was retained because it "involved no change of books or blanks" and was "sufficiently comprehensive" to include the territory traversed.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN