

Comment by the Editor

A PERSONAL FACTOR

"The business I came up to attend to will be arranged pretty comfortably, I think, though I have been compelled to manage tolerably shrewdly", wrote James W. Grimes to his wife one Sunday morning in December, 1850, from Iowa City. "There is some opposition in the House of Representatives, but I think I shall succeed in quelling it before any final action is had. I shall return as soon as it is safe for me to leave. I think I am doing a great deal of good for Burlington by being here."

The president of the Burlington and Mount Pleasant Plank Road Company was at the State capital for the purpose of persuading legislators to grant his corporation the power of eminent domain as well as the privilege of using portions of the public highway for their toll road. His mission was successful, for on December 18th a statute containing such provisions was enacted. Whether or not this legislation was a boon to Burlington, it certainly facilitated the construction of the plank road.

Two months later, when "a great railroad and

plank-road fever" afflicted the business interests of his city, Mr. Grimes confided to his father that he had invested \$4000 in the plank road to Mount Pleasant. "I think it will pay well", he wrote. Encouraged by that hope, no doubt, he was willing to assume "the entire responsibility and management of the work" of construction. At the same time he was officially and financially interested in the Peoria and Oquawka Railroad which would soon connect Burlington with the markets of New England.

Progress is seldom accidental. In the story of any achievement, some dominant source of volition may be discerned. Improvements in transportation are not created by wishing, nor is causation revealed in legal records and statistical information. The personal factor is the vital element. He who would appraise the rise of Burlington will find a master key in the career of James W. Grimes.

J. E. B.