

## The Coming of the Railroad

I can well remember Iowa City as it was in the days long before the Civil War, when Gower and Holt and the Powell Brothers were among the principal business men and when Crummy's Tavern set out good cheer for the stranger. Those were the days when the only public conveyance between towns was the slow stage coach that also carried the mail. The drivers during the bitter cold weather were often so numbed when they reached their stopping place that they had to be lifted from their seats and carried into the station where a large fireplace was always heaped with glowing logs to welcome all who chose to enter.

The meeting of the legislature was the main event of importance until the excitement caused by the prospect of a railroad coming into the city. This brought a great boom to Iowa City and sent the price of property soaring. In those days everything the railroads asked for was willingly given to induce them to come into the State. Grants and privileges of all kinds were freely offered.

In the last days of December, 1855, I came up from Louisa County to Iowa City, a distance of fifty miles, with C. H. Berryhill, one of the most influential citizens of the town. We came by horse and buggy through deep snow and it took us two days.

As we neared the city, we saw off to our right huge bonfires burning to afford light for the men on the railroad construction to continue their work. The business men and others were out there helping to complete the road according to contract, and by twelve o'clock New Year's morning, 1856, the last rail was laid and the last spike driven. On the 3rd of January followed the great event of celebrating the completion of the railroad to Iowa City. It was a bitterly cold afternoon when the whistle blew announcing the entry of the first passenger train bringing the invited guests from Chicago, Rock Island, Davenport, and Muscatine. The cannon roared out their welcome, and the rattle of omnibuses was heard over the hard frozen street, as they bore the invited guests to the homes the committee had arranged for them.

The committee on arrangements consisted of thirty-five ladies and as many gentlemen. Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Berryhill were of this number and I, a schoolgirl, being one of the family at that time, had the opportunity in a small way of seeing and helping spread the four tables set the length of the Representatives' Hall. For instance, I had the privilege and pleasure of helping frost with *real loaf* sugar (a thing of luxury in those days) the thirty-two pounds of pound cake which Mrs. Berryhill had ordered from her baker for the occasion. We were told that only the white meat of the turkeys she had ordered would be used and must be sliced very thin. But the

supreme time to me was when on the last day of preparation, I went with Mrs. Berryhill to the Capitol and saw the tables and hall in all their glory. Over the speaker's stand was an arch that the ladies of the committee had covered with branches of evergreen in the midst of which were balls of cotton to imitate snow balls. In one corner of the hall was an old fashioned cook stove where the committee prepared and served hot coffee and hot fresh oysters, as the coming of the railroad made fresh oysters for the first time possible in Iowa. As the tables were bountifully spread with cold food, the committee served hot coffee and oysters all night "till broad day light in the morning".

As this was before the age of the European way of serving, everything was on the tables in abundance and every one helped himself. Besides the loaves of cake supplied, each table had three pyramids of cake from three to four feet in height and at the head of one table was one of popcorn four feet in height. I remember two of the pyramids of cake in particular from the way they were decorated. In the center of one was a peach tree, of wax of course, bearing perfect fruit with a blackberry vine with green leaves and black fruit starting from the base and winding round and round over the white surface to the top. The other one bore a tree of leaves and red apples with a vine of red raspberries. One of the trees was presented to the president of the road and the other, I believe, to the Governor.

Almost everything connected with this event was very primitive compared with to-day. The lighting for the halls was accomplished by means of two rows of chandeliers hung from the ceiling. They were made of rows of common laths, the first row of four laths full length, then the next row of shorter length succeeded by row after row until the apex was reached near the ceiling. Each row of laths had nails driven in about three inches apart on which were placed common lighted candles.

For outside illumination, there was a candle at each pane of glass from the basement of the Capitol building to the cupola, and all the business houses near the Capitol grounds were illuminated in some way; but not an alarm of fire was heard all night. Well, there were not so many insurance companies in those days.

LeGrand Byington, that silver tongued orator, was President of the Day and introduced the speakers. In complimenting the ladies of the committee on the dinner or supper as I guess it was called at that time, he said, "it was too good for kings, princes and potentates, but just good enough for the contractors and builders of our western railroads."

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