

## Iowa's Streamliners

Iowa railroads were eighty years old when the Diesel era began. First to be built was the Mississippi & Missouri, predecessor to the present-day Rock Island. Service began out of Davenport on August 25, 1855, when Iowa's first passenger train ran the twelve miles to Walcott. Made up of two coaches, borrowed from the Rock Island lines, and five flatcars decked out with chairs and settees protected by temporary railings, the train carried "some five hundred people, including . . . seventy-five ladies and a brass band" to the newly-platted town of Walcott, where an auction of townlots was in progress. The road reached Iowa City at midnight on December 31, 1855, after an exciting race against time to fulfill a contract; on January 3, 1856, a train of six cars ran from Davenport to Iowa City, a distance at that time of sixty-seven miles.

To the south, at Burlington, another race was in progress. The Burlington & Missouri River Rail Road, forerunner of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy in Iowa, was building rapidly westward over the route of the old plank road to Mount Pleasant. On January 1, 1856, "the first locomotive, a wood-burning, brass-trimmed engine with

funnel stack, chuffed out of Burlington a few miles and returned." By April the first passenger train had arrived, in May the track had reached Danville, on June 17 "the cars" ran as far as New London, and in the following month reached Mount Pleasant. Iowa now had two railroads, both pointing westward to Council Bluffs.

In May of 1857 two important events took place in Iowa railroading. The Dubuque & Pacific Railroad, later to become a part of the Illinois Central System, ran from Dubuque to Dyersville. The train, "pulling a strange assortment of passenger and freight cars, filled to capacity with men, women, and children," took three hours to cover the twenty-nine miles between the two towns. Today, the Illinois Central's *Land O'Corn* makes this same trip in forty-one minutes. South of Dubuque, at Clinton, the Chicago, Iowa & Nebraska Railroad, during the same month of May, 1857, ran from Clinton to DeWitt. In 1864 this road became a part of the great North Western System.

Thus, within two years, four of Iowa's major east-west lines (which now operate streamliners across the state) were begun. The last to be built was the Dubuque & Southwestern — later the Milwaukee Road. Operation of passenger trains on this line started in May of 1859, from Dubuque to Sand Springs.

All these east-west lines, begun in the 1850's,

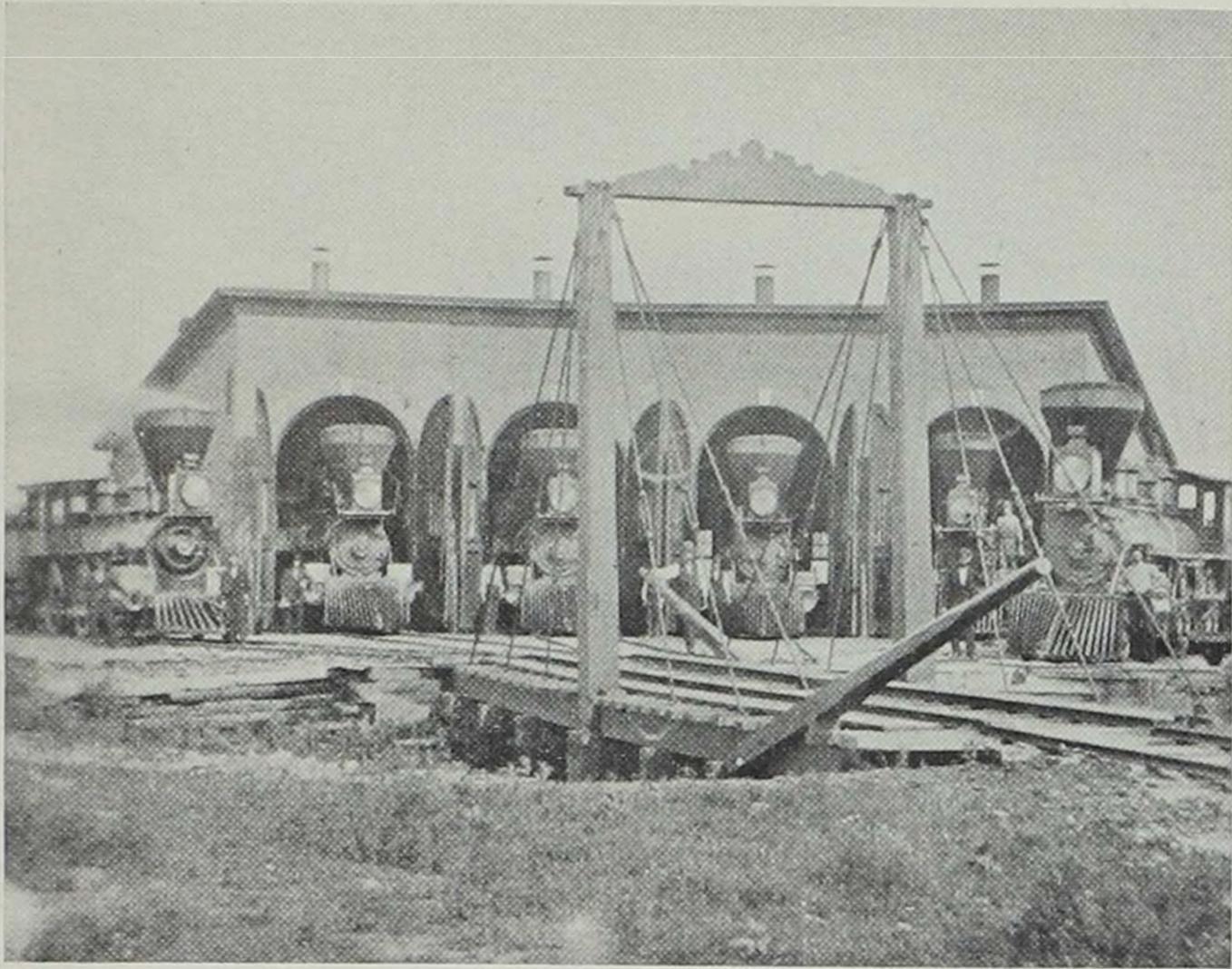
were pushing toward the Missouri River. But depression and war intervened, and it was not until the late 1860's that their objective was reached. Council Bluffs was the main "end of track" for Iowa roads. The North Western won the race, reaching Council Bluffs late in 1867. Two years later, in May of 1869, the Rock Island reached that Missouri River city. On January 1, 1870, the Burlington, building across southern Iowa, arrived at East Plattsburgh; two days later their train ran into Council Bluffs on the tracks of the Council Bluffs & St. Joseph Rail Road. The Illinois Central, across north-central Iowa, arrived at its Missouri River outlet at Sioux City in 1870. Not until the decade of the eighties did the Milwaukee reach the Missouri from the east, with outlets at both Council Bluffs and Sioux City.

Many other lines were built in Iowa during the nineteenth century — east and west lines, north and south lines, and lines which angled in every direction. Gradually these little roads were gathered under the control of a few large railroad corporations. Today the main roads for passenger traffic are still the "big five" of the 1850's — the North Western, the Rock Island, the Burlington, the Milwaukee, and the Illinois Central. In 1887, a sixth line, the Santa Fe, traveled some twenty miles across Lee County on its way from Kansas City to Chicago. Today these six roads have some 7,500 miles of track in Iowa. Streamlined

passenger trains travel on almost one-third of this trackage — a total of 2,218 miles.

In the early years of the twentieth century railroads prospered or suffered, along with the rest of the country. The prolonged business depression in the 1930's almost proved fatal. Passenger and freight traffic declined rapidly and disastrously. Buses, private automobiles, trucks, waterways, pipe lines, and airways — all were contributing to the troubles of the railroads. Buses were cheaper, private automobiles or public airplanes were faster, and trucks were taking large amounts of freight traffic away from the nation's railways. Something had to be done.

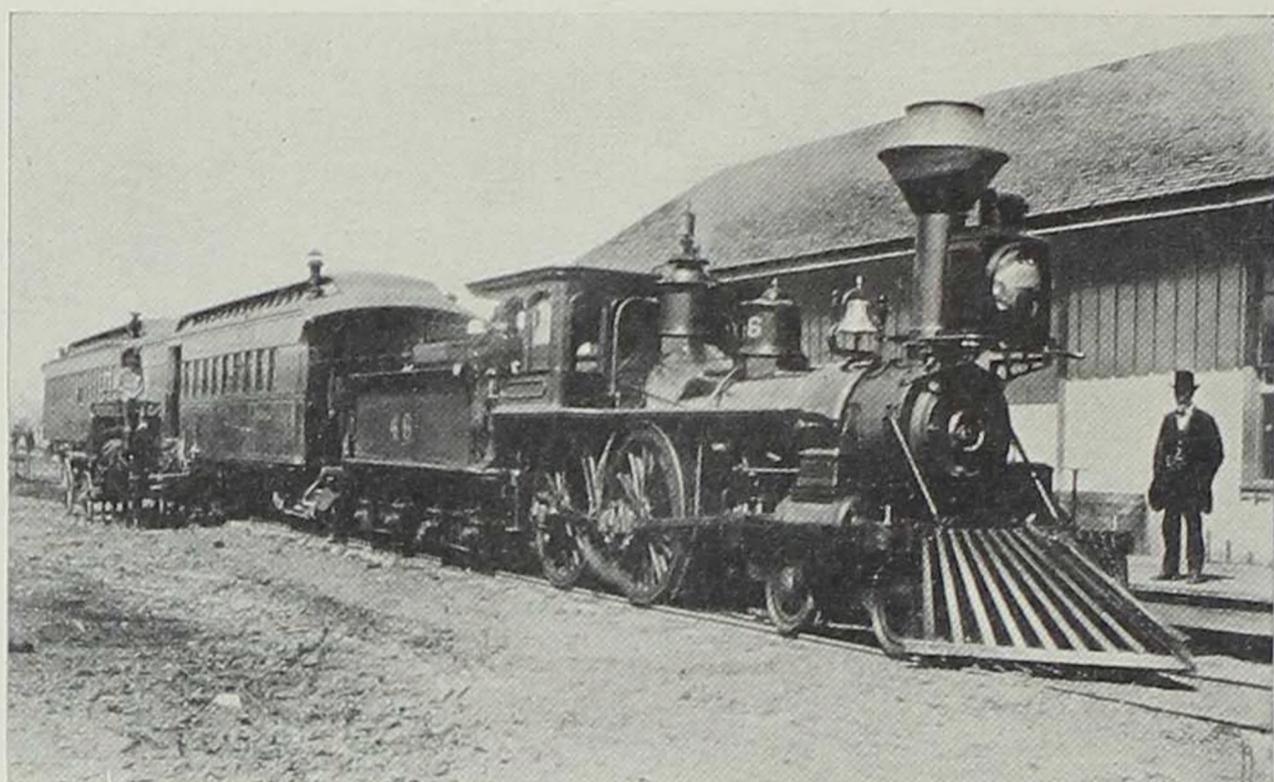
The reduction in passenger fares on Middle Western lines on December 1, 1933, from 3.6c to 2c per mile, helped somewhat, resulting in an increase in passenger traffic but a continued loss in revenue. The North Western lines had reported, in 1932, a decline of 73 per cent in passenger revenue during the period 1920 to 1932, while the Burlington, in 1932, showed a 34.75 per cent decrease. The Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933 and 1934 increased passenger traffic considerably, but the roads were still operating at a loss. Since reduced fares did not solve their financial problems, another expedient was tried — the dieselization program was instituted. If cheaper travel was not the answer, perhaps faster and more luxurious travel would be. The



A North Western Roundhouse in 1881



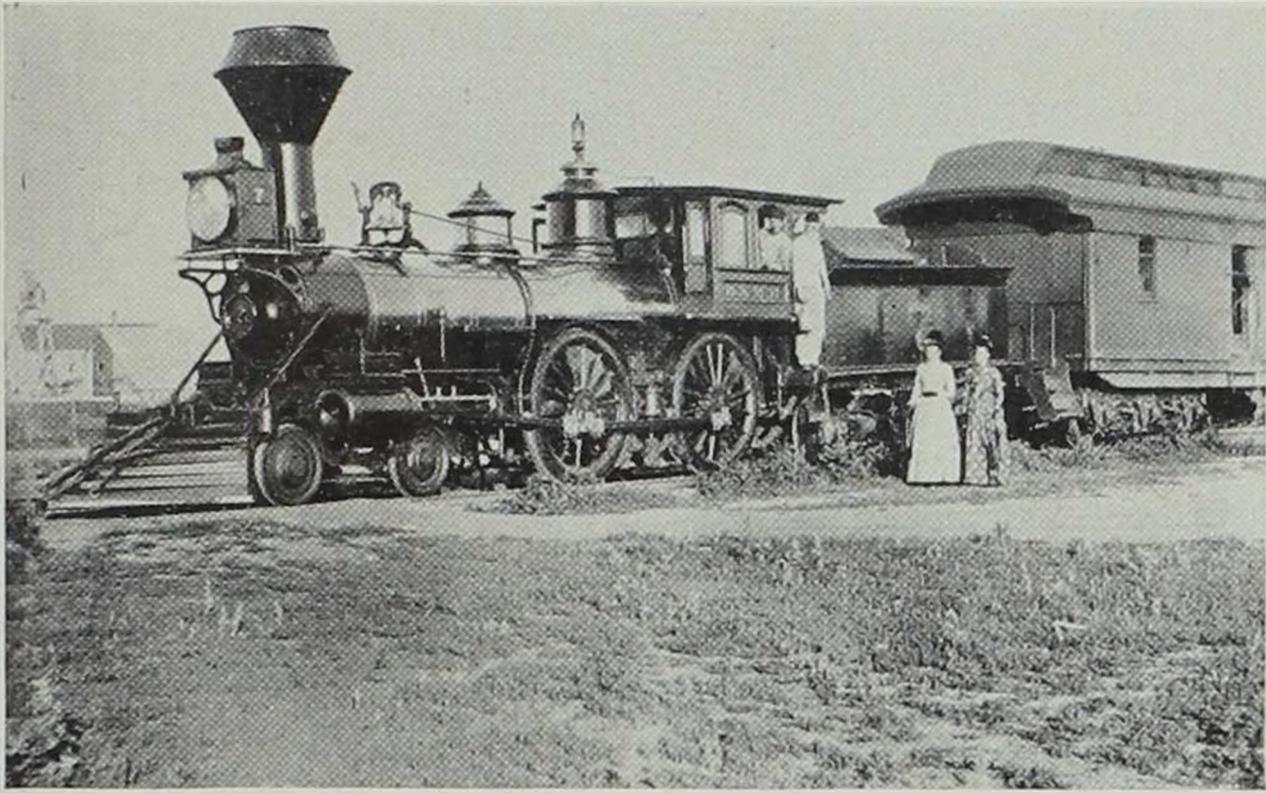
\$10,000,000 worth of North Western streamliners in Chicago yards



Rock Island Train at Indianola in 1881



Rock Island Rocket Crossing Iowa



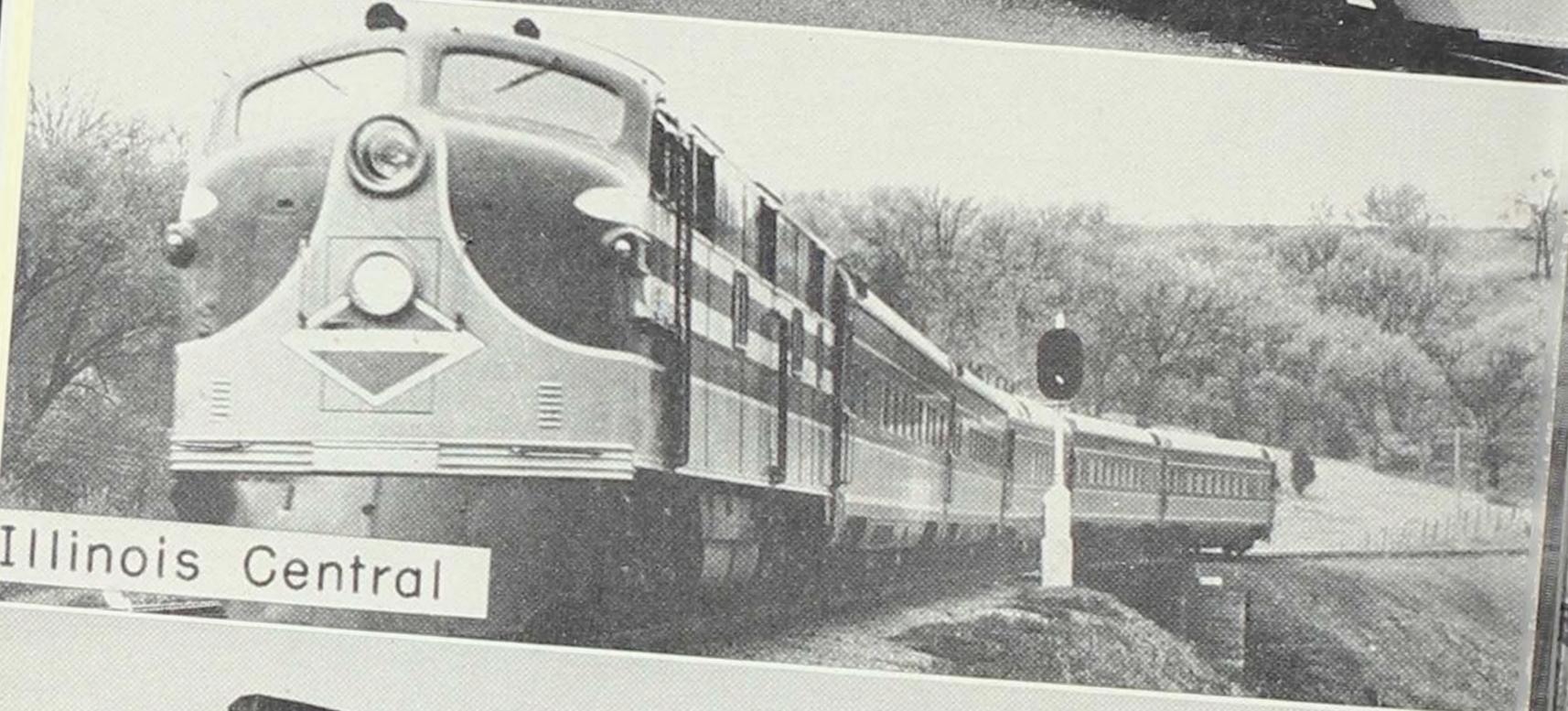
The "Wahoo" of the Burlington & Missouri River lines in 1870



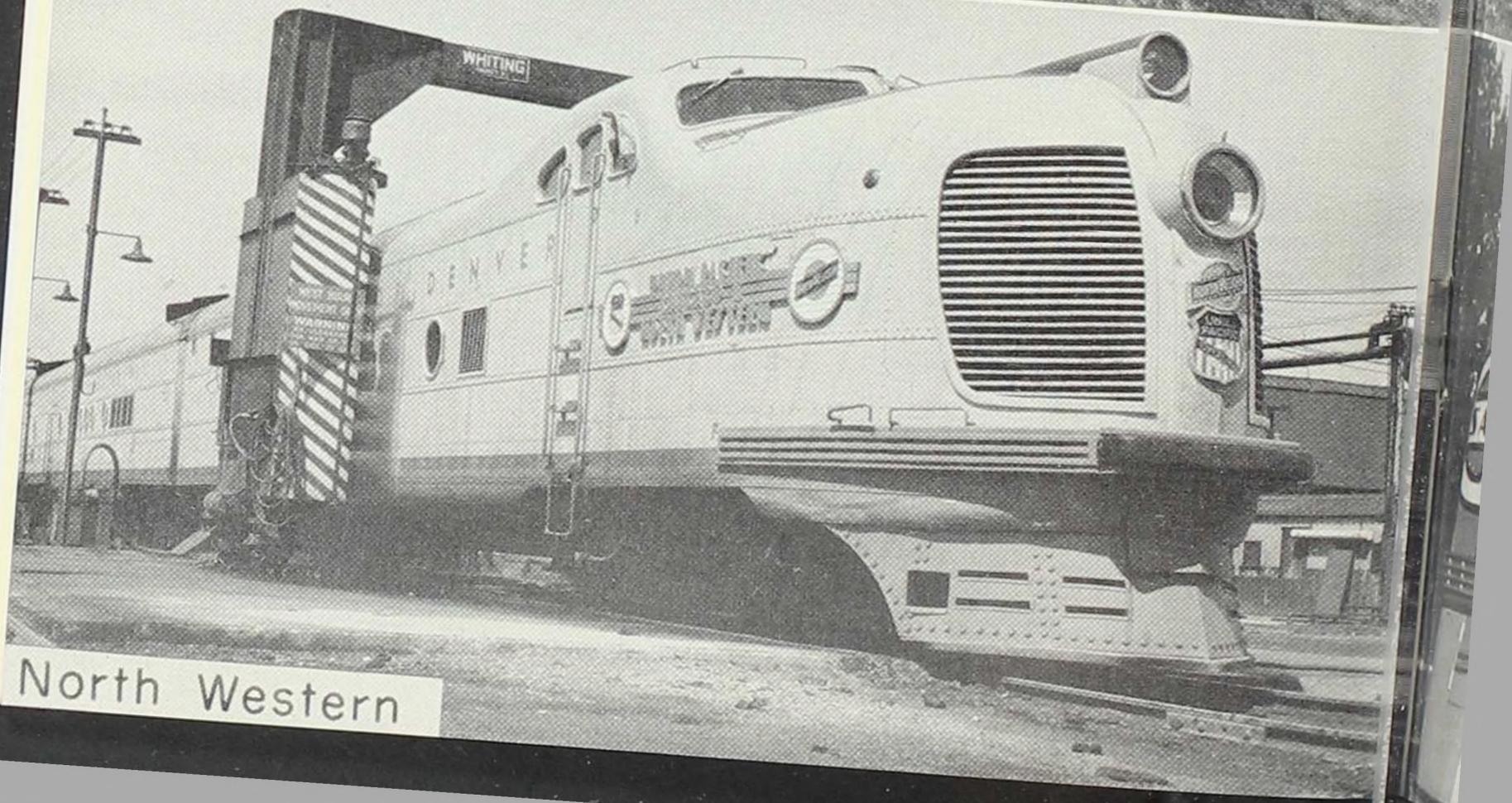
*The Denver Zephyr*



Rock Island



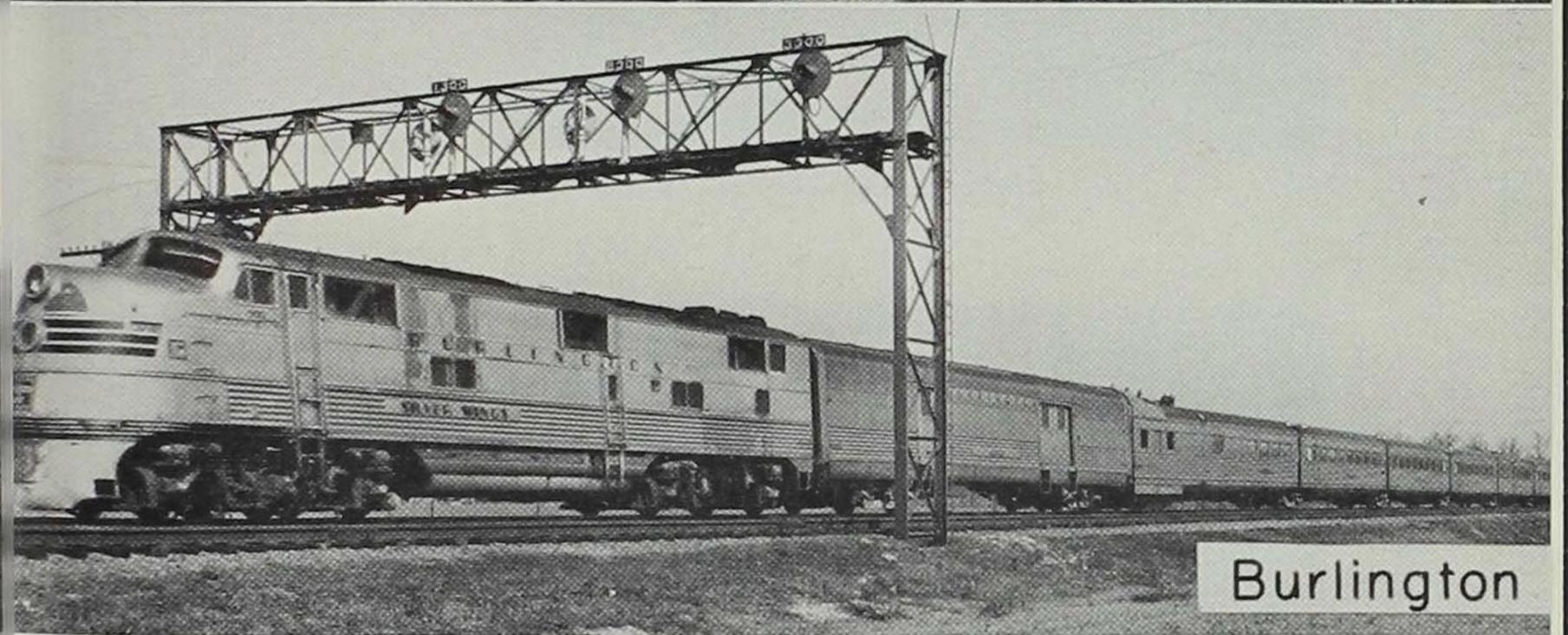
Illinois Central



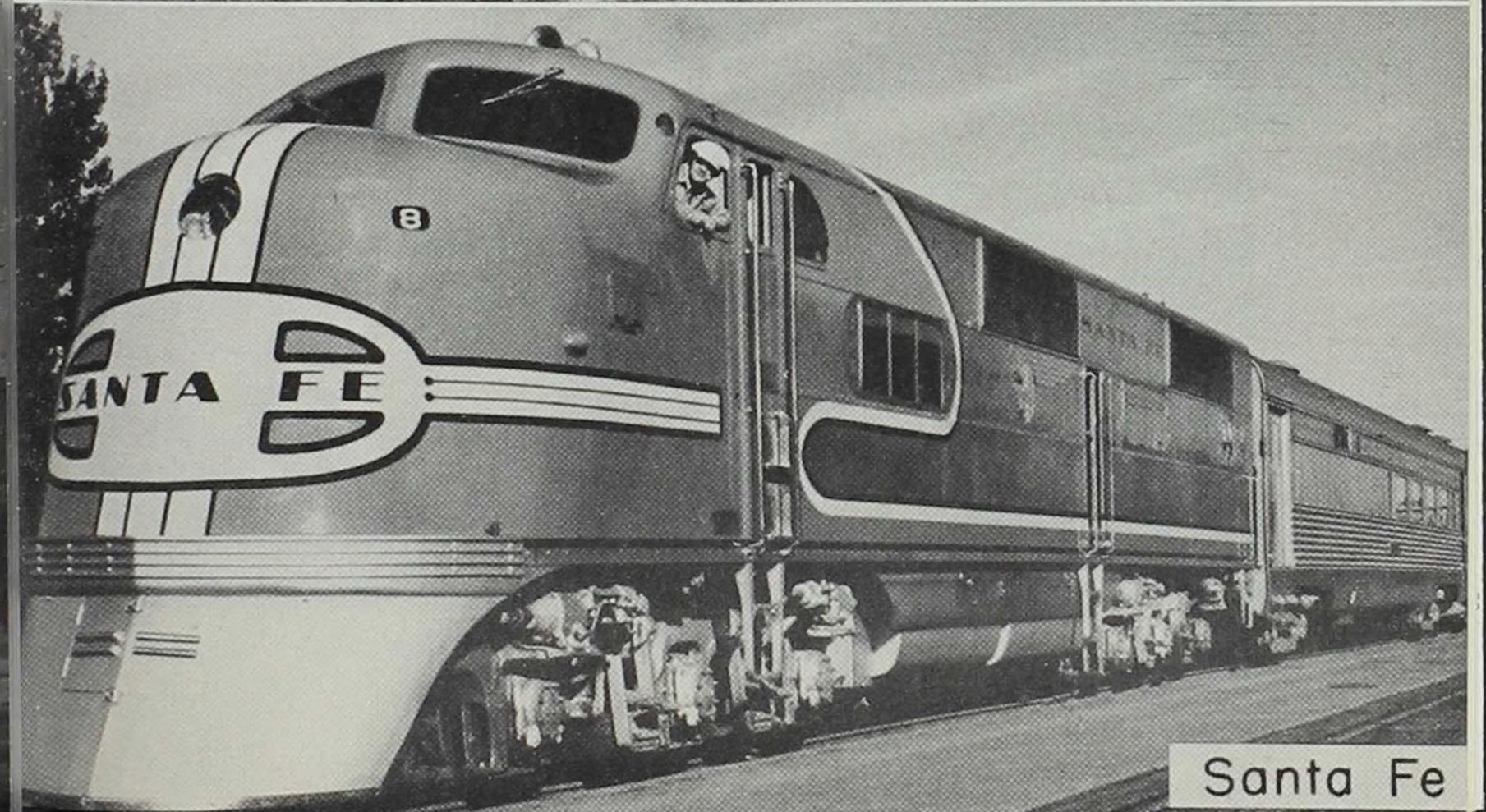
North Western



Milwaukee



Burlington



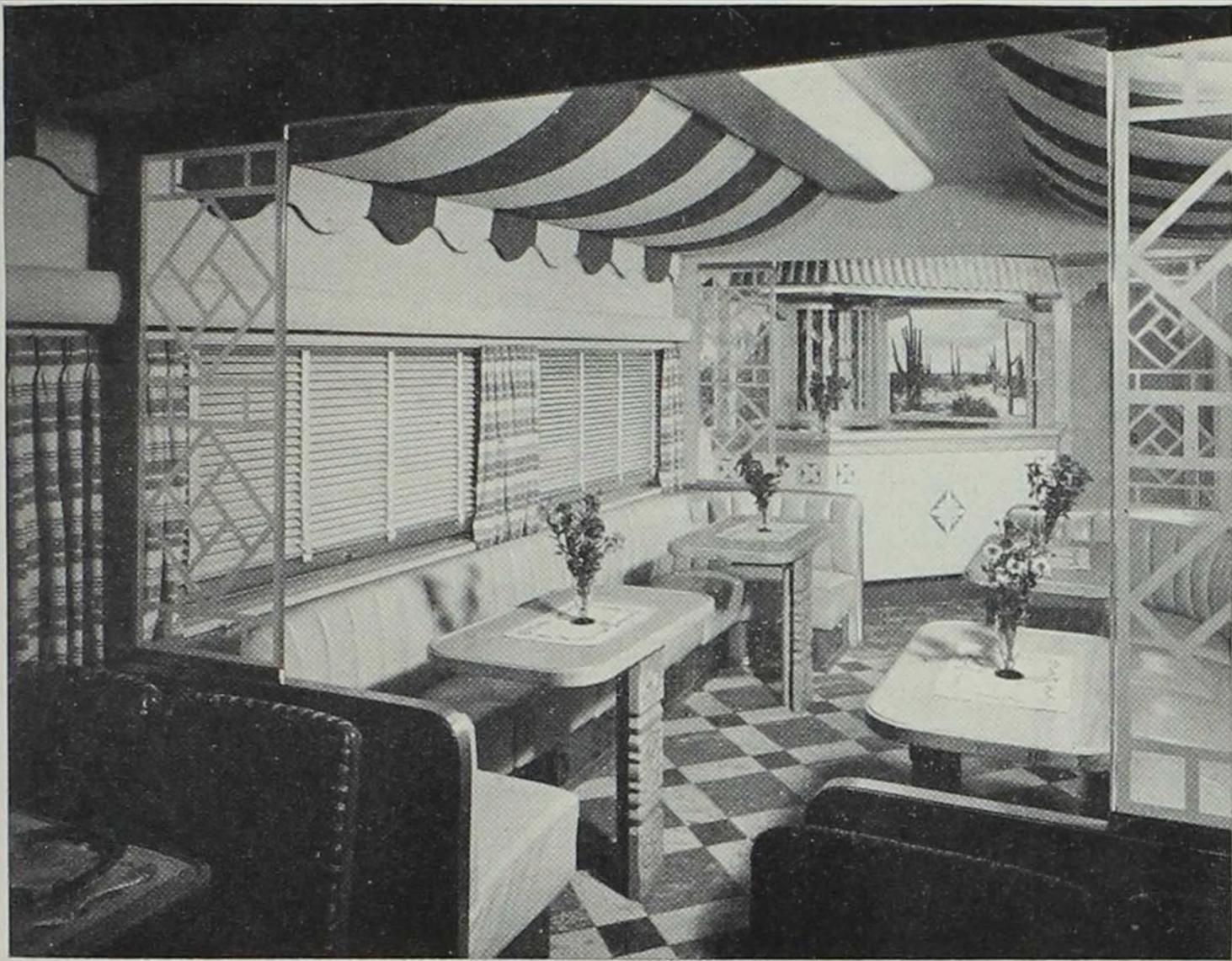
Santa Fe



"Little Nugget" Car — North Western *City of Los Angeles*



Buffet Car — Burlington *California Zephyr*



"Fiesta Car" — Rock Island *Golden State*



Observation Car — North Western *City of San Francisco*



*Burlington California Zephyr*



*The Vista Dome*



*New Burlington Station at Burlington, Iowa*

*Zephyr's* famous nonstop run in 1934 was more than a trial of speed; it signaled the beginning of a solution to the problems besetting the railroads.

In 1935 two Iowa roads began operation of streamliners on regular schedules: the North Western and the Burlington. Almost at once increases in both passenger traffic and revenue were noticeable. The Burlington reported a rise of 12.5 per cent in the number of passengers carried in 1935; while the North Western's increase in passenger revenue was 22 per cent in 1936. Meanwhile, the other roads were planning and building streamliners. Within a decade, six railroads had Diesel passenger trains running in Iowa: the North Western, the Burlington, the Rock Island, the Milwaukee, the Illinois Central, and the Santa Fe.

### *The North Western*

First to run a complete coach-Pullman streamliner in Iowa was the North Western. On June 8, 1935, the *City of Portland* made its pioneer run from Chicago to Portland, Oregon. Entering Iowa at Clinton, the main line of the North Western crosses central Iowa through Cedar Rapids, Tama, Marshalltown, Ames, Boone, Carroll, Denison, and Council Bluffs, a distance of 347 miles.

A local train, making all 54 stops on this line, takes 13 hours and 10 minutes; the *City of Portland*, making but 6 stops, covers the same distance in 5 hours and 45 minutes. Painted a brilliant yel-

low, with scarlet red stripes, the 13-car *Portland* cost \$1,600,000 to build.

Such was the success of the *Portland* that the North Western added three other streamliners to its line in 1936: the *City of San Francisco*, on January 11; the *City of Los Angeles*, on May 18; and the *City of Denver*, on June 18. The first two were 15-car trains, costing respectively \$1,614,000 and \$1,700,000 each. The two *Denvers*, with 13 cars each, cost a total of \$2,029,000.

The *Portland*, the *San Francisco*, and the *Los Angeles* were operated at first only every third day, but by 1947 it was necessary to institute daily service on each. To do this, three new trains were added to each run, making a total of twelve. The *Denver* had been a daily from its inauguration. Thus, today, the North Western's fleet of streamliners in Iowa constitutes 14 trains, at a total cost of about \$24,000,000.

Every evening, between 7:03 and 9:24, four giant Diesels pass through Clinton, heading for the Pacific Coast; every morning, between 7:10 and 9:00, four more race eastward to Chicago. "The Streamliner 'City of Denver' has one of the most spectacular records of any train in history. Each night it departs from both Denver and Chicago on a 1,048 mile run and arrives at its destination in the early morning."

Keeping these luxury trains clean and in good running order is a task accomplished daily in Chi-

cago. When, for instance, the *City of San Francisco* arrives in Chicago at 10:45 in the morning, it is run onto a special streamliner ramp. Four and one-half hours later it comes off this ramp, clean and shining from "the front coupling on the diesel to the tail sign on the observation car." A special machine, using 3,500 gallons of water, has washed the exterior of the train. Inside, an army of workers has cleaned the cars, replenished the linen supplies, loaded the diner with some 145 items of food, and performed a hundred other "house cleaning" tasks. A final touch is a thorough chemical spraying of the entire interior, to remove all trace of tobacco, cooking, or other odors. Gone are the days when a passenger, boarding a train, was met with the old familiar smell of plush seats permeated by years of acrid coal smoke, with the lingering odors of box lunches seemingly always filled with oranges and bananas, and with the inevitable gritty dust seeping in through the window frames. Traveling on the new trains arouses no nostalgia for the old.

#### *The Burlington*

Four months after the *City of Portland* went into service on the North Western lines, the Burlington's *Mark Twain Zephyr* began operating from St. Louis to Burlington. This was a small train, of four coaches, costing \$332,000. Its route in Iowa, up the Mississippi shore through Lee and

Des Moines counties to Burlington, is but 45 miles. Although it was the first north-south streamliner in daily operation in Iowa, it was by no means as spectacular as the *Denver Zephyr*, which began daily runs between Chicago and Denver over the Burlington's main east-west line through Iowa on November 8, 1936. Before that date, however, to pave the way for the coming of the big train, two small streamliners of the type used on the nonstop run were put into service and called the "Advance Denver Zephyrs." They operated from May until November, thus instituting regular Diesel service one month before the *City of Portland* was inaugurated.

The *Denver Zephyr*, a 12-car, coach-Pullman train, cost some \$1,183,000. Like the North Western streamliners, there are actually two *Denvers*, one running each way daily. Leaving Chicago each evening at 5:00, this fast streamliner reaches Denver at 8:30 the following morning. The 287 miles of the Burlington line across Iowa are covered in 4 hours and 57 minutes, the train entering Iowa at Burlington, and making stops only at Ottumwa and Creston before reaching Council Bluffs. In contrast, a local train making all the stops on the main line takes 8 hours and 35 minutes. In 1937 the Burlington showed an increase of 19.9 per cent in passenger revenue, in part attributable to improved business conditions, in part to the popularity of the *Zephyrs*.

In western Iowa a Burlington line runs from Kansas City north along the Missouri River to Council Bluffs. On this route, on April 15, 1940, the *Silver Streak Zephyr*, a 5-car train costing \$600,000, was put into daily operation, cutting some two hours off the regular local service on that line.

World War II prevented further Burlington expansion until 1947, when the *Zephyr 9902*, a 4-car train, was inaugurated on the Hannibal to Burlington route along the Mississippi River, serving Keokuk and Fort Madison in Iowa. This is the same route followed by the *Mark Twain Zephyr*. The Burlington also introduced, on November 16, 1947, the *Nebraska Zephyr*, an 8-car, all-coach train which runs daily from Chicago to Omaha and Lincoln in Nebraska.

In 1945 the Burlington exhibited a new pioneering venture in streamlining — the Vista Dome. First used on the *Zephyrs* operating from Chicago to the Twin Cities in Minnesota, the Vista Dome was later incorporated as standard equipment in the Burlington's largest streamliner, the *California Zephyr*, which was put into service on March 20, 1949. Costing almost \$2,000,000, this 12-car, coach-Pullman train operates daily from Chicago to Denver over the Burlington lines, and from Denver to San Francisco over the lines of the Denver & Rio Grande Western and the Western Pacific. "Basically it is of caboose architecture,

with a dome of double-laminated safety glass. A short stairway leads up to the dome compartment in which some twenty passengers have a 180-degree view of the countryside."

From the 660 horsepower, 3-car *Zephyr* of 1934 to the 4,000 horsepower, 12-car *California Zephyr* of 1949, lie fifteen years of amazing development in passenger travel.

#### *The Rock Island*

The third road to introduce streamlined service to Iowans was the Rock Island. On September 26, 1937, the *Des Moines Rocket* made its first run; two years later, Diesel travel was extended to Denver with the *Rocky Mountain Rocket*, which began operation on November 12, 1939. A third *Rocket*, on the east-west line of the Rock Island through central Iowa, is the *Corn Belt*, introduced on November 23, 1947. This line enters Iowa at Davenport and passes through Iowa City, Des Moines, Atlantic, and Council Bluffs.

The Rock Island differs from the other "streamliner" roads in Iowa in that it has a north-south line crossing the entire state from Northwood to Lineville. On this line, the *Twin Star Rocket* appeared on January 14, 1945. Originating in Minneapolis, the *Twin Star* runs through the American Southwest to Houston, Texas. It makes but three stops in Iowa: at Manly, Mason City, and Des Moines. A fourth line of the Rock Island is the route of the *Zephyr-Rocket* from Burlington

northwest to the state line at Northwood. This train, in combination with the *Mark Twain Zephyr* of the Burlington, gives service from St. Louis to Minneapolis.

Still another Rock Island line in Iowa is the route of the *Golden State* and the *Imperial*, two long-distance trains which were dieselized during this period. These West Coast trains enter Iowa at Davenport and travel southwest, leaving the state at Lineville on the Iowa-Missouri border. The combined mileage of this fleet of streamliners in Iowa is the largest of any of the roads — 897 miles.

#### *The Milwaukee*

Travel on the Milwaukee's *Midwest Hiawatha* began on December 11, 1940. The line enters Iowa at Green Island in Jackson County and passes through Marion, Tama, and Perry. At Manilla in Crawford County the train divides, part going northwest to Sioux City, and to Sioux Falls in South Dakota, the balance southwest to Council Bluffs, and to Omaha in Nebraska. Two *Hiawathas* give daily service on this route which covers 477 miles within the state. It is normally a 9-car train, with a 4,000 horsepower Diesel locomotive. The two trains cost a total of \$1,979,000; the operation cost per year in Iowa is \$863,000.

#### *The Illinois Central*

The *Land O'Corn*, inaugurated in 1947, leaves

Chicago each evening at 5:30, enters Iowa at Dubuque at 9:00, and reaches Waterloo, 93 miles away, at 10:55. Although the Illinois Central's main line across Iowa continues on to Sioux City, Diesel service is available now only to Waterloo. The *Land O'Corn* is a 9-car, all-coach train and offers all the speed and comfort of the traditional streamliner.

### *The Santa Fe*

The route of the famous *Chief* and *Super Chief* crosses Iowa in Lee County, and gives streamliner service through the Southwest to the residents of Fort Madison. The *Chiefs* enter Iowa over the Des Moines River near Vincennes, angle northeast to Fort Madison, cross the Mississippi there, and continue on their way to Chicago, the focal point of all of Iowa's railroads.

Such is the story, to date, of streamliners in Iowa. Because of her geographical position, Iowa is served by almost all of the famous new trains operating west of the Mississippi. Daily, from Dubuque south to Burlington, these spectacular "speed kings of the rails" cross the Mississippi from Chicago and flash across some three hundred miles of track in four or five hours — a distance which, but a hundred years ago, took the covered wagons and plodding oxen of the pioneers many weeks.