

Branch Line Construction

There was no marking time, once the dynamic Perkins was given free hand. When the B&M pushed westward beyond the Missouri River, Perkins went with it, soon becoming its vice president. The line was called the Burlington & Missouri River Rail Road Company in Nebraska, to distinguish it from its Iowa counterpart. It reached Kearney, a point on the Union Pacific, in 1872.

One reason for the westward course was that the B&M had expected, and hoped, Plattsmouth, Nebraska, would be the termination of the Union Pacific. Instead, the UP decided on Council Bluffs. Not to be daunted, the B&M continued its southern route as a short cut to Kearney.

From the early 1870's, and for nearly twenty years thereafter, the Missouri River was crossed by car ferry, the first transfer boat being the *Vice President*, built in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Later a railroad bridge replaced the ferry, and, while Omaha-Council Bluffs became the favored passenger gateway, the Plattsmouth route loomed increasingly important in expediting freight.

Westward expansion or not, Charles Perkins had a warm spot in his heart for Burlington. Although he spent most of the time in Nebraska, his

home and his family remained in Burlington, and his employers allowed him to keep his headquarters there. Moreover, he had a deep affection for the B&M and stood by Iowa and the railroad when other officials looked elsewhere. James F. Joy, for example, was a partisan of the Hannibal & St. Joseph, another "Boston Group" railroad, which crossed northern Missouri. Then, too, there was intense competition from the other east-west railroads in Iowa. And, finally, there was the sinister hand of Jay Gould!

Because of the above circumstances the B&M's branch line building had no hard and fast pattern. One feeder might be constructed to fill an economic need, another to tap new territory, a third to fend off competition, or a fourth to acquire an independent railroad to keep a rival from gobbling it up first. Expansion was afoot, unbridled competition reigned, and there were no holds barred.

The first branch line left the main stem at Red Oak and went in a southwesterly direction to Hamburg, on the Missouri River. Completed in 1870, it measured 39 miles. Three more feeders, all to the south, were completed by 1872. One veered southwest from Creston to Hopkins, Missouri, just over the state line. At the latter terminal it connected with a railroad which had been built up from Amazonia, Missouri, also on the "Big Muddy." Then there was a stub line from Villisca to Clarinda, and a much longer mid-Iowa branch

linking two county seats—Chariton and Leon.

By the end of 1872 the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad leased the B&M, and the Hawkeye road became an integral part of the larger system. The parent company now continued expanding with renewed zeal. Before the decade was over it had flung out a half dozen more feeders. Perhaps the most important branch was the northwesterly line from Albia to the state capital. Governor Samuel Merrill was president of one of the component companies of the line. This 68-mile property not only put the Burlington directly into the Rock Island preserves in Des Moines, but it also paralleled the latter's Des Moines Valley road. We have seen that the "Valley" had been a thorn in the side of the B&M—halting progress across Iowa in the late 1850's. Now the thorn changed hands—the Burlington did the pricking.

The Burlington's "branching out" of component roads from 1870 to 1880 is listed below. The towns connected, the mileage, and the years of initial construction and completion are indicated:

Albia, Knoxville & Des Moines RR

Albia-Knoxville, 32 mi.; 1871-1875.

Brownville and Nodaway Valley Ry.

Clarinda Jct. (Villisca)-Burlington Jct., Mo.,
35 mi.; 1872-1879.

Burlington & Missouri RR

Chariton-Leon, 36 mi.; 1871-1872.

Chariton, Des Moines and Southern RR

Chariton-Indianola, 33 mi.; 1878-1879.

Creston and Northern RR

Creston-Fontanelle, 27 mi.; 1878-1879.

Creston Branch of the Burlington & Missouri River RR

Creston to Iowa state line near Hopkins, Mo.,
42 mi.; 1871-1872.

Des Moines & Knoxville Ry.

Knoxville-Des Moines, 35 mi.; 1879-1880.

Hastings and Avoca RR

Hastings-Carson, 15 mi.; 1880.

Leon, Mount Ayr and Southwestern RR

Leon-Grant City, Mo., 78 mi.; 1879-1880.

Nebraska City, Sidney and North Eastern Ry.

Hastings-Sidney, 21 mi.; 1878.

Red Oak & Atlantic RR

Red Oak-Griswold, 18 mi.; 1879-1880.

Considerable credit for the aggressive expansion of the "Q" must go to Perkins, who became vice president in 1876. To quote Richard Overton, distinguished Burlington Railroad historian: "From the time that Charles Elliott Perkins became vice president of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy . . . until he resigned as president of the system in 1901, he *was* the Burlington."

Another facet of the Burlington's growth required getting control of roads already built. In western Iowa the Council Bluffs & St. Joseph Rail Road, originally incorporated in 1858, had undergone little construction until after the Civil War. In 1867, however, this road had a line following the east bank of the Missouri River from Council Bluffs to the Missouri border. At that point it

linked hands with affiliated roads continuing south to St. Joseph and Kansas City. In 1870 these roads were consolidated to form the Kansas City, St. Joseph & Council Bluffs Railroad.

The Boston Group had an interest in the above property which, at the end of the decade, had turned into virtual control. It will be recalled, the B&M's pioneer line had used the road from Pacific Junction to Council Bluffs. In other hands this Council Bluffs-Kansas City line could retard the Burlington's growth by severe competition.

In eastern Iowa two roads came into the Burlington's domain. Both terminated in Keokuk. The Iowa portion of the St. Louis, Keokuk & Northwestern, which was completed in 1881, stretched some 48 tenuous miles to Mount Pleasant on the main line of the "Q." It had a checkered and precarious history, beginning life as the Iowa Northern Central chartered in 1866.

The other road, the Keokuk & St. Paul, never went beyond Burlington, a distance of 42 miles. Completed in 1869, it formed a link in an important through route from St. Louis to the Twin Cities. It, too, had a hectic past, going back to the high-sounding Fort Madison, West Point, Keosauqua & Bloomfield Rail Road in 1853. John Edgar Thomson, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, had an interest in the company. This line, along with the other Keokuk road, passed on to Burlington control upon completion.

An interesting sidelight during this decade was joint control, with the Rock Island, of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern in 1879. Going from Burlington to Albert Lea, Minnesota, it was part of the through line from St. Louis to St. Paul mentioned above. The Burlington later sold its interest in the BCR&N to the Rock Island.

Brief mention should be made of the so-called River Roads episode culminating in more unified Burlington management. The trouble arose from questionable construction contracts and irregular financing of two lines along the Mississippi River. Both were based in Dubuque. One went north to the Minnesota line; the other south to Clinton. They both were built by Joy and his associates with the financial support of the Burlington. The outcome was a disastrous receivership of the River Roads in 1875. Subsequently reorganized, they were bought by the Milwaukee Road in 1880.

Meanwhile, Joy had been dropped from the Burlington's directorate. Forbes, determined to tighten the reins of management, headed the road for a three-year period. After that he had a man selected for the job, and that man was Perkins.

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