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Stickney's Railroad

"An institution," said Emerson, "is the lengthened shadow of one man." If Emerson had lived in the Midwest around the turn of the century he might have had the Chicago Great Western Railway in mind as the institution and A. B. Stickney as the man. It was Stickney who founded, built, and headed that 1,500-mile railroad serving Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, and, to a very limited extent, Kansas and Nebraska. Practically no mileage has been added since Stickney's death, nor have there been abandonments of any consequence. Other men have since taken over, and they have done — and are doing — a good job. If it had not been for the courage, resourcefulness, and determination of a New England schoolteacher, lawyer, and entrepreneur, however, there would not have been any jobs for them — at least not on the CGW. The story of the Great Western then is largely the story of Alpheus Beede Stickney.

Born in Wilton, Maine, June 27, 1840, Stickney remained in New England long enough to get an

education and to spend his late teens in studying law and teaching school. Later admitted to the bar, he found his legal training of considerable aid in subsequent railroad work. In 1861 he came west to Stillwater, Minnesota, where he taught school and later hung out his shingle. At the end of the sixties, sensing greater opportunities in the state capital, he moved to St. Paul, gave up his law practice, and became actively engaged in promoting, constructing, and operating railways. He served as vice-president, general manager, and chief counsel of the St. Paul, Stillwater & Taylors Falls Railroad (now the Omaha Road) and also as superintendent of construction of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba, which later became the Great Northern. In 1880 he served with the Canadian Pacific, supervising several hundred miles of line. The following year he returned to railroad building in the United States.

With this varied background, Stickney decided to build his own railroad. He acquired the charter of the Minnesota & Northwestern Railroad. Associated with Stickney in this enterprise were Maurice Auerbach, W. R. Merriam, Wm. Dawson, R. A. Smith, Crawford Livingston, W. R. Marshall, and Ansel Oppenheim of St. Paul; Wm. L. Boyle, of Winnipeg, Canada; and C. W. Benson, K. D. Dunlop, and C. F. Benson of Sibley, Iowa. The company, which had been chartered on March 4, 1854, had never laid a yard of track.

The energetic Stickney was quick to change this. Construction started in September, 1884, and by October of the following year the road was in operation from St. Paul southward to Lyle, on the Minnesota-Iowa border, 109 miles. Late in 1885 he extended the road to Manly Junction, in Worth County, Iowa, on the Iowa Central. Meanwhile the ex-schoolteacher had his sights set on Chicago.

From Hayfield, Minnesota, a few miles north of Lyle, a prong of the road pushed southeast to Dubuque, Iowa, which it reached on December 1, 1886. The Iowa section completed, the company went forward with construction in Illinois. This particular segment, however, was built from east to west because of hilly terrain in the vicinity of Winston, Illinois, twenty miles east of Dubuque. At that point a long tunnel had to be bored. The line from Forest Park (just outside of Chicago) to South Freeport was railed in 1887. Trains, however, did not run from the latter point westward through the 2,493-foot Winston Tunnel to Aiken, Illinois, until the following year. Between Aiken and Dubuque running rights were had over the Burlington and the Illinois Central railroads; from Forest Park to Grand Central Station in downtown Chicago, Stickney ran his trains over what is now the Baltimore & Ohio Chicago Terminal Railroad. Thus the dream of a new Twin Cities-Chicago route became an actuality.

Obviously the name Minnesota & Northwestern

was misleading to many people. Stickney was fully aware of this, so he and his associates incorporated the Chicago, St. Paul & Kansas City Railway in Iowa on June 1, 1886, to further his expansion program. The new company purchased the old Wisconsin, Iowa & Nebraska Railway, extending from Waterloo to Des Moines with a branch from Cedar Falls Junction to Cedar Falls. Because of its cater-cornered route in Iowa the WI&N was known as "The Old Diagonal"; it was incorporated under the laws of Iowa on March 17, 1882. The Chicago, St. Paul & Kansas City bought all the properties of the Minnesota & Northwestern in 1887.

Now the Stickney-envisioned system struck out for Kansas City. It spanned the gap between Waterloo and Oelwein, Iowa (the latter town being on the Minnesota & Northwestern), in 1887. It built from Des Moines to St. Joseph, Missouri, reaching "St. Joe" by the end of 1888. As a final step, it leased the Leavenworth & St. Joseph Railway in 1891. With certain trackage rights over other roads in Missouri, it ran into the heart of Kansas City, thus serving all the places in its name: Chicago, St. Paul, and Kansas City.

From the time that its rails first extended south from St. Paul, the Stickney road did a brisk cattle business. It was A. B. Stickney and his associates who in 1882 started what is now the famous St. Paul Union Stockyards. As the cattle and pack-

ing center grew, the railroad operated many stock trains from South St. Paul to Chicago. Contemporary accounts say that cowboy attendants on these trains sat atop the cars and whiled away the time shooting at the glass insulators on telegraph poles. They kept linemen busy repairing the damage.

During Stickney's regime the railroad always had its headquarters in St. Paul; until 1899 its shops were located at South Park, near the capital city. Among the executives of the road were Ansel Oppenheim and Arnold Kalman, well-known St. Paul businessmen and financiers. Later other prominent St. Paulites, such as Frank B. Kellogg and C. O. Kalman, were active in the affairs of the company. Samuel C. Stickney, a son of President Stickney, was for many years general manager and subsequently became vice-president.

Never a wealthy road, the Stickney enterprise needed all the managerial ingenuity its officers could muster to keep it on the black side of the ledger. Beset on all sides by well-entrenched trunk lines linking the Twin Cities with Chicago, the newcomer in this territory met intense and often cutthroat competition. Stickney had to be ever on the alert to capture and hold traffic. For a time in the late eighties he headed the Iowa Central Railway as a means to shunt more traffic to his road at Manly, Iowa. He even put on through sleeping car service between the Twin Cities and

Columbus, Ohio — a bizarre route over the roads he headed to Peoria, Illinois, and thence on the Big Four to the Buckeye capital.

When it came to courage, audacity, and original thinking it was hard to beat A. B. Stickney. The red-headed and red-bearded railroader was a non-conformist of the first water. He dared to sympathize with the Grangers when all other railroad presidents were dead set against restrictive legislation affecting rates.

Not content with running his railroad — a job in itself — Stickney found time to write a book called *The Railway Problem* (1891) in which he sharply criticized railroad management. Stickney foresaw the Hepburn Act and state and federal legislation which would prohibit all forms of discrimination. Time has vindicated his judgment. It may be added that Stickney was not necessarily for lower rates, but he was most ardently for *one rate for all shippers for a specific commodity between two given points*. He felt the Granger legislation was enacted because of rate-cutting, rebating, and other forms of discrimination.

Stickney cut rates along with his competitors. He had to, as long as other carriers posted one tariff and then found ways to lower the rates for favored shippers. Today this is an academic subject, but in the nineties it was very real. Nor was it entirely the railroad managers' fault. They were frequently dominated by large shippers, and they

had to grant a rebate. Sometimes it meant a special rate or a special master in receivership. And the specter of receivership on the Stickney system was always imminent.

In fact, the Chicago, St. Paul & Kansas City became virtually insolvent. Stickney, however, avoided receivership by reorganizing the road in 1892 as the Chicago Great Western Railway — a new company with no mortgage indebtedness. He prevailed upon the shareholders to exchange bonds of the old road for stock of the new. A novel feature of the reorganization was the issuance of debenture stock along with three other kinds of stock. Since most of the shareholders were English, they agreed to the proposition of having debenture stock in lieu of bonds. Thus the Chicago Great Western was the only American trunk line at that time without mortgage indebtedness. When the panic of 1893 came, the CGW rode the storm.

A few years earlier the railroad offered a prize for the best emblem in a contest open to ticket agents in the United States. R. G. Thompson, a Wabash employee at Fort Wayne, Indiana, won the award by designing a maple leaf on which the veins showed the lines of the railway. During the remainder of Stickney's tenure the CGW's timetables and advertising literature featured the Maple Leaf as the road's colophon.

In 1899 the CGW purchased stock control of the Wisconsin, Minnesota & Pacific, a road which

never operated in the Badger State and fell short of the Pacific by over 1,500 miles. It had a curious history, being operated in two parts: one from Red Wing on the Mississippi westward to Mankato on the Minnesota River; the other, or western end, from Morton, Minnesota, to Watertown, South Dakota. It was the eastern segment, which crossed Stickney's north-south line at Randolph, of which the CGW had control and, curiously enough, which A. B. Stickney helped build in the early eighties. Prior to CGW interest the road had been controlled by the Rock Island and operated by the Minneapolis & St. Louis. In 1900 an up-and-coming young lawyer by the name of Frank B. Kellogg was elected president of the eastern part of the WM&P. He later became world-famous as author of the Kellogg Pact to outlaw war. The Great Western subsequently operated the WM&P as part of its system.

No sooner had the Great Western controlled the WM&P than the latter company acquired other roads. The Duluth, Red Wing & Southern, extending from Red Wing south to Zumbrota, Minnesota, 25 miles, was purchased on July 3, 1901; on September 10 of the same year the Winona & Western came into the fold. The W&W road operated a 113-mile line from Winona, Minnesota, to Osage, in Mitchell County, Iowa. It also had a seven-mile branch from Simpson to Rochester, Minnesota. In 1903 the 26-mile gap

between Rochester and Zumbrota was spanned, giving the Great Western access to Rochester from both the north and south over its own rails.

All this time it was the driving force of Stickney which brought about these consolidations. He remained president of the Great Western and its predecessor companies except for the period from 1890 to 1894, when he was chairman of the board. During the interim John M. Egan, formerly general manager of the Stickney system, was president. Egan, onetime general superintendent of the Canadian Pacific's Western Division, and a civil engineer for several roads in America, had almost as varied a career as Stickney. In later years Egan headed the Central of Georgia.

This, roughly, is the history of the Chicago Great Western up to the twentieth century. Its subsequent expansion was chiefly in Iowa.

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