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PALIMPSEST
JANUARY 1922
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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

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The M. and M. Railroad

Long years before actual railroad construction began in Iowa the people of the State talked and dreamed of a day when their villages would be bound together by steel pathways for the iron horse. As early as 1837 John Plumbe, Jr., of Dubuque, was urging the practicability of a transcontinental railroad; in the forties while rails were being laid in the Eastern States, the topic of steam transportation in Iowa was one of frequent discussion in the villages west of the Mississippi River; but it remained for the decade of the fifties to bring the fruition of all these hopes.

The laws of Iowa for 1850 are filled with acts "to grant the right of way." These grants were made to such companies as the Lyons Iowa Central Rail Road Company, the Davenport and Iowa City Rail Road Company, the Camanche and Council Bluffs Rail Road Company, the Iowa Western Rail Road Company, the Dubuque and Keokuk Rail Road Com-

pany, North, the Junction Rail Road Company, and the Dubuque and Keokuk Rail Road Company, South. The organization of these companies and the granting of right of way clearly show the crystallizing of interest among the people. Many of the companies, however, proved to be only dreams, or they merited the description of the Philadelphia, Fort Wayne and Platte Valley Air Line road: "It was an 'air line'—hot air. It so exhausted the corporation to write the whole name, no energy or breath was left to build the road."

But the people were not to be discouraged, nor were the officials. Governor Stephen Hempstead in his message to the General Assembly in 1852 suggested that "In consequence of the failure of Congress, at its last session, to make a donation of land for the construction of railroads in this State, it would seem to be advisable to again urge this subject upon their consideration". Mr. Lyman Dillon in December of that year introduced into the House "A joint memorial to the Congress of the United States, asking a grant of land to aid in the construction of a railroad from the termination of the Illinois Central Railroad on the Mississippi river at Dubuque, to a point on the Missouri river, at or near Kanessville, in the county of Pottawattamie, by the way of Fort Desmoines." And a few days later the Senate passed a "memorial and joint resolution on the subject of a grant of land to aid in the construction of a railroad from Davenport via Muscatine to the Council Bluffs".

The people of Iowa had become determined to have a railroad, and early in January, 1853, a company was organized which was to make the first attempt in railroad work which resulted in any permanent structure. This pioneer organization, the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company, had as members such men as John B. Jarvis, Joseph E. Sheffield, Henry Farnam, John M. Wilson, N. B. Judd, Ebenezer Cook, James Grant, John P. Cook and Hiram Price. The company, as organized under the general laws of Iowa, had a capital stock of six million dollars, of shares of one hundred dollars each; and the corporation was to continue for a period of fifty years. At the first election, which was held in May, 1853, John A. Dix of New York was elected President; Ebenezer Cook, Vice President; John E. Henry, Secretary; A. C. Flagg, Treasurer; and Ebenezer Cook, Assistant Treasurer.

The purpose of the company was to construct lines of railroad across the State, embracing three divisions. The main division was to extend from Davenport westward across the State as a projection of the Chicago and Rock Island then terminating at Rock Island, Illinois. The *Washington Press* remarked: "This road . . . will be to Iowa something what the Illinois Central is to Illinois, but built, as a matter of course, under less favorable auspices to its projectors." It was suggested that the main line from Davenport pass through one corner of Muscatine into Cedar County

to Iowa City — a distance of fifty-five miles, and from here still westward through Iowa, Poweshiek, and Jasper counties to Fort Des Moines on the river of that name. From Fort Des Moines it was to pass through the south end of Dallas, and the north end of Adair, Cass, and Pottawattamie counties, ending perhaps at the "Bluff City" a few miles below and two miles back from the river, directly opposite Omaha City in Nebraska. The distance from Iowa City to Fort Des Moines to be covered by this railroad was one hundred and twenty miles, from Fort Des Moines to Council Bluffs one hundred and thirty-six — making the total from Rock Island to Council Bluffs three hundred and eleven miles, and the cost was estimated at nine million dollars.

In May of 1853 William Penn Clarke and Le Grand Byington were sent from Iowa City to a meeting of the proposed Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company. They were instructed to subscribe stock in the company, if called upon, payable in bonds of the city to be issued by the City Council, and in case a company was formed, to cast a vote in the name of the city provided Iowa City was made a point on the road.

There was much opposition to the plan from the people of Muscatine who were endeavoring to secure a road from Davenport to Muscatine and from thence west to Oskaloosa. Feeling over the proposal ran high and is well expressed in a cartoon of the time drawn by George Yewell and at present in

possession of the State Historical Society of Iowa. It is entitled the "Muscatine Opposition" and pictures the Muscatine element astride a bull which is charging the oncoming locomotive. One of the riders is playing a "railroad overture" upon a flute-like instrument while the other proclaims: "If we fail in this, we declare everlasting hostility towards Iowa City and all therein." A compromise was finally effected whereby a branch known as the Muscatine and Oskaloosa Division was to extend from Wilton Junction (twenty-six miles from Davenport), through Muscatine on the Mississippi thirty miles below Davenport and then westwardly or southwestwardly by way of Oskaloosa to the Missouri River, to the State line of Missouri, or to both. A third branch was to extend from Muscatine to Cedar Rapids and from thence northwestwardly to Minnesota.

On the first of September in 1853, ground was broken for the building of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad. This event is well described in Barrows's *History of Scott County, Iowa*:

It was a day full of interest to the people of Davenport. Many of the old citizens, who had for years been living on in hope and confidence, now began to feel all their most sanguine wishes gratified. The Rock Island and Chicago Road was near completion, and the first locomotive was soon expected to stand upon the banks of the Mississippi river, sending its shrill whistle across the mighty stream, and longing for its westward flight across the prairies of

Iowa. The occasion was one of universal rejoicing. A great and important object had been accomplished for our city, our county and our State. As Mr. Le Claire, who was selected to perform the ceremony of removing the first ground, came forward, pulling off his coat and taking the wheel-barrow and spade, he was greeted by a most tremendous and hearty cheer.

The year 1854 meant perhaps even more than any previous year to the people of Iowa. The stage had been set and in this year great events happened. A railroad through Iowa without easy and definite connection with the roads in Illinois would be an unpardonable blunder. Realizing this the people of Iowa had welcomed the act of January 17, 1853, entitled, "An Act to incorporate a Bridge Company by the title therein named". The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company immediately entered into an agreement with this bridge company for the purpose of connecting the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad at Rock Island, Illinois, with the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad at Davenport, Iowa. Now in the spring of 1854 the people of Iowa were to receive some visible evidence of the previous year's activities. The work of location and construction was begun in earnest under Henry Farnam as Chief Engineer and John B. Jarvis as Consulting Engineer and in the early fall the corner stone of the first pier was laid in the presence of a large number of citizens. The bridge was one thousand five hundred and eighty feet long and thirty feet high across

the Mississippi River from the west bank to the Island, and four hundred and fifty feet long across the slough from the Island to the Illinois shore. The entire cost of both bridges and the railroad connecting them across the Island was approximately four hundred thousand dollars.

This led the way for other important events. During the fall of 1853 and the following winter Peter A. Dey, with the assistance of Grenville M. Dodge, had surveyed a line across the State from Davenport to Council Bluffs along the line suggested. Their plan was in the main adopted for use in final construction. On the twenty-second of February, 1854, the long contemplated railroad from Chicago to Rock Island was completed and in May came another event—the first rail was laid in Iowa, at or near the high water mark on the bank of the Mississippi, in the city of Davenport.

When the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad line was thus located, the surrounding land became valuable and was sought after with a perfect mania. A note of ridicule, or of jealousy, is found once in a while in this connection. A Louisa County historian quotes from a Wapello newspaper of 1854 the following bit of satire:

Hurrah for the Muscatine and Oskaloosa Railroad! From a gentleman who has just returned from Muscatine we learn that work has actually commenced upon that much talked of road. He states that one boss and two hands are actually engaged upon the work. Should they prove to be

industrious and energetic it is confidently expected that the road will reach the Iowa River some time during the present century.

Even the laying of the track, however, was not to conclude the happenings of this memorable year. In July, 1854, that which had previously been thought impossible happened: the first locomotive in Iowa landed at Davenport. It was promptly called the Antoine Le Claire by the enthusiastic citizens.

The next two years were busy ones for the people of Iowa but their labors were well repaid. As the year 1855 drew to a close the railroad was rapidly approaching Iowa City. The people became greatly interested and decided that the track should be complete to the depot grounds before the first of January. Hard labor, long hours, and extra help did much toward accomplishing their purpose but the evening of December thirty-first arrived and the track was still some distance from the depot grounds. Then it was that the citizens working by the light of lanterns and bonfires, regardless of the cold, combined their efforts and reached their goal. At midnight the track was completed so that "the year 1856 and the first train came in on the same day." A formal celebration took place two days later.

While the people of Iowa City were looking forward to the completion of the first section of the railroad the people of Davenport were eager for the completion of the bridge. Their hope was realized early in April. That they were proud of their bridge

no one can doubt. It was a matter of interest for the entire State as an article from an Iowa City paper indicates.

HO! FOR THE MISSISSIPPI BRIDGE.— On and after Monday, April 14th, all trains leaving this city will cross the Mississippi at Davenport upon the Railroad Bridge! According to the new arrangement, two passenger and one freight train with passenger cars attached, will leave and arrive at this city, daily: the first passenger train leaving at 6:45 A. M. until further notice.

Congress had steadily refused during the past eight years to heed the numerous resolutions and memorials passed by the legislature asking for grants of land for the construction of a road from Davenport to Council Bluffs. Railroads through Iowa now seemed assured whether given aid by Congress or not, and fearing the loss of the opportunity to do what it knew to be its duty Congress hastened to pass an act on May 15, 1856, granting land for the purpose of constructing railroads in this State. A special session of the General Assembly was convened at Iowa City early in July, and on the fourteenth an act was approved accepting the grant and regranteeing the lands to the railroads on certain specified conditions. The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company was granted seven hundred and seventy-four thousand acres but was authorized "to transfer and assign all or any part of the grant to any other company or person, 'if in the opinion of

said company, the construction of said railroad across the state of Iowa would be thereby sooner and more satisfactorily completed.' ”

The people of Iowa now looked forward to a rapid development of their railroads. This hope was reflected in the newspapers of the time. One such article from the *Washington Press* reads as follows:

The passage of the Iowa Land Bill will have many and important effects, both upon the interests of our own State, and other contingent interests. In the first place, it will place the railroad system of Iowa upon a secure basis, which will ensure its early and speedy completion, thus opening up avenues of trade for the increasing demands of our commerce, and developing yet more fully the vast agricultural resources of our young and growing State. . . . the Muscatine and Oskaloosa road will indirectly receive a share of its benefits, for it is a branch of the Mississippi and Missouri road, and built by the same company. Hence, the funds thus placed at the disposal of that company, although to be applied exclusively to the other branch, will enable it to apply other funds at its disposal to the prosecution of the Muscatine and Oskaloosa branch.

Another article leads one to believe with greater certainty that the wishes of the people are to be realized and that the railroad is to be extended. It reads: “Mr. J. V. Judd and other gentlemen connected with the M. & M. R. R., are now on a tour of examination of the route hence to Oskaloosa, with the intention — we believe — of putting the entire road under contract forthwith”. This first appeared

in the *Muscatine Journal* and was copied in the *Washington Press*.

And it was more than newspaper talk, for on July 23, 1856, there appeared in the *Washington Press* a call for workers: "Messrs. Dort & Butterfield want 500 men to work on their contract on the M. & M. Railroad, between Cedar and Iowa Rivers. Wages \$1,25 per day". To this advertisement was attached the observation: "From the above it will be seen that the Muscatine and Oskaloosa Road is being prosecuted with a good deal of vigor, and we think our citizens need have no fears, if they vote the \$50,000 proposed next Monday, but that we shall have a Rail Road within the time prescribed in the proposition."

Another paper of the time has the following rather extensive time-table for the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad:

On and after Monday, June 1st, 1857, and until further notice, trains will leave Iowa City daily, for Muscatine, Davenport, Rock Island and Chicago (Sunday excepted) as follows:

1st — Freight, and Emigrant, at	5,15 A M
2d — Mail and Passenger, at	6,30 A M
3d — Freight at	11,15 A M
4th — Express at	3,15 P M

Trains arrive at Iowa City daily, Sundays excepted, as follows:

1st — Freight and Emigrant, at	10,50 A M
2d — Mail and Passenger, at	10,25 A M

3d — Freight, at	4,45 P M
4th— Express, at	8,45 P M

Trains arrive at Davenport daily, Sundays excepted, as follows:

The evening train stops one hour at Davenport for supper.

All trains out of Davenport will make connections with Muscatine and Iowa City.

The Passenger Train connects at Davenport with the Rock Island & Chicago Trains. The evening train stops one hour in Davenport for supper.

Passengers are reminded of the necessity of giving distinct direction as to the destination of their baggage — also to procure tickets before taking their seats in the cars.

A. DAY, *Superintendent.*

From these indications one might come to the conclusion that the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company was in a prosperous condition. In the early fall of 1858 the Muscatine and Oskaloosa branch was completed to Washington; and the opening of this portion of the road was celebrated on September first. A thousand invitations had been issued, and on the appointed day many guests arrived from Muscatine, Iowa City, Davenport and the east on an excursion train. "A train of thirteen passenger cars came in, drawn by the splendid locomotive 'Washington' gaily decorated." A procession from Dutch-creek Township bore a banner with the picture of a locomotive and the inscription: "The Iron Horse shall not rest till he goes farther."

All things, however, were not as bright as they

seemed. Through this pervading spirit of optimism came anxieties and uncertainties. The *Cedar Valley Times* [Cedar Rapids], for instance, prints on June 18, 1857, the following article:

The people of Des Moines are beginning to manifest considerable anxiety respecting their Railroad prospects. They are quite dissatisfied with the slow progress of the M. & M. R. Road towards their city, and are already counting the probabilities of an earlier outlet over the Chicago, Iowa & Nebraska road. The *Iowa State Journal* [Des Moines] in an article upon this subject, says:—"From the appearance the M. & M. Road appears to have entirely abandoned their road between here and Iowa City for the present—throwing all their force upon a 'branch' road—and if their present state of 'masterly inactivity' continues much longer, our citizens will be compelled to look in some other direction. We must and will have railroads—and that soon—and if disappointed in our hopes and expectations by the Company, it will be an easy matter to *reconsider* former acts, and accept the propositions of other roads".

A few days later the following item appeared in the same newspaper:

We see it stated that the Directors of the Road have nearly closed arrangements for a loan of seven millions of dollars, with which in connection with private and public subscriptions along the line, they expect to put the whole road between this city and Council Bluffs, under contract, and complete it to the Missouri River at almost as early a day as has been named for its completion to Des Moines City.

The people along the third branch, which was to extend to Cedar Rapids, became discouraged and embittered about this time because they had been neglected. When in 1857 it was suggested to the city of Davenport that it transfer the \$350,000 loan from this branch road to assist in the extension of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad, Cedar Rapids replied that the Davenport people would not if they knew what was for their best interest. A connection with Cedar Rapids by railroad they declared would be worth twice as much to Davenport as with two towns like Iowa City.

Under the trying circumstances to which it was subjected this road like all others made slow progress in getting through to Council Bluffs. It was not until the last day of August, 1860, that the Mississippi and Missouri ran its first train of freight over the Iowa River; and in the preceding year the *Davenport Democrat* had announced a decrease in the passenger service by the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company to one train daily between Davenport and Iowa City. The business on the road would not justify more than one. During the middle of the Civil War period, about 1863, the work was resumed but not very enthusiastically. For several years it was rumored that the railroad would "reach Newton in ninety days" but by 1865 it was completed only as far as Kellogg, forty miles east of Des Moines.

Carelessness, mismanagement, and shortage of

supplies, men, and money because of the Civil War, had created distrust among the people, which the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company was unable to overcome. Condemnation proceedings were begun by A. O. Patterson, attorney, in October, 1865, and not long after the company went into the hands of a receiver. The foreclosure took place in the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Iowa on May 11, 1866, and soon after the whole line of road to Council Bluffs was purchased by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company, which was incorporated in this State a few week previous to the sale.

On the 20th of August, 1866, this company consolidated with the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company of Illinois. Under the management of the consolidated company the work was rapidly pushed to completion. In the spring of 1869 it became known that the first train over the new road — the third to enter the city — would arrive at Council Bluffs on the 12th of May. On the day set, the citizens “with the fire company, civic societies, band and artillery squad with gun,” gathered at the grounds where a temporary depot had been erected; and as the train pulled in they gave it a hearty welcome.

MILDRED J. SHARP.

Letters of a Railroad Builder

Isaac Lane Usher came to Iowa in 1853, ahead of the railroads, and located at Muscatine. He learned that the Lyons Iowa Central Railroad Company was constructing an air line from Lyons on the Mississippi River to Iowa City and thence westward across the State, and he and his partner, William H. Thayer, took a contract to build a part of the road near Tipton. Work on this road was commenced in 1853 and was probably the first actual railroad construction in the State of Iowa. But in the following year the company abandoned its operations and the road — which was called the “Calico Road” because of the bolts of calico and other merchandise in which the company partially paid the men who were doing the construction work — was never completed.

Usher and Thayer returned to Muscatine and as proprietors of the “Ogilvie House” carried on a thriving hotel trade. They also took a contract for railroad building on the road from Muscatine to Oskaloosa. In the spring of 1855 Thayer sold out to Usher and not long afterwards Mr. Usher also sold his interests and removed to La Crosse County, Wisconsin, which was his home until his death in 1889. The following extracts of the letters of Mr.

Usher were contributed through the kindness of his son, Ellis B. Usher, of Milwaukee.

THE EDITOR

[To his father]

Muscatine, Iowa, Oct. 16th, 1853.

I have been here two days only and of course can give no very distinct ideas of business matters, but can give impressions gathered from my limited observation, and from conversation with others.

Iowa as yet is quite new, she has a few smart towns on the river, (among which this is one of the smartest) which derive their business directly and indirectly from the agricultural resources of the surrounding country, which are at present quite extensive and daily increasing. These river towns have not only the advantage of the trade thus received, which is equal to cash, but they manufacture and get pay for the labor. They have two large flour mills running night and day, making about three hundred barrels of flour of the best quality, every twenty-four hours. They have steam mills here for making the flour barrels, that make them very fast indeed. They have also two large steam saw mills that saw about 20,000 feet per day. Connected with them are lathe, shingle, and planing mills. They get their pine logs from up river 300 or 400 miles, and raft them down the river. One thousand feet of common boards are worth here about \$12. per thousand, and better qualities range from that to \$25.

Shingles are worth here \$3.50, and lathes, from \$2.50 to \$3.00.

I think that with the exception of California, which is an exception to all rules, Iowa is at present settling faster than any state in the Union has ever been settled, and with a better class. Emigrants are coming here from Ohio by hundreds every day — regular old farmers, just the men to develop this country. As a general thing they are men who emigrated to Ohio several years ago, without means, and located their 80 or 100 acres of land, which they can now sell for \$40. or \$50. per acre, according to location. They are energetic and industrious, and have the money.

Land in this town is worth from \$100 to \$125 per front foot in the business portion of the town. One mile out, good locations for farms are worth from \$15. to \$25. per acre. From four to five miles out it is worth from \$4.00 to \$10. per acre, a great inequality, as you will at once perceive. The land in town will not go down and the land out of town must advance; it is in fact, advancing from 12% to 25% every month, and in many cases 100%, and will continue to do so as long as emigration continues to flow in as at present.

You can let any quantity of money here at 25%, with ample security. A man told me yesterday that he wanted about \$2,500. to locate some land with, in Cedar county, the county just back from this, and if anybody will locate it and give him a bond for a

deed, he will give them a 25% advance with security on the land and also on 4,000 acres which he owns, besides. He is a Mr. Tuefts, formerly of Maine, the eastern part. He left Maine when he was twenty-one, and has lived in Ohio most of the time, until this summer, when he came here as mail agent at \$100. per month. He has invested all his spare means in land here and intends to settle about five miles from town, when he has bought land enough for three farms for himself and two boys, and the land he wants the money to secure is for some of his Ohio neighbors, who intend to emigrate here next year, and he is afraid someone else will get it before they can sell where they are and secure it.

I rode twenty miles into the country yesterday, horse back, with Mr. Tuefts and another man. Most of the country in this section is rolling prairie, and as beautiful as nature could make it, with here and there an oak opening to supply wood and fencing timber, and the soil is as good as any in the world, and the climate as healthy.

The site of this town is very rough, a succession of hills and valleys, requiring a great deal of grading and filling up to make it as it should be. The reason why it was chosen is that the river here makes a large elbow, and this town is built on the outer point of the elbow, thus securing a larger extent of country, the trade of which can reach this point and can't be turned off from it. The town getting the best location of course gets the most

trade. The great rival of this place is Davenport, thirty miles above. It is the most beautiful western town I have seen and about the size of this (about 5000 inhabitants) but they don't at present do half the business that they do here. But they are building a railroad from Davenport to Iowa City which will give them the advantage until they build one from here, which they probably will do as soon as next year.

To give you an idea of the emigration here; there are more emigrant wagons than the ferry boat can take across the river in the day time; sometimes there are fifteen or twenty wagons waiting on the eastern shore to come across, and when I rode out yesterday, I met fifteen wagons going a distance of five miles, on the main road, that came into the state in another direction. This is what you see at our point.

The society here I should judge is very good indeed. I have a very nice boarding house; much better than I expected to find. It is better than most eastern boarding houses. The price is two dollars and twenty-five cents per week. Everything to make us comfortable and happy.

[To his wife]

Muscatine, Iowa, Oct. 27th, 1853.

I think now I shall leave here next week for Tipton, an inland town about twenty-five miles

west¹ of this, where we expect a contract on a railroad upon quite advantageous terms. We have had the offer of as much work as we can do or get done, at so much a yard according to the distance we have to haul it, and we are not bound, only to do the best we can, and they guarantee us not to lose. We shall have to furnish hardly anything. We can get men to build the camp for the sake of getting the boarders, and we shall get our pay without doubt every month. The other contractors told me they always had got theirs just at the time agreed. This road is to run from Lyons in Clinton County to Iowa City, a distance of 75 miles, and they intend to have it finished by next fall at this time. The same company is intending to build another road, from this place to Iowa City, and from thence to Cedar Rapids, in Linn County, and we expect to get the thirty miles from this place to Iowa City to build.

[To his father]

Tipton, Iowa, November 10, 1853.

We have taken a contract on the Lyons Iowa Central Railroad, of two miles, near this place. The work on it will amount to about \$30,000. We have 15 cents per yard for all earth hauled less than fifty rods and 20 cents for all hauled over that distance. There are no rocks or trees in the way, and after breaking the surface there is no difficulty in shovel-

¹ Tipton is about this distance north, instead of west, of Muscatine.

ing it without any plowing or picking. By our contract we are paid once a month, our whole estimate, the company reserving the right to take the work off our hands whenever in the opinion of the chief engineer we are not likely to complete it in the given time. The time given is the first of June, 1854. We have not had to buy anything to commence with but a lot of shovels. We found men here to build the shanties for the sake of the boarders, and the farmers have plenty of teams that they are anxious to work at reasonable prices.

We pay \$2 per day for two horses and driver, they boarding themselves and receiving their pay when we receive ours. We pay the same for one yoke of oxen and cart. Scrapers, plows, and wheelbarrows the company lends us whenever we want them.

I think, judging from the rates they pay in the East, we cannot fail to make some money out of it.

The same company wants us to build thirty miles of railroad from Muscatine to Iowa City, commencing as early as practicable in the spring.

They gave us all we asked for this job, and if they do the same with the other, we shall take it.

Thayer understands his business as very few of the contractors here do.

The company has a nice office here which they have given us the use of, with a nice stove, desk, and furniture, and wood enough to last a month or two. They come to do business in it once a month when they pay off their hands.

The company wants to hire me to keep their books at this point and would probably give about \$30 per month for it. It will work me a little too hard as I shall have to do most all of it evenings, but I guess I shall try it. I have been for the last two days fixing up their books for a settlement which comes off tomorrow. They have about 200 hands to pay off here.

We board at a hotel here for \$2 a week, a first-rate table, but the house is so full all the time that I expect we shall have to put a bed in the office. There are three hotels in town and all full every night.

[To his wife]

Tipton, Iowa, Nov. 16, 1853.

The railroad company has had some trouble with the Tipton people about their stock book. Some of the subscribers erased their names from the book because they thought the company had done so much work near this place that they would pass through it anyway, but the company were so indignant at it that they were determined to abandon what they had done and not come to this town, and they could do it and not lose anything, because the route that does not come here is much cheaper to build.

Their old books made them pay only 20 per cent a year, and their subscription was \$28,000. The company now tells them that they must furnish \$50,000, payable 10 per cent. per month, and they will have to do it. They have already raised \$30,000 of it and will undoubtedly get the rest.

The vice president and the man who came with him to pay off have been so busy with that matter that I have had to pay off the hands, here and at Iowa City. I have paid out \$13,000 and go to-day towards Lyons, with the vice president to pay off the rest.

We shall get off \$500 or \$800 worth of work this month, and it will not cost us over one-half. It counts up faster than our other work, and we are doing it to get ahead a little.

[To his wife]

Elk River, Sunday, November 20, 1853.

Wednesday afternoon I started from Tipton along the line of the Lyons, Iowa Central Railroad, in a one horse buggy, in company with Wm. G. Hourn, Esq., over a prairie country, interspersed here and there with a grove of oak timber and watered with several beautiful, clear, running streams. The country is beautifully undulating until you reach within two or three miles of the river, where it becomes quite hilly and broken, and very much more pleasant and beautiful to my eye than the flat country over which we had traveled.

Mr. Hourn is a Kentuckian and his wife also. She is considerably younger than he and has regular Kentucky manners, wants a little in refinement, but is direct and truthful in expression, and has quick perceptions and a high sense of honor. Taken all in all, an agreeable woman.

Mr. Hourn is a smart, or rather sharp, active man, rather loose in detail, but far-seeing and just the man to manage the general business of a railroad in this western country, with somebody to follow and attend to all the details.

The rest of the family consists of a young lady about twenty years old, by his former wife, and three small children, two boys and a girl.

Mr. Hourn has a brother-in-law in business with him by the name of Graves, a near relative of the Graves who killed Cilley of Maine.²

[To his brother-in-law]

Muscatine, Iowa, May 8, 1854.

Our business is paying beyond our expectations.³ We have a perfect rush of travel all the time, filling the beds and frequently the floors full. We have 85 regular family and sometimes as high as 125 arrivals per day. We pack them away like bales of goods and charge them big storage.

We have taken a large contract on a railroad from this place west to Oskaloosa, connecting with the Rock Island road east, to Chicago. The Rock Island road has been opened since I came back, (within a few weeks), and is doing the biggest business of any road in the West. Mr. Farnam, the man who made

² In February, 1838, a fatal duel was fought between Graves and Cilley, members of Congress from Kentucky and Maine respectively. Cilley's death created a profound sensation in the country.

³ By this time Usher had returned to Muscatine and engaged in the hotel business as one of the proprietors of the Ogilvie House.

it, finished it one year before his time, and is running it on his own hook for the one year. He will make money enough for one man.

We have taken the contract under a wealthy firm here, Ogilvie & St. John, and at prices which must net us a large profit. We have 20, 21, and 22 cents a yard for dirt excavation and 75 cents for rock.

Thayer will go onto the road and I shall stay in the hotel.

[To his father]

Muscatine, Iowa, May 12, 1854

We have taken a large contract on the Oskaloosa railroad in connection with Ogilvie & St. John. Ogilvie is the owner of this house. We have got a good contract and have been offered \$12,000 for it. That will be \$3000 each. We shall take it if we can't talk them up higher. We want to get about \$1500 more if we can.

[To his brother-in-law]

Muscatine, Iowa, Sept. 3, 1854.

Corn is worth 20 and 25 cents per bushel. Flour \$6 and \$6.50 a bbl. Beef 6 and 7 cents a pound. Pork 5 and 6 cents. Prairie chickens \$1.50 per dozen. Quail 30 cents per dozen. Turkeys 50 cents each. Tame chickens \$1.50 per dozen. Butter 10 and 12 cents per lb. Milk 4 cents per quart. Potatoes 25 cents per bushel. Peaches \$1.00 per bushel. Tomatoes they will give you all you want. Muskmelons 5 cents. Watermelons 5 and 10 cents.

I have given you the retail prices, so if you want to live, come on.

You can shoot your own game. Just get into a buggy and drive along the road and shoot without getting out.

A man with \$3000 or \$4000 can live easy here by "shaving" short paper at 20 and 30%.

[To his brother-in-law]

Muscatine, Iowa, Dec. 7th, 1854.

We have not settled with the railroad folks yet. Can't tell how we shall come out. Our company makes \$3000 out of it aside from the question of damages. We ask \$10,000 damages and could no doubt get that amount at the end of a law suit. Ogilvie & St. John offer to give us \$3000 and let us out, and run the risk of getting damages. I think we shall take it rather than be bothered with a long law suit.

Business in all departments is good here, though money matters have been very much deranged for the last three months. We take no Indiana bank bills excepting State Bank. No Ohio money excepting State Bank. No Kentucky excepting Northern Bank, and none from banks south of that. How long this situation will last I can't tell, but not long, I think.

[To his father]

Muscatine, Iowa, Jan. 17, 1855.

We have settled our railroad matters with Ogilvie

& St. John. They gave us two Muscatine County bonds, of \$1000 each, 20 years, 10%, and \$800 credit on their books. The bonds are worth \$800 cash now, and are a good investment. They bind themselves to pay all debts, etc. of Ogilvie, St. John, Usher & Thayer. The debts are not much, \$300 or \$400. I thought that as railroad matters stand at present all over the country we were better off to take that clear profit than run the risk of waiting to get more.

Comment by the Editor

AN INDIAN PATHWAY

“Finally, on the 25th of June, we perceived on the water’s edge some tracks of men, and a narrow and somewhat beaten path leading to a fine prairie”. Father Marquette, whose words we have just quoted, and Louis Jolliet, his companion, stepped from their canoes to the west bank of the Mississippi; and on that summer day in 1673 white men for the first time trod an Iowa road to an inland town.

For a long time their followers kept to the waterways. Explorers and fur traders relied largely upon the canoe. With the coming of settlers the Ohio and Mississippi route and the Great Lakes route floated thousands of families into the West, and when they came to the far side of the Mississippi they squatted for the most part near the river. Dubuque, Davenport, Burlington, and Keokuk grew and thrived, but the interior prairie land was uninviting and fearsome. Where would they get water and fuel, building material and easy transportation if they did not stay by the wooded streams? When they left the Mississippi, they struck out to the shores of other streams and stopped. They optimistically believed in the navigability of the Des Moines, the Iowa, and the Cedar rivers, and tried to

make these waterways their arteries of trade and travel.

But just as in later years in the West the irrigationist spread his ditches out over the desert and made it fruitful, so the squatters soon began to stretch out lines of communication into the "fine prairies" and where these life-giving streams of transportation penetrated, settlements sprang up and prospered. The crude early roads, crossing the rivers at fords and ferries, gave way to Territorial roads and military roads and bridges across the inland streams. Then came, in many parts of the State, a glowing enthusiasm for "plank roads" and thousands of dollars were spent by enterprising towns on these wooden Appian Ways.

RED AND WHITE TRAIL MAKERS

Meantime for a score of years shining rails had been creeping westward, and when they reached the Mississippi at Rock Island in 1854, Iowa towns abandoned themselves to speculative excitement. Intense rivalries sprang up and neighboring towns forgot their friendship and fought for the favor of the railroad companies. They made extraordinary promises and voted huge sums of money, for they knew that the stream of immigration and commerce would nourish the towns along the railroad, and leave dry and withered the roots of the inland settlements.

The ground had already been broken at Davenport

for the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad, and Antoine Le Claire, whose life is an epitome of that romantic early period of Mississippi Valley history, had removed the first shovelful of earth. In his veins ran the blood of American Indians whose moccasined feet had deepened the buffalo traces into human roadways; as interpreter he had brought red men and white together in numerous councils, and had translated Black Hawk's dictated autobiography into English; and he had been one of the men who had helped to found and develop the town of Davenport.

Here was a bit of unconscious pageantry that has seldom been equaled in our history. In Antoine Le Claire the various people of the Valley were symbolized. He was an Indian, master of fourteen Indian languages and spokesman for Black Hawk. In name and by ancestry he was a French Canadian, a fur trader and the son of a fur trader, representative of that race that had explored the rivers of the Mississippi Valley. And he was an American pioneer, a sturdy white settler and the first postmaster of the frontier town of Davenport.

As an Indian he turned the soil of his ancestors' beloved hunting ground for the passage of the white man's railroad. The first locomotive that reached Iowa, after being towed across the Mississippi on a flatboat, was christened with his French Canadian name. And yet it is probable that his townsmen thought little of these relationships, but chose him

to break ground for this great enterprise because he was the leading citizen of their town, the benefactor of their churches and schools, and the most prominent figure in their business adventures.

The line of railroad begun so auspiciously at Davenport in 1853 reached Council Bluffs in 1869, and it was in that same year that the last spike was driven in a continuous line of rails that stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. Since 1853 Iowa has laid approximately ten thousand miles of railroad and the network of rails runs into every county and not many miles distant from every homestead in the State. But with all this progress we can not help a feeling of regret that in the obscurity of two centuries and a half we have lost beyond recall the trace of that "narrow and somewhat beaten path leading to a fine prairie", that early trail by which Marquette and Jolliet came into the land of Iowa.

J. C. P.

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