

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 Kaneshville, 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.