

Cheers for the D. & S. C.

How it rains, rains, rains!
Patter, patter, patter!
In a constant ceaseless chatter
In a misty, muddy spatter —
Falls the rain, falls the rain,
Falls again without refrain.

In dirges similar to the above, editors chronicled the downpours which had deluged northern Iowa for three weeks following the vernal equinox of 1861. Nowhere during that time were citizens watching the sky with greater solicitude than in Cedar Falls. Seven years of waiting for the railroad were apparently approaching an end. In spite of previous deferments and undismayed by the incessant spring rains, a "committee of arrangements" composed of eight leading citizens of Cedar Falls was busily engaged in executing plans for community jubilees to celebrate the long anticipated arrival of the steam cars on the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad, now the Illinois Central.

During the last week of March, 1861, the committee announced to the sixteen hundred inhabitants of the town, to settlers in Black Hawk and surrounding counties, and to thirty editors of the

State that Cedar Falls would celebrate "the advent of the snorting iron horse" with two festivities. On the occasion of the first *bona fide* arrival of a train, the committee planned a preliminary celebration, which would feature a parade and a dinner for the train crew. For the second festival, they decided upon a Grand Jubilee to welcome the officials of the road and their guests with a more elaborate and formal parade, with military salutes, a banquet, and a grand ball. The first event became history on Easter Monday, April 1, 1861; the second and more elaborate ovation occurred ten days later on Thursday, April 11th.

Spontaneity and excellent coöperation characterized both the anticipation and realization of these plans. Everybody seemed to realize that the initial arrival of "the iron horse" symbolized the end of an epoch of pioneering and the beginning of a new era for the Cedar Valley — the end of isolation and the beginning of closer contacts with the East. Agrarian progress, which prophets asserted "would sweep in with every gale", seemed near at hand. Neither repeated disappointments nor the incessant rain could dampen their ardor.

Ever since 1854 the people of Cedar Falls, then numbering four hundred, had hoped that the railroad would soon come. In that year advance engineers had surveyed a route across Black

Hawk County, which passed directly through the rival villages of Cedar Falls and Waterloo. By 1856 the rails had crept westward as far as Dyersville, seventy miles away. During 1857 the financial depression, as well as the severe winter and scanty harvests, checked work for many months.

Hope revived, however, in 1859. Construction of the road across Delaware and Buchanan counties was resumed. The rails reached Independence on Sunday, December 11th. By the following spring regular freight, passenger, and mail service was established as far west as Jesup, only twenty miles away. News filtered in that the company had increased its rolling stock to four locomotives, six passenger coaches, and thirty-five flat cars.

On March 16, 1860, H. A. and George D. Perkins issued the first number of the *Cedar Falls Gazette*. In the enthusiasm of their youth and that of the community, they congratulated their patrons on the "new and extraordinary impulse" which the railroad would immediately bring to local agricultural interests. Not only to the Perkins brothers, but to rural and urban dwellers, train connections with the East seemed very near; yet within two months the editors developed a wariness in their utterances. Cautiously they fell back on quoted remarks. In a June issue, they stated

that Judge H. H. Hamilton of Dubuque, a director of the railroad, had visited their sanctum to say, "The railroad is a surety for October." In July, with equal caution, they clipped from the Dubuque *Herald* and printed in very small type a statement to the effect that trains might be expected to reach Cedar Falls within ninety days. Later the *Gazette* reported that the railroad had set the date of arrival for December 1st.

In September, however, hope flared up again when engineers surveyed sites for the depot, water tower, and turntable. Autumn passed but brought no trains to Cedar Falls. With drifting snows at hand and the Civil War in the offing, another railroadless winter set in for Black Hawk County.

With spring came good railroad news. Crews were laying ties and driving spikes, and construction of the depot had begun. At Waterloo, six miles down the Cedar River, trains were already delivering passengers at the station and freight at the warehouses.

Fully assured that its insularity belonged to the past, Cedar Falls prepared to celebrate. Every member of the committee on arrangements was blessed with initiative and integrity, and all could be counted upon to advertise the metropolis and to furnish entertainment with all the *eclat* and dis-

tion which a prairie town could offer. They were Col. William H. Sessions; two legislators, A. F. Brown and J. B. Powers; George Secord, hotel keeper; G. B. Van Saun, attorney; Edwin Brown, mill owner; H. H. Carpenter, merchant; and Peter Melendy, president of the Horticultural Society. The buoyant enthusiasm of "The Eight" spread to the townspeople and to the rural community beyond. Perhaps the committee's reception of the iron symbol of progress would have been even more elaborate had these boosters known that Cedar Falls would remain the end of the line until the close of the war, and that during those years it would serve as the shipping center for farmers a hundred miles to the west and north.

Their first act was to appoint eight subsidiary committees, designated as Finance, Decorating, Music, Toasts, Salutes, Grand Ball, Banquet, and Reception. For each of these except the last, they assigned from three to ten aides. For the reception committee, however, they drafted 128 representative citizens, whose names were officially printed in two imposing columns in the *Gazette*.

Wives and daughters, spinsters and bachelors, carpenters and village artists assisted with the decorations and plans for the reception. Including the members of the band, hotel assistants, and marshals, over two hundred men and their wives

were assigned specific duties in the epochal reception of the train crew, and later of the executives and official guests of the railroad.

On March 30, 1861, the *Gazette* proclaimed that at five in the afternoon on Monday, April 1st, the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad would send its first train into Cedar Falls. A misty rain obscured the morning sun on the first of April, but the skies cleared somewhat in the afternoon. Nevertheless, in spite of the inclement weather, increasing numbers of ox teams besplattered with mud, smart spring "democrat" wagons, and saddled horses lined Main Street and the cross streets adjoining.

Late in the afternoon the newly outfitted bandwagon, drawn by two spans of high-stepping horses, left the Overman Block for the depot. About the partially completed station men, women, and children in crude homespun crowded the platform or moved down the muddy edges of the right of way in order to catch the first glimpse of the locomotive as it rounded the bend to the southeast.

"At five-thirty P. M. their anxious desires were realized", observed an out-of-town reporter. "The shrill whistle of the locomotive gave warning of the near approach of the cars, and the snorting Iron Horse came bounding into town as if conscious of its triumph over difficulties and disap-

pointments." Editor George D. Perkins declared, "The shrill shriek of the approaching locomotive tingled the nerves of the excited crowd in such a way that a galvanic battery would have been put to shame." Not only the school boys shouted but men threw up their hats and stamped the platform with their muddy boots.

With brakes screeching and steam hissing and the bell ringing, Engineer Cawley brought the locomotive to a noisy stop. When Conductor Northup appeared smiling on the open platform between the two passenger cars, the crowd broke into lusty cheers. Only with difficulty could the passengers alight from the cars. Immediately young gallants assisted fair lasses up the steps and led them down the aisles, while irrepressible small boys, somewhat fearful of the hissing steam above, tentatively explored the iron wheels and the long, triangular cow-catcher.

At a signal from the Chief Marshal, J. M. Overman, a bugler sounded reveillé. As soon as the assistant marshals had ushered the members of the train crew into decorated vehicles, the driver of the bandwagon turned the horses toward the hotel and with pealing strains of lively patriotic airs escorted the train crew to the American House where they were banqueted and toasted for their part in making Cedar Falls the end of the line.

The excitement of this preliminary ovation merely whetted interest in the grand celebration set for the eleventh of April. No wonder that the eyes of local merchants and rural dwellers turned often toward the lowering skies. Mud on prairie and timber roads would keep farmers at home; rain on the new clay embankment would impede track laying; floods in Dubuque, Manchester, and Independence might at the last moment dissuade the guests who had accepted the formal invitation from embarking on the excursion train. Even so, the daily and nightly downpours were powerless to check the zeal of the celebrants. School boys and young men made heavy inroads upon the river timber. By boat and by ox team they brought into the jubilee headquarters in the rooms of the Horticultural Society immense quantities of cedar boughs. For days before the eleventh of April, mothers and daughters wove these evergreens into festoons. The greatest care of all was given to the building of an immense wreath, resembling a mammoth Hawaiian lei. As the crowning event of the train's arrival this was to be thrown over the smokestack of the locomotive when in triumph it reached the exact end of the line.

A generous share of the evergreens was reserved for a triumphal arch, designed to span the railroad track and under which the engine would

pass to receive its cedar crown. The special committee on decoration not only sanctioned the building of the lei's frame but to it they artistically attached enough colored pennants to secure a corona effect. Each banner bore a sentiment or motto to symbolize the event and to extol with exuberance the railroad, its officers, the guests of the day, and the importance of Cedar Falls, soon to become the metropolis of the Cedar Valley. "Herman Gelpcke, The Fuel and Steam of the D. and S. C. R. R."; "Edward Stimson, Esq., The Tender of the D. and S. C. R. R."; "Platt Smith, The Driving Wheels of the D. and S. C. R. R."; "The Iron Horse, The Best Blue Blood of Modern Stock"; "Ladies of Dubuque and Cedar Falls, The True Moral Conductors on the Great Railroad of Life"; "Iowa, The Granary of the West"; and "Cedar Falls, The Paradise of the West" were typical of the sentiments expressed.

Never had the town been so resplendent with decorations. Every lamp post bore festoons of cedar. The waiting room of the depot, the Horticultural Society headquarters, the banquet room of the American House, and the ballroom on the third floor of the Overman Block, were all redolent with cedar and pine. Framed mottoes, wax and hair wreaths, Victorian plaster casts, and oil paintings adorned the walls.

The hotel keepers, Secord and Winslow, had ransacked the country for available fowl and fresh pork; and had ordered from Dubuque supplies of coffee, oranges, and oysters. No more out-of-town guests were invited than could be well served by the hosts. Necessity limited the number to one hundred. G. B. Van Saun, the financial director, set out to raise the needed funds by subscription. Banquet tickets were sold at two dollars apiece, and those for the ball at two dollars a couple. With eggs worth eight cents a dozen and butter twelve cents a pound, the committee on finance was certainly to be congratulated in being able to report through the *Gazette* that all indebtedness was paid before the end of April.

In the afternoon at four o'clock on Thursday, May 11th, the stage was set for the official recognition of the advent of a new era for Cedar Falls. In spite of the sunless sky, farm wagons had crept into town all forenoon. Although every sprig of the cedar festooning dripped rain, the depot grounds were crowded with people who had come from miles away to participate in the event. The cedar arch, firmly supported, curved high over the track. Directly across the rails were two cannons, designated as the Baby and the Devil Waker, whose gunners had been instructed to salute the train with thirty-four rounds of ammunition.

Soon after four o'clock, across the river a quarter of a mile away from the depot, the greatest procession that Cedar Falls had ever witnessed was being formed. At its head on horseback sat the Grand Marshal, John Milton Overman. In newly furbished suits, in a freshly painted bandwagon drawn by two spans of black horses whose heads were caparisoned with plumes and held high with check reins, the members of the band sat ready to burst into music as soon as Henry Overman raised his baton. A decorated wagon, bearing the "Committee of Eight", fell in line immediately behind the bandwagon, followed by a second carrying Mayor J. F. Jaquith and the city council. Back of these in a smart democrat wagon sat Sheldon Fox, the Master of Ceremonies and President of the Day.

A half block to the south at the corner of Main and Second streets, accompanied by their wives, the 128 members of the reception committee, save those who had been drafted to serve in other capacities, stood ready for marching orders. In the excitement of the occasion they were as little mindful of the cold misty air as they were of the black mud oozing up between the wooden planks, which, placed lengthwise, did service for a sidewalk. Behind these, space was apportioned to a small army of local townspeople, children, and farmers. They

much preferred to bring up the rear of this cavalcade to taking their chances with throngs already milling about the depot, for the committee, believing firmly in community coöperation, had promised reserved standing room along both sides of the railroad's right of way for all who participated in the parade.

The grand marshal gave the signal; a bugler sounded the call to march; the baton was raised; the band struck up a lively patriotic air; the driver pulled slightly on the reins and the cavalcade moved northward, across the muddy flooring of the mill-race and river bridges. Presently, with the marshal's aid, several hundred people were aligned beside the rails with ears strained to catch the first sound of the train which was bearing to Cedar Falls its honored guests.

Almost exactly at 4:45 the smoke from the locomotive was sighted. As the engine rounded the bend and as the whistle cut the bleak air, a shout went up which almost drowned the noise of the train and the ringing bell of the engine. Following instructions, Engineer Cawley brought the locomotive to a slow stop just beyond the arch of cedar, and the great cedar lei was successfully lowered into its place with its crown of colored mottoes encircling the smokestack. When the marshal signalled the two gunners to salute, the

children covered their ears with their hands, blue with the chill of the April drizzle, but not too tightly to ascertain whether the gunners completed the toll of the advertised thirty-four rounds.

Meanwhile, the President of the Day and Mayor Jaquith had taken their assigned places where the excursionists would descend to the station platform. Through a passage way made of cedar-covered ropes they led the official guests into the waiting room of the depot where in the name of the municipality of Cedar Falls they were welcomed by Hon. A. F. Brown. The response was made by Herman Gelpcke, the genial president of the road, who "paid high compliments to the enterprise, energy, and public spirit of the citizens of Cedar Falls, declaring that from it had come about all the assistance which the railroad company had received in the county."

While the invited guests were safely ensconced in the cedar-adorned, half-finished depot, the marshals were reconstructing the parade line by introducing immediately behind the bandwagon a sufficient number of decorated wagons to transport the officials, their guests, the editors, and the members of the Germania orchestra. Again the bugle note sounded; the band burst into music; and through the gathering April dusk the procession triumphantly departed for the city.

At the Overman Block the drivers halted the guest carriages. The visitors were ushered into the headquarters of the Cedar Valley Horticultural and Literary Society on the second floor. There they were again greeted, this time by President-of-the-Day Sheldon Fox and by Colonel W. H. Sessions. To these welcoming speeches the vice-president of the road, Platt Smith, responded by complimenting the people of Cedar Falls for their fine economic support and for the promise of abundant produce which the shining rails would soon transport from the wide valley of the Cedar.

Along muddy paths at the side of darkening streets the citizens who were to participate in the banquet and ball had made their way to their homes from which in festal attire and accompanied by their hoop-skirted partners they soon repaired to the hotel. At seven the host of the American House sent word that dinner was served and the guests were led across Main Street to the loaded banquet tables. As waiters hurried back and forth, the Germania orchestra, imported from Dubuque, played until the toastmaster's voice sounded above the conversation.

The speakers from Cedar Falls praised the officers of the road in the effulgent language sometimes adopted by their Rotarian grandsons, and

in turn the guests extended to Cedar Falls such extravagant compliments that a newspaper war was precipitated by the rival editor, W. H. Hartman at Waterloo, who felt that the community which he represented had contributed as much to secure the railroad as had his neighbors who now held the advantage of the end of the line. With equally glowing compliments the hosts were congratulated on their newly acquired connection with the Gulf of Mexico, with the whole of the United States, and with the world across the seas, and were gravely assured that this present celebration "was symbolic of an everlasting union which should result in the mutual benefit of Dubuque and Cedar Falls." The extravagant blandishments, the abundant food, and the toasts, scintillating with their puns about rails and iron horses, assured and reassured hosts and guests that the era of pioneering in the Valley of the Cedar had slipped definitely and irrevocably into the past.

At ten o'clock the marshal directed the Germania orchestra to repair to Overman Hall. Up two long and narrow flights of stairs ninety couples followed the musicians to the ballroom, fragrant with cedar and lighted candles and a few swaying kerosene lamps. One dance followed another in merry succession. Old settlers in Cedar Falls used to say that the party which climaxed

the celebration of the arrival of the railroad lasted until sun-up.

One young man, who had served as chief press agent for the festival, could not tarry long in the ballroom. Instead, he crept down the stairway to the editorial rooms on the ground floor, lighted a tallow candle, and prepared the copy for his brother to set in type for the next day's *Gazette*. "The celebration is over," wrote George D. Perkins. "We believe every portion of the programme has been executed to satisfaction." He then proceeded to praise the committee and particularly the ladies for making the celebration a success.

"If time would permit," he wrote as the faint sound of the violins above mingled with that of dripping rain outside, "we might make this report much more complete and interesting: but the hour of one o'clock A. M. warns us that we must close else daylight will find us unable to place it before the public. . . . The Railroad is completed, the cars running regularly into Cedar Falls, the event so ardently wished for, so long expected, yet so long deferred, the advent of 'the Iron Horse' into our city is at length realized, and the 'Metropolis of the Great Cedar Valley and its Tributaries' is bound with iron bands to the great commercial marts of the world."

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