

The **P**ALIMPSEST

JUNE 1929

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RAILROADS CAME TO COUNCIL BLUFFS

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

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THE EDITOR

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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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Council Bluffs in 1865

Where, poised the directors of the Union Pacific Railroad, — could anyone tell them where their railway began? “I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do, upon the application of the said company, designate and establish” the eastern terminus of the railroad from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean “on the western boundary of the State of Iowa, east of and opposite to the east line of section 10, in township 15 north, of range 13, east of the sixth principal meridian, in the Territory of Nebraska.” Fiat. Council Bluffs, born Kaneshville, deserted by the Mormons on the doorstep of the Platte Valley, fed by the commerce of the Overland Trail and laved by the Big Muddy, was to grow up into a railroad town.

Some railroad towns were boom towns — raucous affairs of board-shack saloons and canvas-walled hotels, that flaunted their expensive ugliness for a lit-

tle while and vanished as quickly as they appeared. But Council Bluffs, because Grenville M. Dodge had talked with his friend the President and because Abraham Lincoln was a man of wisdom, was to be a terminus, the focal point where several railways should meet. The Union Pacific was not to thrive alone. In September, 1865, Springer Harbaugh, Government Director of the railroad, reported: "The Union Pacific Railroad cannot be speedily, vigorously, nor economically constructed until we get railroad connections with the east."

The Chicago, Iowa and Nebraska Railroad, lately become the Iowa arm of the Chicago and North Western, was running cars to Boone, a hundred and thirty miles east of the Missouri. The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad was open to Grinnell. Two other railroads pointed westward, the Burlington and Missouri River line and the Dubuque and Sioux City road; both lagged within walking distance of the Mississippi, unwilling or unable to build a mile beyond the proceeds of their land grants.

In September the Union Pacific made its first vigorous strides. Nearly a mile of track was being laid each day. Eighty miles of iron rail, four locomotives, an abundant supply of spikes and chairs, switches and switch stands, even several passenger cars, were that autumn unloaded from Missouri River steamboats upon the landing at Omaha. Thirty platform cars and four or five box-cars were carrying supplies to "end o' track". The grading

crew was within sight of Columbus. At Omaha machine-shops, a round-house and a transfer table, shops for boiler-makers, coopers, carpenters, and painters, were being built. And Director Harbaugh railed: "The several railroads of Iowa pointing to connections either at the terminus or at some point on the main trunk of this grand chain, do not appear to be making that rapid progress in construction westward, which I would suppose that their interest would warrant, the State of Iowa desires and which would contribute so greatly in the prosecution of this national work."

If the citizens of Council Bluffs speculated on the day when the first railroad should enter the corporate limits, if they relaxed into visions of grandeur, they did so at the close of day. From sunup to sundown they were too busy.

One of the town's newspapers was Copperhead, the other Radical. In intervals between belaborings of each other and of the "railroad way-station" across the river, each gave valiant testimony of the busyness of their town.

"Council Bluffs is a city containing a little over 3,000 inhabitants and does as much business as any city on the eastern border of the State containing three times the number of inhabitants. Its business houses, though not so numerous as in some of the cities on the Mississippi river, are much more extensive and each one does as much business as three or four of the Mississippi river houses. The trade is

principally with freighters and merchants, who trade with, and do business in the mining country west of us, and when one of our heavy houses fails to make sales of a thousand or more dollars a day, the proprietors begin to look blue and say, 'Times are dull — nothing doing.' ”

“In pork packing, Council Bluffs may be regarded as a new beginner; yet we notice that in three years the number of hogs packed have increased from 8,000 to 25,000, which shows a healthy state of affairs”.

“In ready-made clothing, Council Bluffs is a long ways ahead of any city on the eastern border of the State; and in boots and shoes she defies competition. In hardware, iron, nails, &c., no city on the eastern slope of the State can show more extensive establishments. In short every branch of trade and industry is more extensive here, and is pushed ahead with more energy according to the number of inhabitants than at any other point in the State.”

The Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad and Packet Line ran tri-weekly boats from Council Bluffs and Omaha to connect with the trains at St. Joseph. Three freight companies were running teams to Boone, meeting the Chicago and North Western there; and the Western Stage Company brought four or six stage-loads of passengers from Des Moines and Boone every day into Council Bluffs. The People's Line had five packets on the river scurrying between Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Omaha, and St. Joseph. A stage line to Kellogg linked Council

Bluffs with the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad. There were other packets, other stages.

And there was this message to the East: "We say, then, to all who are looking for homes, 'come this way.' If you desire to live in town, there is no point in the United States that offers you inducements superior to those held out by Council Bluffs; our people have capital, and they have energy, and the amount of work in the city would be increased tenfold, if workmen could be had. . . . But if you prefer to 'farm it,' we can offer you lands not inferior, in any respect, to the best the sun shines upon, and at such prices that the sum necessary to buy a 'potato patch' in the East, will here buy you a farm. . . . When you make up your mind to 'move West,' buy your ticket to Council Bluffs."

But how long was it to be until the city had no need of its stage-coaches?

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

The C. B. and St. Joe

The Council Bluffs and St. Joseph was one of many roads organized in the late fifties that had hardly begun to lay its tracks when the Civil War in one paralyzing blow halted all construction. Its charter, granted by the State of Iowa in July of 1858, authorized the company to build "from Council Bluffs to some point on the Missouri State line to connect with a railroad from St. Joseph to said line." Missouri was not content to rest upon the seasonal commerce of its arterial rivers: catching the contagion prevalent in the Middle West, it was pledging its credit to a number of railway building schemes. The Hannibal and St. Joseph was to transect the State, river-to-river; from St. Joseph the Platte County Railroad had the privilege of extending its rails to the northern border of Missouri; and the Iowa road was to be the last link in an iron highway from the merchant-houses of St. Louis to the eastern entrance of the Platte Valley.

After the war, the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph had simply its franchises, a few items of property — lands and bonds due from the city of Council Bluffs, a claim upon the national government for \$16,000, a partially cleared title to a right of way — and a grading, neglected for almost five years, to the south line of Mills County. The Platte County had con-

structed about a third of its line, but had not been able to make its first fifty miles profitable.

In the summer of 1865 a mass convention in St. Louis revealed an avid optimism for the continuance of the railroad projects. The officers of the Platte County road were in fact better qualified as scoundrels than as railway directors; but in anticipation that the Platte County would build toward the State border, the directors of the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph on September 23, 1865, made a contract with Willis Phelps of Massachusetts for the completion of their line. The contract was of necessity liberal to the engineer: its terms made Phelps practically the proprietor of the road; but Phelps was bound to have the road ready for service between Council Bluffs and the Missouri border at the end of two years.

Council Bluffs was elated. The *Bugle* reported, "The fact that the building of the road has been let has had its influence here and we notice that several sales of real estate to Eastern men have taken place within the last few days, and real property is rapidly advancing in price." Early the next spring, the directors announced, all the iron and rolling stock for the railroad would be at Council Bluffs; cars would be running to Pacific City by the first of July, and the entire road should be completed by the beginning of September.

In November Phelps's agent arrived, to make contracts for the cutting and delivering of ties and

bridge timber. He brought two comforting items of news: that Willis Phelps expected to have his iron shipped as far as St. Louis by the opening of navigation in the spring, ready to be sent up the Missouri on the first boats; and that H. W. Phelps, the managing partner of the constructing company, was coming with his family from Springfield, and intended to stay on the ground until the road was completed.

“Citizens along the line should be liberal towards the contractor in furnishing ties and other timber,” admonished the editor of the *Bugle*. “They should bear in mind that the high price paid for ties by the Pacific Railroad company, will not and cannot be paid by the contractor on this road. The Pacific company had forty miles to build, so as to be ready to have the same examined and a report made to the present session of Congress, and hence it was forced to pay an exorbitant price for ties and timbers — prices that will not be paid hereafter. We understand that Mr. Phelps is paying from forty-five to fifty-five cents for ties. If he cannot get them at that, he will get them out himself. He has made extensive purchases of timber land along the line and will get out his own ties and timber if citizens do not deal liberally with him.”

And the citizens of Council Bluffs were indeed liberal. In no case was it necessary for the road to purchase its right of way in Pottawattamie County, although property owners in Mills and Fremont

counties, outside the stream of overland traffic, were not as unanimous in liberality.

During the winter of 1865-1866 the Union Pacific speeded its activities to that unparalleled haste which it maintained until the Golden Spike was driven; in its insatiate appetite for materials, it laid the whole river front of Pottawattamie County under contribution for timber. The Council Bluffs and St. Joseph could not meet this competition. Phelps perforce bought his ties and bridge timber in Mills County, for delivery along the line of road in that county. The excavating machine was landed at St. Mary's, and was put to work near Pacific City. The track was laid, first, from St. Mary's to Pacific City, where the bulk of the timber was delivered. Construction followed to the north, from St. Mary's to Council Bluffs; and Phelps assured the citizens that by the first of August they might expect to see the C. B. & St. Joe locomotive on its tracks at the lower end of Bancroft Street.

By the first of August there was no locomotive in Council Bluffs, none in western Iowa; but if construction north of St. Mary's had not even been begun, there was a piece of news quite as cheering. The Messrs. Phelps, associated with one Smith and one Richardson, "both men of ample means," in the last week of July purchased the Platte County road. This change of ownership guaranteed complete construction between Council Bluffs and St. Joseph, already connected with St. Louis by the rickety

roadbed of the Hannibal and St. Joseph. The proprietors, buoyant as ever in their estimates, spoke of through service by the first of June, 1867; but one did not have to believe that to appreciate the material promise to Council Bluffs and to St. Louis.

Frequently during that summer of 1866 steamboats landed cargoes of iron rails at St. Mary's; in late August passenger and freight cars, from Michigan City, arrived; and the first locomotive completed its journey by rail and steamboat from Massachusetts. Construction at last pushed northward.

"Dinna ye hear the whistle blow?" the *Nonpareil* asked as December began. "The advance guard of the Council Bluffs & St. Joe Road is only three and a half miles from town. . . . This road has been pushing ahead quietly but steadily, till it is right among us before we are hardly able to realize it. When the track is laid to the depot in this city, the road will be done to the State line. Can't we get up some kind of a demonstration next week, to celebrate the coming of the first train of cars into Council Bluffs? Let us at least have a general coming together of the people to welcome the Iron Horse. This is an event that we have labored and waited and prayed for, these many years, and it should not be permitted now to pass by in silence."

The floods and high water of the spring and summer, the slow and uncertain transportation of iron and rolling stock from the East, the more uncertain

hindrances of limited capital, had meant nothing more serious than delay. The road was peculiarly Council Bluffs' own. The money required for its building — the cost of labor, provisions, and wood materials — had been spent within the county. For the last fortnight of December, from fifty to a hundred teams owned in and about Council Bluffs had been hauling iron to complete the road into the city.

On the ninth of January, 1867, the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph was formally opened to Bartlett, with an excursion to "end o' track". "A number of the ladies and gentlemen of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County," recorded the *Bugle*, "had the pleasure of taking a car ride from our city for the first time in the history of her life. The day was cold, but the event was one of so much importance to our country, and the car so comfortable as to overshadow all else, and to cheer up our hearts, and turn the occasion into a jubilee."

The terminus, it must be said, was not very imposing. Bartlett, not far below the northern line of Fremont County, then embodied one hotel, one bar, one drug store, one grocery, a warehouse, and a handful of dwelling-houses. The editor of the little paper in Glenwood wrote of it: "This town was conceived in jealousy and malignity, and the founders have neither the enterprise or the ability to make it better than it is"; but that may have been jealousy.

In summer, however, the wealth of the farming lands that the little railroad made accessible was re-

vealed. The editor of the *Bugle* made the trip again: "It will pay any man who is housed up during the busy months, to take a trip over this road, and look at the vast fields of beautiful, luxuriant corn, wheat and oats. The Missouri Valley between here and Bartlett is wonderfully rich, and is now groaning, as it were, under vast loads of grain. Here you can look upon acres of as good corn as ever was grown. It waves like magic rods, and may produce magic results when ripened and gathered for the market." The little town of St. Mary's had been swirled away by the floodwaters; but Pacific City was perking up, and sawmills about Bartlett were buzzing.

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

The North Western

Out of a maze of mergers, recharters, and consolidations, emerged the Chicago and North Western Railway in June of 1864. The Chicago, Iowa and Nebraska Railroad had been built from Clinton to Cedar Rapids during the three years ending in June, 1859; the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River company, taking four years for the work, had laid tracks from Cedar Rapids to Boone by the close of 1864. Meanwhile this connecting line, without a change of name, had become a part of the first "octopus" in the history of American railroads; and the same energy that had created the Chicago and North Western was not willing that the Iowa spur of the system should rest in mid-State, with the rich prizes of a connection with the Union Pacific only a hundred and thirty miles away.

In July, 1864, Congress made another grant of land, with the State of Iowa as the intermediate party, to the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River road, with the authorization to build to the Missouri River. In December, with wonderful promptness, construction was begun, as the grading crew struck out for the Boyer Valley. Certainly the directors must have planned from the first that Council Bluffs should be the terminus; but they were in a position to exact favors, and remained coy. "It is yet an

unsettled question", soberly reported the *Nonpareil* in September, 1865, "whether this road will come down the Boyer to Council Bluffs, or cross the river at De Soto, but we have reason to believe, from what we have seen and heard of the feelings of the company, that if a reasonable inducement is offered by Pottawattamie County the road will make its connection with the Union Pacific at Council Bluffs. This road will reach the Missouri several years in advance of any other coming across Iowa, and that town upon the river which secures the advantage of its terminus, will derive an impetus therefrom with which rival points will find it difficult to compete."

In early spring the piers and abutments for the bridge across the Des Moines River were erected, and in April one of Howe's Patent Truss bridges was swung across the stream. The iron rails began to arrive that same month, and construction trains crossed the river in pursuit of the graders. Work progressed uneventfully and speedily. Thomas C. Durant, vice-president of the Union Pacific, and Grenville M. Dodge, chief engineer of the Pacific line and native son of Council Bluffs, travelled to Chicago, spoke the right words, and came back with the assurance that the Chicago and North Western would build into Council Bluffs. "Under this new arrangement between the two companies," announced the *Omaha Herald*, "the Union Pacific are to build and furnish two hundred and fifty cars for the transportation of their own material over the

Chicago and North Western. These cars are all to be manufactured in this city, in the extensive carshops of the Company, where they are now constructing large numbers of superior platform and freight cars."

On July 9, 1866, the railroad was ready to ask its favors. Burhop's Hall that night was a lively place, housing the enthusiasm of a city. Stages had been erected at either end of the hall, one for the guests of the evening, John I. Blair and W. W. Walker, and the other for the band; both stages were crowded with American flags. The list of the speakers at that meeting was a roll of the "first citizens" of old Council Bluffs. The resolutions that the conference adopted by acclamation were almost as numerous as the speakers. The final resolution was a verbal high-ball for the visitors: "Resolved, That we feel under obligations to Messrs. Blair and Walker, the gentlemanly officers of said company, for their visit to our place, and for the interest manifested by them in the early completion of their road to our city, and for the free, full and frank expressions given by them of the prospects for the speedy completion of their road, and of the future prospects of our city." There seems an alcoholic fragrance in that redundancy.

Major M. Turley headed the list of subscriptions with the gift of eighty acres of land within the city for a depot and other railroad buildings. One business firm gave two thousand dollars; eleven sub-

scribers pledged a thousand each; a hundred and six additional signatures swelled the total to thirty-six thousand dollars. And in the infectious enthusiasm echoed the words of editor Burke of the *Nonpareil*: "It would be better for every lot owner in the city to donate one half of his possessions — be they much or little — if, thereby, these railroad connections could be secured, than to own twice what he now has and allow them to go elsewhere. Without her railroads, we would scarcely give a baubee for the best vacant lot in Council Bluffs; with them, we will see how rapidly every stagnant impulse will be stirred into life, and the flush of a radiant but permanent prosperity mantle all the future."

A fortnight later Walker was advertising in the *Chicago Times* for five thousand laborers to work on the western division of the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River road; and the *Chicago Tribune*, with complacence which time has not withered, was predicting that by the first of June, 1867, the *Tribune* would be laid on breakfast tables in Council Bluffs and Omaha on the morning after its publication, and ten hours later would brighten the tea-time hour at Fort Kearney, six hundred and sixty miles west of Chicago.

By mid-September the road was within fifteen miles of Denison; the huskies from Chicago were laying the rails down the valley of the Boyer. The contractors asked that the citizens of Council Bluffs coöperate to keep away the men who were following

the line-camps and establishing grog-shops under canvas. But the work went on.

On September 15th ground was broken for the depot at Council Bluffs: with Thomas Jeffries as master of ceremonies, the townspeople again made their enthusiasm known. The procession began at the Pacific House, and marched and countermarched along Broadway, with the Council Bluffs Brass Band in the lead. At the depot grounds the assaults of the artillery and the band, followed by four speeches, were necessary before the first shovelful of earth was turned.

And on Tuesday, January 22, 1867, answering the call of Mayor Caleb Baldwin, the citizens of Council Bluffs assembled, in sleighs, buggies, carriages, and omnibuses, at the Pacific House at two in the afternoon; thence they went to the depot grounds, to witness the laying of the last rail on the Council Bluffs and Missouri River Railroad — the binding of Council Bluffs in one unbroken line of iron to the whole sisterhood of States. At the Board of Trade rooms later in the evening, congratulatory telegrams were read, the directors and the superintendents of construction of the road were honored by resolutions; and out of the abundance of speeches rang one, the address of General Grenville M. Dodge, linking the labor of the present with the labor of the future:

“CITIZENS OF COUNCIL BLUFFS: We have met here to-day to celebrate the completion of the Cedar Rap-

ids & Missouri River Railroad to Council Bluffs — thus finishing the last connection and closing the last link that gives us the only all rail route from the Missouri River to the Atlantic coast. . . . Nature has been lavish in concentrating here in this valley and around this city advantages for a commercial and railroad centre, possessed by no other point between St. Louis and the head of the Missouri River. If we but will it and use the ability, energy, enterprise and capital we have among us, we can within the next two years — if financial matters continue prosperous, and no great revulsion overtakes our country — concentrate here five great trunk railroads, that shall bring to and through us the trade and traffic of the North, East, West and South. I therefore appeal to you, to-day, to awake from the sleep that has possessed us, and each one and all of us determine from this day henceforth to place our shoulders to the wheel, and use all our ability, capital and enterprise in building up here a city and a railroad centre, that shall be second to none in the State of Iowa; and which shall be the metropolis of the Missouri Valley. To do this, we must extend the right hand of fellowship to labor, commerce, capital, manufactures, and to men of all trades, of all nations, climes and colors — and make it of interest to them to seek here a home, a fortune, and hereafter be one of us.”

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

The Rock Island

Council Bluffs' first experience with railroads had not been pleasant. The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company, organized as long ago as December, 1852, should have been the first to build a railroad across Iowa into Council Bluffs. The company had once made a gesture of compliance; officers had come into Council Bluffs and performed the customary prerequisite — that is, they had raised subscriptions from the townspeople. But they had gone away, leaving to the citizens a bad taste and a deficit.

In May, 1856, the national government granted to the State of Iowa several hundred thousand acres of its public lands to aid in the construction of a railroad to Council Bluffs. These lands were pledged to the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad, whose line had staggered into Iowa City on the first of the year; but the railroad showed no inclination to gather its energies for another push westward. Grenville M. Dodge, assistant engineer to Peter M. Dey in the survey of the Mississippi and Missouri, had settled at Council Bluffs and accumulated a mass of information, from emigrants and from his own explorations, of the highways of overland travel and of the volume of western trade: in 1857 he was invited to visit the Mississippi and Missouri

company offices in New York and make a detailed report.

The directors were assembled, and Dodge's paper was given to the secretary to be read: as the perfunctory voice droned through the data in behalf of the extension of the road, the directors walked out. One of them, leaving, protested because he had been asked to hear such nonsense. But Thomas C. Durant and Henry Farnam remained. They believed that a Pacific railroad would soon be created, which would justify the extension of the Mississippi and Missouri to the western river; and Dodge was authorized to begin work at Council Bluffs, if he could obtain local aid, and build eastward through Pottawattamie County.

What happened is obscure. The company promised to build fifty miles of railroad east of Council Bluffs, if the city would issue bonds to the road to the amount of three hundred thousand dollars. The bonds were pledged. The company graded four miles of the road at a cost of perhaps forty-five hundred dollars, secured a third of the bonds, and then . . . comes the veil. General Dodge in his autobiography says simply, "And then we were called east to continue the road from Iowa City west. . . . In 1861 we discontinued the work because of the Civil War."

Accordingly, no tears were shed in Council Bluffs when the Mississippi and Missouri, having extended its line to Kellogg, fell upon hard times. In December, 1865, came news that the railroad had been sold,

with all its interests and privileges, to the Chicago and Rock Island Company. "There will be a rattling among the dry bones on the line of the M. & M.", exulted the *Nonpareil*. "The object of the C. & R. I. Company in making the purchase, is to push the road through at the earliest moment, to secure a connection at Council Bluffs with the Pacific Road, and our readers may rest assured this will be done, for the company has the money, and their every interest is at stake in having this connection made without delay."

The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company was created to take over the bankrupt road; and in August, 1866, the holding company and the original Chicago and Rock Island, an Illinois company, were merged.

Obviously the Rock Island had to build its line to the Missouri. The Chicago and North Western was vigorously building west of Boone; and the completion of a through freight line by a competitor would leave only way business for the Rock Island. There was a gap of a hundred and fifty miles that had to be closed.

By the fall of 1867 construction was humming. Seventeen hundred men were at work, and the contractors were advertising for three thousand more. Bridges were being built in Davenport, ready to be transported as they were needed. While the line of finished track was still east of Newton, the company stationed a representative, William Reynolds, at

Council Bluffs, whose main function was to act as a good-will emissary.

As the new year began, grading had been completed forty miles west of Des Moines, and the company engineers were engaged in making the permanent location through Pottawattamie County. Editor Babbitt visited Des Moines: "We had a conversation with some of the managers of this road and they informed us that it was their intention to complete the road to Council Bluffs within one year, notwithstanding the fact that they had two years to complete it in."

Meanwhile the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph Railroad, pausing awhile at Bartlett, had gathered itself for another spurt. Its fellow corporation, the St. Joseph and Council Bluffs Railroad, risen from the ashes of the old Platte County Railroad, had been shaken out of its lethargy. Earnest construction had not been easily begun; the merchants of St. Louis and St. Joseph had had to do a great deal of shouting and pointing-with-alarm at the advancing tentacles of business-hungry Chicago; and newspapers had had to become emphatic in their reproof. "To-day," declared the *Bugle*, "all Western Iowa, Nebraska and the territories north and west of them are completely cut off from St. Louis, while trade and communication is open and prosperous with Chicago. This trade, which amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars every day, and results in the shipment of thousands of tons of goods over the

Chicago & Northwestern Railroad, naturally belongs to St. Louis; but she has lost it for the time being, if not forever, because she has been sleeping for the past eight or ten years." Sometime in the late months of 1867, the St. Joseph railroad began to build. By the spring of 1868 construction had reached Forest City: meanwhile the Council Bluffs road had reached the southern border of the State, passed it, and without the little formality of authorization by the State of Missouri had continued to build southward. In June a gap of only thirty-five miles separated the two roads. On Wednesday, August 19, 1868, the first through train from St. Joseph arrived in Council Bluffs. The second railroad into Council Bluffs had been completed.

The steam shovels of the Rock Island construction gangs were cutting very slowly through the tough "blue clay" of the hills of western Iowa. Only the immense force of six thousand men and three thousand teams carried the work forward at a fair pace. By October, 1868, the road was completed fifty-six miles west of Des Moines, and by the end of the year twenty miles more had been finished. Construction was careful; "the best constructed railroad in Iowa" was to be the Rock Island's boast. And the Chicago and North Western, anticipating that the Rock Island would attempt a faster time between Chicago and Council Bluffs, in the spring and summer of 1869 relaid its Iowa Division with heavy rails of the "Fish Plate" pattern.

On the twelfth of May, 1869, the first train of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific entered Council Bluffs. There was another event to be celebrated: two days before, Leland Stanford and Thomas C. Durant had had occasion to telegraph President Grant from Promontory Summit, Utah, "The last rail is laid, the last spike driven. The Pacific Railroad is completed." Mayor D. C. Bloomer was in charge of ceremonies. The fire company, the ladies' societies, the town band and the artillery squad had places in the day's proceedings. Appropriately, as a part of the ceremonies saluting the future of Council Bluffs, the cornerstone of the Ogden House was laid — that hostelry, completed three days before Christmas, which was the showplace of Council Bluffs, the finest hotel between Chicago and San Francisco.

"East, West, North, and South, the iron tracks are laid, and the iron horse drags his long train of cars, loaded with passengers, freight, and live stock, to and from our city in every direction. But this is not all, added to this we have the great Missouri river — a natural highway — upon whose turbid waters float one hundred steamers loaded with commercial traffic. Let us be proud, we have a right to be. Let us rejoice, for in this respect we have great cause for rejoicing." Council Bluffs had become a bang-up town.

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

The Final Ties

The Burlington and Missouri, the tardy one of the three railroads building across Iowa to the Platte Valley, had long been expected to build its tracks into Council Bluffs. In the fall of 1868 President James F. Joy of the Burlington came to Council Bluffs with a proposal to make that town its terminus, provided that the citizens would donate twenty acres of ground for a depot. Perhaps the people of that fortunate town believed that the Burlington must build into Council Bluffs perforce, donation or no, if that road hoped to share the Pacific trade. And when, in the summer of 1869, the Burlington was only seventy-five miles away, the newspapers of Council Bluffs confidently asserted that the rails of yet another railroad would soon lead into Council Bluffs. But President Joy had become a heavy stockholder in the line between Council Bluffs and St. Joseph; and the Burlington and Missouri formed a junction with that line at Pacific Junction, running into Council Bluffs upon the same track. On the fourth of December, 1869, the first Burlington train entered the city.

The Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company, organized in August, 1864, after the Union Pacific had been released from its obligation to construct a branch to Sioux City, began track laying at Cali-

ifornia Junction in September, 1867. The work zipped along: thirty-five miles were completed by December, and fifty miles in all by the first of January, 1868. In a month the line was completed into Sioux City; and from California Junction the Chicago and North Western offered access into Council Bluffs. Twelve years later the Chicago and North Western was to acquire practically all the stock of the Sioux City and Pacific; and the name itself passed away in 1884.

As Council Bluffs entered upon the eighteenth year of its corporate existence — the year 1870 — the town made a résumé of its assets. Not a week was passing without the arrival of several letters of inquiry about Council Bluffs. Its population was about eleven thousand. The list of public buildings was a matter of pride, while business houses were “numbered by hundreds”.

The Union Pacific, finished except for the bridge across the Missouri, was running three freight trains and one express daily; the transfer of freight and passengers was being made by three steam ferry-boats, and the transfer business was far from the least in Council Bluffs. Two trains a day over the Rock Island, two over the North Western, two over the St. Joseph, two over the Sioux City line; and valorous announcements of other railroads who hoped to build into Council Bluffs. . . . Council Bluffs had earned the right to hand itself a cigar. “Now, the election is past, Council Bluffs has been

elected to the highest position that can be given to any city on the upper Missouri river." And Colonel Babbitt of the *Bugle* added, "There is no necessity now for talking and writing about Council Bluffs as we talked and wrote twelve years ago. The clouds that then overhung our destiny have been removed, and the sun of the city's glory is shining fully upon us and all we have to do is to direct its rays to our advantage and future greatness."

But there happened to be one unwelded link in the chain of railroads about Council Bluffs. The Union Pacific bridge was not begun until the completion of the road. When the North Western railway brought freight cars to the east bank of the Missouri, the Union Pacific used car ferries, similar to those great barges which may now be seen about Manhattan Island, to convey freight without reloading to the Union Pacific tracks.

Perhaps the sister cities, with the prize of the Union Pacific to divide between them, inevitably had to quarrel. Perhaps if George Francis Train, irrepressible, extravagant, and vulgar, had not elected himself the spokesman of Omaha, the quarrel would have been less bitter. Perhaps if the citizens of Council Bluffs had had the vision to protest against the building of the Union Pacific bridge at Child's Mill at the first suggestion of that site, Omaha might have been less greedy.

In the winter of 1866-1867 Omaha entered into an agreement with the Union Pacific to donate all the

terminal space that the railway needed; the Union Pacific engineers surveyed the ground that they wished to acquire, and Douglas County authorized a quarter million dollar bond issue to make the purchase, with the understanding that the Union Pacific would build its depot in Omaha. Then came the stunning news that General Dodge had recommended that the Union Pacific build its bridge at the Child's Mill crossing. This crossing offered easier grades (there were high banks upon each side of the river), and the river was rather narrow at that point. But Child's Mill was a few miles below Omaha, and the adoption of that site meant that the Union Pacific would veer sharply to the south from Council Bluffs, leaving Omaha practically upon a siding. A delegation from Omaha bearded the Pacific directors in New York; and at Jay Gould's intervention the order was rescinded. On March 28, 1868, the directors located the bridge at the Train Table crossing, directly linking the two cities.

A Chicago corporation secured the contract to build the bridge, but the first cylinder was not ready for sinking until March, 1869. Exasperated by the delay, the Union Pacific revoked the contract and itself built the bridge.

The editor of the Leavenworth *Bulletin*, in Council Bluffs in May, sauntered down to the river. He was impressed: "The bridge will be the largest one yet projected over the Missouri river — will consist of eleven spans of two hundred and fifty feet each.

. . . When we visited the work, the men were engaged on the first pier on the Iowa side; the first tube of this pier had been sunk to its place, and stood upon the solid rock, eighty feet below the surface. . . . The second tube, when we saw it, was down about forty feet. We spent about an hour and a half looking at the operation, and during that time the big column went down five feet. When looking at these half-dozen men, quietly pursuing their work, with no more fuss or ado about it than a farmer makes in cultivating his field, one can hardly realize that they are successfully and rapidly executing one of the grandest conceptions of modern genius."

The bridge was completed on the twenty-fifth of March, 1873. The Union Pacific seemed inclined to consider Omaha its legal terminus, none the less. A grocery firm, Hall and Morse, like other merchants of Council Bluffs compelled to deliver their freight to the Union Pacific at Omaha, brought the test case. The firm obtained a writ of mandamus against the Union Pacific; the writ, carried to the Supreme Court, was confirmed, and Council Bluffs was assured for all time of the benefits of Lincoln's proclamation. Three railways from the Mississippi to the Missouri, an unbroken connection by rail with St. Louis, and, fifth, the keystone of the structure — the Pacific Railway to San Francisco: was there any better hand in the deck!

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

Comment by the Editor

LINCOLN CAME TO COUNCIL BLUFFS

Late in the afternoon of August 12, 1859, a flat-bottomed, stern-wheel steamboat churned up the Missouri River to the landing at Council Bluffs and swung her gang-plank ashore. Among the motley throng that disembarked came the "Honorable Abe Lincoln" — tall, travel-stained, leisurely. Climbing into the omnibus, he rode two miles or more across the level river-bottom land to the frontier town at the foot of clay-colored bluffs. Scarcely had he registered at the double-porched and sagging-floored Pacific House before W. H. M. Pusey, a former acquaintance in Springfield, learned of his presence and straightway arranged a public reception for that very evening.

The next morning, from a high bluff above the town, Lincoln gazed up and down the tortuous course of the yellow Missouri. Between the Iowa hills and the river lay a flat unbroken field of grass and sunflowers, while beyond the river in Nebraska, four miles away, sprawled the rival town of Omaha. "Many railroads will center here", remarked the uncouth statesman with prophetic vision.

This observation was not as casual as it sounded. Lincoln had been interested in railroad development

for several years, and his trip to Council Bluffs was partly for the purpose of studying the natural advantages of that locality as a railroad center. On Sunday evening, after an informal talk on the porch of the Pacific House, he met Grenville M. Dodge who was even then reputed to know more about railroads than any two men in the country.

“Dodge,” inquired Lincoln, “what’s the best route for a Pacific railroad to the west?”

“From this town out the Platte Valley”, was the instant response.

“Why do you think so?” drawled the Illinois attorney. The young engineer launched upon a spirited defense of the route he had recently explored. Adroitly, by means of questions that implied a doubt, Lincoln learned the secret hopes and half-made plans of the railroad builders. Apparently he was convinced that Council Bluffs was the most likely junction for the Iowa railroads and the proposed Pacific trunk line. Three months later he bought a lot in Riddle’s subdivision near the terminus-to-be of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad.

The act of Congress which authorized the creation of the Union Pacific Railroad Company provided that a line should be built from a point on the western boundary of Iowa to be fixed by the President of the United States. Amidst conflicting opinions and selfish influences President Lincoln again sought the advice of General Dodge, and received the same reply he had elicited four years before. On Novem-

ber 17, 1863, the President located the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad at a point on the western boundary of Iowa in the township containing the city of Omaha — thus permitting a range of six miles north and south. But this did not satisfy the directors of the company who wanted the road to end in Omaha instead of across the river. After weighing the probabilities of obtaining a more favorable decision, they asked the President to be more specific, whereupon he definitely fixed the terminus in Council Bluffs!

J. E. B.

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