

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## United by Rail

On a day in mid-October, 1855, the shrill whistle of a locomotive echoed over Muscatine, its sound defiant, challenging, announcing the imminent defeat of the wilderness, the westward retreat of the frontier. It was the first time that such a sound had been heard in the city. Men, women, and children stopped in the midst of their activities, rushed to windows or doors, or if duties permitted, hastened to where the "iron horse" itself "snorted" impatiently to be off on its first "run" out of Muscatine. What did it matter if only six miles of track had been laid, or if the train consisted only of an engine with its tender and one construction car? This little train was prophetic of what was to come. Men and boys scrambled upon the cars until no more could get aboard, the wheels moved, the "chug-chug" increased in rapidity, and the train was on its way. There was a great shout from those left behind,



women waved their kerchiefs, and the office force of the *Muscatine Journal* gave three loud cheers.

The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad, the first in Iowa to take actual form, was beginning its main line from Davenport to Iowa City. A branch line was to extend from Wilton to Muscatine. Although the main line to Iowa City was not completed until the first of the year (1856), the road from Wilton to Muscatine was finished by mid-November, 1855, and thus Davenport and Muscatine, two of the ranking cities of pioneer Iowa, were connected by railway.

Such an epoch-making incident could not go unheralded. As early as August 23rd the *Muscatine Iowa Democratic Enquirer* suggested an appropriate celebration. On the evening of October 19th a preliminary meeting of citizens was held to discuss the propriety of a celebration. The next day handbills announcing a general meeting that evening were circulated, "a bell was rung through the city," the court house was lighted and heated in anticipation — and nobody came, nobody but a "baker's dozen"; so the gathering was adjourned. Nevertheless, the movement went on. By October 30th the city council had apparently voted funds to make the celebration a certainty. At a meeting in Hare's Hall on November 3rd, a communication from the railroad officials was read stating that the road to Muscatine would definitely be open by the 15th. Tuesday, November 20th, was then designated for the celebration.



On November 10th, the committee on arrangements, consisting of Joseph Bennett, Joseph Bridgman, A. O. Warfield, H. Q. Jennison, and William Stone, announces its plans. The train from Davenport, bringing invited guests from Davenport, Rock Island, Chicago, and elsewhere, is to arrive at noon; the mayor of Muscatine is to make an address of welcome; the guests are to be escorted to various dining places; and there are to be speeches at the courthouse. In the evening there is to be a free supper for the guests at Ogilvie's new hall on Iowa Avenue. Last, and perhaps best of all, there is to be "a grand free ball". But the celebration is not to end with the dance. On the following day, when the guests return home, they are to be escorted formally to the train; and on the day following, Thursday, a train of Muscatine people are to journey to Davenport, to be entertained there by the citizens of that city. It is to be a wonderful three-day celebration!

No city or village that is holding a celebration is indifferent to the weather. In the midst of preparation, on the thirteenth, the *Journal* pauses to say that the weather is "the most delightful ever known at this season." A promising indication, that! But who can predict the whims of the weather in a climate so variable as ours? Three inches of snow fall in Muscatine on the 16th, and Tuesday the 20th, the first day of the celebration, arrives "amid a sea of mist and rain". The earth "presents one magnifi-



cent mass of mud''! It is discouraging, yet we must not let our visitors receive an erroneous impression of our fair city. "And here let us remark," says the editor of the *Journal*, "that it is something unusual for our streets to present such a muddy appearance, especially at this season of the year. We do have mud, but we must say that this exceeds anything we have seen since we became a resident of the city." Perhaps California and Florida have learned their apologies from our Muscatine editor!

In spite of the rain and mud, noon approaches, and with it the train of visitors. First Street, near the Ogilvie House, and that spacious building itself, are thronged with people. Almost the whole population of Muscatine is there "to witness the advent into our city, of the First Train of Cars ever run in the State of Iowa, one of the most sublime triumphs of mind over matter that perhaps the history of the world records." It is an impressive event these people have come to witness. It is the beginning of "the Railroad era of our State, the beginning of a period in our history from which the present and future generations will ever date."

What historian can renew the enthusiasms of that expectant group of pioneers? There they are, in a little city of seven thousand inhabitants. Five years ago there were but two thousand; fifteen years, five hundred; twenty years ago — wilderness and Indians. But to-day, as the train rolls in, great distances are no longer barriers. Wealth and comfort



and culture are infinitely nearer. The struggle of the past has been worth while. Who can prophesy the possibilities of the future?

No, only a contemporary can tell the story to convey the original fervor: "At 1 o'clock the welcome snort of the Iron Horse announced the approach of the cars. They came, six of them, drawn by the new Locomotive — 'Muscatine' — gracefully and proudly, ornate with the ensigns of our country, the glorious stars and stripes, and crowded with invited guests and others who enthusiastically united in the general rejoicing. They arrived amid the stentorian shouts of the assembled people and the soul-stirring strains of music which threw a charm into the moment beyond the power of language to describe."

The train comes to a halt, the visitors alight. Mayor J. H. Wallace of Muscatine gives an address of welcome in which he plays upon the fancy of a "celebration of the nuptials of Chicago and Muscatine." Mayor Boone of Chicago, with apologies that he has not prepared a speech, replies to the welcome. Muscatine, he says, reflecting the common topic of Mormonism then in the air, is the fairest and most prosperous of Chicago's brides, one at whom Chicago has long been "looking wishfully as one worthy to be grappled . . . with hooks of iron." The intellectual feast at the courthouse, unfortunately, must be abandoned because the mud has made walking disagreeable; so the guests scatter until evening.



Toward evening the streets have dried, and every one is in good humor for the supper at Ogilvie's new hall. There are twelve long tables, "each graced with handsome pyramids of cake." On the main table is a mammoth work of art, a cake with a base three feet square, and at least five feet high, the handiwork of Mrs. Cummins, Mrs. Leffingwell, and Mrs. Palmer. One is almost overcome by the array of meats, of which there are twenty kinds, including turkey, quail, and venison. There are, too, that choice delicacy of the pioneers, oysters. Though the season is almost winter, there are peaches and pears and ice cream.

After the supper, with J. Scott Richman presiding, there are toasts. Mr. Hiram Price responds to "The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad — the first opened in Iowa"; Mayor Levi D. Boone of Chicago, "The nuptial ceremonies of Chicago and Muscatine"; Mr. William Bross of the Chicago *Democratic Press*, "The City of Chicago, the emporium of the west, the granary of the world"; Mr. Henry O'Connor of Muscatine, "The State of Iowa — Her natural beauty is only surpassed by the fertility of her soil"; Mr. Harper of Oskaloosa, "The farmer and the mechanic"; Mr. John F. Ely of Cedar Rapids, "The ladies — We are indebted to them for the 'better half' of our enjoyments upon the occasion"; Mr. J. P. Hornish of Keokuk, "The Union — A common interest prompted it, may a common affection perpetuate it." Others, too, are asked to speak, among



them Mr. Veile of Keokuk, Mr. S. A. Russell of Washington, Iowa, and Colonel N. B. Buford of Rock Island. Henry Farnam, president of the new road, addresses the group, but when Mr. Reed, the engineer who has built the road, is asked to speak, he stands only long enough to say that he would rather build railroads than make speeches. The Rev. James Tanner, an Indian clergyman, is present with six Chippewa chiefs. In his talk he says that only he and his six companions are true Americans, the others only foreigners. He hopes that the relations between his people and the whites will hereafter be characterized by "unity, love and peace".

The supper and the toasts ended, Unger's Brass Band plays. Their concert is but a prelude to the greatest event of the evening—the free ball, with the Cotillion Band of Le Claire, providing the music. "The hall is crowded, yet not to excess; there is room for all, yet not a seat yawns in lonely vacancy, and there is mirth and joy for all, with not a discontented look to cast a marring shadow amid the all prevailing merriment. And when, soon after the band 'strikes up' and seats are vacated, promenading ceases and flirting is for the nonce arrested, the floors resound to the pattering of feet, and eyes and hearts all dance, till the very lights shine with giddy lustre and the echoes of the music seem themselves to have gone delirious. It is a brilliant scene".

But we must hasten to the end. At nine o'clock the next morning (Wednesday), the guests are con-



ducted to the waiting train. In the afternoon there is an excursion to Wilton and return. The formalities at Muscatine close. Tomorrow Davenport is to entertain the citizens of Muscatine.

At ten o'clock Thursday morning a train of six cars bearing some four hundred passengers leaves for Davenport. It is, of course, a novel event. After the train has passed the groves near the city and has come out upon the glorious prairie, there is a rush to the windows, which present a mottled array of bonnets, hats, and bare heads of those eager to view the magnificent scene. In the prevailing excitement Judge T. S. Parvin drops his hat out of the window, and thereby becomes the center of merriment. When Dr. Henry Murray of Iowa City has a similar accident, the women scream and the men shout with laughter.

Arrived in Davenport at the corner of Brady and Fifth streets, the visitors are met by their entertainer, General George B. Sargent, who has secured the services of the Davenport Brass Band for the occasion. The band plays as the guests alight and find seats in the hacks, omnibuses, and other conveyances chartered for their convenience. Those unable to find seats form a procession led by two brass bands, the one from Davenport and Unger's from Muscatine, and march to the home of General Sargent. Here, after brief ceremonies of introduction, the ladies are ushered into the dining room, where the table "groans beneath a wealth of delicacies, a



profusion of good things embracing everything that Nature furnishes or the inventive genius of woman can create." The gentlemen eat later. At least four hundred people are served. Then there is music again by the two bands. Judge Parvin, in behalf of Muscatine, extends thanks for the generous entertainment, and General Sargent graciously responds. Brief addresses are given by Messrs. Ebenezer and J. P. Cook of Davenport, and by Jacob Butler of Muscatine. Mr. Farnam, president of the M. & M., closes his brief talk with this sentiment: "Muscatine and Davenport, twin cities: may their greatest rivalry consist in the effort to live above all petty jealousies and lead in the great railroad enterprises in the State."

It is evening when the train comes to a stop on its return to Muscatine. The youthful city has resumed its normal quiet, and the railroad celebration has ended. Low on the horizon, where the woods skirt the eastern bank of the majestic Mississippi, hangs an almost full moon.

HUBERT H. HOELTJE