

# THE PALIMPSEST

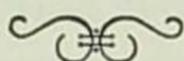
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## Dubuque's First Railroad

In the middle of the nineteenth century the largest towns in Iowa were along the Mississippi River. They were Burlington, Dubuque, Muscatine, and Keokuk in that order. Iowa City, then the capital of the state, had only 1,250 inhabitants; whereas Burlington had 4,082, Dubuque 3,108, Muscatine 2,540, and Keokuk 2,478. It was clearly evident that the Father of Waters was responsible for most of the population of the Hawkeye State.

By 1850, however, far-sighted men in the river towns saw the railroad as a means of fostering travel westward from the Mississippi across the state. Even before this time, the citizens of Dubuque were exhorted not only to span Iowa by rail, but to continue it on to the Pacific Ocean. What is believed to be the first public meeting to promote a railroad to the Pacific was held in Dubuque in 1838. The spokesman was John Plumbe, Jr., who had migrated to Dubuque from the East, where he had worked under the famous civil en-

gineer, Moncure Robinson, in surveying the Allegheny Portage Railroad in Pennsylvania. Plumbe subsequently was a superintendent of a pioneer Virginia railroad. Later he turned to photography, in which he achieved considerable success.

Plumbe envisioned a railroad from Milwaukee to Dubuque, thence westward to the Pacific Coast. He seems to have enlisted very little support, and his name is scarcely remembered today. But in 1838 he did get \$2,000 from Congress to survey a route from Milwaukee to Sinipee, Wisconsin, on the Mississippi above Dubuque. The grant was largely through the efforts of Territorial Delegate George Wallace Jones, later United States Senator from Iowa. Furthermore, Plumbe made a trip to California on his own, which convinced him even more that a transcontinental railroad was feasible.

While John Plumbe was ahead of his time, and was for the most part regarded as an impractical visionary, he planted the germ which culminated in Dubuque's "railroad fever" of the 1850's. Once the germ was planted, others nurtured it. Foremost among these was George Wallace Jones, and his colleague Augustus Caesar Dodge, the first two United States Senators from Iowa, who insisted that the rapidly-building Illinois Central Railroad terminate on the Mississippi River opposite Dubuque. Heretofore the Illinois Central had planned to end its tracks at Galena, Illinois, sev-

enteen miles east of the Mississippi on the Fever River.

Once assured that the Illinois Central would come to Dunleith (known today as East Dubuque), it was up to Dubuquers to build their own railroad. Already plans were hatching for railroads into the hinterlands from Davenport, Burlington, Keokuk, and the Clinton-Lyons area. Iowa newspapers were full of "railroad talk" and Dubuque must not be caught napping.

One by one the business men and leading citizens in Dubuque rallied to the cause. Preliminary meetings were held in which Lucius H. Langworthy, pioneer Dubuque lead miner, acted as spokesman. Hardly less important was Jesse P. Farley, merchant, ex-mayor, and pioneer steamboat builder and operator. These meetings led to the chartering of the Dubuque & Pacific Railroad Company on April 28, 1853.

From the start, several of the Illinois Central's key men were active in promoting Dubuque's first railroad. Farley was elected President and Colonel Roswell B. Mason, Chief Engineer of the Illinois Central, was made Engineer-in-Chief. Other officers included Platt Smith, a prominent Dubuque lawyer, who became Solicitor of the road, and Frederick S. Jesup, a local banker, who was made Treasurer. Among the original incorporators were Robert Schuyler, President of the Illinois Central, and General C. H. Booth, first

mayor of Dubuque and owner of the city's earliest sawmill and its pioneer flour mill. Senator George Wallace Jones, who did so much to foster railroads in Iowa, was elected Chairman of the Board of the Dubuque & Pacific.

Despite the impressive list of important Dubuquers associated with the project, the new company encountered many difficulties. While the people of Dubuque County subscribed to approximately \$250,000 worth of stock, bonds sold as low as 50¢ on the dollar, and land and other collateral was accepted in lieu of cash. By the summer of 1855 there was little to show for its existence except a surveyed route a few miles westward from Dubuque.

On July 31, 1855, Colonel Mason resigned as Chief Engineer, and B. B. Provoost, a Division Engineer on the Illinois Central, succeeded him. At this juncture the "paper" railroad made a contract with the firm of Mason, Bishop & Company, which Colonel Mason headed, to construct the line to Dyersville. Meanwhile the Illinois Central had reached Dunleith, so that railroad was more interested than ever in backing a friendly connection west of the Mississippi.

On October 1, 1855, George Wallace Jones dug the first shovel of earth for the Dubuque & Pacific. The following spring construction went on apace through the rocky, hilly Dubuque County terrain. On September 10, 1856, the first

locomotive, the *Dubuque*, was ferried across the Mississippi from Dunleith, marking the occasion when the first steam engine turned a wheel in northern Iowa. The crude wood-burner was outshopped by the historic firm of Rogers, Ketchum & Grosvenor of Patterson, New Jersey. Not long afterward a second locomotive, the *Jesse P. Farley*, named in honor of the road's president, arrived on the scene.

It was on May 11, 1857, that the first train made the twenty-nine-mile run from Dubuque to Dyersville. The *Jesse P. Farley* pulled an assorted "consist" of passenger coaches and freight cars filled with joyful celebrants. In traveling the unballasted line, the engine jumped the track three times before completing the historic run. James S. Northrup was the conductor while Thomas W. Place pulled the throttle. Place later became chief mechanical officer of the road. When he retired in 1901 the Waterloo roundhouse shopmen presented him with a trim horse and carriage as a tribute to his leadership.

The Panic of 1857 halted construction, and for two years the Dubuque & Pacific had its "end of track" at Earlville, "a crossroads which boasted two houses," eight miles west of Dyersville. Even the road's extensive land grant of 1,162,373 acres (thanks to the efforts of George Wallace Jones) was of little use since it did not become available until the road reached the respective areas stipu-

lated in the grant. Not until a very substantial part of the road was completed would the struggling Dubuque & Pacific realize much from its land sales. Furthermore, what little land there was available along the constructed line brought low prices due to the business depression.

As a result of unfavorable economic conditions, poor credit and lack of significant western terminal, the Dubuque & Pacific defaulted on its bonds and underwent reorganization. But it was still in business, although feeble and halting in operation. In short, it was marking time. Its future was uncertain . . . if, indeed, it had a future.

DUBUQUE & SIOUX CITY RAILROAD			
			
TIME TABLE.			
Moving West.	Names of Stations.	No. of Miles.	Moving East.
11 10	Dubuque		1 50
11 50	Julien	9½	1 10
12 10	Peosta	5	12 50
12 30	Epworth	4½	12 30
12 50	Farley	4	12 10
1 20	Dyersville	6½	11 40
1 50	Earlville	7½	11 10
2 06	Delaware Center	4	10 54
2 30	Arr. at	} Manches'r	10 30
2 45	Leave		10 25
3 15	Masonville	6¾	9 55
3 50	Winthrop	7½	9 20
4 27	Independence	8½	8 43
5 05	Jesup	8½	8 05
5 45	Raymond	8¾	7 25
6 15	Waterloo	6½	6 55
6 40	Cedar Falls	6¼	6 30