

North and South Railroads in Iowa (pt. 5)

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NORTH AND SOUTH RAILROADS IN IOWA.

BY C. W. IRISH, C. E.

At quite an early date the people of Iowa began to look to their interests in railroads.

As early as 1840-41 they made a move in that direction, by memorializing Congress upon the subject of a land grant in aid of what was then called the "Western Railroad." T. J. McKean, of Linn county, delivered an address before a Literary Society of Marion, upon the subject of a railroad projected from "Chicago westward through Illinois and Iowa to the mouth of Platte river; thence up that stream across the Rocky Mountains, to a point on the shore of the Pacific Ocean."

He sustained his position by an able array of facts and arguments, showing that to him the subject was not a new one. "The practicability of the route," the great importance of the enterprise to the American people and to the world at large, he brought out in a clear light, and pressed with earnestness that the building of this great road should then be undertaken.

We have seen the public were not at that time ready for such a job. As might be expected, the attention of commercial and agricultural circles was centered upon the idea of building a road in the direction in which their trade went and came. For this reason the first important railroad line projected in Iowa pointed towards St. Louis.

It was to that town that all the surplus corn, wheat and pork found its way along the channels of the Mississippi and its branches. And in the same manner it was that all the supplies of goods found their way from that trading point to the country above.

Chicago had hardly begun to be known as a rival trading point. The iron channels over which such an immense trade now makes its way to and fro across the watery channels of the trade of thirty years ago, were not yet laid. The hills, mountains, valleys, and chasms that lay between us and the shores of either ocean had not yet been leveled, and these

barriers then appeared so impassible and those ocean shores so distant that it seemed impossible to surmount the one to reach the other. It is not strange then that in this view of the case the efforts of leading men should be put forward to reach the trading point in less time and with greater certainty than could be attained by keel boats floating down the slow currents of the western rivers.

As far as the writer's recollection now goes, the first north and south line of railroad projected in Iowa was intended to run from Dubuque in a southwesterly direction, passing through the towns of Anamosa, Marion, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, West Union and Mt. Pleasant, and terminating at Keokuk. The idea being to avoid the hazardous channel of the two rapids of the Mississippi and secure all the benefits of cheap transportation through the uninterrupted channel of that great river from the last named town to St. Louis. After the usual preliminary meetings, held in the counties through which the intended line was to pass, a preliminary organization was effected, and after that a survey was made.

From the indirectness of the line the embryo railroad was called the "Rams Horn," and by this significant cognomen has since been known. The organization made but little progress beyond a very superficial survey of a line. Dissensions arose between parties at the extremes, and gradually the project lost favor in the eyes of its projectors and was allowed to sleep.

All this time St. Louis failed to see wherein her interest lay—failed to seize time by the forelock. Chicago was a village, and the hundred iron tracks that now point to her center were yet to be thought of. St. Louis sat upon the banks of her favorite river like a giddy queen at a banquet—all allured to the immediate surroundings of the scene, but wholly indifferent to that of greater importance which lay at a distance.

That St. Louis was so lost to her own interest in this matter is much to be regretted; for had she have given her powers to assist in the completion of that which was earnestly begun by the people of Iowa, then, I make no doubt that this Rams Horn road would have been built a

to-day have been throbbing with some of the millions that now go into the arteries of trade leading to her rival.

That the idea of building a railroad over this route has always been considered as an important one by the people residing along it is to be seen in the fact that several times since they have revived kindred projects. This has resulted in building the one which is now called the "Dubuque South Western R. R."

In 1857 an organization styled the "Iowa Union R. R. Co." was organized at Iowa City, by citizens of Linn, Johnson, Louisa, Washington, Henry and Lee counties. This corporate body shared the fate of its predecessor. Dissensions arose among its incorporators; those at its south end seemed to manifest indifference, and with one year's existence it closed its books. After ten years had passed, again these people made an effort, this time with more success, for in 1866 and 1867 they organized what is known as the "Iowa Northern Central Railroad Company," and were so successful that a stock subscription sufficient to build the line from Iowa City by the way of Washington to Mt. Pleasant was readily obtained, and almost enough to carry the line from Iowa City to Cedar Rapids. This being done, the Company set at work grading their line and at the same time making efforts to procure the grading of a line from Mt. Pleasant to the city of Keokuk. In the latter part of the plan for a time they met with disappointment, but at the eleventh hour, almost, the people of the "Gate City" came to the rescue, and at this writing a subscription has been made up and ardent workers put in the field, so that by the time the grading is done on this, the southernmost link in the chain, the rest of the line can be finished.

Thus it seems that the favorite project of the early settlers is to be accomplished, and a railroad is to be built over the route so earnestly advocated by H. D. Downey, J. L. Enos, Major McKean, T. W. Claggett and others. It is to be hoped that this consummation is not far ahead, and that we shall soon hear the rattle of the trains and the scream of the engine's whistle over the line of the much talked of Rams Horn Railroad.

(To be continued.)

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