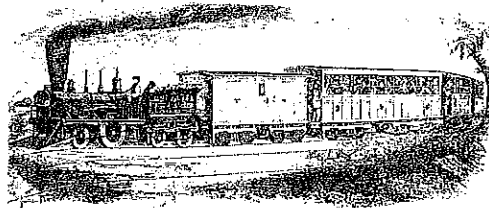


20 Workin' on the Railroad



"I like to see it lap the miles, / And lick the valleys up, / And stop to feed itself at tanks; / And then, prodigious, step / Around a pile of mountains..."
What was the poet Emily Dickinson referring to?

You could ask anyone, anywhere in the United States, to tell you who was a symbol of everything good and noble about America—and the answer would always be the same. It was a man who represented honesty

and duty and patriotism. A few people could still actually remember him. He was George Washington, and his birthday, along with the Fourth of July, was an important holiday.

So, if you had a big event to celebrate, February 22 was the perfect day for it. And when the first railroad train made it from the East Coast to the Mississippi River, it was an enormous event. They were still spiking down railroad ties just an hour before the train came whistling and hooting into view at Rock Island, Illinois, on George Washington's birthday in 1854. The train, the Chicago & Rock Island Line's Number 10, was covered with wreaths and

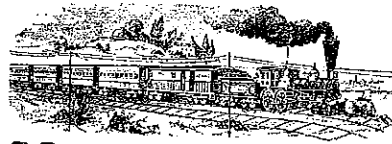
English writer Charles Dickens said: "There are no first and second class carriages as with us; but there is a gentlemen's car and a ladies' car... in the first, everybody smokes; in the second, nobody does."



Who thought up the idea of railway tracks? No one knows, but we do know that the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Assyrians understood that wheels roll easily on a smooth track. They cut grooves in stone slabs and rolled wagons along those tracks. Their vehicles are long gone, but some of those tracks can still be seen.

GREAT NATIONAL ROUTE TO KANSAS AND NEBRASKA

COMPOSED OF



CHICAGO AND ROCK ISLAND

AND MISSISSIPPI AND MISSOURI RAIL ROADS.

Only one change between Chicago & Ft. Des Moines

THROUGH TO IOWA CITY IN 10 1/2 HOURS,

Without Change of Cars or Baggage.

THE COMPLETION OF THE

MAMMOTH R. R. BRIDGE

At Rock Island enables the passenger, via this route, to make the transit from Illinois to Iowa without encountering delays and dangers of ferrying the Mississippi River in Winter.

Passengers will Notice this Fact.

That the CHICAGO & ROCK ISLAND RAIL ROAD, and its connections, are 27 miles nearer Fort Des Moines than any other route, and only one change, making 12 hours time in favor of this route. No other route can take them within 90 miles of Iowa City by Rail Road.

This route offers superior advantages to passengers going to CENTRAL AND WESTERN IOWA, KANSAS AND NEBRASKA, it being the SHORTEST, CHEAPEST, QUICKEST AND SAFEST, MORE RAIL ROAD, AND LESS STAGING, THAN ANY OTHER.

Companies going to the Territories can purchase or hire teams at Iowa City at moderate prices; and those wishing to settle in Iowa will find the most valuable lands in the vicinity of this, the Great Overland Route to the West, better timbered and watered than any other part of the State, and offered at moderate prices and easy payments.

THREE TRAINS LEAVE CHICAGO DAILY, AS FOLLOWS:

9 10 A. M. } DAY EXPRESS, for La Salle, Peoria, Rock Island, Iowa City, and Muscatine.
 2 30 P. M. } MAIL ACCOMMODATION, for Rock Island.
 11 00 P. M. } NIGHT EXPRESS, for Peoria, Rock Island, Iowa City and Muscatine.

ALSO TWO DAILY TRAINS FOR ST. LOUIS.

DAILY LINES OF STAGES LEAVE IOWA CITY FOR ALL THE PRINCIPAL TOWNS IN WESTERN IOWA.

ALL BAGGAGE RE-CHECKED AT CHICAGO

THROUGH TO IOWA CITY, AND TRANSPORTED FREE FROM CONNECTING ROUTES.

THROUGH TICKETS VIA THIS ROUTE

Can be purchased at all Eastern and South-Eastern Rail Road Offices, and at the Company's Offices in Chicago.

W. L. SE. JOHN,
General Ticket Agent.

JOHN F. TRACY,
General Agent.

A. M. SMITH, TRAVELING AGENT.

CHICAGO JOURNAL STEAM PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT.

Competition with steamboats was not the only question raised by the construction of the Rock Island Line to Iowa. It fueled the arguments between the South and the North about slavery. You can read more about that in chapter 33.

red, white, and blue banners. The locomotive pulled six passenger cars filled with people all waving flags and handkerchiefs. A second train, also decorated and filled with passengers, followed close behind. Musicians struck up "Hail Columbia." They were followed by speech makers (including the governor), who weren't going to let this day pass without getting their words in. Then everyone sat down to eat at banquet tables set up in the brand-new train depot. Someone offered a toast "to the Press, the Telegraph, and the Steam Engine, the three levers which move the world of modern civilization." A man standing near the door signaled the train engineer, and the Iron Horse applauded with a shrieking blast from its whistle.

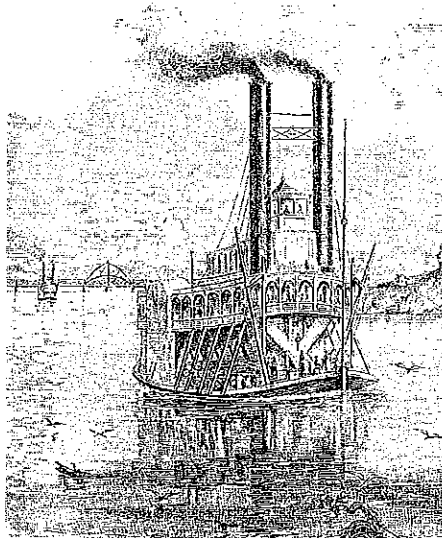
Not everyone was thrilled about the coming of the railroad. Rock Island was a steamboat town. So was Davenport, across the big river in Iowa. What would railroads do to steamboats?

You didn't have to be brilliant to figure out that the wheat and corn and hogs being shipped from the middle of the nation down the Mississippi and around to East Coast ports could go by train—due east. If that happened, railroads would make the city of Chicago (a railroad center) more important, and the Mississippi River cities—like St. Louis and New Orleans—less important.

No one was quite sure of all that in 1854, but they knew the railroad would bring big changes. Most people liked the idea of change; it seemed exciting. But not to those steamboaters.

The men who'd planned the train-depot dinner didn't care what the steamboat people thought. This was just the beginning of their dream. They intended to take the

In the decade between 1820 and 1830, 40 miles of track were built in the entire United States. By 1835, 1,000 miles of track had been laid, and more than 200 railroad lines were being planned or constructed. By 1850, 9,022 miles of railways were operating. And by the time the Civil War broke out, in 1861, total track distance was three times as large as it had been 10 years before—31,246 miles.



A Mississippi steamboat in 1858, two years after the Rock Island Line was finished. The bridge, the cause of all the trouble, is visible in the background.



There were reasons other than fear of competition for worrying about the spread of the railroads. Boilers often blew up (on boats, too), killing many and inspiring this grim cartoon.

railroad right across the broad Mississippi. Then they wanted to go even farther. They planned to make tracks across the nation. They'd brought the railroad to the town of Rock Island because there was an island with that name nearby, in the middle of the river. They could build a bridge to the island and on to the western shore.

But as soon as construction began on the bridge, steamboat owners started to scream. They said the bridge was "unconstitutional, an obstruction to navigation, dangerous." They weren't the only ones concerned. The train tracks were following a northern route. Southerners wanted the first railroad across the continent to go through southern territory. They knew it would bring commerce and industry with it. They wanted that business for the South. So they went to court; but they lost. Construction continued, and, in 1856, the bridge was ready. A newspaperman was on board when the first train crossed the river. This is what he wrote:

Swiftly we sped along the iron track—Rock Island appeared in sight—the whistle sounded and the conductor cried out, "Passengers for Iowa keep their seats." There was a pause—a hush, as it were, preparatory to the fierceness of a tornado. The cars moved on—the bridge was reached—"We're on the bridge—see the mighty Mississippi rolling on beneath"—and all eyes were fastened on the mighty parapets of the magnificent bridge, over which we glided in solemn silence. A few minutes and the suspended breath was let loose. "We're over," was the cry. "We have crossed the Mississippi in a railroad car."

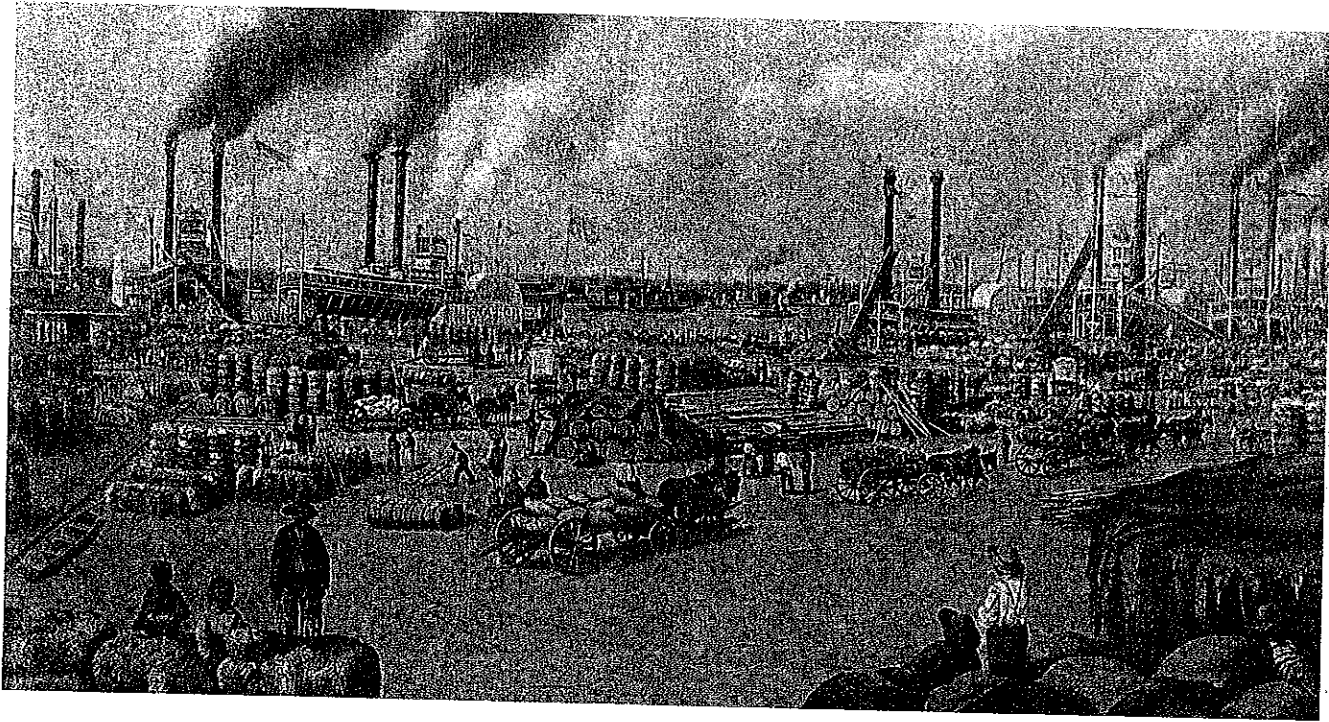
Back East, an article in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* said, "Civilization took a railroad trip across the Mississippi."

But the steamboaters didn't care what newspapers said or what most people believed; they were angry. Still, no one expected what happened two weeks later, when alarm bells woke the citizens of Rock Island and Davenport. The wooden parts of the bridge were on fire! The *Effie Afton*, a boat from New Orleans, had had an accident (or so it was said). The boat had run into the bridge. The collision had overturned the steamboat's stoves and set her afire. The fire had spread to the brand-new bridge.

Was it an accident, some people asked? That afternoon a banner went up on one steamboat. It said, MISSISSIPPI BRIDGE DESTROYED. LET ALL REJOICE.

The owner of the *Effie Afton* sued the bridge builders. He said the bridge got in the way of his boat. He said the bridge was a navigation hazard. The railroad men needed a lawyer. They asked around and got the best Illinois lawyer they could find. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln, who was in his early 40s, was tall and lean, with a thick



tangle of dark hair and no beard. He was a solemn-looking man, but known for his whimsical humor. He was also known to be the kind of lawyer who spent plenty of time preparing his cases. He did his homework carefully.

Lincoln walked out on what was left of the bridge, took a teenage boy with him, and then figured out the speed and direction of the water's current by timing the movement of twigs that his young friend dropped into the water.

The trial began and it was soon clear that this was North against South as well as railroad against steamboat. Whoever won would control the commerce of the growing Midwest. Abraham Lincoln sat quietly whittling on a stick, but when he stood up to question a witness he seemed to know exactly how big the bridge was, and how deep the water, and the exact size of the *Effie Afton*, and what its normal schedule was, and what the river currents were, and what the steamboat captain had to do to avoid the bridge. Besides all that, Lincoln kept saying that railroads had just as much right to cross over rivers as steamboats had to go up and down them.

The jurors couldn't reach a decision, but that was seen as a victory for the railroad people. And when the case was appealed—all the way to the Supreme Court—it was made clear: railroads had the right to bridge rivers.



The great steamboat era: in the incredibly busy port of New Orleans in the 1880s (*top*); stoking the boilers (*bottom*). But east-to-west commerce across the country was controlled by the railroads.