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A Town Takes on City Ways

From the end of the Civil War until the turn of the century, Council Bluffs and its principal newspaper thrust their roots deeper to balance the upward growth of a booming population. The 1870-1880 decade saw the greatest proportionate population growth, from 10,000 to 18,000 residents. An era of industrial expansion and aggressive business was matched by private utilities and public services, lending a varnish of sophistication to the pioneer.

Ample banking facilities became available — “Baldwin and Dodge Company” under the management of Nathan P. Dodge was incorporated as the Council Bluffs Savings Bank in 1870, a year after the Dodge brothers had founded still another, the Pacific National Bank. The First National had been founded in 1865 and the Citizens bank in 1862, merging in 1899 under the former’s name. Later came the State Savings Bank in 1888 and in 1909, the City National Bank. Taking advantage of the upturn after the 1893 panic, the Council Bluffs Mutual Building and Loan association (now the First Federal) was established in 1895.

Fire protection, which had developed from the

first bucket brigades scooping water from Indian Creek, through the era of fire cisterns located at strategic points, reached a force numbering 200 volunteers at the Ogden Hotel fire in 1874. Five years later they had their first one-horse iron cart. By 1883, the city had established a professional fire department, made possible by new-laid mains bringing water from the river. Water service has been municipally owned since 1906.

One of the few gas manufacturing plants in the country was built in 1870, burning coal imported from England. Electric power took over street illumination from the gas works in 1884. Seven 175-foot-high "electric towers" at strategic intersections cast a glow from their carbon arcs over large areas. Maintenance men ascended the towers each day by means of hand-operated "monkey" elevators to readjust the carbon arcs. Not until 1917 were these towers removed, after one located near First and Broadway toppled over. By 1899 there were 30 miles of underground mains and 35 miles of electric wire, with 125 arc lights augmenting street illumination.

The city had telephone service in 1879, within three years of its invention by Bell. Fifty-six telephones were installed within a month. Names of subscribers and their numbers were published periodically in the *Nonpareil*, until the first telephone directory came out in 1882.

In city transportation, the year 1868 was signifi-

cant — the first mule cars appeared. A single-track line (with occasional turn-outs) was laid from the Methodist church west, then south to the Rock Island depot. There was a spur to the Union Pacific transfer, thence down First avenue to the river connecting with the ferry. Originally, fares were 10¢ to the business district and 25¢ to the transfer from the church, but were soon reduced. John T. Baldwin, builder of the Ogden Hotel, bought an interest and ended up controlling the transit company with Caleb Baldwin and George F. Wright. They ruled that "all roads lead to the Ogden House" and passengers were taken there unless they protested sufficiently.

Paving was nil. "The mud was so bad that it was not uncommon for a horse to get stuck, or for a car to leave the rails and lie in the street until it could be righted." The mule car route to the river was replaced after 1872 by the Union Pacific's "dummy" trains, running from Omaha to the station at Ninth and Broadway. Passengers who had expected to be taken to a Council Bluffs hotel for the 25¢ train fare, found another nickel necessary for horse-car transportation from Ninth to the Ogden. The indignant uproar that ensued brought about a joint fare, but no enthusiasm existed locally on behalf of the arrangement. All too often, the mule cars would "happen" to miss the scheduled connection.

Principal business streets were paved with gran-

ite blocks in 1884. Four years later, in 1888, the old "mule" cars gave way to electric "trolley" cars, making Council Bluffs one of the earliest cities to install electric trolleys following their introduction in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The splendid modern cars cost \$4,000 apiece, and they carried inter-city passengers over a new \$750,000 toll bridge built by Omaha and Council Bluffs investors.

Community responsibility for public schooling had been established by election in 1859. Through the years, a steady program of building culminated in a fine brick high school structure, dedicated in 1870 at ceremonies attended by Governor Samuel Merrill and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Abraham S. Kissell.

It wasn't long before both students and public began complaining about the location, on a high elevation between Fifth avenue and High School avenue. "Many students have been forced to quit school from too much high climbing," it was reported, and one merchant's ad in a high school annual recommended use of parachutes to descend the hill.

Four students survived the ordeal, however, to become the first graduating class of 1874. The six young women who graduated in 1875 were referred to as the "Dolly Varden" class.

The town was jubilant to learn in 1870 that Iowa's School for the Deaf would be moved to

Council Bluffs from Iowa City. At the same time, Catholic parochial schools were being founded in 1869 and 1871. Continuing the educational trend, a move to establish a city library won tax support in 1881, although the permanent building to which Andrew Carnegie contributed substantially waited until 1905.

An 1876 City Directory, printed in *The Nonpareil's* job shop, listed seventeen hotels, ten boarding houses, three stockyards and three packing plants, nucleus of a stockyards industry which Omaha welcomed after the flood of 1881 at Council Bluffs. It also listed three flour mills, four banks, nine public and church schools, twelve churches, three music halls and one opera house, twenty-six physicians, twenty-eight law firms, one brewery and thirty saloons.

What seems to have been an early version of a shopping center within the city limits was the section called "Streetsville," centered around the present Twenty-fourth and Broadway area. "Indian Lake," a marshy widening of the creek channel, cut this section off from the business district. "Streetsville" took its name from Judge Frank Street, who filed a plat on Street's Addition in 1866.

Big names off the theatrical "road" came to perform at the Dohany theater after its opening in 1868. The theater proper occupied the second story of a building on Bryant Street (behind the

present Peoples Store location), with stables housed on the ground floor. Theater patrons "parked" their horse-drawn carriages with the stable boys. "And notwithstanding the odor of the livery stable below, it continued for many years to be the most popular place of amusement in the city," says an early account. Ole Bull, Henry Ward Beecher, Blind Boone, Victoria Woodhull, Louise and Fanny Kellogg, Rosa Patty, Robert Browning, John McCulloch, John Drew and Robert B. Mantell were only a few of the "greats" who appeared there. After the structure was declared unsafe in 1894, a second "Dohany" was built at Sixth and Broadway, where a theater still stands.

Dissatisfaction with the city's special charter led a group of citizens to petition for a special election in 1870, hoping to organize the city under general state incorporation laws. Chief objection to charter rule lay in the fact that city and county taxes were paid in separate places, and that city law called for prompt foreclosure action compared to a three-year lag in county foreclosures. During the legal investigation connected with the action, it was discovered that all city councils to date had been illegally elected, making it necessary to obtain special legalizing action by the state.

Complications developed after the voters approved shelving the charter on October 3, 1881. The city council refused to canvass the vote.

George Keeline instituted a writ of mandamus suit to force the city to operate under the public incorporation laws, and the court upheld the action, ordering new city elections for two-year terms to be held on March 7, 1882.

An old controversy was finally resolved in 1883, when the town's original grant of land, or "patent," showed up. Thirty years had elapsed since Cornelius Voorhis as mayor had applied for it. Legal delays based on Catholic claims to the old blockhouse had kept it buried in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington for years.

That Missouri River rampage of 1881, worst of its many floods, brought hardship and loss to all property-owners on the flats, but left a gift in its wake. Suddenly there was a 400-acre body of water south of the town, created by a capricious change in the river channel. When it became obvious the lake was there to stay, it was christened Lake Manawa, Indian for "peace and comfort." Its cool waters became a magnet drawing thousands of summer visitors. The Council Bluffs Rowing Association was formed, built a clubhouse and purchased racing shells in 1887.

Later on, an amusement "midway," a resort hotel, excursion launches, bathing beaches, and picnic grounds brought swarms of pleasure-bent vacationers in summer, and ice skaters in winter. A permanent community of cottagers developed. Now a state park, the lake has been saved from

drying up by a channel linking up with Mosquito Creek, and water sports are more popular than ever.

From 1880 until the turn of the century, sportsmen paced their trotters in the Union Driving Park, which boasted one of the finest mile tracks in the country. Visitors could stay in the new 80-room Grand Hotel, opened in 1891 as "an answer to persistent joking and slighting remarks about the town's accommodations."

Of note was a political record of sorts, set in August of 1880. A marathon Republican convention, held to select a nominee for the eighth Congressional district, balloted 285 times during three days and two nights. The deadlock was finally broken by drafting Colonel W. P. Hepburn of Page County, who had withdrawn from the race after the first few ballots.

Just two years before the town founded its first salaried fire-fighting force, enthusiastic volunteer firemen entertained the State Firemen's Association in fine style June 7-10, 1881. Competition was fierce among teams competing for prizes; thousands watched. Elaborate grounds had been prepared in the northwest section of town with buildings, grandstand, and a track 300 yards long and 60 feet wide, graded and rolled.

Forty-six fire companies participated in the parade on June 8, watched by 30,000 people. Governor John H. Gear was a speaker at the public

opening. Each day brought hose races and trials of fire engines and appliances. There were evening fireworks and a grand ball. Rescue Company and Bluffs City Company won prizes. Civic pride was later to bask in performance records by two famous teams of fire horses — Jack and Jim, who won the world's speed-run record at Clinton in 1906, and Lou and Herb, who set another record in 1914 at Maquoketa.

Between 1870 and 1880 industrial growth expanded through the fortunate combination of rail accessibility and location on a main route to the West. At one time Council Bluffs claimed to be the second-largest shipper of farm machinery west of Chicago. As the twentieth century approached, grape vineyards and fruit orchards began to share commercial dominance.

But during the 1880's, unfavorable factors held back community progress. "The town was afflicted with fossils who resisted improvement fearing taxation," a disgusted *Nonpareil* editor, J. J. Steadman, reminisced later. Even the obvious improvement affected by linking Council Bluffs-Omaha by trolley car and bridge in 1889 brought fear that benefits would accrue solely to their strapping Nebraska neighbor.

Such negativism had no resources to fight the financial depression gripping the region after crop failures set the stage. Iowa had adopted prohibition; sectarian and political disputes divided the

people; worst of all, ill-timed rail schedules discouraged travel and business. "To the investor, western Iowa might as well have been in Africa," wrote E. F. Test, who had assumed control of the *Nonpareil* in 1891, only to run head-on into hard times. Newspaper distribution was hamstrung by those unrealistic railroad schedules, and dissatisfied stockholders threatened receivership action. Test took "heroic" measures. Employees were admonished to abstain from personal factional politics, although the newspaper itself would continue Republican. "Treat the Republicans as brethren and the Democrats as gentlemen," he instructed.

In addition, the *Nonpareil* formulated a "legend" to buck up business: "Patronize home industries, home institutions and home dealers." Publicized aggressively by Editor E. F. Watts, its spark induced businessmen to organize the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association in 1894.

But another measure pursued by Test boomeranged disastrously. The *Nonpareil* launched a campaign to separate Republicanism from prohibition, advocating instead high license fees and local option. Several other prominent Iowa papers joined the movement, but prohibitionists burst into righteous wrath. "The editor of The *Nonpareil* was portrayed as a 'six footer' writing editorials, flanked on one side by a beer keg and on the other by a jug of whisky," General Test wrote later.

The battle swelled *Nonpareil* circulation from 3,463 in January, 1892, to 6,109 in March, but so shaky was the foundation that five months later the *Nonpareil* was bankrupt.

Daily publication continued in receivership under William Arnd through the Panic of 1893. Then, in 1894, a group of local investors reorganized as the New *Nonpareil* Company, and a superlative newspaper man named Victor Bender was hired at \$40 a week to manage it. In four years' time he accomplished a minor miracle of modernization. Handset type was replaced with automatic Mergenthaler type-setting machines. An Optimus two-revolution job press that could print 10,000 eight-page papers an hour was installed to print the augmented news gained through membership in the newly-organized Associated Press.

In the fall of 1895 a Monday morning edition was added, making seven-day-a-week publication. By 1899 up to 52 persons were employed, and the company owned its own building on Broadway at Scott Street. Many features were added to spruce up the paper's content, including comics in the Sunday section; headlines were more uniform and makeup more attractive. In 1898 they "scooped" the opposition by publishing the first color supplement in the area, featuring Omaha's Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition.

By 1899, when the *Nonpareil* issued a special "Prosperity" color supplement on July 30, the

paper boasted more circulation than either Omaha newspaper. Council Bluffs' population was 26,000, served by "six brick hotels, twenty school buildings, two hospitals, twenty miles of double track electric street railway, eighteen churches and 745 acres in public parks."

Council Bluffs had also proudly waved goodbye to its entire company of the Dodge Light Guard as they moved off on the Rock Island to Des Moines. There they had become Company L of the Iowa Fifty-first Regiment, headed for the Spanish-American war. Dr. Matthew A. Tinley and Dr. Donald Macrae, Jr., began the military careers which were to be enhanced by much more important roles in World War I. Mustered out in November, 1899, they came home to a tumultuous welcome. Mothers and friends of Company L had "done their bit" by forming the Women's Sanitary Relief Commission, which in a year raised over \$1,000 to send to First Lieutenant Surgeon Macrae for his field hospital relief fund.