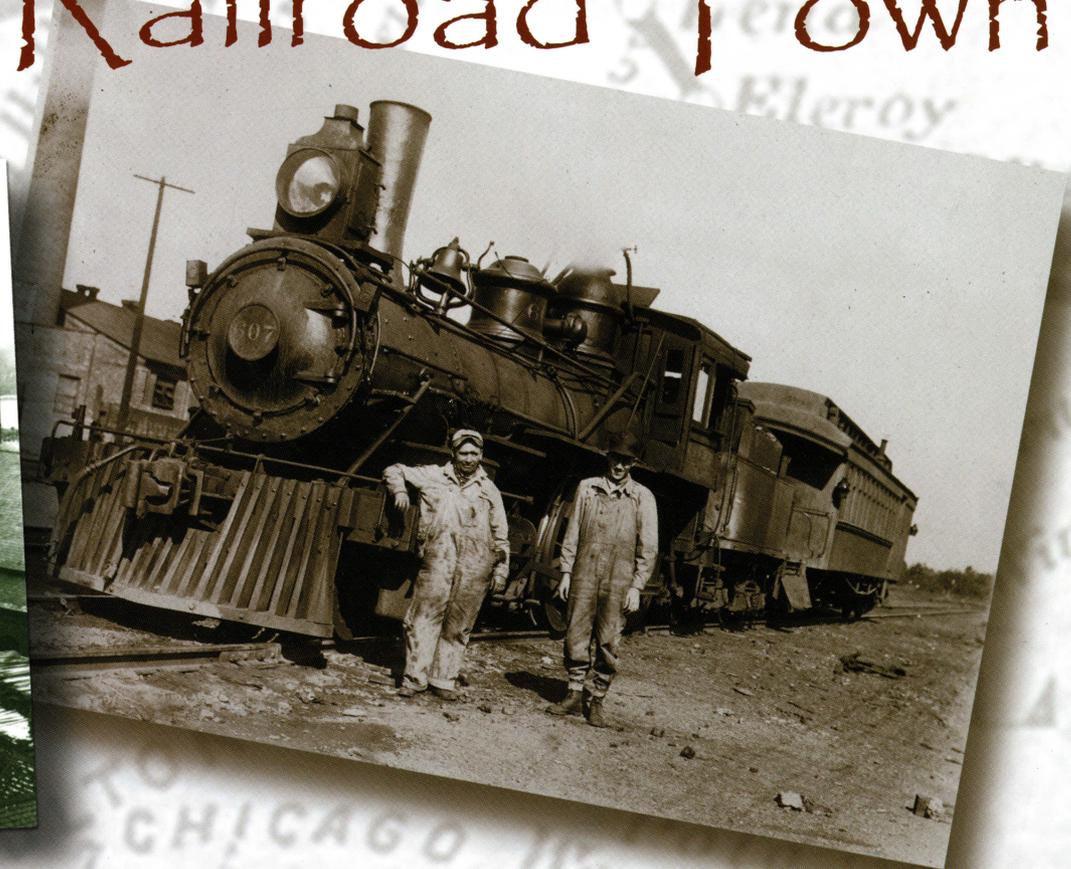
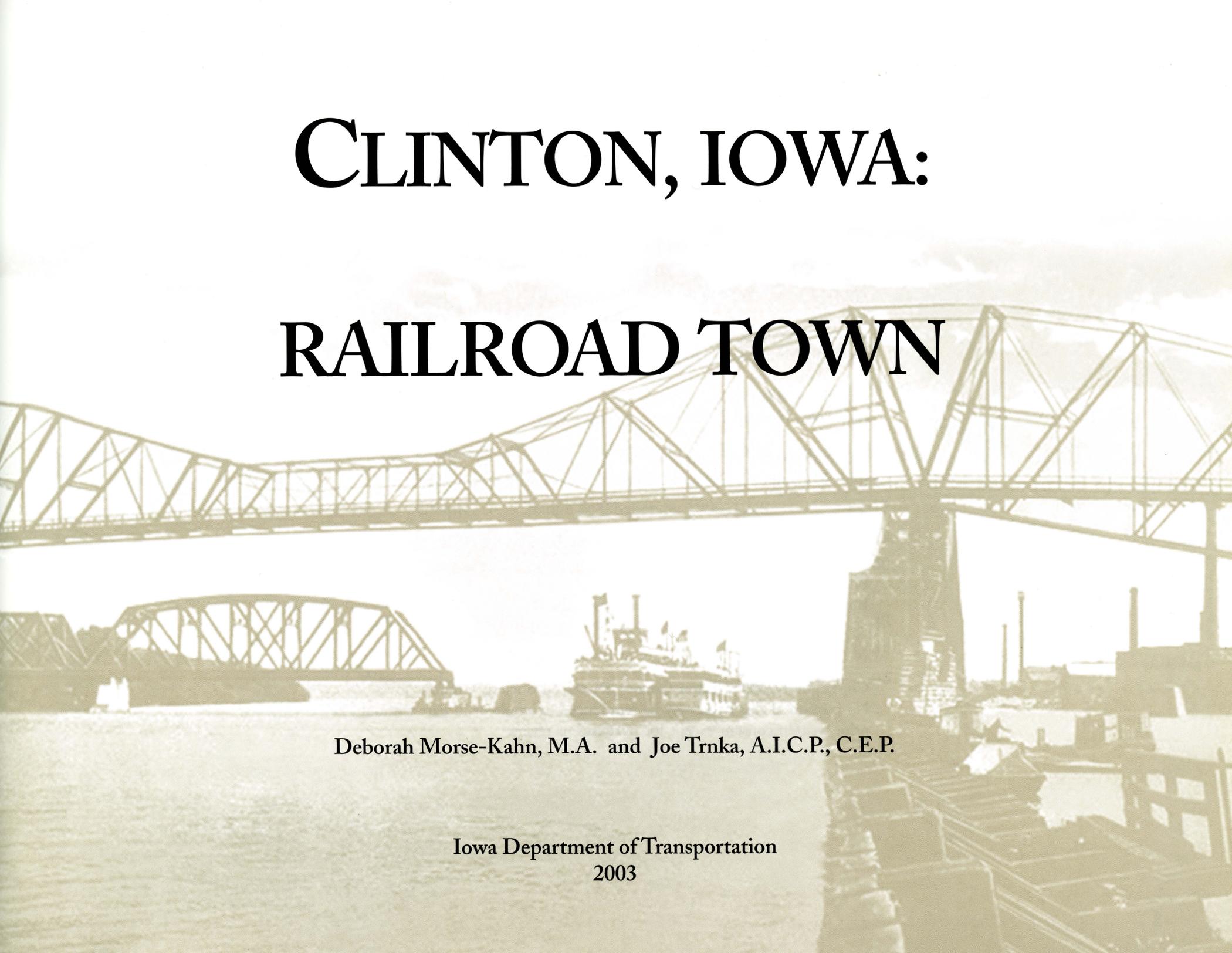


Clinton, Iowa:

Railroad Town



Deborah Morse-Kahn and Joe Trnka



CLINTON, IOWA: RAILROAD TOWN

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Iowa Department of Transportation
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CLINTON, IOWA: RAILROAD TOWN

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DEDICATION

To all the past employees
of every railroad
ever to pass through the
City of Clinton:

this book is for you,
and for your children,
and for *their* children,
that no one may forget
what was true here...



CLINTON, IOWA: RAILROAD TOWN

INTRODUCTION

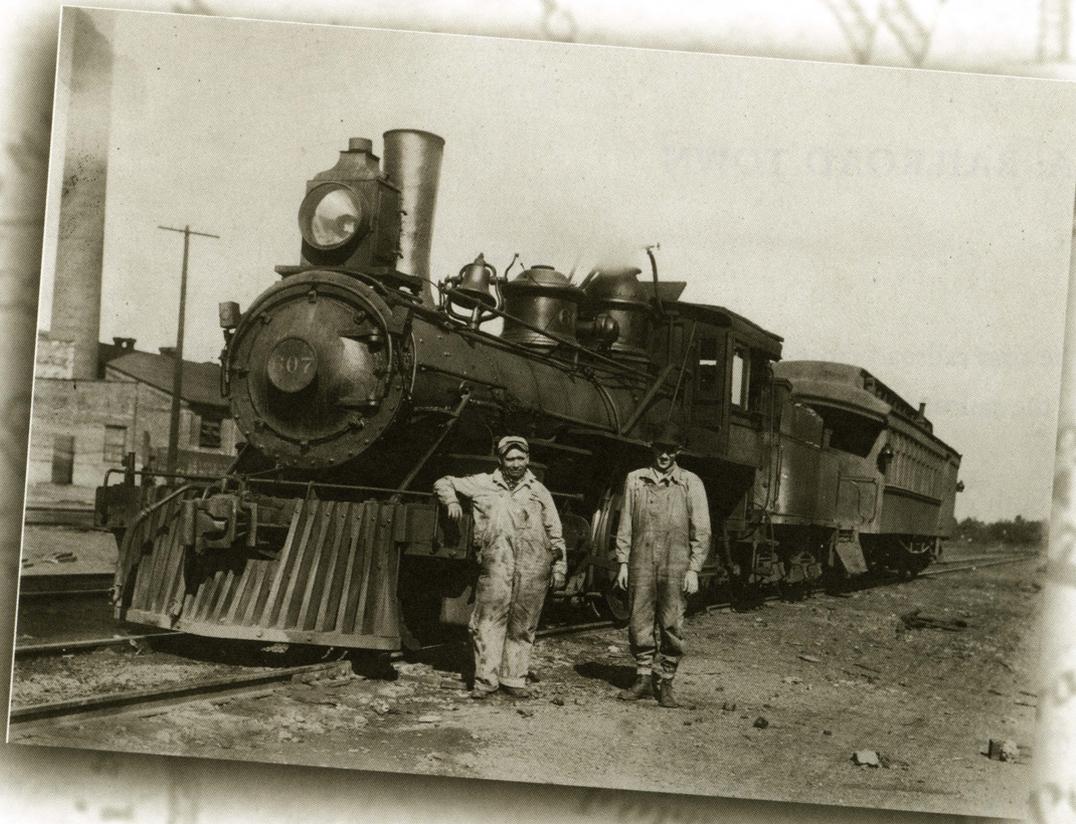
Clinton, Iowa, one of the first railroad crossings over the Mississippi River, has been a major gateway to the Great Plains and beyond since 1859. For over one hundred years, the railroads employed thousands and supported a good quality of life in Clinton.

Railroad activity peaked both nationally and in Clinton during World War II and the late 1940s. This peak coincided with the post-war explosion of private automobiles, the rise of the trucking and airline industries, and the expansion of federally funded highways, all of which contributed to the slow decline of the railroads. This decline was reflected in Clinton by the closure and eventual demolition of many railroad buildings, leaving a mere handful remaining by the end of the 20th century.

In the late 1990s the City of Clinton, the Iowa Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration made plans to improve Clinton's major thoroughfare, U.S. Highway 30, locally known as Camanche Avenue. At the same time, the *Union Pacific* was seeking to redevelop their old *Chicago & North Western* property adjacent to Camanche Avenue, wanting to demolish vacant buildings out of safety concerns.

In 1999, the UP demolished the remnants of the old Camanche Avenue Car Shops. This demolition generated renewed interest in the history of the railroad in Clinton and curiosity about what remained of that railroad legacy today. The City, the Iowa DOT, the FHWA, and the State Historical Society of Iowa agreed to study Clinton's railroad history as part of their work on the Highway 30 corridor. This book is a product of that study.

The authors wish to express their sincere appreciation to the many people who made this publication possible: Gerry Kennedy (Federal Highway Administration); Steve Larson, Randy Faber, Judy McDonald and Matt Donovan (Iowa Department of Transportation); Jeff Kooistra (City of Clinton); Ralph Christian and Doug Jones (State Historical Society of Iowa); John F. Campbell of Milwaukee; Jan Hansen (Clinton County Historical Society); Joe Piersen (Chicago & North Western Historical Society); and Deb Poundstone, Gil Janes and Mike Fisher (Howard R. Green Company, Cedar Rapids). Finally, the authors wish to thank Charlie Bailey of Minneapolis who turned text and photos into a work of art.



"Old Scoot" shuttled C&NW railworkers over the Mississippi in 1910.

CHAPTER 1: RAILROAD BEGINNINGS: THE C&NW ARRIVES



“The fact is that American railroad building in its beginning afforded an opening for the speculation mania that always has sought outlet in one form or another of American industrial activity. When American railroad building first began, every community wanted its road in order to get its share of immediate advancement. In consequence, everybody—preachers, farmers, lawyers, and doctors—built railroads. Nearly all of the first ventures failed.”

- Frank H. Spearman,
*The Strategy of
Great Railroads, 1904*

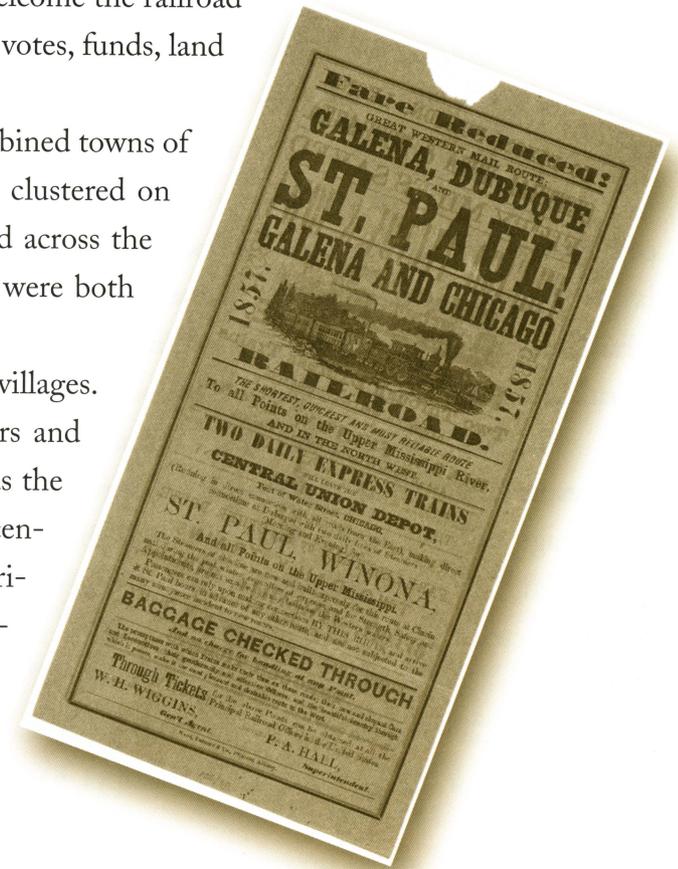
In the decade immediately before the Civil War, dreamers and practical men alike were scheming to bring the railroad over the Mississippi River into the new state of Iowa, admitted into the Union in 1846. Throughout the early history of Eastern Iowa, a great many rail lines were envisioned but never built; built but never finished; finished and lost to financial disaster; or finished and sold to another rail company. The seemingly endless rise and fall (and rise once again) of railroad projects was due to the obvious benefit that a successful rail line would bring to any community. Thousands of pioneering settlers had streamed into the state through the early decades of the 1800s. By mid-century, the pioneers were producing a surplus that could be shipped to markets out of the area, if only there were a way . . .

By 1850, rail lines were already heading west from Chicago toward the Mississippi, and the residents of Iowa were looking at making the big connection over the river. Clinton and Lyons, two river towns just over two miles apart, were otherwise dependent on the river or on dusty roads that were little more than dirt tracks. Their need to ship goods to market caused the citizens to welcome the railroad planners and support the many plans, both solid and specious, with votes, funds, land and supplies.

Clinton, as we know it today, is actually made up of the combined towns of New York (Clinton), Lyons, Ringwood and Chancy that were all clustered on the west bank of the Mississippi a few miles above Camanche and across the river from Baker’s Ferry (Fulton), Illinois. Lyons and Camanche were both founded in 1835, New York in 1839.

Lyons was originally the largest and fastest growing of the villages. As early as 1840, the Lyons-Fulton Ferry worked to help travelers and emigrants cross the river at a spot called “The Narrows.” Lyons was the site of one of Iowa’s first post offices and was a promising milling center, first for grain, then for lumber. Lyons was also an important distribution center for river traffic. Large warehouses were built to accommodate the increasing quantity of boxed and baled goods being shipped on the river.

Camanche became the first county seat of Clinton County in 1840, and had an established ferry service connecting to Albany on the Illinois shore of the Mississippi. Camanche grew rapidly to become the largest trading center early in the





An early map showing the new rail lines running west out of Chicago to Fulton, ca. 1855-57.

county's history. By mid-century, Camanche was able to boast two hotels, fifteen stores, a bank, two schools and three churches. The Albany & Camanche Ferry provided a stable crossing for travelers and emigrants moving west. Little New York lingered with a scattering of houses and a river landing.

The area's first steam sawmill was built on the Mississippi in New York in 1849. It immediately proved profitable. Lyons' first sawmill went up in 1855. A second mill was in operation in New York, and two in Camanche, by 1856. Lumber was in great demand throughout the country and shipping milled timber became big business. Great rafts of logs were floated down the Mississippi from the northern forests of Minnesota and Wisconsin for milling. Sawmills sprang up along the five miles

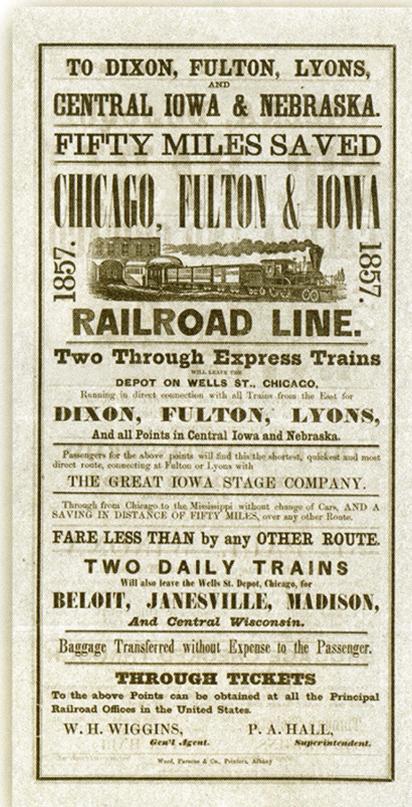
of the western shore of the river from Lyons down to Camanche, and massive warehouses and storehouses were built.

Camanche was the first of the towns known to have tried to obtain a railroad to serve the community. In 1851, the Illinois legislature proposed a rail line to Albany, which suggested the eventual need for a bridge to Camanche to replace the existing ferry service. Another plan promoted a line to be called the *Camanche Albany & Mendota*. A plan for the *Camanche & Council Bluffs* line also emerged in 1851. None of these lines materialized.

In 1854, the *Lyons & Iowa Central* became the first line to actually lay track in Iowa. The *Lyons & Iowa Central* intended to have Iowa City, Des Moines, and the Missouri River as destinations. Only a tiny percentage of the line was ever laid, and the rail workers were never paid their promised wages. Instead, they were encouraged to secure credit at the company store, which had only limited stocks of yardgoods, earning the *Lyons & Iowa Central* the nickname "The Calico Road." Only in later years was it discovered that plans for a bridge over the Mississippi had been seriously considered.

The *Iowa Central Air Line* was also established out of Lyons in an attempt to move westward to Maquoketa, Anamosa,

Only a few men building the roads in the 1850s were paid by the month, including the locomotive engineers on the work trains at \$60 dollars a month. Everyone else on the construction crews earned by the day: \$2.25 a day for the blacksmiths and the foremen, \$1.50 a day for carpenters; and \$1 a day for the general laborers. Such wages were considered quite good for the times when unskilled workers in other industries were earning only 50 to 80 cents a day, and when eggs went for 8 cents a dozen, butter 6 cents a pound, and corn eight bushels to the dollar.



Cedar Rapids and finally to Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. The line only reached as far as Anamosa and was later was absorbed by the *Iowa Midland*.

Meanwhile, on the Illinois side, the *Galena & Chicago Union* laid track all the way to Fulton on the Mississippi (across the river from Lyons). With the exciting prospect of a rail crossing over the river, a development group formed in 1855 calling themselves the Iowa Land Company. The new company bought up the tiny settlement of New York, replatted it, and renamed it in honor of nationally famous Governor De Witt Clinton, of New York. The Iowa Land Company set up a new rail line, called the *Chicago Iowa & Nebraska*, and started laying track to Vandenburg (renamed De Witt, also in honor of Governor Clinton). The first line, completed in 1857, was a short run to Camanche. At this same time, competition appeared in the form of a new railroad line called the *Burlington Cedar Rapids & Northern*, whose first depot was a boxcar. In what was likely the most important single event in that city's history, the *Chicago Iowa & Nebraska* reached Cedar Rapids, Iowa, about 80 miles west of the Mississippi River, in 1859.

Back at Fulton, on the Illinois side, the *Galena & Chicago Union* formed the Albany Bridge Company to solicit subscriptions (shares) from investors to support the crossing of the Mississippi on the natural bridge of land provided by Little Rock Island. Speculation on land boomed and more mills were built. Lyons was shocked. The town's long-dreamed of plan to bridge the great river between Fulton and Lyons was suddenly threatened.

This time the bridge really was built. The *Galena & Chicago Union* ran a rail line down the Illinois shore

Connecting Clinton and Cedar Rapids by Rail in 1859:

“Those who were present described the occasion as like the 4th of July or a circus day. Big lumber wagons with the entire family on spring seats, or on boards laid across the top of the box, were seen coming from every direction very early in the morning. The roads from the country districts were lined with teams and the excursion train from the east...brought families in passengers cars...city guests from Chicago. After a great parade through the main streets of Cedar Rapids...the crowd turned aside into a nearby grove to enjoy the picnic dinner. The tables were six hundred feet long and about 4,000 people were served...the people in and near Cedar Rapids were glad to use a party to celebrate the coming of the first railroad to their city and county.”

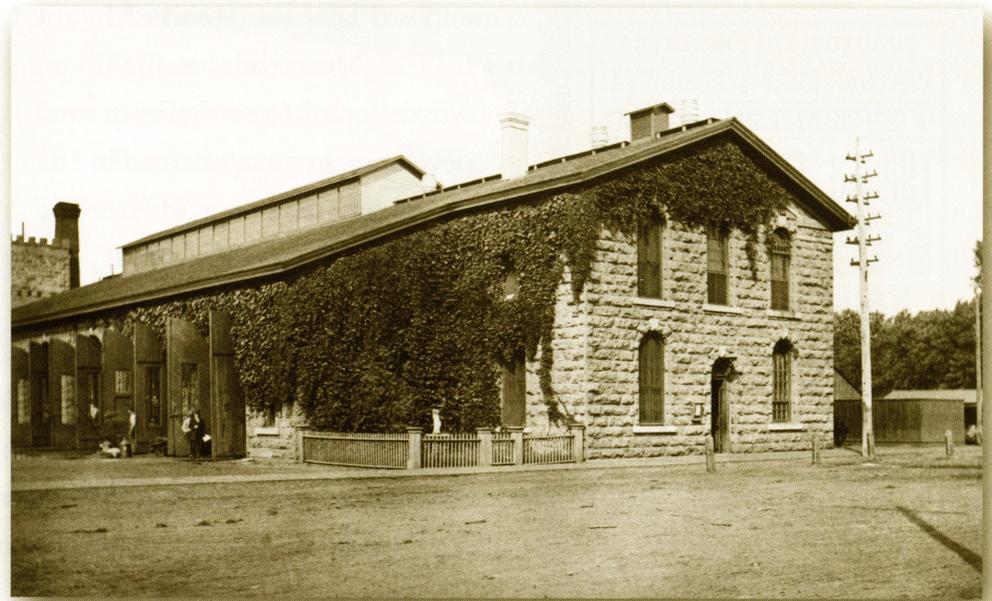
- Clarence Ray Aurner, *“Iowa Stories”*

from Fulton to the new crossing point east of Little Rock Island. Harper & Cross, of Chicago, sank the first piers in 1858. They were installed on piles in the river bed between the Illinois shore and Little Rock Island. Seven 200-foot-long McCollum patent inflexible arch truss sections were set in place, with the last span dropped into place in late 1859. This bridge, which only partially crossed the river, had a final cost of \$100,000. During periods of open water between Little Rock Island and the Iowa shore, the steamer *Union* shuttled the railcars and passengers across the gap, landing below the town of Clinton. In winter, the gap was crossed by track laid across the ice and horse-drawn teams were used to haul the railcars across the river. Seasonal changes, like high water in spring and thin ice in fall, would temporarily halt railroad crossings.

The first train, headed by the *Galena & Chicago Union's* engine, "Elgin," crossed into Iowa in January 1860 pulling two cars filled with rail iron. Its arrival was greeted by a group of citizens and a twelve-gun salute. There was a bonfire celebration that night on the island, and the Wentworth Hotel was lit with lanterns to host a fundraiser dance to establish a Young Men's Association. By 1860, trains could regularly run from Chicago to Cedar Rapids via the combined bridge and ferry crossing and it was only a matter of time before rails would extend clear across Iowa. The first "depot" on the Clinton side was a frame structure used for both passengers and freight. This building was actually an old coal house moved from the island and placed at the foot of what is now Fourth Avenue South.

In 1862, the Iowa legislature felt it would be in the state's best interests to have the *Chicago Iowa & Nebraska* reorganized by the *Galena & Chicago Union*, and to have the bridge completed across the river. Two years later, the *Galena and Chicago Union* was itself absorbed into the *Chicago & North Western*. Completion of the bridge became a primary goal of the new owners.

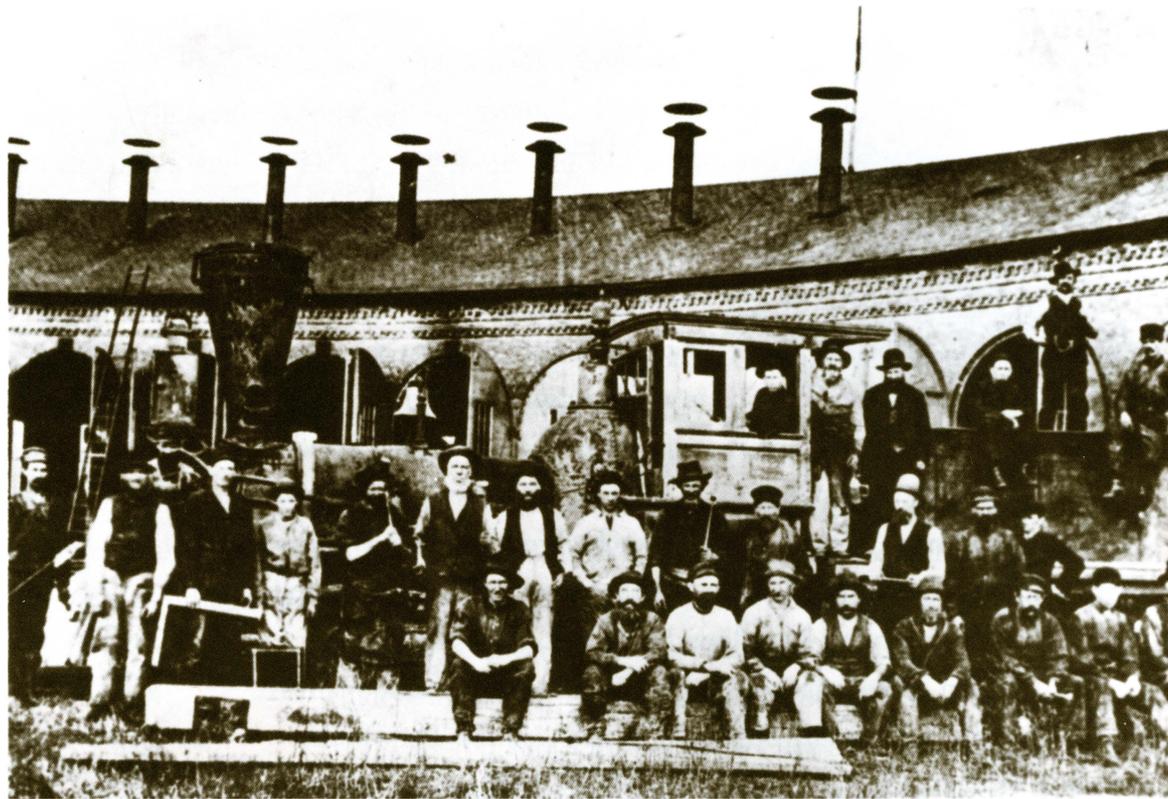
The new section, between Little Rock Island and the Iowa shore, required an 850-foot bridge. This bridge was made up of three Howe truss spans and a 300-foot Bollman draw span, supplied by the Detroit Bridge & Iron Works, which turned on anti-friction rollers. When open, the bridge



The Chicago & North Western machine shop at the old yards downtown, ca. 1885.

provided two openings of 123 feet each. This permitted boats to pass up and down the west channel of the river. When completed in 1865, the full length of the bridge between Illinois and Iowa was 1.1 miles.

The once-bustling town of Lyons would have to wait five more years before seeing a rail line through its center. Meanwhile, the *Chicago & North Western's* partnership with the City of Clinton and the State of Iowa had begun.



The "Pioneer" built in 1836 was the first locomotive to be used by the C&NW on their lines west of Chicago. This view shows the crew at Clinton with the historic engine.

CHAPTER 2 THE BOOM YEARS : 1865-1900



The Chicago & North Western invented the cupola—a small viewing tower atop the waycar (caboose) designed to give freight conductors a viewpoint for keeping an eye on the cars ahead—in the late 1850s. By 1863 the U.S. Government mandated it as a standard for all railroad waycars. The Clinton car shops built all the cupola waycars for the Chicago & North Western for years. Eventually, the cupola was replaced by bay windows on the sides of waycars.

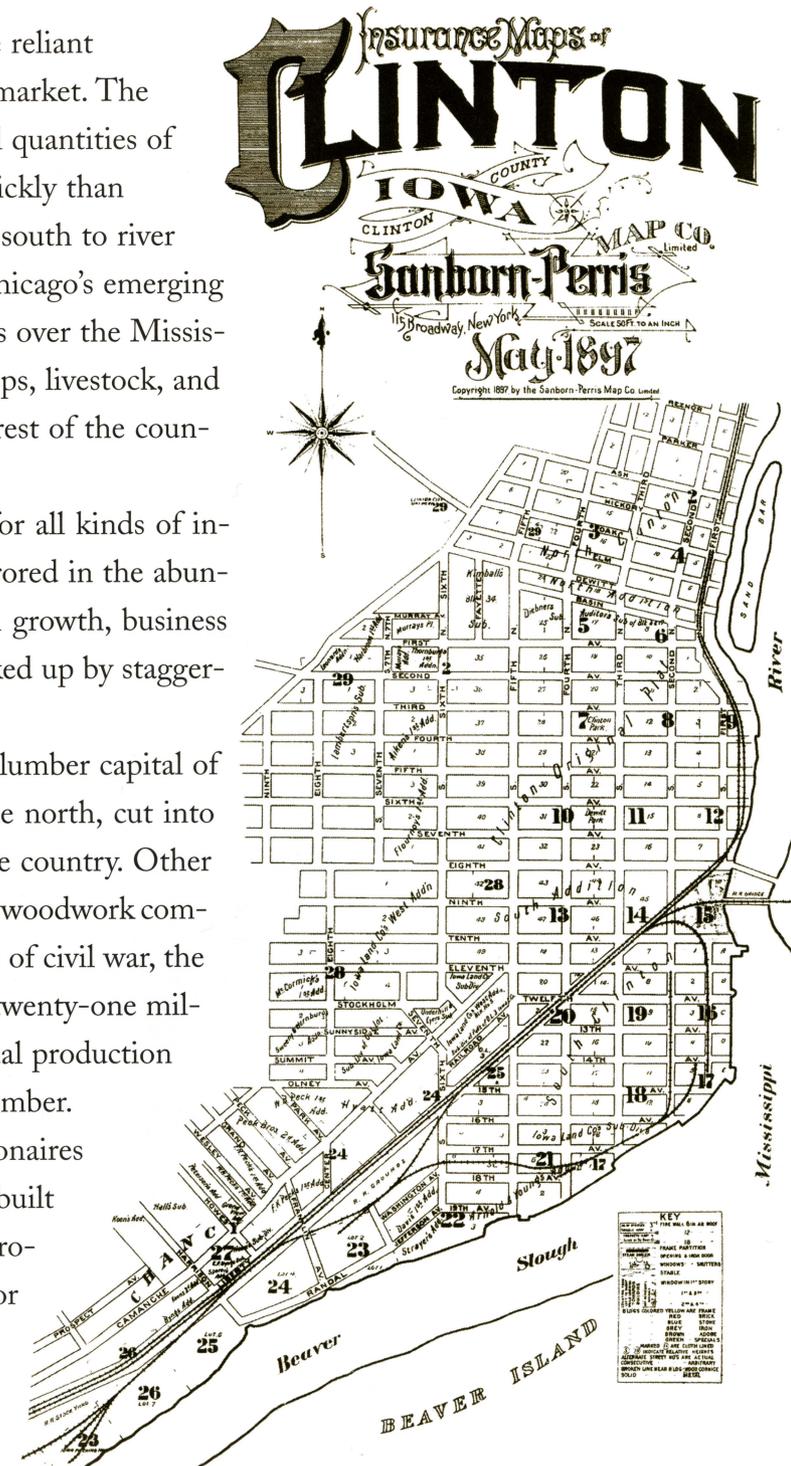
Since the 1830s, the pioneers settling Eastern Iowa were reliant on either wagons or steamboats to ship their goods to market. The wagons however, were limited to slowly carrying fairly small quantities of goods. Steamboats could carry heavier loads much more quickly than wagons, but the rivers themselves predominantly ran north-south to river port cities like Saint Louis and New Orleans. Now, with Chicago's emerging stature as a railroad center and the extension of her rail lines over the Mississippi River and into Iowa, large quantities of all kinds of crops, livestock, and goods could be efficiently shipped through Chicago to the rest of the country, and to the world beyond.

And of course, the railroads brought great change for all kinds of industry. The stunning wealth that came to Clinton was mirrored in the abundance of America's Gilded Age, a time of rapid population growth, business growth, and industrial development on a massive scale, backed up by staggering speculation in real estate and railroads.

With the help of the railroads, Clinton became the lumber capital of the nation. Huge log rafts were floated down-river from the north, cut into lumber at Clinton, then shipped in all directions around the country. Other lumber-related industries such as sash-and-door factories and woodwork companies also sprang up in Clinton. In 1865, despite four years of civil war, the sawmills of Clinton, Lyons, and Camanche produced over twenty-one million board feet of finished lumber. By the early 1890s, annual production had risen to more than 190 million board feet of finished lumber.

Clinton earned the reputation of having more millionaires for its population than any other city in the country. They built massive residences and dominated city affairs. Huge mills provided employment for hundreds and were the foundations for the modern industrial city Clinton would later become.

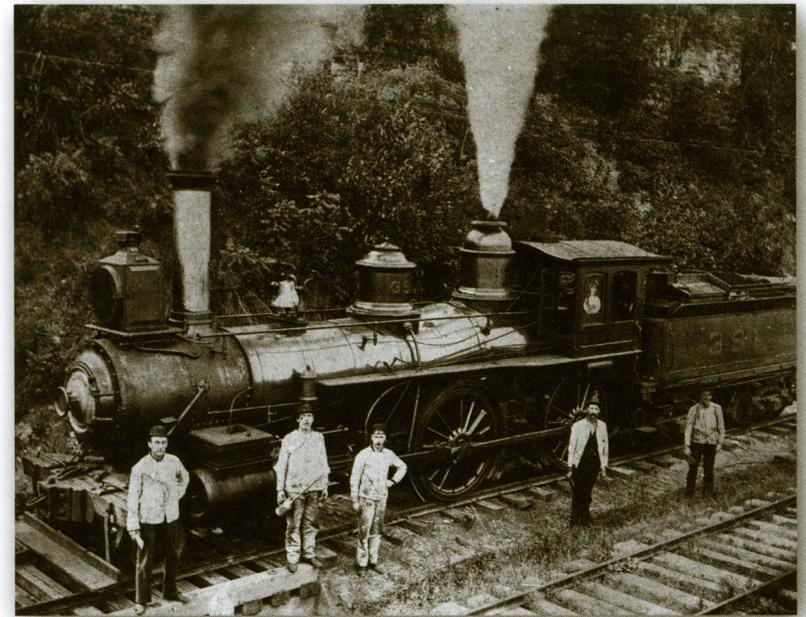
But things weren't that simple in the beginning . . .



Where the *Chicago & North Western* had brought nearly instant prosperity to Clinton, the citizens in Lyons were feeling terribly left out of things. Soon Lyons and Clinton were arguing over what later became popularly known as ‘The Plug’: a short run of rail line proposed to provide Lyons mills with a connection to the *Chicago & North Western*-controlled bridge over the Mississippi. The lawyers on both sides argued for years until a groups of locals decided to make fun of the issue. They formed an imaginary organization called “The Clinton Institute,” which created outrageous timetables, bought nonexistent rolling stock, and proposed impossible rail lines. This continuing publicity, which received a lot of newspaper attention, kept the issue lively in the public mind. The *Iowa Midland* finally secured rights to build the Plug in 1868; track and depots were completed by 1870.

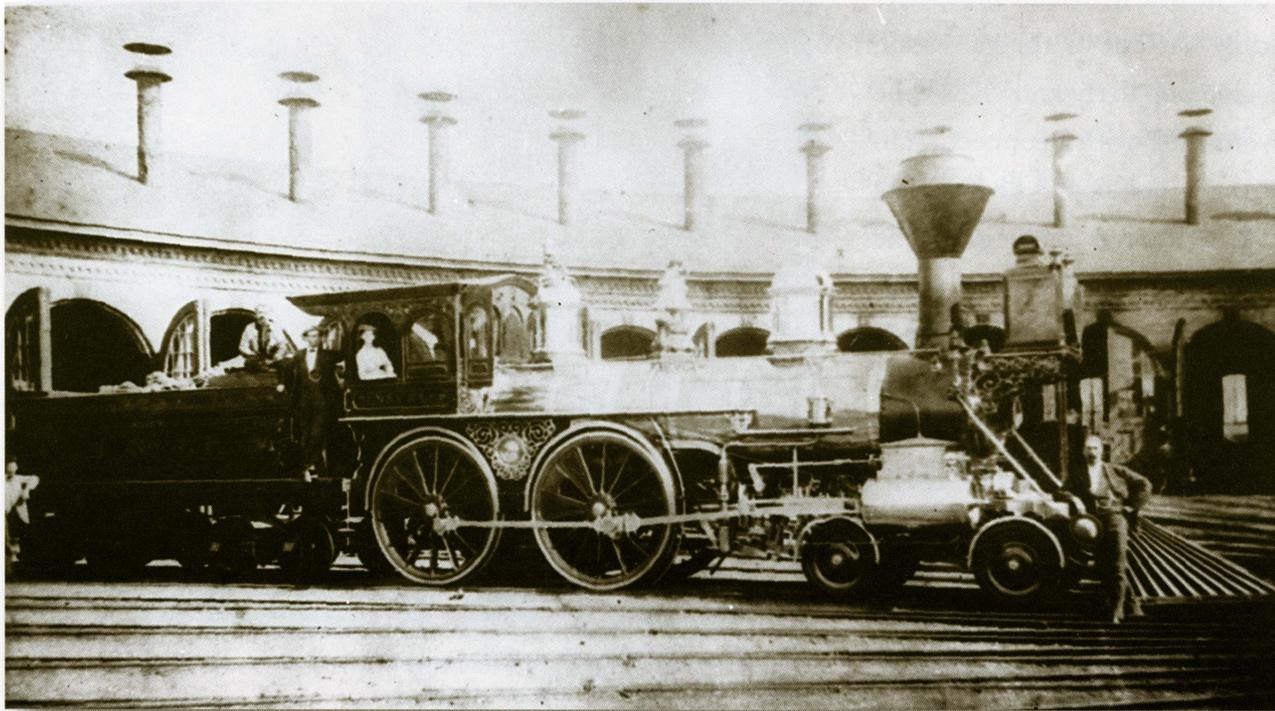
Of course, not all lines were created equal and glamour was a low factor for many of the secondary lines. The run from Clinton to Mendota, Illinois on the *Chicago Burlington & Quincy’s* little Train No. 33 became famous for the amount of farm produce, lumber, and livestock it routinely carried (plus as many as 20 passengers) as it patiently moved along at 33 miles per hour. This train earned various nicknames such as “The Cabbage Train,” the “Toonerville Trolley,” “Doodlebug,” “Bug Squasher” and “Gallopig Goose.” Such sobriquets reflected fondness and reliance of the local citizenry upon the small rail lines so crucial to their daily lives.

For most Clintonians, the railroad brought jobs, transportation, and, if not great prosperity, then certainly stability. The *Chicago & North Western* company poured enormous amounts of money into developing Clinton as a major railhead. After first taking over the old *Chicago Iowa & Nebraska* facilities at 8th Avenue and 2nd Street, the *Chicago & North Western* went on to build new offices and shops in the district bounded by 8th and 10th Avenues, and 3rd Street above the river bank. A brick depot was built, as was a machine shop (destroyed by fire 1864 but rebuilt) a 27,000-gallon water tank, a blacksmith shop, a 330-foot-diameter roundhouse that could shelter 60 steam locomotives, three engine and car fabrication and repair shops, and carpenter and paint shops. A second major fire destroyed the shops buildings in 1879 but they too were rebuilt.



Engine 391 north of Clinton at Eagle Point, Iowa ca. 1895

Standard Gauge: The United States standard railroad gauge (the width between the two rails) is 4 feet, 8-1/2 inches, based on the English rail measurement, which itself was based on standards for horse-drawn wagon wheel spacing.



The steam engine Henry Keip in the C&NW roundhouse at 8th Avenue and 2nd Street, 1872

Housing for railroad employees and their families did not offer much more than the basics. Families shared cottages or crowded into tiny shanties. Single men lived in boardinghouses, residential “hotels” or coldwater flats with outhouses at the end of the yard. Far from the mansions of the lumber barons, these housing districts clustered around the rail yards. The employees walked to their 12-hour work days with lunchpails in hand. Though there were no unions in these early years, the Clinton railroad employees formed “brotherhoods” to redress grievances over long hours, wages or layoffs. Clinton’s first strike took place in 1864 when *Chicago & North Western* railroad workers dumped the wheel assemblies of several train cars into the Mississippi

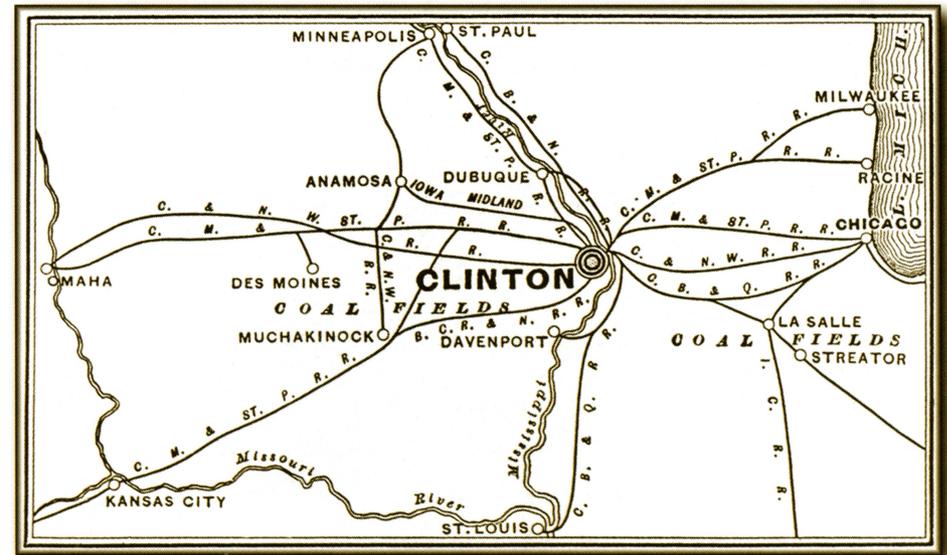
River as protest against what they felt were low wages. Clinton experienced several railroad strikes in 1877, and again in the early 1890s, including several work stoppages at the Clinton yards. Overall, life was stable and generations of Clinton railroad employees had their start in these first boom years.

There was constant attention to the bridge, as would be expected for so valuable a commodity. Over the years, repairs were made as parts showed wear or as new machinery was required. The trains were constant, and the single-track bridge was at its traffic capacity, day and night. As many as 150 trains used the bridge every 24 hours. Also, the trains were growing increasingly heavier, both in railroad equipment such as engines and rolling stock, and in the amount of freight they carried. By the 1890s, discussion about the need to build a new bridge had already begun.

The bustle of life around Clinton continued. Clinton supported more than just millionaires; a busy and prosperous middle-class developed to provide goods and services to the city. Meanwhile, the railroad provided work for those who wanted it. Life in Clinton was altogether satisfactory.

In fact, getting to Clinton was becoming a regular priority for those living in the nearby towns. Lyons was still smarting from being passed over by the *Chicago & North Western*, but its residents wisely reasoned that they didn't want to be left out. In 1868, some of the good Lyons citizens formed the *Clinton & Lyons Horse Railway Company*. This streetcar railway, drawn by draft animals, scheduled a mule-drawn car to make the round-trip journey to Clinton as far as the corner of 8th Avenue and 2nd Street near the *Chicago & North Western* depot. This streetcar line was an immediate success and the coming-and-going from the two towns increased greatly. By 1890, the streetcar line had been extended farther south, to Camanche. The first electric trolley line started up that same year. Commuters could travel all the way between Lyons and Davenport on an interurban railway.

Clinton was seeing so much business and expansion due to the railroad that it began casting its eye on its neighbors as a possible source of new borders. Sure enough, the first to go was Ringwood, annexed in 1873. Chancy was next in 1892. Lyons voters held out, rejecting one merger referendum before giving in to the inevitable in 1895. That year, Clinton annexed Lyons, gaining the wonderful new Lyons-Fulton High Bridge constructed just a few years earlier. The 1900 census figure for Clinton totaled 22,700.



An early rail map showing Clinton as the critical crossroads for major Midwest roads, 1897.

Road Battles

A famous right-of-way battle took place in 1881 at Lyons when personnel from the Chicago & North Western tried to prevent a Chicago Milwaukee, & St. Paul construction crew from building a crossover of the Chicago & North Western tracks at Stockwell's Switch. The construction crew found a Chicago & North Western locomotive and waycar blocking the tracks at the crossover site and a dispute started. A special session of the Lyons town council was hurriedly called to settle the dispute but tempers flared and a pitched battle began, complete with clubs and empty whiskey bottles. The fight was broken up by the arrival of the burly town Marshall, who fired his pistol over the combatants' heads. Lyons residents were deputized to take charge, the Marshall removed the Chicago & North Western engineer and fireman from the scene, and the engine and waycar were backed down the tracks so that crossover construction could begin.



By the 1890s, the *Chicago & North Western*, the *Chicago Burlington & Quincy*, the *Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul & Pacific* (later known as the *Milwaukee Road*), the *Davenport Rock Island & North Western*, and the *Chicago Rock Island & Pacific* railroads each had at least one depot in the city. Clinton could legitimately claim to be one of the most important rail centers in the Midwest.

But there were changes coming to Clinton and to the *Chicago & North Western* as well.

By the 1890s the supply of wood from the northern forests that had so steadily provided timber to Clinton was becoming exhausted, even while new rail routes were developed that could take timber directly from the logging camps to mills in Chicago. Clinton's boom years came to a startlingly sudden end. One by one, starting in 1893, the mills from Lyons down to Camanche began to close, the last shutting its doors in 1905. The Gilded Age had come to a crushing end. In less than five years, Clinton lost nearly one-quarter of its 22,000 inhabitants, who moved on to look for work and a new home elsewhere.

To make matters more severe, the deregulation of the railroads in 1887 brought hard times to the *Chicago & North Western* as it struggled to cope with rising costs. Things became even worse after the Financial Panic of 1893. The *Chicago & North Western* had to regroup and modernize to meet the demands of the new century. The plans for stabilization of the *Chicago & North Western* brought great change to Clinton.

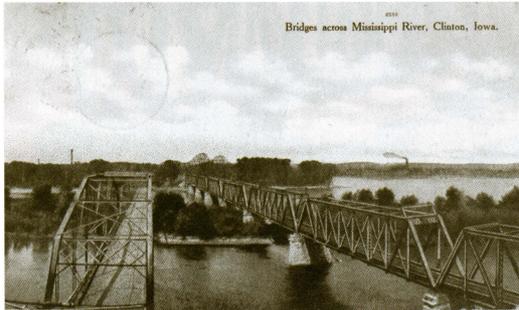


Looking northwest towards the Chicago & North Western's roundhouse and second depot, 1898.

"Spanning the Mississippi River, the Chicago & North Western Railroad built the longest train bridge in the world. It connected the fishing holes and gravel back roads of East Clinton, Illinois to the sweaty streets of summer in Clinton, Iowa. When railroad men working in the maintenance shops got too reckless, you'd swear you could feel the steel wheels hit the concrete floor. The growling metal ring would clang straight through a screen window—three and a half miles away—on thick, sleepless August nights..."

Bob Einwek, remembering a Clinton childhood in the 1960s

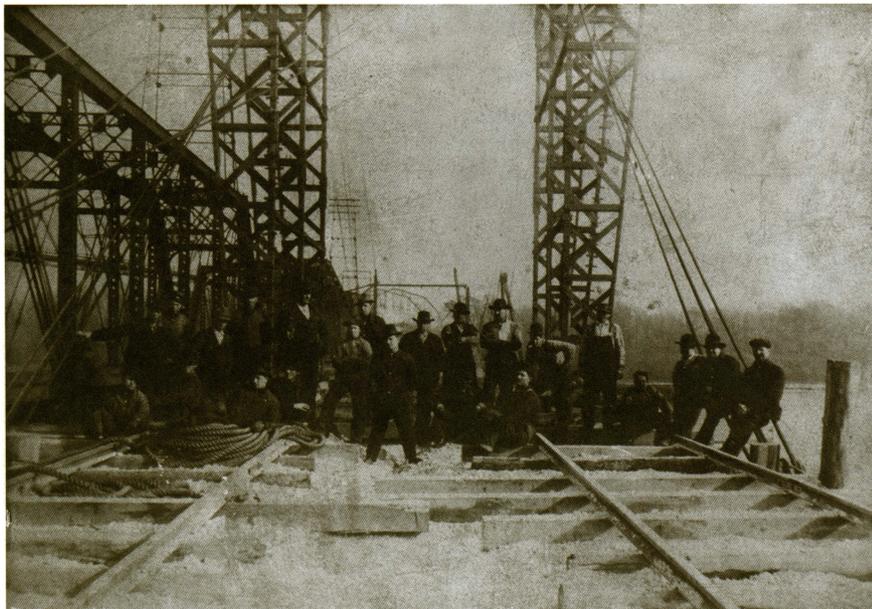
The Bridge



The old and new bridges as seen in a postcard ca. 1909



'The New North Western' postcard dated 1909



Building the new bridge, ca. 1908



Waiting under the High Bridge for the westward signal on the new C&NW draw span, ca. 1910



The C&NW draw span open to permit passage of a lumber boom in the west channel, ca. 1900.



The rail lines passing under the High Bridge, from a rare glass negative, ca. 1900.



The 1898 and 1909 Chicago & North Western bridges side by side with the High Bridge, ca. 1909

CHAPTER 3 CHANGE AND CHALLENGE: 1900-1940



Safety First

1906 - *The Chicago & North Western* was the first industrial firm to create a department concerned with employee and public safety. This department commissioned a booklet titled "Railroad Accidents, Their Cause and Prevention," written by the railroad's general claims agent. The slogan "Safety First" became the company's national slogan and aided in the founding of the National Safety Council in 1912.

The *Chicago & North Western* had established an Iowa Division for its lines in the state and made Clinton the Division Point. A division point was a basic unit of the railroad and managed traffic for the parent railroad within a set geographic area. Division points were responsible for maintaining the facilities the railroad needed in that region for general operations. This was also the place where the railroad would recruit and train personnel necessary for the yards and crews in the division. The railroad traditionally promoted the economic well-being of the area through which the rail lines traveled.

The building and maintenance of rolling stock (anything that ran on the track on wheels) was the major responsibility of the *Chicago & North Western* facilities at Clinton. Mechanics at the existing Clinton facility maintained all the steam locomotives that put in at the Clinton roundhouses, while the shops built and repaired passenger and freight cars.

In 1901, just after the New Year, the *Chicago & North Western* requested surveys and river bottom borings for a badly-needed new double-track bridge. They had to wait several years before congressional authorization finally came through in 1907. Construction began that spring, just forty feet south of the old bridge. The first train finally crossed the new bridge in late winter of 1909, and the old bridge was taken down. The cost for the new bridge reached one million dollars.

Clinton's second phase of industrialization began as the city moved away from the fading lumber industry and toward an agricultural processing and manufacturing industrial base. This new industry was a good match for Clinton's excellent existing railway and waterway transportation systems. Much of the new industrial development went to the south side of Clinton and along the Beaver Slough, away from the old lumbering-railroading-factory zone downtown along the Mississippi.

In 1900, the *Chicago & North Western* decided it was time to modernize and expand its Iowa Division facilities. The downtown car shops and roundhouse were to be phased out after construction of



The Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Depot, Clinton ca. 1910.

new, modern car shops along Camanche Avenue. The new car shops were established in the southwest part of the city, on thirty acres along Camanche Avenue near the old Riverside/Chancy community. Here they began to build an entirely new division yard with all the trimmings. First built

was a large engine roundhouse. Next came the car shops themselves, two large brick shop buildings with distinctive saw-tooth monitor roofs. Also constructed were a brick office building, a power plant, assorted storage sheds, and a considerable amount of trackage; even a state-of-the-art water softening plant that provided treated water drawn from the river for the entire yard. The new car shops complex could completely strip, refit, repair, paint and test rolling stock before returning it back into service. The grand opening of the new facilities was a celebration day in Clinton. It was attended by a number of *Chicago & North Western* officers from the Chicago headquarters, as well as several hundred Clinton businessmen. A public reception was held in the main plant, and a banquet at the LaFayette Hotel was sponsored by the Clinton Commercial Club. Within just a few years, the Clinton car shops were running 24 hours a day and employed several thousand skilled and semi-skilled mechanics from around the region.

With the facilities running at full steam at the Camanche Avenue division yards, the *Chicago & North Western* decided they also needed new “marshalling” or terminal yards, and looked for room across the river. Fulton, Illinois-Lyons’ old neighbor across the Mississippi—already had a long

Crossing the Mississippi

“You could almost feel the tenseness of everyone. Silence reigned. It was a great emotional crisis . . . I kept reminding my subconscious mind that the bridge had been there for many springs and there was no reason why it should choose this particular time to collapse . . . Now, at last, we were West!”

- Alice Huyler Ramsey, Crossing the Mississippi River on the Clinton Railroad Bridge, 1909



relationship with the earlier *Dixon Air Line* and the *Chicago Iowa & Nebraska*. The *Chicago & North Western* decided to locate the new buildings on land purchased just below Fulton at East Clinton, on the Illinois end of the Mississippi River railroad bridge.

The East Clinton Yards development was enormously ambitious: 23 new tracks in the freight yards (the longest able to hold 105 cars), a passenger depot, power house, coal chutes, sand house, yard office, oil house and storehouses. Perhaps most impressive was the construction of a giant 438-foot-diameter brick roundhouse providing service shelter for 58 steam locomotives and boasting an electrically operated 60-foot turntable.



The depots at Lyons, ca. 1910.

This new roundhouse, over a quarter mile in outside circumference, received tremendous publicity and quickly earned acclaim in national newspapers as the “world’s largest.”

This new complex at East Clinton employed 500 people. Some lived in nearby Fulton or at the three-story hotel built for the train crews at the yards. The rest commuted from Clinton, Lyons, Camanche, and other nearby towns, traveling over the *Chicago & North Western* bridge on a shuttle called “Old Scoot” that operated hourly with one engine and one car. Old Scoot routinely carried crews and roundhouse employees to and from each side of the bridge.

In the same year the East Clinton complex was opened, the *Chicago & North Western* also built small depots in Camanche and at the Lyons yards in the north end of Clinton. In 1915, the *Chicago & North Western* built a magnificent new brick passenger depot in Clinton midway between

downtown and the still new Camanche Avenue car shops. Thus, between the turn of the century and 1915, the *Chicago & North Western* had built the new roundhouse and car shops complex on Camanche Avenue, a new, double-tracked bridge over the Mississippi River, massive new facilities across the river in East Clinton, and a brand new, large passenger depot in Clinton. These investments, totaling millions of dollars, were a strong indication that the Clinton area was very important to the *Chicago & North Western*.

By now, the *Chicago & North Western* was a major force in the lives of a great many Clinton residents. Social involvement followed employment, with the *Chicago & North Western* sponsoring many auxiliaries, clubs and organizations. The *Chicago & North Western* Railway Woman's Club met on the first Monday of every month at their official club room in the *Chicago & North Western* Freight House on 10th Avenue and 3rd Street. The Women's Club was a social and service organization for the wives of management and supervisory personnel. It had subcommittees for hospital work and community programs. And for the wives of shop and rail line employees, there was the Ladies Society to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen. Even the children had their own clubs, including the Junior "400" Railroad Safety Police—a membership club for school boys and girls that emphasized safety issues around the rail yards and along the tracks that often ran through residential neighborhoods. The *Chicago & North Western* sponsored many other community organizations and special interest clubs including the Choral Club, a number of sports teams, book clubs, and the Railroad Veterans Association for retirees.



Signal Tower, 1908

The years preceding American involvement in the First World War were difficult ones for railroads everywhere. Federal rate deregulations, bitter competition from the fledgling trucking and barge industries, and labor problems brought confusion and challenges. War-time government control of the railroads during the First World War further pummeled *Chicago & North Western's* profits on a system serving routes from Chicago to the Pacific coast.



The wreck of Engine 237 near Clinton, 1923.

For the community as a whole, unemployment was low during this time. *Chicago & North Western* employees were among the best paid workmen in Iowa. Nevertheless, a large percentage of Clinton's railway workers, especially the semi- and unskilled ones, were living at or below poverty in the neighborhoods adjacent to the rail yards.

Changing technology was rapidly outmoding some of the facilities that *Chicago & North Western* built just twenty years earlier. The East Clinton roundhouse didn't last more

than a few decades in service. It was phased out when the *Chicago & North Western* began to use the great Class-H steam locomotives, which were too large for the roundhouse facilities to accommodate.

The 1929 stock market crash left the *Chicago & North Western* dealing with staggering debt. Like the rest of the country, Clinton experienced high levels of unemployment and a large number of business failures during the Depression. Attempting to regroup and consolidate, the *Chicago & North Western* made the decision in 1931 to base all repair and service facilities in the Camanche Avenue yards. East Clinton's giant roundhouse and all its companion facilities were torn down, leaving five hundred area residents without employment. The economic devastation wrought on Clinton was more than some citizens could bear. Many left the community in search of work. Finally, in 1936, the *Chicago & North Western* declared bankruptcy. It did not emerge from receivership until the end of 1944, near the end of the Second World War. Down river at Camanche, the *Chicago Rock Island & Pacific's* business also began to lag. In 1932, the depot was auctioned off to the highest bidder and was later used as a residence. The tracks were taken up and the land returned to its original owners.

"My Grandfather August Nelson was a car repairman for the Chicago & North Western at Clinton, Iowa. My other grandfather William Thompson was an engineer for the Chicago & North Western on the East Iowa Division. My Dad was an engineer, as was my uncle Bill Thompson. I had another uncle who was a trainman on this division, but we didn't speak to him; he scabbed on the switchmen way back in the 1920s..."

- Larry Nelson, Memories of the Chicago & North Western, 1997



The shared Chicago Burlington & Quincy Depot and Milwaukee St. Paul & Pacific "Union" depot, ca. 1920.



The first yards and Roundhouse, ca. 1910



Looking east toward the bridge and the river, from a rare glass negative, ca. 1910.



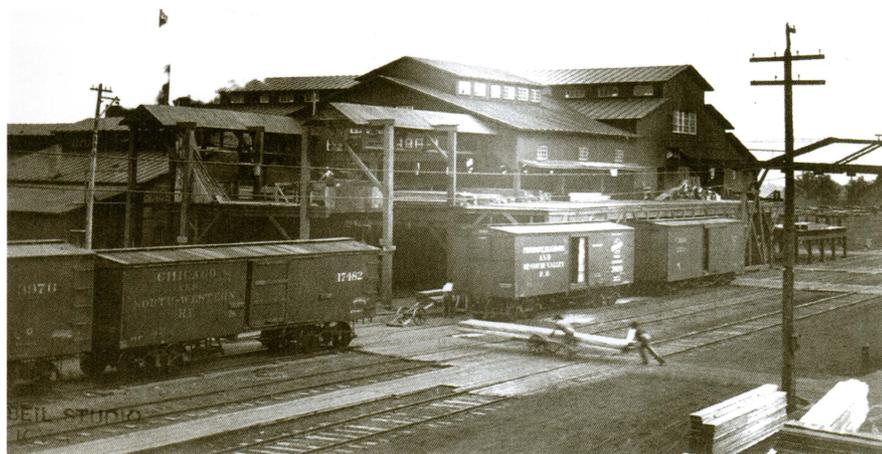
Looking towards the bridge from the depot, ca. 1910



The C&NW Depot



The roundhouse crew posing for the camera, ca. 1910.



Along the rail sidings, ca. 1905.

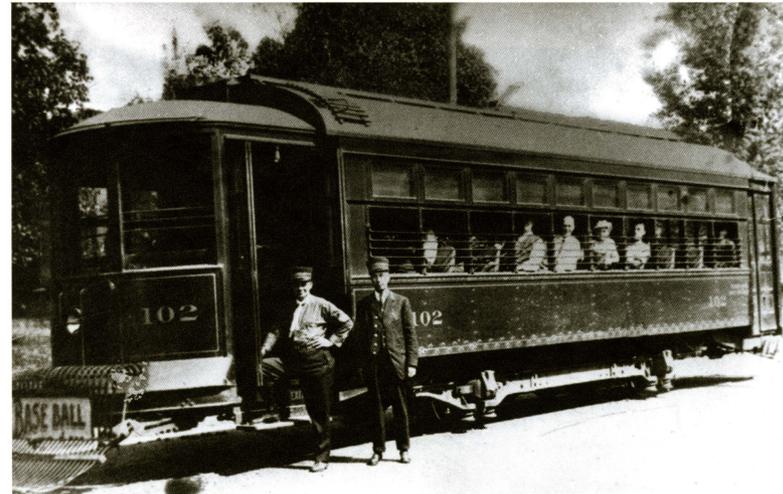


The Freight House, Offices and C&NW administrative staff, 1913



A Class 'J' steam engine idling in the yards, ca. 1914.

The Street Railways



Conductors and Car 102 on the Clinton Street Railway, ca. 1917



A timetable listing the schedule of runs for the Interurban Line.



A horse-drawn streetcar at Lyons, ca. 1908

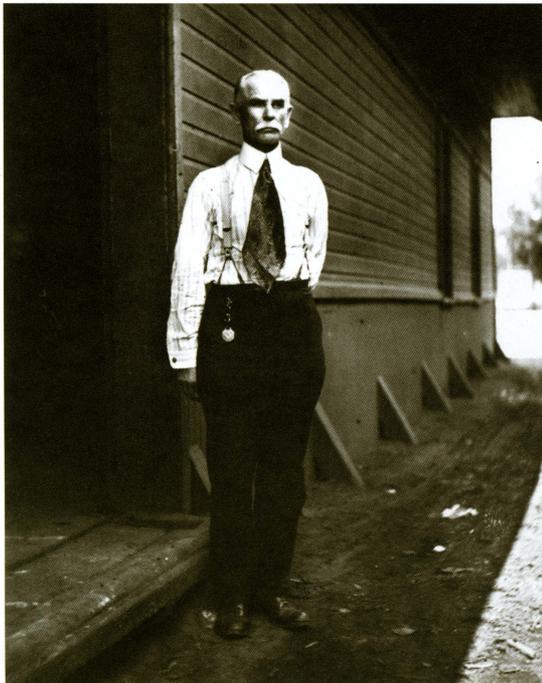
Lyons



*Walking the rails near old Franklin Street
(21st Avenue North), Lyons ca. 1920.*



Flatcars on the siding in the Lyons yards, 1916



The C&NW stationmaster at the Lyons depot, 1920.



Workmen at raiiside in the Lyons yards, 1916

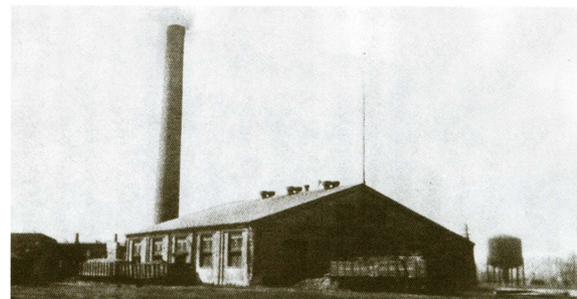


*The Chicago Minneapolis & St. Paul
stationmaster and assistant, Lyons 1916*

East Clinton



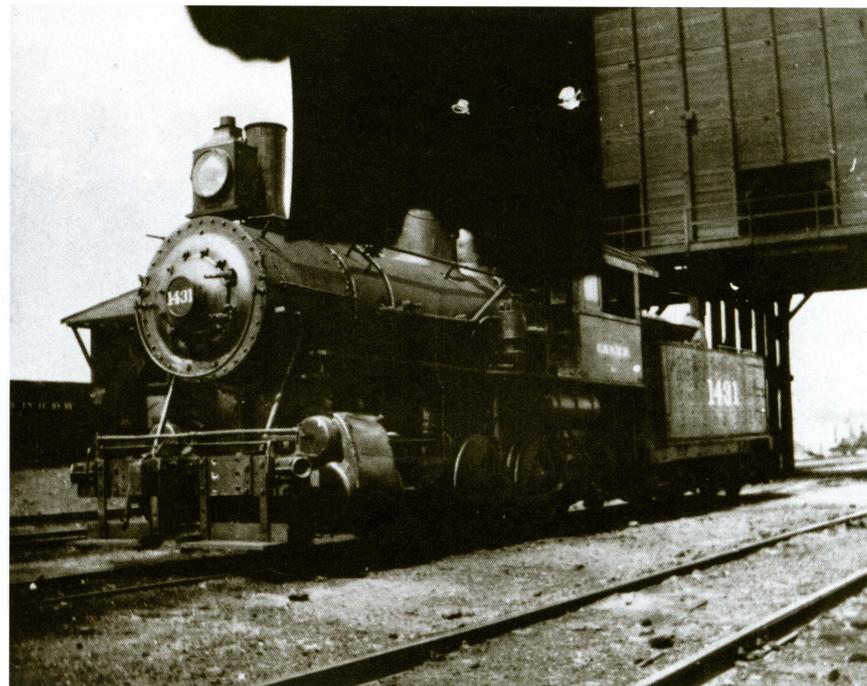
The East Clinton C&NW roundhouse crew, 1913



The Power House, ca. 1910



"Old Scoot" shuttled C&NW employees over the river, shown in 1910.



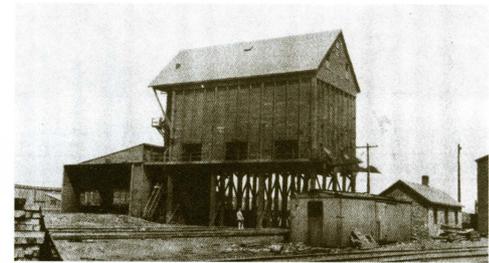
Engine 1431 filling at the East Clinton coal chute, 1911



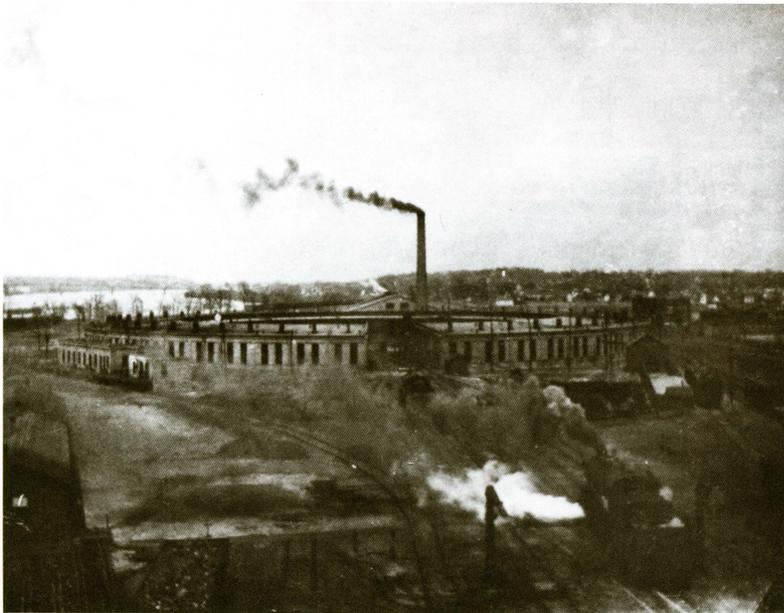
The hotel and clubhouse provided housing for railway workers, ca. 1910



The Road House, ca. 1910.



The Coal Chute, ca. 1910.



The C&NW roundhouse at East Clinton was the largest in the world when built in 1910.

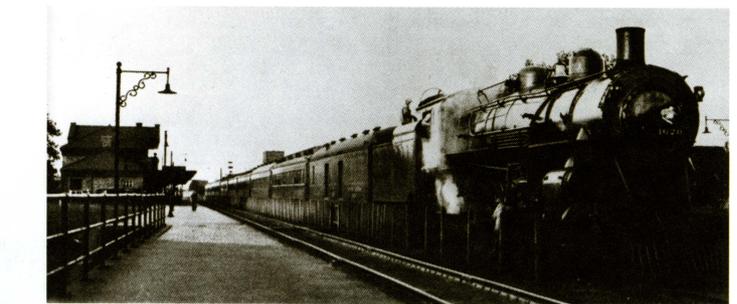


•The East Clinton yard office crew posing for the camera in 1913

NEW YARDS



The C&NW wins 1st prize for its "float" at the Clinton Fall Festival, 1925.



Engine 1620 waiting at the new C&NW depot in 1930.

The New Yards machine shop crew posing for the camera, ca. 1920

CHAPTER 4 NEW TIMES: 1940-1970



End Of The Steam Locomotive

1956-Fourteen Chicago & North Western steam locomotives destined for the scrap heap were towed through Clinton by a diesel unit from western Iowa. No more would be the wail of whistles or black smoke trailing behind "iron horses." Higher efficiency diesel-electric locomotives had supplanted all but a handful of steam units. It was the final chapter in a colorful era of railroading. By 1949 only thirteen steam locomotives were ordered by domestic railroads, compared to 1,800 diesel-electric locomotives being ordered that same year.

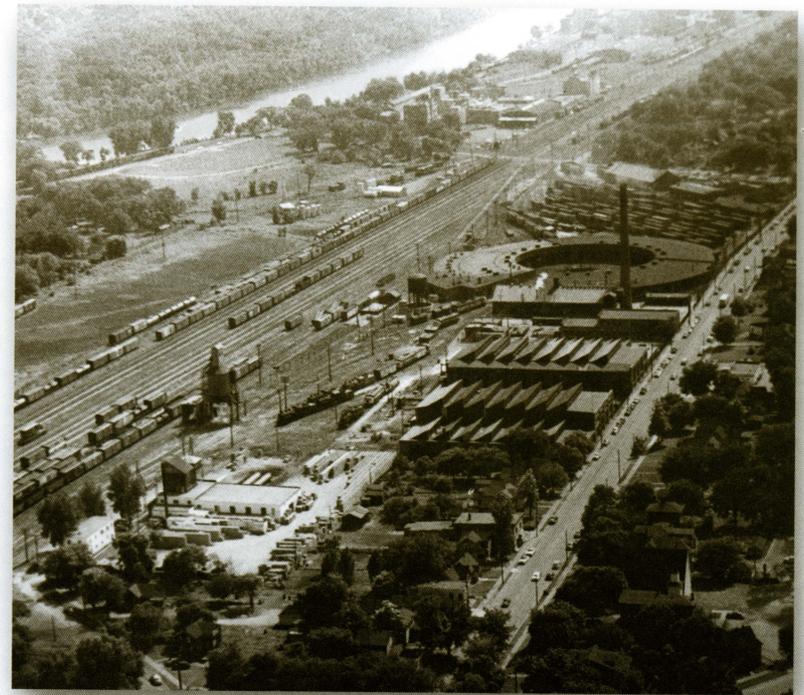
At the opening of the 1940s, Clinton's population stood at 26,300. A significant number of Clinton's employed adults worked for the *Chicago & North Western*, especially at the Camanche Avenue car shops.

Wartime brought great change to the city life and to operations of the *Chicago & North Western*. The years 1940 - 1946 saw heavy restrictions placed on any procedure that required the use of steel, which was in great demand for the wartime production of munitions and materiel. The railroads were required to cease building of all-steel freight cars. This restriction put real pressure on the Clinton shops ability to meet railcar order demands, which remained very high. The *Chicago & North Western's* answer to the restrictions was to build all of their box cars with wooden panels braced by strong steel bars. At the end of the war there was a serious freight car shortage that was estimated at 50,000 cars on backorder but not completed. The Clinton car shops were placed on 24-hour duty and charged with replacing the all-wooden panels on boxcars with new steel panels and getting as many of these freight cars out as possible in as short a time as possible.

During the war years, the Clinton chapter of Sustaining Wings of Iowa sponsored a canteen at the *Chicago & North Western* depot that was enormously popular. It was estimated that in several instances in 1944 the canteen served over 5,000 service men and women in one day.

The North Western Newliner, a publication that was distributed to all *Chicago & North Western* employees starting in 1945, continued to list and report enlistments and POW reports out of the Clinton division. It later printed news of servicemen returning to work for the *Chicago & North Western* after their tours of duty.

During the war years, with so many men away in the service, a women's work corps was formed. Called the Military Railway Service, it trained and employed women from the community to take over jobs traditionally assigned to men in the *Chicago & North Western* maintenance shops, offices, and service facilities. The program was unique, and very successful: in 1945 the War Department sent a reporter and pho-



The new C&NW Camanche Avenue yards, 1950.

tographer out to Clinton to write a story about the MRS employees at the Camanche Avenue yards.

The *Chicago & North Western* did its part to promote wartime themes of patriotism and support for the troops overseas. A special train, called the Victory Garden Special, was sent out to eighteen communities in six states. Featuring “Victory Garden” and “Food Preservation” coaches, the train attracted over 20,000 visitors. One special coach, called “Food and the World,” featured displays highlighting wartime work being done by the American Red Cross, the Department of Agriculture, the War Department, and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The Victory Garden Special passed through Clinton as its second port of call, stopping on a siding on the Midland tracks along River Front Park. Over one thousand visitors from the greater Clinton community visited the displays in one afternoon.

At the close of the Second World War, in late 1945 and early 1946, the *Chicago & North Western* turned over all of its Pullman sleeper cars to bring home troops across the country. It was estimated that over one million men and women were on their way home by train from coast to coast in December 1945 alone.

At the end of the Second World War, the population of Clinton had grown to 31,500 and it was estimated that 1,500 *Chicago & North Western* employees were now living in Clinton. By 1947 the city of Clinton led the state in total building permits. The railroad continued to be of critical importance as a factor in this growth with the steady presence of the *Chicago & North Western*; the *Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul & Pacific* (a.k.a. *Milwaukee Road*); the *Chicago Burlington & Quincy*; and the *Chicago Rock Island & Pacific*.



Heading out of Clinton over the Mississippi, 1946.

The War Department Photographs



An Engineer in the Depot Lunchroom



Dorothy Lucke at the Roundhouse



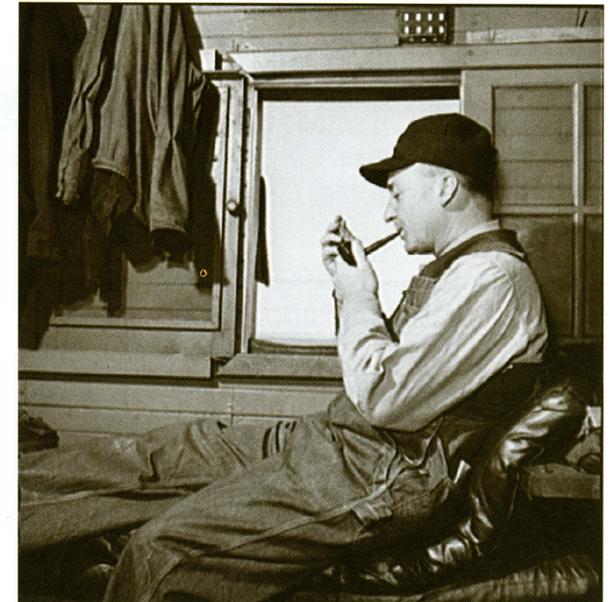
Marcella Hart in the Roundhouse



Card Game in the Depot Rec Room



Waiting for Orders at the Clinton Yards



Rear Brakeman Clarence Averill



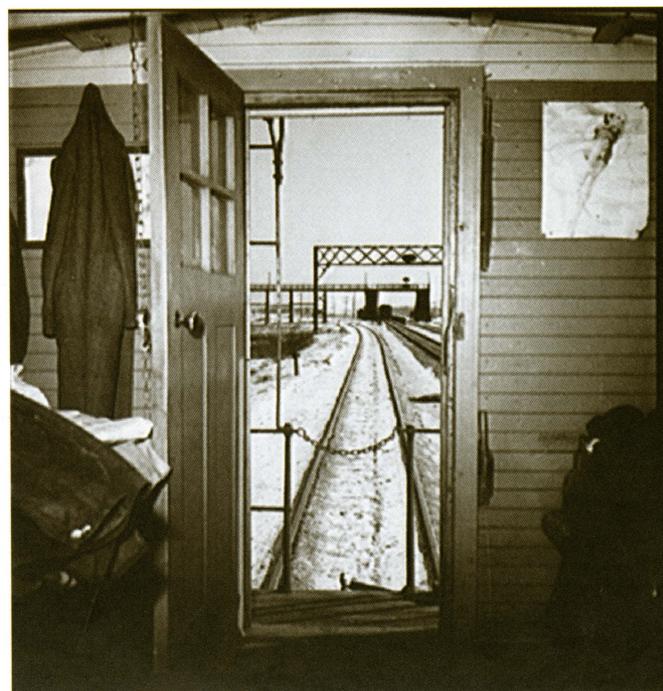
Women Wipers Reporting to Work



Room Assignments at the Boarding House



At the Coaling Station near East Clinton



Leaving the Clinton Yards

The *Chicago & North Western* had become one of Iowa's major industries and had more than 1,500 miles of track within the state's borders. The *Chicago & North Western* was hauling more grain, livestock, eggs, wool, and hay into Chicago than any other rail carrier. In Clinton, over 45,000 bushels of corn were being ground daily by Clinton Industries. Pillsbury Mills was manufacturing stock feeds at their Clinton headquarters and had built a huge grain elevator capable of storing a million bushels of the soybeans used in their feeds. Du Pont De Nemours built and operated a cellophane plant. Other major Clinton industries manufactured millwork, combustion engines, steel and wire products, distilled products, and bridge works. Swift built a new packing plant in 1947. In 1952, Dairypak, a milk carton manufacturer, built in Clinton specifically to be served by the *Chicago & North Western* lines.

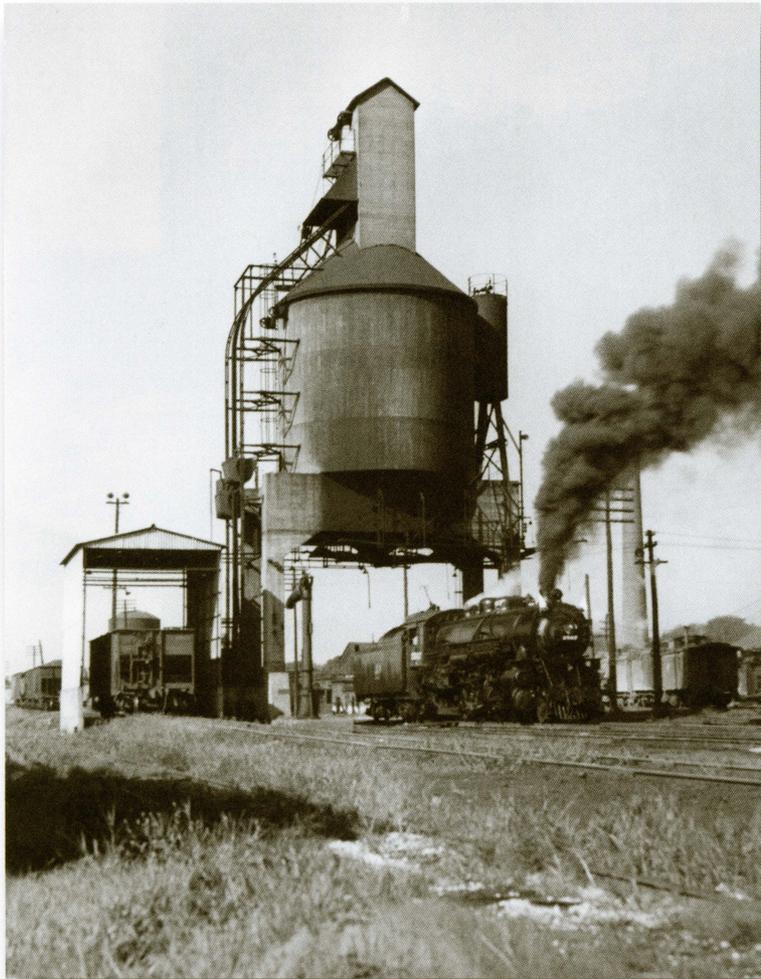
Clinton celebrated the *Chicago & North Western* centennial in 1948 with a three-mile long, 40-float parade and a civic banquet seating 700 citizens, the mayor, and representatives of the railroad administration. The centennial celebration was one of the largest events ever held in Clinton. A freshly-painted yellow-and-green *Chicago & North Western* centennial train made a stop at Clinton carrying the *Chicago & North Western's* first, and original, Pioneer steam locomotive and its coach on open flatbed cars. The centennial train also carried a specially fitted museum car highlighting the story of the railroad from its early beginnings. It is possible that the entire city of Clinton turned out to honor the railroad. The police detailed a parade route lined with over 40,000 persons from the Clinton County region, which made it the largest crowd in the city's history.

Yet, for all its strength in Clinton, the *Chicago & North Western* was on the verge of major systemic change which would have a dramatic effect on life at the Camanche Avenue yards and in Clinton.

The first sign of change came in 1949. After a year-long dispute, the management of the nation's railroads and the rail unions agreed to establish a 40-hour work week with paid overtime. This was an extraordinary shift and gave a strong voice to a workforce that would never give ground again. At the same time, the *Chicago & North Western* was seeing a dramatic increase in the frequency of retirements of lifelong railroad employees. In 1950 alone some 840 former *Chicago & North Western* employees were added to the retirement rolls. By 1951, over 6,000 retired employees were drawing pensions totaling \$517,000 monthly, a heavy hit on the *Chicago & North Western* revenues.



Train wreck near the Lyons yards, ca. 1946.



Loading coal at the new Camanche Avenue yards.

By 1956 the *Chicago & North Western* had brought in new management to keep the railroad competitive. One key competitive feature was to seek ways to keep the rolling stock well maintained. One of the first announcements made by the new management was that Clinton was the site for a new \$6 million *Chicago & North Western* freight car repair and rebuilding shop. Seen as a way of consolidating the operations of 14 smaller shops that dotted the system, this new shop was to be the most modern of its kind in the country. Plans included employment of as many as 300 personnel to turn out 30

A year later, the *Chicago & North Western* was feeling tremendous pressure from the rise of trucks to transport goods around the country. The company began an intense and bitter national advertising campaign against trucking use. They called the trucks “heavy road freighters” and the strove to educate the American public (and lawmakers) to the damage done by trucks to highways and, of course, to the unfair competition trucks posed to railroads.

But trucks were here to stay, revenues were flat, and the era of line closures had begun. In the Clinton district, this trend hit the *Iowa Midland* line—owned by *Chicago & North Western* since 1884. Flooding and economic problems due to war shortages had already forced its closure for two years, from 1944 to 1946, but the line finally ceased operation for good in 1953.

Things got worse. In that same year, Congress authorized an airmail experiment, flying first-class 3-cent letters between New York, Washington and Chicago. The railroads immediately began a campaign to the public (and to the lawmakers) claiming that the government was taking away almost all of the railway mail, which would threaten the security of railway post office employees. After a 16-month experiment and every sign of success, the airmail option became a reality for the American public and the railway post office car became obsolete.

By 1954, the *Chicago & North Western* had announced a whopping \$11 million drop in total operating revenues for the first seven months of the year. The *Chicago & North Western* declared bankruptcy for the second time, in 1955, and almost immediately the *Chicago & North Western* divisions begin to be dissolved and redistributed to streamline operations.

rebuilt freight cars per day, with the capacity to build 1,000 new boxcars and repair 7,000 annually.

The new Clinton Car Shops opened at the Camanche Avenue yards in October of 1957. The main building was a structure 1,000 feet long and 160 feet wide, divided into two bays, with overhead cranes running the full length of the building to transfer material and to move cars undergoing either construction or repair. The overhead cranes actually started 700 feet outside of the building where vast quantities of parts and supplies were stacked in wait. The complex also included paint and wheel shops, air-brake and accessory shops, a fuel and oil supply depot, an acetylene generating plant, and a new employee center. A *Chicago & North Western* official was later to say that “it really was an impressive place. It was something the North Western desperately needed and it was money very well spent.”

While such service facilities as the Clinton Car Shops were badly needed, the nation’s railroads continued to decline. Passenger and commuter rail traffic began to be curtailed to the point where, in the early 1960s, the *Chicago & North*



Heading out of the new Camanche Avenue yards, ca. 1950.

Western discontinued seventy-six passenger

trains system-wide, thereby saving millions of dollars. By 1963, only a single passenger train operated between Chicago and Clinton. The *Chicago & North Western* had completed a total survey of its trackage and buildings system-wide. Soon many historic, yet outdated, facilities were being sold or razed. In Clinton, the land under the old *Galena & Chicago Union* Freight Depot, built 1855, was sold to the Fidelity Life Association in 1964. The old depot was razed in order to put up a new building. The *Chicago & North Western's* net revenues declined sharply in the late 1960s and the railroad sustained a net operating loss of \$5.7 million in 1969. Rail lines



Switch Engine 1479 passing through, 1955.

were seeing less and less maintenance to the point that some freight runs were being shuttled on other available track to avoid particularly rough points.

Finally, in an attempt to save the company, the *Chicago & North Western* entered into an agreement in 1970 with the North Western Employees Transportation Company to sell the assets of the company for \$19 million to be paid over a period of 20 years, and to assume the \$340 million in company debt. The employees now owned the railroad.

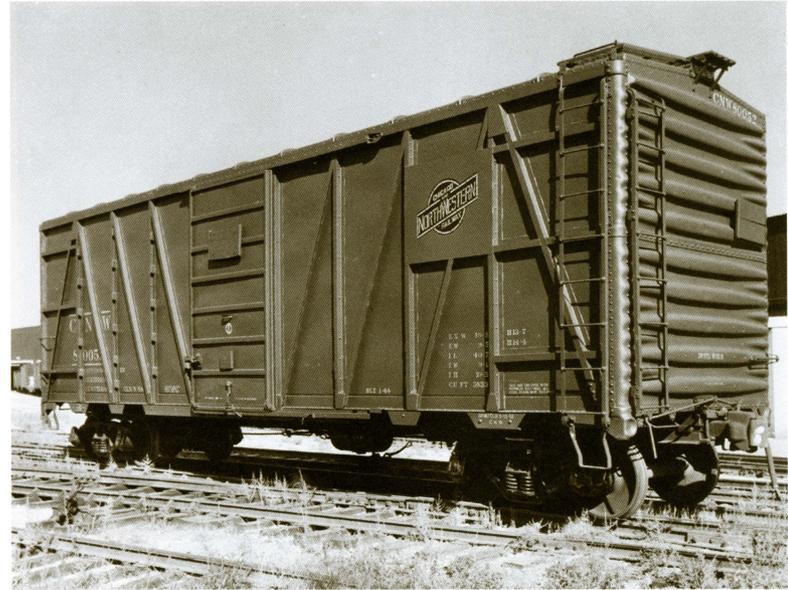


Cover of *Modern Railroads* showing the C&NW yards at Clinton, September 1963.

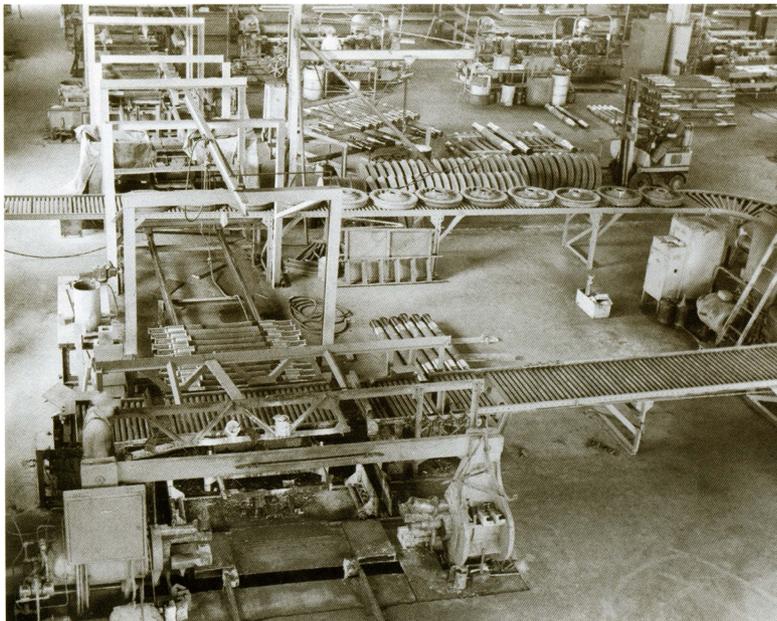
The New Camanche Avenue Shops: The Grand Opening, October 1957



Welding in the Car Shops



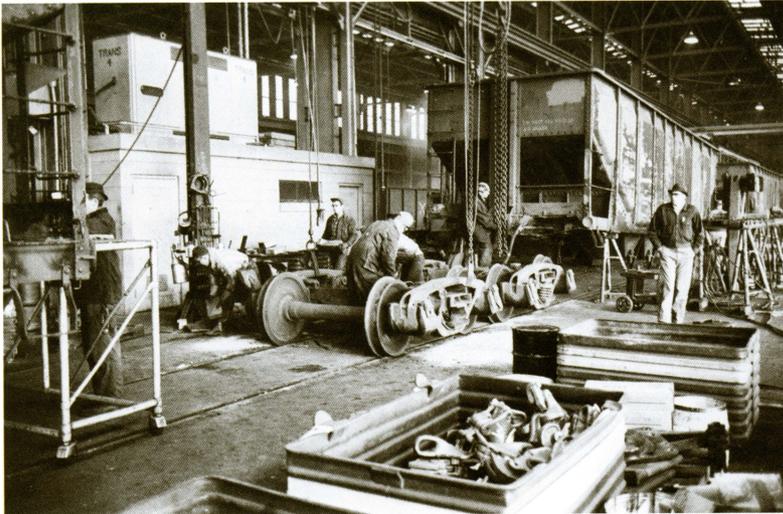
Box Car Built at the Clinton Car Shops



The Wheel Shop



The Overhead Crane



Building the Wheel Assembly in the Car Shops



The Wheel Assemblies Line



Camanche Avenue Shop Yards



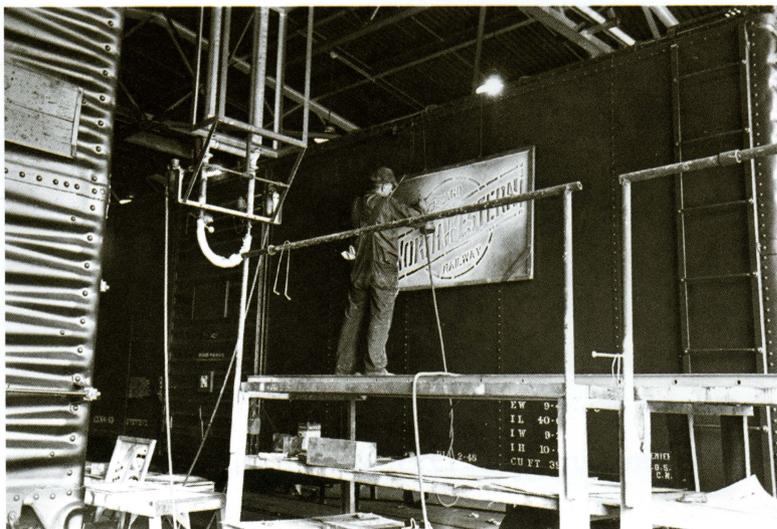
The Wheel Yards



Wheel Assemblies in the Yards



Car Shop, ca. 1967



Affixing the C&NW Sign on the Box Cars

CHAPTER 5 THE END OF AN ERA



Last Days

“At the end of August 1995, on the next-to-last-day for the few Supply Department employees still working, a barbeque was held. About an hour later, the quiet stillness of the Shops was perforated by one of the employees who had brought a trumpet to the shop. Thirty-eight years of operation were concluded with the playing of taps in the parking lot. The next day, August 31, 1995, was the very last day that any employee reported to work at the Clinton Shops...”

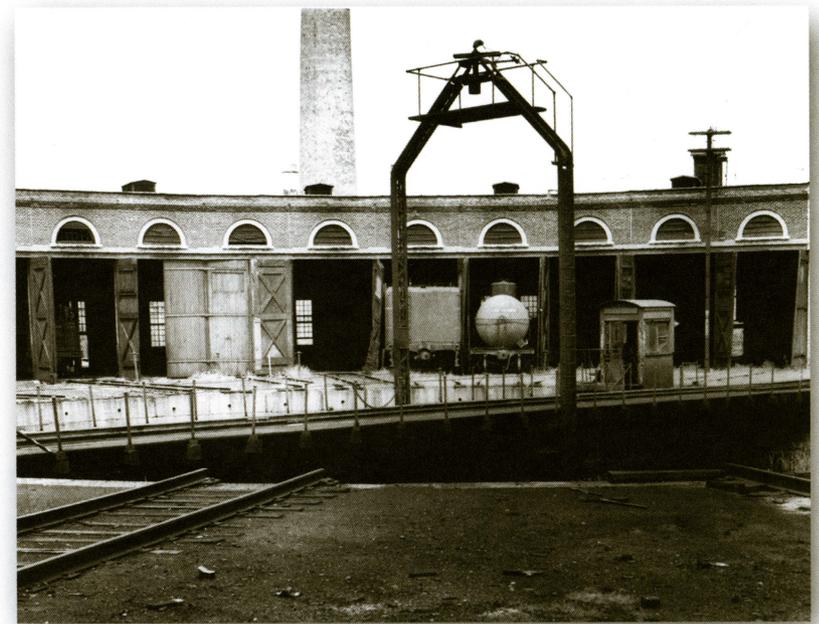
Joe Pierson, Chicago & North Western Archivist

In the early and mid-1970s the *Chicago & North Western*, now an entirely employee-owned railroad, made a profit most years of the decade. The *Chicago & North Western* was able to invest \$440 million into improving and repairing its network of track, rolling stock, and facilities. Employment in the Camanche Avenue car shops topped 500 workers.

But by 1976 the strain on all the nation’s railroads was beginning to show: the *Chicago Rock Island & Pacific* and the *Milwaukee Road* both filed for bankruptcy reorganization that year. The Rock Island line donated its 1899 depot at Camanche to that city in 1982. The community moved the building from trackside to the library grounds, renovated it, paved the grounds with brick from the original depot platform, and brought in a caboose donated by *Milwaukee Road* to complete the grand opening day. The building included a museum room displaying artifacts and memorabilia from the early days of railroading and city’s history. Other historic buildings would not be as fortunate: The old *Chicago Burlington & Quincy* freight depot at 10th Avenue and South 2nd Street in Clinton was torn down.

By the early 1980s, the *Chicago & North Western* had begun to sell or otherwise dispose of unprofitable sections of its rail lines in an attempt to consolidate and regroup from instability. There was also an attempt by the *Chicago & North Western* to buy the entirety of the *Milwaukee Road* holdings but the *Chicago & North Western* lost out to the *Soo Line* in this endeavor. The *Chicago & North Western* instituted a hiring freeze system wide in 1985. The *Chicago & North Western* was facing the prospect of selling as early as 1988. In attempts to stave off the inevitable, cost-cutting measures were instituted. This included the decision to reduce train crews from four to two employees. The slide continued; however, and the *Union Pacific* filed notice of intent to assume control of the *Chicago & North Western* in 1992.

The UP took over all *Chicago & North Western* operations in March 1995, which resulted in an immediate loss of 250 jobs-welders, machinists, electricians, and clerks-and the closure of the Camanche Avenue car shops, though a number of workers did accept jobs elsewhere in the UP system.



The abandoned roundhouse at the Camanche Avenue yards, ca. 1970



The Camanche Avenue car shops officially closed on August 2, 1995. The Clinton Area Development Corporation brought a delegation from the UP on a tour of the empty car shop facilities in hopes that local support in marketing the site would bring in a badly needed new tenant for the 36-acre, ten building site. No such tenant was found, and the Camanche Avenue car shops lingered on, the largely vacant buildings standing quiet. In 1999, the buildings at the Camanche Avenue car shops, except for the 1950s-era, 1,000-foot long car shops building, were razed, thereby bringing a great era of railroading in Clinton to an end.



The car shops offices at the Camanche Yards, 1982.

The Lyons Depot

2000 - The Clinton city council appropriated \$27,000 to have the Chicago & North Western depot at Lyons moved from trackside to 25th Avenue North and McKinley Street. The building was renovated by the Clinton Jaycees to provide community meeting rooms.



The car shops crew posing with the last car produced in Clinton, July 27th, 1995.



The last car produced in Clinton.



Coming into the Clinton Yards, 1952.



LIST OF RAILROADS PLANNED FOR OR OPERATING IN THE CLINTON REGION: 1851-2002

Burlington Cedar Rapids & Northern
Camanche & Council Bluffs
Camanche Albany & Mendota
Cedar Rapids & Missouri River
Chicago & North Western
Chicago Burlington & Quincy
Chicago Camanche & Mendota
Chicago Clinton & Dubuque
Chicago Iowa & Nebraska
Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul (Milwaukee Road)
Chicago Rock Island & Pacific
Davenport Rock Island & North Western
Galena & Chicago Union
Iowa Central Air Line
Iowa Midland
Lyons & Camanche
Lyons & Iowa Central
Milwaukee Road (Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul)
Mississippi & Iowa Central



SOURCES

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Clinton Book: Photo Credits Final

Clinton County Historical Society: 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17 (all), 21, 22 (all), 23, 24 (upper and lower left), 25 (upper and lower left), 26 (all), 27 (all), 28 (lower left and right), 29 (lower left and right), 30 (middle and bottom), 35, 37 (lower left), 42

Chicago & North Western Historical Society: 18 (top, lower left), 19, 24 (upper right), 25 (lower right), 28 (upper left and right), 29 (upper left, middle, right), 30 (top), 31, 32, 36, 37 (upper right), 38, 39 (all), 40 (all), 41 (all), 43 (all), 44

Taplin Family Collection: 16, 18 (lower right), 24 (lower right), 25 (upper right)

Library of Congress: 20, 33 (all), 34 (all)



Where to learn more:

Clinton County Historical Society

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Clinton, IA 52732

(563) 242-1201

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~iaclinto/cchs/cchs.htm>

Camanche Historical Society Depot (1899) Museum

102 Twelfth Avenue

Camanche IA 52730

(563) 259-1285

Lyons Train Depot

56-25th Avenue North

Clinton IA

(563) 242-1240

president@clintonjaycees.org.

www.clintonjaycees.org/depot.htm

Chicago & North Western Historical Society

Northern Illinois University

De Kalb IL 60115

(815) 753-1779

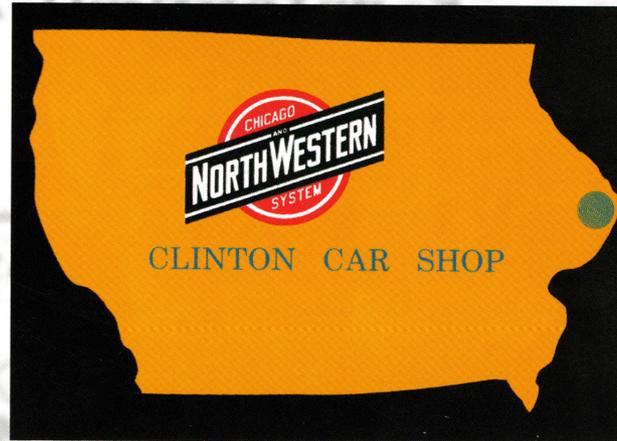
<http://www.cnwhs.org>

State Historical Society of Iowa

800 East Locust Street

Des Moines, IA 50319

www.iowahistory.org



In the decade before the Civil War, many dreamers and practical men were scheming to bring the railroad over the Mississippi River into Iowa. Thousands of pioneering settlers had streamed into the state of Iowa through the early decades of the 1800s and by mid-century shared a common need for getting their agricultural goods to market. Throughout the early history of Iowa, many rail lines were envisioned but never built; built but never finished; finished but then absorbed by another rail company.

The great Chicago & North Western Railroad laid rail to the Mississippi and built a magnificent bridge to carry the tracks over the river to Clinton in 1865, at the end of the Civil War. From that time the C&NW was one of the dominant rail lines in the United States, an employer of thousands, builder of the first caboos, designer of the first post office car, and the first industrial company in the country to establish a safety code.

From such beginnings grew the vast Clinton Rail Yards, a principal C&NW division point and a partnership that endured for 130 years.

This is the history of the Chicago & North Western Railroad at the City of Clinton, Iowa, as it once was, and as it remains in the minds and hearts of those who were there.