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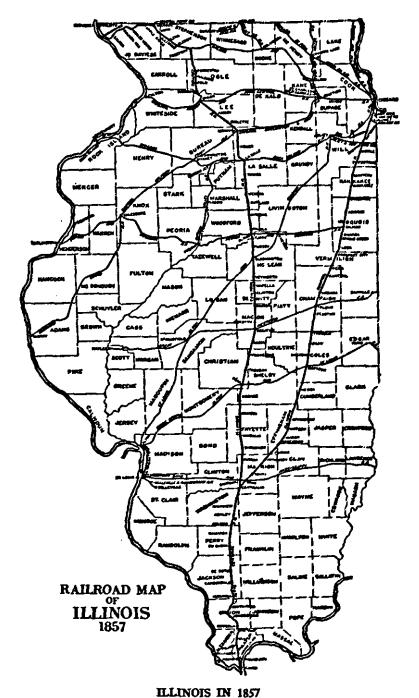
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(Prepared from map in Gerhard's Illinois in 1857 sources by the Illinois Central Railroad)

The Illinois Central Railroad and Its Colonization Work

BY

PAUL WALLACE GATES ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY



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FREDERICK MERK

THE glamour and romance in the early history of American railroads have led to the writing of many volumes dealing with its more spectacular features. These accounts have been devoted largely to two phases of the story, construction and the battles of the financial giants. Fiske, Gould, Vanderbilt, Huntington, Hill, and Harriman. The more important social and economic results of the laving down of the railroad net have been little touched. We know far more about the conflict between Daniel Drew, Jay Gould, and Commodore Vanderbilt over the control of the Erie Railroad than we do about the effects which the construction of this road had in providing rapid transportation facilities for the southern counties of New York, in making it possible for previously isolated farmers to get their commodities to market easily and cheaply, and in giving greater mobility to the people living along its line. The Crédit Mobilier scandal in connection with the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. because of its political complications, has also been treated at length, but little attention has been paid to the more important contribution which that railroad made in opening up great regions previously so isolated as to prevent their settlement except by hardy and venturesome pioneers. Likewise the conflict between Hill and Harriman over the possession of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which led to the organization of the Northern Securities Company, has received much attention but, until recently, the sale and settlement of its princely 40,000,000 acre land grant has been barely mentioned.

Another feature of the railroad histories so far produced which it is difficult to explain is that they have been based largely on published documents such as the annual reports and other company pamphlets, state and federal documents, newspapers, and reminiscences. The search for manuscripts which has led historians to delve deeply into government archives has not attracted the railroad historian. This cannot be accounted for by the fact

that the records do not exist, since this does not appear to be the case. The archival materials of three great American railroad systems, which have recently been explored, have proved both extensive and valuable, and there is little reason to suppose that other railroads are less well off in this respect.

Nor can it be said that historians have not had their attention called to the value of railroad archives. As far back as 1913 Professor William E. Dodd, speaking of the desirability of someone's making a study of the Illinois Central Railroad, said: "There are rich files of papers and collections of manuscripts in Chicago awaiting the right man. Such a work would certainly change some 'fixed opinions' of American history for the years just preceding the War." In an earlier article in the American Historical Review in 1911, Professor Dodd had suggested the importance of the colonization work of the land grant railroads in Illinois and Iowa, indicating their political importance with reference to the election of 1860.

The suggestion of Professor Dodd and the hints thrown out by other writers who have recognized the importance of the railroads in affecting the social and economic development of the United States had to wait until Dr. James B. Hedges began his valuable studies of railroad strategy and colonization which have done much to show the real significance of the railroads in American history. Dr. Hedges encouraged the writer to undertake the study of the colonization work of the Illinois Central Railroad, and his inspiration and criticisms have been of much assistance.

It was the original intention of the writer to limit his study of the Illinois Central Railroad to its land policies and colonization activities. As the work progressed, however, it was found necessary to examine the question of the land grant and the charter, and, because the financial history of the road is inseparable from its land policies, some attention had to be paid to the former. Consequently the study is not devoted simply to land policies and colonization but endeavors to deal with those phases of the early history of Illinois and the Illinois Central Railroad which supplement and help to explain the colonization

work, the encouragement of agriculture, town-site promotion, and the political significance of the immigration resulting from the advertising of the road. It was also found necessary to study the operation of the federal land system in Illinois in order to understand the competition which the railroad had to face in disposing of its land grant.

During the preparation of this study the writer received assistance from numerous people to whom grateful acknowledgements are due. Professors Fish and Paxson, then of the University of Wisconsin, Professors Dodd, Jernegan, and Craven and Miss Pierce of the University of Chicago, the late Professor Frederick Jackson Turner, and Professors Gay and Merk of Harvard University have all given him encouragement and helpful suggestions.

His greatest obligation is to Professor Frederick Merk, who, by suggestions as to form, content, organization, and style, by patient advice and friendly encouragement, and, most of all, by the example of his own critical and careful scholarship, has placed the writer under a lasting obligation.

The officials of the Illinois Central Railroad were most generous in giving the writer access, without restrictions, to everything in their extensive archives, including both the financial and the land and colonization records. To Mr. C. J. Corliss, Associate Editor of the *Illinois Central Magazine*, whose interest in the early history of the railroad led him to delve into and to preserve many of its early records, the writer's most cordial thanks are due. Through his assistance missing material was found, inaccessible records were made available, and everything possible was done to facilitate the work. Mr. Corliss's last kindness was in supplying the map which is reproduced as the frontispiece. Other officials of the railroad, too numerous to mention, were equally courteous in aiding in the search for material.

Miss Edith Rantoul, of Salem, Massachusetts, kindly gave the writer access to the family manuscripts dealing with the Associates Land Company, recently deposited in the Baker Library of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. Mr. T. Hasselquist, of Rock Island, recalled many interesting facts

concerning the early development of the Swedish settlement at Paxton. Miss Anna Olsson, likewise of Rock Island, aided the writer in translating some of the Hasselquist correspondence and the Swedish newspaper, *Hemlandet*. Mr. E. P. Skeene, last Land Commissioner of the Illinois Central, supplied some missing links concerning the work of the Land Department.

Thanks are due to Professor Harlan H. Barrows of the University of Chicago for permission to republish the glacial map and the prairie and woodland map which are taken from his Geography of the Middle Illinois Valley. The editors of the Journal of Economic and Business History, Agricultural History, and the Studies and Records of the Norwegian-American Historical Association have kindly consented to the republication of material which first appeared in those publications.

Acknowledgements should also be made to the many library officials for their kind cooperation. Special attention was given by Mr. Herbert Kellar of the McCormick Library, Miss Margaret Norton of the Illinois State Archives, and Mrs. Oscar Nelson of the Illinois State Auditor's office.

My most recent obligation is to Professor A. P. Usher, who has assisted a novice in preparing this manuscript for the press.

Finally to my wife, Lillian Cowdell, who has delayed her own plans to assist me in organizing the material, in writing, in weeding out many awkward phrases, and in checking for accuracy, my most heartfelt thanks are extended.

P. W. G.

WASHINGTON, D. C. March, 1934

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KEY TO BIBLIOGRAPHY

The location of material used in the preparation of this study which is not to be found in most research libraries is designated by the key letters shown below. No attempt has been made to list all known copies of the books and pamphlets but only to locate those which the writer himself has used. Buck, *Travel and Description*, cited below, gives the location of many of these references.

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A. SOURCES

I. UNPUBLISHED

(a) Illinois Central Railroad Company Archives

The chief source for a study of the colonization activities of the Illinois Central Railroad is the archives of the Company. The writer was given complete access to them and to all available material in the various offices of the Central Station. Unfortunately many of the early records, particularly the correspondence of the Land Department, were destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. The losses of the Department were less than they might have been owing to the fortunate circumstance that an empty freight car was available during the fire, which enabled the officials of the Department to remove many of the account books, plat books, and ledgers before the flames destroyed the so-called "fire-proof" building which had been recently constructed. This material, however, was not sufficient for the present study and without further records the scope of the work would have been somewhat limited. A second saving factor was the "President's Correspondence." which from the beginning of the Company's existence had been preserved in the New York office. In the early days of the road the main offices were maintained in New York, and there the President, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, the Treasurer, the Secretary, and other officers were located. To them came daily and weekly letters from the resident officers in Illinois reporting the various occurrences which came under their supervision. There are thousands of these letters, including many from the officials of the Land Department and many from President Osborn, who spent much of his time in Illinois. They were of prime importance for this study. Equally important were the impression letter books of the New York officials in which were kept copies of all letters sent out. A huge chest of these books furnished much help.

The "President's Letters" were preserved in the New York office until recently, when they were taken to Chicago for use in the preparation of the evaluation records which were required by the Interstate Commerce Commission. There this collection was broken up and scattered in various locations; parts of it were lost. A large number of the original letters were taken to a storehouse in the freight terminal at South Water Street, where they remained in danger of fire until quite recently. Mr. C. J. Corliss of the *Illinois Central Magasine*, in search of items of historical interest to publish, discovered this mass of letters and, recognizing their value, had the bulk of them transferred to his office in the Central Station, where they still remain. A second trip by Mr. Corliss and the present writer led to further discoveries in this storehouse, but not all the newly found documents were removed, some books and other bulky materials being left there.

Two chests of the President's Correspondence were left in Mr. Ward's office in the Dowie Building, where the writer was permitted to use them. The remainder and by far the larger part of this collection, which had first been taken to the Dowie Building, was removed to another place and temporarily forgotten. No one seemed to remember where it had gone. The Dowie Building, the Central Station, and the South Water Street storehouse were ransacked, but with no result. Finally permission was granted to take a gang of roustabouts furnished by the Company to its 63rd Street storehouse and there examine some large chests which were known to be in existence. As a result of this search the missing correspondence, the impression letter books, and tons of other documents were found in these chests. They have been preserved in a dry place and are in excellent condition. These four parts of the same collection are referred to respectively as Magazine office or M. O., South Water Street storehouse, Ward's office, and 63rd Street.

The original plat books containing the location, sales, cancellations, and other information about the lands are to be found in the Land and Tax Commissioner's office, Central Station. This was at first closed to the writer by the then commissioner, but access was later gained as a result of his demise and subsequent replacement by Mr. Hogberg, who furnished every possible assistance in locating further material. In the "6th floor vault" under the control of this same office was found a file of correspondence on A. J. Galloway's relations with the Company, as well as some other material. In the "Clock Tower," likewise under the same office, are copies of several thousands of the land contracts with the files of correspondence concerning them. The later contracts with their correspondence are kept in the office of the Land and Tax Commissioner.

All the files and books of the old Land Department which have been preserved and are not in use or in the Clock Tower are either in a storehouse addition to the Dowie Building or in the 16th Street storehouse, in that portion allotted to the Land and Tax Commissioner's office. Most of the material is at 16th Street. It has suffered greatly from dampness and from rough handling. Some of the impression letter books are in wretched condition, the ink having run or rotted the paper. Letters are jumbled up in a pile and many are lost. The material is, however, now kept in a dry place and is subject only to fire and loss by irresponsible and unthinking caretakers and truckmen. Upon information gathered from this material the last chapter was largely based, and further light was also thrown by it on the earlier period.

(b) Office of the Auditor of Public Accounts, Springfield

i. Records of the government land offices are deposited here and were of invaluable assistance in the preparation of this work. For a list of the material available see Alvord and Pease, The Archives of the State of Illinois, cited below.

ii. Semi-Annual Reports of Sales of Illinois Central Lands, 7 volumes. These volumes include each transaction which was completed, giving the

BIBLIOGRAPHY

names of the purchasers, the location of the land, the price and number of acres, and the date the deeds were given. Of particular importance is the volume containing the records of conveyances of town lots, as the Company's records of this business were partially destroyed in the fire of 1871.

iii. Tract Books containing the records of the original sales of most of the land in the State. These books are convenient for tracing the records of original purchasers.

(c) Illinois State Library

Manuscript returns of the state census of 1855 and 1865. These were not officially published but the figures for 1855 were given considerable publicity by the local newspapers.

(d) Augustana Book Concern, Rock Island

Hasselquist Manuscripts. These include original letters to, and impression copies of letters from, T. N. Hasselquist. This collection is combined with the Norclius Manuscripts, some of which were also used for this study.

(e) Baker Library, Harvard University

Neal-Rantoul Manuscripts. They include a Journal and Autobiography of David A. Neal, plat books, impression letter books, and other documents dealing with the activities of the Associates Land Co. The Autobiography and Journal contain much of interest on the early development and financing of the Illinois Central. They were originally in possession of Miss Edith Rantoul, of Salem, Massachusetts, who kindly gave the writer access to them, but have been recently deposited in the Baker Library.

(f) Chicago Historical Society Library

i. Brayman Manuscripts. The most important collection, next to the archives of the Company itself, for the early history of the Illinois Central. While Solicitor of the Road, Brayman apparently planned to write its history some day. Accordingly he saved every document, published and unpublished, concerning it which came into his hands. Forms, blanks, copies of deeds, pamphlets, and advertisements are found here which are nowhere else available. But more valuable is the correspondence. Brayman's plan to write a history of the Illinois Central never materialized. At his death the collection passed into the hands of a St. Louis dealer from whom it was purchased by the Chicago Historical Society.

ii. Ackerman Manuscripts. Almost from its inception William K. Ackerman was connected with the Illinois Central as clerk, Secretary, Vice-President, and finally President. By this means he became familiar with its history, and in later life he decided to write it. He corresponded with early officials yet living, and in the replies secured much information of real value even though it was written twenty years or more after the events had occurred. A considerable amount of the material used in the preparation of Ackerman's two works on the Illinois Central is available in this collection.

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iii. Swift Manuscripts. The letters of E. S. Prescott, Land Agent of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, to W. H. Swift contain useful information on the affairs of the Illinois Central.

iv. Andreas Manuscripts. Material used in Andreas, History of Chicago.

v. Gillespie Manuscripts. Correspondence from W. H. Bissell concerning the Illinois Central.

vi. Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

(g) Newberry Library

i. Ackerman Manuscripts. Contain several extended aketches of the early promoters of the Illinois Central, of which Ackerman used only small portions in his published works. The sketches were prepared in most cases by intimate associates.

ii. Pamphlet: Letter on the Value of the Public Lands of Illinois (Boston, 1851), by Robert Rantoul, Jr., with corrections in his hand in the margin. The pamphlet also contains two letters from Rantoul's son and some newspaper clippings.

(h) Harvard College Library, Harvard University

i. Haven Manuscripts. Mostly concerned with the finances of the Illinois Central. The collection contains a number of published documents.

ii. Davis Diary. "Diary of a journey to Illinois in 1843 and 1844, etc.," by John Davis. Of considerable interest for those years.

iii. Transcripts of material in the office of the Chief Accountant, General Land Office, Washington. Volume of transcripts and photostats entitled, "Purchase-Money Received and Acreage Transferred in the Sale of Public Lands by the United States Government, 1806–1860," prepared under the direction of Arthur Harrison Cole. The statistics here contained can be found mostly in the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of the General Land Office. The collection was of use for its photostat copies of maps of the land districts as they existed at different periods.

(i) Massachusetts Historical Society

i. Woodman Manuscripts. Contain a letter descriptive of Cairo in the Civil War.

ii. Hoven Monuscripts. The material bearing on the Illinois Central was deposited in Harvard College Library.

(j) Wisconsin Historical Society

Fairchild Manuscripts.

(k) Dominion Archives, Ottawa, Canada

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(1) Library of Congress

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(m) McCormick Library

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