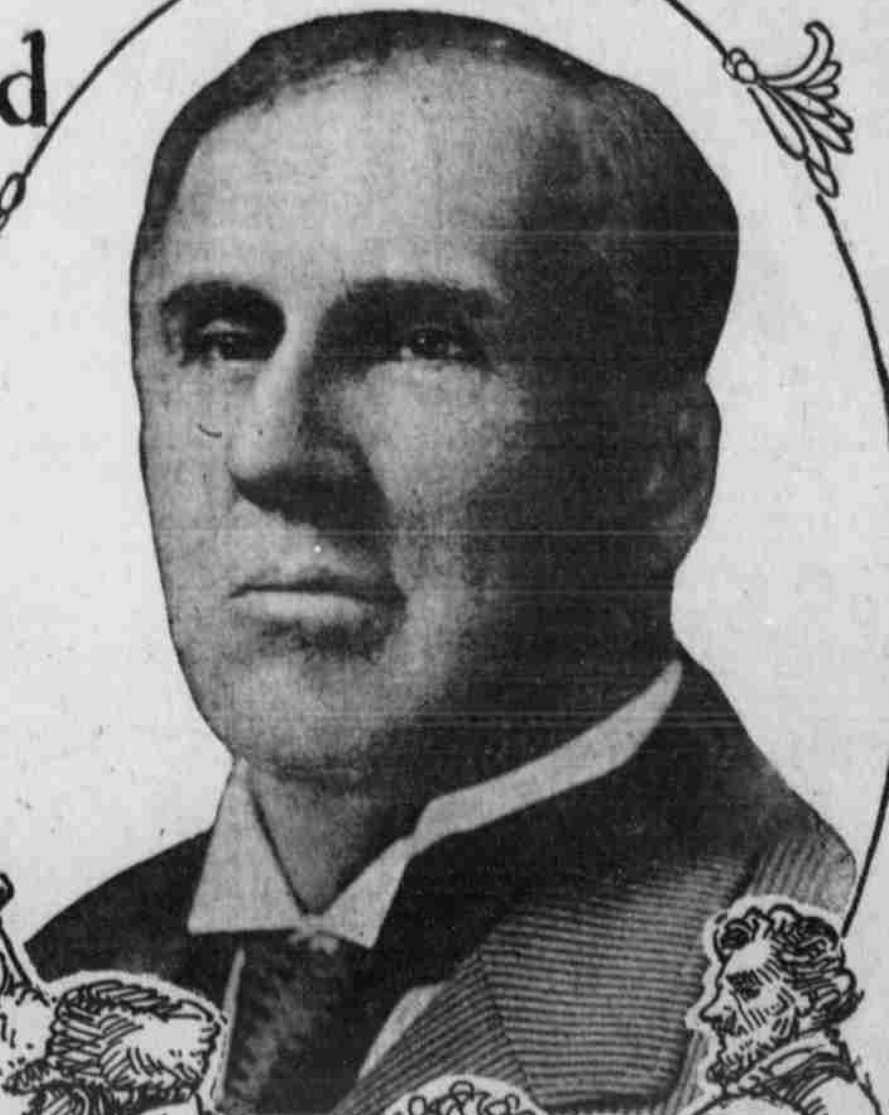


Just Fifty Years Ago.

Pioneers Break Ground in Omaha for the Building of the Union Pacific



B. E. B. Kennedy
Mayor of Omaha
Who Turned the
First Shovelful—
Still Alive



A. L. Mohler
President of
the Road Today
50 Years After
That Famous
Event.



is told by Hon. B. E. B. Kennedy, the man who handled the spade.

DO I remember the ground breaking for the Union Pacific when I was mayor of Omaha fifty years ago? I certainly do remember it distinctly, now that you fix the date for me, although, of course I could not give all of the details leading up to it, but the day the first shovelful of dirt was thrown is as fresh in my memory as if it occurred but yesterday.

"There were not so many of us living in Omaha at the time, and if I made an estimate I should say the population numbered about 2,500. Travel was by wagon and coach or river steamboat, for the nearest railroad was over 300 miles away over in Iowa. To have it determined that we were to be placed upon the railroad map to be made the terminus of a great transcontinental road with which the other lines would be eager to connect, was naturally calculated to stir enthusiasm. The promoters of the railroad had been at work for some time in the east, and we were all waiting for something definite.

Weatherman Lends His Help.

"It was on December 1, 1863, a Tuesday, that the rumor spread that resident Lincoln had officially located the road to start at Omaha. When this rumor was confirmed early the next day by receipt of a telegram by Chief Engineer Peter A. Dey, ordering him to break ground, the whole town became excited. In less than an hour a public meeting was held, over which I as mayor presided, and a committee of arrangements was named to provide the proper ceremonies. It was agreed that A. J. Hanscom should be the president of the day, and others on the committee included Augustus Kountze, Enos Lowe, John McCormick, B. F. Lushbaugh, A. J. Poppleton, John I. Redick, Ezra Millard, E. Estabrook, E. B. Taylor, George M. Mills, W. F. Sapp, Jesse Lowe, O. P. Hurford, Edward Creighton, James J. Brown and George B. Lake.

"The morning of the day when the exercises were held, if I remember correctly, was cold, but clear and bright. The weather warmed up later, and at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon of December 2, 1863, headed by a band, most of the male inhabitants of the city, a large number of the women and many visitors from Council Bluffs, gathered at about Tenth and Douglas streets and marched to a point near what I think is the foot of Burt street, as it was understood that was to be the starting point of the Union Pacific.

"Back in 1863, at about the foot of Burt Street was the narrowest point of the Missouri river, and it was expected that it was there the bridge was to cross. A change in the course of the river the following spring, however, altered all the plans

Mayor Kennedy's Address

"Mr. President and Fellow Citizens: I hold in my hand a telegram from Hon. John A. Dix, president of the great Union Pacific railroad company, and it becomes my pleasurable duty to read it to you on this important occasion.

"Fellow Citizens: I see you are all elated and buoyant. I see an expression of gladness in your countenances and apparent relief from the awful suspense which has overshadowed you for the last few months, but it requires no great effort to divine this great and sudden change. The breaking of ground and the inauguration of the great Union Pacific railway have just taken place here, in front of your infant city. This is a momentous occasion. It is an epoch in the history of this country, and I congratulate you that this great national enterprise is entered upon, and that upon this second day of December, 1863, this bond of union is inaugurated—the iron belt that is to unite the east with the west, and the north with the south through all coming time."

and, as a result, the bridge was afterwards built at its present location.

Location of the Starting Point.

"Reaching the site at the foot of Burt street, prayer was offered, but by whom I am unable to say. Then, as mayor of the city, I stated the object of the meeting and presented Andrew J. Hanscom, who was to take charge. He followed in a short speech, and then I took the spade, a new one, and, putting the blade into the ground, threw out some dirt, remarking that this was the beginning of a railroad that some time would unite the Atlantic and Pacific oceans by bands of steel. I passed the spade over to Alvin Saunders, who was then our territorial governor. He did a little spading, and handed it to George Francis Train, who was followed in turn by Dr. Gilbert C. Monell and, I think, A. J. Poppleton and Augustus Kountze of Omaha, and General Dodge of Council Bluffs.

"Following the throwing of the dirt, there were more speeches by Judge A. V. Larimer of Council Bluffs, A. J. Poppleton, Augustus Kountze and George Francis Train. The speech by Train was particularly eloquent, and in it he pictured Omaha the central city of the United States and destined to be the great commercial center of the Missouri valley, saying that the country was about to start upon an era of railroad building, and that in time Omaha would become one of the most important railroad centers.

Aftermath Ball in Celebration.

"The day was made a holiday, and after the exercises on the river bank were concluded, the procession marched back up town, and the balance of the afternoon and evening was given over to jollification with a grand ball in the old Herndon house as the climax.

"Returning up town, I remember an incident that was amusing. In those days it was swampy along the Missouri river, and there was a marsh between the town and the spot where we threw dirt in starting the Union Pacific. Across the swampy places, plank, supported on a little trestle, had been laid. This trestle was not very secure and in passing over the planks, they slipped

aside and several of the men of the party fell into the mud and mire below. Augustus Kountze was one of them and we had a great laugh on him on account of him not being able to walk the plank. "There was nothing done on Union Pacific construction the winter following the throwing of the dirt, but the next spring active operations commenced and, I think, the next summer there was something like 100 miles of grading done."

Some of the Telegrams.

New York, December 1, 1863.
To Committee of Arrangements of Union Pacific Road:
The inauguration of the Union Pacific railroad, the great enterprise of the western hemisphere, whether considered in reference to its

commercial importance or its influence as a bond of union, is to push on to completion with all the rapidity which a command of means will permit, and I congratulate those who are to be present at breaking ground on the early commencement of the work.
JOHN A. DIX.

John Hay Speaks for Abraham Lincoln.

New York, December 2, 1863.
Committee of Arrangements of Union Pacific Road,
To General Dix:
General—I have not been permitted until today to present to the president your communication of the twenty-third of November. He directs me to express his deep regret that his illness will prevent him from giving expression to the profound interest he feels in the success of a work so vast and beneficial as that which you are about to inaugurate.
I have honor to be,
Your Obedient Servant,
JOHN HAY,
Assistant Private Secretary.

Secretary Seward is Optimistic.

State Department,
Washington, November 24, 1863.
Committee of Arrangements—To General John A. Dix, President of the Union Pacific Railroad, New York.
My Dear Sir:

Your kind note inviting me to attend the ceremony for breaking ground for the Union Pacific road in Nebraska has just been received. For the first time, as I think, since the foundation of the government the foreign relations of the country occupy the attention of this department so constantly that its head is often obliged to forego customary good offices and courtesies toward loyal citizens, who are engaged in developing the resources of the country and establishing its domestic interests. For this reason I can reply to your invitation only very hastily and briefly. Of course, I cannot go to Nebraska and therefore I must decline. With your brave help, and that of your armed companions on sea and land, I hope we shall soon put down this wretched and wicked insurrection against the Union. With one-half of our capitalists and our free and loyal laboring men, the Union Pacific railroad can, and I hope will, be extended to the Pacific ocean. When this shall have been done, secession will be rendered forever afterwards impracticable. There will be no fulcrum for the lover of treason to rest upon.
Faithfully yours,
WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

What George Francis Train Said

"The great Pacific railway is commenced, and if you knew the man who has hold of the affair as well as I do, no doubt would ever arise as to its speedy completion. The president shows his good judgment in locating the road where the Almighty placed the signal station, at the entrance of a garden 700 miles in length and twenty broad.

"Look at the force of nature here—study the map and point out, if you can, another place for the central station of the world's highway.

"The enterprise is national. 'Tis the people's road. No party politics dare obtrude their obnoxious features into this organization. The directory is the agent of the government in carrying out the wishes of the nation. Four thousand years ago the pyramids were started, but they simply represent the vanity of man. The Chinese wall was grand in conception, but built only to break the tide of invasion. The Imperial canal was gigantic, but how limited all these things appear in comparison to an enterprise that joins together thirty-four states and a dozen territories.

"Before the first century of the nation's birth, we may see in the New York depot some strange Pacific railway notices.

"European passengers for Japan will please take the night train."
"Passengers for China this way."
"African and Asiatic freight must be distinctly marked For Peking, via San Francisco."
"Ere ten years ago by," said one of the prime movers of this great undertaking, "I intend to let the European traveler get a new sensation by standing on the ridge pole of the American nation and sliding off into the sea."