

### OMAHA AND ITS RAILROADS.

[Text of Address Delivered by Major J. R. Buchanan of the Elkhorn Road Before the Omaha Commercial Club, October 5, 1901].

All business is necessarily selfish in its aim. Investment and labor are entitled to fair compensation, and so, in the consideration of these questions of business, we do not consider them from a philanthropic standpoint, but from that of business relations.

The man who wants, or asks, or gets something for nothing, is a dangerous and a dishonest man. There is no business within my knowledge (and that knowledge extends over a pretty wide range and an extended career), which is so dependent upon the thrift and prosperity of the people, and of the community, as that of operating a railroad, no business that is more entitled to kindly consideration and co-operation of the public.

The railroads are the great immigration agency which settles and builds up a new country. They are absolutely permanent investments. They cannot, if adverse conditions occur, sell out and close up or move away, as a man in mercantile life or other business can. They must stay, and, if necessary, create the conditions of thrift upon which they depend.

I have wished a great many times that every business man, or at least every one in ten of the business men along the lines of the various railroads was a shareholder in the railroad which he patronized. This would make him a careful adviser, a careful observer, and it would prove disastrous to the demagogue.

It takes a wise man today to be president or manager of a railroad. He must be alert to every substantial interest in the communities where his road exists. No physician is more careful to keep his fingers upon the pulse of his fevered patient than is a wise railway manager or officer to keep his ear to the ground and his eye on every interest which must contribute to the success of his road, or the reverse.

The railroad is the best organized system for doing business of perhaps any that exists. Its divergent lines extend for hundreds or thousands of miles. Its agents are remote as well as near by. Hence, it must be managed under a carefully devised system of general rules, subject to rigid and exacting accountability, and a new line entering a new country establishes markets here and there at convenient points; it introduces into that community a great organized and disciplined force of men who, by habit, are accustomed to conforming to the restrictions of law and order, and hence their influence becomes a dominant one in the

community, and aids in the establishment of a like system of order where they exist.

Hence, the influence of the railroad is not only in the direction of an immigration agency, of a great business co-operative society, of a permanent and fixed status, but it is promotive of law, order and good government.

#### Thirty-four Years Ago.

I was in Omaha first in 1867. It was a village, as I remember it, of between 3,000 and 4,000.

There was one railroad completed from the east to Council Bluffs, and one apprehending completion to Kansas City, and the Union Pacific was running west into the heart of the desert—or plains.

There was no bridge across the Missouri river, and the only access was by ferry boat, which, as I remember it, landed near the foot of Douglas street, or in that vicinity.

The present Union Pacific headquarters was the principal, and, I believe, only so-called first-class hotel.

I came through, I think, near 200 miles of virgin prairie in Iowa, where habitations were few and far apart. One stretch, I recall, the conductor told me was twenty miles between houses. That was on what is now the Northwestern railway, the first railway completed to Council Bluffs and the land along this railway was rated at \$2.50 per acre. In Nebraska, it was available for the taking, and by many regarded as a poor speculation at that.

It took a little over twenty-four hours, as I recall, to come from Chicago to Council Bluffs, and some of the way over this new road seemed like a pretty heavy sea. Now, that line, and one other, have double track lines practically from Omaha to Chicago, and have, with three others, as superb railroads as exists in the United States.

As the tendency of commerce (especially until within the last few years) has always been toward the east, to the population centers and large markets, and as these great plains to the west practically produced but little traffic, the one above railroad was not only ample, but courted insolvency by coming; but as it received a small land grant from the government, it was hoped it might be sustained.

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This was only thirty-four years ago—one generation—and note the change! Now, that Iowa land, which was selling slowly at \$2.50 per acre, is impossible at less than \$65 to \$75, or even more, per acre. This Nebraska, or American Desert, land is being sought at \$45 to \$60 per acre. The agricultural part of Nebraska is pro-

ducing an average of about 250,000,000 bushels of corn annually, 40,000,000 to 50,000,000 bushels of wheat, and other grains in proportion. The apparently boundless plains farther west, then covered with millions of buffalo and thousands of savage Indians, are now pasturing hundreds of thousands of cattle and sheep.

The Rocky Mountain range, then but little explored, is now yielding annually in the neighborhood, probably of \$35,000,000 of gold, besides silver, coal, timber and other products. They have grown cities and settled a large population.

The Black Hills, then unknown, or purely a myth, is now one of the richest mining districts in the world, and the home of about 100,000 population, extensively engaged in mining and commerce.

The Pacific ocean was then impossible, or nearly so, except via Cape Horn, and the oriental shipping trade undreamed of.

#### Then and Now.

Omaha, then a village, is now a city of rather uncertain population, but nevertheless a large and prosperous city, recognized everywhere as the gateway between the populous east and the great west; and while all commerce did tend eastward, it is now, under modern conditions, pushing westward to the orient, as well as east to the Atlantic coast and European markets.

What has wrought this change?

Consider in your mind a map, with Omaha in the center, and note radiating from this city.

Five great railways, eastward, from this gateway city to Chicago.

Three railways to the south, connecting with like systems to St. Louis, Texas, the gulf and the ocean.

Three railways to the north, to St. Paul, Minneapolis and the Great Lakes.

Two railways to the northwest to the Black Hills, their mining camps and commercial centers.

Four railways, with direct connections from this city to the Golden Gate shores of California and the Pacific coast—every point of the compass pierced, every center reached. And this city is the gateway through which all this distribution of people and commerce passes.

There are fifty-three passenger trains arriving here every day, bringing to this city an average daily number of passengers of 4,500 people.

There are 4,400 railway employees of these several railroad companies who home here, and who spend their earnings here.

These employees draw salaries aggregating \$302,800 per month, or \$3,633,600 per annum. From these figures and computing in the ordinary