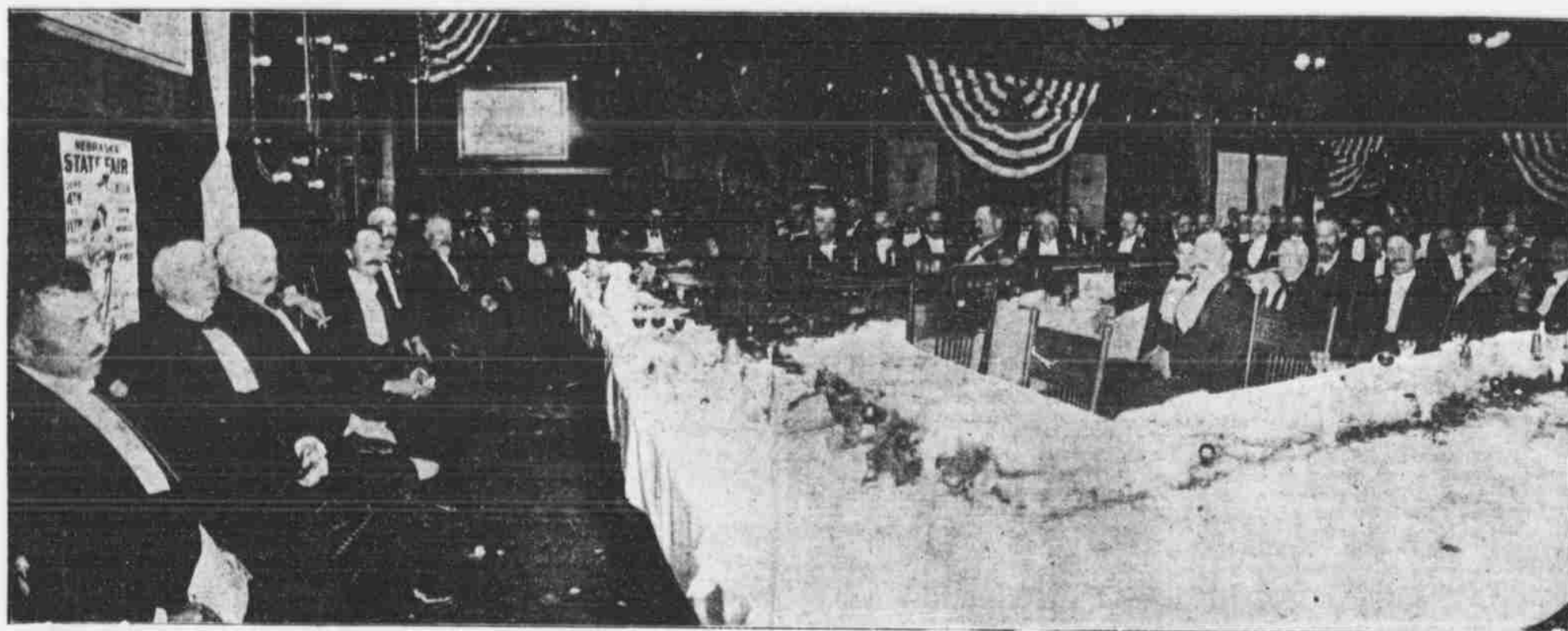


Alpheus B. Stickney | Personal Characteristics and Business Methods of the Chicago Great Western Railroad Magnate



SCENE AT THE BANQUET GIVEN BY THE COMMERCIAL CLUB OF OMAHA IN HONOR OF PRESIDENT STICKNEY OF THE CHICAGO GREAT WESTERN RAILROAD, ON SATURDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 12, 1903—Photo by a Staff Artist.

WHAT do you think of him?" asked one Omaha business man of another last week at the Commercial club after listening to the address of President Stickney of the Chicago Great Western.

"He's a slasher," was the quick response. Dr. Noah Webster, in speaking of "slasher," calls it "a machine for applying size to warp yarn."

Now Mr. Stickney certainly is not that, and yet he is a "slasher," or at least he has warped a good many yarns of defiant railroad competitors and slashed a good many arbitrary freight rates, so that he has come to be known to such men as head the great railroads of the middle west with which the Great Western competes as pretty much of a slasher. The Omaha business man, therefore, was not so far off after all.

The railroad world takes issue with Dr. Webster on the definition of "slasher" and coins one which it contends is more adapted to the uses of the twentieth century, especially since Alpheus B. Stickney happens to live in that century.

"A slasher is a railroad president who, when rates, freight or passenger, are higher than he thinks they ought to be, or are so high as to prevent him from getting as big a slice of business as he thinks he ought to have, jumps in and whittles said rates, freight or passenger, into shoestrings."

This definition, it is understood, was evolved after months of careful thought on the part of a number of the railroad kings of the west and finally approved by a unanimous vote at one of their secret meetings. It is said that the president of the Chicago Great Western was not present at this meeting.

Mr. Stickney's success as a slasher was strikingly reflected in the circumstances attending the recent entrance of his road into Omaha. The city stood with open arms anxious to receive him. The only influence that opposed his coming was that of a railroad rival-to-be whose managers saw in the advent of the "slasher" the possibility of having to share profits with him. It was significant that every commercial interest

in Omaha joined in the cordial welcome, in the rousing reception given to President Stickney and his railroad. It was a token of the popularity of "slashers" in general and of this "slasher" in particular. By that demonstration Omaha has taken Mr. Stickney on probation and believes in him, because of his past record and his pledges for the future.

President Stickney is a man to arouse enthusiasm and inspire confidence. No one who heard him speak at the Commercial club, whether he had ever seen or heard him before, could doubt this. That is one of the dominant characteristics of the man—one which has contributed materially to his remarkable success as a business man. Quiet, calm and conservative, unassuming but attractive and interesting in appearance as well as in speech, he possesses natural advantages whether facing two or three men in conversation or as many hundreds or thousands in making an address. He impresses his audience, large or small, with the fact that he knows what he is talking about. He is a voluminous reader, a profound thinker and a close and conscientious student, possessing, therefore, with his faculty of ready, graceful speech, the prime requisites of a good orator.

Mr. Stickney is a native of Maine. His father was a minister of unusual power and influence, and was also a prominent contributor to the public press. But he was not rich. His son is, but might not have been if his father was, for under the conditions which existed the boy was called on at a tender age to get out and learn how to make a living. He is said to have been a very apt pupil. By the time he was 17 years of age he had all the boys in his native town of Wilton, county of Franklin, green-eyed with envy over his success as a school "marm," and he had plunged headlong into society as the most popular young man among the young women in that portion of the pines. Mr. Stickney's education up to this time consisted of a public school career. But he was a sort of teacher to himself, devouring all the books and mastering all the subjects he had time to take up.

School teaching in the tall pines of Maine was too tame for young Stickney, so he determined to be a lawyer. At 18, therefore, he entered the law office of Joseph Crosby, at Dexter, Me. Three years later, in 1861, at the age of 21, he drifted west, landing finally in Minnesota, where he was admitted to the bar. He stuck out his first shingle in Stillwater, the picturesque little city, now of 12,000 population, where the famous state penitentiary is situated. It didn't take young Stickney a long time to erect a pretty good-sized practice. He soon became known for his force and eloquence as a "pleader," and was a "jonah" to opponents.

Born with an insatiable thirst for better things, Attorney Stickney found at the end of eight years' practice that he was confined within the limits of a profession whose pecuniary resources were insufficient to satisfy him. So he branched out.

In 1869 he went over to St. Paul, fifteen miles away, and became a railroad man, his initiatory occupation being that of a railroad contractor. And he proved himself a mighty good hand at the business. His first line of road was built from Hudson, Wis., to New Richmond, which line is now a part of the Omaha system. In 1872 he did his first work as an operator of a railroad by assuming charge of a small road running eastward from St. Paul into Wisconsin, built by him. He was a sub-contractor on about 400 miles of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba road in 1880. Two years later he built a short line of eighty miles in Minnesota and in 1883 he began the construction of the Chicago, St. Paul & Kansas City railroad, now the Chicago Great Western, which has borne in succession the names of the Diagonal railroad, Maple Leaf of the West and the Chicago & Great Northwestern.

Of late years one of Mr. Stickney's most common avocations has been to deny that his road was for sale. He has done this with the same vim and tenacity with which he fought his way over bridges and rivers and lawyers and courts and trains of legal technicalities into Omaha. And if he has succeeded as well in the former occupa-

tion as in the latter he certainly must have the speculative world rid of "Doubting Thomases" once in its life.

Mr. Stickney has been called a "fighter." Men who never saw him in the ring have accused him of being a hard man to whip, and it is said to be some such conviction as this in the minds of a certain class of magnates with an obvious dislike for "the independent railroad" which leads to so many rumors of "the Great Western's" for sale. But the president of the road insists that it is not for sale and that before he tears up his tracks he means to convince some people down Omaha way that it is not.

People who do thousands of dollars worth of shipping every year and who have been of the opinion for several years that they were not getting quite the concessions they should, are looking on with great interest—waiting to see the result of the Great Western's advent into Omaha. Will Mr. Stickney find it possible to remove the discrimination against Omaha that prevents it from becoming the grain market he says it should be? Will he jump in and cut live stock rates in two, if he can be made to see that they are too high? Will he do something as he did down at Kansas City and contract to put packing house products on the market for less than other roads have been doing?

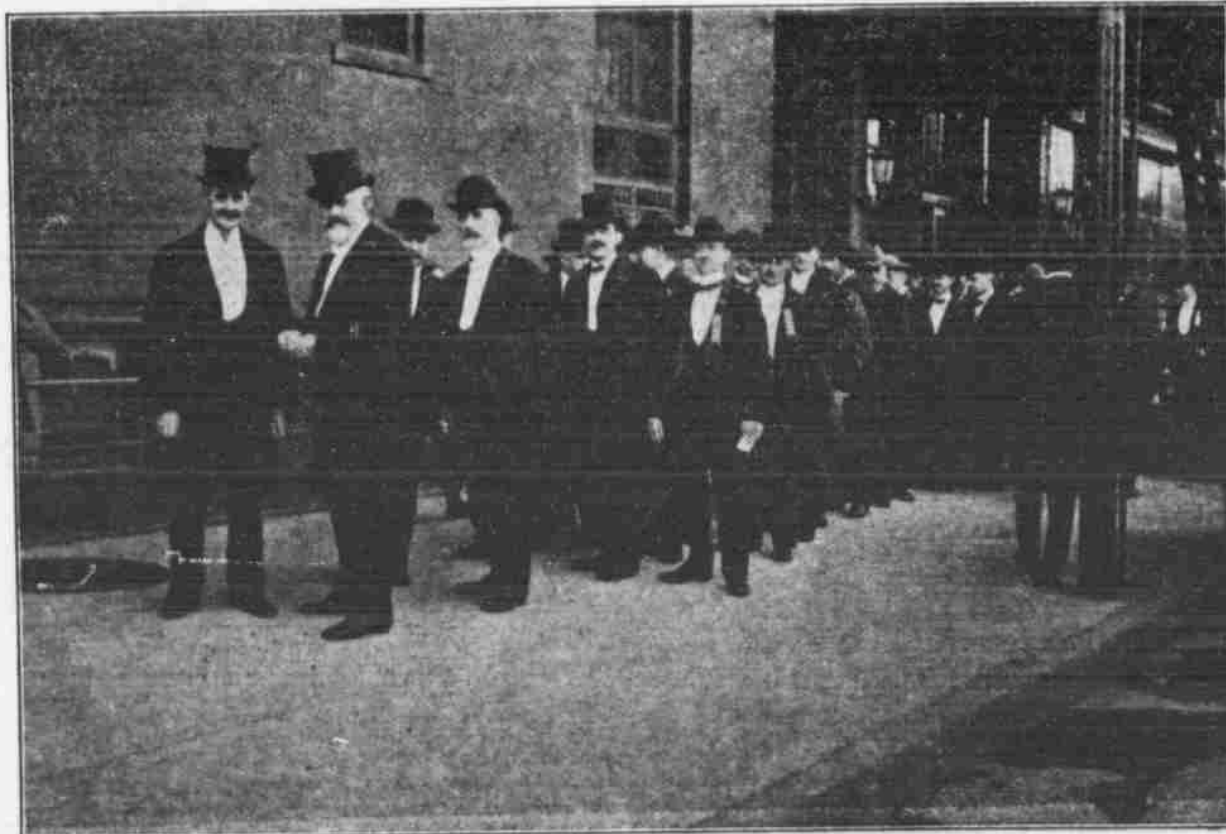
These are interesting questions which the business men of Omaha are asking themselves and over which doubtless certain other powers are more than casually concerned.

While not a politician in any sense of the term, the president of the Great Western figured quite prominently a few times in the presidential campaign of 1900. On several important occasions he addressed large assemblies on the money question—a favorite one with him—always attracting wide attention for his profound utterances in defense of sound money and a stable currency. His addresses before national gatherings of bankers and business men brought him into the front ranks of the nation as a student and exponent of safe and conservative policies.

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PRESIDENT STICKNEY AT THE DOOR OF THE BANQUET ROOM—Photo by a Staff Artist.



PRESIDENT STICKNEY AND PARTY LEAVING THE HOTEL FOR THE BANQUET HALL—Photo by a Staff Artist.