Omaha Fell Into Position As Midwest's Jobbing Center By Odd Turns of Fortune

ates Seemed Arrayed Against Little Trading Post In Early Days When President Lincoln Declared Council Bluffs Should Be Western Terminus of U.P. Then They Made Strange Shifts.

By A. E. LONG.

rails to a hungry surrounding em-pire, started on this headlong career as a trading post.

Who was there who had the courage 60 years ago to say that Omaha was destined to become a great

would have measured it.

Dozen Trading Posts.

At that early date there were a dozen trading posts along the Mis-souri river that had as good a chance to becoming the distributing center of the middle west as did Omaha. Bellevue it seemed had a better chance than Omaha. A shrewd gambler would probably have not bet on Bellevue as against Omaha at that time. A shrewder still would doubtless have pitted Council Bluffs against the field, especially after the great president, who was responsible for the building of the Union Pacific had made his choice.

A business man from whatsoever corner of the globe, scanning the two hemispheres for opportunity, would have said "Council Bluffs has been made by the president of the American republic, it must become the distributing center of the west-ern half of the United States, and Omaha will always be the 'tail of the great dog' sticking over on the Nebraska side of the Missouri river."

Omaha Fools 'Em.

But Omaha was destined to arise and overthrow the wisest judgment in this respect. As for reasons, well, that is a matter that involves a lot of tracing back, and even then is a matter of opinion. History does not give reasons. It leaves only facts, and leaves the historians to supply the conclusions from those facts. History then leaves us the facts

that in the very early period Coun-cil Bluffs was the real jobbing center for the early development of this empire now tributary to Omaha and Council Bluffs. From the Council Bluffs side of the river the business men looked over, sneered a little and said, "Oh, that's a little place called Omaha that you see huddling along the Nebraska side of the river.'

Cross On Ice.

"little place" they ferried across the river in summer and crossed on the ice in the winter as did also the jack

rabbits and the coyotes.

True the trappers and hunters from the upper Missouri river country and the Platte valley and its western tributaries, where beaver boomed in abundance, used to straggle into the little village of Omaha to trade furs for whisky, bacon and beans. But that wasn't jobbing. That was retailing in an extreme

Gradually across the river in Council Bluffs a distributing center was growing up. The lands in Iowa were being settled, and homesteaders were taking up claims in Nebraska. More and more Nebraska homesteaders and farmers braska homesteaders and farmers were needing supplies. They had to go to Council Bluffs to get them. Thus on the Iowa side grew up early a grocery distributing center and a great farm implement distributing center. Clothing wholesters also were doing business from there. Farmers in Nebraska needed overalls, shirts, groceries, plows, overalls, shirts, groceries, plows, harrows, threshing machines, har-vesters, hay tools and barbed wire. Pay Heavy Tolls.

As the population of Nebraska and the territory west of the river increased its demands on the jobbing center increased, and yet every trip necessitated a crossing of the river and a paying of heavy tolls either for the ferry services, or later for the "dummy" service across the U. P. street bridge.

'Many and many a time, and often two, three or four times a day I have ridden the 'dummy' across and back at 50 cents a fare," said Frank L. Haller, in reminiscing the other day. That 50-cent fare for each trip

across the river grew tiresome to the Nebraskans and they began more and more to cry for distribution arrangements on the Nebraska side so that they might not be compelled to go to Iowa every time they wanted supplies of any consequence.

Soon a few distributors began to spring up in Nebraska.

Grocery Jobbers Early.

safely be said that the grocery disamong the earliest.

ness on Farnam street. The westerners were glad to welcome a distrib-uting house of this kind and the company prospered until it built a building at the southeast corner of Twelfth and Farnam streets, where the business was conducted for several years. Later, upon the death of one of the partners, the business was sold to William R. King and the

1860 also. Some have long since Omaha, the mighty jobbing heart vanished from the scene, but others have grown into magnificent instiof the middle west, throbbing with tutions. Among the latter is Paxton industry, and with every throb forc- & Gallagher company. This is one ing streams of merchandise from its of the early Omaha distributors of wholesaling center along arteries of groceries which has enjoyed such a steady march of progress that it has spread through new addition after addition until it is one of the really large grocery houses of the country and known from sea to sea.

Implement Business Develops. half dozen or more surrounding goods jobbing began to develop states?

But while the grocery and dry goods jobbing began to develop early in Omaha the farm machinery stand on a spot in Council Bluffs, dig his heel into the earth and declare, "This shall be the terminal of the stand of the stand of the standard of the stand Union Pacific railway" Did to tell. Farmers and dealers from Omaha have a chance at that time west of the river did not like to to figure as a great distributing cen- stand this continual drain when they ter? No, on that day Omaha's came to Omaha to get to the jobbing chances were small as the gambler center. But that was not all. Again it may be repeated that history

> interstate freight rate, which started a great migration of implement to the Nebraska side. Partners Dissolve Relations.

It is doubtful whether any house now in existence led the march ahead of the Lininger concern. In the early 70's this was Shugert, Lininger & Wies of Council Bluffs. Always a pioneer by nature G. W. Lininger wanted to push westward across the river, but his partner, Mr. Shugert, wished to remain in Council Bluffs. There came a parting of the ways and the partners dissolved relations, Mr. Shugert remaining in Council Bluffs and afterward developing what is today Empkie-Shugert-Hill company and Mr. Lininger coming to Omaha and developing what is today the Lininger Implement company. For a time it was Lininger & Metcalf since its location in Omaha, and towith not only a jobbing house in day its activities cover the entire Omaha, but a string of retail im-plement houses throughout the state, factured lines, the Mina Taylor element houses throughout the state, but in comparatively recent years the Metcalf name has dropped out of the firm, which is today the Lininger Implement company. If this concern was not the first

to start the movement to the Ne-braska side of the river and thus to plant the seed for a great farm im-plement distributing center here, it was at least one of the very first of any importance to start the move-

Ill., one of the two largest implement concerns in America.

On Old Church Site.

This concern occupied various buildings in Omaha until it finally bought the old St. Philomena Catholic church, tore it down and built the magnificent structure which is now the home of the John Deere Plow Co., in Omaha, said to have the largest sample floor of any implement house in America.

W. S. Cass, present advertising manager of the John Deere Plow Co., C. W. Senift, former manager for the Sterling Manufacturing Co., Omaha branch, and some of the other old timers or implement other old timers on implement row remember well when the old church stood on the present John Deere site, and when the horse cars hauled passengers to and from the old Cozzens hotel which stood where the Carpenter Paper Co. house now

The Grand Detour Plow Co. sought better quarters, better accommodations, and a more advantageous reight rate in Omaha. David Bradley & Co. followed. The Rock Island Plow Co. came and the South Bend Chilled Plow Co. In rapid succession they abandoned the lowa side of the river and hastened to get located in Omaha, as the experience of smaller towns out in the territory. the leader in this movement showed instantly that the farm machinery jobber on the Nebraska side of the river was going to get the Nebraska most made wholesalers before they and western business.

Other implement manufacturers throughout the United States cast their eyes on Omaha, saw the success of their competitors and made a headlong rush to get here. Branch after branch and jobbing house after jobbing house sprung into existence, until Omaha came to take third place in the United States as an implement distributing center, and dis-tributed in 1919 some \$25,000,000 worth of farm machinery.

Drygoods Jobbing Moves West. The history of the drygoods job-bing in some degree followed the path of the farm machinery jobbing. An example of this is found in the \$13,199,115. early maneuvers of what is today M. E. Smith & Co., Inc., the large

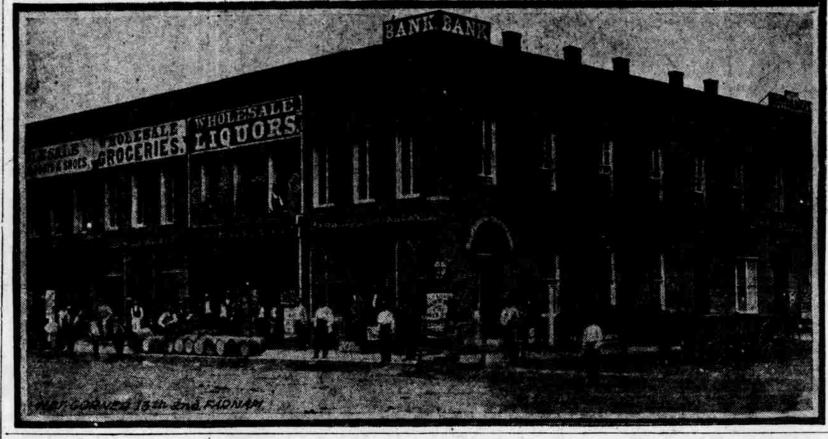
Groceries were among the first wholesale drygoods house of Omaha. and prime necessities, and it may M. E. Smith and A. J. Crittenden came to Council Bluffs in 1868 and tributing business was among the established a retail and wholesale first to spring into existence on the drygoods business. A little later the Nebraska side. Of the present day firm disposed of its retail business survivors of the early jobbing houses in this line, McCord & Brady and first store was located at what is Paxton & Gallagher company were now 410 Broadway in Council Bluffs when that city was little more than The first gun at Sumpter, the a hamlet. Omaha was now forging ening gun of the great civil war, to the front, and after one more mid not yet boomed when Nave-Mc-move in Council Bluffs the big step across the river was made. It was move in Council Bluffs the big step Hardware jobbing out of Omaha has

was sold to William R. King and the firm became William R. King & Co. In 1879 the business was again renewed as Nave-McCord in the building which is the present headquarters of the C. B. & Q. on Tenth and Farnam streets. It was 1890 when the firm was incorporated and became McCord-Brady company.

Other wholesale grocery houses were conducting business as early as the firm was early as building just across the street to the street and this business has reached a total of \$4,800,000 annually. Even paper and stationery to the volume of \$7,679,000 is distributed over the territory in a year, and this item also has shown an increase of 10 per cent in the last 10 years.

With the advance of building throughout the territory came naturally along with a sum of the stationers to the streets.

Liquor Was Still Plentiful In Those Days



gess, vice president. Twin buildsquare, eight stories high on Ninth and Farnam streets to accommodate the business.

was erected at the southeast corner In 1920. of Tenth and Douglas streets, the mounted to \$19,493,000. company having bought all of the land between Farnam and Douglas facing on Tenth, thus giving them control over the entire block bounded by Ninth, Tenth, Douglas Omaha, that no one knew the fighouse dress and Beau Brummel shirts being sold practically in every state in the union. The company owns and operates large factories not only in Omaha, but in Lincoln,

The brief sketch of the history of Followed then Deere, Wells & Co., which soon on the Nebraska side became the John Deere Plow Co., a subsidiary of Deere & Co., Moline, Ill. one of the two largest imple. an equally interesting history, but it is not the purpose here to give detailed history of each individual firm, but rather to pick out and hold up the progress of a few individual jobbing houses as representatives of the mighty march of jobbing progress recorded here in the past half cen-

increase of nearly 200 per cent in the last 10 years, to say nothing of the increase over the business of the early years of the city's history. Lumber distribution also grew into importance in Omaha. Never a timber state, Nebraska always had

to depend upon lumber shipped in from the yellow pine fields of the south and from the fir forests of the Pacific coast, but it was necessary that these shipments have some central point of destination in Nebraska from which distribution over the state and territory could readily be made afterward. The early lumber yards were called upon to sup-ply lumber for the immediately sur-Thus those earliest in the lumber business here quite naturally ueveloped into wholesalers, or were alrealized it.

Railroads Developed. Coal and coke also found distri-

bution from Omaha, as the railroads developed and ramified in all directions from the city. In 1920 the Omaha amounted to \$19,000,000. Even cigars and tobacco grew to

be a powerful item in Omaha's jobbing. This development, might be said to have come within only the past 10 or 15 years. Even in 1910 Omaha was distributing only \$1,930,-

With the advancement of invention in electrical appliances, Omaha grew to be a jobbing center for electrical supplies, so that while in 1910 it distributed \$1,400,000 in electrical supplies, 1920 recorded a dis-tribution of \$7,500,000 in this line. In the distribution of fruits and vegetables also Omaha has doubled its volume in the past 10 years, reaching a total of \$11,000,000.

Vast Amount of Business. Grocery jobbing has reached the huge total of \$60,800,000 per year. reached the total of \$9,000,000. Oils in 1886 that they moved across and used the building now occupied by the Marshall Paper compang, Eleventh and Douglas streets.

Becomes M. E. Smith & Co.

It was at this time that Mr. Crittenden disposed of his interest and the firm became M. E. Smith & Co.

Not content with jobbing alone, this form shortly after coming to

in the tributary territory. The last more and more business. ings were built in 1906, 132 feet 10 or 15 years have seen many such the growth of the business that in tion. Statisticians did not even take 1920 it was found necessary to have account of the figures at that time, more room and the third building in listing Omaha's jobbing activities.

Auto Industry Booms.

Ten years ago so few automobiles which Omaha serves. and Farnam. The firm's business ures or cared. The figures are not For has grown steadily and rapidly ever on record today. Then this industry began to assume more and more importance and Omaha grew more and more into a jobbing center for automobiles and trucks until in 1920 this item reached the enormous total of Ten years ago tractors were un-

wheat farms in the Dakotas were gines to pull their plows. The traccenter of a great agricultural region, was again chosen as the logical dis-

Hammer Dry Goods company have and equally interesting history, but it growth of Omaha as a jobbing center, from the little trading post on the west side of the river, across from Council Bluffs, to the throb-bing metropolis of the middle west. Nine trunk lines of railroad and 23 branch lines now carry produce into Omaha and draw the finished pro-The various drygoods houses in Omaha distributed in 1920 nearly \$27,000,000 worth of drygoods out of Omaha. This alone represents an trict of Omaha annually \$458,000,000

With visits to their jodding and do their buying while attending convention to a large extent.

The Bureau of Publicity of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, supducts out. Leaving aside the manuworth of goods, which represents an increase in only the past 10 years of 244 per cent.

it may be repeated that history does not record the cause for Omalia's development as an implement jobbing center, but does record some facts from which historians may draw their own conclusions. Two outstanding facts then, there were one, the 50-cent "dummy" fare, and the other, an 8-cent per purposes.

In August, 1897, M. E. Smith & Co. was incorporated with can industry, Omaha readily became heading and other countries. It has over 4,000 plants in successful of this line of business. If Omaha on the fare of the sum of the firm of M. E. Smith & Co. was incorporated with can industry, Omaha readily became held in Omaha each year, averaging of this line of obscinces in Omaha is one of the forward movement of the forward movemen

however, this item had the territory. For many years now aration had been made to receive

Meet Customers. Realizing that many of the mer-

hants who buy their stocks from Omaha year after year, seldom see any representative of the jobbing house except the one traveling man who calls upon them, they believed too it would be an excellent move as a good-will builder to let the executives of the firms go out once known except as some few large or twice a year and meet some of their dealer customers on their own ception they have met on these trips citizens. has proven that their reason for There tributing center, and distributed in 1920 the total of \$3,967,480 worth of farm tractors.

Only a few lines of jobbing activity are mentioned in this article

Visit Jobbing Houses.

Dealers in all lines throughout the territory, recognizing Omaha as their jobbing point, have more and more selected Omaha as the location for their various trade conventions. In this way they are able to combine their convention activities

ported liberally by the local jobbers, organized a convention bureau to encourage these dealers conventions As the jobbing business swelled in Omaha year after year, live busi-

Arthur C. Smith as president, F. M. the jobbing center for any such smith, secretary, and Ward M. Burarticles which would be in demand great region even more carefully for other in the fall. Here the jobbers create a joint fund to provide special "If there are any merchants in entertainment for one week for the inventions forge to the front, and this great area tributary to Omaha visiting dealers who are invited and consequently have seen Omaha swell who do not yet understand that encouraged to come in at a given its jobbing figures to that extent. Omaha is their logical trading point time and do the spring and fall It was predicted at the time that Thus, for example, 10 years ago there these buildings would be large were not enough automobile tires enough to house the firm for a quarter of a century, but so rapidly was Omaha to be worthy of considerations. Thus, for example, 10 years ago there from which to get their stocks of goods," these jobbers argued "then buying of their stocks. From the goods," these jobbers argued "then we want to do something to contemporate the trade territory who wanted to Thus, for example, 10 years ago there were not enough automobile tires goods," these jobbers argued "then very outset this was a successful en-"Extensive advertising was done make a buying trip to Omaha at and this was followed up by well least once or twice a year were only organized trade excursions out into too glad to learn that special prepa half dozen big trade excursions them at a given time in the spring every summer have been made by and fall, and consequently came in the jobbers out into the fertile belt in strong numbers from the first. So successful was this plan of the job-bers that Merchants' Market week in Omaha is regarded over the territory as a real outing, and many other jobbing centers in the country have written to leading jobbers in Omaha repeatedly to learn the de-tails of this plan, which outside of

Omaha is known as the Omaha plan. On the West Banks.

Omaha has won its spurs as a jobusing heavy steam threshing en- ground. Thus these trade excur- for the reason for this development sions are made up of executives, one cannot say that it is the result tors sprung into the harness with and salesmanagers of the various of anything but natural advantages, such vigor that Omaha, being in the jobbing houses, and the cordial re-

There is an old theory in America will tell you that this is almost universally true up and down the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Those who hold to this theory, while they cannot explain it, will dismiss the question of why Omaha became great as a jobbing center with the

"Well, it's on the west side of the

Woman Gets High Degree. Atlanta City, June 18.—An honor-ary degree of doctor of literature, as "an author, essayist and revealer of life's beauty." has been presented to Mrs. Cora Harris by Oglethorpe university. Mrs. Harris is the first wo-

Big Stride Made By Ice Machine Firm in 18 Years

Baker Company Started With Factory Force of Four; Now Has Plants All Over World.

Just 18 years ago, J. L. Baker, resident and general manager of the present Baker Ice Machine company, engaged in manufacture of ice machinery and parts. At that time, the factory force consisted of four men, and the office force of one man. Its production capacity was not more than 20 machines and its sales practically nothing.

Today, the company cannot keep up with the demand made upon it for ice and refrigerating machines. It's factory force is over 200 men while the sale force numbers over men, including its different branch offices and agencies which are located in the most important cities in the United States and in foreign countries. It has been forced to work day and night to supply the demand. The Baker Ice Machine company

plants in practically every state in the union, as well as in

mand for these machines, to fill present orders and to take care of

future demands, the company erecting a new factory and office building on Grand avenue, between Evans and Pratt streets. The plant will cost in the neighborhood of \$250,000 and will be the last word in modern construction. The fac-

Officers of the company are J. L. Baker, president and general manager; Charles Knox, vice president and erection manager; R. L. Baker, treasurer; F. L. Vette, secretary office manager; C. A. Baker, pur-chasing agent; H. G. Veneman, sales manager, and J. C. Vaught, manager drafting department.

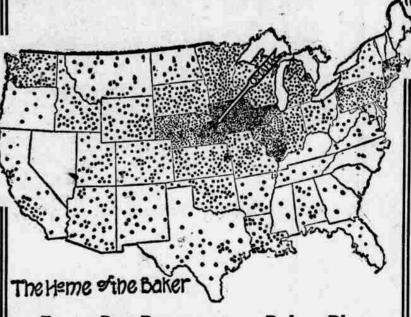
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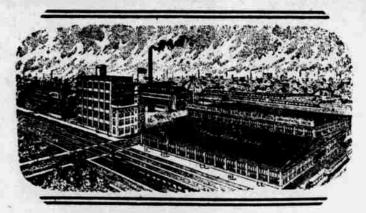
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