

Berkeley



# THE BEGINNING OF RAILROAD BUILDING IN MINNESOTA.\*

BY JOHN H. RANDALL, ST. PAUL.

The Territory of Minnesota had a very sparse settlement north of Saint Paul in 1856. The Chippewa and Sioux tribes occupied the greater part of that section of the Territory. The majority of the white settlers were south of Saint Paul and along the Mississippi river.

It was not thought there was anything north of Saint Cloud worth going after, save the pine lumber. The lumbermen at Saint Anthony bought large stretches of this timbered land from the government at \$1.25 an acre, and after stripping the timber from the land, leaving what they considered only sand barrens, they refused to pay the taxes and these lands reverted to the State. The result is that the State sees, in the not very distant future, a school fund of some \$100,000,000 from royalties from the iron ore discovered a few years ago underlying this section, making Minnesota one of the richest states in the Union.

When I came into the Territory in 1856, the nearest railroad to Saint Paul was at Galena, Illinois.

March 3, 1857, Congress passed an act to aid in the construction of railroads in the Territory of Minnesota, making a grant of the right of way and of the odd-numbered sections of the public lands within six miles on each side of the located lines of road. One of these railroads was to commence at Stillwater and run via Saint Paul and Saint Anthony to the foot of Big Stone lake and the mouth of the Sioux river, on the western boundary of the Territory, with a branch from Saint Anthony via Saint Cloud to the Red river of the North.

On May 22, 1857, by act of the Territorial Legislature, the Minnesota and Pacific railroad company was incorporated and

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given this grant, with all the rights and franchises that had been conveyed to the Territory by the government.

During 1857 the engineers located the line west to Big Stone lake and north to Crow Wing, finishing the location surveys on November 22, 1857, and turning in their maps to the governor of the Territory and also filing a duplicate copy with the General Land Offices at Washington, D. C., December 5, 1857.

In July, 1857, Edmund Rice, president of the Minnesota and Pacific railroad company, entered into a contract with Selah Chamberlain, of Cleveland, Ohio, to build the road from Stillwater to Crow Wing. He was to begin work October 1, 1857, and to complete the same by September 1, 1859. The part of the road between Saint Paul and Saint Anthony was to be ready for the cars October 1, 1858. Work was carried on for thirty days and then stopped.

In September, 1857, the Ohio Trust Company, of Cincinnati, failed, and the result of that failure was the terrible panic of 1857, which ended all work requiring money, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. At that time there were no banks in Saint Paul, but there were nine broker firms that were doing a banking business. Most of them succumbed to the pressure and went out of business, as there was no money to be had. You could not give away a corner lot at that time, as no one would assume the taxes on any property, and some of us had to go ninety days or more without seeing as much as a five-cent piece; but there was a disposition to stand by each other, so we had our three meals a day and a place in which to sleep.

A new contract was entered into with Mr. Chamberlain in April, 1858. He commenced work again and graded the road from Saint Paul up the river to about opposite Clear Lake, some sixty-two miles, when again he stopped, and as a result the state foreclosed and took over all the property of the Minnesota and Pacific company. From 1858 to 1861 the property was held by the state. To get the road constructed, the state by act of the Legislature turned back the lands and franchises to the Minnesota and Pacific company on March 8, 1861, upon the company depositing ten thousand dollars as a guarantee of good faith that work should be commenced at once and be finished

between Saint Paul and Saint Anthony by the first day of January, 1862.

A contract was entered into at once with the banking house of Winters and Harshman, of Dayton, Ohio, to build this piece of road between Saint Paul and Saint Anthony. Messrs. Winters and Harshman associated with themselves Mr. Elias F. Drake, a lawyer in Dayton, and the president of a small railroad running between Dayton and Cincinnati, and sent him to Saint Paul to care for their interest in the construction of this ten miles of road.

Mr. Drake brought the first locomotive, the William Crooks, into the state, with other construction material, and laid a piece of track fourteen hundred feet long, from the river up on the bank that had been graded by Mr. Chamberlain, and then failed to meet the conditions fixed by the state for the construction of the ten miles, and again the property was taken over by the state.

March 10, 1862, the Legislature made another effort to get the road under way, passing another act, which turned the property over to the same organization, called by another name, the Saint Paul and Pacific railroad company. The contract was renewed with the Dayton firm and the work was completed, and the company commenced its regular business by putting on its train July 2, 1862, starting from its little depot, of seven by nine feet, situated on the railroad bank down near the mouth of Phalen creek, and terminating on the prairie back of the old University building in Saint Anthony.

The conditions as to the lay of the land here at Saint Paul will account for starting the road where they did. A bluff some ninety feet in height at its highest point, thence sloping west toward Jackson street and east toward Trout brook, was on the north side of what was known as the Government road from Point Douglas to Fort Snelling, now Fourth street, and from this road the land dipped into what was called the river bottom. Third Street was laid out on the map as running across this low land. The valleys between this bluff and Dayton's bluff on the east were about four hundred and fifty feet wide, the banks on each side being from forty to fifty feet high. Trout brook (the valley down which the main line of the North-

ern Pacific railroad comes into the city) and Phalen creek (the valley down which the Duluth branch of the Northern Pacific comes) ran down these two valleys. The embankment of the road, from the river up these valleys, was about fifteen feet high. Fourth street was graded to cross this fill, and the next crossing was what is now known as Lafayette avenue.

Kittson's Addition, and other additions laying out this section of the city east of Broadway, were simply on paper; the streets were not graded, and only here and there was a shanty to be seen. For nearly twelve months the passengers had to go to the little depot down on Phalen creek to take the cars for Saint Anthony.

Early in 1863 a contract was made for the construction of a trestle some three-quarters of a mile long, from the levee at the foot of Sibley street to the railroad embankment at the crossing of Fourth street. The trestle was from four feet high at Sibley street to twenty-two feet high where it crossed the creek. It was used by the trains from 1863 till after 1868.

The owners of the bluff north of Fourth street commenced grading their property about this time, and the company bought all of the dirt they could, paying twelve and a half cents per cubic yard, a like sum being paid by the owners to the contractors. This dirt was in part hauled onto the railroad grounds at the west end of the bluff, while the company was grading their property up to Pennsylvania avenue and hauling the other part by cars to fill the trestle at its east end.

In 1864 Mr. Edmund Rice retired from the presidency of the road, and Mr. George L. Becker succeeded him in that office.

The company was buying, in the late sixties and early seventies, the lots lying south of the alley of the blocks between Third street, as laid out, and the river, when the president received a communication from the stockholders of the company, saying, "You are a fit subject for an insane asylum, Mr. Becker, to ever think Saint Paul will be large enough to require a railroad yard of the size you are building." We were paying laborers at that time eighty cents a day, and they were laying up money on that wage.



In 1862 a contract had been made with Mr. E. B. Litchfield, of New York City, to build the branch line from Saint Anthony to Crow Wing and the main line from Minneapolis to Big Stone lake.

The iron for the road under the Litchfield contract was all purchased in England, unloaded at New York, railroaded to Chicago and unloaded there, reloaded and railroaded to Prairie du Chien, which was the nearest railroad point to Saint Paul on the river up to the late sixties, there loaded on barges and brought to Saint Paul, and there loaded on cars at the bank and hauled to its final destination.

I began service with the St. Paul and Pacific company the 2nd of July, 1862. There were three officials in the office, president, secretary, and chief engineer. The treasurer was an official of the First National Bank. My official position was general ticket agent, chief accountant, chief clerk in the engineering department, and paymaster. The outside employees were one conductor, one engineer, one fireman, and one baggageman, with one or two men at the roundhouse. When either the conductor or the baggageman was sick or away, the general ticket agent ran in their stead on the road.

In September, 1862, settlement was made by the engineering department with Mr. Drake, for the Dayton bankers, for the construction of the ten miles of road between Saint Paul and Saint Anthony; and the same month Mr. William Crooks, the chief engineer of the company, was accepted by the government as colonel of one of the Minnesota regiments that went south.

Hard times came on as the result of the war, and the work under the Litchfield contract was very slow. It took two years to build from Saint Anthony to Anoka, a distance of seventeen miles, then another year to reach Elk River, and still another year before the road was completed to Saint Cloud, which was in the fall of 1866, taking four years to construct sixty-five miles of road.

In 1866 a contract was made with De Graff and Company for the construction of the main line from Saint Anthony to Big Stone lake. During 1866 the slough on the Saint Anthony side was bridged, crossing to Nicollet island at its northwest

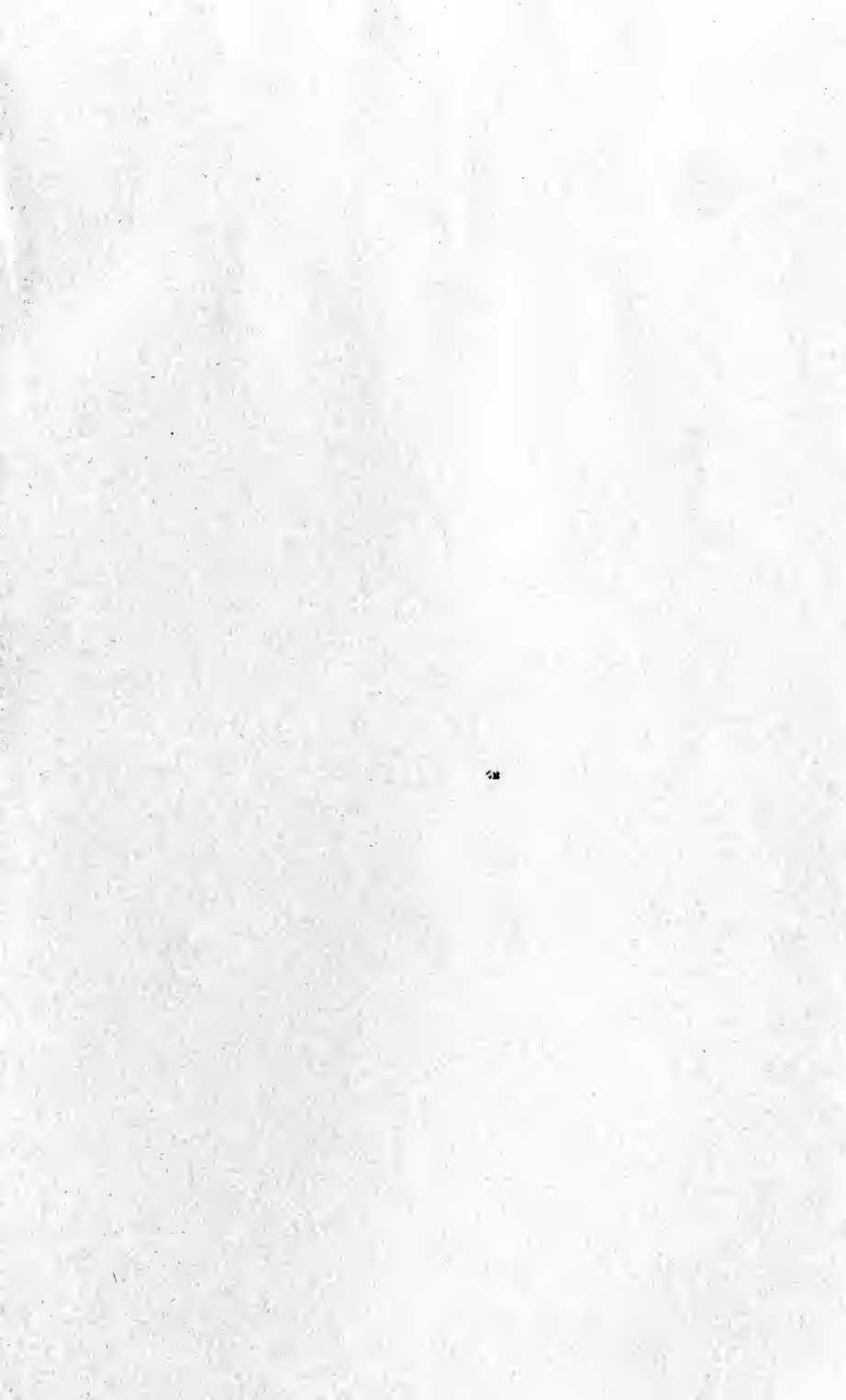
end, and in 1867 the main channel of the Mississippi river was bridged from the island to the shore on the Minneapolis side. The location was changed and the end of the road was at Breckenridge, which point was reached in 1871, taking four years more.

This was about the first railroad company in the country to construct its line ahead of settlement. Between Minneapolis and the prairie west of the Big Woods there were only two or three small settlements with less than a dozen houses in either. There were no settlers between the Big Woods and the Red river of the North. The first buildings in any of the towns west of the Big Woods were the depots. Litchfield, the first town on the prairie, was largely made up the first winter by moving the houses on runners from a settlement six miles north on Crow river.

During these early years other roads were being built in the parts of the state lying south and southwest of St. Paul; but the first ten miles, from St. Paul to St. Anthony, of the old Saint Paul and Pacific railroad, now the Great Northern railway, was the first railroad in this great Northwest. In this imperfect way I have sketched the beginnings of this great railway system, and hope I have given some faint idea of what it was to build a railroad in the early days.







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