



## The Burlington First Main Line

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Article Summary: The 1862 and 1864 Pacific Railway Acts authorized some eastern railroads, including the Burlington and Missouri, to build their lines to a connection with the Union Pacific. The article describes the building of the line from Plattsmouth to Kearney.

See also the related article ["Early Railroad Passenger Business."](#)

### Cataloging Information:

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Photographs / Images: Burlington survey lines, reproduction of map certified to Land Office, Thomas Doane, Plattsmouth from the west (2 views)

## THE BURLINGTON FIRST MAIN LINE

By D. R. BURLEIGH

To have a number of eastern terminals for the great trans-continental railroad (and secure the support in Congress of all the rival cities, wishing to be such terminals), Congress provided, both in the original Act of 1862 and the amended Act of 1864, for land grants to a number of eastern railroads if they would build their roads to a connection with the Union Pacific. One of the railroads to which aid was given was the Burlington and Missouri (Iowa). The amended Act of 1864 authorized that company to build its line to a connection with the Union Pacific at some point east of the 100th meridian, giving them land for a right of way, a land grant of alternate sections extending twenty miles on each side, but no bonds. At the time of the passage of this act the Iowa company's line extended from Burlington to Ottumwa, Iowa, where construction had been held up by the Civil War. After the war, the Iowa company rapidly extended its line, reaching the Missouri River opposite Plattsmouth at the end of 1869.

To build from Plattsmouth to a connection with the Union Pacific in the neighborhood of Fort Kearny, the controlling interests of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad (Iowa) formed a new company, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, to which Congress transferred the rights and privileges of the Iowa Company by resolution on April 10, 1869. The new company was incorporated on May 12, 1869, its articles filed with the Nebraska Secretary of State, May 25, 1869, and formal organization completed at

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Note:—In order to give a better understanding of the short articles by Miss Mabel Hill, and the Paul Hill papers from which extracts have been selected for presentation in this issue, this outline of the pioneering of the Burlington in Nebraska was prepared. The following sources were used:

Ainsworth, D. H., **Recollections of a Civil Engineer**, Privately Published. Nebraska State Historical Society Ms File.

Baldwin, W. W., **Corporate History of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company**. (By Interstate Commerce Order No. 20).

\_\_\_\_\_, **Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company, Documentary History**, 3 volumes, (Chicago, 1929.)

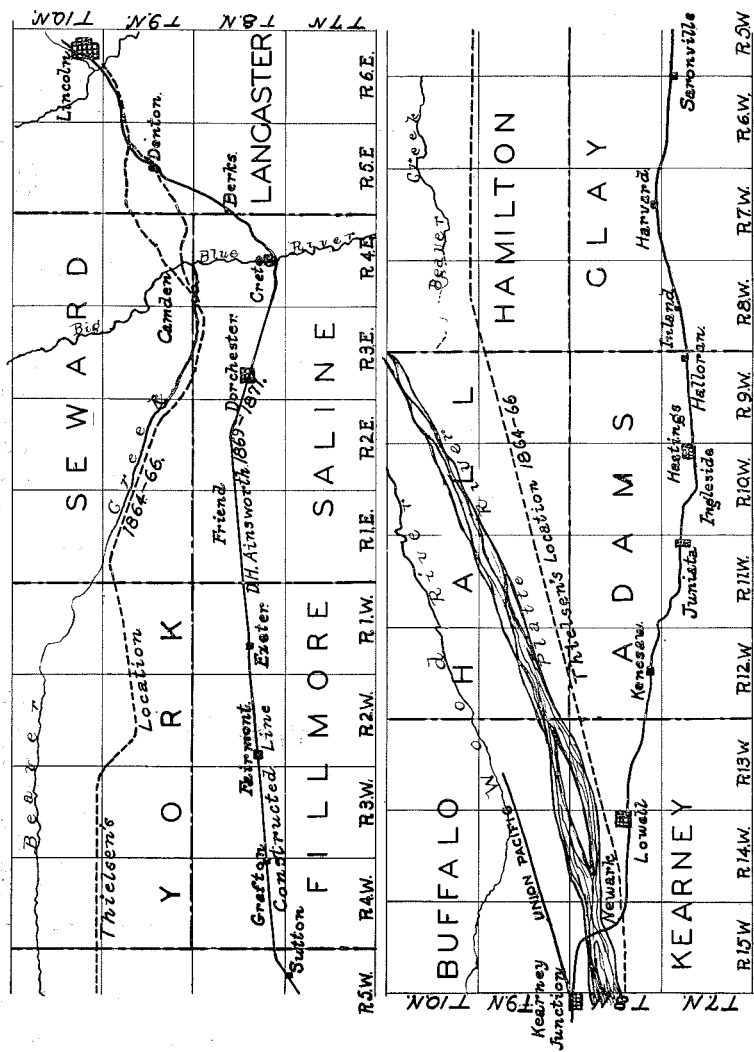
Hill, Paul, **Papers**, Nebraska State Historical Society Ms File.

Keefer, Ellen Eloise. **The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy in the Early History of Nebraska, 1860-1885**, (Thesis, Lincoln, 1929.)

Morton and Watkins, **Illustrated History of Nebraska**, 3 vol. (Lincoln, 1905-1913.)

Nebraska Herald, Plattsmouth, 1869-1872.

Poor, H. V., **Manual of the Railroads of the United States**, 1871-1874.



Burlington Survey Lines

Top half shows lines east of Sutton, bottom shows lines west of Sutton. Dotted line, marked Thielson's Location, 1864-66, is original survey line. Solid line is survey of Ainsworth, where railroad line was constructed. Courtesy, Burlington Railroad.

Plattsmouth, November 15, 1869. Though the officers and staff of the Nebraska organization were not the same as those of the Iowa company, both companies had the same directors.

Under the supervision of Thomas Doane, Superintendent and Chief Engineer, and his assistant, F. W. D. Holbrook, the Burlington (Nebraska) began to build from Plattsmouth in July, 1869. Construction of any magnitude was impossible until the Iowa line reached Pacific Junction, Iowa, opposite Plattsmouth. This was officially completed on January 1, 1870. Even then the engineers and contractors had some problem of getting material<sup>1</sup>, since there was no Missouri River bridge at this point until 1880.

In 1870, construction work proceeded rapidly with road opened to Lincoln on July 26, 1870, (via Louisville, February 15; South Bend, April 18; Ashland, May 9; Newton, now Havelock, July 6.) A year later the road chose to continue west from Lincoln along the south survey<sup>2</sup> and built to Harvard by December 20, 1871, (via Crete, June 12; Dorchester, July 4; Sutton, August 24.) This line was completed when the rails met the Union Pacific at Kearney Junction on September 18, 1872.<sup>3</sup>

The outstanding engineering work on this line was the construction of the Platte River bridge just east of Kearney. The bridge was built by the united efforts of John Fitzgerald, contractor, and Paul Hill, construction engineer. Letting of the contract for construction of this bridge was reported in the Plattsmouth *Herald* on January 18, 1872, though it appears that some preliminary work was done during the winter of 1871-2. Much of the bridge material was shipped to Kearney over the Union Pacific.

<sup>1</sup>From 1869 to 1871, Paul Hill (as an engineer of the Burlington Company) seems to have been responsible for securing and shipping construction material to end of track. The Missouri River transfer was often the most difficult part of this work.

<sup>2</sup>The original (north) survey ran up the valley of the West Blue through southern Seward County, parallel and near the route of the old Steam Wagon Road. The failure of the Burlington to proceed on this survey was the cause of an indignation meeting at Camden on October 28, 1871, at which it was resolved to force the railroad to build on the original survey. For an account of this action, see Miss Keefer's thesis. Considerable information on lines of survey is given in Ainsworth's *Recollections*.

The accompanying map (from the Burlington engineering office, Lincoln) shows the original Thielsen survey lines and final Ainsworth survey, the present line. The records of the change of location are presented elsewhere in this issue under "Burlington Change of Location."

<sup>3</sup>Dates are official dates given in Baldwin's *Corporate History*. The actual date of laying track into these towns may be a few days earlier.

During the period of constructing its main line from Plattsmouth to Kearney through Nebraska's new capital city, the Burlington and Missouri in Nebraska secured an Omaha connection, and a south feeder line from Crete to Beatrice by leasing the Omaha and Southwestern for 999 years on July 19, 1871. This was a local company organized by Nebraska men to build a line from Omaha to Fort Riley, Kansas, by way of Bellevue, Lincoln, and Beatrice.<sup>4</sup> At the time of lease this road included twenty miles from Omaha south and a few miles out of Crete towards De Witt. The line out of Omaha ran through Bellevue and La Platte and continued along the north side of the Platte to a point called Cedar Island (Sarpy County), where its Lincoln traffic crossed the Platte to a point on the Burlington and Missouri called Omaha Junction. (The Omaha and Southwestern road survey continued west on the north side of the Platte to a projected crossing at Ashland.)

After the Burlington obtained control of this road they continued construction of the Beatrice branch (in the name of the Omaha and Southwestern) reaching De Witt on November 2, and Beatrice on December 22, 1871. They also tore up the eight miles of track from La Platte to Cedar Island and built a bridge across the Platte from La Platte to a connection with the Burlington at Oreapolis. This bridge, completing the first Omaha and Lincoln direct rail connection, was authorized by the Nebraska Legislature by an Act of March 1, 1871, which also granted 20,000 acres of internal improvement lands to aid in its construction. John Fitzgerald and Paul Hill built this bridge, beginning in the latter part of 1872.

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<sup>4</sup>The Omaha and Southwestern Railroad was a combination of two railroad promotions; the Omaha, Lincoln and Fort Riley Railroad and the Bellevue, Ashland and Lincoln Railroad, the former promoted by Omaha men and the latter by Henry T. Clarke of Bellevue. The leading promoters, beside Clarke, were A. S. Paddock, Enos Lowe, Alvin Saunders and S. S. Caldwell. These men were also interested in the Omaha and Northwestern Railroad, a similar project, locally promoted to "grab" a part of the half million acres of internal improvement lands which the State legislature had voted to give to any railroad building ten miles;—at the rate of 2,000 acres per mile built. This Omaha railroad "ring" threw up makeshift lines, and by borrowing rolling stock—used in the morning on the O. & S. W., and in the afternoon on the O. & N. W.—gave evidence of having operating railroads, thus receiving 100,010 acres for the O. & S. W. (though 50 miles were never built) and 80,416.24 acres for the O. & N. W.—**Nebraska Commonwealth**, June 6, 1868; Ainsworth, 17-19; Morton & Watkins, 341-343; Sheldon, **Nebraska, The Land and the People**, 408.

The present main line of the Burlington from Ashland to Omaha was not built until 1886-7, when the Omaha and North Platte, a Burlington subsidiary, bridged the Platte at Ashland and built the line on the present location, commencing construction at South Omaha in February and completing the road to Ashland on January 3, 1887. Until this date, the Burlington main line was the Plattsmouth-Ashland-Lincoln line.

### BURLINGTON CHANGE OF LOCATION

The shift from its original survey line to the present line (which, incidentally, worked to the disadvantage of the settlers in the northern part of the land grant, and to the advantage of settlers to the south, both within, and just south, of the land grant lines) did not alter the land grant originally made in southeastern Nebraska.

Congress permitted the change by the following Act, approved May 6, 1870:\*

**Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,** That the Burlington and Missouri Railroad Company, or its assigns, in the State of Nebraska, may so far change the location of that portion of its line that lies west of the city of Lincoln, in said state, as shown by the map thereof now on file in the general land office of the United States, so as to secure a better and more practicable route, and to connect with the Union Pacific Railroad at or near Fort Kearney reservation, said new line to be located within the limits of the land grant made by the United States to aid in its construction: **Provided, however,** that said line shall not be located farther south than the southern boundary line of township number seven, in said state, and said change shall not impair the rights to, nor change the location of the said land grant, and the said company or its assigns, shall receive no different or other or greater quantity of land than if this act had not passed, and no change had been made in the located line of said railroad.

The map here reproduced was certified to the General Land Office by the officials of the road:

Change of location

State of Nebraska        )  
                                  ) S S,  
County of Lancaster    )

Thomas Doane, of Crete, in Saline County, and said State being duly sworn deposesh and says that he is the Chief Engineer of the said Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in

\*U. S. Statutes at Large, XVI, 118-119.

Note:—The map and certifications of change of location are exact reproductions from the General Land Office, now in the Burlington real estate office at Lincoln.

Nebraska, and that this map shows correctly in connection with the lines of the public surveys the **change of location** of the said Railroad as authorized by Act of Congress, and that it is within the limits authorized by that act.

(SEAL)

Thomas Doane,  
Chf. Engineer.

Sworn & subscribed this 18th day of September, A. D. 1871.

Jas. E. Philpott,  
Notary Public.

(SEAL)

It is hereby certified that Thomas Doane is the chief engineer of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, and that the location of the road, as represented on this map is correct and approved by the company; & also that the said portion of the said road has been completed and equipped in all respects as required by law.

(SEAL)

J. W. Brooks,  
President.

Attest.

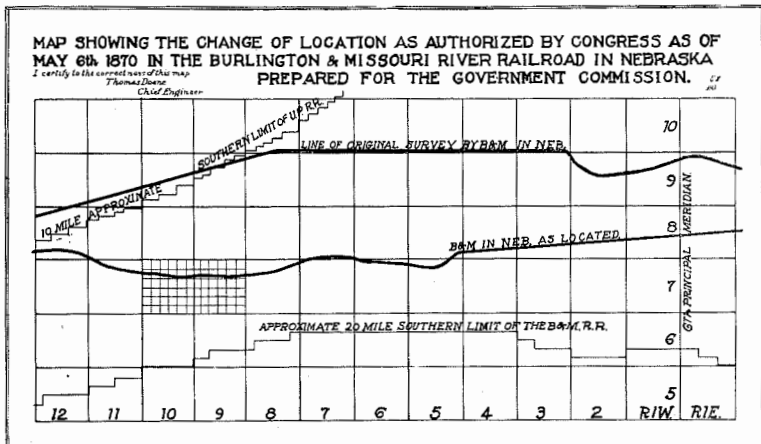
J. N. Denison, Secretary.

Boston, Oct. 2nd, 1871

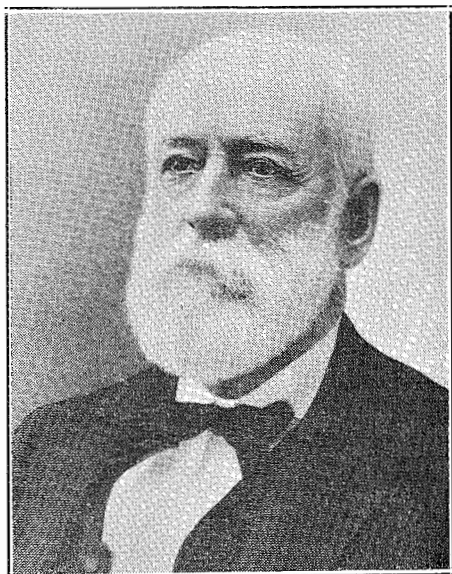
I, John W. Brooks, President of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, do hereby certify that this map indicates the definite relocation of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, relocated in pursuance of the act of Congress approved May 6th, 1870, entitled "An Act to authorize the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company or its assigns to change the established line of said road in the State of Nebraska" and that the said change has been made by the authority of, and accepted by the said company.

J. W. Brooks, President  
B. & Mo. Railroad Co.,  
in Nebraska

Attest. J. N. Denison,  
Secty.



Reproduction of Map Certified to Land Office



Thomas Doane

From a biographical outline of Thomas Doane, by F. T. Darrow, is taken the following extract on his Burlington activity:

"In 1869 he was made Chief Engineer of the B&MR Railroad in Nebraska, the ownership of which was largely held in Boston.

In four years he completed 241 miles and instituted steam ferry service at Plattsmouth across the Missouri River.

He also built telegraph line.

It was he who selected most of the names for the towns, hence so many Massachusetts names such as Dorchester, Harvard, Lowell, etc.

He made a special study of grades and the road was built with a view to great economy. It was exceptionally well constructed for prairie country.

Howe spans and masonry abutments were used on many streams. Screw Pile piers were used on two crossings of Salt Creek at Ashland.

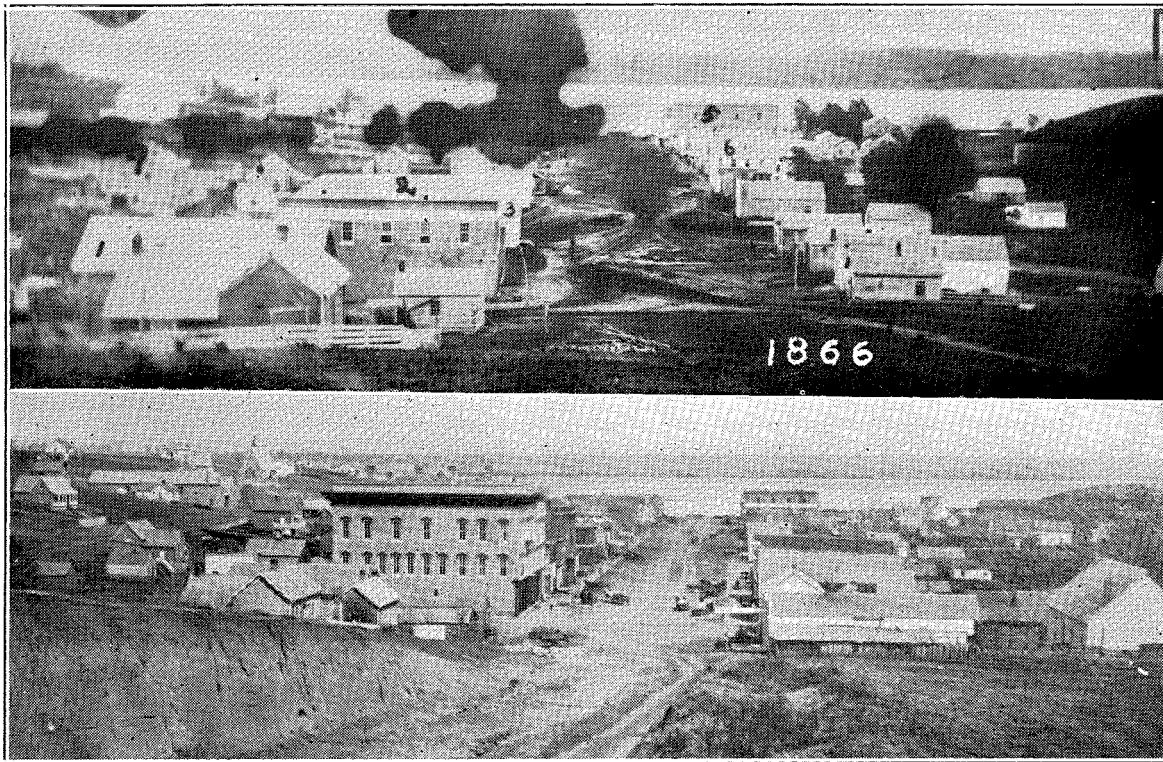
Oak ties and good drainage were provided.

Trees were planted on north side of many cuts as wind-break and snow catchers and to demonstrate the forest possibilities of the country.

Right of way widths provided for protection of drainage along steep slopes of the Platte River."

—Ms files, Nebraska State Historical Society,  
Courtesy Burlington engineering office, Lincoln.





Plattsmouth From West

Top view taken in 1866. Lower view taken in 1872