

UNIT 1: THE RISE OF TECHNOLOGY (1870 - 1896)

Topic: Transportation/Communication

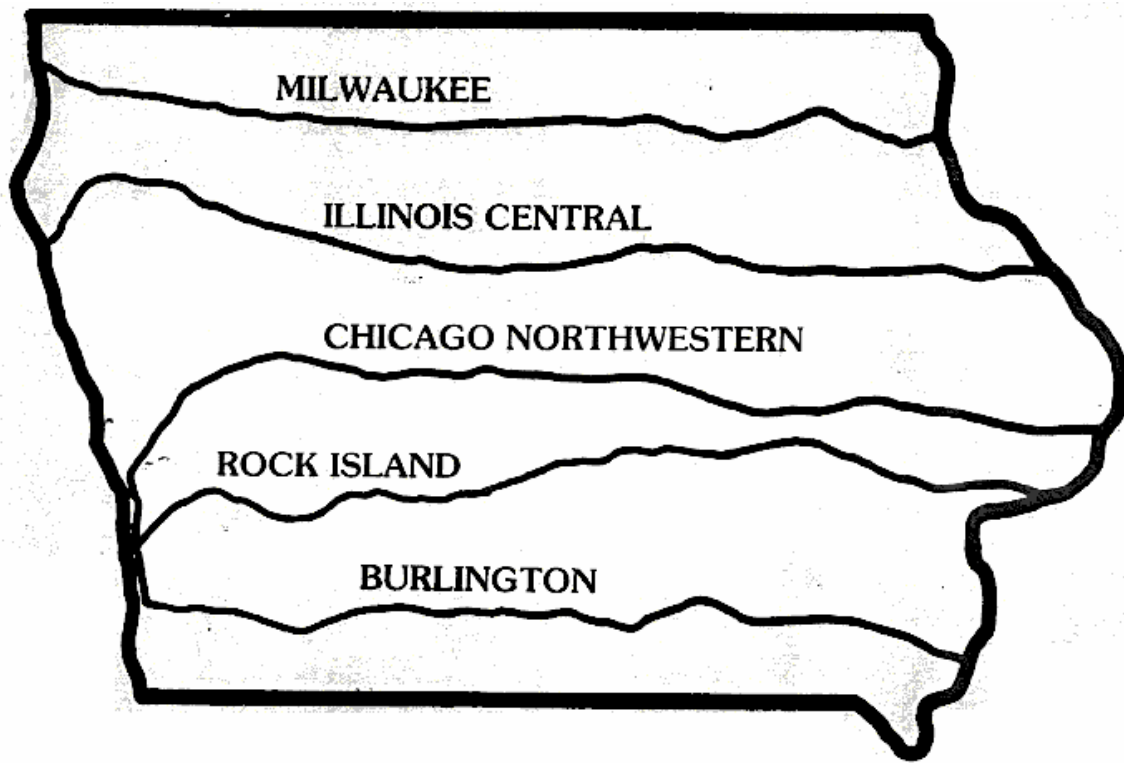
INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS

Iowa's railroad history is closely linked to the history of railroading in America. When Chicago had been linked to the cities of the East, it was inevitable that the railroads would then be extended west successively linking Chicago to the Mississippi, the Missouri and ultimately the Pacific.

Iowa was drawn into the politics of westward expansion because of its geographic position in the Midwest. It is important for students of history to recognize Iowa's economic ties to the nation when looking at railroad expansion within the state. The four main lines which were initially drawn across the state were not isolated stretches of track. Instead, they were extensions of tracks originating in Chicago.

Prior to the Civil War Congress recognized the need to link the nation by rail. An Act of Congress in 1856 made land available to railroad companies for the purpose of building roads across the state. By 1895, five major railroad companies extended tracks across the state of Iowa.

Five Major Railroad Lines of Iowa in 1895



Although this map shows the main lines of the Milwaukee, Illinois Central, Chicago Northwestern, Rock Island, and the Burlington Railroads, Iowa's railroad expansion was a progressive movement. Before any of the lines had reached their destination at the Missouri River, secondary lines were being built in eastern Iowa networking Iowa's many small towns to terminals in major cities to the east.

The five maps in *Growth of the Iowa Railroad Network* graphically illustrate this point. Iowa's population and economic productivity rose in the years between 1870 and the turn of the century. The reliable and affordable transportation provided by the railroad industry made much of this possible. Iowa's many small towns failed or flourished depending upon their proximity to the railroad. The coming of the railroad also contributed significantly to individual mobility. After the railroad system was in place, business people and other travelers could move between Iowa's towns in a single day where previously these trips might have taken several days.

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