

Railroads and Interurbans of Muscatine County

The steamboat and stagecoach era in Muscatine County failed to provide the transportation needed for rapid settlement and development. Steamboats on the Mississippi and Cedar Rivers were bound to north-south travel and subject to the ebbs and flows of the seasons. Steamboats could only ply the Cedar River, for example, during high water and temperatures above freezing. Stagecoaches and wagons had little to no freight capacity and the county's early dirt roads were hampered by permanent and seasonal obstacles (i.e., rivers, streams, swamps, floods, snow and ice, and mud) making for slow, uncomfortable, and frustrating travel. In the early 1850s, a new form of transportation – railroads – appeared on Iowa's eastern horizon and promised to aid the natural east-west migration of settlers, followed by commerce and industry. Railroads "made Chicago a commercial challenger to St. Louis and the lower Mississippi ports, and it was only a matter of time before their tracks would be laid to and through Iowa enroute to the West."²⁶⁸ Located on the Mississippi River west of Davenport and Scott County, the city of Muscatine and Muscatine County were well positioned to receive the first of Iowa's railroads, the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad (M and M), which would become the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad in 1866.²⁶⁹

M&M/Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad (1855/1866) - The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad began as the Mississippi and Missouri (M&M) Railroad, which was the first railroad to cross the Mississippi River into Iowa. The company intended to build in three directions: 1) from Davenport west through Iowa City, the main line; 2) from Muscatine southwest through Columbus Junction, Washington, and Oskaloosa; and 3) from Davenport northwest to Tipton and Cedar Rapids. The Iowa City and southwestern extension to Muscatine were built first. Davenport became Iowa's eastern terminus, beating out Muscatine. The first locomotive arrived in Davenport on July 19, 1855. The line was built through Muscatine County, reaching newly platted Fulton Station (later renamed Stockton) first, then headed northeast just across the Cedar County line to Durant, then Wilton Junction (the planned "junction of Muscatine and Cedar Rapids" line) in November 1855, then Moscow, and then the new location of Atalissa. When the railroad arrived in Liberty in late 1855, the tracks were built about one-half mile to the south of Liberty, so a new town plat was made in 1858 along the railroad. Earlier buildings moved to new town site, which was renamed West Liberty. The M&M reached Iowa City on January 1, 1856, the end of the line.²⁷⁰

At Moscow, a railroad bridge over the Cedar River had to be built. A location was chosen at the west end of Cedar Street. The bridge was to be a single track wooden truss bridge that could be built quickly to keep pace with tracklaying, and replaced with a more permanent iron/steel/stone bridge sometime in the future.²⁷¹ An attempt was made to enlist a steamboat to carry the material to the bridge site on the Cedar River, but it failed due to very low water that year.²⁷² The first wooden railroad bridge over the Cedar River lasted almost 20 years before it was replaced in 1874 by an iron bridge.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Thompson, *Transportation in Iowa*, 16.

²⁶⁹ See Rebecca Conrad and Tracy Cuning, *The Advent and Development of Railroads in Iowa: 1855-1940*, National Register Multiple Property Document, 1990. On file at the State Historic Preservation Office, Des Moines, Iowa.

²⁷⁰ Frank Donovan, "The Rock Island in Iowa," 169-170, in *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, edited H. Roger Grant (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2000); see also Mildred J. Sharp, "The M. and M. Railroad," *Palimpsest* III/1 (January 1922), 1-15; McCarley, *Planning for Preservation in Muscatine County*; WLSC, 2. Map of town and sites WLSC, 4; Richman, *History of Muscatine County, Iowa*, 409.

²⁷¹ See Robert Riebe, Letter to Stanley P. Nielsen, Shelby, Iowa, dated March 4, 1977, quoted in Leah D. Rogers, *Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Stone Arch Viaduct, Shelby County, Iowa*. National Register Nomination (1998), 2.

²⁷² *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*, July 14, 1854.

²⁷³ *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, March 20, 1874; "An Interesting Method of Bridge Renewal," *Railway Age Gazette* 54/16 (April 18, 1913), 896.: In 1889, that bridge was replaced by a steel through truss bridge that "consisted of five latticed through trusses" with stone masonry piers that were "remodeled in 1892." By 1912, the traffic on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad line through northern Muscatine County – the main line from Chicago to Omaha – had become increasingly heavy. The main line had been double tracked for several years as far as Iowa City, with the exception of the 1889 Moscow Railroad Bridge, which caused frequent delays. The old bridge was also "not designed for present loadings." A second track and heavier designed bridge over the Cedar River at Moscow had become urgent.

Back at Wilton, tracklaying left the main line and turned south toward Muscatine, reaching that city about the same time the main line reached West Liberty in late 1855.²⁷⁴ Wilton – or Wilton Junction, the more descriptive name – was to be “an important repair maintenance center, the eastern terminus point of the Southwestern Division, servicing all mainline trains.” At first, a wooden shed served as a depot. In 1856, a purpose built depot was added adjacent to a freight house.²⁷⁵ Over the next 25 years, “Wilton became a major repair point for trains, employing 100-25 railroad men.”²⁷⁶

By 1866 a roundhouse and turntable, a carpenter shop, and a dispatch office were all in full operation. The C.R.I. and P. repair shops were located to Wilton in 1877. In 1876, the ticket office was expanded. In 1883, the United States Lime Company engaged the railroad to ship fifteen car loads of lime per day over the Rock Island line. As business increased the repair shop was enlarged to twice its original size (1885). Passenger service increased during this period as well. The *Wilton Exponent* of February 19, 1875 reported: “From 4:00 Tuesday morning until 10:00 in the evening, 42 trains...arrived at or departed from this station. Where is the town that can boast such railroad proportions?” Further growth was documented in the *Wilton Review* of March 25, 1880: “Business is booming on the C.R.I. and P. Railroad. Three days in succession last week there were 43 trains passed this place on the main line. Add to this about 20 on the branch line and you have over 60 trains a day.”²⁷⁷

DISTANCES ON THE MISSISSIPPI AND MISSOURI RAIL ROAD.		
<i>First General Division, from Davenport to Council Bluffs.</i>		
From Davenport to		Miles.
Graded.	Wolcott.....	12
	Farnam	17
	Durant	20
	Junction of Muscatine and Cedar Rapids.....	27
	Moscow, on Cedar River	30
	West Liberty	39
Located.	Iowa City.....	55
	Centre of Iowa County	85
	“ Poweshiek County.....	111
	Newton, Jasper County	141
Proposed.	Fort Des Moines	174
	Council Bluffs	310
<i>Second General Division, from Muscatine to Mouth of Platte.</i>		
From Muscatine to		Miles.
Under Contract.	Fredonia, or Iowa River	20
Located.	Columbus City	22
	Washington	39
	Oskaloosa	95
Surveyed.	Mouth of Platte (21 miles below Council Bluffs).....	280
<i>Third General Division, from Muscatine to Cedar Rapids.</i>		
From Muscatine to		Miles.
Graded.	Junction with 1st General Division	12
Located.	Tipton.....	27
	Cedar Rapids.....	63

Figure 59. Table of Distances on the three planned divisions of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad in 1855, showing which sections were graded, located, and proposed as of 1855. Source: Parker 1855:99-100

After the first Mississippi River Bridge was completed between Rock Island and Davenport in April 1868, construction on the M&M line slowed to a crawl. If not for the Land Grant Act of 1856, the railroad would never have reached Council Bluffs. “The act called for alternate sections designated by odd numbers, six sections in width on each side of the track, to owned by the railroad and developed for settlement.” Construction progress was so slow, the railroad was in danger of losing its claim to the lands. After that, the Panic of 1857 and management problems slowed everything down. It took over six years to build 30 miles from Iowa City to

²⁷⁴ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 170.

²⁷⁵ Patricia Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*. National Register of Historic Places Nomination (July 1988), 2.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 3.

Marengo, reaching that town in Iowa County in 1862, then Brooklyn in 1863, and Kellogg in 1864, and there it stopped for the next two years. By then, the M&M was heavily in debt and foreclosure was inevitable.²⁷⁸

The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad (CRI&P or Rock Island Railroad) was incorporated in 1866 “to safeguard the federal land grants assigned by Iowa” to the M&M. The Rock Island Railroad was authorized to build from Kellogg to Des Moines, which it reached in 1867, and on to Council Bluffs, which it reached in 1869. The towns in Muscatine County along the main line either owed their existence to or were forever changed by the building of the M&M Railroad.

Stockton, originally known as Fulton Station after A.C. Fulton, the township’s eponym, and this name was retained until 1866, when the name of the town and post office was changed to Stockton. Stockton became a good livestock shipping point, and with Hetzel & Haner’s elevator, it was a good grain shipping point, as well.²⁷⁹ The Rock Island Railroad depot was built on the north side of the original Fulton town plat. Sometime in the 1890s, the BCR&N built a new line from Blue Grass in Scott County northwest through the northeast corner of Fulton Township, linking nonextant Petersburg R.R. Station (Section 13) and Stockton. The BCR&N built a railroad depot located on the south side of the Fulton plat. None of the Stockton’s railroad associated buildings are extant, including the depots.²⁸⁰ Despite having two railroads, Stockton failed to thrive, likely due its proximity to Walcott, just over the Scott County line, and Durant, just over Cedar County line.



Figure 60. Stockton Rock Island Railroad Depot, c.1950, nonextant. Source: John P. Vander Maas Railroadiana Collection, University of Iowa Digital Library

Wilton Junction (a.k.a. Wilton) was first named “Glendale,” but just “before the plat was recorded the name of Wilton was selected.”²⁸¹ was platted in September 1854 in anticipation of the M&M Railroad. Wilton was not only to be located on the main railroad line to Iowa City, but also the Southwestern Division that would extend to Oskaloosa (Mahaska County) by way of Muscatine.²⁸² On October 1, 1855, the railroad construction train reached Wilton and passenger service commenced two months later. The railroad built a freight house in 1856, “along with the first real depot building adjacent to the freight house.”²⁸³ Wilton would become “a major repair point for trains” employing over 100 railroad men.²⁸⁴ By 1866, railroad support buildings and structures in Wilton “included

²⁷⁸ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 173-174.

²⁷⁹ Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 14.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County, Iowa* (Chicago: Acme Publishing, 1889), 660; Richman, *History of Muscatine County, Iowa*, 240: The town was named after Wilton, Maine, the birthplace of Franklin Butterfield, one of the owners of the land on which the town was platted; Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 18.

²⁸² Richman, *History of Muscatine County, Iowa*, 240, 409; Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 18.

²⁸³ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 2.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

a roundhouse and turntable, a carpenter shop, and a dispatch office.”²⁸⁵ The Rock Island repair shops were relocated to Wilton in 1877, and eventually doubled in size in 1885.²⁸⁶ Thus, “Wilton had grown and prospered as a repair maintenance center, the eastern terminus point of the Southwestern Division, servicing all mainline trains.”²⁸⁷

Figure 61. Moscow Rock Island Railroad Depot, 1900s, nonextant. Source: Nopoulos 2005



Moscow was first laid out in the fall of 1836 along the east bank of the Cedar River. The town grew slowly until the Mississippi & Missouri Railroad (later the Rock Island) arrived in 1855 extending through the town, the year that the bridge crossing the Cedar River was completed. Moscow’s Rock Island is nonextant, but it was located at the east edge of the town plat where the road entered from the northeast and curved to the southwest, cutting through the pre-railroad town plat. According to the 1911 county history, the railroad caused “a rapid spurt of growth until 1859, when it began to go down.” Moscow’s population peaked at 400 in 1859, but had declined to 346 in 1870, and then to 222 just three years later. The Panic of 1857, which also affected the M&M Railroad, could have affected a small town like Moscow.²⁸⁸

Atalissa, located in Section 11 of Goshen Township, began as a small settlement two miles west of its current location on the new line of the M&M Railroad. “A side-track was there laid, a platform built, and William Pickering engaged in buying grain, which was loaded directly into the cars.” Capt. William Lundy owned the 80 acres on which the current town of Atalissa would be laid out. Lundy “sold an undivided half to John P. Cook, of the firm Cook & Sargent, Davenport, with the intention of having it laid out in town lots.” Afterward, Lundy paid the M&M Railroad a sum of money to secure the location of a station at the new town site, “with the privilege of using the water from an immense spring, situated in the northeast corner of the village.” Lundy had the town surveyed, and a plat was filed by Cook and Lundy on January 31, 1856. Lundy named the new town Atalissa after a small mining village in California that he had lived near while mining for gold. The new Atalissa Post Office “was moved from Overman Ferry and established in this place in 1856.”²⁸⁹ The depot is shown on the 1874 plat map of Atalissa.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 18.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 2.

²⁸⁸ Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 12.

²⁸⁹ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County*, 664; Rogers, *Churches and Schools*, 14.

²⁹⁰ Harrison and Warner, *Atlas of Muscatine County*, 1874.

West Liberty began c.1838 as a small village called Wapsinonoc Settlement, so-called because of its location near Wapsinonoc Creek. This village was located just northwest of West Liberty's current city limits.²⁹¹ In anticipation of the coming of the M&M Railroad, the village relocated about a mile south-southeast to the south half of Section 12 of Wapsinonoc Township, where the M&M line passed from southeast to northwest.²⁹² The *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine, Iowa* from 1889 noted that the "first locomotive wended its way westward through a corn field where West Liberty now stands. Then, there was a farmhouse and a barn within the present limits of the town, and where the business part of the town now is, was a cornfield the cornstalks standing thick and as high as a man's head. The only dwelling was the house on the corner of Spencer and Fourth Streets..."²⁹³

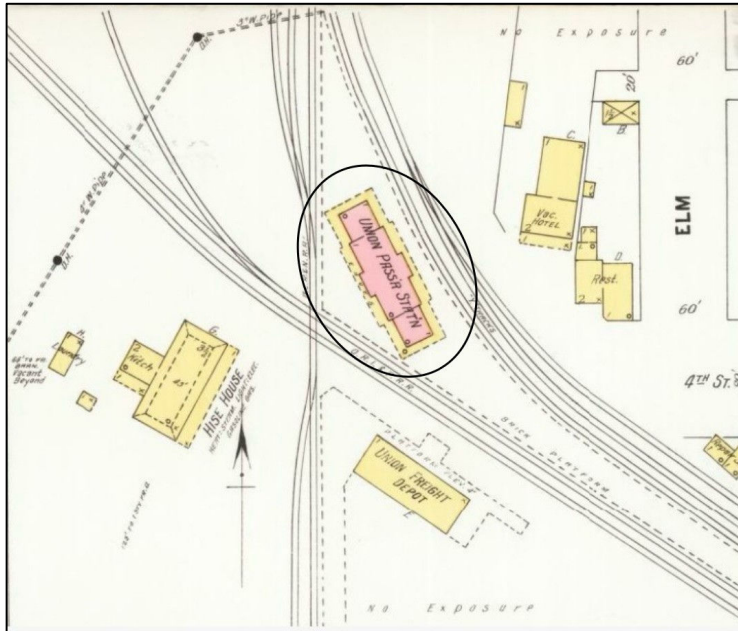
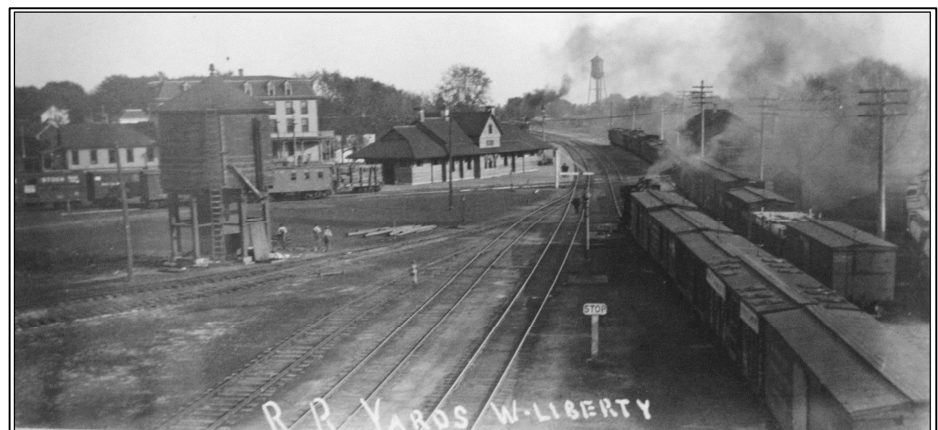


Figure 62. 1899 Sanborn Map for West Liberty, showing current depot (circled). Source: Sanborn 1899 accessed online at the Library of Congress website – 2024.

Figure 63. West Liberty Union Depot, c.1915, and rail yards, with Hotel Moylan behind the water tank. Source: West Liberty Heritage Foundation collections



While the western line of the M&M was heading to Council Bluffs, the Southwestern line was being built from Muscatine. The Southwestern Branch began at Wilton Junction and proceeded south along the Wilton-Moscow township line to Muscatine, establishing the Summit station in Section 36 of Moscow Township at the halfway point. At Muscatine, the branch line turned southwest, passing through Fruitland Township to Section 36 where

²⁹¹ Ray Werner, Leah D. Rogers, and Deborah Wilson, *Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Passenger Depot, West Liberty*, National Register of Historic Places Nomination (2021), 15.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County*, 657-658.

it crossed the Muscatine Slough bridge into Louisa County. The first train arrived in Washington (Washington County) in 1858, 36 miles from Muscatine. Washington remained the terminus of this line for the next 12 years.²⁹⁴

Fruitland (formerly known as Island, or Muscatine Island) became a station and post office on the Southwestern Branch when a group of farmers contacted the Rock Island Railroad in 1875 about establishing a station. An agreement between the farmers and railroad called for the farmers to pay \$1000 and post office and store would be built. A station soon followed. In 1880 the name of the post office was changed to Fruitland.²⁹⁵



Figure 64. Fruitland Rock Island Depot, 1895, on the Rock Island's Southwestern Branch, the line first built in 1856-57 by the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad. The depot was built in 1880. Source: Musser Public Library, Muscatine Iowa

CRI&P: Rock Island River Railroad: Davenport to Muscatine (1881-1980) - The Rock Island had wanted to link Davenport and Muscatine, and in 1880 began making plans for the best route, either through Blue Grass or along the River Road through Buffalo and Fairport straight into Muscatine. The first would go "through Blue Grass and 'Summit' between Muscatine and Wilton" and would "[strike] the Muscatine Western three to six miles on the other side of Muscatine," near Ives Station, or Bayfield as it had just been renamed.²⁹⁶ The advantage of this route was "far less bridging than the river route."²⁹⁷ The decision had to be made during a particularly bad high water year on the Mississippi River Road between Davenport and Muscatine.²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, by the end of July 1880, the river route had been chosen, the details of which were described in the *Muscatine Weekly Journal*:

It follows the river bank to Fairport, 19½ miles from Davenport, and goes along Second street in that village. Wyoming bluffs are two miles below Fairport; they face the river with perpendicular banks from 85 to 100 feet in height for two thousand feet, and for track room the faces of these stone bluffs will have to be cut into a good part of the whole distance. The route passes through Colonel Hare's farm just above Muscatine, and then verges toward the river again, so that it cuts through the south portion of the Dessaint Lumber Company's premises, and strikes the present C. R. I. &

²⁹⁴ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 174-175.

²⁹⁵ Marilyn A. Bekker, *Heritage Vignettes, Around the County* (Muscatine Area Heritage Association, Inc., 1979); Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 21-22.

²⁹⁶ "The River Railroad," *Muscatine Journal*, June 23, 1880; "The River Railroad," *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, July 2, 1880;

²⁹⁷ "The River Railroad," *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, July 2, 1880.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

P, track just below that property. The intention is to have the road three feet above the high water mark of the present year, the whole distance.²⁹⁹

This 27-mile long route was actually only 10 miles less than the line via Wilton. The route had an easy grade and only three curves between Davenport and Fairport. However, the route would require “no less than 98 bridges,” “the heaviest 390 feet long (over Sweetland creek,) another 360 feet, others 60, 64, 80 and 97 feet – in short, the bridges range in length from 16 feet to 390 feet.”³⁰⁰ Construction would begin in the fall of 1880. By February 1881, tracklaying and bridge-building had reached Pine Creek.



Figure 65. Rock Island Depot at Montpelier, c.1910. The depot was completed in 1881, shortly after the Montpelier Town Company incorporated and platted the town in anticipation of the River Railroad Line of the Rock Island Railroad connecting Davenport with Muscatine and its Southwestern Division to Kansas City. Source: John P. Vander Maas Railroadiana Collection, University of Iowa Digital Library

By the end of 1881, Montpelier had become quite the railroad town. The depot was “nearly completed and is a handsome structure. The water tank is one of the largest built and has a capacity [of] 20,000 gallons, which is pumped from the river over 20 rods away by steam power. The engine house is located about half way between the river and tank. Two switches are nearly completed at this place and a third runs from the depot about half a mile to a stone quarry where the [railroad] company have 70 men employed in geological work, getting out specimens of the foundations of the earth.”³⁰¹ Fairport was also a station on the new River Railroad, a fact that Pine Mills correspondent put into verse: “Fairport now is a new station, / With more direct communication / By the Railroad newly made; / And it expects some slight inflation / Of this recent consummation, / In the way of better trade.”³⁰² When completed, the Rock Island’s River Railroad became “the line for the Davenport and Kansas City trains—and the road between Davenport and Wilton [was] relieved of all southwestern trains of whatever kind.”³⁰³

The Rock Island River Road was leased by the Milwaukee Railroad in 1902 to be connect its new Milwaukee Cut-Off with Davenport. The Milwaukee bought the line outright in 1982 from the bankrupt Rock Island Railroad. Today, it is owned by the Canadian Pacific and operated by the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern R.R. Co. (DME).³⁰⁴

Thus, the completion of the Rock Island’s River Railroad in 1881 changed the economic fortunes of Wilton Junction. The direct routing of trains along the River Railroad “left Wilton marooned.”³⁰⁵ The roundhouse and car shops soon located further west, reducing Wilton to the role of a line junction point, which had a “disastrous” impact on the prosperous railroad town:

When they removed all of their equipment and buildings, the Division set up was as follows—Round House with 9 stalls, a Turntable, Blacksmith Shop with 4 forges employing 4 men to each forge, a large carpenter shop for the bridge gang with 8 or 10 men and a construction train with 15 to 20 men, about 15 Conductors, 15 Engineers, 15 Firemen and

²⁹⁹ “The Route Settled,” *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, July 23, 1880.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ “Montpelier,” *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*, December 1, 1881.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ “The Route Settled,” *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, July 23, 1880.

³⁰⁴ Map of *Chronology of Railroad Abandonments, 1911-present*. Iowa DOT website.

³⁰⁵ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 3.

Brakemen for all of the trains, 4 Telegraph Operators, Dispatcher Office, Wheel Tapping gang of 4 or 5 men. When all of this left this little berg, it was disastrous.³⁰⁶



Figure 66. Postcard view of the 1898 Wilton Rock Island Railroad Depot, c.1905.
Source: Ebay.com

The Wilton "Plug," as it became known, continued to travel thrice daily between Wilton and Muscatine to the south, a rate that would increase to four times daily by 1900. This train departed from the south side of the depot. The majority of main line passenger trains travelling east and west stopped at Wilton to make connections with this short line.³⁰⁷ A new brick railroad depot was built in 1898, in response to the rapid growth of rail service and in anticipation of increased rail traffic. At its peak in 1911, six passenger trains stopped daily at Wilton.³⁰⁸

After World War I, the line began a slow decline. The automobile and increasing road improvements gradually made train travel slow and old fashioned. The last run of the Wilton Plug was reported in the *Muscatine Journal* on May 12, 1934:

The old Wilton plug, long regarded as a landmark and almost a tradition in this vicinity, completed its last regular run from Wilton to Muscatine today. From now until the completion of paving on highway No. 38, the line will only be used to haul materials to be used by the paving contractors.³⁰⁹

The Muscatine-Wilton Road was designated Iowa Highway 38 in 1920 (running from Anamosa (Jones Co.) to Muscatine) and was paved from Wilton to Muscatine in 1933, essentially replacing the Wilton Plug as the main connector between those two towns. The Wilton Plug line was abandoned in 1934.³¹⁰ As a local *Wilton Advocate* reporter opined in 1962:



Figure 67. The Wilton Plug pulling into Wilton Rock Island Depot, c.1916. Source: *Muscatine Journal*, June 17, 1988

³⁰⁶ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 3-4.

³⁰⁷ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 4: Wilton continued as division point for railroad mail car service to Council Bluffs, and "Wilton was the terminus point for the 'Cannon Ball', a new train established in 1883 to service the Chicago-Twin Cities. 'Water Cranes' watered west and east bound trains, the water coming from a railroad low dam across Mud Creek, and thereafter pumped by steam power to the standpipe west of the depot."

³⁰⁸ Smith, *Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad: Wilton Depot*, 5, 6.

³⁰⁹ "Old Wilton Plug Makes Last Run," *Muscatine Journal*, May 12, 1934.

³¹⁰ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 179; "Old Wilton Plug Makes Last Run," *Muscatine Journal*, May 12, 1934; McCarley 2017:33; Rogers, *Country Schools and Churches Survey*, 8.

The light rails of the Rock Island branch to Muscatine were no competition for the concrete ribbon of Highway 38, however, and soon service on the line was reduced to one mixed train a day running on an irregular schedule. The Wilton Plug became the butt of many a joke as it poked its way along through the cornfields, the ancient locomotive dragging a short string of freight cars and a single coach. And eventually the lowly mixed train made its last run, and Wilton became a junction in name only.

Passengers no longer detrain at the old brick depot in Wilton Junction; there is no longer a pall of locomotive smoke hanging over the town. But the weed-covered rails south of the depot attest to the fact that Wilton was once an important junction point for the Iron Horse, a fact that kept Wilton Junction from becoming Wilton, the forgotten hamlet.³¹¹

The Rock Island ran its last train through Stockton, Wilton, Atalissa, Moscow, and West Liberty on March 31, 1980. As of April 1, 1980, the Rock Island began the process of liquidation.³¹² Unlike some of the other branch lines in Muscatine County that were abandoned long ago, the original M&M/Rock Island Railroad line continued freight operations. In 1984, the Heartland Rail Corporation, whose owners consisted of Maytag, Pioneer Seed, CRANDIC, Pella Rolscreen, and others, selected Iowa Interstate Railroad (“IAIS”), a separately owned company, as its operator. Trackage rights to Chicago were obtained and the railroad moved its first train on April 29, 1985, signifying the restoration of through-service from Council Bluffs to Chicago for the first time since the Rock Island’s liquidation in 1980. The IAIS still operates this line from Davenport to Iowa City.³¹³

Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway (1869; 1876-1903) - During the construction, bankruptcy, and the formation of a new railroad company to take over, the M&M’s planned third northwesterly line – the road to Cedar Rapids – had been all but forgotten. Instead, other railroad interests formed to take over this project: 1) the Cedar Rapids & St. Paul Railway; and 2) the Cedar Rapids & Burlington Railroad, which was to go from Cedar Rapids through Iowa City to Burlington. Eventually backers of both of these companies united as the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railway in 1868, with headquarters in Cedar Rapids. Iowa City was dropped from the route plans in favor of West Liberty, crossing the main line of the Rock Island Railroad in that town. Construction started in 1869, as reported by the *Muscatine Weekly Journal*:

The first tie on the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Minnesota Railroad was put down on the levee at Burlington on the 14th inst., and a force of seventy-five men at once set to work track laying. The first shipment of iron is at Chicago, and will reach Burlington this week. The Hawk-Eye, from which we gather the above, says "that everything is in readiness and a sufficient force on hand to put down from a mile to & mile and a half per day."³¹⁴

Tracklaying proceeded from Burlington through Columbus Junction (Louisa County) and into Orono Township of Muscatine County at Port Allen (nonexistent county-line post office/station), then north through Conesville, through Pike Township and newly platted Nichols Station, then north through Wapsinonoc Township and West Liberty. From there, the BCR&M continued through Cedar County, Linn County and Cedar Rapids.

Conesville was surveyed and platted in 1870 in anticipation of the BCR&M Railroad. It was located in Section 17 of Orono Township, and was named for its founder, Beebe S. Cone. The railroad built one of its signature two-story depots and the station was known as “Cone.”³¹⁵ In 1878, the town was incorporated as Conesville, and the little railroad town was thriving. Businesses in the late 1870s included: a mill, three general stores, a clothing and boot and shoe store, two blacksmith shops, a wagonmaker, a grain business, a hotel, and two physicians.³¹⁶

³¹¹ Richard J. Anderson, “Only Spur Remains to Justify Use of ‘Junction’ in Town’s Name Now,” *Wilton Advocate*, September 6, 1962.

³¹² “The End of the ‘Rock,’” *West Liberty Index*, April 3, 1980.

³¹³ The History of IAIS, Iowa Interstate Railroad website at <https://iaisrr.com/railroad/history-of-iais/> - 2024.

³¹⁴ *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, June 25, 1869.

³¹⁵ Bekker, *Heritage Vignettes*; Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 11.

³¹⁶ *History of Muscatine County, Iowa*, 595-586; Rogers, *County Schools and Churches Survey*, 11.



Figure 68. Cone BCR&N Railroad Depot, c.1900. Source: Rock Island Railway Historical Society

Nichols Station was platted by Benjamin F. Nichols in Section 15 of Pike Township in anticipation of the arrival of the BCR&M Railroad. A post office was established and the town plat was filed in August 1871. Nichols named the town in honor of his father, Samuel Nichols, an early settler and prosperous Pike Township farmer, who had “subscribed liberally for stock” in the BCR&M railroad company and donated land for the right-of-way and depot. The tracks entered Nichols Station from the southwest and ran northeast along the town’s western edge, paralleling Railroad Street.³¹⁷ Editors of the *Muscatine Journal* visited the new town that same year and recorded their impressions of the new town for readers: “Six months ago the [Nichols Station] site was a bleak prairie, but now it is a thrifty and growing village, with bright prospects, especially since Pike [Township] has voted in favor of the tax, thus securing the Muscatine Western Railroad through Nichols.”³¹⁸

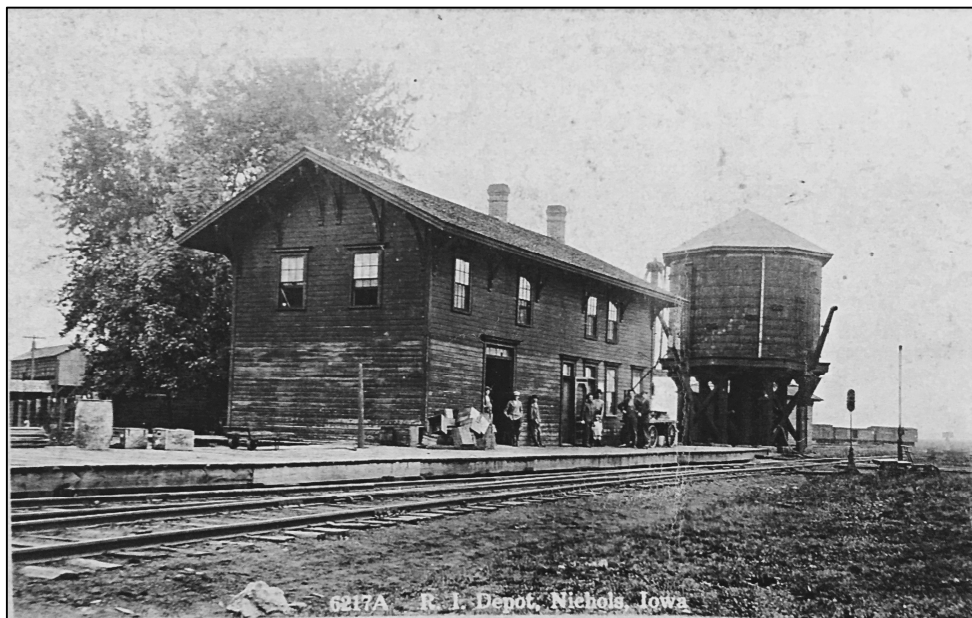


Figure 69. The Nichols Station was a classic two-story BCR&N designed depot, seen here in after 1903 when the line was sold to the Rock Island Railroad. Another depot just like it was built at Conesville. It was located at the junction of the main line of the BCR&N and the Muscatine Western (a.k.a. BCR&N Muscatine Division). Source: Lynn Pruitt, Nichols, Iowa

³¹⁷ Jennifer A. Price, *Ijem Avenue Commercial Historic District*. National Register of Historic Places Nomination (2020), 14-15.

³¹⁸ “Nichols Station,” *Muscatine Evening Journal*, May 5, 1871, quoted in Price, *Ijem Avenue Commercial Historic District*, 15; *Muscatine Journal*, December 10, 1958: In 1958, the Nichols depot closed for good, and West Liberty took up the slack in handling Nichols’ freight.

BCR&N: Muscatine Western/Muscatine Division BCR&N Railroad (1872-1938) - In 1871, a branch line – the Muscatine Western – was surveyed from Muscatine to Riverside (Johnson Co), crossing Lake and Pike townships, and intersecting the main line at Nichols Station.³¹⁹ The Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railroad Company furnished the iron, laid the track, and put on the rolling stock.³²⁰ In spring 1872, Chief Engineer N.R. Gibson advertised for sealed proposals “for the clearing, grading, bridging, and tying of the first twenty-five miles of the Muscatine Western Railroad. Construction was about to get underway.³²¹ Elias Adams of the future Adams Station in Pike County, was one of contractors laying track. Cochran & Co. received the bridge contract for the first phase of construction of the Muscatine Western Railroad from the city to the Iowa River. This company built all the wooden bridges, culverts, and trestles along this line.³²² In May 1872, Cochran & Co. advertised for 100 more “choppers,” or tree cutters. The fast pace of construction – 26 ½ miles from April to July – meant building temporary timber bridges, trestles, and culverts, to be replaced at a later date with permanent facilities of steel or stone.³²³ By late June 1872, the work of grading, bridging and tying were complete, and track-laying was nearing completion on the first phase of the Muscatine Western, from Muscatine to the Iowa River in Johnson County. Mr. Cochran, the bridge contractor, was singled out for praise:

Mr. Cochran, who took the entire contract for the bridge and trestle work (except the Cedar river bridge), has also shown himself to be a master of his business, as he has not only crowded his work along beyond the expectations of all, but at the same time done such excellent work that no one who has seen it will have the least fears of riding over any foot of it on the first train of cars.³²⁴

The railroad, which was graded, bridged, and tracked in just a few months, would have had no time for the construction of stone masonry facilities. But as early as 1875, the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railroad gave orders to replace all wooden bridges with iron. Replacing wood culverts with arched stone culverts would come later (*Muscatine Journal*, August 30, 1875). The *Muscatine Journal* lauded the construction of the Muscatine Western line, operating as the Muscatine Division of the BCR&M, as “the quickest work ever done in railroading.”

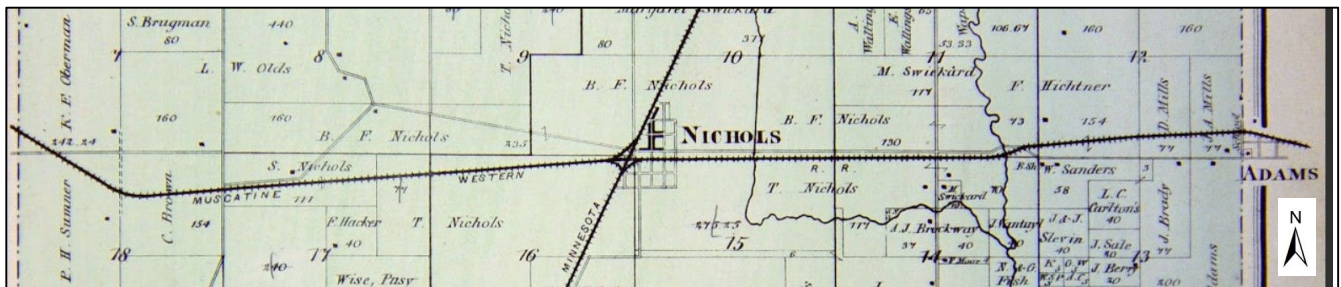


Figure 70. Plat Map of Pike Township, 1874, showing the junction at Nichols of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railway and the newly completed Muscatine Western, to be known as the Muscatine Division of the BCR&M. Source: Harrison and Warner 1874

Quick Work.-We venture to say that the quickest work ever done in railroading, was done on the Muscatine division of the B., C. R. & M. on Monday last. Two and a half miles of iron were run off and laid by a single set of hands, in twelve hours. Seven and one-half miles were laid on the road since Saturday night. Trains are now running regularly. This work which has been done so rapidly was under the immediate supervision of Wm. Greene, Esq., the efficient Superintendent of the B., C. R. & M. -Cedar Rapids Republican, 3d.³²⁵

³¹⁹ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 181-182.

³²⁰ “Muscatine Western,” *Railroad Gazette* (June 29, 1872), 278.

³²¹ *Muscatine Evening Journal*, April 11, 1872.

³²² *Muscatine Evening Journal*, May 2, 1872; “The Muscatine Western,” *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, June 21, 1872.

³²³ *Muscatine Evening Journal*, June 19, 1872.

³²⁴ *Muscatine Journal*, June 20, 1872.

³²⁵ *Muscatine Evening Journal*, July 5, 1872.

The Panic of 1873 halted further construction on the BCR&N, but just five years after incorporation, the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railway had a 368-mile all-Iowa railroad network.³²⁶ In 1876, the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railroad was reorganized as the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway (BCR&N), the same year that Ives Station (named for Railroad Superintendent C.J. Ives most likely) was established in Lake Township; in 1880 it was renamed Bayfield.³²⁷

Figure 71. Bayfield BCR&N (Muscatine Division) Depot and Cash Grocery, c.1910, completed in 1902. Nonextant. Source: *Muscatine Journal*, November 20, 2015

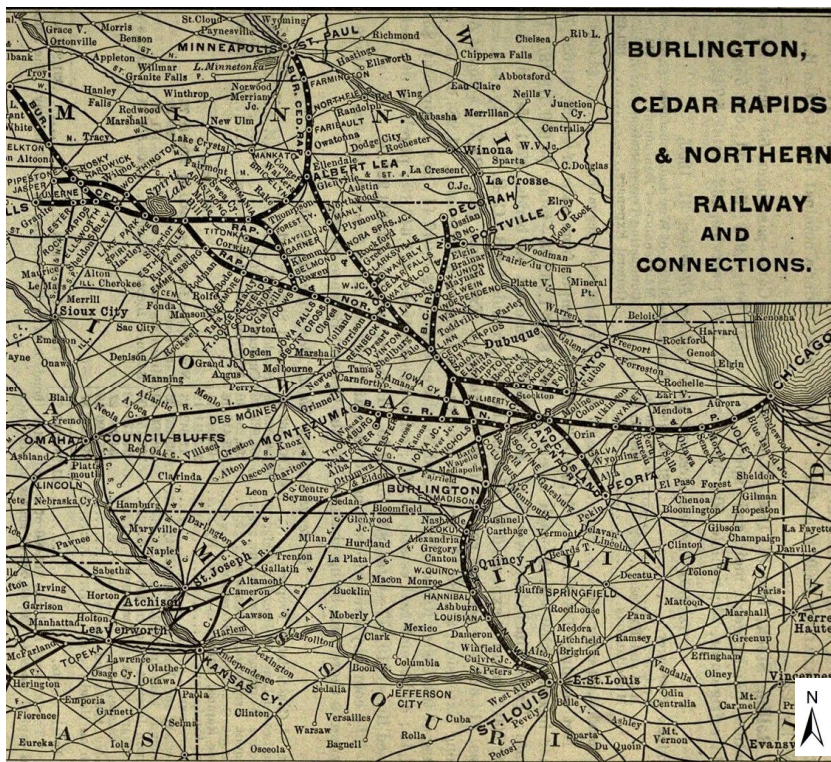


Figure 72. 1901 Map of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway. Two years later, this extensive railroad system stretching from St. Louis to Minneapolis would be purchased and become part of the Rock Island Railroad system. Source: H.V. and H.W. Poor, 1901

Beginning in the late 1870s, the BCR&N began upgrading bridges on the entire system, replacing wood box culverts and trestles with stone arch culverts and steel and stone bridges. In its 1878 Annual Report, the BCR&N reported its culverts were “too many to enumerate conveniently; *nearly all* small, wooden box culverts.”³²⁸ In 1884, the BCR&N reported 4 arch culverts of 20 feet opening or less in its entire system.³²⁹ In 1886, the BCR&N reported 5

³²⁶ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 182; 184.

³²⁷ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 184, 185; “A New Station,” *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, October 13, 1876; *Muscatine Journal*, November 8, 1880.

³²⁸ Iowa Board of Railroad Commissioners, *First Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners, State of Iowa* (Des Moines: B.F. Clarkson, 1878), 113.

³²⁹ Iowa Board of Railroad Commissioners, *Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners, State of Iowa* (Des Moines: B.F. Clarkson, 1885), 131.

stone arch culverts with openings 20 feet or less and two timber culverts replaced with stone.³³⁰ In 1888, only one wooden box culvert was replaced with a stone arch culvert.³³¹ The Bayfield Stone Arch Railroad Culvert (TR-LA-01; 70-0018135) could have one of the reported arched culverts constructed by the BCR&N from 1884 to 1888. Conversely, the Hockey's Slough Tributary Railroad Trestle (TR-PI-02) west of Nichols appears to be an original wood trestle that was never replaced.

The pace of this upgrading picked up in the 1890s. In 1892, the *West Liberty Enterprise* noted "the large expenditures in betterments of the road are indications of thrift and enterprise," specifically mentioning that "in the last year many old wooden bridges have given place to expensive and secure iron structures; wooden trestles have either been filled or replaced with substantial stone culverts."³³² By 1897, the BCR&N's work of replacing wood culverts and trestles with steel or stone had accelerated. "During the past few years the company has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in improving the track. Solid stone culverts are now the rule, especially on the main line."³³³ In 1902, entire BCR&N Railroad was leased and then purchased by the Rock Island Railroad in 1903, bringing to an end Iowa's last major independent railroad.³³⁴ For one year in 1916, the Iowa City-Muscatine Interurban electrified and ran its cars along the Muscatine Western line through a lease agreement with the Rock Island Railroad.

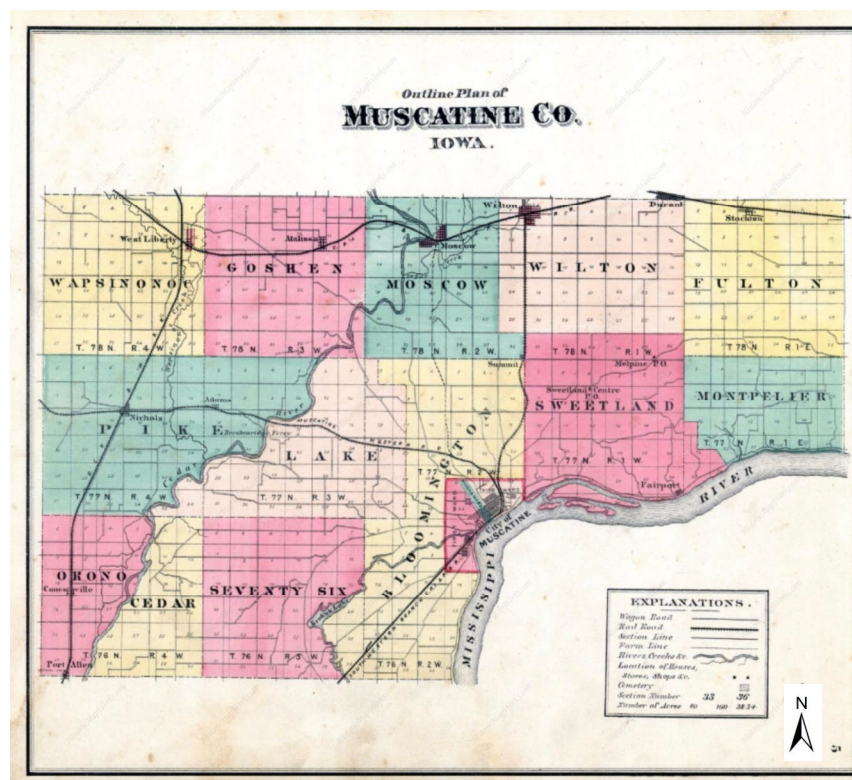


Figure 73. Plat Map of Muscatine County showing the railroad construction progress as of 1874. The Rock Island main line through the northern tier of townships, and its southwestern branch from Wilton through Summit to Muscatine then through Fruitland Township. The BCR&N main line through the western townships from Port Allen and Conesville to Nichols and West Liberty, and the its Muscatine Division from Muscatine through Bloomington, Lake, and Pike Townships. Source: Harrison and Warner 1874

³³⁰ Iowa Board of Railroad Commissioners. *Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners, State of Iowa* (Des Moines: B.F. Clarkson, 1886), 103.

³³¹ Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway, *Eleventh Annual Report* (1887) (Cedar Rapids, IA: The Times Printing and Publishing House, 1888), 14.

³³² "Railroad Commissioners: Their Annual Report Contains Some Interesting Information," *West Liberty Enterprise*, January 14, 1892.

³³³ *Muscatine Journal*, September 25, 1897.

³³⁴ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 190.

BCR&N: Davenport, Iowa And Dakota Railway (c.1887; 1892-1925) - Around 1887, Davenport business interests organized the Davenport, Iowa & Dakota Railway (DI&D), “determined to build a road which would give them an outlet into the north and northwest independent of all existing lines.” The railway company secured the right of way and planned a line “as far as Elma, Howard county.” The company graded in sections along the line, “but it was only completed and iron laid to a point about three miles this side of Bennett, on the Clinton branch of the Burlington.”³³⁵ That line went through Blue Grass in Scott County, then northwest through the northeast corner of Fulton Township, linking the nonextant Petersburg R.R. Station (Section 13) and Stockton.³³⁶

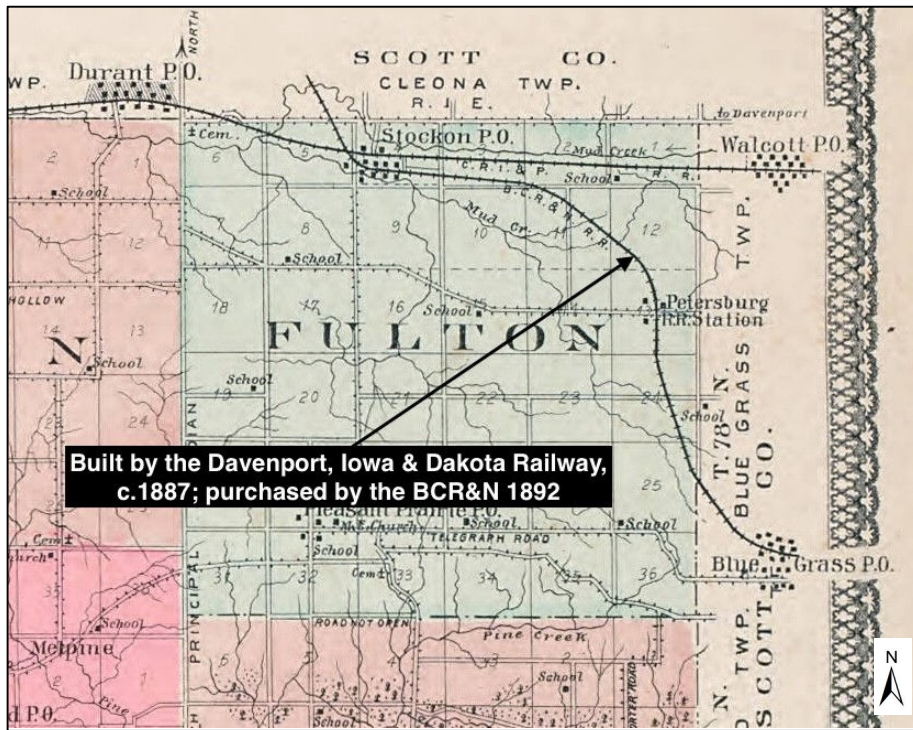


Figure 74. 1899 Map of Muscatine County, showing the Davenport, Iowa & Dakota Railway line purchased by the BCR&N Railroad line in 1892. The 30-mile line went from West Davenport to Blue Grass in Scott County through the northeast corner of Fulton Township, including Petersburg R.R. Station and Stockton, where it crossed the main line of the Rock Island Railroad. Source: Huebinger Surveying and Map Publishing Co. 1899

The DI&D Railway, however, never operated any trains on this 30-mile line, and “nothing was done with the line until the B.C. R. & N. secured possession of the bonds” in 1891. The BCR&N “then rented the road, built a cut-off into Bennett, cleared up a lot of long standing litigation, built a fine depot at Davenport and began to operate it as a branch of its system.”³³⁷ According to the *Muscatine Semi-Weekly News Tribune*, “It is understood that the people of Davenport are well pleased with the outcome of the matter and as well satisfied with the outlet it gives them to the north and northwest as though it had been given under the original scheme.”³³⁸ This line was abandoned in 1925, the first railroad in Muscatine County to do so.³³⁹

Muscatine North and South Railroad/Muscatine, Burlington & Southern Railway (1893/1905-1940s) -

The Muscatine North and South Railroad (MN&S) was a short-line operation organized in 1893 and built from Muscatine through Fruitland Township to Elrick Junction in Louisa County, where freight was transferred to the Iowa Central Railroad. The tracks of the MN&S paralleled the southwest route of the Rock Island Railroad out of Muscatine until it reached the southeast side of the Fruitland Rock Island Depot. There the MN&S line curved southward as it headed towards Louisa County.

³³⁵ “A Railroad Deal - The D., I. & D. Line has Been Purchased by the B., C. R. & N.,” *Muscatine Semi-Weekly News Tribune*, November 9, 1892.

³³⁶ See Fulton Township Plat Map, Huebinger, *Atlas of Muscatine County, Iowa* (1899.).

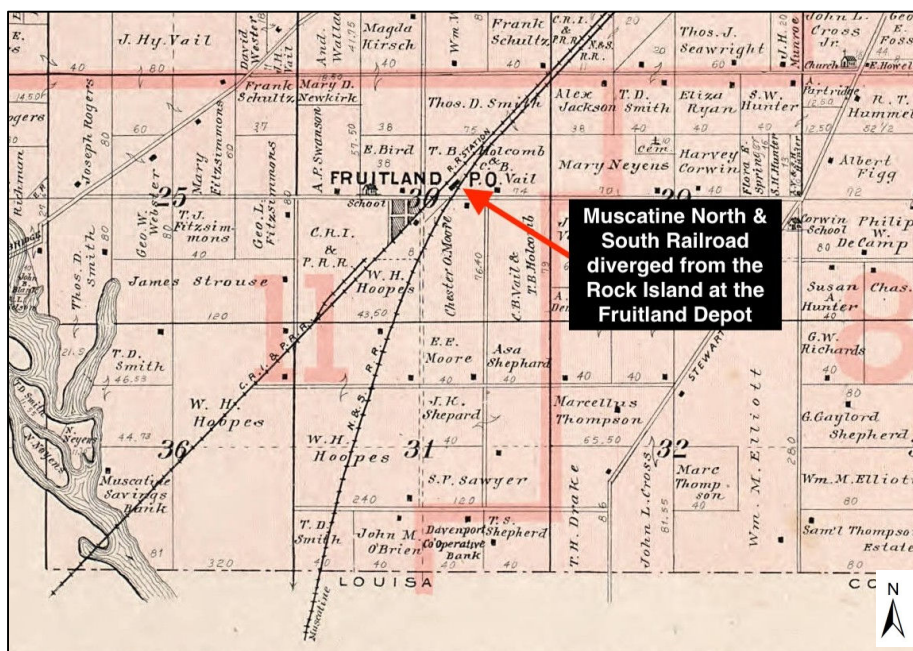
³³⁷ “A Railroad Deal, The D., I. & D. Line Has Been Purchased by the B., C. R. & N.,” *Muscatine Semi-Weekly News Tribune*, November 9, 1892.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad List of Lines and Abandonments, 3.

This line was extended to Burlington in 1905 and was reorganized as the Muscatine, Burlington and Southern Railway (MB&S).³⁴⁰ This company went bankrupt in 1922. The railroad was purchased by E.L. Tobie of Monmouth, Illinois, who reincorporated the line as the Burlington, Muscatine & Northwestern Railroad and later shortened to the Muscatine & Northwestern. This company operated into the late 1920s. The remnants of the MB&S were eventually sold to the Rock Island. The line was abandoned sometime before 1949.³⁴¹

Figure 75. Plat Map of Fruitland Township, 1899, showing the route of the Muscatine North & South Railroad (in 1905 it became the Muscatine, Burlington & Southern) paralleling the Rock Island Southwestern line from Muscatine southwest to Fruitland, where after it reached the Fruitland Rock Island, Depot, it turned southwardly as it headed toward the Louisa County line. Source: Huebinger Surveying and Map Publishing Co., 1899



New Milwaukee Cutoff: Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad (1902-1982) - In 1874, the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad Co. was reorganized as the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Co. Four years later, in 1878, the Milwaukee became the fifth railroad to complete its tracks across Iowa.³⁴² The last major extension of the Milwaukee Railroad in Iowa was the building of the Milwaukee Cut-Off (a.k.a. Kansas City Cut-Off), and the beginning of the line was the city of Muscatine. Before this line was built, all trains from Chicago, Milwaukee, and other Midwest cities going to Kansas City “were obliged to go over the long, circuitous, and hilly line between Marion and Ottumwa.” Because of this situation, “the Milwaukee could never compete very successfully for passengers or freight to the great southwestern gateway of Kansas City.” Thus, the Milwaukee Railroad “began buying land in southeastern Iowa for a low-grade, direct line to Kansas City.” George M. Titus, Muscatine attorney and later state senator, “was instrumental in purchasing much of the right-of-way,” which crossed Fruitland, Seventy Six, Cedar, and Orono townships.³⁴³

In 1899, “reliable sources” informed the Milwaukee Railroad’s route agent in Davenport that the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway was sure to come to Muscatine, and that “within twelve months” the route agent “expects to move his quarters from Davenport to Muscatine. “The corps of surveyors,” the route agent continued,

³⁴⁰ See Fruitland and Fruitland Township Plat Maps in G.W. Anderson, *Atlas of Muscatine County, Iowa* (Mason City, IA: Anderson Publishing Company), 1916; Howard & Ruth Cocklin, “A Brief History of Grandview, Iowa 1850 to 1950,” Grandview, Iowa website at <https://www.grandviewiowa.com> – 2024.

³⁴¹ According to the Iowa DOT’s *Chronology of Railroad Abandonments Map*, this railroad was abandoned before 1949. Newspaper research shows it was in business through the late 1920s. “Ten Years Ago Today,” *Muscatine Journal*, July 14, 1932; “25 Years Ago,” *Muscatine Journal*, June 1, 1950; “25 Years Ago,” *Muscatine Journal*, June 12, 1950; “Debate Fate of Defunct M.B.S.,” *Muscatine Journal*, June 26, 1924; “25 Years Ago,” *Muscatine Journal*, February 29, 1956; “75 Years Ago,” *Muscatine Journal*, June 23, 2000; Kristin McHugh-Johnston, *Images of America: Muscatine* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 66.

³⁴² “Iowa Rail History,” Iowa Rail, Iowa DOT website at <https://iowadot.gov/iowarail/historical-culture/iowa-rail-history> – 2024.

³⁴³ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 218.

were “gradually nearing this place and were seen at work yesterday morning this side of Wyoming Hill.”³⁴⁴ By March 1902, the sites for new Milwaukee Stations in Muscatine County had been selected:

There will be eleven stations on the cut-off of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railway between Muscatine and Rutledge. Nine of these will have names new to the Hawkeye railroad map, the other two being at Cone and Washington. “Ardon” is the brand new name of the first station, which is located seven miles west of Muscatine on the farm of Adam Wigim, and will be a good point for the shipment of stock. “Maduro” [later renamed Cranston] is the second station, about four miles further on and about midway between Ardon and Cone, which thriving place has been having a great real estate boom because of the Milwaukee’s coming.³⁴⁵

Figure 76. This April 1903 real estate ad for Ardon, “The First New Town on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul R.R. West of Muscatine,” notes that the new depot “is now in process of construction.” Source: *Muscatine Semi-Weekly News-Tribune*, April 28, 1903

The development of new town sites along the line was unusual at this point in railroad history. According to the *Muscatine Journal*, “[t]he Milwaukee people believe in developing towns along their lines. In this way they build up a good contributing territory. Along the line from Muscatine to Ottumwa, . . . there are some old towns, but the most of the stations will be new ones and the people in this section of the state will have to become used to some unfamiliar names. But they will not be unfamiliar long if the plans of the road carry out as intended. These places are to become centers for the trade of the country lying contiguous to the line.”³⁴⁶ Both Ardon and Madura (later renamed Cranston) were platted in 1903, and town lots promoted and sold by George M. Titus, who had initially selected these new town sites along the Milwaukee Cut-Off.³⁴⁷

Work on the Milwaukee Cut-Off started at Cone (i.e., Conesville), with the company building a track from the south edge of Wagner’s Addition to the Town of Orono (the west half of Conesville) to the Cedar River Bridge. Soon after, “a tower and cross switches were put in at Cone, and that active little place took on a renewed activity and energy.”³⁴⁸ Plans for the depots at Cone and Linby in Jefferson County were drawn by J.U. Nettenstrom, architect for the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, and included “unusual depot-signal towers,” the only two such depots on its Davenport—Ottumwa—Kansas City line, a.k.a. Milwaukee Cut-Off.³⁴⁹ The Milwaukee Depot at Cone was the first to be constructed on the Milwaukee Cut-Off between Muscatine and Rutledge, Iowa. It had a concrete foundation, wood-frame exterior, and “a projecting bay window in which telegraph operator’s

³⁴⁴ “It Is a Sure Thing,” *Muscatine Semi-Weekly News-Tribune*, April 14, 1899.

³⁴⁵ “Stations on the Milwaukee Cut-Off,” *Muscatine News Tribune*, February 27, 1902.

³⁴⁶ “Towns Along the C., M. & ST. P. Line,” *Muscatine Journal*, December 16, 1902.

³⁴⁷ *Muscatine Semi-Weekly News-Tribune*, April 28, 1903; *Muscatine Journal*, May 26, 1903.

³⁴⁸ “Progress of the Milwaukee Cut-Off Work,” *Muscatine Journal*, December 13, 1902.

³⁴⁹ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 232.

desk is stationed, affording him a full view in front and up and down the track either way.”³⁵⁰ The depot was located on-half-mile south of the business center of Conesville.³⁵¹

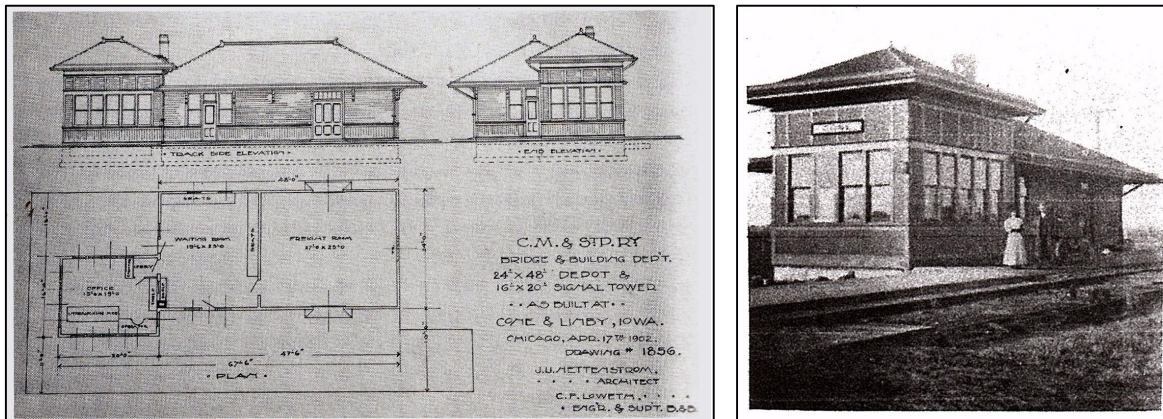


Figure 77. Left - These plans by J.U. Nettenstrom, architect for the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, show the “unusual depot-signal towers” that the railroad constructed at Cone and Linby on its Davenport—Ottumwa—Kansas City line, a.k.a. Milwaukee Cut-Off. Right - The Milwaukee Depot at Cone, c.1903. Trains began regular service June 1, 1903. The depot was located on-half-mile south of the center of town at the junction of the Milwaukee Cut-Off and the BCR&N Railroad. Sources: Left - Grant 2000:232; Right- Brown 1978:130

In May 1902, the track laying gang had left Conesville and were on their way to Muscatine:

The track laying gang of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad company will probably be in Muscatine by tonight. At least that is the report that has reached this city and which seems to be authentic. As stated in these columns some time ago the track layers have been at Cone for some little time laying the track: to the two bridges, the Iowa and Cedar, but now they have finished at that point and are coming to Muscatine.

Expected Tonight.

A railroad man stated to a Journal reporter the other day that without doubt this gang would be here in a few days and last evening confirmed the report, that they would be here to-night. At Cone they have built a track each way to the bridges, and can go no farther in either direction, until these bridges are completed and the grading on the other side. The large force of men in their fifteen boarding cars will be taken around, either by Columbus Junction or West Liberty or Nichols and brought to this city. They will go to work immediately at the Oregon street crossing, where already the switch and street car frogs are placed. The ties are also laid for a considerable distance.

Rails Are Here.

On a side track near the Muscatine Sash and Door company about 20 cars of steel rails are standing. These cars are all property of the C., M. & St. P. and the rails for the new cut-off to Ottumwa. These cars of rails will be switched up to a convenient point so the track laying crew can take charge of them. These rails are all 80 pound to the yard and of the best steel turned out by the rolling mills of the country and will be able to stand the heaviest of traffic that will go over this road.”³⁵²

A promise of “Trains by Thanksgiving” was one contractor’s optimistic forecast in May 1902.³⁵³ Instead, trains on the Milwaukee Cut-Off began regular service between Muscatine and Rutledge in Wapello County on June 1, 1903.³⁵⁴

The rest of the route between Muscatine and Davenport “was had by a curious bit of trading.” The Rock Island wanted better access to Albert Lea and Milwaukee-St. Paul and the Milwaukee needed access from Muscatine to Davenport. The two railroads reached an agreement, whereby the Milwaukee gave the Rock Island trackage rights

³⁵⁰ *Muscatine Journal*, June 17, 1902.

³⁵¹ Mable Estle, Brown, *The Fork of the Rivers: History is People/History and Partial Genealogy of Oakland – Orono Townships, Louisa -Muscatine Counties* (Typescript, 1978), 130; Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 218.

³⁵² “To be Here Tonight - Track Layers For the New Milwaukee Cut-Off Coming to Muscatine, *Muscatine Journal*, May 23, 1902.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ Grant, *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, 218.

over its line to the Twin Cities and the Rock Island allowed the Milwaukee to operate its trains on its River Railroad between Muscatine and Davenport.³⁵⁵

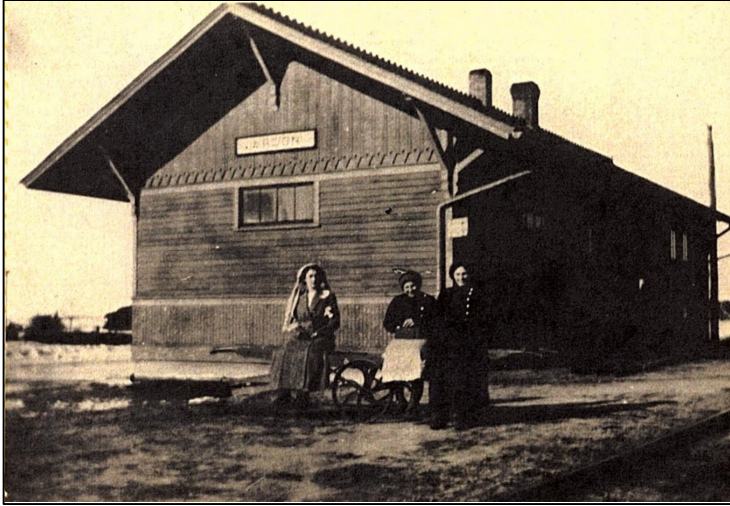
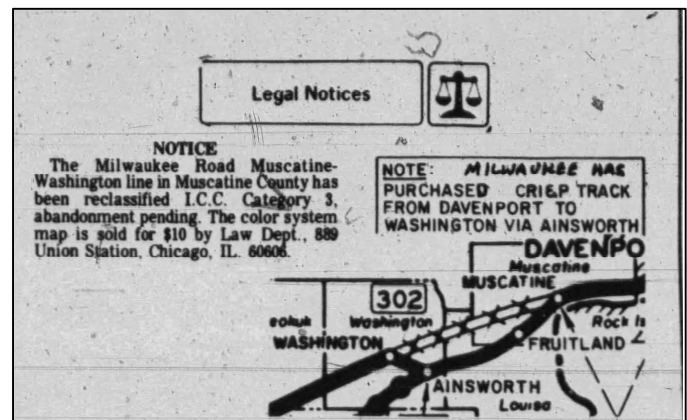


Figure 78. View looking southwest at original Ardon Depot, c.1910. This depot burned down in 1917, and was rebuilt in the exact same style the following year. Source: Healey 1979

Depots built to serve this railroad line included the Ardon Milwaukee Railroad Depot (TR-SS-01); the Cranston Milwaukee Railroad Depot (nonextant); and the Conesville Milwaukee Railroad Depot (TR-OR-01). Bridges built to carry the railroad over the Cedar River, Cone Lake, streams, and roads included the Cedar River Milwaukee Railroad Bridge (TR-CE-03); the Cone Lake Milwaukee Railroad Bridge (TR-OR-02); Honey Creek Railroad Bridge (TR-OR-03); Farm Drive Overpass (TR-SS-03); Kincaid Creek Railroad Bridge (TR-FR-01); Lowe Run Railroad Bridge (TR-FR-02).

Figure 79. The Milwaukee Cut-Off Line from Washington through Conesville to Culver Station in Muscatine was abandoned in 1982. The Milwaukee purchased the Rock Island line from Davenport to Washington via Ainsworth to make up for the loss of the Cut-Off. Source: *Muscatine Journal*, September 7, 1982



In 1954, the Milwaukee railroad announced that service at Conesville depot would be “reduced from 24 to eight hours a day and the staff of agents from three to one man.” In explaining the reasons for limiting services, the railroad noted: “In the past few months, Milwaukee trains have ten on no mail, freight or passengers at Conesville.” Also, “the Milwaukee Co. has installed electric automatic signals that can be run by one man.” The railroad had no immediate plans to dispose of the depot.³⁵⁶ However, just one year after service was limited at the Milwaukee Depot at Cone, the station was discontinued. The signals and controls for the railroad had been automated and the depot was no longer needed. In 1982, the Milwaukee Cut-Off line was abandoned from Washington northeast through Conesville to Culver Station in Muscatine, and tracks removed sometime thereafter. The Milwaukee purchased the Rock Island line from Davenport to Washington via Ainsworth –

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ “Plan to Reduce Service at Cone Railroad Depot,” *Muscatine Journal*, January 16, 1954.

including the Rock Island River Railroad that the Milwaukee had been leasing – to make up for the loss the Cut-Off through Muscatine, Louisa, and Washington counties.³⁵⁷

Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine Electric Interurban Railway (1912-1938) - The Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine Electric Interurban Railway (CD&M), Muscatine County's only interurban railway, started as the Iowa & Illinois Railway in 1904, connecting Clinton with Davenport. In 1912 the Davenport & Muscatine Railway linked the two towns in its name. Four years later the two lines consolidated, forming the Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine (CD&M).

The popularity and success of streetcar systems within cities areas gave rise to the idea of electric interurbans, or streetcars that operated between cities. About a dozen electric interurbans began operating in Iowa between 1900 and 1920. One of the earliest – the Iowa & Illinois Railway – began operating in 1904 between Davenport and Clinton by way of Bettendorf, LeClaire, and Princeton. In 1912, a second line was opened between Davenport and Muscatine, when the holding company that controlled Davenport's streetcar system purchased Muscatine's system. The two interurbans – the Iowa & Illinois and the Davenport & Muscatine – were consolidated in 1916 as the Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine (CD&M). The CD&M operated electric cars between the three cities from that date until 1938.³⁵⁸

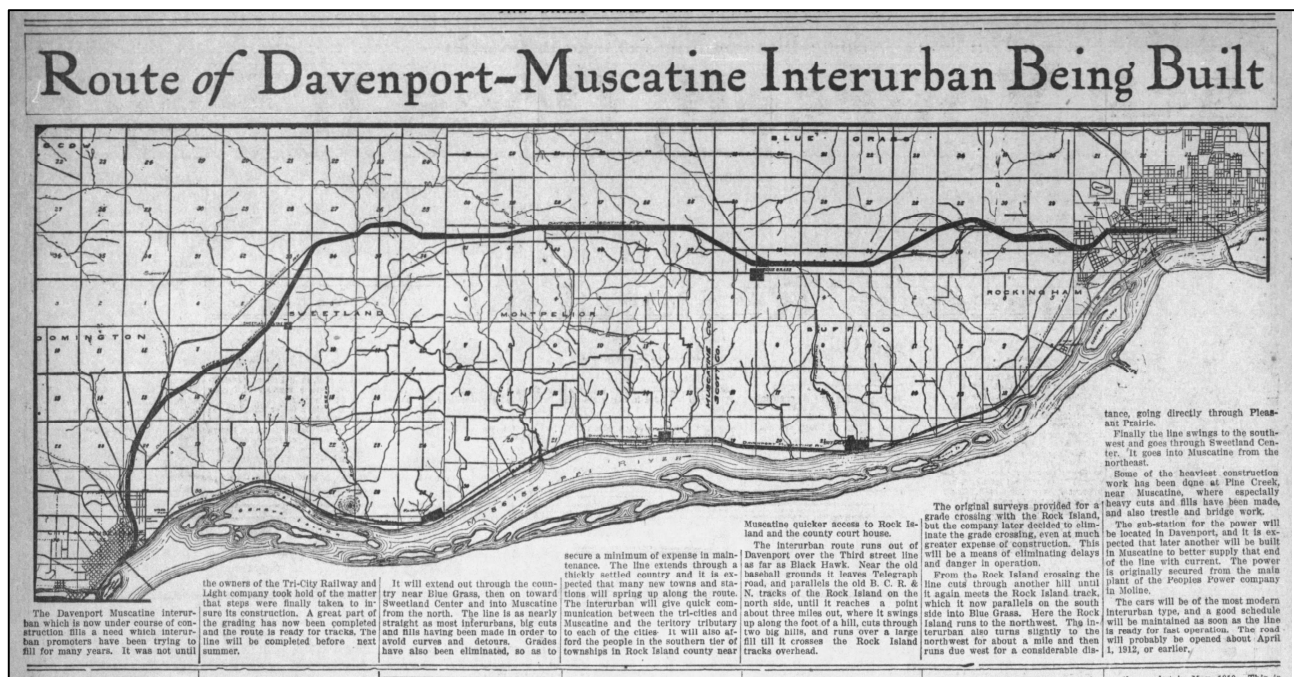


Figure 80. The Planned Route of Davenport-Muscatine Interurban, 1911. The interurban essentially followed the alternate route considered by the Rock Island for its Davenport to Muscatine River Railroad in 1880. Source: *Davenport Daily Times*, October 28, 1911

The Davenport & Muscatine interurban line was the last railroad built in Muscatine County. The route essentially followed the alternate route (through the upland hills) once considered by the Rock Island for its Davenport to Muscatine River Railroad in 1880. When most of the grading was completed in October 1911, and tracklaying was about to begin, the *Davenport Daily Times* gave a description of the route and some of the topographical obstacles to overcome in Muscatine County:

³⁵⁷ Steve Sullivan, "Milwaukee Track Abandonment Is Supported," *Muscatine Journal*, July 30, 1982; "Legal Notice [Railroad Abandonment Pending]," *Muscatine Journal*, September 7, 1982.

³⁵⁸ Wayne A. DeJohn, "The Interurban Years," *Palimpsest* 62/2 (March 1981), 35.

From the Rock Island crossing [in Davenport] the line cuts through another hill until it again meets the Rock Island track, which it now parallels on the south side into Blue Grass. Here the Rock Island runs to the northwest. The interurban also turns slightly to the north west for about a mile and then runs due west for a considerable distance, going directly through Pleasant Prairie.

Finally the line swings to the southwest and goes through Sweetland Center. It goes into Muscatine from the northeast.

*Some of the heaviest construction work has been done at Pine Creek, near Muscatine, where especially deep cuts and fills have been made, and also trestle and bridge work.*³⁵⁹

The entire line from Davenport to Muscatine required 27 bridges, three of which were large ones. According to the *Electric Railway Journal*, the deck girder bridge over Pine Creek in Section 27 of Wilton Township was one of the most expensive bridges along the route:

Although the country is rolling, no very expensive bridges were necessary. Those required were built with steel girders on concrete abutments. In some cases where under-crossings were required there was some question as to the advisability of installing permanent structures, as there was a possibility that they might be eliminated in time. At these points trestles of creosoted timber were constructed. *One of the most expensive bridges was built over Pine Creek.* During the construction period a central material yard was established at Blue Grass. Steam railroad cars were hauled over the electric line to this point and unloaded in case the material was not needed at the front immediately.³⁶⁰

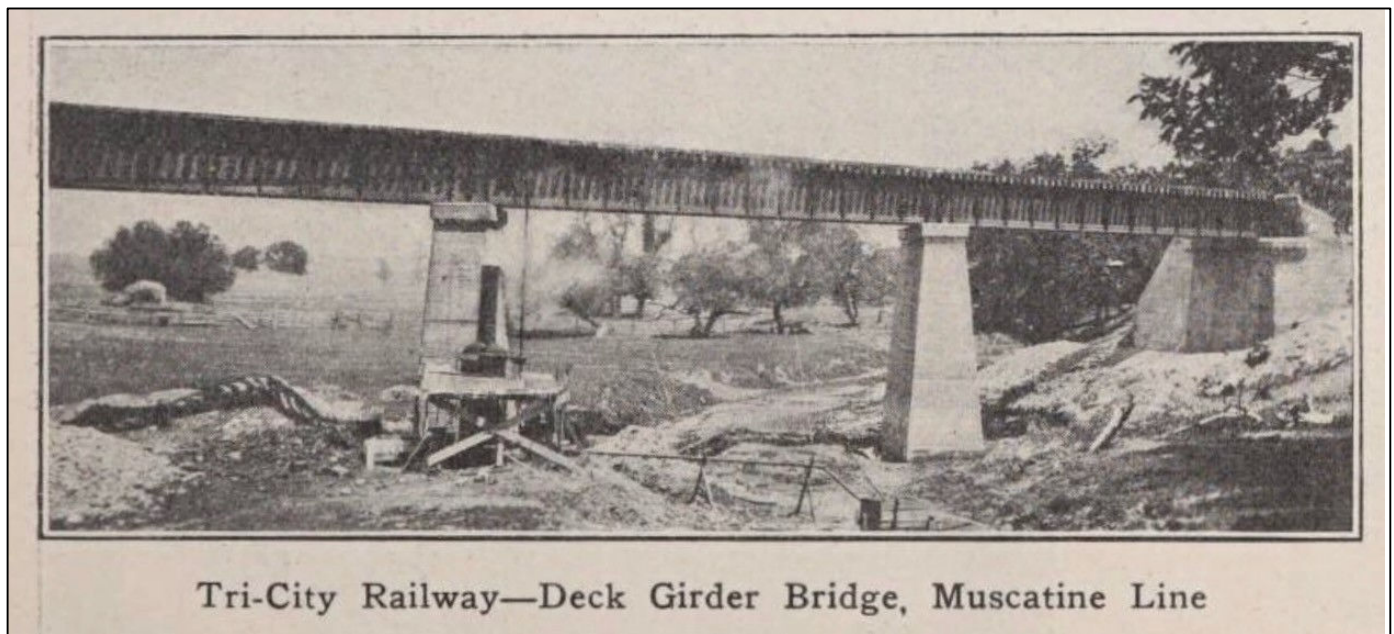


Figure 81. View of the construction of the Pine Creek Interurban Railroad Bridge, 1912, “one of the most expensive bridges” on the route. This was a deck girder bridge with concrete abutments and piers. Only the two concrete piers framing Pine Creek are extant, apparently the only surviving resources of the CD&M in Muscatine County. Source: *Electric Railway Journal* 1912:1267

Tracks were laid with 70-pound rails and oak ties, and lined with 22-foot poles carrying the overhead wire that powered the interurban cars. The older line from Clinton to Davenport operated on a 620-volt current. The newer Davenport to Muscatine route operated on a 1,200-volt capacity. The power difference required different equipment between the two sections, and so they were operated as separate divisions, requiring passengers to transfer in Davenport to move from one division to another. The interurban companies sold electricity to residents and towns along the CD&M route, offering an early form of rural electrification.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ “Route of Davenport-Muscatine Interurban Being Built,” *Davenport Daily Times*, October 28, 1911. Author’s emphasis to highlight the interurban piers at Pine Creek, the only known extant resource of the CD&M Interurban in Muscatine County.

³⁶⁰ “Engineering and Operating Features of the Tri-City Railway, Davenport, Ia.,” *Electric Railway Journal* 40/25 (December 28, 1912), 1267. Author’s emphasis.

³⁶¹ DeJohn, “The Interurban Years,” 35.

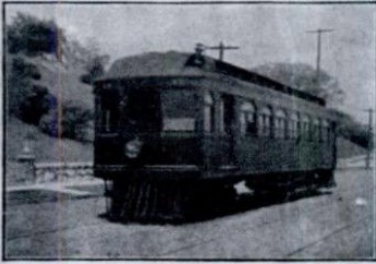
GEOGRAPHICAL LIST OF STATIONS C. D. & M. RAILWAY		INTERURBAN TIME TABLE	
DAVENPORT	DAVENPORT	EFFECTIVE MARCH 1ST, 1917	
BETTENDORF	Blackhawk		
Zimmerman	Fairmont		
Davis Gardens	Petersen	Clinton, Davenport and Muscatine Ry.	
Nuttings	Cawlesell		
Iowana	Schupp		
Fennos	Steenholt		
Schutter	Hetsel		
PLEAS. VALLEY	Coates		
Mason	Gabbert		
McArthur	Barnes		
Alta Ripa	Brue		
Snell	BLUE GRASS		
Tile Works	Schroeder		
Riverview	Nicholson		
Smiths	Drum		
Suiter	Abee		
Sharon	Baker		
LE CLAIRE	PLEASANT PRAIRIE		
Walnut Street	Stecker		
I. & I. PARK	Paul		
Hopsons	Kelley		
Collage Grove	Melpine		
Budd Creek	Pine Creek		
PRINCETON	RAINBOW		
Toby	Van Camp		
School House Road	SWEETLAND		
W. Public Highway	Halfiegh		
Waple	Sherley		
Folletta	Richman		
SHAFFTON	CITY LIMITS		
Oakes Park	MUSCATINE		
Rock Creek			
CAMANCHE			
Fenions			
Power House			
Car Barn			
CLINTON			

Figure 82. CD&M Interurban Timetable, 1917, lists the stations in Muscatine County between the Scott County line and the city of Muscatine: PLEASANT PRAIRIE, Stecker, Paul, Kelley, Melpine, Pine Creek, Rainbow, Van Camp, SWEETLAND [Center], Halfiegh, Sherley, and Richman Crossing. Most of these were no more than a stop and shelter (like Melpine) for those waiting to catch the interurban, while the capitalized station names are actual villages. Source: Johnson 2010:69

A different set of interurban cars and motormen were used on the Davenport-Muscatine line, and passengers transferred from the Clinton division at the Perry Street depot in Davenport. The cars traveled west on Telegraph Road to the first major stop at Blue Grass, “the center of a prosperous farming district and a town of several hundred people,” the interurban track generally paralleling the Rock Island trunk line until that point. When the cars entered Muscatine County, they “veered southwestward to within about four or five miles of the Mississippi River before curving back toward Pleasant Prairie and Sweetland.” As historian Wayne DeJohn writes: “Most of the dozen or so stops in Muscatine County were farm or road inter-sections indicating lighter traffic than on the Clinton division. The latter was busier, both in freight and in passenger volume, but in the first ten to fifteen years of operation both parts of the line frequently enjoyed full cars and plenty of business.”³⁶²

At its peak during the World War I years, the CD&M provided twelve runs, as early as 5:10 AM and as late as 11:30 PM, were made from Davenport to Muscatine. In the beginning, the trip between the two cities took two and a quarter hours, but by the 1920s and early 1930s, the time had been reduced to an average of 75 to 80 minutes.³⁶³ Some of the towns along the route had depots, ticket agents, and even waiting rooms. At some of the rural stops, like Melpine Crossing, the interurban company provided small shelters, while others had just a crossing road. In either situation, passengers were required to signal their desire to board the car:

At some of the lesser stops, small sheds provided shelter for waiting riders. Rural riders, however, usually had to signal the train in order to board. The procedure recommended by the company was to extend one’s arm horizontally above the tracks and wait for the motorman to blow the whistle twice in acknowledgment. After nightfall this was not effective, and waiting riders were then urged to “light a match or a piece of paper and wave it until the motor-man answers the signal.”³⁶⁴

³⁶² DeJohn, “The Interurban Years,” 37-38.

³⁶³ DeJohn, “The Interurban Years,” 36.

³⁶⁴ DeJohn, “The Interurban Years,” 38.



Figure 83. Scenes on the Davenport & Muscatine Railway: (left) - Richman Crossing in Bloomington Township, 1913. The last station before the city of Muscatine had no waiting shelter; a rider may have been waiting in the automobile parked at the crossing; (right) - Melpine Station in Sweetland Township with shelter shed for waiting riders, 1914. Sources: Collection of Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa

In the 1920s, the interurban company added an express trucking service, with “free pickup and delivery of goods anywhere in the Tri-Cities.”³⁶⁵ The trucks were soon operating in areas far from the interurban’s trackage, “making regular express runs to Buffalo, Montpelier, and other places.”³⁶⁶

In 1928, with competition from automobiles and road improvements increasing, the CD&M began supplementing its interurban with a motor coach service. Like its trucking service, the motor coaches, or buses, operated apart from the interurban tracks. The bus route between Clinton and Davenport utilized the newly designated and only paved section of US Highway 61. In 1929, after US 61 was paved between Davenport and Muscatine, the CD&M buses began traveling the highway between those two cities, making regular stops at Buffalo, Montpelier, and Fairport.³⁶⁷

GEOGRAPHICAL LIST OF STATIONS BETWEEN DAVENPORT AND MUSCATINE VIA COACH LINE

DAVENPORT	Broncho
Behrens	Baer
Fairview School	Wild Cat Den (State Park)
Junge	Meyers
Linswood	Fairport
Dewey	Bransart
Buffalo	Atwell
Dolese	Genova School
Morehead	MUSCATINE
Montpelier	

Connections at Muscatine with C. R. I. & P., C. M. St. P. & P.—C. R. & I. C. Coaches to Burlington, Keokuk, Iowa City and Cedar Rapids.

Connections at Davenport for Clinton, Iowa, via C. D. & M. Coach or Electric Train.

Connections at Davenport with C. R. & I. C. Coaches for Cedar Rapids.

Connections at Clinton with C. & N. W. Ry. for points east and west. Information concerning schedules, pullman reservations and baggage transfer will be supplied by our agents or general office at Davenport, Iowa.

Information concerning Bus lines cheerfully supplied by our agents.

C. D. & M. RAILWAY TIME TABLE

GEOGRAPHICAL LIST OF STATIONS

CLINTON	Davis Gardens
Car Barn	Zimmerman
Fennell—Jct. Lin. Hgts.	Bitterdorf
Davenport—Harrison School	DAVENPORT
CAMANCHE	Blackhawk
Rock Creek	Fairmont
SHARPTON	Petersen
Follett	Casswell
W. Public	Schuyler
Wagon	Steenholt
School House Road	Hotel
Tubey	Coates
PRINCETON	Gilbert
Budd Creek	Bruce
Pennock	BLUE GRASS
Edgewater	Schroeder
Quarry	Nicholson
Ferry Street	Drum
I. E. CLAIRE	Albee
Sharon	Baker
Smith	PLEAS, PRAIRIE
Smiths	Stecker
Revering	Pail
Tile Works	Kelley
Millport	Melpine
Alta Ripa	Pine Creek
Country Club	RAINBOW
Morgan	Van Camp
PLEAS, VALLEY	SWEETLAND
Schutter	Halfway
Fennell	Shirley
Riverside Power Plant	Richman
Iowans	City Limits
Nottings	MUSCATINE

For any further information you may desire about passenger, freight or baggage tariffs, don't hesitate to apply to our Station Agents or General Offices:—United Light Bldg., 2nd and Perry Sts., Davenport, Phone Ken. 5008.

TICKET OFFICES

Davenport—213 Perry Street. Phone Ken. 578.

Clinton—4th Ave. S., between 1st and 2nd Streets. Phone Bell 403.

Muscatine—109 Iowa Street. Phone 113.

Clinton, Davenport and Muscatine Railway

INTERURBAN AND MOTOR COACH TIME TABLE



**SWIFT
CLEAN
SAFE**

Figure 84. 1929 Interurban and Motor Coach Time Table. The addition of motor coaches, or buses, to the interurban service in the late 1920s allowed the company to reach towns not served by the interurban route. The bus service reveals the interurban’s intense competition from automobiles at this time. Source: Courtesy of Bill Koellner, West Liberty, Iowa

³⁶⁵ DeJohn, “The Interurban Years,” 42: “A separate freight depot at 101 Brady Street in Davenport was the hub of this expanding business.”

³⁶⁶ Ibid..

³⁶⁷ DeJohn, “The Interurban Years,” 42-43.

The completion of the CD&M Interurban Railway gave every township within Muscatine County at least one railroad connection, a situation not common in all areas of Iowa.³⁶⁸ By 1938, as the *Muscatine Journal* wrote, “the Davenport-Muscatine line had operated at substantial losses for the past five years and there was no prospect for material increase in traffic.” Trucks and busses could “give better service than is now offered by the railway line.” The 30-mile Davenport-Muscatine line was abandoned in August 1938, and the Davenport-Clinton line soon followed.³⁶⁹

Muscatine & Iowa City Railway – Interurban (1916) - In March 1916, after years of promises and planning, the Muscatine & Iowa City Railway began interurban service. At first, the proposed route involved leasing existing rail lines, but also constructing a brand new interurban track between just west of Adams Station to just south of Hills. By 1916, that idea was scrapped, and the plans moderated to electrifying existing rail lines, including: 1) the old Muscatine Western (or Rock Island Muscatine Division) from Muscatine to Montezuma; and 2) the St. Louis to Minneapolis Rock Island line from Iowa Junction north to Iowa City. According to the *Muscatine News Tribune*, “Twenty-two towns and cities will be touched by the electrical cars over the Montezuma branch,” including “Muscatine, Bayfield, Adams, Nichols, River Junction, Iowa Junction, Hills, Iowa City, Riverside, Kalona, Wellman, Nira, Kinross, South English, Webster, Keskick, Thornburg, What Cheer, Gibson, Barnes, and Montezuma.”³⁷⁰ On March 19, 1916, the first day of operations, the Muscatine & Iowa City Railway successfully carried 300 passengers in cars over the line.³⁷¹ After just a few months in service, however, the Rock Island tracks were returned to steam train service, and the Muscatine & Iowa City Railway surrendered its franchise and ceased operations on August 11, 1916.³⁷²

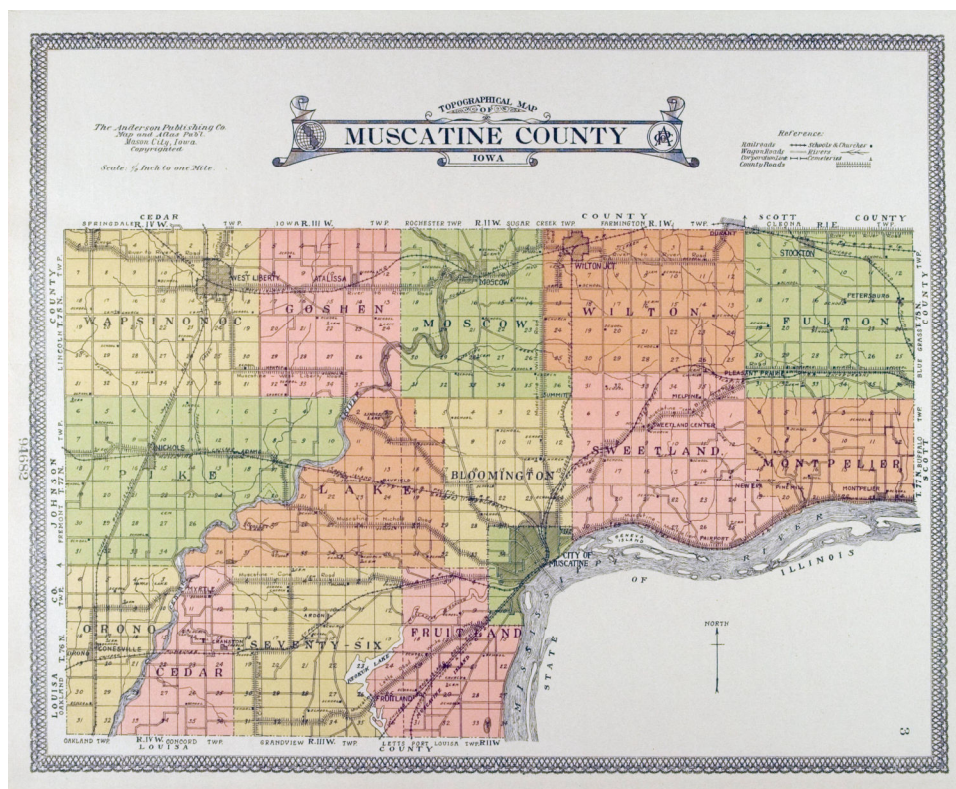


Figure 85. The 1916 Plat Map of Muscatine County shows the county's complete railroad development, with railroad access in every township. Source: Anderson Publishing Company, 1916

³⁶⁸ Rogers, *Country Schools and Churches Survey*, 8.

³⁶⁹ “Schuyler Recalls Interesting Events of Past With Proposal to Abandon Interurban Service, *Muscatine Journal*, June 29, 1938; “Abandonment Advised for Interurban Line,” *Muscatine Journal*, August 26, 1938.

³⁷⁰ *Muscatine Journal*, June 1, 1915; “\$2,500,000 Electric Railway from Muscatine Wins Positive Assurance,” *Muscatine News Tribune*, October 20, 1915.

³⁷¹ “New Electric Service Becomes Reality Here,” *Muscatine News Tribune*, March 20, 1916.

³⁷² “Steam Service Again Saturday – M. & I. C Surrenders Franchise Friday,” *Muscatine Journal*, August 10, 1916.