

## C&NW RY WILL SOON BE HISTORY

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story from Oskaloosa Herald

The Chicago and Northwestern Ry will soon be a thing of the past in Mahaska County, with railway crews completing the removal of the rails and workers employed by Willis Parker salvaging the ties, while right of way is being transferred to farmers along the route.

Abandonment of the North Western branch line between What Cheer and Consol was authorized by the ICC at Washington DC, last year after revenue had dropped far below operating costs due to the passing of the large scale coal mining activities in the southern Iowa coal fields served by the road.

Buildings were sold last year, but actual dismantling of the line did not get underway until this year. Work crews started at the southwest end of the branch and have been removing bridges and rails. Tie salvagers have followed on the heels of the work train.

The opening of extensive mining operations around What Cheer and later in eastern and southern Mahaska County attracted railroad builders and the Ottumwa, Cedar Falls and St. Paul Railway was organized July 2, 1883, to serve growing coal industry. The following year the line from Belle Plaine reached Stark and the property was acquired by the Northwestern on October 24, 1884.

A spur entered the county in the southeast corner of Monroe township to serve the Columbia Coal Co. mines and the branch entered Mahaska in the center of section 23 of White Oak township, about a mile and a half east of Tioga.

The line was extended from Stark to Muchakinock, three and a half miles to serve that field and another line built south from Stark to Lost Creek. Spurs from the Muchakinock line were built to Colon, Morrisville, Klondike, of the Iowa Fuel Company, Excelsior, Givin and the Oskaloosa Coal and Mining company workings.

Then as the Muchakinock field was exhausted that line was gradually

abandoned and a new southwest line was constructed to the operation in the vicinity of old Buxton in 1901. This line touched the workings of the Rex Fuel company, White City, the Cricket Coal company, the Eveland Coal company, Rexton, Whiteburg and Maple. A coal line was built south of Kakonta to old Coalfield.

The Southern Iowa Railway company which was a part of the mining field rail network was organized March 27, 1900, and became the property of the Northwestern on June 8, 1901.

Eventually the Buxton field was abandoned and operations were carried farther southwestward into Monroe county and the Northwestern extended its lines and from Miami to Consol in from Buxton to Miami in 1913 and 1915. Although immense coal deposits remain in the territory as served by the Northwestern mining activities gradually died and the field was abandoned.

The principal tonnage hauled by the Northwestern was coal, yet the line served a number of inland communities which became important trading centers after the line was built. Among these were Tioga, Wright and Laconta - now Truax.

The branch might never have been abandoned but for the disastrous cloudburst in the Coal Creek locality two years ago which destroyed bridges and trackage. The cost of rebuilding was regarded as excessive in comparison with the income from the line.

Oskaloosa made many efforts to attract the Northwestern to this city. At one time its mining lines were within a couple of miles of Oskaloosa, just south of town. The main line crossed the Des Moines river just northwest of Eddyville. Daily passenger and mail trains were operated between Belle Plaine and Buxton. Oskaloosans who used the Northwestern generally made connections at Stark on the old Burlington line. Now both the CB\*Q and the Northwestern have taken their departure.

The passing of the road recalls the colorful days of Mahaska's mining importance. Thousands of mine workers found employment in the various coal fields about Oskaloosa and Mahaska easily led the state in coal production. Pay days found Oskaloosa packed with miners and their families and the money flowed almost as freely as water.