

New Albany-Salem spurred Monroe County growth

By ROSE WOERTZ

Special to the H-T

In his comfortable home in New Albany in the late 1840's James Brooks made some plans for his future. His plans eventually changed Bloomington from just another Indiana county seat town into a community that began to grow more rapidly.

ENTERPRISING AMERICAN businessmen were replacing horse-power with railroad-power. Monroe Countians who wanted to travel anywhere went on a stagecoach operated by two brothers, Samuel and James Orchard. Farm produce and manufactured goods went to Louisville by wagon over dirt roads that turned to sticky mud when it rained.

Brooks' original idea was to link New Albany and Salem with a railroad that would carry passengers and freight between those two points on the Indiana map. He didn't have the capitol to build the line himself. What he did have was the imagination and the kind of personality to persuade southern Hoosiers between New Albany and Salem that the railroad would be of mutual benefit. They were asked to put up enough

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money in the form of donations or purchase of stocks.

IN JANUARY 1847 Brooks was granted a license by the state to build his railroad. As the young company began to lay rails in its northward progress Monroe Countians began to take notice

Seeing the advantages of the "iron horse" citizens here met in a series of meetings to insure that this county would have railroad service, too. Money for subscriptions was no problem. Most every property owner pledged to the company and a right-of-way was also guaranteed. Some Monroe Countians gave their investment in the form of cordwood, land, timber, or bridge stone. In exchange Bloomington was promised a round-

house, machine shops, and a division freight terminal.

BY THE FALL of 1850 the New Albany and Salem Railroad surveyors were working their way through the county. Originally the line was to be located farther west in the southern part of the county, but Smithville residents successfully argued that rail service through their town would bring more business out of the mills near there.

The original route through Bloomington was located east of the present tracks along Walnut Street. However, it was later changed to what was called the "Bedford Road" and along Morton Street.

CLOSE TO \$100,000 worth of stock was put up by Monroe Countians. Built on a shoe string, the railroad progressed across the county in 1853-54.

According to *History of Lawrence and Monroe Counties, Indiana*, "Its plaything-like track was laid of common flat-bar iron, spiked through to sawed wooden stringers, braced apart and bound together every six feet by wooden cross-ties.

The ordinary pounding of the engines on this flat-bar track often loosened the flat-headed nails and the end of the springing up was called a

'Sneak-head'. The constant loosening of these bars was a source of trouble and danger."

According to Brooks' promise, Bloomington got its four-stall roundhouse. It also got a machine shop in a lean-to and a brick depot located on Gentry Avenue where the First National Bank drive-in now stands.

THE TWO GREATEST challenges in building the railroad through the county were the high bridge and fill at Jackson Creek and a deep rock clay cut at the edge of town. It was necessary to do some blasting for the latter.

The first train that rolled up the track through Bloomington was a light weight wood burner pulling little eight-ton boxcars so small that the employees couldn't stand up straight in them. That first engine was soon followed by two light weight engines named the James Brooks and the Phoebe Brooks after the owner and his wife. They pulled freight and passenger cars that were tiny compared to today's standards, but they were adequate enough in the early days of the company.

FROM THE BEGINNING, however, the

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