# The Iowa Northern Railway

Article by John Leopard

Yes, the Rock Island Line was a "mighty fine line," or so the song says. Although gone as an operating entity, the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad lives on behind the liveries of a list of other roads that resurrected operations on portions of the former road. Some of these service restorations have been notable, such as Cotton Belt's purchase of 992 miles of track, known as the Golden State Route, between St. Louis and Santa Rosa, New Mexico, west of Tucumcari. Others were much less ambitious, like the sale of 44 miles of line in Arkansas to upstart shortline Little Rock & Western.

One success story rising from the ashes of the Rock Island bankruptcy is the Iowa Northern Railway (IANR), which operates 125 miles of former Rock Island trackage in Iowa. Angling northwest from Cedar Rapids, through Waterloo, to Manly, Iowa, this line was once a key component of the Rock Island system, hosting the *Zephyr Rocket*, a passenger train jointly operated by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and Rock Island between St. Louis and Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. In addition, IANR operates 25 miles of former Chicago Great Western Railway track between Waterloo and Oelwein.

## Iowa Northern's Humble Beginnings

Built by Rock Island predecessor Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern, the Cedar Rapids–Manly line toiled in relative obscurity after the last *Zephyr Rocket* operated on April 8, 1967. Freight traffic on the route was in decline and by the mid-1970s, Rock Island as a whole was in trouble. Pressure from stronger neighboring competitors like Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, Chicago & North Western, and CB&Q, along with an overbuilt rail network in middle America, contributed to a downward spiral for Rock Island's fortunes.

Union Pacific became interested in the Rock Island as a means to reach Chicago, and in September 1964, UP made public a proposal to merge the two companies. The case dragged on in the halls of the Interstate Commerce Commission for nearly ten years. Final approval came in November 1974. By then, however, Union Pacific became disinterested in its marriage proposal to Rock Island and walked away. Meanwhile, Rock Island's management, believing takeover by UP was imminent, allowed the physical plant to deteriorate.

The death knell for Rock Island, already well into its third bankruptcy, began in summer 1979 when the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks and the United Transportation Union struck the property as management refused to give in to labor's demand for retroactive wage increases. A short while later, the ICC directed several neighboring carriers to take over Rock Island's operations at the federal government's expense. These arrangements lasted until March 23, 1980, when the ICC refused to extend its directed service order, and the bankruptcy trustee began to liquidate the property.

## Railroad before Railway

Shortly after the collapse of the Rock Island in 1980, farmers along the Cedar Rapids–Manly route became worried about the survival of rail service. To meet their concerns, shippers along the line, collectively known as the Shell Rock Valley Shippers Association, began negotiations with the Carus Corporation of LaSalle, Illinois.

Carus owned the LaSalle & Bureau County Railroad, a name that dates from 1893 on an eight-mile zinc-hauling line in its namesake county in Illinois. Carus had prior dealings with the Rock Island trustee, since they had recently begun leasing former Rock Island track in the Chicago Port District and Blue Island, Illinois, areas. Carus hired the consulting firm of John Gohman and Associates to aid in setting up the Chicagoland operations. After Gohman became aware of the Shell Rock Valley Shippers intentions, he contacted them about operating the line. For a pledge of guaranteed business from the shippers, Carus leased portions of the Cedar Rapids–Manly route from the Rock Island's trustee, and the Iowa Northern Rail*road* was formed in August 1981.

Train service was restored in stages. In the beginning, Carus leased the track from Cedar Rapids to Washburn, where the first run made on August 8, 1981. An office was established in the small metal depot at Vinton and Tom Logel, a former Rock Island agent at Iowa Falls, was hired to deal with customers on that portion of line.

On October 27, 1981, the north end of the railroad was opened from Nora Springs to Shell Rock. At that time, trains could not run to Manly because of bad track conditions, and did not operate east of Shell Rock for the same reason. In addition, most street crossings in Cedar Falls and Waterloo had been paved over and trains could not operate through them. An office was established in Greene, and C.J. Stoffer, a former Rock Island train dispatcher, was hired by Carus to handle customers on the north end of the railroad. This operation of two separate segments continued until late summer 1982, when the railroad was opened the entire way from Cedar Rapids to Manly.

On July 23, 1984, the 12 online elevator companies that made up the Shell


***Above:*** **On April 18, 1989, CF7 2493 rests between assignments at Bryant Yard in Waterloo. This unit began life in 1949 as Santa Fe F7A 300L. It entered Santa Fe's CF7 rebuild program at the railroad's Cleburne, Texas, shops in 1974, emerging as number 2493. During the 1970s, the CF7 program converted 233 aging F-series cab units into road switchers. Santa Fe went on to sell a number them to shortlines all across the country. The 2493 came to the IANR in 1987, retaining its Santa Fe road number. — *John Leopard photo***

***Right:*** **The Farmers Coop at Manly is IANR's largest grain shipper. On the chilly morning of February 15, 2007, the North Crew is switching past the Coop elevator. In this photo, the train is on a short section of Union Pacific's "Spine Line" trackage that IANR uses through Manly to reach the Manly Terminal yard and ethanol storage/loading facility just north of town. — *John Leopard photo***

Rock Valley Shippers Association closed on a loan package from federal and state agencies and purchased the rail system from the Rock Island's trustee. Shortly before securing this loan, the shippers association bought out Carus' interest in the line and renamed it the Iowa Northern Rail*way* Company.

## A NEW BEGINNING

During IANR's formative years, a man named Daniel Sabin worked as a transportation consultant to the grain dealers along the line. Frustrated with ten years of operating a railroad, the dealers approached Sabin about finding a buyer for the line. Sabin grew up in Manly in a railroad family. His father started on the line in 1944 as a steam locomotive fireman. Dan Sabin and his brothers followed in their father's footsteps toward careers with the Rock Island, Dan worked as a track laborer and train order operator through high school, then as a train dispatcher from 1971 through the end of 1977.

After leaving the Rock Island in 1978, Sabin earned a degree in economics and business, moving on to serve as an operating and planning officer at both Canadian Pacific and Chessie System. He then established a consulting firm in 1987, which brought him back to his roots working with the Iowa Northern. With such close ties to the IANR line, Sabin wanted to save it.

In November 1994, Sabin partnered with the Iron Road Railways, Incorporated, to purchase the company. Created in 1993, Iron Road Railways was a shortline and regional holding company that first acquired Canadian Pacific's former Dominion Atlantic property (now Windsor & Hantsport) in Nova Scotia in August 1994. After closing on the IANR in November, Iron Road's next acquisition came in 1995 with the takeover of the Bangor & Aroostook, followed closely by the purchase of additional CPR track in Maine, Vermont, and Quebec.

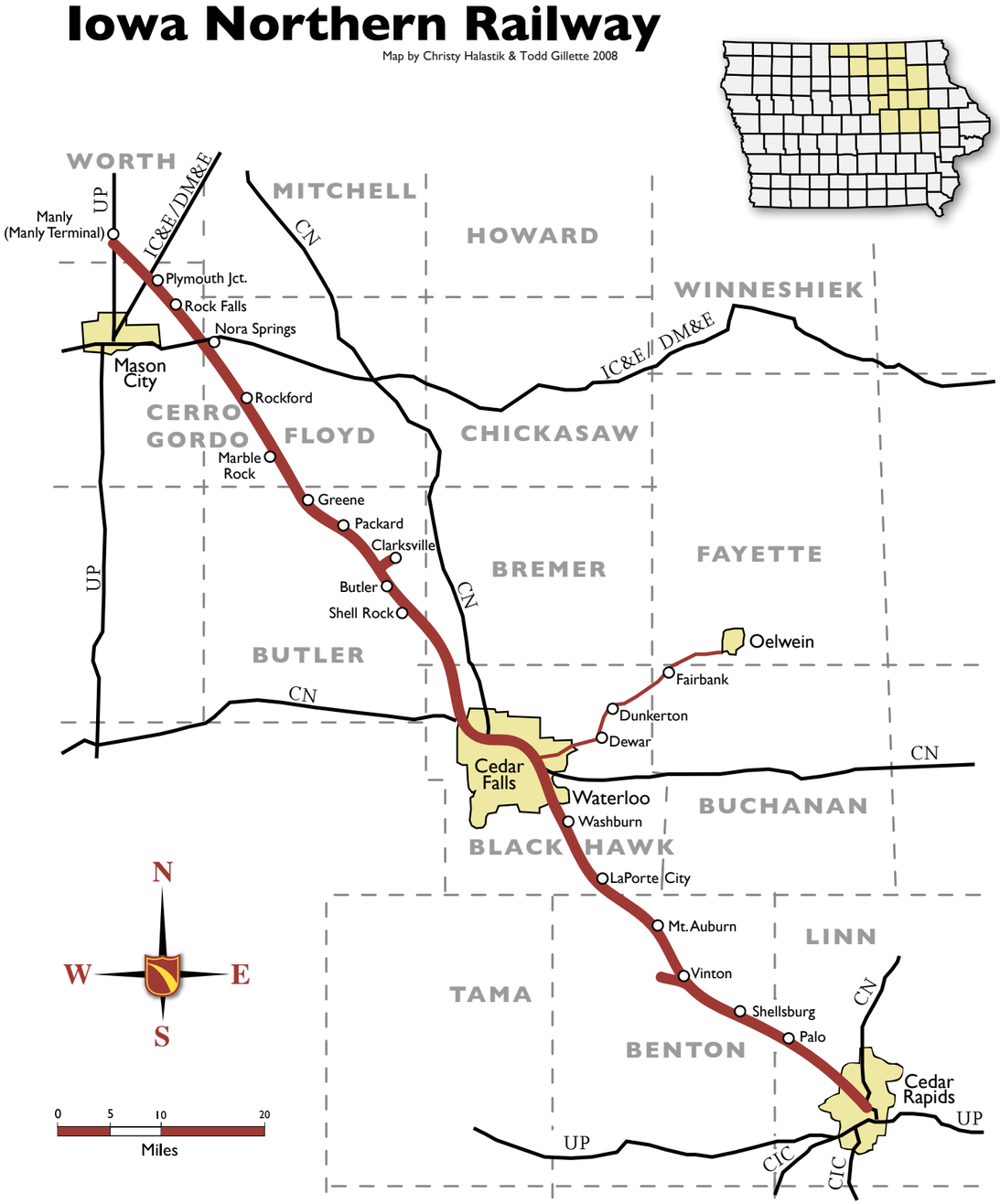
Back on Iowa Northern, the group immediately reduced shipping rates, increased the freight car fleet, and doubled train frequency. However, poor track conditions proved costly, often leading to derailments. During Sabin's tenure, the company has poured $15 million into track repairs, and he is quick to credit the state of Iowa for providing financial assistance used in track repair programs. In the second financial quarter of 2005, Sabin bought out the remaining 30 percent interest of Iron Road Railways and completed terms with all other remaining shareholders to become the sole owner of the company.

The Sabin family's railroading tradition continues at IANR with Dan's brother, Mark, serving as Vice President–General Manager. Two of Dan's sons, Joshua and Jonah, serve as Director–Administration, and Director–Field operations, respectively. In addition, Dan's brother-in-law, Bill Rhodes, is Director–Reload Marketing, along with two nephews who are project managers.

## CHANGES IN THE WATERLOO AREA

During the mid-1980s, construction projects brought about by the relocation and expansion of U.S. Highway 218 through Waterloo changed the look of railroad operations in that city. The former Rock Island mainline between Waterloo and neighboring Cedar Falls was removed, and IANR secured trackage rights over a convoluted route between the two cities. In addition, IANR's Waterloo Yard was in the path of the new highway and government funds were used to build a new yard and

***Below:*** **The bridge over the Shell Rock River at Rockford feels the weight of a trio of GP38–2s and a train of loaded covered hoppers. This is the North Job making a return trip to Greene on February 8, 2005.** ***—John Leopard photo***



***Below:*** **Railroad-wise, Oelwein is a shadow of its former self. But there is still plenty to offer the rail photographer. The Hub City Railway Museum has an interesting collection of equipment surrounding the former Railway Express Agency station and CGW yard office. Underneath the yardmaster's high tower rests nicely restored FP7A 116. On September 7, 2006, the Oelwein Job is finishing an air test and is about to depart with a cut of reconditioned freight cars from the Transco shop. — *John Leopard photo***


shop near southeast Waterloo, called Bryant Yard.

Traveling from east to west, trains departing Bryant Yard entered a mile of trackage rights over C&NW track that include a bridge over the Cedar River. Next came a connection with Illinois Central on the northeast side of Waterloo. IC track was used to circle the north side of the city; this was once part of interurban-electric line Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern. At West Tower, IANR trains entered IC's Chicago–Omaha mainline, using that route west to Cedar Falls, where after crossing the Cedar River for a second time, home rails toward Greene and Manly were found. This route continues today, albeit the players have changed from C&NW to UP and IC to Canadian National.

Iowa Northern was not the only railroad in Waterloo affected by the highway construction. Chicago & North Western operated a former Chicago Great Western line through the city that would also be displaced by the new Highway 218 project. C&NW wished to abandon its track southwest from Waterloo to Marshalltown, leaving the 25-mile Waterloo–Oelwein segment isolated from the rest of its system. In fall 1987, IANR and C&NW began a haulage agreement under which cars for C&NW's island operation at Waterloo would be handled in regular IANR freights from Cedar Rapids and Manly.

Opportunity for expansion came to Iowa Northern when Transco Railway Products acquired Union Pacific's line between Dewar, just outside of Waterloo, and Oelwein. Transco, a contract railcar repair firm, was in jeopardy of losing its only rail outlet since UP indicated its desire to abandon the line. In October 2003, Transco finalized the purchase and in turn leased the line to IANR, which maintains, markets, and provides train service to Oelwein. Transco dubbed the 25-mile line as the D&W Railroad; the initials are in remembrance of two Transco employees who lost their lives on the job.

For years, Oelwein was the hub of the Chicago Great Western Railway. At one time, four main lines radiated from Oelwein, stretching to Chicago, the Twin Cities, Omaha, and Kansas City. A large switching yard and car and locomotive shops once employed 1,200 people. CGW was acquired by C&NW in 1968, which was in turn merged with UP in 1995. Transco took over the CGW car shop on August 1, 1969. Currently, Transco employs up to 100 people and utilizes a pair of SW1 switchers to move cars about the repair areas.

Of interest to rail historians at Oelwein is the Hub City Heritage Railway Museum. Artifacts are housed in the former CGW passenger station and yard office building, including the yardmaster's high tower. A variety of rail equipment surrounds these structures including a CGW FP7A locomotive, EMD SW1 switcher, Alco S-1 switcher, 40-foot steel CGW boxcar, Rock Island wooden caboose, and CGW steel bay-window caboose. The museum is open every Sunday from 1–4PM, from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Iowa Northern's operation of the Oelwein branch soon paid off, as in the first months, grain shippers at Dunkerton and Dewar began shipping by rail to processors at Cedar Rapids for the first time in nearly 20 years. Since Union Pacific owns the track as far east as Dewar, UP continues to switch cars (inbound liquid fertilizer and outbound grain) at the Agvantage Farm Service facility at Dewar, with the exchange of cars between the two companies at UP's Linden Yard in Waterloo.

## Customers and Commodities

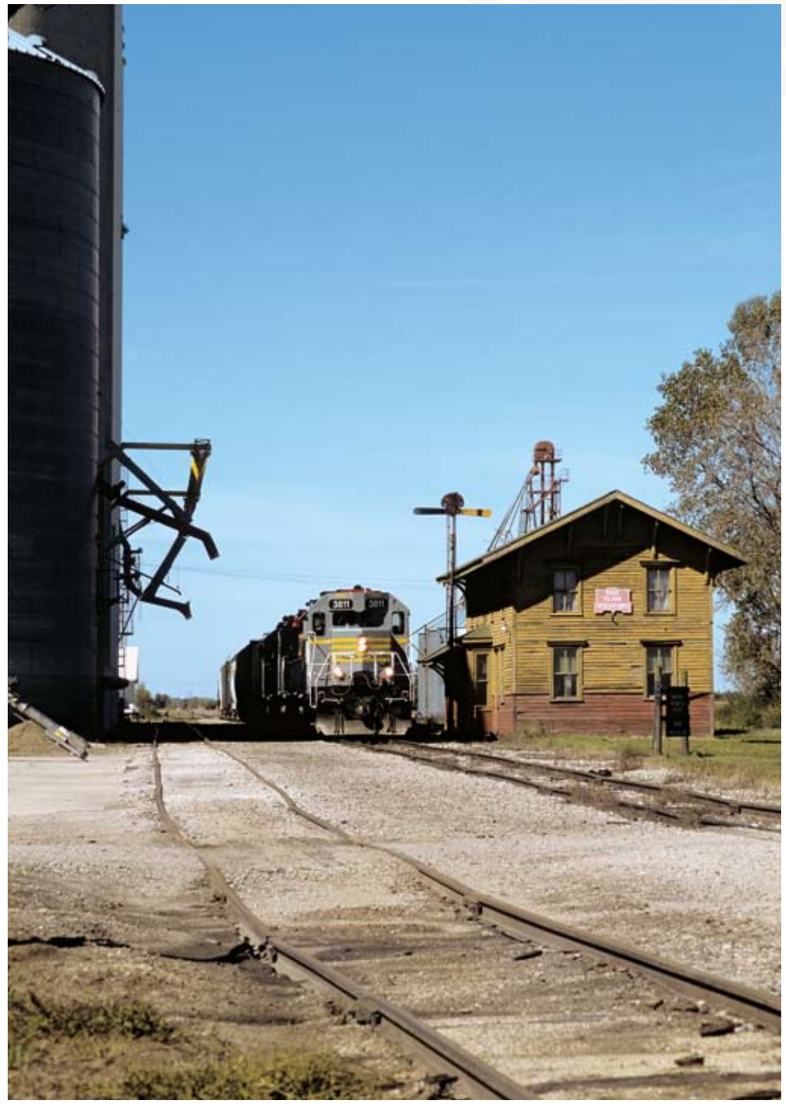
Nearly 180 million bushels of grain, corn, and soybeans are loaded each year at online elevators, which can number up to 18. When Sabin purchased the line in 1994, the company averaged 230 carloads each month; by 2004 this was up to 1,200 carloads monthly. The largest grain shipper is the Farmers Coop at Manly; second is Cartersville Elevator at Nora Springs. The station at Clarksville had no shippers in 1994; it now has three separate companies loading: Peavey, Shear, and United Suppliers, which collectively amount to 15 percent of IANR-originated grain. In addition to online loading points, cars are received from IC&E at Nora Springs that are loaded along the IC&E's network of former Milwaukee Road trackage in northwestern Iowa and southern Minnesota.

Currently, most grain and corn traffic loaded along the IANR is destined to Cedar Rapids for processing into sweeteners, alcohol, and corn starch at the plants of agricultural giants Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) and Cargill. ADM is constructing an ethanol plant at Cedar Rapids that will produce 275 million gallons annually. It will be located adjacent to its existing plant and is expected to be in operation the second half of 2008. Iowa Northern does not serve ADM and Cargill directly and interchanges cars at Cedar Rapids to Union Pacific, Canadian National, and local switching road Cedar Rapids & Iowa City for final delivery.

One customer not directly linked to the agricultural sector is the Cedar Falls Utilities (CFU) coal-fired electric generating plant at Cedar Falls. This small facility consists of two steam turbines; the first, built in 1963, generates 16,500 kilowatts using a stoker boiler. The other unit, put in service in 1973, uses a pulverized coal-fed boiler that generates 35,000 kilowatts of power. In recent years, this small facility did not generate its own power; instead, the plant found it more economical to bring in electricity generated elsewhere via high-tension lines. But, as costs ratcheted upward, CFU restarted its boilers, and beginning in 2000, IANR spotted 89 carloads of coal at CFU, which grew to 845 cars in 2004. Much of the coal was mined at Galacia, Illinois, on the CN (former Illinois Central), and delivered by them in 60- to 70-car blocks at West Waterloo for pick up by IANR.

In an effort to find a more economical source for coal and its handling, CFU upgraded its unloading and stockpile facilities to handle 100-car-plus unit trains. In June 2005, CFU received as a test its first unit train loaded with low-sulfur coal mined at the Spring Creek Mine in Montana. This mine is located along the BNSF, which delivered the train to CN at Sioux City, Iowa. CN then brought the train to IANR at Cedar Falls. Since the handling facilities were upgraded, several unit trains from various sources have been received, mainly from the UP at

***Below:*** **Iowa Northern GP38–2 3811 is in charge of the North Job on September 30, 2005. While the train order signal indicates orders are waiting, none will be issued this day as the train passes the nicely restored depot at Rockford. The design and wood construction of the structure reflects its Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern ancestry. A BCR&N predecessor spiked the first rails through here in 1872. — *John Leopard photo***



Manly, which brings trains loaded at the Monterey Mine in southern Illinois. Iowa Northern supplies a locomotive and crew when CFU has cars of coal to unload. The CFU plant is accessed by a 1.9-mile spur that runs through city streets of Cedar Falls. This segment was once part of Rock Island's main track to Waterloo that was sacrificed in the earlier mentioned highway construction project.

Iowa Northern continues to provide a link to the outside world for the isolated segment of Union Pacific trackage in the Waterloo area. The UP bases a switch crew out of the former CGW yard, in northeast Waterloo, to serve a contingent of customers in the area, like farm tractor and implement manufacturer John Deere; Tyson Foods, formerly Iowa Beef Processors; and Kinder Morgan Terminals, a fertilizer warehouse and distribution center. Iowa Northern handles UP's cars in its regular trains between Cedar Rapids and Waterloo and a smaller number of haulage cars to Manly.

Kinder Morgan Terminals (formerly Midwest Bulk Services), located on the Union Pacific at Waterloo, accepts delivery of 100-car unit potash trains and stores the product until it is required for furtherance via rail or truck. Kinder Morgan contracts with Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, Canada, to manage the latter's U.S. distribution of potash in the Waterloo area. Upwards of 80,000 tons of potash are received annually via unit trains that are brought in via the UP/IANR connection at Manly. Iowa Northern crews bring the trains from the connection at Manly using run-through UP locomotives. The cars are spotted for unloading by Kinder Morgan's own switcher locomotives, a former Boston & Maine SW9 and an ex-Baltimore & Ohio Chicago Terminal SW1.

***Above:* A beautiful September 2004 afternoon finds the North Job trundling southward near Rock Falls. With only three boxcars in tow, the trio of GP38–2s is having an easy go of it. By the time this train reaches Cedar Rapids, these units will be struggling with a tonnage train of over 50 loaded grain hoppers. — *John Leopard photo***

## IANR and ethanol

Skyrocketing gasoline prices, flexible fuel or hybrid vehicles, global warming, and cleaner air are all are hot topics in today's world. To combat these problems, an energy boom of sorts has emerged in the United States — not in new found oil reserves in Alaska or along the Gulf Coast, but an alternative fuel known as ethanol, which is made from a renewable resource that America has in plentiful supply: corn.

Ethanol is a clean-burning high-octane liquid fuel produced by the fermentation of plant sugars. With few exceptions, corn is the primary feedstock used for ethanol production in the United States. Each bushel of corn processed yields over two-and-a-half gallons of ethanol. Ethanol's main use is as a blend with gasoline to increase octane and make a cleaner-burning fuel. It also works as a fuel extender that is equally important as a means to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil.

Recent Federal legislation has caused ethanol production to reach new levels, specifically, the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The act mandates that renewable fuels consumption reach a level of 7.5 billion gallons annually by 2012, and the majority of the mandate's requirements are to be met by the use of ethanol. While there are critics denouncing the benefits cited by ethanol's proponents, the mushrooming number of new ethanol production facilities being built proves that it is here to stay. In 2006, about 4.5 billion gallons of ethanol were produced annually in the U.S. and production is expected to reach 12 billion gallons in the next few years.

With new ethanol plants sprouting up in increasing numbers, hauling raw materials and the finished product is rapidly becoming big business for the nation's railroads. For various reasons, ethanol does not lend itself to efficient transport via pipeline, thus, the preferred method of transportation is by rail or tanker truck. As a result, the growth of the ethanol industry is regarded as the most significant development of new railroad traffic in decades. American railroads hauled 175,000 carloads of ethanol in 2006, and this figure is expected to mushroom to over 425,000 carloads by 2012.

Iowa Northern is situated atop one of this country's most productive corn growing regions, making it a key player in the ethanol trade. The company's direct link to ethanol began in spring 2005 when groundwork began on a new ethanol production plant near Fairbank. Opened in May 2006, the Fairbank plant increased carloads and revenues on IANR by nearly 50 percent. Operated by Midwest Renewables, this plant has the capacity to produce 100 million gallons of ethanol a year using approximately 32 million bushels of corn. The Fairbank plant receives a large percentage of its inbound corn by rail, coming from all of IANR's online elevators, and some offline sources as well.

The Fairbank plant is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. It is anticipated that three additional ethanol plants and two bio-diesel production facilities will be located along the Iowa Northern in the near future. And by the end of 2009, there will be 75 ethanol plants operating within a 275 mile radius of the railroad's north end point of Manly. Groundbreaking commenced on a new ethanol plant at Shell Rock in spring 2007. Known as the Butler plant and operated by Hawkeye Renewables, it has a planned output of 110 million gallons annually and should commence shipping by the end of 2008.

Output from a 100-million-gallon-per-year plant is only 10 to 12 cars of etha-


***Below:* The North Crew has just cleared CN's North Industrial Lead at West Waterloo and is in the process of getting their train up to 50 mph for a quick run to Cedar Falls Junction, where they will get back on their own tracks for the trip to toward Manly. Iowa Northern has trackage rights over CN, former Illinois Central, from Linden Avenue in Waterloo to Cedar Falls Junction, approximately 12 miles. CTC governs train movements over this route from West Waterloo to Cedar Falls Junction. Recently delivered locomotive 4002 is making its second trip on the point. — *Craig Williams photo***

nol per day. To get the efficiency and cost benefits of shipping in unit trains of 75 to 100 cars, some plants are adding onsite tank storage capacity, but this is not the norm and adds additional costs. A recent development in this regard is opening of an ethanol storage and brokering terminal at Manly.

Operating under the name Manly Terminal (a wholly owned subsidiary of IANR), this is a multi-product truck and rail reload facility providing over 20 million gallons of liquid storage capacity. Manly Terminal began limited operations in October 2007 and is the first project of its kind in the United States. The new venture allows producers a common point to truck production to the facility where it can be staged, loaded into outbound railcars, and then assembled into unit trains for distribution throughout the United States.

In Rock Island days, Manly was an important division point facility sporting a large yard and roundhouse. Shortly after the Rock's financial collapse, the yard tracks were removed. The Manly Terminal project will see the former yard restored with a capacity of nearly 1,600 cars on 12 tracks. A new railcar repair facility will be located nearby. Iowa Northern is contracted to classify and stage the outbound loaded ethanol cars by destination, then deliver the unit trains to connecting rail carriers such as UP at Manly and Cedar Rapids; IC&E at Nora Springs; CN at Waterloo; and Iowa Interstate at Cedar Rapids.

In addition to an ethanol plant's outbound finished product, other commodities generated by the industry lend themselves to rail shipment. Dried distillers grain with solubles (DDGS) is a byproduct of the ethanol production process. It is a powdery flour-like substance that has various uses, including as a feedstock for cattle, poultry, and swine, and as an ingredient in dog food. DDGS is shipped primarily in high capacity covered hopper cars. Each ethanol plant that produces 100 million gallons annually can generate about 3,500 carloads of DDGS each year. DDGS is currently shipped in single car or small units, but eventually larger consumption points will allow handling of DDGS in 75–100 car unit trains.

An ethanol plant also requires inbound rail shipments for the process, including pure gasoline, which is used as a denaturant. Since pure ethanol is basically whisky, to prevent diversion for human consumption, federal regulations require ethanol produced for fuel use to have a denaturant (usually gasoline) added before shipping. The gasoline is received in tank cars and is mixed at a 2 to 10 percent factor with the ethanol that is produced. Other commodities, such as sulfuric acid and caustic soda, are also brought in by rail.

***Below:*** **Where strings of Chicago Great Western F-units once ran, the Oelwein Job slices through the farm fields between Dewar and Dunkerton on September 2, 2004. The Oelwein Subdivision took on a much greater importance when the ethanol plant at Fairbank opened. —** ***John Leopard photo***



***Above:*** **During a pause in switching moves, engineer Ed Raye is looking over the power of the Oelwein Job at the ethanol plant at Fairbank on October 3, 2007. Four covered hopper loaded with DDGS will be pulled from the plant this day. —** ***John Leopard photo***

## Current train operations

Seven-day-per-week service to most stations is provided with crews based out of Greene and Waterloo. Crews out of Greene handle the Waterloo–Manly segment using one set of locomotives, normally two to three units. They have start times of 7AM, 3PM, and 11PM, and will take a company vehicle out to the train wherever it happens to be when their tour of duty begins.

Completing the cycle for covering the mainline between Manly and Cedar Rapids is a crew called at 7PM at Bryant Yard, which makes a run to Cedar Rapids, arriving there sometime between midnight and 2AM. This crew will get relieved at Cedar Rapids between 3 and 5AM and come back north to Bryant Yard, then operate a transfer to the UP Linden Yard at Waterloo prior to a late-morning tie up. Four to five locomotives are used on this normally long and heavy tonnage train.

Once the Fairbank ethanol plant was opened, train service to Oelwein was expanded from a once-per-week routine to every day. A crew is called to work at 11AM at Bryant Yard for the run to Fairbank and operates to Oelwein as needed, usually on Tuesday and Thursday. A pair of locomotives is normal for this run. Extra trains

to serve the elevator at Dunkerton may be operated during the harvest season.

On December 1, 2007, IANR assigned the first of several yard jobs planned at Manly. The new six-day job reports for duty at 7AM Monday–Saturday and handles classification of traffic to and from UP and IC&E, industry switching at Manly Terminal, and may perform local elevator switching as far as Greene. Traffic growth is expected to require 24-hour-per-day, seven-day-per-week switch service at Manly within two years.

Neighboring regional railroad IC&E operates via trackage rights over a nine-mile stretch of IANR between Nora Springs and Plymouth. This routing provides a short cut for IC&E trains operating between Austin, Minnesota and Marquette, Iowa, bypassing IC&E's cramped yard at Mason City, Iowa. This agreement began with the Soo Line in the late 1980s and has been handed down over time as the Austin–Marquette line changed operators: Canadian Pacific; I&M Rail Link; and finally IC&E in 2002. IC&E typically operates two or more trains each way per day over this route.

Administration, engineering, and train operations were housed in an office/depot built in Greene in 1999. In May 2006, having outgrown these office facilities at Greene, some executive and administrative functions were moved to downtown Cedar Rapids. Train dispatching is currently handled from Greene using AAE85, 161.385 MHz.

## Hawkeye Express

Rather than fight the traffic on game days in Iowa City, fans of the University of Iowa Hawkeyes football team hop on the *Hawkeye Express* and enjoy a leisurely ride to the game. For its first two seasons the *Hawkeye Express* provided train service from Coralville to Kinnick Stadium for the University of Iowa's home football games by leasing the 11-car Ski Train from Colorado. It took the cooperation of Iowa Interstate Railroad (the train operator and track owner), the University of Iowa, and Union Pacific and BNSF Railroads (who moved the train from Colorado to Iowa City free of charge).

In 2006 Iowa Northern purchased six former C&NW/Metra Chicago bi-level commuter cars and a former Amtrak F40PHR locomotive. The new equipment will allow more passengers, as well as smoother entry and exit at station points because the cars were designed for heavy commuter use. IANR, which has helped manage the project since it began, and the University of Iowa signed a five-year contract for the equipment to run as the *Hawkeye Express*.

The *Hawkeye Express* was originally conceived to help relieve traffic congestion on game day from the already congested Iowa City area roads. For the last two years, ridership of the *Hawkeye Express* averaged around 3,000 persons per game, diverting many cars from the Kinnick stadium area.

## Motive Power

The workhorses of the Iowa Northern are 12 rebuilt GP38–2s, 3800–3811, all of which wear the road's attractive paint scheme, patterned after Canadian Pacific's classic Tuscan red and gray livery. These engines are currently leased from Locomotive Leasing Partners (LLPX) and IANR is working toward purchasing all 12. All were originally constructed for the Louisville & Nashville in 1971, except for the 3800, which began its career in 1970 as Baltimore & Ohio number 4812 and the 3801, which came to life as Penn Central No. 7935.

Until the current fleet of GP38s arrived on the property during summer 2004, Iowa Northern's motive power fleet was in a constant state of flux. Operations began with former Rock Island GP35s, an RI SW1200, and Florida East Coast GP7s. The mid-1980s brought a five-unit fleet of former Burlington Northern GP9s along with an ex-Santa Fe CF7. Next came five GP20s of Southern Pacific heritage, all painted in an IANR burgundy color scheme. As traffic grew, the GP20s were supplemented by a variety of locomotive model types leased from nearby roads DM&E and IMRL, and from dealers Helm, NRE, and LLPX. One GP20, 2003, is the last of the old motive power currently on the roster. The two stall engine house at Bryant Yard tends to all but the most complicated needs of the locomotive fleet.

To help out with increased business, three reconditioned GP40–2Ws were received in spring 2007 from dealer Progress Rail Services. They were built in 1974 for CN and carry the wide-nose Canadian Safety Cab. Their new numbers are 4001 (CN 9425), 4002 (CN 9445), and 4003 (CN 9508).

More recently, the company has begun receiving the first of four former Amtrak locomotives. To make them more suitable for freight service, these former passenger units were previously modified by the addition of a front "porch" that makes it easier for crews riding the units during switching movements. In addition, the HEP (head end power) alternator has been removed. All are expected to be online during first quarter 2008. Dubbed F40M-2F, their history is as follows: 451 ex-CDAC 451 nee-AMTK 341; 454 ex-CDAC 454 nee-AMTK 384; 458 ex-CDAC 458 nee-AMTK 360; and 461 ex-CDAC 461 nee-AMTK 266. They will retain their CDAC numbers and continue to wear the old Canadian Pacific-inspired livery that IANR adopted from the old Iron Road operations.

Rounding out the current roster is the aforementioned F40PHR No. 678 (ex-Amtrak 241) used on the *Hawkeye Express* passenger trains. Number 678 is adorned in a paint scheme inspired by Rock Island passenger locomotives. When not used during the football season, the 678 and bi-level commuter coaches will be used along the IANR route for civic celebrations and other community events. In addition, the 678 may see limited use in freight service.

## The Future

The Iowa Northern has been able to double its online traffic approximately every three years, on average. This trend is expected to continue. The IANR has initiated plans to spend $55 million on its physical plant over the next five years. Twenty-seven miles of continuous welded rail were spiked down in 2007 with 90 more to be installed by the end of 2009. A new yard near Shell Rock is planned. It will be named Butler Yard for the county it is located and will include 13 tracks with a capacity of just over 1,000 cars. This facility will include a new locomotive shop and operating offices to accommodate an expanded staff to support the growing business.

Additional non-ethanol customers are being developed such as a reload and warehousing operation that opened at Oelwein in spring 2006, handling such things as lumber, paper, food products, and farm and industrial machinery. In addition, a new pulp and paper mill designed to convert corn stover (corn stalks) is being planned near Clarksville, with groundbreaking anticipated in 2008.

Iowa Northern finished 2007 handling over 50,000 revenue cars and expects to handle nearly 120,000 projected by 2012. By providing reliable customer service with a sharp-looking locomotive fleet, much like the Rock Island Railroad before it, the Iowa Northern is proving to be "a mighty fine line."

*My appreciation to C.J. Stoffer and Daniel Sabin, Iowa Northern's past and present presidents, respectively; and Ed Raye, engineer/conductor at IANR, for their assistance with this article.*

***Below:*** **The northeast side of Waterloo is home to Union Pacific's Linden Yard, known as Highland Yard in Chicago Great Western days. Late in the day on October 3, 2007, the Oelwein Job is exchanging cars with UP at the west end the facility. The UP switch crew has finished for the day and their idle engine Y674 looks on. — *John Leopard photo***


***Below:*** **The north end of the line is never far from the course of the Shell Rock River, crossing it twice. On September 29, 2005, the North Job vaults across the Shell Rock just south of Clarksville. Debris from summer flooding has accumulated at the base of the span's center pier. — *John Leopard photo***