Charting a Course

Lawrence, Kansas, and Its Railroad Strategy, 1854–1872

by I. E. Quastler

The Kansas Territory opened to settlement in 1854 and immediately witnessed a rapid influx of farmers. This expanding rural population was served by a number of small Missouri River frontier towns such as the older settlements of Kansas City and St. Joseph in Missouri and the new communities of Atchison and Leavenworth in Kansas. Another newly founded Kansas town that provided services to a surrounding rural population was Lawrence, the home of many free-state leaders, located on the Kansas River about thirty-three miles west of its confluence with the Missouri.¹

Despite the small populations of some of these growing places, within a short time their civic leaders began to develop plans designed to make their respective towns the future regional metropolis. Since the nearest metropolitan center, St. Louis, was about

¹I. E. Quastler earned his Ph.D. in history from the University of Kansas and has been a professor of history at San Diego State University since 1967. He is especially interested in the historical geography of railroads in northwest Kansas; his most recent book is Missouri Pacific Northwest: A History of the Kansas City Northwestern Railroad (1994).

250 miles away, residents anticipated that a major city soon would develop in the region. They also recognized that only one of the contenders for regional urban dominance could succeed. Expanded trade, lower per capita taxes, and especially rapidly increasing land values were among the expected benefits of success. In each community, leadership was vested in a small number of politicians, businessmen, and professionals. Their plans for inducing urban growth were promulgated through community newspapers, the owners and editors of which also tended to belong to the urban leadership.
In the second half of the nineteenth century in this part of the United States, strategies for achieving urban leadership were based primarily on plans to make the city the regional railroad center. An emphasis on a railroad strategy was logical since frequent low water levels in summer, cold winters, and a swift current that impeded up-river traffic made transportation on the Missouri River (the region’s main waterway) unreliable, seasonal, and slow. Therefore urban leaders developed plans for a system of rail lines to tie their communities to important traffic sources, such as rich farmlands and major cities. This strategy, if successful, would make the city the regional center for traffic interchange between railroads and could attract such labor-intensive activities as railroad shops and offices. Major rail centers also obtained low rates for long-distance freight and therefore could attract wholesalers and large manufacturers. Civic leaders did not command enough capital to build the railroads themselves, and so they did what they could by securing the necessary charters, obtaining federal and local aid, and trying to attract capitalists who would undertake construction. Urban boosters sought financiers who supported their railroad plans, but they always faced the risk (and perhaps the inevitability) that the two groups’ interests would soon diverge.

This study focuses on the railroad strategy of the leadership of one of these towns, Lawrence, and deals with the railroad rivalry between Lawrence and the eventual winner of the competition, Kansas City. This case is noteworthy as an example of almost total failure of community railroad policy. In support of their civic leaders’ plans, voters in Lawrence and surrounding Douglas County invested more than nine hundred thousand dollars in several railroads, none of which achieved the advantages claimed for them. This is not to imply that the leaders’ plans were impossible or that residents were illogical in pursuing them. As historian Albert Fishlow has said, not to have tried would have meant giving up any possibility of large profits; that is, it would have involved almost infinite opportunity costs. With more timely and complete plans, herculean efforts, and a more fortuitous combination of circumstances, Lawrence conceivably could have become the regional rail center and metropolis.2

This study illustrates two important themes of current research in western history. One is that the West was not an isolated frontier, and that western development can only be understood in its relationship to a larger national and international economy anchored in the East and in Europe. Thus a chronic shortage of capital in the West made it necessary to depend on eastern and European financial markets as well as on federal aid in the form of land and financial subsidies. As historian Richard White has pointed out, railroads were the first western enterprises that required substantial capital. Because the main sources of capital were in the seaboard cities, eastern financiers and lawmakers could make or break western plans for development. Such western dependence inevitably led to resentment of eastern power and control. A second somewhat related theme focuses on the important role of cities in the development of the West. Historian William Cronon has shown that Chicago was the main western outpost for eastern control of the economic development of the nation’s interior; in the process, the city became the main gateway linking the West with the seaboard economic core. Chicago’s growing influence in Kansas during 1854–1872 played an important role in the outcome of the urban rivalry involving Lawrence. The same theme is illustrated at a local scale by Lawrence’s impact on the regional rail network. This impact shows that even the losers in the urban competition can have longer-run economic impacts. The general theme of the losers’ influences on western development merits further investigation.3

2. I.E. Quastler, The Railroads of Lawrence, Kansas, 1854–1900 (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1979), 247; Albert Fishlow, American Railroads and the Transformation of the Antebellum Economy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 193. Examination of the rivalry between Lawrence and Kansas City is facilitated by references to Charles N. Gaab, Kansas City and the Railroads (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1982). This fine work makes it possible to compare, with some precision, the timing and scope of Lawrence railroad efforts with those of its main rival. Gaab saw Leavenworth as Kansas City’s chief opponent, and his findings about that city also are useful.

Several aspects of the locations of Lawrence and Kansas City form important background elements to this study. One of these is the location of these communities relative to the area's major streams, the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. Lawrence is on the south bank of the Kansas River, approximately thirty-five miles southwest of Kansas City. Here the river is near its southernmost point; the site is twelve miles south of the latitude of downtown Kansas City. Therefore Lawrence was closer than Kansas City to what its leaders considered the most promising nearby agricultural hinterland, "southern Kansas" during 1854-1872 that term referred to all of the area south of the Kansas River. Kansas City is on the south side of the Missouri River, just east of its confluence with the Kansas where the river changes direction from northwest-southeast to largely east-west. Therefore Kansas City was located where the Missouri River was closest to southern Kansas and at a favorable place to conduct trade with the South-west. Both Lawrence and Kansas City were especially interested in controlling the trade with these two developing regions; most of the area north of the Kansas River was firmly in the orbits of Leavenworth, Atchison, and St. Joseph.

Another consideration was the location of the cities relative to the expanding rail networks of Chicago and St. Louis. In 1854 two major railroads were under construction westward across Missouri. North of the Missouri River the standard-gauge (a distance of 4' 8.5" between the rails) Hannibal and St. Joseph (H&St), later the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, a company soon identified with the system of railroads radiating from Chicago. To the south was the broad-gauge (5.5') Pacific Railroad of Missouri (hereafter referred to by its later and more familiar name, the Missouri Pacific) extending westward from St. Louis. As early as the mid-1850s some strategists in the region became aware that the first city to gain rail access to both Chicago and St. Louis would have an initial advantage difficult for rivals to overcome. Since Kansas City and Lawrence were south of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, it was unnecessary for a railroad from St. Louis to either city to cross a major stream. A line from Chicago to Kansas City would

---

cross only one large river, the Missouri, while a direct railroad from Chicago to Lawrence would cross both the Missouri and Kansas Rivers. Because large bridges were a major expense, the number of such structures required was of some consequence in railroad locational strategy.\(^4\)

In the ensuing rivalry, Kansas City gained some advantage from its location within Missouri, for in the 1850s and 1860s the state provided aid to several railroads. As residents of Missouri, Kansas Citians could and did use the political process to try to obtain a railroad. At the same time, Kansas was still a thinly populated territory, and as such it could not have afforded a railroad subsidy program. This disadvantage for Lawrence was reinforced by its location west of Kansas City, and therefore farther from an existing railroad.\(^5\)

Lawrence was further handicapped by not being located on the Missouri River. Although this river initially was important in moving heavy goods in the region, it required major improvements before it could become a reliable traffic artery, and early railroads were able to divert substantial traffic. Therefore the main longer-run disadvantage for Lawrence did not involve the river’s transportation role, but was more subtle.\(^6\)

During 1854–1872 American railroad companies were small relative to the systems that developed later in the century. Thus the longer distance movement of freight and passengers usually required two or more railroads. Westward from Chicago, for example, one set of railroads went as far as the Mississippi River, with another group of companies crossing Iowa to the Missouri River, and a third set operating beyond that waterway. As the foregoing demonstrates, major rivers often were used to separate groups of railroads; in part, such separation was maintained to control competition within the industry. This practice was a convention not a necessity, but quite possibly the Missouri River along the Kansas–Missouri border also would be used as a boundary separating the railroads to the east and west of it, with river cities acting as traffic-interchange points. Therefore a city on the Missouri River had an inherent advantage in the struggle to become the leading regional rail center.\(^7\)

---

4. Glaab, Kansas City and the Railroads, 38–40. The Hannibal and St. Joseph was intended to be a feeder to steamboats serving St. Louis, but interests oriented to Chicago gained control and made northern Missouri tributary to that city. Railroad gauges did not become substantially standardized nationally until the 1880s.


6. Early American railroads often acted as feeders to waterways, but as they became improved technologically the two forms of transportation became increasingly competitive.

7. In economic terms, earlier railroads were characterized by more limited economies of scale. Rather than using rivers, regional groups of railroads could have been separated by a line connecting a series of cities. The tendency for railroads to use major rivers for regionalization has not received systematic treatment in the literature. Early railroad regionalization west of Chicago is illustrated in Richard C. Overton, Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), especially 39–139.
Before the Civil War it often was assumed in Kansas and Missouri that for many decades only one trunk line would run to the Pacific, and it would follow the so-called central route westward from Baltimore and St. Louis. This location was considered likely because it was the only alignment that could serve both North and South, thereby satisfying these strongly conflicting sectional interests. Within Missouri it would follow the Missouri Pacific from St. Louis to the Kansas border; perhaps another railroad would continue westward via the “natural path” up the Kansas River valley. Given these plans, both Lawrence and Kansas City quite possibly would be on this prospective trunk route, with attendant urban-growth implications.

The projected Pacific railroad prompted the first Lawrence newspaper article to discuss possible rail connections for the city. This piece appeared in the January 10, 1855, issue of the Kansas Tribune, when Lawrence was less than a year old and still more than two hundred miles from the nearest railhead. The editor pointed out that a projected railroad to the Pacific probably would follow the south side of the Kansas River and therefore would serve Lawrence. The same issue noted that the Hannibal and St. Joseph and the Missouri Pacific were under construction toward the Kansas border. The editor called for a citizens’ meeting to determine which company offered the better prospects for Lawrence, a suggestion that went unheeded.

Despite such articles, and partly because much community energy was going into the slavery issue, throughout the pre-Civil War period Lawrence lagged far behind Kansas City in taking steps to attract railroads. Between 1855 and 1860 Kansas Citians, who consciously tried not to let partisan politics interfere with city business, developed a well-articulated railroad master plan designed to make their city the regional metropolis. Voters there also passed a number of bond issues in support of projected railroads; for example, in 1857 and 1859 they approved aid to the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Importantly because of such support, by 1858 Missouri Pacific officials seemed to have assured civic leaders that they would build to Kansas City. As early as 1856 Kansas Citians also had recognized the strategic importance of obtaining a second, competing line to Chicago. In 1859 a company was organized to build such a connection northward to the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad at Cameron, Missouri, and in April 1860 voters approved two hundred thousand dollars to aid this project. By that October a contract providing for

---

8. See Herald of Freedom (Lawrence), January 6, 1855.
Hannibal and St. Joseph support to the proposed line was signed. Because of financial difficulties and the advent of war, work was suspended in 1861 after about two-thirds of the roadbed had been completed. The contract expired in 1862, and without maintenance the roadbed deteriorated.9

In sharp contrast, by 1860 Lawrence's leadership had developed no railroad plan, had placed no propositions for aid before the voters, and had convinced no railroads to build to their city. This was partly because, before 1857, Lawrence citizens generally assumed that a city on the Missouri River would become the regional metropolis. For example, in 1855 a local newspaper identified Kansas City as the great regional commercial mart, and the editor thought that, because of its locational advantages, it would remain so for years. This perception was reinforced by the discovery that commercial navigation on the Kansas River was impractical. It also was understandable when the town's size is considered; in 1860 Lawrence had only 1,650 people, compared with about 4,400 in Kansas City and 7,400 in Leavenworth.10

In mid-1857 local attention to railroads began to increase. An editorial in July noted that Lawrence was starting to feel a need for railroads and that Kansas' trunk lines eventually would diverge from St. Joseph. This was a logical assumption as that city soon would become the western terminus of the Hannibal and St. Joseph, which was well ahead of its rival in completing a line across Missouri. The same editor noted that while other Kansas towns were making railroad plans, Lawrence was inactive. Nevertheless, that month the city had its first railroad meeting to discuss a potential line from Chicago to Santa Fe, New Mexico, via Lawrence.11

Local activity picked up considerably in 1858 and 1859 when Kansas experienced a railroad boom in the form of a proliferation of charters. Among these was a charter for the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson Railroad (LL&F&G), a company meant to link Lawrence (and Leavenworth) with southern Kansas and eventually with a port on the Gulf of Mexico. Initially its offices were in Leavenworth, then in Prairie City (near Baldwin City), but in 1859 they were moved to Lawrence where they stayed for many years. The main Kansas railroad event of 1858 was a large meeting in Wyandotte (later a part of Kansas City, Kansas) where delegates devised plans for a system of Kansas railroads. One recommended line was to run from Wyandotte up the Kansas River valley via Lawrence, while another would follow the route planned for the LL&F&G. Lawrence editorials in July and September 1859 were highly critical of the lack of local action on railroads as compared with such rivals as Leavenworth, Atchison, and Wyandotte. As if to highlight that point, by year's end a Leavenworth–Lawrence survey had almost been completed for the Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western Railroad, a Leavenworth project.12

Not until 1860 were there signs that the Lawrence leadership would develop a railroad plan. That same year the notion of a direct railroad westward from Pleasant Hill, Missouri (thirty miles southeast of Kansas City), to Lawrence first appeared in the community press. It was noted that if the Missouri Pacific were built to Kansas City, it would turn northwestward at Pleasant Hill (Fig. 1). Alternatively, it could continue directly west, bypassing Kansas City and perhaps striking the Kansas River valley near Lawrence. Such a route was said to be shorter by fifteen to twenty miles compared with a line via Kansas City. Lawrence leaders argued that this was important, for in the long run the shortest route inevitably would attract the bulk of the traffic. As envisioned, this proposed line would form a part of the main

transcontinental route to California, with Lawrence occupying a key location. This proposal acted as a catalyst in Lawrence. It appears that, for the first time, civic leaders could envision their city as the regional rail center and metropolis. Soon editorials began to stress Lawrence’s other alleged advantages, particularly its central location in the Kansas River valley and its proximity to southern Kansas.  

As a result, during the difficult Civil War years, the leadership finally developed a railroad plan designed to achieve regional urban hegemony. In this period Lawrence also had an energetic, persuasive, and politically powerful leader in U.S. Senator James H. Lane, a man determined to do everything he could to promote the city. In mid-1864 he was elected president of the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson Railroad.  

The community plan that evolved emphasized three key railroads, to be controlled (as much as possible) by Lawrence interests, that would link the city with St. Louis, Galveston, and Santa Fe (Fig. 2). Most important to the strategy was the construction of the LL&FG southward through Kansas and Indian Territory, to connect at the Texas border with a railroad to Galveston. Since that port was closer than any on the Atlantic Ocean, most Kansas foreign trade was expected eventually to flow through it. A second railroad, sometimes called a branch of the LL&FG, was projected to the southwest. Initially it would be built to Emporia, but eventually it would terminate in Santa Fe and bring the famous trade of that place to Lawrence; later it would be extended to the Pacific Coast. Finally a broad-gauge line, visualized as a vital link in the central transcontinental route, would be built to the Missouri Pacific at Pleasant Hill. Since all other projected Lawrence railroads would be standard gauge, the city would become a major change-of-gauge point.  

Two other railroads played somewhat less important roles in the plan, and they were not expected to be controlled by local interests. One of these was the central transcontinental railroad; from Lawrence’s perspective this was the continuation of the Pleasant Hill route westward from the city. The second was a connection to Leavenworth and through that town to the Hannibal and St. Joseph and to Chicago. A Lawrence-Leavenworth railroad had been authorized by the LL&FG’s charter, but it was less emphasized than the route south once Lawrence interests controlled the company.

In retrospect, this plan was based on several questionable assumptions. Most critically, despite strong evidence to the contrary, community leaders seemed to think that St. Louis would remain the dominant higher order center for the region; this would account for the secondary role assigned to a direct Chicago connection. Second, the assumption that most transcontinental traffic would flow via the Pleasant Hill route did not recognize that the cost advantages of the shortest route could be overwhelmed by the economies of concentrating traffic interchange at one

---

13. Lawrence Republican, May 31, July 19, 1860. As built, the line was only twelve miles shorter than the route via Kansas City. The concept of a line west from Pleasant Hill dated from at least 1857 when it appeared in the Jeffersonian Inquirer. Glaab, Kansas City and the Railroads, 66.


15. See Lawrence Republican, September 19, 1861; Kansas Tribune, November 29, 1863, February 27, 1864.
The Lawrence Railroad Plan After 1860

Fig. 2. Routes of the Lawrence railroads after 1860.

major rail center in the region. Third, since both Leavenworth and Lawrence were in Kansas, it was naively assumed that the cities would work cooperatively to assure that the regional metropolis developed within the state rather than in Missouri. The cities' interests were said to be complementary not competitive, and Leavenworth's anticipated success in building connections to the Chicago rail network and to Lawrence was expected also to benefit the latter. Had Leavenworth succeeded, however, almost certainly it would have become the regional metropolis.

Passage of the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 led to Lawrence's first rail connection. That law allowed one branch of the Pacific Railroad to start at the south side of the mouth of the Kansas River in Wyandotte (immediately adjacent to Kansas City, Missouri) and to build westward via Fort Riley. This route was awarded to the Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western, soon renamed the Union Pacific Railway Company, Eastern Division. In September 1862 this company awarded contracts to build two lines westward from the Missouri River, one from Wyandotte and the other from Leavenworth. These segments were to join near Lawrence, from where a single track would be built westward. Partly because the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, was a Leavenworth railroad, the Pacific Railroad Act was seen in Lawrence as favorable to its interests.17

During this period Lawrence witnessed substantial benefits from Senator Lane's political power and his persuasive abilities. It was he who applied strong pressure on the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, to serve the city when the promoters started to locate the railroad some miles to the north. To help pay for the route change, the city donated land for a new right-of-way and for a depot. Thereafter the railroad reached the north bank of the Kansas River opposite Lawrence in December 1864, and for about a year the city benefited substantially from being the railhead. Lane also was instrumental in securing a land grant for the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson's main line and for its branch to the southwest.18

While Lawrence was making progress, Kansas City also remained active. In 1863 the Cameron railroad project was reorganized in anticipation of renewed activity after the war, and officials obtained a state charter for a Missouri River bridge at Kansas City. That year Kansas Citians also helped convince the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, to move its headquarters from Leavenworth to adjacent Wyandotte. One inducement to make this change was to offer the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, control of the Cameron-Kansas City line. Soon

18. Glabb, Kansas City and the Railroads, 120; Kansas Tribune, December 20, 1864, May 27, 1866; Quastler, Railroads of Lawrence, 67; Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 3d sess., 1862, 1: 138; Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 3d sess., 1863, 2: 1157-58, 1484-85, 1499; Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America, from December 5, 1839 to March 3, 1863 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1866), 340. The land grant for the branch extended to its intersection with the proposed Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe line in the Neosho River valley.
construction westward from Leavenworth stopped, and all Union Pacific, Eastern Division, resources went into building the line up the Kansas River valley from Wyandotte. 19

In 1865, for the first time, Lawrence and Douglas County voters were asked to approve aid to the railroads planned by their leaders. In September the county overwhelmingly voted for a proposal to provide $125,000 to Lawrence's first priority project, the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson's main line. At the same time voters approved like amounts for the Emporia branch and for the newly organized St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver Railroad (StLL&D, the Lawrence-Pleasant Hill line). By then all but one of the Kansas counties along the LL&RG main line had voted for aid. This outcome had followed Lane's June tour of the route, where his speeches had strengthened support for the project. In November he was in St. Louis addressing the chamber of commerce on behalf of the Pleasant Hill "cutoff." Late in 1865 the LL&RG was renamed the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Railroad (LL&G). 20

In February 1866 the LL&G received more aid in the form of one quarter of a five-hundred-thousand-acre land grant to Kansas for internal improvements. In April voters unanimously approved a Lawrence subscription of two hundred thousand dollars to the St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver, and permanent location stakes were driven for the LL&G main line. By June a preliminary survey had been completed to Emporia, and four months later a report of the first survey for the St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver was issued. In July the LL&G sent agent B.S. Henning to Chicago and to East Coast cities to find capitalist support. Three months later an agreement with Chicago capitalist William Sturges to build the LL&G was announced. At this time Lawrence appeared to have caught up with Kansas City in terms of plans, and it was well ahead in progress toward a line to southern Kansas. Near the end of 1866 Lawrence residents were optimistic that they were winning the urban rivalry. 21

Nevertheless, in the midst of these significant gains were some major setbacks. Early in 1866 the

19. Glaab, Kansas City and the Railroads, 116–17, 141–42. Union Pacific, Eastern Division, control of the Cameron-Kansas City line never was implemented.
21. Ibid., February 9, April 10, 28, June 9, July 15, 25, October 17, November 9, 10, 1866; Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Minute Book, 48–49; Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Offices; Thomas Le Duc, "State Administration of the Land Grant to Kansas for Internal Improvements," Kansas Historical Quarterly 20 (November 1953), 547.
Kansas legislature struck the Pleasant Hill railroad from a measure for land grants. Over Lane's objections, in July Kansas City's projected railroad to southern Kansas was awarded a congressional land grant. It is noteworthy that Lane (suffering from the effects of a mental breakdown) was absent from the Senate floor during all debates about this proposal. In September and November Johnson County, Kansas, decisively defeated proposals to aid the Pleasant Hill project, probably because it already had voted to aid Kansas City's line to southern Kansas. These defeats effectively stalled the St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver.22

In July 1866 Lawrence lost its chief spokesman when Senator Lane committed suicide. Because he backed President Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policies, which were unpopular in Kansas, he had suffered serious political setbacks, and his Kansas support had been severely eroded. Possibly Lawrence's political defeats in Congress and in the Kansas legislature were related to Lane's close identification with the city. Nevertheless, he had been a strong leader, and his loss at such a critical time was a severe blow.23

Thereafter local railroad leadership passed to George W. Deitzler. In the early 1860s he had served briefly as president of the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson, and during the Civil War was given command of the Kansas State Militia after distinguishing himself as colonel of the First Kansas Volunteer Infantry. But Deitzler did not have Lane's political power or persuasive abilities, and he suffered from a debilitating physical condition resulting from a wartime wound. He was president of the St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver Railroad and focused his energies on that project. Deitzler no longer was directly involved with the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston.24

During 1865–1866 Kansas City made considerable progress. In mid-1865 interests there organized the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad to build to southern Kansas. This company usually was called the "Border Tier" because its planned route went through the easternmost tier of Kansas counties. In September Kansas City voters approved two hundred thousand dollars for this project, and two Kansas counties, Johnson and Miami, also voted for aid. As mentioned earlier, in the following year Congress approved a land grant to the Border Tier.25

In September 1865 the Missouri Pacific was completed to Kansas City.26 Thereby the city had direct rail access to St. Louis a month before the first (and later rejected) survey for a Lawrence–Pleasant Hill railroad was completed. Now Kansas City had two railroads, the broad-gauge Missouri Pacific and the standard-gauge Union Pacific, Eastern Division, and it had become the change-of-gauge point.

Most damaging to Lawrence, however, was its lack of representation in an 1866 railroad battle that was vital to its interests. At this time Leavenworth and Kansas City leaders were competing to convince the Hannibal and St. Joseph directors to support their project for a connecting link. By June the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, had completed its Leavenworth–Lawrence line, which virtually had been required under the Pacific Railroad Act of 1864, and the Missouri Pacific had been extended from Kansas City to Leavenworth. Therefore Leavenworth and Kansas City were about equal in terms of railroads, each with a line to St. Louis and one to the west; neither had a direct Chicago connection (Fig. 1). In the important

24. Leavenworth, Lawrence and Ft. Gibson Minute Book, 378–79; Allen Johnson and Sumas Malone, eds., Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 201–2; The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. 3 (New York: James T. White and Co., 1877), 367; C. M. Deitzler, "History of the Deitzler Family," letter dated January 24, 1893, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence; St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver Railroad Minute Book, 6, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Offices. Deitzler also engaged in farming, real estate, and Indian trading, and for a short time he was treasurer of the University of Kansas, but his prominence came from his roles as politician and soldier. His wound was received at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, August 10, 1861. Deitzler was promoted to brigadier general in November 1862, resigned his commission in August 1865, and took command of the state militia in February 1864.
25. Kansas Daily Tribune, August 4, 1866; Glaab, Kansas City and the Railroads, 130. The Missouri River, Ft. Scott and Gulf originally was named the Kansas and Neosho Valley Railroad.
During 1865–1866 Kansas City made considerable rail progress and organized the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad to build to southern Kansas.  

Southeastern Kansas and Southwestern Missouri,  
VIA  
MISSOURI RIVER, FORT SCOTT & GULF RAILROAD,  
FROM  
KANSAS CITY  
To the Great Lead, Zinc and Coal Fields of Kansas and Missouri.

rivalry for such a link, Lawrence relied on Leavenworth to act as a kind of surrogate. It is revealing that the Lawrence leadership had so long played down the importance of a direct route to Chicago; the Lawrence press first explicitly mentioned the strategic significance of such a connection only on February 16, 1866.27

During this critical period committees from both Leavenworth and Kansas City met frequently with the Hannibal and St. Joseph officials. In this competition Kansas City had several advantages. For one, a line via that city to southern Kansas would require but one major bridge. Only Kansas Citians could assure the H&S&W officials that their roadbed was wholly the construction of the roadbed to Cameron. Furthermore, Kansas City’s leaders apparently convinced H&S&W officials that their roadbed was almost finished, which was not true. The Leavenworth cause was damaged by the presence of two rival groups, each with a charter for a Cameron line. By August 1866 Kansas Citians had both state and federal authority for a Missouri River bridge and a land grant for their railroad to the south.

In the midst of the negotiations, the chance factor may also have worked against Leavenworth. The sudden illness of a key Hannibal and St. Joseph decision maker John W. Brooks led the Boston capitalists who controlled the railroad to ask James F. Joy (not a Boston insider but a close associate and a noted railroad builder) temporarily to assume official representation for the company. Although it may not have been a major consideration, earlier in the year Joy had begun to invest in Kansas City real estate. On his recommendation, on December 19, 1866, H&S&W directors approved a contract to supply iron and rolling stock for the Cameron–Kansas City project and to furnish funds for a steel bridge across the Missouri River. Although this bridge was not finished until 1869, by the end of 1866 Kansas City had achieved a decided initial advantage that none of its rivals could overcome.28

In November 1867 workers finished construction to the north bank of the Missouri River opposite Kansas City, and for some time ferries were used to complete the connection to Chicago. During the two


28. Glaab, Kansas City and the Railroads, 152–60; Overton, Burlington Route, 87-92; Theodore S. Case to James F. Joy, March 26, 1866, R.S. Watson to Joy, June 6, July 11, 1866, John W. Reid and Case to Joy, June 7, 1866, James F. Joy Papers, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Mich.
and one-half years of the bridge’s construction, Kansas City’s population grew from about thirteen thousand to thirty thousand, leaving its rivals far behind. By 1870 Kansas City had thirty-two thousand people, while Leavenworth had eighteen thousand and Lawrence slightly more than eight thousand.\(^{29}\)

In retrospect, for the Lawrence plan to have succeeded, a number of conditions would have been necessary. The Missouri Pacific would have had to support construction of the Lawrence–Pleasant Hill line and make that route, rather than the one to Kansas City, its main line. This would have required its western connection, the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, to agree to interchange its transcontinental traffic with the Missouri Pacific at Lawrence rather than at Kansas City. This the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, would have resisted to avoid short-hauling itself. In addition the Hannibal and St. Joseph interests would have had to build from Cameron to Leavenworth and then build beyond (or buy the Union Pacific, Eastern Division’s, Leavenworth–Lawrence branch) to Lawrence. That in turn would have required constructing major bridges at Leavenworth and Lawrence. Only if timely commitments had been made to ensure all of these changes would Lawrence’s position have been analogous to Kansas City’s when the latter achieved its initial advantage. With the aid of hindsight, it is apparent that each of these conditions was problematic and that the need for them all made success for Lawrence unlikely.

For several years after 1866 Lawrence residents did not completely understand that the urban rivalry had been lost. Therefore all three top-priority lines in the master plan eventually were built, at least in part (Fig. 3). Following passage of a $300,000 Douglas County bond issue in February 1867, replacing the $125,000 approved in 1865, the first twenty-eight-mile segment of the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston, between Lawrence and Ottawa, went into service on January 1, 1868. Thus the LL&G began operating almost a year before the Border Tier opened its first segment from Kansas City to Olathe.\(^{30}\)

Unfortunately for Lawrence, completion to Ottawa was followed immediately by a bitter dispute between William Sturges, president of the LL&G, and a portion of the local leadership. The latter claimed delivery of the Douglas County bonds should be withheld until the LL&G had met all requirements including acquiring and occupying its permanent route within the city, obtaining land for a depot, and constructing a bridge over the Kansas River. This conflict escalated and resulted in a stalemate, a condition made possible because Kansans continued to hold several seats on the board of directors. Virtually all construction stopped for about eighteen months allowing the Border Tier to catch up with and pass the LL&G. Eventually Lawrence’s perception of Sturges and his associates grew so negative that widespread opposition threatened passage of the situation.


Osage treaty, under which the LL&G would be allowed to buy eight million acres of Indian lands in southern Kansas for only twenty cents per acre. Sturges, who recognized far greater potential for profit in the land than in operating the railroad, applied pressure by saying repeatedly that passage of the treaty was a precondition for renewed construction. The Osage treaty never was ratified.31

As the foregoing demonstrates, the decision allowing William Sturges and his associates to build the LL&G proved damaging to Lawrence. Sturges' reputation among respected capitalists can be gleaned from a statement by Nathaniel Thayer, a member of the Boston group that controlled the Hannibal and St. Joseph. In a letter to James Joy, Thayer noted the only problem with Joy's pending business transaction was that it would be necessary to deal with a man like Sturges.32 If the community had not been so eager to find a capitalist to build the LL&G, perhaps more time would have been devoted to investigating Sturges' character. Whether another capitalist group could have been found to build the rail line, and if so, whether it would have acted more in accordance with community goals, is not clear.

The long impasse was broken in June 1869 when James F. Joy and the same Boston capitalists who now also controlled the rival Border Tier purchased the LL&G. This move completed a common western pattern; the need for outside capital led to eastern control of what had been a local enterprise. Now the LL&G would be integrated into a broader railroad pattern designed primarily to forward western goods to eastern markets. Strictly local goals would become largely irrelevant. Construction resumed under Joy, but both the LL&G and the Border Tier lost a famous three-way race (which the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad won) to be the first to reach a certain point on Kansas' southern border and thereby obtain exclusive rights to build through Indian Territory to Texas. In August 1870 the LL&G lost most of its value to Lawrence when a cutoff between Ottawa and Kansas City was completed; thereafter southern Kansas traffic was routed directly eastward through Kansas City bypassing Lawrence (Fig. 3). The poor quality of construction under Sturges between Ottawa and Lawrence, including excessive gradients, and the continued lack of a Lawrence railroad bridge to connect with the city's only other railroad, the Union Pacific, Eastern Division, reinforced the logic of this change. Subsequently the Lawrence—Ottawa line became an underutilized branch, which one Lawrence editor sarcastically called "our Galveston switch swindle."33

Workers completed the Pleasant Hill line in late 1871, which the Missouri Pacific immediately leased. It was built to the standard gauge because in 1870 the Missouri Pacific had been converted to that width. For a few years it provided convenient service to the East, but it lost its greatest potential value to Lawrence when the Missouri Pacific would not give the city freight rates as favorable as those it gave Kansas City. That decision resulted from the 1868 completion of a second St. Louis—Kansas City railroad, the North Missouri (later the Wabash). By threatening rate competition if its rival did not cooperate, that company forced the Missouri Pacific to give Kansas City more favorable rates. The Pleasant Hill—Lawrence branch lost money, and subsequently the Missouri Pacific lease was broken. This abandonment of service to Law-

31. Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Minute Book, 118–19; Kansas Daily Tribune, July 20, 1869, April 1, August 18, 1870, April 5, 1872; H. Craig Miner, "The Border Tier Line: A History of the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad, 1865–1870" (master's thesis, Wichita State University, 1967), 103–4, 113; Octave Chanute to James F. Joy, November 10, December 15, 1869, Joy Papers; Report of the Directors of the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Railroad Company (Chicago: Rounds and Kane, 1871), 16. At the height of the race to the border, the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston was so far behind the other two railroads that Joy shifted its workers to the Border Tier. In 1880 the successor to the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston became part of the Santa Fe system. The northern half of the Lawrence—Ottawa line was abandoned around 1960, and common-carrier operations over the southern half ceased some years later. In the 1990s a segment around Baldwin City is used seasonally by a museum train.


rence represented a Missouri Pacific retreat to the Missouri River; until the 1880s the Missouri formed the border separating the railroads running westward from Chicago and St. Louis from those operating to the west and southwest of the river. The newly independent Pleasant Hill line soon went bankrupt, and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe purchased the route in 1877 primarily to utilize the seventeen miles between Lawrence and Cedar Junction as a part of its first main line into Kansas City. 

In 1872 a local company, the Lawrence and Southwestern, built the planned railroad to the southwest as far as Carbondale, thirty-one miles. By that time the Santa Fe had preempted most of its intended route and construction ceased. For a few years the company did modestly well, as the Santa Fe utilized it for some eastbound traffic. When the Santa Fe later obtained its own essentially parallel link to Lawrence, that traffic disappeared, and the company went bankrupt. In 1879 it was bought by the Union Pacific (a successor to the Union Pacific, Eastern Division), and for some years it carried coal from Carbondale mines. When the mines closed, the line became unprofitable and was abandoned in 1894. 

In March 1871 the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston completed a Kansas River railroad bridge at Lawrence. It had been required by the company's charter and probably would not otherwise have been built. However, the bridge was a cheaply constructed wooden structure on wood piers. In 1879 the Union Pacific bought it for use with its Carbondale branch, but it saw little traffic when coal shipments declined. The bridge was abandoned in 1894.

Finally, the Union Pacific, Eastern Division (later the Kansas Pacific), did not become the main transcontinental route; that role went instead to the Union Pacific line through Nebraska. The Kansas Pacific eventually merged with the Union Pacific and developed into a major traffic artery. The line continued to terminate in the Kansas City area, however, and Lawrence became just one modest-sized on-line traffic point. The Leavenworth–Lawrence segment became a light traffic density Union Pacific branch line.

After 1872 Lawrence obtained one railroad that had not been included in the city's plan. In 1874 the Kansas Midland, an affiliate of the Santa Fe, finished a line from Topeka along the south bank of the Kansas River. Thereafter the Santa Fe completed a connection from Lawrence into Kansas City using a portion of the St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver. Lawrence editors enjoyed pointing out that the Santa Fe was the only railroad ever to reach the city without public subsidies.

In all, about 120 miles of railroad were built primarily due to local efforts (Fig. 3), but Lawrence and Douglas County received little from the large amounts they had invested in railroads. Instead a large debt in bonds accrued, a burden that became unbearable during the depression that started in 1873. After the city and county applied much pressure, bondholders agreed to a 50-percent decrease in the face value of their bonds.

34. Kansas Daily Tribune, December 3, 1871, February 23, 1877; Republican Daily Journal (Lawrence), January 20, 1876; St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver Railroad Minute Book, 85-91, 146; the Missouri Pacific-St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver Railroad contract stated that for the first fifteen years of the lease, the Lawrence rate was not to exceed the rate between St. Louis and places "unaffected by river competition," and that the St. Louis-Lawrence rate should never exceed the St. Louis-Kansas City rate by more than 50 percent. River competition referred to cities on the Missouri River, for at this time steamboats were not competitive with railroads in the region. Under the Santa Fe, the Cedar Junction-Olathe section was abandoned in the 1880s, and the Olathe-Pleasant Hill portion was sold to another railroad.

35. St. Louis, Lawrence and Western, Minute Book, 163-66, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Office: Kansas Daily Tribune, December 7, 1872; Republican Daily Journal, June 24, 27, 1875; Evening Standard (Lawrence), May 17, 1879; Lawrence Daily Journal, July 11, October 9, November 27, December 31, 1879; Lawrence Daily Journal, January 5, 1880, March 21, 1894. After the Missouri Pacific relinquished its lease of the St. Louis, Lawrence and Denver Railroad, the latter merged with the Carbondale line to form the St. Louis, Lawrence and Western Railroad, which had a short corporate existence (with headquarters and operating base in Lawrence) before it went bankrupt and its constituent parts were sold to the Union Pacific and the Santa Fe. When the Carbondale line was abandoned in 1894, it was being leased by the Kansas City, Wyandotte and Northwestern Railroad.


37. Lawrence Daily Journal, January 27, 1880. The Leavenworth-Lawrence branch was abandoned in about 1890.


The Lawrence example is not unique. To varying degrees other nearby cities such as Leavenworth, Atchison, and Fort Scott also had unsuccessful railroad programs. Scores of other examples may have been scattered over the country thus adding many thousands of miles to the nation’s rail network. Some mileage was incorporated into various main lines, and some was abandoned quite early. Most segments, however, became parts of low traffic density lines that came to characterize the American railroad network.

and some secondary shops until 1875. *Kansas Daily Tribune*, December 6, 1867; June 28, 1871; October 21, 1876; *Republican Daily Journal*, August 10, 1875. For some years the Union Pacific Railway helped support Bismarck Grove, a park near Lawrence where fairs and meetings were held. Lawrence had the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston offices until 1874 and those of its successors between 1882 and 1888. *Republican Daily Journal*, April 1, 1874; *Kansas Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1874; *Laurence Daily Journal*, April 12, 18, May 27, June 24, 1882, January 24, 1884, April 14, May 30, June 2, October 20, 1888, June 2, 22, 1889. From 1887 to 1889 Lawrence had the offices and was the operating center of the Lawrence, Emporia and Southwestern Railroad, which leased the Carbondale line from the Union Pacific. This was a minor railroad and the employment impact was small. *Laurence Daily Journal*, October 4, 1887; Lawrence, Emporia and Southwestern Minute Book, 19, 22–23, Union Pacific Railroad Offices, St. Louis.

In September 1865 the Missouri Pacific was completed to Kansas City giving that city a decided advantage over Lawrence in railroad development.