

## FIRST RAILROAD

*The Mexican War was a turning point in New Albany history. No longer could the city by the river be considered a frontier town. Even while New Albany troops were fighting in Mexico, plans were made for a railroad from New Albany to Salem so that Salem could have better connections with the all-important river. That railroad is today the Monon which has adopted as its slogan, "The Lifeline of Indiana" . . .*

The first railroads built in the United States were short lines intended to connect rivers and canals. In Indiana the story was the same. Railroads were planned to connect the central part of the state with the Ohio River.

In New Albany talk of a railroad to link the city with Salem started while New Albany men were still fighting in Mexico. The city wanted a thoroughfare to the rich farming country of Washington County. Trade between New Albany and the area back from the river had become so heavy that teams and wagons on muddy roads could no longer handle it.

The enthusiasm for the new railroad was so great that over 4,000 persons bought stock in the project. The City of New Albany itself purchased \$100,000 worth of stock, and Salem and other towns purchased large amounts. Work started in 1848 and on July 4, 1849 the first three miles were completed. A special excursion was run to the end of the track and a huge barbecue was held near where the Mt. Tabor School is today. By 1850 the track had reached Pekin and in 1851 it was completed to Salem. The first train into Salem was greeted by the cheers of thousands of people who had come from miles around in buggies and wagons to take their first look at the Iron Horse. Since a

railroad to Salem was a good thing for New Albany, it was soon decided that a railroad to Bedford and Bloomington would be even better. Construction crews were put to work again at the back-breaking labor of drilling through the hills and filling the valleys to make a route for the track. When Bloomington was reached, the work didn't stop. The track was pushed farther and farther north until in 1854 it reached Michigan City.

Now there was a railroad all the way from the Ohio River to Lake Michigan, the longest in Indiana. It was an important line and the New Albany depot at Pearl and Oak was a busy place. Many settlers headed for the lands in Wisconsin and farther west traveled over the new railroad. They came down the river from Pittsburgh, changed to the train at New Albany, and went all the way to Chicago by rail.

The railroad was first called the New Albany & Salem, but after it reached Lake Michigan the old name was changed to Louisville, New Albany & Chicago. Later still it became the Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville – better known as the Monon.

The new railroad quickened New Albany's already lively pace. Louisville didn't have a railroad yet when New Albany's first train ran to Salem, and residents from the Kentucky city flocked across the river to take their first train ride. A new hotel was built across the street from the railroad station for the convenience of passengers. Freight could be shipped on the railroad even when the river boats were tied up by low water. The railroad shops were located in New Albany and built many cars and locomotives. Through the years the Monon had its financial troubles, but it kept expanding until it had its own tracks into Chicago and a line to Indianapolis. Today the Monon is one of America's Class I railroads – an important traffic link between Louisville, New Albany and Chicago. Diesel locomotives and streamlined cars hum along the track where a century ago smokey, wood-burning locomotives frightened

horses at country crossroads. And the Monon is a monument to New Albany citizens whose foresight and business ability turned talk of a railroad into reality and helped keep pace with the rest of the nation, in industry and commerce.

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