

The Day Leland Stanford Met David Jordan

HOWARD F. McMAINS

ABSTRACT: On the evening of Saturday, March 21, 1891, Leland and Jane Stanford arrived at the Bloomington, Indiana, railway depot in the standard accommodation car of the Louisville, New Albany & Chicago's Number 9. The couple were building a university on their Palo Alto ranch to honor their late son, Leland Jr., and Senator Stanford was searching for a president for his new university. David Starr Jordan, the president of Indiana University, had been recommended to Stanford to fill the position. The two men met briefly and privately the next morning, Jordan accepted the post, and the Stanfords quietly left town on Monday. Howard F. McMains details the reasons behind Stanford's discreet visit and examines how historians have mischaracterized the Stanfords' travels to Bloomington and thus the meeting between Stanford and Jordan.

KEYWORDS: Leland Stanford, David Starr Jordan, Jane Stanford, Stanford University, Indiana University, railroads, higher education

California railway magnate and U. S. senator Leland Stanford once spent a day in Bloomington, Indiana. His arrival on Saturday night March 21, 1891, was deliberately inconspicuous, although by early Sunday afternoon

Howard F. McMains received his Ph.D. in history at Indiana University in 1970 and has retired from a career that included teaching in two universities and editing the *OAH Newsletter*. In U. S. history he has written a number of articles and reviews (his first *IMH* article appeared in 1971) and in English history *The Death of Oliver Cromwell* (1999). He thanks Dr. Dawn Bakken at the *IMH* for carefully editing this text, and Carthan W. Davis III and David A. Riggs, who were students "long ago," for reading and commenting on the early draft.

two newspaper editors were aware of an eminent person's presence in town, if not his purpose. Stanford talked with the editors, one of whom reported in the town's semi-weekly paper on Tuesday—the day after the senator had already left town—that Stanford thought “he could come into our little city and get away without anyone being the wiser.”¹

Stanford did not want the editors or the public to be “the wiser” about his plan to offer Indiana University president David Starr Jordan the presidency of his new science-based university in California. Jordan's acquaintance Andrew White, president of Cornell University, had recommended him to Stanford when the senator had recently visited Ithaca. Jordan, a Cornell graduate, had built a reputation as a scientist and, more recently, as an administrator who personified Indiana University. He was also, as it happened, discontented: a few weeks earlier the Indiana legislature had once again failed to support the university adequately, and Jordan was concerned that this limited the growth of the institution and inhibited his own career.²

Stanford and Jordan believed in the importance of higher education, even if they came at it differently. They agreed that universities, in contrast to classical colleges, pursued “the search for order,” as historian Robert Wiebe famously described the Gilded Age, with its objectives of science, discovery, and utility.³ Based on White's recommendation, Stanford decided to see Jordan in Bloomington as soon as possible, quietly offer him the presidency of Stanford University, and leave town before the chips began to fall.

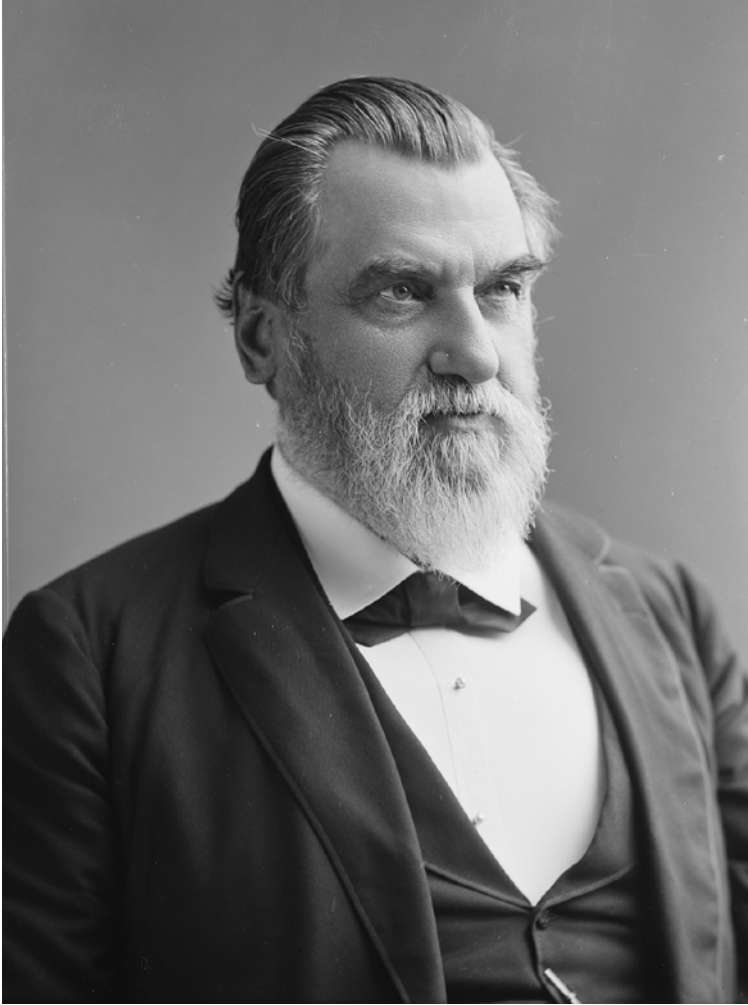
Until Jordan's memoirs appeared in 1922, historians had not especially known of his meeting with Stanford. Jordan had said virtually nothing about it at the time. In his memoirs thirty years later, he recalled that the arrival of Stanford's private railway car in Bloomington was the central fact of the senator's visit. Nonetheless, he was not at the depot, did not see the private car, did not meet Stanford until the next morning, and did not see the car depart. Upon Jordan's foundation of sand, writers subsequently deposited layers of error.⁴

¹ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 27, 1891.

² David Starr Jordan, *The Days of a Man: Being the Memoirs of a Naturalist, Teacher, and Minor Prophet of Democracy* (2 vols., Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York, 1922), 1:354.

³ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York, 1967).

⁴ Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 354.



Leland Stanford, c. 1880. Stanford had made his fortune in railroads and dedicated a portion of that fortune to founding a new university in Palo Alto, California, in memory of his son Leland Junior. Stanford and his wife Jane came to Bloomington, Indiana, in March 1891 to ask IU president David Starr Jordan to take the presidency of the new Stanford University.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

In 1925, Orrin Leslie Elliott, one of Stanford's founding administrators, followed Jordan's lead about the private car. He wrote that "the Stanford car was headed to Bloomington, Indiana, the same evening" as Stanford's meeting with White but incorrectly assumed that the private car

also arrived in Bloomington. He mentioned Jordan's favorable impression of Stanford and the senator's theme of establishing "a university of the highest order."⁵

In her 1959 history of the university, Stanford English professor Edith Mirrieles included a longer account of the visit. Her reference to the arrival was succinct but also incorrect: "On the day the Stanford car reached Bloomington, Jordan was away." Mirrieles noted that "no record was made then or later of what was said."⁶ In fact, Jordan had returned from a speaking trip just prior to Stanford's arrival and at the end of their meeting the two agreed to a memorandum of understanding.

Oscar Lewis in 1966 apparently elaborated upon Jordan's statement, lapsing into creative prose that distorted his already incorrect premise. According to Lewis: "One Saturday afternoon the Stanford car was shunted to a sidetrack in Bloomington and half the population . . . hurried to the depot to stare at its curtained windows." He went on to write that Stanford and Jordan met "at the village hotel," where Stanford described the quadrangle as still under construction (actually, it was already finished). He also said that only a few phrases of the interview were preserved in the senator's "hesitant speech."⁷

In 1988, photojournalist Margo Davis and university archivist Roxanne Nilan published a wonderfully illustrated scholarly history of Stanford University. They also assumed that the founding couple arrived "in Bloomington by rail in 'Car Stanford,'" implying how ingrained the story had become.⁸

Nor were such liberties confined to Stanford-based historians. Noted historian Thomas D. Clark wrote Indiana University's official three-volume sesquicentennial history in 1970. Clark, who enjoyed full access to all resources and the assistance of six graduate researchers, leaped beyond preceding writers by asserting new and unsubstantiated information as a matter of settled fact. He described Stanford, appropriately enough, as builder of the Central Pacific and one of the "big four" of the Southern

⁵ Orrin Leslie Elliott, *Stanford University: the First Twenty-Five Years* (1977; Stanford, Calif., 1925), 41–43.

⁶ Edith R. Mirrieles, *Stanford, The Story of a University* (New York, 1959), 34–35.

⁷ Oscar Lewis, *The Big Four: The Story of Huntington, Stanford, Hopkins, and Crocker, and of the Building of the Central Pacific* (New York, 1966), 186–87.

⁸ Margo Davis and Roxanne Nilan, *The Stanford Album: A Photographic History, 1885–1945* (Stanford, Calif., 1989), 14.

Pacific (although “builder” might be misleading). But he ignored Jordan’s testimony about the private car—which others had followed, if mistakenly so—and posited instead that Stanford arrived at the Bloomington depot “aboard a Union Pacific private train.”⁹ One is left to conjecture that Clark imagined a truncated Overland Flyer that left California with Stanford aboard, powered over the Sierra Nevada, thundered across Nebraska, and steamed into Bloomington from the north—or maybe the south—on tracks of the Louisville, New Albany, and Chicago (LNA&C) Railroad. In reality, however, this was not possible because the Stanfords had spent the previous week aboard their private car traveling from Washington, D. C., to Baltimore, New York, Ithaca, and Indianapolis.

Clark’s publisher, Indiana University Press, chose not to include footnotes in the three-volume history, and so curious readers find no documentation for his claim regarding the Stanfords’ train. However, the phrase “Union Pacific train” does not appear in contemporary sources. If indeed there had actually been a private train, Stanford would have traveled aboard a *Central* Pacific train rather than a *Union* Pacific train. And finally, traditional operating protocols would not have permitted a Union Pacific locomotive and crew to run on the LNA&C, because it would be dangerous to have “foreign” equipment and crews on unfamiliar tracks. In turn, the protocols also did not permit an LNA&C crew to drive a Union Pacific locomotive with which they were unfamiliar.

In fact, on March 21, 1891, neither private car nor private train arrived at the Bloomington depot, leaving open the question of *how* the Stanfords got there. Leland Stanford’s purpose was to speak with Jordan, which required discretion, not an arrival in a small town where half the population could stare at a private car’s curtained windows or gawk at an Overland Flyer sitting at the depot under steam for a day and a half. Such a presence would have made Stanford’s business with Jordan visible, and Stanford preferred his business to be invisible. He had not built his fortune with transparent and open agreements, and an inconspicuous arrival was integral to his purpose. Later writers could only imagine that one of the nation’s wealthiest men made an audacious arrival at

⁹ Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University, Midwestern Pioneer*, vol. 1: *The Early Years* (Bloomington, Ind., 1970), 260.

the Bloomington depot.¹⁰ Misrepresenting the journey misrepresents the subsequent meeting.



In 1891, Jordan was a popular and successful university president who had acquired a national reputation. He had been professor of natural history at Indiana—a small college really—since 1879 and president since 1885, when he began transforming the institution from a classical college to a modern science-based university. As a result, by 1891 enrollment doubled to nearly 400, a fact that many attributed to Jordan's constant train travel around the state and Midwest to lecture in the university's interest.

Jordan had been an academic pioneer, and the Stanford presidency would require a pioneering incumbent. He had grown up in western New York and entered Cornell University's first class halfway through its opening year. Nonetheless, he graduated on time in 1872, earning both a bachelor's and a master's degree. He taught at an academy in Wisconsin and then at a sectarian college in Galesburg, Illinois. From there he came to the new Indianapolis High School at a time when high schools were not yet widespread. Restless and wanting the cachet of teaching in a college, he sought a position at Butler University, a sectarian college that at the time was building a new campus east of Indianapolis in suburban Irvington. Jordan arrived just in time to help open the new campus, which added to his pioneering credentials. His memoirs claimed—possibly for colorful effect—that on his first day he drove a team and wagon filled with equipment to the new site. Sectarial Butler colleagues recognized his teaching ability, but conservative rural preachers affiliated with the school objected to his modern science.

In 1879, Jordan talked his way into an appointment at the state university in Bloomington, where his skills again proved useful. He was popular with his clerical colleagues because he was personable, spoke of scientific fact, and avoided theology. He was soon virtually a president-in-waiting.

¹⁰ Historian Richard White concludes that for the railway magnates "private success came from luck, fortunate timing, and state intervention. Profit arose more from financial markets and insider contracts than successfully selling transportation." He writes that Stanford exemplifies how "so many powerful and influential people are so ignorant and do so many things so badly." Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York, 2011), 508–509.



David Starr Jordan, c. 1888. Jordan joined the faculty of Indiana University in 1879. He soon became university president and began to redesign the curriculum and hire new faculty.

Jordan's success gained him national recognition.

Courtesy, Indiana University Archives

After a devastating fire in 1883, trustees built a new campus with two buildings on an attractively wooded hill. They planned Owen Hall for Jordan's use and Wylie Hall for science. A year later, an impropriety led the Rev. Dr. Lemuel Moss to resign the presidency, and the board quickly appointed Jordan to the post. As the new president, Jordan promised that he would devote his career to the service of Indiana University. He led the

institution onto the new campus, redesigned the curriculum to emphasize science, and began hiring faculty with modern training to replace the cadre of aging seminarians. In 1891, he was the university's most popular professor, the town's best-known citizen, the state's most eloquent spokesman for higher education, and an internationally recognized scientist. He was not quite forty.

At the same time in California, Leland and Jane Stanford had begun arranging the Leland Stanford Junior University. The institution was a memorial to their only child, Leland Junior, who was born in 1868 when his parents had been married for eighteen years and Jane was forty. The young Stanford died in early 1884 in Florence, Italy, during a family tour of Europe, probably of typhoid fever. The grieving parents decided while still in Europe to build an educational institution in his memory—but not a traditional college dedicated to Greek and Latin, recitation and conjugation, classical literature and repetition of lessons *ad infinitum*. They wanted a modern institution that would train students—men and women—in the practicalities of life, to use Stanford's phrase, and they quickly expanded their concept into a comprehensive university that would emphasize science but also teach all the branches of learning.

The founders' plans were well publicized. In remote Bloomington, David Jordan would have been aware of them after the monthly *Indiana Student* reported: "Ex Governor, now United States Senator, Stanford, the California millionaire, has laid out plans for a university at Palo Alto as a monument to the memory of his late and only son." After the California legislature elected Stanford to the U. S. Senate, he was able to confer with educational leaders in the East. He based his plans on Jordan's alma mater because, the senator said, "the Cornell course more nearly coincides with my ideas than that of any other of the colleges."¹¹

In mid-1884, the couple visited Yale, Harvard, M.I.T., and Cornell and decided that Cornell's modern science and comprehensive curriculum indeed exemplified their objectives. A year later, in his mansion atop San Francisco's Nob Hill, Stanford signed the deed of endowment that dedicated a considerable portion of his fifty-million-dollar fortune to the university. Money would not be a problem in the near term. According to an oft-repeated story, when visiting Harvard, Jane Stanford asked President Charles Eliot how much a university would cost, exclusive of land and

¹¹ *Indiana Student*, March 1885, p. 101; December 1885, p. 77; *Bloomington Telephone*, April 17, 1891.

buildings. Eliot replied offhandedly that it would cost five million dollars. (In comparison, Indiana's new minimal campus had cost about \$50,000 and had a yearly budget of some \$40,000, mostly for salaries.) Stanford winked at her and said, "Well, Jane, we could manage that, couldn't we?"¹²

The Stanford campus took shape on their Palo Alto ranch between 1887 and 1891, but finding a president proved more difficult than raising buildings. Stanford first offered the position to General Francis Amasa Walker, since 1881 president of M.I.T. and a prominent political economist with experience leading a seven-hundred-student institution, the size Stanford anticipated. Walker visited Palo Alto in 1886, but he found the landscape forty miles south of San Francisco dreary. He declined. Eastern academics were reluctant to transit a continent just to become educational pioneers.¹³

The Stanfords broke ground at a place where young Leland allegedly once picnicked. Stanford historian Richard White commented in his recent history of the transcontinental railroads: "The deep loss of the Stanfords is still visible in the nineteenth-century sections of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. The Stanfords' grief was touching. It was also mad." By early 1891, with the quadrangle complete and fully modern dormitories under construction, Stanford was concerned because he had neither faculty nor president. The Stanfords wanted the university to begin classes in six months, thus exerting pressure to name as soon as possible a president who could appoint faculty and open the campus.¹⁴

After the senate adjourned in March 1891, the couple set out from Washington in their private railway car to find a president. This car figured prominently in putative narratives of the Stanfords' visit to Bloomington, which in turn determined how writers imagined the senator's meeting with Jordan. The car had been Mrs. Stanford's gift to her husband so that he would not have to travel in one of the ordinary private cars the railroad made available to corporate officials. According to Mrs. Stanford's secretary, Bertha Berner, the car provided the full range of Gilded Age luxury and over-indulgence, from rosewood paneling, to a five-octave organ, to

¹² Davis and Nilan, *Stanford Album*, 11.

¹³ A few years later, in 1891, Mrs. Orrin Elliott from Indiana described the campus as a "dry, dun waste . . . unrelieved by greenery," whereas the naturalist Jordan boasted of its "beauties and attractions" without exactly contradicting her. They were both right. Ellen Coit Elliott, *It Happened This Way; American Scene* (Stanford, Calif., 1940), 179; *Indiana Student*, May 1891, p. 173.

¹⁴ White, *Railroaded*, 26; Elliott, *Stanford University*, 39–40; Davis and Nilan, *Stanford Album*, 13–14.



The “Stanford Car,” given by Jane Stanford to her husband Leland as a gift. The private car, built at the California Pacific Railroad car works in Sacramento, California, allowed the couple and their servants to travel in luxury and comfort.

Courtesy, Stanford University Archives

plate-glass windows surrounding the twelve-person sitting room. The bedrooms “left no convenience to be wished for.” The dining room could seat a dozen with elaborately formal table settings. During a journey, the car received fresh produce and “choice things” at prearranged stops. The cook and his assistant ran a kitchen outfitted with the latest in amenities, but they slept with no conveniences in the car’s baggage storage area.¹⁵

The Stanfords first traveled to Baltimore, where they visited Daniel Coit Gilman at Johns Hopkins University. They inquired about persons with experience arranging a faculty and opening a campus, and Gilman discussed several names. From Baltimore, they traveled to Cornell, where Stanford offered Andrew White the presidency. White declined, saying he had already built the University of Michigan and Cornell. He then

¹⁵ Bertha Berner, *Incidents in the Life of Mrs. Leland Stanford* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1934), 24–27.

called aside his protégé, George Lincoln Burr, whom Jordan had attempted to entice to Indiana several years earlier. White told him that Stanford wanted a Cornell man for the California position and asked, “who is there to name?” Burr gave him three names, including Jordan. The first time Stanford heard Jordan’s name, therefore, was four days before they met in Bloomington. White should immediately have thought of Jordan, who had just been in Ithaca to attend a trustees’ meeting and who had written a trustees’ report that had become required reading in national educational circles. White recalled the day in his memoirs, without mentioning the closeted conversation with Burr. He remembered urging the Stanfords to see Jordan, “one of the leading scientific men of the country, possessed of a most charming power of literary expression, with a remarkable ability in organization and blessed with good sound sense.” White could rattle on and on, and so he did.¹⁶

On Thursday, March 19, according to White’s diary, the Stanfords “left for Indianapolis in the evening.” Apparently the railroads had not yet completed the itinerary for Bloomington. In traditional narratives, the Stanfords departed Ithaca aboard their private railway car and arrived in Bloomington aboard the same private car. The actual arrival was quite different and only notable for not being notable, which disagrees with what previous writers have said about Stanford’s visit to Bloomington.

From Indianapolis, the now-expanded itinerary carried the Stanfords forty miles west to Greencastle, the Putnam County seat, where they could connect to Bloomington on the Louisville, New Albany & Chicago. The east-west Indianapolis and St. Louis Railway (I&StL) intersected the LNA&C north of town at the Greencastle station; the east-west Vandalia intersected the LNA&C two miles southwest at Limesdale, generally known as Greencastle Junction. Sources are not clear which route they traveled, but it is most likely they were on the Vandalia.¹⁷

¹⁶ Elliott, *Stanford University*, 40–41; *Saturday Courier*, February 21, 1891; Andrew Dickson White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White* (New York, 1905), 1:569, 2:447. White writes that he first met the Stanford family in 1880 when he was U. S. consul in Berlin and they were on a grand tour. He remembered a fourteen-year-old Leland Jr. (he was actually twelve) as “one of the brightest and noblest and most promising youths I had ever seen. . . . The aspirations of his father and mother were bound up in him.”

¹⁷ In later years, the I&StL became part of the New York Central System and the Vandalia part of the Pennsylvania Railroad. When Bloomington travelers referred to connecting at Greencastle in the 1880s and 1890s, they were usually connecting between the Vandalia and the LNA&C at Greencastle Junction. The Vandalia promoted itself as providing Bloomington travelers with

The LNA&C ran three-hundred miles across Indiana from Louisville on the Ohio River to Michigan City on the lake, with trackage rights into Chicago. North of Greencastle, the railroad ran in a straight line to Michigan City, but south of Greencastle the line twisted over and around “the rolling, sometimes rugged hills of southern Indiana.”¹⁸ Bloomington students called the LNA&C “the long, narrow, angular and crooked railroad” on which express trains averaged about twenty-five miles per hour.¹⁹

The railroad’s timetable was arranged for arrivals and departures at Louisville and Chicago, leaving residents of towns in the middle of the line captive to the railroad’s whim. After one schedule change, an irritated Bloomington student asked, “What have we done that the railroad company should try to shut us up here by making no connections whatever with any other [rail] road.”²⁰ If passengers missed their connection, they “got left”—sometimes until the next day. Even Governor Albert G. Porter had complained: “Will we never be able to go to and from Bloomington without such great inconvenience.”²¹ Bloomington could be a difficult destination, even for a California railway magnate.

The LNA&C’s March 1891 timetable listed four southbound trains, of which three could have carried the private car to Bloomington. (See Table 1) There was a day express and an overnight express between Chicago and Louisville, and an accommodation train that ran the line between Lafayette and Bedford, running up mornings and down evenings. The accommodation train was convenient for the Stanfords’ itinerary. It left the Junction at about 7:00 p.m. and was scheduled to get to Bloomington at 8:05. Nonetheless, attaching the private car to this train was ill-advised, because the small locomotive and perhaps two lightweight cars would have had difficulty accelerating, pacing along the right of way’s many grades, and braking with a large and heavy private car attached at the rear.

In the end, however—contrary to previous accounts—none of these trains took the private car from Greencastle to Bloomington. When the

excellent connections at the Junction for cities both east and west. See for example, *Bloomington Telephone*, November 26, 1881.

¹⁸ Gary W. Dolzall and Stephen F. Dolzall, *Monon: The Hoosier Line* (2nd ed., Bloomington, Ind., 2003), 31.

¹⁹ *Bloomington Telephone*, April 12, 1884.

²⁰ *Bloomington Telephone*, December 22, 1883; *Indiana Student*, January 15, 1887, 99.

²¹ Gov. Albert G. Porter to Rev. Lemuel Moss, June 13, 1882, Indiana University President’s Office Records, C73, Indiana University Archives, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Table 1

<i>Train</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Origin -- Destination</i>	<i>Dep.</i> <i>Bloomington</i>
No. 3	express	Chicago to Louisville	3:12 a.m.
No. 5	express	Chicago to Louisville	4:00 p.m.
No. 7	local	Bloomington to Louisville	6:00 a.m.
No. 9	local	Lafayette to Bedford	8:05 p.m.
No. 4	express	Louisville to Chicago	11:30 p.m.
No. 6	express	Louisville to Chicago	11:30 a.m.
No. 8	local	Louisville to Bloomington	7:30 p.m.
No.10	local	Bedford to Lafayette	8:10 a.m.

Bloomington newspapers frequently printed the railroad's schedule. The information in the table is arranged from the *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 1891.

through train carrying the private car from the East reached Greencastle, the railroad simply detached it and placed it on a sidetrack. This was according to Stanford's instruction, for otherwise the maneuver would not have happened. A few hours later, the car was attached to the 12:30 a.m. overnight express to Chicago, where the Stanfords caught up with it Monday night.²² The private car went *north* to Chicago, not *south* to Bloomington, and the Stanfords traveled as passengers in the humble accommodation train.

Neither the Bloomington nor the Greencastle newspapers reported the sidetracking maneuver because they did not know of it. Stanford may have thought the car would be at some risk on the LNA&C's long, narrow, angular, and crooked rail line; or he may have suspected that facilities for the car's storage and retrieval in Bloomington were inadequate. But the most likely explanation is that Stanford did not want the car making a conspicuous arrival that advertised his presence and purpose.

Meanwhile, the car sat on a Greencastle sidetrack and the Stanfords waited for the accommodation train to rattle into the Junction from Lafayette. During their wait, they could have ensconced themselves in the parlor at the Junction House hotel.²³ If the car were sidetracked next to the depot, the Stanfords could simply have waited in it until Number 9 was ready to depart about 7:00. Writers in later years did not—indeed could not—imagine that one of the richest couples in the country would travel as ordinary passengers from Greencastle to Bloomington aboard the southbound LNA&C accommodation train Number 9.²⁴

A single newspaper report makes clear beyond all doubt that the Stanfords were not aboard their private car when they arrived at Bloomington on Saturday night. Only the weekly Bloomington *Saturday Courier* caught this story, if not its significance, but it was unable to publish the scoop until its next issue the following Saturday. In the meantime, the semi-weekly *Telephone's* editor, Walter Bradfute, missed the story. On Tuesday, after

²² *Saturday Courier*, March 28, 1891.

²³ A few years earlier, Rosa Smith, an Indiana University student and typical Bloomington traveler, had waited two hours in the hotel parlor for an eastbound Vandalia train, which she mentioned in a letter to her parents in California. Rosa Smith to Mrs. C. K. Smith, April 13, 1882, Eigenmann Mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

²⁴ Railway maps indicate that the Vandalia was the likeliest route from the East to Indianapolis and Greencastle, but the Stanfords could in theory have been on the I&StL from Indianapolis. Changing lines at Greencastle's I&StL station would have made no difference in what happened that night: the car would still have been sidetracked, it would still have been dispatched to Chicago with the overnight express, and the Stanfords would still have waited for train number 9 to Bloomington.

the Stanfords' Monday morning departure, Bradfute reported merely that "Senator Leland Stanford of California was in Bloomington over Sunday." In his Friday issue he added that Stanford's arrival had been "a surprise."²⁵ One week after the event, the *Saturday Courier* finally reported the story: "The modest little accommodation train on the Monon [LNA&C] brought to this city last Saturday night one of the most distinguished persons, as far as wealth is concerned, that ever visited here."²⁶

When the senator alighted from the accommodation train at the Bloomington depot, no one recognized him, no one expected him, no one greeted him. He hired the hackney carriage to take his party two blocks to the National House hotel. He signed the register "Hon. Leland Stanford and wife, and two servants," and they received the hotel's best rooms. They "did not ask any better service than any other guests, and took all their meals in the dining room with the other boarders," the *Telephone* reported.²⁷ They could assume that at that hour no one was likely to guess their purpose or even recognize them.

Stanford's purpose, of course, was to see Jordan, whose movements at the time have also been something of a historical muddle. He was on a speaking tour, which he typically took two or three times a month; on Thursday, March 19, he lectured at Vincennes and on Friday, at Urbana, Illinois. Jordan claimed in his memoirs that the purpose of the latter visit had been "the dedication of a new science building . . . at Urbana," but the Illinois dedication took place in November 1892, when he spoke as Stanford's president.²⁸ In 1891, he gave his stock lecture on the value of public higher education. It was during the Urbana lecture that he received a telegram from Cornell's Andrew White: "Decline no offer from California till you hear from me." Jordan and every other educator would have understood "California" to mean "Leland Stanford." The telegram alerted Jordan that something was afoot and probably enabled him to guess what. Jordan's memoirs claimed that he arrived back in Bloomington "at five on Sunday morning"—the Chicago–Louisville overnight express was scheduled at 3:12 a.m.—and that he "met on the street one of our trustees," who said

²⁵ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 1891.

²⁶ *Saturday Courier*, March 28, 1891.

²⁷ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 27, 1891. This is the only reference to the two servants, who were probably the Stanfords' maid and valet.

²⁸ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 20, 1891; Winston U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois, 1867–1894: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Urbana, Ill., 1968), 350.

Stanford was at the hotel to see him.²⁹ The story sounds “off” (a trustee walking the streets at 5 a.m.?) but Jordan’s memoirs are not particularly reliable. His actual return was Saturday afternoon—the day express was due at 4:00 p.m.—and “a telegram was waiting for him stating that Senator Stanford would be in Bloomington Sunday.”³⁰

Arriving on the accommodation train had kept Stanford out of the public eye, and Sunday morning he invited Jordan to the hotel. They met quietly in the parlor an hour later with no one yet suspecting the senator’s presence or purpose.³¹ Their discussion was surprisingly brief and quickly reached its object. There seems to have been an absence of chit-chat and bonhomie. Stanford wanted a president; Jordan wanted a new position. Andrew White had convinced Stanford that he should talk with Jordan, whose experience with the Indiana legislature had convinced him that he should speak with anyone offering an important presidency.

Previous accounts do not consider that the two men needed only a fairly short meeting because they already “breathed together” in the cause of higher education. They quickly reached agreement on the Stanford University presidency. Each impressed the other, for both were born in upstate New York and liked to talk about individualism, practical education, and social mobility (whatever they may really have meant by such terms). Stanford explained, as he had many times over the years, that he was establishing “a university of the highest order, a center of invention and research” where students should be prepared for “usefulness in life.” He described the buildings and said that his estate of some fifty million dollars formed the university’s endowment. Jordan was surprised by the disparity between the funds available for Stanford’s private university and the meager biennial legislative appropriation available for Indiana’s public university in Bloomington. Jordan then stated his views, a digest of the higher-education stump speech that he had delivered many times, most recently in Vincennes and Urbana. The interview was so satisfactory that Stanford told a reporter in San Francisco, “I at once tendered him the position.” Jordan’s salary would

²⁹ Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 354; Mirrieles, *Stanford*, 34.

³⁰ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 1891.

³¹ Newspaper reports do not indicate whether Mrs. Stanford was present.

be \$10,000 per year, with a residence provided; his salary at Indiana had risen to \$4,000 with no residence.³²

Mrs. Stanford, meanwhile, attended the 11:00 a.m. service at First Christian Church. She was not recognized but as a visitor “was shown to the front seat.”³³ She drew attention to herself when “she tossed a five-dollar bill in the contribution plate, and everybody wondered who she was, as such liberality was unheard of before. When requested, however, the lady refused to give her name.” As she left the church, the doyenne of Nob Hill reprimanded the preacher for his stern sermon, telling him she was acquainted with “a God of Love, who pities them that fear him.”³⁴

After speaking with Jordan, the senator went to the hotel's dining room, where the *Courier's* editor found him “separating his pie with his knife.” By then, the editor knew of Stanford's presence, and Stanford was willing to engage with him. He had fulfilled his objective by offering Jordan the presidency without the public or the press being the wiser. Stanford was voluble about many things but not his business with Jordan. The editor asked how the food compared with that of larger hotels, and Stanford replied that he was so tired of dining at such places as Chicago's magnificent Auditorium Hotel that one of his purposes in Bloomington was to get “a square meal.” He also asked about the free coinage of silver; Stanford said he had no use for silver dollars and emphasized the point “by handing two of them to the waiter.” The editor then asked if the purpose of the visit was “to buy our University, or in some way connected with it.” No, Stanford replied wryly (as he awaited Jordan's reply to his offer), “nothing connected but something might be disconnected” before he left town—Stanford's attempt at humor. Having missed Stanford's thinly disguised hint, the editor fearlessly plodded on and asked if he intended to invest in a limestone quarry. Stanford again smiled and said he had just paid millions for a railroad and a university and would be “rather short until

³² *New York Times*, March 24, 1891; Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 354; Davis and Nilan, *Stanford Album*, 14; Elliott, *Stanford University*, 42. The average Indiana salary was in the \$1,600 to \$1,800 range, which was near the bottom among midwestern state universities.

³³ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 1891.

³⁴ *Saturday Courier*, March 28, 1891; Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 355. Jordan said Mrs. Stanford went to church with her secretary, but the formidable Bertha Berner was not on this trip. Her memoir refers to the car's cook more than Jordan, whom Ms. Berner barely deigned to mention. Berner, *Incidents in the Life of Mrs. Stanford*.

his June clipping of bonds came in." By this time the senator had "swept the platter clean" and excused himself.³⁵

Meanwhile, Jordan walked home from the hotel and consulted his wife. Before the town even knew the Stanfords were there, he had decided to accept the offer "with some enthusiasm." According to his memoirs, he concluded that "the possibilities were so challenging to one of my temperament that I could not decline."³⁶

In the afternoon, the Stanfords settled in the hotel parlor, where they spoke with the *Courier* and *Telephone* editors and other "inquirers" who approached them. Their presence in Bloomington had not remained completely unobserved. An overly excited editor wrote that by Sunday morning "everybody was buzzing about . . . what brought such a distinguished a party [sic] here." The senator spoke to persons in the parlor "as freely as any ordinary citizen," but he talked only about his university. (The number of persons showing up at the hotel on a Sunday afternoon to talk with the eminent senator from California must have been small, judging by the congregation's not identifying Mrs. Stanford that morning.) Both editors were deaf to his clues about the purpose of his visit, which they saw only through the lens of their own interests. One assumed that Stanford's purpose was "to inspect our college for the purpose of getting some pointers." The *Courier's* editor speculated that he intended to invest in limestone quarries, development of which had only begun within the past ten years. The senator spoke with the *Telephone's* Bradfute about his university in general terms and described his requirement for a president familiar with educational affairs, themes he had discussed with Jordan. Stanford described how he wanted women students in the university because "upon the training of the mother depended the future of the child." Even if some knew of the Stanfords' presence, "the business with Dr. Jordan was transacted so quickly that it was generally unknown until the party was out of town."³⁷ The meeting seems to have been socially awkward. Stanford did not invite Jordan to join him for lunch; Jordan

³⁵ *Saturday Courier*, March 28, 1891.

³⁶ Jordan, *Days of a Man*, 355–56. The university's twenty-four person board had no real authority as long as either Stanford lived. Leland Stanford died in 1893, and Jane Stanford was murdered in Honolulu in 1905, a case that remains unsolved. The 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed the Stanfords' Nob Hill mansion. Robert W. P. Cutler, *The Mysterious Death of Jane Stanford* (Stanford, Calif., 2003).

³⁷ *Saturday Courier*, March 28, 1891; *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 27, 1891.

What our University now needs most is more room, and more Professors with older heads. We now have a fine corps of teachers, but composed largely of young men.

We need some teachers more advanced in years and, consequently, experience, but the financial inducement we can offer them are not strong enough.

We have been enabled to secure some first-class teachers because they wanted a change and were willing to work for less in an institution that has a National reputation.

To show how other States appreciate the services of efficient educators, we have only to point to the fact that Dr. Branner is to get \$3,500 a year and expenses from Arkansas, while Dr. Jordan has more than once refused a salary much larger than he is receiving here.

Since Dr. Jordan became President of the Indiana University, about three years ago, the attendance of students has increased over one hundred.

The endowment fund is steadily increasing, and so the work of the institution can gradually be extended. There is no boom; none is wanted, but there is a steady, healthy growth.

In 1887, a Bloomington newspaper editor noted the improvements made to Indiana University under President David Starr Jordan. He also noted the recent departure of Geology professor John Branner, who had left IU for a better-paying job in Arkansas. The editorial boasted that, in contrast, "Dr. Jordan has more than once refused a salary much larger than he is receiving here."

Bloomington Courier, May 21, 1887

did not invite Stanford to see “his” campus and laboratory. They were altogether circumspect.

Jordan wrote a note that afternoon to a friend from his Cornell days, geologist John Branner, who had been his first appointment in 1885 to the Indiana faculty. After only two years at Indiana, Branner had taken leave to be Arkansas state geologist, with a promise to return. Prior to Stanford’s visit, Jordan had written twice to remind him of his commitment, but meanwhile Branner had received inquiries from the Universities of Wisconsin and Michigan. Jordan’s note on Sunday afternoon contained four concise sentences, the first two purposefully discouraging. He told Branner he knew the two universities “can do better than we” and that the board might offer him only as much as \$1,800 per year on his return. The note came quickly to the point: “But do not engage yourself absolutely to them for there is something still better under consideration for a good geologist.”³⁸ He signed that he would write later and dispatched the note in time for the 4:00 p.m. southbound express and its postal connection to Little Rock.

Jordan held the matter under consideration overnight, but his note to Branner implied he had already made his decision. Monday morning, he visited the Stanfords and officially accepted. Stanford reiterated that the university’s policy would be “like that of Cornell as far as practical.” Jordan asked him to approve a memorandum of their conversation: the university would emphasize both sciences and arts, supply faculty with all means for teaching and investigation, and publish faculty and graduate student research.

Stanford’s time in Bloomington ended Monday morning at the depot, soon after he saw Jordan again. He bought the party’s tickets, and as a newspaper reported, “They took the noon [11:30] train to Chicago, where the Senator’s private car is in waiting to take them to their western home.” They traveled in the express train’s parlor car, which was slightly more appropriate to their Nob Hill status than the accommodation train’s much abused coach. Incidental expenses for the trip included “\$2 to a hotel waiter, \$2 to a porter, and \$1 to a hackman.”³⁹ Stanford left Bloomington before news of his visit appeared in Tuesday’s semi-weekly *Telephone* and the uproar began over Jordan’s resignation from

³⁸ Jordan to Branner, March 22, 1891, John Casper Branner Papers, SC0034, University Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

³⁹ *Bloomington Telephone*, March 24, 1891; *Saturday Courier*, March 28, 1891.

the university. He had indeed gotten away from Bloomington without anyone being the wiser.

On Monday afternoon, Jordan wrote Branner a second note. He began directly: "I have resigned my present position to accept the Presidency of the Leland Stanford Jr. University. I have abundant assurances of freedom in making out my views." He did not mention the Stanfords' visit or the past day's events. He said he expected to nominate Branner as professor of geology at a salary of "about \$4,000" and that other decisions would follow within a month. He did not refer to Indiana University's granting Branner leave in 1887, after only two years, with the understanding "that he was to return to the institution," but the *Bloomington Telephone* reminded readers of the point when it announced Branner's appointment to Stanford. The paper did not mention Jordan's prior commitment to devote the rest of his career to Indiana University's interest. Branner's future, like Jordan's, was at Stanford, where one of his first students was Herbert Hoover, and where, in 1913, he succeeded Jordan as the university's second president.⁴⁰

Branner was one of eight faculty members—about half of Indiana's faculty—whom Jordan would take to Stanford. Despite this raid on the university, Jordan received endless praise in the weeks before he left. A student essayist, to take one example, listed his contributions to statewide education in Indiana, especially the teaching of scientific method at all levels and replacing "text book science" with laboratory science. The state and university "can ill afford to see him go; and we envy California's latest acquisition to the list of her great men."⁴¹

Stanford's appearance in Bloomington is more than an arcane detail because it underscores the senator's determination and sense of urgency to settle the presidency for a university that had acquired national visibility before it even had a faculty. For Stanford, hiring a president was a business transaction for which he considered an unobtrusive arrival in Bloomington as necessary to his purpose. Arriving in the private car would have made his presence and purpose dramatically visible, but arriving on the accommodation train kept the meeting with Jordan under wraps. He knew that his purpose would be locally unpopular. Therefore, how he got to Bloomington was as important as his being there. The person he hired would place his

⁴⁰ Jordan to Branner, March 23, 1891, Branner Papers; *Bloomington Telephone*, April 14, 1891.

⁴¹ *Indiana Student*, April 1891, p. 148.

own imprint on the new institution by the way he arranged faculty and opened the campus. He would also set precedents and confront vicissitudes, such as “the Ross Affair,” which in 1900 made academic freedom a national issue.⁴² Jordan’s appointment affected broad developments in California and Indiana: Stanford University with Jordan began its rise as California’s second national university; Indiana University without Jordan began its recovery from the loss of half its faculty and of the educational momentum he had initiated.

Four days after Indiana University’s 1891 commencement, it was the turn of Jordan and his family to depart from the Bloomington depot. It was a rainy Saturday in June, but many townspeople and most faculty who were still around turned out to shake the former president’s hand, wave farewell as he boarded the express, and watch the train steam westward towards Leland Stanford’s new university.⁴³

⁴² A convenient summary of the affair is in Cutler, *Mysterious Death of Jane Stanford*, appendix 2, 114–21.

⁴³ *Saturday Courier*, June 20, 1891; *Indiana Student*, June 1891, 204.