

New Albany: Reaching for the Hinterland

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Promoters of early New Albany realized that if their town's initial growth were to be continued and accelerated, the advantages of its favorable river position would have to be exploited to full measure. This they knew could best be accomplished by establishing a commercial interdependence between the town proper and the areas beyond its immediate geographic boundaries. No one knew what the limits of this hinterland were, or what they were to become. The merchants of New Albany, like those of dozens of other infant communities, set their ambitions as far as the most optimistic eye could penetrate, and then reached out to fulfill those ambitions. Every young settlement in Indiana could not become a Cincinnati, a Louisville, or a Chicago. But in 1830, the race toward urbanization was open to all comers, and it was believed that the degree of greatness achieved by a town depended largely on the alertness and enthusiasm of its promoters.

Expansion meant movement, and movement could take place only if there were facilities to channelize and direct it. A rich farm country was of little benefit to a town without adequate means for interchange between the two. Thus a keynote of New Albany's history from 1830 till after the Civil War was its persistent effort to establish railroads and turnpikes to the north, the east, and the west, in order to round out its pattern of transportation which naturally pivoted on the river. A few successes, more failures, and the frequent upsurges of rivalry with other similarly ambitious communities marked this stormy period of New Albany's attempt to make a reality of its commercial dreams.

The first really organized effort of the many towns in the state to reach out for the wealth of the countryside was the elaborate internal improvements project of 1836, the pretentious scale of which eventually bankrupted the state treasury and gave Indiana an unsavory reputation throughout the Union. The legislative maneuvering and log rolling exemplified in the enactment of this internal improvements

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bill were the epitome of local self-interest.¹ New Albany's position in the affairs of the state of Indiana at the time is evidenced by how successful it was in gathering the plums that fell from the legislative tree. Of the seven major projects prescribed by the bill, New Albany was to be directly benefited by two: the Jeffersonville, New Albany, and Crawfordsville Railroad, and the New Albany and Vincennes Turnpike.² A third, the New Albany and Mount Carmel (Illinois) Railroad, was given legislative sanction as a privately sponsored enterprise.³

The Mount Carmel Railroad was proposed to undertake something a railroad was not yet able to do: to run almost parallel to the Ohio River in direct competition with the steamboat. The idea of the projectors was to connect the Ohio Falls with the city of St. Louis. The eastern branch, of which New Albany was to be the terminus, was to be built to join its Illinois counterpart, which ran from St. Louis. Since state funds were unavailable, a memorial was sent to Congress, "praying for a grant or a pre-emption to 500,000 acres of land."⁴ But the grant was never forthcoming, and New Albany's enthusiasm for the project began to wane.⁵ Partly because of the lethargy of the New Albany citizens, the Indiana branch of the St. Louis to Ohio Falls railroad was not to become a reality for another forty-five years.

The railroad that gave New Albany its most notable boost as a mart for the interchange of town and country products was the New Albany and Salem. This road was not completed between the two towns until 1851, but initial plans for its building go back to the 1836 improvements bill.⁶ This bill authorized a state-built railroad to run from Jeffersonville,

¹ For a survey of this internal improvements movement see Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1915-1918), 352-393.

² *New Albany Gazette*, January 22, 1836.

³ *Indiana House Journal*, 1836, pp. 125, 223, 402.

⁴ *New Albany Argus*, September 23, 1839.

⁵ Editors in towns on the Illinois end of the projected railroad criticized New Albany for its listless attitude. (*New Albany Gazette*, October 20, 1837.) Actually the New Albany promoters were directing their enthusiasm to the planning of the Jeffersonville, New Albany, and Crawfordsville Railroad. This road to the north they considered far more important.

⁶ The name New Albany and Salem Railroad came at a later date. In 1836 the official name of the projected railroad northward was the Jeffersonville, New Albany, and Crawfordsville. For further information about this railroad, predecessor of the Monon, see Thomas C. Perring, "The New Albany-Salem Railroad," *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, 1905-), XV (1919), 342-362, and John Poucher, "Social Effects of the Monon Railway," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XII (1916), 326-336.

four miles down the river to New Albany, and then north-westward 150 miles to the town of Crawfordsville. Crawfordsville was strictly an interior town, and this early plan to have it serve as the northern terminus is an example of how early transportation projects were allowed to wander out in the rural spaces. The extension to Lake Michigan, a natural terminus for the railroad, was not included in the immediate plans of the projectors.

In carrying out this venture, \$1,300,000.00 was to be spent, "if practicable."⁷ It turned out not to be "practicable," and when Indiana's lofty improvements structure began to crumble, the unbuilt Jeffersonville, New Albany, and Crawfordsville Railroad suffered as did most of the other projects throughout the state. But in 1847, New Albany merchants, along with those of other towns which would be benefited by a revival of the old project, raised their voices anew to have at least part of the original plans carried out.

This time the railroad project began almost exclusively as a southern Indiana enterprise. The principal idea behind the new scheme was to furnish a thoroughfare from New Albany to the rich farming country of Washington County. Salem, the seat of justice for this county, was to be the northern terminus of the road, and the money was to come chiefly from interested parties in the two terminal towns. An extension of the road on beyond Salem, along the route outlined in the old surveys, was contemplated; but extensions were to come only as each town on the proposed line expressed its desire to be joined by pledging its share of the building cost.⁸

The first president of the New Albany and Salem Railroad was James Brooks, a New Albany merchant who stepped from his customary role to take the reins of the new project. His personal interest and individual administrative talents were responsible for much of the success that came to the road in its initial years. He succeeded in obtaining an amendment to the original charter that authorized the company to extend its road "to such point or points as the good of the company might seem to require."⁹

There was a question as to just where the road should go after it had reached Salem: some thought northeast to

⁷ *New Albany Gazette*, January 22, 1836.

⁸ *New Albany Ledger*, August 2, 1850.

⁹ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1852.

Columbus, Indiana, others northwest to Bedford and Bloomington.¹⁰ The latter choice was made, and the New Albany and Salem rambled on in a general northwesterly direction. Its eventual goal was still to be Crawfordsville, where it was to meet a line coming down from Lafayette. Apparently there was thought to be no harm in covering as much ground as possible before getting there.

Cars began to run on each stretch of the track as soon as it was laid down. By June, 1850, the company was operating two passenger cars on the ten-mile completed section, for the "ladies and gentlemen, who appeared delighted with the short railroad excursion."¹¹

The editor of the New Albany *Ledger* was among the first to try out the new conveyance which he had been energetically publicizing. About his first ride he wrote: "An event of this kind is one of the memorable passages in the history of New Albany improvements, and large numbers of our citizens have taken their first railroad ride within the last week. Great curiosity of course exists all along the line to see the snorting 'iron horse' as he passes along. At every door might be seen good dames surrounded by troops of youngsters, which tell in unmistakable language of the fruitfulness of our soil in the animal as well as the vegetable kingdom. Ever and anon from humble and we might even say ugly tenements, might be seen fair and handsome faces peering modestly out from behind doors and windows to take a peep at the much talked of stranger 'Locomotive,' with his 'train' almost as long as those worn by the ladies of Old England in the days of 'Good Queen Bess.' The horses pricked up their ears and stretched forth their arched backs in wonderment, and perhaps were lamenting that their valuable services would be sadly depreciated in the eyes of their owners, when contrasted with the powerful rival which dashed by them in such hot haste. The dogs barked wistfully at the impudent intruder and made desperate efforts to overtake him, but, alas! were compelled to give up the race in utter despair. The legs of cows, calves, pigs, sheep, etc., were never put to such excellent use as when scampering off from a too close proximity with the locomotive. But this state of things will not be of long

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1850.

duration. The passage of the cars will in a short time excite but little curiosity in those who see them daily."¹²

Fourth of July, 1850, was celebrated with a big barbecue at Providence (Borden, Indiana), not so much to commemorate the deeds of patriotic ancestors as to celebrate the arrival of the first cars at that town, fifteen miles up the line from New Albany. Six cars were used that day to accommodate the thousands from surrounding counties who participated in the grand festivities.¹³ By January of the next year the road had been completed to Salem, and the first train there, after "taking in passengers at almost every farm," was welcomed by "the ringing of bells, the roaring of cannon, and the shouts of thousands of people of all ages, colors, and conditions of Adam's race." Lengthy speeches and sumptuous dinners were the order of the day.¹⁴

Accidents on the new road were frequent. Besides the constant danger of explosions, head-on collisions, and fire from the flying sparks, there were other inconveniences for the passengers of the New Albany and Salem. Spring freshets played havoc with the crude roadbed, and when a washout occurred the passengers had no alternative but to walk ten or twelve miles to the nearest village.¹⁵ All traffic on the road was held up until repairs could be made, and on one occasion this took two weeks.¹⁶ New Albany passengers going north had the choice of a train leaving about 4:30 A.M., or a more crowded one leaving around noon. Keeping pace with the ever-changing schedule was a job in itself; but there were times when the trains were so late that an hour or two didn't make much difference anyway. By January, 1855, even the genial editor of the *Ledger* was disturbed by the failure of the cars to make their schedule: "This concern is getting to be one of the greatest humbugs of the age. The cars *occasionally* arrive within ten hours of the time they are due, but are more frequently from twenty-four to forty-eight hours behind."¹⁷

As the New Albany and Salem Railroad penetrated more deeply into the Indiana farm country its importance as the

¹² *Ibid.*, June 4, 1850.

¹³ *Ibid.*, June 19, 1850.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1851.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, March 11, 1854.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, April 6, 1852.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, January 29, 1855.

state's chief north-south thoroughfare became established. Going northwest from Bedford and Bloomington, it went to Crawfordsville, joined with the branch coming south from Lafayette, and then headed directly north to Michigan City on the lake. The completion of its 287-mile course in 1854 made it the longest railroad in the state.¹⁸

Developing beyond the confines of a local project, the outward prosperity of the road daily increased. Its business boomed as the increasing farm output sought its market in the many villages scattered along the line. And at the bottom of this funnel was the town of New Albany, ready to catch in its markets the biggest portion of the trade that was to be drained down this artery from the north. The effect that the railroad had on the commercial prosperity of New Albany cannot be readily measured by statistics, but it is clear that coincidental with the building of the road the importance of the town as a wholesale and forwarding center was established. This was in part but an acceleration of a trend that had begun years earlier; but the extent to which the commercial activity increased in the first few years after the establishment of the road lends credence to the contention that the New Albany and Salem was largely responsible. It was that vital link to the hinterland that the merchants of New Albany had sought. At no time did the hopes of what the town might some day become rise so high as in the early 1850's.¹⁹

After reaching Michigan City in 1854, the New Albany and Salem joined with the Michigan Central at that point and then went some thirty miles westward to Chicago. By this date Chicago's importance was universally recognized, and a rail connection from the Ohio River to this new city on the lake was an important event in Midwestern railroad development.²⁰ The combined river-railroad route was publicized as

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, December 11, 1855.

¹⁹ Paragraphs like the following were very common in the daily *Ledger* at this period: "The time has not arrived when we can properly estimate the importance of the New Albany and Salem Railroad to the growth, prosperity and business interest of this city. Nor do we believe even the most sanguine among us has any just conception of the future flattering prospects of New Albany, as this road shall from time to time be extended further and still further into the interior of the State If they [the citizens] are united, as they should be, we have no fear but our population will be doubled, and the wealth of the city trebled, in five years." *Ibid.*, June 28, 1850.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1855.

the cheapest and most convenient way to travel westward. The following letter, presumably written by a citizen of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and cited in the *New Albany Ledger*, points out the advantages of this route: "Mr. Editor: As there is at present quite a number of families preparing to emigrate to the 'Far West' from this country, permit me through your paper to give them a hint as to which is the best route from Pittsburgh to Chicago. I would advise them to go by the Ohio River to New Albany, Indiana, there ship their furniture and farming utensils by the New Albany and Salem Railroad direct to Chicago.

"The advantages of this route are, first, cabin passage from Pittsburgh to New Albany (meals included) can be obtained on first class boats for from \$6 to \$7, and from thence by railroad for \$8—making in all \$15—while by other routes the fare is from \$18 to \$20.

"In the second place, furniture shipped by the river has to be reshipped only once from Pittsburgh to Chicago, (at New Albany) while by other routes it must be reshipped from five to seven times"²¹

The New Albany and Salem came to have still a greater part in the travel westward when it made its connection with the newly-laid Ohio and Mississippi Railroad in 1857. This road ran between Cincinnati and St. Louis, and its trains met a special accommodation train of the New Albany and Salem at Mitchell. Travelers leaving New Albany at 10:30 A.M. were scheduled to reach St. Louis the same night.²²

New Albany was not only the terminus of the railroad, but it was also the seat of the general offices and machine shops.²³ From the former came prestige, from the latter a tangible contribution to the town's economy in the form of wages to at least 150 employees. As New Albany came to figure less and less in the calculations of the railroad managers, there was a growing fear that the shops would be moved from the town to a more centrally-located point. When the threat seemed greatest it was aggravated by a fire which swept through the New Albany shops, destroying a large part of the buildings and rolling stock. But the people of New

²¹ From Cambria, Pennsylvania, *Tribune*, cited in *New Albany Ledger*, April 22, 1856.

²² *New Albany Ledger*, April 21, 1857.

²³ *Ibid.*, May 20, 1858.

Albany donated enough money to the company to encourage them to rebuild in the town, and thus retained for New Albany this important share in the railroad.²⁴

New Albany's stake in the railroad was more than sentimental from the first years of its building. Even the "laborers and mechanics" of the town had been urged to contribute what they could to start the grandiose project on its way; but the town's chief financial contribution was in the form of a \$100,000.00 purchase of stock, this amount to be raised by increasing the general tax rate.²⁵ By 1856, when the line had been completed to Michigan City, the railroad corporation was worth about six million dollars, and New Albany's original share had diminished in proportion.²⁶

It took but a few years for the people of New Albany to see that this growing child which they had fathered and thought to be their own, did not entirely reciprocate their benevolent feelings. There had to be two ends to a railroad, and the funnel was open at both ends. Too, dozens of in-between towns awakened by the new railroad began to share in commercial activities that a short while before had been handled at a few larger places like New Albany.

A puzzling thing to the people of New Albany was how the railroad could be so prosperous and yet be so poor. The receipts of the road for the year 1855 were \$645,827.00, and for the following year \$739,704.00. During the first six months of 1856, the road received \$150,405.00 for freight, \$170,699.00 for passengers, and \$16,275.00 for mail. Yet, the company reported that "the earnings have not been sufficient to enable the directors to go on with the necessary improvements, and have sufficient left to meet existing engagements." The solution recommended by the directors was: "\$500,000 of income bonds to be issued, secured by a mortgage on the rolling stock of the company and such other property as had not before been pledged, and propose to the holders of the second and third mortgage bonds to receive these bonds instead of cash, for two and a half year's interest; and the holders of the first mortgage bonds to receive them for one year's interest."²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid.*, May 19, 1858.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1852.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, December 11, 1855.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, July 17, 1856.

It is not surprising that New Albany's "laborers and mechanics" shook their heads and wondered what had happened to "their railroad."²⁸

In 1857, the old managers of the New Albany and Salem were accused of paying off the floating debt at the expense of the stockholders, and further dissension brought a complete reorganization in 1858. James Brooks, the president, came back to New Albany to resume his grocery business.²⁹

What happened the following year held even more significance for New Albany and "its railroad." The title of the road was changed from the New Albany and Salem Railroad to the Louisville, New Albany, and Chicago Railroad.³⁰ The change was to some degree appropriate, for Salem had long since been passed by as the terminus of the road. But placing Louisville in the title was ominous.

The initial prosperity that came to New Albany with the building of the railroad to the northwest inspired citizens of the town to look around for possible railroad projects in other directions. From 1853 there were at least three railroad proposals that came under serious consideration, none of which was carried to completion. These were the New Albany and Cincinnati; the New Albany and Fort Wayne; and the New Albany and Sandusky City Junction Railroad.

Everything in the form of a railroad proposal that came their way the New Albanyians grasped and attempted to turn into a reality. When they had the various propositions down on paper and had translated their ambitions into dollars and cents sacrifices, they were forced to make choices. The New Albany and Cincinnati Railroad was the victim of one of these choices. This road, which was to stretch about 120 miles along the Ohio River, was abandoned in the proposal stage in August, 1853, because New Albany's pledge of \$400,000.00 to the more attractive Fort Wayne road was as much as the town could handle.³¹ Shortly after, the Fort Wayne project was giv-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, May 7, 1852.

²⁹ *New Albany Tribune*, October 28, 1857; *New Albany Ledger*, October 12, 1858. Upon his return to New Albany, following his unsuccessful negotiations with "eastern bankers," Brooks was serenaded by over a hundred local employees of the railroad at his Main Street residence.

³⁰ *New Albany Ledger*, October 25, 1859. The railroad continued to be known as the New Albany and Salem long after the formal name change had been effected.

³¹ *Ibid.*, August 29, 1853.

en up so that efforts could be concentrated on the Sandusky. Though the Sandusky was never completed, it was to leave its mark on the city treasury.

Merchants of New Albany acknowledged that the proximity of their town to the Falls "barrier" brought them certain advantages which they could not otherwise enjoy. On the other hand, when receiving cargoes from the east they were confronted with the same Falls transshipment problem that plagued mercantile people in all the down-river towns. And when a merchant or other resident of New Albany went eastward, he had to begin his journey by hiring a wagon to carry him and his baggage to Louisville to catch an up-river boat or train. For years such inconveniences had been taken in stride and excited little comment. But by 1850 the tenor of thinking had changed. "How much longer shall this state of things continue?" asked the editor of the *Ledger*. "Why should not our merchants have their goods delivered from the cars to their own city, and when they wish to make a journey, jump into the cars at their own door instead of being compelled to wade through mud and cold, or scorching heat, to avail themselves of the facilities for travel which neighboring cities provide?"³²

The planned solution to these problems was the New Albany and Sandusky City Junction Railroad. This railroad was to begin at Sandusky, Ohio, on Lake Erie, go southwestward across Ohio, and continue in this direction across Indiana until it terminated at New Albany. Not only would this railroad supply a more convenient means for New Albany merchants in receiving their eastern shipments; but it would place the town of New Albany in a key position on what might become a major east-west thoroughfare.³³

To carry out its campaign to gain New Albany's financial support, in 1853 the Sandusky corporation set up its main office in the town.³⁴ The directors contracted with an Ohio concern to begin the building of the road just as soon as New Albany made good its pledge of \$100,000.00 in cash and

³² *Ibid.*, June 1, 1854.

³³ This potential throughfare would by-pass Louisville completely—a very practical consideration for New Albanyians at this time. Through-travelers coming from the East via the railroad could continue their journey by steamboat from New Albany.

³⁴ *New Albany Ledger*, August 19, 1853.

\$200,000.00 in real estate. The money was to come from local residents in the form of individual stock purchases.³⁵ As in the case of the New Albany and Salem, this was a lot of money to be raised from private investors, and shortly it was obvious that the subscriptions were not going to be adequate. On June 1, 1854, the worried editor of the *Ledger* admonished his readers: "Remember, citizens of New Albany, if we do not secure the terminus of the Sandusky road, some of our neighbors and rivals will. There is bound to be a Railroad from the Falls of the Ohio to Lake Erie. If our road is built, other projects will probably be abandoned; if ours is abandoned, theirs will go ahead."³⁶

Private enterprise having failed to reach the goal, the city council received a petition signed by a majority of the voters authorizing it to pledge the city of New Albany to 8,000 shares of the Sandusky's stock. This made New Albany's share in the project \$400,000.00—four times its stake in the New Albany and Salem. The amount was to be raised by the sale of "hundred dollar city bonds" in New York.³⁷ Thus, New Albany was prepared to gamble to the extent of \$400,000.00 that the road would be built, and it would be a paying road. The whole subscription list of the company outside of the New Albany shares amounted to only \$353,000.00.³⁸

During these negotiations the Indiana supreme court brought forth a decision which prevented municipal governments from investing to the extent that New Albany had planned.³⁹ The delay from this respite gave time for a local anti-railroad group to organize. The group claimed that New

³⁵ *Ibid.*, May 2, June 1, 1854.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1854.

³⁷ This was the financial agreement made between New Albany and the railroad: "The New Albany and Sandusky City Junction Railroad Co., shall pay to the city of New Albany, in stock in said company, an amount thereof equal at its par value to the amount of interest on the bonds of said city, issued under the provisions of this ordinance for the first three years after the date thereof, deducting therefrom any dividends that may be paid by said railroad company to be issued at such times as the said interest may become due. After which time the company assumes and will pay the interest on said city bonds to the holders thereof, thereby relieving the city from such payment of interest on her stocks, [and the city] will receive her dividends on the net proceeds of the earnings of the road as other stockholders." *Ibid.*, March 1, 1855.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, March 8, 1855.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, December 7, 1855.

Albany was going beyond its means in supplying its stated share to the railroad, particularly since the real estate pledged from other sources was actually worth only a small fraction of its stated value.⁴⁰ But the protest failed to swerve the city council from its position, and when a new bill was passed in the state legislature nullifying the supreme court restriction, the council went ahead with its plan to subscribe the \$400,000.00.⁴¹

Actual work on laying out the railroad was begun, but the confusion resulting from New Albany's contested subscription was one of the prime factors that prevented it from ever being completed. In the spring election of 1855 the Know Nothing Party gained control of the New Albany government, and one of its objectives was to kill the Sandusky railroad project. The new mayor and council proceeded to do this by levying an "enormous and unnecessary tax, nominally for railroad purposes but really, as was generally understood, to apply a portion of the railroad tax to ordinary city purposes." This served the purpose of discrediting the whole Sandusky affair, and shortly there was a movement afoot to repudiate New Albany's pledge altogether. Friends of the railroad proposed a compromise whereby the \$400,000.00 pledge would be reduced to \$250,000.00, and the repudiators were temporarily silenced.⁴²

As a further token of the railroad's intention to get the road built as quickly as possible, the contractor took up his residence in New Albany. The road received a right-of-way through the town, and some of the work was commenced on the grading.⁴³ This was as far as the project got. Money paid into the company's treasury was dissipated in the preliminary activities, and there is no record of a track of this road ever approaching New Albany. But the townspeople were given something by which to remember it: as late as 1865 they were taxed to pay for a railroad which was never built.⁴⁴

Improvement of the wagon roads which connected New Albany to its outlying rural sections did not keep pace with the

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, March 9, 1855.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, December 7, 1855.

⁴² *Ibid.*, December 7, 1855.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1855; March 7, 1856.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, July 11, 1864.

growing need of communication with these sections. In the decades preceding the Civil War there was constant urging on the part of the New Albany mercantile interests to keep the old roads in a passable condition and build new ones to the areas that the merchants considered part of their natural sphere of operations. Some action was taken to make the roads more nearly adequate, but most of the improvements turned out to be but temporary remedies. After much effort and money were spent to get a road built or improved, within a few years it was declared impassable. Public and private enterprise alike, or the combination of both, failed to achieve the success in road building and maintenance that merchants and farmers in the New Albany area demanded.

The most ambitious road project with which New Albany was concerned in the pre-Civil War years was the New Albany and Vincennes Turnpike. The plans for this project included improvements on the old roadbed commensurate with its importance as a major east-west highway. The volume of travel on this road, at least in the 1830's, was greater than that on any other road crossing Indiana.⁴⁵ New Albany's interest in the route was two-fold: first, as noted before, the merchants of the town needed it to reach the agricultural area to the northwest; second, it was necessary to preserve New Albany's status as a key point on one of the most popular river-land routes to the West. This second factor became ever more important in the 1840's and 1850's as throngs of emigrants searched for the shortest and easiest way to the undeveloped regions to the northwest. Hundreds came down the Ohio River as far as practicable, then branched off at some convenient point to continue the journey by land. The Falls made New Albany one of these convenient points, but its position could be maintained only if the road connecting the town to the northwestern country were kept in a passable condition.⁴⁶

The state legislature of 1835-1836 decided that this road

⁴⁵ *New Albany Gazette*, April 7, 1837.

⁴⁶ In 1833, according to the report of one man who traveled over it, the road to Vincennes was not much more than passable: "A great part of the road was hilly and rough, as bad, on the whole, as any that I have passed in a state in the United States The view from the top of the hills above [New] Albany . . . is one of the most splendid and extensive I have seen in America, and compensated in a great degree for the fatigue of the journey from Vincennes." James Stuart, *Three Years in America* (2 vols., New York, 1833), II, 269.

should be made to pay for its own improvement by its conversion into a state-operated turnpike. More than a million and a half dollars were prescribed by the "improvements legislature" to complete the work, but this road too was the victim of the financial vicissitudes which came shortly after.⁴⁷ Instead of building the road the full 105 miles between New Albany and Vincennes, it was decided first to construct the forty-one mile section from New Albany to Paoli. For this the state spent almost seven hundred thousand dollars before it was forced to abandon the work in the early 1840's to a private concern. The road was macadamized, but only a few years passed before planks were laid down in an attempt to preserve its passability. The \$9,000.00 annual toll was not enough for the turnpike corporation to pay the cost of upkeep, let alone the initial outlay. But whatever its economic status or its physical condition, the Vincennes road did serve as a valuable "feeder" from the farm country to New Albany.⁴⁸

The idea of restoring roads by "planking" them became unusually popular in the late 1840's and 1850's.⁴⁹ Building or improving plank roads was customarily taken over by private turnpike corporations, which appealed to merchants and farmers along the routes to lend their aid by subscribing stock. The campaign for funds was customarily initiated by a series of meetings, not only in the larger towns concerned, but in most of the villages in between.⁵⁰

The plank roads that excited most attention from New Albany citizens were the ones leading to Corydon and to Jeffersonville: the one to Corydon because it gave access to a valuable farm district; the one to Jeffersonville because it served to link the two towns in a united effort to bring river shipping to the Indiana shore.

In May, 1851, a mass meeting was held at the "Hoosier" fire house in New Albany to bring home to the people the importance of contributing money to the Corydon plank road.

⁴⁷ *New Albany Gazette*, April 14, 1837.

⁴⁸ *New Albany Ledger*, November 13, 1849; May 28, 1851. The Vincennes end of the road did not receive its share of improvement for many years. As late as 1851 the people of that town petitioned the Indiana legislature to "divorce itself from the road and place it in the hands of a private company." *Ibid.*, January 28, 1851.

⁴⁹ Robert Dale Owen was one of the chief proponents of this method. He paid New Albany at least one visit to advise its people on "the construction of Plank Roads." *Ibid.*, April 11, 1850.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, January 29, 1851.

The editor of the *Ledger* advised a large attendance, for this was to be "a road of incalculable benefit to our city and to the county of Harrison, and no one who has the means to spare should neglect to take stock in it when the books are opened."⁵¹ By September, 1853, eleven miles of the twenty-mile road had been completed at a cost of \$75,000.00. As in the case of the Vincennes road, the real advantages did not come from profits from the tolls; for the road was again ready for a complete overhaul long before the seven or eight thousand dollars annually collected in tolls had paid off the initial building cost.⁵²

The proposed plank road to Jeffersonville drew special attention when the Jeffersonville-Columbus Railroad neared completion (1850). It was thought that if the wagon route were sufficiently improved, this railroad northward would serve almost as conveniently as if it were New Albany's own. In addition to up-river freight which halted at Jeffersonville to be transshipped on down the river, freight coming down from the central portion of the state to Jeffersonville by rail could be hauled by wagon over the plank road to New Albany, and then be loaded on boats at the New Albany wharf for further conveyance down the river.⁵³

In 1851 the New Albany and Jeffersonville Plank Road was completed and was declared by local observers to be one of the most excellent roads in the West.⁵⁴ But, like the others, its improved condition was shortlived. By 1857, the Jeffersonville wharfmaster refused to accept cargo destined for New Albany because "the road from that place to this is in such a shocking condition that goods cannot be wagoned down."⁵⁵

Throughout this period, many shorter, less important roads were also contemplated; some of them were carried to completion. Roads stretching only a few miles into the countryside, as the ones to Georgetown and to Hamburg, received all the attention due projects of a much vaster scale.⁵⁶ But even the shortest roads were vital to the farmers immediately served by them, and on their maintenance depended much of New Albany's commercial prosperity.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, September 14, 1853.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, December 4, 1850.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, December 8, 1851.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, February 23, 1857.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, December 5, 1849.

The rivalry between New Albany and other places in Indiana which were considered its serious competitors is one of the most conspicuous features of the town's history from about 1830 to the last quarter of the century. This rivalry was most manifest in the writings of the newspapers, but the industry and zeal with which the editors applied their talents to this subject indicates that they were concerned with the economic preservation of their home towns. Places whose interests could be pursued in conjunction with New Albany's were usually accepted as allies; among those were Salem, Crawfordsville, Corydon, and Lafayette. Consistent with the "balance of power" pattern, some, such as Jeffersonville, at times were friends, at other times opponents. Still others were almost always "enemies."⁵⁷

Jeffersonville was New Albany's nearest Indiana neighbor, and the relationship of these two towns varied according to the immediate circumstances. If it were a question of combining the assets of Jeffersonville with those of New Albany to compete with some other town in the state, or with Louisville across the river, New Albany was unusually civil and appreciative. But one fact the New Albanyians wanted understood: their own town was supreme on the Indiana side of the river, and "our dear little sister on the other side of the falls" could serve best by conforming.⁵⁸

As a rule New Albany maintained a benign attitude toward Jeffersonville because always alive was the hope that the two would sometime be joined to form one great commercial and industrial metropolis. Jeffersonville had its own network of roads into the interior, and after 1850 it had its very valuable railroad to the north. An enterprising and imaginative promoter of New Albany could see how his town benefited from the proximity of Jeffersonville. The major problem was to prevent the advantages from going to waste, or falling to Louisville.

That Jeffersonville resented this "little sister" role can be seen in the manner in which it occasionally followed its

⁵⁷ Such expressions as the following were common in the New Albany papers all through this period, and they left little doubt as to what the town's ambition was: "With its present affluence and advantages . . . the ultimate destiny of New Albany cannot be mistaken—she must triumph over every competitor, and become the great commercial and literary center of the State." *New Albany Gazette*, May 19, 1837.

⁵⁸ *New Albany Ledger*, June 22, 1850.

own course. An early example is how Jeffersonville fought the conversion of the old Crawfordsville turnpike into a railroad for New Albany. Since the original wagon road terminated at Jeffersonville instead of New Albany, Jeffersonville merchants saw that an alteration of the southern terminus would make it easier for the farmers in the back countries to bring their produce to New Albany markets.⁵⁹ Jeffersonville lost out in this particular contest, but in another important issue it chose to throw benefits to the common rival, Louisville, rather than to sacrifice for the sake of New Albany.

The major question in this 1853 issue was where to make the terminus of the Fort Wayne and Southern Railroad. This road was to begin at Fort Wayne in the northeastern corner of Indiana, pass southward through the eastern counties of the state, and end at one of the Falls towns.⁶⁰ Both New Albany and Jeffersonville wanted to be the terminus of the road, but New Albany's attention at this time was centered on the Sandusky road. Since New Albany could not afford to subscribe stock to both ventures, it had to give up the idea of becoming the Fort Wayne terminus, and thus allowed Jeffersonville to have this distinction. Following this condescension on the part of New Albany promoters, their opposition took another form; the object was to prevent the depot of the new railroad from being placed at Jeffersonville's river front where freight could too easily be placed on ferries to Louisville.⁶¹

Such controversy over whether a railroad station should be located by the river or a mile from it may appear somewhat incredible today, but not so in the 1850's. A few years before this episode, the managers of the Jeffersonville-Columbus Railroad had tried to place their station by the river, and the town of Jeffersonville had prevented the step by taking the question to the state legislature.⁶² In this earlier affair,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, June 15, 1850.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1853. When in the planning stage, the titles of the projected railroads were not standardized. When New Albany was negotiating for a part in the Fort Wayne and Southern, the editor of the *Ledger* usually referred to it as the "New Albany and Fort Wayne."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1853.

⁶² *Ibid.*, August 20, 1853. Attempts of the Indiana towns to keep their railroad stations some distance from the river front were motivated by their desire to be true railroad terminals. In the light of later events, this stand may appear naive, for Louisville was destined to become more and more the focal point for trade in the Falls area.

Jeffersonville had called on New Albany for support, and the fact that in an identical situation Jeffersonville was ready to play into the hands of the Louisville rival greatly disturbed its New Albany ally. But the editor of the Jeffersonville *Times* thought the people of New Albany had nobody but themselves to blame, for in the most "disgraceful proceeding . . . perpetrated in broad day light by men calling themselves honorable," New Albany had withdrawn its financial pledge to aid in the building of the Fort Wayne and Southern.⁶³ Jeffersonville preferred having its road benefit Louisville to not having it built at all.

This railroad was eventually completed, and years later a branch was built down to New Albany.⁶⁴ But the refusal of New Albany and Jeffersonville to make this a joint project to bind themselves together redounded in another unsolicited favor to Louisville. Little by little, New Albany's natural partner was lost to the common rival on the Kentucky side of the river.

Evansville, the natural river outlet for the southwestern section of Indiana, occasionally prompted attention of the New Albany editor as a potential rival, but in the 1850's it was still not large enough, nor its commercial sphere close enough, to warrant consistent attacks. It was occasionally necessary to call attention of those who would pursue boat-building at Evansville that New Albany was the most qualified place for this important river enterprise. Other towns that were sometime to dwarf New Albany, as Terre Haute and South Bend, came in for a blast or two, but there was no serious attempt at this time on the part of New Albany to stem their potential threat.⁶⁵ As for the Queen City, Cincinnati, New Albany was on occasion even ready to line up with Louisville when it became evident that the Ohio city made overtures to cut into the trading pattern of the Falls region. But Cincinnati was ever respected as the city which "has set us a most excellent example, and one which we intend to follow."⁶⁶

⁶³ Cited in *ibid.*, August 24, 1853.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, November 2, 1887. This connection was not made until 1887. It currently serves as an important spur of the Baltimore and Ohio.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, August 26, 1850, September 21, 1849.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1849, April 2, 1857.

Anyone checking the population figures of Indiana's cities today would not be likely to choose Madison as a one-time claimant to population and commercial honors in the state. Yet, it was Madison that came closest to rivaling New Albany through most of the years when town rivalry was at its height. Madison had the good fortune of having been established earlier than New Albany, and as a river port it had succeeded in becoming the commercial mart for a large section of southern Indiana. By 1830, the two towns were nearly equal in population, but Madison's edge in trade, milling, meat packing, and manufacturing was to be maintained for at least two more decades.⁶⁷

Both New Albany and Madison were scheduled to receive railroads in the internal improvements bill of 1836, but unlike New Albany's proposed road to Crawfordsville, the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad was not allowed to become the victim of the wholesale scrapping of the legislature's improvements program.⁶⁸ In just a few years this railroad had reached forty miles to Columbus, giving Madison a decided advantage in reaping the benefits that came with having a rail attachment to one of the state's richest farm districts. This was the state's first railroad, and the increased trade that came to Madison as a result of its building marked this town as Indiana's most eligible commercial point on the Ohio River.

As early as 1836, there was a movement within the state legislature to bring a branch of this road down to New Albany, but "the Madison interests seemed to be aware of this," and the "unwearied and persevering effort of her representatives" prevented the extension.⁶⁹ When New Albany eventually got its own railroad headed toward the interior (the New Albany and Salem), Madison attempted to extend its railroad westward from Columbus to stem the influence of the New Albany road.⁷⁰ Bloomington, the contested prize in this phase of the rivalry, decided in favor of the New Albany road, and halted further "encroachment" of Madison into the allotted sphere of New Albany.

Madison's early railroad advantages were seriously countered in 1850, not only by the New Albany and Salem

⁶⁷ *Fifth Census: or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States*, 1830, pp. 144-145.

⁶⁸ *New Albany Gazette*, April 15, 1836.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *New Albany Ledger*, August 2, 1850.

but also by the new railroad built from Jeffersonville to Columbus. This presented Madison with the competition of two railroads, whereas a few years previously the Madison road was the only one to penetrate the southeastern counties. The editor of the *New Albany Ledger* was on hand to pass his Madison friends some soothing advice: "Don't fret, gentlemen, there will be enough for all. Remember the fate of the greedy dog in the fable, who while swimming over the stream in grabbing at the shadow of the meat let go and lost forever the delicious morsel itself."⁷¹

It was about the year 1850 when the editorial debate between New Albany and Madison editors reached its most heated stage. Any "fuel" on hand was tossed in to brighten the flame of rivalry. The population figures from the 1850 census were one of the most inflammable items at the New Albany editor's disposal, for his "contemporaries" in Madison had promised that the population count would settle once and for all how Madison had outstripped all her rivals. The official count for Madison was 8,012; for New Albany, 8,181.⁷² The margin of difference was slight, but it meant victory for New Albany. "Why don't the Madison editors publish the returns of the census of that town?" chided the editor of the *Ledger*. "They have had a good deal to say about the tremendous increase in population, and one of them boasted a few days ago that it would go considerably over 10,000. Come, gentlemen, out with it. We know it will hurt a little for a while, but you will feel better after the first pangs of disappointment are over."⁷³

Making Madison "eat crow" over the population figures did nothing to abate the verbal campaign on either side. When the singer Jenny Lind gave a concert at Madison to something short of a full house, the editor of the *New Albany Ledger* thought this a good opportunity to attack the rival town's cultural pretensions, and wrote: "Nothing would do, but these enterprising citizens must have a concert from Jenny Lind. Agents were dispatched to Barnum and negotiations set on foot for a grand concert. 'Madison! Madison!' quoth Barnum, 'where is Madison?' and he pulled out his pocket edition of the map of the United States, and at length de-

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, November 5, 1850.

⁷² *Seventh Census of the United States*, 1850, pp. 762, 766.

⁷³ *New Albany Ledger*, October 2, 1850.

scribed the locality of the aforesaid Queen City. It was represented to Barnum that were the divine Jenny to give a concert in Madison, his own and her fortune would be made But Barnum was not altogether satisfied; he said he thought he had looked over the census tables and had 'stuck a pin' in all the big cities, but he didn't find Madison at all."⁷⁴

No feature of either town was immune from the exchange of sarcasm. Madison's boast that it already had municipal waterworks, while New Albany had none, was countered with the *Ledger's* defense that the construction of such facilities would be ridiculous in a city growing as fast as New Albany, for the work would just have to be done all over within five or ten years when the population had doubled. New Albany's excellent brass band was contrasted to the poverty of music in Madison, "save that which ascends from the slaughter house during the hog killing season." The greater number of delinquent letters in the Madison post office was offered as proof by the editor of the *Madison Tribune* that his town was a far busier place than New Albany. The editor of the *Ledger* replied: "We suppose the next proof will be that their jail is three times as large . . . that there are more illegitimate children born there; more rapes and seductions committed Such is Madison's greatness, from which . . . 'Good Lord deliver us.'"⁷⁵

So on and on went the duel between the editors. The rivalry supplied them with a good topic on which to express their talents for satire, and, no doubt, made entertaining copy for readers in both towns. The vigorous campaign of the *Ledger* editor might have contributed to the retarding of this most immediate rival, but Madison's inferior geographic position doubtlessly had something to do with its losing out in the race.

During this preoccupation with Madison, another town rose almost unobserved which was to put both of these places sadly in the shade of its own advance. This was Indianapolis, of which the editor of the *Ledger* had written in 1850: "We of New Albany certainly have no cause to be jealous or envious of her prosperity. The interests of the two places do not in the least come in contact."⁷⁶

The interests of the two places did come in contact, for it was the inherent interest of both to be the largest city in the state of Indiana. Indianapolis' growing commercial su-

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, April 12, 1851.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, May 12, April 28, May 7, 1851.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, May 8, 1850.

premacry resulted in large part from this town's capturing of the interior trade that surveyors of the early commercial pattern thought would invariably find its outlet at points along the river. Railroads brought a revolutionary shift in this orthodox conception, and soon Indianapolis was to become one of the best examples of how a town with almost no water connections could become a great transportation and trade center.⁷⁷

The realization that Indianapolis might be pulling away from its competitors was not completely absent in New Albany. The *Ledger* boasted as late as 1852 that "New Albany is considerably the largest city in Indiana," but in giving a second thought to Indianapolis, cautiously added, "or we are greatly mistaken." In 1853 the *Ledger* editor expressed his hope that Indianapolis might grow and prosper, for "she has exhibited enterprise and untiring energy in making herself the focus of so many railroads and she deserves the reward." But in 1857, three years before the new census figures placed Indianapolis appreciably ahead of New Albany, this editor was less sympathetic. "Unquestionably, Indianapolis will lose much of her prestige at no very remote period. Heretofore people have passed through that city . . . from necessity rather than choice." He reasoned that the opening of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad considerably south of Indianapolis would remove from that town much of the trade it had built up in the past few years. The New Albany and Salem with its new connection to Chicago would swerve the northeasterly traffic to the right of it. And most important of all: "The example of great cities being built up off from regular water courses are so extremely rare that we hardly believe she will form an exception. No one can suppose that steamers will ever be supplanted by railroads in carrying freights."⁷⁸

Arguments that the New Albany spokesman arrayed against the continued advance of Indianapolis proved to be so much whistling in the dark. What no one could suppose would happen, did happen. By 1860 what contest there had been between New Albany and Indianapolis was virtually over: Indianapolis' population was 18,611, against New Albany's 12,647.⁷⁹ The margin in population, as well as in trade and industry, was to be speedily multiplied within the next few decades.

⁷⁷ A few of the smaller steamboats did reach Indianapolis by way of the White River, but it was not an important river port.

⁷⁸ *New Albany Ledger*, May 10, 1852, May 28, 1853, April 22, 1857.

⁷⁹ *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860, I, 117, 121.