

## JOHN JACKMAN (1816-1896)

John Adams Jackman was born in 1816 in Boscawen, New Hampshire, where members of his family were among the earliest settlers. Jackman's father believed in **contributing** to the community, and Jackman's grandfather served as town clerk for thirty-six years and was elected several times to the New Hampshire General Assembly. Jackman followed his family's tradition of public service—but he also followed his own dreams.

Formal education in the early nineteenth century was usually limited to eight- or ten-week sessions of school in the summer and winter months. As a teen, Jackman took advantage of any amount of schooling he could attend in winter while continuing to work the rest of the year.

Jackman loved to learn, and he always looked for opportunities to improve himself. He not only went to school but also read often, attended lectures, and took part in debating clubs. These activities probably helped Jackman in his short time as a teacher, but they also prepared him for a forty-two-year career as a railroad man.

Jackman started working for the railroad when the industry was still new. In 1837, he was hired by the Boston & Worcester (B&W) Railroad. As an “expert mechanic,” Jackman helped in “the establishment of the railroad from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi [River].”

Early passenger cars looked like **stagecoaches**, with four wagon-type wheels rolling on bands of steel, and could carry passengers only a few miles. These “iron horses” quickly evolved, and by the fall of 1852, the beginnings of a national railroad system had already reached Ohio—and Jackman went with it. Once in Ohio, Jackman became superintendent of machinery for the Cleveland & Toledo (C&T) Railroad, which was being built to “**furnish** a connection with the eastern country.” When the C&T was complete, the company set up machine shops in Ohio.

Before he moved to Ohio, Jackman married his childhood sweetheart, Sarah. The couple had seven children, five of whom survived to adulthood. His family waited a few months to join him, moving in the spring of 1853. By this time Jackman had already been asked to return east, but had refused, explaining that the railroad expansion was “an enterprise too important to abandon,” adding “I have men who need my attention ... I am not willing to leave as long as they are willing to stick by me.”

A few years later, in 1859, Jackman did return to the east to work with the Boston & Albany (B&A) Railroad. When the Civil War began, the B&A was the “**chief** avenue of communication, between New England and the **seat of war**.” Jackman was responsible for **overseeing** the movement of troops and supplies across state lines, and he took his responsibilities seriously. When rumors **surfaced** that the railroad had been **mined**, Jackman volunteered to drive an engine ahead of a troop train. The story goes that he was willing to sacrifice his engine and himself in order to ensure that the troops were unharmed. Fortunately, the rumor wasn't true and both trains arrived safely.

In 1864 Jackman moved to Bloomington to work as superintendent of machinery for the Chicago & Alton (C&A) Railroad. After only a few weeks Jackman was “already very highly **esteemed** both by the employees and by such of our citizens that have become acquainted with him. He is a *citizen* in every sense of the word, and takes a lively interest in the welfare of our city.”

Jackman was **regarded** as a man of “unusual intelligence, deeply interested in all public questions, and displaying a decided taste for intellectual pursuits.” He quickly became part of many community organizations, committees, and boards, and he regularly submitted articles to the local newspaper, *The Pantagraph*.

Only four years after Jackman moved to Bloomington, he began serving on the Bloomington Board of Education—including two years as president. While he was president, the board heard a **motion** to sell two **vacant** lots that were next to one of the schools. Jackman **opposed** the sale because he thought the lots would be needed for another school in a few years, and he threatened to leave the board if the sale was approved. It was approved and Jackman did resign, but he quickly **withdrew** his resignation “at the request of several gentlemen.” Although Jackman seemed to have the support of his fellow board members, there were others in the community who didn’t always agree with his opinions, and they may have **preferred** that Jackman’s resignation be permanent!

However, Jackman was well-liked by most of his fellow citizens. In 1870, he was voted “the most popular man in Bloomington” at the Catholic Fair—by six votes—over very **prominent** people like millionaire Asahel Gridley.

Jackman had many **diverse** interests. He enjoyed reading and writing poetry, but he also wrote **technical** articles and gave public speeches.

Described as “an admirer and student of Shakespeare,” under Jackman’s railroader exterior beat the heart of an actor. At the 1872 **dedication** of Durley Hall in Bloomington, he “surprised and delighted his friends” with his portrayal of “Duke of Venice” in *The Merchant of Venice*. More than 500 tickets were sold for the first performance, although the crowds were probably there to see the new building as much as the play. His wife was a member of the Bloomington Library Association, and Jackman performed in a number of plays for its benefit.

Jackman had a talent for design which was very helpful when, three years after he moved to Bloomington, the C&A shops burned in a fire that began late at night in the brass foundry. A number of buildings were destroyed and the estimated cost of just the materials was over two million dollars in today’s money! Citizens worried that the company would give up and leave Bloomington, but they began rebuilding the next spring using plans that had been created under Jackman’s supervision. The new buildings stood as an example of Jackman’s professional expertise.

Changes in the industry and in Jackman’s responsibilities were **rapid**. Considering the less-than-ideal conditions Jackman had described in his letters home during his early days in Ohio—such as his experience “crossing the Maumee river at Toledo in the winter time, wheeling a **barrow** with some necessary material and obliged to cross in his stocking feet, in order that he might keep his footing upon the icy timbers”—it’s doubtful that Jackman **foresaw** a day in which he would supervise shops staffed by 600 to 900 men capable of producing “everything needed, from a locomotive of the heaviest class to a finely-finished and elegantly-upholstered sleeping-car.”

By the early 1870s the C&A shops had 15 buildings, covered 40 acres, and supported one-fifth of the city’s business. As one of the people in charge of managing the operation, Jackman was described as a man “prominently identified with the **material** development of Bloomington.”

His railroading career **coincided** with both the Panic of 1873 and the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. These national **crises** hit the railroad industry’s economy so hard that even Jackman’s job wasn’t safe. In 1878, in an effort to save money, the new C&A superintendent of maintenance closed the machinery department in the car shops. He said that “all that class of work should be done under the supervision of Mr. Jackman.” Only three months later, though, the same supervisor ordered Jackman removed from his recent joint-position as superintendent of

machinery and master mechanic of the shops—which ended his career with the C&A. Jackman's son also resigned from his own job at the C&A shops when his father was fired.

For the first few years of his retirement Jackman probably tended to a farm he owned near Normal, but eventually he moved back to his home in Bloomington to live out the rest of his days in the company of his wife, his children, and his grandchildren.

Jackman died at home on July 29, 1896 at the age of eighty. His wife and four of his children were alive at the time, but his oldest son died just nine days before his father. Due to Jackman's poor health, he was not told of his son's death.

Jackman's body—later to be joined by his wife Sarah's—was laid to rest at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

**Discussion:** How was moving people and goods different before railroads were established?