

Chicago & Illinois Midland: built on coal

How a local line tripled in size, and briefly was widely known for running steam



Although many railroads bore the names of towns they served or wanted to, the Chicago & Illinois Midland never reached Chicago, nor did it plan to. When the line was bought by a coal company in 1905, it first was named Central Illinois Railway, but that caused confusion with the nearby Illinois Central. So the new name was formulated from the coal firm's co-owners, Chicago Edison and Illinois Midland Coal. The former was a property of utility and interurban magnate Samuel Insull, while IMC was jointly owned by Chicago Edison and Peabody Coal, which in turn was owned by Insull's friend Francis Peabody.

C&IM's lineage traces to the Pawnee Railroad, which opened in 1889 from that town west to a connection with the IC (at first, Pawnee Junction, later—logically—Cimic) and employed an ex-IC 1853-vintage 4-4-0. In 1892 the Pawnee extended west to Auburn and a Chicago & Alton connection. Built to serve local agricultural customers, the Pawnee gained longevity with the discovery of vast coalfields under the farmlands.

Under Insull and Peabody, C&IM was completely rebuilt; in 1906 it was extended east to Taylorville and a connection with the Wabash. (A further extension to Assumption, on IC's original line, was contemplated but never built.) In 1917, a short extension was built beyond Auburn to a connection, called Compro, with Chicago & North Western's recently completed Southern Illinois coal line. This was an important link, as one of Insull's newest Chicago-



Two photos, Walter A. Peters; R. R. Wallin collection

Two of C&IM's nine ex-ACL 2-10-2's are pictured at Springfield, sporting the ex-NYC tenders C&IM had bought to retrofit these engines' predecessor 2-10-2's, acquired from the Wabash.

area power stations was on C&NW.

C&IM, just "the Midland" to many, rolled along into the early '20s. Insull's money had provided two new 2-8-0's plus some 4-4-0's of uncertain parentage and secondhand 2-6-0's and 2-8-0's. Several passenger trains ran, mostly accommodations for coal miners.

A new era dawned in the mid-1920s, and little C&IM would never be the same. A neighbor road, the Chicago, Peoria & St. Louis, had always been in financial distress. Running from Peoria to St. Louis, with a branch from Havana, Ill., due south to Jacksonville, it served mostly small villages and had suffered from years of deferred maintenance. It was about to be abandoned when Commonwealth Edison realized it would be a ready-made coal route to several proposed power stations.

For reviving the CP&StL, however,

Insull demanded a piece of flesh. Reasoning he might need extra space to install high-voltage power lines, he required each lineside landowner to donate strips of property to the railroad, creating a 100-foot right of way. It was a tough sell, but eventually all the landowners capitulated.

Gaining a major gateway

Thus in early 1926 did C&IM more than triple in size, gaining a major gateway in Peoria, at the time served by a dozen Class 1's. By obtaining trackage rights on IC from Cimic to Springfield, C&IM linked its original Taylorville line with its new Peoria route. (The leg from Pekin to East Peoria and Peoria was over Peoria & Pekin Union, jointly owned by several Class 1's.) Eventually, interchanges at Barr, near Athens, with C&NW and at Alton's Ridgely Yard in

Springfield allowed the Cimic–Auburn–Compro line to be abandoned.

The remainder of CP&StL did not interest C&IM. The Jacksonville branch became the Jacksonville & Havana, while the line south of Springfield became the Chicago, Springfield & St. Louis. Neither lasted long—J&H folded in 1937 and CS&StL in 1941.

CP&StL's locomotives likewise got the cold shoulder from C&IM; three 1913-vintage 2-8-0's went to the Green Bay & Western and everything else to scrap. Motive-power needs of the suddenly much larger C&IM quickly became acute, however, so it picked up two secondhand 4-6-0's and some former New York Central 2-8-0's. C&IM ordered two 2-10-2's and two 4-4-0's from Baldwin, which arrived in 1927. Soon a third 4-4-0, plus some 2-8-2's and 2-10-2's, filled out the roster.

That third 4-4-0, No. 502, shipped by Baldwin in 1928, would be the last American type built for a U.S. railroad. The 4-4-0's handled C&IM's daily passenger train from Springfield to Pekin and back, which made its final run in May 1953, ending their careers, among the last 4-4-0's in U.S. Class 1 service.

In the Depression year of 1931, Lima built few engines, but among them were C&IM 2-8-2 No. 552 and four 2-10-2's, 700–703. Depression or not, the 2-10-2's reeked of prosperity with nickel-plated cylinder and valve heads—C&IM was becoming a first-class operation and wasn't ashamed to show it!

A hidden gem was revealed when C&IM acquired CP&StL: the modest Illinois River harbor at Havana. C&IM



M. L. Powell; J. David Ingles collection

As built, the SD9's had black roofs; month-old 53 and 50 leave Pekin on December 17, 1955.

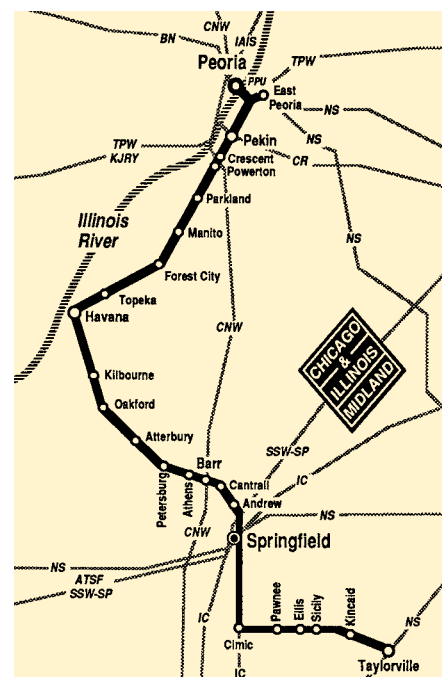
soon built a coal transfer facility there, from where barges moved coal to Chicago-area Insull power stations. Over the years, the Havana dock was upgraded a few times, and in the modern era it was used for blending Illinois coal with low-sulfur coal from the West.

The 1930s and '40s were truly the Golden Age for C&IM, as it transformed itself into a big-time operation and mimicked many features found on larger railroads. The road solicited from offices in Chicago and New York, and had its own agricultural facility, CIMCO Farm, to help area farmers.

In the postwar era C&IM was widely known for two things: the trademark red stripe on the tenders of its steam power and cabooses (and later the diesels) and a fleet of 70-ton "bathtub" gondolas, the right size for the track structure and the Havana coal dumper. They were a harbinger of modern-day unit-train cars.

The locomotive fleet was periodically upgraded. C&IM had determined the

2-10-2 type to be best for its coal trains, which had to ascend 2-mile Petersburg Hill north of that town, the line's ruling grade at 1.62 percent. In the 1940s, the Wabash was selling 2-10-2's, so C&IM acquired nine, its Nos. 651–659, built by Brooks in 1917. They were found, however, to almost self-destruct at speeds in excess of 25 mph, and the Midland's engineering department soon determined they were poorly balanced. After modifications at Taylorville shop, the Wabash engines could double their speed. C&IM also bought tenders for them from New York Central, which helped



Can you spot the apparent mislabeling on connecting roads on this 1989 C&IM map?



R. R. Wallin collection

American-type No. 500, first of three built for C&IM in 1927-28, rolls north toward Pekin; the interurban-style cars show the road's Insull heritage. The 4-4-0's made their last runs in 1953.



R. R. Wallin

Unique to C&IM were EMD's only RS1325's, leaving Ellis Yard with a few non-coal cars ahead of the road's signature bathtub coal gondolas. That's the Kincaid Power Station visible at rear.

extend time between service stops.

C&IM's president, Fred L. Schrader, was a diehard steam man who reasoned that since coal was what his road hauled, it was good business to burn it as fuel. By the early '50s, most big roads were dieselizing, so serviceable steam engines could be had for close to scrap price. Thus, C&IM in 1951-52 acquired nine 1920s Baldwin 2-10-2's from Atlantic Coast Line, numbering them 751-759. They replaced the ex-Wabash engines and would be C&IM's last steam road power. Of C&IM's 67 total steam locomotives, 44 were secondhand.

Inevitable changes

As a late steam operator, C&IM began to attract rail photographers from far and wide. The fame would be short-lived, however. Although some C&IM sources said Schrader had his eye on even more 2-10-2's as late as 1954, perhaps B&O "Big Sixes," parent Commonwealth Edison, being a big Chicago utility, was beginning to take heat on its own regarding smoke abatement. With C&IM headquartered in Illinois' state capital, "Com Ed" felt it was time to pull the plug on steam locomotives.

C&IM arranged, through EMD, the

loan of two Milwaukee SD9's and found them satisfactory as road power to replace the 2-10-2's, and so ordered five (Nos. 50-54). With a big Pillsbury mill adjacent to its Springfield yard and other switching needs, C&IM had relied on seven 0-8-0's (two new from Lima in 1937 plus five secondhanders), and so also ordered six SW1200's, with m.u. to allow them to operate in road service.

Dieselization came quickly. SW-1200's 18 and 19 came in April 1955, and the remaining four, Nos. 20-23, plus all five SD9's, in November. Steam purists wondered how 11 diesels could replace 25 steam engines, but many of the latter were out of service. With the diesels, C&IM's shop location changed, too, as a new two-track diesel shop arose in Springfield where the 10-stall ex-CP&StL roundhouse had stood; car-repair work moved there, too. Not coincidentally, steam-enthusiast President Schrader retired in early 1956, succeeded by Com Ed grad James E. Dare.

C&IM was cooking along into the 1960s, hauling coal primarily from the huge Peabody Mine No. 10 near Pawnee. It expanded its all-EMD fleet with two RS1325's in 1960, one SD18 in 1961, and another SD18 in 1962 (Nos. 60 and 61). The RS1325's (30-31) turned out to be the only examples ever built.

Then a drastic event occurred, as Com Ed built a "mine-mouth" power station near Kincaid, which when finished in 1967 took all the coal from Peabody No. 10 across Highway 104 on an overhead conveyor belt. Thus did C&IM's primary source of coal traffic almost evaporate. A rebound soon occurred, though, with the influx of low-sulfur coal from the West; C&IM received it in Peoria from the Burlington (BN after 1970), hauling it to Havana for barging to Chicago. Later, C&IM built a new connection at Powerton to receive unit coal trains from C&NW.

Ironically, changes in air pollution regulations would be C&IM's salvation. Peabody No. 10 would close and be dismantled, and C&IM would haul low-sulfur western coal right to Kincaid power station, the very plant that had robbed it of its main traffic source. The Midland bought six more new EMD's, SD38-2's 70-75, in 1974, and most of the SW1200's were gradually sold off.



R. R. Wallin collection

Two SD38-2's haul a BN unit coal train into Powerton Yard south of Pekin. C&IM would build a connection for unit trains from C&NW, whose track crossed the overpass in the distance.



R. R. Wallin collection

As did the steam engine tenders, and later the diesels, C&IM's cabooses sported the road's signature red band along their sides.

The ultimate in change began in 1987 when Com Ed decided to sell its railroad. Although Com Ed planned to keep using C&IM to haul coal, changes in the utility industry made such a move prudent. Com Ed was a pioneer in nuclear power generation, and at the time, the long-term future of coal-fired generation was questionable. Despite unions' concerns, the Illinois Commerce Commission approved the sale.

Soon the Kincaid power station was in need of western coal as its only fuel. Initial plans envisioned it arriving on IC or Norfolk Southern and being trucked to the plant, bypassing C&IM, but, ever resourceful, the road modified the conveyor belt from defunct Mine No. 10 so it could unload coal from trains arriving at its adjacent Ellis Yard.

The final changes came in the mid-1990s. The SD38's, which at times had been leased to BN, were in need of major repairs and so in 1995 were sold to Union Pacific, which made them hump-yard power. Replacements arrived in January 1996: five ex-Southern SD24's rebuilt by VMV Corp. at its shop in Paducah, Ky., into "SD20's." Originally high-nosed, these 1959 units (C&IM 80-84) were rebuilt with non-turbocharged prime movers and low noses. Happily for train-watchers, they came painted in C&IM green with the old red stripe revived.

The euphoria over the new units was short-lived, though, for on February 9, 1996, it was announced that C&IM had been bought by Genesee & Wyoming Corp. (GWI), the burgeoning shortline holding company based in western New York. With the deal came a name change to Illinois & Midland Railroad.

Today's I&M bears scant resem-



M. L. Powell; J. David Ingles collection

As-built, the first C&IM SW1200's lacked the white pinstripes along the red band. No. 18, built in April '55, is at Pekin on November 22.

blance to C&IM, although the RS1325's and SD18's, now in GWI orange and black, have not moved, running in local service between Springfield and East Peoria. Big Union Pacific road units run through, taking Powder River Basin coal to Kincaid power station. Four of the SD20's have gone to other GWI properties, while No. 81 usually works in Peoria transfer service. GWI in 2004 leased the former Peoria & Pekin Union and renamed it Tazewell & Peoria (TZPR), for the two counties it serves; TZPR and I&M share the same management. GWI also closed the diesel shop in Springfield, shifting all repair and maintenance on I&M and TZPR engines to the latter's former P&PU shop in East Peoria. ■

C&IM FACT FILE

Comparative figures are for 1930 and 1995

Route-miles: 135; 118

Locomotives: 24; 18

Freight cars: 1,559; 421

Passenger cars: 14; 0

Headquarters city: Springfield, Ill.

Special interest group: Chicago & Illinois Midland Chapter, National Railway Historical Society, 100 N. State Street, Chatham, IL 62629; (217) 483-7792

Recommended reading: *Chicago & Illinois Midland*, by Richard R. Wallin, Paul H. Stringham, and John Sz wajkart (Golden West Books, 1979); *Chicago & Illinois Midland Railway in Color*, by Ryan Crawford and James E. Lewnard (Morning Sun Books, 2009).

Sources: *Train-Watcher's Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach, 1992), *Official Railway Equipment Register*, *Moody's Transportation Manual*