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"The Birth of the City" (original from "Chronicles...") by Robert L. Archer

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THE BIRTH OF THE CITY

By Robt. L. Archer

It was in the late 1860s that Collis P^r Huntington was engaged in the gigantic task of building the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway from Newport News on Chesapeake Bay to a point on the Ohio River, and it was from the terminus of the line that the road derived its name, viz, from Chesapeake Bay to the Ohio River.

Mr. Huntington had already distinguished himself as a builder of railroads. In 1848 he went to California, and there in 1859 he with Charles Crocker, Mark Hopkins and Leland Stanford laid plans for and in 1869 completed the building of the Central Pacific Railroad. Later with his associates he built the Southern Pacific Railroad, completed in 1881

The War between the States had been ended only a few short years, and the difficulties that confronted Mr. Huntington and his backers and associates were not only the difficulties of a constructing a line of railroad over the mountains, but great financial difficulties as well. However, the great founder of the City of Huntington, with keen foresight and grim determination was not to be deterred. He became president of the Chesapeake & Ohio in 1869 and served in that capacity until 1888. He visited the Ohio valley in 1869, making most of the journey west from White Sulphur Springs by horseback, the horse-back ride being broken by a dash down the turbulent New River in a flat bottom boat, and a ride by steam boat from Kanawha Falls to Charleston. He had started from Richmond with quite a party, most of whom including Mrs. Huntington, remained at White Sulphur while Mr. Huntington, his brother-in-law, Mr. D. W. Emmons, Vice President William C. Wickham, and the representatives of Fisk & Hatch (New York bankers interested in the enterprise) continued to the future terminus of the road on the Ohio River. Arrived at the mouth of Greenbrier River, and not being able to proceed down New River by horse-

back, the horses were sent forward by land and the party proceeded down New River in a bateaux or flat bottom boat. Around the Falls of New River, then called Richmond Falls, they were compelled to transfer their boat on skids, and some of the party were almost overcome by the extreme heat. Their voyage is said to have been the first ever accomplished down New River by boat. A day or two after starting the party met a mountaineer from whom they purchased a string of catfish for two dollars. They asked him if he knew the lower river, and if he could pilot their boat down the next twelve miles. He replied that he would if they would pay him enough. It was finally agreed that he would pilot the boat down the next twelve miles for the enormous sum of one dollar and fifty cents. At Hawk's Nest the party was met with their horses, thence to Kanawha Falls. There the men and horses boarded a boat, thence down the Kanawha to Charleston, then a small town of about twenty five hundred population, thence by boat again to near Scary in Putnam County, and then again by horse-back to the Ohio River, following as nearly as possible the line of the railroad then under construction.

It is said that Mr. Huntington's first thought was that the terminus of the road should be at or near Ceredo, West Va. However, legend has it that at the time of his visit there was exceedingly high water in the Ohio River. This caused Mr. Huntington and Colonel Emmons to cast their eyes on the beautiful stretch of fine bottom land below the mouth of the Guyandotte River, extending for about five miles along the Ohio River. They were so much impressed with the beautiful expanse of high rolling bottom land that Mr. Huntington had his agents undertake the securing of options. Colonel Emmons was deputed by Mr. Huntington to obtain, and later to close, the options, pay the money and take deeds for the various farms. To ~~assist~~ assist him he engaged the services of Albert Lakdley, a lawyer, who was familiar with the lands and acquainted with the people. Options were obtained in all on twenty farms. These options were closed later and

the lands finally conveyed to a corporation known as the Central Land Company. Among the farms included in the options were those of James H. Buffington, Dr. John N. Buffington, W. H. Hagen, and Mary Buffington Hagen, John Laidley, Henry Buffington, Dr. Payne, P. C. Buffington, W. P. Helderby, Harvey Poage, John Hanley, Charles Everett, Ephraim Frampton, John M. Pennypacker, Dr. P. H. McCullough, and G. A. and W. L. Johnston. The descendants of many of these owners still live in Huntington. Little did their forefathers think that on the site of their farms would be reared a city such as our beautiful City of Huntington. A number of the owners made reservations of moderate tracts of acreage surrounding their homes.

As Superintendent and Manager of the Central Land Co. Mr. Huntington sent his brother-in-law, Colonel D. W. Emmons, and as Secretary and Sales Agent he sent General John H. Oley. Colonel Emmons and General Oley were both citizens of New York. General Oley was a former Brigadier General in the Union Army who had served with distinction in West Virginia, mostly in the Kanawha Valley.

When the time came to close the options Colonel Emmons advised Mr. Huntington that he would require fifty thousand dollars to make the first payment which was due March 1st. 1870. Mr. Huntington's reply was delayed, and when it did arrive asked how Colonel Emmons would like to have the money, whether by certified check or otherwise. The reply reached Colonel Emmons only four days before the option payments were due, and failure to make the payments then rendered the options void. He tried to get in touch with Mr. Huntington but failed. In desperation, accompanied by Judge H. J. Samuels, he proceeded to Portsmouth, Ohio, that being the nearest banking town where he was likely to obtain such a sum of real money as fifty thousand dollars. Arrived there he proceeded to a bank with his request to honor a draft on Mr. Huntington for fifty thousand dollars, his request being based on Mr. Huntington's letter to

him. The president of the bank summoned his board of directors, and after consideration, the request was declined. Though greatly discouraged, a few minutes later Colonel Emmons and Judge Samuels entered the banking house of Thomas Dugan. Mr. Dugan was the grandfather of Matt W. and Dr. Thomas Dugan of this city. Colonel Emmons again told his story to Mr. Dugan and exhibited Mr. Huntington's letter. But Mr. Huntington's name and fame had not reached Portsmouth, and Mr. Dugan demurred to taking a draft on him. Then Colonel Emmons had the happy thought of drawing on Fisk & Hatch the New York bankers who furnished the financial backing for the enterprise. These bankers were well known to Mr. Dugan, and he agreed to cash a draft on them for fifty thousand dollars, provided that Fisk & Hatch would wire that they would pay it. Colonel Emmons immediately dispatched a telegram to Fisk & Hatch. Only four hours remained until the leaving time of the boat on which he must return to meet the option payments on the following day. Hour by hour went by and no reply, and the captain of the boat finally agreed to delay its leaving for another hour. Almost in despair Colonel Emmons again went to Mr. Dugan and that gentleman did advance fifty thousand dollars against Colonel Emmons draft on Fisk & Hatch for that amount. So far, so good, and Colonel Emmons with the cash in his bag boarded the boat which at once departed for Huntington, or rather for Holderby's Landing at the foot of Sixteenth Street, or for Guyandotte, for at that time Huntington was only an imaginary point. But alas! Shortly after the boat had left a telegram was received from Fisk & Hatch which read "Mr. Huntington out of town. Cannot honor draft." When Mr. Dugan read that telegram it is reported that he almost collapsed, and who would not? His fifty thousand dollars was gone, and he began to feel that he had been the victim of a big confidence game. He determined to stop Emmons at Ironton, Ohio, that being the nearest place he could reach by wire. On the point of taking such a step and apprehending the supposed

"confidence men", a second telegram arrived from Messrs. Fisk & Hatch which read "Mr. Huntington returned. Will honor draft." Mr. Dugan's relief was immediate and immense, and the transaction proved to be a good investment for him. His bank was made the depository for large sums of money disbursed by Mr. Huntington and his associates in carrying on their projects.

Colonel Emmons reached Huntington on the following day, and made the necessary payments on the options. He knew nothing of the scare Mr. Dugan had undergone pending the arrival of the second telegram.

Title to the farms was taken in the name of Collis P. Huntington. Shortly thereafter the Central Land Company was formed, and the title to practically all the land passed to that company.

Then it was in 1871 that Engineer Rufus Cook was sent on from Boston to make a plat or map of the future city. This he did and with marvelous foresight laid out the wide streets and avenues which Huntington now enjoys, and which are the envy of many older communities.

Sales of lots began in the winter of 1871-72, and in the same year the railroad was completed to the Ohio River, with connection by steamboat to Cincinnati and Pittsburg. The new town and future metropolis was named Huntington in honor of its founder.

Then came the panic of 1873 and for a while it seemed as tho' Huntington would become another "lost city". However, the early inhabitants, mostly from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New England, held on and in 1875 the town was reported to have a population of five hundred, and three years later in 1878 this had increased to fifteen hundred.

The City of Huntington was incorporated by the Legislature February 27th. 1871, and the first election was held December 31st. 1871. This resulted in the election of Peter C. Buffington as the first Mayor of the new city; and the first City Council was composed of Dr. J. O. Wall,

E. S. Holderby, D. W. Emmons, W. H. Hagen, and E. T. Mitchell.

The first meeting of the Council was held January 8th. 1872, when the following officers were appointed:

Marshal	Isaac T. Mitchell
Treasurer	J. H. Poage
Assessor	L. H. Burks
Street Commissioner	A. J. Enslow
Recorder	John H. Oley

General Oley was probably the most generally loved and popular man in the new city. He continued to fill the office of Recorder until his death in 1888.

So here ends the story of the birth of the City of Huntington.