

Triumph of 1861 Will Be Relived

History repeats itself Tuesday as Omaha joins the nation in paying tribute to a pioneer who welded the union with a telegraph wire.

The dream of linking the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts by "singing wire" belonged to Omahan Edward Creighton.

On October 24, 1861, he saw it come true.

The message originated at Sacramento, Cal., and sped eastward on the newly strung line to the Western Union terminus at Omaha.

While dignitaries and townspeople cheered, the Omaha telegrapher relayed the words east to the desk of President Abraham Lincoln in Washington.

On Tuesday, one hundred years to the day, the linking of East and West will be recreated on the Courthouse lawn, where a telegrapher will receive the anniversary message from California and relay it to Washington.

A telegraph pole will be erected on the lawn and a line run from the Western

Union office. Facsimile copies of the message will be distributed to bystanders.

Heading the list of dignitaries at the affair will be Walter P. Marshall, president of Western Union. He will speak at a Civic Affairs Luncheon at the Sheraton-Fontenelle Hotel and be introduced by the Very Rev. Carl Reinert, S.J., president of Creighton University.

Omahans think of Mr. Creighton primarily as the founder of the city's first university. But historians give him a major role in preserving the Union.

That first message assured President Lincoln of California's loyalty in event of civil war.

While it took minutes to span the country, the message was years in the making and fitting climax to a saga that began in Omaha.

When Mr. Creighton arrived in Omaha in 1856, the tiny frontier town was the farthest point on the telegraph line originating on the Atlantic Coast. An

earlier attempt to bring the line east from the Pacific Coast succeeded only in reaching from San Francisco to Carson City, Nev.

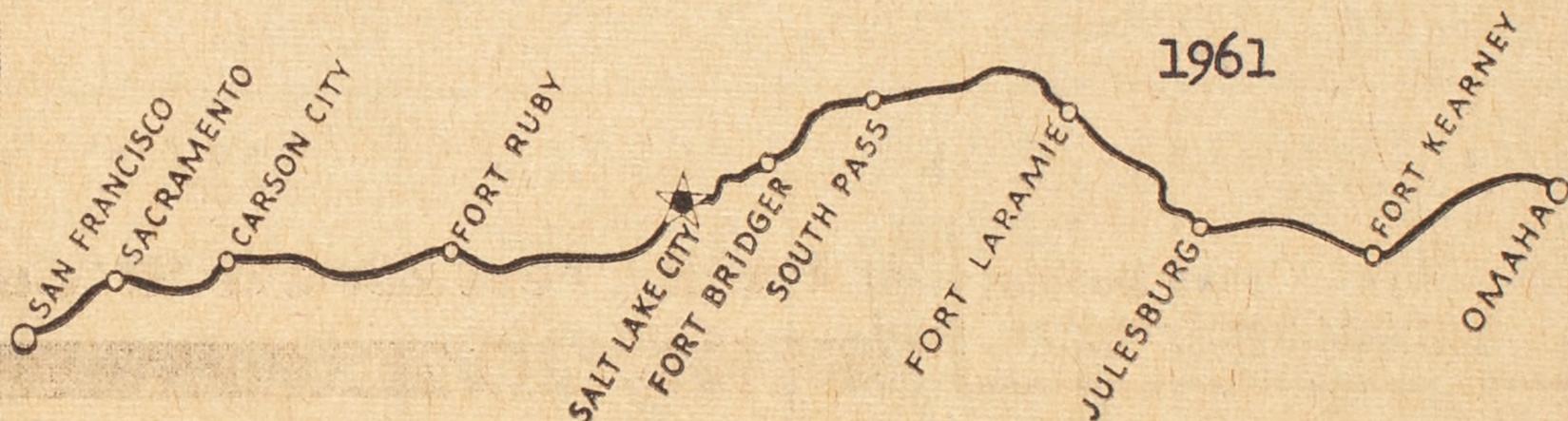
It was Mr. Creighton's consuming ambition to bridge the gap between Omaha and Carson City, an expanse of mountains and arid plains inhabited by hostile Indians.

His experience at hauling poles, stringing wire and superintending work crews fitted him for the task.

To prove it could be done, Mr. Creighton traveled between the two points. The trip almost killed him but convinced Congress that the Creighton plan was feasible.

With an appropriation of 400 thousand dollars, Mr. Creighton supervised setting of the first pole in Omaha on July 4, 1861.

Three months and 25 thousand poles later, the Creighton crew arrived in Salt Lake City. Seven days later a crew working east from Carson City arrived, the wires were joined and history was made.



Creighton . . . Wires across West doomed Pany Express.