



The WATERTOWN EXPRESS and the "Hog and Human": M & StL Passenger Service in South Dakota 1884-1960

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In mid-July of 1960 editors of the *Minneapolis Tribune* found much on the regional scene that they judged to be newsworthy: Minnesotans were heavily engaged in political debate anticipating the general elections of the coming fall; the Hill Lines were rebuffed in their attempts to consummate a huge railroad merger; the speeding AFTERNOON HIAWATHA was derailed near Saint Paul, resulting in injury to several persons; Minneapolitans were enjoying the annual Aquatennial Celebration; and it was hot. One important event was overlooked by the Minneapolis journalists, however. On 21 July passenger service by the Minneapolis & Saint Louis Railway between Minneapolis and Watertown, South Dakota, ended forever. At 10:30 P.M. on 20 July train number thirteen quietly slipped out of the trainsheds at the Great Northern depot in Minneapolis for the last time; its counterpart number fourteen had made its final departure from Watertown an hour and one-half earlier. Without hoopla and almost without notice, a seventy-six year tradition of service ended when these two trains reached their respective terminals in the misty morning hours of 21 July.¹

1. *Minneapolis Tribune*, 9-22 July 1960; *Watertown Public Opinion*, 21 July 1960; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Time Table No. 15, 6 December 1959, pp. 1-2, 11-12.



Here the crew of the last number fourteen is shown at Watertown prior to the final departure. Left to right are Danny Williams (brakeman), Conrad Gjestvang, Jr. (engineer), and Ole Froyland (conductor).

Yet in this lengthy history of passenger train operation on the West End of the M&StL, thousands of people and tons of mail, express, and baggage had faithfully been delivered to and from South Dakota stations. The purpose of this study is to delineate the broad story of passenger train service on the lines of the Minneapolis & Saint Louis in South Dakota; to demonstrate the importance of passenger service to Dakota residents during the steam car era; to establish the economic importance of passenger operations to the railroad itself; and to sustain the notion that these trains were, in the final analysis, tools of human utility—nothing more and nothing less.

The original but elusive goal of the Minneapolis and Saint Louis was to link the cities of its corporate namesake. To this end, construction began in Mill City during 1870 and Albert Lea, near the Iowa border, was reached eight seasons later. At Albert Lea, Saint Louis traffic was grudgingly yielded to the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern, a carrier that was

linked to yet another railroad at Burlington, Iowa, thus facilitating the long desired Saint Louis connection. Frustrated in its attempt to build a single line of road to Saint Louis, the M&StL redirected its energies and constructed a road leading in a southwesterly direction, eventually tapping the important Iowa communities of Fort Dodge and Des Moines. In 1881 the traditional north-south orientation of the company was altered when authorization was given by the stockholders to build a secondary main line to reach the rich agricultural regions west of Minneapolis. One year later rails of the M&StL reached Morton, 92 miles from the main line junction at Hopkins. During the same season the M&StL came under a short-lived influence by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Company, and the Rock Island, in a mood for great expansion, ordered a 122-mile westward extension of the Morton branch. Subsequently, in 1883-1884 the line was lengthened from Morton to Watertown, Dakota Territory.²

Passenger business on the West End was instituted nearly as soon as the rails had been put down. Initially, irregular service was offered by construction and freight trains, but scheduled operations began as soon as the necessary track surfacing had been completed. By 1889 the M&StL was able to boast of the helpful close connections that its trains made with the cars of the Hill Lines at Saint Paul Union Depot. Additionally, Dakotans were reminded that the Albert Lea Route, as the M&StL was then known, allowed each patron 150 pounds of baggage—checked free! In 1897 the railroad charged its patrons the usual three cents per mile for travel in Minnesota and a reasonable four cents per mile in South Dakota. In the same year the one-way fare between Minneapolis and Watertown was \$6.82; from Reville to Watertown the fee was \$1.37. Between Watertown and Chicago, the one-way fare was \$17.25 on a routing that took passengers via Minneapolis and Albert Lea (M&StL), Cedar Rapids (BCR&N), and West Liberty (CRI&P). The M&StL passenger train for Saint Paul left Watertown daily

2. Frank P. Donovan, Jr., *Mileposts on the Prairie: The Story of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway* (New York: Simmons-Boardman Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 21-22, 54-64; U.S., Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission, *Valuation Reports*, vol. 137 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 812; Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 66.

at 7:25 A.M. and its counterpart arrived from the Minnesota capital at 6:05 P.M. In either direction the trip was completed in a short ten hours.³

Soon after the turn of the century, however, passenger trains made the 234-mile run between Saint Paul and Watertown in only nine hours and fifteen minutes. These trains continued to be operated on a daylight schedule so Pullman or first class accommodations were unnecessary; meals were available at the depot lunchroom in Morton, Minnesota. Of course, the federal mails were handled and at that time the United States Express Company held the express franchise. News privileges on the trains were held by the estate of one George Allison. The trains clearly were unglamorous; rather, they were ordinary workhorse locals. Yet, with only forty miles of railroad in South Dakota, the M&StL handled no fewer than 10,540 patrons during fiscal 1902. During the same year passenger operations in South Dakota alone contributed revenues in the amount of \$17,686.36, while handling freight in that state netted a mere \$10,331. In 1902 and throughout the period of the early twentieth century, passenger train revenues were of crucial importance to the M&StL.⁴

There was, however, cause for concern. Revenues derived solely from South Dakota operations in 1902 were exceeded by expenses. Indeed, there was a net loss of more than seventeen thousand dollars. It was necessary to acquire expanded trade areas and fortunately, the M&StL management at that time was headed by Edwin H. Hawley, a man thoroughly dedicated to the successful undertaking of such tasks. The M&StL had already thrust a new line southward from Winthrop, a station located eighty miles west of Saint Paul; and rumors circulated that this new branch would eventually tap Omaha and possibly

3. *Watertown Courier News*, 2 May 1889; *The Compendium of Passenger Rates and Divisions*, No. 23 (Chicago: W.F. Bailey, July 1897), p. 220; Albert Lea Route Passenger Tariff Number Four, 5 December 1897, pp. 4-5; *Watertown Kampeskan*, 25 June 1897.

4. *The Rand McNally Official Guide and Hand Book* (Chicago: American Railway Guide Company, October 1901), p. 421; South Dakota, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners for the Year Ending June 30, 1902*, n.p., pp. 120-29.



Minneapolis and Saint Louis Depot and Yards in Conde, South Dakota.

even Kansas City. Thus, South Dakotans were unsurprised, but still were pleased to learn that the "Louie" was going to build west of Watertown. In this connection the Minnesota, Dakota & Pacific Railway was incorporated under the laws of South Dakota on 18 December 1905. This corporate puppet of the M&StL soon began construction under a guarantee from the parent company. Track gangs reached Conde in October 1906, and then made an abrupt turn to the northwest, passing Aberdeen in November and reaching Leola before Christmas. However, the track had been thrown down on a superficial grade and it appears unlikely that the 114-mile line between Conde and Leola entered revenue service before the summer of 1907. Still, Hawley's seemingly insatiable appetite for new M&StL trade areas remained unsatisfied. While one construction crew finished the Leola line, another built from Conde toward the Missouri River, reaching the "Big Muddy" at Le Beau in September 1907; the line was placed in service shortly thereafter.⁵

Original passenger service west of Watertown was in the form of a Monday-Wednesday-Friday mixed train that made a Watertown-Conde turn on a ten-hour schedule. In the fall of 1907 traffic on the LeBeau line supported only irregular service.

5. South Dakota, *Thirteenth Annual Report*, p. 129; J.S. McLintock, "History of the Corporate Organization and Construction of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad," n.p., 17 June 1921, p. 3; *McPherson County Herald*, 20 December 1906; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year Ending June 30, 1908*, p. 8.

However, in the same season the traditional once-a-day service between Saint Paul and Watertown was augmented with the establishment of a new night train between Saint Paul and Aberdeen, the consist of which included "Through Vestibuled Brand New Electric Lighted Pullman Sleeping Car and Free Chair Cars." Additionally, there was a daily-except-Sunday Conde-Leola turn that was designed to compliment the schedule of the new Aberdeen train, an arrangement that was applauded by the many drummers who then used the M&StL. By 1909 a through connection with the Aberdeen train had been established for the LeBeau line. Thus, overnight service to and from the Twin Cities was available to all of the West End and by adding a mere \$1.50 to the one-way coach fare, passengers could avail themselves to the amenities of Pullman travel. This paltry fee would purchase one double berth large enough, it was claimed, for two persons.⁶

As soon as train service was instituted west of Watertown, the M&StL encouraged investigation of the area by prospective home-seekers. "Land Seekers Rates" to all points on the new lines were advertised by ticket agents of the M&StL and its Iowa Central satellite. For patrons on the Peoria branch of the Iowa Central, the round trip fare was fifteen dollars; for prospective settlers located in Iowa at stations closer to Dakota, the rate was only ten dollars. The M&StL actively solicited not only agricultural homeseekers but mechanics and entrepreneurs as well: "The new country in South Dakota along the M. & St. L. R.R. affords many openings for stores and business houses." West of LeBeau were the Cheyenne and Standing Rock Indian Reservations, lands that were to be opened to white settlement in October 1909. This development was naturally much advertised by the M&StL. President William Howard Taft eventually proclaimed LeBeau as a registration point for 2.6 million acres and between 4 October and 23 October, no less than 3,023 people participated in the lottery held at the end-of-track of the M&StL. Many of these hopefuls, and

6. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, winter ed., 1907, p. 12; *The Official Guide of the Railways* (New York: National Railway Publishing Company, October 1907), p. 772; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, spring ed., 1909, pp. 10-12; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, summer ed., 1909, p. 22.

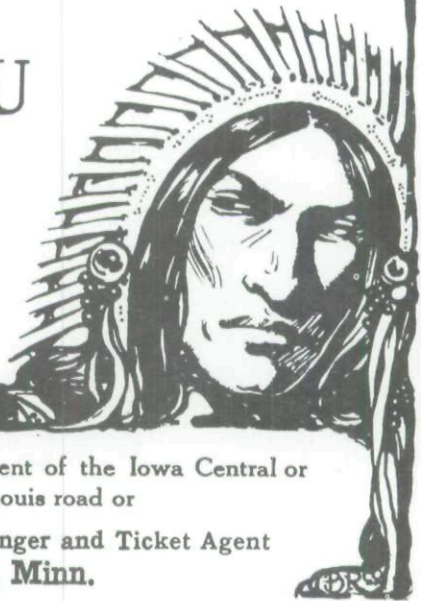
CHEYENNE RIVER RESERVATION

3,000,000 Acres

of good land will be thrown open
to Homesteaders soon—probably in
October 1909.

LE BEAU

So. Dak., (on M. &
St. L. R. R.) is the
gateway to all
of this land.



For rates, etc., write or ask any agent of the Iowa Central or
Minneapolis & St. Louis road or

A. B. CUTTS, General Passenger and Ticket Agent
Minneapolis, Minn.

*A.B. Cutts, the energetic General Passenger Agent and Ticket Agent
for the M&StL, looked forward to a boom in passenger revenues
when the government opened the Cheyenne River Reservation.*

numerous others who were there simply to observe, arrived on the regularly scheduled trains. Others traveled in the comfort of the RESERVATION SPECIAL, a daily train that the M&StL placed in service to handle the tremendous volume of traffic resulting from interest in the South Dakota land lottery.⁷

In 1908 a visitor to LeBeau observed that "the iron horse impatiently awaits orders to cross the muddy stream and plunge into the wilderness beyond." Indeed, the M&StL management was, at that time, again looking for additional avenues of expansion. During the next four years journalists speculated that the M&StL was going to create a through railroad from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, that a new Chicago-Vancouver route would include the extension of the Leola branch to a point on the Soo Line in North Dakota, that the original Saint Louis goal would finally be reached independently, that the M&StL would fully absorb the Iowa Central, that a branch would be built from Pierre to the West End at Cresbard, and that the M&StL would be extended from LeBeau to the Pacific Coast. There was a germ of truth in all of these rumors, for Hawley did consider each proposition and he did succeed in merging the Iowa Central with the M&StL. As for the Pacific Extension, locating engineers eventually worked at least one hundred miles west from LeBeau, and two pile drivers and supplies of wood piling were unloaded at the bank of the Missouri River. Unfortunately for the M&StL, the Milwaukee Road, backed by Rockefeller money, frustrated the "Louie's" westward expansion by building tributary lines into the territory west of LeBeau and by constructing its own Pacific line. Finally, E.H. Hawley passed away in February 1912 and dreams of extending the West End died with him.⁸

7. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders*, p. 11; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Time Table*, spring ed., 1909, p. 12; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Time Table*, 20 December 1911, pp. 21-22; *LeBeau Phenix*, 26 August 1909, 2 September 1909, 28 October 1909.

8. *Minneapolis Tribune*, 16 November 1911; *LeBeau Phenix*, 11 March 1909; *Minneapolis Tribune*, 19 November 1909, 21 November 1909; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Minute Book of the Board of Directors for 1909 and 1910*; *Minneapolis Sunday Journal*, 4 August 1907; *LeBeau Phenix*, 22 July 1909, 9 September 1909.



This photograph of LeBeau, one of the few that survived the death of the town shows the two-stall engine house, the double-spouted water tank, the multiple track yard, several rail cars, and on the right, the M&StL stockyard. To the west end of the yard, near the end of track, a locomotive is switching cars.

Meanwhile, LeBeau basked in a brief moment of glory. Between 1907 and 1910 LeBeau was one of the most important of all western cattle shipping points. The *LeBeau Phenix* estimated that 25 thousand head of cattle moved into and out of the M&StL's stock pens during the season of 1908. Each spring entire train-loads of Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico yearlings were brought in to feed on the tender buffalo grass that characterized the region. During the following fall these cattle were rounded up, loaded, and sent to the markets at South Saint Paul or Chicago. Drovers, of course, accompanied their livestock, riding the cushions of the M&StL caboose. After selling their cattle and after a few days of "shootin' 'em up" in the big city, the cattlemen returned home aboard the cars of the ABERDEEN LIMITED. But LeBeau's glory was cut short. Disastrous fires plagued the town in 1910 and again in 1911;

the extensions of the Milwaukee Road west of the Missouri River were capturing the livestock market; and the agricultural frontier was close at hand. Recent prosperity simply evaporated and most of the nearly five hundred residents of LeBeau soon sought economic opportunity elsewhere.⁹

In 1910 the M&StL expanded passenger service to South Dakota, including the extension of the traditional daylight Saint Paul-Watertown train to Aberdeen. This gave Aberdeen two through trains to Saint Paul over the M&StL, the WATERTOWN LIMITED and the ABERDEEN LIMITED, in addition to the usual passenger and freight trains of the Leola branch. Broadened service in South Dakota resulted in a pleasant 13.19 percent increase in the passenger traffic of the M&StL for 1910. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, passenger revenues accounted for approximately one-third of all M&StL income. After the merger with the Iowa Central in 1912, the percentage dropped to a still impressive one-seventh of the total revenues.¹⁰

Passenger traffic on the lines of the M&StL in South Dakota was down in 1914. Stockholders were advised that "diminished crops operated to reduce travel." The fickle weather of South Dakota frequently resulted in either prosperity or poverty for the residents along the M&StL and, indeed, contributed to the relative financial health of the carrier itself. When crops were good people rode the trains; conversely, when crops were bad, they simply watched. In the winter, snow frequently interrupted service, especially west of Watertown. LeBeau was without rail service for two weeks in 1910 and the winter storms of 1917, 1922, and 1936—among others—are legendary. Rotary plows were often called upon to open the lines and

9. *LeBeau Phenix*, 19 November 1908, 20 May 1909, 27 May 1909, 10 June 1909, 17 June 1909; Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 130.

10. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1910*, p. 7; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Time Table*, 20 December 1911, p. 6; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1909*, pp. 30-31; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1912*, p. 31.



During the winter of 1922 a M&StL rotary plow was dispatched to clear the road near Conde.

frequently even they had difficulty. Meanwhile, passenger and freight traffic was at a standstill.¹¹

Military traffic accounted for much of the increase in passenger revenues from 1915 to 1920. Regular ridership increased too, and in many ways it was the *belle epoque* of M&StL passenger service. Trains were many and full; service was excellent and passenger receipts were high. But circumstances changed in the early 1920s and already one portion of the road's western division was suffering poor health. As early as 1911 the M&StL reduced service west of Conde to a tri-weekly mixed train. Three years later the company had revived full passenger service, but only on a three-day-per-week basis; a mixed train sufficed on alternate days. However, by 1921

11. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1914*, p. 8; *LeBeau Phenix*, 3 March 1910.

regular passenger train service west of Conde was a thing of the past. Then a mixed train ran through to Le Beau on a daily-except-Sunday arrangement while additional freight was picked by a Conde-Hoven turn. Soon the local freight was gone and, between Akaska and LeBeau, so was the railroad itself. In the first six months of 1924 total operating revenue from this twelve and one-half mile segment of the railroad amounted to only \$24.37. The M&StL subsequently petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission for permission to abandon this romantic portion of the West End and when no protests were made, the proposal of the company was granted on 12 September 1924.¹²

For the M&StL severe competition was a way of life. The "Louie" was surrounded by larger and more prosperous carriers and survival demanded resourceful leadership of the type found in Anson B. Cutts, the company's ingenious general passenger agent and ticket agent. As early as the 1890s Cutts pioneered the use of Popular Excursions to the Twin Cities from all points on the M&StL. Special trains and reduced rates were, of course, not restricted to Twin City excursions. Before the M&StL built west from Watertown, Cutts was advertising in South Dakota for passengers to the Lake Park Hotel at Minnetonka, "the most popular resort in Minnesota"; and to Lake Tetonka at Waterville, Minnesota, "the best fishing grounds." Naturally, both stations were on the M&StL. For the second anniversary of the founding of LeBeau on 16-17 September 1909, Cutts ordered special excursion trains and cheap rates. The M&StL was also quick to assist any special movement such as Terry's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" Company. In 1909 this organization of thirty-seven people traveled in two private cars, a sleeper and a baggage car, and performed at nearly every town on the line east of Watertown. In the same helpful fashion the M&StL ran excursion trains in conjunction with the many circuses that played Watertown. For circus-goers of Troy there were always the regular westbound trains, but most residents of that little village preferred the ten o'clock excursion run; its arrival in

12. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, 20 December 1911, p. 6; U.S., Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission, *Finance Reports*, vol. 90 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), pp. 630-32.

Watertown corresponded with the colorful circus parade. The last homebound train of the day was always crowded with people who purposely delayed their departure in order to stay at the circus as long as possible.¹³

The M&StL early recognized the recreational potential of Lake Kampeska and as soon as its rails reached four miles west of Watertown, A.B. Cutts began to boom Yahota as a new summer resort town on the "best lake in South Dakota." During the summer months the M&StL ran three shuttle trains each Sunday between the Watertown depot and the Outlet: fare, twenty-five cents. Additionally, special trains were often run to the Outlet in connection with baseball games that were played there. Baseball specials were also operated from Watertown to Winthrop, Minnesota. In 1916 Cutts told stockholders that the Popular Excursions of the M&StL had resulted in a handsome profit for the Passenger Department. In that year the railroad also garnered \$18 thousand in revenue from the travel of people who were seeking homes along the M&StL in South Dakota.¹⁴

Residents on the West End developed a surprisingly strong interest in the athletic fortunes of the University of Minnesota, an interest that was always exploited by the energetic Cutts. On Friday evening before a Saturday football game in Minneapolis, extra cars were added to the train from Aberdeen. As local stops were made, these coaches soon filled with football fans. Such was the case in 1924 when several young men from South Dakota were members of the Minnesota team. On 15 November "Harold 'Red' Grange and his ten assistants" from Illinois were

13. Anson B. Cutts to Frank P. Donovan, Jr., 7 March 1949; *Watertown Kampeskian*, 25 June 1897; *LeBeau Phenix*, 2 September 1909; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Transportation Order No. 64, signed by A.B. Cutts, 17 August 1909; *Watertown Public Opinion*, 20 July 1960; Evelyn Mara O'Day, former resident of Troy, S. Dak., to the author, 19 February 1972.

14. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, winter ed., 1909, p. 22; *Pictorial Review of Watertown and Coddington County, South Dakota*, n.p., n.d. (this is a souvenir booklet available at the Watertown Regional Library); Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 131; T. H. Farmen, former M&StL station agent, to the author, 4 March 1972; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1916*, p. 8.

slated to be the guest team at the dedication of the new Memorial Stadium. Twin Cities journalists were glum about the prospects of a meeting between the mediocre Gopher team and the Grange machine. Nevertheless, Dakotans crowded M&StL trains in order to attend the battle between Grange and their home-grown gladiators of the gridiron. They were not disappointed. Conrad Cooper of Pierre and Clarence Schutte of Hecla were two of the heroes of the game as the Gophers leveled Grange and went on to a 20-7 upset. Exuberant fans, undoubtedly some from the Dakota plains, subsequently celebrated by storming Mill City. Before the riotous demonstration had run its course, the smiling western visitors began to assemble at the Great Northern depot for the trip home. Eager to obtain the best seats, they gathered around the train-gates long before the 8:40 p.m. departure of the M&StL's number fifteen.¹⁵

The express franchise on the West End, originally in the hands of the United States Express Company, passed to the Adams Express Company, and finally to the Railway Express Company. Perhaps the most unusual express shipments on these lines originated at Troy after local residents learned that Twin City restaurateurs would pay premium prices for frogs' legs. Accordingly, shipments of live frogs were frequently consigned by such diverse groups as the Ladies Aid of the Congregational Church. In addition to express, the trains also carried baggage in all forms—caged animals, trunks, bicycles, carriages, and even remains. The rate for a corpse, "regardless of the age of the deceased" was one regular lowest first-class fare. Of course, 150 pounds of regular baggage was allowed on each corpse ticket! For years the principal newspapers of the Twin Cities used M&StL baggage service to send their issues to on-line South Dakota destinations.¹⁶

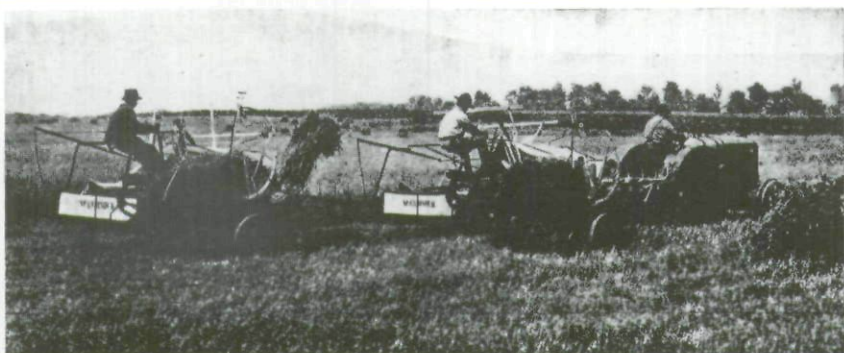
15. Evelyn Mara O'Day to the author, 29 March 1972; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 13-15 November 1924; *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, 16 November 1924; Otis Dypwick, Sports Information Director, University of Minnesota, to the author, 27 April 1972; *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1970.

16. Evelyn Mara O'Day to the author, 19 February 1972; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, summer ed., 1905, p. 17; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Bulletin of the General Passenger Department, 3 February 1950.

With the arrival of the rails at Winthrop, Minnesota, in 1882, the federal government authorized Railway Post Office service for the line. Two years later when the M&StL reached Watertown, R.P.O. service was likewise extended to that community. The Railway Mail Service also served the communities between Watertown and Aberdeen as well as those between Conde and LeBeau; Leola was never favored with enroute sorting service. These various R.P.O. operations were not a part of any transcontinental organization. Rather, they were simply important expeditors of local mail. In 1909 there were two foremen and nine clerks assigned to the Saint Paul, Watertown and Aberdeen R.P.O., and two clerks made up the roster of the Conde and LeBeau R.P.O. Most of the westbound mail reached the R.P.O. cars of the M&StL at the Saint Paul Union depot or at the Great Northern depot in Minneapolis. Connections with other R.P.O. routes were made at Norwood, Winthrop, Hanley Falls, Watertown, and, of course, at Conde with the LeBeau R.P.O. At many communities along the West End the postmaster met all day trains. Usually he employed a small cart or sled to convey the mails to or from his nearby post office. At night, mails were stored in the depot freight house or delivered to the train by mail messenger.¹⁷

The depression came early to the M&StL. On 26 July 1923 the road was plunged into a receivership from which it would not escape until more than twenty years later. Initially, passenger operations remained much as they had been, but the horseless carriage was beginning to make heavy inroads on local and excursion traffic. On the Leola branch full passenger service disappeared by 1921 and "hog and human," or mixed trains, carrying freight, passengers, baggage, mail, and express had been substituted. West of Conde, shipments of cattle on Saturdays accounted for the earlier than normal departure of the usual mixed from Akaska on that day. The Leola mixed and the Akaska mixed continued to connect with the Saint

17. Leo A. McKee and Alfred L. Lewis, eds. and comps., *Railroad Post Office History* (Pleasantville, New York: Mobile Post Office Society, 1972), p. 59; Railway Mail Service, *Schedule of Mail Trains* No. 241, Tenth Division, n.p., 9 June 1909, pp. 40, 110.



South Dakota Homeseeker EXCURSIONS

\$10.00 Round Trip

from most M. & St. L. stations in Iowa

\$15.00 Round Trip

from all M. & St. L. stations in Illinois

To all Stations on M. & St. L. R. R. in South Dakota

\$10.00 from Stations In Iowa.

\$15 FROM ALL M. & ST. L. STATIONS IN ILLINOIS

EXCEPT from the following, the
fares are as shown:

FROM	FARE	FROM	FARE
Wright, Iowa	\$10.60	Wayland, Iowa	\$14.20
Fremont, "	11.00	Olds, "	14.60
Hedrick, "	11.50	Winfield, "	15.00
Martinsburg, "	11.75	Marsh, "	15.00
Ollie, "	12.35	Morning Sun, "	15.00
Richland, "	12.80	Newport, "	15.00
Brighton, "	13.45	Elrick Jct., "	15.00
		Oakville, "	15.00

DATES OF SALE—June 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30; July 7, 14, 21 and 28; August 4, 11, 18 and 25; September 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29; October 6, 13, 20 and 27, 1925.

RETURN LIMIT—15 days in addition to date of sale. Return trip must be completed to original starting point prior to midnight of final limit.

STOPOVERS—Stopovers will be allowed on both the going and return trips at all stations in South Dakota. Stopovers will NOT be allowed at any other point.

Your Opportunity To See The Wonderful Farm Land Bargains in South Dakota

Descriptive Literature and Further Information on Request to the Undersigned.

A. B. CUTTS, Passenger Traffic Manager, Minneapolis, Minn.

The depression came early to the M&StL, and passenger and freight revenues from South Dakota operations slumped throughout most of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, as this advertisement from 1925 reveals, the M&StL continued to promote the advantages of life in Dakota.

Paul-Aberdeen passenger train, thus retaining through service to all stations in South Dakota. In spite of reduced income from operations on the West End during the 1920s and 1930s, the M&StL continued to advertise the advantages of living in South Dakota. C. C. Lake, the agricultural development agent for the railroad, thus enjoined: "Land Owners! Go to South Dakota for a farm for your boy. Tennants! [*sic*] Go to South Dakota for a farm for your family." A.B. Cutts encouraged prospective settlers to view this "land of sunshine and opportunity" from the cars of the M&StL. In this connection he authorized excursion rates and stop-over privileges to patrons leaving on Tuesdays for any station on the M&StL in South Dakota. Cutts also advertised excursion fares to Florence, where "the waters of Medicine Lake . . . are providing a great benefit to persons troubled with skin and stomach ailments." Meanwhile, traveling salesmen continued to favor the sixteen-section sleeper assigned to the overnight run between Saint Paul and Watertown and the day trains were so reliable that farmers set their watches according to their passing. Indeed, before the advent of all-weather roads and modern school buses, this reliability allowed students to commute on regularly scheduled trains from Troy to the two-year high school at nearby Strandburg.¹⁸

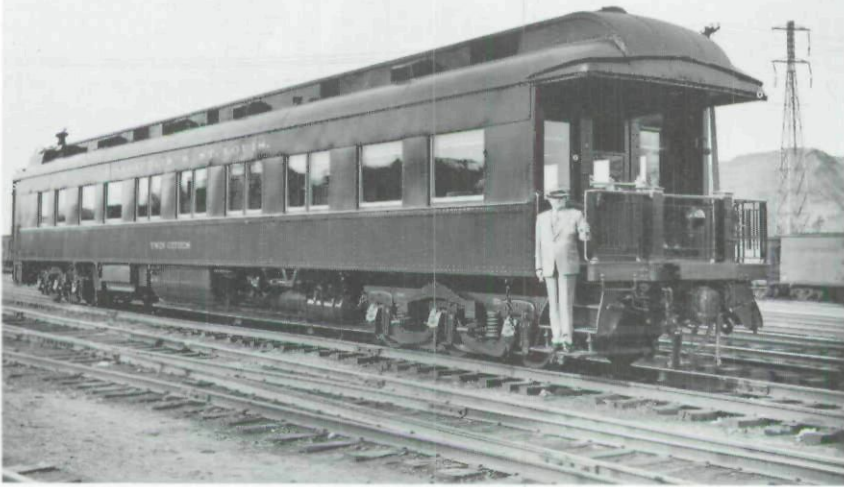
Nothing signified the defeat of the local passenger train by the automobile more than the arrival of gas-electric cars to displace the usual steam trains. Beginning in 1929 the M&StL began to motorize all but its heaviest passenger movements. In all, the "Louie" finally acquired eleven such units, the largest seven of which were similar to GE-28, christened Watertown. This unit, delivered in November 1930, was built by the Saint Louis Car Company and powered by a 400 horsepower Winton engine. Behind the engine compartment was a thirty-foot Railway Post Office section and a twenty-nine-foot baggage compartment equipped with the usual fish racks and milk can

18. Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 180; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, spring ed., 1921, p. 7; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, 15 December 1925, p. 18; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, 15 August 1930, p. 9; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, spring ed., 1921, p. 7; *Watertown Public Opinion*, 21 June 1960; M.J. Reitan, former Chief Dispatcher for the M&StL, to the author, 1 May 1972; Evelyn Mara O'Day to the author, 19 February 1972, 29 March 1972, 22 June 1972.

chains. Units such as this could pull from one to three baggage cars or coaches without undue strain. In 1932 about one-half of the passenger train miles of the M&StL were run by the GE cars. Yet revenues from passenger services were down—nearly one-third less than those of 1931—and drastic changes were ordered. Full passenger train operation west of Watertown ended before 30 April 1932, and mixed train service was substituted thereafter. The Post Office Department responded by curtailing the authorized R.P.O. service between Conde and Aberdeen, a move that further reduced mail revenues. The Akaska mixed and the Leola mixed were scheduled to connect with the newly instituted mixed train between Watertown and Aberdeen. This train, in turn, connected with the evening Saint Paul passenger train at Watertown.¹⁹

Passenger revenues continued their unfortunate downward trend and early in 1936 the M&StL discontinued passenger service between Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Also discontinued were trains eleven and twelve, the NEW ULM ACCOMMODATION, a semi-commuter operation that most travelers affectionately referred to as the WOODEN SHOE. The day train from the Twin Cities to Watertown, a run that was established as soon as the "Louie" reached Watertown in 1884, was similarly discontinued. On the branches the Akaska train was changed from daily-except-Sunday to tri-weekly, and the Leola train was scheduled to operate only on Wednesdays and Saturdays. In 1937 the R.P.O. authorization on the Conde-Akaska line was terminated and M&StL trucks began hauling mail, baggage, and express on the Leola branch. By 1939 the GE cars accounted for 93 percent of all M&StL passenger miles and they had done much to alleviate the heavy passenger deficit. And, like the country itself the M&StL was struggling toward economic recovery. But there were still amputations to be made. The five-year period from 1934 to 1939 had witnessed repeated agricultural failures in the

19. Office of the Master Mechanic, *M&StL Passenger Equipment*, n.p., n.d., p. 88; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1932*, pp. 18, 20, 31; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Time Table*, 30 April 1932, p. 7; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders*, p. 20.



President Sprague is shown here on the rear steps of his private car, the TWIN CITIES.

normally rich country serviced by the Akaska line. Railroad traffic was naturally affected; freight revenues dropped and in 1938 only sixty-seven passengers were handled on the line. There were ample reasons to expect the return to prosperity, yet authority to abandon the operation was granted on 15 June 1940 and dismantling began shortly thereafter. Thus died the railroad built to serve what the company once labeled The New Empire.²⁰

Passenger revenues in 1940 were up by nearly 7 percent. It was symbolic of the prosperity that had returned to the "Louie." Finally, on 1 December 1943 the road was restored to its owners. Much of the credit for the revitalization of the road was due to the efforts of Lucien C. Sprague, "Doctor of Sick

20. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Western Division Time Table No. 34, 17 May 1936, pp. 6-9; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Superintendent's Bulletin No. 416, 18 November 1936; McKee and Lewis, *Railroad Post Office History*, p. 59; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1938*, p. 27; U.S., Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission, *Finance Reports*, vol. 240 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 329-36; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, Time Table, winter ed., 1909, pp. 21-22; At the same time the M&StL sought to abandon the Aberdeen-Leola branch, but the Interstate Commerce Commission denied the request. U.S., Decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission, *Finance Reports*, vol. 239 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), pp. 179-85.

Railroads," who was first receiver and then president of the company. Sprague had an affection for the West End and he periodically ordered a special train to take him, selected shippers, and nationally known celebrities to the fine pheasant hunting areas around Conde and Aberdeen. These trains consisted of baggage cars, a diner, sleepers, and, of course, Sprague's private car—The Twin Cities. The finest food and drink was served, the hunting was always successful, and the "Louie" gained important new friends. Employees on the line were always alerted regarding the approach of the Sprague Special and were expected to flag street crossings as the train roared through town. There was no delaying these runs; Sprague, himself, might be at the throttle!²¹

Lucien Sprague was remarkably popular among the public and was something of a folk hero to the M&StL employees. He personified and engendered loyalty and friendliness, characteristics commonly found on the West End where traffic was lighter and where shippers and travelers were personally known by the employees of the railroad. During World War II conductors on the WATERTOWN EXPRESS once purposely delayed their trains in mid-route when a passenger on the Minneapolis train wanted briefly to see her war-hero brother who was on the westbound train. Romance, too, rode the rails of the West End. One Watertown insurance representative, who did not own an automobile, used the M&StL passenger trains to court his future wife.²²

The Minneapolis & Saint Louis had numerous nicknames, among them Misery & Short Life, Miserable & Still Limping, Musty & Stale, Midnight & Still Later and, finally, Modern & Streamlined. For folks around Winthrop the road was the "Louie," while residents of Watertown referred to the M&StL as "The M" or "The Emmy." The GE cars, which replaced the

21. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1940*, p. 5; Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 214; T. H. Farmen, former M&StL station agent, to the author, 4 March 1972, 29 March 1972, and 21 April 1972.

22. Sylvia Hanschen, former Watertown, S. Dak. resident, to the author, 10 December 1971; H. Bill Brown, resident of Watertown, S. Dak., to the author, 3 November 1971.

steam trains, were labeled "The Puddle-Jumpers" or "The Doodle-Bugs." Employees of the road and local patrons frequently joked about the M&StL, but were offended when outsiders joined in. Local residents knew that the "Louie" had survived storms of wind, dust, snow, and depression. It was a local institution; it was *their* railroad. Dakotans living along the M&StL took pride in the fact that one of the popular passenger conductors of the road, Fred H. Hildebrandt of Watertown, had been elected to the South Dakota legislature in 1922 and later served as chairman of the South Dakota Game and Fish Commission. Eventually, he was elected to three terms in the Congress and was a delegate to the 1944 Democratic National Convention. But undoubtedly, the most famous of those who have lived along the M&StL in South Dakota is Hubert H. Humphrey, former mayor of Minneapolis, United States senator from Minnesota, former vice president, and presidential aspirant. Humphrey was born at Wallace, twenty-four miles west of Watertown, in 1911. Later, he moved with his family to nearby Doland, but his first long train ride was on the M&StL. As a teenager he accompanied his father to Minneapolis aboard the sleeper of the evening train. Young Humphrey had the upper berth and fondly recalls that the trip was "quite a thrilling experience." Some years later during the depression, the future presidential nominee of the Democratic Party used the M&StL to commute between Minneapolis and his South Dakota home. On these trips Humphrey eagerly anticipated the station stop at Morton where the nearby lunchroom offered a bill of fare that corresponded with his gastronomical desires and his financial limitations: a brimming cup of coffee for a nickel and a generous ham sandwich for a dime.²³

The Second World War caused a boom in business for the "Louie." Passenger revenues were swollen by private citizens who returned to the rails because of gasoline rationing and by no less than 944 extra passenger movements of a military nature. Revenues dropped in 1946 and 1947, but Lucien

23. U.S., Congress, Senate, *The Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, Senate Document 92-8, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, pp. 116-17; U.S., Congress, *Official Congressional Directory*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1972, p. 88; Hubert H. Humphrey, United States senator from Minnesota, to the author, 16 June 1972.

Sprague convinced the directors of the company that the remaining passenger trains should have first-rate coaches. Thus, in 1946 six light-weight stainless steel cars were ordered, each costing nearly one hundred thousand dollars. Numbered fifty to fifty-five, these handsome new coaches were placed in service about mid-May of 1948. Two of them were assigned to the Minneapolis-Watertown trains.²⁴

There were a number of schedule alterations for the Watertown train in 1945 and 1946, but by 1947 the familiar night schedule was again adopted. The restaurant in the old frame hotel next to the depot in Morton still served excellent food and the conductor woke dozing passengers in order that they could have lunch when the train stopped there. Elderly passengers were often reminded that once there had been similar depot lunch counters at Winthrop, Conde, and Aberdeen. Railway Post Office clerks were normally too busy with the mails to stop for coffee at Morton. In the late 1940s and until service was discontinued, the normal crew consist of the Minneapolis and Watertown R.P.O. was a foreman and one clerk, although a helper was also assigned until the early 1940s. Always there was a large quantity of letter mail, newspapers, circulars, and mail-order packages to be sorted. Additionally, there was the task of postmarking the countless letters, which patrons brought to the train or deposited in the depot drop boxes. The train rarely exceeded its authorized speed of forty-five miles per hour between Hopkins and Morton or forty miles per hour between Morton and Watertown and the nine hour and fifteen minute running time reflected this leisurely schedule. Still, with mail to be received and dispatched at thirty stations along the line, there was little time to dawdle.²⁵

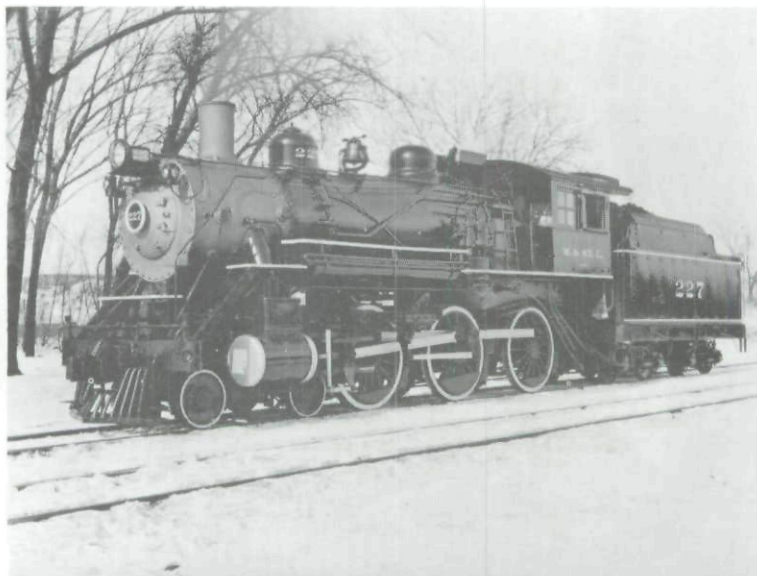
24. Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 221; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1946*, p. 10; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, *Annual Report to the Stockholders for the Year 1948*, pp. 7, 19; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Superintendent's Bulletin No. 3054, 15 May 1948.

25. H. Bill Brown to the author, 3 November 1971; Donovan, *Mileposts on the Prairie*, p. 147; Everett E. Hermanson, former clerk on the Minneapolis and Watertown R.P.O., to the author, 5 March 1972; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Time Table No. 15, 6 December 1959, p. 20.



Here a mixed train has just arrived at Leola and the business of loading cattle has begun.

After the arrival of the GE cars, most of the steam passenger locomotives were scrapped. One survivor was number 227, a frequent visitor to the West End.



In October 1948 the Post Office Department suspended R.P.O. service on the daily-except-Sunday mixed trains between Watertown and Aberdeen. Normally, three or four passengers continued to ride the cushions of the old combination car and the Minneapolis and Watertown R.P.O. still dispatched a few sacks of mail to the Aberdeen mixed. Express shipments remained stable, but this business could be handled easily by the regular train crew and early in 1949 the M&StL asked permission to drop passenger service west of Watertown. Unsurprisingly, nobody appeared to contest the application and on 1 January 1950, the M&StL was relieved of passenger carrying responsibilities west of Watertown.²⁶

Mail revenues from trains thirteen and fourteen, the only surviving M&StL passenger trains in South Dakota, increased throughout the 1950s. Prospective patrons were invited to ride in the finest coaches available and fares were extremely reasonable; for the 223-mile trip between Minneapolis and Watertown the M&StL received a paltry \$5.36. Perhaps more people would have used the trains if they had been operated during daylight hours, but this arrangement was unsatisfactory for the Post Office Department. Thus the schedules were unchanged and the operation became more a mail train than a passenger train. The significance of the decrease in ridership is evident from the following statistics, which were the system totals for the years indicated:

1916 -	2,457,856	total	passengers	
1936 -	135,944	"	"	
1946 -	190,319	"	"	
1948 -	81,398	"	"	
1953 -	45,148	"	"	27

By the early 1950s the venerable GE cars had been reengined with diesels, but were clearly growing weary after nearly thirty years of labor. Rail Diesel Cars (RDC) were

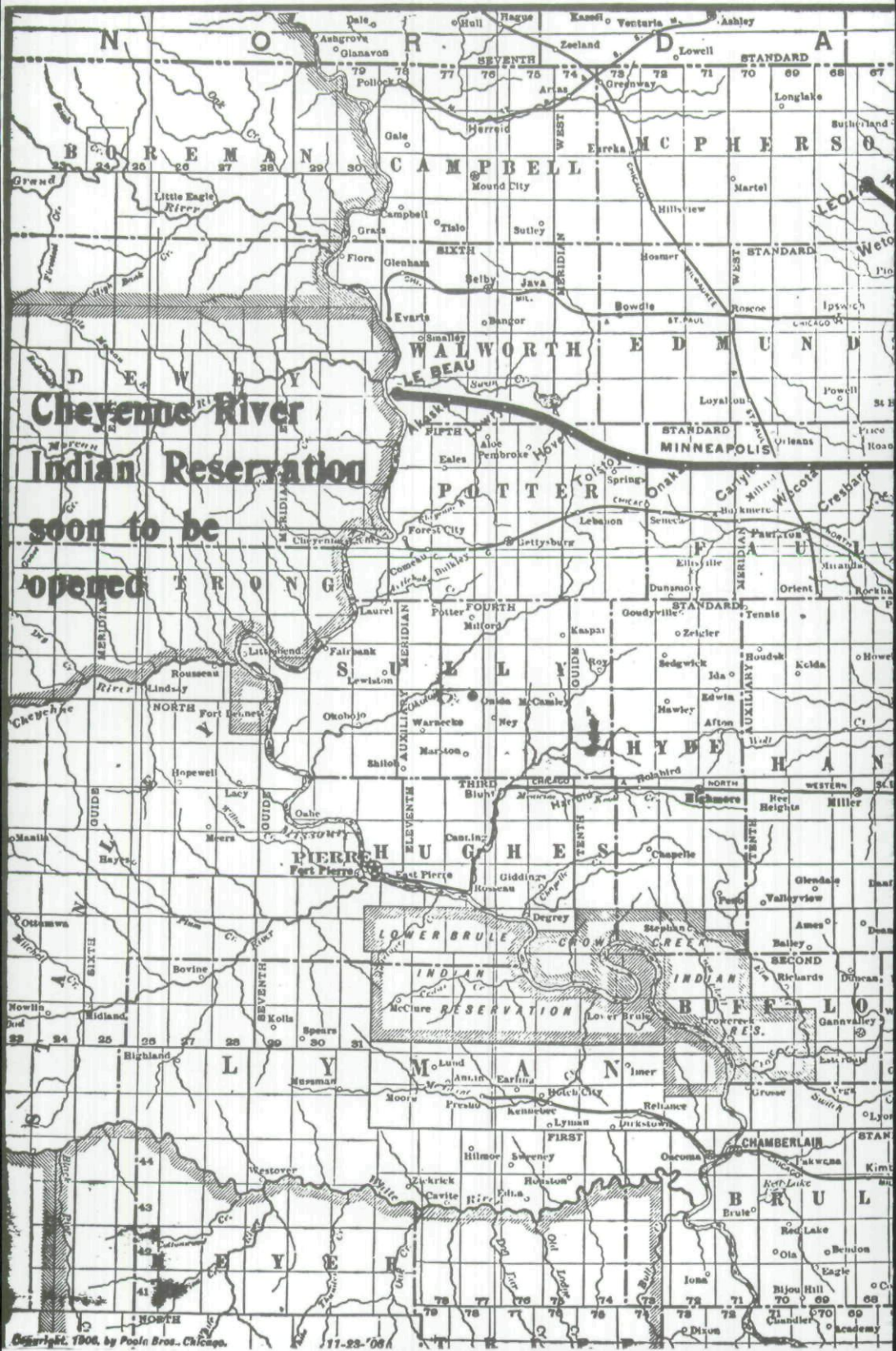
26. South Dakota, *Sixtieth Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1949*, n.p., n.d., pp. 10, 18, 47; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Bulletin of the General Passenger Department, 2 January 1950.

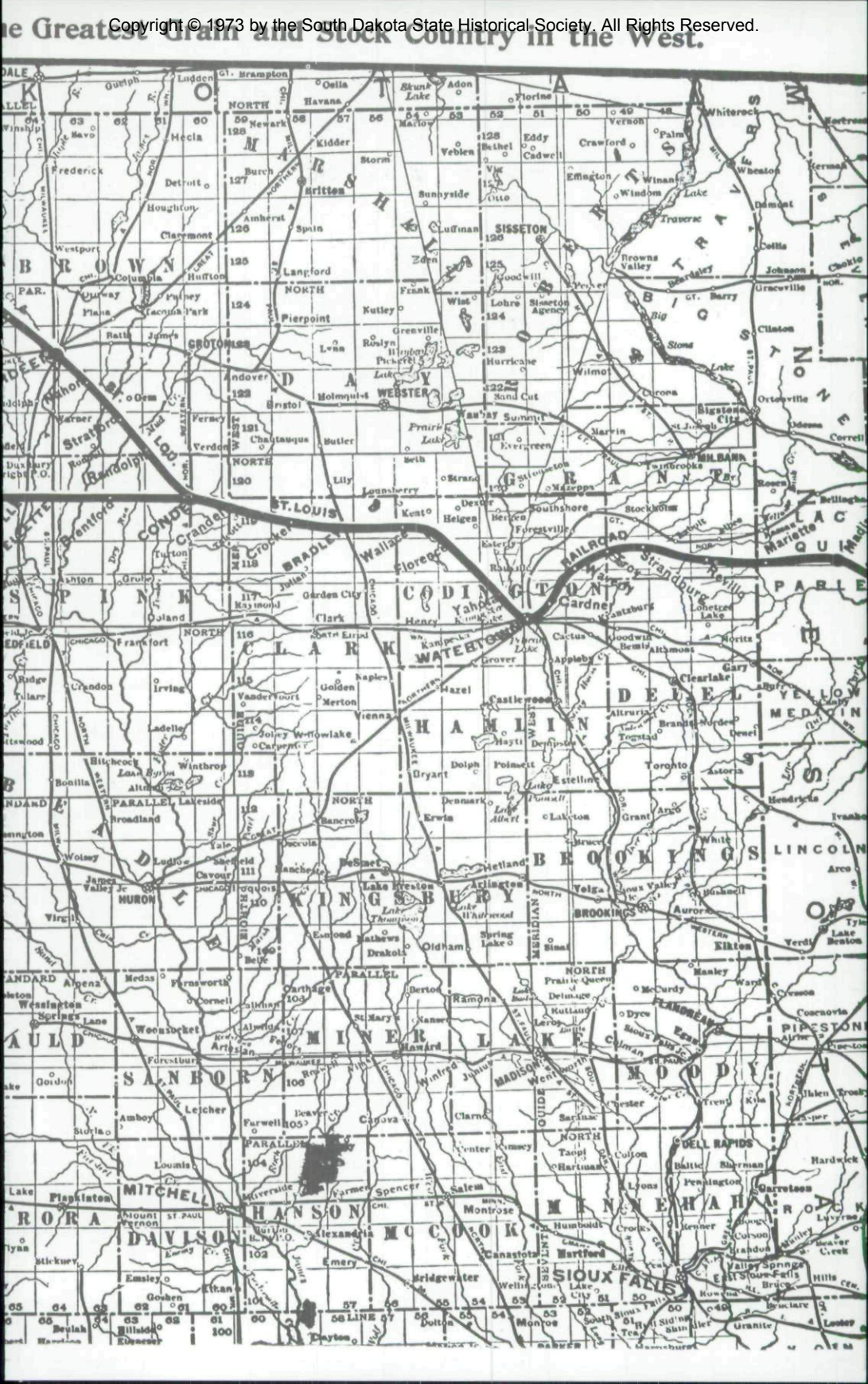
27. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Local Passenger Tariff No. 1-1953, 10 March 1953, pp. 5-8; Statistics for the ridership of M&StL trains were obtained from the Annual Reports to the Stockholders for the years indicated.

purchased from the Budd Corporation and during the winter of 1957 they replaced the GE car and coach train on the Minneapolis-Des Moines route. That took the pressure off the elderly GEs, but left two coaches unused. Because the RDCs did not perform well and because ridership was low on all of the three remaining M&StL passenger routes, it was decided to shop the GEs and place a small coach section in the rear of their baggage compartments. This was done during 1957 and subsequently the six streamlined coaches were sold. At the end of May 1958 the M&StL terminated passenger service on the main line between Albert Lea, Minnesota, and Albia, Iowa. Later that season, the RDCs were sold to the Chesapeake and Ohio for thirty-two coal hoppers and in March 1959 service to Des Moines was concluded. Then, only the Watertown train remained.²⁸

Lucien Sprague had left the property in the early 1950s and the new management was never as service oriented. Riding in the newly fashioned coach section of the bouncing GE car discouraged even the most dedicated patron. Yet, by the late 1950s the fate of the local passenger train was sealed. The management of the M&StL warned employees in December 1959 that trains thirteen and fourteen were losing money, but held out hope that there remained one way by which the operations could be salvaged. If the Post Office Department agreed, the M&StL proposed to run the trains only between Hopkins and Watertown, thereby eliminating the expensive terminal costs at Minneapolis. This curtailment would, it was estimated, save the M&StL about twenty-five thousand dollars and permit a nearly break-even operation. However, the Post Office Department told the M&StL in January 1960 that it would not agree to the change since expensive double handling of mail would result. Moreover, the railroad learned that the Railway Post Office authorization for the trains soon would be suspended. On 15 February 1960 the company responded by asking to discontinue the trains. At the public hearings held in Minneapolis on 28 April, M&StL attorneys revealed that in 1959

28. Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Time Table, 2 February 1957, p. 1; *The Express: Employee Publication of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway*, vol. 3, no. 1, January 1958, p. 2; *The Express*, vol. 3, no. 10, December 1958, p. 2.





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the trains had handled only 1,293 passengers and the operation for that year had resulted in a net loss of \$36,202. At the Minneapolis hearing no testimony was offered by any person who used the trains for passenger service. The Interstate Commerce Commission applauded the efforts of the M&StL to make the trains profitable by hauling a through car of less-than-carload freight and for investigating the possibility of using the trains to handle piggy-back trailers. However, on 2 May 1960 the Post Office Department advised that all mail service on the trains would be discontinued effective 22 May. With that announcement all hopes of retaining the Watertown run vanished. Permission to discontinue service was granted by the regulatory agency on 30 June; eleven days later the M&StL announced that the trains would make their final trips on 20 July 1960.²⁹

Thus ended an institution that had served the residents of South Dakota for more than three-quarters of a century. In 1884 they had rejoiced when the M&StL initiated passenger service to Watertown. The owners of the railroad correctly anticipated profits from the operation. For residents of Dakota Territory the arrival of steam cars meant the onward march of manifest destiny, the advance of civilization, the facilities of efficient transportation and communication, and a long step toward the goal of statehood. By 1960 all these goals had been realized, but passenger service no longer was profitable for the owners of the railroad. Seemingly, all utility of the local or short haul passenger train had vanished, and there were precious few mourners when the WATERTOWN EXPRESS ran its last miles. Unlike the *Minneapolis Tribune*, the *Watertown Public Opinion* considered the event to be newsworthy. This newspaper carried an obituary notice that was appropriately

29. *The Express*, vol. 4, no. 10, December 1959, p. 4; *The Express*, vol. 5, no. 1, January 1960, p. 4; The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, "Discontinuation of Passenger Trains 13 and 14 in the States of Minnesota and South Dakota," exhibits 3 and 4 (legal brief), 15 February 1960; U.S., Interstate Commerce Commission, "Decision and Order," Finance Docket No. 21015, 30 June 1960, pp. 2, 5, 12; Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, Bulletin of the Vice-President of Operations, 11 July 1960.

brief but succinct: "Nos. 13 and 14 of the M&StL are the last of a long line of passenger trains to serve Watertown since the railroads first carved their gleaming metal signature across the vast area of the Old West which was then an untapped frontier." ³⁰

30. *Watertown Public Opinion*, 21 July 1960. On 1 November 1960 the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway was sold to the Chicago & North Western System. By 1972 nearly all of the former M&StL trackage in South Dakota had been abandoned and only the seventy-two-mile section between Watertown and Stratford remained in operation. The future augurs ill for even that remnant.

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