## From Razing to Restoring: The Rehabilitation of South Dakota's Railroad Passenger Depots

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On 26 January 1905, the lead story in the *Brookings Register* described the town's newly opened Chicago and North Western passenger depot. The article noted, in particular, the depot's massive pillars of stone guarding the doorways, the warm red walls in the men's waiting room, and the warmed and lighted lunch room for the traveling public. Overall, the depot and grounds were claimed to be "as beautiful a structure and surroundings as can be found in the Northwest." Three years later, the *Pierre Weekly Dakotan* similarly praised the state capital's new Chicago and North Western depot, commending the rich walnut woodwork, the modern restaurant annex, and the new tile platform, and calling it "one of the most handsome and best arranged structures in the Northwest."

While both depots served their communities for nearly sixty years, when the railroads discontinued passenger service in the early 1960s the history of these two structures parted ways. Pierre's North Western depot was torn down in 1962 to make room for a new Holiday Inn motel. The North Western depot in Brookings gained a new life, first housing a radio station and then an investment firm. As railroads abandoned or reduced service on lines that did not generate enough business, most depots were either vacated or, like Pierre's, simply demolished. The wave of deterioration and demolition that occurred generally throughout the 1950s and 1960s eventually sparked a new

<sup>1.</sup> Brookings Register, 26 Jan. 1905.

<sup>2.</sup> Pierre Weekly Dakotan, 27 Feb. 1908.

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phase of preservation and rehabilitation for South Dakota's depots that continues today.<sup>3</sup>

Trains arrived in what is now South Dakota in the fall of 1872 and spring of 1873 when the Winona and Saint Peter entered Dakota Territory near Gary in Deuel County and the Dakota Southern built a line from Sioux City, Iowa, to Vermillion. Rail companies soon constructed a large network of lines across eastern South Dakota and throughout the Black Hills. The two networks, however, were not connected within the state until 1907 when the Chicago, Milwaukee and Saint Paul

3. Pierre Weekly Capital Journal, 1 Mar. 1962; Brookings Register, 16 Apr. 2004. For examples of closures and abandomments, see South Dakota, Public Utilities Commission, Meeting Minutes, Vols. 27–32 (1955–1960), State Archives Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society (SDSHS), Pierre; Leni Healy, History of the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, 1882 to 2001 (Pierre: South Dakota Public Utilities Commission, 2001); Congressional Budget Office, The Past and Future of U.S. Passenger Rail Service (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2003), p. 6.



This view of the Chicago and North Western depot in Brookings was taken in 1910, a few years after the local newspaper lauded it as a "beautiful" structure.



The "handsome" Chicago and North Western depot serving the state capital of Pierre was built shortly after the depot in Brookings.

and the Chicago and North Western bridged the Missouri River and constructed lines across western South Dakota to Rapid City.<sup>4</sup>

Because early Dakota Territory was sparsely populated, railroads initially built simple, inexpensive depot structures with little or no architectural detailing. Converted boxcars were often used and reused as temporary depots, complete with telegraph service and platforms, until further settlement warranted more permanent buildings. To save time and money, several railroads developed standardized depot designs scaled to fit a community's size and expected growth. These plans were generally for smaller frame depots that served as both passenger and freight facilities. Architect-designed brick depots were reserved for larger cities.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4.</sup> Mark Hufstetler and Michael Bedeau, South Dakota's Railroads: An Historic Context (Pierre: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, 1998), pp. 6–15. See also Rick W. Mills, The Milwaukee Road in Dakota (Hermosa, S.Dak.: Battle Creek Publishing Co., 1998).

<sup>5.</sup> Kenneth M. Hammer, "Dakota Railroads" (Ph.D. thesis, South Dakota State University, 1966), pp. 106, 179–81; Oacoma Gazette-Leader, 5 Oct. 1905. For detailed explanations of the

For nearly a century, depots held a significant place in South Dakota communities, serving dual roles as rail and social centers. In *The Railway Station: A Social History*, Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie note that the depot "was invariably a community centre, where the pot-bellied stove, the wooden benches, and the convivial sense of being in touch with the rest of the world drew local inhabitants to hear the news, discuss problems, and entertain each other." The prominence of the local depot developed from its position as an impromptu gathering spot and as host to a variety of organized events, such as church services, send-off and welcome celebrations, and political stump speeches.

As other forms of transportation replaced the railroad, the prominence of depots declined. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, depots along closed lines were abandoned, sold, or demolished. While a few depots were modified to serve rail-related functions, such as freight storage or railroad offices, new uses needed to be devised in order to save other depots from the wrecking ball. Historic preservationists refer to this practice as "rehabilitation" or "adaptive use." According to historic preservationist Norman Tyler, adaptive use applies to historic buildings that "are no longer viable in their original function and use but retain their architectural integrity." Depots were no longer viable as passenger stations because passenger service had ended. They needed to be rehabilitated for new functions or face demolition.

Following the abandonment of service to Hot Springs in 1938, Frank O. Butler worked to have the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy

various depot designs in South Dakota, see Charles W. Bohi and H. Roger Grant, "Country Railroad Stations of the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western in South Dakota," South Dakota History 9 (Winter 1978):1–23.

<sup>6.</sup> Richards and MacKenzie, The Railway Station: A Social History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 183.

<sup>7.</sup> Salem Special, 16 June 2005; Timber Lake Töpic, 2 June 2005; Pierre Capital-Journal, 23 June 1916; Deadwood Pioneer Times, 22 May 1902; Sanborn County Herald, 3 Oct. 1908; Sioux Falls Daily Press, 29 Sept. 1908; Aberdeen Daily News, 14 Oct. 1899, 23, 24 Oct. 1911; Aberdeen Evening News, 29 Aug. 1936.

<sup>8.</sup> Rick W. Mills, Railroading in the Land of Infinite Variety: A History of South Dakota's Railroads (Hermosa, S.Dak.: Battle Creek Publishing Co., 1990), p. 114.

<sup>9.</sup> Norman Tyler, Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000), p. 28.

and Chicago and North Western Union depot converted into the town's chamber of commerce, which it still houses today. <sup>10</sup> Such early examples of reuse were rare and most often left to private individuals like Butler. Will G. Robinson, director of the South Dakota State Historical Society from 1946 to 1968, recognized this fact. Before the demolition of the Chicago and North Western depot in Pierre, Robinson said, "I've been waiting for some Pierre citizen to propose something in regard to [the abandoned depot]. It would make a fine bus depot. Its upstairs could be remodeled to make a YMCA." Little could be done at that time, however, to encourage preservation. <sup>11</sup>

As the number of railroad abandonments increased, closed depots were often auctioned off to anyone willing to move the building. Generally, these depots were smaller frame structures that could be easily moved and converted into garages or storage sheds by local farmers or ranchers. Even though this practice gave several depots a new use, many were still neglected on their new sites and were eventually demolished.

Nationwide, a few high-profile demolitions triggered recognition of the need to preserve the country's railroad stations. One of the more controversial demolitions occurred in 1963 when the old Penn Station in New York City was razed to make room for Madison Square Garden. While the historic landmark was lost, the demolition helped to build support for the preservation movement in the United States.<sup>13</sup> Other notable demolitions included Union Station in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1969, Terminal Station in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1970, and Union Station in Columbus, Ohio, in 1979.

As in Hot Springs, prior to 1966 any efforts to rehabilitate abandoned depots were generally left to private citizens or organizations. Government at every level had limited involvement in historic-preser-

<sup>10.</sup> Hot Springs Star, 7 Sept. 2004.

<sup>11.</sup> Pierre Daily Capital Journal, 4 Apr. 1961.

<sup>12.</sup> See, for example, F. Duresky, Huron, S.Dak., to Ed Schaffer, Aurora, S.Dak., 16 July 1954, Chicago and North Western Division Headquarters Records, Acc. no. H95-14, Box no. 6034, State Archives Collection, SDSHS.

<sup>13. &</sup>quot;Farewell to Penn Station," New York Times, 30 Oct. 1963; United States Conference of Mayors, Special Committee on Historic Preservation, With Heritage So Rich (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 139, 141.



Like many other abandoned depots in the 1960s, the Highmore depot was wheeled away to a now-forgotten location.

vation efforts. The publication of *With Heritage So Rich* in 1966, which documented the loss of such architectural landmarks as New York's Penn Station to urban-renewal efforts, led to passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. This legislation expanded the federal government's role in historic preservation and created the framework for cooperation in preservation efforts among all levels of government that exists today. Historic-preservation offices were created at the state level, and local governments could become certified to receive grants and technical assistance by enforcing state preservation legislation and establishing historic preservation commissions.<sup>14</sup>

One of the more significant sections of the NHPA created the National Register of Historic Places. Administered through the National Park Service, the National Register was designed to recognize the country's significant cultural resources and encourage their pres-

<sup>14.</sup> Tyler, Historic Preservation, pp. 44-45.

ervation. The NHPA allowed for a review of federal projects that could impact any historic properties listed on or eligible for the National Register.

As an additional incentive to encourage rehabilitating historic buildings, Congress in 1976 authorized the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, which offered a 20-percent tax credit for "certified rehabilitations of certified historic structures." To be eligible, buildings had to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, have an income-generating use, and meet specific federal guidelines designed to ensure that defining architectural features would be preserved as the building was adapted for a new use. Features like original windows, exterior cladding, and interior woodwork were required to be repaired rather than replaced. 15

With the new legislation and tax incentive in place, attitudes toward historic railroad stations began to shift. In contrast to the high-profile demolitions of the 1960s and 1970s, large depot rehabilitations in the late 1970s and 1980s demonstrated that these buildings could still be useful to their communities. Union Station in Washington, D.C., underwent a \$160-million renovation in the late 1980s that created 215,000 square feet of retail space. Other large-scale renovations were also undertaken on Cincinnati's Union Terminal in 1978, Saint Louis's Union Station in 1985, and New York City's Grand Central Terminal in 1986, to name a few. The idea of reusing passenger stations was gaining ground. 16

In 1972, the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office was created to carry out functions mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act. Soon thereafter, the state legislature passed two measures creating a framework for preservation at the state and local

<sup>15.</sup> Michael J. Auer, Preservation Tax Incentives for Historic Buildings (Washington D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2003), p. 3. The federal guidelines are set forth in Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer, The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Properties (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995). This document may be accessed at http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standards/index.htm.

<sup>16,</sup> Frank Kuznik, "Colossal Comeback: Washington's Union Station Is Back on Track after a \$160 Million Renovation," *Historic Preservation* 40 (Sept.—Oct. 1988): 64–69.

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levels. Part of the legislation also authorized a five-year moratorium on the property tax assessment of improvements undertaken on properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Eligible projects had to follow the federal guidelines spelled out in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and be approved by the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office. South Dakota preservationists at last had a means to promote depot rehabilitation

Despite the new legislation, preservationists still faced railroad companies resistant to preservation efforts directed toward those depots that remained in their possession. Railroad officials expressed concern about the adoption of city preservation ordinances that could potentially restrict their ability to alter, sell, or demolish depots listed on the National Register of Historic Places, B. H. Bobbitt, director of the Real Estate, Economic and Resource Development Department for the Milwaukee Railroad, made his company's concerns known to the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office in 1975 after being notified that the Aberdeen depot had been proposed for listing on the National Register. "Requests to nominate depots," he wrote, "are pouring in from all over our system with the result that very few of our buildings have escaped such honorable mention. Some of the difficulties resulting from this program are certain designation documents that may be filed in the Register of Deeds Office, adverse zoning changes . . . and new ordinances . . . adopted by the City or Community to prohibit either demolition or a change in ownership of the structure for periods of up to one year." Bobbitt concluded, "I would greatly appreciate your advising me if the City of Aberdeen already has or might be considering any measures that would in any way restrict our present use or ability to sell, alter or modernize this building which serves as a combination depot-office building."18

While ordinances as restrictive as those Bobbitt described were not adopted in South Dakota, the railroads' experience with such restric-

<sup>17.</sup> See South Dakota, Codified Laws, ch. 1-19A; ch. 1-19A, sec. 20, and ch. 1-19B.

<sup>18.</sup> B. H. Bobbitt, Chicago, Ill., to John J. Little, Vermillion, S.Dak., 29 Sept. 1975, Aberdeen Milwaukee Depot National Register of Historic Places File, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), SDSHS.

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tions in other states made executives wary of any attempts to nominate their depots. North Western Division Manager D. B. Carlisle summarized that railroad's position when he said, "We would certainly not want to have any action taken that might limit our ability to function in a safe and efficient manner or act decisively . . . including the possible removal of the building." <sup>119</sup>

Despite the objections of railroad officials, depot rehabilitation efforts began slowly in South Dakota during the late 1960s and continued through the 1970s. After storage, the conversion of depots to restaurants became one of the most popular adaptive uses for the structures. In 1968, the Minneapolis and Saint Louis depot in Aberdeen became the Depot Club and housed several night clubs, restaurants, and bars throughout the 1970s before the Janitor Supply Company and a few other small businesses occupied the building through the 1990s and into the new century. Following its abandonment in 1970, the Rock Island depot in downtown Sioux Falls was rehabilitated into The Depot restaurant in 1974.<sup>20</sup>

By the early 1980s, depot preservation was becoming more common across the state. Paul Putz, then director of the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, noted in 1983 that "the practicality of depot conversion in South Dakota has been aptly demonstrated." Of the twenty-two South Dakota depots currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nineteen were listed by 1989. The state property-tax moratorium was also extended from five years to eight years in 1982, further encouraging preservation efforts. <sup>22</sup>

Likely responding to financial incentives such as the property-tax moratorium, private businesses continued to lead the way in larger depot rehabilitations in the 1980s. The Milwaukee depot in Yankton

<sup>19.</sup> D. B. Carlisle, Mason City, Iowa, to John J. Little, Vermillion, S.Dak., 19 Nov. 1975, Brookings Depot National Register of Historic Places File, SHPO.

<sup>20.</sup> Art Buntin, Living Legacies: Railroad Stations of Brown County, South Dakota (Aberdeen, S.Dak.: Aberdeen/Brown County Landmarks Commission, 2002), pp. 87–88; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 21 Jan. 1972, 25 Oct. 1979.

<sup>21.</sup> Paul M. Putz, Vermillion, S.Dak., to James R. Myers, Pierre, S.Dak., 26 Jan. 1983, Beresford Depot National Register of Historic Places File, SHPO.

<sup>22.</sup> Numbers compiled from South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, Historic Sites Inventory, 5 Oct. 2005; South Dakota, Codified Laws, ch. 1-19A, sec. 20.

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These images depict the Sioux Falls Rock Island depot as it looked in its original form in 1890 and as remodeled to house The Depot Restaurant and, later, the offices of an insurance company.

gained a new commercial use in 1980 when it was renovated into offices for Yankton Cable Television. Karen Harmelink, a member of the local preservation group Historic Yankton, Inc., at the time of the renovation, noted that the fifty-thousand-dollar rehabilitation of the Yankton depot was "an example of preservation at its best, where the aesthetic properties of a building are retained while its spaces are adapted to utilitarian purposes of our day."<sup>23</sup>

In 1982, the Court Street Partners, a group of Aberdeen lawyers, undertook the rehabilitation of the Aberdeen Great Northern depot. Spearheaded by lawyer Roy Wise, the project cost almost four hundred thousand dollars and took nearly two years to complete. Strikingly similar to the Aberdeen Great Northern project was the Illinois Central depot in downtown Sioux Falls. It, too, was rehabilitated into law offices in 1983 by attorney Charlie Dorothy, realtor Don Dunham, and Rollie Yates of Central Plains Consulting at a cost comparable to that of the Aberdeen depot.<sup>24</sup> The projects in Yankton, Aberdeen, and Sioux Falls all utilized both the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit and the state property-tax moratorium.

In addition to private businesses, public and nonprofit organizations also undertook depot rehabilitation projects in the 1980s. Deadwood obtained the abandoned Chicago and North Western depot and renovated it first into the city hall and in 1988 into a tourist information center. In 1982, the Beresford depot was sold at auction to Community Depot, Inc., a group of local citizens who preserved the structure as a community center. Madison also preserved its depot in 1989 as a chamber of commerce. <sup>25</sup>

Conversion to museums was the most common use for depots in the 1980s. In 1984, the Chicago and North Western donated the De Smet depot to the city to serve as a museum. The Codington County

<sup>23.</sup> Yankton Milwaukee Depot Tax File, SHPO. See also Sioux City Journal, 5 June 1980.

<sup>24.</sup> Aberdeen American News, 30 Jan. 1983; Aberdeen Great Northern Depot National Register of Historic Places File, SHPO; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 16 Sept. 1983.

<sup>25.</sup> Rick W. Mills, Making the Grade: A Century of Black Hills Railroading (Hermosa, S.Dak.: Rick W. Mills, 1985), pp. 30–31, 48; Putz to Myers, 26 Jan. 1983; Beresford Republic, 21 Mar. 1985; Patt Germann, "Madison Restores Railroad Depot," Centennial Sentinel 3, (June/July 1989): 25.

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Originally built in 1910, the Chicago and North Western depot in De Smet was converted into a museum in 1984 and still maintains that function today.

Historical Society purchased the Watertown Minneapolis, and Saint Louis depot in 1985 and operated it as a museum until 1996. Kadoka opened its depot museum in 1986, Miller in 1988, and Flandreau in 1989. Several other depot museums can be found today in towns across South Dakota, including Aberdeen, Clark, Garretson, Hill City, Midland, Milbank, Mitchell, Webster, Winner, Woonsocket, and Yankton.<sup>26</sup>

As the adaptability of depots became better known, more creative uses were employed for rehabilitations during the 1990s. Bob Pruitt recognized the potential of the Mitchell Milwaukee Road depot. Pruitt, who renovated the building into a Mexican restaurant in 1990, said, "The building just lends itself to adapt to any situation. Our imagination is the only thing holding us back." In 1992, Jerry Carey purchased the depot and undertook another renovation that changed the restaurant from Mexican cuisine to a railroad-themed pub and grill. The restaurant is now decorated with railroad memorabilia and features a menu that includes steaks named the Dakota Southern and the Milwaukee Road. <sup>28</sup>

Some projects during the 1990s used depots for housing and lodging. After the Miranda depot closed in 1956, it was moved next to a hardware store where it served a storage function for over thirty years. In 1992, Craig and Judy Hodson purchased the depot, moved it to a farm south of Ipswich along South Dakota Highway 45, and renovated it into a home. The Pollock depot was converted into a hunting lodge in 1995. The second floor of the two-story building had originally housed the depot agent and his family, making its use as lodging particularly fitting. <sup>29</sup>

<sup>26.</sup> Hazelle M. Sckerl, De Smet, S.Dak., to Paul Putz, Vermillion, S.Dak., 16 Sept. 1984; De Smet Depot National Register of Historic Places File, SHPO; Watertown Public Opinion, 18 June 1985; Kadoka Depot National Register of Historic Places File, SHPO; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 17 July 1995; 17 Apr. 2000.

<sup>27.</sup> Quoted in Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 22 June 1990.

<sup>28.</sup> Mitchell Milwaukee Depot Tax Credit File #SD-93-00008, SHPO; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 10 June 1991, 30 Aug. 2002; The Depot Pub and Grill, http://www.mitchelldepot.com/html/menu.cfm?category\_id=3, accessed 24 Oct. 2007.

<sup>29.</sup> Craig V. Hodson, "The Miranda (South Dakota) Railroad Depot: A Renewed Life," http://www.west.net/~cvh/index.html, accessed 24 Oct. 2007; Pollock Depot Tax File, SHPO.

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One of the more interesting rehabilitations in South Dakota was that of Huron's Great Northern depot in 1994. The rise of automobiles and other modes of transportation was a major factor in the decline of railroad travel and the abandonment of passenger depots. Ironically, Schoenhard Motors, a used-car dealer, renovated the Huron depot into their offices.<sup>30</sup>

Two more financial incentive programs were created in the 1990s, which, like the earlier tax-incentive programs, attempted to encourage preservation efforts. The federal Transportation Equity Act for the Twenty-first Century (TEA-21) was created as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Act of 1991. TEA-21 mandated that 10 percent of federal transportation funds be passed through state transportation departments to various enhancement projects, including rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings with public uses. These enhancement grants proved essential to larger depot projects because they provided large amounts—up to five hundred thousand dollars with a small amount of match—especially important when the rehabilitation costs regularly reached over one hundred thousand dollars. Depots in Redfield, Canton, and Aberdeen have recently utilized nearly \$1 million in TEA-21 grants.<sup>31</sup>

The South Dakota Legislature authorized the second program in 1995, giving preservationists another potential source of grant funds. The Deadwood Fund, generated by gaming revenues from the City of Deadwood and administered by the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, provided matching grants for the rehabilitation of properties on the National Register of Historic Places. To be eligible, projects had to adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The Beresford depot received a grant in 1997 to help fund interior restoration work. The Aberdeen Milwaukee depot and the Java depot also recently received Deadwood grants for window and roof repairs, respectively.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30.</sup> Ralph Borkowski, email to author, 21 May 2007.

<sup>31.</sup> South Dakota, Department of Transportation, Transportation Enhancement Program Guidelines (Pierre, 1997); Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 4 Nov. 2002; Aberdeen American News, 21 Oct. 2004, 16 Feb. 2005.

<sup>32.</sup> South Dakota, Codified Laws, ch. 42-7B, sec. 48.1.





In 1908, the Great Northern depot in Huron stood ready to serve the travel needs of the community. Today, it still fills that purpose as a used-car dealership.





The elements have taken a heavy toll on many abandoned depots, like this one in Java. With the assistance of preservation funds, however, some of these structures can still be saved.

Over the past decade, several of South Dakota's large brick depots have undergone their second, third, or fourth major rehabilitations, many of which have used at least one of the aforementioned financial incentive programs. In 1996, Midland National Life Insurance used the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit to renovate the Sioux Falls Rock Island depot into offices after nearly twenty years as a restaurant. The North Western depot in Aberdeen stood vacant for most of the 1980s and briefly served as both storage and mixed commercial space during the 1990s. In 1999, however, Avera Health Care purchased the depot and remodeled it into offices for their Heath Care Plus Federal Credit Union.<sup>33</sup>

After closing in 1961, the Redfield North Western depot was used for storage and offices for a feed and hatchery business until 2001,

<sup>33.</sup> Sioux Falls Rock Island Depot Tax File #SD-95-00034, SHPO; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 20 May 1996; Buntin, Living Legacies, pp. 82–83.



Pictured here is the renovated Great Northern depot in Aberdeen, which now houses offices for the Avera Health Care credit union.

when the building went up for sale. When a potential buyer expressed interest in moving the depot out of Redfield, several citizens stepped in and asked the city to forestall such action. The City of Redfield then purchased the depot, put up \$80,000 in cash and in-kind donations to match a \$364,000 TEA-21 grant, and established a committee to oversee restoration of the building. The depot is now used as a tourist information center with railroad-history displays. It also hosts various community events, such as a telegraph demonstration held during Redfield's one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary celebration and a flag-presentation ceremony with Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34.</sup> Duane Sanger, Redfield, S.Dak. to author, 29 Aug. 2005; Redfield Press, 6 Oct. 2004, 18, 20 July 2005; Aberdeen American News, 21 Oct. 2004.

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With the help of grants and donations, the City of Redfield purchased and restored the town's North Western depot, preserving much of its original character. These photographs depict the depot as it appeared in 1980, before restoration, and in 2005, after restoration.

The North Western depot in Brookings has also recently undergone a second major rehabilitation. After its abandonment in the 1980s, the structure was renovated to house Depot Radio, which included the stations KIJO-AM, KKOO-FM, and KDBX-FM. Depot Radio resided in the building until 2004, when a merger with Three Eagles Communications forced them to vacate. Capitaline Advisors, a Brookings-based investment firm, purchased the depot and began another extensive rehabilitation. First the railroad and then Depot Radio had previously modified the buildings. Original doors and windows had been replaced, an overhead door had been installed on the west end, and much of the interior woodwork had been removed. Taking advantage of the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit and the State Property Tax Moratorium, Capitaline restored the building by installing replica windows and doors modeled on the original architectural plans, rebuilding the west wall, and replicating the remaining wainscoting, trim, and floorboards in the interior.35

After sitting vacant for several years, the Minneapolis and Saint Louis depot in Watertown recently underwent an extensive rehabilitation into offices for First Dakota Title of Watertown. Like the Brookings depot renovation, this project strove to retain as many historic features and materials as possible while at the same time making the building functional for modern use. The same time making the company's decision to purchase and renovate. The size of the building and its proximity to downtown, he noted, were primary reasons, but Anderson also mentioned the benefit rehabilitating the depot could have for the community. After we made the determination that there was sufficient square footage to meet our needs, we then became intrigued by the possibility of rehabbing the depot. We viewed it as an opportunity to be a good corporate citizen by putting the building back to a usable state.

<sup>35.</sup> Brookings Register, 16 Apr. 2004; Brookings Chicago and North Western Depot Tax File #SD-05-001, SHPO; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 2 Oct. 2005.

<sup>36.</sup> Spencer Ruff, Spencer Ruff Associates, Sioux Falls, S.Dak., to author, 31 July 2006.

<sup>37.</sup> Dennis Anderson, First Dakota Title, Watertown, S.Dak., to author, 9 Nov. 2006.

ovation plans.38

The Milwaukee depot in Aberdeen is currently being renovated by the Tom and Danielle Aman Foundation to serve museum, cultural, and tourism functions. At \$3 million, the project will be the largest and most expensive depot renovation undertaken in South Dakota. Space for the James Valley Model Railroad Association, a railroad museum, an American Indian cultural center, and offices for the Northern Route to the Black Hills Tourism Association and the Aberdeen

38. Jodi Gerdes, Tom and Danielle Aman Foundation, Aberdeen, S.Dak., to author, 13 Sept. 2005.

Convention and Visitors' Bureau have been incorporated into the ren-



The large Aberdeen Milwaukee depot is currently undergoing major renovation. When complete, the project will be the most expensive depot renovation to date in South Dakota.

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Despite the numerous examples of successful depot rehabilitations, not all South Dakota cities have been willing or able to contribute resources or attract the private development needed to reuse their local depots. The case of the Bridgewater depot offers insight into the dilemma cities often face. In 2003, after the abandoned depot failed to sell at auction, the city council approved a twenty-eight-thousand-dollar plan to reuse it as a combination museum and concession stand at the Sparky Anderson Athletic Complex. Councilman Roger Hofer believed the cost, which covered moving and renovating the structure, was too high and gathered enough signatures from citizens to send the proposal to a citywide vote. Advocates on both sides expressed their opinions in the weeks leading up to the vote. Hofer argued that the plan was not cost effective and preferred new construction over renovation. Other residents expressed similar concerns, contending that the city's limited resources could be better used elsewhere and questioning the value of such a museum to the community.39

Supporters of the plan believed twenty-eight thousand dollars was a small price to pay for preserving an important community landmark and even offered to donate money for the project. Bridgewater Mayor Ron Pringle, while admitting the difficulties of preserving such a building in a small town, acknowledged that it could become an icon for the community. Janet Lalley, a former Bridgewater resident, also argued that the depot was a landmark of Bridgewater history of which the town's citizens should be proud. Voters, however, overwhelmingly rejected the plan by a vote of 107 to 26, and the depot was razed.<sup>40</sup>

The stories of successful depot restorations and unsuccessful attempts illustrate the enormous challenges faced by communities, companies, organizations, and individuals. Limited financial resources, especially in smaller towns, combined with the poor condition of many buildings, makes renovation projects particularly daunting. As the vote in Bridgewater also illustrates, renovation projects can face negative public sentiment when public money is involved. Because of these challenges, most projects have utilized a wide range of resources for both publicity and funding.

40. Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 31 Mar., 16, 18 June 2003.

<sup>39.</sup> Bridgewater Tribune, 17 June 2004; Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 31 Mar. 2003.

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Regardless of the challenges, numerous people have been drawn to preserving South Dakota's depots for a multitude of reasons. Many depots, especially those made of brick, were among the most architecturally significant buildings in their communities.<sup>41</sup> During the rehabilitation of the Aberdeen Great Northern depot, project manager Roy Wise and construction foreman Tarrel Ellestad both acknowledged the uniqueness of the depot's architecture, calling it "something you just don't see anymore."<sup>42</sup> Mayor Duane Sanger of Redfield echoed this sentiment during the rehabilitation of Redfield's North Western depot, noting, "They don't build buildings like that anymore."<sup>43</sup> The irreplaceable nature of these depots, combined with continued demolitions, have convinced many of the need for preservation efforts.

Economics are also a factor in depot preservation. Because depots were generally constructed in the heart of a town's commercial center, those that remain in their original locations provide prime spots for new businesses. In other instances, tax and grant incentive programs have made possible several large-scale rehabilitations that otherwise would have been too expensive. When preservation has been determined to be unfeasible, it was generally because the project was deemed too expensive to be worth the cost.<sup>44</sup>

It is the personal connection of people with their local depots, however, that may be one of the most important reasons for the success of preservation efforts. Memories of riding the train to the city, watching family members arrive and depart from the station, or just having fun with friends at the depot were commonly recalled by those who donated money or labor for a renovation project.<sup>45</sup> Kasey Jacobson, former executive director of the Madison Chamber of Commerce, acknowledged these personal connections during fundraising efforts for the Madison depot rehabilitation. "We saw the love the people had for

<sup>41.</sup> Lawrence Grow, Waiting for the 5:05: Terminal, Station, and Depot in America (New York: Main Street/Universe Books, 1977), p. 8.

<sup>42.</sup> Aberdeen American News, 30 Jan. 1983.

<sup>43.</sup> Ibid., 25 Jan. 2004.

<sup>44.</sup> H. Roger Grant, *The Country Railroad Station in America* (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Publishing Co., 1978), p. 3; John E. Miller, "Railroad Depots on the Dakota Central in Eastern South Dakota," *Locus* 7 (Spring 1995): 169.

<sup>45.</sup> Sioux Falls Argus Leader, 14 May 1981, 17 July 1995, 17 Apr. 2000.

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the railroad and this depot. It goes back so many years that a lot of peoples' lives had been touched by this railroad. I think that's why the fundraiser was so successful." Individuals were more willing to help preserve their local depots because they had personal memories that connected them with the buildings.<sup>46</sup>

Even though depots are no longer as central to community life as they once were, their loss during the 1950s and 1960s stimulated efforts to preserve and rehabilitate them for continued use. The strength of personal connections, architectural significance, and potential economic benefits all combined to bring forward those who would preserve these buildings. Businesses were started in or moved to renovated depots; various governmental entities utilize them for office space; and numerous nonprofit organizations employ depots as either offices or historical and cultural destinations. These adaptive uses provide those who value South Dakota's depots with an alternative to demolition, ensuring that the architectural and social history of these buildings will be preserved for future study and enjoyment.

46. Ibid., 19 May 1990.

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