Few American railroads resemble each other more than the Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul & Pacific (Milwaukee Road) and the Chicago & North Western Transportation Company (C&NW). Each carrier serves essentially the same territory; each operates a plethora of prairie branch lines; and each boasts a few high density “speedways.” Moreover, both roads depend heavily on agricultural traffic. While the Milwaukee Road successfully pushed to the Pacific coast early in this century, the company can not be considered a major transcontinental artery. Neither can the North Western; the company stalled at Lander, Wyoming, in its attempt to reach the sea.

The importance of the Milwaukee Road and the North Western to the development of South Dakota can not be overstated. While other railroads, particularly the Great Northern and the Minneapolis & Saint Louis, operated important lines locally, the Milwaukee’s 1,802 miles of trackage and the C&NW’s 1,305 miles made these two carriers predominant; they collectively controlled 73 percent of the state’s total rail net.1 Indeed, it can be

1. Doane Robinson, Doane Robinson’s Encyclopedia of South Dakota (Pierre: Published by the Author, 1925), pp. 603-5.
argued that the Milwaukee Road and the North Western virtually dominated South Dakota's commercial life for much of its history.\(^2\)

As the premier railways in South Dakota, the Milwaukee and the North Western constructed most of its depots. These "country" stations were once crucial to the economic and social life of hundreds of Dakota communities; they literally served as "gateways." In the days before internal combustion engines and modern communications, the railway station provided the only contact with the outside world. Visitors and residents, newspapers and mail, merchandise and carload freight passed through the depot. The shipping of goods, of course, involved the same building. Furthermore, the station's chattering telegraph offered the sole means of quick communication. Such an important place naturally became a gathering spot, much like the post office or general store. The "deepo" surely left a lasting impression on those South Dakotans who remember the railroad age.\(^3\)

The need to adapt to the Great Plains environment dominated the station design strategies of the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western in South Dakota. Both companies wanted uncomplicated buildings that would meet the demands for freight and passenger service of predominantly farming and ranching communities. Moreover, space was required for operators to inform dispatchers of train movements past their depots, thus allowing safe meeting and passing points to be planned. In some instances, usually in remote sections west of the Missouri River, the sole function of country stations was for train-control work. Since these railroads at times preceded settlement, housing was scarce; even established towns might not have adequate living accommodations. Thus, carriers in the Sunshine state as in other prairie areas were regularly forced to supply living quarters for employees, including agents.\(^4\)

2. So important were the two railroads to South Dakota that they could actively influence the selection of the state capital. The Milwaukee Road backed Mitchell, a division point and key junction on its system, while the Chicago & North Western supported Pierre, until 1907 the western terminus of its main east-west line. See "Capital and Capitol History of South Dakota," South Dakota Historical Collections 5 (1910): 181-82.


4. While railroads typically provided living space in the depot, one South Dakota carrier, the Minneapolis & Saint Louis, regularly constructed double section houses. Located every five to ten miles on its Watertown-Le Beau and Conde-Leola lines, these two-story buildings contained twin apartments for agents and/or maintenance-of-way employees.
The Milwaukee and the C&NW joined the majority of the nation’s railroads by generally relying on “combination” stations. Since few South Dakota towns generated enough business to justify separate freight and passenger facilities, placing a waiting room, freight house, and office under one roof made sense. The design of these combination stations became a matter of great importance to Milwaukee and North Western officials. Competition between the two carriers was intense; in fact, a number of South Dakota towns were served by both roads. It would hardly do for one company to erect plain stations when the other employed more elaborate ones. As state railroad commission reports of the period indicate, communities regularly complained when they thought that their depots were inadequate. Unattractive shacks were not acceptable to village boosters who “knew” that they deserved better. Furthermore, the reputation of the railroad industry had already suffered badly in the post-Civil War years because of consumer dissatisfaction with rate structures and other acts of corporate arrogance. If an attractive station design could help mollify public opinion and even serve as a quickly recognizable visual symbol of the company, the extra cost involved would be justified.

Keeping expenses low, however, was of major import to the Milwaukee Road and the North Western. Since neither firm was a financial “Gilbraltar” (the Milwaukee is presently in receivership and faces possible liquidation), officials could not waste funds on extravagant small-town depots. Also, since railways in South Dakota often predated settlement, it was difficult to guess which towns would grow. Consequently, investing large sums of money in elaborate depots seemed foolhardy until the future of a community could be more reliably predicted.

The use of standardized drawings for combination depots emerged as the logical method of reducing costs. Common plans

5. There is evidence to indicate that the original stations in some South Dakota towns were portable ones. These short, narrow, and nearly always standardized structures were easily moved by flatcar from site to site. They could be rapidly assembled so that an agent might be at work soon after a line opened, in fact, in some cases while the route was still under construction.

6. Examples of South Dakotans’ concerns about their depots are found in the South Dakota, Board of Railroad Commissioners, Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners of the State of South Dakota (1903): 60-61; Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners (1904): 104-5, 118-20; and Twentieth Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners (1909): 60-61.
made it simple to order the required supplies in bulk, to transport these materials to the construction site, and then to have them erected by company personnel already familiar with the operation. It was easy to vary basic plans to meet local needs. Not only was this system cheaper than erecting custom-designed stations, but also it was more convenient. When both the Milwaukee and the C&NW faced the immediate need of building multiple stations along a new route within a short time span, company officials appreciated having suitable drawings in their file drawers.

Between 1872, the year the Milwaukee Road and the North Western arrived in the territory, and 1900, when both roads began to revise their depot plan portfolios, each company appears to have developed widely used standard station designs. The removal or replacement of nearly all of these pioneer stations and the paucity of corporate records make identifying these initial designs difficult. Nevertheless, some stations built by both companies during the first “Dakota Boom” can be studied.

One early plan used by the Milwaukee Road is typified by the pleasing two-story station at Plankinton. This regularly duplicated design contains an agent’s apartment on the top floor. While this section of the structure is covered by a hip roof, which is broken on each end by gabled dormers, another hip roof extends over the ground level and provides unusually narrow overhangs. A rather inconspicuous, rounded bay fronts the office. The railroad, probably for economy, limited decorative features to vertical siding under the bay windows and additional woodwork on top of the bay.

The depot at Doland represents the Chicago & North Western’s most common pre-1900 plan used in South Dakota. Designed by the Winona & Saint Peter, a C&NW predecessor firm, the Doland structure is topped by a gable roof and sports a gabled dormer over the rectangular bay. The inclusion of the dormer makes the roof line much more attractive and the bay

7. Overall conclusions reached by the authors on the combination station designs of the Milwaukee Road and the North Western come from a variety of source materials, mostly from photographs in the authors’ possession and from drawings supplied by Lou Bolwahnn, Assistant Architect, Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul & Pacific Railroad Company, Chicago, and William Armstrong, Structures Engineer, Chicago & North Western Transportation Company, Chicago.
The Plankinton station is a fine example of an early standard design widely used by the Milwaukee Road. The window boxes were probably added by an employee who sought to beautify the building. Some railroads regularly encouraged agents and other employees to enhance the appearance of depot property.

The Milwaukee Road depot at Lennox is a good illustration of how changing modes of transportation made most country stations redundant. The poor financial state of both the Milwaukee and North Western during the 1960s and 1970s limited their abilities to maintain adequately or even to operate hundreds of marginal depots. This photograph was taken in 1967.
The Doland station is typical of an early and popular North Western design. The employment of the dormer creates a more interesting roof-line and makes the bay window more prominent. The placement of doors on the front indicates that two waiting rooms may have been included.

The North Western station at Groton is longer than the one at Doland. This extra floor space likely provided the agent with living quarters.

This photograph, taken in the early 1960s, shows a smaller version of the Doland station. Both the North Western and the Milwaukee developed standard designs that could be easily changed to meet local needs. The Volga depot replaced an earlier two-story one.
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window more noticeable. Like most standard plans, the design used at Doland allowed for easy variations. Consequently, similar buildings of varying sizes were erected throughout eastern South Dakota. It is difficult to tell whether any of these structures contained living quarters. Smaller versions did not, but door and window placements on several of the larger editions indicate that an apartment might have been included.

For South Dakota locations that needed living accommodations, the North Western in the 1870s and 1880s selected designs resembling the two-story buildings it built in Iowa. These twin-storied affairs were scattered throughout the state. Simple in construction, they included gable roofs and cheap, easy to install “boards and batten” siding. Their appearance surely complemented South Dakota’s early village architecture—what novelist Hamlin Garland called those “flimsy little wooden towns.”

Both the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western drew up new combination station plans during the formative years of the twentieth century. Each company wanted to systematize a hodge-podge of plans that stemmed from the acquisition of various smaller roads, each with its own notions about combination station architecture. Also, both railroads sought to restructure their respective financial operations after the serious economic dislocations caused by the depression of the 1890s. New lines were now not only financially possible, but also they were being eagerly planned and surveyed. The Milwaukee Road had ended its initial wave of railroad building in 1887 at the time agricultural depression came to Dakota and construction was not renewed until 1902. The North Western stopped laying rails in South Dakota in 1890 and did not resume expansion until 1902 as well. A systematic set of depot plans made supplying stations for these new lines both easier and cheaper.

For all of their similarities, the Milwaukee Road and the North Western took different approaches to their twentieth-century country depot plans. Of the two carriers, the Milwaukee devised the larger number of standard combination designs. While the total exceeds twenty, only about a dozen drawings were used systemwide. Together these designs gave the firm great flexibility and a highly rational approach to specialized local building needs. Without question, the Milwaukee could conveniently and

economically meet the transportation requirements of any South Dakota community, regardless of business generated. The company’s plan book is a marvelous illustration of the “station for every purpose” concept.

Four of the most commonly employed Milwaukee Road styles found in South Dakota reflect the company’s building philosophy.

This historic view of the original Chicago & North Western depot at Volga illustrates the company’s initial station style that included an agent’s apartment.

When the line reached Volga in 1879, the community lacked adequate housing. By the time Volga needed a replacement station, a smaller one without living quarters was adequate.

The smallest in the road’s portfolio measures only 16 by 24 feet. The interior of this tiny structure is divided in half, creating a 16-by-11 1/2-foot freight house and a waiting room-office of approximately the same size. The agent did not enjoy much privacy; he worked in a small area behind an open partition. Covered by a simple gable roof with bracket-supported overhangs, this structure boasts few decorative features. Obviously intended for hamlets where traffic demands were minimal, eight of these Lilliputian depots dotted the South Dakota landscape.

The Milwaukee Road used a larger station—eighteen by thirty-six feet—at least six times in the Sunshine state. Providing a more spacious waiting room and freight house, this building still required the agent to labor behind an open partition in the waiting-room section. Outside, brackets under the overhangs of the gable roof provided the only decoration.
The Milwaukee Road's tiny sixteen-by-twenty-four-foot depot featured the ubiquitous waiting room, freight house, and office. Concerned about the external appearance, the company placed inexpensive brackets under the eaves and iron work on the roof. These paste-on features enhanced an otherwise Spartan station.

The standard combination design most employed on the Milwaukee Road generally, and in South Dakota in particular, was adopted in 1902. The company selected the plan, represented by the depot at Garden City, for nearly forty locations in the Dakotas, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Montana. Similar depots were also built in Washington State. South Dakota could claim nearly a dozen stations identical to the one at Garden City, and there were other larger versions used elsewhere in the state. Measuring twenty-four by sixty feet, it includes the traditional waiting room, office, and freight house as well as living quarters. Although cramped, an agent's three-room apartment was probably much more adequate than the housing available in most raw South Dakota townsites.

The twenty-four-by-sixty-foot depot sports more decorative features than most contemporary Milwaukee stations. Although the gable roof with its bracket-supported overhangs is retained, gingerbread is added under the eaves, and vertical siding appears on the lower portion of the building. These features make the twenty-four-by-sixty-foot structure less stark than the smaller depots and more acceptable to town boosters.

The Milwaukee Road likewise developed two designs that include a second story. The most attractive one was apparently...
This design, a larger version of the sixteen-by-twenty-four-foot depot, is an illustration of the Milwaukee's "station for every purpose" policy. Such drawings allowed the company to erect depots quickly in new towns.
The rear details of the eighteen-by-thirty-six-foot Milwaukee Road station are shown in this 1920s view of the Twin Brooks depot. Though small, even this building served as a community gateway.

The use of an uncomplicated standardized plan and the lack of extensive decorative features give the Milwaukee depot at Dimock a functional look.
never used in South Dakota. Adopted in 1900, its ground floor dimensions are twenty-four by sixty feet, identical to Garden City-type stations. However, by placing the living quarters on the top floor, more space became available downstairs for railroad business. The unique feature is the rounded, two-story bay, which is covered by a gabled dormer. This dominates the front and gives the building a handsome look. The hip roof over the freight house further creates an interesting roof line. A more conventional gable roof tops the second story. Minor decoration is used on the roof, and brackets support the overhangs. This 1900 two-story depot is worthy of note because it is one of the few post-1900 Milwaukee Road standard designs that includes a structural feature for decorative effect.

The Milwaukee must have found the 1900 two-story building too expensive, because only a year later the company adopted a simpler but less expensive drawing for its double-floor stations. Gone from the 1901 design are the rounded bay, gabled dormer, and hip roof over the freight house. Minor decoration continues to remain on the roof, and brackets still support the overhangs. Yet, these minor features do little to relieve its plain appearance. At least ten of these buildings were erected in South Dakota, and it is likely that more existed.

Twentieth-century Milwaukee Road depots in South Dakota can be correctly labeled as Spartan. In most cases a simple gable roof is employed, although a few structural alterations—dormers, hip roofs, and the like—are occasionally found. For decorative effect, the company relied heavily on minor and hence inexpensive features such as gingerbread, vertical siding, and brackets. The only standard station drawing developed after the turn of the century that includes dormers—the 1900 two-story depot—was quickly discarded. The Milwaukee also strongly believed that living space was necessary. Even its most commonly used post-1900 designs include an apartment for the agent.

The Chicago & North Western did not duplicate the Milwaukee Road’s combination station design policies. Rather than developing a large number of standardized drawings, this carrier opted for four basic plans, two of which differ radically from those used by the Milwaukee. Unlike its competitor, the C&NW utilized a simple numerical system, based on the structure’s size, to distinguish these core drawings.

The smallest, designated Number Three, would have been at home among the Spartan depots of the Milwaukee. Measuring
This photograph of the twenty-four-by-sixty-foot Milwaukee station at Garden City reveals the vertical siding of the lower part, gingerbread under the eaves, and brackets used for decorative effect.

Utilization of minor features greatly improved the appearance of a depot at low cost.

Providing space for the traditional waiting room, office, and freight house is part of the highly utilitarian twenty-four-by-sixty-foot Milwaukee station plan. This drawing also contains a small apartment. The privacy of the living quarters is protected by having entrances from only the outside or through the office. However, because of this the agent had to leave the building to reach the freight house; on a cold day that must have been unpleasant.

By surrounding the apartment with the waiting room on one side and the freight house on the other, additional protection from winter winds was achieved. In some cases, the construction department pointed the unoccupied freight house into the path of the prevailing wind, thus making it easier to heat the regularly inhabited sections.
On this drawing of the Milwaukee Road's Standard Class A Passenger Station, "variable" is used to indicate that the size of the freight room could be adjusted to meet local requirements. By placing the freight house and the waiting room on the ends, extensions were easy to make.

The only essential difference between the Milwaukee depot at Stickney and the one at Garden City is the name on the station sign. Standardized structures, like the one below, could easily become a visual symbol of a railroad company.
While this attractive Milwaukee design was never used in South Dakota, the dormer of the Albert City, Iowa, station does show the effect of a structural feature on the overall appearance of a depot.

Only 16 by 40 feet, it contains a 15-by-11 1/2-foot waiting room, 8-by-13-foot office, and 15-by-18 1/2-foot freight house. Between 1903 and 1920 the North Western erected more than forty at widely scattered locations. At least four Number Threes were built along the line between Pierre and Rapid City; none are known to exist east of the Missouri River in South Dakota.

The North Western called a far more attractive style its Number Two. In this twenty-by-seventy-two-foot depot, adopted in January 1900, a spacious waiting room, office, and freight house are found. On the exterior the Number Two features a double-pitched hip roof, broken by a prominent gable over a rectangular bay. Slate shingles are used and decorative woodwork is attached on the front of the dormer. Clearly, such a structure would have been much more acceptable to civic promoters than
The lack of decorative features on the "Type 1901" station is evident in this photograph. Even during the late 1960s the agent and his family occupied the Milwaukee depot at Lake Andes.

Compared with the Albert City, Iowa, station, the Milwaukee’s “Type 1901” drawing is indeed Spartan. By placing the apartment upstairs, a larger office and freight house could be realized.

Perhaps no depot photograph better reveals the openness of the South Dakota prairie than this Milwaukee “Type 1901” station at Orient.
either the Number Three or most of the contemporary Milwaukee styles. While not widely used in South Dakota, the C&NW built over a score of the Number Two stations.

The largest of the three newly devised one-story North Western standard combination depot designs formulated after 1900 is the Number One. Also adopted in January 1900, it is strikingly similar to the Number Two. The plan features the same double-pitched roof and gabled dormer over the bay. The Number One, however, is best identified by its greater length and its longer hip roof over the waiting room and office. Furthermore, it has three conventional doors on the front instead of two. The principal change inside is the addition of a 21½-by-19-foot women's waiting room. Apparently, company officials accepted the notion that the “fairer” sex and children in some communities needed protection from “coarse and vile” males. To accommodate this extra section, the Number One measures 90 feet in length—unusually long for a combination station. The C&NW constructed more than a score of these structures, intended for
Structural features like the double-pitched hip roof and dormer give the second-class North Western stations a striking appearance. Though in poor condition and lacking its original slate roof, the North Western second-class depot at Hetland reveals the basic design features of this popular style. This particular structure likely replaced an earlier, albeit standard, one.
Strongly resembling the Number Two in basic appearance, the North Western Number One plan provides for a greater length, longer high roof, and an extra door on the front elevation.
The Philip depot was only a year old when this photograph was taken in 1908. A good example of the North Western "Combination Station with Living Rooms Overhead," this design was more widely employed in South Dakota than in other states. Undoubtedly, the pioneering nature of the carrier's route west of the Missouri River explains the inclusion of the agent's apartment.

locations of major traffic potential—county-seat towns, for example—between 1900 and 1902. South Dakota could claim five (or possibly more) of these attractive stations. Likely most Number Ones in the state replaced earlier buildings that the road no longer considered adequate.

While the three depot plans discussed were not heavily used in South Dakota by the North Western, they illustrate the company's thinking about station design. Interestingly enough, a depot style not widely selected throughout the system appeared frequently in the state. Similar to the Milwaukee Road's 1901 two-story building in its overall appearance, the C&NW officially called it a Standard Combination Station with Living Rooms

The activity shown in this photograph indicates the former importance of the North Western depot to residents of Newell. The transportation monopoly enjoyed by the railroads at the turn of the century gave their stations a much greater primacy than today's airports.
Similar to the Chicago & North Western station at Doland, the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Number Three depot was selected by the parent C&NW for many Nebraska and South Dakota communities. Later remodeling often led to the elimination of the small gabled dormer over the living quarters.
This photograph of the North Western station at Bonesteel indicates the location of the living quarters in a typical FE&MV Number Three. So flexible were these designs that they could even serve small division points like Bonesteel. At one time this small west-river community boasted a roundhouse and small rail yard.

Overhead. A minimum of fourteen of these structures were built; eleven were placed on the Pierre to Rapid City line alone.

An important anomaly found among North Western depots in South Dakota resulted from the use of stations designed by the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad (FE&MV), a large-ly Nebraska-based North Western affiliate. Depots along the Wood branch and the line from Chadron to Rapid City were either designed or inspired by the FE&MV. Often extending track through lightly settled country, the FE&MV made extensive use of two-story depots, and it understandably included living quarters in most of its single-story ones. Of particular interest is the FE&MV’s Number Three station. Remarkably similar to the Doland depot (perhaps even influenced by it), the FE&MV model is covered by a gable roof and sports a gabled dormer over a rectangular bay. On some small stations a small gabled dormer is also included over the living section to light an attic bedroom.

With the same basic needs to meet, the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western held different notions of how best to design small-town combination depots. While similarities
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abound—standard plans, minimal-cost requirements, functional layouts—differences exist. Unlike the Milwaukee, the C&NW generally relied on *structural* features like dormers for decorative effect. This was particularly true after 1900. The roof line and dormers of the Number One and Number Two North Western stations created a very different appearance than did the minor decorative features used on the Milwaukee's Garden City-type depot. Also, the North Western did not own a big plan book, relying instead on only four principal blueprints.

Of the two carriers, the Milwaukee's post-1900 designs with the inclusion of living space were ideally suited to conditions in South Dakota. When the Milwaukee committed itself early in the century to building a transcontinental line across the sparcely settled expanses of the Dakotas and Montana, living quarters were needed in these high plains depots. Thus, stations contemplated for other parts of the system found ready use in the state. The Chicago & North Western, on the other hand, did not heavily utilize its post-1900 plans in the Sunshine state. Since the carrier apparently was more interested in developing the already well-settled agricultural regions, especially Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, few of the new depots required agent's apartments. Logically, the company's revised station portfolio lacked such facilities. Yet, the C&NW likewise had to confront the Great Plains environment; it knew that its Dakota depots often necessitated inclusion of apartments even after 1900. Consequently, the road turned to a fourth plan, one with two-stories, and to a Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley design, a style that it did not employ in the more developed sections of its service territory.

While the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western clearly concocted different combination station plans, both roads not only adapted to prairie conditions, but also each agreed that depots were important and thus devoted careful attention to them. While few of these historic buildings survive today, those that remain are tangible reminders of a fading dimension of South Dakota's architectural heritage.
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