

NORTH DAKOTA RAILROADS: THE CENTENNIAL STORY

On June 6, 1872, a Northern Pacific steam locomotive rolled westbound across the newly constructed bridge over the Red River between Moorhead, Minnesota, and Fargo, Dakota Territory. Beyond it lay 200 miles of newly constructed track. It marked the commencement of train service in what is now North Dakota.

In a report dated June, 1889, the Railroad Commissioners of the Territory of Dakota noted that what was about to become North Dakota had 2,006 miles of railroad. The pace of new construction had, however, been slowed by physical barriers such as Indian reservations and crops that "were not so good as heretofore..." the settled portions of Dakota were, nonetheless, "...reasonably well supplied with railroad facilities." North Dakota's original rail carriers were the Northern Pacific, the Chicago & Northwestern, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, the Great Northern, and the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Saulte Ste. Marie. A reproduction of the North Dakota portion of the territorial railroad map of 1886 is presented on the revenue side of this print.

By 1900, the State's rail network had grown to 2,660 miles of track. The list of primary carriers remained

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unchanged. Railroads such as the Jamestown & Northern, the Dakota & Northwestern, and the Bismarck, Washburn, & Fort Buford had already come and gone, much of their trackage being assimilated into the systems of larger carriers.

North Dakota's rail system grew by nearly sixty percent to 4,178 miles of track between 1900 and 1910. The major railroads built new lines and new carriers came into being. The list of new carriers included the Chicago, Milwaukee & Puget Sound, the Farmers Grain & Shipping Company, the Brandon, Devils Lake & Southern, the Devils Lake and Chautauqua, and the Northern Dakota.

The size of the State's rail system peaked at nearly 5,400 miles in 1920. The only new carrier to come onto the scene was the Midland Continental; several of the small carriers that had existed ten years earlier had been incorporated into larger systems. Plans called for building another 600 miles of new lines between points such as New Rockford and Mohawk (just east of what is now Watford City), Edgeley and Cannon Ball, and Wimbledon and Pembina. A reproduction of a 1914 railroad map, completed with proposed lines, is shown on the lower half of the back side of this print.

The State's rail system shrunk to about 5300 miles of track during the 1920's, and remained there through the

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1930's. Over-zealous plans, drought years, the construction of thousands of miles of highways and rural roads, and modernized personal, farm, and commercial vehicles all contributed to unrealized construction plans and eventual line abandonments. Between 1915 and 1940 the number of licensed public grain elevators in North Dakota declined from 2031 to 1155; the trend to concentrate grain at fewer shipping points had begun.

The size of the rail system remained relatively constant at between 5,100 and 5,250 miles of track during the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's. In 1961, the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Saulte Ste. Marie became the Soo Line and in 1970, the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific merged with the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy to form the Burlington Northern.

In 1970, there were 5,096 miles of railroad in North Dakota. That same year the Midland Continental closed its doors and ended its dream of establishing a north-south transcontinental railroad through the country's midsection.

The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad (Milwaukee Road) also came on hard financial times in the 1970's. Bankruptcy forced the abandonment of 230 miles of Milwaukee Road trackage in North Dakota by the early 1980's. The State's other carriers have also abandoned unprofitable branchlines in the 1980's. Some abandonments were protested while others went uncontested, the traffic having already been lost to truck

competition or concentrated at other area rail sites.

As of January 1, 1989, there are about 4,320 miles of railroad in North Dakota. Major carriers include Burlington Northern, Soo Line, and Red River Valley & Western. The Red River Valley & Western came into being in 1987 when it commenced operations over 650 miles of track previously operated by Burlington Northern in southeastern and central North Dakota. The Dakota, Minnesota, & Eastern operates fourteen miles of track previously owned by the Chicago & Northwestern in Dickey County.

Railroads pick up and deliver approximately 200,000 carloads of freight annually in North Dakota. Tonnages originated and delivered in the State are up from less than 5 million tons in 1900, to over 20 million tons today. Over sixty percent of this volume is grain and oilseeds shipped by the state's 575 licensed public grain elevators. The remaining forty percent consists primarily of chemicals (including fertilizer, petroleum and petroleum products, coal and food products. Several hundred thousand additional rail cars pass through the State each year enroute to eastern markets and the Pacific Northwest. The rail industry played a major role in the settlement of North Dakota and remains a vital link in its economy.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission hopes you find this centennial railroad map both interesting and useful. Happy Birthday North Dakota!

Bismarck, North Dakota, January 1, 1989.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION:

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1993k

NORTH DAKOTA RAILROADS

There were five railroads operating in North Dakota when it became a state in 1889. They operated just over 2,000 miles of track.

The state's rail system changed dramatically during North Dakota's first thirty years. Small operators came and went and the size of the system increased two and one-half times. In 1914 we had nine railroads operating 5,370 miles of track in the state. These carriers had plans to build yet another 600 miles of track.

War years put construction plans on hold and subsequent droughts, improved roads, and modernized cars and trucks resulted in a lessening need for railroads. Proposed lines were not built and abandonments began to occur. The number of grain elevators in North Dakota dropped from 2,015 in 1915 to about 575 today. The size of our rail system has similarly shrunk from 5,370 miles of track to about 4,320 miles.

Despite these reductions our elevator and railroad industries are handling more grain more efficiently today than ever before. They have kept pace with changing times and continue to meet the needs of producers in North Dakota and consumers all over the world.

Grain Elevators Licensed in North Dakota

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. Licensed</u>	<u>Total Capacity</u>
1886	260	9,012,000 bushels
1890	307	
1915	2031	60,514,200 bushels
1920	1999	
1922	1720	53,654,000 bushels
1926	1772	
1930	1625	
1935	1340	
1940	1155	
1945	1279	56,740,000 bushels
1950	1025	60,791,600 bushels
1955	911	74,721,259 bushels
1960	829	116,000,000 bushels
1965	771	126,000,000 bushels
1970	656	129,000,000 bushels
1975	619	127,000,000 bushels
1980	590	156,000,000 bushels
1981	589	156,000,000 bushels
1982	579	166,000,000 bushels
1983	582	177,000,000 bushels
1984	591	180,000,000 bushels
1985	576	199,000,000 bushels
1986	585	224,000,000 bushels
1987	575	261,000,000 bushels
1988	567	267,000,000 bushels

In 1879 river boats as well as the railroad were used to ship grain to market.