

City of Madison Landmarks Commission  
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (1)

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common  
The Milwaukee Road Depot

(2) Historic (if applicable)  
The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Ry. Co. Station at West Madison

II. Location

(1) Street Address  
640 W. Washington Avenue

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)  
Ninth District

III. Classification

(1) Type of Property (building, monument, park, etc.)  
Building(s)

(2) Zoning District  
M1

(3) Present Use  
AMTRAK Depot, Ticket Office, Office space, Dispatcher, Locker Room

IV. Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Name(s)  
Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Ry. Co.

(2) Street Address  
360 Union Station, Chicago Ill.  
60606

(3) Telephone Number

V. Legal Description (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Parcel Number  
0709-232-2916-0

(2) Legal Description  
Sec. 23, T7N, R9E (specific descrip.)

VI. Condition of Property

(1) Physical Condition (excellent, good, fair, deteriorated, ruins)  
Good - Fair

(2) Altered or Unaltered?  
Somewhat Altered

(3) Moved or Original Site?  
Original Site

(4) Wall Construction  
Pressed Brick and Bedford Stone

(5) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the present and original physical construction and appearance (limit 500 words).

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

**VI.(5) Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance:**

On November 15, 1903, the Madison Democrat reported that work on the new West Madison Passenger Depot for the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway was nearing completion and that the old Depot built in 1853 was about to be razed. In describing the new structure the Democrat claimed that "it embodies all of the newest and latest features of depot construction with a view particularly to the convenience of the traveling public." About a month later, at the height of the Christmas travel season, the Depot was officially opened, and the Democrat commented that the building was especially attractive in the evening when the electric lights were turned on. The newspaper further described the interior waiting room as having brown kalamine sidewalls, decorative ceiling of white plaster of paris, and benches and fancy rockers to accomodate 200-300 passengers.

Today the Milwaukee Road Depot site includes two buildings of a light umber pressed brick laid up in a regular bond of eight string courses alternating with a single header course. The buildings are the passenger depot and the old baggage depot, now used as a trainmens' locker room. The main building masses of the site are dominated by a long covered platform running the length of the passenger depot and extending in both directions to West Washington Avenue on the south and beyond the baggage depot on the north. The south half of the platform terminates in a gate-like structure comprised of square brick and stone corner piers, a brick crosspiece, and two central doric columns of stone. Stone globes cap the corner pillars. Formerly this gate has borne the legend "Madison" in metal letters and in later years, the sign of the Railroad, "The Milwaukee Road". The platform floor is distinguished by the diagonal placement of pavers in a pleasing design. The scale of the platform bespeaks the excitement of past years when 200 or 300 passengers might well crowd the space preparing to embark or alighting from the cars.

The passenger depot building, which rests on a Bedford Stone foundation comprises two attached building masses; a main waiting room area, now an office space, dominated on each side of the building by three large arched openings that serve as fenestration and as entrance and egress points; and an ell which formerly served a restaurant and as the superintendent's office. Today the main building houses the dispatcher, the ticket functions, and a small waiting area for AMTRAK passengers as well as the aforementioned office space. The hipped roof is supported by a line of carved stylized acanthus brackets. Formerly there were porthole dormers on the roof of the main waiting room area. The main facades (east and west) are graced by two pilasters and two half pilasters flanking the arches and capped in stone. Quoin-like brickwork relieves the corners and provides the transition from wall to arched area. The south end facade bears the initial letters of the company name: C.M. St. P.&P. Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway.

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**VI. (5) Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance:** (Cont'd. Page Two)

The interior of the waiting room, minus the benches and rockers, is intact, although modern fluorescent office lighting has taken the place of the delightful older fixtures.

The total architectural effect of the main building is one of academic pretension; indeed, one might have expected something grander, but the building materials and the budget did not respond to such expectations.

The baggage depot, the second building on the site, is detached from the main depot but tied to it via the huge platform. A gable-roofed structure, this building is individually little distinguished but charming. It is built of a similar pressed brick and is characterized on its north end gable by the growth of vines, a black sign with gold letters reading "Madison", and three exposed rafters, one at the peak and one at each eave.

As a penultimate note on the original construction of the Depot, it may be well to mention in passing that the Madison Democrat of May 8, 1902 reported on the construction of the new depot in Janesville, erected by G.A. Thompson and Sons of Chicago. On April 19 of the following year, the Democrat reported that the Madison depot will be built of pressed brick and modeled somewhat after the style of the one built at Janesville".

Finally, one more distinguishing mark must be cited. Mounted on the west wall of the main depot near the south corner is a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey benchmark declaring the structure to be 107 feet above mean sea level.

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**LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)**

**VII. Significance**

**(1) Original Owner**

Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul  
 Ry.

**(2) Original Use**

Passenger Depot and Baggage Depot

**(3) Architect or Builder**

Architect unknown  
 Builder: G.A. Thompson, Chicago

**(4) Architectural Style**

Eclectic

**(5) Date of Construction**

1903

**(6) Indigenous Materials Used**

None which are peculiar to  
 this locality

**(7) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the significance of the nominated property and its conformance to the designation criteria of the Landmarks Commission Ordinance (33.01), limit of 500 words.**

**VIII. List of Bibliographical References Used**

1. Chi., Milw. and St. Paul Ry., Gems of the Northwest, 1885.
2. Cloverdale and Colpitts, Report of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Ry. Co., 1925.
3. Englehardt, George, Chicago, the Book of its Board of Trade and other Public Bodies, 1901.
4. Madison Daily Democrat, May 8, 1902; March 17, 1903; April 15, 1903; April 19, 1903; June 9, 1903, November 15, 1903; December 22, 1903.
5. Rankin, George A., An American Transportation System: a Criticism, G.P. Putnam's, New York, 1909.
6. Wisconsin Public Documents, LX Report of the Railroad Commissioner, 1903-04, Vol. I.
- 7.
- 8.

**IX. Form Prepared By:**

**(1) Name and Title**

Lance Neckar, Preservation Planner

**(2) Organization Represented (if any)**

City of Madison Landmarks Commission

**(3) Address**

City-County Building, Rm. 414

**(4) Telephone Number**

266-4635

**(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared**

May 14, 1975

City of Madison Landmarks Commission  
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

**VII.(7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria:**

Erected at the turn of the century, the Milwaukee Road Depot represents the specific preoccupation of the period with the transportation network of America, at the core of which was the railroads, and a specific expression of architecturally transitional age. A brief summary of the development of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Company (C.M. & St. P. Ry.) will serve to prepare the stage for the construction of the West Madison Depot. The nucleus of the C.M. & St. P. Ry. is, or was, the LaCrosse and Milwaukee R.R., chartered in 1852. By 1866 the Milwaukee and St. Paul Ry. Co. had purchased both the western and eastern divisions of the LaCrosse line. Smaller lines were added in the late 60's and early 70's until in 1874, two years after the Chicago-Milwaukee line had been built, the name of the company became the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Company.

The 1880's brought a 250% increase in track acquired and laid, and the Milwaukee Road appealed to passengers to visit the City of the Four Lakes. In Gems of the Northwest, 1885, the Road reported that in Madison "down in the valley, along the ridge breasting the hillside, arise mansions that rival the villas of the Hudson--graceful in architecture, beautiful in their soft cream colored tints in brick and sandstone, spacious in their grounds, and embowered in forest trees and blooming flower plats...etc". In the eighties, Madison was a resort town and the Tonyawatha Hotel was its watering place. Business in the city would not take an upturn in this city until late in the next decade, however.

In the early 1890's farm prices fell drastically and speculative land interest in the Upper Midwest died. The Milwaukee Road expanded little during the decade, but as the century turned, an agricultural and business revival sparked some renewed expansion. In 1900 George Engelhardt wrote of the line that he called the St. Paul Road calling it a vital link to the wheat belt and to the resort places in Wisconsin.

The main thrust in the new century was to be rail service improvement, not expansion, since the railroads were at this period an object of constant public scrutiny.

By 1909 George Rankin had written his analytical book on the American rail system giving attention to wage and rate structures, safety, and general adequacy. He further cited legal problems associated with private ownership and the crossing of state-lines and recommended a federal control commission for the railroads, which by 1917 was a reality. State politics were continually involved with the rail issue during this period, and barely a day passed when some article on the railroads did not find its way in the pages of the Madison Democrat.

In 1902 the Democrat clamored for a new depot for the west side in light of the new building in Janesville and the stated inadequacies

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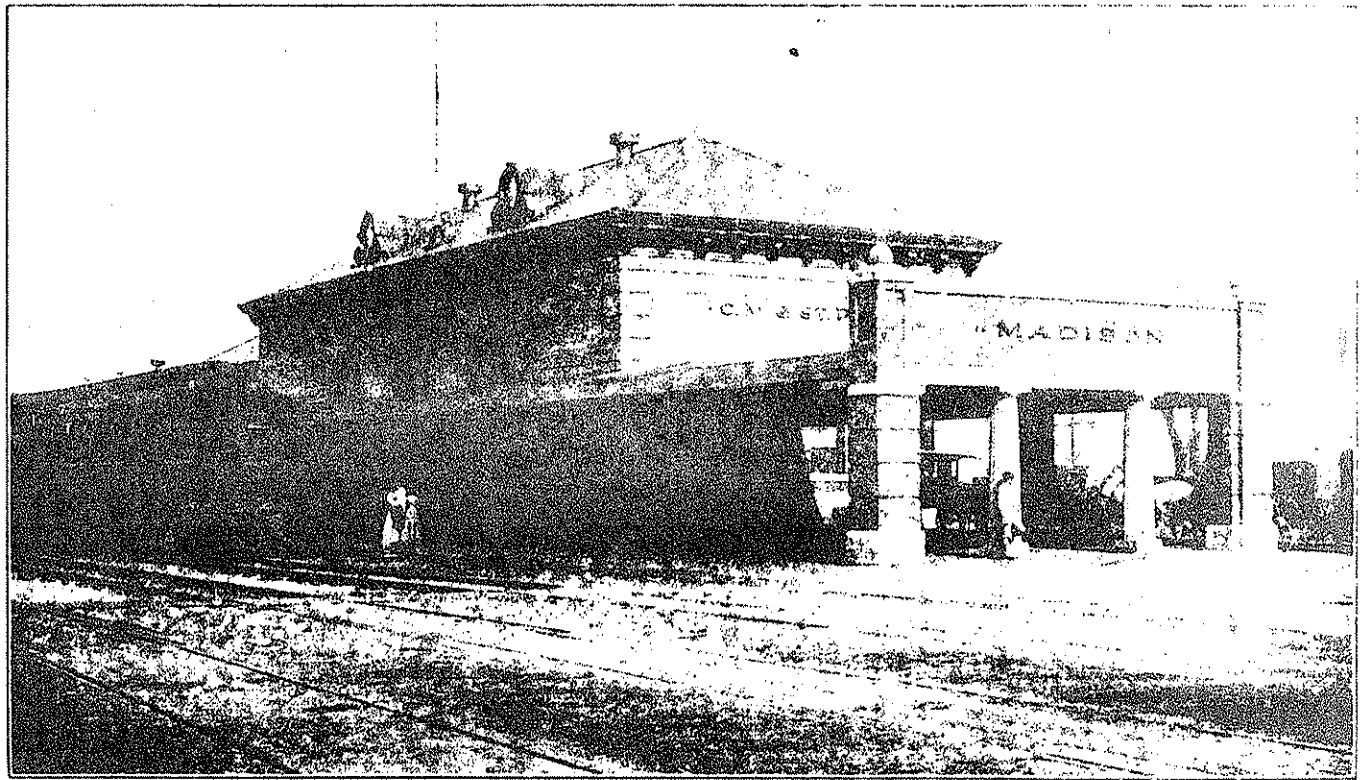
**VII.(7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria: (Cont'd) Page Two**

of the Madison's old building. The West Madison Depot was built in a time when the Capitol City was a rail hub for business people and governmental officials, when rail linkages brought nearly all products from farm to market, and when vacationers were traveling by rail to their favorite resort spots in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Here in the city, F.W. (Flat Wheel) Montgomery's West Main trolley line brought passengers from all points in Madison to the station.

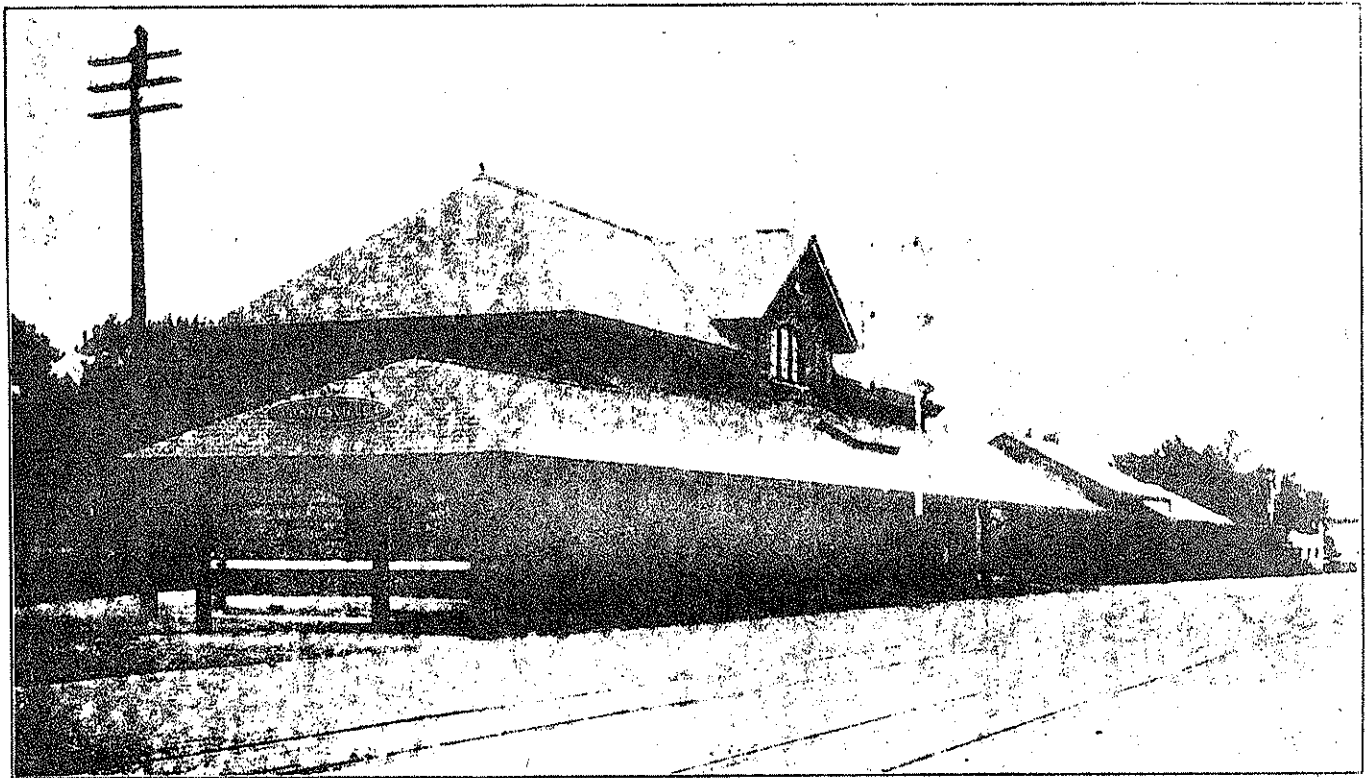
The way of the rail was not to last however. By 1924, the Milwaukee Road reported an annual decline of \$10 million in revenue as compared to the same period four years earlier. The competition of motor vehicles was cited as a reason for the decline.

In commenting on the architectural expression of the main passenger building, it is not insignificant to note the popular wave of classicism that over-spread the Midwest in the wake of the World Columbian Exposition of 1893. Architectural offices all over the Midwest imbibed the lessons of Chicago's Great White City. Only a few held out under the crushing weight of this highly popular fashion. Without the budget to pull it off, the creators of this building demanded that it "embody all the newest and latest features of depot construction." In many ways it looked ahead in time and fashion, to the construction of Union Station in Chicago in 1924 more than it looked back to the construction of Grand Central in 1894. Unfortunately, this precociousness gave Madison a design less suited to its materials than it might have been, and, therefore, less distinguished, albeit pleasing enough to the eye, than it should have been.

In summary, the Milwaukee Road Depot having been built during the last significant era of railroad dependence and improvement before the effects of the automobile were to challenge rail dominance, and being a unique expression of an architecturally transitional age, as well as symbolizing a hope for future transportation solutions, is a building worthy of Landmark designation.



C. M. & ST. P. RY. CO., STATION AT WEST MADISON, WIS.



C. M. & ST. P. RY. CO., STATION AT JANESVILLE, WIS.