

ABERDEEN RAILROAD DEPOTS: CENTERS FOR ACTIVITY

Railroads and their *depots* were a very important part of Aberdeen. In the days before semi-trucks and cars, almost everything including people was *transported* from place to place by the railroad. Aberdeen had four different railroad companies that ran trains into town every day. Each of these companies built a depot, or headquarters, where the train stopped. Trains could then drop off or pick up freight, mail, livestock, and people. These four depots still remain today.

The Milwaukee Depot (pictured at right, now Burlington Northern) on North Main Street was built in 1911. It was the fourth and largest depot built by this company in Aberdeen. The first two were torn down and replaced by larger ones, and the third one burned down. During World War II, a *Canteen* was opened at this depot for the soldiers traveling through Aberdeen to the east or west coast. The canteen was run by the Red Cross and the *USO* and served food, including pheasant sandwiches, to the soldiers. They also had birthday cakes in case it was someone's birthday and a small gift for each soldier at Christmas time. The canteen was opened in August of 1943 and closed in March of 1946. Soldiers always remembered Aberdeen because of the pheasant sandwiches.



The Chicago Northwestern Depot (pictured at right)



is located on Dakota Street and was built in 1910 to replace its first depot built in 1883.

When the circus came to town in those days, it arrived by train at this depot. The animals were unloaded and paraded down Main Street. Two United States presidents that visited Aberdeen arrived at this depot. President Taft came in 1911 and President Franklin Roosevelt came in 1936.



The Great Northern Depot (pictured at right) was built in 1907 on Court Street. One of Aberdeen's first hotels, the Park Place, was *removed* so this depot could be constructed on the same site.

GREAT NORTHERN PASSENGER AND FREIGHT STATION,
ABERDEEN, S. D.



The Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad built its depot (pictured below) on South Main Street in 1907.

The railroad had many different types of cars to handle the different types of *cargo*. Passenger cars had seats, tables, and even beds. Boxcars were just what their name says "boxes" on wheels. They

carried all kinds of freight including grain, food, and furniture. Cattle cars held livestock and had *slatted* sides to allow air to *circulate* to the animals so they could breathe. Flat cars had no walls or roof so they could haul very large items like machinery and lumber. Tanker cars hauled water, oil, and milk. There even was a mail car which was a post office on wheels where men sorted mail for delivery along the route. They would also



pick up mail at each stop the train made. The very last car on the train was the caboose. It was an office for the trainmen and a place for them to eat and sleep. Trains with all these types of cars came to each of Aberdeen's depots

Many people worked at these depots to take care of the trains, the passengers, the freight. The yards around the depot are where the trains were fixed and fueled. You will learn about some of these jobs later in this lesson.

To help you understand how active the railroads were in Aberdeen, consider these numbers. At the peak of the Milwaukee's activity in Aberdeen, **26** passenger trains arrived EACH DAY. During WW II, over **ONE HALF MILLION** soldiers were served at the Canteen.

During holiday seasons over **700 BAGS** of mail were processed by over 30 postal employees. And in a typical year over **10,000 cars** of livestock came to Aberdeen. Railroads were indeed important to Aberdeen history.

Each of these depots remains standing today but are no longer used by the railroads. One serves as an office for a group of lawyers. Try to find the four depots as you drive through Aberdeen and imagine them full trains and the people working and traveling there.

