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Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot

other names/site number Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul RR Depot; CM&StP Freight Station

2. Location

street & number 203 W. Pearl Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Decorah vicinity N/A  
state Iowa code IA county Winneshek code 191 zip code 52101

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 25 July 2016  
Signature of certifying official Date  
State Historical Society of Iowa  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register  
   See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the  
National Register  
   See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the  
National Register  
 removed from the National Register  
   other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Keeper Patrick Andrews Date of Action 9/12/2016  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot  
Name of Property

Winneshiek County, Iowa  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing    Noncontributing

- |              |                        |
|--------------|------------------------|
| <u>  1  </u> | <u>    </u> buildings  |
| <u>    </u>  | <u>    </u> sites      |
| <u>    </u>  | <u>    </u> structures |
| <u>    </u>  | <u>    </u> objects    |
| <u>  1  </u> | <u>  0  </u> Total     |

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

  0  

  N/A  

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION/rail-related

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY/Greek Revival

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation   WOOD    
roof   METAL  

walls   WOOD  

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

**A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or a grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure

**F** a commemorative property.

**G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

#### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION

ARCHITECTURE

#### Period of Significance

1869-1971

#### Significant Dates

1869

#### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation

#### Architect/Builder

Milwaukee & St. Paul Rwy

\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing	Zone Easting Northing
1 15 598425 4794500	3
2	4

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jan Olive Full, Historian jofofic@gmail.com  
organization Tallgrass Historians LC date December 2015

street & number 2460 S. Riverside Drive telephone 319.354.6722

city or town Iowa City state IA zip code 52246

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name David Wadsworth

street & number 1087 250<sup>th</sup> St. telephone 563-419-0390

city or town Waukon state IA zip code 52172

=====  
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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## 7. Description

### *Summary Paragraph*

Constructed by the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway for its immediate use in 1869, the M&St.P combination depot is located in south-central Decorah, Iowa, on level land about eight blocks south of Water Street, the town's main retail commercial street. Decorah has a population of just over 8,000 and is home to Luther College, an undergraduate college founded in the early 1860s by and still affiliated with the Lutheran Church. The "driftless" topography surrounding Decorah in northeast Iowa is well known for its picturesque bluffs and valleys, where forested limestone slopes and rugged uplands merge into row crop fields on the lower terraces of the Upper Iowa River. More or less at the south edge of town when it was constructed, the depot is now surrounded by residential streets with houses ranging from the mid-nineteenth century to modern decades. A handful of commercial metal pole buildings have been added recently near the depot, filling out the open land left when the railroad abandoned the right-of-way. The gable-roofed depot was aligned parallel to this right-of-way, which ran southwest/northeast. Its main entrance doorway is on the northeast gable end, with larger freight doorways on either long side walls. Converted to a freight depot following construction in 1888 of a new passenger depot on Water Street, the 100-by-30-ft. building was shortened by about 30 feet on the southwest gable end. This happened sometime between the 1930s and 1956 based on aerial views and a historic photograph (see Fig. 8). A relatively shallow roof line and the exterior crown moldings surrounding the tall windows mildly suggest a Greek Revival influence for this basically utilitarian building.



**Figure 1** This view shows the northeast gable end wall and long northwest elevation of the combination depot. Tracks ran along both sides making it an island depot. These were removed sometime between 1956 and 1981. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by Tallgrass Historians LC, 2015.

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*Exterior*

The foundation is not exposed in any location but is composed of short wood posts, some of which are failing causing the roofline and walls to sag in places. Walls are covered by horizontal wood siding with a 4 ½ inch exposure, butt ended to vertical boards at each corner and terminated at the roofline by a medium-width fascia board. Eaves are wide and overhang without supporting brackets or soffits. Bead board paneling covers the underside of the overhanging roof, which is clad with gray metal roofing. A red-brick chimney stack protrudes from the ridgeline toward the northeast front gable end. At ground level, a modern wood handicap ramp leads to the front door from around the corner on the long northwest wall.

Fenestration on the primary façade – the northeast gable end – consists of an offset pass door, flanked by two tall windows with original opening dimensions. These two windows are now filled by replacement two-over-two sashes (one of which is further clad by a solid material on the outside). A smaller replacement window is present to the left (southeast) of these openings. This small window replaced a larger original window after 1956 and illuminates a restroom inside. Though no exterior visual evidence is apparent, the interior wall to the southeast of this small window still has a door and doorway present on the interior. This suggests that the present wood siding, while clearly quite aged, may not be the original siding. All these windows and doors lead into the waiting room/office (or non-freight) end of the combination depot.

Fenestration around the corner from the sealed door, along the long southeast elevation (Fig. 2) consists of an operable four-panel pass door (without crown molding), and a tall original window opening with crown molding. The window is filled with a nine-light upper sash over a single-light lower sash, perhaps a replacement due to breakage. This door and window open into the waiting room/office space of the interior. Toward the middle of this long southeast elevation is a wider freight door accessed by a modern wood deck and steps. The door is trimmed with crown molding and the opening is divided into an upper transom (painted or covered over) above a barn-type sliding wood door that is hinged and slides sideways along the interior. The lower edge of this elevation is clad with a wider, more modern siding.

The southwest gable end wall has no fenestration. It is clad with the same narrow wood siding and the foundation is covered by vertical-board wood skirting. This is the freight-room end of the depot that was shortened by about 30 feet.

The long northwest elevation (Fig. 3) has three tall original windows, with crown molding and original nine-over-nine sashes, toward the front (northeast) end of the building. These openings illuminated the waiting room/office space of the building. Toward the southwest, about midway between these windows and the southwest gable end, is another wide freight door with crown molding. It lacks the transom of the opposing freight door on the other long side, but has the same sliding barn-like door of vertical-board construction.



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**Figure 2 Long southeast elevation and gabled "front" northeast end.**



**Figure 3 Long northwest elevation with three passenger-waiting-area windows and wide door into the freight room. To the right is the narrow gabled southwest end wall.**

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*Interior*

The interior of the non-freight waiting area (Fig. 4) at the northeast end is now one large room with a smaller bathroom that projects toward the center of the room from the exterior front wall. The majority of the open area is used now as the owner's workshop for restoring and rehabilitating historic windows, with storage in the rest of it. Floors are maple (probably, see Section 8) and walls are clad with horizontal car-rail siding, mostly painted. The bathroom has modern fixtures. Heating is now provided by a small furnace or stove that hangs from the ceiling outside the restroom's back wall. The previously mentioned sealed door that once opened to the outside from the northeast corner of the waiting room appears to be the same 4-panel wood door as is found elsewhere.

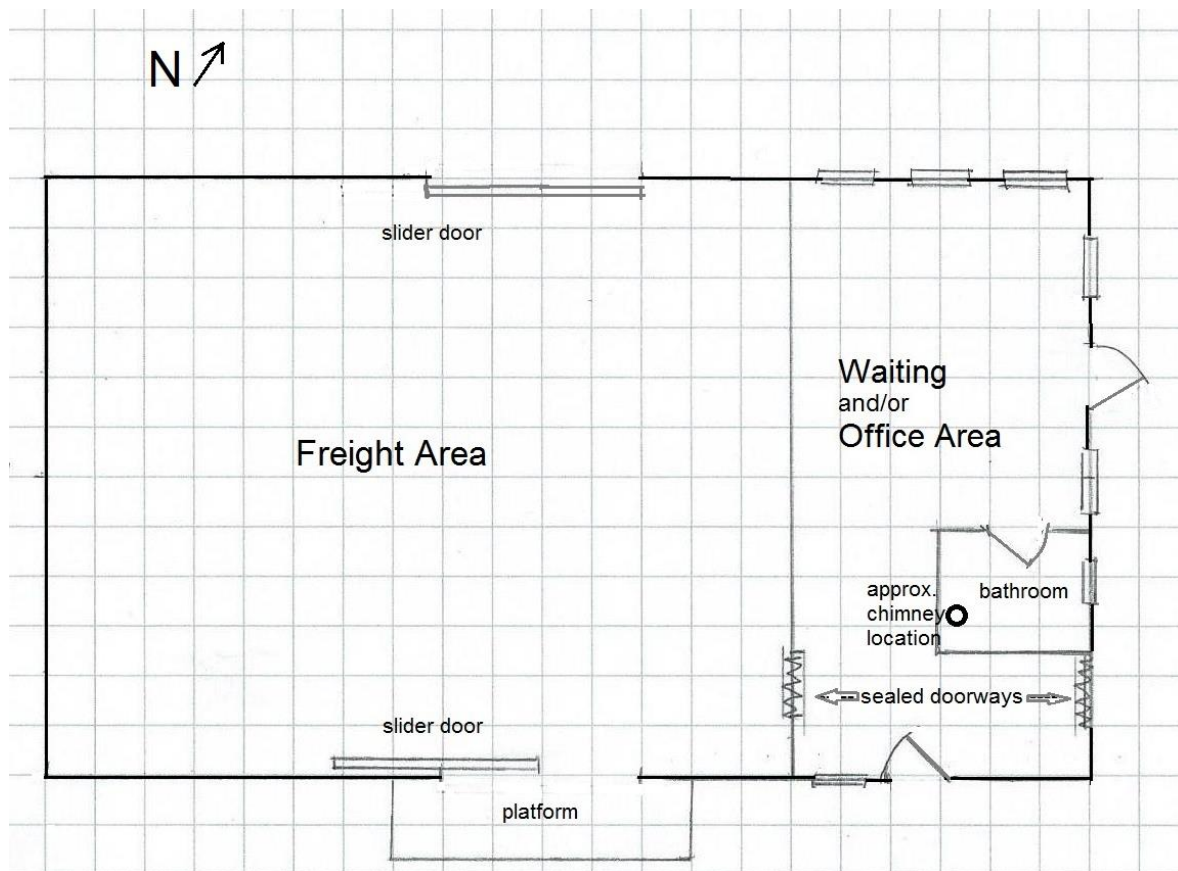


Figure 4 Sketch floor plan of the depot. Not to scale. Tallgrass Historians LC, 2015.



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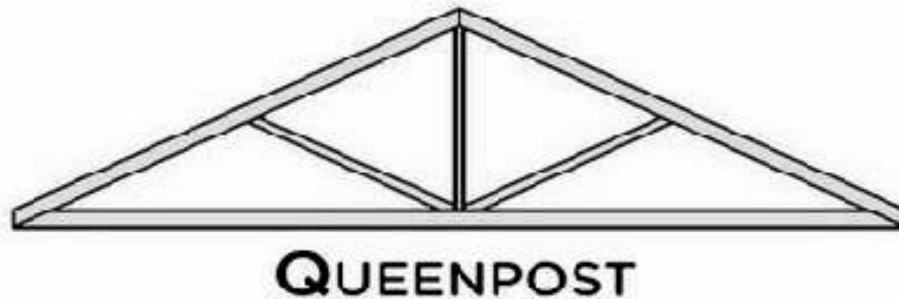
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The freight room occupies the majority of the building's space under the roof, which is supported by wooden queenpost trusses (Fig. 5; see also Photo 8) of irregularly shaped planks. Wall studs are 3 by 6 inches in dimension and set 21½ to 28 inches apart, center line to center line (Fig. 6). Studs are pine throughout. Interior wall sheathing is composed of 13-inch wide planks. Flooring is mostly made of extremely wide planks, typically 15 to 16 inches wide and 1½ inches thick, except in several spots where slightly smaller planks are used (heavy wear patches, perhaps).



**Figure 5 Roof support for the depot.**

Obtained 12/10/2015 from <http://www.quickbuildtruss.com/rooftrusses/commontrusstypes.html>



**Figure 6 General view of the depot's freight space from one corner, looking south toward the end that was shortened.**

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A single pass door, now sealed, connected the two major interior spaces. While this is sealed on the waiting area side, the original paneled door is still present on the freight side. Over this door are recycled boards with hand-painted notations. One says "office," the other (which was installed upside down) reads: "CM+StPRR Decorah Ia" or "CMyStPRR Decorah Ia" (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7** The script on this board is actually upside down as nailed to the wall above the doorway from the freight room to the waiting room, suggesting it was salvaged from elsewhere in the building.

***Integrity***

The building has good historic integrity considering its age and heavy use, and most of the changes to it were undertaken more than 50 years ago by the successor railroad company, the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul. Thus, these changes have attained their own historical significance. The most significant alterations include the removal of about 30 feet from the freight end of the building and the replacement of a tall original window for a smaller bathroom window opening. The present wood siding, while clearly very aged, may not be original, and the metal roofing is clearly not original.

Comments on specific integrity aspects are as follows:

- (1) location: the building is in its original location;
- (2) design: the simple, utilitarian exterior is relatively unchanged except for the window replacement, the sealed door, and the shortening of the freight space at one end of the building. The interior may retain its original floor plan and much of the original finishing;
- (3) setting: the removal of trackage on either side of the depot sometime between 1956 and 1981 diminishes the integrity of setting, as does the construction of a modern building close to the depot's southwest end. However, another freight depot, built around 1900 by the same railroad line is extant just on the other side of this modern

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building. This freight building and the angled orientation of the buildings enhance the public's understanding of this area and the M&St.P Rwy depot as a historic railroad setting;

(4) materials: the exterior materials are mostly either original or historic replacements such as the siding. Interior finishes appear largely original;

(5) workmanship: the workmanship employed in the building is best reflected in the building's functional and utilitarian design and its sturdy wood construction;

(6) feeling: the overall plan, mass, orientation to the nearby streets, and fenestration provide a strong sense that this was a historic and very early railroad depot;

(7) association: the depot's long use by the railroad, as well as its modifications over time, directly relate to its historic significance.



University of Iowa | [digital.lib.uiowa.edu/railroadiana](http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/railroadiana)

**Figure 8** This 1956 photo of the depot is evidence that the tracks on both sides were still extant and that the far end of the building had already been shortened as of this year. University of Iowa Collections, John P. Vander Maas Railroadiana Collection.

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## 8. Narrative Statement of Significance

### *Summary Paragraph*

The Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot in Decorah, Iowa is locally significant under Criterion A as the city's oldest railroad depot and one of the few remaining railroad-related resources of any type in the town. Built in 1869, two decades after the town was established, the Milwaukee railway officials were enticed by local boosters to build a short branch line to town after bypassing Decorah with its main northbound line. With a growing population, Decorah was in the heart of northeast Iowa's wheat region and the ample water power provided by the Upper Iowa River already supported a variety of mills and manufacturing concerns. Decorah was in competition with other new settlements for residents and businesses, and aspired to become entrepôt to a regional hinterland. City leaders wanted to make sure their town would be connected to the lucrative distant markets reached through the Milwaukee's main line. Without that life line to the greater markets, the town's continued growth could not be assured. The depot also is eligible under Criterion C as one of the few remaining wooden depots left in the state, and surely one of its oldest wooden depots, a rare remnant of the first generation of railroad companies and train depots in Iowa. No statewide survey of depots has been conducted to support this theory, but the passage of time, wooden construction materials, and all railroad companies' propensity to frugally but heavily use (up) their resources points to the likelihood that the Decorah's Milwaukee & St. Paul depot is a rare survivor of its property type.<sup>1</sup> The period of significance, 1869 to 1971, runs from the completion of the building through the period it served the railroad company in some capacity, largely as a freight depot. That latter year marks the end of the building's association with railroad transportation history; after 1971 it was adapted for new and non-railroad uses.

### *Establishment of Decorah & Need for Rail Connections*

Decorah's earliest founders are generally conceded to be William and Elizabeth "Betsy" Painter who located in the western part of the future city, and Elizabeth and William Day, who built a cabin along a spring in the eastern part of the settlement. The year was 1849. The Painters were from Ohio and William was a miller and "master tanner" according to federal census records from 1850 and 1860.<sup>2</sup> By 1870, the couple had moved on to farm the Dakota Territory but not until William had established two mills and a tannery in Decorah.<sup>3</sup>

Local historians largely credit William Day with the accomplishments of the family. Elizabeth remains anonymous in some published histories, referred to only as "Mother Day."<sup>4</sup> However, there are numerous suggestions that Elizabeth Thompson Day played a more important role than one might suspect in the founding and early development of Decorah. She selected the site of their new home near a spring, helped establish a lodging house

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<sup>1</sup> Decorah is doubly fortunate because it also has a much more elaborate wooden, Queen Anne-style passenger depot extant. Built in 1888, the depot anchors the east end of the Water Street commercial district (NRHP nomination in progress). Few Iowa towns can boast two surviving depots, much less two wooden depots.

<sup>2</sup> Decorah's first residents are noted in W.E. Alexander, *History of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties, Iowa* (Sioux City: Western Publishing Co, 1882), 130; and Edwin C. Bailey, *Past and Present of Winneshiek County, Iowa* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1913), 189.

<sup>3</sup> 1870 U.S. census and William's obituary recorded at Findagrave.com, both obtained through Ancestry.com on 12/17/2015.

<sup>4</sup> Bailey, 189.

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and tavern soon after, and ran a larger hotel for at least a time following William's death in 1860. Elizabeth was the family's "master spirit" who knew "cities and villages were mostly located on living streams or beside considerable bodies of water."<sup>5</sup> Not only did she pick a choice site by a spring, it also was close to the Upper Iowa River, which had a good "fall" for generating water power, as well as ice caves in the surrounding bluffs that provided chilled water and ice well into summer. The Days had married in Tazewell [aka Tazwell], Virginia in 1824, and traveled west with five children in tow. They first built a log cabin that served as a lodging house and tavern<sup>6</sup>, and in 1854-55, built their heavy-timber frame hotel called the Winneshiek House, some incarnation of which exists even today.<sup>7</sup> A modern local history book quotes an unnamed source as saying "Without the ability and business sense of Mother Day, the Winneshiek House would never have succeeded."<sup>8</sup>

Hotels and mills, however, only succeed if there were customers to patronize them, and the growing wheat culture of the surrounding farms and their increasing sheep flocks assured business for the grist and woolen mills. The selection of Decorah as the county seat in 1851 and the establishment of a federal land office in town in 1855 promised to bring plenty of new settlers and itinerants to town who would need accommodations and services.<sup>9</sup> Resident merchants, craftsmen and tradesmen, and professionals such as land agents, doctors, and lawyers, often unmarried and new to town, also needed lodging and Decorah appears to have offered them an abundance of options.<sup>10</sup> When in 1862 the Norwegian Luther College was relocated from Wisconsin to Decorah, it brought students, teachers, and a whole new pulse of activity to town.<sup>11</sup> From just a few families in 1850, the town grew to 1,219 in 1860 and was approaching 2,100 by the end of that decade.<sup>12</sup> The nascent settlement already had "hotels, stores, stables, shops, and buildings of all kinds," including a school and churches.<sup>13</sup> Entrepreneurs John Ammon and George Scott and others had established a business concern in 1853 that operated a successful agricultural machinery factory and foundry along the town's main street as well as a flour mill on the river and a general merchandise store. By the 1870s, this one business was annually producing hundreds of wagons, plows, bob sleighs, among other products for sale well beyond Decorah, using the railroad to distribute them. By 1875 Ammon and Scott's Decorah Flouring Mills could produce 40,000 barrels of flour annually, much more than could be consumed locally.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Decorah residents were being successful at growing their town in the deep valley of the Upper Iowa River and the railroad was a vital ingredient of this success.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Living along a river that could flood, however, meant such a site was also risky. The Tazewell, Virginia area may not have been prone to flooding, leaving the Days less hesitant about the hazard. The good "fall" of the Upper Iowa River and its capacity for producing a steady source of power almost assured that manufacturing entrepreneurs would be attracted to the area, thus increasing the diversity of the settlement's economy. A good discussion of the cost-benefit analysis of settling along the rivers is found in Timothy R. Mahoney's *River Towns in the Great West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially Chapt. 3 "Encountering the rivers."

<sup>6</sup> Chas. H. Sparks, *History of Winneshiek County with Biographical Sketches of the Eminent Men* (Decorah: Jas. Alex. Leonard, 1877), 87-88.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, 263. The 1860 federal census was taken the same year William Day died. At that time there were two Day children still living with Elizabeth, both in their late teens, and 16 hotel guests or lodgers recorded in residence, with occupations ranging from domestics to tailor, saloon keeper, and physician. By 1870, at age 65 Elizabeth was still living at the hotel although another family ran it. This may be true in 1880 at age 75, though that census is unclear.

<sup>8</sup> Gillmer Seegmiller and Eleanor Seegmiller, *Decorah: City of Springs* (Decorah: Anundsen Publishing Co., 1998), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, 266, 271.

<sup>10</sup> Seegmiller and Seegmiller, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 190-191.

<sup>14</sup> *Gazetteer and Directory of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul* (Detroit: Polk, Murphy & Co., 1875), full-page advertisement following page 454. .



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*Construction of "The Branch" to Decorah*

As population in northeast Iowa was growing with settlers from the East Coast and Old Northwest, and with Norwegian immigrants traveling to the upper Midwest via the Great Lakes, Milwaukee investors were bent on constructing a rail line across Wisconsin to the Mississippi River.<sup>15</sup> In 1840, the Territory of Iowa had a greater population than the Territory of Wisconsin (43,112 versus 30,945, respectively), but the 1840s saw "phenomenal growth" in Wisconsin's population, which reached several hundred thousand to overtake and outpace Iowa's.<sup>16</sup> Railroad building across Wisconsin advanced in stops and starts despite this rapid population growth, but in 1857 the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railway finally completed the 235 miles of track between Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien, the long-established outpost on the east bank of the Mississippi River opposite McGregor, Iowa (Fig. 9).<sup>17</sup> Just a year earlier, probably in anticipation of the Milwaukee & Mississippi reaching Prairie du Chien and a clear sign of their eagerness to gain railroad connections, Decorah interests had formed a company they called the Northwestern Railroad. This company however failed to generate any activity.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the McGregor Western was incorporated in 1863 and by early the next year it had completed construction between North McGregor (now called Marquette) and Monona, 15 miles west of the Mississippi.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 9 From William J. Peterson, "The Milwaukee Comes [to Iowa]," *The Palimpsest* 41 (April 1960): 250.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike most of the railroads constructed west across Iowa, once the Milwaukee & Mississippi reached Iowa, it turned more or less north.  
<sup>16</sup> "The Milwaukee Comes [to Iowa]," *Palimpsest* 41 (April, 1960): 243-244. Surely there are many reasons for this rapid increase, not the least among them the growth of lakeshore towns like Milwaukee on the east and the establishment of Madison as the state capital in the interior. Madison in Dane County was a significant stopping point for Norwegian immigrants who would move on to northeast Iowa in later decades. See Jan R. Olive Full, *Hinterland or Heartland: The Survival of Small-Town Lake Mills, Iowa, 1850-1950* (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University Chicago, 2006), Chapt. 4.  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.  
<sup>18</sup> Bailey, 195.  
<sup>19</sup> "McGregor Gets a Railroad," *Palimpsest* 45 (May 1964): 178.

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According to railroad historian Frank P. Donovan, “almost from the start, the McGregor Western appears to have been associated with the Milwaukee & Mississippi interests in Wisconsin. It was designed to be an extension westward from Prairie du Chien and a part of a unified through-line from Milwaukee.”<sup>20</sup> Construction was completed to Conover by 1865 and Cresco near the Minnesota border by 1866.<sup>21</sup> The next year, 1867, the McGregor Western was formally acquired by the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway.<sup>22</sup>

As the McGregor Western construction approached Conover, just nine miles to the southwest, Decorah leaders pledged \$40,000 to the railroad company if it would also construct a branch line to their village. Eighteen thousand dollars of that amount were actually paid “by the people of Decorah” to the company and, as a result, the branch “road was graded and bridged, ready for the superstructure.”<sup>23</sup> From the community’s perspective, the branch was a vital connection to distant markets, critical for shipping out their products and produce and bringing in exotic goods not locally available; from the railroad’s perspective, the “building of this branch was deemed necessary to prevent diversion of business to points on the Mississippi [other than McGregor].”<sup>24</sup> The branch line served the interests of all concerned and Decorah’s monetary pledge certainly sweetened the deal for the railroad.

However, the company’s pending acquisition by the Milwaukee & St. Paul—which was in the process of consolidating the smaller local railroad companies between Milwaukee and Minneapolis to create the through-line—delayed completion of the Decorah branch line for several years.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in 1869, the Milwaukee & St. Paul laid the tracks on the prepared grade and completed the long promised branch line—the oldest Milwaukee branch in Iowa (Fig. 10).<sup>26</sup> According to a local historian writing in 1882: “The branch was completed to Decorah in September, 1869, in accordance with the agreement made by the company with the citizens of Decorah. The event was one of great importance to the capital city of the county. A day of celebration and rejoicing was given in honor of the event. Large crowds of people thronged to the city, and many availed themselves of the opportunity offered and made excursion trips to Conover and back.”<sup>27</sup> Critics dismissed the glowing predictions made that day regarding the amount of business this branch line would generate; however even by 1877 the predictions seem to have been validated both in terms of freight shipped and passengers carried.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander, 218.

<sup>22</sup> Edgerton, A.J., Railroad Commissioner (Minnesota), *Report of the Railroad Commissioner with Reports of Railroad Companies for the year ending August 31m 1872* (St. Paul: Press Printing Company 1873), vii.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, 218.

<sup>24</sup> *Sixth Annual Report to the Board of Directors of the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway* (1869), 9 [Milwaukee Archives Collection, Milwaukee Public Library].

<sup>25</sup> Edgerton, *Report of the Railroad Commissioner*, 16-17, Appendices.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, 219.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>28</sup> Sparks, 68-69.

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According to the local Winneshiek County Historical Society, when the railroad line arrived in Decorah it temporarily conducted business from a freight car.<sup>29</sup> The new depot, however, would be the Milwaukee road's "largest depot west of the Mississippi" according to the *Decorah Republican* from September 17, 1869.<sup>30</sup>

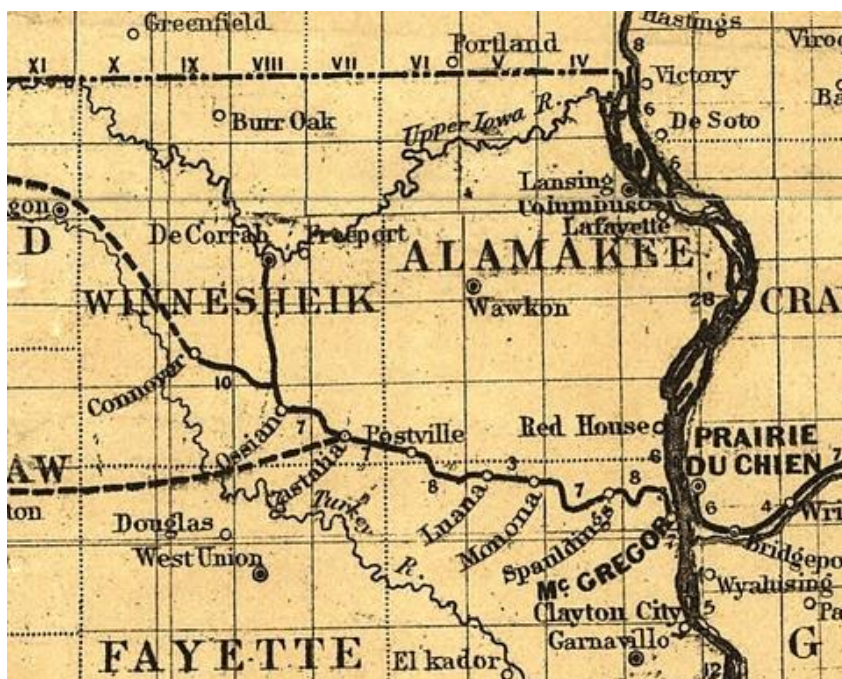


Figure 10 1865 map of the Milwaukee & St. Paul railway line published by the company. Note the 9-mile branch from "Connover" to "DeCorrah" is shown as complete though between 1865 and 1869 only the grade and bridges were built. Source: EBAY. com on 6/14/2015.

Over the next decade, the Milwaukee protected its growing freight and passenger business on the through-line and branch by gaining control over proposed competing lines. Frustrated Decorah residents sought competition in order to reduce freight rates. To that end in the summer of 1879 they voted a tax to "induce" the Chicago & Northwestern to extend its line from Waukon to Decorah. The right-of-way was graded but the "road was bought out by the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul company,<sup>31</sup> and the enterprise stopped." Two years later, Decorah township and city residents again voted a tax to support construction of a railroad to the Mississippi River at

<sup>29</sup> State of Iowa Historic Preservation Program, Historic Resource Survey "A" form, completed by E.J. Weigle, President, Winneshiek County Historical Society [Research by James K. Beranek] (1974). The railroad executives' *Sixth Annual Report to the Board of Directors* suggests the depot construction as well as other construction efforts were completed by the end of 1869 when it stated "The Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Company are not now engaged in the construction of any railroad, and they have no floating debt" (at 9).

<sup>30</sup> A new freight depot was later constructed just down the tracks from the 1869 depot, in about 1900. This second depot was built using standard plan "dwg 16-598," now available, along with Reports to the Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Valuation, 1918 and 1922, at the Milwaukee Road Archives, Milwaukee Public Library.

<sup>31</sup> The name was changed in 1874 to include "Chicago," but by that time the line was already known simply as the Milwaukee or the Milwaukee Road, as it is today. Donovan, 187.

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Lansing, but that failed also.<sup>32</sup> In 1884, another attempt was more successful when the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific (backers of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern) arrived in Decorah. Like the arrival of the Milwaukee line 15 years earlier, completion of this second rail connection was celebrated with a gala banquet and speeches.<sup>33</sup> The new local competition may have been the impetus for the Milwaukee to upgrade its Decorah facilities in 1888 with a stylish new passenger depot located in the city's retail district and clearly intended to attract the traveling public (Figs. 11-14).



**Figure 11** The renovated 1888 Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul RR passenger depot today.



**Figure 12** 1956 view of the same passenger depot.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander, 219.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, 103-104.



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**Figure 13** The 1888 Milwaukee passenger depot in Decorah at east end of the town's main commercial street eventually had a separate baggage building constructed where the horse is walking in this view. Circa 1900 view, obtained on Flickr.com on 6/5/2015



**Figure 14** The Milwaukee baggage building behind the passenger depot about 1975, before the buildings were renovated. Photo by James K. Beranek.



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Upon the new depot's completion, the original 1869 depot south of downtown on Pearl Street was repurposed to serve solely freight shipping. Though no records of the 1869 depot's uses between 1888 and 1918 have been located in the Milwaukee's archives, Sanborn fire insurance maps between 1894 and 1914 reflect the depot's use for freight as well as the shifting footprint of the loading platforms attached to it (generally downsized over the years; see Additional Documentation pages). The 1918 and 1922 Interstate Commerce Commission's inventories, filed for valuation purposes, do survive in the Milwaukee's archives and provide snapshots of the building's physical condition during those years. Value was added for interior partitions clad in shiplap siding, a ticket office with a ticket shelf with turned brackets (nonextant), maple and fir flooring. The 23 feet of the "old inside," probably a reference to the northeast waiting/office area, was clad with tongue-and-groove siding. The maple flooring was found in this same 23 ft. area. One of the inventories refers to "For panel" doors, likely either a reference to four-paneled doors or paneled doors in the quantity of four. Most of these doors still exist. Available aerial photographs of the depot's location indicate the southwest end of the building was shortened to its current length sometime between the 1930s and the 1950s.<sup>34</sup> Finally, in line with the general decline of the railroads in Iowa from the 1920s on, the Milwaukee finally abandoned its depot on Pearl Street in 1971.<sup>35</sup> Trackage on either side of the depot, still seen in place in a 1956 photo (refer back to Fig. 8) was pulled up sometime after 1971, and the building sold and adapted to non-railroad purposes.

### *Wooden Depots in Iowa*

Today very few of the wooden railroad depots from the nineteenth century still stand in Iowa. Decorah's privileged status of having two such depots is unusual, especially on such a short but clearly important branch line of the Milwaukee road. According to historian Rebecca Conard, "it was not uncommon for old combination wood depots to be recycled as freight houses when a new depot was constructed."<sup>36</sup> The 1869 depot's conversion to a freight building, and its continued maintenance as a utilitarian railroad asset, are likely the only reasons it survived into modern times.

It is probably safe to suggest that the majority of other wooden combination depots—the most common form constructed in the state's small towns for cost reasons—have been either demolished or left to disintegrate following the arrival of the motor vehicle and, certainly since the twentieth century, the decline of railroads. Though no statewide survey of wooden railroad depots has been done, the Iowa SHPO's Architectural Data Base gives a slice of the picture. It contains a total of 277 depot entries among its thousands of entries. Of these 277 depots, just two are recorded as being *wooden* depots, one in Anamosa and a Milwaukee line depot in Maxwell. Both of these depots have now been demolished.

The 1869 Decorah depot is not listed among the 277 depot entries because it was entered as a "freight house," the function it still appeared to have in 1974 when it was recorded with an Iowa site inventory form. While this data

<sup>34</sup> Viewed at <http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu/>, various dates November and December, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> State of Iowa Historic Preservation Program, Historic Resource Survey "A" form.

<sup>36</sup> Rebecca Conard, "The Advent and Development of Railroads in Iowa: 1855-1940," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Documentation Form (1990): F-20 (the associated individual nominations were authored by Tracy Ann Cunning).

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entry protocol reveals the problems of trying to use the raw data completed by both trained professionals and untrained community members for a variety of reasons and under varying budgets that limit the extent of underlying research, it nevertheless does suggest that railroad depots are not encountered very frequently, that they are not a common property type in the state, and that wooden depots are definitely a shrinking category of this uncommon property type.

*Conclusion*

In 1869, when the railroad reached Decorah, the town had about 2,000 residents. The county was (and remains) thinly settled with fewer than 23,000 residents spread out over 690 square miles. In such small communities west of the Mississippi River, according to railroad historians:

the most common method of providing railway service...was to erect a 'combination' station. Such a structure sheltered passengers, freight, and train control under a single roof. Floor plans were usually simple. One end contained a waiting room while the middle area housed an office, nearly always with an attached bay window. The office, of course, provided sufficient space for the agent to do his bookkeeping work and perform services for the public, plus the bay window gave him better visibility up and down the track. This section, too, contained the operator's table on which were located the telegraph key and other tools needed for the train control. Finally, the end opposite the waiting room accommodated the freight section. Usually some type of wooden platform was attached to the freight house to permit the easy movement of bulky goods to wagons or trucks. While there existed variations in this basic layout, most small towns had depot floor plans of this type.<sup>37</sup>

The Decorah combination depot reflects the earnest efforts at town-building and lofty aspirations of early residents. From a practical standpoint, it also reflects Decorah residents, business operators, and boosters' recognition of the need for the railroad's connections with the world beyond Winneshiek County and Iowa. The depot also represents an accomplishment of the Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway prior to assuming its final corporate persona in 1874. Finally, the depot is a rare survivor in Iowa of a wooden combination depot.

*Future Plans*

The depot has been leased by and was recently purchased by the owner of a construction company who uses the waiting room as a shop for the restoration of historic windows. The freight room is used for storage. In 2015, the owner was awarded an emergency Historic Resource Development Program grant by the State Historical Society of Iowa to be applied toward the cost of hiring a structural engineer and the shoring materials necessary to stabilize the foundation pending additional phased rehabilitation work.

<sup>37</sup> H. Roger Grant and Charles W. Bohi, *The Country Railroad Station in America* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1978), 22.

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Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance maps of Decorah, Iowa, 1885, 1894, 1902, 1914, 1927, 1927 updated to 1948.

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property has the following legal description: Lot 1 of N1 of the Southeast Quarter of Section 16; and Lot 1 of 2 of N2, except the West 65 feet thereof, of the Northeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of Section 21; all in Township 98 North, Range 8 West of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M. The parcel may be further described as within the Railroad Addition to the Town of Decorah. It is bordered on the northwest by Railroad Avenue, on the southeast by Railroad Street, on the northeast by a parking lot, and on the south west by an unrelated modern building.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes features historically associated with the depot, including the building, a portion of the graveled parking lot to the northeast, and narrow areas of grassy lawn on the other three sides.



No Scale

Source: Winneshiek County Assessor, November 2015





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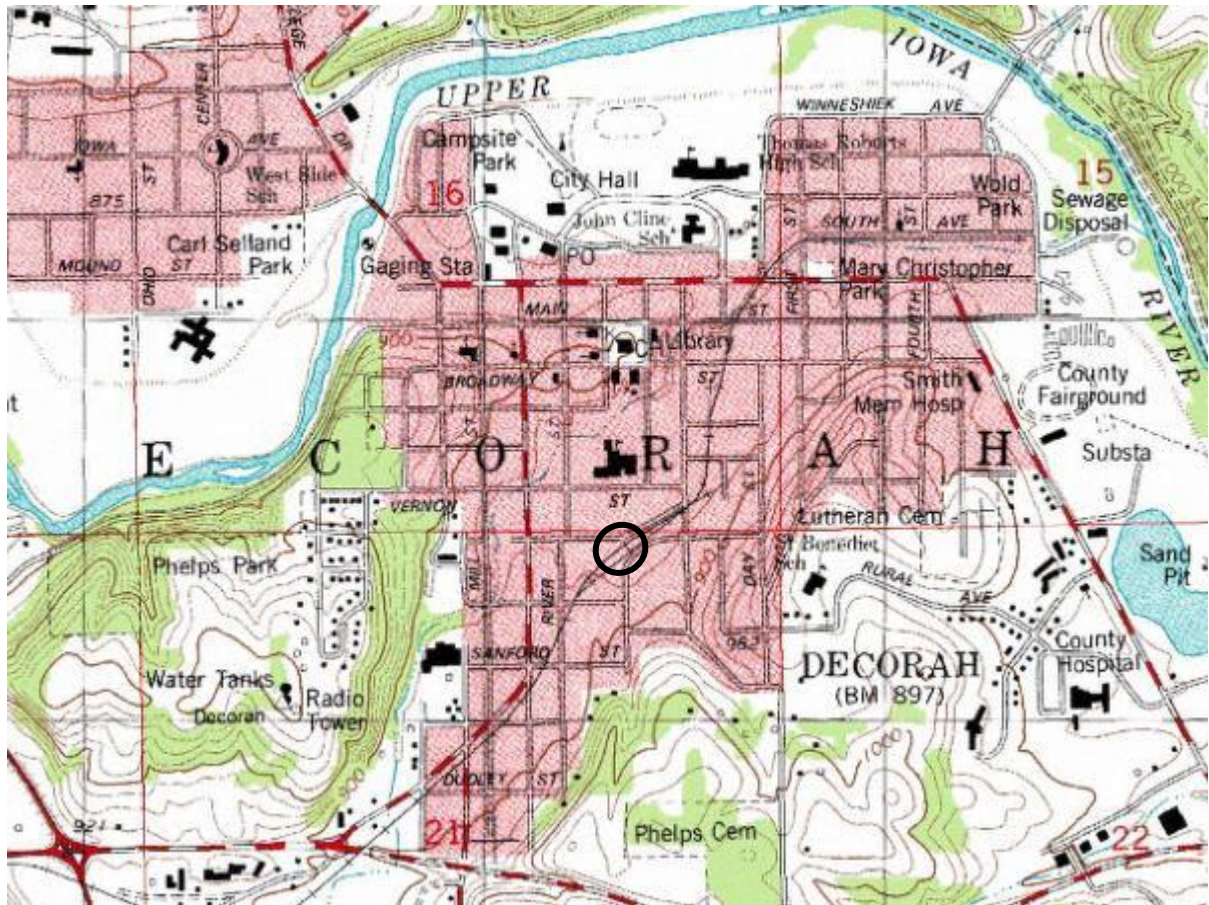
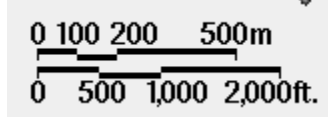
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**Decorah, Iowa, with approximate location of the nominated property circled.**

(detail obtained 11/25/2015 from U.S.G.S. 7.5' topographic map:

<http://ortho.gis.iastate.edu/client.cgi?zoom=10&x0=598283&y0=4794719&layer=drg24&action=zoom5&pwidth=600&pheight=450&x=301&y=210>)



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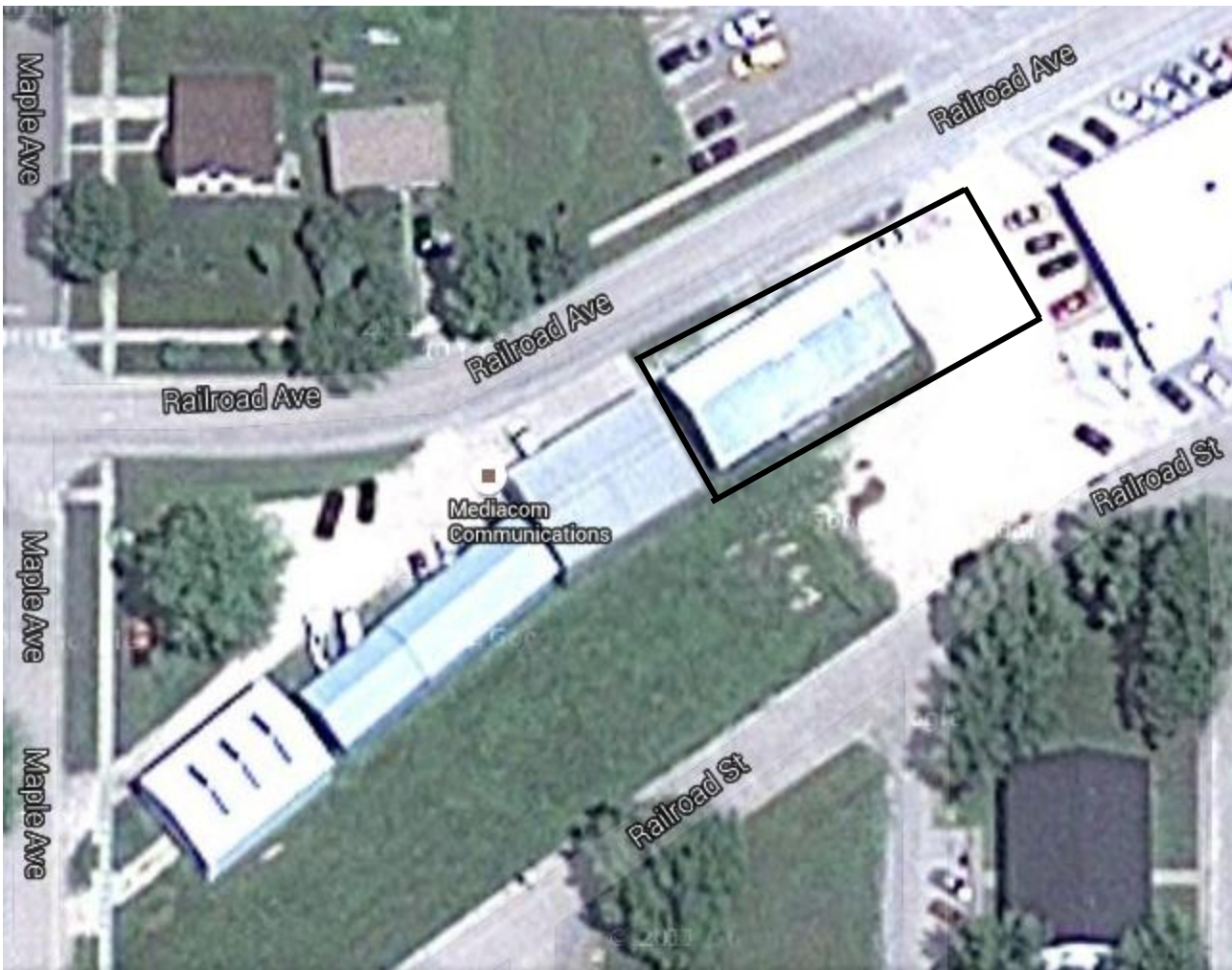
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**Site Plan showing Boundary of Nominated Property in Decorah, Iowa**  
(Length and angle of boundaries taken from Winneshiek County assessor website, November 2015.)



Source: Winneshiek County Assessor, 2015

N ↑ No Scale

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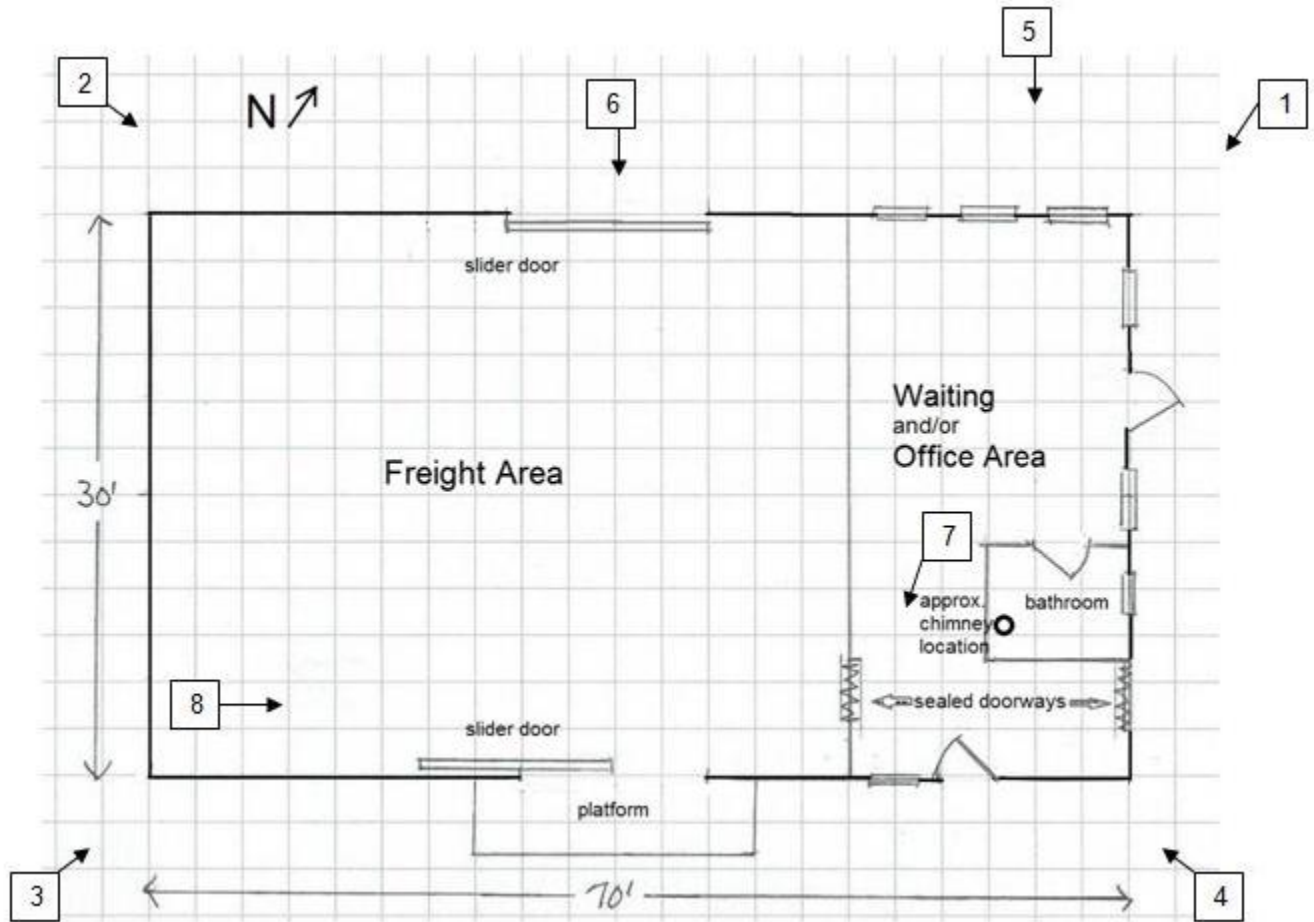
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**Floor Plan and Photo Key**

Tallgrass Historians LC sketch, 2015.





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## Photograph Label Information

**## 1, 2, 3, & 5 share the same information as follows:**

1. Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot
2. Decorah, Winneshiek County, IA
3. Tallgrass Historians L.C.
4. June 2015
5. N/A (digital photographs)

6.-7 Description of view and photo number

1. Northeast gable front and northwest long side, looking SW
2. Northwest long side and southwest gable rear wall, looking NW
3. Southwest gable rear wall and southeast long side, looking N
4. Southeast long side and northeast front, looking SE
5. Detail, 9-over-9 sash windows, north end of northwest long side, looking SW
6. Detail, freight door roughly centered on northwest side, looking W
7. Interior, non-freight waiting room, looking E
8. Interior, looking NE toward wall that separates freight room from front waiting room

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National Park Service

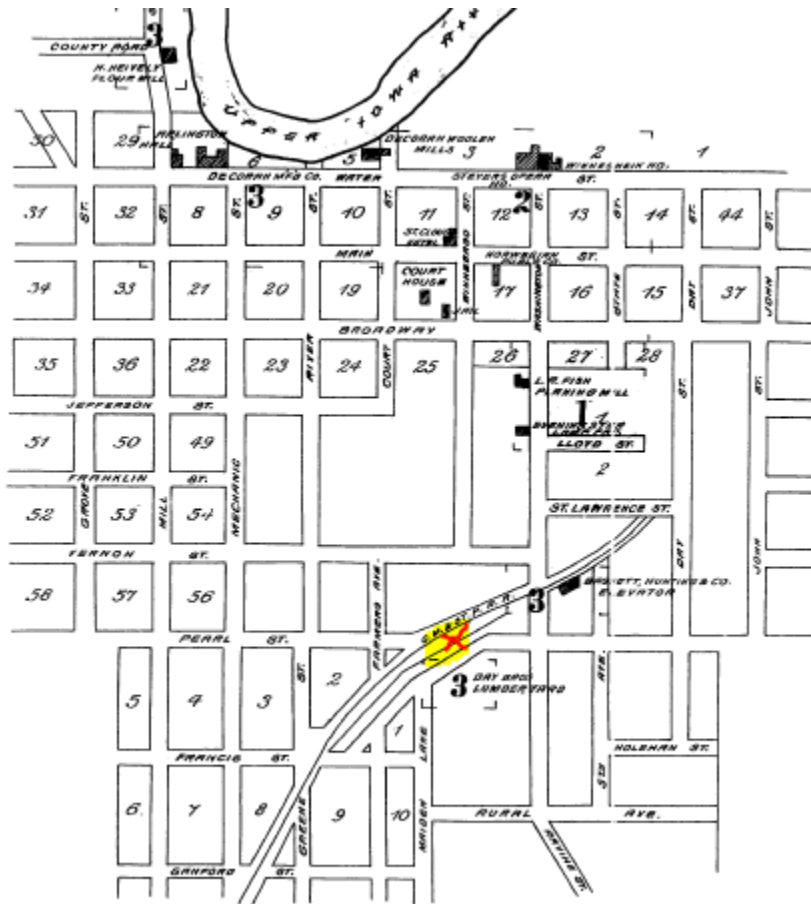
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**Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map of Decorah, Iowa (1885)**  
The rail line appears on this index map but not the depot. Its location is marked with an X.



- 81**
- Arlington Hall,
- Bassett, Hustin,  
Bernatz, A., & Co.
- Court House an
- Day Bros., Lumb



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National Park Service

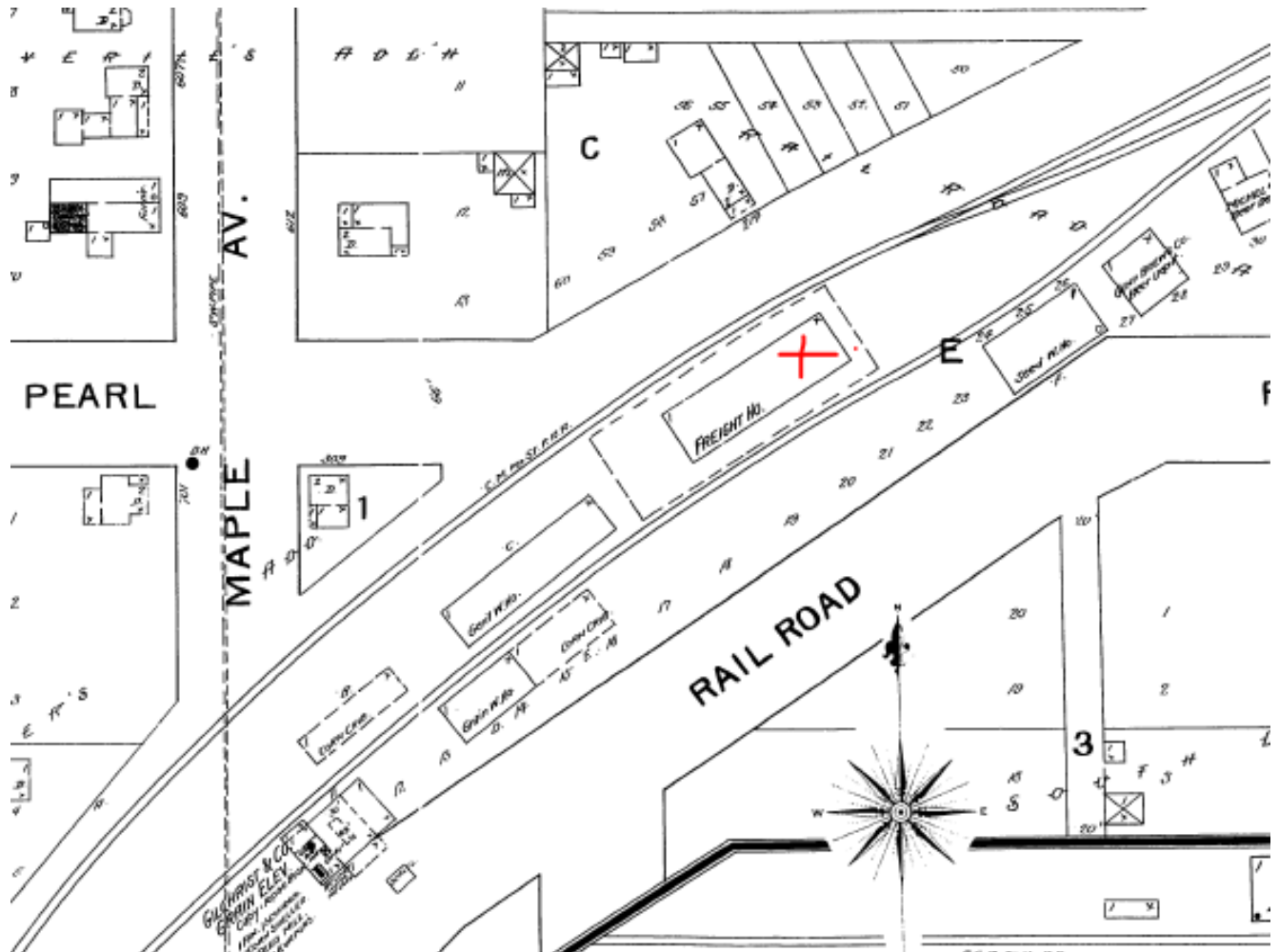
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**Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map of Decorah, Iowa (1894)**  
Note the loading platform (nonextant) that completely surrounds the depot.



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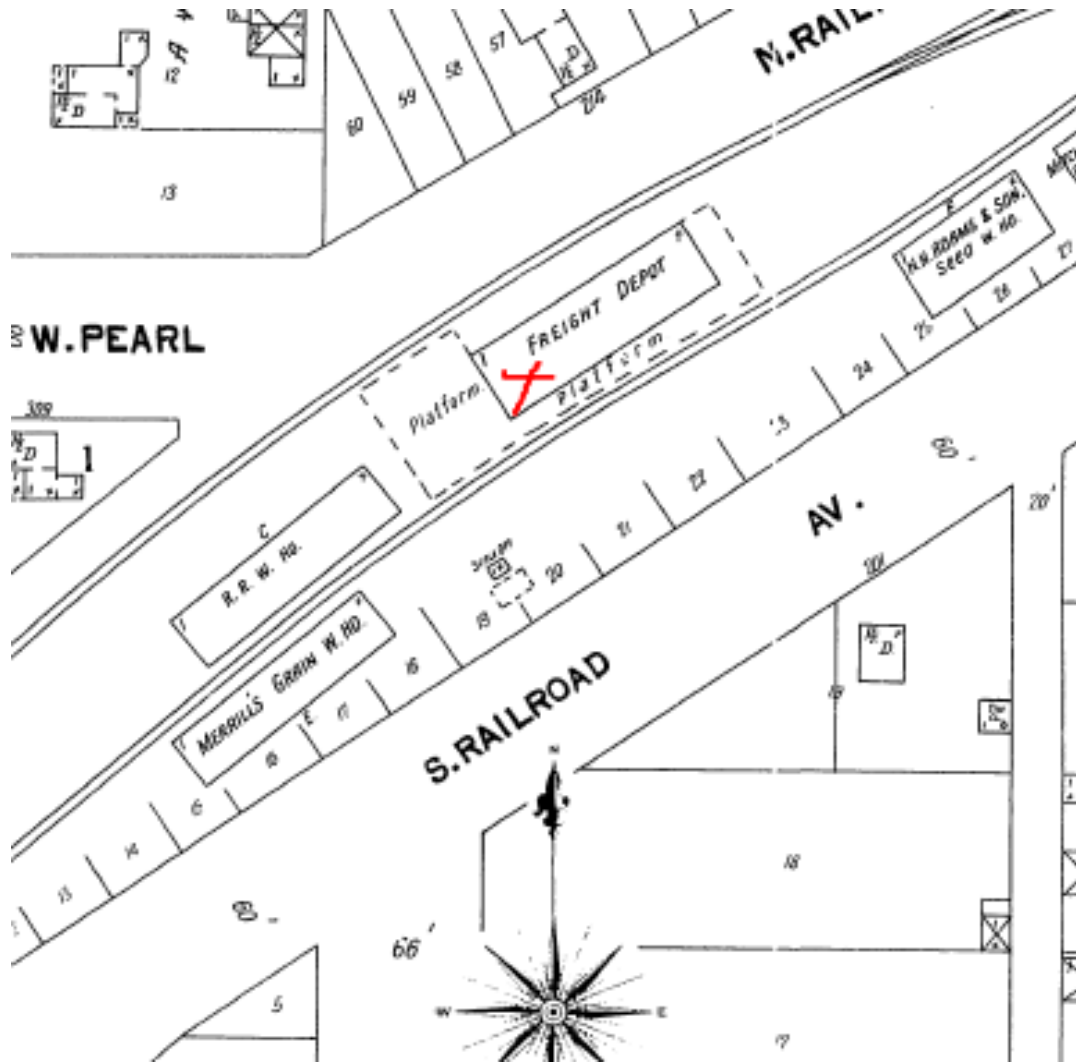
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**Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map of Decorah, Iowa (1902)**

Note the loading platform has been reduced on the northwest side wall.



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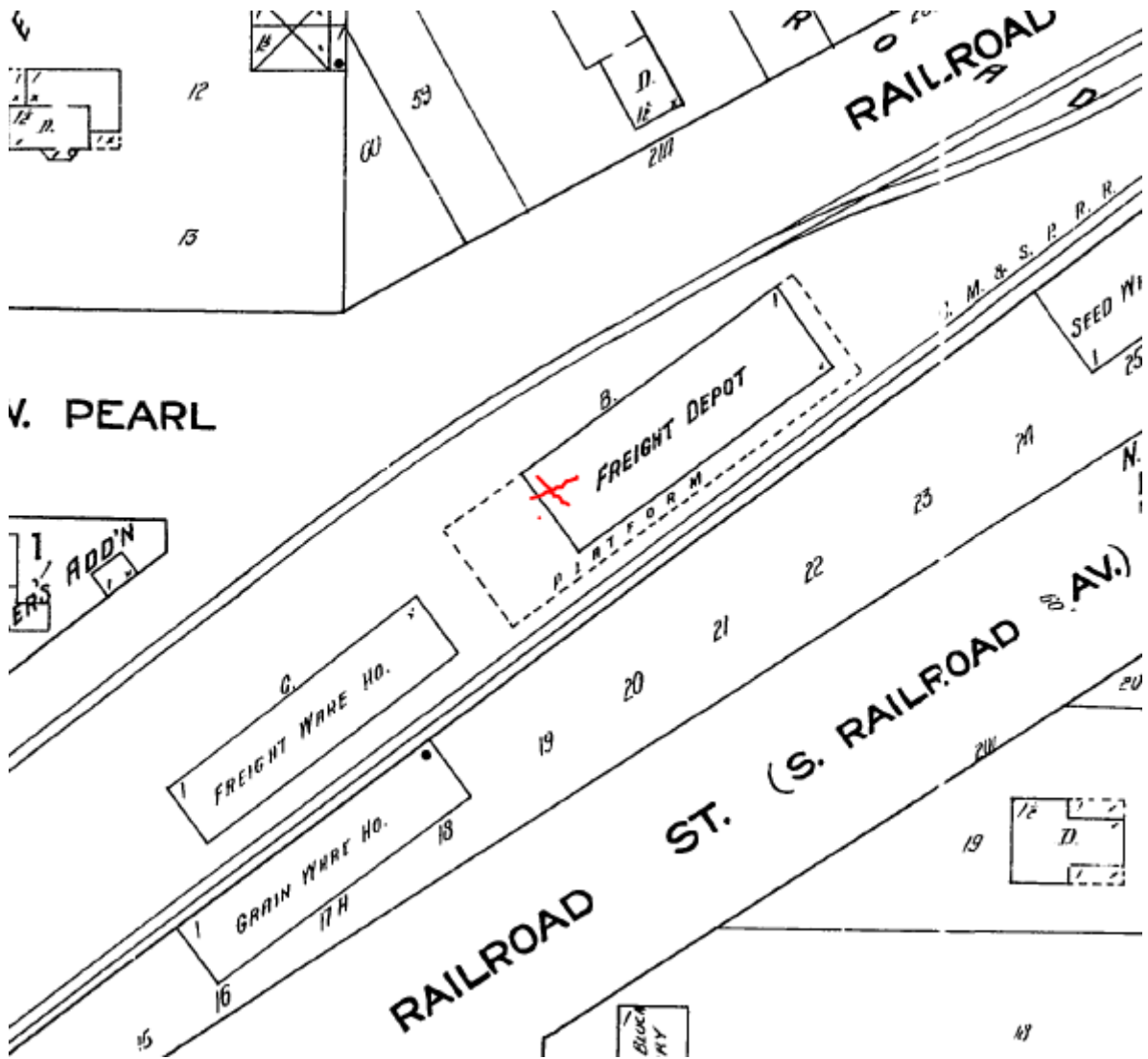
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**Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map of Decorah, Iowa (1914)**

Note the loading platform has been further reduced on the northwest side.



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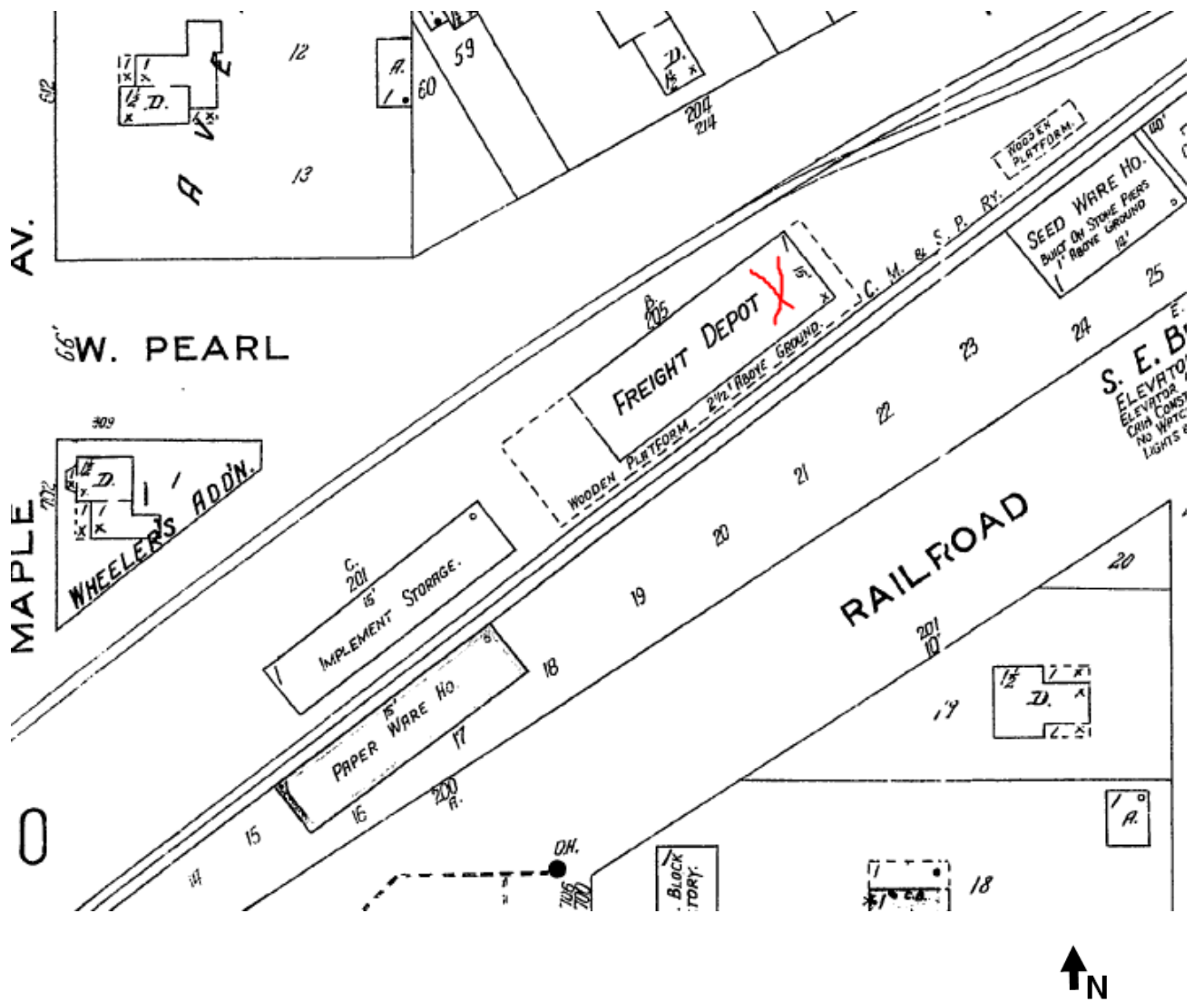
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**Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map of Decorah, Iowa (1927)**

The loading platform was unchanged from 1914, but the related railroad warehouse to the southwest is now labeled "implement storage."



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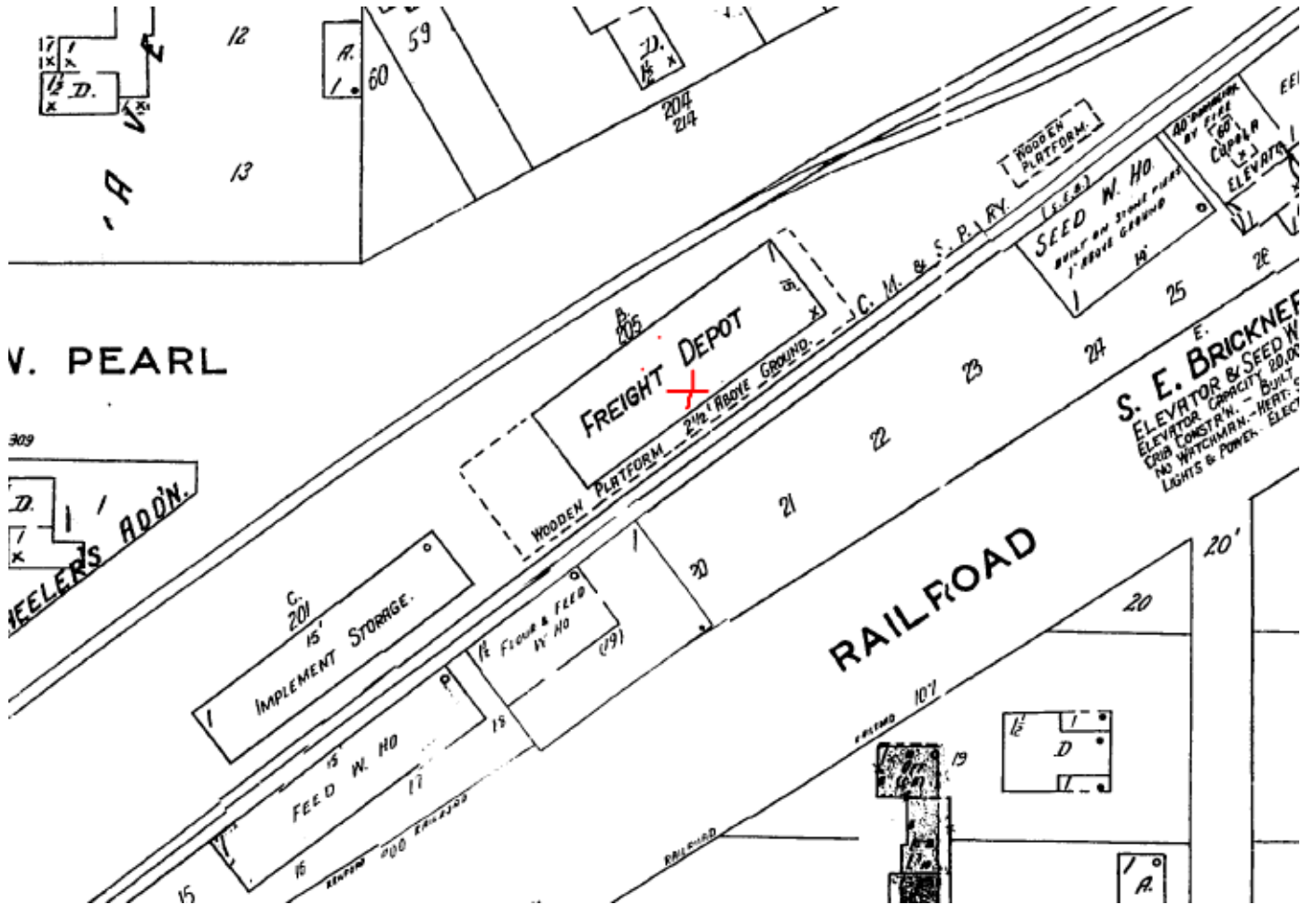
Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot  
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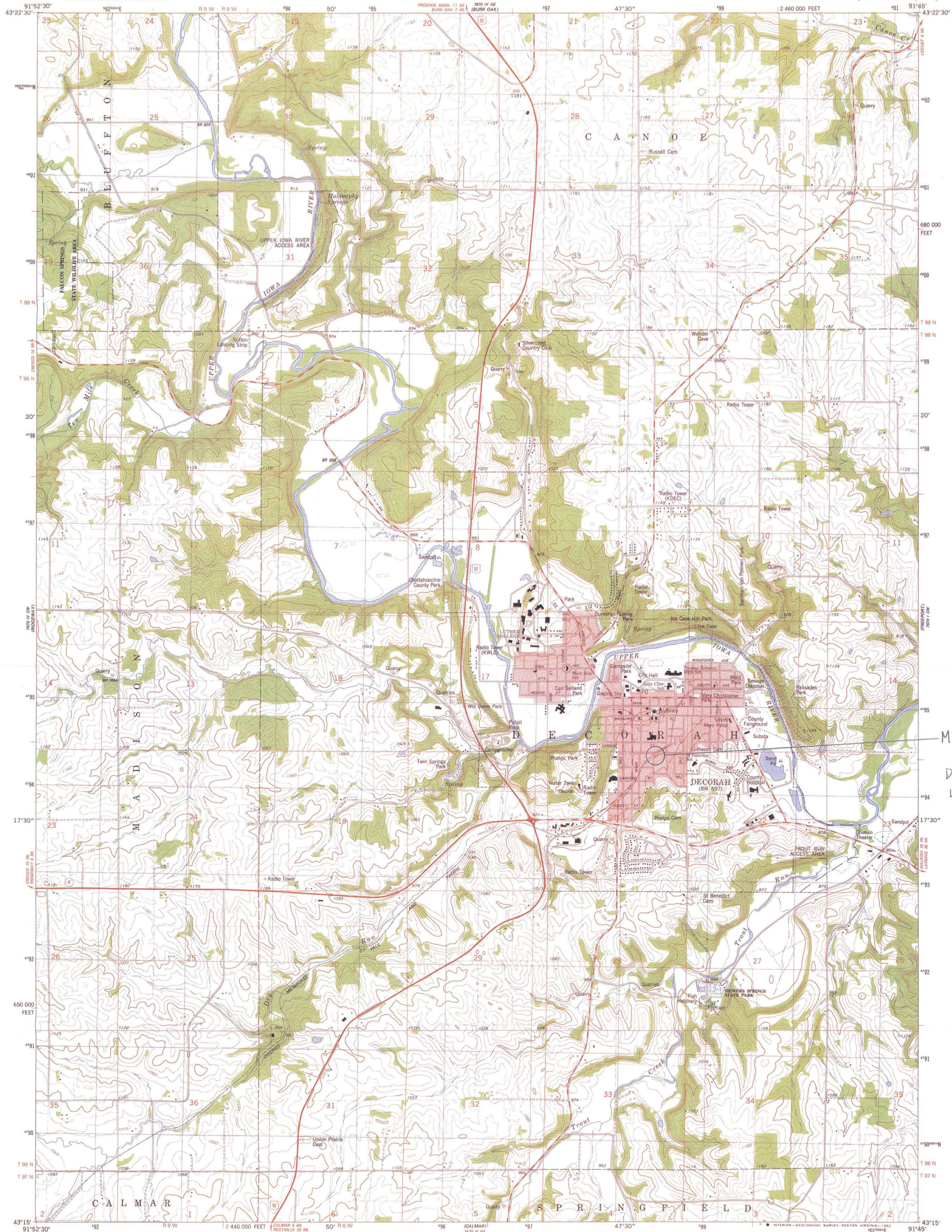
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**Sanborn Map Co., fire insurance map of Decorah, Iowa (updated to 1948)**  
The depot and platform are unchanged from 1927.







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Decorah, Winneshiek Co., IA  
UTM REFERENCES:  
15/598425/4794500

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1975. Field checked 1977. Map edited 1981

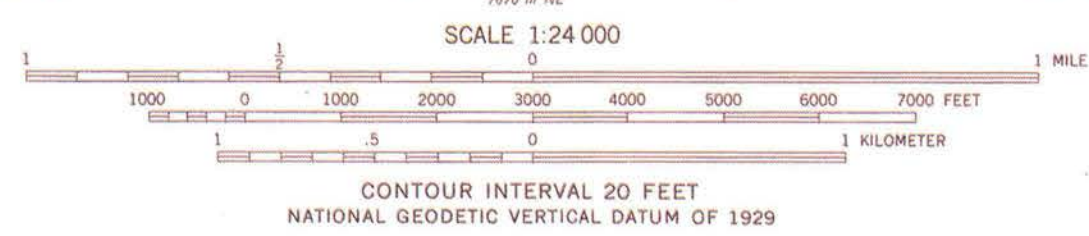
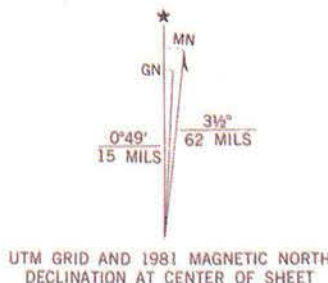
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Iowa coordinate  
system, north zone (Lambert conformal conic)  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 15  
1927 North American Datum

To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983  
move the projection lines 5 meters north and  
14 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of  
the National or State reservations shown on this map

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
AND BY THE IOWA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, IOWA CITY, IOWA 52240  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

DECORAH, IOWA  
N4315-W9145/7.5  
1981  
DMA 7670 IV SE-SERIES V876





Wadsworth  
503-16-3300

571001  
203-16-3300

























2097

SHANGHAI HARDWARE

SMART PRIMER







UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Combination Depot

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: IOWA, Winneshiek

DATE RECEIVED: 7/29/16      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/18/16  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/02/16      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/13/16  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000609

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    9/12/16 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept  
REVIEWER Patrick Anderson    DISCIPLINE Historian  
TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_    DATE 9/12/2016

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

**CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION  
EVALUATION REPORT FORM**

**RECEIVED**

MAY 13 2016

by SHPO

As a participant in the Certified Local Government Program (CLG), the Historic Preservation Commission is required to review and comment on proposed National Register nominations of properties within its jurisdiction. The State is required to provide the CLG with a 60-day period for the review prior to a State Nominations Review Committee (SNRC) meeting. This form must be received by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) five days in advance of the State Nomination Review Committee (SNRC) meeting.

(Please print clearly)

**Historic Property Name:** Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** 203 W. Pearl Street, Decorah, Winneshiek County, Iowa \_\_\_\_\_  
**Certified Local Government Name:** Decorah Historic Preservation Commission \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date of public meeting for nomination review:** May 10, 2016, 7:00, Decorah City Hall \_\_\_\_\_

**Applicable Criteria:** (Please Check the Appropriate Box)

- Criterion A (Historical Events)  
 Criterion B (Important Person)

- Criterion C (Architecture)  
 Criterion D (Archaeological)

**Please check the following box that is appropriate to the nomination** (Please print clearly).

- The Commission recommends that the property should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.  
 The Commission recommends that the property should not be listed in the National Register for the following reasons: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The Commission chooses not to make a recommendation on this nomination for the following reasons: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The Commission would like to make the following recommendations regarding the nomination: (use additional sheets if necessary): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Official Signatures Required Below**

**Historic Review Board Chair or Representative**

Print Name: Mark Z. Muggli \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: *Mark Z. Muggli, May 10, 2016* \_\_\_\_\_

Approved  Not Approved

**Chief Elected Official**

Print Name: Don Arendt, Mayor \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: *Don Arendt, May 11, 2016* \_\_\_\_\_

Approved  Not Approved

**Professional Evaluation**

Print Name: Paula Mohr \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: *Paula Mohr* \_\_\_\_\_

Approved  Not Approved

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF  
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

TERRY E. BRANSTAD, GOVERNOR  
KIM REYNOLDS, LT. GOVERNOR

MARY COWNIE, DIRECTOR  
CHRIS KRAMER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

RECEIVED 2280

JUL 29 2016

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

July 25, 2016

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Register and National Historic Landmarks  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Fl.  
Washington D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

The following National Register nomination(s) from Iowa are enclosed for your review and listing if acceptable.

- Wilton Commercial Historic District, Roughly bounded by 4<sup>th</sup> E and W Cedar; Railroad E and W and Chestnut streets, Wilton, Muscatine County, Iowa
- Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Combination Depot, 203 W Pearl Street, Decorah, Winneshiek County, Iowa
- Masonic Temple, 413, 417, 427, 429 Douglas Avenue, Ames, Story County, Iowa

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Foster  
National Register Coordinator  
State Historical Society of Iowa

PROUDLY  
Presents  
IOWA  
STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY ARCHIVES  
State  
HISTORIC  
SITES  
STATE HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION  
DEPT. OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
IOWA  
HISTORICAL  
FOUNDATION