

# Milwaukee Road Depot

## 1899, 1998

Completed in 1899, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Depot (Milwaukee Road Depot) replaced a depot that was located nearby on Washington Avenue South between Third and Fourth Avenues South.

Chicago-based architect Charles Sumner Frost designed the Milwaukee Road Depot and Train Shed. Frost designed many train stations, including the Minneapolis Great Northern Depot in 1912 and the St. Paul Union Depot in 1919. The Milwaukee Road Depot and Train Shed were built for a total cost of \$200,000.

The Milwaukee Road Depot – designed in the Renaissance Revival style – originally had an elaborate bell tower capping the clock tower. The tower was fashioned after the famous La Giralda in Seville, Spain. In 1941, a windstorm damaged the bell tower, and the intricate wooden cupola was removed.



*The Minneapolis Tribune* described the new depot when it opened as, “one of the finest buildings of the kind in the Northwest and an ornament to the city.” Early railroad stations were modest in design, but with railroad expansion, stations became monuments of civic pride, and many were grandiose in design.



*Minnesota Historical Society*

The Milwaukee Road Depot is considered conservative in design. The interior has arched doorways, marble floors, and carved wood ceilings. The first story is built of pink granite from Ortonville, Minnesota – the same material used in the building of the Minneapolis City Hall.

The station was built on the head plan, meaning the tracks end at the station rather than pass by the side of the station. The head plan type station fell out of favor

When through-type stations were built, where the tracks pass through or beneath the station.

At the time of the new depot’s opening, Minneapolis was prosperous and growing rapidly. Mills lining both sides of the Mississippi riverfront produced over 20,000 barrels of flour per day. Lumber mills were producing millions of feet of lumber products. The railroads were not only the lifeblood



*Minnesota Historical Society*

of western expansion, but also aided in the growth of Minneapolis, connecting the city to goods and materials in the east that the cities there needed.



*Minnesota Historical Society*



*Minnesota Historical Society*

Passenger traffic reached a peak in the 1920s when twenty-nine trains left the depot every day, bound for Chicago, Houston, and Dallas.

During the 1960s, the Minnesota Public Service Commission and the Minnesota Department of Transportation fought unsuccessfully to demolish the depot, to be replaced by a freeway interchange on Third Avenue.

In 1971, Amtrak was formed to provide rail passenger service across the country, and passenger traffic at the Milwaukee Road Depot ended. The Milwaukee Road railroad ceased to exist, and once again, demolition of the depot was discussed.

Fortunately, in 1978, both the depot and the train shed were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Just a year later, the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission designated the depot for preservation. However, it took twenty years for the property to be developed. In the meanwhile, the depot sat vacant.



*Minnesota Historical Society*



*Minnesota Historical Society*

In 1992, with the hope of rehabilitating the buildings, the City of Minneapolis purchased the depot and several city blocks surrounding the depot. The 100-foot clock tower was repaired in 1996.

In 1998, CSM Corporation, working with Shea Architects, began the remodel and refurbishment of the depot. The depot and train shed were transformed into a Renaissance Hotel and Residence Inn by Marriott, with an outdoor ice-skating rink, and an indoor water park.

The buildings were subsequently remodeled; the water park removed; and the event space extended into a portion of the train shed.

The Milwaukee Road Depot and Train Shed stand as reminders of an era when traveling by train was commonplace. The steel truss-roofed train shed is one of only twelve remaining in the United States.