

Our Times: Lake City in History

“Preserving Yesterday’s Memories for Tomorrow”

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PRESIDENT’S CORNER

Hi, Did you see us? We were there.

Yes, our Society had a booth at Patton Park during Water Ski Days and we thank so many of you for stopping to say “Hi” and to share some of your memories as you leafed through our wonderful history book, Lake City photos, etc.

That’s exactly why we exist, to encourage the expression of those memories and to preserve them for future generations. Artifacts are another important facet of remembering the past. That’s why we are truly grateful to everyone who considers the Lake City Historical Society as a repository for their treasures that tell Lake City’s history.

We look forward to seeing many of you again, this time at our booth at Lincoln High School during Johnny Appleseed Days, October 2 and 3. This is an opportunity for you to purchase some reminders of what has gone before in Lake City. But whether you open your pocket-books or not, please stop by to say hello and look around.

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Eloise Blattner

Architecture at City’s Depot Site Recalls Era of Travel by Rail

With history in mind, Lake Citians Doug Wallerich and Mike Hagedorn built a commercial building adjacent to the railroad tracks on Lyon Avenue that reprised the architecture of passenger depots that once occupied the site.

Don Schwartz, secretary of the Lake City Historical Society and a Lake City native, noted that the new structure incorporates some features from the old depots: rectangular shape, hipped roof, and a sign proclaiming “Lake City.” The building was designed by local architect Chris Peterson and built by Wallerich.

The Liquor Depot on the Lyon Avenue end of the building opened on xxxx and the Railhouse Grill, whose entrance is on xxx opened xx.

It was a sad day for Lake City on May 1, 1971, when passenger rail service, inaugurated here on Sept. 6, 1871, came to an end as new interstate highways beckoned and airlines expanded their routes.

In the following paragraphs, we call upon the *Lake City Graphic* article of April 29, 1971, which recounts the profound influence of freight and passenger railroads on the community. It was published under the headline **LAST PASSENGER TRAIN TO STOP AT LAKE CITY FRIDAY EVENING:**

Not quite 100 years ago, on Wednesday, Sept. 6, 1871, the first railroad passenger train passed through Lake City en route from St.

Paul to Winona. The following day regular passenger trips commenced and on Friday, Oct. 13, of the same year it is recorded that the United States mails were brought in on the trains "and so closed the old era of stages and steamboats as mail transports in Lake City."

On May 1 of this year another era will come to a close. The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad has posted notices warning that there will be no passenger service at all out of Lake City from that date onward. The last passenger pick-up here will be on Friday, April 30

STOPS AT RED WING

Happily, one west-bound and one east-bound train will still stop daily at Red Wing, only 17 miles away, and at Winona, about 45 miles from here. So rail travel in this general area will not be cut off completely

The local ticket office in the depot has been closed since Jan. 1970. Persons traveling aboard the Hiawatha purchase tickets from the conductor on the train.

This drastic cutback in passenger train service results from the sweeping changes being made in nationwide passenger service by the National Railroad Passenger Services Corporation—formerly called Railpax, now Amtrak—as a result of declining public interest in rail travel

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Railroads assert that passengers have deserted them for other modes of transportation. Former passengers contend that railroads have so downgraded their services that it is no longer desirable or advantageous to travel by rail.

LAST RESORT

Here, as elsewhere, the past century has seen the rise and decline of rail travel. When the golden spike was driven in Utah in 1869, signaling the completion of a trans-continental railroad line, the event was heralded everywhere as one of the great achievements of the age. Today the train is usually one of the traveler's last resorts. The public generally seems to prefer the automobile or the airplane.

The railroads report that they have been steadily losing money on passenger service and federal aid to rail lines has been insubstantial compared with that offered to highways and airways

FREIGHT BUSINESS

Meanwhile the Lake City depot will remain open to handle the substantial flow of freight to and from the city. Melvin Malles, freight agent, will remain on the job to make out freight bills, supervise the switching of cars, and issue orders.

According to Malles, Lake City does an excellent freight business, with its volume exceeding even that of a metropolitan center like LaCrosse, Wis. He points out that small items are no longer shipped by freight. Only carload lots of produce or merchandise go in and out of the community by rail. At the Lake City station the chief items of commerce are wheat and flower to and from the Tennant & Hoyt mill and iron and sand which is shipped in to the Gould National Batteries Engines Parts Division Plant here.

Over 3,000 carloads of flower and feed are shipped from the mill each year, and there is an inflow of 2,000 carloads of wheat to the mill.

The foundry uses about 200 carloads of iron and sand in a year's time, which is shipped in by rail. But finished products leave Gould by truck carriers.

About seven freight trains pass through the Lake City yards in each direction daily, but only two stop here. One west-bound and one east-bound freight load and unload every day, usually in the afternoon or evening.

These are the times when traffic is likely to be blocked along Lyon Ave. as cars are switched to side tracks or are picked up. Formerly, as many as 20 or more freight trains moved up and down the Milwaukee rails every day.

CENTURY OF SERVICE

Lake City has seen close to a century of rail passenger service. The last rail in the tracks through this locality was laid on August 15, 1871, about two miles above Weaver, thus connecting Winona with St. Paul through Wabasha County. The first regular passenger service over the rails was initiated between the two cities Sept. 7, 1871. At that time, the bridge at Hastings was not completed and passengers and freight were ferried across the river there.

Lake Citians had enjoyed rail travel in St. Paul for a short time prior to the completion of the road. On July 25, 1871, trains were put in service between Lake City and St. Paul, when the roadbed was completed between the two cities.

A Wabasha County history reports that at the same time "works on the depot here was being rapidly pushed ... The only regret on the part of the people being that its location was so far from the business portion of the city."



Original Lake City depot built in 1910 and destroyed by fire in 1921.

Sadly, this attractive depot was completely destroyed by fire on Aug. 12, 1921. The fire was discovered shortly after noon and in about half an hour the entire building and the brick baggage room were in ruins. Very strong winds fanned the blaze and sent burning firebrands and cinders flying as far as a mile away from the site of the fire. Estimated value of the structure was from \$8,000 - \$10,000.

NEW DEPOT

Agitation for the construction of a new depot soon began and work on the building was begun in the summer of 1923. The grand opening was held Dec. 11.... In the interim between the loss of the old building and the construction of the new one, an old coach was moved to the site for the convenience of passengers and ticket sellers.

In the past century there has been much coming and going "by rail" in Lake City. A great forward step in passenger accommodations was taken in 1935 when the Milwaukee "Hiawatha, hailed as the fastest train on the road, passed through here on a trial run. A large crowd lined the tracks to see it pass. Ultimately the Hiawatha made

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regular stops here, but after April 30 the local service will be discontinued

A long-time baggage man and clerk who still lives in Lake City is Herman Vollmers, who was employed by the railroad from 1921 until 1966.

Hopefully Amtrak, or some other [entity] may once again give us passenger service. Trains just may come back to give faster, pleasanter and more efficient service to the many folks who still "love a train."

Society Member Andru Peters Updates the Railroad Story

Andru Peters, born in Lake City and a 1958 Lincoln High graduate, returned to his home town in 20xx after a professional career as a university teacher and consultant, principally in the field of transportation. Today, he serves on the City Council and represents our community on the Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission, which is exploring the revival of passenger service and high speed trains. In the following, Peters, who also is a model train buff, adds to the historical information contained in the Graphic article and provides updates.

First, some historical trivia:

- In 1937 the Milwaukee Road the "Hiawatha" powered by a streamlined 4-4-2 class A steam locomotive, ran up to speeds of 90 MPH. Other trains that ran through Lake City were named the Columbian, Olympian, and Pioneer Limited.
- In 1877, the Midland Company (later Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific) laid track for the "Bug Line" from Wabasha through Zumbro Falls to Zumbrota. Tracks were removed starting in 1938, with the last tracks pulled in 1955. (I have a HO model freight car with the Wabasha-Zumbrota route name on it.)
- In 1882, the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific railroad built pontoon bridge #29 from Reads Landing to Trevino, WI. It was abandoned in 1952.

Current facts and figures:

- An average total of 28 trains go through Lake City every day. An additional eight trains come into and terminate within the city for Federal Mogul and Cargill Flour.
- Lake City has a total of five road/rail crossings within Wabasha County, with one recently closed (Sportsman Drive), and two road/rail crossings in Goodhue County.
- In 2009, more than 500,000 passengers traveled the St. Paul, Red Wing, Winona Amtrak route into Chicago.

Looking into the future:

The Minnesota River Route between St. Paul and Chicago (former Milwaukee Road route) is one of four routes being considered for the High Speed Rail (HSR) corridor. If ultimately selected, all rail/road crossings in our area would be upgraded to "whistle free zone" standards. Projections show HSR generating \$2.3 billion in economic development opportunities and \$180 million for the communities near each station.

If plans go forward, existing tracks would be upgraded to accommodate 110 MPH average train speeds. The upgraded corridor would handle high speed, commuter, and freight traffic, often with dedicated track for each service on the Minnesota side of the river. Amtrak hopes to add as many as six more roundtrip trains between St. Paul and Chicago, and by 2018 Amtrak plans to add a second round trip train on the Portland - St. Paul - Milwaukee - Chicago route.

St. Paul's Union station is currently being restored as regional multi-modal transit center with \$125 million from federal and state funding and \$50 million in local funding. The grand reopening is planned for late 2012. The center will accommodate and connect light rail, commuter rail, high speed rail, Amtrak, Greyhound, Jefferson Lines, metro transit buses, taxis, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Currently transit time between the Twin Cities and Chicago is 4.5 to 5 hours by air, 6.8 hours by auto, and 8 hours by Amtrak. HSR would reduce the train time to 5.5 hours.



With architecture reminiscent of the railroad depots that once occupied the site, the Liquor Depot (foreground) and Railhouse Grill (entrance at right) opened for business this year.

Welcome To Our Meetings

You need not be a member to attend meetings of the Lake City Historical Society. In the past some long-time residents of the community with historical items they wish to see preserved for posterity have come to meetings to "check us out." We meet the fourth Tuesday of every month at 2 p.m. on the second floor of City Hall. To discuss presenting the Society with items of local historical significance, please call Eloise Blattner, 651-345-3063.



Cemetery Tour

Often referred to over the years simply as "the foundry," the longtime manufacturer of pistons and other engine parts was owned in 1993 by the AE Geotze enterprise. This commemorative coaster observing the local company's 125th anniversary was donated to the LCHS by the late Art Gray. Often referred to over the years simply as "the foundry," the longtime manufacturer of pistons and other engine parts was owned in 1993 by the AE Geotze enterprise. This commemorative coaster observing the local company's 125th anniversary was donated to the LCHS by the late Art Gray. AE Geotze enterprise. Thiy the late Art Gray.



The Lake City Historical Society

The present day Lake City Historical Society was established in 1986 to collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the history of Lake City and relate it to the history of Wabasha and Goodhue counties and the state of Minnesota. Membership is open to the general public.

Officers, 2011-2012

Eloise Blattner, President
Don Schwartz, Secretary
Georgene Arndt, Treasurer
Katie Schmidt, Board Member
Donis Boss, Board Member
Lucy Sontag, Board Member

Archive and Displays

The Society welcomes contributions of photographs, artifacts and other items relating to the history of Lake City. Some of the Society's holdings are on display in cabinets located in the second floor Ballroom of the City Hall. The archive of photographs and written material can be made available to researchers and other interested parties upon application to the Society's secretary, Don Schwartz, telephone 651-345-2692.

Recent Gifts to the Society

Often referred to over the years simply as "the foundry," the longtime manufacturer of pistons and other engine parts was owned in 1993 by the AE Geotze enterprise. This commemorative coaster observing the local company's 125th anniversary was donated to the LCHS by the late Art Gray. Often referred to over the years simply as "the foundry," the longtime manufacturer of pistons and other engine parts was owned in 1993 by the AE Geotze enterprise. This commemorative coaster observing the local company's 125th anniversary was donated to the LCHS by the



LCHS Membership (July, 2011)

* Designates Life Member

The Lake City Historical Society appreciates the support and encouragement of the members listed below. Although the annual dues are modest by any measure, they support a number of projects and programs that preserve local history for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations. See membership application form at right.

Alice Atkinson	Marianne Kaufman
John Albright	Roger Knutson
Georgene Arndt	*Onalee Kramer
Amanda Baldwin	Susan Leuer
Nancy Banks	Shirley Luettinger
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*Eloise Blattner	Jim & Darlyn Lyons
Ben & Monica Boege	Jean & Dave Matheny
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Virginia Bowers	Ethel Moyer
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Lorraine Glander	David & Lucy Sontag
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Jean Heidenreich	Henry & Carolyn
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Sam A. Holcomb	David Walstrom
Virginia Holst	Carol Warfel
Ron & Billie Hunt	Patricia Wirtanen
Ila Jacob	Ethel Zimmerman

Yes, I Would Like to Join the LCHS

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Annual Membership:

**\$10 Per Individual, or
\$25 Per Family**

I also want to support the Society's Annual Fund. My contribution of \$ _____ will be added to annual membership(s).

I have included in my payment gift memberships for the following persons at the individual rate:

Gift Membership For:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Gift Membership For:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

My check for a total of \$ _____ is enclosed and made payable to the Lake City Historical Society.

**Mail to: Lake City Historical Society
POB 246
Lake City, MN 55041**

The LCHS is a non-profit organization and contributions are deductible for tax purposes.