National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property
   Historic name: __Northern Pacific Depot___________________________
   Other names/site number: __Dining Car #423/Steel Wheels_____________________
   Name of related multiple property listing: ________________________________
   "Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956"
   (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location
   Street & number: __423 South Cascade Street_____________________
   City or town: __Fergus Falls________ State: __MN________ County: __Otter Tail_________
   Not For Publication: [N/A] Vicinity: [N/A]

3. State/Federal Agency Certification
   As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following
   level(s) of significance:
   ___national ___statewide X local
   Applicable National Register Criteria:
   X A ___B ___C ___D

   ____________________________  12/3/2021
   Signature of certifying official/Title: Amy Spong, Deputy SHPO, MN Dept. of Admin Date
   State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

   In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

   ____________________________
   Signature of commenting official: Date
   Title: ____________________________
   State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) ___________________

__________________________  _________________
Signature of the Keeper     Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:  X

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s)  X

District

Site

Structure

Object
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Otter Tail, MN
County and State

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

_TRANSPORTATION/rail-related_________

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

_COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant_________
7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
Classical Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, STONE, ASPHALT

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Northern Pacific Depot is located just south of the central business district in Fergus Falls, a city in west-central Minnesota with a population of about 14,000. (Figure 1) The original rail corridor that once served the depot remains in active use and is located immediately to the south of the building.1

The Northern Pacific Depot is a large, rectangular building clad with brick. (Photo 1) A hip roof with broad eaves covers the one-story building. A cross-gable positioned near the west end of the building defines a prominent bay that projects from both the north and south walls. The long side walls are characterized by the rhythmic placement of windows and pedestrian doors, as well as large freight doors for transporting freight and baggage in and out of the building. The restrained design features a number of classically-inspired details such as segmental arches, keystones, and stone trim.

1 The Northern Pacific rail corridor across the state of Minnesota has been determined eligible for the National Register as a “railroad corridor historic district.” The eligible resources within the city of Fergus Falls have been surveyed and include the depot, the railroad tracks, and two bridges (OT-FFC-230).
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Otter Tail, MN
County and State

The interior of the depot included a ticket office, men’s and women’s waiting rooms, large rooms for storing freight and baggage, as well as office space. The depot also contains a partial basement.

The depot was constructed in 1920 following the destruction of the previous depot by a disastrous cyclone that destroyed much of Fergus Falls in 1919. The new depot combined both passenger and freight services, which had been previously housed in separate buildings that were one block apart. The depot served Fergus Falls and the surrounding community until operations ceased in 1970. In 2018, the depot opened as a restaurant and event space now known as Dining Car #423/Steel Wheels.

Narrative Description

1. Northern Pacific Depot – Contributing Building
   Date: 1920

The Northern Pacific Depot is 180 feet long and 30 feet wide. The building is constructed with concrete, brick, and hollow tile. Resting on a concrete foundation, the depot features red pressed brick and buff-colored Bedford limestone trim. A complex roof with broad eaves consists of three distinct sections. A steeply-pitched roof with flared eaves covers approximately the western third of the building. A brick chimney projects from the ridge. This roof is intersected by a cross-gable roof that covers projecting bays on the north and south sides of the building. The third section of the roof is a lower-pitch roof that covers approximately the eastern two-thirds of the building. The soffits of the broad eaves are clad with beadboard.

Two shallow, gabled dormers project from both the north and south slopes of the eastern section of the roof. Each dormer features a four-light window, with the glass angled to conform to the slope of the dormer. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles, which was also the material used for the building’s original roof.

The original brick-paved platform in a herringbone pattern fronts the building on the south, west, and a portion of the north elevation. A raised wooden platform for handling freight is positioned along the remainder of the north elevation and along the east elevation. The platform allowed freight to be on-and-off loaded directly from rail cars that could pull up along the platform from a spur track that extended around the north side of the building. The wooden loading platform had been demolished, but was recently rebuilt and closely reflects the original footprint. The new platform, however, was built according to the current building code, which also required the inclusion of a wooden railing.

The spur track still exists as it approaches the building from the east and extends the length of the depot along its north side. But the tracks that continued to the west of the depot and rejoined the main tracks have been removed. Both the main track and the spur track are “live” tracks that are
utilized by trains. As a result, the Otter Tail Valley Railroad required that fences be installed on both sides of the building for pedestrian safety. The iron fences feature narrow pickets that do not obscure the view of the building. The fence along the main tracks is roughly six feet high while the fence along the spur track is roughly three feet high.

All the windows in the building are original. However, very few of the original storm windows remained and new storm windows have been installed. The new storm windows feature thin-frame thermal panes, which do not obscure the original windows. The pedestrian doors have been replaced with doors that are similar to the design of the original doors.

The six original freight doors are still in place. They feature single wooden doors with recessed panels. The freight doors are installed on the interior walls and operate on sliding tracks that would move the doors into pockets built with vertical wooden slats. Four of the six original pockets remain in place in the freight room.

The three freight doors that open onto the brick-paved loading platform remain visible from the exterior of the depot, although they are no longer operable. The three freight doors in the freight room that open onto the raised wooden loading platform are not visible from the exterior as new doors have been installed on the exterior. The original doors remain in the open position on the interior. The new doors resemble the original doors, although they are double doors, and they are flush with the exterior wall. The new doors are operable and help with the weatherization of the building.

**South Elevation**

Doors and windows are spaced along the south elevation. (Photo 2 and Figure 6) Beginning at the west end of the building, there is a single, nine-over-one double-hung window followed by a pedestrian door with recessed panels in the lower section of the door and a nine-light window in the upper section. There is also a six-light transom above the door. Next is the three-sided projecting bay. Each side wall includes a single, six-over-one double hung window. (Photo 3) The south side of the projecting bay includes two, nine-over-one double hung windows. This bay forms a wall dormer as the brick wall extends through the eave and into the gable. A single, six-light casement window is centered in the gable. All three windows on the south side of the projecting bay are capped with segmental brick lintels with keystones of Bedford limestone. The brick gable is also capped with a coping of Bedford limestone. Faint traces of paint remain at the top of the gable from the Northern Pacific’s circular logo.

Next, there is a pedestrian door identical to the previous door. Next are two nine-over-one double hung windows. They are followed by a large, recessed wooden freight door with panels and a six-light transom. Next is a single, nine-over-one light double-hung window, followed by a pedestrian door identical to the previous doors. Next are three, nine-over-one double-hung windows. Next is a single, twelve-light casement window. Next is a large, recessed wooden freight door with panels and a seven-light transom. Finally, there are four, twelve-light casement windows spaced along the remainder of the south elevation. (Photo 4)
Northern Pacific Depot

Name of Property

East Elevation

There is one freight door located at the north side of the east elevation. (Photo 5) The replacement freight door features paired doors, each with a six-light window. The door is flush with the wall.

North Elevation

The north elevation is similar to the south elevation with a rhythmic placement of windows and doors. (Photo 6) Beginning at the east end of the building, there is a freight door identical to the one on the east elevation. Next are two, twelve-light casement windows. (Photo 7) Next is a freight door that is also identical to the freight door on the east elevation. Next there are two, twelve-light casement windows. Another freight door follows that is identical to the one just described. Next are two, twelve-light casement windows. Next is a nine-over-one double-hung window followed by a pedestrian door identical to the doors previously described. Next is a recessed freight door with panels and a six-light transom that is similar to the freight doors on the south elevation. Next are two, nine-over-one double-hung windows followed by a pedestrian door identical to the doors previously described. (Photo 8)

Next is the projecting bay, which is similar to the projecting bay on the south elevation. (Photo 9) This bay, however, does not include windows on the side walls. In addition, while there are two windows on the north side of the bay, they are narrower than those on the south bay, and feature six-over-one light double-hung windows. The glass is also frosted, reflecting the fact that these windows are associated with the depot’s original restrooms. The remaining features of this bay, such as the window centered in the gable, the segmental brick lintels with keystones, and the stone coping, are identical to the south bay. Like the projecting bay to the south, faint traces of paint remain at the top of the gable from the Northern Pacific’s circular logo. Finally, there are two, nine-over-one light double-hung windows at the west end of this elevation.

West Elevation

The west elevation includes two, nine-over-one double-hung windows. (Photo 10) This section of the building, which is covered by the steeply-pitched roof, reflects the location of the depot’s waiting rooms and ticket office. This section of the building also features corner piers and a brick belt course that links the window sills. Another design detail found in this section of the building is a steel bar with a saw-tooth pattern installed on each of the window sills. The purpose might have been to keep birds at bay.

Interior

The description of the interior will begin by explaining the layout and functions of the depot based on the original plans. (Figure 4) The western portion of the building covered by the steeply-pitched roof included a women’s waiting room to the west, the ticket office and restrooms in the center, and the men’s waiting room to the east. The restrooms were located in the projecting bay on the north side of the building, while the ticket office and an operator’s bay
Northern Pacific Depot

were located in the projecting bay to the south. The operator’s bay was alongside the exterior wall, with windows on three sides that provided good sightlines of the railroad tracks. There was a broad passage between the ticket office and the restrooms, and thus there was only a partial separation between the men’s and women’s waiting rooms. According to the plans, the floors in this area of the building are “concrete with a cement finish.” The walls are plastered.

The next room in sequence was the baggage and express room located to the east. This room extended the full width of the building and features a brick floor in a herringbone pattern. (All other floors in the depot are concrete.) This room also included a large scale built into the floor, which has been removed, and the stairway to the basement. Built-in storage compartments are still in place. Large freight doors were located on both the north and south walls. Metal mesh grates that operate on tracks are placed on the interior side of the doors. The grates were for security purposes and remain in place.

The freight office was next in sequence and occupied about two-thirds of the width of the building. There were two rooms to the north of the freight office: the roadmaster’s office, and a room for storing records and stationery.

A hallway along the south side of the building led from the freight office to the large freight room. A fire door could be closed to separate the freight office from the freight room. The freight room was nearly seventy feet long and occupied the full width of the building. A ramp led into the freight room as the floor was raised up about three and one-half feet and is at the same level as the wooden loading platform along the north and east sides of the room. This allowed for the efficient transfer of freight directly to and from rail cars that pulled up alongside the loading platform on the spur line. The ramp also provided an efficient means to move freight in and out of the building from the lower platform on the south side of the building along the main tracks. A large scale built into the floor remains in place. The interior of the freight room is unfinished, the floor is concrete, and the rafters and hollow-tile walls are exposed. Two of the dormer windows bring light into the room. The freight room is the only room in the building that was unheated.

A “warm room” is located along the west side of the freight room and was used for goods that could not be stored in cold temperatures. At some point, partitions were installed between the freight room and the warm room, creating a separate room. This space then contained the ramp. Based on the apparent age of the partitions, it appears this space was created during the historic period.

The building includes a partial basement, which is located beneath the men’s waiting room. The basement contained the boiler. Also visible in the basement are pipe tunnels that extend around the perimeter of the building as far as the freight room. The tunnels contain heating pipes and other mechanical systems. The basement also contains a fire door. Like the one in the freight office, the fire door is set on an inclined track and was operated by a rope pulley system. It appears that if a fire ensued, the rope holding the door open would give way and gravity would cause the door to automatically close.
Northern Pacific Depot                                                                 Otter Tail, MN
Name of Property                                  County and State

**Dining Car #423/Steel Wheels Restaurant**

After remaining empty and in deteriorating condition for many years (Figure 7), the Northern Pacific Depot was converted into a restaurant and event center currently known as Dining Car 423/Steel Wheels Restaurant. The main dining room is located in the space formerly occupied by the waiting rooms, ticket office, and restrooms. The partitions for the ticket office were removed to create a larger space. (Photo 11) The space occupied by the restrooms is now used for storage. A small dining room was also partitioned off from part of the east side of the men’s waiting room. A new tile floor and tin ceiling have been installed, although the original plaster walls remain. The main dining room contains seating that is inspired by the design of the original seating in the waiting rooms. (Photo 12)

The baggage and express room, freight office, roadmaster’s office, and the storage room for records now provide space for the kitchen and new restrooms. A new u-shaped hallway was also built to provide better circulation throughout the building. The hallways feature the original herringbone brick floor from the baggage room. The hallway along the west wall of the baggage room contains original storage compartments. Original wall and ceiling treatments are also evident, including a wood wainscot and wood paneling. (Photo 13) A hallway along the south wall links with the existing hallway to the freight room, and provides a connection to the restaurant. An original mesh grate for the freight door is still in place. (Photo 14) Similarly, a hallway along the north wall provides another connection to the freight room and also features a wire mesh grate over the freight door. (Photo 15) Thus, the restrooms and kitchen are located in the interior of the building, and hallways are at the perimeter.

The freight room is now used for larger events. Originally, a ramp led up into the freight room. However, the ramp has been covered over and stairs have been installed instead. The room remains in very original condition with its exposed rafters and hollow tile walls. (Photo 16). Three original freight doors are still in place (Photo 17) as is the original scale (Photo 18).

No changes were made to the basement, other than the replacement of the furnace. The original fire door is still in place and operable (Photo 19), while only the track still remains for the fire door that was once located in the freight office.

2. **Storage Shed – Non-Contributing Building**

**Date: 2019**

There is a Storage Shed on the property, located to the east of the depot. (Photo 4) The rectangular frame building is covered with a gable roof. The south elevation features two pairs of double doors. While the building was constructed in 2019, the design was based on a plan for a Tool House dated February 7, 1905 that was found on file at the Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association. (Figure 8) Because the Storage Shed was constructed after the Period of Significance, it is considered a non-contributing building.
Assessment of Integrity

The Northern Pacific Depot retains good integrity and meets the Integrity Requirements for Railroad Depots as defined in the Multiple Property Documentation Form titled, “Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956.” The depot retains integrity of location as the building remains on its original site. Integrity of setting, feeling, and association is also very good because the depot remains within its original rail corridor. The rail corridor itself (OT-FFC-230) has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including the railroad tracks and two bridges, and, thus, the depot along with its surroundings effectively convey the historic character of the property. Moreover, the tracks are still in active use. Additionally, there are properties located along the tracks near the depot, such as large silos with an industrial character, which were typical of the warehouses and businesses that once lined the Northern Pacific tracks. Thus, the property continues to convey the feeling of a working railroad from the historic period.

The depot also retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The exterior retains good integrity. There have been no additions or major alterations and all the windows are original. The pedestrian doors have been replaced with doors based on the original doors. Three new freight doors have been installed on the exterior, although the original doors are still in place on the interior. The raised freight platform had been removed, but it has been rebuilt based on its original design. Several ventilation units have been installed along the south side of the building, although they are placed away from the exterior wall.

Some loss of integrity has occurred on the interior as a result of the adaptive reuse of the building. The ticket office has been removed, which created a larger open space for the dining room. However, there had only been a partial separation of the waiting rooms historically. The original plaster walls remain, although a new tile floor and tin ceiling have been installed.

The greatest modifications occurred in the mid-section of the building with the construction of the kitchen, restrooms, and hallways. However, evocative original fabric still remains in place in this section of the building including brick floors, metal grates covering the freight doors, wood-paneled walls and ceilings, and built-in storage. It is notable that the freight room remains in very original condition and includes the original scale and original freight doors.

Thus, in spite of the changes, the interior still recalls the building’s original use, and together with the high integrity of the exterior and its setting, the depot retains sufficient historic integrity.
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.)

- [x] 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.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years
Northern Pacific Depot ____________________________
Name of Property Otter Tail, MN
County and State

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION

___________________
___________________
___________________
___________________
___________________

Period of Significance
1920-1970

___________________
___________________

Significant Dates
1920

___________________
___________________

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

___________________
___________________

Cultural Affiliation

___________________
___________________

Architect/Builder
Northern Pacific Railroad, Architect
Conlin, J. E., Contractor

___________________
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Northern Pacific Depot is historically significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Transportation. The building is associated with the statewide historic context of “Railroad Development in Minnesota, 1862-1956.” It is also associated with the local historic context of “Building Fergus Falls, ca. 1857-1969.” Within the local context, the depot is associated with the themes of “Early Transportation” and “The Cyclone and City Development.” The Northern Pacific Depot reflects the patterns of transportation development in Minnesota, and the railroad’s importance to the settlement of Fergus Falls and its subsequent growth and development. It is also associated with the massive effort to rebuild Fergus Falls after the devastating tornado in June 1919.2

The depot is an important physical reminder of the Northern Pacific’s critical role in Fergus Falls and the surrounding area from a time when railroads provided the major form of transportation in the state. The building’s construction in 1920 followed the destruction of two previous passenger depots by fire, and the destruction of a third passenger depot during the cyclone of 1919. The new depot was the Northern Pacific’s most substantial building in Fergus Falls to date. Rather than frame construction that characterized the earlier buildings, the new depot featured brick and reinforced concrete construction.

The up-to-date building efficiently combined freight and passenger service and served as the critical interaction point between the Northern Pacific and its customers. Yet, the new building was even larger than the prior passenger and freight depots combined, reflecting the increasing importance of the Northern Pacific in the area. In addition to its passenger service, the Northern Pacific’s freight business was also of particular importance. A number of the Northern Pacific’s commercial customers developed into such large concerns that the railroad extended individual spur tracks directly to their properties. In fact, the Northern Pacific’s freight business in Fergus Falls eclipsed that of its main rival, the Great Northern Railway.3 Even after passenger service ceased, freight business continued in importance until the depot closed in 1970 following the Northern Pacific’s merger with other carriers to become the Burlington Northern.

The Northern Pacific Depot meets all three Registration Requirements for Railroad Depots under National Register Criterion A as defined in the Multiple Property Documentation Form titled,

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2 The Northern Pacific Depot was determined eligible for the National Register in September 2008 as the result of a draft National Register Nomination submitted by Chris and Brooke McConn. The building’s eligibility was further confirmed as a result of a survey of Fergus Falls conducted by Gemini Research in 2012.

3 The Great Northern Depot (OT-FFC-021) is located at 200 Mill Street North in Fergus Falls. The building is currently occupied by the Otter Tail Valley Railroad. During a survey of Fergus Falls conducted by Gemini Research in 2012, the building was determined ineligible for individual listing on the National Register because of alterations. However, the Great Northern railroad corridor has been determined eligible across the state. The survey noted that additional evaluation would be needed to determine if the Great Northern Depot remains ineligible within a “railroad corridor historic district.”
Northern Pacific Depot

“Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956:” 1) The depot was a significant contributor to the economic growth of surrounding commercial or industrial operations; 2) The railroad depot served as a significant regional distribution center for commercial or industrial products; and 3) The railroad depot served as a significant regional transportation center for passengers.

The Period of Significance begins in 1920 with the construction of the depot and ends in 1970 when operations in the building ceased. The building is locally significant.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

The establishment of Fergus Falls dates to the “townsite speculation fever” of the 1850s, when an expedition headed into west central Otter Tail County, Minnesota, to a site whose dramatic waterfalls held the promise of future waterpower. The 1859 expedition was headed by James Fergus, a Scotsman, who wrote enthusiastically about the journey to George Stephens, his friend in Moline, Illinois, urging him to come north to the Red River country and join him in developing lumber mills in the area that was to become Fergus Falls. The town was ultimately named for Fergus, although he decided to remain in Little Falls, Minnesota, where he had business interests.

Fergus Falls remained relatively unsettled until 1867 when surveyor George B. Wright purchased 160 acres along what was then called the Red River of the North (now the Otter Tail River). Wright then sold and gifted lots in the townsite, populating the area and giving him the reputation of “an advertising genius.”

With this influx of people, Fergus Falls was incorporated as a village on February 29, 1872. Just four months later, the village approved bonds to bring the railroad to Fergus Falls, but it would be over seven years before the first train actually arrived.

While not the first railroad in Fergus Falls, the Northern Pacific Railway was the first to lay tracks in Otter Tail County in 1871. The railroad’s decision to bypass the county seat of Otter Tail City may have led to its downfall; the county seat moved to Fergus Falls in 1872.

By the end of the 1870s, there were just over 1,900 people in Fergus Falls Township and all but 300 of them lived in the village. In December 1879, the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba

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7 John W. Mason, 1:485.
8 John W. Mason, 1:489, 491, 290.
9 John W. Mason, 1:284, 493.
Northern Pacific Depot

Railroad (StPM&M) (later the Great Northern Railway)\(^\text{11}\) was the first railroad to reach Fergus Falls.\(^\text{12}\) George B. Wright, however, continued to lobby to bring the Northern Pacific Railway to town, an effort that “displeased” James J. Hill, who oversaw the StPM&M. Their feud was chronicled in a 1926 newspaper article about the plan to erect a statue to Wright in Fergus Falls:

Wright is remembered as a man of tremendous energy. The St. Paul & Pacific Railway, now the Great Northern, had originally planned to build four miles south of [Fergus Falls] and graded a line through the territory, but was induced to change its course and come through Fergus Falls. Not satisfied with this, Wright made a vigorous fight and secured a branch line of the Northern Pacific.

This displeased the late James J. Hill, the railroad builder, and there was warfare between Wright and Hill up to the time of the former’s death on April 29, 1882, at the age of 47 in the prime of life and in the midst of intense activity.\(^\text{13}\)

Wright’s death from typhoid fever on April 29, 1882,\(^\text{14}\) did not end Hill’s feud with the city and in 1884, Hill moved the StPM&M machine shops from Fergus Falls to Barnesville, Minnesota.\(^\text{15}\)

Wright did, however, live to see the first Northern Pacific passenger train enter Fergus Falls on New Year’s Day 1882. The next day, the Fergus Falls Weekly Journal reported:

Yesterday the first regular [Northern Pacific] passenger train ran from Wadena to Fergus Falls, arriving promptly on time. Quite a party of citizens came over from the former place, among them C.H. Peake and Editor Whitney (prudently accompanied by their wives), Rev. John Knight and others.\(^\text{16}\)

The Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railways linked Fergus Falls with the rest of the nation and were essential to the city’s settlement and economic development. A 2012 historic property survey of Fergus Falls explains:

The land along the two railroad corridors historically contained many of Fergus Falls’ important industrial facilities, including grain elevators, flour mills, breweries, iron works, stockyards, meatpackers, and bottling works. Also located along the tracks were wholesale warehouses and companies that sold bulk products such as oil, coal, and lumber.\(^\text{17}\)

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\(^\text{12}\) *Star Tribune*, December 12, 1879, 4.

\(^\text{13}\) “Fergus Falls Plans Statue of Founder,” *Star Tribune, Minneapolis, Minnesota*, April 26, 1926, 4.


\(^\text{15}\) *Little Falls Transcript*, July 4, 1884, 4.

\(^\text{16}\) “Northern Pacific Branch Reached This City in 1882,” *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*, July 1, 1972.

The first Northern Pacific Depot was located on the site of the current depot, on the northeast corner of Hampden Avenue and Cascade Street.\textsuperscript{18} While it suffered some fire damage within the next ten years, it was not until April 5, 1892, that the \textit{Fergus Falls Weekly Journal} reported that “the passenger station of the Northern Pacific Road is burned for the second time.”\textsuperscript{19} In this instance, it was destroyed.

It appears that a new depot was not constructed right away. A map of Fergus Falls from June 1896 indicates a Northern Pacific freight house, located on the east end of the same block, but no depot.\textsuperscript{20} One had certainly been built by 1903, however, because in August of that year, it too burned down. Described as a possible arson by burglars attempting to cover their tracks, the losses included trunks filled with merchandise samples used by travelling salesmen. The Wyman, Partridge Company of Minneapolis lost six sample trunks and the wholesale jewelers Jennings Brothers of Bridgeport, Connecticut, lost two.\textsuperscript{21}

The depot was quickly rebuilt, this time across Cascade Street on the northwest corner of Hampden Avenue and Cascade. The new depot’s footprint was approximately one-third larger than the previous building, suggesting a growth in passenger service. It included a large covered platform on the east side.\textsuperscript{22}

On December 17, 1903, the \textit{Fergus Falls Daily Journal} reported, “The new Northern Pacific station . . . is practically completed and the offices of the company will be moved in today.”\textsuperscript{23} A photo of this depot shows passengers waiting for the approaching train. (Figure 2)

### 1919 Cyclone

On Sunday, June 22, 1919, a cyclone ripped through Fergus Falls,\textsuperscript{24} killing 54 people and damaging or destroying nearly 100 buildings on the south side of the city, including the Northern Pacific depot, described as “gone” for a loss of $10,000.\textsuperscript{25} (Figure 3) John Hoving, roadmaster of the Fergus Falls branch of the Northern Pacific, was described as:

... standing at the N.P. depot when the funnel shaped cloud tagged it and the structure collapsed. Hoving escaped uninjured but a man near him was struck by flying debris and instantly killed.\textsuperscript{26}

After the storm, another survivor reported:

\textsuperscript{18} Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, July 1884, 6.
\textsuperscript{19} “The N.P. Station Burned,” \textit{Fergus Falls Weekly Journal}, April 5, 1892, 3.
\textsuperscript{20} Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, June 1896.
\textsuperscript{21} “N.P. Station Burned,” \textit{Fergus Falls Daily Journal}, August 21, 1903, 3.
\textsuperscript{22} Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, January 1903.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Fergus Falls Daily Journal}, December 17, 1903.
\textsuperscript{24} “Fergus Falls Is Devastated By Fierce Cyclone,” \textit{Brainerd Daily Dispatch}, June 23, 1919, 1.
\textsuperscript{26} “Cyclone Stories: Brainerd People,” \textit{Brainerd Daily Dispatch}, June 24, 1919, 4.
There was nothing left of the Northern Pacific station except a square place where the building had stood and the station platform on which was the body of a man.  

The two men killed at the depot were travelling salesmen from Minneapolis, Harry E. Olson and W.W. Brain.  

Building the New Depot

Following the cyclone and the destruction of the depot, the Northern Pacific Railway moved its Fergus Falls operations to a temporary “two-car arrangement” while the city’s citizens anticipated the speedy construction of a new depot. They were to be disappointed. In September 1919, the Northern Pacific’s General Superintendent Newman Eline wrote in response to a query from the Fergus Falls mayor: 

The reconstruction of facilities for handling freight and passenger traffic at Fergus Falls has not been lost sight of. We have had a large number of improvements to take care of this season and work has been more or less delayed because of scarcity of material and shortage of labor. 

It might have been frustrating to the people of Fergus Falls to see that Brainerd, Minnesota, 100 miles to the east, had completed construction of a new Northern Pacific depot over the summer of 1919 and opened it with much fanfare in the fall of 1919. 

It was not until March 1920 that plans for the Fergus Falls Northern Pacific Depot were finalized. (Figures 5-6) J.E. Conlin was selected as the contractor for the $50,000 project; Conlin suggested it would have cost only $45,000 the previous fall. The site chosen for the new depot was east of the former passenger depot site, across Cascade Street. The Northern Pacific freight depot currently on that land would be removed and the new depot would be a combined passenger and freight depot. As the newspaper article announcing this new location explained, “The company did not have as much ground as it wanted on the more westerly site.” 

The plans from the Northern Pacific Railway’s Office of Chief Engineering in Saint Paul called for a combined freight and passenger depot approximately 180 by 30 feet, with half of the space

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27 “Great Roar and Blackness Heralded Fergus Falls Storm,” Star Tribune, Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 24, 1919, 2.  
30 “N.P. Station,” Fergus Falls Weekly Journal, September 18, 1919, 11.  
Northern Pacific Depot

Name of Property: Northern Pacific Depot

Count and State: Otter Tail, MN

used for the freight business. The repositioning of the depot also required two new tracks to cross Cascade Street.

Work on the new depot continued throughout the spring and summer of 1920, with Inspector F.T. Howes overseeing the work for the railroad. The *Fergus Falls Weekly Journal* reported in August that “the new Northern Pacific station here is being roofed over. The building should be ready for occupancy by the time cold weather sets in.”

It is interesting to note that the evolution of the Northern Pacific Railway’s importance in Fergus Falls is reflected in the designs of its four depots. The original 1882 depot and separate freight house were each approximately 75 by 25 feet. The freight house retained its original size and function until 1920. By its third iteration, however, the depot had expanded to approximately 100 by 30 feet, and included an attached baggage room. When the current building was constructed in 1920, combining the freight and passenger service, the new building was somewhat larger than the prior buildings combined.

With a final cost of $60,000 and an additional $15,000 for the new track arrangement, the building was officially opened at a “housewarming” on October 18, 1920, hosted by Station Agent G.W. Johnson and the Commercial Club. The *Fergus Falls Weekly Journal* boasted that:

> The building is one of the most modern buildings along the line. . . . The company does not construct any two of its larger stations alike, and the design of this one is at once convenient and substantial.

A description of the new building followed:

> The building is constructed of brick and tile and is floored in reinforced concrete. The interior woodwork is white oak and the adamant walls are coated with “Interio.” The shingles are of asbestos, making the building absolutely fireproof.

Minor work continued after the opening, and it appears that Inspector Howes became frustrated with the Station Agent Johnson. On November 8, 1920, Howes wrote to District Engineer J.T. Derrig:

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35 “City News,” 10.
36 Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, July 1884, 6.
37 Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, August 1915, 11.
38 Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, October 1924, 10.
I think Mr. Johnson’s objection to the manner of placing the hasp on the outside of the freight room door is rather farfetched and trivial in any case, and think that no attention should be given to the objection. I find that Mr. Johnson is a hard customer to satisfy and I do not believe the building will ever be in condition to meet with his unqualified approval.40

Nevertheless, The Fergus Falls Weekly Journal concluded that “the new station is one of the best along the line.”41

Freight Traffic

In building a combination passenger and freight depot, the Northern Pacific Railway recognized the importance of its freight business in the area. The Great Northern Railway, which had the only other depot in Fergus Falls, hauled more freight in Minnesota than the Northern Pacific Railway; in 1919, for example, the Great Northern exceeded Northern Pacific freight movement by six million tons.42 But the number of Fergus Falls businesses and manufacturers who relied on the Northern Pacific to transport their materials was significantly greater than those who used the Great Northern Railway.

Four years after the new depot was constructed, the Sanborn Map Company’s map of Fergus Falls showed 15 manufacturing businesses adjacent to railroad spur lines. Of these, nine were Northern Pacific spurs while only six were Great Northern spurs.43

The size of the companies the Northern Pacific served is also significant. Otter Tail Power Company received its coal from the Northern Pacific Railway spur line and in the 1920s the power company provided electricity for 2,000 square miles, including 44 towns.44 Another Northern Pacific spur line was for the Red River Milling Company, the largest flour mill in town.45 The Fergus Packing Company used the Northern Pacific to ship hog, cattle and sheep from an area that included North Dakota as well as Minnesota.46 The company’s first spur line came in 1904, when Northern Pacific General Manager H.J. Horn received approval “for a three-hundred foot spur.”47

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41 “Station Opens,” 7.
43 Sanborn Insurance Map of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, October 1924.
Northern Pacific Depot  Otter Tail, MN

Rosengren Lumber in Fergus Falls was a longtime Northern Pacific customer with a spur line. Lumber, in fact, accounted for a third of Northern Pacific Railway’s freight business in 1920, when it carried over seven million tons of “products of forests” in Minnesota. This was almost double the 3.8 million tons that the Great Northern carried. In 1968, four lumber companies were on a list of over two dozen “important customers” along the line that served Fergus Falls.

In 1932, the Northern Pacific Railway played a role in helping to feed hungry people during the Great Depression:

> Four carloads of federal farm board wheat have been received from Chicago for grinding by the Red River Milling company in [Fergus Falls]. Three cars of flour were shipped to Montana for distribution, and the fourth car of flour was turned over to the Otter Tail county chapter of the American Red Cross for distribution to unemployed and dependent people in [Otter Tail] county.

Red River Milling Company remained an important Northern Pacific Railway customer and in 1945 the railroad added an additional spur for the milling company. The company served local, regional, national, and at times international markets.

In addition to carrying goods away from Fergus Falls, the Northern Pacific Railway also brought raw materials, manufactured goods, parts, and other inventory to the city’s retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers. Even what might be considered mundane materials were newsworthy, such as gravel from Darling Township, located 100 miles southeast of Fergus Falls. Under the headline “Darling Gravel Used in Paving at Fergus Falls,” a 1923 newspaper article explained:

> Three carloads of gravel, the first consignment for use in the foundation for the paving [in Fergus Falls], arrived over the Northern Pacific Thursday afternoon. It comes from the Darling pit near Little Falls and it is expected that about 100 carloads will be shipped in.

The last passenger train left the Northern Pacific Depot in Fergus Falls on May 2, 1959, when the company found the “expense of providing service far exceeds revenues earned.”

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52 “Darling Gravel Used in Paving at Fergus Falls,” Brainerd Daily Dispatch, May 15, 1923, 1.
The Northern Pacific’s freight business, however, continued to generate significant business. A Northern Pacific report from 1968 listed the railway’s “important customers” in Fergus Falls, which included some of the city’s largest business. They included the Otter Tail Power Company, Montana Flour Mills (historically known as the Red River Milling Company), North Star Dairy, Farmers Co-op Elevator, Fergus Rendering Company, National Tea Packing Company, and Hel-O-Pak Insulation Company.”

Commercial spurs lines continued in use for businesses such as Otter Tail Power Company, Montana Flour Mills, Fergus Foundry, Fergus Dairy Co-operative, and the Fergus Rendering Company.

On March 3, 1970, the Northern Pacific Depot in Fergus Falls closed as a result of a merger with “other regional giants,” including the Great Northern, to become the Burlington Northern. The Burlington Northern continued to utilize the Great Northern Depot, and the Northern Pacific’s freight business was transferred to that location. Today, the Great Northern Depot serves as the headquarters for the Otter Tail Valley Railroad, which operates 81 miles of track, including the tracks alongside the Northern Pacific Depot.

Conclusion

As the Northern Pacific Depot celebrates its 100th anniversary, the building remains an evocative reminder of the long and important role the railroad played in Fergus Falls and the surrounding area. The depot provided vital services to both passengers and commercial enterprises that depended on the railroad to meet their transportation needs. The impact on commercial customers was particularly notable as the railroad allowed various businesses to expand beyond their local markets and become thriving regional concerns. While trains may no longer stop at the Northern Pacific Depot, their continued presence on the tracks alongside the building reflects the long and evolving history of railroads in Fergus Falls.

Additionally, the Northern Pacific Depot meets all three Registration Requirements for Railroad Depots under National Register Criterion A as defined in the Multiple Property Documentation Form titled, “Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956.”

Fergus Falls in May 1971, when “the new Amtrak system [was put in place], leaving the city without passenger service for the foreseeable future,” *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*, December 29, 1971, 8.


57 According to the company’s website, the railroad handles commodities such as agricultural products, chemicals, plastics, coal, coke, minerals, and stone, Otter Tail Valley Railroad (OTVR), accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.gwrr.com/railroads/north_america/otter_tail_valley_railroad#m_tab-one-panel.
9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)


Archives

Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association, nprha.org.

Otter Tail County Historical Society, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.
Northern Pacific Depot

Otter Tail, MN

Name of Property

County and State

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 #___________
____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #___________
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #___________

Primary location of additional data:

__X__ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other

Name of repository: _____________________________________

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): OT-FFC-022

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .72

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: ____________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude: 46.279707    Longitude: -96.071768

2. Latitude:
   Longitude:

3. Latitude:
   Longitude:

4. Latitude:
   Longitude:
Northern Pacific Depot Otter Tail, MN
Name of Property County and State

Or

UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:
2. Zone: Easting: Northing:
3. Zone: Easting: Northing:
4. Zone: Easting: Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Original Plat of Fergus Falls, Parts of Lots 3 and 4, Block 39, 100’ North of Railroad Main Centerline; and Cutler’s Third Addition, Parts of Lots 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8, Block 4, 100’ North of Railroad Main Centerline

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary include the land and building historically associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: ___Emily Ganzel and Rolf Anderson__________________________________________
organization: __________________________________________________________
street & number: _212 West 36th Street___________________________________________
city or town: __Minneapolis_____ state: __MN_____ zip code: _55408____
e-mail _roanders6@aol.com______________________________________________
television: _612-824-7807__________________________
date: February 2, 2021__________________
Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps**: A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items**: (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Northern Pacific Depot

City or Vicinity: Fergus Falls

County: Otter Tail  State: MN

Photographer: Rolf Anderson*

Date Photographed: October 31, 2020
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Otter Tail, MN
County and State

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 19. South and east elevations, facing east
2 of 19. South elevation, facing northeast
3 of 19. South elevation, east end with bay, facing east
4 of 19. South elevation and shed (right), facing west (Robert Frame)
5 of 19. East elevation, facing south (Robert Frame)
6 of 19. North and west elevations, facing southeast
7 of 19. North elevation, east end with wooden platform, facing south (Robert Frame)
8 of 19. North elevation, facing southeast
9 of 19. North elevation, west end, facing southwest (Robert Frame)
10 of 19. West elevation, facing east
11 of 19. Former waiting room, facing east
12 of 19. Former waiting room, facing northwest
13 of 19. Former baggage room, west wall, facing north
14 of 19. Former baggage room with iron grate, south wall, facing east
15 of 19. Former baggage room with iron grate, north wall, facing west
16 of 19. Freight room, facing east
17 of 19. Original freight door, south wall, facing southeast
18 of 19. Built-in scale in freight room, facing northeast
19 of 19. Detail of fire door, basement, facing east

*All photos by Rolf Anderson unless otherwise noted.

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.
Figure 1. Aerial view noting the location of the Northern Pacific Depot. Image Maxar Technologies
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property
Otter Tail, MN
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Figure 2. Northern Pacific Depot, ca. 1904. Otter Tail County Historical Society Photo #9931
Figure 3. Destruction of the Northern Pacific Depot in the 1919 Cyclone. Otter Tail County Historical Society Photo #4015
Figure 4. Plans, sections, and elevations for the depot. McConn draft nomination form.
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Otter Tail, MN
County and State

Figure 5. Northern Pacific Depot, c.a. 1920. Otter Tail County Historical Society Photo #4235
Northern Pacific Depot  Otter Tail, MN
Name of Property  County and State

Figure 6. Northern Pacific Depot, c.a. 1920. Otter Tail County Historical Society Photo #50320
Figure 7. Northern Pacific Depot, ca. 2012. Photo courtesy Craig Gantner
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Otter Tail, MN
County and State

Figure 8. 1905 plan for a Tool House. Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association
Northern Pacific Depot
Name of Property

Figure 9. Bing map with distant and close views of the Northern Pacific Depot