

## RAILROADS and DEPOTS

### DIXON COUNTY, NEBRASKA

By Jim van Delden, Cowboy Line Division

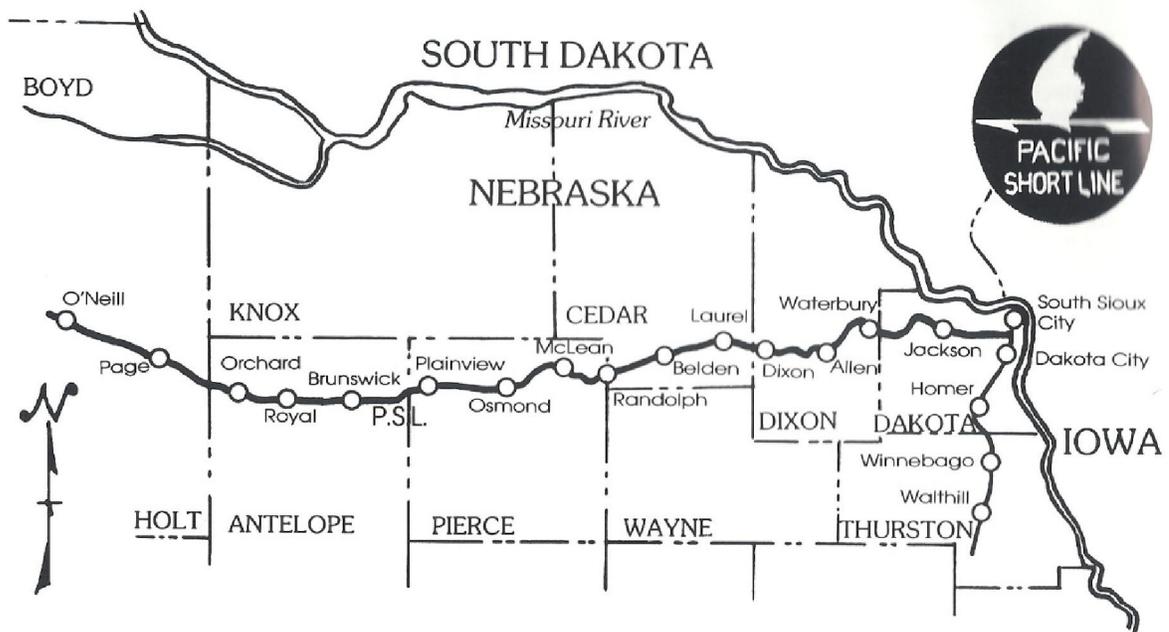
Exciting events took place in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the growing nation extended westward. President Jefferson and Congress authorized the acquisition of a vast tract of land west of the Missouri River. Lands appropriated by the French from the indigenous peoples now became available to the fledgling republic and was called the Louisiana Purchase. Exploration of this territory rested on the shoulders of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Their Corps of Discovery traced the Missouri River to its origins and the explorers eventually reached the Pacific Ocean during their epic voyage in the years 1804-1806. Paddling upstream from St Louis, they were to pass the early settlements that eventually became Omaha, Nebraska and Sioux City, Iowa.

Fast forward some five decades later, with the Civil War pitting the North against the South, President Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862. This empowered the nation to offer incentives and payment for the construction of a transcontinental railroad that would connect the East and West coasts with a twin ribbon of steel. The Central Pacific started construction in an eastward direction in 1863 and the Union Pacific followed by heading westward in 1865. A combined 1776 rail miles later, the two companies would meet at Promontory Point, Utah in 1869.

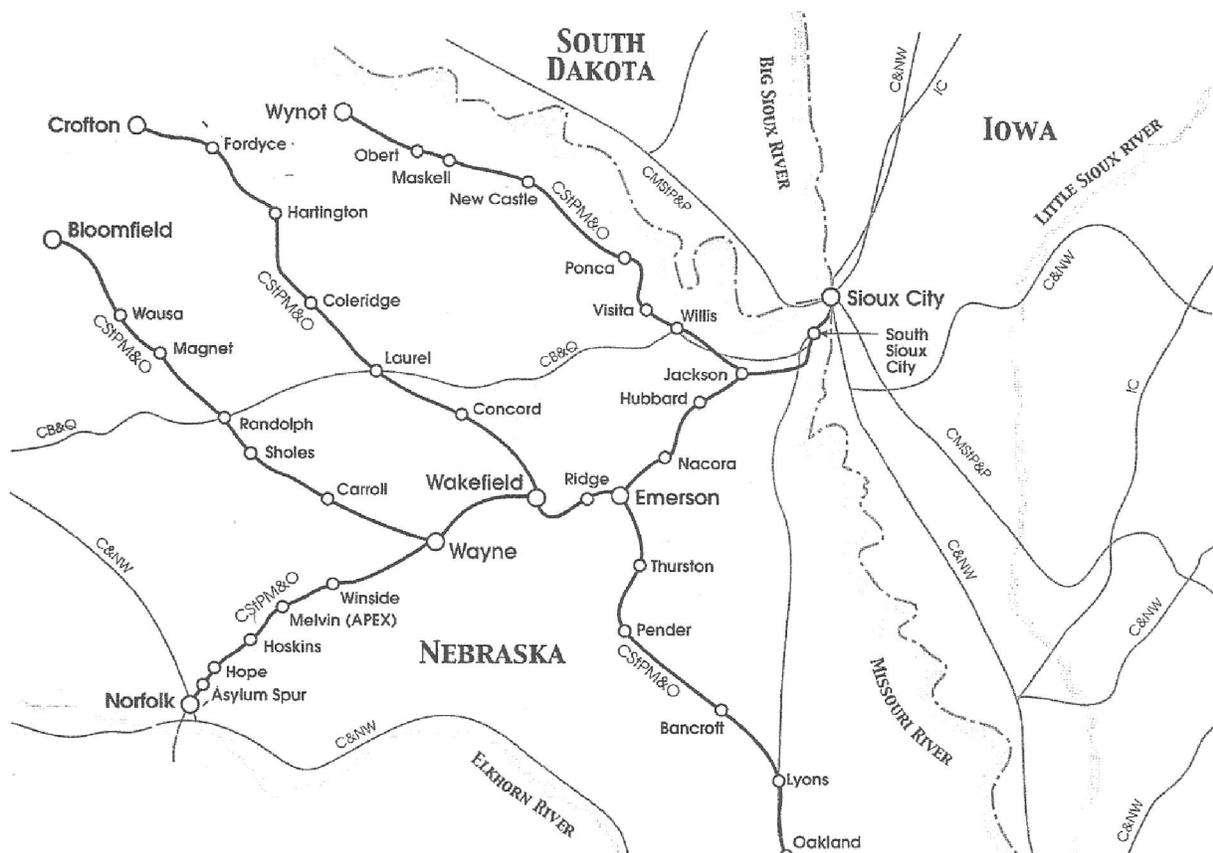
The initial Pacific Railroad Act of 1861, called for three rail lines that would eventually merge near North Platte, Nebraska, and continue as the Transcontinental Railroad. One of these was to go through Sioux City, Iowa, but these plans were revised, and the eastern terminus was subsequently located in Council Bluffs/Omaha. By 1868, the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad made its local debut. The Illinois Central followed soon and so did the Sioux City and St Paul Railroad. The latter was joined by other smaller companies and in time became the Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway, known later as the Omaha Road. Growing in population and by the mushrooming of the meatpacking industries, Sioux City, Iowa, was entertaining plans for constructing a railway all the way west to Salt Lake City, Utah, for distribution of meat products.

The Pacific Short Line became the name of this proposed railroad and it was to be built in three segments. Local interests were to construct the Nebraska and Western Railway from Covington

(early name of South Sioux City), Nebraska, across the northern portion of the state to the Wyoming state line. The second portion of the line through Wyoming would be the responsibility of the Wyoming and Eastern Railway Company. From the Utah/Wyoming border, the Salt Lake Valley and Eastern Railway would then complete the Pacific Short Line into Salt Lake City. In mid 1890, the initial portion of the line, 128 miles, was completed into O'Neill, Nebraska. Due to financial difficulties, no further construction was accomplished. The segments in Wyoming and Utah were never begun. The Nebraska and Western Railway became the Sioux City, O'Neill, and Western Railway Company in 1891, and by 1899, following additional legal wrangling; it changed into the Sioux City and Western, and eventually became a part of James Hill's Great Northern Railway. By 1907, an operating agreement assigned the Sioux City and Western to be part of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. The line coursed through Dixon County and called on three depots in the communities of Waterbury, Allen, and Dixon.

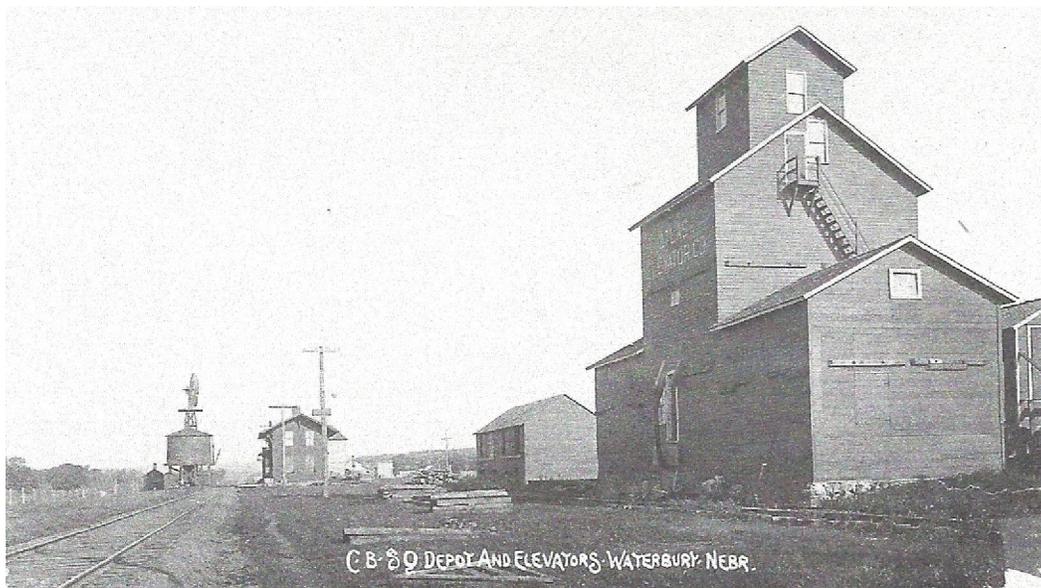


Gold was discovered in South Dakota's Black Hills by the mid 1870's and this fueled desires for additional rail transportation west from Sioux City, Iowa. Dixon County in northeastern Nebraska became a partner in building the narrow gauge Covington, Columbus, and Black Hills Railroad from Coburn Junction just west of South Sioux City, Nebraska all the way to Ponca, situated in northern Dixon County on the Missouri River and possibly beyond. By 1876, Nebraska's only narrow gauge railroad was functioning but soon it became evident that it was not a profitable business. The shipping of grain, cattle and hogs from Ponca eastward necessitated off-loading and re-loading the freight on standard gauge equipment on arrival in Sioux City. Also, fraudulent practices by the Covington, Columbus and Black Hills Railroad's management such as not paying their workers did not endear the railroad to the general public. Bankruptcy and receivership soon followed and Dixon County lost out on their investment. The Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroad acquired the property and rebuilt the narrow gauge into a standard gauge line. Additional construction extended the line to Newcastle and Maskell, with both communities situated in the northern part of Dixon County. The Omaha Road, later absorbed by the Chicago and North Western stopped at depots in Ponca, Newcastle, and Maskell until its demise.



In 1869, the Omaha and North Western Railroad incorporated in Omaha, Nebraska. It planned to construct a railroad from Omaha in a northwesterly direction through Blair, Nebraska, towards the Niobrara River as it emptied into the Missouri River. The O&NW connected with the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad. The latter originated in Sioux City, Iowa, and trains headed southward to the Missouri Valley area, then turned west across the Missouri River. From Blair northward, passengers and freight both continued the journey through such towns as Herman, Tekamah, Oakland, Pender, eventually reaching the Dixon County community of Emerson. Previously known as Kennesaw Junction, Emerson was a busy junction town as it received and dispatched trains westward to Norfolk, Nebraska. Rail traffic also came and left in an easterly direction for Sioux City, Iowa. Heading in a southerly direction, the destination was Omaha, Nebraska. From Emerson, one could reach the depots in Wakefield and Concord, the other towns in Dixon County on the Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railroad.

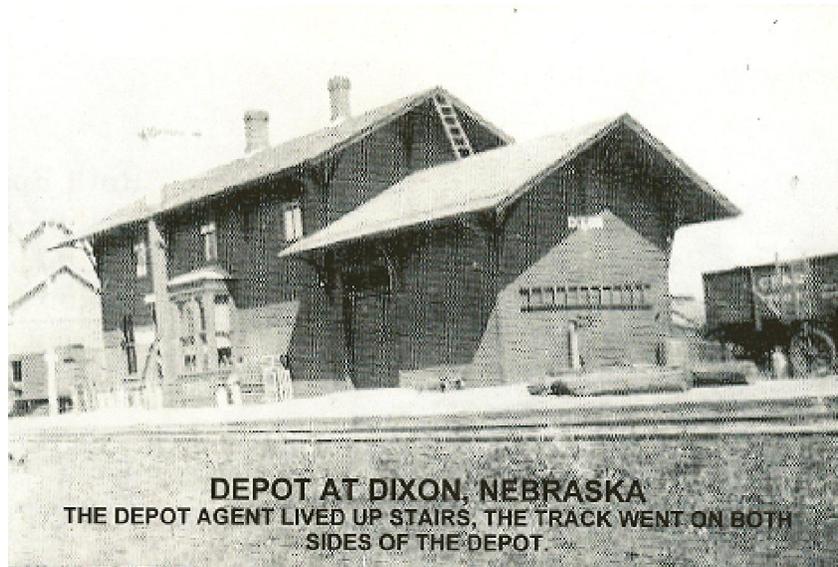
The Pacific Short Line whose eastern portion was the Nebraska Western Railway was the only section completed. This section was known as the Sioux City, O'Neill and Western Railway in later years and still later as the Sioux City and Western. It was then absorbed by the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad which serviced the Dixon County depots of Waterbury, Allen, and Dixon.



George Herrick donated 80 acres for the town site. This property had a big spring and the railroad built a water tower and reservoir to provide for the steam locomotives. Thus, Waterbury was born. Known locally as the Sioux City and Ogden, the railroad was completed in 1890 and carried passengers, grain, produce and livestock. By the early 1900's, the line was absorbed by the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy. Passenger service was discontinued in 1942, but rail service continues today as the Northeast Nebraska Railroad (NENE), headquartered in Osmond, Nebraska. It specializes in agricultural products including ethanol produced at the Jackson plant.



A donation of 40 acres in 1890 by Henry Allen started the community of Allen near the Pacific Short Line Railroad. By 1893, the town was thriving with "general and hardware stores, grain dealers, dray lines, doctors and undertaker". Fire destroyed the business district in 1913, but it was soon rebuilt. In 1939, the Burlington Route's Zephyr paid the town a visit. Living quarters were available for the agents on top of the depot. By the 1960's, the building was razed. Freight service is carried by the NENE Railroad.

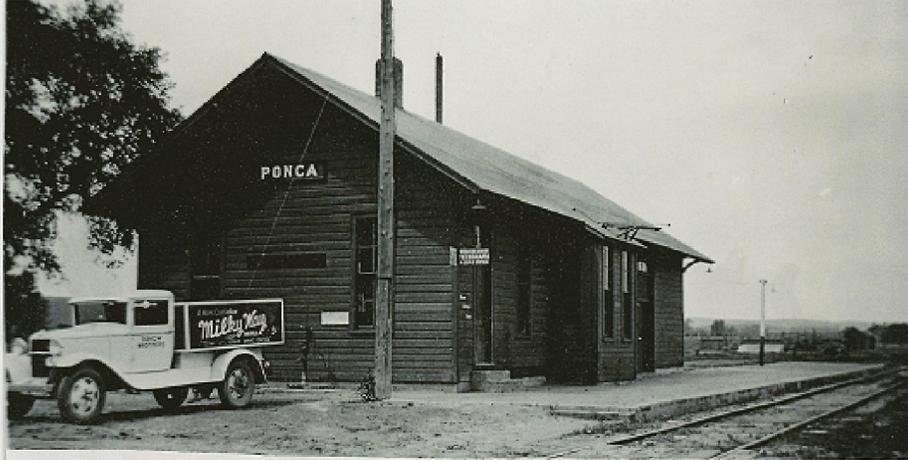


Further west, the village of Dixon was platted in 1890 by a railroad engineer who was homesick for his home in Dixon, Illinois. A grain elevator was built in 1891 and a flour mill and creamery soon followed several years later. Settled mostly by people of Irish descent, this community had a healthy rivalry with neighboring Concord, populated by people of mostly Swedish origins. Currently, Dixon still has freight train traffic, several large elevators, a post office, new community center, and Euny's Place.

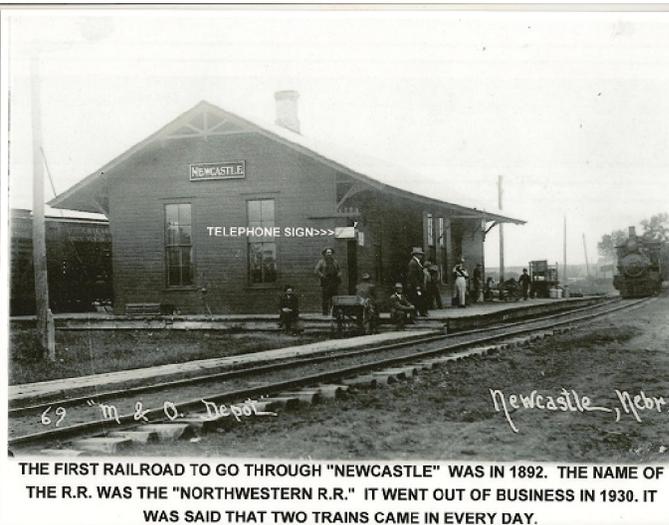
Ponca was established in 1856. Located on the Missouri River, steamboat traffic and a twice weekly stage coach had provided the bulk of transportation by 1870. In 1876, the narrow gauge Covington, Columbus and Black Hills Railroad arrived in Ponca. By 1881, the population was 1200, and the town boasted four hotels, three newspapers, and a "fine, thoroughbred horse track". Purchased by the Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroad, it was boasting standard track in 1880. The Omaha Road continued its westward expansion to Newcastle, Maskell, and Wynot. The branch line was abandoned in 1933.

YOKO, NE

5-19-33



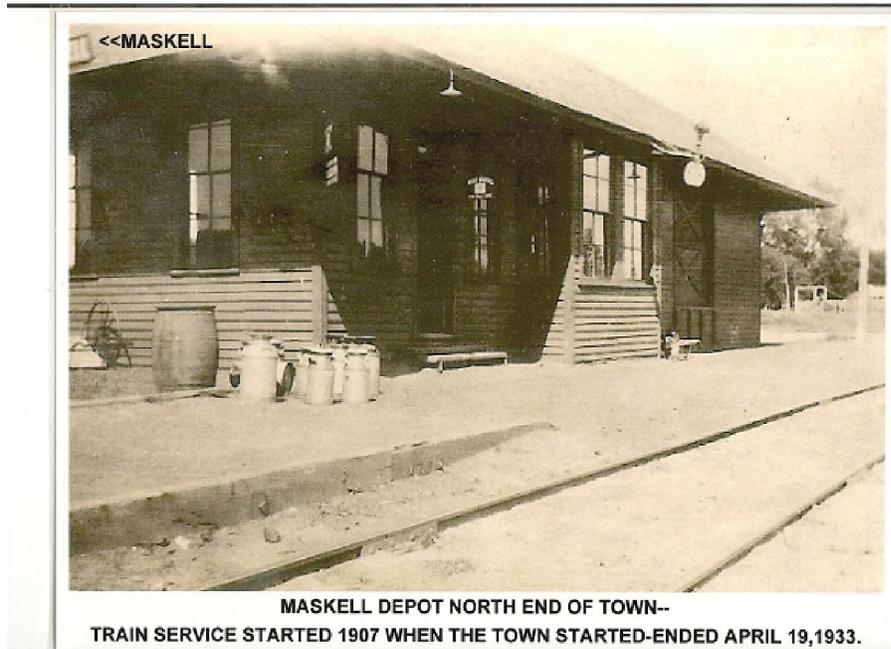
THIS PHOTO OF THE DEPOT SHOWS THAT WESTERN UNION TELGRAPHS COULD BE INITIATED FROM THE STATION. ALSO SHOWN IS THE DELIVERY TRUCK BELONGING TO RAKOW BROTHERS (HERBERT AND ALFRED) WHO OWNED AND OPERATED A TOBACCO AND CANDY WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORSHIP FOR MANY YEARS.



THE FIRST RAILROAD TO GO THROUGH "NEWCASTLE" WAS IN 1892. THE NAME OF THE R.R. WAS THE "NORTHWESTERN R.R." IT WENT OUT OF BUSINESS IN 1930. IT WAS SAID THAT TWO TRAINS CAME IN EVERY DAY.

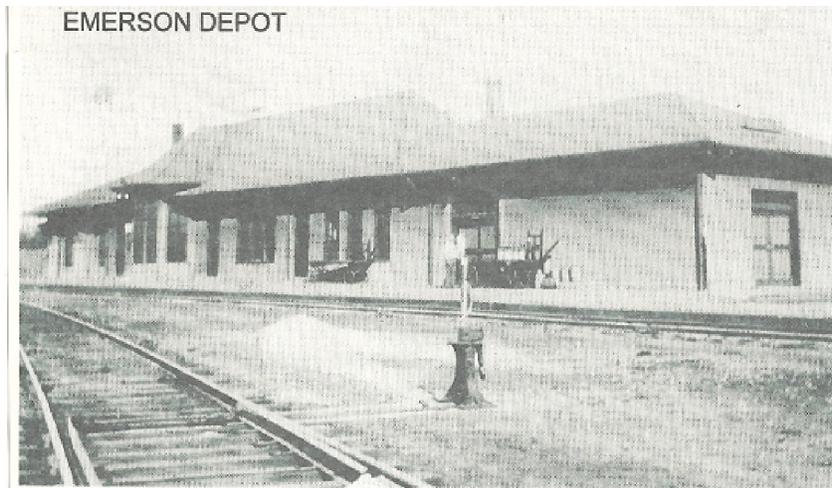
The Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroad (Omaha Road) continued the line to Newcastle by 1893. Its arrival sparked even further growth since the birth of the village in 1856. One of the newcomers, Gustavus Smith built a large house that he named "New Castle". The name simply stuck. The peak population reached 500 in 1911, but a spark from a July 4<sup>th</sup> firecracker that year burned down a majority of the business district. The town was rebuilt and

continued to thrive. Rail service stopped in 1933 with abandonment of the branch line to Wynot, Nebraska.



John Maskell settled on the banks of Lime Creek in 1856, following the trail of native peoples who settled that area many centuries ago. Successfully petitioning by the town fathers to the officials of the Omaha Road, the line was continued west of Newcastle and completed to Maskell by 1907. Many merchants settled in the town. Livestock and produce were carried to eastern markets by the railroad. Rail service ended in 1933.

The Omaha and North Western Railroad was built northward from Omaha reaching Emerson in Dixon County. Bought out by the Omaha Road and still later absorbed as part of the Chicago and North Western Railway, the line also connected with two other Dixon County towns, Wakefield and Concord.

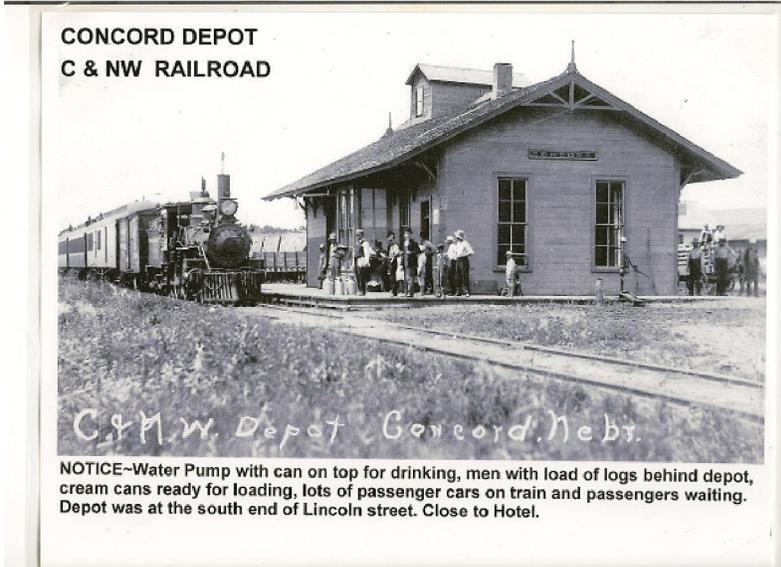


Earlier named Kennesaw Junction, but realizing that there already was a town in Nebraska by that name, Emerson was named for the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1881, Emerson was established as a railroad junction and division point, receiving and dispatching 67 trains in three different directions daily. The town had section houses, car scales, stockyards and a roundhouse. Several banks, a handful of hotels, civic organizations and a cigar factory graced its history. A portion of the roundhouse is still standing, and a CNW caboose can be seen near the old rail yard. The last train passed through town in 1977.

Further to the west on the banks of Logan Creek, a town site was surveyed for the Omaha Road. Named for the surveyor, it became Wakefield. An early benefactor of the new town was Willard Graves. His son Philo continued much of the town's development. By 1881, a depot was built and regular rail service was established. Some years later, a second rail depot replaced the older one and it stands to this day. Locals say there were upwards of two dozen trains arriving and departing Wakefield in its heyday. An egg processing plant was built in the 1950's, utilizing rail transportation. By 1977 however, the last train departed, never to return. This is the only railroad depot still in existence in Dixon County and in the past three years has been refurbished as the Wakefield Depot and Museum.



Further west and to the north on the Omaha Road's branch line to Crofton, Nebraska, early settlers arrived in the late 1850's near the area that was to become Concord, a name the wife of the Omaha Road's president had suggested. Rail service began in 1882 and provided the means of growth to this village. A telephone company and a light plant provided service. Two banks were established and years later, a nationally known plant nursery provided employment. As in many smaller communities, competition from highways and the trucking industry was the reason for eventually discontinuing rail service.



Bibliography:

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