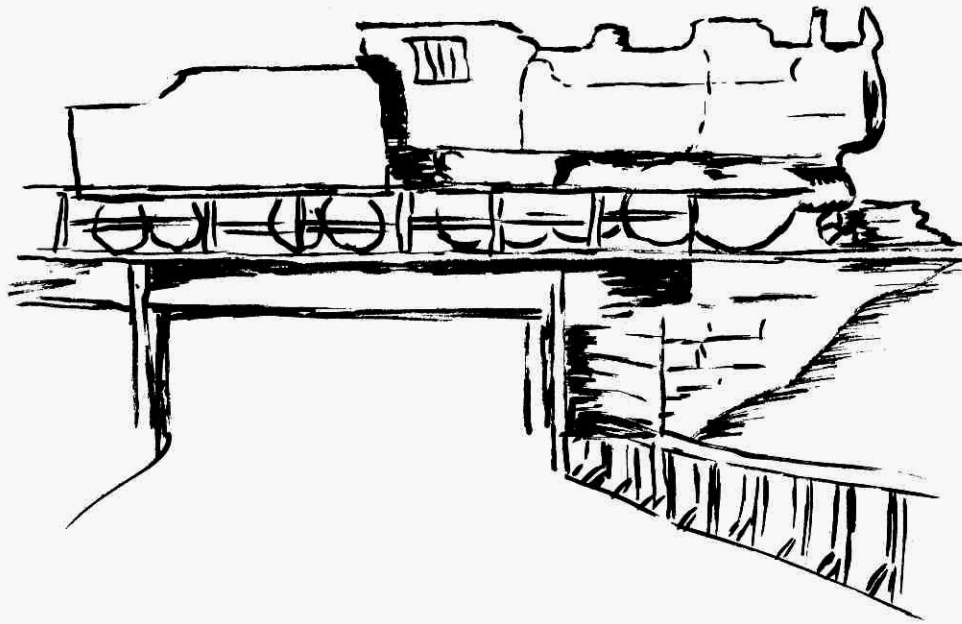


# The Chicago Great Western in Elma



*submitted by Donna McGrane*

CHAPTER 2  
by S. L. Kramer

Transportation in the years prior to the railroad was slow and uncertain, and often hazardous. Areas of commerce were separated by sloughs and unbroken prairie, traversed only by dirt (or mud) roads. Freight was moved by ox teams and carts, and passenger travel was by tedious and tiresome stagecoach. The coming of the railroad brought with it the promise of development and progress.

There was considerable enthusiasm for railroad building, not only among area residents, but among promoters as well. One plat of Howard County, drawn sometime between 1882 and 1886, showed five rail lines crossing the county. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway (part of which was formerly the McGregor Western R.R., and which later became the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific R.R.) ran from Cresco to Bonair, Lime Springs Station, and Chester, and then into Leroy, Minnesota. The Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sea Coast Rail Way Co. is depicted entering Howard County from Leroy, Minnesota, then southeast to Saratoga, following Crane Creek to about 1½ miles west of Lourdes, and continuing into Chickasaw County. The Minnesota, Iowa & South Western R.R. is shown running from the southwest corner of Howard County to 1½ miles north of Cecilia, to just southeast of Busti, then northeast into Cresco. An unnamed line is shown from Cresco, going southwest to Vernon Springs, then south to one mile west of Protivin, and into Chickasaw County. Of the foregoing, only the Milwaukee Road line was actually built.

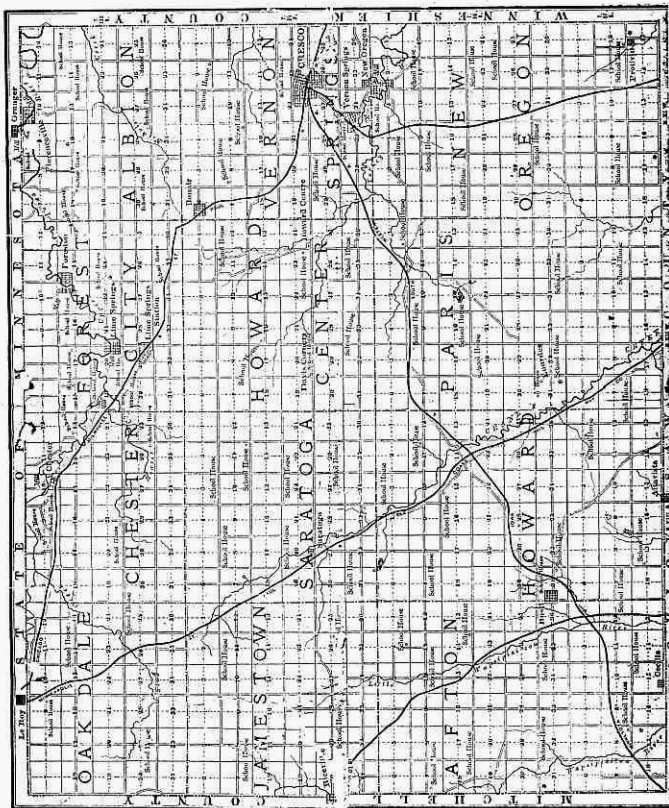
The other line shown on the above-mentioned plat is unnamed, and it is unclear whether it is supposed to be the Minnesota & Northwestern R.R., the predecessor of the Chicago Great Western, or its would-be competitor, which was called the Chicago, Iowa & Northern Pacific Railroad. The plat shows it running from Riceville into Section 36 of Afton Township, just west of Busti. This was the route of the M&NW, which continued southeasterly into Alta Vista. But the route on the plat continues south along the Little Wapsie into Chickasaw County, which seems to have been the CI&NP route.

The first attempt to build a railroad in the area was between 1865 and 1870. The Williams Company had tracts of land graded and ready for rail from Dubuque to Owatonna, Minnesota, but due to a lack of funds, the project was never completed. The roadbed ran somewhere near the Andrew Gardner farm about two miles west of Alta Vista.

Elma almost had two railroads in the 1880s. One was graded from Independence to Riceville in 1885, passing just west of town, near the creek. This was the Chicago, Iowa and Northern Pacific Rail Way Co. Lemuel Potter gave this road 14 acres of land, located where Colonial Manor is now situated, and running northerly along the east side of the Little Wapsipinicon River. According to an early source, the scheme was so uncertain that real estate prices were largely unaffected.

C. K. BERG,

Recorder of Deeds, Abstracts of Titles, Real Estate, and Loan Agent  
CRESCO, HOWARD COUNTY, IOWA.



Will Furnish Accurate and Complete Abstracts, and Reliable Valuation of Property in  
Howard County on Short Notice.

All Business Transacted to my care will Receive Prompt Attention. C. K. BERG,

One year later the Minnesota & Northwestern was graded into Elma. The two railroads were to cross north of Elma, but the CI&NP was never completed. It either failed for lack of funds, or, according to one source, it was bought out by the M&NW. Part of the grade still remains near the Jack McAvoy farm just north of Elma.

The promoters of the soon-to-be renowned Chicago Great Western were more successful. The plans for the Minnesota & Northwestern Railroad lay dormant for 29 years, until the franchise was acquired by Mr. A. B. Stickney in 1883. A depression in 1884 drastically reduced the price of steel rail. Taking advantage of the lower costs, Stickney built the M&NW with 60-pound rail rather than the 56-pound rail originally intended. This meant better and faster track for less money. Construction began northward at Randolph, Minnesota, in September, 1884, and by May, 1885, the tracks had reached to just 7 miles south of St. Paul. Rails were then laid south of Randolph to Mona, Iowa, just south of Lyle, Minnesota. The line officially opened to St. Paul on September 27, 1885.

Meanwhile, in May, 1885, the Dubuque and Northwestern Railway agreed to become part of M&NW RR.

With the D&NW, Stickney could build south and east of Hayfield, Minnesota, connect at Compton, Iowa, about 50 miles west of Dubuque, and then route this system into Chicago. The D&NW project had become stalled in 1884, but following the merger agreement, construction soon got under way. By May of 1886, 24 miles of track from Dubuque to Farley was complete.

By early July, building from the north had been completed to 20 miles south of Hayfield. Work on the roadbed through Elma had begun around April, using men and horses, wagons, and wheel barrows. Workers boarded in nearby farms, in Elma and surrounding towns. On August 21, 1886, scheduled freight and passenger service was opened to Elma. Located halfway between the terminals (131 miles south of St. Paul and 122 miles west and north of Dubuque), Elma was soon made the division point. Work progressed steadily southward, and the M&NW met the D&NW near Oneida on October 20, 1886. Local train service began immediately. The first through passenger train, from St. Paul to Dubuque, ran on November 28, 1886, and the first through passenger train in the opposite direction ran the following day.

The land east of Busti Avenue in Elma, a 36-acre tract, belonged to Mr. Truman Robison. He deeded half of this land to the Minnesota Loan & Debenture Co., a creation of Stickney's which undertook construction arrangements for the M&NW. Mr. Lemuel Potter gave the M&NW 80 acres of land bordering the west side of Busti Avenue. An eight-stall roundhouse, turntable, machine shop, coal chutes, water tank, workers' clubhouse, and a windmill-water tank were built there. The president of the M&NW, Mr. A. B. Stickney, asked Lemuel Potter for permission to name the new town after his youngest daughter, Elma. Mr. Potter drove the first train through Elma and a very big celebration followed.

The Minnesota & Northwestern continued to expand reaching Chicago, and later Kansas City. In December, 1887, the M&NW was consolidated into the Chicago, St. Paul & Kansas City Co. A contest was held in 1889, asking the nation's ticket agents to design a logo for the new road. The winner was a Wabash Railroad employee who submitted a sugar maple leaf design with the CStP&KC's system shown thereon as the veins of the leaf. The road became known as "The Sugar Maple Leaf Route," and later simply "The Maple Leaf Route."

Economic difficulties by the end of the eighties brought about a restructuring by Stickney of the railroad's finances, and the CStP&KC was reorganized in 1893 as the Chicago Great Western Railway. Stickney's foresight and quick action, along with his associations with certain British investment firms, enabled the new company to survive the panic of 1893.

Steam locomotives brought prosperity to Elma. In a few years it boasted a population of nearly 1500, numerous business establishments, and "a saloon almost every other place." The railroad supported some 300 families, and the first and second grades of the Elma Public School totaled over 90 boys and girls at one point.

# CHICAGO GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY



## DES MOINES ST. JOSEPH KANSAS CITY AND THE SOUTHWEST

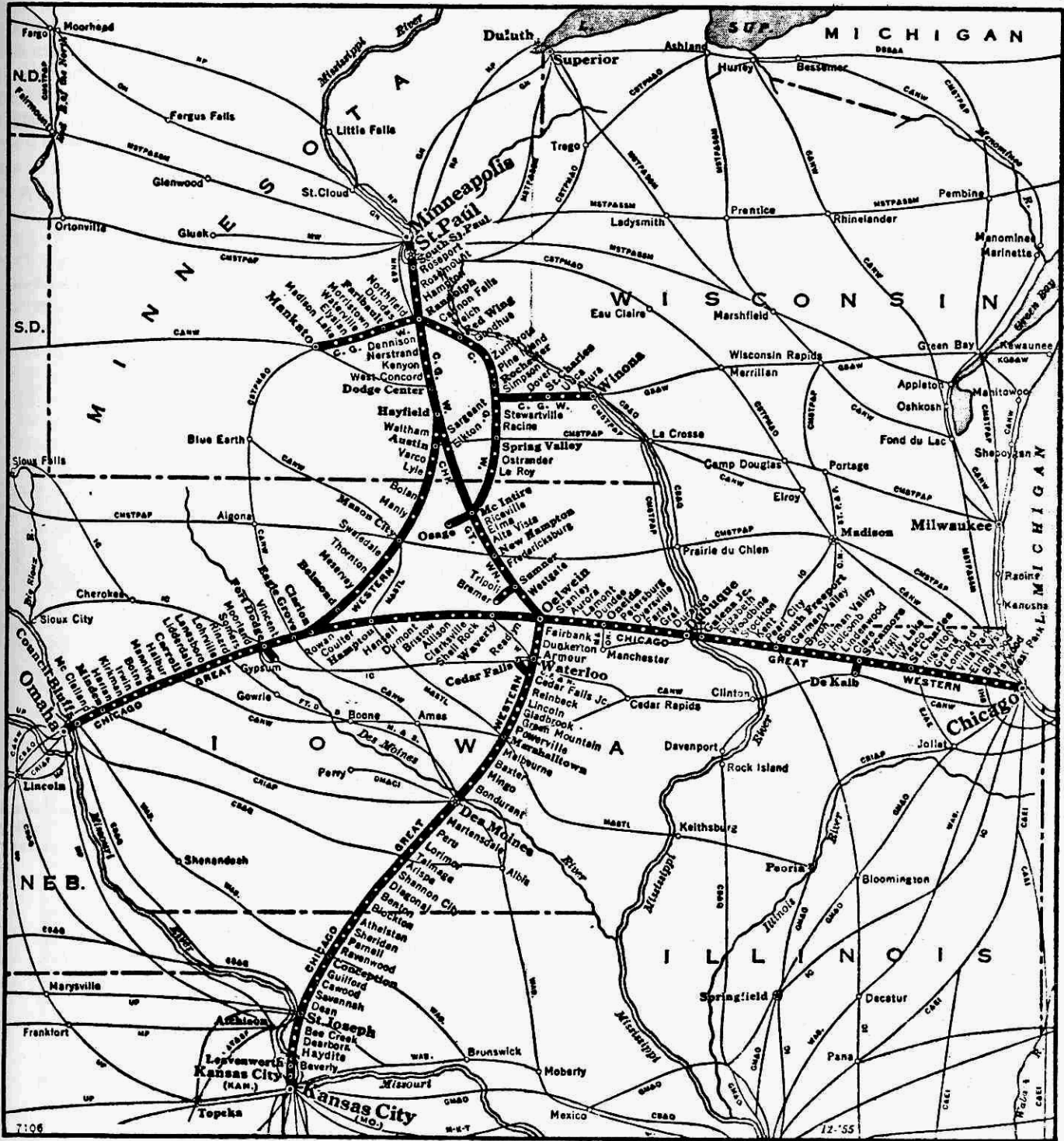
September 15, 1902.

McGILL-WARNER CO., ST. PAUL, MINN.

Cover of 1902 CGW timetable displays logo of "The Maple Leaf Route."



# CHICAGO GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY



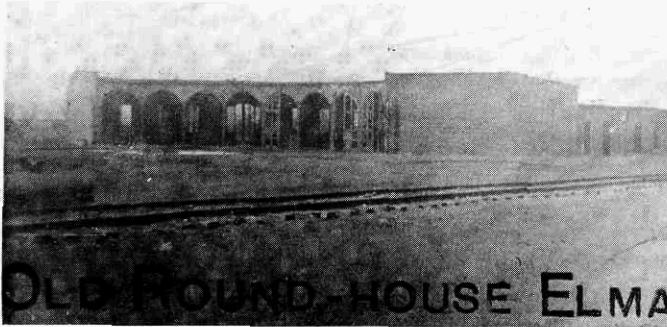
Map of CGW system from 1957 timetable.

The progress of the railroad, however, worked to Elma's disadvantage. The terminals now being Chicago, St. Paul and Kansas City, Elma was no longer central. By 1894, there was a competition between Elma, Sumner, and Oelwein for the site of the

new CGW Shops. This repair facility would create a great number of jobs and assure the city's importance as long as there was a railroad. Oelwein was logically situated and was favored by the railroad's management, and soon was selected. About 1896, the round-

house was moved, and with it most of 300 families moved.

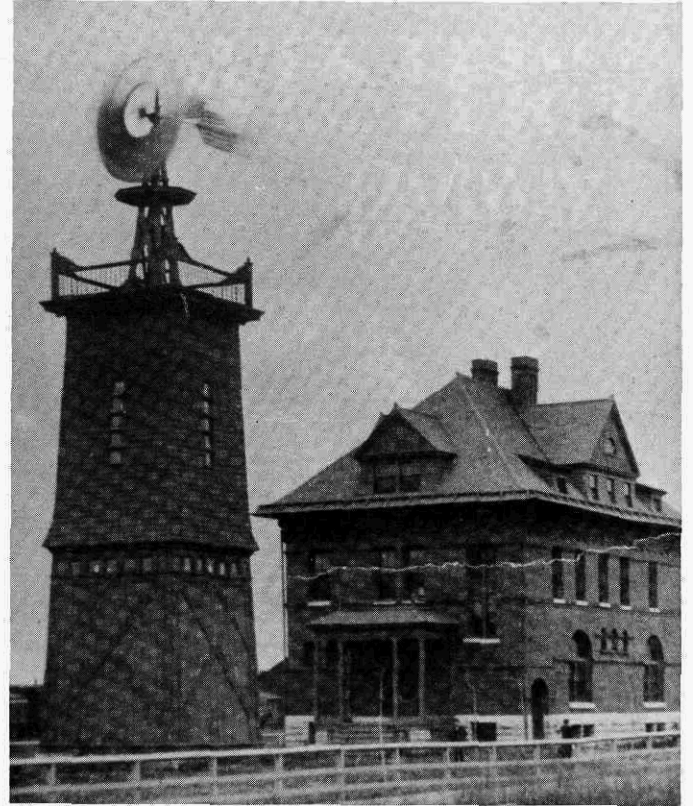
The railroad yard in Elma had been a fairly large facility. Initially, it was built with 9 or 10 yard tracks (including passing tracks) in addition to the main line. But as Elma's railroad fortunes declined, the number of yard tracks was down to 6 or 7 by 1905, and to 2 or 3 by 1981. The north switch was located about 500' north of Mead Creek, near which the old Co-op Creamery was located. The south switch was approximately 3800' south, and was across from the highway intersection at the southeast corner of the public school playground. A white concrete milepost with black recessed lettering, situated just north of the Equity (in later years), read "KC 399," indicating the distance to Kansas City was 399 miles. The yard also contained coal chutes and a water tower. The viaduct was not built until about 1901. Until then, Main Street ran east to the railroad property, and then angled southeast about one block, to a grade crossing where Busti met Oak Street.



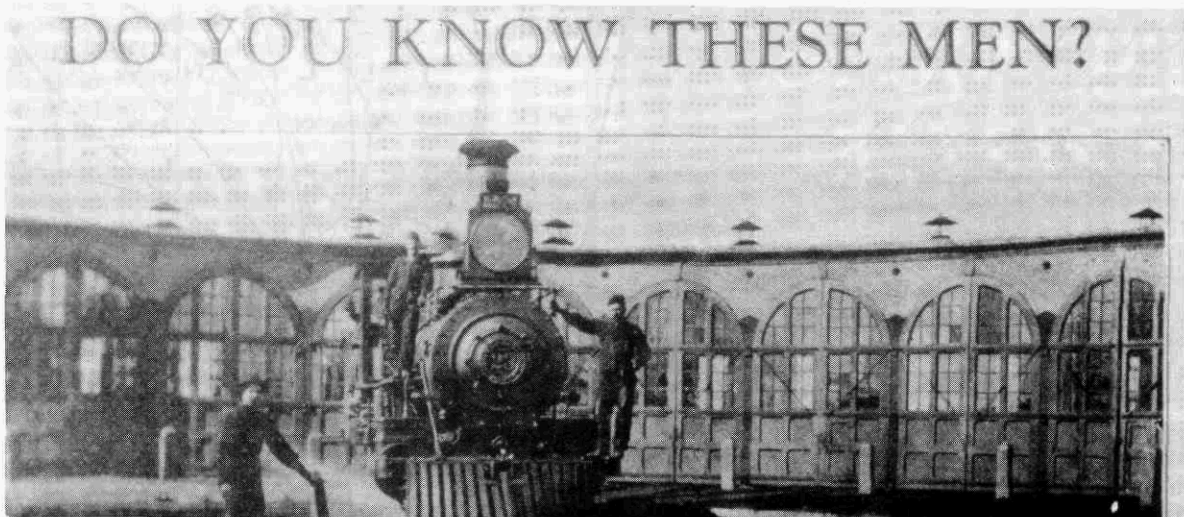
The roundhouse and turntable were located west of the main line in the area halfway between Birch and Grove streets (Highway 272). A machine shop was also located alongside the roundhouse. The roundhouse had 8 stalls, said to hold 12 engines, and was used to service and repair locomotives. Because of its design, it was impractical to run a steam locomotive in reverse for any great distance, which meant the engine had to

be turned around for its return trip. The turntable was used for this purpose, and also for moving engines from one roundhouse track to another. A lead track approached the roundhouse from both the north and the south. This facility, built about 1886, was used for 10 years, until about 1896, when Oelwein was chosen as the site for the new shops. The remains of the brick-lined turntable pit, grown over with weeds and filled with tree stumps and branches, can still be seen today.

The original depot was located beside the main line



Railroad Club House in Elma. Built in 1887 for the use of railroad employees away from home, it contained "bathrooms, reading rooms, and other home-like comforts." Unusual windmill-water tower to the south was 25' high.



Engine 23, an early M&NW 4-4-0, poses on the turntable at Elma. Photo is from the 1890s.

opposite the intersection of Plum and Busti, behind the present location of Zeimetz' Service Station. To the north of the depot, and across the street from the Iowa State Liquor Store (formerly the Interstate Power Co. office), was the railroad Club House. This area is presently occupied by Elma Lumber. The Club House was provided by A. B. Stickney, President of the M&NW RR, for the use of railroad employees away from home, free of charge, for the purpose of diversion, rest and recreation. To the south of the Club House was an unusual windmill-water tower, 25' high, across from the Bluebird Tavern, which was then a hotel-restaurant.

In 1894, Elma's population was 1,100. North of the depot and east of the main line, was a siding called the team track. At some point, probably in later years, a wooden unloading platform was built beside the team track. The platform had a ramp leading down the south end, to facilitate unloading equipment such as farm implements. The platform remained into the 1960s. East of the team track was the house track. Located along the house track, just south of Wood Street, where C&H Farm Service now stands, was the Gilchrist Grain warehouse. About half a block north was the Hunting Elevator, and north of it was the Lewis Grain warehouse. Further north, about where the Equity is, was the Interstate Grain warehouse, followed by a coal bin, the stockyards, and then the Elma Cooperative Creamery. A water tower with a capacity of 40,000 gallons was southwest of the creamery about 100', next to the house track, but it was probably built

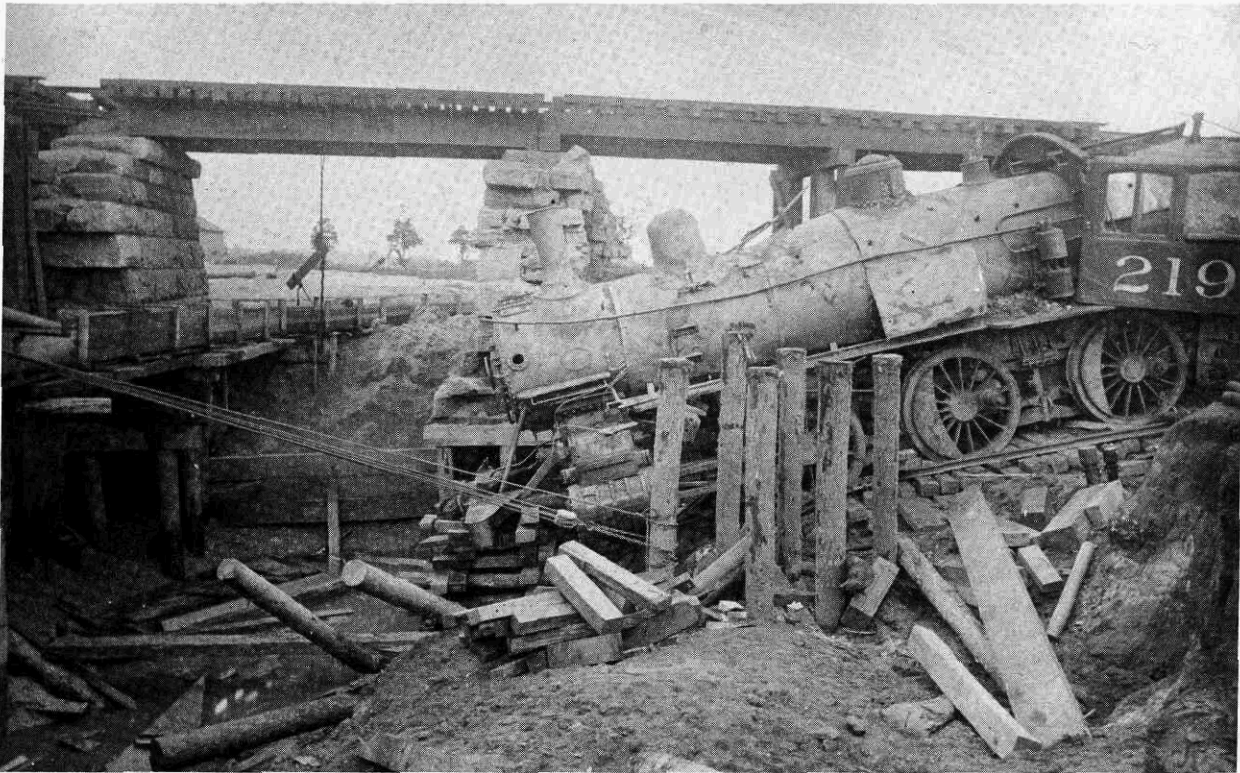
about the same time as the roundhouse.

No businesses were located on the west side of the yard. West of the main line was the passing track and six yard tracks. The north and south roundhouse leads ran off of the track farthest west, which was called the ice house track after the ice house was built about 1904.

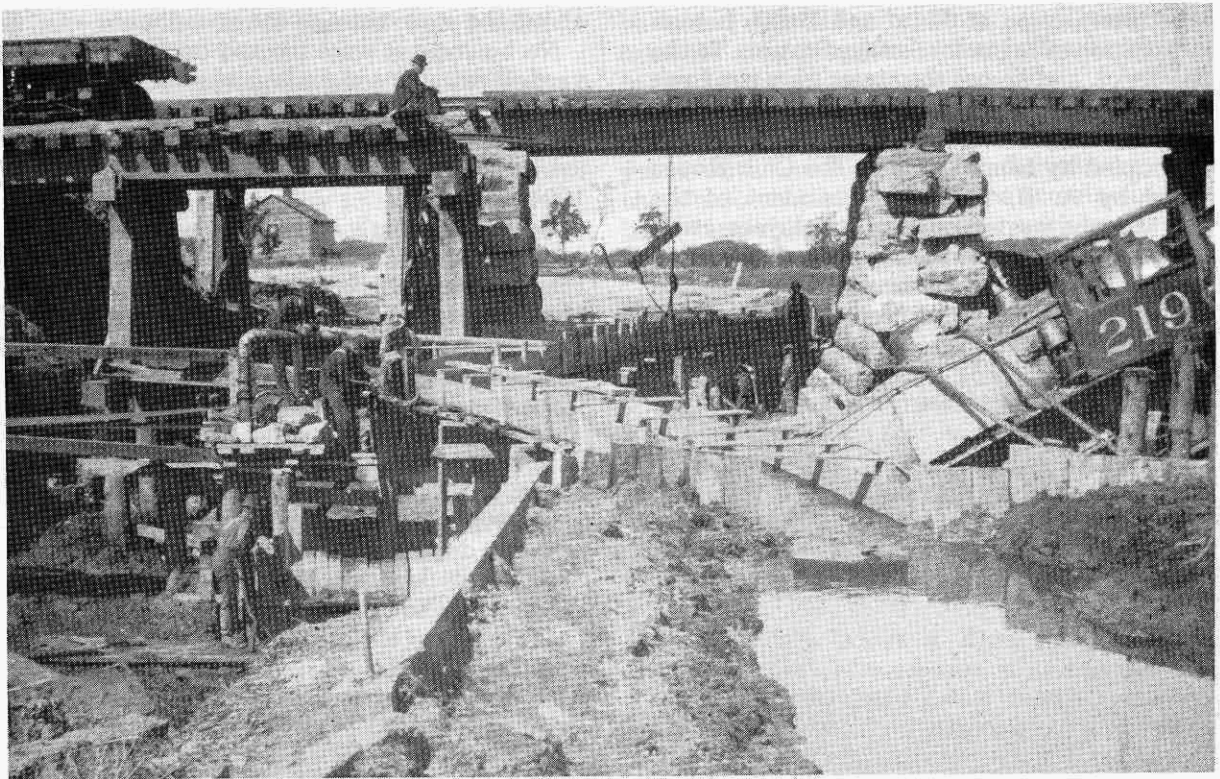
By 1900, Elma's population was 1,400. The Northwestern Iowa Grain Company built an elevator along the ice house track on the north side of Elm Street, about where Schnurr's Feed Store was located. A coal bin was beside this track near the edge of Main Street. Lewis Grain was now the Sidman Grain Company. Only one siding remained between the passing track and the ice house track. On the house track, Farmers Grain warehouse had built just south of Gilchrist Grain, halfway between Forest and Wood.

In 1900, a fire claimed three grain elevators and apparently damaged the depot. A new depot was built in 1901 at the location of the present depot. The grain elevators also rebuilt and relocated. The Co-op Creamery was either rebuilt or enlarged. In the 1901 fire, the railroad Club House and windmill-water tower were destroyed, but these were not rebuilt. The depot agent in 1900 and 1901 was E. Galehouse, and in 1902 the agent was T. F. Constantine. H. Pasp was also agent sometime during this period.

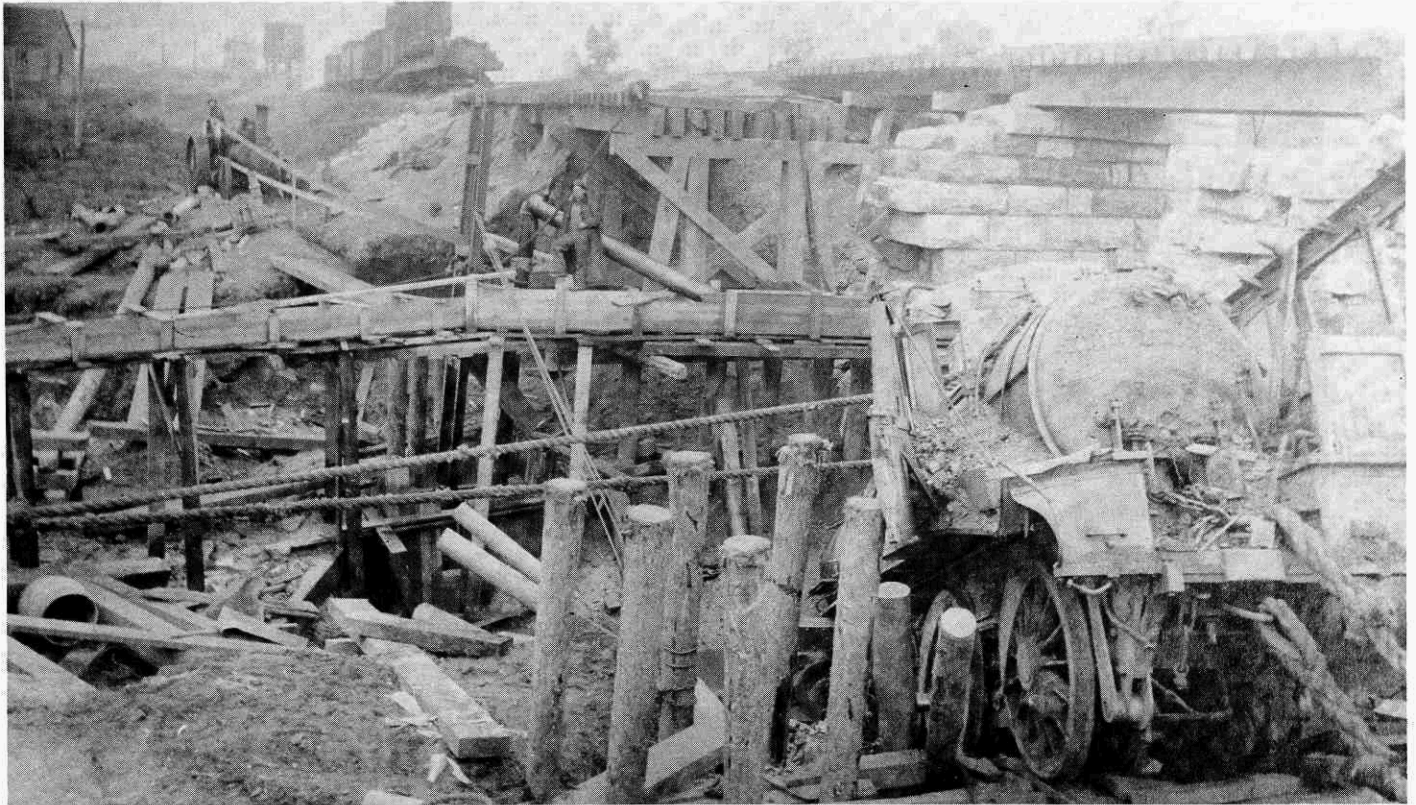
In 1905, Elma's population was listed at 1,000. The Oelwein shops had been completed by 1901, and a large number of Elma's railroad employees had moved there. The ice house had been built along the west



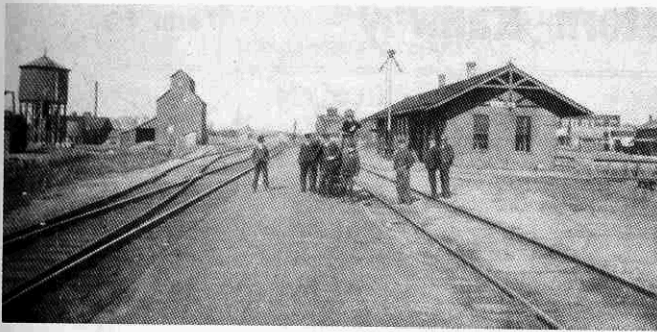
Derailment over bridge just north of the old creamery, west of Howard Cemetery, probably in the early 1900s. Engine 219's nose is buried in the mud. A wooden channel was constructed to divert the creek while workers retrieved the engine. A pump drained the water from the creek bed.



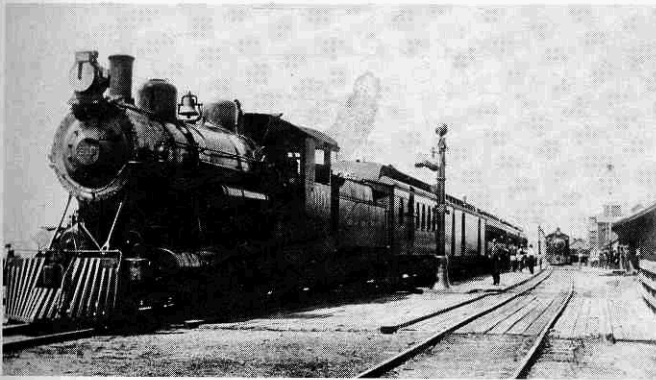
**Engine 219 has been pulled back in this photo. Note front of locomotive frame resting on stack of ties. The story has it that the engine's front truck is still buried there.**



**Engine's cab has been removed. Engine hauled out with massive rope cables.**



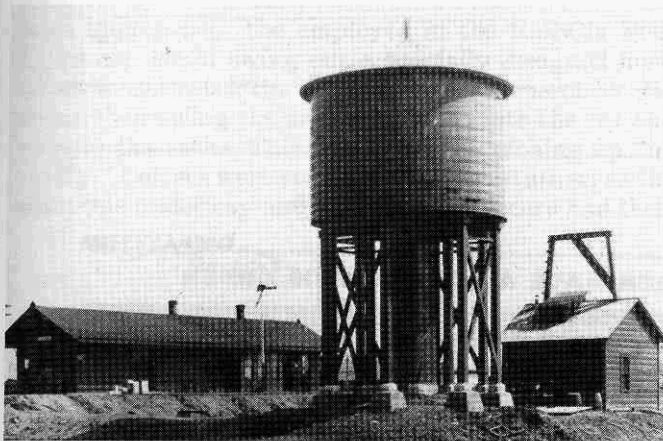
1907 postcard view of the CGW depot and yards from the south. Loomis, Johnson & Lee Grain Elevator is on the left. Wooden platform and stairs on the right lead down to Busti Avenue.



Southbound Engine 910 and her 5-car passenger train awaits high-ball signal, while engine on north end of platform takes a drink. 1908 postcard repeats common error of referring to CGW as Chicago and Great Western.

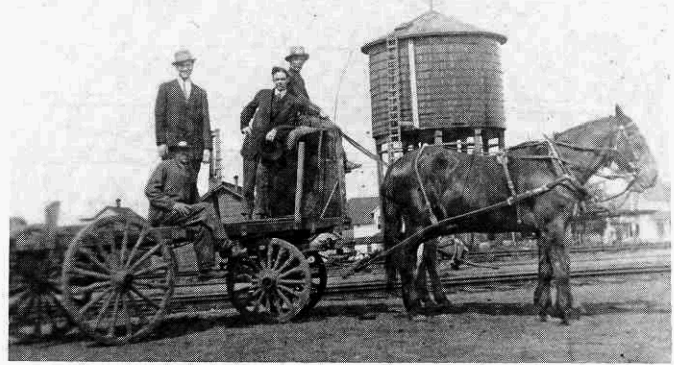
track in the yard, in line with Wood Street, and the Northwestern Iowa Grain Company had become the Loomis, Johnson and Lee Grain Elevator. The house track had been extended southward and the Farmers Grain Storage warehouse stood where the original depot had been. Gilchrist had relocated along the track just south of Forest Street, Hunting Elevator was just north of Forest, and next to it was the Anchor Grain Company Elevator.

Another railroad water tower was built in 1905 off



Railroad water tower built in 1905, with capacity of 1,193 barrels. Pump house is next to it. Depot displays stop signal for southbound trains.

Elm Street across from the Loomis elevator. It had a capacity of 1,193 barrels, which was equivalent to 37,579.5 gallons. The well pump was powered by a 15 horsepower gasoline engine. Water columns were built at each end of the platform so the engines could take on water while stopped at the station.



Drayman delivers LCL (less than carload) freight arriving on inbound train to consignee. Driver is Truman Robison.

Numerous commodities were shipped into and out of Elma on the CGW during this period. Among these were corn, oats, beans, feed, hogs, cattle, sheep, dairy products, fresh meats, vegetables and fruits, lumber, coal, iron ore, furniture, implements, hardware and supplies of every description. And passengers, of course!

The passenger trains did more than provide service to persons wishing to travel in and out of Elma. They also carried the U.S. Mail, packages sent via Wells Fargo Express (which later became Railway Express), milk, eggs, live baby chicks, newspapers, and caskets —sometimes empty, sometimes not. Wells Fargo also provided “Self-Identifying Travelers Checks.” The depot was also the telegraph office. The Postal Telegraph Cable Company, later the Western Union Telegraph Co., operated over the entire system of the CGW, and through relay offices could reach any town or city in the nation where there was a telegraph office.

The depot agent thus found himself with a great many things to do. He had to sell tickets to travelers who invariably would show up only minutes before train time, especially if they were taking an extended journey which required looking up involved routes and rates. A round-trip ticket could easily approach three feet in length, depending on the destination and the number of railroads being traveled over. In addition, the agent often had to get train orders from the dispatcher for the train, and check baggage and express packages for those patrons desiring to use this service.

Once the checked baggage and packages were loaded onto the baggage wagon, he had to wheel it out into position on the brick station platform (it was a cinder platform before the depot was relocated) before the train arrived, help load these items into the baggage car and unload whatever was inbound, and assist departing and arriving passengers. If the agent had a telegraph operator under his charge, of course, some of these duties could be delegated, unless the operator



TRAIN ORDER NO. 239 NOV 6 1959

To Oelwein No 43.

At Elma

To

To

X Operator. M.

Motor 6 run extra  
Oelwein to North Switch  
New Hampton and return to South  
Switch Sumner.

No 43 wait at Alta Vista  
until 3:30 pm.

No 42 wait at South  
Switch Sumner until 6:01 pm.  
CKC

DISPATCHER

CONDUCTOR AND ENGINEMAN MUST EACH HAVE A COPY OF THIS ORDER

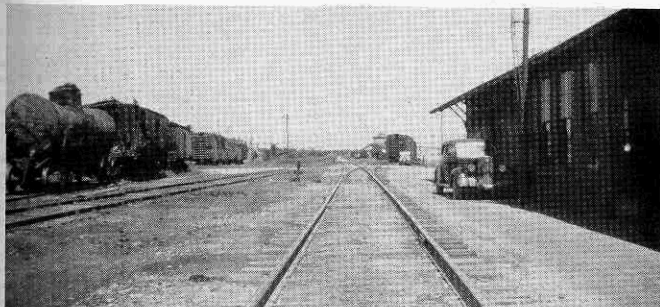
MADE Complete TIME 9:10 a. M. Schieffer Opr.

Train movements were regulated by a system of train orders. This order, copied at Elma, November 6, 1959, by agent-operator Frank Schieffer, authorizes engine No. 6 to run from Oelwein to New Hampton and back to Sumner. Train No. 43, a southbound train, is advised of this train's movement at Elma, and train No. 42, northbound, gets the order at Oelwein. No. 43 cannot leave Alta Vista before 3:30 p.m., and No. 42 cannot proceed past the south switch at Sumner before 6:01 p.m. The extra train, Extra 6 North, must be clear in the siding at any station by 3:25 p.m. for No. 43, and by 5:56 p.m. for No. 42. CKC is Chet Cole, the train dispatcher at Oelwein who issued the order.

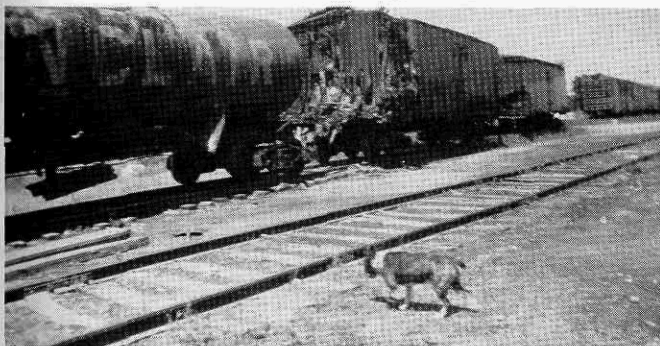
was busy on the wire. Needless to say, the train could not be delayed on the agent's account.

**MY JOB**

It's not my job to run the train,  
 The whistle I can't blow;  
 It's not for me to say how far  
 The train's allowed to go;  
 I'm not allowed to let off steam,  
 Nor even clang the bell,  
 But let the damn thing jump the track  
 And see who catches hell!

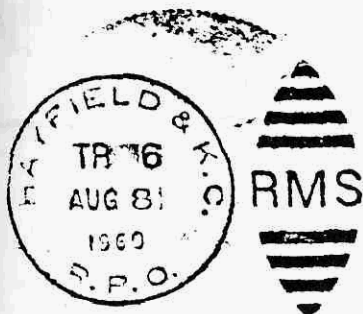


Wrecked cars in Elma yard, late 1930s to 1940s.

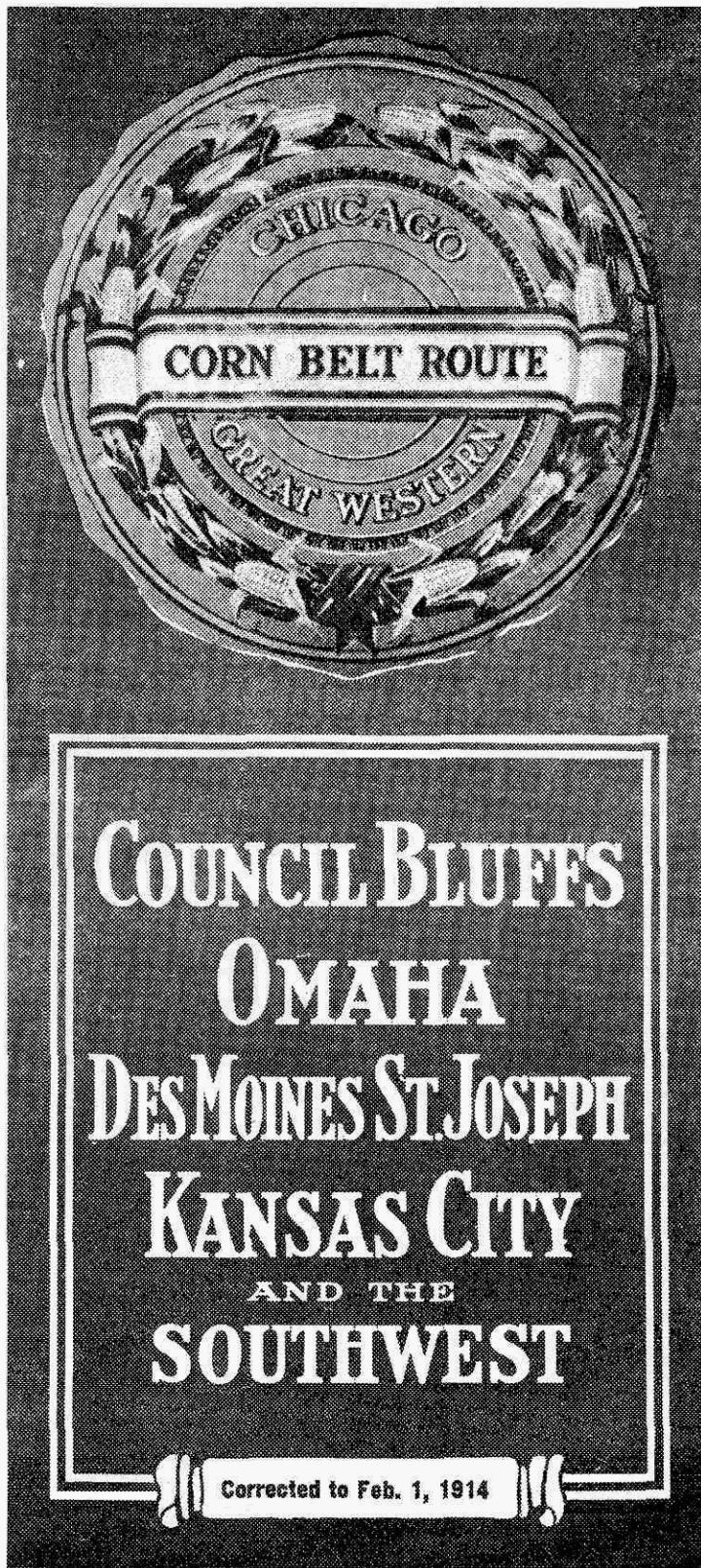


Agent Frank Schieffer's dog Pal inspecting the damage.

The mail carrier from the post office delivered mail to the train and picked up the incoming mail. A stand was erected alongside the track, and mail sacks were hung vertically between two arms on the stand. As the train approached, the employee in the Railway Post Office car would swing out a specially designed hook which would catch the sacks as the train went by. He would then swing the arm back down into the car and retrieve the sacks. This was known as picking up "on the fly." Letters were sorted for various stations as the train was underway and cancelled (RPO cars had their



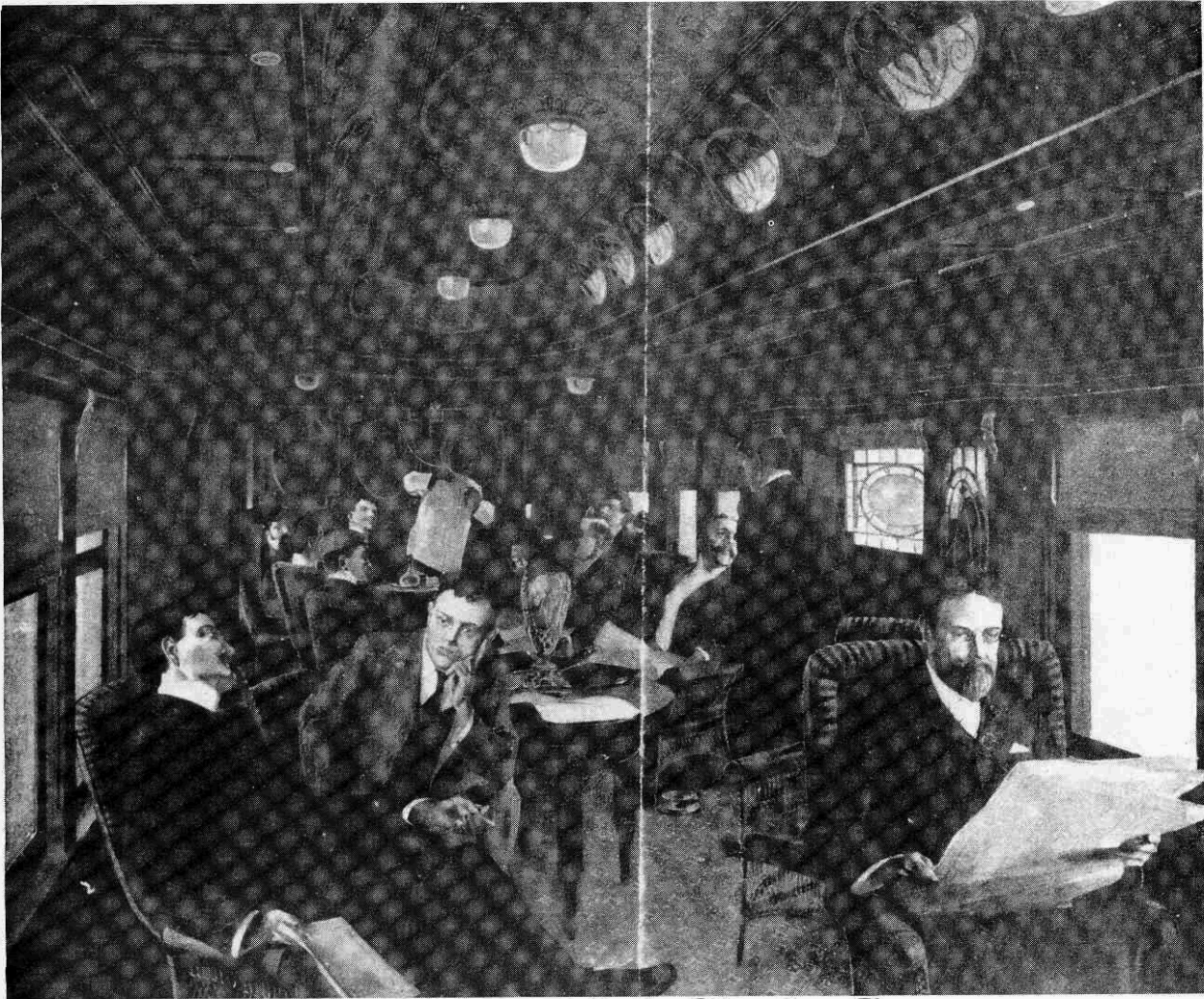
Cancellation stamp from Railway Post Office (RPO) car. Stamp shows Train Number 6 (south-bound) on August 8, 1960, operating on Hayfield and Kansas City district. RMS is Railway Mail Service.



Cover of 1914 CGW timetable with new "Corn Belt Route" logo. own postmarks for each train), and mail for each station was bagged and tossed off at the depot as it went through town, unless the train stopped there. Elma's mail stand was at the south end of the platform.

The September 15, 1902, CGW Timetable, "The





## The Beautiful Club Car

a part of new green and gold

### “Great Western Limited”

running daily between Chicago, Dubuque, St. Paul and Minneapolis. It is impossible to do full justice to the richness of these cars—the flat ceiling with its oval dome, decorated in olive green and gold, the latticed windows, the brilliant vermilion wood finish, the handsome reading lamp and center table, combine to produce an effect unequaled in railway-car building. The service is as near club-like as money can furnish, and is winning praise every day. The “Great Western Limited” runs every night in the year between Chicago and Minneapolis.

REPRINT BY RAIL PIX LIMITED

Maple Leaf Route,” shows four passenger trains daily in each direction. Through trains from Chicago to Minneapolis and from Kansas City to Minneapolis merged at Oelwein, and then came north. Through trains the opposite direction traveled south from Minneapolis to Oelwein, and then split into two trains, one to Chicago and one to Kansas City.

Trains No. 1 and 2, the “Great Western Limited,” introduced in 1898, made the Chicago Great Western famous. Reportedly, the Pennsylvania Railroad, whose

service on their “Chicago Limited” between New York and Chicago was reputed to be ideal, ordered its cars refurbished and modernized in the style of the CGW’s Limited. The 1902 timetable description of this train reads: “A solid wide-vestibule, electric lighted, steam-heated train of through free Reclining Chair Cars, Pullman Compartment and Standard Sleeping Cars and Buffet-Library Cars Chicago to Minneapolis. Dining car serves dinner a la carte from Chicago to Byron.” No. 1 left Chicago at 6:30 p.m., departed Elma



## Dining Car Illinois

a part of the

## “Great Western Limited”

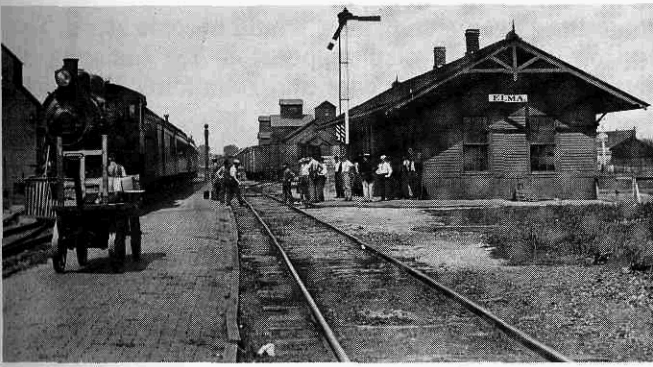
running daily beteen Chicago, Dubuque, St. Paul and Minneapolis. All meals are served a la carte and the appointments and food are unsurpassed while the prices are very reasonable.

northbound at 3:22 a.m., arriving in St. Paul at 7:25 a.m. No. 2 left St. Paul at 8:35 p.m., departed Elma at 12:45 a.m., arriving in Chicago at 9:30 a.m.

In 1908, the Chicago Great Western Railway went into receivership. It was reorganized in 1909 as the Chicago Great Western Railroad. In 1910, the CGW dropped its Maple Leaf symbol, and adopted a new slogan, “The Corn Belt Route.” The 1914 timetable carried the new logo, although it did not begin appearing on stations and equipment until almost 1930, and the newer “Lucky Strike” herald had already appeared in CGW advertising during the 1920s. The 1914 timetable still shows four trains daily each way through Elma, plus one train each way daily except Sunday be-

tween Dubuque and McIntire. The “Great Western Limited” still left Chicago at 6:30 p.m., but now departed Elma at 3:32 a.m., and arrived in St. Paul at 7:30 a.m. No. 2 left St. Paul at 8:30 p.m., departed Elma 12:24 a.m. (but only stopped to pick up passengers for points beyond Oelwein), and arrived in Chicago at 8:55 a.m.

In 1909, Elma’s depot agent was W. J. Boyle, and from 1915 to 1926 the agent was R. H. Adams. A telegrapher’s schedule from 1915 shows the Agent-Telegrapher’s rate of pay was then \$75.00 per month. This was the third highest rate on the Northern Division, with Riceville, McIntire and Randolph, Minnesota, having the same rate. This schedule also shows

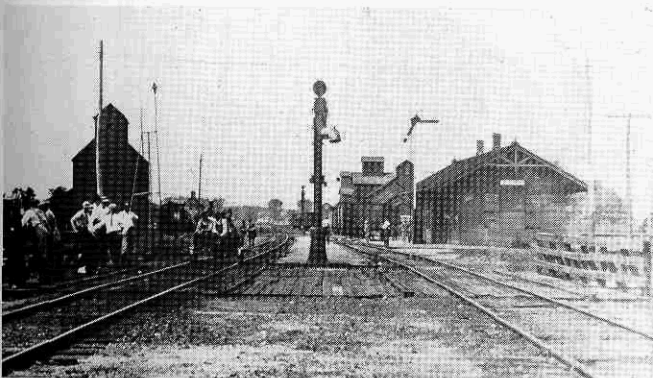


Engine 901 stopping for passengers at Elma. Train order signal has stop displayed northbound. Luggage on baggage wagon in foreground will be loaded into baggage car. 1911 postcard.

that Elma had two other telegrapher positions, which were paid \$60.00 per month. (This, of course, was in 1915 dollars, when a dollar was worth a dollar.) The rules provided: "At offices where but one telegrapher is employed, twelve consecutive hours, commencing between 6:30 and 8:00 a.m. or p.m., including meal hour, will constitute a day's work... Except in emergencies, telegraphers will not be required to remain on duty longer than sixteen hours. After sixteen hours service they will be allowed eight hours for rest."

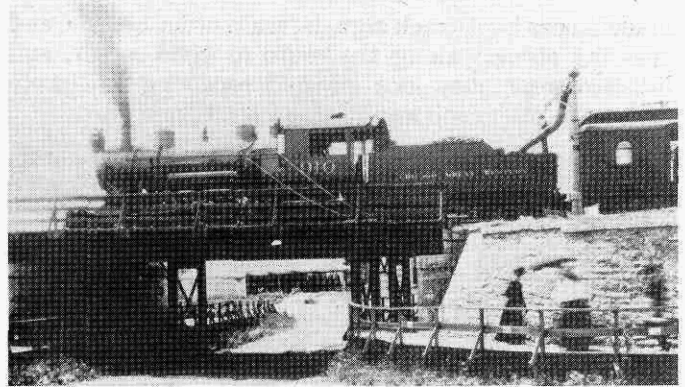


1912 postcard view of Elma depot. Stop signal is displayed for both directions. Message on back of postcard reads: "A fine place to get off at when you come to the United States."

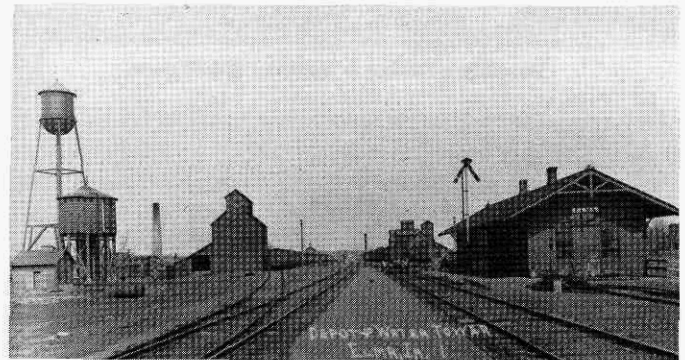


Section gang and others waiting over viaduct. Note water columns on each end of the brick platform, and the "mile-high" switch stand just north of the viaduct bridge. Postcard photo around 1915.

Nineteen-twenty did not see much change in Elma's trackage. Although its yard had shrunk and it was no longer a division point, Elma developed a large volume of freight and express business during the early 1920s. Chapman Lumber was at the south end of the house track, between Plum and Forest streets; Huntting Elevator had two elevators and bins in the next block north; then came Standard Oil's tanks, a coal shed, the Howard County Equity warehouse buildings and elevator, the stockyards, and the Co-op Creamery. Part of the team track was removed, from Standard Oil to the coal shed, and switches were installed to connect the remaining sections to the main line. Across the tracks from Huntting on Pine Street was the Hawkeye Oil Company. The former Loomis elevator was now the D. H. Tidgwell Grain Elevator, with a coal shed to the north of it. Elma's population stood at about 900.



Engine 910, a 4-6-2 Pacific engine, takes on water at the south end of the platform. Mail car is next to tender.

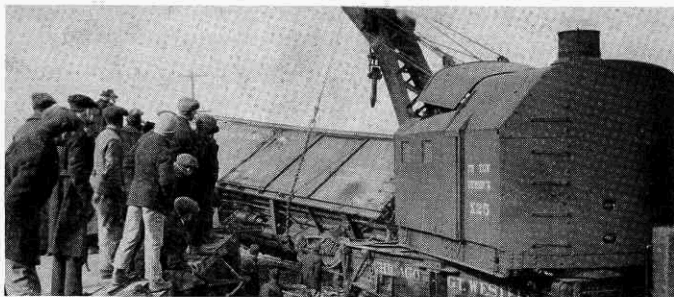


1917 or 1918 view from south end of platform. Train order board reads "Clear" both directions.

In 1924, the Great Western Limited was re-equipped, and the public was invited in 1925 to submit a new name for the train. Four entrants chose the winning name, The Legionnaire. Running between Chicago and the Twin Cities, this train, like its predecessor, was still an example of the finest transportation on rails. But in the difficult years of the 1930s, the through sleeper cars were removed, and the Legionnaire was downgraded to become The Minnesotan, a much less elegant service.

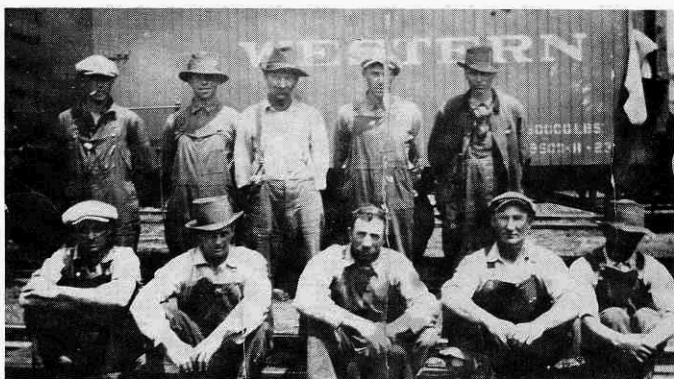
Tracks and yards required maintenance, of course, and this was the province of several crafts. The section gang was responsible for inspecting and maintaining

the track in its "section" or territory, and for replacing any broken rails. Additional inspections were made by roadmasters and track walkers, who in later years had the advantage of electronic technology which gave audible indications (tones) of defects in rails. Signal

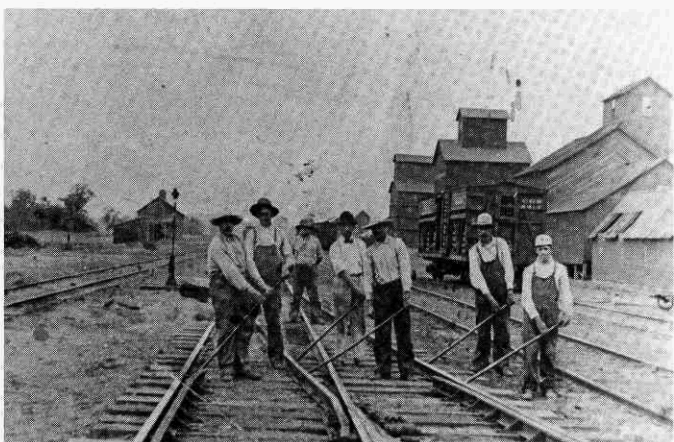


Crane X25 on the job at 1922 derailment just north of Alta Vista.

maintainers kept track signals, train order boards, and crossing signals along the route in good repair, and linemen were busy locating and repairing any problems with telegraph and railroad telephone lines.



Possibly a Bridge & Building (B&B) crew.



CGW Section gang in Elma working on main line switch. Standing in background: S. A. Smith, foreman. Rest of crew, left to right: H. Garrett, W. Maruska, L. Katz, Albert Derr, Pete Ferrie, J. H. Smith.

Winter brought its own special problems for the section gang. Switches and crossings had to be kept free of ice and snow, and operating smoothly. Station platforms also had to be kept clear. If a train became snow-bound, sectionmen often literally had to dig it out with shovels. The use of snowplows made the job easier, but

sometimes even a snowplow would become stuck. The section gang was also responsible for assisting at derailments—rerailing cars and rebuilding the track.



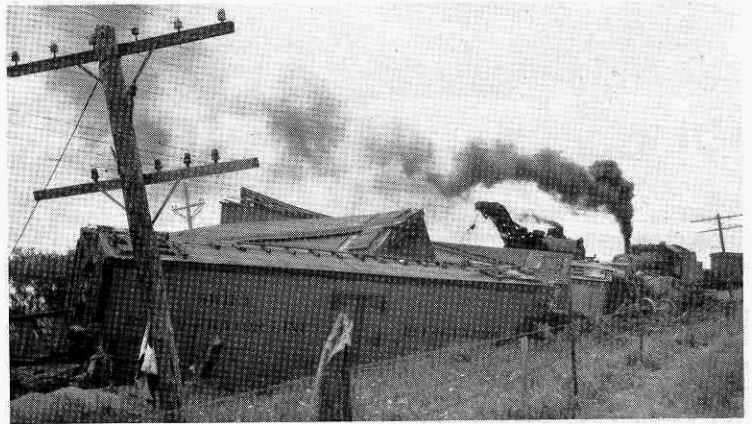
Snowplow train with Engine 282, somewhere north of Elma after heavy snow.



Sometimes even a snowplow is not enough.

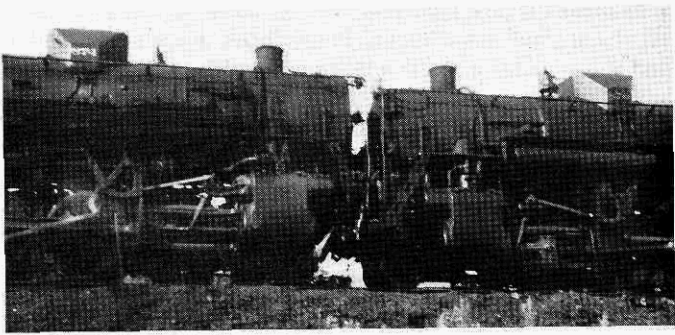


Cars derailed next to the Eclipse Lumber Company warehouse in 1951.



**Deraiment of a meat train near Lylah's Marsh about 1947. Two locomotive cranes and two helpers—a Texas engine in the top left—were used to clear the wreckage.**





Engines 874 and 876 had an unplanned meeting, known as the "orange wreck," at the north switch at Acme, August 5, 1936. Onlookers received a feast of oranges from the crates that were broken.



A later derailment at the bridge west of the cemetery.



Snowstorms and derailments both present hazardous situations, for sectionmen, for trainmen, for any railroader. An Elma section foreman was killed in an 1895 wreck at New Hampton. In 1947, four Elma sectionmen, Paul Krumm, George Kirchner, Orville Frank, and Paul Reich, all suffered burn injuries when the engine they were riding crashed into a stalled freight train during a raging blizzard just south of Alta Vista. Three trainmen were killed in that accident.

### TO THE TRACKMAN

Have you ever worked through a stormy night

While the mercury hovered low,  
And felt the wind through scanty clothes

As you bent to clear the snow?  
Or perhaps you've walked the settling fills

While rain in torrents fell,  
Or rerailed an engine down in the yards

On a night as dark as hell.  
You've tramped the cuts on frozen feet

Where rocks are apt to slip  
And heard the scream of Number Three

As it roared through Murphy's dip.

If you've stopped in a shack beside the track,

After knowing the track was clean  
Eaten a frozen snack from a paper sack

Then you know just what I mean.

You're in a class, not known to brass;  
A He-man rugged and stout.

The one damn man in the railroad plan

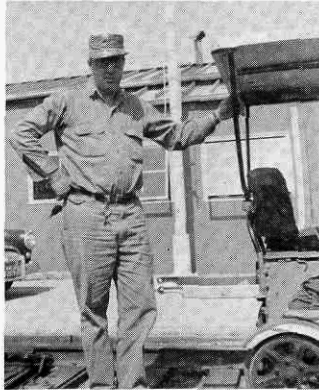
They just can't do without.

—M. H. Moses

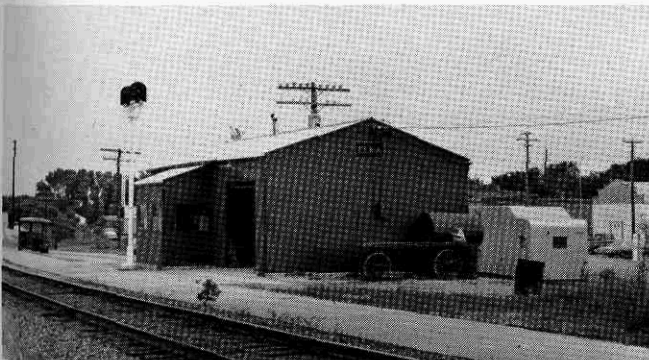


George Kirchner, Elma section foreman, and Frank Shiefer, Elma depot agent.

Tom Grace, signal maintainer from Oelwein.



The Bridge and Building crews were in charge of construction, maintenance and repair of bridges and railroad buildings such as depots. The B&B gangs usually stayed in railroad cars specially outfitted for their use—two or three bunk cars, a shower car, and a kitchen car (a cook was assigned to the gang). In early 1957, these cars were replaced by four fully equipped 38' mobile trailers. Sporting a shiny aluminum exterior, each unit housed 10 men.



New Elma depot in November, 1963. B&B gang's trailer is parked on the east side.

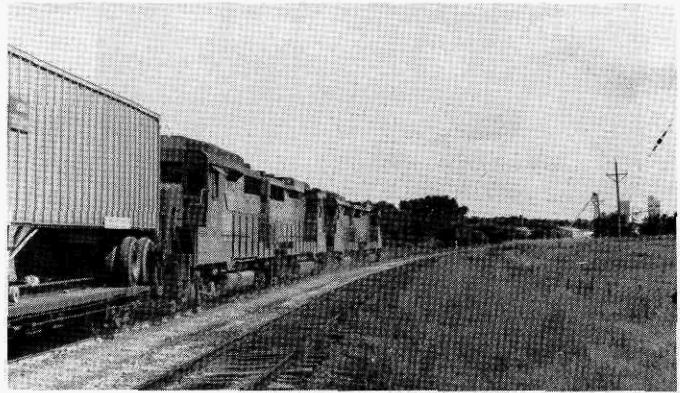
Government operation of the railroad during World War I, mismanagement during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the Great Depression lasting from 1929 through 1941 all contributed to the further decline of the Chicago Great Western. In receivership again in 1935, the Chicago Great Western Railroad was reorganized in 1941 as the Chicago Great Western Railway, reclaiming its prior identity.

The CGW fared better during World War II than in the previous war. The volume of traffic was huge, but again maintenance of track, rolling stock, and stations was neglected. Passenger service, which had been greatly reduced during the 1930s, was whittled down some more, even as freight trains lengthened. Stations and branch lines saw additional closings, and other attempts were made to reduce expenses. As service was reduced, traffic diminished, and as traffic diminished, service was reduced. Through all its difficulties, however, the CGW continued to innovate.

Piggy-back service, hauling semitrailers on top of flat cars, was initiated in 1936, after some experimental runs in 1935. By the mid-1950s, the CGW was 4th in the nation among railroads offering piggy-back. In 1960, tri-level auto racks were placed in service. These cars held 15 compact autos (or 12 full-size autos), 5 (4) on each level. A great number of new automobiles moved in this fashion southbound through Elma to their destination in Kansas City.

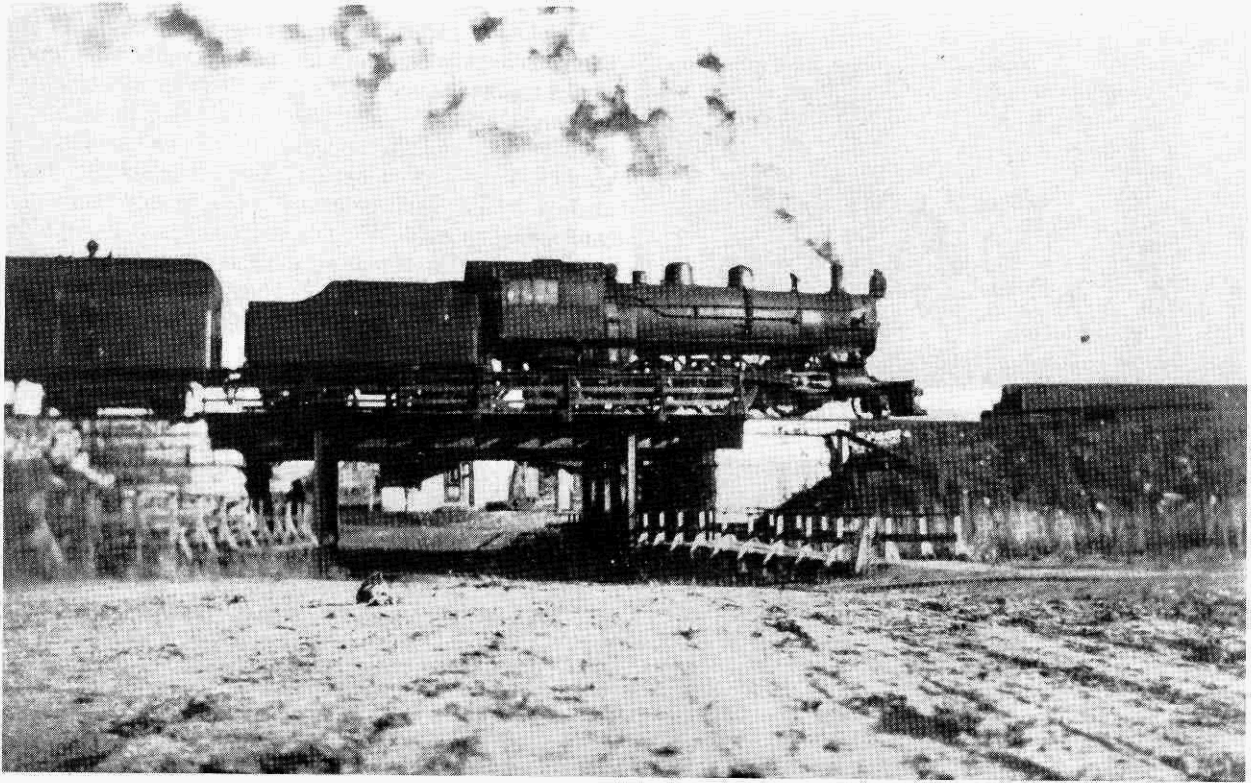
Because its routes between major terminals were slightly longer than its competitors, the CGW had to make an extra effort. Early on, the road aimed at moving more freight faster. In 1930, the Great Western purchased a number of powerful Texas-type steam locomotives, which enabled it both to haul long trains and to maintain speed over the heavy grades between Oelwein and St. Paul. These engines, the 800's, had a 2-10-4 wheel arrangement, and became a symbol of the road during the steam era.

The Chicago Great Western was one of the first railroads to dieselize, beginning in 1946. By 1950, its pro-

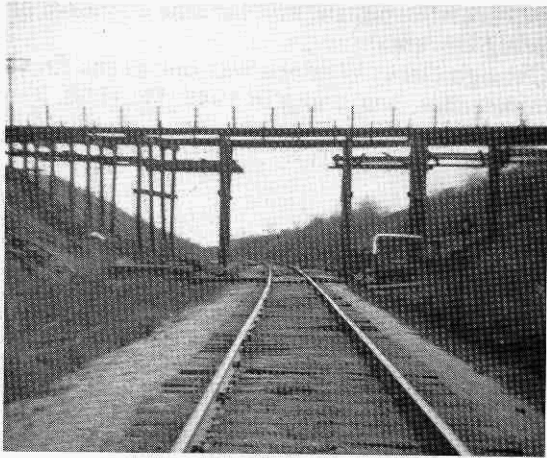


Four GP-30's move Train No. 43 south into Elma with piggyback loads.

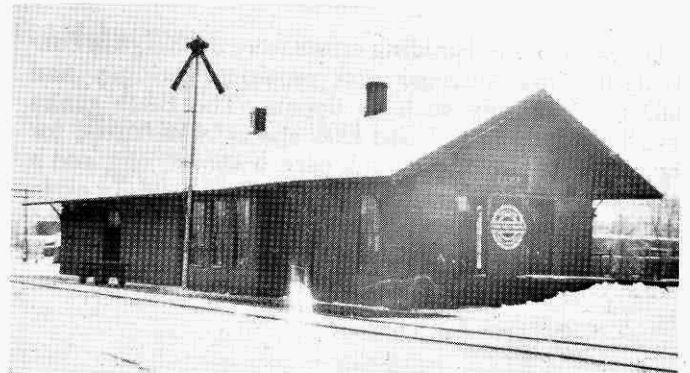
gram was complete and the remaining steam engines were sold or scrapped. The last steam locomotive through Elma was in 1947 or 1948. The diesel fleet allowed greater economies, and even longer trains. The CGW developed a nation-wide reputation for its freight trains, which by the 1960s commonly used six to eight "covered wagons" (EMD F3's, F7's and FP-7's rated at about 1,500 H.P.) on the head end and ran over 200 cars in length. The longest train through Elma is said to have been 273 cars, although this writer is fairly certain that he once counted a 300-car train passing through here, pulled by eight to ten F-units.



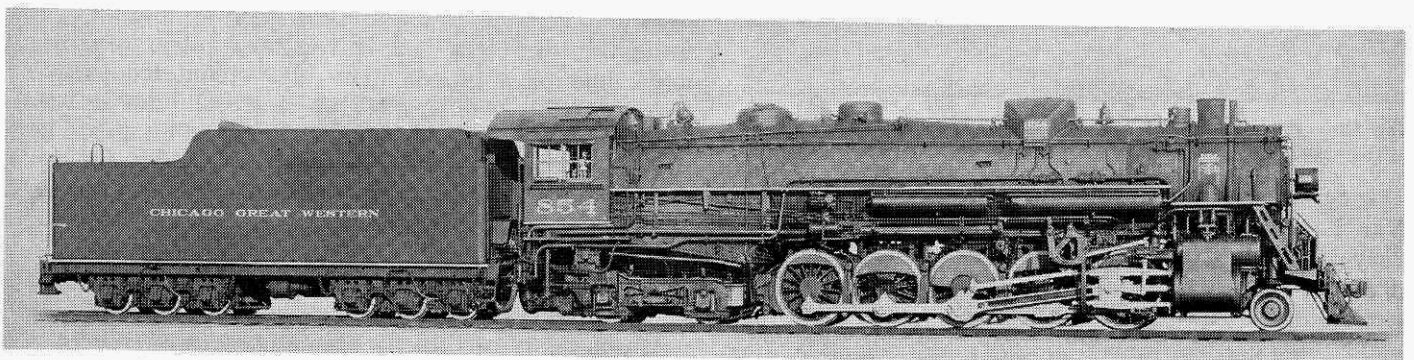
Passenger train with 2-6-2 Prairie locomotive departing Elma southbound.



Overhead bridge two miles south of Elma was rebuilt by B & B crew in November, 1963.

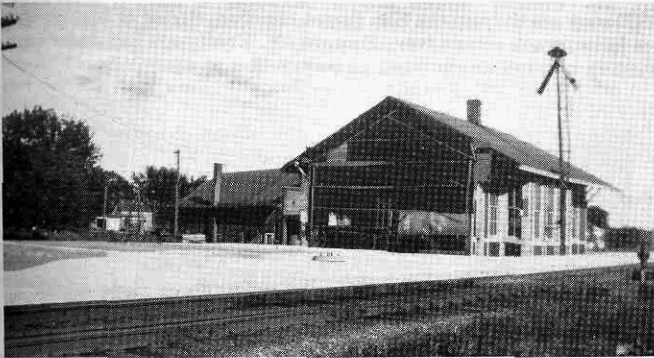


Elma depot in December, 1940. Corn Belt Route logo did not show on stations and equipment until 1930's.



Number 854, one of the CGW's well-known 2-10-4 (Texas) engines, poses at the builder's shops in Lima, Ohio, in 1930.

CGW diesels and cabooses were painted garnet red (early F-3's were two-toned with golden yellow dual



Making room for new depot, freight house is cut off from waiting room of old depot, and moved north, to be moved later beside Hart Chevrolet. Cement platform is laid to accommodate new depot.



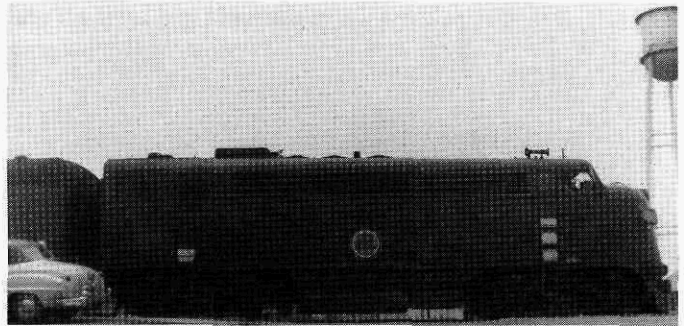
The new and the old. Semaphore-type train order signal has given way to new flashing light system. Soon the old depot will be dismantled and removed.

stripes along the sides, the bottom stripe curving up over the engine's nose; the two stripes continued along the sides of most passenger equipment). In 1963, the company purchased eight 2,250 H.P. GP-30 diesels. These were a very bright Chinese red, and some of the older F-units were repainted in this color. In 1966, nine 3,000 H.P. SD-40's were added to the roster.

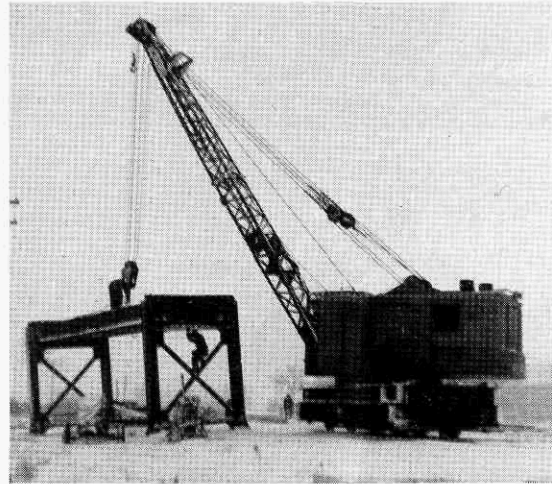
During the 1950s, efforts were undertaken to rehabilitate the railroad's equipment and physical plant. The roadbed and track through Elma was upgraded, which was a welcome improvement. In 1952, Elma's classically-styled wooden depot (painted in the standard CGW tuscan red with buff trim) was replaced

with a new, if plain, sheet metal garnet red depot. Hart Chevrolet purchased the freight portion of the old depot for storage purposes, and it remains there today.

By October 31, 1951, only one passenger train each way, No. 11 and No. 12, the Mill Cities Limited, traveled through Elma, between the Twin Cities and Kansas City. Known through the 1920s for her quality service, by 1951 only one coach trailed behind the mail and express cars. The October 1957 timetable no longer carried the Mill Cities Limited name, and she now ran as No. 5 (daily except Saturday) and No. 6 (daily except Sunday). No. 6 left Elma at 4:43 a.m., arriving St. Paul Union Station at 8:10 a.m. Returning, No. 5 left St. Paul at 2:35 p.m., and arrived in Elma 5:42 p.m. The schedule was changed in the March 1958 timetable so that No. 6 left Elma at 12:50 p.m., and arrived in St. Paul at 4:15 p.m. No. 5 left St. Paul at 10:35 p.m., and returned to Elma at 1:44 a.m. Running time between Oelwein and Elma was about 1 hour, 20 minutes.



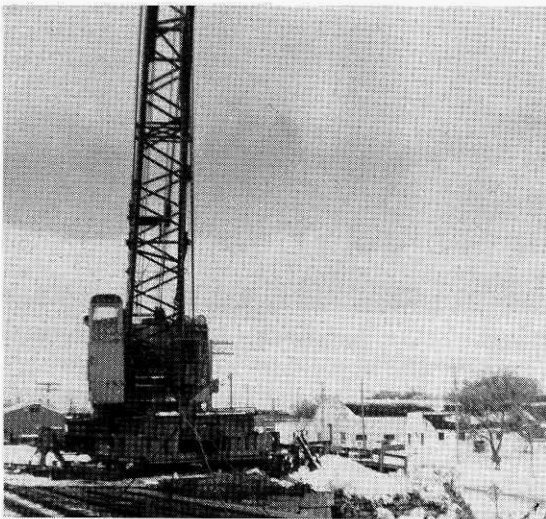
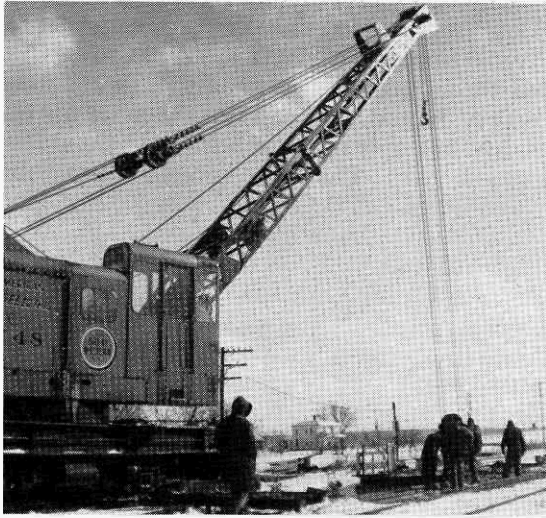
Train No. 6 to Twin Cities pauses in Elma. Auto belongs to Clem Cashman, who is picking up the mail.



The Elma viaduct, built around 1901, by the late 1950s required attention. On a cold, snowy November 5, 1959, the old bridge was removed by Crane Y-48, and cut into scrap. It was replaced the next day with new 35-ton steel I-beams. The old bridge scrap was loaded onto a flat car and gondola car on November 20, and hauled away.

Along with the commodities mentioned earlier, the CGW brought into Elma carloads of fertilizer, lime,

ammonia, plasterboard and asphalt. The stockyards closed in the 1950s, and perishable shipments into



Elma declined. The outbound shipments were primarily corn and soybeans. The major remaining customers on line were the Howard County Equity, Eclipse Lumber Co. (later, Great Plains Lumber), Standard Oil, and Schnurr's Purina Feed Store.

The switch just north of the depot and the team track were removed in the 1960s, and the house track



1980 view north from the Elm Street crossing. String of box cars on ice house track across from Howard Co. Equity are bad order cars waiting to move to rip track to be repaired or scrapped.



Looking east to the viaduct.

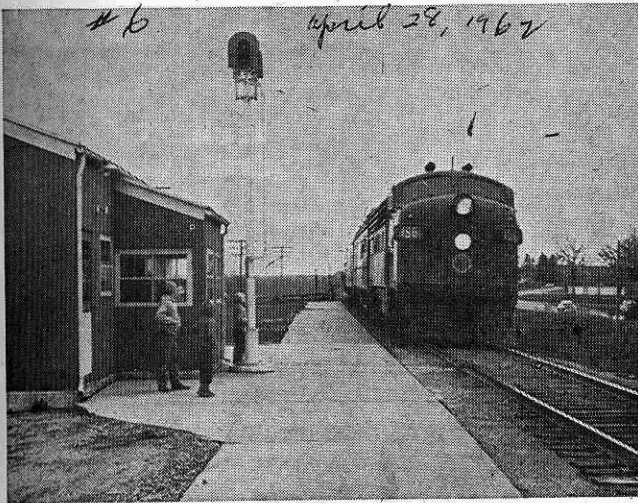
was stubbed on the south end. The ice house track was stubbed on the south end at Schnurr's, and the passing track was shortened, with the south main line switch just north of the crossing.

The close of 76 years of passenger service, much of it unparalleled anywhere else in the nation, came in



Elma depot agent Frank Schieffer on the signal maintainer's motor car.

# Passenger Train Makes Final Trip



Seventy-eight years of passenger service on the Chicago and Great Western railroad came to a close for residents of the community Saturday when the last passenger train made its trip through Elma. This photo was taken as the train approached the depot for the final time. The railroad is dropping the service for lack of patronage.



Shaking hands with the conductor on the final stop in Elma, is Clement Cashman, who has delivered mail from the train to the post office for the last 14 years. This was Mr. Cashman's final trip, too. Standing by are LeRoy Mohrfeld and Keith Roethler, councilmen, who presented the train crew with a box of Elma processed butter.



Elma residents gathered at the railroad depot Saturday to watch the last trip of the passenger train. Now the town will be served by four freight trains daily, two northbound and two southbound. Mail will be dispatched by motor truck.

1962. Nos. 5 and 6 made their final runs through Elma on Saturday, April 28th. Engine 156 carried one mail car, one baggage car, and one combination coach-baggage car. One hundred twenty-nine Alta Vista school children rode the train to Elma the day before.

At 12:01 a.m., on July 1, 1968, the CGW vanished into memory as it was merged with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. The C&NW only wanted a gateway into Kansas City, and Great Western employees knew that the rest of the CGW line soon would be gone. On May 12, 1971, the Elma depot was closed, along with Westgate, Sumner, Fredericksburg, Riceville, and McIntire. All agency work for these stations was handled from New Hampton, effective May 13. Alta Vista had been closed earlier.

Frank Schieffer was the depot agent in Elma from 1926 until 1962, serving here longer than any other agent. A man named Taft was the night operator around 1926-1927. Dale Schmitz was the agent from 1962 until Elma was closed in 1971.

The last freight train, pulled by C&NW Engine 4546, made its final run through Elma on November 6, 1981,



CNW work train picks up the pieces in 1982.



CNW crane (possibly the old Y-48) picks up the classes' artwork.

thus ending nearly a century of railroad service. Once a division point with a roundhouse, turntable and yard, Elma found itself with no agent and no trains. In April 1982, the track and viaduct were removed. All that remains of the Chicago Great Western is the depot's empty shell—and the memories of those who knew her.



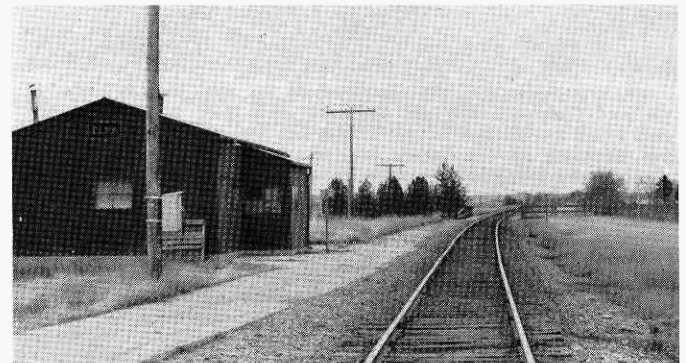
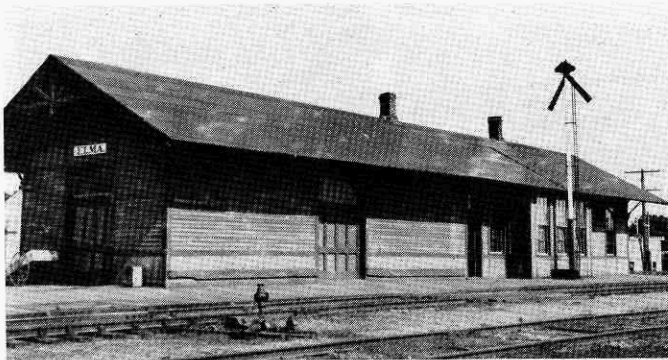
The last beam of the viaduct is removed, April 1982.

### WHEN FIGURES FALL

The wind blows high 'neath a leaden sky  
 And the semaphore complains;  
 The snow flies fast on the stinging blast  
 That howls above barren plains.  
 The traffic's late so I sit and wait  
 Keyed up for an urgent call,  
 'Cause it makes a mess for the old DS  
 When his well-planned figures fall.  
 My wood shack rocks with sudden shocks  
 That lunge from the zero stream,  
 I sit here tight on the pulse tonight—  
 There is no time to dream.

It's an eerie line; the taut wires whine  
 And screech like an irate witch;  
 The phone is bad; the dim light sad  
 Down there by the eastbound switch.  
 We ops have been through the thick and thin  
 On our nomad boomer rounds,  
 We've hit sharp curves with frazzled nerves,  
 And jumped to selector sounds.  
 But work I must for this streak of rust  
 So there's nothing much to fear.  
 I'll work with grace in the wild storm's face  
 Till the depot isn't here.

—Charles D. Dulin



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