

The Standardized Railroad Station in Saskatchewan: The Case of the Canadian Pacific*

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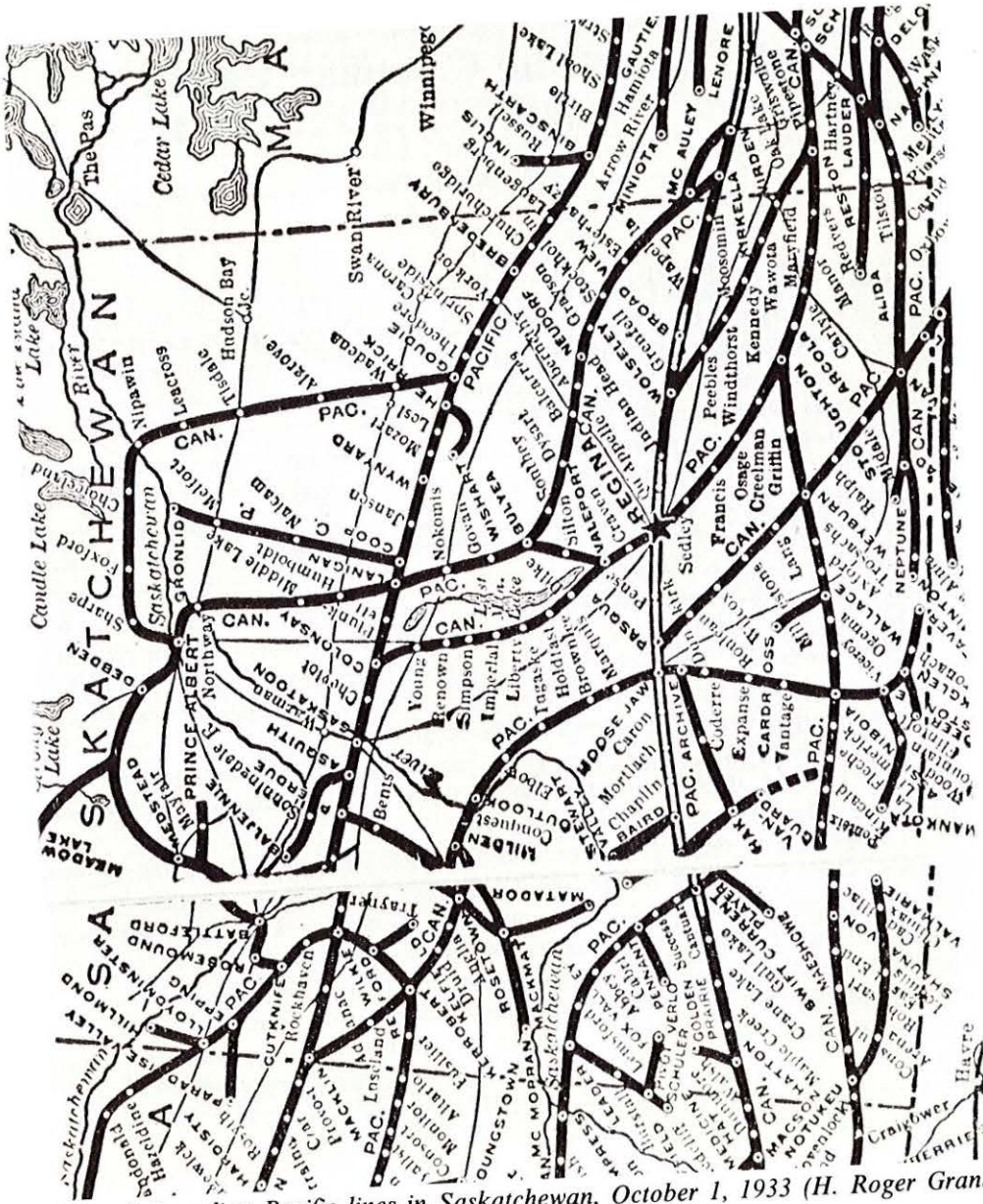
THE CANADIAN PACIFIC (CP), like the Canadian National (CN) and its two gargantuan predecessors, the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific, developed a series of highly standardized station plans for use along its Saskatchewan lines. This pictorial essay explores the evolution of CP depot designs in the province.¹

Perhaps no other corporation played a more important role in uniting Canada than did the Canadian Pacific. Building across the formidable Canadian Shield and the towering Western Cordilleras when few thought it possible, this pioneer railroad allowed Canada to become a "transcontinental" nation when Sir Donald Smith drove the last spike in the ocean-to-ocean link in November 1885. When the CP pushed its mainline across Saskatchewan, this region was thinly settled. The company opened broad swaths of virgin lands for development, and it created a pattern of townsite location that persists to the present day. Stations, and hence towns, were placed approximately every eight miles. Division points, where crews and often equipment were changed, appeared about 125 miles apart. Every other division point boasted a repair shop. These terminals, with their railway-connected jobs, grew quickly. It is no wonder that would-be land speculators watched with keen interest the CP location parties.²

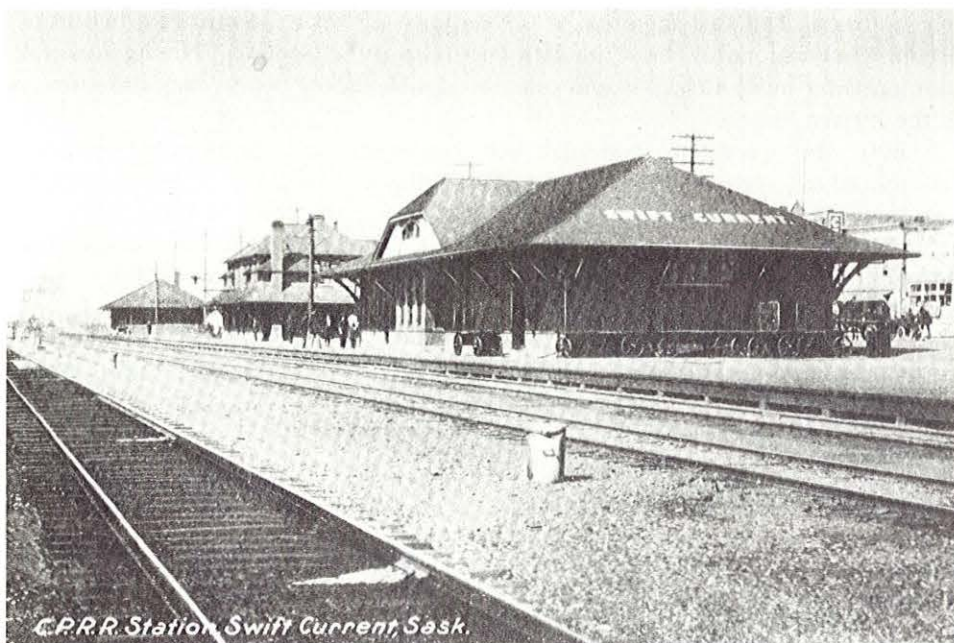
In order to serve the raw communities it created, the Canadian Pacific required numerous station facilities. In the first place, these buildings were a place for the company to conduct its local operations. Businesses, especially grain elevators, ordered rolling stock for their needs. Of course, car supply was of immense importance at harvest time. Stations, too, provided storage for less-than-carload-lot freight until shipped. Agents sold tickets and planned travel itineraries; telegrams were sent and received. In the days before long-distance telephones and other forms of electronic communications, market reports, family news, and other messages of vital importance to the community came through the station. The "deepo" even became a centre for local socializing.

In addition to being the focal point of a town's economic activity and often part of its social life as well, the depot served as a critical element in the safe operations of the railroad. By having agents report train movements to dispatchers, meeting and passing points could be planned. In fact, the Canadian Pacific built stations for this purpose even where such buildings had few customers to serve.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the new towns that dotted the Saskatchewan landscape frequently lacked decent housing. To attract married agents (the company thought them to be more stable and responsible representatives) nearly all CP depots in the province included apartment space. Usually living quarters were provided by adding a second floor, and, on some buildings, a small



Map of Canadian Pacific lines in Saskatchewan, October 1, 1933 (H. Roger Grant Collection)



C.P.R. Station, Swift Current, Sask.

Although brick depots were uncommon on the Canadian Pacific in Saskatchewan, Swift Current's status as a terminal explains why the company erected a more substantial building in that city. While probably of custom design, this structure, built in 1908, is similar to the one constructed at Kerrobert. (H. Roger Grant Collection)



The Weyburn station may well have been built to a standard plan. Erected in 1912, it resembles the one at Indian Head. Weyburn was a junction on the important Pasqua-North Portal line, and at one time had a roundhouse. (H. Roger Grant Collection)

rear addition. The vast majority of CP stations in Saskatchewan were two-storey affairs. Unquestionably, the Canadian Pacific, and the Canadian National as well, developed far more attractive and practical double-storey depots than did railways in the United States.

Both the Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific used so-called "combination" stations to meet the transportation needs of small agricultural communities of Saskatchewan. Each contained a freight house, waiting room, and centre office under one roof. Including an apartment in this basic floor plan was not difficult. Few communities were large enough to rate two separate buildings — one to serve as the freight depot and the other as the passenger facility.

When designing standardized depots, the Canadian Pacific regularly sought to minimize costs. Since railway construction was an expensive proposition, money saved on depots could be used elsewhere. Consequently, the majority of CP depots in Saskatchewan were built to cheap standard plans, though they could be varied to meet local needs. Wood was utilized almost exclusively; few CP stations were constructed of more costly brick or even given a coat of stucco. Platforms, too, were wooden rather than the more expensive and durable brick or concrete. The road did not include indoor plumbing and electricity in the original specifications for most structures, though in some cases they were added later. Most stations lacked basements; this meant that more than a single stove was required to heat them.

Temperature control for Saskatchewan depots emerged as a great concern to the CP and CN alike. To remedy this problem, such design features as awnings and overhangs were included. Properly conceived, these devices not only gave protection against inclement weather, but provided shade during the hot summer months while still allowing the low winter sun to shine through the windows.

Trees properly planted and careful placement of the depot at the site further kept interior temperatures more comfortable. Some CP stations were nearly totally surrounded by high deciduous trees with shorter pines interspersed. The latter, naturally, helped deflect frigid gusts that would otherwise have blown through the often uninsulated structures. Moreover, in many cases the freight house — the only largely unoccupied section of the building — was situated so that it, rather than the office or waiting room, got the direct blasts of the prevailing winds.

Towns along the Canadian Pacific did not automatically receive a combination station. Generally, their first depot was the cheap, easy to transport portable structure. Some cost less than \$100; virtually all portables came with price tags of less than \$1000.³ Many hamlets never achieved more elaborate stations. However, if the community grew, the company likely erected a larger building. Because of this construction policy, depots along the CP by mid-century varied greatly. Frequently, stations in adjacent communities were built decades apart.

The initial standard plan used by the Canadian Pacific for its combination stations in Saskatchewan was Spartan. The depot at Balgonie is typical. Covered by a plain gable roof, these structures contain few decorative features. Like the also standardized portables, many of these stations (e.g. Regina and Indian Head) were later replaced by more attractive ones. While over one hundred comparable buildings remained in 1970 on the Soo Line, a CP subsidiary in the United States, it appears only Balgonie and Grenfell still claim depots of this design in Saskatchewan.⁴

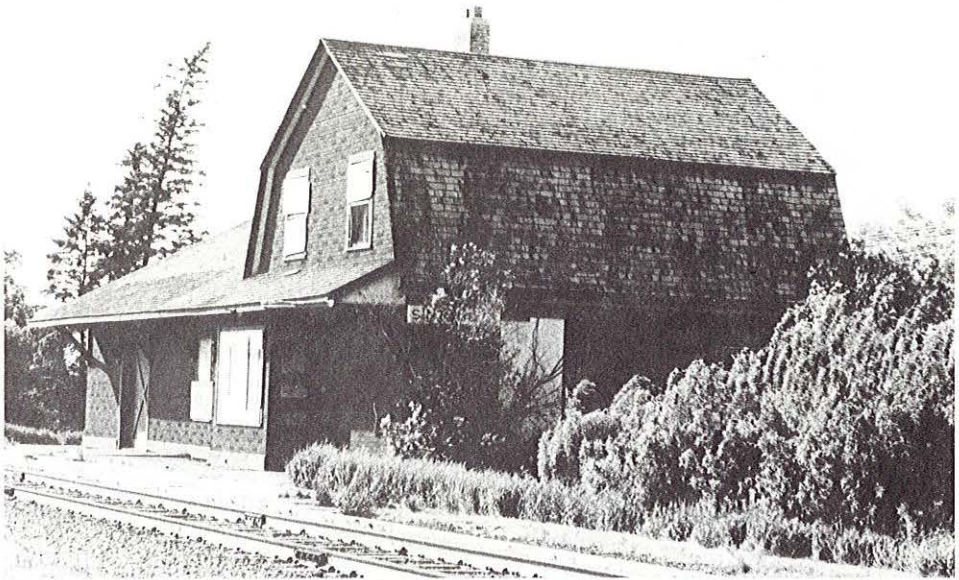
As the North American railway industry matured in the late nineteenth century, it began to perceive the depot as an important public-relations asset. Since



Located east of Regina on the Canadian Pacific mainline, the Balgonie depot is typical of stations originally built by the company. The lack of an overhang meant the office and bay received the full effect of the summer sun. The shade provided by even a small overhang is shown by the shadow on the freight house. Built in 1893, the CP upgraded the Balgonie station by the application of stucco on the upper storey and the addition of "Insul-brick" on the lower walls. "Insul-brick" was also widely used on CP's Soo Line affiliate to tighten uninsulated depot structures. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

stations were literally gateways to countless rural towns, communities did not want some unadorned "shack" to serve as their "front door." Furthermore, railways in general, and the CP in particular, experienced popular unhappiness with their high rate structures and allegedly poor consumer service. Pressure for tough regulation and government aid to competing lines increased. The failure of the CP to move the grain harvest to Lake Superior ports in 1901 and again in 1902 did little to improve its image in Saskatchewan.⁵

If building a more attractive, though largely inexpensive depot could soothe community feelings, it would be money well invested.⁶ Therefore, in the first years of the twentieth century, the Canadian Pacific introduced several small depot designs that were much more architecturally pleasing than the one selected for Balgonie. One of these — the station at Sintaluta is an example — is characterized by a gambrel roof on the second floor with a gable roof that tops the freight house running at right angles. Inclusion of a bracket-supported shingled awning is another new feature. Only two depots of the Sintaluta-type survived in Saskatchewan until the 1970s, although others were found in all the western provinces.



Sinaluta is on the mainline east of Regina. Erected in 1911, this depot was the last of its type built. Likely this structure was a replacement one that probably resembled Balgonie's. The Sinaluta building was one of the first CP designs to include a shingled awning. Notice, too, the trees and shrubs that were once part of a neatly kept station grounds. Many CP depots in Saskatchewan are presently boarded up and abandoned. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)



Located near Moose Jaw, the Pasqua station is an earlier example of the Sinaluta-style depot. Built in 1903 at the junction of the mainline and an important branch to North Portal, this building is one of the very few CP stations in Saskatchewan that had stucco applied. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

Another of these early twentieth century designs appeared at only two locations in Saskatchewan including Carievale. This structure has a second storey mansard roof with a gable roof covering the freight house. A hip-roof addition on the waiting-room end creates an interesting roof-line not found on many other depots in the province. The awning extends only along the office front. Another depot in Saskatchewan that resembles the one at Carievale is located in Rosthern on the Canadian National.⁷ Additional examples are found along early CP lines in Manitoba and Alberta.



The CP opened the Carievale building in 1901. The placement of the doors at the front indicates that the waiting room was located between the office and freight house. The hip-roof addition on what would be normally the waiting-room end was almost certainly used for living space. Even in 1969, when this photograph was taken, children were still growing up in country depots. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

In 1902 the Canadian Pacific adopted one of the most ornate combination station plans used in the Canadian West. The road constructed one of these at Theodore. Appropriately called the “pagoda” style, it contains a hip roof over the first storey and a “bellcast” hip roof on the second. Broken by hip-gable dormers, the second storey roof has tiny decorative dormers on its peak. While some roof overhang is provided, it is not as pronounced as on the other CP depots. Only three of these structures remained in Saskatchewan in the seventies, but there are several others in Manitoba.

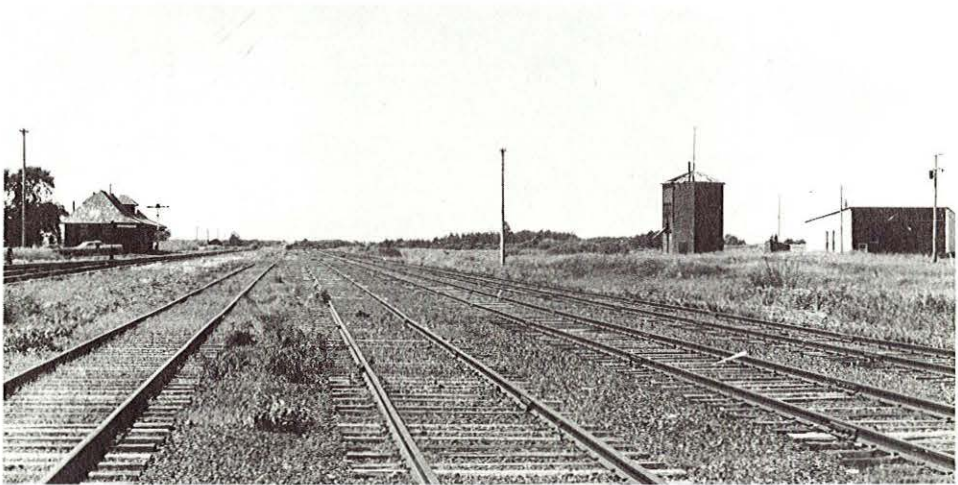


This unusual building is southeast of Saskatoon on the Winnipeg line. The oriental flavor is unmistakable. Yet, the Theodore depot, like the most simple combination stations in Saskatchewan, contains a waiting room, freight house, office, and agent's apartment. The seemingly endless variety of exterior appearances that could be created to serve the same basic purpose is vivid testimony to the creativity of railroad architects. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

Another contemporary design was employed at Esterhazy. A group of at least six depots similar to this one were erected in Saskatchewan in 1903 and 1904. This particular design can be identified by its high roof interrupted front and back by hip dormers. The front sports a bracket-supported roof overhang, and under it is a rectangular bay with three trackside windows. While only a few of these depots could be found locally in the early seventies, there is evidence that the road erected several others. Moreover, the CP put up similar structures in Ontario.



The shadows cast on the Esterhazy building indicate the shade overhangs could provide. This station has had some of its windows and doors removed over the years. Standardized plans usually were made so that they could allow easy alteration should local needs require change. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)



The Neudorf depot is similar to the one in Esterhazy. Neudorf is a small division point that once had an active roundhouse and watertower. The CP also built a small yard. Facilities like this used to bustle with activity as locomotives were serviced, cars switched, and trains dispatched. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

In addition to introducing more handsome depots, the Canadian Pacific also sought to spruce up its corporate image by beautifying station grounds. For decades the road gave prizes to agents, section foremen, and other employees who maintained particularly attractive gardens on company property. The agent at Bulyea, for instance, enjoyed great success in cultivating his flower and vegetable garden and won several divisional awards for his efforts.⁸

In 1905 the years of great railroad expansion were still ahead for Saskatchewan. No longer would the CP enjoy a transportation monopoly. Both the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific were about to embark upon major track construction programs. If the CP was to remain competitive, it, too, would have to undertake major expansion. This, of course, would entail building many new depots.

The Canadian Pacific had tried five different standard station designs before 1905, but none had been adopted for widespread use. Something new was now thought to be needed. Thus in 1906, the CP introduced a plan that it would later duplicate over forty times in Saskatchewan alone. The depot at Mortlach is a splendid illustration. A second storey covered by a low pyramid roof, broken by a hip dormer with two windows, characterizes Mortlach-style stations. Built as late as 1914, this design has a medium hip roof over the freight house, that then flows down to the front to become part of a bracket-supported awning. Although this awning extends beyond the limits of the building on the front, it does not cover the ends nor does it appear on the rear. This popular station is common to all of the western provinces and Ontario, it is one of the most widely used CP depot drawings.



Built in 1906, the Mortlach depot near Moose Jaw is one of the first of a large group of Canadian Pacific standard buildings. As on other structures, the shading effects of the overhang are clearly shown. Note, too, the large trees on the station's northside which were planted to help break the force of the winter winds. By having the freight house on the west end, only this usually unoccupied section received the full impact of cold blasts.

(Charles W. Bohi Photo)



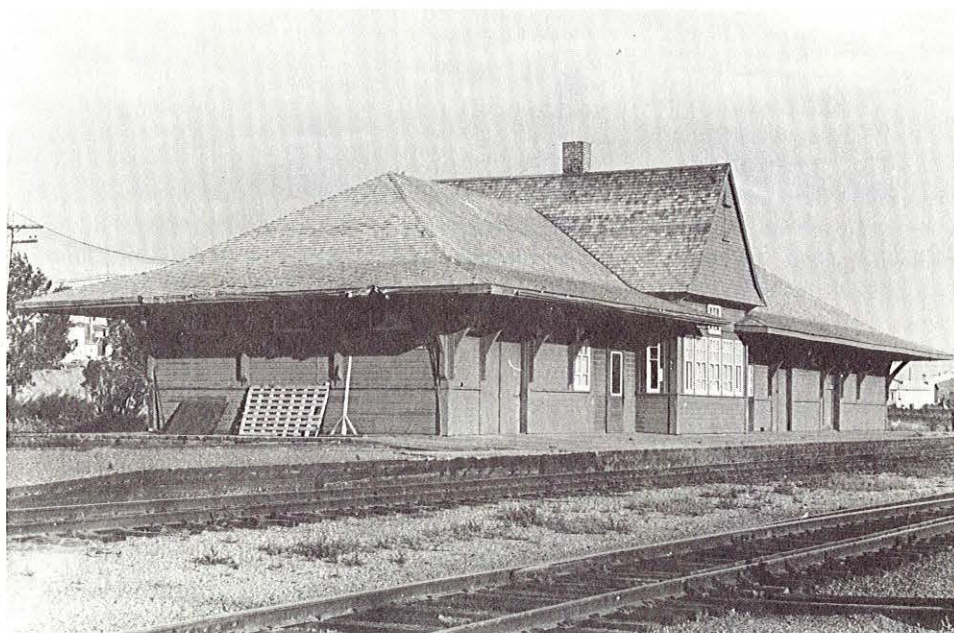
Located at Alida in southeast Saskatchewan near Estevan, this 1913 version of the Mortlach depot is one of the few to have the upper storey painted a light color. The ever-present wooden platform in Saskatchewan is especially evident in this photograph. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

Desiring to reduce the monotonous impact of a single design, the Canadian Pacific adopted a second one for its western Canadian stations in 1907. Erected widely as late as the end of World War I, an example is found at Fife Lake. Similar to the depot at Balgonie, the one at Fife Lake is covered by the same gable roof over both floors. However, the addition of a gable dormer to the second-storey floor gives it a much less spartan appearance. Another distinction is inclusion of the shingled awning on the front of the office and waiting room. The CP built about thirty of the Fife Lake-type buildings in Saskatchewan and more examples appear in Manitoba and Alberta.



At the rear of the Fife Lake depot, south of Assiniboia in central Saskatchewan, are the remains of a fence that once enclosed several shade trees. Built in 1914, this station was still in service in 1970. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

To meet the transportation requirements of rural division points between 1908 and 1911 the Canadian Pacific built five carbon-copy stations in Saskatchewan. These have some of the oriental styling found on stations like the one at Theodore. A fine illustration appears at Kerrobert. This one-storey building covered by a hip roof has the ubiquitous wide, bracket-supported overhangs to shade the building and provide protection in bad weather. For decorative effect, a prominent gable dormer breaks the roofline. (This dormer is not used to provide living space.) These large structures appeared only in Saskatchewan and Alberta.



West of Saskatoon near the Alberta border, the CP designed the Kerrobert-type depot to serve the needs of branchline junctions. Door placement indicates that two waiting rooms, one on each side of the office, were provided. Separate rooms were also included for L.C.L. freight, baggage, and express. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

The Great War slowed the railway boom in western Canada to a crawl. Indeed, disruptions caused by the conflict led to the bankruptcies of the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific and the subsequent formation of the Canadian National system. But by 1920, a new period of railway construction seemed to be in the offing. It became clear that the Canadian Pacific was not going to be allowed to reassert its rail monopoly in the West by absorbing the two financially-ailing firms. Rather, an increasingly competitive Canadian National was emerging out of the wreckage. The implications of the internal combustion engine for transportation were not yet fully realized, and most residents felt that Saskatchewan needed more steel rail.

During the 1920s, a fierce struggle erupted between the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National.⁹ In Saskatchewan hundreds of miles of new branch lines were opened. To provide depots along these new lines, both systems introduced more substantial structures.¹⁰

Sheho, Saskatchewan is the site of one of the new Canadian Pacific stations built during the twenties. Careful examination of this structure reveals strong



The massive appearance of the Sheho-type station is obvious. The overall effect of the front dormer with its bay, awning, and rectangular office bay makes for a striking structure. This 1971 photograph reveals that L.C.L. freight shipments were still being delivered by the CP to various Saskatchewan depots. Constructed in 1927, this building may have replaced an earlier one. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)



The Whitewood depot is one of the few brick stations in Saskatchewan. Built two years later than the one at Sheho, it is virtually identical. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

similarities between it and the earlier, more modest Balgonie and Fife Lake buildings. All three sport gable roofs over their second stories, and all have relatively simple roofs over the freight houses. A rectangular bay is employed on each. The addition of a gable dormer enhances the appearance of the Fife Lake station, but it pales in comparison with the gable dormer on the front of the Sheho depot. Certainly, the gable dormer can be said to dominate the Sheho station. The use of a prominent bay in the dormer only heightens the effect. The shingled awning is also more striking on the Sheho building because it is employed on both the end and rear. While the over-all visual impact of these changes is tremendous, it is not likely that they unduly raised construction costs. No doubt many a prairie community was proud to claim one of these as its gateway. Structures of this type were not only built on new lines, but they also were employed as replacement ones along main lines and branches opened long before the twenties. The CP erected at least a score of these buildings in Saskatchewan, and more were constructed in Manitoba. Perhaps, too, some were used in Alberta, though none survived until the 1970s.

In 1927, likely for economic reasons, the Canadian Pacific designed a fresh, less striking depot. The station at Mankota is representative of this architectural breed. Essentially a hip-roofed, one-storey affair with a gable dormer that forms the upper floor, the first-level roof shades it on all sides with wide, bracket-supported overhangs. A rectangular bay with two front windows is located under the trackside overhang. The company duplicated this plan approximately a dozen times in Saskatchewan; Alberta probably had at least that many more. One Mankota-like building was constructed in Ontario near Thunder Bay. Most had been razed by the seventies.



Though smaller and less impressive than the Sheho depot, the one at Mankota, southwest of Assiniboia, is nevertheless attractive. Erected in 1929, the station still got the ubiquitous wooden platform. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

A small group of stations erected on the Canadian Pacific line from near Nipawin to Prince Albert between 1938 and 1951 were probably the last standardized combination depots built in Saskatchewan. These one-storey structures apparently contained no living quarters. Covered by a hip roof, which has a wide overhang on the front, these simple buildings boast a rectangular bay with two front windows. It is doubtful that more than five were built; none are known to have existed outside the province.



The Canadian Pacific built the White Fox depot in 1939. It is one of the rare examples of a small-town station with only a single storey. (Charles W. Bohi Photo)

While the depots of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National had to meet the same requirements, it is clear that the CN and its predecessors utilized fewer standard plans for their combination stations than was the case with the CP. In part this may have been simply because the CP was an older road. More time passed thus allowing early CP depots to become obsolete, to be destroyed by fire, windstorm, or other means, or simply to wear out. Moreover, between 1900 and 1930 when most of the CN lines opened, there were fewer management changes. Both the Canadian Northern, and the Grand Trunk Pacific had essentially the same corporate leadership throughout the years that most of their depots were being built. The CP, on the other hand, experienced several different administrations between the completion of its mainline across Saskatchewan in the 1880s, and the end of large-scale railroad construction in the 1930s. For whatever reasons, it is apparent that the CP achieved a richer variety of standard station design than did its competitors.

The same forces that caused the removal of so many CN depots, has likewise thinned the numbers of CP stations. However, as late as 1970, over 140 country CP

combination depots still survived in Saskatchewan. Since that time their numbers have diminished greatly. Central agency programs, agency eliminations, and outright abandonment of lines have led to the closing of many of these buildings. Most have been dismantled. Some, however, have been converted into farm buildings, cafes, museums, and private homes. While this change is understandable from an economic point-of-view, those who review the story of the Canadian Pacific likely will express a sense of loss at the destruction of so many of these fine buildings that were once vital to the communities they served.

NOTES

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¹ Published material on the standardized combination railroad station is found in Charles W. Bohi and H. Roger Grant, "The Standardized Railway Station in Saskatchewan: The Case of the Canadian National System," *Saskatchewan History*, Volume XXIX, No. 3, pp. 81-102; and Charles W. Bohi, *Canadian National's Western Depots: The Country Stations*, forthcoming from Railfare Enterprises, Montreal.

² W. Kaye Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York, 1977), p. 86.

³ "Insurance Book," CP Rail Archives, Montreal.

⁴ Between 1969 and 1973 Mr. Bohi photographed more than 400 stations in Saskatchewan. This collection serves as a basis for determining the number of depots of a particular design that were built or that survived until the 1970s. Of course, it is possible that more structures of each type still remained in 1970, and it is probable that more of each design were constructed. The number mentioned is simply to give the reader an idea of the extent a drawing was employed.

⁵ G. P. de T. Glazebrook, *A History of Transportation in Canada* (Toronto, 1938), pp. 317-318.

⁶ See John A. Droege, *Passenger Terminals and Trains* (New York, 1916), pp. 260-261.

⁷ See Bohi and Grant, "The Standardized Railroad Station in Saskatchewan: The Case of the Canadian National System," and G. R. Stevens, *History of the Canadian National Railways* (New York, 1973), pp. 186-187, for an explanation of how depots designed by the Canadian Pacific came to be owned by the Canadian National.

⁸ "Passenger Service Bulletin #240," CP Rail Archives, p. 12. Other bulletins publicized successful efforts at gardening by company employees. In some instances, the successful gardens are cited as further evidence of the fertility of the prairie soil. The idea, naturally, was to reinforce other efforts to assure prospective settlers that the Canadian West was a good place to migrate. See also, Aileen Garland, "Gardens Along the Right of Way," *Manitoba Pageant*, Volume XXII, No. 2, pp. 5-7.

⁹ Good accounts of the rivalry between the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National during the 1920s are found in Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*, pp. 310-327, and Stevens, *History of the Canadian National Railways*, pp. 340-342.

¹⁰ The Canadian National designated the new station plans it introduced in the twenties as "Third-Class Depots." A station drawing used at smaller communities was classified as a "Fourth-Class Depot" by the CN. See Bohi and Grant, "The Standardized Railroad Station in Saskatchewan: The Case of the Canadian National System."