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Remembering Bob Jorvig, long-time trustee and member of the Historical Society.

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Unlocking our city's history in its parks, and a membership reminder.

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We toot our congratulations to the St. Louis Park High School paper, the *Echo*, on its national awards.

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Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway advertisements from its last run, in the 1940s and 1950s.



# REeCHO

PARK HISTORY TODAY

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Volume 20.1 / Spring 2021

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

I grew up in a Wisconsin town pierced by railroads, and listened to the toots and wails of the train whistles nightly through my bedroom window. For the past 35 years, I've found the same toots in the Park to be comforting; sounds surely treasured by all Park residents as measured in direct proportion to the distance of their bedroom windows from the railroad tracks.

- Bill Beyer, FAIA

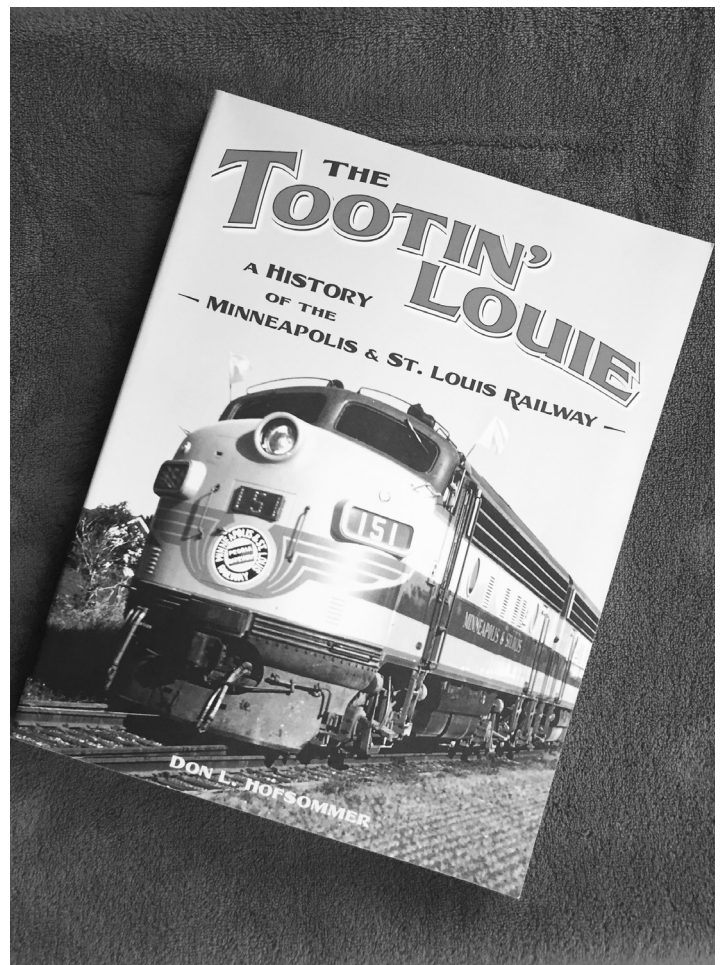
## “THE TOOTIN’ LOUIE”

We focus this issue on the history of the railroad company that gave St. Louis Park her name, the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, by offering a sort of book report on the definitive history of that railroad - “The Tootin’ Louie” - by Don Hofsommer.

As an illustration of the incredibly granular detail in Hofsommer’s book, he commences with a list of 62 acronyms for railroad corporations of the Midwest. Good thing he used them; the book would have been seventy pages longer had he spelled them out. Only five of the 62 railroads contained “Minneapolis” in their names. The detail of his research is truly astounding.

The company’s original purpose was reflected in its name - to connect Minneapolis to St. Louis and thereby escape the control of local commerce exercised by earlier and larger railroads from Chicago and Milwaukee. And therein lie the key elements of the M&StL’s ultimate destruction; it started business a decade or more late, was geographically outflanked, and was undercapitalized throughout its ninety-year life span.

St. Paul was said to be the last city of the East, and Minneapolis the first city of the West, and the twins were in fierce competition for new business and transportation infrastructure as railroads supplanted riverboats after the Civil War.



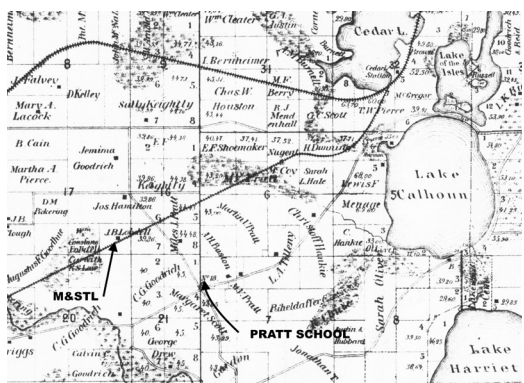
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In 1870, Minneapolis titans of flour and lumber met with Franklin Steele, dusted off Steele's pre-statehood, 1854 charter for the undeveloped Minneapolis Western Rail Road, and with an assist from the state legislature, created the M&StL. Its first order of business was to look east to St. Paul and north to Duluth's portal to Great Lakes shipping, extending trackage through its twin to White Bear Lake.

It then looked west to start finding its way to St. Louis, surveying and grading a route out of town that took it through the future Village of St. Louis Park, laying down tracks beginning in 1871.

As shown on the 1874 plat map, the future village was farmland and swamp; its 100% corner was the intersection of Excelsior Road, which had been improved from Minneapolis to Glencoe in 1853 before Minnesota became a state, as Territorial Road No. 3, and Wooddale Avenue, (or Pleasant Avenue or the Schoolhouse Road), improved by farmer, miller and horticulturalist Jonathan Grimes from 44th Street in not-yet Edina across a wide swamp to the Pratt School at Excelsior Road, established in 1859. Wooddale was later extended north across the M&StL tracks to future Mayor Joseph Hamilton's farmhouse.

Before 1874, Harley Hopkins had negotiated a deal that traded a path through his homestead land for naming rights, a depot and a post office, plus the bonus of all-you-can-ride train tickets for himself and his wife as long as either lived. That established the Hopkins Depot on the Excelsior Road as a major railroad transfer point and hub 15 years before the Park became organized as a village. According to the Hopkins Historical Society website, by 1901, Hopkins was the largest railroad hub west of Chicago, with



## IN MEMORIAM

Bob Jorvig, a long-time member and 10-year trustee of the St. Louis Park Historical Society, died on February 10, 2021, a month shy of his hundredth birthday.



Bob grew up in the Park after his parents moved here in 1930 when he was nine years old. He recounted his childhood, and his father, 27-year city councilman Torval Jorvig, in our book, "Something in the Water," (pages 176-181). Jorvig Park, the city's first park and now home to the historic Milwaukee Road Depot, was named after his dad.

Bob recalled early jobs he had caddying at the Westwood Hills Golf Course (now nature center), and working as a roller-skating transfer boy at Western Union Telegraph Company, earning \$15/week in 1936 as a high-schooler. He rode the Park's only streetcar, west along Minnetonka Blvd and Lake Street to school, and east into downtown to his job. Both parents had worked as telegraphers for Western Union.

After watching his father spend lots of time dealing with constituents on the phone and in person, Bob decided politics was not his thing, and instead pursued a degree in city planning. He served as Director of the Minneapolis Housing Authority through the 1950s and became the first executive director of the Metropolitan Council in 1967.

Bob left home to join the Marines in 1943, and served in both WWII and Korea. He moved back to the Park in 1993 to care for his elderly mother, (who lived to be 104), in a home they had built in the early 1940s on Minnehaha Creek just south of Minnetonka Boulevard. Bob later lived in the Wolfe Park condominiums, and had a front-row seat for the transformation of that neighborhood as part of the Excelsior Grand developments.

Along the way, Bob also recorded DVDs of interviews with his contemporaries about their lives in St. Louis Park, viewable at the city's cable TV portal and on YouTube. Current Society trustee Kathy Spence Johnson remembers Bob:

"I knew him as the go to guy to get things done at SLPHS. He liked to get other people his age together and get them to talk about the early days of SLP. People at City Hall all knew him and would meet with him...He was funny and liked to laugh, many times at himself."

Trustee John Olson recalls that, "He used to go to the schools during the year to talk about history...He loved doing that... He also made sure that anytime we had an open house at the Depot he would get someone from a local telegraph group to be on hand to show visitors how it worked."

If any readers have stories about Bob that they wish to share, please mail or email them to us. He's shown below on his recumbent bike at the 2015 Parktacular parade, age 94.

## LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear readers,

This time last year I sat down to write my Re-Echo letter and reflected on the new outbreak of COVID-19. It is hard to believe we are still managing through it 12 months later, but here we are. As I have mentioned in the past, we are interested in collecting stories, photos and artifacts that will help tell the story of this time. Please share what you have specific to St. Louis Park, and look out soon for a more direct solicitation of your stories from the past year.

In some lighter news, the City of St. Louis Park is currently doing a fun activity helping “unlock” some history of our parks. During the month of March they are hiding an antique-looking lock in four parks, each of which have a bit of history to tell. The activity promotes our organization and helps teach a bit of the history to the general public. We are fortunate to have such a great city parks staff who come up with these ideas and execute them on their own! We are only through the first two clues at the time of this writing, and I wanted to share a bit about these two parks:

The first park on the treasure hunt is our personal favorite, Jorvig Park. Home of the Milwaukee Road Depot and named in honor of Torval Jorvig, father of Bob Jorvig who recently passed away (see our memorial about Bob in this issue). The City’s clue reads: “The Milwaukee Road is where I began my reign. Get on the right track by using your brain. History is here to remain. The exact location is where the children would train.” As you hopefully guessed, the lock was in the train-themed playset in the park.

The second park is Lilac Park, which is the current location of the Bee Hive oven which used to be on the east side of 100 just south of Minnetonka Boulevard. The Bee Hive was moved in 2008 with the joint efforts of the City and the Historical Society. The old site is also near Monkey Island, now referred to informally as Rock Island, which is being cared for (as currently allowed by MNDOT) by the neighborhood and Restore Lilac Way – google their name and you will see some great information and photographs of the remaining roadside parks of Highway 100. The City’s clue for this park reads: “Originally from Monkey Island just down the road. I could “Lie” but it would “Lack” the information you should be told. There was a buzz about the main icon when they moved the heavy load. The exact location is where the historic information will unfold.”

The third and fourth parks are not officially revealed yet, and there are many parks with some great history that it could be. You can visit the City’s website to find out what they did for Parks three and four. And if you are so inclined, go on our website to learn more about some contenders like Ainsworth Park, Carpenter Park, Wolfe Park, or John Ross Field.

Lastly, you should have recently received our membership renewal letter. I want to thank all of you for your past year of support, and I hope we can count on you for another year to support this newsletter mailing and the other operations of the Society. Your membership donations are our main source of funding the organization, and your support is our motivation to continue our work preserving and sharing the history of our great city!

With gratitude,

Ted



## CONNECT WITH US

**Stop by:** 3546 Dakota Ave. S., Suite C  
St. Louis Park  
Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.,  
and by appointment

**Call:** (612) 465-9288

**Email:** slphistory@gmail.com

**Visit online:** www.slphistory.org

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Founded in 1971, the St. Louis Park Historical Society collects, preserves and shares the history of St. Louis Park. The *ReEcho: Park History Today* is an official publication of the Society.

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seven tracks passing through town carrying freight lines and over 40 passenger trains daily.

Contributing to those tracks was the much larger Milwaukee Road, which in 1881 had assumed control of the Hastings and Dakota line that had built trackage immediately south of, and parallel to, the M&StL's right of way. Its 1886 depot building was named to the National Register of Historic Places and moved to Jorvig Park in 1969, and was the impetus for formation of the SLPHS.

By 1886, when the Park finally organized itself as a village, local control of the M&StL had already passed in 1882 from the Washburns and Pillsburys of Minneapolis commerce to owners from the larger rail concerns headquartered in Chicago, like Ransom Reed Cable, president of the Rock Island Line. Cable named his trusted protégé at the C&RI, William H. Truesdale, to manage the M&StL as its vice president.

William Truesdale soldiered on and was soon president of the company, but the 40-year wild expansion of railroads in the U.S. had invited governments to step in with regulation. Minnesota instituted a Railroad and Warehouse Commission in 1885, and the federal Interstate Commerce Commission added a layer of rules in 1887. Despite the new infusions of capital, joint operating agreements, and change of control, the M&StL defaulted on bond payments and was bankrupt by May 1888, with William Truesdale its court-appointed receiver.

Ironically, the deal that gave St. Louis Park her name and her train depot was engineered entirely by outsiders. Truesdale had moved to Minneapolis, where his younger brother, Hiram C. Truesdale was a protégé of streetcar magnate Thomas Lowry, and was Vice President of the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company, a real estate speculation enterprise and creature of Thomas B. Walker, who had his eye on the Park as an industrial suburb for Minneapolis comparable to Pullman, Illinois for Chicago.

The Village of St. Louis Park was incorporated in October 1886, and, as Norman Thomas tells us:

*Between H.C. Truesdale of the development company and William Haynes Truesdale of the railroad...a deal was made by which the Park could be boomed. The railroad president was to have a depot built at the site if the embryonic village would be named St. Louis Park in honor of the railroad...the M&StL built a depot sometime before 1886. That the deal was made before 1886 is indicated by the fact that the St. Louis Park Land and Improvement Company was organized in April 1886 and thus promoters knew that the area would bear that name.*

Also in 1886, 23-year-old Minnesotan Richard Sears from Stewartville, who had worked for the M&StL as a telegrapher, was station agent in Redwood Falls when he came into possession of a shipment of watches unwanted by the local retailer. He sold them up and down the railroad line, quit his job and opened a watch shop in Minneapolis. In 1887, he moved the business to Chicago and expanded its offerings. Perhaps you've heard of Sears, Roebuck and Company.

William Truesdale ably guided the M&StL through its insolvency, thwarted in his late attempts to save it by the Panic of 1893. After it emerged from bankruptcy in 1894, he moved on to greater railroad glories in other cities and states. His brother Hiram's lawyerly star had risen meteorically, appointed by President William McKinley in 1897 as the Chief Justice of the Arizona Territory, the youngest man to ever hold such a post. He tragically died in Phoenix of a brain abscess a few months later at age 37.

The sheriff's sale of M&StL's assets in October 1894 generated just enough cash to pay off the firm's debts. From the defunct Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway emerged the new, Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad, control having passed from Minneapolis flour magnates, then to Chicago and Omaha rail magnates, and finally to Wall Street bankers.

In 1895, Anson B. Cutts became the M&StL's general passenger ticket agent and began a career lasting several decades in which he promoted passenger travel by organizing cut-rate excursion trains, doubling passenger rides to around 1.2 million in 10 years. Many went to the resorts on Lake

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Minnetonka, where the railway owned half interest in the Lake Park Hotel, (later the Tonka Bay Hotel). That year, Cutts arranged excursion trains for the Loyal Order of Hibernians, the Daughters of Erin, the Woodmen, and for attendees of the 4th national convention of the Concatenated Order of Hoo Hoo, which was held in Minneapolis.

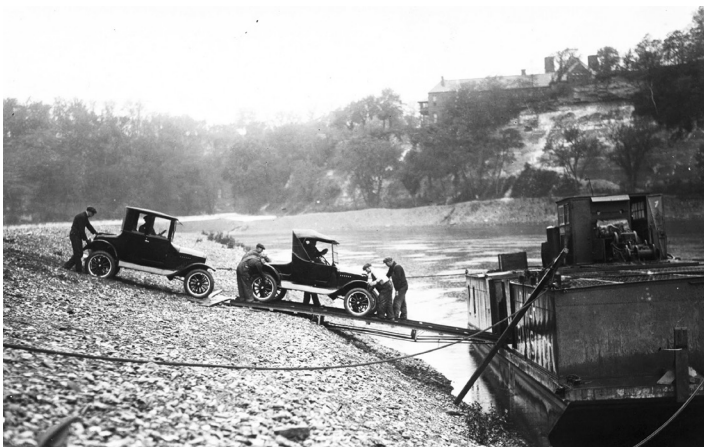
From the mid-1890s on, the railroading game in America resembled nothing so much as a giant multi-party chess match, played for money and fueled by Wall Street capital, where the human, land and machine components of the rail network were treated mostly as pawns, to be sacrificed for short-term gain or long-term strategy, or inched across the board to be exchanged for kings and queens. As Hofsommer put it:

*The M&StL started somewhere of importance, but went no place in particular. Its tiny route structure could not support independence, and as the Panic of 1893 ended the giants again awakened to imperial conquest. Would the New Yorkers merely gussy up the M&StL for marriage? Would they milk the property for all it was worth and then throw the carcass to the jackals? Would they expand M&StL as a means of goading the giants into bidding for the pesky smaller road? Or would they chart a strategic course designed for long-term independence? Whatever the cards in that hand, they would be played by Edwin Hawley, named president of the road in 1897.*

Hawley ran the road and consolidated it among his other railroad interests including the Clover Leaf line connecting to Toledo and Detroit and the venerable Chesapeake & Ohio, connecting to the east coast. He was a man of few words, and kept his competitors guessing, but in 1911 realized he needed new capital infusions to pay M&StL notes coming due, so agreed to adding a new face to the railway's board – Newman Erb.

At Erb's urging, the financial engineering began with acquisition of the Iowa Central Railway, concluded at the end of 1911 and described by Hofsommer as follows:

*Iowa Central would sell all assets to the M&StL; M&StL would take on Iowa Central' debt, but Iowa Central would kick in \$2.5 million "additional money." One share of M&StL common stock would be exchanged for two shares of Iowa*



In 1915, Model Ts are loaded on barges below the Ford Plant in St. Paul, to be floated into the American heartland. HCL photo.

*Central common, along with one share of M&StL common and nine shares of M&StL preferred stock for each ten shares of Iowa Central preferred. M&StL would authorize \$75 million in new Refunding and First Mortgage Extension Five Percent Fifty Year bonds and \$2.5 million for first lien on the lines west of Watertown, retiring Minnesota, Dakota & Pacific bonds. Existing shareholders of both companies who chose to subscribe would receive...a bonus of five shares of preferred stock for every \$1,000 bond.*

The year 1912 dawned with Hawley's sudden death on February 1st, and the decade of the automobile well underway, a decade that would present the first real competition to passenger rail service in 60 years, competition that the railroads would eventually lose. Despite the broad prosperity of American life during that decade, by 1915 "one-sixth of railroad mileage in the United States was in the hands of receivers."

After the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, the Congress passed and President Wilson signed the Railroad Control Act, a federal takeover of all railroads in the country to ensure cooperation rather than competition in the war effort. The Esch-Cummins Act of 1920 returned railroads to their owners, with a new rulebook governing all aspects of operation, including limits on shipping rates and substantial wage increases for railroad workers.

As the 1920s roared on, those two contradictory rules generated a string of labor actions. M&StL's revenues had increased by 66% from 1916 to 1923, but its costs rose 100%, and on July 26, 1923, the M&StL entered receivership once again. It would not emerge until 1943, when the Great Depression and World War II had changed all the rules forever.

Stuck in receivership for two decades, its every corporate decision requiring approval of the courts, the railway was assaulted on multiple fronts, including by the NIMBYs of the Kenwood neighborhood. The noise, stink and soot generated by the M&StL's Cedar Lake Yard and roundhouse, located literally in the shadow of the Kenwood water tower up the bluff on the parkway, made for tense community relations. Finally in 1984, the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority cleared it all out, eventually developing the Kenilworth Trail link between the Cedar Lake and South Cedar Lake Regional Trails.

Shortly thereafter the HCRRA made the critical mistake of selling off part of the original M&StL right-of-way for townhouse development, creating a bottleneck for the Southwest Light Rail project that has obstructed, stalled, delayed, increased costs, and sorely vexed the project to this very day.

Hofsommer grew up in Callender, Fort Dodge, and Spencer, Iowa, all former Iowa Central links taken over by M&StL years earlier. In those formative years, he was befriended by railroad personnel in each place. "All I wanted to do, I told myself, was spend my life working for the railroad – and the only railroad I wanted to work for was the M&StL..."

Hofsommer doesn't specify how the railway he loved got the nickname "The Tootin' Louie," although he notes it had others, called simply "the Louie" at Winthrop, the "Em" at

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Watertown, SD, and the "Saint El" at Spencer, IA. And up and down the line, during its most recent two decades of receivership, it was the "Maimed and Still Limping."

By 1960, the M&StL was disposed of in a sale to the Chicago & Northwestern and ceased to exist, which proved to be an enormous culture shock to the people who ran the day-to-day operations. Other railroads simply didn't treat their people as well as the M&StL, a legacy lovingly preserved by Don Hofsommer.

Note: We discovered a cache of photos of M&StL infrastructure from the 1920s and 30s in the Hennepin County Library collections and our own, which we present on the following pages.



More photographic bounty from the Hennepin County Library' collections showing M&StL infrastructure in the Kenilworth corridor from around 1930, with a rare view of the Cedar Lake Yards and the Downtown Minneapolis skyline from Kenwood.



## WE TOOT CONGRATULATIONS TO THE *ECHO*

From the December 9, 2020 SLP Communicator, plus, our favorite Echo clipping from 1981:

### Echo Receives National Awards

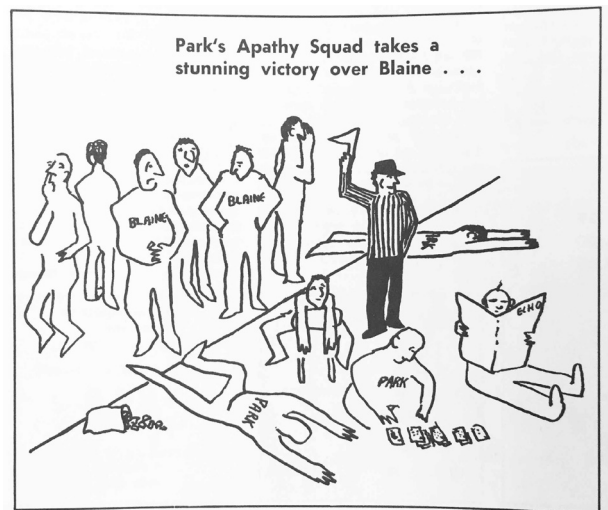
The National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA) recently released its national awards for individual contests and Newspaper Pacemakers, at the Nov. 21 virtual National Journalism Convention.

# Echo

*Echo* students received a National Newspaper Pacemaker for last school year's print editions. The National Pacemaker is the highest award the organization gives to student news media and dates back to 1927. *Echo* has been a National Newspaper Pacemaker Finalist every year since 2010 and has won the prestigious award five times since. This year, only 21 newspapers won a National Pacemaker. *Echo* is the only school from Minnesota to be honored this year.

Additionally, during the convention, *Echo* won fourth in Best of Show for its online new site, [slpecho.com](http://slpecho.com).

Four students also placed nationally in NSPA's individual awards. (NSPA awards First through Fifth places and then about another two to five are recognized as Honorable Mentions in each category.)





Above, a view looking west from Wooddale Avenue in the 1920s shows two depots for catching trains into town or out into the world (SLPHS collection). Below, an aerial view from above Bryn Mawr Park looking south toward the Kenwood neighborhood, with the M&StL roundhouse and shops just below the Kenwood Tower. Bottom, looking out from the Kenwood bluff over the roundhouse roof with Cedar Lake in the background, photos from Hennepin County Libraries.





**REeCHO**  
PARK HISTORY TODAY

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## DISPATCH LOOKBACK

After its final bout with bankruptcy ended in the 1940s, the M&StL advertised in the Dispatch to promote its new lease on life. New passenger cars in 1948 and a new office building headquarters in 1951 enticed passengers to ride the rails.

**NEW PASSENGER CARS on**  
*The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway*



**STREAMLINED,  
AIR-CONDITIONED COACHES  
NOW IN SERVICE ON SIX TRAINS**

As a major improvement in service to travelers in Minnesota, Iowa and South Dakota, the M. & St. L. now operates New, All-modern Passenger Coaches in place of old-type cars in six trains on three main lines. They were designed and built by the Budd Company of Philadelphia.

These new and larger cars, one of which is pictured above, are of stainless steel, air conditioned and of identical modern design. Each cost about \$100,000, is 85 feet long and seats 64 passengers, 56 of them in the body of the car and four in each lounge.

All the coaches are separate units, permitting operation in standard M. & St. L. trains, and each has its individual Diesel unit, for air conditioning, heating, light and hot water. Each seat is a separate chair, with adjustable back and footrest and soft, deep-cushioned upholstery.

One of the coaches is now in service on each of the following trains on M. & St. L. lines:

**MINNEAPOLIS-ALBERT LEA-ALBIA LINE**  
Trains No. 1, northbound, and No. 2, southbound, Daily except Sunday

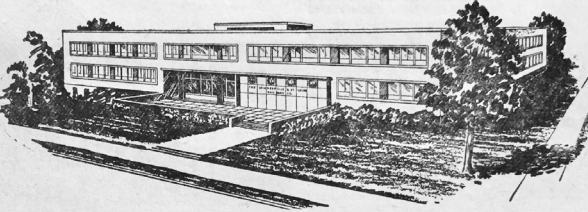
**MINNEAPOLIS-ALBERT LEA-FORT DODGE-DES MOINES LINE**  
Trains No. 3, northbound, and No. 4, southbound, Daily

**MINNEAPOLIS-WINTHROP-WATERTOWN LINE**  
Trains No. 13, westbound, and No. 14, eastbound, Daily except Sunday

Addition of these fine, modern passenger coaches to rolling stock of the M. & St. L. is a part of its program for constant improvement of equipment and service. Already, purchase of 40 Diesel Locomotives and more than 4,000 new freight cars in the past ten years has helped the M. & St. L. maintain its 77-year reputation for Fast Dependable Freight Service.

*The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway*

*New Home of*  
**The M. & St. L. Railway**



**This is the new General Office Building of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway, as it will look when completed in early 1951 on Franklin Avenue between Stevens and First Avenues South in Minneapolis, near the edge of the downtown business district. Construction was begun April 4.**

To cost nearly \$1,000,000, the project climaxes an improvement program on which the M. & St. L. has spent more than \$35,000,000 since the present management, headed by President Lucian C. Sprague, assumed charge in 1935.

The new headquarters building, attractive in appearance but modern and utilitarian in design and equipment, will comprise two stories and basement. It will be U-shaped, with frontage of 201 feet on Franklin Avenue, 181 on First Avenue and 161 on Stevens. Foundation and walls will be built to carry additional floors when needed. Floor space will total some 80,000 square feet and nearly 300 M. & St. L. officials and employes will occupy the various offices. Walls will be faced with red Minnesota granite and cream-colored brick. A raised terrace will extend 75 feet along the front. Materials and equipment produced in Minnesota will be used extensively. An escalator will run from the first to the second floors and an auto park for employes will occupy the rear of the site. Clyde W. Smith of Minneapolis is the architect and the James Leck Company of Minneapolis is the general contractor.

*The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway*  
**FAST DEPENDABLE FREIGHT SERVICE**