

MINNESOTA HISTORY/ARCHITECTURE INVENTORY FORM

Project: Union Depot Ph. I/II St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota

Identification			
Historic Name	Union Depot Elevated Rail Yards		
Current Name	Union Depot Elevated Rail Yards		
Survey #			
Address	n/a E. Kellogg Blvd.		
City/Twp	St. Paul		
County	Ramsey		
Legal Desc.	Twp 28	Range 22	Sec 5
USGS Quad	St. Paul East 1993		
UTM Zone	15	Easting	493437
		Northing	4977164
Property ID (PIN)			

SHPO Inventory Number RA-SPC-6904 6907

Review and Compliance Number

Black and White Photo Number

Form (New or Updated) New

Description	
Resource Type	Railyards
Architect/Engineer	Frederick Mears
Style	N/A
Construction Date	c. 1920
Original Use	Railyards
Current Use	Parking Area

Integrity

Although all the tracks have been removed from the elevated rail yard structure that is now used for parking on the upper and lower levels, the structure remains mostly intact. At some time after the Union Depot was no longer used for active rail in the early 1970s, a ramp, known as the Broadway Extension, was cut into the middle of the east platform at Broadway Street to allow for automobile and truck access to the upper platform. This has resulted in slight diminishment of the material and design integrity. The Lafayette Bridge was constructed over the eastern portion of the structure in 1968 and Shepard Road was built as a parkway along the Mississippi River circa 2000; both of these elements somewhat alter the setting of the rail yard structure. The removal of the track and sheds on top of the structure certainly diminish its associations with the railroading, although the linkage to the Union Depot, which so clearly demonstrates the railroad connection, assists the associative values. Despite the minor changes in setting, association, material, and design integrity, the elevated rail yards continue to convey their important associations with the Union Depot property and to illustrate this breadth of the railroading activity during the early and mid twentieth century.

Description

The Union Depot Elevated Rail Yards (RA-SPC-6904) are roughly situated between East Kellogg Boulevard to the north, Shepard Road to the south, East Robert Street to the west, and an area approximately 1,000 feet east of the Lafayette Bridge to the east. This structure generally runs parallel to East Kellogg Boulevard and Shepard Road. The overall structure is devised to raise the railroad tracks above the river's flood zone at a gradual slope, peaking at the area below the raised Union Depot concourse. To the east, the ramp is supported by concrete retaining walls with the platform being made of fill. Between Broadway and Wall streets, the outer edge of the ramp on the north side is supported by round, concrete columns with mushroom caps. At Broadway, a cross street has been cut through, forming a ramp to the upper level for automobile access. The portion between Broadway and Wacouta streets is a broad, concrete platform covering the entire block. The platform is supported by a series of round, brick posts with concrete skim coat approximately 20 feet on center. Both the upper deck and the undertrack area are used as parking for the adjacent United States Postal Service trucking activity. The area extends below the Union Depot concourse, spans Sibley Street, and continues behind the post office building. From there, the structure narrows and meets the grade at East Robert Street.

Related Outbuildings

None

EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

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Historical Context

Urban Centers, 1870-1940

Historical Narrative

St. Paul's first unified train station was constructed in 1881 near the location of the current Union Depot. Prior to that time, each of the railroads servicing St. Paul built its own depot. Most rail lines approach the city's Lowertown area from the east to use the valley formed by Trout Brook/Phalen Creek that provided an even grade out of St. Paul's river valley. Trestles as high as 18 feet were built in the swampy lands and were eventually buried as various projects provided fill. After the original depot burned in 1913, a new facility was constructed between 1917 and 1926 (interrupted by World War I). Despite the on-going construction, the depot served 140 trains, 20,000 passengers, and 750 tons of mail a day for its nine member railroads on 21 passenger and four freight tracks in 1917. The Classical Revival headhouse was designed by Charles Frost, while the track and train sheds were designed by engineer Col. Frederick Mears. Mears had served as an assistant engineer for the Panama Canal (Westbrook 1983:82).

Mears was commissioned with the task of raising the rail yard another 17 feet above grade to avoid disruption when the flood-prone river rose above its banks. In addition, the tracks were realigned and expanded toward East Third Street (now East Kellogg Boulevard) to occupy all of the area between the street and the river. All of these activities were done while maintaining continuous operations of the rail lines. The project resulted in the removal of old warehouses and hotels on several blocks of Lowertown St. Paul. The elevated yard and platform was formed by a massive concrete platform atop round, mushroom-capped columns. The structure resulted in considerable belowground baggage handling area below the tracks. It also necessitated the replacement of the Robert Street Bridge and raising the Chicago Great Western Lift Bridge because of the grade change (Westbrook 1983:82). Historian Larry Millet noted that the project was one of the last great enterprises that the railroads would undertake in St. Paul (1996:138).

As the term "Union Depot" implies, every railroad line that stopped in St. Paul used the set of common tracks entering the depot that were approached by the individually owned tracks of the railroad companies also within the APE. A review of historical Sanborn maps from 1885 through 1951 indicates that at least 14 lines used the services of the Union Depot and its rail yard, including:

- Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad; Chicago St. Paul Minneapolis & Omaha Railroad;
- Northern Pacific Railroad;
- St. Paul & Duluth Railroad;
- St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad;
- St. Paul Minneapolis & Manitoba Railroad;
- Wisconsin Central Railroad;
- Chicago & Northwestern Railroad;
- Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad;
- Chicago Great Western Railroad;
- Great Northern Railroad;
- Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad;
- Minneapolis St. Paul & Sault Ste Marie; and
- Northern Pacific Railroad.

The rail yards were abandoned for rail yard use in the 1970s and are now used for automobile and truck parking on the upper and lower decks. A single active rail line is located adjacent to Shepard Road, bypassing the Union Depot and its former rail yards.

Significance and Recommendations

The St. Paul Union Depot (including both the headhouse and the concourse) is listed in the NRHP under significance Criteria A, B, and C. It is also a contributing property to the NRHP-listed Lowertown Historic District, which is also significant under Criteria A and C. The elevated rail yard structure associated with the Union Depot is integral to the structure and operations of the Union Depot and was an important element of the massive undertaking. As such, it should be considered a contributing

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element to the Union Depot historic property, the boundaries of which would require expansion (see Figure 3). The elevated rail yard structure would contribute to all three areas of the significance under which the Union Depot is listed.

In addition to the elevated rail yard structure, several of the rail lines that used the rail yards are themselves considered historic through previous determinations of eligibility, including the Northern Pacific (Lake Superior & Mississippi Rail; St. Paul & Duluth) from St. Paul to Duluth; St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad (later Chicago, Minnesota and Omaha; Chicago & Northwestern) from St. Paul to Sioux City; and the St. Paul & Pacific Main Line (BNSF) from St. Paul to E. St. Cloud. Mn/DOT is currently undertaking a historic railroad context study that will aid in the evaluation of many of the state's historical railroad companies and routes, and may result in the eligibility of additional lines.

Sources

Millet, Larry

1996 Twin Cities Then and Now. Minnesota Historical Society Press. St. Paul.

Westbrook, Nicholas

1983 A Guide to the Industrial Archeology of the Twin Cities. Prepared for the Twelfth Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial Archeology. St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

National Register Eligibility Recommendation

Eligible - Contributing

National Register Status

Not Previously Evaluated

Prepared By

Jeanne-Marie Mark
The 106 Group Ltd.

Date

5/21/2007

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View of the St. Paul railroad yards from the top of the First National Bank.
 Photographer: St. Paul Daily News
 Photograph Collection 1931-1932
 Location no. HE6.7 p24
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Property Photograph



Between Lafayette and Broadway Facing SW

Property Photograph



Between Broadway and Wall Streets Facing SW

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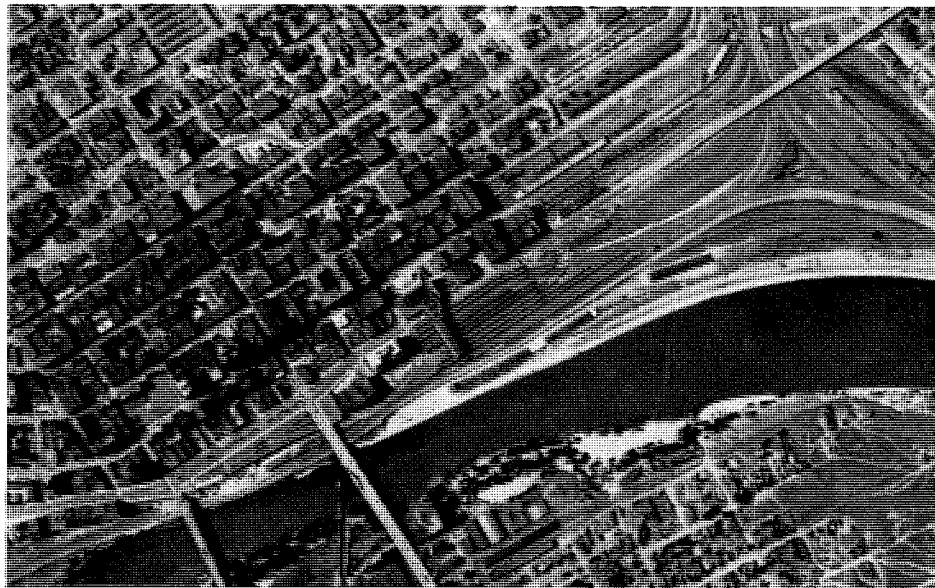
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Property Photograph



Looking West From Sibley Street

Property Photograph



1941 Aerial View of Union Depot