

# Time for some Watertown railroad trivia

**W**atertown, especially in its early years, was a prime location for the railroads. It wasn't long after the city was founded that the first tracks arrived here, coming from Milwaukee. Later, the tracks were extended to Madison in a branch line, and the main line continued northwest to Columbus, Portage and on to Minneapolis/St. Paul before ultimately going all the way to Seattle. For some years in the 1800s the city was the location for

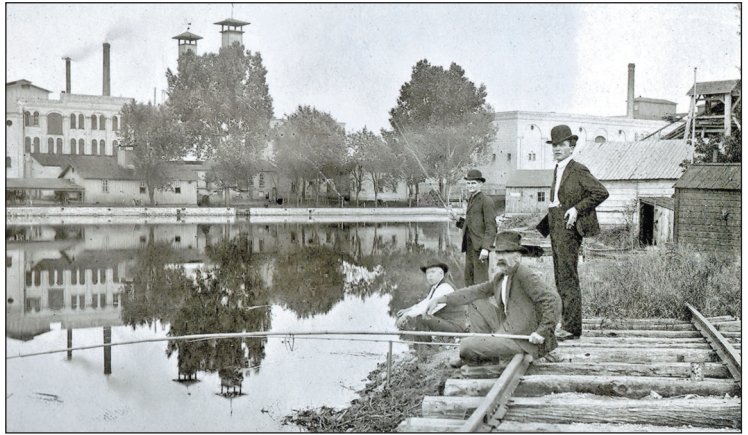


**TOM  
SCHULTZ**

a huge railroad shop where cars were rehabilitated and one engine was even manufactured here. But, a fire took down the shops and the industry never returned.

Over the years there have been many changes to railroading here, and in this column I'll cover a couple of them.

First of all, some friends asked about a spur track that left the main line of the old Chicago and North Western Railroad. That spur left the line just east of N. Church Street, through what is now Lakes Gas business and traveled east across Silver Creek pond and then south along the Rock River to about Rock Street.



COURTESY WATERTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This photo shows a few men fishing from the long ago removed railroad spur along North Water Street. Across the river is the now razed Hartig Brewery. The spur traveled east from the main line near Lakes Gas on North Church Street, to the river and then south to approximately Rock Street. Back then it looks as if coats and ties were the dress of the day even for fishermen! In the distance and to the right in the picture is the old Fuermann's Brewery where the Municipal Building is now located.

That spur was installed in the early 1900s and was to be used by several businesses in the area in addition to Hartig's Brewery, across the river where the vacant Breselow's Family Market stands.

After the tracks were removed, probably in the 1950s, the land between N. Water Street and the river became single family building lots and also what is now Fanny P. Lewis Park. Those lots had river frontage and were coveted.

I've covered much of that in a column a couple decades ago, but because there were some recent historical questions, I did ask Watertown historian Ken Riedl

if the Watertown Historical Society's files contained a photo of the old spur.

Sure enough, Ken came up with several good ones.

Another item that may be of interest is that many people are not aware the old Madison branch line is still in use between Portland and Watertown.

That branch, in the 1960s and earlier, was used daily for passenger and freight traffic between Watertown and Madison and even further west. Today the switch that allow trains to connect up with the CP Rail main line has been removed.

## Square/

from A4

Only one train uses the tracks and it services the Michels Quarry just west of Hubbleton Road in Jefferson County. A rail spur near the quarry is used to load 40-50 cars with stone and gravel. From there the train, often pulled by three locomotives, travels east to Watertown at the slow speed of about five miles per hour due to

track conditions. It then follows the old tracks and connects to the CP Rail main line and heads west at much higher speeds. I don't know the destination for these trains, but especially in the summer months trains operate on that track a couple times a week.

It's on this line that a few train cars left the track in recent days and rerailing them became necessary. That minor

derailment was near Gypsy Road.

This track actually is getting more traffic than the Union Pacific tracks that now travel between Jefferson Junction and Clyman Junction. A few years ago this UP line was upgraded and used consistently but rail traffic patterns change and the track is used little now.

Today the only business using rail in Watertown on a consistent basis

is Rail & Transload, Inc./ Specialty Ingredients which is located at 546 West Street.

This business regularly uses rail cars for loading and unloading. While this company is busy with rail traffic others have moved away from rail for incoming or outgoing shipments or have left the Watertown scene for one reason or another.

TLS