

The Blueberry Depot Restoration Project

The Old Brule Heritage Society has been given the unique opportunity to take possession of an early rural railroad depot and restore the structure to its original state. Once restoration is complete we will furnish the depot with period artifacts and open it for interpretive tours. The depot was built by the Northern Pacific Railway Company (NP) in 1900 and sat on the NP's Wisconsin First Subdivision (Ashland Branch) and served the community of Blueberry, Wisconsin and the surrounding area.

A Brief History of Our Depot

The Northern Pacific Railway built their line from Superior to Ashland between the years of 1883 and 1885. The arrival of the NP and other railroads provided a much improved and reliable transportation source for the early settlers at a time when roads were few and passable only when conditions were favorable. The new mode of rail transportation spurred the rapid settlement and growth of our region as well as around the rest of the country. To promote new settlement and business along their lines and act as an interface with the public, the NP and other railroads adopted a general practice of erecting depot facilities every three to six miles along their rights-of-way.

Many of these early depots served their communities in several ways. Before the first settlers could construct adequate community facilities the railroad depot would often serve as the first classrooms, post office, general store, meeting center and even as a place of worship. The first depot in Blueberry was a small log structure built by the NP around 1885. By the late 1890's the facility had become too small to adequately serve the rapidly growing population and logging related activities in the area. In 1899 local residents, unhappy with their small depot petitioned the NP to provide a better and larger depot facility at this site. Northern Pacific officials were persuaded and the following year funding was approved for a new depot facility at Blueberry.

The present frame style structure was built in 1900 at a cost of \$450.00. The cost for building materials was listed at \$250.00 and \$200.00 covered labor expenses. For the next six decades the depot and the rail line served a vital role to the Blueberry area by providing rail passenger service and transporting freight between Superior and Ashland WI. The depot remained in service until around 1960, at which time rail passenger service and local freight deliveries declined to a point where the NP discontinued customer service at this site. The NP sold the depot to a private party and the structure was moved a

short distance from the company property. During the ensuing years the building has been used as a residence, an antiques shop and for storage purposes, all the while the owners kept it well maintained.

This 1962 photo was taken shortly after the NP retired the depot. The 17' x 36' structure has been moved off of NP property and was used as an antiques store at this time.



In 2016 new owners acquired the land and it is their wish to remove the depot building from their property. They contacted our group (OBHS) and offered to donate the building to us, contingent upon the relocation of the structure to our site. We examined the structure and quickly accepted their offer. As funds become available we will relocate the building to our site and commence restoration efforts. It is our plan to move the building in the Spring of 2019 with restoration work to start soon after. OBHS has a strong history of taking on projects such as this and following them through to completion. Once completed the depot will join our other restored exhibits and be open to the public for interpretive tours.

Projected Expenses and Funding Requirements

Any worthy historical restoration project requires adequate funding to make sure the project can be successfully completed. We have started our fund raising campaign for this project and hope to have funds available when the work season starts. The cost to relocate and restore this depot is anticipated to be \$26,400.00. A majority of the work will be performed by our volunteers with a minimum of contracted work. Following is a brief break-down of our projected costs:

Phase I	(Permitting – Relocation – Foundation)	\$8,500.00
Phase II	(Depot Restoration).....	\$15,300.00
Phase III	(Build Track Panels – Final Landscaping and Interpretive Materials).....	\$2,600.00

Total Projected Project Costs.....\$26,400.00

Typically we can raise about 25 percent of the costs through donations made from within our membership with the balance coming from foundation grants and area donations. We are wishing to partner with local and area residents and businesses to raise further funding so that we may successfully reach our goal. Involvement from both private and business sectors has always been critical in the success of our projects and it also creates a sense of community pride for all involved. If you feel that you or your family or even your business may be able to help support OBHS with this project we welcome you to send your donation made payable to: Old Brule Heritage Society – Depot Fund.

Please mail to: Old Brule Heritage Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 24
Maple, Wisconsin 54854

Generous donors/donations are acknowledged on our website, in our bi-monthly newsletters and in our on site interpretive signage and flyers as well as any other methods which may arise. We also welcome your volunteer help once restoration work begins, whether you have skills in carpentry, masonry, electrical work or painting, your contributions will be appreciated. Old Brule Heritage Society is a registered 501(c)(3) IRS recognized organization and all donations are tax deductible.

Very few of the early wood construction style depots which served our rural communities remain intact today. We feel that this depot will be a unique resource in which to interpret and educate our residents and visitors on the vital role that the railroads and their small town depots played in the settling and development of our rural areas. With this initiative on our part and the support of the community we hope to make this exciting project a success. If you need further information please contact: brianpaulson@centurylink.net