

The Golden Age of the Milwaukee

August Derleth, in his history of the Milwaukee, calls the Mitchell-Merrill era "The Golden Age of the Milwaukee Road." With the exception of the Des Moines-Spencer line, the Kansas City Cutoff, and a few unimportant branches, the system in Iowa had been completed when Mitchell died suddenly in 1887.

Too much credit can scarcely be given these two railroad statesmen. They complemented each other as few rail executives have ever done. Alexander Mitchell was a shrewd judge of men, deliberate, calculating, but not afraid to take a chance although weighing each move carefully. He had a sturdy, stocky figure, a commanding face, and luxurious whiskers. Immaculate in dress, courteous in manner, he looked and acted like a dynamic executive. In contrast, Sherburn S. Merrill was tall and angular, often careless in dress, nervous in manner, and ever on the move. A man of direct action, Merrill was markedly aggressive and always on the offensive.

Each man might well have succeeded in his own right, but when teamed together they were well-nigh invincible. They had great respect for each other's abilities. When Mitchell became president

in 1865 (Merrill became general manager about the same time), the Milwaukee had about 850 miles of track. When Mitchell died trackage had risen to over 5,000 miles. Moreover, Iowa in 1887 accounted for 1,573 miles — or more of the Milwaukee's mileage than any other state.

In his *Transcontinental Railway Strategy*, Julius Grodinsky declares the "punch and drive that characterized the management early in 1879 was largely the work of Merrill, although Mitchell uniformly supported his program." This view is supported by Albert Keep, head of the North Western, who averred the Milwaukee's policy was dictated by Merrill in all things "as absolutely as if he were the sole owner of the property." Under Merrill's general managership the Milwaukee invaded the North Western territory at every opportunity.

Along with the North Western, the Milwaukee did battle with the Rock Island and the Burlington in maintaining its position in the Midwest. When the latter built its own line into the Twin Cities in the 1880's, the Milwaukee retaliated by entering Kansas City. The first part of the "KC" extension was made from Cedar Rapids to Ottumwa and finished in 1884. From Ottumwa the line ran in a southwesterly direction to Kansas City, which it reached in 1887.

Another important and logical extension was the branch constructed southeast from Sioux City

through Rodney to Manilla, where it connected with the Chicago-Omaha line. The section north of Rodney was in service by 1886; the section south of that point was in operation the next year. This gave the Milwaukee an alternative route to the East from Iowa's packing center which was better and shorter than over the Iowa & Dakota Division.

Among the secondary items of construction during this period was the continuation of the Turkey River Branch to West Union in 1882. Seven years later the Maquoketa Branch reached Hurstville by a 2-mile extension. It was incorporated in 1888 and built under the name of the Maquoketa, Hurstville & Dubuque Rail Road.

The Milwaukee's mileage in Iowa remained static until President Roswell Miller brought the system into the state capital. This was effected by the purchase of the 146-mile Des Moines, Northern & Western Railroad in 1899. At the time of the acquisition, the road had a line running in a northwesterly direction from Des Moines to Fonda, and a branch from Clive seven miles west of Des Moines to Boone.

The 178-mile route connecting the capital of Iowa with the state's chief lake area began with the ill-fated Des Moines Western Railway, which was incorporated in 1871. With high spirits and slender resources, the road planned to build from Des Moines through Waukee, Adel, and Panora

to the Mississippi River. It did some grading between Adel and Waukee and faded out of the picture. Meanwhile, the populace of Adel, seat of Dallas County, was fearful that the county seat would be removed to some other locale already on a railroad. They took the initiative of reorganizing the dormant road in 1875 as the Des Moines, Adel & Western Rail Road. Most of the officers were from Adel with T. R. Foster as president, who was shortly to be succeeded by J. T. Caldwell. The pipsqueak short line was poorly graded, narrow in gauge and merely connected Adel with Waukee, a 7-mile link. As Ora Williams recalled:

The locomotive was much like a mine engine, with the water tank slung saddle fashion over the boiler. There were one or two freight boxcars in which wood benches had been set up for the guests. The two or three flatcars had boards across for seats for the youngsters. . . . There was no turntable, so the locomotive that pulled the train from the county seat, pushed the cars back, most of the way down hill, to the temporary platform across the river from the town [Adel]. There had not been enough money with which to build over the Raccoon River.

Passenger service was inaugurated in 1878 soon after the initial train, loaded with excursionists, returned to Adel by moonlight. Tom Ashton, the liveryman, served as general manager, conductor, and ticket agent; Sam Ward, the town blacksmith, filled the post of engineer; and Wes Howe, a local boy, shoveled coal into the locomotive.

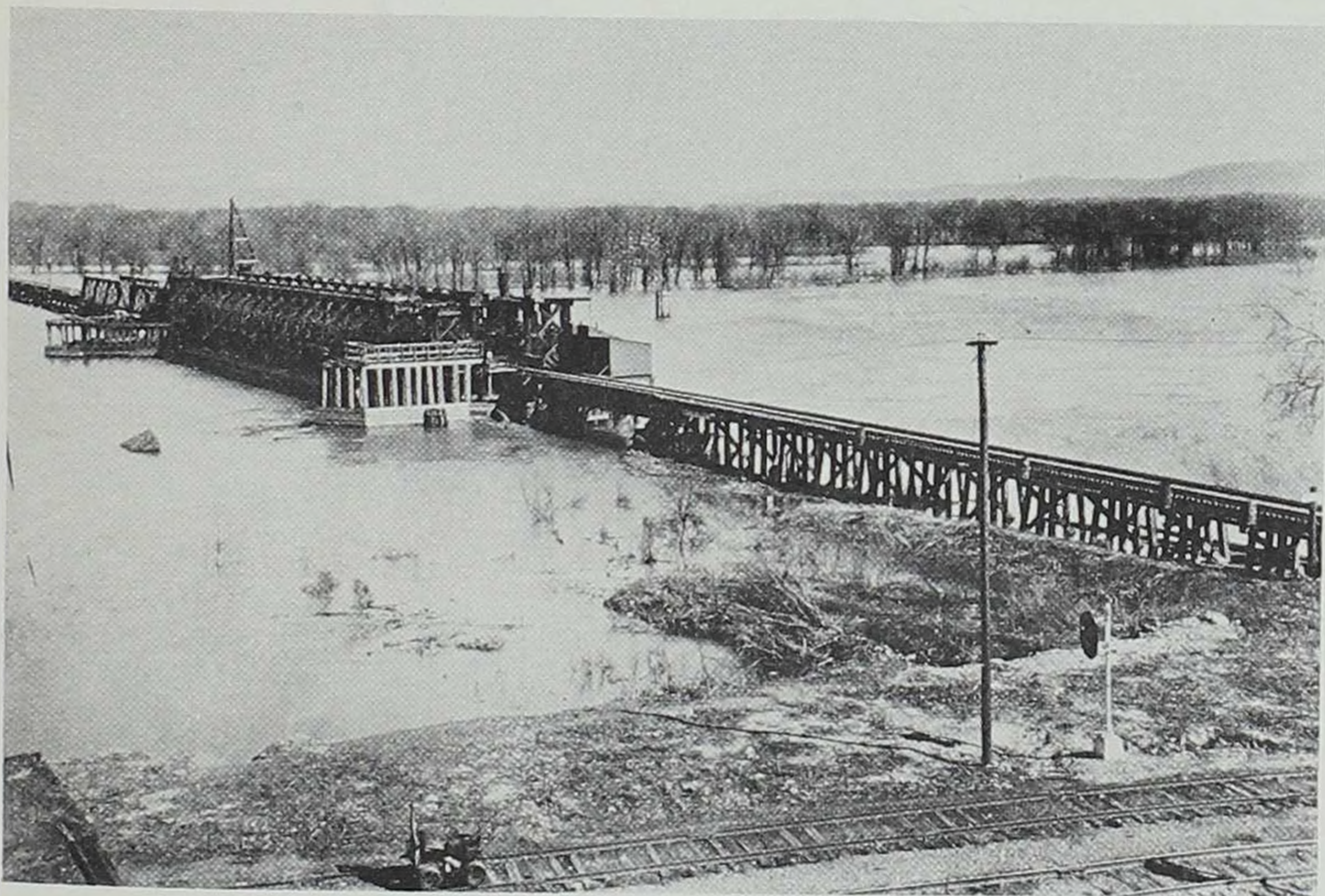
Of limited importance, the narrow gauge did, nevertheless, succeed in keeping the county seat permanently in Adel. In 1879, the little rails reached Panora. Under the name of the Des Moines North Western Railway, the struggling company built through Rockwell City into Fonda, seventy miles from Panora. This was in 1881, when the Wabash leased the road and underwrote most of the cost of the extension. For a time, access to Des Moines from Waukeee was had over the Des Moines & Fort Dodge Railroad (now the North Western), which added an extra rail to accommodate the narrow gauge rolling stock.

Although surveys were made into the Okoboji and Spirit Lake country and considerable grading was done, the Road never built beyond Fonda. The Wabash went into receivership in 1884, and not long afterward the narrow gauge was returned to its owners. But the 3-foot system was enlarged when it consolidated with the Des Moines & Northern Railway in 1891. The latter had a narrow gauge line from Des Moines westward to Waukeee, where it connected with the road to Fonda. But that part which stood for "Northern" in its name ran in that direction from Clive — midway between Des Moines and Waukeee — to Madrid and Boone. The road started its existence under the highly pretentious name of the St. Louis, Des Moines & Northern and was incorporated May 21, 1881. It was completed in 1882.

For many years Grenville M. Dodge, Civil War general, railroad builder, statesman, and one of Iowa's foremost citizens, headed the company. It was leased to the Wabash in 1881, and the lessee aided in its building. When the Gould lines later went bankrupt, the narrow gauge was left to shift for itself.

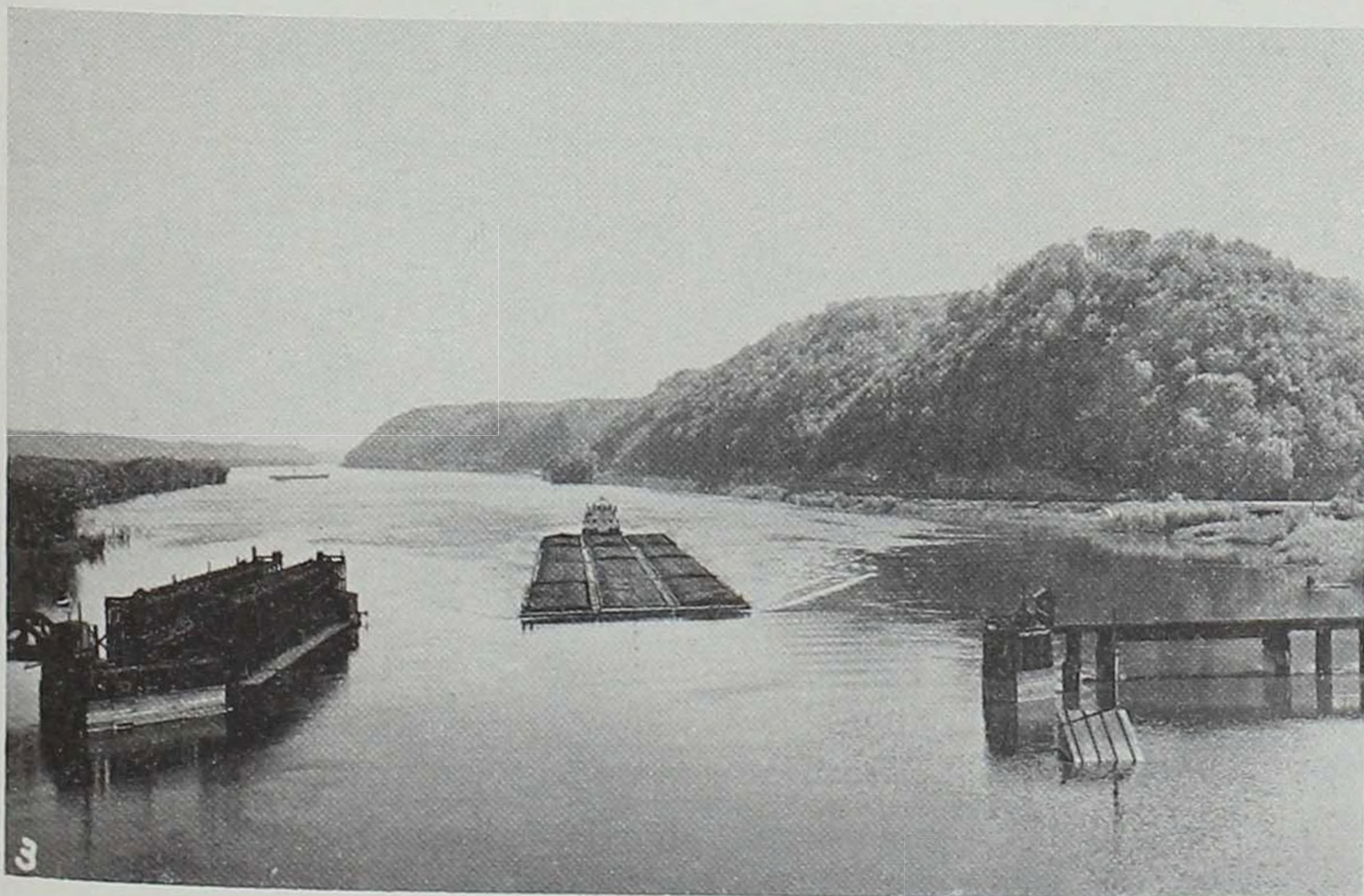
Since the "Dodge" line went to Des Moines, it was only logical that the Fonda road should secure trackage rights over it from Waukee to Iowa's capital. Indeed, the two companies were more or less under the same interests. With the amalgamation of the two roads to form the Des Moines, Northern & Western Railway, F. M. Hubbell became president and Dodge vice-president. By 1891, the entire system was broadened to standard gauge. After numerous reorganizations and name changes, the Milwaukee got controlling interest in 1894 and purchased the "Des Moines" company from F. M. and F. C. Hubbell five years later, making it the Des Moines Division.

To integrate the property with the Iowa & Dakota Division, the Milwaukee extended the road from Fonda to Spencer, a distance of forty-three miles, in 1899. At Spencer it also hooked up with the Spirit Lake Branch, thereby opening up a direct route from Des Moines to the popular resort and vacation area. At the same time, a 38-mile branch was completed from Rockwell City to Storm Lake.



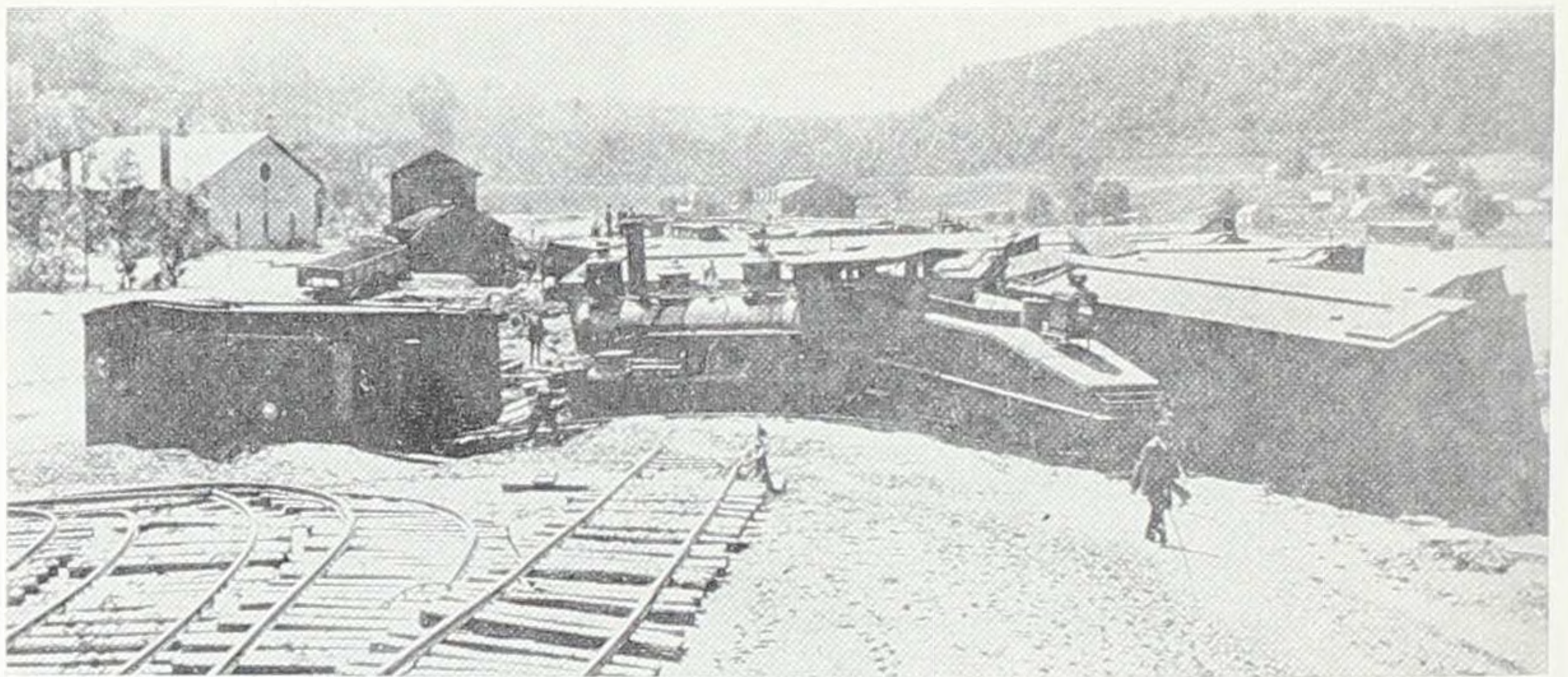
Courtesy Milwaukee Road

Pontoon bridge over west, or Iowa channel of Mississippi at Marquette.



Alma B. Almanrode

Pontoon bridge open for tow of coal barges. Bridge dismantled in 1961.



Harold Davison Collection

Washout of Marquette (North McGregor) yard of C. M. & St. P. Locomotive #310.

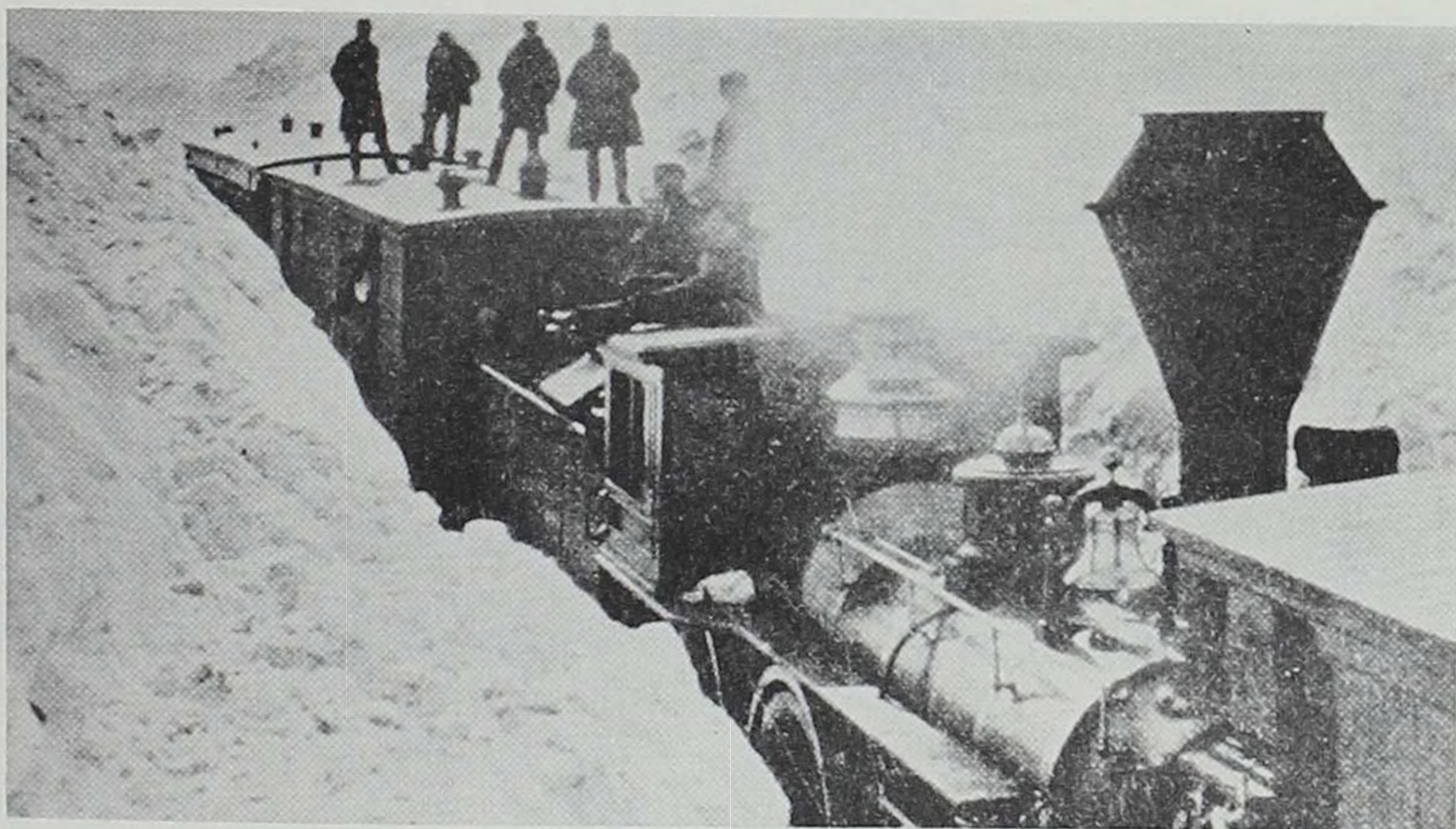


Harold Davison Collection

Derailment of Milwaukee stock train at Ossian, Iowa, in mid-1890's. Locomotive 451.

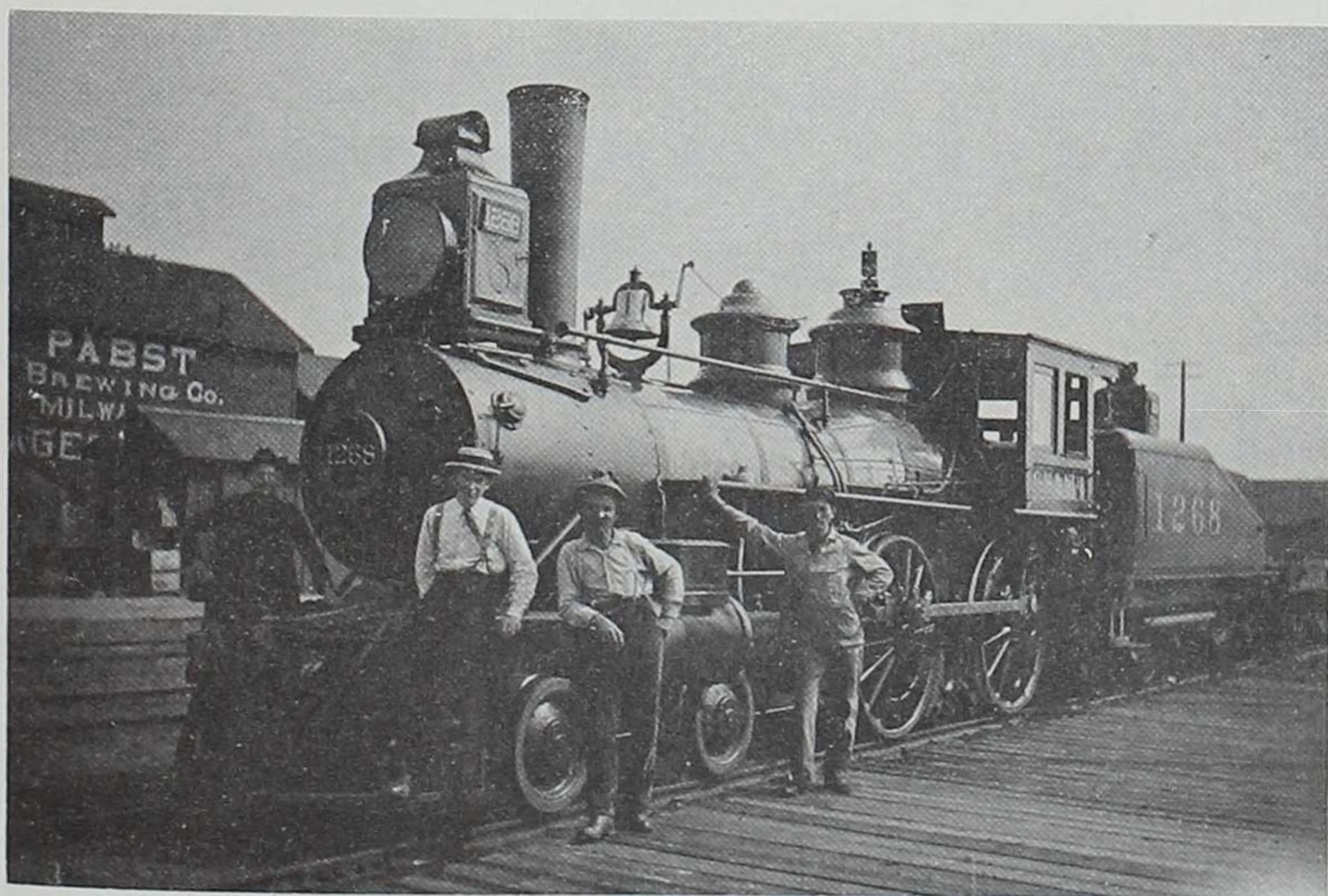


Midwest Hiawatha leaving Chicago for Iowa.



Courtesy Milwaukee Road

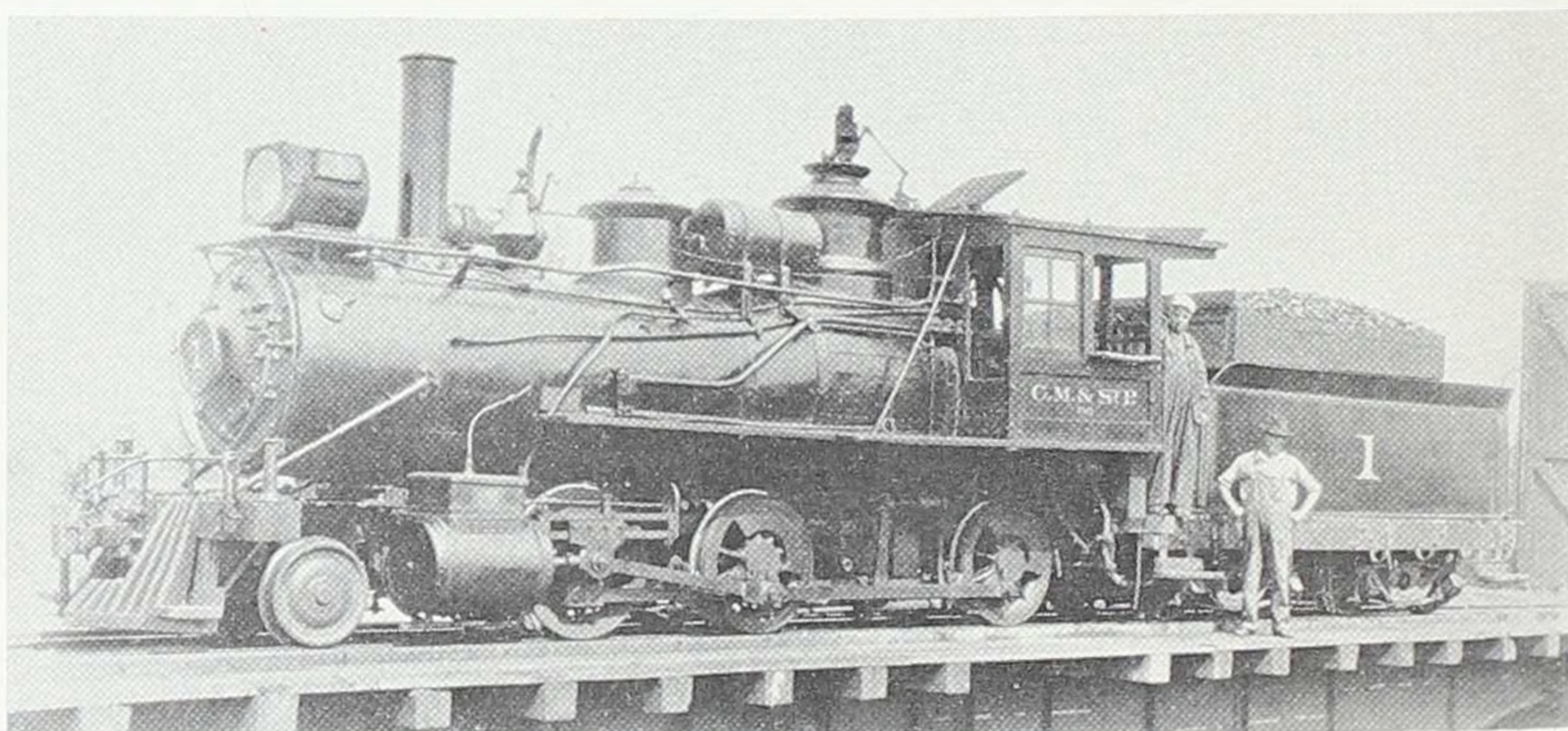
Early Milwaukee train snowbound on Iowa-Minnesota Division, winter of 1868-69.



Railroad Magazine

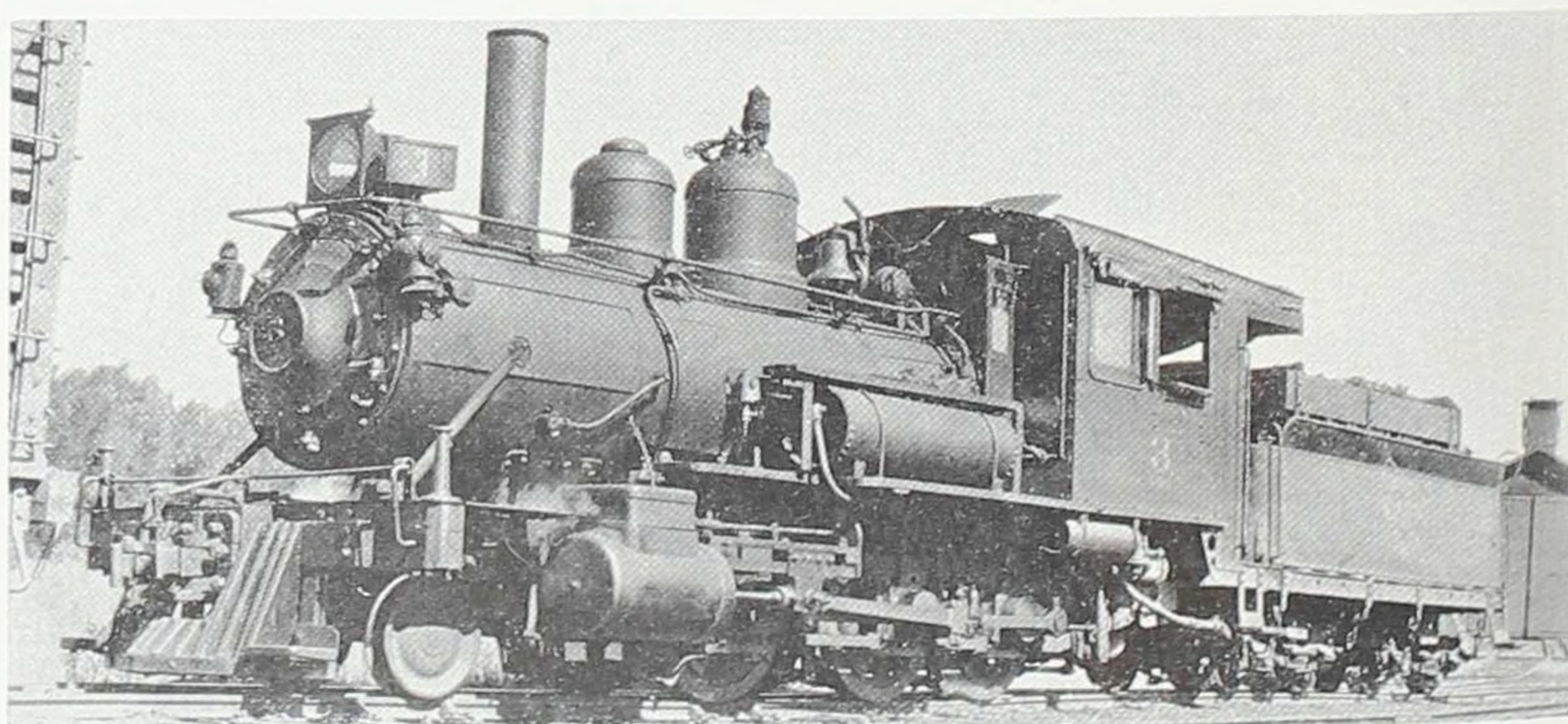
Switch engine at Lyons, Iowa, about 1890.

ON THE BELLEVUE & CASCADE



Ray W. Buhrmaster Collection

This one-spot Mogul-type engine built by Brooks in 1889 for Bellevue & Cascade.



Ray W. Buhrmaster Collection

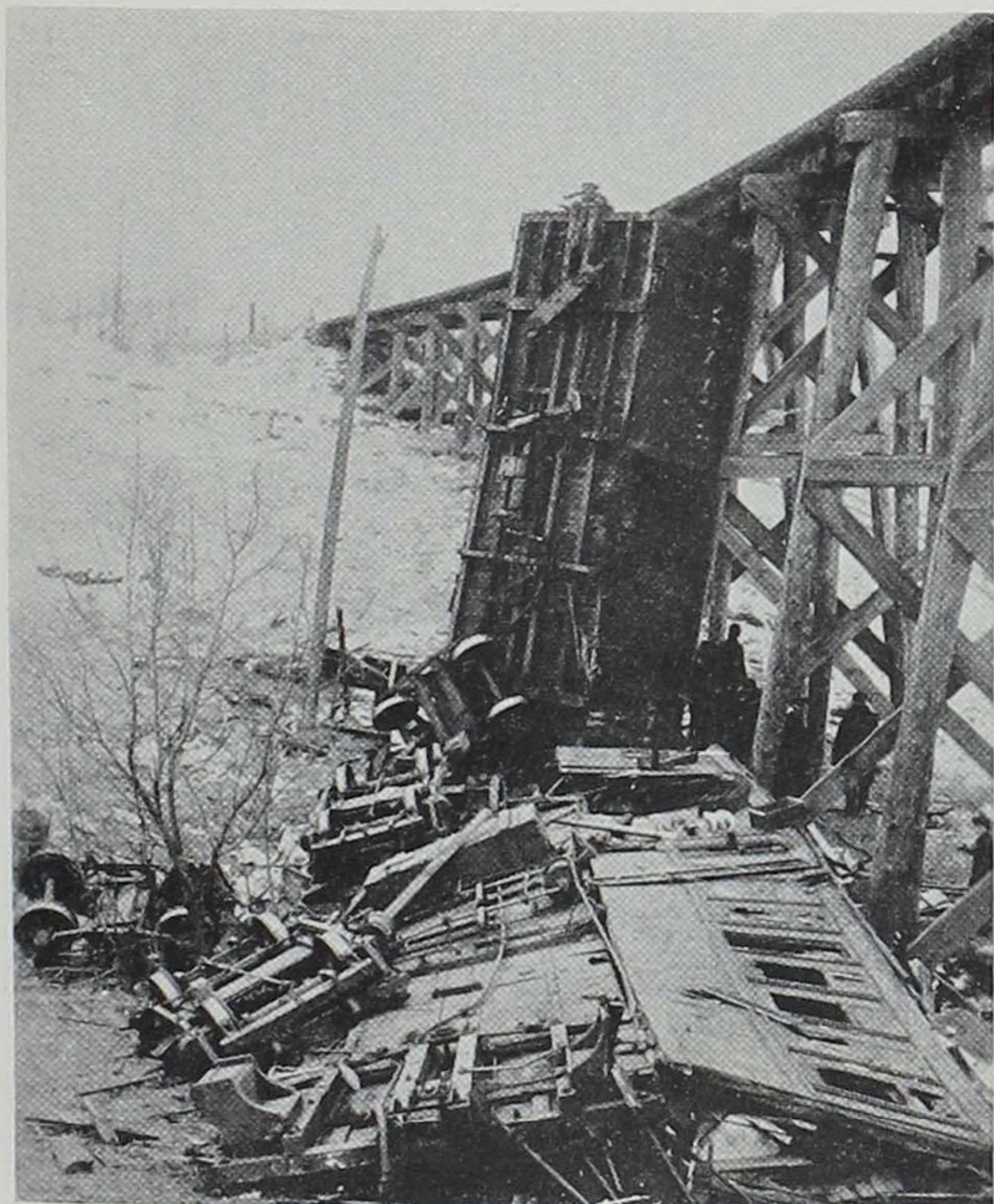
Old No. 3 was outshopped by Baldwin in 1890 for Bellevue & Cascade.



Ray W. Buhrmaster Collection

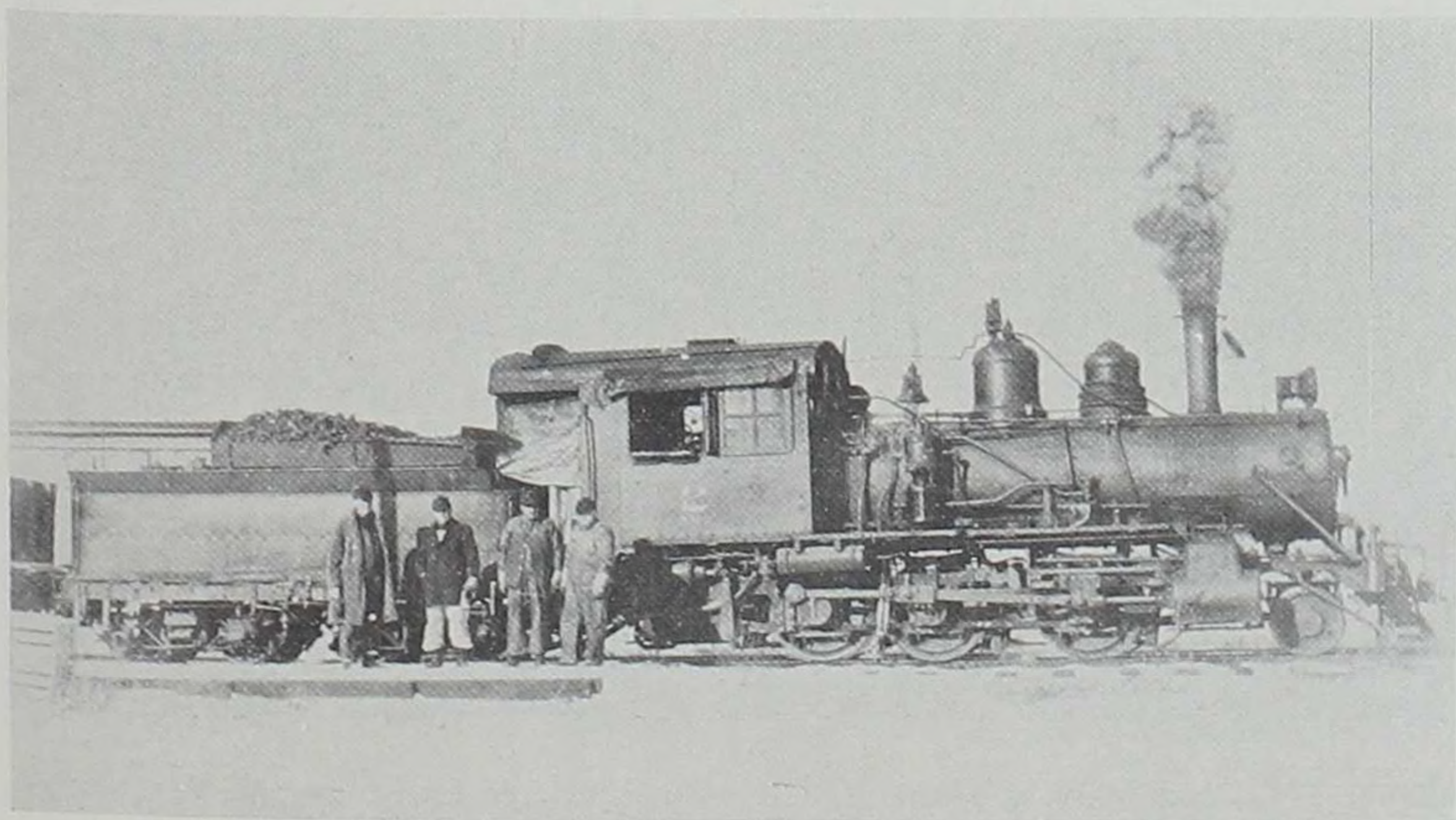
Cooke-built No. 4 operated on the Cascade branch.

NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD



W. F. Armstrong Collection

Narrow gauge wreck near Washington Mills, Iowa, on February 22, 1907.



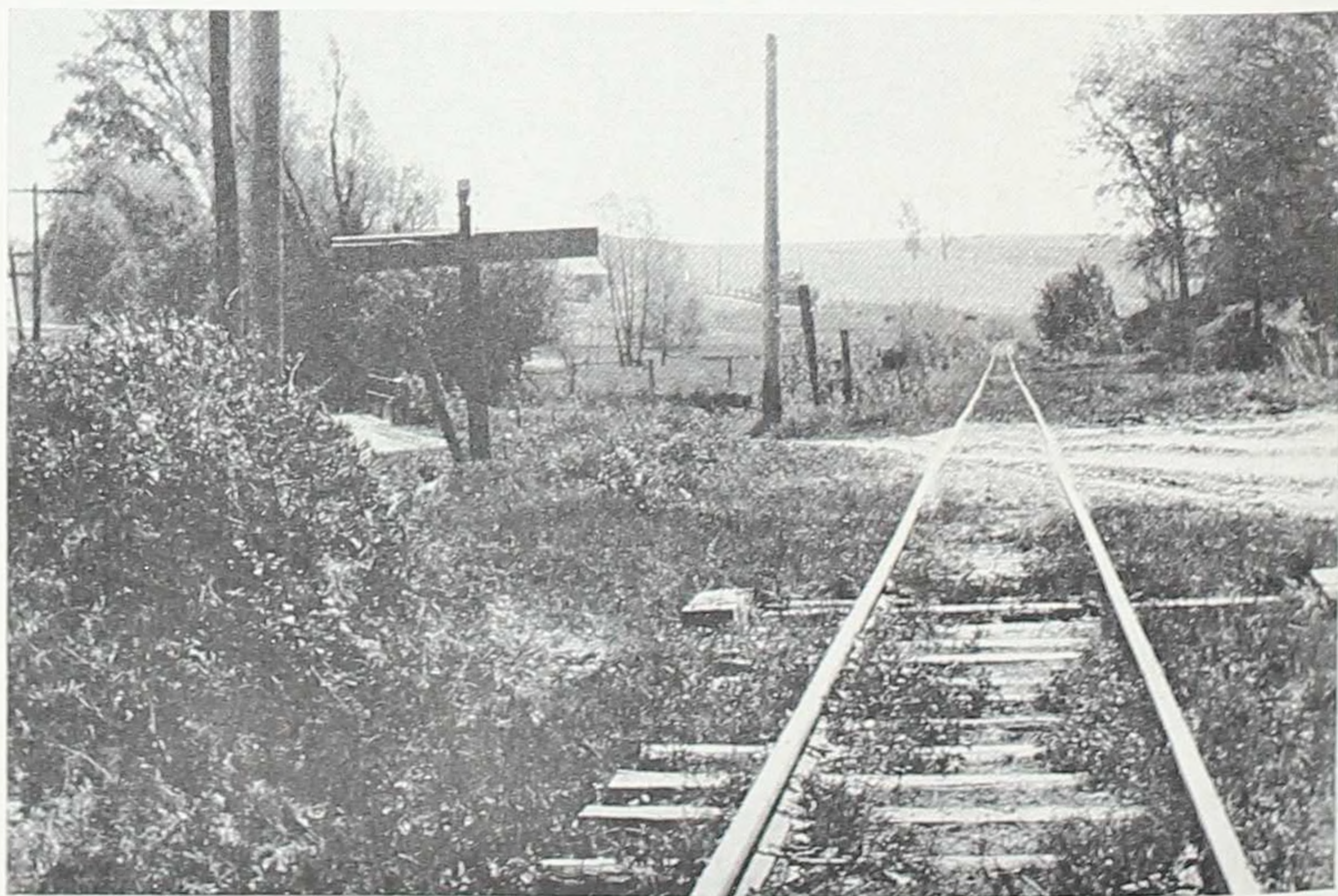
A. L. Lee Collection

Crewmen pose in front of their Baldwin engine No. 2 on Bellevue & Cascade.



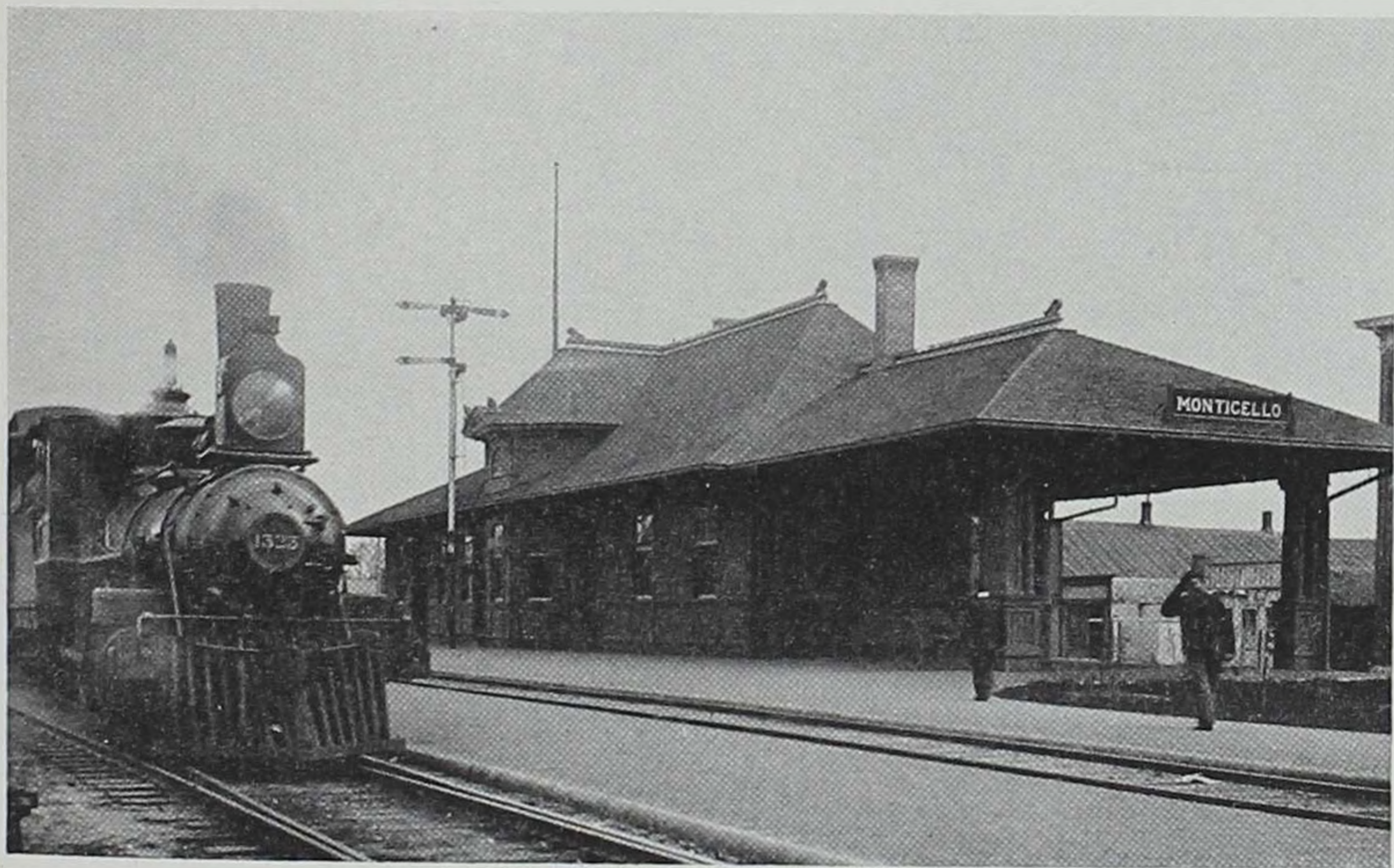
A. L. Lee Collection

La Motte, with its kerosene lamp and Wells Fargo Express sign, was a typical station on the "narrow gauge."



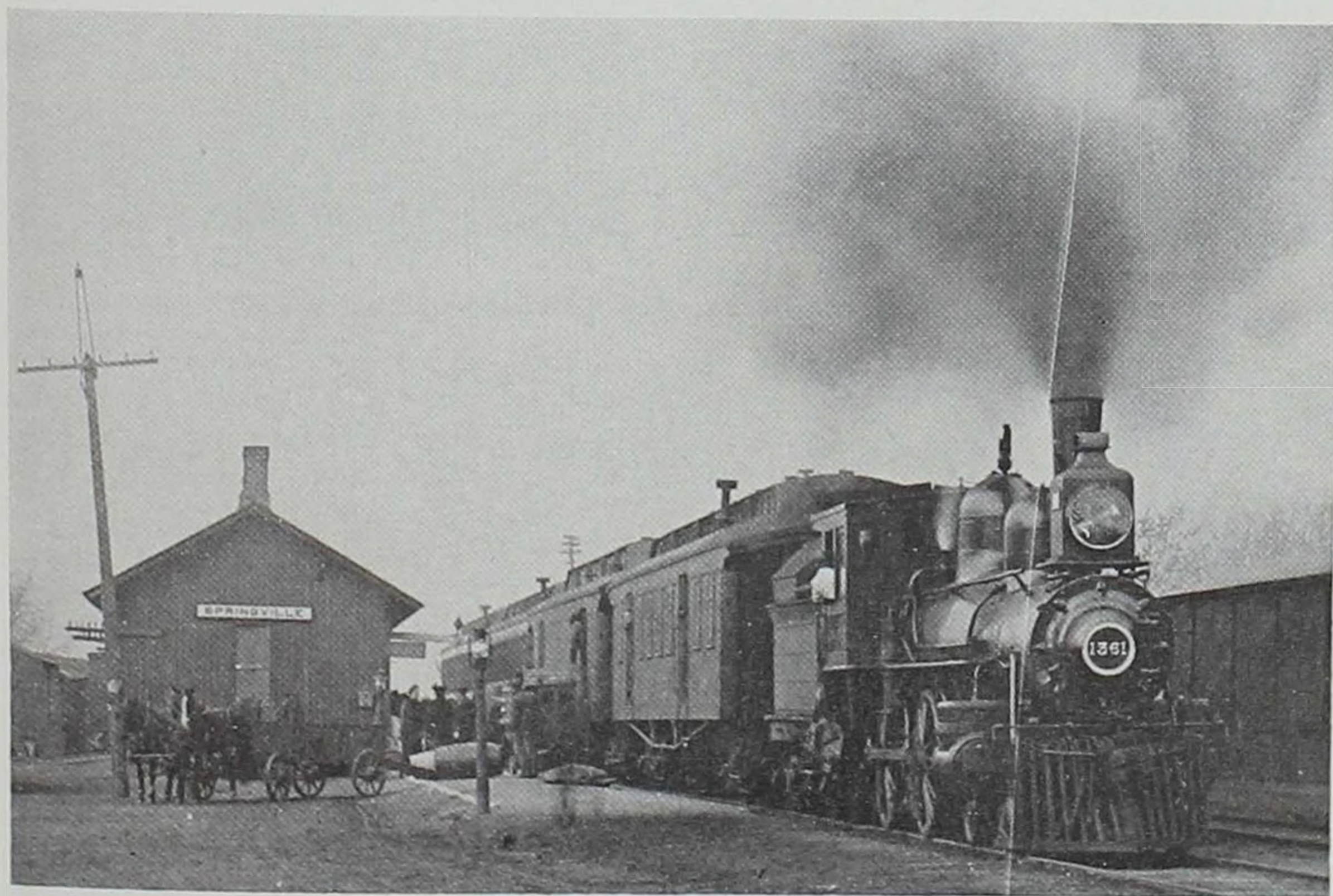
A. L. Lee Collection

Bellevue & Cascade narrow gauge grade crossing between La Motte and Washington Mills.



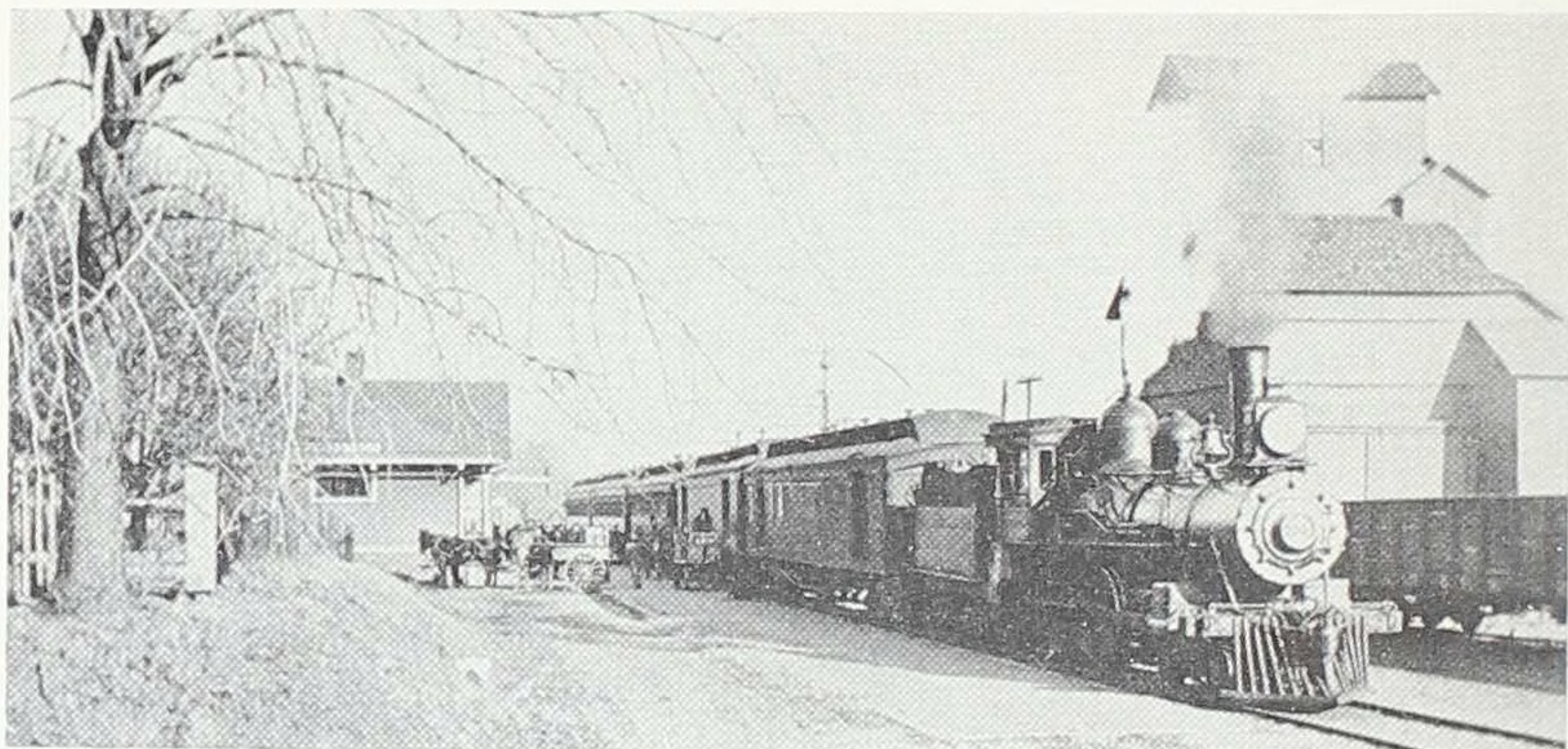
*E. H. Meyers Collection
J. P. Vander Maas Collection*

Little local train which ran between Monticello and Farley at Monticello depot, 1908.



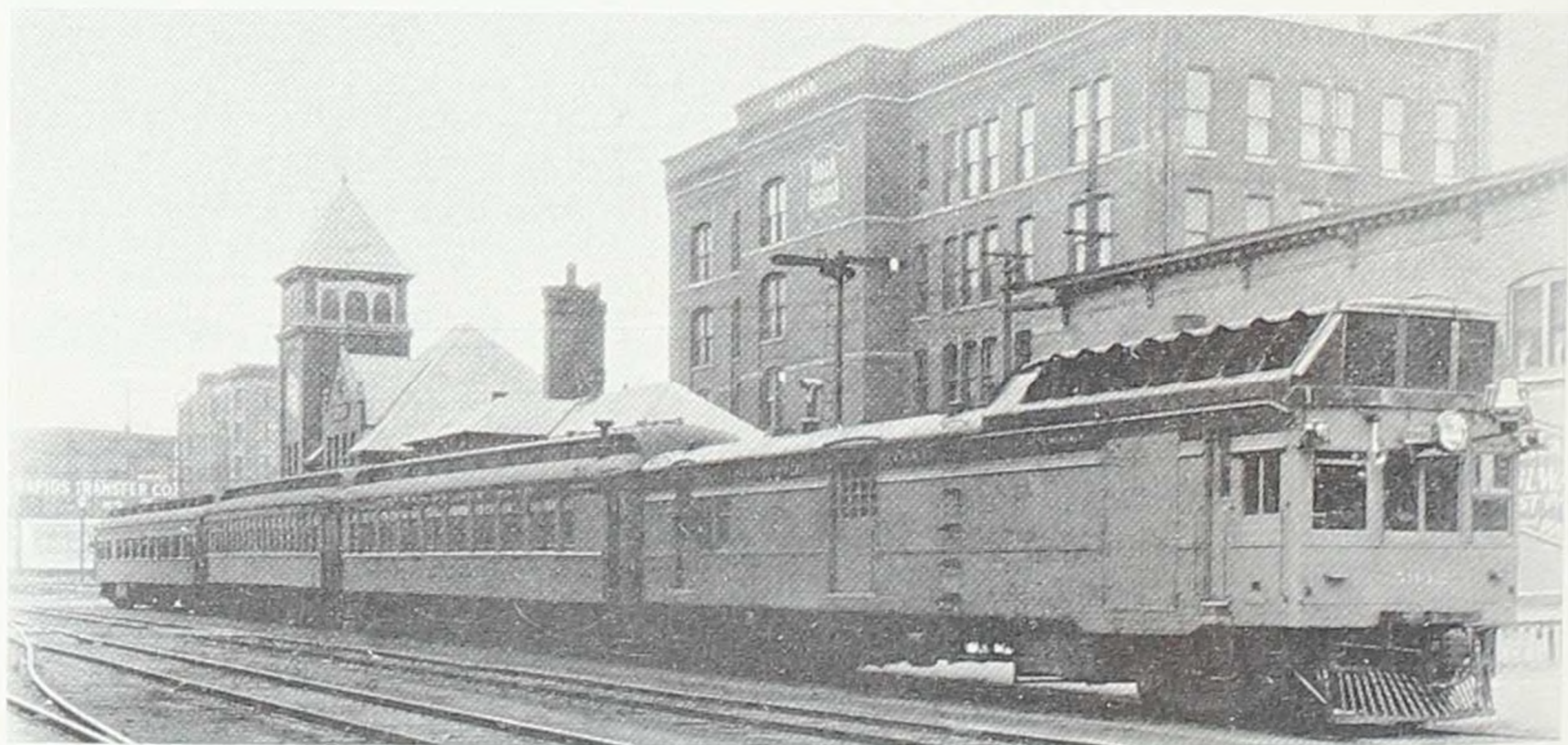
E. H. Meyers Collection

Train-time at Springville on branch between Cedar Rapids and Jackson Junction, 1908.



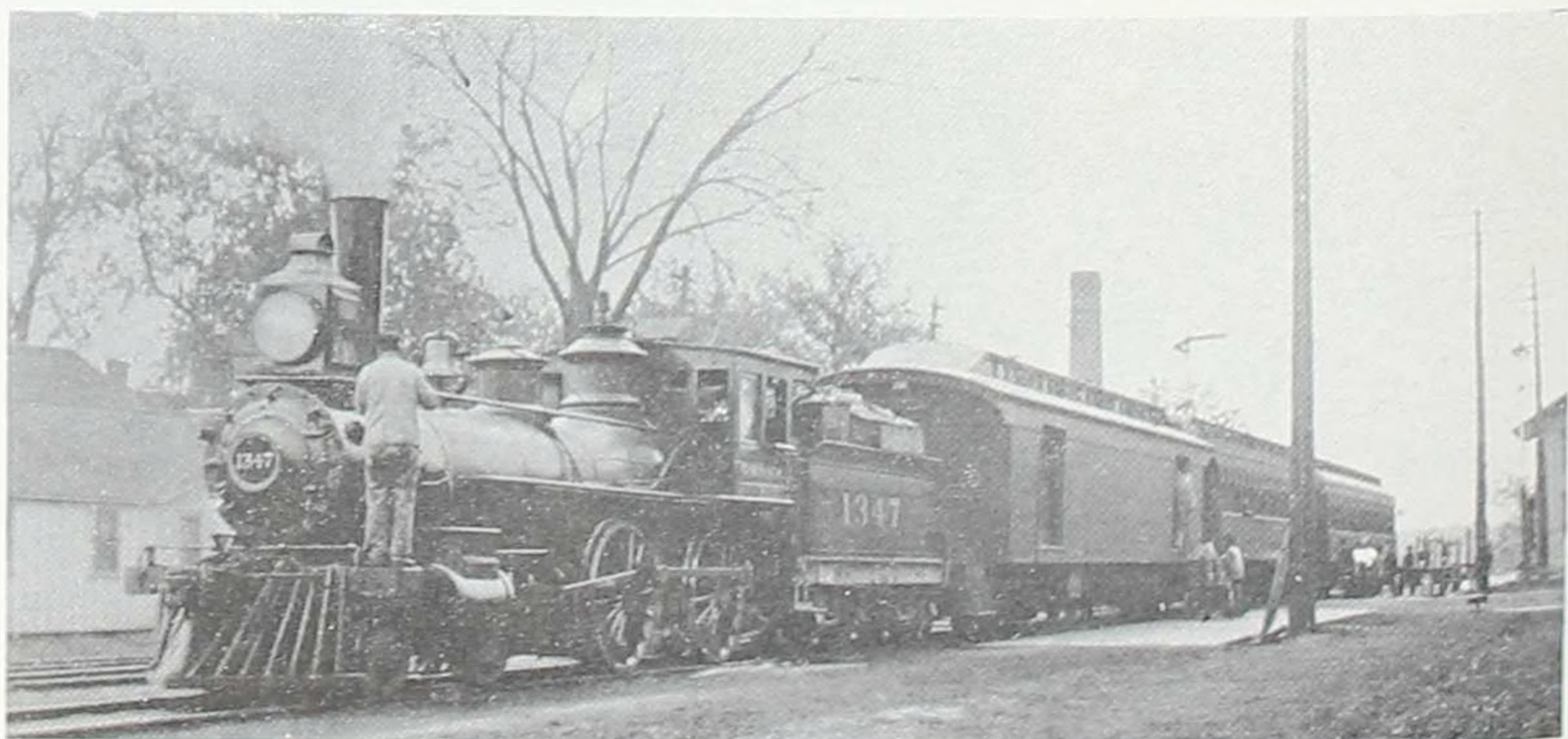
W. F. Armstrong Collection

Jefferson depot on the line between Des Moines and Spirit Lake.



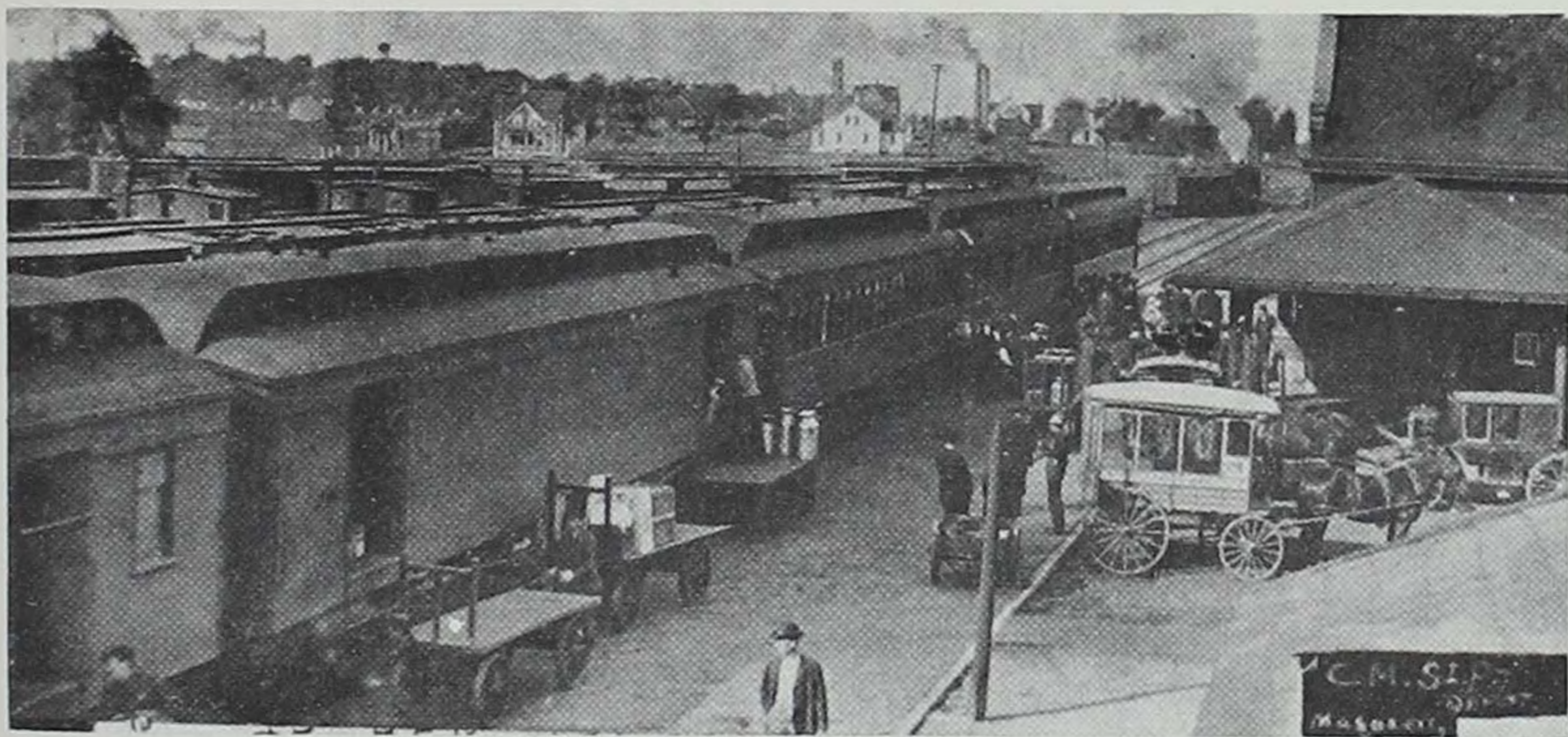
Harold Davison Collection

Rail-motor unit at Milwaukee Road station in Cedar Rapids.



W. F. Armstrong Collection

Well-groomed American-type engine pauses on the double-track main line at Tama.



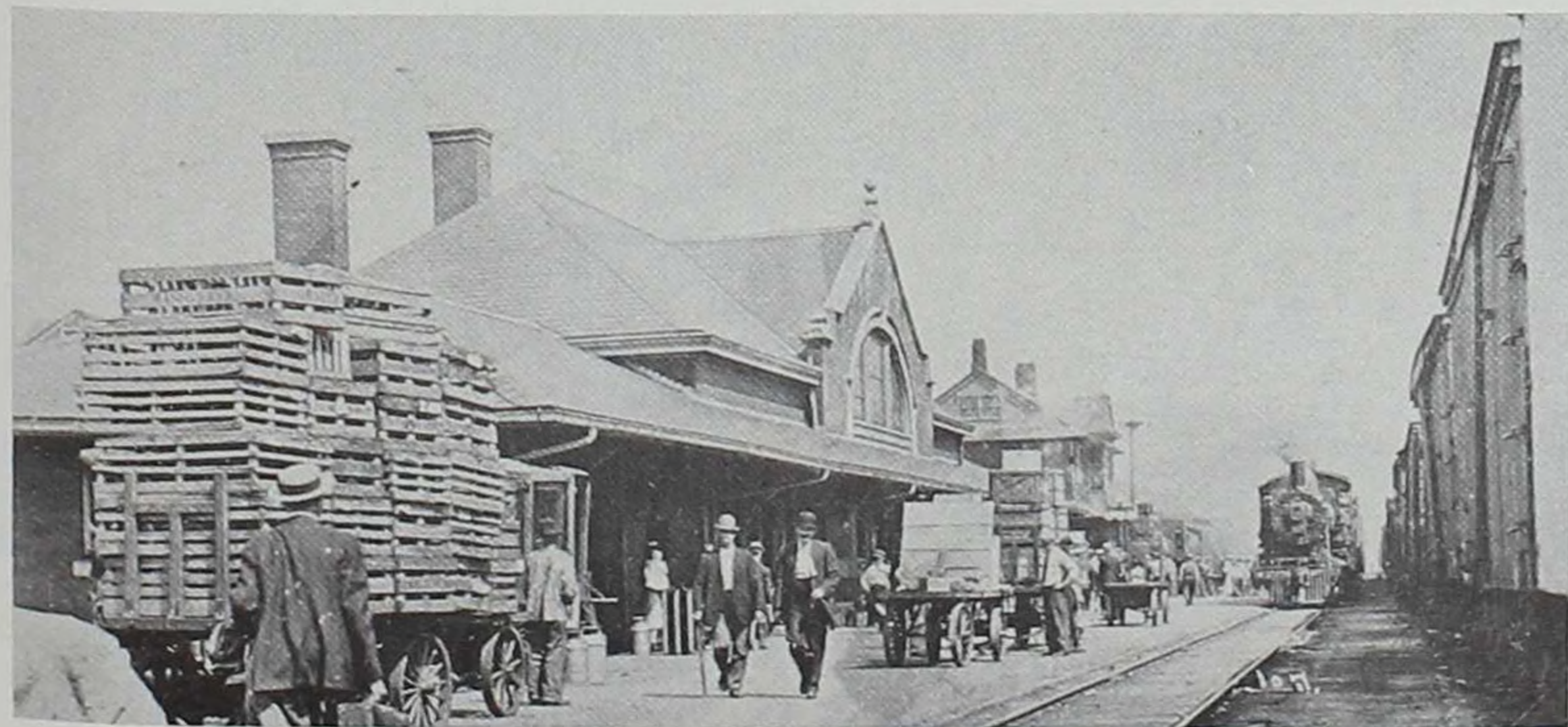
Harold Davison Collection

A busy time at Mason City. Fast passenger trains crossed Northern Iowa and locals ran to Austin, Minnesota.



Courtesy Mrs. E. L. Baxter

Warren F. Musser, later fireman and engineer on the Milwaukee R.R., driving a hack in early 1870's in Mason City.



C. M. & St. P. depot at Mason City, Iowa.



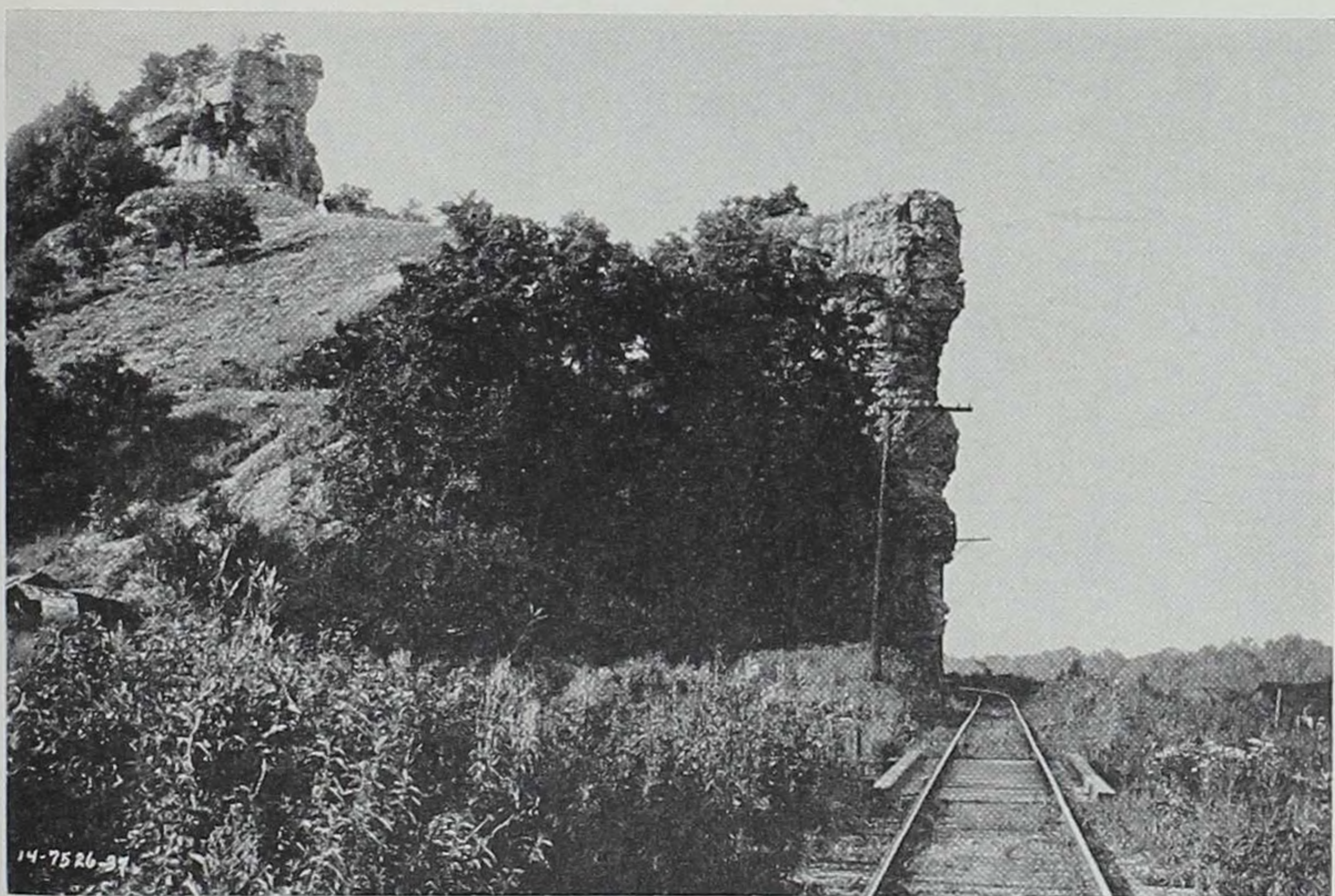
E. H. Meyers Collection

Milwaukee R.R. at Strawberry Point, November 7, 1953. Note streamlined coach behind aged steam engine.



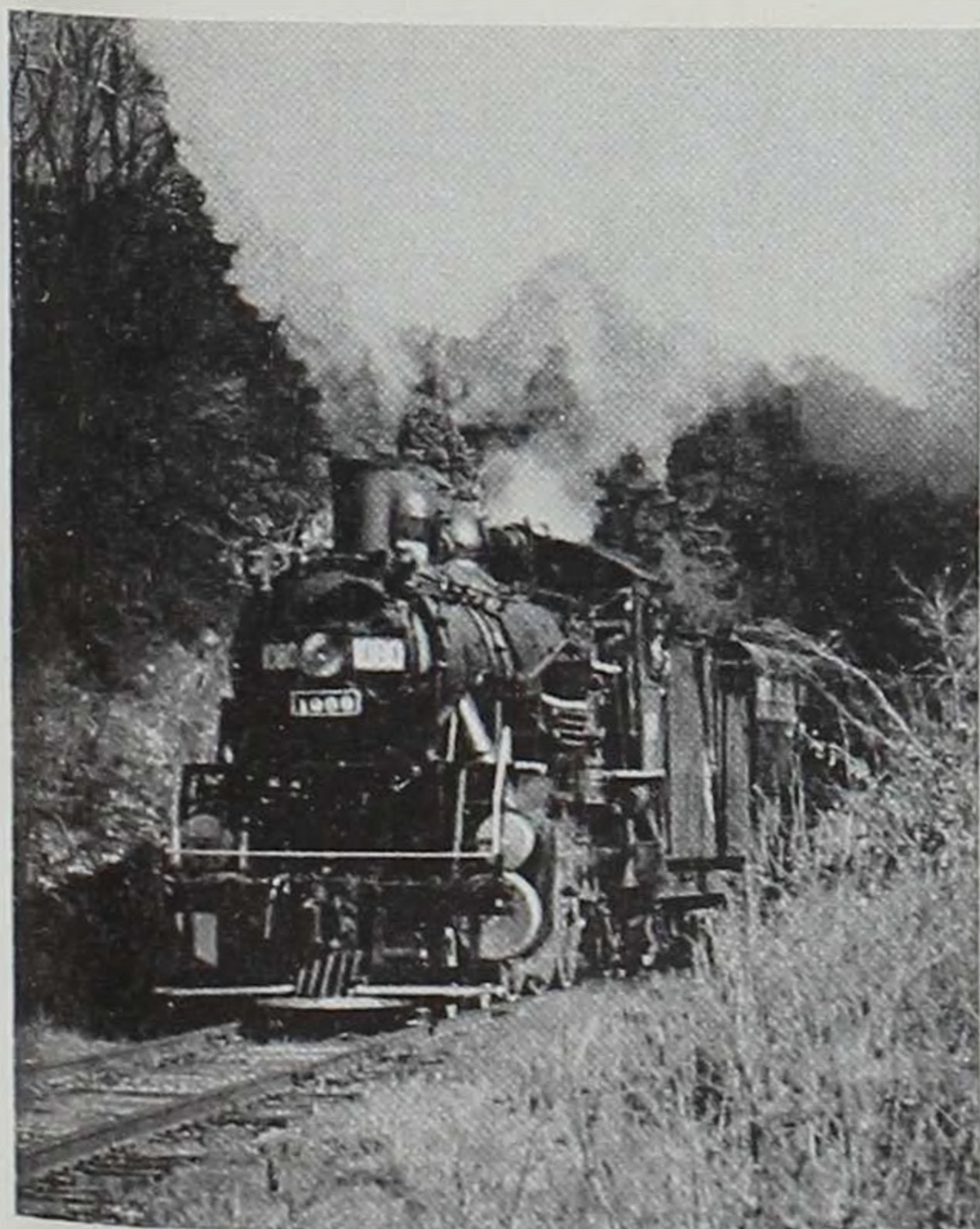
Don Hofsommer Collection

Last run of Cedar Rapids-Calmar motor-car pictured at Jackson Jct. Aug. 10, 1954.



Courtesy Milwaukee Road

The Milwaukee RR at Lone Rock near Waukon Junction.



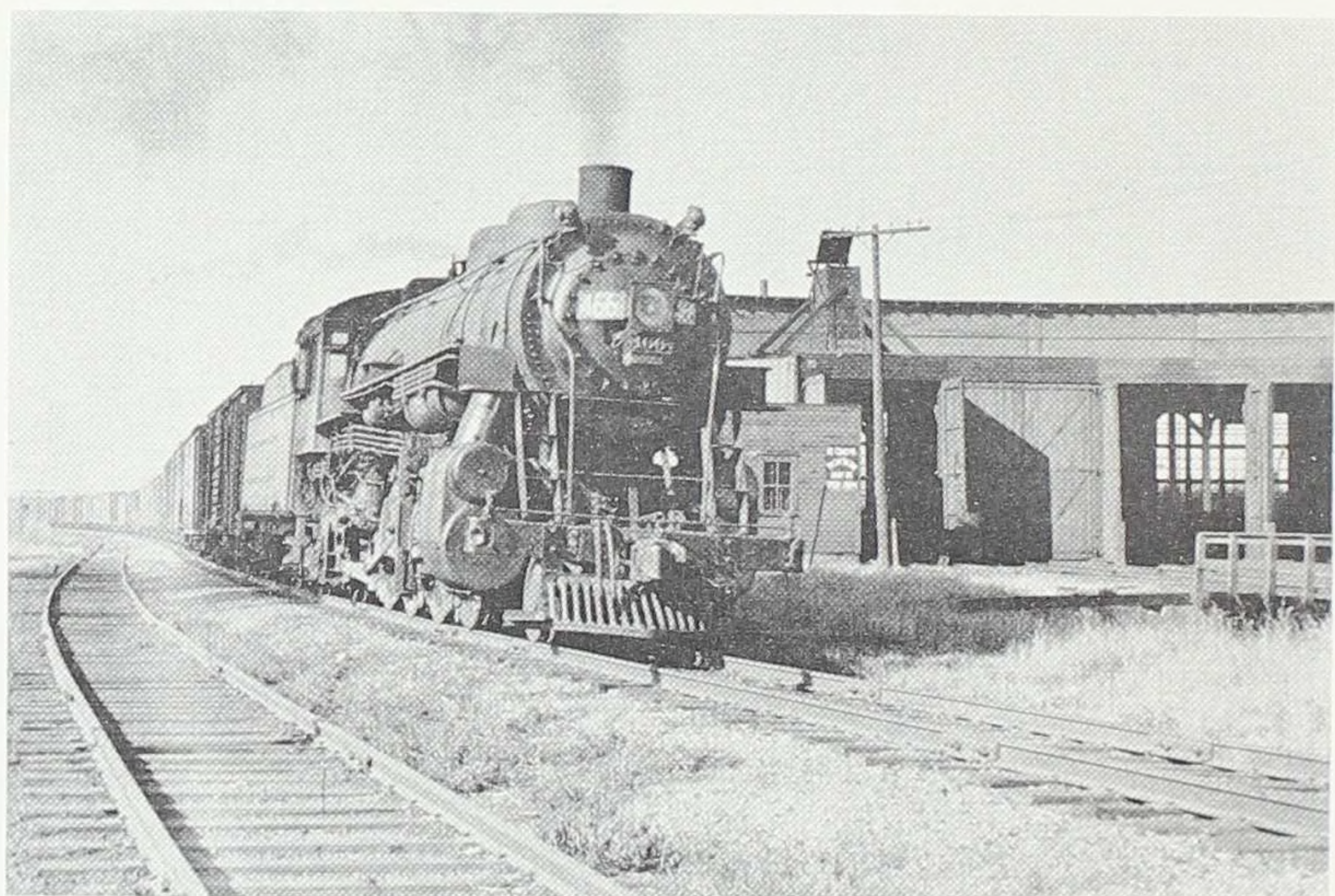
Don Hofsommer Collection

One of the last steam-operated branch-line passenger runs on the Milwaukee at Fayette in 1953.



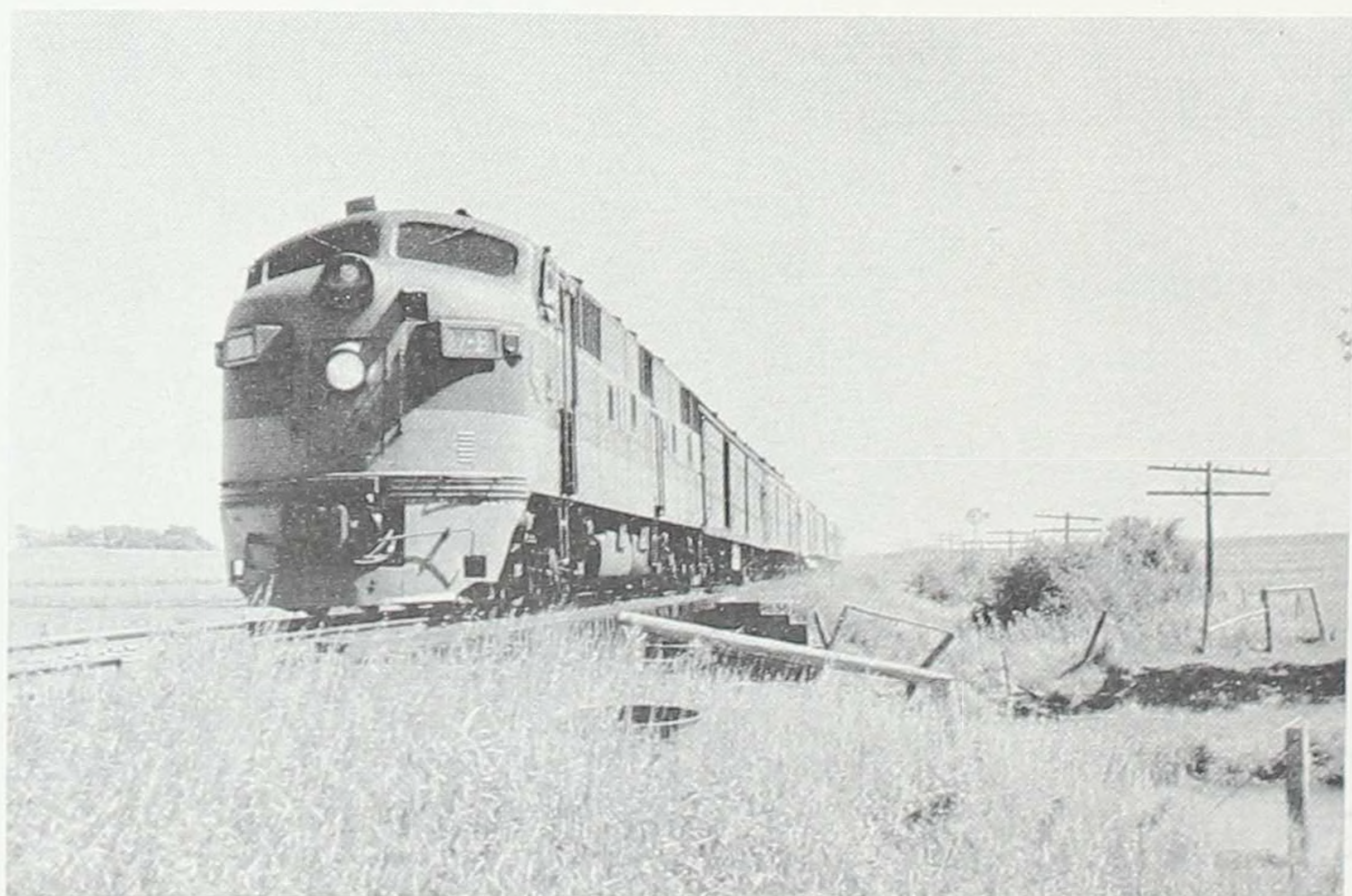
E. H. Meyers Collection

C. M. St. P. & P. RR train south bound on Cedar Rapids-Calmar branch—November 7, 1953.



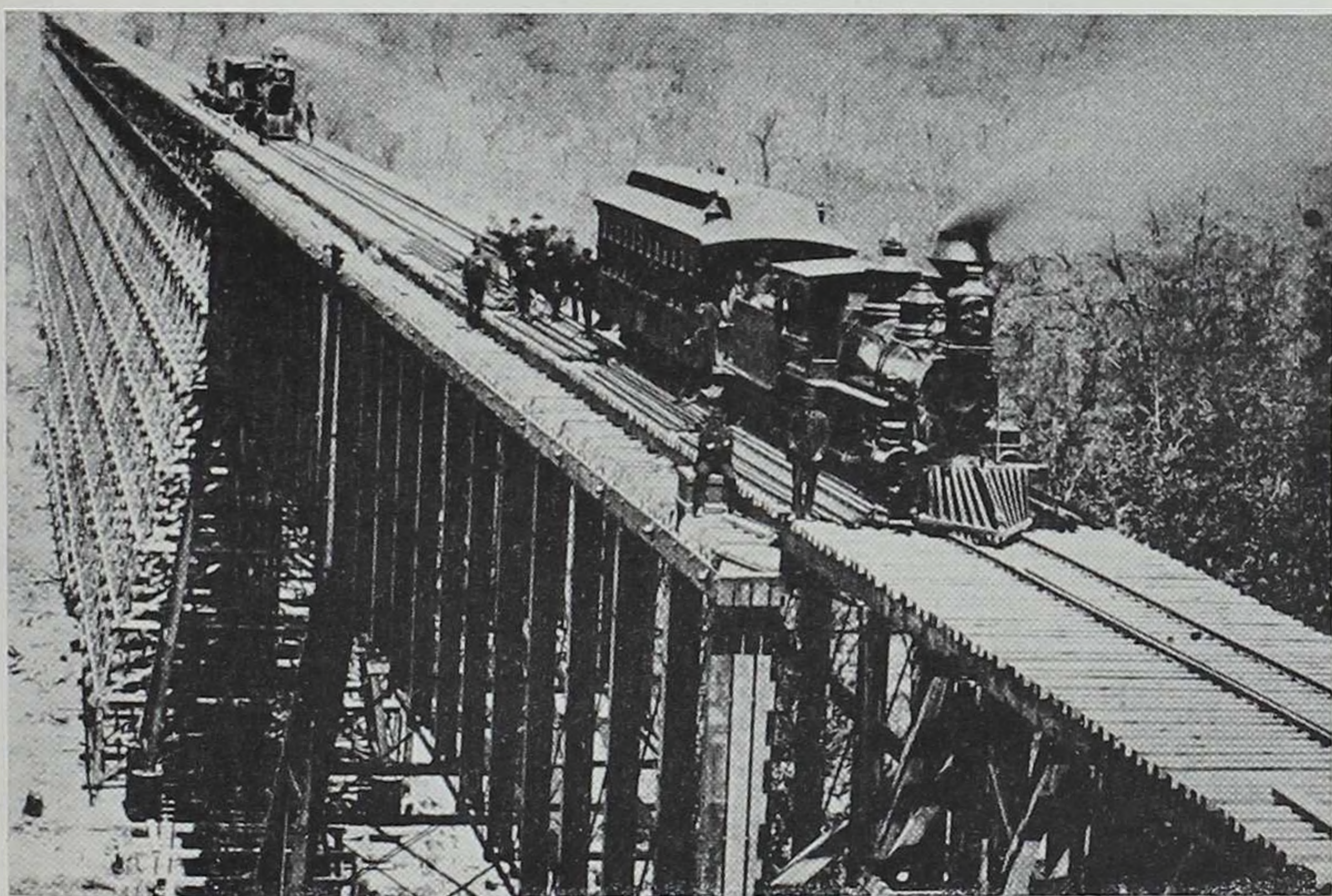
Don Hofsommer Collection

Fast freight at Calmar pulled by a powerful Mikado type locomotive.



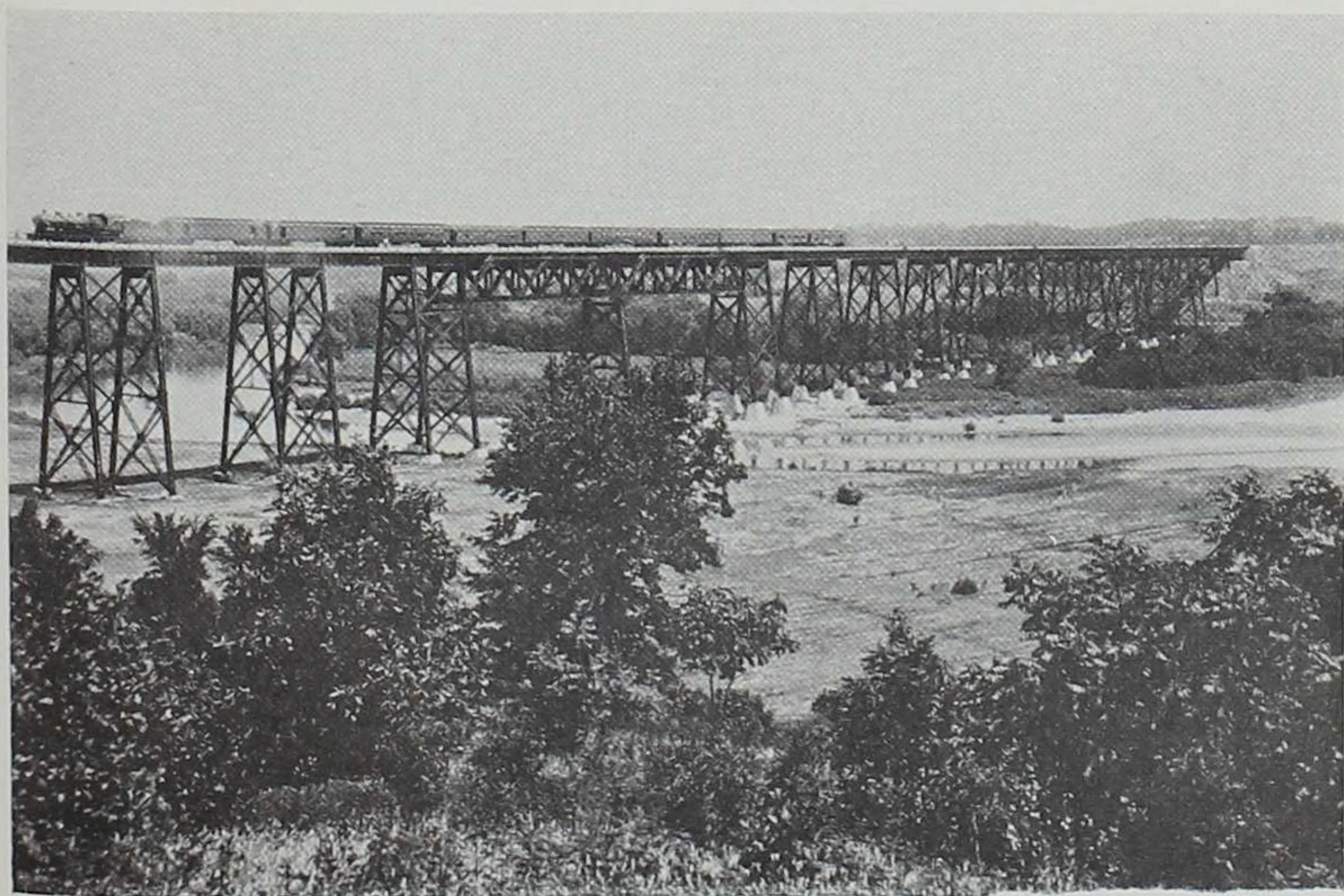
Don Hofsommer Collection

"The Sioux" highballing east of Spencer on its run to South Dakota, July, 1957.



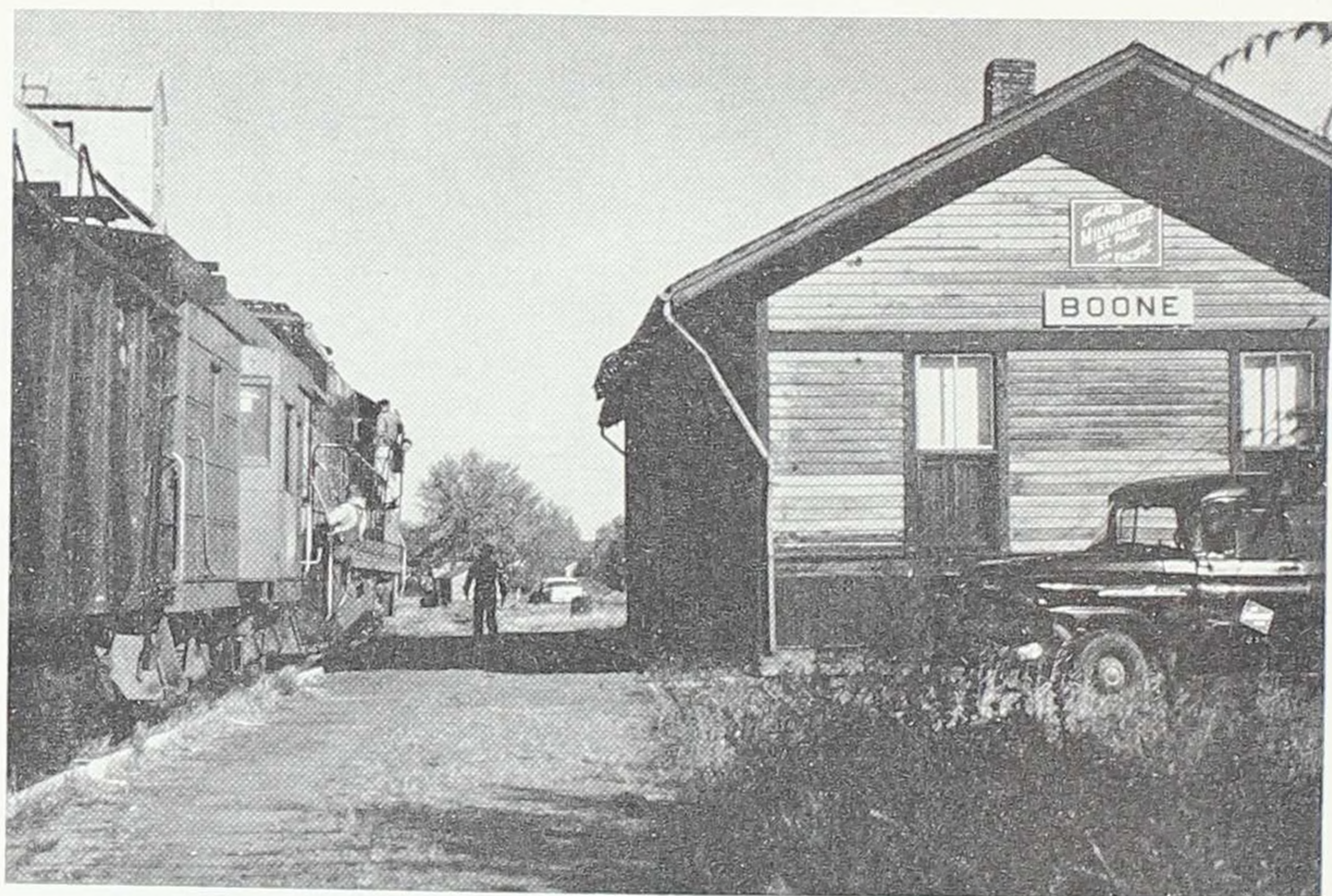
E. H. Meyers Collection

Narrow gauge trains of the St. Louis, Des Moines & Northern Railway on newly constructed bridge south of Madrid, crossing the Des Moines River, in early 1880's.

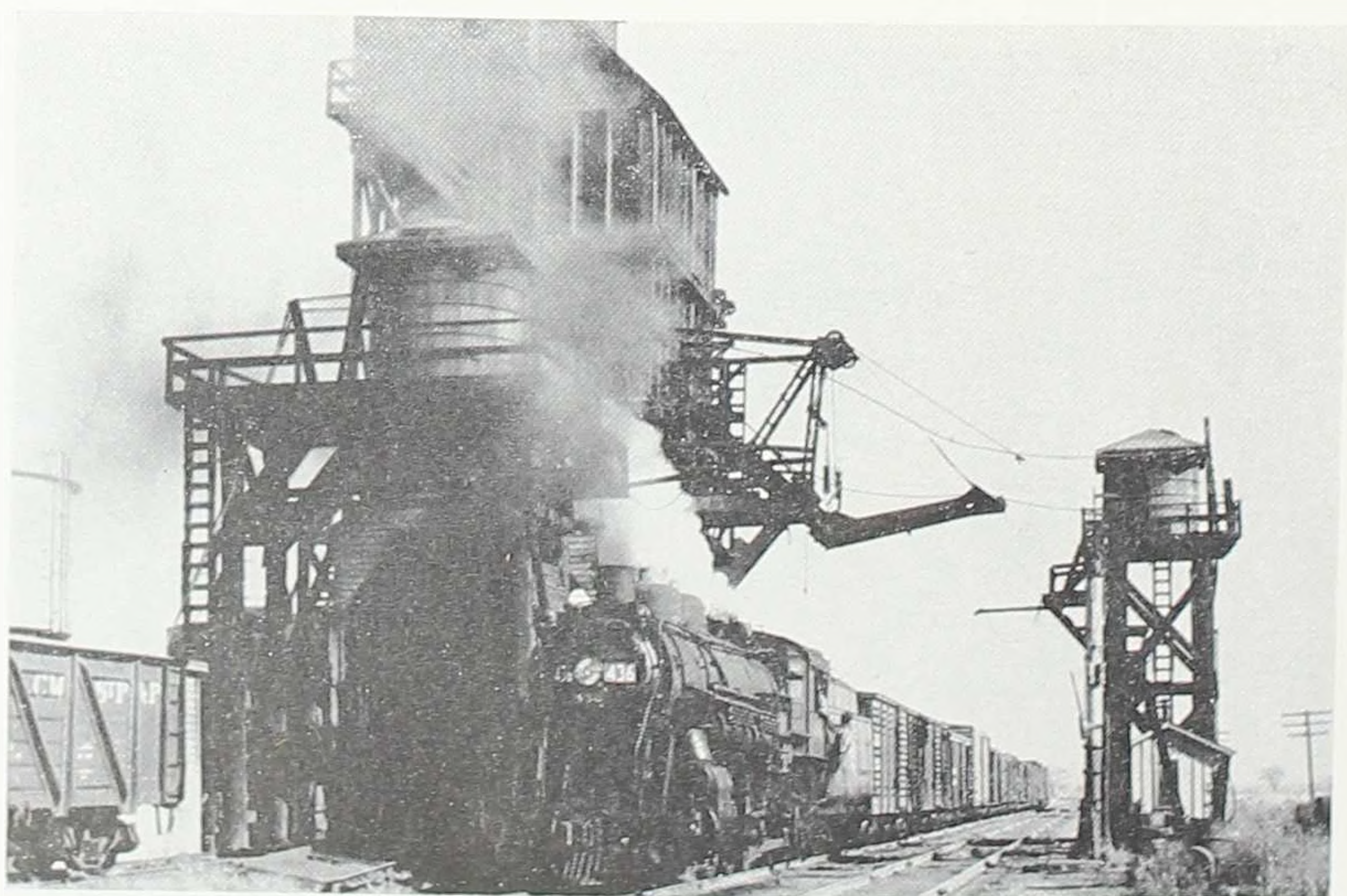


Courtesy Milwaukee Road

Modern girder bridge on main line over the Des Moines River west of Madrid.

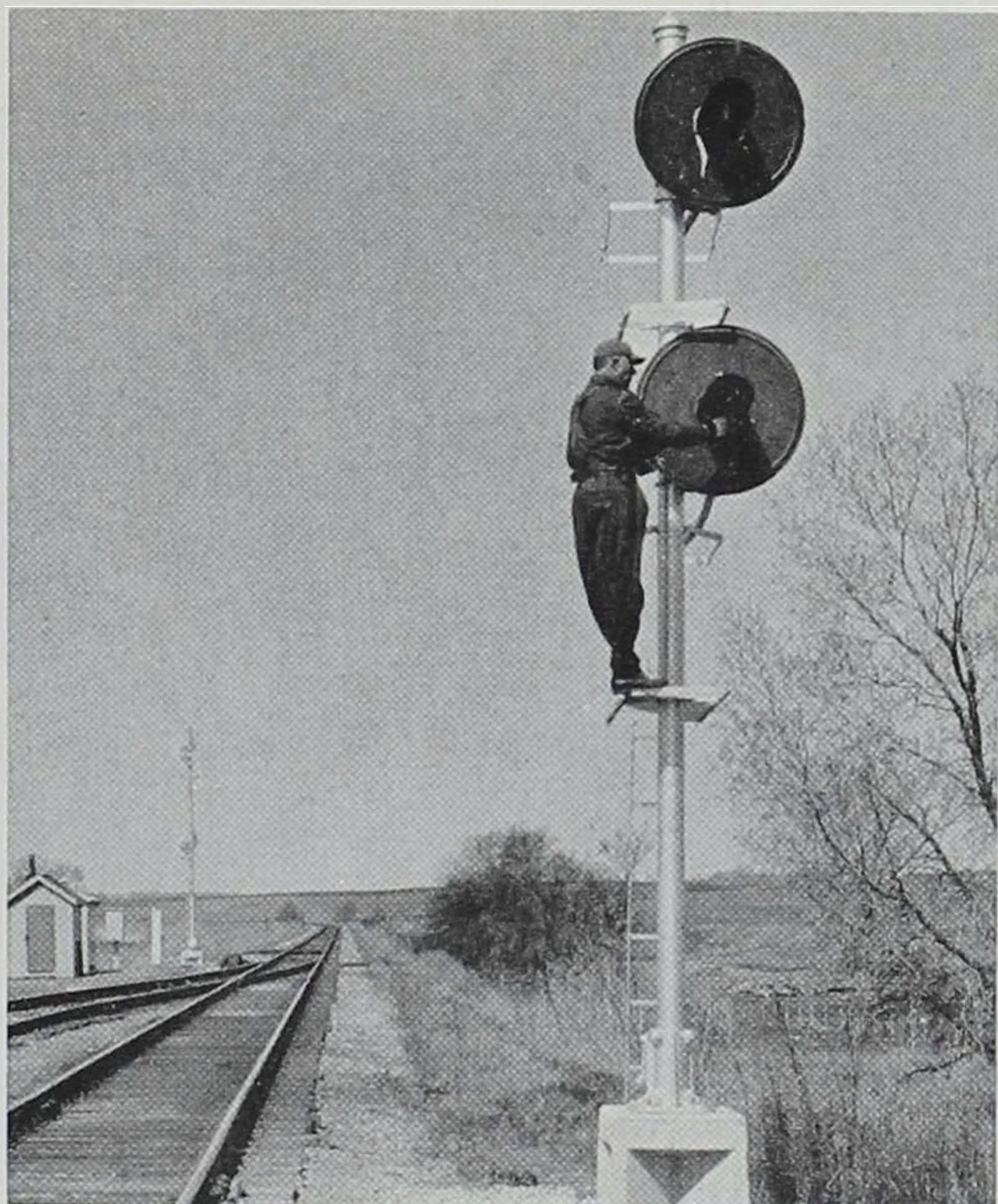


Way freight at end of line at Boone, October 15, 1961. The depot is no longer used and trains operate on irregular schedule for carload freight only.



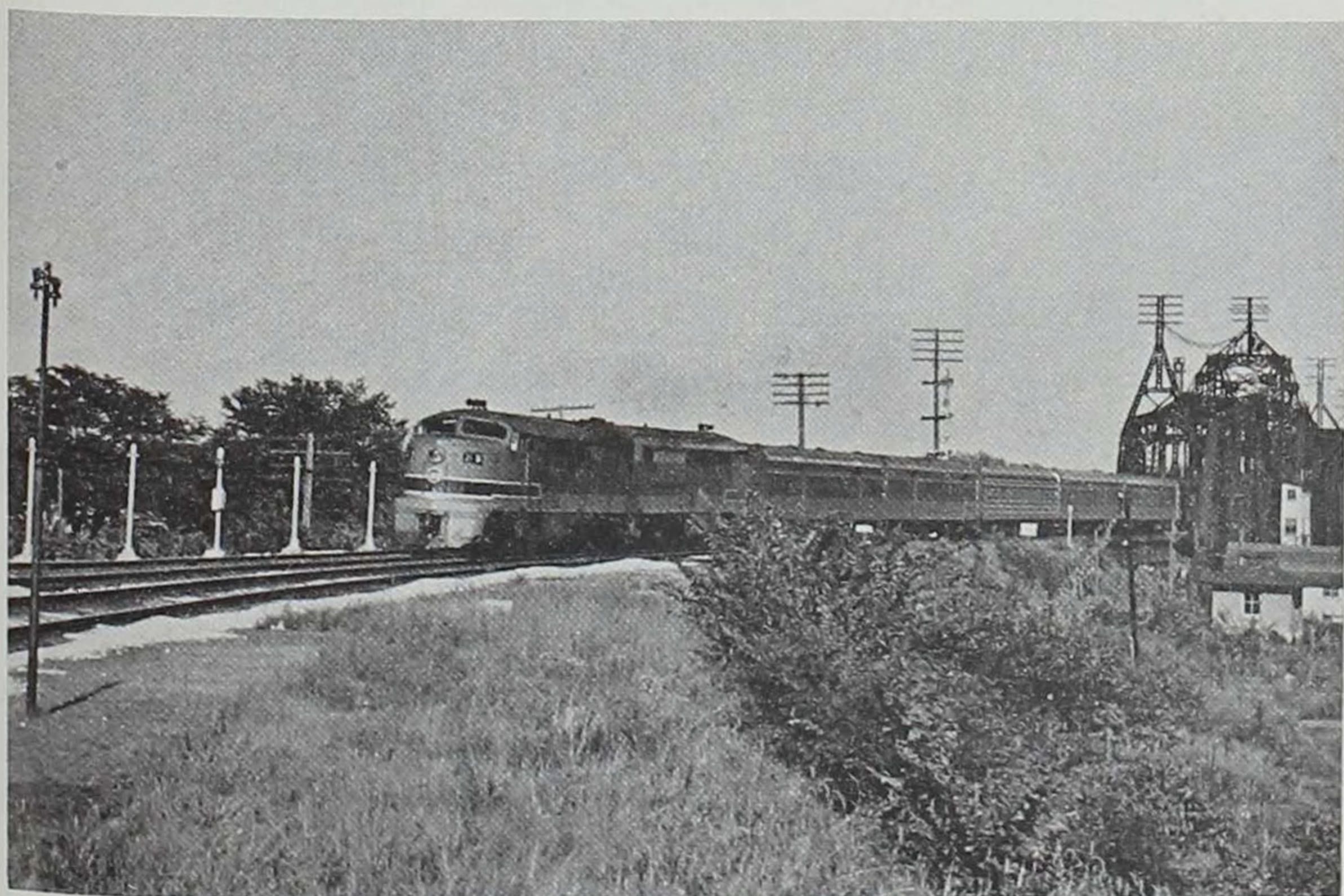
Courtesy Ernest Sevede

Westbound local freight (Engine #436) has just taken on coal at the chutes at Tama and is leaving for Perry. Nothing remains of this scene, everything has been dismantled.



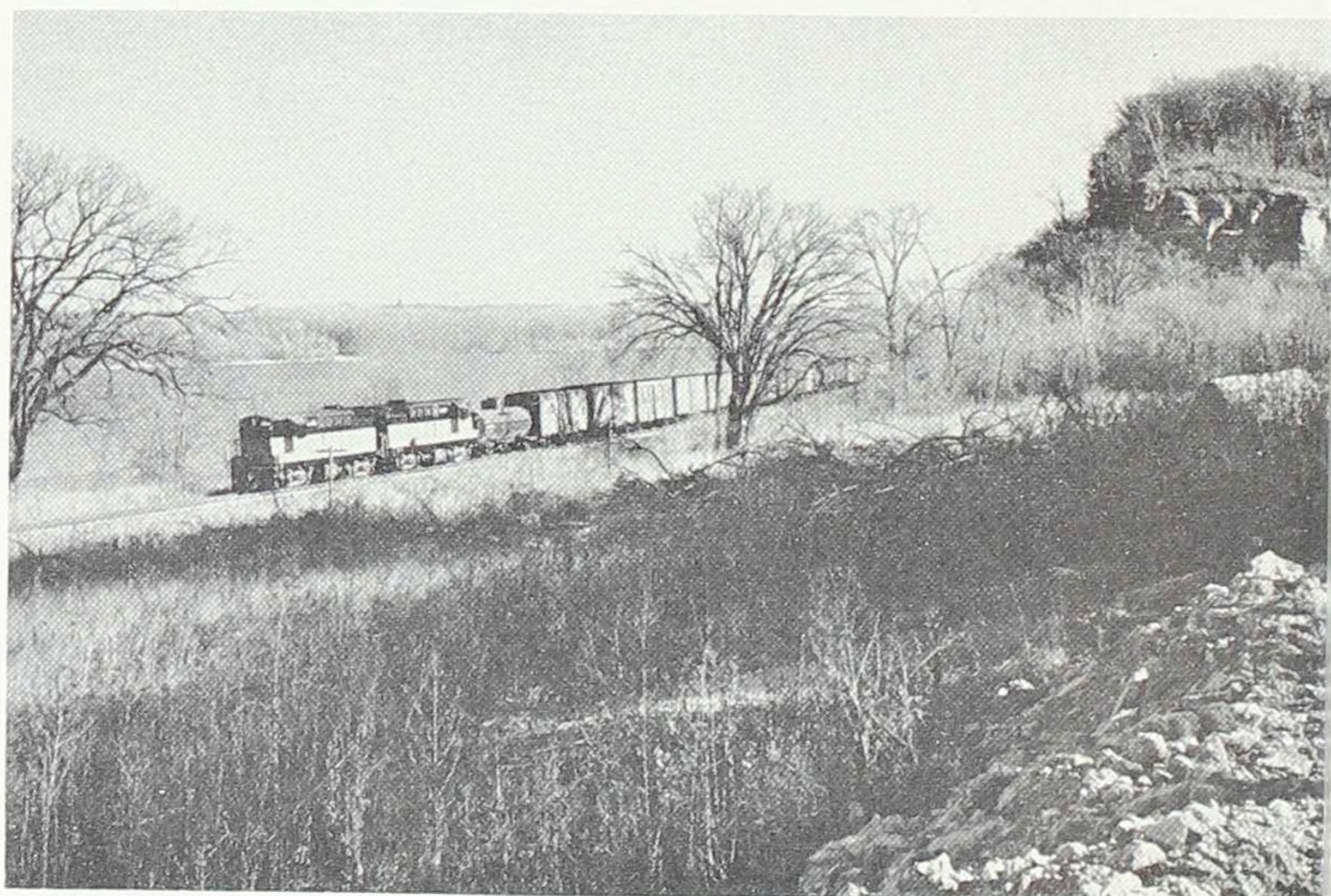
Courtesy Milwaukee Road

Signal maintainer inspects modern Centralized Traffic Control target over the Milwaukee's Omaha line in eastern Iowa.



Courtesy Milwaukee Road

"Midwest Hiawatha" crossing the Sabula Bridge over the Mississippi River into Iowa.



William D. Middleton Collection

Northbound freight, powered by two Fairbanks-Morse diesel-electric units, approaching Dubuque in November, 1956.



Don Hofsommer Collection

Westbound time freight rolling through Emmetsburg with tonnage for Iowa and the Dakotas over the Milwaukee line.

As independent roads, the lines from Des Moines to Boone and to Fonda were often at sixes and sevens. But when absorbed into the Milwaukee system, they were rebuilt to receive heavier traffic from the main line connection at Herndon and Madrid. Thus, the Milwaukee, rather late to be sure, got a firm toehold into the Capital City, where it competed with the Rock Island, the Burlington, the North Western, the Great Western, and the Wabash.

The last major railroad extension of the Milwaukee in Iowa came with the building of the Kansas City Cutoff. Heretofore, all trains from Chicago, Milwaukee, and other points in the Midwest to Kansas City were obliged to go over the long, circuitous, and hilly line between Marion and Ottumwa. As a result, the Milwaukee could never compete very successfully for passengers or freight to the great southwestern gateway of Kansas City. To rectify this shortcoming, the railroad quietly began buying land in southeastern Iowa for a low-grade, direct-line to Kansas City. George M. Titus, who later became state senator, was instrumental in purchasing much of the right-of-way. The Milwaukee had the new line in operation between Muscatine and Rutledge by 1903.

Much of the remainder of the route between Muscatine and Clinton was had by a curious bit of trading. Inasmuch as the Rock Island desired a better line from Albert Lea, Minnesota, to the

Twin Cities, and the Milwaukee needed access between Muscatine and Davenport, a reciprocal agreement was reached. The Milwaukee agreed to give the Rock Island trackage rights over its line to St. Paul and Minneapolis. In return, the Rock Island allowed the Milwaukee to use its rails between Muscatine and Davenport.

But there was still a hiatus of some thirty-three miles between Davenport and Clinton. Here the Milwaukee teamed up with the Burlington in operating the jointly owned Davenport, Rock Island & Northwestern Railway. This joint facility started out as the Davenport, Rock Island & Railway Bridge Company in 1884. It subsequently linked Clinton and Davenport with a bridge across the Mississippi to East Moline, Illinois.

With the inauguration of the short cut, running time of the *Southwestern Limited* was cut and freight service accelerated to and from Kansas City. The Cutoff has paid for its original investment many times over in economical operation.

Another line change of more modest proportions occurred when a low grade alternate route was constructed on the main line between Green Island on the Mississippi and Browns — twelve miles inland. In the course of time, the old main stem between Browns and Elk River Junction, via Preston, reverted to local freight service, and in 1953 the 9-mile sector from the Junction to Miles was retired.

It should be pointed out that while the Milwaukee's expansion program in Iowa had run its course, such was not the case on other parts of the system. For some years the road had looked longingly at the Pacific Coast as it extended its lines westward into the Dakotas. But it was not until November, 1905, that the route to the West Coast was authorized. This was a bold step, for approximately 1,400 miles of new construction was involved. Furthermore, it meant crossing five mountain ranges — the Big Belt Mountains and the Rockies in Montana, the Bitter Root Mountains in Montana and Idaho, and the Saddle Mountains and the Cascades in Washington.

In the spring of 1906, construction was started, and on July 4, 1909, the entire line was opened for freight service and shortly thereafter for passengers. But the extension to Seattle and Tacoma proved a heavy financial burden. Then, too, the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 and adverse economic conditions in the Northwest further weakened the road. The company went into receivership in 1925 which continued until it was reorganized on January 13, 1928. On that date the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad assumed control of the property. With the addition of "& Pacific" to the name the line became known as "The Milwaukee Road" rather than "The St. Paul," by which it was previously called. For clarity, however, the Milwaukee Road has

been uniformly used throughout this history and is so known by railroad men and the public generally today.

Shortly after the extension westward had been completed, the company decided to double-track its Omaha line. Work was started at Sabula in 1912, and by 1914 it was completed to Manilla. The 60-mile gap to Council Bluffs was never double-tracked. Ironically, the increased traffic which was expected failed to materialize. The Milwaukee was now in a position to compete for Pacific Coast freight over its own rails, and the Union Pacific looked coolly at its new rival.

Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul R'y.

To Kansas City, St. Joseph, Excelsior Springs, Cedar Rapids, Etc.

PRINCIPAL STATIONS.	No. 3.	No. 1.	
Chicago.....Lve	a10 40pm	a12 30pm	
Savanna....."	4 00am	5 40 "	
Marion.....Arr	7 35 "	9 40 "	
Cedar Rapids.....{ Arr	8 00 "	10 00pm	
{ Lve	b8 05 "		
Amana.....Arr	8 51 "		
South Amana....."	9 06 "		
Williamsburg....."	9 28 "		
North English....."	9 57 "		
Webster....."	10 15 "		
Sigourney....."	10 33 "		
Hedrick....."	11 10 "		
Ottumwa....."	11 45 "		
Blakesburg....."	12 30pm		
Moravia....."	1 00 "		
Seymour....."	1 55 "		
Gault....."	3 38 "		
Laredo....."	3 54 "		
Chillicothe....."	4 30 "		
Ludlow....."	5 03 "		
Cowgill....."	5 34 "		
Lawson....."	6 25 "		
St. Joseph....."	8 55 pm		
Excelsior Springs....."	6 45 "		
Liberty....."	7 23 "		
Birmingham....."	7 36 "		
Kansas City.....Arr	8 15pm		