

MN&S: Unique and colorful well beyond its size

Once named for a racehorse, this latter-day mini-Class 1 had all internal-combustion motive power by 1913!

IN THE MUSTY FILING CABINETS of railroad history are many carriers whose names include places they never reached. One of the all-time greats in this category of ambition is the Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester & Dubuque Electric Traction Company, a predecessor of the Minneapolis, Northfield & Southern Railway. The only city in its long name the MStPR&DETC served was Minneapolis.

The railroad began as a passenger-only interurban and evolved into a freight-hauler whose bread and butter was bridge traffic avoiding the congestion of Minneapolis-St. Paul. It was never electrified, and in between its original name and MN&S, which was incorporated in 1918, the line was named for a racehorse! In modern times, MN&S was only about 80 miles in length, but when a railroad needed only \$1 million in annual revenue to be Class 1, it joined the club in 1956.

MN&S's unusual history began at the turn of the 20th century when Col. Marion W. Savage, a Minneapolis livestock feed and mail-order tycoon, built a farm along the Minnesota River south of Minneapolis (today, it's in the city of Savage) and acquired a stable of racehorses to promote his International Stock Food Co. He purchased the famous pacing horse Dan Patch for \$60,000. Col. Savage took Dan Patch on tour around the U.S., with the horse riding in his own Omaha Road car attended by white-uniformed grooms.

To connect his properties with Min-

The horseshoe emblem adorns Dan Patch Lines 1915 Porter 2-6-0 201 (below). Doubleheaded MN&S Decapods 502 and 505 roll north with a freight at Cedar Lake, Minn., in September 1942.



CHARLES LAVALLEE

neapolis, Savage entered the railroad business, becoming a co-founder in 1907 of MStPR&DETC. He soon shortened the name to "Dan Patch Electric Lines," a more marketable label, and designed the logo, a horseshoe superimposed on a lightning bolt. The first few miles were spiked down in 1910. Service began on the 4th of July between a terminal at 54th and Nicollet in Minneapolis, a connection with Twin City Rapid Transit Co. streetcars, and Savage's new Antlers Park, south of the Minnesota River near Lakeville.

Savage bought two Strang gas-electric cars to begin passenger service, then switched to General Electric, and at one time had 15 gas-electrics—trolley wire was never strung over the Dan Patch Electric Lines. Northfield was attained later in 1910, and trackage rights were secured over Chicago Great Western to Randolph, Faribault, and Mankato. Lines were projected to Dubuque, Iowa, and several southern Minnesota cities, and some grading was done, but the road never laid track past Northfield.

The company made history in 1913 when it entered the freight business and bought a GE gas-electric locomotive, the first of its kind. Dan Patch Lines 100 had two 175 h.p. V-8 engines. Three heavier units joined it the same year, earning Savage's line the title of being the first railroad to run both freight and passenger trains exclusively with internal-combustion power, a crown it held until 1915 when it bought three Porter 2-6-0's.

Remarkably, No. 100 survives today, after being purchased by another railroad, converted to straight electric operation, and then to diesel in 1957. It is preserved by the Minnesota Transportation Museum in St. Paul, displayed in its original Dan Patch Lines livery with MN&S business car *Gopher*.

Pioneer GE gas-electric 100, preserved today, helped Dan Patch Lines make history in 1913.

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NAV FOSSE COLLECTION



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1924 it was sold and became the Minnesota Western Railway, which extended west 115 miles to tiny Gluek, Minn.

Col. Savage had envisioned great traffic gains to the south and began buying more land for sale to Twin Cities residents. He was 60 years too early in forecasting suburban development, though, and in 1916 the railroad went into receivership. In an ironic twist, Col. Sav-

age and his great horse Dan Patch died within hours of each other in July 1916.

MN&S, formed that year, acquired the Dan Patch Lines at auction on August 6. Harry E. Pence Sr. led the company, and the Pence family would control the firm for most of its existence. Pence saw that MN&S was ideally positioned as a belt line around western Minneapolis, and in 1927 MN&S built a new line from Glenwood Junction in suburban Golden Valley, site of a yard and shop, to a connection with the Soo Line in Crystal. Trackage rights on the Soo took MN&S trains into Soo's Humboldt and Shoreham yards (MN&S used four stalls of the Shoreham roundhouse) and to Northern Pacific's Northtown Yard.

MN&S eventually connected with eight other railroads. Shippers were urged to route their cars via the Northfield and Randolph gateways, where MN&S connected with three lines. Road jobs brought the northbound traffic to Glenwood Junction, where it was broken up and transferred to other roads. MN&S also had an aggressive sales department to promote on-line industry in its growing service area, and by the 1950's it was earning enough revenue to be considered a Class 1 railroad.

After MN&S was formed, it jettisoned the gas-electric locomotives but kept some of the motor cars until passenger service to Northfield ended in 1942. It had gotten more motor cars in 1927 when it took over the operation, but not the ownership, of the Minnesota Western. MN&S became a conventional steam railroad, first using the 2-6-0's and three ex-NP 2-6-2's, then picking up six 2-8-0's from Duluth, Missabe & Northern in 1927. MN&S's best-known steam engines were nine Decapods (all but one "Russian") bought in the 1930's and '40's. They often operated on the main line, but were split when crossing the Minnesota River rail-and-highway bridge at Savage.

MN&S's diesels came from three builders. First was a Baldwin VO660, in 1940; Minnesota Western got its own VO in 1942. The gems of the fleet were five Baldwin DT66-2000 center-cabs of 1948-49, Nos. 20-24, which introduced the nice blue-and-silver livery. These





THREE PHOTOS THIS PAGE, STEVE GLISCHINSKI

The author had had his driver's license for only a year when, at age 17 on St. Patrick's Day 1974, he captured MN&S's last active center-cab Baldwin, No. 21, coming off Soo Line trackage onto the BN at Northtown Yard with a transfer.

175-ton transfer units lasted into the 1960's, with No. 21 hanging on in transfer work until mid-1974. It is preserved in working order at the Illinois Railway Museum. In 1950, MN&S bought a lone Baldwin DRS-66-1500, No. 15, followed in 1953 by another center-cab, RT624 No. 25. A VO1000 came from the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern the next year. In deference to its suburban neighbors, MN&S mounted on its units pleasant-sounding Hancock air whistles, whose sound was gentler than most air horns.

Minnesota Western, meantime, re-

MN&S's interurban heritage is evident (below) as the "High Line Job" ambles down the original Dan Patch main at Richfield, Minn., in 1982. SD39 41, today back on the property, plus a 1500 and two 1200's, leaves Northfield in February 1980.

ceived two Fairbanks-Morse switchers: H10-44 No. 51 in 1946 and H12-44 No. 10 in 1951. Both migrated to the MN&S in 1956, becoming MN&S 11 and 10 respectively. They remained in service into the '70's, then found new owners. No. 10 did a stint on short line Central Wisconsin and now is on display (without its engine) on ex-Chicago & North Western right of way at Milton, Wis., painted as C&NW 10. No. 11 went to Hallett Dock Co. in Duluth and is the subject of preservation efforts.

In 1956, operating control of the Minnesota Western went to the Minneapolis & St. Louis, but MN&S got the two FM's. MN&S then began replacing its Baldwins with EMD's, first with SW-1200's 30 and 31 in 1962. They had Flexicoil road trucks and multiple-unit controls; previously, only the FM's had m.u. Additional pairs of SW1200's (32-35) came in 1964 and '65, followed by SW-1500's 36-37 in '66. MN&S's last diesels were 2300 h.p. SD39's 40-41 in 1968.

I first saw the MN&S on October 7,

1972, when I was 15 years old. Growing up in St. Paul, plus the lack of a driver's license, kept me from reaching the road "way over" on the west side of Minneapolis. During the fall rally of the Thousand Lakes Region of the National Model Railroad Association in Minneapolis that year, a tour of MN&S's facilities at Glenwood Junction was offered, and NMRA friend George Isaacs kindly gave me a ride to the meet.

For a teenage fan, Glenwood Junction was quite a place! The facilities were neat as a pin, and the railroad was very hospitable. It pulled Baldwins 15 and 21 and FM 10 out for photography, and we were invited to inspect them at will. MN&S even fired up hi-rail trucks and maintenance-of-way equipment so we could examine them. It appeared to be a first-class operation all around.

Unfortunately the next few years would be tough on the railroad, mergers and deregulation becoming twin blows that torpedoed it. Mergers caused the loss of old interchange partners, and deregulation meant MN&S couldn't take advantage of high rate divisions on its bridge hauls, revenue which it had received out of proportion to its size. The Rock Island's closure in 1980 hurt, and when Chicago & North Western took over Rock's "Spine Line" through Northfield, there was no longer need to travel the branch to Randolph. Soo Line, hoping to reach Kansas City, bid on the Rock, and in January 1982 announced plans to buy the MN&S, which would give Soo a direct connection to the Spine Line. Soo got MN&S in June 1982, but the Spine Line went to C&NW, and the MN&S became essentially a Soo branch.

In retrospect, the former MN&S has



fared well since it was merged out of existence 23 years ago. All 10 of its EMD's found new owners after serving Soo for over a decade. The entire main line remains, with the exception of a half-mile in Northfield proper; a 10-mile portion from Lakeville to Savage is out of service but may be reactivated. The Greenwood Junction shop and yard are gone—the land they occupied in suburban Golden Valley was too valuable for rail use, so newer buildings occupy the site. The Minnesota Western is gone except for a short stretch in the suburbs.

The MN&S refuses to die completely, though. Progressive Rail (PGR), which serves the Air Lake Industrial Park in suburban Lakeville on the old MN&S, in 2001 took over operation of the original Dan Patch line in Bloomington and Richfield, called the "High Line." The SW1500 assigned there wears MN&S style blue and silver, complete with the old diamond logo but PROGRESSIVE RAIL in place of the MN&S name. The railroad even put a Hancock air whistle on the unit! PGR also bought MN&S caboose 102 and completely restored it to MN&S livery, including the herald.

The best was yet to come, though, for in 2004 Canadian Pacific turned over the Lakeville-Northfield leg of the old MN&S to Progressive Rail, and PGR acquired Soo 6241, the former MN&S 41, to use there, and had the SD39 painted back into MN&S colors. Bottom line: a bit of the "Dan Patch Electric Lines" keeps pacing in the 21st Century. ■

MN&S fact file

(comparative figures are for 1929 and 1979)

Route-miles: 140; 82

Locomotives: 12; 13

Passenger cars: 8 (4 motor cars); 0

Freight cars: 53; 716

Headquarters city: Minneapolis, Minn.

Special interest group: Soo Line Historical and Technical Society, 323 Fremont St., Lake Mills, WI 53551; www.sooline.org

Recommended reading: *The Railroad That Was Once Named for a Racehorse* (William D. Middleton, June 1959 TRAINS); *The MN&S Story* (Stan Mailer, Aug.-Sept. 1982 Railfan).

Source: *The Historical Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach, 1999).