

SAINT PAUL HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION SITE NOMINATION FORM

1. NAME

Historic: Northern Pacific Railway Company's Como Shops
Common: Burlington Northern Incorporated: Como Shops

2. LOCATION

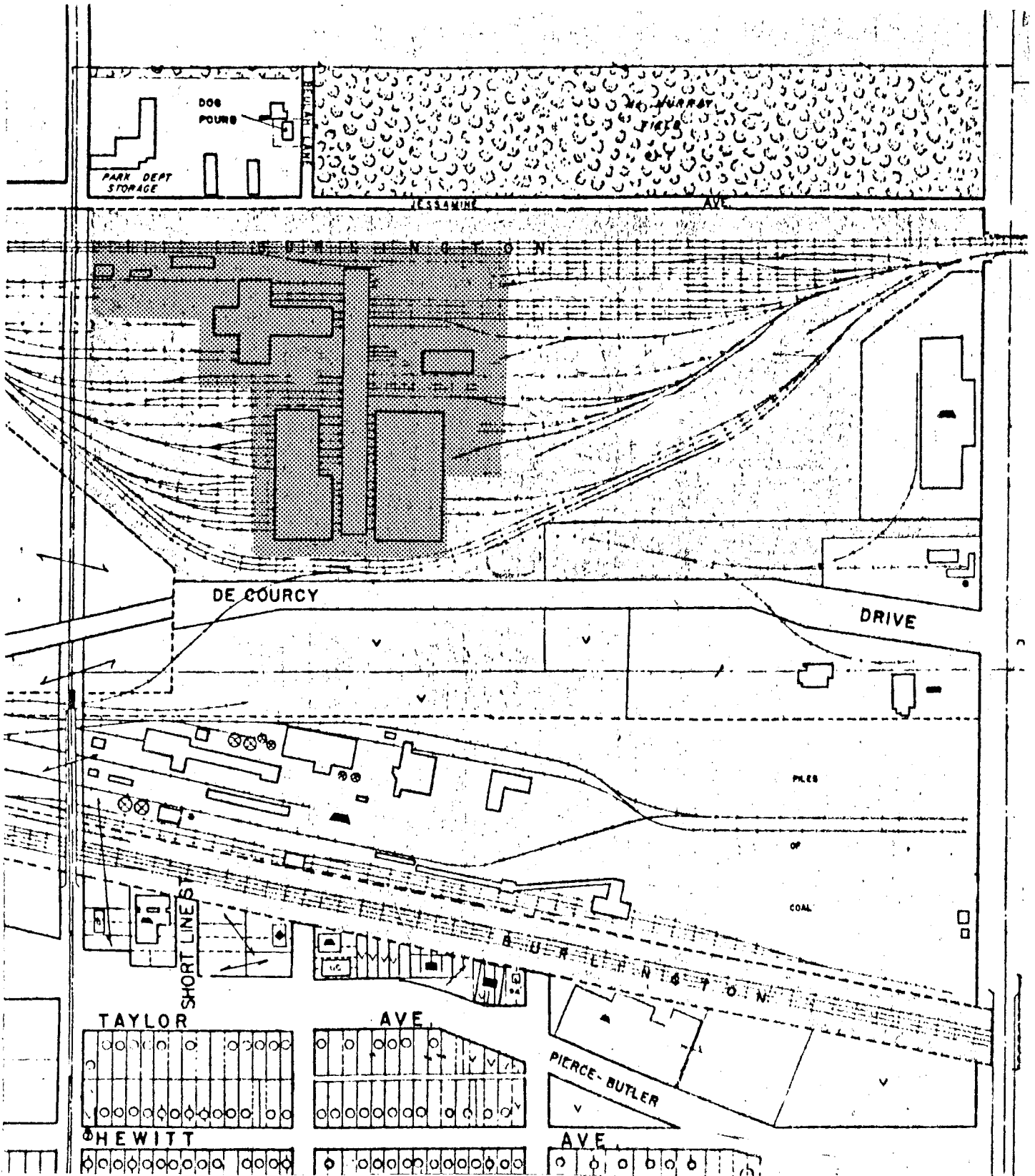
Address: 1269 Energy Park Drive

Legal Description: Beginning at the intersection of a line forming the northern extension of the centerline of Albert Street with a line that is 100 feet south of the centerline of Jessamine Avenue running parallel with the centerline of Jessamine Avenue; thence southerly along the northern extension of the centerline of Albert Street 225 feet to its point of intersection with a line 166.75 feet north of the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue running parallel with the centerline of Orchard Avenue; thence easterly along said line 835 feet to its point of intersection with a line forming the northern extension of the centerline of Short Line Street; thence southerly along the northern extension of the centerline of Short Line Street 200 feet to its point of intersection with a line forming the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue; thence easterly along the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue 175 feet to its point of intersection with a line 150 feet west of the northern extension of the centerline of Syndicate Street running parallel to the centerline of Syndicate Street; thence southerly along said line 525 feet to its point of intersection with a line 100 feet south of the western extension of the centerline of Hatch Avenue running parallel to the centerline of Hatch Avenue; thence easterly along said line 575 feet to its point of intersection with a line 230 feet west of the northern extension of the centerline

3. PRESENT OWNER

Name: A.H.W. Corporation
Address: 1130 Northwestern Bank Building, St. Paul, Minnesota

4. LOCATION MAP



5. DESCRIPTION

The Como Shops of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company are located on a 51 acre parcel of land in the northwestern part of the City of Saint Paul east of the former site of Midway Stadium within the city's current energy park development. The shops are the central portion of a development called "Bandana Square". The shop buildings are separated from a residential community and Como Park on the north by the east/west grade of the Burlington Northern tracks. The buildings are between, though not immediately adjacent to, two major north/south thoroughfares, Snelling Avenue on the west and Lexington Parkway on the east. Immediately to the south is Energy Park Drive.

The major buildings on the site were all constructed between 1885 and 1920, and are located along or near a 75 x 736 foot transfer table which ran perpendicular to the tracks on the north. Of the eight buildings standing on the site, five have been rated pivotal and three rated supportive. The pivotal buildings include two large coach shops with additions, a large cruciform building which originally functioned as a car erection and woodworking shop, a blacksmith shop, and an office/storeroom building.

The utilitarian site layout has been complemented aesthetically by the use of similar building materials in cohesive styles. All of the pivotal buildings are constructed primarily of cream-colored Little Falls brick with Mankato Limestone trim and hammered St. Cloud granite sills. All of the pivotal buildings except the office/storeroom originally had monitors at the peaks of their low-pitched gable roofs; however, many of these original monitors have been removed.

All of the original windows in the pivotal buildings were removed and replaced with glass bricks with one or two transparent panes inserted with the exception of the office/storeroom building. Major additions to the buildings, including those to the coach shops and office, were harmonious in style and massing. The addition to the blacksmith shop, however, is less sympathetic to the original design because of a change in roofline. The proposed renovation of the shops, as discussed in the National Register nomination is completed for some buildings and underway on others. Currently, the renovation on the 1885 portion of the paint shop and paint shop addition and on the new car shop is completed. Work is currently underway on the woodworking and car erecting shop and has just started on the blacksmith shop.

At one time there were a number of additional buildings on the site. Most of these were open or enclosed wood frame structures situated at some distance from the transfer table at the periphery of the shops complex. They were used as storage sheds for lumber, wheels, and other materials associated with passenger and freight car construction and repair. Most of these structures were razed beginning in 1967 when declining passenger service led to the Northern Pacific Railroad's decision to gradually phase out work at the shops. Since 1967 the work force at the site was reduced steadily, and some of the structures, including the blacksmith shop, were closed. The Como shops were vacated by the railroad in March of 1982.

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: continued

of Griggs Street running parallel with the centerline of Griggs Street; thence northerly along said line 275 feet to its point of intersection with a line 231.15 feet south of the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue running parallel with the centerline of Orchard Avenue; thence easterly along said line 165 feet to its point of intersection with a line 70 feet west of the northern extension of the centerline of Griggs Street running parallel with the centerline of Griggs Street; thence northerly along said line 100 feet to its point of intersection with a line 125 feet south of the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue running parallel with the centerline of Orchard Avenue; thence easterly along said line 135 feet to its point of intersection with a line 70 feet east of the northern extension of the centerline of Griggs Street running parallel with the centerline of Griggs Street; thence northerly along said line 150 feet to its point of intersection with a line forming the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue; thence westerly along the western extension of the centerline of Orchard Avenue 125 feet to its point of intersection with a line 70 feet west of the northern extension of the centerline of Griggs Street running parallel with the centerline of Griggs Street; thence northerly along said line 425 feet to its point of intersection with a line 100 feet south of the centerline of Jessamine Avenue running parallel with the centerline of Jessamine Avenue; thence westerly along said line 1750 feet to the point of beginning.

6. SIGNIFICANCE

The Como Shops of the Northern Pacific Railroad played a significant role in the development of the railroad industry in the northwest, and contributed to the growth of St. Paul's population from 41,473 in 1880 to 214,744 residents in 1910. The Como Shops are also significant in the history of the railroad industry in the United States. The Northern Pacific Railroad completed the nation's first line between St. Paul and Seattle in 1883, thus opening up a large portion of the northwestern United States to settlement. Established by the railroad in 1885, the Como Shops complex were used to build and service railroad passenger cars. It was the only passenger car service complex which the Northern Pacific Railroad operated east of the Rocky Mountains.

In 1877, the Northern Pacific Railroad Company purchased the majority of the stock of the Western Railroad Company of Minnesota. In 1882, the Northern Pacific began surveying land with the aim of establishing a line between St. Paul and Minneapolis. This survey was conducted fairly secretly in order to prevent land speculation in the area. The following year the Western Railroad Company of Minnesota became known as the St. Paul and Northern Pacific Railroad Company, leased its tracks to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company for 999 years, and began work on the line to connect St. Paul and Minneapolis. At that time 200 acres of land was purchased along the future St. Paul and Northern Pacific track bed in the Lake Como area for the purpose of constructing the Como passenger car shops. By 1885 the Minneapolis-St. Paul line was completed and in the summer of that year construction of the Como Shops commenced and the first phase of building on the site was completed by 1886.

The Como Shops were an impetus to the settlement of the surrounding area since some of the workmen at the shops built houses in the nearby residential neighborhoods, such as Frogtown. One source indicates that a large number of employees at the Northern Pacific's freight car shops in Brainerd, Minnesota, were transferred to the Como Shops when they opened, and some of them may have settled nearby. There were several other railroad construction and maintenance facilities in St. Paul in the late nineteenth century, including the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Shops near Jackson Street (extant), and the Chicago, St. Paul, and Omaha Shops near Randolph and Toronto Street (razed). These shops, together with supporting industries such as iron foundries and lumber mills which were established along track beds, provided employment for thousands of workers who settled in St. Paul in the late nineteenth century. Several of St. Paul's oldest neighborhoods, including the North End, Thomas-Dale, and West Seventh Street, became the home of large numbers of railroad workers. It is estimated that by the 1880's one fourth of the city's work force was employed by the railroad and their supporting industries.

The primary function of the Como Shops was to erect and maintain passenger cars. At the turn of the century it was estimated that passenger cars needed to be serviced every eighteen months on the average. A major function of the shops was also the conversion or "betterment" of passenger cars as innovations in design were introduced.

The Como Shops were characterized by mechanical diversity. Cars were brought in for overhaul and were totally disassembled. Every part was inspected, cleaned, and repaired--wheels, trucks, general woodwork, upholstery, and metal--and plating plumbing, electricity, and painting were done.

6. SIGNIFICANCE

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In 1885 when the Como Shops were opened, most railroad companies, including the Northern Pacific, used sleeping cars and more lavish coaches built and owned by the Pullman Company of Pullman, Illinois. More modest coaches, many only used for day trips, were constructed at the Como Shops. An average Northern Pacific passenger coach in the 1880's was of wood frame construction on a steel underframe with eight wheels per car. Cars were heated by a wood stove on each end and ventilated through the first-story windows along the roof of the car. The cars seated approximately fifty people and interior furnishings included varnished wood panelling and upholstered seats. Until 1887 cars were lit by kerosene, but electric lighting was required after that date. Most cars had a brightly colored exterior and many were both numbered and named, frequently in honor of railroad-founded towns. By the late 1880's the use of the enclosed vestibule and diaphragm allowed passengers to move between cars while the train was moving. This invention corresponded with the introduction of dining cars on many trains which freed the trains from making frequent stops at dining facilities along the route.

There were three major phases of construction at the Como Shops site. In 1885 the car erection and woodworking shop, paint shop, freight car repair shop, blacksmith shop, and office were constructed. In 1902 a new coach shop and transfer table were constructed, and major alterations were made to the freight car repair shop. In 1911, major additions were made to the paint shop and coach shop, and the transfer pit was extended between these two buildings. It should be noted that additions were also made to the office and blacksmith shop in 1917.

Even though three significant periods of building took place at the shops, a functional uniformity was maintained regarding building site location. Almost all of the structures at the Como Shops complex are rectangular in shape and are located either parallel to the Northern Pacific tracks which run east and west on the northern border of the site or perpendicular to these tracks, focusing around the transfer table. Unlike many local industrial sites that have buildings constructed over a period of time, at the Como Shops there is an intriguing compatibility of building materials and style, even though the buildings vary considerably in scale and original use. Those buildings which were constructed at the site after 1913 tend to diverge from this pattern although they were primarily ancillary structures such as the record storage buildings and transfer table at the center of the complex. The 1913 buildings tended to be smaller and of a different colored brick, and in most cases, are not comparable in style.

The continual decline in railroad passenger travel foretold the demise of the Como Shops, and in 1967 the Northern Pacific Railroad's Industrial Engineering Department prepared a one volume report which examined the functions of the Como Shops. In this report it was suggested that the shops be phased out of operation gradually to make way for future industrial development of the property.

This was done by retiring certain machines and duties, and through employee attrition. By 1969, the Northern Pacific had only 198 passenger cars in service. In contrast, in 1937 there were 692 passenger cars in service, and in 1912 there were 1,161. On March 2, 1970, the Northern Pacific merged with the Great Northern and Burlington lines to form the Burlington Northern Railroad. Subsequently some of the passenger cars which had been serviced previously at the Como Shops could be serviced at shops owned previously by the other rail-

6. SIGNIFICANCE

continued:

road. When the initial plan for phasing out the Como Shops was issued in 1967 it was intended that they would be vacated by 1980. (This plan was about a year behind schedule, as they were not totally closed down until March of 1982).

The site of the Como Shops and its surrounding acreage has been targeted by the Port Authority of the City of St. Paul as part of a 218 acre energy efficient industrial development known as Evergy Park. Recently the AHW Corporation (which specializes in centralized property development, marketing, management, and maintenance and is a subsidiary of the Anherst H. Wilder Foundation) announced plans for a \$70,000,000 development on a 53.5 acre site including the Como Shops, within the 218 acre Energy Park. The AHW Corporation's plans call for renovating most of the buildings at the Como Shops to adapt them for use as retail and commercial space, and also would entail the construction of 950 new housing units adjacent to the site. Those buildings scheduled for rehabilitation are the car shops, the cruciform building, the blacksmith shop, the office and storage building, and the record and storage building and laboratory.

7. PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Established by the railroad in 1885, the Northern Pacific Railway Como Shops played an important role in the development of the railroad industry in the Northwest and contributed to St. Paul's growth. The shops were the only passenger car shops operated by the Northern Pacific Railroad east of the Rocky Mountains. The exterior appearance of the buildings should be preserved in a manner consistent with the original design intent. Any additions or alterations that would obscure or detract from the architectural integrity or historic character of the buildings or their site should be avoided.

8. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Thomas Twohig, staff intern
Supervisor: Thomas Zahn, Preservation Planner
Date: August 28, 1984

National Register Form:

prepared: June 1982
by: Patricia Murphy, Director
Historic Sites Survey of St. Paul and Ramsey County
75 W. 5th Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

9. DOCUMENTATION ON FILE

Slides/photographs
National Register Form
Historic Sites Survey Form