

# Milwaukee Road's Early Depot Paint Schemes



ABOVE: Here is a view of the new depot at North Bend, Wash., a short time before it was opened in late June or early July 1911. It shows the basis for the standard four-color scheme but for some reason it does not have the white trim; everything else is properly painted, including the black doors and window frames. Was this a deliberate variation on the standard scheme, or did the paint crew have to pack up and leave before they could finish the job? PHOTO COURTESY SNOQUALMIE VALLEY MUSEUM, NORTH BEND, WASH.

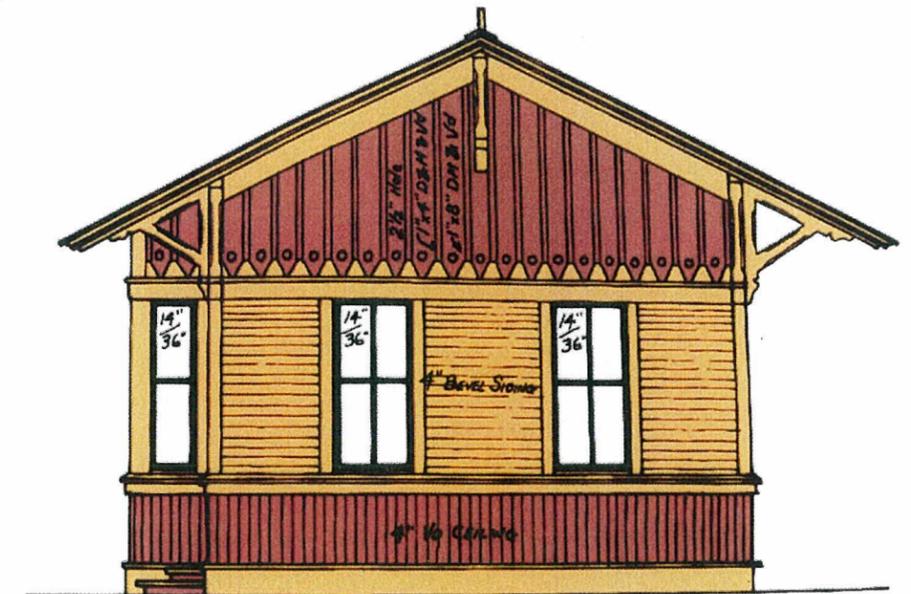
BY ALLEN MILLER

There has been much speculation over the years, especially among modelers but also historians, as to what colors the Milwaukee's depots were painted in the early years. Because there wasn't any color film in those days, one must try to distinguish between shades of gray what portions of various depots

were painted in what color. In some cases this is an easy matter, but, in less than ideal lighting conditions or the absents of clear original prints, this can become a real guessing game. This article will help clear up some of the mystery surrounding the current confusion about what colors the Milwaukee used and in what parts of the

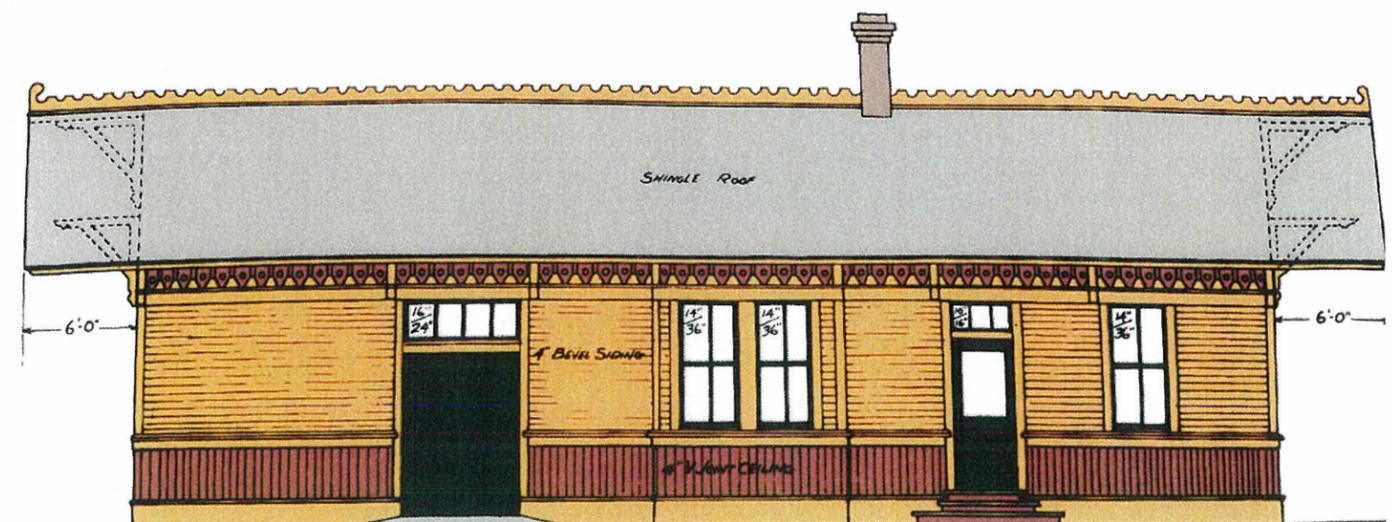
building exterior these colors were applied.

Unfortunately, I have yet to find a long lost Milwaukee Road standard planbook of painting details—if there was such a thing. Rather, this is a collection of my observations, theories, and notations over a period of 35 years or more of general interest in this subject.

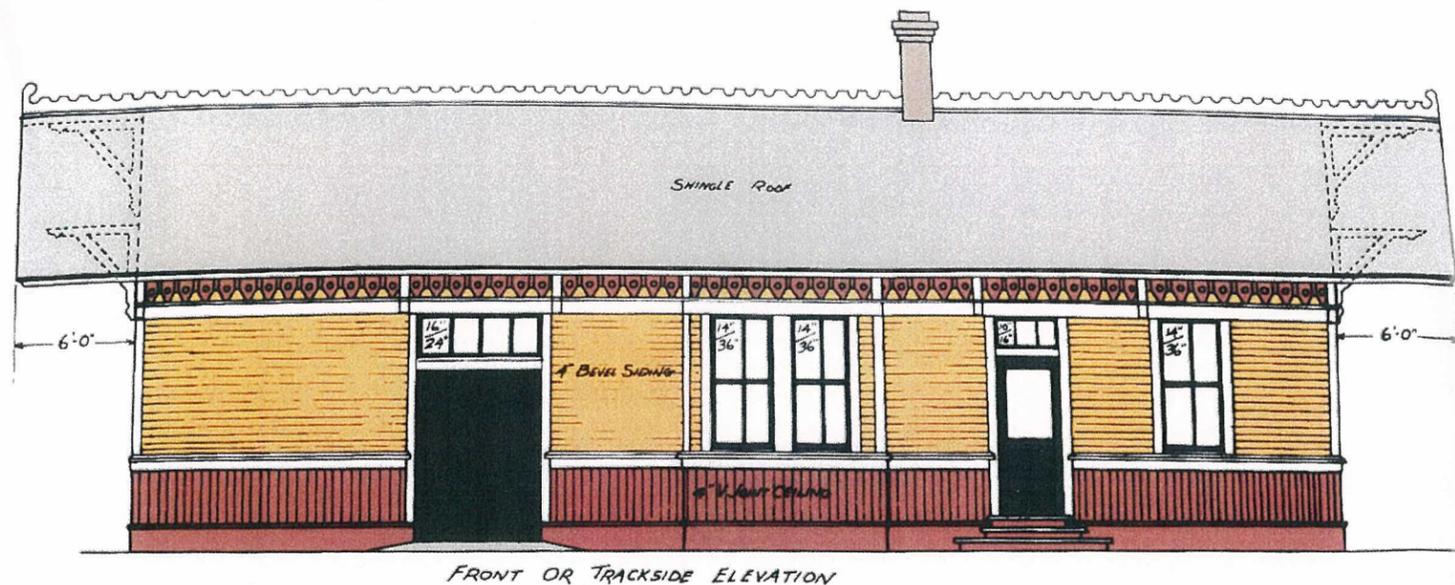


END ELEVATION

ABOVE AND BELOW: This is the North Bend depot as it was painted—basically the four-color scheme without the fourth color. In this case the white trim was replaced with additional orange. Different, to be sure, but actually quite pleasing and much better than the all-orange depot with maroon trim (two-color scheme) that was introduced a few years later. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



FRONT OR TRACKSIDE ELEVATION



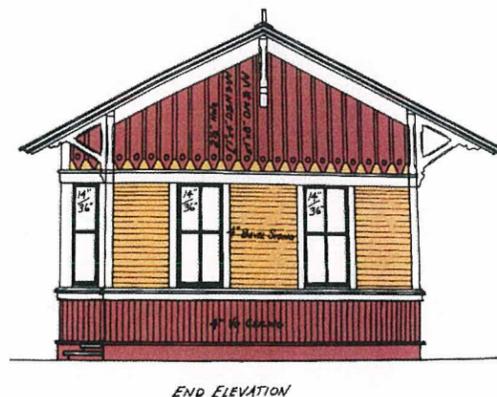
ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Here is what North Bend, on the Everett Branch, should have looked like, painted in the standard four-color scheme. Sumner and Rainier, Wash., depots were of very similar design and likely did carry this scheme in the earliest years of their existence. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

I have long had an affinity for railroad depots and interlocking towers, especially where The Milwaukee Road is concerned. I worked almost every open station on the old Coast Division on the operator's extra board, and I was always pleased to arrive at a new location where I would find the original depot structure—versus a modern prefab building—still in use. I had a regimen that I often followed at these buildings when I was on my own time. One was to search the attics and inside the freight-room walls for old train orders and tossed-out memorabilia.

Another was to scrape away little areas of paint from portions of the depot to find the older colors down below and mentally note what they were.

Although many refuse to believe, it is an established fact that for many years in the early history of the Milwaukee's Western extension its wood-frame combination freight-and-passenger depots were painted in a varying combination of harvest orange and maroon, sometimes combined with other colors. In fact, this color combination originated on Lines West

BELOW: This is the new depot at Doty, Wash., in 1915, in a variation of the four-color scheme. The main difference is that the entire gingerbread gable end has been painted in the white, whereas it should have been maroon. See the Beverly depot which is the same "Lombard" style. Nearby Dryad was another example of this depot design and may have also been painted this way when it was in the four-color scheme. PACIFIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, SOUTH BEND, WASH.



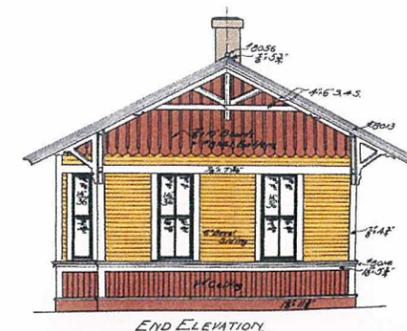
and then spread to other divisions on Lines East in the 1910s. In the Cascade Mountains of Washington, the earliest depots on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway of Washington and Chicago, Milwaukee & Puget Sound Railway main line were painted in a dark green color. I have seen photos of depots in this early single color scheme at the following locations: Moncton, Garcia, Rockdale, Laconia, Keechelus, Cle Elum, Rye, and Malden in Washington State and also St. Maries and Elk River in Idaho. This scheme was very short-lived, appearing in photos dating from 1908 to early 1910.

The next scheme makes its appearance in 1910 and is what I refer to as the "four-color scheme." Generally, it consisted of the main body of

the depot being painted in harvest orange with the gingerbread or shingled gable ends and the wainscoting under the window line painted in maroon. The trim boards around the doors and windows, above and below the window line, the corners and the roof braces (and sometimes the soffits) were painted white while the window frames and doors themselves, often including the freight-room doors, were painted black.

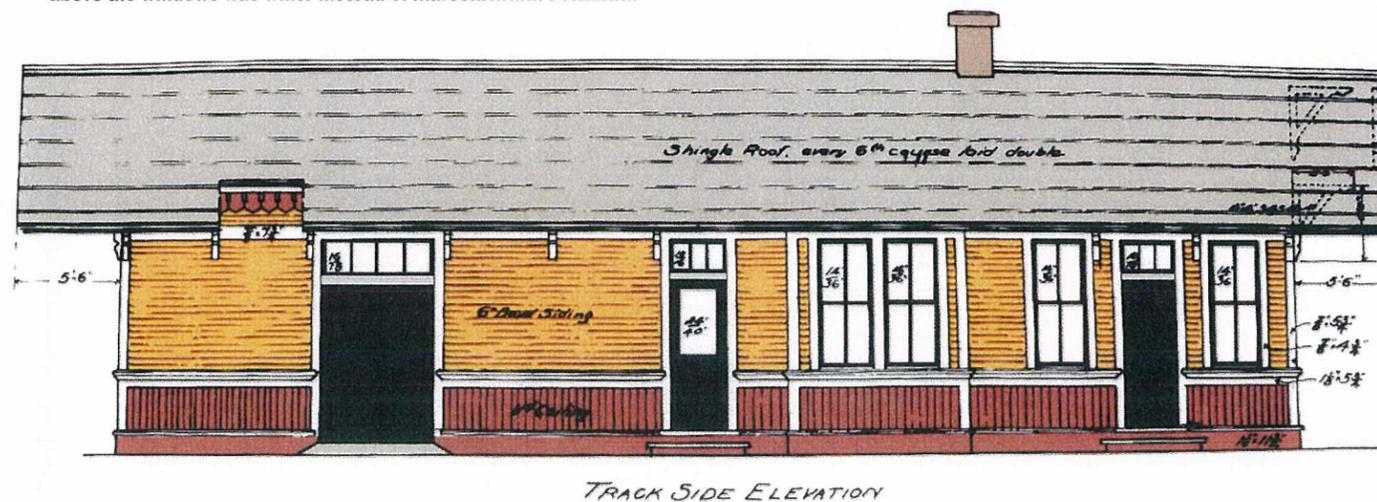
Now, in some of the early green scheme pho-

tos, one can see different shades of darkness in the shingles on the gable ends of the buildings. This leads me to believe that the early green color may have been more in the form of a stain rather than a paint. This makes me wonder if this early and short-lived green application may have been some sort of wood primer to ready the building for the boiled linseed-oil-based paint and that the four-color scheme was actually the first official paint scheme in the series. There is



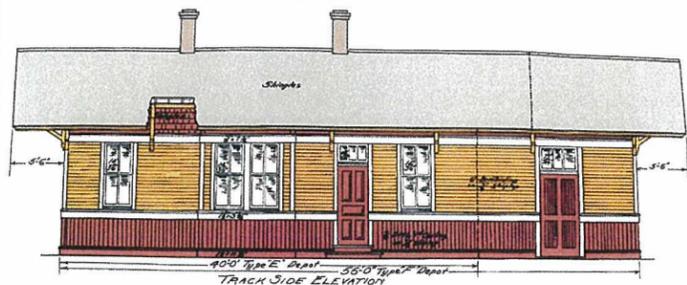
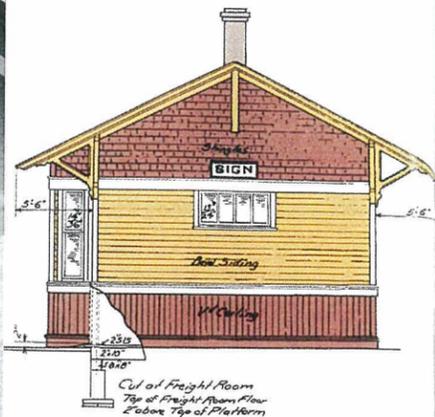
ABOVE: Here is the depot at Beverly in 1910 wearing the standard four-color scheme, with an orange mid-section and in the area above where the sign projects upward. Maroon was used on the gingerbread on the gable end and below the window lines; black was used on window frames and white on trim and brackets. Note the fancy bracket for a kerosene platform light mounted on the side of the building. PHOTO COURTESY YAKIMA VALLEY MUSEUM, YAKIMA, WASH.

TOP RIGHT AND BELOW: This is the standard four-color scheme as applied to the standard "Lombard Type" depot. We know from photographs that Beverly was painted in this scheme; most likely nearby Kittitas was also in this scheme, being built and painted at roughly the same time. Also its namesake, Lombard, Mont., may have likely carried this scheme. The two that were built on the Willapa Harbor line had a slightly different variation in that the gingerbread above the windows was white instead of maroon. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION





ABOVE: Station agent Jim Terry and his wife, night telegraph operator Jeanette, pose in front of the Garcia, Wash., depot in a winter view. Here is Garcia, about three years later with what I term the "proper" or "standard" application of the four-color scheme. The maroon is applied on the shingled gable ends and the area above and below the window lines. Orange is the middle area where the windows are placed, the trim and roof brackets are white as were often the soffits, and the window frames and doors are black. POSTCARD FROM AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



TOP RIGHT AND ABOVE: This is an early three-color scheme that was used at least on the Type E depot at Garcia for a couple of years. The differences are that the doors were maroon and the window frames white instead of the standard four-color black in these areas. Also, the white trim is confined mostly to the orange middle section of the building. The roof brackets, fascia, and soffits on the upper portion of the building were orange, and on the lower portion of the building the trim was white at the outside corners but maroon on the operator's bay window to match the wainscotting. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

also reason to believe that the white color mentioned in the four-color scheme may have actually been a cream color that just photographed as white. When Fred High tore down the old Cedar Falls depot to make it into a home, he found a cream-colored paint on the soffits under the old light fixtures. Now, I have pictures of the new depot at Cedar Falls (then Moncton) before it was officially opened, and it is definitely in the four-color scheme, and the soffits appear to be

in the white color in the black-and-white photograph.

Early photos of the company town site of Moncton show at least two employees houses were also painted in the four-color scheme. There are always exceptions to every rule, and all wood depots in those early years did not get the full four-color scheme.

Early pictures of North Bend, on the Everett (Wash.) branch dating back to before the depot was opened, show that it received all of the colors except white. Whether this was an experimental variation in the scheme, or the Bridge & Building crew that was painting it got an urgent call to quickly finish up and attend to

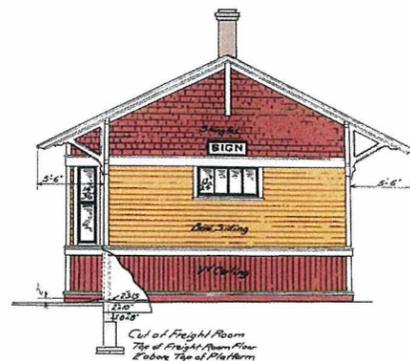
LEFT: Garcia, Washington depot is shown in the old green color scheme. Note how the various light and dark shades of the gable-end shingles show through the painted surface. It could be just the linseed oil base of the paint reacting to the porous surface of the cedar shingles, but it also could mean that the green coating was some form of wood primer to ready the raw wood surface for the orange and maroon colors to come. This photo is perhaps as early as the fall of 1908. The depot has just been completed and the water tank is under construction. GEORGE BAYNE, AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



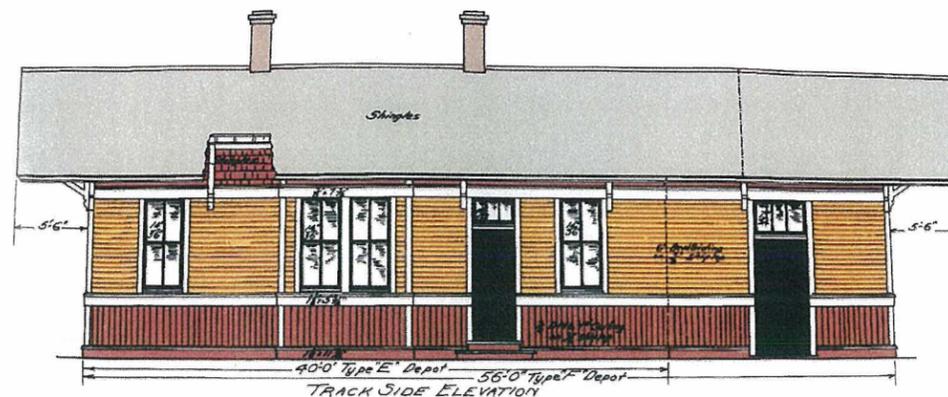
more important matters, we will never know.

Another variant in the scheme was the depot at Doty, on the Willapa Harbor branch. It was a standard 20 x 60-foot "Lombard Type" such as was used at Kittitas and Beverly. But in Doty's case (and possibly its sister station of Dryad) it received the white color on the gingerbread on the entire gable ends and under the roof line along the front and back of the building. It had the usual maroon on the wainscotting below the window lines and just a small area of maroon above the window line, between it and the gingerbread. Eunumclaw seemed to be a glimpse into the future. Early photos of it, including one before it was officially opened, show the entire building painted in orange, with maroon applied to all of the areas where white should be. It's hard to tell but the window frames also appear to be maroon, rather than the standard black, and the doors could be either.

Nevertheless, within a few years this would become the new standard scheme in an effort to cut expenses by eliminating two of the four colors, namely black and white. A good clue as to when this simplified two-color scheme was adopted lies in the fact that the Willapa Harbor and Olympic branch lines were being built



ABOVE AND BELOW: Here is the Type E/Type F depot in its standard four-color scheme. Easton, Garcia, Rockdale, and Corfu, Wash., were known to be painted in this scheme. Boylston, Rye, Revere, and others most likely followed suit. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



ABOVE: Here is a color view of the abandoned depot at Dryad, Wash., on the Raymond branch, in 1975, just a year or so before it was torn down. Here we see the faded remains of the two-color orange and maroon scheme. Basically, the entire depot was painted orange and the formerly white trim and roof brackets were painted maroon, along with the formerly black window frames. ALLEN MILLER

at roughly the same time. The Willapa Harbor line to Raymond was opened first, Nov. 8, 1915, and the line at Port Angeles was opened in May 1916. Early pictures show that the depots and towers on the Raymond line are painted in the four-color scheme whereas the depots on the Port Angeles line are in the two-color scheme.

The next question is: how orange was the orange? Well, the scheme was meant to mimic the colors of the passenger trains, so they were as orange as the passenger cars, which was pretty orange. I kick myself now for not trying harder, but when the depot in North Bend was being torn down in 1975 there was a lean-to addition on the back of the building. When this was torn off it revealed a big patch of the building still

in its orange-and-maroon colors and virtually unfaded from the sun. It was a brilliant hue of orange and a purplish maroon on the decorative gingerbread. I wanted to take a chainsaw and cut off a piece of this living history for myself but wanted permission from the owner first. I was never successful in catching him at the site and before I knew it, that portion of the building was gone. It must be stated that, officially, these depots were painted "yellow with red trim" and that has led to a lot of the confusion among railfans and historians and has caused much speculation as to exactly what shade and how orange these buildings really were. Orange was frequently referred to as "yellow," especially in the old days. Even today there is a motor freight company called Yellow that has a fleet of orange tractor trailers. I myself once owned a "Vitamin C Orange" 1969 Plymouth Road Runner automobile and my father used to sometimes ask me: "Do you still have that yellow car?" A 1909 guidebook on sign painting shows the following color combination to achieve orange: three parts yellow and one part red (vermillion). There are three combinations to achieve maroon: (1) tuscan and ultramarine blue (2) maroon brown: tuscan and black, and the most-likely for the Milwaukee depots, (3) three parts carmine one part yellow. Cream color is achieved by combining five parts white lead, two parts yellow, and one part red.

Why orange depots? For one it was to coincide with the colors of the road's passenger trains, but I think a big reason was for identifica-

tion. The Milwaukee Road was the last railroad to build out to the West Coast and painting their depots bright orange would certainly make them stand out.

These colors were carried over to other buildings too, particularly section-car houses, depot coal and oil houses, and outhouses. Some water tanks were painted orange with a maroon band around the top. When I was a kid there was a chain of lumber yards in the Western states named Copeland Lumber. Their trademark was an orange lumber warehouse with a black cat painted on it. Gaudy perhaps, but they stood out and you didn't have to drive around much to find them. The orange-and-maroon passenger colors remained the standard on Lines West depots for almost two decades. It even spread to other divisions on Lines East. Witness these quotes from the July, 1916 issue of *The Milwaukee Railway System Employees Magazine*: "K.C. (Kansas City) Division Items. A number of station buildings have been painted the familiar Milwaukee orange, and it will not be necessary for passengers to inquire the whereabouts of Milwaukee stations any longer." Also: "LaCrosse Division Doin's. The painters have been changing the complexion of buildings on our Division from the old dark red to a color that makes them look like a passenger coach. All handcar houses, switch houses, and depots that need repainting have been given a coat of the new color."

How far throughout the vast Milwaukee system these colors were adopted is anyone's guess. The recent repainting of the Amana, Iowa,

depot in orange and maroon and other restored depots like Monroe, Wis., and Wheaton, Minn., being repainted in some version of the orange scheme shows that it was widespread. It wasn't necessarily set in stone then either. *The Milwaukee Employees Magazine* reported the depot at Rolling Prairie, Wis., on the Northern Division, being painted a dark green with cream trim in February, 1919.

About 1927-28 a new color standard for depots was adopted in the electrified zones, the new chosen colors were white and black. Perhaps the paint shops had an ample supply of these colors left over from when they were eliminated from the old four-color scheme? Whatever the reason for the change, the white was applied to the majority of the building, where the orange had formerly been, and the black was applied to the trim boards and window frames, where the maroon had formerly been. Maroon is essentially a higher pigment form of red and reds are notorious for being hard to cover up, tending to bleed up through lighter colors. The addition of black may have been necessary to eliminate the maroon from showing through. Pictures of the water tanks at Cle Elum and Sumner show that these structures received the white and black scheme also. The scheme also carried over to the branches in the electrified territory. North Bend, Duvall and Everett, on the Everett branch, were known to have been in these colors. In the non-electrified districts the depots received a gray coloring with maroon trim. In some instances a tan coloring replaces the gray. Again,

how far throughout the Milwaukee system this new color standard was adopted is unknown.

A new, two-tone gray scheme appeared on depots as early as 1950 and was adopted as the official standard by 1952. Basically this could have four variations. The simplest and, I think the original method, was the main portion of the building painted in a moderate shade of gray with a band of darker gray extending around the building below the window level. Here the band could either continue across the doors at the same height, or could just skip the door area entirely, leaving the entrance and freight-room doors in the lighter shade of gray. Later repaintings have the doors completely covered in the darker gray or, again, the lighter gray with the raised surfaces (frame and crisscross bracing) in dark gray.

By the early 1970s, possibly even the mid-1960s, most of the depots that were eligible for repainting were given just a coat of the lighter gray color. This gray shade even evolved, and in some cases had a noticeable blue tinge to it. Whether this was intentional or just haphazard mixing by paint crews is unknown by this author. I do know that in some brands of paint, mixing black with white to make gray creates a mottled effect because of the white's lighter pigments rising to the paint coat surface after it is applied. To avoid this, sometimes the unlikely colors of orange and blue are substituted to make a gray color that won't mottle, but if they aren't mixed carefully the gray will have a noticeable blue hue to it. 

## THE QUESTION FOREMAN

By ED SPITZBARTH

TMR welcomes questions about items relating to the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific and its predecessor lines. If pertinent to the question and/or answer, please include photos. Send submissions to: The Question Foreman, Ed Spitzbarth, 832 Vista Ridge Drive, Mount Horeb, WI 53572. You may also e-mail your questions/answers to the Question Foreman at: questionforeman@mrha.com Code for questions numbers show: We code all questions when they are published. The first two numbers indicate the volume and issue number in which the question first appeared; the last number indicates the question's sequence number when it first appeared. Please no phone calls.

### New questions:

**Q: (43.4.1)** I've often wondered about the railroad bridge that crosses 84th Street in West Allis, Wis., immediately south of the Air Line (Hank Aaron State Trail) bridge. It angles toward the southeast and into Wisconsin State Fair Park. Apparently the Milwaukee had a spur that went into the fairgrounds at one time? I am curious to know how far into the grounds it went, what year it was removed, if there was a depot or loading platform in the grounds, and if there are any pictures anywhere. The Chicago & North Western also had a spur coming up from the south, paralleling 84th Street just to the east, but stopping short of the grounds at Greenfield Ave.—MARK RADLOFF, WAUWATOSA, WIS.

**Q: (43.4.2)** The Milwaukee Road at one time offered service to the coal power plant in Richland Center, Wis. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, I would see Illinois Central/Illinois Central Gulf Railroad and Erie Railroad/Erie Lackawanna coal hoppers at the plant. Where did coal for the plant originate and what routes were taken to get it there. An SD10 (usually No. 555) switched the industries in town at the time. Also, any information on the power plant itself will be helpful.—ALAN FARRELL, RIO, WIS.

**A:** We have a partial answer here. According to David Franzen of South Beloit, Ill., who briefly worked that line as a conductor for The Milwaukee Road, the IC/ICG cars were received by the Milwaukee at Mendota, Ill., from the IC/ICG interchange that existed

there. The loaded coal cars originated at IC/ICG on-line coal mines in southern Illinois. We're still trying to identify the origination and route of the Erie/EL coal hoppers.—B.N.

**Q: (43.4.3)** I am looking at old depot photos and was wondering when the semaphore-style, three-position order boards with upper ladders began appearing? The older-style cantilevered timbers had rotating boards that hung below the timber. It looks like the older style board had a lantern above the timber on the rotating vertical axle that showed a green or red light for night orders? Is that correct?—KELVIN RETTERATH, MOUND, MINN.

**Q: (43.4.4)** What year was the rail between Austin, Minn., and Calmar, Iowa, upgraded to 90-pound rail? I believe it was 90-pound rail when it was ripped up in 1983 and am confident that it was not the original rail from 1867.—KELVIN RETTERATH, MOUND, MINN.

**Q: (43.4.5)** What would have been the colors on early Milwaukee Road passenger equipment dating from 1870s to 1920s? —KELVIN RETTERATH, MOUND, MINN.

**Q: (43.4.6)** We have two baggage wagons outside the depot at Brodhead, Wis. One is a Railway Express wagon painted green and red, and the other is painted all yellow. Would this have been a Milwaukee Road wagon? We are in the process of restoring the wagons and want them to be correct. Was the Milwaukee wagon all yellow or would there have been another color? Also, was it labeled for The Milwaukee Road, and if so, where? Does anyone know the correct shade

of yellow or have color photos of them?—POLLY WEEDEN, SECRETARY, BRODHEAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, BRODHEAD, WISC.

**Q: (43.4.7)** When The Milwaukee Road assumed operation of the Union Pacific Overland Route Streamliners in 1955 what style and format dining-car menus were utilized in the Milwaukee Road dining cars? Did the Milwaukee Road ever adopt the same style menus used by UP, four panel with western scenes featured on the cover?—JEFF ROOT, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

**A:** According to our resident passenger-train historian who also happens to be editor of TMR, *The Milwaukee Road did not adopt UP-style menus when the railroad began handling the Overland Route trains; basically, the Milwaukee only adopted the UP color scheme for its passenger equipment, whether or not it was used as part of the Milwaukee's contribution to the Overland car pool. On a related note, Mike points out that Milwaukee Road diners normally were not on long-term assignments to Overland Route trains although the Milwaukee did contribute its own dining-car employees to the City train work pool. You would occasionally see Milwaukee Road diners on make-up trains created by Western Avenue Coach Yard to protect an outbound City train schedule if an inbound City train was unusually late into Chicago. In those rare instances, a regular Milwaukee menu was probably still used.*—B.N./M.S. 



ABOVE: A very late eastbound City of Denver/Portland is pulling out of Davis Junction, Ill., during the winter of 1968-69. Trailing the two City of Denver coaches is a Milwaukee Road lunch-counter lounge, which apparently had been pressed into service several days earlier westbound to help fill an equipment shortage. MIKE SCHAFER



LEFT: The ten car northbound Mendota to Janesville train, is at Davis Junction, Ill., in April, 1976. The pair of F-units are pulling mostly ICG hoppers, 43 miles north of the ICG connection at Mendota and are quite possibly heading toward the power plant in Richland Center, Wis. MIKE MCBRIDE



RIGHT: The Geraldine, Mont., depot, a former Milwaukee depot is shown here in a variation of the orange-and-maroon paint scheme in 2006. It is now owned by the Geraldine Historical Society. BOB STOROZUK