

Dempster Station

GETS A SECOND CHANCE

by Graham Garfield



▲ Relocated and restored, Dempster Station was dedicated, for a second time, on November 24, 2003.—Graham Garfield

It is said that one never gets a second chance to make a first impression. But that's exactly what the Dempster Street station, formerly serving trains of the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee and Chicago Rapid Transit Company (CRT), has gotten. Thanks to the dedication of a group of railfans and historians and the investment of a developer with an interest in adaptive reuse of historic structures, the station begins a new life. The Dempster station is significant not only for its place in the history of one of Chicago's – and the nation's – premier interurban railways, but also for its role in the history of the Village of Skokie and its architectural design.



▲ Dempster Station first opened for service on March 28, 1925, serving Chicago Rapid Transit (CRT) trains, followed by Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee on June 5, 1926.—Illinois Railway Museum Collection via J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATION

Already in control of Chicago's "L" lines under the banner of the Chicago Elevated Railways Collateral Trust, utilities magnate Samuel Insull acquired the bankrupt Chicago & Milwaukee Electric Railroad in 1916, reorganizing it as the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee and embarking on an aggressive modernization campaign for the interurban. The "L" and the North Shore Line had shared trackage through Evanston as early as 1908, and beginning in 1919, under Insull's common control, the North Shore Line gained access into downtown Chicago by way of the elevated.

As the lakeshore communities north of Chicago became wealthier and denser in the early 20th century, the North Shore Line's train speeds decreased and the long-distance aspect of the operation became less efficient. It was decided to create a high-speed bypass route through Skokie Valley several miles to the west of their original Shore Line Route to cut the travel time for the interurban's Milwaukee-bound trains and better serve the railroad's freight operations. The Skokie Valley Route left the existing "L" system at Howard Street at the Chicago-Evanston border and branched to the west. The route went west from Howard for approximately four miles, then turned north at Oakton and Cicero and paralleled the existing Chicago & North Western Railroad line, portions of which were abandoned in 2002.

Construction of the five-mile segment between Howard and Dempster Street commenced in April 1924 and progressed rapidly. Both the elevated and the North Shore would operate over this segment, which in 2004 is the route of the Chicago Transit Authority's "Skokie Swift" Yellow Line. Eight stations were constructed on this section, two of which the North Shore intended to serve: Dempster, which was surrounded by little but prairie at the time, and Oakton, the only station near the existing population of

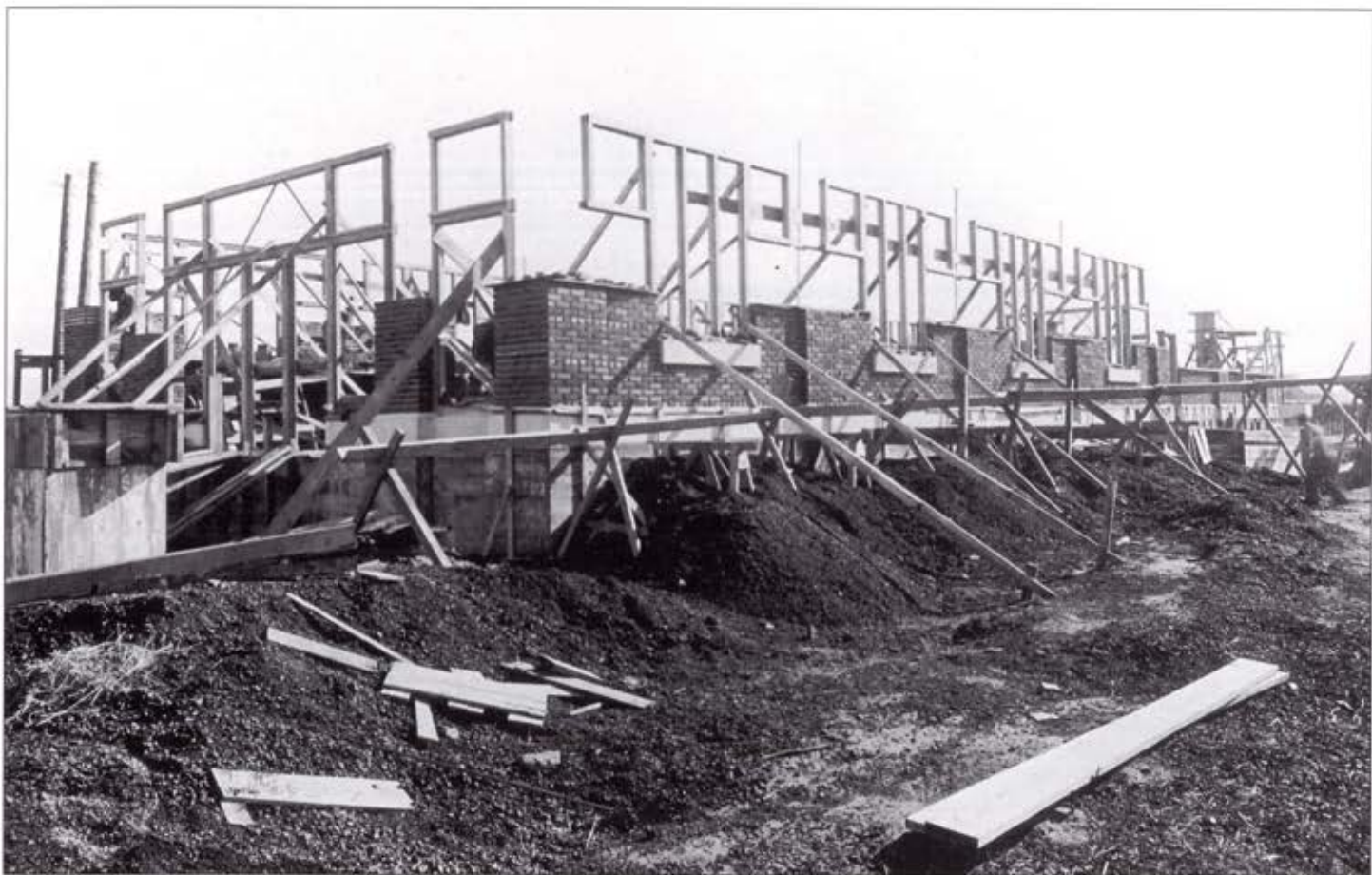
Niles Center at the time. For unknown reasons, the North Shore Line ended up only serving the Dempster Street station, a magnificent station designed by Arthur Gerber. All of the stations were to be served by the "L."

The early development of the Village of Skokie, known as Niles Center until 1940, was closely tied to the Skokie Valley Route and the transit stations planned along it. Until the 1920s, the village was still a sparsely populated settlement of immigrant German farmers, with no industrial development and little influx of new settlers. The suburb's first major land boom was associated with the development of the rapid transit extension. Land speculators and real estate developers saw the potential for Niles Center to develop into a densely populated town, not unlike Evanston to the east. In the mid-1920s, streets and lots were laid out and public improvements were installed in much of the village. Some houses and small apartments were constructed, many in the vicinity of the railway, and the village's population jumped from 763 to 5,007 between 1920 and 1930.

Much of this development occurred near the local stations of the CRT and the shared station at Dempster, and these stations played an important role in the lives of early residents. Until the popular proliferation of the automobile, most citizens used railroads as their mode of travel and the rail station represented the gateway to the city for these arriving passengers and travelers. Because of this distinctive and respected function, railroad stations were designed with a great deal of care and respect, with the popular architectural styles of the day often employed. In Chicago, these styles came to include Greek Revival, Classical Revival, Beaux-Arts and Art Deco among several others. Architect Arthur Gerber introduced another style: Prairie School bungalow.



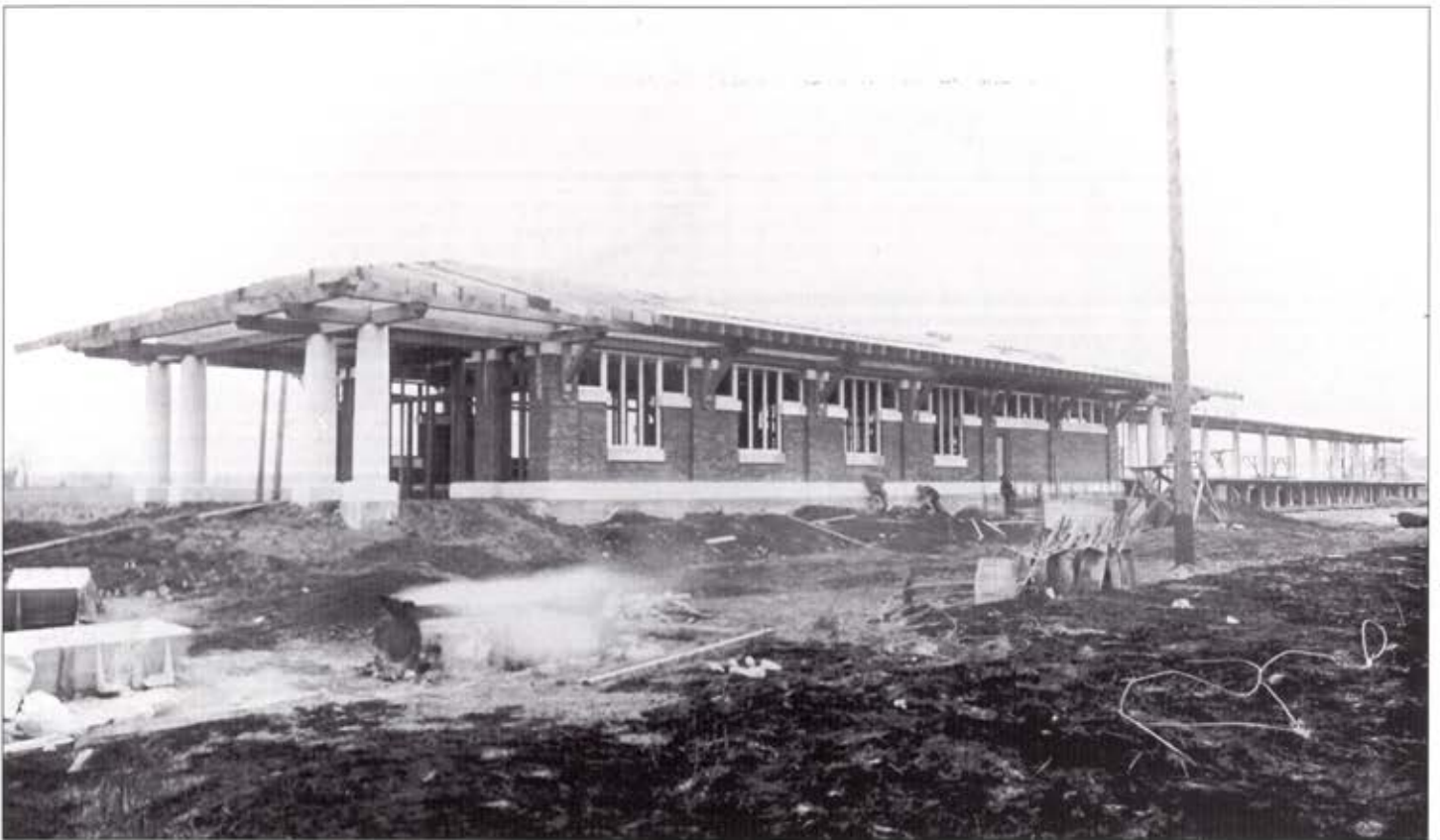
▲ Construction of the Dempster Station was well chronicled by photographers. Foundation work was well underway on October 30, 1924.—Illinois Railway Museum Collection via J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection



▲ *Dempster Station begins to take shape as framing and wall construction has begun in this view looking southeast on November 12, 1924.—Illinois Railway Museum Collection via J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection*



▲ *In this view taken on November 20, 1924, masonry work continues, platform construction can be seen at the far right, and the pillars at the front entrance have begun to appear.—Illinois Railway Museum Collection via J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection*



▲ More construction progress can be seen on December 4, 1924. All four pillars are in place at the main entrance and framing of the roof and platform canopy near completion.—Illinois Railway Museum Collection via J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection



▲ By March 3, 1925, the station building roof has been completed and windows are in place.—Illinois Railway Museum Collection via J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection



▲ *Dempster Station, architect Arthur U. Gerber's masterful combination of the bungalow vernacular style with significant influence from the Prairie School style of architecture, stands ready to serve the people of Nilcs Center (now Skokie) in this April 13, 1925 photo.—J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection*

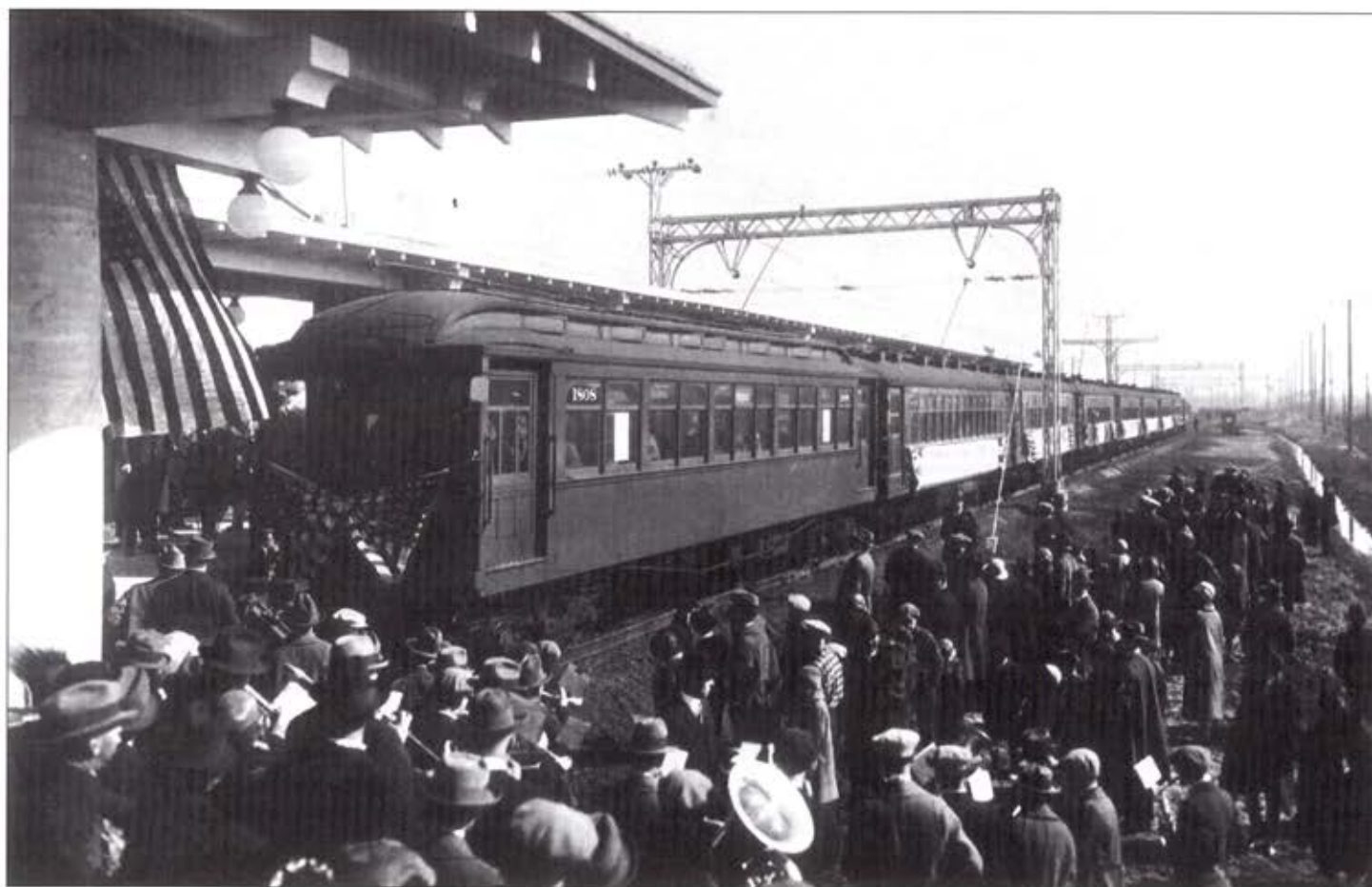


▲ *The spacious interior of Dempster Station looked inviting with carved wooden benches and a lunch counter on April 13, 1925. The south end was divided into sections of enclosed rooms—a parcel room and men's restroom with a smoking lounge on the west side and a baggage room and ladies' restroom on the east—bisected by a hallway that led to the south doorway and the "L" platform. A wooden ticket agents' booth stood at the mouth of the hallway in the back of the waiting room.—J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection*

◀ *The lunch counter was a popular attraction on opening day, March 28, 1925.—Shore Line Interurban Historical Society Collection*



▲ Three special trains were operated to Dempster Street on March 28, 1925 to celebrate the official opening ceremonies of Dempster Station and the start of rapid transit service on the Niles Center branch. The train on the right is headed by car 4271, one of two 4000-series cars preserved by CTA. The banner on the cars reads "Official Opening of Service by the Chicago Rapid Transit Company over the Niles Center Division of the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad."—A. F. Scholz photo for the Chicago Rapid Transit Company, from the Krambles-Peterson Archive



▲ An estimated 2,000 onlookers were assembled at the Dempster Station for the opening ceremonies on March 28, 1925. Speeches were made and an air show was performed in the skies over the terminal.—J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection

Service Starts

JUNE 5th

on the Skokie Valley Route

NORTH SHORE LINE

ON Saturday morning, June 5, the Skokie Valley Route of the North Shore Line will be opened with full service. This new twenty-three miles of double track will prove of benefit, directly and indirectly, to every community served by the North Shore Line.

Increased Service on the Shore Line Route

First of all, by relieving traffic on our Shore Line Route, the new line will enable us to render increased service to all North Shore suburban communities. Such increased service will be started immediately.

Commencing June 5, three types of town-to-town service will be supplied. There will be new service—Waukegan Limited trains, making all Limited stops, half hourly in each direction; also Highwood Express trains, making all Express stops, half hourly each way. And there will be Local trains every half hour in both directions.

More Than Twelve Trains Every Hour

The foregoing schedule provides twelve trains every hour—six trains each way. In addition there will be 15 Milwaukee Limiteds daily—8 north-bound and 7

The high-speed electrically-operated railroad



south-bound—over the Shore Line Route, all of them making the more important stops along the way.

The value of this frequent service is self-apparent. It should prove especially beneficial to Evanston, through attracting shoppers, from points further north, to this Shopping Center.

To Kenosha, Racine, Milwaukee

Fifteen Milwaukee trains each day, as previously explained, will operate via the Shore Line Route, making stops at Church Street and Central Street. These trains will provide direct, fast service from Evanston to Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee. Persons wishing to travel via the Skokie Valley Route may do so conveniently by taking the Rapid Transit ("L") to Howard Street and boarding the North Shore Line there. The running time from Howard Street to downtown Milwaukee via the Skokie Valley will be 1 hour and 35 minutes.

Direct-Without-Change to Libertyville and Mundelein

With the opening of the Skokie Valley route, trains will operate direct-without-change from the Chicago Loop to Libertyville and Mundelein in the Lake County Countryside. Evanston people desiring to visit these places will find it convenient to board trains at Howard Street—a comfortable, pleasant 43-minute ride from there to Libertyville. Hourly service will be maintained in both directions.

Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad Co.
72 W. Adams St., Chicago



ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Arthur U. Gerber, staff architect for Samuel Insull, designed Dempster station in 1924. The depot is generally considered Gerber's crowning achievement and nearly identical stations were built at Kenosha and Mundelein further north on the interurban. The station was designed as both a terminal (for the "L") and a through station (for North Shore trains) and featured a single high-level island platform projecting from the rear of the station house for the "L" as well as dual low-level platforms adjacent to the west to serve the interurban.

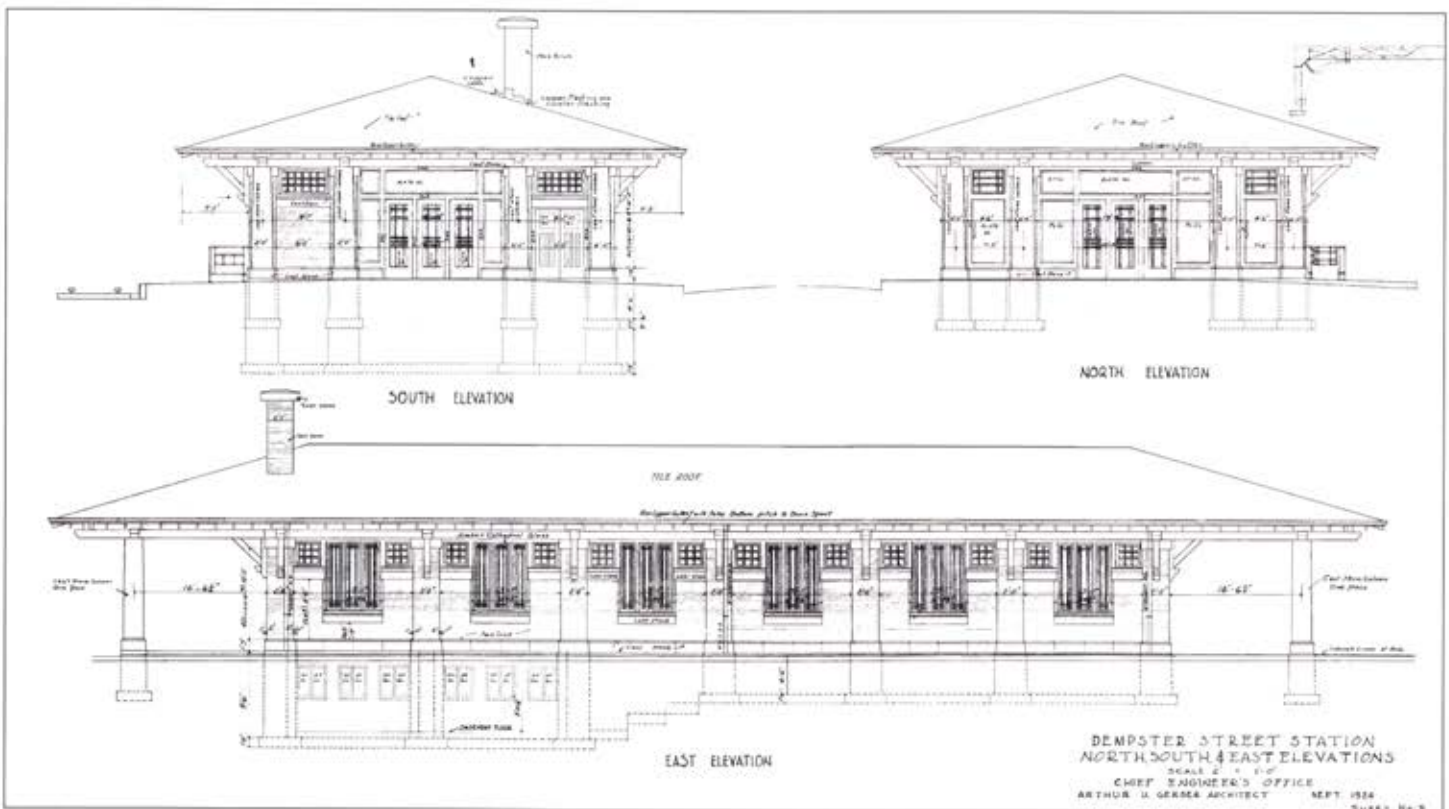
The Dempster Street station's architecture is an interesting mix of styles. The wide, overhanging eaves, low-pitched hipped roof, multi-paned casement windows and strong horizontal lines demonstrate a strong Prairie School influence, a Midwestern style that mimics its low, flat landscape and was popularized by architect Frank Lloyd Wright. However, in spite of the multitude of facets that point to the Prairie School style, elements such as its highly symmetrical design, textured exterior brickwork, clay tile roof, and elaborately bracketed eaves with exposed rafters suggest that the building adheres more closely to the bungalow vernacular style popular at the time for residential construction but rarely seen in rail stations. Gerber's design incorporates many elements that come together to create a station that is not only unique and significant today, but one that was quite unusual for the time as well.

On the exterior, the one-story station is constructed of multi-colored textured brick with pre-cast concrete base, window sill and pilaster cap pieces. It has a low-pitched hipped roof with overhanging eaves on all four sides, especially in the front and rear where it creates a porch supported by massive tapered concrete columns. The rafters are exposed with additional beams added under the eaves. Brackets and other wooden beams fill out much of

the rest of the exterior decoration and a signature Gerber touch included the globe lamps, hung from the eaves. The window bays along the sides consisted of three long, narrow, vertical multi-paned windows flanked on either side by smaller square nine-paned windows, with each window bay divided by a pier and eave bracket. The wooden rafters, brackets, and window sash were originally painted a cream yellow color and the window frames were painted an olive green. These colors complemented the rich, warm brick colors and the green clay tile roof.

The interior was unpretentious and open, but still quite beautiful and intricate. It included pink and green terrazzo floors, brick walls with pre-cast sills, wooden moldings, and plaster ceilings. Most of the interior was a waiting room, an open space with rows of heavy carved wooden benches. Toward the back of the interior, at the south end, the interior was divided into sections of enclosed rooms – a parcel room and men's restroom with a smoking lounge on the west side and a baggage room and ladies' restroom on the east – bisected by a hallway that led to the south doorway and the "L" platform. A wooden ticket agents' booth stood at the mouth of the hallway in the back of the waiting room, while a lunch counter was located in the southwest corner. Most of the subterranean level was unexcavated, except for a basement under the south third of the station, accessible by a stairwell along the west elevation on the exterior of the building. It all came together to provide a facility that was both architecturally attractive and functional.

Gerber's use of the Prairie School bungalow style for an interurban/rapid transit station was unusual to say the least. While stations of the era did often employ liberal ornamentation and design features commonly associated with commercial buildings, these often ran toward influence of the Italianate, Greek Revival and





▲ Ticket sign from the original Dempster Station.—J. J. Sedelmaier Productions Collection

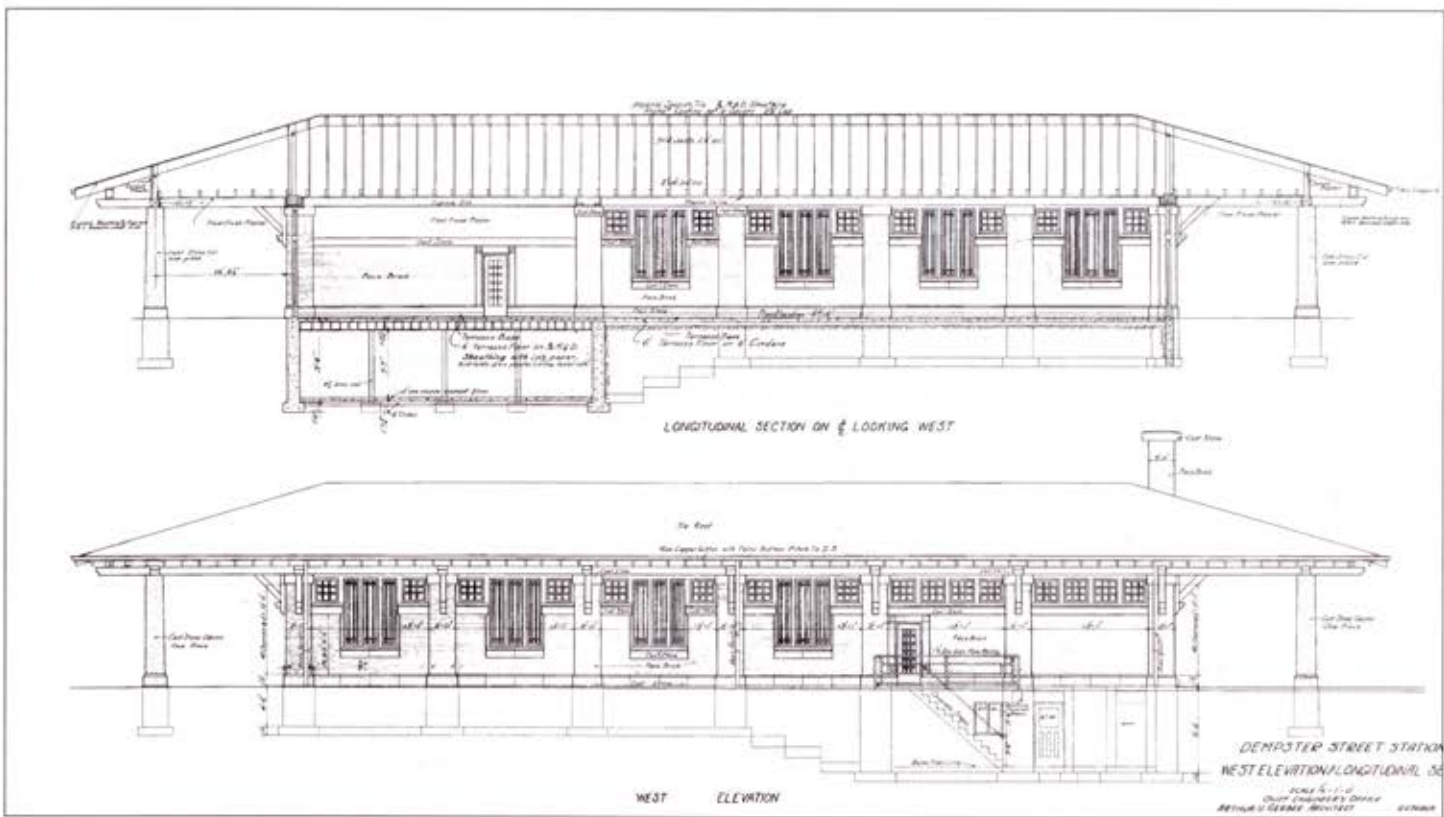
renditions of various Neoclassical styles. But Gerber, who built several transit stations around the city and suburbs, treated his projects with the grandeur and respect usually afforded only to main line passenger facilities. Often employing seemingly unusual styles like Beaux-Arts with Doric elements and Prairie School bungalow, he liked to design stations that spoke just as strongly architecturally as any of the surrounding structures.

Often, “L” stations were constructed where at least some semblance of a neighborhood already existed and so the architect (or company engineer, who also often designed stations) usually tried to somehow tie the facility’s design into the existing urban fabric. Elements that the designer would try to match might include size, scale, massing, height, setback, material, building elements and site design. While Gerber did this at all of his city stations, here he was presented with an interesting problem: there were no buildings around the station!

The official opening of the new Niles Center branch of the “L” was held on March 28, 1925 at the Dempster station. Three special trains carried dignitaries and officials to an elaborate ceremony at Dempster where an estimated 2,000 onlookers were assembled. Speeches were made and an air show was performed in the skies

over the terminal. Arthur Gerber was at the station early that morning as well, polishing the windows and globed lights. Gerber was well known for visiting the stations he designed on the eve of their opening, doting over them and applying final touches of care. “There was just a great deal of pride that he had in his work,” says his granddaughter, Barbara Marcus. Regular “L” service commenced at the conclusion of the ceremony. North Shore Line service through the station was inaugurated on June 5, 1926.

▼ Architectural plans for the Dempster Station were drawn by Arthur U. Gerber, staff architect for Samuel Insull, in 1924. Gerber designed a unique building that followed the bungalow vernacular style used widely in Chicago at the time with significant influence from the Prairie School style of architecture made popular by Frank Lloyd Wright.—Graham Garfield Collection



► Despite the Dempster Station also being on the North Shore Line, the elevated trains got more “billing” with the large electric sign. North Shore Line combination car 254 is leading a northbound Milwaukee Limited train on April 22, 1933. The baggage portion of the car was used for hauling express shipments of all kinds as well as many newspapers. The photographer was the man who forty years later created the Skokie Swift.—George Krambles photo, Krambles-Peterson Archive



▲ A four-car North Shore Line Limited train from Milwaukee, with a parlor-observation car on the rear, is discharging passengers at Dempster Station on Thursday, October 17, 1929, one week before “Black Thursday,” the day the stock market crash started. The presence of a steel-bodied 4000-series car suggests that this unit was part of a Howard-Jackson Park Express train, as through service to the Loop was briefly tried between mid-1929 and early 1930 by adding and cutting a Niles Center car from these trains at Howard. The wooden-bodied car at the far right was the norm for service on the Niles Center locals.—A. F. Scholz photo for the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Railway, from the Krambles-Peterson Archive

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Niles Center’s land boom was short-lived. Within just a few years of the opening of the Skokie Valley Route and the CRT’s Niles Center local service, the Depression hit. New construction virtually halted and thousands of the 30-foot lots that had been platted and sold just a few years earlier were worthless. As many plots were abandoned or in arrears, some were once again farmed. Some parts of the town took on a strange appearance, with streets, sidewalks, and utilities, but no buildings. Most of the local stations developed little traffic, but the CRT soldiered on with its local service even as the company itself entered bankruptcy. The Chicago Transit Authority, which took over rapid transit operations in 1947, was not so willing to suffer. A March 1948 strike by North Shore Line personnel provided the opportunity for the CTA to abandon local service and replace it with more economical buses. The seven local stations on the Niles Center branch closed, but Dempster remained open, occupied solely by the North Shore Line.

When the CTA abandoned rapid transit service in 1948, it was estimated that there were 30,000 vacant lots in Skokie – Niles Center was renamed in 1940 – many of which were being farmed. In the 1950s Skokie experienced its second major expansion boom.

A new zoning plan was passed in 1946, with much of the commercial land around the old transit stations and other parts of the village reclassified as residential. The lots were mostly revised to be single-family homes with setbacks. What commercial zoning remained was typically envisioned to be strip mall-type storefronts, with wide setbacks and off-street parking in the front of the stores. With low density, new wider streets, and the construction of the Edens Expressway on the west edge of the village, the postwar vision for Skokie was not centered around transit.

Between 1950 and 1960, Skokie’s population quadrupled from 14,832 to 59,364, but this expansion did little to save the struggling North Shore Line. Rising worker wages and operating costs, increasing automobile usage, and declining freight and passenger traffic were dooming the interurban. At its height in 1923, ridership was 16 million passengers; in the final years it was down to 4 million. After repeated petitions, the Interstate Commerce Commission granted the North Shore the right to begin the abandonment process on May 18, 1962, and it ceased operation in the early morning hours of January 21, 1963.

At this point, the Dempster station was more or less abandoned. Within a matter of months, however, the CTA acquired the station as part of its purchase of the former North Shore Line right-



▲ Dempster Station in July 1933.—Robert V. Mehlenbeck



◀ Chicago Rapid Transit car 1807 boards passengers while North Shore Line car 709 pulls out of Dempster Station on July 25, 1937. Single car trains on the Niles Center trains and North Shore's Skokie Valley locals were a result of the modest ridership brought on by the low density and largely undeveloped nature of Niles Center and the rest of the Skokie Valley.—Ralph A. Perkin photo, Norman Carlson Collection

of-way as far north as Dempster Street. The Transit Authority planned to resume "L" service over the line, though rather than a local branch service it was envisioned as a nonstop shuttle between Dempster and Howard. The "Skokie Swift," as it was dubbed, was a "demonstration project" conducted under the terms of the National Housing Act of 1961 and was to be provided on an experimental basis for a duration of two years beginning in April 1964. The project was funded by the CTA, the Village of Skokie, and the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency (which became the Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] during the project). The goal of the Swift was to see if an effective, economical, and passenger-friendly service could be established linking a typical postwar suburb to an urban center.

Given that the service was initially envisioned as a two-year experiment, the CTA chose not to use the existing station at Dempster as the investment for improvements and operating costs required by re-inhabiting it were not warranted by what was supposed to be a short-term demonstration project. Instead, two small platforms were built to the southwest with green plexiglas canopies and a wooden ticket agent's booth. Still, the CTA now owned the building and could put it to some beneficial use. So, in 1964, the CTA converted the building to rented concession spaces.

In converting the Dempster station to retail space, some modifications were performed that changed the building's look and relation to the surrounding space. The interior space, previously a single open waiting room, was partitioned into separate spaces. This was done without regard to the facility's original design or function, but rather according to the needs of any businesses that chose to rent space. All but two of the side window bays were in-filled

with brick (of a different type and shade than the rest of the exterior walls, no less), as they no longer matched with the interior. The front doors and windows were altered to create a better storefront and the rear portico was enclosed with aluminum and Plexiglas curtain walls to create additional tenant space. The building became the center of a turnaround for CTA and suburban buses, removing the building's intended park-like setting and disrupting the original site design by having traffic on all four sides.

The station had a long parade of different retail tenants, although many occupied the building for long stretches of time. Among the first was the Goodman Bros. fabric and yarn store, which actually occupied the front section of the building during the final years of North Shore Line operation. Another early occupant was a dry cleaners, which resided in the south portion of the station, and at one time a restaurant was located in the former station. In August 1969, Greyhound, the intercity passenger bus carrier, established a ticketing office and depot in the middle section of the building, representing part of the simultaneous establishment of Greyhound stations elsewhere on the outskirts of the system at the then-new 95th and Jefferson Park "L" terminals. When the building was vacated in October 1992, the final tenants were For Pete's Sake dog groomers in the front section, Greyhound in the middle portion, and Spiro Arvanitis Cleaners in the south segment. There was also a Skokie Trust & Savings Bank Money Network Machine, a type of early automatic teller machine with an enclosed vestibule, on the premises. All of these tenants had occupied the station since at least the mid-1980s, some earlier than that.

Over the years, additional piecemeal changes took their toll on the station's appearance. The eave lights were removed over time



▲ CTA #97 Skokie Bus replaced the rapid transit service to Dempster Street in 1948 – different mode, same terminal. In these 1964 photos, Gold lettering “To Trains” is still on the glass although no trains served Dempster Station after January 20, 1963, when the NSL ceased operations.—CTA photo, Graham Garfield Collection

and a drop ceiling was installed in the front eave to cover the exposed rafters, which created a bird sanctuary in the space between. Despite these unfortunate changes, the building still retained the majority of its design integrity. Two of the original multi-paned window bays remained intact on the south end of the station’s east elevation. The majority of the alterations could be removed or replaced, which provided a good chance that the structure could be restored to its original look and design, at least on the exterior.

After the Skokie Swift ended as a demonstration project in 1966, the line became a regular CTA rapid transit line. The “temporary” Dempster station built for the demonstration project in 1964, however, served for about thirty years. In the early 1990s, it was finally replaced with a new, more substantial, permanent brick station house. Designed by the architectural firm of Dubin, Dubin and Moutoussamy and constructed at a cost of \$3.4 million, the new rapid transit station house is roughly in the same location as the temporary inbound platform, and the new platforms were immediately to the north of the old ones.

The master plan for the new Swift terminal included not just the rapid transit station, but also the site as a whole. Over the years, the CTA and suburban bus agencies grew to feel that the turnaround encircling the old Dempster station was inadequate for both safety and operational reasons. Funding was obtained under Operation Green Light, a Midwestern effort to improve traffic flow and reduce vehicle emissions, to enlarge the park’n’ride and create new off-street taxi stand and bus terminal facilities at Dempster—on the site of the old station. The Village of Skokie, who administered the Operation Green Light-funded portion of the \$1 million project on behalf of the village, the state and the various transit companies that use the station, planned to demolish the Gerber station as part of the project. Confident in the details and timetable for the terminal master plan, the CTA terminated all of the old station’s tenants’ leases effective September 30, 1992 in anticipation of its demolition (except for Greyhound, which was to continue to occupy the building until it could move into a new building for its exclusive use elsewhere on-site) and construction of the new “L” station began in 1993. The completed Dempster Terminal came into use at the end of May 1994.

With the completion of the “L” terminal phase of the project and the interurban station’s demolition imminent, the threat galvanized a group of railfans, architects, historians, and preservationists to mount a campaign to lobby for the building’s landmarking



▲ Two stations – CTA’s “temporary” Skokie Swift Terminal at left and the closed North Shore Line Dempster Station – and a sea of cars bring some people from points where they previously could have ridden on the NSL plus new traffic attracted by the Skokie Swift.—CTA photo, Graham Garfield Collection

and preservation. Elements within the Village of Skokie’s municipal government were initially divided: the village president wanted the station demolished as an eyesore to improve the intermodal terminal, but the historical society felt it was an important part of the village’s history. In 1995, a nomination for the building to the National Register of Historic Places was prepared. But in a rarely-seen move, the National Park Service, which administers the register, set aside the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council’s recommendation for listing and rejected the nomination on August 29, 1995, citing heavy alterations to the building that stripped it of sufficient historical integrity.

Now more vulnerable than ever, the building’s fate seemed sealed. But a devoted group, which included the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) and the Skokie Historical Society, continued the fight and appealed the National Park Service’s decision. Those who opposed the station’s listing claimed that the building had been altered, detracting from its significance, but exploration of the building found that original floors, brickwork, moldings, and the concrete pillars on the south porch were all in place, merely hidden by curtain walls, drop ceilings and false facades. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA), the state historic preservation office, resubmitted the application and on February 28, 1996 the National Park Service reconsidered: the station was granted listed status and was now protected. “It was a huge victory for the preservation world,” said Nancy Wagner, director of LPCI at the time.

Although proponents of the station’s preservation were relieved, the building was still not out of the woods. The Illinois Department of Transportation set out to study how keeping the station and completing the intermodal improvements could both be simultaneously achieved, but its plans would have to be approved by IHPA and the possibility that the station could be demolished if a mutually agreeable solution could not be found – with an extensive documentation of the structure mitigating the need to save the building itself – lingered on.

Four years later, the station still awaited a savior and the situation became dire. Things seemed especially perilous when, in July 2000, Skokie’s Village Board voted to tear the historic station down. The building was for sale for \$1, but whoever bought it was required to move it and renovate it according to historic preservation guidelines. If no one came forward, the village would document the building and then demolish it.



A NEW BEGINNING

With a date with the wrecking ball looming on the horizon, a development team stepped forward less than a year later with a plan for rehabilitating the building that met the requirements of IHPA and the village. A partnership of the Taxman Corporation, led by president Seymour Taxman, and Scott Gendell's Terraco Inc. paid \$1 to buy the building from the CTA, but spent close to \$1.4 million to move the building, refurbish it, and reopen it as a retail outlet.

The 4,000-square-foot building would be moved 145 feet east to make room for the parking and transit improvements that had been programmed for the site. The developers brought in noted Chicago architecture and planning firm Antunovich Associates, led by noted preservationist Joseph Antunovich, to lead the restoration project. Antunovich has worked on a number of high-profile historic restorations, including the former Reliance Building in downtown Chicago, which was restored and converted to the Burnham Hotel. William McMillan served as Antunovich's primary restoration architect.

A number of sources were used for the firm's restoration plans, including photos, written descriptions, and blueprints from the Skokie Historical Society, private collections such as those of J.J. Sedelmaier and Tom Burke, and other sources. Plans for the restoration of the building included removing paint from the brickwork and replacing missing masonry, installing duplicates of Prairie-style windows, reconstructing the lost north and south storefronts, replacing the asphalt-shingled roof with the original green clay tile, and adding copper gutters and other historically accurate finishes. Work began in late August 2002.

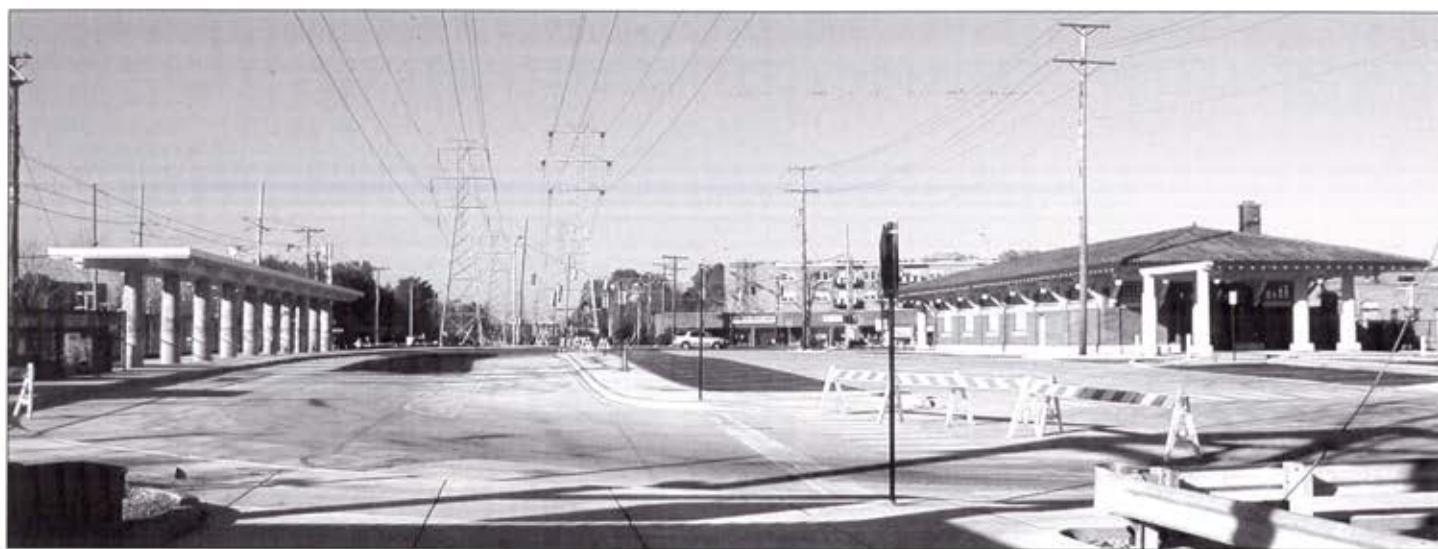
The prospects for the building's restoration took an ominous turn, briefly, in fall 2002 when two fires occurred in the station in a 48-hour period. First, a small fire broke out on September 10, 2002, which was blamed on a short in the building's 78-year-old wiring. Firefighters quickly extinguished the fire, which was on the roof of the commercial space last occupied by Greyhound Lines, which had relocated into a concession space in the CTA Yellow Line station about three weeks before. But Skokie firefighters re-

▲ The restored Dempster Station undergoes its final work. View looks southeast on November 9, 2003.—Graham Garfield



▲ Skokie Mayor George Van Dusen, surrounded by developers, architects and other officials, cuts the ribbon at the opening ceremonies. "This is a very important building to the village because it helps preserve some of our past," said Mayor Van Dusen. Satisfied with the job the development and restoration team did, he said, "the attention to detail is nothing short of miraculous."—Graham Garfield

turned to the building on September 12 to extinguish another blaze. This time the fire was more substantial, causing damage to the roof at the south end of the building. Skokie Fire Department Captain Barry Liss said at the time that the damage was "easily repairable" during restoration, and that the damage beneath the roof was minimal. None of the exterior historic fabric was damaged in either fire. With that, Taxman and Terraco went forward with their plans.



▲ In a view looking north on November 9, 2003, the new intermodal CTA Skokie Swift terminal is at left and the restored Dempster Station is at the right. Between the two structures are the off-street bus turnaround, taxi stand and additional parking.—Graham Garfield

► Looking north under the Gerber-design bus canopy as the new bus terminal nears completion on November 9, 2003.—Graham Garfield



By mid-September 2002, removal of all the nonhistoric partitions and additions was nearly complete. Preparations for relocation of the Dempster station began in mid-October. As a result of the construction activities beginning for the massive building's relocation, the CTA vacated the bus turnaround that encircled the structure. Late on October 15, 2002, the Dempster Street entrance to the park'n'ride lot closed and buses no longer entered the station area. By the end of October, excavators had dug a trench around the former station, about 12–15 feet deep and about five feet wide in preparation for the building to be lifted from underneath and moved. Saws cut a horizontal line through the concrete foundation at 12" below the masonry line and c-channels were bolted to either side of the remaining 12" concrete foundation. A new two-way steel frame was then welded underneath these c-channels. While excavating the driveway along the west elevation, last used as part of the bus turnaround around the station, some tie remnants from the former North Shore Line northbound track were still in place below the asphalt.

The new foundation, with "beam pockets" corresponding to the new steel frame that had been assembled under the building in November, had been laid at the new building location by Decem-

ber 2002. After several months of preparation, the building was moved into place over its new foundation on January 15, 2003. The building was slowly moved east by lifting it up with six jacks attached to the steel sub-frame, then gliding it along three sets of railroad tracks assembled on an east-west alignment specifically to move the structure. The concrete columns were moved separately to their locations on the new foundation, so during the move the porch eaves were dramatically cantilevered, supported by angled steel tube columns attached to the steel frame under the building. The station was lowered onto its new foundation in early February.

When all of the bricked-over windows were opened up, it was revealed that most of the original windows and frames were, in fact, still intact behind the face bricks. Once the building was moved, crews set about restoring the structure, rehabilitating those elements still in place and in good condition, and replicating those that were missing or deteriorated. A new roof of matte green, speckled clay Imperial Spanish-style tile – actually made by the same firm that manufactured the originals, the Ludowici-Celadon Company – was applied and largely complete by the end of August 2003. The brickwork was cleaned and those windows that needed replacement were duplicated according to the original designs. Interior bricks were salvaged for use on the exterior where masonry was damaged or missing. The exterior woodwork, including window frames, eaves, and rafters, were repaired and painted. New lights that replicate the original globes on the edge of the roof eaves were installed. Even an original dated stamp from the cement next to the station was removed and worked into the new concrete around the relocated building.

The interior was not restored to the original design, although most of the interior masonry that was still in place was retained. Developers instead elected to provide an open, unfinished interior, a common practice in the retail industry where a tenant is given a "shell" to build out to its needs and specifications. Early in the process, Starbucks expressed interest in leasing part of the building. Other occupants for the building that were discussed have included a bank branch and a small museum space, but these did not come to fruition. The developers and architects worked closely with historians and the tenant to make sure that the design of the store interior would be appropriate to the building, while still meeting



▲ The restored Dempster Station is resplendent with traditional architectural details.—Tomasz Szymanski

their retail business needs. For instance, Starbucks requested to have a drive-thru window in the building. To accommodate the window with the least disruption to the historic exterior, a modern sliding service window was installed behind an opening cut into one of the reconstructed historic windows. The alteration is virtually undetectable and does not disrupt the integrity of Gerber's design or the restoration project.

Restoration work, as well as construction of the parking and transit improvements on the former site of the building, continued

through the spring and summer. By fall 2003, Dempster station was ready for occupancy. Starbucks built out its retail space during October and November and was ready for business by the week before Thanksgiving. The Village of Skokie, in coordination with Terraco/Taxman, planned an official ribbon-cutting ceremony to commemorate the completion of both the Dempster station renovation and the improvements to what they dub the "Skokie Swift Transportation Center."

The intermodal facility includes the existing Yellow Line Skokie



◀ Have Skokie Swift "L" trains returned to stopping at the Gerber-designed Dempster Station? No, it's a Yellow Line train on the tumbuck behind the Gerber-designed canopy at the new off-street bus terminal, looking southwest on November 24, 2003.—Graham Garfield



▲ Developers, architects and other officials receive commemorative framed photos at the opening ceremonies for the restored Dempster Station on November 24, 2003.—Graham Garfield



▲ A sign of the times: Modern commuters can enjoy Starbucks coffee in the northwest corner of Dempster Station, just as others enjoyed the lunch counter when the station opened in 1925.—Graham Garfield

station, existing parking, and restored Dempster station. In addition, the project created new parking lots, a taxi stand, and an off-street bus terminal for CTA, Pace, and Greyhound buses. The village made sure that some of the intermodal improvements paid homage to the historic station and the site's heritage by asking that a canopy for the new bus terminal be designed to relate to the restored station building. The design is a replica of the canopy that covered one of the North Shore Line platforms at the near-identical Gerber-designed station at Kenosha, though it is similar to the canopy that was once over the rapid transit island platform that was behind the Dempster station. There were a total of nine station canopies designed by Gerber in this style, but at Dempster there was only a simple wooden shelter on the inbound interurban platform.

The official dedication was held at 10 a.m. on Monday, November 24, 2003. Inside the Starbucks, housed in the front half of the restored station, a capacity crowd listened to impassioned speeches, perhaps in some ways mirroring the ceremony marking the opening of the station 78½ years before. Those who attended the opening were suitably impressed by the project and the quality of the restoration work. The restoration, as well as its context and relation to its surrounding, were admired by CTA President Frank Kruesi, who noted that the station, "is being adaptively reused in a way that really gives great honor and distinction to transit and transportation."

Developer Scott Gendell commented that historic buildings in Skokie are "few and far between. That's why it was so significant for all of us to have the opportunity to restore this building, which has been so much a part of Skokie's history."

Gendell's partner, Sy Taxman, echoed those feelings and paid homage to architect Gerber, saying, "We were lucky to be a recipient of [Gerber's work] and we were able to embellish what he did in 1926. Hopefully, based on what we do here in 2003 and going forward, we will understand and appreciate the importance of maintaining solid, historic buildings such as this." Taxman credited Joe Antunovich for his sensitivity in design.

The new parking lots and taxi stand came into use shortly before the station dedication, in mid-November. The CTA waited to divert its buses off Dempster Street and into the new bus terminal

until the installation of the globed lights under the bus canopy was complete, making it suitable for both day and night use. The lights were installed in late December 2003, and Greyhound began using the new bus terminal before the end of the year. The CTA expects to begin using the off-street terminal in early 2004.

After a decade-long fight to save the building, the Dempster Street station is now assured a place among Skokie's historic structures and Chicagoland's transit and architectural heritage. Although small battles may yet still have to be fought – plans for a high-rise to replace a neighboring strip mall threaten to hide views of the station from the east, and is currently being reviewed by Skokie's zoning board – the thoughtful restoration of the station will allow dedicated fans and casual passersby alike the chance to partake in one of Chicago transit's premiere treasures.

"The North Shore Line... has really been embraced by many people," notes Gendell, "and is historic in its own right."

Thanks to those who were committed to the building, the history of Dempster station opened a new chapter rather than coming to an end.

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