IN OCTOBER, 1972, the Minnesota Historical Society and Burlington Northern Inc. entered into an agreement whereby the extensive historical records of the Great Northern Railway, one of the firm's predecessors, would be systematically transferred to the society for sorting, description, preservation, and research use. (A similar arrangement some four years earlier gave the society the sizable records of the Northern Pacific Railway Company.) Since the Great Northern project began on July 1, 1973, thousands of boxes and hundreds of volumes dating from 1854 to 1970 have been received by the society's manuscripts division. This massive body of material will be a primary source for the documentation of the business and economic history of the Upper Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia.

Correspondence files, financial records, photographs, maps, and printed brochures included in the collection document the survey, construction, and operation of the Great Northern. In addition, the archives contain the records of Great Northern's predecessor companies, the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (1862-1879) and the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway (1879-1890), as well as those of nearly 400 branch lines, subsidiaries, and related firms. Burlington Northern assisted the society not only by donating the records but also by providing funds for the inventory, moving, and arranging of the files. For this teaming with the society to make available vast, important records for research use, Burlington Northern received an award of merit from the American Association for State and Local History.

Before the society receives any units of Great Northern records, they are inventoried in the railroad storage areas. Society personnel make the inventories with the cooperation and assistance of Burlington Northern employees. The inventories list each type of record (for example, minute book, journal, ledger, correspondence file) and its inclusive dates and quantity. This procedure is both exciting and difficult. Some of the records have not been touched for many years. Consequently, many are covered with dust, pieces of plaster, or other accumulations that have gathered throughout the years. The archivist approaches each new vault or shelf with anticipation of likely treasures there. Discovering a correspondence file relating the saga of a tunnel's construction, for example, or locating the missing minute book of
of them is given to Burlington Northern and permission is requested to transfer them to the society. Records approved for transfer are carefully readied for moving and are transported to the Minnesota Historical Society's Research Center at 1500 Mississippi Street, St. Paul. There the records are cleaned, sorted, arranged, and described. The staff prepares further detailed inventories of the records to aid researchers in locating materials.

As previously stated, the Great Northern records document all facets of the railroad’s development in the

A KEY DOCUMENT in the collection is the agreement of March, 1878, by which George Stephen, Donald A. Smith, Norman W. Kittson, and James J. Hill took control of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, a forerunner of the Great Northern. The last page is shown.

BELOW: a stock certificate from the Great Northern records

FROM THE preliminary inventories, manuscripts division staff members select records of historical value. Minute books, journals, ledgers, correspondence files, maps, photographs, and printed materials comprise the main body of important records. These will enable researchers to document the organization and development of the company. Correspondence files relate this information to the history of the communities through which the railroad passed. Early records tell of local political feuds, county seat fights, immigration meetings, fires, economic development, and other subjects.

After the valuable records have been selected, a list
CURIOSITIES in the collection include a July 4, 1906, menu—complete with a flag cover in color—of the “S. S. Dakota” and a “wanted” poster (right) of July 5, 1910, for a locomotive fireman named Sheridan Burke.

Communities it served. Business, economic, labor, and local historians, as well as genealogists and railfans, will be interested in using them. This brief article can mention only a few specific topics covered in the collection.

Letters relating to agricultural development of areas adjacent to the line comprise a large segment of the collection. Correspondence files for the 1890s contain letters of “Empire Builder” James J. Hill concerning the Great Northern’s experimental farms used to test new crop varieties and to encourage land settlement. Letters between Hill and Theodore L. Schurmeier, president of the Minnesota State Immigration Association, discuss the formation of immigration societies and their meetings. Others explore the possibilities of townsites and communities it served. Business, economic, labor, and local historians, as well as genealogists and railfans, will be interested in using them. This brief article can mention only a few specific topics covered in the collection.

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The records contain a great deal of information on navigation. From steamboats on Lakes Minnetonka (Minnesota) and Kootenay (British Columbia) to steamships that traversed the Pacific, the Great Northern used vessels to extend its influence and to provide additional service connections. The Red River Transportation Company, operated by Hill and Norman W. Kittson, a pioneer entrepreneur of the Northwest, plied the Red River of the North during the 1880s. Portage books, payrolls, and financial records of the steamers “Grand Forks” and “H. W. Alsop” supply an added dimension to

the railroad collection. The Northern Steamship Company, a Great Northern subsidiary which hauled freight between Superior, Wisconsin, and Buffalo, New York, loomed large in the Great Lakes trade for thirty years after 1890. Perhaps Hill’s most ambitious maritime adventure was the Great Northern Steamship Company organized in 1900 to conduct freight and passenger business between Seattle and the Orient. Luxury service on the giant 28,000-ton ships “Minnesota” and “Dakota” was provided during the first decade of the twentieth century.

ONE OF THE great natural wonderlands acquired by Great Northern in the late nineteenth century was the area later known as Glacier National Park. Louis W. Hill, son of James J. Hill and his successor as president of the line, was instrumental in securing congressional approval for the establishment of the park in 1910. The Glacier Park Hotel Company, a subsidiary of the railroad, had charge of developing the recreational aspects of the region. It built the hotels and ran the camps that drew increasingly large numbers of tourists. From the correspondence of Louis Hill to the guest lists of various hotels, the Great Northern records relate the story of the park to 1963 when the railroad sold its interests. Across the border in Waterton Lakes National Park, the Canadian Rockies Hotel Company, another subsidiary, built
Typical of numerous photographs of Great Northern Railway scenes for which the collection has negatives is this one of the station at Princeton, Minnesota, probably in April, 1921.

The Prince of Wales Hotel and operated it between 1926 and 1941. These recreational facilities exemplify another significant aspect of the Great Northern archives.

The records also reflect Great Northern's keen interest in the mining districts along its route. These areas provided a source of transportation revenue, of fuel, and of direct income from mines owned by the company. The railroad invested in coal properties in Montana and Canada in the early 1890s. Great Northern subsidiaries — the Sand Coulee Coal Company and later the Cottonwood Coal Company — operated mines in Lehigh and Fergus counties of Montana until the 1940s. The extensive records of these firms document the creation and growth of the company towns which surrounded the mines. Detailed payroll and production records of these companies will fascinate the labor specialist as well as the local historian.

Through an agreement with Russell M. Bennett and Edmund J. Longyear in 1906, the Great Northern acquired certain rights to ore lands on the Minnesota iron ranges. As the records show, the extension of Great Northern trackage and the construction of the Superior ore docks by the Allouez Bay Dock Company gave the railroad prominence as both an ore producer and ore carrier.

Canadian scholars especially will be interested in the wealth of material on the Winnipeg connection of the railroad for which James J. Hill fought so earnestly. Canadian subsidiaries like the Brandon, Saskatchewan, and Hudson's Bay Railway extended Great Northern influence to many settlements in the prairie provinces. The Crow's Nest Southern Railway connected the main line with the rich coal fields of the Crow's Nest Pass district of British Columbia. The Vancouver, Victoria, and Eastern Railway and Navigation Company connected the British Columbia mining areas with the coastal cities. Information on all of these firms can be found in the Great Northern records.

The Great Northern archives are the second major railroad collection presented to the society by Burlington Northern. Through the Northern Pacific project, begun in 1968, the society has accessioned 10,000 linear feet of material. The Great Northern project is expected to total about 15,000 linear feet. The collections complement each other very well. The lines traversed the same territory and shared mutual problems. Many topics appear in both archives. The Northern Pacific developed Yellowstone National Park, while the Great Northern concentrated on Glacier. The two roads held joint control of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad and the Spokane, Portland, and Seattle Railway, parts of whose stories appear in each unit. Together, they make the Minnesota Historical Society one of the great centers for railroad research in the entire nation.