



SandHill Marketing photo.

Gotham Train Depot – Village of Gotham, Buena Vista Township.

“Give us a reasonable price, or we’ll make a hunting ground of your city.” The carrying out of this threat influenced Richland County history perhaps more than any other single factor since 1858. The statement was made to the citizens of Richland City by the surveyor of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad, prompted by the attitude those people were taking toward building the main rail line from Lone Rock to Prairie du Chien. The community of Richland City believed the rail line would have to go through their town and were taking advantage by asking an unheard of price for their land. When work was started on a bridge to lay tracks along the south bank of the Wisconsin River, they realized their mistake.

Richland City being on the north bank of the river was doomed even though, at that time, it was the most important city between Madison and Prairie du Chien. River traffic died out along with Richland City, Orion, Richmond and Port Andrew. The Wisconsin River eventually eroded away the land where Richland City was located and many of the buildings were moved to other towns including Gotham and Lone Rock.

In the early 1870s a company was formed whose purpose was to “promote the development of the Pine River Valley and Stevens Point Railroad.” It was composed of some of Richland Center’s most enterprising and well-to-do citizens and was headed up by George Krouskop and David and Norman James were to “hold and operate the same until paid for.” It was meant to be quite the railroad but never quite worked out as planned. It remained a narrow gauge setup which ran on wooden rails and never did progress any further north toward Stevens Point than the sixteen miles from Lone

Rock to Richland Center. It did however, create a link to the outside world and ushered in an era of prosperity in



Above: Pine River Valley & Stevens Point Locomotive-Richland County History Room photo.

Richland County.

The promoters believed that as a matter of respect to the city of Richland Center, which was to benefit greatly from this enterprise, its citizens should be privileged to be the point of origin for the first trip. Oxen, mules and horses were contributed by owners who wished to have the prestige of being among those who were involved in the task of having hauled the locomotive the treacherous sixteen miles to Richland Center.



The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad connection to Richland Center - Richland County History Room photo.

The Pine River Valley & Stevens Point Railroad did not receive its power from coal and every six miles piled at the side of the track was a stack of wood. Every six miles the train stopped and the engine was "fired up." It made two round trips a day between Lone Rock and Richland Center except Sunday. Ten miles an hour was record speed with the original engine.

The approximate cost of the railroad was \$55,000 and operated ten weeks. The James brothers realized the company could never pay off the debt and sold it for \$50,000 to Alex Mitchell, S.S. Merrill and John Lawler.

In 1880 these new owners realized it was a bad investment and sold the Pine River Valley & Stevens Point Railroad to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad and it became a branch of the their Prairie du Chien Division.



The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul depot at Gotham - Richland County History Room photos.



In one day the old narrow gauge wooden roadbed was wiped out and replaced with standard gauge steel rails. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul depot is still in Gotham, now as a well-maintained attractive residence.