

1992

# GREAT NORTHERN RY AUTHORITY FOR EXPENDITURE

## BACKGROUND

An "Authority for Expenditure" (AFE) was created as a means to organize and outline any proposed capital project on the railroad. Originally required by the I.C.C., the Great Northern Railroad (along with other US railroads) kept these files as a permanent part of their corporate financial records.

The projects covered by the AFE could be as small as purchase of hand tools or as significant as construction of a major rail line or terminal. The GN kept more than one set of AFE's; President's AFE Files, Chief Engineer's AFE Files, and Resident Engineer AFE Files (which were located at Division offices). Once a need for an expenditure was determined, an AFE was created in order to collect all pertinent information on the subject. The files which were received by Great Northern Ry Historical Society, were those of only the President's Files.

As the subjects for the files varied in importance, so did the size of the files in their contents. One file could contain as little written material as a single page, while another (even on a similar subject) could contain several inches thick of documents. It would be difficult to generalize about the exact contents of each of the files, as they varied greatly. Files did normally contain certain types of documents:

**File Title Page:** Standard in format, this page listed the description of the file, the reason or need for the expenditure, and the estimated cost. Officer's signed the document at the bottom, indicating they had reviewed and approved the proposal.

**Statement of Charges:** Accounting Department breakdown of estimated and actual charges for the specific project. Often this section lists the account codes debited for the project (ie structures, rail lines, property, rolling stock, etc.)

**General Correspondence:** Preliminary writings on need for project, discussion on completion of project, or explanation of cost overruns, etc.

**Blue Prints:** General arrangement drawings of structures constructed, detail drawings of additions, general layout maps of project.

It needs to be restated, not every file contains the same types of papers. This is especially true of blueprints. I have concluded, however, if the project is unique or a remodel project and has detail that needs to be illustrated, the file will contain a blueprint. Further, if the government or state/local governing bodies is involved in the project, the file is generally more detailed.

The Great Northern Ry kept their AFE Files at the general office building in St

Paul, Mn. There were two groups of files (I refer to them as "Series I & Series II). Series I dated from 1896 to 1915, and were number through over 25,000 files. Series II had two numbering series, number 1 to 95,000 (+) dated from 1915 to 1959. In 1960, the numbering began with the year and continued numerically to the end of the year (60-1 to 60-2000, 61-1 to 61-2000).

Total files number of both series was nearly 200,000. The year 1915 was used to divide the groups because that was the year of Federal Valuation Studies. Used to bring account practices up to date, it seems logical for a clear division of files prior to or after the valuation study.

Series I AFE's were originally stored in cardboard boxes (350) and Series II were housed in 215 file cabinets. The consistency of file representation showed that rules governing them had changed over the years. Several groups of files were missing or missed filed. Several files might have been pulled or destroyed because the project had been retired (although this was not consistent). Most missing files were simply pulled by the railroad and simply never replaced. The presence of "out" cards indicate that at one time they were expected to be replaced, but ultimately not.

### GNRHS AND THE AFE FILES

→ According to my contacts at BN, when the I.C.C. relaxed the rules governing the files during the early 1980's; seemingly, attempts were made to donate and house the files at Minnesota Historical Society. The railroads logic was to keep the AFE files with the already donated GN President's Subject Files. MHS reviewed the contents and determined the files were too large for their facility. Therefore, without a source of disposal, the need to move the files from BN's control was not great. The Series I files were stored at the old NP Commissary building near the St Paul Union Depot. These files were offered for donation to GNRHS because the building needed to be vacated during mid 1984. *Custody*

→ series I  
FE's Pat Stafford, then BN Public Relations, contacted myself and Bill McGinley because he felt we would be a logical group to get the files. I was told that I had one week to get the 350 boxes, or they would be thrown out at a local landfill. Bill helped secure financial backing for a truck, and storage building for the files. They remained in this location for three months, until Sept when they were moved to a storeroom in the Dakota County Fairgrounds.

→ Almost immediately, letters were generated by myself inquiring about the Series II Files. Burlington Northern did not respond to these inquiries until again necessity required quick and immediate response. BN had decided to move their corporate offices to Seattle, and the railroad offices to Fort Worth. The G.O.B. had been sold and space was critical. I met with the building people, who agreed to pay to have the files moved to Farmington at BN expense.

→ Arrangements were made to store these files in the old "Horticultural" building at the fairgrounds. The building was not being used by the fair, mainly because of deteriorated conditions, but they were not planning to remove the building because it was almost 100 years old. Storage we were granted was intended to be temporary until suitable storage was found elsewhere.

→ When BN's trucks pulled up with the Series II files, I began to question the logic behind my efforts. Three semi-trailer moving vans, loaded front to back pulled in with the 215 file cabinets. The building was totally consumed with

the files, leaving the most deteriorated building area free from any storage. The desperation of the situation dictated a lot of actions on my part in the next three years. Pressure from the fair became strongest in 1987, when the building was finally condemned and scheduled for demolition.

#### FURTHER RELATIONS WITH BURLINGTON NORTHERN

The original files were donated to GNRHS without written restrictions, and no formal paperwork was presented (and according to BN sources, none exists at BN today). When the second group was presented to GNRHS after my initial requests, this group was "loaned" to GNRHS for purposes of research - but could not be altered, destroyed, or broken up without BN approval. For legal purposes, GNRHS was simply named a "custodian" for the files.

Access  
Custody

Payment to the fairgrounds, for their efforts, was made by GNRHS/BN by the donation of one ex GN caboose. We were given the caboose and we in turn donated it to the fairgrounds. Actual ownership of the caboose was given GNRHS in 1985 (October) and we transferred the title in August of 1988, along with two box cars.

Our attempts for securing two box cars was intended for storage, but was not recognized by BN for a long time after initial contacts were made. Circumstantially, we had just been given a caboose and "Hussel Mussel"; and BN seemed concerned over continuous requests for items to be donated from them. I received a letter (from Al Wiegold) releasing the AFE files for our disposal, rather than donation of additional rolling stock from BN. This letter was received in response to our request for three box cars.

custody

During the winter of 1987, BN sent several representatives from the legal department to research (and pull) files used in a pending law suit. I had the first hand opportunity to explain my situation to them of having to vacate the fairgrounds building and having nowhere to go with the files (mind you BN had already released them). It was this contact from the legal department, who saw the need for further access, which ultimately got the two box cars sent to the fairgrounds. The box cars arrived in May of 1988, and they were moved in June to fairgrounds property. I moved the files to the boxcars over the July 4th Holiday. Within one week the "Horticultural Building" was torn down. At this time, all files were "cramped" into the two box cars, and have been since the summer of 1988.

#### FILE MANAGEMENT GNRHS AND FILE CONDENSING

Guidelines were established in 1984/1985 for condensing the Series I files. Given without restriction, our intent was to make the quantity of files more "usable". In the first full year, between 6000 & 8000 files were condensed. The establishment of guidelines was done directly through understandings of Norm Keyes (Technical Committee), Charles Wood, Peter Thompson, and Martin Evoy. The main purpose of this effort and further efforts was to get the file collection into a "manageable" condition, best described as "reducing volume of paper contents without reducing research potential of the documents."

Guidance for this criteria of condensing was given through contact with researchers and archivists at Minnesota Historical Society and reviewed by officials of Burlington Northern Railway and GNRHS as well. During this time,

Martin Evoy (then Secretary GNRHS) was very active in making recommendations on the original criteria for condensing, and either directly or indirectly influenced the eventual criteria that has been used for the past several years.

Before evaluating the current criteria, it may be important to explain what currently has been condensed:

Series I:

File numbers 1 to 16000, plus 2500 random files up to 26,000 (end of series).

Series II:

Random files, approximately 3000 in number. Normally pulled for research purposes (both personal and by requests), or space limitation requirements of the storage space itself.

Totally, 21,000 files have been condensed, or just over 10% of the total. Emphasis the past three years has not been to condense files, but rather catalog. You will note, 6000 to 8000 were done the first year, when the need for space was the greatest. Since the space situation was resolved (for the moment) the file condensing has slowed down. Generally, a file will be condensed when it is pulled for research. This has been done for purposes of handling and mailing.

#### CRITERIA OF FILE CONDENSING

Because criteria used today has evolved over the years, I will describe the situation as it is today. It should be understood, that all files handled are condensed. All files condensed are entered into an appropriate data basis for organization purposes.

General Considerations:

Parts of all files are retained, two categories of files are purposely eliminated (except for location maps). Those two are Right of Way Fences and Road Crossings (both public and private).

Condensed files are put into a refiling system by subject or location. Index considerations maintains the integrity of the original collection.

Page Categories Retained:

Title pages, with cost breakdown of the original proposal

General correspondence about need for project, complications in building project, and analysis of project construction.

Material lists, description of project uniqueness

Page Categories Destroyed:

Duplicate pages of information described elsewhere

Correspondence on file maintenance (ie request for information or drawing)

Pages describing material shipping information.

In July of 1985, I reported to the officers a general outline of condensing procedures. A short time afterwards, Mr Evoy and I reviewed and clarified several points on the condensing procedure. With the second series of files received the next year, the procedures stayed intact until BN released the files (Al Weigold letter). At that time it seemed most important to concentrate time on the Series II files.

*custody*  
←

By 1988, when MHS refused all files (either condensed or not), the files which had previously been kept intact were then condensed and put into filing with the previously condensed files.

*custody*

**GNRHS AND THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Initially, (1985-1988) it was intended that a long term working relationship be developed with MHS and GNRHS. Select documents were going to be donated to them to supplement the existing GN files at their Division of Archives & Manuscripts. GNRHS would keep (perhaps permanently) all files of the AFE - with highly "significant" files going to MHS intact. Specialty items, such as general arrangement blue prints, would supplement their existing blueprint files.

Principle to this working relationship was the donation of the GN index books for the AFE files. The contents of these indexes listed AFE numbers, project locations, project descriptions, and ultimate costs. The indexes truly are a road map through the files, and stood on their own for a history of the GN.

All working relationships changed in the spring of 1988, when contact was made with MHS for (GNRHS) renewed desire to place all AFE files at the DAM. Mr Tom Lamphire contacted policy making people at MHS, where it was decided that the files were not then or ever would be desired by them. Explanation was that the files represented "duplicate" information found elsewhere.

**CURRENT FILE STATISTICS**

An important consideration for further discussion on the eventual disposition of the files is the makeup of the file contents. Plus what others feel about the need to preserve documents included in the files. As stated earlier, files 1 - 16,000 were condensed totally. Of that total, 15000 are in a data base by number and by subject (location also available, but not run). Attached is the breakdown of the first 15,000. Not surprising, the majority of the files pertain to the "rail line" itself. Although subject matters change as technology advanced, the later group of files hold true to the approximate breakdown.

**ARCHIVE COMMITTEE REVIEW**

With the election of board members, it was proposed that the board review the

contents of files and voice their own opinions as to the desirability of file condensing. Needless to say, opinions varied as did reasons for the opinion variance. Members Martin Evoy, Dale Peterka, Norm Preibe and myself are represented on the attached recap. File contents and significance varied intentionally. Files were:

- 1). Ephrata, Wa - depot remodel & expansion 1943
- 2). Marcus, Wa - coal chute construction 1910
- 3). Blackbrry, Mn - Private road crossing 1908
- 4). Odessa, Wa - depot & platform construct 1909
- 5). GN Ry - Stm Loco equip w/ elect headlight 1910

Reading this letter, you may have a disadvantage trying to interrupt the decisions of the committee members. I will have the files with me at the convention for your review should you desire.

### PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

Norm Preibe suggestion that the files be reviewed for possible donation to an archival institution, prompted me to review this entire concept. Three people were contacted, Don Hofsommer (St Cloud State University - Dept of History), Al Lathrup (University of Minnesota - Special Libraries), and John Wickre (formerly of Minnesota Historical Society). All spent time reviewing the same five files above. Two of the three wrote their individual responses to these questions:

- 1). What significance do the files represent to their discipline.
- 2). Would the files be accepted at the institution they worked.
- 3). Could any leadership be offered on proper handling of the files (either storage or condensing).

The response of the two are attached. John Wickre did not respond in writing, but did verbally. I think it is important that his thoughts be shared, as he is as knowledgeable about the contents of the GN/NP records as anyone. John feels that the "collection" is enhanced by condensing. The files are cumbersome in size and contents the way they were originally. Refiling blueprints and files by subject rather than by number (chronologically), makes them easier to use and fully corresponds to the philosophy of professional archivists.

### GNRHS BOARD MEETING 1991: POINTS OF DISCUSSION

The following points are brought up by GNRHS board members on the handling of files from the AFE's. I will list them first, then separately respond to them based on my opinion's. Discussion at the board meeting will certainly be centered around these points:

- 1). Files should remain intact, with no further condensing.
- 2). Files should be donated to some depository for permanent preservation.
- 3). Files need to be more accessible to members for "library" style research.
- 4). Files should not be mailed, to great a chance of being lost in mail or not properly returned.

5). Files are in danger of paper decomposition, steps should be taken to copy files to acid free paper.

6). Stuart Holmquist may not permanently be able to care for files, therefore other alternatives need to be considered including enlisting other individuals to be in charge of the files.

7). Problems exist with GNRHS members not returning files or returning them on an untimely basis, or in a miss.

8). (SRH brought up) Several letters of request are delayed in being answered and files are not pulled on a timely basis.

Each of you may exercise your own reservation on these or other issues. The agenda for the convention is to establish some guideline for operation, condensing, use, and preservation of the files. Nobody has all the answers. On the above issues, I would like to make a position statement for your consideration. Please bare with the discussion, I'm almost done.



**BURLINGTON NORTHERN RAILROAD**

**MICHAEL P. NEWMAN**  
Director, Capital & Material Accounting

176 E. Fifth Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
Telephone (612) 298-7300

July 5, 1994

Mr. Stuart Holmquist  
Great Northern Railway Historical Society  
12910 Essex Way  
Apple Valley, MN 55124

Subject: GN Property Accounting Records

Dear Mr. Holmquist:

The Great Northern Railway Historical Society has custodial care of a wide variety of records for the Great Northern, Northern Pacific and Burlington Route. It seems appropriate that we take this opportunity to restate our position of your use and care of these records.

The working agreements originally drawn up in 1984, and revised for subsequent records delivered into your care, still remains in effect. It should be emphasized that open access to these files remains a continued concern. The Burlington Northern may require use of these files for company purposes from time to time, and for that reason we must stipulate that access to the files must be restricted to authorized individuals.

As the "custodian" of our files, we entrust in you the discretion necessary to keep the files protected as though they remained in our possession. Any access for purposes other than those outlined in our "working agreement" must be cleared by Burlington Northern. Questions about the use of the files should be directed to me in writing prior to permitting access. Any use of the files for purposes other than previously agreed upon will prompt our reconsideration of the current arrangement.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Newman