

Fairmont's Union Bus Depot

We've seen it happen many times before; buildings that once served a specific and necessary purpose and were a proven asset to the community for many years are suddenly demolished, gone and forgotten! This is the fate of one Fairmont building, soon to become nothing more than a memory. It most recently served as the Fairmont Municipal Liquor Store on North Park Street; however, some may recall that it at one time served the community in a much different capacity.

The building permit for this structure was taken out in 1947. It was to become the Union Bus Depot, owned and operated by Matt Dietz. As reported in the June 9, 1948, edition of the *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, Fairmont's new Union Bus Depot was to have its grand opening on June 10th of 1948. It was stated that this would give Fairmont one of the finest new "ultra modern bus terminals in the Midwest." It boasted a restaurant that was open twenty-four hours daily, lockers, a newsstand, and many other modern public conveniences of that era.

The construction costs of the Union Bus Depot totaled \$40,000.00. This included a modern design of the time incorporating brick facing highlighted with the use of glass brick. The interior included what was described as a beautifully decorated lunch room that could accommodate fifty people. The kitchen had the latest stainless steel equipment of that time period. There was also a horseshoe-shaped newsstand with ticket windows at the far end. A waiting area was located just beyond the ticket counter with nearby rest rooms, lockers, and public telephones. A large gate led from the waiting area south to the bus loading area. There was an eighteen foot wide driveway for busses to enter from the rear and pull up for loading on the south side of the building. A canopy protected passengers from the elements while they waited for their bus.

The bus schedule was served by three bus lines. They included daily trips to Albert Lea, Worthington, Omaha, and Sioux Falls. Daily trips were also scheduled to Minneapolis, Mankato, and Omaha. In addition, connections to the west coast, the southwest, Chicago, and points east were available.

The Bus Depot Café's menu featured T-bone steak for \$1.50, pork chops or fried ham for seventy cents, and for sixty cents you could enjoy roast beef, roast pork, spaghetti & meat balls, or hamburger steak. This included an appetizer, salad, and dessert, however, beverages were five cents extra. For the lighter appetite, hamburgers and other sandwiches were only forty-five cents. In addition, they served home-made pies and would pack lunches for anyone needing that service.

However, the times changed over the years and transportation was evolving. Travel by other means was becoming more prevalent, and bus service gradually diminished in this area. In July of 1969, the Bus Depot had become the new home of the Fairmont Municipal Liquor Store. In 1989 an addition was built to the liquor store. Finally, in 2010 the city decided to build a new liquor store in a more favorable location. Consequently, the Park Street location was closed and is slated for demolition in 2011. Upon completion of the demolition process, it will become a parking lot serving the Fairmont Fire Department.

The times change, our priorities change, and the needs of the community change. As a result, the local landscape is also affected and continues to evolve as well.

FAIRMONT'S NEW UNION BUS DEPOT will have its formal grand opening Thursday (tomorrow), with the public invited to participate from 2 to 9 p. m. The modern new transportation and cafe facility will be dedicated to the city by Owner-Operator Matt Dietz in a special ceremony to be held at 8 p. m. City officials will participate. The new terminal, served by three bus lines, is located at 314 North Park street.

