## THE RAILROAD SYSTEM IN THE REGION DURING THE HARD WINTER OF 1880-81 SHOWING YEAR THAT EACH SEGMENT WAS COMPLETED



## A NOTE ABOUT THE MAP

The railroad lines and companies became intricately entwined in the events of the Hard Winter. I spent several months at the beginning of the project simply determining the progress of the tracks from the Mississippi River westward, and how towns were linked and founded. This was done to determine how established—or not—some of the shipping and warehouse centers were along the various railroad lines, and whether there might have been storehouses of food and fuel close to De Smet. This exercise also helped visualize the location of rail systems and towns in relation to one another. It was a critical part of the research that helped create this map.

Looking at the map, you can see the tracks as they ran from the established towns of eastern and central Minnesota to the newer communities of southwestern Minnesota and Dakota Territory (as of the end of 1880). The year noted near each segment of track indicates when the rails reached the more westward town. The impact of the Panic of 1873—a financial crisis that caused, among other things, the stagnation of railroad expansion—is highly visible.

The noted dates occasionally differ from published railroad history books by one or two years. Where newspaper articles from the towns involved indicated that a train had reached them, those were the dates used, rather than official histories, which may have had other criteria for establishing completion, such as a prepared railbed without rails. For our purposes, the year that trains could reach a town determined when a segment was considered complete. As an additional reference within the book, the inside cover will feature a version of the map showing miles between towns.

Most of the towns west of the 1878–79 resumption of railroad construction were no older than the tracks that stretched across the prairie. Some were barely months old as the first storm hit in October, making them particularly vulnerable. Construction of houses and businesses had been rapid, sometimes even haphazard, and supply chains were still being established.

**The Beautiful Snow** originally had a first half that followed, in detail, the construction of the Winona & St. Peter and Dakota Central Railroads, with the Ingalls family woven in amongst the milestones. For many reasons, it has been split apart, and that fascinating story will appear as a second book, similar to this one but focused on *By the Shores of Silver Lake* instead of *The Long Winter*.