



Kansas Preservation

Newsletter of the Cultural Resources Division • Kansas State Historical Society

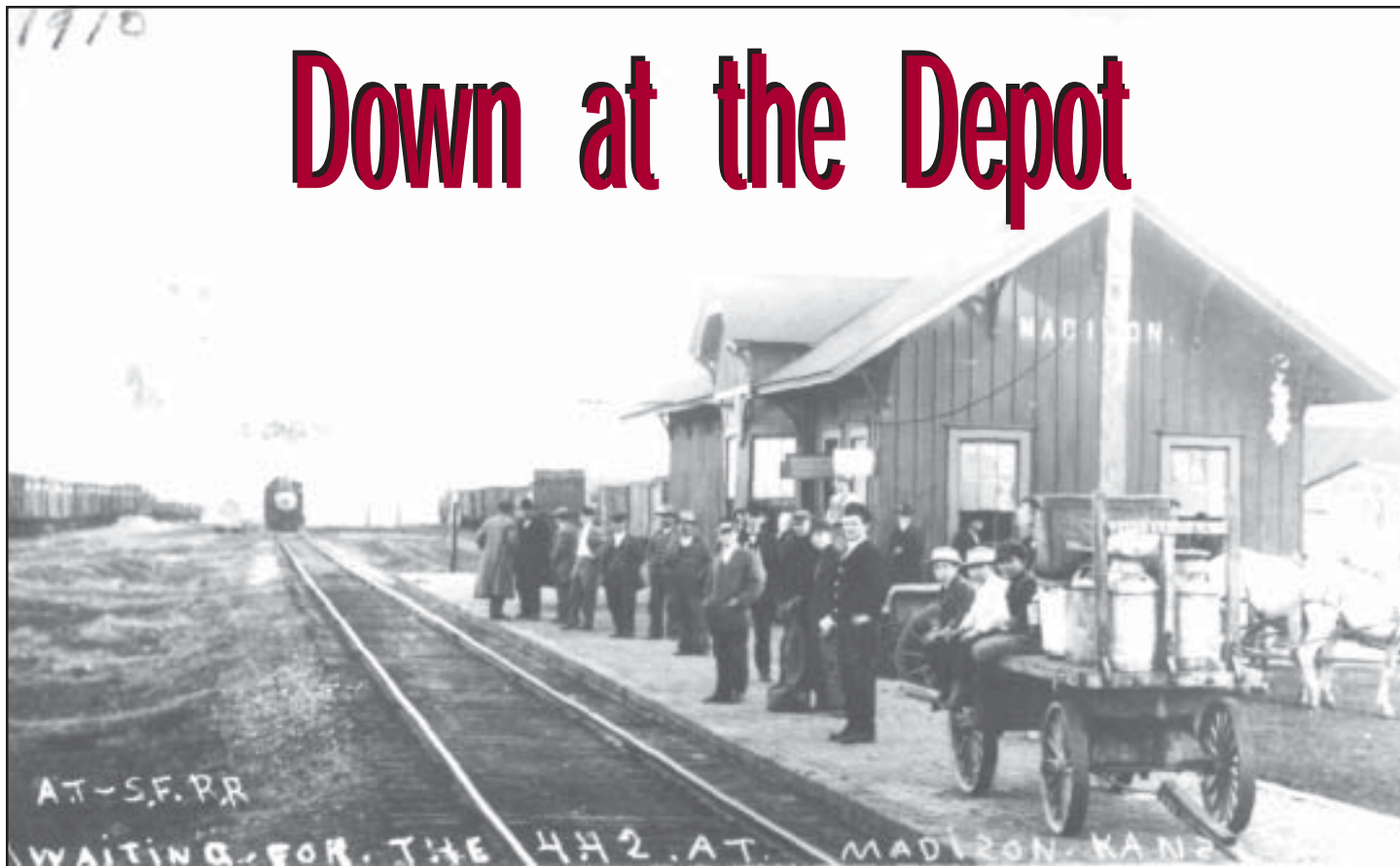


Most Kansas towns owe their very existence to railroads. As railroads began to crisscross the country, the presence of a depot assured a community prosperity. This issue includes a look at the architectural styles of some of the state's remaining railroad depots.

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Down at the Depot



This 1910 photo shows passengers and onlookers awaiting the arrival of the Santa Fe's 442 at Madison. The combination depot was built in 1879. Listed on the National Register in 1991, it was rehabilitated with Heritage Trust Fund and Transportation Enhancement funds assistance to serve as a community center.

If few of us can imagine our lives without computer technology, there are fewer still who could imagine our country's development without railroads. No other technological invention has had as much impact in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as trains. Railroads changed our country's perception of time, space, and distance. Travel that once took days or weeks could be accomplished in hours, and distance was no longer a barrier for people, commerce, or ideas. The settlement and development of the majority of the middle and western part of the United States was almost wholly dependent upon railroads. Indeed, most of the towns in Kansas owed not only their very existence, but also their continued survival to the

railroads. Marshall Murdock of the *Wichita Eagle* reflected upon the importance of railroads to Kansas towns:

“No Kansas town ever won except through running the gauntlet of relentless rivalry. Towns have given their half to get their first railroad, and half of what was left to get their second. The first railroad was secured to keep a rival from securing it, the second to save the town from the monopoly of the first, the third to hold the other two level, and, if a fourth, the fourth with the hope of breaking up the pooling arrangement of the other three. There is a distracting history to this succession. In almost all cases the second railroad ruined the profitable wagon trade and business waned. The third may have caused an influx of population, which the town's development did not warrant, and brought on a relapse; the fourth a boom in realty values which brought on a collapse. But the town which never got its first rail-

road died; the town that never got its second stopped its growth; the town that never got its third, let the rival who secured it, outstrip it in the race.” (Murdock's comments are taken from Craig Miner's *Wichita: The Magic City*, which was published in 1988 by the Sedgwick County Historical Museum Association.)

While a rail line was clearly important to the survival of a town, it was almost as important for its citizens to secure a depot—and a good-looking one at that! Depots were the center of activity in Kansas towns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the quality of a depot said much about a community's prosperity. Unfortunately, almost a century later, these buildings are among the most threatened in the state.

Survey of Railroad Depots

For several years, the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) has recognized not only the historical significance of depots, but also the fact that these

This article, prepared by Deon Wolfenbarger, is based on the National Register Multiple Property Document Form for historic railroad resources she prepared under contract to the Kansas State Historical Society. Wolfenbarger is a historic preservation consultant based in Nederland, Colorado.

resources are threatened. In 1993 and 1994, two articles listing all of the known extant depots in the state were published in *Kansas Preservation*. At that time, KSHS received information about approximately 350 depots remaining from what once numbered around 1,800. Of those depots that remained, several had already been moved from their original sites, and many more were threatened with demolition. From the information gathered as a result of these articles, it became even more apparent that historic depots were rapidly disappearing from the Kansas landscape.

In 1999, the KSHS contracted with Deon Wolfenbarger of Three Gables Preservation to inventory thirty-five previously undocumented depots and to prepare a National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) for "Historic Railroad Resources of Kansas," as well as five nominations for individual depots. The thirty-five depots were selected with the assistance of Father Herman Page of the Topeka chapter of the National Railway Historical Society for their geographic, architectural, and historic diversity. Father Page has been interested in depots for many years, with his earliest surveys dating back to 1984. He has visited every county in Kansas looking for depots and believes there may be as many as 500 "survivors." In 2003 alone he revisited more than 200 depots.

The survey revealed that eighteen of the thirty-five depots had already been moved, and some of those on-site were abandoned at the time. The five depots nominated and listed on the National Register utilizing the MPDF were the Santa Fe Depot in Kingman; the Santa Fe Freight Depot in Atchison; the Santa Fe Depot in Halstead; the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Depot in Council Grove; and the Missouri Pacific Depot in Downs. Another depot, the Union Pacific Passenger Depot in Topeka, was listed in 2002 using the MPDF as well.

Types of Depots

Railroad depots were buildings used for the shipping and receiving of goods along rail lines, the handling of passenger arrival and departure, and as communication centers for the operations of the railroads. Depending upon the size of the community, a depot might serve all or just a few of the functions listed above, with the larger communities having separate buildings for each use. Thus different subtypes, based upon Walter Berg's 1893 book *Buildings and Structures of American Railroads: A Reference Book*



The Atchison Santa Fe Freight Depot was listed on the National Register in 2001. The building presently serves as a visitors' center/museum.



The Downs Missouri Pacific Depot was added to the National Register in 2001. It has been rehabilitated with the assistance of a Heritage Trust Fund grant for use as a community center/museum.



The Union Pacific's stone combination depot at Solomon was built in 1885 when Solomon was an important railroad center. This was the first railroad depot in Kansas to be listed on the National Register (April 26, 1972). It was demolished by the railroad in 1977.



This early twentieth-century photo shows the train arriving at the Missouri Pacific Depot in Wilsey. Although modest in size and appearance, the depot was enhanced by decorative gable ends and the imaginative roof line.

for Railroad Managers, Superintendents, Master Mechanics, Engineers, Architects, and Students, are useful for further identifying depots.

Combination depots were the most common depot property type in Kansas. Combination depots nearly always had three rooms—one for each of the various functions or uses of the building. There was a passenger waiting room at one end, a central office for train operations, and a freight-baggage-express package room at the other end. Combination depots were rectangular buildings with the long axis parallel to the tracks. Most were one-story, with gable roofs being the most common, and the hip roof less so. Roof eaves generally had a wide overhang, both for the visual effect of making the building appear larger and for the functional purpose of providing shade. Many of the combination depots were frame, with siding varying from board-and-batten to clapboard and with shingles sometimes used as decoration in the gable ends. For textural interest, the siding application was sometimes differentiated, such as arranging it vertically under the window sill level, and horizontally above. Other architectural ornamentation was generally minimal, although the wide eaves often had ornamental brackets and gable ends had bargeboards.

One of the most distinctive features of the combination depot was the large

bay window located close to the center of the building trackside.

Architectural ornamentation was often found here, especially if there was a dormer roof above. This bay corresponded on the interior with the central office and provided the station agent with an unobstructed view of the main track in either direction. Telegraph instruments were located in this bay, as well as the levers required to operate the depot semaphore. The semaphores were poles that contained signals for the train indicating whether it should proceed (no orders) or stop (get orders). These poles, also sometimes called order signals or order boards, were located just outside the bay window between the depot and the tracks.

Modifications to the combination



The very wide eaves of the Abilene Rock Island Depot not only provided protection from inclement weather but also served as an area for elaborate decorations, including stick work brackets and carved vertical siding. Here the office bay is incorporated beneath the eaves of the main roof. (This depot has been relocated.)

depot plan would occur in response to the needs of particular stations. The size of the rooms might change depending upon the use of that depot—those that served primarily as a train-order office would have a larger midsection, for example. The basic number of rooms might be altered due to the size of the town. Very small communities, especially those where the railroad preceded the

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development of the town, often required living accommodations for the station agent and his family due to the scarcity of housing. These rooms were usually in a second story above the business rooms of the depot. Larger communities might have depots with separate waiting rooms for women and men, although these were more generally found in passenger depots.

When the number of passengers at a community or stop was sufficient to warrant a separate building, a *passenger depot* was often constructed to replace earlier combination depots. Many were built from standardized plans and varied little in plan from combination depots except for perhaps the size, level of architectural ornamentation, and construction materials. Larger passenger depots, usually constructed of brick, featured separate waiting rooms for each gender since women and children needed to be segregated from the rowdy behavior of men. Baggage areas could also be separated into areas for passenger bags, an express room, and mail room. A telegraph office, lunch room, supply room, rooms for train personnel, and toilets might also be found. On the exterior, a covered waiting verandah was sometimes added to the passenger end, and the streetside entry might find the addition of a covered drop-off area. Tile roofs were commonly employed, indicative of higher status of such depots. Even with these additional features, many passenger depots were still constructed from standardized plans, such as the "county seat" depots frequently found along the Santa Fe line. These standardized plans would be customized for each community in some slight manner. When warranted, however, passenger depots may have been architect-designed.

Terminal or *union depots* were built to serve passengers and their related needs (baggage, etc.) at the terminals of



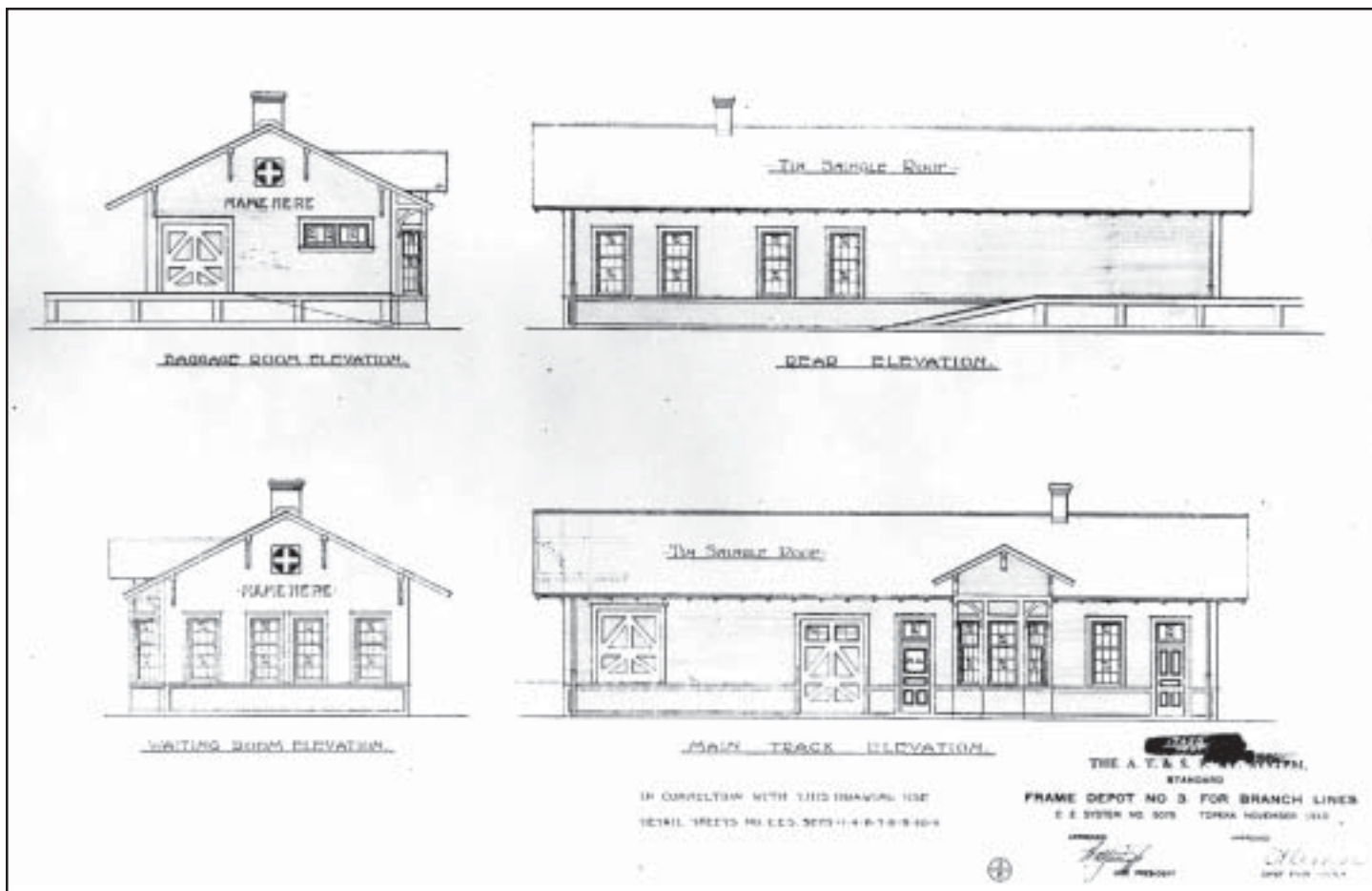
Shown above is a 1935 view of the Abilene Union Pacific Railroad Passenger Depot. The Spanish Colonial Revival style structure was built in 1929 from plans prepared by Gilbert Stanley Underwood, who designed a number of facilities for the Union Pacific between 1924 and 1931.



Typical of the attention often accorded to passenger depots, the Marysville Union Pacific Depot is a Mediterranean Revival style example with highly elaborate decorative glazed tiles. Although presently the only crew change point on the Union Pacific line, the railway is relocating the line and this station's future is uncertain.



Salina's Union Depot was built to serve five railroads after the Union Pacific Depot burned in 1912. Many U.S. soldiers stopped or passed through this depot during two world wars.



The railroads developed sets of standardized plans for different types of communities with differing levels of passenger and freight activity. Above are the elevations for a Santa Fe frame depot no. 3 for branch lines. The office bay is the most easily recognized feature of standardized Santa Fe depots. (These plans, along with the plans for hundreds of depots, bridges, and other structures on the Santa Fe system, are in the collections of the Kansas State Historical Society.)

rail lines, and were the largest form of passenger depots constructed by railroad companies. Terminal depots were located at the key junction of two or more rail lines, and often united the passenger services of various companies within one large building. Most terminal or union depots were in larger cities, were designed by architects, and were often among the most elaborate architectural landmarks in a city. If these multiple rail lines were from different companies, there was often cooperation to build a “union depot” or station.¹ Before construction of a terminal depot, the stations for competing rail companies were separated from one another by long distances, compelling passengers to walk distances between stations or hire transportation. Union stations thus facilitated the exchange of passengers between trains of different railroad companies. Terminal stations can be further classified into “island stations” (located between the tracks), “head-stations” (located at the dead-end of the tracks), and “side-stations” (located on one side of the tracks).

Standardized Depot Plans

For the majority of Kansas communities that were platted by railroad companies, the first building in town was usually either the depot or a land office. These were generally crude structures, sometimes just portable shacks or old box cars, hastily built during the initial phase of railroad construction. Generally after a community proved itself prosperous enough to warrant such a building, a permanent depot was constructed. However, rail lines in Kansas were expanding so rapidly that the number of depots located in the state was astounding—eventually over 1,800 depots were constructed. Thus the earliest of Kansas depots were simple spartan buildings. The depots on the Kansas Pacific in the late 1860s, for example, were just simple gable roof buildings over a wood frame rectangular shell. Board-and-batten siding was typical, as it kept down costs by using less wood, fewer nails, and was quicker to complete.

Unfortunately, the image of these early depots left some travelers with a

poor image of Kansas towns. After all, the depot was the first building seen by an incoming visitor, and the last one seen as they left. It was the center of all activity in a community. News arrived there in the form of mail, newspapers, and telegrams. People and goods came and went with punctual regularity. No other building in a town was used as frequently and by as many people. It was clearly the most important building to a community, but the local citizens were at the mercy of the railroad companies regarding the size, design, and type of depot. It should come as no surprise that following complaints against railroads about high freight rates, the number of complaints about inadequate depots were the most frequent. But how would the railroad

¹A station, in railroad terminology, usually refers to the entire site (i.e., ground and associated structures), while a depot usually refers to a single building. In more recent years, general usage sometimes finds these two terms used interchangeably.

companies decide where to spend their money? New tracks were still being laid across Kansas in the 1880s, and future revenue remained uncertain for many of the newly formed railroad companies. Furthermore, even though stops might be planned every five or ten miles along a line in Kansas, the reality was that many of these places would never be more than a “whistle-stop.” Kansas ranked second in the nation in track mileage in 1890, and correspondingly had a very high number of depots constructed along these lines, many of which were destined to serve very little traffic. Thus, lowering the cost of depot construction was a prime concern for railroad companies.

This need for lower construction costs for the large number of Kansas depots prompted railroad companies to refine the craft of architectural standardization. By having standardized plans prepared internally, the cost of hiring an architect for each station was obviously eliminated. The experience gained from constructing so many depots led to a pared-down building where form met function perfectly—a linear rectangle oriented to the tracks, generally containing a waiting room, agent’s office, and freight/baggage room. Not only were standardized depots cheaper to design and construct, but the convenience of such plans was a huge time-saver for the railroad companies. With so many depots being constructed in Kansas alone, it would have been impossible to wait for an architect to individually design every building. A company’s engineer, however, could create a series of standard plans and select the one appropriate to the community. If necessary changes could be made to fit the depot to the site; sometimes the changes were as minor as flipping the plan.

Railroad Company Depots

An additional advantage of standardized plans was that they could provide a railroad company with a distinct corporate identity. For example, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe created a series of standard drawings in the 1870s as it was expanding its mileage across Kansas. These plans were updated at regular intervals, and by 1910, the company had five standardized plans for main line depots and four branch lines. Railroad depot historians Charles Bohi and H. Roger Grant feel that the Santa Fe utilized standardized plans more effectively than any other railroad, and thus had depots throughout the state that were as familiar to travelers as corporate fast food restaurants are today.



The Bancroft Kansas City and Northwestern Depot is an example of a very simple combination depot, with the office bay formed by two angled walls and incorporated beneath the eaves of the main roof. (This structure has been moved a number of times and is now a museum in Bancroft.)



The Pauline Santa Fe Depot was moved to Topeka’s Ward-Meade Park in the late 1970s. The simple combination depot has been nicely restored and maintained by the Topeka chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.



Halstead’s Santa Fe depot is a brick “county seat” type depot with separate waiting rooms for men and women. Kansas typically did not have depots with separate waiting rooms based on race. The Halstead Historical Society was formed to save the depot in 1988, and the building is currently used as a museum. It was added to the National Register in 2001.



The Missouri Pacific Depot at Oskaloosa was originally built by the Kansas City Northwestern Railroad, a line that merged with the Missouri Pacific in 1901.

The earliest Kansas depots along the Santa Fe line were very spartan structures. The next generation of standardized combination-type depots were generally still simple buildings, but the addition of a few inexpensive architectural features created depots that were not only more aesthetically pleasing but helped to create the Santa Fe “look.” The basic form consisted of a rectangular building with gable roof, overhanging eaves, and brackets. The agent’s bay window, located trackside, was the feature that gave the Santa Fe combination depots their distinctive look. This three-sided bay had angled or “beveled” side walls with spandrels joining its corners to the eaves of the main roof. Above, the gable dormer had an overhanging bargeboard with corner brackets. Siding was normally horizontal clapboard, but sometimes vertical boards were used. Vertical trim boards helped to divide the building visually, and rid the building of its “cheap, primitive look.”

The Santa Fe also had a series of plans for its “county-seat” depots. These were its passenger depots in more important towns; most were built of brick and several had architectural styling popular at the time, such as Mission Revival tile roofs. Two passenger waiting

rooms separated by gender were common. Additional features might be added as necessary for an individual community, such as flat-roofed waiting verandahs on one end of the building, and drop-off porte-cocheres on the front or “street-side” elevation. Baggage and express parcel rooms were located at the opposite end from the passenger rooms and often had flat roofs as well.

It was more difficult for other Kansas railroad companies to achieve a distinct corporate identity, such as that found with the Santa Fe, as most were formed by acquisitions and mergers of several smaller companies. Based on the extensive studies and publications about some of the larger Kansas lines, some conclusions about depot architecture can be drawn.

Rock Island depots fall into four categories based on form: small combination depots, medium-sized depots (either combination or passenger), depots with housing quarters, and larger passenger depots. Stylistically, though, Rock Island depots tended to be a hodgepodge, due in part to the fact that the Rock Island acquired a variety of other rail systems. The smallest combination depots on the Rock Island were very spartan and had little architectural elaboration. Although

there were agent bays corresponding to the central office, these bays were set beneath the overhanging eaves of the main roof and did not feature their own dormer roof. Other small combination depots are similar to those constructed across the country, with a cross gable dormer over the extended agent’s bay. Moderately sized combination depots or passenger depots showed more elaboration on the roofs. There were several Rock Island depots with raised, central hip roofs over the entire central agent’s offices, as opposed to just a dormer roof over the bay. Depots which provided living quarters for agents were usually built in the more remote locations in western Kansas. Similar to stations in Nebraska and north into Canada, these frame buildings often had multiple roof lines typical of Queen Anne and other Victorian era residences. There would commonly be a steeply pitched, gabled hip roof with cross gable dormers, sometimes with flared eaves. Visual and textural interest was provided simply by changing the orientation of clapboards; typically, vertical clapboards would be placed beneath the window sills, and horizontal clapboards above. In the gable ends, decorative wood shingles or vertical siding would be added for

additional variety. Larger passenger Rock Island depots were generally constructed of masonry or stucco and were usually architect-designed.

The St. Louis & San Francisco Railway Company—commonly referred to as the “Frisco”—was another company that acquired several smaller lines in Kansas, and thus its depots varied in type and form, although several of its smallest combination depots were very similar. Almost all had a gable roof, and several had board-and-batten siding. Some of these small depots even lacked a bay window in the central agent’s office. Larger Frisco depots, however, show more attention to detail and cost. Hip roofs with flared eaves, such as found on its “Depot No. 4” standardized plan, added much to the visual interest of the building but were more expensive to build. Larger “county-seat” types of Frisco depots varied greatly, with the only common feature being very wide, overhanging eaves supported by brackets. Cherryvale, Arkansas City, and Winfield all had depots with distinctive roof features, and the one in Fredonia was particularly noteworthy for the complexity of its various roofs.

The Missouri Pacific was a leading railway company in Kansas by virtue of its track mileage. Its depots represent a variety of styles and types due to numerous acquisitions of other railroad companies over the years. Early combination depots built by the Central Branch Union Pacific, for example, were very simple gable roof structures with board-and-batten siding, with the only distinguishing features being brackets supporting the wide eaves. Some did not even have bay windows for the railroad agents. Those constructed by the Kansas City Northwestern, however, sported a few more architectural features such as stick-style bargeboards and more decorative brackets. Missouri Pacific examples in Tribune, Wilsey, and Gypsum all had gabled hip roof buildings, with the gabled section featuring semi-circular windows surrounded by some type of decorative siding or shingles. Missouri Pacific’s “county-seat” depots of the early twentieth century resemble those of the Santa Fe, but the line’s other larger passenger depots were clearly architect-designed, such as the one built in Council Grove and the Richardsonian-Romanesque station in Salina.

The Union Pacific, and its predecessor the Kansas Pacific, built depots over the longest period of time in Kansas. The earliest depots along the Kansas Pacific were almost primitive buildings. Replace-



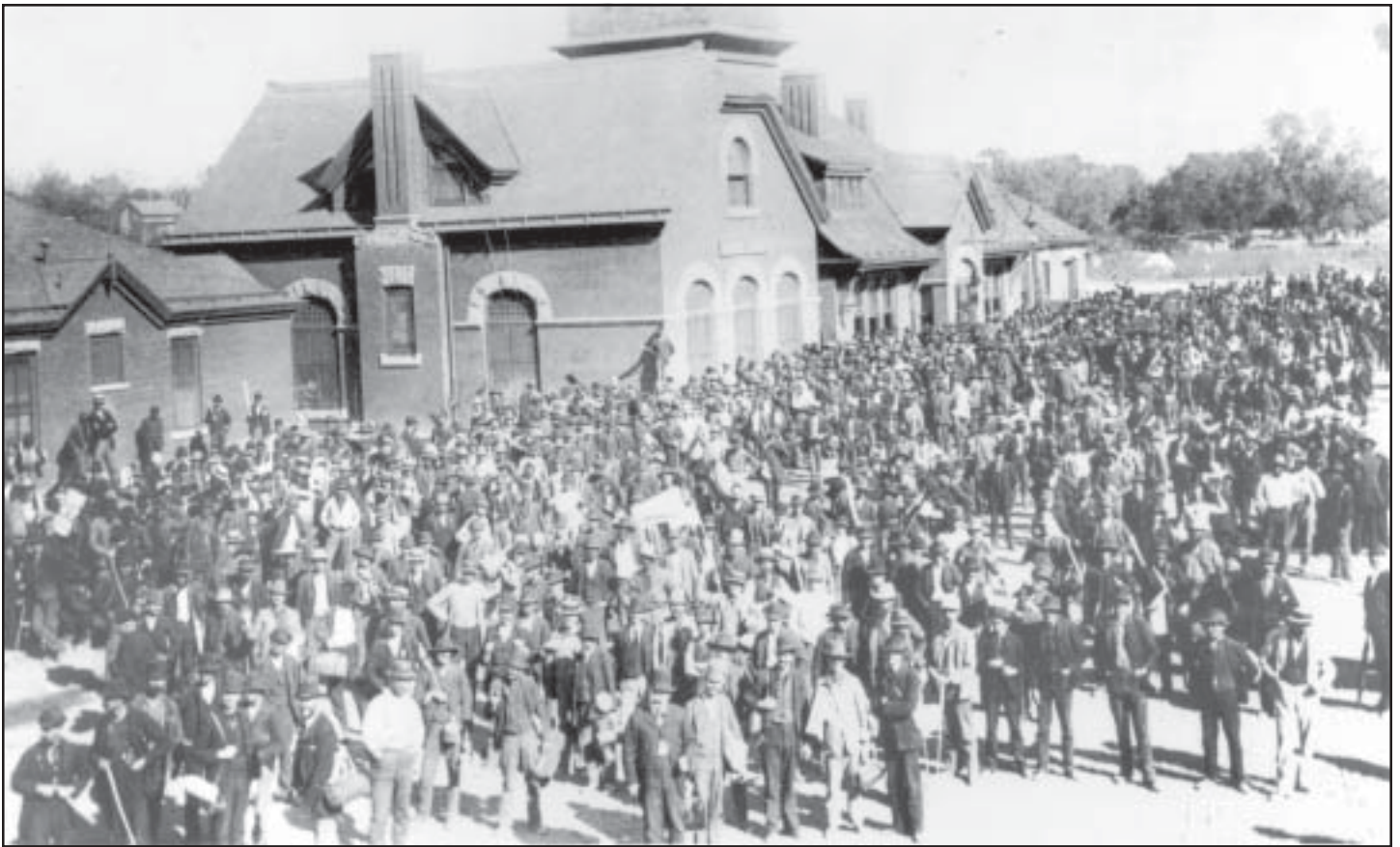
Paxico's 1895 Rock Island Depot, which has been relocated to the Mill Creek Campground, is an example of a small Rock Island combination depot. The roof of the office bay is separate from that of the main building.



The 1882 Augusta Frisco Passenger Depot originally had a tile roof, but was one of the few buildings in Augusta which survived a 1920s tornado. It may also be the only surviving brick Frisco depot left in the state.



Although the Missouri Pacific tracks have been removed, the Salina Missouri Pacific Depot still sits on its original location. The Richardsonian Romanesque structure was built in 1887.



This scene shows a large crowd gathered at the newly completed Santa Fe depot in Arkansas City on April 21, 1889; that was one day prior to the Oklahoma "Land Rush."

ment combination depots, although still simple, featured a few architectural embellishments. Brackets and stick-style bargeboards were added at very little cost but visually added much to the spartan buildings. The gabled roof bay windows for the station agents, although constructed more out of necessity, also helped to break the monotony of the simple linear structures. During the 1920s, the Union Pacific built a number of architect-designed buildings, some from standardized plans but still with enough architectural embellishments features to appear attractive and unique to each community.

Due to the precarious financial situation in which the Missouri, Kansas & Texas (KATY) Railway often found itself, many of the depots constructed by this company were inexpensive. Simple gable roof, board-and-batten buildings had wide eaves that extended unbroken over the agent's bay, such as those found at St. Paul, Burlington, and Hartford. Council Grove's depot is an example of one of the more elaborate KATY depots. Here a gabled hip roof provides interest on the short elevations of the building, and the agent's bay features its own dormer roof. During the 1920s, however,

More than 80 percent of Kansas depots have already been demolished, and many of those remaining have been moved from their original locations.

standardized plans for the company's depots returned to unbroken roofs to save money, although these roofs were now hip instead of gable. Architect-designed KATY depots sometimes employed the Mission Revival style, which reflected the company's south-western connections.

The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy depots were comparatively rare in Kansas, with only about forty constructed; however, they are notably distinct in appearance from depots of other lines. Since they were constructed in remote sections of Kansas, almost all were two-story, gable roof buildings that provided living quarters for their agents

upstairs. These rectangular, lap-sided structures were originally painted "barn red," and many did not even have a bay window for the station agent.

Resources for Historic Depots

With the introduction of diesel engines, the huge number of railroad structures functionally specific for steam power began to disappear. Roundhouses eventually gave way to the pass-through facilities, and support structures for ash handling and boiler washing were replaced by fuel pumps. Inevitably, older facilities were demolished. Shop facilities in several small Kansas towns closed permanently after providing decades of employment for residents. Depots were among the last rail-related buildings to be removed; however, their location within the railroad right-of-ways left depot buildings extremely vulnerable to demolition. More than 80 percent of Kansas depots have already been demolished, and many of those remaining have been moved from their original locations. Some of the frame combination depots were moved and recycled into freight houses in the early and mid-

twentieth century by the railroad companies. When eventually abandoned, however, these were usually demolished or moved off-site.

Listing on the National Register of Historic Places can provide only limited protection for historic depots. More importantly, it provides eligibility for different types of grants, as well as state and federal rehabilitation tax credits. The Downs Missouri Pacific Depot recently received a Kansas Heritage Trust Fund grant for roof and other repairs. The Rock Island Depot in Liberal and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Depot in Dodge City are among those that have received federal transportation enhancement funds through the Kansas Department of Transportation.

In spite of their threatened status, the historical and architectural significance of depots are well recognized by many Kansans. There are numerous sources of information available on the Internet, primarily on railroad history but with some sites covering depot architecture. Several excellent articles and books have also been published about Kansas depots, a small selection of them are listed in the bibliography. *Kansas Depots* is still in print and can be purchased from the Kansas State Historical Society. There are also three Kansas chapters of the National Railway Historical Society located in Topeka, Wichita, and Kansas City.

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The depot at Council Grove is one of the more elaborate Missouri, Kansas and Texas depots. Listed on the National Register in 2001, it is one of the few remaining KATY depots left in Kansas, and possibly the only one on its original site. It is currently for sale.



The two-story design of the 1889 Atwood Chicago, Burlington and Quincy combination depot included housing for the station master and his family on the second floor. The depot has been relocated to Lake Atwood, where it is used by a non-profit crafts co-op.