

DOWN AT THE DEPOT

A recent review of our **All Aboard** index has revealed that over the past twelve years we have profiled fifty-eight individual Frisco depots in our *Down At The Depot* series. It has been one of our most popular features of the **All Aboard** and one that over the years has generated a number of questions. In particular, many of our members and readers have inquired regarding the Frisco's use of standard plans for their depot construction.

With that in mind, we have decided to devote the next few issues of our *Down At The Depot* series to examining Frisco depot construction, both those that were build according to standard plans and those that were unique to themselves.

In the early days of rail travel there were no depots. Most railroads were more interested in laying track and running revenue producing trains than they were in providing for the comfort and



The arrival of the train was both a practical occurrence and an entertaining event that few residents wanted to miss, as witnessed by this photo taken at Cedar Gap, MO, circa. 1909

convenience of their passengers. The early railroads first relied on a local hotel or saloon to serve as their arrival and departure points, a practice left over from the era of stage coach travel.

By the early 1840's, however, construction of railroad depots was a common practice and their style and architecture were as varied as

the many travelers who passed through their doors. Some were simple while others were architectural marvels, a show place for the railroads.

As rail travel increased, so did the importance of the train station. It was the site of many welcomes and farewells between relatives, friends, and even strangers wishing each other a safe journey.

The local depot often served as the site of the local "spit & whittle" club and provided the citizens of many small communities with their only outside contact with the world.

The arrival of the train was both a practical occurrence and an entertaining event that few residents wanted to miss. The train usually brought the latest in world and national news, the local mail, merchandise of all sorts, and a continuous parade of strange, mysterious, yet always interesting rail travelers.



The local depot often served as the site of the local "spit & whittle" club. Seligman, MO, circa. 1910

The young boys in the community would usually greet the arrival of the train far down the tracks and they would run alongside the locomotive, taking in all its majesty while dreaming about some day controlling the throttles themselves.

The depot served as the communications center for the town because it was often the site of the local telegraph office, and the depot clock was generally considered as the official time in the community.

While the early history of depots on the Frisco has been lost or forgotten, there is evidence of their existence. A January 1, 1868 roster of equipment and facilities on the Southwest Pacific Railroad, an early predecessor of the Frisco, lists two passenger coaches, four baggage & express cars, and ten stations along its route.

The oldest Frisco depot on record was on that Southwest Pacific line, built in 1868, at Pacific, MO., the point where the Southwest route branched off from the original tracks of the Pacific Railroad. Throughout its tenure of service, the Pacific station was operated jointly by the Frisco and the Missouri Pacific.

In March, 1903, when the *Official List of Officers, Stations, Agents, etc.* was issued by the Frisco System, 786 stations were included, many of which had some type of depot. Needless to say, with that many stations on their line, the size, style, and architectural design of the depots were as varied as the names, locations, and personalities of the communities they served.

In 1916, when the Frisco



The oldest Frisco depot of record was built at Pacific, MO, in 1868.

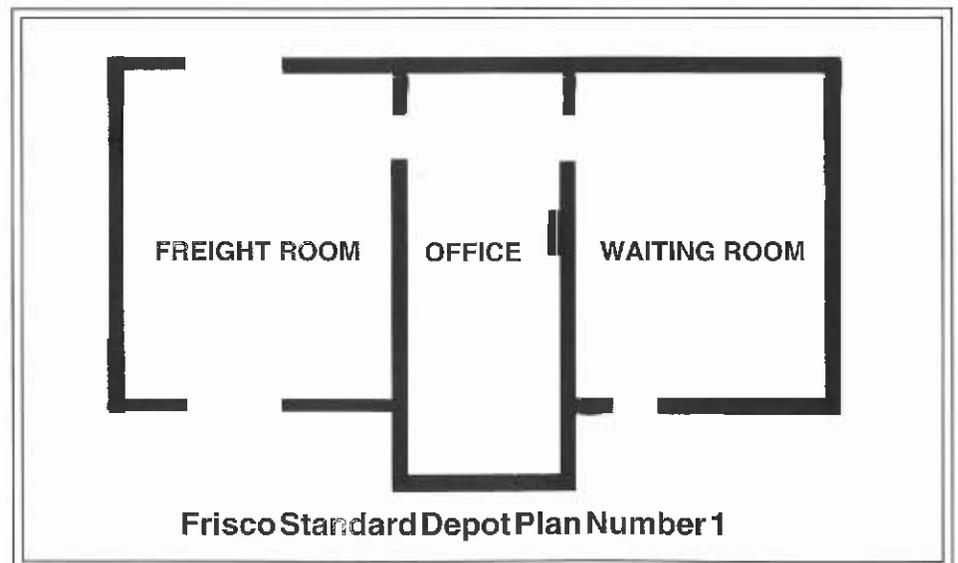
experienced its first major reorganization, 143 different railroads had been absorbed into the Frisco System, each with their own distinctive approach to depot design.

However, when one begins to closely examine current historical, technical, and photographic records, there emerges a number of distinctive design categories of depots on the Frisco.

The most common cat-

-egory of Frisco depots were those built according to standard plans. Over the years, the architectural department developed as many as nine different designs that were based on five basic plans.

Standard Plan number 1 represented the most common depot design on the Frisco. It was a combination station (freight & passenger) with a basic floor plan including a freight room and waiting room,



divided in the middle by the agents office. The building was frame construction with 2" x 6" walls, an open end gable roof design, with boards & batten siding. The depot at Strafford, MO is a good example of Standard Plan number 1.

Early in its operation, the Frisco adopted a gray with white trim and green roof color scheme for its standard plans.

While a standard plan, service requirements and community needs would often dictate a variety of modifications. The Belton, MO, depot had the freight room to the left of the agents bay while the station at Cache, OK, was reversed.

Some of the number 1 depots were small, such as the one at Conway, MO, and some were a larger version like the depot at Crocker, MO.

Another variation was the placement of the agents bay. The station at Niangua, MO, had it located in the middle while it was offset to one end at Steele, MO. Apparently the Steele station handled a large volume of express shipments which required a larger than standard freight room.

Where local laws dictated, all Frisco depot plans were modified for segregated waiting rooms, such as the station at Turrell, AR.

One interesting exterior modification of number one depots was the roof end design as shown on the Verona, MO, depot.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In the next issue of our *Down At The Depot* feature we will take a look at examples of stations built according to standard plans 2-5.



Strafford, MO., April 10, 1948. A. Johnson photo



Belton, MO., April 16, 1957. Howard Killam photo





Some of the number one depots were small, such as the one at Conway, MO.

*March 13, 1955
A. Johnson photo*

One common variation in the number one depots was the placement of the agents bay. The station at Niangua had it located in the middle.

*Niangua, MO
August 25, 1958*



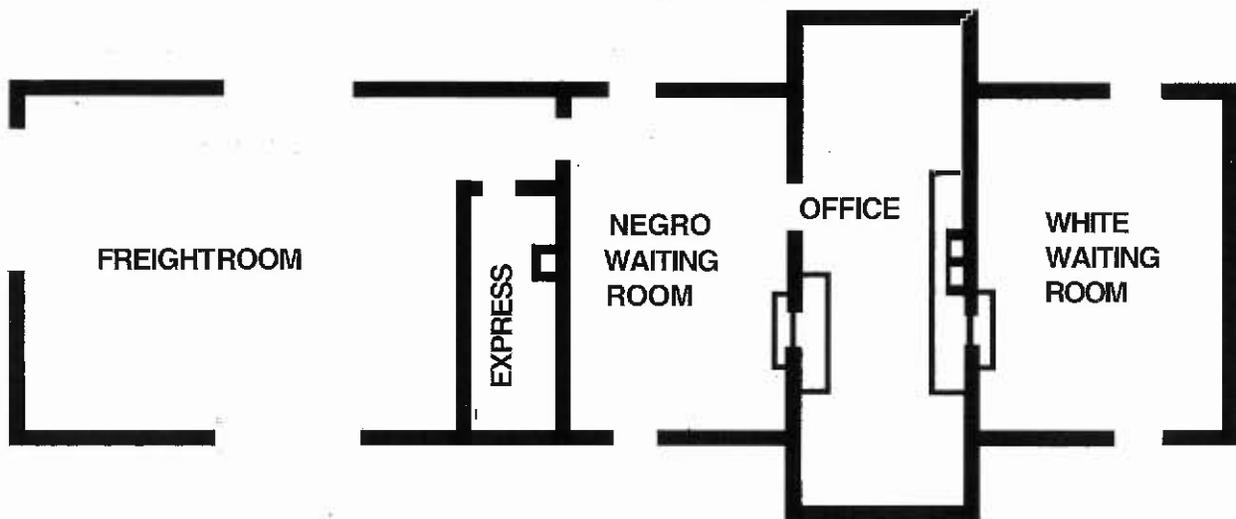
Some of the number one depots were large, such as the one at Crocker, MO. This 1978 photo from the H.D. Connor collection

One common variation in the number one depots was the placement of the agents bay. The station at Steele had it located offset to one end. This 1966 photo from the H.D. Connor collection





*An interesting exterior modification of a number one depot was the roof end design on the Verona, MO station.
July 24, 1949. A. Johnson photo*



Frisco Standard Depot Plan Number 1 ~ Turrell, Arkansas



Turrell, AR., 1966. H.D. Connor collection

Letters From An Old Section Foreman To His Son



This rare 1898 photo shows the Frisco section gang and family that were assigned to Birch Tree, MO. Photo courtesy of the West Plains Gazette.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the 1920's, Mr. D.E. Gelwix, who at the time was Division Engineer on the Eastern Division of the Frisco, wrote a series of letters which he issued to his section foremen.

These letters were written as though from an old section foreman to his son. They carried with them a word of good advice clothed in the homely philosophy of a kindly section foreman who had served his company well, had reared and educated a family, and had proved himself a good and useful citizen. The following is the first letter in the series.

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Dear Son:

I was sure mighty proud to learn that you had been appointed foreman on Section R33. I am glad to see you get a promotion and I like to feel that the raising I have given you has helped make you ready for a foreman's job at a time when it is pretty hard to find material from which good foremen may be made.

If you don't mind listening to a little advice from your old Dad, I can tell you a few things that will be a powerful lot of help to you now and in the years to come. You have heard me say a good deal of

what I am going to tell you but it will mean more to you now, because now I am talking about your job instead of mine or the other fellow's.

I remember a good many years ago one of those Chatauquas came to town and I went to one of the lectures because the Agent and I got a free ticket. The subject of the lecture was "Think Well of Your Job." I didn't understand much that the lecturer said, but I have never forgotten his text. It put me to thinking about my own job, and the more I think of it the better I am pleased with it.

A good many people, including a lot of section foremen themselves, think that a foreman's job isn't much, but I figure, after watching the thing for nearly forty years, that the job is just about as big as you try to make it. Some folks wouldn't be satisfied to be General Manager for over two weeks - they would begin by that time to think that their talents were being wasted. They would think that they ought to

be Vice President, and they would try to figure out how the Vice President should run his job rather than to tend to their own business.

I have never known a lot of section foremen that wanted to be Roadmaster. A fellow does a good job sometime and gets some compliments on it and the thing immediately goes to his head. Then he starts to scheming as to how he can attract attention and pull wires, and the first thing you know there is a politician running his section instead of a foreman. I like to see men ambitious - I don't think it hurts a section foreman to have an idea that there is something better ahead of him some place. But always remember, Son, that the best way to prepare yourself for the next job ahead of you is to do today's work the very best way you know how.

I have had a lot of foremen argue with me that we ought to be paid more. I usually agree with them because I know they would not understand if I tried to tell them

what I am going to tell you. I can look back forty years and recall the boys I grew up with in the old home town and not find one of them that is as well off today as I am. A lot of them have made bigger money than I have, at times, and some of them have lived in better homes and worn better clothes. But their prosperity has not stayed with them. One of my old school-mates was elected to a County office and wore a white vest and later ran for the legislature; but he never acquired the habit of working - dodged around from this to that for a number of years and finally died a few years ago, a public charge.

I have gone thru three panics since I started running a section, and you know enough about what that means to realize that a man should be mighty well pleased with a job that keeps his children fed when others go hungry.

Don't misunderstand me to say that I will not accept more money for my work when the company sees fit to offer it; however, I am not going to forget that the company has enabled me to raise you children and educate you and give you and your mother a home, and that today I command a reasonable amount of respect in our community, largely as a result of my connection with the company. These things are all worth a lot to me, even if I cannot take them to the bank and deposit them to my credit.

You should think well of your job Son, not only because it is a good job for you, but because of its importance to the company which is depending on you to take care of a

of its interests. You and the Agent are the only representatives our company has in your town. The folks down there judge our railroad by the kind of section foreman it has, a whole lot more than they do by how much business it is doing or how much money it is spending for improvements.

You can do more than everyone else on the railroad towards keeping the good will of the folks along your section. You should keep your eyes open for things that are liable to bring about complaints and fix them wherever you can, calling the attention of the Roadmaster to the things that you cannot fix. When a man comes to you with a complaint, remember that your conduct will not only have a whole lot to do with his friendship for you in the future, but also his friendship for our company.

Don't ever make any promises you do not intend to keep or that you are not certain that you will be able to keep. Your word should be your bond, even to the extent of your making it good where conditions arise over which you have no control. When, occasionally, someone comes to you asking that the company do something out of reason, don't argue. Sympathize with him in a way that will not compromise the company; most generally people with a grievance get about all the relief they need when they confide in someone else and get a little sympathy.

When you are loafing around the Post Office or the grocery store, don't ever overlook a chance to say a good word for the company. I don't mean by this for you to go to

extremes either in the statements you make or in talking too often. When the cracker box statesmen get to discussing the heartless corporations, a word now and then from you about some of the good things your company is doing will do a lot towards keeping down the wild talk that usually comes from ignorance. Men are pretty much like sheep anyway, and the fellow that knows his business and has the gumption to stand up for his ideas is always the leader.

I was up at Division headquarters last month to a little meeting of the foremen, and I heard our Superintendent say that most generally a section foreman did not realize how important a man he was for the railroad and that the majority of the foremen did not take their job seriously enough. He didn't mean by that, that you are of much importance and that you should go around with your head up and your chest out inviting people to look at you - what he meant was that the foreman of Section R33 was an important man because of his being largely responsible for the railroad's interest from Mile Post R527 to Mile Post R539.

Well, Son, that is about all for this time. I didn't figure to preach when I started out, but I can't help wanting you to get started off right and have the benefit of some of the things I have learned without the hard knocks that I got learning them.

Write soon.

Dad

*...to be continued*

The

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SAN FRANCISCO  
RAILWAY.

Through  
THE  
Great

South  
West.

H. L. MORRILL,  
General Manager, ST. LOUIS.

The

Spring, 1890

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RAILWAY.

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D. WISHART,  
General Passenger Agent, ST. LOUIS.