

FRISCO

All Aboard

FRISCO

May-June / July-August

1994





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Frisco Folk Ray Wells captures the Peach Blossom Special with Frisco steam locomotive 1522 as motive power, at Stanton, MO, June 18, 1994. See additional photos on pp. 19-21.



A rare photo of a little known Frisco passenger train. The *Southeastern Limited*, predecessor to the Kansas City-Florida Special, was the Frisco's first through train service from Kansas City to the southeast. Inaugurated in the late 1880's, trains 105-106 were solid vestibule trains, carrying Pullman drawing room sleepers, through without change, from Kansas City to Jacksonville, FL. Reclining chair cars (*seats free*) and cafe observation cars (*as shown in the below photo*) were offered from Kansas City to Atlanta. Connections with the Southern Railway were made at Birmingham for service to Jacksonville, and with the Rock Island at Kansas City for service to Denver.

On November 26, 1911, the *Southeastern Limited* was replaced with the Kansas City-Florida Special which ran until September 18, 1965.





The Frisco Museum: Holding a Family Together

By Gerald W. Dupy

It stands at attention at the eastern edge of Springfield, Mo.'s Commercial Street Historic District—a sturdy, four-square little brick building which symbolizes the heart and soul of the once-thriving Frisco Railway.

It is the home of the Frisco Railroad Museum, the brainchild of its founder, Alan Schmitt. Alan is a bewhiskered, bespeckled redhead who can put on a railway agent's cap and appear to be walking out of another century when station agents used flags and lanterns to request train stops.

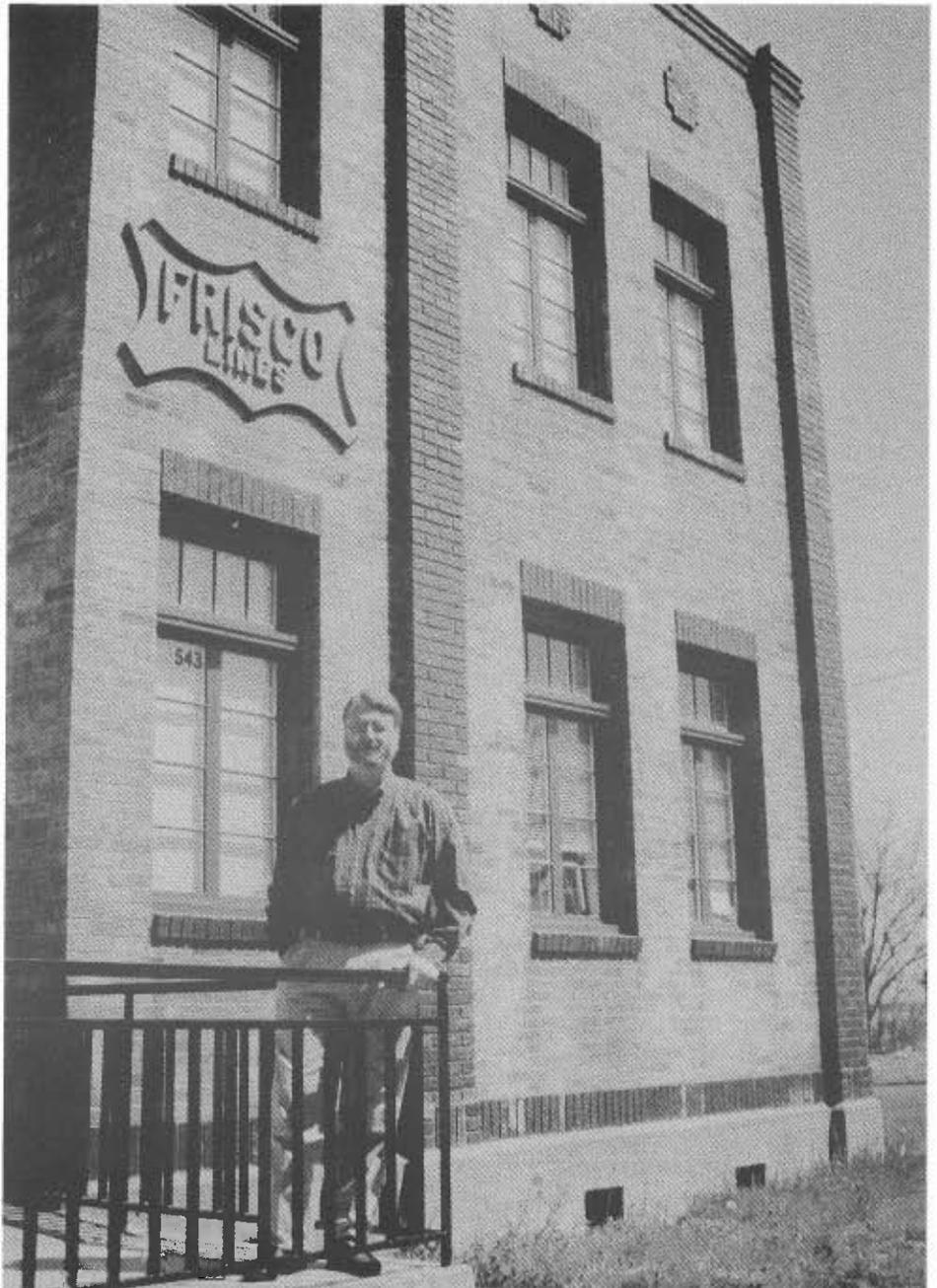
He speaks passionately of a rail system which has passed into the pages of history. He should—his grandfather, father-in-law, both of his wife's grandparents and numerous other family members all worked for the Frisco.

Alan grew up within sight of the Frisco yards in Springfield and within earshot of rumbling locomotives and the incessant clashing of couplers as hundreds of cars were joined for journeys to all points on the compass. Those vivid images never faded, even though a tour in the military and a career in teaching at Ash Grove, Mo. followed Alan's childhood.

By the 1970s, Alan had acquired enough Frisco memorabilia from family and friends to create a pretty close approximation of a train station—in his basement. His hobby was obviously a serious devotion. As he continued to search out new additions to his trove, a series of questions began to burn their way into his daily thoughts—could there be a full-fledged museum devoted to the Frisco? Once established, could it survive? If he built it, would they come?

He began visiting museums around the country, noting how they operated, how their displays were fashioned, their successes and failures. Meanwhile, he drew together a working committee from the community—former railroad employees, model railroaders, collectors and just plain train fans. He infected them with his own enthusiasm, and this group became the board of directors for a dream.

In 1986—five years after Burlington Northern and Frisco merged, essentially



erasing Frisco from the railroad map—Schmitt brought the Frisco back to life. In the detached garage next to his home in Ash Grove, the first and only museum dedicated to the Frisco opened. Alan and his board had created a membership organization called Frisco Folks and

a magazine fashioned after the old Frisco employee magazine, "All Aboard." In its first year, there were but 25 members and, as they say, Alan didn't quit his day job.

Now we all know promoters can talk a good line, but until there is some evidence of their sincerity, something tangible



Opposite: Alan in front of his Springfield, Mo., Frisco Museum. Below: just a glimpse of the Frisco memorabilia within. (Photos by Gerald W. Dupy)

It had become time for Alan and his wife, Sandra, to decide if Alan could quit his day job and devote all his energies to making the museum and the association grow. Sandra, also a teacher at Ash Grove, gave full support to a two-year experiment to see if the dream would continue to grow. They've never looked back.

In 1991, with the garage museum bulging at the seams and a second downtown Ash Grove building filled to the ceiling with Frisco memorabilia, the search was begun for a new, permanent home for the Frisco Museum. The board was determined to find an historically significant, easily accessible, Frisco-

ters. While the number of visitors in Ash Grove averaged under 2,000 a year, Schmitt anticipates over 20,000 in 1994.

And if you believe this is the topping on a sweet story of success, hold onto your hat. By spring of next year the museum will have broken ground on a new, 9,000-square-foot building adjacent to the current museum. It's displays will be fashioned after those of the Smithsonian's Museum of American History, with 50 displays, including life-like dioramas profiling every area of operation on the Frisco, including a mock-up of an old brick engine house. On its mezzanine level, a 2,000-square-foot model railroad layout will be in operation, and an observation deck will overlook Burlington Northern's tracks just below. The museum's current building will be dedicated to general offices, the archives, research space and offices for the magazine.

Dare anyone suggest that this plan for a small museum's future is a bit grandiose, a review of it's first eight years is in order: the museum's supporting membership now numbers over 500, representing 41 states and five foreign countries; the little two-page newsletter, "All Aboard," is now a slick, 20-page magazine crammed full of entertaining and factual information about anything Frisco; the museum's research department is ginning out well-documented reports on queries from far and wide and the museum is being praised in all quarters for its professionalism and its depth of resources.

This "little museum that could" may be the spark in the historic downtown Springfield community which ignites the preservation fire up and down the aging and rumpled old thoroughfare which is lined with elegant 19th century architectural statements too long ignored. Commercial Street is a revitalized turn-of-the-century shopping and entertainment experience just waiting to happen.

Meanwhile, no one doubts Alan Schmitt's prediction for the museum and its membership. He's done what he's set out to do—"We're not in the business of preserving trains," he says. "We're in the business of preserving the Frisco."

Wait 'til the other 25,000 members of the Frisco family hear they have a museum they can call their own. Could be Mr. Schmitt's parking lot will be a tad too small. □

beyond the hot air and blue sky, one's enthusiasm for loaning a cherished reminder of bygone days is less than total. Alan had found it so. But once there was a real museum, however small, doing a real service of keeping the Frisco alive and well for its many generations of employees and die-hard devotees, attitudes began to change—drastically.

"Once our doors were opened in Ash Grove, there was this sense of aiding in saving the Frisco family," Alan recalls. "Information about the Frisco poured in; photos poured in; memorabilia from the Frisco came in from all over the country. In six months, we'd out-grown the garage.

"The museum had started with 1,500 items. In six months, we'd received thousands more. Then the Frisco closed its last shops in Springfield and donated all their files to us—80 filing cabinets full of information and specifications on anything from locomotive design to depot architecture."

built structure that they could afford to acquire. It seemed that their criteria would make the search a long one, but such was not the case.

"We discovered this building, abandoned since 1986, and were able to take possession of it and 30,000 square feet of land in June of '92 on a long-term lease from Burlington Northern, who has been very supportive of our efforts," Alan said.

After a very successful fund raiser and with major donations from the Community Development Block Grant Program, former Frisco presidents, Richard Grayson and Louis Menk, the Community Foundation of Springfield, the Kemper Foundation and scores of others, the Frisco's old centralized traffic control command center reopened on Sept. 25 of last year as the Frisco Museum.

It houses 2,600 items for display (that many more are stored for future display) altogether valued at \$780,000, and 100,000 items are filed in its archives, including diagrams, photos and work ros-