

APPLICATION FOR A HISTORIC SUBJECT MARKER
COLLEGE STATION RAIL ROAD DEPOTS

INTRODUCTION

Historically there are many examples of communities that died, moved or prospered as a result of rail road line locations. College station, Texas is but one such community. The city name, location and history are inextricably woven with that of the railroad.

Brazos County, in which the city of College station is located, was officially created with its current boundaries in 1842. These boundaries are the Brazos and Navasota Rivers on the West and East and the Old Spanish Road (OSR) on the North. At this time freight transportation in the area consisted of steamboat traffic on the Brazos River to a river port at Washington-on-the Brazos some 30 miles away from College Station.¹ An attempt was made to extend a rail line to Washington-on-the-Brazos in the 1840's but the cost was prohibitive. Between 1850 and 1860 the Houston, and Texas Central Railroad (H&TC) extended lines north, by passing Washington-on-the-Brazos with the rail head ending at Millican, Texas in Southern Brazos County in 1860.²

The Civil War in 1861 brought about an end to railroad construction in most of Texas and the rail head remained at Millican, Texas until 1867 when the line was extended to Bryan, Texas just north of the present location of College Station.³

LOCATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL COLLEGE

In 1862 the United States Congress passed the Morrill Land Grant Act to create colleges in the states that would emphasize agricultural and mechanical arts. Since Texas was involved as part of the Confederate States it was not until 1866 that the state of Texas accepted 180,000 acres of federal land for the Land Grant College. Reconstruction further delayed the location and opening of the School and in April of 1871 the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas was officially established. Governor Edmund Davis appointed three commissioners to select a site for the college. Several communities bid for the college. Due to the efforts of Harvey Mitchell, a resident of Bryan, often referred to as the father of Brazos County, and the pledge of additional land and money by local residents, Texas A&M College was located in Brazos County.⁴

Not everyone in Texas was satisfied with the site selected for the College. One person complained that the "lands there about were among the poorest in the state, unfit for agriculture and ... the region was very unhealthy."⁵ Opposition to the location was overcome in large part because of two factors; the central location in the state and the fact that the site was

served by the H&TC rail line. Henry Dethloff in his Centennial History of A&M states that without the rail site it is possible that the A&M College of Texas .would have been located elsewhere.

In October of 1876 Texas A&M College formally opened its doors to 106 students in attendance.⁶ To some degree the College was isolated, being located some five miles from the City of Bryan. The railroad not only served to bring materials, supplies, faculty and students to the College from other parts of the state but also served as a link with Bryan. The H&TC had a north bound train at 12:30 PM and a south bound at 4:00PM and it was possible to take the train to Bryan and return to the College the same day. Travel in the other direction by train obviously took a full day.⁷ A train ticket in the Archives of Texas A&M University, which is ink stamp dated September 5, 1888, indicates that the fare to Bryan from College Station was 15 cents.

In 1900 the International and Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) began service to Bryan and College Station.⁸ Thus, The A&M College of Texas was served by two railroads. Later these rail lines became part of the Southern Pacific (H&TC) and Missouri Pacific (I&GN) and both lines still serve the area to this day.

FIRST DEPOT

From 1876 when the College opened it's doors until 1883 there was no formal depot to serve the campus. In 1883 the H&TC built a depot approximately 800 yards from the Old Main building.⁹ The attached photographs (Numbers 1-5) clearly show this depot being used as a passenger station. Photographs number 1 and 4 show other rail road buildings, possibly freight stations located south of this depot. Photograph number 6, shows this same depot in a new location. This photograph (16) is from the 1910 student year book, The Longhorn (page 314). As can be seen in photograph 16 this first depot is now raised on blocks and a brick chimney has been added. Apparently the former depot is being used as a residence. The note "Fine Business" appears in the Longhorn below the picture but there is no other information provided. It is known that faculty housing on the college campus was in short supply during this time period and it is quite likely that the depot was moved for this purpose. The houses in the background in photograph #6 are obviously campus housing and the center house appears to be either campus house number 410 or 405, both located on Throckmorton street on a 1914 campus map in the Texas A&M Archives. These homes were moved from the campus and are now located at 1700 Laura Lane and 3231 East Hwy. 6 in College Station. It is quite possible that this home is house number 416, also located on Throckmorton street. The outline of the house shown on the 1914 map appears to be similar to that of this house in shape and size.

OTHER DEPOTS

In 1900 the I&GN extended their rail line to College station and apparently constructed a much larger depot East of the H&TC depot. (See photograph # 7) This depot obviously provided freight storage as well as a passenger waiting area. The style of this depot is quite similar to many constructed in the United States during the late 1800's and early 1900's. This depot continued to exist until 1966 when it was razed to allow for the expansion of the state Highway 2154 (Wellborn Road). The attached story and photograph from the Texas Aggie shows the station being razed.

Apparently sometime around 1900 the H&TC also constructed a new station, possibly to replace the older one shown in photographs 1-6 that had been moved to the campus for housing. Photograph number 8 shows both of these depots. The H&TC is to the left and the I&GN is to the right. The H&TC station was also razed, possibly in the 1950's although an exact date is not known •

SIGNIFICANCE OF DEPOTS TO LOCAL HISTORY

From 1900 until 1966, when the last of the depots was razed, these depots served as a focal point of activity for the campus and the community. For many students attending The A&M College, this depot was their first remembrance and it stood as a symbol for the campus and community. The station even appeared in one Hollywood movie, We've Never Been Licked, which was filmed on the campus in 1942.

On October 19, 1938, when the citizens of the area voted to create the city of College Station, the polling place was the I&GN (Southern Pacific) depot. The vote to incorporate as a city was approved by a vote of 217 to 39.¹⁰ The City of College Station used a pen and ink line drawing of this depot by local artist James Gaston as a symbol for the city on stationary and other items •.

For many years, dignitaries visiting the campus came by train. On October 23, 1909, William Howard Taft addressed the student body and local residents from the back of a train.¹¹ On May 5, 1937, Franklin Delano Roosevelt came through the station for a half day visit to the campus and was honored by a review by the Corps of Cadets.¹²

It is unfortunate that both I&GN and H&TC depots were razed. To date, no architectural plans for either station have been located. The Southern Pacific and the Missouri Pacific railroads were unable to locate any plans in their archives. It was suggested by Southern Pacific officials that the College Station depots may have been "generic" stations, perhaps "prefabs" which were shipped to and assembled on the site, a practice quite common in the early 1900's.¹³

The last passenger service to College Station to use these depots was on June 7, 1959 when the OWL made its last run.¹⁴ In 1988 AMTRACK resumed limited passenger service to College

Station. The city of College Station constructed a temporary depot about one half mile South of the location of the old depots.¹⁵

In later years the rail road, which still runs through the campus, and served the campus and community for the first 90 years of its history, had become something of an impediment to campus development. The rail line now bisects the East and West parts of the campus. Several efforts have been made to move or lower the rail line through the campus. In December of 1990 the voters of College station rejected a \$3,000,000 bond proposal to pay for part of the cost of lowering the rail road tracks.

The rail line stands as a reminder of the past history of both the College and the city. Without the rail road it is likely that The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas would have been located elsewhere in the state and the history of Brazos County would be quite different.

- Notes -

1. Kate Efnor, "Historical Sketch of Brazos County, "American Sketch Book 4 (1879), p. 237.

2. Henry C. Dethloff, A Centennial History of Texas A&M University, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 1975).

3. Brazos County Heritage and History Council, Brazos County History, Rich Past-Bright Future, (Bryan, Texas, 1986).
p. 419-420.

4. Deborah Lynn Balliew, College station, Texas 1938-1988, (College station, Texas, Intaglio Press, 1.988) p. 11.

5. Balliew, p.12.

6. Balliew, p.12

7. D.B. Cofer, ed., Early History of Texas A&M College Through Letters and Papers, College Station, Texas: Association of Former Students, 1952.

B. July 4, 1900 A&M Board of Directors granted I&GN a right of way through the Campus. Board Minutes, The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, Archives, TAMU.

9. Galveston Daily News, July 19, 1883, p.1 notes that the H&TC rail road is building a depot in College Station, Texas.

10. Balliew, p.22

11. Copy of Taft's remarks found in the microfilm of the W.H. Taft Papers, Evans Library.

12. Texas Aggie, August, 1966, p.5 and date on photograph in Archives, TAMU.

13. Letter to City of College station from Southern Pacific, 1982.

14. Bryan Eagle, 6-4-58 and Austin American statesman, 6-19-58. pages unknown. Advertisements in both newspapers, TAMU Archives Collection.

15. The Eagle, 11-15-88, p.1