

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER
Palestine, Texas

HISTORY AND RESTORATION

This is the saga of the Neches depot, built in about 1906.

It served a long and useful life as the point of departure and arrival for thousands of East Texans, brought their supplies, necessities and luxuries to them: And finally wound up in a farmer's field as a hay barn. It originally served the International and Great Northern Ry, subsequently to become the Missouri-Pacific.

A group of Palestine folks, called the Diamond Stack Preservation Society, with an interest in local history and particularly in railroading, bought the dilapidated old building, and while pondering its ultimate fate, moved it to the Anderson County fairgrounds. There it languished for many months, becoming a haven for several swarms of bees.

Finally, in 1980, through the cooperation of the Texas Highway Department, county and local law officials, the depot began its precarious move from the fairgrounds to its present (and hopefully last) site. During the move, folks lined the streets to observe this ancient structure ponderously negotiating corners and hills; offering advice, and even forming "the depot watcher's society".

The Palestine Chamber of Commerce, utilizing funds from the motel-hotel occupancy tax, undertook the restoration process. An ad-hoc committee was formed to make the myriad decisions such a project required. Blake Starkey of the Chamber staff coordinated the committee, which consisted of Maurice Rosson, Ralph Irvine, Tucker Royall, Al Skelton, C. D. Terry and Oliver McReynolds.

Restoration carpentry was directed to Douglas Kupper, in cooperation with Fred Heaton, Jr., the project architect.

The large room where visitors enter was originally the waiting room for passengers. Tickets were purchased through the pass-thru window and shelf. In winter, a round pot-bellied coal burning stove kept the room cozy.

You will observe the original flue for the stovepipe, and the pass-thru flue that allowed a second stove to be placed in the middle room, sharing the same pipe and chimney. Benches and cuspidors were standard equipment, in addition to the coal scuttle.

The middle room was the office of the depot agent or station master. It contained an overburdened desk, an iron safe, and a shelf in the bay window where the ubiquitous Western Union telegraph key and sounder were situated. From this position, the depot agent could see down the track in both directions, and be prepared to pass signals to the approaching trains, and also to notify the next station down the line of the presence of trains. It was common practice for railroad telegraphers to bend and mount a "Prince Albert" tobacco tin on the sounding instrument, so the agent could be sure to hear incoming signals.

The depot agent was company bookkeeper, signal controller, communications expert, sold tickets and hustled freight and baggage in his spare time.

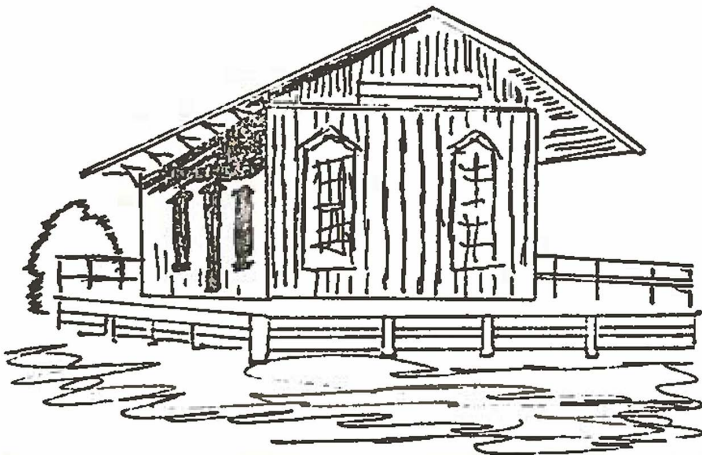
The third room in the structure was the freight room, and access to it was through double doors onto the outside platform.

In reconstructing the building, the committee tried very hard to maintain the integrity of design, compatible with modern materials and techniques. Obviously the lighting fixtures, the restrooms and the central heat and cooling are departures from the original, compromised for the sake of modern comfort and convenience. Surely the committee may be forgiven for not erecting outside "necessarys to preserve the genre.

Vickie (Mrs. Alex) Nemer III, was interior coordinator.

The exterior platform was donated by the Palestine Noon Kiwanis Club. Al Reynolds donated the mail cart. Benches were a gift of the Evening Business and Professional Woman's Club. Chairs were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Walker.

Published by the Palestine Chamber of Commerce
Palestine, Texas



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