

DOWN AT THE DEPOT* - A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE
by W. M. "Mike" Adams

According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language the definition of a depot is: "n - A railroad station." Station then is defined as: "n - A transportation depot." Webster's New School and Office Dictionary and Atlas defines depot as: "A railway station." According to this same authority a station is: "A place on a railway for the discharge of passengers or goods." Now let us look at Webster's Collegiate. Here we find depot, still a noun, as: "A railroad station." Conversely a station is: "A regular stopping place in a railroad route." The collegiate version goes on to give us as a synonym, "depot", and explains that the use of depot as a synonym for a railroad station is contrary to best usage. The word "depot" is from the French while station is of English origin and Webster, when the railways were being first built, urged against the use of the word "depot", preferring the English "station". Why then do the English refer to our "roundhouse" as a "locomotive depot" and our freight house as a "goods depot"? So much for what the scholars have to say about it - what about the railroads themselves?

The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in their 1919 operating rule book defines station as: "A place designated on the timetable by name, at which a train may stop for traffic; or to enter or leave the main track; or from which fixed signals are operated." The Rock Island in their 1930 rule book used the same definition. The Uniform Code of Operating Rules, effective June 2, 1968 and which is used by all our Arkansas rail-

roads with few exceptions, defines station as: "A place designated on the timetable by name." Obviously, on the railroad you do not have to have a depot to be or have a station. Conversely any depot, at least in Arkansas and on the Missouri Pacific, will also be, within the framework of the operating rules and dictionary usage, a station. I fear, however, that the definition of station as used in the Uniform Code of Operating Rules, circa 1968, is becoming more and more true as our "depots" are being abandoned, sold and dismantled with increasing relish. In fact, on the Missouri Pacific, we already have in daily service throughout Arkansas what I suppose we could loosely call mobile depots! Using depot only in the sense of a place where railroad business is transacted.

My father was working in the depot/station of the Missouri Pacific, lately the Iron Mountain, in the White River town of Branson, Missouri when I was born. Branson was an important stop. All trains took coal and water here and being a budding resort on the newly formed Lake Taneycomo, Branson did a good passenger business. There was a large frame combination depot building there. I have no early day memories of Branson as we moved from there to Batesville, Arkansas when I was still quite small. I do remember the station at Batesville. Actually there were two, freight and passenger. The passenger depot was a brick affair and the freight house across the yard was frame with long adjoining platforms. The main line of the White River division coming down the east bank of its namesake ri-

*with apologies to Edwin P. Alexander and Alvin F. Harlow

ver turned left about a half mile north of the depot and headed up Polk Bayou and over Sulphur Rock hill. The station was reached by a stub track. Southbound passenger trains headed down by the depot and when their business was concluded backed up and then headed east. Northbound trains pulled by and backed into the depot accompanied by much shrill whistling by the conductor officiating at the back-up hose. Among my earliest memories is of sitting in the lap of Mr. Walter O'Dell, the telegraph operator, while he pounded out messages on his clicking instruments.

In 1923 my father was appointed to a position in the Trainmaster's office at Cotter, Arkansas and that June we moved to the Baxter County town. Now here was an imposing station, two stories high with a connecting freight house. Upstairs was to be found the office of the train dispatchers and the trainmaster. Also upstairs were register rooms, record rooms and a conference room. Train time at Cotter was quite an event. Both passenger trains stopped 20 minutes for lunch and an exchange of crews and engines. Naturally the good wives drove the old Model T after the breadwinners and if the kids were not in school they came along. Since about three-fourths of the people in Cotter worked for the railroad they had pass privileges, and I can testify they made liberal use of them. You had to beat around with a stick on the two trains to find a revenue passenger but the coaches were full every day. The depot was located in the river bottom on the south slope of a steep hill. Southward the track ran right down the river bank for some 95 miles to Batesville. There was little romance in the departure of a south train - the track was away from town and little effort was required to start the usual three cars and build up to the 35 or so miles per hour necessary to maintain sched-

ule. Northbound trains constituted another story. About 100 yards north of the depot the track started climbing on a steady 1% grade which continued for nearly 11 miles, finally topping the summit of the water shed at Yellville Station. Curving to the right the main line skirted the business district of Cotter and crossed White River on a massive turn-span bridge. A scant half-mile north of the bridge was a tunnel, 800 yards long bored through a rock ridge. Even the diminutive three car local called for some spectacular fireworks in leaving town and the good merchants and town-folks were dusted with coal soot and cinders.

Around the first of September, 1927, the trainmaster, dispatchers and my father were transferred to Aurora, Missouri. Aurora was on the southwest Missouri highlands, some 106 miles northwest of Cotter. It had been headquarters of the White River division since the line was opened about 1906 and the superintendent and his staff were ensconced on the second floor of the Bank of Aurora, sharing these premises with a dentist, a hairdresser and O'Kelly's Barber Shop. The depot at Aurora was three blocks eastward on Clive Street and was a sturdy brick building with two large waiting rooms, baggage room and long "hip" shelters on either side. A frame freight house with necessary platforms was located a block further east. Fifty yards north and three blocks west was the Frisco Station. It too was a brick edifice and being on the main line from St. Louis to Texas was host to a fine fleet of passenger trains headed up by the "Texas Special" and the "Bluebonnet". With our one local passenger each way we Missouri Pacific folks rather hung our heads when confronted by the multitude operated by the Frisco Line. To further glorify the Frisco the famous 1500 class Mountain type engines were new and being used on all the bet-

ter trains. Blue-green boiler jackets, chrome plated rods and cylinder heads, gold lettering off-set with Grecian striping - carefully polished and beautifully maintained, they were the wonder of the Frisco.

In 1932 the bubble burst and the White River division was consolidated with the Joplin division and the division staff, except for the trainmaster and roadmaster, was abolished. The offices in the Bank of Aurora were vacated and the trainmaster and roadmaster were fixed up offices in the former "ladies" waiting room at the depot. My father had to exercise his seniority and finally located at Carthage, Missouri at the north end of the division and some 39 miles from Aurora. Here the White River division connected with the Joplin division for the trip northward to Kansas City. Carthage had a truly beautiful station. Constructed in 1912 of white "Carthage" marble and topped with a rich red tile roof, it was located in a wye between the main track of the White River division on the east and the Joplin division on the west. The platforms were red brick and the grounds, interspersed with flower beds and unique dwarf mulberry trees, were scrupulously maintained by a section man especially assigned to that duty. What a far cry from this day! South of the depot and still within the embrace of the wye was a large two story hotel and restaurant. The first night I spent at Carthage was in this hotel. Being an important junction the rail traffic was much heavier than at Aurora, there being about ten passenger trains daily on the Missouri Pacific. Carthage was also located on a branch line of the Frisco from Monett, Missouri to Wichita, Kansas and they had a two car local pulled by a neat 4-4-0. Decorated and maintained in the same spirit as the 1500's, these spritely little locomotives were, alas, operated late at night so little was

seen of them. The Missouri Pacific freight house was a large affair with multiple platforms and sheds some half-mile south of the passenger station. One of my first "positions" on the railroad was working as station helper at Carthage.

When the White River dispatchers were pulled off, the first trick man, T. S. Potter, Sr., bid in the agency at Cricket, Arkansas. Cricket was located high in the Ozark Mountains about three miles south of the Missouri line. The railroad approached from the south on a long 1% grade the last mile of which was through a ruler straight tunnel ending about 250 yards southeast of the depot. The business district of Cricket, consisting of a general "mercantile" store owned and operated by a hillbilly named Leatherman, was behind the depot and the Leatherman home was just across main street from the store. There were two or three other houses that might or might not have been in the city limits of Cricket located on a winding dirt road south of the depot leading down to Cricket Creek. The Potter family, out of necessity, moved into the "colored" waiting room of the depot. Ted had two sons about my age, we had gone to school together at Cotter and Aurora and were firm friends. Since we could, and did, secure passes we spent many school holidays visiting each other. Cricket was a fascinating place to one enamoured of railroads. The four daily redball freights were always double-headed and one of them coming up the hill out of Cricket Tunnel was a thundering, earth-shaking, thoroughly satisfying event. The local passenger trains stopped long enough to discharge a few sacks of mail and empty cream cans and take on loaded cream cans and the little mail gleaned from the Boone County hills. Needless to say, Mr. Potter did not have to load or unload any mail or baggage. We lads took care of that. One day

some officious state employee visited Cricket and took exception to the fact that the Missouri Pacific was not maintaining a "colored" salting room - it was full of Potters. Luckily, I suppose, for the Missouri Pacific and certainly for Ted and his family, there was a good foreman's bunk car on hand at Nevada, Missouri not being used. This car was immediately dispatched to Cricket and set out on a spur track across from and east of the depot. This was even more satisfying than sleeping in the depot. Just one track separated the bunk car from the main line and when No. 260 with the 6445 leading the 1229 came by about 2:00 A.M., you were well aware of it. Cricket was similar to all other frame depots on the Missouri Pacific. They were painted a rich yellow with brown trim. The paint mixed with sand to discourage indiscriminate application of hillmen's Barlows. On each end hung a sturdy ladder and at each corner a bright red fire barrel with cone shaped buckets. Common to each a bay window with the tall train order signal beckoning the approaching trains.

Another depot on the White River division with which I was intimately acquainted was the affair located at the Marion County town of Summit but called, from the nearby county seat, Yellville. Yellville town was about two miles south and a couple of hundred feet lower than Summit. According to local legend the good people of Yellville paid the Iron Mountain a handsome sum to name the station after their town. I cannot subscribe to the accuracy of this but from the looks of Summit, they would have lost out bidding with even Cricket in civic matters. My father learned his railroading here at the knee of the venerable agent George W. McVey, Sr. There are McVeys scattered the length and breadth of the Missouri Pacific today, all weaned on the Morse code high on the side of Lee's Mountain.

Other depot/stations well remembered from a long departed youth. Union Depot at Memphis with the slick marble steps in front. Kansas City Union Depot with the Missouri Pacific and Santa Fe vying for honors in most trains operated. St. Louis Union Station with trains departing for either coast as well as the Gulf, plus the famed service offered to Mexico by the Missouri Pacific. Both of these stations a delight to the train watcher from the convenient viaducts spanning the throats. Washington Union Station during the height of World War II and the staggering number of trains operated by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Grand Central in New York - just to say I had been there. From my vantage point I could neither see or hear a train. Pennsylvania Station in Pittsburg, constant streams of Tuscan red and gold, K-4's and soft coal smoke, grinding cinders in your teeth. Harrisburg on the Pennsylvania - first glimpses of the famed GG-1 electrics. Princess Landing Stage on the Mersey at Liverpool, entrain to Tarporley and the "reple-depple". Waterloo, Paddington and Euston in London Town. Busy, yet with orderly queues of stolid British folk, more soft coal smoke and the incessant "peep peep" of the shrill English whistles. SCNF at Cherbourg and a pleasant reunion with two old friends from the White River division, Ted Potter, Jr., dispatching as usual with the 729th Railway Operating Battalion, and George W. McVey, Jr., car distributor for the Second Railway Grand Division. Gare du Nord and Gare de Lyon in Paris, the city of light but pitch dark with the security blackout. Both veritable madhouses at train time. Marseille, more Gallic confusion. Cannes by the beautiful Mediterranean - palm trees and sandy beaches, littered with barbed wire, landing craft obstacles and duds. Leipzig, reduced to rubble by the 8th Air Force. Frankfurt - another heap of



Passenger service on the White River Division. In 1943 the Southern Scenic rolled into Carthage, Missouri behind 4-6-2 No. 6420. (Mike Adams photo)
In 1958 the train was down to this Geep and two cars at Yellville (Summit), Arkansas. Within two years even this was gone. (Bill Pollard collection)



rubble. Soissons - all aboard for Le Harve, the Channel, the United Kingdom and Arkansas! Dockside at Southhampton and first sight of the unbelievable Queen Mary, troopship supreme. Jersey City terminal of the Pennsylvania, 16 red coaches behind a GG-1, 35 miles to Camp Kilmer and 35 minutes, emptying a 16,000 man division from a troopship in a matter of hours. Bruce-ton, Tennessee on the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis. Nashville and Chattanooga, too, naturally. Atlanta and Augusta on the Southern. Columbia, South Carolina and the "Orange Blossom Special" of the Seaboard with their beautiful Mountain type haulers. Birmingham, Alabama and change from the Seaboard's "Robert E. Lee" to the Frisco's "Sunnyland". Little Rock, Arkansas, but this calls for another story - one in itself. The many trips from Little Rock to and from Carthage, Missouri called for a familiarity with the depot at Newport - dubbed by the railroaders "fishdock". Arrive from Carthage on Train 231. Just as the sun went down see Number 25 "The Texan" round the curve at Diaz at 75 per behind a roaring, flashing Pacific. Number 25 always took water at Newport and you hurried aboard. When the tank lid slammed shut the old engineer "boot - booted" the deep chime whistle and you could feel the tug of the wide open 6600 pushing you against the seat.

In the fall of 1954 I was appointed Assistant Trainmaster on the Missouri Pacific's Arkansas Division with jurisdiction over all and sundry from Little Rock to Texarkana plus many and varied branches. In this job I became intimate with a new group of depot /stations and in another way. Bauxite Junction, Benton, Slocomb, Lonsdale, Hot Springs, Malvern, Donaldson, Arkadelphia, Gum Springs, Gurdon, Prescott, Hope, Nashville, Okolona, Amity, Delight, Glenwood, Norman, Reader, Chidester, Camden, Smackover and El

Dorado. I knew them all but this time I was checking to see that the train times were posted, that the toilets were clean (almost impossible to attain and maintain in the urban centers of Gurdon, Malvern and Hope due to the propensity of the public, not traveling, to use the depot rest rooms). To see that the agent/operator had adequate and proper supplies and equipment - check their handling of train orders and train order signals. To see that freight was properly handled. To see that ticket/clerks were conversant with their duties and presented a creditable appearance. To be familiar with and require attention to all the multitude of things necessary on a well-ordered railroad. Believe me you get a different view of a depot from a Trainmaster's perch than that of a rail struck kid. On to Texas in 1956 and a new flock of depots. The Union Station at Houston with the many private cars. The imposing Texas & Pacific station at Fort Worth and the Spanish-oriented Missouri Pacific station at San Antonio. The new, ultra modern station at Palestine with glass doors that had to be replaced due to the traveling public's desire to walk through them without a formal opening. The ancient Taylor depot built in the 1870's by the International and Great Northern, forefather of the Missouri Pacific in this part of Texas. Mart, Texas and the snug office decorated with locomotive pictures but impossible to stay in on a July afternoon. The fine old Seth Thomas depot clock from Mart now one of my most prized possessions. Maypearl, Italy, East Waco, Marlin, Calvert Junction. Valley Junction in the Brazos River bottoms with the sweetest water in Texas and an everpresent breeze at night. Bryan, College Station and the remains of a large passenger yard joint with the Southern Pacific (T&NO) dedicated to one purpose football and the Texas Aggies. Navasota, just across the street

the Southern Pacific, and down a ways, the Santa Fe. Magnolia in the big thicket. In 1956 this was, even then, a freight only line and except for detouring the Texas Eagle from Spring to Valley Junction on one memorable occasion, the only thing resembling a passenger train was the infrequent troop trains handled.

And don't forget Clovis, New Mexico on the Santa Fe and the super enlarged picture of Hagerman Pass, heritage of the day when the Santa Fe owned the Colorado Midland. San Jon, New Mexico on the Rock Island, closed, deserted and ransacked except for a Coors Beer ashtray and train-order delivery fork - succor to a collector. It is sad to see them go but we cannot stop progress, witness the vacant lots in downtown Little Rock, host to the evil but necessary automobile and former home to countless small businesses. It behooves us to remember these depot/stations for future less fortunate generations.

1972 MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE

Annual dues for 1972 are now due. Regular: \$5.00; Associate: \$3.00. Pay to C. R. Byrd, Treasurer, 12 Flintwood, Little Rock, Ark. 72207

ELECTION OF OFFICERS WILL BE HELD AT JANUARY MEETING

Officers will be elected to serve for the year of 1972 at our January 9 meeting. The following nominations have been made and accepted by the nominees.

- President: Jim Wilson
- Vice President: Charles H. Ost
- Secretary: George R. Holt
- Treasurer: C. R. Byrd
- N.R.H.S. Director: S. Wozencraft
- Club Director (to serve until January 1978): R. W. McGuire, Earl Saunders, Jack See, Jim Wilson

Additional nominations may be made at the meeting.

Technically the Board of Directors elects the officers but the Board will likely permit itself to be railroaded by the popular vote.

Meeting time is Sunday afternoon at 2:00 P.M. in Room 305, Missouri Pacific Union Station.

W. T. CARTER NO. 201 NOW AT SCOTT

Panama Mogul No. 201 has arrived safely at Scott, Arkansas along with two flatcars, a quantity of rail and a turntable. The Grigsby Collection and the Dortch family are working up a fine museum project there. Help is Welcome.