

## Museum News: The Southern Pacific Depot Part 2

by CW (Bill) Smith, curator

Terrell County Memorial Museum

*Last time we looked at the history of the Southern Pacific depot in Sanderson, Texas. Today we conclude...*

Sherman Lee Mayes, whose father was a blacksmith and early auto mechanic, remembered the depot fondly. He related that when they came to Sanderson in the very early 1900s there was no newspaper and the Western Union man would post the latest news on a blackboard outside the depot. That was also the reason so many people came to the depot at train time...they wanted to hear the latest news from the passengers.

Mayes remembered, as a small child, pressing his nose up against the Beanery window and wondering why those people were eating "little green marbles." When he had accumulated a dime pumping his father's blacksmith forge handle, he decided not to squander his hard-earned money on candy at Kerr's. Instead, he went back to the Beanery and had his first meal of English Peas. He thought they might be the best things he had ever put in his mouth!

Meals at the Beanery could be somewhat elaborate, depending on the time of the year and the day of the week, and amazingly inexpensive to modern eyes.

The Sanderson Times for March 18, 1938 published a special menu for the Beanery, which consisted of tomato and rice soup, cottage cheese and pineapple salad, celery hearts, stuffed olives, barbecued spring chicken, green beans, snowflake potatoes, ice cream, tea or coffee, all for the whopping price of 90¢!

Later that year Mrs. L.H. Lemons, manager, (and former Beanery Queen) advertised Sunday chicken dinner for 40¢. It's not clear how big the portions were, but by usual American standards they were probably substantial, even at those prices.

The Beanery saw excitement at times. In 1947, while the managers were at the Princess Theater enjoying a movie, the roundhouse whistle blew, signaling a fire in progress. The managers rushed home to their quarters adjacent to the Beanery in the east end of the depot, to find their apartment and the Beanery engulfed in flames. Local and railroad firefighters quickly subdued the blaze, leaving about \$2000 damage to the equipment and a \$700 loss to the managers' personal affects.

Upon coming home, the manager rushed in and saved the cash register, putting it into his car. Shortly afterwards, a man was caught 'rifling' the car. He was a recent employee of the Beanery and had the contents of the cash register, a ring and a gun on his person. It turned out that he, along with his common law wife, were wanted for murder in California.

Periodic floods also caused a problem for the Beanery. Every few years, when the Sanderson Creek came on a rise, the depot and Beanery would flood, causing down time for the managers and employees while clean up was done. But, the Beanery had gone out of business by the time the big flood of '65 hit.

The depot was a thriving place until 1970 when the Southern Pacific turned passenger operations over to the newly-formed Amtrak. Passenger trains were a losing proposition in the latter years and the railroad had cut their operations down to the minimum. They always made more money with freight operations and were happy to relinquish the task to the government.

Amtrak still makes stops here six times a week. The depot, however, began to decline as reservations and ticket sales were moved online. Passenger facilities were no longer needed, although some 200 passenger connections per year are still made here today.

The ultimate blow to the depot came in 1996 when the Southern Pacific was bought by Union Pacific and the rail terminal was moved to Alpine. The depot was abandoned and all maintenance stopped. A horde of local folks

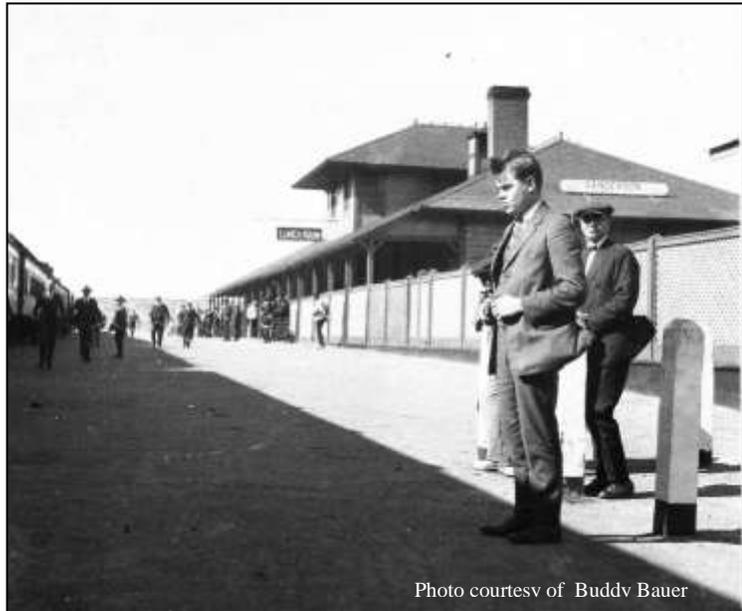


Photo courtesy of Budd Bauer

descended on the depot and began to carry away everything that wasn't nailed down. Even lighting and plumbing fixtures were spirited away.

Ultimately, the Sanderson Depot could not be saved. In October of 2012, almost exactly 130 years from the day of its inauguration, the depot was demolished by Union Pacific Railroad to make way for a pristine vacant lot, ostensibly to satisfy a question of liability. However, at no time was the building sealed to prevent entry, nor were "No Trespassing" signs ever posted. Had it not been left open to the weather it might have been in a more salvageable condition, but after 16 years of vandalism and lack of maintenance, it seemed to most people to be economically unfeasible to move and restore.

Let us hope that our children and grandchildren do not judge us too harshly for allowing this opportunity to save our oldest, most historic building slip through our fingers.