

Terrell County Memorial

May, 2011  
Sanderson, Texas

# Museum News

## Sanderson Depot



Photo courtesy of Buddy Bauer

*This view of the GH&SA depot at Sanderson, Texas, about 1915, is taken from a stereopticon card, the original 3-D viewer of the 19th century.*

The depot of the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Railway was one of the first buildings constructed in Sanderson, Texas, in the fall of 1882, shortly after rail-laying crews got to town. The major portions were constructed at a company sawmill in the redwood forests of northern California and the modules were hauled to Sanderson on flat cars for assembly. Built to Southern Pacific Common Standard Depot #3 plans, it was similar to other

depots located in California, Oregon, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas, but was a unique construction with no exact twin anywhere else in the SP System, the parent of the GH&SA.

Originally about 130' in length, the structure had equal extensions on either side of the central two-storey depot master's residence. The east end contained a lunch room, locally known as the "Beanery". The west end contained a freight warehouse, although a much



Photo courtesy of TC Museum

*View of the depot pre-1910 before the 50' extension was added to the west end. Note the lattice fence on the east end to control the 'stampede' to the lunchroom from arriving passenger trains.*

## Depot

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larger freight house soon was constructed to the east of the depot to handle the massive shipments of wool and

mohair which dominated the Sanderson economy for years.

About 1910 a 50' extension was added



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

*The freight house was built to the east of the depot when wool and mohair shipments began to increase. Many hundreds of thousands of pounds of wool and mohair moved through here in its prime.*



*Photo taken from the front of the depot, showing a passenger train in the the background and a yard switcher in the foreground.. The switcher was permanently stationed at the Sanderson yard to move cars and make up trains.*

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## Depot

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to the west end creating a new passenger ticketing and waiting room area, a baggage handling facility, along with a Railway Express Agency office, a Western Union telegraph office and a bump-out bay window for the station operators to see oncoming trains.

There is no evidence that the original station had a bay window. Operator bay windows were not standard until after 1895 when semaphore signaling was introduced to the SP system.

The original depot was quite drab in color. Standard practice before 1905 was to paint SP properties slate gray with a dark red or green roof. A 1903 photo indicates that our depot was painted in that color scheme.

In the early 1900s the SP sent paint gangs throughout the system to repaint all SP properties with a new color scheme...crème (yellow) walls with brown trim and highlights, and dark green paint for the roof.

Although some depots had sand added to the paint in the lower portion

of the walls to control damage from carts and discourage vandals, the Sanderson depot did not. The photo on the opposite page shows the depot in the new paint scheme.

There is no doubt that the depot in Sanderson was the center of social life in the community for years. The railroad was the only easy way in and out of Sanderson in the early days and two passenger trains a day made scheduled stops. And at every arrival large crowds of people from town wandered down to the depot to watch travelers get off of the train to run to the Beanery ... dining cars were not a part of the Sunset Limited passenger service for many years and hungry passengers had to fend for themselves.

The Beanery was run by at least two companies. From the beginning it was designated a lunch stop. By the turn of the century it was operated by the Brown News Company of Kansas City. They sold magazines, newspapers, books, tobacco products, fruits, nuts



*West end of the depot after the 50' extension was added, ca. 1910. Door at left was to the REA office. Charlie Wilson's Cottage Bar Saloon can be seen to left in background.*

and novelties from newsstands located in train stations. Passengers could also get candy, gum and snacks from “candy butchers” or “news butches,” Brown News employees who walked through the train making sales. Meals were not available on the trains so a stop at the depot lunch room was a necessity if

you wanted a decent meal.

In 1914 the Brown News was absorbed by the Van Noy Interstate Company. Operations continued, but as dining cars were added to the passenger consist the need for depot dining rooms began to decline. Van Noy began to concentrate on railroad hotel operations and eventually became the modern day Host Marriott Corporation.

But back in Sanderson the operation remained unchanged and Van Noy ran the Beanery franchise for many years, under the direction of a long list of local managers.

Many young Sanderson men and women, who were jokingly referred to





*West end of the depot, ca 1909, before the 50' extension was added. The high windows let in light to a freight room, which had a wide door on the north side to receive freight for rail shipment.. The baggage wagons were used to move freight to and from the train. Massive wool and mohair shipments after the big sheep and goat operations were established necessitated the construction of a large freight house to the east of the depot.*

as Beanery Queens, were employed by the Beanery at various times, and it was the place to go for a hot meal or a date with your sweetie.

Some of those early employees were Frank and Shella Weigand, managers, “Little Miss Anita”, Gilbert Lopez, Helen Lemons, Ervin Grigsby (who worked as a ‘hasher’), the Fishers (also managers), Irvin Robbins, Polly Jenkins, Ray Hernandez and many others.

On a darker note, Mary Nell Hinkle and Ray Hernandez of Sanderson recalled that the Beanery had segregated seating for the white, black and Mexican clientele, which lasted up until the Beanery went out of business in the late 50s.

Early photos show a white lattice fence around the east end of the depot, where the Beanery was located. SP depot researcher Harry Bender says the fences were put up for crowd control.



Apparently there was such a stampede for the dining room when the train stopped that people were injured and tempers flared.

But for the most part the Beanery was a very popular place with railroaders, who only had to cross the tracks from the roundhouse or yard to get a hot meal. And it was well patronized by the townsfolk, too.

Sherman Lee Mayes, whose father was a blacksmith and early auto me-



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

*Southern Pacific Sunset Limited passenger train in 1932. The Sunset Limited was the crack passenger service from Los Angeles to New Orleans, beginnings its run in the late 19th century. The name is still used by Amtrak for its passenger service*

chanic, 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



Photo courtesy of Alice Evans Downie

*This is a view of the north side of the depot, taken in 1970 when passenger operations were assumed by Amtrak and the Southern Pacific got out of the passenger business.. These vehicles and many more were owned by employees who still operated the thriving rail terminal at that time.*

movie, the roundhouse whistle blew, signaling a fire in progress. The managers rushed home, having 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 after, 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.

The 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

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

Today, wind and weather, vandals

and souvenir hunters have taken their toll on the building, and it is rapidly deteriorating. After several unsuccessful attempts to save the building, a new, 11th hour attempt is being made. The railroad is willing to give the building to a group that will move it and have it restored, but time is running out. Union Pacific has made it known that the building will be demolished soon unless someone can come up with a feasible plan.

A good start has been made toward that end. A renowned architect has offered to draw up plans of the building, pro bono. A mover has come at his expense and given an estimate for moving the building. A private citizen has offered to donate property on which to move it and other properties are becoming available. The stated goal of this latest group is to move the building and restore it, using money donated by individuals and groups, but not asking for county funds. It is hoped that this plan will be carried out to completion and that we won't lose another precious landmark building from Sanderson's illustrious past.

**The Sanderson depot was demolished in October of 2012. All that remains is a vacant lot.**

*The Terrell County Memorial Museum News* is published monthly from the Terrell County Memorial Museum, Sanderson, Texas, 79848. Issues are available from the Museum, the Terrell County Court House, and local businesses.

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