

MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILWAY DEPOT  
Northeast corner of intersection of  
Natchez St. (State Hwy. 15) and  
Pine St.  
Wisner  
Franklin Parish  
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1270

HABS  
LA  
21-WIS,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
Southeast Region  
Department of the Interior  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILWAY DEPOT

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Location: Northeast corner of the intersection of Natchez Street (La. Hwy. 15) with Pine Street, in Wisner, Franklin Parish, Louisiana.

U.S.G.S. Wisner 7.5' Quadrangle

Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

Northing: 3538976.980

Easting: 627075.514

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The abandoned depot evidences an era, extending from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, when railroads symbolized progress and hope. Whether a railroad came to town or not often meant the difference between future prosperity and mere survival. The depot is significant locally because it included Wisner in the nationwide trend of economic development of rural areas. The style of the building is based on standardized plans used in the northern part of the country, and in its relatively unmodified state, evidences the utility of country rail stations.

Part I. PHYSICAL HISTORY

The Missouri Pacific Railway Depot located in Wisner, Louisiana possesses the architectural characteristics common to many rural rail stations built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rectangular, single story, wood-framed structure dominates a small tract of land once designated as the "Railway Reserve". The one-time present pump house and water tank have been removed. Storage buildings and old rails which fell into disuse have also been removed. The depot stands aligned north-south on the east side of the old rail bed which is now a graveled road. Warehouses, a cotton gin, and an abandoned service station surround the depot grounds. Until recently, the depot was used as a storage building.

The building design is based on standardized plans used by the Great Northern Railway (currently Burlington Northern) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries. The plans for the Great Northern Railway depots generally include a waiting area, which corresponds to Rooms 1 and 2 in this depot. Many times in northern states, the waiting space was separated to segregate men from women, in this case it is likely that the divided waiting area meant to segregate white from black. There is an office, which corresponds to Room No.3 and a storage area which corresponds to Room No.4. "A Company official in 1902 succinctly explained the road's station-design philosophy: 'Depots are constructed to necessary and economical styles. The unnecessary and the extravagant are ignored.'"(Grant, 122). This is most definitely the case for the Missouri Pacific Railway Depot in Wisner, Louisiana.

The exterior of the building is surfaced with extremely utilitarian materials. Cypress siding covers the structure from the ground to a height of approximately 3'. Above the cypress, the building is protected with asbestos siding. The overhanging gabled roof is sheathed with brown asphalt shingles and has decorative molding at the corners of the roof. All of the door and window openings have plain wooden trim and the walls have wooden corner boards.

The northern elevation contains one of the main commercial loading doors leading to the interior storage area. The door is offset to the east to allow for the pocket into which it slides. This pocket door is made of wood and possesses the original track and wheel hardware. Above this door is a five lighted transom which aids in illuminating the interior of the building. A rectangular louvered vent is centered under the gabled end above the pocket door.

As with the northern elevation, the eastern elevation contains a commercial loading door which leads to the interior storage area. This door is identical to the one in the northern elevation including the placement of the transom. The southern half of the eastern elevation contains three two over two double hung windows. There is a singly placed window in the northern portion of this half of the wall. The southern portion contains a paired set.

The southern elevation contains a wooden six-paneled door to the east with a two lighted transom above. All of the original hardware is present. The western portion of this wall contains a two-over-two double hung window. As with the northern elevation, there is a rectangular louvered vent beneath the gabled end.

The western elevation is divided into three parts. The southern portion contains a two-over-two window in the south and a five-paneled wooden door with a two lighted transom above, to the north. The central section of the western elevation is a bay which contains four windows. The south and north facing portions of the bay contain very narrow rectangular windows, the west facing segment of the bay contains two-over-two double hung windows with the remains of metal awnings present. The roof extends from the rafters to cover the bay as well. The northern portion of the west wall contains a commercial loading door identical to the ones found on the northern and eastern elevations of the building. The elevation from the ground of the door openings on this

side of the building suggest that there was once a porch or dock of some kind present, though it must have been very low to the ground.

The interior of the structure is divided into three main sections. The two southern sections, which include Rooms 1, 2, and 3, possess many similarities in form and materials. They all have hardwood flooring that is in a moderate degree of disrepair and no baseboards. The walls are covered with horizontally placed tongue and groove paneling. Quarter round molding is present in the corners. Windows and doors have plain wooden molding, and the ceilings are covered with the same tongue and groove paneling that is present on the walls.

Room No.1 is located in the southwest corner of the building. The southern wall contains a two-over-two double hung window that is offset to the east several inches. The west wall contains a two-over-two double hung window in its southern portion and an inwardly opening five paneled exterior wooden door in the northern portion. The north wall contains an outwardly opening five paneled wooden door in the western portion. This door opens into Room No.3. A one-over-one double hung window is the eastern portion which also opens into Room No.3. The northern portion of the east wall is an open doorway which leads to Room No.2. Centrally located in the eastern wall is a protruding chase for a chimney. There is no evidence remaining as to whether the heating was done with a gas or wood stove. The remainder of the eastern wall is featureless.

Room No.2 is located in the southeast corner of the building. The southern wall contains an exterior, six-paneled door with a transom above. This door is slightly offset to the west. The west wall contains the eastern portion of the chimney chase present in Room No.1. To the north is the open doorway leading to Room No.1. The North wall contains an open doorway which leads to Room No.3. The east wall contains a pair of two-over-two double hung windows. Room No.2 is the only room in the building with a sink and toilet.

Room No.3 makes up the second section of this three sectioned building. The south wall contains a doorway leading to Room No.2 in the eastern portion. Centered in the southern wall is a one-over-one double hung window which opens into Room No.1. West of this is an inwardly swinging door which leads to Room No.1. In the westernmost portion of the south wall is a narrow, vertically placed window which marks the protrusion of the bay on the exterior of the building. The west wall of the building contains paired, two-over-two double hung windows. The westernmost portion of the north wall of Room No.3 contains an identical narrow, vertically placed window to that marks the bay on the southern wall. There is a centrally located chimney chase identical to those in Rooms 1 and 2. The eastern portion of the northern wall contains an open doorway which leads to Room No.4. The eastern wall contains a single, centrally located, two-over-two double hung window.

Room No.4 makes up the third section of the building. Structural elements are exposed throughout. The floors are made of rough pine. The southern wall contains a doorway in its eastern portion leading to Room No.3. There is a centrally located brick chimney that is the northern exposed portion of the chimney chase in Room No.3. The western wall contains a centrally located commercial loading door with the original hardware exposed. There is a four-paned transom above. The north wall contains a commercial loading door offset to the east. All original hardware is exposed and there is a transom above. The east wall contains a centrally located commercial loading door identical to those found in other walls of the room. Rafters are exposed to show utility connections. There is loft space extending from the southern portion of Room No.4 over the ceilings of Rooms 1, 2, and 3.

Part II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Economic development and a link to the outside world were the two main notions rural people associated with the railway at the end of the nineteenth century. Poor roads and the lack of navigable waterways had kept many small farmers, particularly in the ante-bellum south, from reaching their full economic potential. This was especially the case in Louisiana where vast tracts of timber remained uncut and crops were primarily produced for local use. After the Civil War, however, the railroad made its way through the Louisiana countryside. "Between about 1880 and 1910, some five thousand miles of mainline track were laid, opening sparsely populated areas to settlement" (Fricker, 244). Small communities now had hope that if the railway came to their town, they would have economic prosperity and not just merely survival. This was likely the case for the present town of Wisner, Franklin Parish, Louisiana.

The area embracing the railway at Wisner was first settled in about 1830 by a man named William Blunt. He purchased roughly 3,900 acres which became known as the Hope Estate Plantation. The land in time passed to heirs residing in Maryland who controlled the property via a local business manager. Unfortunately for Blunts' descendants, mismanagement resulted in the property's acquisition in 1876 by a New Orleans creditor. The Hope Estate Plantation eventually became known as Bryan City after it was sold at sheriff's sale in 1877 to a Mr. Bryan.

In 1890, Bryan sold several tracts of land encompassing about five acres to the Natchez and Northwestern Railroad. This company had been in operation since 1881 and eventually merged in 1889 with the New Orleans and Fort Scott Railway to form the New Orleans and Northwestern Railway. The documents related to the merger specifically noted that a depot was to be constructed in Bryan City.

Railroad depots, almost as much as the locomotives themselves, represented progress. The depot was a gateway to the outside world, and curiosity about those from afar drew small town residents. Not only could business be done at the depot, but company agents communicating in Morse code could get news from other towns. This made the depot the focus of much attention in small rural hamlets.

Shortly after Bryan sold that small bit of land to the railroad, Edward Wisner purchased the remaining acreage. The town changed its name from Bryan City to Wisner at about the same time that the Railway built its first depot and began service to the area. The initial building was little more than a shed, and in time it became apparent that a more permanent structure was required to meet the demands of increased economic activity. The existing depot was built in approximately 1895.

The depot at Wisner was the central feature of a group of structures meant to service the railway and its passengers. A large water tank of California redwood was built on the east side of the tracks. A pump house contained a coal fired boiler which powered a well pump. This pump then filled the tank, which in turn supplied water for steam locomotives. Other small utility buildings were present as well.

The size of Wisner increased as it became a center for commercial activity. Businesses sprung up near the depot to make it a hub of the community. Stores in the vicinity flourished and the town soon had its own post office. Mr. Gilbert, who had acquired a half interest in the surrounding plantation land, built a permanent, steam powered cotton gin near the depot.

In 1910 the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railway acquired the assets of the New Orleans and Northwestern Railway, including the depot. Within seven years the railroad was acquired by the Missouri Pacific Railway Corporation. The property remained with the Missouri Pacific Railway for many years. It was remodeled only one time when in 1945, hardwood flooring was installed in Rooms 1, 2, and 3.

As America's highways improved over the years, use of rail systems fell out of favor. By the early 1960's, the depot in Wisner fell into disuse and was eventually sold. The plot of property and associated building were sold to a Mr. Beach in 1970. From then until recently, the depot building was used by a private business for storage.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Franklin Parish Library, "History of Wisner: Interview with Mr. Homer Foster and Mr. Bill Sheffield, June 6, 1972."

Fricker, Jonathan. "The Coming of Mechanization," in Louisiana Buildings: 1720-1940. Jessie Poesch and Barbara SoRelle Bacot, eds. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.

Grant, H. Roger and Charles W. Bohi. The Country Railroad Station in America. South Dakota: The Center for Western Studies, 1988.

Meeks, Carroll L. V. The Railroad Station: An Architectural History. New York: Dover Publications, 1995.

Scott, Mrs. Rupert R. "Wisner, Hope Estate Inseparable," Franklin Sun (Winnsboro, LA.), Aug. 16, 1956.

Sheffield, Bill. "Mysteries of This Old House," (locally published) n.d.

Wisner High School F.H. A., "History of Wisner: Bicentennial Project," 1976.

"Wisner Once Resembled 'Wild West'" Franklin Sun (Winnsboro, LA.), Sept. 2, 1992.

Interview with Mike Beach (former Depot owner) on August 12, 1997, Wisner, LA.

Interview with Faye Calhoun (local historian) on August 13, 1997, Wisner, LA.

Documents from the Franklin Parish Clerk of Courts:

Charter for Natchez & Northwestern RR, COB I/468, 1882.

Sale from C.A. Bryan to Natchez & Northwestern RR, COB J/52, 1884.

Agreement from C.A. Bryan to Natchez & Northwestern RR, COB L/223, 1890.

Sale from C.A. Bryan to Natchez & Northwestern RR, COB L/220, 1890.

Right of Way from C.A. Bryan to Natchez & Northwester RR, COB L/300, 1890.

Cash Deed from C.A. Bryan to Edw. Wisner, COB M/40, 1892.

Deed from New Orleans & Fort Scott RR to St. Louis, Iron Mtn. RR, COB X/368, 1910.

St. Louis, Iron Mtn. & S. RR to Missouri Pacific RR, COB 3/1, 1917.

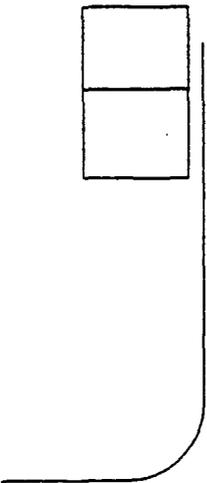
“Plat Showing Depot Grounds of the New Orleans & Northwestern Ry. at Bryan City, La., Sec. 33, T12 R8”, COB L/221, 1890.

“Original Town of Wisner Plat,” recorded July 13, 1902.

Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

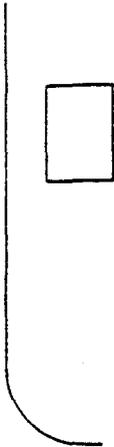
This project is a mitigative recording effort required by a Memorandum of Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Louisiana Department of Transportation (LDOT). Mr. Vincent Pizzolato of LDOT tasked Woodward-Clyde Consultants with the completion of the appropriate documentation. Mark Killan served as project manager. Ernest Eastley (Historian), collected much of the historical information in August of 1997, and Sally Kistler (Senior Staff Scientist) was enlisted as project coordinator and report author. The documentation was completed in December of 1997.

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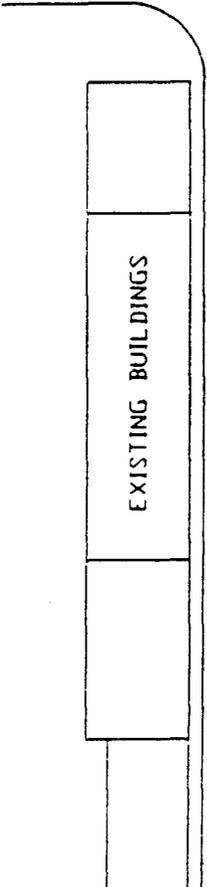


PINE ST.

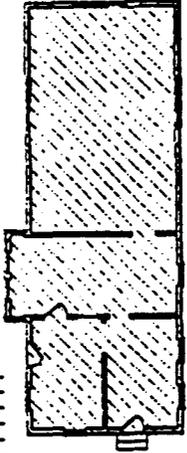
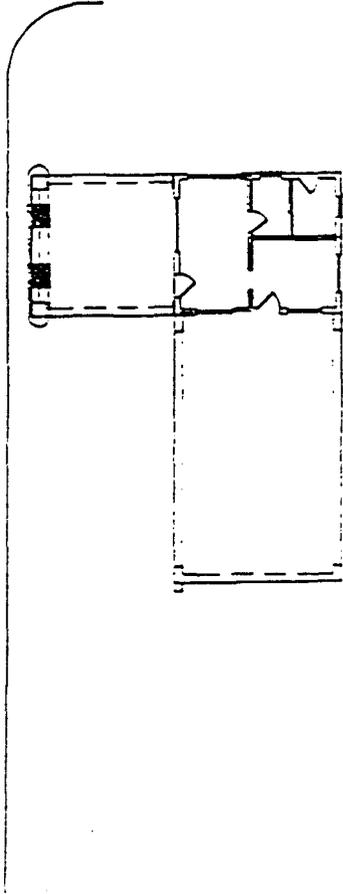
HWY. 15 (NORTH TO WINNSBORO)



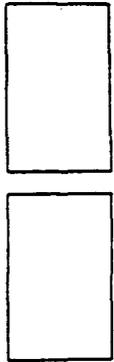
HWY. 15 (SOUTH TO SICILY ISLAND)



HWY. 15

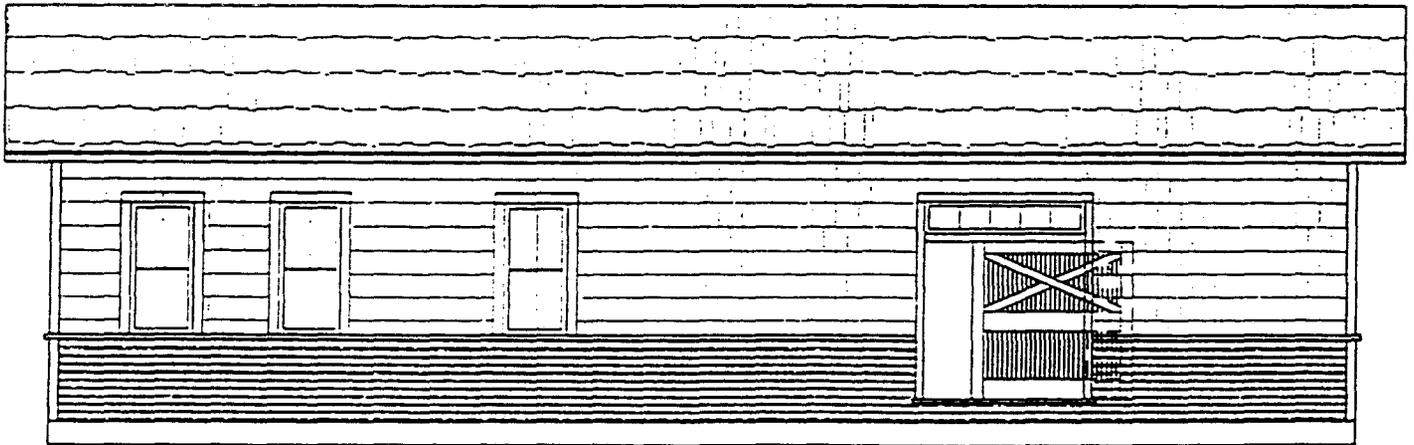


EXISTING BUILDINGS

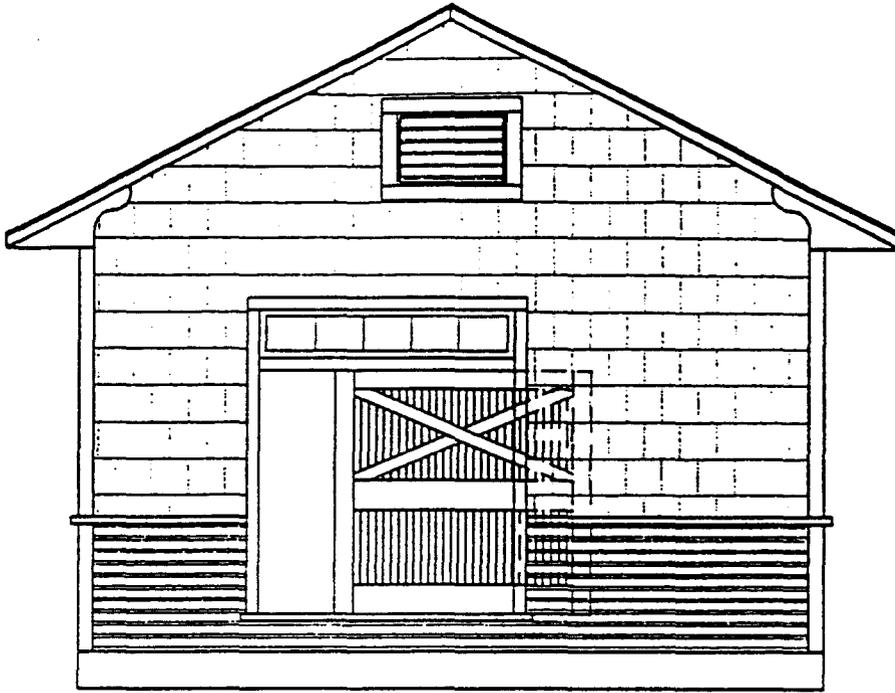




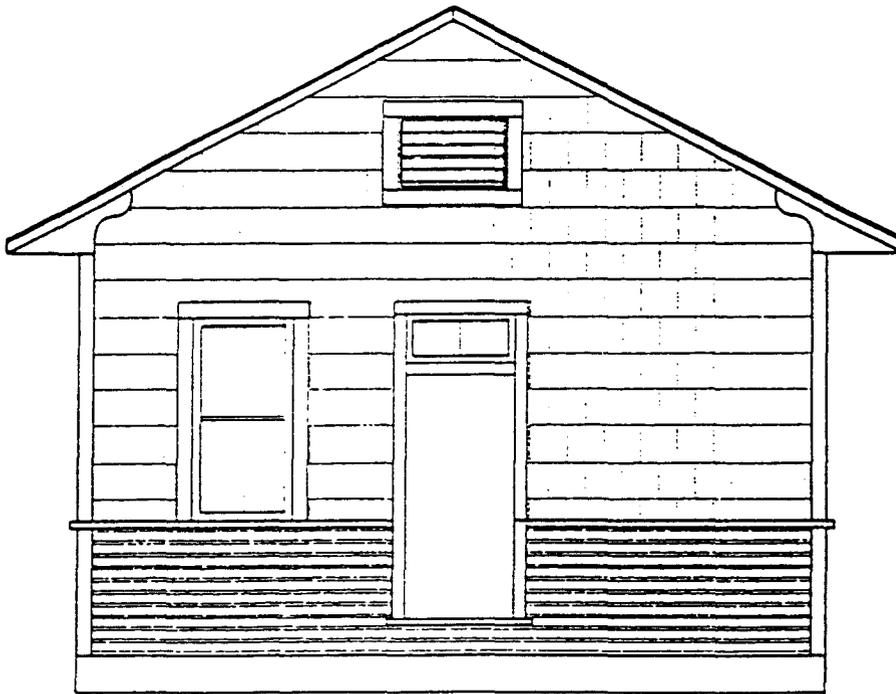
**WESTERN ELEVATION**



**EASTERN ELEVATION**



NORTHERN ELEVATION



SOUTHERN ELEVATION