



History of the Le Flore Depot

The Oklahoma Railway Museum Rescues and Restores a Historic Frisco Railway Station

A small frame structure that once served as the railroad depot in Le Flore, Oklahoma, has been moved to Oklahoma City. Le Flore is a small community located near the western edge of Le Flore County. The county itself is situated in far eastern Oklahoma adjacent to the Arkansas boarder. Before the railroad arrived and years before Oklahoma Statehood, Le Flore existed as a dispersed rural settlement in the Choctaw Nation. Both town and county were named after a prominent Choctaw family.

From "Early Railroads of Southeast Oklahoma" by Eric Standridge, "In 1882, the Fort Smith and Southern Railway acquired rights from Congress to construct its road between Ft. Smith [Arkansas] and the Red River north of Paris, Texas." From the Oklahoma Historical Society, "In 1886–87 the Fort Smith and Southern Railway, soon purchased by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway, laid tracks through the area, erecting a small station at Leflore." This portion of the rail system was known as the Central Division, Arthur Subdivision.

The original depot was constructed in 1887 at milepost 470.6 by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway (SLSF), known as the "Frisco" railroad. The new railroad line spurred community growth, and it was utilized to transport local products: minerals, timber, agricultural products and cattle. In 1907, a flood washed away the original station building. It was replaced in 1908 by the 20-foot x 36-foot depot now located at the Oklahoma Railway Museum.

Over the years rail traffic declined as new roads and highways were built. Eventually, the decision was made to end rail service and remove the tracks. The Le Flore depot was finally abandoned in 1980. Soon after, the building was purchased from the Frisco by Hugh Kennedy who moved it about 100 feet back from the right-of-way. The Oklahoma List indicates it was used as a "farm storage building, located off Line Street next to the former SLSF right-of-way."

From the ORM, "The depot then passed down in the family to Herman Ragland. After Herman's death the land on which the depot sat was to be sold. The family approached the Oklahoma Railway Museum (ORM) to find a home for the depot. The ORM Board discussed using the depot as an entrance building for our planned expansion."

A visit was made by ORM volunteers to determine the condition of the depot. (See the depot photograph in Le Flore.) From a posting at the Quannah Route, “The depot is in need of extensive restoration. Fortunately, the roof has been covered with corrugated sheet metal which will in the short-term help preserve the structure.” In spite of the poor condition and the need to move the building half-way across Oklahoma, the ORM Board voted to accept the depot as a donation. Consequently, a contract was written and signed by the owners, Jerry Ragland, Janet Riley and Susan Heflin, and the Oklahoma Railway Museum President, Eric Dilbeck. (June 23, 2017)

During the remainder of 2017, the structure was prepared for transport by ORM volunteers. From an article in the January 2018 issue of the Museum newsletter, *The Dispatcher*, written by Drake Rice, “The moving of the depot to the Museum grounds has been a real challenge. There have been a number of issues to overcome to allow the depot to be moved. The roof had to be removed along with the bay window, so the depot would not be over height or width. Once completed the mover was ready, but the Department of Public Safety required a structural engineer look it over and issue a report. A work list was created which including wrapping the depot and closing up the bay window opening.”

Meanwhile, a foundation for the building was constructed on the Museum grounds. Finally, with a law enforcement escort, the Le Flore Depot was transported to the Museum in January of 2018. Once in place, the depot was fastened to the foundation and squared up. Then the real work of restoration began. (See the photographs of restoration progress.)

New roof trusses were ordered and installed. The building roof was then closed and green-colored shingles were added. As the structure slowly dried out from the heavy rains, much of the exterior siding was deemed too far gone to salvage. The exterior walls were wrapped with insulation and new siding was installed. ORM volunteers repaired the doors, however new custom-made windows had to be purchased. Preparation is underway for painting the exterior of the depot.

Once the exterior is complete, work will begin on the interior—including electric and plumbing services. The final stages of refurbishment will include Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant entrance ramps, decks and rails—as well as landscaping.

Steven Kamm, June 2019