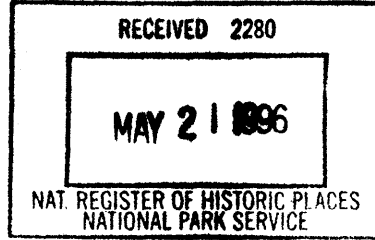


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Fairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House

other names/site number NeHBS #JF04-047

2. Location

street & number south side of 2nd Street between I and J streets not for publication [N/A]

city or town Fairbury vicinity [N/A]

state Nebraska code NE county Jefferson code 095 zip code 68352

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [X] statewide [] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Lawrence Sammel
Signature of certifying official

5/13/96
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall

6-21-99

Entered in the
National Register

for
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
2		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

-0-

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instruction)

TRANSPORTATION/Rail Related

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Renaissance Revival

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Clay Tile

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Fairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House
Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Transportation

Period of Significance

1913-1946

Significant Dates

1913, 1940

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

T.J. Leak & Co., Chicago (builder)

Primary Location for Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5 acres

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	655720	4443880	3.			
2.				4.			

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Ahlgren, Architectural Historian

organization Nebraska State Historical Society date March 1996

street & number 1500 R Street telephone (402) 471-4773

city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68508

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Jefferson County Historical Society

street & number P.O. Box 154 telephone (402) 729-5627

city or town Fairbury state NE zip code 68352

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United State Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House

Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

Description

The Fairbury Rock Island Depot and Freight House are located in Fairbury, the Jefferson County seat in southeastern Nebraska. The large two-story red brick Renaissance Revival style depot was built in 1913. The building served as passenger and freight depot and the Rock Island's [Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific] Western Division headquarters until 1965; the company went bankrupt ten years later. The depot, which exhibits an exceptional degree of interior and exterior integrity, is being restored by a local historical society for use as a railroad museum. The nomination consists of two contributing buildings, the depot and a 1940 steel-panel freight house.

=====

The Fairbury Rock Island Depot and Freight House are located in Fairbury, a county seat community (1990 population: 4,335) in southeastern Nebraska, approximately 70 miles southwest of Lincoln, the state capitol. The two-story brick rectangular-shaped building is located within an open and partially wooded two-block area, bounded to the west by I Street, the east by K Street, and to the south by the present-day Union Pacific tracks. The area to the north is primarily residential; the courthouse and business district is located four blocks northwest of the depot.

The large two-story depot is an excellent example of the Renaissance Revival architectural style. The north and south facades of the building are divided into three large bays, separated by brick pilasters topped with stone trim. The building features a hipped roof of red clay tile, wide overhanging eaves, and decorative brackets. Dormers are located on the attic story of each facade.

The fenestration of the building reinforces its symmetrical design, typical of the Renaissance Revival style. Nine three-part, 7- by 9-foot windows with stone sills are located on the second floor of the north and south facades. The north facade of the first floor has the same fenestration with the exception of the west end which has an exterior doorway. The east end of the building has smaller windows and an exterior doorway which marks the former baggage and freight areas. On the south, or track side of the building, the east and central bays have two three-part windows; each area also contains a doorway that led to the train platform. The east and west facades of the building feature three second-story windows which measure 4 by 7 feet. In the area between the first and second floors is a rectangular-shaped carved stone inset with the word "Fairbury."

The east and central bays of the main floor contained the ticket office, waiting room, and separate men's and women's rest rooms. With its tall ceilings and large windows, in 1914 the waiting room was described as, "while being designed for comfort and plenty of accommodation, [it] is almost luxurious." The waiting room, which measures 40 by 50 feet, features a green and white marble and terrazzo tile floor. An exterior doorway is located on the north facade of the building leading to the ticket area, waiting room, and the second floor stairway.

The ticket office, which features a window grill at the west end of the waiting room, also contains an office area built beneath the second floor stairway. In reference to the previous depot which was an old train car, the newspaper reported that the new office, "will certainly seem almost like heaven to the clerks." The room south of the ticket window contained a "news and cigar stand," (*Journal*, 2-19-1914).

The east end of the waiting room contained separate men's and women's rest rooms to the north and south, respectively. Each of the rooms measures approximately 15 by 20 feet and similar to the rest of the building, were described as being "modern" in every respect (2-19-1914).

The east bay of the building, which has the same dimensions as the waiting room/ticket office area, contained the baggage and express rooms. The area was accessed by exterior doorways on the north and east facades. On the south facade two large wooden doors, measuring 7 feet wide and 10 feet tall, open directly onto the former train platform.

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetFairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House

Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 7, 8 Page 2

Description (continued)

The Rock Island's Western Division Headquarters occupied the second floor of the building. The area retains a high degree of integrity with large offices located on both sides of a wide hallway. The former offices retain their fenestration, tall ceilings, and woodwork including floors and transom windows. The offices are accessed by a six-foot wide staircase located at the west end of the main floor. The staircase leads to a 6-foot by 6-foot landing with a large 4- by 7-foot window at the second floor level on the west wall. The stairway, which retains its original balustrade, leads to a six-foot wide hallway flanked by four large offices on each side.

On the south side of the hallway near the stairs, the first three rooms from west to east was the Operators' area, followed by two Dispatcher's areas. The final room on the east end of the hallway was the former Division Superintendent's office. The hallway terminates at a large 40- by 40-foot room, with windows on the north, south and east sides, which was used by clerical staff.

The first office on the north side of the hallway near the stairway, which measures 40 by 20 feet, contained the Division Engineer's office. A set of tall, three-part windows are located on the north side of the room with a smaller 4- by 7-foot window to the east. Continuing in an easterly direction, the next room which measures 40 by 25 feet served as Roadmaster and Master Carpenter offices. The trainmaster's office was located in the next room east. This 40- by 18-foot room contains built-in wooden shelves and cabinets along the entire west wall. Restroom facilities are also located in this area, as well as in a small separate room at the extreme northeast corner of the building.

The attic level is accessed by a doorway near the former trainmaster's office on the north side of the hallway. Narrow steps lead to the area which is essentially a long corridor flanked by tall shelves that extends the entire length of the building.

Approximately 20 feet east of the depot is a one-story steel panel building built in 1940 which served as the freight house until 1963. The building is located on a raised concrete platform and measures 28 by 80 feet. A 28- by 49-foot concrete ramp and platform extends along the east side of the building. The freight house has five wood panel, glass paned roll-up doors; three on the north and two on the south or track side of the building.

The Fairbury depot and freight house are located on two large lots which encompass five acres. The area immediately north and east of the depot was once extensively landscaped with shade trees and flower beds. On the south side of the current railroad tracks is the location of the once extensive Rock Island rail yards, which at one time included an 18-stall round house. None of these structures are extant with the exception of a two-stall engine house. This structure is not part of the current nomination which is limited to the depot, freight house, and grounds on the north side of the tracks owned by the Jefferson County Historical Society.

The depot served as the Rock Island Western Division headquarters from 1913 until 1965 when the offices were moved to Des Moines, Iowa. The Rock Island went bankrupt in 1975 and the depot was boarded up; its demolition seemed inevitable until the building was acquired by the Jefferson County Historical Society in 1992. The organization is restoring the depot for use as a railroad museum which will focus on the history of the Rock Island.

Statement of Significance

The Fairbury Rock Island Depot and Freight House are being nominated to the National Register under Criterion A on the state level for its association with the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific [hereafter Rock Island] Railroad, a major national carrier which ceased operation in 1975. Constructed in 1913, the large two-story brick Renaissance Revival style building served as a passenger/freight depot and the Rock Island's Western Division headquarters from

**United State Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Fairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House

Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska

County and State

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Statement of Significance (continued)

the time of its construction through 1965. The period of significance, 1913-1946, encompasses the year in which the depot was constructed through 1946, the last year in which the 50-year age criteria is met.

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The city of Fairbury was platted in 1869, and by the early 1870's branch lines of two major railroads had reached the settlement: the St. Joseph and Western branch of the Union Pacific and the Republican River branch of the Burlington and Missouri (Andreas, 1882). In less than a decade Fairbury was a well established county seat and railroad town with a population of 1,600. Although the Rock Island extended west to Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the Missouri River in 1869, the railroad did not reach Fairbury until 1886. The Rock Island, however, eventually had the greatest impact of any rail line on the city's economy and development.

As the last major rail line to enter Nebraska, the Rock Island was constructed without the state and national land grants received by the Union Pacific and the Burlington in the 1860's and 1870's. Not surprisingly then, although it was a major national railroad, the Rock Island had the least amount of trackage through Nebraska. In the 1880's, the Rock Island extended its lines west from Missouri and Kansas through Pawnee, Gage, and Jefferson counties in southeastern Nebraska. Fairbury was located at the intersection of the Rock Island's east-west and north-south lines. The line extended south to Belleville, Kansas, joining the main line to Denver and west through Thayer and Nuckolls counties, ending at Nelson, Nebraska.

Fairbury's significant location was officially recognized in 1886 when it was designated headquarters of the Rock Island's Western Division, giving the town a major role in the system (Bartels, 1971; Rapp, 1980). At the time, the Rock Island expanded its ancillary structures in Fairbury such as engine storage and maintenance facilities, shops and switching yards.

In the meantime, the Rock Island continued to expand its lines through Nebraska. The line northeast of Fairbury to Omaha was surveyed but not completed until 1890 when an agreement was reached for use of the Union Pacific's Missouri River bridge at Omaha. A year later the line was completed from Omaha south through Lincoln and Fairbury, joining the main line to Denver; Fairbury's future as a major division point was secured.

Despite its importance as the Western Division headquarters, in the 1880's Fairbury's Rock Island depot was a simple one-story frame structure. The Division Superintendent's office was located on the third floor of the First National Bank building while dispatchers and telegraphers were housed in a building near the tracks at G Street (*Fairbury News-Gazette*, 2-13-1914). After the frame depot was destroyed by fire in 1911, an old passenger car was used. In early 1913 the Rock Island announced its intention to greatly expand its facilities at Fairbury. The announcement was of great interest to the entire community and was cited as, "the best news which has been published in Fairbury for some time." The *Fairbury Journal* reported that at least \$200,000 would be spent on the expanded facilities including \$30,000 for the construction of a new passenger depot and office building (*Journal*, 3-21-1913).

The Fairbury City Council and Commercial Club immediately began working with the Rock Island to ensure construction of the depot. The city agreed to spend \$1,500 to purchase lots at the depot site and donate the land to the railroad for use as a park. By May 1913, several houses and the old South Ward school which were located in the right of way were sold by auction and removed from the site. Work immediately began on the new facilities and by the end of the year the depot was almost finished (*Journal*, 11-14-1913; 1-29-1914).

The two-story brick depot was completed in February, 1914, at a total cost of \$40,000. The building was dedicated on February 10, 1914, and over 3,000 area residents toured the building during a public reception hosted by Rock Island officials (*Journal*, 2-12-1914). Sited on a full city block, which would later be landscaped, the large brick depot with its red clay tile roof was one of the most imposing buildings in Fairbury. With its spacious lobby,

**United State Department of the Interior
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Continuation Sheet**Fairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House

Name of Property

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Section 8 Page 4**Statement of Significance (continued)**

separate men's and women's rest rooms, and second floor Division Headquarter offices, the building was reported to be the "finest passenger depot in Nebraska, west of Omaha," (*Journal*, 2-12-1914). Further, as the Western Division headquarters, it was one of the most important buildings on the Rock Island line.

Fairbury's future as a major railroad division point seemed secure with the completion of the new depot and headquarters building and expansion of the railyards. During the railroad's peak years in the teens and 1920's, there were at least 14 daily Rock Island passenger trains through Fairbury. The company employed hundreds of area residents and was a major influence on the city's economy and identity.

The future of the Rock Island, however, was not secure. During the Great Depression the company filed for bankruptcy and seemed destined to be merged with the Union Pacific. Instead, the company improved its existing lines and bridges and introduced faster diesel-powered passenger trains, notably the Rocky Mountain Rocket. At the same time, several unprofitable branch lines were abandoned such as the line between Ruskin and Nelson, Nebraska.

The advent of high powered diesel trains enabled the Rock Island to compete with other carriers for the Chicago to Denver trade from the 1930's through the post-war years. By 1952, the Rock Island was completely "dieselized" which made portions of the Fairbury facilities obsolete. Beginning in the 1950's, water tanks, a treatment plant, and parts of the round house and shops were demolished. As with other railroad lines, passenger service on the Rock Island declined during the post-war years. Many smaller stations were closed and miles of track were abandoned and removed.

In 1965, the last Rocket passed through Fairbury; during the same year, the Western Division Headquarters were relocated to Des Moines, Iowa. Ten years later in 1975, the Rock Island declared bankruptcy for the second time in its history. The railroad attempted to obtain a loan from the U.S. Railway Association to continue operating, but the request was denied (Bartels, 1975). Hundreds of maintenance workers had already been laid off, and management had voluntarily taken a 10 per cent pay cut.

Although Nebraska and Kansas Rock Island employees pledged over \$1 million to establish a trust fund to eventually purchase the railroad, the Rock Island's financial problems were insurmountable. The carrier had been "losing money even in the good years," and simply could not compete in south-central Nebraska, an area already extensively served by other lines (Bartels, 1971; 1975).

The impact of the Rock Island's demise was undoubtedly greatest for towns like Fairbury which strongly identified with the railroad. The town had the distinction of being designated the Western Division Headquarters and generations of area families had worked for the railroad; at least 133 residents were still employed by the company in 1975. Realizing the potential economic impact of the Rock Island's end, railroad employees and area businessmen appealed to the U.S. Railway Association to reconsider the Rock Island's request for a loan, but the railroad was essentially finished. From 1975 to 1980, the line was operated by a Kansas City firm until it, too, ceased operation and the depot was boarded up and abandoned. A year later, remaining equipment and furnishings were sold by auction on the brick platform at the Fairbury depot (Bartels, 1971; *Lincoln Star*, 3-12-81).

During the Rock Island's peak years, 36 depots were built in Nebraska. The majority of these structures, 33, were simple one-story frame buildings of standard design which served small communities on the line (Reisdorff, 1983). According to current Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey (NEHBS) data, 30 of these buildings have been demolished and the three extant depots have been relocated.

Rock Island depots comparable to Fairbury's were constructed in Beatrice and Lincoln; the Beatrice depot was demolished in 1968. Lincoln's Rock Island depot (LC13:D9-001) was listed on the National Register in 1971. Now

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Continuation Sheet

Fairbury Rock Island Depot & Freight House

Name of Property

Jefferson County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8, 9, 10 Page 5

Statement of Significance (continued)

used as a bank, the building is located on the north side of O Street, a major automotive thoroughfare; most of the Rock Island trackage through the city is gone.

Unlike the Lincoln depot, which does not retain associated trackage or physical setting, the Fairbury Rock Island depot retains its integrity of setting, surrounded by large open lots immediately north of what are now the Union Pacific railroad tracks. More significantly, as the former Rock Island Western Division headquarters, the building has tremendous historic importance for Fairbury and the entire state.

Bibliography

Andreas, A.T. *History of the State of Nebraska*. Vol. II. Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882.

Bartels, Michael. "History of the Rock Island," in *The Main Line*, a publication of the Lincoln Railfans Club, Lincoln, NE: July 1971; April, 1975; May, 1975.

Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey (NEHBS) site files. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1500 R Street, Lincoln, NE.

Rapp, William F. "The End of the Rock Island in Nebraska," in *The Railroad History Monograph*, Research Journal of American Railways. Vol. 9, No. 4, Crete, NE: J.B. Publishing Company, Oct. 1980.

Reisdorff, James. *An Inventory of the Railroad Depots in the State of Nebraska, 1900-1983*. Crete, NE: The Railroad Station Historical Society, 1983.

Newspapers:

The Fairbury Journal, 1913-1914.

The Fairbury News & The Fairbury Gazette, 1913-1914.

The Lincoln Star, 1981.

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property encompasses a tract of land described as the following: All that part of Blocks 19 and 20, W. G. McDowell's First Addition to Fairbury, Jefferson County, Nebraska, lying North of the center line of the vacated alleys in said Blocks 19 and 20, including all that portion of the east one-half of vacated I Street which lies north of the extension of said center line of the vacated alley in said Block 20 and south of the extended north line of said Block 20, and also including all of vacated J Street lying north of the extended center line of said vacated alleys in Blocks 19 and 20 and lying south of the extended north lines of said Blocks 19 and 20.

Boundary Justification

The nomination includes a tract of land which has historically been associated with the depot and is now owned by the Jefferson County Historical Society.