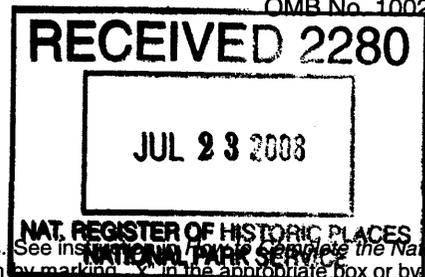


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instructions on the back of the form. Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 Wichita Falls & Northwestern Railroad Passenger Depot
other names/site number Missouri, Kansas and Topeka (M-K-T) Passenger Depot

2. Location

street & number 523 South Main Street [N/A] not for publication
city or town Altus [N/A] vicinity
state Oklahoma code OK county Jackson code 065 zip code 73521

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 [] statewide [X] locally. ([] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title: [Signature] State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: July 21, 2008

State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma 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 the property is:

- [X] 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 [] See continuation sheet.
[] other, explain [] See continuation sheet.

Signature of the Keeper: [Signature] Date of Action: 9.4.08

Wichita Falls & Northwestern Railroad Passenger Depot Jackson County, Oklahoma
Name of Property County/State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	1	objects
1	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: rail-related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Prairie School

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls BRICK
roof ASBESTOS
other

Narrative Description

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

Wichita Falls & Northwestern Railroad Passenger Depot Jackson County, Oklahoma
Name of Property County/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 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
Architecture

Periods of Significance
1909 - 1954

Significant Dates
1910

Significant Person(s)
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Stephens, J.D., contractor

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:
Oklahoma Historical Society

Wichita Falls & Northwestern Railroad Passenger Depot Jackson County, Oklahoma
Name of Property County/State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than One Acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

- | | | | | |
|----|------|---------|----------|------------------------------|
| 1. | 14 | 469370 | 3832150 | (NAD27) |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | |
| 2. | | | | |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | |
| 3. | | | | |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | |
| 4. | | | | |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing | [N/A] 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 Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for Preservation Oklahoma, Inc.
organization Architectural Resources & Community Heritage Consulting date December 2007
street & number 346 County Road 1230 telephone 405-459-6200
city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Altus
street & number 220 E. Commerce Street telephone _____
city or town Altus state OK zip code 73521

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 range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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DESCRIPTION

The Wichita Falls & Northwestern (WF&NW) Railroad Passenger Depot in Altus, Jackson County, Oklahoma, is a one-story, brick, Prairie School style building. Constructed in 1909-1910, the building has a concrete foundation and a moderate-pitched, asbestos shingle, hipped roof with a cross gable on the south side. On the east side of the building, there is an outdoor platform area covered by a dropped, asbestos shingle, hipped roof. The wide, boxed eaves around the building are clad with narrow wood boards and have symmetrical triangular knee supports. The historic, brick, interior, slope chimneys with their corbelled tops remain in place towards the southwest side of the building. Ornamenting the gable wall of the south side bay window is a small expanse of false half-timbering. Other decorative details include the distinctive, flat-arched, brick, projected headers above the windows and the wide, round-arched, brick headers above the doors. The depot is, and has been for some time, vacant. As a result, only one wood, paneled door remains in place with the other doors and all of the windows being boarded.

Modifications to the building include the change in roof material from ceramic tile to asbestos shingle. This change likely occurred during the period of significance, 1909-1954. Probably after the end of the period of significance, the two exterior doors to the large waiting room in the east portion of the depot were enlarged. The doors were likely changed after passenger service on the line was discontinued in the mid-1950s to accommodate freight loading and unloading. Additionally, in the mid- to late-1970s, the building's cornerstone, originally located on the southeast corner, was removed with the space infilled with non-matching brick and mortar. Around the same time, the freight depot which was adjacent to the passenger depot on the west side was demolished. The freight depot was constructed about the same time as the passenger depot and was removed for unknown reasons but possibly due to acts of vandalism which included fire. Related to the lack of use, the windows and doors of the passenger depot have been boarded for decades. Other changes to the property include construction of a chain link fence around the immediate depot grounds to prevent unauthorized access to the building. The chain link fence is considered a noncontributing resource to the property. However, despite the changes, the depot overall retains its integrity of setting, location, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association and ably convey its historic and architectural significance.

The depot remained in use by the railroad until November 1973 when the Katy closed the station in favor of a mobile agency arrangement. The railway company also discontinued service north of Altus at this time but continued the run south between Altus and Wichita Falls, Texas. The building has been vacant since that time. In 2003, the property was deeded to the city of Altus by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. The city would like to rehabilitate the building for use as a museum and/or restaurant.

Currently, the depot is still located adjacent to the railroad tracks which connected Wichita Falls, Texas, to the Oklahoma panhandle town of Forgan, via Altus and many other small western Oklahoma towns. The historic WF&NW road enters Altus on the southeast side of town. To the east of Navajo Street, the tracks turn west and continue that direction past the depot until the west side of town. At about Blain Street, the tracks begin to curve northward again. The tracks continue northward along the city limits until the north boundary is reached and then the tracks curve in a northwesterly direction. Originally, there were sidetracks which ran along the north side of the depot. Additionally, the Kansas

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City, Mexico and Orient Railway Company had a line of tracks that ran one block south of the depot and the Saint Louis and San Francisco Railway Company had a line located two blocks south of the depot.

The depot is situated at the northwest intersection of the railroad tracks and South Main Street. South Main Street also serves as United State Highway 283. Altus' central business district is located five blocks to the north of the depot with a variety of small commercial buildings lining Main Street between the depot and downtown. While many of these buildings are historic, many have also been heavily modified. There are no buildings on the block with the depot, although historically the north side of the block was occupied by the Southwest Utility Ice Cream Plant No. 2. There is one historic brick building to the south of the railroad tracks which has been modified. Across the street to the southeast of the depot, the county has constructed a modern, large detention center in the last few years.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The WF&NW Passenger Depot is a one-story, brick, Prairie School style depot with a concrete foundation and a hipped roof. The platform areas on the north, east and south sides of the depot are brick but the adjacent area on the west side of the depot, where the freight depot stood, is concrete. The passenger depot's red brick walls are laid in a running bond. The building has an asbestos-covered, moderate-pitched, hipped roof with a dropped hipped roof over the east platform area and a dropped cross-gabled roof above the bay window on the south side. Along all sides of the roof, there is a metal guttering. Located towards the west side of the roof, there are two, brick, interior, slope chimneys. The chimneys have corbelled tops. Emblematic of the Prairie school style, the depot has wide, overhanging eaves. The eaves are supported by symmetrical, wood, triangular knee braces with corbels on the bottom. Wrapping around the north, east and south elevation is a narrow, ornamental, stone water table. Directly below the water table, wood boards have been bolted to the brick wall on the east and south sides. Holes in the brick along the north wall also indicate that boards may have one time been bolted along that elevation as well. The boards were not part of the original construction but were in place by the time use of the depot was discontinued.

The east elevation of the depot fronts onto Main Street (see photograph 1). The east elevation features the covered platform area. The dropped, hipped roof of the platform area still has the small wooden sign which read "ALTUS" but is now unreadable. The asbestos-clad roof is supported by narrow, square, wooden posts resting on short, brick piers. The piers have concrete foundations and caps. Adjacent to the south side of the south pier, there is a partial metal downspout. The metal downspout adjacent to the north side of the north pier is intact. Extending off the wooden posts to support the broad roof eaves are wooden, triangular knee braces. Between the east side posts there is a wooden queen post truss. Along the sides of the roof, there are plain wood supports. The underside of the roof is clad with narrow wood boards matching the eaves.

The east wall of the WF&NW depot contains three evenly spaced windows. The windows are currently boarded but, based on the remaining visible wooden frames in the south side bay window, were originally evenly divided, vertical, two-over-two, wood, double hung. The identical window headers are brick, flat-arched and highly ornamental. The header consists of three wedge shapes separated by rectangular forms. The bricks in each section are projected and include four rows of brick. The

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wedge-shaped forms are made of soldier bricks and the rectangular forms are created by rows of stretcher bricks laid in a running bond. Originally, the stone cornerstone was located on the south corner of the east elevation. The cornerstone was removed in the latter 1970s with the space infilled with bricks and mortar that do not match the surrounding historic material. The cornerstone at the Altus depot was typical of those ordered by the WF&NW Railway Company for their depots. The cornerstone read "W.F. & N.W. Ry./1909/J.A. Kemp, President/Frank Kell, Vice Pres. And Gen. Mgr./J.D. Stephens, Contr." The cornerstone was located immediately above the ornamental stone water table. Just to the north of where the cornerstone was, there are the remnants of a historic, metal downspout.

The south elevation fronts onto the railroad tracks (see photograph 4). The brick platform along this side of the depot remains in place, although the chain link fence has been set towards the inside of the platform rather than closer to the train tracks. Highlighting this elevation is the three-part, projected, bay window for the office that is located just west of the halfway-mark along the wall. Topped by an asbestos-clad, front-gabled roof, the bay window has false half-timbering in the gable end. Prominently located in each section of the bay window is a large, rectangular window which has been boarded. The windows were vertical, two-over-two, wood, double hung. The windows are topped by identical headers to the windows on the east elevation. To the west of the bay window, there is a single large opening onto a narrow waiting room. The waiting room door on this elevation is boarded but the brick, segmental arched header remains in place. The wide header has a center, wedge-shaped, keystone and three corbels along the bottom. To the east side of the ticket window, there was a second door which opened onto a larger waiting area. The door opening was widened at an unknown time and 1970s photographs of the building reveal an elevated loading dock constructed adjacent to the door. The opening was likely changed following the demise of passenger service on the line in the mid-1950s. The wooden loading dock has been removed but the opening remains boarded with a large sliding door visible on the inside. A portion of the original brick header remains visible but most of the header was destroyed when the door was widened to accommodate freight. East of the widened door are two, evenly-spaced, boarded windows with identical headers to the other windows on the building.

The west elevation was originally attached to the adjacent freight depot (see photograph 3 and 4). As such, the wall is not clad with face brick but instead has common brick, the upper half of which remains covered with stucco. The freight depot was removed after the mid-1970s. There are no openings on this wall. Supporting the wide eaves of the passenger depot are four, symmetrical, triangular knee brackets. Above this, almost on the principle roof ridge, is a brick, interior, slope chimney with a corbelled top.

The south elevation also had a brick walk, much of which has been torn up over the years (see photographs 2 and 3). On the west end of the south wall is the only historic opening which is not boarded. The wood paneled door has a segmental arched transom which has been boarded. Above this is a brick header which matches the corresponding door on the south elevation. To the east of the door are two boarded windows which are located farther apart than the other windows on the buildings. Both windows would have opened onto the interior railway company office. To the east of this, opening into the large waiting room, is a widened opening that corresponds to the nonoriginal freight door on the south side. This opening was likely originally a door but no part of the brick header remains

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evident to clearly indicate if it was a door or window. A loading dock was likely placed adjacent to the door as the opening beneath the water table is smaller than that above the water table. To the east of the freight opening, are two symmetrical, historic windows that also have been boarded.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The WF&NW Depot fits the pattern of most railroad depots constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century in Oklahoma (see photographs 5 through 7. Adjacent to the covered platform area on the east side of the building was a large waiting room. Although the room was apparently used for freight storage during the later years of use, the walls are still largely covered with plaster above the wood wainscoting that encircles the room. In the northeast corner of the waiting room, there is a nonoriginal, enclosed room that has full-height walls and a wood-framed door with a transom. To the east of the large waiting room was the commodious railway company office which remains much as it was originally, including the wood wainscoting on all walls, a low counter with angled sides in the bay window and the wood-framed opening with a ledge on the west wall for ticket purchases. On the other side of the office was a smaller waiting room with small, divided bathrooms located in the northwest corner. The baggage room for the depot was apparently located in the adjacent freight depot which has been demolished. Many of the original finishes remain visible in the building, although in serious need of repair.

ALTERATIONS:

The most notable alteration to the WF&NW Passenger Depot is the removal of the adjacent freight depot. The freight depot was apparently demolished in the early to mid-1970s after the Katy had completely abandoned the depot. According to various accounts, both buildings suffered from vandalism, including fire, and serious consideration was given to demolishing the depots at that time. Although not matching the existing depot in materials or style, the freight depot shared an intrinsic association with the passenger depot. However, the depots were separated by a full brick wall that had no interior openings; thus, the two depots are considered as separate buildings similar to contiguous commercial buildings. The use of common bricks rather than face bricks for the shared wall indicates the original design of the passenger depot included the adjacent building. Notably, the roofline of the passenger depot was also fully executed, including the characteristic, broad, boxed eaves supported by triangular knee braces, without regard to the freight depot. Overall, although notable, the loss of the freight depot does not destroy the ability of the passenger depot to convey its historic significance in the transportation of people to, through and from Altus during the first half of the twentieth century. The passenger depot also retains the ability to convey its architectural significance as an excellent example of a brick, Prairie School style, passenger depot constructed by the WF&NW Railway Company.

Probably after the 1950s, following the discontinuation of passenger service on the line, the doors to the large waiting room were enlarged and loading docks were located at the openings. The change in size of the historic openings did result in the loss of most of the original brick headers. However, the majority of the fenestration pattern remains intact and this change does not prohibit the building from communicating its historic and architectural significance.

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Other changes to the WF&NW Passenger Depot include the replacement of the original ceramic tile roof with asbestos shingles at an unknown time but likely within the period of significance. The decades of vacancy have also left a mark on the building. The cornerstone was removed in the 1970s, apparently in order to preserve it in the event the depot was demolished. The windows and majority of doors have been boarded. In order to protect the building, a noncontributing chain link fence was erected around the building. The fence is located in proximity to the building and is situated on portions of the brick platform area on the south side. Notably, while the overall area around the depot has undergone some change, the railroad tracks remain in place along the south side of the building. The tracks are critical in the ability of the building to retain its integrity of setting.

Despite the changes, the WF&NW Passenger Depot readily conveys its historic and architectural significance. The building maintains its integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, and most importantly, feeling and association. The depot is the only extant passenger depot in Altus and is an important, tangible link to the bygone era of rail-dominated transportation.

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SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY:

The Wichita Falls & Northwestern Railroad Passenger Depot is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its transportation significance as the only extant passenger depot in Altus and for its association with the Wichita Falls & Northwestern Railway Company in Altus. Under Criterion C, the building has architectural significance as an excellent example of the Prairie School style as applied to a railroad depot. The period of significance for the property extends from its construction in 1909-1910 to the end of passenger service on the road in 1954.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND:

Altus is the county seat of Jackson County, Oklahoma. The town is located within an area of Oklahoma that became highly contested in the late nineteenth century. In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase set the border between the United States and Spanish-controlled Mexico at the Red River. Critically but understandably due to a lack of intimate knowledge of the area, the agreement did not specify which branch of the Red River was actually the border. In 1819, the area that now includes Jackson County diplomatically became part of the United States. However, in 1852, the north branch of the Red River was incorrectly identified as the defining course of the river, allowing the seventy-by-ninety mile swath of land between the north and south branches of the Red River to be claimed by the state of Texas. In 1860, the Texas state legislature created Greer County to encompass all of the area between the branches of the Red River. About thirteen years later, a federal survey of the area discovered the 1852 error and politically cordoned the area off as a part of Indian Territory. As with the rest of Indian Territory, settlement of the land by non-Native Americans was thus prohibited.¹

Despite the restriction on settlement, by 1880, Texas cattlemen had moved into Greer County, laying claim to the land using land certificates given to veterans of the Texas Republican Army and the Confederacy. In July 1884, President Grover Cleveland issued a proclamation prohibiting settlement in the area until jurisdiction of the land was decided. With settlement continuing despite the presidential proclamation, the federal government filed suit against the state of Texas in 1890. The United States Supreme Court issued their decision in mid-March 1896 in favor of the federal government. By that time, much of the west portion of the original designated Indian Territory had become Oklahoma Territory and settlement by non-Native Americans was well underway.²

The newly attached area to Oklahoma Territory continued to be called Greer County. Additionally, under legislation passed by Congress following the Supreme Court decision, the pre-1896 settlers were allowed to file 160 acre claims on the lands they had been occupying. Settlers were also able to purchase up to an additional 160 acres for a dollar an acre. Many of the towns founded in the area

¹ Oklahoma Historic Preservation Survey, "Final Survey Report: Reconnaissance of Certain Parts of the City of Altus," (Available Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; 1993), 88-89.

² Ibid., 88-89.

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before 1896 continued to thrive as well.³

One of the pre-1896 towns in Greer County was the community of Altus. Originating in 1891, the town came into being following a flood at Bitter Creek. The flood caused significant damage to the small town of Frazier, which had been founded in 1885 at a point two-and-a-half miles west of Altus. Seeking higher ground, the Frazier residents formed a land company and purchased 160 acres from Sam Neal. The new townsite was formed from forty acres of land in four adjoining sections. The intersection of the four sections then became the intersection of Main and Broadway Streets. The town was named "Altus" upon the suggestion of W.R. Baucum. The name in Latin means "the high place" so it was particularly fitting for the new community.⁴

With the former Frazier residents quickly setting up shop in Altus, the town immediately thrived. Although the town was organized under the laws of Texas, the 1896 decision allowed the settlement to continue if there were more than seventy-five residents and the community was able to purchase the land within the town limits for a dollar per acre. Despite this, for unknown reasons, the plat for the town, dated June 1900, was not filed until January 13, 1901, nearly five years after the Supreme Court decision and nearly ten years after Altus' original founding.

When statehood was granted to Oklahoma in November 1907, the "old" Greer County was divided into four counties. This included all of the existing Jackson, Greer and Harmon counties, as well as a part of Beckham County. Altus was named the temporary seat of Jackson County at statehood. An election the following year made Altus the permanent seat of Jackson County, allowing the city to become the political and economic center of Jackson County.

As with most of western Oklahoma, agriculture formed the economic base that Altus and Jackson County relied on to stimulate growth and development. Development of oil fields in the first decades of the twentieth century also allowed the area to flourish. The long-time twin economic forces of Oklahoma, oil and agriculture, remain a significant revenue source in the area to the present time. These, of course, have been augmented periodically, most notably by federal programs. In the 1930s, with devastating turndowns in both agriculture and oil, the various New Deal programs of President Franklin Roosevelt assuaged residents during the trying times. This notably included construction of the W.C. Austin Irrigation Project, the first such project sponsored in Oklahoma by the Bureau of Reclamation and one that took over a decade to bring to completion. In the 1940s, the location of an air base in Altus allowed Jackson County to emerge from the Great Depression on a strong upswing. Although closed following the end of World War II, the base was reactivated in the mid-1950s. The Altus Air Force Base remains a significant economic force in Jackson County to the present day.

SIGNIFICANCE:

In late September 1906, Frank Kell and Joseph A. Kemp chartered the Wichita Falls and Northwestern Railway Company of Texas (WF&NW of T). This line was authorized to build a 17.1 mile road from Wichita Falls to the Red River. Nine days after the incorporation of the WF&NW of T, Kell, Kemp, R.E.

³ Ibid., 88-89.

⁴ Ibid., 89.

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Huff, J.A. Henry, C.C. Hightower, John A. Chenoweth and William Hossack incorporated the Wichita Falls and Northwestern Railway Company (WF&NW) under the general laws of Oklahoma Territory. This line was to construct a 375 mile road from the southern border of Oklahoma Territory along the Red River to about Englewood, Kansas. The new road was to pass through or near the city of Altus. Significantly, the charter for the WF&NW was drawn at a meeting in Altus and four Altus businessmen, Henry, Hightower, Chenoweth and Hossack, were involved in the formation of the company. Nominally, Altus was the company's principle place of business; however, the company's true headquarters were at Wichita Falls with Kemp, Kell and Huff retaining the majority of company stock.⁵

Making its way northwestward from Wichita Falls, Texas, the WF&NW completed its line to Frederick, the county seat of Tillman County, Oklahoma Territory, in November 1907, one week before statehood was granted to Oklahoma and Indian territories. Frederick remained the end-of-track for the WF&NW for almost two years. In early 1909, the WF&NW Railway Company began considering expanding their line eight-five miles to run from Frederick to Elk City. Although at the end of March 1909, the "...latest indications (were) that the route will not go through Altus..." a delegation of Altus citizens were sent to Wichita Falls "...to endeavor to get this road." As in the previous year's county seat battle, the nearby town of Olustee was Altus' main competition for the WF&NW road.⁶

Altus already boasted two separate railroad lines by 1909. The Oklahoma City and Western Railroad was the first railway company to complete a line through Altus in January 1903. This company subsequently became part of the St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco) system. Five years to the month later, the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient (K.C. M. & O.), which was affiliated with the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company, connected Altus and Clinton. Despite the presence of an almost east-west (Frisco) line and a nearly north-south line (K.C. M. & O.), Altus was eager to add to their rail connections. The greater number of railway companies with direct lines through the community meant better transportation of people, goods and supplies which readily translated to a thriving economy.⁷

At a mass meeting in early April 1909, the citizens of Altus were "...given an opportunity to secure the..." WF&NW road then getting ready to build from Frederick. In return for the road, the citizens of Altus were to provide a \$30,000 cash bonus, six miles of right-of-way southeast of town and depot grounds and terminal facilities in Altus. The total estimated cost for gaining the new road was about \$45,000 to \$50,000. Notably, this was half the amount required by the railway company shortly afterwards to build through nearby Mangum. The residents were also given just ten days to raise the money and secure the necessary land. If the effort failed, the road would be lost to Altus and it was "...certain that all business and property values in Altus and (the) surrounding country (would) suffer an irreparable loss that the town and commercial interests (would) never recover."⁸

In a late afternoon mass meeting on April 20, 1909, the citizens of Altus reached their goal of \$45,000.

⁵ Donovan L. Hofsommer, Katy Northwest: The Story of a Branch Line Railroad, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 9-11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-17. See also The Altus (Oklahoma) Times, 25 March 1909.

⁷ Oklahoma Historic Preservation Survey, Final Survey Report, 92.

⁸ The Altus Times, 15 April 1909 and 22 April 1909.

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The meeting was summed up as "An Old-Fashioned Methodist Love-Feast, When Business Men Increased Their Subscriptions Three and Four Times and the Real "Altus Spirit" Shone Forth in All Its Strength and Beauty." By the end of the month, the contract between the citizens of Altus and the railway company was signed with responsibility placed upon the railroad builders to keep the momentum going.⁹

In late May 1909, the WF&NW Railway Company filed a \$2.3 million mortgage to cover a bond issue to finance construction of the road through Comanche, Tillman, Jackson, Beckham and Greer Counties. Just over a month later, graders and construction men for the road were nearing North Fork with the optimistic expectation that the line would reach Altus in ninety days. Within three weeks, the road was completed to Stinson, the first station town on the line from Frederick. In mid-August 1909, the Corporation Commissioner, State Engineer and officials with the K.C. M. & O. and the WF&NW determined that the WF&NW would share about 1300 feet of roadbed with the K.C. M. & O. The lines would junction at a point just north of where the K.C. M. & O. line crossed the Frisco line on the southeast side of town.¹⁰

Shortly after this, the WF&NW announced that it would run an excursion train from Altus to Wichita Falls, Texas, at the end of September 1909. Tickets for the trip were to cost \$1. More importantly, this also raised expectations that the road would reach Altus in early September. Indeed by the first week in September, the road was within two miles of Altus. However, the construction company had been out of steel to finish the tracks for two weeks. According to the men in the road crew, the steel had been ordered and should have arrived but was side tracked somewhere enroute. Nonetheless, the first train over the WF&NW road arrived in Altus by mid-September 1909. Work was then pushed to complete the road through to Mangum.¹¹

With trains in operation, the next task for the railway company was construction of a fitting passenger depot and freight house. By early October 1909, a contract had been let to contractor John D. Stephens to build the depot with work to begin at once. The road agent, A.T. Hagan, and other railway employees of the WF&NW moved into the finished brick depot in early March 1910. According to the newspaper, "...the transition from the crowded, uncomfortable, ice-box of a shack which has been doing duty as a depot to..." the new brick station was a "...matter of considerable moment to all of us." The depot was proclaimed "...one of the handsomest railroad passenger stations in the Southwest." With a covered platform on the east end, the building featured two waiting rooms, one for each sex, divided by the railroad office. The office was described as "...handsomely finished in dark wood, stained and hard oiled, and counters, desks and shelving run(ing) around the entire edge of the interior."¹²

Just as the depot was being finished, the owners of the WF&NW Railway Company agreed to take over the failed venture of the Altus, Roswell & El Paso Railway Company. This "paper railroad,"

⁹ Ibid., 22 April 1909 and 29 April 1909.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27 May 1909, 1 July 1909, 29 July 1909. See also The Altus (Oklahoma) Weekly News, 12 August 1909.

¹¹ The Altus Weekly News, 19 August 1909, 9 September 1909. The Daily Oklahoman, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), 14 September 1909.

¹² Ibid., 3 March 1910. See also The Altus Times, 3 March 1910 and 10 March 1910.

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developed entirely by Altus residents, had incorporated in April 1908 with the purpose of building a four hundred mile road from Altus to El Paso, Texas. Taking over the venture, Frank Kemp and Joseph A. Kell incorporated the Altus, Wichita Falls & Hollis Railway Company (AWF&H) in February 1910. The directors of the AWF&H included Kemp, Kell, C.C. Huff, J.A. Henry, C.C. Hightower, J.R. McMahan and Cage Branch. Notably, the first five were also involved in the incorporation of the WF&NW. The AWF&H eventually was completed to Wellington, Texas; however, to do this, a second entity, the Wichita Falls & Wellington Railway Company of Texas, was needed to control the fifteen miles of road in Texas. The Panhandle Division, as the road became known, was not intended to be a trunk line, rather it was envisioned as a "...strong feeder line which would serve to drain the commerce of western Jackson County, Greet County And Collingsworth County, Texas" into the Wichita Falls' coffers. Even before the road was completed, the Panhandle Division was leased to the WF&NW.¹³

The following year, in 1911, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (Katy) Railway Company acquired the WF&NW's capital stock. Although this essentially made the WF&NW merely a branch line on the Katy, the WF&NW corporation continued in existence for twelve more years. Although the line remained distinct in many ways, including on maps, the revenue generated by the WF&NW was included in the corporate earnings of the Katy from 1912 forward. Due largely to the rapid expansion undertaken by the Katy in acquiring roads such as the WF&NW and its subsidiaries, the Katy went into receivership in 1915. Still financially troubled, the Katy was temporarily reprieved in late 1917 when President Woodrow Wilson federalized all of the railroads for war time usage. The government returned the Katy to receivership in late February 1920. The Katy finally emerged as a new company in 1923, at which time the WF&NW "...disappeared as a corporate entity."¹⁴

The WF&NW Passenger Depot in Altus embodies the importance of rail-transportation during the first half of the twentieth century. Constructed during the first decade of the century, when railroads were the dominant means of transporting people, the building continued in service for more than forty years. Due to its central importance in facilitating the transportation of people to, through and from Altus, the depot was a recognizable community hub for decades. However, just over ten years after the depot's construction, rail traffic in general began a slow decline as the automobile became the preferred mode of travel. The development of highway systems, and subsequently interstate systems, also contributed to the railroad's displacement as a significant transportation means. Rail transportation peaked in America in 1920 with 1,270 million passengers riding the rails to reach their destination. Within ten years, the number of railroad passengers had dropped to 708 million and continued to drop over the ensuing decade to 456 million. American's involvement in World War II, which necessitated among other sacrifices gas and rubber rationing, brought an upsurge in rail-related travel which peacetime was unable to sustain. By the 1950s, passenger rail travel had fallen so significantly that it was largely discontinued by railway companies.¹⁵

Reflecting the nationwide trend and after three years of effort, the Katy discontinued regular passenger service on the Northwestern branch in March 1954. The railway company cited insufficient revenue

¹³ Hofsommer, Katy Northwest, 19-20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49-53.

¹⁵ Albro Martin, Railroads Triumphant: The Growth, Rejection and Rebirth of a Vital American Force, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110 and 124.

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and high costs for abandoning the service. For four more years, the company hauled a limited number of passengers on side-door cabooses assigned to local freights. In June 1958, passenger service on the Katy came to an end. The depot in Altus continued in use for twenty-five more years, although no longer accommodating the movement of people. In 1973, the Katy closed the Altus depot, as well as the stations in Frederick and Grandfield, in favor of a mobile agency arrangement.¹⁶

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The WF&NW Passenger Depot is an excellent example of a brick, Prairie School style depot. Characteristics of the style present on the depot include the moderate-pitched hipped roof; the widely overhanging eaves supported by triangular knee braces; and, the covered platform area on the east side with its dropped, moderate-pitched, hipped-roof supported by wood posts on brick piers. The Prairie School style of architecture was at its height of popularity when the depot was constructed in 1909-1910 and was a compatible style for application to a functional building.

The use of brick for the depot was not unprecedented for the WF&NW. Although the majority of depots built by the WF&NW were wood frame combination stations, the company constructed more substantial buildings at various points along the line. In addition to Altus, the WF&NW built brick stations at Grandfield, Tipton, Elk City, Woodward and, eventually, Mangum. According to other National Register nominations and survey information available at the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, the WF&NW depots at Grandfield and Mangum are no longer extant. The WF&NW depots in Elk City and Woodward have been identified as extant and eligible for the National Register. No information is available concerning the Tipton depot.

Notably, the WF&NW Passenger Depot in Altus was not a combination depot. Generally, combination depots were used in towns where the volume of freight and passenger business was such that a single building could accommodate both functions. The WF&NW constructed separate buildings at Altus to handle the passenger and freight service; thereby, indicating an expectation of significant volume. The construction of the freight depot adjacent to the passenger depot, nonetheless, ensured that the services remained in close, easy proximity to each other. More importantly, this probably lessened construction time for the facilities as the road-building activities raced onward to Mangum.

That the two depots were separate facilities is supported by a 1911 article in the local newspaper. The article announces the intent of the WF&NW to build a new freight house one block to the west of the original buildings. Accordingly, "The present freight house which adjoins the depot proper will be remodeled into an eating house, which will add wonderfully to the comfort and convenience of the heavy passenger traffic over this line." The new freight house, however, never came to fruition, likely due to the shift in ownership from the WF&NW to the Katy.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hofsommer, Katy Northwest, 151 and 263.

¹⁷ The Altus Times, 9 March 1911.

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Overall, the WF&NW Passenger Depot is a tangible reminder of the significance of rail-transportation during the first half of the twentieth century. It is the only surviving depot in Altus and is clearly representative of the bygone era of rail-travel. Additionally, it is an important, local manifestation of the WF&NW Railway Company which had significant dealings in Altus that allowed the community to connect to a larger network. Architecturally, the building is an excellent example of the Prairie School style as applied to a railroad depot.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

South ½ Lot 3, all lots 4-5-6-7-8-9, Block 8, Wright's Addition to City of Altus, Oklahoma, According to the Recorded Plat thereof.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the depot and is the legally recorded boundary for the property as conveyed to the City of Altus by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation on April 23, 2003.

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PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to all photograph numbers except as noted:

Photographer: Cynthia Savage
Date of Photographs: 9 August 2007
Negatives: TIFF Files