

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

=====

historic name Sayre Rock Island Depot

other names/site number Shortgrass Country Museum

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2. Location

=====

street & number 106 East Poplar not for publication N/A
city or town Sayre vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Beckham code 009
zip code 73662

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3. State/Federal Agency Certification
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

Oklahoma Historical Society/SHPO
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 commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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4. National Park Service Certification
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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): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date
of Action

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: TRANSPORTATION Sub: rail-related

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: museum

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7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Italian Renaissance

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof CERAMIC TILE

walls BRICK

STUCCO

other _____

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

=====
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.)

- 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation
Architecture

Period of Significance 1927-1950

=====
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
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Significant Dates 1927

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

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Leake Construction Company, builder

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

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

 X State Historic Preservation Office

 Other State agency

 Federal agency

 Local government

 University

 Other

Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	441920	3905530	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

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 the Shortgrass Country Museum

organization Savage Consulting date December 1999

street & number Route 1, Box 116 telephone 405/459-6200

city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079
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Additional Documentation
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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 City of Sayre

street & number 102 W. Main telephone 580/928-2260

city or town Sayre state OK zip code 73662

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SUMMARY

The Sayre Rock Island Depot was built in 1927 in Sayre, Oklahoma. Replacing a 1901 depot which was located outside the town limits, the new depot was situated two blocks north of the heart of downtown Sayre. The depot was erected on the north side of the railroad tracks. South of the tracks, to both the east and west of the depot, are grain storage facilities of various sizes and ages. The depot is a one-story, Italian Renaissance style building with a red, ceramic tile, gable-on-hipped roof and a concrete foundation. The building is a combination of red brick along the lower portion of the walls and stucco along the upper walls. Dividing the red brick from the stucco is a stone stringcourse. The windows are primarily six-over-one hung with several four-over-one windows. The windows have flat heads and stone sills. The three exterior pedestrian doors are glass and wood panel with three light transoms. Additionally, there are two large, freight doors on either side of the baggage area on the west end of the depot. The freight door on the north side is shorter than that of the south, to allow for the above grade dock. All of the exterior doors appear to be original. Decorative details include wide open eaves, oversize brackets with stone drops, triple windows and a red brick chimney with a stone cap.

Since the late 1980s, the building has been occupied by the Shortgrass Country Museum. The exterior of the building remains intact. Two cooling units have been situated next to the dock on the south side; the hole on the south elevation for the former air conditioning unit has been covered with a metal panel; a new brick walkway has been constructed around the east, north and west sides with a new concrete sidewalk on the south side; and, the drive and parking lot around the building have been paved. The new brick walk, concrete sidewalk and paved drive and parking lot were all initiated and completed in 1999. None of these modifications impact the integrity of the building. The interior of the building has been more extensively changed. Although the room configuration remains as constructed, the interior does not retain many historic features. The trim and floors have been painted grey. Additionally, the ticket window between the Black waiting room and ticket office has been blocked off; the Black restrooms have been combined to create a kitchenette; a

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new door has been created between the ticket office and white men's restroom; another doorway has been opened between the ticket office and white waiting room; and, the south portion of the Ladies Rest (waiting) Room has been blocked off. Despite these alterations, the building maintains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association, particularly on the exterior.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The one-story, red brick and stucco building has a concrete foundation and red, ceramic tile, gable-on-hip roof. The roof has a ridge cap and extended open eaves with oversize decorative wood brackets underneath. The wood brackets have decorative stone drops. Towards the west end of the north side is a red brick chimney. The building measures eighty-three feet long and twenty-four feet wide. It is located forty feet north of the railroad tracks. The depot was erected two blocks off of Main Street between Fourth and Broadway on Poplar Street. To the west of the depot, historically and currently, is the Sayre City Hall. North of the depot is the contemporary Sayre Public Library with historic residential development farther north. South of the railroad tracks and the depot is an industrial area containing several grain storage facilities and other commercial enterprises.

The south elevation of the Sayre Rock Island Depot faces onto the railroad tracks. It is also the only elevation with pedestrian doors. The spacing of the fenestration is irregular. Beginning on the east end of the south elevation, there is a single, six-over-one, hung window which lights the ladies waiting room. To the west of this is a single, wood and glass, panel door with a three light transom. Then another single, six-over-one, hung window beside another single, wood and glass, panel door with a three light transom. All three of these openings open onto the "white" waiting room. Next is the bay window for the ticket office. On the short sides of the bay window are narrow, single, four-over-one windows. In the lower portion of the front of the bay window is a triple window composed of two four-over-one windows flanking a larger, six-over-one window. The upper portion of the bay window projects above the main roof. It has a gabled, ceramic tile roof with short brackets.

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In the top half of the gabled projection is a small area with false half-timbering and a sign. Originally, the sign simply said "Sayre." Currently, the sign reads "Shortgrass Country Museum." The lower portion of the gabled projection contains a short triple window composed of two, fixed, four-light windows flanking a larger six-light window. Continuing west of the bay window on the lower level is a single, six-over-one, hung window and a single, glass and wood, panel door with a three light transom. Both of these openings open onto the Black waiting room. The last opening on the south elevation is the large freight door. Matching the freight door on the north elevation, the freight door is a sliding, wood and glass, panel door. Due to the erection of shelving inside the baggage room, the freight doors are not currently operable.

The only openings in the west elevation are two, evenly spaced, six-over-one, hung windows. Centrally located between the windows is a painted Rock Island logo. Flanking the windows on the outside are paired oversize brackets with decorative stone drops. Ornamenting the roof is a gabled projection. The stucco projection has a red ceramic tiled roof with a ridge cap. It is detailed with exposed purlins, false half-timbering and a simple wood sign reading "SAYRE."

The north elevation of the depot is the street side but the depot sits far back on the lot. Separating the depot from the street is a large grassy area. The north side is ornamented with the depot's only chimney. The chimney is red brick with a stone cap and stone decorative details. Beginning on the west end, the fenestration pattern on the north elevation is as follows: a short, glass and wood, panel, freight door with an above grade dock; two single, six-over-one, hung windows separated by a wood bracket; the gable-roofed bay window which contains single four-over-one hung windows on both short sides, two four-over-one hung windows on the lower front, a triple window above this consisting of two, fixed, four-light windows flanking a fixed, six-light window, and, false half-timbering and exposed purlins above that; three, evenly spaced, six-over-one, hung windows, separated by single brackets; a final, six-over-one, hung window lighting the ladies restroom (bathroom). Next to the dock, at grade level, are located new heating and cooling units. The former wall unit

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has been removed from the bay window wall and the opening covered with a metal panel.

The depot has been encircled with a new (1999) walk. Around the east, north and west sides, the walk is red brick with concrete sides. In front of the south elevation, the walk is concrete. A long, asphalt driveway makes a U around the building, beginning and ending on Poplar Street. The grassy area north of the depot has been landscaped with railroad ties dividing the area.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Sayre Rock Island Depot maintains its original interior configuration. However, the majority of original finishes have been removed or covered with gray paint. The concrete floor in the majority of the depot has been painted gray, as has the linoleum floor in the ticket office. Additionally, some interior alterations, such as filling in of the ticket window between the ticket office and Black waiting room, have occurred.

In keeping with the policies and practices of the day, the Sayre Rock Island Depot had segregated waiting rooms. The "white" waiting room was located on the east side of the depot. The spacious waiting room measures twenty-six feet two inches wide and has a raised ceiling. This waiting room was accessed by two doors on the track side. Adjacent to the large waiting room to the east was the "Ladies Rest Room." The Ladies Rest Room, measuring twelve feet six inches wide, was separated from the main waiting room by narrow walls with a cased opening. On the north side of the Ladies Rest Room was the Ladies Toilet. Originally featuring the toilet on the west side, separated from the east side sink by a partition, the Ladies Toilet is now used for storage. Additionally, the south side of the Ladies Rest Room has been blocked off, for unknown reasons. The original wainscoting remains in the Ladies Rest Room, although it has been painted gray. The wainscoting along the south side has been moved and is the material now used to divide the room. The larger waiting room does not currently have wainscoting.

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Off the northwest side of the waiting room, north of the ticket office, was the Men's Toilet. This commodious bathroom features the toilet on the west side and the sink on the east. The original wood partition around the toilet with a glass and wood panel door remain intact. The original, glass and wood, panel door between the bathroom and waiting room also remains extant. A new door between the men's toilet and the ticket office has been cut in. This door was probably opened in the late 1980s, when the museum took over the depot.

Additionally, between the large waiting room and the ticket office, a sizeable opening has been created, taking the place of the historic ticket window. As originally constructed, the ticket office was accessible from only the Black waiting room. The ticket office, measuring fourteen feet four inches wide, had two ticket windows and counters. The ticket window on the east opened onto the white waiting room and the ticket window on the west opened onto the Black waiting room. On the south side of the room, originally in the bay window, was the operators table. None of these features remain in the ticket office. The ticket window to the Black waiting room has been completely blocked off. The ticket window to the white waiting room has been enlarged to create an opening between the ticket office and waiting room. The operators table has been removed and a smaller display case now sits in its spot. However, the original, glass and wood, panel door between the ticket office and Black waiting room remains intact.

The Black waiting room, accessed from outside by a separate single door, is currently used as the museum office. The Black waiting room measured an even fourteen feet wide. It has been painted a peach color, noticeably different than the gray of the remainder of the depot. Off the northeast corner of the Black waiting room, north of the ticket office and directly west of the white men's toilet, were the Black restrooms. In a space equal to the white men's toilet, were both the Black men and women's toilet. The men's toilet featured only the stool while the women's toilet also contained a sink. The toilets were separated by a wall, rather than merely a partition. However, both of these rooms have been gutted and this area is now a kitchenette.

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To the west of Black waiting room was the Baggage and Express Room. Measuring an even sixteen feet wide, this room featured exposed brick walls and a concrete floor. On the north side, there was a single flight of stair to a small basement which originally contained the furnace. When the museum took over the building, volunteers boarded over the opening. Although historically more of an open space, the baggage room has been filled with shelving and is used as the museum's storage area. Due to the shelving, the freight doors are no longer operable. The single panel door between the baggage room and Black waiting room remains intact.

ALTERATIONS

The exterior of the Sayre Rock Island Depot has only been minimally altered. On the north side in the bay window, a wall air conditioning unit has been removed and the hole covered with a metal panel. Also on the north side, new heating and cooling units have been placed next to the above-grade dock. The date of the above alterations are unknown. A new concrete sidewalk has been laid on the south side of the depot with a new red brick walk being placed on the east, north and west sides. Additionally, the U-shaped driveway around the depot has been paved with asphalt. Work on the sidewalks and driveway all occurred in 1999.

Modifications to the interior of the depot have been more extensive. Few of the historic finishes remain intact within the building. The floors and trim have been painted gray in the exhibit areas, while the office walls have been painted a peach color. The Black restrooms have been combined and gutted to create a kitchenette. The ticket window between the Black waiting room and ticket office has been sealed off; the ghost marks of the window remain visible. The ticket window between the ticket office and white waiting room has been enlarged to create a large opening between the two. A new trimmed door has been created between the ticket office and men's toilet. The south part of the Ladies Rest Room has been partitioned; this alteration can be easily reversed. In the baggage room, the opening to the small historic basement on the north side of the room has been boarded over and several sets of shelves have been constructed, blocking the operation of the freight doors.

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The majority, if not all, of these changes probably occurred when the Shortgrass Country Museum took over the building in the late 1980s. These alterations were undertaken to make the building more compatible with its new use as a museum.

Although the interior of the Sayre Rock Island Depot has been modified, it does retain its original room configuration. Additionally, the majority of changes are readily discernible. The exterior of the depot has undergone minimal alteration and, thus, retains a high degree of integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. Overall, the depot maintains its integrity to a remarkable degree and is thus eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

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SUMMARY

The Sayre Rock Island Depot is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and Criterion C. The depot is significant within the context of transportation and architecture in Sayre, Oklahoma. The depot is significant under Criterion A for its association with rail transportation in Sayre, the county seat of Beckham County, from its construction in 1927 to 1950, the National Register's fifty year mark. Under Criterion C, the building is architecturally significant as the only extant passenger depot in Sayre and as an excellent example of a brick and stucco Rock Island Railroad depot.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On 19 April 1892, the Cheyenne and Arapaho surplus lands, situated in what is now western Oklahoma, opened to non-Native American settlement. The run for the 3.5 million surplus acres of Cheyenne-Arapaho country did not garner the attention of other land runs. Only approximately 25,000 settlers staked claim to about 1.5 million acres (as compared to the 1889 opening of the Unassigned Lands in which 50,000 homeseekers competed for 2 million acres of land or the 1893 run in the Cherokee Outlet in which over 100,000 settlers raced for six million acres). The remaining two million acres of Cheyenne-Arapaho land, mostly in the western portion, were not immediately claimed as they were deemed unsuited for farming. However, homesteaders did eventually lay claim to the western part of Cheyenne-Arapaho land.¹

As with many Oklahoma towns, the town of Sayre came into existence due to the railroad. In 1901, the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railway began extending a line through western Oklahoma Territory. At the same time, the Choctaw Townsite and Improvement Company began surveying the area for possible townsites. In July 1901, the firm of McCabe and Steen Contractors began

¹Arrell Morgan Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries Second Edition (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 178-180.

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grading a road between Weatherford and Texola. During this time, the townsite company paid a total of \$8,000 to J.W. Danner, J.M. Danner, James N. Lennox, G.W. Roles and William M. Hutton for land to establish the town of Sayre. All of the men, except for J.W. Danner, had homesteaded their claims. In 1900, J.W. Danner bought a quarter section of land which adjoined his son J.M. Danner's claim from a man named Caldwell. The town of Sayre came into being on 14 September 1901 when the Choctaw Townsite and Improvement Company held their town lot sale. The railroad opened for business before 26 September 1901.²

At about the same time that the railroad completed its line through Sayre, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway Company (Rock Island) leased the line from the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railway. The Rock Island subsequently completed the line through to Amarillo, Texas, and eventually to Tucumcari, New Mexico.³

Sayre was named for Robert H. Sayre. Sayre was a railroad man from South Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He was both a chief engineer and a stockholder in the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railway.⁴

The town of Sayre was originally located in Roger Mills County. In 1907, with the advent of statehood, a new county was formed from the southern portion of Roger Mills County, including Sayre, and the northern part of Greer County.

²Myrtle Danner, Sayre of Red River Valley: A Collection of Historical Data Concerning the Origin and Growth of the City of Sayre, (Elk City, Oklahoma: McDonald's Printing, 1976), n.pg. See also "Shortgrass Country Museum Brochure," on file in the Sayre Rock Island Depot File, Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory, State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and The Daily Oklahoman, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) 26 September 1901.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

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The new county, Beckham County, was named after John Creeps Wickliffe Beckham, thirty-fourth governor of Kentucky. Due to its central location in the new county, Sayre was named the Beckham County seat.⁵

Sayre relied on the rich, surrounding farming district for much of its economic well-being. By the late 1920s, diversified agriculture helped make Sayre one of the most prosperous towns in the state. In addition to fruit, truck and staple crops, area farmers also boosted their revenues with poultry raising and dairying. Additionally, nearby gas and oil fields boosted the local economy, as well as furnished cheap fuel for manufacturing. By 1936, a meat packing plant, chemical plant, large medical laboratory and a carbon plant all operated in or near Sayre.⁶

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In 1901 when the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railway completed its line through Sayre, the town was named a division town. The original frame depot, constructed in 1901, was a commodious building situated to the west of Main Street in an area known locally as "Railroad Hill." Built as the town was just beginning to develop, it turned out that the depot was located about a mile west of downtown Sayre, outside of the city limits. The first Sayre Rock Island Depot was a combination freight and passenger depot. The large, one-story freight portion of the depot was located on the west side with the two-story passenger area on the east end. Also in 1901, the railroad erected an engine house, coal chute, turntable, section house, bunk house and tool house. In 1902, a Harvey Eating House was built to the west of the depot. This large, two-story building remained in place until about 1935 when it was sold to a private individual, who moved it out of the railroad yards, probably into Sayre

⁵Ibid.

⁶V.A. Dale, "Sayre," (n.p., on file in the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Library Vertical Files, 15 April 1936). See also The Sayre (Oklahoma) Headlight, 17 January 1929.

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proper. In 1908, the railway company also constructed a round house and boiler house at Sayre. One year later, a chemical house and hose house were erected. In 1911, a track scale was added, followed by stock pens two years later. The stock pens remained in use until being retired in 1966. By 1915, the railroad also had built a cinder pit, 24X28 water tank, sand house and motor house on site. Additionally, various offices were located in box cars, as were a storeroom and tool house.⁷

Although Sayre enjoyed its prominence as a division town on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway line, the citizens of Sayre quickly became dissatisfied with the location of the depot. Situated outside the city limits, citizens and visitors to Sayre had to either walk or ride the mile between the depot and downtown Sayre. By late 1913, the railroad began to "color up" blueprints for a new depot in Sayre. In January 1914, C.W. Jones, general manager of the Rock Island Railway, notified the Sayre city clerk that a location for the new depot had been decided on. Local residents "...hoped that the company has selected a centrally located site where it will best meet the convenience of the traveling public."⁸

In March 1914, the railroad announced the new brick depot was to be built on Main Street. Located "directly in the middle" of Main Street, the company proposed to construct an underground crossing from one side of the tracks to the other in order to "eliminate all possible danger to Main Street traffic at that point." Additionally, the company was prepared to move the old depot about two hundred feet west of Short Creek bridge. The new depot was heralded

⁷Box 112, Structural Notes, Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 1915.

⁸The Sayre Standard, 1 February and 8 January 1914.

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as "something for Sayre to proud of" and as a "...great improvement over the present depot facilities."⁹

Construction of the new depot in Sayre, however, did not proceed as expected. On October 19, 1914, the Rock Island Railway system was sold at Sheriff's sale at the front door of the courthouse in New York City, New York. The sale of the railway company squashed the plans for Sayre's new depot. Development of the new depot was apparently also hampered at this time due to local controversies over the location of the proposed depot.¹⁰

By 1917, the residents of Sayre began to "demand that promises be kept." In late April, the Rock Island general manager at El Reno indicated that an appropriation for a depot at Sayre was probable, however, the site was still a problem. According to the El Reno general manager, the railway company would not consider purchasing a site as long as they had land on which a depot could be built. Additionally, all plans and estimates had been made using a site at or near the west end of Main Street.¹¹

By June 1917, the mayor of Sayre filed a complaint against the Rock Island Railway Company with the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. The complaint charged the company with failure to stop their freight and passenger trains within the city limits and failure to maintain a depot and ticket office within the city limits. A hearing on this matter was presented to Chairman Jack Love in Sayre on 23 June 1917. Evidence presented at the hearing showed the town of Sayre to possess 3,000 residents and to be a "...well established and prosperous city with brick and stone business blocks, school houses, churches and court house." Additionally, it was shown that the city was "...situated in

⁹Ibid., 12 March 1914.

¹⁰Ibid., 15 October 1914 and 1 February 1917. See also The Sayre Headlight, 7 April 1927.

¹¹The Sayre Standard, 1 February 1917 and 26 April 1917.

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the midst of a prosperous agricultural district and serves the surrounding country for some ten miles east and west, twenty miles south and forty miles northwest." Further evidence indicated the existing depot was "...not easily accessible to persons going to and from" the depot and "...that by reason of its location and the arrangement of trackage the present depot facilities constitute a source of danger to passengers going to and returning from trains...and to persons hauling freight to and from the railway site." It was also noted that the normal routes to and from the depot were inaccessible "...during rains and flood times."¹²

By mid-July 1917, the Corporation Commission ordered a new, fire-proof depot be built at Sayre. The Commission found that "The people of Sayre and surrounding communities and the traveling public have for a number of years put up with inconveniences and have been subjected to dangers growing out of the present inadequate and improperly located depot." The Commission also determined that the "...revenues received at the station at Sayre are sufficient to justify the erection of a modern, fire-proof depot." Additionally, the Commission ruled "The exigencies of the times and the reasons urged by the defendant are not sufficient to warrant further delay in the beginning of construction of this depot." As such, the Commission ordered the railway company to submit plans to the Commission for the new depot by 1 September 1917 with construction to begin no later than 1 October 1917. The depot was to be completed by 1 January 1918.¹³

As ordered, the railway company developed blueprints for a new depot and eating house in Sayre in 1917. Once again, however, construction of the new facility did not occur as anticipated. The siting of the depot was largely blamed for stopping construction. Another factor which halted construction was America's

¹²Ibid., 19 July 1917.

¹³Ibid.

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entrance into World War I with the government taking over the railroad and all building operations being stopped.¹⁴

In September 1926, passenger traffic through Sayre on the Rock Island was deemed "by far the heaviest this line has ever enjoyed." According to the local newspaper, the California train was full both ways and the Oil Special pulled two or three sleepers each night. Additionally, it was noted that the only way to secure a berth on these routes was through advance reservation. Freight traffic along the line was also up. Increased freight traffic was credited directly and indirectly to the development of the Texas Panhandle oil field. Prior to the construction of a load rack at Lela, Texas, the Sante Fe Railway was the only railroad within reach of the oil field. As such, traffic of the immense panhandle wheat crop was thrown to the Rock Island Railway. At Sayre, the wheat rush during the fall of 1926 taxed the local yard. As a result, "...a substantial increase in the trackage in the Sayre yards is to be made at once." Additionally, during this period the company was completing a new line from Amarillo to the oil field which was projected to bring "...oil trains passing back and forth over these lines as frequently as any other character of cars."¹⁵

In March 1927, the newspaper formally announced the city of Sayre was finally going to get their new depot. Although Rock Island officials had informed the newspaper and other city officials of plans to build a new depot the previous fall, they had also requested that the news not be announced "as their plans were not then complete." According to the newspaper, another major factor in

¹⁴A copy of a blueprint for a proposed depot at Sayre, dated 1917, is located in the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. The Sayre Headlight, 7 April 1927 and 14 April 1927.

¹⁵The Sayre Headlight, 23 September 1926.

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the railroad's not announcing their plans were the previous controversies over the location of the new depot. The newspaper reminded residents that

"This is a division point on this railway line, and there is no question but that when they do build a depot we will get one of which the city may well feel proud, while the extension of their yard and terminal facilities mean the employment of more men, an important factor for this city."

Additionally, the newspaper exhorted readers that "All should help boost, instead of discouraging them."¹⁶

It is probable that the railroad finally decided to construct a new depot for Sayre in 1927 because of the increased traffic along the line in the mid-1920s. The location of the 1901 depot, as Sayre residents had frequently complained, was awkwardly located for both residents and visitors. With traffic surging, the railroad needed to improve their accessibility to encourage continued travel along the railroad. Another reason for the railroad to improve their desirability as a means of travel at that particular time was the development of a significant competitor in Sayre -- U.S. Highway 66. Developements related to the construction of U.S. Highway 66 through Sayre and Oklahoma made the local newspaper with increasing frequency following the designation of the route in 1926. U.S. Highway 66 (currently called Route 66) provided Oklahoma with its first east-west transcontinental highway. The highway continued to serve as the major east-west artery through Oklahoma until it was superseded by four lane interstates in 1965.

The railroad probably did not resume their 1917 plans for a new depot after the end of World War I because locals did not press matter as they had in 1917. The 1901 Sayre depot, although bothersome to reach, was a sound building with a Harvey Eating House located nearby. In contrast, the town of Walters in Cotton County, Oklahoma, had been forced to make-do with a '66 passenger coach for a

¹⁶Ibid., 17 March 1927.

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depot when their original frame building was destroyed by fire in 1916. Walters did not receive a new brick and stucco building until 1920. Although part of the delay is attributable to America's involvement in World War I, it must be noted that to get their new depot, the town of Walters was also forced to file suit against the Rock Island Railway company with the Oklahoma Corporation Commission.¹⁷

The new Sayre Rock Island Depot was to be strictly a passenger depot. The old depot was to be moved and used as a freight depot. Additionally, trackage to the existing railroad yard was to be increased threefold, a new water tank was to be erected and a system of stand pipes was to be constructed to allow locomotives to obtain water at different points in the yard. The expanded yards were expected to allow storage of six hundred freight cars and still have room to make up both freight and passenger trains and keep through lines open. The stand pipe system was noted as being "...a feature seen only in the largest railroad yards along their lines." By mid-August 1927, the revamped yards were nearing completion. At that time, the yards at Sayre were described as one of the largest freight lines in Western Oklahoma and the largest west of El Reno, Oklahoma.¹⁸

In early April 1927, it was brought to the attention of local citizens that the railway company desired to erect the new depot north of the tracks and east of the Sayre City Hall between Broadway and Fourth Street. This new site was owned by the city of Sayre and the Sayre Community Hall, built in 1925, was situated on it. In response to the request from the Rock Island, the Sayre city council decided to hold a public meeting to allow local residents to express their wishes concerning the matter. In encouraging a favorable outcome, the newspaper proclaimed the site to be "...the most central one in

¹⁷Savage, Cynthia, "Walters Rock Island Depot National Register Nomination" (on file at the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 1998), 15-16.

¹⁸Ibid., 26 May 1927, 23 June 1927 and 18 August 1927.

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the city and will better accommodate a greater number than any other possible selection..." Additionally, the local newspaper again urged citizens to "get into the game and boost" and to "...give the Rock Island hearty evidence of our appreciation for their enterprise." Citizens of Sayre responded with "an overwhelming sentiment in favor of accepting (the) railroad's proposition."¹⁹

By late June, part of the old depot had been moved to the southwest corner of South Ninth Street and West Main, just outside the city limits. The west end of the depot, remaining at the yard, was being converted to an eating house to serve the freight crews and yard men. Until construction of the new passenger depot was complete, the passenger depot and ticket office were being maintained in the lower half of the old depot which had been moved away from the passenger tracks and were deemed "...anything but convenient to get to."²⁰

In the latter part of August 1927, P.E. Kelly of the Rock Island Railway Company, arrived in Sayre. The purpose of the trip was to allow Kelly to present the revised plans for the new depot to the city council. City officials quickly approved the plans and everyone who saw them "expressed their approval of the plans." Kelly also informed the newspaper that building material would quickly begin to arrive and "...that work would be rushed to the end that the railroad might have the new building completed before cold weather sets in." Following the meeting in Sayre, the depot plans were presented to the Corporation Commission, who also quickly approved them.²¹

Development of the new depot followed rapidly. By the end of September, a contract for the construction of the new depot had been let to Leake Construction Company. Work was to "begin at once and be pushed as rapidly as possible." Additionally, work on a new track to be built in front of the depot

¹⁹Ibid., 7 April 1927 and 14 April 1927.

²⁰Ibid., 23 June 1927.

²¹Ibid., 1 September 1927.

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was to start right away. The new track was to begin in the vicinity of Third Street and proceed west to a point near the Fifth Street crossing.²²

While the Sayre High School band played, the first train pulled into the Sayre Rock Island Depot at 9:45, Sunday morning, 15 January 1928. Despite bad weather which was "threatening all the while", approximately nine hundred people turned out for the opening event. A local "prominent" farmer, S.C. Elliott, purchased the first ticket sold. In addition to J.H. Johnson, trainmaster for the Panhandle division, other railroad officials present at the opening included L.J. Adams, traveling auditor; R.L. Jones, loss and damage inspector; and, F.J. Ward, acting agent. O.H. Martin was named the new ticket agent.²³

Constructed at a cost of about \$30,000, the building was deemed "a credit to the city and to the railroad." Described as "an imposing brick structure, well painted and finished, both inside and out," the building featured a ticket office in "...about the center of the building." To the east of the office was the white waiting room which was characterized as being "large enough to accommodate many people." East of the white waiting room was the ladies waiting room. West of the ticket office were the Black waiting room and baggage room. The building was heated by a hot water system. With a burner manufactured by Sayre resident Fred West, the gas furnace was located in a basement area built under the northwest corner of the building.²⁴

As previously mentioned, at the time the depot was being built, another major transportation means was also under construction in Sayre, U.S. Highway 66. In addition to being a competitor to the railroad in the transportation of people and goods, the development of U.S. Highway 66 foreshadowed the eventual demise

²²Ibid., 29 September 1927.

²³Ibid., 19 January 1928 and 26 January 1928.

²⁴Ibid.

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of passenger travel along the railroad. Although the railroad was the dominant means of transportation for passenger travel until the 1920s, the automobile quickly replaced it. In 1920, rail transportation peaked in America with 1,270 million passengers taking the railroad 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. America's involvement in World War II brought an upsurge in rail-related travel which peacetime was unable to sustain.²⁵

According to the railroad officials at the opening of the new Sayre depot "...they do not expect a greater number of passengers since building (the new depot), but they have built it to accommodate their customers." Although passenger traffic may not have increased significantly after construction of the depot, the next few years, particularly 1929, were a boom to the railroad in terms of freight traffic through Sayre. Rail-related traffic, however, fell significantly by 1932 as traffic, both passenger and freight, was diverted to automobiles and transcontinental highways.²⁶

In addition to enhancing the transportation facilities available in Sayre, the depot was touted as adding to the general economic well-being of the city. According to the local newspaper, following the opening of the depot, three extra men would be hired to take care of the building. Additionally, due to its central location within Sayre, the railroad was required to hook onto the water main which meant more revenue for the city. Also adding to the local coffers was the use of gas in the building. Finally, the new building resulted

²⁵Albro Martin, Railroads Triumphant: The Growth, Rejection, and Rebirth of a Vital American Force (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110, 124.

²⁶Ibid., 19 January 1928, 9 January 1930 and 24 March 1932.

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in a higher assessed valuation of the railroad which resulted in additional taxes to be paid to the city.²⁷

The depot was deeded to the city of Sayre in 1972. In about 1989, a local historical society was established which took over the depot. On 11 April 1992, the Shortgrass Country Museum formally opened in the building. The opening of the museum coincided with the centennial celebration of the 1892 land run for the Cheyenne-Arapaho lands. The museum continues to operate within the building, displaying exhibits on the many aspects of early day life in Shortgrass Country.²⁸

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Sayre Rock Island Depot is architecturally significant as the only extant passenger depot in Sayre and as an excellent example of a brick and stucco depot. As the Rock Island was the only railway company with lines into Sayre, there are no other railway company depots in Sayre. The original 1901 Rock Island depot was dismantled in 1927 with a portion being moved and used as a new freight depot. The remaining part of the depot was left on-site in the Sayre railroad yards and used as a eating place for railroad workers. At an unknown time, the yard was largely dismantled (several sets of tracks remain) and the freight depot demolished. The freight depot was possibly gone by World War II as a museum member recalls freight deliveries to the passenger depot when he arrived and departed from the depot during the war. The volunteer also remembers a wooden loading dock to the side of the passenger depot.

Similar to many major corporations, the Rock Island used standardized plans in constructing their facilities. The Sayre Rock Island Depot is no exception. Following the basic pattern of a "combination depot," the Sayre Rock Island

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Shortgrass Country Museum brochure.

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Depot is similar to other depots in Oklahoma, such as the Hobart Rock Island Depot, Hobart, Kiowa County (NR Listed 12/7/95) and the Walters Rock Island Depot, Walters, Cotton County (NR Listed 9/3/98). Although "combination depots" were designed to incorporate both passenger-related business and freight storage and handling areas, many Oklahoma depots were designated passenger depots only. Like the Hobart and Walters depots, the Sayre Rock Island Depot was intended as only a passenger depot with a separate freight depot located nearby. Also similar to the Hobart and Walters depot, the depot in Sayre was constructed of a brick and stucco mix.

The depot stands out in the community of Sayre as both an Italian Renaissance style building and as the only passenger depot. Generally, downtown Sayre is composed of red and yellow brick, two-story, Commercial style buildings. Due to its location away from the downtown business district, the depot stands out among the nearby buildings which are generally light industry (warehouse) buildings. The city hall, the only notable building on the block with the depot, is a red brick, vernacular commercial style building. Across the street from the depot is the modern public library.

The Sayre Rock Island Depot maintains a high degree of integrity. The building is an excellent example of a standardized Rock Island depot. Additionally, it is the only extant passenger depot and only rail-related building remaining in Sayre. As such, it is the last extant link with the railroad in Sayre.

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The Sayre (Oklahoma) Standard. 8 January 1914, 12 March 1914, 15 October 1914,
1 February 1917, 26 April 1917 and 19 July 1917.

"Shortgrass Country Museum Brochure." On file in the Sayre Rock Island Depot
File, Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory, Oklahoma State Historic Preservation
Office, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 21, 22, 23, 24, Block 59, Original Townsite, Sayre, Oklahoma.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the Sayre Rock
Island Depot.



Rock Island Railroad Depot





Rock Island Railroad Depot

