

Gwen: We left San Antonio and traveled almost 300 miles Northeast for our next investigation.

Tukufu: 150 years ago, this part of the state was just desolate prairie country. Here and there were small frontier towns with only a handful of residents. Then one day something happened that changed this part of Texas forever. Out of this barren landscape, Dallas was born. Big business, big ambition, big city. Today Dallas is the 8th largest city in the U.S., with a population of almost 2 million people. It's a full scale modern-day metropolis. Well, there's a man in Dallas who thinks that it all began here in this little wooden building. This was a first-of-a-kind building in Dallas when it was built. I remember coming here as a little boy and seeing some of the first pieces of equipment being stored here. I imagine waiting in this depot for the first train to arrive must have been an incredible amount of excitement and anticipation. The fact that I could get on a train and be somewhere in a couple of days, riding in comfort. There was a new way of life. Things were going to change. I'm Tukufu Zuberi, here in Dallas with Gwen Wright to unravel this big Texas story.

Gwen: The age of steam museum is now home to this small old depot, nestled among these huge railroad cars and tracks. Paul Carlitz is a member of the museum's board. So Paul, what can you tell us about this depot?

Pail: Some people think that this depot is the first passenger depot in Dallas, from 1872.

Gwen: So what would you like for us to find out?

Pail: Is this the 1872 depot that made Dallas? If this turns out to date from 1872, then it's really a very important landmark to Dallas. [Toot-toot-toot]

Tukufu: I hopped aboard one of the last old railroads in Texas. Trains are an extraordinary part of American history. In 1830, railroads first started to run, out of Baltimore. American statesman Daniel Webster declared in 1847 that railroads tower above all other inventions of this or the preceding age. The race to build across the great expanse of the American plains was on. The covered wagon was soon to be obsolete. By the 1870s, the railroads were red-hot. Investments in the rail industry topped 2.5 billion dollars in one year alone. And America's profile, especially in the west, would never be the same. I'm getting a sense of the tremendous impact railroads must have had early on. But where does Dallas fit into this railroad boom? That's a question I have for Dallas historian Darwin Payne. What was life like in Dallas in the 1870s?

Darwin: Well, it was two different cities. Before 1872 and 1873 -- that was before the railroads came -- okay. It was one kind of city. And after the railroads came, it was an entirely different sort of city.

Tukufu: Well, what was it like before the 1870s?

Darwin: Well, it was a small, sleepy southern town, filled with people who wanted to grow. They wanted the city to grow and they were very ambitious and they worked hard to bring the railroad to the city. And so there were a lot of cities in the state that wanted the north-south railroad, which is the direction it was going, and Dallas wanted it, perhaps, more than any others.

Tukufu: So did this little depot really make Dallas?

Darwin: It was like a gold mining boom town after, after the first railroad came. The population multiplied rapidly. From 3,000, it went within a year to about 9,000. You had all sorts of people coming in. Of course, you

had the trains discharging passengers and freight every day. The pace, the tempo of life, increased tremendously.

Gwen: The first thing I need to do is check if our depot is the original 1872 depot. I'm hoping to draw some clues from historical maps at the Dallas Public Library. I have here an 1878 map of Dallas, which has already grown to be quite extensive. And I can find our train line, the Houston & Texas central railway, and the original 1872 depot. It's quite fascinating to see an aerial view of Dallas in 2001. According to this modern map, the 1872 depot should be here. Today, the central expressway covers all of the train line's original right-of-way, including the site of the original depot. So where is our depot in this modern map? It's miles away from the site of the 1872 depot. Our depot is in the wrong place, but there's still hope. It wasn't uncommon for buildings back then to be taken apart and moved elsewhere. Could Paul's depot be the 1872 depot, in whole or in part? To find out, I need to date this building. At the time, depots functioned as stationhouses, comfortable and pleasant places to await the train. If it is from 1872, Paul's depot should have the ornamentation that was popular during that era. These windows are very plain, 6-over-6s, and regular throughout the building, even though some have been changed. They look as if they're mass-produced. And this wall was clearly added. There are two different kinds of sidings that suggests this was added later on. My first impression is that there's nothing that dates the depot to the 1870s. Its structure is plain, strictly functional, possibly early 1900s. There is a bit of ornament up here at the top of the windows and above it a Palladian arch combined with fish scale shingles. On closer inspection, there are some signs of ornamentation, but it's just not definitive. I need to call in an expert to help date the building. Kevin Davis is a paint analyst. He's dated historic Texan structures, such as the Itasca train station and Ellis County courthouse. So Kevin, what do we see here?

Kevin: We've got about five layers of paint here, I think. We're looking at the back layer here, which is the primer coat. We can actually see the original type of structure. Then we're going to do a chemical analysis on it.

Gwen: He does this by examining paint samples for clues. Paint samples can tell us a lot. For example, hand-mixed and powdery milk-based paints were used predominantly in the 19th century. Well, we've got this thicker area here where we're able to actually get in underneath the paints and see more layers. Kevin has to excavate the layers of paint to uncover the very first coat of primer.

Kevin: Strange little sparkly things going on in here. Not quite sure what it is yet.

Gwen: What could it be?

Kevin: It looks -- looks like sand. The time period of that first layer could point to the age of our depot.

Tukufu: Next stop for me is the Degolyer Library at Southern Methodist University, renowned for its transportation archive. I have a sense of the railroad's effect on Dallas, but how did Dallas first get the railroad? There was intense competition for rail lines. Okay, here it is. "115 acres given as a railroad addition march 22nd, 1872." So a big block of land is given to the railroad in 1872. And there's more. It was given by William Henry Gaston, a confederate veteran and a banker. So a banker gave the land to the railroad. After all, there was much money to be made by bringing a railroad to town. Dallas won the competition, but who lost? Okay, this is interesting. Jefferson, Texas, was the most important city in Northern Texas at this time. I've never heard of it. Why didn't Jefferson get a railroad? I decided to take a trip and visit Jefferson to see what happened to a town the railroad passed by.

Gwen: Kevin is closing in on an answer. Once he's entered our paint sample into his database, it will then be compared to thousands of paint types already collated. If a match is found, we'll know approximately when the building was first painted. The interesting thing is that the sand that we discovered earlier?

Kevin: M-hm. Well, we found out that it was actually from the trains. And they used to use sand on the tracks to give it traction, and they threw that paint up, the sand up, into the paint layers. And so that's where our sand comes from.

Gwen: So it suggests it was a pretty busy area.

Kevin: Yes, absolutely.

Gwen: So, Kevin, is there information here that would help us date the building?

Kevin: Well, it's inconclusive.

Gwen: Kevin was unable to find a definitive match with a paint sample from before 1900, which suggests it was built afterwards. The depot itself could also give us one last piece of forensic evidence: the very things that hold the place up.

Tukufu: I've come to Jefferson, 170 miles east of Dallas. I want to see just what happened to the town that didn't get the railroad. At its peak before 1872, this was a major city, with 30,000 residents. Its Big Cypress Bayou allowed steamboat traffic. But unlike Dallas, Jefferson didn't get a railroad line until the late 1870s, by which time it was too late. Jefferson's loss was Dallas' gain. Dallas prospered while Jefferson's glory days as a shipping hub ended after it lost the competition for the railroad. Today, just 2,000 people live here. I asked local historian John Nance for a tour.

John: Well, it's just kind of hard to believe it's such a sleepy little Mayberry thing now, that once it was a really, really busy, bustling town.

Tukufu: Yeah.

John: At the peak, it was the largest inland port in the state of Texas. It was second really only to Galveston in the entire state as far as shipping and making money.

Tukufu: Jefferson did eventually get a railroad, but it was too late to revitalize the town. Today Jefferson is a station stop rather than a destination. Its modern-day downtown is a fraction of the size of Dallas'. In some ways, though, I prefer the charm of this river town to the hum of modern-day Dallas.

Gwen: I haven't managed to pin down a precise date for the depot. My last hope is Jay Furshing, an architectural historian who specializes in historic Texas buildings. So Jay, what's your take on this little depot?

Jay: Well, the building tells us a lot about its period and its function, just by standing here and looking at it. Get some classical detailing like a broken pediment. You have an arched window with the skylights keystone, so it's a blending of styles. The way the building's put together really tells us the most about when it was built. There's all kinds of things about it -- the lumber, the way it's put together -- but the one thing that I can show you that tells us everything we need to know is what nails were used to put it together. This is a cut nail. These nails were manufactured in the 1800s, and wire nails that we're used to seeing today really came into

use in the 1880s but really weren't used extensively until the early 20th century. So we know pretty definitely by the fact that there aren't any of these nails in this depot that it probably wasn't built in the 1800s.

Gwen: So Jay, you don't find any part of this building that suggests it was an 1872 train depot?

Jay: No, there's not a thing here that I think is from 1872. And in fact, I don't even think this was ever a depot.

Gwen: You don't think it was a depot? Well, what was it?

Jay: I think it was always a yard office. Utilitarian buildings like this tend to be lost in our country, and this is a really great example of a yard office. So I think we should be happy about that and our community should be happy that we have this great example of something that was so important to the development of our city and to commerce in Dallas.

Gwen: So the depot is not from 1872. And it's not even a depot. It's a yard office, the office of the local railroad manager, not a station for passengers. Several details point to its being constructed at about the turn of the last century, 30 years after the first depot went up. But while this depot is not the one that made Dallas, its role as a yard office has historic significance to the making of this modern city.

Paul, we've covered a lot of ground here in Dallas and other parts of Texas, and we have an answer for your question today. We have to tell you this is not the original 1872 railroad depot for Dallas.

Paul: Oh.

Gwen: We think that it's a yardmaster office. That is, it's significant because it is the height of the railroads as a major enterprise and the point at which Dallas is becoming a big city, not just a small town.

Paul: Wow, that's neat. That's neat. You know, I wish, I wish it had been the 1872 depot. Thank you very much for finding out what this building is and what it represents to the history of Dallas.

Gwen: As a gift to thank you for letting us learn so much about the history of railroads and the growth of Dallas, we have a very special train ride that we have figured out for you, okay?

Paul: Great, great.

Tukufu: We took Paul to nearby Fort Worth for a ride.

Paul: This is wonderful! Thank you very much.

Gwen: Have a good ride, okay?