

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

**1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot (Frisco Depot)  
Other name/site number: Comanche Depot  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

**2. Location**

Street & number: 304 S. Austin St.  
City or town: Comanche State: Texas County: Comanche  
Not for publication:  Vicinity:

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
 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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:  
 national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer 10/13/17  
Signature of certifying official / Title Date  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:  
\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register.  
\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_\_ other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot, Comanche, Comanche County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

|                                     |                  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Private          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Public - Local   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Public - State   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Public - Federal |

**Category of Property**

|                                     |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | district    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | site        |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | structure   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | object      |

**Number of Resources within Property**

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1            | 0               | buildings  |
| 0            | 0               | sites      |
| 0            | 0               | structures |
| 0            | 0               | objects    |
| 1            | 0               | total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** TRANSPORTATION: Rail-related = depot

**Current Functions:** COMMERCE/TRADE: organizational; RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Prairie School

**Principal Exterior Materials:** BRICK

**Narrative Description:** (see continuation sheets 7 through 10)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

|                                     |          |  |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>A</b> | Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.   |
|                                     | <b>B</b> | Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>C</b> | 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. |
|                                     | <b>D</b> | Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.  |

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** TRANSPORTATION; ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance:** 1909-1969

**Significant Dates:** 1909

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Company staff engineer

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 8-11 through 8-16)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 9-17 through 9-18)

**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:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** 0.44 acres

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 31.894886° Longitude: -98.603378°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The nominated property includes the parcel identified by the Comanche County Central Appraisal District as "Property ID 71736" with the legal description "ORIG COMANCHE, BLOCK 52 S PT OF." See metes and bounds on page 10-19.

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes the parcel historically associated with depot.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Margaret Dudley, Chairman, Architectural Planning Committee, with THC Historian Bonnie Tipton Wilson  
Organization: Friends of Historic Comanche  
Street & number: P.O. Box 453  
City or Town: Comanche State: TX Zip Code: 76442  
Email: mgdudley@verizon.net  
Telephone: (325) 642-4205  
Date: April 4, 2017

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets MAP 20 through MAP 21)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets FIGURE 22 through FIGURE 28)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets PHOTO 29 through PHOTO 41)

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**Photograph Log**

St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot  
Comanche, Comanche County, Texas  
Photographer: Kyle Riley, Riley Studio (except as noted)  
Date Photographed: June 6, 2017 (except as noted)

Photo 1:  
South elevation—camera facing north

Photo 2:  
Bay window detail—camera facing north

Photo 3:  
South and east elevations—camera facing northwest, June 10, 2017, Margaret Dudley

Photo 4:  
North and east elevations—camera facing southwest

Photo 5:  
North elevation—camera facing south

Photo 6:  
North and west elevations—camera facing southeast

Photo 7:  
West elevation—camera facing east

Photo 8:  
South and west elevations—camera facing northeast

Photo 9:  
Baggage room door detail—camera facing north northeast showing door inside fixed glass

Photo 10:  
Platform—camera facing east showing Thurber brick

Photo 11:  
Platform—camera facing west showing Thurber brick

Photo 12:  
Large passenger waiting room—camera facing west

Photo 13:  
Large passenger waiting room—camera facing north, June, 16, 2017

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Photo 14:

Large passenger waiting room—camera facing east, June 16, 2017

Photo 15:

Large passenger waiting room—camera facing south, June 16, 2017

Photo 16:

Restroom entrances in central corridor—camera facing north, June 16, 2017

Photo 17:

Interior of canted bay window in central corridor—camera facing south

Photo 18:

Small passenger waiting room—camera facing east

Photo 19:

Small passenger waiting room with original door and desk (on right)—camera facing north

Photo 20:

Small passenger waiting room —camera facing south, June 16, 2017

Photo 21:

Small passenger waiting room—camera facing west

Photo 22:

Baggage room—camera facing east , June 16, 2017

Photo 23:

Baggage room—camera facing north, June 16, 2017

Photo 24:

Baggage room—camera facing south, June 16, 2017

Photo 25:

Baggage room—camera facing west

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC

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## Description

The 1909 St. Louis and San Francisco Railway (Frisco) Depot in Comanche, Texas is a one-story brick Prairie School-style building with a rectangular floor plan, wide overhanging eaves, and a hipped terracotta tile roof. A limestone belt course that wraps around the depot adds horizontal decorative emphasis. The red roof and walls are contrasted by green, wooden trim on doors, windows, soffits, and brackets. A canted bay window on the south elevation is topped by a gabled brick dormer and provided rail personnel a clear view of incoming trains. The depot is located three blocks south of the Comanche courthouse square on S. Austin St. (previously E. Main St.) at its original location alongside, what was once called, the Fort Worth and Rio Grande, railroad tracks. Following a long period of vacancy, the exterior was restored in 2011 to its 1909 appearance and the interior was rehabilitated. The property is in excellent condition and exhibits a high degree of integrity.

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## Setting

Comanche is in the central part of Comanche County, approximately one hundred miles southwest of Fort Worth, Texas. As the county seat, the town is anchored by its courthouse square. The present courthouse, an Art Deco-style building, was designed by Wyatt Hedrick and completed in 1941; it is the county's fifth courthouse. Surrounding the main square are historic-age one and two-story brick and stone buildings. The buildings represent several construction booms for Comanche in the late-1880s, early 20th-century, and post-war era.

Located three blocks south of the courthouse square, the Frisco Depot is in a mixed industrial and residential neighborhood of Comanche. Warehouses and processing facilities for the peanut and pecan industry occupy the immediate blocks that surround the Frisco and along the railroad tracks. Rail-related structures—water tank, roundhouse, and repair shop—that were built to service the Frisco line were demolished, likely during the period when it was abandoned (1969-1994), and some of the lots are still vacant. In 1994, CEN-TEX Rural Rail Transportation District purchased the track adjacent to the Frisco Depot and leased it the Fort Worth and Western Railway, which continues to operate along the line.

The Frisco Depot is the only structure on Block 52 and it sits on the south end of its lot. The block is bounded by S. Austin St. (previously E. Main St.) on the west; E. Mill Ave. to the north; S. Pearl St. (previously E. 2nd St.) to the east; and the railroad tracks establish its southern boundary. The original track laid by FW&RG ran, as does the present track, roughly northeast to southwest through Comanche County, but tracks within the town run parallel to the street grid. The nominated building sits alongside the track and operated as the local passenger train station from the time of its construction until, approximately, 1969. It has been rehabilitated to serve as offices for the Comanche Chamber of Commerce, a community meeting space, and small museum. A parking lot on the north side of the building serves visitors.

## Exterior

The rectangular-shaped red brick depot is 22' x 74' with projecting bays on the north and south elevations. It is covered by a hipped roof with seven-foot eaves supported by decorative brackets. Rusticated limestone lintels above all the windows and doors emphasize the low-slung roofline. Single and paired windows throughout the depot are double-hung 1/1 sash with a continuous sill belt course that wraps around the perimeter of the building. During the period of its vacancy, vandals destroyed the original windows beyond repair. The replacement windows, installed during the 2011 restoration, were hand-built and are not operable. The foundation is concrete. The linear design of the lintels, belt course, and foundation emphasize the horizontal character of the Frisco Depot. The pattern of doors and windows on the north and south elevations are almost identical. Styles of protruding bays on either façade are

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different. A 17'-wide brick platform extends from the south elevation, to the train tracks. A modern steel fence between the depot and tracks is a safety requirement of the Fort Worth and Western Railway.

The low-pitched hipped roof dominates the depot's linear silhouette, making it distinguishable amongst the town's building stock. Years of neglect irreversibly damaged the original Mission Revival-style red clay tile roof and it was completely replaced as part of the rehabilitation project. Red Ludowici tiles were chosen as a sympathetic replacement for the original roof material. The seven-foot eaves have bead board soffits that are punctuated by decorative green brackets in an even pattern around the roofline. The eave overhang is covered with green-painted fascia.

A canted bay window divides the south, track-facing, elevation into two unequal portions and, with its dormer, is the visual focal point of the façade. Three large windows (3'3"x 7'6") punctuate each side of the bay and provide a clear view of the railway. Like all the windows in the depot, the bay windows are double-hung 1/1 with painted green wooden sash. A continuous, limestone lintel connects the three windows across all sides of the bay and is mirrored by the limestone belt course that forms the sill. Directly above the bay is a brick pedimented through-cornice dormer that is flush with the extension and equal width of the front side of the bay. The brick pediment has limestone molding that upturns slightly at each angle and accentuates its triangular shape. The small dormer window has a limestone sill.

West of the canted bay window on the south façade contains the entry to the main passenger waiting room. A three-panel partially-glazed door and transom is flanked by paired windows on each side. East of the bay window, is the track-facing entrance to the smaller waiting room. Historically, the room was designated for African American customers and included segregated restroom facilities. A transomed three-paneled door, single double-hung window, and a smaller (2'3" x 5'6") window demarcate this interior space. At the easternmost side of the south façade, a sliding barn door (8' x 8'7"), with 7/7 transom lights, served, what was once, the original baggage room. The baggage room doors on both north and south elevation retain original hardware and sliding functionality but are currently covered by large plate glass windows.

The north elevation is almost identical to the south façade except for a boxed bay window on the north elevation. It has two small windows (2'3" x 5'6") on the front face that provide natural light to the interior restrooms. Otherwise, entries and windows to the baggage room, primary, and secondary waiting rooms are copies of the south elevation. The symmetrical entryways increased efficiency in moving passengers in and out of the depot.

The east elevation has two windows that measure 2'3" x 5'6," providing natural light to the interior baggage room. The western elevation has a set of paired windows, equal in size to the paired windows on the north and south sides of the main passenger waiting room. The "COMANCHE" sign hangs from the roof on the western side of the depot.

Original Thurber brick platforms are laid in a herringbone pattern and wrap around the building on the east, south (track side), and west elevations. Memorial bricks were used as infill in the west elevation that stretches beyond the building's footprint towards the local right-of-way. Its curb is made of concrete. The platform is on grade with a ADA-compliant handicap entrance ramp on the north elevation and provides seamless access to either the north or south entrance doors. The paved parking area on the north is landscaped with plants of the period—crepe myrtles, nandina, and roses. The flagpole is centered on the north side.

### *Interior*

The interior of the Comanche Depot exhibits a simple rectangular floor plan with an east-west orientation. It is divided into four sections: large waiting room; central corridor with office and restroom area; small waiting room; and baggage room. The depot was designed with segregated entries, waiting rooms, ticket windows, and restroom facilities. Its general layout provides the only remaining architectural evidence of the Jim Crow-era in the depot today. Differences



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between its modern and historic layout are most apparent in the central corridor. All rooms, except for the baggage area, have exposed brick walls and salvaged pine wood floors.

A large 20' x 30' passenger waiting room, now public meeting area, occupies the western portion of the depot. Entry doors on the north and south elevations provide easy access to the tracks. Five paired windows throughout the room allow for optimal viewing of incoming train traffic. Its eastern interior wall was re-configured and the original entryway to restrooms was closed off. In its place are storage closets that flank a double-door to the central corridor.

The Frisco Depot's central interior is enclosed by the bay windows on the north and south elevations. The central hallway divides the space and provides access from the large waiting room to the eastern sections of the depot. Entries to bathrooms in the northern side of the section are accessed in the hallway. The railway office, now a workroom/lounge, occupies the space within the canted bay window on the track side of the building.

The small waiting room (14' x 20'), between the central corridor and baggage room, functions as an office space. Double doors recently installed on the eastern and western interior walls provide through-access to other areas of the depot. Two new closets were built in the western wall on either side of the door. Original exterior doors and windows are on the north and south elevations. Two small windows on either side of the room evidence the interior space where the segregated bathrooms were historically located. The restrooms and interior walls that enclosed them were removed during the period the Frisco was a freight depot.

The baggage room (17' x 20') has painted brick walls, white bead board ceiling, and original concrete floor. Sliding barn doors and hardware, original to the depot, function from the interior, but fixed glass on the exterior prevents entry from the north or south elevations. The early 20<sup>th</sup>-century freight scale is countersunk into the floor. The east wall of the room has two small, high windows.

#### *Alterations and 2011 Rehabilitation*

The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF), which acquired the Frisco Depot and railway in 1937, modified the building for freight traffic in the 1970s. The north entrance to the main passenger waiting room was altered. An overhead freight door was installed in place of paired windows and the north door was partially infilled to create a window. Sub-flooring was installed throughout the depot and, in some places, asbestos tiles were used. It is likely the original heating units, iron stoves and chimneys, in the two waiting rooms and the segregated bathrooms were also removed at that time. A loading dock was constructed on the exterior of the north façade. When AT&SF abandoned the line in 1983, the Frisco Depot sat mostly vacant. Years of neglect and a deteriorated roof caused extensive water damage to the interior, destroying much of the original wall, floor, and ceiling materials. Vandals broke windows, but the exterior pressed brick and stonework stayed in good condition.

The Friends of Historic Comanche first began its drive to preserve the Frisco Depot in 2002. In 2011, they began work to restore the exterior to its 1909 appearance and rehabilitate the interior. Architectural plans were based on evidence found in the building, 1920 floor plans (see Figure 8), and historic photographs. The 1914 Frisco Depot in Granbury, sixty miles north on the same rail line, provided more information as it is nearly identical to Comanche's Frisco Depot.

Following asbestos remediation, the badly damaged roof, soffits, and brackets were replaced. A composition roof, installed to help stabilize the building in the 1990s, was replaced with Mission Revival-style Ludowici tile roof materials that closely resemble the original 1909 depot roof. They reversed exterior alterations to the north façade windows and entry in the large waiting room, and exterior woodwork was painted green to match its original appearance. The historic platform, covered by vegetation, was cleared and memorial bricks were used to infill gaps on the western side of the depot.

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Originally, the design of the building encouraged pedestrian traffic in a north-south direction and train passengers could only access interior rooms from either elevation. The 2011 design adapted the interior to function as a meeting space and offices, and though it maintained the general original footprint, it also provided east-west access to all rooms within the building. Interior walls, once solid, were opened with double-door entries. Although evidence suggested the interior walls had been plastered, the brickwork is exposed in most of the depot. The baggage room walls are painted white and its concrete floor cleaned and sealed. They installed new bead board on ceilings and re-claimed pine wood flooring.

The central corridor, damaged the most during years of vacancy, received layout alterations. The north bay bathrooms, now the only restroom facilities in the depot, were originally accessed by patrons in the main waiting room. Historically, the railway agent's office shared a wall with the bathrooms and occupied 13' x 16' of the room which included the area within the canted bay window. A ticket window on the east wall of the room that once served the small waiting room is now gone. Currently, the bathrooms open towards the central hallway corridor and the agent's office has a smaller footprint in its original location within the depot. Some original furniture—desks, display cases, ticket box, lantern, and Railway Express cart—decorate the Frisco Depot.

*Integrity*

Comanche's Frisco Depot retains excellent historic and architectural integrity. It retains a high degree of integrity of materials and design. The roof was replaced with Ludowici clay tiles that resemble the original tile roof material, but the roofline was not changed. Previous alterations to a window and door were reversed as part of the restoration using materials as close to the original as possible. Two alterations, a concrete handicap ramp and steel fence along the tracks, are the only major exterior changes. Two chimneys were not reconstructed. It maintains a high degree of integrity of workmanship in its historic wood windows, pressed brick walls, and limestone details. Overall, the exterior looks as it did when it was built in 1909 and it conveys the feeling of a depot from the outside. It retains integrity of location as, unlike other small town depots, it has not been moved from its position along the tracks it once served. Although some buildings in the immediate vicinity have been demolished, there is an intact industrial presence in the neighborhood. Thus, it retains a high degree of integrity of setting. Although the depot no longer functions as a passenger station for the railroad, its use as offices and public meeting space are compatible functions to the historic character of the building.

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## Statement of Significance

The St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco) Railway Depot is Comanche, Texas' oldest rail-related building and its only remaining resource that reflects early 20<sup>th</sup>-century passenger, freight, and parcel service. Built in 1909 to replace an earlier wooden passenger depot, it sits on tracks laid by the Fort Worth and Rio Grande Railway. The station embodies an architectural design distinctive to the SL&SF Railway Company. Its functional form follows most 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century depots found throughout the country, but the Frisco Company incorporated Prairie School-style design elements in rail depots of this era. It is one of three remaining depots built by SL&SF in this style remaining in Texas.<sup>1</sup> The Frisco line greatly contributed to the economic growth of Comanche during its period of historic significance, particularly in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The depot retains a high degree of integrity and has been thoughtfully rehabilitated to serve as office space and a museum. It is nominated at the local level under Criteria A in the area of Transportation and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is 1909-1969, which reflects the building's use as a railroad depot. The year 1969 represents a logical endpoint and less arbitrary date than the 50-year mark, and as the period extends very slightly beyond the 50-year mark there is no requirement for meeting Criteria Consideration G.

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### *Comanche, Texas*

The Texas State Legislature formed Comanche County in 1856, and three years later a permanent county seat, also named Comanche, was established along the Indian Creek in the central portion of the county. Few Anglos had settled in, what was then part of, the Texas frontier. By 1860, despite limited protection from the federal government against raids by tribes of Comanche Indians, 700 people were counted living in the area. The population included enslaved African Americans.

Before the Civil War, cattle raising was the most important economic activity for the county and the town of Comanche served as a supply base for area ranchers.<sup>2</sup> In the 1870s, cattle-raising increased throughout the county and mirrored the state-wide boom in ranching. Farming was also vital to the local economy with corn and wheat as the most important crops. As the county seat, Comanche became the political and economic center for the developing region. Its newspaper, *The Comanche Chief*, served as the only news source for many neighboring counties.

The period following the Civil War was marked by economic and social instability. Despite tremendous statewide growth, national depressions in the 1870s and 1890s plummeted land values in Texas. The effects of the two recessions were compounded by one of the worst recorded droughts in Texas history (1884-1886). Many Comanche-area farms failed during this period, and the county was not quick to recover from its effects. The unstable economy heightened anxiety and tension leading some Comancheans to seek extralegal means to exert control over their lives.<sup>3</sup> In July 1886, a lynch mob called for the expulsion of all African Americans from the county within ten days. Late one evening, they rode into Comanche and warned every black citizen to move or be killed. Not every Anglo in the community agreed with the threat and a group organized in protest; some vowed to personally protect the African Americans they employed. Ultimately, Comanche's black citizenry left the county by the mob's prescribed deadline.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The other two depots are: SL&SF passenger depot in Granbury and a union-style SL&SF depot in Paris, Texas. A similar Frisco Depot in Dublin, Texas was demolished in 1972 after a train de-railed and destroyed the building.

<sup>2</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Comanche, TX," accessed May 05, 2017. *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Comanche County," accessed May 05, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Late Nineteenth-Century Texas," accessed May 12, 2017. *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Droughts," accessed May 12, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Billy Bob Lightfoot, "The Negro Exodus from Comanche County, Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (January 1953): 407-416. "Comanche's Trouble," *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, August 4, 1886. "A Matter of Simple Justice," *Fort Worth*

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Railroad expansion would alleviate the economic depression in Texas by connecting its ranching and agriculture to markets outside of the state. Between 1880 and 1890, more than 6,000 miles of railroad was constructed in Texas.<sup>5</sup> Despite its importance as the county seat, Comanche was overlooked by the Texas Central Railroad when the company decided to build a line in 1881. Instead, the Texas Central Railroad formed a new town around the rail line, sixteen miles north at De Leon.

*The Fort Worth & Rio Grande Railway*

The Fort Worth and Rio Grande Railway (FW&RG) was officially chartered on June 1, 1885 to build a 127-mile route southwest between Fort Worth, through Comanche, and stop at Brownwood. The company wanted to connect West Texas livestock business and agriculture with markets across the Texas. Its first stops were to include Granbury, Stephenville, Dublin, and Comanche. As early as 1881, Comanche's leading citizens met with FW&RG director W.W.H. Lawrence to discuss the proposed track and to promise right-of-way at no cost to the railroad.<sup>6</sup> However, the FW&RG had difficulty securing its own funding for the project and plans stalled. Work on the railway finally broke ground from Fort Worth in 1886 and the first forty miles of track, to Granbury, were completed in 1887.

The first train arrived in Comanche in early November 1890, and FW&RG completed two depots, wye (triangular junction), and section house soon after.<sup>7</sup> The FW&RG depots were inexpensive frame structures with board & batten siding, simple gable roof, and wide over-hanging eaves. Although there are no pictures of the original building, an image of the Proctor Depot (Figure 2), north of Comanche on the FW&RG line, shows what the first depot may have looked like.<sup>8</sup> The Fort Worth and Rio Grande completed the rail line from Comanche south to Brownwood in 1891 with regular freight and passenger service beginning July of that year.<sup>9</sup>

The railroad had an immediate impact on the county seat. *The Comanche Chief* reported its arrival gave people a "business walk and a business sparkle in their eye," and described a flurry of action: twelve new businesses; prospectors "from everywhere;" proposals to build ice houses, mills, and an electric light plant; and the construction of a new county courthouse. The *Dallas Morning News* wrote that \$150,000-worth of stone and brick buildings were being erected in Comanche. Enthusiasm over the new railway revived Comanche, and saloon owners offered free beer to the men laying FW&RG rail tracks.<sup>10</sup>

*St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Company (Frisco)*

The St. Louis and San Francisco Railway (commonly called the "Frisco") was a Missouri-based rail company that operated in nine midwestern and southern states from 1876 to 1980. In 1901, the Frisco purchased the FW&RG trail and financed a fifty-mile extension south of Comanche, from Brownwood to Menard. Although the Frisco continued to lease the railway to the FW&RG, the line benefitted from company standards and programs. From that time on, the

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*Daily Gazette*, September 8, 1886.

<sup>5</sup> Handbook of Texas Online, George C. Werner, "Railroads," accessed June 28, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eqr01>.

<sup>6</sup> *The Austin Weekly Statesman*, September 1, 1881.

<sup>7</sup> The Golden Edition of *The Comanche Chief* in 1920 stated the first train likely arrived on October 1, 1890. Several articles from *The Dallas Morning News* from late October and early November 1890, give vague dates to its inaugural trip that suggest sometime between October 31 and November 12, 1890. "Comanche's Boom is On," *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, November 12, 1890.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Comanche Chief*, Comanche, Texas, Golden Anniversary Edition, June 6, 1924

<sup>10</sup> "Comanche Enthused," *Dallas Morning News*, October 21, 1890. "All About Our Texas," *Dallas Morning News*, November 3, 1890.

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Comanche passenger depot was called “The Frisco” and its rail line was referred interchangeably by both company names. Its acquisition by the Frisco connected Comanche to a 5,000-mile-long rail line that stretched north to Chicago.

Greater access to Midwest markets increased Comanche’s importance as the economic, cultural, and political center of the region. Over the next ten years, its population increased 75 percent and property value for the entire county increased 100 percent.<sup>11</sup> As Comanche grew, its outdated train facilities were strained and the local newspaper, the *Pioneer Exponent*, disparaged its wooden depots. The editor wrote, “the present [depot] is not only a disgrace to the town but it is too small for the business. The business offices are crowded, there is no baggage room, and the waiting room is entirely inadequate.”<sup>12</sup> A local committee organized a petition to the Railroad Commission of Texas for new passenger and freight depots that was successful. On January 13, 1909, the Commission issued an order requiring the Frisco to build passenger depots at Dublin and Comanche.<sup>13</sup> The same year, the State Legislature enacted a law that shaped the construction of all depot buildings in Texas. It stated that railroad companies were required to “keep all their passenger depots well lighted and warmed for the comfort and accommodation of the traveling public;” depots were also to have segregated areas for white and black patrons. Seeing this as an “imperative public necessity,” the Legislature deemed the new law an emergency.<sup>14</sup> SL&SF was, therefore, obligated to provide Comanche with a depot befitting state law.

Newspapers communicated locals’ enthusiasm for the new depot and reported on its construction between February and July 1909. In a published letter from Railroad General Superintendent W. B. Drake, he described it as a “commodious brick structure with stone trimmings and tile roof. It will be first class in every particular way...[it will be] electrically lighted and will have lavatories inside the building.” The paper added, “It will...[contain] both white and colored waiting rooms...with a large and commodious office and baggage room.”<sup>15</sup> Architectural plans for the passenger depot were identical to the Frisco Depot built in Dublin that year, and it is estimated the building, completed in July, cost \$12,000.<sup>16</sup> The railway company moved the original frame FW&RG passenger depot down the tracks and used it to enlarge the old freight depot.

A study of Sanborn maps shows that beginning in 1908 new businesses sprang up in what had been a majority residential area around the Frisco Depot. Proximal access to the freight and passenger stations advantaged the hotels, warehouses, and industrial facilities that populated the immediate blocks. As Comanche solidified its position as the principle retail market, increased passenger traffic to the county hub required hospitable lodging. By 1915, the number of boarding houses and hotels in Comanche doubled versus the previous decade. The Ridgeway, Colonial, and Harvey hotels advertised accommodations to traveling businessmen, one of which offered a dining experience “served like you were at home.”<sup>17</sup> They also hosted public day-long demonstrations with visiting salesmen, doctors, and boosters who crossed the state via the Frisco.

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<sup>11</sup> Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: The Encyclopedia of Texas. (Dallas: A. H. Belo Corporation, 1904), p. 241-242. Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: The Encyclopedia of Texas. (Dallas: A. H. Belo Corporation, 1914), p. 167-168.

<sup>12</sup> *Pioneer Exponent*, January 23, 1909.

<sup>13</sup> *Twentieth Annual Report of the Railroad Commission for the State of Texas for the Year 1911*. (Austin: Austin Printing Co. Printers, 1912), p.305-307,  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=YKLVAAAAMAAJ&pg=PR38&dq#v=snippet&q=comanche%20depot&f=false>.  
Accessed January 14, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Senate Bill No. 13, General Laws of the State of Texas, Thirty-First Legislature, Second Called Session, 401-402.

<sup>15</sup> *Pioneer Exponent*, February 26, 1909.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Ad, *The Comanche Chief*, October 17, 1919.

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Increased freight service during this period led to the success of businesses near the depot. The Meadows Wholesale Grocery Company, founded in Comanche in 1915, occupied an adjacent building (still standing) to the Frisco and received rail shipments of goods from Fort Worth to distribute locally. By 1920, the company expanded branches to four other towns, linked by the Frisco train, and earned some 75,000 dollars.<sup>18</sup> When Comanche's agricultural economy shifted to selling pecans and peanuts in the mid-1930s, the warehouses and businesses around the depot reflected the change. The Durham Pecan Company, started in 1928, established its processing facilities across from the Frisco and later expanded to include warehouses in the adjacent blocks. During the Great Depression, the company helped sustain the local economy and locals hand-shelled nuts to earn extra money; it has been in continuous operation in Comanche for more than 80 years.

The Frisco Depot carried people, news, and entertainment to and from Comanche. The *Comanche Chief* and *Pioneer Exponent* newspapers provided the weekly train schedule, including special trains for regional events, like stock shows in Fort Worth. Although auto transportation was common by 1920, Comanche was still working to pave its roads, and the train was a more reliable and efficient method of mobility. A passenger on the Frisco railway could arrive in Fort Worth in five hours, with two time options for northbound and southbound service. During the Great Depression, the Frisco advertised its affordability over flying or driving, saying, "There are many ways to go, but train travel costs less."<sup>19</sup> The comings and goings of local citizens on the train made the social section of the weekly papers, and observing the arriving trains was a form of entertainment on Sunday afternoons.

The railroad provided access to a nationwide network of communication. Comanche's depot operated as the local telegraph office with Western Union telegraph lines strung along the rail right-of-way. A local man remembered that football fans went to the depot on Friday nights to get the scores coming in by the wire.<sup>20</sup> The baggage room doubled as the handling center for the mail and parcels. The United States Postal Service and the Railway Express Agency, a parcel shipping service, operated out of the depot until the 1960s.

Information also arrived in the form of lecturers, some sponsored by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Company. A boll weevil infestation devastated the county's cotton farming economy between 1900 and 1930, and many were forced to abandon their farms. The Frisco Company sponsored agricultural demonstrations and sent horticulturists to teach area farmers about growing nuts and fruits.<sup>21</sup> Crop diversification ultimately helped offset the effect of the boll weevil and strengthened Comanche's economy. Visitors also connected Comanche to larger political movements. William Jennings Bryan found wide Populist support from Comancheans when he spoke from the back of a Pullman train car during his final presidential bid in 1908.

In 1915, Comanche was a flourishing farm-to-market center and the economy depended on access to the rail line. Rail transportation expanded during the period with the construction of the Cotton Belt railway across from the FW&RG.<sup>22</sup> Farmers and ranchers in the county then had access to three different train companies in Comanche and De Leon, combined. Infrastructure improvements—paved roads, sidewalks, and bridges—and an expanding city foot print evidenced relative prosperity. Population figures for the time show a steady rise, but the boll weevil infestation and, later, the Great Depression ultimately stunted growth. By 1934, the Cotton Belt track was abandoned by its parent

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<sup>18</sup> "Meadows Grocery Company Changes Name," *The Comanche Chief*, July 30, 1920.

<sup>19</sup> *The Comanche Chief*, March 23, 1934.

<sup>20</sup> Odell "Woody" Ormsby, *Comanche Historic Depot Memories*, Friends of Historic Comanche, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> *Pioneer Exponent*, January 14, 1910.

<sup>22</sup> The St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company, commonly called the Cotton Belt, acquired extended a rail line through Comanche in 1913, but abandoned the tracks in 1934. It built a combination depot across from the Frisco Depot in 1914 and can be seen on the 1915 Sanborn Map. *Handbook of Texas Online*, George C. Werner, "St. Louis Southwestern Railway," accessed June 28, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eqs27>.

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company. In 1937, SL&SF faced its own financial difficulties and sold the Frisco Depot and FW&RG rail line to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company (AT&SF). Passenger rail service was offered for several more decades, but ridership gradually declined.

AT&SF discontinued passenger rail service along the Comanche line in 1968 or 1969 and, shortly thereafter, Railway Express and the USPS ceased using the train for transporting mail. Comanche's Frisco Depot was converted to freight service and the building was altered to accommodate the transportation of goods rather than people. Windows and doors at the western portion of the depot were enlarged, a loading dock was installed, and a sub floor added over the original wooden floorboards. The rail line was abandoned in 1983 and eventually the building sat vacant. Cen-Tex Rural Rail Transportation District acquired the FW&RG line in 1994 and deeded the depot to the City of Comanche in 2004. Since that time, the Friends of Historic Comanche spearheaded an effort to rehabilitate the Frisco Depot and, today, the Chamber of Commerce has offices and a small museum exhibit space in the building.

### *Architectural Significance*

By the time of its construction in 1909, the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Company had already established standardized plans for depot construction that communicated its brand, was cost effective, and provided local communities an attractive addition to the built landscape. Like most other national rail companies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, the SL&SF had a formulaic approach to its rail buildings and related infrastructure. There were a variety of depot sub-types, with some variation to its chosen materials and design, but the ones built during this period in Texas were generally similar. The Frisco Depot is classified as passenger, or "county-seat," sub-type which included waiting rooms, an agent's office, and a combination baggage and mail room. Virtually identical stations were built in Dublin and Granbury, northeast of Comanche, and SL&SF built a larger, union-style station in Paris, Texas.

In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Texas State Legislature began codifying segregation, and public transportation would become one of the most tightly regulated of all interracial areas of contact.<sup>23</sup> Just as Texas railroad construction accelerated in the 1880s, efforts to pass "Jim Crow" laws, a colloquial term for both *de facto* and *de jure* segregation, also gained momentum. In 1891, a new Texas law required rail companies to provide separate coaches for different races of passengers. Its passage, and subsequent laws, shaped the architecture of public spaces.

At first the Texas Railroad Commission merely encouraged railroad companies to comply with Texas segregation laws. However, public complaints sent to the commission about interracial mixing at train depots led the state in 1909 to mandate that companies provide "separate apartments for the use of white passengers and negro passengers" at stations.<sup>24</sup> The same year the Railroad Commission authorized SL&SF to build new passenger and freight depots in Comanche. Although no African Americans were reported to live there in 1909, the SL&SF followed the Jim Crow law and designed a standard depot layout to accommodate the rule. The architectural segregation strategy at southern depots included separate waiting rooms, restrooms, and ticket windows. Because compliance was expensive for railroad companies, spaces for African American customers were generally smaller.<sup>25</sup> As Jim Crow was slowly dismantled in the mid-twentieth century, physical remnants of segregated spaces began to disappear. Comanche's Frisco Depot only retains the footprint of the once-designated "Negro Waiting Room."

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud, "Jim Crow's Emergence in Texas," *American Studies* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 53.

<sup>24</sup> William S. Obsborn, "Curtains for Jim Crow: Law, Race, and the Texas Railroads," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 105, no. 3 (Jan. 2002): 400. *Railroad Companies—Requiring Suitable Passenger and Freight Depots*, S 13, 31<sup>st</sup> Leg., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *General Laws of Texas* (1909): 402.

<sup>25</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past," *The Public Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 19.

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Most Texas railroad stations, including the Frisco, had basic rectangular plans, wood frame construction, and a hipped roof with deep eaves. The exterior finishing materials chosen, however, helped distinguish Frisco brand depots to allow for easy recognition by its customers. The SL&SF's color scheme of a red brick façade, contrasting limestone belt course and lentils, red tile roof, and green trim set its depots apart from other companies. Architectural influences favored a modest Prairie School-style with its low-pitched hipped roof, widely overhanging eaves, exposed rafter ends, and details that emphasize the horizontality of the building. Its design facilitated passenger traffic through the building and its appearance offered travelers a positive first impression of Comanche. The Frisco Depot is the only intact example of a rail-related building in the city.

*Summary*

The 1909 St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco) Railway Depot provided passenger rail service to Comanche for more than sixty years, and shaped the social, political, and economic history of the town. It is the only remaining rail-related building in Comanche. The depot typifies standard SL&SF passenger depot architectural design for the period with a familiar depot form and modest Prairie School-style elaborations. A 2011 rehabilitation project restored the exterior to its original appearance, preserving its character and functionality, and the building now houses offices and an exhibit space. The Frisco Depot is nominated at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Transportation for its role in transporting people, communication, and goods through Comanche for more than half a century. It is also significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as an excellent local example of an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century railroad passenger depot.



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### Boundary Description

Property: Being 0.44 of an acre of land, situated in the City of Comanche, Comanche County, Texas, and being part of Block 52, ORIGINAL ADDITION, and being part of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, Northern Division, Dublin District, and further described by meets and bounds as follows:

BEGINNING, at a cotton picker spindle set at Railroad station 44491+28.30 (M.P. 108+509.6) and being 15 feet North of and perpendicular to the center line of said Main Track, for the Southeast corner of this tract;

THENCE, S 89°29'43"W 175.30 feet, 15 feet North of and parallel to the centerline of said Main Track, to a ½ inch iron rod set at Railroad Station 44493+03.6, for the Southwest corner of this track;

THENCE, N 00° 30' 17" W 110.00 feet, to a cotton picker spindle set, and being 125 feet North of and perpendicular to the Main Track centerline station 44493+03.6, for the Northwest corner of this track;

THENCE, N 89° 29' 43" E 175.30 feet, parallel to the centerline of said Main Track, to a ½ inch iron rod set, and being 125 feet North of and perpendicular to the Main Track centerline station 44491+28.30, for the Northeast corner of this track;

THENCE, S 00° 30' 17" E 110.00 feet, to the point of beginning and containing 0.44 of an acre of land

Parcel 71736, Comanche County CAD (<http://gis.bisconsultants.com/comanchecad/>), August 11, 2017.



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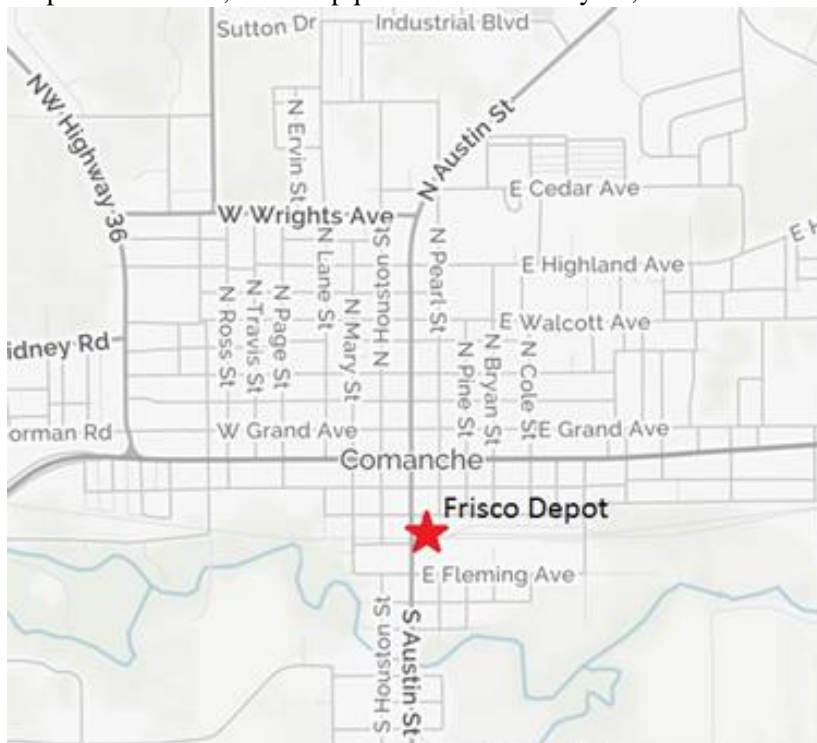
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**Maps**

Map 1: Comanche County, Texas



Map 2: Comanche, TX. Mapquest. Accessed May 25, 2017.

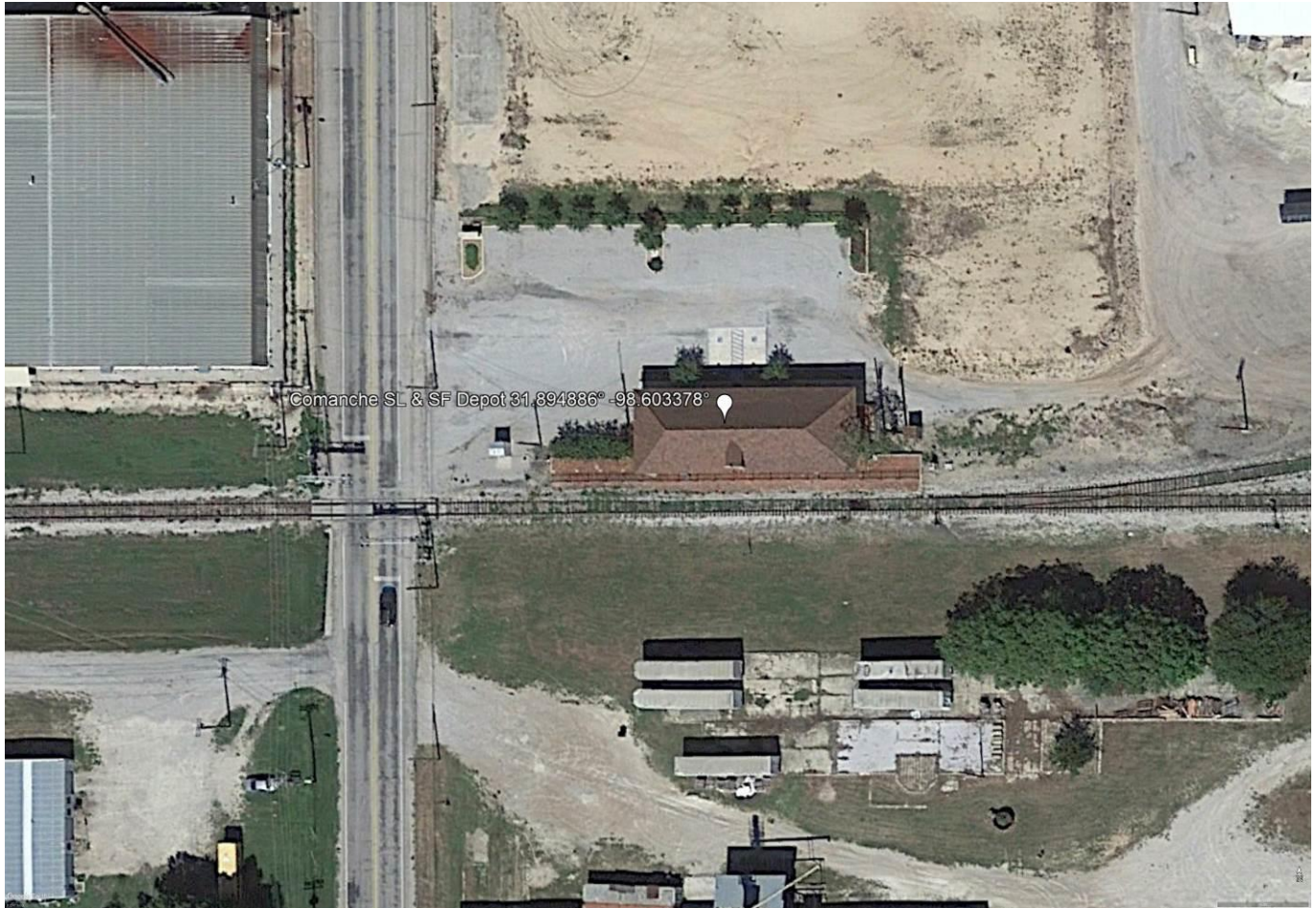


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Map 3: Google Earth, accessed August 11, 2017.

Latitude: 31.894886° Longitude: -98.603378°

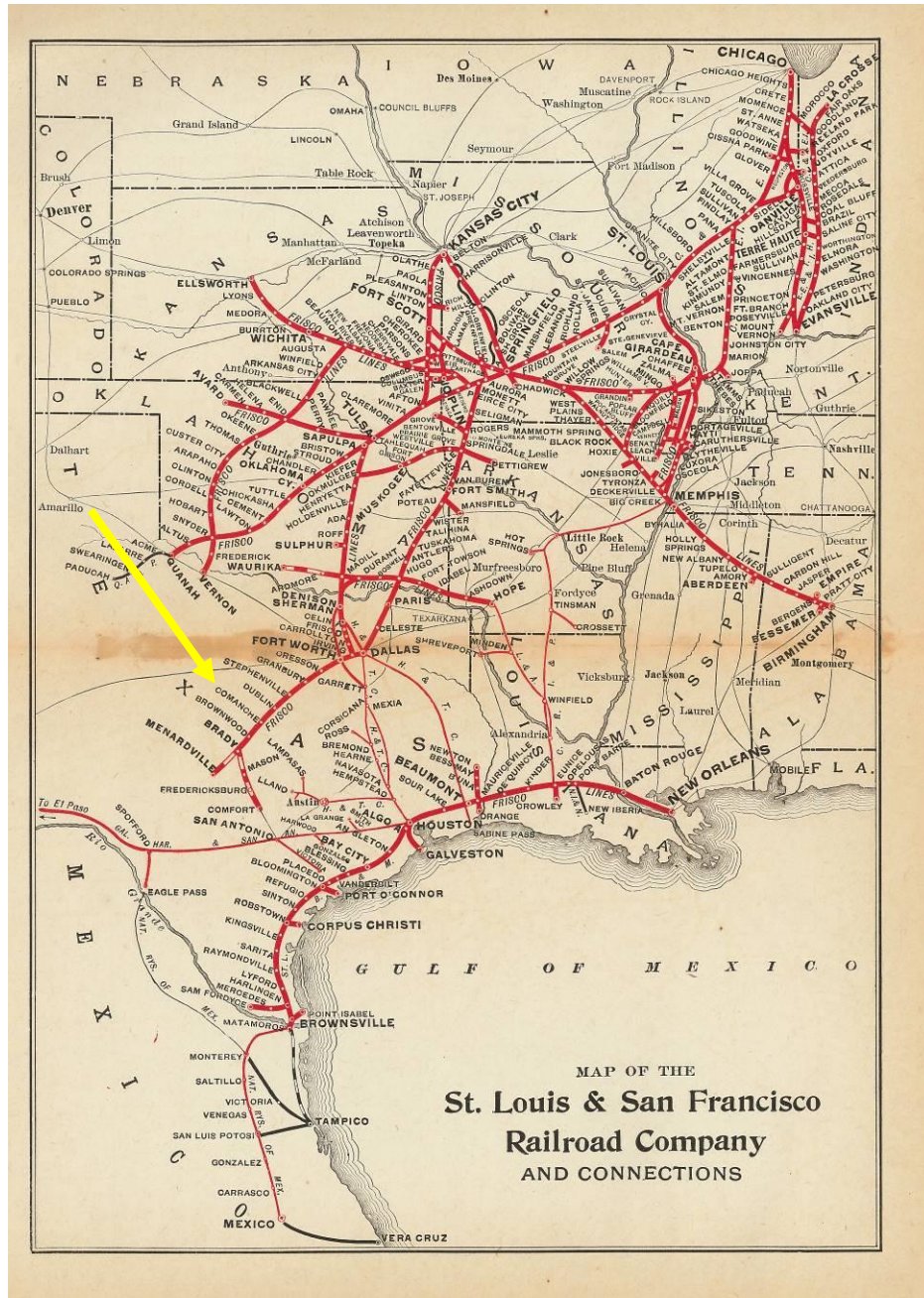




St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot, Comanche, Comanche County, Texas

Figure 3: St. Louis and San Francisco System Map, c. 1910, accessed May 25, 2017

Source: <http://frisco.org/mainline/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Frisco-System-Circa-1910.jpg>



St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot, Comanche, Comanche County, Texas

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Figure 4: St. Louis and San Francisco System Map, c. 1910 (detail), accessed May 25, 2017

Source: <http://frisco.org/mainline/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Frisco-System-Circa-1910.jpg>

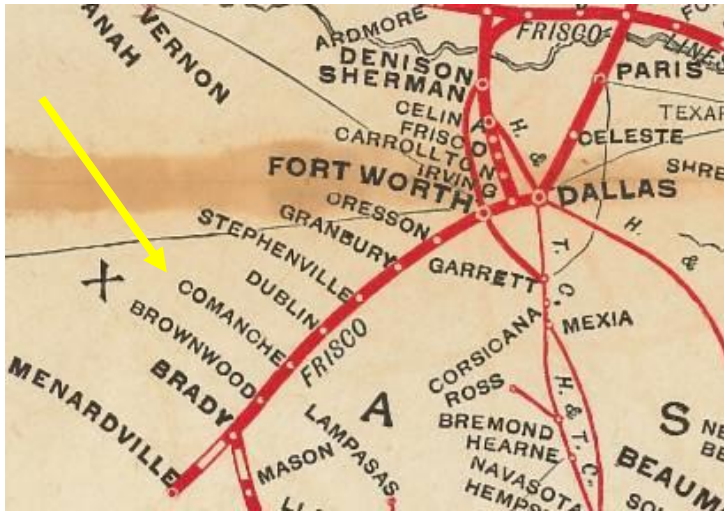


Figure 5: Photograph of the Frisco Depot, 1921, built by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Co.

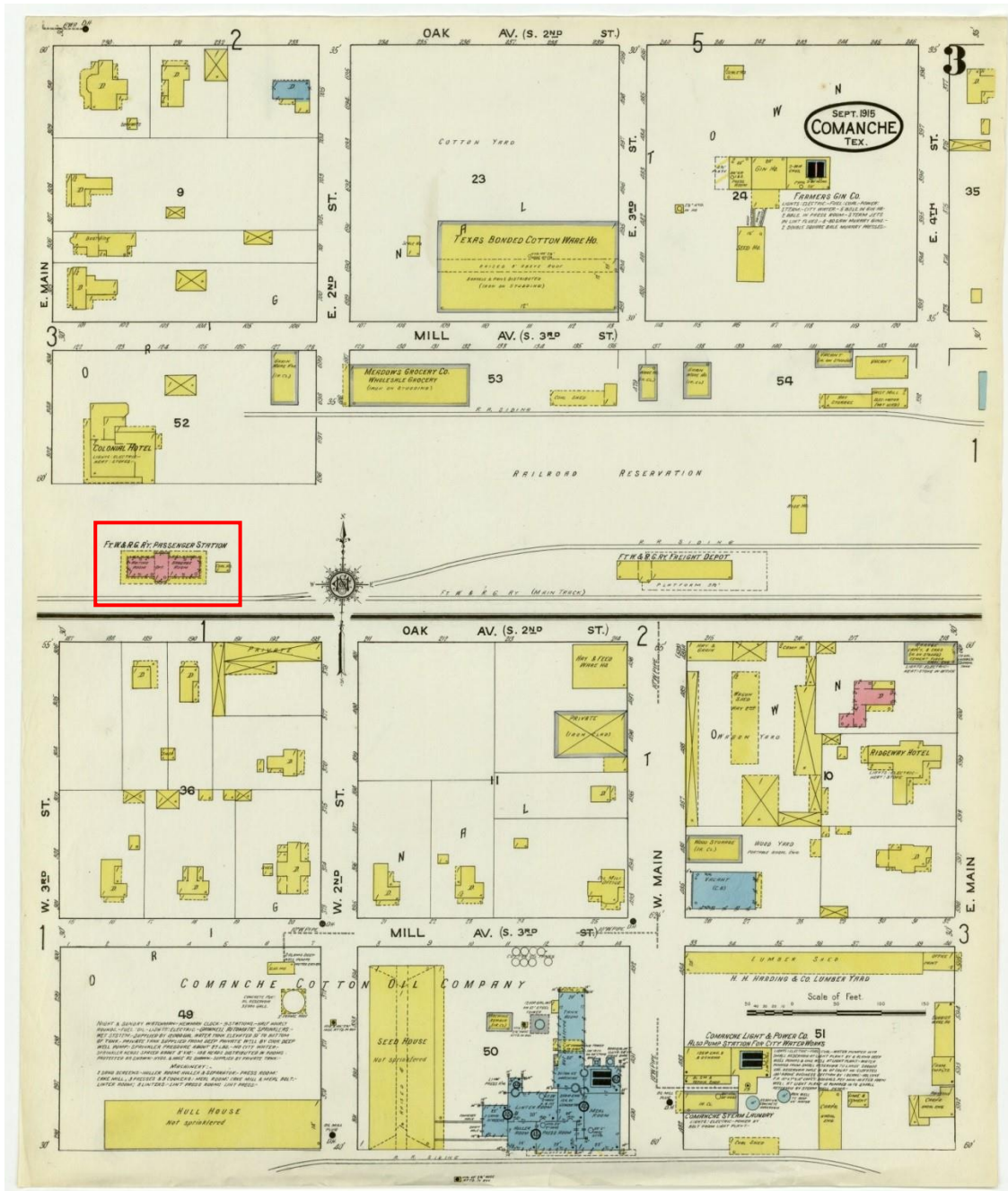




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Figure 6: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1915

Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-comanche-1915-3.jpg>

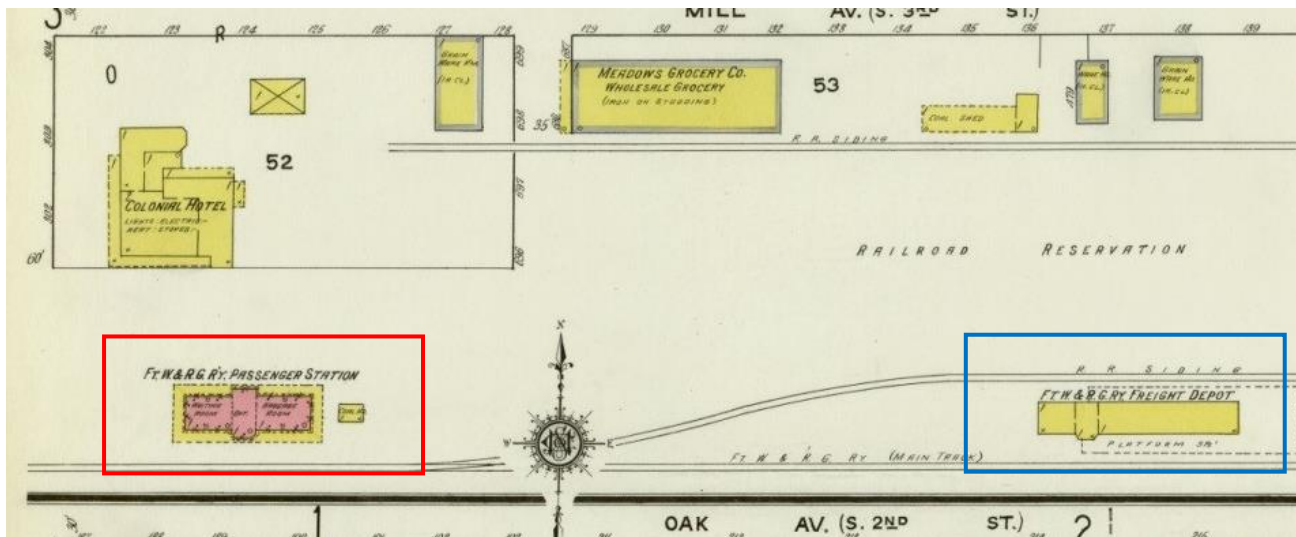


Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

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Figure 7: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (detail), 1915. Frisco passenger depot (nominated property) is outlined in red. The Frisco freight depot (demolished) is outlined in blue.

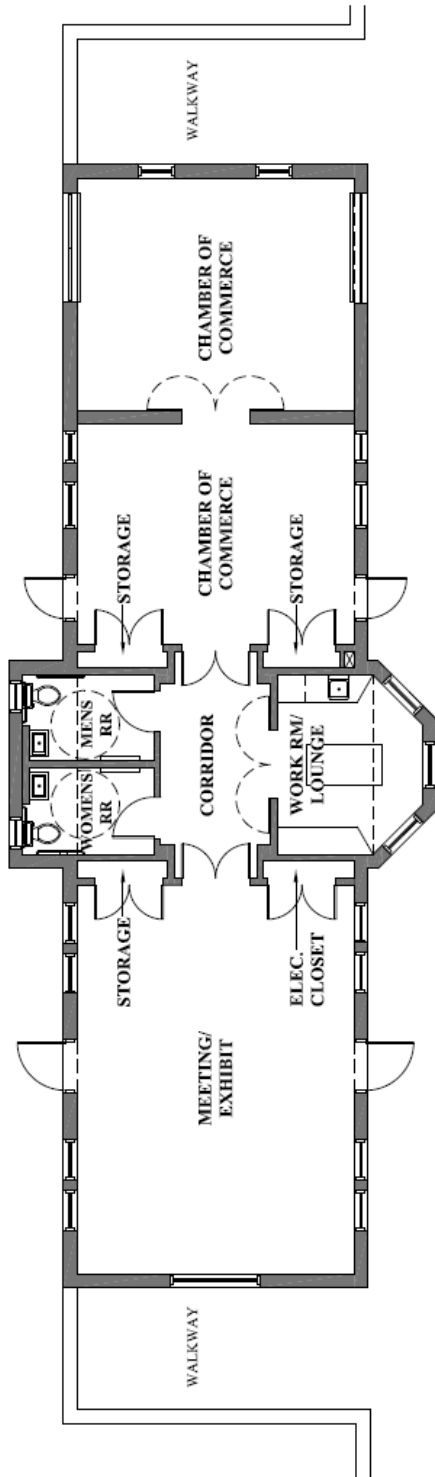
Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/txu-sanborn-comanche-1915-3.jpg>





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Figure 9: Current floor plan for the Comanche Depot, 2017.  
Source: Charles W. Ligon AIA Architects, Inc.



3.13.2017  
**COMANCHE TRAIN DEPOT**  
RENOVATION TO BLOCK 52  
1/10" = 1'-0"  
CHARLES W. LIGON AIA ARCHITECTS INC.  
3100 RICHMOND AVE STE 107  
HOUSTON, TX 77098

St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot, Comanche, Comanche County, Texas

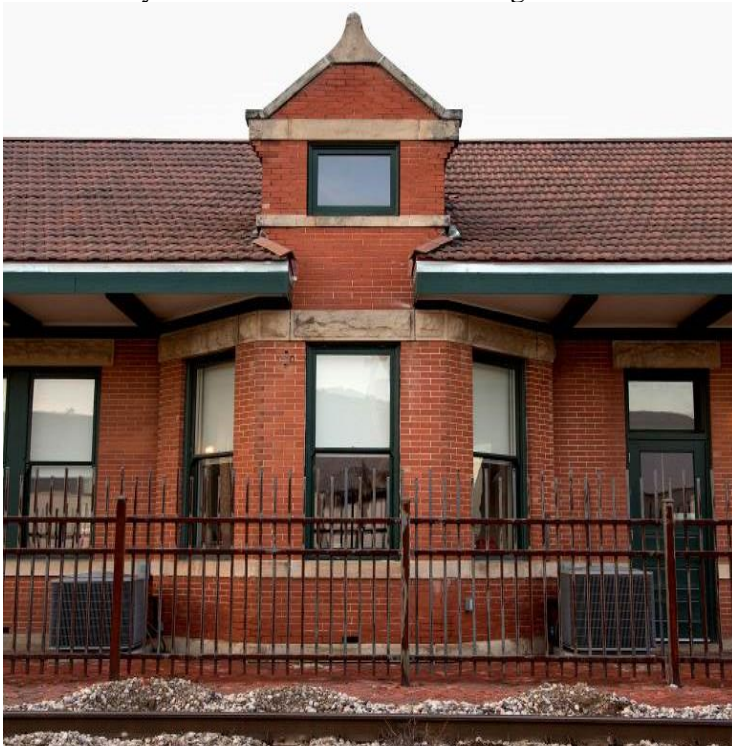
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**Photographs**

Photo 1: South elevation—camera facing north



Photo 2: Bay window detail—camera facing north



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Photo 3: South and east elevations—camera facing northwest, June 10, 2017, Margaret Dudley



Photo 4: North and east elevations—camera facing southwest



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Photo 5: North elevation—camera facing south



Photo 6: North and west elevations—camera facing southeast



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Photo 7: West elevation—camera facing east



Photo 8: South and west elevations—camera facing northeast





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Photo 9: Baggage Room door detail—camera facing north northeast showing door inside fixed glass



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Photo 10: Platform—camera facing east showing Thurber brick



Photo 11: Platform—camera facing west showing Thurber brick



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Photo 12: Large passenger waiting room—camera facing west



Photo 13: Large passenger waiting room—camera facing north, June 16, 2017



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Photo 14: Large passenger waiting room—camera facing east, June 16, 2017



Photo 15: Large passenger waiting room—camera facing south, June 16, 2017



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Photo 16: Restroom entrances in central corridor—camera facing north, June 16, 2017



Photo 17: Interior of canted bay window in central corridor—camera facing south



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Photo 18: Small passenger waiting room—camera facing east



Photo 19: Small passenger waiting room with original door and desk (on right)—camera facing north



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Photo 20: Small passenger waiting room —camera facing south, June 16, 2017



Photo 21: Small passenger waiting room—camera facing west



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Photo 22: Baggage room—camera facing east , June 16, 2017



Photo 23: Baggage room—camera facing north, June 16, 2017





St. Louis and San Francisco Railway Depot, Comanche, Comanche County, Texas

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Photo 24: Baggage room—camera facing south, June 16, 2017



Photo 25: Baggage room—camera facing west



*-End-*