

About These Buildings

9300 Highway 290 West

Austin, Texas

The structures in the middle of the block at the Texas compound include the Santa Fe railroad depot from Dumas, Texas built there by the company in 1930 according to standard blueprints drawn in 1910. It was scheduled for demolition after the city declined a donation offer by the company. The current owner was contacted by Blaine Bilderback and Dennis Kearns of the BNSF Railway, which offered to allow removal in lieu of demolition. It was brought here in one piece, excepting the topmost part of the roof which had to be removed for height clearance reasons along the way (600 miles). This structure is among the very last depots built in Texas by the Santa Fe before the stock market collapse and ensuing depression permanently ended the age of new railroad line construction. Other nearly identical depots built by the company in that final breath of corporate expansion were located at the ends of the company lines at Sonora and Presidio. The project developer also tried to rescue the Presidio depot in 2011 but it was torched by an arsonist during purchase negotiations. All of these depots, in compliance with Texas statutory requirements, had separate waiting rooms and ticket windows for white and black passengers. There was no indoor plumbing for any customers, the railway company built outhouses, to carefully drawn specifications. The trackside signal in front of the depot is fully functioning, and came from Santa Anna, Texas. The brick waiting platform in front of the depot was built from bricks which originally served the same purpose at the Santa Fe depot in Goldthwaite, Texas. The Santa Fe was partial to bricks from Coffeyville, Kansas, and shipped them everywhere along its lines, where they were the company standard of choice for depot and train waiting platforms. The bricks used for this purpose in the Texas Compound are all from Coffeyville, and some are found to bear the thumbprints or fingerprints of their original makers.

The United Oilfield Supply warehouse came from Snyder, Texas, where it was purchased from its second owners, Garland and Frances Williams. It was built in 1948 as a pre-engineered structure, essentially a numbered kit, shipped by rail in partially assembled pieces from its manufacturer, the Braden Building Company of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The part numbers are still visible on the warehouse steel ceiling joists. United, a subsidiary of United States Steel Corporation was one of four primary competitors in the oilfield supply business across the Southwest. It was founded by Andrew Carnegie, and the "Carnegie" name was still being placed in raised letters on its steel when the structure was built, you can see it on the exterior stair support. The other competitors were Mid-Continent Oilfield Supply, Republic Oilfield Supply, and National Oilwell Supply. All of these companies used similar steel pre-engineered buildings, and because housing was in short supply across the territory, the second story of their buildings were usually finished out to serve as housing for store employees. If providence should further bless the efforts underway at the Texas Compound, we will acquire and restore one oilfield supply warehouse from each of these four companies. In 2015, the National Oilwell Supply warehouse from Midkiff, Texas, a ghost town south of Midland, was moved here for restoration, moving us halfway to the goal. The front downstairs portion of the United warehouse was moved intact, and the warehouse and upstairs was moved in pieces and reassembled, on a slab to match the original one. The National Oilwell Supply House was completely disassembled and put back together here, being too wide for a highway move intact. Unlike all other structures in the Texas Compound, it had to be given a completely new exterior skin, because it was built in 1944 and wartime demands for steel accommodated only a thin and poor grade of siding, which had started to rust and fail badly. All of the multi-paned steel windows in each building are original. In each of the two oilfield warehouses restored here, the upstairs portion had a central hall, with bedrooms on each side, and a common kitchen and bathroom. We have replaced those floor plans with office space. The green porcelain enamel warehouse and exterior light fixtures are all old originals, of a type commonly used in industrial applications across the west before mid-century. The large industrial-sized clear glass light bulbs once used in these fixtures are now difficult to find, but some years ago, a very large supply was purchased, enough to ensure the continuation of this technology at the Texas Compound for many decades to come.

The Texaco bulk fuel warehouse in the middle of the block came from McCamey, Texas, where it sat alongside the tracks of the Orient railroad line to Presidio. The building had been abandoned, and its owner McClain Truck Service of Odessa kindly allowed a rescue before demolition. It was built to a standard company plan, and was once a common sort of structure in every small west Texas town with rail service. Competitors in west Texas were most often Gulf, Sinclair, Humble, and Magnolia. These structures accepted deliveries of gasoline in railroad tank cars and offloaded it to above-ground storage tanks, were small trucks picked up the fuel for delivery to filling stations or large industrial customers. The warehouse portions of these buildings were filled with 55 gallon drums lubricating oil, kerosene, grease, and other products which also arrived by rail. The warehouse floors bear the scars of much heavy freight. The project developer's maternal grandparents were the Texaco consignees for Coryell County from 1928 to 1968, and worked out of a building exactly like this one, but it did not survive long enough for him to rescue. He made up for that loss, with this project...

There are four railroad cars in the middle of the block, all manufactured by the Budd Company of Philadelphia. The exterior and interior designer for all of the Texas Zephyr cars was Philadelphia architect Paul Cret, who was trained in Europe to appreciate the classical style. His concept for the exterior design of the first stainless steel cars in America, still used to this day, was that of a fluted greek column, laid on its side. Cret was the primary architect for the University of Texas beginning in the early 1930s, and designed the main UT tower, topped by a classical greek temple design, and some 20 other structures on the main part

of the campus. His personal archives are now located at the University of Texas Library, and include hundreds of photos, both interior and exterior, of his railroad car work. He was quoted as remarking that it was his favorite line of work, but perhaps he said that to all of his customers. The Santa Fe and the CB&Q railroads gave him nearly complete design discretion, and his cars from the early 1930s represent the height of industrial art deco style in America.

The "Texas Zephyr" cars were originally built for the CB&Q "Denver Zephyr" trainset, which ran daily between Chicago and Denver starting in 1936. In 1956 that trainset was completely replaced with new equipment, and the original equipment was reassigned to the Texas Zephyr, which ran daily between Dallas and Denver. There were two trainsets, consisting of 12 cars each, and they passed each other at midpoint on their trips, and then were turned at their destination and repeated the trip the other way. The Texas Zephyr operated from 1940 to 1967, when it was discontinued, along with most other passenger train service, because of a decision that the United States first class mail would no longer travel by train. The mail service heavily subsidized the passenger service, as had been the case for nearly 100 years. Of the two original Denver Zephyr/Texas Zephyr trainsets, the three cars that you see here at the Texas Compound are the only ones which remain in the United States. In the 1970s, one of the trainsets was purchased by the Saudi Arabian Royal Government and shipped to that country, where it now rests quietly disused in the desert. Though now moribund and unused for years, the equipment remains as shiny as the day it was delivered new in 1936, due to a somewhat continual sandblasting from the surrounding Saudi dunes. These cars were built of stainless steel both inside and out, so do not corrode, and will essentially last forever, if maintained. However, they are today valuable as melting scrap, for the manufacture of razor blades or other stainless steel items of which we are now more needful as a society. The three cars here were purchased from a tourist railroad in Hill City, South Dakota, where they had been preserved through an unusual chain of circumstance, by an aficionado now deceased. They were brought here by truck, because the Hill City railroad complex had been long ago cut off from its rail link to the outside world, stranding as in amber all of the railroad equipment located there. But for that stranding, these cars would likely have moved to a scrapyard long ago. The owner of the tourist rail line graciously allowed their purchase and repatriation to Texas, on reasonable terms. The Texas Zephyr cars you see here are the Silver Streak (a rounded tail-end cocktail lounge observation car), the Silver Lining (a cocktail lounge/crew dorm/baggage car) and the Silver Beam (a coach/kitchen/dinette car). These cars were purchased and delivered to Austin with the considerable assistance of railcar broker Jon Clark of Los Angeles.

The "Sunset Limited" car in the middle of the block was T&NO (Southern Pacific) 10408, a kitchen/coffee shop/cocktail lounge/bar car called the "Pride of Texas". In 1950 the Southern Pacific, which operated in Texas under the Texas & New Orleans Railway name, placed in service all new streamlined equipment to serve its Sunset Limited train, which has been running between New Orleans and Los Angeles since the 1880s. In Texas the train stopped in Beaumont, San Antonio, Del Rio, Sanderson, Marathon, Alpine, and El Paso, and points in between. The Pride of Texas was finished out in a Texas ranch theme, with brands from Texas cattle ranches on a genuine leather bar front and leather window pier panels, and a spur and longhorn motif above the windows. The interior was designed by Paul Cret's firm, which had continued after his death (and continues in business to this day). Southern Pacific was so proud of this train, which was its flagship, that it commissioned noted mid-century industrial photographer Robert Yarnall Richey to take more than 100 photographs of the interior, with professional models, and to film a movie of the interior. With kind assistance from the archival staff of the DeGolyer Library at Southern Methodist University, we reproduce for historical purposes on this website some of Mr. Richey's images of the interior of the Pride of Texas. Most of these images are in black and white, but some are in color, although the color has very badly shifted on a few of the negatives. The dyes in color negative film from that era have not proved to endure. There are unshifted color prints surviving from 1950 which have enabled reproduction of the original interior colors, and some of these images are also shown on the project website. Note from review of the interior images that there were curtains in the car to partition one set of tables. This design feature was to accommodate the Texas statutory requirement that railroad dining cars be segregated by race. The curtains were drawn, and black passengers were screened off from white passengers while eating in the diner. The developer of the Texas Compound authored an article about this insidious practice in the January 2002 issue of the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. The Pride of Texas suffered an unfortunate interior redecoration by Amtrak in the early 1970s, when its colors were changed from yellows and browns to a brilliant orange, purple and pink formica look. There were six "Pride of Texas" cars built to serve the Sunset Limited fleet, and the one you see here survived in the loving care of Mr. Bud Garrett of Tyler, Texas, who rescued it by trackside purchase after a wreck derailment near Marshall, Texas in 1976. He moved the car to his "Whistle Stop" Ranch near Tyler, and after his death his son kindly allowed the sale of the car for preservation and restoration here.