

Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Passenger Depot

109 1st Street SW, Waverly, Iowa

Application for Waverly Historic Register submitted February 16, 2021, Accepted March 23, 2021

Currently known as 4 Queens Dairy Cream (and over time, also as assorted businesses such as Laundry Depot, Quality Cleaners and Elsamiller Electric), the Rock Island Depot was built on land originally platted by William Sturdevant and later sold to the railroad by Edward Knott in 1904. Completed in 1910, the Rock Island Depot was later attached at one point (after 1959) to B & B Co-Op Oil on the north end. That addition, constructed in 1938 as a gas station, was torn down after a fire in 2017. The remaining original Depot building was then purchased and restored by Mark Nagle, owner of 4 Queens.

The historically significant depot portion was erected in 1909-1910, under the supervision of George M. Graham. According to a June 10, 1910, newspaper article about the dedication of the new depot, Graham, head of Suspension Steel Construction Company in Chicago, owned the patent on the process for constructing buildings of this unique structural nature. It was “of the Venetian type, built entirely of steel and concrete.”

The following description is from an Iowa Site Inventory Form researched and completed in 2010 by Jan Olive Full of Tallgrass Historians L.C. At that time, she concluded that the Depot was not eligible to be part of the East Bremer Avenue Commercial Historic District, although she also determined that it was individually eligible to apply for individual recognition on the National Register of Historic Places.

The **Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad** constructed the depot in the Spanish Mission style in 1909-10 (refer to the 1915 Sanborn fire map below; note it has a 1912 date). It has a 28x72-ft footprint, with the long axis running north and south, parallel to the river. Its exterior walls are stuccoed and it has a modern steel roof. The roof lacks soffits but eaves are supported by exposed timber rafters of robust size with decoratively cut ends. The depot’s end walls have distinctive tall curvilinear parapets typical of the revival style. Located south of the center of the building is a small gabled bumped-out bay on each of the west and east walls. Both bays feature less elaborate but still nicely curved parapets. The east side bay was the operator’s bay that overlooked the tracks (nonextant) and from which tickets were sold. The west side bay contained windows that overlooked the street and may have housed restrooms. Street side entrance doors are located on either side of the east bay, with the southern door leading into the smaller, baggage room of the depot. The door on the north leads into the large passenger waiting room. Today these open areas are more or less intact and (*at the time of this summary in 2010*) used as a self-serve laundromat. The larger window openings throughout the building have a segmental curved header and are divided by thick muntins. The curved transom at the top of these large windows is divided vertically by thinner muntins. The windows appear to be original though several of them are covering over with a solid material. Also, the trackside baggage room doorway is now filled in and a door has been inserted in this side’s agent’s bay. It is unknown if any of the brick platform is extant.

The depot was designed in-house by the railroad company in Chicago. Local sources only reference a “Mr. Hawk” as the railroad’s architect. This is perhaps A. T. Hawk whose name surfaces in a “google search” though the actual role he played is unknown. The June 30, 1910 *Bremer County Independent* reported the following about the depot’s construction: “In architecture it is of the Venetian type, built entirely of steel and concrete...The depot was erected under the supervision of George M. Graham of Chicago, who owns the patents on the process for constructing buildings of this kind...Mr. Hawk said that he was favorably impressed with the new station, it being the first of the kind in the Rock Island system, and that in the future more buildings of the same kind would be erected. Mr. Graham is at the head of the Suspension Steel Construction Co. of Chicago...” (reported to author via email by railroad historian Jamie Beranek, 1/18/2012). Also, the December, 1911 issue of the Rock Island railroad’s employee magazine described the depot as being “fireproof...The framework of the building is of gas pipe with riveted malleable iron connections; the reinforcement used was round wire and expanded metal plastered on both sides, leaving an air space in the middle of the wall” (Beranek email, 1/18/2012).

The construction method sounds unusual and suggests an almost experimental forerunner of today's metal studs that have replaced wood 2-by-4s in many projects. The concern with building fireproof depots presumably is linked to the fire danger of sparks thrown off by steam engines traveling so close to the buildings. The Rock Island line was apparently trying out this new patented construction method in Waverly. The reference to "Venetian" type architecture is less clear unless the depot's stucco was initially white, which is the color of the stone used in most of the actual architecture in Venice. The style of the Waverly depot is clearly "Mission" as that term is used today. Railroad historian Jamie Beranek posits: "Given the Rock Island's extensive trackage in the Southwest, I would imagine that the company would have been influence by and used mission architecture at least in that part of the country" citing Mission style depots on the line in Tucumcari, NM; Ponca City, OK; Seminole, OK; and Liberal, KS (Beranek email, 1/18/2012). The only other Mission style depot in Iowa that Beranek immediately referenced was in Newton, which is a brick depot constructed in 1912.

Statement of Significance

The Rock Island railroad was one of the nation's "main line" railroads before it went bankrupt around 1980. Its primary course through Iowa bisected the central counties and was roughly parallel to U.S. 6 and present Interstate 80. This Waverly depot, therefore, served a branch line, as the town is located well north of the main route. This trackage built by the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota RR and acquired by the Rock Island (Sanborns, 1915; centennial edition of the *Bremer Co. Independent*, 3/7/1956). Whether it was built in 1910 or 1912, the Waverly Rock Island depot was constructed during the "heyday of railroads, roughly 1890 to 1920" according to historian Rebecca Conard. Brick and fire-resistant depots replaced wooden ones during this period and non-standard, architect designed depots projected the success of the railway companies. Idling just over the horizon, however, was the motor vehicle—the growing numbers of automobiles and trucks that would eventually replace the railroad as the dominant form of transportation in this country. This depot is one of two extant surviving depots in Waverly from this time period, a fortunate but rare occurrence in Iowa's small cities and towns. The other depot is a Chicago Great Western depot on the east side of the river. Of the two, the Rock Island's depot exhibits the most self-conscious style, while the CGW depot is more typical of sturdy and functional red brick depots.

This is a wonderful railroad depot and merits great efforts to preserve it. It is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and C. Because of its unusual revival style, additional research might provide the evidence for statewide significance in addition to local significance.



1915 postcard



Photos looking southeast (above) and northeast (below) by Tallgrass Historians L.C., October 2010

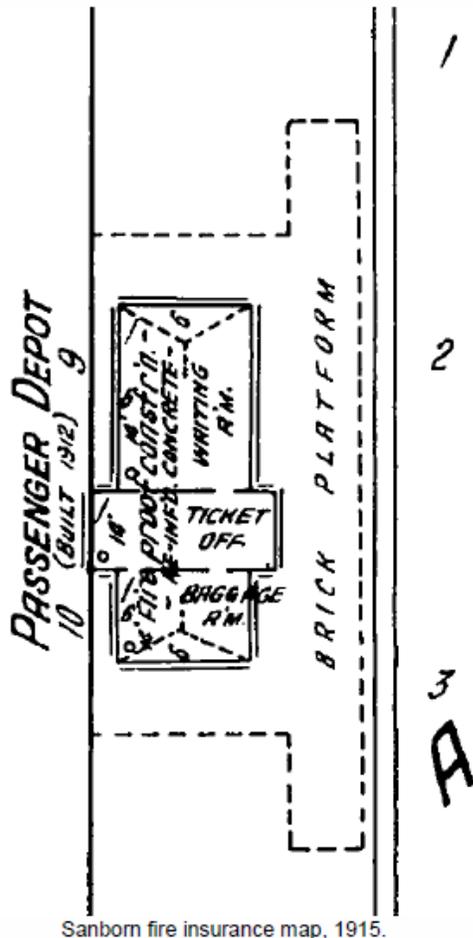




Photo from the 1930s



The vacant lot between the Depot and West Bremer Avenue, where William Sturdevant's pre-Civil War home and, later, Knott's Livery once stood, served as an informal park and garden. Here stand "Mr. Trainor with Jimmy Van Heel ca 1923." Trainor tended the garden. Van Heel reported that digging there was difficult from all the nails left by the Knott blacksmith shop.



Sanborn fire insurance map, 1915.

Depiction of the interior of the Depot.

Rock Island RR Depot Chronology, compiled by historian Rick W. Sturdevant, Ph.D.

Last updated, 3/9/21

“Special thanks to the Waverly Public Library Local & Family History Collections, especially the work of local historian Mary Cheville.”

9 November 1904 – The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific (CRI&PRR) purchased from Edward Knott, for \$5,000, the lot on the southeast corner of Bremer Avenue and 1st Street SW. A blacksmith shop, part of the Knott Livery business had been there.

19 October 1905 – News received that Rock Island RR intended to build a new passenger depot on Bremer Avenue. Railroad agent Philleo said work would begin in the spring on the lots formerly belonging to the Knott Livery that had been destroyed by fire in 1904. The railroad agent described the planned depot as “a handsome brick structure to cost from \$5,000 to \$7,000.”

21 October 1909 – Construction was underway on the new Rock Island passenger depot, which involved “a process of construction different from anything they [Waverly residents] ever beheld.” The *Bremer County Independent* newspaper described it as “the latest thing in the builder’s art . . . a suspension steel structure with a cement covering,” which made the Spanish-style building one-third the weight of a same-size brick building and cost about the same as the latter. George M Graham from Chicago, who was superintending construction of the new depot, had received a patent for this “Reinforced Concrete Building” design on 7 January 1908, and Waverly’s Rock Island passenger depot was “only the second building of its kind ever erected.” The only wood in the structure was in the window frames and doors. It was “virtually fireproof.”

2 December 1909 – A brick platform, 12 feet wide on the north and south sides of the depot, with a 140-foot frontage on the east side between the depot and the rails, was under construction. The steam heating plant was installed, and the plastering of interior walls was underway.

16 December 1909 – Rock Island agent Philleo expected to move, before year's end, into the new depot, which would be available only for passenger business. All freight business would be handled at the old, red, wood-frame depot, which stood southward approximately two blocks.

21 April 1910 – Installation of furniture was underway at the new depot, with 1 May touted as the occupancy date. The waiting room had heavy oak benches with individual arm rests, and huge chandeliers hung from the ceiling.

30 June 1910 – Distinguished visitors arrived to inspect the now-finished Rock Island passenger depot. They included Charles W. Stephon, general manager of Alimein Company in Chicago, whose artist Fred Murray had done the interior painting and decoration. Other visitors included George Graham, the depot's architect-designer, who headed the Suspension Steel Construction Company of Chicago, plus Mr. Hawk, the Rock Island architect.

1 September 1919 – Short Line conductor Milton G. "Mitch" Mitchell retired. He had been the conductor since 1891 and had landscaped the park surrounding the passenger depot. In 1926, a granite monument honoring Mitchell was placed at the trunk of a tree he had planted near the riverbank. Mitchell died in Waverly on 8 December 1921 and was buried in Harlington Cemetery. The new Rock Island agent at Waverly was Ben H. Van Heel, who remained on the job until his retirement on 31 January 1955.

1920s – About five trains per day arriving and departing Waverly on the Short Line.

26 April 1933 – During the Great Depression, the Short Line was running in the red. Its cost to operate was 45 cents per mile, but its returns amounted only to 23 cents per mile; of that 23 cents, passenger traffic brought in only 5.5 cents per mile. At a Bremer County Courthouse hearing, the Rock Island RR proposed removing passenger service but leaving freight via steam engines (freight service could include passengers) under advisement. Waverly protested, claiming the city had a valid passenger contract with the railroad signed in 1886 with the BCR&PRR.

26 August 1938 – Having purchased from the CRI&PRR the flower-garden lot between the passenger depot and West Bremer Avenue, the B&B Cooperative Oil Company began construction of its main station.

1940 – Depot reopening was delayed due to repair of the concrete roof. There had been problems stopping leaks because expansion and contraction during winter months caused cracks.

21 April 1943 – Half of the passenger depot waiting room was converted for the *Bremer County Independent* to store a railway carload of print paper. What was touted as "once the busiest railway waiting room in Waverly" had descended to the point where there was "no longer any passenger business out of Waverly over that [Rock Island] line."

28 January 1955 – Ben H. Van Heel, who had witnessed the transition from steam to diesel locomotives, retired as Waverly's Rock Island agent. Marvin Van Gorp replaced Van Heel.

27 January 1959 – The Rock Island freight station, which had been handling mostly grain from Waverly on trains three times a week, officially closed. Abandonment of the Short Line ensued.

21 June 1960 – Rock Island sold the Spanish-style, stucco-covered passenger depot to the B&B Cooperative Oil Company, which needed a structure for storage and so interconnected it, on 29 November 1960, with the main B&B station at 97 West Bremer Avenue.

23 May 2019 – Owner Mark Nagle had nearly finished revitalization of the old passenger depot as 4 Queens Dairy Cream, a popular ice cream parlor.

22 March 2021 – The Waverly Historic Preservation Commission approved adding the restored Depot to the Waverly Historic Register.