

2.3 Cotton Belt Railroad Historic District



Although included in these *Guidelines for Historic Commercial and Residential Properties* for general information and reference, the Cotton Belt Railroad Historic District has specific design guidelines that apply to all buildings, structures and sites within this district. A copy of the *Design Guidelines for the Cotton Belt Railroad Historic District* are available from staff at the Historic Preservation Commission in Development Services, City of Grapevine.

2.3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COTTON BELT RAILROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT

Grapevine's Cotton Belt Railroad Historic District (also known as the 'Industrial' District) encompasses a cohesive collection of late 19th and 20th century buildings occupying the historic transportation focus of Grapevine, and illustrates the community's evolution as a transportation hub for an agrarian economy based on the development of agricultural processing industries.

Grapevine's first rail service was the St. Louis, Arkansas & Texas (SLA&T) line; Grapevine was a stop on their 'Cotton Belt' line connecting

Waco and Fort Worth in 1888, with service to Grapevine the following year.

The phenomenal impact of rail service on the township and the development of a cash crop economy ended the town's relative isolation, and Grapevine became the shipping point for crops and produce from hundreds of surrounding farms and a number of small rural communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A number of industrial and commercial facilities were built in conjunction with cotton cultivation and processing including 3 cotton gins, a rail depot that served passenger and freight, the Farmers and Merchants Milling Company Flour Mill, and numerous small warehouses and machine shops south of the rail line.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, the Cotton Belt line experienced a steady increase in both its freight and passenger traffic. The coincident growth of the local truck farming industry continued to steadily increase in response to the availability of rail shipping. In 1927 the Cotton Belt line announced its plans to establish a "shipping and packing shed for the truck growers" participating in the region's burgeoning industry.

This expansion of Grapevine's truck farming industry increased vehicular traffic in the vicinity of the depot. In response, the Cotton Belt line in cooperation with Tarrant County, undertook construction of an underpass to "eliminate a bad grade crossing on the Grapevine Road about 400 yards west of the depot" in 1928, known "Cotton Belt Underpass" or the "Grapevine Pass."

The effects of the Great Depression, coupled with increased competition from automobiles and trucks, precipitated a dramatic decline in passenger and freight traffic, prompting the Cotton Belt line to gradually withdraw from the Grapevine market. In 1930 the line discontinued regular passenger service to Fort Worth, running only one mixed (passenger and freight) train in either direction each day. In 1932 it sold the line to the Southern Pacific system, although it continued to operate under the name of the Cotton Belt Route as a subsidiary of the larger carrier.



COTTON BELT TRACKS

Heeding calls for agricultural diversification, local farmers created a well-developed poultry industry by 1930. There were several businesses that catered to this industry, including several in the vicinity of the railroad tracks. The local poultry industry continued to expand during the post war period, with over 125 poultry farms in operation within a 50-mile radius of the mill within five years.

The Merchants Milling Company (now B&D Mills) undertook a series of expansions to the farmers and poultry business that facilitated delivery of agricultural feeds in bulk quantities. Beginning with four steel bulk warehouses added to the complex in 1946, this innovative

effort culminated in conversion to an electronic weighing process in 1956 that received national publicity. This campaign added a manufacturing tower and an office building adjacent to the east warehouse. The feed store was expanded to service the retail trade in 1956. The last major additions to the facility were made between 1968-69 when 12 soft stock ingredient bins and bulk load out bins for rail distribution were installed. These changes coincided with the transition by Grapevine area farmers from cotton to grain production. The mill served as the principal consumer of local grain production to manufacture its line of feeds during this period, becoming a state leader in the field.

The mill served as Grapevine's largest employer throughout the postwar period, providing a vital base for the local economy and became the city's largest rail user, making up as much as 75% of the shipments processed through the depot. The urbanization of the Grapevine area and redevelopment of agricultural lands prompted by the construction of the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport ultimately prompted the sale and closure of the feed mill in 1973.



B&D MILLS

The post-war period also witnessed the sale and transfer of portions of the right-of-way by the Southern Pacific. Changes to the depot accelerated in the 1960s, as sections housing the packing sheds, waiting rooms and offices were demolished, leaving only a freight room and telegrapher's office. The company officially abandoned the facility in 1974, transferring ownership to the City of Grapevine.

The surviving segment of the depot was moved to a new site in a nearby community park. In 1992 the Grapevine Heritage Foundation led the move to reinvigorate this area by returning the depot to its 1937 location along the tracks. The foundation acquired the entire original tract from the Southern Pacific system, conducting archaeological and documentary research to determine an appropriate location for the depot. At the same time, the section house was also acquired and returned to its original site. The depot once again serves its historic function as a terminal for daily steam-powered rail service, this time for the Tarantula Train passenger excursions from nearby communities.

2.3.2 READING YOUR BUILDING

Property owners planning to make exterior changes to a historic building should start by identifying the features and materials that give their structure its unique character, as well as its historic and non-historic elements. By taking the time to recognize and understand significant features, you will be much more likely to plan a project that is compatible with the original style of the building.

If, after looking over these guidelines, you would still like more information, the staff at the City of Grapevine will be happy to arrange a pre-application meeting. Staff can provide additional advice on the character of your building and how it relates to your planned project.

Learning to read a building and identify its significant elements is not complicated. Begin by thinking about and answering the questions below.

Step One: Identify the overall visual aspects of a building. Do not focus on the details, but on the setting and architectural context. Begin by working through the checklist below.

Shape: What is there about the form or shape of the building that gives the building its identity? Is it short and squat, or tall and narrow?

Roof and roof features: How does the roof shape or pitch contribute to the building's character? Are there unique features like weathervanes, cresting or cupolas?

Openings: What rhythm or pattern does the arrangements of window or door openings create? Are there unusually-shaped window openings or distinctive entryways?

Projections: Are there parts of the building that are character-defining because they project from the walls of the building like porches, or functional elements associated with its' industrial use? Are there widely overhanging eaves or chimneys?

Trim and Secondary Features: How does the window and door trim contribute to the character of the building? Be sure to consider the decoration, color, or patterning of the trim.

Materials: From a distance, what contribution do the color, texture, and combination of exterior materials make to the overall character of the building?

Setting: What aspects of the setting are important in establishing the visual character of the site? Think about the building's setback, alignment with adjacent buildings, fencing, relationships to adjacent buildings, outbuildings, and its relationships to the rail line, street or alley.



COMMERCIAL BUILDING FORM

Step Two: Identify the character of the building at close range. Assess the color and texture of the building materials as they convey the

craftsmanship and age that give the building its unique appearance. Begin by working through the checklist below.

Materials at Close Inspection: Are there one or more materials that have an inherent texture that contribute to the close-range character such as galvanized siding, concrete, or brick textured with vertical grooves?



CORREGATED METAL,
SHOWING RUSTING.

Craft Details: Is there high-quality brickwork with narrow mortar joints, or hand-split or hand dressed clapboards or machine-smoothed beveled siding? Are the windows or doors unique? Craft details, whether handmade or machine-made, contribute to the character of a building because they are manifestations of the time in which the work was done and of the tools and processes that were used.



BRACKET AT EAVE DETAIL
AT TRAIN DEPOT

2.3.3 CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

Character defining features means those architectural materials and features of a building that define the historic nature or character of the building. Such elements may include the form of the building, exterior cladding, roof materials, door and window design, exterior features such as canopies and porches, exterior and interior trim, etc.

Examples of character-defining features are:

Site:

- The building exhibits a relationship with the Cotton Belt railroad line, with vehicular access of secondary importance;
- Has a strong relationship to nearby industrial buildings;
- Has consistent topography;



TURNTABLE: AN IMPORTANT
SITE ELEMENT

Building Form:

- Building form is typically functional, based on function of industry within the building and its' relationship to railroad tracks or other loading access.
- Has strong lines, and simple volumes,.

Brick:

- Rarely used on industrial buildings.

Wood:

- Articulates minimal stylistic features in building siding, window and door trim;
- May articulate stylistic features in cornices, eaves, porch elements, and decorative trim;

- Has remained relatively free from the application of synthetic siding.



WOOD SIDING

Metal Siding:

- Typically corrugated steel (often galvanized)
- Used in planar applications, simple forms, with no detailing or decoration.



CORRUGATED STEEL SIDING

Windows:

- Are typically steel casement or multi-paned industrial windows, with one operable section within the window.
- May be wood, double-hung;



STEEL WINDOW WITH OPERABLE MIDDLE SECTION

Doors:

- Are usually sheltered by canopies, awnings, or porches;
- Include both single and double doors, and use a wide range of glazing patterns to convey a building's architectural character;
- May be accompanied by sidelights and transoms.
- Will have large, sliding doors for loading or vehicular access to contents (grain, flour, etc); these will typically be of corrugated metal.



REAR DOOR USED FOR LOADING

Roofs:

- Are typically gable form, w/ gentle slopes;
- Are typically functional in material (corrugated steel) and simple in design.

Applied Ornament:

- Typically minimal or limited.

Rear Facades:

- Uses same materials as front facades;
- With other aspects of the building, is functional in design.



‘WORKING’ SIDE OF BUILDING W/
FENCE, WATER TROUGH, ETC.

Alleys:

- Represent an important historic feature of the district’s transportation network; and
- Provide a primary means of vehicular access.

Refer to ‘Design Guidelines’ (Part 4) and ‘Technical Guidelines’ (Part 5) for additional information.

2.3.4 PRESERVATION PRINCIPLES

As described in the *Introduction and General Information* chapter of these Guidelines, allowing each existing property in the Cotton Belt Railroad Historic District to authentically tell the story of its own period in time, while reinforcing the historical period of significance (c. 1888 to 1956) with infill construction, is the goal of the historic district designations. The preservation and conservation of original architectural features is preferred, rather than “modernization” or “updating” of older properties, or imposing a false “historical look” on newer properties.

A number of guiding preservation principles modeled after the Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for Rehabilitation* are outlined below. Reading through these principles will help you begin to think about how you can carry out your upcoming project in a way that both enhances

your historic building or site and preserves its character-defining features.

Relationships: When evaluating the appropriateness of a given project, the structure, the site and the relationship to the rest of the Cotton Belt Railroad district should be given careful consideration.

Use: Historic structures within the Cotton Belt Railroad district should be agricultural, industrial use or for an alternate purpose that requires minimal alteration to the building or site.

Historic Character: the historic character of existing buildings and the Cotton Belt Railroad historic district can be best preserved by the repair of original materials rather than replacement. Repair and restoration is often more cost effective than replacement, conserves energy and reduces the amount of trash added to landfills. Removal or alternation of historic fabric compromises the original character of a building or site and should be avoided.



HOUSE w/ UNIQUE DIAMOND
ROOF SHINGLES

Alterations: Repair is always preferred over replacement. When replacement is necessary, materials should replicate or match the visual appearance of the original.

A high level of craftsmanship distinguishes structures within local preservation districts. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques should be preserved whenever possible.

Properties, however, do change over time. Those alternations that have become historic in their own right should be maintained as a record of a resource's physical evolution.

New Construction and Addition: Additions should be designed to minimize impact to historic fabric and should be compatible with the main structure in massing, size and scale.

New, infill construction should reflect the character of the district during its historic period of significance (1888 - 1956), and should be designed so that it is compatible with its neighbors in size, massing, scale, setback, façade organization, and roof form. New construction may also draw upon established stylistic elements within the district to create a sympathetic design but one that is clearly of its own era.

False Historicism: Additions that use new or salvaged material to create a conjectural or falsely historic appearance are inappropriate. Only when a previously demolished Grapevine building can be accurately replicated may a reproduction be considered.



**RECONSTRUCTED
BLACKSMITH SHOP**

Treatments: Chemicals and physical treatments should always be as gentle as possible, since harsh methods (like sandblasting) can irreversibly damage historic fabric.

Archeology: Historic sites often contain archeological resources, which should be protected and preserved whenever possible. If artifacts are found, contact the Historic Landmarks Commission for assessment.

2.3.5 COTTON BELT RAILROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT



