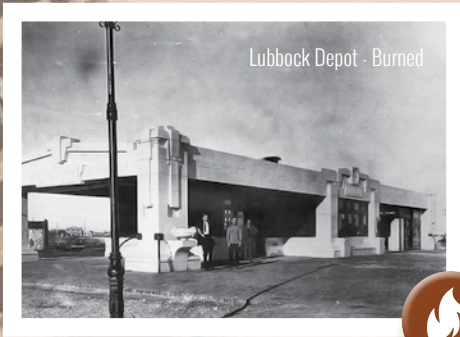


Louis Curtiss and the Snyder Depot

BY LARRY HARRIS



Lubbock Depot - Burned



Post Depot - Rehabilitated
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Photography



Snyder Depot - Threatened



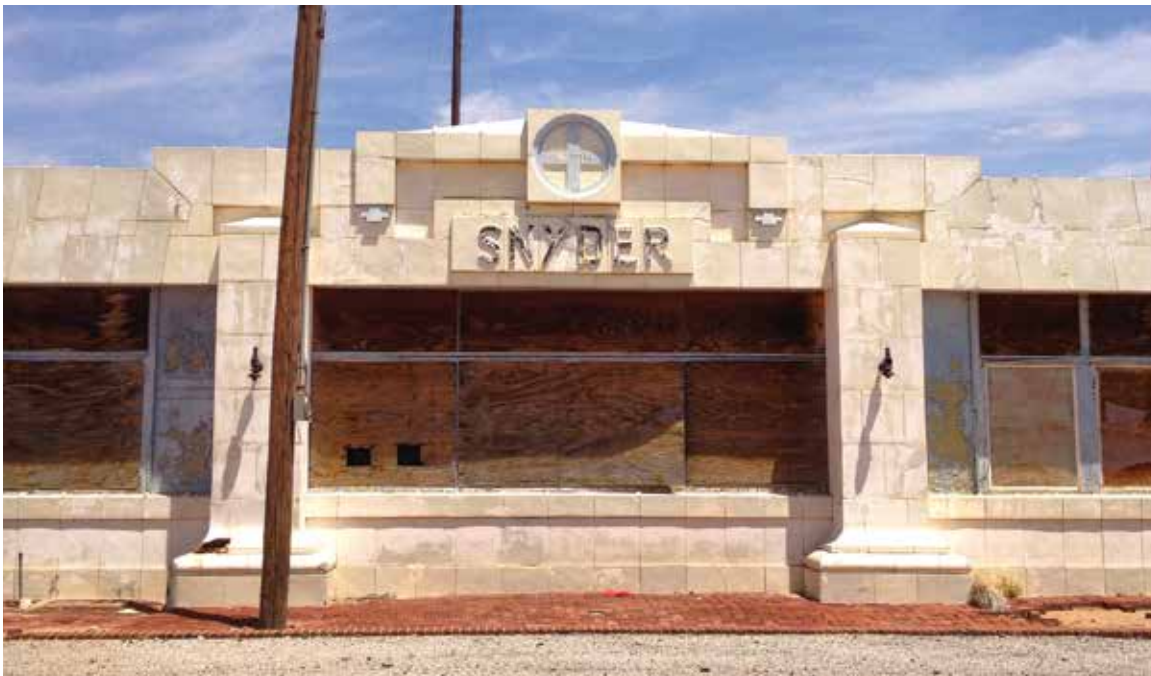
THE 1911 SANTA FE RAILROAD DEPOT IN SNYDER, TEXAS IS one of the few surviving works of an under-recognized pioneer of American architecture, Louis S. Curtiss (1865–1924). The Canadian-born Curtiss was based in Kansas City, Missouri, where he designed over 200 works of architecture, many in an innovative yet idiosyncratic design style.

Curtiss is best known as the creator of the world’s first glass “curtain wall” office building, the 1909 Boley Clothing Company Building of Kansas City, considered by scholars to be a landmark in architectural history. Curtiss’s revolutionary curtain wall construction technique became a standard for multistory office buildings around the world, as reflected in the “glass box” skyscrapers of the latter half of the 20th century. In Texas, Curtiss is best remembered as the co-architect of Fort Worth’s Tarrant County Courthouse, a majestic Renaissance Revival design constructed in 1893–95, as well as several lost structures in Kingsville including the remarkable Casa Ricardo Hotel.



Sweetwater Depot - Demolished





During his 30 years of practice, Curtiss developed an architectural language all his own rooted in the traditions of the 19th century but expressive of new 20th century innovations. His mature work of 1900–1920 exhibits a rich hybrid of influences, ranging from Art Nouveau, the Arts & Crafts Movement, as well as the Prairie Style of Frank Lloyd Wright. In fact, many of Curtiss’s designs are so unique that historic architectural surveys use the term “Louis Curtiss Style” to describe the structures.

The Snyder Depot was one of the four Texas commissions that Curtiss received from the Santa Fe Railroad. (More specifically the Pecos and Northern Texas Railway, a subsidiary of the Santa Fe.) All four depots matched in design and were constructed during the same period of 1909–1911. The construction method of the Texas depots was reinforced concrete, a relatively new building system that became commonplace during the new century. Architectural scholars have pointed out that Curtiss used concrete to his advantage not only in the building’s structure, but also in its ornamentation. Most of Curtiss’s commercial projects from this period were embellished with bold, angular exterior details that were made possible because of concrete’s elastic properties.

Of the Texas quartet of depots, only the Snyder and Post locations survive, with the Lubbock and Sweetwater structures having been lost, respectively, to fire and demolition. The Post Depot was rehabilitated as the site of the Post Chamber of Commerce in 2011 while the Snyder Depot remains shuttered and unused, with an uncertain future. Of all Curtiss’s 200+ buildings, only about 30 remain, many in endangered status.

As the preserved Boley Building continues its life as a beloved gem in the heart of Kansas City and the restored Tarrant County Courthouse endures as downtown Fort Worth’s central landmark, the Santa Fe Depot more than deserves an opportunity to be renewed as a landmark for the town of Snyder.

Larry Harris is an architect and photographer who lives in Houston. His website www.narrowlarry.com is dedicated to the documentation and public awareness of both modern architecture and folk art environments throughout the United States.





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Stories from the Santa Fe Depot

BY PAULA HATFIELD

In 2011 the Santa Fe Depot in Snyder, Texas turned 100 years old. She saw the glory days of train travel. There were vacations and family visits that began from the depot. Many hellos and good-byes were said on the platform. She also saw her fair share of the “troop trains” coming through during World War II.

Homer Godair was a cashier for the Santa Fe in the 1950's. He told us in 2011 that, “Those days were hectic. We'd be billing out 260 oil tanks every 24 hours. Snyder went from 9,000 people to 22,000 people overnight.” Despite the long, busy hours of billing, servicing the passenger trains, and monitoring the large bags of mail, both said they enjoyed their work and the city so much that they decided to stay.

Rona Sikes, longtime Snyder resident, remembered taking train trips to visit her grandparents in Bonham. It was during

WWII, and with rations on tires and gas her family would board the train at midnight and arrive in Fort Worth in the early morning hours to make their connection to Bonham. The train cars would be crowded with troops but she vividly recalled them willing to give up their seats for others.

At the age of 10 or 11, John Fenton, former resident of Snyder, recalled would ride the train with his cousin by themselves to visit their aunt and uncle in Hico.

Like many towns across the state and across our nation we lose valuable history when our buildings are torn down or fall down due to neglect. After years of conversation with BNSF amid intermittent pauses, the Depot is waiting patiently for a reprise, for new life, for a new purpose. Her fate hangs in the balance.

Paula Hatfield is Chair of the Scurry County Historical Commission.

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—HOMER GODAIR

