

## *DOWNNS HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

*Downs, Kansas*

### *The Past*

The Historical Society of Downs Carnegie Library was founded in 1982 with the mission of preserving the history pertaining to the development of the City of Downs and surrounding area and the families who have, or presently do dwell therein and to provide proper housing for such materials. This original group operated as such until 2005 when it became clear that the Historical Society should drop the 'of Downs Carnegie Library' portion and become Downs Historical Society. This was done to separate the organization to add to the clarity of the two entities and their functions.

Downs Historical Society determined that the depot was a significant architectural structure that has been an important part of the community since it was built in 1917 by Missouri Pacific. The society was able to reach a purchase agreement with the Union Pacific Railroad (successor to Missouri Pacific) in 1999 and with a Heritage Grant from Kansas State Historical Society, stabilized the structure. Preservation work began as community volunteers spent 10,000 hours over the next few years to save the depot from disrepair. Restoration was completed around 2005. As part of phase one of the preservation plans for the depot, a GP-7 diesel engine was also acquired and refinished in Missouri Pacific blue and gray, the colors worn by the first diesels that came to Downs. It is located just east of the depot building. No tax dollars were ever used in the reconstruction. Preservation of this property was assisted by the Kansas Heritage Trust Fund Kansas State Historical Society, donations, local grant funding and volunteer support of the Downs community. Thousands of dollars were raised in the sale of personalized memorial bricks which are always on display as part of the brick platform on the track side of the building.

Resolution No. 103, adopted April 3, 2000, by the Governing Body of the City of Downs declared the Missouri Pacific Depot of significant historical importance to the City of Downs, KS, and its residents, serving as a symbol of the work ethic, preservice and continued dedication to historical preservation that the city and its residents' support. The resolution supports the renovation efforts and plans for future use of the depot as a significant focal point of the community to be used by its residents and visitors. Having operated from 1917 – 1951, the Downs Missouri Pacific Depot was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places by the US Department of the Interior on October 11, 2001. It is also listed in the Register of Historic Kansas Places by the Kansas State Historical Society.

The restored depot is now remarkably close to the original structure built in 1917. It houses Downs Historical Society and its collection of Downs historical photographs and documents and is the location of the historic archives research office. The original freight room houses the society's archives which includes the original Downs Newspapers from about 1880, photographs and Downs historical memorabilia. The Downs Historical Society houses historic photographs, records, and a limited number of historical railroad memorabilia relevant to the Missouri Pacific heritage. The archives also hold genealogical research and family histories from the area. The society managed a research grant for a book about the Ise family. Historical photo scanning and display services are available to anyone loaning historic photos and documents. The depot rooms, however, are reserved for railroad related items. Historical materials and photos are donated each year and we continue to add displays including a scale model of the ten-stall roundhouse which was located three blocks west of Morgan Avenue.

In the early 2000's, the Oak Creek School House Society was formed to save one of the last standing one room schoolhouses in the area located in Smith County. The Downs Historical Society acquired the land and structures from Smith County, Kansas. Functioning under the Downs Historical Society, volunteers of the Oak Creek School House Society raised their own funds and restored the schoolhouse and continue to maintain the buildings and grounds. The Downs Historical Society also played a key role in developing the original website for the City of Downs with a focus on the restoration of the Downs Historical Railroad Depot. The website has since been updated to include city information and community organizations and their activities.

Past Downs Historical Society members participated in the Kansas Storytelling Festival by giving a storytelling bus tour of 1911 Downs. They built a replica of the original Gazebo that was built in the 1870's and it stands in the Railroad Park just west of the Depot. A re-dedication of the 1917 Downs Missouri Pacific Depot with an afternoon program was conducted in May 2006. The group erected a Sod and Stubble Marker at the Downs Roadside Park on Hwy 24 in 1996. A Historical Signs Committee that worked to develop and place signs throughout Osborne County featuring historical sites that were made famous in John Ise's Kansas classic book 'Sod & Stubble.' In honor of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the book's initial publication, the Sod and Stubble Country Self-Guided Tour was dedicated in September 2006. Nineteen historic markers interpret how Kansas homesteaders successfully dealt with adversity and hardship to create homes during the late nineteenth century in Osborne County, Kansas. A brochure provides a map and other background information. The tour starts one mile west and one mile north of the city of Downs, Kansas, located on Highway 24. Other bronze signs have been placed to mark original homesteads, schools, and the like in and around the Downs area.