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Missouri Pacific Brownsville Depot Measurement files - Tips on internet research and photo extrapolation

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Tips on Internet Research and Photo Extrapolation
by David N. Currey

Most of the research done on the Brownsville Missouri Pacific passenger station was done on the internet. I also made a trip to Brownsville and went to several museums and libraries there. Through connections in my model railroad and railroading hobbies, I was able to contact people who had helpful information as well. Through such networking I was able to come into contact with quite a few nice people who were able to provide helpful information and leads.

Google searches are a good place to start. My typical search string was something like the following:

> Brownsville "Missouri Pacific" passenger station OR depot -LP -CD -45 -PA -Pennsylvania -guitar -smoking -boys -room

Some of the above is obvious as to purpose, but I will explain some of the others. Placing "Missouri Pacific" within double quotes was so that only returns containing both words would be returned. This helped to eliminate returns about the state of Missouri or the Pacific Ocean.

There was a musical band named "Brownsville Station", and I was getting a lot of search returns concerning that band and its recordings and publicity items such as T-shirts, etc. So all the words with a minus sign in front of them were inserted in the search string to cause returns containing that word to be omitted from the search results. The state of Pennsylvania has a town named Brownsville, and I was getting a significant number of returns concerning that city, which also had a train station, so I entered the full name and abbreviation of the state preceded by minus signs to eliminate them. There is also a brand of guitars named Brownsville, so I needed to eliminate that as well. Other words I included with minus signs were to eliminate entries that were some of the band's most famous songs.

The use of the word "OR" in capital letters was so that whether the search return included either the word "station" or "depot", it would be returned in the search results.

I discovered that sometimes photos of the hotel next door, "The El Jardin Hotel", contained the station or part of the station in the photo, so I would sometimes do searches on the hotel name as follows:

> "El Jardin Hotel" Brownsville

Another source for information is eBay. A lot of postcards and occasional photos are sold on eBay, and can be great sources of information. Even colorized post cards which are almost like drawings can be great sources of information,

especially for the colors of the subject matter being searched for.

Locating Sanborn Maps (fire insurance maps) of the area, can give you the dimensions of the building(s) you are searching. One of my contacts provided me with such a map, and I was able to get the overall dimensions of the station, which backed up many of the measurements I had already determined. It also enabled me to get the depth of the building as 50' instead of the 48' I was thinking it was.

One thing I discovered, though, is that information can be inaccurate. I found some inaccuracies in the Sanborn Maps, which are reputed to be extremely inaccurate. For instance, Sanborn had one of the wye switches located too close to the depot switch so that the points of the switches would have interfered with each other—a physical impossibility for functioning switches. In other cases, I found written measurements of the depot waiting room to be in error—they were just approximations or perhaps typos. You have to take everything with a grain of salt, and go with a preponderance of the evidence. If four photos suggest something is probably one measurement, but you have written evidence stating it is something different, go with the photos, not the written evidence. Photos do not lie, or can they? Colorized photos can lie, most definitely. When the artist colorizes the photo, he may misinterpret something in the photo. For instance, a walkway behind the depot could get transfigured into a roof. Be careful, and go with a preponderance of the evidence.

For drawing up the plans, I had to have a means of determining measurements for the research to be valid. The best way to do that is to find something in the photo that you know has a certain length. For instance, the item that helped me out the most was a kid's bicycle that was parked in front of the station in one photo. Using a rim measurement of 24” (the rim for a kids bicycle, not an adult bicycle), I was then able to extrapolate, though a lot of trial and error, other measurements in the photo. Some doorways are about 6' 8” tall, but main doorways can be taller. Sometimes you can look at people and determine some kind of average height from them if there are a number of them standing around in the photo. A single person in the photo might be misleading.