

Historic Erlanger, Kentucky Depot and Park

Preserving the Depot



In 1990 the Norfolk Southern Railroad made the decision to demolish all wooden depots on their line. They would now house their employees in trailers/prefab structures where needed. The Erlanger Historical Society had just formed and with great city support, extensive support from community business', and a Kentucky Bicentennial Grant the depot structure was saved! The building would become an Erlanger Museum and a home for the Erlanger Historical Society. The depot structure was donated by the railroad with the stipulation that it would be moved 100 feet from the tracks and a fence be built. The railroad removed the lighting, the furnace, and hot water heater. Only the shell of the structure remained. Then the volunteers, donors, city personnel, and the Erlanger Historical Society got to work. The community is so fortunate to have preserved this historic structure.

Some History of the Depot



In June of 1876, the Railroad began laying track in Ludlow, KY. One major obstacle was the steep grade north from Ludlow. Between The Ohio River and the top of the hills ringing northern Kentucky, trains would have to climb 60 feet per mile for 6 miles. The steam engines which powered the trains of those days required large amounts of water. To provide a reliable supply of water, the railroad builders decided to construct a reservoir at the top of the grade. Joshua Bates built Silver Lake for \$1,745.34. Closer to the depot a large water tower was constructed to hold the water pumped from the reservoir. That tower stood where the parking lot of Boone Kenton Lumber Company is now situated. It was also decided to build a depot where passengers could board and freight could be loaded or unloaded while the train was refilling. Convenience for transporting freight and passengers determined that the location most appropriate for the both the reservoir and the depot would be in the heart of what was to become Erlanger. The Erlanger Depot was built in 1877 for a cost of \$1,411.00 and is the only remaining wooden depot structure on the original Southern RR Line between Cincinnati, OH and Chattanooga, TN.

Cochran Brown and Company constructed the railroad yards in the area that was to become Erlanger. There were 14 depots, of various sizes, between Ludlow and Somerset, KY and the Cochran Brown Company built all of them. In 1900 there were approximately 65 depots from Cincinnati to Chattanooga.

Rail Road Companies and a commuter train



The first company to operate the railroad was the Cincinnati Southern Railway Company. In 1879 a new lease was granted to the Cincinnati Rail Road Company. In 1881 upon completion of the railroad to Chattanooga the lease was granted to Frederick Wolffe. Shortly thereafter Wolffe assigned his lease to the Cincinnati, New Orleans and Texas Pacific Railway Company. This company was owned by an English Syndicate controlled by Baron Frederick Emile d'Erlanger. Baron d'Erlanger's railroads ran from Cincinnati to New Orleans and became known as the Queen and Crescent Route

Passenger service was started July 27, 1877. However, when Railroad President Charles Schiff started the first commuter service from Richwood, KY to Central Union Station in Cincinnati at least three times daily, important changes began. Suddenly residents could be in Cincinnati within minutes, travel time was 35 minutes by rail. Tickets for commuters cost \$3.00 per month or 25 cents per day. The impact of the commuter train through the Erlanger Depot cannot be overestimated; Erlanger became a bustling town, promoted by the Erlanger Land Syndicate. Ads stated....*the land is gently rolling, the air dry and healthful, and springs of clear, cold water abound...* A special train was run with free fare and lunch on the grounds for prospective buyers. The first lot was sold on the corner of Locust Street and Crescent Avenue to J.W. Greer of Covington for \$16.00 per front foot. Sunday afternoon excursions came from Cincinnati to Erlanger, and as many as 20 carloads came to visit the area on each Sunday. The railroad had made the early stagecoach travel obsolete and Erlanger a destination.

Some shared Memories of the Erlanger Depot on Crescent Avenue

Lucille Haskell Houston – remembered the stockyards in the now Depot Park. Her older brothers and sisters worked in Cincinnati and rode the commuter train to work each day

John Domaschko – most exciting thing when he was young was when the circus animals were unloaded...a parade of animals, clowns, and circus acts would come

down Commonwealth Avenue to the present site of the Erlanger City building, then the Erlanger Fairgrounds. The tent would be raised and the circus would stay for a week. Everyone in town came out to witness the parade and the circus.

Charles Dahlenburg – remembers the children setting up football and baseball fields in the small Depot Park. The park was always a place for activity for the residents of Erlanger. From 1951 to 1953 the Lions Club carnivals were held there. Large beautiful oak trees provided shade for social activities and family gatherings. Every 4th of July a committee collected funds for a large fireworks display at the Depot Park. Carnivals and medicine shows provided entertainment. The shows would arrive at the depot on the train and parade to the open space.

Nell Viox – recalled an excursion from Lexington, KY to Lockland, OH for a celebration honoring her soon- to- be husband James Viox, a professional baseball player for the Pittsburgh Nationals. The train stopped at the Erlanger Depot for a few minutes. Right beside the depot, on a grassy knoll, large white painted rock letters spelled out ERLANGER, Ky.. Jimmie and Nell were married the following year in 1914. When Jimmie began work for General Motors, they bought a home on Crescent Avenue in 1927. Fifth generation Viox's still live in our town.

Mary Kathryn Bell – said that when she first stepped in Erlanger it was from the Depot. She and husband Paul came from Moreland, Kentucky on the old steam train for Paul's work. During the summer months Mary K's parents in the Tennessee hills would pick dew-fresh green beans early in the morning and pack them in colored cotton feed bags. Her Dad would rush them a mile to the Tennessee depot and get them on the steam train to Erlanger. They would arrive about 5:00 pm that day. Mary would can the beans and use the colorful sacks to make clothing for her children.

These were just a few of the memories that have made the Historic Erlanger Depot so special.

The Erlanger Depot Park



The railroad park continues to provide an outdoor meeting place for Erlanger's citizens. Informal picnics, birthday parties, and train watching are frequent activities. The city maintains the park with its gazebo, large picnic shelter, playground, and wonderful open spaces and has many events and celebrations in the park throughout the year. The Park is available for rental by calling the City of Erlanger 859-727-2525 and paying a returnable deposit.

Heritage Day-Biggest Day at the Park



On the third Sunday of every September, the Erlanger Historical Society and the City of Erlanger and Elsmere celebrate Heritage Day at the Depot Park. Memories continue to be made...

Come Visit the Museum



The park is also the location of the Historic Erlanger Depot Museum. The Museum is inside the original 1877 Depot building and includes the 1943 Caboose located on permanent tracks behind the Depot. The Museum is filled with memorabilia and artifacts from the people, places, and events related to the heritage and development of the City of Erlanger