

The Davis Bottom History Preservation Project

Railways & Train Stations

Some residents consider Davis Bottom to be a railroad town. During much of its history, the Davis Bottom valley was flanked by two railroad tracks running along its ridges. The Lexington and Danville railroad built tracks along the north ridge in the 1850s. This track became part of the Cincinnati Southern Railway in the 1870s, serving cargo trains at a freight depot off South Broadway. The tracks were removed after the freight depot was closed in the 1950s. A narrow pathway running along Combs Street now marks the route of the old L&D railroad tracks.



Figure 1: Steam train, Cincinnati Southern Passenger Station, ca 1900s. Courtesy, Nollau Collection, University of Kentucky.

The Cincinnati Southern Railway built another set of tracks along the southern ridge in the 1870s. This was the main line of the historic "Queen and Crescent" route, which served passenger trains until 1970. The tracks remain active with freight trains as part of the Norfolk Southern System. Numerous residents from Davis Bottom worked for the railroads and their associated stations from the 1860s to the 1970s.



Figure 2: Railroad workers, Lexington, 1890s. Courtesy, Lyle Family Photographic Collection, Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

The Cincinnati Southern Railway (1870s-present)

The Cincinnati Southern Railway had a major impact on Davis Bottom. The railway, which is still owned by The City of Cincinnati, was conceived in the 1830s in order to connect the resources of the south with the industrial power of the Midwest (Hall 1902). However, economic depressions, the Civil War and legislation blocked construction until the 1870s. The tracks between Ludlow and Somerset, Kentucky (via Lexington) opened on July 23, 1877. The original 337-mile route between

Cincinnati, Ohio and Chattanooga, Tennessee opened in 1880. The Cincinnati, New Orleans & Texas Railway began leasing this portion from The Cincinnati Southern Railway in 1881, thus completing passenger and freight service from Cincinnati (the “Queen” City) to New Orleans (the “Crescent” City) on the “Queen and Crescent” route. The Cincinnati Southern Railway continues to lease the freight line running along the southern ridge of Davis Bottom to The Cincinnati, New Orleans and Texas Pacific Railway, which is part of the Norfolk Southern System.

The Queen & Crescent Freight Station (1880s-1920s)



The Cincinnati Southern Railway built two freight stations in Davis Bottom to support commercial trains on the old Lexington and Danville line, which ran along the route of present-day Combs Street. The first freight station was a two-story, wooden structure built in the 1880s at 601 South Broadway. The train platform and wagon cargo bays were located on the first floor. Freight offices were located on the second floor. In 1914, Louis Edward Nollau, who would become the official photographer of the University of Kentucky, took two photographs of the station. This wooden structure was demolished in the 1920s for construction of a larger, concrete building needed to handle Lexington’s tobacco market.

Figure 3-4: The Queen & Crescent Freight Station (front and back), August 24, 1914. Courtesy, Louis Edward Nollau F Series Photographic Print Collection, Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

The Cincinnati Southern Freight Station (1925 – 2007)

The second freight station was a two-story, concrete building completed in 1925. This Art Deco-style freight depot the last railway station ever built in Lexington (Dollins/Abner 2010). The Cincinnati Southern Freight Station had a long, rectangular platform and numerous truck bays to serve a variety of commercial cargo, including shipments for dozens of white burley tobacco warehouses and redryers.

Figure 5: The Cincinnati Southern Freight Station, ca. 1931. Courtesy, Lexington Public Library.



Sylvester Kiger, who grew up on South Broadway, says circus trains also unloaded at the freight depot to set up for a circus at the Red Mile horse track. "The whole neighborhood would be out at midnight to watch the circus come in," says Kiger, adding, "It was a working parade. All the animals, you know the elephants were pulling wagons and so forth. And they would set up the big top, and we kids would help with all that and get free passes to the circus. They would come in that night and by one o'clock the next day they were up and going." (Kiger 2011)

The freight station was closed in 1959. Brumfield Hay and Grain Company, a warehouse and a furniture and antique store occupied the building for several decades. The building was vacant when gutted by fire in 2007. The remaining walls were soon demolished.



Figure 6: 2D graphic, Cincinnati Southern Freight Station, ca 1930s. Courtesy, The Kentucky Archaeological Survey/The Kentucky Heritage Council.

Cincinnati Southern Passenger Stations

The Cincinnati Southern Railway built two passenger stations at 701 South Broadway to serve the famous "Queen and Crescent" line, a major route connecting Cincinnati to New Orleans. From federal census records, we know that numerous residents from Davis Bottom worked at these stations as railway porters, flagmen, stewards and crew.

The first passenger station was a three-story, wood structure built when the Cincinnati Southern tracks were completed in 1877. The first train of the Cincinnati Southern Railway arrived in Lexington on the morning of July 23, 1877, according to the *Lexington Press*. Newspaper article describe how the new railroad and passenger station increased business in the south end of town, including factories, stores, boarding houses and hotels. The first Cincinnati Southern passenger station was gutted by fire in 1906. The Cincinnati Southern Railway soon started construction of another passenger station at the site.



Figure 7: Cincinnati Southern Railway's first passenger station, 701 South Broadway, Lexington, Kentucky, ca 1890s. Courtesy, Lexington Public Library. The Davis Bottom valley is located just beyond the station and tracks.

The Cincinnati Southern Railway built a larger, two-story passenger station at the site from 1906 to 1908. This Georgian Revival-style building was the last major railroad station standing in Central Kentucky (DeCamp 1987). Designed by H. Herrington, the passenger depot was made of yellow brick with massive pilasters and architectural designs accenting its entrances and platforms. The First District office of The Cincinnati, New Orleans & Texas Railway was located on the second floor.



Figure 8: The second passenger station, Cincinnati Southern Railway, 701 South Broadway, ca 1908. Courtesy, Louis Edward Nollau F Series Photographic Print Collection, Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

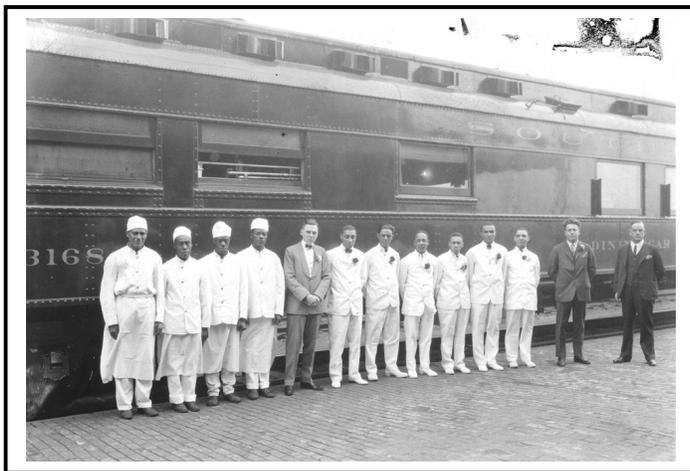


Figure 9: Cincinnati Southern Railway's dining car staff at Ferguson Yard, Somerset, KY, ca 1940-50s. Courtesy, Louis Edward Nollau F Series Photographic Print Collection, Special Collections, University of Kentucky.

The Cincinnati Southern Railway's passenger station operated during the golden years of train travel. In the 1930s, about sixteen passenger trains ran on the tracks each day, and about twenty-eight freight trains checked into the nearby freight yard each night (Segoe 1931). In 1970, the last passenger train pulled out of the station. (Leader 1981). The railway's district office was closed, and the waiting and dining rooms were reduced to freight storage. Local citizens drafted plans to develop the building into a family restaurant, but the station was gutted by fire (ruled arson) in 1991, and ultimately demolished.

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