

Union Pacific Pumphouse

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Hoping to Preserve the Pumphouse

by Penny McPherson, Kit Carson Historical Society

In 1956, shortly after Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) discontinued the use of steam engines on the railroad through Kit Carson, the Union Pacific Pumphouse and site were leased to the Kit Carson Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber maintained the lease until 1981, when it was transferred to the Kit Carson Historical Society (KCHS). While the Pumphouse was donated to KCHS by UP, UP maintained ownership of the land on which it stands.

KCHS wants to preserve the building, however without a long-term lease or ownership of the land, preservation is difficult and funding hard to obtain. Meanwhile, UP is concerned that the building is deteriorating, becoming a potential liability. Since the building is historic, UP may allow the structure to remain if renovated.

The current lease expires in May 2005, again raising the question of whether the lease will be renewed, short term or at all, threatening the location or existence of the Pumphouse. Without a long-term lease, KCHS is unable to apply for funds because of requirements for assurances that contributions will have a lasting and long-term effect.

With a long-term lease, the Pumphouse and its renovation could serve as a focus for interpretation of what was once a large railroad complex in Kit Carson. Railroad aficionados already visit the local museum with interest in the original location of the railroad complex. Renovation of the Pumphouse is a logical extension of the preservation work KCHS has begun on the depot. For families and tourists, the short two block walk from the museum to the Pumphouse would provide an opportunity to understand the significance of the railroad to the rural areas of the state.



Beulah Hogan's father and his dog at work at the pumphouse in 1911.

Photo courtesy of Beulah Hogan.

Memories of the Pumphouse

by Beulah Wolfe Hogan, daughter of the pumper

In the many years Papa worked in the pump house, I saw much of it. The little rock house held a large engine to run the pump. It had two giant flywheels higher than Papa's head. He started the motor by giving one of these wheels a spin. It made an unearthly noise. I believe the pump itself was in the well house out back. The water was pumped high up into the softener. He often took us up the high ladder to the little round house on top of a solid steel tower.

I wish I could give a good description of the inside of that fascinating room, the softener, but I was a child and will have to rely on impressions. There were many little tanks surrounded by walkways and machinery. In some of the tanks, the water was clear. Some were filled with wood excelsior. In the middle of the room, the tank had a huge water wheel. It turned all the time, its buckets dipping the water and pouring it into another tank. Into some the vats Papa dumped hundred-pound sacks of lime and soda ash. The excelsior acted as a filter. When the whole process was finished, the water was pure, soft, slippery to the touch, and tasted terrible. But Papa said it would not form sediment on the inside of the trains' boilers. The water had to be tested and meet certain standards of softness. Many townspeople hauled it home to do their laundry; it made the clothes clean and white.

After the softening process, the water was then pumped into the water tank which was not so tall as the softener. He used to let us stand in the window of the softener and watch the trains take on water. It was a thrill to watch the fireman climb up on the engine, reach up with a long hook, and pull down the spout to fill the train's boiler.

The water well itself was located behind the pumphouse. It was a dug well, twenty to twenty-five feet in diameter. There was a house built over it. The door was always kept locked with a heavy padlock. The inside of the well was walled up with heavy lumber down to water level. Above the water was a heavy plank floor. Many pipes and much machinery filled the big round well room. Heavy stairs led down to the floor. The walls were always damp, oozing with water and overed with mold or moss. It was a cool, pleasant place to visit on a hot summer day.

All of this was my father's place of business. He was very proud of the way he took care of it. There was a pot-bellied stove with an old coffeepot always on it. There was a big rolltop desk for his records and an easy chair. In one corner, there was a cot with some rather greasy blankets. Here he slept when it was stormy or there were other emergencies. Also, he could never refuse a bed to any fellow who was down on his luck and had no place to sleep. Papa himself was a teetotaler and never went near Nate Miller's saloon, but often some farmer or cowboy who stayed at Nate's too long spent the night on that greasy cot until he was able to travel the next morning.