Historic railway depot slated for restoration

Facility at Poole was built before 1900

By JOHN ANDREW PRIME
The Shreveport Times

POOLE — One of the few remaining old-time railroad plantation freight depots, complete with deep wooden porch, may get back on track if historians have their way.

The depot at Poole, a community in the southermost part of Bossier Parish, was built just before the turn of the century.

It was moved about 100 yards off the main track about 50 years ago and used for storage. That might have saved it, though, because it wasn’t in the way of the trains or the wider highways that followed and paralleled the track.

“It’s authentic,” said Libby Wallace, president of the Bossier Restoration Foundation, which hopes to move the depot to Benton. “It’s a piece of history from Bossier Parish that hasn’t been done over to make it look pretty. We want to save it as an old depot, so children can see what it actually looked like.”

A living link to the past of the depot is Ben Jones, who lives in the old farm “great house” that still overlooks the railroad tracks at Poole, just a few hundred yards east of U.S. 71. Jones looks after the property for its owners, who now live in Georgia, but who have agreed to donate the depot to the foundation.

Jones, now 62, was born on the Poole property, where his father, Ben Sr., worked until he died in 1964. The elder Jones was born in 1896, the same year the depot was built. “I remember when they moved it,” Jones said. “It’s made of cypress and has a tin roof, but they put that type roof on it when they moved it.”

“It’s the only open-air depot I’ve ever seen,” said Bossier Parish historian Clif Cardin, pointing out a deep wooden porch that isn’t screened in. Cardin said it is one of only two known remaining railroad depots in Bossier Parish. The other has been turned into a residence.

The depot’s porch takes up half its 33-foot depth. The depot is only 17 feet wide and 19 feet tall. Cardin said the best way to move the building would probably be to shift it to a railroad flatcar, move it by rail as close to Benton as trackage will allow, and then truck it the rest of the way. The limiting factor there will be the width of the depot and clearances along the track.

Cardin said it will take about $25,000 to move and restore the house. That figure is an estimate, since the back part of the depot slipped off its foundation piers and the extent of rot to the wood, if any, is unknown. “Until you get someone who knows what they’re doing to lift it up, you won’t know how extensive the damage is,” he said.

At Benton, the depot would join the Hughes House, an antebellum home the foundation restored in 1974 and moved from its original site in Rocky Mount in 1995.