

Savage reclaims a piece of its rail-driven history

Restored 1880 train depot recalls largely forgotten roots

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Ask just about anyone about the historic roots of Savage, and you'll be greeted with a blank expression. That's because the southwestern suburb is today home to primarily industrial businesses that date back no more than a few decades.

To a large extent, towns rely on historic buildings to keep local history alive. In Savage, the oldest businesses still standing went up in the 1950s and only a few homes predate them, so it's little surprise that most residents are unaware of the city's heritage.

"We've struggled with that for years," said Rob Fendler, a member of Savage's Dan Patch Historical Society.

A possible solution to that problem arrived on a series of flatbed trucks last summer, as the historic Savage Depot was returned home after spending the past 30 years at Murphy's Landing, a recreated 19th century village near Shakopee.

Originally built in 1880, the depot has been painstakingly restored to its original condition (though it now rests on the opposite side of Highway 13) and will house a coffee shop and visitor's center when it reopens this summer.

Any novice can see that the building has historic value, but a select few historians will recall the building's connection to the birth of Savage, providing access to the railroad and a source of goods for wealthy Marian Savage, who owned the International Stock Food Farm nearby.

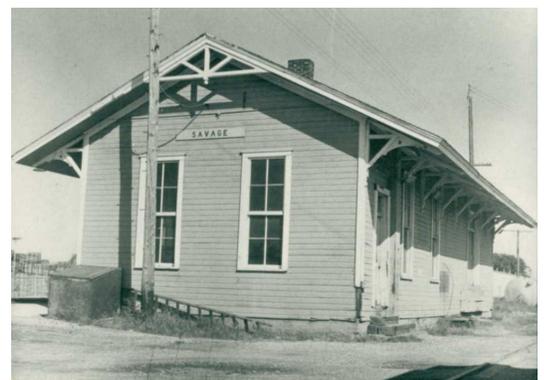
"Mr. Savage once walked these halls," Fendler said reverently as he gazed upon the original wooden plank floors and steps inside, sturdy but well worn from a century of passersby.

The interior has been spruced up with a fresh coat of paint, structural reinforcement and some remodeling to provide facilities for the new Dan Patch Coffee Shop, but otherwise it looks much like it did in the 1880s. The original ticket window, the wood floor, walls and multiple wooden doors all date back to the early days of the depot — undamaged from two separate 12-mile moves



After a 30-year absence, the historic Savage Depot has been returned to near its original resting place and remodeled to restore its 1880 appearance, above.

Much of the building's original materials are intact, providing the southwestern suburb with a window into a history many residents know little about.



over the years. Little is known about the previous move, but Minneapolis-based Lunak House Movers transported the building last year by dividing the roof into four sections and moving the rest of the 1,600-square-foot structure in one piece.

The outer siding and shingles were shot, so they've been replaced and the building insulated from the outside to avoid damaging the well-preserved interior walls.

As president of Fendler Patterson Construction, located a mere block from the depot's new home, Fendler has overseen the renovation himself by donating time and coordinating subcontractors who either donated their work or offered deeply discounted rates.

"It's just been a labor of love for me," Fendler said.

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— Barry Stock, Savage city administrator

Of course, restoration and transportation costs still add up, and Savage City Administrator Barry Stock said total costs are likely to come in between \$250,000 and \$300,000. About half of the money has been raised through ongoing donations led by the Dan Patch Historical Society, with the city drawing the rest from its community investment fund.

Despite the sense of historical illiteracy among some residents, organizers have found Savage veterans eager to support a rare artifact, what Fendler calls "all we really have" as structural evidence of the city's past.

Stock said the city tried to assess what residents saw as their community vision a few years ago and identified a yearning to connect with the town's roots.

"Our residents do like the fact that we have a pretty rich history, but it seems that we haven't had a lot of things here to show for it," Stock said.

With the return of the depot, from its rustic sliding doors to its ornate exterior roof supports, now they finally do.