

The Railroad Comes to Town!



Santa Fe, Oregon, and California
National Historic Trails

McCoy Park
Oregon-California Trails Association
City of Independence
National Park Service

The entire country had railroad fever in the 1830s, with the dream that one day a railroad might span the continent! In Independence merchants needed to get goods between the town square and Wayne City steamboat landing on the Missouri River—why not a railroad? Merchants and investors secured money, surveyed a right of way, and in 1849 the state legislature approved the Independence & Missouri River Railroad. Architect William Singleton designed

a road with cut and crushed stone, wooden ties, and iron-capped rails. Mules or oxen pulled freight and passenger cars up to Independence Square, located 4½ miles from the river. There the train made a quarter turn in the middle of the street on a turntable before entering the elaborate station. On the steep trip back to the river, one mule led the loaded freight car while the other mule might be resting inside—a way to ballast the car from bouncing off the tracks.

When the Independence & Missouri River Railroad went bankrupt, its station became a warehouse or livery stable, and the turntable was buried in the street. You are standing near the old railroad bed. The rail line swept into McCoy Park to your immediate right before turning left in front of you on the way to Independence Square.



Painting by Cheryl Harness