

Mystery Photo from Page 1 — “Is It The Yellow Jacket?”

Submitted by Kenneth Brown

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A couple of years back, Rodney Alms of Ava, got me interested in the Mansfield to Ava Railroad that operated from 1910 until 1935. He has spent considerable time tracing the old road bed that is still visible in many places between the two cities, and he was kind enough to give me a tour of the old roadbed.

Also of interest to me are the old photos that survive of the railroad, depot, and vehicles. The vehicles that are most mentioned by people who remember the railroad are the passenger coaches with the nicknames of “Yellow Jacket” and the “Bluebird.”

J.D. Ross’s recollection of the “Bluebird” appears on the next page. His article got me to thinking...I don’t recall ever seeing a photo published of the “Yellow Jacket.”

Well, the photo at right was loaned to me by Cinita Davis Brown, and I believe it quite likely is the passenger vehicle called the “Yellow Jacket.” Here’s what J. Elmer Curry said about the “Yellow Jacket” in his 1957 book, “A Reminiscent History of Douglas County.”

“On October 14, 1921, the railroad’s passenger coach, the “Yellow Jacket” was completely demolished in a accident at the Ava Depot. A carload of 1000 cases of tomatoes weighing about 65,000 pounds broke loose from the engine at the second grade out of Ava about a mile from town, and crashed into the “Yellow Jacket” at the depot, jamming it between the car of tomatoes and an empty merchandise car.

Two weeks later the railroad management announced the pur-



The “Yellow Jacket?” circa 1918-20 next to the Ava Depot. This photo was loaned by Cinita Davis Brown. The date of the photo was established from the WWI soldier in the crowd of people to the left. If this was the “Yellow Jacket,” then it was probably situated at this approximately location when it was destroyed by a carload of tomatoes on October 14, 1921.

chase of a new passenger coach to be known as the “Blue Bird,” with a seating capacity for 32 passengers. The new coach was put into service about the middle of November on a schedule of two round trips daily. The “Blue Bird” was operated by a 45-horsepower motor.”

Look closely at the photo above, and notice the dress of the people. The crowd at the left of the coach includes a WWI soldier in his uniform. This dates the picture in the 1918-1920 period when the “Yellow Jacket” was believed to operate (it was destroyed in 1921).

If anyone remembers the “Yellow Jacket” or has any information about it, this author and the Society would love to hear from you.

Facts about the Ava Railroad

- Road bed 15 miles long (2nd shortest in state — shortest was the Cassville to Exeter train — five miles long).
- First freight train: Feb. 14, 1910
- First passenger train: Feb. 25, 1910
- First locomotive: A Heisler steam engine built in Heisler, Penn.
- Types of freight hauled — railroad ties, lumber, livestock, and canned tomatoes.
- Local ownership began: 1922
- Mail service began: 1923
- Vehicles known to be used for transportation after 1922:
 - “Blue Bird” passenger coach
 - 5-ton truck equipped for rail service.
 - 50-ton geared Shay locomotive
 - “Doodlebug” passenger coach
- Railroad closed: April 1935.

“Here Comes the Bluebird!”

Narrative by J.D. Ross

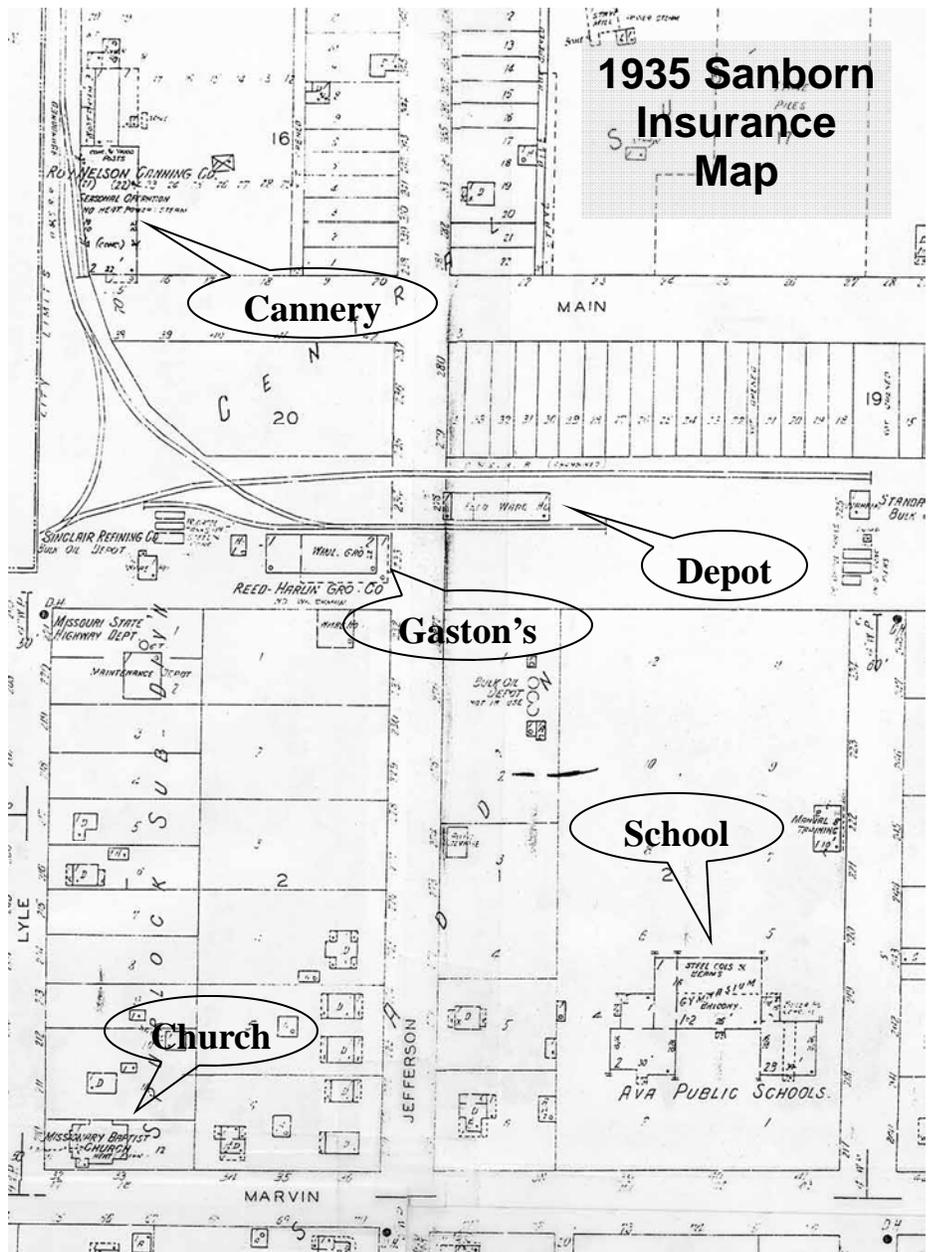
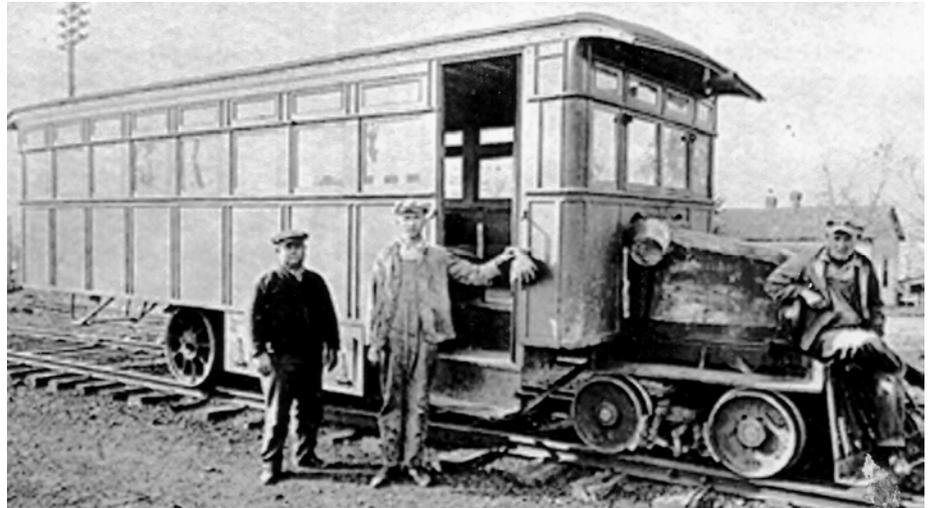
(Maps & Photo Submitted by Kenneth W. Brown)

When I was “tricycle motor” age through the first grade, I spent a great amount of time with my grandparents, Cal and Artie Ross. Their home, with small acreage, was located on what is now North Jefferson and 15th St., NW. The house was approximately 200 yards east of the Ozark Southern Railroad.

Legend to Photo & Map At Right

(Top) The “Bluebird” passenger vehicle. Some sources identify the people as (l-r) Fred Grover, Walter White and Otis Tate. However, Ed Crabtree, of Nixa, MO, has identified the person on the “cowcatcher” at right as his wife’s grandfather, Charles Dix.

(Bottom) This Sanborn Insurance map was drawn in 1935 to illustrate the fire risks in a city’s structure. Notice the location of the depot at the center of the map.



There would be a sound similar to a chalk board scratch and a goose with bronchitis trying to harmonize. One of the adults would yell “Here comes the Bluebird!” I would sprint trackside in time to wave to the driver as the green railcar trundled northward out of sight.

I couldn’t understand why the rail bus was painted dark green but was called the “Bluebird.” Years later I learned the bus was built by the Blue Bird Bus Company.

The train station and turntable was situated on what is now the N.W. corner of the Ava High School parking lot. The tracks ran west crossing Highway 5 on what is now the N.W. 8th Ave., past Gaston Wholesale (originally Reed-Harlin Wholesale Grocery) and the Sinclair bulk kerosene and gasoline tanks (regular or Ethyl). A single short siding served both rail customers.

The tracks turned north on what is

now N.W. 3rd St. past the canning factory (single siding) crossing Highway 14; continuing north passing the Peter's property, then further north behind the Yandel Apple Orchard. The rails skirted the County Poor Farm and eventually crossed what is now Highway 5 on its way to Mt. Zion. Southbound, approximately six miles from the stop light at old Highway 60 in Wright County, minor remnants of the old road bed can be seen.

We of seasoned citizen vintage, who lived on the North side of Ava, remember the yell "Here comes the Bluebird." It stirs a pleasant memory of the depression days long past.

Frisco Researcher Inquires About Ava-Mansfield Line

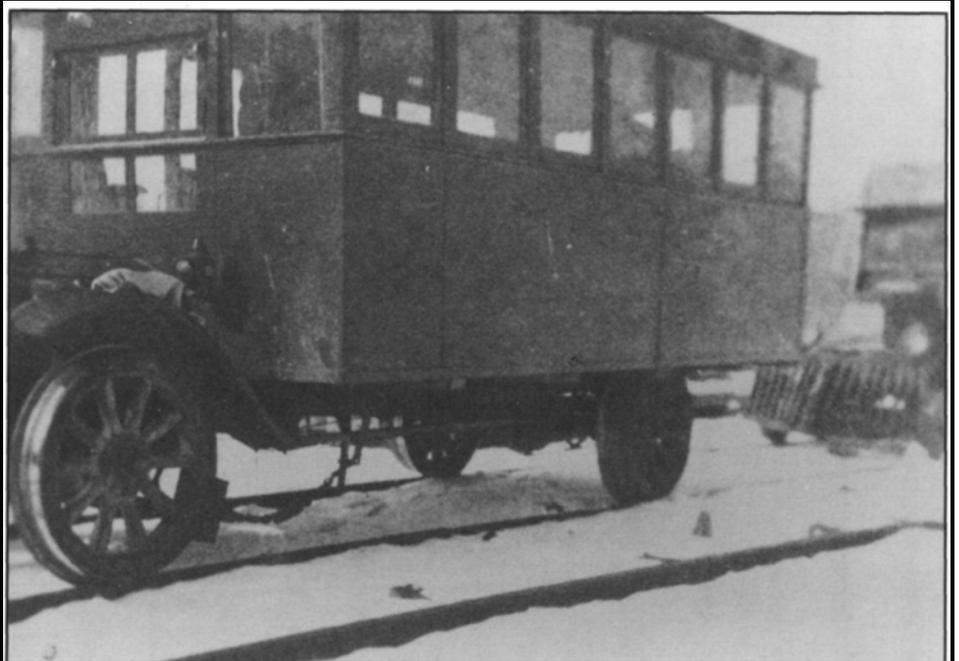
As this Journal was being put together, layout editor, Kenneth Brown, received an inquiry from Buck Dean, of Florida, who is an avid researcher of the old Frisco Railway across Missouri.

Buck and his colleague, Bill White, of Kansas City had heard old-time railroaders speak of a line between Ava and Mansfield but the two of them could find no references to it in Frisco records. As a result, Buck was provided with a preliminary draft of the articles here, and he was able to provide some valuable assistance. According to Buck Dean, the 1920 Poor's Directory of Railroads showed the following:

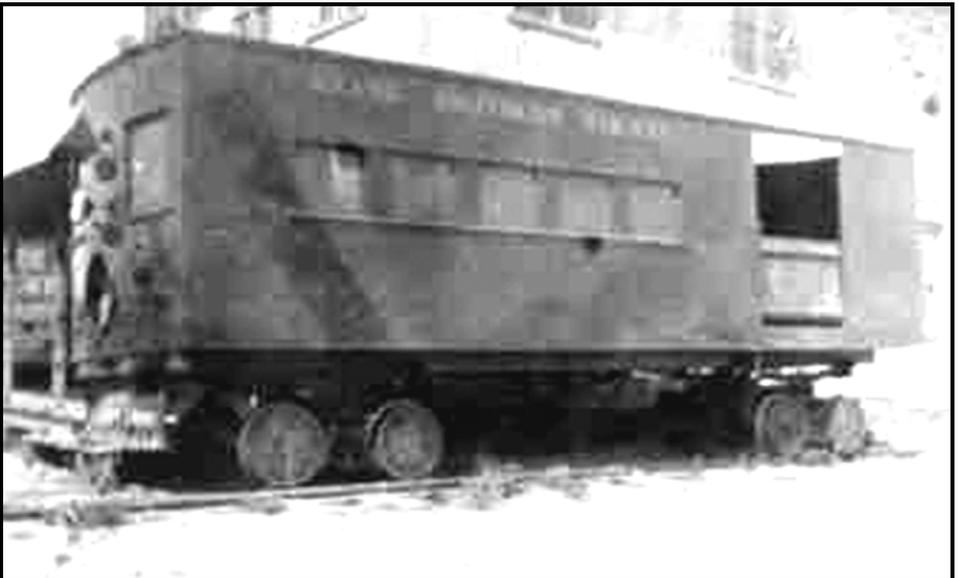
"Ozark Southern Ry — Line of road connects Mansfield, Casto, Alwanda, and Ava, Mo., 15 miles. Gauge, 4 ft. 8-1/2 in. Locomotive (1). Successor to the Kansas City, Ozark and Southern Ry."

Mr. Dean's research suggests to him that 'our little' train had standard rather than narrow gauge rails, and any Frisco equipment on the line had been leased to the owners of the line. Mr. Dean has a soft spot for our area with memories of trout-fishing trips with his father to Rockbridge; thus, he is familiar with Douglas County.

Other Passenger Coaches on the Ava Railroad



The above coach, identified by the photo donor, Rosalie Grabeel Huffman, as the "Bluebird," was copied from p. 10 of the 1995 "Douglas County Missouri History & Families" book. Look closely—the coach is different from the "Bluebird" on page 21 and the "Yellow Jacket" on page 20. The vehicle just behind the above coach, however, appears to be the 5-ton rail truck purchased in 1923—dating the photo in that period. Contact the Society if you have any information or opinions about this vehicle or the one below.



This self-propelled vehicle was known to be used in 1929 and may have been one of the last used in 1935 when the railroad closed. Railroad history buff, Dr. Matt Karshner, of Joplin, MO, says these vehicles were called "Doodlebugs" and were used by small railroads needing low-cost alternatives. Please contact the Society if you have any information or opinions about this vehicle or the one above.

Map of Rail Bed between Mansfield and Ava — A “First Draft”

Submitted by Kenneth Brown

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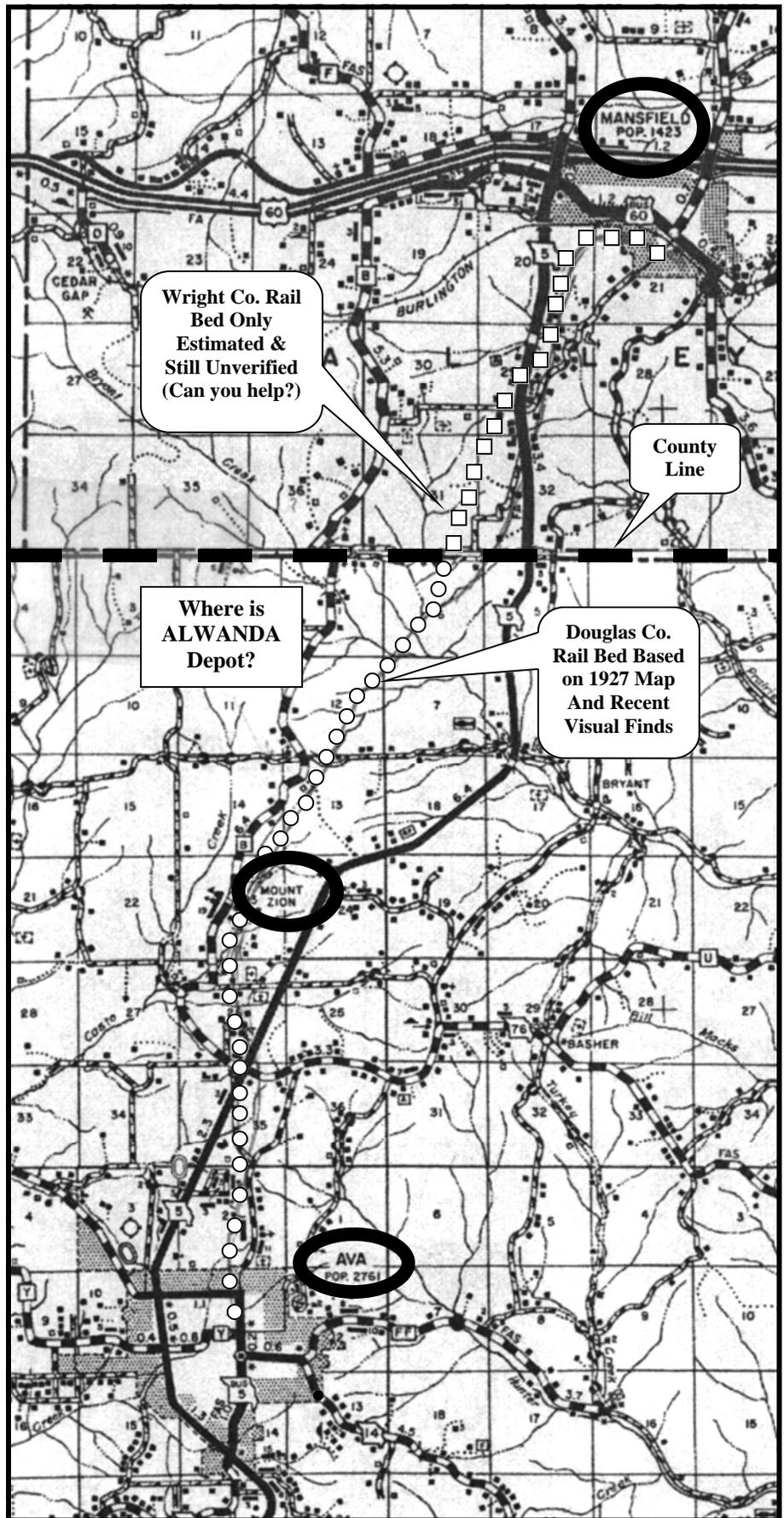
The map at right shows the approximate location of the rail bed for the Kansas City, Ozark Southern Railway that operated between Mansfield and Ava from 1910 until 1935. It’s called a “1st Draft” because the Wright County portion of the bed, depicted by white squares, is only an approximation. The author is seeking individuals with information that can help him identify this portion more accurately.



Rail Bed Shown Between Fence and Hedge Rows Along East Side of Copeland Industries on North Edge of Ava.

The Douglas County or lower portion of the rail bed, depicted by white circles, is based on a 1927 sectional map of the county that outlined the rail bed. This map is consistent with physical evidence of the road bed that can be seen from the county roads that cross its original path even today.

Credit for the physical evidence should be given to Rodney Alms of Ava who once spent considerable time searching for signs of the road bed on the Douglas side of the county line. He was kind enough to give this author





Road Bed and Bridge Abutment That Runs along County Road 5-203 Just East of Mo. Hwy 5 Just North of Ava

a tour of those places, and the photos included here were taken during that tour.

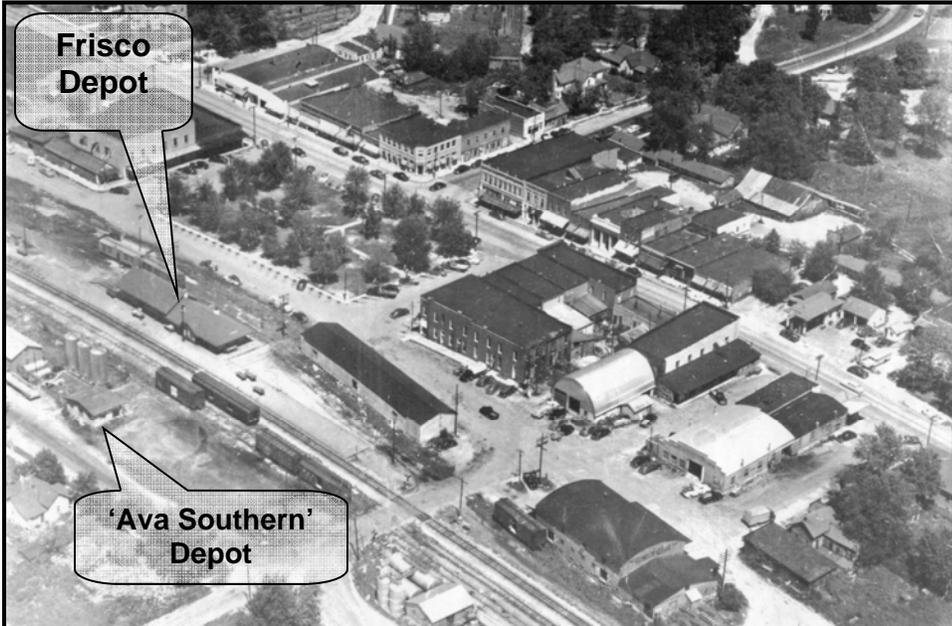
Whistle Stops — Where’s Alwanda?

Besides its terminals at Mansfield and Ava, the Ozark Southern also made stops at a depot located in Mt. Zion and another called “Alwanda.” Also, the 1920 Poors’ Directory of Railroads listed stops at Alwanda and Casto. The Casto stop is believed to be the same as Mt. Zion. Casto Creek runs just west of Mt. Zion and Casto School was located a short distance to the southwest of Mt. Zion.

To date, the author is not yet clear exactly where “Alwanda” was located except that it was between Mt. Zion and Mansfield perhaps near the county line.

Anyone with comments or information about the Ava-Mansfield railroad is encouraged to write to the author: Kenneth W. Brown, 4108 E. Eastmoor St., Springfield, MO 65809, or send an email to ozarkuncle@sbcglobal.net.

1950 Mansfield Photo Shows the Location of the Frisco Railway and Ava Southern Depots



The “Ava Southern” in front of the line’s Mansfield Depot — ca 1922-23



The above photos reproduced from the book “Mansfield Missouri — The First Hundred Years — 1882-1982”



Ava’s Reed-Harlin Grocery Wholesale House from 1920s-30s (In later years, it housed Larkin Barnes’ Supply Business)