



# 1874 Lisle Depot

Self-Guided Tour



# Lisle Depot

This self-guided tour is designed to give you a more detailed look at the displays here in this part of the museum.

You'll notice that the page numbers in this pamphlet match the numbers on signs posted throughout the museum.

As you take a look at the objects in our collection, also take a moment to read and learn even more about Lisle's past.

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# Lisle Depot

The Chicago and Aurora Railroad was established in 1852 to connect Aurora and Chicago by train. The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad (the CB&Q, Burlington, or the Q) was established in 1855 by connecting this original section of line with a few others in the region all the way to Burlington, Iowa.

Nine years later, a depot station opened in Lisle, one of the Burlington's original stops. The first train through Lisle Station was May 20, 1864. The main purpose during this time was to transport locally-produced agricultural products to the growing city of Chicago. Ten years later, a spark from a train passing through caused a fire and the building was destroyed. The Burlington decided to rebuild and completed this building in 1874. It served as the railway station in Lisle for over a hundred years, transporting people and goods to and from Lisle.

In the 1970s, the Burlington started planning to build a new station. Local residents raised awareness of this building's historical significance and gathered support for saving the structure. The Lisle Heritage Society, Lisle Park District, and Village of Lisle worked with the Burlington to move the building and turn it into a museum. On October 14, 1978, it was moved to its current location and was opened to the public for tours in 1984.

## Built to Ship

The 19<sup>th</sup> century invention of the railroad allowed for large quantities of goods and freight to be sent over long distances. Building rails, trains, and cars was very expensive and many large projects failed early in their development. Smaller rail lines were built throughout the country and later connected by junctions or business mergers. These large systems linked communities of all sizes and encouraged regional commerce.

In Lisle, farmers produced large amounts of raw milk, hogs, wool from sheep, peony flowers, and more that were sent to Chicago. Individuals sent and received packages to and their family members who lived or went to school in other towns. Local business owners purchased goods from businesses outside of Lisle and had them shipped to the Depot. People paid shipping fees to send items by rail and picked up items delivered by train.

## Waiting Room

This is the Lisle Depot's original Waiting Room. Railroads were first used to transport items, not people. This room only would have needed to hold a few people at a time, mostly those who needed to travel with their items during shipment. A standard issue potbelly-style stove sat in the center of the room and was likely smaller than the one you see on display now.

Passenger travel became more common in the early 20th century as railroad technology became more affordable and comfortable. People were able to live in rural areas like Lisle that surrounded cities take the train each day to the city for work or business. In the 1970s, the living quarters on the other side of the building was turned into a waiting room to accommodate the growing need for affordable transportation.

Museum volunteers and staff restored the Waiting Room to appear as it originally did. It looked like this well into the 1930s until the Burlington renovated it.

## Layers of Change

The Burlington Railroad made indoor and outdoor renovations to the Lisle Depot over the years. Rooms were changed based on the needs of staff, patrons, and families living here. Over the years, the Burlington added drop ceilings, covered up the original flooring with tile, and put a layer of white Stucco on the exterior walls. Electricity was installed in the 1940s and running water in 1966. Families used coal and gas for heating as well as the outdoor hand powered water pump and outhouse for decades.

Most of the Burlington's renovations were placed on top of existing parts, so much of the wood in the flooring, walls, and ceiling you see are original to this building. During the museum restoration process in the 1980s, volunteers removed layers of materials to reveal original 19<sup>th</sup> century build materials. Some portions of this building were recreated by volunteers because the Burlington had the originals removed to make room for modern bathrooms and more.



The floor in the Waiting Room is mostly original to 1874, and if you look closely at the wood you can see nail holes and even a piece of coal burned into it. The ticket bench and cage were recreated by a local carpenter in the 1980s based on clues located on the walls and ceiling. The wall separating the Waiting Room and Baggage Room, the floor of the Baggage Room, second floor and basement stairs, and some other interior structures were rebuilt using wood from other older buildings. The Baggage Room sliding doors are both original, and one door still has some worker signs hanging on it from early 1900s.

Many of the artifacts in this building were from different stations and trains along the Burlington. Each railroad company stamped its supplies with their company letters or logo. This can help determine where each artifact was used. The stoves in the Waiting Room and Kitchen are probably larger than the type that would have been provided by the Burlington. The light green sorting box and yellow Y-shaped train order holder were recovered from the Lisle Depot in 1978 when it became a museum and were used at this station.

## Ticket Window

The station agent, sometimes called the stationmaster, was the only railroad worker assigned at the Lisle Depot. They completed all of the work that had to be done in the depot. Packages were sent to friends and family using the Railway Express Agency (REA). Businesses and individuals purchased money orders from the station agent to buy items or even send money to children away at school. Individuals and families purchased train tickets to move or take vacation to see other parts of the country. Letters were sent through the United States Postal Service on train cars throughout the region and the country while the Lisle post office was located in the depot.

The Burlington replaced the original ticket bench and cage with other office structures by the time this building was received as a museum. Volunteers looked at evidence on the walls for original spacing and attachments, then had a carpenter replicate the original ticket cage and doorway.

This was the main work space for the station agent, sometimes called the stationmaster. This area features a bench for completing transactions at the ticket window, and would have had a Railway Express Agency (REA) scale for weighing express mail packages. The Burlington supplied a case for filing tickets for passenger trips, sending freight, and more. The work desk area was used for completing paperwork, receiving and sending telegram messages from the railroad superintendent and from incoming trains, and a large bay window to see up and down the tracks. Many of the items the station agent needed or requested from the railroad were stored here, from work items like lamps to typewriters to forms.

The ticket office here is organized as it would have been during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century before the Burlington began its first round of major renovations.



# The Station Agent

The main manager of a Burlington Railroad station was referred to as the stationmaster or the station agent. They were in charge of keeping the station clean, orderly, and comfortable for all station visitors. Locals were able to rent buildings and storage spaces next to the railroad tracks for living and working, and the station agent acted as their landlord on behalf of the Burlington. Railroad workers on incoming and outgoing trains understood that the station agent was the ranking officer when entering the depot area and received orders from them.

As trains entered Lisle, the station agent checked for freight, baggage, and mail to be picked up by Lisle residents. They made sure that outgoing items were put onto the proper trains so they would arrive at the correct destinations. Accounting and log books were kept very carefully to track the station's activity.

## A Fixture of the Community

Although the station master was a middle class railroad worker, they were considered a prestigious and important person in the local community. They provided many types of services for the resident families and businesses in Lisle. It was important for the station agent to accurately weigh and count the items being shipped out of Lisle so that the people shipping their items would get a fair price. Local stores purchased money orders for food and supplies to be shipped into Lisle to run their businesses or sell. The station agent worked with local farmers shipping their products out of Lisle by weighing milk cans, counting livestock, and writing consignment agreements and receipts among other tasks. Livestock animals like hogs and sheep were counted and shipped on consignment to places like the Union Stockyards in Chicago.

The Burlington shipped goods on consignment, or on behalf of local people. The station agent collected shipping fees just like modern shipping services do, such as FedEx or UPS. Some people and businesses used cash to purchase verified money orders from the station agent to securely send money. These money orders were just like money orders or bank checks are today, a piece of paper representing an amount of money addressed to a specific person or business. Our collections have a number of money orders to Aurora Brewing Company, which was right next to the Burlington line in Aurora.

When Lisle's post office was located in the depot, the station agent received incoming letters and packages from a train's special mail sorting car. Lisle residents picked up their mail from the ticket window during this time. After the post office was moved to other buildings in town, railroad mail cars continued to drop off mail at the depot. Each day, the station agent was responsible for hand delivering incoming bags of mail to the local post office and bring back any letters that needed to be mailed on the next train.

The daily milk train arrived in Lisle first thing each morning, around 5 am. The station agent fired up the Waiting Room stove, opened the building, and stood ready on the platform to weigh and receive the dairy goods being shipped from Lisle that day. Other people arrived throughout the day to see the station agent about sending and receiving packages, getting the daily train schedules, shipping hogs or sheep on consignment to the stockyards in Chicago, and more.

## Known Lisle Station Agents

Charles Shoger began working as the station agent in the Lisle Depot in 1894 after he was injured while working for the Burlington. He and his wife, Caroline, moved into the Depot just before they're first child, Olive, was born. The museum researched the money order booklets and other items in our artifact collections to learn more about the Shoger family. It seems that Olive and her sister, Esther, were helping Charles to run a newspaper sales business on the side in the Depot as early as 1903. The girls would have only been 9 and 7 years old! The Shogers moved out of the Depot a few years later and into an apartment down the street, where they continued their newspaper business. Charles worked as the Lisle Station Agent until 1934.



In 1939, Ralph Scroggins became the first station agent to live in the Depot since the Shogers. This apartment had been vacant since the Shogers moved out. Ralph identified some concerns and asked the Burlington to make renovations to the apartment. This included building a new outhouse and installing a new gas line so they could use their gas appliances in addition to the coal heating and cooking stoves.

The museum is continuing to seek out and research the lives of the station agents and families that lived here.

## Station Master to Postmaster

The Post Office Department (today's United States Post Office) upgraded their mail service during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by using railroads to send mail quicker and over longer distances than by horse. Trains had special mail cars and postal workers who were responsible for sorting mail by towns along the train's route. The Lisle Post Office was located inside the Depot from 1874 to 1885. During this time, the Lisle stage agent was Lisle's postmaster and responsible for the sorting mail for residents to pick up at the station. After the Lisle Post Office was moved out of the Depot, mail was still being delivered to the Depot even though the station agent was not the postmaster. They walked to the post office each day to deliver bundles of mail from incoming trains and picked up mail for the train to deliver out from Lisle. This was the normal routine until Lisle instituted a local mail delivery service in the 1900s.

The tall mail post outside on the Depot platform was used to hang bags full of mail going out from Lisle. Train workers in the waycar's top cupola section would scoop up the bag while the train was leaving Lisle. Incoming mail was delivered by dropping it off of the mail car onto the platform with other incoming package. The mail post currently located at the Depot is a replica of the original Lisle mail post.

# Baggage Room

This large room was used as a holding room for things being shipped into and out of Lisle. Its main features are the two large baggage doors located on either side of the room. These doors hang on roller tracks at the top and can be slid left or right to create wide openings to the front and back platforms. These doors are large enough to fit a rolling baggage cart carrying passengers' trunks. Baggage men and the Lisle station agent were responsible for moving incoming and outgoing items between the back and front platforms through these openings.

Local people dropped off their items onto the front or back platforms and paid shipping costs to the station agent. Baggage men working on incoming trains unloaded the items shipped into Lisle on that train by dropping them onto the platform and Baggage Room. They then moved the items being shipped out by locals from the Baggage Room onto the proper train cars.

Large and busy depot stations typically employed more staff to do the various tasks in a depot while the station agent acted as a supervisor. Although Lisle was a busy train stop, the station agent was the only employee working in the Lisle Depot for most of its history. Once incoming items were on the platform and in the Baggage Room, the station agent sorted through them and brought them out to people in the Waiting Room picking them up.

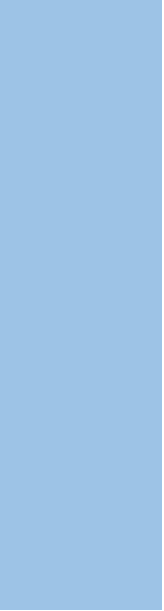
The baggage doors and exterior walls here are original. The wall between this room and the Waiting Room were removed by the Burlington to create modern bathrooms for the station. Lisle Heritage Society volunteers reconstructed this wall using wood from a Lisle business dating to the 1800s during museum restoration. Reclaimed barn planks cover the floor and the wall between this room and the apartment. You'll notice a few Burlington informational and safety signs from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century still hanging on the back baggage door and under plastic for protection.

# Apartment Living Quarters

Many Burlington Railroad train depots contained a one-floor apartment for the station agent's family or others to rent. When this building was built in 1874, it included a two-story apartment, which was relatively luxurious compared to other Burlington depots.

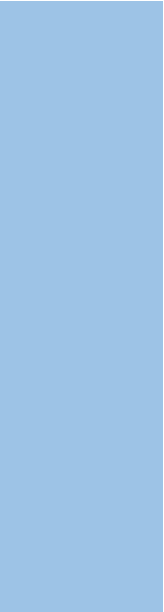
This spacious setup included:

- Formal parlor room for entertaining guests
- Kitchen for cooking and eating
- Standard railroad issue coal heating and cooking stoves, gas lines added later
- Pantry for food storage with access to a cellar
- Two full bedrooms upstairs
- Upstairs side storage and playroom
- Hand-powered water pump outside of kitchen
- Outhouse with two seats, shared with station passengers



There is a door between the station and apartment sides today, but this did not exist while the station was in use. It was a solid wall to keep the personal areas separate from working areas. The station agent had to walk outside the apartment door and into the Waiting Room door for work each day.

Families and individuals lived in this apartment on and off for over 80 years. The Burlington turned the original living quarters into a second waiting area in the 1970s. Lisle Heritage Society volunteers restored the space back to its original apartment configuration after it became a museum.



# Parlor

Formal parlors were very common in the front areas of houses during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This type of space was used only for hosting guests and for special family events – children were not permitted to play in this room. The practice of formal parlor entertainment became less common as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed. Later families living in the Depot used this parlor as a living room for casual family time. Photos of these families show couches, rocking chairs, toys, holiday decorations, and family members of all ages spending time.

This museum space shows furnishings typical of the 1910s -1920s. Some highlighted features here include a fine china cabinet, yellow loveseat-style sofa (a “settle”), a “crazy quilt” style blanket made from various colorful material pieces, an oak Morris Chair recliner, secretary’s rolltop desk with sets of books and encyclopedias, and a modest potbelly style coal stove. One personal account from someone who lived in the Depot recalls a piano and pet bird in this space.



The pantry was used for bulk food storage. Families could buy food ingredients and store meals in ceramic crocks like the ones you see here. The Depot's current basement was added when the building became a museum in the 1980s, but this doorway used to lead to the apartment's cellar. Temperatures underground are much cooler and more stable than temperatures on the surface, so foods could be stored without spoiling much longer than in the pantry. It was common to chop blocks of ice in the winter months and bring them into cellar spaces to help keep foods cold. These food safety methods helped prevent more sensitive and wet food items from spoiling before electricity and refrigeration was installed in the Depot.

## Kitchen

This common area was used for daily activities such as food preparation, family meal time, and even completing homework. The back door led outside, with the outhouse to the left and the hand-powered water pump to the right. The outhouse was shared with everyone at the station: the family used one side of the outhouse while the station patrons and passengers used the other side. The original outhouse was replaced in 1939 with another outhouse and used until running water was installed in the 1960s. The depot's water pump is on display now just outside the Kitchen.

This room shows a typical late 19<sup>th</sup> century kitchen area. The coal stove shown here is a bit ornate and not a typical Burlington potbelly style, but the family living in the Depot may have been able to afford their own stove. A dry sink was used before running water was installed in the building. Members of the household fetched water from the outdoor hand pump using a bucket, then poured the water in a removable wash basin on the top of the sink to use for cooking and washing dishes. Used water was dumped outside, sometimes into garden spaces to water plants. The cabinet spaces underneath were used to store utensils, bowls, and more.

## Living in the Depot

The Burlington offered the apartment living quarters to the station agents and their families. However, there were times when the agent's family chose not to live in the Depot, so another family could apply to rent the Depot apartment. The Burlington usually offered a reduced or discounted monthly rent and asked the tenant family to maintain the Depot apartment, public station spaces, and outdoor platform and grounds. These "Custodians" were responsible for sweeping the floors and platforms, lighting the coal stove in the Waiting Room each morning, mowing the grass, and other related tasks. Some Custodians had to buy their own coal from the Burlington to heat the apartment. A few Custodians worked other jobs for the Burlington while others were local Lisle residents.

The museum has some lease documents from various years detailing who rented the Depot's indoor and outdoor areas. In addition, we have a few personal accounts in our collections from people who remember living in the Depot or visiting friends who lived here. The museum is actively researching the information in these accounts to complete our understanding of the Depot's stories.

## Hallway Alcove

The hallway alcove was another common area for the family's daily activities away from the formal parlor and busy station. A parent could complete chores while monitoring the children sleeping or playing. It also provided another area for storing items away from children's reach. Items that were commonly found in this type of space were sewing machines, potty training chairs for young children, and more.

## Bedrooms

The second floor features two full bedrooms for sleeping, clothes storage, and washing. These spaces show typical “turn-of-the-century” 1900s style furnishings. The room on the left is set for parents, with a matching bed and dry sink wash cabinet as well as a crib for newborns.

The room on the right is set as the children’s room for all to sleep in. Featured here is a rope bed with cannonball style posts and a rope trundle bed that is stored under a regular bed. These were the popular styles that led to the modern slat bed and box spring, which is also on display. Clothing was stored in trunks located in each room since closets were not very common for many working families at this time. Chamber pots were common too, since going downstairs and outside at night made using the outhouse inconvenient. Household members could use these porcelain containers to relieve themselves during the night and dump it outside in the morning.

## Side Room

This side room was an all-purpose space and was used by families living in the Lisle Depot as a playroom, extra storage, or even a second bedroom for children. Ray Schmidt, the son of a Lisle Depot Custodian and first paid police officer in Lisle, writes in his memoir that he slept in this bedroom as a child.

Toys were very practical in addition to being leisurely. Play-based learning was the prominent way that children learned household skills and social conventions. For example, tea sets taught children how to participate in adult afternoon tea times. Children sewed letters, numbers, and their names onto sampler pillows to practice their letters and learn to hand sew.



*Our mission is to preserve and interpret the dynamic history of Lisle that inspires and involves the community through research, programs, and exhibits.*

The museum campus was created in 1978 to provide a home for the community's historic train depot. Over the decades, volunteers and staff have collected artifacts, restored historic structures moved to the site, and shared research with visitors through educational programs and exhibits.

A cooperative effort of:

Lisle Park District

Village of Lisle

Lisle Heritage Society

**September 1-May 31**

**Guided tours:**

Tuesdays and Saturdays  
10 am, 11 am, 12 pm

**Closed December 23<sup>rd</sup>  
through January 31 for  
routine maintenance.**

**June 1-August 31**

**Guided tours:**

Tuesdays and Saturdays  
10 am, 11 am, 1 pm, 2 pm, 3 pm

Thursdays  
1 pm, 2 pm, 3 pm

**Self-guided tours available during all hours.**