

Kremlin OK & the Rock Island Railroad

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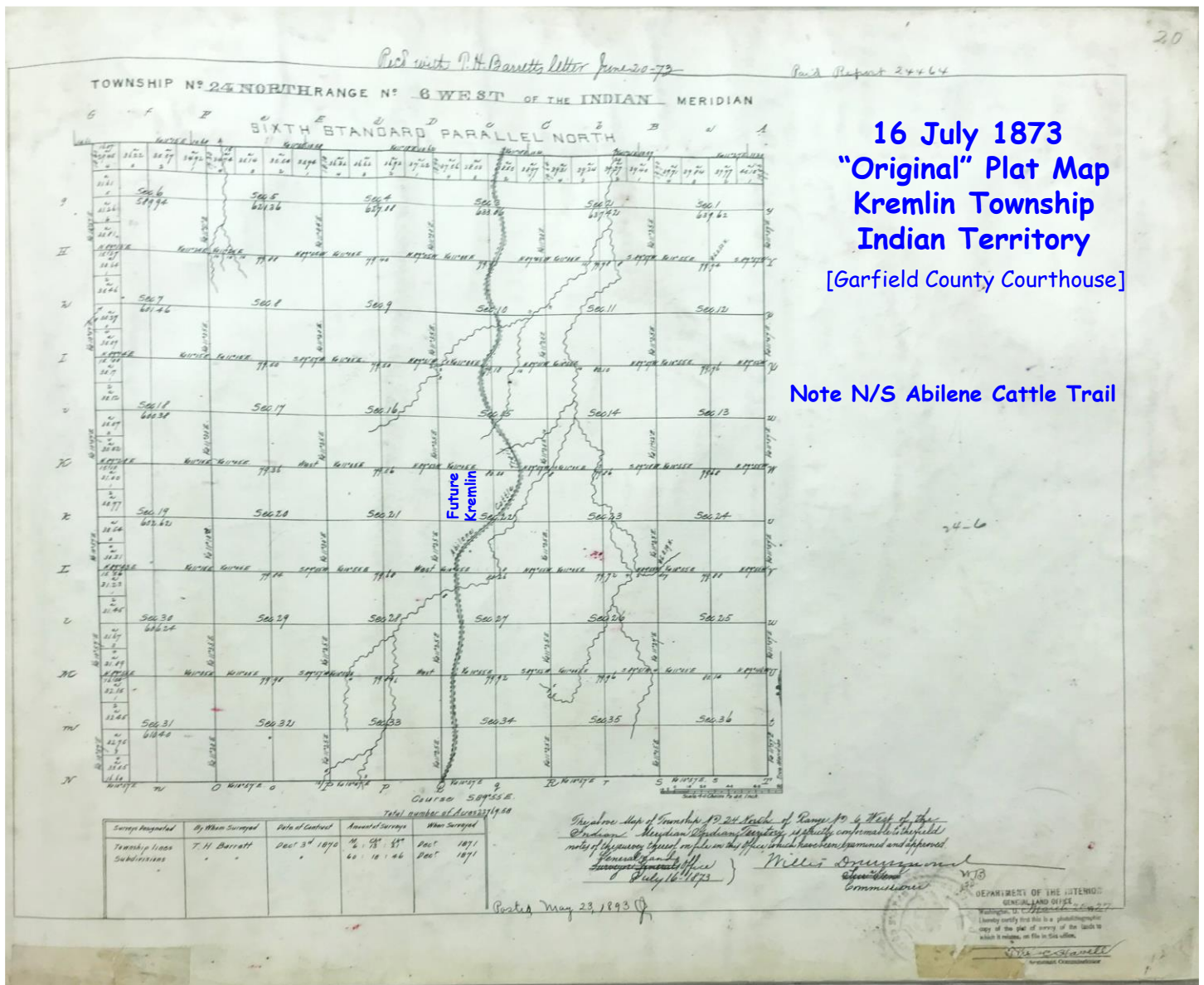
Arrel Toews



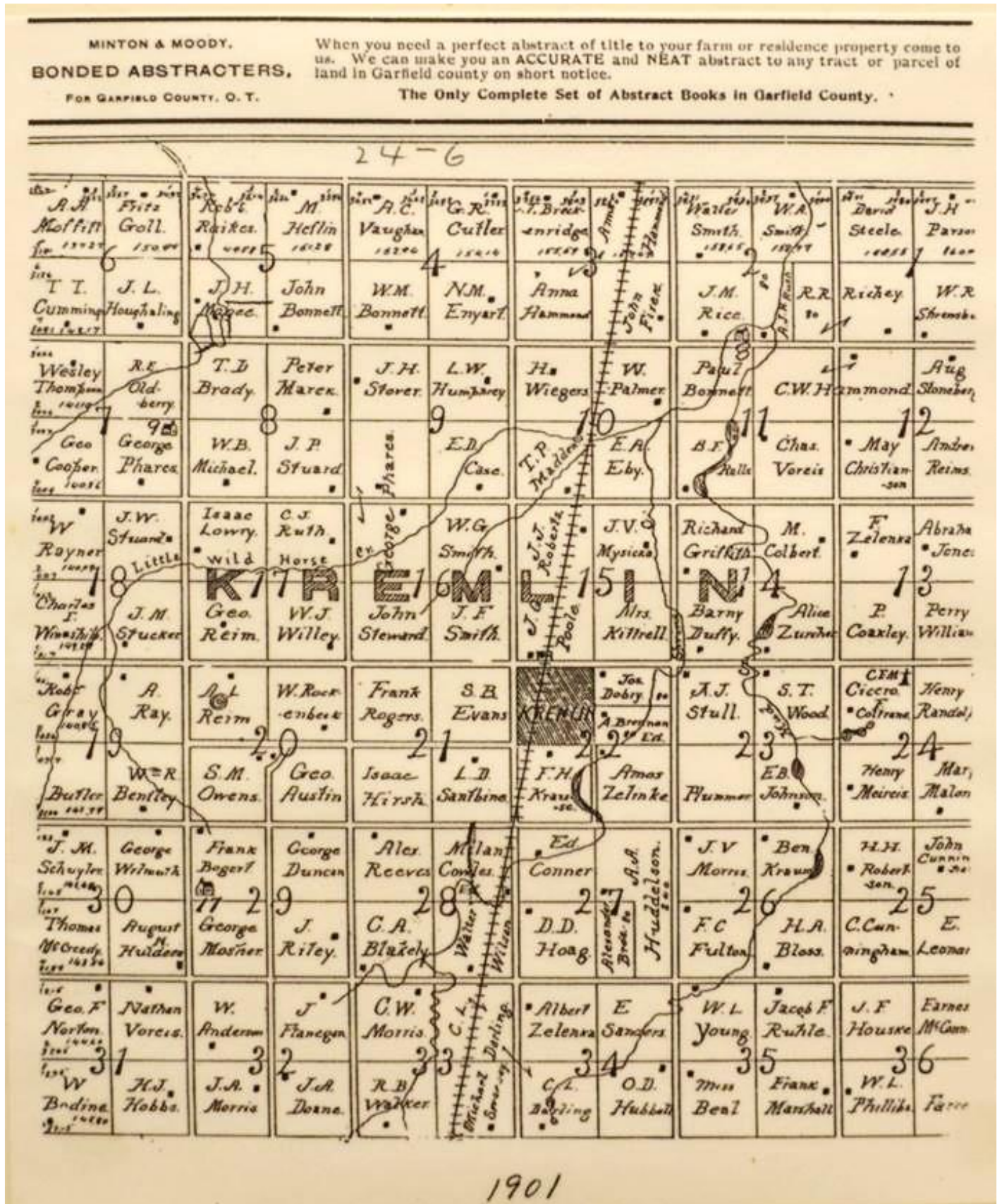
Kremlin OK and the Rock Island Railroad

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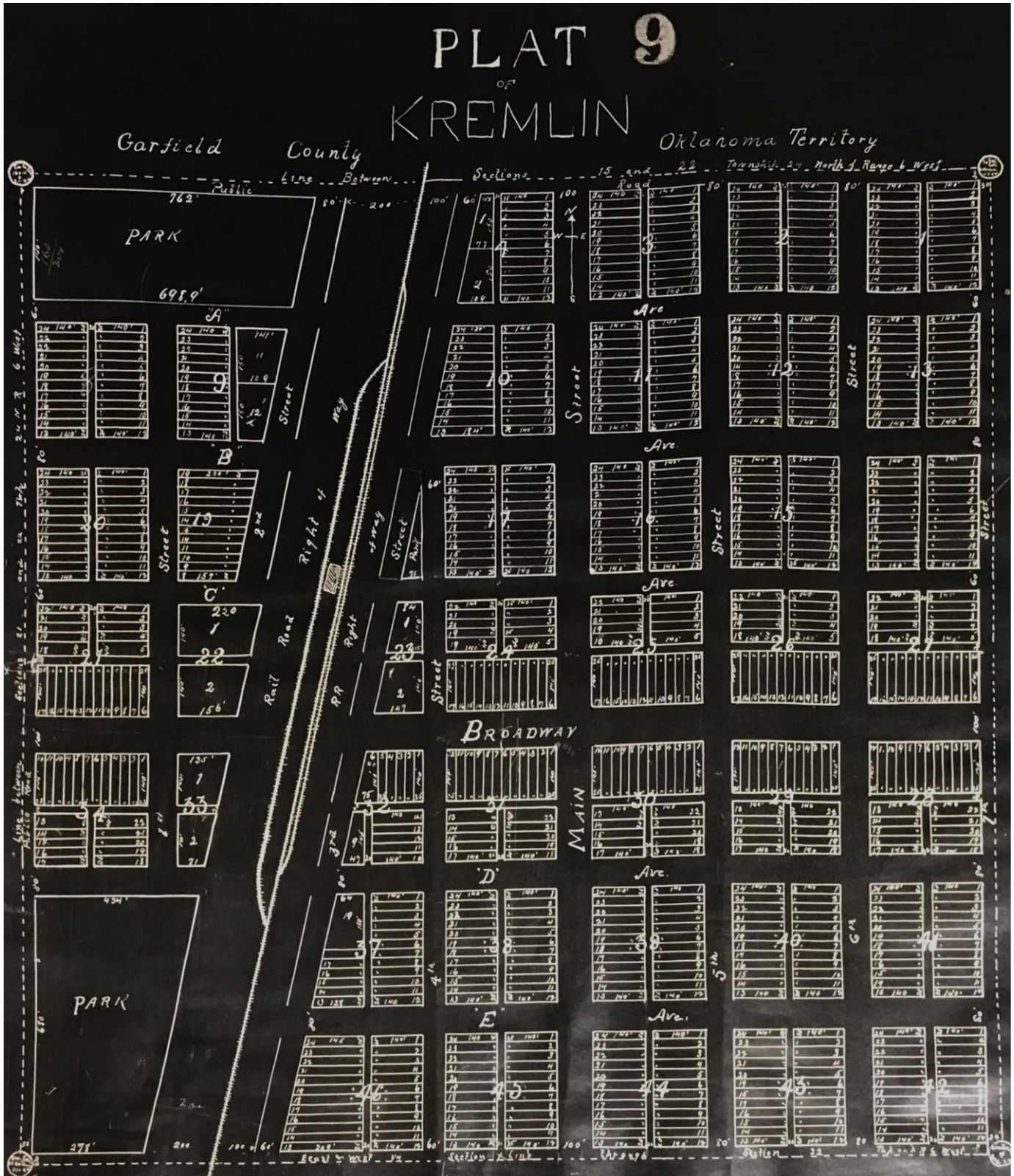
Before there was a **Kremlin OT**, or even a **Wild Horse OT**, there was the **Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific (CRIP; "Rock Island")** Railroad running through the center of it. The earliest known plat map of what would become **Kremlin Township** is shown below - it was filed on **16 July 1873**, more than 20 years before the 1893 Cherokee Outlet Land Run. This land was part of **Indian Territory** at the time it was surveyed. The **Abilene Cattle Trail**, later known as the **Chisholm Trail (1867-1887)**, had its peak capacity during 1871-73. It can be seen coursing from S to N through the township and passing very near the future town of Kremlin. An estimated 6 million longhorn cattle were driven along this 800 mile trail from their ranges in the Rio Grande/San Antonio region of TX to railheads in KS, initially **Abilene**, but later **Newton, Wichita**, and finally **Caldwell**. The CRIP railroad would closely follow the path of the Chisholm Trail. From a plat book in the **Garfield County OK Register of Deeds** office, discovered by Myron Toews.



The next available Kremlin Township map from 1901 (below) shows the Rock Island Railroad already in place. David & Rosa Toews Family archives



The earliest known plat map of the town of Kremlin is dated March 1899; it was recorded in 1901 in Plat Book 2 in the Register of Deeds Office, Garfield County Courthouse. Note the presence of the passing track E of the main line, the house track to the W, and the depot between the house track and main line. This basic configuration is still present today.

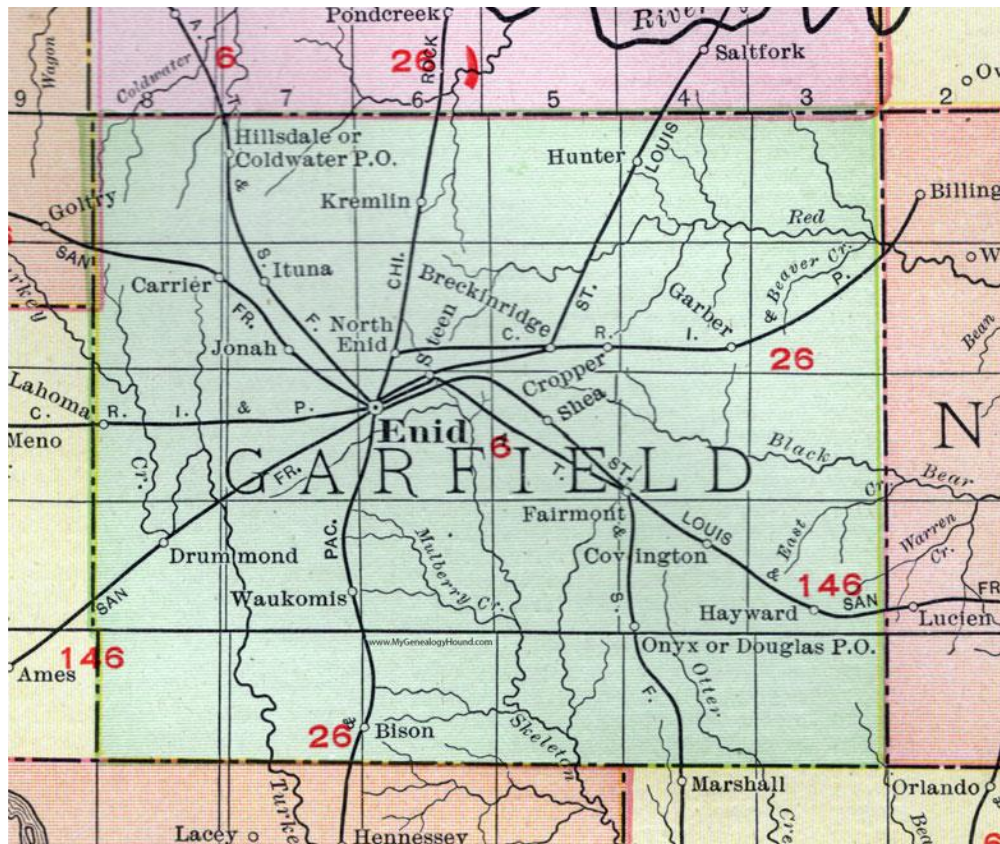


A 1906 plat map of the town of Kremlin (Standard Atlas of Garfield County Oklahoma; Geo A Ogle & Co, Chicago, 1906) is also shown below for orientation purposes. Note the CRIP tracks running SSW to NNE through the town, with the house track to the W and the passing track to the E of the central main line. Locations of the depot, several grain elevators, a nearby hotel, bank, and two churches are also indicated. Block 43 is designated for a school.



A 1911 Rand-McNally atlas map (below) shows a number of [railroad lines in Garfield County](#), but only the CRIP Railroad (then BNSF, now Union Pacific) has ever passed through Kremlin. Note the extinct towns of Coldwater, Ituna, Jonah, Onyx, Shea, Steen and Cropper.

AT&SF = Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (Santa Fe)
St Louis-San Francisco (Frisco)
CRI&P = Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific (Rock Island)



Originally called [Wild Horse](#) due to its proximity to [Wild Horse Creek](#) and to the presence of herds of wild horses, the future Kremlin town area was crossed by the [Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad](#) in 1889. The [OK Historical Society Encyclopedia of OK History & Culture](#) website has a nice article on the [CRIP Railroad](#). Under the name [Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railroad](#), it entered Oklahoma Territory in 1888 from the N and built south along the Chisholm Trail to the Red River, reached in 1892; the Chicago, Rock Island and Texas Railroad then took over to lay tracks into Fort Worth TX. The first Rock Island depot and section house in Kremlin were built in 1894 and were instrumental to the permanence and future growth of the nascent town. Mr. [Olaus Gumerson](#) was the section foreman and Mr. [George McQuaid](#) the first depot agent. In earliest days, the train stopped at the Kremlin depot and the mail bag was thrown out - it was placed in a tent where the locals sorted through the pile for their mail.

The town of Kremlin was planned for the [Cherokee Outlet Opening](#) (aka [Land Run of 1893](#); commonly but incorrectly referred to as the [Cherokee Strip Land Run](#)) as a part of "[O](#)" [County](#), later re-named [Garfield County](#). The 16 September 1893 Cherokee Outlet Opening was the 4th and largest of the OK Territory land runs (perhaps the largest land run ever). Claims for the quarter-section that would become Kremlin were staked by 4 men - Messrs. Welch, Ogden, Townsend, and Burdette, with the claim eventually passing to Mr. Burdette. It was then sold and platted into town lots. Kremlin Township was surveyed and platted soon after the land run opening, and the [US Post Office](#) established [7 November 1893](#). With a population of 221 and wanting to be incorporated, the town received its charter on 20 May 1901.

[Gus Gumerson's](#) memories of [Kremlin depot events](#) on the day of the [Cherokee Outlet Land Run \(16 September 1893\)](#) are well worth reading - from a November 1939 Enid newspaper article. Gus' father Olaus was now serving as the Rock Island station agent at Wild Horse, perhaps still as section foreman as well, on the day the Cherokee Outlet was opened. He later operated a mercantile store in Kremlin for many years, passing away while working in his store on 26 September 1922 at age 83.

Once Principal Town

A thoroughly modern school houses 128 students evenly divided between the grade and high schools with three busses covering an area of 180 square miles to bring the students into Kremlin.

But Kremlin's greatest importance came in the hectic days of the Cherokee Strip when it was one of the principal townsites of what is now Garfield county.

From a story written for the Enid Morning News by Gus Gumerson, Enid realtor, comes much of the early history of the town.

Gumerson had a ringside seat for the opening since he was living in Kremlin, or Wildhorse as it was then known, at the time of the opening.

Gumerson's father was station agent for the Rock Island railroad before the Strip was opened and father and son witnessed the historic race as it surged by and around them.

'On that eventful day,' Gumerson said, "I took my position on the Kremlin depot platform. About 1:30 o'clock I saw the smoke of the train at North Enid, the train crossing from the south, and presently I saw the smoke of the train from the north. The trains met at Wildhorse.

"The stock cars were empty of passengers as they had all gotten off at Enid, Pond Creek, Jefferson or some other point but when the train from the south arrived the few passengers remaining got off and took claims* around Kremlin, many of which are still owned by the mesteaders."

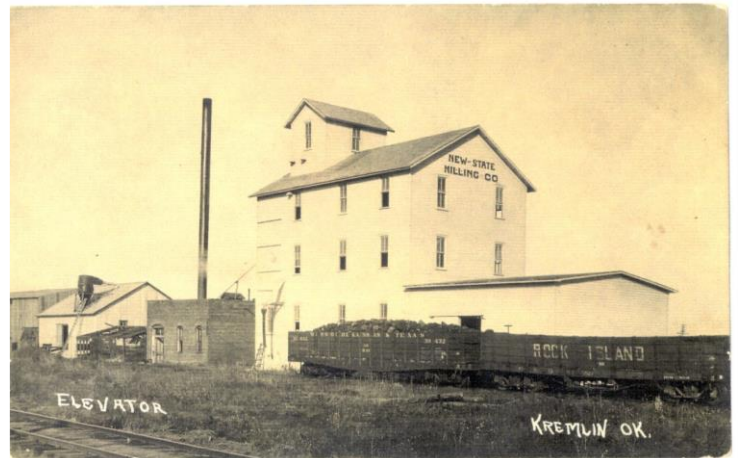
The town and surrounding homesteads were settled by participants in this last great land run, as well as by S Russian immigrant farmers of Dutch/Swiss/German descent (mostly [Mennonites](#), but some Lutherans and Catholics too). Most, if not all, of the Mennonite settlers did not participate in the land run, but rather purchased land soon thereafter from speculative or disillusioned initial homesteaders, migrating from their previous farms in S central NE (Hamilton and York Counties) and KS (Marion and Harvey Counties). Importantly, these Mennonite pioneers brought with them their precious [Turkish hard red winter wheat \("Turkey Red"\)](#), which proved very amenable for the arid climate and soon became the major crop grown in this NW OK region (and pretty much all of the Great Plains as well!).

The later designation of the town as [Kremlin](#) was not, in fact, related to the Russian pioneers nor the Russian citadel in Moscow, but rather to a horse named Kremlin! Local pioneer [Ned Leonard](#) and his sister, Mrs. Ethyl Newton, were eye (and ear) witnesses to the naming event, as recounted in the Daily Oklahoman: As Ned Leonard related, "The town was called Wild Horse because it was close to Wild Horse Creek and bands of wild horses roamed the country. But Rock Island officials did not like that name, which stuck until after the opening of the Cherokee Strip in September 1893. In the summer of 1894, a party of railroad officials came down. One of the party, MA Lowe, a vice-president, had instructions to change the name. Lowe left the selection up to his daughter, who was a horse enthusiast. She wanted to associate her hobby with the former name of the town, so she suggested '[Kremlin](#),' the name of her favorite saddle horse." And the rest, as they say, is history!

Some early (1912) photos of the [Kremlin depot](#) are shown below: (L) Rock Island depot looking NW; note passengers waiting on the bench in front and baggage cart at far R. (R) Rock Island Railroad depot looking N along main track with depot on L (W) and New State Milling Company mill and elevators on the R (E side). Note chickens placidly foraging between the tracks.

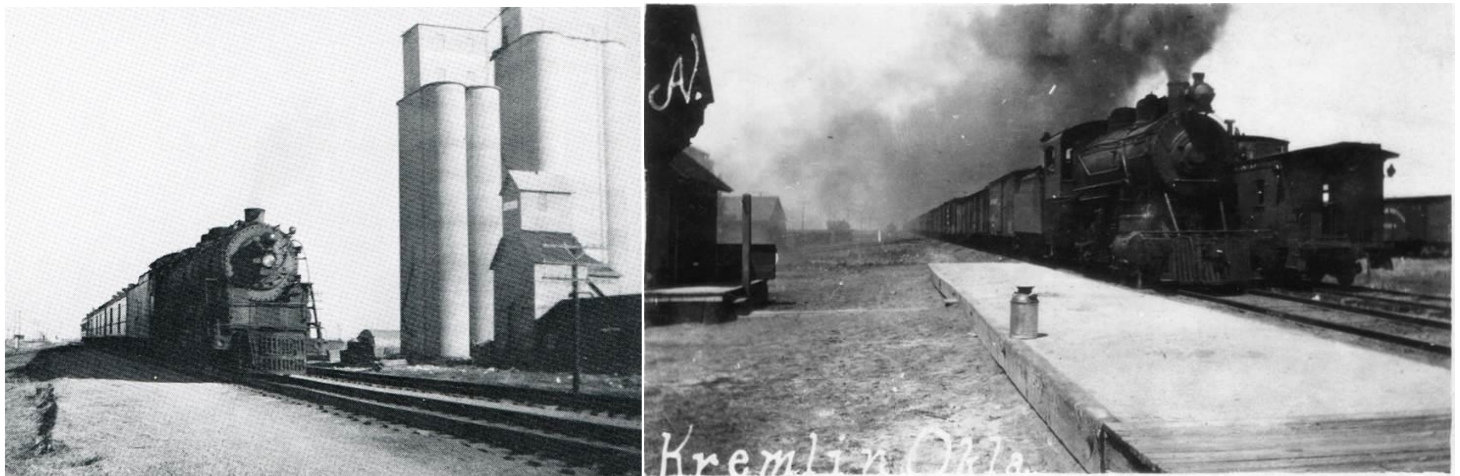


[New State Milling Company](#) with coal cars on the siding. This site would eventually become the Farmers Grain Company Co-op. Passing track is at extreme L. (1912)



The [last steam passenger train to pass through Kremlin](#) (date unknown) is shown at L below. Note the initial wooden/tin grain elevator but also the first and second 4-silo concrete elevators of the Farmers Grain Company Co-op. Also note Zaloudek's round-top shed between the locomotive and (behind the) elevators. Looking NNE

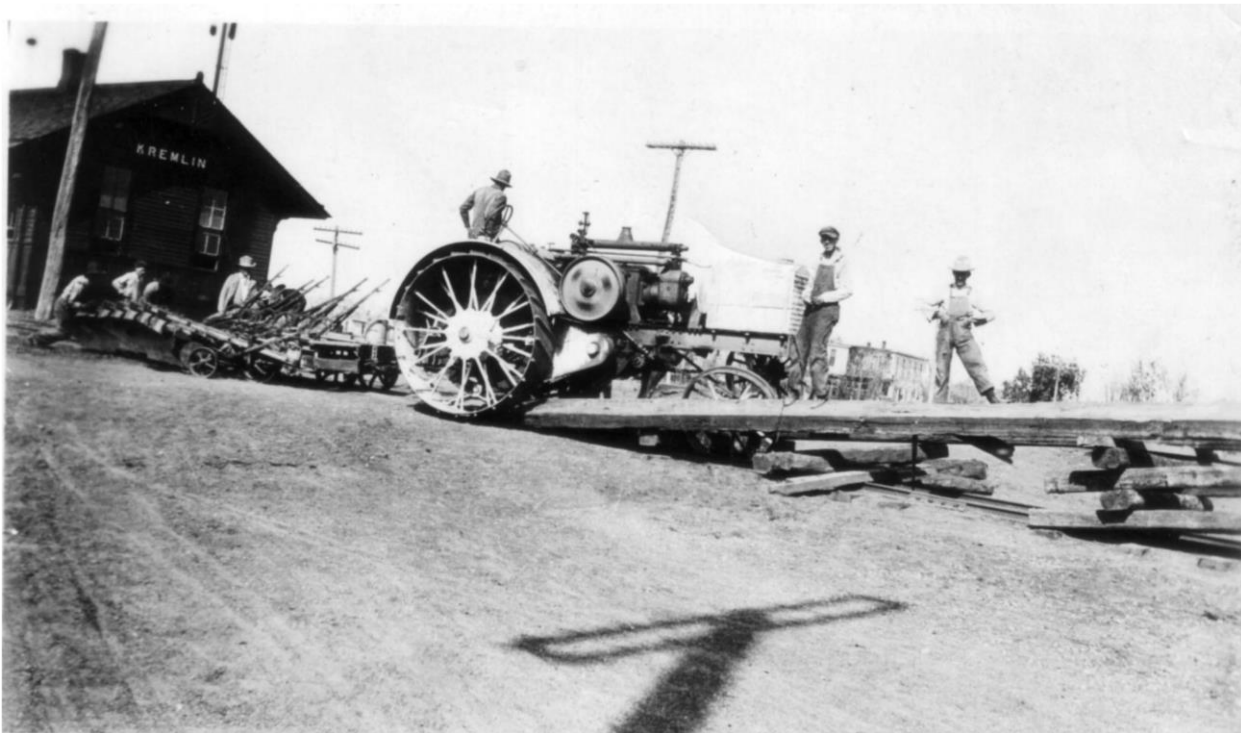
At R below is a Jacob A Voth photo of a [steam train at the Kremlin depot](#) - note the milk/cream can on the station platform and my Grandpa Jacob A Voth's stylized JAV initials on the depot at far L. The caboose of a train on the passing track is also visible. Looking N



[Ernest H "Ernie" Voth](#) (1925-2011) recalled that Kremlin folks would often get on the train at the depot in Kremlin and go to Enid, then come back when business was finished; there were several daily trains each way. [Gerry Toews Reimer](#) recalls her mother Elsie often taking the train to Enid to visit her mother, returning later the same day. Gerry and her mother took the train together to Enid for shopping trips as well.

At least during the 1940-60s, a Kremlin-based section crew repaired and maintained the railroad - "section hands" would go out with their little hand-pump (and later gasoline-powered) rail cars to check and maintain the railroad and bed. There was a section-hand workshop near the N Kremlin crossing (E side of tracks).

Photo below shows a tractor and farm machinery being unloaded in front of the old Kremlin depot shown on page 8. Date unknown; Two-story buildings visible in background.



The [Rock Island depot](#) in later years is shown below: (L) Longtime depot agent [BA Chester](#) is shown in front of the depot in October 1962, along with his Ford Falcon, looking N. [BA \(Boyd\)](#) and wife [Lucile](#) and son Robert ("Bob") actually lived for some years in the depot itself. (R) CRIP depot in 1965 with Zaloudek Grain elevators on the L and Farmers Grain Co-op elevators, feed mill and warehouse on the R. A boxcar is on the elevator service track. Both looking N.



October 1962 B. A. Chester
in front of Depot at Kremlin



CRIP DEPOT 1965
KREMLIN, OKLA.

A painting of the [Enid Rock Island depot](#) by noted Enid artist [Fred Unruh](#) is shown on the following page. From author's personal collection



Rock Island-Enid

Vintage photos of depots of the three railroads that served Enid OK are shown below and on the following two pages.

Below (Top; L/R): ca 1910 postcard of early **Rock Island** depot; Rock Island depot, Enid Mill & Elevator and Enid Ice Plant; (Bottom; L/R) postcard of depot in my childhood; later view of abandoned depot. The depot still stands today.



Santa Fe passenger depot at 700 N Independence is shown in the top photo below - note **WB Johnston grain elevators** in background. E façade of passenger depot and the Santa Fe freight depot are shown at bottom - the freight depot currently houses the **OK Railway Museum**, well worth a visit. Both structures still stand today.

SANTA FE DEPOT, 700 N. INDEPENDENCE, ENID, OKLA.



Three views of the Enid OK Frisco depot are shown below. I believe this building still stands as well.



Frisco Depot, Enid, Okla.

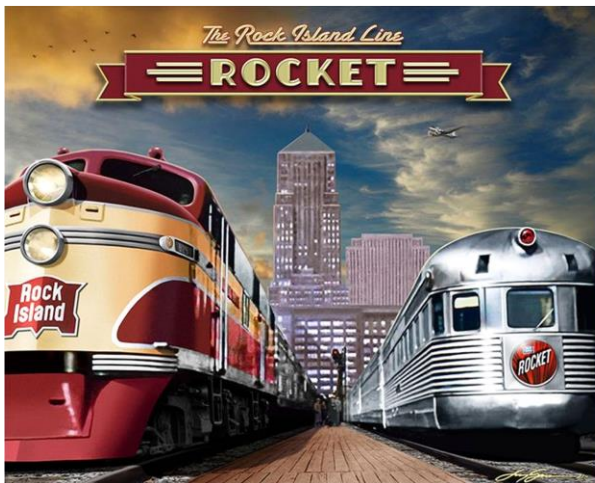
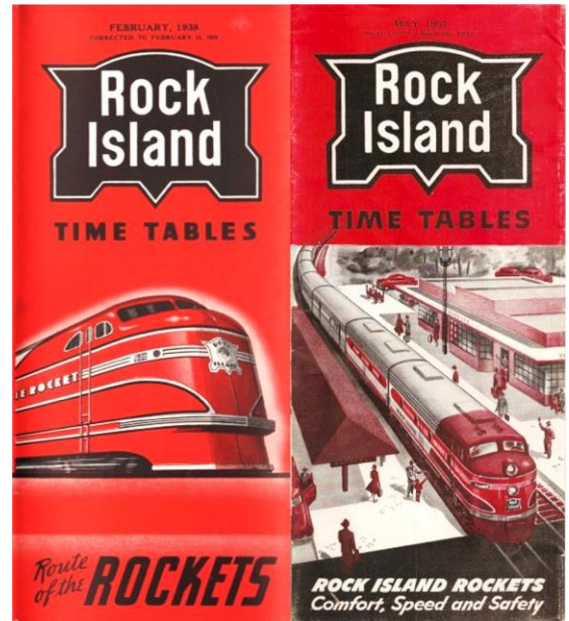


FRISCO DEPOT, 700 N. INDEPENDENCE, ENID, OKLA.



Frisco Depot,
Enid, Okla.

The **"Rocket" passenger trains** were a major presence through Kremlin for many years, and the [1948 Rocket wreck](#) was one of the more memorable town happenings, so some additional information is presented below. The [Streamliner Memories](#) website has much specific information about the Rocket trains, including [.pdf files of timetables](#) from multiple years - well worth examining for the interested train scholar. Rock Island initiated its Rocket trains in **1937** - they were streamlined lightweight stainless steel trains with articulated railcars, built by the Budd Company, and powered by a diesel-electric engine with two 1,000 hp V-12 (later 1,200 hp V-16) diesel engines, each attached to a DC generator which supplied power to 2 wheel motors. The **1938** timetable already lists the Kansas City to OKC to Dallas/Fort Worth route passing through Kremlin and Enid, one train/day each way (#s 509 & 510), designated Rocket for the KC to OKC portion. According to the **1957** timetable, there were then actually four daily Rockets passing through Kremlin and Enid - the **Twin Star and Kansas City Rockets** (both N and S trains; trains 507, 508, 509, 510). **Train 509**, designated as the **Texas Rocket** in the official ICC accident report, was the train that **wrecked in Kremlin in 1948**. Some illustrations are below and on p 23.



Kremlin School/Rock Island Rocket memories: [Mick Zaloudek](#) (Class of 1956) recalls taking the Rocket to Chicago for his senior class trip (juniors went along as well). Three other schools, including Pond Creek, also had cars on the same train for their senior trips. In **May 1959** (when I was in the 5th grade), the senior class, including [James Buller's sister Loretta](#), also took their **Senior trip to Chicago on the Rocket** - it made a special stop at the Kremlin depot so the class and chaperones could board, and the entire school was let out to give them a proper send-off and to witness this historic event. More senior trip memories on our [Kremlin Schools webpage](#).

While the author was a young lad (1950s), the [Rock Island "Rocket" passenger train](#) (Ft Worth TX to/from Kansas City MO) passed through Kremlin each day each way without stopping (although it did stop in Enid). Unfortunately, it did stop abruptly in Kremlin one day - [14 April 1948](#), just a couple months shy of my birth - there was a [massive train wreck](#) involving a dump truck, a freight train on the passing track, and the Rocket passenger train ([see our "Kremlin Train Wrecks" also on this website, for details and numerous photos](#)). Three people were killed and numerous others injured in the resulting fire.

Photo below (top) shows the Rocket at the Enid OK Rock Island Depot - perhaps it shows our grandfather *George P Toews* carrying *Gerry Toews Reimer* or *Dorothy Voth Gray* in front of the locomotive. "[The Rocket](#)" is faintly visible on the engine just above them. Bottom photo, taken at the same time, shows passengers boarding the Rocket. Note conductor and stepstool.

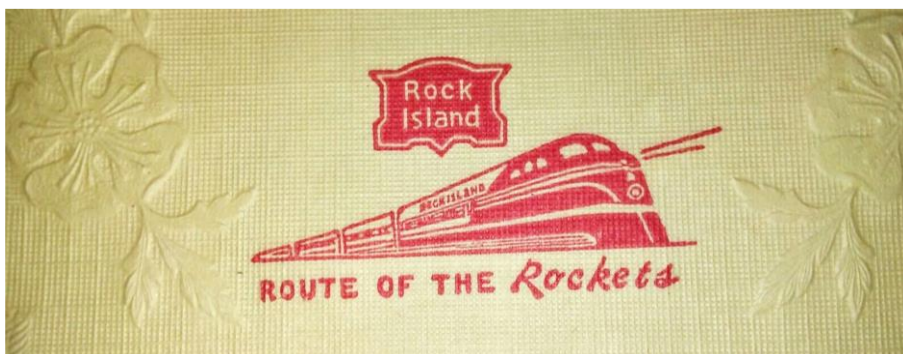


When the Rocket passed through Kremlin, a mail bag was thrown out for collection by the depot agent, and there was a post with an arm that held the outgoing mailbag on a loop beside the track. A hook protruding from the mail car grabbed the outgoing mail bag from the arm without the train stopping. "Air Mail" for just a few seconds!

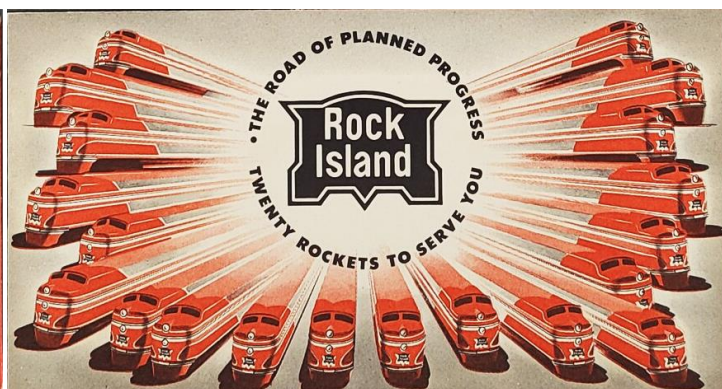
Another photo below of a [Rock Island passenger train](#), this one taken by my [Uncle Jake Regier](#) as the train pulled into the [Enid station](#) on [Easter Sunday, 1960](#). Looking N



Embossed paper coaster (R) from the Rock Island Rocket (online source)



Vintage [Rocket ticket holders](#) from the 1950-60s are shown below.



["Remembering the Rocket"](#) by Enid native [David Wade Chambers](#) is a great story with very nice photos of the Rock Island Rocket train in Enid - you'll be glad you clicked on the link above! A 1947 advertisement and several photos from this story are included below and on next page.

It was a [Texas Rocket](#) train that was involved in the train wreck in 1948 in Kremlin.

The GOLDEN ROCKET
29½ hrs. Chicago-Los Angeles
2 completely new super-luxury trains—in service later this year

The GOLDEN STATE
Chicago-Los Angeles
5 luxurious trains (completely new in 1947) now in service

CORN BELT ROCKET
Chicago-Omaha
2 completely new, modern trains in service this Fall

TEXAS ROCKET
Kansas City-Topoka-Wichita-Oklahoma City-Ft. Worth-Dallas
2 modern trains with new chair cars now in service

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROCKET
Chicago-Des Moines-Omaha-Lincoln-Denver-Colorado Springs
2 modern trains now in service

TWIN STAR ROCKET
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Houston
2 modern trains (with new all-room sleeping cars this Fall) and chair cars now in service

DES MOINES ROCKET
Chicago-Des Moines
1 modern train with new chair cars now in service

CHOCTAW ROCKET
Memphis-Amarillo
2 modern trains with new chair cars now in service

PEORIA ROCKET

22 in '47

The Route of the Rockets, after ten years of Planned Progress, has 22 streamlined trains!

While American business was still staggering under the impact of the Great Depression, when other roads were cautiously ordering one or two of the new streamliners, the Rock Island ordered six, which went in service just ten years ago.

Rock Island

trahzied traffic control—short wave radio linking dispatchers, engineers and conductors—new testing laboratories—new car shops—automatic car washing—improved roadbed.

In short, the Rock Island in 1947, with twenty-two Diesel-

The Rockets were followed by

Photos on next page: Top - Rocket locomotive and train at the Rock Island depot in Enid OK, looking N. Rocket at Rock Island depot in Enid OK, looking N (center) and S (bottom). Bottom two photos by Frank Tribbey, courtesy of Danny Travis. All ca late-1940s.



Some later photos of trains in Kremlin are shown below:

Rock Island freight train in the passing track near the N Kremlin grade crossing, ca late 1960s. Note the boxcars in the Farmers Grain Company siding, bulk fertilizer plant and grain elevators at L. Across the tracks W, Zaloudek's bulk fertilizer plant, concrete grain elevators, and old tin elevator. Great Lakes Carbon Corporation's petroleum coke processing plant is visible in the background just R of the boxcar. (online photo looking S).



I worked at the Farmer's Grain Co-op one summer during my college years (late-1960s), and one very unpleasant job was to "cooper" the empty boxcars to ready them to be loaded with wheat. This involved nailing heavy wooden slats across the inside of the door openings and then sealing them further with large sheets of craft paper, leaving only a narrow slit at the top - all in the heat of summer. The insulated metal cars were literally baking ovens! We crawled out, then loaded the cars with wheat and sent them down the siding above with a winch. [Ruben Thesman](#) was my demanding yet good-natured, fair and friendly yard boss.

Below is another, more recent, view of the Kremlin grain elevators, looking S - [Farmers Grain Co-op](#) on the L; [Zaloudek's Grain Company](#) on the R. Note the approaching BNSF freight train. The railroad siding beside the Co-op elevators where I coopered and loaded boxcars with wheat, as well as Zaloudek's tin grain elevator S and across the tracks, are no longer present.



A nice photo of the railroad through Kremlin taken in [June 1988](#), with grain elevators on both sides, is shown below, courtesy of [Mark Llanuza](#), a well-known photographer and collector of railroad images. A set of 3 MKT (Katy) locomotives is on the passing track with the train on the main line. On the left side (Farmers Grain Co), note the round flat-storage grain bin, feed mill behind the small concrete grain silos, bulk fertilizer plant, and anhydrous ammonia tank, with tank cars, presumably with anhydrous ammonia, on the Farmers Grain service track. On the right (Zaloudek Grain Co), note the still-standing tin/wooden elevator as well as their flat-storage building and tank cars on their service track. Neither of the elevator service tracks are still present today.



A final view of the [railroad through Kremlin](#), looking S, ca 2012. Farmers Grain Company on L, Zaloudek Grain Company on R. Coke plant (currently [Oxbow Calcining](#)) in distance between grain elevators and behind Kremlin water tower.



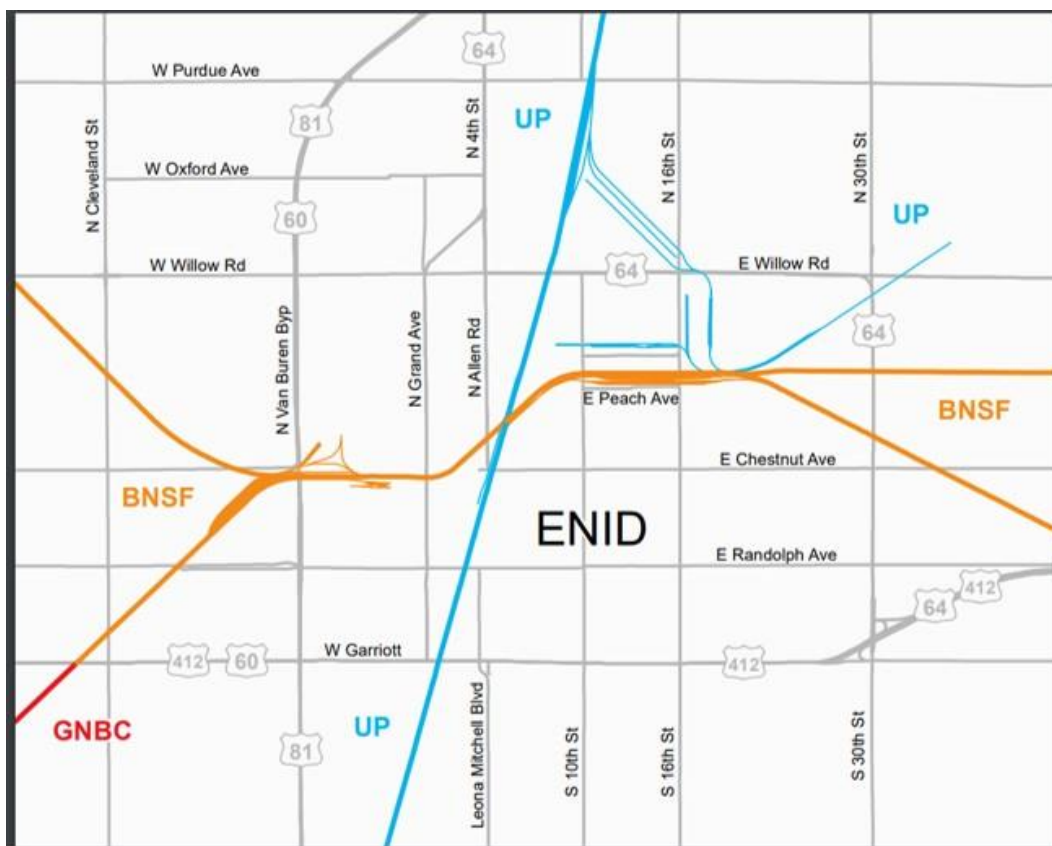
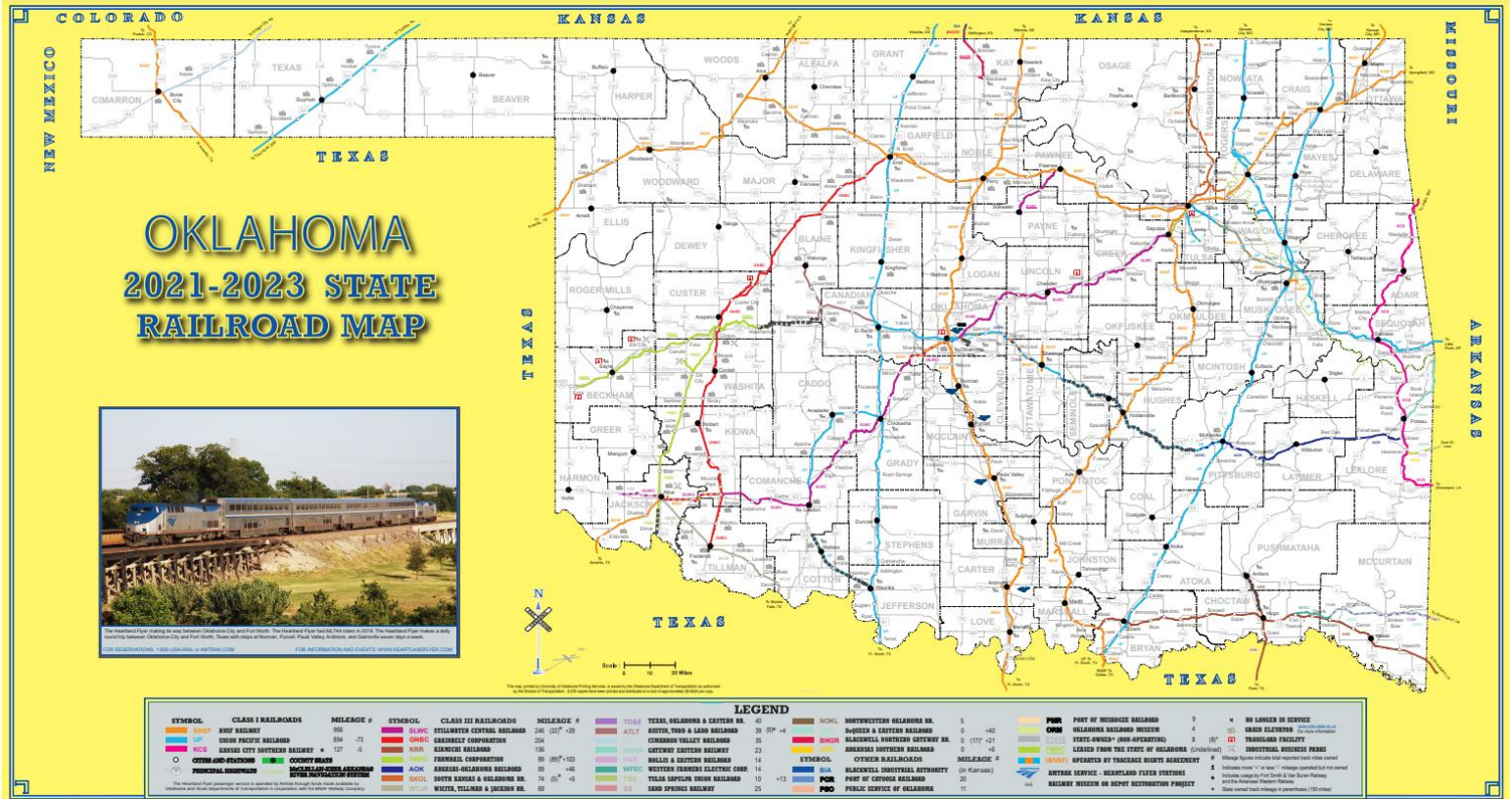
Some historical background of the [Rock Island Railroad](#) is available online. It had its origin as the [Rock Island and LaSalle Rail Road Company](#), which was chartered in Illinois on February 27, 1847. Myriad mergers, reorganizations, and name changes followed through the mid-1800s. Although initially a fairly prosperous and solid company, poor management and over-expansions, followed by receiverships, downsizings, and more reorganizations occurred almost continuously through the mid-1900s. The CRIP finally



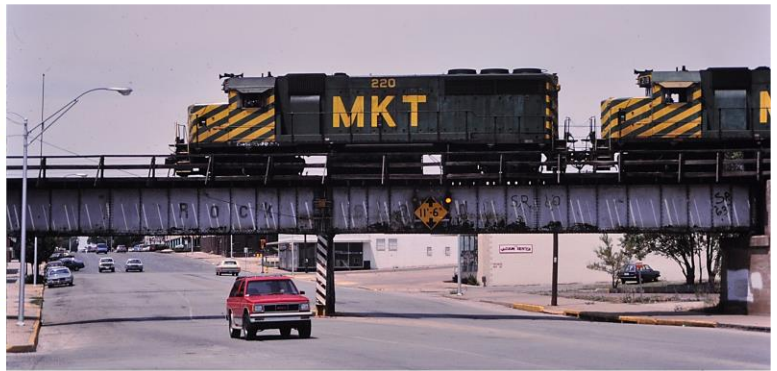
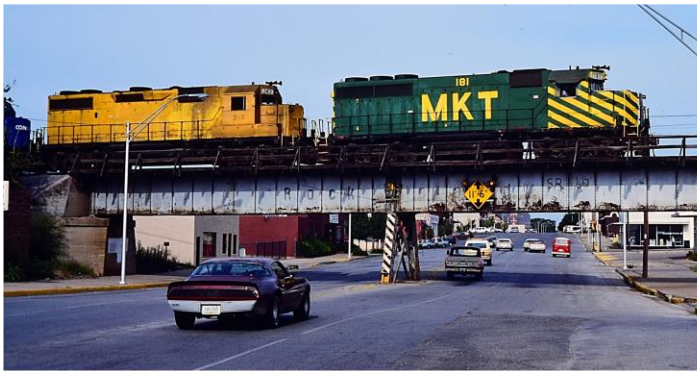
entered bankruptcy and ceased operations in 1980. [Union Pacific \(UP\)](#) trains currently operate on the tracks that pass through Kremlin. The [Union Pacific Railroad](#), founded in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railway Act, also has a fascinating history worth exploring.



A **2021-23 OK railroad map** is shown below (from OK DOT website). A map of the three lines currently serving Enid is shown in the map below that. **UP** = Union Pacific; **BNSF** = Burlington, Northern & Santa Fe; **GNBC** = Grainbelt Corporation, a 176-mile line from Enid to Frederick OK. Of potential interest to OK railroad buffs is the Americanrails.com website on OK railroads.



The top two photos, courtesy of [Mark Llanuza](#), are of the former Rock Island Railroad (now Union Pacific) trestle over [E Maine Street](#) in [Enid OK](#), dated [June 1988](#). The trestle was constructed in 1908, well before the advent of box trucks and semi-trailer trucks. The clearance of this trestle is only 11' 4" and it has become notorious for zipping off the tops of those box trucks and semis. So notorious, in fact, that it eventually merited a shark mural and the name of "[Bridge Shark](#)" or "[Truck-Eating Bridge](#)." It is now a part of Enid folklore.



An additional image of a [Rocket locomotive](#) (Forgotten OK Facebook posting, 2022)



I am grateful to my brother Myron for his invaluable assistance and advice. We hope you enjoy this overview and history of the Rock Island Railroad and its relationship with the Kremlin OK community. We will always appreciate any comments, additions (particularly photos), and suggestions for improvements from any interested readers. Thanks in advance for any help. You may contact us by clicking on our names below.

Compiled and written by [Arrel Toews](#)
many photos/negatives/maps collected & scanned by [Myron Toews](#)
updated 27 October 2024

Please note that Myron and I have also prepared a detailed document on train wrecks in and around Kremlin, with numerous photos and diagrams, and we hope you will find that interesting reading as well. Entitled "[Narrative of Kremlin Train Wrecks](#)", it is also available on [this website](#). These train wrecks had major consequences for the town and include the 1930 derailment and subsequent fire that killed 4 hobos and nearly burned down the entire town, as well as the 1948 Rocket passenger train wreck that involved a heavily loaded dump truck and a freight train in the passing siding - it killed 3 passengers and injured many others.

We encourage interested readers to explore [websites](#), which are [underlined in purple](#).