Niota is home to Tennessee’s oldest historic train depot, built in 1854 when the town was known as Mouse Creek. This National Register landmark became the heart of the modern town, a place that gained national recognition in 1920 when state representative Harry T. Burn of Niota took his mother’s advice and cast the deciding vote for woman suffrage.

Following the nationwide decline in passenger rail travel, in 1972 the Southern Railway Co. deeded the station to the city. Three years later, Niota successfully placed the depot on the National Register of Historic Places for its significance in Tennessee transportation history. Graffiti on the baggage doors provide a tangible historical record. A major restoration completed in 2019 will keep this historic landmark in public service for another generation.

MTSU’s Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area prepared this brochure. Text by Antoinette G. van Zelm, CHP assistant director. Special thanks to biographer Tyler Boyd for images of the Burn family.

Visitors to the Niota Depot might also enjoy the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum in Athens, Hiwassee River Heritage Center in Charleston, Englewood Textile Museum in Englewood, and L&N Depot Museum in Etowah.

Train shows and the annual Fried Green Tomato Festival bring visitors to the depot. Courtesy of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

As part of Niota’s ongoing commemoration of Harry T. Burn’s suffrage vote, local artist Jade Lewis painted “The Road to Suffrage” mural on the side of the Niota Public Library in 2020, with the support of an Arts Build Communities grant from the Tennessee Arts Commission.

Visit the mural, located at 11 E. Main St. Courtesy of the City of Niota

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White and enslaved laborers built the Mouse Creek Depot in 1854 as part of the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad’s 98-mile line from Dalton to Knoxville. The brick depot housed a post office and became a commercial hub, which, unfortunately, included the sale of enslaved people.

Married in 1894, James Lafayette Burn and Febb Ensminger Burn had two sons and two daughters. For many years, James was the Southern Railway agent at the Niota Depot. A graduate of U.S. Grant Memorial University (now Tennessee Wesleyan), Febb was a former teacher with a keen interest in national and world affairs.

During the Civil War, Confederate troops first occupied the depot. In 1863, to defend the railroad, Union soldiers turned the depot into a military outpost, installing gun ports in the depot’s walls. The Federals held off Confederate raids in 1864 and occupied the depot until July 1865. After the war, the railroad became the East Tennessee, Virginia, & Georgia, which in 1894 was merged into the Southern Railway Co. During the Jim Crow era, the Southern operated racially segregated stations and passenger trains. In 1897, local officials renamed the town Niota.

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