

Oxford Depot

In the fall of 1873, the three girls stepped off a train at the Oxford Train Depot. Just 17 and 18 years of age, imagine them carrying their belongings in a trunk, leather case or carpet bag. The trip here would have been two or three legs, potentially taking two days. They would have likely ridden in a horse-drawn vehicle on rough roads from their Kosciusko home for 15 miles to Durrant, Mississippi. Once in Durrant, they would have boarded a train and traveled an additional 100 miles to Oxford.

In a recollection in letters from Mary, she wrote that when they arrived here in Oxford that fall, they knew they weren't going home until the end of the year. A yellow fever epidemic was raging through this part of the South, and they would have a shortened winter break. Between the epidemic and the travel time, the girls' families decided it would be best for them not to come home for holiday breaks. Later in life Mary reflected, "we understood perfectly that when we went to school in September, we were to stay until the following June ... but we were happy and contented."

On the site of this depot stood a previous train station, which like the railroads themselves were largely built with labor of enslaved people. That original structure burned in the Civil War, and was replaced with the building you're now standing in. Built in 1872 by the Mississippi Central Railroad, this depot has a distinctive Italianate-style with large overhanging eaves and substantial decorative brackets. All over the South, depots like this would be one of the most important locations in a town, transporting people in segregated cars and goods at speeds unfathomable to previous generations. The impressive speed at which goods traveled and were received could be comparable to Amazon Prime today. Into the early 1900s, this depot and railroad transportation was the way most students at the University of Mississippi traveled to school.

Passenger service ended in 1941. The University of Mississippi purchased the Depot in 1983 and the building was restored in 2003.

Consider the following questions and discuss them with your tour group:

- The Founders made a very long journey to get to Oxford. Considering what you know about them, what do you think this journey was like for them? Compare it with your own journey away to school for the first time.
- How has transportation changed from when the Founders took this first train ride to school? What might they have packed for their journey that would be different from today? What would be the same?