THE CATALYST FOR REVITALIZATION: A STUDY OF THE ADAPTIVE USE OF RAILROAD DEPOTS IN IOWA

Abbie Hurlbut

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
Columbia University
May 2007
The Catalyst for Revitalization: A Study of the Adaptive Use of Railroad Depots in Iowa

Author: Abbie Hurlbut
Advisor: David Sampson

Abstract

The railroad depot is a significant building in many small towns in the Midwest. Historically it served a dynamic function, acting as the local newsstand, town meeting hall, social gathering place, source of commercial goods and the link to the rest of the world. Due to the abandonment of these buildings by the railroad in the last three decades, some communities have acquired the depot and adapted it for a new use. In many cases the new uses do not serve the town in the same dynamic way in which they served historically. Often the depot is reused as a local history museum which hosts very few visitors and does not contribute significantly to its local community. Therefore, this thesis explores the effects of a dynamic adaptation of a depot on a town and further demonstrates that the best reuse of a railroad depot in a small railroad town is to adapt it for a dynamic multi-functional use.