

The Troop Trains

In the 1920s and '30s, the nation's railway system began to see a decline in usage, as automobile ownership increased across the country. Dirt roads were increasingly giving way to paving, with Coppell's last mud road being converted to gravel in 1942. It was a time of transition for both the nation and the little north Texas town that grew up around the Coppell Depot.

This decline was granted a temporary reprieve with the advent of World War II. Gasoline rations sent people flocking to the rails. The industry also proved vital to America's military, with most U.S. troops being carried across country by train.

Ray McDowell, who started in Coppell schools in 1936, recalled troop trains passing by the school. In an short essay written for the Coppell Historical Society, he states that the school's principal, a Mr. Fuller, always gave the students three minutes to get to class when the lunch or recess bell rang.

"The exception was when the troop trains came by," McDowell said. "We were allowed to go to the back of the playground and wave and yell at the soldiers on the train."

The railroads would prove vital to the American success in World War II, but it also proved to be the swan song for the industry's dominance. Automobiles and aviation were the future. By the 1950s, train service would cease completely in Coppell.