Exhibit at the Great Overland Station:

“Railroads and the National Parks: Partners in Promotion”
January 10 – March 5

This exhibit will display colorful posters from the Union Pacific and private collections which showcase the role of the railroads in promoting travel to the national parks. So entwined were the railroads with the National Park Service that many of the national park lodges were designed by railroad architects. One of the best-known of these was the architect of our Topeka UP Station, Gilbert Stanley Underwood, who designed a total of 26 Union Pacific stations/depots and the national park lodges at Yosemite National Park (“The Ahwahnee Hotel, still operating), the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Bryce National Park and Zion National Park.

The exhibit will complement the “Arts for the Parks Top 100 Tour”, to be displayed at the South Wind Gallery at Framewoods, 3074 SW 29th in January. It features 100 pieces of art depicting national parks (3 of them by Kansans) honored by the National Park Service as winners in 2005. Several of these artworks will be displayed at the Great Overland Station.

Sponsor: Commerce Bank & Trust
Community Partners: Framewoods Gallery, KTWU TV, The Great Overland Station

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INTRODUCTION

From the early days of the national park system, the railroads played leading role in the promotion of the parks by bringing visitors to the parks and advertising that service. In some instances, the railroads were involved in the development and management of parks and railroad architects designed park lodges to house the visitors. This exhibit showcases some of the travel posters produced by the railroads to entice visitors to the national parks, as well as information about Gilbert Stanley Underwood (architect of the Great Overland Station) and the park lodges he designed.

GILBERT STANLEY UNDERWOOD, ARCHITECT

Gilbert Stanley Underwood was a prolific Union Pacific Railroad architect, designing Topeka’s 1927 Union Pacific Station (now the Great Overland Station), the Union Pacific headquarters station in Omaha (now the Durham Western Heritage Museum), 24 other Union Pacific stations and depots, along with national park lodges: Bryce Canyon Lodge, Zion Lodge, Cedar Breaks Lodge, North Rim Grand Canyon Lodge and the Ahwahnee Hotel at Yosemite National Park.

From a 1925 Union Pacific brochure:
“America’s Most Enchanting Vacation Land – Now Open. Here in Southern Utah are canyons preserving the flaming sunsets of a million years! Mountains of vermilion! Vast amphitheatres of filigreed stone stained with uncounted colors and studded with jeweled statues! Cathedrals, castles, pyramids, temples: Nowhere else are scenes so marvelous as in Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon-Cedar Breaks.”
OLD FAITHFUL INN AT YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

The first National Park was established at Yellowstone by an Act of Congress on March 1, 1872 and placed under the management of the Secretary of the Interior. Visitors to the park arrived by rail and transferred to horse-drawn stagecoaches to continue their journey. From 1883 to 1891, the Yellowstone Park Association, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railway, built hotels along Yellowstone’s grand loop roads to provide accommodations for the visitors. In 1891, the railroad sold its controlling stock in the Yellowstone Park Association to private investors, hoping that the new owners would continue to work with the railroad to bring tourists to the park via the Northern Pacific line.

In June 1904, the “Old Faithful Inn” opened only one-eighth mile from the geyser. Designed by Robert Reamer, it was the first “Great Lodge of the West.” Originally, guests climbed through the lobby stairway and the suspended balconies, through the crow’s nest and onto the roof for a 360-degree view of the Upper Geyser Basin. A spotlight on the widow’s walk pointed out erupting geysers and prowling bears, much like a ringmaster highlighting circus acts. “A geyser in eruption under the searchlight is a most remarkable sight,” a 1905 Northern Pacific Railway brochure exclaimed. The lights were removed in 1948 and the widow’s walk closed to the public in 1959.

Old Faithful Inn was designated a National Historic Landmark, May 28, 1987.

EL TOVAR HOTEL AT THE GRAND CANYON – South Rim

Like other railways at the turn of the 20th century, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe was opening up tourism in exotic American landscapes. In 1901, the railway completed a branch from its Chicago-Los Angeles main line to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. President Theodore Roosevelt’s visit in 1903 gave broad national attention to this wonder: “In the Grand Canyon, Arizona has a natural wonder which, so far as I know, is in kind absolutely unparalleled throughout the rest of the world.” Although the President wished it to remain uncluttered by buildings, the El Tovar Hotel opened in 1905, the “Grande Dame of the South Rim”. It was designed by AT&SF architect Charles Whittlesey, a student of Louis Sullivan who had already designed the Alvarado Hotel and railway depot in Albuquerque. The railway spared no expense to build El Tovar, described as a combination of a “Swiss chateau” and “castles of the Rhine”. The El Tovar Hotel was designated a National Historic Landmark, May 28, 1987.

With the development of the hotel came the Fred Harvey Company as concessionaire for the hotel, restaurant and gift shop. The Santa Fe Railway and the Fred Harvey Company blazed a new trail in advertising and marketing of merchandise in conjunction with their train lines, stations and destination facilities. The Santa Fe hired and promoted artists and photographers (often using rail trips, lodging and meals as payment) to capture the beauty of the Southwest and thus acquired a vast art collection of Southwestern art. The Indian Department of the Fred Harvey Company collected Native American art and artifacts to sell in its shops and to use in decorating.
THE AHWAHNEE HOTEL AT YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

In 1968, when John Muir laid eyes on Yosemite Valley, he experienced an epiphany. The towering granite formations, valley and powerful waterfalls were his vision of heaven on Earth. Muir was instrumental in the establishment of Yosemite National Park, finalized on October 1, 1890. In 1912, he met Stephen T. Mather, businessman and mountaineering buff, and lobbied him to devote his talents to saving the National Parks. In December 1914, the same month that Muir died, a reluctant, forty-seven-year-old Mather arrived at the nation’s capital. Two years later, the National Park Service was born and Mather became its director.

In his favorite park, Mather envisioned a cohesive park building program that would include a Great Lodge and bring people of wealth and influence to Yosemite and other national parks. In July 1925, two months after Zion Lodge opened, Gilbert Stanley Underwood, fresh from his graduate work at Harvard, was hired to design Yosemite Village. His marching orders were to build a first-class, “fire-proof” hotel to blend with the environment.

Underwood had dreamed of creating a large rustic hotel in his work for the Union Pacific and its Utah Parks Company. Plans were revised and downsized several times until finally the hotel was built – amid bickering and finger-pointing over cost overruns and delays – and opened on July 14, 1927.

World War II prompted the remarkable transformation of the elegant building into a military installation. On May 30, 1943, The Ahwahnee closed its doors as a civilian hotel and the U.S. Navy took charge, using it as a convalescent hospital. At times, up to 853 patients plus staff filled the hotel, cabins and surrounding buildings. When the Navy moved out, the staff returned and began a restoration of the building and furnishings. Besides the building, the ground designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., were ruined. Another major renovation was undertaken between 1975 and 1984.

The approximately 90,000 guests who stay at the Ahwahnee each year include royalty, dignitaries and celebrities. Set in a meadow with the Royal Arches as a backdrop, and views of Half Dome, Glacier Point and Yosemite Falls, the hotel stands in relative isolation and remains today the most elegant and stunning hostelry in the National Park system. It was named a National Historic Landmark, May 28, 1987
BRYCE CANYON LODGE  
ZION LODGE  
CEDAR BREAKS PAVILION

The Union Pacific Railroad saw potential in extending railroad lines into the little-known environs of southern Utah and developing tourism in the state’s parks. The grand plan would bring tourists by rail to a main station and then shuttle them by motor coaches on a “Loop Tour”, where they could take in the beauty of Cedar Breaks, Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Along the way, they would stay at Union Pacific-constructed lodges and dine at its restaurants. Not only would the lines open up the spectacular canyons of Zion and pink limestone formations of Bryce, it would provide transportation lines for agricultural products, coal and other ore from the region. Perhaps most important to the competitive Union Pacific railmen was the potential of drawing the highly successful tourist trade from the Santa Fe Railway at the South Rim, and duplicating the Northern Pacific’s success at Yellowstone National Park.

The challenges for completing the project were huge, but the UP succeeded in constructing a rail spur from Lund, Utah to Cedar City, where a new depot was built, and in 1923 the El Escalante Hotel was opened in Cedar City. In 1924, a dining pavilion at Cedar Breaks and the Zion Lodge were opened. Bryce Canyon Lodge opened the following year. In 1928, the Grand Canyon Lodge was completed on the North Rim.

One architect was responsible for all of this work: Gilbert Stanley Underwood. By the time the Utah project at Zion began, the National Park Service and its Director, Stephen Mather, were closely supervising building projects. NPS landscape engineer Daniel Hull suggested that Underwood apply for the job. Underwood met UP executives in Omaha, then joined a party surveying the site for Zion, continuing on to Bryce Canyon.

With each plan, Underwood refined his approach to rustic architecture. Each successive lodge became more dramatic, its details more elegant. The lodges were designed to offer accommodations for a wide range of visitors and would eventually include cabins, gift shops and an auditorium.

Of all Sullivan’s work in the Utah parks, only Bryce Canyon Lodge and Deluxe Cabins remain intact, named a National Historic Landmark May 28, 1987. Zion Park Lodge burned in 1966 and the pavilion at Cedar Breaks is gone. Zion Lodge was rebuilt on the original footprint, but it reflects little of Underwood’s original design although his cabins still stand.

THE GRAND CANYON LODGE - North Rim

The Grand Canyon Lodge was opened in 1928 on the very rim of the canyon, with guests housed in cabins nearby. “It harmonizes perfectly with its sublime surroundings and seems itself a work of nature,” read one UP brochure. A combination of Underwood’s rustic design with influences from Mary Colter’s work on the south rim, it was a masterpiece.

On September 1, 1932, the Lodge burned in the largest structural fire in Grand Canyon’s history. Two years later, it was rebuilt on the remaining stone foundation. While stunning, the watchtower was eliminated, and the jagged rooflines that blended so perfectly with the rim of the canyon were replaced with a traditional pitched roof.