Railroads played a significant role in the Civil War in East Tennessee. Commanders on both sides viewed the railway as an important asset, not only as a carrier of military supplies, but also as the means of rapidly concentrating their forces.  This brick depot was constructed in 1854 here in Niota, then known as Mouse Creek.  It is the only Civil War-era depot surviving along the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad line.

Mouse Creek first appeared in the official records of the war when a Union spy reported that a Confederate company was stationed there in January 1862.  After Union Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside’s occupation of East Tennessee in September 1863, Union troops occupied the railroad line, including Mouse Creek.  Artillery units, such as Co. C, 2nd Ohio Heavy Artillery, garrisoned the depot at different times.  The superior protection afforded by the brick depot here made the usual practice of building a timber fortification unnecessary.  Federal soldiers removed some of the bricks to fashion shoulder-height gun ports in the walls for defense.  The ports are still visible.

In the last year of the war, both sides continuously sparred for control of the railroad.  Although Confederate Gen. George G. Dibrell’s Tennessee cavalry brigade tore up the tracks for miles on both sides of Mouse Creek in August 1864, the depot itself was not captured and remained in Union hands until the end of the war.  Co. C, 1st Wisconsin Heavy Artillery, stayed here until July 1865.

“The very names, Sweetwater, Mouse Creek, speak of everything plentiful and quiet and cozy.  Many pleasant Union demon-strations were made along the route; in some places really superb national flags, which the ladies had wrought with their own hands ...... were given to the winds.”  --- Capt. William Wheeler, 13th New York Battery