

ARRIVING IN LOS ANGELES:  
RAILROAD DEPOTS AS GATEWAYS TO THE CALIFORNIA DREAM

by

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## **DEDICATION**

To those who inspired in me the desire to never stop learning,

And to wanderlust – hearing that distant train whistle and longing to follow . . .

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## ABSTRACT

The first transcontinental train steamed into Los Angeles in 1876, and thereafter arrival by rail gave most visitors their first impressions. Before the construction of Union Station, a number of other railroad depots served Los Angeles, but from more modest. As the city of Los Angeles grew, boosters and engineers alike increasingly promoted the idea of establishing a “union” passenger station, to provide arriving tourists and potential residents with an idyllic arrival experience.

By tracing the history of the principal railroad depots in Los Angeles, the first chapters show the growth of a city through architectural style, depot amenities and locations, and the neighborhoods around them. The second half discusses reasons to build a union passenger terminal, gives a synopsis of the legal processes surrounding its eventual construction, and examines the myriad proposed sites and plans leading to the Spanish Colonial Revival station which graces the site today.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the American West is a history of conquest. Those who came to claim it came from someplace else. Early on they came on foot, by ship, on horseback and in covered wagons. As their conquest became more certain, they arrived by stage and finally, when the golden spike was driven home in Promontory, Utah on May 10, 1869, they began to arrive by rail. The first transcontinental trains traveled between New York and San Francisco in seven days, considerably faster than sailing around the tip of South America in a four to six month voyage or making an overland crossing of Panama risking malaria.<sup>1</sup>

Gold fever catapulted San Francisco to a bustling destination. The young city boasted a population of 26,000 by 1850 when California was granted statehood. Far to the south, the pueblo of Los Angeles remained an unremarkable settlement, producing wines and brandy along with meat, hides and soap from cattle.

The advent of railroads connecting California to the East made possible faster, cheaper movement of goods and people. It was to each town's advantage to be on the rail line; a location on a trunk (main) line was even better as it virtually guaranteed a town's economic success. The story of the struggle between Los Angeles and San Diego for the Southern Pacific Railroad's attention culminated in a bond approved by the voters to subsidize Southern Pacific's construction of main line track to Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> The first transcontinental train arrived into Los Angeles, greeted by a majority of the townspeople on September 6, 1876.<sup>3</sup> From this day forward, arriving in L.A. would never be the same.



**Figure 1 – Arrival of a train greeted by the town band. The passenger cars are from the California Southern Railroad. From *La Reina: Los Angeles in Three Centuries*.**

As historian William Deverell described the changes that could overtake a community in *Railroad Crossing*,

. . . the approach of the train into a community, any community, meant the simultaneous arrival of coal dust, soot, noxious smells, piercing whistles: the sights and sounds of late-nineteenth American industrial might. It also meant the reorientation of space, time, and the physical layout of towns and villages.<sup>4</sup>

Eventually three separate transcontinental railroad companies operated services into Los Angeles. As noted above, the Southern Pacific arrived September 6, 1876. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad steamed into town on November 29, 1885 over tracks belonging to the Southern Pacific. The last to arrive started the closest to Los Angeles. The San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company purchased the line from San Pedro to Los Angeles from the Terminal Railway Company with the intention of eventually reaching Salt Lake City. Although its service to Los Angeles began March 31, 1901, the connection to Salt Lake was not

completed until April 17, 1905. Known as the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad by 1916, it was integrated into the Union Pacific Railroad's operations in 1921.

Voluminous materials exist that describe every imaginable aspect of railroad engines and rolling stock; corporations, partnerships and their intricate mergers, machinations and bankruptcies; and scenic routes, detailed surveys and track grades throughout the West. Far less studied are the passenger depots that served as the transitional spaces between pre-jet age industrial cities and the sequestered comfort of passenger trains complete with dining and sleeping cars.

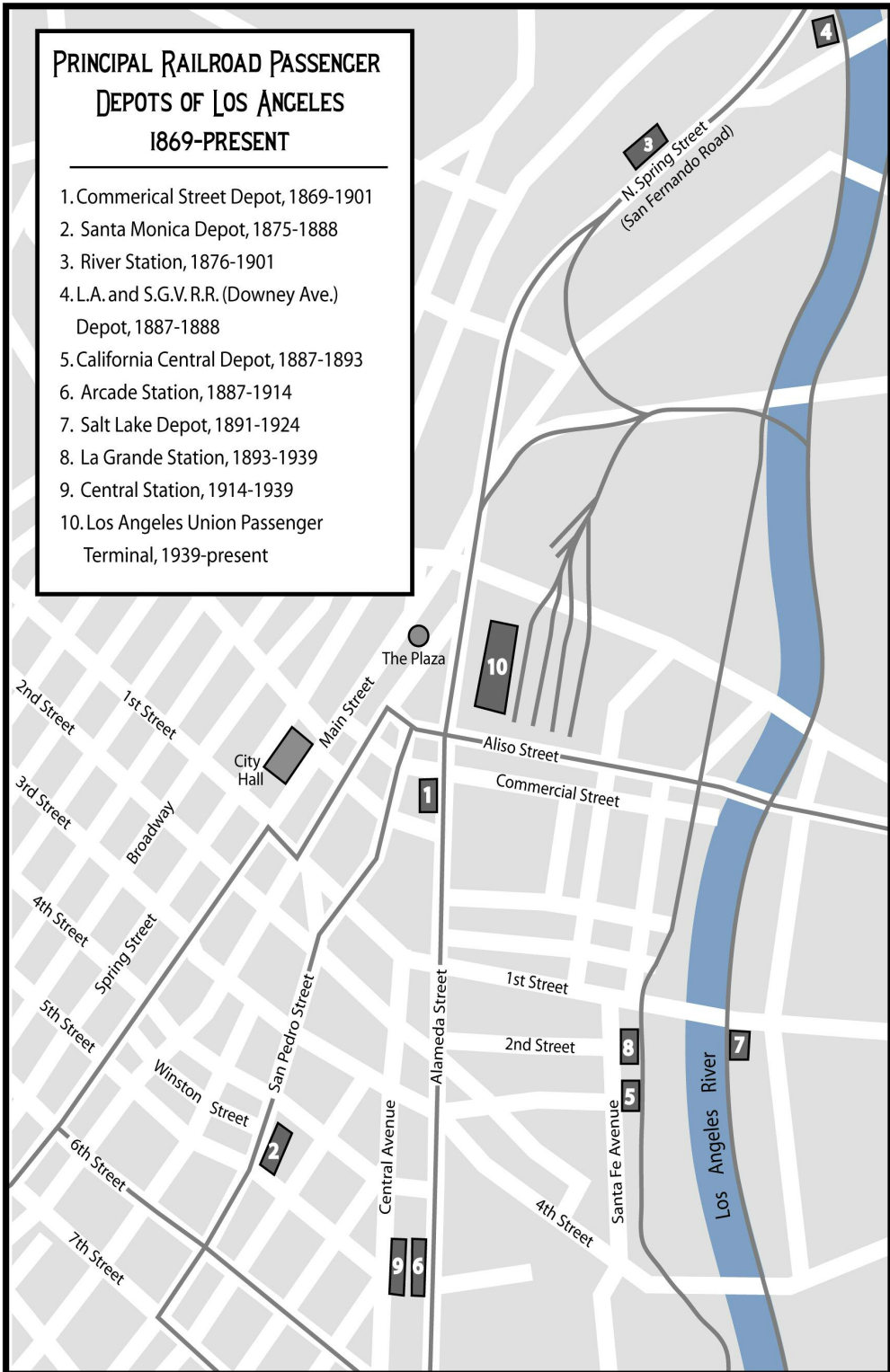
Because of the immense number of railroad enterprises initiated, absorbed, bartered and sold in Southern California, this work is compelled to establish limits, both to maintain focus on the principal operators and to achieve clarity. Many fine works exist that delve into detailed histories of railroad companies. This work's focus remains with the arrival experience at principal passenger depots serving standard-gauge (mainline) steam railroad companies in the city of Los Angeles, with the culmination in the construction of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. The history and ownership of each parcel of land with a main passenger depot, as well as its neighborhood and the passenger arrival experience will be examined. Chapters four and five document the rationale and efforts by the city of Los Angeles, the California Railroad Commission and the three steam railroads – Southern Pacific, Santa Fe and Union Pacific – in the construction of a Union passenger terminal in Los Angeles.<sup>5</sup> Chapter six takes a close look at the site history and design process of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, or, as we know it today, Union Station.

In an attempt to achieve clarity in definitions, I offer the following guidelines in word usage for the terms “depot,” “station,” and “terminal.” “Station” has two possible meanings: 1) the area/yard/platform/flag stop where a train stops, but does not necessarily indicate a single building nor is it required to have a depot, or 2) an “engineering point” which is a surveyed point used for measurement along a rail line and is not directly related in any way to a building location, essentially it can be any point along a rail line that a train crew can identify as a definite location (e.g. a sign, a tunnel entrance, a siding, etc.). A “depot” is a building constructed to facilitate the loading and offloading of passengers and/or freight from trains. This depot building can be located in a station, which is where much of the confusion began. A “terminal” in the early days would be a place where crew and engine changes were effected. Usually terminals were about one hundred miles apart and corresponded with depot locations.<sup>6</sup> I generally refer to either a “depot” or a “terminal” when I am discussing the buildings passengers used to access trains. If the subject encompasses a larger area, for instance the gardens located on station grounds, or the depot along with tracks and grounds, I then use “station.” Since the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal was officially named as such from the beginning, and was a depot where crew and equipment changes took place, I generally refer to it as a “terminal” instead of a “depot.”

The evolution in passenger stations in Los Angeles is instructive in many ways. The location, services, architecture and unique features of each depot draw vignettes of the city and its growth. As Los Angeles changed from a small town with



vineyards and orange groves to a metropolis in need of a “union” station, depots serving the city grew from basic facilities to the grand Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal which opened in 1939. In the early years, social life and news-gathering took place at the depot. The telegraph operator at the depot was the first to know about news from the outside world. The decisions made by a railroad company to site depots and rail yards altered the neighborhoods around them. Single room occupancy hotels sprang up around depots where largely single, working-class men stepped off transcontinental trains and began to search for work. Neighborhoods of railroad workers clustered within walking distance of rail yards and depots. Areas such as Lincoln Heights, the Central Avenue district and Watts were composed of high percentages of those employed by the railroads, whether in service facilities or as Pullman porters.<sup>7</sup> Names and addresses of arriving and departing passengers were often published in the society pages, and when an important train, such as a troop train or a Presidential train came to town, the occasion demanded a celebration at the station. Railroads brought prosperity, access to freight transport of manufactured goods and the ease of transcontinental travel for both tourists and new residents (both Americans and immigrants) lured by the promises of orange groves, palm trees and perfect weather. In an era before the dominance of the automobile, railroads connected Los Angeles with the world and the world with Los Angeles, and the world disembarked at the station.



**Figure 2 – Map of Los Angeles showing locations of depots discussed in this thesis.  
Map by Jennifer Mapes.**

## Introduction Notes

<sup>1</sup> Carl C. Cutler, *The Story of the American Clipper Ship: Greyhounds of the Sea* (New York: Halcyon House, 1930), 177-180.

<sup>2</sup> A concise treatment of the early railroad politics involving Los Angeles and San Diego can be found in Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and in the Railroad Commission of the State of California's *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination and Passenger and Freight Terminals in Los Angeles* (Sacramento: Railroad commission of the State of California, 1920).

<sup>3</sup> Laurance L. Hill, *La Reina --- Los Angeles in Three Centuries*, ([Los Angeles]: Security-First National Bank, 1929), 51.

<sup>4</sup> William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 173. Reading newspapers of the time continually shocks one with the sheer number of accidents, maiming and death involving trains. My own great-grandmother, a German immigrant girl named Rose Peterson Carney, was killed along with her youngest son by a train in Turney, Missouri when she was 29.

<sup>5</sup> The principal government agency in California during much of the period this work covers was the Railroad Commission. It will be variously referred to as the California Railroad Commission and as the Railroad Commission of the State of California, with both understood to refer to the same agency.

<sup>6</sup> Finding a clear definition of each and achieving proper usage for this thesis involved querying knowledgeable rail fans across California. I especially want to thank Bruce Semelsberger for his concise answer; this definition is taken from his reply, though any inaccuracies in wording are mine!

<sup>7</sup> Larry Mullaly and Bruce Petty, *The Southern Pacific in Los Angeles, 1873-1996* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books and The Los Angeles Railroad Heritage Foundation, 2002) discuss black Southern Pacific railroad workers on pages 90 and 97. Los Angeles Union Station collection at USC and the Railroad Commission of the State of California's book also mention large numbers of workers living in Lincoln Heights.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **PRINCIPAL SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD PASSENGER DEPOTS IN LOS ANGELES**

#### **Earliest Depots in Los Angeles**

Two railroad companies operated trains into Los Angeles before the arrival of the Southern Pacific and its connection to the East: the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad Company and the Los Angeles & Independence Railroad Company. Each of these companies built depots to service both freight and passengers in Los Angeles; ultimately both were acquired by the Southern Pacific once it began rail service in 1876.

#### **Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad Depot, 1869-1901**

The story of the first railroad to operate in Southern California captures the difficulties facing the movement of goods and people before the transcontinental railroads opened up the West. In the 1850s, the United States government had designated San Pedro, California as an official port of entry.<sup>1</sup> Phineas Banning, an entrepreneur whose 1851 journey to Southern California began in Philadelphia, had agreed to escort a shipment to San Pedro in exchange for his passage west. His voyage included the dangerous land crossing of the isthmus of Panama. Banning continued onward, boarding another ship for the journey up the west coast to San Pedro. Working as a clerk and mule team driver for the firm of Douglass and Sanford, transporting freight between San Pedro and the village of Los Angeles twenty miles to the north, gave Banning firsthand experience in the freight business.

Eventually, Banning and George Alexander formed a partnership and bought out Banning's employer, renaming the business Alexander & Banning.<sup>2</sup> Their business expanded to include stagecoaches, and ranged as far as the Kern River; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Yuma, Arizona.<sup>3</sup> With a group of investors, Banning founded Wilmington (named after the Delaware town in which he was born). Wilmington had the advantage of being six miles closer to Los Angeles, and during the Civil War, the government billeted Union troops in Wilmington, providing Banning with both a business opportunity in supplying the soldiers as well as a commission as a General in the California National Guard. After the war, he was elected to the California State Senate, where he convinced the legislature to allow local government funds for a railroad.<sup>4</sup> This involvement of government funds later enabled the Southern Pacific to bargain control away from Banning, yet still the Southern Pacific maintained the vital rail link to Wilmington ensuring its growth and a position in the fight to establish a harbor for Los Angeles.

Construction on Banning's railroad, the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad began on September 19, 1868 in Wilmington, the harbor through which the majority of freight moved into and out of Los Angeles. The track was laid twenty miles north to the depot on Alameda and Commercial streets, where the first public service ran on October 26, 1869.<sup>5</sup> This depot had a turntable so the locomotive and cars could be turned upon arrival without the need for a large looping track. There was also a water tank at the Los Angeles depot. The earliest locomotives in the Los Angeles region came by ship and were put into service. Of note is the fact that the route

towards the small, provincial town of Los Angeles was built along the “Lane,” an extension of Alameda Street.<sup>6</sup>

The Los Angeles depot in Los Angeles, located on the southwest corner of Alameda and Commercial streets, was a simple rectangular frame structure with a pitched roof and a deep overhang protecting the platform from the sun. Local resident Harris Newmark later described it as

more of a freight shed than anything else, without adequate passenger facilities; a small space at the North end contained a second story in which some of the clerks slept; and in a cramped little cage beneath, tickets were sold.<sup>7</sup>

The depot was located near the edge of the town when it was built, roughly between the business district and Chinatown. Historian John W. Robinson describes the process of securing the depot site.

. . . they secured a lot . . . for \$10,000 from their own company president, John G Downey, and James F. Burnes. The site was 410 x 190 feet, and was located at the southwest corner of Alameda and Commercial streets. Tichenor quickly had his crews cut down the vineyard that occupied the land and build a depot that cost \$6,000, just the amount specified in the contract.<sup>8</sup>

According to the *Los Angeles Star*, the depot was enlarged in late 1871:

the depot has had a new warehouse erected, has had an entire block of ground enclosed within a fine picket fence, has had several branch tracks laid for the accommodation of its rapid increase of business, and an outside storehouse erected..<sup>9</sup>

Freight hauling accounted for the major share of business. Eldridge E. Hewitt, who later worked for the Southern Pacific, was the Superintendent for the San Pedro & Los Angeles Railroad. He reported business for 1870 totaling 7,050 tons of exports and 10,600 tons of imports. The ships calling at San Pedro Bay during the year

which handled the freight totaled one hundred forty-seven steamships and forty-seven sailing ships.<sup>10</sup> Because of the importance of freight movement, trains were synchronized with ships arriving in San Pedro.



**Figure 3 – First Los Angeles depot, located at southwest corner of Commercial and Alameda streets. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.**

According to Larry Mullaly and Bruce Petty, this early depot served as “a major source of news, and reporters were assigned to visit there each day to gather information about the arrival and departure of steamers, as well as the outgoing and incoming movement of freight. Upon arrival, passengers found their names and their places of residence, as well as lists of goods awaiting pick-up at the depot, announced in the local press.”<sup>11</sup>

Wherever a railroad depot was constructed, other development soon followed. The area around the Commercial Street depot had been principally

vineyards and orchards. John W. Robinson credits the new depot with significant changes.

In Los Angeles itself, real estate near the depot zoomed to new heights and Commercial Street became the industrial center of the city. By the end of 1870 the area had a new iron foundry, machine shop, carriage factory and two lumber yards. Property doubled and tripled in value within a few months, and the first realtors arrived on the scene, among them Robert M. Widney.<sup>12</sup>

The California Railroad Commission later reported that the passenger facilities were “very inadequate” and that the depot was used mainly for freight.<sup>13</sup> The city had not yet experienced a boom in population, most businesses and residences clustered near the Plaza area, and industry principally consisted of agriculture, including vineyards and citrus.<sup>14</sup> Geographer Blake Gumprecht credits the wine industry not only with filling the vacuum left after the cattle industry collapsed with the droughts of the 1860s, but also with boosterism by portraying Southern California as a semi-tropical paradise with its wine exports to the East.<sup>15</sup> This portrait of a semi-tropical paradise with wine grapes growing outside ones home did much to promote Los Angeles’ ongoing land speculation to winter-weary Easterners.

When the Southern Pacific began regular service to Los Angeles in January of 1874, this is the depot its trains initially utilized for the stop in Los Angeles. The Southern Pacific formally acquired this depot when it gained ownership of the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad. Because much of the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad had been funded with public money, the city and county of Los Angeles had the right to transfer ownership, and, in exchange for an agreement from the



Southern Pacific that it would lay tracks into Los Angeles, the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad was formally turned over to the Southern Pacific on April 23, 1873.<sup>16</sup> Legally, its stock was consolidated with that of the Southern Pacific on December 17, 1874.<sup>17</sup>

Most residents of Los Angeles moved about on foot, but for those who desired to travel around town more quickly and did not own carriages, horse-drawn railway cars began to appear soon after the Southern Pacific arrived. Funded by private enterprises, the city government nevertheless was persuaded to give permission to lay tracks and operate on public streets.<sup>18</sup> Although these “cars” did not travel at great speeds, they nevertheless helped to establish the precedent of rail lines running on public streets. Further growth and expansion came in the 1880s with a rate competition between Southern Pacific and Santa Fe, and booster activities of civic organizations lauding the temperate climate, a romantic Spanish past and ready availability of oranges.<sup>19</sup> Historian Robert M. Fogelson marks the 1880s as the transition period between an agricultural economy and a market economy, “while vineyards and orchards were still cultivated, their owners were principally in the wine, fruit, and real estate businesses.”<sup>20</sup>

By 1888, the former Commercial Street depot was home to the Los Angeles Farming and Milling Company, complete with tracks and a platform to load freight, quite possibly utilizing the existing depot building.<sup>21</sup> Overland passenger trains still stopped there up until April 1901, picking up or dropping off passengers onto the old platform, after which only local trains stopped.<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, the neighborhood

was more densely populated toward the north and west, that is, in the direction of the plaza and of Los Angeles and Main streets. An examination of the 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows numerous livery stables scattered among single family dwellings, along with a few commercial enterprises, lodging houses and hotels. The Southern Pacific continued to use the Commercial Street depot until 1877 after which it became a stop on the line to the new main passenger depot.<sup>23</sup>

### **Los Angeles & Independence Depot, 1875-1888**

Another small railroad company in existence before the transcontinental lines arrived was that of Nevada Senator John P. Jones – the Los Angeles & Independence Railroad Company. This railroad company commenced service between Santa Monica's waterfront and Los Angeles sixteen miles away on December 1, 1875 (albeit on narrow gauge track, later widened by the Southern Pacific). Robert S. Baker, owner of Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica, sold a two-thirds interest in the property to Nevada Senator John Jones around 1874. The two subdivided part of the rancho to lay out the future town of Santa Monica, and sold lots at auction on July 15, 1875.<sup>24</sup> Building a railroad brought prospective buyers and afforded easier freight movement to Jones's harbor. The Los Angeles & Independence Rail Road Company was incorporated on January 8, 1875, fully seven months before the auction of town sites. Between the incorporation of the railroad and the auction, a hotel and bath houses were constructed to demonstrate the viability of the new Santa Monica.<sup>25</sup>

The Los Angeles & Independence depot in Los Angeles was sited between Fourth and Fifth streets on the east side of San Pedro Street, nearly opposite Winston Street. With its two ornate, prominent towers capped by steeply pitched mansard roofs with gabled dormer windows, the depot exhibited Italianate details with French Second Empire influence on the front section of its main façade.<sup>26</sup> Copious gingerbread details and curlicue wrought iron embellishments added interest to the façade. An oddly monumental staircase flanked by large bronze-colored Sphinxes led up to the side of the building, quite out of context with the depot itself. These fanciful details and tall towers advertised the presence and location of the railroad depot in a town where most other buildings were still a single story. The remainder of the building was a simple vernacular frame structure with deep roof overhangs to provide shade from the California sun, reminiscent of the Los Angeles and San Pedro depot at Alameda and Commercial streets.



**Figure 4 – Photograph of the Los Angeles & Independence Depot, also known as the Santa Monica Depot, taken soon after it was built. Photo by Carleton Watkins, courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.**



**Figure 5 – Santa Monica Depot in 1888, modified for other uses, shown shortly before it burned down.**

Collis P. Huntington bought control of the Los Angeles & Independence Railroad from Jones on July 1, 1877, after the latter had run into severe financial difficulties. Huntington's Southern Pacific Railroad had a virtual monopoly on the freight traffic of goods moving in and out of the harbor at Wilmington/San Pedro. By purchasing the other railroad that linked Los Angeles to a local port he hoped to strengthen his monopoly on the harbor at Wilmington and thus more easily control freight rates in Los Angeles. Trains continued to operate, moving both passengers and freight to the harbor and beaches, however, the Santa Monica depot in Los Angeles on San Pedro Street was no longer used as the principal depot and was sold around 1880 to W. H. Perry, for private use. This postcard view dates from 1888 after the depot had been taken out of use as a passenger station and was being used by the California Door Company, and the Los Angeles Storage, Commission and Lumber Company. W. H. Perry owned a lumber yard and planing mill on Commercial Street in the 1880s, up until at least the time the Santa Monica depot burned; there appears to be no connection between his lumber company and the Los Angeles Storage, Commission and Lumber Company which leased the space from him. The wall with four openings on the right side of the photo was added, enclosing the platform and its deep overhanging roof after the depot was taken out of service, most likely to increase the interior space. When the depot was in use, the platform was located here. Additionally, the door centered on the main façade of the building was originally a window without stairs beneath it.

The photograph shown on page 16 is one of the last images taken of the Santa Monica depot before it burned to the ground on October 30, 1888. Because of the old depot's location – with tracks running alongside the building – its latter use as both storage for a lumber company and the Los Angeles headquarters for a San Francisco firm engaged in the production of doors, sash and window blinds was appropriate. The California Door Company manufactured its components in San Francisco, shipped them by rail to Los Angeles, and glazed them in their warehouse at the old depot. The fire reportedly began in the glazing room where large quantities of turpentine were stored.<sup>27</sup> The Sanborn Fire Insurance map drawn in 1888 shows the Los Angeles Planing Mill Company, and the Atlas Feed Mill nearby, otherwise the surrounding blocks are dedicated to orchards and vineyards, low-density housing and the Goodwin and Company Livery.

### **San Fernando Street “River Station,” 1876-1889**

The first depot constructed by the Southern Pacific for passenger use in Los Angeles stood on the west side of North Spring Street (in 1876, when the depot was constructed, North Spring was named San Fernando Road) roughly opposite Sotello Street. Some confusion exists in published sources about the name for this depot, and it is often confused with a one-story brick commercial building on the northeast corner of North Spring and Sotello streets that the Southern Pacific purchased in 1901. To maintain clarity, I will refer to the passenger depot used by the Southern Pacific from 1876 to 1889 as the “River Station,” with the reader's understanding that I am *not* referring to the 1901 brick, commercial storefront “River Station” on

the northeast corner of Sotello and San Fernando Road, which *never* operated as the main Los Angeles passenger depot for Southern Pacific.<sup>28</sup>

Construction on the Southern Pacific's River Station depot and River Station yards began well before the actual trains arrived from the north, on land purchased by the railroad for \$7,500 from a wealthy Los Angeles widow named Arcadia B. de Stearns.<sup>29</sup> The deed securing the future River Station yards, dated December 18, 1872, states, "The land truly conveyed is for the purpose of establishing therein the Passenger and freight Depot of the Southern Pacific Rail Road," and the land is identified by name as "Huerta del Molina." A savvy businesswoman, she sold an adjacent parcel to the Southern Pacific on April 29, 1875 for an additional \$3,300.<sup>30</sup>

A notice in the *Los Angeles Star* reported a city ordinance dealing with this land:

An ordinance was read, in accordance with the Railroad agreement, fixing the location of the depot and passenger grounds to be set apart for the Southern Pacific Railroad. It designates fifteen acres of land on Alameda street, at a point known as the Huerta del Molino (Stearns Mills).<sup>31</sup>

When the first tracks were laid on the site in 1875, it stood a good distance from the business center of Los Angeles and was actually considered to be outside the town. Sonoratown lay to the south and the Los Angeles River just to the northeast.

The River Station started serving passengers and the freight business in 1876. Constructed in 1875 in anticipation of the north/south connection between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the main buildings at the station were dedicated to freight handling. According to a description published in the *Los Angeles Star*, the

company offices and the passenger facilities shared a smaller building unconnected to the main freight depot.

At the western end of the main depot a two-story frame building, 32x50 feet, is being erected for the necessary offices. The ground floor contains ladies' and gentlemen's reception and waiting rooms, one 15x23, the other 15x25 feet, with closets, toilet conveniences, etc.; ticket and telegraph office, 18 feet 9 inches by 25 feet; baggage room, 11 feet 6 inches by 17 feet, while between this floor and the main depot is the local freight agent's office, of the ample dimensions of 32x50 feet. The second story of the office building is divided as follows: Superintendent's office, 15x25 feet, with private office adjoining, 15x9 feet; adjoining this is still another office, 15 feet by 13 feet 6 inches; the chief bookkeeper's office, 18 feet 6 inches by 21 feet, completing the list. All of the offices and rooms above mentioned are to be ceiled [sic] in the best manner with mitred and tongue and groove redwood and furnished with all necessary conveniences, gas, water, toilet rooms, closets, etc. The depot and office buildings are to be finished on the outside with redwood rustic, all material used being of the very best quality.<sup>32</sup>

Mullaly and Petty report that the original River Station depot was moved to the west end of the yard around 1883 to be used for freight, and a new depot with a hotel was constructed for passenger use. This building was enlarged three years later with single story additions on each end, adding a baggage room and crew sleeping quarters.<sup>33</sup> The 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows a long narrow building measuring approximately 375 feet long by 35 feet wide, with the center section two stories high and each end symmetrically one story.

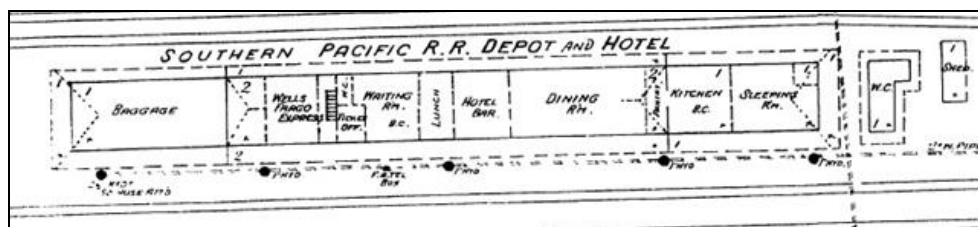
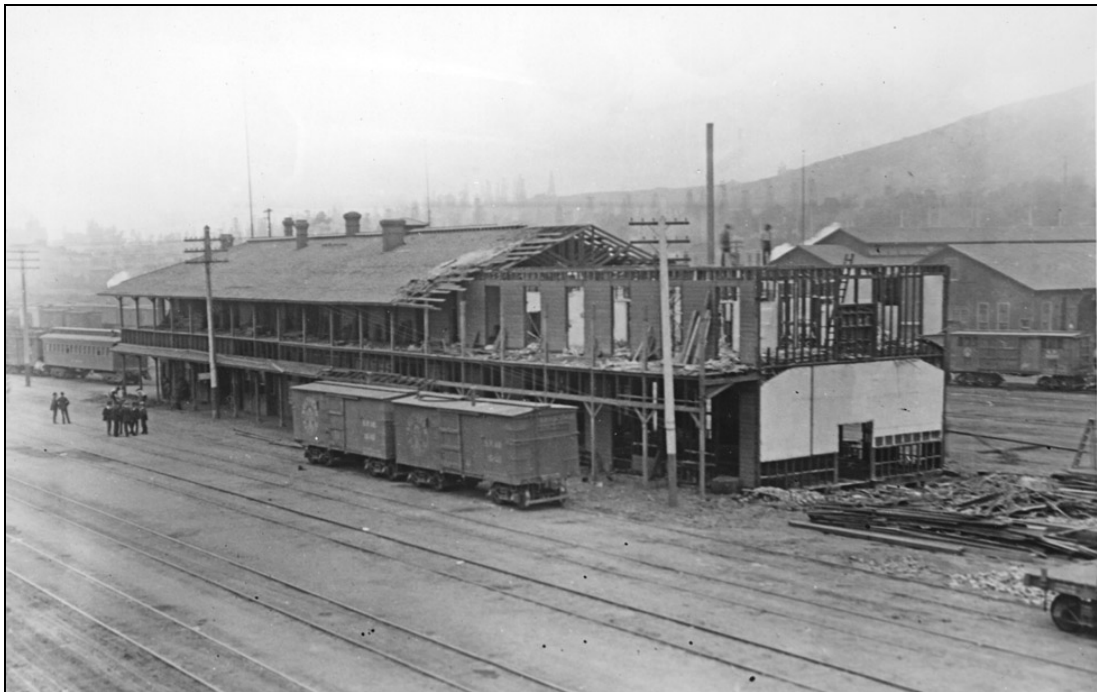


Figure 6 – Detail from 1888 Sanborn showing the plan of the Southern Pacific's "River Station" depot on San Fernando Road, vol. 1, sheet 5b. Accessed via Los Angeles Public Library.



The ground floor of the station had no interior hallways, but rather was composed of a series of rooms: baggage (starting on the southernmost end), the Wells Fargo Express office, stairs, a ticket office and water closet, a waiting room, lunchroom, hotel bar, dining room, pantry, kitchen and sleeping room.

Outside the main building to the north lay another water closet (restroom), so that workers and “less desirable” persons could use the facilities without disturbing any gentlewomen who might be waiting for the next train. Tracks ran along both sides of the depot. The Southern Hotel and a number of less formal lodging houses, restaurants and storefronts faced the depot grounds from the opposite side of San Fernando Road, according to the 1888 Sanborn map.



**Figure 7 – The old River Station depot being torn down in 1902. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.**

After passenger service moved to the new Arcade Depot in 1888, the old River Station was mainly used for freight, although passenger trains continued to

stop there until the purchase of the brick commercial storefront in 1901, when the Southern Pacific moved their passenger service across San Fernando Road to the “new” River Station.<sup>34</sup> The old frame depot was torn down in 1902, soon after passenger service moved across San Fernando Road. The Sanborn Fire Insurance map from 1894 shows the same footprint for the building, but with some minor changes in the interior configuration. The baggage room, ticket office, water closet, waiting room, bar, pantry, kitchen and sleeping rooms are all in the same locations, however, gone are the Well Fargo Express office and the lunchroom, and a notation suggests the dining room no longer serves passengers. There are furnished rooms on the second floor, which most likely existed in the 1888 version, but were not indicated on the Sanborn map.

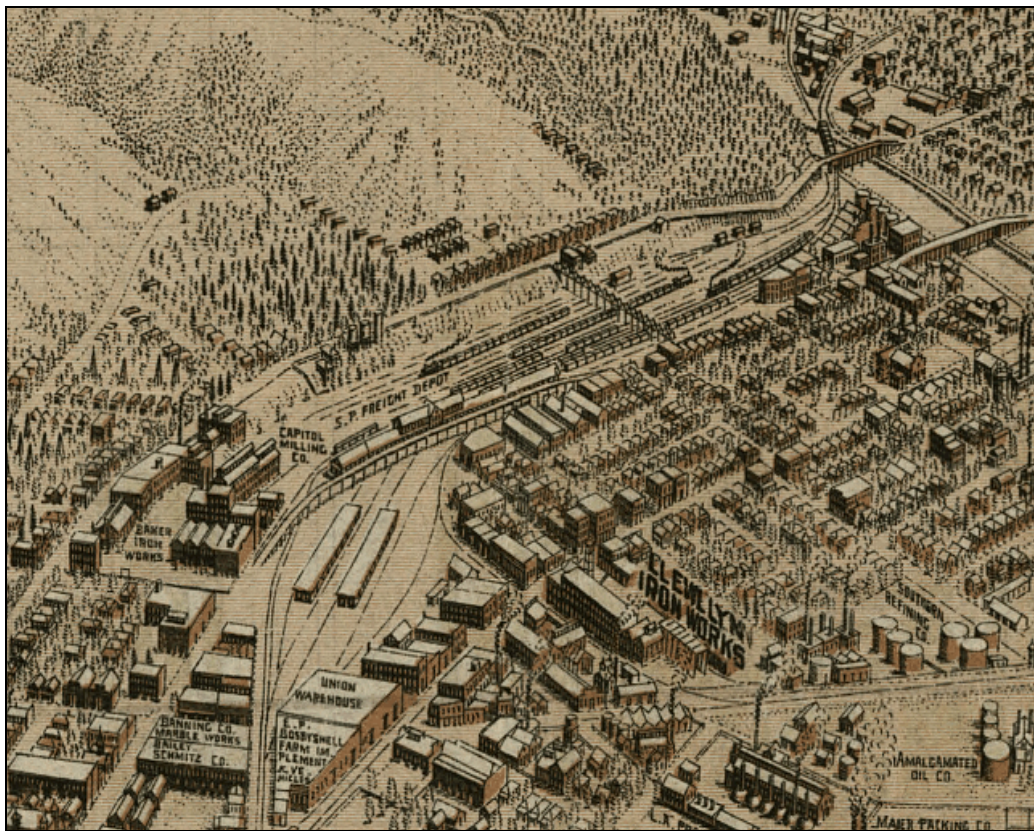
When telephone service was introduced in Los Angeles in 1882, the Southern Pacific’s River Station was granted number “1,” a significant indicator of the railroad’s importance to the community.<sup>35</sup> By 1880, the Southern Pacific was the largest employer in the area with approximately 300 workers, more than one hundred of whom lived in the vicinity of the River Station yards.<sup>36</sup> This influx of workers, most of whom walked to and from work, caused the growth of areas adjacent to the yards, including the Ann Street, Elysian Park and Macy Street districts. Although the Southern Pacific’s principal passenger depot moved south in 1888, the freight business, round house, repair shops and rail yards remained as the Southern Pacific expanded across the river, south of Alhambra Avenue. This growth of repair shops and a new roundhouse drew workers from across the Southern Pacific system.

Mullaly and Petty reinforce the dominance of the Southern Pacific in the area by stating that, “by 1920, Lincoln Heights had a population of 21,000 and almost everyone seemed connected to the railroad in some way.”<sup>37</sup>

Soldiers, many leaving home for the first time, were transported on trains that passed through Los Angeles. Newspaper accounts in 1898 describe the military trains filled with soldiers on their way to fight in the Spanish-American War. The first such troop train arrived in Los Angeles at the River Station on April 21, 1898 from San Francisco. Considered a major social event, the arrival of troop trains was carefully tracked by Southern Pacific staff, who kept the populace informed of the train’s progress and its expected arrival time into the city. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, people began gathering near the station at six in the evening, and by the time the train arrived at seven fifty, the assembled crowd began cheering. Every detail was considered newsworthy – arrivals and departures of trains and their passengers were often reported, and the importance of an entire train filled with men going off to battle aroused patriotic feelings and curiosity in the townspeople. Describing the train in great detail, the *Los Angeles Times* reported twenty-two cars and a caboose – cars holding the horses, four flatcars loaded with guns, cars containing ammunition (“closely sealed” so no sparks from the steam engines could accidentally cause ignition), feed cars, six tourist sleeping cars for the enlisted men and a Pullman for the officers. The populace’s interest included information about the rolling stock and engines, and it was reported that this train was pulled by engines numbered 1391 and 1807 with Engineers Lou Hays and Charles Wright in

charge. Train engineers of the day were extended the same respect as astronauts receive today.

As the soldiers fed and watered their horses (168 of them traveling in the cars immediately behind the engines), the crowd explored the train cars, examined the weapons on the flat cars, and reportedly “many ladies even climb[ed] to the top of the flatcars to place their hands on the 3.2 inch cannon.”<sup>38</sup> Two wagon loads of fruit were distributed among the train cars, with hundreds of bouquets of flowers given to the soldiers. Although their stay in Los Angeles lasted a mere seventy-five minutes, the hospitality of Angelenos and boxes full of oranges for their cross country journey surely must have left a favorable impression.



**Figure 8 – Detail from a 1909 bird’s eye map showing the Southern Pacific’s River Station yards and the location of the freight depot. Library of Congress, American Memory Project.**

Even by 1909, when this bird's eye map was drawn, the River Station yards remained on the outskirts of Los Angeles. The city continued to grow to the east and south, but the Elysian hills and the river acted as natural barriers to the north and west. Some manufacturing and commercial enterprises were located near the Southern Pacific freight yards, but much of the flat areas nearby remained residential.

Today, this is the area known as the "Cornfield." Designated Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument #82 in 1971 because of its history as the former site of huge rail yards for the Southern Pacific Railroad, this storied tract of land is in the process of being transformed into the Los Angeles State Historic Park by the California State Park system.

#### **Arcade Depot, 1889-1914**

The land where the Arcade Station was built was donated to the Southern Pacific by the Wolfskill family with the caveat that it be used for a railroad station. This land, approximately three hundred feet by nineteen hundred feet with frontage on Alameda Street between Fourth and Sixth streets, was the site of the first orange groves in Los Angeles and was known as the Wolfskill tract.<sup>39</sup> William Wolfskill first planted orange trees here in the 1830s and by the 1850s had seventy acres of orange groves near present day Alameda and Fourth streets. Wolfskill's son Joseph took over the family business and was the first to ship a boxcar of oranges, which came from this grove, to St. Louis in 1877.<sup>40</sup> By the 1880s, Joseph Wolfskill's orchards covered most of the family's 120-acre holdings south of Third Street. With the land boom of

the 1880s in full swing property values skyrocketed, making agricultural returns pale in comparison. Joseph Wolfskill, undoubtedly knowing that land near railroad passenger depots commanded higher prices, and that the Southern Pacific was rumored to be searching for a site to build a new passenger terminal, cut a deal to donate part of his land for the new depot.<sup>41</sup> He then subdivided the remainder of the land, mainly into twenty-five foot wide lots for residential use, and sold it privately.<sup>42</sup>



**Figure 9 – Large palm being moved to entrance of Arcade Station (rear left) with Wolfskill land office to the right. Courtesy of University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Special Collections.**

Interestingly, an examination of the current tract maps (still labeled as Wolfskill Orchard Tract) of the blocks comprising the former orchards shows a large

single parcel where the Arcade Station and its tracks were located, with a row of small lots bordering it running along Central Avenue. Wolfskill retained ownership of these small lots. In 1902, the railroad attempted to purchase these lots under the pretext that more land was needed for tracks.<sup>43</sup> The city was sponsoring a public market on the land (at the corner of Central Avenue and Fourth Street) and apparently denied the request. Years later, when the Central Station was built next to Arcade Station, the railroad finally succeeded in acquiring these lots, and Central Station was built directly on top of the former commercial sites. The corner of Central Avenue and Fourth Street on the block directly to the north of the railroad property is labeled “Joseph W. Wolfskill Homestead Property.” The remainder of the lots from the former Wolfskill orchard were mainly twenty five by one hundred foot lots and are now zoned M2 indicating industrial zoning.<sup>44</sup> Another notable feature of the subdivision are three of the street names: Stanford, Towne and Crocker are all names of Southern Pacific executives who were involved in the decision to site the depot on the Wolfskill tract.<sup>45</sup>

Construction of the Arcade Depot began March 1, 1888 and was completed around the beginning of September, 1888, however, passenger train service did not commence until February 25, 1889 because of a disagreement over a right-of-way to bring a track directly to the depot from Santa Monica.<sup>46</sup>

Designed by Arthur Brown, Superintendent of Bridges and Buildings Department for the Central Pacific Railroad, with F. K. Flanders in charge of

construction, the vast wooden depot was five hundred feet long and eighty feet wide, with a ninety foot high arched roof.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 10 – Southern Pacific's Arcade Station train shed.**

Constructed mainly of wood, the Arcade Station was designed in a Romanesque style, quite popular for public buildings in the eastern United States and Europe during the two decades preceding its construction. Concurrent with the construction of the Arcade depot, the massive Romanesque style reached its apogee in the United States.<sup>48</sup> As with many of the great train stations in Europe, the huge roof was supported with iron roof trusses.<sup>49</sup> Station architecture such as this proclaimed the importance of the building to the city in which it stood. The expense of maintaining such a large structure contributed to its stylistic demise and when the newly invented Bush train sheds became available, the railroads made the switch to the smaller, more economically attractive alternative.<sup>50</sup>



The largest part of the building shielded trains from the elements so passengers could board them or disembark in comfort. Tracks ran both alongside the depot as well as under the massive roof, where three full-length passenger trains could stand at the ready. Skylights above the trains and glazed arches on either end allowed for natural daylight. Small turrets marked the corners of the train shed. Typical of the construction used in some of the great train stations in Europe at the time, the interior of the enclosure covering the trains rose to a great height, mainly to dissipate the noxious fumes from the steam boilers on the engines. Sulfur fumes from burning coal caused corrosion to wood structures over time. However, fires were one of the greatest risks; coal-fired steam locomotives idling under dry wooden roofs could give off sparks that would quickly ignite the buildings protecting them. The Arcade Station was equipped with hydrants in the floor of the station, served by the local water company, and maintained a fire department of six men.<sup>51</sup> Fortunately, the Arcade never experienced a devastating fire.

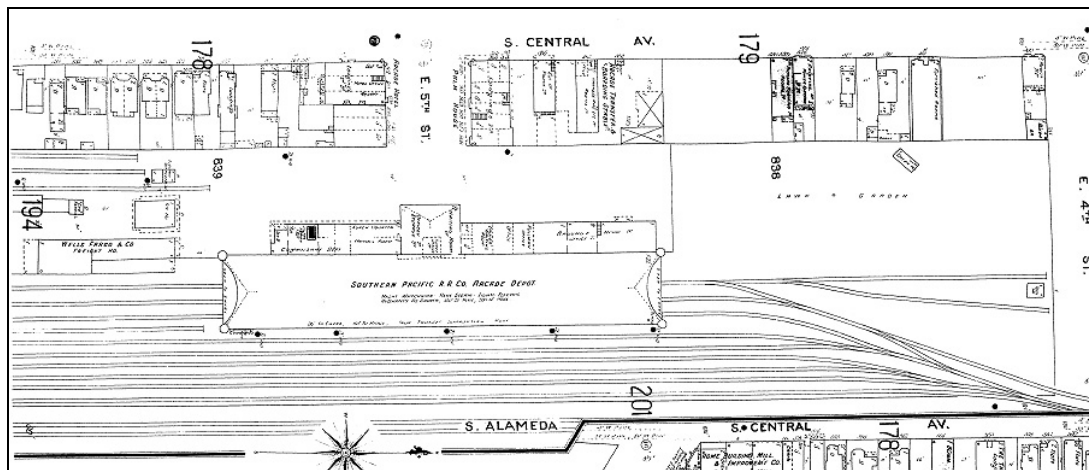
The wooden exterior was originally painted a “light shade of olive green and dark red,” according to a *Los Angeles Times* article extolling its near perfection.<sup>52</sup> A commonly used color for Southern Pacific depots in that time period was gray, which could be construed as similar in appearance to an “olive green.”<sup>53</sup> While the Arcade Station is long gone, frustrating our efforts to identify the exterior colors with certainty, paint samples from other Southern Pacific stations in the same time period show that a gray / dark red combination was used.<sup>54</sup>

The Arcade depot was clearly one of the premier Southern Pacific depots in Southern California, and as such, contained elaborate facilities both for passengers as well as railroad employees in the “head building.”<sup>55</sup> A description written when the construction finished noted that the first floor contained

two large waiting rooms, one for gentlemen and the other for ladies; a baggage-room, Wells, Fargo & Company’s office, dining room, newsroom, two ticket offices, a barroom and kitchen, and a Pullman palace-car office. On the second floor [were] situated the operating departments, consisting of the track and B. B. division of nine rooms, seven general rooms, and four living rooms for the men in charge of the eating-house, or a total of 20 rooms.<sup>56</sup>

Postcards of the Southern Pacific’s depot in Sacramento, California (formerly the Central Pacific Railroad’s station, constructed in 1879) show a design quite similar to that of the Arcade Depot in Los Angeles. The earlier iteration in Sacramento, however, was painted “a lighter two tone (or maybe three-tone) plus white color scheme,” significantly different in color from the Arcade’s olive green and dark red colors.<sup>57</sup> Later postcards show a classical revival station in Sacramento, reminiscent of the Central Station in Los Angeles, which replaced the Arcade in 1914. Since railroad depots were generally designed by in-house architects, it is no coincidence that similar designs were executed in different towns along the rail lines. Both station designs and common paint color schemes helped to “brand” each railroad company’s stations in the same manner that today’s travelers recognize golden arches or a boy holding a burger aloft before being able to read an establishment’s name.

Gardens outside train depots became a popular feature to showcase the virtues of the Southern California climate and the plantings outside the Arcade were some of the most elaborate in the Southern Pacific system. Note the size of the gardens in relation to the size of the depot itself in the excerpt from a Sanborn map from 1888. A photographer hired by the station was available to ensure that tourists could provide visual evidence to the folks back home of the strange and wonderful vegetation growing in Los Angeles. A lawn provided space for picnicking families, with agaves, sago palms, small coniferous trees, and a cactus garden with saguaros, aloes, more agaves and cordylines. Postcards from travelers, showing them posed near a large cactus or a palm tree were sent back East, many carrying an “Arcade Station” postal cancellation.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 11 –Plan showing Arcade Station and surrounding area. The station gardens are to the right of the map, labeled “Lawn & Garden.” Detail from 1906 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, vol. 2, sheet 194. Accessed via Los Angeles Public Library.**

The signature planting, a mature palm tree towering more than two stories high, was moved from a site on San Pedro between Second and Third streets to stand directly before the Arcade Station where the Fifth Street extension ran past the

commercial storefronts and into the station entrance. This palm was later moved to Exposition Park when plans for the new Central Station were finalized.<sup>59</sup>

In moving their passenger station south, the Southern Pacific attained a location more convenient for arriving passengers. The usual activity that surrounded a train depot continued here, with horse-drawn carriages awaiting each arriving train to whisk the passengers to one of the major hotels, such as the Nadeau Hotel at First and Spring streets. Built in 1884, the Nadeau was the first four story building to pierce the skyline in Los Angeles.<sup>60</sup> The other five largest hotels in Los Angeles were all located on Main Street between First Street and the Plaza: the Grand Central Hotel, the Natick House, the Pico House, the St. Charles Hotel, and the St. Elmo Hotel.<sup>61</sup> The Grand Opera House, also known as Child's Opera House, had long been Los Angeles' main performing arts venue. Its location on Main near First Street provided a cultural center for well-to-do tourists in Los Angeles.

Less expensive hotels and lodging houses slowly began to dot the neighborhood near the station. Just outside the station entrance, on the "stub-end" of Fifth Street, stood the Arcade Hotel and the Palm House. Services offered at the Arcade Hotel include a drugstore, barber, billiard room and restaurant; the Palm House also offered a restaurant for those who chose not to eat at the station's lunch counter or dining room. Other arriving passengers, sometimes returning residents, climbed aboard a street car or a horse-drawn omnibus to move through the growing town to stay with friends or return to their own homes. Mullaly and Petty report that "between 1895 and 1910 passenger traffic nearly tripled on the system."<sup>62</sup> These

arrivals paralleled the growing popularity of Los Angeles both as a tourist destination and as a desirable place to live.

Aside from the hotels and lodging houses that served passengers, the area around the Arcade Station was slow to be built up. Wolfskill's plan to boost desirability for his newly subdivided lots with a rail station was inspired, unfortunately his timing was poor. The hot real estate market of the 1880s in Los Angeles cooled dramatically by 1888, the year the station was constructed. Ordinarily a station would attract further investment, but an examination of the 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, produced five years after Arcade Station opened, shows very little development. The Arcade Hotel and Palm House, directly outside the station entrance provide the only commercial services within proximity of the station. Another hotel, the Narcisse, near Ceres and Central Avenue (or Wolfskill Avenue) offered furnished rooms. Otherwise only scattered dwellings dot the area.

By 1906 lots along Fifth Street and Central Avenue were populated with hotels, lodging houses, restaurants and stores. A Chinese laundry and a Japanese Bamboo Furniture factory shared the block on Fifth between Gladys and Ruth avenues with a livery stable. Another livery stable stood just north on Central Avenue near the station. The Mechanics Planing Mill stood half a block down Ceres Avenue, and the Home Building Mill and Improvement Company slightly south at the corner of Central and Sixth Street. In a more somber note, the Emergency and General Hospital spread between Towne and Crocker three blocks from the station, possibly built there to handle the numerous accidents involving rail yards. Some

industrial facilities also moved into the neighborhood after the station was built. These businesses included the National Vinegar and Pickle Factory, Weber Show Case and Fixture Company, F. O. Engstrum Iron and Cement Warehouse, and the Merchants Ice and Cold Storage Company. The Los Angeles Gas and Electric Company's machine shop and storage departments were located on the east side of Alameda. Some larger tracts of land remained vacant, and most of the smaller twenty-five by one-hundred foot lots from the original subdivision had simple dwellings. By the 1909 bird's eye view map shown in figure 12, it is evident that the city has grown out toward the old Wolfskill Orchard tract. There are fewer vacant lots, with more hotels in evidence in the blocks near the station. Third Street and Central Avenue both have multi-storied buildings dedicated to commerce, produce, manufacturing and markets. Fifth Street maintains a higher density extending from downtown Los Angeles to the Arcade Station, with enterprises such as the University of Southern California College of Dentistry, Corona Wine Company, and numerous hotels and rooming houses. The area south of the station is less commercially developed, with mostly smaller dwellings.

Dramatic changes in the city of Los Angeles occurred between the opening celebration for the Arcade Station, and its demolition twenty-five years later. In this quarter century, Los Angeles gained nearly a half-million residents, taking the population from 50,000 souls to nearly 550,000. Los Angeles gained a harbor near San Pedro and had just begun receiving a seemingly boundless supply of water through the Owens Valley aqueduct. Indications of business can be found in the

bank clearings, which totaled \$29,000 in 1888 compared to \$1,200,000,000 in 1914, and the valuation of new buildings grew from \$2,500 to nearly \$40,000,000.<sup>63</sup> Inflation must be taken into account, but even with an adjustment, the phenomenal growth signaled a certain move from a railroad town miles from a shallow harbor to a genuine city, and the next growth boom was still to come.



**Figure 12 – Detail from 1909 bird's eye map showing the Southern Pacific's Arcade Station and the surrounding neighborhood. Library of Congress, American Memory Project.**

The old Arcade continued its service to Southern Pacific passengers even as its successor, the new Central Depot, was being built next door. When Central Depot opened for business on December 1, 1914, demolition began at the old Arcade. The vast, enclosed space that had protected travelers and their trains for

twenty-five years was about to be replaced by “modern” steel-framed umbrella sheds.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 13 – Construction underway of new Central Depot (white building to right) next to the Arcade Depot train shed remnants (dark structure on left).**

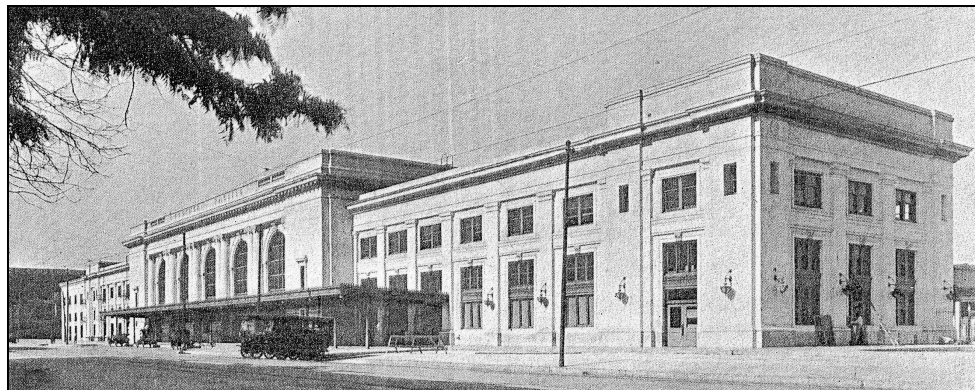
### **Central Depot, 1914-1939**

Although construction of Central Depot did not begin until 1914, the Southern Pacific announced its intention to build a new depot in 1912. Approvals were needed from both the city for franchises for access tracks, and from the California Railroad Commission for the site plans.<sup>65</sup> Telling commentary in an article published in *Southwest Contractor and Manufacturer* at the time expresses desire for a suitably imposing “union” station.

While not to be the grand natural cut stone structure designed as a union station costing a million or more, which the city had hoped would be the ultimate outcome of the popularly voiced demand during several years, the building is to be an imposing one.<sup>66</sup>



The new design, both larger, more imposing and modern than its predecessor, possessed clean, neo-classical lines. This neo-classical architecture as employed by Parkinson & Bergstrom was a simplified version of the Union Station in Washington, D.C., and built on the ideals of the City Beautiful concept that civic architecture should express monumentality and inspire a sense of pride among citizens.<sup>67</sup> The clean appearance of the white stuccoed two-story building with classical columns and arched windows on the main façade, marked a new trend in train station construction in the West. Both the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe leaned heavily on regional architectural styles such as Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival, when constructing signature depots in western towns. The architectural style chosen for Los Angeles' Central Station reinforces the importance of Los Angeles as a west coast terminus.



**Figure 14 – The Southern Pacific's Central Depot. Originally published in *The Architect and Engineer*, February 1917.**

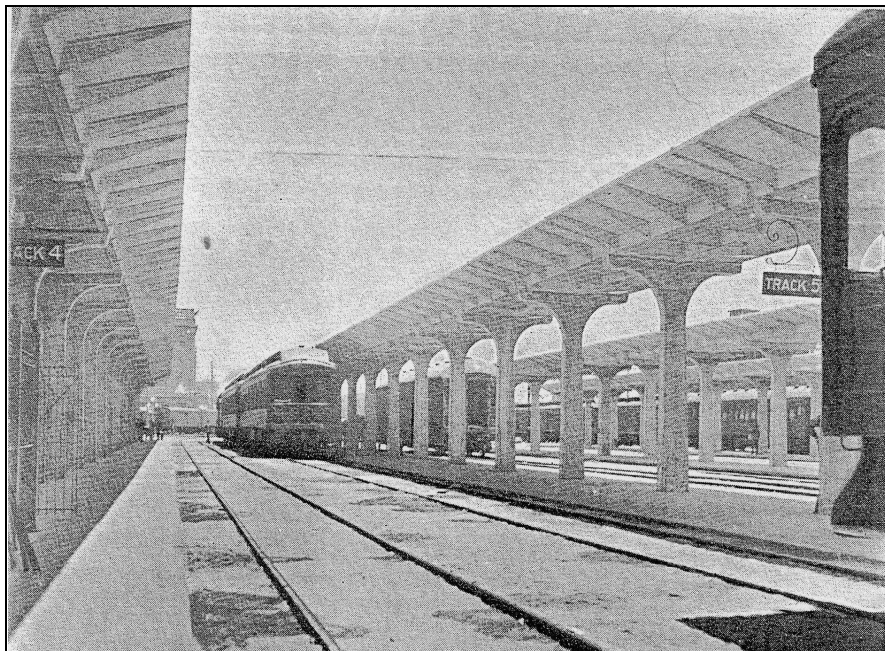
The 1891 Arcade Station's entrance was accessed via the "stub-end," or short extension, of Fifth Street crossing Central Avenue and passing between the two hotel buildings located just outside the station. When the Southern Pacific proposed to build the new Central Station fronting on Central Avenue, the Los Angeles City

Council had to agree to “vacate” the street and pass its ownership to the railroad.<sup>68</sup> This street vacation was critical so that the new “modern” station could be constructed between the old Arcade Station and Central Avenue without an interruption in service or the need to lay additional tracks. With the two hotels and other small shops that had previously separated the Arcade Depot from Central Avenue replaced by Central Depot, the new depot served as a visual endpoint on the axis of Fifth Street. In addition to acquiring the land from the city, the Southern Pacific was also obligated to spend approximately \$700,000 to secure “950 feet of property fronting on Central avenue, a portion of which came at \$750 a front foot, or better.”<sup>69</sup> This desirable strip of land comprised the hotels and storefronts that separated the Arcade Station from Central Avenue. In the burgeoning automobile age, street frontage for a train station was a necessity.

Well-known Los Angeles architects Parkinson & Bergstrom designed the new station, utilizing its frontage directly on Central Avenue, with an indentation from the street covered by a wide ornamental iron marquee measuring two hundred twenty feet long and thirty feet wide, which provided protection from both rain and excessive sun to passengers entering and exiting automobiles.<sup>70</sup> Unlike eastern stations serving more compact areas, it was essential for a new station in Los Angeles to accommodate automobiles. By 1914 when construction began, automobiles were becoming quite common: statistics from 1910 show 16,000 registered autos and from 1915, one car per every 8.2 residents. By 1918 automobile registration hit 110,000 vehicles.<sup>71</sup> According to Lucius Beebe, “by the year 1915

the horse drawn hotel buses that had met all trains at the old Arcade Station in Los Angeles were gone and guests were whisked to the Alhambra [sic] Hotel or The King Edward in autobuses bearing the names of Ford, Autocar and Maxwell.”<sup>72</sup>

The passenger terminal portion of the Arcade was demolished so that work could begin on its replacement. While construction progressed, passengers walked through the rising Central Station and found their train after passing into the Arcade’s covered train shed. The train shed remained operative until after Central Station opened, at which point it was demolished. Newer style steel-frame umbrella sheds provided the same function without trapping fumes or risk of ignition from stray sparks. The tracks for Central Station continued to be “through” tracks (as opposed to stub end) with at least fourteen tracks, double the number handled by the Arcade Station.<sup>73</sup> Eight of these tracks were protected by umbrella train sheds.



**Figure 15 – Steel “umbrella” train sheds at Central Station. Originally published in *The Architect and Engineer*, February 1917.**

Building permit #3763 was issued in February, 1914 for a brick passenger railway station, listing the following details: three stories, 80x572 feet, 33 rooms, 124 plumbing fixtures, with the cost estimated at \$300,000.<sup>74</sup> Newspaper descriptions of the completed structure provide testament to its grand appearance. Among the details, the *Los Angeles Times* reported “five great arches and [a] row of double columns . . . Italian renaissance style . . . brick and terra cotta work . . . [with a] facing of white cement,” while the interior was finished with fourteen “one-ton chandeliers” and “soft-toned woodwork” with marble wainscoting and counters.<sup>75</sup>

Local establishments provided the materials and labor force to build the new Southern Pacific station. Alta Planing Mill Company, a well-known builder in Los Angeles at the time, handled the majority of the construction. Baker Iron Works installed two freight elevators, and B. V. Collins installed marble and tile.<sup>76</sup>

The central mass of the building was Class A construction, that is, steel and reinforced concrete, while the two-story 136x80 foot south wing and the three-story 227x67 foot north wing were Class C construction.<sup>77</sup> A complete description, as published, follows:

The main section will contain a public concourse; the north wing the baggage rooms and depot offices, and the south wing the lunch and dining rooms and offices. Reinforced concrete foundations, brick walls, steel trussed roof with concrete slabs over main section, reinforced concrete stairways and corridor floors, composition roofing, cement ground floors, marble wainscot in main concourse, tile and terrazzo floors, prism glass floor lights, steel frames and sash, skylights, plate and maze wired glass, oak and pine doors, fire doors, plastered and pressed brick exterior, galvanized iron cornice, asbestos flooring felt, freight elevators, steam heat, wrought iron balustrades, fire escapes, asphalt floors in baggage rooms.<sup>78</sup>

In an innovation designed to help expedite service, train tickets were sold over a counter instead of through a ticket window, and local tickets were dispensed from a machine designed by G. B. Harrington, an engineer for the Southern Pacific.<sup>79</sup>

A deed restriction in the original deed from the Wolfskill family required that a restaurant be maintained in the train station built on their former tract of land. Station restaurants were quite common, and necessary before the introduction of dining cars in passenger trains in the early 1880s.<sup>80</sup>



**Figure 16 – General waiting room at Central Depot. Architects: Parkinson & Bergstrom. Originally published in *The Architect and Engineer*, February 1917.**

Central Station quietly opened for business on December 1, 1914. Soon after, the hulking train shed, all that was left of the old Arcade Station, was demolished.

With the completion of this imposing new station, arriving in L. A. became a more modern, sophisticated experience. Gone was the old Victorian train shed which captured soot and blocked the sun. In its place stood a gleaming white building with steel “canopies” to protect one while disembarking from a train or alighting from an automobile. Gone, too, were the extensive depot gardens so common in the late 1800s. A paved parking lot, capable of holding up to 250 cars, satisfied the “new” necessary accoutrement for an up-to-date train station.

For many in Los Angeles, the new Central Station befitted the status the city wished to project to arriving tourists. The last part of the journey along Alameda Street, however, left much to be desired. Historian Mark Wild described the residential demographics of the area between Main Street and the Southern Pacific station in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Middle-class Anglos had built many of the homes here during the nineteenth century, but encroaching industrial development drove them out of the area, leaving it for new settlers of more modest means. The denizens of Fifth Street lent the area a seedy reputation, but many working families inhabited the deteriorating homes around Skid Row. At the turn of the century, African Americans constituted one of the area’s populations, and two-thirds of the city’s 2,500 Jews lived there as well. Over the next two decades immigrants from around the world joined them, and a 1917 survey, identifying members of forty-two nationalities within its boundaries, declared it “the most cosmopolitan district of Los Angeles.”<sup>81</sup>

Dissatisfaction among some that train passengers arrived and departed from the industrial area of Los Angeles fueled the on-going debate over possible sites for a new, truly unified union station. Civic planning and the concentration of civic architecture in carefully planned settings became prevalent in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>82</sup> These ideas focused on precise plans in terms of location

and experience, not just monumental architecture, but grand architecture that fit into the overall City Beautiful. As will be discussed in chapter three, the Union Pacific, in its earlier incarnation as the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, also used the Central Station for passenger service after its own depot burned in 1924. This combined use by two separate railroad companies qualified the Southern Pacific's Central Station as a "union" station in its own right.

Central Station continued its passenger service until May 7, 1939, when all scheduled passenger trains began arriving and departing from the new Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. The grand old station remained standing until August 1956, when the Southern Pacific sold the property to Young's Market Company. The distribution center Young's constructed still stands on the site today.<sup>83</sup>

## Chapter One Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (1967; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Banning married Rebecca Sanford, the daughter of his boss at Douglass and Sanford. John W. Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad: The Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad, 1869-1873* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1978), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Tom Sitton for additional information from his research on Phineas Banning.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad*, 35 states "Authorized by the California legislature and approved by the voters, the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad was to be subsidized by \$150,000 in Los Angeles County bonds, bearing ten percent interest per annum, and \$75,000 in Los Angeles City bonds, bearing the same interest rate. The remainder of the \$400,000-plus needed to build and equip the line would be subscribed by private investment." Also City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. "The General Phineas Banning Residence Museum: Astounding Adventures" Accessed May 7, 2007. <http://www.banningmuseum.org/index.htm>

<sup>5</sup> According to Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad*, 47, the first actual train run from Los Angeles to Wilmington was on September 8, 1869.

<sup>6</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 77-78. Although the formally published name for the Railroad Commission is as noted above, in this thesis I commonly refer to the commission as the Railroad Commission or the California Railroad Commission.

<sup>7</sup> Harris Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853-1913* (Los Angeles: Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, 1970), 400-401.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad*, 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Los Angeles Star*, December 27, 1871.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad*, 70; *Los Angeles Star*, January 8, 1871.

<sup>11</sup> Larry Mullaly and Bruce Petty. *The Southern Pacific in Los Angeles, 1873-1996* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books and The Los Angeles Railroad Heritage Foundation, 2002), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad*, 71; Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California*, 401; *Los Angeles Star* April 16 and June 4, 1870.

<sup>13</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 86. This information was reported in the 1920 report, some of which is inaccurate.

<sup>14</sup> Based on research done for a historiography on early industry in Los Angeles, unpublished. Sources included Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*.

<sup>15</sup> Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, *Southern California's First Railroad*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> A legal notice published in the *Los Angeles Star* (numerous dates, for example see January 21, 1875) stated that the "Southern Pacific Railroad Company announced that it had consolidated its own stock along with that of the Los Angeles & San Pedro RR as of December 17, 1874." Another source, Donald B. Robertson, *Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History: California* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1998), 143, gives a date of December 18, 1874, one day later than Robinson.

<sup>18</sup> Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 40-41.

<sup>19</sup> Railroad posters from the time period provide colorful illustrations of these booster efforts, good sources for examples are Brad S. Lomazzi's *Railroad Timetables, Travel Brochures & Posters: A History and Guide for Collectors* (Spencertown, New York: Golden Hill Press, 1995), and K. D. and



Gary F. Kurutz. *California Calls You: The Art of Promoting the Golden State, 1870-1940* (Sausalito, CA: Windgate Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 23

<sup>21</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance map 1888 vol. 1, sheet 17b labels this business as “Los Angeles Flouring Mills”; other maps of the neighborhood can be found on sheets 12b and 16b; articles in the *Los Angeles Times* (Manufactures, July 1, 1887, 17) predating the Sanborn call the business “Los Angeles Farming and Milling Company, , one of which reports a one story, brick warehouse with galvanized roof, 65x160, costing \$9,000 in the course of erection “near the old depot,” cost of lot \$22,000 (New Buildings, August 24, 1886, 2).

<sup>22</sup> Railroad Record, *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1901, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Baker later married Arcadia Bandini de Stearns, who had sold the River Station property to the Southern Pacific in 1872.

<sup>25</sup> Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California*, 479; Robertson, *Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History, Vol. IV California*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge, MA: The M. I. T. Press, 1969), 103. Boyle Workman includes a drawing of the Santa Monica Depot on page 163 in Boyle Workman’s *The City that Grew*, however, the drawing shows two sphinxes flanking the central part of the ornate façade, with stairs leading down from a door, instead of the middle window. The tracks are drawn in the foreground, at some distance from the building. I discount this illustration because all known photographs show the train arriving along the front of the building, where Workman located the steps and the sphinxes. He continues his tale by reporting that the sphinxes were “removed and next appeared in front of a house on Alameda Street” after the Southern Pacific began using the depot.

<sup>27</sup> “A Big Blaze,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 31, 1888, 3.

<sup>28</sup> The Sanborn map from 1888 labels the passenger depot as “Southern Pacific R. R. Depot and Hotel,” and as “River Station.” Because this wooden building, and its successors on the same site, acted as the principal depot for the Southern Pacific in Los Angeles up until 1889, it was simply called the Los Angeles depot by the railroad and in some newspaper articles and advertisements. In 1889, the main passenger depot for the Southern Pacific became the newly built Arcade depot, and the River Station depot became a secondary stop, and was then referred to in newspapers as the San Fernando Street depot. With their freight business expanding and a new passenger depot further south, the Southern Pacific planned to raze the old River Station passenger depot to build a freight depot when they purchased the brick storefront across San Fernando Road from the River Station yards. Adding to the confusion, the Sanborn map from 1906 labels this small brick depot as “River Station.”

<sup>29</sup> Born Arcadia Bandini, she married a Yankee named Abel Stearns in May 1841 at age 16. (Los Angeles Public Library, California Biography File dates her marriage to 1839 at Mission San Gabriel, age 14.) Her beauty was famous and her family well-known and respected. After Abel died in 1871 leaving Arcadia a wealthy woman in her own right, she sold the land to the Southern Pacific. Arcadia remarried in 1875 to Colonel Robert S. Baker, owner of a ranch in Kern County; the Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica, which he and Senator Jones subdivided to create Santa Monica; and later the Baker Block, built on the site of Abel Stearns adobe in 1877. Robert S. Baker died in 1894, and Arcadia died in 1912, reportedly one of the richest women in America at the time. Harris Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853-1913* (Los Angeles: Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, 1970). 510; and Patricia Baker, “The Bandini Family,” *The Journal of San Diego History* 15 (1969): 1 accessed online <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/69winter/part2.htm>

<sup>30</sup> The original deeds can be read on microfilm at the Los Angeles County Recorder’s archives. The deed dated December 18, 1872 is numbered 23-136; the deed dated April 29, 1875 is numbered 34-521.

- <sup>31</sup> *Los Angeles Star*, November 30, 1872.
- <sup>32</sup> “The New S.P.R.R. Depot,” *Los Angeles Star*, April 21, 1875, 4.
- <sup>33</sup> Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 17 and 21.
- <sup>34</sup> Tie and Track, *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1888, 5.
- <sup>35</sup> Newmark, *Sixty Years*, 531. Newmark reported that his business was granted No. 5.
- <sup>36</sup> Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 20.
- <sup>37</sup> Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 71.
- <sup>38</sup> “Off to the Front,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1898, 9.
- <sup>39</sup> Newmark, *Sixty Years*, 562; Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 88-89; Boyle Workman, *The City that Grew* (Los Angeles: The Southland Publishing Company, 1935), 225 and 231; Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 85 and 112. The actual first grove planted, according to Gumprecht and Los Angeles Planning Department maps, would have been directly beneath the northbound trains as they exited the station and crossed over Fourth Street.
- <sup>40</sup> Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 51-52.
- <sup>41</sup> Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 85; Newmark, *Sixty Years*, 562; “That Depot,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1887 and The Railroads, *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1887, 1. A small news item at the end of the June 30<sup>th</sup> article informs the reader that “United States District Attorney J. Marion Brooks yesterday purchased the J. Philbin place of thirty-one acres near and south of the Wolfskill tract, upon which the Southern Pacific is expected to erect its new passenger depot. The purchase was made through T. J. Cuddy, and the price was \$175,000. Mr. Brooks will subdivide it in a short time.”
- <sup>42</sup> Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 84.
- <sup>43</sup> “Southern Pacific May Buy Market Site,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1902, A2.
- <sup>44</sup> On current day maps the Wolfskill Orchard Tract is roughly bounded by Alameda Street to the east, Sixth Street to Kohler, then down the middle of the block nearly to Seventh, west to San Pedro Street with a jog east mid-block between Fifth and Sixth to Crocker, then looping up to Third, down Central Avenue encompassing the Homestead property and back to Alameda Street. Prior to the construction of the depot, Central Avenue was named Wolfskill Lane until it reached Washington Street (now boulevard), at which point it was named Central Avenue.
- <sup>45</sup> Leland Stanford was the President of Southern Pacific Railroad from 1885 to 1890, A. N. Towne was the General Manager of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, and Charles Crocker was a former President of the railroad as well as a founding member of the Central Pacific along with Stanford. Prior to the subdivision of the land, Central Avenue was known as Wolfskill Lane and initially served as the driveway up to William Wolfskill’s residence. By 1887, both Wolfskill Street and Central Avenue were in use, and gradually the street became known only as Central Avenue. *Los Angeles Herald*, July 23, 1887, 9.
- <sup>46</sup> Tie and Track, *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1888, 2; Tie and Track, *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1888, 5; The City in Brief, *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1889, 8; Tie and Track, *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1889, 2.
- <sup>47</sup> The Central Pacific Railroad was leased to the Southern Pacific on April 1, 1885, listed by the Interstate Commerce Commission as a “non-operating” subsidiary on June 30, 1888, and finally, formally merged into the Southern Pacific on June 30, 1959. Donald B. Robertson, *Encyclopedia of Western Railroad History, Vol. IV California*, 100; Central Pacific Railroad Museum, [www.cpr.org/Museum](http://www.cpr.org/Museum).
- This Arthur Brown seems to have no relationship to Arthur Page Brown, a New York architect who worked for McKim, Mead and White, before coming to San Francisco in 1889 to design a mausoleum for Charles Crocker, and who later designed the San Francisco Ferry Building. Arthur Page Brown died in 1896 aged 36.
- <sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>49</sup> 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, vol. 2, sheet 83b.

<sup>50</sup> Carroll L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 89. In 1904 Lincoln Bush invented low, "turtle-backed" canopy train sheds which covered a platform, and contained smoke ducts over the tracks to vent smoke from train engines.

<sup>51</sup> 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map, vol. 2 sheet 83b. According to Tom Sitton, pers. comm., the local water company was the Los Angeles Water Company.

<sup>52</sup> "The New S. P. Depot," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1888, 2; Lee Gustafson and Phil Serpico, *Santa Fe Coast Lines Depots: Los Angeles Division* (Palmdale, CA: Omni Publications, 1992), 16, reports that Santa Fe used similar colors in this time period.

<sup>53</sup> During my research, I corresponded with the Central Pacific Railroad discussion group about the colors of the Arcade Depot. Many of the members offered informative insight into the discussion, and one member in particular, Kevin Bunker, gave me a very detailed and useful answer. I am quoting part of his answer, with his permission and am grateful that he was so willing to share his experience. Kevin Bunker stated: "In the mid-1980s I received a few commissions to assess and analyze historic color strata on several SP depots in Northern California that were all built between the mid-1870s and the 1890s. One, at Livermore (which was built in the 1890s) had as its first (earliest) color layer a uniform solid gray-green. Call it drab, call it olive - all its oldest exterior walls bore this somber color with strong evidence of deep red or lake window sash. At Livermore all original exterior shingles (often dip stained or painted to coordinate with wall colors) were long gone, however, having been replaced with later generations of green composition roofing allied to the post 1905 to circa 1930s "Colonial Revival" yellow, amber, brown and white colors.

SPCo and CPRR depots in the period c.1875-1885 were, by evidence gathered from four Northern California combination passenger and express depots built no earlier than 1865 and as late as 1877, were painted a duo-tone olive with white sash. These olives were bright, typically repeated twice into the early 1880s and clearly not related to the next generation of company colors.

Nevertheless, I began to see that what I had thought might be a primer layer on older depots color strata samples was in actuality a short-lived -- perhaps ten years maximum duration -- color scheme that I informally dubbed "Huntington Drab" since Collis P. Huntington, famous for his frugality, was then President of the Southern Pacific System.

In the intervening years I have examined a few more SP and CP railroad depots and found the same drab/olive color layer -- one layer only -- that always falls between the late 1880s and about 1905-15. Only one other small depot that I've been able to examine had dark red or perhaps lake window sash; the rest had off-white sash at the same historic strata levels relative to the drab/olive.

It has since become my studied opinion that SP adopted this "drab scheme" which was a variant of the then popular olives and stone-colored drabs throughout the US, but surrendered it to the more familiar yellow, amber, brown and white scheme (with green shingled roofs where appropriate) following Huntington's death and the during the build-up for increased West Coast tourism allied to the simultaneous Panama-Pacific International Exposition and Panama-California Exposition in San Diego during 1915."

<sup>54</sup> Central Pacific Railroad Discussion Group, [http://cpr.org/CPRR\\_Discussion\\_Group/2005/06/gray-paint-and-red-station-trim-in.html](http://cpr.org/CPRR_Discussion_Group/2005/06/gray-paint-and-red-station-trim-in.html)

<sup>55</sup> Also referred to as a "head house," this is the building containing offices and passenger facilities which was attached to the massive train shed.

<sup>56</sup> Buildings, *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1888, 4. According to Bruce Semelsberger, the B. B. Division mentioned here refers to "Bridges & Buildings." His explanation follows: "The railroad companies were organized into several departments, which were then further sub-divided.

Responsibility for the infrastructure maintenance fell to the Section gangs, each of which were assigned to a specific section of track, and the B&B (Bridges & Buildings) crews that maintained the depots, trestles, culverts, etc. Anything constructed of wood or steel (other than track) was theirs.

The man in charge was the Roadmaster, and under him were the foremen and the individual crews.” E-mail message to author, July 12, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Central Pacific Railroad Discussion Group,

[http://cprrr.org/CPRR\\_Discussion\\_Group/2006/01/southern-pacific-depot-colors.html](http://cprrr.org/CPRR_Discussion_Group/2006/01/southern-pacific-depot-colors.html)

<sup>58</sup> Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> “The New S. P. Depot,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1888, 2 reports the first move, and J.

Seewerker, *Nuestro Pueblo: Los Angeles, City of Romance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 82 who reports the palm was moved to Exposition Park in 1914, and marked with a bronze plaque stating, “A mute witness to the growth of Los Angeles from a community of pueblo days to a great world metropolis of today.”

<sup>60</sup> Remi Nadeau, *City-Makers: The Men Who Transformed Los Angeles from Village to Metropolis During the First Great Boom, 1868-76*, (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), 247.

<sup>61</sup> According to the *Los Angeles City and County Directory, 1887-8*, the hotels were located at the following addresses: the Grand Central Hotel at 226 N. Main, the Natick House at the corner of First and Main, the Pico House at 334 N. Main, the St. Charles Hotel at 216 N. Main, and the St. Elmo Hotel at 251 N. Main. The major hotel location furthest from Main Street was for the Bellevue Terrace, listed as “Westside, S Pearl nr W Sixth.”

<sup>62</sup> Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 97.

<sup>63</sup> “City’s Oldest Gate to Fall (Arcade Station to be demolished),” *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1914, I11.

<sup>64</sup> “New Depot Today. S. P. Abandons Arcade Station to Wreckers,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1914, I13.

<sup>65</sup> “Southern Pacific’s Classic Modern Depot for Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1913, VII. Application details from Railroad Commission of the State of California. *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 233: “Authorization for its [Central Station] construction was requested of the Commission in Application No. 793 and was granted in Decision No. 1019, dated November 25, 1913. By this decision the Commission authorized the Southern Pacific Company to tear down its then passenger station and to erect the present depot in lieu thereof, and also to take up and rearrange trackage as much as necessary.”

<sup>66</sup> *Southwest Contractor and Manufacturer* 10, no. 4 (November 30, 1912): 1.

<sup>67</sup> The City Beautiful movement influenced civic planning in the United States beginning in the early 1900s. A similar design, albeit with scaled-down proportions, appeared in Sacramento in 1926, and with a brick façade in San Jose in 1935. For images, see Janet Greenstein Potter, *Great American Railroad Stations* (New York: Preservation Press and John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996), 475 and 479.

<sup>68</sup> “Espee Depot Barrier About Swept Away,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1914, I11.

<sup>69</sup> “Southern Pacific’s Classic Modern Depot for Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1913, VII.

<sup>70</sup> “Rushing to Complete Great Espee Station,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1914, I11.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>72</sup> Lucius Morris Beebe, *The Central Pacific and the Southern Pacific Railroads* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1963), 249. He should have written “Alexandria Hotel” not “Alhambra Hotel.”

<sup>73</sup> “Southern Pacific’s Classic Modern Depot for Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1913, VII.

<sup>74</sup> This is virtually a direct quote, however, since the details listed in the source are abbreviated, I chose the clarity of complete spellings in lieu of using the actual text. From *Southwest Contractor & Manufacturer*, February 28, 1914, 35.

<sup>75</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1914, I11, and June 13, 1915, III.

<sup>76</sup> *Southwest Contractor & Manufacturer*, March 21, 1914, 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Southwest Contractor & Manufacturer*, March 21, 1914, 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Southwest Contractor & Manufacturer*, March 21, 1914, 19.

<sup>79</sup> “New Depot Today. S. P. Abandons Arcade Station to Wreckers,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1914, I13, and June 13, 1915, III.

<sup>80</sup> According to Meeks, *The Railroad Station*, pages 77-78, dining cars were first introduced in England in 1879, then used in Michigan in 1883. Around the time of the original construction on the Wolfskill tract, dining cars became commonplace.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>82</sup> Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 38.

<sup>83</sup> “Market Firm Finishes Deal for Old Rail Site,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1956, B2.

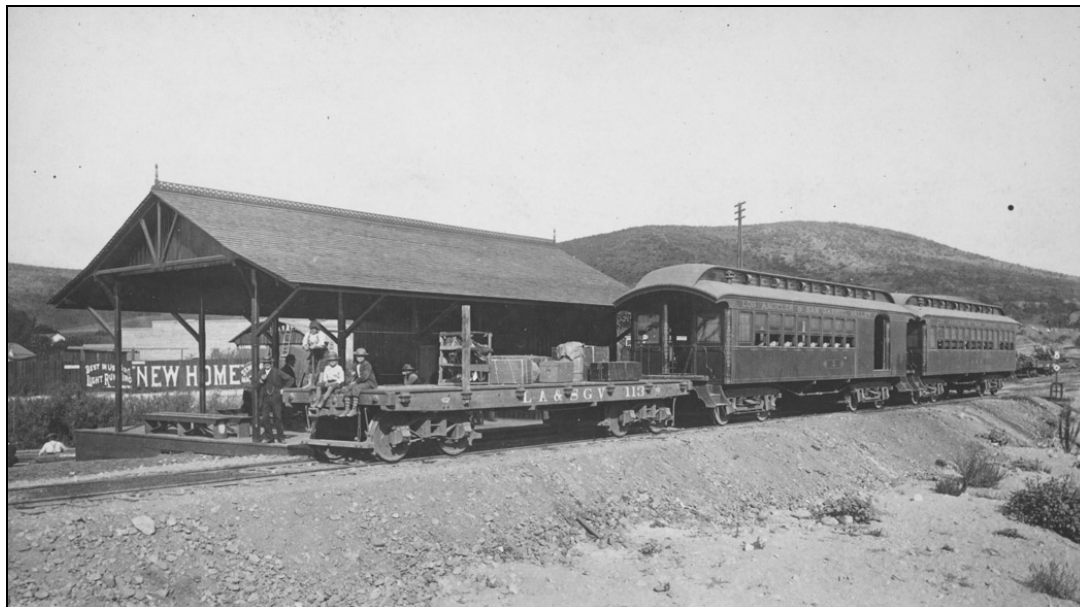
## CHAPTER TWO

### PRINCIPAL SANTA FE PASSENGER DEPOTS IN LOS ANGELES

The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad gained access to Los Angeles through an agreement with the Southern Pacific Railroad, operating on its Colton to Los Angeles track from November 29, 1885 until its own track was completed on May 24, 1887.<sup>1</sup> For the first two years the Santa Fe operated trains into Los Angeles, the company shared the Southern Pacific's River Station on San Fernando Street. According to the California Railroad Commission,

The Santa Fe, through a subsidiary company, the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway Company, started the construction of a second line from San Bernardino to Los Angeles. This route ran in a westerly direction from San Bernardino through what is known as the Santa Ana Valley, and entered the City of Los Angeles from the south by crossing the Los Angeles River just south of Butte Street and paralleling the river on the west bank to First Street, where it connected with the tracks of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley Railroad [to] where the La Grande station of the Santa Fe [was later] located.<sup>2</sup>

After gaining their own right-of-way into Los Angeles, the first depot used by the Santa Fe was a small building built by the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Valley Railroad just to the north of the Downey Avenue overcrossing on the west side of the Los Angeles River.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 17 – Los Angeles & San Gabriel Valley Railroad depot. This photograph appears to be of the depot located at the Downey Avenue viaduct which was the first depot used by the Santa Fe Railroad independently of the Southern Pacific’s operations. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.**

This rectangular building consisted of a large open air “waiting room” with an enclosed end containing a small telegraph and ticket office. Although it was a simple building, Victorian Stick-style details added decorative elements. The gable roof was supported by prominent brackets and a decorative brace on the gable end. An elaborately pierced false ridgepole ran the length of the roof’s ridge and terminated with ridge spikes on each end. Wooden benches were provided for passengers to sit on while waiting for the train. This simple depot served as the Santa Fe’s main passenger depot for only a short time while another depot was being constructed.<sup>4</sup> It did, however, continue in use until at least July 1888 by the California Central Railway Company, which was formed when eight subsidiary branches of the Santa Fe system were consolidated.

In 1886, the Santa Fe purchased land from a number of different owners near the First Street bridge to consolidate a large parcel where they could base their Los Angeles facilities. A search of property deeds yields the name of M. L. Wicks as the grantee. Along with Howard W. Mills, he purchased large blocks of land, including the Santa Fe site, and extended Second Street east to Santa Fe Avenue, where it later led into the La Grande Station (built in 1893).<sup>5</sup> Of the land that became Santa Fe property, approximately fifty acres on the west side of the Los Angeles River running south from First Street were purchased from Mrs. L. M. Bigelow, a widow, for \$77,000, an additional twelve acres south of the Bigelow property were purchased from Mrs. Apollonia Huber (also a widow) and finally approximately three acres improved with a row of small houses standing along First Street next to the bridge were purchased for an unspecified price.<sup>6</sup> These purchases gave the Santa Fe a sixty acre block of land running alongside the Los Angeles River upon which to build their depots, yard and railroad shops.

The third depot Santa Fe occupied in Los Angeles was built on its grounds in 1887 south of First Street and east of Santa Fe Avenue, roughly on the block across from where Topeka and Atchison streets (later renamed Second and Third streets respectively) intersected Santa Fe Avenue.<sup>7</sup> This depot was constructed under the auspices of one of its subsidiary railroads, the California Central. In a surprise notice, the California Central announced on June 1, 1887 that all of their passenger and freight services would henceforth commence from their own depots on the land near First Street and Santa Fe Avenue. Prior to that, all Santa Fe operations used the



Southern Pacific's yards at the River Station, but, upon expiration of their two-year contract, the Santa Fe and its subsidiaries were free to move operations to their own site.<sup>8</sup>

Constructed in a utilitarian manner, the California Central passenger depot was a simple wooden structure measuring twenty feet by sixty feet with tracks accessing the depot from both the east and west sides. Appearing more like a country depot than the principle Los Angeles passenger depot for a transcontinental railroad, the simple depot lacked the regional architectural style that the Santa Fe railroad later became known for in the West.<sup>9</sup> In a nod to the importance of Los Angeles as a destination, the Santa Fe began planning a new depot to reflect both the potential of Los Angeles and the desire of the Santa Fe to meet Los Angeles' transcontinental needs. After the La Grande passenger depot opened, this frame depot was reportedly moved to another location.<sup>10</sup>

### **La Grande Depot 1893-1939**

Undoubtedly the most exotic looking depot passengers encountered in their western travels, the design for the new La Grande depot was conceived by a young draftsman, Frank Levet, who worked in the engineering department of the A.T. & S.F.<sup>11</sup> Levet's Moorish domes, crenelated towers, arched porte cochère, and elaborate brickwork provided a unique tourist experience for locals and travelers alike. Historians Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie nicely summarize this trend in depot architecture internationally.

Spires, corner towers, belfries, even unusually shaped domes soon adorned all but the smaller frame stations. Elaborate wood and iron work,

overhanging eaves, portes cocheres, and all sorts of architectural ornamentation all conveyed a sense of the romance of travel, identified the station as a landmark, and offered the various companies the opportunity to distinguish themselves by particular 'house' characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

Elements of the design, such as the heavy masonry arches and the steeply pitched conical roof called to mind popular Richardsonian Romanesque station architecture used in the eastern United States in the same time period. While the La Grande depot exhibited these elements of Richardsonian Romanesque, the overall design contained strong elements of "Moresque" or "Moorish" details that reflected the transition between Richardsonian Romanesque and Mission style that was occurring in the West. Another excellent example of this transition style is the surviving Hotel Green Annex in Pasadena, now known as Castle Green. Built in 1898, five years after the La Grande, the style of the Hotel Green Annex contained strong Moorish elements, such as ribbed domes, tripartite recessed balconies, and an arched porte cochere, under which the Santa Fe's California Limited would stop to drop off passengers, however its massing and the stucco exterior evoked the old Spanish missions. Karen Weitze pegs the height of popularity of Mission Revival depots in the West from 1905 until 1915.<sup>13</sup> This ten year period best epitomizes the image that the Santa Fe carefully crafted with its regional style depots. Although the La Grande predates this period, its style was clearly a precursor to the Santa Fe's later move away from more traditional wooden depot buildings.

The depot actually consisted of two buildings, the main passenger building and a more pedestrian baggage and express office to the south, connected via a covered area billed as an open air waiting room.



**Figure 18 - Postcard of La Grande depot, view from northwest side showing Santa Fe Avenue in foreground. Personal collection.**

Bricks were a dependable commodity in Los Angeles, and no real connection had yet been made between building with un-reinforced masonry and earthquakes. Instead, by constructing their new depot with brick, the Santa Fe affirmed the importance of Los Angeles as a destination and succeeded in building the most permanent passenger depot to date. Railroad companies employed architects who generally produced standard designs with varying degrees of complexity which were used for any new depot construction along each line. Depot size, amenities and design indicated each town's relative importance in relation to other stops, and bricks were used for important depots on a railroad, not for flag stops or cow-towns. By creating a unique design and specifying brick and sandstone construction, the Santa Fe assigned a special status to pre-1900 Los Angeles. Without doubt, the Santa Fe was also aware that bricks laid in an exotic Moorish style would attract passengers. One of the speakers at the La Grande's formal opening ceremony, Assemblyman

Robert Bulla, nicely summed up the unique style in remarking that the new depot was “an ornament to the city.”<sup>14</sup>

In other western railroad towns most Santa Fe depots pre-dating 1900 were wooden structures which too easily caught fire.<sup>15</sup> There were some exceptions, with brick construction becoming more prevalent, note Lee Gustafson and Phil Serpico. They lists stations such as the ones at Santa Anita, Perris and Patton, which “exhibited a wide use of circular, arched and angled decorative brickwork, that when coupled with the use of balconies, turrets and domes produced a combination depot of impressive design.”<sup>16</sup> Other brick stations of the time period were constructed not by the railroad, but by land developers who hoped to ensure their new town’s success with easy rail access. Brick depots in La Mirada, Raymond and Val Verde reflected the developer’s sense of importance of the future community rather than the Santa Fe’s investment.<sup>17</sup> As railroad profits increased along with tourism of the west, the Santa Fe began constructing many of their depots in the Mission style using stucco exteriors. Reflecting the southwestern experience, these later depots, many with Harvey Houses, helped establish a corporate identity for the Santa Fe as a western railway.<sup>18</sup>

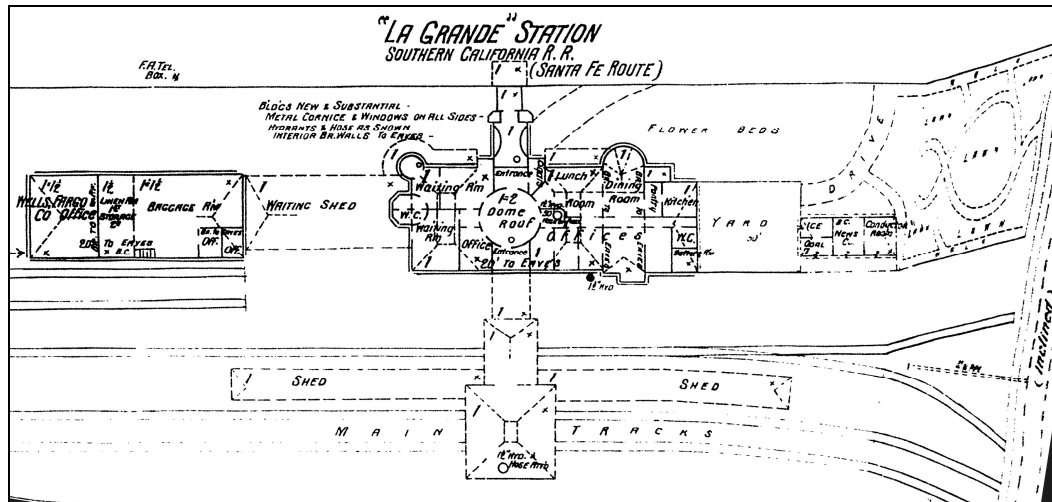


Figure 19 – Plan of La Grande Station, showing the depot, train shed and gardens in 1894. Santa Fe Avenue is at the top of the drawing and First Street is to the right. (Note that the gardens to the right are distorted due to scanning limitations from the original map.)

Detail from 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, vol. 1 sheet 28a.

Accessed via Los Angeles Public Library.

On July 29, 1893 the La Grande station officially opened for passenger use.

The main building was three hundred twenty feet long, with the nearby baggage/express building measuring ninety by forty feet. Exterior materials consisted of pressed brick and Flagstaff sandstone from Arizona. The *Los Angeles Times* described the new depot as follows:

The building . . . is broken into many lines and given a graceful yet improving appearance for a one-story structure . . . The central and highest portion is surmounted by a dome which is a suggestion of the Orient. Beneath this is the rotunda, tile floored and open to the apex of the roof, lighted by a row of stained-glass narrow windows in the lancet arches. About other portions of the sky line there are suggestions of the architecture of the Alhambra, of Moorish origin, while the square and sexangular battlemented turrets, which face the building where begins the wing comprising a porte cochere and a similar structure for pedestrians, remind the beholder of feudal castles.<sup>19</sup>

The rotunda, irreparably damaged in the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, measured seventy-five feet in circumference. The depot had three indoor waiting

rooms, the larger one dedicated to ladies opened off the rotunda, with a smaller adjoining room that was carpeted, and boasted upholstered window seats, a fireplace and a water cooler. The men's waiting room, located beside the ladies waiting rooms, also had a fireplace and comfortable seats, but without the upholstery. Restroom facilities were located in both the men's and ladies' waiting rooms. The north end of the building contained lunch rooms, a kitchen and offices for railroad employees. Interiors were trimmed with Oregon pine and redwood.

Containers of iced water brought in from Colorado were served at the opening ceremony, a promotional move that is not as unusual as it sounds. Many western towns had poor quality water supplies and the railroads often brought water from better sources in stainless steel or glass-lined tank cars.<sup>20</sup> Although water was not regularly transported into Los Angeles, nevertheless providing "exotic" water from Colorado helped to make the grand opening a special event.

Added to the depot in 1900 was a Fred Harvey lunch counter, able to seat twenty customers at a time. Unlike many Santa Fe depots, the La Grande did not have a full-blown Harvey House, most likely because it was a "terminal" station so most passengers left the station upon disembarking from the train.<sup>21</sup> Many other Santa Fe depots in the West around the turn of the century contained a Fred Harvey dining room, lunch counter and often a hotel as well. Harvey revolutionized dining in the West by emulating the service provided by exclusive restaurants – linen tablecloths, uniformed, highly trained waitresses and fine food served in a quick and efficient manner. Harvey's system was at its finest when challenged to serve large

numbers of passengers a four course meal in thirty minutes. When planning began for the new union passenger terminal in Los Angeles, one of the Santa Fe's contributions was a Harvey House restaurant, complete with an interior designed by Mary Elizabeth Coulter.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 20 - Gardens at Santa Fe's La Grande station. Courtesy of University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Special Collections.**

La Grande Station, like its contemporary, the Southern Pacific's Arcade Station, maintained beautiful gardens for tourists, passengers and townsfolk to admire, picnic and stroll in while waiting for a train, or simply to while away an afternoon. The gardens at La Grande included flower beds, lawns, agaves, palm trees and a "figure eight" path patterned after the Kite-shaped track in Los Angeles.<sup>23</sup> A newspaper article pre-dating the La Grande depot describes another graphic promotion of the kite-shaped tract: "An attractive and highly colored elucidation of

the geographical peculiarities and scenic advantages of the kite-shaped track has been painted upon the window of the Santa Fe's Spring Street ticket office."<sup>24</sup>

The neighborhood around La Grande Station grew slowly. Even though the station opened for passenger use in 1893, the 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows no improvements on the lots across from the station. The closest lodging house was one block distant, at the corner of Vignes and the alley between First and Second streets.

A huge lumber yard – Stimson Mill Company – conducted business and stored lumber across Santa Fe Avenue and one block south from the La Grande Station. Behind the lumber company were the Santa Fe Planing Mills and Culver and Little Manufacturing Company. Rail spurs ran into the Stimson Mill Company, a necessity when keeping transportation costs low for companies dealing in heavy or bulky materials.<sup>25</sup>





**Figure 21 – Detail from 1909 bird’s eye map showing Santa Fe’s La Grande station and the surrounding neighborhood. The First Street viaduct over the Los Angeles River is shown in the upper right corner. Library of Congress, American Memory Project.**

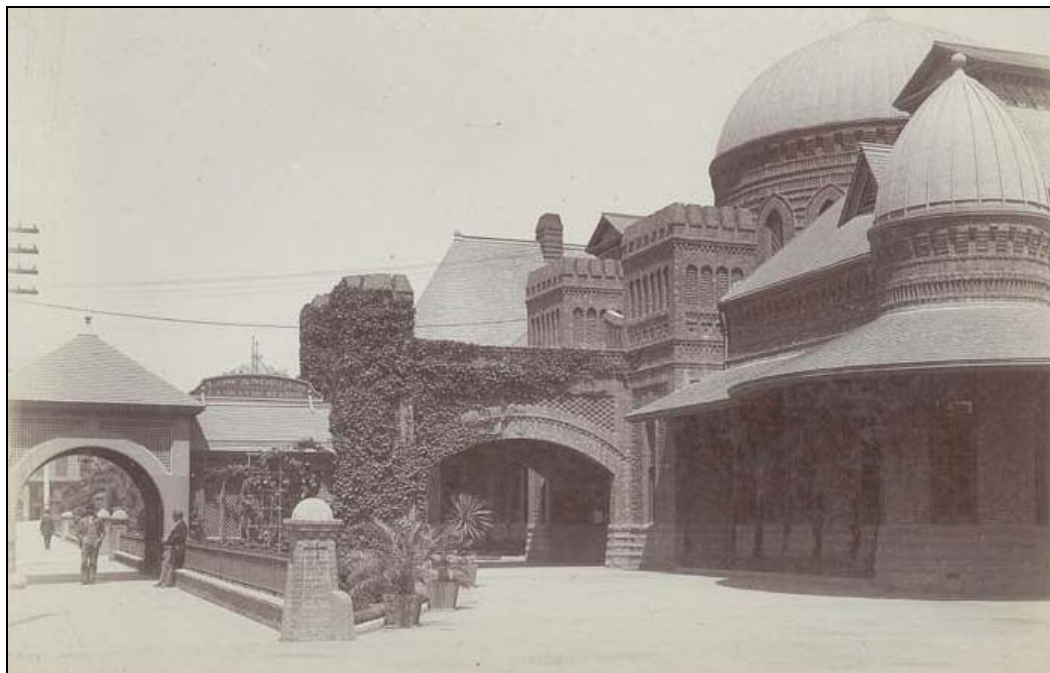
By 1909, the station faced multi-story wholesale buildings across Santa Fe Avenue. Since the Santa Fe freight depot was located in the next block to the south and on the opposite side of the street from La Grande, the proliferation of companies in the area who relied on rail lines to transport goods was logical.

Throughout the early years of rail travel in Los Angeles, arrivals were often printed in the newspaper ostensibly so that one could search for names of friends or family returning to the city, but more likely to satisfy the curiosity of residents. Passenger lists were often telegraphed ahead so that they could be published before the arrival of a train. Other lists identified passengers by which hotel they were checking into. Numerous passenger lists can be found, but as an example, one

particularly telling *Los Angeles Times* article detailing the occupants of a Santa Fe Pullman train in 1887 begins with:

Below will be found the complete list of the great Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe excursion which arrived yesterday in 21 Pullman cars. The first section arrived at 4 p.m., and the other two at 10 p.m. The list, thanks to lazy and incompetent work by the excursion agents who made it up, was in frightful shape – only the list of the third section being done up in a workmanlike shape. With a tedious amount of labor, the list has been revamped in this office, so that the places from which the tourists come are alphabetically arranged and one can find in a moment if an expected friend has come. No other paper in the city will present the list in this shape.<sup>26</sup>

Following this pointed declaration is a list of four hundred ninety persons, along with their embarkation points. No further descriptive text is included, the simple fact of arrival in Los Angeles was newsworthy.



**Figure 22 – La Grande depot, perspective view from street. California State Library. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.**

The La Grande served Santa Fe passengers well until the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, a 6.2 magnitude temblor, which caused extensive damage, especially to un-reinforced masonry buildings. An excerpt from the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

Many [people] were struck down by flying bricks . . . roofs, walls and other portions of many of the older buildings, particularly in the industrial section of the city, crashed into the streets before the full force of the first quake had expended itself.<sup>27</sup>

La Grande's large Moorish dome suffered extensive damage although the rest of the masonry depot survived. After the earthquake, the dome was removed, leaving a building with a distinctly less Moorish appearance. Because the union passenger terminal debate was nearing a conclusion, the Santa Fe continued to use the La Grande as a passenger station until May 7, 1939 when all Los Angeles passenger service moved to the new terminal. La Grande, a shadow of its former self, continued in use as a freight office until it was demolished in 1946 to make way for a new freight terminal.<sup>28</sup>

## Chapter Two Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donald Duke, *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, Vol. 2, *Passenger and Freight Service, the Fred Harvey System, Steam and Diesel Locomotives, Signals, Communications, and the Santa Fe Emblem* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1997), 299. Page 82 of the Railroad Commission of the State of California's *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination* clarifies the agreement: "At Barstow connection was made with the Atlantic and Pacific road, then owned jointly by the Santa Fe and the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company. Completion of this line, together with a traffic agreement with the Southern Pacific from Colton to Los Angeles, allowed the Santa Fe to inaugurate through train service from Kansas City to Los Angeles. For an elegant, concise and understandable history of the Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe's efforts to establish a railroad to the Pacific, I recommend Donald Duke's *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, Vol. 1, *Chicago-Los Angeles-San Diego* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1995), 11-20.

<sup>2</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 82-83.

<sup>3</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination* states that this was the first depot used by Santa Fe, however, their history of depots carries a disclaimer that it was partially constructed from the anecdotes of "old-timers" and was found to contain errors, 52; Donald Duke's book *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, Vol. 2 lists all the main passenger stations Santa Fe used in Los Angeles and identifies this one as the second station to be used, 505. "The Wreck," *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 1886, 1, reports that the Downey Avenue depot was destroyed in the catastrophic flooding that wiped out much railroad infrastructure that year, this depot was apparently rebuilt before the Santa Fe began to use it.

<sup>4</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance map 1888, vol. 1, Sheet 4b; Duke, *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, vol. 2, 505.

<sup>5</sup> Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California*, 476-477. Newmark notes that Moses Langley Wicks was a Mississippi native, who had a law office in Anaheim before coming to Los Angeles and beginning to deal in real estate. The Wicks and Mills original subdivision can be found in Los Angeles Miscellaneous Records book 13-87 and 13-88. Second Street was originally named Topeka Street.

<sup>6</sup> "Railroads," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1886, 8; Los Angeles County Deed 182-282 from Bigelow to M. L. Wicks. The math does not quite work out as Mills & Wicks subdivided some of the land they purchased, not all of it was used by the Santa Fe. In fact, a close estimate of the parcel bounded by Santa Fe Avenue, First Street, the Los Angeles River and Third Street yields a total size of only forty acres. Additional land tapers off both to the north and south and was not included in the calculation.

<sup>7</sup> This location, misidentified in other works, was taken from the following map: *Compiled from Surveys made by the City Surveyor during 1886 and from Records on File in the County Recorders Office*, dated Nov 1887. This shows definite locations for both a passenger depot and a freight depot. The passenger depot appears to be sited just south of where the La Grande was eventually constructed, which would explain why it remained in use during the construction but does not show up in the commonly published photo of La Grande under construction with the Salt Lake depot across the Los Angeles River in the background.

<sup>8</sup> The Santa Fe operated in Southern California through sometimes complicated agreements/acquisitions/mergers, etc. with other railroads. Briefly, as of June 1, 1887 when the new stations opened, the Santa Fe operated in conjunction with the California Central, which comprised eight different roads under the control of the Santa Fe, and the California Southern, which served San Diego up past Riverside to Barstow, but did not go through Los Angeles.

<sup>9</sup> Santa Fe's newly built freight depot suffered a devastating fire on October 28, 1887 when it caught fire on "oil day," that is, the day tank cars filled with oil were sitting next to the depot. The depot burned to the ground along with "eight oil cars," and another ten freight cars were mostly ruined. The same *Los Angeles Times* article reports that the passenger depot, located more than 200 yards away (to the north near First Street), was undamaged. "A \$200,000 Fire," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1887, 1. Undoubtedly this also provided an incentive to build from less flammable materials, as a brief mention of the new depot reports. "The building of the new Santa Fe depot is now under fair headway and the bricklayers were busy yesterday." Briefs, *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1887, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Gustafson and Serpico, *Coast Lines Depots, Los Angeles Division*, 109. They report the depot was moved on July 27, 1893, but do not indicate where it was moved.

<sup>11</sup> Duke, *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, vol. 2, 493. Duke cites *Railway Review*, March 25, 1891, 151. According to Karen J. Weitze, *California's Mission Revival* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1984), 66, a man named B. F. Levet, working as a company architect for Santa Fe, designed its San Juan Capistrano station in a Mission Revival style. This is probably the same person who designed La Grande depot.

<sup>12</sup> Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Weitze, *California's Mission Revival*, 85.

<sup>14</sup> "La Grande," *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1893, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Some burned more than once, a few California examples: the 1897 depot in Needles burned in 1906; the 1884 depot in San Bernardino burned in 1916; the 1886 California Southern depot in Barstow burned in 1887, was rebuilt by Santa Fe and burned again in 1892, was rebuilt again and burned again in 1908, after which it was built in brick. Fires often started from sparks escaping steam locomotives or from cooking fires in rudimentary kitchens. Depot examples taken from Duke, 390-391.

<sup>16</sup> Gustafson and Serpico, *Coast Lines Depots, Los Angeles Division*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> For a concise discussion on railroad's efforts to "brand" themselves, see Potter, *Great American Railroad Stations*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> "La Grande," *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1893, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Duke, *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, vol. 2, 379.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Duke has an excellent chapter on Fred Harvey and the Santa Fe in *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, vol. 2.

<sup>23</sup> The kite-shaped track was a railroad track laid in a figure 8 pattern so that the locomotive never had to be turned around, nor were passengers forced to endure the same views on their return journey!

<sup>24</sup> Railroad Affairs, *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1892, 4.

<sup>25</sup> 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, vol. 1, sheet 27b. Accessed via Los Angeles Public Library.

<sup>26</sup> "By Train-loads," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1887, 8. Note that a few entries stated "and family" leaving no clear indication of how many additional persons, in which case two persons were assumed in the count. Regularly scheduled trains were often divided into "sections" to accommodate all passengers who wished to travel. These sections were operated separately on the tracks but were considered to be part of the same train, and would fly colored flags and use a different color of light for the engine and marker lights to indicate that another passenger train was following so the track was not yet clear. Personal communication with Richard E. Borstadt of the International Border Rail Institute.

<sup>27</sup> "Scores Perish in Southland Quake," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1933, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Duke, *Santa Fe: The Railroad Gateway to the American West*, Vol. 2, 497.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PRINCIPAL SALT LAKE/UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD PASSENGER DEPOTS IN LOS ANGELES**

The Union Pacific Railroad gained entry into Los Angeles through an already established company, the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company. The S. P., L. A. & S. L. R. R. Co., incorporated in 1901, built a railroad running from the harbor at San Pedro, to Los Angeles, towards Salt Lake City via Las Vegas. After negotiations with the Union Pacific, who controlled trackage already constructed from Salt Lake City to the Utah/Nevada border, the Union Pacific gained a fifty percent ownership interest in the S. P., L. A. & S. L. R. R. in exchange for the rail lines already constructed. The line from Salt Lake towards Las Vegas connected with the southern section in 1905, giving the Union Pacific transcontinental access to Los Angeles.

The San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company shortened its name to the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company on August 25, 1916, and fell under the operation of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1921. Union Pacific Railroad, which had been operating as the Union Pacific System, consolidated its holdings under one company on January 1, 1936, when the Los Angeles & Salt Lake ceased to exist.<sup>1</sup>

The San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company began service as a reorganization of the Los Angeles Terminal Railway Company, a railroad originally incorporated on January 1, 1891. The Terminal Railway ceased to exist on

March 31, 1901 when the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake took over its trackage and facilities.

### **Los Angeles Terminal Railway Company Land**

After its incorporation, the Los Angeles Terminal Railway Company sought a land concession from the Los Angeles City Council. Sixty acres were granted to the company giving them a right-of-way through the city along the east bank of the Los Angeles River.<sup>2</sup> T. B. Burnette, General Manager of the Los Angeles Terminal Railway, reported in April 1891, that the company had just completed the purchase of “a strip of land on the east bank of the river near First Street, 200 feet wide and 5000 feet long . . . and will build a depot upon it as soon as the road can be built down to it.”<sup>3</sup> Until their new depot was constructed, the Terminal Railroad used the little depot on Downey Avenue that was also used by the Santa Fe as a secondary passenger station.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 23 – Salt Lake depot at First Street on the east side of the Los Angeles River, originally the Terminal Railway Company depot. California Railroad Commission book, 244.**

## **Los Angeles & Salt Lake Passenger Depot 1891/1901-1924**

The elaborate, two story Victorian stick style structure shown in figure 23 was built on the east bank of the Los Angeles River just south of First Street at its intersection with Myers Street. This new depot originally served the Los Angeles Terminal Railway's passengers and was completed and open for business in October 1891. The road itself was completed as far as Long Beach on October 22 and further construction continued it to San Pedro.

The San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad took over operations at the depot in April 1901, with the only change in the depot being new names in the gold lettering, spelling out "The Salt Lake Route" and "San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad."<sup>5</sup> The actual connection to Salt Lake City remained elusive until nearly four years later, when the first through train entered Los Angeles on April 17, 1905.<sup>6</sup>

Deep overhanging roofs on both the first floor and the top of the depot were supported by prominent stick-style brackets that were painted a contrasting color to emphasize the building's details. Supporting brackets for the upper roof also contained Victorian gingerbread details. Decorative boards on the façade were painted in a contrasting color, expressing the idea of an exposed frame construction. The second floor balcony, a nod to benign Southern California weather, was used by the station agent to watch for approaching trains. Most smaller depots accommodated the need to watch for trains by placing a bay window on the trackside of the depot. As Marcus Whiffen notes, "an important part of the purpose of the



deep eaves and numerous minor projections of rafters and beams was to provide visual relief through shadow in the bare and brilliant setting” of Southern California.<sup>7</sup>

Both the location and the amenities of the Salt Lake depot indicate it was built by a local railroad with a smaller capital endowment. While still more elaborate than a single story, board-and-batten country depot, the Salt Lake depot did not provide shelter for passengers while boarding trains. Additionally, its location on the east side of the Los Angeles River made it less convenient to downtown for tourists and residents alike. Photos and drawings from the time often show La Grande depot with the Salt Lake depot in the distance across the river. Certainly, the Salt Lake’s position on the east bank of the Los Angeles River left it in a more low-density commercial and residential area, as opposed to the more industrially-oriented growth that took place around the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific stations on the west side of the river.

The design and construction of the Salt Lake depot occurred toward the end of the Victorian period. Two years later, in 1893, the La Grande depot debuted with its fanciful arches, roofs and dome. According to architectural historian Carroll Meeks, this was the height of the picturesque eclecticism in railroad architecture that dominated the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The City Beautiful movement, stemming from a desire for organization, civic pride and more comprehensive city planning, prompted a collective change in the civic consciousness regarding the planning and design of cities and civic structures after the turn of the century. As noted regarding the Southern Pacific’s Central depot, constructed in 1914, its neo-

classical appearance was an outgrowth of this influence. Within ten years' of the completion of the Salt Lake route, the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railway began planning for a new train station in Los Angeles, one that would reflect its importance to the city as a third transcontinental line.

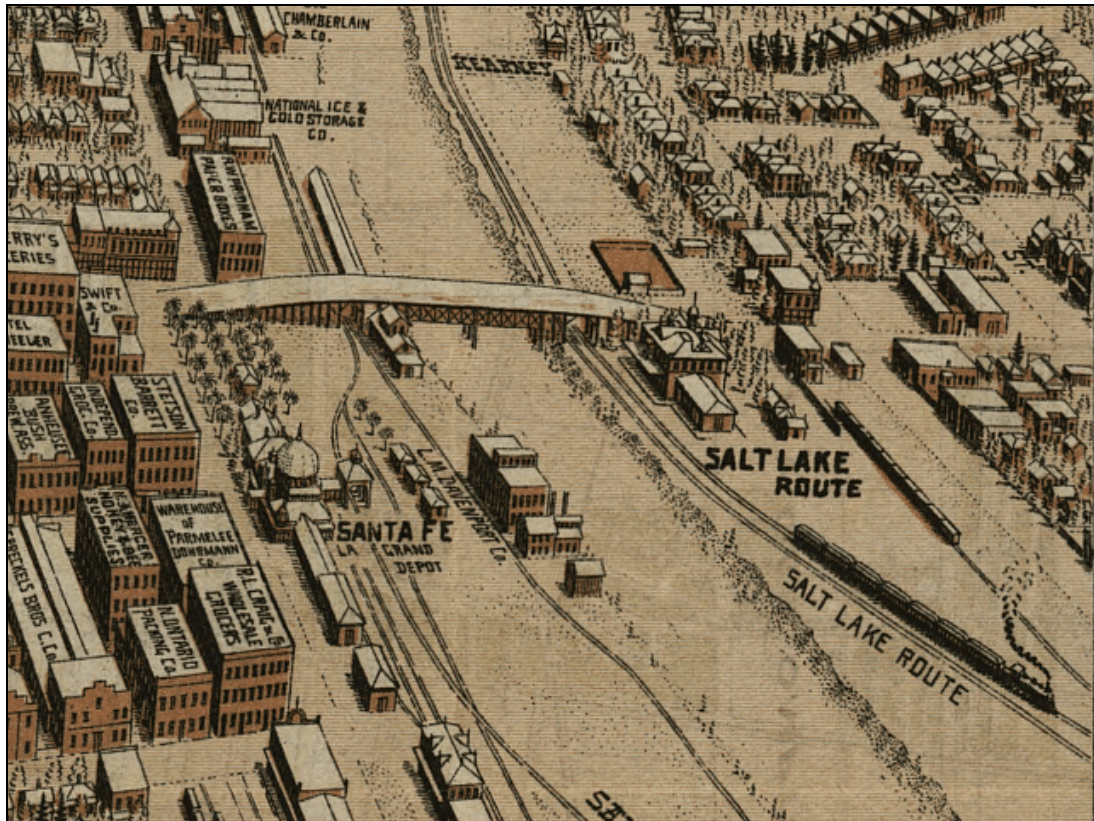


Figure 24 – Salt Lake depot, showing relationship to La Grande depot, the Los Angeles River and the surrounding neighborhood. Detail from 1909 bird's eye map. Library of Congress, American Memory Project.

In early 1915, the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railway commissioned Los Angeles architects Sumner Hunt and Silas Burns to design a new passenger depot to be built on the east side of the Los Angeles River south of Seventh Street on land they purchased from the Simons Brick Company. In conjunction with their plans to establish a new station, Los Angeles & Salt Lake officials presented their request for

certain street vacations and franchises for tracks to the Public Works and Public Utilities Committees of the Los Angeles City Council at the end of January 1915.<sup>9</sup> The proposed depot, designed in a classical style with Spanish touches, was to be two stories high with wings on either side of the main structure.<sup>10</sup> The building was to be somewhat similar in design to the Southern Pacific's Central depot, which, coincidentally, the Salt Lake would be operating out of starting in 1924. This proposed neo-classical style depot was never constructed. Instead, according to the California Railroad Commission report, the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad did maintain a shelter at Seventh Street and the Los Angeles River where local trains would stop. This appears to be the only passenger usage of this proposed site.<sup>11</sup>

As passenger operations became more complex, the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific petitioned the city council in 1917 to allow joint use of the Southern Pacific's Central Station for passenger trains. Contingent upon this plan was a proposal to move freight operations to the east bank of the Los Angeles River, where the Salt Lake depot stood. The railroads asked for a twenty-one year franchise to re-route freight traffic, an issue that conflicted with the contentious question of establishing a union terminal near the plaza. Although opinions calling for a union terminal had been openly expressed since the early 1900s, by 1924 the issue reached a crescendo – a battle that would rage for another decade. Councilman Gregory stated, “Regardless of stipulations by the railroads that they will not use this temporary joint occupation of the Arcade [actually Central] Depot as an argument against the Plaza project, the fact will be there and will speak for itself.”<sup>12</sup> Their

reluctance reflected the concern that allowing any concessions would impede the fight to establish a union station under terms acceptable to the council. Although final authority to grant the permits did not lie with the city council, but rather with the California Railroad Commission, numerous organizations opposed the city council's decision to move forward. Among those opposing the revocable permits were the Business Men's Cooperative Association and the Central Development Association, both of whom had sponsored their own versions of a union terminal near the Plaza; the Lincoln Heights Board of Trade; the Hollenbeck Heights Improvement Association; the North Main Street Improvement Association; and Harry Hawgood and Samuel Storrow, authors of two proposed union terminal plans.

The third principal depot to burn in Los Angeles, the Salt Lake depot caught fire on March 11, 1924.<sup>13</sup> The upper floor and attic were destroyed along with records of the Union Pacific Railroad which were stored in the attic. Faulty electrical wiring in the north end of the attic was blamed for the fire.<sup>14</sup> Trains continued to stop at the depot, but it was not re-built. Instead, the Union Pacific pushed the California Railroad Commission for permission to consolidate their passenger operations with the Southern Pacific at the commodious Central Station. When formal permission was granted on August 19, 1924, the first concrete step was taken toward consolidating passenger service in Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup>

## Chapter Three Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maury Klein, *Union Pacific* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 288; and Alvin A. Fickewirth, *California Railroads: An Encyclopedia of Cable Car, Common Carrier, Horsecar, Industrial Interurban, Logging, Monorail, Motor Road, Short Lines, Streetcar, Switching and Terminal Railroads in California (1851-1992)* (San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1992), 72; Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 84; J. W. Barriger, III, "The Development of Railway Corporate Structures," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 7, No. 3 (Summer 1940), 372.

<sup>2</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 84.

<sup>3</sup> "The Railroads," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1891, 8. Another article in the *Los Angeles Times* ("The Railroads," May 8, 1891, 3) reports that the deeds to the property were "formally delivered" to the Terminal Railway Company on May 7, 1891.

<sup>4</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 84.

<sup>5</sup> Railroad Record, *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1901, 13 and Railroad Record, *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1901, 7.

<sup>6</sup> "First Train of the Salt Lake," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1905, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1969), 211.

<sup>8</sup> Meeks, *The Railroad Station*, 25

<sup>9</sup> *Southwest Contractor & Manufacturer*, January 30, 1915, 16 and February 6, 1915, 13.

<sup>10</sup> "Great Station East of River," *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1915, III describes the proposed station and contains an artist's rendering.

<sup>11</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 245.

<sup>12</sup> As quoted in "Rail Franchise Trickery Seen," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1924, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Other principal depots that burned were the Santa Monica depot in 1888 and the Santa Fe freight depot in 1887.

<sup>14</sup> "Fire Wrecks Old Depot," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1924, A1.

<sup>15</sup> "Joint Espee Station Use is Approved," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1924, 11

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **WHY A UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL? PUBLIC OPINION, GOVERNMENT POLICY & POTENTIAL SITES**

#### **Why Unify?**

Accidents involving trains began nearly as soon as trains arrived in town, and the problem intensified as the city continued to grow around the tracks and the depots. The increasing number of pedestrians, horses, electric streetcars and automobiles competing on city streets with both passenger and freight trains created major hazards for a populace not accustomed to the speed and power of a locomotive. Beginning in 1893, arriving Southern Pacific passenger trains steamed through town down a long stretch of Alameda Street before arriving at Arcade Station. Numerous newspaper articles of the day enumerate countless tragedies involving trains. By 1916, civic groups were clamoring for relief in the form of grade crossing elimination. Grade crossing elimination simply meant separating train tracks from intersections with other forms of transportation to the greatest extent possible. Eliminating grade crossings was quite a challenge, especially in the areas adjacent to the Los Angeles River. As trains cannot easily turn, and at least three different railroad companies and their track layouts had to be accommodated, this task involved many crossings and large amounts of capital. In addition to the complex network of steam railways and depots in Los Angeles, drivers and pedestrians were also obligated to maneuver around street railways, all of which created hazards and congestion in the area between downtown and the river. This

single issue – grade crossing elimination – acted as the major catalyst for the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal.

Calls for a unified passenger station in Los Angeles can be found in print as early as 1887, and the *Los Angeles Times* remained wholly in favor of the movement to establish a union passenger terminal throughout the process.<sup>1</sup> Concern also grew among city boosters about the images of Los Angeles to which arriving passengers were subjected. By 1915, with the new Southern Pacific station still using Alameda Street for inbound and outbound train access, Los Angeles County had grown to a population of 815,000.<sup>2</sup> Southern Pacific trains had been arriving into the city by steaming down Alameda Street past Chinatown and areas of concentrated vice since 1888. A firsthand report mentions the proximity of the “cribs,” where prostitutes sought customers, to the slow moving passenger trains.<sup>3</sup> Worldly passengers “experienced” the less desirable side of Los Angeles before even disembarking at the station. Although the city “relocated” or shut down some of the more blatant activities in a crackdown around 1910, the approach through industrial areas still supplied a less than ideal arrival experience, not the image the city wished to project. A *Los Angeles Times* article from 1917 notes, “First impressions of cities . . . are always retained and that received of Los Angeles by travelers on any of the three lines now touching here is not such as to predispose visitors to admiration.”<sup>4</sup> The Chamber of Commerce, the California Railroad Commission, and others pushed to give new arrivals, as well as departing tourists, the California dreams they had been told to expect.

In 1920, the California Railroad Commission printed an exhaustive report examining the state of railroads in the city of Los Angeles. Although its primary focus remained on grade crossing elimination, the report also addressed issues related to grade crossing elimination and proposed improvements in both passenger and freight operations. One of the key solutions proposed by the Commission involved establishing both a dedicated “union” passenger terminal and a dedicated “union” freight terminal. By consolidating operations, the number of grade crossings would be reduced, thus reducing the potential for accidents. Only two reasons were given against creating a union station: 1) that “Los Angeles is not a through station,” meaning most train travel terminates in the city leaving only approximately fifteen percent of all passengers transferring to other stations, and 2) the high initial cost of building an adequate union station.<sup>5</sup> In the end, neither of these reasons played a significant role in the decision.

In all, the Railroad Commission listed six reasons in favor of establishing a union passenger station. Briefly summarized, the reasons in favor of a union passenger terminal are convenience to passengers; greater ease in the transfer of mail, express packages and baggage between railroad companies; the obsolescence of current passenger facilities; simplified grade crossing elimination; and that the existing topography of the city along with the locations of the railroads would make “centralization and consolidation” both easy to accomplish and desirable in terms of operations. After eliminating dangerous grade crossings, the primary reason cited applied to the arrival image of the city of Los Angeles:



As a gateway to the city, Los Angeles prefers one adequate, convenient and beautiful entrance to several separate gateways, onen [sic] of which can by themselves have all the advantages of a single union depot. Los Angeles, by reason of its wonderful advantages as a tourist center and as a center of travel, is justified and sound, in our opinion, in making this consideration one of the first importance.<sup>6</sup>

With these words even the Railroad Commission abandoned its dry analytical manner and waxed eloquently on the desirability of providing a scripted arrival experience in Los Angeles. Ultimately, the new union passenger station accomplished this goal, but not until another twenty years had passed.

The long running, highly litigious debate over establishing a union passenger terminal, and which agency had the authority to render a final decision, played out in the press, the ballot box and the courtroom over more than two decades before a final acquiescence came from the railroad companies.

### **The Argument for Grade Crossing Elimination**

The Southern Pacific was granted the right-of-way down Alameda Street in an 1873 ordinance, as a result of its acquisition of the San Pedro & Los Angeles Railroad.<sup>7</sup> While this was a logical route down a country lane in the 1870s, by the 1920s, the city had grown and Alameda was no longer on the outskirts of town, but rather reflected the growing importance of Los Angeles as a manufacturing center. A daily average of forty-two passenger trains traversed Alameda Street every day in 1917, with an additional twelve daily through freight trains and another forty-two light engine movements. This daily average of ninety-six passenger, freight and light engine movements along Alameda does not include switching activity that also took place.<sup>8</sup>

Both sides of the Los Angeles River played host to passenger and freight trains in the 1900s with each railroad company owning its own trackage and depots for freight and for passengers. As noted in chapters one through three, major passenger facilities had all been moved to locations between First and Sixth streets by 1901. Nevertheless, many passengers still made connections in Los Angeles and were obligated to hire transportation between stations serving different railroads. These conveyances ferrying passengers, baggage and mail between depots added to the congestion in neighborhoods to the east of downtown, all competing for space on local streets with arriving and departing trains.

The California Railroad Commission report cited the inadequate passenger facilities at both the Santa Fe and Salt Lake stations, and the financial investment needed to upgrade those facilities, as a solid reason to invest, instead, in a union passenger station. Along with the consolidation of passenger facilities, the California Railroad Commission also recommended centralizing freight operations in the city. By re-routing trains and reducing the number of grade crossings, the number of accidents and delays would necessarily also decline as a result. With consolidated passenger and freight operations, the physical number of grade crossings to eliminate in the city would necessarily be reduced, thus saving money in the long run.<sup>9</sup>

### **Early Movements Toward Establishing a Union Terminal**

Charles Mulford Robinson, an early urban planning theorist, prepared a report near the end of 1907 for the Municipal Art Commission, advocating

establishing a union passenger terminal in Los Angeles. In 1909 this report was submitted to the Los Angeles City Council, and read in part as follows:

It is obvious that there ought to be a Union Station. In locating this and planning approaches to it, we have to seek the maximum of effect at the minimum of expense, and must do this by making use of all which is good in the present situation. The location of the Arcade Station is good, if it be suitably developed; the tracks on Alameda Street are bad and, if possible, must be given up; the location of the tracks of the Santa Fe and the Salt Lake Roads is, perhaps, as little objectionable as possible. We have, then, a basis on which to work; and it must be recognized that there must be both give and take, as between the railroads themselves and as between the city and railroads, to obtain a result that will be to the advantage of all.<sup>10</sup>

Robinson favored establishing a Union Station at the site of the existing Southern Pacific Arcade Station, one of the three sites later proposed by the California Railroad Commission in its 1920 report.

Formal action promoting a “union” station for Los Angeles surfaced as early as 1911, when the Los Angeles City Council employed Bion J. Arnold, an expert in “municipal and railroad affairs” from Chicago, to travel to Los Angeles to “investigate, examine and report upon the subject of a union railway terminal.” His analyses included passenger and freight trains; municipal, street and interurban lines; and congestion on Main Street. Of note is his belief, expressed in the report, that if all three railroads could be brought to work together, establishing a union passenger depot at the plaza was the best solution.<sup>11</sup> Even in 1911, the consideration of the tourist arrival experience played into his analysis:

The greatest opportunity exists here for the planning of a center of civic beauty and usefulness, which would hardly have an equal in all the efforts being made by the cities throughout the county to surround their public buildings with imposing settings.

This report is not intended to be a city planning program, but as transportation is the fundamental of the city useful, it should also become the foundation for the city beautiful. It is pleasing to find this splendid opening for a portal which will allow the city to display at its gates the evidence of its growth, its prosperity, its progress in government, and its possibilities in art.

The first impression which would be created in the minds of the visitor would include a glimpse of the original Plaza and the Old Mission directly back of it. A new Plaza, a central park and open courts should take the place of the old buildings between the old Plaza and the Post Office, and this breathing space would act as a foreground to the new City Hall and to the Post Office, which buildings would naturally be located with an open space between them to allow for their future growth. Back of these buildings would rise the Hill Side Park with terraced gardens furnishing a frame of green and color. Have city builders ever had a more inspiring opportunity?

. . . I have already pointed out other sites for railroad stations which will answer all the commercial purposes, but if the city is really desirous of putting its front yard in order, and of creating such a favorable impression on the visitor within its gates that his stay may be all the longer, I cannot but point out that in the development of this Plaza center will be found a great opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

This early reference to the City Beautiful concept in planning foreshadows the designs for the proposed Union Passenger Terminal that would later flow from drafting tables between 1917-1934. The City Beautiful concept and its relationship to the eventual passenger terminal at the plaza will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

In publishing Arnold's conclusions in its report, the Railroad Commission echoed Arnold's sentiments with this statement: "This analysis of the situation, we believe, is sound today and the City of Los Angeles should not lightly pass by so splendid an opportunity for a great and permanent improvement of the community."<sup>13</sup>

## **Site Selection for a Union Passenger Terminal**

Although sentiment for a “union” passenger terminal at the plaza appeared prior to 1900, and was again put forth in Arnold’s 1911 report, it wasn’t until the California Railroad Commission’s report was printed in 1920 that the plaza site was officially endorsed as the front runner. Chief Engineer Richard Sachse’s succinct summary in his Letter of Transmittal (which serves as both summary and introduction to the report) contains two short paragraphs on the subject of a union passenger terminal. The first briefly states that the expenditure is justifiable, and the second advises that three sites – the Plaza site, the Santa Fe Station site and the Southern Pacific site – were found to be acceptable, but that “the Plaza plan is the best and it is our recommendation that the Commission order the establishment of a union passenger station at this site substantially in accordance with the plan we have developed.”<sup>14</sup> The cost estimate published in this report, prepared in 1919, placed total capital expenditures for a new union passenger terminal and coach yard at \$10,933,202.<sup>15</sup> When the actual passenger terminal opened twenty years later, the total cost was slightly more than \$11,000,000, a figure nearly identical to the 1917 estimate.<sup>16</sup> Because the construction and land acquisition took place during the Great Depression, costs were lower, workers were anxious to find jobs, and land was less expensive.

Richard Sachse summed up the complicated issues surrounding the report with the following statement: “The choice is not between a large expenditure if these recommendations are adopted and a small one if they are not adopted: it is

rather between an adequate and carefully planned development without wasteful expenditures and a haphazard growth dictated, in the main, by private interests from the standpoint of each individual road. In either case the burden of capital and operating costs must, in the end, be borne by the public.”<sup>17</sup>

During the public hearings process, a number of plans and variations on plans were presented to the Railroad Commission for their consideration. Although the limits of this thesis preclude additional analysis of the interurban, or street railways, as a contributing factor, all of the plans discussed included elements tying local transportation to the steam railroads’ operations. The majority of plans eventually reviewed were sited in the plaza area since the Railroad Commission considered the plaza site to be the most advantageous of the three general sites under consideration. The following sections will briefly examine the plaza-sited plans, as well as the Southern Pacific site, the Santa Fe site, and a site on the east bank of the Los Angeles River, along with their advantages and disadvantages.

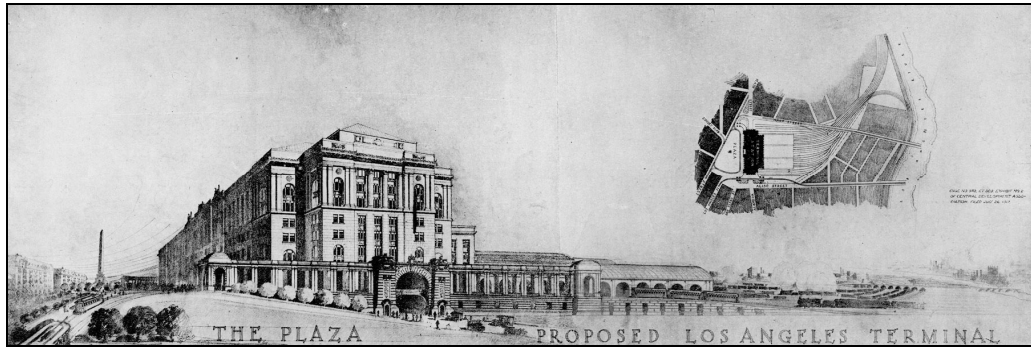


### **Potential Sites – The Storrow, Hawgood and Barnard Plans at the Plaza**

A Plaza location provided two important incentives: proximity to Los Angeles' civic center and the possibility to fit the passenger station design into a greater City Beautiful plan, and the virtual elimination of passenger train traffic on the length of Alameda Street. In addition, the area around the plaza suffered from depressed real estate values and was home to a higher percentage of minority populations than areas to the south. The principal tract of land that was generally considered most suitable for development into a new union passenger station was the original Los Angeles Chinatown. Few Chinese owned property, making condemnation proceedings and tenant relocations a potentially simpler process.

Two plans were submitted by a civic organization, the Central Development Association. The first, known as the Storrow Plan, was presented by one of their engineers, Samuel Storrow. This plan sited the depot over Alameda Street with the rail yard on the east side of Alameda. Passengers would have been required to enter the depot on the west side of Alameda, cross over the street inside the depot, then descend approximately seventeen feet down to the trains.<sup>19</sup> This elevation change of seventeen feet was predicated on the removal of rail lines running down Alameda Street; if the railroad continued to use Alameda, the elevation change increased to twenty-five feet rendering it quite undesirable. The Storrow plan also proposed bringing the Pacific Electric tracks to a special depot located on the east side of Alameda south of Union Station.<sup>20</sup>





**Figure 26 – Rendering of the proposed Hawgood plan for the plaza. Note that Alameda Street runs through a tunnel under the building, the plaza is to the left. This was Exhibit No. 3 from the Central Development Association as shown in the California Railroad Commission report, 312.**

The Hawgood Plan, similar in many ways to the Storow plan, was an alternate plan submitted by the Central Development Association. In it, the depot had the same location as the Storow Plan, with the entrance on the west side of Alameda Street and access to the trains on the east side. The rail lines entered Union Station perpendicular to the station, butting up to the concourse. The principal improvement over the Storow plan was a further refinement of the track layout and connections by Central Development Association engineer Harry Hawgood, however this plan did not propose the removal of train tracks from Alameda Street. The Railroad Commission dismissed this plan because the “distance between Alameda Street and the Santa Fe line is too short for the development of the station yard and throat tracks . . . [and caused] too much interference with freight movements at the river.”<sup>21</sup> The same problem of unacceptable elevation changes in passenger movement in the Storow Plan also plagued the Hawgood plan.

Ultimately both of these plans were dismissed by the California Railroad Commission in their final report, as being located on sites too short to accommodate

the necessary trackage as well as necessitating too great a change in grade between the concourse and the station platforms.<sup>22</sup>

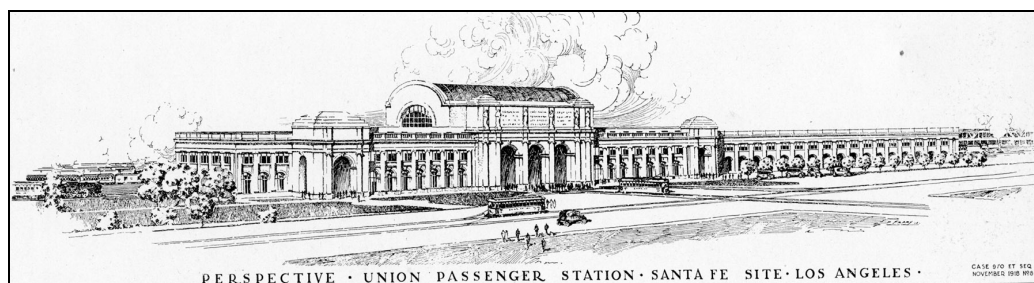
The Barnard Plan, from the Business Stability Association, another interested civic group, sited the proposed station east of Main Street toward Date Street and between Arcadia Street and Alhambra Avenue. Barnard's drawings did not actually include station facilities, but was considered quite comprehensive and well-thought out. Elements in the plan included provisions for connecting with municipal railroads; rapid and efficient handling of mail, baggage and express; "complete and effective elimination of grade crossings of main thoroughfares and railroads"; and for trains to arrive head-in or back-in as desired. Parts of this plan were integrated into the plan formally proposed by the Railroad Commission.<sup>23</sup>

The site ultimately chosen fronted Alameda Street, with entrance driveways allowing for landscaping and parking lots, and was bordered by Macy Street to the north and Aliso Street on the south. An important distinction in the layout between these preliminary proposals and the final plan was the adoption of stub-end tracks running parallel to the depot building instead of the perpendicular tracks shown in drawings pre-dating 1924.

### **Potential Sites – The Santa Fe Station Site**

As the second choice for the proposed union passenger terminal by the Railroad Commission, the property considered was land owned by the Santa Fe next to the Los Angeles River from about Jackson Street to the north stretching south to Seventh Street (current location of the Southern California Institute of Architecture

school in the old freight depot). No streets cut through the land reducing the need for grade crossings and the land itself allowed the potential construction of a through terminal, unlike the stub-end terminal at the plaza.<sup>24</sup> The Railroad Commission considered the site too large for a passenger station, but not large enough to hold both the passenger station and a coach yard serving it. The sheer size and location of the Santa Fe site next to the Los Angeles River made it ideal for the consolidation of freight handling in Los Angeles, a consequence of which made it less desirable for passenger use in the eyes of the Railroad Commission. Another alternative considered siting the passenger terminal there with a provision to accommodate future growth in freight handling.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 27 – Drawing of a scaled-down version of Washington, D.C.’s union terminal used as a stand-in design for the Santa Fe site. California Railroad Commission report, 350.**

The proposed passenger station was not formally designed, but its proposed size and location were calculated at five hundred feet by one hundred sixty feet, with a twenty-seven foot set-back from Santa Fe Avenue. The commission did consider that approximately sixty percent of passengers would arrive by automobile, and therefore desired the front portico to be automobile accessible. Notably, although the commission did not prepare architectural plans for a terminal building (unlike at the plaza) they chose to base their calculations on a reduced version of the Neo-

Classical Union Station in Washington, D.C.<sup>26</sup> The extant La Grande Station was not considered for use in the plans because of its limited size and outmoded facilities.

While a number of objections were cited, an intriguing reason given dealt with tourist arrivals and passenger impressions. Since the Santa Fe property was situated in the industrial district, the Railroad Commission expressed concern about the site's suitability with the following statement:

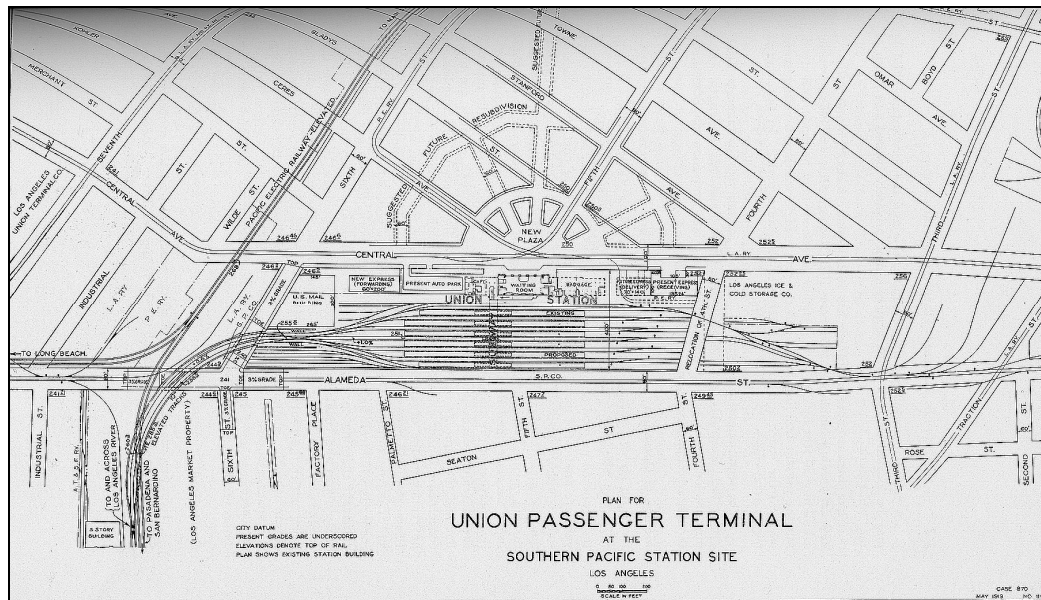
The site makes no particular appeal when considered from the aesthetic standpoint, since it does not appear possible to obtain a very imposing setting for such a large station building as would be necessary. Moreover, the location does not harmonize with the general principle that passengers should not be obliged to pass through the industrial district in going to and from the station. This is a matter not so much of time as of the impression on the traveler, which is of particular importance in Los Angeles because of the extremely large number of tourists visiting the city.<sup>27</sup>

As noted in the descriptions of earlier passenger stations in Los Angeles, a park was a common feature of important train stations and provided tourists with both a first impression and often photo opportunities as well.<sup>28</sup> This plan did not include a plaza or a park; one could be included by the acquisition of land nearby, in which case the station site would have been moved to center on the park.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the Railroad Commission clearly did not feel that the mere addition of a park would make the Santa Fe Station site a suitable location for a new union passenger station.

### **Potential Sites – The Southern Pacific Station Site**

The third choice for the new union passenger terminal, the existing site of the Southern Pacific's Central Station, was already in use as a passenger station with facilities constructed only five years previously. The Railroad Commission considered most aspects of this site to be acceptable since passengers would arrive at

the depot having traveled on viaducts above the industrial district rather than through it. Tourist facilities, such as hotels, restaurants and transportation, were already in place and the easy access to “hotels, shopping and business districts,” as well as downtown via Fifth Street was clearly advantageous.<sup>30</sup>

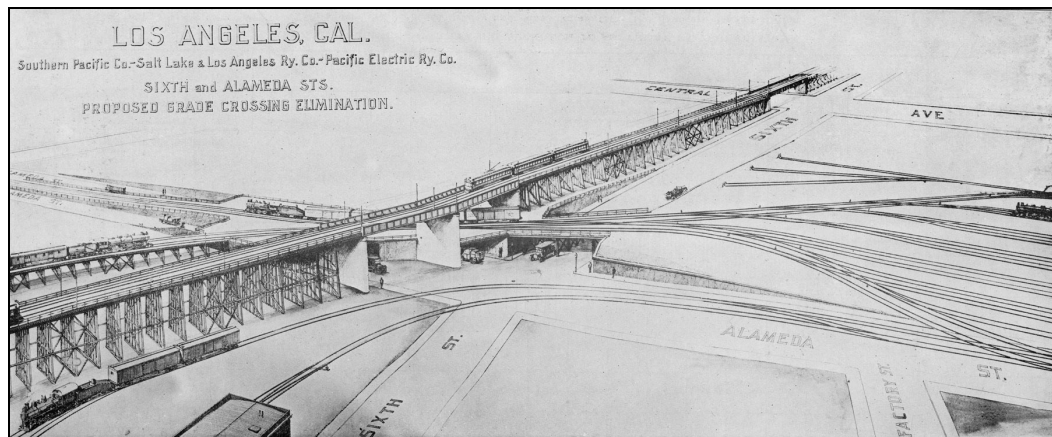


**Figure 28 – Plan for a union station at the Southern Pacific site, modified by the Railroad Commission to provide a better comparison with the plaza site. California Railroad Commission report, 341.**

Future growth in train travel, estimated by the Railroad Commission to be up to one hundred forty trains per day within twenty years, made the limited available land at the Southern Pacific site their last choice.<sup>31</sup> Based on the available land, the maximum number of tracks that could have been made operational stood at twelve; the Union Passenger Terminal at the plaza was constructed with sixteen just to accommodate passenger trains.<sup>32</sup>

In 1917, the Southern Pacific and Salt Lake railroads had proposed combining their passenger depots at the site of the Southern Pacific’s existing

Central Station on Central Avenue between Fourth and Fifth streets. Because the union station debate was already contentious, approval was not granted. When the Railroad Commission enumerated the Southern Pacific site as a contender for a union station, the original plan was modified slightly for consideration as a potential candidate. One of the main drawbacks of the plan was the required elevated approaches, which were unsightly and harbored their own risks.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 29 – Rendering of a proposed viaduct to eliminate grade crossings on Alameda Street and Central Avenue. California Railroad Commission report, 333.**

Another version of a combined Southern Pacific/Salt Lake union depot, the “Titcomb Plan,” was prepared by Vice President Titcomb of the Pacific Electric Railway during the hearings process in 1920. This plan included a mile-long viaduct over Alameda Street. Testifying under oath, Titcomb admitted he “believed all the railroads had better operate their own stations,” but that since the “Southern Pacific would shortly have to evacuate Alameda street” due to grade crossing conflicts, the company’s best interests were in making a deal with the Los Angeles & Salt Lake to jointly use the Salt Lake’s trackage and the Southern Pacific’s station.<sup>34</sup>

W. H. Daum, who had filed a formal complaint with the Railroad Commission prior to 1915 against the Southern Pacific and its grade crossings on Alameda, proposed his own plan to site the union station on land in which he controlled a majority interest, located on the east side of the river between Seventh and Ninth streets.<sup>35</sup> As noted in chapter three, the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad had purchased this land and commissioned plans for a new passenger terminal in 1915. The Railroad Commission rejected this site as too far from both the civic center and the downtown business district, noting that being on the “other” side of the river put it at “serious disadvantage.”<sup>36</sup>

The Los Angeles City Council approved a resolution by a vote of seven to one (with one member absent) on November 3, 1920 expressing confidence in the decision-making process of the California Railroad Commission members and urging them to proceed expeditiously. The council did not state any preference for the site of a union station, but instead left the determination to the Railroad Commission.<sup>37</sup> This hopeful resolution was still to be followed by another thirteen years of legal debate.

## Chapter Four Notes

<sup>1</sup> “A Union Depot – Why Not?” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1887, 4. Perhaps hundreds of articles published in the *Los Angeles Times* between 1887 and the early 1930s mention the benefits of a union passenger terminal. The *Los Angeles Times* management was adamantly pro-Union Station!

<sup>2</sup> Urban Education Partnership Science in the City. “Population Growth by Single Year Los Angeles County, 1850-1998” <http://www.lalc.k12.ca.us/target/science/population/table.html>

<sup>3</sup> Lynn C. Kronzek and Roberta S. Greenwood, “Historical Background,” *Down By The Station: Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880-1933* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), 10.

<sup>4</sup> “Union Terminal Plan to be Pressed with High Hopes,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1917, III10.

<sup>5</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> *An Ordinance Granting to the Southern Pacific Railroad Co. the Right to Lay an Additional Railroad Track on Alameda Street, Etc.* Adopted by the City Council, December [blank], 1892. Daily Journal Print, 1892, 1-2. The text reads as follows, “Whereas the mayor and common council of the city of Los Angeles did, by ordinance entitled ‘An ordinance providing a free right of way for the Southern Pacific Railroad through the city of Los Angeles,’ which said ordinance was passed July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1873, and approved July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1873, setting apart from the public highways of the city of Los Angeles to the unreserved and unrestricted use of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company all that portion of Alameda street between San Fernando street depot and Commercial street for the building, maintaining and operating of its railroad thereupon, by and through the track or tracks which said company shall deem necessary under the terms of said ordinance which is here referred to; And whereas the Southern Pacific Railroad Company has petitioned this council for the right to lay another track . . . .”

<sup>8</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, table III, 567. Data compiled from information furnished by Southern Pacific Company.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 303. This excerpt from Charles Mulford Robinson’s report (n.d.) is taken from the Railroad Commission of the State of California’s report, published in 1920. The text continues on to propose track usage modifications and changes, a land swap by the city in exchange for the “restoration of Alameda Street,” and the use of tracks along the river for passenger trains. No apparent actions resulted from Mulford’s report.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 305; “Fight Permits to Railroads,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1924, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Bion J. Arnold, “Preliminary Report upon the Transportation Problem of Los Angeles,” supplement to *California Outlook* 11, no. 19 (1911), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 306.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. The Commission received multiple plans for some sites, but in their initial analysis only considered the four general locations suggested. Three (the Plaza site, the Southern Pacific Station site and the Santa Fe Station site) were ranked, the fourth (a Washington Street site) was suggested by Mr. D. A. Hamburger, of the Business Men’s Association, but was rejected as too far from the business center of the city. Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 281.

<sup>15</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 15.



<sup>16</sup> Construction costs for the terminal alone totaled \$672,405.14. This figure does not include land acquisition or any of the peripheral accoutrements of a railroad station. Construction cost figure taken from builder Robert McKee's final accounting to the three railroads, dated 5-18-39. Final Billing on LAUPT – General Summary Sheet. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>17</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 287. The boundary for the business district was determined by City ordinance. The highest real estate values were centered at Seventh and Broadway with the business center at Fifth and Spring streets.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 299-301, 307.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 320-324.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 324-326.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 291

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 295, 351.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 352. This is an interesting example of the Neo-Classical influence still prevalent in monumental architecture in the United States at the time. Stemming from the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, this City Beautiful style seemed entirely appropriate as a stand-in model to the Railroad Commission, rather than using a more regional style such as Mission Revival or Spanish Revival.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>28</sup> Both the Arcade Station and La Grande Station had landscaped grounds. The Arcade also included a cactus garden and, according to Mullaly and Petty, *Southern Pacific in Los Angeles*, 37, a station photographer who captured tourist moments for the "folks back home."

<sup>29</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 295 and 352. The reason given for not including a park in the plans or cost estimates for the Santa Fe Station site was that it would be a more "utilitarian" solution, "less expensive than a more aesthetic terminal embodying the conception of the monumental gateway to the city."

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>31</sup> It is ironic that the Union Passenger Terminal we know today opened almost exactly twenty years after the study was completed, with thirty-three arrivals and thirty-three departing trains per day. Even during World War II with its massive troop movements, the maximum number of trains only topped out near one hundred per day. The Commissioners made their best guess based on growth, but could not possibly have taken air travel and the automobile and their effects on rail travel into consideration in 1919.

<sup>32</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 286; Aside from sixteen passenger train tracks, the completed station had eight tracks for mail, baggage and express, five additional tracks for private train cars, three engine release tracks, one storage track, and six tracks for switching facilities, making a total of thirty-nine tracks. "Streamlining a Pueblo: Los Angeles Opens a New Union Station," *The Santa Fe Magazine* 33, No. 7 (June, 1939), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 340.

<sup>34</sup> "Says Salt Lake had Whip Hand," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1920, III.

<sup>35</sup> "Roads Admit New Plan Old," *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 1926, A11. W. H. Daum, who is also mentioned in chapter five, appears to be a private citizen with possible business interests tied in with the railroads' decision. In the Los Angeles City Directory of 1923 his occupation is listed as "Industrial properties, Commercial & Industrial Finance, Mgr., Industrial Center Corporation" located in the Van Nuys building at 210 West Seventh Street in Los Angeles. In the 1930 directory his listing

reads, "W. H. Daum & Staff, Analytical Realtors." Daum Commercial Real Estate Services, founded by W. H. Daum, is one of the larger companies operating today in Los Angeles.

<sup>36</sup> *Decisions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*, "Decision No. 8901," dated April 26, 1921, 26. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>37</sup> "Council Reaffirms its Stand for Plaza Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1920, II1.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**LEGAL PROCESSES AND**  
**THE LOS ANGELES UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL**

Judicial challenges to official decisions shape the processes whereby the built landscape is changed. Railroads in California epitomized power and railroad companies were tough negotiators. Loopholes in early legislation allowed railroad companies to use the court system to their advantage through the appeals process. By filing voluminous briefs and continually requesting rehearings, each case could be stretched interminably. The larger issue involved not only the construction of a union passenger station, but also the location, track arrangements and the ability for a government agency to order a private corporation to make a large capital expenditure in the public interest. The process through which the big three railroads were compelled to construct a union passenger terminal in Los Angeles is, in itself, a study in power struggles and conflict resolution. Neither the California Supreme Court nor the U. S. Supreme Court were unfamiliar with Los Angeles and its railroads when the dust settled.

**California Railroad Commission v. City of Los Angeles**

For railroad companies to make changes in tracks, rail yards or station facilities, they were required to submit applications. Prior to 1917, both the city of Los Angeles and the Railroad Commission believed their organization held jurisdiction over these matters. The city claimed that:

the power to regulate and control the construction and operation of railroads within its limits, especially where such railroads run along or across its public

streets, was on October 10, 1911, vested in the City of Los Angeles under and by virtue of its charter, constituted one of said city's municipal affairs, has not been surrendered, remains unaffected and unimpaired by the provisions of section 23 of article XII of the constitution as said section was amended on October 10, 1911 and again on November 3, 1914, and therefore may be exercised by the City of Los Angeles, subject only to the restrictions and limitations provided in its charter, and is neither subject to, nor controlled by, the Public Utilities Act which is conceded to be a general law.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the Railroad Commission believed it was empowered under Section 8 of Article XI of the California Constitution.

In 1911, the Public Utilities Commission was established by Constitutional Amendment as the Railroad Commission. In 1912, the Legislature passed the Public Utilities Act, expanding the Commission's regulatory authority to include natural gas, electric, telephone, and water companies as well as railroads and marine transportation companies.<sup>2</sup>

This legislation gave the California Railroad Commission jurisdiction at a state level over the railroad companies including placement of depots and tracks.<sup>3</sup> The question of which agency actually did have the jurisdiction to order the construction of a union passenger terminal became an ongoing dilemma.

### **Los Angeles Railroad Politics**

Decisions had already been made by the city council and the voters in a number of cases where the railroads had sought approval for new tracks, issues involving crossings, and when street grades were established in areas where rail traffic co-existed.<sup>4</sup> As the sentiment for a union station grew, these applications met with greater scrutiny and resistance from officials.

An example of active resistance to the Southern Pacific, and valid concerns on the part of government that allowing any improvements or changes might hinder the eventual adoption of a union passenger terminal, is shown in the following case.

The Southern Pacific, in an effort to update its station facilities in Los Angeles as described in chapter one, filed an application with the California Railroad Commission in 1913. The request proposed the construction of a new depot, demolition of the existing depot, and permission to rearrange trackage as required and as shown on the application. The application, numbered 793, was officially granted in Decision No. 1090, dated November 25, 1913.

Opposition to the Southern Pacific was filed by W. H. Daum with the Railroad Commission in anticipation of the Southern Pacific's application for a new depot. Daum's complaint was heard by the commission first, but was considered along with the application made by the Southern Pacific for a new depot. Daum, who later presented a union station plan to the commission, was present at the hearing. According to the Railroad Commission's officially published decision, Daum's complaint alleged

that the Southern Pacific was operating its steam line railroad into the city of Los Angeles over Alameda Street to and beyond the depot site herein mentioned . . . between Main Street and Ninth Street . . . operates at grade across several important streets, and that said operation results in serious danger, damage and inconvenience to the public using such cross streets; and that the building of the depot . . . would result in preventing or delaying the separation of such grade crossings.<sup>5</sup>

Daum's argument essentially challenged any track changes the Southern Pacific proposed to make in conjunction with their new depot and further pressed an issue that continued to grow in severity. While the safety issue of dangerous grade crossings remained, the city's desire for a new depot overruled any immediate action on grade crossings, and permission was granted for a new depot. The Railroad

Commission's order authorized the Southern Pacific to tear down the Arcade depot, to build the new Central depot and

to take up, relocate and place new trackage in connection with the erection of said new depot . . . provided, however, that the tearing down and abandonment of said old depot and the erection of said new depot, and the taking up, relocating and placing of new trackage in connection with said new depot, or the approval of this Commission therefore, shall never be used as a defense against the separation of grade crossings in the State of California.<sup>6</sup>

### **Formal Complaints Filed Against the Railroads**

In order to force a jurisdictional decision and to press the issue of grade crossing elimination, a number of civic groups and smaller municipalities near Los Angeles formally filed complaints with the California Railroad Commission. These complaints requested the Railroad Commission to

require common carriers serving the city of Los Angeles to rearrange the present layout of their yards and various main and branch lines [to] . . . eliminate existing grade crossings and consolidate their freight and passenger depots into one union station . . . ."<sup>7</sup>

Although the defendants named in the cities' petitions and the civic organizations' petitions varied, all petitions were addressed in a single consolidated decision. The Case Numbers, dates filed and parties involved are listed below.<sup>8</sup>

Case No.	Complainants	Defendants
970	Municipal League	Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., and San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co.
971	Central Development Association	Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., and San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co.
972	Civic Center Association	Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., and San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co.
974	City of Pasadena	Pacific Electric Railway Co., Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co., and City of Los Angeles.
980	City of Alhambra	Pacific Electric Railway Co., Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co., and City of Los Angeles.
981	City of San Gabriel	Pacific Electric Railway Co., Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co., and City of Los Angeles.
983	City of South Pasadena	Pacific Electric Railway Co., Southern Pacific Co., Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Co., San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Co., and City of Los Angeles.

**Table 1 – List of original petitioned filed with the California Railroad Commission that helped instigate the legal process.**

The Railroad Commission held a number of hearings at which it received petitions and letters from smaller cities in the region, including San Dimas, Pomona, Ontario, El Monte and Sierra Madre, as well as various organizations and

individuals. Some of the organizations which sponsored a representative at the hearings were the “Associated Jobbers of Los Angeles, Business Men’s Co-operative Association, Business Stability Association, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Los Angeles City and County Viaduct Committee, Los Angeles Realty Board and the Northwest Association.”<sup>9</sup>

A consolidated public hearing on all of the petitions was held on September 15, 1916. All parties, with the exception of the city of Los Angeles, agreed that the Railroad Commission had exclusive jurisdiction over the issues. The city of Los Angeles asserted their own jurisdiction over all railroad grade crossings in the city. Because the city of Los Angeles would not relinquish control to the California Railroad Commission, the Railroad Commission rendered Decision No. 3805 on October 21, 1916, dismissing all proceedings.<sup>10</sup> Essentially the Commission’s reasoning was that the investigation was so important and would cost so much to undertake that it did not want to proceed with any action until jurisdiction was definitively determined.

### **The First California Supreme Court Decision**

Two writs of mandamus were filed to bring the matter before the California Supreme Court. In the first proceeding, the applicants were the same three civic groups listed above (proceeding L.A. No. 5028) and in the second the applicants were the cities who had filed formal complaints (proceeding L.A. No. 5029). In the first proceeding, the applicants asked the court to order the California Railroad Commission to proceed with its investigation. The city of Los Angeles argued that



while the commission did have jurisdiction over the questions of union passenger and freight terminals, the city had exclusive control over grade crossings and use of streets by the railroads. The Supreme Court rendered its decision in both cases on June 11, 1917 in favor of the applicants and the Railroad Commission, upon which the city of Los Angeles filed a petition for rehearing.<sup>11</sup> The California Supreme Court dismissed this petition for rehearing on July 10, 1917 and considered the matter to be closed.

Prior to the ruling by the California Supreme Court, three railroad companies operating in Los Angeles had filed applications with the Railroad Commission. The Industrial Terminal Railway Company filed Application No. 2962 requesting the ability to issue capital stock to fund a right of way for an industrial railroad in Los Angeles, which would be approximately two miles in length running from Alameda north of Aliso Street, across the Los Angeles River to a point just south of Alhambra Avenue. The second application was filed July 16, 1917 by the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company (Application No. 3037) requesting permission to construct “certain crossings in connection with a proposed new freight terminal at Eighth and Alameda Streets.” The third application (Application No. 3346), filed by Southern Pacific and Salt Lake Railroad Companies and considered at a hearing on November 22, 1917 sought approval for an agreement between the two companies dated July 18, 1917 to permit the joint use of Southern Pacific’s station at Fifth Street and Central Avenue, as well as to construct “elevated tracks south of Sixth Street between Alameda Street and the east bank of the Los Angeles River.” Their

reasoning was that “the joint use of track would obviate the necessity for operation of passenger and freight traffic over Alameda and certain other streets and would also eliminate many grade crossing movements.”<sup>12</sup> The Commission’s decision on the first two applications essentially postponed any action until a larger investigation into the issues had been conducted.<sup>13</sup> The third application, requesting a joint facility and elevated tracks, was consolidated with the other seven pending formal cases.

With their authority confirmed by the court, the Railroad Commission met with the Los Angeles City Council to discuss both the railroad grade crossings and the passenger and freight terminals serving the city. After the meetings were concluded, the city council voted unanimously “to contribute \$20,000 toward the expense of a complete and thorough investigation to be made by the Railroad Commission.”<sup>14</sup> An additional series of hearings were scheduled to allow all claimants and defendants to present evidence and testimony. The hearings took place on the following dates: September 15, 1916; July 24 and 26, 1917; August 22 and 23, 1917; November 20-22, 1917; and December 11 and 12, 1917. By December 1917, the Railroad Commission had established an office in Los Angeles staffed by its chief engineer, Richard Sachse and a number of assistants, to begin assessing the issues pertaining to railroads in the city.<sup>15</sup> This report was commissioned in December 1917, presented at the end of July 1919 and printed in 1920. The processes, explanations, maps and analyses presented in the nearly six-hundred page report present a comprehensive picture of the railroads’ presence in

Los Angeles circa 1919, along with well-reasoned arguments for centralizing both passenger and freight operations in the city.

### **Federal Control of Railroads, 1917-1920**

The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), a federal regulatory body, was formed as a result of the 1887 federal “Act to Regulate Commerce.” This Act applied to all common carrier railroads engaged in interstate commerce, which of course included the transcontinental railroads. This initial attempt to regulate railroads and the tariffs they charged was strengthened by subsequent legislation including the Elkins Act in 1903, the Hepburn Act in 1906, and the Mann-Elkins Act in 1910.<sup>16</sup> The Hepburn Act made ICC orders binding, requiring courts to enforce obedience from the railroads. If a railroad company disagreed with an order, its recourse was to contest the matter in court. Although a lower court could set aside an ICC order, any appeals went “directly to the U.S. Supreme Court thereby limiting the delays that the railroads had used so well to their advantage.”<sup>17</sup>

Just before and during the First World War, shipping activities around east coast ports became congested both because of the movement of freight to be shipped to aid the war effort, as well as the reluctance of ships to leave port due to submarine attacks. President Woodrow Wilson recognized the need to coordinate railroad operations to protect supply lines and transport, and therefore deemed it necessary to have direct power over railroad companies. On December 26, 1917, Wilson “proclaimed presidential control of all rail and combined rail and water

transportation and created the United States Railroad Administration. Federal control took place beginning two days later, on December 28, 1917.”<sup>18</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the United States Railroad Administration issued an order for the unification of railroad facilities, including terminals, where possible, in response to pressures from World War I. As the California Railroad Commission’s study was already underway in Los Angeles, the Director General of Railroads, William Gibbs McAdoo, notified the California Railroad Commission of his desire to push a unification of the terminal facilities and to inform him of their progress:

Am having investigation made of terminals at Los Angeles with a view of unifying them in line with similar policy through country with view to increasing the public convenience and economizing in cost of operation. I also desire, if possible, to reduce existing traffic on Alameda Street. Shall be glad if the California Commission will look into this situation and give me the benefit of its views on proposed changes. Mr. Sproule [District Director] will gladly co-operate with you and supply all available information.<sup>19</sup>

The Engineering Department of the Railroad Commission filed a report on September 7, 1918 titled, “Immediate Unification and More Economical Operation of Railroads with Resulting Betterment of Grade Crossing Conditions in Los Angeles and Vicinity.” This report, submitted to McAdoo on September 16, 1918, recommended some changes in railroad operations, but most notably recommended unifying all passenger facilities at the Santa Fe Station.<sup>20</sup>

McAdoo had made a similar request to the engineers of the United States Railroad Administration, and in response, engineers employed by the three rail companies serving Los Angeles submitted a joint report with their own recommendations regarding the unification of facilities. Because the two reports,

that of the California Railroad Commission and that from the railroad companies, differed markedly, the three railroad companies requested a conference of the engineers on both sides to attempt to reconcile the differences.<sup>21</sup> Three conferences were held to discuss the matter: one in Los Angeles November 12-14, 1918, and the other two in San Francisco December 30-31, 1918 and January 14-15, 1919. Results from the conferences were submitted to Walker D. Hines, who had succeeded McAdoo on January 15, 1919.

The Railroad Commission's first report had recommended "temporary unification of all passenger facilities at the Santa Fe station site. In the supplemental report to Mr. Hines, the Commission recommended temporary *partial* unification by the joint use of the Santa Fe passenger station by the Salt Lake and the Santa Fe."<sup>22</sup> Following the cessation of World War I, the federal government no longer considered the complete temporary unification of terminal facilities to be imperative, but rather preferred the lower cost alternative of partial temporary unification while a more permanent solution was sought.<sup>23</sup> On February 28, 1920 the Transportation Act of 1920, commonly known as the Esch-Cummings Act, was signed into law.<sup>24</sup> With the stroke of a pen, Federal control of the railroads was terminated, and the question of which agency governed railroad facilities in Los Angeles rose from the ashes.

### **The Union Terminal Battle Resumes, 1920-1924**

Decision No. 8901, reported in *Decisions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*, dated April 26, 1921 disposed of the cases which had

come before the commission prior to federal involvement with the railroads. Case nos. 970, 971, 972, 974, 980, 981, 983, and application no. 3346 from 1916/1917 were consolidated and a single decision was rendered by the commission.<sup>25</sup> The decision concluded, in part, with the following orders:

1. That said defendants, Southern Pacific Company, The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, and the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company and Pacific Electric Railway Company . . . erect a union passenger station and buildings incidental thereto in said city of Los Angeles . . . .
2. That the site of the union passenger station . . . shall be within that portion of the city of Los Angeles bounded by Commercial street, North Main street, Redondo street, Alhambra avenue and the Los Angeles River.
- 3(b). There shall be filed within six months from the date of this order a general plan . . . and detail drawings, of a passenger union station located on the Plaza site . . . .<sup>26</sup>

The order went on to dictate responses on cost estimates and sharing, grade crossing eliminations, and the construction of viaducts. Ultimately, this order would be given again in essentially the same form in 1928 but would not be invoked until another five years had passed. Application no. 3346 was dismissed in the same decision.

In less than a month's time, on May 21, 1921, the Los Angeles & Salt Lake applied for a rehearing on case nos. 970, 971, 972, 974, 980, 981, 983, and application no. 3346 (seeking permission to establish joint terminal facilities with the Southern Pacific). Although the rehearing was granted, the December 1921 decision reaffirmed the original decision and a supplemental and final order was entered.<sup>27</sup>

The Santa Fe filed a "Petition for Writ of Review" with the California Supreme Court in January 1922. The Los Angeles & Salt Lake filed a "Memorandum of Points and Authorities in Support of Petition for Writ of Review" with the California Supreme Court in January 1922, and finally a combined "Brief in

Support of Petitions for Writs of Review” was submitted jointly by the Santa Fe, the Los Angeles & Salt Lake, and the Southern Pacific in April 1922. The Respondent in the case, the California Railroad Commission, filed its brief in May 1922. The California Supreme Court decision in this case, *Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Ry. Co. v. Railroad Commission of California*, 190 Cal. 214 (1922), was rendered on December 19, 1922. The decision “held that by the Transportation Act of 1920 Congress had taken exclusive authority over the matter of a union interstate terminal depot, and the court therefore denied the State Railroad Commission the jurisdiction which it had sought to exercise.”<sup>28</sup>

Within weeks, both the California Railroad Commission and the city of Los Angeles petitioned the California Supreme Court for a rehearing. On January 12, 1923 the California Supreme Court issued its “Answer to Requests for Rehearing” in cases L.A. No. 7166, L.A. No. 7165, and S.F. No. 10111. Citing a New York Supreme Court case which referred to the Transportation Act of 1920, the court determined that authority rested with the Interstate Commerce Commission and not the California Railroad Commission.<sup>29</sup>

In response, the city of Los Angeles filed a formal complaint with the Interstate Commerce Commission asking for an order to provide, maintain and use a union station.<sup>30</sup> The response from the ICC states, in part,

Congress has not only vested jurisdiction in the Interstate Commerce Commission over the question of the extension of terminal facilities, such as contemplated by the order of the Railroad Commission in the case at bar, but has also prohibited the railroads from making such improvements without the consent of the Interstate Commerce Commission. This being true, Congress

has fully occupied the field of regulation of such matters and the power of the state commission has thereby been terminated.<sup>31</sup>

The concurring opinion, signed by Chief Justice Shaw cited the case of *Atchison, T. & S.F. Ry. Co. v. R. R. Com.*, 173 Cal. 577 (1916), and provided the following interpretation.

That decision establishes the principle that railroads are private property which are devoted to public use, and that the state has no power to order the railroad company, without its consent, to establish a new line of railroad for the benefit of the public. The scheme here embraced in the order of the Railroad Commission contemplates the expenditure of a very large sum of money by the railroad companies in the construction of a new terminal depot for their joint use in a place where there is no existing depot and no tracks leading thereto. Entirely new tracks will have to be built to reach the new depot, and the land on which it is to be erected and on which the track is to be built will have to be acquired by the said companies, or by some subsidiary company in which they are all interested, and vast sums of money must be used in constructing the buildings and tracks required for the union depot. If this be true it is equally beyond the power of the Interstate Commerce Commission to make the order. To require the railroad companies to construct this depot and the tracks necessary therefor [sic] is equivalent to ordering them to dedicate new property to a public use. I know of no power which will justify the state in commanding a railroad company to thus acquire and dedicate property to a public use.<sup>32</sup>

With these words, the ICC granted the application of the city of Los Angeles and annulled the order given by the California Railroad Commission. A further hearing in the proceedings to order the erection of a union station, 142 I.C.C. 489, resulted in its denial. Again, the city of Los Angeles remained aggrieved. Their recourse was to file for a writ of mandamus in the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia.

. . . the city . . . dismissed the petition. On an appeal, the judgment was reversed by the Court of Appeals of the district, which held . . . the Commission [ICC] was vested with supervisory control over the three carriers and that they were subject to an order requiring the construction of the union station and the necessary connecting tracks prayed for.<sup>33</sup>



In its October term 1923, the Supreme Court of the United States heard cases numbered 283-285 – *Railroad Commission of the State of California, Petitioner, v. Southern Pacific Company et al. Respondent, v. Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company Respondent*, and *v. Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company, Respondent*.<sup>34</sup> The hearing was on a

petition for writ of certiorari to a judgment of the Supreme Court of California, annulling, upon review, an order of the State Railroad Commission which sought to require the above named railroads to eliminate certain grade crossings and establish a new union terminal depot, in the City of Los Angeles.<sup>35</sup>

The California Railroad Commission had argued in the California Supreme Court that because the Commission’s findings indicated that establishing a union station was an integral part of eliminating dangerous grade crossings, that it had “the incidental right to order its building. The court rejected the argument,” writing that the Railroad Commission had “unquestioned police power to regulate grade crossings in the interest of the public safety” but was not granted the right to order a union station.<sup>36</sup>

In its decision, the United States Supreme Court determined that the jurisdiction over a union station was with the Interstate Commerce Commission rather than the California Railroad Commission.

For the reasons given, we think the course taken by the City of Los Angeles was the correct one. Until the Interstate Commerce Commission shall have acted under paragraphs 18 to 21 of section 402 of the Transportation Act, the respondent railways can not be required to provide a new interstate union station and to extend their main tracks thereto as ordered by the State Railroad Commission.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the ICC must issue a certificate of approval.

. . . unless and until the Commission [ICC] shall certify that public convenience present or future requires it, and that no carrier shall abandon all or any portion of its line or the operation of it without a similar certificate of approval. Such a certificate is, we think, necessary in the construction of a new interstate union station which involves a substantial and expensive extension of the main tracks or lines of interstate carriers who theretofore have maintained separate terminals.<sup>38</sup>

This ruling by the United States Supreme Court demonstrated to all parties involved that the Interstate Commerce Commission should be the agency to determine the fate of a future union passenger terminal in the city of Los Angeles, and the matter proceeded as such. In a future opinion, however, the United States Supreme Court made the following statement regarding its decision in *Railroad Commission of California v. Southern Pacific Company*, 264 U. S. 331 (1923), remarking that the issue considered was only

whether it was necessary to secure from the Interstate Commerce Commission its approval of the construction of a union station and the relocation of the connecting tracks proposed. The point in that case was the necessity for the acquiescence by the Interstate Commerce Commission in respect to a union passenger station. We held such a certificate to be necessary before a union station or connecting lines of interstate carriers could be lawful. That is all we held.<sup>39</sup>

These words were not to be uttered until another five years had passed. Meanwhile the litigation continued.

### **The Interstate Commerce Commission in Charge, 1924-1930**

Now that the Interstate Commerce Commission had seemingly been given the final authority over railroad trackage and station decisions, the Los Angeles &

Salt Lake Railroad and the Southern Pacific Railroad once again filed a petition requesting permission to establish joint depots and to abandon “through” usage of tracks along Alameda.

In July 1925 the Interstate Commerce Commission reiterated that “public convenience and necessity required the construction of a union passenger terminal in the Plaza area,” and denied the application.<sup>40</sup> The Interstate Commerce Commission was also of the opinion that the order to establish a union station had to come from the California Railroad Commission. Pursuant to the United States Supreme Court decision in 1923, the ICC was required to issue a certificate of approval prior to action on the part of the railroads, but chose to wait, pending further action.

The California Railroad Commission ordered further hearings and submitted a report detailing the proceedings. According to Stanley V. Meigs, at this point in August 1926, the “record covered 5492 pages, 302 exhibits, and the testimony of 85 witnesses.”<sup>41</sup> At a point midway between the California Railroad Commission’s order and the hearings, the city of Los Angeles put a measure on the ballot in a July 1926 election as Proposition 8 and Proposition 9, asking the voters to decide if they wanted a union station to be built, and if it should be located at the plaza.<sup>42</sup> Voters in the city cast 115,493 votes in favor of a union passenger terminal versus 72,714 against. The vote was also in favor of the plaza site for their (hoped for) future union passenger terminal.<sup>43</sup>

When the California Railroad Commission released its findings in July 1927, it determined that a union passenger station constructed in the plaza area was still the

best course of action, and that the order would become effective as soon as the Interstate Commerce Commission issued a certificate.<sup>44</sup> Both the city and the California Railroad Commission immediately requested the certificate from the Interstate Commerce Commission.

In May 1928 the Interstate Commerce Commission declared, “public convenience and necessity required the construction of a union passenger station and terminal in the Plaza area, to cost approximately ten millions, in compliance with the order of the California Railroad Commission, and issued certificates authorizing construction.”<sup>45</sup> This action cleared the way for the order given by the California Railroad Commission on May 26, 1928 for the erection of a union passenger terminal on the plaza site. A request for rehearing by the three railroads was denied.<sup>46</sup>

Attorneys for all three railroad companies filed applications for a writ of review to the California Supreme Court, which the court granted within forty-eight hours. The essence of their arguments denied that the Railroad Commission possessed the authority to order a new union station to be erected at the plaza for public convenience and necessity, while denying the continued use of existing passenger facilities. Their writ went on to assert that the existing facilities were entirely adequate and that the Railroad Commission had failed in its primary mission of reducing dangerous grade crossings. According to a summary prepared by the Railroad Commission’s attorney, Carl I. Wheat, in response to the railroads’ briefs, the case had been “before the Railroad Commission three times, the Interstate

Commerce Commission twice, the State Supreme Court three times, the United States Supreme Court once, and we're on our way back to the United State Supreme Court again."<sup>47</sup>

Simultaneously with this action by the railroads, the city of Los Angeles filed an application for a writ of mandamus in the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia on July 12, 1928 asking that the Interstate Commerce Commission be compelled to issue an order requiring the railroads to build a new union passenger station.<sup>48</sup> The ICC did not object to the action; however, the railroads did and appointed Frank Karr, counsel for the Pacific Electric Company, to act on their behalf. In one of the shining legal maneuvers of the protracted battle, Max Thelen, special counsel for the city of Los Angeles, traced the history of the case in front of Justice William Hitz, then quickly moved that the application be denied. By requesting the case he was arguing be denied, Thelen and the city of Los Angeles could expeditiously take the case to the Court of Appeals. Neither the counsel for the Interstate Commerce Commission, nor Frank Karr representing the railroads' interests objected. If the arguments had continued and the railroads had been allowed to intervene in the case, the matter could have dragged through the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia for months. Thelen reportedly had already prepared the paperwork to begin the appeal process and filed the writ of mandamus with the District Court of Appeals October 18, 1928.<sup>49</sup>

Expectations were building as the arguments appeared to be culminating. The three railroads were contesting the California Railroad Commission's order to

build a union station and the commission's denial for a rehearing, which was being heard by the California Supreme Court. At nearly the same time, the city of Los Angeles and the Interstate Commerce Commission were moving through the appeals process in the U.S. Court of Appeals. For both cases, the next legal step led to the United States Supreme Court and a truly final decision.

As expected, the California Supreme Court remained neutral, ruling that the matter of determining where the jurisdiction lay to order the new station rested with the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, the United States Court of Appeals reversed the earlier lower court judgment on February 25, 1929, ruling that the Interstate Commerce Commission did have jurisdiction over the matter, and remanded the case for further proceedings.<sup>51</sup> The Interstate Commerce Commission filed a petition for a writ of certiorari and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to begin the review process on April 15, 1929.<sup>52</sup> Now, both cases asking for a final determination on which agency had the authority to order a union passenger terminal in the city of Los Angeles awaited a decision by the highest judiciary in the land.

The arguments took place on October 28, 1929 and a final decision was rendered on November 25, 1929.<sup>53</sup> The decision, in part, follows:

We cannot agree with the Court of Appeals of the District in its disposition to view section 3, paragraph 3, as vesting the Interstate Commerce Commission 'with almost unlimited power in the matter of establishing terminals and union stations for the proper interchange of traffic between the converging interstate railroad lines.' . . . The general ousting from their usual terminal facilities of the great interstate carriers would work a change of title and of ownership in property of a kind that would be most disturbing to the business interests of every state in the country.<sup>54</sup>

In short, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Interstate Commerce Commission did *not* have the authority to make such an order. The Court did not say which agency did possess the authority. While seen as a serious blow to the city's fight to establish a depot at the plaza, a legal avenue still remained open.

A decision pending in the California Supreme Court in a case where the three railroads appealed for a writ of review of the California Railroad Commission's authority to order the union passenger station left the door open for the city of Los Angeles to file a brief as a "friend of the court."<sup>55</sup> The California Supreme Court's earlier ruling that the California Railroad Commission did not have jurisdiction in the matter was predicated on the belief that the Transportation Act of 1920 gave jurisdiction to the Interstate Commerce Commission. Because the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled against this belief, the California Supreme Court was then empowered to consider the case.

Two decisions on May 27, 1930 left only an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in the way of a new station. The first action, by the California Railroad Commission, denied a petition from the railroads requesting a rehearing in the matter of its order. Shortly after, the California Supreme Court handed "down a unanimous decision legalizing the Railroad Commission's authority to force construction."<sup>56</sup>

In a last effort to appeal, the railroads filed a brief with the U.S. Supreme Court on October 14, 1930 challenging the decision by the California Supreme Court. All interested parties, including representatives of other railroad companies

across the nation, hoped for a clear, final decision by the Court. Without it, only an act of Congress could remedy the situation.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Legal Finale, 1931-1933**

The battle to force the railroads to construct a union passenger terminal lasted more than twenty five years, fifteen of them in court, and through numerous appeals. Upholding the latest ruling made by the California Supreme Court, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Railroad Commission's authority on May 18, 1931. A request by the railroads for review of its decision was denied on October 12, 1931. This final request was seen as a necessary legal action to confirm beyond any doubt the final ruling, clearing the way for a new union passenger station.<sup>58</sup>

The Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroads (Union Pacific gained control of the Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad in 1921) both favored a station plan with stub-end tracks, while the Santa Fe proposed a version with through tracks to expedite train management. Both proposed plans were submitted December 14, 1931 to the California Railroad Commission for evaluation. On January 18, 1932 the Commission announced that the stub-end plan was chosen. Carrying on the former litigious spirit, the Santa Fe filed a petition for a rehearing with the Railroad Commission on February 4, 1932 citing the difficulties of backing trains into the terminal and the possible congestion with stub-end tracks. Less than two weeks later the Railroad Commission denied the Santa Fe with a terse, "No good reason having been shown."<sup>59</sup> Unsuccessful with the Railroad Commission, the Santa Fe then requested a review of the decision by the California Supreme Court on March 15,



1932. On April 8, 1932 the Santa Fe's battle for a through station ended when the California Supreme Court denied their application to review the California Railroad Commission's order directing the carriers to go ahead with the Hill plan (a stub end station).<sup>60</sup> Undaunted, the Santa Fe then obtained an injunction in the United States District Court in San Francisco on June 29, 1932, "enjoin[ing] the State Railroad Commission from enforcing its order requiring the road to join with the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific in building a union terminal in accordance with the Hill plan."<sup>61</sup>

On October 14, 1932 all three transcontinental railroads requested another rehearing from the California Railroad Commission asking it to reconsider the order for the union passenger station in light of the economic depression now facing the nation. In addition, the railroads requested an extension in the deadline requiring them to submit a proposal showing how the costs would be split between the three companies.<sup>62</sup>

With the national economy heading into the depths of the Great Depression, the three railroads petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission for relief from the Railroad Commission's order to pay for the new union station. The Railroad Commission filed a protest citing the long delays brought about by the legal process and stated, "The station could be built today at lower labor and material costs than at any time since it was first ordered and the carriers should not be permitted to defeat the project by indirection through a vacation of the permissive certificates."<sup>63</sup> Additional requests came from the city of Los Angeles and the Municipal League of

Los Angeles that the railroads' petition be denied. Their wish was granted in March 1933, when the ICC denied the petition.<sup>64</sup>

In June 1933, the Interstate Commerce Commission denied the railroads a rehearing and instructed them to comply with the Railroad Commission's original order issued in 1927.<sup>65</sup>

### **Agreement to Build**

On June 16, 1933, the presidents of the three transcontinental railroads serving Los Angeles announced that litigation on their part was at an end and, in addition, that their companies had prepared an alternate plan for the union station, which would be released shortly. In July, the railroads put forth a proposal that the new union passenger station be constructed on a site toward the north end of the Southern Pacific's River Station yards.

Recently elected Mayor Frank Shaw entered the fray by strongly supporting the notion of a proper civic center and the expectation that the new union station would be a part of it. After negotiations, "Mayor Shaw, on behalf of the city of Los Angeles, [agreed] to contribute not more than \$1,000,000 toward grade separations, grading and street paving adjacent to the Plaza."<sup>66</sup> These funds were to be allocated "from gasoline tax sources sufficient to meet the required expenditure," a move agreed to by the Board of Supervisors. In exchange, the presidents of the Southern Pacific, the Santa Fe and the Union Pacific agreed to formally notify the California Railroad Commission that their fight against the plaza union passenger station was

over.<sup>67</sup> Los Angeles would get the new union passenger station the city had hoped for, but the details were still to be determined.

## Chapter Five Notes

<sup>1</sup> Court case: Supreme Court of the State of California, “Jurisdiction of the Railroad Commission of the State of California respecting railroads and railroad crossings within municipal corporations organized under section 8 of article XI of the Constitution of California,” City of Pasadena, City of Alhambra, City of San Gabriel, City of South Pasadena, Plaintiffs, versus Railroad Commission of the State of California, February 1917, 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> California Public Utilities Commission, “PUC History & Structure,” <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/static/aboutcpuc/puhistory.htm>. For an in depth discussion of state and federal legislation affecting the railroads, consult Ward M. McAfee’s “A Constitutional History of Railroad Rate Regulation in California, 1879-1911,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 37, no. 3 (August 1968): 265-279.

<sup>4</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 928.

<sup>6</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. III, July 1, 1913 to December 31, 1913 (Sacramento: Friend Wm. Richardson, Superintendent of State Printing, 1913), 930.

<sup>7</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XI, September 1, 1916 to November 30, 1916, Decision Numbers 3612-3898 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1917), 642.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 641-642.

<sup>9</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XI, September 1, 1916 to November 30, 1916, Decision Numbers 3612-3898 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1917), 641-669.

<sup>11</sup> *Civic Center Association of Los Angeles, et al. vs. Railroad Commission of the State of California*, 175 Cal. 441 (1917).

<sup>12</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 49-50.

<sup>13</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XIII, April 1, 1917 to August 31, 1917, Decision Numbers 4223-4607. Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1917, 715-722.

<sup>14</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 45. The meeting took place on July 3, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>16</sup> Richard D. Stone, *The Interstate Commerce Commission and the Railroad Industry: A History of Regulatory Policy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 6-15. This is a well-researched book on the early ICC and how each new piece of legislation affected its operation.

<sup>17</sup> Stone, *The Interstate Commerce Commission*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Stone, *The Interstate Commerce Commission*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> McAdoo’s telegraphic request, July 22, 1918.

<sup>20</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 53-54, emphasis is mine.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

- <sup>24</sup> Stone, *The Interstate Commerce Commission*, 20-21.
- <sup>25</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XIX, November 1, 1920 to May 31, 1921, Decision Numbers 8311-9029 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1921), 740; and *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XX, June 1, 1921 to December 27, 1921, Decision Numbers 9034-9929 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1922), 937.
- <sup>26</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XIX, November 1, 1920 to May 31, 1921, Decision Numbers 8311-9029 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1921), 777-778. The order is quoted in part only, and is not complete.
- <sup>27</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XX, June 1, 1921 to December 27, 1921, Decision Numbers 9034-9929 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1922), 937-948.
- <sup>28</sup> *Interstate Commerce Commission v. United States of America, at the Relation of the City of Los Angeles (a municipal corporation)*, 280 U.S. 52, 52 (1930).
- <sup>29</sup> Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>30</sup> *City of Los Angeles vs. Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company, Pacific Electric Railway Company, Southern Pacific Railroad Company, The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, and Union Pacific Railroad Company*, 100 I. C. C. 421 (1925).
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>34</sup> 264 U. S. 331 (1923). The cases were argued November 22, 1923 and decided on April 7, 1924.
- <sup>35</sup> *Railroad Commission of California v. Southern Pacific Company*, 264 U. S. 331, 332 (1923).
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.
- <sup>39</sup> *Interstate Commerce Commission v. United States of America, at the Relation of the City of Los Angeles (a municipal corporation)*, 280 U.S. 52, 71 (1929).
- <sup>40</sup> S. V. Meigs, comp, *The Union Passenger Terminal: An Early History of the City and its Transportation, and the Proceedings Leading up to the Union Terminal* (Los Angeles, CA, between 1933 and 1943), 22.
- <sup>41</sup> Meigs, comp, *The Union Passenger Terminal*, 22. Meigs was the Assistant Construction Engineer for the union passenger terminal project in the 1930s when this report was compiled.
- <sup>42</sup> Bill Bradley, *The Last of the Great Stations: 40 Years of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal* (Glendale, CA: Interurbans, 1979), 62.
- <sup>43</sup> "History of Long Fight for Union Rail Station," *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1933, 2.
- <sup>44</sup> Meigs, comp, *The Union Passenger Terminal*, 23.
- <sup>45</sup> Meigs, comp, *The Union Passenger Terminal*, 23.
- <sup>46</sup> *Opinions and Orders of the Railroad Commission of California*. Vol. XXXI, December 23, 1927 to June 22, 1928, Decision Numbers 19192-19916 (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1928), 797-798.
- <sup>47</sup> "Depot Fight Advances," *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1928, 1.
- <sup>48</sup> "Plaza Station Order Sought," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1928, A1.
- <sup>49</sup> "Plaza Fight Gain Made," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1928, 1.
- <sup>50</sup> "Union Depot Ruling Made," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1929, 1.
- <sup>51</sup> City of Los Angeles applied for a mandamus against the Commission in 34 F. (2d) 228 (Ct. of App. D. C. 1929)
- <sup>52</sup> "Depot Decision Assured," *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1929, 1; *Certiorari*, 279 U.S. 830 (1928), to review a judgment of the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia, which reversed a judgment of the Supreme Court of the District dismissing a petition for a writ of mandamus.

<sup>53</sup> *Interstate Commerce Commission v. United States of America, at the Relation of the City of Los Angeles (a municipal corporation)*, 280 U.S. 52 (1929).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 280 U.S. at 69-70.

<sup>55</sup> This type of brief, known as “Amicus Curiae,” allows an interested third party to contribute to the decision making process in a case in order to give the justices information on a legal argument or a clearer understanding of how the outcome might affect third parties to the case. Tech Law Journal. “Glossary” Copyright 1998-2005 David Carney. <http://www.techlawjournal.com/glossary>

<sup>56</sup> “Union Station at Plaza Ordered by High Court,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1930, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “Railroad Brief on Plaza Filed,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1930, 3.

<sup>58</sup> “High Court Awards City Union Depot Decision,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1931, 1, and “Fight Won on Depot,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1931, 1.

<sup>59</sup> “Union Depot Move Lost by Santa Fe,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1932, 2.

<sup>60</sup> “Santa Fe’s Depot Case Plea Fails,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1932, 1.

<sup>61</sup> “Plaza Station Again Delayed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1932, A1.

<sup>62</sup> “Union Station Hearing Asked,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1932, 3.

<sup>63</sup> “Board Presses Depot Battle,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1933, A16.

<sup>64</sup> “Station Edict Received,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1933, A12.

<sup>65</sup> “Union Depot Way Cleared,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1933, A1.

<sup>66</sup> “Railroads Abandon Fight Against Plaza Station,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1933, 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER SIX

### UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL: THE PLAZA SITE HISTORY, PLANS, DESIGN & USE

#### History of the Plaza Site

Native Americans occupied the areas along the Los Angeles River when the Spaniards first arrived in 1769. A Gabrielino village with more than two hundred inhabitants, called Yangna, was located on the riverbank somewhere near the present site of Union Station.<sup>1</sup> Descriptions of the land prior to its becoming a Spanish settlement come down to the modern reader from the writings of a Spaniard in the first exploration party who found the native American village to be a “delightful place among the trees on the river.”<sup>2</sup>

The original pueblo settlement of Los Angeles began in the plaza area in 1781, near the future terminal site. The new pueblo was laid out according to the Laws of the Indies, a codified set of one hundred forty-eight ordinances containing exacting guidelines governing how new settlements should be organized. As such, the dwellings were placed in a rectangle around the plaza, with land between the original pueblo and the river devoted to agriculture to help support the new arrivals. It is important to note that the exact location of the original plaza is unknown, as a flood in 1815 “moved the location of the plaza and the main church and caused something of a redistribution of parcels of land,” according to Dora Crouch, Daniel Garr and Axel Mundigo.<sup>3</sup>

As the pueblo grew and became well-established, agricultural products included oranges, lemons, olives, wheat, barley and beans. Grapevines were especially prevalent near the plaza, as the number of distilleries that sprang up nearby testify. Archeologists Lynn Kronzek and Roberta Greenwood report that,

as early as 1831, there were vineyards on the east side of Alameda Street; Ballesteros had 4 acres in grapes, Luis Vignes, 5 acres, and Maximo Alanis, 5 acres. Juan Ramirez had 5 acres, Juan Apablaza had 2 acres, and other growers in the area 'northwest of Aliso Street' were such familiar names as Abila, Sepulveda, and Carillo [sic]. Shipping from San Pedro to San Francisco, New York, and so on to Europe had begun in the 1850s, and in 1867 Los Angeles had fifteen of the thirty-six distilleries in the county.<sup>4</sup>

A map drawn by Lt. Edward Ord in 1849, just before California became a state, showed the city streets along with a graphic representation of the crops grown around the town. The area between the pueblo and the river shows a broad band of "wine grapes."<sup>5</sup>

Benjamin D. Wilson owned seven and a half acres on the southeast corner of Alameda and Macy streets, which was covered in vines in 1855. Wilson, a vocal supporter of bringing the Southern Pacific Railroad to Los Angeles, sold his property in 1856 to the Sisters of Charity for \$8,000. Ironically, Wilson's parcel would continue to be connected to the Southern Pacific. Mayor Workman, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1887, predicted that the "nine-acre place of the Sisters' school, southeast corner of Alameda and Macy streets, will be the site selected" for the Southern Pacific's new Arcade Station.<sup>6</sup> Although Joseph Wolfskill successfully enticed the Southern Pacific to build the Arcade on his land, Wilson's tract would later be purchased by the Southern Pacific for a rail yard. During the nuns' tenure on



the land, they ran the County Hospital from 1858 to 1869, a school for girls, an infirmary, a college and finally an orphan asylum.<sup>7</sup>

In 1873, the Southern Pacific laid tracks on Alameda Street to connect the existing Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad depot at Commercial and Alameda streets with rail lines being laid to connect Los Angeles with Sacramento.<sup>8</sup> These new tracks passed in front of the Sisters' orphanage. Reportedly daunted by the growth of the town around them, most likely including both commercial uses as well as the rise of Chinatown, the Sisters of Charity sold their holdings in 1890 to J. M. Griffith to be used for a lumberyard.

Another significant landowner, Juan Apablaza, had purchased land just south of Wilson's parcel in 1848.<sup>9</sup> Many of the lanes within the larger city block were named after him and his children.<sup>10</sup> When these early families moved to other parts of the county by 1887, the land was seen as less than desirable by most citizens. Floods in 1884 and again in 1886 left standing water up to Alameda Street.

### **Los Angeles Chinatown**

Because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and continued discrimination, Chinese people in California generally lived in "Chinatowns" within larger communities. Many early Chinese residents in Los Angeles probably worked in railroad construction or gold mining, and as the major rail-building projects were completed and mining became more organized, jobs became scarcer. Larger towns offered areas with less discrimination, making Los Angeles and the less desirable area around the plaza a logical place for Chinese to settle. Most Chinese residents

prior to 1887 lived near Calle de los Negros, on the west side of Alameda.<sup>11</sup> Population statistics cited in Kronzek and Greenwood list 605 Chinese residents in 1880, and a tripling of that number to 1,871 in 1890.<sup>12</sup> Increasing pressure on the limited available housing as well as a fire that burned most of the buildings along Calle de los Negros in 1887 caused the expansion of Chinatown to the east. It was a logical step for Chinese in need of housing to cross Alameda and move in to the recently vacated buildings on the future rail station site.

This area, centered within Aliso, Alameda and Macy streets, became the heart of Los Angeles' old Chinatown. Dwellings were constructed of wood up until around 1900, when two-story brick buildings with continuous facades, lined the unpaved streets. Historian Mark Wild describes the lack of city services in Chinatown.

Of all the neighborhoods in central Los Angeles, Chinatown perhaps came closest to re-creating the type of crowded, grimy, and impoverished tenement neighborhood characteristics of northeastern cities . . . Despite its central location, Chinatown languished without basic infrastructure improvements and regular garbage collection into the twentieth century. Streetlights were not installed until about 1913, and as late as 1922 the neighborhood had only two paved roads.<sup>13</sup>

By 1888, the area where the future union passenger terminal would be built was home to those on the fringes of society, as well as agricultural and industrial uses. The Los Angeles Orphan Asylum was on the southeast corner of Macy and Alameda streets, the northwest corner of the union passenger station property today. Directly to the east, extending to the river, were vineyards. The Bull & Grant Agricultural Implement Warehouse was fifty feet southeast of the Orphan Asylum's

poultry yard. Further south, across from Marchessault Street (now approximately where Los Angeles Street runs into Union Station), was a continuation of the Chinatown that existed on both sides of Alameda. A few small dwellings are noted as “female boarding,” a euphemism for prostitutes, who were generally accepted in this area of the town.<sup>14</sup> South of the Chinese dwellings were the Well & Water Pipe Manufactory, the Germain Fruit Company, which had a railroad spur running through its warehouse, and the Los Angeles Vintage Company, a winery and distillery. The Hotel de France sat on the southernmost corner of the block, at the corner of Aliso and Alameda streets, across from the Italian Hotel. Along Aliso Street, just past the Hotel de France was the Aliso Board, Feed and Sale Stable, followed by another “female boarding” house, furnished rooms and small dwellings, including a Chinese laundry. Behind this row of modest buildings were more vineyards.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Hanchett Tract**

Twenty five and a half acres of land earmarked for the new union passenger station site were already under the ownership of the Southern Pacific Railroad by 1933. Thirty eight and eight-tenths acres of land on the northern end of the future station grounds had been purchased by Lewis E. Hanchett in the 1910s through two corporations in which he was a majority shareholder. Hanchett was a businessman from San Francisco who was aware of the terminal fight in Los Angeles. At the time Hanchett’s companies purchased the tracts of land in the plaza area, Hanchett was

well aware that a site in the vicinity of the plaza was actively being promoted for the future train station. His speculation eventually paid handsomely.

The Southern Pacific acquired the land through some non-transparent corporate deals that left the actual purchase price of the land in doubt.<sup>16</sup> Since the Santa Fe, Southern Pacific and Union Pacific were sharing the total cost of construction for the new union passenger terminal, this land had to be appraised. A number of investigations as well as testimony from individuals involved in the dealings reveal that Hanchett was the majority shareholder of two companies – the Industrial Development & Land Company and the Industrial Terminal Railway Company – that purchased the land between 1912 and 1918.<sup>17</sup> The property investment these companies showed on their books totaled \$2,003,000. A third corporation, the Stagg Canon Fuel Company acquired the outstanding capital stock of the two companies some time between 1916 and early 1924. An attorney for the Southern Pacific, Frank Karr, said in a formal hearing that the capital stock of the Industrial Development & Land Company and the Industrial Terminal Railway Company constituted the only assets of Stagg Canon Fuel Co.<sup>18</sup> This capital stock was then purchased by the Southern Pacific under agreement effective April 30, 1924 between Stagg Canon Fuel Co. and Southern Pacific for \$6,250,000, which was paid in securities, not cash. Neither of the Hanchett-controlled companies had ever operated with any appreciable profit and appeared to solely be holding companies for the plaza land.<sup>19</sup> In the same hearing mentioned above, an engineer named

MacAuliffe reported that Hanchett told him he “sold them [the lands] for twice what they were worth; sold them for more than twice what he paid for them.”<sup>20</sup>

Special hearings were held to justify the exorbitant amount that was charged to the Southern Pacific for this land. One price breakdown, given by a Southern Pacific land appraiser before the California Railroad Commission, noted that Hanchett purchased the land that would become part of the union passenger station site for \$1,671,381 or \$1.514 per square foot.<sup>21</sup> Richard Sachse stated that the Southern Pacific had acquired part of the land “in 1898 at an average cost of \$0.20 per sq. ft.,” and was claiming a cost of \$3.70 per square foot for the balance of the tract.<sup>22</sup> After a detailed analysis, Sachse concluded that, “the fair present market value of this land, exclusive of improvements, is not higher than \$1.05 per square foot, resulting in a total for the tract to be acquired of \$1,407,761.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Chinatown in the 1930s**

By the 1930s, few residents of the area were not Chinese, though virtually no Chinese owned property in Chinatown. Few Chinese owned their own homes or the buildings where their businesses were located, instead, because of restrictions, the vast majority paid rent. A review of the names of property owners who were bought out of their holdings on the future union station site reveals primarily Hispanic surnames. White Angelenos often feared venturing into Chinatown, although some published descriptions of Chinese eateries were designed to entice Anglo patrons. Reports of prostitution, opium dens and gambling characterized outside perceptions of Chinatown and contributed to an early “urban renewal” decision to build the new

Union Station on the site of the old Chinatown. An article in *Architectural Forum* expressed the sentiment of many residents by saying, “Los Angeles likes to say it has no slums but the buildings the terminal will supplant strike few people as picturesque, many as dirty and squalid.”<sup>24</sup> According to Jean Bruce Poole and Tevvy Ball, “The neighborhood’s character was also defined by the nearby rail yards, along with machine shops, cheap hotels, and a noisy substation providing power for electric trolleys . . . .”<sup>25</sup>

While attorneys for the railroads negotiated with attorneys representing manufacturing interests nearby, most residential owners simply accepted the railroads’ offered buy-out. Manufacturing and industrial tenants were primarily located where rights-of-way were needed for new trackage. Some of those affected included Gladding McBean, Sunset Oil, Wilson Packing Company, American Foundry Company and Consolidated Steel Corporation.<sup>26</sup>

As the new landlords for the rental properties on the future station site, management for the three railroads drew up charts showing which properties would be condemned and torn down at certain stages, allowing the railroads to collect the maximum amount of rent from their tenants. After all of the residents had finally left and most evidence of the former Chinatown had been scraped from the site, truckloads of fill dirt began arriving to completely cover over the remains.<sup>27</sup> Four hundred thousand cubic yards of fill dirt were brought to the site to raise the tracks twelve feet above Macy Street and sixteen feet above Aliso Street.<sup>28</sup> Covering the recently demolished old Chinatown site with a thick layer of clean soil allowed later

archeological excavations during the construction of the Metro Red Line to more easily document the history of the site.<sup>29</sup>

### **City Beautiful and Early Designs for a Union Passenger Terminal**

City Beautiful concepts and the notion of a more comprehensive approach to city planning had taken hold by the early 1900s. Charles Mulford Robinson, one of the early promoters of a union passenger terminal for Los Angeles, published a seminal book in 1901, *The Improvement of Towns and Cities: or, the Practical Basis of Civic Aesthetics*.<sup>30</sup> In it, and in subsequent works, Robinson communicates ideas on how to design a beautiful city that had been evolving since Frederick Law Olmsted's time.<sup>31</sup> Robinson and William H. Wilson give credit to the Chicago 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, not for creating the City Beautiful movement, but rather "that it immensely strengthened, quickened, and encouraged it."<sup>32</sup>

While Robinson dealt with beautifying all aspects of a city, this work will focus on his ideas pertinent to planning a major passenger train station in a city. In *Modern Civic Art*, published in 1903, Robinson devotes forty pages to planning a suitable "land" entrance to the city and arranging that entrance and the civic buildings in a suitably imposing and pleasant manner. He saw the railroad passenger terminal as the equivalent of the medieval city gate and elucidated on its significance.

With the coming of the railroads conditions again changed. Passengers by rail had a single definite point of arrival and departure, which for practical purposes was to them the town's entrance. Here they left the city to enter the train, or left the train to emerge into city streets. Their senses had there the first opportunity for a 'time exposure' in which to secure a lasting picture of

the town. . . . In its railroad stations, therefore, the town had suddenly new, permanent, and formal entrances.<sup>33</sup>

This single idea encapsulates the civic leaders' great desire to establish a Los Angeles union passenger terminal at the plaza. Robinson goes on to say, "Turning, then, to the community's own treatment of the land entrance, we find that stations always should, and not uncommonly do, front upon open public spaces. They should be thus situated . . . ." <sup>34</sup> As noted previously, the plaza site provided a more open public area upon which the station could front. None of the other sites considered by the Railroad Commission offered a ready-made open space.

During the hearings and reviews conducted by the California Railroad Commission in the late 1910s, designs that were proposed were universally neo-classical, in keeping with long-standing classical influences on civic architecture. The Railroad Commission's succinct conclusion to its 1917 investigation on passenger stations pronounced, "The Washington union station may, we believe, be considered as typical of the best practice in station design in the country today. The circumstances surrounding its location and design are worthy of careful study."<sup>35</sup>

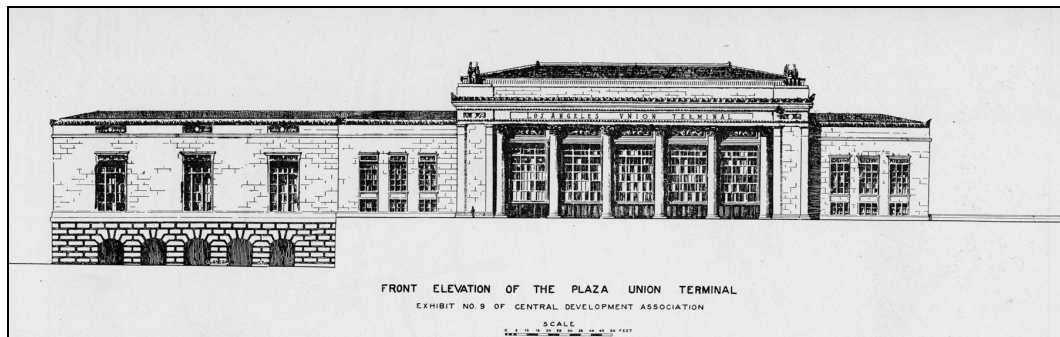
Early drawings of the proposed union station are universally neo-classical. Exhibit No. 2 from the Central Development Association is a perspective drawing of a Monticello-like structure complete with a low dome capping a colonnaded central mass, symmetrical stepped wings and smaller curved arcades culminating in pavilions.<sup>36</sup>





**Figure 30 – Central Development Association’s Exhibit No. 2, the Hawgood Plan, as presented to the California Railroad Commission in 1918. California Railroad Commission report, 311.**

Exhibit No. 3, another perspective drawing, shows an even grander neo-classical structure with a diminutive Alameda Street passing into a tunnel under the building (refer to figure 26 on page 85). Even Los Angeles architect Aleks Curlett produced a neo-classical elevation for the California Railroad Commission demonstrating the “size and character” which could be obtained for about \$700,000 in 1917 (see figure below).<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 31 – Elevation of theoretical design for union passenger terminal by Aleks Curlett. California Railroad Commission report, 313.**

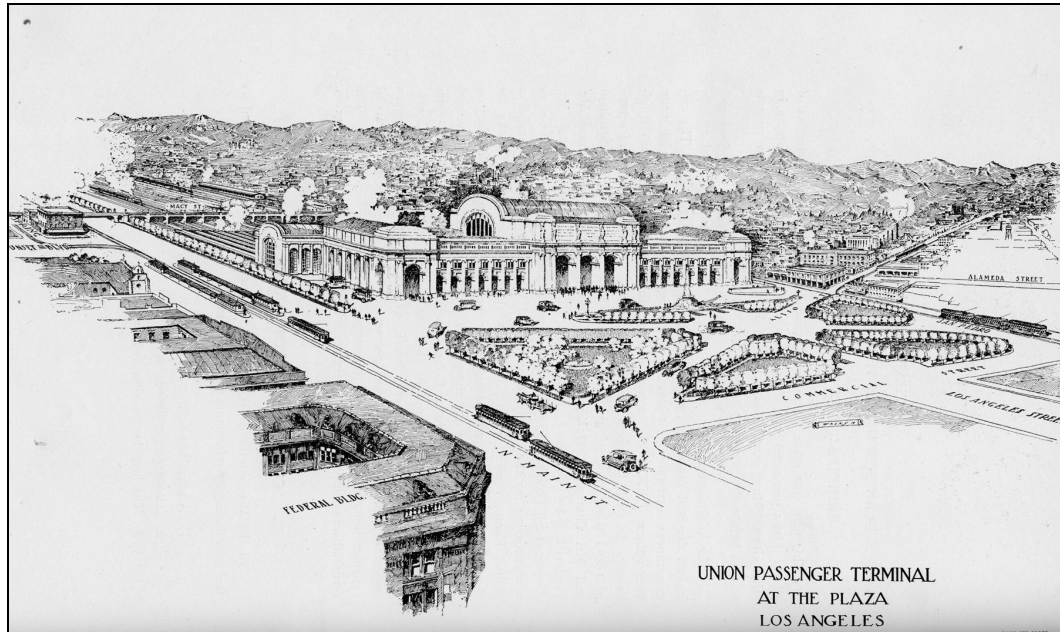
Neo-classical architecture carried strong connotations of civic sensibility stemming from Greek and Roman cultures. Although the plaza area was in decay in the

twenties and early thirties, it is important to remember that the existing civic center of Los Angeles was but a few blocks southwest. City Hall had been completed in 1928 and a clear view of the plaza area could be seen from its tower. The Hall of Records, the Hall of Justice, the Federal Building and the State Building were all in close proximity.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the freeway system in Los Angeles had not yet been planned. The Hollywood Freeway, which effectively acts as a barrier between the plaza neighborhood and the civic center, did not exist and the distance between City Hall and the plaza was only a few short blocks on surface streets.

Following another tenet of the City Beautiful, a distinct grouping of monumental civic buildings was thought to inspire pride and uplift citizens and therefore contribute to a successful city. Robinson believed that,

in the study and practice of modern civic art, [the designer] must pass from the portals of the city, from the entrances by water and by land, to the administrative centre of the town. This is the point that should naturally demand our next attention, for this should be the heart of the town. Its municipal life should be centred here, and it should be a distinct and definite point.<sup>39</sup>

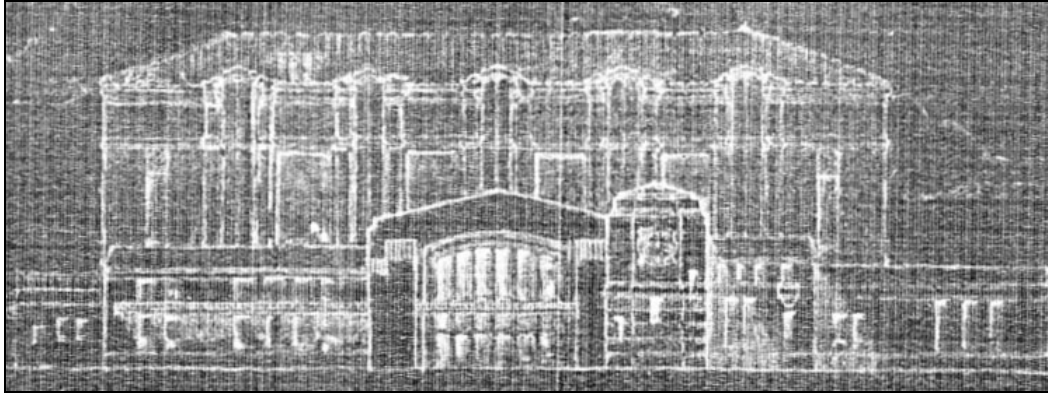
Proponents of the plaza plan preferred the arrival experience to show Los Angeles in the most favorable manner possible.



**Figure 32 – Sketch drawn by California Railroad Commission engineering department in 1910s of possible site and design of the union passenger terminal. California Railroad Commission report, 366.**

Another sketch, drawn by the California Railroad Commission’s engineering department, shows a grand neo-classical terminal on one side of a large plaza with larger civic buildings, one labeled “Federal Building” in the foreground. The cross streets shown in the foreground are North Main and Commercial streets. An early plan, this drawing has the union passenger terminal located on top of the former plaza and what we know as Olvera Street (see figure 32 above).

Another trait that plans drawn before 1933 exhibit are tracks on which trains stop perpendicular to the station. This was seen as undesirable by the Santa Fe, which continued to propose its own version with “through” tracks running parallel to the station. The Santa Fe’s plan was known as the “set back” plan. A sketch from a 1933 blueprint shows a monumental building with a “gateway” entrance similar to that of the union terminal recently completed in Cincinnati, Ohio.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 33 – Blueprint sketch of proposed union passenger terminal, Santa Fe Railroad, 1933.  
Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC SpecialCollections.**

The central element in the drawing shows strong Art Deco details, much like the Cincinnati station. The remainder of the building appears more generic.

A change in design direction came about in September 1933, when Los Angeles architects John and Donald B. Parkinson sent a letter to R. L. Adams, Chief Engineer for the Union Pacific System, seeking “the architectural commission in connection with” the “Los Angeles Union Depot project.”<sup>41</sup> A contract between the Parkinsons and the three railroads involved in the project was formally signed on December 20, 1933. As per the contract, their duties included:

1. In connection with the general plan or layouts to be furnished by the Terminal, the consulting architect in conjunction with representatives of the Terminal shall meet from time to time as may be necessary to consider plans and studies made by the Terminal, and as a result of these meetings he shall prepare not less than three general plans with sufficient colored elevations, sketches, etc and such minor changes or modifications of these three plans as may be required, to permit of the Committee of Chief Engineers of the Terminal selecting one for adoption as The Plan.
2. After the adoption of the Plan, the consulting architect shall furnish the following:
  - a. All four elevations, scale 1/8” equal 1-ft.
  - b. A perspective, scale 1/16” equal 1-ft.
  - c. Interior elevation of all principal requirements, scale 1/4” equal 1-ft.
  - d. Principal ornamental details, scale 1/4” equal 1-ft.
  - e. Typical full size details of all ornaments and mouldings.

f. General outline specifications in sufficient detail to permit of railway architectural forces carrying out the idea of consulting architect with respect to design, materials of construction, decorative treatment, color schemes, etc.

The contract goes on to note that “detail working plans and drawings will be made by the architectural forces of the Terminal” and that the consulting architects will not be directing the construction of the building, nor will they be responsible for landscaping.<sup>42</sup>

Each railroad company had its own architect – H. L. Gilman for Santa Fe, J. H. Christie for Southern Pacific and R. J. Wirth for Union Pacific – to oversee its interests in the union passenger terminal project.<sup>43</sup> By hiring prominent local architects John and Donald B. Parkinson as consulting architects, the railroads added local expertise. The Parkinsons, a father and son team, came to the project already having designed large railroad depots in Caliente, Nevada and Ogden, Utah in the Mission Revival and Italian Renaissance Revival styles respectively.<sup>44</sup> John Parkinson also had collaborated with Edwin Bergstrom on the Central depot in Los Angeles for the Southern Pacific. Union Station was one of the last projects John Parkinson worked on; he passed away December 9, 1935.

An Architectural Committee was formed and the first formal meeting was held on January 5, 1934, when the men began the design process in earnest.<sup>45</sup>

### **A Regional Architecture – Spanish Colonial Revival**

The evolution in design from a neo-classical building reminiscent of the Union Station in Washington, D.C. to the Spanish Colonial Revival building we know today came from the railroads’ management and architects. Although the

Parkinsons deserve credit for the final design, the collaboration in ideas and practical matters involving terminal design between the experienced railroad architects and the Parkinsons led to the final product. The Spanish Colonial Revival terminal building was the result of a regional design ethos, cost saving measures on the part of the railroads, and local demand for a suitably impressive station.

On January 18, 1934, before a month had passed since signing their contract, the Parkinsons had presented a preliminary plan to the committee. Incorporating various suggestions from the committee, the Parkinsons refined their plan and presented it again on January 19. A letter from members of the Architectural Committee to M. C. Blanchard, head of the Engineering Committee reported that,

The Consulting Architects seemed to favor the Monumental or Formal type of architecture, it being their idea to tie the station into the City Hall style. However, when they were shown a picture of the Court House at Santa Barbara, they said they would make further study of the Informal California type.<sup>46</sup>

The letter goes on to recommend that “the Consulting Architects be instructed to make studies of three distinct types of architecture rather than three studies of the same type or design,” and notes the plan of the Architectural Committee to “visit stations at Omaha, Portland, Sacramento and San Francisco for the purpose of studying the buildings and all facilities in connection with same.”<sup>47</sup>

As early as February 2, 1934, a letter from M. C. Blanchard to H. C. Mann, Chief Engineer for the Union Pacific, shows that both Donald Parkinson and Blanchard believed the general inclination was toward using a “Southern California type” architecture.<sup>48</sup>

A telegram dated February 16, 1934 sent from Omaha read:

Parkinsons have made considerable improvement in plans and elevations particularly Spanish type which is now superior all others. Four elevations will be ready for review by Friday 23<sup>rd</sup>. Suggest you be present.<sup>49</sup>

The meeting was held on February 26, where four architectural schemes were evaluated. Coincidentally, cost estimates were provided for each, prepared by the Architectural Committee, with the following details:

Scheme "A": Modern Standard Station	\$1,084,041
Scheme "B": Modernized Byzantine	1, 403,788
Scheme "C": California Type	854,611
Scheme "D": Modern Monumental Style	1,074,484

Scheme "A" was considered "more commonplace" than the other designs. Scheme "C" was deemed "characteristic of Southern California and would have much more charm than the others, due to its informality and intimate coordination of garden areas." Scheme "D," while "in harmony with the new buildings in the Civic Center" and "modern and monumental in character both inside and out [but does not] feature California atmosphere or the outdoor effects as exist in plan 'C.'" The committee unanimously favored plans "C" and "D" and proposed "that the Chief Engineers Committee select one of them for the final design."<sup>50</sup> Although the "California Type" plan seemed to be the favored design, the Parkinsons continued to refine each of the four plan types with further suggestions from the Architectural Committee.

Some interesting politics must have taken place during the design selection process, though we must content ourselves with the written records that remain. A letter from L. T. Jackson to H. C. Mann, dated April 21, 1934 updates Mann on the selection process:

The Santa Fe has selected Scheme C (Spanish Type) which with this company makes a majority [L. T. Jackson worked for the Union Pacific], however, S. P. Co. has not indicated its official selection although local officers have been favoring Scheme D.

It is understood that Mr. Etter discussed this subject with an S. P. executive who said he was in favor of the cheapest plan which according to estimates, would be Scheme C.<sup>51</sup>

Railroad companies were businesses and had to balance expenditures to attract passengers while maintaining their bottom lines. With the country in the Great Depression, it is understandable that a \$200,000 difference, especially with the Southern Pacific paying the largest share, would help to determine which design was favored. The Santa Fe's decision stayed true to the character the railroad had promoted throughout the southwest, with depots in the Mission style (as opposed to standardized frame construction depots) all along its lines.<sup>52</sup> In a letter dated May 7, the Southern Pacific officially stated it was in favor of the "Mediterranean or Southern California type for the exterior of the new Los Angeles passenger station" but raises objections about the floor plan itself, as well as the outdoor patios because "they have no utilitarian value and their cost does not warrant the expense of construction and upkeep."<sup>53</sup>

The exploratory trip to Ogden, Omaha and Kansas City was postponed indefinitely; however, the Architectural Committee did travel to Santa Barbara on May 16 to examine "California types of construction."<sup>54</sup> Besides viewing the beautifully designed courthouse, the committee would also have seen the Spanish Colonial Revival-themed commercial district containing paseos, arcaded walkways, patios and white stuccoed buildings with red tile roofs.<sup>55</sup>





**Figure 34 – Current view of the Santa Barbara Courthouse, which was used as an example for the preferred design style of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal.  
Photo by Kenneth Breisch.**

Elements in the Santa Barbara courthouse can easily be identified in the final design of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. The placement of the main entrance as a large arched opening in a gabled building mass, with the clock tower located just to the right, is the most obvious similarity. The deep reveal on the main entrance as well as the appearance of one on the corner of the building in the photograph above is mimicked in the painted, as opposed to stone-faced, arches in the Los Angeles terminal. Each uses a contrasting medium to emphasize the change and the importance of the openings. The overall elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival style so adeptly expressed by the William Mooser Company in the 1925-1929 courthouse can also be found in the final design of the Los Angeles terminal building. The building itself surrounds a garden area, which could be construed as

an enclosed Spanish courtyard. The basic outline from the street remains the same, the clock tower is slightly modified but retains the essential character of that in Santa Barbara, and the main entrance is a less expensive, updated version of the one designed by William Mooser Company. With the images from Santa Barbara in mind, the architects must have returned to Los Angeles and begun designing in a new direction.

The first of the “final” elevations to come from these directives appeared to be more influenced by the Spanish missions than later drawings. The tower had a narrow dome with a small lantern on top. The main building mass was very plain except for a quatrefoil window in the gable.

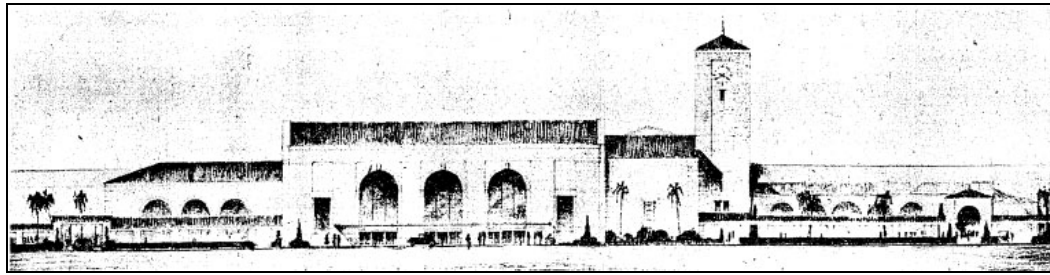
During the ongoing design process a number of exterior sketches had been prepared by the Parkinsons. Each sketch of the “Southern California type” showed a tower connected to the terminal building. One of the variables that had to be considered during the design process was the possibility that a post office would be constructed next to the terminal building to handle mail moving in and out of the city. One of the Parkinsons’ designs had a tower on the north side of the terminal, but as the likely location for a post office was just to the north of the building, an objection was made that the tower would then “emphasize the postoffice building rather than the station building.”<sup>56</sup> This, perhaps, is the reason why the tower at Union Station is to the south of the main building mass.

The Architectural Committee began to express some concerns with the Parkinsons’ additions to the plan. The Parkinsons proposed adding an additional bay

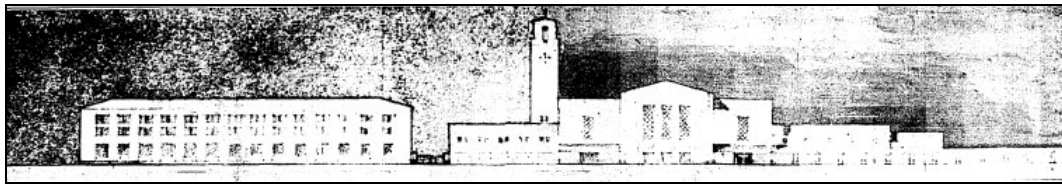
onto the east end of the main waiting room and were being “too ambitious in the selection of materials.” To the chagrin of the railroad architects and the executives trying to keep costs down, the Parkinsons proposed “a vast amount of marble wainscot and terra cotta walls in [the] Waiting Room . . . [and] black and colored granite as a base for the front elevation.” There was also some concern at the same meeting that the Parkinsons’ design intentions were not following the dictates of the railroad architects. The Architectural Committee believed that

the elevation studies and sections made so far by the consulting architects indicated they are gradually getting away from the “Southern California” style of architecture. The waiting room and concourse are too stiff and formal. A tile roof alone does not express the feeling of the type or style of architecture which was selected by the Railroads.<sup>57</sup>

Other complications arose in December 1934, when Los Angeles Mayor Frank Shaw adamantly refused to locate a post office on the terminal grounds and further stated that the city would not approve the elevation drawings then favored by the railroads because “he expected a more imposing and magnificent station building, comparing favorably with the Kansas City and Washington stations.”<sup>58</sup> This pronouncement caused the railroads to re-evaluate one of the earlier plans. In a politically wise move, the two plans were shown at a mayor’s conference in January 1935. Both plans were evaluated, with the previously discarded plan, a “strictly Southern California type architecture,” proving to be the favored plan by all present.<sup>59</sup> Both drawings were published in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>60</sup> The sketches are shown below.



**Figure 35 – Parkinsons’ sketch of “Southern California type” architecture for proposed union passenger terminal. This drawing shows the terminal occupying the entire site between Macy and Aliso streets. From the *Los Angeles Times*.**



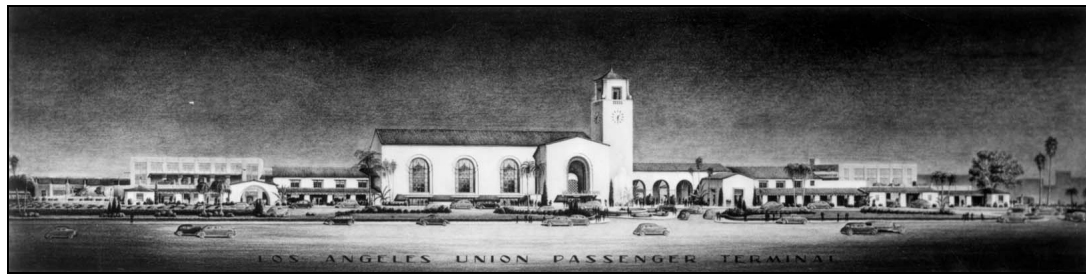
**Figure 36 – Parkinsons’ sketch of an alternate design for proposed union passenger terminal. Some more formal architectural elements still exist in the design. This drawing shows the terminal building to the right and the proposed post office building to the left. From the *Los Angeles Times*.**

Elements of the final design can be seen in both of the above images. The final decision between the two rested on the federal government’s determination on where the new post office would be built.<sup>61</sup> A plan drawn from the suggestions of a government architect changed the position of many of the interior features, reduced the height of the tower and the buildings and cut the patios off from the circulation pattern. A strongly worded letter of objections to the government plan included the following points:

The general appearance of the Union Terminal in the arrangement suggested by the government architect loses its dignity and height . . . . Even the finest Spanish details without sufficient mass, freedom and location are not able to save the impression of being a miniature against the big block of the Working Post Office . . . . The design does not permit a parklike approach from Alameda Street and Civic Center, as intended originally . . . .<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, the government abandoned its plan to build the post office next to the terminal in November of 1935 and the architects were able to work out the design details and finalize the plan.<sup>63</sup>

John Parkinson passed away on December 9, 1935. A telegram sent from Frank Karr to railroad executives noted, “Donald, son and junior member, will carry on the business. Donald has been only active member on LAUPT work and will continue as consultant. Terminal forces will make detail design. City has approved plan and elevation.”<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 37 – Artist’s rendering of final design, 1937.**

Throughout the design process a number of factors were at work. Clearly, railroad personnel from each of the three railroads had opinions on spatial connections and needs that had to be worked into the plans based on experiences with previous terminal construction. The management overseeing the process was most concerned with getting good, but utilitarian, design for the lowest possible cost. The Parkinsons were pleased to have the commission as the early 1930s were a lean time for architectural work because of the depression. However, their designs continually veered towards a more formal, neo-classical style. Toward the end of the design process, railroad officials were expressing reservations about their work both because of their reluctance to adhere to a regional style and because many of the

materials they specified were costly. Eventually, with pressure from city officials, railroad officials, and the Architectural Committee, Donald Parkinson finalized the design with the above shown rendering. Hailed as one of the last great passenger stations built in the United States, the serenely monumental terminal building has become one of the icons of Los Angeles.

### **Southern California Style in the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal**

In the late 1920s, the area around the plaza was “rediscovered” by a local socialite named Christine Sterling. She was appalled by the pending demolition of the Avila adobe and the deterioration in the buildings around the plaza area. By heightening awareness and involving Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*, Sterling began a crusade to “save” Olvera Street and to “re-create its Spanish past,” or at least an Anglo vision of that past. Her efforts bore fruit by the time construction began on the future union passenger terminal across the street. A *Los Angeles Times* article from 1929 describes the intent thusly: “Olvera street is being changed into a charming thoroughfare by the Plaza de Los Angeles Corporation, to which interested citizens have been invited to contribute. The street is to be made into a market place for Mexicans and Indians who will sell curious [sic] to residents and visitors.”<sup>65</sup> The existence of this conspicuously Spanish Colonial Revival block just across from the Union Passenger Terminal site is another likely influence on its design.

The exterior appearance and treatments of the terminal building blended well with the surrounding plaza area and the gleaming white tower of city hall rising

nearby.<sup>66</sup> Uniformly clad in red clay tiles, the rooflines varied considerably, though none extended past the cornice lines except over the covered arcades.



**Figure 38 – Union Passenger Terminal under construction, 1938. View is from the taxi area, the south patio is just beyond the covered roof in the foreground. (See figure 41 for plan.) Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library photo collection.**

Partly because of the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, architects and builders were more sensitive to designing with tectonic movement in mind. As such, “each of the individual building masses was made structurally independent of adjoining masses through the medium of wide expansion joints . . . the width of these joints varies from two to four inches.”<sup>67</sup>

Unlike the adobe construction emulated in much of the terminal’s design, steel and concrete construction gave the building considerable strength and its clean, smooth-walled appearance. Celotex board form linings were used to leave a faint

texture on the poured concrete when it cured. To achieve the off-white color of the building, two different cement concrete paints were used: Cemelith (principally on the front faces of the terminal and the tower) and Bondex.<sup>68</sup> Walls throughout the building and along the arcaded walkways were made to appear very thick, similar to the appearance of an adobe block wall. Windows had sectional steel sash painted Venetian blue, and the reveals were painted tan above the red quarry tile sills.<sup>69</sup> Doors and windows were trimmed with bronze, grilles were of wrought iron, and other metal work in the terminal was of satin-finished aluminum.<sup>70</sup>



**Figure 39 – Current photo of exterior front of Union Station showing main entrance and clock tower. Photo by Holly Kane.**

The most prominent feature, the clock tower, blended the romantic, nostalgic image of the old Mission bell towers with the modern-day need to keep to a schedule and the reminder that the transcontinental railroads were the authors of synchronized time-keeping in the United States.<sup>71</sup> The clock tower at Union Passenger Terminal



rose one hundred twenty-five feet and was topped by a stepped-back top resembling a belfry. The tile roof was capped with a Moorish finial. A massive arch at the base of the tower led into the vestibule (see photo below).



**Figure 40 – Current view of arcaded walkway between the former Harvey House restaurant and the vestibule. Photo by Holly Kane.**

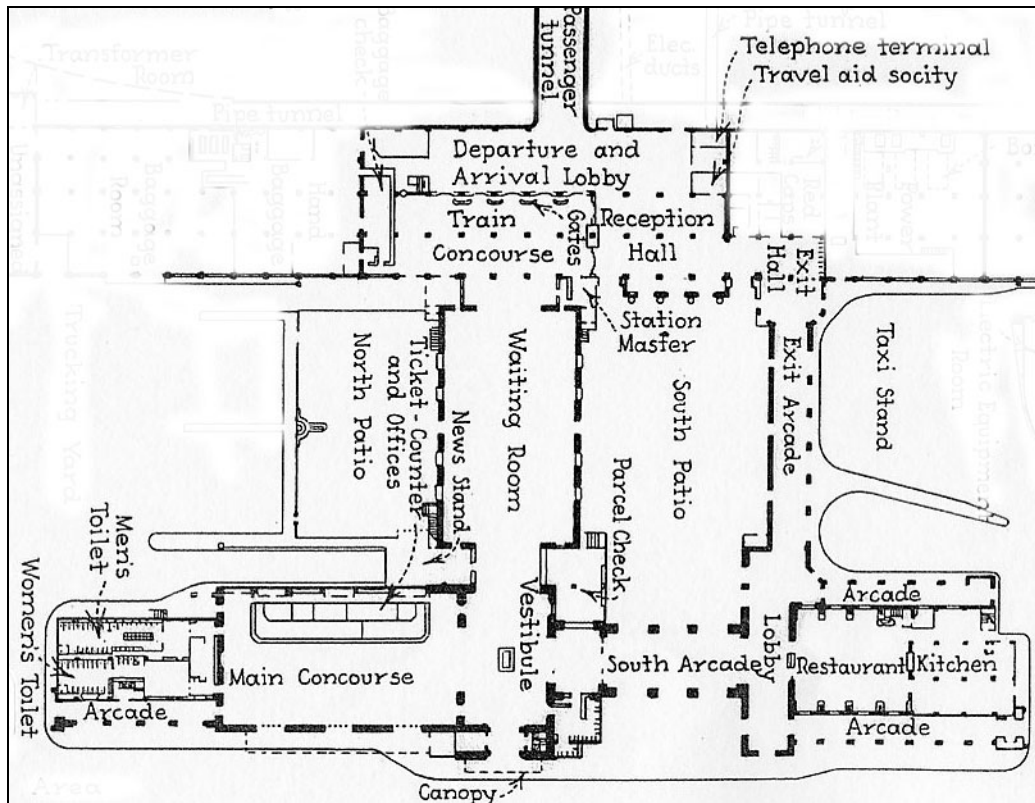
Outdoor covered walkways allowed pedestrians to proceed to and from the terminal to the Harvey House restaurant, located just to the south of the tower, or to continue south towards Aliso Street and terminal parking areas. Another arcaded walkway connected the main concourse with the Los Angeles Railway stop that served the terminal on the Macy Street side. These arcaded walkways with deep reveals expressed classic elements of both Gothic ambulatories and mission-style ecclesiastical architecture.

Two landscaped patios as well as landscaped gardens in the central island in front of the terminal provided passengers with a “typical” outdoor California experience that drew on both mission and railroad history. Although the Southern Pacific executives had privately viewed the addition of outdoor spaces as an unnecessary expense, train station gardens had a long history, and these gardens made the Los Angeles terminal distinctive. Their appearance also emulated mission gardens and blurred the lines between the indoor/outdoor environment that was becoming a hallmark of California modernism through architects such as Irving Gill.

The addition of copious parking for automobiles marked the Los Angeles terminal as unique in train station design. Throughout the design process, more and more spaces were added. Los Angeles was, after all, clearly a car town by the 1930s. Surface parking held four hundred seventy-eight cars, and in the final design, a parking garage under the terminal was built that could accommodate one hundred twenty-five cars.<sup>72</sup> According to architectural historian Carroll Meeks, “the automobile was better provided for than at any previous station, with extensive parking lots which were immediately in front and not cut off by an intervening highway.”<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, the importance of the automobile to Southern California soon led to greater personal mobility and less travel by passenger train.

Circulation patterns inside the terminal were established so that departing passengers and arriving passengers remained separated but had access to the amenities they needed while also having the chance to linger in an outdoor patio landscaped with mature trees and flowers. The trains themselves were accessed via

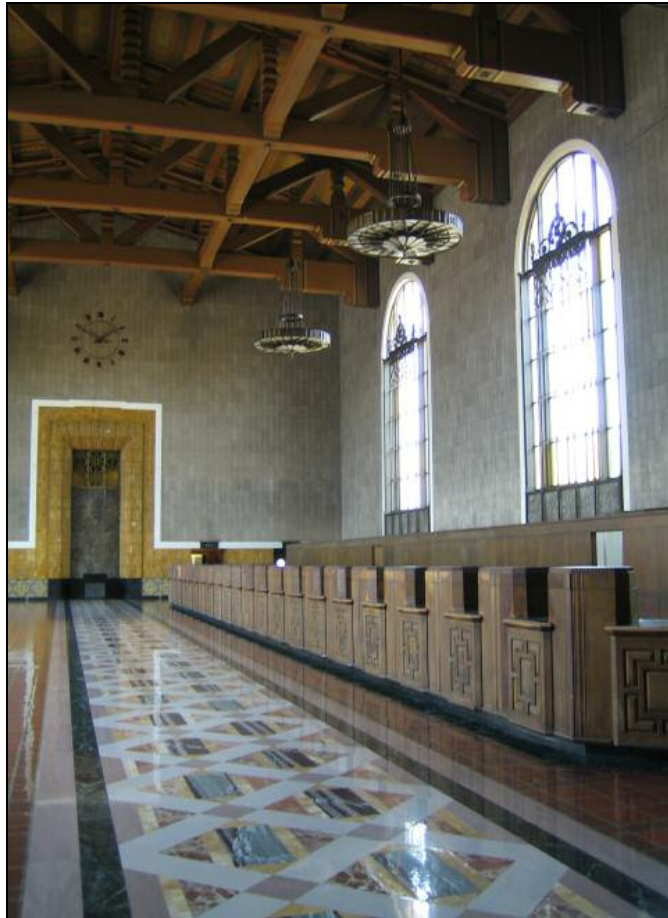
an underground tunnel on the same level as the terminal. Passengers proceeded up ramps to the train platforms above.



**Figure 41 – Plan showing the public areas of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. Adapted from plan shown in *Railway Age* magazine.**

Departing passengers could be dropped off at the main entrance to the station and proceed under the reinforced cantilevered concrete canopy to the fifty by eighty foot vestibule. Entering through one of the five glazed doors in bronze frames set in the base of the largest of the oversized arched openings in the front façade, the passenger beheld a large space containing only an information desk. From here, the passenger could choose to turn left into the main concourse and purchase a ticket, continue straight ahead into the waiting room or turn right and head toward the

Harvey House restaurant. Those who strolled to the station from the plaza area passed fan palms, magnolia trees and olives before arriving at the station entrance.<sup>74</sup>



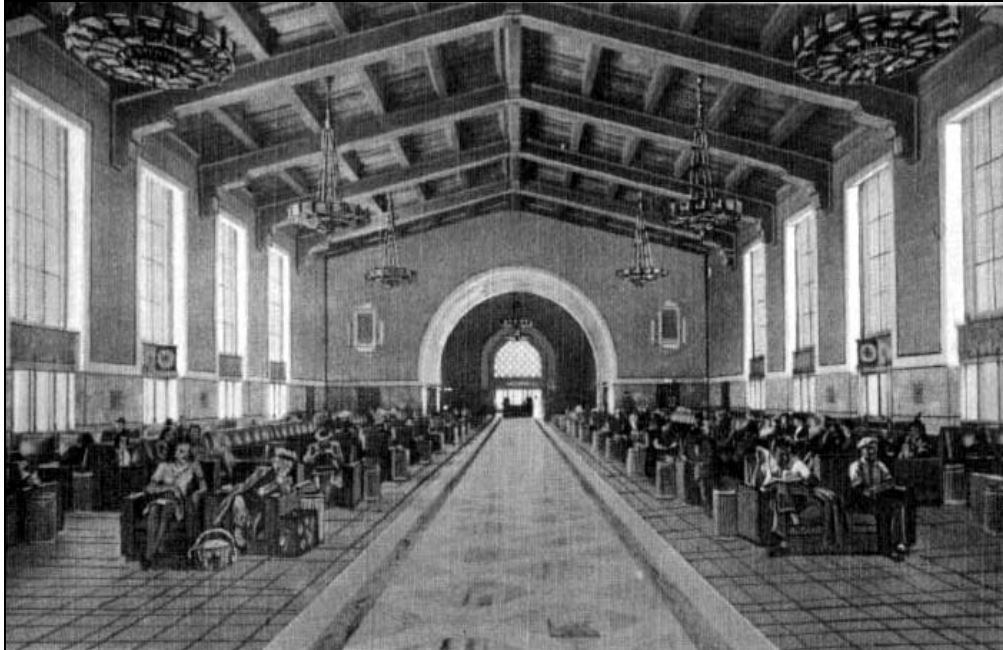
**Figure 42 – Current view of the main concourse and ticket counter. Note the inlaid marble pattern on the floor and the ornamentation around the door at the far end. The arched windows look out to the north patio. Photo by Holly Kane.**

The main concourse measured one hundred forty-six by eighty feet, with a roofline sixty-two feet above the floor. Aside from a few clusters of seating and the ticket counter, the room was open. Six large arched windows provided plenty of natural light from the east and west sides of the room. To better conceptualize how spacious the main concourse felt, an article in *Architect and Engineer* notes that “an ordinary 5-story building could be set inside of it and there would be room to

spare.”<sup>75</sup> Ticket sales took place in an area one hundred fifteen feet long by twenty-five feet deep. The counter itself was constructed of black walnut and had black Belgium marble deal plates. Restrooms and a barber shop were at the far end of the room. The vestibule, passages, main concourse and waiting room walls were all decorated in the same manner with a

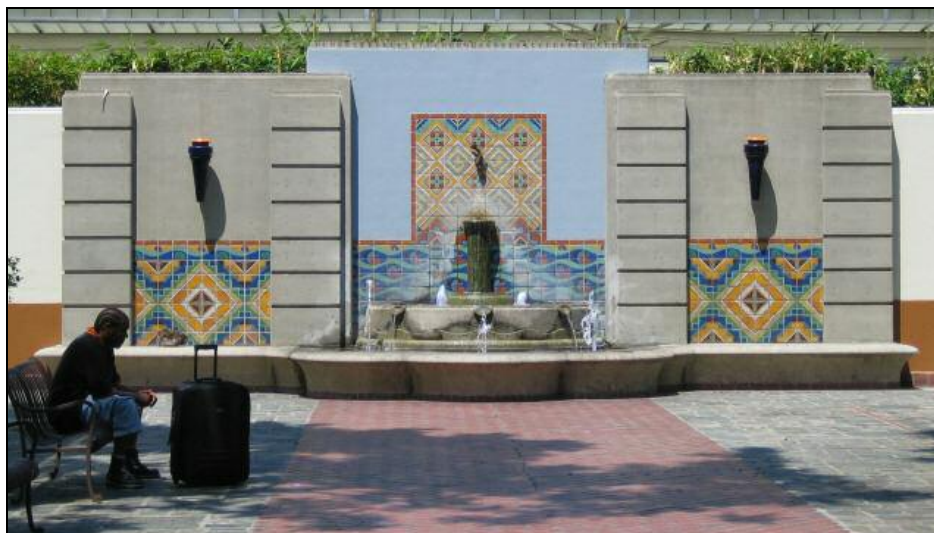
6-in. base of Belgium black marble surmounted by a 3-ft. band of ornamental tiles in tones of French blue, olive, terra sienna and raw sienna, laid up in a mosaic pattern. Capping this colorful base is a 2-in. band of Campan Melange marble, which, in turn, to a height of 7 ft. 8 in. above the floor is surmounted by Montana sienna travertine, ornamented with 3-in. by 3-in. decorative tile inserts. Above this course is an 8-in. band of painted hard plaster, and then, to and across the ceiling, the interior is faced with acoustical material given a tinted finish.<sup>76</sup>

The acoustic wall and ceiling coverings acted to dampen the echoes that traditionally plagued train stations. Floors throughout the terminal were composed of patterned quarry tile in two shades of red. Ornamental marble borders in the main areas and an eleven foot wide “marble carpet” extending down the centerline of the vestibule and waiting room added a richness to the flooring materials. Steel roof trusses in the ceilings were finished to resemble heavy timbers, continuing the motif of traditional mission architecture. Ornate circular Spanish style metal chandeliers measuring ten feet in diameter illuminated the interior spaces, with six each in the main concourse and waiting rooms and two more in the vestibule.<sup>77</sup>



**Figure 43 – The waiting room at Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. The outdoor patios were visible through windows on both sides. Postcard from personal collection.**

If the patron already had a ticket, they could proceed to the waiting room or to the Harvey House restaurant. The waiting room, a one hundred forty foot by eighty foot wide space with walls rising thirty six feet high, contained clusters of leather-upholstered seats. This open space, illuminated with natural light from nearly ceiling-height windows, was at a right angle from the main concourse. Doors on the north side of the waiting area opened onto the north patio, a sort of open air extension to the waiting room. Mature Valencia orange trees, avocado trees, eucalyptus, jacarandas, California sycamores and live oaks were supplied and planted by R. W. Hamsher, a nurseryman, in the north patio.<sup>78</sup>



**Figure 44 – Current view of fountain in south patio. Photo by Holly Kane.**

Passengers could wait on colorfully tiled benches, relaxing under trees that appeared quite exotic to Easterners, and listen to the sounds of water cascading in a tiled fountain. Because of the more temperate climate, open air waiting rooms were not uncommon in train depots in Southern California. The Santa Fe's La Grande depot, for example, had a large open air waiting room adjacent to the platform, between the depot and the express and baggage offices. The unique design of the union passenger terminal's north patio combined the conventions of the station garden with an open air waiting room.

Important passenger terminals of the day contained many of the same shops and services a modern day traveler would find in airports and hotels. Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal contained a barber shop, news and cigar stand, a soda fountain, luncheonette and parcel check service.<sup>79</sup>



**Figure 45 – Current view of interior of former Harvey House restaurant at Union Station, note Native American rug pattern on floor. Design by Mary Coulter. Photo by Holly Kane.**

The Harvey House restaurant, located in a separated building to the south of the main terminal, was easily accessed via the covered arcades connecting the two. Twelve magnolia trees were planted in the restaurant arcade. As a signature element for the Santa Fe system, the Harvey House operated at the high end of railroad station restaurants and had a well-established reputation for quality and service. Designed by Mary Coulter, the interior treatment was described as “Eighteenth Century Spanish Provincial, modified,” by *Railway Age* magazine.<sup>80</sup> The main dining room seated two hundred patrons at tables and booths, and another twenty-seven at a U-shaped counter. There was also a dining area in the mezzanine that accommodated an additional sixty diners. A cocktail lounge served seventy-five and a soda fountain/ luncheonette hosted another thirty people. All told, the Harvey House



could serve three hundred ninety-two patrons at a time. A separate lunch room was also available for terminal employees and seated eighty.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 46 – Current view of south patio which provided arriving passengers with their first “Southern California” experience, while moving toward the exit. Photo by Holly Kane.**

Arriving passengers were directed away from the waiting areas and toward the south patio to exit the terminal. A covered walkway led alongside the gardens in the south patio, and opened onto a taxi stand or led out to the front of the terminal building. Like the north patio, the south patio was designed to symbolize the warm Southern California lifestyle to new arrivals. Planted with California pepper trees, olive and fan palm trees, the south patio finally delivered the arrival impressions that city boosters had longed for over the course of many years.<sup>82</sup>

One of the more fascinating design decisions made was to incorporate Art Deco motifs for signs and lettering and for some of the interior design. Art Deco had been in vogue for over a decade, and the Parkinsons had designed their highly acclaimed Bullocks Wilshire in the Art Deco style in 1929. The streamlined look evoked speed and efficiency – certainly appropriate to a train station which hosted

transcontinental express passenger trains. The juxtaposition with the redolent Mediterranean patios where travelers could wait in sunny seclusion surrounded by palms, flowering plants and tiled fountains, and then board a streamlined passenger train was perfectly captured by the design decisions.

### **Constructing an Arrival Experience**

Arriving passengers first moved through the gentle, moderately-scaled spaces of the terminal building, past deep arches and gardens, then exited out towards Alameda Street. While many travelers departed by automobile or on a streetcar, those that chose to wander toward the plaza itself soon became immersed in Christine Sterling's Olvera Street and the re-created Spanish past mentioned earlier. Encompassing the area just across from the terminal's entrance, Olvera Street still contained some adobe buildings and other masonry buildings that were stuccoed and decorated with wrought iron railings and red tiled roofs.

Another project by Christine Sterling strove to create a cleaner, more modern Chinatown in an area adjacent to Olvera Street. This Chinatown, while designed to give displaced Chinese residents a more sanitary place to live, was also a tourist attraction. The area, bounded by Macy, Ord, Main and Spring streets, was dubbed China City and came complete with a Chinese temple and garden, a wishing well, and a "Chinese motion-picture exhibit" of sets, costumes and properties from Cecil B. DeMille.<sup>83</sup>

Although Olvera Street still exists today, more or less as Christine Sterling envisioned it, China City caught fire on February 21, 1939 and was not rebuilt. An

alternate Chinatown had been initiated by Peter Soo Hoo, a Chinese-American. Along with a group of approximately twenty-eight Chinese-American investors, he ironically purchased vacant land from the Santa Fe near Broadway and College Street at about the same time other Chinese were being evicted from the union passenger terminal site.<sup>84</sup> This Chinatown, owned by Chinese and run by Chinese, eventually blended with the remains of China City and is the Chinatown that Los Angeles residents and visitors are familiar with today.



**Figure 47 – Photo taken on Olvera Street during Fiesta de Los Angeles in 1936.  
Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library.**

Both Olvera Street and China City added to the tourist experience. The exotic elements of each were of great curiosity to tourists, and in their sanitized states, very accessible. Photographs from the thirties show young women posing next to a Hispanic guitar player, or dressed up in Mexican costumes with large sombreros. Both of the examples shown here exhibit a romanticized Anglo

interpretation of Los Angeles' past rather than the reality of its beginnings under Spanish and Mexican rule.



**Figure 48 – Women dressed in costumes on Olvera Street, circa 1930.  
Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library.**

When the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal finally opened its doors, the Southern Pacific, the Santa Fe and the Union Pacific scheduled three days of celebratory activities.<sup>85</sup> A parade down Alameda Street kicked off the festivities, followed by a formal dedication on May 3, 1939.<sup>86</sup> Mayor Fletcher Bowron even proclaimed “a business and industry holiday for the parade period.”<sup>87</sup> Two days of pageant performances, private parties and station tours followed. The pageant, entitled “Romance of the Rails, or California’s Story of Transportation” was

produced by John Ross Reed of Chicago, and took place on a stage erected above the train tracks.<sup>88</sup> Crowds estimated at up to 600,000 people attended the events. After the celebrations concluded and the terminal was put in order, the first train into the new terminal was the Southern Pacific's Imperial from Calexico which was scheduled to arrive at 5:15 a.m. on May 9.<sup>89</sup>



**Figure 49 – Drawing of the new Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 6, 1939.**

A *Los Angeles Times* article on May 6, 1939 sums up the triumph in the more than forty year quest for a union passenger terminal in an article entitled,

*They have Streamlined the Pueblo*

And now, a few paces beyond the colorful old plaza of El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles stands the railroads' contribution to the romantic progress that has made the Los Angeles of today – the new Los Angeles Union Passenger Station which officially opens this Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup>. You will not find it a massive sky-scraping structure of granite and steel.

Rather, it is as though the dons of days gone by had come to us and, with twentieth century vision had said: “Let us show you the way,” and had proceeded to do just that. In the new station you will find an architectural triumph of early Spanish-California appreciation, but it was not designed just to admire. We believe it to be the most modern railway passenger station in the world today – one in which there will be no problem at all in finding your way about.<sup>90</sup>

The 1939 train timetable for the Union Passenger Terminal listed thirty three arrivals and thirty three departures daily.

Catellus Development Corporation, a spin-off of the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe, now owns the property and has built apartments and offices on the two corners of Alameda Street. These new buildings diminish the sight lines of those approaching the terminal, but provide additional revenue. Unlike the fate of all of its predecessors in the city, the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal received a complete renovation in 1994, and is growing in popularity once again. Locals and visitors still relax on the patios under the trees, politicians still have lunch and a martini at Traxx Restaurant in the waiting room, children still play in the fountains, and people late for their trains still dash past.

## Chapter Six Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 29. It is important to note that prior to the Army Corps of Engineers' "concretization" of the Los Angeles River channel, the riverbed's location was apt to change during floods and was not always located where we know it today.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Quote noted as being from Herbert Eugene Bolton, ed., *Fray Juan Crespi: Missionary Explorer of the Pacific Coast*. 1927. (Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1971). Consult Gumprecht, 35-39, for a description of the Spanish expedition that discovered the future site of Los Angeles.

<sup>3</sup> Dora P. Crouch, Daniel J. Garr and Axel I. Mundigo, *Spanish City Planning in North America*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982), 159. This source specifically cites some of the "laws" and examines the details of the pueblo of Los Angeles in relation to Spanish city planning guidelines.

<sup>4</sup> Kronzek, Lynn C. and Roberta S. Greenwood, "Historical Background." In Greenwood, Roberta S. (ed.), *Down By The Station: Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880-1933* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ord's Plan de la Ciudad de Los Angeles, 1849. Re-drawn map can be found in Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 59.

<sup>6</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1887, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Kronzek and Greenwood, "Historical Background," 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. The former property owner of the Apablaza land, according to Kronzek and Greenwood, was Rosalia Dalton, whose property was bounded by that of Encarción [correct spelling is Encarnación] Sepulveda, Juan Ramirez, and Maria Antonia Pogerión. Many of the street names that existed before the land was consolidated for the passenger terminal reflect names of early residents.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Streets named after Juan Apablaza's family members were Apablaza, Cayetano, Juan, Benjamin, Concha, Mary.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. Calle de los Negros went by other names as well, including "Nigger" Alley, Negro Alley, Ferguson Alley and eventually was changed to Los Angeles Street.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, table 2.1, Chinese population in the City of Los Angeles, 1880-1940.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Julia G Costello, "A Night with Venus, a Moon with Mercury' The Archeology of Prostitution." in *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*, eds. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 177-196; and Kronzek and Greenwood, "Historical Background," 10.

<sup>15</sup> 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, vol. 1, sheets 10b and 12a.

<sup>16</sup> Conflicting reports exist even within the files of testimony on the subject. This narrative has been pieced together using the sources deemed most reliable. All source material from the Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>17</sup> Hanchett reportedly owned 840 out of 1000 shares of the Industrial Development & Land Company and 51 shares out of 55 issued in the Industrial Terminal Railway Company according to "Report on Facts Developed in Connection with Investigation of Original Cost and Chain of Ownership and/or Control of Certain Lands Now Owned by Southern Pacific Co., Lying Partly Within Site of Proposed Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles," dated December 11, 1933. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>18</sup> Statement by Richard Sachse, acting as Consulting Engineer to the A. T. & S. F. and the L. A. & S. L. R. R., dated December 13, 1933, 5. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>19</sup> Union Pacific System Telegram (translated) to HCM, Omaha from LTJ, dated December 1, 1933; Statement by Richard Sachse, Consulting Engineer to the A. T. & S. F. and the L. A. & S. L. R. R., dated December 13, 1933; and Report on Facts Developed in Connection with Investigation of

Original Cost and Chain of Ownership and/or Control of Certain Lands Now Owned by Southern Pacific Co., Lying Partly Within Site of Proposed Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, dated December 11, 1933. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>20</sup> Statement by Richard Sachse, acting as Consulting Engineer to the A. T. & S. F. and the L. A. & S. L. R. R., dated December 13, 1933, 5. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>21</sup> Testimony of E.P. McAuliffe, Land Appraiser for California Railroad Commission, before said Commission, March 2-4 and May 19, 1926. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>22</sup> Statement by Richard Sachse, Consulting Engineer to the A. T. & S. F. and the L. A. & S. L. R. R., dated December 13, 1933, 4. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> "Los Angeles Gets its Union Terminal." *Architectural Forum* 59 (October 1933): 334.

<sup>25</sup> *El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), 40.

<sup>26</sup> Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>27</sup> The Whiting-Mead Company contracted to remove most of the buildings from the site, and paid the sum of one dollar for the privilege. "Bill of Sale." Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>28</sup> Bill Bradley, *The Last of the Great Stations: 40 Years of the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal* (Glendale, CA: Interurbans, 1979), 78.

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed description of the archeology of the site, see Roberta S. Greenwood, *Down By The Station: Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880-1933* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Robinson's background is discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>31</sup> For an excellent evaluation of the trends in park planning, landscape design and architectural design that led to the City Beautiful movement, consult William H. Wilson's *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Mulford Robinson, *Modern Civic Art or The City Made Beautiful* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1903), 60-61.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Railroad Commission of the State of California, *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*, 365.

<sup>36</sup> Drawing and description of plan can be found on page 311 in the Railroad Commission of the State of California's *Report on Railroad Grade Crossing Elimination*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>38</sup> "Los Angeles Gets its Union Terminal." *Architectural Forum* 59 (October 1933): 334.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Mulford Robinson, *Modern Civic Art*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Cincinnati's union terminal opened in March 1933. Details can be found in Kevin J. Holland, *Classic American Railroad Terminals*, (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 2001), 48-51.

<sup>41</sup> Letter dated September 30, 1933. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>42</sup> Exhibit "A" of "Agreement between John Parkinson and Donald B. Parkinson and The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company, Southern Pacific Railroad Company and Southern Pacific Company," dated December 20, 1933. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

<sup>43</sup> R. J. Wirth finished the project for the Union Pacific, E. C. Batty was the original Union Pacific architect assigned to the project.

<sup>44</sup> "Other Notable Parkinson Buildings," Parkinson Archives. Copyright 2000.

<http://www.parkives.com>



- <sup>45</sup> An informal meeting, not including all of the participants, was held on December 27, 1933.
- <sup>46</sup> Letter from E. C. Batty, J. H. Christie, and Per H. L. Gilman to M. C. Blanchard, dated January 20, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>47</sup> Letter from E. C. Batty, J. H. Christie, and Per H. L. Gilman to M. C. Blanchard, dated January 20, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>48</sup> Letter. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>49</sup> This telegram was sent by L. T. Jackson to H. C. Mann, Chief Engineer, Union Pacific. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>50</sup> Meeting of the Architectural Committee of the Three Railroads Held in the Office of John Parkinson & Donald B. Parkinson, Architects, at 3:00 P.M., March 5, 1934, Those Present Being Messrs. H. L. Gilman, J. H. Christie, E. C. Batty, John Parkinson and Donald B. Parkinson. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>51</sup> Letter. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>52</sup> The Santa Fe used architecturally interesting depot design as one of its tourist draws. Many of its depots throughout the Southwest were in a Mission style and included elements of Native American art or references to Spanish and Mission styles. Mary Coulter, a talented designer and architect, did much of the design work for the Santa Fe
- <sup>53</sup> Letter to F. H. Knickerbocker, Chairman, Board of Managers, LAUPT and J. R. Hitchcock, General Manager, Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway from A. T. Mercier. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>54</sup> Letter to H. C. Mann from L. T. Jackson, dated May 16, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>55</sup> The town of Santa Barbara suffered extensive damage in a 1925 earthquake. The city had already begun planning for architectural oversight of new buildings specifying a Spanish Colonial Revival motif. An Architectural Board of Review had to approve all reconstruction, ensuring a jump start for the homogenous look visitors see today.
- <sup>56</sup> Letter to M. C. Blanchard from Architects' Committee, dated October 25, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections. Note that this is the actual title of the document, however, it is generally, but not always, referred to as the "Architectural Committee."
- <sup>57</sup> Letter to M. C. Blanchard from Architectural Committee, dated November 22, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>58</sup> Letter to M. C. Blanchard from W. H. Kirkbride, dated December 14, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>59</sup> Letter to H. C. Mann from L. T. Jackson, dated January 15, 1934. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>60</sup> "First Sketches Showing Proposed Union Depot and Postal Station," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1935, A1.
- <sup>61</sup> Letter to A. T. Mercier, Southern Pacific, J. R. Hitchcock, Santa Fe, and Frank Karr, from F. H. Knickerbocker, dated July 16, 1935. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>62</sup> Letter to H. C. Mann and W. H. Kirkbride from M. C. Blanchard with an attached memo by E. W. Markus, Chief Draftsman, LAUPT, dated September 11, 1935. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>63</sup> Letter to the Board of Managers from M. C. Blanchard, dated November 23, 1935 stating that he is enclosing "one print showing general floor plan and one print showing front and side elevations." He accedes that there may be further minor changes as the working drawings are prepared, but that the plan he is submitting is the final. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections. There were various iterations of the Spanish Colonial Revival designs, each with small detail changes. A poster on display at Union Station shows some of these drawings.
- <sup>64</sup> Telegram to WMJ HCM from F H K, dated December 11, 1935. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.

- <sup>65</sup> “Relics of Past Unearthed,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1929, A2.
- <sup>66</sup> Olvera Street, across from the union passenger terminal, was “revitalized” by Christine Sterling and an interested group of Angelenos in the late 1920s. Their intent was to bring back the romantic Spanish past and to provide an “authentic” tourist experience.
- <sup>67</sup> “Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, Cal.” *Railway Age* 106, No. 18, 778.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., 769.
- <sup>70</sup> Irving S. Fritzen, “Streamlining a Pueblo: Los Angeles Opens a New Union Station,” *The Santa Fe Magazine* 33, no. 7 (1939), 8.
- <sup>71</sup> Prior to regularized train travel, there was little need for the average citizen to worry about time, and each locality determined its own “local” time. According to Janet Greenstein Potter, “in 1869, there were more than 80 different time regions in the United States. Efficient and safe railroad operations necessitated dividing the country into Standard Railway Time Zones (Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific). [The time zones we use today.] This plan was designed by the industry and effected in 1883.” *Great American Railroad Stations*. (New York: Preservation Press and John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996), 15.
- <sup>72</sup> “Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, Cal.” *Railway Age* 106, No. 18, 774; and Fritzen, “Streamlining a Pueblo,” 8.
- <sup>73</sup> Carroll L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 158.
- <sup>74</sup> Plant list taken from: Supplemental Agreement between LAUPT and R.W. Hamsher. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>75</sup> “Los Angeles Union Passenger Railway Station.” *Architect and Engineer* 137 (May 1939), 39.
- <sup>76</sup> “Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, Cal.” *Railway Age* 106, No. 18 (1939): 771, 773.
- <sup>77</sup> Most of the interior design information in these paragraphs was taken from “Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, Cal.” *Railway Age* 106, No. 18: 768-774.
- <sup>78</sup> Plant list taken from: Supplemental Agreement between LAUPT and R.W. Hamsher. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>79</sup> Fritzen, “Streamlining a Pueblo,” 10-11.
- <sup>80</sup> “Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, Cal.” *Railway Age* 106, No. 18, 773. Mary Coulter (1869-1958) designed in a southwestern style. Many of her designs are still in use and popular with tourists including Desert View Watchtower, Hopi House, Hermit’s Rest, Phantom Ranch and Bright Angel Lodge at the Grand Canyon, and La Posada (1930) in Winslow, Arizona, La Fonda (1922) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and El Navajo (1916) in Gallup, New Mexico. She designed for the Fred Harvey Company for nearly a half century. Her use of Native American motifs and Spanish Colonial Revival ideas created a distinctive Southwestern architecture that appealed to boosters and tourists alike.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>82</sup> These trees were also supplied by R. W. Hamsher. Plant list taken from: Supplemental Agreement between LAUPT and R.W. Hamsher. Los Angeles Union Station Collection, USC Special Collections.
- <sup>83</sup> “Plans for Los Angeles’ New China City Completed,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1938, A1.
- <sup>84</sup> Kronzek and Greenwood, “Historical Background,” 40.
- <sup>85</sup> Terminal construction and operating expenses were split between the three railroads with each of the three railroad companies contributing the following percentages: Southern Pacific 44%, Santa Fe 33% and Union Pacific 23%. “Union Passenger Terminal at Los Angeles, Cal.” *Railway Age* 106, No. 18, 778. The builder was Robert E. McKee.
- <sup>86</sup> Ironically, the parade route began at Eighth and Alameda and proceeded down Alameda, the site of the worst-offending grade crossings in the city, past the new passenger terminal, and concluded at Ord Street. “Half Million Await Terminal Festival,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1939, A.

<sup>87</sup> “Half Million Await Terminal Festival,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1939, A.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> “Station Staff Bars Visitors to Clean Up After Throngs,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1939, A10.

<sup>90</sup> “They Have Streamlined the Pueblo,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1939, 5.

## CONCLUSION

Unquestionably the architectural style and building materials of a depot convey an image and often a sense of place to the observer. As has been emphasized throughout this work, the size, location, style and materials of a depot reveal functions of the building, the importance of the town to the railroad and vice versa, and in some cases the regional identification that allows a passenger to step out of a cross country train and know that they are in Los Angeles. Their tourist experience has begun, they've arrived, and sometimes they chose to stay.

For nearly fifty years arriving in Los Angeles meant disembarking from the train down at the depot. In the early years of train travel passengers stepped out onto dusty streets in a small town and headed to the local hotel or to the local stable to hire a horse. Perhaps they came as immigrants on an immigrant train and decided the climate was familiar and Los Angeles was a good place to start a new life. In the early years of rail travel the plaza area teemed with many ethnicities, as French, Italians and Germans from Europe settled near the depot and started new lives. A decade later the Chinese began arriving in significant numbers and the seeds of a Chinatown were sown. Commercial enterprises thrived and the city grew.

Arriving in Los Angeles in 1939 was a very different experience than in 1868. The first railroad depot, the little building at the corner of Alameda and Commercial streets, served only a twenty-two and a quarter mile track, but opened the town to easier imports and exports from the harbor at Wilmington. In a simple way, this depot served as the town headquarters for news from the outside world.

Businesses sprang up around it, speculators bought land nearby, and residents went down to the depot for entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of transcontinental travel, the Southern Pacific brought big changes to town. Despite the fact that high tariffs made the shipment of freight prohibitive, the east was open. No longer did travelers have to come by ship or by stagecoach. The Southern Pacific built up its rail yards and the station did enough business to support a combination depot and hotel. The assignment of telephone number “1” to the Southern Pacific office succinctly summarizes the railroad’s importance in Los Angeles in 1882. The railroad station agent held a rank only slightly below the Mayor.<sup>2</sup> Station agents anticipated incoming shipments, knew the latest news and who would be arriving on the next train. Gathering at the depot was the best way to discover this news and gossip and to catch a glimpse of any out-of-towners disembarking from the train.

When the Santa Fe finagled a connection to start service to Los Angeles, the town benefited from the competition. After two short years, the Santa Fe moved to its own depots on land that was outside the town. Soon, the town spread towards the Santa Fe station and its new neighbor, the Southern Pacific’s Arcade station. Because of the proximity of rail spurs and freight connections, the industrial district grew up in this area around Alameda Street and the rail lines that Phineas Banning and his partners first laid for the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad.

Naturally, as the population and popularity of the city grew, new passenger depot designs increased in architectural detail and materials, and in the amenities

offered. A major “boom” period in Los Angeles occurred with the land speculation in the 1880s. The Arcade depot was constructed in 1887-88, replacing the River Station depot and giving the Southern Pacific a new Romanesque Revival structure with a massive train shed and depot garden in lieu of an older depot hotel in a rail yard. The ornate Moorish La Grande depot was next to be constructed, opening in 1893. This domed brick building provided the Santa Fe with a signature depot (and station garden) better befitting its status than the simple frame building that had served passengers from 1887 to 1893.

After the third transcontinental route, the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, began service to Los Angeles, the city’s reputation as a crossroads of the West was cemented. Jeffery Richards and John M. MacKenzie attribute Chicago’s growth to the convergence of twenty-seven railroad lines in the city.<sup>3</sup> Wide open spaces in the West necessitated fewer long distance railroad operators, but certainly the presence of three separate railroad companies allowed a healthy competition and provided free market choices in shipping and travel. The forces of growth in the city prompted the city fathers to rally for a more scenic arrival experience for visitors and residents alike.

But not everyone arrived at the station. Darker moments in Los Angeles’ history took place at the station, too. When Japanese Americans were relocated to the Owens Valley during World War II, they left from the old Santa Fe Station, not Union Station. Undoubtedly their presence was seen as both undesirable and possibly a risk to regular ticketed passengers. Photographs from the time show them

near the tracks at the La Grande depot with the few possessions they were allowed to carry with them.<sup>4</sup>

Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal acted as a test case establishing legal precedents. Moving through both the California Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court, the battle to build a true union terminal in Los Angeles lasted through six presidents, eight mayors, the Great War and very nearly to the jet age.<sup>5</sup> As the last great union station built in the United States, the irony of the time lost in legal battles and the expenses incurred versus the actual years of regularized use is galling. After such a long fight, the clear separation of the industrial side of the railroad business from the passenger services near the civic center and tourist areas was finally achieved in 1939. For a short time, well-dressed travelers departed the sparkling new terminal near the plaza in a yellow cab, and were driven past the soaring tower of City Hall, past the bustling bank district on Spring Street and the theaters on Broadway, to arrive at the Biltmore Hotel where they could gaze out over Pershing Square and dream of the days to come. Truly, in 1939 tourists and visitors had finally arrived at the destination envisioned by the city fathers since the 1880s.

During World War II, the importance of Los Angeles as a defense manufacturing city as well as a port of departure for U.S. troops greatly increased the demand for rail travel. With as many as 100 trains per day, the demand still outstripped availability and many trains operated with standing room only.<sup>6</sup> Many young soldiers formed their first impressions of Los Angeles, and of California, after debarking from a troop train, getting a quick meal at the Harvey House and walking

into the California sunshine amidst swaying palms and drooping pepper trees. Many of these soldiers came back as civilians after the war and changed the landscape of the city by driving the demand for suburbia.

By the mid 1950s air travel began to supplant slower train travel and automobile travel replaced more localized train routes. Union Station, as it is now known, continued to serve those traveling by rail, but ridership declined considerably. The re-establishment of light rail projects in Los Angeles brought new life to the station, with many commuters passing through on weekdays. Regular Amtrak service connects Los Angeles with San Diego and San Francisco, as well as Tucson, Santa Fe and points east.

### **Trends in Architecture and the City Beautiful**

Early station design demanded that architects formulate circulation patterns to accommodate large numbers of travelers. Often, when a new terminal for a large metropolitan area was planned, future use projections called for designs to handle much larger numbers of people than the current terminal. With few examples of current building types to draw from, mainly churches and theaters, architects researched more ancient forms, such as the Colosseum and the baths at Caracalla or the great basilica of Maxentius and Constantine in ancient Rome.<sup>7</sup> The ease with which the ancient Romans handled crowds, in conjunction with the desire for monumental architecture and the City Beautiful movement resulted in the vast majority of large train stations being built in the neo-classical style.



While not executed in the neo-classical style that the Parkinsons seemed to prefer, the influence of the city beautiful movement still affected the final design of the Union Passenger Terminal in subtle but effective ways. Although pressure from the railroad decision-makers as well as city officials steered the design toward a more regional style, the Parkinsons did manage to ultimately create a monumental interior space through the use of concrete and steel construction and by emulating elements of the mission style as used in Spanish missions across California. Arguably, the model of the Santa Barbara courthouse suggested by the railroads provided a civic monument designed within a comprehensive plan that achieved the same goals of the city beautiful movement, albeit in a regional manner, a concept which was reinforced by the terminal's lush Mediterranean gardens.

Station gardens began appearing after 1867 in the United States and were designed to entice and intrigue travelers and locals alike, as well as to promote a particular rail line.<sup>8</sup> Both the Arcade and the La Grande stations maintained these outdoor spaces, and tourist postcards survive showing ladies in Victorian garb posing stiffly in front of cacti or palm trees. The notion of an outdoor space as an extension of a depot was taken a step further in the Union Passenger Terminal with the north and south patios designed as an open air waiting room and an open air arrival "hall" respectively. This notion combined the regional open air waiting room, such as the covered al fresco space at La Grande depot with the idea of a formal garden designed specifically for passengers. The integration of indoor and outdoor space had roots in the traditional Spanish and Mexican house, which often consisted of continuous

rooms arranged around a central courtyard. Later architects, with a bow to the sunny, temperate weather, continued to design outdoor living spaces.

If the railroads had acceded to the construction order issued by the California Railroad Commission a decade or two earlier, the design would likely have been very different. Up until the early 1930s, neo-classical designs universally appeared in conjunction with new terminal proposals. In retrospect, the blending of mission style architecture with Art Deco elements strikes the viewer as an elegant solution to the design parameters. The reality was closer to more practical matters: the railroad companies desire to spend as little as possible, the Parkinsons' preference for neo-classical architecture, and the city's desire to promote the Southern California experience. Ultimately designed in a fitting regional style, the Union Passenger Terminal has become one of the iconic symbols of Los Angeles.

### **Historic Preservation and the Depots of Los Angeles**

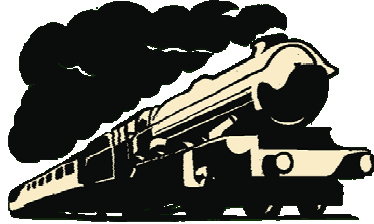
None of the depots documented in this work survive except for the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. What does this say about Los Angeles as a city? The railroads promoted growth of the town and the growth of the city pushed back. Railroads were big users of land, and in a growing city the pressures of land values versus necessity of use often caused the consolidation of railroad facilities and tracks. Railroad depots were commonly demolished all across the United States to make way for "progress," and Los Angeles was no exception.

Our appreciation as citizens for buildings that had some significance in our past has grown in recent decades. Ironically, one of the principal catalysts for the

modern preservation movement was the demolition of Pennsylvania Station in 1963. The Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal was threatened with demolition in the early 1980s when the city and the state filed an eminent domain case to “take” the property from the railroads in order to build a new transit center.<sup>9</sup> Railroad management countered with development plans of their own. The economic downturn in the late 1980s probably kept the development from proceeding, but elements of the transportation hub were integrated into the existing site. After a renovation in the early 1990s, the magnificence of the 1939 terminal building once again became evident. Unfortunately, economics prompted the private owners to add additional income-producing buildings to each of the corners of the property along Alameda Street, diminishing the visual impact of the terminal building. Although as preservationists we can be critical of any alterations made to the site, pragmatism also dictates that sensitive additions can breathe economic life into private holdings enabling continued care and maintenance for the structures we value. The original Los Angeles Union Station site has been compromised in some ways, but the principal elements remain intact and in excellent condition.

A number of designations and vehicles which promote preservation exist. While local, state and national listings cannot save historic buildings, they can impede efforts to alter or demolish them. Union Station has been documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey and is listed both as an Historic Cultural Monument in the city of Los Angeles as well as on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural, historical and archeological values.<sup>10</sup> As the sole

remaining example of Los Angeles' transcontinental passenger depots, it serves as a unique reminder of the importance rail travel once played in the growth of the city.



**Figure 50 – Stylized Steam Train.**

## Conclusion Notes

<sup>1</sup> Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California*, 401, Potter, *Great American Railroad Stations*, 7, Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 183.

<sup>2</sup> Potter, *Great American Railroad Stations*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Richards and MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress, American memory, photos by Russell Lee.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> I started this timeline with Charles Mulford Robinson's report prepared for the Municipal Art Commission in 1907. The end point came when the railroads agreed to build the terminal in 1933.

<sup>6</sup> Bradley, *The Last of the Great Stations*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> The architecture of Pennsylvania Station in New York City was based on the Baths at Caracalla. Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station*, 45, 391. Personal communication with Kenneth Breisch for example of the basilica.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>9</sup> The city of Los Angeles and the state of California balked when a jury determined that a fair price for the entire property would be \$84.7 million. Instead of paying that amount, the government transportation agencies negotiated for space on the terminal property with the railroads, leaving Union Station in railroad ownership. "State, L.A. Assessed Union Station Costs," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1984, OC A10; "State, City Scrap Bid to Condemn Union Station," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1984, F2.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that the National Register nomination was approved in 1980, soon after the site appeared on a list as a possible site for the intended transportation center.

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