SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD SIXTEENTH STREET STATION
1789 Sixteenth Street & 1601 Wood Street
Oakland
Alameda County
California

HABS CA-2805
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700
Oakland, CA 94607

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD SIXTEENTH STREET STATION
HABS NO. CA-2805

Location: 1798 Sixteenth Street / 1601 Wood Street, Oakland, Alameda County, California

USGS 7.5 minute series – Oakland West, Calif.
UTM Coordinates: 10 . 561970 . 4185380

Date of Construction: 1911-12

Architect: Jarvis Hunt

Present Owner: Union Pacific Railroad
1416 Dodge Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68179-0310

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Southern Pacific Railroad Oakland Sixteenth Street Station is significant for its association with Oakland and East Bay growth in the years following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. It is also an excellent example of monumental civic architecture in the Beaux-Arts Classical style, exhibiting high artistic merit in its design and ornamentation. The station and adjacent Sixteenth Street Tower (HAER No. CA-2264) were determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990, under criteria A and C.

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I. DESCRIPTION

The Southern Pacific Railroad's Sixteenth Street Station in Oakland is of steel frame, reinforced concrete, and brick masonry construction. Above a base of polished black granite the walls are faced with Gladding-McBean "Granitex" terra cotta on the north, south, and east sides, and Richmond Brick Company face brick on the west side. The face brick has a granite-like spatter finish, colored similar to the "Granitex" terra cotta. The building's hip roof is clad in red mission tile. The main two-story block of the building is flanked by one-story wings, while a one-story baggage/express/boiler room also extends from the north end of the building.

The station is 273' long overall, and 60' high, and features a full panoply of Beaux-Arts decorative details derived from classical architectural sources. At the top of the main block of the building, a plain frieze surmounts an architrave molding and is topped by a shallow cornice supported on block modillions. Above this rises a parapet, accented by balustrades above the main windows. The parapet of the wings is decorated with a Greek fretwork motif. Tall, arched windows, set within deep concave niches, dominate the façade and light the waiting room from east and west. The main entrance is protected by a massive metal marquee carried on ornate acanthus-leaf-decorated ancones and topped by acroteria, suspended from the building façade by chains. Decorated pedestals with leaf and rosette bosses project below the arched windows flanking the central entrance. Secondary windows are set deep within projecting, shouldered surrounds, some capped with a plain cornice, others with an acroterium flanked by horizontal fasces.

A bridge-like structure projects along the west side of the building, supported on steel columns. This structure carried the tracks of the Oakland, Alameda & Berkeley Railway (later the Interurban Electric Railway) to the building at second story level, the approach being made on trestle structures. A pair of butterfly canopies provided weather protection for patrons of the suburban trains, while the entire overhead structure provided a protected boarding area for the passengers of main line trains at ground level.

The heating plant was housed at the extreme north end of the baggage wing, with a tall, square brick chimney faced in "Granitex" terra cotta. The chimney is decorated with a molded cap and regulae and guttae.

The main waiting room is 116' long and 60' wide, with California marble wainscot, baseboard, and floor. The interior décor is as ornate as the exterior, employing molded plaster wall and ceiling elements painted in polychrome. Details include acanthus leaf, Greek key, and Cretan-derived wave moldings, as well as other foliar moldings utilizing somewhat more provincial motifs such as oak leaves and acorns. At opposite ends of the room, molded arched enframements enclose a large, polychrome Southern Pacific herald on the south, and a clock on the north. Below these are mounted paintings of California scenes: Mount Shasta on the south and Emerald Bay at Lake Tahoe on the north. Immense, multi-faceted globe chandeliers are suspended on chains from the center of highly ornate ceiling rosettes. The chandeliers can be lowered to floor level for cleaning and lamp replacement by hand winches in the attic.

The west side of the waiting room opens onto the track platform area for main line trains. In addition, this side of the waiting room also opened onto broad stairways leading to the second floor level for access to interurban trains. A baggage elevator also served this level, allowing for the transfer of baggage and express between main line and interurban trains.

After the end of electric suburban train service in 1940, the upper level tracks were removed, as were the approach trestles. The stairs, elevator, and upper level waiting area remained unused since that time.

II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Designed by Chicago architect Jarvis Hunt, the Southern Pacific Railroad's Sixteenth Street Station stands as a monument to the post-earthquake period when Oakland began its metamorphosis from quiet neighbor of San Francisco to big city in its own right. The building is also a monument to the series of improvements begun by E. H. Harriman during his control of the Southern Pacific Railroad which began in 1901,

though the building was completed after Harriman's death in 1909. The choice of Hunt, an Eastern architect, could well have been directly influenced by Harriman himself.

The role of the railroad in Oakland's history looms large and long. The history of the Southern Pacific Railroad in Oakland dates to September 6, 1869, when the Central Pacific opened its line over Altamont Pass and through Niles Canyon. While its first terminus on San Francisco Bay was in Alameda, this soon shifted to Oakland, and by late 1870 transcontinental freight and passengers were arriving in Oakland. At this time, the main passenger station was at Seventh Street and Broadway. The freight line diverged east of Lake Merritt to run along First Street. By 1871 the railroad had completed the Long Wharf off the end of Oakland Point, from which freight and passengers were ferried to San Francisco, and from which freight could be transferred directly to and from ocean-going vessels.

In 1876 the Central Pacific began building the Northern Railway from Oakland, north along the east shore of San Francisco Bay, toward Port Costa. In that same year they completed the Southern Pacific Railroad of California between Oakland and Los Angeles. Along with the completion of the Northern Railway on December 28, 1879, came a project to remove passenger operations from the Long Wharf: the railroad built the Oakland Mole in 1879-81, of rock hauled 26 miles from Alameda Canyon. By 1890 Oakland saw four transcontinental passenger trains, 19 interstate and 20 suburban trains daily, with 60 ferry trips daily to San Francisco.

Collis P. Huntington was the last of the "Big Four" founders of the Central Pacific Railroad. Following his death on August 13, 1900, E. H. Harriman gained control of the Southern Pacific, becoming president on September 26, 1901. During the ensuing years, Harriman undertook a massive program to modernize and improve the operating plant and equipment of the Southern Pacific, as well as that of the other railroads under his control. Spending $127 million in reconstruction and re-equipping and $114.5 million for line extensions, his efforts included line improvements across the Sierra Nevada, construction of the Lucin Cutoff across the Great Salt Lake to bypass the original route through Promontory Summit, and construction of the Bayshore Cutoff which shortened distance and running times from San Francisco to San Jose. Harriman also carried out improvements and building programs within major shops and terminals, and

electrification of the suburban lines in and around Oakland, part of a larger scheme to electrify Southern Pacific lines along both sides of the Bay and across the Dumbarton Cutoff.

The Southern Pacific Lines, which ultimately became the Interurban Electric Railway, date to June 1, 1911, when they replaced steam-powered suburban service which, dated back to August 2, 1863. These suburban lines had been the brainchild of Huntington, who had sought to develop a total transportation system, operating main line railroad, short lines, ferries, river steamers, steamships, and street railway systems. (That he and his partners were successful was evident in the political and economic control which Southern Pacific exerted on California for decades.)

The pattern of acquisition and control as espoused by Huntington was followed in the East Bay, and the Central Pacific (later Southern Pacific), came to own all the local steam lines in Alameda County. Under Central Pacific control, these local lines came to use the Alameda Mole which Central Pacific had acquired from (and with) the narrow gauge South Pacific Coast Railway.

Following Harriman's aforementioned acquisition of control of the Southern Pacific, he began rapid improvements and modernization of all the railroads he controlled, standardizing virtually everything from track spikes to locomotives. Harriman laid the plans to electrify the steam-powered suburban lines in Alameda County to allow greater competition with Francis M. "Borax" Smith's electrified Key System.

Under the name San Francisco, Oakland & San Jose Railway, the Key System was formed in 1902 by Smith's consolidation of East Bay streetcar operations. Smith had begun his acquisitions of streetcar lines in 1893, as direct competition to Southern Pacific's steam-powered local trains. Smith constructed a 3-1/4 mile pier from the Oakland shoreline nearly to Yerba Buena Island to serve his ferries. This gave his operation a decided advantage, since his pierhead was much nearer to San Francisco than that of the Southern Pacific. A shorter ferry run and better train schedules offered his patrons a reduced commute time. By the early teens, however, Smith had overextended his investments on all fronts, and was forced into bankruptcy. Reorganized, the Key System replaced the original timber pile pier with a solid fill

pier completed in 1916 (though portions of the original pier remained until 1932). The system took its name from the shape of the pier, and formally became the Key System Transit Company after another reorganization in 1923. By 1924 the Key Pier was handling 800 trains per day.

The Harriman line was known as the Oakland, Alameda & Berkeley. Development of the Oakland, Alameda & Berkeley by Harriman was part of his general improvement of lines in the Bay Area, including an intent to electrify the San Francisco Peninsula lines (today's Caltrain). During the 1906 upgrade, these lines were built to clearances required for the never-completed electrification. Harriman built the Dumbarton Cutoff between Newark and Redwood City as part of this proposed electrification on both sides of San Francisco Bay, and he intended the Oakland, Alameda & Berkeley to connect to San Jose.

Electrification of the East Bay suburban lines was accomplished between 1905 and 1912. The effort was delayed by the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, and was not completed until after Harriman's death in 1909. Originally estimated at $4 million, the actual cost of the effort was $10.6 million. Southern Pacific completely rebuilt the existing suburban lines and added twenty-one miles of new lines. It was during this same period that Harriman retained Chicago architect Jarvis Hunt to design the new Oakland Station, with an interface between main line and suburban trains.

Hunt (1859-1941), a nephew of Richard Morris Hunt, was born at Wethersfield, Vermont, and studied at Harvard and M.I.T. before going on to supervise construction of the Vermont Building at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago, where he remained in the practice of his profession for the next twenty-five years. His works were numerous and varied, and included a number of railroad stations, such as Kansas City Union Terminal, Dallas Union Terminal, and Joliet Union Terminal. His choice of Beaux-Arts Classicism for the Oakland Station is not surprising, given his background. The design was noteworthy for its choice at a time and in a locale where Southern Pacific had a strong tradition of regionalism, choosing the Mission Revival or Mediterranean Revival styles for most of its major stations.

The new station replaced an earlier, wood frame station which dated from the 1870s. Planning for the new Oakland Station apparently began concurrently with the plans to electrify the suburban lines, for the elevated approaches were part of the design of the electric system, even before construction began on the new building. The Oakland Chamber of Commerce exerted pressure on Southern Pacific to build a new station, needed by a city which had doubled its size in the preceding decade. Train movements at the old station were frequently blocked by crowds of passengers and their baggage. Work on the new structure began in October 1910, with the razing of the old station, after which the new building began to take shape under the supervision of J. Q. Barlow, Southern Pacific Assistant Chief Engineer. The station was completed and formally dedicated on Thursday, August 1, 1912. Two days later, the Chamber of Commerce staged a celebration, including a parade of 500 automobiles, and an evening reception at the station.

Though the new station was completed in 1912 and began serving main line and suburban patrons, the second level tracks were not ready, and the suburban trains initially arrived at ground level alongside the main line tracks; the problems of mixing suburban and main line trains at the same level can be imagined. It was not until February 19, 1914 that the first electric trains rolled into the station's second level, from where they continued to arrive and depart for the next twenty-six years. Completion of the second level was timely, for within a few years, the station was handling 50 main line trains each day, plus 488 electric suburban trains per day, and 200 streetcars per day on the tracks in front of the building.

During World War I, the United States Railroad Administration, which controlled the nation's railroads for the duration, consolidated Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, and Santa Fe passenger service at the Southern Pacific Oakland Mole, though freight service remained separate. Ultimately there were 440 passenger trains per day in and out of the Oakland Mole, a large majority of which also stopped at the new Sixteenth Street Station.

Southern Pacific reorganized the Oakland, Alameda & Berkeley into the Interurban Electric Railway on November 14, 1934, in anticipation of the construction of the San Francisco – Oakland Bay Bridge. After the Bay Bridge opened, the pace of operations at

the Sixteenth Street Station changed radically. Interurban Electric ridership across the new bridge failed to reach projected levels, and the Interurban Electric lasted but a short while longer. Citing economic loss due to auto competition, Southern Pacific filed for permission to abandon Interurban Electric Railway service on February 26, 1940, and the last IER train rolled on July 4, 1940. Shortly thereafter, Southern Pacific local service vanished entirely – the Seventh Street trains stopped running in 1941.

The replacement of Southern Pacific's steam locomotives was completed by 1958, and this brought still further changes to the Oakland railroad scene. The year 1958 also saw the last runs of Southern Pacific's ferryboats, with trains now terminating at the Sixteenth Street Station, with connecting bus service provided to San Francisco. The trainshed of the Oakland Mole stood silent, and finally was demolished in 1965 for the construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system.

The station saw its greatest traffic during World War II. After those years, it continued to serve ever-diminishing numbers of Southern Pacific passengers until the advent of Amtrak in 1971. For a short time the decline in patronage continued, as Amtrak operated even fewer trains than had Southern Pacific. But in later years patronage increased, serving patrons of Amtrak's Los Angeles – Seattle, Oakland – Chicago, and San Jose – Sacramento lines. Through the post-World War II years, however, the Sixteenth Street Station has seen precious little maintenance, and the neglect has not been benign: concrete has spalled, paint has peeled, and roof leaks have gone unrepaired. Deterioration has accelerated since the Loma Prieta earthquake of October 1989, when the building was vacated and passenger service was shifted to a small, modern building to the north of the station. A new passenger station was opened in 1995 at Oakland's Jack London Square, approximately two miles to the southeast. The fate of the Sixteenth Street Station is uncertain, with no future use identified.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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Maps and Plans

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Photograph Collections

Roy D. Graves Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The collapse, in 1989, of the Cypress Structure portion of Interstate 880 during the Loma Prieta earthquake has led the California Department of Transportation to replace the collapsed facility with a new freeway on new alignment. At the location of the Sixteenth Street Station, the new freeway will be placed essentially where the railroad's main line tracks are now located. The main line tracks will be relocated farther west, isolating the Sixteenth Street Station from the railroad. While not impacting the building directly, the new freeway will constitute an adverse effect to the historic station due to its visual intrusion and alteration of its setting. This loss of direct usefulness as an operating railroad structure, coupled with the damage sustained by the station during the Loma Prieta earthquake, threaten the continued existence of this building after completion of the new freeway. Future plans for the building's disposition, however, lie with the owner, the Union Pacific Railroad. This documentation is intended to comply with part of the mitigation requirements for the construction of the new freeway, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

V. LOCATION MAP