SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD SIXTEENTH STREET TOWER
1798 Sixteenth Street & 1601 Wood Street
Oakland
Alameda County
California

HAER CA-2264
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD SIXTEENTH STREET TOWER
HAER NO. CA-2264

Location: 1798 Sixteenth Street / 1709 Wood Street, Oakland, Alameda County, California

USGS 7.5 minute series – Oakland West, Calif.
UTM Coordinates: 10 . 562020 . 4185450

Date of Construction: 1913

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

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Southern Pacific Railroad Sixteenth Street Tower is significant for its association with Oakland's development following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. It is also a representative example of an early twentieth century railroad facility, the Harriman Common Standard Signal Tower. The tower and adjacent Sixteenth Street Station (HABS CA-2805) 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 Tower in Oakland is a three story, reinforced concrete structure with a hip roof and broad, boxed eaves. The original plans called for the roof to be clad in black slate, but the present cladding appears to be asbestos-cement shingles, and it is doubtful that slate was ever installed. The exterior finish is cement stucco. Belt course moldings encircle the building at the second floor level and just beneath the third floor windows. Windows encircle the third story to give tower operators an unobstructed view of train movements. Second story windows are twelve-lite fixed, nine-over-one double-hung, and six-lite pivoting. Third story windows are one-over-one double-hung on the north and south sides, and twelve-lite sash on the east and west sides. The center six lites of each twelve-lite sash are awning windows which operate for ventilation.

Entry is gained via a door on the north side of the tower, and the first floor contains the battery room, transformer room, and a workshop. The second floor contains the operating instrument room and a water closet. The third floor contains the interlocking machine which the tower operators use to remotely control switches and signals between Tenth and Twenty-fourth streets in order to direct train movements, plus a small auxiliary interlocking machine for a crossover at Richmond.

Except for installation of the auxiliary interlocking machine and fluorescent lights, the tower appears virtually unaltered.

II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Southern Pacific Railroad's Sixteenth Street Tower was built as a necessary adjunct to the adjacent station (HABS CA-2805), and both stand as monuments to the post-earthquake period when Oakland began its metamorphosis from quiet neighbor of San Francisco to big city in its own right. The tower also represents 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 signal tower which had controlled train movements to the old Oakland station had stood at water's edge to the south of the station. With the construction of the new Sixteenth Street Station, including provision for increased electric suburban train service, arose the need for a new, modern interlocking plant and tower to control train movements in and out of the station. Thus, in 1913, after completion of the station but before inauguration of suburban service into the second level of the station, Southern Pacific designed and undertook construction of the new Sixteenth Street Tower, in form essentially a Harriman Standard tower, but doubled in size and built of reinforced concrete instead of the more usual wood frame. By 1914 the new interlocking plant, essential for the safe operation of the station, was ready to handle the steady stream of main line and suburban trains. Virtually unaltered except for the installation of auxiliary interlocking plants, required when the closing of other towers extended the range of control of the Sixteenth Street Tower, the facility continued in its intended use until the mid-1990s, when the reconstruction of the Cypress freeway necessitated the relocation of the adjacent railroad tracks. The building now stands vacant.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Books

Beebe, Lucius. *The Central Pacific & The Southern Pacific Railroads*. Berkeley: Howell-North, 1963.

Ford, Robert S. *Red Trains Remembered*. Glendale: Interurban Publications, 1980.

Periodicals

The Western Architect, 26, 1, July 1917 (illustration of the Oakland Sixteenth Street Station).

Newspapers

"Plans For New S. P. Depot Arrive," *Oakland Enquirer*, November 7, 1910.

"Sixteenth Structure Plans Unveiled," *Oakland Tribune*, November 7, 1910.

"New S. P. Depot is Under Way," *Oakland Tribune*, January 23, 1911.

Maps and Plans

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Oakland, 1889, 1902, 1903, 1911, 1912, 1925, 1928, 1929, 1911-50, 1912-50, 1912-1951, 1925-50, 1926-50, 1928-50.

Manuscripts

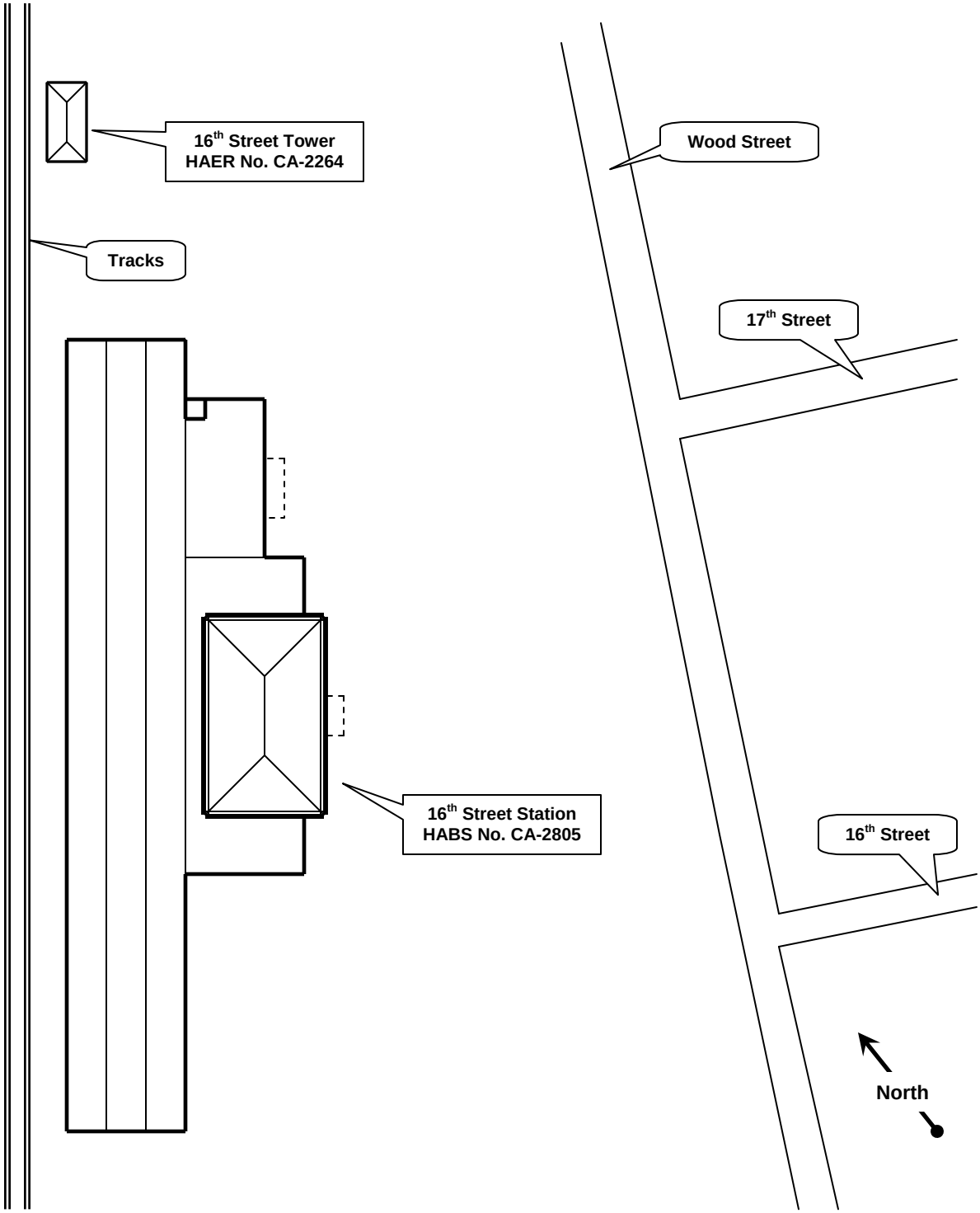
Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey, Volume 28A. Oakland City Planning Department, 1990.

"Southern Pacific Co. Historical Outline 1931." Typescript prepared by Southern Pacific Bureau of News, Development Department, 1933. On file at the California State Railroad Museum Library, Sacramento.

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 Tower, 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 Tower from the railroad. While not impacting the building directly, the new freeway will constitute an adverse effect to the historic tower due to its visual intrusion and alteration of its setting. This loss of direct usefulness as an operating railroad structure threatens 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