

Southern Pacific Railroad West Oakland Shops HAER No. CA-2262
Foot of Cedar, Pine, Wood, and Willow Streets,
 between Seventh Street and Middle Harbor Road
Oakland
Alameda County
California

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Oakland, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD WEST OAKLAND SHOPS
HAER NO. CA-2262

- Location:** Foot of Bay, Cedar, Pine, Wood, and Willow Streets,
between Seventh Street and Middle Harbor Road, Oakland,
Alameda County, California
- USGS 7.5 minute series – Oakland West, Calif.
- Date of Construction:** Beginning approximately 1874 with later alterations
- Present Owner:** Union Pacific Railroad
1416 Dodge Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68179-0310
- Present Use:** Railyards and shops for the Union Pacific Railroad
- Significance:** Begun ca. 1874 and reaching its fullest extent by 1918, the Southern Pacific Railroad West Oakland Shops was one of the largest and most important railroad facilities in California. In addition to its important role in the development of transcontinental and regional railroad service, the Shops played a vital role in the development of the city of Oakland. The surviving buildings of the West Oakland Shops were determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district in 1990.
- Report Prepared By:** John W. Snyder
Senior Environmental Planner, Architectural History Studies
Andrew Hope
Associate Environmental Planner (Architectural History)
California Department of Transportation
1120 N Street, Room 4301
Sacramento, California 95814

I. DESCRIPTION

The Southern Pacific Railroad West Oakland Shops consist of two clusters of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings. These buildings are the remnants of a sprawling complex that once included a much larger number of buildings and structures. The passenger car shops are the earliest of the buildings, dating from ca. 1874 to 1918, and are mostly of brick masonry construction. They are located adjacent to the main line tracks along the northeast edge of the railroad yards, between the foot of Cedar Street and the foot of Willow Street. These brick buildings include the Car Painting Shop, Pullman Building, Laundry, Master Mechanic/Master Car Repair Office, and Car Lighting Shop (HAER No. CA-2262-B through CA-2262-F). Also in the vicinity of these buildings is the wood frame Cedar Street Signal Tower (CA-2262-A).

A group of four smaller buildings are located deep within the West Oakland Yards near Middle Harbor Road, about one-half mile southeast of the brick building group. These buildings, remnants of the car shop planing mill complex, date to ca. 1900-14 and are of wood frame construction. They include the Repair Yard Office, Freight Department Store 3, Planing Mill, and Lumber Shed (HAER No. CA-2262-G through CA-2262-J).

II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Southern Pacific (SP) Railroad West Oakland Shops is a railroad industrial district that developed over the course of some 45 years, from ca. 1874 to ca. 1918. At the height of their development, the West Oakland Shops were a self-contained and largely self-sufficient railroad maintenance, repair, and manufacturing facility. The West Oakland Shops included roundhouses and machine shops for locomotive maintenance and repair; car shops for the construction, maintenance, and repair of freight and passenger cars; planing mills that supplied much of the entire SP system with finished lumber for cars, buildings, and bridges; a gas works to generate acetylene for locomotive headlights and passenger car lamps; and a tie-creosoting plant. The facilities also included a shipyard that built and maintained SP's extensive fleet of ferry boats that plied the water of the San Francisco Bay.

The history of the Southern Pacific Railroad 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. By 1871 the railroad had completed the Long Wharf off the end of the 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. While the railroad's main shops were in Sacramento, and would remain so, still there was a need for extensive facilities at the western end of the transcontinental railroad. Thus the railroad quite early established switching yards, a roundhouse, car repair shops, car building shops, and other facilities in West Oakland.

After the death in 1900 of Collis P. Huntington, last of the Big Four founders of the Central Pacific Railroad, E. H. Harriman gained control of the Southern Pacific, becoming president in 1901. During the ensuing years, Harriman undertook a massive program to modernize and improve the operating plant and equipment of the SP, as well as that of the other railroads under his control. Spending \$127 million in reconstruction and re-equipping and \$114 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's efforts also included 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 SP lines on both sides of the Bay. The West Oakland Yard plat maps of 1910 and 1915 reveal evidence of Harriman's efforts: a huge new roundhouse, an addition doubling the size of the Car Paint Shop, expansion of the Gas Works and Planing Mill, construction of the Car Lighting Shop, rearrangement of the yard tracks, and massive fill of tidelands to create more space for tracks and facilities. By about 1915, the West Oakland Shops had reached their zenith of development.

The Harriman period, which saw the West Oakland Shops reach their most extensive development, also brought changes which began to diminish their role. The advent of steel passenger cars, which the company built at the Sacramento Shops, brought to an

end the building of wooden passenger cars at West Oakland (though the construction of wooden freight cars would continue through the end of World War II), and the passenger car shops were used for painting and repairs. Similarly, though the gas works were expanded, the rapid conversion of passenger cars, locomotives and cabooses to electric lighting quickly made the gas plant obsolete. The replacement of SP's steam locomotive was completed by 1958, and this brought further changes to the West Oakland Shops. With major locomotive maintenance shifted to Sacramento and Roseville, there was no longer a need for roundhouses and turntables at West Oakland, and they were demolished. The former Car Paint Shop had been converted in 1942 to service the railroad's early diesel locomotives, and now assumed the role of light maintenance of those engines assigned to the Bay Area. The year 1958 also saw the last runs of SP's ferryboats. The remaining buildings at the West Oakland Shops are but a handful of survivors of what was, by the end of World War I, one of the most important yards and shops of the Southern Pacific lines in California.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Books

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Maps and Plans

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"Oakland Yard, Scale 1" = 100'. June, 1915. (revised to Jan. 31, 1918)"

"Oakland 1st St., Cedar to Kirkham, Scale 1" = 100', Nov. 1913."

"Right of Way and Track Map, Main Line, Central Pacific Railway Company, Operated by Southern Pacific Company, Western Division, Alameda County, California, from Station _____ to Station _____, Scale: 1 Inch = 100 feet, December 31, 19__ [traced Feb. 1917], Office of Chief Engineer, San Francisco, California."

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"Southern Pacific Co., Compressor House, West Oakland, Elevations & Plan, Oct. 14, 1958."

"Southern Pacific Co., Demolition of Mill Facilities, Middle Harbor Road, Oakland, California, Location Plan and Specifications, 24 November '69."

"Southern Pacific Co., Diesel Shop, West Oakland, Calif., Ventilation, Section & Plan, 1952."

"Southern Pacific Co., Extension to Diesel-Shop at West Oakland Yard, Oakland, Cal., Aug. 12, 1947."

"Southern Pacific Co., Standard Signal Tower for Electro-Mechanical Interlocking; Plans, Elevations, Sections & Details, Scale: As shown, July 1913. Revised Dec. 18, 1916 – Changed from All Electric Interlocking to Electro-Mechanical Interlocking."

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"Southern Pacific Co., Streamliner Facilities, West Oakland, Calif., Changes to Doorways at Track #16, May 15th, 1941."

"Southern Pacific Co., Streamliner Facilities, West Oakland, Calif., Remodeling Diesel Shop, Oct. 6, 1944."

"Southern Pacific Co., West Oakland Coach Yard, Part Plan showing location of Proposed Commissary Stores Bldg. And Facilities for servicing Streamliner Trains, Feb. 20th, 1941."

"Southern Pacific Company, Car Lighting Shop & Office Bldg. at West Oakland, Details, Nov. 1914."

"Southern Pacific Company, Car Lighting Shop & Office Bldg. at West Oakland, Details of Benches, Tanks, Locker & Racks, [n.d.] Revised Jan. 1915."

"Southern Pacific Company, Car Lighting Shop & Office Bldg. at West Oakland, Elevations & Plat Plan, Aug. 1914."

"Southern Pacific Company, Car Lighting Shop & Office Bldg. at West Oakland, First and Second floor plans, Aug. 1914."

"Southern Pacific Company, Car Lighting Shop & Office Bldg. at West Oakland, Sections & Details, Aug. 1914."

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Photograph Collections

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Vernon Sappers Collection, Western Railway Museum Library, Rio Vista Junction.

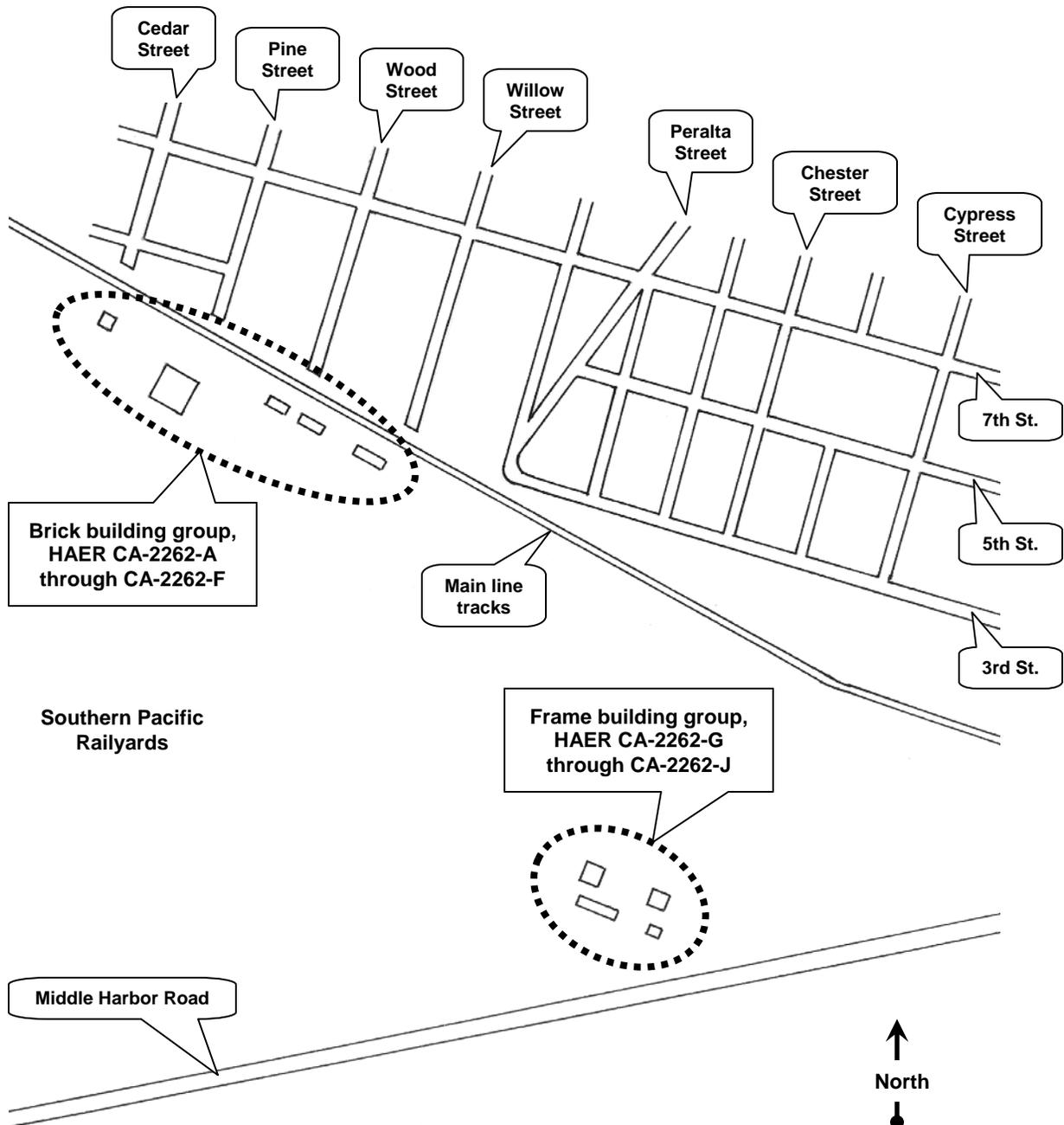
Interviews

Interview with the late railroad historian and author Vernon Sappers at his home in Oakland.

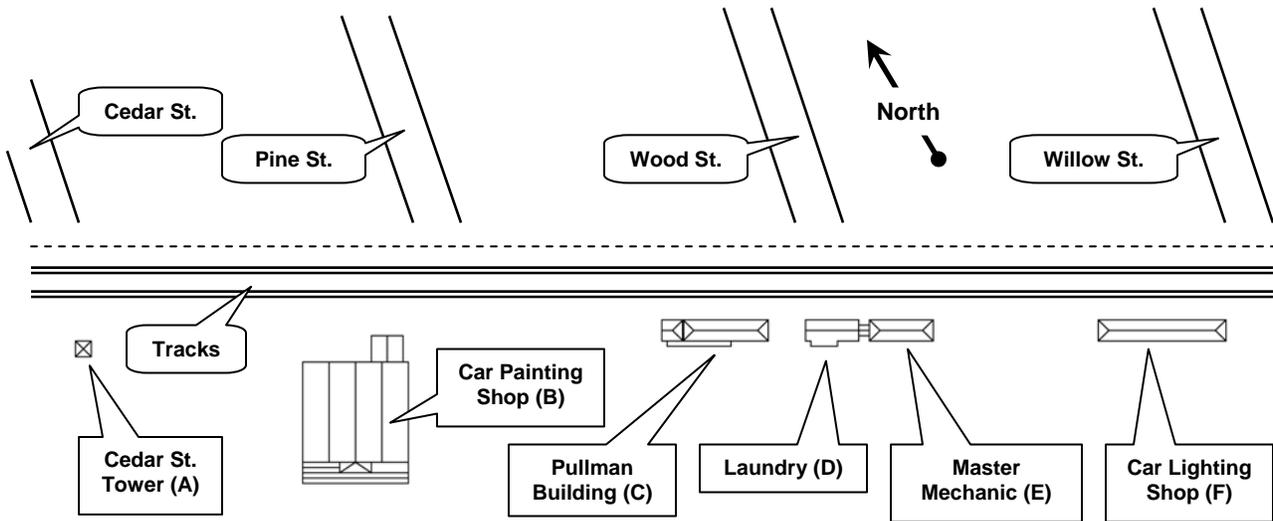
IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The California Department of Transportation constructed a new segment of Interstate 880 in Oakland, to replace the Cypress Street structure that collapsed in the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989. The new freeway is on a different alignment, and a portion of the Southern Pacific Railroad West Oakland Shops was acquired by the State of California as right-of-way for construction of the new freeway. Consequently, four of the brick buildings were demolished in 1996. Concurrently with the freeway project, alterations to the West Oakland yard and shops by Southern Pacific included demolition of four of the frame buildings. 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 MAPS



**Brick building group
(HAER CA-2262-A through CA-2262-F)**



**Frame building group
(HAER CA-2262-G through CA-2262-J)**

