

Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal  
800 North Alameda Street  
Los Angeles  
Los Angeles County  
California

HABS No. CA-2158

HABS  
CAL,  
19-LOSAN,  
64-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL

HABS  
CAL,  
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64-

HABS NO.  
CA-2158

Location: 800 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, Ca. 90012

Present Owner: Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal Corporation

Present Occupant: Los Angeles Passenger Terminal Corporation

Present Use: Railroad Station

Significance: Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal is believed to be the last monumental railroad station built in America. It is also considered the only major station built in the Spanish style in America. It was designed by two of the most important architects of the period in Los Angeles, John and Donald Parkinson. The Spanish colonial style was chosen to reflect the heritage of the area and to blend in with El Pueblo de Los Angeles, across Alameda Street (now a National Register landmark). The station also deliberately took advantage of the climate by incorporating open air courtyards and extensive landscaping into the original design. There is extensive and imaginative use of Mexican style tile, both quarry and handpainted. The fixtures (lamps, signs, doors) reflect the Art Deco influence of the period and are largely unaltered. For many years, particularly during the Second World War when 100 trains a day carried servicemen to and from Los Angeles the station was an important gateway to the city.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of Erection: 1936-1939 (building permits)
2. Architects: John and Donald Parkinson

John Parkinson (1861-1935) - Parkinson was born in England. After unsuccessfully attempting to establish an architectural office there he moved to Napa, California in 1885.

From 1890 to 1894 he practiced in Seattle and in 1894 he moved his office to Los Angeles. One of his first important commissions was the Homer Laughlin Building (now Grand Central Market).

In 1905 he formed a partnership with Edwin Bergstrom. This firm designed numerous important structures in Los Angeles, including the original California Club,

the Alexandria Hotel, the Citizens National Bank Building, the Metropolitan Building, and the Bullocks Broadway.

The partnership with Bergstrom was ended in 1915. After this John Parkinson continued practice with his son Donald. During this final period in his career his most important works were the Title Guarantee, Title Insurance Building and a collaboration on the Los Angeles City Hall.

The last major work he helped design was the L.A. Union Passenger Terminal. Parkinson was one of the most important architects in Los Angeles. During his lifetime he designed or helped to design more major buildings than any other architect in the city. His work shows that he was familiar with a variety of architectural styles, and that the value of this was recognized by businessmen and developers throughout Southern California.

Donald Parkinson (1895-1945) - Donald was the son of John Parkinson. He studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and returned to Los Angeles after graduation to work in his father's office.

In 1920 he began practice under the firm name of John and Donald Parkinson. The firm designed a number of prominent buildings. Independently, Donald Parkinson designed such structures as the Lockheed Air Center.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: LAUPT has been owned continuously since construction by the Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal Corporation, a corporation composed of Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, and Union Pacific railroads.
4. Builder: Robert E. McKee
5. Original Plans and Construction: All of the original plans are on file at the Terminal.
6. Alterations and Additions: LAUPT is substantially unaltered. The former Pacific Electric yard on the southern end of the station was abandoned when the Pacific Electric Company went out of business. A steel and stucco parking garage was erected on the PE site in 1956.

B. Historical Context: With the building of LAUPT, the scattered operations of the Union Pacific, the Southern Pacific, and the Santa Fe were finally united in one location. The unification came after almost twenty years of controversy -- controversy about whether to provide a single terminal for the three railroads and where to locate it when it was built. The site chosen required the relocation of a number of Chinese businesses; a movement that resulted in the development of a new Chinatown along North Hill and North Broadway.

As the last of the great passenger terminals, LAUPT marked the end of the golden age of railroads in the United States, and in Southern California in particular. Although it was heavily used through World War II, the 1950's and 1960's were characterized by decline and neglect. The resurgence of interest in rail travel and the increased support of commuter trains by the California Department of Transportation have generated new interest in the station and the site. It is now being proposed as the northern terminus for the Los Angeles Downtown People Mover and for the regional rapid transit starter line.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement: The LAUPT is a multi-unit building complex including a central building unit with clock tower, north and south wings, concourses, and garden courtyards. Additional features of the complex include parking areas, access ramps, a large track area with butterfly sheds, storage and office units, a baggage handling/carservice area, and a control tower facility. The parking area adjacent to and in front of the central building is landscaped on its perimeter by trees and shrubs. Amenities include Deco style parking lot lights, and several styles of street lighting along Aliso Street which borders the property to the south.

1. Architectural Character: The central or main building is designed in an eclectic combination of Deco and Spanish Mission styles. The massing of the structure builds toward the central entrance, culminating in a clock tower 125 feet in height. The central mass is flanked by two wings with extended arcades. The facade, including the central mass and arcades, extends 850 feet. To the south of the central entrance and behind the open arcade there is a garden courtyard/patio area. The arcade is used both as a visual screen and serves as a supplemental entrance to the interior lobby. To the south of the arcade there is a restaurant area. To the south of the restaurant there is an arcade which extends to the southern boundary of the parking area.

To the north of the central mass an arcade extends to form a ticket concourse leading from the lobby area to an open transportation waiting room.

With the exception of the track control tower which is designed in a manner similar to the central building, the associated structures forming the Union Terminal complex are designed in a utilitarian/industrial manner. These buildings include an REA facility, butterfly sheds, the baggage handling/car service building, and company storage and office facilities.

The entire complex forms a unique built environment with a strong sense of time and place.

2. Condition of Fabric: Good to excellent

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The L.A. Union Passenger Terminal occupies an area of approximately 40 acres.

2. Foundations: The building foundations are of reinforced concrete and concrete slab construction.
3. Walls: The walls of the central building are of double 8 inch reinforced concrete construction. The wall surfaces are flat, in keeping with the Spanish Mission/Colonial architectural influence.
4. Structural system, framing: The building is of steel reinforced concrete with steel roof trusses and is of fireproof construction.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The building has a clock tower with an observation platform. There are no major visible bulkheads. A curved portico covers the entrance area.
6. Chimneys: none
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The central entrance consists of an arched surround with tile decoration. A curved portico covers the main doorway. All door openings are flat.
  - b. Windows and shutters: The central building has both flat and arched window openings. To the north of the central entrance there are three overscaled and arched window openings. These are major architectural features. The majority of window openings in the flanking wings are flat with metal frames.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The roof over the central mass is low pitched with a tile covering. The roof above the clock tower is pyramidal, and the roofs over the flanking wings are low pitched with tile covering.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: The building has no cornice, and the eaves are shallow and simply detailed.
  - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: A 125 foot clock tower is adjacent to the central entrance. The clock tower is the most visible architectural feature of the building facade. It is simply detailed with an open observation deck and pyramidal roof above.

- C. Description of the Interior: Since this submission refers only to exterior recordation of the structure, only a brief description of interior details is included.

The central entrance opens onto a L shaped great hall with decorated beamed ceilings. The floors consist of red quarry tile marble, and Travertine. Marble and tile are utilized in the wall decoration. Doors are of bronze.

D. Site:

1. General Setting: The L.A. Union Passenger Terminal is located across from El Pueblo de Los Angeles. It is the largest building feature in the area; and is architecturally the most prominent. The building is oriented along Alameda Street in a north to south direction. It is entered from the east. The property is bordered by Aliso Street to the south, Alameda Street to the west, Macy Street to the north, and to the east by a line approximately 1200 feet from and parallel to Alameda Street.
2. Historical landscape design: The parking lot area to the east of the central building is landscaped with a variety of trees and shrubs, including both Moreton Bay figs and palms. These landscape features have been altered and extended from the original. The garden courtyard/patio area with its flowering plants and fruit trees is, however, largely unaltered.
3. Outbuildings: The building complex incorporates a number of support structures including a track control area, butterfly sheds, office and storage areas, and an REA building.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City of Los Angeles, Department of Building and Safety, building permits

Lovret, Reuben, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, (Los Angeles, City Planning Department: August, 1978)

2. Secondary Sources:

Bradley, Bill, The Last of the Great Railroad Stations (Glendale, California, Interurban Press: 1979)

Hatheway, Roger G., "Inventory of Historic Structures:" (Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Project: June, 1978)

Prepared by: Myra L. Frank,  
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Los Angeles Downtown  
People Mover Authority  
October, 1980

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Project, supported by a demonstration grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, is proposing to build an automated, grade-separated transit system in downtown Los Angeles.

A portion of the route as proposed would run along the southern boundary of the Union Station property from Alameda Street on the west to the track area behind the station. This portion of the station grounds was substantially altered when the Santa Ana/Hollywood freeways were built in 1952 and Aliso Street was realigned as a frontage road for the freeway. Behind the station, a DPM maintenance facility is proposed for what are now Tracks 13-16.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
LOS ANGELES UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL  
(Union Station)

Please see HABS No. CA-2158-A, Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, Tracks and Shed, for additional information on this structure. An Addendum, consisting of 50 black and white photographs, 4 photo caption pages, and 15 written historical pages, was mistakenly transmitted under HABS No. CA-2158-A instead of HABS No. CA-2158. When this error was discovered in May 2003, rather than change and move the addendum, it was decided to leave the documentation as it was and include this cross-reference page, directing researchers to further information.

Prepared by: Jennifer Baldwin, Collections Manager, HABS/HAER, May 2003.