Southern Pacific Railroad West Oakland Shops, HAER No. CA-2262-A
Cedar Street Tower
Foot of Cedar Street
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
CEDAR STREET TOWER
HAER NO. CA-2262-A

Location: Foot of Cedar Street, Oakland, Alameda County, California

USGS 7.5 minute series – Oakland West, Calif.
UTM Coordinates: 10 . 561220 . 4184330

Date of Construction: Ca. 1913

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

Present Use: Last used as a railroad signal tower; demolished in March 1996

Significance: The Southern Pacific Railroad Cedar Street Tower is an increasingly rare example of a Harriman Standard Signal Tower. The building was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1990, as a contributor to the Southern Pacific Railroad West Oakland Shops Historic District.

Report Prepared By: John W. Snyder
Senior Environmental Planner, Architectural History Studies
California Department of Transportation
1120 N Street, Room 4301
Sacramento, California 95814

I. DESCRIPTION

The Cedar Street Tower is a two-story, wood frame building, only 14′ by 16′ in area, with a pyramidal roof and broad (3′-6″) boxed eaves. The construction drawings for Southern Pacific's Standard Signal Towers show that the first story walls were sheathed in 6″ v-rustic siding, with vertical corner boards. Above this, shallow modillions supported a bell-cast skirt of 4″ rustic siding immediately below the large second-story windows. An exterior stairway of wood construction led up to the second story. The first story, which included a water closet and work space, was lit by two-over-two and four-over-two double-hung windows. The second story windows, virtually surrounding the building to give the operator an unobstructed view of the tracks he controlled, were one-over-one double-hung. The original roof cladding was wood shingles laid 4-1/2″ to the weather.

Later alterations to the building included resurfacing the exterior walls with asbestos shingle siding (presumably with the original siding intact underneath to the level of the second story windows), replacement of the wood stairway by a steel stairway with pipe railings, and replacement of the original wood shingles with composition shingles.

II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Cedar Street Tower was an increasingly rare example of a Harriman Standard Signal Tower. It functioned as a station from which the tower operator controlled signals and switches to route trains through conflicting tracks in the area of his control. His control was via an interlocking plant installed on the second floor. This device used a series of hand-thrown controls to actuate signals and switches, originally through all-electric controls, and later (1915) through electro-mechanical controls. Tower communication was originally via telephone or telegraph, and later by telephone and two-way radio. With the onset of centralized train control systems and centrally controlled, automated yards, such towers have become obsolete, leading to their demolition.

While Southern Pacific records indicate an original construction date of 1885 for this tower, it does not appear on the 1910 yard plat map. Since it does appear on the 1915 plat, is construction is estimated at ca. 1913, the date shown on company plans for standard signal towers. This date would coincide with the completion of the Oakland, Alameda & Berkeley (OA&B) electric interurban railway, whose main line ran adjacent to the tower, and conflicted with the train movements on the Southern Pacific main line which ran down Cedar Street. The Southern Pacific main line thus crossed the OA&B main line and SP lines leading to the Oakland Mole ferry terminal, necessitating the Cedar Street Tower to control train movements through this rail junction.

III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Maps and Plans

"Oakland yard, scale, 1 In. = 100 Ft., May, 1910."

"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."

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Oakland, 1889, 1902, 1903, 1911, 1912, 1925, 1928, 1929, 1911-50, 1912-50, 1912-51, 1925-50, 1926-50, 1928-50.

"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."

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.

Photograph Collections

History Center, Transportation Library, California Department of Transportation, Sacramento.

History Room, Oakland Public Library.

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

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. The new freeway, and consequent relocation of Southern Pacific's rail lines, resulted in the isolation of the Cedar Street Tower from its historic relationship to the railroad tracks. Southern Pacific therefore demolished the vacant and unneeded building in 1996. 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.