

The next meeting of the Southwest Chapter will be at Avila's Restaurant, 6232 N. Mesa, El Paso at 6 pm on Wed. June 11, 2014. Visitors welcome.

Where The Trains Met

The Life and Times of El Paso's Union Passenger Station
1906 to the rededication 1982

By Frank Smith

(Written in 1981 for the dedication of Union Depot's restoration)

Special points of interest:

- El Paso Union Station
- Chapter News
- Museum News

Keep in mind the National R&LHS meeting



this year at Ely, Nevada, home of the Nevada Northern, June 5-8, 2014. (rlhs.org)



For over twenty years the rail passengers to El Paso had a choice of where to step off the train. That was fine if the trip terminated in El Paso, but most confusing for those transferring from one railroad to another.

The problem was resolved in 1906 with a Union Passenger Station. It didn't happen overnight, nor was everyone overjoyed at the choice of location. A number of residents and businesses were distressed by the plan, but when the dust

settled the location was obviously a good one. The three major lines at that time made their way through the pass

within a few yards of each other and remained so right to the Depot. The Southern Pacific, The El Paso & Southwestern and the Santa Fe actually met at the Depot. All the other railroads in El Paso operated over the tracks of one of the major lines.

After much discussion and something of an agreement between the railroads the "El Paso Union Passenger Depot Company" was incorporated February 7, 1903 with a capitalization of \$300,000. The architect selected was Daniel H. Burnham of Chicago and Frank Powers of El Paso was awarded the contract for the construction. Powers' firm is credited with the building of the EP&SW shops at Piedras Street and the EP&SW headquarters building that presently houses the ABC Bank.

Despite the reluctance to give up their individual depots, the date of February 28, 1906 found all the El Paso railroads as participants in the Union Station along with the Mexican Central and it is fair to assume they were all equal partners with a 1/6th interest, The Southern Pacific eventually took over the affairs of the El Paso & Southwestern and the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio and wound up with a 50% interest at the time the Depot closed its doors February 28, 1974,

The 3.251 miles of track controlled by the Depot Company was compressed into the 12.24 acres of the property. From the west the Southern Pacific arrived at the Depot property line at a slightly higher level than the other roads and had to cross the EP&SW tracks to bring its trains onto Main Street for their eastward trek. The EP&SW swung across the Rio Grande after exiting a tunnel on the New Mexico shore and ran its single track a bit closer to the river than did the Southern Pacific. The Santa Fe followed the east bank of the river and entered the Depot grounds over a slight grade. The Mexican Central operated over the Santa Fe tracks.

The train order board listed 22 arrivals and departures in the early days of the Depot with such illustrious names as Sunset Limited and Golden State Limited and in later years the building played host to The Texas Eagle, The Californian, The Apache, The Arizonian as well as a good share of local service.

The Harvey House area was the dance floor for the festivities of the 27th of February, 1906 when the town turned out to celebrate the completion of this important facility for the rapidly growing community. Over the years The Harvey House was considered one of El Paso's finer eating places. Old Timers will tell you that the railroad was the only sure way to get to this remote West Texas spot, Roads were seldom paved and often under water or eroded from a recent downpour. This meant a concentration of events at the railroad depot. In a 1974 interview with Mrs. Hazel Lee Counts, The El Paso Depot's last employee, everything imaginable happened under the roof of that building including birth and death.

During World War II some 30 trains were handled at El Paso and the tile floor of the Depot felt the weight of thousands of travelers each day. The building had undergone an exterior renovation just before those hostilities began. The steeple was removed, and the canopy over the door on the train side was replaced with an extension incorporating several arches and the red brick was covered with a light stucco paint. These changes were requested by local citizens to give the building more of a southwestern atmosphere,

From the close of the war to 1966 the traffic at the El Paso Depot declined as was true of most rail passenger facilities. There were indications that the railroads were ready to abandon the operation and the area began to take on that unwanted look. A respite was found in 1969 when the Greyhound Company leased space for their operations until their new building was finished in 1972, However that only postponed the inevitable. The pigeons were more numerous than patrons, the light-colored stucco was dirty and smudged, leaks were beginning to take their toll and the community surrounding the Depot was fast developing into an eyesore.

For years the rails in El Paso had constricted street traffic and while solutions had been discussed for twenty years, it wasn't until 1950 that a grade separation project took the tracks under the city streets from the Depot to the yards on the east side of Campbell Street. This heightened the sense of isolation of the Depot facility

Many efforts to reinvigorate the Depot area were proposed, but were lost for one reason or another with the delays on approvals and financing. One scheme would have incorporated the depot building into a hotel, office complex similar to the treatment of the Dallas station while another sought to make the area into a tourist facility. It does not appear that a buyer was able to put it all together until the City of El Paso reached an agreement with the owners to take over the rapidly deteriorating building. The reported price of \$923,000 was paid during the administration of Mayor Ray Salazar.

The City of El Paso needed a facility to house and service its local bus transportation system. The acquisition of the acreage on the depot site was selected as the best available for the Sun City Area Transit's operation from its size and central location. The depot itself was incorporated in the plans, and funding for the rebuilding was arranged through federal, state and local grants.

In 1980 the work began with the removal of tracks and some of the service buildings. A great deal of fill was required to level the space destined for the large bus storage and service buildings. During most of 1982 the contractor's scaffolding surrounded the depot building, while the white stucco paint was removed, a new roof laid and the rebuilt steeple put in place. Lots of interior plastering, marble replacement, floor tile and paint was necessary to give the 76-year old building that spanking, fresh look. A walk through this historic and memory-laden station will make you feel a sense of pride in these accomplishments and when you plan your next train trip you will find Amtrak ready to serve you from its newly decorated space.

Harvey Girls of El Paso

Recap of activities provided by Patricia Kidney, Chairman.

April and May just about killed us; so many interested folks, so little time and personnel! Through our eight programs, events, atmosphere promoting Harvey Girls of El Paso 1906-1948, we reached over 1,000 people!

April 11 - Barbara conducted our very first official Oral History Collection interview, using UTEP recorder and Texas State Historical Commission procedures! Tom Seward provided historical stories about his grandparents working in San Marcial...she was a Harvey Girl and he was a railroad worker.

April 26 - Las Cruces RR Museum - Lois, Carolyn, Angie & Moses, 426 attendees

April 26 - Mission Trails/1st Thanksgiving @ San Eli - Patricia K, 100 attendees

May 3 - Trinity Lutheran Church Mothers Day Tea , Las Cruces- Carole W., Patricia, 70 attendees

May 8 - Spirit of Amigo Tourism Fair at Convention Center - Patricia, Beth (with Prince & RR exhibit), 126 attendees

May 8 - Las Cruces Farm & Ranch Museum - Lynn, Carole, Pres, Patricia , 60 attendees

May 10 - El Paso RR Day at Union Depot - Angie, Lois, Carolyn, Patricia, 150 attendees

May 10 - St. Paul's Methodist Church Mothers' Day Tea - Patricia ,45 attendees

May 11 - Ft. Selden Victorian Mothers' Day Tea - Patricia, 85 attendees.

Next meeting: June 9, 2014 at Union Passenger Station Depot, 2-4 p.m.

Upcoming events:

June 19 - Jolly Elders at Trinity Methodist Church, 10:30 a.m. Presentation. Details pending.

Harvey Girls Webpage <http://harveygirlsel Paso.weebly.com>

MEETING OF MAY 14: Southwest Chapter of the R&LHS

The Southwest Chapter met at Avila's. Twelve people were present including four visitors.

The slate of officers for 2014 was presented to the membership. New officers, elected by acclamation are Chairman: Dr. Stephen Heetland, Vice Chair: Patricia Kidney, Treasurer: Rick Brightman, and Secretary: Prince McKenzie. Steve Heetland led a discussion on a pending chapter proposal to hold the annual meeting of the National R & L H S at Las Cruces, NM. Various side trips and train excursions were proposed. The program presented by Rick Brightman continued the interesting series on the Use of Railroads in the US Civil War.

NEXT MEETING: JUNE 11

Wednesday, 6 pm at Avila's Mexican Restaurant on N. Mesa. For directions call: (915) 584-3621. Rick Brightman will continue the series on Railroads of the Civil War. The wartime railroads used locomotives contemporary to the historic EP&SW No. 1, owned by UTEP on exhibit Downtown. Don't miss this interesting program event.

EL PASO STREETCAR PRESERVATION:

Two primary issues are under discussion among members of the Paso del Norte Streetcar Preservation Society. Sun Metro announced it intended to restore only one of the historic PCC cars and buy replica cars when the City Streetcar Project is funded by the state. This is a contradiction of the plan approved by City Council. The last Council had insisted that the historic PCC cars be used. Former City Representative Susie Byrd and retired Master City Planner Nestor Valencia have brought together a group of supporters to refocus the current council on the Streetcar Project. They have a petition campaign called "Finish What We Started and Bring the Streetcars Back" to keep the issue in line for state funding. (cont. on p.4)



Southwest Chapter
 Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

TO:

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EP&SW Flyer
June 2014



(cont. from p. 3)

For more information, or to sign a petition, contact Ernesto Villanueva, Vice President of the Streetcar Group at (915) 329-1030 or member Ron Dawson at upper14@aol.com .

NATIONAL TRAIN DAY: MAY 10

At the historic Union Station the Railroad Museum staff presented the history of the Transcontinental Railroad links across the West. The Harvey Girls of El Paso described the Harvey House operations, and Ron Leiman gave station tours. Roy Platner came in from Odessa to display the Texas & Pacific history and present the Amtrak issues of the American Rail Passenger Association. Woody Bare set up a Streetcar Exhibit and the Railroad Model & Historic Association set up two running model train layouts in different scales.

MUSEUM NEWS:

The Railroad & Transportation Museum of El Paso has offices and an operations center in the historic Alamo Facility with the Insights-Science Center, Fire Dept. Museum, Medical Museum, and other groups. The staff is preparing the AT&SF "live steam" Locomotive No. 485 for exhibit in the Science Center when it opens to the public. Anyone interested in working on this 4 1/2 " gauge engine contact the Museum at: (915) 740-7480 or Prince McKenzie at 240-8384 railroadmuseum.elpaso@gmail.com or elpasorails.org .