



PACIFIC ELECTRIC BUILDING (THE HUNTINGTON BUILDING)

Architect: Thornton Fitzhugh

Completion Date: January 15, 1904



January 15, 1904 marked a momentous day for Los Angeles commerce, as Henry Huntington's Southern Pacific Railroad headquarters, located on the corner of 6th and Main, officially opened and began its operations as the principal downtown terminal for Pacific Electric's distinctive wood and steel Red Cars. Befitting both its significant role in the city's development and its financier's wealth and extravagance, architect Thornton Fitzhugh designed the massive ten-story structure in a Beaux Arts style of architecture that drew its inspiration from Classical and Roman monuments.

The Beaux-Arts style of architecture that would eventually define the aesthetics of much of downtown's financial district over the following two decades found no other host as monumental and active as the ten-story, half-a-million square foot Huntington-Pacific Electric Building. From its inception to its decline in the 1950s, the building was a source of superlatives, boasting such distinctions as being home to the largest inter-urban electric rail system in the world and being the most massive building west of Chicago. Its considerable size and grandeur was proportional to the impact it would have as a catalyst for the development of the Southern California social and structural landscape. Huntington's decision to locate the building well to the South of the nascent

economic core near Second Street provoked Southward expansion of the city's financial district. Meanwhile, the thousand miles of tracks emanating from its bottom floor webbed everywhere from Pasadena to South Orange County in a system of convenient mass-transportation that facilitated the settlement and development of Los Angeles and its surrounding communities.

A bevy of different services attracted commuters, celebrities, businesspeople, laborers, and even Southern California's elite to the Pacific Electric Building. Beginning at the basement, hungry diners would queue up outside Cole's Restaurant for original French-dipped sandwiches and/or for a helping of nighttime entertainment when the restaurant operated as a nightclub. Almost a century after its 1908 opening, Cole's has outlived all of its host-structure's other powerful tenants, still continuing to serve French-dip sandwiches out of the same location in which they were allegedly invented. Eight floors up from Cole's basement location, a completely different social environment existed; characterized by exclusivity and extravagance, the Jonathon club, an elite men's social club founded in 1895 for Republican supporters of William McKinley, occupied the building's top two, marble clad floors. Henry Huntington was a member of the Jonathon Club, and for a time even reserved some space in the building for his private residence.

The eight-stories that spanned the vast social divide between Cole's and the Jonathon Club housed the various companies responsible for the mass-transit operations below. In 1910, Huntington sold his train line to Southern Pacific Railroad, who occupied the building's commercial space for the next seventy-nine years. While the number of commuters soared from just five thousand per day in 1905 to one hundred thousand per day in 1942, streetcar usage began eventually to decline as Los Angeles's dependence on the automobile started gaining momentum. By 1950, the Pacific Electric Building abandoned the red car system in favor of the more versatile bus, and within another eleven years all trolley lines in the city entirely disappeared. As with many downtown institutions, the following decades of economic decline, decentralization and suburbanization rendered the building's transportation services obsolete. Southern Pacific sold the Pacific Electric Building in 1989 to its current owners, who are now in the process of revitalizing the historic structure through an Adaptive Reuse conversion from office space to three hundred and fourteen apartments. The Pacific Electric Building was recognized in 1989 as a Historic-Cultural Monument.