

**Sandwiching in History  
Union Station  
1400 W. Markham, LR  
December 2, 2011  
By: Rachel Silva**



## **Intro**

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Sandwiching in History tour of Union Station! I'd like to thank Bailey Properties for allowing us to tour the building—and in particular, I'd like to recognize property manager Eric Stoiber, maintenance technician Lee Castle, and Steve Shadid with Next Level Events, who is providing FREE LUNCH for tour participants today!!

Union Station, also known as the Missouri Pacific or “MoPac” Station, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

## **History of Union Station**

### *Cairo & Fulton Railroad*

[Although railroad companies were chartered in Arkansas beginning in the early 1850s, it would be another twenty years before the first railroad line was actually completed due to financial difficulties and the impact of the Civil War. In August 1871 the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad opened with service from Memphis to Argenta and was the first operating railroad in the state.]

In 1853 the State of Arkansas approved a charter for the Cairo & Fulton Railroad, which proposed to build a railroad line diagonally across the state of Arkansas from the AR-MO border in northeast Arkansas to Texarkana on the AR-TX border (original survey stopped at Fulton, AR, on the north side of the Red River but eventually went beyond Fulton to Texarkana). The Cairo & Fulton was chartered in Missouri the following year to build the remainder of the line from the MO-AR state line to Birds Point, Missouri, on the west bank of the MS River opposite Cairo, Illinois. However, like most other railroads during this period, construction of the Cairo & Fulton line was delayed due to financial shortfalls and the Civil War.

In November 1872 tracks from St. Louis reached the AR-MO border to connect with the Cairo & Fulton tracks. On January 11, 1873, the first train from St. Louis reached the northern bank of the Arkansas River at Argenta. The railroad company originally operated two separate divisions—one north of the Arkansas River and one south of the river—and relied on a ferry to transport cargo and passengers from one line to the other. But in 1872 the railroad announced plans to construct the Baring Cross Bridge, which was completed on December 21, 1873. The Baring Cross Bridge was the first bridge to span the AR River at Little Rock and received its name from two sources—“Baring” came from the famous Baring and Company bankers of England, who financed much of the project, and “Cross” came from C & F president Thomas Allen, whose family coat of arms contained a prominent cross.

[The 1873 Baring Cross Bridge was destroyed during the Flood of 1927 and was rebuilt the following year. It officially reopened on February 2, 1929. In 1967 the bridge was retrofitted with a new lift span to meet the requirements of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System. The Lincoln Avenue Viaduct, a rainbow through-truss bridge, was also built by MoPac in 1928 as part of a general improvement plan for the area. It replaced two older wooden viaducts.]

### *1872-1873 Cairo & Fulton Station*

In 1872 and 1873 the Cairo & Fulton built the first railroad station in Little Rock on this site. It was a wood-frame structure designed in the Second Empire style of architecture. The first floor of the station housed the waiting rooms, ticket office, dining room, and newsstand. By 1886 the second floor of the station was occupied by the Gleason Hotel, and then from at least 1889 until 1897, Pratt’s Hotel was located upstairs in the station. [Gleason Hotel later built building at 2<sup>nd</sup> & Center streets (as of 1907 still at this location).]

In 1874 the Cairo & Fulton and St. Louis & Iron Mountain consolidated to form the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad, so this became known as the Iron Mountain station at that time. In 1906 the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad demolished the Second Empire-style station and began construction of a new depot.

### *1906-1907 St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Station*

In the fall of 1906 the contracting firm of Westinghouse, Church, Kerr & Company poured the concrete foundation and built the concrete retaining walls for the new station. This was quite a big job because the company first had to dig into the side of the hill to create space for the basement rooms. The station would be built up so that the first floor (lobby area) was on grade with Victory Street. According to an article in the *Arkansas Democrat*, “It is hard for the average man to understand that the ground at the union station will be raised to a point eighteen feet above the top of the present foundation but such is the case...at that time the station plaza will be on a level with Victory Street.” Interestingly, the Westinghouse Company was also contracted to demolish the old Hoffman Hotel, which in 1906 was located in a small building at the southeast corner of Victory and Water (now Garland) streets so that the streetcar line could cut the corner there and make two ¼ turns instead of a sharp 90-degree turn onto Water Street on its way downtown. So that’s when the corner was clipped there, and then the Hoffman Hotel built a large new building on the site of the parking lot at the NE corner of Victory & Markham streets.

Prominent St. Louis architect Theodore C. Link designed the 1907 Union Station building using a combination of the Renaissance Revival and Gothic Revival styles—the brick building featured large arched openings and decorative cast-stone detailing as well as a steeply pitched roof with parapets at the gable ends. Murch Bros. Construction Company of St. Louis was awarded the contract to build the actual station (did everything besides the concrete work, which was done by Westinghouse). The station was completed in 1907 at a reported cost of \$750,000. It also had a large concourse extending from the back of the main building out over the railroad tracks and train shed down to covered walkways where people boarded the trains. The concourse was made out of steel and reinforced concrete and had a gabled roof.

In May 1917 the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern merged with the Missouri Pacific Railroad line.

### *1920 Fire*

On the night of Wednesday, April 7, 1920, a fire devastated Union Station. About 8:00 p.m., Chief Train Dispatcher W. A. Anderson saw the fire as he approached the station to report for work. He called the fire department 3 times, but their response was delayed for a total of about 30 minutes due to complications with the telephone system and clocks at the fire station. The fire originated on the third floor near the Tire & Timber Department and caused a series of loud explosions. When the city fire department attempted to use the four nearby MoPac water plugs, they were all dry. So the firemen then had to use a water plug at 2<sup>nd</sup> & Victory streets, wasting valuable time. The fire heavily damaged the building, leaving just a shell of outer walls and the clock tower standing. The roof totally collapsed, and many interior walls had to be demolished and rebuilt. The western exterior wall was also destroyed. The estimated loss in buildings and equipment was \$1 million. In addition, at least 250 suitcases, 12 sacks of mail, and 2 carloads of express were destroyed, totaling several thousand dollars in damages.

People reportedly flocked to the fire, requiring the entire police force to keep them in order.

Just by chance, Benjamin F. Bush, president of MoPac; Alexander Robertson, VP & General Manager of MoPac; and about 30 MoPac officials arrived by train in LR at 11:30 p.m. on the night of the fire. They were on their way from Louisiana to St. Louis and had no knowledge of the fire until they pulled into the station. Bush announced that Missouri Pacific would rebuild the station as soon as possible.

On the morning of April 8, 1920, several hundred people showed up to help clear the debris at the station. Carpenters constructed a temporary wood building to serve as an information center. Additional temporary buildings were later built on the main drive of the station grounds to serve as a passenger depot and ticket office. Fortunately, train service was not disrupted, and the train shed and concourse were unharmed. Partially burned paper records from the station were reportedly scattered throughout Pulaski Heights.

### *1920-1921 Missouri Pacific Station*

Following the fire, it was hoped that the new station might serve all three railroad lines operating in Little Rock at that time—the Missouri Pacific, Cotton Belt, and

Rock Island. But legal technicalities and increased expenses made such a union impractical; however, the station was commonly referred to as Union Station.

Construction began immediately on a new station using as much of the existing building material as possible. Architect E. M. Tucker of St. Louis designed the building, keeping the 1907 Renaissance Revival-style characteristics and changing the roof from gabled to flat. The Stewart Construction Company of St. Louis built the new station at a cost of \$1.25 million. The grand opening was held on August 1, 1921, at the stroke of midnight. According to a write-up in the *Arkansas Gazette*, the station was “one of the finest and most modern in the South.”

Baggage, express, and freight rooms were on the basement level with large loading dock areas on the southern end of the building below the retaining wall. The first floor contained the main lobby, white and colored passenger waiting rooms, 12 ticket windows, and restaurant and dining facilities (on the west end of building). The second and third floors housed offices for railroad personnel as well as the telephone and telegraph offices.

The large concourse and train shed built in 1907 was incorporated into the 1921 station and remained intact until at least the late 1960s. The structure is no longer extant but from the north (back) side of the station, you can see where the steel beams were cut off. And it is interesting to note that the train yard was originally much larger than it is now—there were at least 4 sets of tracks running under the concourse alone, and at least 2 sets of tracks to the west side of the concourse (which would be out where the Episcopal School buildings are now).

Missouri Pacific continued passenger service out of the station until 1970. In 1982 Missouri Pacific merged with Union Pacific. Today the Union Pacific Railroad and Amtrak continue to use this route.

## **Recent Past**

In the 1970s, a large portion of the basement area on the southwest end of the station (which had previously been used as a loading & storage area for freight & express) was converted to restaurant space. By the late 1970s, this space was occupied by two very well-known establishments—Buster’s and Slick Willy’s. Buster’s Restaurant & Bar was in the easternmost space, and Slick Willy’s World of Entertainment (which was full of pool tables and other games for adults) was in the westernmost space. After observing customers going from one business to the other, Buster of Buster’s and Dave of Slick Willy’s got the idea to combine the two

business concepts under one roof. In 1982 they started the first Dave & Buster's in Dallas and now operate restaurants all over the U.S.

Bailey Properties, LLC, (owner, John Bailey) purchased the station in July 1991. Several changes were made to the interior of the building in the early 1990s...

The Amtrak station was moved from the main lobby level to the basement. Great effort was made to recreate a 1920s passenger waiting room. Everything in the Amtrak station dates from the early 1990s, including the tile floor. However, the benches are historic but are not from Little Rock—they came out of Memphis Central Station (completed in 1914).

About 20 years ago, the lobby area/main passenger waiting room was sectioned off into office space but you can still see the original crown molding and columns in some places—Arkansas Community Foundation offices and old ticket area. The area on the northeastern end of the station where the Bailey Properties office is now was originally the colored passenger waiting room—you will notice that the columns are plain and unornamented. Much less decorative when compared to the columns in the white waiting area.

Currently most of Union Station is used as office space. Next Level Events, an event venue and catering business, is located in the basement, as is the Amtrak station.

Notice the marble throughout the building, decorative grilles on the columns (hid the radiators), and leaded glass transom windows with pivoting sashes.

**REMEMBER TO GET BROCHURE FOR 2012 TOURS!!**

**FREE LUNCH AT NEXT LEVEL EVENTS!! Thank Steve Shadid again.**