



Fletcher Swan

UP's Deco depot in Las Vegas

When the builders of the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad arrived at the spot in southern Nevada that they designated Water Station No. 25, none of them could have predicted that within a few decades the place would become one of the most popular recreational destinations in the world. Las Vegas' first passenger station was an old coach, set up at the foot of Fremont Street when the Union Pacific-controlled SPLA&SL opened in 1905. This temporary depot was replaced in 1909 by a substantial structure of the same Spanish Mission style as several others on the line. In 1931, two events occurred that would radically change the area: Work began on the nearby Boulder (now Hoover) Dam, and Nevada legalized gambling. The Vegas boom was on. Something more in keeping with the new spirit

of the place was in order, so in 1940 UP replaced the old depot with this one, designed in a variant of the Art Deco style known as Streamline Moderne. The railroad's shield and "Route of the Streamliners and the Challengers" sign—both rendered in neon, of course—faced up casino-lined Fremont Street. In 1956, UP augmented the top train on the route, the transcontinental *City of Los Angeles*, with the *City of Las Vegas* out of L.A. The "Crapshooter Commuter" initially ran with GM Aerotrains equipment, switched to an E9 and coaches in 1957, became triweekly in '58, was renamed *Las Vegas Holiday Special* in '62, and quit in 1968. By that time, UP had razed the 1940 depot and put up the Union Plaza Hotel, whose ground floor sported rail passenger facilities along with the requisite casino. ■