



During the 1880's, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad rushed to compete with the Southern Pacific for southern California traffic. The AT&SF's first objective was to reach a Pacific Coast port, when the SP was already in Los Angeles and the Central Pacific as already in the San Francisco Bay Area. The AT&SF first reached tidewater at Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico, in 1882, via its New Mexico & Arizona and Sonora railroads. But the AT&SF lost no time continuing toward the only major California port without rail service, San Diego. The AT&SF formed the California Southern Railroad to build north from San Diego up Temecula Canyon and over Cajon Pass to reach the SP-built, AT&SF-leased mainline at Barstow. AT&SF trains first arrived in San Diego in 1885, and by 1888 the difficult Temecula Canyon portion of the CS line was circumvented by the AT&SF's coastal route to San Diego, built by the Riverside, Santa Ana & Los Angeles and the San Bernardino & San Diego railroads.

The San Diego Santa Fe Depot was built in 1915 to replace the small Victorian-style structure erected in 1887 for the CS. The Depot was completed during a particularly optimistic period in the City's development, and represents the battle waged by the City of San Diego to become the primary West Coast terminus of the AT&SF's transcontinental railroad, a fight that was ultimately lost to the City of Los Angeles. The facility not only handled Santa Fe traffic but also that of the San Diego & Arizona Railway and San Diego Electric Railway, and the designation was officially changed to "San Diego Union Station" when the SD&A completed its own transcontinental line by connecting to SP tracks in south-central California in 1919. The Santa Fe resumed solo operation of the station in 1951 when the San Diego and Arizona Eastern Railway (successor to the SD&A) discontinued passenger service.

The Spanish Colonial Revival style station is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its architecture is echoed in the design of many modern buildings in downtown San Diego. The historic Depot is still an active transportation center, providing services to Amtrak, the San Diego Coaster, the San Diego Trolley, and the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System bus system.



Tile detail in the beautiful San Diego Depot.