

The *El Paso Times* / Labor Temple Building  
223 South Oregon Street, El Paso, Texas

Architectural History

Construction of the Times Building began in perhaps late 1900 and was completed by late February 1901 (Middagh 96). The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map of August 1900 indicates that the site was vacant, whereas a subsequent map dated March 1902 shows the same site as the location of the “El Paso Times Printing Off’s” with the address as 315 South Oregon. Although no drawings of the building have been located, nor has the architect been identified, the building may have been designed by one of a handful of practicing architects in El Paso at the turn of the century. Only ten architects are listed in the city directories for 1900 and 1901, and of those only five appear in both directories—Matthew Hughes, Edward Kneezell, Ernest Krause, Harry Schutz, and Samuel B. Zimmer. In 1900, Samuel Zimmer was listed as an assistant to Edward Kneezell, so it is doubtful that he designed the Times Building. His employer, however, was a member of the Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks, Lodge No. 187, of which James D. Ponder, a leading contributor on the editorial staff and later the newspaper’s editor, was also a member. Kneezell originally settled in El Paso in 1882 and had practiced architecture in the frontier town since his arrival. His established practice and membership in the Elks Lodge suggests that Juan S. Hart, the editor of the *El Paso Times*, and Ponder retained him to design the Times Building.

The Times Building is a three-story with the appearance of a two-story, rectilinear structure constructed of brick with a spare amount of neoclassical features. The front façade features two bays with arched windows on the ground level, one with a small balcony and the other with a decorative wrought iron rail. The upper floor features double arched windows on either side of a central pilaster, and the edges of the building also are accentuated with pilasters. The red brick exterior is accented with cut white stone at the bases of the pilasters and as headers. Similar stone is cut and emplaced as central brackets above each arched window. The façade is divided horizontally with a stepped bracketed cornice toward the middle and is capped with a similar cornice and short parapet well at the roof. The fenestration on the right side of the Times Building contains tall arched windows with brick sills and arched brick headers. Presumably, the identical fenestration pattern exists on the left side of the building. Painted on the right side of the building at the top of the wall is a sign reading “Times Building.”

As the current photographs will show, the Times Building / Labor Temple Building has been altered from its original condition. The side walls have been stuccoed; the lightning rod has been removed, and the front façade features a metal roll-down door. At the rear of the building, window openings have been bricked-in.

## Historical Information

“Trials and Tribulations of El Paso’s Pioneer Newspaper” *El Paso Times*, September 28, 1921 (EPVF—Newspaper Printing Corporation folder)

The article indicates that the *El Paso Times* began in 1879 [incorrect, April 1881]; the original office was located on the site presently occupied by the Roberts-Banner Building [215 North Mesa]; the office was next located on El Paso Street between Second and Overland in the Monarch Building (1884) [this building still stands]; in the spring of 1881 the *Times* was located on St. Louis (now Mills) Street facing the plaza in a newly erected two-story building [possibly the building shown on the Sanborn map of October 1883 at 623-625 St. Louis, which was vacant at the time]; “In 1885 the *Times* moved into a two-story building on the east side of El Paso Street, between Overland and Second streets, and occupied this structure until June, 1886”; “From the Monarch building the *Times* was moved to the rear part of the old Hotel Linden building on the north side of East Overland Street. The next move was to another room in the same building. This was on the west side of South Oregon Street. This is now occupied by Laskin-Swatt Company. The paper remained there from 1887 to 1891... The next move of the *Times* was into the building on the northeast [*sic*] corner of Oregon and Overland streets, across the street from the old Zieger hotel... Something like 10 years ago, Captain [Juan] Hart sold the *Times* and the Oregon Street building to the present owners. The company continued to publish the paper here until December 29, 1910 [*sic*], when the move was made to its present handsome five-story building at San Francisco and Santa Fe streets.”

John Middagh, *Frontier Newspaper: The El Paso Times*. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1958.

A photograph shows the Times Building, a two-story wood-frame building with a balcony extending across the entire storefront and glass windows. Two signs are legible in the photograph, one for “Boots and Shoes” and the other for the Consulado Mexicano. The caption reads, “First Home of The Times—Across from San Jacinto Plaza” (4).

“The *Times* was located now on East Overland Street, ‘in the brick building nearly opposite the fire bell tower,’ the new publishers [J. H. Bate and Juan S. Hart] noted in their editorial column of November 26, 1884, indicating that they thought the town had grown to such an extent that there might be residents who were unfamiliar with its location” (25). [Sanborn Map dated July 1885, Sheet 2, shows the two-story building opposite the fire bell tower (Sheet 4) with the Berlin Hotel on the second floor and the address of 206-208 East Overland Street.]

“The year 1886 was an important one in the history of The *Times*. Its stand in the battle over the courthouse construction fraud had brought it new prestige. El Paso was growing and business was getting better. The *Times* was printing the news and running its share, or better, of advertisements. The owners greeted the year at its beginning by moving from their old location at Overland and Oregon Streets to a larger plant in the Monarch Building on El Paso Street” (41). [Sanborn Map dated July 1885, Sheet 2, confirms that

the newspaper's office at 208 East Overland was indeed located at the corner of Overland and Oregon Streets, which was on the northwest corner of the intersection.]

“At the time of the change of ownership, the paper was being printed at 208 East Overland Street. Hart had started construction on a new building at 223 South Oregon Street and the new offices were occupied on February 26, 1901. The new location was called The Times Building. Today it houses the *Labor Advocate*, a weekly labor journal” (96).

### Significant Dates

#### 1885

The city directory indicates that the *El Paso Daily Times* office is located at No. 14 East Overland between South El Paso Street and Oregon Street; Juan S. Hart is the manger and editor of the newspaper.

#### 1886-1887

The city directory lists the *El Paso Daily Times* office at a location on South El Paso Street; this location is the Monarch Building, 400-406 South El Paso Street, and renumbered in 1888 to 202-208 South El Paso Street.

#### 1888

The city directory does not include a listing for any local newspapers, but does indicate that the printing office for the *El Paso Daily Times* is located at 73 Oregon Street.

#### 1889

The *El Paso Daily Times* printing office is listed at 73 South Oregon Street.

#### 1892-1893

The *El Paso Daily Times* printing office is listed at 73 South Oregon Street.

#### 1900

The *El Paso Daily Times* office is located on the south side of East Overland between Oregon and Stanton streets.

#### 1901

Hotel Zieger is located at the northwest corner of South Oregon and East Overland. The *El Paso Daily Times* occupies its new building, the Times Building, at 223 South Oregon Street on February 26, 1901.

#### 1902

The *El Paso Daily Times* office is located in the Times Building, 223 South Oregon; Juan S. Hart, president and general manager, and J. D. Ponder, managing editor; the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map of March 1902 (Sheet 12) lists the address for the *El Paso Times* Printing Offices as 315 South Oregon; both the city directory and the Sanborn map refer to the same building, however.

Circa 1910

Otis A. Aultman (1874-1943) photographs the exterior of the Times Building (image number B164; Otis A. Aultman Collection, El Paso Public Library. The photograph is pasted on cardstock and bears the caption, “This building is now ‘The Labor Temple’ operated by the American Federation of Labor.”)

1918

The *El Paso Times* office is last listed at 223 South Oregon.

1919

The *El Paso Times* office is located at 200-202 San Francisco Street; the former office at 223 South Oregon is listed as vacant

1920

The former Times Building at 223 South Oregon now houses the Labor Temple and the *Labor Advocate* printing office; William J. Moran is the weekly newspaper’s editor and proprietor

1925

The city directory indicates that the *Labor Advocate*; the Labor Advocate Printers and Publishers, Inc.; and the Labor Temple are all located at 223 South Oregon

1931

The city directory indicates that all three entities from six years earlier are still located at 223 South Oregon, as well as the Union Labor Club and the residence of E. L. Alexander, a business representative for the Central Labor Union

1932

The city directory indicates that all three entities from seven years earlier are still located at 223 South Oregon, although E. L. Alexander no longer resides there; the Union Labor Educational Club is also listed at this address, with its secretary, William Rice, residing in the building

1957

The city directory last lists the Labor Temple at 223 South Oregon; the Labor Temple was located at this address from 1920 to 1957; the *Labor Advocate* remains here

1958

The city directory lists the Labor Advocate and Southwest Press printers located at 223 South Oregon; Southwest Press had already located here several years earlier

1979

The city directory indicates that the *Labor Advocate*, Southwest Press, the Labor Club (private), and the El Paso Central Labor Union AFL-CIO are all located at 223 South Oregon

### 1983

The city directory lists 223 South Oregon as vacant; the *Labor Advocate* and El Paso Central Labor Union AFL-CIO are last listed in the 1982 directory

### 1984-1999

The city directories indicate that various offices were located in the building, but none of them remained at the location for more than one year

### 2000-present

The city directories indicate that Xicali Store, a hobby and toy shop, operates out of 223 South Oregon

### Biographical Sketches of Juan S. Hart and James D. Ponder

Juan Siqueiros Hart was born on June 24, 1856, at Hart's Mill near the falls on the Rio Grande upstream from present-day downtown El Paso. His parents were Simeon Hart and Jesusita Siqueiros Hart. Simeon Hart established a grist mill on the Rio Grande in 1849 to supply grain to the nearby Post Opposite El Paso del Norte, later renamed Fort Bliss. Juan S. Hart studied mathematics, languages, and engineering at Christian Brothers College in St. Louis, Missouri. Upon returning to El Paso, he was employed as the city engineer in 1881, and in the following year he entered the newspaper business as an editor and managing partner of the *El Paso Link* shortly before that newspaper was purchased by the fledgling *El Paso Daily Times*. In late November 1884, Juan S. Hart and J. H. Bate purchased the *El Paso Daily Times*. Hart served as editor from late 1884 until 1900; he briefly relinquished the editorship until 1903 when he planned to retire, but he resumed his work in his former capacity for an additional seven years until the *El Paso Times* was sold in 1910. Hart was responsible for strengthening the newspaper's journalistic reputation through solid reporting on major issues such as the city's public water supply problems, the closing of gambling dens and the red-light district, corruption among public officials, and violence in the city's streets. He served as president of the Texas Press Association in 1891. Hart also funded the construction of the three-story brick building for the *El Paso Times* in 1900-1901, which was another major accomplishment during his tenure. Upon his retirement in 1910, Hart spent much of his time in Mountain Park, New Mexico. Following his death on July 15, 1918, Hart was buried in his family's vault at Hart's Mill.

James D. Ponder was born on May 21, 1861, in Decatur County, Georgia. He received an education at a boarding school in Marianna, Florida; in public schools in Georgia; and at Mercer Institute in Macon, Georgia. Ponder embarked on a career in journalism in his home state with various newspapers, including the *Atlanta Constitution*. He founded the *Rome (Georgia) Courier* and served as its editor until 1883. For the next two years, he worked in Washington, D.C. as a correspondent for the *New York Herald*. Ponder's career also included stints with newspapers in Chicago, St. Louis, and Houston. In December 1888, he arrived in El Paso, and Juan S. Hart convinced him to edit a special edition of the *El Paso Times*. Ponder found the Chihuahuan Desert to his liking so he

opted to remain in El Paso to work on the *Times*' editorial staff and eventually became the newspaper's editor and general manager and a company stockholder. On November 23, 1904, he married Stefanie Jeanette Gemoets. Ponder relinquished his duties to Juan S. Hart in 1907. Following his newspaper career, he entered civil service. Ponder was appointed county treasurer in March 1911 upon the resignation of James W. Magoffin, and he was subsequently elected to a full term in that capacity in the autumn of 1912 and served until 1917. During the administration of Mayor Charles Davis (1917-1923), Ponder managed the city's warehouse. A lifelong Democrat, Ponder was also a member of the McGinty Club, the El Paso lodge of Elks, and the El Paso Pioneer's Society. He died on October 30, 1928, and was buried in El Paso.

(Sources for each biographical sketch: John Middagh, *Frontier Newspaper: The El Paso Times*. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1958. Vertical Files, Southwest Collection, El Paso Downtown Public Library.)