

## A Tale of Three Cities

### The Union Stations of Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati

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#### Introduction

I was fortunate enough to attend college near Chicago in the late 1960s and became a railfan as I learned more and more about the vast tapestry of trains, junctions, stations, and operations of the nation's Railroad Capital. Riding the fast-dwindling fleet of privately operated passenger trains became my passion, and in doing so I spent a lot of time in railroad stations, depots, and terminals. Large or small, elegant or spare, these were the primary point of contact between the railroad companies and the public. In smaller towns, "Down at the depot" was where an endless stream of passengers, baggage, mail, express, and telegrams arrived and departed, the focal point of much of the community's economic life.

The depots played an important symbolic role as well. Often executed in distinctive architectural styles, they were intended to reflect well on the railroad company and to provide services and amenities in a setting that would impress, awe, or inspire patrons. Many times in smaller communities, the railroad station was the most distinctive and ornamental building in town.

The same was true in larger communities, and particularly so in the case of union stations, those shared by two or more railroad companies. Employing established architects working in cutting-edge styles, railroad and union depot companies built memorable stations in all sizes and designs.

As a railfan in the 1960s, I was as fascinated by the stations as I was by the trains that served them. Indeed my thirty-year career in historic preservation was inspired in large part, I think, by the time I spent in dusty, neglected but still glorious railroad stations.

I have always liked railroad stations for themselves, but as a preservationist I am also interested in how cities grow and change. I have long understood that railroads and railroad facilities have been powerful influences in shaping American cities, particularly in the location and design of passenger depots. Long after the departure of the last train, these places have continued to influence urban life and can be important components of vital twenty-first-century cities.

### Ohio's "3-C" Union Stations

Some time ago it occurred to me that the union stations of Ohio's "3-C Route" (Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati) provide an instructive microcosm of the importance of union stations in the lives of cities. In all three cities, the union stations developed differently, had different fates, and survive today in distinctly different ways.

This essay will explore three aspects of the union stations in each of these Ohio cities: the stations' histories and impacts upon railroad operations; their architectural designs; and their ultimate fates and influence upon the urban fabric of each city. The stations are considered in chronological order.

### Early Ohio Railroads

Ohio's pioneer railroads were built inland from established lake and river ports; the state was first crossed by routes running generally north and south, later the east-west trunk lines crossed the state on their way from eastern cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore to gateways such as Chicago and St. Louis. By 1851 two lake-to-river routes were in operation, one via the Little Miami Railroad (LM) and the Mad River and Lake Erie Railroad between Cincinnati and Sandusky; and the other via the LM, the Columbus and Xenia Railroad (C&X), and the Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati Railroad (CC&C) between Cincinnati and Cleveland by way of Columbus.<sup>1</sup>

#### Columbus Union Depot/Union Station

Rail passenger service came to Ohio's capital city in 1850. Late that year, the C&X entered Columbus from the southwest, crossing the Scioto River about where the former Pennsylvania Railroad bridge is today. Crossing North High Street at what then was the city's northern edge, the C&X entered the new Columbus Depot at the northeast corner of High and Naghten Streets (Naghten today is called Nationwide Boulevard in this area). Little more than a double-ended wooden barn, the depot had three through tracks. It became a union station in early 1851, when the CC&C was completed from Cleveland and entered the depot's north end to link up with the C&X and LM, establishing the 3-C route connecting three of Ohio's most important cities.<sup>2</sup>

The Columbus rail network grew rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the original frame union depot quickly became outmoded. It was replaced in 1875 by a brick structure, with a train shed that had seven tracks. Designed in a spare

version of the then-popular French Second Empire style, the city's second depot had at least a bit more character than its predecessor.<sup>3</sup>

Almost from the beginning, and especially after establishment of Ohio State University four miles north of downtown Columbus in 1870, the grade crossing at High Street west of the depot was a constant problem. As the city's north end developed rapidly, the increasing number of trains—both freight and passenger—blocked the crossing for longer lengths of time. In one survey in the 1890s, the crossing was blocked more than seven hours in one twenty-four-hour period. The Union Depot Company had constructed a tunnel under the tracks before the completion of the second depot, but few people used it except riders of the city's horsecars. A wood bridge built for the newly electrified city streetcars was built in 1888, which many trespassing pedestrians also used, but most preferred to take their chances at the High Street crossing. Delays and accidents were increasingly common.<sup>4</sup>

The answer to the problem was separation of street and rail traffic, which was achieved between 1893 and 1897 with construction of the third union depot on the same site. The project was the work of the firm of Daniel H. Burnham, the Chicago architect who was primarily responsible for the plan and design of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Key to the project was the complete separation of street and rail traffic by means of a viaduct over the tracks, along which there was an ornate entry arcade along the east side of High Street. A drive and walkway led back several hundred feet to the depot itself. The arcade served as a gateway to the city and, along with smaller and less ornamented extensions, housed commercial space for various businesses along both sides of the viaduct; the arcade also contained a street railway

waiting room. The principal floor of the arcade and the depot was nearly thirty feet above the original ground level, yet someone crossing the viaduct would not even be aware that he was on an elevated structure. This arrangement remained largely intact for the life of the depot, by this time called Columbus Union Station. Major alterations included demolition of the southernmost of the two main arches of the arcade in the late 1920s to extend the original drive into a loop to accommodate autos; and removal of the original train shed and construction of an enclosed concourse with enclosed stairs to track level, completed in 1931.<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen on maps from the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the right-of-way through central Columbus and the union station property has always been the primary rail route through the city and remains so today. With few exceptions, every rail route constructed into Columbus between 1850 and the turn of the twentieth century focused on this central location. There were other depots in other parts of Columbus but, unlike Cleveland and Cincinnati, it never was necessary to consolidate disparate stations into a single union station—there always was only one, from the earliest days of rail travel, including bypass tracks to keep freight trains out of the depot.<sup>6</sup>

### Cleveland Union Terminal

The union station in Cleveland was built at a different time and for different reasons. Rail service in the City on the Lake came a couple of years earlier than to Columbus, and the pattern of passenger depot development was different. As in numerous other cities, the various railroad companies—the New York Central, the Pennsylvania, the Erie, the Nickel Plate, and the Baltimore and Ohio (either the original

companies or components of these systems)—all built their own depots near downtown Cleveland between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century.

As the twentieth century dawned and Cleveland became an industrial powerhouse and major urban center, there were plans for re-creating the city. Cleveland was one of the first cities to embrace the “City Beautiful” movement and even engaged its guru, Daniel H. Burnham. Inspired by the 1893 Chicago exposition, the movement drew together architects, planners, business people, and politicians, who were desirous of dealing with some of the many ills plaguing central cities.<sup>7</sup>

The Cleveland Group Plan published in 1907 called for reordering downtown Cleveland in a monumental way. Just off the northeast corner of Public Square was to be the south end of a large public space called the mall, around which major federal, county, and city buildings would be placed. Crowning the assemblage at the north end was to be a new Union Station, spanning the existing tracks along the lakefront.<sup>8</sup>

Although Cleveland implemented most of the Group Plan over the next three decades, the new depot never left the drawing board. As it happened, the Van Sweringen brothers, O. P. and M. J., began as developers of the suburb of Shaker Heights and ended up as railroad magnates who would remake downtown Cleveland in a completely different way than that envisioned in the Group Plan.

Rapid transit from Shaker Heights to downtown Cleveland was key to the Van Sweringens’ plans, and they proposed a transit terminal on Public Square, the part of downtown Cleveland most easily reached by the transit line. Even though the transit terminal plan had evolved to include the steam railroads as well, World War I

demonstrated that the lakefront lines, where the Group Plan proposed its depot, were a serious bottleneck.

Although Cleveland voters had approved the lakefront depot in 1915, in 1919 the voters instead approved one on Public Square by a wide margin. The Van Sweringen brothers were now free to implement their plans for what would become the Terminal Group, a massive project that changed the face of Cleveland and gave the city its most enduring landmark. The “Vans,” as they were called, constructed the Hotel Cleveland on the west side of the square in 1918. Legal and political delays kept the rest of the project from proceeding until 1923, but by 1934, when the U.S. Post Office building was completed, the huge construction site seldom was quiet.<sup>9</sup>

Cleveland Union Terminal opened on 29 June 1930, some two years after completion of the complex’s feature building, Terminal Tower. The project made use of huge amounts of air rights. It was not readily apparent to visitors that virtually the entire Terminal Group—buildings, roads, and all—was built up on a steel structure rising several stories above ground level. Cleveland Union Terminal itself was contained entirely within the complex and was not visible from the exterior. Sharing the barrel-vaulted entrance rotunda of the Terminal Tower office building, the station floor was some thirteen feet below the level of Public Square. Four sloping ramps connected the entrance rotunda with the station. Two straight inner ramps provided direct access to the “steam” (that is, main line, not transit) passenger facilities, consisting of a ticket lobby and a skylighted concourse at the south end of the station. Two additional dogleg ramps took transit passengers to and from east and west “traction” concourses that gave direct access to the transit tracks, which were located north of the through tracks for the steam

railroads. Cross passages connected all the various spaces, which were lined with shops and stores catering to travelers and also featured an elegant restaurant known as the English Oak Room.

The project was massive. Covering some fifty acres, it required demolition of nearly 1,500 buildings and major reshaping of the land between Public Square and the Cuyahoga River. It included construction of a four-track high-level viaduct across the river valley, as well as seventeen miles of new electrified route mileage. This was the domain of the famous P-Motors, which hauled trains to and from Union Terminal between 1930 and 1953 to keep steam locomotives out of the station. Completion of Union Terminal was celebrated in the railroad press and elsewhere (the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* published a thirty-two-page tabloid to celebrate opening day), and the project forever altered the Cleveland skyline.

Although the Pennsylvania Railroad never became a user of Cleveland Union Terminal, all other train service in Cleveland ran through it. It was exclusively for passengers and mail—freight trains stayed on their traditional routes through the city. Except for removing most passenger runs from the congested trackage within the city, the terminal had little impact on railroad operations generally. It did, however, cause a wholesale revision of how passenger trains—from all-Pullman expresses to lowly locals—came from and went to the City on the Lake.<sup>10</sup>

### Cincinnati Union Terminal

In the mid-1920s, while Cleveland was beginning work to draw its disparate rail passenger facilities together into a single union terminal, Cincinnati was getting serious

about doing the same. Similar to Cleveland, the Queen City suffered from the cramped quarters, slow service, and inconvenience of having to use multiple depots that were charming of countenance but woefully outmoded. However, it faced an additional problem Cleveland did not: Ohio River floods. The extensive system of flood control dams that today keep a fairly tight rein on the river did not exist then, and the unpredictable Ohio regularly inundated the city's riverfront depots.

The solution was a new union depot on high ground. From an operation and construction standpoint, the only logical location was the valley of Mill Creek west of downtown Cincinnati, where numerous rail lines already ran. Involving some 5.5 million cubic yards of grading, excavation, and fill, the project to build the new depot lasted from 1929 to 1933 and took on a massive character and included work well beyond the passenger depot itself. The project included a coach yard, engine terminal, mail facility, two major street viaducts, and five new connections to the seven railroads that were participants in the Cincinnati Union Terminal Company. A large public park extending several hundred yards east of the terminal building made it the principal jewel in the Queen City's crown. As in Cleveland, the new terminal project was celebrated in the press and various other publications.<sup>11</sup>

The depot was, of course, the focal point, and neither Cincinnati nor the world has seen anything else like it. Described as resembling an old radio, a quarter of a cantaloupe, or Half Dome in Yosemite, Cincinnati Union Terminal was a complete departure from traditional railroad station architecture and was a stunning manifestation of the streamline/art deco/art moderne aesthetic just then sweeping the country in designs ranging from cream separators to zeppelins.

The terminal achieved its purpose brilliantly. Designed to accommodate more than two hundred arrivals and departures daily, it never reached that level. Nonetheless, it functioned smoothly and well, making train travel—at least at one end of the trip—something special again. The project was unaffected by the depression (its bonds had been sold before the 1929 crash) and in fact was an economic and civic bright spot in a difficult period.

Requiring as it did a wholesale reorientation of passenger routes into and out of Cincinnati, Union Terminal had a major effect upon rail operations. New freight yards filled the Mill Creek valley, and many passenger trains were diverted from traditional routes well outside the downtown area in order to line up for their approach to the new terminal. The Mill Creek valley remains the focus of rail operations in the city today.<sup>12</sup>

## Architecture

### Columbus Union Station

As discussed earlier, Columbus Union Station had two principal parts: the High Street arcade and the depot building itself. Though both were the work of a single architectural firm, each was distinctly different and reflected two different eras in design.<sup>13</sup>

The arcade was by far the more flamboyant. The dominant style of Burnham's work at the Chicago exposition was, for its time, the latest thing, a French-derived style known as Beaux-Arts classicism. Based in classical architecture, and other reflections of Greek and Roman design, this style came from the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. The

common “spotting feature” of the style was the paired columns or paired pilasters (engaged columns projecting from a surface) used on both interior and exterior walls.

The union station arcade was pure Beaux-Arts. It was constructed of terra-cotta (Italian for “cooked earth”), a clay material pressed into molds and fired like a brick. This material could be produced in complicated forms and often was employed to resemble cut stone. Arches, modillions, paired columns, cherubic figures, and medallions with the profile of Christopher Columbus all graced the arcade, and there was nothing else like it in the city.

The exterior design of the depot itself hearkened back to the recent past, to a style known as Richardsonian Romanesque, named for Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson. Where the arcade was ornamental and exuberant, the depot had the dark color, simple form, and heavy feel of its style. Heavy masonry construction, employing arches, thick walls, and small window-to-wall ratios all came from Romanesque design of the medieval period in Europe, and Richardson turned these elements into a style all his own. Columbus Union Station is a good example of the style, but even so, it revealed details and elements that had an unexpected charm and craftsmanship, particularly in the high quality of the exterior brickwork.

Once the traveler entered the depot, however, he was transported back to the present and to a glorious Beaux-Arts interior. The main waiting room had a forty-foot-high flat ceiling with coffers and skylights; flanking it on the east and west were barrel-vaulted corridors whose coffered ceilings contained plaster rosettes. The paired columns and pilasters typical of the style were there, and the whole space had a steady, traditional, permanent feel to it. In the 1931 concourse that replaced the original train shed, there

was a spare, restrained modern version of the original Beaux-Arts design, complete with shallow paired pilasters and traditional wood waiting benches.

### Cleveland Union Terminal

Terminal Tower, sometimes mistaken for Cleveland Union Terminal, was in fact an office building. It and other buildings in the Terminal Group (the Hotel Cleveland, Higbee's Department Store, three office buildings, and the U.S. Post Office) had restrained modernist designs and lightly ornamented stone exteriors that put them at the forefront of late-1920s design. The whole group was the work of Chicago architects Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, designers also of Chicago Union Station in 1925 and Thirtieth Street Station in Philadelphia in 1920.

Terminal Tower had no direct relationship to the terminal except the shared entrance lobby off Public Square. On the interior, Cleveland Union Terminal was a curious blend of old and new. The entrance lobby was pure classical design, a barrel-vaulted space with pilasters, cornice, and a rosette-filled coffered ceiling straight out of Penn Station in New York or the baths of Caracalla in Rome. The main ramps to the traction concourses were much plainer. Rising some twenty-eight feet from the entry arcade was a double stair leading to the Prospect arcade, a branching corridor lined with shops and with a doorway onto Prospect Avenue, the street behind Terminal Tower.

The railroad depot—in both the steam and the traction areas—had plenty of classical elements such as columns and groin-vaulted ceilings, but it had a spare, contemporary character as well. The segmental-arched and skylighted ceiling of the

Steam Concourse was surprisingly light and pleasant for a space that essentially was underground (while at the same time suspended twenty-two feet above ground level).

### Cincinnati Union Terminal

And then there was Cincinnati Union Terminal, the work of the New York City firm of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, who just a few years before had completed Buffalo Central Terminal. That depot was so clearly inspired by classical design—with some of the most impressive vaulted interior spaces in architecture—that it must have seemed startling that the firm could do a design as audacious as that of Cincinnati Union Terminal.

The terminal dominated the western reaches of the city and was so unprecedented as to shock and awe the viewer when he first encountered it. The view from the north, in particular, in which the great hump of the terminal's roof loomed over a nineteenth-century neighborhood, was especially memorable.

Once again, however, it was the interior that contained the true treasures. Cincinnati Union Terminal was not so much architecture as a work of art that happened to house human activity. It is considered an art deco masterpiece, but it should be remembered that art deco was not an architectural style; it was an aesthetic philosophy that sought to introduce artistic design into everyday objects, places, and products.

At Cincinnati Union Terminal, established artists such as Paul Cret, Pierre Bourdelle, and Winold Reiss, a German who had become known for his paintings of American Indians, had commissions to integrate artwork into the very design of the

building. The building was the art, and vice versa, and art was no longer something simply to be hung on the wall when the building was finished.

Best remembered, no doubt, were the soaring dome of the rotunda and Reiss's huge mosaic murals on the inside of its curved walls. Depicting the settlement of America and development of Cincinnati and the Ohio valley, the curved rotunda murals were the largest and the most colorfully executed. They were done as "shadow" mosaics, in which large areas of a single color were rendered in plaster, while the mosaic tiles gave form and detail to individual figures and objects.

High above the terminal up in Tower A, the nerve center of operations, the model board and interlocking machine were works of art in themselves, ensuring smooth arrivals and departures for passengers who never had to wonder how it all ran.

The concourse over the tracks was a more traditional space but still was worthy of note. Here were fourteen additional murals depicting Cincinnati industries, also rendered in shadow mosaic.

The arrival and departure boards had their own murals, oddly reversed, since the arrival board showed the rear of a train and the departure board showed the locomotive. Other artwork integrated into the design included carved stone, wood veneer, sculpted leather, and beautifully worked metal elements. Down to the last detail, Cincinnati Union Terminal was completely true to its art deco inspiration.

#### Urban Design/Urban Fabric Impact

All of the "3-C" union stations had a significant and unique impact upon the cities in which they were built. When each was built, it helped—to a greater or lesser degree—

to shape its city's future development; and, in varying ways, all three stations still affect their cities today.<sup>14</sup>

Station location was the most important factor. In Columbus, for example, all three union stations were located at a point that successfully balanced the convenience of the public with the operational needs of the railroads. Development of rail service to the city occurred in a way that dictated only one logical location for a depot. Its location less than a mile from the city's center at Broad and High Streets made Columbus's union station one of the most convenient of the "3-C" stations.

The first depot literally straddled the lines of the city's pioneer railroads, which followed a "natural" route outside of but close to the city's core. This route gave the best combination of affordable land, manageable grades, and ease of use by the public, and it proved to be nearly ideal for all the additional rail lines that reached Columbus in the second half of the nineteenth century.

With elevation of High Street over the tracks, the third union station gave Columbus a truly functional transportation hub that, with easy access to streetcar routes, enabled a traveler to reach all parts of the city with a minimum of trouble. The High Street arcade provided a continuous row of commercial development that kept the viaduct from becoming a barrier between the downtown and the north side, and the depot quickly became integrated into the fabric of the city.

Cleveland's experience was considerably different. Unlike Columbus, Cleveland did not have a single dominant union station dating from the earliest years of rail travel. The city's unusual and distinctive topography had a strong influence on the locations of its rail lines, and the bluff-top location of the city's downtown core made it something of

a chore to get to, from, and between the various lakefront and riverside depots.

Overcoming these disadvantages would take a capital expenditure that simply was not forthcoming in the nineteenth century.

The Cleveland Group Plan addressed this issue in a way that successfully struck the necessary balance between operational convenience for the railroads and ease of use for the traveling public. The plan's lakeside depot at the head of the proposed Mall was appropriately scaled, architecturally distinctive, and provided the best solution to the problem of getting passengers between the lakefront level of the tracks and the bluff-top level of the city. Had it been built, the union station on the Mall would have substantially aided the Group Plan's purpose of organizing and reorienting Cleveland's development.

As it actually happened, the construction of Cleveland's new union station took an entirely different direction. Development of the Mall and implementation of the Group Plan were well under way when the Van Sweringen brothers achieved a political and economic coup by winning approval for the Public Square location of their massive development. Indeed the Terminal Group could not have succeeded without its union station component; it needed the daily ebb and flow of passengers and commuters. Location of the new union station in the heart of the brothers' commercial development was a brilliant move, as was the creation of the whole complex on a steel structure located above ground level. No other union station in the country developed in quite the same way.

Cleveland Union Terminal's balancing of needs between the public and the railroads was tilted decidedly toward the public. The very existence of the Van Sweringens' development caused a shift of focus and development back toward Public

Square, and the terminal was the best located of the “3-C” stations in terms of ease of public use: a shopper or businessman could easily arrive in town, do shopping or have business meetings, stay overnight, and eat in fine restaurants without ever venturing outdoors. For those who needed to go elsewhere in the city, everything was a short walk or streetcar ride away.

For Cleveland’s railroads it was a different matter. The terminal required construction of a new seventeen-mile electrified railroad and included the necessity of changing from steam to electric power and back again at each end of the new route. It required operating and trackage-rights agreements and was an expensive facility. At the same time, it did have some benefit by removing passenger trains from some heavily used freight routes, easing traffic flow through a busy urban area.

Cincinnati Union Terminal had almost entirely the opposite result. It made railroad passenger and freight operations easier, but it was anything but conveniently located for the traveler. In the case of the Queen City, the “natural” rail routes, dictated by topography, were along the Ohio River and in the valley of Mill Creek west of the city’s core. Like Cleveland and unlike Columbus, Cincinnati never had a single dominant union station dating from the earliest days of rail service. Its several small depots were inconveniently scattered around the town’s low-lying areas and were subject to serious flooding. Any union station would require a large amount of land that was above flood level.

This made it almost a given that the terminal would have to be located in the valley of Mill Creek, up on artificial fill, to achieve the needed elevation. The terminal itself was a work of architectural and artistic genius. From the rotunda murals to the

large concourse and conveniences such as the Rookwood Tea Room and the tiny newsreel theater, Cincinnati Union Terminal made travel as easy and pleasant as possible. Once in the terminal, passengers had little to complain about. However, its location well over a mile west of the downtown core made walking to the terminal impossible. While the terminal's design accommodated streetcars, they never actually went there, so the options were automobile or city bus. The result was a wonderful union station located at such a distance that it never became fully integrated into the city's urban fabric, standing instead in splendid isolation, the jewel in the crown of the Queen City.

For the railroads, however, the terminal was more than convenient. It occupied new land that did not interfere with freight operations, yet blending the flow of passenger trains into and out of the existing rail network was a fairly simple proposition, since the five new connections between the terminal and the railroads were so well thought out and built to such high standards. The self-contained coach yard, mail facility, engine terminal, and control tower, all located in a logical flow of trackage as part of the double-ended terminal project, were a model of modern passenger transportation planning. What the traveler lost in convenience the railroads gained.

## Conclusion

Given the relative merits and demerits of the three union stations, one might have expected that the eventual disposition of each would have been different from what actually happened.<sup>15</sup>

In Columbus, only the union station arch remains of all of the development that once was Columbus Union Station. Its good location made it perhaps the most

vulnerable of the “3-C” stations, as the decline in rail service made the station’s land increasingly desirable for other uses.

As noted earlier, there were no real reasons not to incorporate at least portions of union station into the convention center that today occupies its site. That was not to be, yet Columbus Union Station still affects the city, and not only by the fact that the arch crowns the head of a new urban park. The High Street viaduct, though a new structure, still gives High Street the same curious hump it had at the turn of the twentieth century. The railroad tracks it crosses remain active, so for the foreseeable future there will always be this one hill in an otherwise flat downtown area.

Perhaps even more important, though, is that union station inspired some of the most recent and innovative development in Columbus. For decades, the north leg of the city’s inner-belt highway, which was located below grade, cut off the Short North area of High Street from the rest of the downtown area to the south. A freeway-style bridge crossed the inner belt’s numerous lanes and formed a significant barrier for pedestrians; however, such bridges simply are not a pleasant place to walk, and urban planners know (or should know) how badly they disrupt urban areas. After long negotiation with highway planners, the recently completed rebuilding of the inner belt included a “cap” over the freeway at High Street, built wide enough to accommodate commercial buildings on either side. Taking a cue from union station’s design some eleven decades after the station was built, the developer of the “cap” has built new commercial buildings in a revived version of Beaux-Arts classicism, making the freeway invisible from High Street and restoring the lost pedestrian connection to the lower portion of North High

Street. Columbus Union Station indeed lives on, influencing the development of the city some thirty years after its demolition.

Cleveland Union Terminal suffered a less drastic fate, although it underwent extensive alteration. Some fifteen years ago, a Cleveland developer envisioned Tower City Center, a major indoor shopping mall that would integrate the existing hotel, office, commercial, and transportation functions of the Terminal Group. Its purpose was to make use of the outmoded and under-utilized space occupied by the Cleveland Union Terminal, bringing to downtown Cleveland a unique version of the “festival marketplace” urban development concept that was proving to be successful in cities such as New York and Boston.

It has now been more than ten years since completion of Tower City Center. Its long-term viability is still subject to debate, and it has been affected by forces beyond anyone’s control. The former Higbee’s department store, for example, is closed, and planned development on the river side of Huron Road is still in the future. On the other hand, the complex now includes a new hotel and office tower, the former Hotel Cleveland has been well restored and is downtown Cleveland’s premier hostelry; and the former terminal still hosts thousands of daily rail riders. There are no intercity trains, but Tower City hosts all of Cleveland’s rail transit routes in a new terminal that is vastly more efficient and attractive than the old traction concourses. Terminal Tower itself remains the city’s best business address.

All of this rebirth occurred within a context of partial preservation and partial demolition and rebuilding. The arched entry rotunda on Public Square has been restored, and the ornate sloping ceilings of the former main ramps to the terminal have also been

returned to their original appearance. The renovation included insertion of new floor levels, which flattened out the sloping ramps, and the former steam concourse is gone, replaced by a glass-roofed, barrel-vaulted gathering space with a large fountain surrounded by two levels of retail space and a large food court. Some original ticket window grilles, light fixtures, brass storefronts, and marble columns have been preserved and integrated into the design of the mall, but it has not been preserved in anything like its original form. This is not necessarily a bad result—much historic fabric has survived, and the former terminal serves an important transportation function. Tower City Center brought new life and traffic to Public Square and reignited interest in the Terminal Group. The former post office and the three original office buildings have been rehabilitated and, even with the demise of the complex's department store, the level of activity in the Terminal Group is far above what was there fifteen years ago. Though by no means in its original form, Cleveland Union Terminal does in a way live on in the heart of one of the Midwest's major cities.

Of all the “3-C” union stations, Cincinnati Union Terminal's prospects should have been the bleakest. After the terminal was closed, its concourse demolished, and its murals removed to the airport, it should have been a candidate for demolition as a hopeless white elephant. It was huge and expensive to run, had a unique and hard-to-alter floor plan, and was not in the downtown area.

The city of Cincinnati, to its credit, took ownership and in the 1980s brought in a developer who gamely tried to make the terminal succeed as a retail facility. This eventually failed, making the building's future once again uncertain. Again the city and its citizens came to the rescue, voting in favor of bond funding that enabled the terminal's

conversion to the Cincinnati Museum Center, a public facility housing, among other occupants, the Museum of Natural History and the Cincinnati Historical Society. The Railroad Club of Cincinnati maintains Tower A as an exhibit on the terminal's history; the Rookwood Tea Room is back in service as an ice-cream parlor, and it actually is possible to arrive and depart by train. Amtrak's triweekly Washington-Chicago Cardinal still calls at Union Terminal (after many years at a miserable little facility down near the river), making it the only one of the "3-C" stations still serving its original purpose. Cincinnati Union Terminal still exists in splendid isolation in an area that has always been largely industrial and has had little if any impact upon the development of the rest of the city. However, the terminal has become part of Cincinnati's identity and character, remaining the jewel in the crown, and its preservation and reuse are a real credit to Cincinnati's vision and persistence.

The passenger train created modern America and its cities, operating on a scale that is almost unbelievable today (the Pullman Company, for example, once hosted 100,000 overnight customers daily). Although the legacy of the train lives on in our culture, our history, and our folklore, few today remember the great trains from the golden age of the mid-twentieth century. Amtrak is a modern transportation system and does a good job with woefully inadequate resources, but most people today do not travel by train. The American public's generally positive image of passenger trains comes mainly from movies and television, stories of family members, or perhaps a ride on a tourist line. The passenger train is no longer a part of most people's daily lives.

Nevertheless, the train has left its imprint on our cities and towns, in the form of the stations, depots, and terminals, large and small. Many places have lost their stations,

while others have been fortunate to save and reuse theirs. The struggle, however, continues, as the number of stations grows ever smaller each time a dilapidated station falls to the bulldozer.

If one message can be taken from the story of Ohio's "3-C" union stations, it is that these structures will always be, in ways both large and small, a part of our lives. It is our responsibility to think carefully about what that part will be.

#### Notes

1. Rowlee Steiner, "Columbus Railroads" (unpublished manuscript, 1952), 5–6.
2. Rowlee Steiner, "Columbus Union Depot, 1851–1956" (unpublished manuscript, 1956), 1–3.
3. *Ibid.*, 6–8.
4. *Ibid.*, 9.
5. *Ibid.*, 11–16.
6. Columbus city map, 1853; *Atlas of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio* (1972); Baist's Columbus atlas maps, 1899, 1910, 1920.
7. Eric Johannesen, *Cleveland Architecture, 1876–1976* (Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1979), 71.
8. *Ibid.*, 72.
9. *Ibid.*, 131–34.
10. Walter S. Lacher, "Dedicate New Cleveland Station Today," *Railway Age* (28 June 1930): 1–5.
11. Publications Committee, Cincinnati Railroad Club, *Cincinnati Union Terminal* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Railroad Club, 1999), 16–20.

12. Ibid., 21–44.

13. Observations on the architecture of the three union stations are based on the author's repeated site visits over many years and on photos made during those visits.

14. Observations on the urban design aspects of the three union stations are based on the author's familiarity with and analysis of each station's urban context and design characteristics.

15. Observations on the disposition of the three union stations are based on the author's direct involvement in each.