

Railfanning through New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York

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By Derek Boles, TRHA Historian

Sites Visited:

- Liberty State Park, Jersey City ,NJ
- Railway Museum of Pennsylvania, Strasburg, PA
- Strasburg Railroad, Strasburg, PA
- Railroaders Museum, Altoona, PA
- The Horseshoe Curve, Altoona, PA
- Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Terminal, Buffalo, NY
- Buffalo Central Station, Buffalo, New York
- Amtrak Station, Buffalo, New York
- Hunter Street Station, Hamilton

Note: *Picture captions are in italics just below each picture.*

A recent vacation to visit a friend in the Philadelphia area provided an opportunity to see much of railroad interest. Unfortunately an Amtrak trip to Philly from Toronto was not in the cards since it's impossible to get there in one day, hence Porter Airlines to Newark. The sightseeing began a few miles from the airport with a visit to Ellis Island in New York Harbor, the famed immigration depot near the Statue of Liberty for millions of people arriving in the U.S.

Jersey City

I was more interested in the fact that the ferry departed from the old Central Railroad of New Jersey station in Jersey City, used by generations of commuters who crossed the Hudson River by ferry, then boarded CRNJ trains for home. The station and grounds are now part of Liberty State Park.



The Victorian headhouse was built in 1889 and closed in 1967. It was incorporated into Liberty State Park in 1976. Between 1913 and 1918, this was the New York terminal for the Lehigh Valley Railroad, which maintained a downtown Toronto ticket office and operated several sleepers a day between this terminal and Toronto Union Station via the Grand Trunk Railway.



The Bush style train shed was added in 1914 and is similar in design and construction to the shed at Toronto Union Station, now being rebuilt. Park authorities have allowed vegetation to fill the abandoned shed and tracks, which creates a surprisingly agreeable ambience.



The Jersey City Bush shed was the largest ever built, at 308,000 square feet, slightly larger than the Toronto Union Station shed. Unlike Toronto, skylights were built over the platforms, part of the original Bush design, but eliminated in Toronto to reduce expenses. (photo by bridgepix)

More information on this structure can be found at:

http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/Pages/C_Pages/Central_Railroad_of_New_Jersey.html

Baldwin Locomotive Works

The following day, August 4, I rode various commuter trains around the Philadelphia area. In my opinion Philadelphia is the most interesting city in North America to experience a wide variety of rail passenger transportation and mass transit. I had ridden most of the commuter lines on previous trips and this time I traveled from Center City Philly to Wilmington, Delaware along the Northeast Corridor. Along the way, I snapped two photos of the old Baldwin Locomotive Works site through the window of the speeding SEPTA coach.



The Baldwin works were located in Eddystone, PA, a few miles southwest of Philadelphia and these were the boiler shops. From 1831 to 1956, Baldwin produced over 70,000 locomotives. The company made 535 steam locomotives for CN, about 13% of their roster, as well as hundreds of locomotives for CN predecessor companies, including the first locomotives used in commuter train service in Toronto in 1878.



The administration building was built in 1928. Baldwin was far less successful with its diesel locomotives than with steam. One of its 1948 diesel products was CPR 7069, currently residing in Roundhouse Park. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to develop the site since Baldwin went out of business in 1972.

Railway Museum of Pennsylvania and the Strasburg Railroad

Time was also spent visiting the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania on our way to Buffalo, New York. The museum had a display called the Railroad Education Centre that I was interested in photographing for ideas for the Toronto Railway Heritage Centre. It was aimed towards educating the general public about the role of railroads in society and was economical and compact in its presentation. Unfortunately this has now been displaced by a day care centre and Thomas play area, a telling sign of the direction that railroad museums are moving towards these days.

Another disappointment was the bookstore at the Strasburg Railroad, which I remember as the best and most comprehensive bookstore for railroad titles I've ever seen. The store has been moved to an outlet mall closer to the main highway three miles away and the book selection has been considerably reduced. It was also a mess with books all over the place and clearly no one had bothered to clean it up in days.

The Strasburg operation itself was, as always, interesting. I usually marvel at the different ways that they manage to extract money from visitors, usually a couple of new schemes every time I visit. My Pennsylvania friend went for a bike ride around Amish country and I sat on the passenger platform watching the steam locomotives. There were three of them in operation that day, including a CN engine, and it didn't cost a dime to watch them!

Altoona: Railroaders Museum & The Horseshoe Curve

Following Strasburg was an early evening visit to Altoona, Pennsylvania where we discovered that Horseshoe Curve is now completely shut down for visitor access after 5 PM. The staircase is closed off and you're not even allowed to park anywhere near the place! We parked on the side of the road and sat on a picnic table near the visitor's center, where we could hear a freight train going through the curve with only fleeting glimpses of the train itself.

The next morning the Railroaders Museum in Altoona relieved the cumulative disappointments somewhat.



The display is extremely well done and focuses on the people in railroading rather than the trains. They are currently building a new roundhouse and turntable although the museum almost shut down this year due to a lack of funding. The economic downturn in the U.S. seems to have hit Central Pennsylvania very hard.

A plan of the new roundhouse and turntable, which appears to be completed although it wasn't operating the day we visited.

More info on the Altoona Railroaders Museum can be found at:

<http://www.railroadcity.com/>

Buffalo, New York

A day-long drive north from Altoona brought us to Buffalo, New York, once the second busiest railroad center in the United States after Chicago. In 1927 there were 13 different railroads serving Buffalo, including the CPR, CNR, Grand Trunk and TH&B. All passengers traveling directly from Toronto to points in the eastern U.S. passed through Buffalo. In some respects, Buffalo is a sad remnant of what it once was, with a population half that of 1950 and containing several abandoned buildings that are architectural treasures, but no capital available to restore or adapt them to other uses. Many Torontonians unfortunately have a rather jaded view of the city based on some of the execrable local newscasts originating from Buffalo that we see on television.

However, it is still the second largest city in New York State and has an active cultural life and concern for its heritage.

Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Passenger Terminal

In the two days I was there, I was able to take in three heritage tours, all provided by local heritage advocates who were proud of their city and its history. A boat tour of the Buffalo River brought us past the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western passenger terminal or what was left of it. The headhouse was demolished in 1979, although the train shed is now used as a maintenance and storage facility for the Metro Rail system.



The former Lackawanna train shed now used as a light rail depot. The 1917 headhouse occupied the foreground.



The east end of the train shed from the Buffalo River. This was also a Bush train shed built on top of the freight shed which was underneath.



The Lackawanna headhouse demolished in 1979. Interestingly, I had explored the interior of this abandoned building in 1965 but unfortunately did not take any photographs. (archive photo)



This was the interior of the headhouse a few years after I explored it. It was abandoned by the Lackawanna Railroad in 1962.

More information on this structure can be found at:

http://www.historic-structures.com/ny/buffalo/lackawanna_terminal.php

Buffalo Central Terminal

The highlight of the trip was a tour of the Buffalo Central Terminal (BCT), opened by the New York Central Railroad in 1929 and abandoned by Amtrak in 1979. BCT was familiar to many Torontonians, who changed trains there to reach various destinations in the United States. In order to avoid some of the problems that had plagued Toronto's new Union Station, whose approach tracks and trainshed were still under construction in 1929 because of disputes over property acquisition and grade separations, Central Terminal was located two miles from downtown on 70 acres of land purchased by the NYC. This would later prove to be the terminal's undoing as it was too isolated from Buffalo's central business district for the convenience of passengers and was difficult to recycle for other uses after the station closed in 1979.

For many years after, this magnificent terminal was an embarrassing urban ruin, open to the elements and inhabited by indigents. After several different owners, the building was acquired by the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation, a voluntary non-profit organization, and is slowly being secured and stabilized.



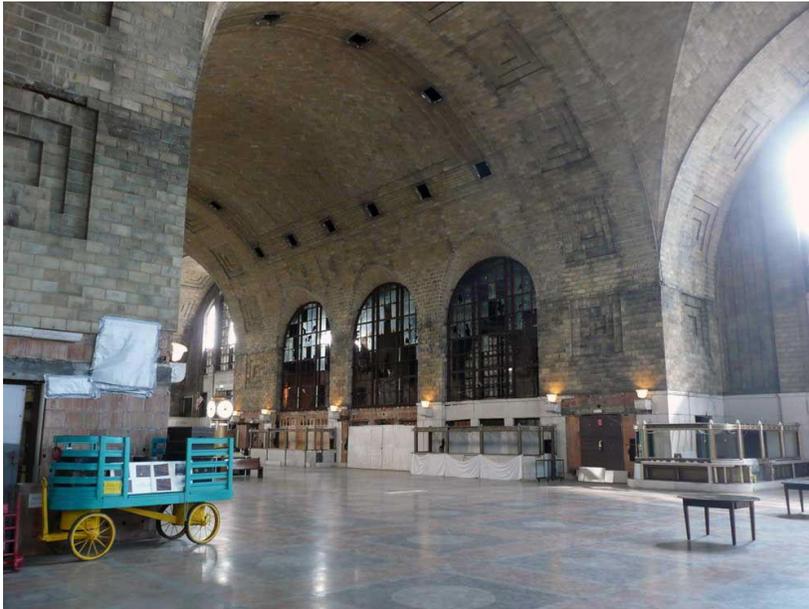
The approach to Buffalo Central Terminal along Paderewski Drive. The terminal was located in the Polish neighbourhood of Buffalo and many of the local street names reflect that heritage. The station is dominated by a 15-story Art Deco office tower, now abandoned.



The outdoor parking lot actually sits on top of a large parking garage, which includes a streetcar loop and lobby that were never completed since a local gangster controlled the taxi monopoly and didn't want any competition from public transit. The design of the station was partly influenced by Central Station in Helsinki, Finland.



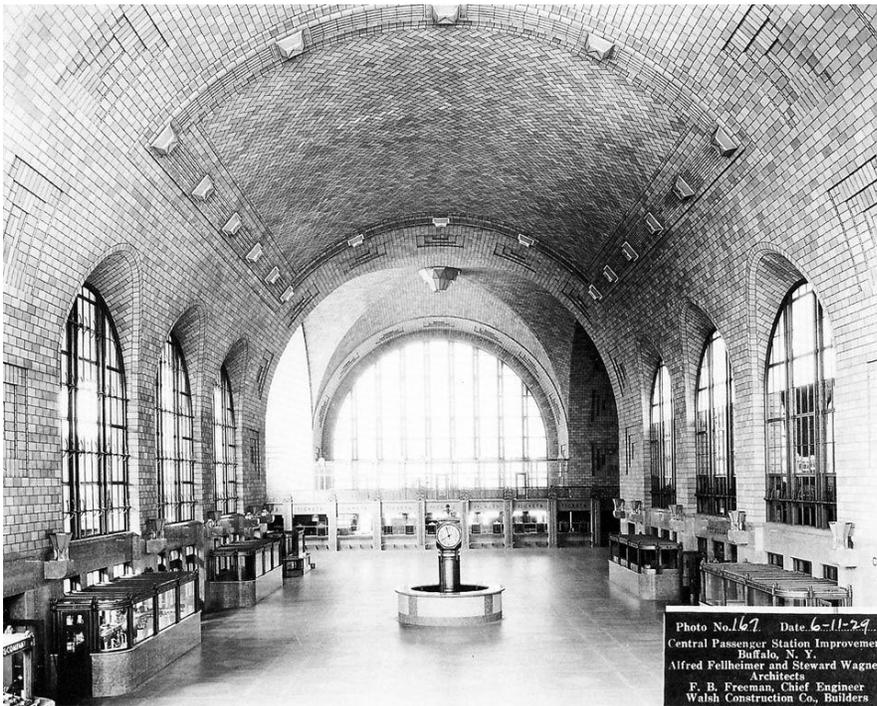
The passenger concourse was built over the tracks, similar to VIA's Central Station in Montreal. In 1982, the concourse was partly demolished to permit Conrail double-stack freight trains to pass through the station complex.



The interior of the lobby. The waiting room was located behind the three arches with the broken windows. Buffalo Central Terminal was designed by Fellheimer & Wagner, who also designed the Toronto, Hamilton & Buffalo station in Hamilton and their Art Deco masterpiece, the Cincinnati Union Terminal, opened in 1933.



The ceiling tiles were supplied by the Gustavino Company, the same firm that provided the ceiling tiles for the Great Hall in Toronto Union Station. The dining room was located on the right.



The lobby in 1929, just before the station opened. A grand banquet was held here on opening day, attended by Canadian National President Sir Henry W. Thornton.



The remains of the news stand in the lobby. In the 1980s, BCT was acquired by a local developer who stripped the station of all its decorative elements and sold them at auction. The light above the newsstand is actually a plastic flowerpot with a bulb mounted inside!



The 14-foot high clock was sold in the auction and moved to Chicago. In 2004 it was acquired on eBay for \$25,000 and moved back to BCT following a fund raising effort by local businesses and benefactors.



The remains of the dining room, bar and cafeteria area.



The stunning Art Deco dining room looked like this in 1929.



A variety of retail concessions once occupied the area behind the marble facades, including a liquor store on the far right.



The 362-foot long mail and baggage wing, topped by railroad offices and now completely abandoned and open to the elements.



Buffalo Central Terminal was acquired for \$1 by the Central Terminal Restoration Corp. in 1997. The organization has secured and stabilized the building and begun a partial restoration.



The Buffalo Central Terminal complex looking northeast along Curtiss Boulevard. The complex is surrounded by a seedy neighbourhood of single-story residences so the building really stands out on the skyline.



I took this photograph of New York Central E-units at the head of a passenger train at Central Terminal in 1965. The intact concourse can be seen above the train. Unfortunately at the time I was in my callow youth and only interested in locomotive roster shots and I ignored the magnificent passenger terminal in my photographic record.



(C) John Vincent 2000 NYC Buffalo Station train board Aug./67

TRHA member John Vincent took this picture of the BCT train board in 1967. By the time the station was closed in 1979, there were only a handful of trains, including the daily Toronto-Buffalo Dayliner operated by CP/TH&B/Conrail.



The most famous image of Buffalo Central Terminal was prepared by the New York Central for a 1930 calendar. The painting showed the eastbound and westbound sections of the railroad's most famous train, the 20th Century Limited, meeting at Buffalo. There was some artistic license involved since the two trains didn't normally meet at this location, nor did they board passengers in Buffalo since it was in the middle of the night.



CPR Pacific No. 2715 prepares to haul a Toronto-bound train out of Central Terminal in the mid-1930s. The locomotive was an "international" engine equipped with Automatic Train Control so it could operate over the New York Central. In Toronto, 2715 was serviced at John Street. (Al Paterson photograph)



*One of the last passenger trains to be serviced at John Street was the CPR Dayliner for Buffalo, seen at Central Terminal in the 1970s. This train was discontinued in 1980, a year after BCT closed. (from **Buffalo Central Terminal** by Ken Kraemer)*

The Buffalo Central Terminal organization runs about a half dozen tours of the station every year. In September, they hold an annual train show inside the terminal. I find it amazing and gratifying that a volunteer group has taken on the responsibility of maintaining this magnificent building. More information on the organization as well as an extensive archive is maintained at their website:

<http://buffalocentralterminal.org/>

Amtrak in Buffalo



In 1979 Amtrak abandoned BFT in favour of the tiny Exchange Street station located closer to downtown and a trailer located in suburban Depew that was later upgraded to an "Amshack." This was the location of the New York Central's Buffalo terminal until



The Exchange St. station is used by Amtrak's daily Maple Leaf between Toronto and New York and the Niagara Falls-New York Empire Service. The Chicago-New York/Boston Lake Shore Limited uses the Depew station.

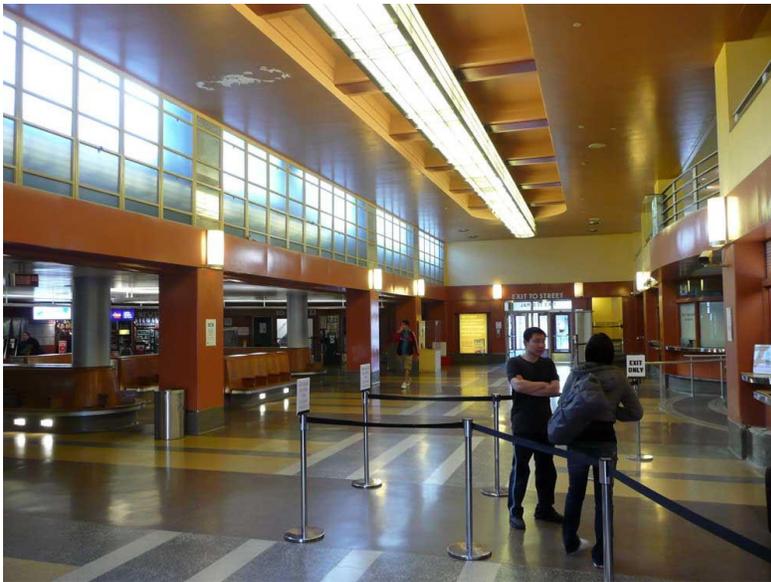


I photographed the Maple Leaf at Exchange Street in 1984 when there were still two tracks.

Hamilton: Fellheimer & Wagner's Hunter Street Station

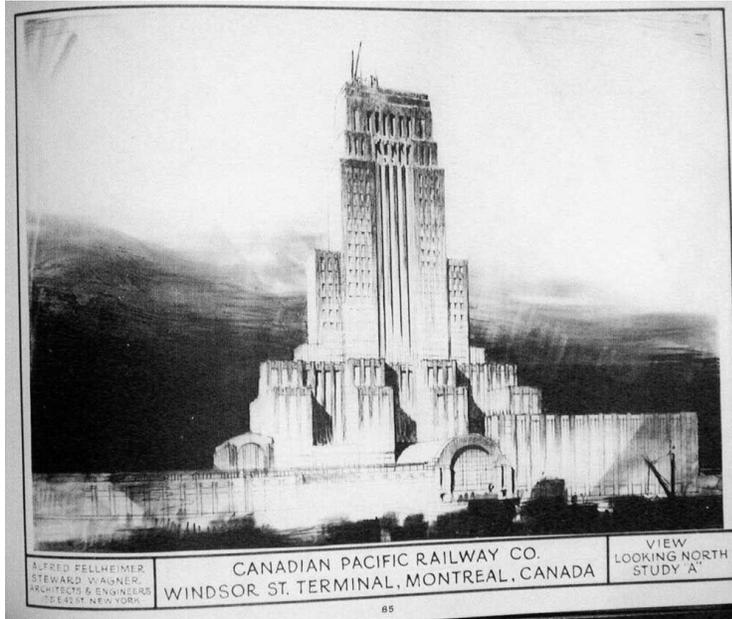


Fellheimer & Wagner's 1933 Toronto, Hamilton & Buffalo station, now the Hamilton GO Centre. F&W used the Art Deco architectural style which came into vogue in the late 1920s. Unfortunately few Art Deco railroad stations in North America were built because of the Depression. The Hamilton station was considerably reduced in scale from F&W's original plans, which is why the building appears to be larger than it actually is when you get close to it.

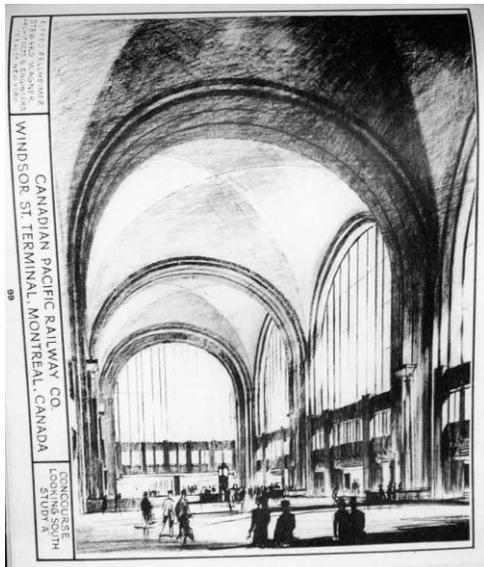


The interior of the station on Hunter Street, which has been beautifully restored. Four GO trains a day connect Hamilton with Toronto Union Station.

Hamilton: Fellheimer & Wagner's Proposed Montreal Station



In 1928, Fellheimer & Wagner were commissioned by the Canadian Pacific Railway to secretly prepare a variety of plans to rebuild Windsor Station in Montreal. In its place would have risen the most spectacular railway terminal ever contemplated in Canada, with 34 tracks and a 40-storey office tower reminiscent of the RCA Building in New York City's Rockefeller Centre.



The planned ticket lobby/concourse would have dwarfed the Great Hall in Toronto Union Station. Had these plans been carried out, the venerable 1889-1914 Windsor Station would have been demolished.



The concourse was to include this colossal animated map showing CP's world-wide transportation network. This scheme was abandoned by CP because of the Depression.

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