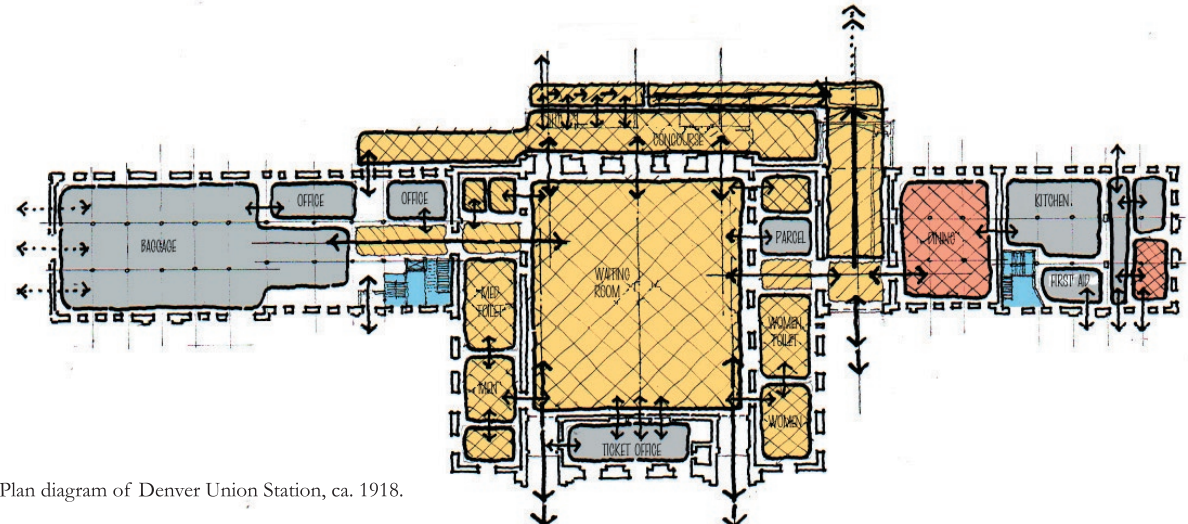


Plan diagram of the original Denver Union Station, ca. 1885.



Plan diagram of Denver Union Station, ca. 1918.

The Importance of Rail to Denver's Growth

The barrier of the Rocky Mountains has always influenced transportation and development in Colorado. The transcontinental railroad went through Cheyenne, and in 1870, a connection between Denver and Cheyenne was made, connecting Denver to both the east and west coasts via rail.

Railroads made the city's prosperity possible, and the growth of the city into a Rocky Mountain metropolis ensured the economic success of railroads. Thanks to the steam locomotive and steel rails, Denver became one of the first and best examples of a major population and trading center far removed from water-based commerce.

The railroads usually met Denver between the river's floodplain and the upland claimed by Downtown between Blake Street and Cherry Creek. Roughly parallel to the river, the main railroad alignment occupied the original Wewatta Street right-of-way. This alignment became the basis for the current Denver Union Station passenger-rail platforms.

After 1870, different railway companies built eight passenger depots around the city. To eliminate the cumbersome transfer of freight and passengers from one station to another, railroad interests incorporated the Denver Union Station and Railroad Company in 1879 and set upon constructing a consolidated passenger and freight-rail station.

Denver Union Station

For more than 120 years, Denver Union Station has been one of Downtown's most visible landmarks. The station has undergone two major architectural transformations, along with many smaller additions, subtractions, and changes to tracks and platforms that have affected neighborhood circulation. A rather grand park-like space and a civic arch that once faced Wynkoop Street are both distant memories.

Designed by architect William E. Taylor, the first Denver Union Station building opened in 1881 with a 500-foot-long limestone-and-rhyolite facade set back 140 feet from Wynkoop Street. This building radiated a civic monumentality far beyond its relatively modest interior volumes.

On the Wynkoop Street side of Denver Union Station, an oblong outdoor space was given over to a large park-like lawn and perimeter rows of street trees. The entire space was edged by flagstone sidewalks and low wrought-iron fencing. At 17th Street, this area was interrupted by vehicle access and by a long walkway extending from the main passenger entry at the clock tower base toward Wynkoop.

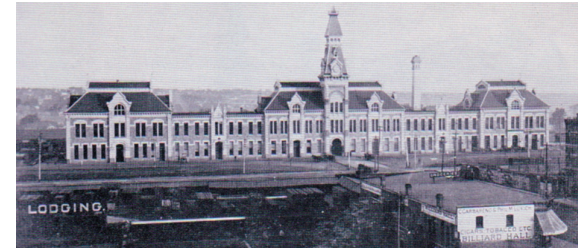
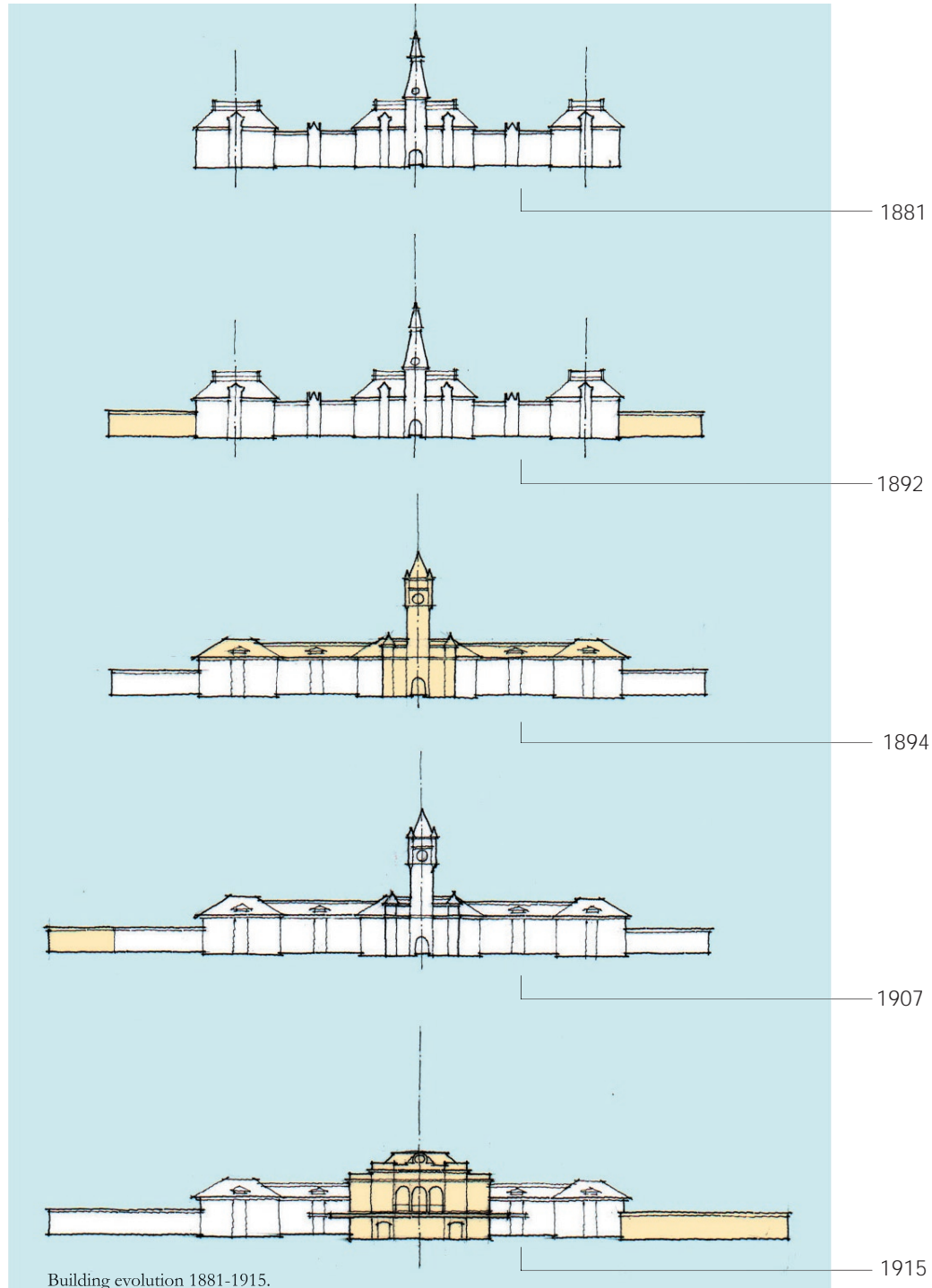
Downtown grew quickly in the 1880s and early 1890s. This growth stopped with the silver crash of 1892, and resumed in 1900. Wynkoop Street evolved from a disparate collection of early frontier buildings into an imposing frontage of masonry-walled, timber-framed mercantile warehouses. The monumental nature of these warehouses seemed to increase the stature of the station's park-like forecourt.

The original passenger-rail platforms on the west side of Denver Union Station were placed at roadbed level with grade crossings at 16th, 18th, and 19th Streets. The 16th Street viaduct was built between 1881 and 1889. Freight-rail yards grew quickly to the south to warehouse termini along 15th Street. The one-story wings on Denver Union Station were added in 1892.

A fire on March 18, 1894, destroyed the interior of the building's south and central portions. Reconstruction completed in 1895 preserved the building's interior plan but greatly altered the exterior. In the then-*au courant* style of Romanesque Revival, a massive new tower crowned the vista down 17th Street. The building acquired a new, lower-pitched, hipped roof while architectural ornament from the original 1881 depot was removed. Unbroken for its 500-foot length, the new façade appeared much more monolithic, except for a large shed dormer, symmetrically placed around the new tower and crowned by two pyramidal caps above the flanking doors.

Through most of Denver Union Station's life, passenger platforms held the western part of the Delgany Street (now Wewatta) right-of-way. With no other buildings in the way, the 500-foot-long western facade of DUS has created a memorable Downtown edge for years. From the Highlands Neighborhood and western approaches to downtown, DUS remains a prominent presence.

In the next 20 years, Denver's economy and population exploded. DUS was pressed to keep up with the corresponding increase in railroad activity. By the century's end, new baggage and express wings were added.



Historic Landmark

The building has many architecturally significant features. These include:

The Train Room interior volume, including the 1918 detailing around the monumental windows and original monumental wood-bench seating.

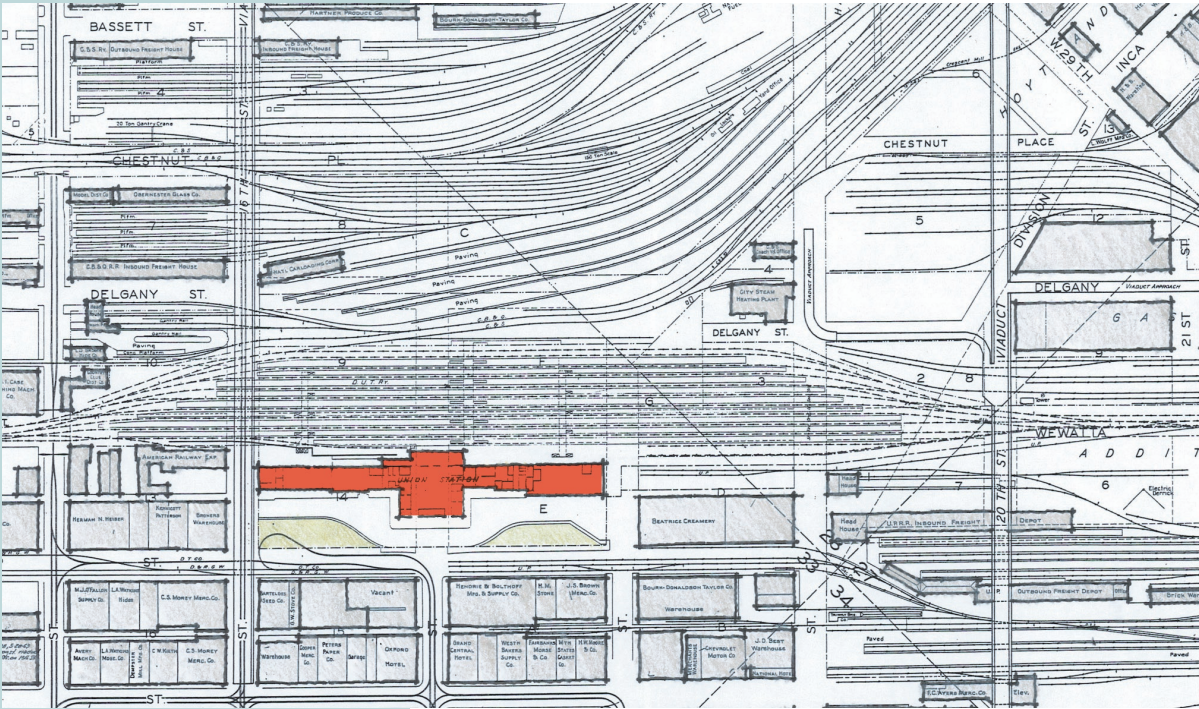
The terra cotta and granite exterior of the Beaux Arts/Renaissance-Revival Central Block, including the original Wynkoop Street entrance canopy, monumental metal windows, and large clocks atop the entablature.

The 1881 exterior stone facing of the wings, stripped of much of their original, character-defining detailing.

The neon "Travel by Train" signage at either facade on the 17th Street axis (added in 1951.)

Some remaining pre-1914 interior casings and detailing, particularly on the southwest wing.

The 1914 passenger tunnel, including many original tiles and architectural fixtures.



Union Station and the Central Platte Valley, ca. 1936. Railyards covered almost the entire area between Denver Union Station and the South Platte River.



Denver Union Station Platforms, ca. 1900, looking northeast.

Twentieth Century: ‘Travel By Train’

In 1906, Denver Mayor Robert Speer dedicated the ornate “Welcome Arch” (also known as the Mizpah Arch) in front of Denver Union Station to greet travelers. Often called “Denver’s front door,” this 70-ton steel gateway was 65-feet high, 86-feet wide, and illuminated by 1,294 light bulbs. In 1931, the arch was deemed a traffic hazard and removed.

In 1914, Denver Union Station was expanded and remodeled to keep up with increasing traffic. The redesign by Denver architects Aaron Gove and Thomas Walsh created one of Denver’s finest Beaux-Arts/Renaissance-Revival buildings. Sheathed in a granite façade and a wrought-iron canopy, the new interior

volume combined the formerly separate functions of vestibule, hall, and waiting rooms, surrounded with a roughly symmetric arrangement of ticketing offices, toilets, a barber shop, and a parcel checkroom.

A new façade inspired by Roman triumphal arches replaced the Romanesque clock tower. This façade design was repeated on the western platform side. Inside, the lofty, light-filled Train Room created a major new public space.

The new central block dramatically changed open space fronting Denver Union Station along Wynkoop Street. The addition projected into the open space, effectively cutting it in half. At about that time, a tramway loop off

Wynkoop Street encroached into the southern half of the park. The north side of the park was then eliminated for asphalt paving and parking to accommodate autos and trucks.

New baggage and passenger tunnels were constructed to provide grade-separated access to all platforms. Platforms were raised above the tracks, lengthened, and fitted with canopies. These changes severed access to the Central Platte Valley from 16th, 18th, and 19th Streets. Later a new passenger tunnel allowed arriving passengers to bypass the Train Room and go directly to Wynkoop Street. This fundamentally changed the original design’s simple through-circulation scheme for passengers.



Aerial view looking north along the South Platte Valley, ca. late 1930s. (Denver Union Station is left of the number 8.)

Modern Times

In the 1920's, major alterations essentially came to an end. Over time, restaurants, cafes, and leased office space replaced railroad-related functions such as baggage handling and administrative offices. The Colorado and Midland Model Railroad moved into the basement in 1933.

In the 1990s, the 16th and 20th Street viaducts were removed, once again altering Denver Union Station's circulation. The one-story wings were removed in 1990. Passenger platforms were shortened to allow pedestrian and bicycle access from 16th Street into the Central Platte Valley. Twentieth Street was relocated below the main

tracks and now connects into the Central Platte Valley.

Today, Denver Union Station is used by Amtrak, the Ski Train, RTD Regional Bus, RTD's 'C' Line light rail, and the 16th Street Mall Shuttle. Restaurants occupy the north and south wings, with office space on the second and third floors. In the Train Room, a gift shop and cafe counter primarily serve Amtrak patrons.



Denver Union Station Main Waiting Room, during the 100th Anniversary Celebration on July 25, 1981.



Denver Union Station, showing vehicle access and public open space, ca. 1905.



Welcome Arch, looking southeast up 17th Street.

