

## **UNION STATION: A GRAND WELCOME TO DENVER**

### **What do you think the connection is between transportation and architecture?**

Denver's Union Station has seen many lives. In 1881, the station was built in order to centralize several railroad operation depots, including Union Pacific's, Denver & Rio Grande Western's, South Park & Pacific's and Colorado Central's. The owners of the original four lines agreed to build a combined station, complete with a central clock tower. In 1914, the larger Great Hall was added. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the building served as a hub for train travel to and from Denver, and in 2014, the entire building was remodeled again. Union Station has served (and still serves) as an anchor for the downtown neighborhood, bringing traffic to the various businesses located there.

### **History**

In 1870, several prominent early Denver entrepreneurs including William Cheesman, John Evans and William Byers, among others, brought trains to Denver by creating the Denver Pacific Railroad, a 106-mile spur connecting to the transcontinental railway in Cheyenne, Wyoming. A second rail line, the Kansas Pacific, came from Kansas City. Both the Denver Pacific and the Kansas Pacific arrived at the station within a few months of each other. The Union Pacific Railroad bypassed Denver in order to take advantage of the less treacherous passes to the north, which connected with the Central Pacific coming from the West Coast. Eleven years later, Union Station was built to house Denver's many railroad depots, and soon became a travel hub for the city.

Union Station served over 80 trains daily through the 1920s and 1930s, and functioned as the major transportation source until the 1950s. It was in 1958 that passenger traffic at Stapleton Airport exceeded Union Station for the first time.

### **Structure**

The wings are original, Italianate in design and made of rusticated rhyolite, a pink lava stone from the Castle Rock formation, along with limestone trim. They feature tall narrow windows and motifs of Colorado's state flower, the Columbine (Denver Union Station National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form). Fire destroyed the central portion of the station in 1894. A Kansas City firm, Van Brunt & Howe, was hired to rebuild a larger replacement depot in Romanesque Revival Style. The original partnership dissolved in 1912 and was replaced by the Denver Terminal Railway Company which represented the major rail operators at the time, including: Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe; Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific; Colorado & Southern; Union Pacific; and Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroads (Paglia, Wheaton and Wray, 1999).

In 1914, the center section was replaced with the larger Great Hall to accommodate the number of people arriving in Denver each day. The exterior is terra cotta and granite in a Beaux Arts style, and features tall, multi-story arched windows, bays on the façade and terrazzo floors. The public space is a barrel vault spanning the entire width of the Great Hall. A Columbine motif appears on the borders of the arched bays, metal light sconces and the marble paneling. The building has many windows, which allow for abundant light (Voelz Chandler 2013).

### **Renovation**

The entire building was remodeled and repurposed from 2012 to 2014. The Crawford Hotel, named for preservationist and adaptive reuse expert Dana Crawford, was added on the second and third floors of the wing buildings. The repurposing was budgeted at \$54 million. It was carried out by the Union Station Alliance, which included Tryba Architects and J.G. Johnson Architects, with master planning by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and wing buildings by Anderson Mason Dale and Semple Brown Design. The original ticket counters are now the Terminal Bar, and the current chandeliers were modeled on the originals but are significantly larger. There is ample public space, in addition to several restaurants and boutique stores located around the Great Hall on the first floor. The station has rapidly earned its popular reputation as “Denver’s living room.”

### **Architects**

William E. Taylor, a Kansas City architect, designed the original 1881 building. Gove & Walsh were responsible for the 1914 design of Union Station when the lobby area was increased. Architect Aaron M. Gove (1867-1924) received his professional training at the Colorado School of Mines and the University of Illinois, and he practiced architecture in Denver for 35 years. Thomas F. Walsh (1866-1948) started his architectural career with Edbrooke and Burnham in Chicago before moving to Colorado, and after arriving in Denver, he supervised construction of architect Robert Roeschlaub’s Trinity Methodist Church. Gove & Walsh became partners in 1894 and were the architects for many of the warehouse buildings in the LoDo neighborhood.

Tryba Architects is an architecture, urban design and planning firm based in Denver and worked on the building’s remodel in 2014. Founding Principal David Tryba’s passion for cities directs the firm’s work. Their completed projects throughout the U.S. recognize that for modern urbanism to be successful it must link past and future and re-establish connections between people and their built environments. J. G. Johnson Architects, now Johnson Nathan Strohe, is a 23-year-old firm located in LoDo. The firm, under the leadership of founder James G. Johnson, is recognized for its creative expertise in unique hotel design, emphasizing connection to surrounding experiences and culture.

### **References**

Denver Union Station National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.

Paglia, M., Wheaton, R. and Wray, D. 1999. *Denver: The Modern City*. Denver: Historic Denver, Inc.

Voelz Chandler, M. 2013. *Guide to Denver Architecture*. Denver: Fulcrum Group.