

DENVER UNION STATION

1701 Wynkoop Street, Denver, Colorado 80202



Architect: William E. Taylor

Year Built: 1881

The long story of Denver's Union Station begins in 1870, the year the railroad came to Denver. The first transcontinental rail line had been finished a year prior but had bypassed the difficult terrain of Colorado's Rocky Mountains in favor of the lower mountain passes of Wyoming. Foreseeing the potential disaster in excluding Denver from not only the commercial benefits of transcontinental rail access but, more importantly, the heavy mining equipment that would be needed for the continued growth of the gold and silver economy, prominent Denverites acted quickly. They collaborated to build the 106-mile spur that connected Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming and a second connection to Kansas City, Kansas to secure Denver's link to the resources and capital that soon flowed from the coasts. Eleven years later, when the owners of Denver's four major rail companies agreed to pool their resources and build a large, combined station, Denver's Union Station was constructed.

The building is some 880 feet long and is comprised of structures built in three different times. The central section is a three-story Neoclassical rectangle built in 1914, the two outer wings were part of the original construction and are done in an Italian Romanesque style that dates to 1881. The two lower wings, also Italian Romanesque, were built in 1892. The central portion is the focal point in terms of size and design. This highly ornamented block is constructed of granite on a steel frame and sits centered on the axis of 17th Street with the front façade pushed forward to create hardscaped courts on either side. Here, the main entrance presents visitors with a large metal awning wrapping the front underneath three large, two-story arched windows surrounded by scalloped and grooved design work with centered scrolls at their peaks. On either side are large niches abundant with carved stone details that include the dates of the major building phases: 1881 and 1914. Above this, the name "Union Station," then a decorative boxed cornice, carved panels, a clock and a sign reading "Travel by Train" that was added as promotion when train travel was plummeting in the U.S.

The two wings are constructed of volcanic stone with pink sandstone trim. This portion of Union Station holds sets of double windows in keyed arch surrounds and a hipped roof with dormers. Medallions and flutings decorate the stone here.

The different building phases that contributed to Union Station's appearance had varying impetus. An electrical fire started by a chandelier in the ladies room destroyed much of the central portion of the station and resulted in a larger depot being built in 1894. In 1914, this new center section was replaced again with an even larger Great Hall to accommodate increased use. The renovation completed in 2014 was spurred by dilapidation. Rail travel thrived in the U.S. until post-war automobiles and airplanes caused its popularity to plummet. The economic potential of the site was eventually realized and, after restoration, the building now services bus lines and expanded light rail and houses retail space, the Crawford Hotel and a redesigned public square in the front.

References

Carter-Birken, P. (2010, September/October). Denver Almost Didn't Become Denver. *Humanities*.

Retrieved from <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2010/septemberoctober/statement/mile-high-station>

Paglia, M., Wheaton, R., & Wray, D. (1999) *Denver: The Modern City*. Denver, Colorado: Historic Denver, Inc.

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

National Register of Historic Places, Union Station, Denver, Denver County, Colorado, National Register #74000571