

Chapter 2

A Change of Plans

It would become known as one of the crucial moments in the development of modern Washington. On July 17, 1901, Pennsylvania Railroad President Alexander Cassatt welcomed to his London hotel room Daniel Burnham, America's most famous architect and chairman of a U.S. Senate commission studying parks in the capital. Cassatt was in England as part of his annual European summer vacation; Burnham and his fellow commissioners, architect Charles McKim and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., were concluding a tour of the Old World's greatest cities to find ideas that would give the United States the kind of capital the it deserved. The three men had decided that Burnham, famed for his salesmanship, should ask Cassatt to move his railroad off the Mall, since only then could the city have the impressive central park it needed. But the request was a risky one for Burnham: five months earlier, the PRR had hired his firm to design the new Sixth Street depot.

Cassatt listened carefully to his guest, and then reiterated his satisfaction with current plans. However, he continued, “the Pennsylvania Railroad should not block an improvement so important to the national capital by continued occupation of the Mall,” and so he was willing to use the Pennsylvania’s newly acquired control of the Baltimore & Ohio to build a union depot just north of the Capitol. This plan would give the city a single grand gateway and a beautiful green center, and Burnham’s excitement was clear when he later wrote his wife for the third time that day. “Mr. Cassatt agreed with me concerning the things I want in Washington,” he celebrated. “If he had refused, the glory of my work would have been gone, but he did not, so I am very happy.”

Or so the story was told. In fact, this altruistic account of Union Station’s conception was a creation myth, a fable that served those involved but had little connection to what really happened. The Pennsylvania Railroad actually decided to leave the Mall because of its own interests, not the nation’s. Subsequent events leading to the terminal’s birth would be no more high-minded, as legislation necessary for its creation became bogged down in disputes that had little to do with the building. As a result, the development of Union Station was much more a lesson in how things really got done in the capital than a demonstration of public spirit and sacrifice.

I

It was easy for Washingtonians to dismiss the hearing Senator McMillan gave to a start on March 19, 1901. Though the special subcommittee he chaired was examining a subject of great interest to locals, “the entire park system of the District of Columbia,” its history suggested that nothing much would come from its work. McMillan

had managed to bring it to life only by manipulating Senate procedure, as his earlier attempts to create a more authoritative joint Congressional committee on parks had failed because of House opposition.

The hearing highlighted three separate but related trends. It illustrated, first of all, the growing American interest in parks. Some cities, notably Philadelphia and Savannah, had included parks in their original plans, but most had added them piecemeal throughout the 19th century as industrialization and urbanization spread. Advocates across the country relied on similar arguments to acquire land and funding: green spaces served as the city’s lungs, cleaning air fouled by factories; they provided opportunities for workers and their families to vent frustrations developed during the week; and they created more attractive communities that attracted residents. The model for most cities was New York’s Central Park, where during the 1850s and ‘60s Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted had turned 840 acres of scrub land and sporadic settlements into Manhattan’s prime recreational space. Admiration for the results fueled Olmsted’s enormously successful landscape architecture practice (Vaux later focused on buildings); when McMillan was head of the Detroit Parks Commission, for example, he hired Olmsted to make Belle Isle in the Detroit River into that city’s finest park.

The push for more and better green space was a constant feature of late 19th century Washington. Though the Mall remained the center of public attention, projects appeared in several other areas. During the 1880s, the Corps of Engineers had reclaimed more than 700 acres of parkland along the Potomac River south of the Washington Monument. In 1890 Congress purchased much of the valley that surrounded Rock Creek as it wound through Northwest Washington. Later that decade, Frederic Law Olmsted, Jr., now part of his father’s

firm, led a commission that designed a series of parks and parkways for the northern section of the city. Though planning for each area moved ahead, the only construction came in the southern end of Rock Creek Park with the opening of the first buildings for the National Zoo.

The second influence behind the subcommittee was the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Designed to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas (a well-founded fear of not being finished led promoters to push it back a year), the World's Columbian Exposition was considered by many of its 27 million attendees "the most stupendous, interesting and significant show ever spread out for the public." The White City, as the fair became known because of the ivory paint that covered most of its buildings, had an impact that continued long after its six-month run had ended. It promoted neoclassicism through its widespread use of columns, arches, and other Greek and Roman elements; it showed the beauty that resulted from grouping architecture and art around public space; and, since Director of Works Daniel Burnham had overseen virtually every element of its development, it argued for comprehensive planning. In the years that followed, both the White City and the movement it helped inspire, City Beautiful, affected how Americans improved their communities in both style and method.

The third and most immediate force behind the hearing was the attempt to celebrate Washington's 1900 centennial. Historian Jon Peterson has shown how efforts to mark that anniversary began in 1898, when the Board of Trade recommended building a single memorial—a bridge over the Potomac, perhaps, or a civic hall—that would "inspire patriotism and a broader love of country." After two years of little progress, centennial organizers asked Senator McMillan to become part of the committee reviewing ideas for the memorial,

hoping that such an influential participant would give their celebration a desperately needed boost.

That invitation led to what Peterson has described as "the battle of plans." Early in 1900, McMillan proposed adding a new avenue running west-northwest from the Capitol, angled so it would slide past the front of the expanded Pennsylvania depot, the legislation for which was now making its way through his committee. The Army Corps of Engineers, upset at further evidence that the PRR would stay on the Mall, responded with its own plan. Besides pushing the railroad into South Washington, they proposed adding a boulevard between the Capitol and the Washington Monument and continuing the Mall's Romantic landscape. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) then put forward a third design, one that developed the Mall in a more rectangular style and connected it to an impressive grouping of government buildings in the triangle defined by the White House, Pennsylvania Avenue, and B Street, north. The AIA promoted this scheme aggressively, particularly during its 1900 convention, which happened to take place in Washington in December.

The arguments over these plans were new rounds in an long-running fight between the Corps of Engineers and the AIA over who would dominate planning of the capital. The engineers saw themselves as the only participants free of selfish motives that would cloud judgements; architects believed that only they had the aesthetic skills necessary for an integrated treatment of art and architecture. The battle had spilled into Congress, with the House allying itself with the engineers, the Senate with the architects.

McMillan had tried to reduce conflict by introducing Joint Resolution No. 139, which called for a House-Senate Commission to examine the planning of Washington. Yet existing tensions—between

the Engineers and the AIA, between the House and the Senate—kept his proposal (and several similar ones) from being enacted before Congress adjourned in early 1901. He then fell back to his special Senate subcommittee, which he created in an executive session supposedly reserved for personnel matters. He hoped it would produce an outline for improving the city, though Peterson has suggested that the senator's



Daniel Burnham (*Northwestern University*)

motivation was personal as well as public: success would begin to rebuild a reputation damaged by what many saw as a surrender to the Pennsylvania Railroad.

It was against this background that the subcommittee held its first and, as it turned out, only public hearing. Meeting below one of the elaborate ceiling frescos painted in the Capitol by Constantino Brumidi, its three members—McMillan and fellow District Committee members Jacob

Gallinger and Joseph Martin—discussed what sort of study they should undertake. They said they would produce a “preliminary plan” rather than a “matured one,” with its emphasis on parks but with consideration of public buildings. This approach would give the standing House and Senate committees on parks, public buildings, and memorials a chance to insert their preferences into the final design, participation that would increase the chance that both houses would support whatever projects followed. The senators also considered who should fulfill a clause, originally in the failed Joint Resolution, which

allowed the appointment of “such experts as may be necessary for a proper consideration of the subject.” AIA secretary Glenn Brown testified that Burnham and Olmsted, Jr. should have two of the three positions, and McMillan responded, “those are the very men I would have selected.”

That exchange was early evidence of how this body would edit what really happened. Charles Moore, secretary to McMillan and soon to the panel of experts, later admitted that he and the senator had chosen Burnham and Olmsted a week before the hearing; Brown played along because his organization wanted the senator's support in its battles with the Engineers. Soon after the March 19th hearing, New York architect Charles McKim became the third member; sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens occasionally joined them, but poor health limited his participation. Burnham, McKim, and Olmsted soon became known as the Senate Park Commission or, more commonly, the McMillan Commission.

The three men differed in many ways but collectively fit their task well. Burnham had been prominent even before he supervised the White City, but its success dramatically increased his fame—in 1894 he received honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale—and helped him build what was then the world's largest architectural firm. By the turn of the century, the 200 people at D.H. Burnham & Co. were designing mansions, churches, banks, university halls, department stores, warehouses, skyscrapers and train stations. Burnham's flourishing career appeared in many ways, including an elaborate home in suburban Chicago, a thickening waistline, and an self-assurance that bordered on arrogance. The Columbian Exposition also affected his methods, deepening his commitment to the Beaux-Arts style, a version of neoclassicism named after the Paris academy where many of its

practitioners had received their training, and to a more comprehensive approach to city planning. Although Burnham, whose blue eyes and strong features helped explain why one colleague called him “one of the handsomest men I ever saw,” probably never said, “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood,” the phrase that became known as his motto accurately reflected his ambitious outlook.

McKim offered a number of contrasts to Burnham. Balding



Charles McKim

and slender, he was very much a Manhattanite at a time when the rivalry between New York and Chicago had heated up. Burnham had received little academic architectural training, while McKim had attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; where Burnham was direct and even abrasive, McKim made points with a subtle humor. When a pair of draftsmen working for the Park Commission failed to

receive their pay, McKim forwarded their letters to McMillan’s office with this cover: “I enclose signals of distress, from two unfortunate mariners...apparently cast adrift by the Ship of State, whose attention they have thus far been unable to attract”—and showed that the men were in New York by giving his office’s longitude and latitude. Yet Burnham and McKim, both in their middle 50s, had become close friends during the World’s Fair, when the latter often served as the former’s aesthetic advisor. Buildings such as the New York Public Library and the Rhode Island State Capitol showed that McKim was also committed to neoclassicism, and his work as a partner in McKim,

Mead, and White had produced connections to powerful men whose support the commission might find valuable.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. appeared to be the subordinate member. At 29 a generation younger than his colleagues, the clean-shaven (though already balding) Olmsted had been an assistant to his more famous father during the Chicago Fair. His experiences since then, however, had made him invaluable to the commission. He and step-brother John had gradually taken over the family’s landscape architecture firm, and work around the country had given “Rick” Olmsted extensive knowledge about parks. He was far more familiar with the capital than Burnham or McKim: besides his highway studies for Washington and his plans for the National Zoo, his paper at the AIA’s 1900 conference argued for reshaping the Mall along L’Enfant’s original lines.

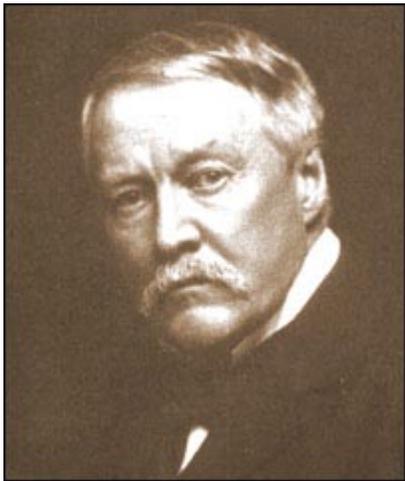


Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. in the 1920s. (*National Park Service*)

The three men, who would receive only expenses for their work, held their first official meeting on April 6. Drawing heavily on the methods they used for the Chicago Fair, they immediately began a comprehensive survey of the metropolitan area, including government buildings, transportation, utilities, and public safety. Though McMillan had warned them to see their work as preliminary, they decided instead to create what Moore called “the very finest plans their minds could conceive.” Much of their thinking grew from the L’Enfant plan,

interest in which had increased as the Corps of Engineers, the AIA, and others cited it.

The commissioners soon focused on the Mall. They realized that any attempt to create an impressive capital would fail unless they improved the center of the city, and that kind of change was impossible as long as the Pennsylvania Railroad loomed along Sixth Street. Yet legislation for its new depot had become law just two months before, and McMillan had told the commissioners that the expanded station



Alexander Cassatt (RPI)

was “a fixture on the Mall.”

The three men decided to ignore this warning, a brave choice in two ways. The three men knew they owed their opportunity to the man whose directions they were about to contradict: not only had McMillan used his political capital to establish the commission, but he was contributing personal capital as well, having agreed to pay from his own pocket any expense over the \$10,000 the Senate had appropriated. Telling the Pennsylvania to move also carried professional risks for two commissioners. It was unclear how the railroad would respond to an architect who, just months after winning a prime job, wanted to rewrite its terms. Both Burnham and McKim were also aware that the Pennsy had already built new terminals in several cities and would likely consider developing others, and offending the Pennsy’s executives would not increase either man’s chances of winning commission every architect in the country wanted.

The person they had to convince was an unusual combination

of characteristics for a railroad president. “Handsome..., of upright stature, clear complexion, piercing blue eyes, and chestnut hair turning to white,” Cassatt was one of the corporate leaders of the period—J.P. Morgan was another—who had grown up with money and proceeded to make even more. His family’s affluence enabled his parents to send him to German boarding school and gave his sister Mary the training that allowed her to become America’s most famous Impressionist. Cassatt was hardly a white-glove manager, however. He started with the Pennsylvania in 1860s surveying new lines across wilderness, helped break the massive 1877 strike that resulted when many railroads significantly reduced workers’ pay, and supervised the company’s main shops in Altoona. One journalist claimed he was “more ruthless, if still respectable” than any other industry executive, while muckraker Ida Tarbell was less critical of Cassatt than of contemporaries like John Rockefeller. He had retired in 1882 as a vice president, but remained a member of the company’s executive committee. Frustrated at being passed over for the presidency of the PRR, he took the office two years later after the board of directors’ previous choice died of pneumonia. Cassatt, then 60, immediately began strengthening a company he felt had drifted for too long.

According to the traditional accounts of the commission, its daring scheme to remove the railroad climaxed at the Claridge, London’s most elegant hotel. Cassatt was conducting some business before starting his vacation, while Burnham, McKim, Olmsted, and Moore were ending their six-week study of great civic spaces. The commissioners decided that Burnham, already familiar with Cassatt and exceptional at cajoling clients, should be the one to request that the Pennsylvania move off the Mall. Early in the afternoon of July 18, Burnham traveled across town to the Claridge, only to find that

Cassatt was not in his room as promised. But later that day they did meet, two successful and intelligent men considering the future of the nation's capital. As the Park Commission's final report described the scene, the president listened carefully, then said he would move his company "for no other purpose than to help out the general conditions of convenience and beauty."

Developing this dramatic change of plans involved an increasing number of municipal and corporate employees, all of whom, amazingly, managed to keep their work quiet for more than two months. On October 5, however, the front page of the *Evening Star* announced, "A railroad official connected with the Baltimore and Ohio, who was recently in Washington, said there was a project on foot for a grand union station in Washington." The other papers in Washington, as well as some in Baltimore and Philadelphia, followed with similar stories, and the railroads soon admitted what they had been working on. The local reaction was clear from an October 15 editorial in the *Evening Star*, which celebrated "a union station befitting in architecture and cost both the dignity of the capital city and the wealth, importance, and enterprise of the corporation which now controls both lines."

Cassatt was far less enthusiastic about these stories. On the 9th he reprimanded L.F. Loree, the former Pennsy vice-president who now led the Baltimore & Ohio, for the leaks coming out of his company and told him that any future conversations with the press had to convey a specific message: "The public should understand that, under the Acts of Congress, our two Companies were going on to build two separate stations and that if any change is made in the proposed plan, it will be out of deference to the wishes of the authorities at Washington and their desire to preserve the Mall." This positioning reflected one of Cassatt's strengths, his sensitivity to how the public and politicians

perceived his enormously powerful company. Cassatt's perceptiveness was clear in a letter from McMillan to Moore on the 10th, in which the clearly miffed senator wrote, "I had supposed that this matter would not be given to the public until Mr. Cassatt and our Committee had come to some arrangement as to terms, etc."

The portrayal of the Pennsylvania as a deferential corporate citizen ran through most accounts of the station's origins. According to Moore's 1920 biography of Burnham, it had begun in August at a dinner McMillan had thrown for the commissioners. When it came time for the toast, the senator announced, "Perhaps you have noticed that I have persisted in calling Mr. Burnham 'General.' He doesn't like it, but I want to say that a man who could persuade President Cassatt to take the Pennsylvania Railroad out of the Mall, *deserves* to be a general." The commission's final report, issued in January 1902 and written largely by Moore and Olmsted, continued this theme, crediting the move to the "public spirit" of the PRR and the B&O.

It was a fantastic story, one that would be repeated for years in histories of Washington and of American city planning, and its appeal was easy to understand. It involved two men, Burnham and Cassatt, famous across the country, and a third, McMillan, just as well known in the capital. It provided a rare moment when politics supported art and art triumphed over commerce. It produced Union Station, one of the capital's most famous buildings, and removed the main impediment to creating the modern Mall, one of the nation's most recognizable landscapes.

Unfortunately, this account was fantastic in that word's other, "unbelievable" meaning. Given the Pennsylvania's past policies, it would have required a corporate change of direction more shocking than a 90° turn by one of its fifty-ton locomotives. Widely admired for

a sophisticated management system based on “constant consultation and correspondence” among its executives, the railroad supposedly now allowed its president on his own to transform its operations in a major city. Even more out of character was the suggestion that the company worried about what would best serve the beauty of Washington. Cassatt may have had, as his biographer put it, “aesthetic inclinations,” but he shared the attitudes of an organization that a decade earlier had claimed that its station was the best part of the Mall.

Records that explain what really happened still exist, however. As Peterson investigated the origins of the design for Washington that the commissioners produced at the end of their study—what would become known as the McMillan Plan—he uncovered some of the discussions that set up the London meeting. When Burnham visited Philadelphia on May 20th to show the railroad’s top executives sketches of the new Sixth Street depot, for example, he used the end of his presentation to suggest moving the station to Virginia and Maryland Avenues. On June 10th, Burnham wrote to Cassatt about the B&O’s site, “on which you suggested that a great union depot could be built,” and later in the month, Cassatt and McMillan shared a round of golf during which they arranged compensation for the railroad if it relocated.

These exchanges help show when the Pennsylvania decided to build Union Station but say little about why. Many plausible explanations collapse when tested against conditions in turn-of-the-century Washington. Burnham’s May proposal to move the terminal to Maryland and Virginia Avenues had little influence, as it simply recycled an idea the PRR had rejected many times. The company did not agree to a union station because of McMillan’s willingness to have the government shoulder some of the costs: he had long favored that approach and had been willing to provide financial support since the

late 1890s. Nor was the Pennsylvania’s newly announced control over the Baltimore & Ohio an important factor, as it had begun to buy B&O stock in 1899, before the separate bills passed.

So why did the Pennsylvania—never a deferential part of the community, in possession of the right to expand in the center of the capital, rich enough to follow whatever plan it wanted, and with the clout to defeat Congressional attempts to force it to move—agree to leave the Mall? The answer lay, as it almost always did with the railroad, in a calculation of self-interest. Though the Pennsylvania publicly claimed an unassailable right to the area along Sixth Street, its private view was quite different. After the station opened, vice-president Samuel Rea admitted that, because of how the company had originally obtained the land, “our possession and use of the Mall for railroad purposes was very insecure.”

The Pennsylvania realized that its hold was only going to get weaker. Movements like City Beautiful were increasing public support for appealing civic spaces, which would make it difficult for future Congressmen to defend a railroad in the center of the capital. The company had begun monitoring the McMillan Commission immediately, seeing in its appointment more evidence, as Rea recalled, that “it was but a question of time until we should be compelled to remove.” Cassatt agreed and pointed out that if the PRR waited too many years, “there would then be no suitable place for...[another] station.”

This concern for the long run was characteristic of Cassatt. A major reason he retired was dissatisfaction with what he saw as the railroad’s shortsightedness; he favored comprehensive facilities that, although initially more expensive, would be able to handle demand for decades. The most striking example of his methods came late in

1901, when the Pennsy announced its \$70 million plan to tunnel the Hudson and East Rivers in order to enter Manhattan directly and to create the first continuous and direct route between the cities of the Eastern seaboard.

Cassatt also believed that the industry should shift from free-wheeling competition that emphasized now to a measured cooperation that planned for the future. This approach appeared in a variety of ways, most broadly in his proposal for a “community of interest” in which leading carriers would divide up traffic among themselves and end the kind of punishing rate wars that helped send the B&O into bankruptcy. The most tangible evidence of his thinking near Washington came south of the city. Around the turn of the century, the Seaboard was considering building its own line to Richmond in order to free itself from relying on the PRR, which operated the tracks from the Long Bridge to Quantico, and the RF&P, which controlled the rest of the route south. The project not only would have substantial costs for the SAL, which would have to pay millions of dollars for its construction, but also the PRR and the RF&P, since the resulting competition would have significantly reduced revenues. To avoid a situation that would have been expensive for everyone, the Pennsylvania brought all six railroads serving the capital into the Richmond-Washington Company. Starting late in 1901, it took control of the entire route between the two cities and began building Potomac Yard, a 400-acre freight facility in Alexandria that would become one of the Eastern seaboard’s biggest transfer points.

Freight traffic provided another reason a union station was in the best interests of the PRR. If it stayed on the Mall, all of its trains would be fighting for space on the tracks running through South Washington. By moving to the B&O site, however, most of the company’s passenger

service would terminate in Northeast, allowing it to handle more freight and avoiding the need to widen the Virginia Avenue tunnel to four tracks.

The events that followed Burnham’s May request showed how it was the Pennsy, not the Park Commission, who steered the relocation. As Burnham rode the *Pennsylvania Limited* to Chicago after that meeting, he was nearly gushing as he told McKim what happened when he unrolled sketches showing a terminal at Maryland and Virginia Avenues. “Mr. Pugh [a vice-president] already appreciates our side; Mr. Brown [the chief engineer] is anxious to see what I can do in the way of planning the new depot; Mr. Cassatt is open-minded and expecting to hear further from me on the subject; and Mr. Rea is carefully considering the matter.” This response—conservative executives encouraging a seemingly radical proposal in front of an outsider—could not have come because the company was seriously considering that site. It had constantly rejected this plan during the 1890s, and Cassatt soon had Pugh remind the architect that he was only to create plans for Sixth Street. Instead, its encouragement of Burnham was a safe way to signal that it would consider the idea of a move. The railroad could be confident that McMillan, who would have to arrange any deal, would learn of its position; if anyone else did and began to pressure the company to leave the Mall, it could claim a misunderstanding or say that it was simply trying to be open-minded.

The Pennsylvania then showed how serious it was about relocating. On June 11, the day after Burnham and Cassatt talked about the B&O site, Rea sent Capt. Lansing Beach, the District’s popular Engineer Commissioner, a letter marked “personal.” Admitting that “there is still more or less pressure to get us off the Mall, and that likewise there is, and always has been, more or less sentiment in favor of the establishment of

a Union Passenger Station,” Rea offered a proposal he thought might be “satisfactory to all interests.” The Pennsylvania would keep the route along Maryland and Virginia Avenues, but would add a tunnel below the Mall to carry passenger trains to a union station on the B&O site. Its northbound trains would share the B&O’s viaduct to Florida Avenue, where they would split off on a new line through Northeast Washington. The letter ended with a reminder of the PRR’s delicate situation: Rea explained he wrote personally because “in the present state of affairs it would not be proper for us to take it up officially.”

This details of this proposal highlighted one of the big difficulties facing a union station. The B&O offered no passenger service south of Washington, and so it only needed a “head station,” one where the tracks ended at the building. While the PRR’s own trains followed a similar pattern, it also exchanged dozens of cars each day with the southern railroads, which meant it needed a “through station” that allowed cars to run from Maryland to Virginia. Combining the two kinds of terminals was unusual, but, as Rea noted somewhat redundantly, “necessarily essential.”

Though Rea and Beach did not correspond for another ten days, their ideas merged. Beach rejected Rea’s original route, saying it would be impossible to get trains under the Mall, but he liked the idea of a union station, and so he and Assistant Engineer C.B. Hunt—“I had him do the work,” Beach explained, “as I could rely upon his not talking more than he should”—drew up an alternative. All trains from the South would follow the current route across the Long Bridge, Maryland Avenue, and Virginia Avenue. At Delaware Avenue a new spur for passenger trains would curve northeast, run into a tunnel under First Street between the Capitol and the Library of Congress, and end up at the B&O site. As Beach and Hunt were finishing up their drawings,

they received a telegram from Rea that showed his increasingly official investigations—including meeting with the two chief engineers, J.W. Graham of the B&O and William Brown of the PRR—had ended at the same place. This simultaneous conclusion was not as surprising as it might have seemed: the idea for a Capitol Hill tunnel had appeared as early as the 1870s.

Encouraging developments followed quickly. Beach told Rea that they were thinking along the same lines and that he “laid the matter confidentially before the Commissioners and found them heartily in favor of the plan proposed, and I do not think there would be slightest trouble about securing legislation on the subject.” Cassatt confirmed Congressional support, including financial assistance, during his round of golf with McMillan at the end of the month. By July 9th, just before he went to Europe, Cassatt was sure enough of the future that he was already talking with Ernest Graham, the partner in D.H. Burnham & Co. who handled much of its business affairs, about a union station. By the time Cassatt and Burnham met in London, therefore, they were simply confirming a deal that had already been made.

Yet the story that Burnham had converted Cassatt and saved the Mall became part of Washington lore, largely because it helped many of the participants. A public telling of this tale first appeared the McMillan Commission’s 1902 report: its claim that the Pennsylvania had been “perfectly satisfied” with the existing plans implied that someone had changed the company’s mind. Railroad officials reinforced this idea during Congressional testimony for the Union Station Act, and articles during construction, both in the local papers and the professional journals, also attributed the company’s move to the persuasiveness of the Park Commission.

Additional support for this story appeared when Moore finished

his biography of Burnham, which had been commissioned by the architect's family. Moore's role with McMillan, the Park Commission, and later the federal Commission on Fine Arts made him highly credible, and his book became a key source for historians. Its use of dialogue, such as Cassatt's explanation in London and McMillan's toast to "General Burnham," seemed particularly trustworthy,

The mythology of Union Station's birth certainly benefited the architect. Burnham always worried about his reputation—he would later go to the trouble of complaining to the B&O when the *Baltimore Sun* referred to "W.D. Burnham & Co."—and it was good for business to be known as the man who saved the Mall. He also had the ego of most successful architects, as his use of the first person showed: "Mr. Cassatt agreed with me concerning the things I want in Washington...If he had refused, the glory of my work would have been gone, but he did not, so I am very happy." Burnham never showed that he recognized the difference between being the man who convinced the railroad to leave and being the head of a commission that came along at a time when the company was already contemplating that direction.

The Pennsylvania was in the best position to correct this story, but it had little incentive to do so. It was much better off pretending that it sighed, put the back of its hand across its forehead, and relocated for the good of the country. Any new plans would require more legislation, and too much willingness to go could have encouraged Congressional opponents to reduce or even eliminate \$1.5 million the B&O and the PRR each expected to receive. Its apparent reluctance would also encourage others, such the members of the McMillan Commission, to keep selling the project, and its "sacrifice" had the potential to help it in another way. The good will that resulted from its leaving the Mall and building a new gateway might benefit the company as negotiated with

the federal government on topics, including rates and consolidation, that profoundly affected the railroad business. All these considerations led the PRR's executives to keep its real reasons secret, not even sharing them with the management of the Washington Terminal Company, the corporation that ran Union Station and was jointly owned by the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore & Ohio. Only after the PRR, by then one half of the Penn Central, went bankrupt in the 1970s did its records become accessible.

Establishing an accurate account mattered little to the people of Washington. They focused on an almost unbelievable turn that meant the capital would soon have an end to grade crossings and a grand new joint terminal and the chance to develop the central park it had long wanted. The excitement was great enough that the *Evening Star*, which a decade before had compared the Pennsylvania to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, now praised "one of the institutions of the continent, a credit to the American civilization and a source of pride when comparisons are drawn between domestic and foreign railroad conditions."

The excitement overwhelmed any discussion about how this long-desired development had occurred. Burnham, McKim, Olmsted, McMillan, Cassatt, Rea and Beach had accomplished in six months what hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians had found themselves powerless to achieve over three decades. The capital would have a more beautiful and impressive future, but it was one created through private negotiations that bypassed the democratic principles the city was supposed to represent.

II

Burnham and McKim paid little attention to the black crepe hanging from many of the buildings they passed on this Sunday late



in September 1901. Though they had previously joined in mourning President McKinley, assassinated three weeks earlier in Buffalo, their thoughts had now shifted to events to come. This afternoon they were walking just north of the Capitol in order to imagine how the area would look without its dozens of aging brick row houses, without its occasional larger apartment building, without its stores and saloons serving residents and visitors.

The two men hoped their visit would answer a seemingly simple question: what was the best location for Washington's new train station? Planning had initially assumed that the terminal would use the land awarded to the B&O, a stocking cap-shaped property that faced C Street and stretched north up Delaware Avenue. The building would sit on the site's southern end, its doors opening towards the Capitol, its tracks extending north across Massachusetts Avenue or diving south under First Street.

The PRR's control over the B&O meant that Cassatt would ultimately decide where the station went, and he had made it clear he favored this spot. The project had to consider three main factors—access, expense, and appearance—and C Street had obvious advantages on two of them. A station here would be convenient for travelers, since it stood close to Pennsylvania Avenue and opened onto the C Street trolley line. Land costs would be lower, since at the end of the 1890s the B&O had quietly, and therefore cheaply, purchased the necessary property. The topography of the site, with its southern section thirty feet above the northern, also promised to save money for both the

Facing page: Swampoodle, from the roof of the U.S. Capitol. The steam in the center of the picture comes from a B&O locomotive; the company's depot stood just past the left edge of the photograph. (*Library of Congress*)

railroads and the government. That slope allowed the through tracks to emerge from the tunnel at the same elevation as those dead-ending into the back of the station, so every northbound train could use the viaduct. Because of the elevation of the tracks, cross-town streets would pass underneath with little regrading, reducing the city's costs for both paving and damages.

Yet a union station at C Street created serious aesthetic problems. Two years earlier, the Congressional Library had opened just across from the Capitol and, though undeniably elegant, it competed with and therefore diminished one of the nation's most significant buildings. Placing the railroads' new home similarly close to Capitol, though perhaps an accurate statement about political power, would be even more distracting, since the need for nearly thirty gates meant that the terminal would be the wider of the two structures.

C Street promised other kinds of disfigurement. One of the city's fire companies already gave the Capitol an annual bath to remove the combustible soot and cinders that landed on its roof, and putting coal-fired locomotives two blocks away would accelerate the rate at which the white paint covering the dome's cast iron frame would fade to gray. Conditions would be even darker out behind the station. Because the viaduct would carry thirty tracks, it would be nearly 800 feet wide when it crossed over Massachusetts Avenue, converting Washington's longest street into a damp tunnel just when it passed two of the city's most important places.

The obvious solution was to move the station. Among the first advocates of a shift was McKim, who used his light touch to try to nudge Burnham north after their September survey:

...I will only add that if Massachusetts Avenue could be saved, by setting it [the terminal] back, so that the

Avenue would pass in front of it, instead of under it, that you would be saving one of the principal arteries of the city which, as a Commissioner, you feel it your duty to defend. Moreover, as the Baltimore & Ohio approach enters Washington on the axis of one of the radial Avenues, and centers upon the dome, it seems a thousand pities that it should, at the last moment, cross the normal and lose its direction. If removed, back to the line of Massachusetts Avenue, and upon low ground, there would be no danger of criticism of disturbance of the seat of the Government, by commercial approaches, nor could it be criticized architecturally, as interfering with the outlines of the Capitol, as seen from distinct points.

Pushing the station north offered another advantage. Most major European terminals included a plaza in front to leave room for events such as greeting an important visitor. Not long after their London meeting Burnham and Cassatt had viewed the Place de la Concorde in Paris to see if it could provide a model for Washington, which would have many of these gatherings. Though a plaza was possible at C Street, it could be larger and its approaches more convenient at Massachusetts Avenue.

Olmsted soon agreed with McKim, and a walk around the area in early November also convinced McMillan. The senator soon shared his view with Cassatt, who responded that the PRR "positively cannot agree to" the move. Burnham worked with both sides, his neutrality understandable given that he had a patron on either side. He showed Moore drawings his firm had worked up for Massachusetts Avenue but also told Olmsted he was still "heartily in favor of the B&O site."

Expense was the main reason the Pennsylvania resisted. The neighborhood north of Massachusetts had absorbed the nickname of "Swampoodle" in acknowledgement of its marshy past, and test borings

suggested that establishing solid foundations there could be expensive. In addition, the intersection of Massachusetts and Delaware Avenues lay at +25' datum, nearly thirty feet lower than C Street and therefore too low to create a climb north that stayed below the railroads' 1% maximum grade. The only solution was extensive filling, perhaps as much as one million cubic yards, the price of which would likely top \$300,000.

The new location would also cost the public. Elevating the terminal site would force the government to build up the streets approaching it and to compensate adjacent landowners whose property had lost value once "first floor" and "street level" were no longer synonymous. Costs would rise even farther if the plans included a plaza, since it would require buying more land and moving another million cubic yards of fill. The total for these projects might reach \$1.6 million, to come on top of the \$3 million already promised to the railroads. It was so much money that even McMillan's closest friend, Senate Appropriations Committee chair William Allison, hesitated to move the station north.

Site selection continued into the winter. The most public episode in the process came on December 3rd, 1901, when McMillan, Cassatt, and the Senate Park Commissioners gathered in the Senate District Committee room. They were originally going to meet before Thanksgiving, but each had other responsibilities that had forced a rescheduling. McMillan and the rest of the Senate leadership were trying to figure out how to work with Teddy Roosevelt, three months into being head of their party as well as of the country. Cassatt was continuing large-scale improvements to the Pennsylvania, most notably its plans to tunnel the Hudson River and bring its trains into Manhattan. The Park Commission was rushing to finish the exhibit

scheduled to open in mid-January at the Corcoran Museum of Art, since its models, drawings, and descriptions were their best chance to convince Congress and the public that these plans would finally create a capital worthy of the nation.

The hearing and the accompanying tour of Swampoodle were as much a piece of theater as the sole meeting of the Park Commission nine months earlier. Certainly McMillan was not going to learn much about the development of the union station, having either participated in or received summaries of all the key discussions. Instead, he wanted the hearing to convince two audiences of the advantages of the Massachusetts Avenue site: the members of Congress who would have to pass the relevant legislation, and the residents affected by the change from two depots to one.

The session began with Cassatt explaining his company's willingness to leave the Mall, testimony that included prominent mention of his pride in being able to contribute to the beautification of the capital. Burnham followed with several maps of the C Street site and an analysis of the trouble it created for streetcar traffic and development of a plaza. He then displayed similar drawings for Massachusetts Avenue, noting how its separation from the Capitol eliminated such problems. "Mr. Cassatt viewed the latter plan with a good deal of favor," wrote the reporter for the *Evening Star*.

That reaction signaled the hearing's true purpose. Though the possibility that the station might move across Massachusetts Avenue had become public only within the previous month, opposition had already appeared. Not only were officials concerned about the additional cost, but neighbors worried about losing their homes had started to protest the new location. By offering the testimony and the tour, McMillan had an opportunity to show senators and reporters (who would pass

the news onto local readers) why Massachusetts Avenue was the better choice for the country and the city.

Cassatt's open display of "favor" indicated that he, too, had been won over. Burnham later explained that while the president understood the artistic advantages of moving north for some time, what finally convinced him were calculations showing that the savings from eliminating the viaduct over Massachusetts Avenue would largely offset the expense of filling. Within ten days of the hearing, Cassatt had told Loree, "I think it would be well for you to go on and acquire the necessary property," and Peirce Anderson, D.H. Burnham & Co.'s chief designer, was by that time addressing the concerns of engineers from the railroad and the city.

Though the terminal's location was now set by early 1902, its siting was definitely not. The station could be built at almost any elevation (as measured by its front sidewalk) between +30' and +65' datum, but every alternative had problems. Approximately +40', for example, appealed both to the District, since it minimized grading costs by lifting the cross-town (lettered) streets over the tracks, and to the architects, who knew their building would clearly defer to the Capitol, which sat at +86'. But +40' created operating problems for the railroads, whose locomotives would have a climb steeper than 1%, and for residents of Northeast Washington, whose horses would drive into the steam and smoke floating up from locomotives. At +60', on the other hand, engines would have an easy grade north and drivers would pass happily under the tracks. Far less enthusiastic were District officials, who would have to lower roadways as much as fifteen feet; those living nearest the site, who did not want their homes perched above the streets; and the architects, who worried about competition with the Capitol.

The attempt to balance these needs continued into 1902. The Union Station Act that McMillan introduced in early January placed the station at +45' and sent the streets under the tracks, a seemingly happy compromise. Almost immediately, however, the Northeast Washington Citizens Association condemned this elevation as "more hideous and monstrous than any of its predecessors" because it closed H Street, the area's commercial center and the main trolley and carriage route downtown. Both the railroads and the city engineers preferred dead-ending H into the viaduct: it sat so close to the back of the station that the companies would otherwise have to build an expensive 700-foot subway, and the District would have to lower the roadway substantially, which would result in substantial regrading and damages. But the neighborhood association and the District Commissioners convinced McMillan to reconsider, and he in turn persuaded Cassatt. Another six weeks of negotiations and experimentations established the final elevation at +58', which reduced both the climb north and the costs of getting the streets under the viaduct. In true District fashion, not everyone was happy: the East Washington Citizens Association, whose members lived just east of the building, claimed it would tower over their homes.

The public first saw drawings of the new station in mid-March. Stories about its appearance had begun to circulate in January, when the *Railway Gazette* reported that the District was examining plans that called for "three domes on top for a finish similar to the Capitol and Library buildings." Now, continuing their effort to build support for the project, McMillan, Burnham and Cassatt decided to give the newspapers a sketch. Readers saw that while the domes had been removed, D.H. Burnham & Co. had created a characteristically Beaux-Arts building. It was massive, symmetrical, and neo-classical, and its

dominant motif was the triumphal arch, particularly three large ones defining the main entrance in the center of the south, Capitol-facing side.

McMillan introduced the revised bill on March 31. It placed a deadline of five years on the project, required that the station cost at least \$4 million, placed its entrance three hundred feet north of the intersection of Massachusetts and Delaware Avenues, dedicated the space in front to a semi-circular plaza, and protected the investment of the B&O and the PRR by requiring all six railroads serving Washington use the new terminal exclusively. The two companies received the right to build jointly-owned new yards and shops north of New York Avenue in the neighborhoods of Eckington and Ivy City, and both were also allowed to keep the most of the public land (save for the Mall, of course) the 1901 bills had given them for bigger freight yards. Each received \$1.5 million to offset the cost of ending grade crossings: the District and Federal governments would split the Baltimore & Ohio's payment, a carry-over from the earlier legislation, while the U.S. would be responsible for all of the Pennsylvania's, since the previous grant of the Mall came from federal property. The rights of neighbors were protected through a special jury that would hear claims for grade damages, but any award had to subtract the increase in value that had resulted from being so close to what would soon be one of the city's main economic engines.

The bill was assigned to the District Committee, which reported it back to the full Senate on April 3. McMillan had continued to make small amendments, requiring the District to pay for roads on the east and west sides of the station and changing one clause so it read "The United States pays \$1,500,000 for the land in the Mall occupied by the Baltimore & Potomac" rather than "The United States pays

\$1,500,000 toward the elimination of grade crossings along the line of the Baltimore & Potomac." It seemed a minor point, since the money would end up in Pennsylvania's treasury either way, but subsequent events would show that Cassatt was right when he told McMillan that the old language would have "an unfortunate effect."

McMillan reassured Burnham as Senate debate started that the Union Station Act would pass "in due order," but that did not mean that there would be no objections. Members claiming construction expertise asserted that damage payments would be \$3 million, not the \$600,000 the District engineers had estimated, and that the First Street tunnel would damage the foundations of the Capitol or the Library of Congress. Two Western Democrats, both long-time railroad critics, claimed that \$3 million in payments was too generous, and one introduced an amendment calling for the federal government, since it was already paying so much, to kick in some more money and make the terminal public property.

While most of those complaints caused little trouble—the capitalists in the Senate leadership would never support the proposal for municipal ownership, for example—one proposal was more disruptive. Colorado's James Patterson introduced an amendment that allowed the use of Union Station by any railroad that connected at any point to any of Washington's existing carriers. Though he claimed to be ensuring the development of the capital by providing access to new carriers, Patterson's real interest was the two-year-old Chesapeake Beach Railroad, which ran from suburban Maryland to the bay. Its primary owner was Colorado businessman Otto Mears, who needed good connections from Washington if the resort he had just built at the end of his line—his publicity materials claimed it would soon be the "Monte Carlo of the East"—was to flourish.

Discussions in late April and early May focused on the reasoning behind Patterson's amendment. If the PRR and B&O could keep a new carrier out of their terminal, it would have to develop its own building, a financial commitment only a big line could afford, even if it could find a site. A newcomer could not join up with one of the tenant lines, since the legislation required them to use the union station. This situation, McMillan wrote his adult son William, had led "many senators, good friends of mine, [to] sympathize with his ideas that the depot should be open to every road that desires to use it." The District Commissioners shared that view, hoping their city would soon enjoy even more service, but the Pennsylvania did not. Cassatt, in uncharacteristically sharp language, told McMillan:

Here we are, spending between ten and twelve million dollars for a station in which it is proposed to accommodate all the existing lines, and we are asked to put ourselves in a position to invite the promotion of useless lines.... We are, as you know, perfectly well satisfied with our present situation, but have been willing to incur a large additional cost to meet the views of the Government. Why then should we be put in a worse position than we are to-day, in respect to the use of our property by competitive lines?"

It would take McMillan three weeks to work out a compromise. He finally convinced the B&O and the PRR to allow any railroad with a charter for Washington—something it would have to obtain from Congress—to buy its way into the station, either through negotiations with the owners or through arbitration. A bill with this amendment quickly reappeared on the Senate floor, a surprise since McMillan had returned to Detroit for the funeral of his son. (No one explained why it was taken up with its sponsor out of town, but it seems likely that the Pennsylvania wanted the House's approval and the President's signature

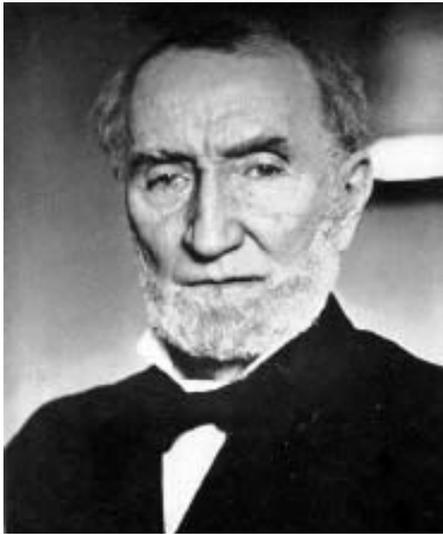
before summer recess.) Senator Gallinger, the District Committee's second ranking Republican, took over for McMillan, defending the legislation through six hours of debate. Though there were several "warm tilts," all attempts to recommit the bill to committee or to amend it failed. Its passage on May 15th allowed Moore to telegram McMillan, still mourning in Michigan, with some good news.

Consideration on the other side of the Capitol began with another tour. On June 4th, a group of railroad officials—Chief Engineers Brown and Graham, B&O lawyer John Hamilton, and PRR lobbyists John Cassels and S.C. Neale—took the members of the House District Committee from Southwest to Swampoodle. Among the traveling party were chairman Joseph Babcock, a Republican from southwestern Wisconsin who lived at North Capitol and B Street, and William Cowherd, a Nebraska Democrat who was in the minority voting against the new Mall station. The following day Brown told Cassatt, "The chairman of the committee and, I think, the majority of the members appeared to be in favor of the bill as it was, and only one or two [including Cowherd]...were apparently opposed to it."

Next came two full mornings of committee hearings. Railroad representatives filled the first, using their time to make three main points: their desire to start work as soon as possible; the idea for a union station originated with the McMillan Commission; and the new plan, because of additional elements like the First Street tunnel, would cost them several million dollars more than separate stations. Local people dominated the second, with most saying that they favored the terminal but thought the legislation needed some revisions. Men from South Washington argued over whether the tracks there should run on K Street or Virginia and Maryland Avenues; those from Northeast tried to push the new B&O freight yards farther east, to provide better access

to Eckington. Broader criticism came from Board of Trade president Thomas Smith, who said that the money going to the railroads could be much better spent. “With a depleted municipal treasury and the two important subjects of water supply and sewerage to be provided for,” the Board would say later, “the contribution of millions of dollars seems...hardly advisable.”

The District Committee issued its report on the 20th, two days after the second hearing. It unanimously recommended returning



Joseph Cannon

the station to C Street, arguing that the aesthetic benefits of Massachusetts Avenue were not worth the additional \$1 to \$1.5 million the District and federal governments would have to pay. When Babcock went to Neale’s office to convey this news, he also told the railroad lobbyist that there was not “the slightest chance of the passage of the Senate bill at this session or the next.” This prediction

was so worrisome that various people in Washington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia immediately employed the often frustrating new technology of long-distance phone calls to search for a quick solution, but neither the railroad executives nor McMillan could get the Union Station Act out of the doldrums before Congress recessed for the summer.

The bill was floundering because of three prevailing features of Washington politics, all of which involved House Appropriation

Committee Chairman Joseph Cannon. Its lack of progress reflected, first of all, a split that ran through the Capitol when it came to spending on public works. The Senate typically took a more generous approach, seeing federal appropriations as investments that helped build the nation; the House, particularly a faction of self-described “economists,” believed funding was generally a local responsibility. A previous District improvement clearly illustrated this difference: the Senate had voted to buy the two thousand acres that would form the heart of Rock Creek Park in 1886, but the House went along only after four years of failed attempts to make neighboring property owners, who supposedly would benefit most from the purchase, pay a surtax towards the park’s cost. The leading economist was Cannon, a Republican from east-central Illinois known both as “Uncle Joe” for his homespun manner and “Filthy Joe” because of his skill with profanity. He took great pride in limiting spending and had already come out against the cost of the Massachusetts Avenue site.

Cannon’s leadership role created the bill’s second problem. The House normally held two “District days” a month to handle local legislation, but leadership had the right to suspend them in order to take up other matters. According to Babcock, Cannon had warned that if the District Committee reported the Massachusetts Avenue version, he would send so many Appropriations bills to the House floor that the District days would be cancelled and the Union Station Act would never come up. Procedures to stop this flood of paper existed, but Cannon’s authority over fiscal matters made members reluctant to challenge him on what most saw as a minor issue.

The final reason the legislation had stalled was the never-ending battle between the two halves of the Capitol. The House saw Union Station as the first product of the Senate Park Commission, a body

whose origins led Cannon to call it a “bastard child.” Allowing the legislation to pass unaltered would appear an egregious surrender of authority, particularly for Cannon, who most people expected to be Speaker of the House when the next Congress convened.

Moving the bill became even harder after August. On the 10th, McMillan lost his breath while playing golf on the same Massachusetts course where, a year earlier, he had negotiated with Cassatt. He felt better as the day went on, but that night he suffered two heart attacks, the second of which was fatal. His achievements over the previous two years—developing the two original railroad bills, creating and nurturing the Senate Park Commission, brokering the development of Union Station—made it difficult to imagine the impact of his absence. Olmsted’s condolence to Moore revealed the worries of those involved: “I fell at once to wondering, fearfully, how seriously this irreplaceable loss would set back the movement upon which we have all set our hearts. When the Captain is swept from the bridge, I know there is nothing the chartmaker can do to help the ship in her distress but to take care of his charts and wait for orders from the navigating officer.”

Events during the fall did little to establish who the new captain might be. Gallinger had become the Senate District Committee chairman, but he carried less influence, both in the Senate and the Republican Party, than McMillan had. Congressman Babcock tried to take charge by suggesting a direction that, he told Cassatt, would bring the station safely back to Massachusetts Avenue. Allow his committee to pass C Street, since that site’s lower costs would satisfy Cannon and get the bill onto the floor calendar. Once the full House passed it, the differences between the two versions would then be resolved in conference; at that point, House negotiators secretly sympathetic to Massachusetts Avenue—a group to which Babcock said he belonged—

would find themselves “forced” to give in. It was an approach McMillan had suggested at the end of June, but the House’s failure to act before recess had prevented its use.

The Pennsylvania considered a number of routes during the fall. It had Burnham revisit earlier plans, and in November Cassatt told the architect, “we had better let the House pass the original ‘C’ Street bill.” The president also had Burnham consult with new Engineer Commissioner John Biddle about lowering the elevation at Massachusetts Avenue in the hope of saving the District enough money to satisfy the economists. The PRR pointedly reminded the capital that it had another choice by filing a petition to lay more tracks on the Mall. Behind each effort was what Cassatt said was the company’s ultimate interest: to “get this thing settled now without any further delay.”

The Pennsy ultimately took the helm and tried to return to its original course. “We would not accept the C street site if the bill was passed,” Samuel Rea bluntly told the House District Committee in December hearing, which responded by passing the Senate bill—but only after making a major change. In its report, the committee argued that since the Baltimore & Ohio, the Pennsylvania, and the city all wanted the more expensive location, they should share its extra \$1.6 million cost. The amended bill therefore reduced the payments to the railroads by \$500,000 each and made the District, not the U.S., provide the extra \$600,000 for filling.

This version sailed through the House, but the Senate voted it down without debate. The railroads held a final meeting with Biddle, concluding that although a lower elevation could save the government money, it made the climb north too steep. They then began responding to their critics, starting with letters Cassatt and Loree sent to Babcock. Despite complaints that his company was profiting from a move to

Massachusetts Avenue, Cassatt wrote, the change would actually cost the PRR nearly twice what staying on at Sixth Street would, mainly because of the tunnel and its new line through Northeast. The Senate bill was still a good deal for the government, he said: in exchange for its \$1,500,000 payment, it would receive two tracts of land on the Mall—what the company held now and what it had been awarded—each worth \$1,275,000. He concluded by exploiting the mythology his railroad had helped create:

(T)he establishment of a Union Station did not originate with this Company, but was prepared and introduced in the Senate to accommodate a scheme of public improvement which was deemed to be of great interest and importance to the City of Washington, and this company was asked to accede to the proposed changes with the understanding and assurance that in lieu of the site on the Mall granted by the United States as a contribution towards the cost of the improvements provided for by the Act of February 12th, 1901, a fair and equitable appropriation. These considerations appear to me to so fully justify the contribution of \$1,500,000...[that] I am impelled by a sense of duty to the Company and its interests in this important matter, to submit the same to you.

Loree provided a similar explanation, showing that even after the B&O shared costs for the station and the viaduct, it would pay more with a union station than it would for a separate building.

The New Year brought more action but little progress. After the Senate had rejected the House's December amendments, each chamber appointed three members to a conference committee. When six men met on January 21st, Babcock insisted that the B&O would not receive more than \$1 million. The conferees tried again two days later, at

which point Gallinger suggested giving each railroad \$1,285,000, the appraised value of the PRR's existing Mall holdings. All three Senators voted in favor, as did Babcock, but the two other House conferees—Sydney Mudd of Maryland and Adolph Meyer of Louisiana—refused, dooming the proposal, which had to win the approval of at least two men from each house. Afterwards, Gallinger asked Cassels privately whether the PRR would accept the House bill; the lobbyist refused to answer, but hinted his company would be satisfied with \$1,250,000.

As February began, supporters of each version were optimistic. Those looking to reduce the payments took heart from statements by men who seemed to know what was happening. Babcock told the House, "there is no question...the bill will become law as it is if the House stands by its position," while Mudd promised that, at worst, "We can get an agreement forthwith on a million and a quarter to each railroad." Cannon agreed, declaring that it was "an open secret" that both companies had admitted that they would accept the House version. He also appealed to the loyalty of his chamber, telling Representatives "Now, then, gentlemen, choose ye whom this day you will serve."

Those who thought the payments should remain at \$1.5 million also had reason to be encouraged. The Senate was determined to hold its original position, both to defend its territory and to honor McMillan. Their stubbornness was even greater after Mudd, in a violation of Congressional etiquette, gave a public summary of the conference committee's private negotiations. Many House members had also committed themselves to the larger payments, either out of fealty to the Pennsylvania or because they wanted to ensure that the capital received the best possible station. The PRR was extending its lobbying as well, pressing its supporters and having allies like the president of the Southern Railway call the Congressmen they knew

well.

The Senate's refusal to compromise left the House with a choice. It could give in and pass the Senate version, or it could hold its position and have the entire legislative process restart when a new Congress began in May. On February 25th, the next-to-last day of the session, Representatives debated the bill one more time. For a raucous hour-and-a-half, members mixed barbs—Why did the economists support expensive projects in their home states? Was not everyone scared of a certain member's temper?—with a review of the main arguments about whether the benefits of Massachusetts Avenue were greater than its cost.

It is difficult to determine how much of the back-and-forth was genuine. The House dedicated a lot of time to the Union Station Act during the end-of-session rush, suggesting members believed it was important. Given the Senate's inflexibility on the \$1.5 million, however, the debate offered members an excellent opportunity to portray themselves as frugal public servants before they "gave in". The roll call revealed that the leadership did not force members support its position, suggesting that men like Cannon did not believe the issue was crucial. When the bill came up for a vote, it passed the House 158 to 100, went immediately to the Senate, and was signed by President Roosevelt the next day.

Reaction in Washington was surprisingly muted given how much the community wanted the bill. Though the local papers had covered the story closely for eighteen months, only the *Evening Star* saw final approval as important enough to deserve an editorial. "At Last the Union Station" was, as its title suggested, less a celebration than an expression of relief and an interest in getting started on construction.

III

Daniel Burnham had worked hard to become the Pennsylvania's architect in Washington. His first job involving the railroad had come in 1888, when he and then-partner John Root did a small job on the union station the PRR used in Chicago. In the mid 1890s, his firm won the contract for the union station in Columbus, Ohio, with chief designer Charles Atwood modeling the building on the depot he had created for the Chicago World's Fair. And at the turn of the century, Cassatt had selected D.H. Burnham & Co. to create the PRR's terminal and office building in Pittsburgh, one of its busiest cities.

When it became clear in 1900 that Washington would soon need two new railroad stations, Burnham lobbied aggressively for the Pennsylvania's. After one visit to its headquarters above Broad Street Station in Philadelphia, for example, he promised to "give constant study" to a new Mall terminal with "no charge for our time or services." Always careful to take care of business, however, he added that this planning would not come completely free: if D.H. Burnham & Co. started on the project and "you proceed with the station...we are to be your architects." His relentless salesmanship, which later included telling Peirce Anderson to lobby Cassatt for the PRR's Manhattan terminal, would provoke a range of reactions over the years: even Louis Sullivan, who dismissed Burnham's designs as reactionary, admired his willingness to "go through hell" to win a commission, but others, especially those who thought his less-famous co-workers provided the firm's creativity, dismissed him as a "promoter/architect."

The job in Washington was enormously appealing. It would mean money, both because the standard 5% architect's fee would be applied to a \$2 million project and because a successful station would be a tremendous selling point with future clients. It would bring public

acclaim, as the terminal would occupy one of the most prominent spots in the capital. And it would give him a chance to spread neoclassicism, since the legislative requirement that the terminal be of “monumental character” and the need to integrate it with Washington’s existing architecture strongly favored a building in the Beaux-Arts style.

These efforts paid off in late 1900, when the Pennsylvania hired his firm to design its new Mall depot. The architects and engineers in the Rookery, the landmark skyscraper (for the time, anyway—it had eleven stories) that Burnham had designed with Root and now housed his practice, were in the midst of that work when the railroad and the government started discussing a move north of the Capitol. By September of 1901, the men had shifted to a project that was much bigger, both in opportunity and in responsibility.

Though credit Union Station has normally gone to Burnham, he and many others have said that the person who truly deserved it was Peirce Anderson. William Peirce Anderson had grown up in Utah and upstate New York, graduated from Harvard in 1892, and received a master’s in electrical engineering at Johns Hopkins in 1894. A talk with Burnham reinforced his doubts about that field, and he decided to join the many American architects-to-be heading to Paris. Accepted into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, he finished his degree in 1899 and celebrated with the traditional, yearlong graduation tour of the continent’s architectural sites. Upon returning to the U.S. he went to D.H. Burnham & Co., starting as a draftsman but quickly becoming its chief designer. Tall and reserved—architect Thomas Hastings affectionately joked about collaborating with “Wild Billy Anderson”—his artistic talent was clear in the watercolors he occasionally painted. While Burnham contributed to the station, it was Anderson who led the project, from visiting other major railroad terminals in search of

ideas to signing the construction drawings before they went to the contractors.

Anderson faced what had become a common challenge. The growth of urban America since the Civil War, both in population and wealth, had led to a boom in the construction of public places. Architects could generally draw on admirable precedents: there were, for example, hundreds of years of courthouses and city halls. The history of railroad stations, however, was so brief that Burnham was actually older than any major American terminal. Through the 1880s, few of these were impressive; as Carroll Meeks wrote in his definitive history of stations, “only [the original] Grand Central in New York failed to disappoint visitors from abroad.”

This lack of models was only part of why creating a terminal was so complicated. An architect was expected to design, within budget, a building that would impress locals and visitors while simultaneously moving people, luggage, and trains. These operating demands were so powerful that one French commentator argued: “Stations are designed by engineers. The architect only comes along later to decorate them.”

Towards the end of the 19th century, however, architects began skillfully merging form and function. Theodore Link’s 1894 St. Louis Union Station adapted Romanesque features such as a tower, rounded arches, and a rusticated stone exterior into an impressive depot that handled seventeen different railroads. The temporary terminal for the Chicago World’s Fair showed how Roman and Renaissance elements such as columns, pilasters, and deep arches could help create a stylish and efficient building. Perhaps the most significant station of the period was in Frankfort; architect Georg P.H. Eggert’s clever arrangement of spaces from platform to vestibule and his elaborate ornamentation led many, including Cassatt, to consider it the world’s finest.

Designing in Washington presented additional challenges. While the desire for an impressive gateway was unusually strong there, the debate over siting had emphasized the need to create that effect without rivaling the Capitol. Anderson and Burnham also had to make Union Station big enough to handle the crowds that would accompany wars or inaugurations, but not so large that it dwarfed passengers during normal periods or cost too much to operate. Finally, the same prominence that made the project appealing also meant added scrutiny from politicians, engineers, architects, and the public.

Anderson's reaction to these demands has been lost over the years, but they sent Burnham roller-coastering through the eighteen months of planning. As early as November 1901, when the debate over location had required two sets of drawings, he told his wife that he "long[ed] for peace and quiet." In March, compliments from McKim on preliminary designs helped him "to settle and rest my mind," but his edginess reappeared in May, when he chose to take PRR Chief of Motive Power Theodore Ely's friendly question about his health as an implication he was falling behind. During the summer of 1902, when the Union Station Act was stuck in the House, Burnham admitted to McKim, "I do not think I shall feel any more willing to begin the work a year from now than I am at present. I assure you the national character of it gives me a constant 'fit of ague.'" Preparing the final drawings during the spring of 1903, always a tense time, became even more stressful when Anderson fell ill.

Relief finally seemed close in the beginning of May, when Anderson and Burnham made yet another trip to Philadelphia. Each had been to Broad Street Station more than a dozen times since the spring of 1901, with Anderson often spending several days in a row there. This time they carried with them floor plans, elevations, sections

and a site layout, all of which showed the advantage of using one of the country's first full-service architectural firms. In the Rookery were talented designers like Anderson; engineers who solved structural, mechanical, and ventilating problems; and a drafting department that could provide the hundreds of drawings a major building required.

To an audience of PRR executives that included Cassatt, Rea, Brown, the architects showed how they had met the demands of Washington, both in city planning and architecture, and of a working railroad station. They began by centering the building on Delaware Avenue, an arrangement that respected both L'Enfant's street scheme and the Beaux Arts' belief in symmetry. That placement was vital in another way: those leaving the capital's gateway would have a clear vista up to the U.S. Capitol.

The terminal had no trouble fulfilling the legislative requirement that it "be monumental in character." Its footprint covered more than four acres—bigger than any station in the world, and 50% larger than the White House. To limit its bulk, the architects had borrowed from Frankfort and separated the interior into two pieces, expanding each only where needed. Closer to Massachusetts Avenue was the headhouse, which contained most terminal operations; farther north was the concourse, which sheltered travelers before they walked onto the platforms. The headhouse had to be nearly 100' tall to impress visitors with a soaring waiting room ceiling; the concourse had to be 755' wide—fourteen feet more than the Capitol—to accommodate all the gates. Yet Cassatt pointed out that nothing that happened in the headhouse required it to be as wide as the concourse, which in turn did not need such a tall ceiling. Anderson and Burnham managed to take 60' off each end of the headhouse and lowered the concourse ceiling to a more human 44 feet.



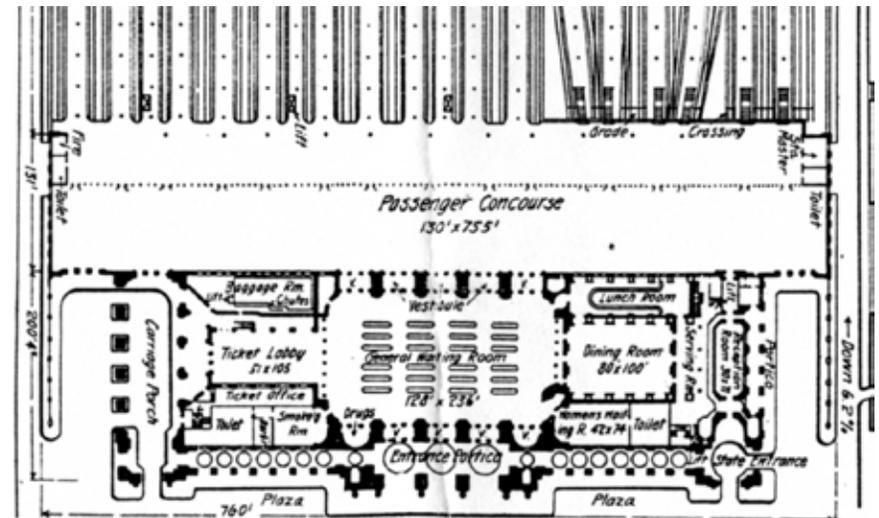
Floor plans: Above, the Baths of Diocletian; opposite, Union Station.

Anderson based Union Station's floor plan on a Roman landmark. Started in 296 and finished ten years later, the Baths of Diocletian were a standard stop on any young architect's European tour, both because of their original importance and because Michaelangelo had later modified them into a church. Their fame increased at the turn of the century, as a decision to convert part of the complex into a museum had led to well-publicized plans for a restoration. They would have been a more appropriate model philosophically if Diocletian had been a consul of the republic rather than a Caesar of the empire, but Washington's long-standing affection for Rome still gave the choice an extra resonance.

What really appealed to Anderson was the Baths' floor plan. He recognized that they artfully handled one of his main problems, the circulation of thousands of people each day, and therefore

borrowed their basic layout. Both buildings started with three large main doorways, all of which led into a tall, rectangular central hall. Archeologists were never certain how this area was used in the Baths, but it would be the main waiting room in the station. Opening off this central space were a series of rooms—pools for Roman bathers, services such as dining and ticketing for American travelers. The Baths had large wings on either end that housed exercise rooms; Anderson used one of those areas for the Presidential Suite, the other for a carriage porch. In the back of each building was one large space open to the air: it was an open-air swimming pool at the baths, the concourse at the station.

Anderson's skill showed in how he adapted the plan of the Baths. He adjusted dimensions, expanding the waiting room so it was more prominent and widening the concourse so it could accommodate enough gates. He inserted extra elements when he needed them, most notably placing a roof over the concourse so that its users, unlike those of the pool, had shelter from rain and snow. Anderson also worked



on additional levels, starting with the basement he added under the concourse so that baggage could be sorted and moved without interfering with passenger flow. Around the outside of each wing he placed three floors of offices, leaving their centers open to serve as wells that provided natural light. These spaces made two contributions, providing space for the station's managers, and, by increasing exterior height to nearly 70', offering visual support to the soaring center section.

Subdividing the station interior offered a number of benefits. A series of smaller spaces made the building seem less overpowering, but still left the room necessary to handle large crowds. They also improved the movement of people, since putting the ticket offices in one wing, for example, kept its lines from impeding travelers rushing from the front doors to the gates. Separating the headhouse from the concourse with a wall and a series of double doors also saved money, because less outdoor air had to be heated or cooled.

The building's dominant motif also came from Rome. The triumphal arch had become, as Carroll Meeks said, "standard in any classical repertory," and it therefore fit well with Washington's architecture. Though the term originally referred to a freestanding memorial that included commemorative sculpture, by the end of the 19th century it denoted any rounded, decorated arch that served as an entrance. That made it a perfect symbol for this building: ancient travelers had passed through triumphal arches when they entered Rome, and modern ones would do the same when they came into the capital of the new world.

Arches appeared across the front of the building in three different sizes, each chosen to reflect the importance of that area. In the middle stood the three largest ones, their sixty-foot height attracting attention

to what was the main entrance. Extending right and left were two sets of seven arches, each 25' feet tall, which formed an arcade. At each corner was a pavilion punctured by a single forty-foot arch, big enough to end the building but no so large as to compete with those defining the entrance. All three sizes had enough depth to produce interior shadows, creating an appealing rhythm of light and dark across the front of the building. Overall, the arrangement was a grander version of Atwood's terminal at the Columbian Exposition, which had one large central arch, two simpler and smaller ones to either side, and more elaborate corner pavilions.

The terminal's exterior was more than just one shape stamped out in varying sizes. Anderson and Burnham added to the center section's prominence by pulling it forward from the rest of the façade, and they increased each doorway's resemblance to a true triumphal arch by framing it with columns topped by statues, the subjects of which would be determined later. Between the arches in the arcades they inserted two-story pilasters that ended in Ionic capitals, and above placed an attic window and a balustrade. On either side of the corner arches they included attached columns, on top of which were one of the dominant symbols of the U.S., bald eagles.

The architects continued this vocabulary inside. Triumphal arches provided the entrances to the four rooms—men's and women's toilets, lunchroom, and parcel check—that opened off the corners of the waiting room, and running between each of those doorways were Doric columns. On the mezzanine level were statues of Roman legionnaires, and the large windows along the north, east and south sides of the waiting room were semi-circular, just like the tops of the triumphal arches. Though the concourse was less decorated, it also included fluted columns and an arched roof. This mixture of Roman

elements like the arch and Renaissance features like the balustrade was characteristic of the firm's work that it became known as "Burnham Baroque."

The station attracted so much attention that it was easy to forget that the building was just part of the chain of projects from the Potomac River to the Maryland border that the railroads called the "Washington improvement." The B&O and the PRR together developed the facilities whose ownership they would share, including the viaduct, the Capitol Hill tunnel, and new yards above Florida Avenue. They also hired D.H. Burnham & Co. to design two buildings just north of the station: east of the tracks was the express building that would handle small freight, milk, and mail, while to the west was the powerhouse that would supply steam and electricity. The Baltimore & Ohio had to create new freight yards, coal yards, and grade-separated rights-of-way for both the Metropolitan and Washington branches, while the Pennsylvania needed to replace the Long Bridge, dig a longer tunnel along Virginia Avenue, develop an entirely new six-mile right-of-way through Northeast, and eliminate its grade crossings. Construction budgets showed how much the companies had to do: the B&O expected to spend (including its half of the \$4 million station) \$6 million in the District, the PRR \$12 million. Though there is no perfect method for converting costs across the years, one popular index suggests that in modern terms, the total Washington improvement would be a \$1 billion project.

Because it was the station that the public would see, however, it received the most attention. The railroads approved the final drawings in June 1903, and D.H. Burnham & Co. then began soliciting bids from potential contractors. The terminal's significance and cost made it a very desirable contract, and so it was little surprise that companies tried

to improve their chances by obtaining influential "recommendations." One electrical equipment supplier asked a B&O official to vouch for them, a hardware manufacturer told a PRR vice-president that they were "anxious to secure special consideration," and a contractor from Milwaukee even came to the capital to lobby. Cassatt himself received a letter from Senator Mark Hanna, best-known as the man who had guided McKinley into the White House. "I do not assume that I should have any personal influence in this matter," Hanna wrote rather disingenuously about a general contractor from New York, and "therefore can only say that some of my good friends are in the company and ask *consistent* consideration."

Any firm could bid, as long as they made the September 9 deadline, and the railroads also invited twenty general contractors to participate. The biggest companies might ask for the entire job, while others would concentrate on specialties like masonry or ornamental iron. Those who expressed interest received blueprints and supply estimates from D.H. Burnham & Co.; working away in what were known as "calc books," its engineers had already come up with figures for how much material each part of the job should require. Each firm turned these documents over to their estimators, who were divided into specialties such as steel or masonry. A bid for a major project was typically fifty or sixty pages long, and had to balance the need for profit with the fear that someone else might come in lower.

The bids that arrived in Chicago set off another surge of work. The lowest bid to handle the entire job came to \$3.9 million, almost a million more than Burnham had promised the PRR. (These figures did not include the platforms or the sheds, which were another \$1 million.) Even the sum of the cheapest bids on each element added up to \$3.6 million, and it was not clear that each of those firms could

handle the work they wanted.

Leading the effort to get the numbers down was Ernest Graham. In some cases the architects and the railroads saved money by eliminating features, deciding that the basement, for example, could no longer include a swimming pool, sauna, or bar. They specified less expensive materials: trim everywhere but the main floor went from mahogany to birch stained to look like mahogany, cement replaced terra cotta in domes of the front arcade, decorative plastering inside became plain. The extent of these changes appeared clearly in the final agreements: four- or five-page drafts now included a two-page addendum filled with clauses that began “omitted” or “substituted.” When even that approach did not save enough money, Graham negotiated lower prices, an activity he was famous for pursuing zealously. Paul Starrett, who had worked for Burnham before becoming a construction company executive, later said it sometimes seemed that Graham wanted contractors to lose money.

By the middle of October, these techniques had brought the cost the building to just over \$3 million. In the process, the railroads decided that, rather than hiring a general contractor, their engineers would supervise the entire job and choose the firm they wanted for each element. Though dividing the work in this way upset some of the country’s big builders, the owners believed it would accelerate progress, assure quality, and reduce costs. In their selections, they tried whenever possible to use firms either they or the architects had worked with previously. Handling the foundations and masonry, for example, was the Thompson-Starrett Company, whose employees included several men who had worked for Burnham early in their careers.

One big decision remained. The Senate report on the Union Station Act had said the terminal would be built of “white marble,” the

same material that covered the Capitol. When cost became a concern, however, the railroads suggested Indiana limestone, which covered several public buildings in Washington and would cost \$600,000 less. But the architects opposed this change, arguing that limestone’s gray tint and frequent use would diminish the station’s impact. They recommended “white granite” from a relatively undeveloped quarry near Bethel, Vermont, since it split the price difference between marble and limestone but had an appropriately formal appearance.

The selection process soon extended far beyond Washington. The presidents of the terminal’s two owners each visited the corner of Broad and Walnut Streets in Philadelphia, where there were buildings made from limestone, granite, and marble. “I reached the same conclusion you did,” Loree told Cassatt, and in October the railroads announced that the station would use Bethel granite because it would look best in the long run. One of its advantages was an almost invisible black flake that would camouflage the small bits of ash that would inevitably accumulate, whereas a marble station would have had to be cleaned regularly, just as the Capitol was.

Many residents objected, seeing this choice as evidence that the railroads were about to start backsliding. The PRR and B&O had previously indicated they would “greatly decrease the smoke nuisance in the city,” but picking a stone because it demanded less cleaning made those commitments seem like only talk. Just as important, the station’s owners had promised to create a brilliant gateway for the capital, but “it is well known,” the *Evening Star* sniffed, “that ‘white granite’ is not white at all, but a light gray with dark flecks.”

There was so much concern that several groups made their own evaluations of the stone. In early November, the Pennsylvania sent two quarry owners it trusted to Vermont’s Green Mountains. After

inspecting a pair of marble quarries, including one owned by Senator Redfield Proctor, they took a horse team—a railroad line was surveyed but not built—into the hills above Bethel. There they found “beautiful white granite of fine quality, remarkably uniform in color, entirely free from sap and stains...in sufficient quantity for all purposes.” The problem was getting it out: because his son had died while working in the quarry, the previous owner had allowed its stone to be used only for tombstones until he himself died in 1900. His heirs had started to expand business, but the Union Station contract required the 30,000 cubic feet a month, far more than it currently produced. The superintendent of a nearby quarry said that another local site, one he considered the best-equipped in the country, had struggled to meet a monthly quota of 10,000 cubic feet for the new Pennsylvania State Capitol. The PRR’s agents concluded, however, that with six months and “a large expenditure of money,” the Bethel quarry should be able to meet the demand.

The District Engineers undertook three other investigations. Commissioner Biddle asked the American Institute of Architects for its opinion; knowing that the stone had been used largely on memorials, several AIA members went to Rock Creek Cemetery, where its appearance on a mausoleum left them “much pleased.” A couple of weeks later, Anderson took Commissioners West and Biddle to Philadelphia so they could stand on the same spot as Cassatt and Loree had. Certain members of Congress, still skeptical, then had Biddle send one of his engineers to Vermont. His report was much like the one from the PRR, warning about the need to develop the quarry but convinced that it could meet a demanding schedule.

These surveys managed to quiet most objections, and the station and the Washington improvement seemed settled. Contractors were

filing for the permits they needed, and some were already starting to dig and demolish, part of their effort to claim the bonuses the railroads had promised for jobs finished ahead of schedule. Those incentives helped the B&O’s local lawyer to make a prediction that thrilled the city: though the station might still have a few rough edges, it would be ready to give visitors from across the country a grand welcome to the 1905 inauguration.