

Pennsylvania Railroad Station
47 Walnut Street
Johnstown
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5389

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11-5070,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD STATION

HABS No. PA-5389

Location: 47 Walnut St., Johnstown, Cambria County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: S. F. B. Partnership.

Present Use: Passenger railroad station.

Significance: Johnstown historically was an important freight and passenger stop on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The station's architectural grandeur represents the railroad's pride and its desire to impart that to both passengers and citizens.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1915-16. Original construction documents for the station are dated December 29, 1914; construction was begun in 1915, and the dedication ceremony was held on October 12, 1916.
2. Architect: Kenneth M. Murchison of New York. Murchison (1872-1938) received his architectural training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He is best known for railroad-station designs, which include the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Station in Hoboken, New Jersey (1904-05), the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Station in Scranton, Pennsylvania (1907), and Baltimore Union Station (1910), in addition to the one in Johnstown. Murchison's station designs were typically Beaux Arts schemes incorporating Neoclassical elements.
3. Engineers: A.C. Shand was chief engineer, F.M. Sawyer assistant engineer, and A.L. Ware the resident engineer. (Architecture and Building 49 [January 1917]: 11-12.)
4. Original and subsequent owners: The station was owned and occupied by the Pennsylvania Railroad until 1977, when the company and station became part of Conrail. In 1985 businessman Eugene Doemling bought the station; he sold it to S.F.B. Partnership in July 1988.
5. Builder, suppliers: The builders were W.H. Fissell and Company; the Comerma Company built the Gustavino vault ceiling; Hemsing and Son crafted the interior woodwork; L.

Del Turco and Brothers made the mosaic, terrazzo, and tile.
(Architecture and Building (49 [January 1917]: 11-12.)

6. Original plans and construction: Original plans are located at the national Amtrak offices in Washington, D.C. Also, a reproduction of the first-floor blueprint was published in the January 1917 issue of Architecture and Building. As recorded in the October 13, 1916, Johnstown Daily Democrat, speakers at the dedication ceremony noted that the new station was "an artistic and stately structure" and "the most modern known to the railroad world."
7. Alterations and additions: The station retains most of its original integrity; the only significant alteration has been the June 9, 1976, removal of the passenger platform to accommodate Amtrak trains.

B. Historical Context

The history of Johnstown became intertwined with that of the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1851, when the main line was extended from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. An important link in the main line, Johnstown was a bustling freight and passenger station. The city was much more than a stop on the railroad, however; beginning in the late 1850s the Cambria Iron Company supplied steel to the Pennsylvania Railroad. As the railroad grew, so did Johnstown. Cambria Iron's steel rails snaked far out into the nation, connecting Johnstown and cities beyond.

The present building is the second Pennsylvania Railroad passenger station to have been erected in Johnstown. The earlier station was at the corner of Iron and Station Streets, and by 1914 it was outdated. The old Pennsylvania station was a disgrace to progressive, forward-thinking Johnstown, explained Judge Francis J. O'Connor in his speech at the dedication ceremony:

The old edifice meant one thing to Johnstown--a serious handicap. The public-spirited citizens of Johnstown have long been laboring to convince the outside world that Johnstown is one of the most progressive cities in the United States, that here are the largest independent steel works in the world, that the city is composed of hardworking, progressive citizens. The effect of these great efforts of Johnstown citizens was shattered by the old station. The traveler on passing trains could judge Johnstown only by the part he could best see going through.
(Johnstown Daily Tribune, October 13, 1916.)

The new station, by contrast, symbolized the monumental industrial

spirit of Johnstown, Reverend Walter Everett Burnett proclaimed in his dedication speech:

This imposing building represents two facts today. First, it suggests our industrial strength. The successful industries of this city underlie our city's progress, as successful industry indeed underlies any progressive civilization. We are proud of our great industries that are as sound as Gibraltar and that give Johnstown an honorable name among the progressive industrial centers of our land. Because these industries have thrived under capable management our city has grown. This building is a sign of our material success. But it is also a sign of our standing in things higher and finer than material wealth. The beauty and dignity of this building are a tribute to the intellectual and social and spiritual values that find expression in our city's life. A large shed would have served our actual needs as a station. But the Pennsylvania Railroad built this artistic and stately structure that their building might harmonize with the finer spirit, no less real than the steel in our furnaces and the smoke from our stacks that exists in our city's life. (Johnstown Daily Democrat, October 13, 1916)

Not only was the station important in and of itself, it was important because of what it symbolized -- namely that Johnstown in 1914 was a city of "intellectual and social and spiritual values." The subtle message in Burnett's speech was that Johnstown had long been recognized as an industrial giant; it was now time to give the city its due as a cultural haven. To that end, the Pennsylvania Railroad rewarded the city with a luxurious new station.

Dangerous grade crossings--surface-level intersections between streets and railroad tracks--had long been a problem in Johnstown. Concomitant with the construction of the new station, the Pennsylvania Railroad eliminated three grade crossings and replaced them with subways, extended an existing pedestrian subway, and constructed a new pedestrian subway and foot bridge. In his dedication speech, S. C. Long, railroad general manager, praised Johnstown for its civic pride and its concern about the grade crossings:

This magnificent celebration appeals to me, first of all, as an expression of satisfaction and approval on the part of the people of Johnstown on the consummation of the work of eliminating the several grade crossings of the Pennsylvania Railroad within

the city, as well as the completion of a well-appointed, up-to-date passenger station. The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, through its representatives here tonight, heartily joins with you in celebrating the achievement of these results which mean so much to the city, to the railroad company, and to the convenience and safety of the traveling public.

The improvements here, in which we are proud to have had a part, stand out strikingly as the results of cooperation between the city and the company, which I have the honor to represent. It was not a work forced upon either party, but entered into jointly and voluntarily, having as its controlling influence and object the safeguarding of human life.
(Johnstown Daily Tribune, October 13, 1916)

The total cost for the construction of the new station, subways and the elimination of the grade crossings was \$3 million.

The elaborate dedication ceremony and the lofty speeches demonstrate the importance of the new station to Johnstown. More than mere rhetoric, the erection of the station was a symbol of civic pride and involvement. The city fathers were very aware of the intertwining destinies of Johnstown and the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the grand new station was seen as both a reward and a vote of confidence in the future.

Since 1916, the station has been the setting for returning war heroes, presidential-campaign whistlestops, and visits from national leaders. It survived the 1936 and 1977 floods.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Incorporating a rectangular plan, the Pennsylvania Railroad station combines Beaux Arts symmetry and Neoclassical elements. Its central three-story vaulted waiting room rises above the main two-story mass that houses the railroad's administrative and service functions.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The station is composed of two rectangular buildings -- the passenger area and the baggage room -- set perpendicular to each other. The main structure is 90' x 98' x 50'. The partial basement has an area of 1,000 square feet,

the ground floor comprises 9,000 square feet, and the second floor (office space) is 3,500 square feet. The single-story baggage wing is 97' x 50', with an area of 2,300 square feet.

2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: All exterior walls are tapestry brick, with sandstone columns, pilasters, and rondels; a sandstone stringcourse; a sandstone cornice; and terra cotta keystones. The base of the building is sheathed in granite.

The south facade (facing Walnut Street) is divided into three bays, with the central portico in antis serving as the pedestrian entrance vestibule. The terminating bays on this facade project slightly and feature two-story brick arches.

On the east facade the central bay serves as the entrance from the parking lot into the waiting room. The center of this facade is composed of five recessed bays articulated by half-round columns. Again, the terminating bays project slightly. The longitudinal span of the vault tops this elevation.

4. Structural system: Reinforced concrete.
5. Chimney: An ornamental brick chimney faces the railroad tracks.
6. Openings: The six metal doors in the Walnut Street entry bay contain vertical glazing. Directly above each pair of doors is an ornamental nine-light window with decorative metalwork. Each of the terminating, projecting bays on this facade features a two-story Palladian window enclosed within a brick arch. The bottom part of the window on the westernmost bay is composed of three metal doors similar to those in the entrance bay.

The parking lot facade features thirteen (seven on the second story, six with a central door on the ground level) double-hung, eight-over-eight-light metal-encased windows. The bottom window in each of the terminating bays is topped by a sandstone pediment with terra cotta brackets. The two metal doors in the central bay have vertical glazing.

The south wall of the vault features a multi-light, semicircular window; each light is covered with decorative metalwork. The three arched windows on the longitudinal span of the vault topping the eastern elevation are also encased in metal.

7. Roof: The main two-story mass of the station has a flat parapet roof; a clock is built into the eastern side of the roof. The

line of the vault's gable facade is emphasized by a sandstone blocking course.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Sketch attached.
2. Flooring: Terrazzo with cream-colored marble access panels in the central waiting room, wooden floors in smaller support spaces.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The central Guastavino vault provides the drama in the waiting room. Marble Doric pilasters articulate the interior walls, which have marble wainscoting. Terra cotta rondels highlight the entablature, one atop each pilaster.
4. Openings: An entrance vestibule leads from the parking lot into the central waiting room; three doors lead from the Walnut Street portico in antis into the waiting room. Other doorways lead from the central waiting room to service areas, restrooms, newsstand, smoking room, passenger platform, and baggage areas. The original doors have been removed.
5. Original furnishings: The marble-based oak benches in the waiting room are original.

- D. Site: The station faces south, on to Walnut Street. The Pennsylvania Railroad tracks run east and west. Pedestrian access is from the southern entrance; the parking lot is on the east side of the station. The station is now, and always has been, on the edge of the downtown commercial district. It is adjacent to the main gates of the lower works of Bethlehem Steel.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: A plan of the station was published in the January 1917 issue of Architecture and Building.
- B. Early views: Photographs were published in the October 13, 1916, Daily Democrat and Daily Tribune. There are also photos in Architecture and Building 49 (January 1917): 11, and Railway Age Gazette 62: 1012-1017.
- C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Benjamin Policicchio, draft of nomination for National Register of Historic Places listing.

Tax-assessment records, Cambria County Courthouse, Ebensburg,
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2. Secondary and published sources:

Architecture and Building 49 (January 1917): 11-12.

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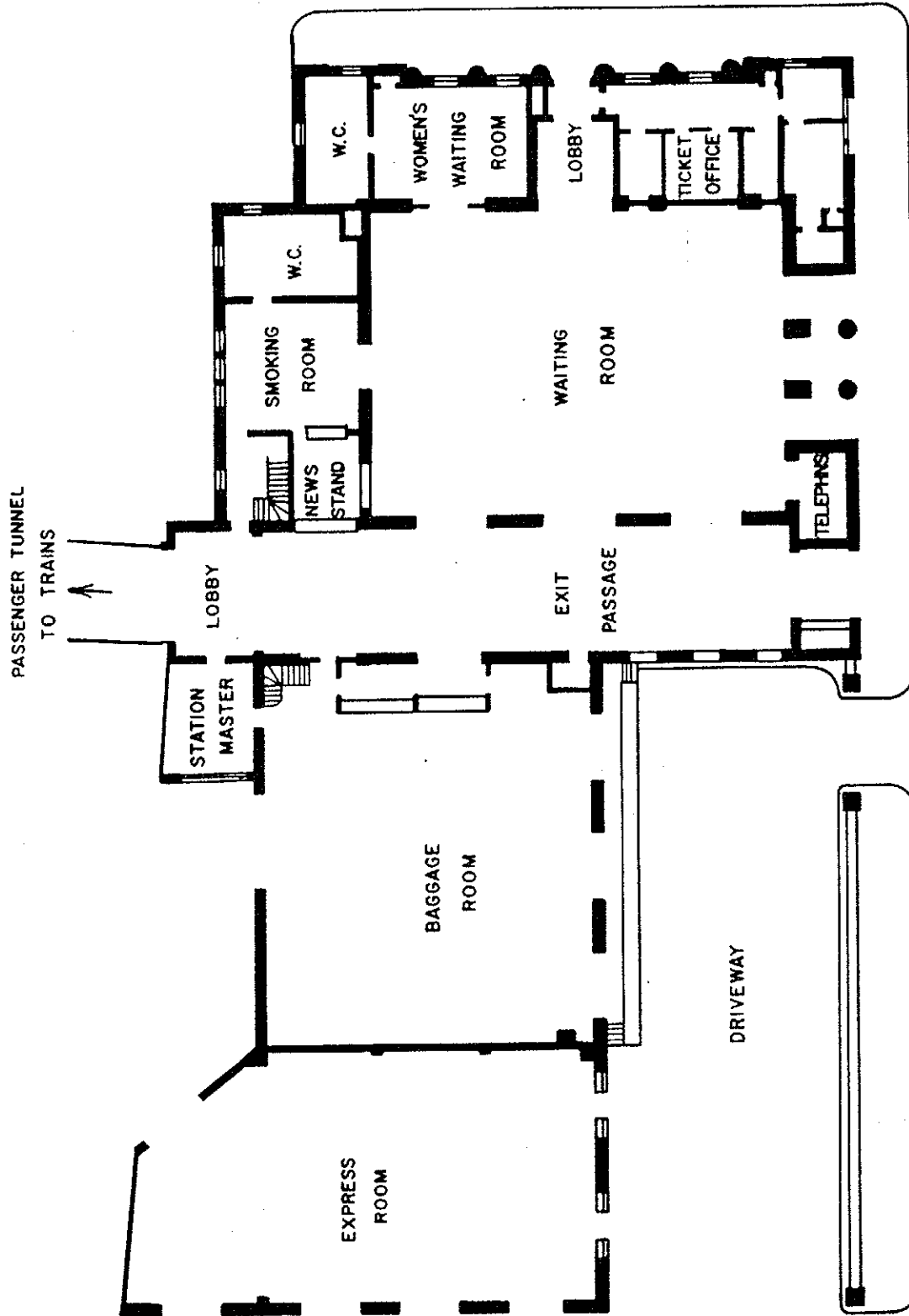
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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of
Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic
American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record
(HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial
Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No.
PA-5669) provides context for the neighborhoods. See additional HABS
reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Terri Hartman in August 1988 under the
direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the
supervisory historian of the project. Hartman's and other project
historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City:
Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.:
HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace.
Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken
by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project
historians.

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WALNUT STREET

J. D. BALACHOWSKI, 1989 (TAKEN FROM ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING, JAN., 1917)