

The Sentinel



A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE PUBLISHED BY THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

\$8.00

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 2

SECOND QUARTER 2019

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Message from the President

I hope spring will arrive soon so we can get to our outdoor activities. This winter had more occurrences of snow, but little impact on operations at the archive. Work is progressing on the *B&O in Baltimore* book and a pre-publication flyer is included with this *Sentinel*. Plans for the Mini-Cons are final and flyers are included with this mailing. The annual convention is almost locked in with just a few details to be confirmed to give the membership an outstanding three days of experiences.

This past week we had our second Founders Day Dinner at world headquarters. Among the 43 attendees were Kris Hoellen, Executive Director of the B&O Museum in Baltimore, and Ed Rothstein, Col. Ret., Commissioner District 5, Carroll County, Maryland. Both were impressed with what has been accomplished by the Society these past few years, and the wealth of information contained in our collection. Mr. Rothstein has volunteered to help us with a grant proposal, and that will be my next objective after we put the Baltimore book to bed.

Our community outreach presentations are set for 2019. On March 21st member Ray Lichty will do his presentation on Lake Michigan Railroad Ferries. On June 13th member Ira Silverman will do a presentation on Railroads of Switzerland. And finally, on October 17th Carroll County resident and Sparrow Point historian Bill Wolfe will talk about Bethlehem Steel at Sparrows Point. If you are in the area, please attend.

As always, we are attempting to increase our membership. We were fairly successful this past quarter in the Maryland area. If you need recruiting materials for community functions or train events, let us know. Having had conversations with other historical groups and museums, we are all faced with how to get younger-generation people involved in preserving history. Suggestions and trial applications from members to determine what activities work in recruiting younger members would greatly be appreciated.

The retire-the-mortgage program has

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The official publication of
**THE BALTIMORE AND OHIO
RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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The Baltimore and Ohio Historical Society is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving and disseminating historical information about The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

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On the Covers

FRONT COVER: Mount Royal Station in Baltimore as it appears today, seemingly missing only the large B&O letters on the clock tower. Restored in 1967, the station was a pioneer adaptive reuse that now houses the Maryland Institute College of Art. See David Pfeiffer's article opposite. (*David Pfeiffer photograph, edited by Sentinel staff*)

BACK COVER: B&O 51, whose post-retirement photo graced the Sentinel's 2018 Q4 cover, has made a trip back through the magazine to the rear cover, and back in time to when it was new. In this image, it dignifies yet another cover—that of the B&O's dining car menu. For the rest of the menu, and a story about how the B&O measured its dining car service against the competition, see the article beginning on page 13.



A color postcard of Mount Royal Station, circa 1920. (ICC, Bureau of Valuation, Engineering Field Notes, located at the National Archives at College Park)

B&O's Mount Royal Station

By David Pfeiffer

Avoiding the grim fate of many historic railroad stations in the country, the B&O's Mount Royal Station still graces the landscape of Baltimore. It is now home to the Maryland Institute College of Art. The history of the station is a shining example of a grand railroad station, historic preservation, and adaptive reuse.

Following the Civil War, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad decided to compete with the Pennsylvania Railroad for the passenger traffic along the northeast corridor. The new service from Washington to New York was called the Royal Blue Line, known for its quality, style, and class. The main bottleneck on the route was the ferry that carried cars, both passenger and freight, from Locust Point to Canton. It was a both clumsy and time-consuming route. At first, a bridge was considered, but by 1891, to create the most efficient route northward

from downtown, the B&O began digging the Howard Street tunnel from Camden Station to the site of its new uptown station, Mount Royal Station.

The Howard Street tunnel was built during the period 1890 to 1895, to connect Camden with Mount Royal Station and the new Baltimore Belt Railroad, to expand the B&O to points north of the city. The tunnel was 1.5-miles long, double tracked and with a 0.8 percent uphill grade heading north. Steam engines were not a viable mode of transportation through the tunnel due to the smoke and steam billowing out of the tunnel. The tunnel project cost about \$2.4 million to build.

The B&O was the first railroad in the US to operate an electric locomotive to pull trains through a tunnel. This was the first mainline railroad electrification in the country. The project was headed up by the

B&O and the new General Electric Company. Samuel Rea, who later worked on the Penn Station electrification project in New York City, and in 1912 became president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, was the design engineer for the project. The first mainline electric locomotive was built by GE and delivered to the B&O in June 1895. It was a 96-ton behemoth designated as "B&O 1" and used to pull trains through the tunnel, using for power an overhead rail. In 1902, the overhead rail was relocated to track level. All in all, the electric line was 3.5 miles long. Steam engines took over just north of Mount Royal at Huntington Avenue. The project was a great success for GE.

Construction of Mount Royal Station began in 1894 and was completed and opened for passenger use on September 1, 1896. The station was built as a through station as the final piece of the tunnel project.



A B&O electric locomotive and an eastbound Royal Blue Line train in train shed in 1896.

(ICC, Bureau of Valuation, Engineering Field Notes, located at the National Archives at College Park)

It was located on the Bolton lot in a primarily residential area just west of the city center. With both passenger and freight trains using the tunnel, water transfer by car ferry was abandoned.

The station was designed by architects E. Francis Baldwin and Josias Pennington, who designed some of Baltimore's most notable Victorian-era structures. Working for the B&O Railroad for the last quarter of the 19th century, they designed the famous 22-sided roundhouse next to the Mount Clare Station in downtown Baltimore. The world's largest circular industrial building when completed, it is now home to Baltimore's B&O Railroad Museum. The Mount Royal project was to be, as Herb Harwood wrote, "Baldwin's last, largest, and finest B&O station."

Problems cropped up during the design period. The difficulty with the site was

that the tracks came out of the north end of the tunnel below street level and then went under Mount Royal Avenue a block north, so the station either had to be a two-level structure or built at track level. The railroad decided to build it at track level, which necessitated that the block had to be extensively excavated and the grounds regraded. This is the reason why the station is in an artificial hollow below street level.

The station's striking architecture can be described as a mix of Romanesque and Renaissance styles, with its distinctive square 150-foot-high central clock tower, rough cut Port Deposit granite finish, and red tile roof. It was one of the last public buildings built in this style. It was a symmetrically designed two-and-one-half story building with a wide 250-foot frontage facing east. The main entrance was and is still a porte-cochere, projecting forward

from the main wall. The tower once had "B&O" letters below the clock faces on all four sides and was topped off by a steep copper-clad roof.

On the inside of the station, the rich décor of the vaulted 125-foot-long main waiting room with two-story ceilings provided comfortable surroundings for Royal Blue Line passengers. The waiting room had general and ladies' sections with a central ticket office and a small restaurant. B&O customers waited in style—mosaic floors, oak wainscoting, and stamped metal ceilings. Modern, at the time, amenities included a private ladies' parlor, a gentlemen's smoking room, and a news and cigar stand. The station was particularly known for its rocking chairs, added in the 1920s, oriental carpets, and fireplaces at each end of the waiting room. A gramophone playing music added a graceful touch.



Exterior view of Mount Royal Station with B&O seal. (ICC, Bureau of Valuation, Engineering Field Notes, located at the National Archives at College Park)

Adjacent to the station on the west side is the huge train shed, covering the entire distance from the tunnel to the tunnels under Mount Royal Avenue. Today, CSX trains exiting the tunnel continue to travel through the shed. The shed, which still exists in near original condition, is 800 feet long, 71 feet wide and had three tracks which narrowed to two tracks to the Mount Royal Avenue tunnels. In 1936, the shed was extended from 400 feet to its current length of 800 feet to accommodate longer trains. An attractive ornamental iron fence separates the shed from the grounds and decorates the covered staircase from the shed to Mount Royal Avenue. In the front of the station, a curving driveway led downhill into the hollow, past gardens and lawns to the front entrance. The driveway and the adjacent parking lot allowed for ample parking at the station.

The station, according to noted author

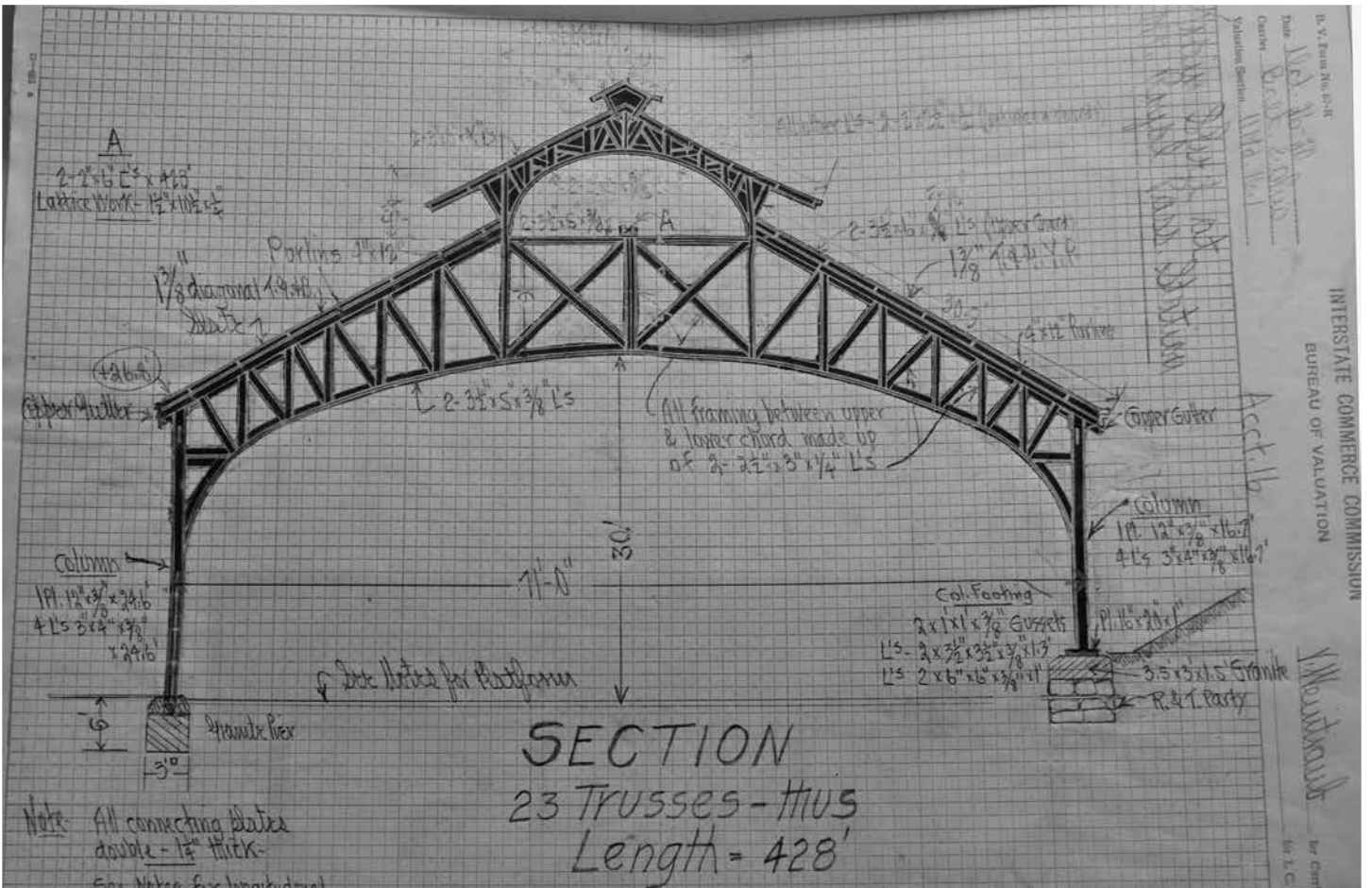
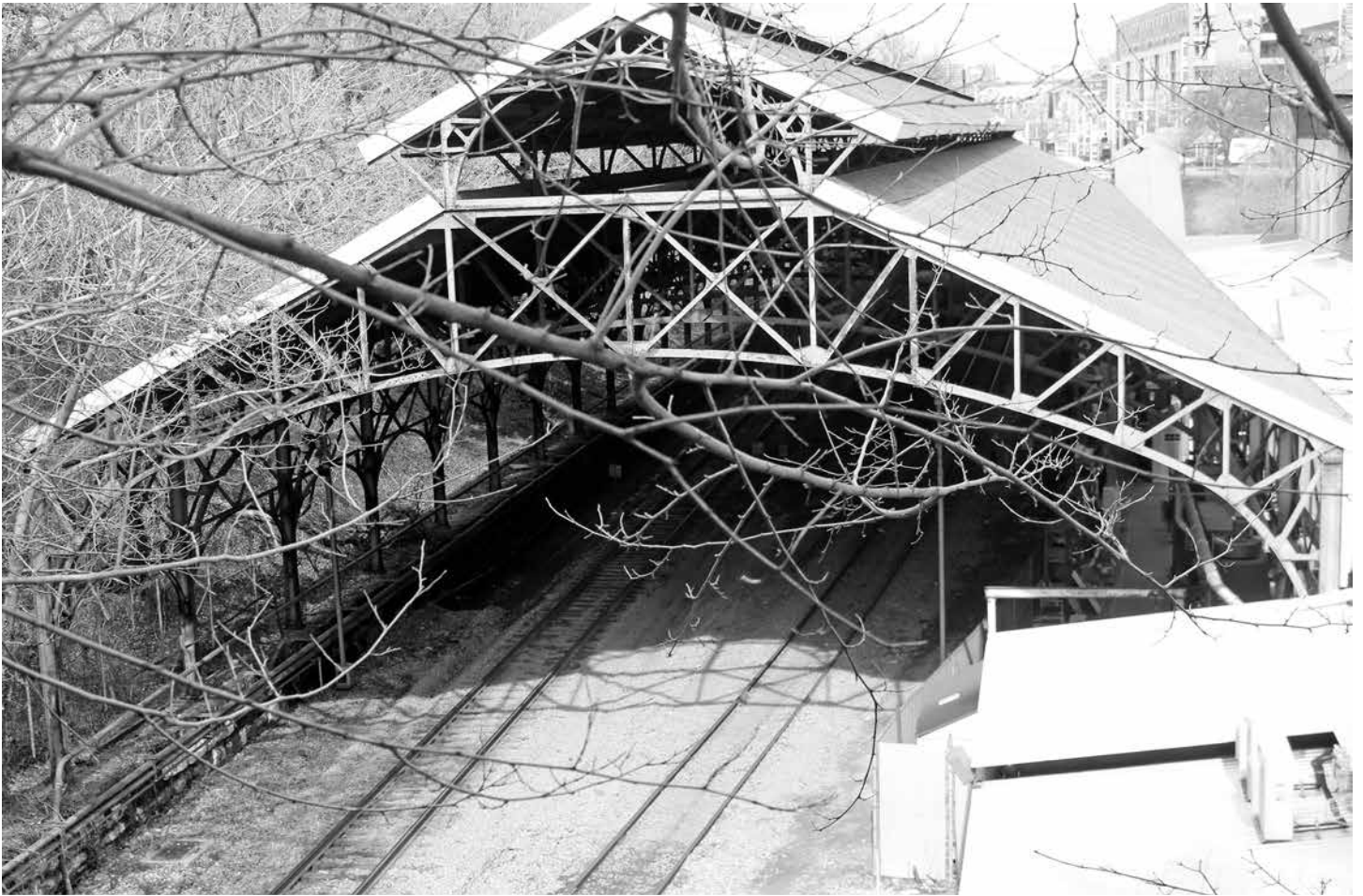
Herbert H. Harwood “was everything the Camden was not—spacious, supremely fashionable, aesthetic, and well matched to its genteel surroundings.” The book of the Royal Blue also declared “Mount Royal Station enjoys the distinction of being the most magnificent railway station in the United States built and used exclusively by one railway.” Mount Royal served the “better” residential areas as they moved north and northwest from the city, and the station was convenient to the northern Baltimore suburbs.

Unfortunately, the station was never as popular with passengers as was Camden Station downtown, even though passenger business increased during the early years as the residential neighborhoods filled in. Harwood added that “in its way, the monumental station was as symbolic of the Royal Blue Line as the ornate rolling stock and graceful high-driven locomotives:

beautiful, luxurious, and underutilized.” The station was the B&O’s last major passenger station construction project and cost \$300,000 to build. The good news was, the opening of the Howard Street tunnel and Mount Royal Station did, in fact, speed up the Royal Blue Line service from Washington to New York to match the Pennsylvania Railroad’s running times.

During its history, the City of Baltimore used the station as its official welcoming point to greet distinguished visitors, including several US presidents, British Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald, Cardinal Gibbons, and Queen Marie of Romania.

As more Americans embraced the automobile and the airplane, passenger rail travel declined sharply and, by the late 1950s, the B&O’s famed Royal Blue service had ceased. Reluctantly, the B&O closed the Mount Royal Station in 1961,



The Mount Royal train shed (drawing from ICC Bureau of Valuation records; image taken by author)