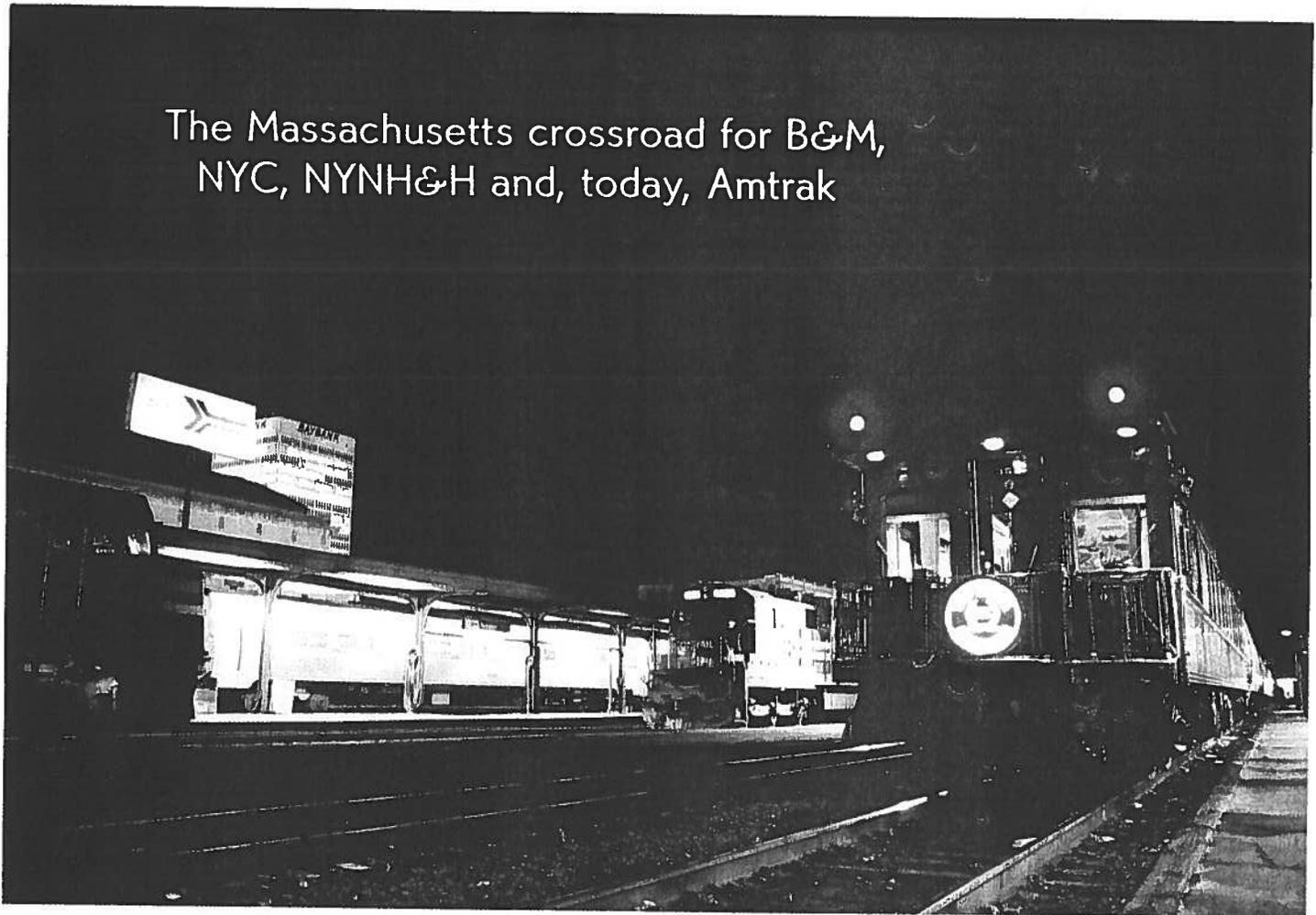


SPRINGFIELD UNION STATION

The Massachusetts crossroad for B&M,
NYC, NYNH&H and, today, Amtrak



Mike Schofer

Private car Lehigh Valley 353 adorns Amtrak's westbound *Lake Shore Limited*, pausing at Springfield, Mass., on Nov. 2, 1986. Equipment for Connecticut Valley runs is at left, while Conrail made its presence known at the then-60-

year-old union station in the form of GE C30-7A No. 6585 resting between assignments; CR's division headquarters occupy most of the main station building—not Amtrak.

ROBERT BOUDREAU

Springfield, the third largest city in Massachusetts, marks the crossroad of two important New England rail arteries. North/south traffic flows on Guilford's Boston & Maine Connecticut River line while the east-west title goes to Conrail. Amtrak, of course, is the other major railroad in town. Amtrak owns the former New York, New Haven & Hartford main line south of Springfield (over which B&M has trackage rights), and also operates trains along Conrail's east-west main.

For Amtrak, Springfield is an important station, principally as a terminating point for Northeast Corridor traffic splitting from mainline NEC trains at New Haven, Conn. But it is also an important stop for the Boston section of the Chicago-East Coast *Lake Shore Limited* and for the modicum of Washington-Boston trains routed via the Inland Route through Springfield rather than the Shore Line Route.

Once considered one of Amtrak's four worst stations, Springfield Union Station underwent a \$300,000 upgrading that began in 1973. Actually, what Amtrak did was to renovate but a small portion of the huge structure for its own use (more on that later). Now, in 1988, the station is beginning to show its age again, but Amtrak's station personnel and toll-free number keep things moving smoothly.

Only a fraction of its former size, today's station is adequate for the number of people handled. Travelers feel relieved once inside, especially if they have trudged two blocks from the new bus terminal past boarded up bars and over litter-strewn sidewalks. This bleak neighborhood is undergoing change, however. Across the street from Amtrak's side of the terminal, former businesses have been converted to studio apartments, many overlooking the rail activity.

I recall in particular a day in 1983 when I decided to head for



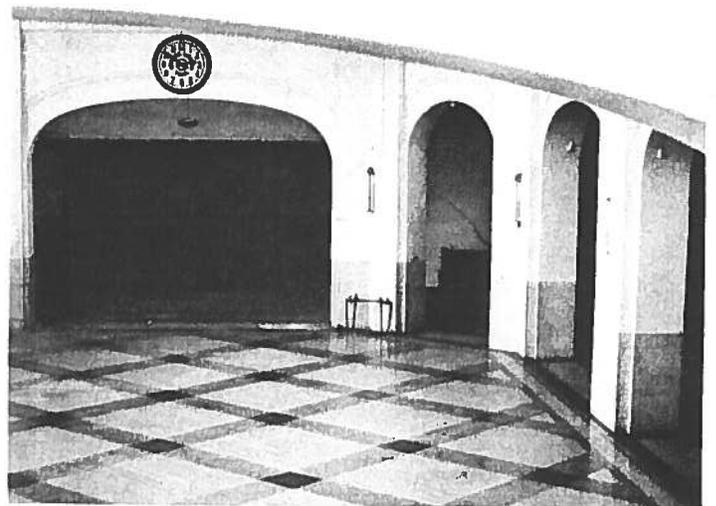
Robert Boudreau

(Above) The original "front" of Springfield Union Station is on Frank B. Murray Street, but the main entrance shown here is not open to Amtrak passengers. Conrail offices are on the top two floors; the lower attached building at right is the abandoned mail and express building. (Right) The concourse halls remain empty.

Union Station to watch the arrival of the *Lake Shore Limited*. The place was nearly empty, since Amtrak's "Connecticut Valley" trains (those up from New Haven) had already arrived or departed. However, I wasn't alone. Even in the 1980s, people come to the station merely to watch trains. An elderly couple brought their little granddaughter to see Amtrak's Chicago-Boston flagship.

I was impressed by the courtesy of Amtrak personnel toward these people who were not passengers. The attention afforded them was not in vain—the couple was already considering a train trip to give their granddaughter a sample of rail travel. As we chatted, the woman admitted the station was not as bad as she had imagined. Her husband, meanwhile, reminisced about his train travel from Springfield during the war years when men and women wearing uniforms of the various armed services darted about in seemingly conflicting directions. Fear of getting on the wrong train was indeed very real for those who had to be at appointed posts at strictly adhered-to times.

I could remember as a child the turmoil at the depot during World War II; but it was difficult to picture the controversy surrounding railroads of the area in the early 1800s, when Springfield was about to be put on the railroad map. In 1835, three routes were proposed between Albany and Boston. One involved a central routing through Massachusetts via Watertown, Rutland, Belchertown, Northampton (now the first Amtrak stop north of Springfield) and Adams. Connecticut, wanting to capture a share of the transportation market, was pushing for a Boston-Hartford-Albany routing. Winner was the Boston & Worcester Railroad Company, which, two years earlier, had already obtained a charter to run a line westward through Springfield to the New York state line. This charter, the Western Railroad Corporation, would help Springfield maintain its transportation supremacy in western Massachu-



Vincent Thomas Sayers

setts. Work was begun in 1837. Trains were running between Springfield and Worcester by October 1839, and by Dec. 21, 1841, Boston and Albany were joined by rail. Such was the roots of the Boston & Albany, which was formed by the consolidation of the Western Railroad and the B&W in 1867. B&A was leased to New York Central in 1900, and finally merged into NYC in 1961.

Southward from Springfield, the Hartford & Springfield (which went into the NYNH&H eventually) was opened in 1844. Northward, the Connecticut River Railroad Corporation (which became the Boston & Maine) was completed to the Vermont state line by 1849, thus giving Springfield access to all four points of the compass.

Springfield's first railroad station was constructed of wood and completed in 1841. Built on the west side of Main Street, it was just slightly west of today's depot. Trains ran through the middle of the covered station, which had a castle-like tower in each corner, and across Main Street. This building lasted ten years, until it caught fire and burned down.



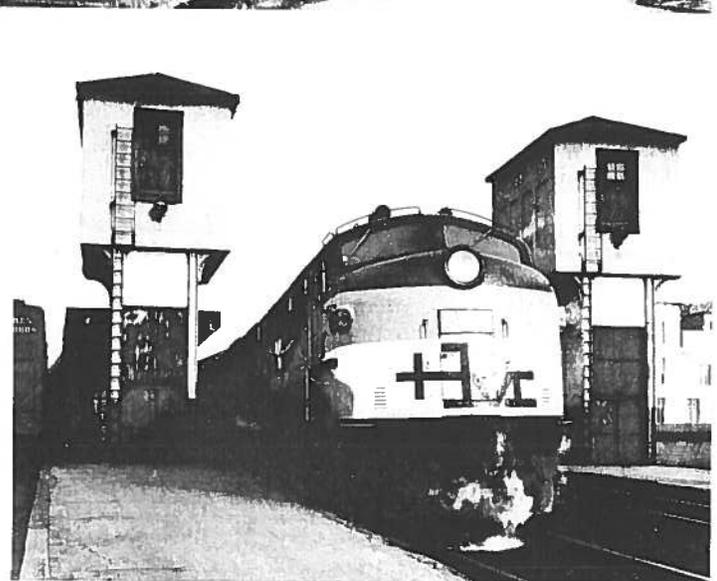
(Left) An E7/E8 pair leads a New York Central mail train at Union Station on Aug. 26, 1967. (Below) NYNH&H FL9 2012 heads up an old-and-new pair of "American Flyer" coaches at Springfield on the same day. The train will connect with a Boston-New York mainline run at New Haven. (Bottom) Boston & Maine Fs on the north bound Ambassador (New York/Grand Central-Montreal) are framed by the baggage elevators at the west of the platforms. B&M trains had to make a back-up move to reach the station. Date: Nov. 17, 1962.

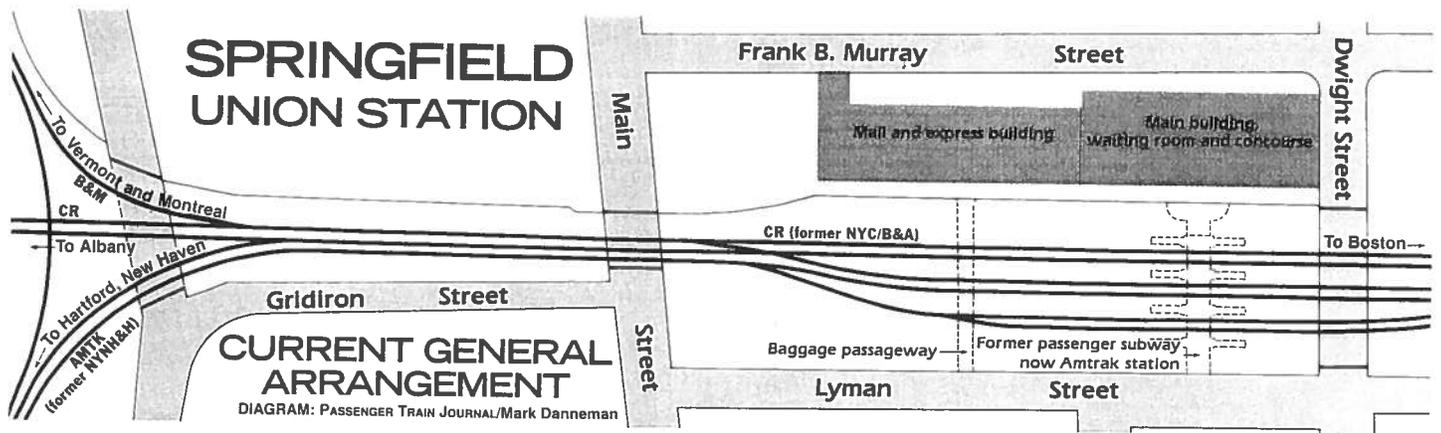
Three photos, George A. Forero Jr.



The next structure, built in 1851, was a huge iron-and-brick-covered building 400 feet long and 113 feet wide. The architect, George Whistler, was the brother of the famous painter, James Whistler. Their father, George Washington Whistler, was the chief civil engineer of the Western Railroad. Both sides of the building had facilities of a complete depot. The north side was used by westbound Boston & Albany trains and by the Connecticut River Railroad—which also used an outside track, suggesting the line might have had heavy traffic patterns. The south side of the station was shared by eastbound B&A traffic and New York, New Haven & Hartford trains.

Architecturally, the most beautiful Springfield station was the third, a Romanesque depot built of Milford granite and





Longmeadow sandstone. On July 7, 1889, the station was opened for passenger service. Architects for this asymmetrical twin station were Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, successors to the famous Henry Hobson Richardson. The firm also designed Boston's South Station (see the March 1981 *PASSENGER TRAIN JOURNAL*).

The depot was located about two blocks east of the first two stations at approximately the same location as today's terminal. Four through tracks ran between the two station buildings; the tracks were elevated on a stone arch built over Main Street, and the depot was constructed at this level. No longer would train and trolley tracks need to cross each other at grade on the main thoroughfare of the city.

By 1925, the four through tracks handled 1,400 traffic movements each day. Nowhere in the world was traffic per track more dense. To handle that and an anticipated increase in traffic, construction of the present station complex—the fourth to be built—was started in May 1925. It opened for passenger service on Dec. 19, 1926. The structure cost \$1,500,000 out of a total outlay for terminal facilities of \$4,387,000.

At that time, the situation was similar to that of Amtrak's early years. The Feb. 7, 1925, edition of the *SPRINGFIELD UNION* stated "... instead of having one of the worst railroad stations in the country, Springfield, in its new \$5,000,000 terminal, will have one of the best in America and the finest on the entire Atlantic seaboard."

The station is a three-story, 300-foot by 120-foot gray brick building, trimmed with buff Indiana limestone. Its stark office-building appearance fits in well with today's urban re-

newal area. To the right is the now-abandoned mail-and-express building. Away from the view of passengers, baggage and mail could be brought up to the tracks by means of an under-track tunnel and elevators to each platform.

On the above rear of this building, overlooking the tracks, is the now-defunct interlocking tower. Once considered the last word in modern interlocking technology, the tower was closed in 1964 after CTC (Centralized Traffic Control) facilities were installed on the third floor of the station. The CTC was used to direct all train movements on the New York Central between Boston and Albany, including those of the station trackage.

The north entrance on Liberty Street (since changed to Frank B. Murray Street) opened into the 120-foot-long, 90-foot-wide concourse. As with the rest of the terminal, this, too, was designed for efficiency. So as not to hamper the flow of traffic, the concourse was empty except for a Travelers' Aid booth. The cream-colored reinforced concrete ceilings and walls were blended together with the terrazzo floors by various light shades of polished marble trim.

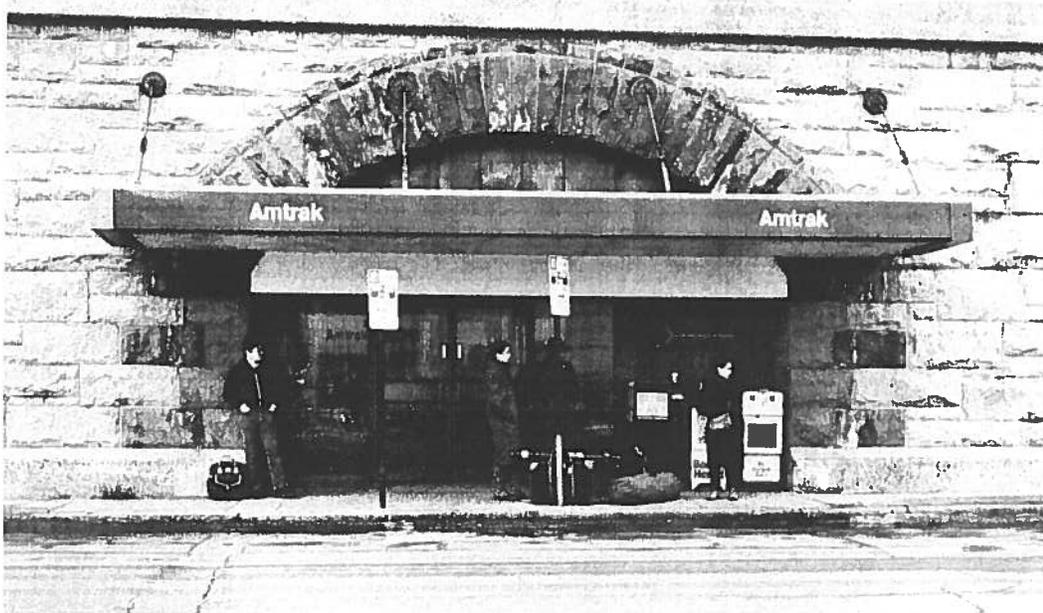
On the immediate right was a restaurant 66 feet deep and 30 feet wide, capable of seating over 100 hungry travelers. Next came the ticket windows, followed by a passageway off which was an emergency room for men and a baggage area. Because of current emphasis on mobility for the handicapped, we might assume that in earlier times these people were forgotten. Not so! The passageway also contained a room for wheelchairs.

Those weary from their journey could relax in the waiting room at the east end of the building. Over 650 could be seated

Bruce Beardsley

New Haven Fairbanks-Morse H16-44 No. 1600 and a Geep swing around the south wye and past a snorting Alco switcher west of the Springfield station with a mid-morning departure for New Haven and New York in spring 1967. Interstate 91 now obscures much of the junction west of Union Station.





Vincent Thomas Sayers

(Left) The new "front" to Springfield Union Station is actually the old Lyman Street entrance to what was the passenger subway. This entrance is not in a building as such, but in the south retaining wall of the elevated trackage. (Below) Officials mill about the new waiting room/ticket office on opening day in August 1973.

in the 120 x 82-foot area away from the hubbub of the concourse. Travelers seeking something to do could obtain a magazine or paper at the Union News Company concession, and an opportunity for a cool drink was available at the soda fountain. Both of these businesses were located on the south side of the waiting room. When the restaurant near the entrance went out of business, the soda fountain furnished lunches until it, too, closed—supposedly for repairs. A CLOSED BY THE BOARD OF HEALTH sign appeared later. It never reopened.

Men in need of a shave, haircut and shoe shine could visit the businesses on the opposite side of the waiting room. Well-to-do ladies could take advantage of hairdressing and manicure parlors. At hand, also, was a smoking room for men, men's and women's rest rooms and an emergency room for women. Apparently, train travel in the early 1900s could be hazardous to your health.

Straight ahead, through the concourse, a subway passage 30 feet wide and 12 feet high led to Lyman Street, the south side of the terminal. Planners anticipated having the Liberty Street entrance serve both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, while Lyman Street would handle trolleys and pedestrians. This plan theoretically eliminated bottlenecks at either end.

The Lyman Street side was nothing more than a 20-foot-high granite retaining wall with brownstone trim, obtained from the former station, built to accommodate extra fill on which additional trackage would sit. The subway ran under all eleven through tracks, and passengers reached the tracks by way of enclosed, heated stairways on either side of the subway, emerging in glass-and-iron enclosures on the covered platforms. In the subway, each side of the stairway doors had a roll board listing each stop for the next train departing on that track. Wooden seating against the remaining wall provided passengers with another place to wait while their trains rumbled in overhead.

The interlocking tower was still controlling over 100 trains per day in 1954, 90 of which were passenger. But despite the continued relative high rate of passenger activity at Springfield Union Station, New York Central System in 1956 put the station up for sale as part of an economy move—Even then, the overall decline in rail passenger service was painfully evident. Nonetheless, B&A officials did not expect a quick sale of the buildings and land, which were assessed at over \$1 million.

Such was the beginning of years of speculation for the terminal. It was rumored in 1957 that the station, still unsold, might perhaps be used for a state building, but both NYC and



Photographer unknown

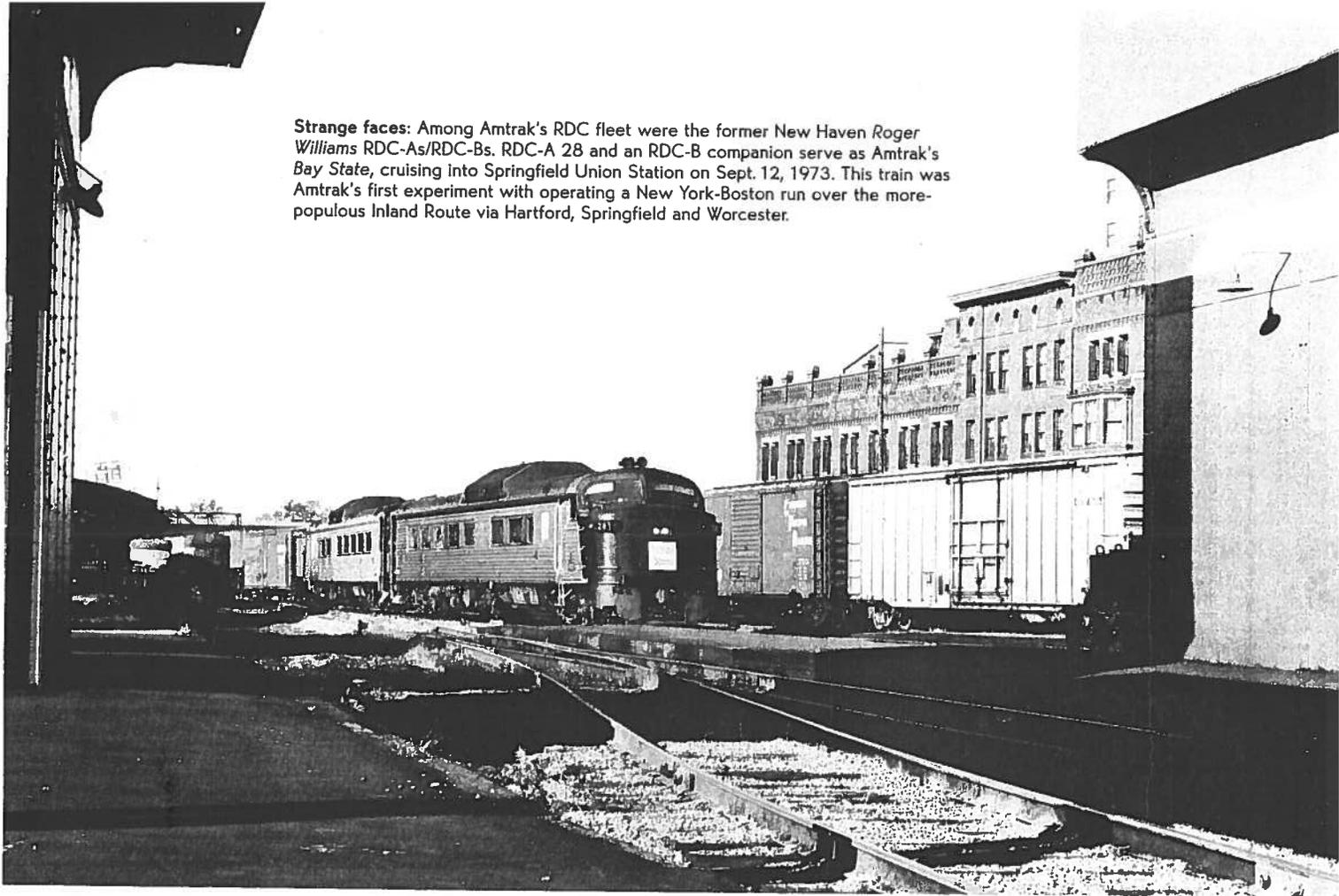
a state representative denied this. Another unfruitful idea at this time was to use the depot as a giant supermarket.

Another sign of the declining passenger market was the removal of most of the storage lockers in 1959. In 1961, Red Cap service was eliminated entirely, and three train callers were laid off. Henceforth, train announcing was done from a microphone in the baggage check room. Then, in 1964, the Springfield Taxpayers Association suggested using Union Terminal for the police and fire departments. That same year, the City Planning Department considered making the station into a transportation center for rail, bus, taxi and even helicopters. The following year, the waiting room was walled off and the Lyman Street entrance blocked off.

On March 9, 1966, it appeared Union Station might become an intermodal terminal, as intercity buses began using the facility when the Greyhound terminal several blocks away was being torn down to make way for route 91. However, a year later, the New Haven petitioned the city to move passenger service out of Union Station to its freight office. At this point, traffic had dwindled to about a dozen trains per day and the Railway Express Agency was planning to move to a new warehouse.

On March 31, 1969, a new bus terminal opened in the urban renewal area called "New North," effectively killing any chance of a transportation center at Union Station. Once again, the city was petitioned that passenger service be moved, this time by Penn Central in 1970. Earlier in the year, David Buntzman of Scarsdale, N.Y., had purchased the station for \$150,000. Buntzman agreed the railroad should move—a

Strange faces: Among Amtrak's RDC fleet were the former New Haven *Roger Williams* RDC-As/RDC-Bs. RDC-A 28 and an RDC-B companion serve as Amtrak's *Bay State*, cruising into Springfield Union Station on Sept. 12, 1973. This train was Amtrak's first experiment with operating a New York-Boston run over the more-populous Inland Route via Hartford, Springfield and Worcester.



Tim Phelps

railroad terminal was not in his modernization plans. But, in a statement read to the city council, Mayor Freedman said, "I feel that the petition of Penn Central should not be approved because it seems to be a continuing affirmation of the railroad's decision to provide second-class service to a first-rate city. The railroad seems to wish to doom its own future." Operations remained in the station, and Amtrak was born in May 1971, inheriting several Penn Central passenger trains in the process.

In 1972 Springfield Union Station was named one of the four worst Amtrak stations in the country. Amtrak decided to do something about it, no doubt influenced by two developments: (1) the debate over whether the proposed Montreal service would operate through New York State via Albany or through New England, and (2) the re-inauguration of Chicago-Boston service in the form of the *Lake Shore Limited*. In 1973, construction was started on a new \$300,000 facility which was to be built *within* Springfield Union Station, in a part of the subway beneath the tracks. Over the objections of the building's owner, Amtrak put up a wall to keep the paint-peeling concourse—which would remain unused—from the passengers' view. The Lyman Street entrance that had been sealed several years before was reopened, and this would be the only entrance to the new 8,000-foot-square facility—which was approximately one tenth the size of the once-bustling station.

Amtrak's renovation was probably the most positive occurrence since the decline of passenger service began its rapid acceleration after World War II. Although Amtrak was no longer using the impressive concourse, the smaller station was clean and modern. Plastic seating, a lowered ceiling, air-conditioning and a new ticket counter with a computer reservation terminal brought it into the jet age—more or less.

As you enter through the double glass doors of the "new" station, the brightly lit interior reveals seats for 22 on the left wall. These are separated by telephones and a door marked TRACK 8. At the end of this wall, a modern-looking metal-and-glass door leads to the stairs up to platform 3. On the right side, vending machines are unappetizingly sandwiched between the rest room entrances. Next is a small alcove containing a cube of storage lockers, followed by the ticket office and an elevator to platform 3.

The back wall has a rack for timetables. To the left of the



Tom Nelligan

The norm today are Amtrak F40s and Conrail Geeps and GEs. In this 1981 scene, the Boston section of the *Lake Shore Limited*, train 448, is arriving from Chicago. For a time, some New Haven-Springfield runs were protected by Budd SPV2000s, which connected at New Haven with Shore Line trains. Now, Amtrak operates Washington/Philadelphia/New York-Springfield through-car service, with Amfleet and F40s.



Night train: The *Montrealer* drifts into Springfield Union Station during its overnight trek through New England. Currently, with *Montrealer* service sus-

pending account of track-related problems north of Springfield, Vermont service is provided by a dedicated bus connecting to Springfield trains.

Vincent Thomas Sayers

rack, another glass doorway leads out of the waiting room into what Amtrak calls "the tunnel." This is simply another portion of the subway, which permits access to two diagonally opposed stairways leading to platforms 1 and 2; the other two stairways to these tracks have been blocked off. Above, six of the eleven through tracks remain.

Until the *Montrealer* was suspended in 1987, the station was open 24 hours a day. That train (and its return to full service is beginning to look assured) represents a bit of an anomaly in station operations: Because Springfield Union Station lies on the east-west Conrail line and east of the B&M/Amtrak north-south main, the *Montrealer* had a back-up maneuver on the wye west of the station—a maneuver that was necessary for all passenger trains calling at Springfield off B&M's Connecticut River line. For trains up from New Haven which terminate at Springfield, consists usually head into the station; when they depart as southbound (westbound) trains, they usually back out of the terminal through the north wye onto the Connecticut River main to become properly pointed for the trip back to New Haven.

Demolition of five of the station buildings and the taking of land through a course of eminent domain was proposed by a city chancellor in February 1977, with the idea of building a parking garage nearby. Unfortunately, this was never done, and to this day parking remains a problem for passengers. One must wonder what Amtrak passengers must think when alighting on platform 1: The three tracks between platform 1 and the station building have been removed and the right-of-way turned into a parking lot for Conrail personnel.

On April 30, 1977, the red carpet was rolled out—literally—as tuxedo-clad pages escorted people to the concourse entrance. The crowd of 450 arriving in 1930s attire were not rail passengers, but guests of the 33rd annual ball of the Women's Symphony League. For two months, the women of the League had worked to clean up the abandoned station, while local carpenters volunteered their time to satisfy the building codes. Bedecked in apple blossoms, birch branches, geraniums and palms, Union Station for one night was once again the center of attraction for downtown Springfield. The League hoped the ball would encourage future downtown events and interest in renovating the whole station. The latter was never realized, although recently the exterior of the structure was cleaned.

Conrail has actually helped to keep the terminal from becoming another derelict building. In 1978, the corporation moved its New England divisional headquarters from Boston to Springfield and into the top two floors of the station. The move has kept at least part of the building looking alive—a better fate than that of the broken-windowed mail/baggage building.

As long as Amtrak continues to serve Springfield, and as long as Conrail remains a tenant, the station's future probably remains secure, although the overall facilities will, for the foreseeable future, largely remain empty. If nothing else, 62 years after its opening, and following years of neglect, decline, plans, speculation and rumors, today's Springfield Union Station is still being used solely for the purpose intended—rail-road business.