



A HISTORY AND GUIDE TO
**OMAHA'S
UNION
STATION**



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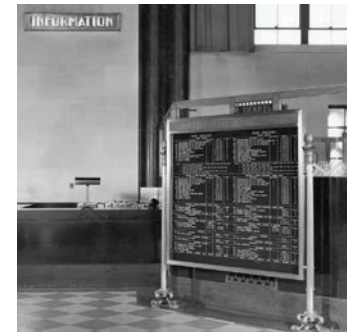


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PREFACE

In the predawn hours of May 2, 1971, the final Union Pacific passenger train rumbled into Omaha's Union Station. The last call to board the train and the last few footsteps of embarking passengers echoed in the main waiting room. Minutes later the churning gears and steel wheels pulled the train away. The station superintendent locked the doors and the main waiting room fell silent. It was the end of an era.

Today, Union Station has found new life as The Durham Museum. Though it houses thousands of objects related to the history of Omaha and the surrounding region, the station itself is the museum's largest artifact. We invite you to spend a few minutes exploring the Suzanne and Walter Scott Great Hall, formerly the main waiting room, and rediscover some of the history hidden in this amazing building.

Omaha's Union Station opened on January 15, 1931. It was Omaha's second Union Station and Union Pacific's seventh train depot in the city since 1866. The new station included just about every amenity a passenger could want: a 24-hour restaurant, news and magazine stand, barbershop, taxi stand, telegraph office, hospital, and traveler's aid office. Through the 1930s and 1940s the station bustled with activity.

Can you image the sounds that filled the building? In the west hallway, the telegraph clicked and telephones rang as people rushed to catch the electric streetcar on the 10th Street bridge. In the east wing, plates and silverware clinked in the bustling restaurant while the newsstand operator shouted out the headlines of the day. The station's Red Caps, in their distinctive round red hats, assisted passengers with luggage through the south doors and to the waiting trains on the tracks below.



During World War II, countless American servicemen rolled through Omaha by train. Travel-weary soldiers rested and relaxed in the United Service Organization canteen, located in the offices above the west wing. Union Station had its peak year after the war. In 1946, 64 steam engines chugged through the station, picking up and dropping off 10,000 passengers daily.

Over the next 20 years, highways, interstates, and airplanes replaced trains as the preferred means of long-distance travel. With traffic dwindling to just a few trains each day, Union Station closed in 1971.

Union Pacific donated the building to the City of Omaha in 1973. Many ideas to reuse the building were debated, as well as the possibility of tearing it down. It remained vacant until 1975. By the time the Western Heritage Museum (the original name of The Durham Museum) moved in, the building needed repairs.

The museum began with a small but dedicated group of staff and volunteers. They helped to restore the building and laid the groundwork for the museum's exhibits and permanent collections. In 1995, a group of community business leaders and philanthropists, led by Margre and Charles Durham, began committing the resources needed to return Union Station to

its original grandeur. The museum closed for more than a year as major renovations, including the restoration of the main waiting room, were completed. The museum reopened in 1997 as the Durham Western Heritage Museum, a name that was shortened in 2008 to The Durham Museum.

The station recalls a bygone era of our history and heritage that is as uniquely American as it is Omahan. It is this



history that makes Union Station The Durham Museum's largest and most important artifact. It is why the community investment to restore and preserve this building is so important. And, it is why we are here – to share this experience with visitors like you who come to discover, reflect, and remember.

Welcome to Union Station.
Welcome to The Durham Museum.

What is a Union Station?

It might seem like every major American city has a "Union Station." If you have been to places like St. Louis, Kansas City, or Denver, you might have even visited another one. To be a union station, a train depot must serve more than one railroad line. Seven railroads stopped at Omaha's Union Station:

- Union Pacific
- Chicago & Northwestern
- Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific
- Chicago, Rock Island, & Pacific (also known as the Rock Island)
- Illinois Central System
- Missouri Pacific
- Wabash Railway



Union Station's Architect – Gilbert Stanley Underwood

Gilbert Stanley Underwood designed Omaha's Union Station. Years before, Union Pacific began hiring Underwood to design lodges in national parks. The company wanted to attract tourists to national parks, who would use their railroad to travel there. Underwood designed many lodges, including the Old Faithful Lodge in Yellowstone National Park and Bryce Canyon Lodge in Bryce Canyon National Park.

What Makes Omaha's Union Station Art Deco?

Omaha's Union Station is an example of art deco architecture. What does that mean? Its name comes from a shortened form of the 1925 World's Fair held in Paris, the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts). Art deco was a popular style for many of the skyscrapers built in the 1920s and 1930s. These buildings were vertical, had terraced-form sides, and exterior and interior stylized decorations.

Omaha's Union Station is not as tall as those skyscrapers, but it has vertical design. The high ceiling, cathedral windows, and pillars towering in the Suzanne and Walter Scott Great Hall make the entire room feel tall.

Did you notice how the exterior design of Union Station looks like stairs?

Architectural historians call that "terraced form." You can find this trait on many art deco buildings from the era.

Architects used geometric shapes to stylize natural elements such as plants or animals in their art deco designs. If you look at the clocks in the Great Hall you will see two giant birds on either side. The architect stylized these birds by using zigzags, squares, and lines. Can you find the two ears of corn in the decoration around the western clock? Look around the ceiling, walls, and floors: do you see any other natural elements made up of shapes?

Another trait of art deco architecture is the use of metallic materials. Architects used metals such as aluminum and stainless steel to give buildings a modern, futuristic feel.

Underwood designed all of the station's decorations. He used Caen stone (a type of limestone quarried near Caen, France) for the interior walls, highly polished black Belgium marble for the wainscoting (the panels on the lower portion of the walls), and a terrazzo floor laid out in a checkered pattern with three large sunbursts. On the ceiling Underwood used gold, silver, and

aluminum leaf to emphasize decorative elements.

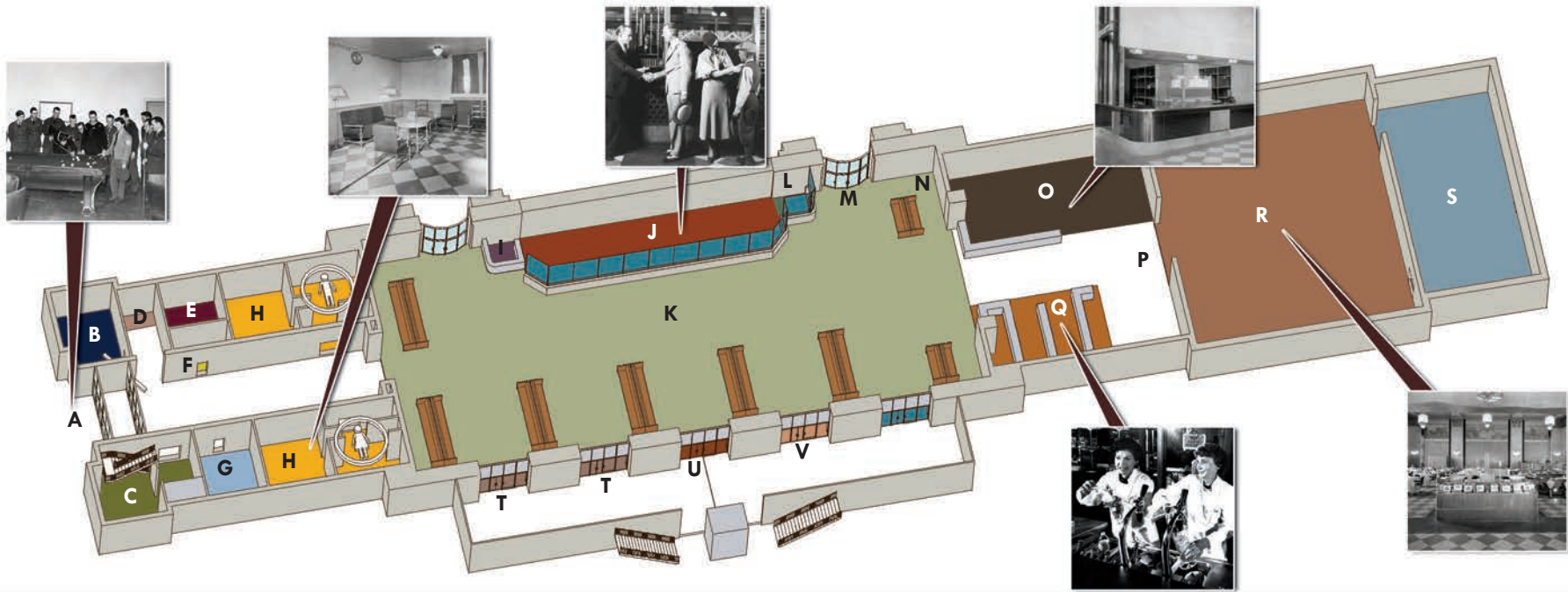
Can you see the herringbone (also known as a chevron) pattern on the ceiling? This shape often appears in art deco architecture. Keep your eyes peeled for this design, which appears in many architectural elements in the Suzanne and Walter Scott Great Hall.



Big rooms like this one need light. Both the windows and massive light fixtures are original to Union Station. Underwood designed the six brass lighting fixtures to create the effect of a "great luminous mass" when lit. Each fixture weighs more than 2,000 pounds. He also used bronze in the spandrels at the top of the windows. Glazed in a rose tint, the windows give a slightly pink tint to light streaming in.



MAP OF UNION STATION (1942-1944)



A. USO Club/Men's Service Center: Directly above the west wing was the USO Club. This area included a letter-writing station, dormitory, showers, and bath facilities. The north side housed the USO Club game room with pool tables, table tennis, cards, and light food service.

B. Barbershop & Shoe Shine: Travelers were able to visit the station's barber for a haircut or have their shoes shined while they waited for their train.

C. Hospital: The station had a well-equipped hospital and nurse's station, with direct access to track level through the elevator.

D. Union Pacific Passenger Agent: In this office, passengers could meet with a Union Pacific Passenger Agent regarding their travel plans.

E. Offices for Superintendent & Station Master: The station's leadership offices were located in this area of the station.

F. Military Police Station: During the war, military police were stationed in this office managing military paperwork and ensuring orderly conduct of the soldiers passing through the station.

G. Western Union Telephone & Telegraph Room: Travelers could send and receive telegrams and make phone calls in this area of the station.

H. Men's Smoking Room (northside) and Ladies Lounge (southside)

I. Information Desk: At this desk, travelers were welcomed to the station and could inquire about the station, surrounding area, and train routes. The station's phones were also answered in this area.

J. Ticket Office: Travelers taking the trains would purchase their tickets or make reservations at one of the 12 ticket windows or "cages."

K. Main Waiting Room: In this room, travelers would wait for their train, purchase tickets, and say "goodbye" and "hello" to loved ones.

L. U.S. Military Transportation Desk: Travel plans and reservations for service personnel were made at this location.

M. Taxi Door: In this area, people could catch a taxi.

N. Travelers' Aid Desk: Here, passengers were able to meet with Passenger Agents to check for lost luggage or address other travel concerns.

O. Baggage Room/Parcel Check: Passengers coming and going from the station would check and pick up their bags in this area.

P. Locker Rooms: Directly above the baggage claim area and Soda Fountain, there were locker rooms and facilities for the Red Caps. They provided services for customers such as delivering baggage, escorting passengers to their trains, and other services as needed.

Q. Station Gift Shop & Soda Fountain: Travelers could purchase gifts, newspapers, magazines, or necessities at the gift shop and enjoy a cool treat at the soda fountain.

R. Hayden House Restaurant: Union Station was home to the Hayden House restaurant, which was a popular destination for both passengers and the citizens of Omaha. Half the restaurant was designed for formal, tablecloth service with the other half designated for counter service.

Additional Floors: The station's track level was used for various functions of the train station. The western third included areas for mail handling and express freight. The center section included areas for freight and package handling. The east section housed the baggage storage areas, baggage agent office, the Union Pacific mailroom, and the "under the kitchen" facilities for cold storage and the bakery.

S. Kitchen: A kitchen located east of the dining room served the Hayden House Restaurant. Directly under the kitchen was a bakery and cooling lockers for fish, meat, vegetables, and dairy products.

T. Concourse Vestibule – Ticketed passengers: The concourse or "gate" area located on the south side of the main waiting room was where passengers would have their tickets checked before passing to their designated train.

U. Concourse Vestibule – Passenger Arrival: Passengers returning to Omaha would arrive through this gate.

V. Concourse Vestibule – First-Class Passengers: Passengers with first-class tickets and reservations with assigned seats would enter through this gate.

The Mezzanine level, the area between track level and the main waiting room, housed the Rail Express offices.

The basement of Union Station was used for freight storage and locker rooms. The freight elevator that hauled baggage and freight to all floors of the building is still in use today.

Union Station has a multitude of unique features, many with a hidden story. Using this guide, you can follow in the footsteps of many of the passengers who came before you.

The Suzanne and Walter Scott Great Hall

This grand space was where travelers spent most of their time. Known as the Main Waiting Room, this is where travelers purchased tickets, checked their baggage (at the baggage claim on the east end), and waited for trains to arrive. From time to time the train caller's voice would echo above the chatter announcing the latest arrivals as well as which trains were ready for boarding.

In 2007, the main waiting room was renamed Suzanne and Walter Scott Great Hall in recognition of the couple's many contributions to the restoration of Union Station and the museum's exhibitions and education programs.

The Ticket Counter

Well before hearing the conductor call "All aboard!" a passenger would begin his journey at the brass ticket windows where travelers purchased their tickets. Look closely at the floor in front of the ticket windows (now the Gilbert M. and Martha A. Hitchcock Museum Shop). Do you see any indentations? The dents came from the many tens of thousands of people who stood in line there.

The **Great Hall** really is great! The room is **72 feet wide** and **159 ½ feet long**. The ceiling is 60 feet high. **Can you imagine** painting and applying all of the decoration to the ceiling?

Statues

In 1996, John Labja, an Omaha sculptor, crafted the six groups of statues spread throughout the Great Hall. The statues symbolize people who passed through Union Station. Models for each statue dressed in period clothing. Labja used wet clay to quickly carve their likeness. After he completed sculpting, he cast the statues in a hard resin.

Labja gave each sculpture a personality. The statues' positioning, looks on their faces, or even the way they might be holding or looking at an object tells us something. Take a moment to visit with each of these travelers on your way through Union Station but be careful not to touch as the statues are fragile pieces of art.

Soda Fountain

The soda fountain buzzed with activity during the station's busy years. The energetic sales pitches of station workers were just another part of the sights and sounds of the lively station. Tobacco products once lined the east counter where the candy is today. Newspapers,

magazines, and postcards circled the center counter. For people short on time the soda fountain offered tasty treats and quick eats.

Before you move on, taste some history. The restored 1930s-era soda fountain still turns out some of the best, most authentic milk shakes around. Stop and have one!

South Gallery

To reach the train, passengers walked through the double doors below the "To Trains" signs and onto a long walkway connecting Union Station with the Burlington Station across the tracks. Long stairways, later replaced with escalators, descended to the tracks and the waiting trains below.

Today the South Gallery is home to an exhibition that expands on the history of Union Station. The gallery also features a display of photography by Charles Guildner. The images, donated by Suzanne and Walter Scott in honor of Charles Durham, reveal present-day views of traditional rural and ranching life. A matching set resides at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.



East Wing

Swanson Gallery

Union Station's popular restaurant offered appetizing meals enjoyed by travelers and locals alike. Patrons had their choice of the lunch counter on one side or a more formal sit-down meal on the other. Originally, Union Pacific staffed the restaurant with chefs from its trains. Later, local restaurant owner Dave Hayden took over the restaurant and renamed it the Hayden House. As train travel declined so too did the restaurant's business. The Hayden House moved to Omaha's Eppley Airfield airport in the late 1960s.



Today, this space is the Swanson Gallery, named in honor of the family of Bud and Gretchen (Swanson) Velde who supported renovation efforts of Union Station

in the 1990s. This beautiful room, as well as the C.C. and Mabel L. Criss Conference Room located on the far east end of the building, are available to the community for private events.

Swanson Gallery Murals

The Swanson Gallery contains six beautiful murals painted in 1931 by Los Angeles artist, Joseph Keller. The murals depict the history of transportation and development of the country, beginning with the Native Americans and ending with New York City. However, two of the murals were hung in incorrect order. Herding, the right mural on the eastern wall, and Harvesting, the right mural on the western wall, should be switched.

In 2008, The Durham Museum hired a conservator to clean and conserve the paintings. The conservator found soot from early trains and grease from the kitchen on the murals.

West Wing

While many passengers came through the entrance doors facing the parking deck, others came by streetcar. Until the 1950s, streetcars stopped right outside the west end doors on 10th Street.

The sounds of scissors in the barbershop and the clicking of a telegraph from the Western Union office greeted people coming through these doors. The traveler's aid office and a small hospital were in this section of the station, too. During World War II, the superintendent's office and the Union Pacific agent's office were also located in this wing.



Library

When the station opened in 1931, the barbershop was decorated mauve and green. After daytime

service stopped in the 1950s, the barbershop closed. Today, it serves as the museum's library, named in honor of the Adah and Leon Millard Foundation for its support of renovation efforts to the station.

Upper Level

Though this area is now closed to the public, until the 1940s Union Station maintained a small hospital, staffed by a nurse, in a room behind these doors.

During World War II, a USO Canteen opened on the station's administrative level. It soon expanded to take over the entire floor. Both the Station Superintendent

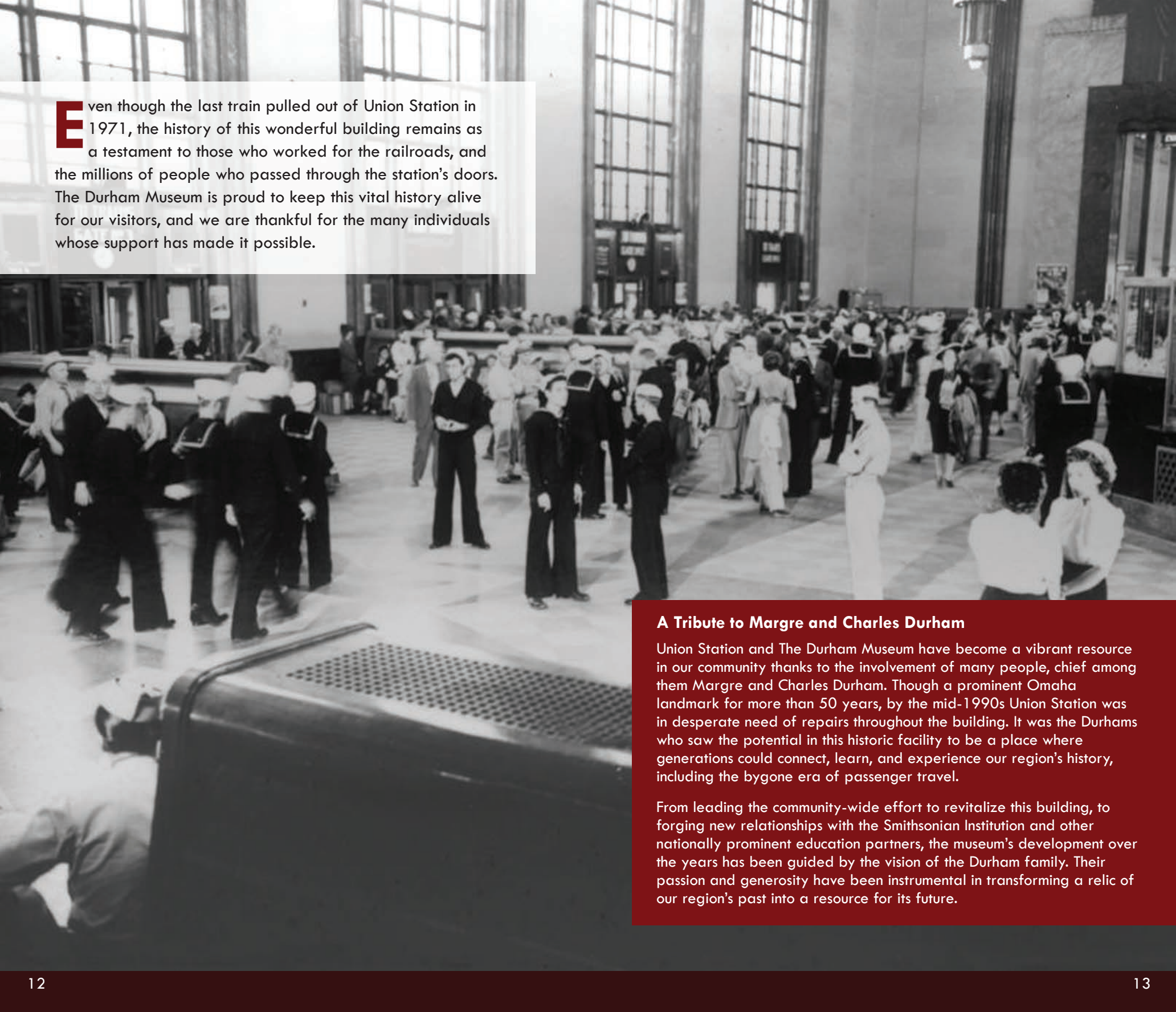


and the Union Pacific Agent's offices moved to the floor below.

“What’ll you have?”

If you stopped in the **restaurant**, you could have your choice of many sandwiches on the menu, such as a roast beef, egg salad, or braunschweiger, a type of cold cut made from smoked pork-liver. Sandwiches cost between **30 and 65 cents**. If you weren't in the mood for a sandwich, you could order a **filet mignon for \$2.75**.





Even though the last train pulled out of Union Station in 1971, the history of this wonderful building remains as a testament to those who worked for the railroads, and the millions of people who passed through the station's doors. The Durham Museum is proud to keep this vital history alive for our visitors, and we are thankful for the many individuals whose support has made it possible.

A Tribute to Margre and Charles Durham

Union Station and The Durham Museum have become a vibrant resource in our community thanks to the involvement of many people, chief among them Margre and Charles Durham. Though a prominent Omaha landmark for more than 50 years, by the mid-1990s Union Station was in desperate need of repairs throughout the building. It was the Durhams who saw the potential in this historic facility to be a place where generations could connect, learn, and experience our region's history, including the bygone era of passenger travel.

From leading the community-wide effort to revitalize this building, to forging new relationships with the Smithsonian Institution and other nationally prominent education partners, the museum's development over the years has been guided by the vision of the Durham family. Their passion and generosity have been instrumental in transforming a relic of our region's past into a resource for its future.