

The last great unsaved terminal

Will plans to restore New York's Buffalo Central Terminal ever become reality?

The distinct Art-Deco style office tower of the Buffalo Central Terminal complex still dominates the city's east end skyline, as it has since the New York Central opened this grand station on June 22, 1929. But will it ever return to glory?

The impressive 225-foot-long concourse with arched windows on each end, rising 63½ feet above the decorative tiled floor, was designed to accommodate 3,200 people an hour on 200 daily trains as one of the nation's busiest stations.

The station never achieved that level of business — the Great Depression and World War II took care of that — and today, almost 30 years after the last passenger train left, the station's preservation continues to be precarious. In fact, it has become the last of great terminals in the U.S. that has not found salvation.

Amtrak abandoned the terminal on Oct. 28, 1979, in favor of a new station in nearby Cheektowaga and a reopened station in downtown Buffalo; Central Terminal, which cost \$14 million to build, was then sold to Anthony Fedele for just \$75,000.

After another sale at court order in 1986, the building began 18 years of decline, as the structure was left open to vandals. The only reason the building was not lost completely was due to the estimated \$12 million cost to tear it down.

In 1997, Scott Field of the Preservation

Coalition of Erie County bought the property for \$1, plus \$70,000 in back taxes.

Soon after, a nonprofit volunteer organization called the Central Terminal Restoration Corp. was formed to preserve the station and promote its redevelopment.

The corporation's ultimate goal is the complete restoration of the building into a multi-use space that would restore the building's Art-Deco features and maintain its historic connection to the New York Central.

For several years, work took place to

stabilize the building, beginning with a \$1 million grant from the state of New York in 1999 to re-roof the building and seal the structure's multitude of broken windows.

Since then, funding has come primarily from privately organized fundraising events that are held throughout the year and by renting out the building for everything from private functions to the filming of low-budget horror movies.

The city of Buffalo has now come to see the value of the restoration and has assisted in re-paving the approach and parking lot of the terminal building in order to accommodate large numbers of cars during special events.

In 2007 British developer Bashar Issa expressed serious interest in investing \$160 million to completely redevelop the property for business use while restoring many of the building's Art-Deco features. While such a large project is still in negotiation, basic work still needs to be done as the building is without proper plumbing or electrical wiring, all having been removed by scavengers and vandals.

Current plans call for the restoration and permanent operation of the terminal's Art-Deco restaurant and the opening of a gift shop in one of the concession stores in the main concourse as sources of revenue to keep alive one of the nation's great 20th century stations.

Buffalo Central Terminal rises against the New York sky. Will the station rise again to usefulness? Joseph Cooper

