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TERMINAL STATION

“Great Temple of Travel”



↑ “GREAT TEMPLE OF TRAVEL” — Built in 1909 at a cost of almost \$3 million, Birmingham’s Terminal Station was hailed as an masterpiece of Byzantine architecture, and the finest railroad station then existing in the South. (*Ed Dismukes*)

The “last golden era” witnessed many changes to the Birmingham railroad scene, among them the consolidation of local carriers and operations, the abandonment of mineral lines and industrial trackage, and a steady decline in passenger service. No single event, however, was more noteworthy than the passing of Birmingham’s Terminal Station, the most recognized and cherished icon of railroading in the Birmingham District.

For more than a half-century, the “Great Temple of Travel,” as it was hailed, was one of the most dominant features on the Birmingham skyline. Built in 1909 for the then-remarkable sum of \$3 million and occupying an area of 10 square blocks, the Byzantine-styled edifice was hailed as the finest passenger station then existing in the South, and one of the most magnificent to be found anywhere in the country.

When the station opened on April 6, 1909, Birmingham was a thriving metropolis of nearly 100,000 residents. In addition to its established iron and steel industry, Birmingham also was becoming Alabama’s leading commercial center. During that era, passenger trains were the primary means of commercial travel, much as air travel is today, and the new Terminal Station was built to meet the area’s growing need for passenger rail service.

Six of Birmingham’s eight passenger railroads joined to form the Birmingham Terminal Company. Owners included Southern Railway Company (“Southern”), Seaboard Air Line Railroad Company (“Seaboard”), Central of Georgia Railway Company (“Central”), Alabama Great Southern Railroad (“AGS”), Saint Louis and San Francisco Railroad (“Frisco”), and Illinois Central Railroad (“IC”). These roads previously had operated passenger service from Union Station, but the