

Piece of Original Penn Station Hides In Plain Sight



This steel and glass doorframe is the sole remnant of the old Penn Station, opened in 1910 and demolished in 1963, to be found in the new.

(Jennifer Hsu / WNYC)

Aug 6, 2012 · by [Jim O'Grady](#)

At first, MTA spokesman Sal Arena insisted that no part of the architectural glory of the old Penn Station survived in the stripped down bunker of today's Penn Station. But the carved leaf pattern in the large steel and glass entryway on the lower level seemed so at odds with Penn Station's no-frills style that we asked him to re-check that.

Arena obliged. Then wrote back, "I stand corrected."

As WNYC has learned, this entryway — part of the original Penn Station — was walled off in 1963, when the above-ground part of the station was razed. The destruction was [decried by many](#) as "historical

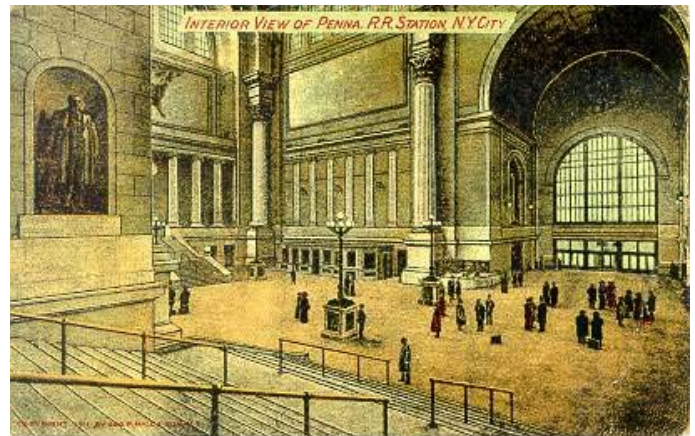
vandalism." (Public ire at the leveling of the 1910 building is widely credited with launching the modern preservationist movement.) Madison Square Garden and a blocky office tower replaced the formerly grand public space; the train hub was shunted into the corridors beneath them.

There the entryway lay hidden for 30 years.

In the early 1990s, Penn Station underwent a major renovation, its first since the original building was demolished. That's when workers took down the wall and discovered the entryway. "It was found exactly where it is now," Arena said. "The contractor cleaned it, painted it and put in windows." It is now a deep umber color.

(Photo: Postcard image of the old Penn Station.)

The entryway went back into service quietly — no announcement was made about the salvaged piece of history. It's safe to assume that a large part of the station's 600,000 weekday travelers pass by it without an inkling of its provenance. In places, the paint on the entryway's columns is worn away from the hordes of travelers brushing past it, wanting only to leave Penn Station.



Simeon Bankoff, executive director of the Historic Districts Council, called the discovery a "cool" but minor find. "It's the sort of thing that's a curiosity, an oddity, one of those pieces of history that you need a plaque to explain," he said.

He noted a remnant of the past that can be found outside the present station: [two stone eagles](#) from the vanished building that flank an entrance at 33rd Street and Seventh Avenue.

Bankoff said they're handsome, if hard to see, and small consolation for the "interplay of space and light" that was lost when the original station was torn down and tossed into a trash heap in New Jersey

Except for a pair of stone eagles and a strangely tenacious red entryway.



(Photo: Detail of glass and steel entryway from the old Penn Station. Jennifer Hsu / WNYC)

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