

PHILADELPHIA NEIGHBORHOOD RECOVERY TOUR

TOUR STOP #1: READING TERMINAL

Introduction

The incremental revitalization and adaptive use of a late-19th-century railroad terminal, which houses a new underground, mass-transit station; the grand hall of a convention center; commercial enterprises; a pre-existing farmers market; and the annex of a modern hotel.

Neighborhood Background

The Reading Terminal is located in an area of downtown Philadelphia known today as "Market East": the stretch of Market Street "east" of Broad Street. During the late-19th and early-20th centuries, Philadelphia's manufacturing economy was booming and its population growing rapidly. On Market Street, large buildings of more sophisticated design replaced some of the older low-rise commercial structures. The intersection of 12th and Market Streets—one of the most active spots in the Philadelphia area—was a hub of transportation, shopping, and business.

Completed in 1893, the Reading Terminal was the principal station of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad (soon to be reorganized as the Reading Company). The new station consolidated passenger services from three old depots, located in less central parts of the city. Its Italian Renaissance-style head house (at the "head" of the tracks) was designed by Francis H. Kimball and contained the railroad's offices on the upper floors and retail enterprises in the half-basement. From its second-floor waiting room, throngs of people walked a wide, skylit concourse to reach the cavernous train shed, designed by the Wilson Brothers and Company, where long-distance and local trains were loading and unloading passengers. Below the tracks, which were carried into the station on a viaduct, the Reading Terminal Market sold a bounty of meat and produce.

After the mid-20th century, the gradual demise of the Reading Company and the weakening of downtown as a shopping-and-office center reduced the vitality of the 12th-and-Market-Streets area. The Reading Terminal, among other buildings, was in jeopardy. From the vision of urban planner Edmund Bacon, Market East began to reposition itself for success in a different economy—starting with the construction of a railroad tunnel and urban shopping mall ("The Gallery," I and II), and later, with development of the publicly financed Pennsylvania Convention Center and entrepreneurs' ventures into a corresponding hospitality industry. Restored and reconfigured buildings, such as the Reading Terminal (a designated National Historic Landmark) serve as anchors and give character to the redefined area of Market East. □

Development of the Venture

The repositioning of the Reading Terminal for success in a new economy came about through a series of development activities, spanning a quarter century.

In the late 1970s, David O'Neil took over management of the Reading Terminal Market, established in the lower part of the Reading Terminal train shed since the 1890s. It had been suffering from years of high vacancy, the steadily decreasing participation of both fresh-food purveyors and the farmers in the region. O'Neil succeeded in making the market a popular lunchtime destination for tourists and for Center City workers by attracting additional vendors who offered a wide variety of distinctive prepared-food selections—regional and ethnic—for eat-in or take-out. At the same time, better maintenance and operation of the market encouraged several of the traditional merchants, such as butcher Harry G. Ochs—a family business that had been a tenant since 1906—to continue leasing space. The market—one of the busiest, most engaging public areas in the region—now attracts a crowded blend of lunchgoers and grocery shoppers.

During the same decade, construction began on the Center City commuter connection. This new project was the implementation of an old idea to build a tunnel joining two (now defunct) railroads: the Reading Company and the Pennsylvania Railroad, whose commuter lines are operated today by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. The \$400-million project enabled the "Reading"-side riders to reach Suburban Station (a former Pennsylvania Railroad Station, located amongst downtown's principal office buildings), as well as 30th Street Station (a long-distance and commuter station, built by the Pennsylvania Railroad, now owned by Amtrak). At the same time, it allowed "Pensy"-side riders to reach the new Market East Station—situated below the old Reading Terminal. The project, which involved five years of excavation and construction across four downtown blocks, drew much criticism from the press and the general public. However, the completion of this venture in 1984 made the region's public transit-system (railroads, subways, buses, and streetcars) accessible to a much broader base of riders. In the process, it set the stage for the Reading Terminal's new role in Philadelphia.

Workers began clearing land for the much-debated Pennsylvania Convention Center, which occupies more than two city blocks and is principally located across Arch Street from the Reading Terminal. A pedestrian bridge (enclosing a portion of the old railroad viaduct) linked the new portion of the convention center with the former train shed. The exterior of the train shed was restored and the interior was converted to a 31,000-square-foot Grand Hall—the largest single area of the convention center complex. This 256-foot-wide, arched shed was made into a spectacular space for exhibitions and receptions. Yet when the convention center opened in 1993, the fate of the rest of Reading Terminal—the head house—remained unknown.

Fortunately, that same year, the City of Philadelphia, through its redevelopment authority, acquired the head house—an objective dating from the early 1980s. In 1997, Mayor Ed Rendell announced that the new Marriott Hotel, which opened in 1993, would convert the head house to an extension of its main facility across 12th Street. This undertaking would include restoration of the Market Street facade; a splendid direct-from-the-street entrance to the Grand Hall; and transformation of the historic second-floor waiting room into an additional hotel ballroom. At ground level would be a restaurant (now a Hard Rock Café with a huge, pivoting guitar on the outside) and direct access to the underground Market East station, which flows into an urban shopping mall. The completion of this development enabled the Reading Terminal to serve—once again—as one of the region's centers of energy, attracting a daily mix of residents, workers, and visitors.

- In the book *Neighborhood Recovery*, John Kromer discusses the importance of the downtown economy as a source of jobs for neighborhood residents (Chapter 7, "Working

the Economy"), but argues that economic success downtown does not guarantee a "trickle-down" of benefits for distressed neighborhoods (Chapter 1, "A Strategic Problem").

www.neighborhoodrecovery.com

- For information about the Pennsylvania Convention Center, contact:

Public Affairs Coordinator
Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority
1101 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
215/418-4757 voice
215/418-4747 fax
www.paconvention.com

- For information about the Reading Terminal Market, contact:

General Manager
Reading Terminal Market
51 North 12th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215/922-2317 voice
215/922-2040 fax
www.readingterminalmarket.org

- For information about the design of the Reading Terminal Head House, contact:

Bower Lewis Thrower Architects, Ltd.
1216 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215/563-3900 voice
215/563-3036 fax
www.blta.com

Cope Linder Associates
30 South 15th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
215/981-0200
215/569-8651
www.cope-linder.com

- For information about the design of the Pennsylvania Convention Center, contact:

Thompson, Ventulett, Stainback & Associates
1230 Peachtree Street, N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30309
404/888-6600 voice
404/888-6700 fax
www.tvsa.com

Vitetta
4747 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19112
215/218-4747 voice
215/218-4740 fax
www.vitetta.com

Kelly/Maiello Architects, Inc. Architects & Planners
1420 Walnut Street, 15th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102
215/546-0800 voice
215/546-1420 fax
www.kmarchitects.com

A Personal Perspective

Comments by Arthur W. Jones, A.I.A.

Design Principal
Bower Lewis Thrower Architects

There are some buildings that simply refuse to die and therefore projects that, whatever their complications, have to be done. The Reading Terminal Head House is one of those. When, in the late 1970s, the redevelopment of Market Street East was first planned and the Gallery retail mall conceived, planners assumed that the five famous department stores of east Market Street would continue to thrive as anchors of the new development. Schematic plans showed new construction extending without a break from 8th to 13th Streets, and the old Reading station sacrificed to progress. Now, 25 years later, two of the department stores have been demolished, and the head house has become the glorious anchor of Market Street East and its link to the new Pennsylvania Convention Center.

Urban redevelopment, and particularly redevelopment involving historic preservation, has everything to do with being in the right place at the right time. Before the convention center was conceived, the famous shed of the station presented a dilemma for its owner—the real-estate arm of a defunct railroad, the Reading Company. It was studied, then rejected, as a shopping mall. When the convention center plans reached fruition, and the future of the shed was assured, the Reading Company believed that the terminal's head house had a future as a privately developed office building. Full design and documentation was commissioned for this use. The investors did not foresee the severe downturn in real estate development that would block their efforts for nearly a decade.

After 1993, with the convention center and its hotel serving as a new destination for visitors, the boarded-up and decaying head house became a public embarrassment. Pressure from the hospitality industry caused the City to purchase it, but without any definitive plan for its use—except wanting to make the ground floor a ceremonial entrance for the convention center. It was the creativity and persistence of the City's redevelopment authority that brought Marriott to the

project and made possible a resolution—one that looks like something that was always meant to be there.

Although the building is classified as a National Historic Landmark, its restoration does not follow strict preservation criteria in every detail. Its new, rich finishes are much finer than those of its former life. Its floor levels have been opened, giving a dramatic, vertical entrance up the escalators to the winter garden. Its walls are enlivened by colorful new elements, including murals of famous Reading Company trains. To all the members of the design-and-construction teams, the head house became a 15-year commitment to quality—a gift to and from the City of Philadelphia. □

Nearby Points of Interest

CITY HALL

City Hall Tours: 215/686-2840
Broad and Market Streets

Constructed between 1871 and 1901, City Hall has 14.5 acres of floor space (642 rooms with lavish public spaces) and is the largest municipal building in the country. It was designed in the Second Empire style by John McArthur, Jr., (with Thomas Ustick Walter) and includes hundreds of exterior sculptures by Alexander Milne Calder. Until 1987, a gentlemen's agreement kept all buildings in Center City below City Hall's tower-topping, 37-foot-high statue of William Penn. (see [Tour Stop 27](#))

PSFS BUILDING

(now Loews Philadelphia Hotel)
12th and Market Streets

Completed in 1932, the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society's new headquarters emerged as the first International Style skyscraper in the United States. Designed just before the Great Depression by George Howe and William Lescaze, its avant-garde characteristics and expensive materials made a striking statement from a conservative banking establishment. In 2000, the building was converted to a hotel, with its architectural integrity intact. A restaurant occupies the former retail space on the first floor; the upper-level, high-ceilinged space where bank transactions occurred, is now a ballroom.

JOHN WANAMAKER'S DEPARTMENT STORE

(now Lord & Taylor)
1300 Market Street

Designed by Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham to serve as one of the first department stores in the country, the John Wanamaker building was completed in 1911. The selling floors (nearly two million square feet) were organized around a five-story high central court; its famous 30,000-pipe organ is still in operation. In 1991, portions of the interior were renovated (by architects and interior designers Ewing Cole Cherry Brott), converting the upper floors to commercial office space.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM IN PHILADELPHIA

www.aampmuseum.org

215/574-0380

7th and Arch Streets

Founded in 1976, in celebration of the United States Bicentennial, the African American Museum in Philadelphia is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the material and intellectual culture of African Americans in Philadelphia, the Delaware Valley, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the Americas. Its 500,000-object collection includes fine arts, folk arts, photography, and textiles. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, and Easter.

Directions**TO READING TERMINAL**

12th and Market Streets

By car: Driving directions are identical to those for the Pennsylvania Convention Center. Click on <http://www.paconvention.com/visit/driving.asp>. Note that 42 parking facilities are available within a seven-block range. The closest parking is located directly across from the Reading Terminal at 12th and Filbert Streets.

By Mass Transit: The Reading Terminal is directly above the underground Market East Station, served by all regional rail lines and the Market-Frankford elevated/subway line.

Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

www.septa.org

Information line: 215/580-7800