

Station and create a National Visitors Center. I still have high hopes that a suitable location for a monument to the magnificent story of mankind's development of transportation—from the wheel to the wing and beyond—can be found. This in no way limits my enthusiasm for the proposed use of Union Station, as I recognize first, the compelling need for a National Visitors Center in Washington, and second, the ideal suitability of the station for this purpose.

The need for a National Visitors Center has become more critical over the years. Few major tourist attractions operate without a central and convenient location where visitors can acquaint themselves with the information they need to make their sojourn more enjoyable. Williamsburg, Virginia, for example, has a visitors center where a short orientation program is offered so that visitors will receive maximum benefit from their trip. Surely, Washington, D.C., where the average tourist spends only a few days trying to take in the highlights of a city which by expert's count could exhaust three weeks time, is in need of a center to assist the traveler to help plan his stay in order that he may make the most profitable use of this time. This need grows as the number of visitors mounts yearly, and more people are in need of such elementary information as what to see and where to go.

As a proposed Visitors Center, Union Station offers several advantages. First, its size; second, its location; third, its beauty; and finally, the relatively inexpensive cost to the taxpayer to convert this impressive and imposing edifice into a reception center for the millions of Americans and citizens from other nations who visit this world capital each year.

In the early years of its existence, period pieces noted that Union Station, "contains in the passenger concourse the largest room in the world under one roof." Recent D.C. guidebooks suggest that this fact may still be true, noting that in comparison to New York's Penn and Grand Central Stations, the Union Station concourse is almost as large as the two combined. That the size is adequate to handle the daily crowds anticipated to the Visitors Center is evidenced by the fact that during World War II, the Station handled over 100,000 persons per day; up to 175,000 on holidays. It was closed only once due to over-capacity and that was on December 24, 1944, when an estimated 250,000 persons jammed the Station. As further proof of its size, the Station once served as the dining facility for 3,000 persons. In 1936, when the engineers at the Third World Power Conference were in need of a hall large enough to permit a sit-down dinner for all of the delegates, only Union Station was large enough and the waiting room was converted for the banquet.

Union Station is ideally located for a Visitors Center. It has been called at various times, the "gateway to the city," "gateway to the Nation," and by one magazine, as "... the grandest front door in the world." Surely, there is no more imposing or appropriate introduction to the citadel of democracy, and the seat of our Nation's Government, than the vista of the Capitol with its majestic dome that greets the visitor as he emerges from the main door of the Station. It is as breathtaking to the uninitiated as to those of us who have focused on it in awe throughout the years.

Long recognized as a building of great beauty in its own right, the Union Station was hailed as "the most beautiful building architecturally in America," and by the American Architect magazine when the building first opened. And over the years this vast Roman palace of shining white Berthel granite with its central pavilion modeled after the Arch of Constantine has been cited as an inspiring example of the true conformation of function and design. In the style and the use of materials it is both ornamental and useful. As such, the White House consultant was prompted to note: "Union Station is a significant landmark with historic and esthetic value to the National Capital, and as part of our Capital's heritage, it should be preserved."

For this reason alone, many have asked that Union Station be saved from the fate suffered by New York City's Penn Station. I have received letters from such organizations and groups as Downtown Progress, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Commission of Fine Arts, to name a few, all of whom concur on the one point that Union Station ought to be preserved. And most agree that a fitting use of this stately and dignified structure would be as a National Visitors' Center.

A final argument in behalf of the proposal before this Committee is the low cost of the project. Assuming there is agreement that a National Visitors Center is a necessity, the comparative cost between demolishing an existing structure to make way for a new one and renovating an existing building to serve the purpose