**Nashua’s Union Station would turn 135 this year – had it lived**

**By Dean Shalhoup Nashua Telegraph Staff | Mar 28, 2015**

If you glance now and then at this, my weekly allotment of space I can fill (within reason, of course) with whatever words and sentiments I choose, then you know how I love to beat the bushes for the most unusual, colorful personalities heretofore denied their richly deserved “15 minutes of fame.”

My favorites are the tales of triumph, of subjects I find fascinating for one reason or another, and those filled with ironic or unexpected twists and turns. And although I prefer happy endings, I’ve learned that the most compelling, need-to-be-told stories don’t always turn out that way.

I say “subjects” rather than “people” because I also learned long ago that inanimate, and even intangible, objects can, and do, have as much personality as some people.

One of the best examples is, quite lamentably, no longer with us. This proud, old-time Nashua icon of which I write today met its demise some 50 years ago this month, and I don’t know any longtime Nashuan over 55 who doesn’t shake his or her head in sadness when they hear “Union Station.”

If Union Station’s life as a railroad hub was nearing its end, as was pretty evident at the time, then why not try and find some way to get the handsome old structure into safe hands, perhaps one of those public-private partnerships we hear so much about, and breathe new life into its historic nooks and crannies as, perhaps, a restaurant or office space, maybe a rail museum?

Truth is, the demise of Union Station, which was from its debut in 1880 until the summer of 1910 known as Nashua Junction, was as unsurprising as it was tragic and lamentable.

This was the 1960s, known in many cities like Nashua as the Urban Renewal era, or more

snidely, the age of “tear-it-down-and-pave-it-over.”

I vaguely remember walking through the old place a few times, perhaps tagging along with Mom or Pop to meet a visitor coming in on the 12:45 from someplace or another. Being a kid, I’m sure I was unimpressed by a sight I’d now give almost anything to behold.

One faded memory – not surprisingly – is that neat old wooden counter, behind which an old man or woman roamed, selling newspapers, magazines, comic books and – yes! – candy to anyone with a few nickels.

I read in a 1993 column by esteemed former colleague Marilyn Solomon that one of those counter attendants was named Rose, so identified by the late Catherine Valley, one of several people Marilyn quoted in the column.

Part history lesson and part journey down memory lane, the column brought back to life some of Union Station’s moments in the spotlight, such as the presidential “whistle stops” that featured then-hopefuls Woodrow Wilson (1912), Harry Truman (1948) and Dwight Eisenhower (1952).

But perhaps the most controversial figure to arrive and depart from Union Station wasn’t a politician – at least in the office-
seeking sense.

That would have been one Carrie Nation, the Bible-thumping firebrand who traversed the nation more than a century ago hailing the virtues of temperance and taking an axe to a saloon door now and then.

But no matter who they carried from destination to destination, passenger trains, and their cousins that transported goods to all corners of the nation, were “the nerve center of city life,” as Solomon wrote in that 1993 column.

You can at once wax nostalgic and practical on the subject of rail travel, whether it be freight, long-distance passenger or commuter rail. For decades people set their watches by train whistles, hence the famous pocket watch chained to every railroad man’s belt.

I won’t veer into the politics of rail travel, but wouldn’t it be really neat to walk once again into a railroad depot, scan the giant digital screens that took the place of printed schedule cards, then watch in anticipation as your train rolls into view?

In March 1965, long-ago Telegraph reporter Don Anderson penned something of a eulogy to old Union Station, complete with several historic photos and one he took of “an old timer, watching as Union Station falls under the power of a crane and bulldozer … ,” according to his caption.

Interestingly, Anderson didn’t seem to believe rail travel would ever return to the American landscape. He called Union Station “a monument to the city’s early growth” that represented rail travel of “days gone by … days only to be recaptured and relived in a history book or a library.”

Unfortunately, many would agree, Don wasn’t far off the mark. And nobody can argue with the observation he makes in the very first sentence: “Nashua’s industrial development in the last two decades has depended primarily on the proximity of air service and availability of the area’s rambling turnpikes and highways.”

I would submit, however, that if Don could take a look at our often jam-packed streets, highways and turnpikes of today, he might just craft an amendment to his 50-year-old prognostication.

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