

1 America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places - NTHP

FINAL DRAFT 2014 NOMINATION

(24 February 2014)

Part I

Contact Name: **William J. McKelvey, Chairman, Liberty Historic Railway, Inc.**

E-mail: wjmckelvey@hotmail.com

Name of Place: **Central Railroad of New Jersey, Jersey City Terminal Train Shed at Liberty State Park, New Jersey**

Location: **Foot of Audrey Zapp Drive (formerly Johnston Avenue) at the Hudson River, Jersey City, New Jersey 07305**

Date Submitted: **February, 24, 2014**

Part II

Why should this place be listed on NTHP's Most Endangered List? (250 words - now 243)

The Train Shed structure, designed by Abraham Lincoln Bush and completed in 1914, is the largest of its type ever built, encompassing 20 tracks and 7.5 acres. Although abandoned and allowed to deteriorate since 1967, it is an important and connected part of the sole remaining building complex from the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ) era at Liberty State Park. For 53 years passengers destined for Manhattan walked under this Shed and boarded ferries. Two-thirds of the estimated 12 to 17 million immigrants who entered the United States through Ellis Island boarded trains here to points throughout the country to establish their new homes. German sabotage damaged the Shed which shook from the massive Black Tom munitions blast in 1916. Liberty State Park and the CNJ Terminal, until hurricane *Sandy* devastation, were visited annually by nearly 5,000,000 people, many of whom rode ferries to visit the nearby Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island National Monuments. With breathtaking views of the National Monuments, the Manhattan skyline, and New York Harbor from the CNJ Terminal, Liberty State Park is the nations' second most visited state park. A 2000 study which documented the Shed's decades of neglect, also recommended that it could serve valuable public uses upon ultimate restoration. A 2012 Assessment Study observed "...if action is not taken soon there will be no Shed left to preserve." Designation by the NTHP would focus attention on the Imminent Risk to this valuable historic resource.

Significance and potential newsworthy angles... (300 words - now 298)

The unrestored 1914 Train Shed is an integral part of the restored 1889 Central Railroad of New Jersey, Jersey City Terminal and is physically connected to it. The entire building complex is listed on the New Jersey and National Historic Registers and is a National Historic Landmark. In 2012 the Train Shed was added to Preservation New Jersey's Most Endangered Structures List. It is a major adjunct of the "Historic Trilogy" which also includes the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island Immigration Station National Monuments. The Terminal is the cornerstone of the 1,212 acre Liberty State Park, dedicated in 1976 as New Jersey's Bicentennial gift to our Nation and is the focus of numerous community, metropolitan, statewide, and even national special events. Interpretive exhibits (to be reinstalled), offer present day visitors the opportunity to experience both the history and the renaissance of this great landmark. At peak times this Terminal and Shed accommodated 75,000+ people per day on 300+ trains and 150+ ferry runs. In addition to the Central Railroad of New Jersey, it was also served by trains of the Baltimore & Ohio, Reading, and Lehigh Valley Railroads. If ultimately restored, this unique Train Shed structure could serve a variety of additional worthwhile public purposes (e.g. an 815-foot covered walkway for visitors arriving by auto and making their way from the ferry parking lot to the terminal concourse and National Monuments ferry; a public meeting place; interpretive exhibits; museum and display space, including display of historic locomotives and rail equipment which once used the Terminal; a terminus for Park trolley shuttles; and arts, crafts, and food fairs). Such a restoration will add to the quality and eclectic experiences of visits to the "Historic Trilogy" area. All of these opportunities will be lost if the Shed is demolished.

Part III

Nature and urgency of the threat: (200 words - 199 words now)

Further delay in stabilizing the Train Shed is the greatest threat. The condition of the Train Shed was documented in the 2000 Curtis and Ginsberg Architects, LLP of New York report: *Liberty State Park Train Shed Historic Preservation Plan: Preliminary Report*. No action has been taken on the decade-old recommendations of this excellent report. The 2012 Assessment Report, performed by the same team and entirely funded by Liberty Historic Railway (LHRy), confirmed that the structure, which was in danger of collapse in 2000, has continued to deteriorate and its condition worsens every year. Its "...collapse will become a certainty if steps are not taken soon to preserve the structure." Several sections of the reinforced concrete slab canopy roofs of a ton or more have already fallen. Many of the cast iron columns are cracked and will fail in the instance of a collapse of roof concrete or steel. The threat of a domino type collapse which could damage restored sections of the Terminal Complex is very real. Since the fiscally-challenged State has not yet set aside funding for this needy project, national acknowledgement of the structure's value and the risk of its loss is imperative and urgent.

Solutions: (200 words - 200)

Following LHRy's financing of the 2012 Assessment Report, the non-profit and NJDEP embarked on several initiatives to direct funds toward the shed's stabilization. All of them have failed. LHRy submitted an unsuccessful application to the NJ Department of Transportation for a \$1 million Transportation Enhancement grant to stabilize the Train Shed's perimeter. LHRy also financed a professional fund-raising consultant to conduct a feasibility study for obtaining the estimated \$23 million from private and public sources needed to stabilize the Train Shed. That study concluded that since no leadership level financial support was forthcoming, no capital campaign should be initiated. Finally, FEMA replied negatively to NJDEP's inquiry whether stabilization of the Train Shed would be eligible for Superstorm Sandy relief. With all of these setbacks, it has become apparent that NTHP's addition of the Train Shed to its list of one of America's 11 Most Endangered historic resources would be an invaluable boost toward generating public awareness and galvanizing support for critical public funding and recruitment of private sector fund-raising leadership. Trust's continuing interest and guidance after such a listing would be the last best hope for saving the Train Shed from further decay and inevitable demolition.

Group engaged to save this place: (250 words - 249 words now)

Liberty Historic Railway, Inc., a non-profit, public benefit, NJ corporation, was established in January 2010 to help foster improvements to Liberty State Park. Its' board soon decided to focus on the restoration of the deteriorated Train Shed and to promote the construction of a heritage trolley shuttle to connect the more than one-mile gap between the nearest transit station to the CNJ Terminal and National Monuments' ferry docks. To advance the heritage trolley concept, LHRy worked with the City of Jersey City and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority to obtain a \$220,000 grant to explore transit options for the Park. That study, which has won a number of professional awards, found the concept of a heritage trolley shuttle that would terminate inside the Train Shed to be theoretically feasible. No action, however, has been taken on these findings. Specific actions LHRy has undertaken to support preservation of the Train Shed are: the commissioning of the 2012 Assessment Report; development of a list of 67 reasons why the Train Shed should be restored; successful nomination of the Train Shed to Preservation New Jersey's 10 Most Endangered Structures list for 2012; submission of a Transportation Enhancement grant application for stabilization of the Train Shed; hiring of a fund-raiser to conduct a feasibility study of raising sufficient funds to stabilize the Train Shed; establishing a comprehensive website; and engaging in extensive public outreach. To date LHRy has spent approximately \$100,000 toward its initiatives at Liberty State Park.

Specific ways one can get involved to help save this place from the threat it faces? (150 words - now 141)

Ways for individuals to get involved in saving the Train Shed are;

- **Join others in a citizens' group and help publicize the need, including getting the word out that "This Place Matters."**
- **Become familiar with the LHRy website's 67 reasons why the Train Shed needs to be saved.**
- **Write letters to NJ DEP leadership asking them to support stabilization and its inclusion in the next Green Acres bond issue.**
- **Contact their New Jersey state and national representatives supporting preservation of the Train Shed.**
- **Donate money (via a donation link on our website: www.LHRy.org) to assist LHRy in its effort to advance the necessary first phase stabilization project.**
- **Sponsor presentations by the Curtis & Ginsberg firm to engender discussion on the future uses of everyone's restored Train Shed.**
- **Become an advocate for its prompt stabilization or the Train Shed will be lost.**



#1: Steam and diesel powered evening rush hour trains ready to depart from under the Train Shed at the Jersey City Terminal ca. 1952 taken by CNJ photographer Adolph Q. Vogel - Frank T. Reilly collection.



#2: Commuters departing their train walk under the Train Shed toward the ferry for Manhattan ca. 1958 - Jersey City Public Library.



#3: The streamlined, stainless steel, Reading Railroad *Crusader* train waits under the Train Shed for its passengers and departure to Philadelphia ca. 1955 - Robert Lewis collection.



#4: Mid-day under the Train Shed finds a two car Rail Diesel Car train and standard coach trains awaiting departures ca. 1960 - Jersey City Public Library.