

# Montclair's Lackawanna Terminal: 'A Certain Type of Beauty'



CONTRIBUTED BY BY MARK SCHMITT,  
DIRECTOR, JERSEY CENTRAL RAILWAY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**J**OHN NOLEN HAD AN EYE for a certain type of beauty. In his 1909 survey of Montclair's aesthetic attributes commissioned by the Municipal Art Commission, he was quick to point out that the town's railroads put their "worst foot" forward. The back sides of the commercial establishments that lined the railroads provided a decidedly "wrong side of the tracks" image to commuters and prospective residents. Not only that, but every street, including Bloomfield Avenue, crossed the tracks at grade. The Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad's station on Bloomfield Avenue was subjected to his particular scrutiny.

Montclair was then served by a two-story brick station, which had replaced a primitive wooden original in 1893. By 1910, the station facilities were considered "old, obsolete, and inadequate," to quote the report. Thirty passenger trains stormed into the station daily then turned to head back to Newark and Hoboken. Sixty trains a day rumbled across local streets. Four hundred trolley cars pounded across the railroad's Bloomfield

Avenue crossing, along with all the other traffic. Nolen correctly saw this as "ugly and dangerous."

His report's timing was propitious, for the Lackawanna was near the height of its prosperity and in the hands of a progressive president, William H. Truesdale, who was already well into a three-decade program rebuilding his company's infrastructure everywhere from New York to Buffalo. The railroad's financial resources were formidable, and its pride in constructing new stations and facilities was unmatched.

Within four years of Nolen's report, the Lackawanna's property underwent a complete metamorphosis. A new six-track stub-end terminal replaced the old single-track station. The engine and freight handling facilities were relocated to Bay Street. Grove Street was elevated above the new terminal and incorporated into the station design by the addition of stairways from the overpass directly onto the train platforms below. The new terminal's design contemplated electrifying the railroad at some future time, which as it turned out, would be another 20 years.

Award Winning  
Cuisine at Montclair  
Landmark  
23 Watchung Plaza  
Montclair, NJ  
(973) 744-2090

**La Couronne**  
Restaurant  
Montclair NJ

lacouronnerestaurant.com

**Find a New Path**  
*Guiding Clients Through  
Life Transitions*

Barbara Josephson Koplin, CPLC  
Certified Professional Life Coach

973.600.7683 / barbarakoplin@aol.com

Your First Step is to request a FREE Consultation

Lackawanna Terminal, circa 1913



All the bothersome street crossings were eliminated: either elevated, depressed or abandoned.

The new passenger station, designed by Truesdale's in-house architect, William Hull Botsford, was a work of art. The design was of the Grecian Doric order, executed in high-quality tapestry brick and roofed with Brookville green-glazed tiles. The waiting room ceiling was carried on oak beams and several of the auxiliary rooms were paneled in quartered oak. The floors were marble terrazzo and the exterior colonnade was marble-chip concrete. The grounds were tastefully landscaped and planted. With chest-swelling civic pride, Montclair declared a holiday on June 28, 1913, and the Lackawanna Railroad formally presented the town with its new terminal, which had cost a reported \$500,000, a princely sum in those days (the equivalent to \$12.5 million today). A band played and 100 decorated automobiles paraded to the terminal. Botsford could not be there for the celebration: The architect perished on the Titanic the year before, at the age of 26.

The work had been conceived and executed in a first-class manner with a view to longevity. The terminal fulfilled its original purpose for a half-century, until, 1969, when it faced demolition by urban renewal. Preservationists and a recession beat back that threat. In 1973, the complex earned its place on the National Register of Historic Places. By 1981, the trains had moved to a bus shelter near Bay Street, and the terminal was repurposed as a shopping center.

Now a new development plan is steaming ahead. Once again, the historic integrity of this landmark is threatened. Hopefully, the terminal's rejuvenation can be accomplished with style, grace and respect for history. Those who conceived this station understood the need to build wisely and well, not only for their own generation but for those to come. They could not have foreseen what the automobile would mean for the railroad industry. Certainly, their Montclair terminal outlived its usefulness as a railroad facility a half-century ago. Those present at the time saw this clearly enough. However, they also recognized its value as a work of art and architecture, its utility as a re-purposed public space, and as a memorial to civic pride and the leaders like Nolen, Truesdale, Botsford and the thousands of commuters from throughout West Essex who passed through its classical portals daily.

**Mark Schmitt is director of the Jersey Central Railway Historical Society, a chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.**


**NOW OPEN!!!**



**Certified Organic, Adult & Child Mattresses, Baby Crib Mattresses, Toppers, Pillows, Sheets, Blankets & more!**

**Stone Home Organics 219 Bellevue Avenue, Upper Montclair NJ (next to Beyond the Bagel)**

**Montclair Real Estate Specialists**  
**Our Marketing Plan Gets Homes Sold in Just Two Weeks!\***



**Award-Winning REALTORS®**

**Jeffrey Kist and Richard Cherchio**

**REAL ESTATE GROUP**

**Weichert Realtors®** Equal Housing Opportunity

**Receive a Complimentary Home Valuation**  
**Call 973-866-5478 or Visit JeffandRichard.com**

**\*Some exceptions apply.**