



Daniel Burnham

IN NEW ORLEANS

BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
TULANE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

DANIEL HUDSON BURNHAM (1846-1912) is mostly associated with Chicago. The famed architect and city planner helped rebuild the City by the Lake after the 1871 fire, and later pioneered the development of the skyscraper, oversaw the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, co-authored the influential 1909 Plan of Chicago, and helped inspire the City Beautiful movement. Burnham is also known for his work in Cleveland, San Francisco, New York and Washington, D.C., where Union Station stands as his most iconic creation. "Make no little plans," Burnham is often quoted as saying; "they have no magic to stir men's blood.... Make big plans; aim high[;] let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty."

One of the lesser-known chapters in Burnham's illustrious career was his work in New Orleans. It yielded two downtown building designs which, though not as "big" as his Chicago projects, nonetheless exhibited "order" and "beauty." One has been lost; the other thrives in adaptive reuse.

Burnham arrived at New Orleans in June 1902 to discuss plans for a new Hibernia Trust and Banking office to be located at 226 Carondelet in the heart of the cotton-trading and financial district. "This will be the first twelve-story building [in] New Orleans," reported the *Times-Picayune*, "a skyscraper, [and] one of the most modern office structures in the whole country." The high-rise would be erected in tandem with the Gravier Street annex to the St. Charles Hotel designed by Thomas Sully and built on St. Charles Avenue in 1894. "While the excavating for [the bank] and the tearing out for the [hotel] is going on," explained the *Picayune*, "it would be much easier to do it for both, as they are adjoining." The hotel annex, which would also rise 12 stories, would share a wall with Burnham's bank. The two building permits were submitted and approved in May 1903, and with budgets of \$300,000 for the hotel and \$430,000 for the bank, work got underway.

Burnham's design was Neoclassical in its style, gray and granite in its exterior, and fire-proof in its construction. The 12 floors were supported by a steel frame rested upon steam-driven pilings, two relatively new engineering techniques at the time. The massing fairly well complemented the similarly sized hotel annex, whose reddish-brick Italian Renaissance design aimed to match Sully's main lodge on the avenue. Indeed, some might say Burnham's bank office blended in almost too well, being rather staid and indistinctive in its façade and hardly salient on the skyline — despite that it ranked as the tallest office building in the city (some sources enumerated 13 and 14 floors, depend-

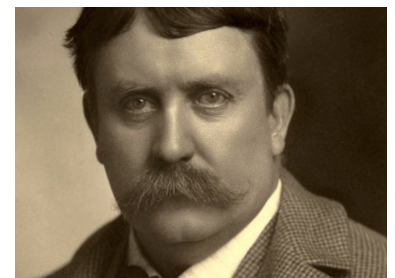
ing on criteria and later renovations). Both the bank office and hotel annex were completed and occupied in 1904.

The Hibernia Trust and Banking Company experienced tremendous growth over the next decade, and soon found itself outgrowing Burnham's building. In 1916, bank officials eyed the block diagonally across Carondelet Street, and felt it was time for a truly prominent and capacious icon. The Hibernia Bank Tower, designed by Favrot & Livaudais and opened in 1921, would become the tallest building (355 feet) in the state until 1932 and the city until 1962. Its elegant white lantern cupola formed a landmark so visible that for a while it served as an official navigational beacon for ships on the Mississippi.

Burnham's edifice, meanwhile, was sold in 1920 and renamed the Carondelet Building, though for years locals would call it the "old Hibernia building" to distinguish it from the "new Hibernia building" across the street. Dozens of tenants, most of them in financial services, would occupy offices within the solid structure over the next seven decades, even as ownership changed hands at least four times.

In 1994, in an era of rising tourism, the building was converted into a Hampton Inn hotel, and has been busy and well-maintained ever since. As for the neighboring St. Charles Hotel, both the 1896 main lodge and the 1904 annex became a Sheraton in 1959 and met the wrecking ball in 1974. Eight years later, the Place St. Charles office building and parking garage were erected in its space. The 53-story postmodern skyscraper towers over the century-old, 12-story Neoclassical creation of one of the inventors of the modern skyscraper.

A few years after Daniel Burnham completed his Hibernia work, he took on a second New Orleans commission, for a very different purpose in quite a distinct place: a passenger train station by the notorious red-light district known as Storyville, just steps from Basin Street's line of saloons and sporting houses.



Daniel Burnham, pictured in 1908



HIRBORNIA BANK BUILDING, NEW ORLEANS, LA., 1903. D. H. BURNHAM & CO., ARCHITECTS.

LEFT: Burnham's Hibernia Bank Building. Image courtesy *Architectural Record*, Volume 38 **TOP:** Terminal Station circa 1915. Photo courtesy Library of Congress



LEFT: Burnham's bank today, now a Hampton Inn. Photo by Richard Campanella **ABOVE:** Terminal Station at upper center in 1909. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

Burnham's client was The New Orleans Terminal Company, an asset of the Southern Railway Company. Fresh off his triumph of Union Station (1907) in Washington, D.C., Burnham sketched a scaled-down version in a similar Beaux-Arts style, reshaped to the narrow confines of the Basin Street neutral ground. Trains would pull in via the trackbed paralleling the circa-1794 Old Basin (Carondelet) Canal, where the company also had extensive freight yards. From there the rails ran out to the cemeteries on the Metairie/Gentilly Ridge, at which point they bifurcated to all points east and west.

Terminal Station, also known as the Southern Railway Station, would become one of six train depots in downtown New Orleans. Each had its own home line, and each line had rights-of-way transecting the cityscape, creating dozens of frustrating and potentially dangerous grade-level crossings of pedestrians, autos, trucks, mule drayage and streetcars with passenger and freight trains. Each company assiduously fought the city's attempts to unify lines into a single station, as each saw the other railroads as competitors and wished not to sacrifice the lucrative status quo in exchange for some government-negotiated arrangement. Railroad executives did, however, work out deals with rival lines to share certain assets, and Terminal Station from the beginning hosted not just its own Southern line but also the Mobile & Ohio, the New Orleans & Northeastern, and the New Orleans Great Northern.

Burnham and his clients had originally planned on a much larger structure, in expectation of unification. But that did not pan out in time, so Burnham and his clients resigned themselves to a smaller building. Construction cost \$260,000 and was carried out by James Stewart & Company during 1907. The *Daily Picayune* described the final product as a "modern structure, handsomely finished, and large for all trains entering the city." Two stories high, 82 feet wide and 385 feet long, and set on pilings capped with a concrete foundation, the station was made of a "base course of granite and... Bedford stone, capped with [a] re-enforced concrete roof [with] St. Louis pressed brick [and] a copper roof." Inside were a lobby and separate waiting rooms (for men, "ladies," and "colored people"), all clean and tasteful with Italian marble floors. There were also ticketing counters, telegraph rooms, baggage areas and a newsstand. Offices for company officials were located upstairs, and in the back ran open-air concourses with two 704-foot-long steel-frame sheds paralleled by the tracks. Burnham drew from his Washington experience in the design of the "umbrella type" sheds that allowed for the ventilation of locomotive smoke and steam.

After a ceremony on May 30, 1908, the inaugural run of the Queen and Crescent Route (connecting the "Queen of the West," Cincinnati, and the Crescent City) left the station on June 1. The next 40 years would be a golden age for passenger train service in the United States; it was the fastest, safest and most comfortable way to travel long distances. Pulling into the Southern Railway Station must have been quite an experience, as it skirted the gritty cityscapes of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth wards and arrived to the raffish glamour of New Orleans' theater district around Canal, Basin and Rampart streets. For the first half of the 20th century, you could get to just about any city in the United States from Burnham's elegant Basin Street lobby.

All this would change dramatically in the 1950s. The rise of automobiles and the attendant expansion of highways and roadside amenities made rail travel less popular for regional sojourns, while the advent of commercial air service sapped demand for cross-country trains. These two factors, plus the Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison's post-World War II transportation-modernization drive, led finally to the unification of rail stations and trackbeds into the appropriately named Union Station in 1954. This consolidated facility, with train, bus, streetcar and auto access, remains in service today on Loyola Avenue.

Thus, by the 1950s, Burnham's station and downtown's other turn-of-the-century depots found themselves without trains, without passengers, and without a friend in City Hall. In the same year Union Station opened, the city advanced a bond issue to acquire the Basin Street site. Once purchased, the parcel in the spring of 1955 was promptly cleared of the 47-year-old structure, in part to widen Basin Street and create a corridor between Morrison's envisioned Civic Center and Cultural Center, but mostly because the station no longer served any purpose. The neutral ground was later landscaped for a statue to Latin American liberator Simon Bolivar, reflecting Mayor Morrison's other grand aspiration for New Orleans: as Gateway to the Americas, a vision that entailed airplanes and ships, but not trains.

Daniel Burnham's work in New Orleans may be judged as strong, useful and beautiful, but not big and bold as might befit Burnham's reputation. This may reflect the fact that New Orleans, though the largest city in the South at the time, nevertheless lacked the wherewithal of the great Northern cities where Burnham spent most of his career. Architecture is driven largely by client means and needs, and both were more modest here compared to Chicago, New York and Washington.

Today, only the former bank office remains of Burnham's two local contributions, and only in one spot in the city can you actually find the famed architect's name — on the cornerstone at Carondelet and Gravier, where the well-intended owners of the Hampton Inn dutifully inscribed his name.

Alas, they misspelled it, leaving out the "n."

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Cornerstone of Burnham's building that is now a Hampton Inn. Photo by Richard Campanella