

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
Cincinnati Union Terminal

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
1301 Western Avenue

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Cincinnati

— VICINITY OF

2nd

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Ohio

039

Hamilton

061

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Honorable James Luken, Mayor of Cincinnati

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN  
Cincinnati

— VICINITY OF

STATE  
Ohio

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Hamilton County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

1000 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Cincinnati

STATE

Ohio

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
National Register of Historic Places

DATE

October 31, 1972

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

OAHP/National Park Service

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Carroll Meeks wrote in The Railroad Station:

"This station was a badly needed replacement for a clutch of decrepit stations scattered about in the lower parts of the city subject to flooding. Far out from the urban center, an ample site was secured on which to build as ideal a station as could be conceived. The tracks were made to swing past at the rear, and an enormous elevated plaza was raised in front. The conception was that of a half funnel laid on the ground, the wide mouth gathering in the streams of travelers and the narrow end ejecting them onto the platforms. Circulation was the fundamental consideration. From the plaza, passengers enter the semicircular encourse at grade level. Three curving ramps lead down to the lower level, where buses or taxis deposit departing passengers and pick up arriving ones, then loop around and continue back up the ramp to the plaza. This remains today the most elaborate provision for vehicular traffic in any modern station. Back of the concourse a combined waiting room and train concourse 450 feet long stretches out over eight platforms and is connected to them by ramps and stairs, so that passengers have to go from the tracks up to the concourse and then down again to the vehicle ramps. Though simple enough in theory, this up-over-and-down journey must be rather arduous in practice; nothing can be made too simple for the hurried traveler.

Inside this Cincinnati station the era of sumptuous stations had left its traces. The prosperity and optimism of the years before the great Wall Street crash had stimulated a revival of mural decoration, and Winold Reiss was commissioned to decorate the interior in mosaics. Externally, the station is an example of the carton style. The entrance is a great arch 200 feet in diameter--the unchallenged giant of station portals. The plaster vault behind is hung from six arched trusses of which the largest weighs 380 tons. This ponderousness characterizes all the detail and led a German writer to observe smugly that from an architectural standpoint this station was inferior to German ones."<sup>1</sup>

Gale Brooks in his National Register form described it as follows:

"The total cost of the terminal facilities, including ground, and the readjustment of railroad facilities, was \$41,000,000, with the station building accounting for \$7,000,000 of that total. Over five and a half million cubic yards of fill were used to prepare the site for this facility and massive

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<sup>1</sup>Meeks, Carroll, The Railroad Station, an Architectural History, Yale University Press, New Haven, pages 157-158.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1933

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Fellheimer and Wagner

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

One of the very best railroad terminals in the world, the Cincinnati building is the only one of its kind. In 1933 there was no grander terminal than the one in Cincinnati. It served seven unified railroad branches and it covered 287 acres. Its 180 foot diameter, 100 foot-high dome, and a 401 foot-long, 20 foot high concourse were decorated with mosaic murals of the history and industry of Cincinnati and the story of transportation. Every detail was specially designed. Ada Louise Huxtable wrote that the terminal was pure Art Deco, that marriage of art and industry out of Paris of the 1920's, sometimes called "modernistic" or "beautility" by those who championed it. The roster of materials included the curious, fashionable taste mix of the day; aluminum, neon, marble, carved linoleum and exotic woods. The architects were Fellheimer and Wagner, and the artists were Winold Reiss and Pierre Bourdelle. Carroll Meeks called the station their master piece, marvelling at the complexity of its circulation patterns.

The history of the design concept is detailed in a catalogue on the terminal:

"The central question that comes to mind when one is confronted with the Cincinnati Union Terminal is: why did the builders and designers decide that this building should be strikingly modern? It is evident from original plans that, while the scheme of the building was much the same as that eventually built, the architects first developed a conservative design for the Terminal. For example, conventional benches were to be arranged in long rows in the waiting room, according to train station custom, and the side walls were to be divided by a series of high Gothic arches. However, in late 1931 or early 1932, well after the construction of the building was begun, the drawings changed until the final plan for the existing station emerged. It may well have been Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945) who played a decisive role in this dramatic leap from a Neo-Classic to an Art Deco style. Paul Cret was employed by the Union Terminal Company as aesthetic advisor to the firm of Fellheimer and Wagner for the design of the Union Terminal. The style of several of the projects he designed at the time the Terminal plans were being changed is so close to that of the Cincinnati building that it seems likely that Cret's influence was decisive.



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urban planning was required to readjust city movement systems due to the construction of the high railroad facilities which originally covered over 280 acres.

This is a monumental concrete and steel facility located at the western terminus of Lincoln Park Drive. The distinguishing element of the Terminal is a round arch semi-spherical dome, and this is flanked by low stepped wings which are curved to accommodate the street vehicle system. These wings serve to guide movement on the curving lanes of Lincoln Park Drive up to the canopied entrance under the vertical windows of the arch. On either side of the arch are massive buttresses which are decorated with stone carvings. The linear axis of Lincoln Park Drive extends through the center entrance vestibule, the main concourse, the checking lobby, and terminates at the end of the train concourse and waiting room. A large cascading fountain fronts the main entrance and front elevation of the semi-spherical dome. This dome over the main concourse has a span of 180 feet and a clear height of 106 feet. The train concourse is 450 feet long and 80 feet wide, and the eight station platforms under it are each 1600 feet long. The curving lines of the primary architectural element and its related circulation systems are reinforced on the interior with circular pathways in the terrazzo floors, a semi-circular information booth, curved seating arrangements, counters, and circular tables.

The interior of the rotunda is enhanced by two mosaic murals over 100 feet in length which flank the entrance to the main concourse and rise to a height of about 25 feet. They depict the founding and development of Cincinnati and the development of transportation. Above the entrances to the restrooms, located in the area between the rotunda and concourse are mosaics which show the Mayor, City Manager, architects and planners involved in the construction of the Terminal. In the concourse there are 14 mosaic murals approximately 25' x 25' which depict 14 industries which the artist Winold Reiss found representative of area industry. There also is a mosaic mural map showing the U.S. and the world in time-zone divisions on the rear west wall. Throughout the entire interior there is extensive use of marble and chrome. There are lacquered linoleum sculptures in the theatre, restaurant and restrooms. The president's office and the restrooms contain inlaid wood panels. The luncheonette, dining room and private dining rooms are decorated with painted murals on the walls and ceilings. The dining room ceiling mural shows an early map of the city flanked by four modes of transportation. There is also a tea room in the rotunda decorated with Rookwood pottery tiles on the walls and booths. There are also a variety of shops and a bank. When it was built

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it was designed to accommodate 17,000 people and 216 trains daily."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Brooks, Gale, National Register nomination.

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Paul Cret was connected with the firm of Fellheimer and Wagner, with the engineering staff responsible for the building of Union Terminal and with the City of Cincinnati. Steward Wagner of Fellheimer and Wagner, was a friend of Cret's, "especially in the educational program of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design--both were teaching, and they met regularly at the 'Judgements', held in New York, and were sympatico.

Of the members of the engineering staff for the Terminal Edgar Tyler had been a student of Cret's at the University of Pennsylvania. Tyler designed the auxiliary buildings of the new station and was the liaison between Fellheimer and Wagner in New York and the engineering staff actually doing the construction.

It is also interesting to note that Paul Cret knew Winold Reiss, the artist who designed the Terminal's mosaics, as early as 1930. Cret may have been the person who recommended Reiss to the Union Terminal Company since Reiss was known to be a designer in "the modern style." Thus, Cret had the respect of those who worked most closely on the plans of the new Terminal and any suggestions he had concerning these plans would at the least have been received with serious consideration.

For the most part, Paul Cret worked in a Neo-Classic idiom and was committed to the academic Beaux-Arts program of pillars and porticos applied to his buildings. For example, as late as 1931, Cret designed the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. However, just after this date there appears in Cret's work a design for the Chrysler Exhibit and Exhibition for the Century of Progress in 1933 (Plate 2). This design is in a pure, modern Art Deco style which has no precedents in any of Cret's earlier work; it was given an honorable mention in the Chrysler competition. Cret's proposed plan for the Chrysler Exhibition Building is remarkable in its similarities to the plan of Union Terminal. The Terminal plan has been reversed, with the main entrance and facade at the end of the long rectangular building. However, the elements are much the same, with a rectangular building joined to the circular one. The facades of Cret's proposed Chrysler Building and the Terminal also have similarities, although their proportions are different. The emphasis of both is upon flat, rectilinear wall surfaces, using the step motif which was very common in the Art Deco style and which had its source in Aztec pyramids.

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Considerations of expense were also part of the decision to give up the Neo-Classic design of the building. To build the Terminal with a modern scheme of decoration was evidently much cheaper than to build it in the Neo-Classic style. As the building of the Terminal coincided with the Depression, saving a significant amount of money would have been important and would have been a strong reason for changing to the less expensive Art Deco Style. In a speech given before the Rotary Club describing the architects' intentions, Col. Waite mentioned as a reason for the new design its relative cheapness and gave some interesting insights into the evolution of the interior design of the Terminal:

"We tried to build something new, fresh and joyous. At first we planned a classical design with its pillars, cornices, pilasters and pedestals. It would have been cold and costly. It would have cost many times what the present terminal cost.

"We finally decided on this plain type of structure and brightened it with color along lines of modern decoration and art.

"First, we tried out a decorative scheme in low colors--tried it out on a model of the station--but the effect was depressing. We decided that the Terminal which leads into all parts of the world, should be as bright and gay as the flowers and birds of the open country. And when we tried the bright colors the effect was joyous and stimulating."

Although a modern decor was less expensive, the aesthetics of the interior were still an important consideration, as can be seen from Colonel Waite's remarks and from the care that was taken to design each minute detail of the building.

It seems very clear that it was Paul Cret, in his role as aesthetic consultant to the Terminal architects, who became the guiding spirit behind the modern aspect of the Terminal. Although he did not actually specify that the ceiling should be indirectly lit, that the furniture should be arranged in semi-circles between the gates or that the floor patterns should be a guide to the traffic flow, he advocated an Art Deco solution as opposed to any other."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Carter, Denny, Art Deco and the Cincinnati Terminal, Art History Department, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1973.

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The great plaza leading up to the building is also Paul Cret who had so influenced Philadelphians with his grand boulevard.

The Cincinnati Terminal is empty today and although several campaigns have been started to save it, the future is uncertain.

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