

New York Central System Historical Society

2024 Indianapolis Convention

Bus Tour Two



Departs hotel 8:30 a.m.

Union Station / Beech Grove Shops / Hill Yard and Shelby Street engine terminal remnants



This was an everyday scene in Indianapolis seven decades ago, when New York Central passenger and freight trains arrived and departed around the clock on six different divisions. In addition to well-known NYC limiteds like the Southwestern and the Knickerbocker linking New York and St. Louis and the daily trips of the James Whitcomb Riley and the Sycamore between Cincinnati and Chicago, secondary runs like the Corn Belt Special to Peoria and a variety of NYC mail and express trains also called at Union Station. In the southeast corner of the city, the massive Beech Grove Shops built, rebuilt and maintained equipment from across the NYC. A once-busy segment of the system is examined on this tour.

INDIANAPOLIS UNION STATION

Hotel departure: 8:30 a.m. Arrival: 9:00 a.m. [Two-hour tour]

Departure: 11:10 a.m.



The frenzied development of railroads across the American midwestern states brought about the creation of the nation's first union station in Indianapolis in 1852-53. Located south of the present structure, it was initially criticized for being "too far out of town" – but a decade later it was being expanded to serve trains of five different railroads. It was replaced by the handsome structure we will tour today, designed by Pittsburgh architect Thomas Rodd and opened in 1888.

By 1900, dozens of passenger trains were serving Indianapolis. Community outcry regarding the inconvenience of Union Station's ground-level cast iron trainshed and the hazardous street crossings flanking it prompted development of a massive track elevation project through the downtown area, including a new, seven-acre trainshed, that was eventually completed in 1922.

At the time of the formation of Amtrak in 1971, the last remaining passenger trains serving Indianapolis were Penn Central's abbreviated versions of the *James Whitcomb Riley*, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and an Indianapolis-Cleveland mail train.



For decades, the most prominent train to visit Indianapolis Union Station each day was the New York-St. Louis Southwestern Limited, Big Four Nos. 11 and 12, said to be the equal of the New York-Chicago Twentieth Century Limited in equipment, service and timekeeping. Here a J-1d, carrying its pre-1935 number, CCC&StL 6609, departs for St Louis. [J.W. Westbay photo, NYCSHS PB611081]

The same scene was replicated two decades later. Almost-new E7 diesels were easing No. 11 out of the trainshed, gathering speed for the four-hour trip to St. Louis. [NYCSHS WR370467]





On a crisp spring morning in 1954, the pride of the Big Four fleet, the James Whitcomb Riley, rolled gallantly out of the Union Station trainshed, Chicago bound, behind J-3 5421. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG503054]



The postwar Riley featured an all-stainless steel consist – but with a mixture of Budd and Pullman-Standard coaches, Budd dining and tavern-lounge-observation cars, and baggage-coach combines built by American Car & Foundry. [Ed Nowak photo, NYCSHS PB574043]



Niagara No. 6001 demonstrated its strength as it charged out of the Union Station trainshed, westbound with mail and express train No. 473 for St. Louis. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG508083] Near the same location, the Riley departed for Chicago with a through Chesapeake & Ohio sleeper and NYC business car No. 20 in tow. [Herschel Van Sickle photo]





A memorable day at Indianapolis Union Station: the christening of the ultramodern Mercury train on July 19, 1936. [NYCSHS PN507015]



Ten years later, the Indianapolis Industrial Exhibition was installed in the station's concourse, featuring exhibit cases suggestive of streamlined observation cars. [NYCSHS WR370460]

SHAPIRO'S DELICATESSEN / LUNCH

*Arrival: 11:20 p.m. [60-minute lunch break]
Boarding: 12:25 p.m. Departure: 12:30 p.m.*



An Indianapolis institution, Shapiro's Delicatessen has been operated by the same family for over 115 years. Shapiro's offers an extensive menu, but they are most famous for their large, slow-cooked corned beef and pastrami sandwiches. The photo above shows the former Shapiro's store on the left and Passo's drug store on the right; after a fire destroyed the drug store in 1976, Shapiro's doubled in size, incorporating both the former delicatessen and the site of the drug store in an all-new facility.



HILL YARD

Enroute



Kankakee-Indianapolis train KI-2 enters Middle Hill behind L-2c Mohawk No. 2802. The Indianapolis “skyline” in the distance is actually the large Prospect Street plant of Citizens Gas and Coke Utility. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG503034]

The once-huge NYC Hill Yard switching complex on the southeast side of Indianapolis, known colloquially to railroaders as “The Hill,” consisted of three interconnected yards – West Hill, Middle Hill and East Hill.

Built in conjunction with the development of the nearby Beech Grove Shops in the early 1900s, the three-mile-long Hill Yards complex was the largest of the Central’s Indianapolis freight yards. Middle Hill, the nerve center of the facility, operated a rider-hump yard. East Hill contained sixteen tracks and a six-track receiving yard; it was the eastbound classification yard, dispatching trains to Cincinnati and, over the Peoria & Eastern east line, to Springfield, Ohio. West Hill, the westbound yard, held 22 tracks.

Classification work ended at the Hill yards -- and also at Brightwood and West Side yards -- when the new, 490-acre, electronically-controlled Avon hump yard opened on the western side of the city in 1960.



L-4b No. 3127 has arrived with Cincinnati-Chicago symbol freight CC-3. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG503033]

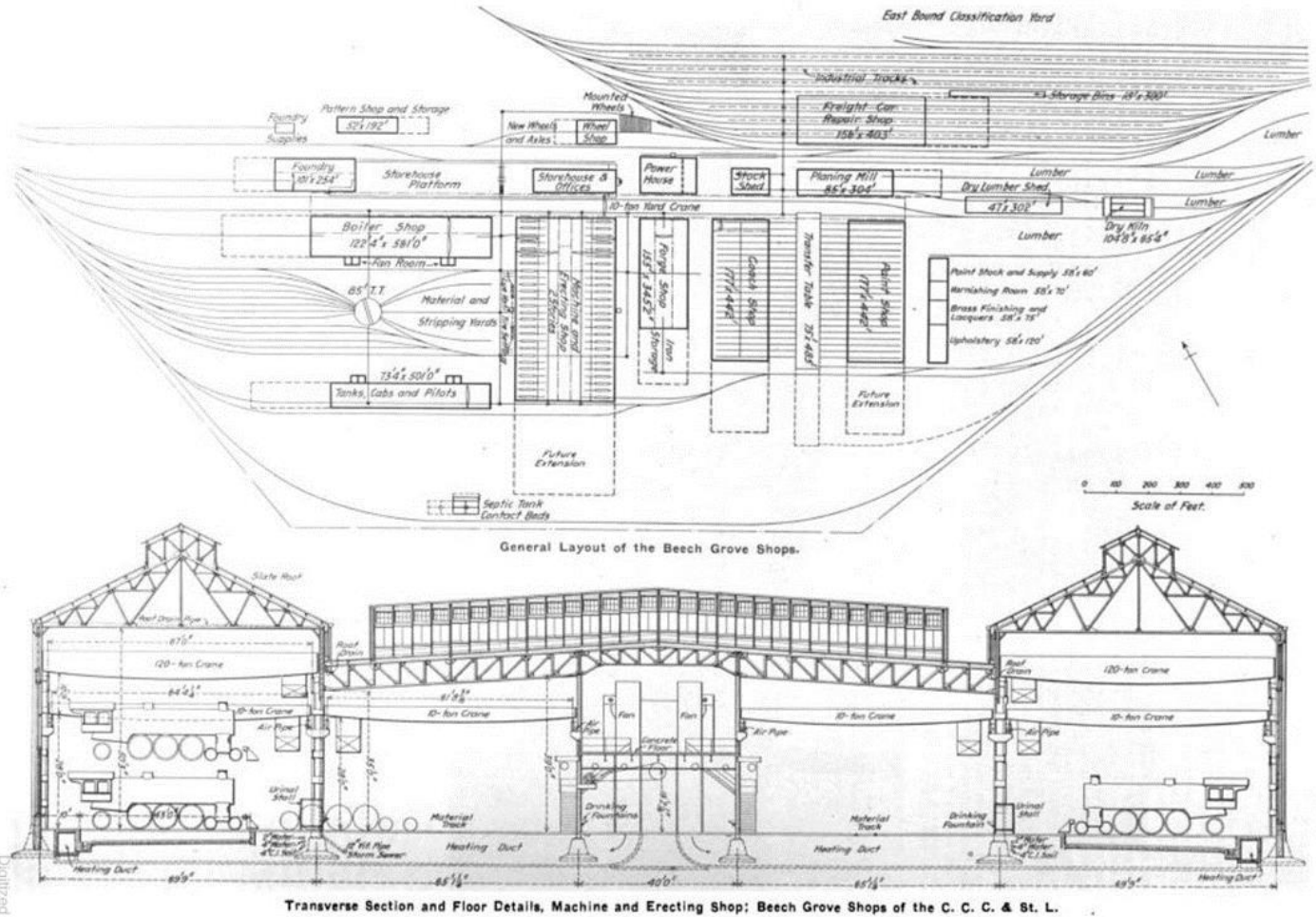


Minutes later, No. 3127 is seen negotiating the crossover tracks to the westbound main as she heads toward the Shelby Street engine terminal. Caboosees congregate around the yard office in this April 1956 scene. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG503033]

Below, L-2c 2802 brings the 44 cars of train KI-2 from Kankakee, Illinois, to Hill Yard. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG503033]



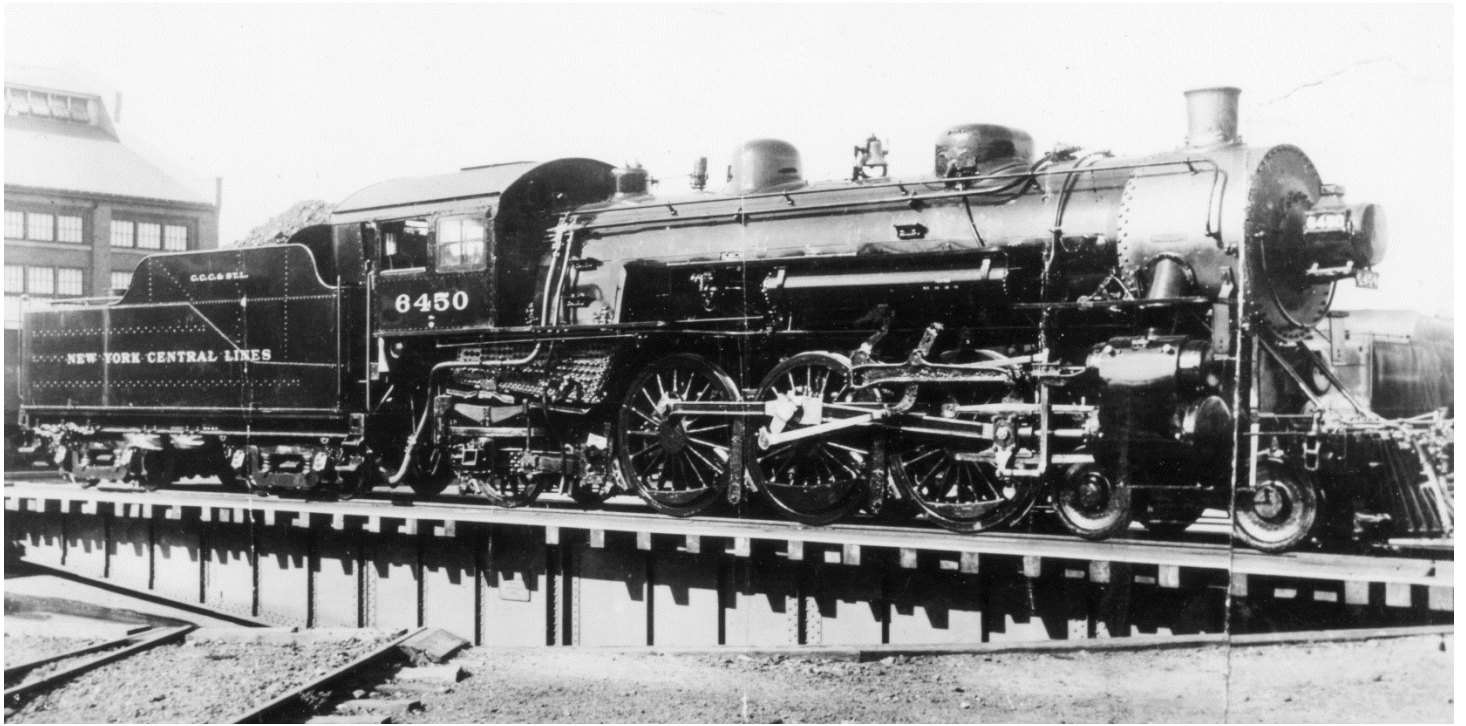
BEECH GROVE SHOPS



A glimpse at a map of the Big Four quickly confirms that Indianapolis was the nexus of the system – and the logical place to construct its principal repair shops. In 1906, the company completed the purchase of 540 rural acres southeast of the city, adjoining its main line to Cincinnati. Over the next four years it spent five million dollars to construct a campus of large brick buildings for locomotive and car construction and repair, some of them containing over 200,000 feet of floor space. At time of its opening in 1910, the Shops employed 700 workers. During the hectic years of World War II, that number rose to 5,000.

Perhaps the Shops' most notable achievement was the construction of the prewar *Mercury* and *James Whitcomb Riley* streamliners, including the shrouds for their upgraded Pacific locomotives. In earlier years, Beech Grove also built new steam locomotives and freight and passenger cars from the ground up.

In 1964, Beech Grove "freshened" the consists of the *20th Century Limited* – but only seven years later the *Century's* twin-unit dining cars and many other NYC passenger cars awaited scrapping in nearby yards. Amtrak acquired the complex in 1975 and continues to use it as a principal repair facility today.



Early home-built products of the Beech Grove Shops included the five Ko-class Pacifics of 1915, Nos. 6450-6454, and, in 1923, two steel Railway Post Office cars for the Peoria & Eastern, Nos. 901-902. [NYCSHS PB615168 and PB059050]





In 1936, the Beech Grove Shops transformed Henry Dreyfuss's drawing and 1927 coach into the Mercury's remarkable parlor-observation car. [NYCSHS WR240216 and PB602139]



A more straightforward design from 1941, observation car No. 52 for the James Whitcomb Riley, nevertheless enjoyed a similarly luxurious interior. [NYCSHS WR260048 and WR280447]





Even the pride of the fleet came to Beech Grove for mechanical upgrades. J-3a No. 5453 was basking in the Indiana sun during an April 1943 visit. [NYCSHS NG520156]



In the mid-1960s, Beech Grove crews converted 1948-1949 built offset-side, two-bay hoppers into Lot 942-H ribbed-sided hoppers. [NYCSHS NG525181 and NG525378]

A roster of skilled craftsmen from a broad spectrum of trades has provided the foundation for Beech Grove Shops' success over thirteen decades. Today's Amtrak shop employees continue to meet the challenges of adjusting to never-ending changes in the design, construction, and maintenance of contemporary railroad equipment.



PROSPECT STREET / BELT CROSSING

Enroute



Returning to the downtown area from Beech Grove, we will pass beneath the Indiana Division overpass at Prospect Street. The three-way crossing features the Indiana Division mainline on top, Prospect Street in the middle and Pleasant Run at the lowest level. In the mid-Fifties Dick Baldwin created this fine photograph of a Mohawk-powered eastbound train, perhaps the afternoon Cincinnati Special. The small space between the two center bridge piers once accommodated the Indianapolis & Cincinnati interurban line, which occupied a right-of-way between the street and the Pleasant Run waterway. In less than 1,000 feet the train will be hammering the diamonds of Belt Crossing, once one of the busiest junctions in Indianapolis.



Looking east from Belt Crossing Tower and into West Hill yard, where in the distance F-7A 1769 and two mates are ready to begin a trip to Kankakee with Cincinnati-Chicago symbol freight CC-3. [Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS 503035] Below: the Belt Crossing tower. This view also looks east along the Indiana Division. Cincinnati is 106.2 miles in the distance. [Charles W. Bohi photo, NYCSHS PB711105]





The massive Citizens Gas and Coke Utility complex was an Indianapolis industrial landmark for decades and a good freight customer for the New York Central and the Indianapolis Union Railway ("The Belt"). On August 8, 1953, photographer Ron Stuckey captured a rare sight on the Belt – an NYC passenger special, turning onto the Indiana Division at Belt Crossing and bound for that day's Reds baseball game in Cincinnati. The lucky folks on the rear vestibule are about to enjoy two hours of high-speed running and a scenic descent into the Ohio River valley. The Reds lost that day's game to the Brooklyn Dodgers, 9-1.



SHELBY STREET ENGINE TERMINAL



Located one mile east of Union Station and two miles west of Middle Hill Yard, Shelby Street was the busiest of the Big Four's Indianapolis engine terminals. In postwar years it became evident that its life would end with dieselization, but the protracted use of steam in this region kept it open well past its prime and home to unexpected guests like Niagaras and ex-Boston & Albany switchers. In this May 1956 view from the southwest corner of Cedar and Shelby Streets, it can be seen that a locomotive had crashed through the wall of the roundhouse and almost onto Shelby Street, leaving a gaping hole and a pile of bricks. The roundhouse foundation is still visible in 2024. [Jeremy Taylor photos, NYCSHS NG503040 and NG504046]





Above: NYC No. 7722, built by Lima in 1921 as Boston & Albany U-3b No. 50, took a spin on the turntable in April 1956. Whitelined J-3a 5411, its career at an end, occupied a nearby stall. Below: Very much out of place in the cramped facilities at Shelby Street that same month was S-1b Niagara No. 6015. It would not fit in the stalls of the 1898 roundhouse regularly occupied by engines like USRA switcher U-3a No. 7815 and, at right, H-7e class 2-8-2 No. 1995. The issue became irrelevant as more diesels arrived and more steamers were retired. [Jeremy Taylor photos, NYCSHS NG503047 and NG503044]



Today all that remains of this once busy facility is a small concrete base for a light standard, embossed "CCC&StL." Watch for it just past the northeast corner of Shelby and Deloss Streets.



NYC railroader Jeremy Taylor, assigned to Indianapolis from 1953 to 1956, described this melancholy Shelby Street scene he had captured on film in the last months of steam:

“Even the bright Memorial Day sunshine could not dissipate the atmosphere of decay which casts an inevitable pall over Shelby Street. Weathered structures, rusting machinery, twisted rails, littered grounds - all combine to suggest that here is the very epitome of that most persistent plague of railroading, obsolescence, and that here also is the excruciatingly stark evidence of its *raison d'etre*, financial instability. The pair of GP-7's, serving as passenger protection between stints on Indianapolis 500 race specials, seems grotesquely out of place among the other occupants of the area - so much so that it is hard to reconcile the legend "New York Central" as being common to them and to the pathetic hulks which predominate in this veritable morgue. The only live steamer in view is L-3a 3015 in the center foreground, and except for her pumps, which emit an occasional soft whine and pant, she is almost as mute as the corpses on her left. The dead line is made up mostly of 2800-series L-2s and various members of the J-1 class. All are consigned to scrap and are waiting for a buyer.”

[Jeremy Taylor photo, NYCSHS NG503041]