

Penn Station's Perils

The Perils of Pennsylvania Station—a tear-jerker of monumental proportions—began with the startling announcement that it was to be knocked down for a huge commercial complex of smashing modernity. Not that the old station hadn't already suffered. The Age of Elegance bowed to the Age of Plastic when the railroad began to sell tickets on the half shell in the giant plastic clam with which it effectively and tastelessly demolished the building's massive Roman interior.

In Installment Two the proposed redevelopment was published. Installment Three brought the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York to protest against the Station's destruction.

Installment Four is supposed to be the Happy Ending. Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris has proposed that two disembodied rows of eighteen of the eighty-four columns be saved and set up on the Battery Mall, colossal crumbs to remind us that New York once had a great building by a fine architect.

Of course, there is no happy ending. This is really the great American tragedy, being played out in every major city. The growing economic obsolescence of so many of our most distinguished older buildings, the peculiar combination of higher building costs and lower architectural standards of today, a lack of vision—all these factors are making our cities uglier and more ordinary every day.