

# TRACK

THE ARCHIVES OF MICHIGAN MAGAZINE

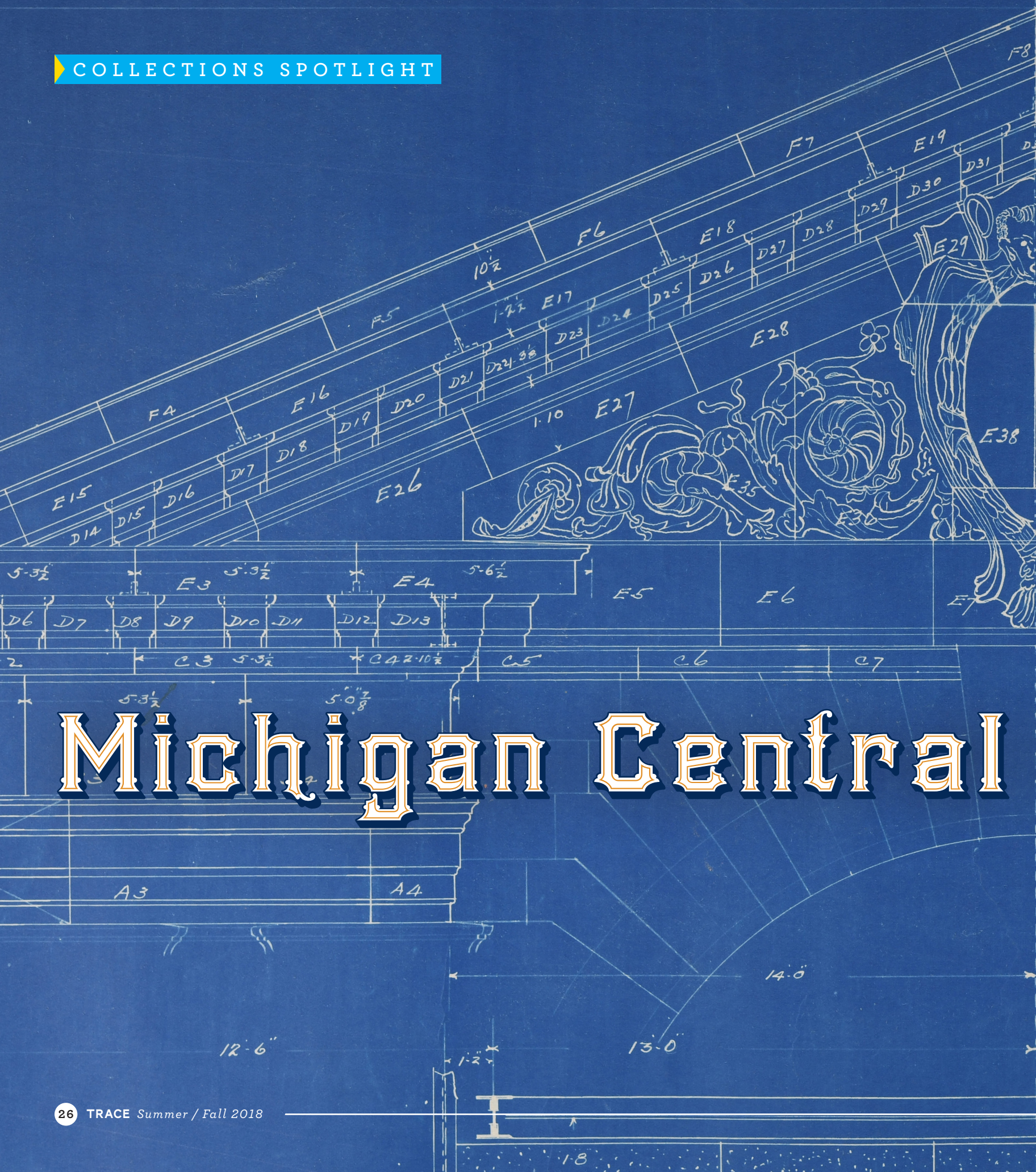
## Michigan Central Depot Gets Back on Track

New drawings surface to aid the  
restoration of a national landmark

- ▶ **LAST STAGECOACH ROBBER IN MICHIGAN** p. 6
- ▶ **SKY PILOT OF THE STATE PRISON** p. 20
- ▶ **THE DUELING SURVEYORS** p. 30

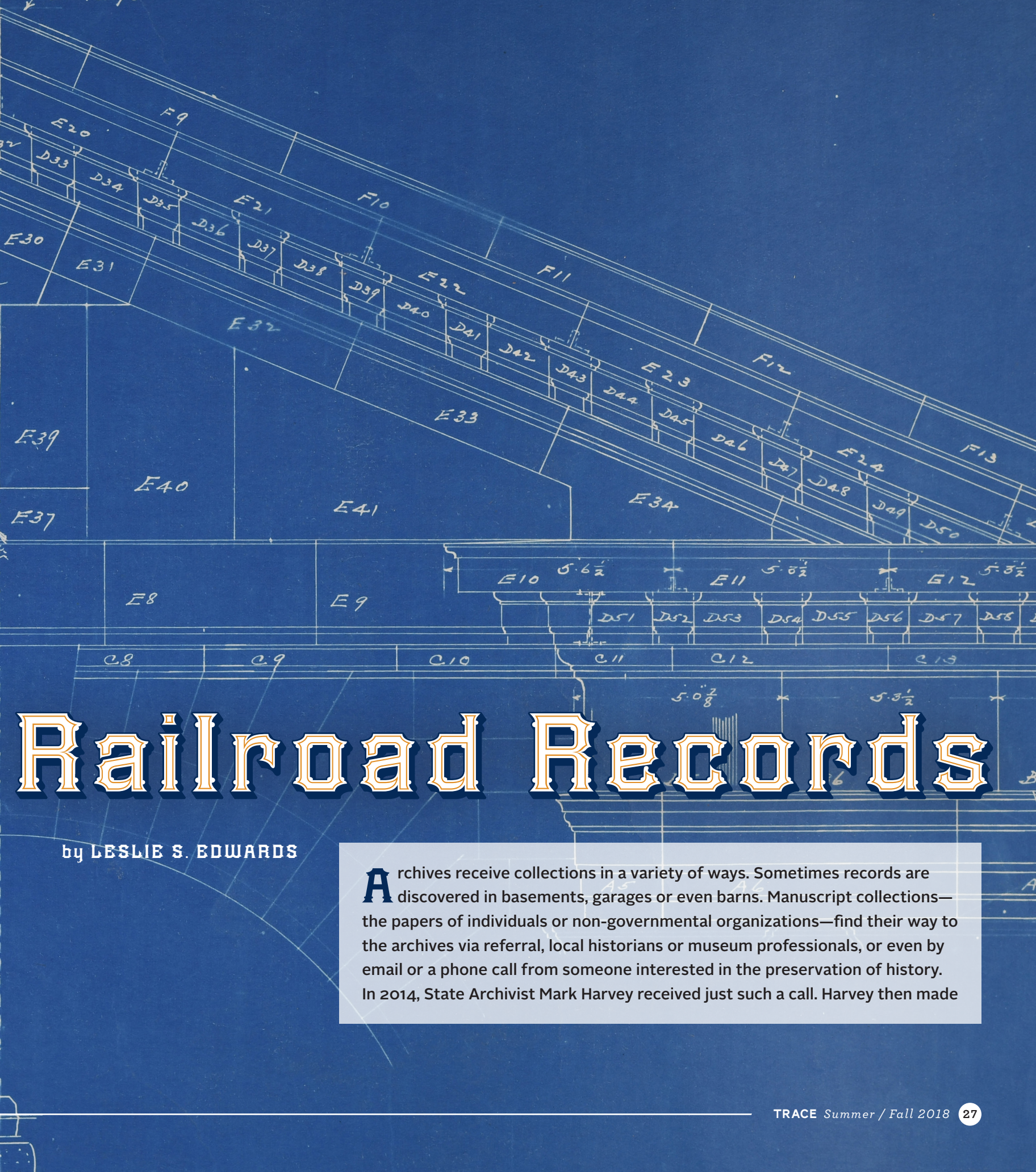
SUMMER/FALL 2018





# Michigan Central





# Railroad Records

by LESLIE S. EDWARDS

**A**rchives receive collections in a variety of ways. Sometimes records are discovered in basements, garages or even barns. Manuscript collections—the papers of individuals or non-governmental organizations—find their way to the archives via referral, local historians or museum professionals, or even by email or a phone call from someone interested in the preservation of history. In 2014, State Archivist Mark Harvey received just such a call. Harvey then made





a site visit to Trenton, Michigan, with Senior Archivist Mary Zimmeth. There they discovered three trailers full of boxes, ledgers, drawings and raccoon nests!

After devising a plan on how to collect the materials, Harvey and Education Specialist Rachel Clark returned several weeks later. They then performed the archivist's equivalent of "dumpster diving" digging through the massive amount of damaged materials to determine what was not only salvageable, but also relevant to the collecting policy of the archives. The result was a large collection now known as The Michigan Central Railroad Records (MS 2014-111).

The collection is multi-faceted. One part comprises railroad timetables, photographs and various railroad track diagrams of stations in cities other than Detroit. The second, and largest, portion of the collection consists of blueprints of the Michigan Central Train Station in Detroit. The draw-

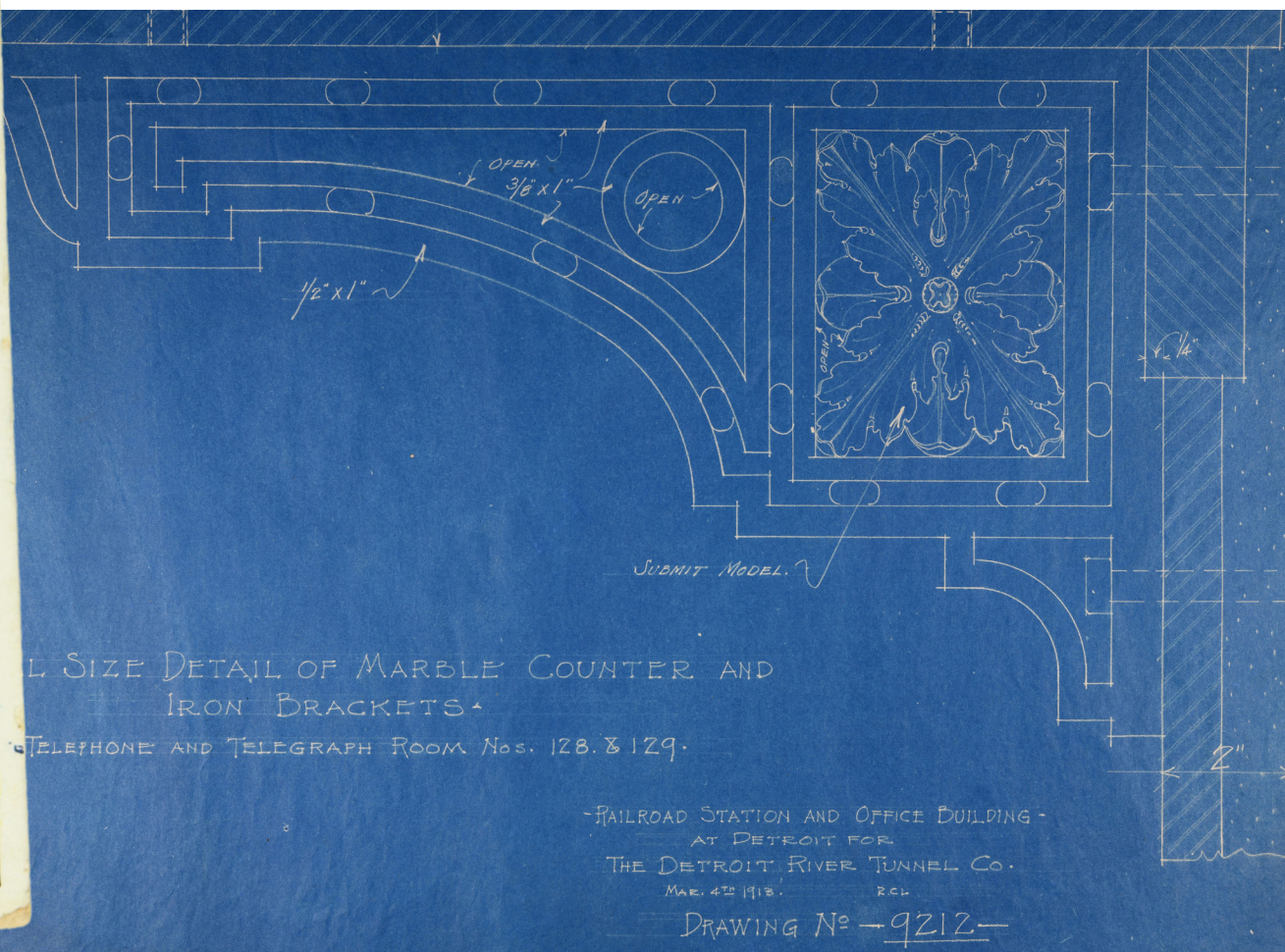
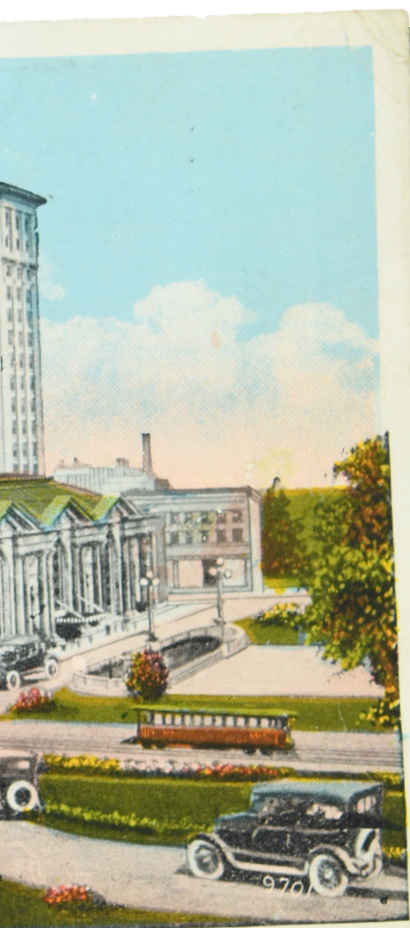
**A view of one of the trailers (left); A 1926 post card of the Michigan Central Train Station (right).**

ings, which are currently being inventoried, range from structural (steel framing) and electrical plans to the shop drawings for the decorative elements of the building—

marble, iron, woodwork and terra cotta, and even the original light fixtures. These working drawings, or "as-builts," were used by the contractors and are often marked up, reflecting design/construction changes that were made onsite. They are crucial for use by architects during restoration of the building.

The station and office building was built at a cost of \$2.5 million and opened for service on December 27, 1913. Concrete covered the steel-framed structure (7,000 tons of steel!) and terra cotta was utilized on both the exterior and interior. On the main floor, the walls up to the window sills were granite. Blue limestone was also featured, most





### Assorted detail drawings from the Central Train Station

notably in the waiting room. Light-colored brick (1,500,000 cubic feet of face brick and 7,000,000 cubic feet of common brick) was married with limestone above the main floor all the way up to the twelfth floor. Above the brick, columns and ornamental spandrels accented the terra cotta. In addition to the light fixtures, interior furnishings included marble countertops and display cases faced with East Indian mahogany.

The drawings include elevations, floor plans, sections and details. Due to their long life in the trailers, before they can be used by researchers, the nearly 1,000 drawings need conservation treatment which could include surface cleaning, humidification, flattening and mending. Once this work has been completed, preservation architects will be able to use these drawings, which only exist in the Archives of Michigan, to assist in the restoration of the building. They tell an amazing story about the construction, and particularly the architectural details, of what was once the tallest train station in the nation.

