

Learning Places Fall 2016

# SITE REPORT #1

## Through A College Student's Perspective: Grand Central Terminal



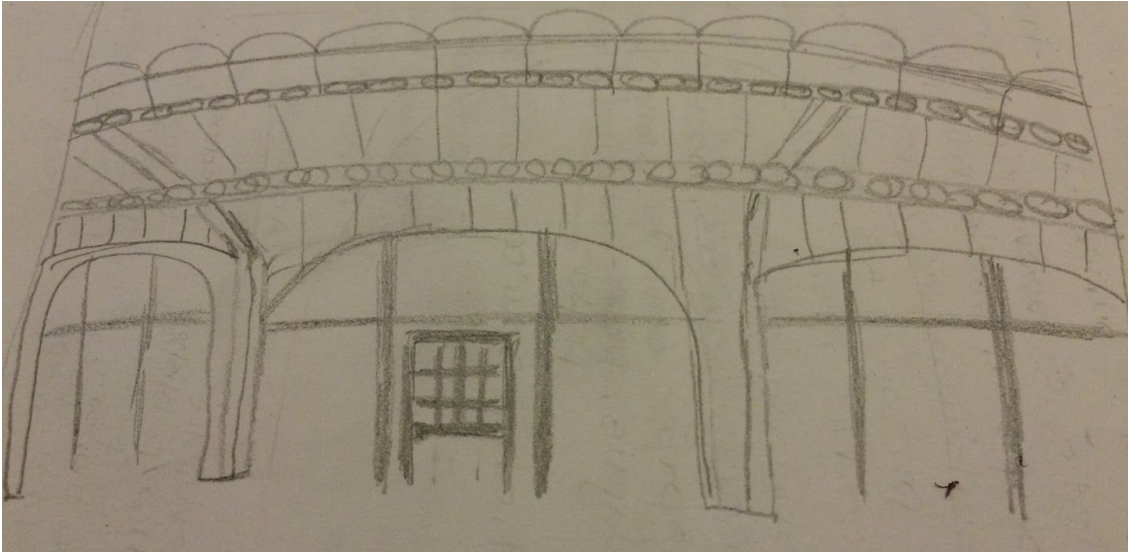
Joyce Tam

9.19.2016

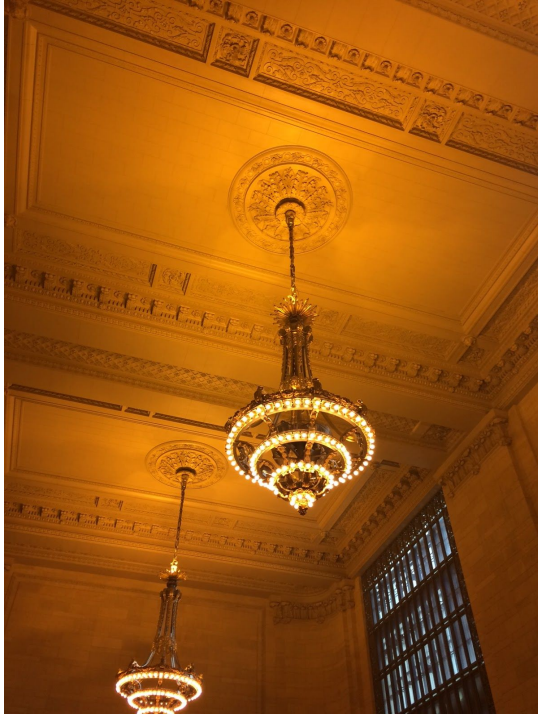
## INTRODUCTION

In the Liberal Arts/Architecture 2205ID course, we had a class visit to the Grand Central Terminal. We briefly explored the underground corridors, main concourse and Vanderbilt Hall. Grand Central has a long history in New York City and is a major architectural and civil structural achievement. Grand Central has transformed from a depot, to a station and finally a terminal which currently serves as the largest terminal in the world. From our guest lecture provided by Professor Jefferey Burden, we were able to connect the rich history of how Grand Central came to be to what we were able to observe in the grounds of the site.

SITE DOCUMENTATION



The class was first lead to the corner of 42nd and Vanderbilt Avenue of Grand Central Terminal. We noticed how prominent the light bulbs were in one of the entrances of Grand Central Terminal. I drew a sketch of the entrance. Professor Grace also told us that a problem for architects was solving the design problem of turning the corners of a building. We noticed the light bulbs aren't enclosed like our current light fixtures, and it was outside.



It was also noted that in the interiors, we will see much more intricate designs of lighting fixtures dedicated to the presence of the exposed light bulbs. I assume this was an important part of the terminal made distinct because electrification was considered modern technology at the time Grand Central was being built and this signifies so. Cass Gilbert's vision for the rich decor clothing his steel-frame skeleton work desired by his patrons (Beaux Arts style). It makes me feel like I am travelling back in time to Europe when I entered the terminal.



Leading into the entrance past Grand Central Oyster Bar, we can see that the tunnels are easily accessible with ramps. From what I have read in the article shared by Professor

Almeida, “The Heart of New York: Grand Central Terminal” by Jeff Lee, and comments made by Professor Grace, I was able to realize the use of space in the tunnels. Instead of using staircases, commuter traffic was cut down to much shorter times and was able to cater to the masses by using the alternative option. Even when I was exploring Grand Central Terminal during my own time, I have not seen many staircases. Most staircases were hidden in corners or obscure spaces. I was able to mostly travel through the ramps.



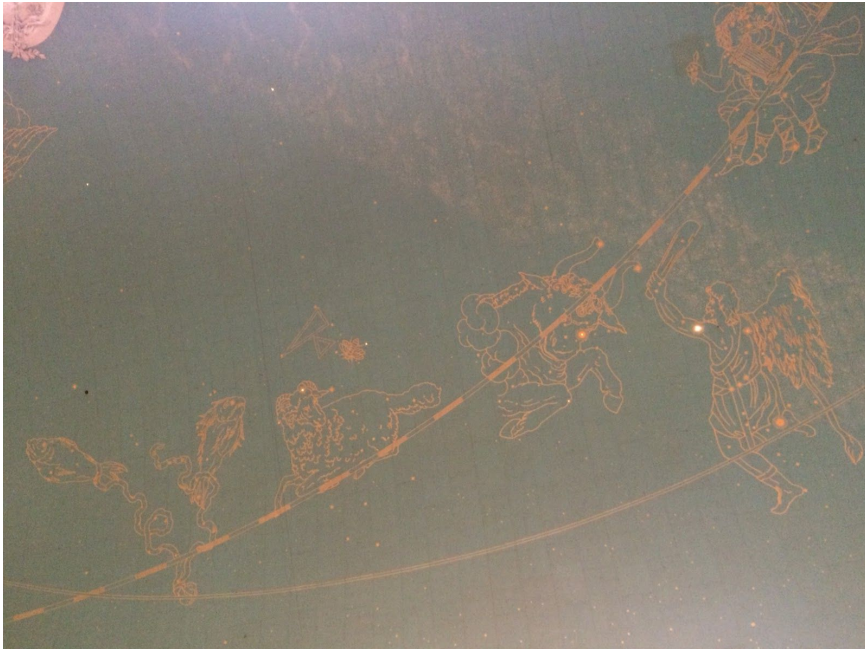
Once we got past the tunnels, we came across the Whispering Arch in the lower concourse. I have always read about this in websites on New York City and things to do but I have only visited Grand Central Terminal once to go hiking upstate. Being able to see the arch and experience it with my classmates was a very unique experience. At first, I was not sure of what to listen for when our classmates stood on opposite ends, but when I got closer up, I was able to hear. It must have been an accomplishment being able to engineer the arch to allow sounds to

travel and reflect on opposite ends of the arch.



Above is the picture I took of the windows and also the sketch I drew on site. Throughout the Grand Central Terminal, we also observed how the architecture allow much of the natural lighting to penetrate throughout the Terminal. We see the exposed lightbulbs once again with much

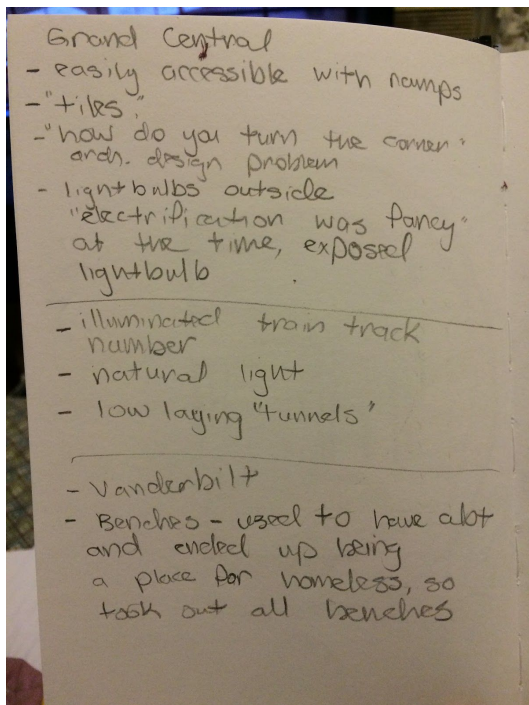
natural light lighting up the main hall. Not only does the main concourse have vast space and beautiful architectural elements to it, but even details such as the half arched windows add an illuminated sense of being looking at the space in the images. I was very surprised to find that the retail store, Apple, was also located in the main concourse by the grand staircases mainly because it is an historical site.



One of the additional pictures I took below is of the astronomical ceiling or zodiac mural located in the main concourse. I thought it was interesting that they left one black spot in the ceiling from all the smoking fumes and soot from when smoking was still not banned. Another note that I would like to add

is that we also recognized that it was painted backwards which ties into Professor Burden's lecture once again.

## GENERAL NOTES:



It was hard to hear some of the comments made by Professor Almeida and Professor Grace. I tried to incorporate most of the thoughts and comments I remember into this site report even though I did not write much down.

## INSIGHTS/DISCOVERIES

One of the discoveries I've made was that in the Vanderbilt Hall, there was only one bench left in its existence. Originally the space was used as a waiting area for commuters and there was many benches in the area. During the period of time when the benches was still there, there was a big problem with homelessness where they would come in Grand Central and sleep there. The benches was then removed some time after and now used as a space for events or gallery viewings.

## KEYWORDS/VOCABULARY & DEFINITIONS

**\*5 keywords minimum required per site visit**

1. Guastavino Tiles - Guastavino vaulting is a technique for constructing self-supporting arches using interlocking terracotta tiles and layers of mortar with the tiles following the curve of the roof.
2. Vanderbilt Hall - It was a former waiting room in Grand Central Terminal.
3. Neoclassicism - "New Classic" or revival of classical styles but sometimes revived in resemblance to classical styles.
4. Preservation - to keep alive or in existence
5. Beaux Arts Style - This style was taught in the Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris and emphasizes on the usage of space while decorated in richly detailed architectural elements (arches and so forth).
6. Grand Central (Depot/Station/Terminal) - Commuter railroad terminal at 42nd street



and Park avenue in Manhattan, New York.

#### QUESTIONS for Further RESEARCH

1. Are there any secret corridors, passages, tunnels or hidden rooms that is accessible by tour or public?