

Learning Places Fall 2016  
SITE REPORT #1 (Expanded)  
Grand Central



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## INTRODUCTION

Grand Central Terminal as we know it today is in midtown Manhattan at the intersection of 42<sup>nd</sup> street and Park Avenue. It is one of the most popular tourist attraction mostly because of its architecture. Its Neoclassical design makes it a beautiful sight and landmark. Originally it was called Grand Central Depot in 1871 then Grand Central Station in 1900 and finally Grand Central Terminal in 1913. It is probably the most innovative train terminal in the world because of the number of available platforms, lines and levels. It is named the biggest train terminal in the world because of the amount of platforms. It has one of the deepest basements going down 13 stories and possibly the biggest as well since the terminal sits on 49 acres. The size is important since the approximate number of passengers per day is 750,000.

Grand Central is very important in New York City's rail transportation because it brought together all the different lines that were in different areas. Before Grand Central, commuters would have to get off at one terminal and maybe use some other form of transportation to connect or transfer to another train. Thanks to Cornelius Vanderbilt, who changed over to the railroad business from the steamboat business, various trains now terminate at Grand Central and commuters can also transfer to other trains.

## SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos\*)

\*3 photos minimum required per site visit



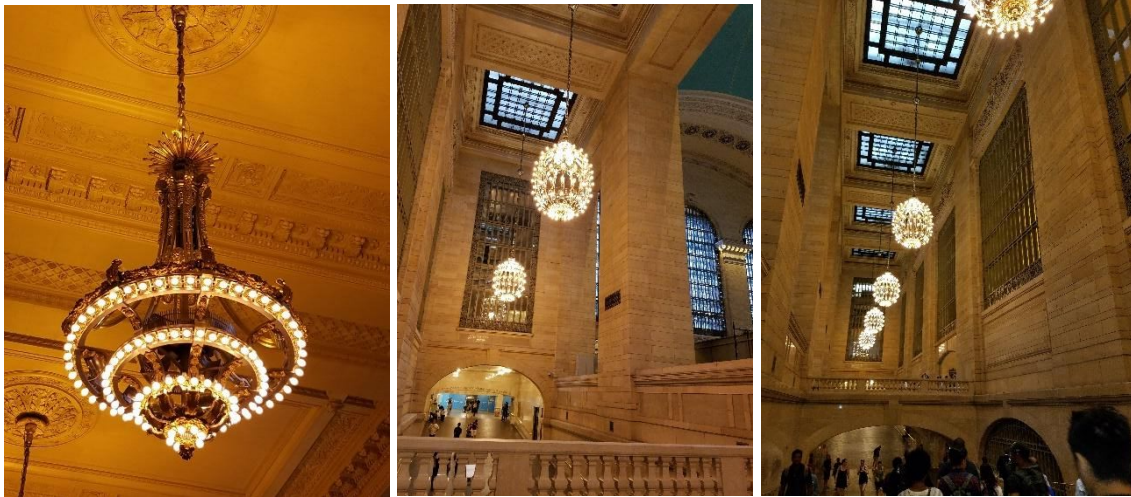
This is an image of the front of Grand Central Terminal. In this image one can see a Tripartite division even though the base is open. Under the upper street level is the base that seems heavy and sets the visual foundation. Above this is the middle and a Tripartite can also be seen in the middle alone. The three huge windows are an example of a Tripartite in an ABA pattern. Then the top is visually light which is an element of the Tripartite division.

Neoclassical elements can also be seen from this image especially above the base. The arches, the columns and the way everything seems to be equally placed. On top of the windows are examples of the Roman arches which gives a feel of triumph or superiority. Perhaps this triumph or superiority is because Grand Central had so many railroad station innovations.



This is an image of one of the ramp leading directly to a platform in Grand Central Terminal. The ramps in Grand Central was and is still a great innovation because it allows commuters to bring a lot of suitcases directly from the street to the train and not have to worry about stairs. This improved efficiency since going down stairs with suitcases would take longer.

Another part where ramps made things more efficient is on the upper roadway on the outside. This upper roadway was accessible by ramps which made it easier for cars or carts to drop off and pick up passengers. Reed and Stem was the architectural firm that designed these ramps. This same idea is seen in airports today.



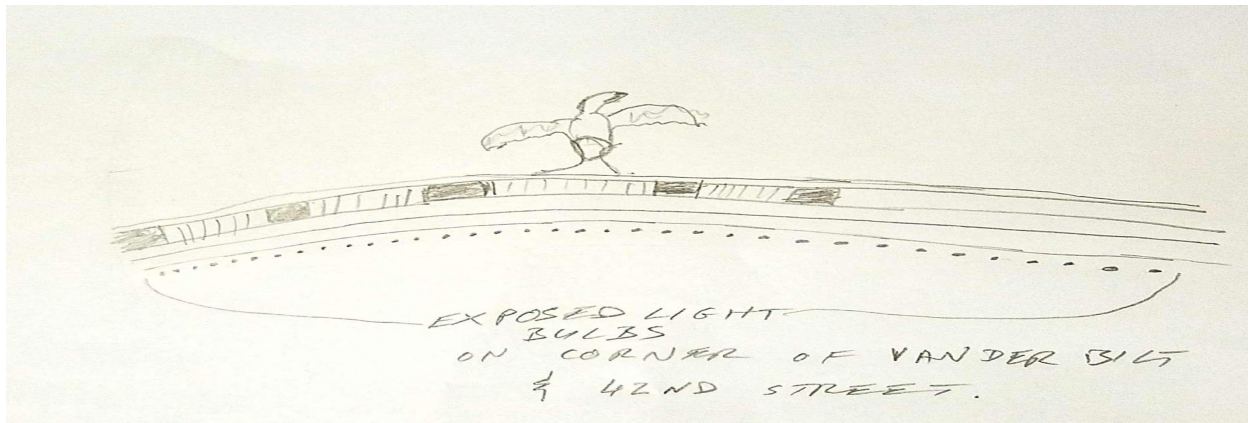
These are pictures of the exposed light bulbs. Electrification was a major railroad innovation and the exposed light bulb was a way of showing of this innovation. The third rail which supplies electricity to the trains, was introduced for the first time on trains in Grand Central.



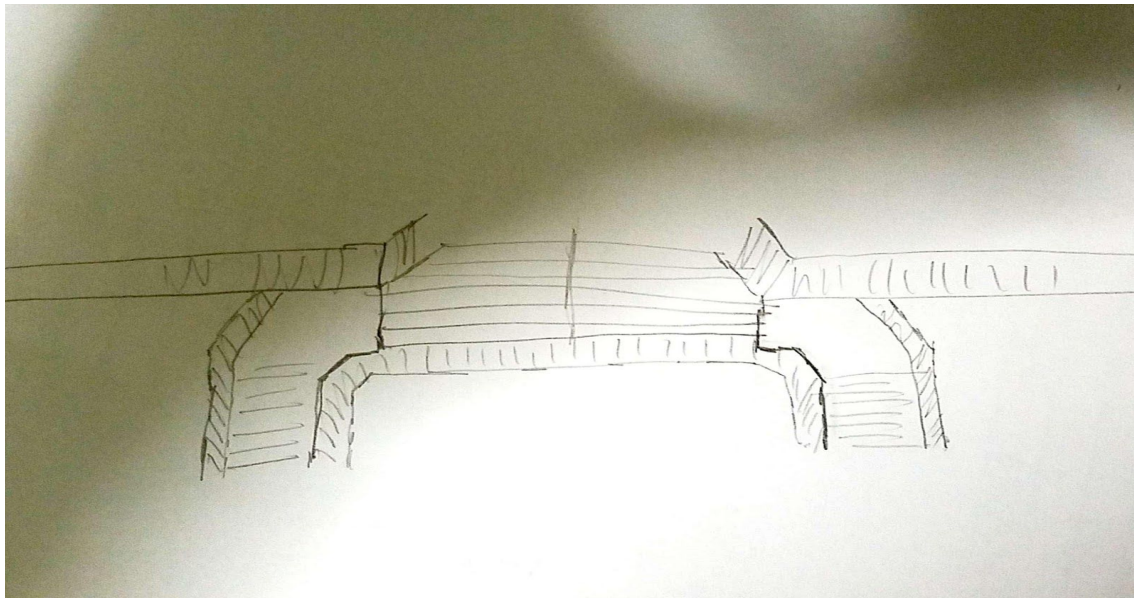
The image on the left is an image of acorns. The image on the right also shows an acorn. The acorns represent the Vanderbilt family insignia and can be seen all over Grand Central carved into decorations.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (sketches\*)

\*2 sketches minimum required per site visit



Sketch of the exposed light bulbs. Exposed light bulbs are beautiful to me and they originally exposed them as a show that Grand Central had electricity. This is because electrification was a big deal at the time.



Sketch of the Staircases. The staircases were inspired by the Oprah Houses.

GENERAL NOTES:

- The exposed light bulb was a way of displaying Electrification as it was a major innovation in railroad transportation.
- The Vanderbilt Hall originally a waiting area use to be filled with homeless people and as a way of controlling this, the waiting area was removed. It now has a restaurant and an area for special events. This contributed to bringing more people in and making more business.
- The design style of Grand Central is Neoclassical which has elements of the Roman style. An example of the Roman style is the arches.
- The black spot on the ceiling of the Grand Concourse is a relic of what it use to be. The ceiling use to be covered with soot probably from cigar smoke and when the ceiling was cleaned, a piece was left so people can see what it use to be and think about the work that went into reviving it..
- The ramps that lead to the platforms and on the outside for the upper street level was designed to improve efficiency.

## INSIGHTS/DISCOVERIES

I have only been to grand central once before and it was a great experience to see its beauty. The one time I did go, I did not stop to look at anything. Maybe i'm not the only one guilty of this but living in New York creates a very busy life and no has time to stop, look and appreciate things. For instance the ceiling was beautiful and I learned that it was inspired by astronomy. Previously i had only read about it. The Vanderbilt Hall is a beautiful area especially with the chandeliers. I learned that it was once a waiting area and that it was closed to the public since a lot of homeless people use to live or stay there. The exposed lighting, I learned the reason that they are exposed is because electrification was a major innovation. I also learned about the secret rail for president Roosevelt, it is very interesting.

Grand Central pioneered many different railroad innovations like the ramps for commuters to use, electrification and also making the railroad into what we know airports as today. When I found out that the upper street level was made for passengers to be dropped off and picked up, I immediately thought about JFK airport. Most terminals if not all at JFK have these ramps for dropping and picking up passengers.

## KEYWORDS/VOCABULARY & DEFINITIONS

\*5 keywords minimum required per site visit

Neoclassical - architecture, music, literature, etc., that is based on or influenced by classical models, or a style that has become established as 'classical' (OED). The design style of Grand Central is Neoclassical.

Tripartite - Divided into or composed of three parts or kinds (OED) Referring to the architectural elements of Grand Central.

Electrification – The action or process of converting something, esp. a railway line, to the use of electricity or to electric operation(OED). Electrification was a huge innovation of the railroad in Grand Central.

Cornelius Vanderbilt – Switched from steam boat transportation to railroad and consolidated various railroads to make Grand Central. (Class)

Grand Central Depot – Grand central was first a Depot in 1871 (Class)

Grand Central Station – Grand Central changed from Depot to Station in 1900 (Class)

Grand Central Terminal – Grand Central changed from Station to Terminal in 1913. (Class)

Oprah Houses – The stair Cases were inspired by Oprah Houses because of 1 huge stair split into 2 and makes a semi-circle making it look grand. (Class)

Roman arches - The arches seen above the windows at Grand Central is an element of the Neoclassical style. (Class)



## QUESTIONS for Further RESEARCH

1. Why is Gustavino Tiles important in the design or why couldn't it be another style?
2. Did the upper street level for dropping and picking up passengers inspire the ramps at JFK or other airports to do the same?
3. I have seen acorns at the MET, is there some kind of significance to the acorn and wealthy people?

## References

New York Transit Museum. (n.d.). Retrieved October 6, 2016, from <http://www.gcthistory.com/>