

Learning Places Fall 2016

SITE REPORT #1

Through A College Student's Perspective: Grand Central Terminal



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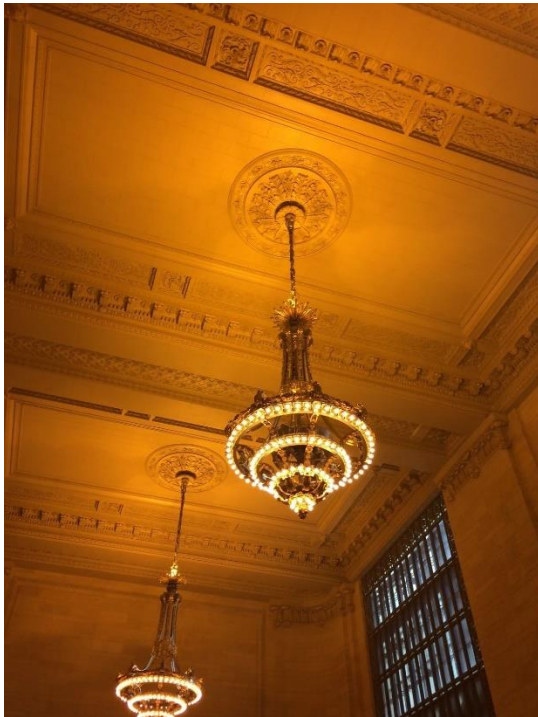
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INTRODUCTION

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 the first time. The second visit to Grand Central Terminal was for a tour. 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. From the tour during our second site visit, we were able to learn about the secrets and historical events leading up to what is now the Grand Central Terminal.

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.

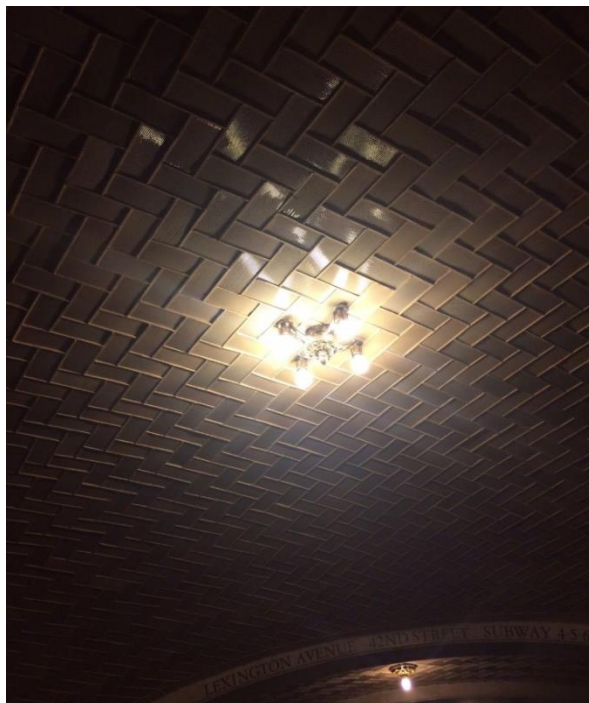


It was also noted that in the interiors, we will see much more intricate designs of lighting fixtures dedicated to the presence of the exposed light bulbs. I assume this was an important part of the terminal made distinct because electrification was considered modern technology at the time Grand Central 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.

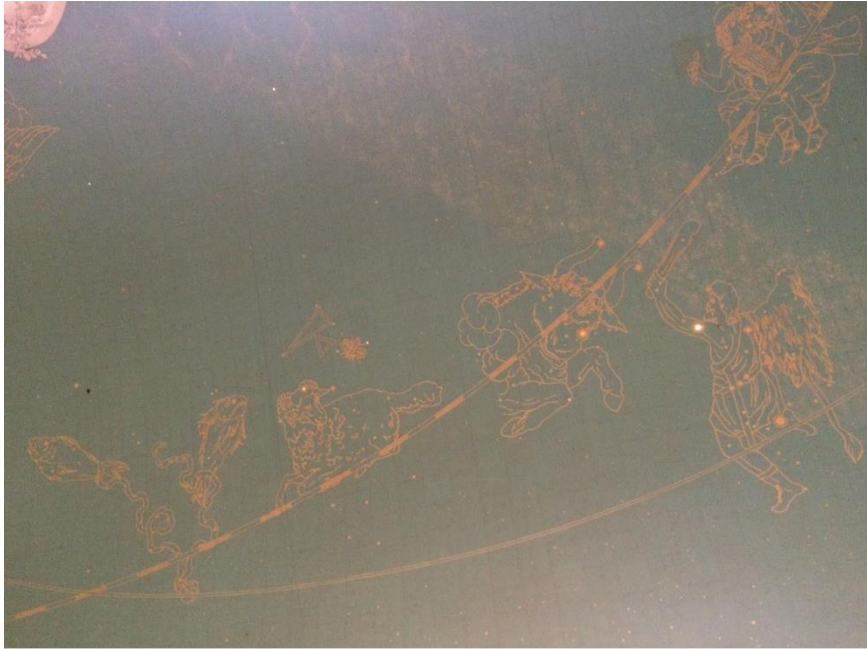


Once we got past the tunnels, we came across the Whispering Arch in the lower concourse. I have always read about this in websites on New York City and things to do but I have only visited Grand Central Terminal once to go hiking upstate. Being able to see the arch and experience it with my classmates 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 arches to allow sound to travel and reflect on opposite ends of the arches.



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. This was

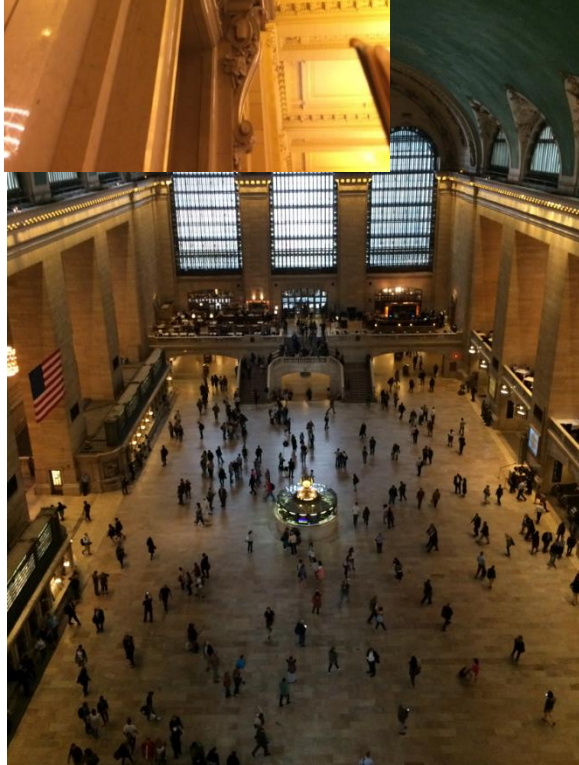
actually not meant to be left there from what we learned in the second site visit.



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 an 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.



Cornelius Vanderbilt started as a poor farm boy in Staten Island but made his wealth and funded Grand Central Terminal to be built. There are many designs of acorns and oak leaves because his family motto after he made his wealth was “From great oaks little acorns grow.”



Our tour guide allowed us to take pictures from behind the windows looking into the main concourse which was truly an experience to remember. He told us that there are narrow catwalks. We were able to open up the windows and take pictures of the entire concourse. The ticket booth which is centered in the picture has a secret staircase which is connected to the lower level booth. The timepiece is a 1913 clock but it is very accurate because it's an atomic clock. Every face of the clock is made up of opal.

GENERAL NOTES:

- It is the world's largest terminal covering 49 acres of land. Park avenue was built on a roof. It also contains New York City's largest basement which is the underground subways.
- During the 2nd World War, if anyone took the wrong elevator to the wrong level, there were guards which was told shoot to kill especially if they had a bucket of sand. This was because of the Nazis who wanted to destroy the rotary converters. In 1942, Hitler was in a losing war and wanted to destroy these rotary converters but the four Nazis checked in their sand in their luggage which was a fatal flaw.
- 750,000 people commute through Grand Central daily which is the population of Alaska or San Fran. They have a 98% of on time railroad but departure boards are off by a minute because commuters always have a last minute rush to the railroads.
- After World War, trains were worn down and government paid for airports and interstate highways allowed driving for free so taxes from railroads went to airports and highways.

- Grand Central bonds were sold to the public for renovation.
- FDR had polio and had his own secret station which was custom designed for his limo from the Grandball Water Astoria.

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 were 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. The hole that we saw was from a miscalculation of a rocket's height for an exhibit so in order to allow the antenna to stay attached to the rocket; they had to drill a hole in the ceiling. Another note that I would like to add is that we recognized that it was painted backwards which ties into Professor Burden's lecture once again. Through the tour, we were told that even though it was a mistake, the Vanderbilts addressed it as God's point of view from looking down from the heavens. I thought that the secret staircase in the ticket booth was very smart because it allowed easy access to different level booths. One of the staircase was originally not there, but it was intentionally made an inch smaller in every measurement taken into account so that future archaeologists will know that it was not erected at the same time. Originally, they opposed the idea because it is a landmark, but they were able to find the original blueprints which contained the idea of building the second staircase in the east side of the concourse. With the Morgan Library, we spoke about how space can be very public despite being interior. I see this consistent with Grand Central Terminal. I thought the glass catwalk or walkways was interesting because despite Grand Central Terminal being a very historic site, they incorporated elements of modern architecture. I also thought it was interesting that the MET Museum also had acorns and oak leaves adornments. We spoke about profane and sacred space when we visited the Morgan Library. I would describe the space as profane.

KEYWORDS/VOCABULARY & DEFINITIONS

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 which was seen during our site visit. (Wiki)
2. Vanderbilt Hall - It was a former waiting room in Grand Central Terminal.
3. Neoclassicism - Neoclassical style or principles in the arts, or adherence to these; *spec. (a) Art and Archit.*, an 18th cent. style characterized by a rejection of baroque and rococo ornamentation in favour of classical simplicity and regularity of form; *(b) Music* an early 20th cent. style of composition characterized by a revival of 17th and 18th cent. baroque and classical forms, procedures, and styles, esp. as a reaction against 19th cent. Romanticism (OED)
4. Preservation - the action of preserving from damage, decay, or destruction. (OED)
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
7. Reverse Ridership - A reverse commute is a round trip, regularly taken, from an urban area to a suburban one in the morning, and returning in the evening. It is almost universally applied to the trip to work in the suburbs from home in the city. This is on opposition to the regular commute, where a person lives in the suburbs and travels to work in the city. (Wiki)
8. Rotary converters - A rotary converter is a type of electrical machine which acts as a mechanical rectifier, inverter or frequency converter (Wiki)

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

1. Why was the whispering arches erected within the grand central terminal? Was there a reason for this? Was it meant to be structured for sounds to travel from one end to the other?
2. How is Grand Central Terminal used as a space by the population?
3. The secret train station that was built for FDR, how many people knew about it, worked on it and wouldn't it have posed a possible risk of this information leaking out? Would it ever be open to the public or be used?
4. Are there any other modern architectural elements incorporated in Grand Central Terminal which we do not know about? What would be other future developments if Grand Central Terminal were to expand, or have a heavier population of commuters, retail stores, commercial purposes, etc?