

Learning Places Fall 2016
Site Report #1 Expanded
Grand Central Terminal



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&
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Introduction

Visit # 1:

We visit Grand Central Terminal first by taking an exterior look at the corner of East 42nd street and Madison Avenue. After a 20 minute sketch, we then move on to visit inside first through the “Whispering Gallery”. A well known spot where sound travels from corner to corner, so that two people can hear each other through whisper. Later, we move on to the main concourse or the center of the terminal. As we look above in this huge space, we witness a painting of the constellations of the zodiac that covers up the whole ceiling. We then wrap up our visit by taking a look at the Metro North railroad.

Visit # 2:

We take our second visit to Grand Central waiting by the Station Master's office for a tour guide to give us a more in depth and historical look on Grand Central Terminal. We first move to the Main Concourse and discuss more on the actual facts behind the zodiac painting on the ceiling. Afterwards, we visit the closed area, Vanderbilt Hall, and brush up on the early history and some statistics on Grand Central today. We then moved onto reaching the fifth floor of the glass catwalks and took our photos from above the Main Concourse. We then wrap up our visit back on the main floor and pick up on a few secrets or facts not known to many.



Located on top of the building is “The Glory of Commerce”, a collection of sculptures designed by Jules Felix-Coutan. Illustrating Minerva, Mercury, and Hercules. Which represent wisdom, speed, and strength. Right under it is the historic Tiffany stained glass clock, with a diameter of 14 feet.

From my first view of this sculpture here, it tells me that this building is unlike other neoclassical buildings. It seems to symbolize more than just an ordinary landmark because I usually don't see this type of artistic work on other neoclassical buildings.



The famous painted ceiling showing the constellations of the zodiac created by French artist Paul Cesar Helleu. Signs of the zodiac including Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Orion, Pegasus, Musca, and Triangulum. Some may not know but the painting is actually backwards. It was to display God's point of view from above and the heavens being seen from the outside.

In my perspective, the painting here tells me that Grand Central is not just a regular stop of a transit system. A painting this big must make the location meaningful. To think of the man power and resources it took to get it done must have been tense and difficult.



All throughout the terminal are these carvings of acorns and oak leaves. Chosen by Cornelius Vanderbilt because they symbolized family, “Great oaks from tiny acorns grow”. Right below it are the 24 carat gold plated Beaux Arts Chandeliers containing 110 bulbs on each one.

As I first look at the chandeliers that surround all over Grand Central, it makes the environment more inviting and welcoming. I assume that just one of these chandeliers use a ton of electricity. Which makes me wonder if there is any eco friendly solution without removing the elegant look.



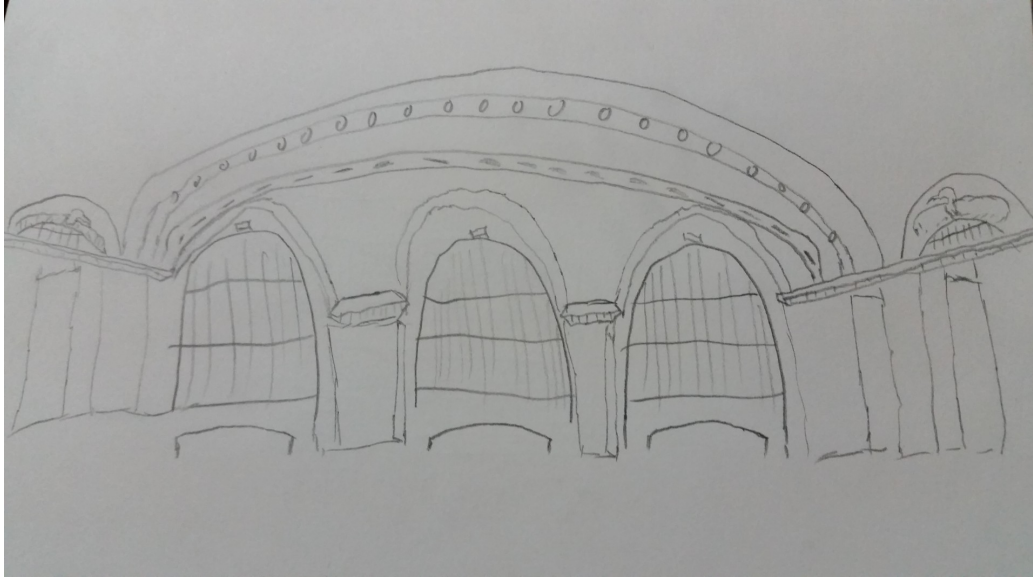
The iconic and recognizable outside view of Grand Central Terminal. A view that summarizes an engineering and architectural design achievement in the heart of NYC. There are several statues and sculptures all around on the outside, but one of the most important one that stand out is “The Commodore”, representing Cornelius Vanderbilt, the man responsible for accomplishing this great feat.

When I take a glance at the outside view of Grand Central, I can tell right away that there this some significance because of the size and neo classical architecture.



(Photos) Vanderbilt Hall, a former waiting room filled with benches built in 1913. What use to be known as the gateway to the nation. The origin of “rolling out the red carpet”. Carefully renovated in 1998.

(Sketch) At first I wonder why this area is closed. It doesn't seem to be one of the unique parts of Grand Central that's being preserve. There's nothing historical in my perspective. I then take a closer look at the huge 3 door exit. What stood out the most was the classic looking clock and décor around it, because I don't see much of the same in other parts of the terminal.



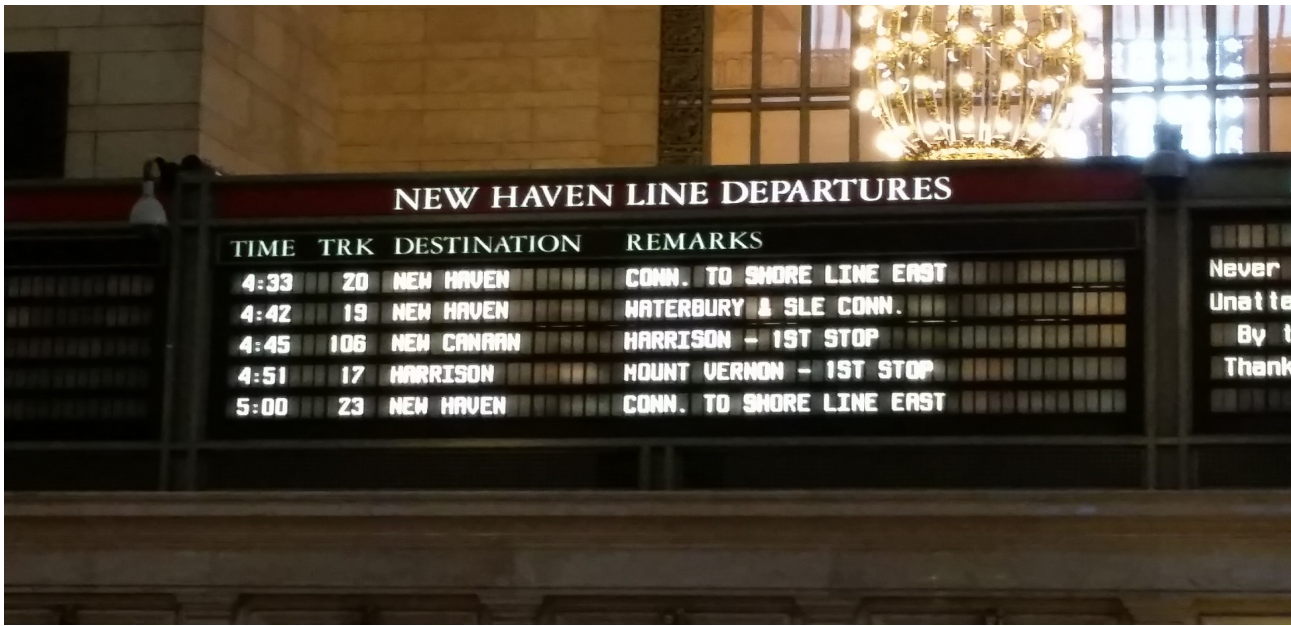
(Sketch) Glass catwalks, the enormous arch windows on both the left and right side of the main concourse. Measuring in 110 feet from the concourse. They represent modern architecture, ventilation, illumination, and transportation.

(Photos) We were able to get a sky view from the fifth floor of the glass catwalks of the main concourse that many haven't seen. From this view, I actually have a sense that the concourse looks bigger up there rather than on the floor level.



The four opal sided clock values in more than \$10 million. Set by the atomic clock from the Naval Observatory. Every time set in the terminal is accurate of one second every 1,400,000 years.

I recognize this clock from films before but never actually got to look in person. I learned that the time on this clock is even more accurate than our smart phones. So accurate that this clock sets every other time in the terminal. Which surprised me because I thought everything digitize today would be the most accurate.



Every single departure time shown on the departure board are wrong. Every departure is actually set to one minute later than the time it shows on the board. For the comfort of commuters to safely catch their trains on time.

As I look at these times, I expect at first for it to be always on time. To learn that the times are set a minute later makes sense, it seems that it's universal that everyone would always just miss their train right at the last second or so.

General Notes

- The constellations of the zodiac painted on the ceiling is actually backwards and said to be from God's point of view. The real reason is that the layout of the drawing was facing the ceiling instead of the ground.
- “The Glory of Commerce”, the sculptures above the exterior of the terminal show Minerva (wisdom), Mercury (speed), Hercules (strength).
- The carvings of acorns and oak leaves all throughout the terminal are Vanderbilt's representation of Family.
- There is a subbasement known as M42 which was used by US soldiers back in World War II. Which was almost infiltrated by German spies.
- A secret train station used by President Franklin D. Roosevelt known as track 61. From the underground it connects Grand Central and the Waldorf Astoria hotel where he had access to a huge elevator. Using track 61 he was able to travel in and out of New York in secret.
- In 1957, a Redstone rocket was put on display in the main concourse but was not measured as it left a hole past the ceiling.
- Grand Central measures in 49 acres and 13 stories below street level. Ranked 2nd in visits next to Times Square.

Insights/Discoveries

Visit # 1:

After this visit, I learned that the terminal's interior is much more than a subway line, railroad, and the main concourse. I was not expecting to be surrounded by the amazing décor, long hallways, shops, and dining spots. I can see why it is a big tourist attraction and an icon to New York City.

Visit # 2:

After our second visit I see that Grand Central emphasizes that it is a terminal and not a station because the trains terminate here. Over 750,000 come through the terminal everyday and 10,000 of them are there not to even catch a train but to have lunch. Which is really unusual to me, to think of a transit stop as “the” place to grab a bite to eat. I knew how significant Grand Central was but I never expected it to be the nation's largest railroad and the most efficient and on time railroad world wide. I was mostly amazed about having access to the top floor of the glass catwalks. I have a huge fear of heights, however it was definitely worth as it was just a phenomenal view. After hearing about the secret layers hidden beneath Grand Central, I couldn't stop to think what could it possibly look like today after years of decay. From being rebuilt three times to becoming a place of modern culture and classic architecture. I see how it makes a mark on NYC today and its history.

Key Terms

M42 – secret subbasement used in WW II

Track 61 – secret underground track used by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a getaway

Glass Catwalk – the enormous arch windows measuring in 110 feet from the main concourse

Vanderbilt Hall – originally a waiting room now open to the public for private events located south of the main concourse

Beaux Arts – neo classical architecture style

Cornelius Vanderbilt – business leader, philanthropist, responsible for the completion of Grand Central Terminal

Grand Central Depot – opened in 1871, a center point for railroad lines.

Grand Central Station – developed from Grand Central Depot in 1899

Neoclassicism – reestablishment of classic style

Main Concourse – main interior room of Grand Central Terminal

Questions for further research

What makes Grand Central a significant landmark compared to others in NYC?

What secrets are within Grand Central that most people don't know?

How was Grand Central able to become more than just an ordinary terminal?

What future renovations can we expect in Grand Central's future?

What procedures does Grand Central take to preserve the antiques and historic parts?

What does it take for Grand Central to run 24/7?