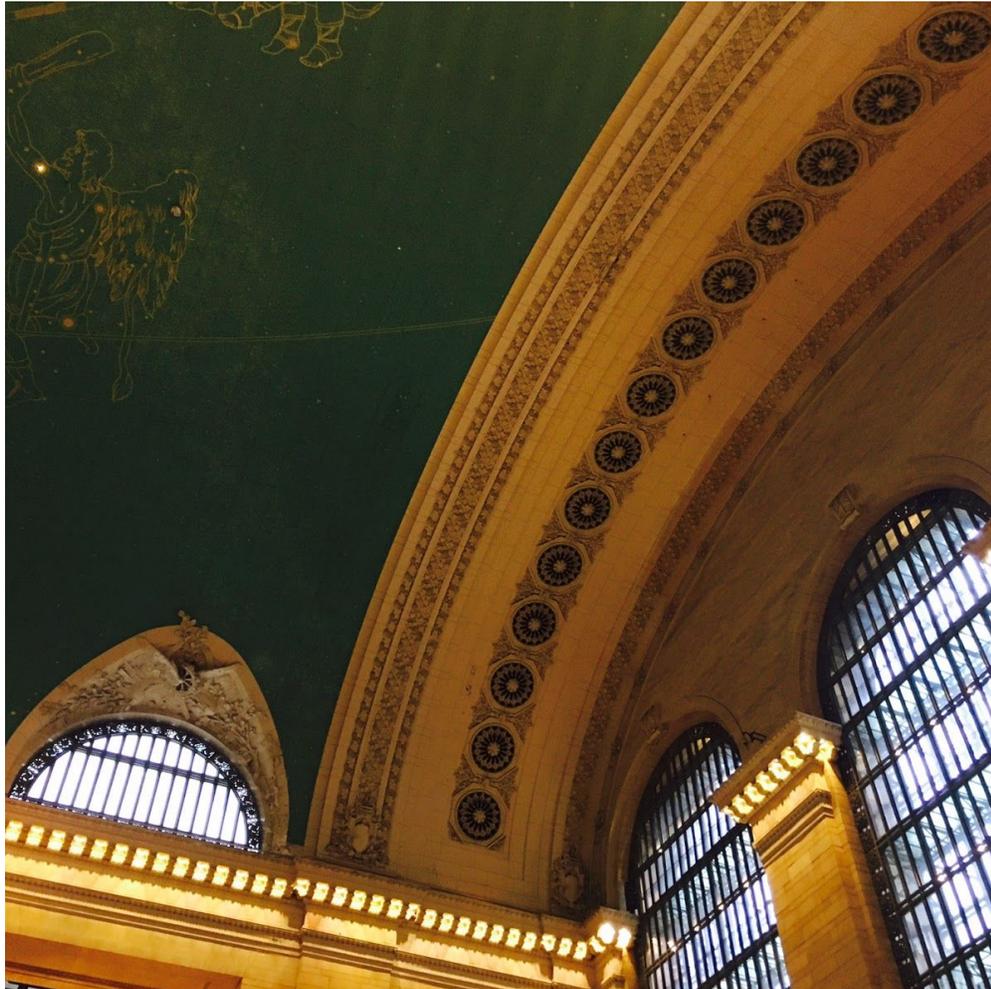


Learning Places Summer 2016

SITE REPORT #1

Grand Central Terminal



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INTRODUCTION

Right smack dab in the middle of New York City is the infamous Grand Central Terminal. The walkthrough for thousands of commuters that enter and exit the city on a daily basis, Grand Central is one of the most recognizable public spaces of the nation. Adorned in the Neo classical art style-

inspired by Beaux arts, Grand Central Terminal's grand and majestic halls enlighten the senses as you walk into it- as though stepping into a cathedral that literally opens to the heavens above you.

Entering Grand Central for my first official tour, after working in the dining concourse for over a year, felt oddly strange, since it has always been a monotonous space where the daily commuters rush by, and the tourists gush over the tiniest of things (later to which I succumbed to as well). Meeting with Anthony, an extremely knowledgeable enthusiast was interesting, and his enthusiasm of GCT was infectious! It was also pleasant to be going on the tour with my fellow classmates, especially since in the main concourse of GCT, amidst all the crowds, it is easy to feel lost.



SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos/sketches/notes)

This photo was taken on the corner of Pershing square looking onto the Pershing Square bridge and the looming Grand Central Terminal above it. This is one of my favorite pictures that I took on that day. It encapsures the very essence of the beaux-arts grandeur from the giant windows that hint of the inside of GCT, to the stately corinthian columns that give the appearance of holding up the top of the building, amass with its great statue of Greek Gods that perch above us mortals. Minerva,

Hercules, and Mercury all symbolize the terminal's strength, brains, and commerce- a fittingly just symbol for the greatest and grandest of all trains stations! One of the things in particular that I really enjoyed in that moment was Anthony talking about the giant Tiffany clock that is adorned by the Greek Gods. The clock measures 14 feet in diameter, and it was because of GCT that standardized time was invented! Because of the train schedules, and being able to figure out when a train was arriving and/or departing, standard time was created in order to efficiently be able to calculate schedules and timings. Another amazing detail that I had no idea about was that the Tiffany clock actually has a secret door where hour 6 is located, that swings open and allows access to the top of the building. Although we were unable to go, envisioning the view of the city below me, while traffic and people meshed and swirled- what a sight it would be to behold! Makes one quite envious of those statues ..



I am no great shakes at drawing (evidently as can be seen here), however, one of the things that has caught my attention time in and again while making my way through GCT, is the information booth clock. Now normally, I would never sit and draw anything, but I felt like I should be compelled to draw this particular part of the interior of the terminal simply because of how unstimulating and bland the clock looks. I always wondered why on earth tourists gravitate towards such an unsightly part of GCT. I learned from Anthony, that this clock is actually worth millions of dollars today, because of the opal material that the clock's faces are made of- imagine that for uninteresting!

People rushing by, and by the looks of it, every type of person. The business woman with her blackberry and high top heels ready to take charge of the world. A gaggle of girls ready to explore the vastness of a great city. The impressive little 5 year old eager to the glimpse the massive train. All under the arched green ceiling with its constellations.

How are fit, here all together! We pass through it never thinking: but what if our stories are connected? I bet these halls have seen it though. Have seen people fall in and out of love. Perhaps seen the tragedy of a young couple, who's once bright and ardent love burnt through right here near these steps, or else perhaps its seen the love and frustration of a mother, who after 50 years of waiting for her child, has at last been reunited.

The apple logo stands a glow. Funny how bright it looks in a hall so grand. I wonder how technology and its advancement will take GCT by storm.

The kissing room was interesting. Perfect for a long lost heroine to finally meet with her lover, or a reunion here, after crossing paths in Vanderbilt hall, completely oblivious to their story. Wonder how many stories were actually told here. Or ended for that matter. If that materialized

Since I'm not really much of a person who draws, I took a moment before leaving GCT to just sit and soak up a bit of the culture inside of GCT. As a person who writes, I draw visual images through writing instead of sketches. While observing the main concourse, the one thing that came to my mind was the significance of GCT to so many lives, and how so many stories of so many different people must have passed through those halls. I really enjoyed sitting there and brainstorming, since it was easier to write in the moment while being physically at GCT.



Speaking of stories, Anthony kindly shared one of GCT's secrets that I had no idea of before. He mentioned The Kissing Room (which is actually The Biltmore Room); a place where many ladies would wait for the trains that would bring their beaux back to them and in the moment when the love of their life would finally arrive, they would rush out to meet them and kiss. I had no idea that such a romantic place existed in GCT and consequently drew my own rendition of such a romanticized affair and texted the picture to my fiancé, who just so happens to live in Connecticut, and who've I've visited by using the Metro-North train from Grand Central Terminal countless times. This really established a sense of how GCT became a part of the people of New York, and Professor Montgomery and Professor Philip's lectures on GCT being a public space was exemplified strongly through the Biltmore Room.

This specific image I did not take while at GCT, however I did peruse my library book, *Grand Central; Gateway to a Million Lives* when I got home in order to look up some of the things that I learned from Anthony. Upon flipping through the book, this image caught my eye because of how deserted GCT looks. Knowing that GCT was considered "uptown" back in 1913, and seeing how it looked was astounding, especially since just returning from GCT and huddle and craziness of the afternoon rush hour made it impossible to imagine GCT not being the center of NYC. To me this image really

shows how GCT became the center of New York and pulled the social demographic down to 42nd street because of its presence as a social hub. The transition of New York City's midtown towards GCT really exemplifies GCT as a major social and economical presence of the 1900s.



Quite contrasting to the image before these two, where GCT stood alone, GCT is nestled between skyscrapers in these images. The image on the left is from *Grand Central: Gateway to a Million Lives*, where the Restoration movement brought Jackie Kennedy Onassis, along with other high profile celebrities to take a stand to save GCT from being demolished as Penn Station had been. To the right of that photo is our class, similarly around the location where others stood before them, learning the history of GCT. To me these two images side by side shows the perseverance of a building through all ages; a building that was envisioned by William Wilgus to stand tall through the changing times. Through the efforts of the Landmark Preservation Committee, we were able to today stand in the same place that they stood, and enjoy the history of such an impactful piece of our city.



Part of the Biltmore Room, this image depicts the scheduled timing of the trains that were to arrive at GCT, preserved forevermore as piece of history.



A seemingly uninteresting part of GCT, one which I have passed countless times is the water fountain. Embedded with oak leaves and acorns, I never really thought about why those specific items were carved so meticulously around so many of GCT's walls. I learned that the financial backer of the creation of GCT, Cornelius Vanderbilt's family symbols were that of acorns and oak leaves ("where an acorn falls a mighty oak tree will take its place").



GCT's main concourse is simply "grand." The main concourse really depicts the gilded age in that public spaces were all about the grand effect of aesthetically pleasing places that were larger than life.

DISCOVERIES

The Grand Central Tour lasted about roughly two hours, and within that time frame there was a lot of information that was acknowledged. Having a basic summarized understanding of GCT helped in keeping up in terms of pace with Anthony, who was quick in his takes. Looking through GCT through his insightful perspective gave me a different, more refined grasp on the terminal. In particular there was a moment where Anthony took us to a track and made us believe that we had just stepped off a grueling 12 hour train ride that lasted through the night, and tired as we were we took our luggage and entered the main concourse (the far opposite side of Vanderbilt Hall). Entering through as though a traveler gave us a split second understanding of why Grand Central Terminal is known as a grand exuberant space. The great ceiling opening above with the zodiac studded sky by Helleu (only meant for people arriving through the terminal since the constellation is backwards from the opposite end of the concourse), the great windows that extend almost to the top, and the great chandeliers full of electric lights that shone day and night in the terminal, all exemplified the dream that William Wilgus and Cornelius Vanderbilt envisioned for GCT.

KEYWORDS

Vanderbilt

Gilded Age

William Wilgus

Beaux Art

Landmark Preservation Committee

Tiffany Clock

The Biltmore/Kissing Room

Hercules, Minerva, Mercury

Pershing Square Aqueduct

Opal Clock face

Hellue Zodiac