

Byron Ullauri

--> Homeless are all over GCT

--> Around the time that the waiting room was overrun by the homeless...

Grand Central was in danger of being destroyed by its owner Pen Central, who wanted to sell its airspace and build an office tower over it.

this raised concerns in New York after seeing what had happened to penn station

So people immediately realized that they needed to stand together in protest of the construction

with the help of Jacqueline Kennedy and other important figures, New York stood together in protest of the construction and the City managed to pass the Landmarks Preservation Law establishing the Landmarks Preservation Commission and deeming Grand Central a Land Mark

Now protected under the law, no one could alter the Terminal's structure and in addition to that

part of that protection law stated that building owners were required to keep the structure in "good repair"

which was the complete opposite of current conditions in spaces like Vanderbilt Hall at the time.

Now at this point, Although grand central was saved from those wanting to destroy it there was no one around with enough money to save it from itself

Essentially, the terminal, especially Vanderbilt Hall, was slowly caving in to years of misuse and neglect

Years later, Metro North and the MTA came to the rescue by leasing out Grand Central and starting plans on the upcoming repairs

What proceeded was a new hope in the form of 30 million dollars from the state, and close to 200 million dollars generated by the MTA through its own capital and their sale of numerous bonds for the use of various restorations.

Now although this may have seemed like a charitable donation

the intent from the start was to create profitable spaces throughout the terminal that would give the MTA a more than decent return

the plan was to renovate areas like the waiting room into retail spaces throughout the terminal so they could lease it out to top bidding stores and restaurants, similar to what had been done over at Union Station in Washington D.C

In a New York Times article, Susan E. Fine, who was the director of real estate for the MTA at the time said “Consistent with maintaining the historic preservation goals of the terminal and its tremendous public art and architecture, we’re going to look toward retail revenue to help pay for those elements. “

Certainly, the most attractive part of GCT’s plan was the resulting increase in square footage which jumped from 105k square feet to over 150,000 square feet of retail space 12,000 of which belonged to the waiting room (VH)

So what followed were a series of repairs between 1983 and 1993

In 1989, After solving the terminals homeless issue and fixing numerous structural issues, the waiting room was boarded up with eight foot high walls leaving ready it for its turn in the process

A restoration process that cost a total of 5.9 million dollars

firstly, the surfaces of the walls had to be cleaned with special cleaning agents that wouldn't damage the limestone on it but would remove the thick layers of filth that were present

the plaster on the roof was stained with thick smoke deposits

and Like wise, had you been there in 1989, you wouldn't have known that the chandeliers were gold plated and more importantly actually worked.

However, The most noticeable change in the space was the removal of the benches

which created a lot of the additional square space that was promised

With the seats gone, what use to be a waiting room filled with rushing commuters was now slowly becoming a venue/retail space

To further establish this, in 1998 the waiting room changed its name and became formally known as Vanderbilt hall,

As far as what was going to be done with Vanderbilt Hall...plans were up for debate

According to an article published by the new york times, the director of development at the time, Jeanne Giordano, was quoted as saying, “It was very European looking, like a food hall” as she described what she and other interested renters of the space were looking to do with the area

Actually since the beginning of restorations the plan had been to put a restaurant on one half of the space while using the other half for a cafe

In fact a year away from construction, restaurants and stores were already lining up to secure leases on the spot for spaces which in 1997 sold for 50 to 225 dollars a square foot

but deciding on who and what would take up the space took time

so until that was decided, Vanderbilt hall was and is used as a venue for temporary exhibits, events, and catered parties

some of these events included things such as art exhibits, fashion shows, fundraisers, and even weddings.

one of its most popular events is the holiday fair held all through December up to the 24th which consists of about 70 small shops selling all kinds of products for those who come by to visit

I key fact to note is that, although these events are held at Vanderbilt hall, not all of them were open to the public

In fact, a further testament to how Vanderbilt hall was commercialized is the fact whenever there is an event, the side that the event is held on is completely closed off to the public with numerous partitions, leaving people no place sit and have lunch, read a book, or just relax other than the hallway further on that leads to the Main Concourse.

if you visit their site, you can see the form you must fill out in order to host an event there.

As far as what the future holds for Vanderbilt hall there is a planned food hall that will open there later this year.

A man named Claus Meyer made a 10 year lease for half of the rooms space for a total rent of 2.8 million.

the food hall will have a Nordic theme that will offer new yorkers fresh Scandinavian cuisine such as, coffee, sandwiches, smoothies, baked goods, and even a bar!

Actually if you go there now you can see how one half of the room is closed off with nothing but a food hall sign there too see.

whats interesting about the construction of the food hall is how the way it had to be set up

due to the preservation laws, the food hall had to be constructed with platforms that rest over layers of liners and any studs that hold up the structure could not penetrate the marble walls so they also had to be fastened to the platform they created.

the reason for all this is not only to prevent any damage to GCT but to also allow the food hall to be easily disassembled and gone in a matter of days leaving no trace behind.

Personally, I look forward to seeing the next phase of Vanderbilt hall being that Ive never had Scandinavian food and photos of what the food hall is going to look really interest me

when looking at Vanderbilt Hall to day and what the future holds, its easy to realize that commuters of GCT travel to and from work meaning they don't really need the space as a waiting room so having kept it as one would have been a waste

instead, the space had to be designed as an area that attracts tourists and other locals to not only see the amazing structure but to enjoy themselves there

truly although New Yorkers helped save this amazing landmark, it cant be denied that the responsibility for preserving GCT in prime condition belongs to Metro North and the MTA

Most importantly the financial burden

as nice as it would be to put back benches for people to use as a public space, the added result of that would be the eventual lack of funds for any up keeping of the area.

Ultimately, the lesson learned is that the price to be paid for the luxury of having a landmark is converting spaces like Vanderbilt hall into commercial/retail zones that can provide the needed revenue to cover the maintenance costs of GCT.