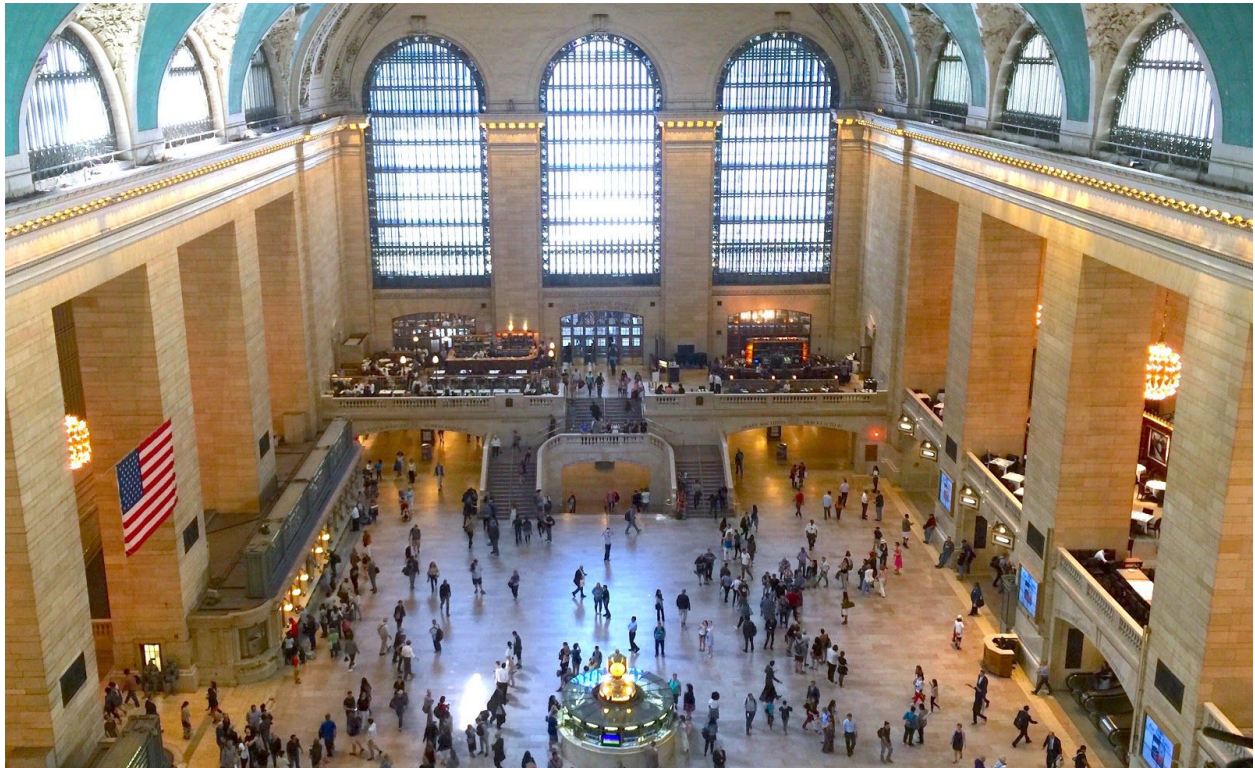


Learning Places Summer 2016

# **SITE REPORT #1**

## **Grand Central Terminal: A Look Inside NYC History**



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During the past few weeks, our class has studied the history of Grand Central Terminal since it's beginning as the Depot to the present day landmark it has become. Part of our studies involved two site visits which consisted of both a personal and guided tour. With each tour, our class explored the terminal even visiting places inaccessible to the general public. As a result, The following report documents what I've learned so far as related to the pictures I took during tour and old photos I found through research.



In order to get a scope of Grand Central’s historical significance, I decided to split an image of the front of the structure into four pieces and replace each part with a corresponding picture from a different year in its history. Starting with the lower image in the center, I found a photo on Vintag.es of Grand Central Terminal during its early phase of construction back in 1913. The image on the left, found on the Daily Mail, is the Terminal in 1930 showing the front in perfect condition. Opposite to the left image, Prosoco shows Grand Central back in 1980 when it was covered in thick black carbon stains. Years later, the top and bottom image, found on Curbed.com, show Grand Central Terminal as it stands today free from all the carbon layers.







While looking through various images of Grand Central on the NY Public Library Digital Collection, I came across this photo of The Concourse during the turn of Century. I decided to add this image because I feel It does a great job of capturing the room's pristine aesthetic. For example, When looking at the Concourse's three large windows, it's easy to visualize the huge scale of the room. Furthermore, the fact that this photo shows the Concourse room empty is not only rare in and of itself, but also key in giving the viewer a sense of how much the barrel-vaulted ceiling helps make the floor space seem more spacious. It's almost as if the room is just waiting for people to flood in from every corner and cover every square inch.



Fast forward nearly 100 years from the last image and you get this picture I took during our visit to the site. Similar to the previous image, I feel like this image is important because it shows how the Concourse has remained relatively the same throughout the last century. Likewise, it also offers a great sense of contrast by being a color picture and having a huge crowd covering it. From first glance, the first thing that catches your eye is the bright bold colors that make up the room. Being able to see colors shows how the lights with the exposed bulbs not only light up the room but also decorate the walls. The massive amounts of people walking every which way also lends itself into making this a captivating sight. Looking closer, you can see people from all walks of life making their way through and around Grand Central. Seeing some standing still, others in a group, and most in a rush begs the question “Who are they and what are they doing here ?“





The next two images are equally important because they depict the same same location at very distinct points in time. Long ago, the place was filled with well dressed people who more or less seemed to be more concerned with getting home rather than hanging out as seen in this image of Vanderbilt Hall in 1937 courtesy of the NY Daily News. In addition to this, It's easy to see that even back then, Grand Central housed thousands of people at any given time being that Vanderbilt Hall was a waiting room for numerous commuters.

As a matter of fact, the whole Grand Central housing thousands thing became very serious back in 1960's. This image, from CNN's website, shows how Vanderbilt Hall became a shelter for the homeless such that they even covered the seats and floor of the Terminal. On the bottom right you can see what looks like two people sitting down waiting for a train while everyone else is laying down fast asleep with all their belongings.





Having shown the last two images of Vanderbilt Hall, this shot I took of the same place looks almost unrecognizable now that it has no benches and is in the process of becoming a place to buy food. One of the only remnants aside from the structure itself is the exposed-chandeliers that hang over the people who make their way past the hall and into the Concourse. When visiting the

site, I was surprised, as most people would be, to find out that the spaces to the left and right were once filled with benches that were removed, leaving only a depression on the floor behind.



I took another photo on the far end of the room to show one of the last benches that made it through the time when Vanderbilt Hall was a waiting room for some and a bed for others. Now, few people who decide to walk past the crowd control posts can go and take a seat to read, eat, or wait like they use to as seen on the picture to the left.



Finally, These last six pictures I took all have one thing In common, go on try and find them. Here's a hint, It's actually two things but they each go hand in hand. Give up? If you look close enough you can make out what is clearly oak leaves and acorns...Random right I thought so too. Turns out the guy who built the place, a man by the name of Cornelius Vanderbilt or formally known as The Commodore, had a family symbol that was oak leaves and acorns. Being that he was one of the richest men in NY history, he decided that the best way to be remembered and recognized was to cover the entire place with his symbol. From the sides of doors, clocks, and cornices to the tops of stairs, ceilings, and scrolls, you can find various oak leaves and acorns ranging from all different sizes. One thing you're guaranteed to find across all of them is high quality masonry. From the top right across to the bottom left image, the oak leaves can be seen as wrapping around the walls as oppose to just covering them. The numerous acorns that either have their cap on or missing have fine details that make them seem as if they were real ones painted over with color. As far as how many individual pieces there are in total, who knows, from the look of it there's enough for people to go on a long scavenger hunt if they have enough time.



## DISCOVERIES

Having now seen Grand Central for the first time, I can honestly say I now get why people go there to visit the site; Frankly, I feel like the second visit is the one that convinced me of this. Like a lot of New Yorkers, I feel annoyed when I'm trying to get somewhere only to be blocked and slow down by tourists who are just standing around sight seeing. As a result, I never really thought of going somewhere like Grand Central Terminal only to take in the sights the place has to offer. To my surprise, Grand Central was an interesting place to explore and take pictures of being that it's just as photogenic as the rest of the city.

During the tour, I found out how Franklin D. Roosevelt used the underground train to be transported in and out of the city so that no one found out he had polio. There is a basement, one of the largest in the country, that housed huge electric converters which played a vital role in power during the second world war. Furthermore, I found it crazy how the Concourse room once had a full sized spacecraft that was intended to be propped up for display. The fact that you could see a hole on the roof that supposedly came from the ship hitting the ceiling was interesting. On the same note, the dark stain on one side of the ceiling was fascinating also. To think that the painting was once, as one student put it, completely black and covered in stains was shocking to me. This lead me to question if the rest of the place was just as stained as the ceiling at some point.

I found that during the mid 70's and 80's Grand Central Terminal's exterior was in fact covered in a layer of carbon deposits. Being that the place is over a century old, it's no surprise that the outside eventually got dirty. An interesting part of the research I did to find photos of the Terminal was that I found the company who cleaned the outside. It was a company in Kansas named PROSOCO. Turns out the fifth was 3/4ths of an inch thick and it took waterproofing with a special chemical that wouldn't damage the surface to remove it. Over a year after they started, PROSOCO returned Grand Central Terminal to the original limestone color it had the day it opened.



## KEYWORDS

The following definitions were found online.

**Cornice:** an ornamental molding around the wall of a room just below the ceiling.

**Scroll:** an ornamental design or carving resembling a partly unrolled scroll of parchment, e.g., on the capital of a column, or at the end of a stringed instrument.

**Vaulted Ceiling:** an architectural term for an arched form used to provide a space with a ceiling or roof.

**Barrel-Vault:** A vaulted Ceiling with a Semi-Circle shape resembling a barrel.

**Guastavino Tile:** the "Tile Arch System" patented in the United States in 1885 by Valencian (Spanish) architect and builder Rafael Guastavino.

**Crown Molding:** another term for cornice.

**Dome:** a rounded vault forming the roof of a building or structure, typically with a circular base.

**Arch:** a curved symmetrical structure spanning an opening and typically supporting the weight of a bridge, roof, or wall above it.

**Cornelius Vanderbilt:** An American business magnate and philanthropist who built his wealth in railroads and shipping.

**Beaux Arts:** relating to the classical decorative style maintained by the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, especially in the 19th century.

**Stanford White:** an American architect and partner in the architectural firm McKim, Mead & White, the frontrunner among Beaux-Arts firms.