

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Grand Central Terminal

AND/OR COMMON
Grand Central Terminal

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 71-105 East 42nd Street

CITY, TOWN New York VICINITY OF 18th

STATE New York COUNTY New York CODE 36

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Pennsylvania Central Transportation Company

STREET & NUMBER
466 Lexington Avenue

CITY, TOWN New York VICINITY OF STATE New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER
31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN New York STATE New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE New York City Landmarks Commission

DATE 1967 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS 305 Broadway

CITY, TOWN New York STATE New York

7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION | | CHECK ONE | CHECK ONE |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A complete contemporary description would be lengthy--in the brief:

"The terminal has two levels. The upper one of these, 20 ft. below the street, is 46.4 acres in area and has 19.5 miles of track. There are 42 tracks, and 29 of these are adjacent to platforms for a total distance of 28,850 ft. The lower or suburban level, about 44 ft. below the street, has 14.1 miles of track and an area of 32.8 acres. Its tracks are 25 in number, a total distance of 13,000 feet. The station building proper fronts on 42nd Street at Park Avenue and extends back to 45th Street. It is a truly massive structure, 673 ft. long, 301 ft. wide, with seven stories but with provision for 13. The base and lower portion of the edifice are of Stony Creek granite with Bedford limestone above. Fronting on 42nd Street there are three large arched windows, surrounded by massive pillars and surmounted by a large statuary group about a clock. The principal entrances to the station are four in number. They are situated as follows: at the corner of 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue; at the southeast corner of the station on Depew Place; in the center of the front opposite Park Avenue; and from the subway. There are also entrances from 43rd Street on Depew Place and Vanderbilt Avenue, the former entering the main concourse directly and the latter by the gallery. Entering the station from the center entrance on the 42nd Street front passes through a short vestibule and down a ramp to the main waiting room, 65 ft. by 205 ft. in size and 3 1/2 ft. below the street. This room is finished in buff stone and marble. It has an artistic beamed ceiling lighted by five large lamps.

The express train concourse, north of the main waiting room is 287 ft. long, 120 ft. wide and 125 ft. high at its highest point; it has further extensions under the gallery at the east end of 105 ft. and under the gallery and street on the opposite side of 55 ft. It is finished in Botticino marble and buff-tinted stone, and light is supplied by day through three large arched windows facing on Depew Place and one on Vanderbilt Avenue.

The room, as handsome as it is by day, is better still by night. It is then that the arched turquoise-blue ceiling shows at its best. Upon the latter is depicted that section of the heavens seen from October to March or from Aquarius to Cancer. All the stars and

(CONTINUED)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD | | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) | | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION | | | | |

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| SPECIFIC DATES | 1903-1913 | BUILDER/ARCHITECT | Warren and Wetmore Reed and Stem |
|----------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Grand Central Terminal is one of the great examples of urban design in America and is a engineering and architectural triumph as well. Currently under repair this New York landmark is not only a station, it is a monument containing its own "city." This railroad complex is the greatest head station remaining in the Nation.

A recent study (1974) published by the New York State Parks and Recreation, Division of Historic Preservation prepared by James M. Fitch and Diana S. Waite gives a complete history:

"The present Grand Central Terminal stands on a site which has been occupied by a series of railroad stations for just over a century. Cornelius Vanderbilt, the railroad tycoon, was authorized by the State of New York to erect a new station on the grounds in May of 1869; construction began that same year and the new station was opened two years later.

Manhattan Island had been connected to the mainland since the 1830's by the New York and Harlem Railroad and the New York and New Haven Railroad, whose lines ran down Fourth Avenue to a terminal at 26th Street, and by the Hudson River Railroad from Albany, whose tracks ran down the Hudson River waterfront to a terminus at Tenth Avenue and 30th Street. But the conflict between the surface tracks of these railroads and the life of the city was continuous and increasing. The reasons were many: the danger of grade-level crossings to pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic; the nuisance of noise, dirt and fire (sparks from the wood-burning locomotives were a constant hazard); and the general depression of real estate values along the rights-of-way. In 1857, the city had banned the use of

(CONTINUED)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 3 acres

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-------------|---------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1 8 | 5 8 6 4 0 0 | 4 5 1 1 6 0 0 | B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C | | | | D | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Manhattan Tax map block 1280, Lot one. Beginning at northeast corner of East 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue running east along East 42nd Street for 394.4 ft. east; proceed north along Depew Place 340.4 ft. north bound; proceed west for 394.4 ft. to Vanderbilt Avenue west boundary; proceed south 340.4 ft. along Vanderbilt Avenue to East 42nd Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

8/11/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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constellations appear in proper order and of the stars in the greater constellations no less than 63 are lights.

In the center of the concourse is an octagonal counter, the information bureau, surmounted by an illuminated clock with four faces. On the right and left as one enters from the waiting room are the ticket offices respectively of the Pennsylvania Central, each having 14 windows on the concourse. On the east side of the room there is a baggage counter. About the room on three sides there is a gallery with a wide stairway on the Vanderbilt Avenue side leading down into the concourse.

Below the express concourse there is a similar facility for suburban patrons. This room is 70 ft. wide and like its counterpart upstairs has an information room in its center and ticket offices on one side, these facilities being in each case directly below the similar facilities above and connected with them by spiral stairways."⁵

The two concourse approaches are arcades--originally stores were installed and some have today become shabby but there is still a great deal of commercial activity in the terminal.

Fitch and Waite continue:

"Structurally, the complex is conventional. Such below-grade features as the tunnels, footings, foundations for skyscrapers and ramped platforms display first-rate expertise in engineering. The above-grade structure employs a steel frame unexceptionable for its day (the Pennsylvania Station concourse was far more spectacular, if only because the steel frame was exposed to view.) Perhaps the most advanced structural elements in the whole complex are the series of thin shallow terra cotta vaults erected in the below-grade Oyster Bar by Raphael

⁵ Droege, John A. Passenger Terminals and Trains. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1916, pp. 163-169.

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Guastavino. Externally, this frame was sheathed with granite at street level and with limestone above. Internally, the surfaces were blond marbles, Caen stone (simulated), travertine and painted plaster-- all in all, a pleasant unobtrusive polychromy offset by bronze and gilt chandeliers.

In terms of mechanical systems, the Terminal has some remarkably advanced features. With most of its public spaces either totally enclosed or totally below ground, the designers faced unprecedented problems in environmental control. Electric traction had made the whole scheme possible by eliminating smoke, gases, and fire. But serious problems of heating and ventilation were also solved. (Although summer air-conditioning would be considered mandatory today, it was not technically feasible then.) A totality new scale of electric lighting was called for, while the sheer scale of the complex demanded the application of electricity to other equipment. Thus the Terminal showed a wide and imaginative use of new communication devices; elevators to move passengers and freight pneumatic tubes to circulate tickets and baggage checks, and what was regarded as the most advanced electric signal system in the world. All such problems, and many like them, were solved at a level so high in 1914 as to remain acceptable more than half a century later."⁶

There have been alterations and changes both to the interior and exterior but it remains intact as Pennsylvania Station does not--a tribute to a small but determined group of dedicated preservationists.

⁶ Fitch, James M. and Waite, Diana. pp. 6.

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steam locomotives south of 42nd Street, forcing the railroads to uncouple the cars and tow them down to the depot by horses. All of these factors were to force the railways to pull back their terminals to the north. Ultimately, they would compel them to place their trackage either above or below grade.

Commodore Vanderbilt's decision to build a "Grand Central Depot"--the very terminology is redolent of the times--was opportune, the more so since, having recently acquired financial control of all the roads, he was able to consolidate them physically as well.

The site of the proposed depot was already occupied by railroad buildings: an 1859 map indicates that already along Fourth Avenue, between 42nd and 44th Streets, there were two locomotive houses, a depot, a car house, stables and "shoeing shop" for the horses which had pulled the cars down to Madison Square. Now Vanderbilt acquired additional property for storage and marshalling yards between Madison and Lexington running as far north as 48th Street. By these far-sighted additions practically all of the present ground area of the present-day complex was acquired. The first foundation stone was laid on September 1, 1869, and the station was completed by October, 1871."¹

¹ Fitch, James M. and Waite, Diana. New York State Parks and Recreation Department, 1974, pp. 1-2.

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The growth of the city, the need for underground tunnels for safety and cleaner air along with expanding services obsoleted the old depot by the end of the century. Competition from both the Pennsylvania Railroad building a new depot and the New York Subway System forced the New York Central to embark on the great project.

"On March 19, 1903, William G. Wilgus (by then vice-president of the New York Central) was able to present his scheme for a new station to the president of the railroad. In its essential features this project, to be called the Grand Central Terminal, solved all the major problems confronting the line--and solved them in a manner so advanced that, two-thirds of a century later, the Terminal is still entirely viable. Wilgus's initial proposal covered all the main features, though not all of the detailed refinements, of the completed Terminal."²

Included in the plan were submergence of all tracks from 97th Street south, two track levels for commuter and long distance trains, ramps for passengers instead of stairs, the development of Park Avenue and easy passenger access to it and the utilization of air rights over the terminal--one of the first uses of this principle.

"History was to prove this an epochal scheme. What seems so impressive about it in retrospect is the fact that, after decades of backing and filling, improvisation and make-do, so truly comprehensive a scheme was adopted. As the new Town Planning Review of Liverpool was quick to recognize in an early issue, the solution was a broadly urbanistic, not a narrowly architectural, one. It was to convert the Terminal complex from an inert obstacle to urban development into a dynamic reciprocating engine for urban activity.

² Ibid pp. 3.

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Following the acceptance of the Wilgus report, plans for the new Terminal were requested on a competitive basis from a selected list of architectural firms. As is often the case in such big commissions, other factors than sheer professional ability seem to have played a large role in the final selection of the architects. Four firms were initially invited to participate: Daniel H. Burnham; McKim, Meade and White; Samuel Huckel; and Reed and Stem. (The very selection seems arbitrary, since the first two firms were internationally famous for their work on the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, while the other two were relatively unknown.) The design of Reed and Stem was accepted, nominally because it called for an elevated driveway around the Terminal but the fact that Charles A. Reed was Wilgus's brother-in-law may have played some role in the selection. Such familial connections certainly seem to have been a factor subsequently, for a firm hitherto not mentioned unexpectedly submitted another design for the Terminal without Reed and Stem's knowledge. The firm was Warren and Wetmore, whose senior member, Whitney Warren, was a cousin of William K. Vanderbilt, the then Chairman of the Board of the New York Central."³

The final partnership was headed by Charles A. Reed, but at his death in 1911, Whitney Warren took over the association.

"Construction of the new Terminal was actually to take almost ten years--from June, 1903, to February, 1913. The slow pace is easy enough to understand, since uninterrupted service had to be maintained throughout the

³ Ibid pp. 4.

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entire period and it had already increased in volume from 500 trains per day in 1903 to over 600 in 1906.... on February 2, 1913 the terminal was formally opened to the public.

Although the completed building consists of hundreds of different specialized facilities at many levels of its complex plan, its central feature--a system of public spaces for handling incoming and departing passengers--was and still is a model of coherence and clarity. This clarity had both its formal and its functional aspects. In a florid statement at the time of the opening, Whitney Warren (by now the architect of the Terminal) employed an analogy popular with "City Beautiful" planners:

Modern cities have no portals or arches of triumph. Their real gateways are the railroad stations, and the motive of the facade of this terminal is an attempt to offer a tribute to commerce. The monumental group decorating the three great Mercury, supported by moral and mental energy--Hercules and Minerva (sculptor: Jules Coutan).

But "gateway" is a totally inadequate term, suggesting a passive orifice under the open sky whereas the Terminal must be seen as a mechanism, a great reciprocating engine for pumping a huge flow of pedestrian traffic through a whole series of valves and conduits into connecting systems--trains, subways, taxis, trolleys and elevated trains.....but the enormous impact of the Terminal is due to the Main Concourse. This great chamber, 120 by 375 feet, with a vault 125 feet high at its apex, was one of the noblest in America--suprassed only by the great glass and metal vaults of the now-vanished Pennsylvania Station. Sheathed in marble and simulated Caen stone, its elliptical vault colored cerulean with constellations painted by Paul Helleu, the Concourse was dramatically

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illuminated by the great windows at each end and the clerestory lunettes along each side.

The visual splendor of this chamber and its ancillaries--the waiting room, the lower Concourse with its famous Oyster Bar, the mezzanine balconies and the vaulted Grand Central Art Galleries--was fully matched by unprecedented amenities and conveniences. Long before its opening, the architectural and urbanistic significance of these had been noted by the Town Planning Review of Liverpool. Hailing it as "the greatest railway terminal in the world...."

Stylistically, the Grand Central Terminal was notable for its consistency and--considering the idiom it employs--remarkable for its sobriety and simplicity. The idiom was that of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and was characterized by rationality in plan but flamboyance in elevation and ornament. Whitney Warren, who had studied there for the decade 1884-1894, obviously brought this experience to bear on the final form of the Terminal; but while the plan is clearly Beaux Arts in origin, the elevations show the style's exuberance only in such details as the sculptural group around the great clock on the south front."⁴

The complex as it finally evolved did make Park Avenue one of the most elegant boulevards in America, it created a hotel district and in an ironic way created the density of office towers that now crowd around it. Grand Central Terminal remains in spite of attempts to mutilate or destroy it a milestone in American architecture and engineering.

⁴ Ibid pp. 5.

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Photographs and Their Descriptions

Location: Grand Central Terminal, New York, New York

Photo credit: New York Landmarks Commission

- Photo description:
1. Facade, Lexington Avenue.
 2. 42nd St. facade (northeast).
 3. Facade, Lexington Avenue.
 4. Facade sculpture. Mercury by Jules Coutan.
 5. Facade detail.
 6. Sculpture of Cornelius Vanderbilt.
 7. Detail light standard.
 8. Interior waiting room.
 9. Interior main hall.
 10. Main concourse.

