

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL, 71-105 East 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Completed 1913; architects Reed & Stem and Warren & Wetmore.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1280, Lot 1.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Grand Central Terminal and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 19). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. A representative of the owner also spoke. This hearing was continued to subsequent hearings of the Commission. The public hearing on Grand Central Terminal was closed January 31, 1967 (Item No. 8).

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Grand Central Station, one of the great buildings of America, evokes a spirit that is unique in this City. It combines distinguished architecture with a brilliant engineering solution, wedded to one of the most fabulous railroad terminals of our time. Monumental in scale, this great building functions as well today as it did when built. In style it represents the best of the French Beaux Arts.

The contrast of solids and voids is a striking feature of this building. The large percentage of glass areas, to be seen in the great windows, is reminiscent of the quality of some of the best French exposition buildings, models of daring structural design in their day, which availed themselves of the latest technological knowledge of their time. The use of these windows for several levels of horizontal circulation, was in itself a daring concept. Visitors can see from the main concourse the diminutive human beings walking between the two layers of glass as they cross and recross from office to office.

The very scale of the monumental columns and the handsome sculptured details, such as the enframing of the oval windows and clock, represent a handsome and skillful combination of architectural elements to create a building overpowering in its timeless grandeur.

History of the Building

Superimposed upon the railroad empire built by the Vanderbilts, which in turn had been built upon the maritime empire of the old Commodore, was the vast network of rails soon to culminate in a new terminus destined to serve the greatest city in the country. On the shoulders of William J. Wilgus rested the staggering problem of assembling the fabulous network of electrified rails into this modern nerve center. This brilliant solution was approved to serve as the basic set of conditions for a nationwide competition among architects for the design of the terminal. The competition was won by Reed & Stem of St. Paul, Minnesota. It was their brilliant design which introduced the concept of ramps. Later Whitney Warren, of Warren & Wetmore, with the concurrence of the Vanderbilts, took over the architectural design of the terminal, as we see it today, displaying the virtuosity of his training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

Grand Central always has been a symbol of the City itself. Commuters, sight-seers, casual visitors and City dwellers on pleasant walks go through it daily. Approximately 400,000 people a day stream through its doors, ramps and escalators. So extensive is the series of connections to nearby office buildings that many commuters can go to work without leaving the station. In 1946 Grand Central Terminal served over 65 million passengers. It boasted of 96 long-distance trains departing and 90 arriving every day. By the end of 1964, there were only 51 departures and 48 arrivals daily. Despite these dwindling numbers, the Terminal served almost 43.4 million passengers in 1964 - a respectable figure for any railroad station. There are 33.7 miles of track in Grand Central and its adjoining train-yard, a total of 123 tracks - 66 on the Upper Level and 57 on the Lower. On these tracks, trains carry about 140,000 paying passengers to and from Grand Central Terminal every week day, and approximately 120,000 are daily commuters.

Grand Central Depot, which preceded the present station, was opened in 1871 for the New York and Harlem Railroad and for the New Haven Railroad which once went downtown through a tunnel as far as 26th Street. After a train wreck in the smoke-filled Park Avenue tunnel in 1902, the State Legislature passed a law prohibiting steam locomotives from using the Park Avenue tracks south of the Harlem River. The law gave the two railroads until 1908 to comply with the new regulation. It was then that the railroad lines had to be electrified, and the work to enlarge the station began in 1903. In 1913 the present terminal was completed in conjunction with the fabulous system of "air rights" over the tracks on which so many hotels, apartment houses and office buildings were subsequently built.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that Grand Central Terminal has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Grand Central Terminal is a magnificent example of French Beaux Arts architecture; that it is one of the great buildings of America, that it represents a creative engineering solution of a very difficult problem, combined with artistic splendor; that as an American Railroad Station it is unique in quality, distinction and character; and that this building plays a significant role in the life and development of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark, Grand Central Terminal, 71-105 East 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1280, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.