The History of Grand Central Terminal

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Abstract

Grand Central Terminal, also referred to as Grand Central Station, is an important asset to New York City. This is one of the major train terminals, which is located in Midtown Manhattan. Grand Central Terminal serves as a commuter railroad for people who travel on the Metro-North Railroad. The terminal is considered a large tourist attraction and has over twenty million people who visit it each year. Its stunning architecture and traditions that go along with it are what draw visitors through this awe-inspiring monument.

The History of Grand Central Station

Grand Central Terminal, also known as Grand Central Station, is a major use of transportation found in Midtown Manhattan. “Most people erroneously refer to this as Grand Central Station, but in fact that is the name of the Post Office next door” (ENY, p.48). Grand Central Terminal is a train station that serves as a commuter railroad for people who travel on the Metro-North railroad. Metro-North railroad serves for people who commute to Dutchess, Putnam, and Westchester counties in New York and the counties of Fairfield and New Haven in Connecticut. “Grand Central Terminal is a big tourist attraction and has over twenty million people who visit it each year” (Robbins, English, 2013). This makes the Grand Central Terminal such a major attraction and piece of history in Manhattan.

In 1871, the first Grand Central Depot was opened by Cornelius Vanderbilt, who was an American businessman who succeeded tremendously with shipping and railroads. The Grand Central Depot served as the destination for various railroad trains that were entering Manhattan. The station was shaped in an “L” along 42nd Street. In 1899, the Grand Central Depot building was replaced with a bigger and better six story building that was named the Grand Central Station/Terminal. “The construction of the building started in 1903 and did not finish until 1913. This included the cost of eighty-million dollars” (Maranzani, 2013, para. 2). The constructing of the Grand Central was one of the biggest project in New York’s history. It was composed of seventy acres and thirty-two miles of track. The building was divided into forty-six tracks and a thirty passenger platforms which is almost twice the size of the Vanderbilt’s Pennsylvania Station.

The station’s interior was decorated with chandeliers that exposed over four thousand light bulbs. For a century, the bulbs were seen as a trademark until the changing of the lights bulbs in 2008. The light bulbs were replaced with energy efficient fluorescent bulbs. Another important feature that Grand Central added was the use of ramps. “Ramps were used to help commuters and travelers to get to and from track level to the city streets” (Maranzani, 2013, para. 4).

Grand Central Station’s “biggest flaw is also its most recognizable feature” (Maranzani, 2013, para. 9). Its massive ceiling in the main concourse is sketched backwards. The most unique part of the mistake was that it was unrecognizable until a commuter discovered it. The real reason for the mistake has not been uncovered but there are various theories to explain the meaning. In the 1930s the original ceiling was actually replaced but the “mistake” was left there. This had become such an important staple to the Grand Central Terminal. Dirt and grime began to build upon the ceiling due to the smoke of the cigarettes that were smoked by the commuters within the terminal. This covered the beautiful ceiling. A project began in the 1980s which removed the dirt and grime from the ceiling to reveal its beautiful nature. During the renovations, an additional staircases was added. “The addition of the staircase balanced out the room and eased the congestion in the main concourse. The workers tried aligning the two staircases but the new staircase was purposely built a few inches above the level of the one across the way” (Maranzani, 2013, para. 9). These renovations are a part of the distinctive characteristics which make the Grand Central Terminal as beautiful and important as it is today.

A major part of this history of the Grand Central Terminal took place within the 1940s. About forty percent of the population in the United States traveled through Grand Central each year, including the millions of soldiers during World War II. They made their way through Grand Central Terminal because of the way they traveled to and from the front. Due to the amount of soldiers that used the Grand Central Terminal, the United States government opened a USO station. This caused terminal to be a target of Nazi destruction. Four German spies slipped onto Long Island with the intentions to cause destruction to key locations, which included the Grand Central Terminal. The spies were quickly captured by American officials, but if they were not captured, they could have made their way to the secret M42 and caused much harm. As of today, M42 has never been seen on any of the maps of Grand Central (Maranzani, 2013, para. 7). This evident staple of history is a part of the building blocks that make the Grand Central Terminal such a special place in New York City.

Throughout the years, Grand Central Terminal has been considered imperative to the cultural life of New York City. In the early years of Grand Central Terminal, many people gathered in the terminal to watch movies, eat in its various restaurants, and learn of the history at its museum. “At one point during the 1920s there was an art school found within the terminal. This school was developed by a group of painters who offered art lessons to students” (Robins, p. 80). Unfortunately, the school closed in 1944. Grand Central Terminal has also been utilized as a backdrop for endless books, movies, and television shows. Many television programs were broadcasted and filmed out of the studios that were located above the famous Oyster Bar (grandcentralterminal.com).

Today, Grand Central Terminal is seen as the ultimate destination. Grand Central Terminal “has become an international example of a successful urban project that gave new life to an historic building which otherwise would have been discarded and destroyed” (as cited in grandcentralterminal.com, para. 9). It has been restored back to its grandeur of 1913. There are five elegant restaurants, twenty casual eateries, gourmet food markets, and fifty specialty shops. The terminal’s Vanderbilt Hall is an area of entertainment and free promotions. Grand Central Station is an evident piece of history in New York City. The architectural elegance, as well as the means of transportation make this a major attraction for tourists, and the media.

References

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