

**Speaker 1:** Thank you for purchasing Free Tours by Foot and Atlantis Audio Tour's Self Guided Audio Tour. I wanted to let you know how this works before you get started. The Audio Tour is one long audio file. You can pause between stops as you walk there, allowing you to take your time and to stop to explore something more, if you'd like. I'll let you know as we move between stops. You'll also find a Google map and a PDF in your confirmation email, in case you'd like to check where you are or read along with your guide. Let's get started with your tour and I'll let you know when to pause to get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** Grand Central Terminal is considered a Beaux-Arts masterpiece. This building sees millions of visitors a year, both commuters and tourists alike. Before we explore the inside of this beautiful building, let's take a few minutes to see some of the features on the outside. If you look up, you will see a cluster of statues. They depict Minerva, Mercury, and Hercules, the Roman gods of wisdom, speed, and strength. These were all of the attributes that a railroad was supposed to have.

The piece is called The Glory of Commerce, and it was the largest sculpture grouping in the world when it was unveiled. The sculptures were designed by French artist Jules-Felix Coutan, but he didn't actually come to New York to oversee their completion. His explanation for not coming was his fear that, "Some of your American architecture might distress me." Because of this, William Bradley of Long Island City, Queens actually completed the piece.

Just beneath the sculptures is a beautiful clock. It's hard to tell from the sidewalk, but this clock actually measures almost four-and-a-half meters in diameter, and it is the largest piece of Tiffany glass in the world. It is also the only clock that is a part of Grand Central that is set to the correct time. This is entirely on purpose. All clocks inside are set 1 minute fast, and trains leave 1 minute after their scheduled departure.

Grand Central is a busy place with 44 train platforms, more than any other station in the entire world. They have to keep to a precise schedule, but they want the passengers to stay safe. The extra minute of buffer time is to help get everyone to their train in a safe and timely manner. Seems to be working out pretty well. Grand Central has the fewest slips, trips, and falls of any station in the country, a pretty big accomplishment considering the sheer volume of passengers and the slick marble flooring.

If you look on the corners of the building, you'll see some eagles perched there. These were actually taken from a previous building. Grand Central Terminal is the third station on this spot. First came Grand Central Depot in 1871, then Grand Central Station in 1899. Then the present building, Grand Central Terminal, which opened in 1913. These eagles adorned the previous Grand Central station. If you look at them closely, you will see that their faces are actually pretty lifelike and definitely, ferocious. This is to help scare pigeons away.

The gray statue of a man out in front is of Cornelius Vanderbilt, known to many as the Commodore. Before we go inside, just a bit of history about this place and how it all came to be, starting with the Commodore. In the mid-19th century, New York City had three train lines, the Hudson Line, the Harlem Line, and the New Haven Line. These three lines originally came into three different stations, which created some

chaos. Cornelius Vanderbilt financed Grand Central Depot, which opened in 1871, so that all three lines could operate through a central location.

Later, in 1899, the Depot had a major overhaul. The building went from three stories to six, and it got a new facade. The new and improved building was christened Grand Central Station. In the days of both the Depot and the Station, trains ran above ground, but traffic was getting increasingly more complicated in a growing city. In 1902, two trains collided north of Grand Central, killing 15 people. Afterwards, William J. Wilgus of the New York Central Railroad proposed replacing Grand Central Station and its steam trains with a new terminal built for electric trains. It would be cleaner, faster, and safer.

Grand Central Station was torn down and replaced in stages, so as to cause as little disruption to train service as possible. Work began in 1903, and Grand Central Terminal was completed in February 1913. The firms of Reed and Stem and Warren and Wetmore designed the station, which, just like the previous two, was built by the Vanderbilt family. The cost in today's money would be over \$2 billion for Grand Central Terminal. The new station was not only electric, but the trains ran underground, clearing the way for Park Avenue, north of the station.

Let's head inside. The bridge that you see is the Pershing Square Bridge. You want to go in the 42nd street entrance just under it. Go through two sets of doors, and you will find yourself in Vanderbilt Hall.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** This hall, with its 14-and-a-half-meter ceilings and gold chandeliers, was once a waiting room named for the family that built Grand Central. This room was carefully restored in 1998. Today, half of it is a food hall, and the other half is rented out for various events. Go under the archway and into the main concourse.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** The main concourse is the busiest and most beautiful part of Grand Central. Every day, approximately 750,000 people cross this massive space, which is larger than the nave of Notre Dame Cathedral. The space is close to 150 meters long and has double staircases on each end, modeled after the stairs in the Paris Opera House. There are many things to see in this room.

Let's start with the information booth. Walk to the booth with the four-sided clock on the top, and stop and press play. The information booth is a busy place that typically receives over 1,000 questions per hour. It is also a popular meeting spot for New Yorkers. The booth is instantly recognizable due to the famous four-sided clock that sits atop it. The clock is done in brass and was made in Waterbury, Connecticut.

People often cite the value of the clock to be tens of millions of dollars. Whatever the actual value, it is a well-loved iconic feature. When you look on the top of the clock, you will see a carving of an acorn and an oak leaf. You can actually see these all over the terminal because they are a symbol of the Vanderbilt family. Out of tiny acorns grow mighty oaks, a saying that resonated with self-made man, Cornelius Vanderbilt.

You can't see from the outside, but inside the information booth, there is a secret spiral staircase. It leads to the downstairs information booth, a level below. There are actually many fascinating features in Grand Central that can't be seen by visitors. One of these is the mysterious room M42. M42 is so secret that it doesn't appear on a single drawing or blueprint for the building. Its existence wasn't even confirmed until the 1980s. M42, which is about 13 stories below where you are standing, contains the massive rotary converters that keep the electricity at Grand Central running. During World War II, guarding this room was a top priority.

Adolf Hitler knew of its existence and wanted to destroy it. Being a major hub, Grand Central was key for moving troops and war materials on the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. Disabling Grand Central would have caused a massive jam-up. This kind of plot would not have involved anything high-tech. The rotary converters could be destroyed with sand. Dumping sand over the hot converters would have turned the sand into glass, destroying the rotary and cutting the power to Grand Central.

For this reason, the guards outside M42 had orders to shoot intruders on site. If civilians were caught down there, they would have been kept down there for the duration of the war. This gives you an idea of how very seriously the secret of M42 was taken. There were spies sent from Germany to attack M42, but they were caught by the FBI before they made it there. Today, M42 is still down there working to keep this place running. Unlike M42, most details in Grand Central can be seen by visitors, but many only by those who are looking very closely. If you look up at the ceiling, you'll see a dark circle right next to Pisces, the fish. This is a remnant from the time that the Main Concourse was home to an American Redstone missile silo. The missile was placed here in 1957 to reassure Americans after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik.

The hole was cut to get the needle nose of the missile into place. After the missile was taken out, it was decided that the ceiling would be left as it was, a testament to the many uses of the terminal over the years. The starry ceiling above you is one of the most famous features of the terminal. It depicts the constellations of the zodiac. Astronomy experts were consulted to design the ceiling, which has 2500 stars.

People come from all over the world to admire it, but if you really know your astronomy, you will notice some odd things. First of all, the vantage point is not supposed to be New York City. The constellations are arranged to depict the view from the Mediterranean. The bigger issue is that the ceiling is actually backwards. Many constellations are in reverse order from how they would actually appear in the night sky. This was promptly noticed by a commuter in 1913.

The Vanderbilt family defended their ceiling, saying it was on purpose and it was meant to be from the perspective of God looking down. Whether that's true or it was a mistake made by the painters with a convenient explanation, we'll never really know. Despite the inaccuracy, it is beautiful. You will see that some of the stars are done with bright lights. This is to depict that those are closer to Earth and would appear brighter in the night sky.

From the floor of the Main Concourse, look for the stairs that have the words to Vanderbilt Avenue, Campbell Apartment over them, so not the stairs with the Apple Store. Walk up these stairs until you were by Michael Jordan's Steak House. Look up

and to the right if you're facing the exit, up where the blue ceiling meets the white marble, just to the left of the line, you will see a dark rectangle.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** As beautiful as Grand Central is today, it did not always appear so. Grand Central began to see a decline in the post-World War II era. In 1947, 65 million people traveled through the station, but in the years following, that number sharply dropped as air travel and cross-country road trips rose in popularity. The railroads in New York were in dire financial straits, which led to the eventual demolition of Pennsylvania Station just across town.

It was proposed that Grand Central would have a tower built over it, which would have destroyed both the original facade and the main waiting room. Many people strongly objected to the destruction of the building, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. At her urging, the building was granted landmark status in 1967, just in time to save it, but the years of hard financial times had taken their toll on the building.

It was grimy and poorly cared for. This beautiful ceiling could not be seen at all. It was completely obscured by layers of dark grime. The Metropolitan Transit Authority signed a 280-year lease on the building in 1994 and began a full restoration. The project cost over \$400 million. One of the most striking transformations was this ceiling. Workers washed away the years of buildup, mostly nicotine tar from people smoking in the terminal.

In this one little patch, you can see what it was like before, making it easy for people to appreciate the effect and transformation of the cleaning. Go through the exit doors and take a left. On your left, you will see a set of doors that say, "15 Vanderbilt Avenue." Go inside, and on your right, you will see the Campbell Apartment.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** Despite the name, the Campbell Apartment has never been a residence. Rather, it was the private office of financier, John W. Campbell. Campbell didn't just want a functional office. When he leased the space in 1923, he had it transformed to resemble a 13th-century Florentine palace. He got a Persian rug to cover the entire space at a cost of \$300,000, or approximately \$3.5 million today.

The Office also had a pipe organ and a piano. In the evenings, Campbell would hire musicians to come and play for 50 or 60 friends. The crowd was waited upon by his butler, Stackhouse. When Campbell died in 1957, the gorgeous space became a storage room. For a time, there was a holding cell for the Transit Police inside. In 1999, the space was restored to its former glory at a cost of over \$2 million, and it opened as a bar that boasted cocktails from another era.

The Campbell Apartment bar is currently closed in a controversial decision. The lease on the bar was given to a new owner who plans to turn it into a more casual trendy spot. The new lease is for over \$1 million a year. Because the space is landmarked, many of the beautiful features, like the windows and the ceiling, are required to be preserved. Go back into the Main Concourse just the way you came out. Head back to the main floor.

Before we continue, on just some additional facts and statistics about Grand Central. On a busy day, there are about 750,000 people that pass through here. That is equivalent to the state population of Alaska. During morning rush hour, there's a train at a platform every 58 seconds, and every month, the Lost and Found retrieves over 2000 items. Despite the volume, about 80% get returned to their owners. It is actually the best recovery rate of any Lost and Found in the world.

Items turned in run from the mundane, like coats and cell phones, to the unusual, including urns of cremated ashes and live animals. Every floor and train platform can be accessed by ramps or elevators. You could go all over Grand Central Terminal without ever taking the stairs. This was important in 1913 when the terminal was built. Many people traveled with large steamer trunks and train cases that had to be rolled along with them.

Turn and face the stairs that you took to the Campbell Apartment. Walk under the archway to the right of the stairs. It will say, "Tracks 31 to 42." The next arch will say, "Waiting room." Pass under that and take a right towards where it says, "Tracks 36 to 42." You will pass a couple of shops, including a Starbucks. After you pass that, you will see an arrow pointing you toward the Biltmore room on your left. Walk all the way into the Biltmore room until you are under the big wall clock.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** This room is officially called the Biltmore Room, but its nickname is the kissing room. People would wait here for their loved ones to return home from long trips, so there was much hugging and kissing in this room. The tracks that you see off to this side once serviced lines that did long-distance trips. Rail lines, like the famous 20th Century Limited, came into Grand Central from Chicago, making the trip in about 20 hours.

Riding on the 20th Century Limited wasn't just travel. It was an experience. Passengers walked up to the train on a red carpet. Men were given carnations for their buttonholes. Women were given perfume and flowers. Passengers ate in luxury dining cars off of fine china. In the 1920s, this experience could be had for \$51.30. Rooms like the Biltmore Room are a reminder of this bygone era of train travel.

The chalkboard that you see under the clock was unearthed during the renovations of Grand Central. It used to be someone's job to continuously update the departure and arrival information. You had to be pretty fast because the information changed every few minutes in Grand Central's heyday. Head out of the Biltmore Room the way you came. Walk back by the shops, but continue walking past where you exited the Main Concourse. You will come to an archway that says, "Tracks 100 to 117 Dining Concourse." Head down the ramp. When you see the entrance to the Oyster Bar on your right, stop.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** In this area, you'll see people huddling with their faces in the corners. This is the Whispering Gallery. Even though the space doesn't have the ornate beauty of the rest of the building, it is amazing. If you stand in one corner and have a friend stand in the opposite corner, you will be able to whisper to one another and

hear perfectly even though you are over 10 meters apart and not facing each other. The arched ceiling and the stone tiles create a path for the sound to travel, corner to corner.

The Whispering Gallery is just outside one of the most famous restaurants in Manhattan, the Oyster Bar. The Oyster Bar is the only business that has been around since Grand Central opened, February 2nd, 1913. Since then, they have become known for having one of the most extensive seafood menus in the city. Many of the physical features, such as the Guastavino Tile Ceiling have been here since the Oyster Bar opened. When you're finished trying out the Whispering Gallery, continue up the ramp to where it says 42nd Street Passage and take a left. Walk past the Lexington passage and take a right into the Grand Central Market.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** Take a stroll through this indoor food market which boasts New York City favorites, such as Eli Zabar's, Murray's Cheese Shop, and Li-Lac Chocolates. On weekdays, this is open until 9:00 PM making it a favorite spot for commuters to grab something for dinner on their way home. When you're finished looking through the market, go back out the way you came in and follow the signs back to the Main Concourse.

**Speaker 1:** Pause here until you get to your next stop.

**Speaker 2:** Now that you've seen most of this beautiful terminal, you can better appreciate why it draws visitors from all over the world. The pristine condition of the Terminal makes it hard to believe it celebrated its 100th birthday in 2013. On that day, businesses throughout the Terminal priced their goods as though people were back in time in 1913. You could get a \$0.06 loaf of rye bread and a \$0.10 shoe shine. On opening day, 150,000 people came through Grand Central which would seem empty compared to the crowds of today.

Grand Central doesn't just interest commuters and tourists, however. For years it has captured the imaginations of filmmakers. Alfred Hitchcock loved Grand Central and filmed part of *North by Northwest* here. The terminal has also been seen in dozens of other films including *Men in Black*, *The Avengers*, *One Fine Day*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and the animated film *Madagascar*.

If you ever see a train platform in Grand Central featured on screen, it is most likely Track 34. One of the few platforms that doesn't have columns, making filming a little easier. Fred Astaire got off the 20th Century Limited and danced on Track 34 in the film, *The Bandwagon*. This concludes our tour of Grand Central. Be sure to check out our other audio tours or join us in person for a pay-what-you-want walking tour. For more information, visit [www.freetoursbyfoot.com](http://www.freetoursbyfoot.com). Thanks for joining me and we hope to see you soon.

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