

All photos courtesy New York Central.

# Haunted Roundhouse

**Hidden beneath New York City's Express Highway, Hudson River roundhouse is memory of the past.**

**BY W. T. CONIFF.**

THERE is a haunted house at the foot of West 72nd Street in New York. Well, it is not exactly 72nd Street, for since the completion of the Express Highway, the bridge high above the maze of tracks that the railroaders call "The Farm" is at the foot of 71st Street. There, crouched under the towering structure of the elevated highway, is the old Hudson River roundhouse, and it is haunted by the wraiths of the iron horse of steel and steam that van-

ished from New York's West Side with the electrification of the New York Central's freight and terminal operations in the city.

It is a far cry since the boom days of the '20's, when the 72nd Street Yards hummed with business and half a hundred steam yard-engines called it home. Now, spluttering Diesel-electrics that look like misshapen black beetles haunt the crumbling stalls where only a few years ago the last of that sturdy stable of steam yard-goats and powerful, businesslike freight-haulers were quartered. A gap in the circular walls separates the old roundhouse into two segments facing each other across the turntable pit. The old tracks extend out into the vacant space and open pits yawn like un-

The present St. John's Park freight terminal is a three-story building, three blocks long by one block wide. The street floor is the freight house proper and has back-up platform space for 127 trucks inside the building. The second floor is the track floor and has eight tracks in pits with concrete track floor construction to facilitate cleaning.

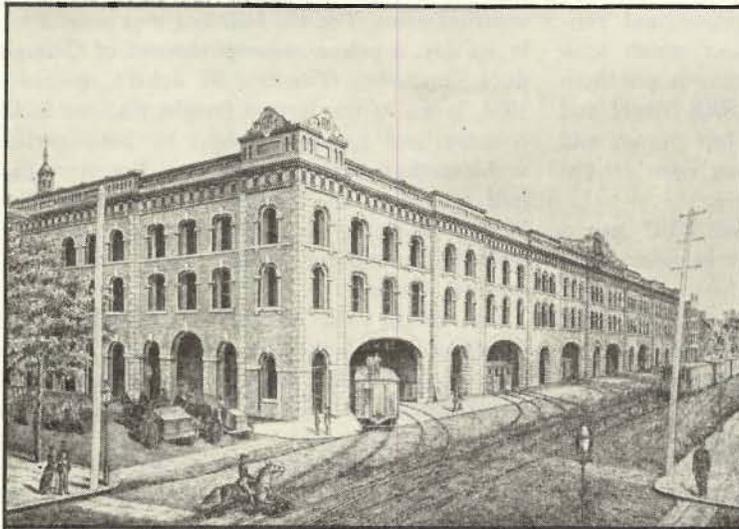


The old crossing of 11th Avenue through the 33rd Street NYC yards was typical of the traffic problems which the road now avoids by the improvements on the West Side Line. The freight train running down the middle of the street in the background is on the old main line. Both yards and main line are now below street level at this point.



Largest and most important freight yards on Manhattan Island is at 60th Street. It provides not only freight terminal facilities but rail-water facilities as well. The main tracks of the West Side freight line are close behind the buildings in the lower left corner of the photo. The main line past here is operated by electric locomotives taking power from a third rail, but yard switching is by Diesel-electrics.

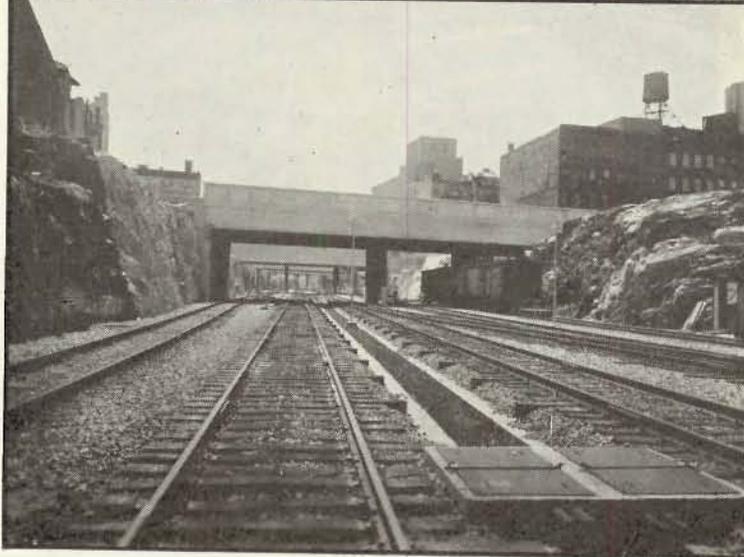




From 1868 to 1934 the New York Central's principal downtown freight station was old St. John's Park, left, at the end of the one-time Hudson River Railroad, now the West Side freight line. A feature of the west front of this building was a huge bronze statue of Commodore Vanderbilt which was moved in 1929 to the front of Grand Central Terminal, where it faces down lower Park Avenue.



Excavation in progress for improvement of the NYC's 33rd Street freight yard, which was lowered below street level as part of the West Side program of the middle 1930's. The building in background was underpinned to suit the new track layout, and a new elevator shaft was extended down to track level. The main line for West Side freight was, up to the time this photo was taken, down 11th Avenue, the street across the middle of the picture.



Much of the West Side freight line is in an open cut blasted out of the granite backbone of Manhattan. This view was taken at the throat north of the 33rd Street yards, where the track layout is used for extensive switching. Notice the longer ties for third rail, which was not installed at the time.

In the late 1930's a vast improvement program was brought to completion which took West Side freight trains off city streets, put them behind electric power north of 30th Street and behind Diesel power south of 30th Street, and brought them into an immense new freight station at the south end of the line.

Below 60th Street, where the NYC has a large freight yard next to the river, West Side tracks formerly ran in city streets and each train was preceded at six miles an hour by a cowboy on horseback who waved a red flag to warn motorists. Now the tracks from 60th Street to 30th Street are in a cut and from 30th Street to St. John's Park freight terminal they are elevated, passing right through a number of industrial and warehouse buildings and thus furnishing ideal enclosed siding facilities.

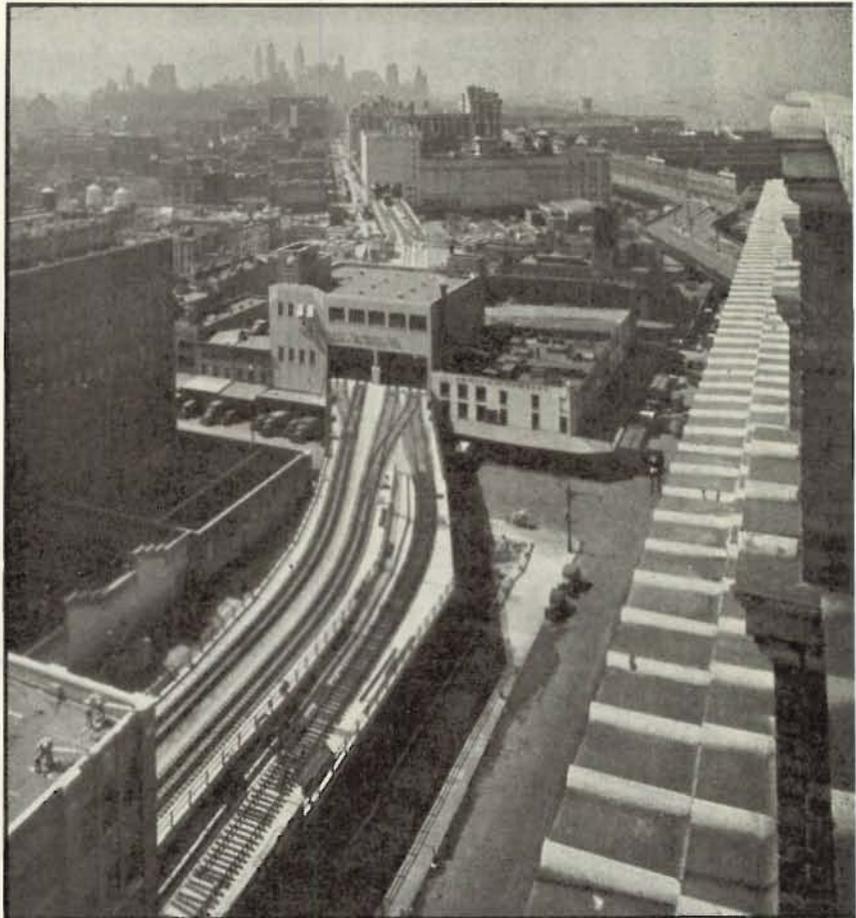
At 30th Street, on the site of the one-time Hudson River Railroad passenger station, is the Morgan Parcel Post Building, where the NYC loads mail cars for all principal points on the NYC as well as for many cities west of Chicago. The biggest train made up here is No. 159, the *Chicago Express*, which includes eight or nine cars from the parcel post building. Cars are consolidated with those from the West Side Railway Express Building at 32nd Street before running as a train up the West Side Line to Harmon, where they are joined to the portion of the train from Grand Central.

The St. John's Park freight terminal replaced an older structure of the same name farther downtown. The old terminal was built in 1868 on a tract of park land sold to the railroad by St. John's Episcopal Church, which is how a freight station acquired such an

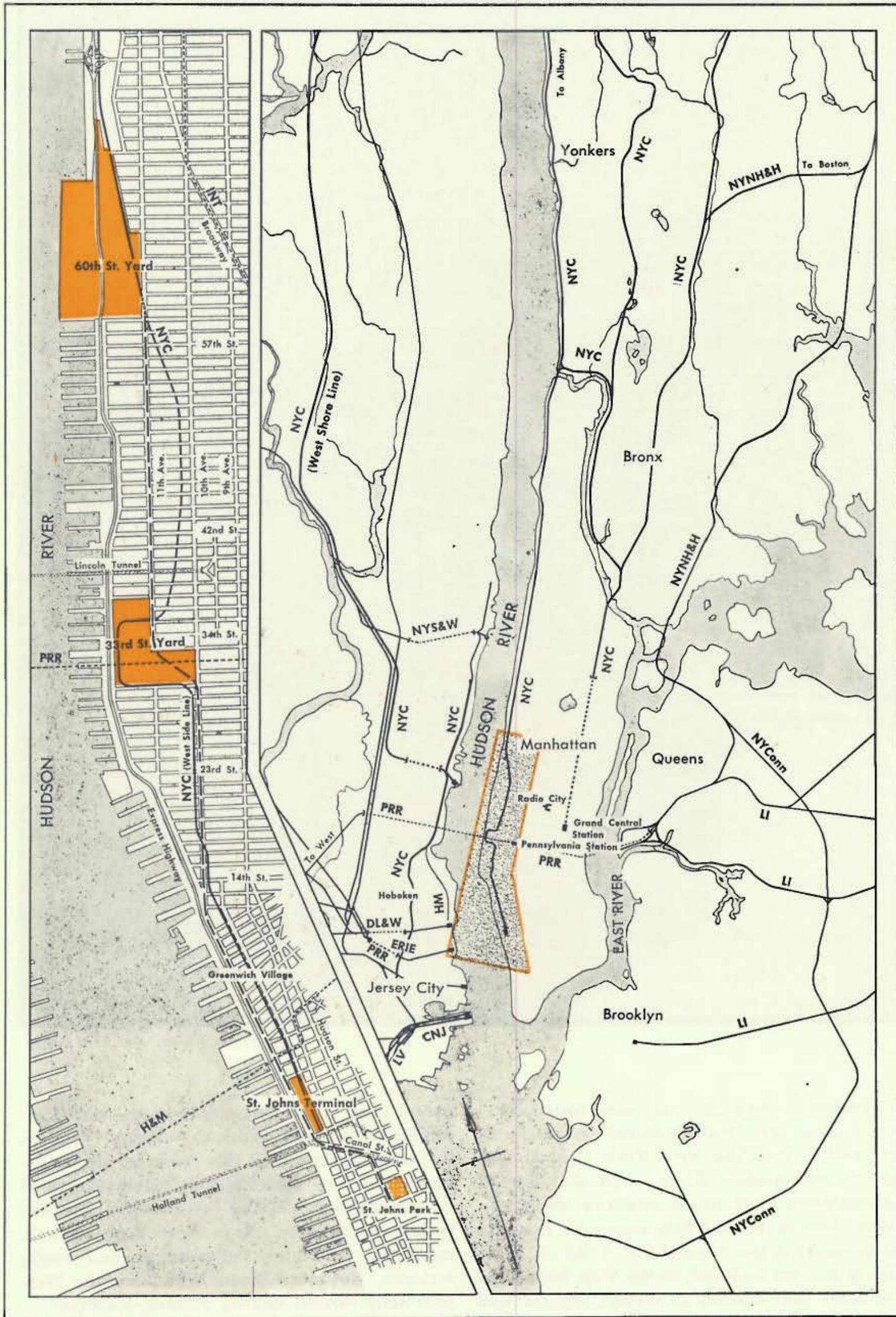
unusual name. The old building was magnificent in its day, a prime accomplishment of Commodore Vanderbilt. The new St. John's, opened in 1934, is one of the largest freight stations in the country and handles freight in both carload and less-than-carload quantities. For more than half a century St. John's Park has been New York's principal delivery station for dairy freight, including butter, eggs, cheese and dressed poultry.

The freight yards at both 33rd Street and 60th Street are so planned that the space can later be built up through lease of air rights, much as was done in the Grand Central district. For some 2½ miles above 79th Street, Riverside Park has been extended over the tracks on a framework of steel, adding 32 acres to New York's park area.

An elevated section of the New York Central's West Side freight line, looking south from West 14th. The Hudson River and the elevated express motorway are to the right. At end of track in the distance is St. John's Park freight station.



The lower end of the NYC's West Side freight line in New York City is shown in detail in the left-hand map. Dotted lines are the old route in city streets, solid lines the present-day railroad. The other map fits the detail into the New York area.



Linn H. Westcott.



Looking south over the 33rd Street Yard when new line had just been completed. Spur to left enters post office, PRR tunnels underneath.

## NYC West Side Freight Line

**Only all-rail freight route into  
Manhattan has been completely  
modernized within last decade.**

**A PHOTO STORY.**



All photos courtesy New York Central.

**PASSENGERS** in the plushy, air-conditioned comfort of trains into Grand Central Terminal seldom realize that the New York Central has, close to the Hudson River, a parallel line of railroad down much of the length of Manhattan Island. Just as the East Side passenger line into the terminal is the descendant of the old New York & Harlem Railroad, so the West Side Line, now given over entirely to freight, express, and

parcel post, is the descendant of the old Hudson River Railroad. When Commodore Vanderbilt consolidated these two roads as the beginning of the New York Central System he created by the same stroke the two-pronged terminal system which now serves New York so well, separating completely the passenger and freight services. Not since World War I has the West Side Line carried regular passenger service.