

MOUNT VERNON WEST RAILROAD STATION
156 South West Street
southwest corner Mt. Vernon Avenue
Mount Vernon
Westchester County
New York

HABS No. NY-6287

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: 156 South West Street, southwest corner Mt. Vernon Avenue
Mt. Vernon, Westchester County, New York

USGS Mt. Vernon Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.596800.4529800

Present Owners: Former Station Building--Israel Soloff
156 South West Street
Mt. Vernon, N.Y. 10550

Passageways and Platforms--Penn Central Corporation
1 East 4th Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

[Metro-North has a lease on the station lasting until the
year 2032.]

Present Occupant: Former station building occupied by a pharmacy, silver
plating works, photography studio, and offices.

Passages and platform occupied by Metro-North Commuter
Railroad Company 347 Madison Avenue New York, N.Y. 10017

Use: Former Station Building is now used for commercial and
industrial purposes.

Passageways and platforms used as waiting room, ticket
office, and train platforms.

Significance: The Mount Vernon West Station of the former New York
Central and Hudson River Railroad's Harlem Branch is
significant as one of the most imposing and
architecturally distinguished railroad stations in
Westchester County. The station was erected in 1915-17,
during the period when southern Westchester County was
developing into a populous suburb of New York City and
when the cities of Mt. Vernon and neighboring Yonkers were
experiencing large-scale development. The Mt. Vernon West
Station is one of three impressive urban stations erected
at this time in Westchester. All three of these stations--
Yonkers, White Plains (demolished), and Mt. Vernon--were
Italian Renaissance inspired buildings designed by the
prestigious architectural firm of Warren & Wetmore. The
Mt. Vernon West Station is a major surviving example of
this firm's work.

PART 1: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1915-17

2. Architect: Warren & Wetmore. Warren & Wetmore was among the most prestigious architectural firms active in New York during the first decades of the twentieth century. The success of this firm is closely related to its relationship with the New York Central Railroad. The firm of Warren & Wetmore was established in 1898 by Whitney Warren and Charles Delevan Wetmore, two socially prominent members of New York's establishment. Whitney Warren (1864-1943) studied architecture at Columbia University and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. From 1894 until the establishment of his partnership with Charles Wetmore, Warren worked in the office of McKim, Mead & White. Charles Wetmore (1867-1941) received an A.B. degree from Harvard University in 1889 and three years later graduated from Harvard Law School. Although he had studied architecture and designed three dormitories at Harvard, Wetmore entered a New York law firm. Whitney Warren met Charles Wetmore when the lawyer consulted the architect about designing a house. Warren was impressed with Wetmore's abilities and persuaded him to leave the law. Apparently, Warren was the principal designer for the firm, while Wetmore took care of the legal and financial side of the practice. Warren & Wetmore's first building was the New York Yacht Club (1899). This prestigious commission immediately established the firm among New York City's social and financial elite. In 1903, Warren & Wetmore became involved with the design of Grand Central Terminal. This commission catapulted the firm to the forefront of New York's architectural firms. Construction had begun on Reed & Stem's design for Grand Central in June of 1903. In that year Whitney Warren, a cousin and close friend of William K. Vanderbilt, Chairman of the Board of the New York Central Railroad, drew up revised plans for the terminal. These were accepted by Vanderbilt and Warren & Wetmore was appointed to collaborate with Reed & Stem on the Grand Central project. This appointment was extremely controversial and led to some animosity between Warren & Wetmore and other members of the architectural profession. Nonetheless, the firm received many important residential and commercial commissions over the next three decades. Among these were a number of buildings for the New York Central Railroad, including the railroad stations at Yonkers, White Plains, Hartsdale, and Mt. Vernon West, the Biltmore and Commodore hotels, and the New York Central's headquarters (now known as the Helmsley Building), built over Park Avenue just behind Grand Central Terminal.

3. Original and subsequent owners: This station was erected by the New York Central and Harlem River Railroad. In 1959, the waiting room building was sold by the railroad to Israel Soloff and the Davenis Realty Company. Israel Soloff is still the owner of the building. The railroad retained ownership of the passageway and subway behind the station and of the platforms and tracks. In 1968, the New York Central merged with the Pennsylvania Railroad to create the Penn Central Corporation. In 1972,

the Penn Central's suburban rail lines, including the Harlem Line, with its station at Mt. Vernon West, were leased to the Metro-North Commuter Railroad for a period of sixty years.

4. Contractor: unknown

5. Original plans and construction: In 1910, the Harlem Line was electrified. At this time the Mt. Vernon West platforms were raised above street level and a concrete retaining wall and bridge built over Mt. Vernon Avenue, just north of the station platforms. The Mount Vernon West Station and its related platforms, passage, subway, and stairways were built in 1915-17. The station is a red brick building with limestone trim and a sgraffito panel. The station originally consisted of a large central pavilion with a double height interior space housing the waiting room. The waiting room was entered through a vestibule with the ticket office to the right. To the south of the waiting room was a one-story wing with toilets, a smoking room, and a passageway. To the north of the waiting room was a one-story wing with an office and baggage room. To the north of this, set back from the building line, was a one-story extension with the express room. Behind the station was a passage that connected the station, platforms, and Mt. Vernon Avenue. At a right angle to this passage was a subway that ran beneath the tracks. This subway led to stairways leading up to the train platforms. At the far end of the subway were a newsstand, boot black stand, and telephone booths.

6. Alterations: The station remained largely intact until the waiting room building was sold in 1959.

a. 1959. With the sale of the original station building with its waiting room, baggage room, ticket office, and toilets, new facilities were built in the subway. These alterations entailed the conversion of the newsstand, boot black stand, and telephone booths to a baggage room and toilets; the construction of a new ticket office along the north wall of the space; the construction of a new bench on the south wall; the addition to an existing bench on the north wall; and the addition of new doors and some new door frames.

b. 1964. The original train station was altered for commercial and industrial use. The benches were removed from the waiting room and this double height space was divided into two floors. A stairway was built to the north of the vestibule, connecting the first and second floors. Walls were removed from the men's toilet and it was combined with the other rooms to create an industrial space. Some other partitions were rearranged. The express room at the north end of the building was demolished and a new two-story bank and office building constructed. This project also entailed the addition of a second floor to the one-story north wing.

c. At an unknown date new aluminum doors were placed at the front and rear entrances to the station.

d. At an unknown date a passage exit arch was cut into the south wall of the station.

e. At an unknown date the 1959 ticket office was removed and a new ticket office constructed in the space that had been used as the baggage room.

f. The length of the station platforms has been extended several times. The most significant platform alterations occurred in 1971 when raised platforms were constructed. The raised platforms extend around the original canopy posts.

8. Historical Context

Prior to the arrival of the railroads, Westchester County was a series of small independent communities separated by farmland and rural estates. The opening of the rail lines connecting the towns and villages of Westchester with New York City was to irrevocably change the character of this county. On April 25, 1831, the New York and Harlem River Railroad was incorporated with a planned run between New York City and the town of Harlem in northern Manhattan. Service to White Plains was soon inaugurated. It was the advent of reliable train service between Westchester and New York City that brought about the suburban development of the county. The original railroads were modest single-track lines with small wooden stations. As demand for service increased, the rail lines were widened, tracks added, and imposing new stations erected. Most of the stations now in use in Westchester date from the last years of the nineteenth century or the first decades of the twentieth century; all of Westchester's Harlem Line stations south of White Plains date from the early twentieth century.

The Mt. Vernon West Station is located in the southwestern section of the city of Mt. Vernon, just north of the northern boundary of New York City and just east of the city of Yonkers. Originally a part of the town of Eastchester, Mt. Vernon was incorporated as an independent village in 1853. The communities location just north of New York City, led to its rapid urbanization in the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century and in 1892 Mt. Vernon was incorporated as a city. By the turn of the century the area near the present Mt. Vernon West station, then known as West Mt. Vernon, was heavily built up with frame houses. An examination of a 1901 Bromley Atlas of Westchester County establishes this fact. Because of its large population, Mt. Vernon West was an important station stop on the Harlem Line and the stop received one of the three imposing urban stations that the New York Central Railroad built in Westchester during the second decade of the twentieth century.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character. The Mt. Vernon West station consists of the former station building which is no longer owned by the railroad, passageways, stairs, platforms, and canopies. The station building is an extremely handsome neo-Italian Renaissance style structure and is one of the most imposing railroad stations in Westchester County. Although the station underwent alterations when it was converted for industrial and commercial uses, it retains almost all of its original fabric.

2. Condition of the fabric: The building was given a general visual inspection and appears to be in good condition. The passageway and subway appear to be in fair condition.

B. Description of the exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The Mt. Vernon West Station consists of a rectangular double height waiting room flanked by rectangular one-story wings. Behind the station building is a passageway that runs parallel to the station and a subway set at right angles to the passageway and station. The platforms and canopies are also located behind the station and extend over the subway. The building is approximately 106' long and 43' deep. The rear passageway is approximately 140' long and is 9' wide. The subway is approximately 75'8" long and 28'9" wide.

2. Foundations: concrete

3. Walls: The building is faced with rough-textured brick laid in English cross bond with heavily textured sandy mortar. The building rests on a granite base. It is trimmed with limestone and ornamented with a sgraffito panel. Below the roof eaves is a single terra-cotta egg-and-dart molding.

4. Structural system: The building has masonry bearing walls. The roof is supported on a wooden truss system.

5. Roof: The central pavilion of the station has a hip roof clad with Spanish tile. The roof has bracketed wooden eaves. The south wing and passageway have flat asphalt roofs.

6. Chimney: There is a single brick chimney with concrete cap rising above the roof along the north side of the station.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance to the station is located in the center of the front facade. The original wood and glass doors have been replaced by an aluminum and glass door. In the north wing is an entrance with a pair of wooden doors. This entry was originally open and led to a passageway running along the south side of the building. It is not known when these doors were added. On the south facade of this wing is a door that has been converted from a window. It retains its original pair of four-light

transoms. At the west end of this elevation is an opening that has been cut into the facade. This entrance leads into the passageway behind the station. The north wing has an entrance that was altered in the 1960s with the addition of a Colonial Revival style wood enframingent.

b. Windows. The main entrance is flanked by pairs of original 6x6 wood sash windows. Each window is crowned by a six-light transom. In front of each window is an original cast-iron grille. The original window on the front elevation of the south wing, which consisted of a pair of 4x4 windows each with a four-light transom, has been altered. Rectangular clerestory windows, each with a pair of wood single-pane pivot sash, were originally located on the north, south, and west elevations. The nine west windows and six south windows are extant (one south window has lost its sash). The windows on the north elevation were covered by the 1964 addition.

8. Entrance marquee: A glass and metal marquee supported by metal struts extends over the front entrance. The original marquee is extant, but it has been refaced.

9. Portico: The front facade is embellished with a portico of six limestone Doric columns set in antis. There are paired columns flanking the main entrance and single columns set to the far side of each window. Narrow pilasters are attached to the side walls of the brick antae. These columns support a simple limestone entablature.

10. Sgraffito panel: Running along the front elevation above the limestone portico is a rectangular sgraffito panel. In the center of this panel is written "NEW YORK CENTRAL R.R." This is flanked by winged wheels and caducei, symbols of transportation.

11. Platforms: The two train platforms are elevated above ground level on an artificial rise with concrete retaining walls. The platforms, originally set at the level of the tracks, were concrete. Raised platforms have been constructed over the original platforms, but the original concrete platforms are visible at the north end of the station.

12. Canopies: Both platforms retain original canopies. Those canopies have steel posts supporting steel cross beams. Pairs of steel brackets connect the posts and beams. Above the beams is the wooden canopy which slopes slightly towards the center. On the northbound platform the canopy is supported by fourteen posts and on the southbound platform it is supported by eighteen posts. The bases of the posts have been covered by the raised platforms.

13. Stair enclosures: There are two stair enclosures on the northbound platform and one on the southbound platform. These kiosks were originally covered with iron panels and had clerestories with wire glass protected by flat iron cross bars. Additional cross bars were located at the base of each enclosure. The enclosures have been altered, but they

retain their upper row of cross bars.

14. Forecourt: In front of the station is an area now used for parking. Part of this open forecourt retains original yellow brick paving.

C. Description of the Interior

1. Floor plan:

a. Cellar: The station has a small concrete cellar located below the original ticket office and north wing.

b. Main floor: The building was entered through a small rectangular vestibule. To the right of this was the ticket office and to the left a women's waiting room. Beyond the vestibule was a large waiting room with toilets and a smoking room to the south and baggage and express room to the north. Presently, the waiting room has been divided into two floors, but retains its general plan. The walls of the men's room have been removed and this room has been combined with the waiting room. Other minor partitions have been removed and new partitions erected, but the basic plan is still visible.

2. Flooring: The cellar has concrete floors. The vestibule, waiting room, and former smoking room have red clay quarry tile floors with marble trim. In the waiting room there is also marble trim around the location of the original built-in benches. These benches have been removed and their location is marked by concrete slabs. The toilets have terrazzo floors. The former baggage room and the cellar have concrete floors.

3. Wall and ceiling finishes: The walls of the waiting room and vestibule are brick. At the clerestory level the brick is laid in a chevron pattern. The other rooms have plaster walls. The toilet rooms have marble wainscot. The ceiling of the waiting room has wood beams. All other ceilings are plaster. The cellar has concrete walls and ceiling.

4. Decorative trim: Just below the clerestory level of the waiting room is a wide band of ornamental terra cotta with classical detail.

5. Doors and doorways: Several interior openings retain their original oak enframements and doors. Among these are a door connecting the original ticket office to the room behind and the door between the women's toilet and the waiting room. Other interior openings have been altered or removed.

6. Windows: The original windows are set into the brick walls and do not have enframements.

7. Stairs: An original iron spiral stair connects the cellar with the room located in the north wing of the building. A new stair was built in 1964 in the ticket office area to connect the first floor with the new

second floor.

8. Hardware: There is no notable original hardware visible in the building.

9. Mechanical equipment: The station has a new boiler in the cellar.

10. Furnishings: There are no original furnishings in the building.

11. Passageway: Located behind the station is a passageway running in a north/south direction. At the north end of the passage is a short westerly extension leading to stairs to the northbound platform. The passage has a concrete floor, concrete walls with a cement finish, and a wooden ceiling. Originally, at its southern end, the passage continued within the south wing of the station building. This section has been closed off and it has been incorporated into the present commercial and industrial uses of the building. The main exterior entrance to the passageway is located at the north end and is set at an angle facing towards Mt. Vernon Avenue. The entrance consists of three original wooden doors, each with four glass panels. Two of these doors have original thumb latch hardware on their exterior faces. There is an additional entrance to the passage from the waiting room of the original station building. These doors have been altered, but their original wooden enframent is extant. There is also a wooden door with glass panels between the westerly extension of the passage and the platform stair. Across from the stairway entrance, on the north wall of the westerly extension, is an abandoned freight elevator leading to the northbound platform. The passage was originally lit by three raised skylights. These are now closed and the skylights removed. The passageway contains an old metal sign with a blue background and yellow letters reading "TO TRAIN."

12. Subway: The subway runs in a east/west direction beneath the train platforms and tracks. It is on a direct axis with the front and rear entrances of the waiting room. The subway has a concrete floor, concrete walls with cement finish, and a wooden ceiling. At the west end of the subway is a recently installed ticket office with wood paneled walls, a hung ceiling, and a linoleum floor. To the right of the ticket office, in the northwest corner of the subway, is an abandoned freight elevator leading to the southbound platform. At the southeast corner of the room is a recently installed newsstand with a metal grate. On the north wall are a bench added in 1959 and entrances to stairs leading to the two platforms. These entrances have doors installed in 1959. The bench at the east end of the north wall is partially original and partially from 1959.

13. Stairs: The two stairways leading to the northbound platform and the single stair leading to the southbound platform have concrete walls with cement facing. The stairs themselves are concrete with steel tread guards. The stairs have pipe rails. At the upper portion of each flight the concrete walls give way to the metal walls of the stairway

enclosures (see B13).

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Mt. Vernon West Station faces east towards an industrial area. Immediately to the south of the station is a gas station and parking lot. Across South West Street is an auto body shop and several factories. Beyond these factories is a residential neighborhood. Mt. Vernon Avenue, located immediately to the north of the station, is a commercial street. Immediately to the north of the station platforms, the train tracks run over Mt. Vernon Avenue on a steel bridge resting on concrete retaining walls dating from 1910. An exit from the southbound platform was cut into the southern retaining wall, but it has been closed up. Immediately to the west of the station is the Bronx River and the Bronx River Parkway. On the other side of the parkway is the city of Yonkers which is heavily built up with apartment buildings and detached houses.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings

Many drawings of the Mt. Vernon West Station have been preserved on microfiche. These drawings include plans, elevations, cross sections, structural details, stair and canopy drawings, and alterations. The microfiche collection is in the possession of Metro-North and is housed at Grand Central Terminal, New York, New York. Israel Soloff, the present owner of the station building, owns a copy of the original plans for the building. These are kept in his office in the north wing of the station.

B. Early Views

None located.

C. Interviews

Interview with Israel Soloff, present owner of the station (August 1988).

D. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Larson, Neil. "Westchester County Railroad Station Thematic Nomination, National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form," unpublished report, n.d.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Atlases of Westchester County, 1901-1920.

French, Alvah P., ed. History of Westchester County New York (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1925).

Goeschel, Nancy. "Grand Central Terminal Interior Designation Report" (NY: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission,

1980).

Griffin, Ernest F., ed. Westchester County and Its People (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1946.

Sanchis, Frank. American Architecture: Westchester County, New York Colonial to Contemporary (North River Press, 1977).

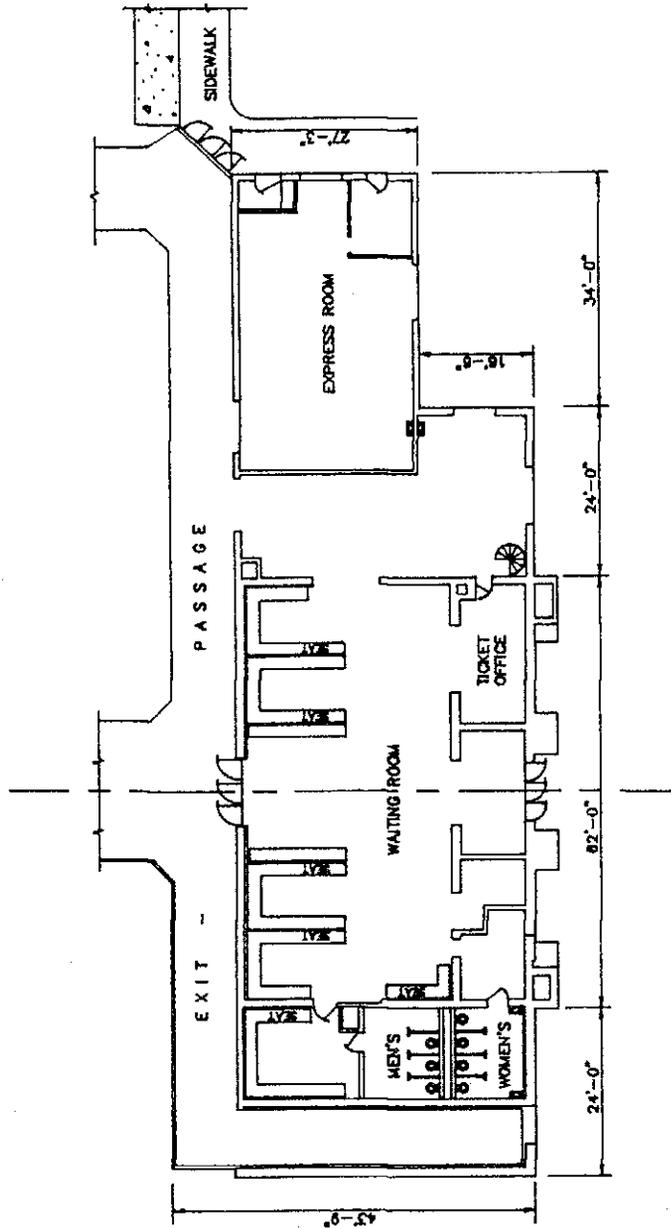
E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

1. We have been unable to locate any archival material from the New York Central Railroad. If such material exists there may be further information about this station.

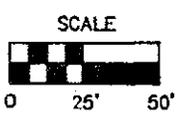
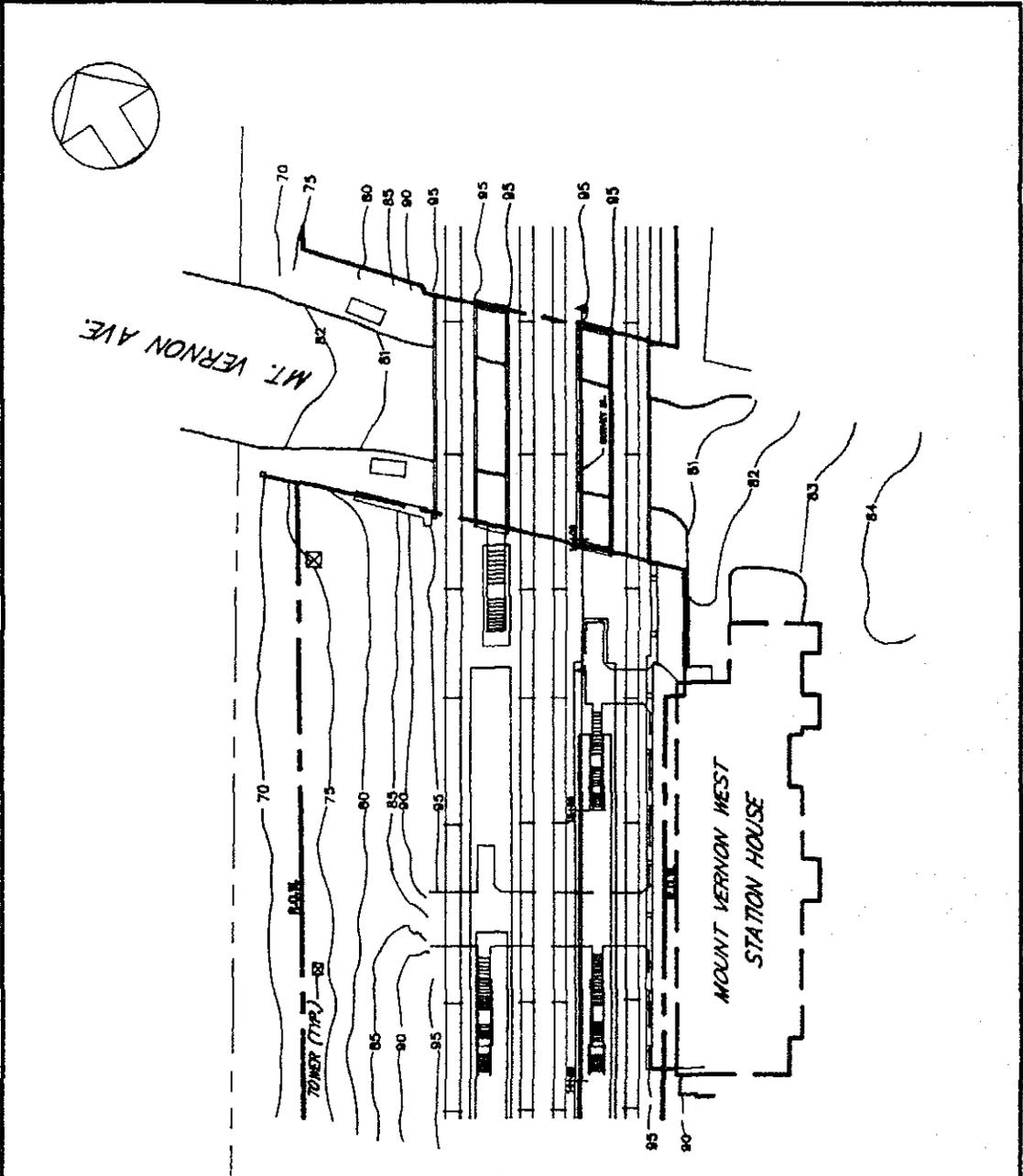
PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The objective of this project, known as the Mid-Harlem Station Improvements in Westchester County, New York, is to provide modern, functional, and attractive facilities for Metro-North passengers at the Mt. Vernon West Station and seven other Harlem line facilities. Changes to the Mt. Vernon West Station include the construction of high level concrete platforms; the addition of platform canopies and passenger shelters; the rehabilitation of the underpass, ticket office, stair, and concession areas; installation of platform and stairway lighting; and the incorporation of features to improve accessibility for the handicapped and elderly including the construction of elevators in the abandoned freight elevator shafts. The former station building will not be altered. Documentation was completed as mitigation before alterations occurred. The Federal agencies involved are the Urban Mass Transportation Administration and the National Park Service (Mid-Atlantic Regional Office) of the Department of the Interior. Records were prepared in August-September 1988.

Prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart and Mary Dierickx
Title: Consultants
Affiliation: Consultants to Goodkind & O'Dea,
Engineers & Planners
Date: September 1988



 **METRO-NORTH COMPUTER RAILROAD**
MID-HARLEM STATION IMPROVEMENTS
CONTRACT NO. 7388
MOUNT VERNON WEST STATION HOUSE
 **YONKERS CONTRACTING COMPANY, INC.**
Goodkind & O'Dea, Inc.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS



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