

# THE WATER LEVEL ROUTE TAKES TO THE WATER: NYC MARINE OPERATIONS IN NEW YORK HARBOR

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## Part 3 – Terminal Facilities

The first part of this series, published in the 2nd Quarter 2011 issue of this magazine, told why the New York Central needed to deliver freight around the Port of New York over the water, and described how the company's Marine Department was formed in 1889. It also described briefly the different types of traffic handled by that department. Here we present a description of its facilities for handling each kind. The large centerfold map places these facilities and their functions in context and in relation to each other. It was published in the 1921 edition of the *New York Central Industrial Directory and Shipper's Guide*.

To describe the department's facilities as they were

at every period over their evolution would require a book in itself. Here we will present a summary of these facilities and their functions during the height of the railroad's presence at New York in the first half of the 20th Century. As mentioned in Part 1, in 1921 the Marine Department employed 1,500 men, 308 units of floating equipment, and maintained 26 piers in the North (Hudson) and East Rivers.

### Passenger Ferry Service

The New York Central's original route down the east side of the Hudson River reached Manhattan directly, with no need for ferries. The acquisition of the West Shore Railroad in 1885 gave the company its first ferry service. The West Shore ferries took passengers from

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Here is a view of New York Central's 60th Street Terminal waterfront as it appeared in 1926, before the Miller Elevated (West Side) Highway was built over it in the 1930's. The rightmost pier is Pier B, with a float bridge just to the right (south) of it. That float bridge was installed about 1906 and lasted until 1956. The main three float bridges are just visible at far left. This early aerial photo appeared in a commemorative book, *The One Hundredth Anniversary 1826 - April 17 - 1926 of The New York Central Railroad*, issued by the railroad. T. Flagg Collection.

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a large terminal in Weehawken across the Hudson to 42nd Street. In 1891-92, a second West Shore Ferry Terminal was built much farther downtown, giving commuters to the financial district a 4-1/2-mile trip down the Hudson with fine views.

In 1899, responsibility for the operation of the West Shore ferries was transferred from the River Division superintendent to the Marine Department. In 1900, the West Shore acquired its first propeller-driven vessel, the *West Point*, and was the last railroad in New York to do so. The side-wheel ferries in operation at the time were all soon replaced by double-deck screw ferryboats except for one which was held in reserve. A ferryboat roster will appear in a future article.

In 1909, rebuilding of the West 42nd Street passenger ferry house was completed, according to the company's annual report. For description and plans, one may consult "The Manhattan Island Ferry Termi-

nal for the West Shore" in *Railway Age*, No. 42, Oct. 5, 1906, pp. 416-17.

Ferry service from Weehawken to both Cortlandt Street and 42nd Street in Manhattan ended in 1959 due to heavy losses; as a result, passenger business on River Division (West Shore) trains declined by 85 percent, and all passenger service from Weehawken was terminated in December. Then in 1961 the Weehawken passenger station and ferry terminal were destroyed by fire, ending any possibility that the service might be restored.

### Freight Service

In the 1920's, the Marine Department handled one-quarter of all the export tonnage via the Port of New York that came by rail. Some of this came through the 60th Street Terminal, but the bulk of it was handled through Weehawken. Both terminals had multiple float bridges for loading carfloats, plus open and covered lighterage piers, grain elevators, and yard trackage to support these waterfront facilities. Trackage included



This painting by Gifford Beal was done on site c.1915. He was looking west from above the 60th Street Yard toward the Hudson River, with plenty of work going on in the yard on a rather wintry day. On the left is the 69th Street floatbridge, which was quite new at the time. To the right is the open lighterage Pier I, used for unloading non-perishable cargo directly from open cars onto scows. And in the distance right across the Hudson can be seen the two grain elevators at the West Shore Railroad's Weehawken Terminal, with Bergen Hill behind them. This is from a postcard issued in 1915. T. Flagg Collection.

receiving, departure, and classification tracks as well as engine servicing facilities. The Manhattan Yard also had team tracks, including some right next to the bulkheads between piers, a major stockyard, and a poultry receiving station. The facilities at Weehawken had additional marine features including an icing plant to provide ice to refrigerator barges and a marine repair yard for ongoing maintenance of all the craft.

### Manhattan Terminals

Trains off the Hudson Division main line on the east side of the Hudson River terminated and originated at the 60th Street Yard. The tracks extended much farther downtown, and were served by switch runs for local distribution. This yard was sometimes also referred to as the 72nd Street Yard, associated with the 60th Street Freight Station. It was a busy place. According to the railroad's 1921 directory, the 60th Street Terminal handled 1,800,000 tons of lighterage per year.

The Marine Department facilities at 60th Street included six lighterage piers. Five of these, Piers B, D, E, F, and G, were covered, double-deck piers and handled carload eastbound merchandise. Arriving cars were switched onto them, and their freight was either loaded directly onto barges, or unloaded into the pier sheds. When the stored freight was called for, it was loaded onto covered barges or other types of craft and delivered around the harbor. The sixth pier, Pier I, was a large, open pier that handled bulk freight, heavy articles, and lumber, using hoisting apparatus located on the barges, or "stick boats," or floating cranes tied up to the pier, that loaded the

freight onto open lighters. The yard occupied .63 miles of waterfront. Each pier was about 100 feet wide and between 500 and 700 feet long. These piers were used only for lighterage, not for docking ships, and 5,000 tons could be handled to and from rail cars in a day. This yard also had large traffic to its team tracks. Much of this came in via the float bridges from other railroads, and from the company's own River Division (West Shore) at Weehawken, and was simply switched over to the team track area.

The 33rd Street Yard farther downtown was mainly used for local deliveries for industries in lower Manhattan. But it did have float bridges for receiving cars for the team tracks in the yard, and there was also a U.S. Mail pier at one time.

### Weehawken

Before the West Shore Railroad was leased to the NYC&HR, the original Weehawken Yard centered on the passenger ferry operation. Only a few of the planned freight piers were constructed before the hand-over to the NYC. But with the prosperity at the turn of the century, export and import traffic at the port accelerated dramatically, and the railroads scrambled to meet the demand for waterfront facilities. New York Central management realized it would have to expand its own facilities if it was going to compete with other railroads for that business, but acquiring more waterfront property on Manhattan Island would have been very expensive, if possible. The alternative was clear: use all of the Weehawken waterfront on the west side of the Hudson

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The Marine Department Dispatcher's Office was located on the second floor of Pier 2 at Weehawken. In this undated view, the crews of tugboats No. 15 and No. 32 are getting their orders from the man leaning out the bay window. Note the classic water tank just visible behind the stack of the left tug, to supply these steamers. The Pier 7 grain elevator with the large New York Central oval lies beyond. Photo by Ed Nowak, Steve Lang Collection.

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River, and move the freight to and from steamships, waterfront warehouses, and industries with barges via the "water belt line." Plans were made to expand the yard to four times its original size and add several piers and a second grain elevator. These plans were described in "The New York Central's Improvements at Weehawken" in *The Railway Age*, Aug 10, 1900, with a four-page inset of drawings. Another article, "Revision of the Weehawken Yards," by Walter Loring Webb, appeared in *The Railroad Gazette*, September 7, 1900, giving good detail about how the traffic would flow.

By 1904, Pier 4 also had a two-story pier shed. The marine repair yard had been completed more or less where stockyards were formerly located, and Pier 13 had been added for loading company lumber and ties.

So at its height in the 1920's, Weehawken was a very impressive terminal. Along its 1.5-mile waterfront were seven ferry slips, six float bridges, two grain elevators, four covered piers, five open piers, and a marine repair shop. Three of the covered piers were double-deck, and each had a storage capacity of 700 cars of freight. Package freight from these piers was delivered to lighters, which were then sent to piers and ships all around the harbor. Heavy and bulk freight such as steel, lumber, and automobiles was loaded onto boats from the open piers. One of the covered piers, Pier 5, was used for westbound import freight that, instead of being lightered, came in directly on ships which berthed at both sides of the pier; raw sugar was one major cargo that came in this way. Other steamships were handled at the open piers, along with the barges. Sulfur, clay, and similar commodities were loaded to cars by means of a special mechanical handling plant on Pier 11. The piers had a track capacity of 500 cars in all. The grain elevators had an unloading capacity of 75 cars a day, and an average of 750 cars could be handled over the float bridges in a day. The capacity of the yard supporting the piers was 1,200 cars, with outlying yards farther west if more capacity was needed.

In a typical month at this time (figures from the 1921 *New York Central Industrial Directory and Shippers Guide*), the Marine Department handled 100,000 to 150,000 tons of export freight by lighterage, not including bulk grain and coal, and not including the direct deliveries to steamships at some of the piers, which was about 50,000 tons per month. This level of traffic made the Weehawken Terminal one of the busiest in the United States.

### Grain Elevators

Grain export was a major traffic source for the New

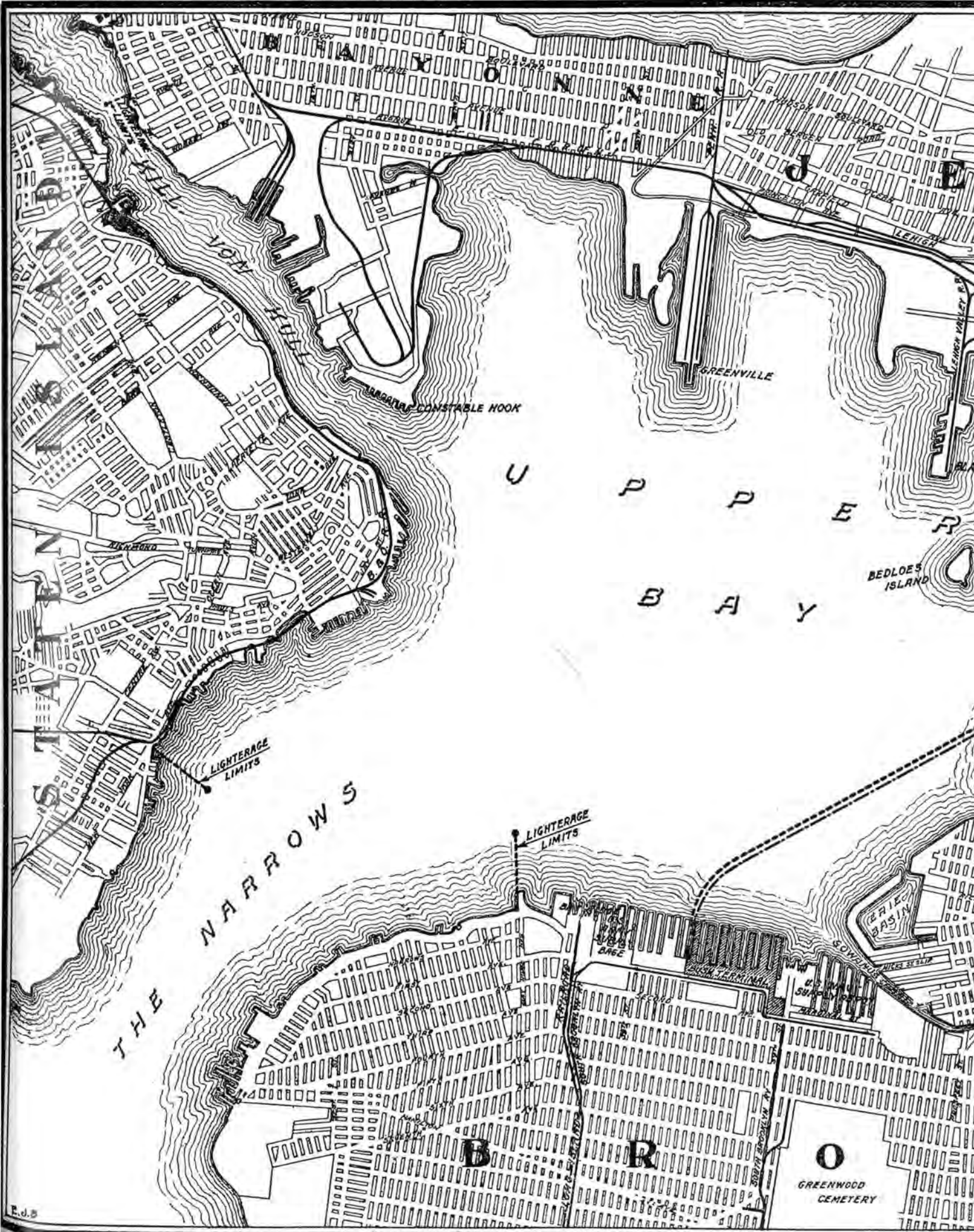
York Central in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the methods of handling this grain at the Port of New York were unusual. Some ships did come right up to the grain elevators to load grain in bulk form. But at New York, unlike at most ports, the majority of grain transfer was instead brought to the ship, which was usually not a bulk carrier. The grain arrived in boxcars and was unloaded into the silos of grain elevators. General cargo steamships at various company piers around the harbor would load their regular merchandise cargoes, but they would find that they still had unfilled space. So they would offer to fill up the rest of their space with grain and charge a low price for its transport. The condition was that the grain would be brought to the ship, and quickly. This was done by loading it from the elevator into grain barges, which were hold barges with covers to protect the grain from the elements. A tugboat would then haul a barge to the side of a ship, and a floating grain elevator would be placed between the grain barge and the ship to transfer the grain between them quickly. That machine was a special craft, hired for the occasion (it was not part of the railroad's fleet), and has been described in detail in an article in the RMIG journal *Transfer*, #40, May 2004 (see [trainweb.org/rmig/journal.html](http://trainweb.org/rmig/journal.html)).

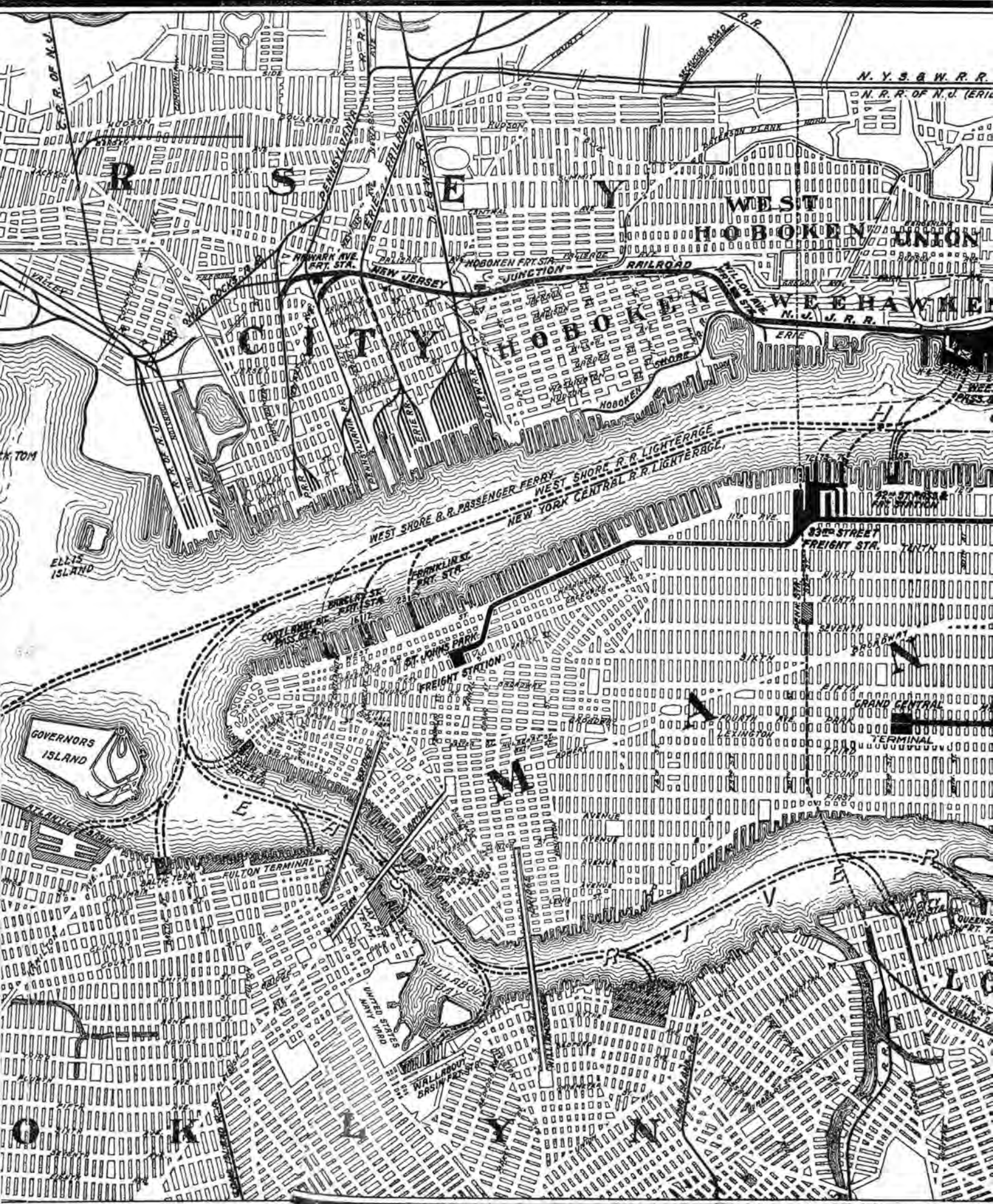
Two grain elevators, designated A and B, were built between 1877-1879 as the first piers at the 60th Street Yard; they were of timber frame construction sheathed with corrugated iron and slate. Both of them burned down in 1889. Elevator A, located on the bulkhead, was rebuilt with a capacity of 1,500,000 bushels, but not B, which was on its own pier. In later years, elevator A was used for local distribution by barge, while export grain went to the Weehawken elevators. Elevator A was out of use and was demolished in 1939.

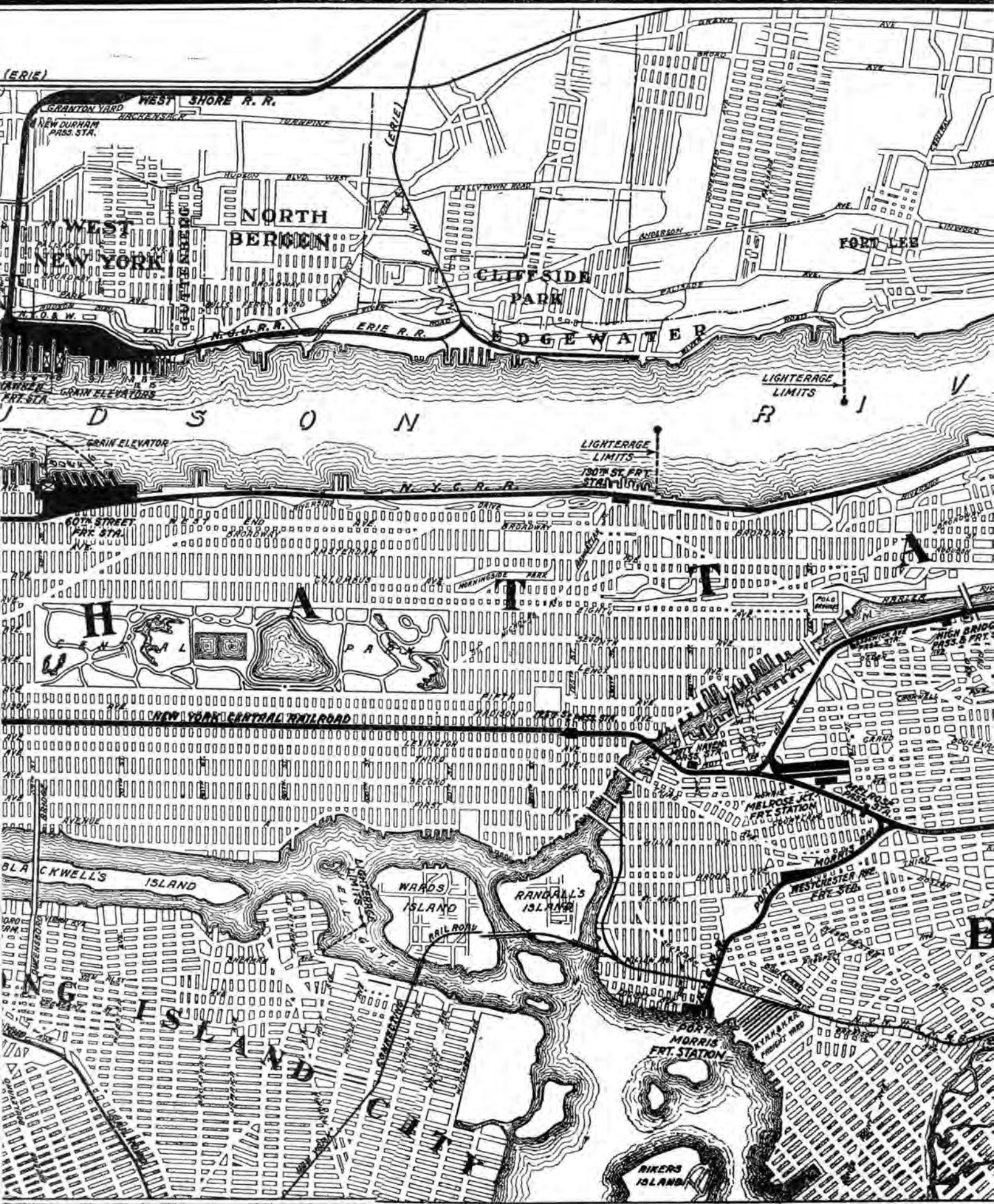
Foundations for a grain elevator were built in 1883 on Pier 8 at Weehawken, but the financial condition of the West Shore did not allow its completion. After the New York Central took over, work was resumed and it was probably completed in 1890. Its capacity was 1,250,000 bushels.

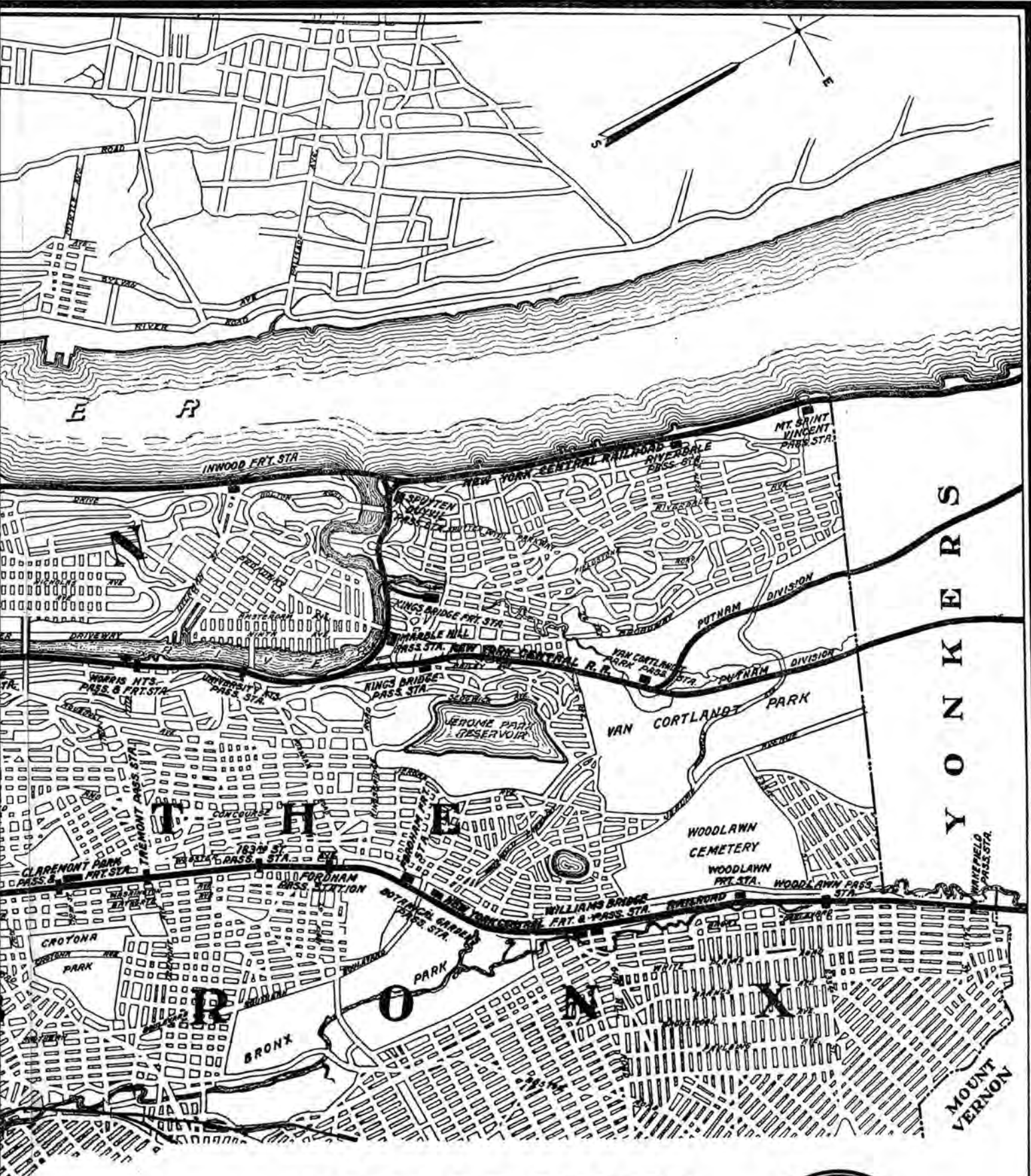
At the turn of the century, traffic was rapidly increasing, and a more modern elevator with a 2,000,000 bushel capacity was begun at Weehawken in 1903. It was put in service as Pier 7 in 1905. It was featured in an article in *Engineering Record* for April 1905 (Vol. 1, pp. 401-404), with photos of the interior. It could service both barges and ships. In all these elevators, grain cars were pushed inside the building, their grain was shoved out into hoppers below the tracks, and from there was taken by continuous bucket elevators to the top of the building, where it was distributed into silos.

New York Central's own view of its lines and routes at the Port of New York in 1921 was prepared by the railroad's Engineering Department and printed as a foldout map in the *New York Central Lines Industrial Directory and Shippers Guide*, published that year. The thicker dark lines are the railroad's own tracks, while other railroads are shown as thinner lines. Dashed lines show the railroad's water routes, including the two ferry routes, and two sets of "lighterage" (mainly carfloat) routes. The "lighterage limits" are indicated and labeled; these are the limits of the free lighterage. Service to piers beyond these limits incurred extra cost to the shipper. T. Flagg Collection.



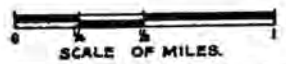






Y O N K E R S

# NEW YORK



Engineering Department, New York, 1921



By 1925 grain traffic had declined greatly, and the Pier 8 elevator was demolished, according to the company's annual report for 1925.

Pier 7 was still in use in 1960, making use of 15 to 80 employees, depending on the season. But in November of 1961 the foundation was found to be twisting, causing the tracks to buckle and water lines to burst. Braces were installed underneath, but, according to insurance reports, the elevator was still found to be moving about an inch every day, so the grain was unloaded from the elevator as quickly as possible. Demolition began in July of 1962 and was completed by the end of the year.

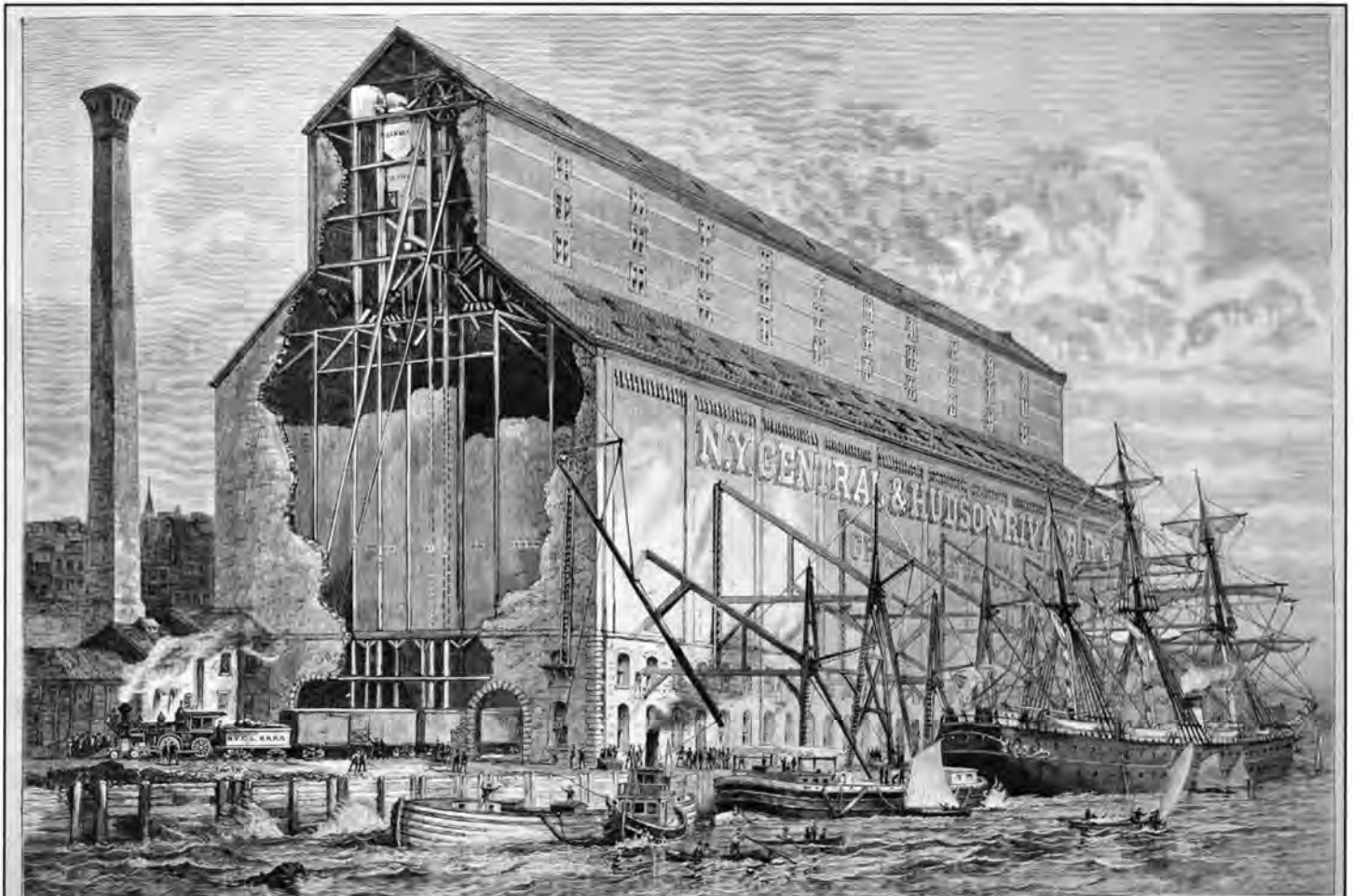
### Carfloating

Transferring whole rail cars via a marine craft called a carfloat was a common method of interchange among the railroads reaching the Port of New York. Even railroads that could have made rail connections chose instead to use carfloating to interchange. Once a railroad had established a carfloating system to reach places it could not access by land at any reasonable cost (such as the Brooklyn independent terminals), then carfloating could reach any other terminal at relatively little additional

cost. The Central, however, had somewhat less need of carfloat interchange than other railroads. Cars coming in on the River Division (West Shore) could be interchanged by rail via the New Jersey Junction Railroad, a line going south from the Weehawken Yard that reached the Erie, Lackawanna, Pennsylvania, Jersey Central, and Lehigh Valley railroads. The NJJ was constructed by the Central not long after the acquisition of the West Shore in 1885.

Even so, the float bridges at the West Shore's terminal made full use of their capacity for interchange with other lines, especially with the New York Central itself! Yes, the West Shore interchanged with the New York Central (i.e.: the original line to New York) via carfloat. According to the railroad's tariff rules, all traffic coming from west of Albany was directed down the West Shore line to Weehawken. Cars of freight destined for the team tracks or livestock sidings at 60th Street on Manhattan had to be floated across the river to the float bridges at the 60th Street Yard. In a sense, this was not that different from the way other railroads terminating on the west shore of the river reached their Manhattan terminals: the Erie, PRR, Lackawanna, and LVRR all

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GRAIN ELEVATOR OF THE NEW YORK CENTRAL AND HUDSON RIVER RAILROAD—Drawn by W. P. SNYDER FROM A SKETCH BY THOMAS R. DAVIS.—[SEE PAGE 1010.]

This drawing of Elevator A at the 60th Street Terminal shows the layout of its interior. It was a woodcut by W.P. Snyder in the December 22, 1877 issue of *Harper's Weekly*, when the elevator was new. At that time, grain from the silos was loaded directly into ships (right), but also into barges (left) that delivered it around the harbor with the help of tugs. Later, only barges were loaded here; all the loading of ships was done at the Weehawken elevator.

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floated cars to their offline terminals on Manhattan and in The Bronx. That still left plenty of traffic coming down the original line from east of Albany: milk, grain, and other upstate materials, plus freight from Montreal and New England, including interchange from the New Haven Railroad.

According to a 1930 engineering report prepared for the Port Authority, traffic was interchanged by carfloat from Weehawken with the B&O, Long Island, New York Central, and Staten Island Rapid Transit railroads.

Carfloating was also used for local distribution of freight to local consignees all around the port. This included delivery to the independent terminals such as the Bush Terminal Railroad. This was not actually interchange, but was instead the terminal distribution portion of a freight movement. In this case, the terminal railroad did the carfloating with its own barges and tugboats, bringing the cars to its offline tracks and

being compensated by the "terminal allowance" turned over to it by the trunk line railroad. This allowance was added to line haul charges on every freight movement to any terminal, and its size was determined by the ICC separately for each terminal region in the country.

These off-line stations were listed in the company's *New York Central Industrial Directory and Shipper's Guide* as if they were New York Central terminals, and in the tariff sense they were. Most of them were in Brooklyn, and they included the Brooklyn Eastern District Terminal RR (BEDT), Bush Terminal, three New York Dock Company terminals, the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and the Jay Street Connecting Railroad. Each of these companies accepted cars on carfloats and switched them to nearby piers, to their own freight stations, or to private industries. There was also a New York Central float bridge on the Harlem River, serving the Bronx Terminal Market for many years.

In the 1920-21 *Shippers Guide*, the waybilling

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The Barclay Street Pier Station handled much inbound produce. Here in August of 1949 we see packages of onions being delivered from a reefer on a carfloat anchored alongside the pier, down a ramp and into the piershed. From here they will be delivered to markets and stores around lower Manhattan. Photo by Ed Nowak, T. Flagg Collection.



Here's Pier 2 at Weehawken again (see the photo of the same pier on page 17), now in 1977, after the elimination of the Marine Department. The railroad-style water tower for tugs shows to good advantage but, alas, there are no more tugs. Photo by T. Flagg.



Here we see the landward end of Pier 2, still in some use in June 1976, a month after the startup of Conrail; note the freight car halfway in. A major fire the day before took out Piers 4 and 5, and a fireboat is still pouring water on the remains. The terminal is still in use for auto delivery and chemicals, but no longer handles any harbor craft. Photo by T. Flagg.

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instructions for all of these stations are revealing. Carload and less-than-carload (LCL) freight from stations east and south of Hoffmans, New York were to be waybilled to 60th Street Station, New York, with final destination added to the waybill. These cars came down the east side of the river on the Hudson Division to the 60th Street Yard, and from there the Marine Department floated the freight to the final destination as a local delivery. Freight from stations west of Schenectady, New York was waybilled to Weehawken, again with final destination also shown. These cars came down the west side of the river on the River Division and were floated from Weehawken. More information about the Brooklyn offline terminal railroads such as the BEDT can be found on the websites of Phil Goldstein, accessible through [www.trainweb.org](http://www.trainweb.org).

### Pier Stations

There was another major form of traffic that traveled by carfloat from both terminals: shipments to and from pier stations, mainly around Manhattan. These were essentially freight stations that were served by carfloat instead of by rails on land, with the carfloat serving as a "floating siding" instead. The freight was then transferred between the cars on the float and the pier shed in much the same way that it would be transferred at the usual type of railroad freight station. The carfloats for this service were called "station floats," and differed from the interchange carfloats by having a platform installed between the two tracks on the carfloat, running the length of the barge. Parcels were moved by hand truck along the platform.

Traffic at pier stations, as at regular freight stations, was mainly LCL. Garments and printed matter constituted much of the traffic leaving Manhattan, while food products arriving from the west or from upstate New York were major inbound items. The New York Central's pier stations as of 1921, and the routes to them, are shown on the centerfold map.

The busiest New York Central pier station was the Barclay Street Station, occupying Piers 16 and 17 on the North (Hudson) River, stretching from Barclay Street to Park Place, for traffic to lower Manhattan. It handled both carload and LCL freight in both directions, including much perishable produce. The other New York Central pier stations were:

Pier 83, North River, at the west end of 42nd Street;

Pier 4, East River, at the foot of Broad Street, handling eastbound freight only;

Pier 34 Station - this station actually occupied 3 piers (33, 34, and 35) on the East River. In 1925, pier 33 was used entirely for handling eastbound newsprint paper, while piers 34 and 35 and the bulkhead were for CL and LCL in both directions.

Wallabout Station in Brooklyn, located on Washington Street in Wallabout Basin, just upriver from the Brooklyn Navy Yard. This station handled carload and LCL freight in both directions, serving the extensive Brooklyn manufacturers in this area. Other railroads had pier stations nearby, but during WW II the whole basin was taken over by the Navy Yard and used for the huge expansion needed for the war effort.



Marine operations in New York Harbor received considerable attention from the company photographer. In this 1950's photograph by Ed Nowak, the float bridges at the 60th Street Terminal are seen from the river. Station floats, with platforms between the tracks, are moored at float bridges 2 and 3, and the tug appears to be moving an interchange float into bridge 4. Pier 1, with several open barges parked around it, is on the left. The West Side Elevated Highway now soars above the length of the yard. T. Flagg Collection.

## Direct Steamship Delivery

Another use of carfloating, done from both terminals, was for shipments going directly to ships tied up at steamship company piers. This was an efficient way to deliver export carload shipments, including heavy-lift items – just load the cars onto a carfloat, move it alongside the ship, and, with a floating crane tied up next to it if needed, hoist the cargo aboard the ship. If the cargo was liquid, it could be piped directly between tank cars and the ship. And of course this could work equally well for import freight.

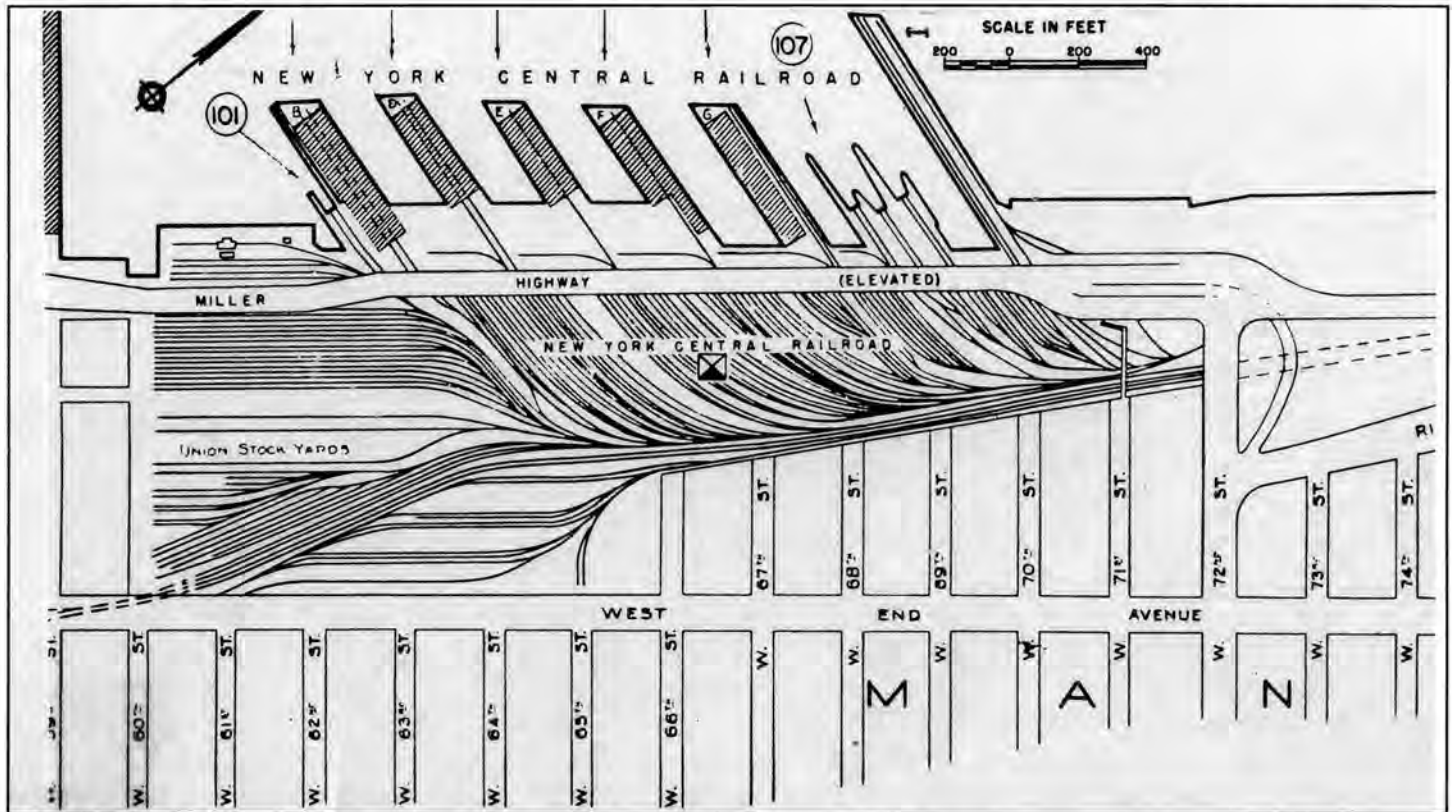
## Float Bridges

Float bridges, also known as “transfer bridges,” were the most uniquely railroad-marine of all the structures on the waterfront. Their purpose was essentially to bridge the gap between track on land and track on a barge. This required a bridge with a flexible connection between fixed rails on land and the rails on a barge which could rise and fall with tides and changing loads, and could also twist under loads. The original solution back in the 1870’s was a land-hinged bridge that rested on a floating pontoon at its water end. That pontoon would automatically compensate for changes in the tides, and would sink under load in much the same way as the carfloat. To lower the bridge to the level of an incoming carfloat, a locomotive or idler car would be moved onto the bridge. Then

the rails on the bridge would be clamped solidly to the rails on the carfloat. Later a more efficient system was developed, with an overhead hoisting engine to lift and lower the bridge end and hold the live load, combined with counterweights to support the dead load of the bridge. In order to maintain the needed flexibility, a much smaller bridge called an “apron” was placed between the main bridge and the carfloat. At one end it was hinged to the outer end of the main bridge, while the other end was raised and lowered separately by another hoisting engine. This type of bridge was much faster and more efficient than the pontoon type, although it was more expensive to build. The New York Central built one to that design in 1905 at the north end of the 60th Street Yard.

Then in 1910 an engineer named F.B. French invented and patented an even more efficient system, in which the apron was incorporated within the main bridge in such a way that only one hoisting engine was needed. He showed his patented “contained apron” design to the management of the New York Central, and the first one was built next to the earlier two bridges at 60th Street. It went into service in 1911 and worked so well that every new hoisted bridge in the harbor after 1911 was built to that design. At Weehawken, the Marine Department replaced three of the four pontoon bridges there

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This map of the 60th St. terminal was part of Map #4 of the 1953 edition of “Port Series No. 5” issued by the Army Corps of Engineers. The elevated highway passes over the yard. Just above the word “MILLER” was the former location of Grain Elevator A; that bulkhead is now used to transfer bulk cement from covered hoppers to barges. The “101” points to Float Bridge No.1, no longer in use. The next pier, B, is used to transfer autos from car to barges. The next three piers, D, E, and F (there was no pier C), are used to ship out general cargo via lighters, while Pier G receives general cargo. The “107” points to the three active float bridges, and the uppermost pier, I, was used primarily to handle large items using floating cranes.

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with contained-apron bridges. Amazingly, considering that most of the region's rail marine infrastructure has vanished by now, the original 1911 float bridge built to French's design is still standing, and has been placed on the National Register. It is not in the best of condition, due to lack of funds to restore it, but anyone can view it from the new Riverside South Park that now occupies the former 60th Street Yard.

### Dispatching

The Marine Department functioned in many ways like a railroad division, in particular a terminal division. The marine dispatcher's office was in the upper story of a pier at Weehawken, with a view out over some of the harbor. The dispatcher determined the most efficient ways of moving all the freight in much the same way as would be done at an all-rail terminal with many branches leading to industries and freight stations, and dispatched the equipment accordingly.

After WWII the New York Central began equipping its tugboat fleet with radio, and by 1948 eleven of the Central's fleet of 24 tugs in New York harbor were radio-equipped. The dispatcher's office at Weehawken was similarly equipped, with its transmitting and receiving antenna located on top of the Central's grain elevator at Weehawken, 218 feet above the water. Before radio installations were made, the dispatcher had to

shout orders to tugs in the vicinity of his office through a megaphone, a method far from effective during windy weather. Land telephone communication, which frequently caused delay, was formerly used when tug crews wanted to call the dispatcher from distant piers. In emergencies involving fires and harbor accidents, instant radio contact was invaluable, permitting the immediate mustering of fire or rescue boats.

### Marine Fleet Summary

As of 1922 the equipment of the Marine Department consisted of nine ferryboats and 21 tugs, all of steel construction. There were also seven steam lighters used to carry express and light freight that required prompt handling. Unpowered craft included 62 carfloats; 34 grain boats; 36 stick lighters (open scows with mast and boom to lift cargo), of which eight were powered by steam, two by gasoline, and 26 were hand-cranked; eleven scow barges, 109 covered barges; and seventeen covered refrigerator barges. We listed the tugs in the previous article, and an upcoming article will include a detailed list of the rest of the floating roster.

### PART 3 REFERENCES

*Industrial Directory & Shippers Guide* New York Central Lines, 1921.

Leshner, Robert. *Railroad Lighterage and Carfloat Service in New York Harbor*. (Report submitted for ICC proceedings, Docket 22824) 1930.

A full bibliography will be provided at the end of the last part of this series.



The ferry *Weehawken* prepares to leave Weehawken for a trip across the Hudson to the foot of West 42nd Street in Manhattan. It's 1956, about three years before the termination of New York Central ferry service and ultimately the end of passenger service on the River Division. The *Weehawken* was built by Harlan & Hollingsworth of Wilmington, Delaware in 1914. The tops of three of the four float bridges, Numbers 1, 3, and 4, are visible beyond the ferry. Three carfloats are docked. To the right is Pier 2, and above it can be seen the oval logo on the Pier 7 grain elevator. Photo by Conrad Milster.