

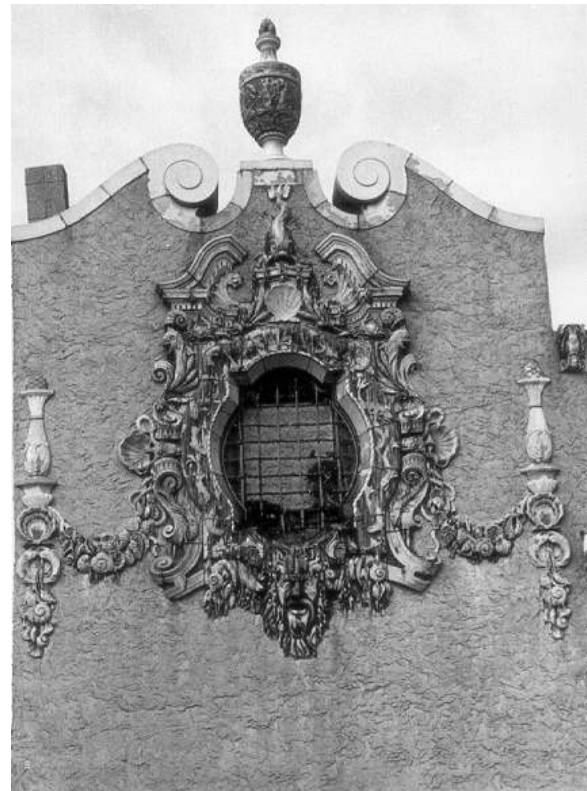
**(FORMER) CHILDS RESTAURANT BUILDING**, 2102 Boardwalk (aka 3052-3078 West 21st Street), Brooklyn. Built 1923; Dennison & Hirons, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7071, Lot 130.

On September 17, 2002 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were 28 speakers in support of designation, including Councilmember Dominec Recchia, and representatives of the Friends of Terra Cotta, the Municipal Art Society, the Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, Place Matters, Coney Island USA, City Lore, the Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Association, the Tile Heritage Foundation, and Brooklyn Pride. Also in favor of designation were curators from the Cornelius Low House Museum in Middlesex County, New Jersey who had mounted an exhibition on the type of architectural terra cotta used on this building, and numerous artists, architects and residents of New York and specifically Coney Island. Assemblywoman Adele Cohen submitted a statement in favor of designation. In addition, the Commission has received letters from Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, the Friends of Cast Iron Architecture, and the Bay Ridge Conservancy in support of designation. The Commission also received a letter from Community Board 13 which took no position on the matter but requested that a public hearing be held in Brooklyn. Hundreds of letters and postcards from other New Yorkers have also been received, both in favor and against designation of this building. Two owners of the building, Robert and Carol Ricci, spoke in opposition to designation and presented letters from two other owners, Dina and Cara Ricci, who are also opposed to designation. Subsequently, the owners wrote another letter to the Commission, rescinding their opposition to designation.

#### Summary

Constructed in 1923, this restaurant building on the boardwalk of Coney Island was designed by Dennison & Hirons in a fanciful resort style combining elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival with numerous maritime allusions that refer to its seaside location. This spacious restaurant building originally had a roof-top pergola and continuous arcades on two facades to allow for extensive ocean views. Clad in stucco, the building's arches, window openings and end piers feature elaborate polychrome terra-cotta ornament in whimsical nautical motifs that include images of fish, seashells, ships, and the ocean god Neptune. The terra cotta was manufactured by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, from models by Max Keck, and coloration by Duncan Smith. The architectural firm of Dennison & Hirons used terra-cotta ornament on many of its designs, but they were more commonly conceived in a classical or Art Deco style. For this restaurant, the firm chose elements from the Spanish Colonial Revival style, (relatively rare in New York City) which included areas of flamboyant, three-dimensional ornamentation and round-arched arcades, and made it appropriate to the resort style befitting "the world's largest playground"<sup>1</sup> – Coney Island. This building, with its large size, showy ornamentation and location on the Boardwalk, is a rare reminder of the diversions that awaited the huge crowds who thronged to Coney Island after the completion of the subway routes to the area.



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Childs Restaurant, which grew to be one of the largest restaurant chains in the country, was founded in 1889 by brothers William and Samuel Childs. Originally intended to provide a basic, clean environment for wholesome food at reasonable prices, the company eventually varied its restaurant designs and menus to reflect the unique location of each outlet.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Childs Restaurant

The restaurant as a unique place to take a meal began to gain popularity in this country after the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> Although travelers had always been able to obtain food at inns and taverns, and later at hotel dining rooms, those living at home generally ate at home. Eating somewhere else was a new idea, related to a modern urban and industrial lifestyle. In 1871, *The New York Times* observed, "It is an undeniable fact that the inhabitants of the large cities in America are every year drawn more and more from the great homelife of their ancestors... [R]estaurants and boarding houses are fast multiplying..."<sup>3</sup> By the 1830s, members of the Del-Monico family established several Manhattan locales to supply New York's elite with replicas of "Parisian" cuisine. At the same time, soup kitchens and one-cent coffee stands began to provide food for the destitute, while immigrants started cafes and beer gardens to recreate a taste of the old country for their fellow emigres. After the Civil War, other restaurants, including saloons, coffee shops and oyster bars began to cater to the working class, with low-priced fare that was available during extended hours, not just at set mealtimes. With the invention of the soda drink in 1839 (by Eugene Roussel in Philadelphia) composed of carbonated soda water mixed with a flavored syrup, soda fountains became very popular in small and large towns alike.<sup>4</sup> Many stores, particularly drug stores, were quick to add this appealing feature to their offerings. By the 1880s, they took the next step, adding light food, especially sandwiches, to the sodas and desserts already served there.

The Childs Restaurant chain, begun in 1889, came out of this lunch-counter tradition. Samuel and William Childs, two brothers originally from New Jersey, learned the restaurant business by working for A.W. Dennett, owner of several restaurants in New York, Philadelphia and Boston.<sup>5</sup> With \$1,600 and some second-hand furniture, the brothers opened their first store on Cortlandt Street in Manhattan. It was so successful that they were able to open a second one several months later. They borrowed Dennett's idea of placing a chef in the window, preparing flapjacks, as a way to advertise their business. They also started to furnish their restaurants with white-tiled walls and floors, white marble table-tops, and waitresses dressed in starched white uniforms, to convey cleanliness. The hard surfaces tended to discourage patrons from lingering on the premises, allowing for quicker turnover and more business. After ten years they had ten profitable restaurants and by 1925, the company

(which was incorporated in 1902) owned and operated 107 restaurants in 33 cities in the United States and Canada.<sup>6</sup>

The Childs chain was responsible for several restaurant innovations, including a self-serve cafeteria. In 1898, at 130 Broadway, they piled a lunch counter high with sandwiches and pastry and trays on which to place them.<sup>7</sup> Cafeteria service proved to be very popular and was emulated at numerous other restaurants around the country. In 1927, due to health concerns by William Childs, the Childs restaurants served only vegetarian food and were known as the Childs Unique Dairy Lunch. After an severe drop in business attributed to the meatless policy, it was reversed. Samuel Childs had died in 1925, and William Childs was removed from governance of the company in 1928 by irate stockholders.<sup>8</sup>

The company and the restaurants themselves went through several changes through the years. After Prohibition was lifted in 1933, liquor and wine were served in some Childs outlets.<sup>9</sup> In 1939, the company received the contract to provide food service at the New York World's Fair, where it sold over 16 million hot dogs! Although the organization suffered financial problems at different times, it continued to operate for many years. In 1950, the Childs Company bought Louis Sherry, the ice cream makers, and was, in turn, purchased by Lucky Stores shortly afterwards.<sup>10</sup> At that time, the company owned restaurants in 14 American cities and three in Canada. In 1961, the chain was acquired by the Reise Brothers and in 1966, they opened the 90th Childs Restaurant on 52nd Street and Third Avenue in New York.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the early Childs Restaurants were set in narrow storefronts designed in an "austerely-elegant" style, with white tile, mirrors, bentwood furniture and exposed ceiling fans,<sup>12</sup> to complement and also to represent the simplicity and purity of the food. In the 1920s however, other designs began to be used, each suited to the individual placement of the stores. One example was the William Van Alen design for a Childs restaurant on Fifth Avenue which, in a bow to the more refined character of that section of town, did not display the usual signage and white decor, but rather had interiors done in brown, in mission style, with "dramatic use of large sheets of curved glass for corner windows."<sup>13</sup> By the late 1920s, some stores, where it was appropriate to tie them to their particular neighborhoods, used a distinctive neon sign in a Streamlined moderne style announcing the company's name. At others, dance music was added, and the lights and furnishings softened. The Childs Restaurant

on the Boardwalk at Coney Island was one of the first from this company to adapt the design to the building's specific location. Built just after the completion of the subway which was to bring huge crowds of New Yorkers to the area, the Coney Island outlet of Childs, with its elaborate and colorful ornament, was designed to fit this resort location. It was so successful that the Childs Company built a similar one on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City a few years later. This later building was designed by George B. Post and it again featured a low profile with arcaded facades enlivened by colorful terra-cotta ornament.<sup>14</sup>

### Coney Island<sup>15</sup>

Coney Island, originally separated from Brooklyn by Coney Island Creek, was the site of the landing of Henry Hudson's ship Half Moon in 1609. The name Coney appears to derive from the Dutch word *konijn*, or rabbits, which ran wild and were found in great abundance on the island. The area first achieved popularity as a rustic seaside resort after the construction, in 1824, of a shell road from Gravesend, Brooklyn and the adjacent Coney Island House Hotel, on the western part of the island. Other establishments followed, but the real growth of the resort came about after the Civil War when five railroads were constructed connecting the island with the rest of Brooklyn. Beginning in the 1870s and 80s many innovations increased the popularity of Coney Island, including mechanical amusements such as carousels and roller coasters, hot dogs, and mixed public bathing. On the western end of the island were gambling dens, houses of prostitution, and race tracks, which thrived until anti-gambling legislation was passed in New York in 1909. Wealthy clientele were lured to the elegant resorts and hotels on Coney's eastern end, in Manhattan Beach and Brighton Beach, with public bathing and numerous other amusements located between them.

The Ferris Wheel, introduced at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, was brought here after that fair closed. In order to attract families and limit alcohol consumption, George C. Tilyou created Steeplechase Park in 1897, grouping a number of mechanical rides, including the famous Steeplechase Race, behind a fence and charging an admission fee. It was so successful that Luna Park (1903) and Dreamland (1904) soon followed, with more rides, entertainments, and a fantasy world of exotic architecture, bright lights, and unusual sights. Nearby, along Surf Avenue and the Bowery, there were numerous small stands for rides, shooting galleries, arcades, and saloons, as well as low-priced

restaurants to feed the hungry crowds. By 1900, Sunday crowds reached more than 500,000 and lines for the various amusements often lasted well into the night. The subways reached the area in 1920, bringing New Yorkers from all parts of the city to the beach for only five cents. After this, approximately one million visitors came to Coney Island each summer day. Something had to be done to alleviate congestion and to allow for better fire-fighting access to battle the huge conflagrations which periodically decimated the area. A boardwalk was constructed along the beach in 1923, stretching four miles from Brighton Beach to Sea Gate and a short time later Surf Avenue and the Bowery were widened,<sup>16</sup> destroying many smaller buildings in the process.

Childs Restaurant, having already established its reputation in other parts of New York, was known as a place one could buy a reasonable meal for a fair amount of money. The company opened a small restaurant at Surf Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street in 1917. The destruction of this store in 1923 (due to street widening), and the area's growing popularity led to the opening of their largest and most decorative outlet, at the Boardwalk and 21<sup>st</sup> Street, a building which added "refinement in the bizarre surroundings of Coney Island."<sup>17</sup> This new building was designed by the architectural firm of Dennison & Hiron.

### Dennison & Hiron<sup>18</sup>

Ethan Allen Dennison (1881-1954)  
Frederic Charles Hiron (1883-1942)

Ethan Allen Dennison, born in New Jersey, studied architecture at the Godfrey Architectural Preparatory School and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He began his career in the office of Trowbridge & Livingston in New York in 1905, joining with Frederic Hiron to form the partnership of Dennison & Hiron in 1910. Their firm continued until 1929, including the one year (1913) during which they were joined by Percy W. Darbyshire, creating the firm of Dennison, Hiron & Darbyshire. Dennison won the Medal of Honor of the Society of Diploma Architects of France and was a member of the Beaux Arts Society of New York, as well as the American Society of the French Legion of Honor. After the dissolution of the firm of Dennison & Hiron, Dennison continued to practice architecture in New York as the head of Ethan Allen Dennison & Associates. Much of his later work was in Connecticut, where he lived, and in 1940 he moved his firm to that state.

Frederic Charles Hiron was born in England but moved as a child to Massachusetts with his family. He

worked as a draftsman in the Boston office of Herbert Hale from 1898 until 1901 when he began to study architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1904, he won the Rotch traveling scholarship, and went to Paris to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He won the Paris Prize in 1906, enabling him to continue his studies and travel in Europe through 1909. Hiron was always interested in drawing and the education of young students. He led his own atelier for several years after his return from Europe, taught architecture at Columbia University, was a founder of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, and served as president of the Beaux Arts Society of Architects. He was named a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor in recognition of his services for architectural education. After the dissolution of the firm of Dennison & Hiron in 1929, Hiron formed a partnership with F.W. Mellor from Philadelphia for two years, and then practiced under his own name until 1940. Hiron won the competition for the design of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York (1928, a designated New York City Landmark) as well as several courthouses and war memorials.

Early works of the firm of Dennison & Hiron include many neo-Classical style bank buildings in various cities along the east coast. Later in their partnership, Dennison & Hiron designed numerous large and small bank buildings in the Art Deco style, often collaborating with architectural sculptor Rene Chambellan for decorative terra-cotta panels. They created designs for the State Bank and Trust Company of New York at Eighth Avenue and 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, banks in Albany, New York, and Hartford, Connecticut, as well as the (Former) Suffolk Title and Guarantee Company Building (1929, a designated New York City Landmark). The decorative terra cotta used in many of these buildings was created by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company which featured a special issue of their magazine devoted to the work of this architectural firm.<sup>19</sup> This article included an explanation of Dennison & Hiron's method for producing the colored terra-cotta panels used on their buildings. One-quarter scale models were created and painted according to their designs. These were then mounted on the building at their exact exposures, so that the colors could be adjusted according to the differing light conditions. After these models were finalized, the Polychrome Department of the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company would create glazes to achieve the desired shades. In this way Dennison & Hiron were able to produce colorful ornament which has remained visually stunning for many years. For this Childs Restaurant, the architects again worked with the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, including model

maker Maxfield Keck (1880-1943)<sup>20</sup> and colorist Duncan Smith.

#### Childs Restaurant, Coney Island

Architects Dennison & Hiron usually designed their buildings in either a restrained classical or Art Deco style. At Coney Island, however, they created a building in a style that was quite different from their other work, but appropriate for this setting. The Childs Restaurant on the Boardwalk was designed in a resort style to go along with the existing "unique fairyland environments for dreamers."<sup>21</sup> In an area filled with an eye-popping array of shapes, colors and lights, a building had to be unusual to attract customers. The amusement parks set the tone, with huge plaster figures, large structures with unexpected shapes, and thousands of twinkling lights beckoning patrons. Other businesses sought to create their own sense of uniqueness, adding towers and turrets, colors, and roof gardens. On the Childs Restaurant building, the colorful terra-cotta ornament in unique maritime motifs, as well as its large size and fine design helped it stand out from the many flimsy shacks nearby which accommodated the area's various entertainments. A contemporary magazine called this building "One of the most encouraging tendencies manifested of late years in building circles to recognize good architecture as a distinct asset strengthening to the prestige of their business and increasing the volume of their patronage."<sup>22</sup>

The Childs Restaurant building is faced with plain stucco, which serves as a background for exuberant bursts of ornament located at specific points on the facade. On the rounded window openings high on the end piers, there is so much ornament that it has been called "Churrigueresque," linking it to the Spanish Baroque period in which exaggerated ornament in the form of elaborate curving and twisted forms, spiral volutes, and florid patterns adorned buildings. This style, with its profuse and lively ornamentation, was not widely used in this country, but it came to be associated with buildings designed for entertainment or leisure activities such as movie palaces.<sup>23</sup>

Dennison & Hiron were well-versed in classical design principles, and they used this system as a base for the Childs building, framing windows and doors with moldings and swags, crowning end piers with urns, and decorating arch spandrels with rondels. The difference is that within this framework, the ornament is composed of an agglomeration of seashells, wriggling fish in high-spirited poses, grimacing gargoyle heads, sailing ships and the sea god Neptune, many draped with dripping seaweed. Originally, large arched openings along the Boardwalk and the West

21<sup>st</sup> Street facade framed huge windows that enabled restaurant patrons to enjoy views of the ocean and the passing crowds. These arches were supported by multi-colored marble columns topped with "Ionic" capitals composed of fish and seashells rendered in terra cotta. Terra-cotta moldings, also with curving fish and cockle shells, border the arches where traditional egg and dart moldings would have been. Contemporary critics lauded this treatment of a

*confident and free departure into details of ornament that are quite as beautiful, intriguing, and altogether satisfying in their relations, as the purely traditional elements which have been discarded for their use.*<sup>24</sup>

The colors of the terra cotta applied to this building were quite striking and unusual. Working closely with the terra cotta artists of the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, the designers were able to produce finely rendered terra cotta ornament in bright, original colors which were eye-catching at the time and remain so today. According to the same article,

*The scheme of coloration in the detail involved the interflowing of different colors and glazes to produce naturalistic effects in such motives as the dripping seaweed of the large oval windows on the flanking towers, the varying colors of other forms of under-sea life and contrasting textures of wet and dry suggestion, often upon the same piece and requiring not only the most intelligent artistry in the necessary hand application but the nicest manipulation of chemical formula in the problems of glazing and firing. Bright and mat surface effects intermingle in the relief upon a ground surface of somewhat gritty texture, the varying tints extending from softly toned white to delicate shades of blue, yellow, green and tawny buff...*<sup>25</sup>

Set low against the Boardwalk, the Childs Restaurant building appears to have one double-height story. Originally, it was topped by a roof garden with a pergola above the main restaurant. Indications of this are evident today in the bracketed posts encrusted with terra-cotta fish and shells, which project above the main story. The Boardwalk is raised above street level, however, and the building has an additional story below the boardwalk level. A large building which could accommodate many patrons, the Childs Restaurant was an attractive and popular spot for the crowds of people using the many public baths and beaches nearby, such as the Washington Baths next door to the east and Steeplechase Park, two blocks away between 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets.

### Subsequent History

The Childs Company maintained a restaurant at this location until the early 1950s, as Coney Island reached its heyday and declined. In 1932, there was a huge blaze which devastated many blocks of Coney Island's amusements. The Childs Restaurant, unlike most flimsy resort buildings, was constructed of masonry, and survived the fire and even helped keep it from spreading eastward.<sup>26</sup> With the disinvestment in Coney Island by New York City during the 1940s and 50s, most of the area's businesses closed, as did finally, this Childs Restaurant. In the 1950s the vacant building was purchased by the Ricci family and used as a candy manufacturing facility, which continues there today.

### Description

The former Childs Restaurant building is a large, rectangular structure that faces the Boardwalk at the corner of West 21<sup>st</sup> Street. There is a plain, modern building adjacent to its rear facade and its utilitarian western facade overlooks a vacant lot and is faced by plain brick, with no window or door openings. The two main elevations are covered with rough textured stucco, painted in yellow tones.

Across most of the main facade are five large archways which have been enclosed across their top with stucco and on the lower portion by roll-down gates. Plain, round cement columns with terra-cotta capitals separate each arch. Non-historic murals of Coney Island scenes are located in the upper portion of four of the arches. Each arch is embellished with decorative terra cotta along the front edge and inside the reveals. The terra cotta consists of repeating, blue and green images of various fish and seashells. Four rondelles are located in the spandrels of these arches, each with maritime motifs in colorful terra cotta. There is another bay located to each side of the central arcade. The bay on the west has a rectangular window opening (which has been closed). It is surrounded by a complex terra-cotta enframing and topped by a broad urn surmounted by a flame. The designs include arching fish, garlands created of a variety of seashells, and a grotesque head, and the entire ensemble is draped with seaweed. The easternmost bay has a plain squared opening which has been blocked in and is unadorned. The two outside bays extend up to form broad piers at each corner. There are round openings covered by historic metal grating and surrounded by ornate terra cotta at the second story level in these piers. Each of these piers rise up to form a small parapet that is topped by an urn. Five shorter piers rise between each bay of the front. Each has a cap formed of terra-cotta fish designs. Originally there was a

railing between these piers which formed the edge of a roof garden.

Along the West 21<sup>st</sup> Street side, the building is three stories high. It extends along 21<sup>st</sup> Street for 14 bays, including end bays which have blocked-in rectangular openings and rise higher at the roof level to form piers for the original roof garden. The front pier is marked by a round window opening covered by a grate and surrounded by ornate terra cotta, as on the front of the building. Between the two end bays, each of 12 bays is marked by a double-height round arch that has been blocked in. A ground-story level is below these arches since the ground slopes down considerably behind the Boardwalk. There are two large vehicle entrances at the ground-story level, as well as three pedestrian doors, all covered by roll-down gates. In the arches above, two stories are indicated by two levels of small, metal-framed arched

windows within each large arch. Between the large arches are decorative roundels of brightly-colored terra cotta in designs which reflect the ocean location, including Neptune with his trident, sailing ships, and cavorting fish. All are surrounded with sprightly fish and shell motifs. Three non-historic downspouts have been located beneath three of these medallions, with the water emerging in the middle of them. The top of this facade ends in a parapet topped by plain terra cotta blocks.

Report researched and written by  
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#### NOTES

1. *New York City Guide* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970, reprint of 1939, Federal Writer's Publication), p. 471.
2. John Jakle & Keith Sculle, *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 20-23.
3. "Cheap Restaurants," *The New York Times* (8/6/1871).
4. Jakle & Sculle, pp. 25-28.
5. "Childs Restaurant Founder is Dead," *The New York Times* (5/18/1925), p. 21.
6. *Childs Company, The Greatest Restaurant Chain*, Financial Statement prepared by Laird, Bissell & Meeds, 1925.
7. Michael & Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York* (New York: Rutledge, 1999), pp. 187-189.
8. Kenneth L. Austin, "Childs Company's Ups and Downs Touch Eating and Investing Public," *The New York Times* (8/29/1943). Some stockholders and managers elected S. W. Smith president of the company on December 12, 1928. William Childs and other members of the family mounted a proxy battle to oust Smith, but they were defeated and Childs ultimately gave up all connection to the company.
9. "George D. Strohmeier Is Dead; Led Chain of Childs Restaurants," *The New York Times* (2/11/1965), p. 39.
10. "Childs Takes Over Louis Sherry; To Be Run as Separate Company," *The New York Times* (5/17/1950), p. 54.
11. "Childs Chain to Open 90<sup>th</sup> Restaurant Here," *The New York Times* (6/30/66), p. 63.
12. Robert A. M. Stern, et al, *New York 1930, Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 275-6.
13. *New York 1930*, p.276. According to Stern, this 1925 store was the first example of this type of modern design in New York.
14. *Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine IX* (February, 1928), pl. 67-68. The Childs Restaurant building in Atlantic City is no longer extant.

15. The history of the Coney Island area is compiled from: "Coney Island," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth Jackson, Ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 272-274; Federal Writers Project, *New York City Guide*, pp. 471-475; Landmarks Preservation Commission, *The Parachute Jump Designation Report (LP-1638)* (New York: City of New York, 1989), by David Breiner;" "Coney Island" <http://naid.sppsr.ucla.edu/coneyisland>; "Coney Island Historiography," <http://history.amusement-parks.com>.
16. This happened in 1923-24.
17. *Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine*, pl. CLIII.
18. Information about the architects Dennison & Hiron comes from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *(Former) Suffolk Title and Guarantee Company Building (LP-2088)* (New York: City of New York, 2001), by Virginia Kurshan; and research files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.
19. "Terra Cotta Work of Dennison & Hiron, Architects," *Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine* IX (June, 1928), n.p. The only other architectural firm to which an entire issue of this magazine was devoted was McKim, Mead & White in 1927.
20. According to information submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission by Cleota Reed of Syracuse, NY, Maxfield Keck, "a successful sculptor of architectural ornament," came from an artistic family of German immigrants. His father worked for Louis Comfort Tiffany in New York and his brother Henry ran the Henry Keck Stained Glass Studio in Syracuse. Another brother, Charles was a well-known sculptor who created the statue of Father Duffy in Times Square.
21. Stephen Weinstein, *The Nickel Empire: Coney Island and the Creation of Urban Seaside Resorts in the United States* (Columbia University, Unpublished dissertation, 1984), p. 254.
22. F.S. Laurence, "Building for the Childs Co. At Coney Island," *The American Architect, The Architectural Review* CXXVI (Sept. 10, 1924), p. 217.
23. A local example would be the Loew's Valencia Theater on Jamaica Avenue in Queens, a designated New York City Landmark. Many others can be found in the Southwestern part of the United States. Michael Stratton, *The Terra Cotta Revival* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993), pp. 208-209.
24. Laurence, p. 218.
25. Laurence, p. 220.
26. "For a Safe Coney Island," *The New York Times* (7/21/1932), p. 16.

## **FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION**

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the (Former) Childs Restaurant has a special character, and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the (Former) Childs Restaurant building was constructed in 1923 on the then-new Boardwalk at Coney Island; that the Childs Restaurant chain for which it was built, provided wholesome food at reasonable prices in a festive atmosphere for the thousands of beach-goers at Coney Island; that the Childs Restaurant chain was begun in 1889 by brothers Samuel and William Childs to furnish a clean environment for low-cost meals and that by 1925, the chain owned more than one hundred restaurants in 33 cities in the United States and Canada; that the building was designed by architects Dennison & Hiron, who often used terra cotta as a major element of their building designs; that the design for the Childs Restaurant, including elaborate “Churrigueresque” details executed with marine motifs in a resort style with Spanish Revival influence, was unusual for New York, but appropriate to its location at the great playground of Coney Island; that the designers used flamboyant three dimensional ornament to mark window openings, arches, and end piers, in nautical motifs such as seashells, fish and the sea god Neptune to link the building to its location by the sea; that these decorative elements were finely executed in terra cotta by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, using models by Max Keck, and coloration by Duncan Smith; that the building is a rare survivor of Coney Island’s heyday as New York’s premier seaside playground and continues to provide a unique presence on the Boardwalk and near the attractions of the Parachute Jump and the Brooklyn Cyclones baseball field.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building, 2102 Boardwalk, aka 3052-3078 West 21st Street, Brooklyn, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7071, Lot 130 as its Landmark Site.





(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
2102 Boardwalk (aka 3052-3078 West 21<sup>st</sup> Street), Brooklyn  
*Photo: Carl Forster*



(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
2102 Boardwalk (aka 3052-3078 West 21<sup>st</sup> Street), Brooklyn  
West 21<sup>st</sup> Street Facade  
*Photo: Carl Forster*



Western facade

(Former) Childs Restaurant Building

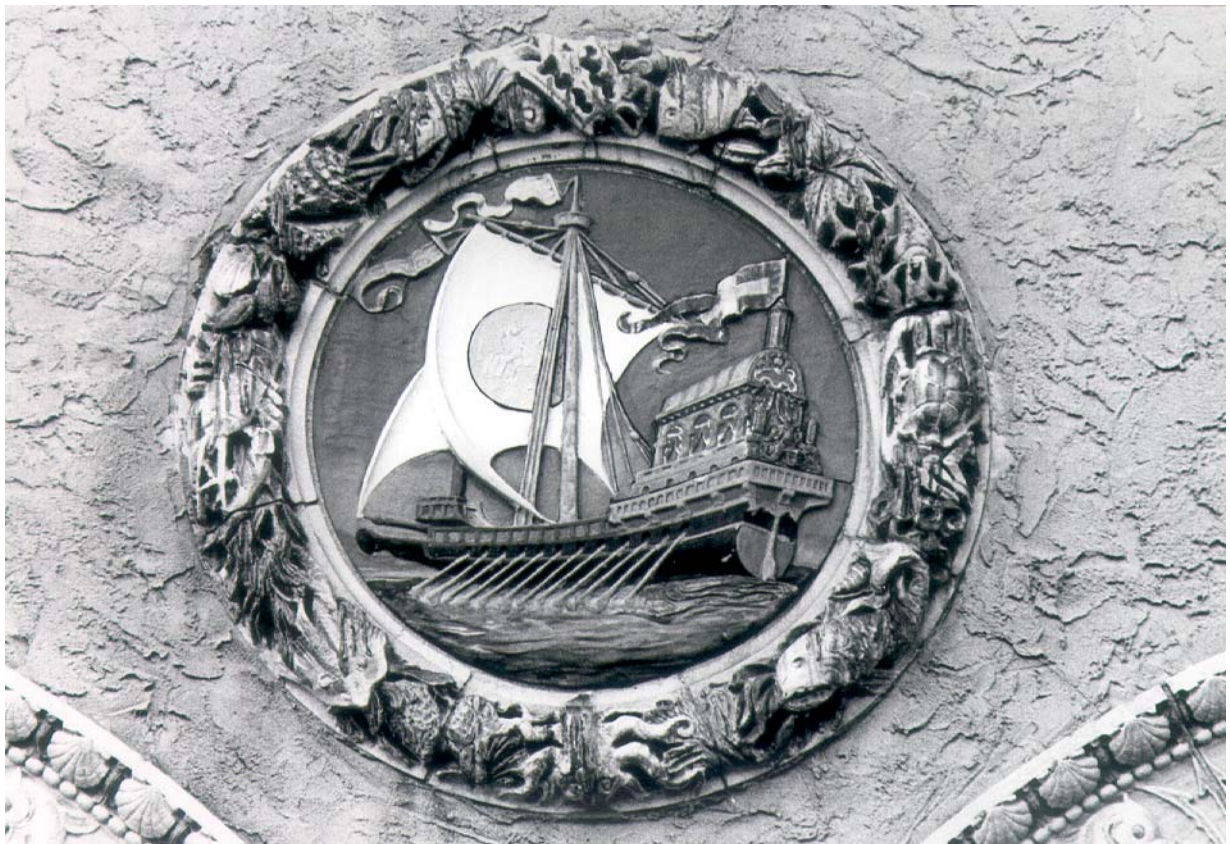
Details, eastern facade



*Photos: Carl Forster*



(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
Terra cotta medallions  
*Photos: Carl Forster*

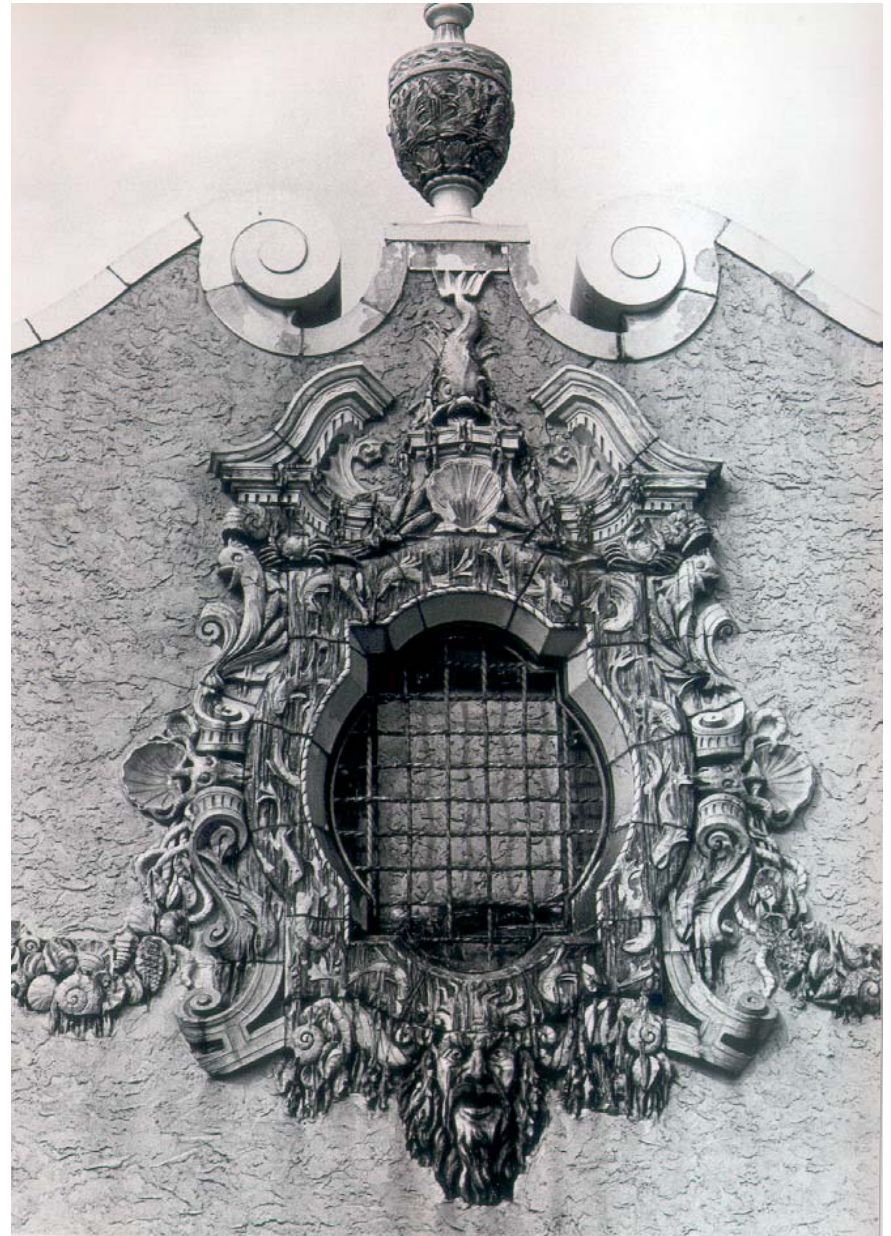




(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
Terra cotta details  
*Photos: Carl Forster*

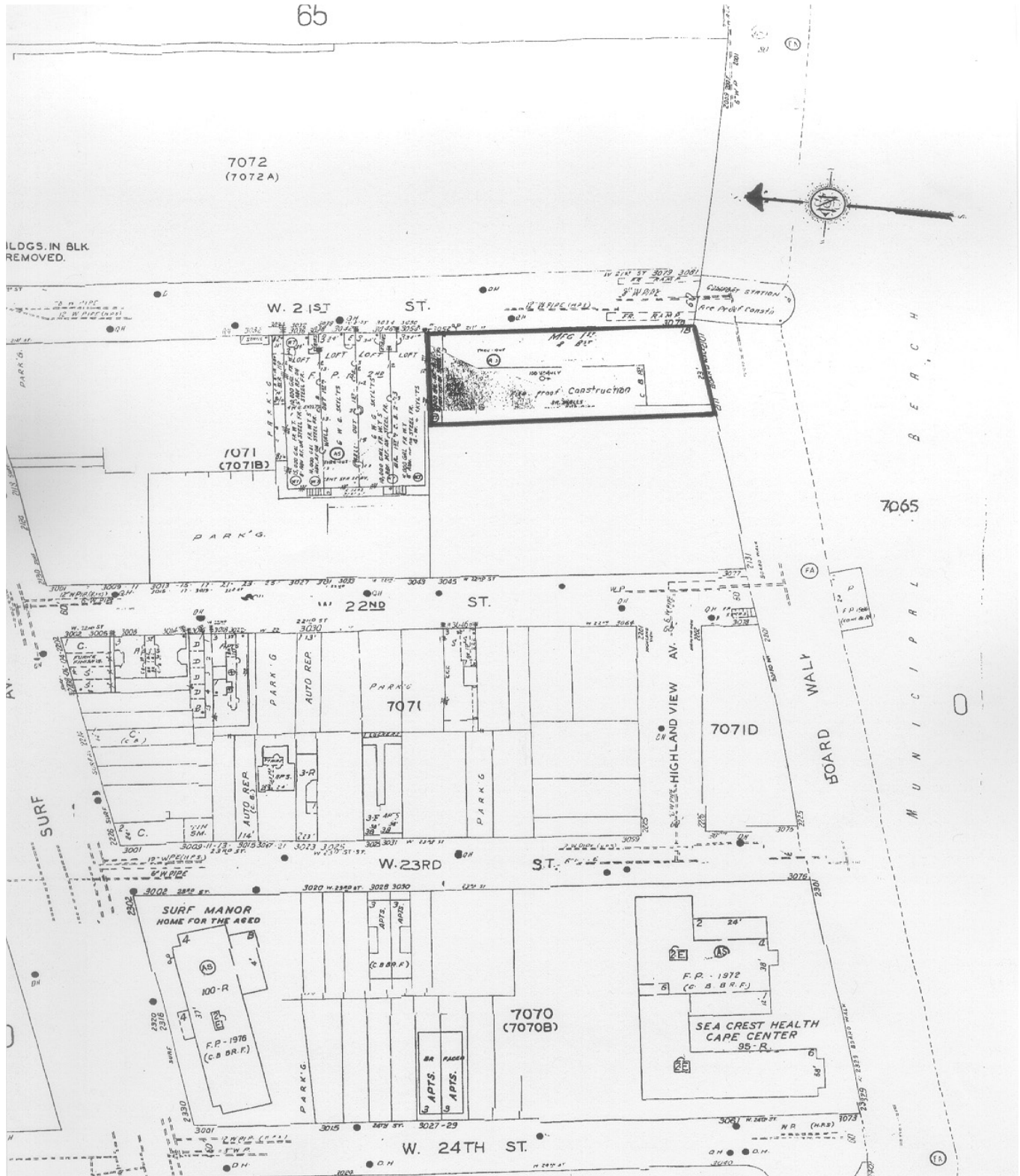


Detail of end pier

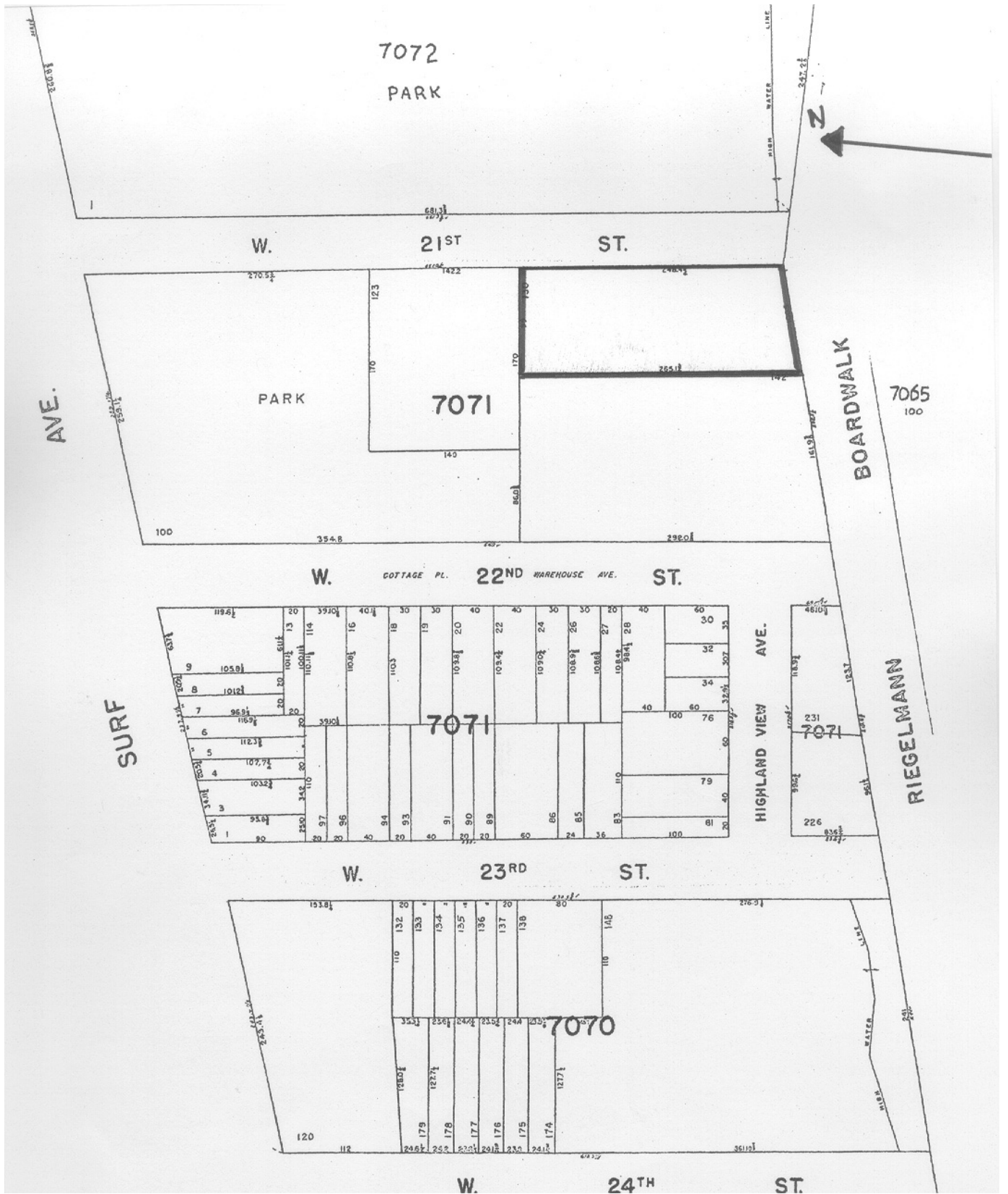


Terra cotta detail

(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
*Photos: Carl Forster*



(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
 2102 Boardwalk (aka 3052-3078 West 21<sup>st</sup> Street), Brooklyn  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7071, Lot 130  
 Source: *Building & Property Atlas* (2002), Vol. 18, Plate 71



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