



## CHILDS' FAMILY SCRAPBOOK

A selected history of the rise, fall and transformation of the Childs' restaurant chain

Compiled by Katherine Dunham, March 2019

In honor of the birthdays of Mary Frances (Raphael) Dunham and her brother Christopher Raphael

***"This is the biggest story in the world's biggest work – the feeding of human beings. It is the tale of two country boys, who started more than thirty years ago with a vision of serving food 'such as Mother used to make,' and to-day control the greatest group of public eating places on earth."***

(American Magazine, Nov. 1921: "Two Country Boys Who Serve 45,000,000 Meals a Year")





## **CHILDS' RESTAURANTS HISTORY**

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**A Brief History of the Childs' Restaurant by Michael Padwee  
Friday, September 1, 2017**

**The Polychrome Terra Cotta of Childs Restaurants and the Nottingham  
Antique Tile Fair**

**Blog: ORNAMENTATION IN NEW YORK: A blog about architectural  
tiles, terra cotta and other ceramic surfaces, architectural glass and  
ornamentation in and around New York.**

<https://tilesinnewyork.blogspot.com/2017/09/the-polychrome-terra-cotta-of-childs.html>



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**The Polychrome Terra Cotta of the Childs Restaurants**

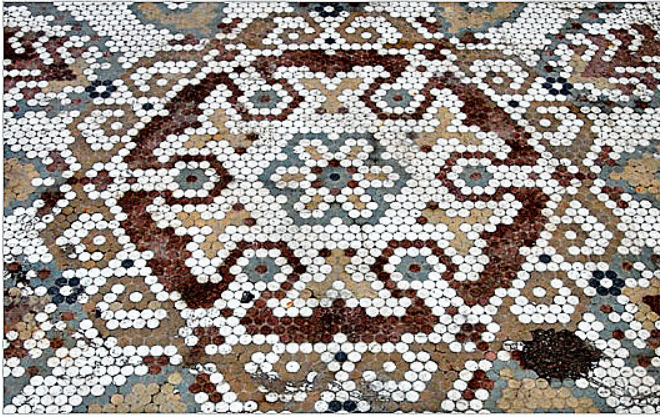
The Childs Restaurant chain, which grew to be one of the largest restaurant chains in the country with 107 restaurants in 33 cities in the United States and Canada by 1925, was founded in 1889 by the brothers William and Samuel Childs. Childs Restaurants were originally intended to provide a basic, clean environment for wholesome food at reasonable prices. The two brothers learned the restaurant business by working for A.W. Dennett **(2)**, owner of several restaurants in New York, Philadelphia and Boston. The first Childs Restaurant in New York was opened on Cortlandt Street in Lower Manhattan. "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."**(3)**

**The tiled interior of Childs Restaurant on Park Row in Lower Manhattan illustrating the tiled walls and columns. (Plate XXXVI from an Associated Tile Manufacturers publication. Collection of Michael Padwee)**



In 2008 the building that housed one of the first Childs Restaurants in downtown New York was razed as part of the post-9/11 reconstruction of the area. David W. Dunlap, a photographer and columnist for the New York Times, captured the last remnants of that restaurant by taking a photo of its tiled mosaic floor through a fence just before its demolition.

The flagship of the Childs Restaurant chain in New York was the Coney Island restaurant, built in 1923. It "replaced" the original Childs Restaurant which opened in 1917 on Surf Avenue at West 12th Street and remained in business until 1943.**(4)** The architectural firm of Dennison & Hirons **(5, 6)** designed the new Boardwalk Childs Restaurant.

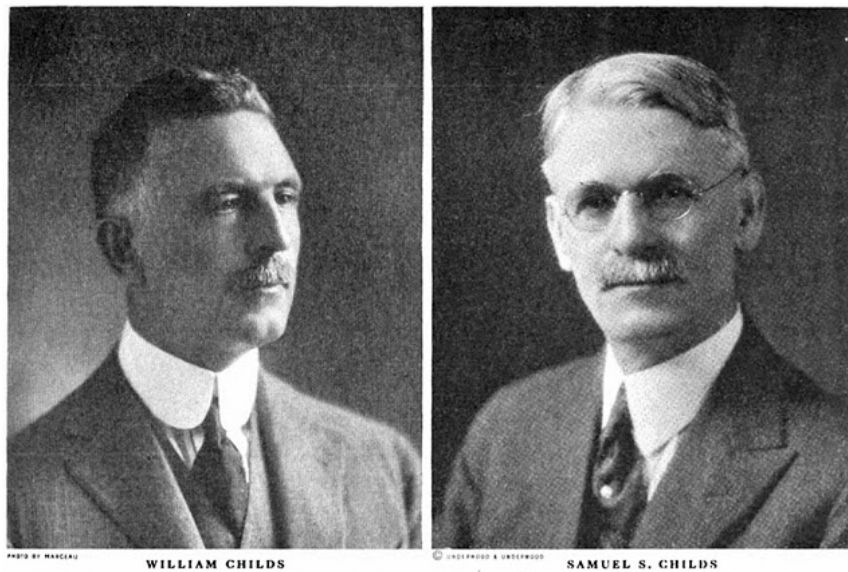


From inside the fence, the tile patternwork looks like this. (Photo: David W. Dunlap/The New York Times)



A picture post card, c. 1920s, depicting Childs Restaurant on the Boardwalk. (Courtesy of [cardcow.com](http://cardcow.com))

William and Samuel Childs grew up on a large, prosperous farm in the northeastern part of Bernards Township, New Jersey in Somerset County. William was born c. 1865, and Samuel was two years older. The two brothers worked hard on the farm, as well as in the wheat fields in Dakota as young men. While on this trip to the West, the brothers ate in many places that served less than wholesome food. William later related, “We used to talk about how nice it would be if restaurants only used good home recipes, and if they were as spotlessly clean as the kitchen and dining-room on our farm.”



(Photo from: Merle Crowell, “Two Country Boys Who Serve 45,000,000 Meals a Year”, *The American Magazine*, Vol. XCII, No. 5, November 1921)

Samuel gave up a career as a civil engineer to work for A.J. Dennett in his restaurant on Park Row in Manhattan, and Samuel convinced William to work with him. While working for Dennett, the brothers studied the operation of the restaurant closely, and became determined to open their own restaurant. When they were fired six months later, they opened a restaurant--using \$1600 they had saved, and their mother’s recipes--at 41 Cortlandt Street in Manhattan.





**An undated true-photo picture post card of an unidentified Childs Restaurant showing the female wait staff in their white dresses.**

“After losing their lease at this site, the brothers opened another restaurant on Cortlandt Street, which was a success, and within five years had five operating restaurants in Manhattan. When asked what they gave to the public that made them successful, William noted that the food was as close to home cooking as possible, and[, in later years,] was varied according to region; the restaurants were kept absolutely clean, had white tiled walls and white marble tables; they were well-lighted with large glass fronts and electric and gas lighting; they all had exhaust fans and smelled clean; they hired neatly dressed, intelligent young women to be waitresses; and the restaurants were well-situated.”<sup>(7)</sup> “This unique emphasis on food safety and hygiene—coupled with other features, such as being one of the first cafeteria-style restaurants—made Childs Restaurants very profitable... .”<sup>(8)</sup>

In William’s words,<sup>(9)</sup>

**“My job was to serve wholesome food, of a quality similar to that served in the home, and to serve it in spotlessly clean surroundings. I determined to keep my place purified by good air. I determined that the food would be served by neatly dressed, intelligent and refined young women and not by men in carelessly dressed uniforms, none too clean, as was the practice in those days. Furthermore, I introduced economy in the kitchen, in operation, in handling and in *smaller* kitchens, because good locations were expensive and the money is made in dining rooms — not kitchens.”**

Although the Childs brothers did not invent the idea of the cafeteria, their contribution to the concept of personal food delivery was the tray. “Around 1898 the two brothers converted their restaurant at 130 Broadway [in Manhattan] into a self-service counter. They created a new format by introducing trays on which their customers could carry food to the tables and implementing a delivery system based on the

tray line. There wouldn't be a cafeteria history without trays.”(10) In 1953 the Childs organization introduced a take-home food department in their 34th Street restaurant in response, partially, to the changing role of women in the workforce. “Among the foods offered in the new department are several types of salad, beef pie, baked beans, chicken pot pie, beef stew, lamb stew, pastry, rolls, muffins, other baked goods and Savarin ice cream.”(11)

The interior of a Childs Restaurant in Philadelphia, c. 1908. The cafeteria-style self-service table with trays is towards the right rear of this picture post card. (PPC by The Platinachrome Company, 23 Duane Street, New York, NY (defunct) - Original is owned by Robert B. Hendrick Jr. (uploader's personal collection), PD-US, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22610874>)



Other innovations made by the Childs brothers were in the area of social welfare:(12)

The Company employs a welfare worker to look after the well-being of its employees and help them in time of sickness. In this work she is assisted by a woman physician and a trained nurse. Also the Company maintains a fully equipped clinic where its female employees are given periodical examinations and advice free of charge. Most of the girls are banded together in a Mutual Welfare Association, the monthly dues of which are very small and provide sick benefits for those temporarily unable to work and a death benefit in case of fatal illness. This Association also provides for the social welfare of employees by giving periodical entertainments and dances. In addition to this the Company maintains a Convalescent Home at Monsey, Rockland County, New York.

William acknowledged that “location is the biggest factor, physical equipment comes second, and management is third. ...The ideal location taps a great traffic artery along which people are constantly moving to shop, transact business, see the sights, and attend the theatres.”(13) The Childs brothers adhered to this maxim when they chose West 21st Street and the Coney Island's Boardwalk as the site of their new Brooklyn flagship restaurant. The Coney Island Boardwalk was one of the busiest pedestrian and tourist thoroughfares in the city at the time. A nautical theme was chosen for the restaurant, and it would serve seafood dishes along with the regular fare.



**A crowded Coney Island boardwalk on a cold day in c. 1925. (Photo by the International Newsreel Corporation; [http://collections.mcny.org/Collection/\[Coney Island boardwalk.\]-2F3XC5IKXU8K.html](http://collections.mcny.org/Collection/[Coney%20Island%20boardwalk.]-2F3XC5IKXU8K.html))**

In 2003 this building was granted individual landmark status by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. "Its plain stucco facade serves as a background for elaborate terra cotta ornamentation, including seashells, wriggling fish, grimacing gargoyles heads, sailing ships and the sea god Neptune. 'The former Childs Restaurant building is a wonderful reminder of the days when Coney Island was considered 'the world's largest playground,' said Robert B. Tierney, Chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission."(14)

"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, 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. ...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."(15)

The architects, Ethan Allen Dennison and Frederick Charles Hirons (**see Note 5**) were chosen by the Childs brothers to design this boardwalk restaurant. The brothers lived in Bernardsville, New Jersey, and probably knew of the architects' work there. Dennison and Hirons designed the Bernardsville Methodist Episcopal Church project in 1913. Dennison and Hirons "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.'





**Coney Island Boardwalk at Night, c. 1906.**  
(Photo from the collection of the Museum of the City of New York)



**A derelict Childs Restaurant (Boardwalk and 21st Street) in 2010. The pergola is gone, but much of the terra cotta ornamentation remains, but not in good condition. (Photo credit: *The Coney Island Blog*, "The Boardwalk – Updated 3/3/10"; <https://coneyislandplaygroundoftheworld.wordpress.com/2009/02/07/the-boardwalk/>)**

Coney Island was "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."**(16)**

"Dennison & Hirons 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.

**"There are four types of expertly modeled rondels by Maxfield H. Keck (17) depicting: 1. Neptune holding a trident, and dripping with seaweed. 2. A Venetian galleon with streaming pennants. 3. The Golden Hind, the Flagship of Queen Elizabeth's Fleet. 4. A pair of fish swimming in the rough ocean waters."** ("Childs Restaurant 21st Street and the Boardwalk Coney Island, Brooklyn, NY Dennison & Hirons, Architects 1923", Friends of Terra Cotta, p. 2; <http://www.preserve.org/fotc/infochilds.htm>; photos credit: Michael Padwee)

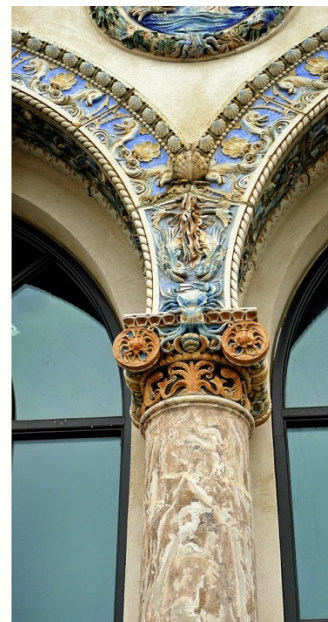


"The difference is that within this framework, the ornament is composed of an agglomeration of seashells, wriggling fish in high-spirited poses, grimacing gargoyle heads, sailing ships and the sea god Neptune, many draped with dripping seaweed.



Childs Boardwalk Restaurant building, June 2017. (Photo: Michael Padwee)

“Originally, large arched openings along the Boardwalk and the West 21st Street facade framed huge windows that enabled restaurant patrons to enjoy views of the ocean and the passing crowds.



The arched openings, restored pergola, marble columns and terra cotta ornamentation of the boardwalk facade. (Photos: Michael Padwee)

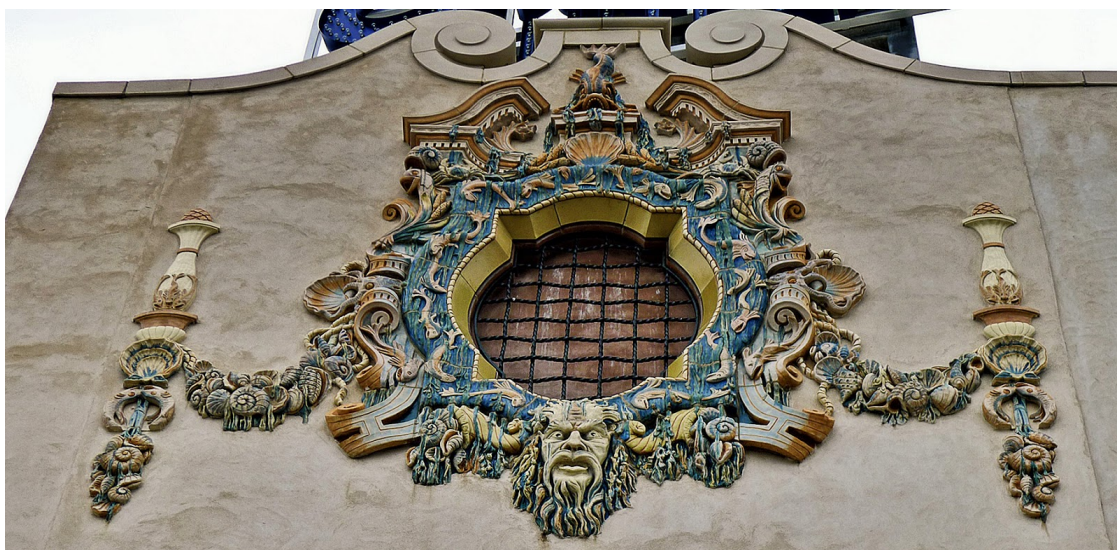


“These arches were supported by multi-colored marble columns topped with “Ionic” capitals composed of fish and seashells rendered in terra cotta. Terra-cotta moldings, also with curving fish and cockle shells, border the arches where traditional egg and dart moldings would have been. ...Set low against the Boardwalk, the Childs Restaurant building appears to have one double-height story.



**The restored pergola (2017) with terra cotta details. (Photos: Michael Padwee)**

“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.



**Terra cotta ornamentation surrounding an ogee opening. (Photo: Michael Padwee)**



“...Along the West 21st Street side, the building is three stories high. It extends along 21st 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.”(18)

**21st Street window (2013 and 2017) and terra cotta details (2017). (Photo credits: 2013 window-Tricia Vita; 2017 window and details-Michael Padwee)**



An interior wall with three re-discovered terra cotta rondels not seen for 65 years. (UR) A view of the Childs facade from the Boardwalk; (LL) A gondola in Venice; (LR) Bathers on the Coney Island beach. (Photo credits: Omar

Robau; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/coneyhop/sets/72157600996640617/with/893165396/>)



The terra cotta ornamentation on, and in, the building was produced by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. It is possible that Dennison & Hiron had a long-standing professional relationship with Atlantic Terra Cotta as the architects used Atlantic products on a number of their projects. (see Note 5)

The Childs' boardwalk restaurant has gone through many changes since it opened in 1923. "During the Coney Island's catastrophic boardwalk blaze of 1932, for example, the fire-proof Childs Restaurant served as a fire break..., preventing the flames from causing even more destruction. The beloved restaurant was eventually shuttered in the 1950s, as Coney Island's amusement district began to decline, and the building languished, dark and unmaintained, until it was finally landmarked in 2002.[sic, 2003] In 2008, the Childs was briefly reinvented as a disco-themed roller rink. But the once bustling attraction was never really brought back to its original glory..., "(19) until this year.

**"An octopus, crabs, and shells adorn a recreated column detail from the original Childs Restaurant nautical façade." (From: "Hand Finished & Glazed Terra Cotta Units Breathe New Life into Seaside", *Boston Valley Terra Cotta Company Blog*, October 21, 2016; <http://bostonvalley.com/hand-finished-glazed-terracotta-breathe-new-life-into->**



The Childs Restaurant on the Coney Island boardwalk has undergone a total restoration. Much of the original terra cotta ornamentation was replicated and hand-painted by the Boston Valley Terra-Cotta Company in Buffalo, New York. (20)

Even though the building was restored, a number of the original terra cotta pieces had to be rescued from the construction site. The Coney Island Museum was invited to the construction site and was given the opportunity to obtain and preserve some of those pieces.

**Three rondels rescued from the construction site: Poseiden, a square-rigged carrack, and bathers enjoying the beach. All three were damaged. The fourth rondel, two fish and a water spout, was a reconstruction by the Boston Valley Terra Cotta Company that was donated to the museum. These are all about 48" in diameter. (Courtesy of the Coney Island Museum; photo credits: Michael Padwee)**

**Some of the other rescued terra cotta ornamentation made by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company are a lobster, a snail, crabs and seashells. (Courtesy of the Coney Island Museum; photo credits: Michael Padwee)**







**A 1924 photo of the interior (Courtesy of [ConeyIslandHistory.org](http://ConeyIslandHistory.org)), and a contemporary interior view (Courtesy of [Kitchen 21](#); photo: Michael Padwee)**

The Childs building is now a combination venue: The Ford Amphitheater, and a restaurant, Kitchen 21. Although the interior has been “modernized”, it still looks similar to its heyday past.

As mentioned above, by 1925 there were 107 Childs Restaurants throughout the United States and Canada. Although the Childs brothers lost control of the organization by the end of the 1930s when their investors revolted over food policies, the Childs Restaurant chain remained in business until 1961 when it was sold to the Riese Organization.

In the New York City metropolitan area there were more than just the few restaurants mentioned in lower Manhattan and Coney Island, and a number of the old Childs’ buildings still exist today. All have been repurposed, some are covered with signs of varying sizes, but many still retain some of their original polychrome terra cotta ornamentation (except for the Bensonhurst Childs below).

"Interestingly, as the Childs Restaurant Corporation expanded into neighborhoods throughout the city, they developed a 'signature style' used for many of the restaurants. Their one-story buildings were often clad in terra cotta and ornamented with a beltcourse of pairs of intertwined seahorses. The corners of these structures often featured a huge shell with a dolphin in the center."(21)

**The main terra cotta ornament, 74 in.H x 48 in.W x 14 in.D, from the Bensonhurst (Brooklyn) Childs Restaurant at 6620 18th Avenue, which was recently demolished. (Courtesy of [Olde Good Things Architectural Salvage](#), Photo credit: Michael Padwee)**

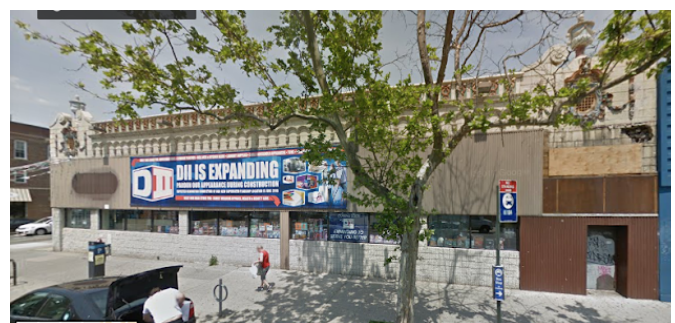
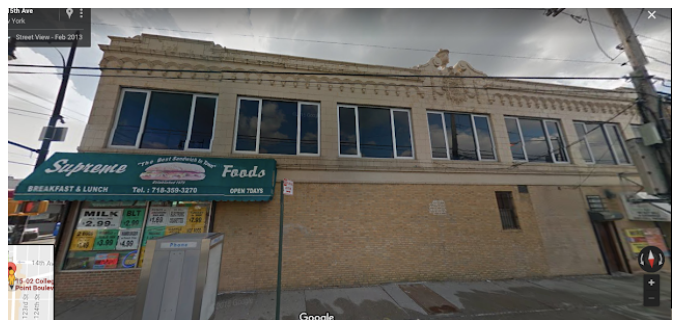


“Among Queens’ most intact branches of Childs are 59-37 Queens Boulevard in Woodside and 36-01 Broadway in Astoria. ...Notable façade features include shells with centered dolphins, intertwined seahorses, gargoyles, shields, a Neptune holding a trident, and curved parapets topped off with urns.”(22)

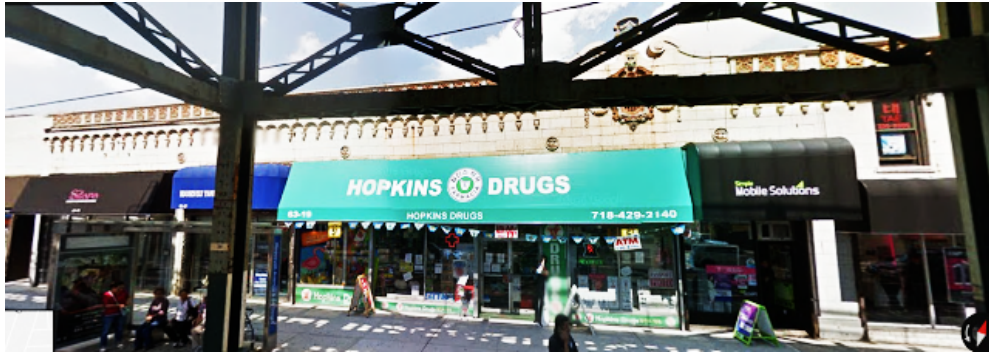


59-37 Queens Boulevard (above; from Michael Perlman and the Rego-Forest Preservation Council; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/8095451@N08/>) and 36-01 Broadway (below), both designed with a nautical theme.. (Courtesy of Google Maps)

15-02 College Point Boulevard (above) and 63-19 Roosevelt Avenue (below), both also designed with a nautical theme. (Courtesy of Google Maps)







**67-09 Fresh Pond Road, in a nautical theme, also seems fairly well preserved.  
(Courtesy of Google Maps)**



**26 S. Highland Avenue, Ossining, New York is one of the existing metropolitan  
area Childs buildings.**

Only two of the original Childs buildings in the city have been given the protection of Landmark status-- both are in Coney Island. Preservationists across the City are beginning to push for landmark status for some of the other Childs' buildings, especially those in Queens.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the manager and staff of Kitchen 21 for their help and forbearance during a busy lunch hour. Also, thanks to Tricia Vita the author of ***Amusing the Zillion*** blog for the use of her photo. Special thanks to Lisa Mangels-Schaefer, Acting Curator of the Coney Island Museum, for the tour and permission to use the photos I took, and also to Susan Tunick, Chair of the Friends of Terra Cotta, for the use of her ***Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine IX*** (1928).

## FURTHER INFORMATION

"Childs Restaurants: Preserving History & Landmarking", a public group on Facebook.

Interior photos of the Boardwalk Childs Building prior to its restoration.

Cindy R. Lobel, "How restaurant culture changed the way we eat," ***New York Post***, May 10, 2014; <http://nypost.com/2014/05/10/how-nyc-restaurant-culture-changed-the-way-we-eat/>.

"Terra Cotta Work of Dennison & Hiron, Architects," ***Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine IX*** (June, 1928).

"(FORMER) CHILDS RESTAURANT BUILDING, 2102 Boardwalk", NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report; <http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/reports/childs.pdf>.

***Amusing the Zillion*** blog; <https://amusingthezillion.com>, and <https://amusingthezillion.com/2013/06/07/coney-flea-market-coming-to-childs-building-on-boardwalk/>.

Charles Denson, ***Coney Island Lost and Found***, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley/Toronto, 2002.

***The Friends of Terra Cotta Newsletter***, Fall, 2017. (FOTC is planning to highlight the Boardwalk Childs Restaurant and its restoration in the Fall issue.)

**The Coney Island History Project**, <http://www.coneyislandhistory.org>

**The Coney Island Museum**,  
<http://www.coneyisland.com/programs/coney-island-museum>

## NOTES:

1. <http://tilesinnewyork.blogspot.com/2017/06/art-deco-commercial-architecture.html>. The article about Child's Coney Island Restaurant is at the end of the blog.
2. Alfred W. Dennett went from driving a Broadway street car to opening a restaurant on Park Row in Manhattan. He opened a coffee and cake room in the old Herald Building, and also sold "sinkers," which were essentially doughnuts that derived their name from a heavy dose of lard and butter. Dennett provided good service, a wide variety of inexpensive foods, and a clean and religious environment, where the walls were decorated with religious sayings. (Cindy R. Lobel, "How restaurant culture changed the way we eat," New York Post, May 10, 2014; <http://nypost.com/2014/05/10/how-nyc-restaurant-culture-changed-the-way-we-eat/> and Charles Austin Bates, "Charles Austin Bates' Criticisms," *Current Advertising*, Volume II, Number 3, September 1897, p. 133) Childs' take on sinkers was the "butter cake", which consisted of thick rounds of griddled yeast dough that fell somewhere between a biscuit and an English muffin on the baked goods spectrum. The name is something of a mystery, considering butter cake dough contains just a small amount of its namesake fat. They were eaten, however, with a large dollop of butter on top--thus, probably, the name. (Leah Koenig, "Lost Foods of New York City: Butter cakes from Childs Restaurant", *Politico New York*, 01/06/2012; <http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2012/01/lost-foods-of-new-york-city-butter-cakes-from-childs-restaurant-067223>)
3. Virginia Kurshan, NYC LPC Research Department, "(FORMER) CHILDS RESTAURANT BUILDING, 2102 Boardwalk (aka 3052-3078 West 21st Street), Brooklyn", Landmarks Preservation Commission, February 4, 2003, Designation List 344, LP-2106, pp. 1, 2.
4. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission recently gave landmark status to the building at West 12th Street and Surf Avenue which the LPC listed as the original Surf Avenue Childs Restaurant. Designed by the architect, John Corley Westervelt, it functioned as a Childs Restaurant from 1917-1943. "After the [Surf Avenue] restaurant closed in 1943, it was occupied by the Bluebird Casino, various nightclubs, and David Rosen's Wonderland Circus Sideshow. ...Coney Island USA currently owns the building, which is occupied by the Coney Island Museum." ("Iconic Coney Island Theater and Restaurant Designated," *CITYLAND*, 02/15/2011; <http://www.citylandnyc.org/iconic-coney-island-theater-and-restaurant-designated/>)

**The original Childs Surf Avenue Restaurant. The Coney Island Museum is on the second floor. (2017 photo: Michael Padwee)**



According to the *Cornell Alumni News* of 1917, John Corley Westervelt (1872-1934) worked in the offices of Carrere & Hastings and Bruce Price from his graduation from the Cornell School of Architecture in 1894, until he began his own, independent practice in 1897. "He was the architect of various hospitals and other buildings for the City of New York and has designed many commercial and residential buildings... ." ("Four Nominees for the Two Alumni Trusteeships", *Cornell Alumni News*, Vol. XIX, No. 26, April 5, 1917, p. 308)

"In his design and construction efforts, William Childs and his internal architect of 30 years, John Corley Westervelt, consulted and engaged respected architects including William Van Alen (modernist designer of the Chrysler Building), Hiron & Dennison, Pruitt & Brown, and McKim, Mead, and White. One design critique from 1924 declared that Childs '...stands as a milestone marking an enormous advance in the taste of what we are pleased to describe as the 'common people' of America.' In more recent years, celebrated architect Robert A.M. Stern described the Childs design as 'austerely-elegant', and recognized their savvy in tailoring design to environment... ." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childs\\_Restaurants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childs_Restaurants))

5. "The partnership of Ethan Allen Dennison and Frederick Charles Hiron, which was formed in 1910 and lasted until 1929, usually specialized in mid-rise office buildings, and normally worked in either a restrained classical or Art Deco style; but the firm was also responsible for designing several of the Childs Restaurants... .

**"Ethan Allen Dennison** (1881-1954) was born in Summit, New Jersey, studied architecture at the Godfrey Architectural Preparatory School and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, afterward entering the office of Trowbridge & Livingston in New York in 1905. After the dissolution of his partnership with Hirons in 1929, Dennison headed his own New York firm and designed numerous banks in Connecticut, Philadelphia, and Delaware. He 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.

**"Frederick Charles Hirons** (1883-1942) came to the United States from England as a youth. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received the Rotch scholarship, after which he went to Paris to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He won the Paris Prize in 1906, which allowed him to continue his studies and travel in Europe through 1909. Hirons taught architecture at Columbia University, and was a founder of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design. It was his design for the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York that won the competition for the Dennison & Hirons firm. Polychrome terra cotta panels were a prominent feature in that building's facade, and the firm was recognized for its terra cotta work in 1928 when an entire issue of ***Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine*** was devoted to the partners' work ["Terra Cotta Work of Dennison & Hirons, Architects," ***Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine IX*** (June, 1928)]. After 1929, Hirons formed a partnership with F. W. Mellor for two years and later practiced on his own until 1940. He designed many public buildings, including the war memorials at Worcester, Massachusetts and Vincennes, Indiana." (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, "Olcott Avenue Historic District Somerset County, NJ," NRIS Reference Number 09000940, Date Listed, 11/20/2009; <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset?assetID=6c6f10d7-e810-47d4-9e40-aedb474534fa>)

6.

One of two pages in the ***Atlantic Terra Cotta Magazine IX***, June 1928 that illustrate Dennison & Hirons' Childs Boardwalk Restaurant in Brooklyn. (Courtesy of Susan Tunick and the Friends of Terra Cotta)



7. Merle Crowell, "Two Country Boys Who Serve 45,000,000 Meals a Year", ***The American Magazine***, Vol. XCII, No. 5, November 1921, pp. 14-15, 106, 108, 110; and Edwin Wildman, ***Famous Leaders of Industry***, The Page Company, Boston, Massachusetts, 1921, pp. 41+.

8. Elizabeth Yuko, "America's Obsession With Restaurant Food Safety Dates Back to 1889," ***CityLab***; <https://www.citylab.com/navigator/2016/02/childs-restaurant-food-safety-sanitation-hygiene/459762/>.

9. Wildman, p. 44.

10. Amy Zuber, "William & Samuel Childs," ***Nation's Restaurant News***, 1996;

11. "The 1904 Facelift of No. 36 West 34th Street", ***Daytonian in Manhattan*** blog, January 18, 2014; <http://daytoninmanhattan.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-1904-facelift-of-no-36-west-34th.html>.

12. Wildman, pp. 45-46.

13. Crowell, p. 110.



14. News Release, "LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION DESIGNATES CHILDS RESTAURANT IN CONEY ISLAND," [February 4, 2003]; [http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/press/02\\_04\\_03.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/press/02_04_03.pdf).
15. Virginia Kurshan, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, pp. 2-3.
16. Ibid., p. 4.
17. Maxfield H. Keck (born c. 1880, Germany-1943, New Jersey) lived in Montclair, New Jersey. He was well known for his architectural sculpture and models, done for grandly-scaled public and private commissions, including the Riverside Church, New York, NY; the New York Telephone Building, New York, NY; the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, NY; the Public Safety and Court Building, Milwaukee, WI; the Atkinson Museum of Fine Arts, Kansas City, MO; and the Art-Deco bas relief sculptures on the exterior of Union Terminal in Cincinnati, OH.

**The facade and one of Maxfield Keck's sculptures on Union Terminal in Cincinnati. (Photo credits: Michael Padwee)**



(<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=32245665> and S. J. Rolfes and D.R. Weise, *Cincinnati Art Deco*, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, 2014, p. 24)

Maxfield Keck was also associated with the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company as a modeler and sculptor, and he is considered responsible for the polychrome terra cotta that adorns the Childs Boardwalk Restaurant.

18. Kurshan, pp. 4-6.
19. Rachel Silberstein, "Watch Evolution Of Historic Childs Restaurant In Charles Denson's New Film", *BKLYNER*, May 3, 2016; <http://bklyner.com/new-charles-denson-film-explores-childs-building-bensonhurst/>.
20. "New Exhibit: Terra Cotta Relics from the Childs Building", *Coney Island History Project*; <http://www.coneyislandhistory.org/blog/history/new-exhibit-terra-cotta-relics-childs-building>, and "Hand Finished & Glazed Terra Cotta Units Breathe New Life into Seaside", *Boston Valley Terra Cotta Company Blog*, October 21, 2016; <http://bostonvalley.com/hand-finished-glazed-terracotta-breathe-new-life-into-seaside/>. According to an article in the Fall 2017 *Friends of Terra Cotta Newsletter*, there was at least "...one complex aspect of the restoration. It [was] clear from the original [terra cotta] pieces that large sections of the ornament were glazed all at one time as if they were part of one huge watercolor. Thus, the glazes tend to blend together with thick and thin areas and various overlaps in the color. ...Most glazing for restoration requires flat, even [glaze] applications of uniform thickness...so this proved to be an interesting learning experience. The sculpting of an enormous number of complex forms and creatures provided another daunting task[.]" (Susan Tunick, "Good News-Childs Restoration Completed", *Friends of Terra Cotta Newsletter*, Fall 2017, p.2)
21. "Childs Restaurant 21st Street and the Boardwalk Coney Island, Brooklyn, NY Dennison & Hirons, Architects 1923", Friends of Terra Cotta, p. 2; <http://www.preserve.org/fotc/infochilds.htm>
22. Michael Perlman, "Push to preserve Childs Restaurants in Queens", *Forest Hills/Rego Park Times*, August 16, 2016; [http://www.foresthillstimes.com/view/full\\_story/27251197/article-Push-to-preserve-Childs-Restaurants-in-Queens](http://www.foresthillstimes.com/view/full_story/27251197/article-Push-to-preserve-Childs-Restaurants-in-Queens).

# Two Country Boys Who Serve 45,000,000 Meals a Year

The story of William and Samuel S. Childs of Childs Restaurant fame, together with many interesting facts about what people all over the country eat, how they want it served, which are their favorite dishes, and what changes are taking place in public taste

*By Merle Crowell*

**T**HIS is the biggest story in the world's biggest work—the feeding of human beings. It is the tale of two country boys, who started more than thirty years ago with a vision of serving food “such as Mother used to make,” and to-day control the greatest group of public eating places on earth.

Every year between forty-five and fifty million people—a number equal to half the population of the United States—sit down at the white-topped tables of Childs restaurants. Thirty-five hundred cows are kept busy supplying these patrons with seven million quarts of milk and one and one-quarter million quarts of cream.

More than forty million cups of coffee—made from three hundred and seventy-five tons of the ground berry—are used in a single year, along with the twenty thousand pounds of tea. If the twenty-two million eggs eaten annually were placed end to end they would reach from Denver to St. Louis and form a loop around both cities. Nearly three million loaves of bread, a million pies, ten million oysters and four hundred and fifty tons of fresh fowl are consumed in the same length of time. Four thousand hogs give up the ghost that this hungry army may have its ham and bacon. The annual consumption of fifty-five million griddle cakes would carpet a good-sized farm. If the billion beans were strung on a colossal necklace—but figure this out for yourself!

Starting in down-town New York, with one thousand and six hundred dollars and an idea, the two brothers to-day direct the operation of nearly one hundred restaurants, that dot the continent from Montreal to Los Angeles, from Minneapolis to New Orleans.

This tremendous expansion has taken place with the quietness of real reserve. The builders have steadfastly shunned the limelight. The talk with William Childs, general manager of the company, from which this article is written, is the only

authorized interview that has ever been given out.

William Childs still lives in Bernardsville, New Jersey, the little town where he was born fifty-six years ago. He owns a farm there, as his father did before him. The home on the hill is far from the typical New Jersey farmhouse—but it is equally far from the typical palace “on the Avenue” which many other millionaires have seen fit to erect for themselves.

fore you went to work in New York.”

“There isn’t much to tell,” he replied. “Father was a farmer—an ambitious farmer of the old school. He believed in work almost as deeply as he believed in God. That is why we ten children were kept busy from five o’clock in the morning until nine o’clock at night. It was a good thing, too, one of the greatest of the many debts I owe him. For, as a consequence, I have never been afraid of work.”

“I remember once he thought of selling the farm and moving into the city. . . . ‘But I shall have to get a place with a big yard,’ he said. ‘In one end of it I shall have a big pile of wood—and when you boys have finished carrying this wood to the other end you will have to turn around and bring it all back again. I won’t spoil you by letting you loaf.’

“Every morning at five there sounded a stern rap on our door and Father’s voice came booming into our dreams. As next to the youngest boy, it was my job to go down into the pasture and drive up the cows. In the fall, when the grass was stiff with frost, I would run barefooted into the meadow. As soon as I got there I would scare up the nearest cow and warm my feet in the place where she had been lying. Then came the chores—and after that the long day’s work, ending with another round of chores at night.

“I had a common-school education. Father had planned to set aside one thousand dollars for each of the six boys to give us a college education. Before my turn came, however, he had become ‘land poor’ from his thousand acres. So I went to work outside.

“In the spring when I was nineteen my brother Samuel went to Dakota. Together with a boy friend I joined him later and we worked in the wheat fields until fall. When we returned home I got a job at nine dollars a week in a hardwood mill over in Newark; but it didn’t last long. The boss fired me. I guess I was a little too independent to suit him.

## They Still Eat Pie for Breakfast in Boston

**B**OSTON is the only city where we have to list pie and beans on our breakfast menu,” says Mr. William Childs. “The popular belief about New Englanders eating pie for breakfast isn’t fiction, after all. In the South there is a marked demand for smoked ham and bacon. Habit has a lot to do with this. Ice is not so available in warmer climates and fresh meat is harder to keep. Crackers and milk are a popular luncheon dish in the East and North, but the South and West show little fondness for the same item. The Middle North, around Minneapolis, is particularly partial to fresh meats.

“Taking the country as a whole, less meat is probably eaten to-day by the average individual than was the case twenty-five years ago, but the difference is almost negligible. Ham and beans, a very popular dish of the past, is losing favor; but ham and eggs is more than holding its own. Soldiers and sailors almost invariably order the latter dish, while nine out of every ten young boys who eat in our places are sure to order griddle cakes. Human beings are pretty consistent, anyway. The managers estimate that forty per cent of our customers have the same lunch day after day.

“Our commonest order is coffee. Almost everyone drinks it in the morning, and most people carry the habit through the other two meals. With 45,000,000 meals we serve 40,000,000 cups of coffee.”

A cold, noiseless drizzle was fogging the windows as we sat before an open fire that late afternoon. Shadows had gathered in our end of the room, and only as the logs flared up could I see the kindly blue eyes of the man opposite me, a little curious as to what possible interest I expected to uncover in his life and experiences. He studied each question, and answered it slowly and thoughtfully. His voice was warm and steady—but so quiet that at each chiming of a nearby clock he stopped speaking.

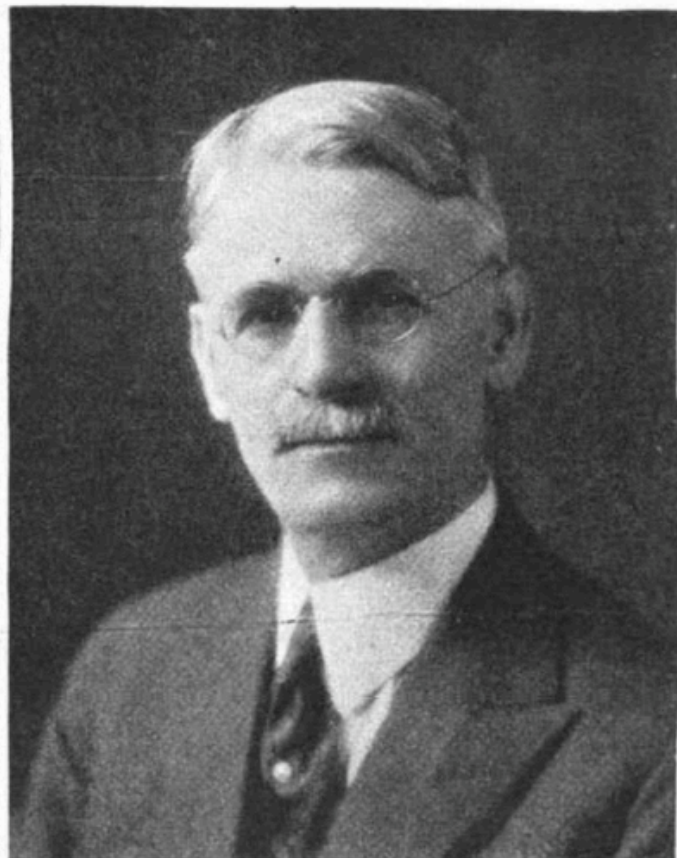
“So this is the town where you were born,” I said, as we sat down facing the fire. “Tell me a little about your life be-





PHOTO BY MARCEAU

WILLIAM CHILDS



UNDERWOOD &amp; UNDERWOOD

SAMUEL S. CHILDS

Starting with \$1,600 and an idea, Samuel S. and William Childs now have nearly one hundred restaurants, which dot the continent from coast to coast, and from Montreal to New Orleans. Forty-five million meals are served in them every year. Samuel S. Childs is president of the company and director of its financial program. William Childs, vice president and general manager, directs the actual operation of the great chain of restaurants. The two brothers still live in Bernardsville, New Jersey, where they began life as poor country boys

"Coming back to Bernardsville, I started a milk route, obtained a nice, clean rig, and introduced the local novelty of delivering milk in glass bottles. Rising at two o'clock in the morning, I finished the tour at eight, and spent the rest of the day teaching in a small school. In two years I had cleared one thousand dollars.

"At about this time my brother Samuel, who was two years older than I, had given up a promising career as a civil engineer in order to go to work for A. W. Dennett, an old-time restaurant man, who had places in New York, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia. It was understood that he was to be trained as a manager. Chances looked bright, and he induced me to come along.

"We both liked the business from the start. During that trip West we had eaten here and there and everywhere. Compared with home cooking, the food served was insipid. We used to talk about how nice it would be if restaurants only used good home recipes, and if they were as spotlessly clean as the kitchen and dining-room on our farm. The musty smell of food that clung to the air in most places was in disagreeable contrast to the fresh clean air that swept into our dining-room from the New Jersey hills.

"Anyway, we plunged right into the work at Dennett's. We took in cash, handed out orders to the waiters, and kept busy studying the kitchen and the customers. Already our minds held the embryo of an idea for starting a restaurant of our own. I guess we worked too hard and

studied too intently, for pretty soon we had stirred up jealousy among some other young men who had come into the organization with similar hopes of promotion. It ended in our getting virtually discharged within six months. . . . Doesn't look as if I had made much of a success working for other people, does it?" And the restaurant man smiled whimsically.

"Right away we decided to start a restaurant in down-town New York. I had the one thousand dollars saved from the milk route and Sam had five hundred dollars. This wasn't much, but we felt very hopeful of success. We had lots of ideas, not the least among which were built around Mother's kitchen and her recipes, many of which we expected to use.

"IT'S kind of strange now, looking back; but do you know that when we started our first place we were already planning to have a chain of twenty restaurants—something hitherto unknown? What we lacked in experience we must have made up in nerve! Goodness knows, we needed it to meet the disasters that lay ahead of us!

"Scouting around, we found available restaurant space on the main floor of the old Merchants' Hotel, at 41 Cortlandt Street. The owner, J. Taylor Monroe, was a spectacular figure in those days, and known to the public as gruff and stern. He listened to our unusual proposal to rent the space for two months as an experiment. We had decided that if we

weren't taking in forty dollars a day by that time we should have to admit failure.

"'I'll do it for you boys,' announced Mr. Monroe; 'but I wouldn't for anyone else.'

"We managed to borrow \$100—bringing our total capital up to \$1,600. That was all we had to start on. We were our own carpenters in fixing the place over. After fitting it up with second-hand furnishings and hiring six or eight people to help us, we opened for business in August, 1889. The start was slow. We just did manage to reach the \$40 mark within the time limit.

"Presently our patronage began increasing rapidly. So we opened another place, in Fulton Street. My brother ran one restaurant and I looked after the other. Before long we had saved \$2,500 and had just changed from a C. O. D. to a credit basis when we were hit a stunning blow. The bank in which all our money was deposited, failed.

"Many obligations stared us in the face, but our creditors were kind. We had just got back on our feet when two young men offered us \$2,500 for the Cortlandt Street place. After deciding to sell out and start another restaurant, we explained to them that the lease with Mr. Monroe was peculiar. It gave him the right to cancel without notice. There had been some talk of a big deal for the building.

"We all went around to Mr. Monroe's office. He refused to make any promises, but he gave us the impression that there was little likelihood (Continued on page 106)





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## Two Country Boys Who Serve 45,000,000 Meals a Year

(Continued from page 15)

of the deal going through. So the agreement was signed and a certified check turned over to us.

"The following Monday morning we were standing at the cash desk, having a final talk with our successors, when the postman came in with the mail. It consisted of a letter demanding the premises be vacated within six days!

"My brother and I talked the thing out. We were quite in the clear. The sale was *bona fide* and without deceit. We had transferred our business and good will and a few hundred dollars in furnishings for a definite sum. The transaction was closed. What should we do? It didn't take us long to decide. We gave back the check and assumed a \$2,000 loss.

"By this time, however, we had confidence in the soundness of our way of doing business. A five-story building was being vacated a few doors away. We assumed the lease, hoping to be able to rent the upper floors. The restaurant we planned to start on the street level would have to take in \$100 a day, we figured, to break even. At the very start our sales were more than \$80, and soon they had swelled to more than \$200 daily. Then we opened the second floor as a restaurant. Another big increase followed. Later we opened a third place, in Beaver Street, and a fourth up around Herald Square. Within five years from the start of our first venture we had five restaurants, and each of them was making money. That's all there was to it." And the restaurant man settled back in his chair.

I couldn't help smiling: "It sounds simple, as you tell it; but did you ever stop to think that several thousand young men have opened restaurants in New York City without ever having been heard from beyond a five-block radius? What did you give the public that it hadn't been used to getting?"

MR. CHILDS sat for a long time in thought, his hands crossed in his lap.

"That's not an easy question," he said at last. "Naturally, we had certain ideas and ideals—and they were pretty much the same as we have to-day. 'What is the restaurant business, anyway?' I asked myself. And the best answer I could work out was that it was merely housekeeping without the problem of shelter. So we determined to make the food as close as possible to that served in the best homes. We used a lot of family recipes—and still use them. All our rice pudding, for example, is prepared just as Mother used to make it for us boys.

"Absolute cleanliness was our goal. Lighting in those days was a compromise between gas and electricity. Most popular-priced restaurants appeared dismal. We put in the large glass fronts we have to-day; white glass walls and white

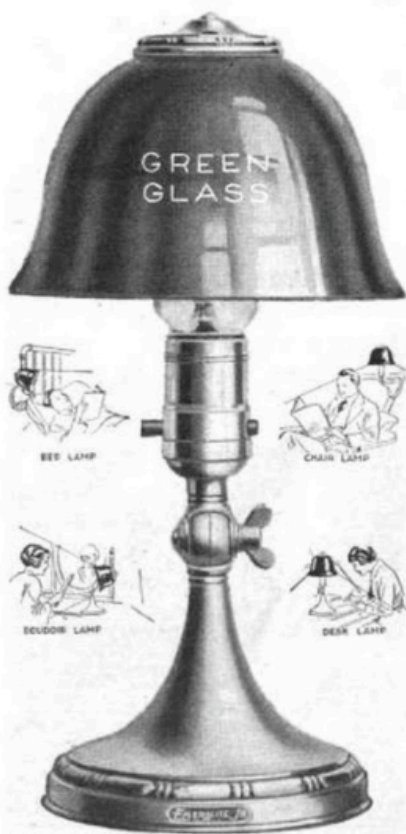


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tables. The place had to look clean, smell clean, and *be* clean. White shows dirt much more quickly than any other color, but it also advertises cleanliness.

"Another thing to eliminate was the smell that hovered in the air of many restaurants. We installed exhaust fans, which changed the air every two minutes by forced ventilation.

"Nearly all restaurants had men waiters—but people were used to having women wait on them at home. We hired attractive girls, paid them more wages than they would get elsewhere, and maintained real discipline. Our young women did not wear jewelry, chew gum, or enter into unnecessary conversation. The average waiter, in those days, was inclined to be chatty. So are many of them to-day, for that matter.

"Space in a good location is a mighty expensive thing. Profits are made in the dining-room, not in the kitchen. So we had our kitchens scaled down to about one fifth the ordinary size. With the exception of those in dining cars, I think they are still the smallest in proportion to the volume of business that you can find anywhere. By adopting a limited menu, having everything in its place, and keeping perfect order, we saved a lot of lost motion and added to the size of our dining-room."

"You were continually learning new things about people's tastes, I suppose."

"That depends on how you mean it. Taste is less variable than you might imagine. People in all parts of the country eat pretty much the same thing, season after season, year after year. You would be surprised to know how closely the individual records of our far-flung group of restaurants correspond.

"NATURALLY, there are minor differences. Boston is the only city where we have to list pie and beans on our breakfast menu. Also, more oysters are served in Boston for breakfast than anywhere else.

"Beans are very popular in Boston, but our sales sheets show that down-town New York holds the record for consumption of this popular dish. Out of every \$100 we take in there, \$2.50 is spent for beans. In Boston the average consumption is only \$1.50 per \$100. It's hard to say just why lower New York holds the supremacy. Our managers attribute it to the fact that thousands of girls employed in the busy offices order beans because they are cheap, nutritious, and ready for instant service. The so-called Boston beans are more popular in Boston, and New York beans are more popular in New York. Other cities show no special partiality.

"In all our restaurants the folks who order beans and other simple dishes are likelier to be regular patrons than transients. When men and women are traveling, or eating in strange places, they usually order fancier dishes. It would be interesting to know how much more people spend for meals when they are in cities away from home, or when they are traveling by rail or boat. The difference is certainly considerable.

"In New Orleans we serve several dishes—mostly Creole products—that are not found elsewhere on our menus. Favorite among these is a cream cheese, which is much the same thing as the old

country pot cheese most of us are familiar with. It is really clabbered milk with the whey drained off."

"Do people as a whole eat the same things they used to?"

"Pretty largely. Fresh fruits, fruit juices, salads, and green vegetables, however, are more popular now than ever before. Whole-wheat bread and graham bread have had a sustained boom since the war. Prunes, apricots, and dried apples are also gaining in favor.

"IF PEOPLE eat less lunch than formerly our records fail to show it, nor is there much apparent backing for another popular belief—that folks eat less in summer than in winter. I am inclined to believe that the average check in winter is a bit larger, but the difference is slight.

"As a whole, our business is little affected by storms. If a restaurant in the shopping district of New York shows a loss we are likelier to have heavier trade down-town. In restaurants where a few regular patrons may be kept away they are more than replaced by transients, who find us convenient to their offices. Also, there is a tendency among people to stay at the table a little longer and eat a little more on a stormy day, when the walking out of doors is unpleasant. All seasons total up about the same. If our sales in the heat of summer fall off in New York we make the difference up at Coney Island, Atlantic City, Montreal, and elsewhere."

"What is the commonest order in your restaurants?"

"Coffee—by an overwhelming majority! Corned-beef hash is a favorite among solid foods. Boiled ham and beef divide the honors in meats. Chicken soup leads its field, and oatmeal is the most popular cereal, both summer and winter. Potatoes are the most largely eaten vegetable, with beans a good second.

"Out of every \$100 spent in a typically located restaurant, about one fifth, or \$20, goes for beverages. This is the largest single item. The others range something like this:

Griddle products	\$16.50
Hot dishes, ready to serve	13.00
Desserts	12.00
Egg dishes	9.50
Special dishes	5.70
Bread, etc.	5.40
Sandwiches	4.25
Oysters	3.50
Soups	2.75
Cereals	2.65
Hot dishes, to order	2.35
Vegetables	1.50
Salads, cold dishes, miscellaneous	.90

"Of course this is an arbitrary list and it varies in detail among different restaurants. By and large, however, it gives a reasonably accurate idea of what people eat."

"How much does your average check amount to?"

"Just now it is forty-seven cents; but it's working downward in fractions of a cent as the cost of food recedes. We lower the prices on the menu cards whenever a reduction in the purchase price of products permits. If it were not for the increased cost of plant operation and wages, prices to-day would be practically at the pre-war level."

"Is there much difference between the orders of men and women?"





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"A little. Men go in more for meats, potatoes, and eggs, while women are inclined to eat more soups, salads, croquettes, and desserts. At the end of the meals the chances are in favor of the man ordering pie and the woman ordering ice cream."

"How are eggs most often served?" I asked.

"For breakfast most people want them boiled. The average luncheon order calls for them to be either scrambled or poached, while at supper the omelet orders crowd close to the front. There is a considerable demand for fried eggs at all three meals."

"How has prohibition affected public eating?"

"It has raised sales. Lots of men who used to drop into cafés for a glass of beer and a light lunch now visit the restaurants. Also, when the day's work is over, they are more likely to take their families to dinner. They have more money to spend and fewer outside influences to distract them. Even before national prohibition came in we noticed these facts as the various states went dry."

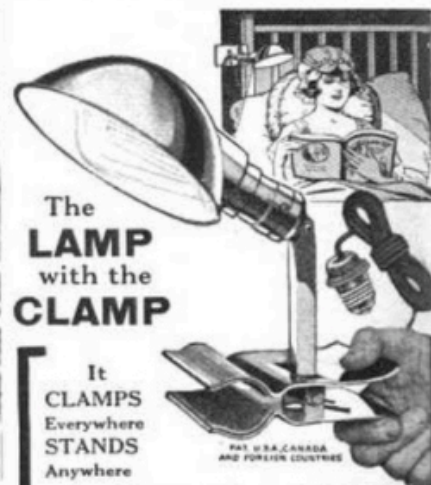
"There's one curious quirk to our business: We are visited in unusual numbers by in-townners out of town, and out-of-townners in town. People from New York who haven't had ten meals in our restaurants in a year will eat there regularly when they are in Cleveland, Montreal, Memphis, or New Haven. The same thing holds true when the outsider visits the metropolis. Two reasons are usually given for this: Since our restaurants all have the same general appearance, they give visitors the 'home feeling.' The second reason is that the patrons are unacquainted with other restaurants in strange cities, and they know that what we serve is clean and safe and moderately priced. This makes a location near a railroad terminal particularly valuable."

"IN THE business of running popular-priced restaurants location is the biggest factor, physical equipment comes second, and management is third. We never locate a new place without carefully counting and studying the street traffic. We know that from 3 to 15 per cent of the people passing our doors will stop in to eat. Dense traffic of a low grade will yield only 3 per cent, the average location will yield 7 per cent, but it is only a strategic location that will bring to us as high as 15 per cent."

"The ideal location taps a great traffic artery along which people are constantly moving to shop, transact business, see the sights, and attend the theatres. A place located between railroad terminals, where people are passing day and night, has distinct advantages, as has a location where a bustling business and theatrical district is found."

"Considering two cities of the same size, one old and the other comparatively new, we find that the second holds much better prospects. There the different kinds of business are all mixed up. In the course of the day's work people are continually moving about; and the more people that pass a place the more enter it."

"A tremendous tide of traffic at noon is not as profitable as the same traffic spread over twenty-four hours. Of course we have a few restaurants where almost all



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# SIMMONS CHAINS

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the business is done in the middle of the day. The one on Broadway, near Wall Street, is typical."

Our talk had covered the first five years' development of the business. The sequel to those early struggles is a story of the most astounding expansion that the restaurant field has ever known.

The success of the Jersey youths had attracted so much attention that several friends offered to invest in the business. Nearly one hundred thousand dollars in new capital was thus added; but the opening of new restaurants was setting a difficult pace for capital and profits to keep up with. By the year 1899 ten places were in operation in New York City.

At that time the brothers made a bold venture. They leased an expensive property at Broadway and Cedar Street and engaged a nationally known architect to make plans for rebuilding three floors into the costliest popular-priced restaurant in the country. The completion of the reconstruction put a severe strain on the finances of the growing company.

One noon William Childs was sitting in his office, studying possible means of raising more capital, when word was brought in that a man wished to see him.

"What does he want?" asked Childs.

"He says he wants to make you smile."

"Send him in. I need that kind of visitor."

The man proved to be A. W. Harris, well known as a developer of oil and many other enterprises.

"I've been watching your growth and your methods of doing business," he explained. "You've got a mighty good thing. I'd like the privilege of financing a million-dollar corporation to solidify and extend your operations."

HARRIS was given the opportunity to interest outside capital, which he did successfully. The proposed company was formed, with the one-time farmer boys in control. In the new organization Samuel S. Childs was made president and director of the general financial program, while William Childs became vice president and general manager, in charge of the operation of the restaurants. These are the positions which they still hold.

Presently the two brothers decided that the time was ripe to extend to other cities.

"Don't you think you boys have gone about far enough?" asked the board of directors.

Evidently they didn't think so. With their own money they started a new company in Philadelphia, and devoted to it as much time as they could spare from the New York enterprise. Within a few years they had ten restaurants in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Newark, and New Haven. So successful did these places become that the directors of the New York company showed great anxiety for a merger. This was accomplished in 1906, and a company was formed with a capital of two million dollars.

Immediately new restaurants were opened in other Eastern cities. So rapid became the growth that in 1908 a third reorganization was necessary. This time the company was capitalized for nine million dollars—a capitalization that is still in effect.

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play golf  
without  
sticks

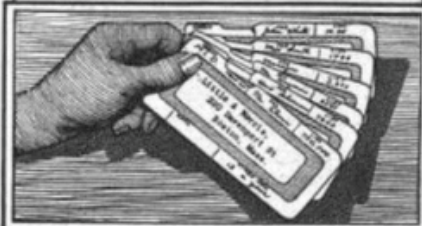
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without  
a gun

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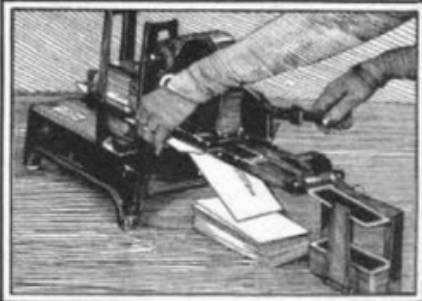
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## CHILDS' RESTAURANTS

### ABBREVIATED TIME LINE

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**Childs Restaurants** was one of the first national dining chains in the United States and Canada, having peaked in the 1920s and 1930s with about 125 locations in dozens of markets, serving over 50,000,000 meals a year, with over \$37 million in assets at the time. Childs was a pioneer in a number of areas, including design, service, sanitation, and labor relations. It was a contemporary of food service companies such as Horn & Hardart, and a predecessor of companies such as McDonald's. [Wikipedia]







The Childs' Vision:

*"we determined to make the food as close as possible to that served in the best homes. We used a lot of family recipes ... All our rice pudding, for example, is prepared just as Mother used to make it for us boys. ... Absolute cleanliness was our goal. ... We put in the large glass fronts we have to-day; white glass walls and white tables. The place had to look clean, smell clean, and be clean. White ... advertises cleanliness."*

[American Magazine, Nov. 1921 interview with William Childs]

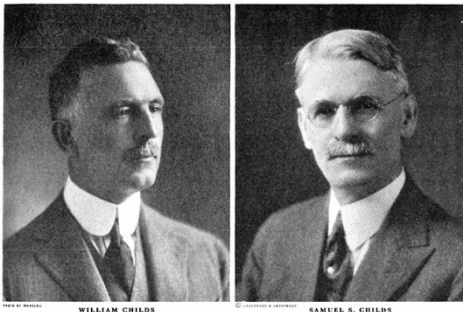


## 1860 - 1900



William Childs

Samuel Childs



*"We managed to borrow \$100 – bringing our total capital up to \$1,600. That was all we had to start on. We were our own carpenters in fixing the place over. After fitting it up with the second-hand furnishings and hiring six or eight people to help us, we opened for business in August, 1889. The start was slow. ... Presently our patronage began increasingly rapidly. So we opened another place, in Fulton Street. My brother [Samuel] ran one restaurant and I [William] looked after the other."*

(American Magazine, Nov. 1921 interview with William Childs)

1863

### BIRTH OF SAMUEL SHANNON CHILDS

Samuel Childs was born in Basking Ridge, Somerset County, NJ on April 4, 1863. He was one of 10 children and grew up on the family farm. He attended Morristown High School, was a graduate of the New Jersey State Normal School at Trenton and attended one year at United States Military Academy at West Point. By 21 he had obtained a degree in Civil Engineering and worked on projects (some related to railroad construction) in upper New York State, Long Island and the Dakotas.

1884

### SAMUEL & WILLIAM START THEIR RESTAURANT CAREERS

At 21, in spite of a degree in civil engineering, Samuel took a job as manager for A.W. Dennett restaurant business with establishments in Brooklyn and Philadelphia. He brought his brother into the company. By their sixth month they were fired. Perhaps happily so, because they were inspired to immediately invest their savings of \$1,500 to set up their own restaurant business. From the very beginning they envisioned establishing a chain of restaurants founded on the concept of affordable, healthy meals just as would come out of 'Mother's kitchen.' Within 10 years they had 10 successful branches and eventually expanded to more than 100 branches at their peak in the 1920s.

1889

### LAUNCHING OF FIRST CHILDS RESTAURANTS

Samuel and William Childs launched their first restaurant in Lower Manhattan's Financial District. It was on the ground level of the Merchants Hotel (current site of One Liberty Plaza, also previously the Singer Building) at 41 Cortland Street, between Broadway and Church.

*... they catered to downtown Manhattan's bustling lunchtime crowd. The brothers' model of delivering high-quality America-style fare at reasonable prices (which at the time was quite novel) proved popular. Just a decade after that first restaurant (originally called Childs' Lunchrooms), Childs boasted a total of nine locations across the city, and was well on its way to becoming one of the first national restaurant chains. [Politico]*

1899

### CHILDS BUSINESS TURNED INTO A CORPORATION

In 1898, the brothers, confident and ready for more aggressive expansion, combined with several investors to legally incorporate **The Childs Unique Dairy Company**, with capitalization of \$1,000,000, and the stated intent to "establish and operate restaurants in New York City and elsewhere." Very soon after the restaurant chain expands to other cities: first to Philadelphia and then to Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Newark and New Haven. [Wikipedia, American Magazine]



Washington Post commentator H.I. Phillips summed up the style of these restaurants with characteristic wit in 1929:

***The early Childs restaurants were so glaringly white it didn't seem right to enter them without a bath, shave and haircut. They were architecturally part laboratory, part squash court, part Roman pool, and part goldfish bowl.***

***Then the owners dressed their managers like hospital internes, put their waitresses into attire partly suggestive of child brides and partly suggestive of dentists' assistants, developed tray-dropping to a high art and prospered.***

***Speed was the keynote. Buttered toast set new heights in rapid transit, and all previous records held by eggs in flight between kettle and customer were broken.***

[Lost Washington: Childs fast food restaurants - Greater Greater Washington,

*To convey cleanliness, Childs restaurants had white tile walls and floors, marble countertops, mirrors, wooden furniture and servers wearing starched white uniforms, like nurses. Many locations had a window out onto the street where a cook would flip yeast pancakes on a griddle to draw in customers. A branch in FiDi that had self-serve sandwiches is credited for inspiring the cafeteria-style, grab-and-go service that would become such a huge part of urban dining in early and*



New York City  
some of the early Childs Lunchrooms:  
41 Cortland Street  
Fulton Street  
Beaver Street  
Harold Square  
130 Broadway

## 1900-1925

1900	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> DAUGHTER LOIS ALWARD CHILDS IS BORN</b> Samuel and Emma Frances had two daughters. Mary Elizabeth Childs was born on Feb. 12, 1896 and Lois Alward Childs was born on Jan. 26, 1900. Lois was later to marry Charles Raphael and have two children: Mary Frances and Christopher.
1902	<b>SAMUEL CHILDS ELECTED TO STATE SENATE</b> Samuel Childs was elected as a democratic senator to the State of New Jersey senate although his county was typically republican. He served from 1902 to 1905.
1906	<b>CHILDS BUSINESS FORMED INTO A \$2million COMPANY</b>
1908	<b>CHILDS COMPANY RE-FORMED INTO A \$9million COMPANY</b>
1917	<b>CHILDS 1<sup>st</sup> CONEY ISLAND LOCATION ON SURF AVE</b> Designed by John Westervelt, Childs' in-house architect. Located at Surf Ave. and 12 <sup>th</sup> Street. The restaurant was in operation until 1943.
1919	<b>CHILDS 1<sup>st</sup> CONEY ISLAND LOCATION ON SURF AVE</b> Designed by John Westervelt, Childs' in-house architect. Located at Surf Ave. and 12 <sup>th</sup> Street. The restaurant was in operation until 1943.
1923	<b>CHILDS 2<sup>nd</sup> CONEY ISLAND LOCATION ON THE BOARDWALK</b> Designed by architects Ethan Allen Dennison and Fredric C. Hirons, who both studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Both Coney Island buildings were adorned with terra cotta in a maritime theme which became part of the standard façade décor for other branches of the restaurant. The restaurant was in operation until 1943.
1925	<b>SAMUEL CHILDS DIES</b> Samuel Childs died on March 17, 1925. He is buried in the Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church cemetery in New Jersey.

**107 CHILDS RESTAURANTS ACROSS 29 CITIES USA & CANADA** [Wikipedia]

### CHILDS EMPLOYEE STOCK OWNERSHIP PLAN

In September 1919, the company launched an employee stock ownership plan for its restaurant managers, and three years later, extended the plan to all employees. Within 10 years, employees would own almost 25% of the company's common stock



## 1926 Childs Menu

Health conscious cuisine:  
Calories listed to the left for  
each item on the menu !



Childs				
CEREALS				
OATMEAL	BOILED RICE	FLAKED CEREALS	SHREDDED WHEAT	CREAM OF WHEAT
	V(44-300) WITH MILK 15		V(30-490) WITH CREAM 25	
FRUITS				
V(8-200) STEWED APRICOTS 10	V(3-175) ORANGE MARMALADE 15	V(5-275) STEWED PRUNES 15		
V(3-175) FRESH BAKED APPLE 20	V(5-70) ONE-HALF GRAPE FRUIT 20	V(-70) ORANGE JUICE 25		
GRIDDLE SPECIALTIES				
V(28-300) BUTTER CAKES 10		V(28-300) TOASTED BUTTER CAKES 15		
	V(44-700) WHOLE WHEAT CAKES 20			
BREAKFAST SUGGESTIONS				
V(- 9-275) Stewed Prunes				15
V(- 3-175) Fresh Baked Apple				20
V(- 5-70) One-half Grape Fruit				20
V(- -70) Orange Juice				25
V(- 48-300) Oatmeal with Cream				25
V(- 38-500) Shredded Wheat with Cream				25
( 25-300) Hot Home Made Rolls				10
V(- 82-445) Bacon, One Egg and Potatoes				35
V(- 87-400) Corned Beef Hash, Poached Egg				40
V(- 89-340) Scrambled Eggs with Potatoes				40
V(- 44-700) Whole Wheat Griddle Cakes with Syrup				20
V(- 92-470) Ham Omelet with Potatoes				45
V(114-1000) Fried Ham, Gravy and Whole Wheat Griddle Cakes				55
SANITARIUM COOKED BEAN IS PROVIDED ON THE TABLE, AND IS RECOMMENDED FOR USE WITH CEREALS AND FRUITS				
EGG DISHES				
V(54-150) BOILED 30	V(54-190) FRIED 30	V(54-150) POACHED 30	V(54-180) SCRAMBLED 30	
V(54-190) PLAIN OMELET 30	V(77-270) HAM OMELET 35	V(72-300) ONION OMELET 35		
HOT DISHES TO ORDER				
(80-325) CORNED BEEF HASH 25	V(7-245) BACON WITH ONE EGG 25	(39-390) BACON 35		
V(82-290) FRIED HAM WITH ONE EGG 30	(70-300) FRIED OR BROILED HAM 35			
V(87-400) CORNED BEEF HASH, POACHED EGG 40	V(90-330) BACON AND EGGS 45			
	V(140-440) HAM AND EGGS 55			



### CHILDS @ 604 FIFTH AVE

*In the developing shopping district on Fifth Avenue, eating establishments were generally limited to clubs, large restaurants or hotels. But as expensive shops brought crowds of patrons, the patrons sought nourishment - not always expensive - and it was here that William Childs saw his opening.*

*... Childs was the closest thing to fast food and thus a distinctly new, even undesirable, element for Fifth Avenue. Foster Ware and Brock Pemberton, writing in The New Yorker, said that the Fifth Avenue Association got wind of the Childs plan and "had its misgivings. Would a nickel-plated lunch place go well along the avenue housing Altman's and Tiffany's?"*

*Van Alen produced a five-story limestone building reserved in style but still a shocking intrusion between the old brownstones. Inside, he did away with the signature Childs white tile, substituting Caen stone and bronze trim. The most striking element was the curved glass at the southern corner, where the facade was brought around to face the church on its south side.*

*[NYT 11/6/1988]*

## 1925-1940

*Starting in down-town New York, with one thousand and six hundred dollars and an idea, the two brothers to-day direct the operation of nearly one hundred restaurants, that dot the continent from Montreal to Los Angeles, from Minneapolis to New Orleans.*

*[American Magazine, Wikipedia]*

*In 1932, a fire ravaged much of the boardwalk, the massive, block-long Childs building was credited for stopping the westward flow of the flames.*

*The space was partially damaged, but reopened quickly, although the rest of the decade was not great for Coney Island or the restaurant. [EATER]*



1925

### VEGETARIAN MENU INTRODUCED

*When Samuel Childs died in 1925, his brother William, a health-nut of sorts, took over the company and instituted an almost entirely vegetarian menu, which proved to be a total flop — he was ousted by the shareholders, and meat was put back on the menu in 1928.*

*[EATER]*

*The company's stock reached a low of \$44 in 1928,<sup>[14]</sup> and during a board meeting on December 12, 1928, William was pressed into resigning as President, but remained Chairman of the Board. [Wikipedia]*

1925

### CHILDS EXPANDS TO 108 RESTAURANTS IN USA & CANADA

#### THE CHILDS COMPANY BUYS THE SAVOY-PLAZA HOTEL

*In November 1925, the Childs company became a major partner in the development of the landmark Savoy-Plaza Hotel, at Fifth Avenue and 59th Streets.<sup>[13]</sup> [Wikipedia]*

#### CHILDS OPENS AT 604 5<sup>TH</sup> AVE (48 & 49 STREETS)

*Designed by architect William Van Allen before he designed the Chrysler building in 1929. Effort was made to ensure a very high level of design to appease the initial misgivings from the Fifth Ave. Assoc. about introducing an 'affordable' dining service into a luxury district. The restaurant proved successful and operated into the 1960s. Van Allen was also hired to design the Massachusetts Ave branch of Childs in Washington DC.*

1929

### WILLIAM CHILDS LOSES CONTROL OF THE COMPANY

*March 7, William lost his controlling shares in the company which was valued at \$37million. [Wikipedia]*

1930

### CHILDS MENU NO LONGER VEGETARIAN

*In the 1930s, no longer under the direction of the Childs family, the chain returned meat to its menus, introduced alcohol at many locations (after the repeal of Prohibition),<sup>[19]</sup> and launched a new subsidiary division called "The Host", meant to be lower-priced than Childs. The company also obtained the hot dog vending license for the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, which turned out a financial mistake. [Wikipedia]*

1939

### CHILDS RESTAURANT @ NYC WORLDS FARE

*Childs had a 1000 seat establishment at the World's Fare and also obtained the hot dog vending license for the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, which turned out a financial mistake. [Wikipedia]*

1930s

### CHILDS OPENS ON THE ATLANTIC CITY BOARDWALK

*Based on success of Coney Island branch*





## Childs Company's Ups and Downs Touch Eating and Investing Public

### Petition for Reorganization Caps Years of Contests Over Management and Dietetic Policies—Business Begun in 1889

By KENNETH L. AUSTIN

It has long been the fate of the Childs Company to provide the securities markets and the general public with unusual episodes as well as food and drink: some of them merry, others grim, but none of them dull. Thus it is that a prosaic plan, cast early in 1942, to pave the way for an uncomfortable debt maturity in the current year has resulted in unexpected drama and swerved sharply from its intended course.

When the company's \$4,490,000 of debentures became due on April 1, only \$2,891,000 had been exchanged for new but substantially similar securities due in 1957, leaving \$1,599,000 in default of principal. However, instead of falling in value, the defaulted debentures rose from \$437.50 on March 31 to \$540 on April 1 and continued a fluctuating advance to \$970 on Aug. 5. The other securities of the company also showed im-

provement, although less spectacular in degree.

Certain creditors presented their claims in State courts and were sustained. Meanwhile the company continued to urge support of its plan for the exchange of securities. Then three persons petitioned a Federal court for an involuntary receivership, but the special master appointed by the court and the Securities and Exchange Commission both asked dismissal of the petition on the ground that two of the petitioners were not bona fide creditors.

While a decision was approaching, the company announced that it was negotiating for a loan which would care for the unexchanged debentures, in default, and diligently resisted the petition for involuntary bankruptcy. After the SEC had had its say, on Tuesday of last week the defaulted securi-

Continued on Page Nine

The New York Times

Published: August 29, 1943

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"Many locations had a window out onto the street where a cook would flip yeast pancakes on a griddle to draw in customers."

[EATER]



## 1940-1960



*By the 1950s, Fortune magazine deemed Childs 'quaint and forlorn'*  
[Politico]



*Hotel Corp of America:  
"The new name was adopted to reflect the growing importance of its activities in the hotel field through the purchase of the plaza Hotel in New York and the lease of the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago, the Cleveland in Cleveland, and the Somerset in Boston...."*  
[NYTimes, 1956, Feb 23]

1943

### CHILDS COMPANY FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

In August 1943, hurt by the depression and under pressure of significant debt maturity, the company filed for bankruptcy reorganization.<sup>[1]</sup> Childs emerged from bankruptcy in 1947,<sup>[20]</sup> and continued to operate through the 1940s and 1950s. [Wikipedia]

### CHILDS CONEY ISLAND SURF AVE. IS VACATED (1952?)

The location continued to be used for different restaurants up until 2013.

1947

### CHILDS COMPANY SOLD TO RICCI FAMILY

#### CHILDS CONEY ISLAND BOARDWALK BECOMES A CANDY FACTORY

*The Ricci Family converted the location and operated it as the Tell Chocolate Factory until 1961 when it was bought by the Riese Organization. The Ricci family maintained the building well: cleaning off any graffiti, and keeping the crests and nautical details in tact. Candy production inside the building dwindled down to almost nothing by the turn of the century, and the company called it quits in 2003. [EATER]*

1950

### BACK TO PANCAKES, DOWN TO 53 LOCATIONS

*By 1950, the company had shrunk to only 53 locations, and was losing money. Nonetheless, it managed to acquire the candy and ice cream maker Louis Sherry Inc., and announced several significant operational changes, including "returning to its old custom of flap-jack making in the windows" and the introduction of prepared meats, to eliminate the need for butchering on-site.<sup>[21]</sup> [Wikipedia]*

1955

### CHILDS COMPANY BUYS THE PLAZA HOTEL FOR \$6.2m (2018 \$60m)

1956

### CHILDS CO. CHANGES NAME TO HOTEL CORPORATION OF AMERICA (HCA)

*In 1955, a young hotelier named A.M. "Sonny" Sonnabend assumed the presidency of the Childs company, and pointed the enterprise in a new direction. In a series of coordinated transactions, the company's name was changed to **Hotel Corporation of America**, it acquired the Plaza Hotel in New York (across the street from the Savoy-Plaza Hotel, which Childs had developed), and entered into long-term leases for three other hotels in Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago.<sup>[22][23][24]</sup> The company was then structured into three divisions: restaurants, manufacturing and distribution of packaged foods (via subsidiaries Recipe Foods, Fred Fear, and Louis Sherry), and hotels.<sup>[25]</sup> HCA changed its name to Sonesta International Hotels in 1970 and sold the Plaza Hotel in 1975. [Wikipedia]*

### Childs Co. Changes Name

The Childs Company announced yesterday that it had changed its name to the Hotel Corporation of America. The new name was adopted to reflect the growing importance of its activities in the hotel field through the purchase of the Plaza Hotel in New York and the lease of the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago, the Cleveland in Cleveland, and the Somerset in Boston. The Childs restaurants will continue to operate under that name as a division of Hotel Corporation as will Louis Sherry, Inc., Fred Fear Company and Recipe Foods, Inc., all subsidiaries.

### The New York Times

Published: February 23, 1956

Copyright © The New York Times



When interviewed for the American Magazine in Nov. 1921, William Childs explained: ***“Nearly all restaurants had men waiters – but people were used to having women wait on them at home. We hired attractive girls, paid them more wages than they would get elsewhere, and maintained real discipline. Our young women did not wear jewelry, chew gum, or enter into unnecessary conversation.”***



## 1960 to 2020

*Childs at Coney Island  
Boardwalk:*

*In the years since Childs  
restaurant occupied this  
building it has served as a book  
storage warehouse, chocolate  
candy factory, roller rink, and  
now is currently a theater and  
dining venue.*

*For now, however, it will be hosting a  
temporary roller rink operated by  
boardwalk entrepreneur Lola Staar  
who got money for the enterprise by  
Tommy Hilfiger and Glamour  
magazine after she won a  
competition that asked entrants to  
write about their "dream come true."  
They'll be shooting a reality show  
about transformation from 1920s  
terra cotta to 2000s hot pink  
showcase. They may also be hosting  
burlesque shows.  
[CURBED]*

1961	<p><b>HCA RESTAURANT FRANCHISE BOUGHT BY RIESE ORGANIZATION</b></p> <p><i>In 1961, substantially all of the remaining Childs restaurant operations, now greatly diminished in number and considered part of the company's past, were sold to the Riese Organization (National Restaurants Management Inc.),<sup>[26]</sup> which as of 2009 operates more than 100 restaurants throughout New York City, including franchised units of Dunkin' Donuts, KFC, Pizza Hut, T.G.I. Friday's and Houlihan's. <b>A number of the Riese properties are former Childs Restaurants.</b><sup>[27]</sup></i> [Wikipedia]</p>
1970	<p><b>HOTEL FRANCHISE BOUGHT BY SONESTA INTERNATIONAL</b></p> <p>In 1970, Hotel Corporation of America (formerly Childs) was again renamed, to <b>Sonesta International Hotels Corporation</b>. As of 2009, the company operates 25 hotels on 3 continents, and owns several cruise ships, and is still led by the Sonnabend family. [Wikipedia]</p>
2003	<p><b>CHILDS CONEY ISLAND BOARDWALK BUILDING IS DESIGNATED A LANDMARKED</b></p> <p>In February the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission granted the Childs Coney Island Boardwalk building landmark status.</p>
2007	<p><b>CHILDS AT CONEY ISLAND SURF AVENUE BECOMES A CULTURAL INSTITUTION</b></p> <p>The building was bought by a local arts organization called Coney Island US. It now houses the Coney Island Museum, theater, bar and exhibition space.</p>
2008	<p><b>CHILDS CONEY ISLAND BOARDWALK BUILDING IS CONVERTED INTO A GLITZY ROLLER RINK</b></p> <p>Under the ownership of the Taconic Development Company with the impetus of the boardwalk entrepreneur <u>Lola Star</u>, the former Childs Boardwalk building reopened on March 22, 2008 as roller rink. [EATER]</p>
2010	<p><b>CHILDS AT CONEY ISLAND SURF AVE. IS LANDMARKED</b></p>
2014	<p><b>CHILDS CONEY ISLAND RENOVATION AS THEATER AND RESTAURANT</b></p> <p>As part of a city government initiative to revitalize the Coney Island boardwalk, the city invested more than \$180 million in rehabilitating the Childs Coney Island building into the Ford Amphitheater and Kitchen 21 restaurant.</p>

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<http://www.preserve.org/fotc/infochilds.htm>  
history of Coney Island Boardwalk Childs

<https://restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com/>

<https://qns.com/story/2016/07/07/owner-of-former-childs-restaurant-in-astoria-says-his-architect-has-interesting-ideas-to-preserve-terra-cotta/>

Childs Coney Island Boardwalk photos:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/coneyhop/sets/72157600996640617/>  
FLICKR – search under CHILDS RESTAURANT – lots of photos before the renovation



## CHILDS' RESTAURANTS IN PHOTOS

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First Childs' restaurant 1899

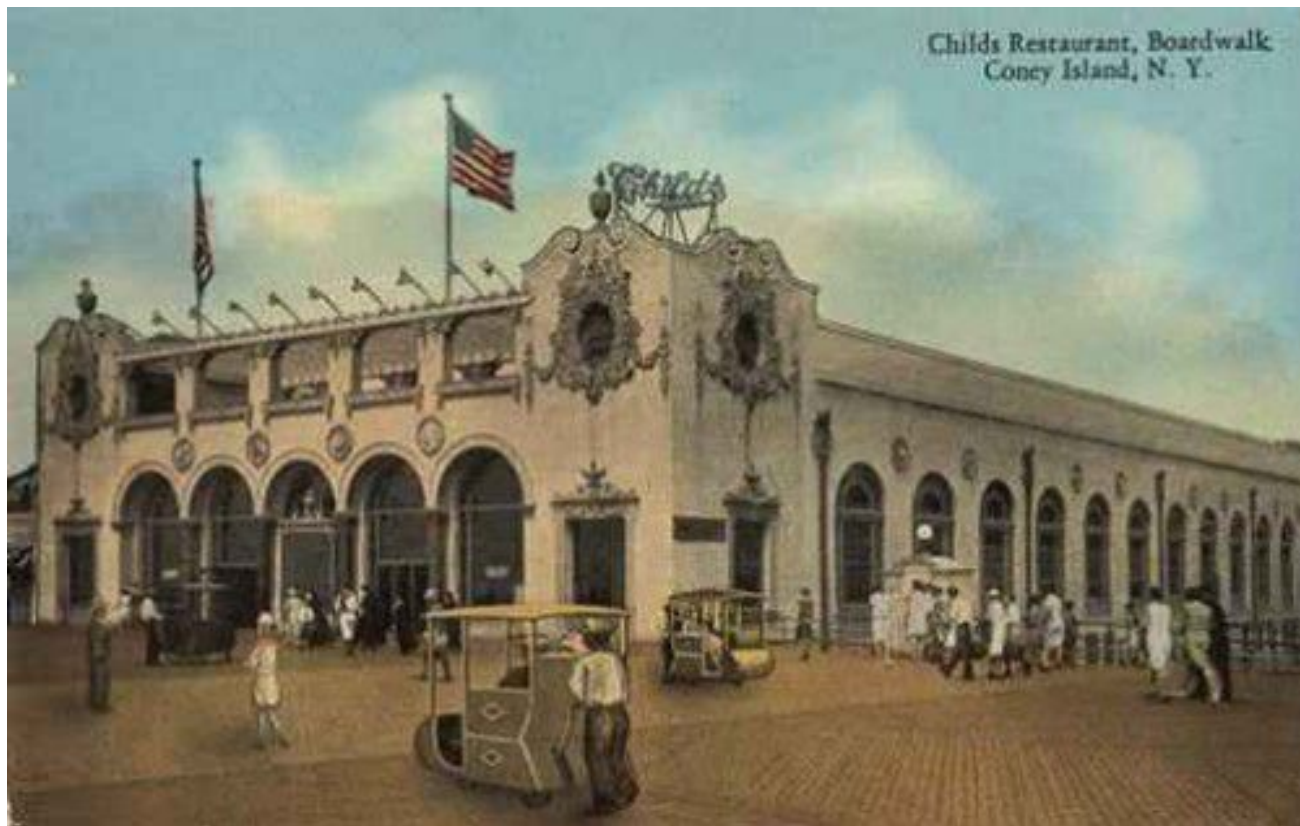


Childs Building at Coney Island Boardwalk

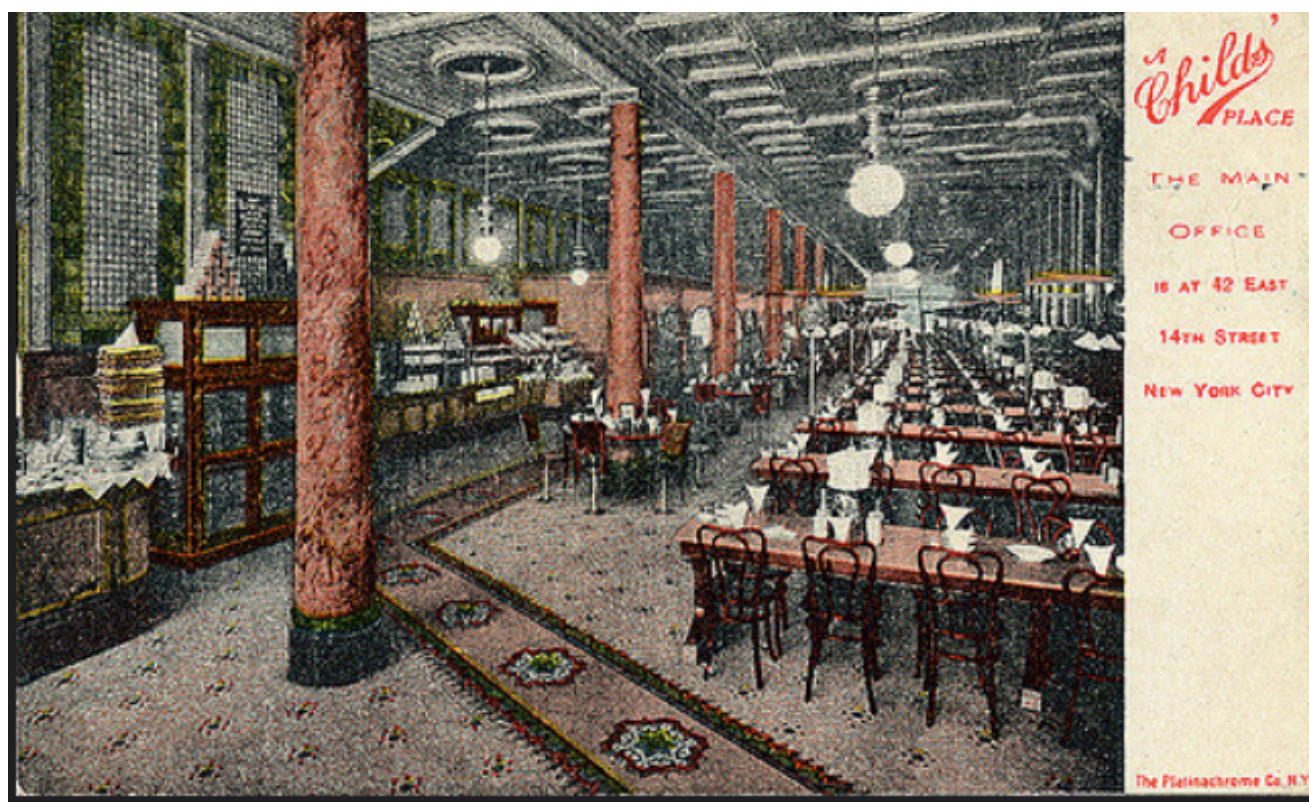
*... it was one of the biggest, and certainly the most ornate that the company had ever opened. The terra cotta façade was designed in Spanish Colonial style with off-design nautical motifs and shields, which were added to match the flavor of the boardwalk attractions just to the east. A critic for American Architect in 1924 wrote that these details were "so lifelike that they might easily have floated in with the tide from Barren Island." Inside, the space was clean and open, with large, arched windows to provide diners with optimal people watching and views of the water. The building also boasted a semi-enclosed rooftop garden. [EATER]*











Childs' Place, 42 E 14<sup>th</sup> Street







Childs' Building at across from Macy's



Childs' Building Pennsylvania Ave., Washington DC, 1917





Childs Building at 123 Park Row, 1915



Childs' Building at 194 Broadway, 1910



Childs Building at 184 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, 1910



Childs restaurant at 283 Broadway, 1907



Childs' restaurant at 47 Broadway



Childs' restaurant building at 604 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.



Childs' restaurant at Atlantic City Boardwalk



Childs' Washington, DC 1920



1 Park Row, New York  
J. Co.

Mr. J. C. Westervelt, Architect

*Walls, Columns and Ceiling in White Glazed Tile of various sizes, Wainscot in Olive Enamel Tile. Borders in Green, Red and Yellow of high Lustre. The Treatment of Beams deserves special attention*









## **CHILDS' RESTAURANTS**

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### **DISTINCTIVE TERRA COTTA TILE WORK**





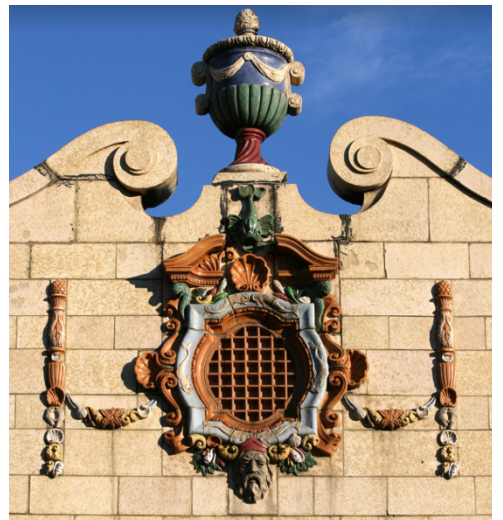
*This use of color, accomplished chiefly through the application of polychrome terra cotta for detail against wall surfaces of soft buff colored stucco of engaging texture, is perhaps the most satisfying feature of the whole visual effect...that the result reflects an achievement in collaborative [terra-cotta] manufacture of the highest excellence is of immense significance to the future of color in architecture in America.*

*[The American Architect & The Architectural Review, (9/10/24): "Building for the Childs Co. at Coney Island," by F.S. Laurence*





Terra Cotta work by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company







## CHILDS' RESTAURANTS MENUS ....

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A rectangular advertisement for Childs Restaurant. At the top, a dark banner with white text reads "A TRADITION FOR QUALITY FOOD". Below this, the word "Childs" is written in a large, white, cursive script on a dark, tilted rectangular background. Underneath the logo, the text "If You Visit Us Once — You'll Return!" is printed in a bold, sans-serif font. Below this is a bulleted list of four menu items. At the bottom, the restaurant's name "CHILDS RESTAURANT" is printed in a bold, sans-serif font, with the address "205 Portage and Main St." on the left and the phone number "Phone WH 2-5732" on the right.

**A TRADITION FOR QUALITY FOOD**

*Childs*

**If You Visit Us Once — You'll Return!**

- Filet Mignon with Mushrooms
- Half Southern Fried Chicken
- Steamed Lake Winnipeg Goldeye
- Childs Specialty "Hot Cakes"

**CHILDS RESTAURANT**

205 Portage and Main St. Phone WH 2-5732

# CHILDS' LUNCH ROOMS

THROUGHOUT THE CITY

## BILL OF FARE.

Fridays	{ Clam Chowder.....	10
	{ Fish Cakes .....	10
	{ " " with Tomato Sauce.....	15

### QUICK LUNCH.

Tea or Coffee.....	5
Liebig's Beef Tea.....	5
Butter Cakes.....	5
Wheat Cakes with Maple Syrup.....	10
Buckwheat " " " ".....	10
Cornmeal " " " ".....	10
Dry Toast.....	10
Buttered Toast.....	10
Corned Beef.....	10
Cold Ham.....	10

The above two with Beans, N. Y. or Boston.

English Beef Soup.....	10
Beef Stew.....	10
Pork and Beans.....	10
Boston Baked Beans.....	10

SANDWICHES 5c. with White or Graham Bread.

### DAIRY DISHES.

With Milk from Our Own Dairy.

Shredded Wheat and Milk.....	10	Milk Crackers and Milk.....	10
Oatmeal and Milk.....	10	Graham " " ".....	10
Rice and Milk.....	10	Milk Toast.....	15
Soda Crackers and Milk.....	10		

The above with part Cream, 5c. extra. Glass of Milk, 5c., part Cream, 10c.; all Cream, 15c.

### FRESH EGGS.

2 Boiled Eggs.....	15c.; 3, 20
2 Fried Eggs.....	15c.; 3, 20
2 Scrambled Eggs.....	15c.; 3, 20
Plain Omelet.....	15
Ham ".....	20
Poached Eggs on Toast.....	20

Small Steak.....	20	Broiled Ham.....	20
Sirloin Steak.....	30	Corned Beef Hash, browned in	
Hamburger Steak.....	20	the pan.....	15
Bacon and Eggs.....	25	Corned Beef Hash, with 2 Poached	
Ham and Eggs.....	25	Eggs.....	25
Fried Ham.....	20		

### DESSERT.

All Pies in Season.....	5	Apple Sauce.....	5
Crullers.....	5	Ice Cream.....	10
Stewed Prunes.....	5	Cup Custard.....	10
Charlotte Russe.....	5	Baked Apple with Cream.....	5

RICE PUDDING 5c.

NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR PERSONAL PROPERTY  
UNLESS CHECKED BY THE MANAGER.

2 Feb. 1900

(OVER.)

From 1900  
menu

## A GLASS OF WATER

*—a la King*

A simple gesture, a fresh, sterile glass filled with brilliantly clear water, carefully placed at your left hand (as though you were a King) even before you have selected your entree. That is CHILDS' hospitality rite. It is your daily introduction to delicious food, properly served. Guests often tell us that such simple, traditional courtesies have gone a long way toward making CHILDS —

*Everywhere the Nation's Host*

## *Something about Childs' Salad Bowls*

Childs' refreshing Salad Bowls have long been famous for their deliciousness and satisfying nourishment.

Carefully prepared according to Childs' own recipes, each salad is made by a trained Salad Girl under the guidance of a Staff Supervisor.

Childs has built a reputation for superior salad bowls. Your first taste will tell you why.

From 1901 menu

### LOCATION OF HOUSES.

45 Cortlandt Street  
90 Fulton Street  
54 Beaver Street  
1305 Broadway  
122 West 23d Street  
10 & 12 East 23d Street  
221 Sixth Avenue  
815 Broadway  
130 Broadway  
272 West 125th Street  
1 Chambers Street  
768 Broadway  
283 Sixth Avenue  
42 East 14th Street  
47 East 42d Street  
111 East 125th Street  
440 Broadway  
46 Church Street,  
New Haven, Conn.



## FOOD

---

- 1 - Use less Wheat and Meat
- 2 - Foods are Fuels for  
Fighters
- 3 - Food — Don't waste it
- 4 - Save a loaf a week
- 5 - Eat more Cornmeal, Rye  
Flour, Oatmeal and  
Barley
- 6 - Wheat—use more Corn
- 7 - Food—is Ammunition
- 8 - Meat—use more Fish and  
Beans
- 9 - Sugar—use Syrup

## BREAKFAST



*Childs*

We are members of the  
**UNITED STATES FOOD  
ADMINISTRATION**

*Eat Plenty—Eat Wisely—But Without Waste*

**Food Will Decide the War**

SAVE THE WHEAT  
SAVE THE MEAT  
SAVE THE FATS  
SAVE THE SUCAR  
SAVE THE FUEL

**For Your Soldiers at the Front  
Need Them All**

1917-0426 copy 2



## FOOD CONSERVATION MENU

### MEATLESS TUESDAY

November Thirteenth

NYC

#### BREAD:

Serve bread or rolls made from corn, rye, or from mixed flours. Use breakfast food and hot cakes composed of corn, oatmeal, buckwheat, rice or hominy. Under European plan, give individual service of bread and butter of uniform weight, rolls or slices to weigh not more than 1½ ounces. Serve absolutely no toast as garniture or under meat, etc. Serve war bread. Do not serve bread and butter before the first course. People eat them without thought. Where a charge is made for bread, a higher charge should be made for white bread. If white bread is demanded, charge for it.

#### MEAT:

Use more chicken, fish, hare, rabbit, duck, goose, lobster, oysters, clams, sea foods and egg dishes of all kinds. Use less beef, mutton and pork. Serve smaller portions of these. Have fewer of these items on the menu. If you must include one of the three, use mutton in preference. Serve "per person" portions of these meats, of moderate size, and charge accordingly. War portions at reduced prices may be served. Provide more entrées and made dishes. Beans are most useful, as they contain nearly the same nutritive values as meat. Serve bacon only as a dish, not as a garniture. The service of fresh pork to guests and employees should be discouraged.

#### MILK:

Use it all. Economize on milk and cream except for children. Serve buttermilk. Serve cottage cheese regularly in varying forms; it is especially nutritious. Use skimmed milk in cooking. A great quantity of it goes to waste in the country. Use cheese generally. The children must have whole milk, therefore reduce use of cream.

#### FATS:

Serve as few fried dishes as possible so as to save both butter and lard, and in any event use vegetable oils for frying, that is, olive oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, vegetable oil compounds, etc. They are equally good. Serve all butter in standard pats for guests and employees. A butter pat machine promotes economy. Trim all coarse fats from meats before cooking and sell the waste fats to the soap maker, thereby increasing supply of soap and glycerine. We are short of soap fats, as our supplies of tropical oils for soap making are much reduced. Do not waste soap.

#### SUGAR:

Use less candy and sweet drinks. Use honey, maple syrup, molasses and dark syrups with hot cakes and waffles in order to save butter and sugar. Use also all classes of fruit preserves, jams, marmalades and jellies. Use brown sugar in cooking and economize by the use of granulated sugar on the table. Do not frost or ice cakes. Use honey for sweetening pastry and cakes.

#### VEGETABLES:

Use more vegetables and potatoes. Make fruits and vegetables into salads and attractive dishes. Feature vegetable dinners and vegetable salads of all kinds. Encourage the use of cheese with salads. We have a great surplus of vegetables, and they can be used by substituting them for staples, so that the staples most needed will be saved.

UNITED STATES FOOD ADMINISTRATION.

## BREAKFAST MENU

### SEASONABLE FRUITS

Honey Dew Melon . . .	10		
Sliced Banana . . . . .	05	Sliced Orange . . . . .	10
Apple Sauce . . . . .	05	Orange Juice . . . . .	10
Stewed Prunes . . . . .	05	Whole Orange . . . . .	10
Marmalade . . . . .	05	Grape Fruit . . . . .	15

FRESH BAKED APPLE, 10  
Cream with Fruit, 05 Extra

### CEREALS

Shredded Wheat	
One Biscuit, small pitcher of cream . . . . .	10
Two Biscuits, with bottle of milk or large pitcher of cream . . . . .	15
Flaked Cereals, small pitcher of cream . . . . .	10
Flaked Cereals, large pitcher of cream or bottle of milk . . . . .	15
Oatmeal, Cream of Wheat, or Rice,	
Half portions, small pitcher cream . . . . .	10
With bottle of milk or large pitcher of cream . .	15

### POSITIVELY FRESH EGGS

TWO EGGS, Boiled, Fried, Scrambled, or Poached .	20
Plain Omelet . . . . .	20
Creamed Eggs on Toast . . . . .	25
Poached Eggs on Toast . . . . .	25

### SPECIALS

FISH CAKES . . . . .	15
Fried Corn Meal Mush, with Syrup . . . . .	15
Onion Omelet . . . . .	25
Chicken Hash . . . . .	25
Creamed Chicken on Toast . . . . .	30
Chicken Omelet . . . . .	30
French Fried Potatoes . . . . .	5 & 10

### GRIDDLE SPECIALTIES

Butter Cakes . . . . .	05
GRIDDLE CAKES WITH SYRUP . . . . .	10
Rye, Corn Meal, Old-Fashioned Buckwheat or Wheat Toast, Dry or Buttered . . . . .	10
Milk Toast . . . . .	20
French Toast . . . . .	20
Corn Muffins . . . . .	05
Coffee Cake . . . . .	05
One Cruller . . . . .	05

### BEVERAGES

Tea or Coffee . . . . .	05	Milk, per Bottle . . . . .	10
Hot Chocolate . . . . .	10	Milk, Half Cream . . . . .	15
Coffee, with Cream . . . . .	10	Pure Cream, per Bottle .	20
Bulgarzoon (Scientifically Fermented Milk), per Bottle, 10, with Vichy . . . . .	15		
Childs' Blend or English Breakfast Tea, per pot . .	10		





## CHILDS' RESTAURANTS IN LYRICS, PLAYS, & FILM ....

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### Lyrics:

*What A Waste (Wonderful Town, 1953)*

*Manhattan (Garrick Gaieties, 1925)*

*You Can't Take it with You (1938)*

### Plays:

*'You Can't Take it with You' (Kaufman & Hart, 1936)*

*'The Governor's Lady' (Belasco, Bradley, 1912)*

*Scene in 'Transatlantic' (Antheil, 1930)*

### Poems:

*"Spain in Fifty-Ninth Street", by E.B. White*

### Film:

*The Odd Couple (1968)*

*Taxi Driver (1976)*

### TV:

*Boardwalk Empire (season 2 finale)*

*And others ...*





## CHILDS' IN PLAYS



### “You Can’t Take It With You” (1936)

*You Can't Take It with You* is a Pulitzer Prize-winning comedic play in three acts by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart. The original production of the play premiered on Broadway in 1936, and played for 838 performances. Frank Capra directed the movie in 1938 movie starring Jean Arthur, Lionel Barrymore, James Stewart and Edward Arnold.

**The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina** (Preferred age: 40 and up)  
She was one of the Grand Duchesses of Russia before the Revolution, another being her sister, the Grand Duchess Natasha. Since then she has been **forced to flee to America where she has found work as a waitress in Childs Restaurant**. The rest of her family has had a similar fate, such as her Uncle Sergei, the Grand Duke, who is now an elevator man. She loves to cook as a hobby. This character will appear later in the play, and the actress needs to be able to be a bit over-the-top, but not over do it. A memorable, not necessarily overwhelming, Russian accent is desired.

### Scenes in:

‘The Governor’s Lady’ by David Belasco, Alice Bradley (1912)

‘Transatlantic’ by George Antheil ( 1930)

## IN PRINT

### "Spain in Fifty-Ninth Street" (Poem by E.B. White)

This poem tells the story of a brief but emotional interaction between a Childs hostess and a random customer (described as a "man of affairs") at the "Spanish Childs" location, presumably on 59th Street.[114] White wrote a number of other short stories and poems that referenced or featured Childs, likely due to the daily presence of the establishments in his life during the late 1920s and 1930s in New York City. [Wikipedia]

## CHILDS' IN FILM

### Odd Couple (1968)

In the opening montage sequence of Neil Simon and Gene Saks' 1968 film, *The Odd Couple* includes a shot of a neon-signed Childs restaurant in New York City, one of several locations Felix Ungar (Jack Lemmon) visits before checking into a fleabag hotel to try to commit suicide. [Wikipedia]

### Taxi Driver (1976)

Travis (Robert DeNiro) take Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) to the Childs restaurant at Columbus Circle for a date.



## GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

### MANHATTAN FROM "GARRICK GAITIES," 1925

RODGERS AND HART

SUMMER JOURNEYS TO NIAG'RA  
AND TO OTHER PLACES AGGRA-  
VATE ALL OUR CARES  
WE'LL SAVE OUR FARES  
I'VE A COZY LITTLE FLAT IN  
WHAT IS KNOWN AS OLD  
MANHATTAN  
WE'LL SETTLE DOWN  
RIGHT HERE IN TOWN

(CHORUS)  
WE'LL HAVE MANHATTAN  
THE BRONX AND STATEN  
ISLAND, TOO  
IT'S LOVELY GOING THROUGH  
THE ZOO  
IT'S VERY FANCY  
ON OLD DELANCEY  
STREET, YOU KNOW  
THE SUBWAY CHARMS US SO  
WHERE BALMY BREEZES BLOW  
TO AND FROM  
AND TELL ME WHAT STREET  
COMPARES WITH MOTT STREET  
IN JULY?  
SWEET PUSHCARTS GENTLY  
GLIDING BY

## CHILDS' IN MUSICALS

"Manhattan" is a popular song and part of the Great American Songbook. It has been performed by the Supremes, Lee Wiley, Oscar Peterson, Blossom Dearie, Tony Martin, Dinah Washington, Ella Fitzgerald and Mel Torme, among many others. It is often known as "We'll Have Manhattan" based on the opening line. The music was written by Richard Rodgers and the words by Lorenz Hart for the 1925 revue "Garrick Gaities". It was introduced by Sterling Holloway (later the voice of the animated Winnie the Pooh) and June Cochran.

(CHORUS 2)  
WE'LL GO TO GREENWICH  
WHERE MODERN MEN ITCH  
TO BE FREE  
AND BOWLING GREEN YOU'LL SEE  
WITH ME  
WE'LL BATHE AT BRIGHTON  
THE FISH YOU'LL FRIGHTEN  
WHEN YOU'RE IN  
YOUR BATHING SUIT SO THIN  
WILL MAKE THE SHELLFISH GRIN  
FIN TO FIN  
I'D LIKE TO TAKE A  
SAIL ON JAMAICA  
BAY WITH YOU  
AND FAIR CANARSIE'S LAKE WE'LL VIEW  
THE CITY'S BUSTLE CANNOT DESTROY  
THE DREAMS OF A GIRL AND BOY  
WE'LL TURN MANHATTAN INTO AN ISLE  
OF JOY

(CHORUS 3)  
**WE'LL GO TO YONKERS  
WHERE TRUE LOVE CONQUERS  
IN THE WILD  
AND STARVE TOGETHER, DEAR  
IN CHILDS**  
WE'LL GO TO CONEY  
AND EAT BALONEY  
ON A ROLL  
IN CENTRAL PARK WE'LL STROLL  
WHERE OUR FIRST KISS WE STOLE  
SOUL TO SOUL  
OUR FUTURE BABIES  
WE'LL TAKE TO ABIE'S  
IRISH ROSE  
I HOPE THEY LIVE TO SEE IT CLOSE  
THE CITY'S CLAMOR CAN NEVER SPOIL  
THE DREAMS OF A BOY AND GOIL  
WE'LL TURN MANHATTAN INTO AN ISLE  
OF JOY

(CHORUS 3)  
**WE'LL GO TO YONKERS  
WHERE TRUE LOVE CONQUERS  
IN THE WILD  
AND STARVE TOGETHER, DEAR  
IN CHILDS**  
WE'LL GO TO CONEY  
AND EAT BALONEY  
ON A ROLL  
IN CENTRAL PARK WE'LL STROLL  
WHERE OUR FIRST KISS WE STOLE  
SOUL TO SOUL  
OUR FUTURE BABIES  
WE'LL TAKE TO ABIE'S  
IRISH ROSE  
I HOPE THEY LIVE TO SEE IT CLOSE  
THE CITY'S CLAMOR CAN NEVER SPOIL  
THE DREAMS OF A BOY AND GOIL  
WE'LL TURN MANHATTAN INTO AN  
ISLE OF JOY

(CHORUS 4)  
WE'LL HAVE MANHATTAN  
THE BRONX AND STATEN  
ISLAND, TOO  
WE'LL TRY TO CROSS FIFTH A-  
VENUE  
AS BLACK AS ONYX  
WE'LL FIND THE BRONNIX  
PARK EXPRESS  
OUR FLATBUSH FLAT, I GUESS  
WILL BE A GREAT SUCCESS  
MORE OR LESS  
A SHORT VACATION  
ON INSPIRATION  
POINT WE'LL SPEND  
AND IN THE STATION HOUSE WE'LL  
END  
BUT CIVIC VIRTUE CANNOT DESTROY  
THE DREAMS OF A GIRL AND BOY  
WE'LL TURN MANHATTAN INTO AN  
ISLE OF JOY



## What A Waste From 'Wonderful Town', 1953

Lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green  
Music by Leonard Bernstein

GO HOME!  
GO WEST!  
GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM!  
OH, WHY DID YOU EVER LEAVE OHIO?

A MILLION KIDS JUST LIKE YOU  
COME TO TOWN EVERY DAY  
WITH STARS IN THEIR EYES.

THEY'RE GOING TO CONQUER THE CITY,  
THEY'RE GOING TO GRAB OFF THE PULITZER PRIZE,

BUT IT'S A TERRIBLE PITY,  
BECAUSE THEY'RE IN FOR A BITTER SURPRISE.

AND THEIR STORIES ALL FOLLOW ONE LINE,  
LIKE HIS,  
LIKE HIS,  
LIKE MINE!

BORN IN DULUTH,  
NATURAL WRITER,  
PUBLISHED AT SEVEN -- GENIUS TYPE --

WROTE THE SCHOOL PLAY,  
WROTE THE SCHOOL PAPER,  
SUMMA CUM LAUDE -- ALL OF THAT TRIP --

CAME TO NEW YORK,  
GOT ON THE STAFF HERE,  
THIS WAS MY CHANCE TO BE HEARD.  
WELL, SINCE THEN I HAVEN'T WRITTEN A WORD.

WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY AND TIME!

MAN FROM DETROIT,  
WONDERFUL ARTIST,  
WENT TO PICASSO -- PABLO SAID WOW!

SETTLED IN FRANCE,  
BOUGHT HIM A BERET,  
LIVED IN MONTMARTRE,  
REALLY LEARNED HOW.

CAME TO NEW YORK -- HAD AN EXHIBIT,  
ART CRITICS MADE A BIG FUSS.  
NOW, HE PAINTS THOSE TOOTHPASTE ADS ON THE BUS!

WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY AND TIME!

GIRL FROM MOBILE,  
VERSATILE ACTRESS,  
TRAGIC OR COMIC,  
ANY OLD PLAY,

SUFFERED AND STARVED,  
MET STANISLAVSKY.  
HE SAID THE WORLD WOULD  
CHEER HER SOME DAY.  
CAME TO NEW YORK,  
REPERTOIRE READY,  
CHEKHOVS AND SHAKESPEARES AND WILDES.

**NOW, THEY WATCH HER FLIPPING FLAPJACKS  
AT CHILDS.**

WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY AND TIME!

KID FROM CAPE COD,  
FISHERMAN'S FAMILY,  
MARVELOUS SINGER -- BIG BARITONE --

RENTED HIS BOAT,  
PAID FOR HIS LESSONS,  
STARVED FOR HIS STUDIES,  
DOWN TO THE BONE.

CAME TO NEW YORK,  
AIMED AT THE OPERA,  
SING RIGOLETTO HIS WISH.  
AT THE FULTON MARKET NOW HE YELLS FISH!

WHAT A WASTE,  
WHAT A WASTE, AH -- FISH!  
WHAT A WASTE OF MONEY AND TIME!

GO HOME! GO WEST!  
GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM!

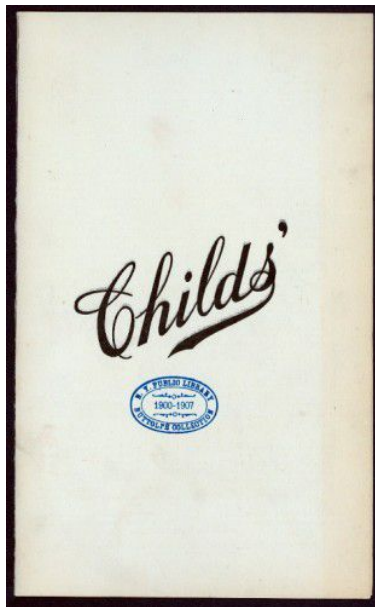
GO HOME!





CHILDS' RESTAURANTS  
CONEY ISLAND BOARDWALK  
NYC LANDMARKS DESIGNATION

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

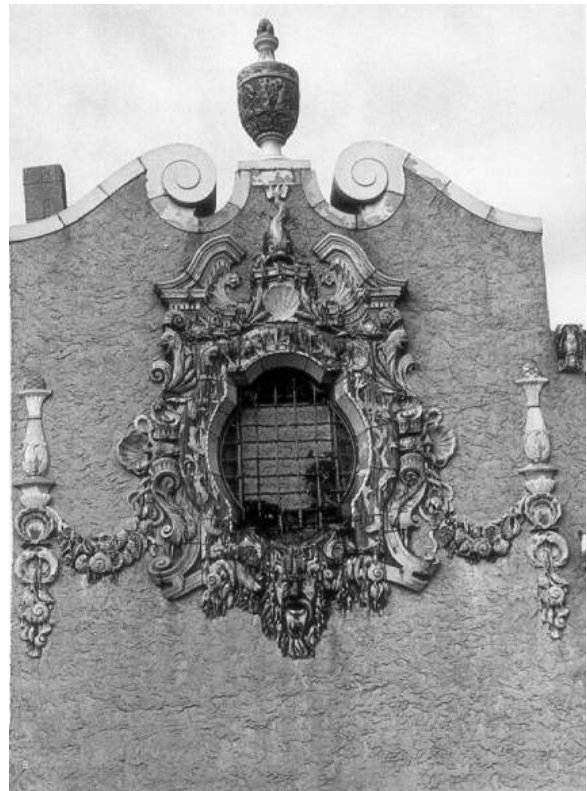
Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 7071, Lot 130.

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.

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.



B



## 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, grinning 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  
Virginia Kurshan  
Research Department

### 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.



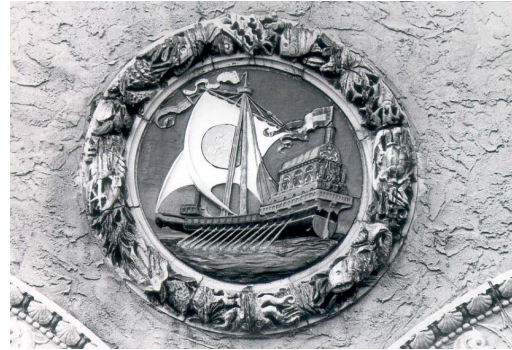
(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
2102 Boardwalk (aka 3052-3078 West 21<sup>st</sup> Street), Brooklyn  
Photo: Carl Forster



(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
Terra cotta medallions  
Photos: 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



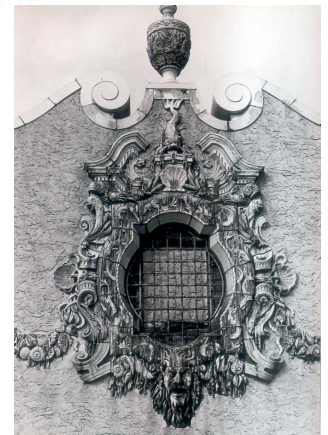
(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
Terra cotta details  
Photos: Carl Forster



Details, eastern facade



Detail of end pier

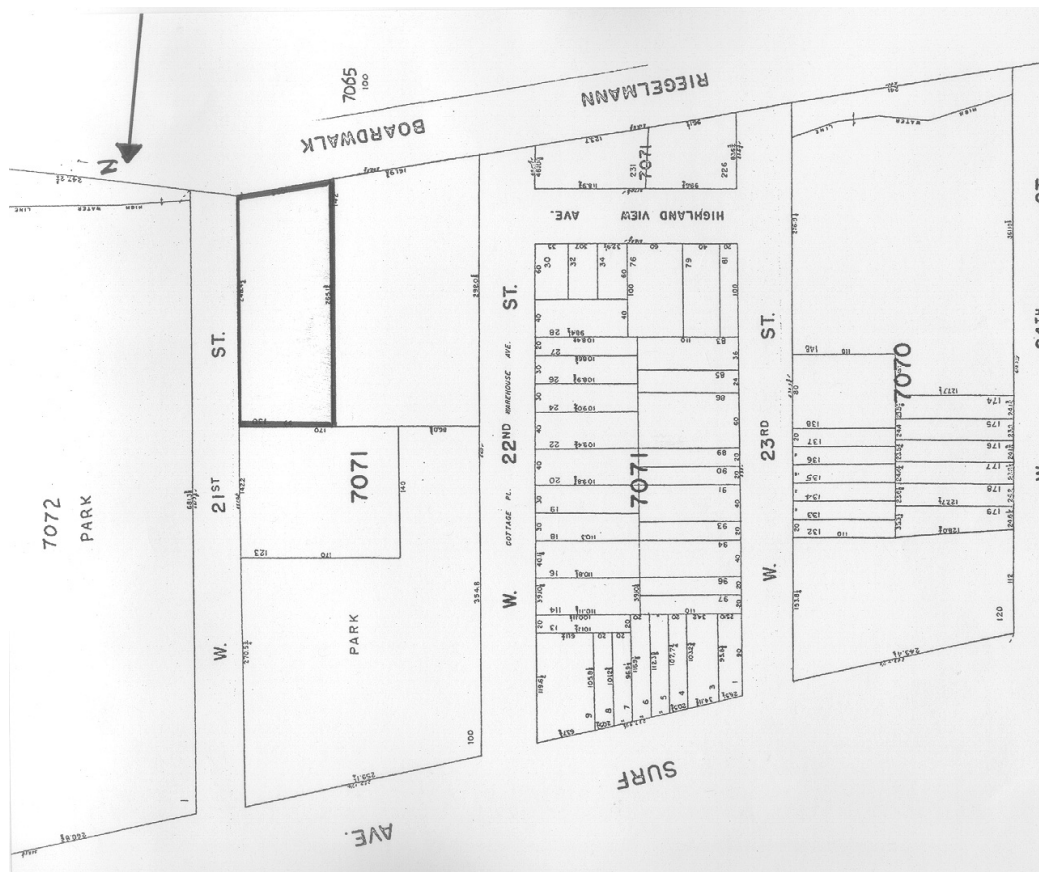


Terra cotta detail

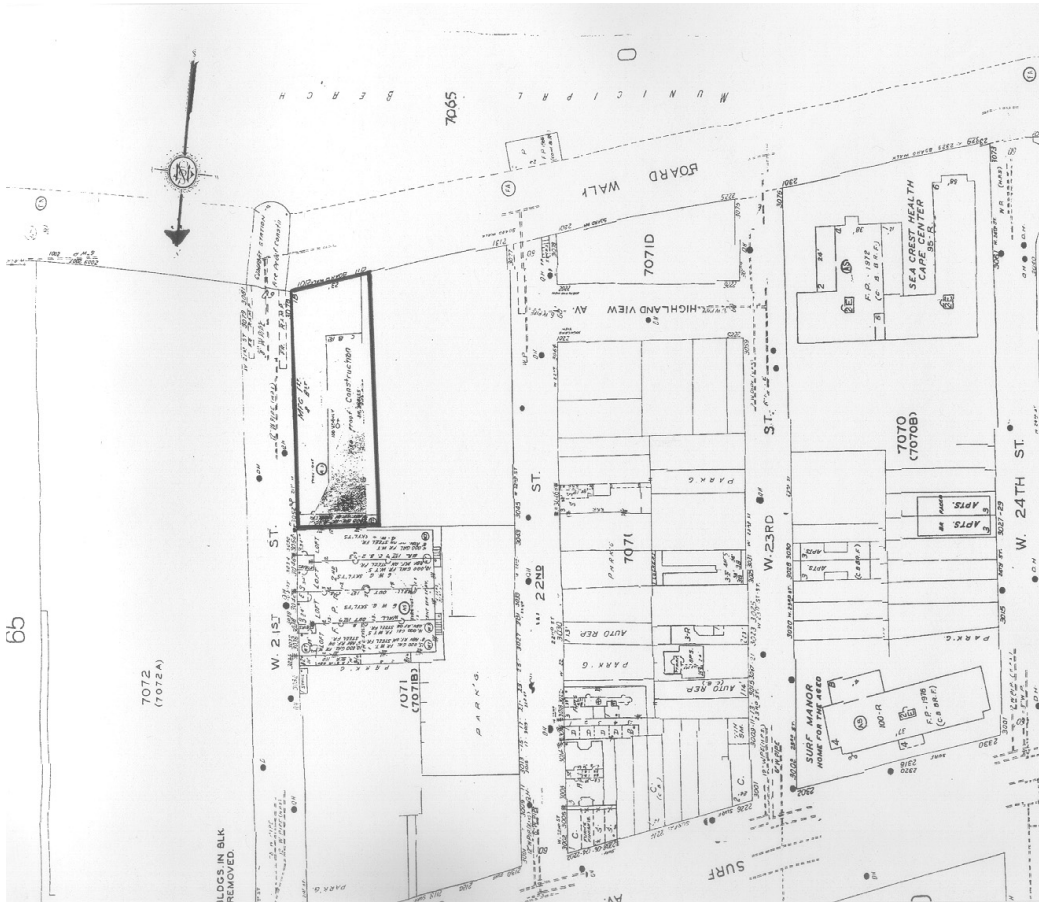
(Former) Childs Restaurant Building  
Photos: Carl Forster

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



(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





## CHILDS' RESTAURANTS RECIPE FOR PANCAKES

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## CHILDS' TRADITIONAL BUTTER CAKES (PANCAKES)

[from POLITICO: <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2012/01/lost-foods-of-new-york-city-butter-cakes-from-childs-restaurant-067223>]

Childs' butter cakes were a hit across New York City—from the chain's bustling, commuter-friendly location in Grand Central to its beachfront hub on the Coney Island boardwalk. Throughout the day, cooks dressed in crisply pressed uniforms stood at a long griddle set in the restaurant's front window, flipping an endless supply of the cakes. These public window performances, which invited onlookers to gawk-before-buying, "immediately entered New York mythology," writes William Grimes in *Appetite City*. For five cents, customers, after watching the impromptu show, could enjoy one of the freshly cooked cakes topped with melting pats of rich, grassy butter (healthfully made at the Childs' own dairy, remember) and drizzles of maple syrup. Maybe not what we would call a dietetic object-lesson, but in its day carrying all the marks of robust wholesomeness.

Along with Childs' fluffy "wheat cakes" (pancakes), their butter cakes were the delight of New York businessmen and women, tourists, children, and the city's artist class, who convened there after-hours for a late-night fix. Not so much "breakfast for dinner," the cakes were simply a 24-hour treat. Celebrated New York gastronome James Beard was also a devoted fan. In his 1964 classic *Delights and Prejudices*, in which he detailed his favorite tastes from throughout his culinary life, he wrote, "One cannot have lived in New York ... of the twenties and thirties without knowing Childs ... who could forget their butter cakes, which were made in the window on a long griddle?"

... Today, a toasted English muffin with butter melting into its pockmarked surface is our closest contemporary link to those old butter cakes. But the recipe, thankfully, isn't lost to history, and to truly tap into the spectacle of eating at Childs' original Cortlandt Street lunchroom, fire up the griddle pan and make them yourself.



## CHILDS BUTTER CAKES

*I adapted this recipe from one written by former Childs cook Edna Sypher Kane, and retrieved from her recipe collection by her grandson, Glen Marshall. See the original handwritten recipe on The Leaven. Makes 12-14 cakes*



- 4 1/2 teaspoons (two 1/4-oz packets) dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 1/4 cups warm water (110-115 degrees)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, divided

1. Stir together yeast and sugar in a medium bowl. Add water, mix gently, and let sit until mixture is frothy, about 5 minutes. Add butter, salt, and 1 cup of flour, mixing well until combined.

2. Add the remaining 2 1/2 cups of flour, stirring with a wooden spoon until the mixture begins to come away from the sides of the bowl. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until it turns supple and silky, 5-7 minutes. Return dough to the bowl, cover and let rise in a warm place until it doubles in size, about 1 hour.

3. Gently deflate dough. Turn it out onto a lightly floured surface and roll it out until it is 3/4-inch thick. Use a 3-inch round cookie cutter to cut circles from the dough. Cover rounds with a towel and let rest until puffed, about 15 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, heat a seasoned griddle pan over medium-low heat. Transfer the rounds to the griddle and cook until golden brown and cooked through, turning once, 2-3 minutes per side. Like with pancakes, you may have to adjust the heat during cooking to avoid burning.

5. Transfer butter cakes to a wire rack to cool. To serve: slice in half, toast if desired, and serve with butter and maple syrup. Extra cakes can be stored in an airtight container the fridge or in plastic bags in the freezer. Reheat before serving.



## CHILDS' RESTAURANTS FUN FACTS

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## 1

### **CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ... THE ORIGINAL iHop !**



To attract families with kids, the Childs brothers came up with the idea to have a cook in the window flipping pancakes. As a result, Childs restaurants became famous for their 'flap jacks'. So not surprising, perhaps, that the company that eventually bought out Childs (the Riese Organization) is the company that started iHOP,

*Ask Kate if you would like the recipe for Childs Butter Cakes (original yeast pancake recipe).*

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## 2

### **CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ... POSSIBLY WERE THE PREDECESSOR TO THE AUTOMAT**

A branch of Childs in the NY Financial District that had self-serve sandwiches is credited for inspiring the cafeteria-style, grab-and-go service that would become such a huge part of urban dining in the early and mid 19th century.

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### 3

#### CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ... THE FIRST TO EMPHASIZE ORGANIC INGREDIENTS

Childs' menus often advertised their milk as arriving "fresh from [the Childs'] dairy each morning." A 1926 menu even provided the vitamin value of each item listed.

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### 4

#### CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ... OFFERING THE FIRST ALL VEGETARIAN MENU

*"When Samuel Childs died in 1925, his brother William, a health-nut of sorts, took over the company and instituted an almost entirely vegetarian menu, which proved to be a total flop — he was ousted by the shareholders, and meat was put back on the menu in 1928."*

[from EATER website]

*William Childs' 1938 obituary in The Reading Eagle provided some insight into his decision, quoting him as saying, "I did it for the same reason that I put white tile in my first restaurant. I honestly thought that was what the public wanted."*

[from <https://www.citylab.com/life/2016/02/childs-restaurant-food-safety-sanitation-hygiene>]

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**5**  
**CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ...**  
**WERE SUPER CLEAN !!**

To emphasize the hygiene of their restaurants the Childs brothers intentionally wanted their dining interiors to look like a hospital.

“.. Childs restaurants had white tile walls and floors, white marble countertops, mirrors, wooden furniture and servers wearing starched white uniforms, like nurses.” [EATER]

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**6**  
**CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ...**  
**WERE THEY THE PREDECESSOR TO McDONALDS ?**

The Childs brothers pioneered the idea of a restaurant chain established on the principle of providing affordable and healthy meals for the middle class, working population.

To reduce costs, they created a standardized menu for all their branches. In some locations, they even standardized the cooking by having food delivered to a network of branches from one central kitchen.

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**CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ...  
SUPPORTED WOMEN IN THE WORK FORCE WHEN FEW OTHER  
BUSINESSES DID**

**The Childs restaurants may have been the first and only restaurants in their time to have a policy to hire only women for their waiting staff.**

When interviewed for the American Magazine in Nov. 1921, William Childs explained: ***“Nearly all restaurants had men waiters – but people were used to having women wait on them at home. We hired attractive girls, paid them more wages than they would get elsewhere, and maintained real discipline. Our young women did not wear jewelry, chew gum, or enter into unnecessary conversation.”***

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**CHILDS RESTAURANTS, ...  
AT THEIR PEAK IN THE LATE 1920s WERE 25% EMPLOYEE OWNED**

In September 1919, the company launched an employee stock ownership plan for its restaurant managers, and three years later, extended the plan to all employees. Within 10 years, employees would own almost 25% of the company's common stock.

[Wikipedia]

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**CHILDS RESTAURANTS,  
WERE DESIGNED BY ONLY THE BEST ARCHITECTS**

Among the prestigious architects hired by the Childs brothers were:

- William Van Alen (before he designed the Chrysler Building in 1929)
  - McKim, Mead, and White
  - Pruitt & Brown, and
  - Hirons & Dennison (Their own, Beaux Arts trained inhouse architects)
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**CHILDS BOARDWALK CONEY ISLAND BUILDING, ...  
WAS A CHOCOLATE FACTORY ALMOST AS LONG AS IT WAS A  
RESTAURANT**

Since it was sold in 1947, the building was used for almost 50 years by a chocolate factory before being abandoned. Fortunately, it was not forgotten and was landmarked in 2003. In 2014 the building was renovated and turned into a theater and dining establishment.

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