



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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News Release

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LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION DESIGNATES CHILDS RESTAURANT IN CONEY ISLAND

On **February 4, 2003** the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the (Former) Childs Restaurant Building on the Boardwalk at Coney Island as a New York City landmark. This exuberant building significantly contributes to the cultural, historical and architectural character of New York City.

Childs Restaurant opened in this fancifully designed building on Coney Island's boardwalk in 1923. 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. “The building’s whimsical architecture, which survives as a celebration of the area’s past, is now secured for the future.”

The once-popular Childs Restaurant chain, begun in 1889 by brothers Samuel and William Childs, emerged from the lunch counter tradition that gained popularity in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. With \$1,600 and second-hand furniture, the brothers opened their first store on Cortlandt Street in Manhattan. After ten years, they had ten profitable restaurants and by 1925, the company owned and operated 107 restaurants in 33 cities in the United States

and Canada. The chain initiated self-service cafeterias.

Childs Restaurant opened on Coney Island's Surf Avenue in 1917. Six years later, Childs opened its largest and most decorative outlet on the boardwalk at the height of Coney Island's popularity. Inspired by the area's eye-popping array of shapes, colors and lights, architects Dennison & Hirons worked with the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company to create an exuberant design for the Childs Restaurant building. Along the Boardwalk and the West 21st Street facade, curving fish and sea cockle shells line large arched openings through which restaurant patrons enjoyed views of the ocean and the passing crowds. Bracketed posts encrusted with terra cotta fish and shells project above the main story and are all that remains of a rooftop pergola.

Coney Island flourished after the Civil War when five railroads connected the island with the rest of Brooklyn. Its reputation as a popular destination was secured after the arrival of carousels, public bathing and the Ferris Wheel from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Amusement parks, including Steeplechase Park (1897), Luna Park (1903) and Dreamland (1904) created fantasy worlds of exotic architecture, bright lights, and spectacular entertainments. By the summer of 1920, three years before Childs opened on the boardwalk, the subways reached the area, and approximately one million people visited Coney Island's amusements and attractions.

After the Childs Restaurant closed, the building was taken over by the Ricci family, which uses it today as a candy manufacturing facility.

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The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the New York City agency responsible for designating and regulating New York City's landmarks.