

72ND STREET SUBWAY KIOSK (CONTROL HOUSE), 72nd Street and Broadway, Borough of Manhattan. Completed 1904; architects Heins & LaFarge.

Landmark Site: The island on Broadway bounded by the southern curb line of West 72nd Street on the north, and by Broadway on the east, south, and west, and which is contiguous to Tax Map Blocks 1143 and 1163.

On November 14, 1978, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 72nd Street Subway Kiosk (Control House) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 10). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eight witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including a representative of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The 72nd Street Subway Kiosk, or Control House, which occupies a prominent site at the intersection of Broadway and 72nd Street, is one of only three such structures surviving in the city. Built to serve New York City's first subway system, it was opened near the end of 1904. Designated by the architectural firm of Heins & LaFarge in the Flemish Renaissance style, the control house is a distinctive and important architectural feature on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and a significant reminder of the early subway system.

Proposals for an underground rapid transit system to alleviate traffic congestion in New York had been put forward as early as the 1860s. In 1864 the Metropolitan Railway Company was incorporated; the intent was to build an underground railroad. Because of political opposition and the competition for franchise rights, the scheme was not successful. Instead elevated steam railroads were built beginning in 1868.

The New York State Legislature created a Rapid Transit Commission in 1891 to explore the possibility of a subway system. To meet the problem of construction costs, the City of New York was authorized in the Rapid Transit Act of 1894 to issue bonds and enter into a contract with a private corporation to build and operate an underground railroad. Although several years of delay and litigation followed, a contract was finally let by the City on October 11, 1899, to the Rapid Transit Subway Construction Company, formed by John B. McDonald with the financial backing of banker August P. Belmont, Jr. Belmont created the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) in 1902 to lease the subway from the City and to operate it for fifty years.

The 1899 contract called for the construction of a subway system according to the route and plan that had been devised by William Barclay Parsons (1859-1932), Chief Engineer of the Rapid Transit Commission, in 1895 and revised in 1897. This route began with a loop under City Hall, went up the east side of Manhattan along Lafayette Street and Fourth Avenue to Grand Central Station at 42nd Street, then went west to Times Square and turned north along Broadway to 96th Street; there it branched into two lines leading to the Bronx. Construction began in

March 1900. A second contract extended the route south from City Hall into Brooklyn where it terminated at the Long Island Railroad Terminal at Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues. Work was begun on this section of the route in 1902.

While the system and the station plans were determined by the engineers of the Rapid Transit Commission working under Parsons, a consulting architect was sought to design the decoration of the underground stations, the control houses, and the kiosks of the subway, and a search committee was appointed in 1901. The firms of Carrère & Hastings and Robert Gibson were considered, but on March 7, 1901, the firm of Heins & LaFarge was selected.

George L. Heins (1860-1907) and Christopher Grant LaFarge (1862-1938) both received their architectural training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the supervision of French-born and -trained Eugene Letang. LaFarge, the son of the noted painter John LaFarge, then worked in the architectural office of Henry Hobson Richardson, while Heins acquired experience in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The two formed a partnership in 1886, which continued until Heins' death in 1907. They are best remembered for their ecclesiastical architecture, especially the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. Winning the competition for the cathedral design in 1891, they served as architects for the first phase of construction. Among their other major church designs are the Fourth Presbyterian Church and Parsonage at West End Avenue and 93rd Street in New York and St. Matthew's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Washington, D.C. They also designed residences for prominent people in New York and Washington. In 1899 the firm began to design buildings for the New York Zoological Gardens in the Bronx. There were no obvious prototypes for such buildings, so the architects chose modified classical designs, ornamented with appropriate animal motifs.¹ Perhaps through the influence of August Belmont, Jr., for whom the firm had designed a chapel in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the architects received the subway contract in 1901. They were faced with a problem similar to that in the Zoological Gardens--devising an architecture for which there was no obvious historical prototype.

The architects were able to exercise the greatest architectural judgment and initiative in the design of the control houses, often familiarly referred to as kiosks.² Control houses were designed by Heins & LaFarge for six of the stations: 72nd Street, 103rd Street, 116th Street, Mott Avenue (now 149th Street and the Grand Concourse), Bowling Green, and Atlantic Avenue. They may have been inspired by a feature of the Boston Subway; a small ornamental house served as the entrance to the Scollay Square station. LaFarge and chief engineer Parsons would certainly have seen it when they visited Boston in May 1901 to examine the architectural features of the subway.³

The control house at 72nd Street occupies a triangular island enclosed by a wrought-iron fence just south of the intersection of Broadway and 72nd Street in Sherman Square. A one-story building designed in fanciful Flemish Renaissance style, it rests on a granite block foundation and is faced with buff-colored Roman brick. Limestone quoins accent the corners and a limestone string course extends around the building at the base of the windows which have projecting stone sills. The low gabled roof is covered with copper sheets with raised joints. At the north and south sides, slightly projecting bays define the entrances. They are topped with curved gables finished with terra-cotta coping and accented with ball finials. The numerals "72" placed within a terra-cotta cross accent each gable. A louvered monitor, for light and ventilation purposes, extends along the ridge of the roof, connection the two gables. There are four entrance doors within each bay which are surmounted by a small pediment

and a large tripartite arched window decorated with wrought-iron grillework. These elements are framed by a modified Gibbs surround executed in limestone. Within the control house are token booths, turnstiles, gates and five stairways leading to the below ground subway platforms. A fifth entrance door has been added to the north side of the building to the left of the bay, and the newstands are also later additions.

The first segment of the subway system was officially opened to the public on October 27, 1904, to wide acclaim. The City was praised for its contribution to "Civic Art" in the design of the new subway system.⁴ Curiously, the West End Association did not approve of the 72nd Street control house for on December 5, 1904, it adopted a resolution declaring the building "not only an offense to the eye, but a very serious danger to life and limb," and requested that the Rapid Transit Commission remove it.⁵ Fortunately, that call was not heeded. The control house has survived to serve the subway system for over 74 years and to become a vital architectural element and visual asset to the Upper West Side.

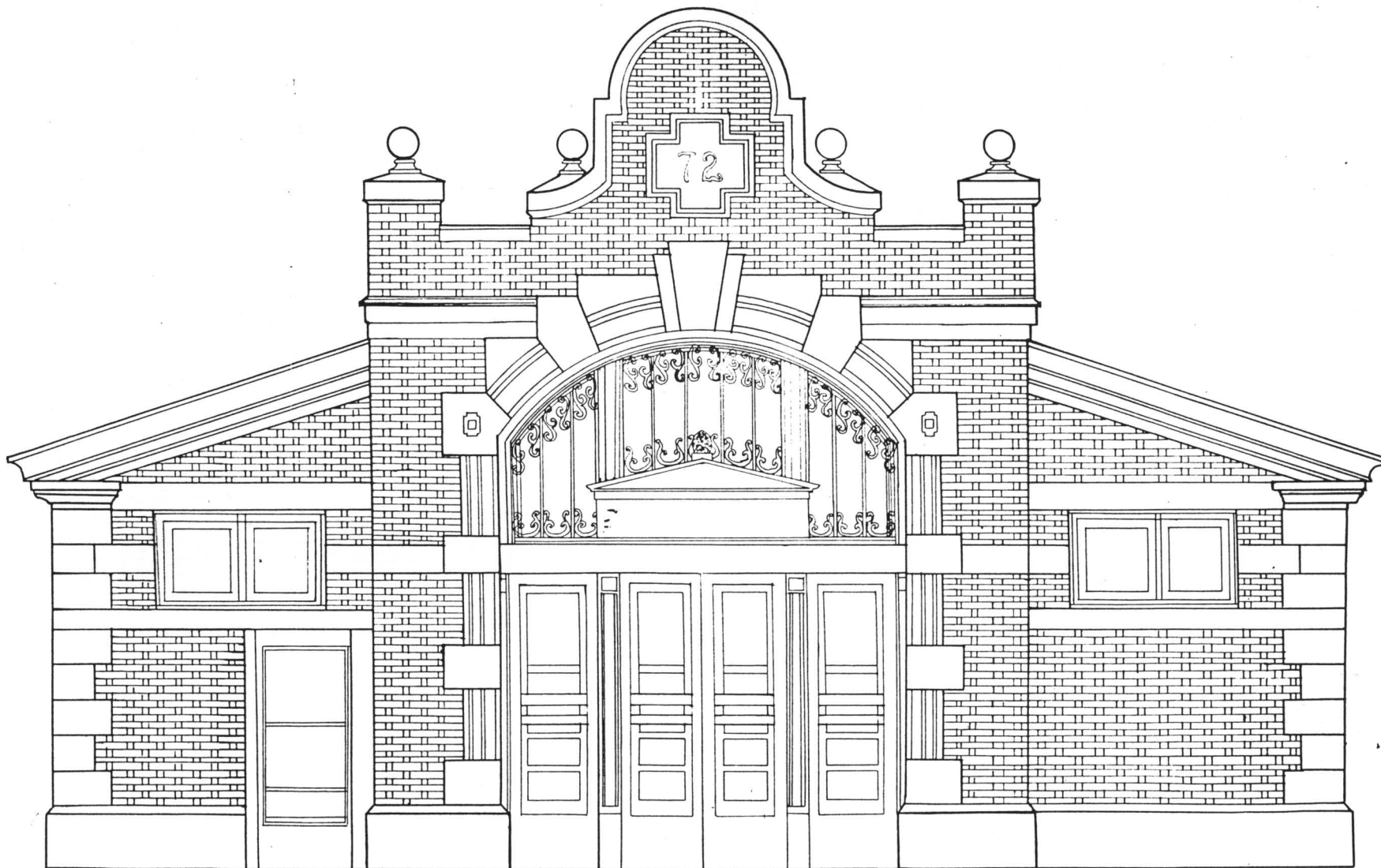
FOOTNOTES

1. David J. Framberger, Architectural Designs for New York's First Subway, unpublished typescript for the Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 1978, pp. 18-19.
2. More properly, kiosks were ornate cast-iron and glass structures which covered sidewalk subway entrances and exits. The first section of the subway required 133 kiosks. Not a single one survives.
3. Framberger, p. 29; and William Barclay Parsons, Construction Diary, unpublished manuscript, May 3, 1901.
4. "The Old Rapid Transit and the New," Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide, 74 (October 29, 1904), 896.
5. Recorded in: Proceedings of the Board of Rapid Transit Railroad Commissioners, (New York, 1904), p. 2892.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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 72nd Street Subway Kiosk (Control House) has a special character, 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 72nd Street Subway Kiosk (Control House) is one of only three such structures surviving in the city; that it was built to serve New York City's first subway system and that it is a significant reminder of that system; that it was designed in the Flemish Renaissance style by the prominent architectural firm of Heins & LaFarge, consulting architects for the subway system; and that it is a vital architectural element and visual asset to the Upper West Side.



Drawing courtesy of E.A. Rappaport

72nd Street Subway Kiosk (Control House)
W. 72nd St. and B'way

Heins & LaFarge

1904



Photo Credit: LPC; Sarah Latham

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