

THE  
96<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
AND THE  
103<sup>RD</sup> STREET  
I.R.T. "BROADWAY  
STATIONS

◇ ——— ◇  
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STATION DESCRIPTIONS & ILLUSTRATIONS  
& LAYOUTS

◇ ——— ◇  
REVISED TEXT, ET AL.  
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◇ ——— ◇

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And  
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◇ ——— ◇  
WITH MY COMPLIMENTS:

*Philip Ashforth Cappola*

JUNE 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2006



AN ARCHITECTURAL,

HISTORIC,

& ENGINEERING-CONSTRUCTION

T O U R

OF THE

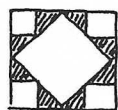
96<sup>TH</sup> STREET

AND THE

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I.R.T. BROADWAY

STATIONS



JUNE 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2006

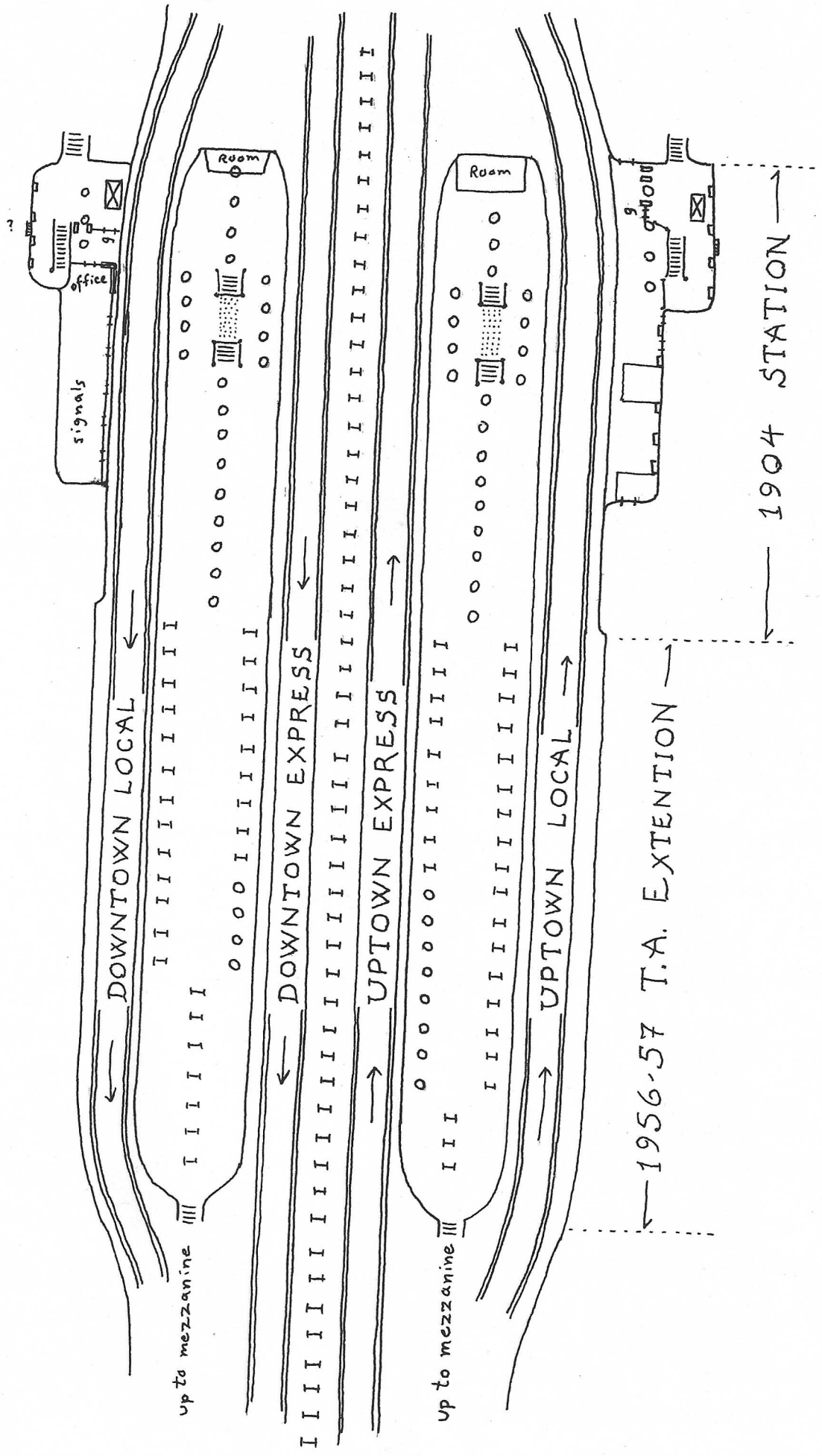
## **SAFETY FIRST !!!**

*Safety Rules & Precautions for June 3rd, 2006 tour of the 96th & 103rd Street IRT Stations*

1. Stay away from the platforms's edges.
2. Avoid the platform's edge when a train is pulling in to the station, or leaving the station.
3. Stay together as a group.
4. Do not photograph an in-coming train.
5. Do not interfere with the commuters on the platforms.
6. Rest when you feel tired; the best time to find bench space is after the crowds have embarked on their departing train.

I.R.T.  
 96<sup>TH</sup> ST.  
 EXPRESS  
 AND  
 LOCAL  
 STATION

- ⊥ door
- g gate
- round column
- I I-beam
- ⊥ plaque
- ▬ name panel
- ⊠ token booth



## 96th Street & Broadway

Here we go again. This station, which serves both express and local trains, had, at one time, two island platforms and two sidewall platforms where the public waited for their trains. Now it only has the islands between the tracks - but the side platforms have not totally departed from 96th Street.

*(See the accompanying diagram)*

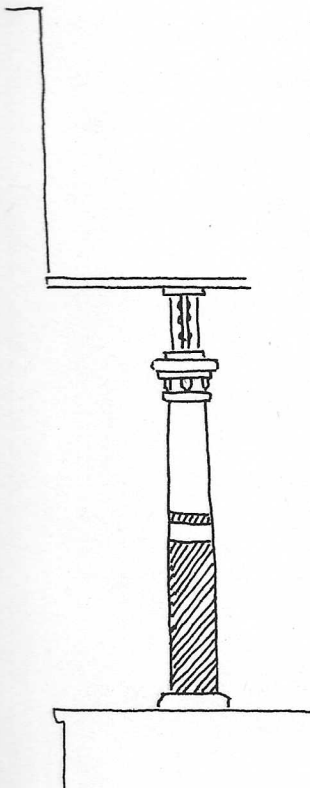
As at the Brooklyn Bridge station and the 14th Street station, 96th Street's sidewall platforms have been decommissioned from public usage - but, unlike Brooklyn Bridge and 14th Street, they are not entirely concealed. There are four entrances in to the north end of the station, and they usher the commuter through at least part of the old sidewall platforms. The faience cornice and plaques and the mosaic designs can be seen on the walls along the entrance corridors and behind the token booth. The token booth and turnstiles have a cage of bars set up between them and the tracks - the same principle as at 79th Street.

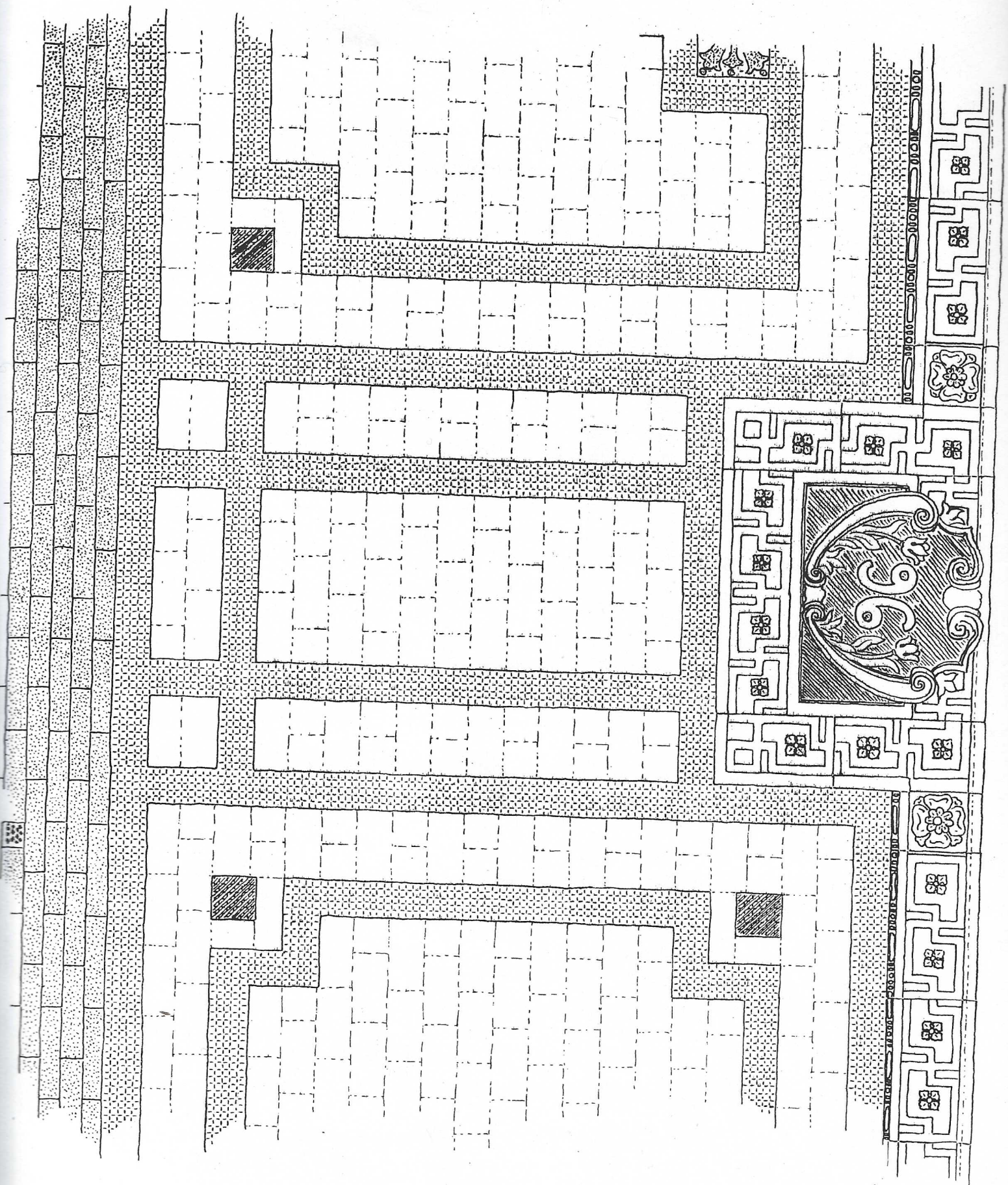
Once through the turnstiles, an underpass leads down and then up to the island platforms. This underpass is a wide, low corridor, with a two-foot-high brick wainscot (with brass vents, even!), rows of white 3 x 6 glass tiles up to the roof (or ceiling), whose longitudinal girders are heavily studded with round-head bolts. Trains can be accessed only from the islands; the conductor won't open the doors of the local trains on the right side of the cars. There are six stairwells in this station; all original and all leading only to the underpass: each island has two stairwells, and there is one from either sidewall platform, leading down under the tracks after the turnstiles. The stairwells are guarded on three sides by authentic 1904 iron railings. The floor of the islands between their stairwells is inlaid with rows of vault light glass discs; there are actually 1,050 of them per platform, in ten panels of 15 x 7 rows each.

The token booths, turnstiles, and underpass are all located beneath 96th Street's crossing, at the northern end of the station. From the northerly end of one of the islands, one has a good perspective on the whole station.

Originally, this station ran from its north entrance at 96th Street down to 95th Street, where the islands and side platforms end. In this old part of the station, the round pillars are about 7 & 1/2 feet high, and upon their capitals rest massive I-beam lintels about 2 feet high, which support narrow barrel vaults, running crosswise. This is the ceiling system above the islands, at least, if not the entrance areas, also. But the ceiling over the tracks rises another five feet up, up to street level, where open grilles pour sunlight and air down onto the trains and tracks. Because 95th Street runs above the original southern end of the station, the ceiling height down at that end is maintained the same over islands and tracks alike.

A look over at the uptown side platform reveals nearly the whole faience, mosaic, & tile format which Heins & LaFarge laid upon it. This side platform is



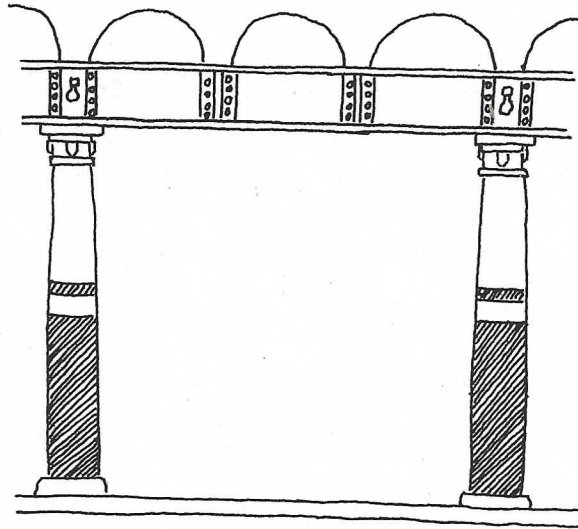


DRAWING #54 56

even accessible for a walk-around, if desired, but you can't board or exit a train from here.

The downtown side platform hasn't fared as well. Only its northernmost wall decor can be seen from the island; the rest of the side wall has been made a corridor, and that length of faienceware can only be enjoyed by those entering the station from the SW corner of 96th & Broadway. There are no name panels along this wall - none exposed, anyway. On the uptown side platform, you can see two panels.

The faience cornice is a creamy ivory shade, and the plaques are also basically cream ivory, backed up by viridian both outside of and within the cartouche frame. The mosaic bands and frames are both formed of rose mosaics. The square set into the inverted corners of the frames are made of vermillion mosaic. Since the next two stations have pilasters basically the same as 96th Street's, a general view of the whole format is reproduced here :




*Drawing No. 56*

96th Street may be an example of a Second Class station.

Name panels hang off some of the frames, in which case the top of the frame ends in plain square corners. These name panels are an astounding composition, mainly in rose and orange mosaics - an astonishingly brash color clash for that usually sedate era of 1903 decor. The rosey-orange hues touch the fleurettes, vines, bells, checks, and squares. Only the small inner frames and the diamonds are buff. The "96th ST" legend is in glazed white mosaics, against a background of glazed vermillion.

As originally constructed, the side platforms ended several yards shorter than the islands. After their end wall curved out to meet the tunnel wall, the station's remaining length was rendered in panels - formed by the tunnel's structural posts - which were paved with vertical rows of 3 x 6 white tiles - as at 14th Street.

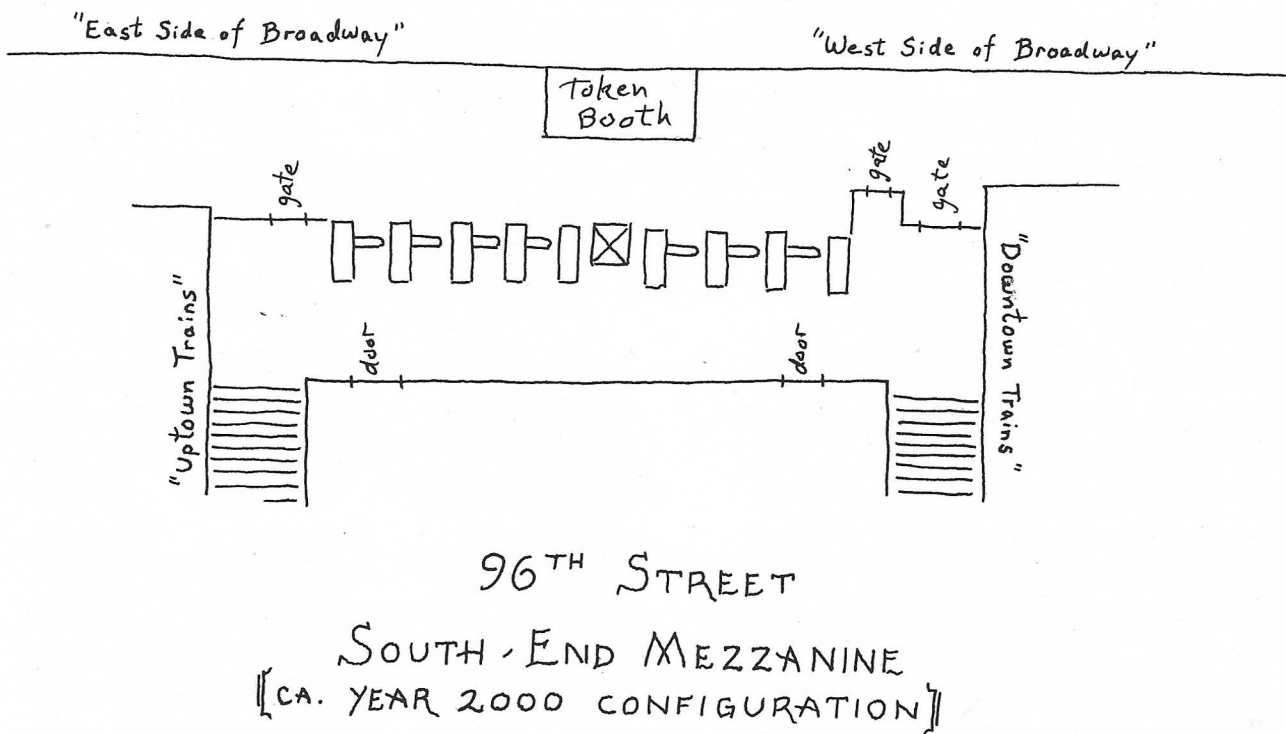
Probably soon after the City took over the IRT subway (but this is just a hunch), the City's Board of Transportation built an operating booth and a long, narrow signal room upon the downtown side platform - between the SW entrance stairs and the platform's edge, creating that "corridor" back there now. This new room begins a few yards in from the entrance turnstiles on this side, and extends the length of this side platform to its southern end. The track-front wall, which is all that the commuters on the island can see if they look across the downtown local track, is faced with ivory-cream-beige 4 x 4" tiles, some of them imprinted with  at regular intervals. A few rectangular windows punctuate this wall's upper regions, and there are five doors in the wall, each marked "signal". A very narrow walkway runs along the very lip of the former platform, secured behind a pipe railing.

Hard against the turnstiles, built into the north end of this new room area, is control tower

#B-4111. There is a huge window next to the door, giving a look inside at all the neat equipment they have in there. there's a massive control board, with banks of silver toggle switches and all these lines and lights representing routes and subway trains, so that the operators can keep an eye on the progress of the Broadway trains via these electronic systems which dit-dot-flash across the board. There's a desk in the room, also, and one of those crazy desk phones on a scissors extension. It's like the sort you'd see in a Grade B '30's flick about a muckraking big city newspaper, where the five star final editor, chomping on his cigar, grabs the phone and barks, "Hold the front page! I've got a story that'll bust this town wide open!!"

But those were other days. After all that excitement, the Transit Authority extended this station one block further south in 1956-57; they extended the islands down to a new access at 94th Street. Their ceiling is supported on exposed I-beams, as usual - except that, from somewhere the TA appropriated a dozen original IRT round columns, and placed eight of them on their uptown island, and four on the downtown one (see diagram). The walls of the TA's extension, across the local tracks, is done in their usual beige lozenge tiles, with a wide mocha band running the length, bearing a brown "96th ST" legend every now and then.

Up a flight of stairs from either island's south end is the entrance/exit mezzanine - a plain affair in mottled beige lozenges. The lettering on these walls - such as "Uptown Trains" and "East Side of Broadway", etc. - is fired in black letters upon the wall tiles.



So much for the Transit Authority and their additions to the ambiance of 96th Street. Other, more recent hands have been at work on this place. And, in fact, the best remarkable sight here, when visited in the early 1980's, is the color scheme. All the pillars and I-beams are painted a handsome forest green, the heavy ceiling lintels are a fresh tan, and the ceiling itself is a gorgeous burnt orange. This was all done ca. 1980 through, doubtlessly, the good graces of Mrs. Wagner and her station refreshing program. If tree trunks were green, you could imagine this station a



green forest, and yourself standing under boughs of tan leaves holding up a burnt orange sky. All you'd need would be a cool glade to refresh your spirits, which an incoming train would gladly supply.

The historical aside backing up the 96th Street station is not related to this Manhattan locale, but rather to the operation of the IRT Company. This particular incident in the early days of the subway's operational affairs was known as "the 96th Street Improvement."

By the time 1906 rolled around, the public had about two years of subway straphanging under their belts, and they began to grouse about some of the problems inherent in the system. One of the two major problem points along the IRT line stemmed from this station. Between 96th Street and the next one, up the line at 103rd Street, the rails which go to serve the Lenox Avenue line branch off from the four-track Broadway tunnel. From here on up for a while the Broadway tunnel has only three tracks; by the time they get to the rock tunnel stations at 168th, 181st, and 191st Streets, the tracks have dwindled down to two.

Train service north of 96th Street was unbearably erratic; the printed schedules which the IRT Company handed out to their customers (and any self-respecting railroad publishes schedules of their train service) might just as well have been thrown out the window, as far as their upper Broadway commuters cared. The trouble centered upon the cross-over in the Broadway tunnel; the shunting of trains coming in from their Lenox Avenue run balled up the Broadway locals going in either direction, especially during the rush hours. The IRT was painfully aware of their problem, but didn't know how to straighten it out. Someone suggested that they could divert some of their Lenox Avenue trains onto the Broadway line, but the operators objected to the scheme, for in those days the Lenox Avenue trains, serving the Upper East Side and The Bronx, pulled in twice as many customers as the upper Broadway Division did. So why spoil a good thing?

The operating company used the middle track beyond 96th Street to store idle trains. Another gentlemen with an idea suggested that they could run an express train on this track from 96th Street to 145th Street, skipping over the five intervening stations. But that would have meant some complicated redispersing in the tunnel to switch one of the uptown locals over to the middle track before 103rd Street (in the midst of the Lenox Avenue trains ducking under the Broadway rails on their journey east), and switching this brief express train back to the local tracks after 137th Street. The IRT filed that suggestion in the circular file.

But since the upper Broadway train service continued to falter as the months went by, it became evident that 96th Street's situation would have to improve somehow. On March 27th, 1907, George S. Rice, by then chief engineer of the RTC, and the IRT's Vice President E.P. Bryan came to an agreement; they'd build two additional tracks in the Broadway tunnel, an additional track in the Lenox Avenue tunnel, and install a complex crossover between 96th and 103rd Streets under Broadway. Rice hoped to solve the problem with this elaborate scheme. The price tag on all this extra construction would be about \$850,000.00. But in July, the Public Service Commission took over the RTC's functions, a new chief engineer stepped in, and things were delayed until October, 1908.

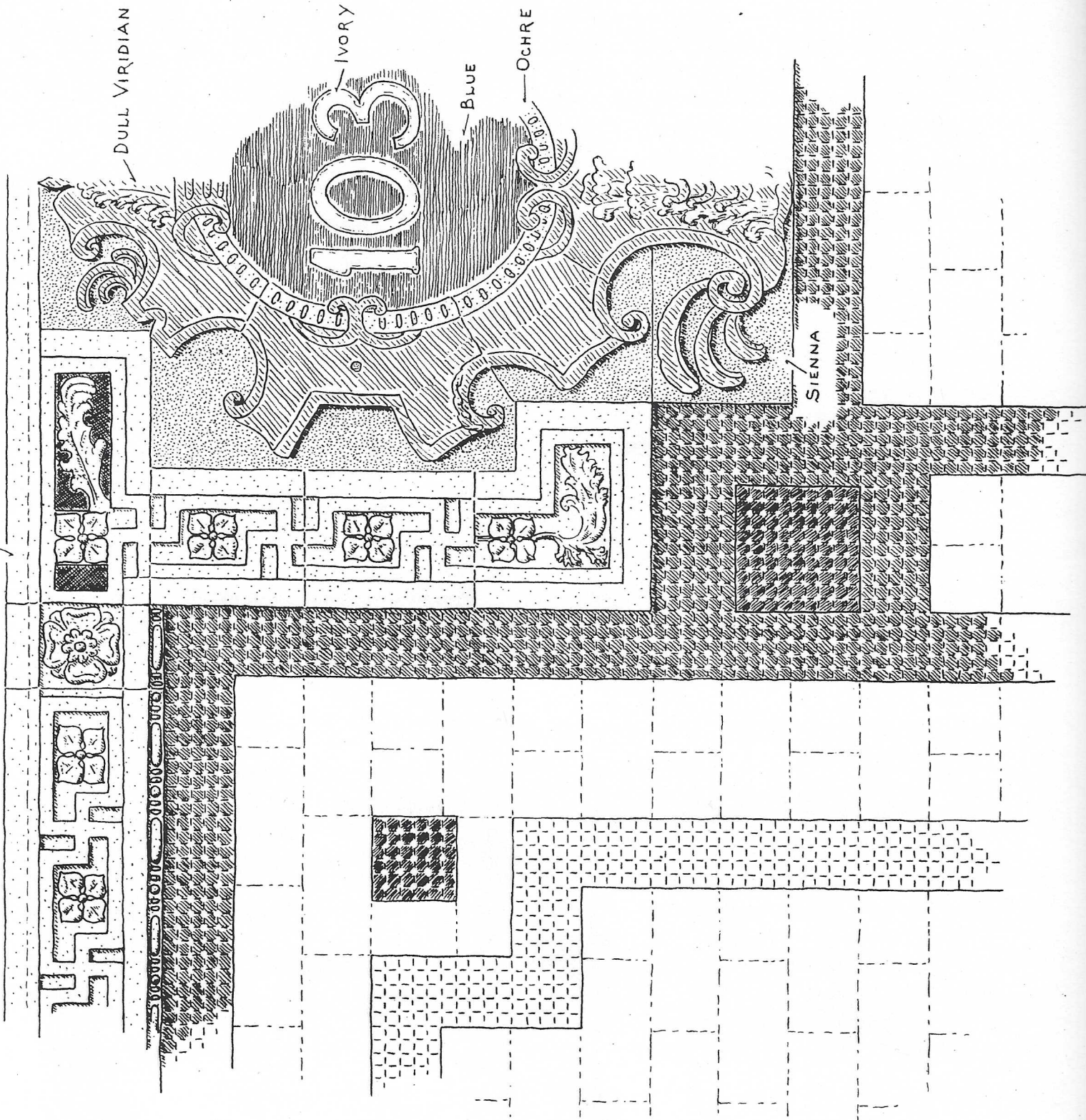
And on the first day of that month, John Myers and the Second Division engineers, who had already encamped at West 100th Street, dug into the 96th Street station. For their first order of business, they started making sewer rearrangements, as usual. They even began excavating for

DRAWING

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the additional tracks. But out of the blue, on December 14th, the 96th Street Improvements came to an abrupt halt. In Mr. Myer's words, a speed-control system had just been timely developed "permitting (a) train to approach very close to the one preceding it, providing a predetermined rate of speed (was) not exceeded. So the improvement plans, as far as 1908-09 were concerned, came to an abrupt end, but a happy one. At least trains passed through with much less delay."

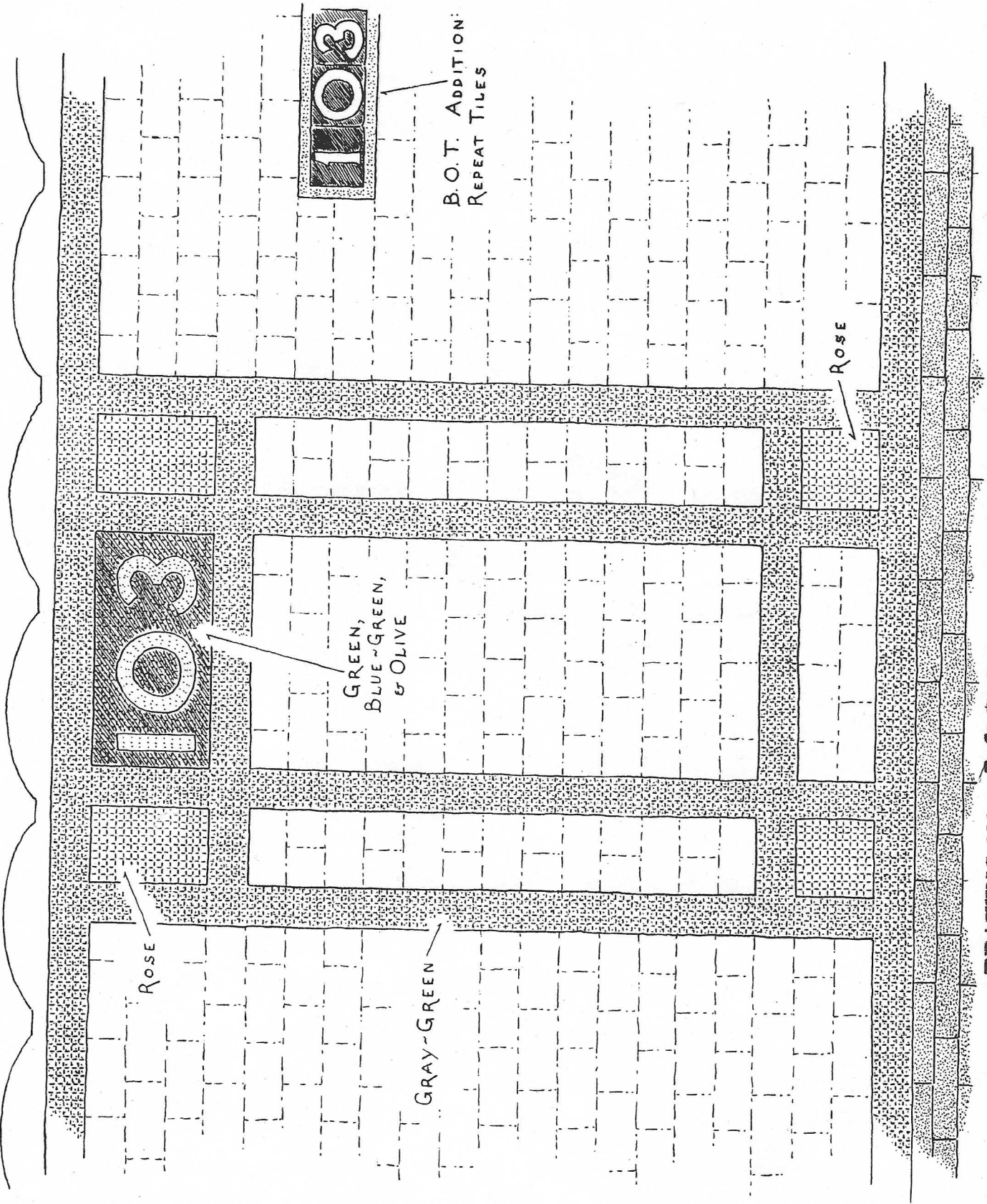
Leaving 96th Street on a local bound for 103rd Street - if there's an express train departing with us, we watch it sink gradually as the track next to our's descends for the Central Park tunnel. About mid-way to the next station, the last, uppermost glimmering line of the lighted windows are squeezed down and extinguished by the car's black roof, and the express train is gone from view. The middle track now replaces the sunken cars and we curve left, then enter the curving station at

### *103rd Street & Broadway*

Upstairs, on the street, we enter this station through an overhead mezzanine. This entrance is down toward the southern end of the station. From the top of the stairs which lead down to the platform, the station's swastika fret cornice and oval plaques are on eye level, but once downstairs our eyes must travel way back up the viridian pilasters to see the cornice again. This station may be no higher than 96th Street is, but by placing the cornice and plaques so near the ceiling - there is barely two inches of plaster wall between cornice and ceiling - the architects gave 103rd Street the appearance of great height. All the artwork here is in remarkably good shape. Even the fancy ceiling beam strips, similar to those we saw at 50th Street, disclose their intricate contours with a great deal of clarity even through their many layers of paint. 103rd Street is a handsome station indeed, with its dark green pilaster & band combination set against neat, roseate frames. Again, the inverted corners of the frames cradle dark red mosaic squares. The pilasters are again divided into three white-tiled panels, as at 96th Street, except that at the bottom - and, in this case, at the top as well - the squares formed to either side by the crisscrossing of the mosaic bars are filled in with vermillion mosaics, instead of white tiles. But the elaborate plaques are the real eye-catchers.

### *Drawing No. 57*

The old name panels here are a bit unfortunate. Some of the components are difficult to distinguish one from the other. The corner fleurettes, and the actual name plate, have no problem, though. The fleurette's cross is viridian, with a dot of turquoise in its center. The bells are a light tan, and it's all set against an ochre background. The name "103rd ST" is white against an unvaried viridian. So far, so good. The outside and the inner frames are so light a tan, they could be ivory. Then the vines, and the hanging bells down the sides, are all viridian, set against a clay gray - rather light. The checks are viridian and clay gray. But the real problem is with the diamonds, which are tan, set within tan frames, with only little ochre triangles at the four corners, behind the diamond. It's hard to see where the diamond's frame ends against the inner and



B.O.T. ADDITION:  
REPEAT TILES

GREEN,  
BLUE-GREEN,  
& OLIVE

ROSE

GRAY-GREEN

ROSE

outside frames of light tan. The squares, however, announce their presence boldly in viridian; they have tan centers. The whole composition is basically tame, even with all the strong viridian.

To recap, the stations between Worth and 33rd Streets on the present Lexington Avenue line had been augmented by extensions built by either the BOT or the TA or both. Then the TA did their own extension work on the Broadway IRT, from 50th to 96th Streets. But some of the upper Broadway stations, between 103rd and 181st Streets (such as this one), were extended, fixed up, and otherwise augmented by the PSC, the BOT, *and* the TA; others were perhaps extended only once, by the PSC, and then maybe touched up here and there by the BOT.

The nice thing about the PSC's extension work was that it happened so soon after the Contract 1 line had been built that the PSC's wall treatments are generally akin to the Heins & LaFarge work - in the same key, as it were - and don't go slamming into one another as the more recent additions to the lower East Side IRT collide their design formats with the 1904 format. This is because here, among the upper Broadway stations, the PSC work predominates; the BOT and the TA added only light touches.

The Public Service Commission built extensions onto both platforms at 103rd Street. Both extensions carry this station's northerly limits on about half again the length of the original station. The PSC extensions have lower ceilings, no faience, and a somewhat brighter color scheme. The PSC's mosaic designs are simplified versions of the Heins & LaFarge work; the cornice becomes a mosaic band and the plaques become mosaic rectangles. The pilasters remain a rather fair copy of their older kin. There are no mosaic frames on the PSC extension walls, and though they did carry on the brick wainscot, there are no little brass vents peeping in between the bricks.

#### *Drawing No. 58*

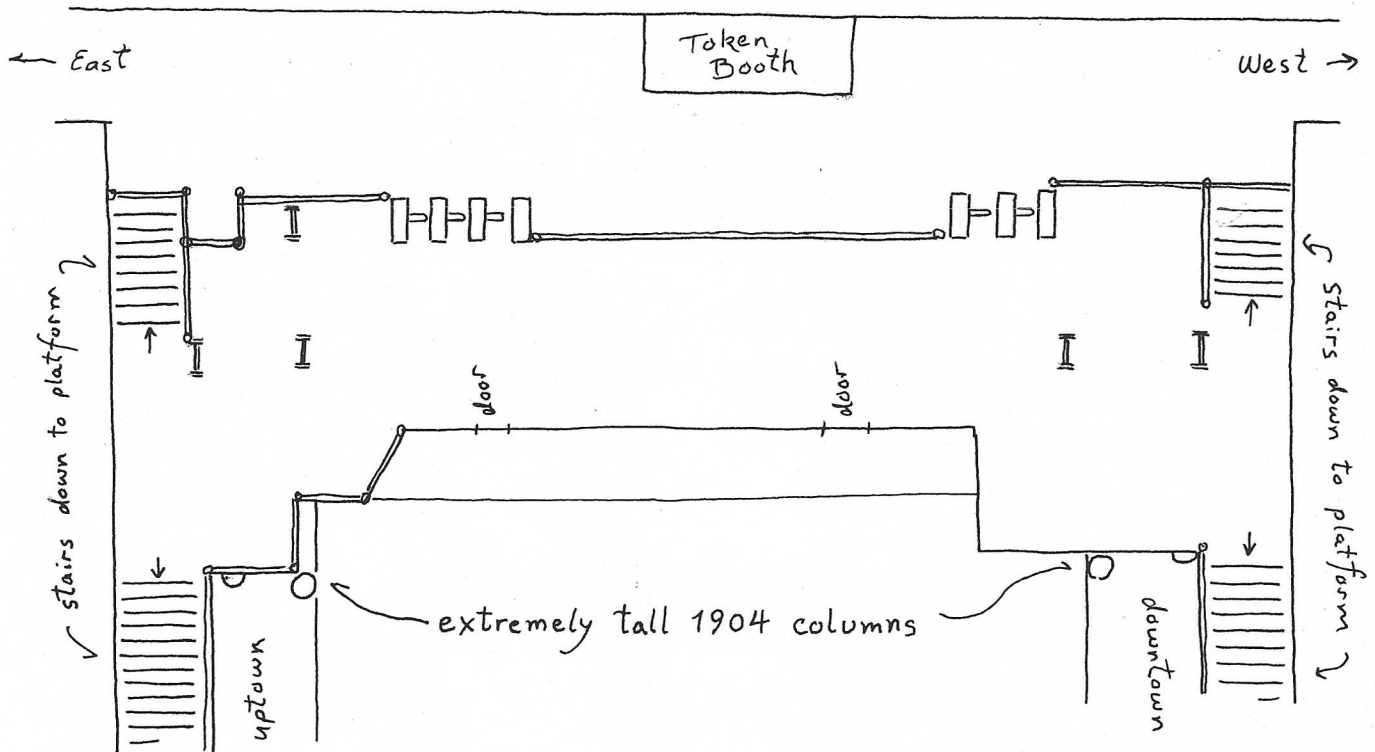
PSC name panels, also, are a very nearly perfect facsimile of the 1904 name panels, with all the vines, bells, checks, diamonds, and fleurettes as before. But the colors are brighter. For instance, the PSC's 103rd Street name panel has bright cobalt blue bells, vines, checks, and squares. Peach, buff, and pink flash out from other parts of the name panel. The white "103rd ST." legend lies against a wild field of green, blue green, and olive mosaics. On the original walls of the station, the older name panels hang from dull rose frames and announce their identity in quiet tones of viridian and tan, as if to admonish their brash, newer brethren by their restrained example. The 1904 name panels are Old Master, and the PSC versions are Mannerist in comparison.

Then the BOT came along in the 1940's and encased both the round pillars of the original station and the I-beam columns of the PSC's extensions in squared-off tile shells. The BOT ran a strip of green mosaics around the top of each shell. They even added their own touch of class to the extensions's walls by setting up black and white repeat tiles and arrow ensembles thereupon, each group enframed in soft green mosaics, matching the PSC's sea green pilasters and bands. The BOT's platform extension plans were dated May 18, 1946.

Finally, the TA moved in, looked at the overhead mezzanine, and found that it was not good. Perhaps they didn't like the control house on Broadway's median, either, for it is no longer there,

but there *is* still the mezzanine, done over in the TA's early 1960's style - though this *might* be later than that; it's a question. So now this mezzanine has a shiny new token booth, modern turnstiles, and its wall has been refaced in large mocha tiles, with many brown ones thrown in here and there for accent. The staircase walls along the platform, also, have been repaved with large speckled gray tiles. [NB : the I-beams which support this overhead mezzanine's ceiling are the only ones in the station without the BOT's shell of tiles surrounding them.]

So for now, anyway, the 103rd Street station has been enlarged and refurbished to everyone's satisfaction - unless the MTA has some ideas they'd like to try out.



103<sup>RD</sup> STREET  
SOUTHERLY MEZZANINE  
{CA. 1990'S CONFIGURATION}

AN APPROXIMATE RENDERING OF THE  
103<sup>RD</sup> STREET CONTROL HOUSE

