

SUBWAY ORNAMENTATION IN NEW YORK CITY

Michael Padwee

Part I--The R. Guastavino Company

The use of ceramics in the New York City subway system is a complicated subject. They were used architecturally, such as their use below with Guastavino vaulting, as well as ornamentally. In addition, contracts were let at different times, and different architects had artistic responsibility for the subway stations: Heins and LaFarge on the first and second contract stations and Squire Vickers on the third and fourth contract lines. However, the artistic tone was set in 1900 by William Barclay Parsons, Chief Engineer of the Rapid Transit Commission, who studied European transit systems and wrote in a contract, "All parts of the structure where exposed to public sight shall therefore be designed, constructed and maintained with a view to the beauty of their appearance, as well as to their efficiency." (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, published by Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, p. 14)

THE BRICKBUILDER.

85



CITY HALL STATION OF THE NEW YORK SUBWAY, SHOWING GUASTAVINO CONSTRUCTION.
Heins & La Farge, Architects.

The old City Hall subway station (now closed). (*The Brickbuilder*, Vol. 13, No. 4, April 1904, p. 85)

One writer has given us a brief history of the subway system, which can be confusing in general, but especially to people who know nothing of IRT, BMT and IND: "the first subway, which ran from City Hall to Broadway and 145th Street and opened in October 1904, was constructed by a company called Interborough Rapid Transit [the IRT line], even though the first route was Manhattan-only. Soon, lines were built into Brooklyn, justifying the name [Interborough]. Beginning in the 1910s, a company called Brooklyn Rapid Transit [BRT] built a network of surface lines and subways between Brooklyn and Manhattan; when that company went bankrupt after a train crash in a tunnel at Malbone Street, Brooklyn, in 1918, it reorganized as Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit, or the BMT. Finally, in the mid-1920s, the City of New York began planning and building its own set of subway lines, called the Independent [the IND line]."

(<http://forgotten-ny.com/2012/03/high-street-station/>) In the 1940s the City took over the whole system.

When the New York City subway system was built in the early 1900s, some of the most famous art tile and terra cotta companies decorated subway stations with faience ornamentation. The R. Guastavino Company was one of them.

In 1904 the City Hall Station "...was the City's pride and joy, the flagship station of the long-awaited subway system. Located on a loop of single track, the station presented...unique design possibilities: the platform and track could be bridged by a single snug arch; the...[R. Guastavino Company's] special system of setting tiles in a criss-cross pattern with fast-setting mortar created lightweight, centerless vaults...the arches and vault ribs are edged with colored tile, and there are name plaques on the walls and over the stairway from the platform." (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, p. 20)

The 1979 Report to the Landmarks Preservation Commission describes the tile work of this station. "The curve of the vaults is ideally suited to the curved configuration of the station as it follows the single loop track. The vaults are constructed of white mat-finished tiles with contrasting green and brown glazed tiles at the edges of the vaults. The younger Rafael Guastavino was especially interested in the development of ornamental and colored ceramic tile for Guastavino vaults. ...Decorative faience plaques in brown, blue, and white with the inscription 'City Hall' are set in the side walls. A large name tablet adorns the arch above the wide staircase leading from the platform to the entrance area." (Marjorie Pearson with David Framberger, *Landmarks Preservation Commission Report, Designation List 129 LP-1096*, October 23, 1979)



1945--The closing of the City Hall station. (Photo courtesy of the NYC Municipal Archives)

This station was closed in 1945 and is currently used as a turn-around loop for the No. 6 local train.

We don't usually think of the domes and tiled vaulted arches of the R. Guastavino Fireproof Construction Company of New York as art tiles, but they are intrinsically artistic, and this company also produced what is generally considered "art" tiles for residences and public and private buildings.

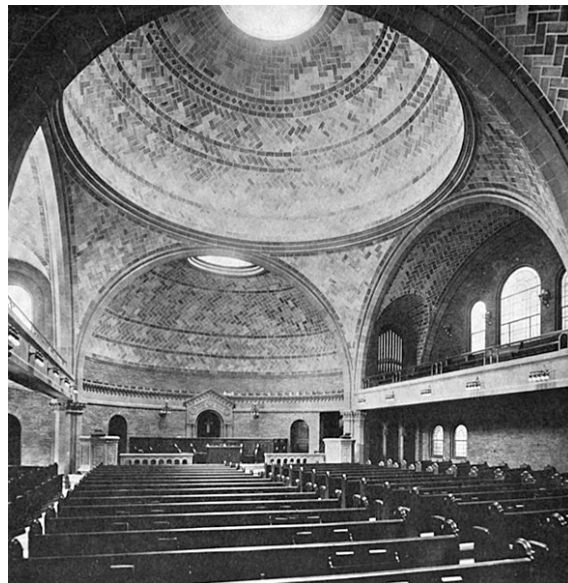
The Guastavino Company was founded in 1888. "In the late 19th and early 20th century, Rafael Guastavino Moreno and his son Rafael Guastavino Exposito were responsible for designing tile vaults in nearly a thousand buildings around the world, of which more than 600 survive to the present day. The remaining buildings are found in more than 30 U.S. states, and include major landmarks such as the Ellis Island Registry Hall, the Oyster Bar in Grand Central Terminal, and the Boston Public Library."

<http://architecture.mit.edu/class/guastavino/about.html>



DOME OF ELEPHANT HOUSE, ZOOLOGICAL PARK, NEW YORK CITY.
Heins & La Farge, Architects.

"Dome of Elephant House", New York Zoological Park, Bronx, NY. (Charles H. Hughes, "Interesting Examples of the Use of Burnt Clay in Architecture", *The Brickbuilder*, Vol. 18, No. 8, August 1909)



Interior view, Amity Baptist Church (demolished) 312 West 54th Street, Manhattan, 1909. (see citation above)

"Born in Valencia in 1842, Rafael Guastavino i Moreno went to Barcelona in 1861 to train as a builder at the Escuela de Maestros de Obras. By 1866, his precocious professional vision had driven him to start his career as builder and architect even before graduating.

"His arrival in the United States in 1881 with his son Rafael Guastavino i Expósito, the subsequent founding of his own building company in 1888, the modernization of the traditional laminated tile system and his business vision all led to the reinvention of a new type of public space for the modern American metropolis —space that was excavated from within the architecture itself, conferring an urban dimension to its interiors. The Guastavino Company participated in many of the emblematic buildings of the time in collaboration with the most prestigious American architects. The clarity, texture and geometry that characterize Guastavinian vaulted spaces have invariably been identified with the modern American metropolis which, for the first time, expressed its desire to become a historic city." (<http://www.rafaelguastavino.com/en/>)

The tilework on the exterior of the dome of the Elephant House, above, is somewhat reminiscent of the later Guastavino dome on the State Capitol Building in Lincoln, Nebraska. On the interior of this building the Guastavino Company worked with the mosaic designs of Hildreth Meière to produce works of art on the walls and ceilings.



(Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)



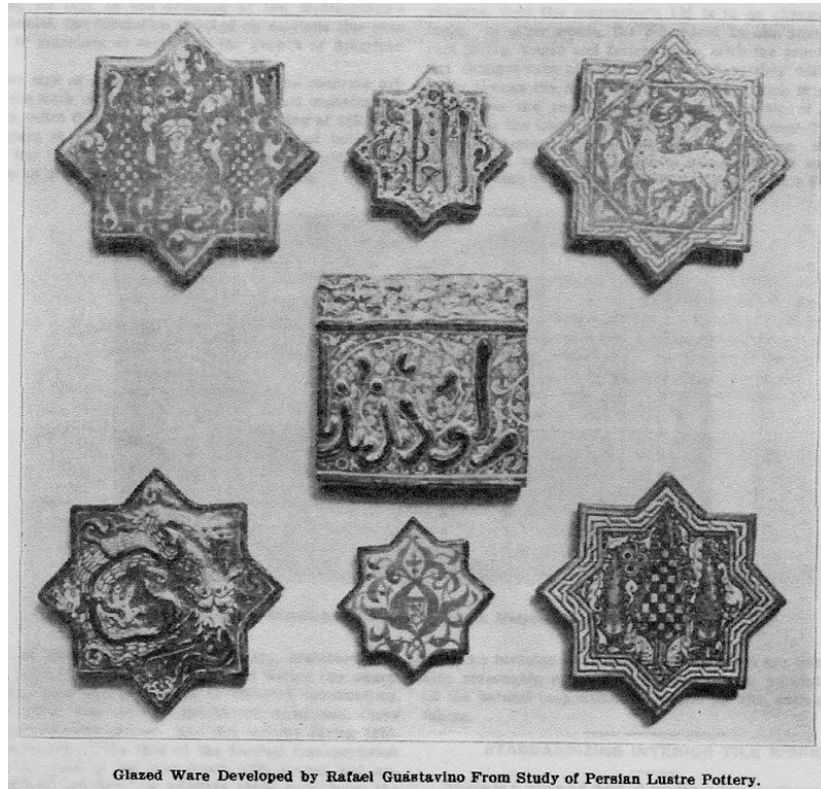
The Eight Winged Virtues (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

"Surviving documents illustrate the working relationship during the Nebraska project. Meière sent images of her mural designs to the Guastavino Company, which then fired the correct size and color of the various tiles. The elaborate tile finish work required much more extensive scaffolding than usual for the vault builders. ...the custom tile pieces were cut by hand to size, taking account of the shrinkage which occurred during firing. Due to the meticulous attention to color, many tiles 'required two and three glaze firings at different temperatures.' Despite this great care, 'Hildreth Meière was a perfectionist and rejected many tiles so the manufacture of many extra batches of tiles became a necessity'." (John Ochsendorf, *Guastavino Vaulting: The Art of Structural Tile*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2010, pp. 173-174)



(Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

In the early years of the twentieth century Rafael Guastavino Jr. experimented with lustre glazes on tiles. In time he developed a series of stable lustre glazes and made reproductions of Spanish and Persian lustre ware.



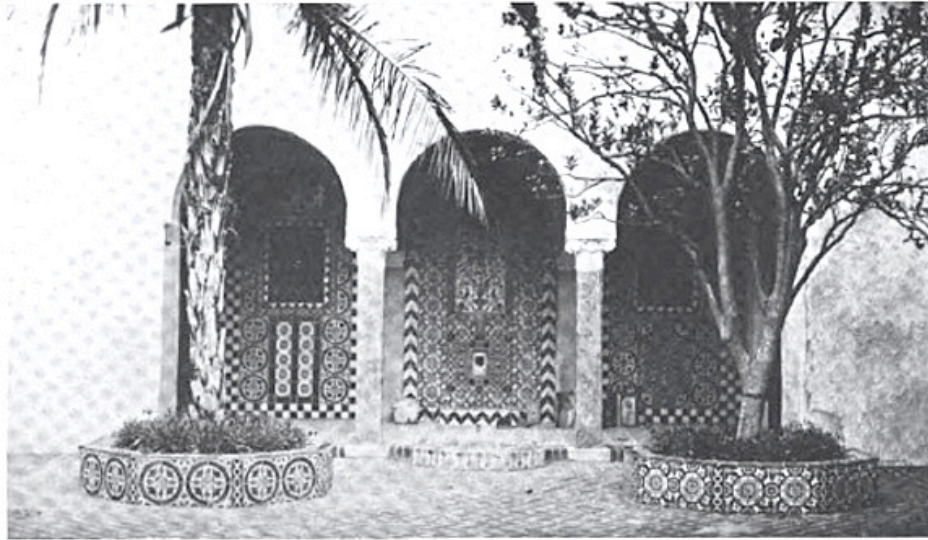
(Rafael Guastavino, "Lustre Pottery", *The Clay-Worker*, Vol. 74, No. 3, September 1920, pp. 215-216)

Guastavino also produced tilework for at least one private residence. The "...architect, Bertram Goodhue (1869-1924)[,] recognized and expanded the decorative possibilities for Guastavino vaulting. ...Goodhue began designing custom decorative tiles in collaboration with Rafael Guastavino Jr., beginning with the Dater Residence in Montecito, California, in 1917." (Ochsendorf, p. 170) Below is a drawing of...art tiles which were installed in the Henry Dater residence in Montecito. Variations of these tiles were also installed in the Washington Hotel, Colon, Panama (1912) and in the Naval Training Center Mess Hall, San Diego, California (1923), which were also designed by Bertram Goodhue. (Janet Parks and Alan G. Neumann, *The Old World Builds the New: The Guastavino Company and the Technology of the Catalan Vault, 1885-1962*, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library and the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, New York, 1996, pp. 36-39)



(Photo of a framed drawing on a wall of the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York, taken, with permission, by Michael Padwee.)

The Dater Residence, "Built in the North African manner...was a contrast in styles: plain wall surfaces and simple blocklike forms surrounding a patio covered in tiles. An article on new California houses in *Country Life* (1920) describes the tiles as being designed by the architect, and the drawings and factory order cards...point to the Guastavino Company as the source of these tiles." (Janet Parks and Alan G. Neumann, *The Old World Builds the New: The Guastavino Company and the Technology of the Catalan Vault, 1885-1962*, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library and the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, New York, 1996, p. 37)



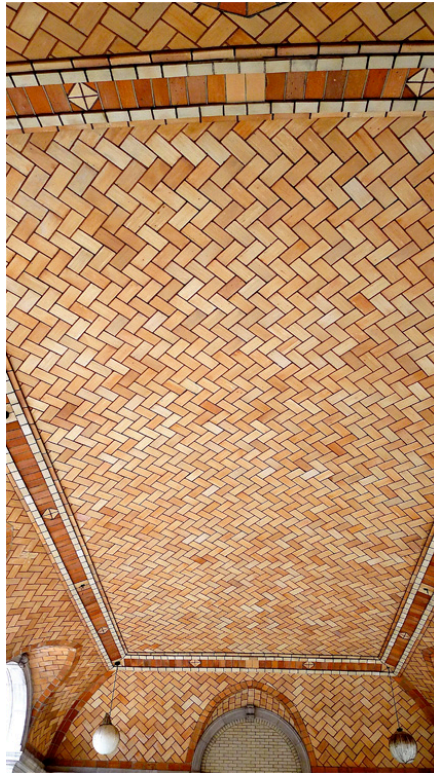
Henry Dater house at Santa Barbara. Bertram G. Goodhue, Architect.

Guastavino tilework, exterior of the Dater Residence, Montecito, California

Although there are many large projects of the R. Guastavino Company such as the McKinley Memorial in Canton, Ohio or the New York City Municipal Building, there are also some small, more intimate Guastavino tilings. The Tennis House in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, for instance, has Guastavino arched vaulting.



Designed by the architects Helmle and Huberty in 1910. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)



(Photos courtesy of Michael Padwee)

And, at the entrance to Prospect Park at Grand Army Plaza, there are two small do-decahedral structures--originally used by people waiting for carriages-- with Guastavino domes.

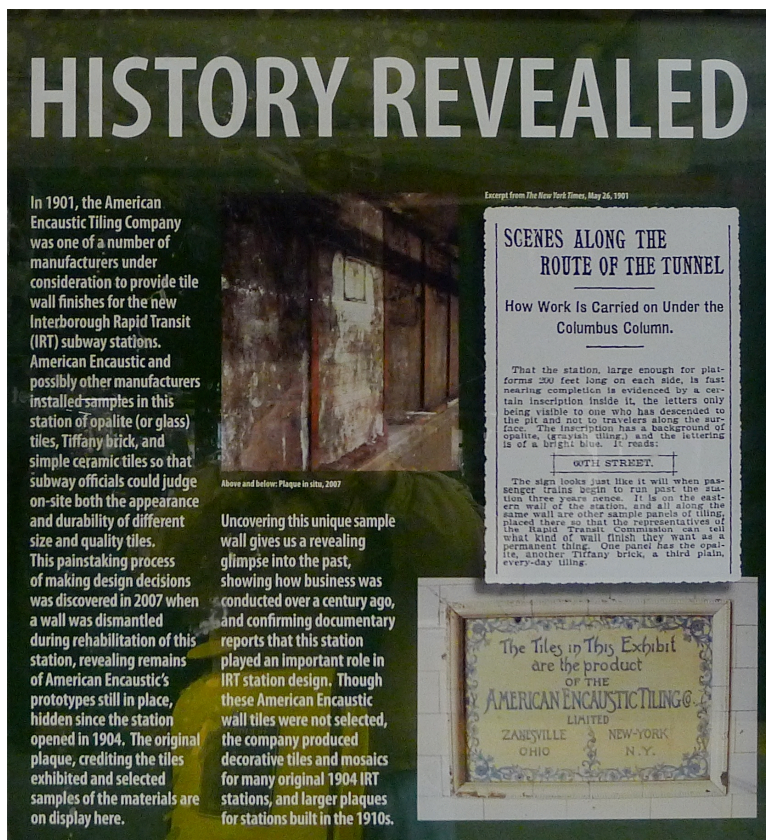


Part II--Heins and LaFarge



A Grueby Faience Eagle on the 33rd Street #6 platform. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee, 2012)

In 1901 a section of wall of what was to become the Columbus Circle station was set aside so ceramic and other companies could install their wares for inspection by the Rapid Transit Commission. (*The New York Times*, May 26, 1901) Among these companies was the American Encaustic Tiling Company, which was hoping to obtain a contract to tile the subway stations' walls with plain tiles. According to a plaque in the Columbus Circle station, "Though these American Encaustic wall tiles were not selected, the company produced decorative tiles and mosaics for many original 1904 IRT stations, and larger plaques for stations built in the 1910s." Many of the early subway station walls were tiled with glass tiles made by the Manhattan Glass Tile Company.



In 1901, the American Encaustic Tiling Company was one of a number of manufacturers under consideration to provide tile wall finishes for the new Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) subway stations. American Encaustic and possibly other manufacturers installed samples in this station of opalite (or glass) tiles, Tiffany brick, and simple ceramic tiles so that subway officials could judge on-site both the appearance and durability of different size and quality tiles. This painstaking process of making design decisions was discovered in 2007 when a wall was dismantled during rehabilitation of this station, revealing remains of American Encaustic's prototypes still in place, hidden since the station opened in 1904. The original plaque, crediting the tiles exhibited and selected samples of the materials are on display here.



Above and below: Plaques in situ, 2007

Uncovering this unique sample wall gives us a revealing glimpse into the past, showing how business was conducted over a century ago, and confirming documentary reports that this station played an important role in IRT station design. Though these American Encaustic wall tiles were not selected, the company produced decorative tiles and mosaics for many original 1904 IRT stations, and larger plaques for stations built in the 1910s.

Excerpt from The New York Times, May 26, 1901

SCENES ALONG THE ROUTE OF THE TUNNEL
How Work Is Carried on Under the Columbus Column.

That the station, large enough for platforms 350 feet long on each side, is fast nearing completion is evidenced by a certain inscription inside it, the letters only being visible to one who has descended to the pit and not to travelers along the surface. The inscription has a background of opalite (opaline tiles) and the lettering is of a bright blue. It reads:

67th STREET.

The sign looks just like it will when passenger trains begin to run past the station three years hence. It is on the eastern wall of the station, and all along the same wall are other sample panels of tiling, placed there so that the representatives of the Rapid Transit Commission can tell what kind of wall finish they want as a permanent thing. One panel has the opalite, another, Tiffany brick, a third plain, every-day tiling.



Plaque in the Columbus Circle station that explains the AET exhibit. The wall at the top is where the tiles were exhibited. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

"Another keyhole to the past opened recently on the uptown platform of the No. 1 train at the...Columbus Circle station...: an interwoven guilloche pattern[*]--...in red and yellow mosaic tiles. ...Next to the guilloche border is a large blue-gray mosaic medallion, enclosing a four-lobed pattern known as a quatrefoil. ...In 'Silver Connections' (1984), his monumental history and description of the New York subway, Philip Ashforth Coppola...wrote '[in 1901]...architects used its [Columbus Circle Station's] walls as an art gallery, experimenting with decorative ideas... .' After their brief service..., 'all these preliminary experiments were covered over and forgotten.'" (David W. Dunlap, "Behind an Old Subway Wall, a Glimpse of an Even Older One", *The New York Times*, October 20, 2010, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/antique-mosaic-comes-to-light-not-far-from-where-the-coliseum-stood/>) * [Guilloche pattern is an ornamental pattern or border, as in architecture, consisting of paired ribbons or lines flowing in interlaced curves around a series of circular voids.]

From the first contract to build a subway system in 1900 there was an emphasis on art in public areas. William Barclay Parsons, the chief engineer of the Rapid Transit Commission, hired George Heins and Christopher LaFarge as consulting architects for the IRT subway system. (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, p. 14)

"All of the station...[construction] was designed by the engineers of the Rapid Transit Board under Parsons' direction. The raw brick walls and concrete ceilings were then turned over to Heins and LaFarge to be 'beautified.' The decorative scheme that they devised was certainly influenced by Parsons... . Heins and LaFarge's plans were subject to the final approval of Parsons, who delegated authority to D. L. Turner, assistant engineer in charge of stations for the Rapid Transit Subway Construction Company. August Belmont also oversaw station decoration; he approved of the first completed station at Columbus Circle, but complained of the use of too much brick at Astor Place, 50th Street, and 66th Street.

"[Heins and LaFarge had designed the Zoo in the Bronx and]...carried several techniques from that project into the subway. These included Guastavino arches and vaulted ceilings, polychrome tile, and ornamental figures... . The stations of the New York subway[, however,] required an approach quite different from any of Heins and LaFarge's previous commissions, for here they were not working with space but merely with decoration. The station plans were determined by the engineers of the Board of Rapid Transit Railroad Commissioners, under Parsons' direction, and the architects were called in to "garnish" the spaces over which they exerted little direct control. [...In the Heins and LaFarge decoration schemes, however, c]olor was the most important artistic device used in the subway stations. As mentioned earlier in connection with Civic Art, color was thought to appeal to the average person more than subtle differences in scale or detail. ("Architectural Designs for New York's First Subway," David J. Framberger, Survey Number HAER NY-122, <http://www.nycsubway.org/articles/haer-design-architectural.html>)



How a subway station wall area originally looked. ("Subway Stations in New York City", *Brick*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, September 1903, p. 93)

[Subway stations had a general decorative scheme:] "In general, the station finish consisted of a sanitary cove base that made the transition from floor to wall, upon which rested a brick or marble wainscot for the first two and one-half feet or so of wall area. This wainscot was applied to withstand the hard usage that the lower wall would be subjected to. The wainscot was completed by either a brick or marble cap, and the remainder of the wall area was covered with three by six-inch white glass tiles, completed near the ceiling by a cornice or frieze. The wall area was divided into fifteen foot panels, the same spacing as the platform columns, by the use of colored tiles or mosaic... . The full station name appeared on large tablets of either mosaic tile, faience, or terra-cotta at frequent intervals, while smaller name plaques were incorporated into the cornice every fifteen feet. Sharp corners were eliminated and junctions between walls were curved to prevent chipping and facilitate cleaning. ...the stations exhibit considerable variation in color and detail. A conscious effort was made by the architects to create a distinct wall treatment for each station, both to relieve monotony and assist in the identification of different locations, and the 'extent of the decoration varies with the relative importance of the stations.' Wherever possible, a local association was worked into the decorative scheme, such as the seal of Columbia University at 116th and Broadway. Heins and LaFarge used a number of different details to add interest to the stations." ("Architectural Designs for New York's First Subway," David J. Framberger, Survey Number HAER NY-122, <http://www.nycsubway.org/articles/haer-design-architectural.html>)



A Grueby "Santa Maria" tile plaque at the IRT 59th Street/Columbus Circle platform (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee, 2012)

Grueby Faience

GRUEBY·FAIENCE·©
·BOSTON·MASS·

MAKERS·OF·TILES·&·FAIENCE
FOR·EXTERIOR·AND·INTERIOR
DECORATON·ON·WALLS·&·
·FLOORS·

List of New York subway stations
in which Grueby Faience was used

Brooklyn Bridge	50th Street
Bleecker Street	59th Street
Astor Place	66th Street
14th Street	96th Street
18th Street	103rd Street
28th Street	110th Street
33rd Street	116th Street
42nd Street	168th Street
181st Street	

GRAND PRIZE
FOR POTTERY·TILES & FAIENCE
AWARDED BY SUPERIOR JURY
ST·LOUIS·1904

A Grueby Faience ad in the 1905 *Catalogue of the Twentieth Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York*.

Heins and LaFarge also worked with designers and producers of ceramics. Two of the most prominent were William M. Grueby of the Grueby Faience Company of Boston, and William Watts Taylor, president of the Rookwood Pottery of Cincinnati, Ohio.

"...Grueby...was responsible for many of the distinctive early plaques: the ship at Columbus Circle, the eagle at 33rd Street, the beaver at Astor Place and a similar plaque for 50th Street, wreath-like medallions at 116th Street and 14th Street..., and the blue oval sign at Bleecker Street...[,] also...the heavy-bordered name panel at 28th Street and smaller letter and number signs and medallions at Brooklyn Bridge, 18th Street..., 42nd Street, 103rd Street, and 110th Street." (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, p. 16)



Astor Place Beaver plaque, 2012. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

In March 2000 a Grueby beaver plaque was going to be auctioned off by the Cincinnati Art Galleries in Cincinnati, Ohio. According to its description it was "formerly of the New York Subway System...[i]ninstalled, circa 1905, at Astor Place Station...[and r]emoved during [an] official renovation sometime in the 1960s... . The tile measures 25 by 14 inches and is signed 'MC+' on its right side in green slip." (Lot 120, "Art Tile Auction, March 1 Thru 9, 2000" [catalog], Cincinnati Art Galleries, Cincinnati, Ohio) Although this historic plaque had been sold previously and had been part of a joint exhibit by a gallery and a museum, it wasn't until this auction that a number of people thought the tile might actually belong to the people of the City of New York and demanded that it be pulled from the auction.



Another renovation in 2012, but the Grueby plaques remain. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

The Atlantic Terra Cotta Company



An Atlantic Terra Cotta letter-cartouche at Canal Street. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

Along with Rookwood and Grueby "...the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company...joined the project...[and was] responsible for shield-like cartouches at Canal Street, Worth Street..., Spring Street and Third Avenue in the Bronx. Atlantic Terra Cotta also produced small number panels for several stations...by ingenious mass-production: a standard plaque, bordered with cornucopias, was designed to receive a separately molded panel with the street number...on it. Examples can be seen in several stations including 86th Street, 137th Street, 145th Street and 157th Street." (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, p. 16)



A mass produced, Atlantic Terra Cotta Company cornucopia and street number panel. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

"During the first quarter of the 20th century the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company was the largest producer of architectural terra cotta in the world. By 1908 the firm operated four plants including Perth Amboy and Rocky Hill, N.J.; Staten Island, N.Y. and Eastpoint, Ga. (near Atlanta). The company maintained branch offices in New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Dallas and Newark, N.J. William H. Wilson presided as company president during peak years of production.

"National production of terra cotta quadrupled from 1900 to 1912, and the industry prospered throughout the 1920s. Terra cotta provided the ideal facade for the high rise, metal skeletal, constructed buildings. Atlantic Terra Cotta manufactured products for forty percent of the terra cotta buildings in New York City...", as well as for the subway system. The company closed in 1943. (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utaaa/00038/aaa-00038.html>)

The Atlantic Terra Cotta Company has other artwork in the subway system--rescued art from another site. In the 1990s twenty Atlantic Terra Cotta tile murals designed by Fred Dana Marsh in 1912 for the Hotel McAlpin Rathskeller (later, the Marine Grill). "Utilizing a favorite subject (boats), [Marsh] created six 8-foot tall lunettes illustrating the naval history of New York Harbor. One depicted Native Americans paddling canoes out to greet a ship. Others featured pilgrims landing on the shore, Henry Hudson's Half Moon, a British warship firing on New York, Robert Fulton's Clermont, and a tug leading a luxury liner with a contemporary (for 1913) city skyline behind it. The murals were transferred to terracotta tiles (made on Staten Island) and installed in the basement restaurant. (There were actually twenty murals with the original six being repeated.) The popular eatery became so associated with the murals that it was soon renamed the Marine Grill." (quoted from "Fred Dana Marsh: A Portrait of an Artist in Society", <http://freddanamarsh.blogspot.com/>)

These were literally rescued from a dumpster by Susan Tunick of the [Friends of Terra Cotta](#) and other preservationists when the last owners of the restaurant decided to demolish it.

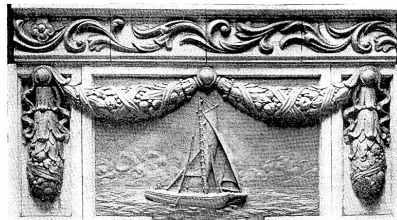


Five of the Marsh murals at the William Street entrance to the Fulton Street station, 2012.



Hartford Faience

Both William Grueby and Eugene Atwood worked for the Low Art Tile Works in Chelsea, Massachusetts in the 1880s. They formed a partnership in an architectural faience company in 1891, and in 1894 Atwood formed the Atwood Faience Company of Hartford, Connecticut, which later became the Hartford Faience Company. At the same time Grueby formed his own company in South Boston. (Susan J. Montgomery, *The Ceramics of William H. Grueby*, Arts and Crafts Quarterly Press, Lambertville, NJ, 1993, pp. 13-16) Hartford Faience supplied some of the plaques and cartouches for at least the Borough Hall Station in Brooklyn, and the South Ferry Station in Manhattan.



(South Ferry Station, Manhattan)

(Borough Hall Station, Brooklyn)



"HARTFORD" FAIENCE PANELS FOR NEW YORK

From "*Hartford*" *Faience and Tiles 1910*, a reprint of an original catalog, owned and published by [Antique Articles](#), c. 2000.



A Borough Hall (Brooklyn) plaque and surrounding mosaic tiling. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

Hartford Faience was at its high point about 1904 when the company participated in the St. Louis World's Fair with an impressive display that included its famous "Sun (or "Fire") Worshipers" fireplace panel.



TOP PANEL OF A MANTEL, REPRESENTING THE FIRE-WORSHIPERS.
ABOUT 9 FEET LONG BY 5 FEET HIGH.
Executed in Faience by the Hartford Faience Co.
Louis Potter, Sculptor.

Rookwood Faience

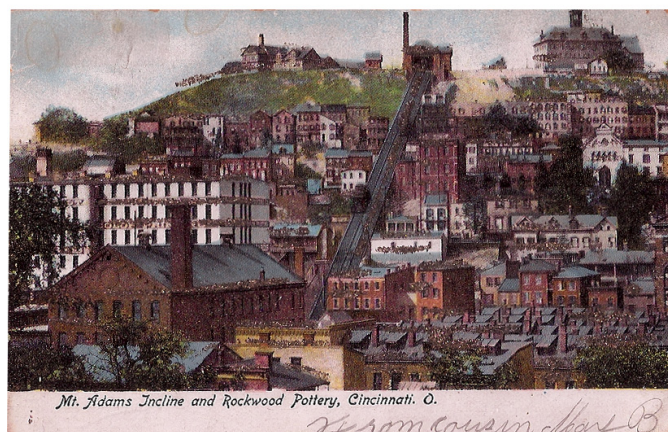
The Rookwood Pottery Company of Cincinnati, Ohio created a number of the tile plaques and other tile ornamentation in some Heins and LaFarge stations. Rookwood's company records note that the pottery's faience division was responsible for the 23rd, 79th, 86th, and 91st Street stations and the large plaques at Wall and Fulton Streets. (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, pp. 16+)



A Rookwood plaque and faience "W" panel installed at the Wall Street IRT #6 station. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee)

"Maria Longworth Nichols Storer founded Rookwood Pottery in 1880 as a way to market her hobby - the painting of blank tableware. Through years of experimentation with glazes and kiln temperatures, she eventually built her own kiln, hired a number of excellent chemists and artists who were able to create high-quality glazes of colors never before seen on mass-produced pottery."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rookwood_Pottery_Company



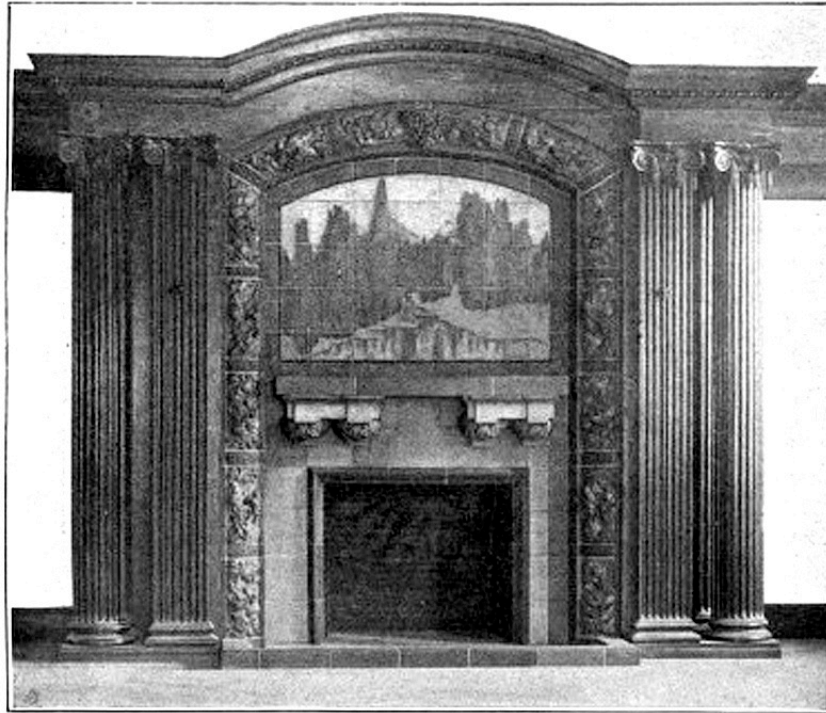
A picture post card from the author's collection.

"In 1883, Nichols hired William Watts Taylor (1847-1913) as the general business manager of Rookwood pottery. Taylor's goals for Rookwood echoed those of [William] Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement which was to restore quality and integrity to the arts. Taylor was adamant about nurturing innovative ideas and even commissioned leading chemists, such as Karl Langenbeck (1861-1938), to aid in the development of new glazes. The results were the extraordinary glazes that were at the time exclusive to Rookwood pottery. It was under Taylor's command that Rookwood would reach the summit of its success." (Daneel S. Smith, "Rookwood Pottery as 'Fine Art'", <http://journal.utarts.com/articles.php?id=1&type=paper>)



A slightly damaged Rookwood plaque and faience "F" panel at the Fulton Street IRT #6 platform.

"In 1902, Rookwood added architectural pottery to its portfolio. Under the direction of Watts Taylor, this division rapidly gained national and international acclaim. Many of the flat pieces were used around fireplaces in homes in Greater Cincinnati and surrounding areas, while custom installations found their places in grand homes, hotels, and public spaces. Even today, Rookwood tiles decorate Carew Tower, Union Terminal (Cincinnati) and Dixie Terminal in Cincinnati, as well as the Rathskeller Room in The Seelbach Hilton in Louisville, Ky. In New York, the Vanderbilt Hotel, Grand Central Station, ...Lord and Taylor and several subway stops feature Rookwood tile designs." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rookwood_Pottery_Company)

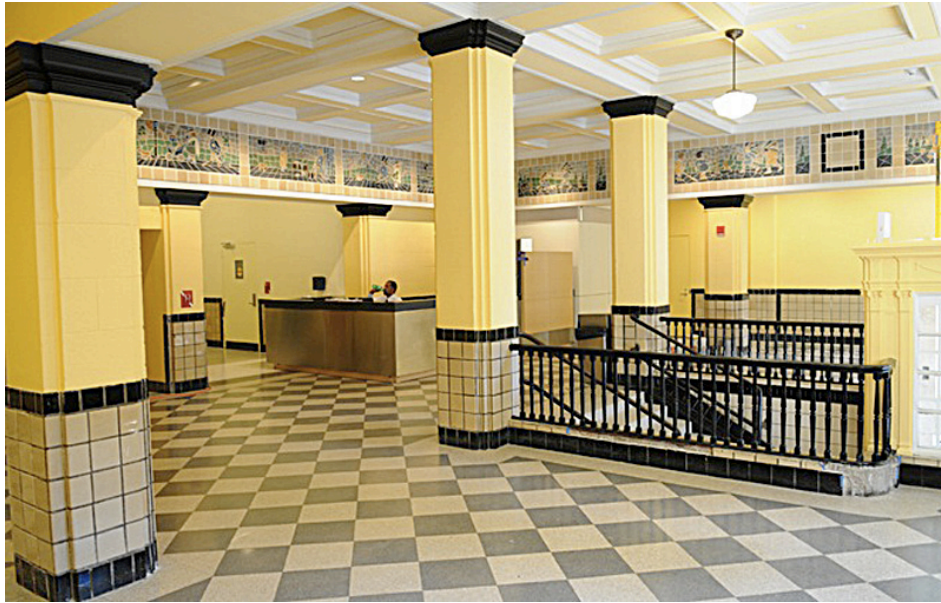


A MANTEL OF ROOKWOOD WARE.

(A.O. Elzner, "Rookwood Pottery--Illustrated", *The Architectural Record*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, April, 1905, p. 301)

Both Rookwood and Grueby have "decorated" other railway facilities throughout the country. Rookwood faience tiles were used in the Oregon-Washington Railroad and Navigation Company Terminal in Spokane, Washington in 1913, and Grueby faience tiles were used in Scranton, Pennsylvania for the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad. In 1908 the DL&W dedicated what was to be its "star [terminal]. ...the palatial structure housed one of the most important art tile installations in America--a frieze that circles the waiting-room and consists of thirty-six murals composed of Grueby Faience tiles. Each mural depicts a scene along the railroad's lines beginning at the Hoboken Ferry slips...and ending at Niagara Falls... ." All the panels are two feet high and four to nine feet long. The railroad waiting room is now a restaurant. The story of these murals, written by Dr. Richard D. Mohr and photographed by Robert W. Switzer, can be found online at <http://www.aapa.info/Portals/0/Lackawana.pdf> where this information was obtained.

[For those who cannot travel to Scranton, William Grueby left New Yorkers a frieze of children's murals in the 104th Street lobby of El Museo del Barrio. He probably designed these after the Pardee Art Tile Works of Perth Amboy, New Jersey bought Grueby's company and designs.]



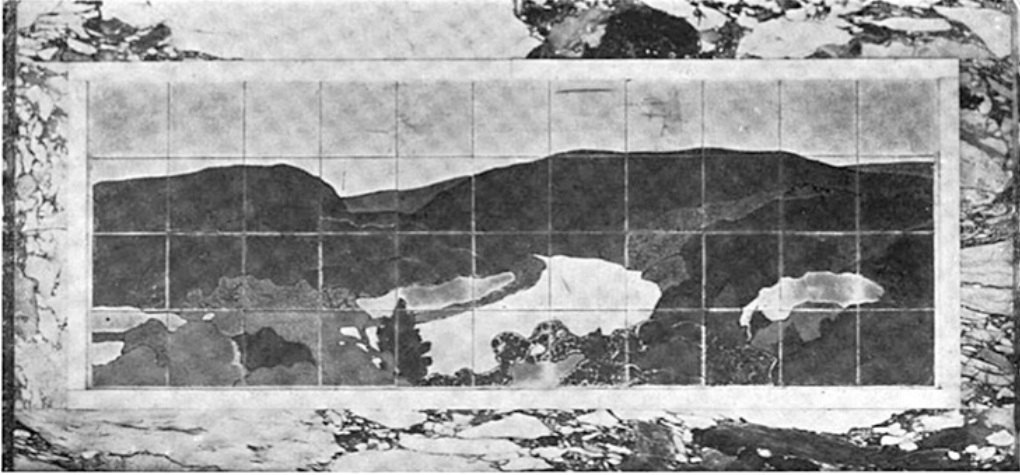
The 104th Street lobby in El Museo del Barrio. (This photo seems to have come from an [IBI Group](#) url that no longer exists.)



THE WESTERN ARCHITECT
JANUARY
1909

GENERAL WAITING ROOM
STATION FOR THE DELEWARE, LACKAWANNA AND WESTERN RAILWAY, SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA
KENNETH M. MURCHISON, ARCHITECT, NEW YORK

A view of the D, L & W waiting room with the panels below the balcony in a 1909 photograph, and one of the Grueby panels, below.



FAIENCE PANEL IN WAITING ROOM

SCRANTON STATION, D., L. & W. R. R.

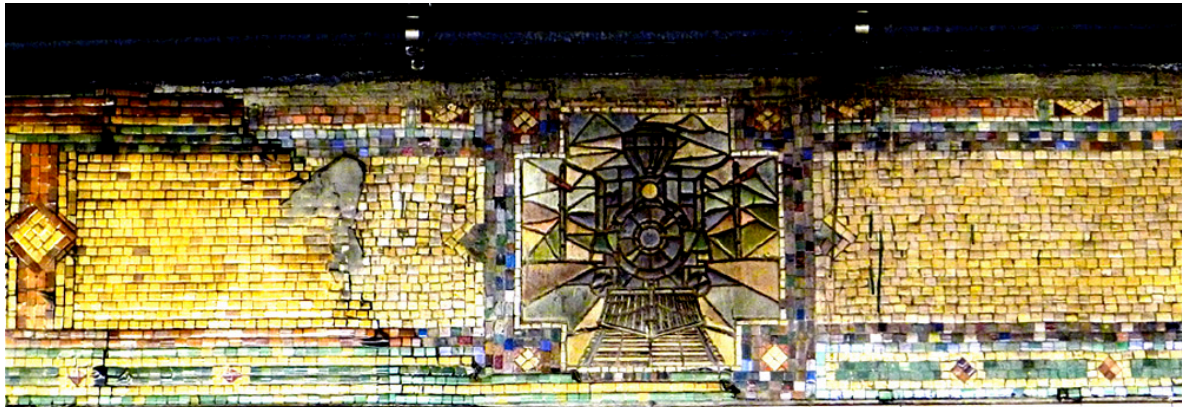
Part III--The Squire Vickers Era



A "Vickers eagle" mosaic tile panel at the IRT #6, 33rd Street station that replaced a Grueby faience eagle, which was possibly damaged. (Photo courtesy of Michael Padwee, color enhanced)

“...the first subway, which ran from City Hall to Broadway and 145th Street and opened in October 1904, was constructed by a company called Interborough Rapid Transit [the IRT line, designated by numbers], even though the first route was Manhattan-only. Soon, lines were built into Brooklyn, justifying the name. Beginning in the 1910s, a company called Brooklyn Rapid Transit built a network of surface lines and subways between Brooklyn and Manhattan; when that company went bankrupt after a train crash in a tunnel at Malbone Street, Brooklyn, in 1918, it reorganized as Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit, or the BMT [, designated by letters starting with "L"]. Finally, in the mid-1920s, the City of New York began planning and building its own set of subway lines, called the Independent [the IND line, designated by letters from "A" to "H"].” (<http://forgotten-ny.com/2012/03/high-street-station/>)

(Most of the mosaic plaques were dingy, damaged and/or filthy and had to be edited in some way-MP)



Mosaic train engine, Grand Central Station (color enhanced)

The architects George C. Heins & Christopher G. LaFarge presided over the original IRT construction from 1901 to about 1907. Overlapping Heins & LaFarge at the end of their contract was Squire J. Vickers (1872-1947), an architect contracted by the City in 1906 to oversee some of the IRT construction, and in 1913, the IRT/BMT "dual contract" lines and, later, the City-owned IND. Vickers worked for the subway system until 1943. The decorative work for the subway system was distinctly different under Squire Vickers. (An excellent bibliography of the history of the dual contract lines is at http://www.nycsubway.org/wiki/The_Dual_Contracts)



City Hall Station, historic mosaic panel, "R" train platform (color enhanced)

"It is clear that Vickers oversaw all of the design work and had a strong hand in choosing the material to be used. ...We...know that at least four [historic plaques] were done by Vickers' Cornell friend, Jay Van Everen, who was then painting in New York. ...In his painting Van Everen was influenced by Synchronist painters who were experimenting with unconventional use of color. ...there is clear evidence that...[Van Everen] created...[these] plaques: 14th Street/Union Square and Canal Street on the BMT; 125th Street and Clark Street on the IRT." (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, pp. 60-62)



Although much of the original mosaic tilework is gone from Union Square, there are some preserved sections of it. This was probably designed by Jay Van Everen.

"Another of the designers was Vickers' Cornell friend, Herbert Dole... .Vickers credited him with 'most' of the historic plaques. He designed the small hexagonal plaques set in fine mosaic bands at Christopher and Canal Streets, as well as

the...bolder plaque at Borough Hall on the 7th Avenue [IRT line]." (Lee Stookey, *Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography*, Lee Stookey, Brooklyn, NY, 1992, p. 62)



Herbert Dole's historic plaque at Borough Hall, Brooklyn



Borough Hall mosaic name plaque (color enhanced)

According to one reviewer of the Transit Museum's 2007 exhibit, "Squire Vickers and the Subway's Modern Age," "...[f]or both aesthetic and budgetary reasons Vickers pushed the subway onto a much more pared-down, modern path than that of his Beaux-Arts predecessors." Vickers and his designers used "...quiltlike geometric abstractions, evoking Piet Mondrian and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, [which] began to put a straight edge to the subway's swoops and curlicues, its terra-cotta cornucopias and floral medallions. ...Mosaic elements were made flat, for example, in part 'to avoid dust ledges,' ...[Vickers] wrote, so they would be cheaper to clean. They could also be set by hand in the factory instead of piece by piece on the wall, making them less expensive to install. And yet, in many places, in design elements like...flat mosaic picture plaque[s],...Vickers was still able pull off beautiful low-cost effects." (Randy Kennedy, "Underground Renaissance Man: Watch the Aesthetic Walls, Please", *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/arts/design/03subw.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print)



Historic mosaic plaque at Chambers Street, #1 Platform

“The Chambers Street station was among the first underground stations built by Brooklyn Rapid Transit, the predecessor of the BMT (Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit). Hence, the stations under Centre Street, Chambers, Canal, and Bowery, look somewhat different from the BMT stations that followed it. The BMT used a diamond pattern in station art, but here it shows up on the ID plaques as well as sanserif lettering.

“Beginning later in the 1910s, the BRT/BMT would shift to serifed letters, which in turn reverted back to sanserif with the IND in the 1930s.”

[\(http://forgotten-ny.com/2012/04/back-in-chambers/\)](http://forgotten-ny.com/2012/04/back-in-chambers/)



Mosaic-tiled diamond motifs and station names with serif lettering, "J" train platform at Fulton Street, Manhattan



Mosaic (serif) "TS" diamond panel in Times Square

"[Vickers']...works include the following New York subway stations, all of which are listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

In Manhattan:

181st Street Subway Station (IND), Fort Washington Avenue between 185th and 181st Streets; A train

190th Street Subway Station (IND), under Fort Washington Avenue between Fort Tryon Park (Cabrini Boulevard) and W. 190th Street; A train

86th Street Subway Station (Dual System IRT), under Lexington Avenue, between E. 85th and E. 87th Streets; 4, 5, 6 trains

West 28th Street Subway Station (Dual System IRT), Seventh Avenue between W. 26th and W. 29th Streets; 1, 2 trains

West Fourth Street Subway Station (IND), under Sixth Avenue between W. 3rd Street and Waverly Place; A, B, C, D, E, F, M trains

Chambers Street Subway Station (Dual System IRT), under West Broadway between Warren, Chambers and Reade Streets; 1, 2, 3 trains

In Brooklyn:

Ninth Avenue Station (Dual System BMT), 38th Street and Ninth Avenue near the junction of New Utrecht Avenue; D train

Avenue U Station (Dual System BMT), between Avenue U and Avenue T and Seventh and Eighth Streets; N train

Bay Parkway Station (Dual System BMT), above Bay Parkway at 86th Street; D train

New Utrecht Avenue Station (Dual System BMT), beneath the junction of New Utrecht Avenue with 15th Avenue and 62nd Street; N train
Ocean Parkway Station (Dual System BMT), above the junction of Brighton Beach Avenue and Ocean Parkway; Q train
Wilson Avenue Subway Station (Dual System BMT), Chauncey Street at Wilson Avenue; L train

In the Bronx:

Pelham Parkway Station (Dual System IRT), junction of White Plains Road and Pelham Parkway; 2, 5 trains
Westchester Square Station (Dual System IRT), above Westchester Avenue, from Overing Street to Ferris Place; 6 train
Woodlawn Station (Dual System IRT), junction of Bainbridge Avenue and Jerome Avenue; 4 train

In Queens:

Court Square Station (Dual System IRT), above 23rd Street between 44th Drive and 45th Road, Long Island City; 7 train
Main Street Subway Station (Dual System IRT), near junction of Roosevelt Avenue and Main Street, Flushing; 7 train"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squire_J._Vickers



Whitehall Street mosaic panel, "R" train station (enhanced)

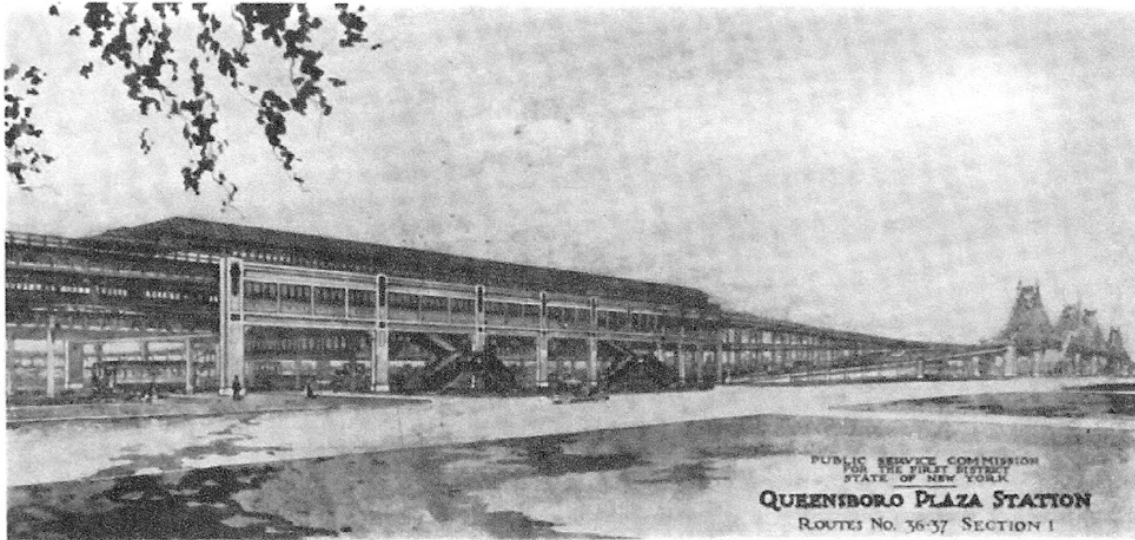


Court Street station, Brooklyn mosaic tile panel, "R" platform (enhanced)



"L" train station at Union Square, Manhattan

Elevated stations provided their own decorative problems to be solved by Vickers. "In one essay Vickers explained frankly why elevated stations, as any frequent subway rider can now see, ended up badly short-changed in the design department: 'Our attempts to beautify have been of little avail, except in certain cases, on account of the COST.'" (Randy Kennedy, "Underground Renaissance Man: Watch the Aesthetic Walls, Please", *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/arts/design/03subw.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print)



Tile work on and between the concrete support columns. (S.J. Vickers, "The Architectural Treatment of Special Elevated Stations of the Dual System, New York City", *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, Vol. III, No. 11, November 1915, p. 501)

Vickers further explains that in the elevated stations that were built during his tenure, a "systematic effort has also been made to simplify the detail and eliminate all ornament, admitting frankly the utilitarian nature of the structures. Although these stations will be orderly, we cannot hope they will be beautiful because of the conditions imposed. ...Inlaid colored tile is used where it seems desirable to add interest to the structure. A hand-made glazed tile with a semi-vitreous back is used... . The tile is set flush with the concrete in order that the surface may be enriched and still retain its simplicity." (From S.J. Vickers, "The Architectural Treatment of Special Elevated Stations of the Dual System, New York City", *Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, Vol. III, No. 11, November 1915, pp. 501-502)

"Much of Vickers's straightening and flattening had to do with the prevailing aesthetics of his day, as Arts and Crafts restraint gave way to the austerity of the Machine Age, reflected in the just-the-facts decoration, sans-serif type and solid colors of the Independent subway, the last major expansion, in the 1930s... ." (Randy Kennedy, "Underground Renaissance Man: Watch the Aesthetic Walls, Please", *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/arts/design/03subw.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print)



The 33rd Street/Rawson Street/Queens Blvd. station, #7 train

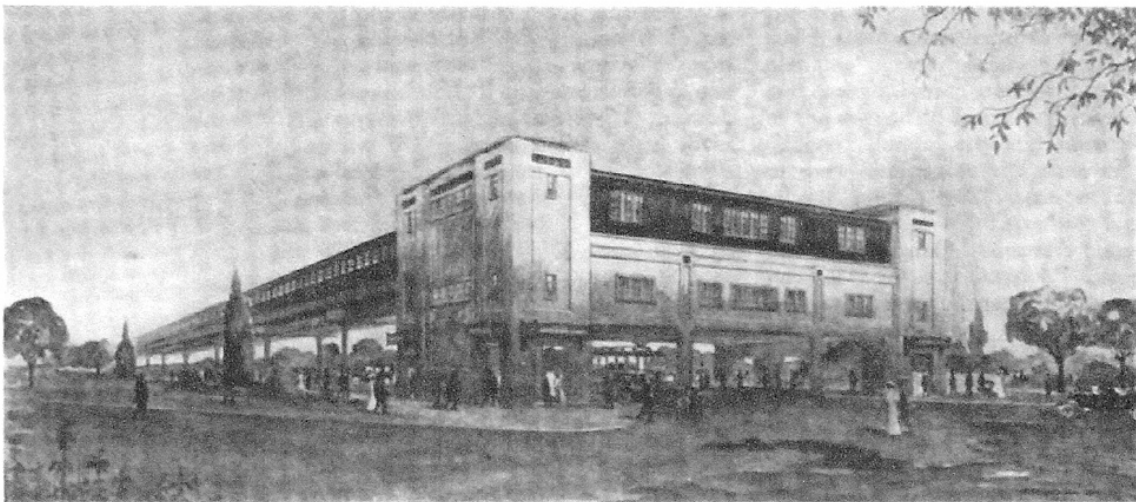


Ft. Hamilton Parkway/New Utrecht Ave. station, "D" and "M" trains



Detail of tiles installed in the station's concrete

In later years, "as subway projects lurched through the Depression[,]...many of his aesthetic decisions were driven by the bottom line." (Randy Kennedy, "Underground Renaissance Man: Watch the Aesthetic Walls, Please", *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/arts/design/03subw.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print)



WOODLAWN STATION—NEW YORK CITY

The Woodlawn (Bronx) IRT elevated station with exterior tiling. 1924 photo from <http://www.nycsubway.org/perl/show?41758>. David Pirmann collection.

Preservation, Maintenance and Modernization

For preservationists the condition of subway art and the seeming lack of interest by the MTA is a constant problem. A recent article by two *Daily News* writers notes that "A survey of three lines - the No. 6, the No. 1 and the L train - uncovered century-old tile nameplates and artwork that are falling apart because of neglect. Missing and chipped tiles, water and rust stains, and thick cracks mar dozens of station decorations that should be the system's crowning glory. ...the decay...is only corrected when a station undergoes a top-to-bottom rehabilitation." (Caitlan Millat and Tracy Connor, "Subway ceramics in shameful state", *New York Daily News*, July 21, 2012, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/subway-ceramics-shameful-state-article-1.306133>)

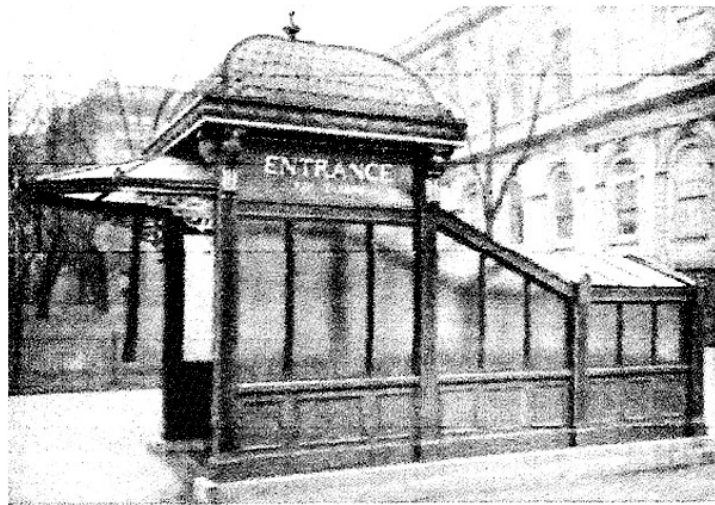
The deterioration in the subway system brought about "reforms" in the 1970s and 1980s under the guise of modernization. "In the 1950s...it was decided in the architectural community that curves were definitely out. ...Clean, unobstructed lines were in; terra cotta, ornamentation and most of all, any curves, circles or ovals were out. It took the subways about 20 years to catch up to this architectural trend, and from the late 1960s on through the early 1980s, the TA (later the MTA) experimented with modern, sleek-looking subway stations that, in some cases, bordered on sterility." (<http://forgotten-ny.com/2003/03/the-future-was-yesterday-when-the-subways-used-modern-design/>)



(Photo courtesy of [Gryffindor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bowling_Green_IRT_002.JPG); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bowling_Green_IRT_002.JPG)

This "modernization" also has its critics. "Preservationists still bemoan Philip Johnson's makeover of the 49th Street station, blanketed with shiny orange tiles in 1975. 'Cheer is the word, like a big shopping center,' Mr. Johnson announced at the time. Or

the demolition of the Bowling Green station starting in 1972, when huge red tiles replaced elegant mosaic name panels and neo-classical designs by Heins and LaFarge, who designed the 1904 and 1908 subway projects... . Or the alterations to the Broadway and 103d Street station, where classic white glazed brick-shaped tiles and at least one terra cotta escutcheon were covered by what [...one critic] called 'penal colony modern' beige walls. Or the destruction of almost all the distinctive above-ground kiosks, carted away in the 1960's, ostensibly because they blocked the sight lines of traffic. 'The real reason...is because they'd been neglected. The cast iron and glass were leaking.'" (Tracie Rozhon, "TURF: On the Express Track to Venerability", *The New York Times*, October 29, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/29/garden/turf-on-the-express-track-to-venerability.html?pagewanted=1>)



THE ENTRANCE TO THE SUBWAY AT CITY HALL
Executed by the Hecla Iron Works

(“The Ornamentation of the New Subway Stations in New York”, *House and Garden*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Feb. 1904, p. 292)

Another part of the system that fell to the ax of modernization were some of the above-ground control stations. The control station at Battery Park, however, still exists and is a landmarked site. “Designed by the prominent firm of Heins & LaFarge, the control houses reflect the influence of the City Beautiful movement on public works. They indicate the effort taken by public works planners in the early twentieth century to embellish and beautify a system that was essentially an engineering project.

“The Battery Park Control House..., completed in 1905, is located in Battery Park in Lower Manhattan. The building rests on a granite base. The corners are defined by limestone quoins which support elaborate triglyphs and volutes. A smooth limestone band course encircles the building just below the eaves. Below this band, the plain brick

walls on the east and west sides are pierced by simple high windows. The gable ends of the building are each decorated with a central bull's-eye with four radiating keystones. A banded wreath follows the curve of the bull's-eye and is crowned by a terra-cotta coping that descends along the sides of the gables. The northern front of the control house has a projecting limestone porch with square engaged columns supporting a stylized pediment on brackets. The pediment over the doorway is crowned by a small rosette flanked by volutes. The southern front has a large brick porch with three doors. The enframement of the central door is identical to that of the northern porch. The extension is edged by plain stone quoins and topped by a copper entablature and roof. The Battery Park Control House was completely renovated in 1978 under the direction of Paul Katz, architect for the Transit Authority.” (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/64000566.pdf>)



(Photo courtesy of [Wally Gobetz](#);
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:NYCS_IRT_LexAve_BowlingGreen_ControlHouse.jpg)

There are a few works that should be kept in mind if you're interested in the subway system and in subway art. Philip Ashforth Coppola's self-published, multi-volume ***Silver Connections: A Fresh Perspective on the New York Area Subway Systems***, is not generally available, but can most likely be located in a library. Lee Stookey's self-published ***Subway Ceramics: A History and Iconography***, published in Brooklyn, NY in 1992 can be purchased online. And, one online resource that I found indispensable was <http://www.nycsubway.org/>.