

# A Rare Example of Egyptian-Inspired Art Deco Architecture in Kings Park, NY

## School/Museum Building Designed by Noteworthy Architects: Tooker & Marsh

by Kristen Matejka



Entering the Kings Park Heritage Museum at the RJO Building in Kings Park, NY, the elaborate exterior entry areas are a likely remnant from a design that first received architectural attention from the mid-1800s, and then again into the 1930s, called Egyptian Revival/Art Deco.

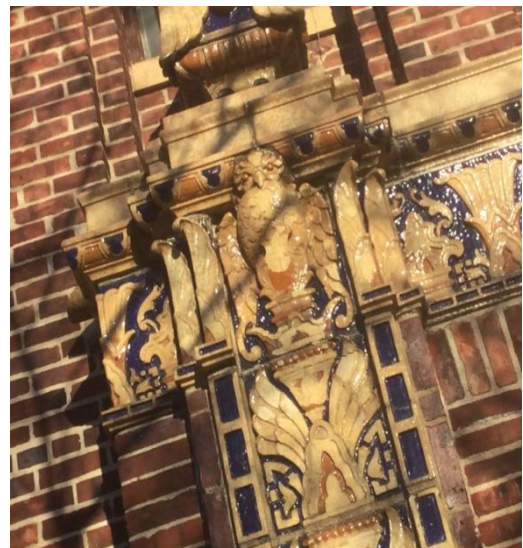
It is quite rare to find the motif remaining on Long Island. The detailing seems to incorporate elements of ancient Egyptian icons, even though they are heavily 'stylized'.

Egyptian influence in western architecture first appeared in the 1830s to 1850s after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, which "unlocked the secrets of hieroglyphics" and broadened access and information about Egyptian history, according to WA state Dept. of Archeology &

Historic Preservation. After the find, there was a large surge of public interest in Egyptian architecture, noted for its timelessness, strength and most-importantly, its mystery.

Architects in the U.S. began bringing iconic elements from Egyptian motifs into buildings they were designing for both public and private projects. In the mid-1800s, they incorporated pylons, papyrus-stalk columns, obelisks, winged-disks and lotus flowers. Ancient Egyptians used these symbols to represent and impart different meanings. Source: Archaeological Institute of America.

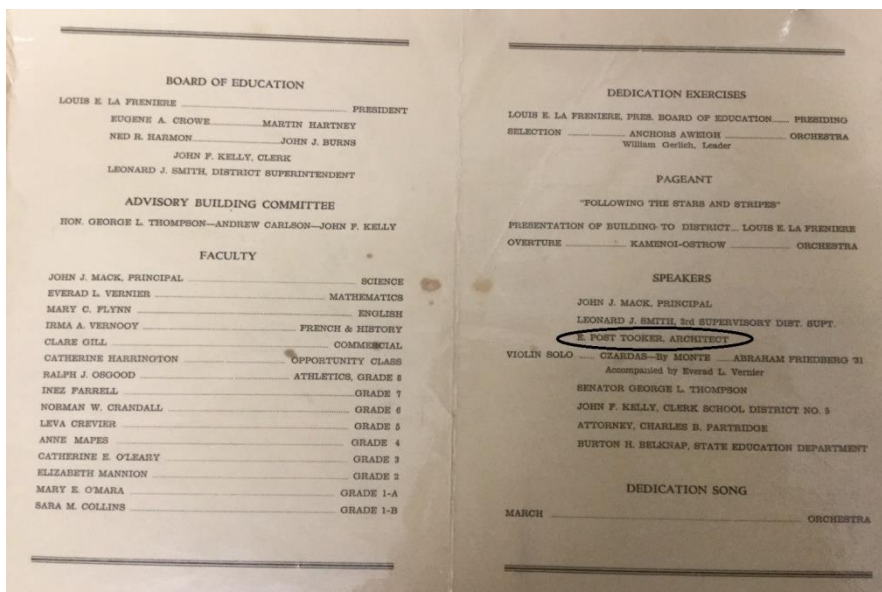
Later, from the 1920s into the 1930s there was a revival of the style, which coincided with the discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. This is when the style became even more prevalent and ambitious in incorporating design elements such as: sphinxes, pyramids, obelisks, and temples. Again, the fascination coincided with the great mysteries that were being uncovered in Egypt, which to Americans and Europeans seemed exotic and unknown. It also coincided with the American Art Deco movement. Source: Britannica: Egyptomania: Sphinxes, Obelisks, and Scarabs.



Egyptian Revivalism has been used largely on prisons, cemetery gates, churches, memorials, public buildings and tomb markers. Source: Archaeological Institute of America. It was used to convey power and mystery.

The designer of the RJO building at the corner of Old Dock Rd. and Church St. in Kings Park was a firm called Tooker & Marsh, founded by E. Post Tooker and Reginald E. Marsh in 1914. The firm was located at 101 Park Avenue, New York. They operated through 1940 and were known for their design work on schools and public buildings, as well as some private estates.

They were known for such landmark buildings as the c. 1915 Bear Mountain Inn (recognized as an outstanding early representation of rustic lodge-style architecture), and also Brooklyn's neo-Gothic, c. 1920, Studebaker Building, a NYC landmark covered entirely in a white terra cotta façade.



E. Post Tooker attended the dedication ceremony of the RJO Building in Kings Park in 1928. He is listed on the program. The building, at the corner of Church St. and Old Dock Rd. was originally constructed as a school and now also serves as the home of the Kings Park Heritage Museum.

The firm designed many other schools and public buildings throughout NY and Long Island. While more prevalent in NYC, it's not common to find original Egyptian Revival architecture on

Long Island, and so the entranceway of the RJO Building is an outstanding and significant study, albeit, open for interpretation and confirmation. It is likely the firm might've thought to incorporate Egyptian elements because interest in Egypt was high at the time, and again, the symbols had inherent meaning.

When combined with Art Deco, Egyptian Revivalism *wasn't necessarily an exact duplication of Egyptian artwork*. Rather it might incorporate abstract components that represented the meaning of the Egyptian iconography.





## Possible Egyptian Revival Symbolism Used in the Entrancesways of the RJO Building/Kings Park Heritage Museum:

1. Owl. In ancient Egypt, owls were known as keen-eyed hunters. In hieroglyphs, the owl can be interpreted as one who sees and also moans, perhaps alluding to the haunting sound they make. Owls were also used as amulets for navigation.

Source: At the Mummies Ball. Egyptology Blog.

2. Stylized spread-wing motif. Wings were used in several forms, for ex. 'winged disks' and 'winged scarabs' that can symbolize rebirth or transformation, but generally they're believed to be a symbol of protection. The wings on the RJO/Kings Park Heritage Museum doorway may be imposed upon a Djed pillar, which is considered a symbol of 'stability.' Source:

<https://www.egypttoursportal.com/ancient-egyptian-symbols/>

3. Lotus Flower. One of the most popular symbols used in Egyptian Art Deco architecture is the stylized lotus flower. It is seen as a symbol of regeneration; of something new emerging each day. It was widely used throughout ancient Egypt as a symbol of growth, enlightenment and purity.

4. Feather of Ma'at. Used as a symbol of justice and truth, along with order and law. Shaped like elongated feathers. Source: Egypt Tours Portal

5. Winged lion. The winged lion may be an interpretation of the Sphinx, who watched over and guarded the horizon against enemies.

Source: <https://ancientegyptianfacts.com/ancient-egyptian-motifs.html>



**Detailing at Entranceway to Kings Park Heritage Museum, Kings Park:**



**Five lotus flowers running horizontally across the top**



**Owl and Feathers of Ma'at**



**Spread wing motif**



**Winged lion motif (open for interpretation)**

## Other Work by Architectural Firm Tooker & Marsh:

Source: Compiled by Pelham Preservation Society

- U.S. Post Office, 100 Fulton Avenue, Hempstead, Long Island (listed on the National Register of Historic Places)
- Amincliff/Ryefield Manor (c.1910), Lattingtown, Long Island (built as home of Amos Dow Carver)
- Hegeman Hall, Stony Brook School, Stony Brook, Long Island
- Home of Reginald E. Marsh (c. 1922), Bronxville, New York
- Studebaker Building (c. 1920), 1469 Bedford Avenue (at Sterling Place), Brooklyn, NY
- People's Trust Company Building (1921), Tamaqua, PA (appearing in *The American Architect*, July 6, 1921)
- Home of Charles Otto, Hartsdale, Westchester County, NY (appearing in *The American Architect*, July 6, 1921)
- Baldwin Grade School (1921), Baldwin, Long Island (appearing in *The American Architect*, July 6, 1921)
- Edwin Thanhauser Lodge, Bayville, Long Island
- Cohoes School, NY
- Grade & High School, Greenburgh, Westchester County, NY
- Hartsdale Grade School, Westchester County, NY
- High School, Norwich, NY
- Grade & High School, Port Henry, NY
- Ferris Avenue Grade School, White Plains, NY
- Home of Mrs. C.A. Woodcock (1928), Glens Falls, NY
- Palmyra Elementary School (1924), 120 Canandaigua Street, Palmyra, Wayne County, NY
- Bridgehampton School (1931), 2685 Montauk Highway, Bridgehampton, Long Island
- Port Chester High School (1930-32)
- "Brookwood Apartments," (c.1938), 90 Knightsbridge Apartment House, Great Neck, Long Island
- Glen Cove High School (1938), Glen Cove, Long Island
- Manhasset High School (1935), 200 Memorial Place, Manhasset, Long Island
- Munsey Park School (1940), One Hunt Lane, Manhasset, Long Island