

Firm History



1928

Founded as Syska & Hennessy Engineers



ADOLPH G. SYSKA



JOHN F. HENNESSY

In 1928, two young mechanical engineers brought their talent and ambitions into partnership. They were Adolph G. Syska and John F. Hennessy. Their firm was among the first to specialize in the elaborate mechanical and electrical systems at the heart of 20th century structures. For building engineers, it was a true technological frontier.

Since the firm opened its first office in New York, Syska Hennessy has grown nationally and internationally by providing consistent innovation and leadership in energy-efficient and cost-effective design solutions that enable its clients to succeed. As clients' needs have grown, so have the services of the firm, evolving from its core design engineering roots in mechanical and electrical engineering to become a diversified and integrated organization providing consulting, engineering, technology and construction services.

Today, Syska draws insights from its rich legacy of experience that includes some of the world's most technically sophisticated buildings— achievements that not only represent the best thinking of their time, but that endure for generations. With offices through out the United States and internationally in Shanghai, China, our staff provides consulting services throughout the project lifecycle, helping to plan, design, build and operate technically superior facilities that are key to the success of an international roster of clients who are leaders in their industries.

Firm History

Early Years

1930s

- National Post Office, Washington DC
- Frick Collection, New York
- LaGuardia Airport
- 1939 World's Fair

1940s

- United Nations Building
- Todd Shipyards
- Dupont Research Center

The firm's first large commission was the U.S. Post Office Department Building in Washington, D.C. Shortly thereafter, the firm broke new ground by helping to design the Frick Collection in New York City, widely believed to be the first fully air-conditioned museum in the world.

In 1939, Syska's first international project came in 1939, with the design of the ES&A Bank in Melbourne, Australia. The success of this project was soon followed by the design of hotels for the former Pan American Airways in Belem and Natal (Brazil) and Liberia (Africa). Taking an innovative approach that has become a hallmark of the firm, Syska pioneered the use of alternative forms of energy generation by designing the two hotels in Brazil to use solar energy as the primary source for heating domestic hot water, with electrical standby for rainy days.

When World War II broke out, Syska shifted its focus back to national projects, and made major contributions to the defense effort, including the Todd Shipyards, expansion and update of military installations in Brooklyn, Hoboken (NJ) and New Orleans, as well as a new installation in South Portland, Maine.

Following the war's end, Syska's industry leadership position was recognized with the firm's selection as project engineer for the planned headquarters of the newly born United Nations, which was to make its permanent home in New York City. The success of the U.N. project fueled the firm's growth, and by the time the project was completed in 1952, Syska's staff had more than doubled to 80 people. Continuing on a path of innovation, Syska introduced several significant leading-edge design concepts into the U.N. project, including use of combination lighting fixtures and air diffusers, strip line air diffusers, and use of river water for cooling for increased energy efficiency and reliability.

In 1960, Syska & Hennessy helped design what was to become "the greatest attraction in New York's history", the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. This was followed in 1962 when the firm was commissioned to work on its largest project to date, the Albany Mall, later to become known as the Empire State Plaza.

1950s

- West Point
- Air Force Academy
- Columbia University
- New York University Medical School
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology

1960s

- Lincoln Center
- Rockefeller Center
- JFK Center for the Performing Arts
- Madison Square Garden
- National Gallery of Art
- JFK Airport
- Bureau of Printing and Engraving

In the 1960's, Syska began to expand its reach with the opening of a regional office in Washington D.C., and introduce an integrated services approach with the addition of Automation and Security, Fire Protection, SHIS, Transport, and Building Management services to clients already familiar with their engineering expertise. This integrated approach was highly successful, and by 1970 Syska had now grown to well over 300 people. The firm returned to the overseas market, formed an International Division, and, in 1973, expanded to the West Coast with the opening of a regional office in Los Angeles, California.

As a national recession caused building construction declined in the U.S. in the early 1970s, the firm management redirected its attention to project opportunities in the Middle East. In 1974, Syska opened an office in Tehran, Iran and immediately began work on the largest project in the Middle East at the time, the King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A consortium of firms, including Syska, was awarded the design and construction administration contract. The campus, built over a nine-year period at the cost of approximately \$3.5 billion, was completed and occupied in the fall of 1983.

In 1977, Syska once again grew nationally with the establishment of a regional office in San Francisco. With this acquisition, and other offices opening overseas, the firm had truly become a worldwide operation, with 8 offices in New York, Washington, Los Angeles and San Francisco and overseas offices in Paris, France; Lausanne, Switzerland; Tehran, Iran; and a field office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Firm History

Restructuring and Change



1970s

- National University of Iran, Tehran
- King Saud University, Saudi Arabia
- Monterey Bay Aquarium
- IBM, Bordeaux, France

1980s

- Harvard University
- Boston Museum of Fine Arts
- New York City Convention Center
- Los Angeles International Airport
- Disney World

In 1978, the nation was looking forward to a period of normalization and prosperity, but the events of the next few years proved to be anything but normal. The first harbinger of tumultuous times ahead was the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which forced the abrupt closing of the Tehran office at the end of 1978.

Once this stormy period passed, however, Syska's integrated service approach and innovative engineering style facilitated a period of unprecedented growth for the firm. By the summer of 1982, Syska team members reached 600.

As the national economy slowed once again in the early '90s, the firm's leadership responded with a plan to more closely align its services and structure with those of its clients. Syska began to internally develop market focused consulting team leaders who were not only skilled engineers, but who also understood and could help solve the market specific business problems their clients. This strategy proved highly effective, and by 1993 Syska was again moving forward, with a growing project backlog.

In 1993, the firm was selected for the design of the Ronald Reagan National Airport expansion in Washington, D.C., destined to become one of many landmark aviation projects to follow. The firm's expansion in both geographic reach and capabilities continued with the addition of more integrated services, including design/build construction, facilities management, and strategic facilities consulting.

Firm History

Moving to a Management Owned Firm



1990s

- Amgen
- Bristol-Myers Squibb
- Bank of America
- City of Hope
- Sony Studios
- Paramount Pictures
- Warner Bros.
- CBS
- NBC

2000s

- Pentagon Reconstruction
- American Express
- Banner Estrella Medical Center
- San Diego Convention Center
- Los Angeles Convention Center
- Amazon.com
- Verizon Communications
- Goldman Sachs

The firm's cornerstones and keys to continued success over the years has been an unrelenting focus on continuity of ownership, innovation of design, and seamless transition of key staff. To assure that this process would continue into the future, an ownership transition plan was implemented in the mid-1990s culminating in a shift in ownership from a family-owned firm to a management-owned firm in 2000. Syska Hennessy was then, and continues today, as a management-owned firm.

With the ownership transition, senior management set its sights on positioning the firm for the new millennium. A re-organized management team was put in place. With this varied set of talents in place, the leadership continued the process of retooling the firm's substantial resources to better serve clients and markets. The firm continues to take a leadership role in such industry-leading environmental initiatives as sustainable design; building specialized expertise in specialized services such as aquatic life support, vertical transportation and architectural lighting design; and working to maintain its leadership position in building systems engineering, architectural lighting design, low-voltage technology, facilities management, central utilities design, and engineer-led design-build construction.

Meeting Today's Needs

2006 marks the formation of SH Group, Inc. as our parent company to two subsidiaries, Syska Hennessy Group, Inc. (our engineering company) and Syska Hennessy Group, Inc. Construction (our technically led construction company). Operating as one firm, we offer integrated consulting, engineering, technology and construction organization, symbolizing a redefined company, one that is better able and organized to meet its client's challenges.