

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 125TH STREET BRANCH,
224 East 125th Street, Manhattan
Built 1904, McKim, Mead & White; architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1789, Lot 37

On June 24, 2008 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of New York Public Library 125th Street Branch; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 10). The hearing was duly advertised according to provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives the New York Public Library, the Historic Districts Council, and the Municipal Art Society.

Summary

The 125th Street Branch of The New York Public Library is notable for being one of the Carnegie libraries and a significant Renaissance Revival style building by the important firm of McKim, Mead, & White.

The library was the third Carnegie branch of The New York Public Library to open, and has served the Harlem community for more than one-hundred years. Made possible by a grant of \$5.2 million from Andrew Carnegie to the City of New York to establish a city-wide branch library system, a total of 67 branch libraries were constructed between 1901 and 1929. Of those, 57 are still standing, and 54 are still in operation.

The firm of McKim, Mead & White, one of the most notable and influential architecture firms in the country, designed twelve of The New York Public Library Carnegie Branches, and played a major part in the formulation of the libraries' design guidelines. The firm's philosophy was that the libraries were designed to serve two purposes: to be specific to their neighborhood yet universal in character, and to be expressive of a municipal building type.

The striking Renaissance Revival-style building is of the palazzo type. The building is clad in rusticated Indiana limestone, and is three stories high and three bays wide. Large arched windows dominate the first floor with an entrance offset to the right with an arched glass transom above. The tall second-floor window openings are topped by arched decorative transom panels. The third floor has three small square windows that pierce the façade, creating a clerestory.

The Carnegie libraries continue to be enormously important to the city as a whole and to the communities they serve.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of East Harlem¹

The part of New York known as East Harlem embraces the area of Manhattan north of 96th Street, from Fifth Avenue to the East River to 142nd Street.

The original village of Harlem was established in 1658 by Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant and named Nieuw Harlem after the Dutch city of Harlem. Some of the earliest families to reside in the area were the DeForrest family. Two brothers, Isaac and Henry, along with African slaves, began to cultivate the area in the late 1600s.²

The advent of new and better forms of transportation, as well as the rapidly increasing population of New York following the Civil War, brought about the transformation of Harlem into a middle and upper-middle class neighborhood. Although the New York and Harlem Railroad had operated from lower Manhattan to Harlem beginning in 1837, service was unreliable and the trip was long. The impetus for new residential development in this area came with the arrival of three lines of elevated rail service which, by 1881, ran as far north as 129th Street and by 1886 extended farther north.³

As early as the 1830s black farmers settled around 130th Street; German and Irish immigrants soon followed. Italian-Americans arrived in East Harlem in the late 1870s. From 1880 to 1910 Italians settled in Harlem primarily in the area east of Third Avenue and by the 1930s Harlem had one of the largest Italian communities in the country.⁴ By 1890 the original Irish-and German-American communities were rapidly being replaced by Italians and a Yiddish-speaking community of Eastern European Jews, which was located between Lexington and Fifth Avenues. Smaller Finnish-American and Greek-American communities also shared the area of East Harlem until the late 1920s.

During the 1890s, a small group of Puerto Ricans arrived in East Harlem. It was only after 1900, however, that significant numbers of Puerto Ricans came. By the 1920s-1930s, due to its large Latino population, the area soon came to be known as Spanish Harlem, however, Spanish-speaking residents referred to the area as “el barrio,” or “the neighborhood”. The second phase, 1946–1964, known as the “Great Migration,” greatly increased the size of the Puerto Rican community of East Harlem.⁵

Social problems caused a decrease in Harlem’s population during the late 1960s through the 1970s, leaving behind a high concentration of underprivileged residents and decaying housing stock. By the late 1970s and 1980s, years of economic recessions and abandonment, redlining and disinvestment had taken their toll.

Since the late 1990s and into the 21st century, Harlem is experiencing a renaissance. Unlike the cultural and literary renaissance of the 1920s, the current rebirth is based on economic development and showcasing Harlem’s cultural history. Today, Harlem is one of the most desirable places to live in New York City.⁶

125th Street⁷

125th Street is Harlem’s largest and most famous thoroughfare; some have christened it the Main Street of Black America. Laid out in the 1811 Commissioner's Plan of New York City, 125th Street is one of 15 broad cross-town streets that fall approximately every ten blocks along the tilted north-south axis of Manhattan Island.⁸ 125th Street has long played a part in the intellectual pursuits of many in the Harlem community. It features two public libraries, the 125th Street Branch of The New York Public Library at the eastern end of the street and the George Bruce Branch of The New York Public Library at the western end of the street. These libraries have nurtured the education of some of Harlem’s most notable sons and daughters. Famed author

James Baldwin was born in Harlem and claimed that by age thirteen, he had read all the books in two Harlem libraries; it was in these Harlem libraries that he found his passion for writing.⁹

In the latter part of the 19th century, 125th Street emerged as one of Harlem's major commercial thoroughfares. By 1914, its large quota of shops, theatres, banks, and markets, rivaled other major cross-town streets.¹⁰ In 1934 civil rights leader and politician Adam Clayton Powell Jr. started to campaign for black employment in the businesses on 125th Street, threatening to boycott any store that would not hire blacks. By the beginning of World War II, most stores along the busy thoroughfare had at least one or two people of color employed in their establishments. The first black-owned business, Bobby Robinson's Shop opened at the corner of West 125th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard (Eighth Avenue) in August 1936.

The corner of 125th Street and Lennox Avenue was often the scene of public political debates, lectures, marches, and discussions; it was named "The Street Corner University." Malcolm X often gave speeches on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 125th Street. Distinguished scholar W. E. B. Dubois had offices at 139th Street and on 125th Street. By the early 1960s, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had offices on 125th street, and acted as negotiator for the community on behalf of the city, especially in times of racial unrest.

Throughout the years, 125th street has consistently been the center of culture and entertainment for Harlem. The Harlem Opera House at 207 West 125th Street opened its doors on September 30, 1889. The Apollo Theatre, originally Hurtig & Seamons Burlesque Theatre, reopened in January 1934, as the first theatre to offer live entertainment to black audience.¹¹ 125th Street is home to The Studio Museum of Harlem founded in 1968, supporting the works of black artists and showing artworks inspired by black culture.¹²

History of Manhattan Libraries¹³

In the 18th and early 19th centuries libraries in New York City were private, institutional, or by subscription. The New York Society Library, a subscription library where users paid a membership fee, was established in 1754, and Columbia University opened a library by 1757. Both were destroyed during the Revolutionary War but were rebuilt, and by 1876, Columbia had one of the largest collections in the country. Reading rooms, operated as businesses or by non-profit organizations, made books available to the public, and a reading room was opened in 1797 at Garrett Noel's bookstore located at 22 Ann Street.

Institutions, including The New-York Historical Society, the Cooper Union, and Union Theological Seminary, opened libraries in the first half of the 19th century. The Astor Library, the City's first free public reference library, incorporated in 1849. The Lenox Library, a private collection of rare and reference books, incorporated in 1870. By 1876 there were about ninety libraries and collections in New York City.

At the end of the nineteenth century New York City, with a population of about three million, was one of the largest cities in the world. Few libraries were accessible to the public, and New York trailed behind other cities in public library support. (In 1901, before the Carnegie bequest, New York City spent nine cents per capita on libraries, comparing poorly with Boston, which spent fifty cents per capita and Buffalo, at forty- one cents per capita).¹⁴ Several institutions were founded in the 1870s and 1880s to address this social concern. The Aguilar Free Library Society, for example, was started in 1886 to foster the "free circulation of carefully selected literature, in the homes of the people of this City, with distributing branches in localities where the Jewish population was dense."¹⁵ There were four branches in 1901 when the library merged with The New York Public Library. The New York Free Circulating Library, established in 1878 to provide education and self-help for the poor, was supported by such wealthy citizens as

Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, and from 1887 in part by public funds. In 1901 it operated eleven branches located in poor and immigrant neighborhoods.

The New York Public Library and Andrew Carnegie¹⁶

The New York Public Library was established in 1895 as a private corporation, which received limited public funds. Formed initially by the merger of the Astor and Lenox Libraries and the Tilden Trust, it was primarily concerned with building a major reference library on the site of the old Croton Reservoir at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. The consolidation of New York City in 1898 led to the growth and unification of the library institutions in the city, including The New York Public Library.

The New York Free Circulating Library merged with The New York Public Library in 1901 and provided the core of the institution's branch library system. Most of the small independent lending libraries, such as the Aguilar, Cathedral, Webster, Kingsbridge, and Tottenville, joined The New York Public Library, increasing the size of the still inadequate branch network. The promise of a large grant from Andrew Carnegie in 1901 spurred these library mergers. The New York Public Library is still organized into the separate reference and branch systems that were created during this consolidation.

Andrew Carnegie and John Shaw Billings, Director of The New York Public Library, strongly supported the amalgamation of all of the libraries, including the Brooklyn and Queens libraries, which ultimately chose to remain independent. Today, New York City still has three separate library corporations: The New York Public Library (consisting of the boroughs of Manhattan, Bronx and Staten Island), the Brooklyn Public Library, and the Queens Borough Public Library.

In 1901, when the library institutions were large and cohesive enough to suit him, Andrew Carnegie donated \$5.2 million to New York City to build a system of branch libraries in all five boroughs. The grant was divided among the three library systems, with The New York Public Library receiving \$3.36 million, and Brooklyn and Queens allocated \$1.6 million and \$240,000 respectively. The grant bought sixty-seven libraries in all five boroughs, two more than originally envisioned.¹⁷ In a 1901 letter to John Shaw Billings, Carnegie said that:

Sixty-five libraries at one stroke probably breaks the record, but this is the day of big operations and New York is soon to be the biggest of Cities.¹⁸

Andrew Carnegie rose from poverty to become one of the wealthiest men in the United States after he sold his steel business to J.P. Morgan in 1901. He began donating to libraries in 1881, but with the grant to New York City he began the vast, worldwide operation which made him unique in the world of philanthropy.

Andrew Carnegie based his donations on a philosophy of giving he developed in the 1870s and 1880s. He believed that the wealthy should live modestly and, while still living, gives away their funds for the good of humanity. He considered seven areas worthy of his philanthropy: universities, libraries, medical centers, parks, meeting and concert halls, public baths, and churches. Like other wealthy New Yorkers involved in the social reform movement, he understood the problems facing New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century: the overcrowding from massive immigration, poverty, lack of education and lack of such facilities as baths, playgrounds and libraries. Andrew Carnegie gave away about 90 per cent of his wealth by the time he died in 1911. More than 2,500 Carnegie libraries were built worldwide and over 1,680 in the United States. Today the Carnegie Corporation and twenty other foundations and funds carry on his mission.

The inventor of cost accounting, Carnegie gave away his money with great efficiency. His grant provided for the construction of the buildings, but New York City had to contribute the cost of the land as well as the books, the upkeep and the operation of the libraries in perpetuity. This cost was substantial: the acquisition of sites alone for the Carnegie branches of The New York Public Library (consisting of the boroughs of Manhattan, Bronx and Staten Island), the Brooklyn Public Library, and the Queens Borough Public Library cost over \$1.6 million, just under half the cost of the buildings.

In 1901, The New York Public Library Board Executive Committee appointed a temporary architects' advisory committee consisting of Charles F. McKim of the firm McKim, Mead & White, John M. Carrère of Carrère & Hastings, and Walter Cook of Babb, Cook & Willard, to advise them on how to proceed with construction. The committee advised that the branches be uniform and recognizable in materials, style, plan, and scale and that different site requirement would provide variety. They recommended forming a committee of two to five architectural firms who would design the buildings in cooperation with each other. Andrew Carnegie objected to the lack of competition in this system but was ultimately convinced that it would be faster and cheaper and would produce a more unified collection. The advisors, McKim, Carrère, and Cook, were fortuitously selected for the permanent committee, and their firms designed most of The New York Public Library Carnegie branches.¹⁹ The architects consulted with the librarians on planning and design, an innovation which was just becoming accepted in library architecture.

McKim Mead & White²⁰

Established in 1879 by Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909), William Rutherford Mead (1846-1928), and Stanford White (1853-1906), the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White gained pre-eminence because of its masterful interpretation of classical models. Each partner brought to the firm a special skill, and these skills were complementary. McKim was the idealist. A graduate of Harvard College, McKim also had attended the famous Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and had worked in the studio of Henry Hobson Richardson for two years. He was an outstanding scholar with a breadth of knowledge and understanding of classical as well as early American buildings. Stanford White's talent was as a skilled artist, putting together details and colors in unique ways. Like McKim, White had worked in Henry Hobson Richardson's office as his principal assistant. In 1878, he left that office to travel in Europe. Upon his return, he joined McKim and Mead, forming an architectural partnership that would last until the deaths of McKim and White. William Rutherford Mead graduated from Amherst College and apprenticed for three years with Russell Sturgis. In 1871, he traveled to Italy to study classical architecture. Upon his return, he joined McKim in partnership. Mead offered a balance to McKim and White and essentially ran the day-to-day operations of the firm.

McKim, Mead & White successfully used Renaissance sources to create new designs that were easily comprehended and uniquely American. They respected and called upon classical antecedents to make new and exciting buildings throughout the country that satisfied a need in the American psyche for a clear architectural identity and structure as well as a desire for elaborate detail.

During their collaboration, the firm designed a total of 784 commissions and became the largest and most important architectural office in the country. With a staff of over one hundred, the firm became a prestigious training ground for architects starting out in the practice. There were few architectural schools in the United States in the 1880s, and increasing recognition of the firm of McKim, Mead & White made working there a sought-after destination for training. Although William Rutherford Mead outlived McKim and White, after the death of his other two

partners, he turned over the day-to-day operations of the firm to a second generation of younger members and took on a position as advisor. The successor firm consisted of the following five architects: William Kendall, Burt Leslie Fenner, William Symmes Richardson, Lawrence Grant White, and Teunis J. Van der Bent. The later designs of the firm followed the initial classical principles but practiced a style with simpler concepts and less ornamentation.

Some of McKim, Mead & White's most well-known buildings that are also New York City Landmarks include the Bowery Savings Bank (1893-1895), First Presbyterian Church (1893-94), Judson Memorial Church, Tower, and Hall (1888-1896), the Colony Club (1904-08), the Villard Houses (1882-1885), the William H. and Ada S. Moore House (1898-1900), Low Memorial Library (1894-1897), 998 Fifth Avenue Apartments (1910-1912), the Payne and Helen Hay Whitney House (1902-1909), the University Club (1896-1900), New York Public Library, Hamilton Grange Branch (1905-1906), and the Brooklyn Museum (1893-1915).

Site Selection and Construction

The sites for the Carnegie libraries were selected by the New York Public Library with approval from the City. Every community wanted a Carnegie library and site selection was the only aspect of the smooth-running building process that could be contentious. The Carnegie branches were intended to stand out in their communities, to be centrally located and, if possible, to be near schools and other civic structures. The library trustees believed that if the libraries were in conspicuous positions, like retail stores, the public would use them more. John S. Billings stated this position in 1901:

Every one of these buildings ought to be of one distinctive and uniform type, so that the most ignorant child going through the streets of the City will at once know as Carnegie Library when he or she sees it.²¹

In Manhattan, the New York Public Library Executive Committee hired New York attorney Alanson T. Briggs to propose the sites and act as agent for the library. After identifying the densely populated neighborhoods, he looked for centrally located sites in these neighborhoods. George L. Rives, Secretary of the New York Public Library, described the philosophy behind site selection in 1901:

The Trustees are of the opinion that in establishing branch libraries it is of great importance to importance to establish them, as far as possible, in conspicuous positions on well frequented streets. In some measure the same principles should be applied that would govern in the selection of a site for a retail store. The fact that a branch library is constantly before the eyes of the neighboring residents so that all are familiar with its location will undoubtedly tend to increase its usefulness.²²

The 125th Street Branch was constructed in 1903-04. The site cost \$38,100, and the building and equipment \$78,352, for a total cost of \$116,452. The library opened on March 7, 1904 and was the first new free library funded by Carnegie to open in Harlem and the third to open overall. The library site was chosen for its close proximity to its predecessor, a branch of the New York Free Circulating Library located at 218 East 125th Street that had opened in 1892.²³

The 125th Street Branch was initially called the Harlem Branch, but another Carnegie branch on West 124th Street later assumed that name when it opened in 1909.²⁴

Building Design

The New York City Carnegie branch libraries share many design characteristics and are clearly recognizable as Carnegie libraries. They were designed to stand out as separate and distinct structures, an innovation in 1901 when most of the branch libraries were located in other buildings. The architects preferred the classical style because it was the recognized style for public buildings in this period. The buildings are clad in limestone, or in brick with limestone trim. There are two distinct types, the urban and the suburban. The suburban branches are sited in the less densely built-up areas of the Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island and Queens. They are freestanding, one-to-two-stories high, located on a corner, and set back from the street on a lawn. The urban branches are located in densely populated Manhattan and sections of the Bronx. They are vertically oriented, sited mid-block with buildings on both sides, and built to the building line.

Designed by McKim and Kendall, the East 125th Street Branch is a variation on a theme, due to the belief that buildings of the same basic type could be adapted to a particular environment and place. The plans for several libraries were identical in plan yet each design is varied and quickly distinguished from its compatriots making each library unique to its neighborhood.²⁵ Five libraries designed by McKim and Kendall that shared identical plans: 125th Street Branch, The St. Gabriel Branch (demolished), the 115th Street Branch, the Tompkins Square Branch, and Chatham Square Branch (the last two are NYC designated Landmarks).

The 125th Street Branch Library illustrates all of the characteristics of the urban branches. The mid-block building is a masonry structure with a rusticated limestone façade, three stories high and three bays wide, with large arched windows, featuring a side bay entrance. The window arrangement is characteristic of McKim, Mead & White branch libraries. The same features are employed at the Tompkins Square, Woodstock, and Harlem 115th Street branches.

The architects' committee drew up the plans of the Carnegie libraries in partnership with the librarians. The librarians met with the committee at the beginning of the process and commented on the final plans. The plans featured accessible stacks, a central librarian's desk, and light, spacious, reading rooms, all innovations at the time. The 125th Street Branch followed this scheme, with a rectangular layout, rooms filled with natural light, adults' reading room on the first floor, children's reading room on the second floor, an auditorium on the third floor and a custodian's apartment in the rear penthouse. The books were located in freestanding shelves accessible to the public. The architecture critic Russell Sturgis, described a similar branch (Tompkins Square) in 1905 as practical, with a great deal of daylight in the reading rooms.²⁶

Subsequent History

The 125th Street Branch continues to be an educational, cultural, and economic resource to the East Harlem community, and has served that community since its opening in March of 1904. The 125th Street Branch Library serves approximately 75,000 residents, has total holdings of 25,389 items, and an annual circulation of 45,199.²⁷ The 125th Street Branch Library offers books and magazines in English and Spanish and also houses an extensive African-American Heritage collection and a Community Information collection.

In 1954 the library was rehabilitated, and again in 2000 as part of the Adopt-A- Branch Program.

The 125th Street Branch, the first Carnegie library in Harlem, celebrated its centennial in April 2004.

Description

The New York Public Library 125th Street Branch is located on the south side of East 125th Street. Located in the middle of the block it is a three-story, three-bay masonry structure that is rectangular in plan. The Renaissance Revival-style building is of the palazzo type, and is clad in rusticated Indiana limestone with a granite base. Two, three-foot high granite bollards mark the entrance. A non-historic pressed-steel handicap accessible ramp is incorporated into a four stair stoop and metal railings, and leads to the doorway.

The first and second floor windows are arched like the entranceway and framed with a simple stone molding. The arched entrance doorway is located at the western side of the façade. The doors have been replaced by steel-and-glass double leaf doors that are set below a historic eight-light transom, separated by a steel sash. Above the door a non-historic alarm system box sits just inside the arch entrance. Two non-historic brass light fixtures flank the entrance. The three openings have arched transoms above. The two sets of arched first floor casement windows have been altered and replaced by paired six-over-six double-hung aluminum windows. All of the windows on the first floor have non-historic wire mesh security fencing.

The first and second floors are separated by a molded stone denticulated cornice that runs the width of the building, and serves as sills for the three arched windows at the second story. Four piers vertically divide second and third stories. Each window contains paired nine-over-nine double-hung wood windows with multi-light transoms. Reading from left to right, stone tympanum above the second-floor windows are carved with the following images and words: an anchor and laurels below the Latin words “Anchora Spei” (Anchor of Hope), a shield containing part of the city seal consisting of a central four-blade windmill (representation of the original Dutch settlers), two beavers at the top and bottom of the windmill and two flour barrels at each side (representing the two most well-known exports of colonial New York: flour and fur), with carved decorative rosettes and foliate designs.²⁸ The last tympanum contains another anchor clasped by two hands below the Christian symbols Chi Ro and the Latin word “Concordia” (Peace). A non-historic metal flag pole is anchored to the middle window at the second floor. The third floor has three small square double-hung windows that pierce the façade creating a clerestory. A projecting stone modillioned cornice is composed of wave scroll fascia, with rosettes and decorative bellflowers. The stone parapet above the cornice is incised with “THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY.” The east elevation is clad in red brick, has an irregular roofline, and is devoid of openings.

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NOTES

¹ This section is compiled from: Christopher Bell, *Images of America, East Harlem* (Chicago, Arcidia Publishing, 2003); Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Mount Morris Park Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0452), (New York: City of New York, 1971); *17 East 128th Street House Designation Report* (LP- 1237), report prepared by Edward Mohylowski (New York: City of New York, 1982); *16 West 130th Street House Designation Report* (LP- 1141), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan (New York: City of New York, 1981); *Graham Court Apartments Designation Report* (LP- 1254), report prepared by Jay Shockley (New York: City of New York, 1984); http://welcometoharlem.com/page/east_harlem_history/; east-harlem.com/cb11_197A_history.htm.

² Ibid, 1.

³ Harlem suffered economic decline in the 1830s when many of the farms, depleted from decades of cultivation, were abandoned and the great estates were sold at public auctions. The area became a refuge for those desiring cheap property and housing, including newly-arrived and destitute immigrants who gathered in scattered shantytowns. However, most of the scenic topography and rural character of Harlem was left untouched.

⁴ Information in this section adapted from: East Harlem History-197-A-Plan, www.east-harlem.com/cb11_197A_history.htm; Italian East Harlem, [www, myharkem.org/v2/sub.php?PK=19](http://www.myharkem.org/v2/sub.php?PK=19).

⁵ Clara E. Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Immigrants and Migrants, A Historical Perspective*, <http://www.americansall.com/PDFs/02-americans-all/9.9.pdf>.

⁶ Information in this section adapted from: Regina Sass, *History of Harlem, New York*, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/98780/history_of_harlem_new_york.html?page=2.

⁷ Information in this section adapted from: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/125th/index.shtml>; <http://www.hometoharlem.com/Harlem/hthcult.nsf/harlem/HarlemHistorydoc>; <http://www.planning.org/newsreleases/2007/ftp10020717.htm>.

⁸ Originally, 125th Street ended at Claremont Avenue and the street where the George Bruce Branch Library is located was once called Manhattan Street, a part of the village of Manhattanville. ⁸ In 1920 however, Mayor John Hyland and the Board of Aldermen voted to extend 125th Street to the northwest, ending at the ferry landing and the Hudson River (thus eliminating the name Manhattan Street).

⁹ Information in this section adapted from: <http://www.sheftman.com/ewrt1a/orwell/index.html>; http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/baldwin_j.html.

¹⁰ Information in this section adapted from *The Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, (June 27, 1914) 1141.

¹¹ Information in this section adapted from: Ted Fox, *ShowTime at the Apollo, the Story of Harlem's World Famous Theatre* (New York: Mill Road Enterprises, 1983), 39. In the 1930s Ella Fitzgerald was discovered at an amateur night contest at the Apollo. In 1937 renowned poet Langston Hughes opened his Harlem Suitcase Theatre at 317 125th Street, where he wrote and produced several notable plays such as *Don't You Want to Be Free* and *Limitations of Life*, both in 1938.

¹² The Studio Museum presents an average of 12 exhibitions each year and offers a wide array of public and educational programs.

¹³ Information in this section adapted from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch Designation Report* (New York: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Mary B. Dierickx (LP-1998); Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy, The Carnegie Libraries of New York City New York*: (New York:Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and the New York City Department of General Services, 1996) 21-24; Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, (New York: Yale University Press, 1996), 667-670; Landmarks Preservation Commission, *New York Public Library, Aguilar Branch Designation Report*, (New York: City of New York, 1996), prepared by Joseph C. Brooks (LP-1837); Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1973), 209-247.

¹⁴ Dain, 215.

¹⁵ Information in this section adapted from: Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library* (New York: Published by New York Public Library, 1923), 241.

¹⁶This section on The New York Public Library and Andrew Carnegie is adapted from Dierickx, 19-43 with additional information from Dain, 209-247; Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1917); Landmarks Preservation Commission, *The New York Public Library, Tottenville Branch Designation Report* (New York: City of New York, 1991), prepared by David M. Breiner (LP-1867); Landmarks Preservation Commission, *The New York Public Library, Morrisania Branch Designation Report* (New York: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Donald G. Presa (LP-1996).

¹⁷The original 1901 agreement called for sixty-five libraries but in 1902 the estimated cost per branch was lowered and the total number was optimistically established as a maximum of seventy-three. Because of rising costs the number of branches totaled just two more than the original sixty-five. See Dierickx for more details.

¹⁸Information in this section adapted from: Andrew Carnegie, letter to John Shaw Billings, Director of The New York Public Library, March 12, 1901, in the "Brooklyn Collection" Brooklyn Public Library.

¹⁹Carrère & Hastings designed fourteen of the thirty-nine Carnegie branches, McKim, Mead & White designed twelve, and Babb, Cook & Willard designed eight. Their successor firms, Babb, Cook & Welch, Cook, Babb & Welch, and Cook & Welch designed another three. James Brown Lord designed the first Carnegie library, the Yorkville branch, but this was actually planned before the grant was given, and Herts & Tallant were responsible for the major renovation of the Aguilar branch, which they originally designed in 1899.

²⁰Information in this section adapted from: Paul Goldberger, *A Monograph of the Works of McKim, Mead and White, 1879-1915* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985) 1; Leland M. Roth, *International Dictionary of Architects* (Farmington Hill, Michigan: St. James Press, 1980) 564-565; Leland M. Roth, *McKim, Mead and White, Architects* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) 8, 46; Lawrence Grant White, *Sketches and Designs of Stanford White* (New York: The Architectural Publishing Co.); Richard Guy Wilson, *McKim, Mead and White, Architects* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983) 9.

²¹Information in this section adapted from: John S. Billings, letter to Andrew Carnegie, November 9, 1901, NYPL Collection, and NYPL Archives.

²²Information in this section adapted from: NYPL Executive Committee Minutes as quoted in Dain, 237.

²³Information in this section adapted from: Press Information *125th Street Celebrates its Centennial* <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=125th+Street+branch+Library+%2B+Carnegie+%2B+NY&btnG=Search>; "The Free Circulating Library, Two Branches Established, (*New York Times*, June 12, 1897), RBA7.

²⁴*Ibid*, 18.

²⁵Leland Roth *A Monograph of the Works of McKim, Mead & White, 1879-1915*, 38.

²⁶Russell Sturgis, "The Carnegie Libraries in New York City" in *Architectural Record*, 18 (March, 1905), 237-246.

²⁷Circulation data included in this section is from DCP's *Selected Facilities and Program Sites in NYC, 2003*; data on holdings is from *NYPL Branch Library Holdings, 2006*.

²⁸Information in this section adapted from: <http://www.ngw.nl/int/usa/newyork.htm>; NYC Green book Highlights City Seal and flag, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcas/html/features/greenbook_seal_flag.shtml; John B. Pine, *The Seal of the City of New York*, (New York, the Knickerbocker Press: 1915) 22-28, 79-85.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that New York Public Library 125th Street Branch 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 125th Street Branch library is notable for being one of the Carnegie libraries and a significant Renaissance Revival style building by the important firm of McKim, Mead, & White; that the library opened March 7, 1904 and was the first new free library funded by Carnegie to open in Harlem and the third to open overall; that the library site was chosen for its close proximity to its predecessor, a branch of the New York Free Circulating Library, located at 218 East 125th Street that opened in 1892; that the firm of McKim, Mead & White, one of the most notable and influential architecture firms in the country, designed twelve of The New York Public Library Carnegie Branches, and played a major part in the formulation of the libraries' design guidelines; that the striking Renaissance Revival style building is of the palazzo type; that the building is clad in rusticated Indiana limestone, and is three stories high and three bays wide, that the large arched windows dominate the first floor with an entrance offset to the right with an arched glass transom above; that the tall second floor window openings are topped by arched decorative transom panels; that the third floor has three small square windows that pierce the façade creating a clearstory; that The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch, has served the Harlem community for over one-hundred years, celebrating its centennial in April of 2004.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch, 224 East 125th Street, Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1789, Lot 37 as its Landmark Site.

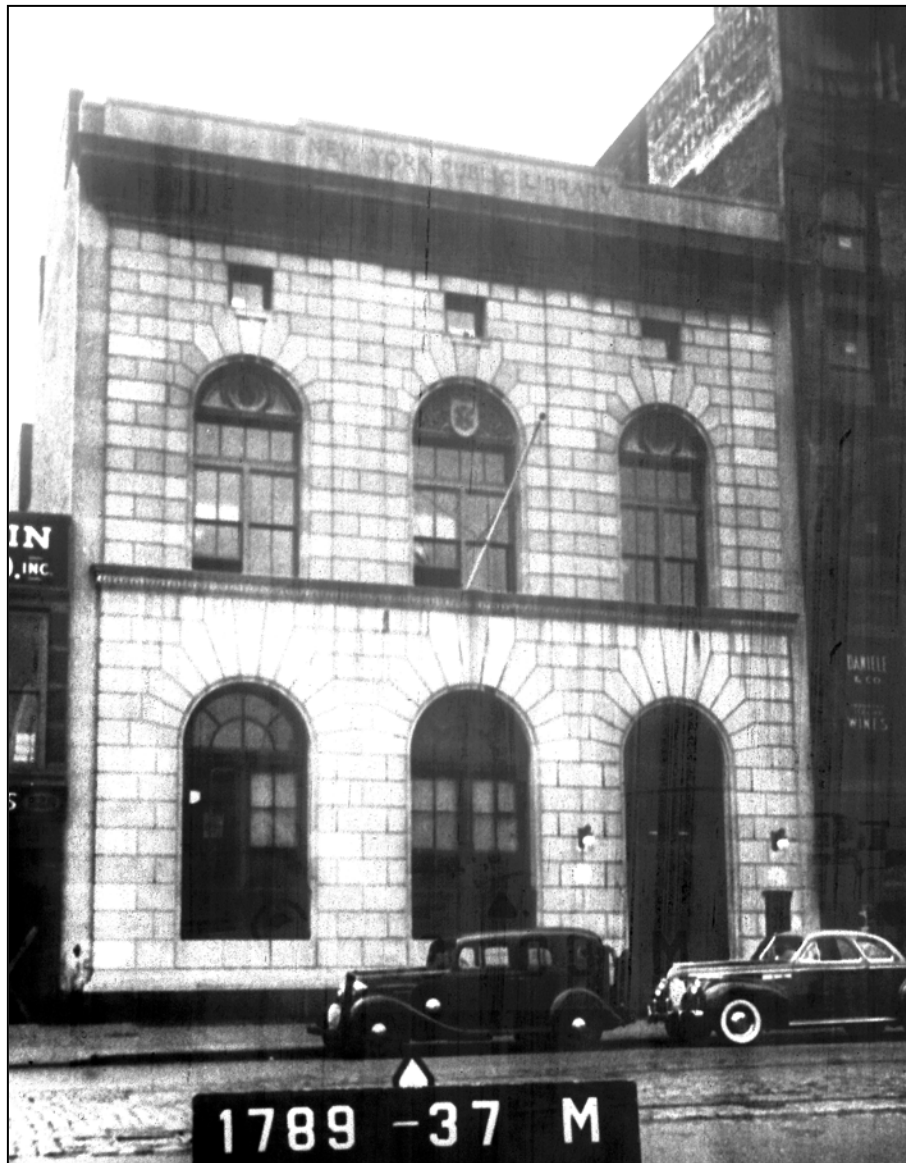
Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair
Diana Chapin, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter,
Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



The New York Public Library, 125th Street
224 East 125th Street
Main (North) Elevation
Photo: Christopher Brazee, 2008



The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch
224 East 125th Street
Main (North) Elevation Detail
Photo: Christopher Brazee, 2008



New York City Tax Photographs (c. 1940)

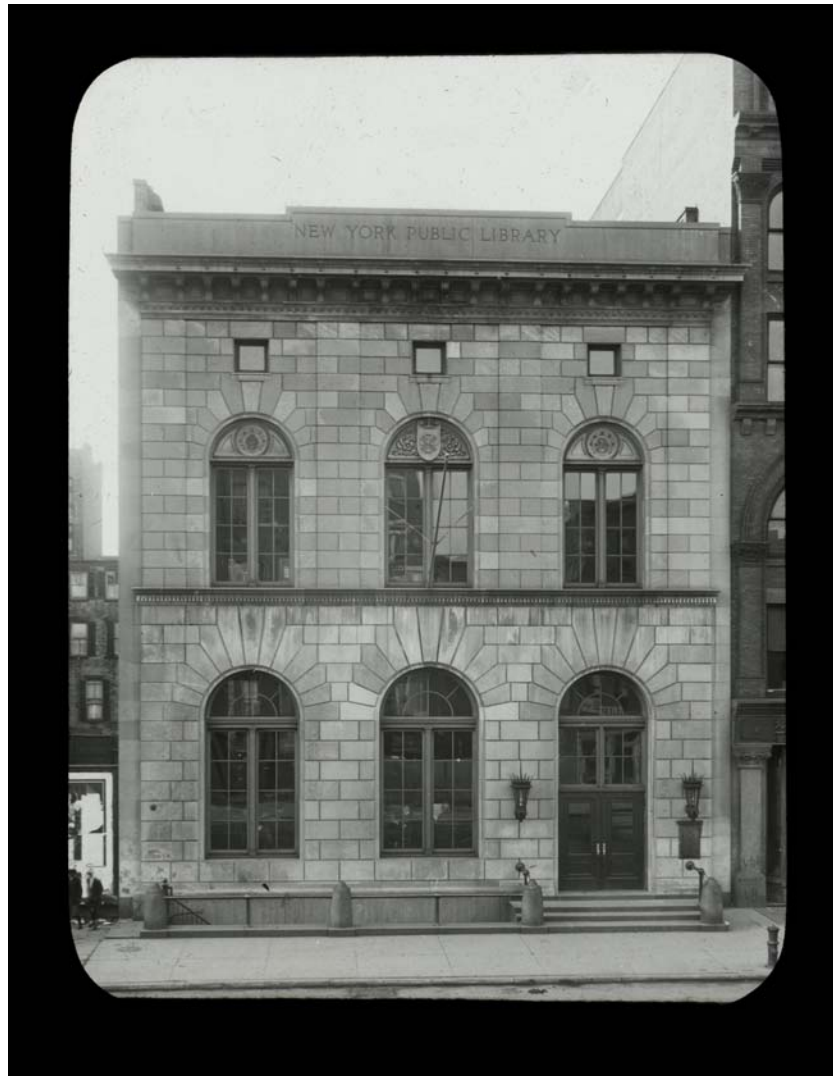


Photo Courtesy:
The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library,
Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.



The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch
224 East 125th Street
Tympanum detail
Photos: Carl Forster





The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch
 224 East 125th Street
 Tympanum detail
Photos: Carl Forster

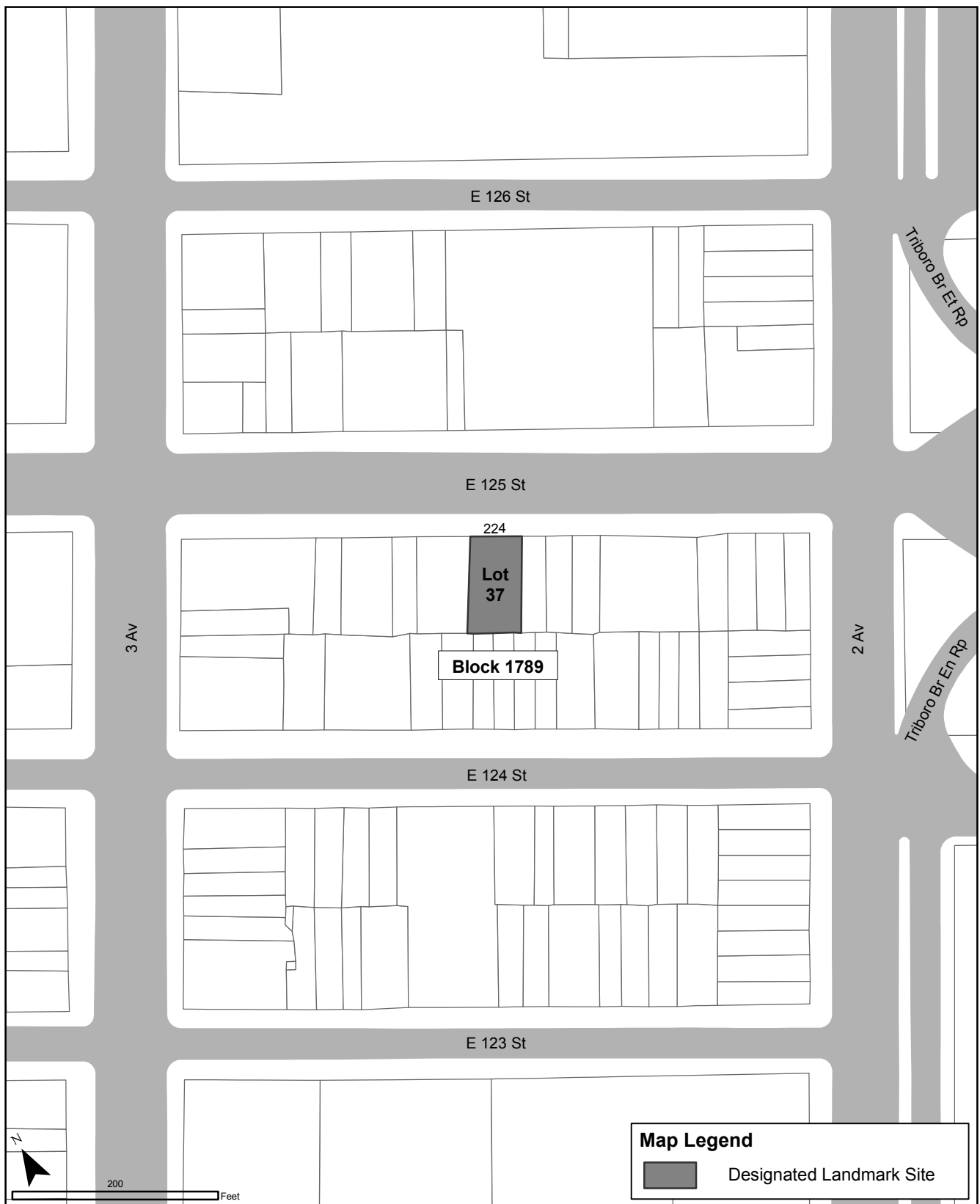




The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch
224 East 125th Street
Cornice detail
Photo: Carl Forster



The New York Public Library, 125th Street Branch
224 East 125th Street
Entrance detail
Photo: Carl Forster



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 125TH STREET BRANCH (LP-2305), 224 East 125th Street.
Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1789, Lot 37.

Designated: January 13, 2009

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.
Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.