

New York Public Library George Bruce Branch, 518 West 125th Street, (aka 518-520 Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard), Manhattan
Built: 1914-15; [John Mervin] Carrère & [Thomas] Hastings, architects

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1980, Lot 22

On June 24, 2008 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of New York Public Library George Bruce Branch, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing was duly advertised according to provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives the New York Public Library, the New York State Assembly Member Daniel J. O'Donnell of the 69th Assembly District, the Historic Districts Council, the Municipal Art Society, and Community Board Nine.

Summary

The striking brick and limestone George Bruce Library building is an excellent example of Georgian Revival-style civic architecture, designed by the prominent architecture firm of Carrère & Hastings. The firm is noted for the design of New York Public Library's main branch building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. The George Bruce Library building is three stories high and four bays wide. The historic ground-floor entryway features an arched transom with Gothic muntins, and sidelights, and is flanked by historic copper lanterns and an ocular window above the entrance with a surround of bricks and a stone keystone. The black-and-red header brick facade forms a distinctive checkerboard pattern. The second floor has three large windows with flared lintels. The third floor has four smaller windows, each with a center keystone. The engraved stone frieze below the denticulated stone cornice is topped by a brick-and-stone paneled parapet.



The George Bruce Library is named for a Scottish inventor of printing machinery. In 1877, his daughter Catherine donated \$50,000 for a library building and books in her father's memory. Completed in 1888, the original George Bruce Library was located on 42nd Street. When it was sold in 1913, the proceeds were used to build the current library located on 125th Street.

Carrère & Hastings designed fourteen Carnegie-funded libraries in New York. This commission was awarded to the firm after the success of the central library building. This library was designed shortly after the tragic death of Carrère and reflects the firm's interest in English architecture.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of Harlem¹

Harlem embraces the area of Manhattan north of 110th Street to 155th Street just below the narrow northern handle of Washington Heights. The original village of Harlem was established in 1658 by Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant and named Nieuw Harlem after the Dutch city of Harlem. Throughout the Dutch, British, and colonial periods, rich farms were located in the region's flat eastern portion, while some of New York's most illustrious early families, such as the Delanceys, Bleeckers, Rikers, Beekmans, and Hamiltons maintained large estates in the high western portion of the area.² Like many large land owners, the Delanceys, Beekmans, Rikers owned slaves, however, no evidence has been found that shows the Bleeckers or Hamiltons owned slaves.³

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 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.

Beginning in the 1870s, Harlem was the site of a massive wave of speculative development that resulted in the construction of numerous new single-family rowhouses, tenements, and luxury apartment houses. Commercial concerns and religious, educational, and cultural institutions—such as the distinguished Harlem Opera House on West 125th Street—were established in Harlem to serve the expanding population.⁴ Those who relocated from downtown included recent immigrants from Great Britain and Germany.

Anticipated transportation improvements in the late 1890s, such as the proposed subway routes to west Harlem, ignited another wave of real estate speculation that led to highly inflated market values. Between 1898 and 1904, when the Lenox Avenue subway opened at 145th Street, virtually all the vacant land in Harlem was built upon. This tremendous increase in residential construction led to overbuilding. A general collapse of the real estate market hit Harlem in 1904-05 as loans were withheld and mortgages foreclosed; landlords dropped rents in an effort to attract tenants. Taking advantage of the deflated market and the housing surplus, a black businessman named Philip Payton and his Afro-American Realty Company, founded in 1904, played a major role in the development of Harlem as an African-American community. In the aftermath of the real estate collapse, Payton acquired five-year leases on white-owned properties, managed, and rented them to African-Americans at ten percent above the deflated market price. Thus, New York's black middle class—long denied access to "better" neighborhoods—began moving to Harlem.⁵

Harlem was considered an ideal place to live, with its broad tree-lined streets and new, up-to-date housing stock.⁶

The migration of African Americans to Harlem continued during the 1920s as people came to New York in record numbers from the American south and the West Indies. During the "Harlem Renaissance" of the 1920s, Harlem became the urban cultural center of black America, with 125th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues as its hub.

The panic of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s was felt throughout the country, and devastated black communities such as Harlem. The pressure of high rents, unemployment

and racist practices culminated in riots in Harlem in 1935 and 1943. Militant activities during the 1940s set the stage for further protests during the 1950s and 1960s, when Harlem played a significant role during the Civil Rights Movement. During the 1960s, figures like Malcolm X, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Queen Mother Moore, and Preston Wilcox used Harlem as a launching pad for political, social, and economic empowerment activities.

Social problems caused a decline 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 new 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.⁷

Manhattanville⁸

Manhattanville, established in 1806, was originally bounded by Bloomingdale Road (Old Broadway) and Manhattan Street (125th Street) west to the Hudson River.⁹ Today Manhattanville's boundaries extend roughly from 120th Street north to 133rd Street and from Broadway west to the Hudson River. During the early part of the nineteenth century the village was the location of country estates, small residences, commercial establishments, and manufacturing enterprises, religious and related educational institutions. The development of the village was originally facilitated by the establishment of a stage coach line from the Bowery. The village grew rapidly, supported by a commercial waterfront that sustained the many industries located on Manhattan Street. Manhattanville's early population was an eclectic mix of American patriots and British loyalists, slave owners and enslaved African-Americans, Quaker anti-slavery activists and free black abolitionists, tradesmen, poor laborers, and wealthy industrialists.¹⁰

The construction of the Interborough Rapid Transit line, which ran along Broadway in 1904, spurred a building boom in Manhattanville. On the cross streets above 129th Street, between Amsterdam Avenue and Riverside Drive, many moderately priced apartment houses were erected. The completion of the Riverside Drive Viaduct made it convenient to reach Manhattanville by car.¹¹ These milestones transformed the village into an urban area and its population increased by 40 percent.¹² During the 1880s, about one thousand African-Americans lived in Manhattanville. By 1909 their numbers had doubled. During World War II, African-Americans from the south seeking industrial jobs settled in the area. The area's rich ethnic diversity expanded in the mid-to late-twentieth century, when an influx of Latinos arrived in the community.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression signaled the end of strong commercial growth in Manhattanville. Trucking replaced water and rail transportation, making Manhattanville's waterfront no longer viable as an industrial and transportation hub. As a result, Manhattanville lost its economic base, and subsequently its neighborhood identity. Due to its close proximity to Harlem, it was ultimately incorporated into the Harlem community.

125th Street¹³

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. Originally, 125th Street ended at Claremont Avenue and the section of street where the George Bruce Branch Library is located was formerly called Manhattan Street, and was a part of the village of Manhattanville.¹⁴ In 1920 however, Mayor John Hylan and the Board of Aldermen voted to extend 125th Street to the northwest, ending at the ferry landing and the Hudson River.¹⁵

In the latter part of the nineteenth 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.¹⁶ 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 and 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

History of Manhattan Libraries¹⁹

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth 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 nineteenth 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.²⁰) 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.”²¹ 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.

George Bruce²²

Inventor and type-founder George Bruce (1781-1866) was widely regarded as the “father and chief” of typography in America.²³ Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Bruce immigrated to the United States in 1795 at the age of 15; preceded by his brother David. In partnership with his brother he became a successful printer and type founder, making metallic type for press, and would later become the country’s leading typographer. In 1803, young Bruce was hired as a foreman and contributor to the *Daily Advertiser*, and quickly became printer and publisher of the paper.

In 1806, the two brothers opened a book printing office at the corner of Pearl Street and Coffeehouse Slip.²⁴ Their hard work and personal attention to business soon brought them abundant customers, and in 1809, the brothers moved their business to Sloat Lane, near Hanover Square.²⁵ In 1818, they erected their own foundry on Chambers Street, which for many years was the largest of its kind in America. George introduced valuable improvements to the business, and in connection with his nephew, David Bruce, Jr., invented a typesetting machine. His scripts became famous as early as 1832, and retained their preeminence for a generation.

With his marriage to Catherine Wolfe, daughter of David Wolfe, George Bruce became allied with one of the most prominent families in New York City. The marriage produced five children, two sons and three daughters. George Bruce and his brother David did not own slaves and were not advocates of slavery. According to the 1800 - 1860 censuses, the Bruce’s employed servants of Irish origins.²⁶

George Bruce invested his earnings in real estate throughout New York City, which made his family one of the city’s wealthiest in the nineteenth century.²⁷ In addition to his work in typography, George Bruce was extremely active in fostering the growth of science and industry in New York. He was a founder and later long-term president of the Mechanics’ Institute and the Type-founders’ Association, and was an active member of The New-York Historical Society. He was also a lifetime member of the American Institute of the City of New York, an organization dedicated to the promotion of American industry and agriculture; St. Andrew’s Society; the Typographical Society; and the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen.

His daughter, Catherine Wolfe Bruce (1816-1900), was a noted woman of science, specializing in astronomy and actively supported science and education through philanthropic gifts to individual scientists and organizations in the United States and Germany.²⁸ The Bruce Medal, awarded annually by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, was named in her honor.²⁹ Among her many charitable contributions was this library named in honor of her father.

George Bruce Library³⁰

The building at 518 West 125th Street is the second home of the George Bruce Library.³¹ The original George Bruce Branch was the third branch of the New York Free Circulating Library and opened in January 1888. Located at 226 West 42nd Street, the library was endowed by Catherine W. Bruce as a monument to her father.³² The first library was designed by noted

architect G. E. Harney, who also designed Clinton Hall Mercantile Library, 13-25 Astor Place (1890-92).³³ The 42nd Street George Bruce Library building was sold in 1913 and the Bruce family stipulated that the proceeds of the sale would fund a second library. A site on Manhattan Avenue in Manhattanville, at the time a bustling waterfront community on western edge of Harlem, was selected. The current George Bruce Library was the forty-fourth library to open in Manhattan.³⁴ The 12,243 square-foot library is three stories in height,³⁵ and was designed by the firm of Carrère and Hastings, celebrated designers of the New York Public Library's main building on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street.

Central to the Manhattanville community, the George Bruce Library has hosted many free programs over its 93-year history, such as live music, art exhibits, drama, author readings, and film series discussions.

125th Street has long played a part in the intellectual pursuits of many in the Harlem community. It features two public libraries, the George Bruce Branch of the New York Public Library at the western end of the street, and a Carnegie Library, the 125th Street Branch of the New York Public Library at the eastern end of the street. These libraries have nurtured the education of many of Harlem's residents. Famed author James Baldwin, who was born in Harlem, claimed that by age thirteen he had read all the books in the Harlem libraries. It was in the George Bruce Library and other Harlem Libraries that he found his passion for literature.³⁶

Carrère & Hastings³⁷

The important architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings designed many of New York City's most prominent structures, including the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (1898-1911), Grand Army Plaza, Fifth Avenue at 59th Street (1913), the Manhattan Bridge Arch and Colonnade (1905), and the Staten Island Borough Hall (1903-07) (all designated New York City Landmarks).³⁸ John Mervin Carrère (1858-1911) and Thomas Hastings (1860-1929) met in Paris while studying at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Carrère, whose previous education was in Switzerland, graduated in 1882 and Hastings, who briefly attended Columbia University, graduated in 1884. Their architectural style was heavily influenced by their studies in Paris. Both men were hired out of school by the office of McKim, Mead & White and, in 1885, they founded their own firm.

The firm's earliest commissions were churches and hotels in Saint Augustine, Florida, designed for the famous developer and partner in Standard Oil, Henry Flagler. Their early hotels include the Ponce de Leon (1888) in St. Augustine, the Laurel-in-the-Pines (1889-90) in Lakewood, New Jersey, and the Hotel Jefferson (1893-94) in Richmond, Virginia. The majority of their significant work was in New York City, but they were responsible for the House and Senate Office Buildings (1906) in Washington, D.C. and Woolsey and Memorial Halls (1906) at Yale University.

Carrère & Hastings designed a wide variety of building types. They introduced the French Beaux Arts-style townhouse to New York City with the Richard Hoe House (1892, 9 East 71st Street, demolished) and the Dr. Christian A. Herter House (1892, 819 Madison Avenue, part of the Upper East Side Historic District), influencing a generation of urban residential building.³⁹ Early, important houses include the Henry T. and Jessie Sloane House (1894-96, now the Lycée Français) at 9 East 72nd Street and the John Henry and Emily Vanderbilt Sloane Hammon House (1902-03, now the Russian Consulate) at 9 East 91st Street. The versatile firm designed the Globe Theater (now the Lunt-Fontanne Theater, 1909-10) at 203-17 West 46th Street and First Church of Christ, Scientist (1899-1903) at 1 West 96th Street. All of these buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

The firm won the competition for The New York Public Library Main Building in 1897. This monumental Beaux Arts-style building was a major influence on early twentieth-century Beaux-Arts architecture in New York. The firm proceeded to design fourteen classically-inspired Carnegie branch libraries in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island from 1904 to 1929. Five of their six branches in Manhattan have survived: the George Bruce, Epiphany, Hudson Park, Muhlenberg, and Washington Heights Branches.

While Thomas Hastings was said to be the firm's main designer, John Carrère had an interest in urban planning, writing *City Improvement from the Artistic Point of View* in 1908. Many of the firm's commissions involved planning and siting, such as Grand Army Plaza, the Manhattan Bridge Approach, and the Staten Island Civic Center.

Carrère and Hastings were active and influential in the architectural profession, both served as directors of the American Institute of Architects and both were elected Fellows. Carrère was a director of the American Academy in Rome and member of the Beaux Arts Society, the New York City Art Commission and Federation of Fine Arts. Hastings was president of the Architectural League of New York. John Carrère died in an automobile accident in 1911 and Thomas Hastings continued the work of the firm, which included the remaining Carnegie libraries and the Standard Oil Building (1920-26, with Shreve, Lamb & Blake) at 26 Broadway and the Cunard Building (1917-21, with Benjamin Wistar Morris) at 25 Broadway (both designated New York City Landmarks).

Design

The George Bruce Library building was designed in a rather free interpretation of Georgian Revival style, based on architecture from the colonial period that was found predominantly along the Atlantic coast. Elements typical of that style are: a stone water table and raised basement with prominent keystones above rectangular windows, and stone and brick exterior walls. Palladian windows were featured in some designs; however, Carrère and Hastings took this element and applied it to an exaggerated arched recessed vestibule on a secondary façade that faces what was once the Moylan Place entrance.⁴⁰ Typical of this style, the secondary façade is usually similar to the main façade. Carrère and Hastings utilized this element, which is usually found in residential buildings, and successfully applied it to a public building.

The George Bruce Branch embodies Carrère and Hastings's notion of urban libraries, expressed through the configuration of the façade and large windows, without overwhelming the residential scale of the neighborhood.⁴¹ This building is similar in design to several of the firm's earlier Carnegie Libraries, such as the Hudson Park Branch in Greenwich Village (1906) and the Tremont Branch in the Bronx (1905). Like several of the earlier designs, the freestanding building is three stories high and four bays wide. The ground floor entrance with an arched transom is at the side bay. The building's Georgian Revival features include the checkerboard brickwork, large arched entrance with Gothic muntins, ocular window, splayed brick lintels with stone keystones, and a simple but elegant engraved stone frieze below a denticulated stone cornice with band courses, topped by a brick-and-stone paneled parapet.

Subsequent History

The George Bruce Branch Library continues to be an important resource for the Harlem community, and has benefited it for over 93 years. The George Bruce branch serves a population of 140,959 and offers special programs such as reading hours, book groups, puppet shows, films, lectures, and has a collection of Spanish-language books. The building contains an auditorium

and meeting room for use by neighborhood children and local groups. During the lean years of late 1980s to the early 1990s, several libraries, including the George Bruce Branch, were either slated for a reduction of hours or closure. In a show of support, over 6,500 letters from the community were sent to the city, while a local dance troupe hosted a show at the building to raise money to keep the library open.⁴² In recent years the George Bruce Branch has been home to many local community groups.

In 1997, the George Bruce Branch Library was part of the New York Public Library's \$500 million campaign to improve the library system through a public private-partnership titled the Adopt -A- Branch Program.⁴³ Closed in 1998 to undergo a \$4.4 million restoration and renovation project, which took two years to complete, the library re-opened in June 2001. The project was made possible through the combined efforts of the Louis Calder Foundation, the New York Life Foundation, and the City of New York. The renovation team was headed by architects Samuel J. DeSanto and Associates. The project included a restoration and cleaning of the façade, a new barrier-free entryway with an elevator and many interior updates.⁴⁴

Description

The George Bruce Branch Library is located on the south side of West 125th Street, and lies within the boundaries of the General Grant Houses, erected during the Robert Moses' Title I urban renewal era (1949-1957), when it was common practice to locate public housing projects near other public entities.⁴⁵

The building is set on a trapezoidal lot and is enclosed on two sides by a non-historic chain link fence with a non-historic iron fence that abuts the lower half of the north elevation. The Georgian Revival-style freestanding structure is three stories high and four bays wide, constructed primarily of red and black header bricks set in a decorative checkerwork pattern on the upper stories with edging along the sides and base and a polished limestone base. At the raised basement there are three rectangular windows that were altered and enclosed during the 1998-2001 renovation.

The broad stone water table frames the raised basement, which contains the main entrance and three enclosed (altered) windows that retain their historic configuration. The main entrance is located in the easternmost bay. The original cheek walls remain, however, the steps were removed, and the entrance is now at grade and handicapped accessible. The historic front entrance features the reconfigured historic wood door with a carved panel at the bottom, a center beveled glass insert (door light) that is flanked by double sidelights and a glass transom above, each with decorative geometric metal inserts. Two carved wood modillions support an ornately carved wood frieze, featuring an oval interlaced motif with a bas-relief open book and flanking ribbon work with a row of pendants above. Incorporated into the molding are two miniature pilasters that in turn support two pilasters in the large arched transom with gothic muntins. The arched glass transom is encased in wood, marble, and brick, with fluted stone end-post blocks at either side that lead to a central keystone. The arched entry is outlined by brick edging with a molded keystone, is encircled by a caption in bronze letters that reads, IN MEMORIAM GEORGE BRUCE, and is crowned by an historic ocular window with a brick surround with raised brick voussoirs and a stone keystone. Historic bronze light fixtures flank the entryway and are anchored to decorative diamond-pattern brick. To the left of the entrance is a non-historic bronze plaque bearing the library's name, and to the right of the entrance is a non-historic metal mailbox and a wood shadow box frame.

The second level has three historic double casement windows with thick molded wood muntins, each with double height transom and flared brick lintels with carved keystone; the sills

are also of stone. The windows at this level also have metal chain link window guards. The third story is pierced by four smaller historic casement windows with transoms and flared lintels composed of brick, with carved stone keystone. A stone frieze engraved with the words “NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY” with a denticulated stone molding topped by a molded cornice is surmounted by a stone cornice topped by a brick-and-stone paneled parapet.

To the right, where the historic building once terminated, is a new multi-level, L-shaped addition with complementary materials and fenestration. The addition consists of two components: the first element is a replica of the original raised basement— it is faced in marble and is one and a half stories in height. It encircles most of the original eastern façade and reads as a single story on this elevation, abutting the brick elevator tower. A reproduction of the original gridded fenestration is located on the front elevation of the new addition. Above this a clearstory repeats the grid and emphasizes the length of the addition. Just behind the elevator tower the original façade continues, with two light wells. The first narrow light well contains two narrow non-historic wood windows with stone sills, the second, wider, light well contains three historic three-over-three wood windows with stone sills. Between the two light wells is a single non-historic three-over-three wood window.

The south façade is almost a mirror image of the main façade, with the same configuration, materials, and fenestration. There are, however, some differences: the water table is lower at the basement level and contains three small windows— (two are partially obscured with louvered vent slats and one is enclosed). The arched vestibule entry is encased in marble and brick with fluted stone end-post blocks at either side that are surmounted by a central keystone. Within the vestibule, is a set of metal stairs leading to the basement. The stairs are protected by a tall iron gate with the same decorative element as in the main entrance doorlights and sidelights. Above the stairs are two historic casement windows with flared lintels, stone sills, and metal chainlink window guards. To the left of the vestibule, the first story contains three historic double casement windows with thick muntins, each with a double height transom and flared lintels with carved keystones. The windows at this level also have metal chainlink window guards. The second story is pierced by four smaller historic casement windows with transoms and flared lintels composed of brick. Each window has a center carved keystone, and a metal chainlink window guards. Above, an engraved stone frieze sits below the denticulated stone molding followed by a projecting stone cornice topped by a brick-and-stone paneled parapet. Behind the parapet are three dormers with copper roofs that are barely visible from the street. The west elevation is clad in red brick. It has an irregular roofline and is devoid of openings.

Report by
Theresa C. Noonan
Research Department

NOTES

¹ Information in this section adapted from: James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan, Studies in American Negro Life*, (New York: Atheneum, 1977); Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1971); Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem 1900-1950* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981); Andrew S. Dolkart and Gretchen S. Sorin, *Touring Historic Harlem: Four Walks in Northern Manhattan*, (New York: New York Landmarks Conservancy, 1997); Thelma Willis Foote *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); <http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/index.html>; <http://www.nyc-architecture.com/HAR/HAR-History.htm>.

² 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.

³ Information in this section adapted from: Jill Lepore, *New York Burning Liberty, Slavery and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Appendix C, The Owners, 262-273; Graham Russell, *Root & Branch, African Americans in New York & East Jersey 1613-1863*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 164, 174, 178.

⁴ The western half of Harlem, beginning in the 1880s, became a fashionable and prosperous neighborhood. Luxury elevator apartment buildings with the most modern amenities were constructed, such as the Graham Court Apartments built in 1898-1901 on Seventh Avenue (now 1923-1937 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard) as well as more modest types of multi-family housing.

⁵ In the late nineteenth century the major center of African-American New York had been the section west of Herald and Time Squares, from the West 20s to the 60s, comprising the overcrowded areas known as Hell's Kitchen, the Tenderloin, and San Juan Hill. A dramatic increase in Harlem's African-American community came when hundreds of families living in the Tenderloin were displaced during the construction of Pennsylvania Station in 1906-10. This real estate climate offered for the first time decent attractive housing in large quantities to a segment of New York's population that had never had such an opportunity.

⁶ Quoting an Urban League report of 1914, Gilbert Osofsky noted that Harlem was "a community in which Negroes as a whole are...better housed than in any other part of the country." The author explained, "The creation of a black Harlem was one example of the general development of large, segregated Negro communities within many American cities in the years preceding and following World War I."

⁷ 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.

⁸ This section adapted from: *St. Mary's Protestant Episcopal Church (Manhattanville) Parish House and Sunday School Designation Report* (LP-1981) (New York: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Eric K. Washington; Manhattanville was notable among several other early nineteenth-century villages and settlements in Manhattan island's rural, uptown vicinity such as Yorkville, Seneca Village, Harsenville, and the village of Harlem.

⁹ Information in this section adapted from: Nancy Dickinson, for Historical Perspectives, Inc., "Cemetery and Domestic Site Documentary Study Manhattanville Rezoning in West Harlem New York, New York," (September 2004), 9.

¹⁰ Many were affiliated with St. Mary's Protestant Episcopal Church (517-523 West 126th Street, organized in 1823, a New York City Landmark) the only place of worship in the area, and the Manhattanville Free School (established in 1827, later Public School No. 4, 1885). The only other house of worship was the Dutch Reformed Church on the East Side. Population shifts occurred around the mid-nineteenth century with the influx of Irish, who established the Church of the Annunciation in 1854 on Old Broadway (the first Catholic church to be built north of Second Street), and Germans, who established St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in 1860 at 405 West 125th Street, and the Yuengling Brewery in 1875. After the American Civil War, the Jewish immigrant population that had begun to settle in Harlem gradually filtered into the western blocks of Manhattanville.

¹¹ An issue of the *Scientific American* magazine in 1900 remarked that the Riverside Drive Viaduct's completion afforded New Yorkers "a continuous drive of ten miles along the picturesque banks of the Hudson and Harlem Rivers." Eric K. Washington, *Images of America, Manhattanville Old Heart of West Harlem*, (New York: Arcadia, 2002), 13-15, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7, 11.

¹³ 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>.

¹⁴ Information in this section adapted from: *St. Mary's Protestant Episcopal Church (Manhattanville) Parish House and Sunday School Designation Report*; Manhattanville was notable among several other early nineteenth-century villages and settlements in Manhattan island's rural, uptown vicinity such as Yorkville, Seneca Village, Harsenville, and the village of Harlem.

¹⁵ Information in this section adapted from: "Harlem Streets Renamed", *New York Times* (June 27, 1920), 95; the name change was supposedly made at the request of business owners in the area; it was thought that the alteration would alleviate streetcar traffic. The Harlem Board of Commerce promoted the change as one of convenience, allowing easy access to the ferry landing; however, the loss of Manhattanville's signature street meant a loss of the area's identity, and ultimately the extension contributed to Manhattanville's absorption into the greater Harlem area.

¹⁶ Information in this section adapted from *The Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* (June 27, 1914), 1141.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ The Studio Museum presents an average of twelve exhibitions each year and offers a wide array of public and educational programs.

¹⁹ This section on Manhattan libraries also appears in 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: Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, 1996), 21-24; *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.

²⁰ Dain, 215.

²¹ Information in this section is adapted from: Harry Miller Lydenberg, *History of the New York Public Library* (New York, 1923), 241.

²² Information in this section adapted from: *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, ed. 6 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887-1889); Landmarks Preservation Commission, *No. 254-260 Canal Street Designation Report* (LP-1458) (New York: City of New York, 1985), prepared by Gale Harris; <http://www.famousamericans.net/georgebruce1/>; <http://www.myfonts.com/person/bruce/george/>.

²³ Charles C. Savage, "George Bruce, a Sketch of his Life in Connection with Printing" (typescript of an address read before The New-York Historical Society, October 2, 1866), Box, Mss. Coll., New York Public Library, 22.

²⁴ Information in this section adapted from: <http://jondreyer.org/hal/slipsfoldnewyork.html>.

²⁵ In 1812, David went to England and brought back with him the new printing process of stereotyping. The brothers attempted to introduce the process, but encountered many difficulties.

²⁶ There were three sets of Wolfe families prominent in New York City from the late 1700s well into the late 1800s. Christopher and J. D. Wolfe from Rhode Island were hardware merchants on Maiden Lane. The N.H. Wolfe family

hailed from the south and was in the flour business. Joel and Udolpho Wolfe were from Richmond, and engaged in the mercantile business. This family had a long association with Thomas Jefferson, and was acquainted with James Madison and James Monroe. New York: City of New York Joel and Udolpho Wolfe likely owned slaves. It is unclear to which family Catherine Wolfe was related.

²⁷ Information in this section adapted from: “Bruce Estate Auction Sale this Week Biggest Realty Event in Many Years,” *The New York Times* (December 4, 1910), X10; Bruce amassed a great deal of property, including twenty-three parcels of land distributed throughout Manhattan, with a small concentration of property below City Hall Park and the entire block of Broadway between Grand and Broome Streets.

²⁸ Information in this section adapted from: Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie, Joy Dorothy Harvey, *The Biographical Dictionary of Women in Science: Pioneering Lives*, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 194; the first Bruce Medal was awarded in 1898.

²⁹ Information in this section adapted from: <http://www.nndb.com/people/643/000168139/>; <http://www.phys-astro.sonoma.edu/bruceMedalists/>; “The West Side Library; A Gift of Miss Catherine Bruce The Third Branch of the Free Circulating Library to Opened next Thursday” *New York Times* (December 30, 1887), 9; “Gift for A Free Library,” *New York Times* (January 22, 1887), 8.

³⁰ Information in this section adapted from: “The West Side Library: A Gift of Miss Catherine W. Bruce” *The New York Times* (December 30, 1887), 9.

³¹ The George Bruce Library temporarily featured several panels from the fêted painter Frederick Judd Waugh (1861-1940). Waugh was a versatile and accomplished artist, but was most widely known for the marine paintings that brought him critical attention. The paintings were on loan to the George Bruce Library, and it is not known when the paintings were removed.

³² In 1877, Miss Bruce donated the sum of \$50,000 towards a library building and books.

³³ Information in this section adapted from: “Harney, George Edward,” *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, (New York James T. White & Co., 1929); “Harney, George Edward,” *Who was Who in America*, v.4, 1950; “The West Side Library A Gift of Miss Catherine Bruce The Third Branch of the Free Circulating Library to Opened next Thursday” *The New York Times* (December 30, 1887), 9.

³⁴ Information in this section adapted from: “New Library is Opened, George Bruce Branch Ready Today to Circulate Books,” *New York Times*, (June 3, 1915), 7. When the public library was built at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, the Bruce Branch was considered to be in too close proximity to the new central branch, New York: City of New York and was subsequently relocated to the Harlem site.

³⁵ The George Bruce Library originally featured an assembly room on the basement level in addition to two other floors, one dedicated to adult patrons and the other to children.

³⁶ Information in this section adapted from: <http://www.sheftman.com/ewrt1a/orwell/index.html>; http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/baldwin_j.html.

³⁷ Information in this section adapted from: *Tottenville Designation Report*, *op. cit.*, with additional information from Channing Blake, “Carrere & Hastings” in Adolf Placzek, ed., *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 387-88; “The Works of Messrs. Carrere & Hastings,” *Architectural Record* 27 (January, 1910-120); David Gray, *The Architecture of Thomas Hastings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933); “John Mervin Carrere Obituary,” *New York Times*, (March 2, 1911), 9; Henry F. and Elsie R. Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessy & Ingalls, 1970), 109-110; 269-271.

³⁸ Information in this section adapted from: Margot Gayle and Michele Cohen, *The Art Commission and Municipal Art Society Guide to Manhattan’s Outdoor Sculpture*, (New York: Prentice Hall Press 1988) 192-193.

³⁹ Information in this section adapted from: Robert A.M. Stern, et. al, *New York 1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 325-29.

⁴⁰ The West 126th Street segment was renamed Moylan Place in 1920; Moylan Place was de-mapped c. 1954 for the imminent construction of the Gen. Grant Houses.

⁴¹ Mark Allen Hewitt, Kate Lemos, William Morrison, Charles D. Warren, *Carrère & Hastings Architects*, (New York: Acanthus Press, 2006) v. I, 332-334, 336-337.

⁴² Information in this section adapted from: Kenneth Meeks, “Dance Troupe helps to Raise Money to Keep Library Open,” *New York Amsterdam News* (November 28, 1992), 10.

⁴³ Information in this section adapted from: Nina Siegal, “Neighborhood Report: Upper Manhattan; New Shelf Life: 2 Libraries Closing for Renovations” *New York Times* (November 8, 1998), 12.

⁴⁴ Information in this section adapted from: Renovation Fact Sheet: George Bruce Library, The New York Public Library, June 2001, <http://www.nypl.org/press/2001/georgebrucefacts.cfm>.

⁴⁵ After World War II, New York City forged ahead with urban renewal projects made possible by Title I of the Housing Act of 1949. While Title I was meant to help big cities replace slums with middle-class housing, New York instead used the program to replace housing for the poor with high-rent apartments, medical centers, and university campuses. Title I later became synonymous with callous relocation and “Negro removal.” Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press 1993), 155.

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 George Bruce 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, New York Public Library George Bruce Branch was built in 1915-15 and is an excellent example of Georgian Revival-style civic architecture designed by Carrère & Hastings; that the firm is noted for the design of New York Public Library's main branch building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street; that Carrère & Hastings designed fourteen Carnegie-funded libraries in New York, a commission awarded to the firm after the success of the central library building; that the George Bruce Library is named for a Scottish inventor of printing machinery; that in 1877, his daughter Catherine donated \$50,000 for a library building in her father's memory; that the original George Bruce Library was completed in 1888, and located on 42nd Street; that when it was sold in 1913, the proceeds were used to build the current library located on 125th Street; that the George Bruce branch library reflects the firm's attention to materials, stylistic details, plan, and setting; that the historic ground floor entryway features an arched transom with Gothic muntins, and sidelights, which is flanked by historic copper lanterns with an ocular window above the entrance with a surround of bricks and a stone keystone; that the black and red header brick facade forms a distinctive checkerboard pattern; that the George Bruce Branch Library continues to be an important resource for the Harlem community.

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 New York Public Library George Bruce Branch, 518 West 125th Street, (aka 518-520 Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard), Tax Map Block 1980, Lot 22 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, George Bruce Branch
518 West 125th Street
Main elevation (north)
Photo: Carl Forster



The New York Public Library, George Bruce Branch
518 West 125th Street
Rear elevation (south)
Photo: Theresa C. Noonan



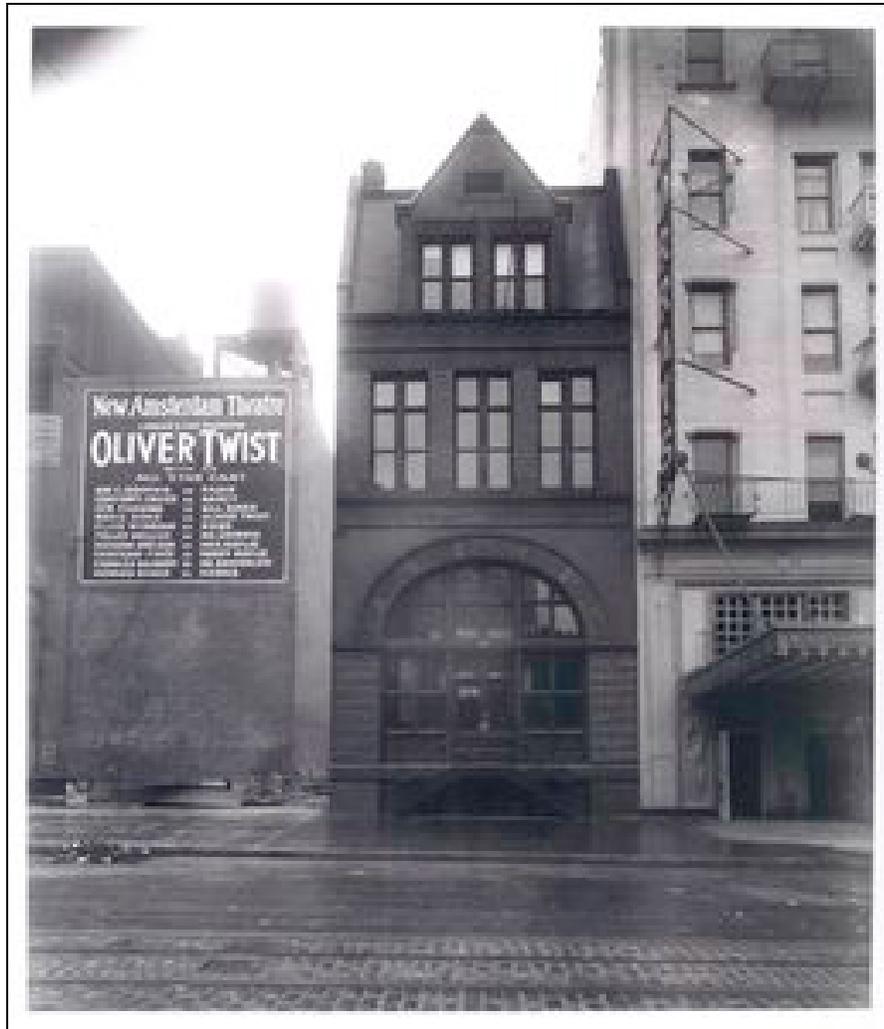
The New York Public Library, George Bruce Branch
518 West 125th Street
Main entrance detail
Photo: Carl Forster



The New York Public Library, George Bruce Branch
518 West 125th Street
Side elevation (west)
Photo: Carl Forster



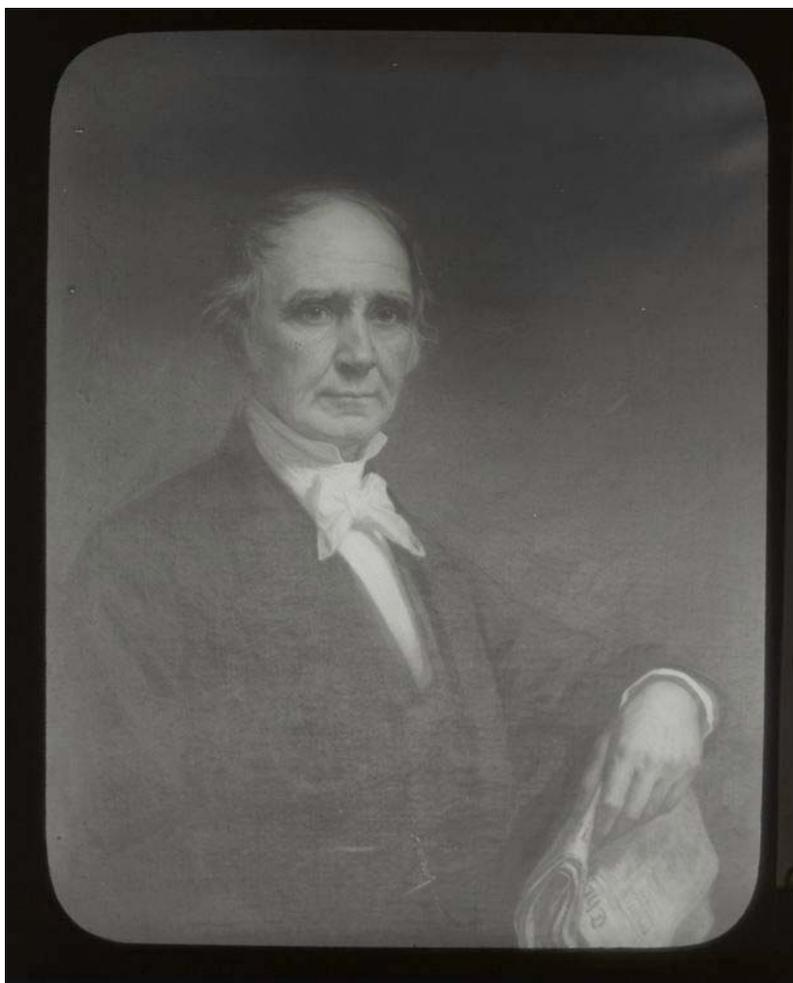
Photo Courtesy: The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division,
The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



George Bruce Free Circulating Library 226 West 42nd Street
Photo Courtesy: The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division,
The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

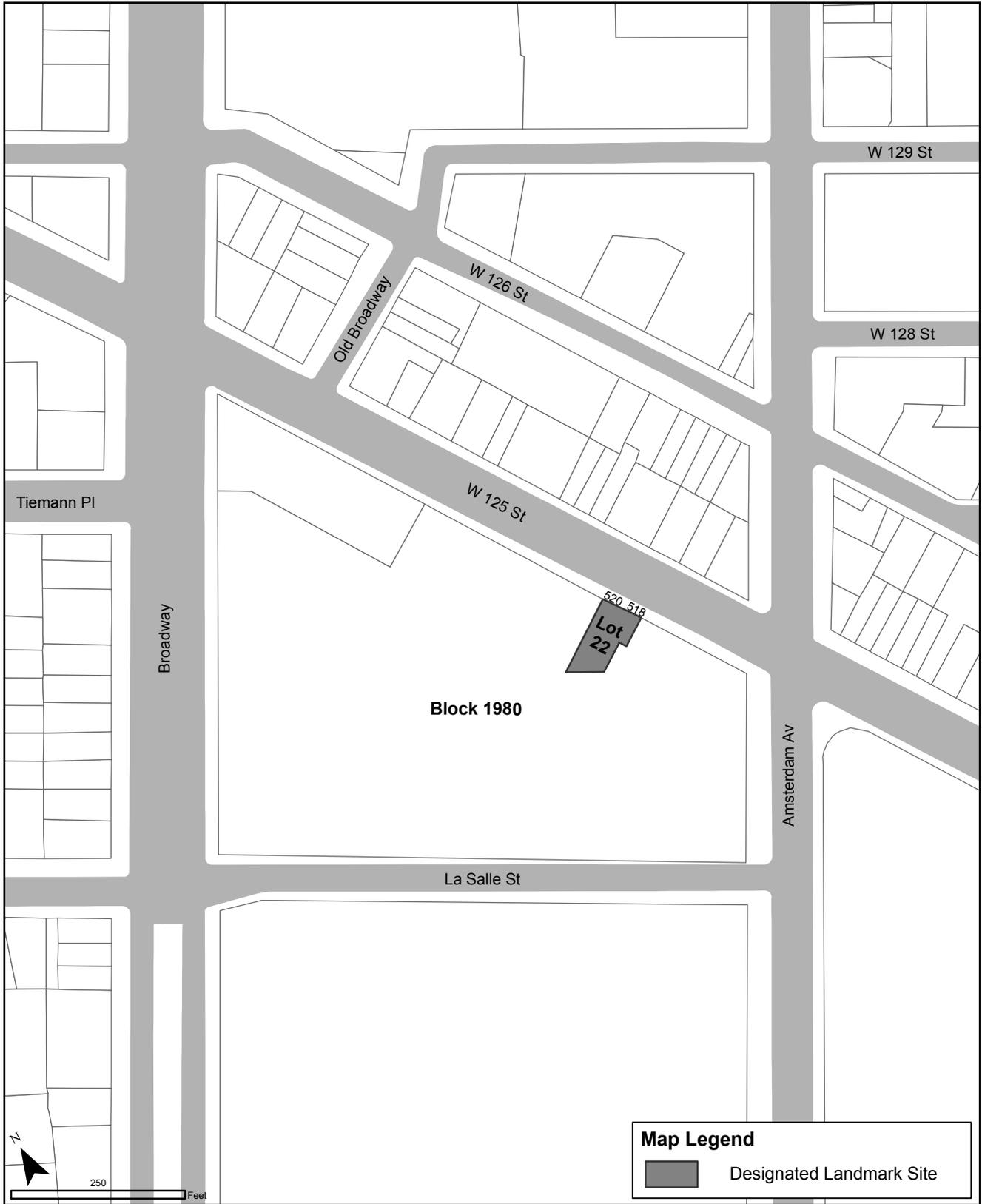


The New York Public Library, George Bruce Branch
518 West 125th Street
Side elevation (east)
Photo: Theresa C. Noonan



George Bruce

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



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, GEORGE BRUCE BRANCH (LP-2304), 518 West 125th Street
 (aka 518-520 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1980, Lot 22.

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.