

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY, CENTRAL BUILDING

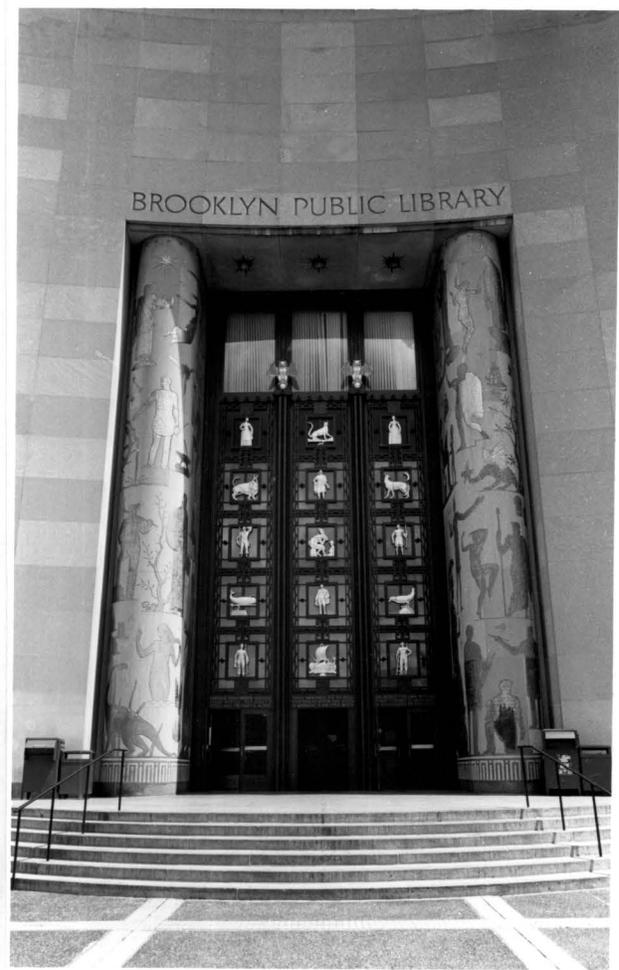
Grand Army Plaza (aka 2 Eastern Parkway and 415 Flatbush Avenue), Brooklyn.
Built 1935-41; architects Alfred Morton Githens and Francis Keally.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1183, Lot 2.

On May 6, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Brooklyn Public Library and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three people spoke in favor of designation, including a representative of the Brooklyn Public Library.

Summary

The Central Building of the Brooklyn Public Library is located on one of Brooklyn's most prominent sites, facing Grand Army Plaza at the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and Eastern Parkway. Initially proposed in 1888 when Brooklyn was still an independent city, the municipally-financed central library took nearly six decades to build. Of the several cultural institutions in the vicinity of Prospect Park, it was the last to open to the public in 1941. Ground was broken in 1911 for architect Raymond F. Almira's Beaux-Arts scheme. However, by 1929 the project stood only one-third complete, a victim of both city politics and finances. In 1935 the architects Alfred Morton Githens and Francis Keally were commissioned to redesign the building, while retaining the existing foundations and steel skeleton. Their monumental design is a limestone-clad Modern Classical structure with impressive Art Deco detailing by the sculptors Thomas Hudson Jones and C. Paul Jennewein. The most striking feature is its fifty-foot high entry portico, set into the concave facade which reflects the elliptical configuration of Grand Army Plaza. An expression of both civic pride and public embrace, the design was widely praised for being both impressive and practical. Its plan is shaped like an open book, and the inscriptions and sculpture that decorate the spare exteriors express the educational purpose of the library. Passed by thousands of pedestrians and motorists each day, the Central Building of the Brooklyn Public Library is one of the borough's best known and most heavily used public buildings.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Libraries in Brooklyn¹

During the mid-nineteenth century several private libraries were established in Brooklyn, primarily in Brooklyn Heights. Although some were associated with existing institutions, several developed enough support to construct their own buildings, including the Brooklyn Apprentices Library (1825) at Henry and Cranberry Streets, the Brooklyn Atheneum and Reading Room (Field & Corregio, 1853) at Atlantic Avenue and Clinton Street, and the Mercantile Library Association of the City of Brooklyn (P. B. Wight, 1869) on Montague Street. At these subscription libraries, readers paid an annual fee to use the facilities and borrow books.

Following the Civil War, the city of Brooklyn grew rapidly, expanding its borders and accommodating thousands of new immigrants. During the late 1870s and 1880s interest grew in creating a free library system, one that would serve all Brooklyn residents and neighborhoods. Brooklyn's earliest free library was privately funded and was located in the main building of the Pratt Institute, a private school in Clinton Hill founded by Brooklyn oil tycoon Charles Pratt in 1887. Within a few years, he established a second facility, the Astral Branch in Greenpoint, not far from the site of Pratt's kerosene refinery. These libraries were immensely popular, and in 1896 the original Pratt facility moved to new and larger quarters on Hall Street, designed by the Brooklyn architect William B. Tubby.²

Brooklyn's Public Library

The Brooklyn Public Library was created on May 3, 1892, by an act of the New York State legislature. Five years later, in December 1897, the first branch opened in Bedford Stuyvesant. Located in Public School No. 3, the municipally-financed facility featured separate reading rooms for men and women and open stacks for browsing, a new innovation.

On January 1, 1898, the city of Brooklyn was consolidated into Greater New York. Despite considerable interest in pursuing a similar merger of the new city's various independent library systems — especially, with the announcement in 1901 that industrialist Andrew Carnegie would donate \$5.2 million for the construction of sixty-five branches — such an alliance failed to occur.³

The New York Public Library, established in 1895, was privately funded and conceived as a

centrally located reference collection, formed by the merger of the Astor Library, the Lenox Library, and the Tilden Trust. The Brooklyn Public Library, on the other hand, was founded as a decentralized system, created to serve a broad range of constituencies and communities. Unlike the New York Public Library, Brooklyn's board of trustees consisted of a number of elected officials, including the New York City Mayor, comptroller, and the Brooklyn Borough President, who opposed the merger in order to retain influence over future plans and construction. Furthermore, many influential Brooklynites feared its absorption into a larger system, arguing that the borough and its citizens would be best served by its own independent library. Carnegie, who initially favored a merger, acceded to their wishes, and in 1901, the Brooklyn Public Library received \$1.6 million to construct twenty branch libraries.⁴

The Site

Brooklyn's Central Library is situated on a triangular lot at the intersection of Eastern Parkway and Flatbush Avenue. It was originally part of the so-called "east-side lands" which were acquired by the City of Brooklyn for the construction of Prospect Park. These lands, which extended as far east as Washington Avenue, included the Mount Pleasant reservoir (today the site of Mount Prospect Park) that officials hoped would be integrated into the park's design. The park's designers, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, however, convinced them to abandon this scheme and acquire land to the west instead. Not only were the dimensions too small, but they believed that Flatbush Avenue, a major thoroughfare, should not bisect the future park. In their 1866 report, they speculated on the site's use, writing that "the lots on this part of Flatbush Avenue, will probably, in course of time, be occupied by handsome buildings, the objects of which will in some way be connected with the education system of the city."⁵

The city-owned property remained undeveloped for twenty years. In 1888, a special committee of the board of park commissioners composed of the Rev. Richard S. Storrs, General John B. Woodward, and Daniel M. Somers suggested how the vacant site might be used: "When a large public library is established free to all comers, no place could be more fitting for it than on the large triangle facing the Plaza and in front of the reservoir grounds,

accessible from different quarters and passed already by thousands of people everyday."⁶

Beginning in 1889 a number of improvements were made to the area near Prospect Park. Most of these civic projects on and facing Grand Army Plaza had a strong classical character. These included the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch (John H. Duncan, 1889-92; alterations, 1894-1901, McKim, Mead & White) and four fifty-foot tall Doric columns topped by bronze eagles and two tempietti (McKim, Mead & White, 1894-1901). In 1889, the property east of the reservoir was given to the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. In 1893 McKim, Mead & White designed what would have been the world's largest museum building, and construction began four years later. At this time the area, from Prospect Park Plaza (Grand Army Plaza) to Washington Avenue, became known as Institute Park.

In 1895 the site of the future library became a park, lined with benches and planted with bushes and trees. In 1903, a bronze tablet mounted on a granite boulder was installed on the lawn near the reservoir. Designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the circular medallion featured a relief portrait bust of Henry W. Maxwell (1850-1902), a banker and Park Slope resident.⁷

In 1902, the Brooklyn Public Library merged with the Brooklyn Library (formerly the Mercantile Library), a private subscription library with a limited endowment and a significant reference collection. Such growth, as well as a persistent rivalry with the New York Public Library (its main building was then under construction), inspired the trustees to rethink the library's mission and purpose. In February 1904, former Brooklyn Mayor and library president David A. Boody (1837-1930) and the board of directors announced its intent to build a "great library building for Brooklyn."⁸ Many sites for the proposed central library were considered, including properties owned by the city on the north side of Eastern Parkway, on Plaza Street between the Parkway and Butler Place, as well as near the Brooklyn Academy of Music (then under construction), and on Joralemon Street near Brooklyn Borough Hall.

In April 1905 the plaza site was selected. Civic groups and public figures attacked the site for its modest size, odd shape, and proximity to the reservoir. Elijah R. Kennedy, former Park Commissioner, warned that such irregular shaped lots lead to the construction of "monstrosities."⁹ The *Brooklyn Daily Times* editorialized that such a costly central building should not be constructed until after the branch system was complete.¹⁰ In

response to these objections, Mayor George B. McClellan invited the architects of the New York Public Library, John M. Carrère and Thomas Hastings, to evaluate the location. In their report of November 1905, they concluded that the plaza site was a "fine setting" and that "there is no reason why it should not be selected."¹¹ After considering their recommendations, a formal resolution, signed in December 1905 by both Mayor McClellan and Brooklyn Borough President Martin W. Littleton, designated the property as the future site of the Brooklyn Public Library.¹²

The Library's First Architect

Raymond F. Almirall (1869-1939) was chosen as the library's architect in July 1906.¹³ Born and raised in Brooklyn, Almirall studied at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, Cornell University, and for four years at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Some of his surviving works include: the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank (1908-12, a designated exterior and interior landmark), 51 Chambers Street, Manhattan; the Brooklyn Public Baths No. 7 (1906-10, a designated landmark) at Fourth Avenue and Carroll Street; and St. Michael's Church, School and Rectory (1905) at 4200 Fourth Avenue in Sunset Park. A consulting architect on the committee for the construction of the Carnegie Gift Libraries, he worked closely with the library's administration and had already designed several brick and masonry branches in Brooklyn, including the Bushwick Branch (1904-08) at 340 Bushwick Avenue, the Pacific Branch (1902-03) at 25 Fourth Avenue; and the Prospect Branch, now Park Slope Branch (1906) at 431 Sixth Avenue.¹⁴

Almirall, A. D. F. Hamlin, consulting architect and Columbia University Professor; and Frank P. Hill, the chief librarian, were sent to study contemporary library design in Europe. In October 1906, after visiting twenty-four examples in nineteen cities, Hill summarized their findings in a forty-six page report which described various models for adaptation to the triangular site.¹⁵

In November 1907, Almirall presented his ambitious scheme to the public which incorporated a central library building as well as "the larger problem of the appropriate architectural treatment of the whole Plaza."¹⁶ His grandly scaled Beaux-Arts design was quickly approved, by both the board of trustees and the Municipal Art Commission of the City of New York (predecessor of the Art Commission).¹⁷

Construction began in 1911, and in June 1912 the cornerstone was laid by Mayor William J.

Gaynor. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported that the library would be built and paid for in stages and completed no earlier than 1917. With the election of each new mayor came new debates regarding the library's worth and value to the city. For instance, in spring 1914, Mayor John Purroy Mitchel refused to support further appropriations. *The New York American* supported the mayor's change in priorities and suggested that public funds could be better spent on parks, bath houses, schools, and playgrounds.¹⁸

Between 1915 and 1927 construction slowed even more.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the library's board remained committed to Almirall and his design. Although there had been occasional suggestions to abandon the plan as early as 1925,²⁰ only with the death of David A. Boody, the library's president for thirty-three years, and the retirement of Frank P. Hill, who had been chief librarian since 1901, was an alternative design seriously considered.

In October 1930, the trustees chose Milton James Ferguson (1879-1954), the former chief librarian of California, as Hill's successor. At the time of his appointment the library stood only one-third complete. Thousands of pigeons had made the shell of the unfinished Flatbush wing their home. *The New York Post* called it a "Roman ruin" and *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, a "hideous old wreck."²¹

Despite Borough President Henry Hesterberg's attempts to secure \$9.2 million in public funds to complete the library, neither the Board of Estimate in 1931, nor the Public Works Administration in 1933, chose to support it.

A New Design and Its Architects

Chief librarian Ferguson recognized that if Brooklyn was to finally obtain its central library, a new strategy was required. He found a supportive ally in Raymond V. Ingersoll, who was elected Brooklyn Borough President in November 1933. With finances a serious concern, they boldly advocated a new, modern design which would cost less and be more appropriate for contemporary library needs.²² The library looked east to the Brooklyn Museum which was being transformed into a modern institution.²³

The museum's new Director, Philip Youtz, was an innovative administrator and trained architect who believed that architecture must "keep pace with social growth."²⁴ During his six years at the museum, from 1933 to 1938, he instituted many innovative (and now controversial) changes, particularly the creation of a new ground level entry and circulation hall. After 1934 Youtz, Ingersoll, and Ferguson communicated almost weekly. In his

self-described "informal relations as advisor," Youtz helped choose the library's new architects.

Alfred Morton Githens (1876-1973) and Francis Keally (1889-1978) were selected by Youtz from a list provided by Ferguson in February 1935. Youtz forwarded a letter and photographs of their work to Ingersoll, describing Keally as a "young architect of good reputation" and Githens as "the best single architect in the library field."²⁵ Although the two architects had not worked together before, their interests and expertise complemented each other. Of the two, Githens was better known and had a proven track record as an architect who had designed numerous public buildings in the neo-classical style including churches, post offices, and libraries. After attending the Ecole des Beaux-Arts from 1903 to 1905, he studied at the American Academy in Rome. He received his early professional training with the architects Cope & Stewardson in Philadelphia, as well as with Cass Gilbert and McKim, Mead & White in New York. His works include the Currier Gallery of Art (with Edward Tilton, 1927) and the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland (1933) that Youtz called "the outstanding large library recently constructed."²⁶ Githens later co-authored (with Joseph L. Wheeler) *The American Public Library Building: Its Planning and Design with Special Reference to its Administration and Service* (1941).

Keally, the younger man, was much more responsive to modern materials and ideas than his partner. He had built few buildings at the time of the library commission and was principally known as an educator and journalist. He had traveled extensively in Europe and during the 1920s taught at several architectural schools in New York, including Columbia and New York Universities. In articles published in such magazines as *American Architecture* and *Country Life*, he promoted a modern architecture tempered by tradition. For the New York World's Fair of 1939, Keally designed the Communications Building with architect Leonard Dean. Like the Brooklyn library, it featured a monumental curved entry facade.

In September 1937 a plaster model of Githens and Keally's new library design was unveiled at the OWPA Federal Art Gallery. Composed of three stories, rather than the four in Almirall's plan, the new structure would be clad with large, unornamented limestone slabs arranged horizontally. Set back behind a small plaza, the new library would feature two nearly identical elevations with simple piers and recessed windows joined at the western end by a monumental entry facade decorated with reliefs and sculpture.²⁷

Praised for its modern character, the design, nonetheless, owed a great deal to Almirall. To keep expenses to a minimum, Githens and Keally re-used as much of the existing structure as possible. They retained the original foundations and structural piers while removing nearly all of the masonry and classical detail and one story of the steel framing for the original fourth floor, giving the library's interior layout and public spaces a strong, though abstracted, classical character.

The *New York Times* praised the new design, writing: "as it turns out, the delay has not been totally unfortunate. . . the architects who have revised the plan have saved money and added to the general utility of the library plant by getting rid of most the Graeco-Roman ornaments. . . The new library might be called a walk-in, inviting patrons to enter without making them climb unnecessary steps."²⁸ Githens and Keally designed a gently terraced plaza, featuring broad shallow steps. Furthermore, the curved entry facade extends, rather than competes with, Grand Army Plaza's elliptical configuration.

In November 1938, the Board of Estimate approved plans for a \$1.88 million structure.²⁹ Construction began in February 1939, and in November 1939 the library's administration began to relocate its offices to the nearly completed facility. On February 1, 1941 — after almost thirty years of construction — the Children's Room and the Central Circulation Room were opened briefly for public inspection. More than twenty-five hundred people visited and two days later, the library began service.³⁰

The Brooklyn Public Library was formally dedicated on March 29, 1941, with Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and Borough President John Cashmore in attendance. And on September 17, 1941, a memorial inscription dedicated to Borough President Raymond V. Ingersoll was unveiled in the plaza on the granite capstones that flank the central stairs. (Ingersoll, who did much to secure funds to complete the library, did not live to see its completion, dying in 1940 during his second term.)

The library's design was praised by architectural critic Lewis Mumford, who wrote that when compared to other libraries, including the New York Public Library as well as buildings at Harvard and Yale Universities: "Brooklyn's new one is tops." He particularly admired its "bowed-in front" which he said "create[s] a sense of happy expectation."³¹ Other contemporary writers admired its spacious interior, especially its open plan and lofty light-filled circulation hall.³²

Architectural Decoration

The library's ornament was chosen to express the building's function as an institution for knowledge and learning. Above the triple doors is a forty-foot bronze screen decorated with fifteen squares, each containing a relief character from American literature, including Tom Sawyer, the Raven, and Moby Dick, as well as a portrait of Walt Whitman. Above the grid are two gold owls, wings spread, standing on small globes. The screen was designed by the sculptor Thomas Hudson Jones (1892-?) who studied at the American Academy in Rome and is best known for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia. Jones was also responsible for two reliefs, each depicting a squirrel, on the entrance gates to the Children's Library.

The fifty-foot pylons which flank the entry are decorated with a series of gilded curved bas-reliefs by the German-American sculptor C. Paul Jennewein (1890-1978).³³ These images depict the evolution of science (at the north) and art (at the south). He was also responsible for the decoration above the doors on the British Empire Building in Rockefeller Center (620 Fifth Avenue, designated New York City Landmark, 1932) as well as the entrance enframing to 19 East 72nd Street, an apartment building designed by Rosario Candela in 1936. He also contributed the figures on the Arlington Memorial Bridge in Washington, D.C. (c. 1922).

Instructional inscriptions are found in three locations: on the capstones dedicated to Raymond V. Ingersoll, on the walls near the steps flanking the main entry, and on the green Virginia albarena stone spandrels set above the first floor windows on the Flatbush and Eastern Parkway wings. The quotes on the concave main facade were composed by Roscoe C. E. Brown, a library trustee since 1908 and its president from 1940 to 1942. On the Eastern Parkway wing the spandrel quotes are taken from Roscoe C. E. Brown, Thoreau, Horace, Thomas à Kempis, and Shakespeare. On the Flatbush Avenue wing they are from Thomas Carlyle, Francis Bacon, Joseph Conrad, Alexander Smith, Goethe, and Shakespeare.³⁴

Description

The Central Building of the Brooklyn Public Library, occupying a triangular site at the intersection of Eastern Parkway and Flatbush Avenue, is set back on a terraced plaza. Three stories high, it is faced in limestone. The building's

most dramatic feature is its smooth concave entrance facade. Where it nears the pavement, it curves slightly to meet the gray granite base on which it sits. On either side of the entrance are deeply recessed windows which are arranged vertically with spandrels made from green Virginia albarene stone. On the second and third floors are single pane windows; below they are divided into four fixed vertical panes.

The terraced plaza is reached by three sets of broad shallow granite stairs with non-historic wrought-iron railings, flanked by waist-high granite blocks, rising from the curve of Grand Army Plaza, Eastern Parkway, and Flatbush Avenue. At the two corners are small landscaped areas separated from the sidewalk by a metal fence. A white flagpole and metal Brooklyn Public Library sign are located at the north side of the plaza.³⁵ At either side of the wide central stairs, which rise in four shallow stages, are two of the plaza's six bronze lighting fixtures (each with three globes) and chest-high granite capstones inscribed and dedicated to Borough President Raymond V. Ingersoll. Facing the library, the right blocks are inscribed in three sections, facing west, north, and east:

IN MEMORIAL/TO COMMEMORATE THE
DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC SERVICE
OF/RAYMOND VAIL INGERSOLL 1875-
1940

A PHILOSOPHER WHO/STROVE
UNCEASINGLY/TO QUICKEN THE
PUBLIC/SENSE OF CIVIC DUTY
INGERSOLL MEMORIAL/RAYMOND
VAIL INGERSOLL SERVED/HIS CITY AS
BOROUGH PRESIDENT 1934-40/AND
COMMISSIONER OF PARKS 1914-1918

The left blocks are inscribed, facing west, south, and east:

INGERSOLL MEMORIAL/RAYMOND
VAIL INGERSOLL SERVED/HIS CITY AS
BOROUGH PRESIDENT 1934-40/AND
COMMISSIONER OF PARKS 1914-1918

AN INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATOR OF
ABIDING JUSTICE/RARE WISDOM
AND/UNFLINCHING COURAGE

IN MEMORIAL/TO COMMEMORATE THE
DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC SERVICE
OF/RAYMOND VAIL INGERSOLL 1875-
1940

The central portion of the main entrance facade rises above the three-story level of the Eastern Parkway and Flatbush Avenue wings. On the roof, set back from the main elevation, are two cubic stair towers. These symmetrical limestone towers, which are barely visible from the terraced plaza, are clearly seen from a distance.

Directly above the main entrance is carved: BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY. At either side, steps with bronze railings lead past a set of inscriptions carved into the facade to a semi-circular landing and three sets of bronze doors. Above, from left to right, are cast in raised relief the following inscriptions:

FARTHER THAN ARROW, HIGHER/THAN
WINGS FLY POET'S/ SONG AND
PROPHET'S WORD

WHILE MEN HAVE WIT TO READ/AND
WILL TO KNOW THE DOOR
TO/LEARNING IS THE OPEN BOOK

THE WORLD FOR MEN WITH ALL/IT
MAY CONTAIN IS ONLY WHAT/IS
COMPASSED IN THE MIND

These, as well as the inscriptions beside the stairs, were composed by library's president Roscoe C. E. Brown. On the stairs, the first two lines of each inscription are framed by a pair of rectangles that suggest open books. At left:

THE BROOKLYN PUBLIC
LIBRARY/THROUGH THE JOINING OF
MUNICIPAL/ENTERPRISE AND PRIVATE
GENEROSITY OFFERS TO ALL/PEOPLE
PERPETUAL AND FREE ACCESS TO
KNOWLEDGE AND THE/THOUGHT OF
THE AGES.

At right:

HERE ARE ENSHRINED/ THE LONGING
OF GREAT HEARTS/AND NOBLE THINGS
THAT TOWER ABOVE THE TIDE/THE
MAGIC WORD THAT WINGED WONDER
STARTS/THE GARNERED WISDOM THAT
HAS NEVER DIED

Directly above the doors, set in the ceiling of the recessed entry, are three recessed lighting fixtures. Like a star, each is surrounded by rays of light cut deeply into the limestone. The forty-foot

tall bronze screen is divided into fifteen squares, each containing a relief set in a small square framed by fountain-like decorations and abstracted rosettes. Behind all but the top row of squares, is bronze-tinted clear glass installed in 1997. Outside the Trustees Room, above the grille, at the level of the third floor, are two owls that stand on globes. These globes sit on square bronze bases decorated with rosettes. Each base extends out over an engaged fluted column that rises from the entrance pavement. The doors are then framed by two fifty-foot tall columnar pylons, each decorated with gilded bas-reliefs. (See Architectural Decoration above.) Just to either side of the entrance are non-historic freestanding book return containers.

The library is built on a gentle slope which rises toward the east. Consequently, close to the plaza its base is quite high, and near the east end it disappears almost entirely. On the Flatbush Avenue wing, where it joins the main facade, is the building's cornerstone. Here "1938" is carved into the granite base. To the right is a set of stairs that lead to a basement service entrance with two metal doors, marked with small raised bronze letters: SERVICE. A yellow "Fall-out" sign is also attached above. Between the cornerstone and the service entrance is a freestanding air-conditioning unit. On Eastern Parkway, a ramp descends to a pair of similar bronze doors marked STAFF.

On both wings the architects have employed large windows, most of which appear to be original to the building. There are eleven sets of windows on Eastern Parkway and thirteen facing Flatbush Avenue. While on the second and third floors, the central panes are fixed, on the first floor most are divided into four horizontal panels. The muntins extend without break from the first to third floors. The side panels on each level are divided into four parts; the lower pair of windows swing out, and the upper pair swing up. Between each floor are dark green stone spandrels. These panels are etched with quotes, star-shaped motifs set in checkerboard-like borders, and classical ornament.

At the rear of the Flatbush Avenue wing is a small three-story extension. The window-less limestone portion on the first floor was built in 1940 as the Branch Distribution Room and curves northeast toward the parking lot. The upper two stories, however, have a completely different character, consisting of cast concrete blocks with incised lines and spare rectangular single pane windows. This wing, added in the early 1990s by the New York City Department of General Services, features abstract classical ornament and details that imitate the book-like forms employed in some of the

adjacent spandrels. Beyond this structure is the library's present service entrance, providing access to the garage and loading docks. From Flatbush Avenue, this elevation is not easily visible to the general public.

Both of the library's two wings are set back from the sidewalk by a lawn planted with trees and bushes. On Eastern Parkway, a number of on-grade vents interrupt the plantings. Adjacent to the stairs that rise to Mount Prospect Park is the library's second public entrance. Set at ground level, it also provides access for users with disabilities through two gates that are painted black, each decorated with a relief depicting a squirrel. The side gates have vertical bars over a concrete base, and the ironwork on the moveable doors is arranged in a crisscross pattern. Across the top of the fence are ten raised stars. There are also letters cut into the metal that once could have been illuminated. They read: CHILDREN'S LIBRARY. Inside the gate, there is modest garden (designed 1993) which leads at right to an entrance above which is again etched in the dark green stone: CHILDREN'S LIBRARY. The door and three sets of windows above face east and are arranged as they are on the library's three other facades: in a single recessed vertical strip punctuated by green spandrels.

Through a second set of iron gates, the library's various post-1941 additions are visible, including the book-loading area, the curved garage and parking lot, as well as the high retaining wall with classical ornament and iron fence that separates the library property from Mount Prospect Park.

Two air-conditioners have been installed in the library's windows. Both serve a mezzanine in the children's library. They are located between the first and second floors in the easternmost window of the Eastern Parkway elevation and above the entrance to the children's library.

Subsequent History

Few changes have been made to the main facade of the building. As the number of branch libraries in the Brooklyn grew, the system became increasingly centralized. These developments put great pressure on the library's administration and the central building where it was located.

During the early 1950s the second floor reading rooms were finally completed. Soon after, in 1960, the Chief Librarian, Francis R. St. John (1908-71), asked Keally to prepare additional plans to expand the library based on his original drawings. This included the construction of a new garage in the rear and the creation of new and larger reading rooms by

extending the central portion of the first and second floors into what was once was the library's courtyard and garden. Completed around 1964, these changes mask the original rear facade.

During the early 1990s a two-floor addition was built on top of the curving, window-less extension that housed the library's original Branch Distribution Room and loading docks. In 1993 the bronze screen above the main entry was cleaned and re-gilded and a small garden was planted outside the entrance to

the children's library on Eastern Parkway. A project for the restoration of the roof parapet is underway.

Report prepared by
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NOTES

1. This report owes much to the Brooklyn Collection of the Brooklyn Public Library, especially the unpaginated scrapbooks devoted to the library's history. Considerable thanks must be given to Judy Walsh, the collection's librarian, as well as Joy Holland. It should be noted that many of the newspaper clippings in these files are without dates. Consequently, some of the footnotes that follow are missing dates and page numbers. For a discussion of early Brooklyn libraries, see Margaret B. Freeman, "The Brooklyn Public Library: A History," vol. 1, bound typescript, 1966, found in the Brooklyn Collection, the Brooklyn Public Library.
2. Closed to the public in 1940, it continues to serve Pratt's academic community today.
3. For a detailed discussion of the proposed merger, see: Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library* (New York: New York Public Library, 1972), 224-228. Beginning in 1901 the New York Public Library added branch lending libraries, including those established by the New York Free Circulating Library and those built with Carnegie fund grants.
4. According to a letter from John S. Billings, Director of the New York Public Library, to Frank P. Hill, Brooklyn's chief librarian, the library unsuccessfully requested Carnegie funds to construct a central building in August 1901. See Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy: The Carnegie Libraries of New York* (New York: The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and the New York City Department of General Services, 1996), 23, 49.
5. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn," in *Landscape into Cityscape*, ed. Albert Fein (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1967, reprt. 1981), 125.
6. "Work Starts To-morrow on \$5,000,000 Brooklyn Library," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 25 June 1911, section 2, p. 5.
7. The inscription on the 4'3" by 3'1" tablet read: THIS MEMORIAL IS ERECTED BY HIS/FRIENDS IS THEIR TRIBUTE TO HIS DEVOTION/TO PVBLIC EDUCATION AND/CHARITY IN THE CITY OF BROOKLYN. See John H. Dryfhout, *The Work of Augustus Saint-Gaudens* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1982), no. 187. The Municipal Art Commission approved its relocation to the "southeast side of the east mound of Prospect Park Plaza" in July 1912. See "Relocation of the Maxwell Memorial," Art Commission of The City of New York, submission 1523, exhibit 80E, Division of Monuments files, Department of Parks, City of New York. However, it was ultimately placed on a berm on Plaza Street, near St. John's Place. Presently, the tablet has been removed and is on loan to the Brooklyn Museum of Art. A replica is being prepared for re-mounting in 1997.
8. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 17 Feb 1904, p. 12.

9. See "Opposition to Proposed Library Site," *The Taxpayer*, 7 October 1905, p. 1-2, 4.
10. *Brooklyn Daily Times*, 27 January 1904.
11. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 29 November 1905, p. 3.
12. "Central Library Site Finally Settled Upon," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 16 December 1905, p. 3.
13. Almirall was awarded the commission without a public competition, unlike many public projects built at the turn of the century. "Architect Selected for Brooklyn Library," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 July 1906, p. 9.
14. For information on these and other Carnegie libraries in New York City, see Mary B. Dierickx, 66-67, 84-85, 86-87.
15. *Brooklyn Daily Times*, 17 October 1906.
16. H. W. Frohne, "The Brooklyn Plaza and the Projected Brooklyn Central Library," *Architectural Record*, 23 (February 1908), 97.
17. The four-story entry facade was similar to Cass Gilbert's design for the U.S. Customs House (1899-1907, now the National Museum of the American Indian, designated landmark), Bowling Green, Manhattan; it featured a grand entry with three bays, a central staircase framed by four pairs of columns, and abundant classical ornamentation. As in the New York Public Library, the stacks were located at the rear (facing the reservoir and a planned extension to Underhill Avenue) and were clearly articulated through narrow vertical fenestration.
18. Ruth Ferguson, "The Hole in the Ground that Became the Central Building of the Brooklyn Public Library," bound (mimeographed) manuscript, 1948, p. 20, found in the Brooklyn Collection, the Brooklyn Public Library. This essay was written by the wife of the chief librarian, Milton James Ferguson.
19. Among the various factors that delayed construction, Almirall's role as foreman of the grand jury investigating the alleged crimes of Mayor John P. Hylan's administration may have done the greatest harm. The 1922 inquiry concerned a reputed conspiracy involving transit fares on the proposed Independent Subway system. Though the mayor was not indicted, the IND was a favorite project, and Almirall's prominent role probably contributed to the mayor's sour attitude towards what would have been the architect's principal achievement. Hylan reportedly announced: "You are not going to get any money here for the public library. We're not going to throw \$11 million into that hole dug by Almirall." And *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* revealed: "It is said a hint has been given the managers of the Brooklyn Library that if they would employ a new architect for the central building Mayor Hylan might see the project in a different light." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 18 January 1923, 10 June 1923, p. 8.
20. Freeman, vol. 2, 610.
21. *The New York Post* and *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 14 Feb 1936.
22. Chief Librarian Ferguson wrote: "The decision to change the architectural style was not hastily arrived at. To spend up to \$15 million on this [Almirall's] structure would result in a monumental library not a functional library building." Ferguson, p. 48.
23. For a discussion of changes, both architectural and curatorial, at the museum, see Joan Darragh, "The Brooklyn Museum: Institution as Architecture, 1934-1986" in *A New Brooklyn Museum* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 52-72.
24. Philip Youtz, *American Life in Architecture* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1932), 13.
25. Letter to Raymond V. Ingersoll from Philip Youtz, 15 Feb 1935, in Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives.
26. Ibid.

27. The final plan was approved by the Municipal Art Commission in September 1937. See *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 September 1937. It should be noted that Robert Moses proposed an alternate plan in 1936. Although quite similar to the final design, it would have reused the original attic story on Flatbush Avenue, resulting in two wings of uneven height. For description and illustrations of the proposal, see *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 13 August 1936, p. 1, 5.
28. "Brooklyn Gets a Library," *New York Times*, 6 June 1938. The library entrance owes a great deal to Youtz who had gone to great lengths to improve the Brooklyn Museum's accessibility by removing its grand entry stairs.
29. *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 September 1937; "Estimate Body Approves Sum of \$1,883,300." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 November 1937.
30. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 15 (March 1941), 582.
31. Lewis Mumford, "The Sky Line: Brooklyn Public Library," *The New Yorker*, 19 (October 1940), 47.
32. In recent years, the building has achieved some notoriety. Eliot Willensky and Norval White described it as: "Streamlined Beaux Arts, or an example of how the Ecole des Beaux Arts developed the Art Moderne of the Paris Exposition of 1937. In effect it is a formal participant in the geometry of the avenues radiating from the Soldier's and Sailor's Arch; but its Moderne/Beaux Arts idiom allowed it to be stylishly modern in its costume as well as classical in its conformance to the grand plan. Inside is lots of grand space." See *AIA Guide to New York* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovonovich, third edition, 1988), 650. It also appears and is discussed in such publications as *New York 1930* by Robert Stern et al (New York: Rizzoli, 1987) and *New York Deco*, photographs and text by Carla Breeze, introduction by Rosemarie Bletter (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 64-65.
33. For additional photographs of his work and a brief biography, see *C. Paul Jennewein* (The American Sculptors Series: University of Georgia Press in collaboration with the National Sculpture Society, c. 1950).
34. For these quotes, see *Brooklyn Public Library, Ingersoll Memorial* (Brooklyn New York, 1942), 19.
35. The white flagpole set on a granite base was dedicated Memorial Day 1959. According to the plaque at its base, it originally served as the mast for the *Shamrock III*, winner of the America's Cup. The plaza is to be used during the summer of 1997 as an outdoor cafe with moveable tables and chairs.

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 the Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building has a special character and a 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 Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, is located on one of Brooklyn's most prominent sites, facing Grand Army Plaza at the intersection of Flatbush Avenue and Eastern Parkway; that initially proposed in 1888 when Brooklyn was still an independent city, the municipally-financed central library took nearly six decades to build and of the several cultural institutions in the vicinity of Prospect Park, it was the last to open to the public in 1941; that in 1935 the architects Alfred Morton Githens and Francis Keally were commissioned to redesign the building begun in 1911 according to the Beaux-Arts design of Raymond F. Almirall, while retaining the existing foundations and steel skeleton; that their monumental design is a limestone-clad Modern Classical structure with impressive Art Deco detailing by the sculptors Thomas Hudson Jones and C. Paul Jennewein; that the most striking feature is its fifty-foot high entry portico, set into the concave facade which reflects the elliptical configuration of Grand Army Plaza; that as an expression of both civic pride and public embrace, the design was widely praised for being both impressive and practical; that its plan is shaped like an open book, and the inscriptions and sculpture that decorate the spare exteriors express the educational purpose of the library; and that, passed by thousands of pedestrians and motorists each day, the Central Building of the Brooklyn Public Library is one of the borough's best known and most heavily used public buildings.

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 Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, Grand Army Plaza (aka 2 Eastern Parkway and 415 Flatbush Avenue), Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1183, Lot 2, as its Landmark Site.



Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn
View from Grand Army Plaza
Photo: Carl Forster



Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn
View from Eastern Parkway
Photo: Carl Forster



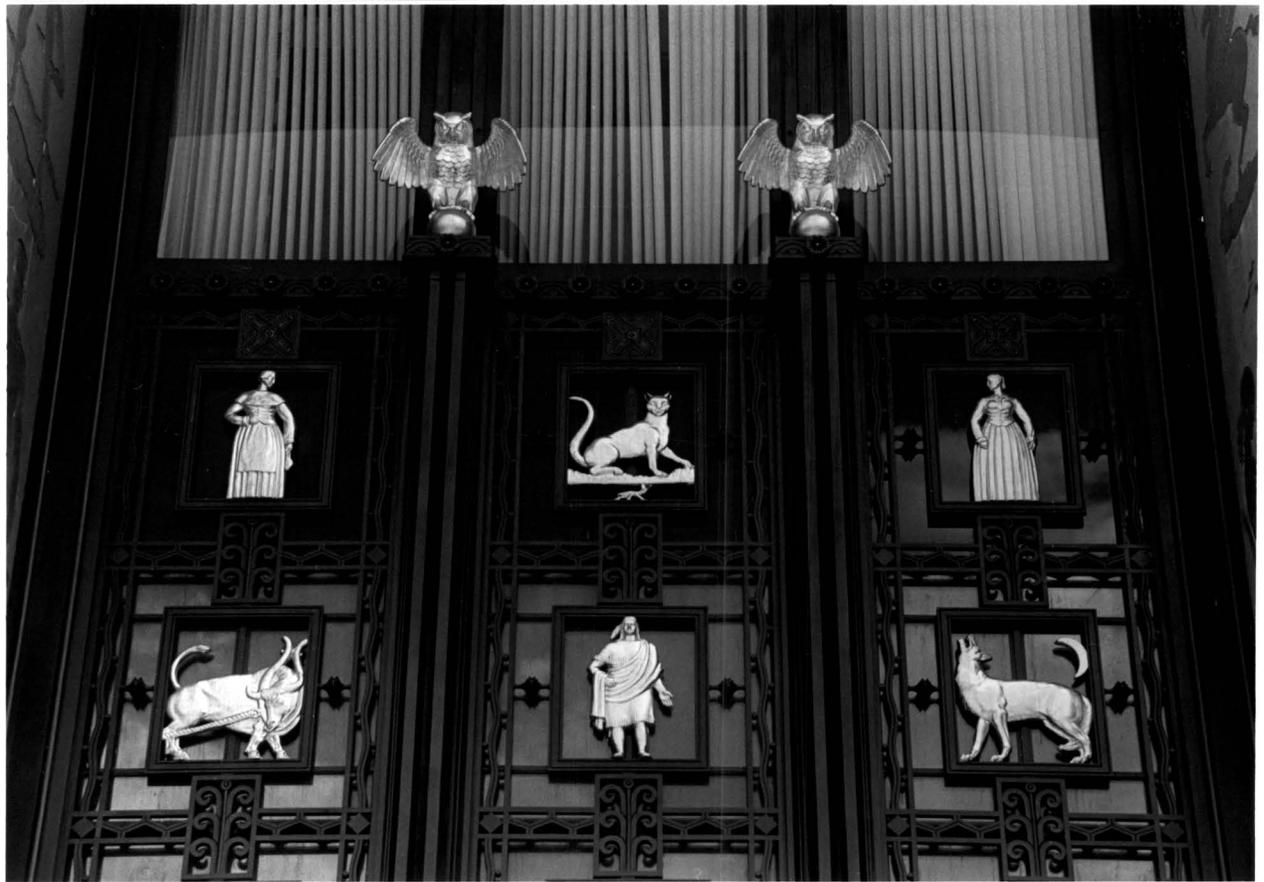
Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn
View from Flatbush Avenue
Photo: Carl Forster



Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building
Grand Army Plaza entry portico
Photo: Carl Forster



Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building
Eastern Parkway entrance gate
Photo: Carl Forster



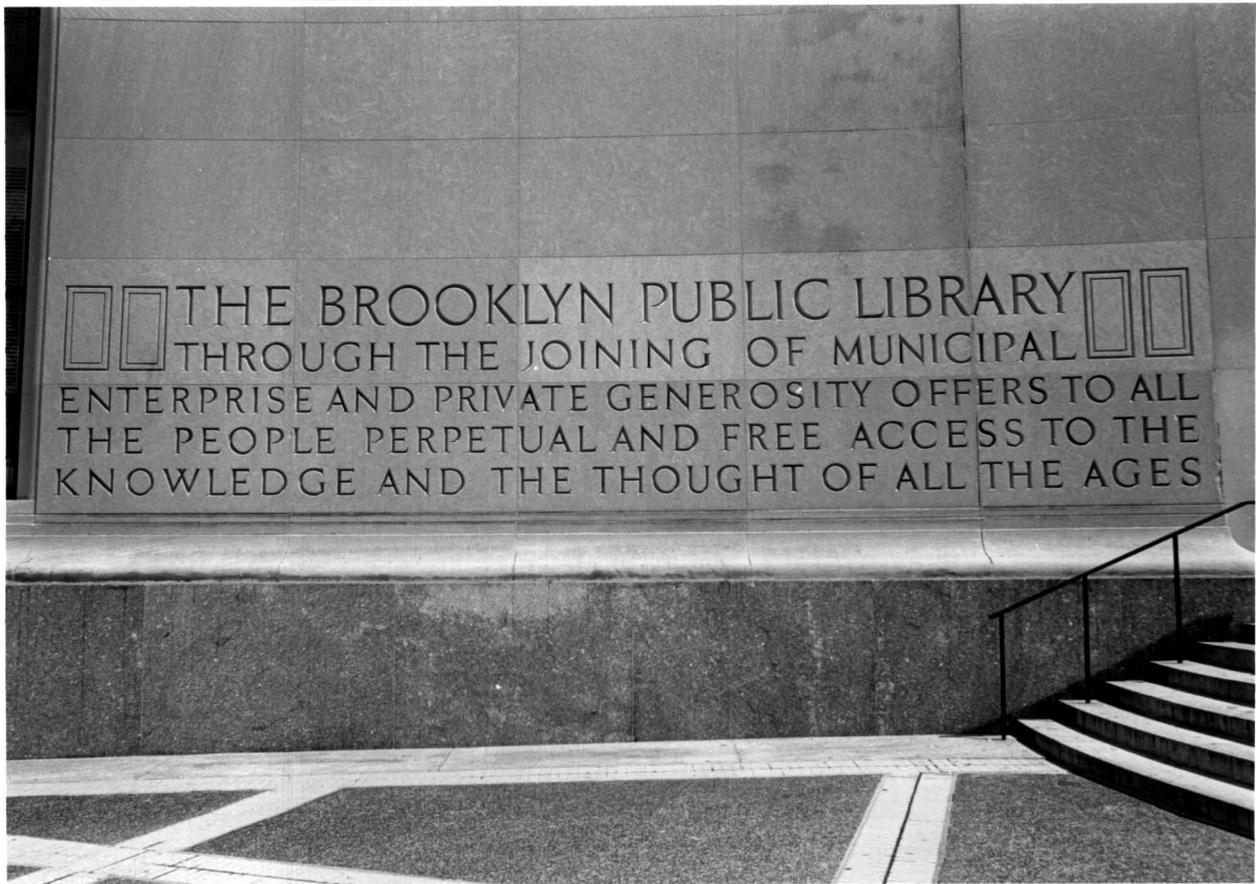
Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building
 Entry portico detail, sculpture by Thomas Hudson Jones
 Photos: Carl Forster



FARTHER THAN ARROW-HIGHER
 THAN WINGS-FLY POET'S
 SONG AND PROPHET'S WORD

WHILE MEN HAVE WIT TO READ
 AND WILL TO KNOW-THE DOOR
 TO LEARNING IS THE OPEN BOOK

THE WORLD FOR MAN-WITH ALL
 IT MAY CONTAIN-IS ONLY WHAT
 IS COMPASSED BY THE MIND

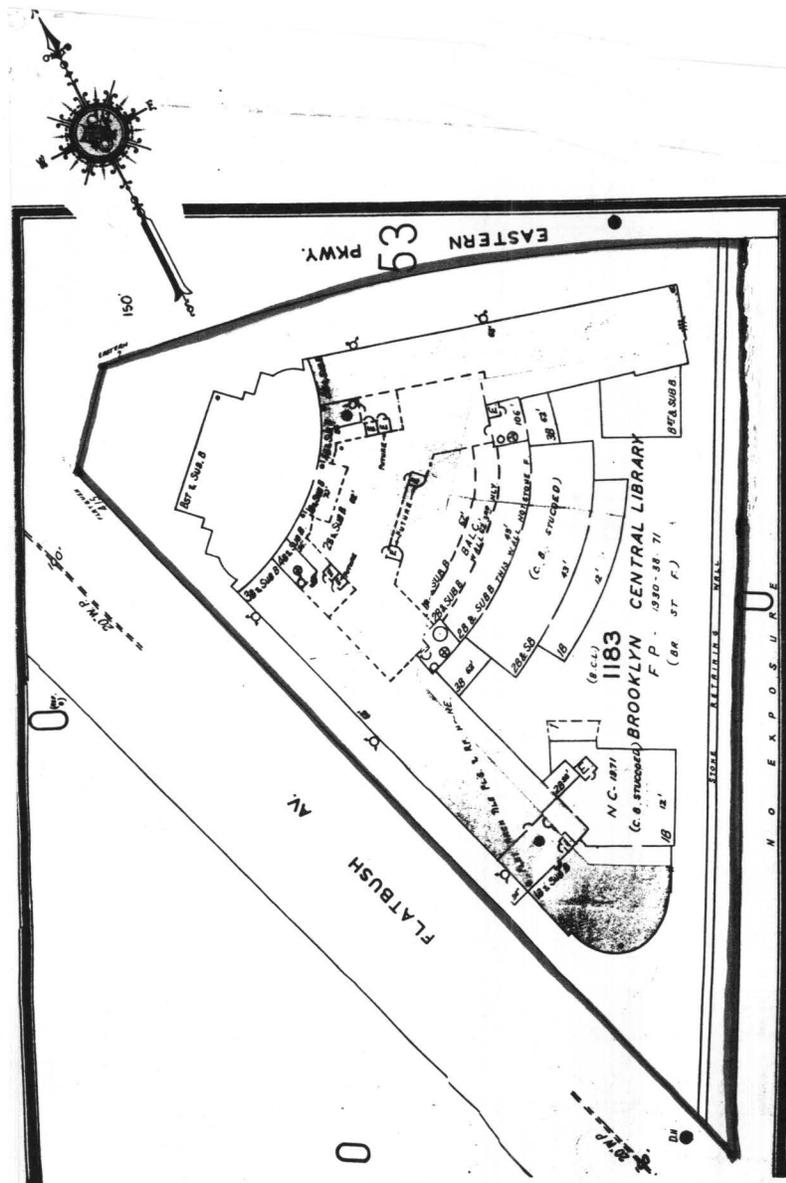


Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building
Inscriptions by entrance
Photos: Carl Forster





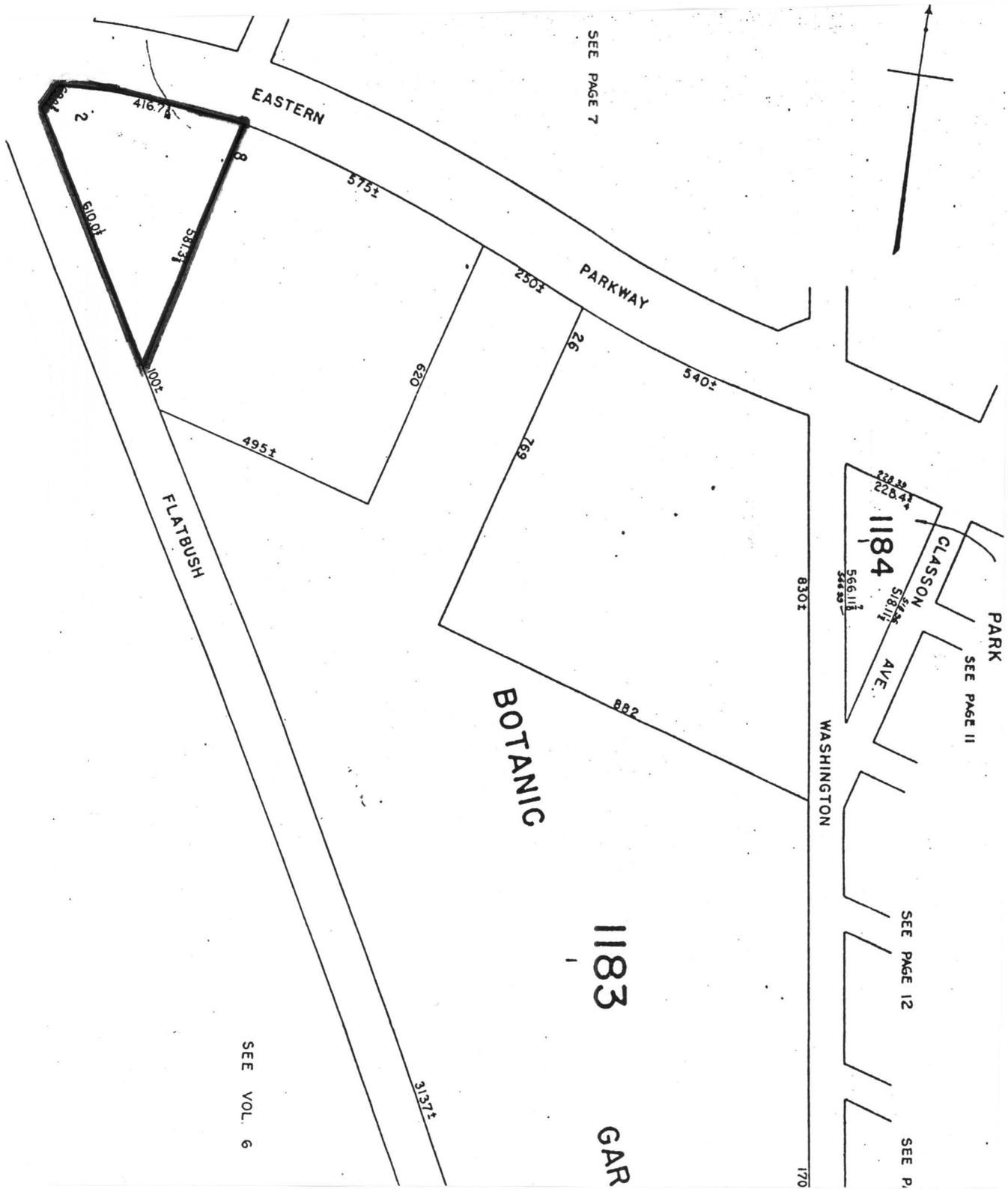
Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building
Building extension on Flatbush Avenue
Photo: Carl Forster



Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn
 a/k/a 2 Eastern Parkway and 415 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1183, Lot 2

Source: Inset from The Sanborn Building and Property Atlas of Brooklyn, Region 2, Volume 6, Page 57



Brooklyn Public Library, Central Building, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn
 a/k/a 2 Eastern Parkway and 415 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1183, Lot 2
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map