

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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LP-0239

THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY AND ANNEX, 29-33 East 36th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Library begun 1903, completed 1906; architects McKim, Mead & White. Annex completed 1928; architect Benjamin W. Morris.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 866, Lot 25.

On April 12, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Pierpont Morgan Library and Annex and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 21). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The original building of the Pierpont Morgan Library, designed in the Italian-Renaissance Eclectic Style, was built in 1906 to house Mr. Morgan's collection of paintings, sculpture and his valuable library. This beautiful building is considered Charles Follen McKim's masterpiece. Twenty-two years later, after the Library had grown to include more manuscripts and drawings, the adjoining Annex was completed on the site of the elder Morgan's residence. Architect Benjamin Wister Morris accomplished this task with rare perception by creating a Florentine Renaissance design, harmonious with the original Library, without copying any of its detail. Although connected at the rear, these two fine buildings appear as separate buildings. They are slightly raised above street level and separated from the street by a lawn, as well as by a beautiful fence and entrance gates.

The Library is more frequently reproduced in various publications than the Annex because it is more striking architecturally. Its central Palladian motif, which uses four paired Ionic columns instead of the usual two, provides a deeper reveal for the arch. This motif, in turn, is backed by a deep porch with a beautifully decorated groin-vaulted ceiling. Niches with sculptured figures and an entrance doorway, enframed in the Roman Style, are other features of this porch. The bronze doors have been ascribed to Italian craftsmen of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and are in the tradition of Ghiberti's renowned doors of the Baptistery in Florence. The exterior details of this building are perfect evidence of the careful collaboration of architect and sculptor, working to produce a masterpiece for one who was not only an outstanding connoisseur of the arts but a philanthropist as well.

The remarkable details include exterior walls which are constructed of "dry masonry" where joining surfaces of the marble blocks have been set without mortar and have been ground until they are absolutely even, and fit so tightly that one cannot insert a pen knife between the stones. This type of "dry masonry" was used in the Parthenon and Erechtheum in Greece but has rarely been used elsewhere.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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 Pierpont Morgan Library and Annex has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Pierpont Morgan Library and Annex are outstanding examples of Italian Renaissance Eclectic design incorporating the talents of architect, sculptor and painter, that they represent the finest available both in use of materials and craftsmanship, that their architectural details are both refined and delicate and that the classical purity of the Library exerted a marked influence on the general development of architecture in this country at the time it was built.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark The Pierpont Morgan Library and Annex, 29-33 East 36th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 866, Lot 25, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.