

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
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NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 476 Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan.  
Begun 1898, completed 1911; architects Carrere & Hastings.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1257, Lot 1.

On April 12, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York Public Library and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 28). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The Commission continued the public hearing until June 14, 1966. (Item No. 1). At that time one speaker favored designation. Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either meeting. In a letter to the Commission, the Director of the Library approved designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Central Building of the New York Public Library occupies a fabulous site, that has often been referred to as "the crossroads of the world". This majestic marble building, one of the masterpieces of the Beaux-Arts style of architecture, is a magnificent civic monument and fully justifies the pride of its generation and of ours. It sits regally enthroned on a terraced plateau, displaying urns, fountains, flagpoles, sculpture and ornament. Replete with sparkle and delicacy, it is by night or day a joyous creation. This building comes closer than any other in America to the complete realization of Beaux Arts design at its best. It has somehow managed to keep that light airy quality, so often seen only in architectural drawings, so rarely achieved in execution.

Set back a considerable distance from Fifth Avenue, this handsome building is placed behind a long terrace extending the full length of the Fifth Avenue side. Flanked by the famous lions, broad steps lead to this terrace separated from the street by a raised parapet wall and a landscaped enclosure. A handsome low-rise flight of steps leads to the imposing entrance dominated by a superb central pavilion with a deep set triple arched portico embellished with coupled Corinthian columns. Surmounting the colonnade is an attic wall with six sculptured figures standing on the ledge of the ornately decorated cornice extending the full length of the building. On either side of the central pavilion wall niches contain sculptured figures above fountains, and five arched windows alternate with fluted Corinthian columns. The building terminates with the excellently proportioned pedimented end pavilions.

The library can be viewed on all four sides and to the west it is architecturally notable from the functionalist standpoint of view. Forming a facade that is expressively designed with tall narrow windows, lighting the seven floors of book stacks within. This is one of the finest elevations in the country. Above these vertical windows are the large arched windows of the spacious public reading rooms. The exterior is enhanced by small balconies, an enriched frieze of swags and ribbons and the deep stone rustication of the base. Pedimented end pavilions again complete the composition.

The Central Building, designed by the architectural firm of Carrere & Hastings, was completed in 1911 at a cost of \$9,000,000. and took eleven years to build. It occupies the site of the old Croton Distributing Reservoir.

At the New York Public Library, there is a collection of 7,500,000 volumes. Three million of these are deposited in the eighty branch libraries and four mobile units in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island. The branch libraries are supported from public funds allocated by the City of New York. The Central Reference Library building is owned and maintained by the City but operates on income from endowments and individual donations. The Central Building occupies the eastern end of two city blocks. It has a reading room that covers half an acre, eighty miles of bookshelves, books in 3,000 languages and dialects, and the number of visitors is now more than 8,900 a day.

The New York Public Library was formed in 1895 by the consolidation of three corporations: These included the Astor Library, established with gifts from John Jacob Astor, his sons and grandsons, amounting to about \$1,700,000, the private library of James Lenox with an endowment of \$505,500 and The Tilden Trust, Samuel J. Tilden's private library and an endowment fund estimated at \$2,000,000. In order to benefit from a \$5,200,000 gift made by Andrew Carnegie to the City for library buildings, the New York Free Circulating Library (organized in 1887 with eleven branches) joined the Astor-Lenox-Tilden consolidation in 1901.

The New York Public Library ranks with the Library of Congress, Harvard University Library and the British Museum as one of the leading research institutions in the world. Its research collections comprise more than four and a half million books and periodicals as well as newspapers, manuscripts, maps, prints, micro-copies and related items.

#### 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 New York Public Library 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 New York Public Library is a masterpiece of the Beaux-Arts style of architecture, that it is a magnificent civic monument, that it is by night or day a joyous creation and that the New York Public Library ranks with the Library of Congress, Harvard University Library and the British Museum, as one of the leading research institutions in the world.

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 New York Public Library, 476 Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1257, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.