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Landmarks Preservation Commission
August 29, 1989; Designation List 220
LP-1616

NEW YORK FREE CIRCULATING LIBRARY, Bloomingdale Branch/now Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 206 West 100th Street, Manhattan. Built 1898; architect, James Brown Lord.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1871, Lot 138.

On November 18, 1986, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York Free Circulating Library, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven witnesses spoke in favor of the designation and the Commission received additional letters supporting designation. The representative of the owner expressed opposition to the designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch, was the only building commissioned and built by the New York Free Circulating Library and as such is an expression of the library's commitment to the branch circulating library system during the period of peak expansion prior to consolidation with the New York Public Library. A distinguished eighteenth-century French Classic style design inspired by Italian Renaissance and other related sources, it is one of four pre-Carnegie era library buildings in New York City and serves as a reminder of the legacy of private philanthropic support of the city's libraries during the nineteenth century. The design of the building, constructed in 1898, by James Brown Lord, architect of the New York Appellate Division Courthouse, appears to have been an influential prototype in the development of the urban branch library, as demonstrated by the design program for the Carnegie gift branch buildings constructed in the early years of the twentieth century. The building, which remains virtually unchanged from the original design, served as the Bloomingdale Branch of the New York Public Library until 1960 and continues in use as a library and research facility for the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The New York Free Circulating Library and the Bloomingdale Branch¹

The New York Free Circulating Library was established in 1878 as an alternative to the Astor and Lenox Libraries which served as research facilities for scholars and several private circulating libraries which charged membership fees. Wealthy New Yorkers interested in encouraging the self-education of the poor and aiding the underprivileged contributed to such libraries financially and were actively involved in the management of the institutions. Among the supporters of the New York Free

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Circulating Library, incorporated in 1880 to provide "moral and intellectual elevation of the masses,"² were Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jacob H. Schiff, and Henry G. Marquand. The system's first circulating library was opened on Bond Street to provide standard works of fiction, books on travel and history, and high-quality books for children. With the acquisition of the Ottendorfer Branch in 1884, a gift from Anna and Oswald Ottendorfer, the circulating library system was firmly established. Financial support from the state after 1887 and the donation of libraries by Catherine W. Bruce, in memory of her father, and George W. Vanderbilt (both opened in 1888) furthered the steady expansion of library services of the system which included eleven branches in 1901.

In 1896 the seventh branch of the New York Free Circulating Library was established when the 3,000 volume parish library of St. Michael's Episcopal Church on West 99th Street was donated as the nucleus of the collection. The library was housed in rented ground floor space in the building at 816 Amsterdam Avenue, at the corner of West 100th Street. Book circulation was heavy from the beginning, and by the second year of operation, branch librarians were warning that the quarters soon would be inadequate. The library was named the Bloomingdale Branch after the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century village of that name which had centered around the present 100th Street. By the time the library was established the village had been eclipsed by the urbanization of the Upper West Side following the opening of the Ninth Avenue Elevated in 1879.

In 1898 the New York Free Circulating Library building committee, chaired by Frederic W. Stevens, a New York philanthropist who served also on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural History, publisher William Appleton, and Mr. J. Frederic Kernochan, president of the Library board, initiated construction of a new building for the Bloomingdale Branch. Head Librarian Arthur E. Bostwick, who later directed the circulation branch of the New York Public Library from 1901 to 1909, and the Bloomingdale Branch librarian, Miss Eugenie Krauss, also worked with architect James Brown Lord.

James Brown Lord³

James Brown Lord (1859-1902), a New York City native and member of the influential Brown banking family graduated from Princeton College in 1879. Lord began an architectural apprenticeship in 1879 or 1880 with William A. Potter, a noted architect who worked primarily in the Victorian Gothic style and was a senior partner of the firm Potter & Robertson. The association with Potter stemmed from a close relationship between the Potter and Brown families. In 1882 Lord worked with William Potter as a junior associate in the design of the Union Theological Seminary complex at Park Avenue and 70th Street (no longer standing). About this same time Lord received his first commission, two houses for Howard Potter on East 37th Street, and commissions followed for private houses in Yonkers, Tuxedo Park, Bar Harbor, Maine and Roslyn, Long Island, as well as in New York City. In 1890 Lord, along with Stanford White of McKim, Mead & White, and Bruce Price, designed row houses which became known as the King

Model Houses or "Striver's Row" on 138th Street in Harlem (now included in the St. Nicholas Historic District).

Lord's non-residential commissions included commercial and institutional work. He designed two restaurants for Delmonico's, the building at Beaver and South William (1891) and the one at 44th Street and Fifth Avenue (1897), and the Grosvenor Apartment Hotel at 10th Street and Fifth Avenue (1891). In the 1890s he designed several hospitals, including a competition entry for St. Lukes Hospital, and won commissions for the Society of the New York Hospital (Bloomingdale Asylum) at White Plains, New York (1894) and the New York Infant Asylum at Amsterdam Avenue and 61st Street (1901). The Bloomingdale and Yorkville Branch Libraries, and his most prominent work, the Appellate Division Courthouse (1896-99, a designated New York City Landmark) on Madison Square, were executed in the Renaissance/classical style he favored in the late 1890s. His successful career was brought to an untimely end by his death in 1902 at the age of 43.

Design and Construction⁴

The Bloomingdale Branch building, three stories over a basement, is of steel-frame fireproof construction with brick upper walls. The library was planned with the circulating library located on the main floor; bookshelves lined the walls and served as a room divider, separating the adult and children's areas. A reading room and reference library with a capacity of thirty-six seats occupied the second floor, and the third floor was devoted to janitor's quarters and a storage room. The lighting of the facility was carefully planned and incorporated large windows in the front and smaller windows above the wall shelves at the rear, a large, inclined skylight with Luxfor prismatic glass, and fixtures fitted for both gas and electricity.

The Bloomingdale Branch was erected at a time when there was great interest among both librarians and architects in the design of modern libraries. The well-publicized competition for the main building of the New York Public Library in 1897, the recent construction of the Library of Congress and the Boston Public Library, and the planning of public libraries in many cities, as well as such changes in library management as the open shelf arrangement, encouraged the discussion of the ideal plan and organization for various types of libraries.

Traditionally, a library had consisted of a reading room lit by a central clerestory above and side aisles where books were stored in alcoves or on shelves. Nineteenth-century innovations included the use of tiers of books in alcoves, which evolved into the modern "stacks" and the storage of books in floor cases in parallel rows rather than around the perimeter of the room in an attempt to maximize light falling on the books rather than the aisles. Librarians urged the adoption of rational plans with a minimum of architectural embellishment and were increasingly critical of the grand, lofty reading room. By 1890, many of the modern ideas had been incorporated into the quintessential freestanding library, a picturesquely massed form developed by Henry Hobson Richardson which

often included a stair tower, an arched entry, and the fortress-like book storage wing with windows in the upper wall.

The problem of the form of a library was different in New York where urban density mandated the use of midblock sites. The midblock branch libraries built in New York prior to 1898, had been nearly residential in form and looked to the romantic styles popular in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The Ottendorfer Branch Library (135 Second Avenue, 1883-84, a designated New York City landmark) by William Schickel was designed to relate to the German Dispensary next door with its mixture of Queen Anne elements and Renaissance detailing and arched entry. The George Bruce Branch library (226 West 42nd Street, 1887-88) designed by George E. Harney was somewhat Romanesque in style and an arched entrance supported by rusticated piers filled the first story facade. The Jackson Square Branch library (251 W. 13th Street, 1888, within the Greenwich Village Historic District) designed by Richard Morris Hunt for George W. Vanderbilt, was residential in scale and Flemish in style. The Harlem Library (32 West 123rd Street, 1891-92) designed by Edgar K. Bourne, which housed the library on the ground floor and bachelor apartments above, was similar to the Romanesque style rowhouse next door.

The use of the neo-classical/Italian Renaissance style in library design as an alternative to the more romantic Richardsonian style, had recently found favor with McKim, Mead & White for the Low Library at Columbia University (1893) and the Gould Memorial Library at the Bronx Campus of New York University (1893-94). The popularity of the Boston Public Library (1888-92), inspired by the design of the Bibliotheque Ste Genevieve in Paris (1843-50) also encouraged the use of neo-classicism in library design. Yet these grand buildings with rotundas and entrance porticoes, or freestanding broad facades, had little relationship to Lord's program. He interpreted the style in a manner suitable for a small building with no book storage area; an emphasized central window group suggests well-lit rooms within. The simple dignity of the Tuscan entrance portico and colossal Ionic order framing the window group on the second and third stories established the public character of the building. Overall this is a distinguished eighteenth-century French Classic style design inspired by the Italian Renaissance and related sources. Lord further explored the form and Italian Renaissance detailing, moving to a more Palladian-inspired three-bay facade for the Yorkville Branch Library (222 East 79th Street, 1902, a designated New York City Landmark). The similarity of the design formula of the Carnegie branches of the New York Public Library, executed by the firms of McKim, Mead & White, Carrere & Hastings, and Babb, Cook & Willard suggest that Lord was developing a prototype for the urban branch library. The separation of uses by floors was a practice continued in the Carnegie gift libraries; however, the New York Public Library trustees required that the reading room be on the first floor, visible from the street, and consequently the main entrances of the later buildings were placed in a side bay.

The Bloomingdale Branch and Its Later Use⁵

The Bloomingdale Branch was the first building the New York Free Circulating Library commissioned and paid for as an institution, and the Library was proud of its accomplishment. The new library was described as the "handsomest of all our branches and best adapted to our present system of library work."⁶ The librarian-in-charge noted the genuine spirit of pride and interest in the neighborhood during the construction of the new building, and suggested that it stood as a distinctive architectural feature of the area, and attracted patrons who would have passed by a plainer building.

The year after the construction of the new building, patronage increased significantly, a trend attributable to the growth in population in the vicinity, and the accessibility of the open shelves where patrons could select their reading material freely. The use of the reading room, however, did not meet expectations; the librarian explained this situation with the maxim that a reading room attracted in proportion to the unattractiveness of the home and noted that the library was located in an area of pleasant residences. From 1899 to 1905 the traveling branch of the Free Circulating Library was housed in the third floor of the Bloomingdale Branch.

In 1901 the New York Free Circulating Library joined with the New York Public Library, formed in 1894-95 with the merging of the Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, and the branch libraries became the nucleus of the circulation department of the larger institution. The five buildings owned by the Free Circulating Library continued in use as libraries; Carnegie gift buildings replaced the rented quarters of other branches. The Bloomingdale Branch occupied this building until moving to the new facility built in 1960 at 150 West 100th Street.

The Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences, a non-profit educational institution, purchased the building in 1961 and has used the site as a library and research facility devoted to the study of East European, particularly Ukrainian, culture and sciences.

Description⁷

The New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch, occupies a midblock site on the south side of West 100th Street. The three-story steel-frame building, is faced with tan glazed Roman brick and enriched with terra cotta and limestone. The first-story facade is deeply rusticated limestone with voussoirs and keystones surrounding the five round-arched openings, the center door and flanking windows. Projecting from the rusticated base, a shallow three-bay portico with Tuscan columns is enclosed on the ends with balustrades and supports a balcony which fronts the central window group of the upper stories. The wood-frame vestibule at the exterior of the main entrance door in the central bay, although an early addition, is of very light construction. It is not an integral part of the architecture of the building. Original wrought-iron railings screen the basement wells.

The prominence of the center three bays is continued on the second and third stories where terra-cotta elements in the colossal Ionic order frame the slightly recessed windows. The framing side bays, faced in tan glazed Roman brick, feature a pair of bulls-eye windows in foliate surrounds at the third story. In the frieze below the main cornice appears the raised inscription "New York Free Circulating Library." A parapet screening the flat roof has balustrade sections above the center three bays. The side facades are windowless and faced in red brick laid in standard American bond. The rear facade is not visible from the street.

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Notes

1. For the history of the establishment of the Bloomingdale Branch and the construction of the library building see the New York Free Circulating Library 1896-98 Annual Reports. See Mott for a description of the Bloomingdale village.
2. New York Free Circulating Library 1880 Annual Report.
3. This section was based on information in Landau, the Temple of Justice, and Lord obituaries in the New York Times and AIA Quarterly Journal.
4. For a description of the new building see the New York Free Circulating Library 1898 Annual Report, p. 23-24. The overview of library architecture was based on Bostwick, Breisch, and Koch.
5. The history of the New York Free Circulating Library, and the consolidation with the New York Public Library, can be found in Lydenberg and Dain.
6. New York Free Circulating Library 1898 Annual Report, p. 13.
7. See the LPC file for a more detailed description of the building at the time of designation. Historic photographs of the library can be found in the New York Free Circulating Library 1898 Annual Report and Zeisloft. The entry appears in both photographs. The only missing portions of the original fabric are four tall, slender finials which extended from the balcony piers.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

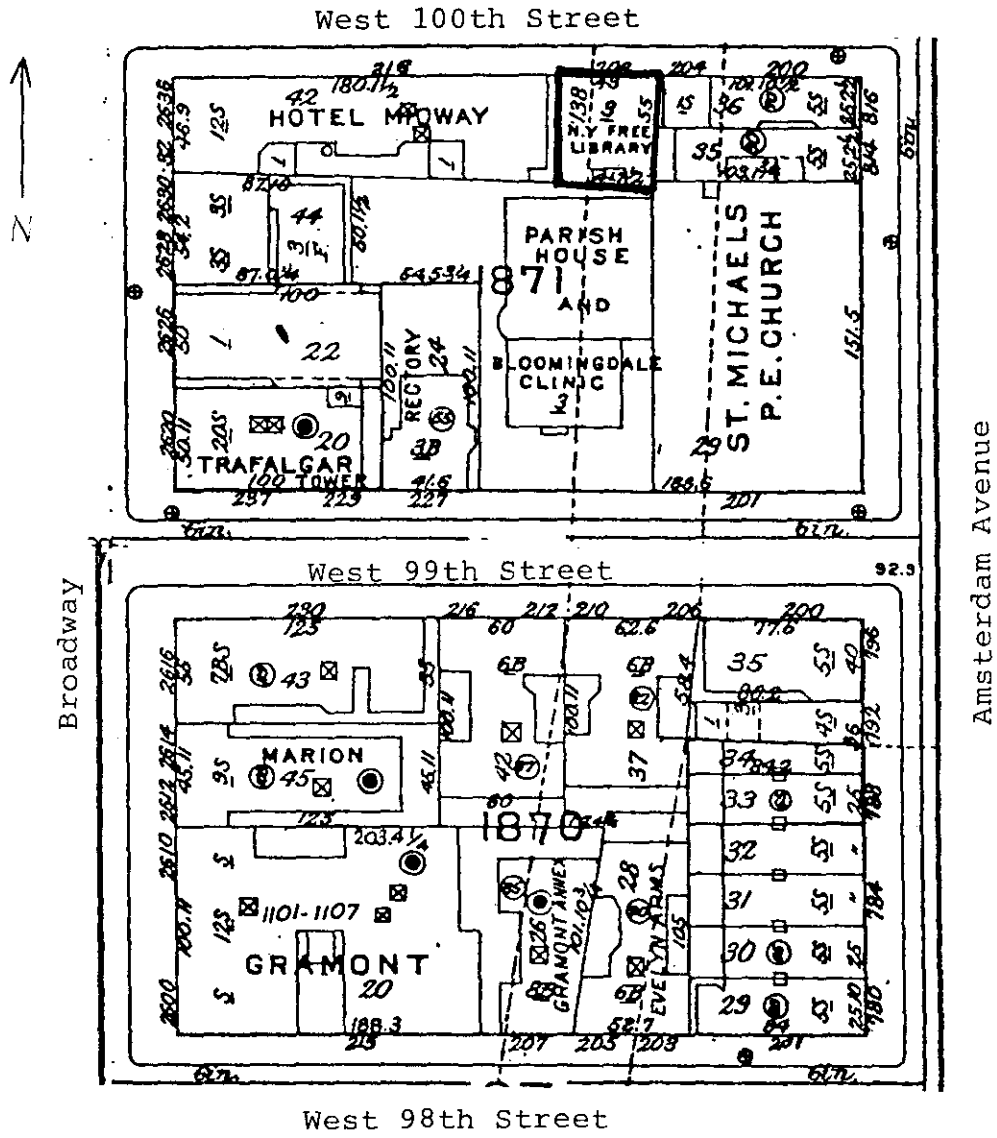
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch was the only building commissioned and built by the New York Free Circulating Library, and as such is an expression of the Library's commitment to the branch circulating library system during the period of peak expansion prior to consolidation with the New York Public Library; that it was built in 1898 and is one of four pre-Carnegie era library buildings in New York City; that it serves as a reminder of the legacy of private philanthropic support of the city's libraries during the nineteenth century; that it is a distinguished eighteenth-century French Classic style design inspired by Italian Renaissance and other related sources; that the design of the building by James Brown Lord, architect of the Appellate Division Courthouse, appears to have been an influential prototype in the development of the urban branch library, as demonstrated by the design program for the Carnegie gift branch buildings constructed in the early years of the twentieth century; that it remains virtually unchanged from the original design; and that it served as the Bloomingdale Branch of the New York Public Library until 1960 and continues in use as a library and research facility for the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the New York Free Public Library, Bloomingdale Branch, 206 West 100th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1871, Lot 138, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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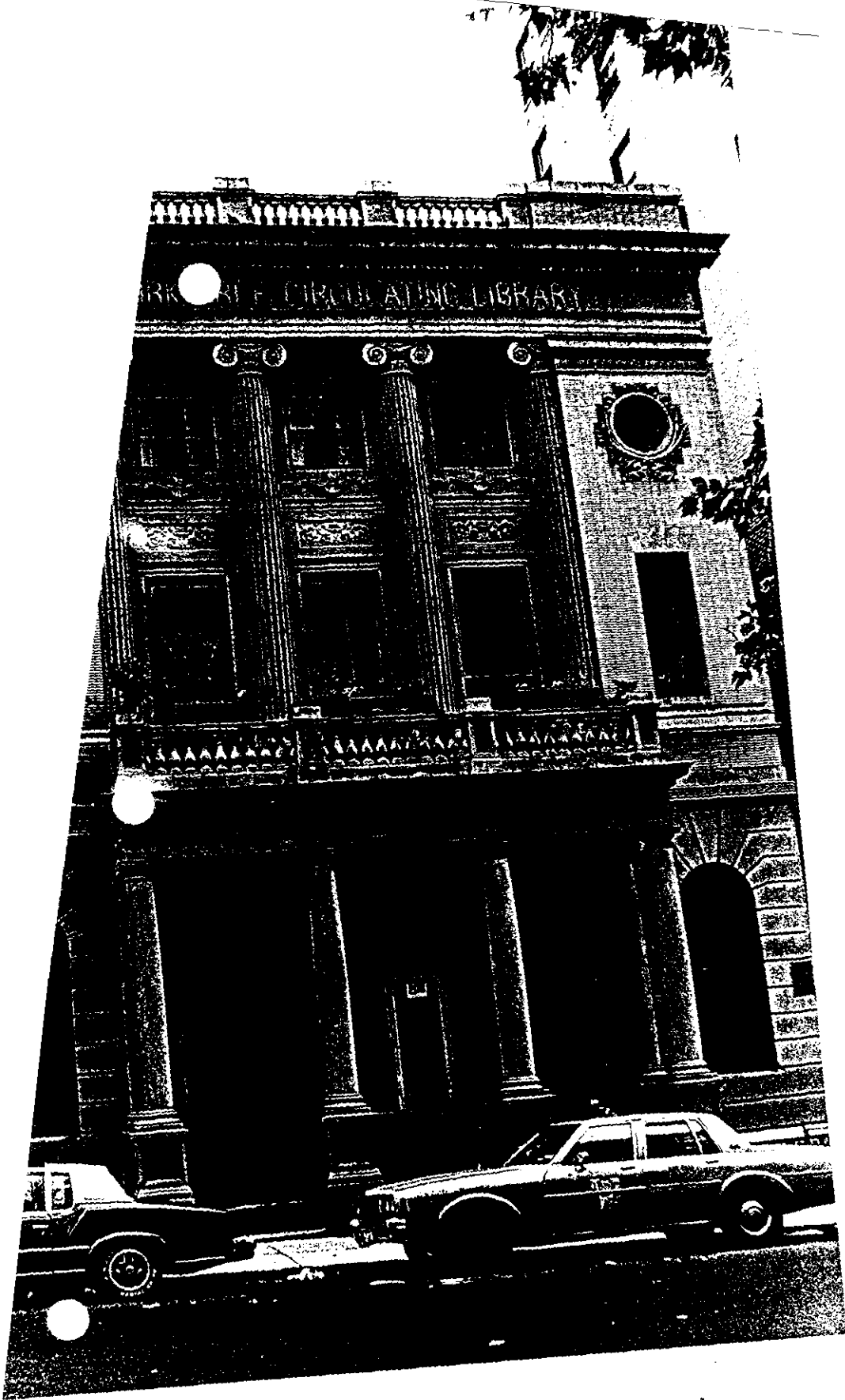
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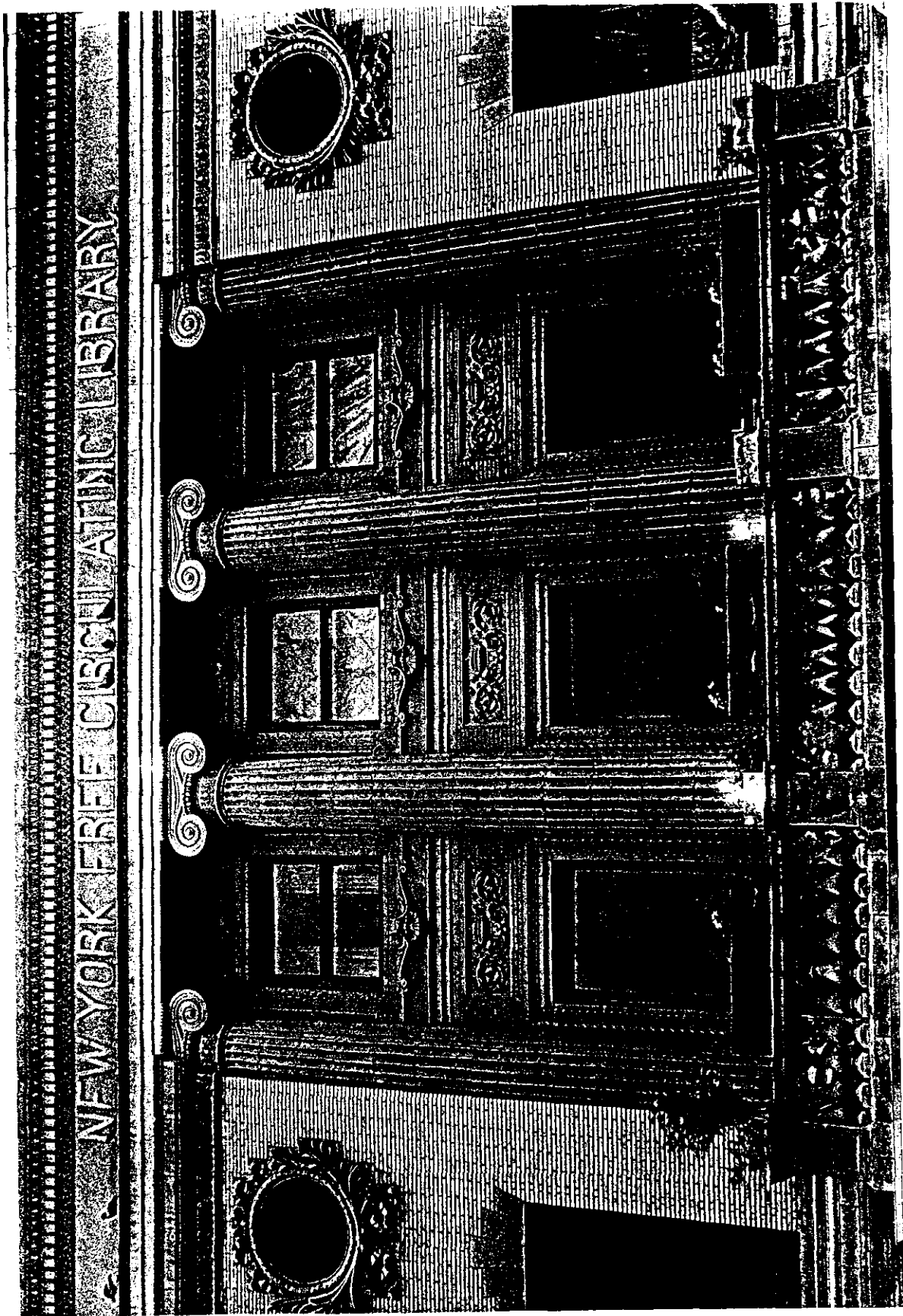
New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch Landmark Site
 206 West 100th Street
 Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89



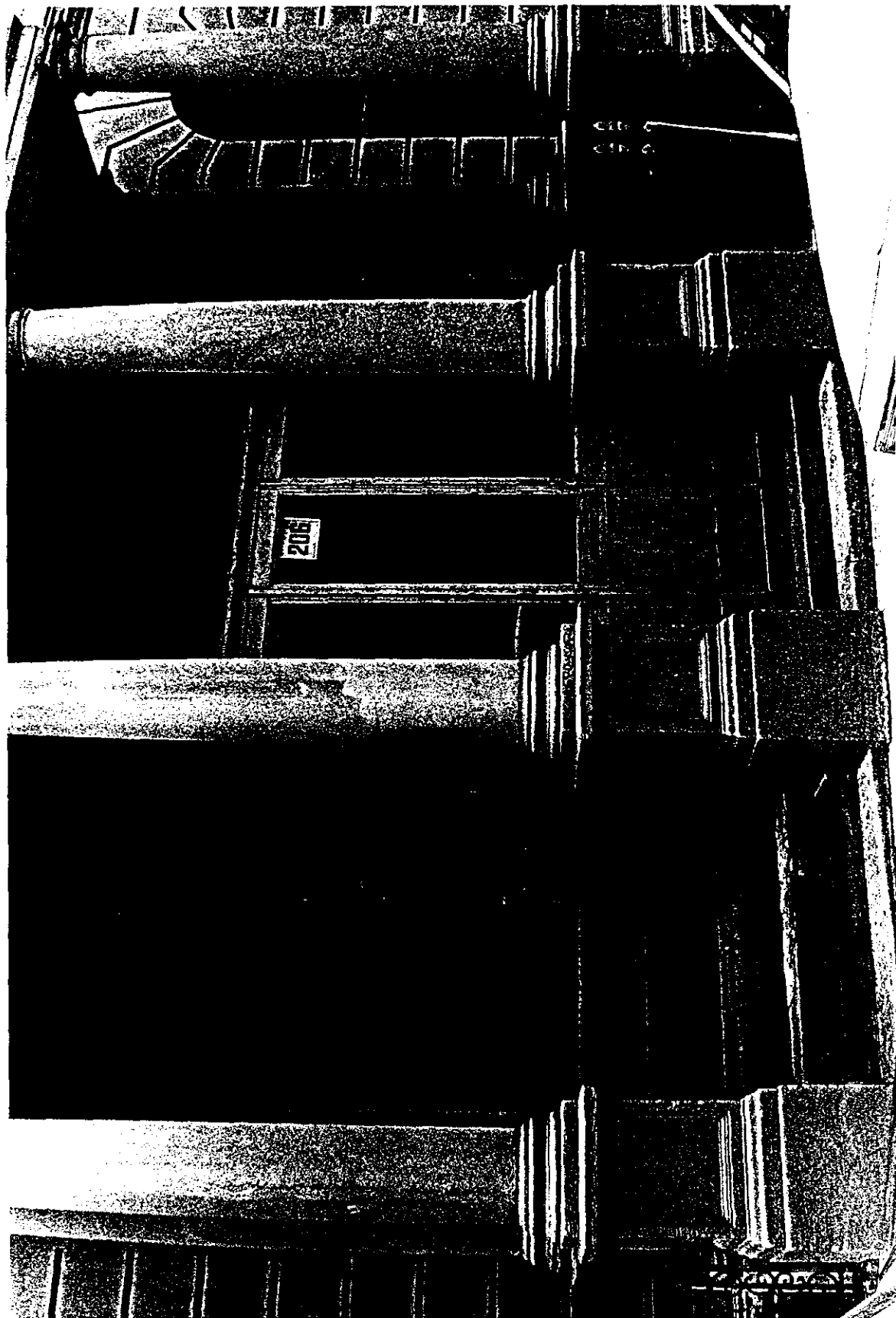
New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch
206 West 100th Street 1898; architect James Brown Lord
Photograph from Zeisloft, E. The New Metropolis, 1899.



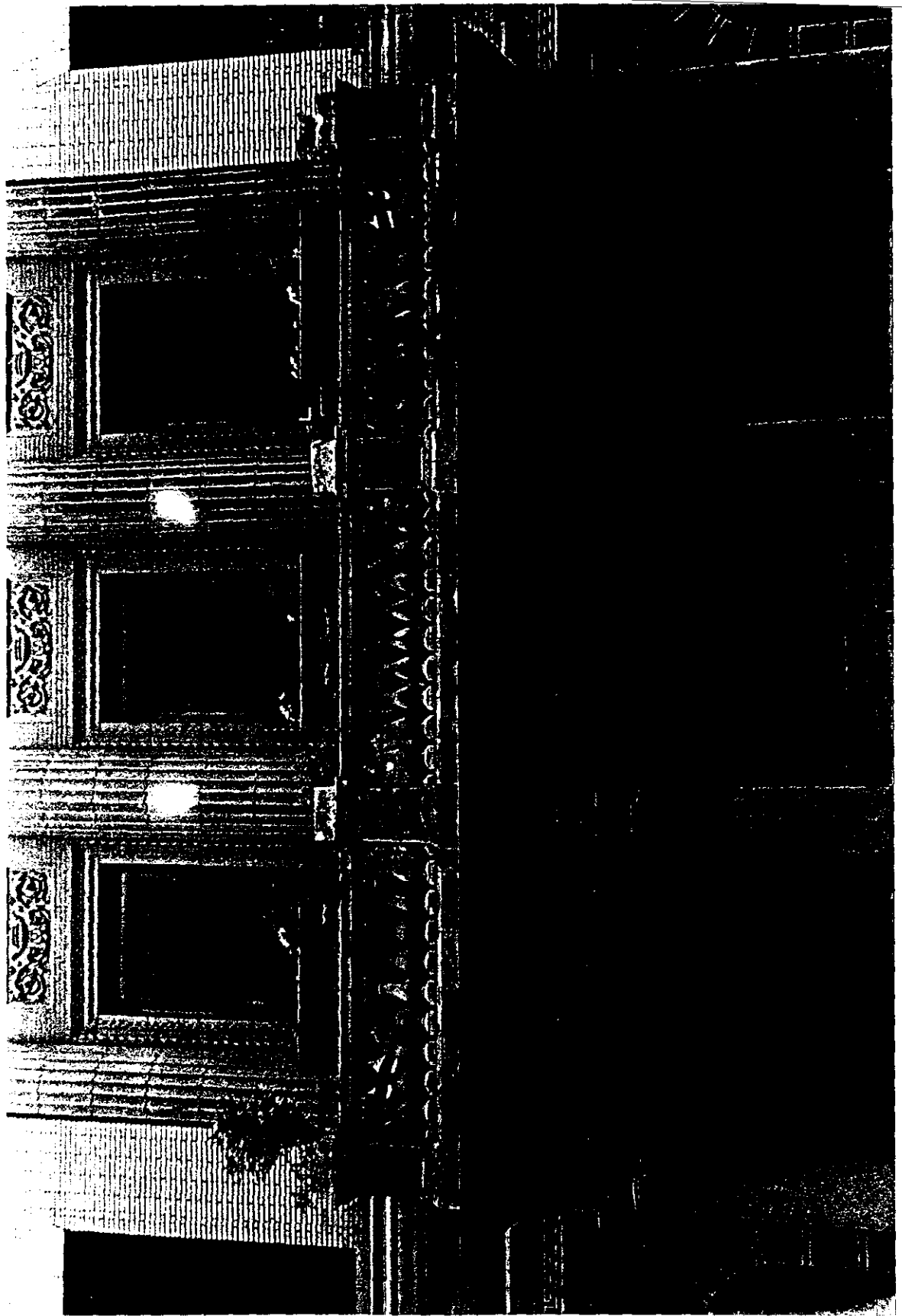
Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch
at 100th Street
Street facade
1898; architect James Brown Lord
Photo Credit: Carl Forster



New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch
206 West 100th Street
Detail, upper facade
1898; architect James Brown Lord
Photo Credit: Carl Forster



New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch
206 West 100th Street 1898; architect James Brown Lord
Detail, portico and entrance Photo Credit: Carl Forster



New York Free Circulating Library, Bloomingdale Branch
206 West 100th Street
Balcony supported by portico

1898; architect James Brown Lord
Photo Credit: Carl Forster