

115th STREET BRANCH OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 203 West 115th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1907, completed 1908; architects McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1831, Lot 26.

On June 14, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 115th Street Branch of the New York Public Library and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 30). Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The hearing was continued until November 10, 1966. (Item No. 11). At that time the attorneys for the New York Public Library made a statement approving of the proposed designation. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were no speakers in opposition to designation at either hearing.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

To come unexpectedly upon the 115th Street Branch of the New York Public Library on a residential street occupied primarily by four and five-story brownstones, is to experience a pleasant surprise. Such is the architectural character of this branch library, with its facade designed in the Italian Renaissance style. Built in 1908, the exterior of this three story structure is faced with grey limestone with deeply grooved horizontal jointing (rustication). Its design is stately and like an Italian palazzo, has great dignity and distinction.

The design emphasizes the theme of three widely spaced windows. On the first and second floors, the great round-headed windows have arches of rusticated stones carried upward to meet the horizontal band course, that forms the window sill level of the next story, and the horizontal joints of the masonry, thereby creating an unusually interesting linear composition. The westernmost arched opening at the first floor has glass entrance doors. Above the adjoining central window and superimposed over its arch is a handsomely sculptured stone cartouche (shield) containing the City's coat of arms and supported by two cherubic angels bearing garlands. Relief from austerity is achieved by delicate scrollwork in the horizontal band course at second floor level. A heavy, projecting stone cornice, carried on ornate brackets, effectively terminates the facade at the top.

In 1901 Andrew Carnegie offered New York the generous gift of \$5,200,000 to build branches of the Public Library throughout the City. This building was erected with money from the Andrew Carnegie Fund. The City purchased land in strategic locations, usually two to three lots for a site. The buildings were almost always three stories high and the style was overwhelmingly classic in character, following the influence of the Chicago World's Fair and our architects' training in Europe. This branch was designed by McKim, Mead & White.

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 115th Street Branch of 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 115th Street Branch of the New York Public Library is an excellent example of those small libraries built at the turn of the Century in New York City, that this one, with an especially beautiful facade in the Italian Renaissance style, has outstanding architectural detail and that, although its design is severely austere, the building has great dignity and architectural distinction.

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 115th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, 203 West 115th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1831, Lot 26, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.