

HAMILTON GRANGE BRANCH OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 503-505 West 145th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1905, completed 1906; architects McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2077, Lot 26.

On December 27, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Hamilton Grange Branch of the New York Public Library and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 89). The hearing was continued until January 31, 1967 (Item No. 35). At that time, a letter was submitted from the attorneys for the New York Public Library, and two witnesses spoke in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Hamilton Grange Branch Library, built by McKim, Mead & White in 1905-6 in the style of the Italian Renaissance, has the true character of a Florentine palazzo. This three-story stone building shows the sensitivity to proportion, relation of elements and scale, which is found in the best examples of the style. Order and unity pervade a composition which in its major architectural elements is quite dynamic.

Characteristic of the style, the openings are the major elements. The openings are graded from the large, round arched door and windows of the first floor, to the rectangular, pedimented windows of the second story, to the smaller, evenly spaced windows of the third story. There are narrow windows between the larger ones, which also are aligned one above the other, but they are graduated the opposite way: from smallest at the first story to widest at the third. These opposing gradations work together to set up the dominant up-and-down movement across the facade. Countering that movement is the fact that the heavier rustication at the first floor gives a solidity to the base and the fact that the second and third story windows are resting on band courses which are emphatically horizontal.

The composition is unified by the all-over rustication and by the refined detail which is carried over the entire facade. The bronze lamps, the grilles on the small windows of the first story, the lace-patterned fence, are well balanced by the decorated panels above the small second story windows, and the frieze with fleur-de-lis ornaments.

The composition is symmetrically ordered. This is emphasized by the large escutcheon on the keystone above the central entrance, bearing the seal of the City of New York. It is further emphasized by the use of an arched pediment over the central second floor window, instead of the triangular pediments which surmount the two windows at either side. The inscription, "New York Public Library", centered on the frieze completes the central emphasis at the cornice level.

This library was one of sixty-five branches built with funds contributed by Andrew Carnegie as part of the program to develop a branch library circulating system. Built by one of New York's most prominent architectural firms, as many of these branches were, the Hamilton Grange Branch Library is a beautiful example of the grand style applied to a small building.

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 Hamilton Grange 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 Hamilton Grange Branch of the New York Public Library is a supreme example of McKim, Mead & White's adaptation of the Italian Renaissance style, that the subtle, precise control of detail and elements results in a classically symmetrical yet dynamic composition, and that its construction was associated with Andrew Carnegie's unique gift to the New York City Library system.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 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 Hamilton Grange Branch of the New York Public Library, 503-505 West 145th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 2077, Lot 26, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.