

Landmarks Preservation Commission
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THE YORKVILLE BRANCH OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 222 East 79th Street,
Borough of Manhattan. Begun and completed 1902; architect James Brown Lord.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1433, Lot 37.

On November 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Yorkville Branch of the New York Public Library and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 44). 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. A representative of the New York Public Library said that they had no objections to the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Yorkville Public Library is one of New York's most elegant adaptations of the Palladian style to a modern public building and one of the few examples of this phase of Italian Renaissance architecture in New York. Its three-story limestone facade, designed by James Brown Lord, displays the symmetrical ordering of its members and the restrained ornament which characterizes this style.

The architect has divided the facade into three bays, announced at first floor level by three round arched openings set in the horizontally grooved (rusticated) stonework. Lion-heads, a popular motif at the turn of the century, emphasize the keystones of the arches. A belt course, incised with a Greek fret motif, marks the transition to the upper floors. Here Ionic columns separate the three windows. Each window has a triangular pediment above which is a small oblong window framed with decorative garlands (swags). At this level, pilasters define the outer ends of the building. Finally, a strong cornice (entablature) capped with a low balustrade crowns the facade. Balusters interspersed with solid parapet blocks, aligned with the pilasters, lend a sense of rhythm, while balusters with small central solid blocks in front of the second story windows restate the rhythmic theme of the Library's design. All of the ornamental members of the facade are Palladian motifs carefully executed and tastefully used.

This library was built with funds contributed by Andrew Carnegie when he helped bring about the consolidation of New York's public libraries. It was here that Thomas Masaryk did the research which led to the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic after World War I.

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 Yorkville 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 Yorkville Public Library is an elegant restatement of a Palladian theme, rich in detail, that pure examples of this style of architecture are rarely to be found in New York and that its construction is associated with the Andrew Carnegie's munificent grant to the culture of New York City.

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 Yorkville Branch of the New York Public Library, 222 East 79th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1433, Lot 37, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.