

YOUNG MEN’S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YMCA) BUILDING, WEST 135th STREET BRANCH, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center), 181 West 135th Street, (aka 179-183 West 135th Street), Manhattan, Built 1918-19; John Jackson, Architect.

Landmark Site Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1920, Lot 7.

On July 15, 1991, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. One person spoke in favor of designation at that hearing.

On November 12, 2015, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a special public hearing on the Backlog Initiative Items in the Borough of Manhattan, including the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Building, West 135th Street Branch (Item B-Borough of Manhattan B Group 2). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of law. At that hearing four people testified in favor of the proposed designation of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, including representatives of the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, The Municipal Art Society of New York, and Explore New York. The Commission also received three letters in favor of designation.

Statements about support for the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch during the backlog process reflect specific testimony given or submitted during the hearing or while the record was open. In addition, the Commission received numerous more general communications about the backlog that were directed at all items on the backlog. These items were not specifically submitted while the record was open. Due to the volume and variety of these more general emails they are not tallied for individual buildings.

Summary

Built in 1918-19, the 135th Street Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) building was one of the first African-American YMCA buildings constructed in New York City and became the center of intellectual and social life for African Americans in the first half of the 20th century. Designed by John Jackson, a specialist in YMCA buildings, the building followed design guidelines that were developed and used to give branches across the United States a uniform look. This branch is typical of branches built at that time. It is designed in the Italian-Renaissance Revival style, and has a high base with alternating arched and rectangular openings, surmounted by a cornice bearing the inscription “Young Men’s Christian Association.” It has arched windows at the second story and the expression of an arcade at the sixth story.

African-American YMCAs were the direct result of the national organization’s policy of racial segregation from its beginnings in the United States in 1851 until 1946. Though excluded from white YMCAs, African Americans were encouraged to form separate branches, which became autonomous community centers. The Great Migration and World War I fueled the need for the YMCAs in New York and in other cities across the nation. In 1910, Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears & Roebuck, pledged



\$25,000 to any city that raised \$75,000 for a new YMCA building with high quality amenities for African-American men. Thousands of African-American citizens in New York City and across the country rose to the challenge and supported the YMCA's building fund drives with contributions from 25¢ to \$1,500. With the success of local fundraising campaign, and donations from both the public and private sectors, this branch opened in November 1919. By the mid-1920s, the 135th Street YMCA became a center of the Harlem Renaissance, where the African American literati met to exchange ideas, lectures were given, plays and music performed. Among the noteworthy individuals associated with the 135th Street YMCA were James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Paul Robeson, John Henrik Clarke, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. In 1938, this building became the home of the Boys Department of the Harlem YMCA. In 1947, it was here that Jackie Robinson and his teammate Roy Campanella began coaching and mentoring the children of the 135th Street YMCA, an association that would last the rest of Robinson's life. The building was dedicated to him and renamed the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center in 1976.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center is a six-story Italian Renaissance Revival style building with a 75-foot wide brick and stucco facade on the north side of 135th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues.

West 135th Street (south) façade

Historic Features: Six-story, seven-bay, brick and stucco façade with terra-cotta and stone trim; tripartite façade configuration divided by terra-cotta cornices; slightly projecting center section framed by brick pilasters from second floor to roofline, with recessed outer bays.

Base: High base with alternating arched and rectangular openings with brick surrounds, surmounted by a frieze bearing the inscription "Young Men's Christian Association"; main entrance in second bay from east; cornerstone between main entrance and secondary entrance at east end of façade; recessed stone tablets above two service entrances at the eastern and western ends of first floor façade, west tablet inscribed "Boys"; three multi-pane, double-leaf casement windows with transoms at center of façade.

Midsection: wall stuccoed between decorative brick elements; arched windows with decorative brick surrounds in center bays at the second story; most windows retain original metal sash including narrow muntins that divided windows into three-over-three lights; decorative terra cotta sill course across central bays at third floor; window openings have brick lintels and stone sills; decorative terra-cotta cornice caps the fifth story.

Crown: sixth story faced with stucco and decorative brick elements; center bays articulated by brick pilasters, recessed blind arches, rectangular window openings set off by brick surrounds with stone window sills; recessed brick panels beneath windows; terra-cotta entablature enriched with dentils, recessed panels, and modillions breaks forward over the center bays.

Alterations: Façade painted or lightly parged at upper floors; brick and concrete handicap access ramp with cast-iron railings; first floor main and secondary entrances reconfigured and replaced with metal-and-glass doors, transom replaced; rounded concrete stairs at eastern service entrance with cast-iron railing; basement windows obscured by metal mesh guards and access ramp; third to sixth story windows replaced; small louvered vents above third-and fourth-story windows; six non-historic light fixtures at first floor; two flag poles at west end second story and one flag pole at center fifth story; several satellite dishes and antenna at roofline.

Eastern and Western façades

Eastern façade: Partially visible angled roofline with bulkhead or chimney.

Alterations: Parged brick façade, television antenna at roofline.

Western façade: Partially visible angled roofline with bulkhead or chimney.
Alterations: Parged brick façade with bulkhead or chimney.

SITE HISTORY

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its African-American Branches¹

The first Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the United States was established in Boston in 1851, seven years after the organization's founding in London. Interdenominational and dedicated to the spiritual, social, intellectual, and physical improvement of boys and young men, with YMCA reading rooms, lectures and educational programs, recreational and residential facilities, later providing libraries and summer camps. Racial segregation remained the official policy of the American YMCA from 1852 until 1946. While African-Americans were initially excluded from YMCAs,² after the Civil War they were encouraged to form separate branches, particularly during the last quarter of the 19th century. African-American communities were faced, however, with the difficult task of self-funding these separate branches. In 1889, William A. Hunton, the first paid African-American YMCA official (who was appointed international secretary of the YMCA's Colored Work Department in 1890) stressed that "not one of our forty-one [African-American] Associations has a building of its own, or a gymnasium, or baths, or a lecture-hall capable of seating over 200 people."³ Hunton, joined by Jesse E. Moorland in 1898, promoted YMCA work and fundraising among African-Americans.⁴ By the turn of the century, only five African-American branches owned their buildings (in Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia, Baltimore, Maryland, New Haven, Connecticut, and Springfield, Ohio), others across the country meet in inadequate rented quarters.

As African-American leaders, particularly in cities, embraced the missions and programs of the YMCA as a means for racial advancement, African-American branches of the YMCA grew steadily in the early 20th century, forming an autonomous organization. As stated in a recent study, "Ironically, Jim-Crowism not only excluded African Americans from white YMCAs but also provided for the emergence of black-controlled community agencies and the development of African-American leadership."⁵ One such African American leader was Dr. Jessie Edward Moorland (1863-1940), who served as Secretary of the International Committee of the YMCA from 1898 until his retirement in 1924. One of his greatest legacies was the establishment of modern YMCA buildings for African Americans in many of the largest cities across the United States.

The campaign to purchase existing buildings and to construct new African-American YMCA buildings attracted a number of white philanthropists. George Foster Peabody was the first to fund a new facility, located in his hometown of Columbus, Ga., and finished in 1907. John D. Rockefeller, Sr., pledged financial support in 1906 for a new YMCA for Washington, D.C., which was completed in 1912. The most significant figure in the construction of African-American YMCAs was Julius Rosenwald, the president (1910-25) and later chairman of the board (to 1932) of Sears, Roebuck & Co., then the largest retail mail-order company in the world.⁶ Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932)⁷ was born in Springfield Illinois, to a middle-class family of German Jewish immigrants, became one of the great American business and philanthropic leaders of the 20th century.⁸ The 20-year partnership between Moorland and Julius Rosenwald resulted in 24 YMCA's buildings most of which were equipped with pools, gymnasiums, and all offered education and employment services.⁹ In 1910, Rosenwald read Urban League founder William H. Baldwin's biography and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, and then met Washington. Identifying with the prejudice and suffering African-Americans were forced to endure and believing that wealthy people had a moral obligation to help those less fortunate in society, Rosenwald began to donate to black causes. His first effort in 1910 was to tie his contribution to Chicago YMCA building campaign to a demand that the YMCA establish a "Y" for African-Americans in Chicago. In December 1910, Rosenwald met with Dr. Jesse E. Moorland to learn about the YMCAs work among African American's throughout the country. Following the meeting with the advice and collaboration of Jessie Moorland,

Rosenwald decided to establish a nationwide program of challenge grants offering \$25,000 towards the cost of building an African-American YMCA to each community that could raise \$75,000.

The African-American YMCAs formed an important national network of community centers that "provided programs and facilities previously unavailable to most African Americans," including gymnasiums, swimming pools, cafeterias, reading rooms, night schools, and dormitories, the latter particularly significant as they were "practically the only places where black male travelers could find comfortable and safe sleeping accommodations outside the homes of relatives and friends."¹⁰ As educational, religious, cultural, and social centers, they served as meeting places for various community organizations such as choirs, clubs, theater groups, and professional, fraternal, and civil rights groups. Funding was a continual problem for these facilities, and survival of African-American YMCAs was uncertain during the Depression; programs continued with the assistance of the federal government through the Works Progress and National Youth Administrations.

W.E.B. DuBois, the prominent civil rights activist and editor of *Crisis*, praised Rosenwald's generosity and recognized the importance of the work of the "colored YMCA", but he also admonished the organization for their continuing segregation: "It is a fine thing that the colored people have such well-equipped Y.M.C.A. buildings in Chicago and Washington and Philadelphia, but it is an unchristian and unjust and dangerous procedure which segregates colored people in the Y.M.C.A. movement. However much we may be glad of the colored Y.M.C.A. movement on the one hand, on the other hand we must never for a single moment fail to recognize the injustice which made it an unfortunate necessity."¹¹

The 1930s were years of great adversity for African American YMCAs. During the Great Depression most members could not afford their YMCA membership dues or to contribute to annual fund-raisers. Donations from white philanthropists also declined, reducing their budgets. Despite their financial hardships, the African American YMCAs continued to provide a variety of services. By 1932 more than 92 percent of the African American YMCAs had established employment services, 77 percent provided temporary lodging, and nearly 65 percent offered free memberships to those unable to pay their dues.¹² Several New Deal agencies, including the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA) worked in close cooperation with the YMCA administration.¹³ The New Deal agencies contributed to the survival of the African American YMCAs across the country, but also helped them to preserve their autonomy. The Harlem YMCA had 55 NYA workers who served the Y's 2500 daily visitors.¹⁴ The WPA classes provided at the Harlem YMCA offered African Americans with a wide variety of educational opportunities, and government-funded programs created employment for many African American teachers.

The National Council's policy of segregation came under increasing criticism at this time. In 1931, the YMCA world conference was held in the United States for the first time. International delegates passed several resolutions addressing racial discrimination and segregation, and 765 delegates unanimously passed a resolution condemning racial discrimination and calling for an end to segregation in the YMCA. Although these resolutions were not legally binding, they represented an ethical strong point that American YMCAs had to acknowledge. A later YMCA 1937 report found that the only countries in the world that practiced racial exclusion were the United States and South Africa. In time, the National Council urged local YMCAs to use their influence to safeguard the civil liberties of minorities. During World War II, the National Council reexamined its racial policy, and in 1946 it passed a resolution to move towards eliminating all racial discrimination and abolished racial designations. By 1950 more than half of all YMCAs in the country had open membership policies.¹⁵

The Colored Men's Branch of the YMCA in New York City, 1901-1919¹⁶

The West 135th Street Branch YMCA has its origins in several early African American YMCA branches in Manhattan. The first YMCA in New York City was organized in 1852, with a meeting and reading room at 659 Broadway. The first African American group, the "Colored Young Men's Christian Association," formed in 1867, independent of the YMCA organization, met at 97 Wooster Street and was

described as "the only free reading-room and place of social resort of a healthful moral character for colored young men in the city" in the YMCA's *Annual Report* of 1867-68. This was the third "Colored YMCA" in the United States and the first group to send a black delegate to an annual YMCA convention (1867). Needing "more commodious and accessible rooms,"¹⁷ it moved to the Freedman's Bank building on Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village in 1870, but apparently disbanded the following year.

A later group began meeting in 1900 through the Mount Olivet Baptist Church, 159-161 West 53rd Street, in the "Negro Tenderloin" neighborhood of midtown Manhattan. This "Colored Men's Branch" was accepted as an official member of the YMCA in February 1901, though it was considered a "special" branch as compared to the six regular branches in Manhattan.¹⁸ Charles T. Walker, pastor of Mount Olivet, stated that "So much trouble is made by the poor fellows having no place to go when they come here. What we need is a place that shall be known to every young man in the South as a home where he can come and find friends"¹⁹ Rev. Walker raised money in the black community to lease a building at 132 West 53rd Street. In 1903, two row houses at 252-254 West 53rd Street were purchased and became the Colored Men's Branch, with an office, reading room, a small gymnasium, and dormitory rooms. The branch was one of the leading large-city African-American YMCAs and described as "the center of intellectual and social life of New York Negroes in the first decade of the twentieth century,"²⁰

Harlem: 135th Street, between Lenox and Seventh Avenues

The character of Harlem changed dramatically during the early years of the 20th century. In 1910, African-Americans constituted about 10 percent of central Harlem's population. By 1914, Harlem had 50,000 African-American residents.²¹ The First World War ignited the Great Migration, when millions of African Americans from the rural South moved to cities in the North, Midwest and West. By 1925, New York City's African American population was over 250,000 and most lived in Harlem, which was increasingly a "city within a city,"²²

As Harlem emerged as the heart of the African-American community in Manhattan in the early twentieth century, most of the major African-American institutions relocated to Harlem. In 1911 St. Philips Protestant Episcopal Church relocated from the Tenderloin area to Harlem and purchased tenements along West 135th Street to rent to black tenants.²³ The Colored Branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) founded in 1905, moved from a location on 53rd Street to West 132nd Street in 1913.²⁴

By the mid-1920s, the vicinity of West 135th Street and Seventh Avenue became the hub of African-American social and intellectual life in Harlem. Among the institutions that were located near the YMCA were the New York Public Library (and Schomburg Collection), 103 West 135th Street (1905); the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People offices, 224 West 135th Street (1911); the New York Urban League offices, 202 West 136th Street (1911);²⁵ New York Amsterdam News offices, 2271 Seventh Avenue (1910).²⁶ Harlem was overwhelmingly a working class community, and contained a significant African American middle class. One WPA study found approximately 300 practicing doctors, 1,300 nurses, 175 dentists, 200 lawyers, 600 teachers, and 250 ordained ministers serving the Harlem community. Harlem flourished, with African-American activists such as W.E.B du Bois and Marcus Garvey taking steps toward achieving civil rights.²⁷

135th Street was considered the heart and soul of black Harlem, its common ground. In many ways it was the symbolic home of the "New Negro" and the New Negro Renaissance, a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement that kindled a new black cultural identity. Its essence was summed up by critic and teacher Alain Locke in 1926 when he declared that through art, "Negro life is seizing its first chances for group expression and self-determination."²⁸

The West 135th Street Branch YMCA, 1919-1932²⁹

A Joint Campaign Committee of the YMCA and YWCA, under Jesse Moorland,³⁰ assisted in raising funds for new buildings for both groups. Henry C. Parker, of the noted African-American real estate firm of Nail & Parker,³¹ was chairman of the committee to select a property in Harlem for the Colored Men's Branch of the YMCA. Three lots were purchased on February 10, 1916; 179, 181 and 183 West 135th Street. Ground was broken on April 29, 1918 and the cornerstone was laid on October 13th.³² Of the total cost of \$375,000, Julius Rosenwald contributed \$25,000, the Harlem community raised \$75,000, which included Madam C. J. Walker's contribution of \$1,500, the largest single gift by an African American towards the construction. The remaining \$275,000 was raised through post card campaigns,³³ and local corporate donations. The building opened on November 10, 1919, as the 135th Street Branch YMCA.³⁴

The building was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style by John F. Jackson. Typical of the Italian Renaissance Revival style branches, the building has brick at the ground floor, and stucco on the upper stories of the facades, terra cotta details, classical columns or pilasters, arched entrances and windows with alternating forms, transitional bands, and prominent arcading at top floor.³⁵

The 135th Street Branch of the YMCA, according to a 1920 *New York Times* article, "has the distinction of being the most modern and largest YMCA building for Negroes in the country."³⁶ The new 135th Street branch filled a void... serving hundreds of men in the Harlem community. The amenities included a swimming pool, a billiard room, bowling alleys, locker rooms with showers and baths, a kitchen and a lunch counter, an assembly room, a gymnasium, club and educational rooms, and sleeping accommodations for 170 members. Class offerings included Bible classes, public speaking, and salesmanship, an Employment Department assisted ex-servicemen find employment, and a literary club held weekly meetings.³⁷

The 135th Street YMCA is notable for its strong associations with many prominent literary, artistic, political and sports figures, including Paul Robeson, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Paul Robeson, John Henrik Clarke, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Jackie Robinson. Many of these figures started their careers at the branch, including Paul Robeson, who made his acting debut in the YMCA's Little Theater program in 1920.³⁸ Laurie F. Leach, in her biography of Langston Hughes, wrote that upon arriving in New York in 1921, "Hughes walked directly to the single most important address for an unconnected young black man arriving in New York after the war—181 West 135th Street and secured a room for \$7.00 a week".³⁹ Hughes would later go on to edit the YMCA's newsletter. Ralph Ellison arrived in New York with little money, and few connections; a chance meeting with Alain Locke and Langston Hughes in the lobby of 135th Street YMCA would change the path of his life. Langston Hughes helped Ellison secure employment, educated him in politics, and introduced Ellison to Richard Wright, who would help hone his writing skills.⁴⁰ In the 1920s, there were education conferences, plays and lectures by the leading scholars of the era including James Weldon Johnson and Dr. Alain L. Locke.⁴¹ The Acme Players, under the direction of Ann Wolter, performed two of Frank Wilson's plays—*A Train North* and *The Heartbreaker*, at the West 135th Street YMCA.⁴² An Annual Students' and Teachers' Education Conference in conjunction with Columbia, Hunter College, New York University, and City College was held at the West 135th Street YMCA.⁴³

After a new YMCA was built across the street at 180 West 135th Street in 1931-32 (Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, Harlem Branch, a designated landmark), the former West 135th Street Branch was used in 1934-36 by the NYC Welfare Department. It returned to YMCA use, as the Harlem Branch Youth Annex, in 1936. In 1936-38 the two lower floors were renovated for a larger Boys' Department, dormitory rooms on the upper floors were renovated. Together with the Harlem Branch, the two buildings provided 435 dormitory rooms, according to an ad in *Crisis* in June 1939. In March of 1945, a forum for the March on Washington Movement was held at the West 135th Street YMCA, speakers included representatives from the National Urban League, the Local No. 155, International Ladies Garments Workers Union, and the Workers Defense League. In 1945, co-ed programs were introduced for girls from ages 14 to 17. Between 1947 and 1948 membership enrollment increased to 8,400 boys and 114,519 attended the 4,500 program sessions either as participants or spectators fueling

the need for further renovations. The building was again renovated in 1948-49 at a cost of \$275,000, the basement, main and second floors were linked together as the youth center. The library, a kitchen, game, and project rooms were updated. The renovation also provided separate play areas for different age groups, as well as new facilities including, an arts and crafts workshop, and an amateur photography laboratory. The building was dedicated to Peyton F. Anderson, chairman of the branch's Board of Managers (1930-45). General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then President of Columbia University, was the principle speaker.

YMCA Architecture

After the Civil War, Americans were deeply involved in the philosophy of cultural change. "The age of incorporation," impacted the development of architecture of the YMCA facilities. YMCA buildings were designed as a part of that national corporate culture, helping to promote the philosophic concept of "national manhood," and extol Protestant Christian values. The creation of YMCAs and YWCAs in almost every American city brought about design standards that marked architecture as a means of corporate branding. Design guidelines were developed and used to give branches across the United States a uniform look. In the early 1900s, the Italian Renaissance Revival style was used frequently as a part of branch design principles across the country; examples of YMCA branches built in this style include the Jersey City Branch, Central Rochester Branch, and the West 135th Street Branch.

The Architect ⁴⁴

John F. Jackson (1867-1948) was born in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. He served his apprenticeship in architecture in Buffalo, New York. There he was long associated with the firm of Green & Wicks. In 1901 Mr. Jackson moved to New York, where he became a noted YMCA architect and designed more than 70 of the buildings in the northeast US and Canada. He practiced for 40 years as John F. Jackson Architect and with Jackson & Rosencrans and others. Jackson's other New York City YMCA buildings include the Bedford, Prospect Park, Highland Park, and Seamen's Branch buildings in Brooklyn. He designed the Central Branch in Rochester, NY (1919), the Bergen Avenue branch in Jersey City (1924) that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and branches in Watertown, NY; Montreal, and Winnipeg. Jackson designed the Downtown Community House in Lower Manhattan in 1925-26 as well as homes, churches and public buildings, including the Samaritan Home for the Aged at 440 East 89th Street in 1929, the Boys Club of NY at 321 East 111th Street, the Calvary Baptist Church in Westfield, NJ, and the Congregational Church in Brookfield, Mass.

Jackie Robinson

Beginning in 1949, Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella agreed to work as counselors and coaches at the Harlem YMCA to help the underprivileged children of Harlem."⁴⁵ The association between the 135th Street YMCA and Jackie Robinson continued until the end of his life. Robinson was the first black professional baseball player in the major leagues. Born in Georgia in 1919 and raised in California, Robinson was the first UCLA student to earn letters in four sports: baseball, basketball, football and track. Robinson served in the U.S. army in World War II, played baseball in the Negro Leagues, and signed to the Brooklyn Dodgers top farm team, the Montreal Royals, in August 1945. On April 15, 1947, Robinson made history as the first African American to play in a major league baseball game, paving the way for generations of black athletes to compete in the sport, which did not become fully integrated until 1959. As second baseman, Robinson led the Dodgers to six World Series, and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of fame in 1962. In 1964 Mr. Robinson received the YMCA of Greater New York "Service to Youth" Award. Robinson later became involved in a number of business enterprises, including several black-owned community businesses, and was active in the NAACP. He also served as a special assistant to Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller before dying in 1972 of heart disease at the age of 53.⁴⁶ The 135th Street YMCA was dedicated as the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center 1976.

Later History

In 1988 the YMCA of Greater New York conveyed the property to the Reverend C. T. Walker Housing Development Fund Corporation.⁴⁷ To convert the Jackie Robinson Annex to low-income housing child care and community center. The C.T. Walker Fund rehabilitated, owned and operated the building. Reverend Calvin O. Butts III, head of the organization received a grant from Columbia University of \$100,000 for the initial stages of the project.⁴⁸

From 1993 to 2004, the foundations, electrical, plumbing, were improved and an access ramp was installed at the main facade.⁴⁹ The ground floor and basement were renovated and the upper floors converted to apartments. Today the building is used as a child care center and community center, and the upper floors are low and middle income housing.

Conclusion

The YMCA Building, West 135th Street Branch is notable for the significant role it played in shaping the civic and artistic culture of Harlem. Today, the YMCA Building, West 135th Street Branch (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center) still plays a critical role in the important civic hub of 135th Street between Lenox and 7th Avenue, along with the Young Men's Christian Association Building, Harlem Branch (a New York City designated landmark) across the street, and the New York Public Library Schomburg Collection for Research in Black Culture (a New York City designated landmark).

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Notes

¹ Information taken from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building* (LP:1973) (New York: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Jay Shockley; George R. Arthur, *Life on the Negro Frontier* (New York: Assn. Press, 1934); Jesse E. Moorland, "The Young Men's Christian Association Among Negroes," *Journal of Negro History* (1924), 127-138; Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Ky.: Univ. Press of Ky., 1994); "Young Men's Christian Association," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, William Bridgewater and Elizabeth Sherwood, eds. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), 2188-2189; "YMCA," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 1284.

² According to Moorland (1924), p. 137-138, a few YMCAs, such as Cleveland and Chicago, allowed some "Mixed" usage.

³ Mjagkij, 37.

⁴ In addition to his work with the YMCA, Dr. Moorland, an alumnus and trustee of Howard University, was a founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, serving as its treasurer for several years. Dr. Moorland donated his private library to Howard University in 1914, which became the first research library in an American university devoted exclusively to the study of African Americans, later became known as the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, one of the largest and most comprehensive repositories for the documentation of the history and culture of people of African descent.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶ Information taken from: Peter M. Ascoll, "Julius Rosenwald: Unconventional Philanthropist," in *A Force for Change African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 19-25.

⁷ Information taken from: Norman H. Finkelstein, *Schools of Hope: How Julius Rosenwald Helped Change African American Education* (Pennsylvania: An Imprint of Highlights, 2014), Beginning with the challenge grants to build YMCA's for African Americans in cities across America, in 1917, Rosenwald created the Rosenwald Foundation to promote the well-being of mankind. Through his generosity, Rosenwald gave grants to assist in the building primary schools for African-American children, by 1932 a total of 5357 new buildings stood in 883 counties throughout 15 Southern states, mostly schools and other facilities, workshops and teachers homes.⁷ Over the course of his life the Rosenwald Fund donated more than \$70 million to public schools.

⁸ Information taken from: Peter M. Ascoll, "Julius Rosenwald: Unconventional Philanthropist," in *A Force for Change African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2009) 19-25.

⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹¹ Crisis (Dec. 1914); Ibid., 78.

¹² Mjagkij, 117

¹³ Mjagkij, 115-120.

¹⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹⁵ Ibid., 126-127. None of the white YMCAs in the Southeast and Southwest however admitted African Americans.

¹⁶ Information taken from: Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971); Mjagkij; Julius J. Adams, "Fifty Years of Christian Service to American Youth," in *Harlem Branch's 50 Years of Progress, 1901-1951, in the North American YMCA Century, 1851-1951* (New York: YMCA, [1951]); YMCA of Greater New York, Archives.

¹⁷ Information taken from: YMCA, Committee on Colored Association, Report (Jan. 1871).

¹⁸ The YMCAs were 23rd Street (1852/1887); Harlem (1868); East Side (1884); Institute (1885); Washington Heights (1891); and West Side (1896). The special branches of the YMCA were Bowery, Railroad, Intercollegiate, French, Army, Colored Men, Pennsylvania Railroad, and Merchant Seamen's. YMCA, Men of New York, Jan.1922.

¹⁹ Cited in Osofsky, 15.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ LPC, *Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension* (LP: 2751) (New York: City of New York 2015), prepared by Theresa C. Noonan, 19.

²² Information taken from: James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, (New York: Knopf, 1930).

²³ St. Phillip's sold the property on 25th Street c.1909 for \$600,000 and with this money was able to buy the site of the current church. LPC, *St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal Church* (LP: 1846) (New York: City of New York 1993), prepared by Charles Savage, 1: Gary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York: Rutledge, 2004) 474.

²⁴ Nos. 179-183 West 135th Street, was purchased for the site of the future building of the Colored Men's Branch of the YMCA on February 10, 1916. The Colored Men's Branch was changed to the 135th Street Branch upon dedication on November 11, 1919. "New Y. M. C. A. Branch," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, V. 97, No. 2500, February 12, 1916, 256; "Colored Branch," *Sixty-sixth Annual Report of the City of New York YMCA 1920*, 29.

²⁵ Information taken from:

http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/uhic/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?query=&prodId=UHIC&displayGroup=Reference&limiter=&disableHighlighting=false&displayGroups=&sortBy=&search_within_results=&action=2&catId=&activityType=&documentId=GALE%7CCX2831200390&source=Bookmark&u=mlyn_s_martha&jsid=f184a42bdf54d02db916f7f38033af6e.

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- ²⁶ Information taken from: http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/new-york-amsterdam-news-founded; The Library (1903-05, McKim, Mead & White) and St. Philip's (1910-11, Vertner W. Tandy & George W. Foster, Jr.) are designated NYC Landmarks.
- ²⁷ LPC, Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension, 23.
- ²⁸ <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/harlem-renaissance>.
- ²⁹ Information taken from: Gary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance Volume I: A-J* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 473-477; Osofsky; Mjagkij; Adams; YMCA, Men of New York (Jan. 1922 - June 1930); Judith Weisenfeld, "The More Abundant Life": The Harlem Branch of the New York City Young Women's Christian Association, 1905-1945 (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Univ., 1992); "Two Branches to Get \$250,000," N.Y. Age, Oct 30, 1913, 1, 7; "Board Votes \$750,000 to Improve Harlem Y.M.C.A.," Chicago Defender, Mar. 26, 1927.
- ³⁰ At that time Jessie Moorland was international secretary of the YMCA Colored Men's Department.
- ³¹ Nail & Parker in 1911 had negotiated the real estate deal for St. Philip's Church to purchase the apartment houses at Nos. 107-145 West 135th Street for one million dollars; their office was located at No. 145.
- ³² Information taken from *Sixty-fifth Annual Report of the City of New York YMCA* 1919, 29.
- ³³ Post card campaigns were a common practice of national YMCA fund raising efforts. A post card with a picture of the local Y was sold for a small denomination, these cards were placed in businesses around the city in an effort to raise money.
- ³⁴ *Sixty-Six Annual Report of the City of New York YMCA* 1920, 37.
- ³⁵ <http://savewashingtonstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/105-107-and-109-Report-Image-Appendix.pdf>
- ³⁶ "Negro Y. M. C. A., A Model," *New York Times*, June 6, 1920, 20.
- ³⁷ "Colored Branch," *Sixty-fifth Annual Report of the City of New York YMCA*, 1919, 24.
- ³⁸ Robeson premiered in Ridgely Torrence's *Simon the Cyrenian* in 1921; Philip S. Foner, *Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews 1918-1974* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 28, 68; Henry Louis Gates Jr., *African American Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 717.
- ³⁹ Information taken from: Laurie F. Leach, *Langston Hughes, A Biography* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 15-20.
- ⁴⁰ Bryan Crable, *Ralph Ellison and Kenneth Burke* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2011).
- ⁴¹ "James W. Johnson to Address Y. M. C. A. Sunday," *the New York Amsterdam News*, May 21, 1923; "Locke Compares Negroes and Jews," *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 12, 1927.
- ⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlem_Renaissance_theater_companies#Harlem_Suitcase_Theater_.281938.29, accessed from the internet 10/28/2016.
- ⁴³ "Avery and Yergan among Speakers," *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 17, 1927.
- ⁴⁴ "John F. Jackson, 81, Y. M. C. A. Architect," *New York Times*, April 28, 1948, 28; LPC Architect files.
- ⁴⁵ "2 Dodgers Spurn Cash, Aid Boys," *The New York Star*, January 24, 1949.
- ⁴⁶ *Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center Designation Report* (LP-2238) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Jennifer Most, 11.
- ⁴⁷ New York City, Office of the City Register and Deeds, December 10, 1987, reel 1330.
- ⁴⁸ "Columbia helps Harlem YMCA buy Building," *New York Times*, September 17, 1988, 11.
- ⁴⁹ New York City Department of Buildings, Alteration No.108-86 (1986); Alteration No.100683048 (1993).

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 Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center), has special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as a part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, that the 135th Street Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), built in 1918-19, was one of the first African-American YMCA buildings constructed in New York City and became the center of intellectual and social life for African Americans in the first half of the 20th century; that it was designed by John Jackson, a specialist in YMCA buildings, in the Italian Renaissance Revival style; that the building has a high base with alternating arched and rectangular openings and is surmounted by a cornice bearing the inscription "Young Men's Christian Association"; and that the arched windows at the second story and an arcade at the sixth story further enhance the design; that African-American YMCA's were the direct result of the national organization's policy of racial segregation from its beginnings in the United States in 1851 until 1946; that though excluded from white YMCAs, African Americans were encouraged to form separate branches, which became autonomous community centers; that the Great Migration and World War I fueled the need for the YMCAs in New York and in other cities across the nation; that in 1910, Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears & Roebuck, pledged \$25,000 to any city that raised \$75,000 for a new YMCA building with high quality amenities for African-American men; that thousands of African-American citizens in New York City and across the country rose to the challenge and supported the YMCA's building fund drives with contributions from 25¢ to \$1,500; that with the success of local fundraising campaign, and donations from both the public and private sectors, it opened in November 1919; that by the mid-1920s, the 135th Street YMCA became a center of the Harlem Renaissance, where the African American literati met to exchange ideas, lectures were given, plays and music performed; that among the noteworthy individuals associated with the 135th Street YMCA were James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Paul Robeson, John Henrik Clarke, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison; that in 1938, this building became the home of the Boys Department of the Harlem YMCA; that in 1947, it was here that Jackie Robinson and his teammate Roy Campanella began coaching and mentoring the children at the 135th Street YMCA, an association that would last the rest of Robinson's life; and that the building was dedicated to him and renamed the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center in 1976.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 135th Street Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1920, Lot 7 as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Adi Shamir Baron, Fred Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire,

Michael Goldblum, John Gustafsson, Jeanne Lutfy, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building,
West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center)
181 West 135th Street, (aka 179-183 West 135th Street)
Photo: Theresa C. Noonan



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building,
West 135th Street Branch, 1931

*Source: Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy,
The New York Public Library Digital Collections (1931)*



*Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building,
West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center)
Photo: Sarah Moses*



*Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building,
West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center)
Cornerstone detail
Photo: Sarah Moses*



Harlem Boys YMCA Day Camp
Source: Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.



Basketball Class November 1948
Source: Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.



*Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building,
West 135th Street Branch, (now Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center)
Photo: Theresa C. Noonan*

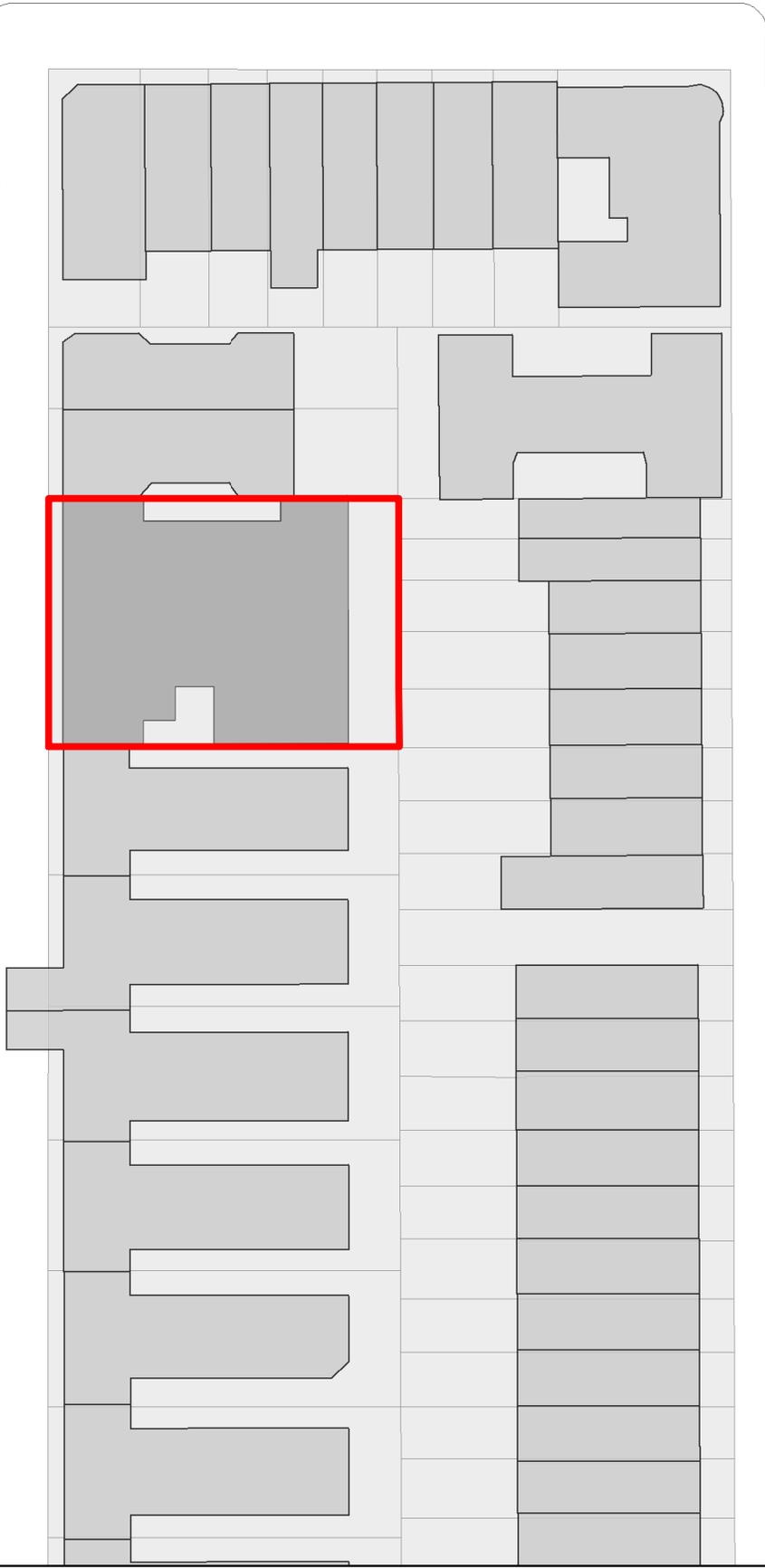


West 135th Street YMCA c.1920
Source: Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries

W 136 St

Adam C Powell BI

Adam C Powell BI



W 135 St

Legend

-  Landmark Site
-  Building Footprints
-  New York City Tax Map Lots

Address: 181 West 135th Street (aka 179-183 West 135th Street)
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1920, Lot 7
 Public Hearing: July 15, 1991; November 12, 2015
 Designated: December 13, 2016

