DESIGNATION REPORT

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch

Landmarks Preservation Commission

Designation Report
New York Public Library, Harlem Branch
June 15, 2021

Designation List 524
LP-2652

DESIGNATION REPORT

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch

LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
9 West 124th Street (aka 9-11 West 124th Street)

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

The New York Public Library, Harlem Branch was designed by the prominent firm of McKim, Mead & White under a grant from Andrew Carnegie in the early 20th century. Since its completion in 1909, the library has served as a space for cultural and civic engagement and in the 1930s contributed to the development of community theater in Harlem when it was the home of the Rose McClendon Players and Theatre Workshop.

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch Entrance
Marianne Percival, May 2021

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New York Public Library, Harlem Branch

9 West 124th Street (aka 9-11 West 124th Street), Manhattan

Designation List 524
LP-2652

Built: 1907-09
Architect: McKim, Mead & White

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1722, Lot 30

Calendared: February 2, 2021
Public Hearing: April 20, 2021

On April 20, 2021, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the New York Public Library, Harlem Branch as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.2). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The Commission received support for the proposed designation from eight people including representatives of the owner, the New York Public Library; Manhattan Borough President Gail A. Brewer; the New York Landmarks Conservancy; Historic Districts Council; Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Association; Save Harlem Now; and neighborhood residents. No one spoke in opposition. The Commission also received two written submissions in support of the proposed designation from Landmark East Harlem and one individual.

Summary

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch

Located on West 124th Street across from Marcus Garvey Park (formerly Mount Morris Park), the Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library is one of 67 circulating libraries constructed for the city's three public library systems in the early 20th century with funding from steel magnate Andrew Carnegie. The elegant Classical Revival style building was designed by the prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White in 1907 and opened in 1909, one of 12 Carnegie libraries designed by the firm for the New York Public Library, including five in Harlem.

The circulating library that became the New York Public Library's Harlem Branch was originally established as a privately-operated subscription library in 1825 when Harlem was an isolated village then centered around Third Avenue. As development increased in Harlem in the late 19th century, the trustees of the Harlem Library purchased a lot at 32 West 123rd Street where they erected a four-story building (Edgar K. Bourne, 1891-92, located within the Mount Morris Park Historic District) with the library on the ground floor and income-producing apartments on the upper floors. The Harlem Library became a free circulating library in 1897 when it dropped its subscription fees and in 1903 it merged with the New York Public Library's circulating branch system which had been established in 1901.

Since its construction, the Harlem Branch has served as an important civic space for the neighborhood with a variety of resources and programs as well as providing space for civic and cultural activities, which in the late 1930s included community theater. The African American actor/playwright Ossie Davis who performed with the Rose McClendon Players Workshop based in the Harlem Branch referred to the library as "the only home I had...the very temple of my existence, my craft, the place that trained me, the first institution to welcome me."

The library's limestone facade is raised on a low granite base and features large recessed arched openings at the first and second stories, decorated with rosettes at the first story and alternating roundels and diamond-shaped lozenges at the second. The window openings of the third story are flatheaded with simple surrounds slightly recessed from the plane of the wall. Double-height pilasters with Corinthian capitals frame the fenestration of the second and third stories, their bases resting on a denticulated sill course at the second story. Below the denticulated cornice, the frieze bears the words "New York Public Library" separated by plaques in the form of open books with fleur-de-lis. The library underwent a renovation between 2002 and 2004 that included minimal sensitive alterations to the exterior, including the replacement of the entrance door and windows.

Intended by its designers to be easily recognizable as an important civic institution, the Harlem Branch with its classically-inspired limestone facade has continuously served its South Central Harlem community as a place to find recreational and educational resources as well as a space for civic engagement and cultural enrichment.

Building Description

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch

Description

The Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library is located on a residential block mid-way between Fifth and Lenox avenues across from Marcus Garvey (formerly Mount Morris) Park and the Mount Morris Park Historic District and Extension. Designed in the Classical Revival style, the library with its limestone facade above a granite base continues to stand out as a distinctive structure in the community as intended in the program established by the Architects' Committee in 1901. While sharing some characteristics with other Carnegie branches, particularly Tompkins Square Branch (1904, McKim Mead & White, a designated New York City Landmark), McKim, Mead & White's design for the three-bay wide Harlem Branch has its own distinct decorative elements.

The entrance and windows at the first and second stories are recessed within arched openings. The deep intradoses are decorated with rosettes at the first story and alternating roundels and diamond-shaped lozenges at the second. The openings at the third story are flatheaded with simple surrounds slightly recessed from the plane of the wall. Double-height pilasters with Corinthian capitals decorated with what appear to be cartouches with heraldic devices frame the fenestration of the second and third stories, their bases resting on a denticulated sill course at the second story.

Below the heavy denticulated cornice, the frieze bears the words "New York Public Library" separated by plaques in the form of open books with fleur-de-lis. Above the cornice, covering the front half of the building is a peaked-roof attic with end gables. The lanterns adjacent to the entrance may be original with some alteration to the lenses and tops. The flagpole at the second story is attached to historic decorative plates that appear in images from the late 1940s.

Alterations[1]

The Harlem Branch underwent an extensive restoration between 2002 and 2004 in which efforts were made to maintain the building's historic character including the reinstallation of casement windows. The original windows had been 20-light casement windows with fanlights at the first and second stories. The casements were replaced, around 1950, with sash windows and at that time the sills at the first story were raised and the stone balustrades removed and replaced with spandrel panels. The new casements are 16-light. The ADA ramp had been installed between 1999 and 2001.

The specific alterations include: stoop reconfigured to incorporate a concrete-paved access ramp, historic granite steps removed and reused, new granite platform, bullnose, and facing on ramp; non-historic metal railings, painted iron fence, and security gates; casement windows and fanlights replaced, sills at first story raised; historic double-leaf door, four-light transom, and fanlight replaced; non-historic mesh security grilles at first-story windows and transom of entrance; library name and building number attached to transom; cresting removed from cornice possibly by the mid-20th century; mailbox attached to stoop railing; hydrant and remote utility meter attached to stoop wall; bronze plaques by entrance removed; locked display box; security camera; doorbell; bird deterrent netting between cornice and third-story window openings extends over the capitals of the pilasters.

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Early History and Development of Harlem

Prior to European settlement, Manhattan and much of the present-day tri-state area was populated by bands of Lenape, a Munsee-speaking people who were members of the larger Eastern Algonquian language family, who traveled from one encampment to another with the seasons. During the Woodland Period, just prior to the arrival of the Europeans, they occupied fishing camps near the water during the summer and inland camps in the fall and winter where they harvested crops and hunted.[2] The main trail through Manhattan ran along the east side of Manhattan from the Battery north to Inwood with branches leading to habitations in Greenwich Village, the Lower East Side, and Harlem. The trail entered what is now Central Park at a point near a campsite known as Konaande Kongh located roughly at today's East 98th Street and Park Avenue and turned northwesterly around 110th Street crossing the Harlem plains to continue along the path of today's St. Nicholas Avenue.[3]

In 1658, the town of New Harlem (originally Nieuw Haarlem) was officially established by Governor Peter Stuyvesant.[4] Among the largest landowners were members of the Benson family, descendants of Captain Johannes Benson who had settled in Harlem in 1696.[5] One of his descendants, Lawrence Benson purchased 42 acres from the heirs of John Bogert in 1785 where he built a homestead and lived with his wife Mary (Maria) until his death in 1822. Bounded on the south and west by the Kingsbridge Road (part of which became West 124th Street) and abutting what would become Mount Morris Park, it encompassed the site on which the Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library was later constructed.[6]

Until the mid-19th century, Harlem remained a sparsely settled farming area with its village center located around Third Avenue.[7] Even with the arrival of the New York and Harlem Railroad in 1837 and the Third Avenue horse cars in 1853 service was unreliable and the trip between Harlem and lower Manhattan long. The completion of the Second, Third, and Ninth Avenue elevated rail lines through Harlem in the 1880s made the area more readily accessible to the city's expanding population and central Harlem west of Fifth Avenue began to develop as a middle- and upper-middle-income white neighborhood.[8] In the first decades of the 20th century much of the area was inhabited by European immigrants particularly from Ireland, Germany, and Russia. Heads of Household professions recorded in the U.S. Census during this period reflect a range of common vocations including manufacturers, merchants, policemen, postal workers, skilled tradespeople, and office workers. Although not uncommon in 1900, by 1930 increasing numbers of households were sharing their quarters with lodgers or boarders and buildings were being converted to boardinghouses.[9]

At the same time, New York City's African American population increased as a result of the Great Migration from the American South and immigration from the West Indies, and with the redevelopment of the Tenderloin pushing African American families out of Lower Manhattan, they began to rent and purchase homes within Harlem.

African Americans moving to New York in the period of 1890 to 1920 did not face the violent resistance of other northern cities; however, racist resistance to their presence took other forms, such as media campaigns, residential restrictions, and racial covenants. Dating since before the 19th century, a

"policy of segregation," whether codified in discriminatory laws or applied through discriminatory practices, had a powerful and disturbing history in New York City and the nation. Residential segregation policies were common, where property owners, insurance companies, and real estate developers enlisted regional governments to enact some form of lawful segregation to keep African Americans from moving into white neighborhoods.[10]

By the 1920s Central Harlem had become a middle-class African American neighborhood, in part through the efforts of Philip A. Payton, an African American realtor who worked to convince landlords to rent to Black tenants.[11] Harlem's Black community continued to grow from its nucleus around West 135th Street and Lenox Avenue and by 1937 the area around Mount Morris Park was mostly a moderate-income African American community. In 1940, professionals including doctors, nurses, teachers, librarians, and musicians lived in the area, but most residents listed occupations such as domestics, laborers, porters, cooks, waiters, and factory and laundry workers.[12]

History of Manhattan Libraries[13]

The concept of a publicly-funded library system did not exist in New York City until the late-19th century. Libraries in the 18th and early-19th centuries were either privately owned, institutional, or subscription. Founded in 1754, the New York Society Library, the first of the city's subscription libraries, offered borrowing privileges to members of the public who paid an annual fee.

By 1876 there were about 90 libraries and collections of various types in New York City, but few libraries were accessible to the general public, let alone free of charge. To address this need, libraries such as the New York Free Circulating Library (1878), Aguilar Free Library (1886), and Cathedral Library (1887) were founded and supported by private philanthropy or religious organizations. Such was the need that each of these libraries established branches throughout the city's poor and immigrant neighborhoods. It was not until 1886 that legislation was passed by New York State that permitted the free circulating libraries to request and receive funds from the city to cover part of their costs. This was followed by another law in 1892 that authorized communities to subsidize free libraries including those privately owned.[14]

In 1895, The New York Public Library was created as a research library by the merger of the Astor Library founded in 1849 as the city's first public research library, the Lenox Library founded in 1870 as a private collection, and the Tilden Trust. Established as a private corporation, it was supported in part by limited public funding. The consolidation of Greater New York City in 1898 further inspired the growth and unification of the library institutions in the city, including The New York Public Library. In 1901, the large New York Free Circulating Library with its 11 branches and a traveling library merged with the New York Public Library forming the base of the circulating library branch system.[15] Spurred in part by the promise of a large grant from Andrew Carnegie in 1901, as well as the city's intention to cut off all city funds to the independent libraries as of the 1904 budget, most of the small independent lending libraries in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island consolidated with the New York Public Library by 1906.[16] The New York Public Library is still organized into the separate reference and branch systems that were created during this consolidation.

Andrew Carnegie and The New York Public Library[17]

The Scottish-born industrialist Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) had risen from poverty to become one

of the wealthiest men in the United States after he sold his steel business to J. P. Morgan in 1901. As early as the 1870s and 1880s, Carnegie believed that the wealthy should live modestly and, while still living, give away their funds for the good of humanity. For him this took the form of donations to universities, libraries, medical centers, parks, meeting and concert halls, public baths, and churches. By the time of his death in 1911, Andrew Carnegie had given away about 90 percent of his wealth for these worthy causes including the financing of more than 2,500 Carnegie libraries worldwide with over 1,680 in the United States.

In 1901, New York City received a $5.2 million grant from Carnegie for the construction of branch libraries throughout the five boroughs.[18] To advise the New York Public Library on how to proceed with construction, the Library Board's Executive Committee appointed a temporary architects' advisory committee consisting of Charles F. McKim of McKim, Mead & White, John Carrère of Carrère & Hastings, and Walter Cook of Babb, Cook & Willard in 1901. The committee advised that the branches be uniform and recognizable in materials, style, plan, and scale and that different site requirements would provide variety. Among their general recommendations were that they should be classical in style, a simplified version of the Beaux Arts model similar to most public buildings designed in this period, and clad either in limestone, or in brick with limestone trim. For those libraries located in more densely populated areas like Harlem, the buildings should be vertically oriented and sited mid-block, while in the less densely built-up areas of the outer boroughs "suburban" branches were on larger sites and horizontally oriented.

To accomplish the project, they recommended forming a committee of two to five architectural firms who would design the buildings in cooperation with each other. Andrew Carnegie objected to the lack of competition in this system but was ultimately convinced that it would be faster and cheaper and would produce a more unified collection. The advisors, McKim, Carrère, and Cook, were fortuitously selected for the permanent committee, and their firms designed most of the New York Public Library's Carnegie branches.[19] The architects consulted with the librarians on planning and design, an innovation which was just becoming accepted.

McKim, Mead & White[20]

McKim, Mead & White, one of the best known and most influential American architectural firms of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, was responsible for the design of the Harlem Branch, and 11 other Carnegie libraries in Manhattan. Charles Follen McKim (1847-1909) and William Rutherford Mead (1846-1928) began working together in 1872 with William Bigelow, forming the partnership McKim, Mead & Bigelow by 1877. When Bigelow left two years later Stanford White (1853-1906) replaced him, forming the new partnership of McKim, Mead & White. The three men shared early training experiences: all had studied in Europe, with McKim attending the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; McKim and Mead had formal academic training and had apprenticed with New York architect Russell Sturgis; and McKim and White had worked for H. H. Richardson. By the time Mead, the last of the partners, retired in 1919 the firm had executed nearly 1,000 commissions.

Although their early work was in the romantic Shingle style, the firm was best known for its classically-inspired designs. The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago was a turning point for the firm, which held a key role in the planning and design through Charles McKim. The exposition captured the public's imagination with its depiction of a brilliant white classical city lit

by electric lights. The firm was a leading advocate of the new classical style which swept the country in the early 20th century.

Several of New York City's important designated landmarks are early examples of the firm's free classical style: the Villard Houses (1882-85), an early Italian Renaissance-inspired design; Judson Memorial Church, Tower, and Hall (1888-93; 1895-96); King Model Houses (1891-92); the Brooklyn Museum (1893-1915), and the former Bowery Savings Bank (1893-95). The socially prominent firm not only designed houses and clubs for the wealthy, including the Century Association (1889-91), the Harvard Club (1893-94), and the University Club (1896-1900) but major public structures such as the United States General Post Office on Eighth Avenue between West 31st and 33rd Streets (1908-13) and the Interborough Rapid Transit Company Powerhouse at Eleventh Avenue and West 58th Street (both New York City Landmarks).

The Carnegie libraries were not McKim, Mead & White's first foray into library design. McKim designed the Boston Public Library (1887-95) one of the first of the new wave of classical public buildings at the end of the 19th century. Within a few years the firm was responsible for the monumental Low Memorial Library at Columbia University (McKim, 1897) and the Gould Memorial Library (White, 1900) at the former Bronx campus of New York University (now Bronx Community College, CUNY). Charles McKim's elegant J. Pierpont Morgan Library (1902-07) is considered one of his finest designs. The Low, Gould, and Morgan libraries are designated New York City Landmarks.

Charles McKim was responsible for the design of the firm's 12 Carnegie branch libraries, assisted by William Mitchell Kendal (1865-1951) who entered the firm in 1882 and became a partner in 1906. His Carnegie libraries are the most formal of the collection, faced in stone with lavish use of classical ornament. While keeping to the architects' committee's design guidelines, they have the most variation in the design of their facades.

The dissolution of the partnership began with the murder of Stanford White by Harry K. Thaw in 1906. The following year Charles McKim who had been in poor health for some time retired. Although Mead continued until 1919, he spent most of time traveling. The firm continued under various name changes into the 1990s.

The History of the Harlem Branch

The Harlem Library

In 1825, a petition was presented to the Common Council stating that by an act of the state legislature trustees had been appointed to sell the lands known as the Harlem Commons and to see that the proceeds were apportioned among the Harlem Library and schools.[21] In that same year the residents who had been responsible for the formation and maintenance of the library were formally incorporated as the Harlem Library Association. A subscription library, in the mode of the New York Society Library, financial support came from sales of shares and membership fees.

The library, consolidated with the Harlem school, was reincorporated under the name of the Harlem Library in 1871 and three years later the trustees erected a new building at 2238 Third Avenue to house the library which by 1875 held a collection of 6,600 books. Occupying only part of the new building, the library received additional income from a ground level store.[22] Within two decades, as conditions changed in the area around their longstanding home and memberships began to fall, the trustees in 1891 purchased a site at 32 West 123rd Street in the newly developing area around Mount Morris (now Marcus Garvey) Park adjacent to

what was then the home of the Harlem Club.[23] Here they erected a four-story Renaissance Revival style building designed by library trustee and architect Edgar K. Bourne that accommodated the library and income-producing bachelor apartments that helped finance the work of the library. The move proved beneficial to the library as subscriptions, which had fallen to 42 in 1891 increased to 700 by 1895, three years after the building's opening.[24]

As noted above, local public assistance to "free" public libraries had become available as a result of an 1892 law. By 1896 the librarian of the subscription-supported Harlem Library noted that the library was doing well but acknowledged there was competition for readers from a "free" library in the vicinity.[25] In 1897, the library trustees decided to change their business model in order to access this public funding and in August of that year the Harlem Library became a free public library.[26] The library remained independent and under its own management until 1903 when it was incorporated into the New York Public Library.[27] Although it was chronologically the first and oldest library in Harlem, two other Carnegie libraries were already completed in Harlem before the site on West 124th Street was purchased in 1906 and construction of the new Carnegie library begun in 1907.[28]

The Harlem Branch

Often referred to as a "people's university,"[29] a public library also serves as a place of cultural enrichment and civic engagement. During its first two decades, the library sponsored literary clubs and debating societies to engage neighborhood children in reading; provided meeting spaces for community organizations such as the Harlem Council of Women, the City History Club, and a Boy Scout troop; and classes from civics for the newly enfranchised women voters in 1918 to English for non-native speakers in 1922.[30] By 1930, as Northern-European immigrants, particularly from Finland, made up a greater percentage of the population, the Harlem Branch became the repository of the library's circulating collection of works in Finnish.[31]

As the demographics of the neighborhood shifted, the Harlem Branch adapted to address the needs and interests of the area's growing African American population. In 1938 Jean Blackwell joined the staff as the branch's first Black librarian.[32] That same year, the Harlem Branch teamed with the National Urban League for their Sixth Annual Vocational Opportunity Campaign showcasing books on vocations, Harlem, and Black life, and biographies of successful African Americans in a range of occupations. Over the next two years the Harlem Branch was one of several locations, under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), offering educational courses such as English for non-English speakers and vocational courses for young women interested in becoming Doctor's Office Assistants.[33]

Community Theater at the Harlem Branch

In the late-19th century what became known as the Little Theater Movement was established in Europe. Introduced to the United States in 1911, it was an alternative to the commercial theater offering audiences more realistic plays in small venues. Derived from the new movement, community theater provided opportunities for artists to hone skills as performers, directors, and technicians; fostered the works of new playwrights as well as the classics and modern masterpieces; and exposed new audiences to the experience of live theater in local venues from church basements to small theaters.[34] In support of Harlem's community theater movement, the WPA constructed professionally-equipped theaters in the 135th Street Branch, Harlem Branch, and Aguilar Branch between 1934 and 1937.[35]

During the Harlem Renaissance, roughly 1918 to 1935, Harlem's many community-based theaters and theater companies such as the Lafayette

Players (1912-1953) offered African American playwrights, directors, and actors, who were under-represented on Broadway and often limited in the type of roles available to them in the commercial theater, the opportunity to build a body of work by and for the African American community.[36] In 1926 noted sociologist and activist W. E. B. DuBois, who had been petitioning for Black Theater for some time, wrote in *The Crisis*:

> The plays of a Negro theatre must be: 1. About us. That is, they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. 2. By us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continued association just what it means to be a Negro today. 3. For us. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. 4. Near us. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people.[37]

During the Depression, a major source of support for the development of Black theater was provided by the Works Progress Administration's Federal Theater Project (1935-1939) through the "Negro Theatre unit" under the directorship of Rose McClendon and organized around her "Negro Peoples Theatre." Ms. McClendon noted the aim was:

> to establish a community theatre in every sense of the word. Such a theatre, properly constructed, will develop Negro directors, technicians, supervisors, writers, painters, and all affiliated theatre workers, so that in time a permanent theatre by and for Negroes will become a lasting theatre institution in Harlem.[38]

Her plans also included training children and adults in playwriting, acting, and scenic design and construction as another means of building community interest as well as training future theater workers.[39] As a venue for community theater in the period between 1938 and 1940, the Harlem Branch provided space for both amateur and professional programs. In 1938, the Harlem Branch announced that a theater course for interested amateurs would be taught by Thomas Gillen, an actor and director on loan from the Works Progress Administration, which culminated in the production of two one-act plays.[40] The following year the Harlem Branch began a relationship with the Rose McClendon Players and Workshop Theatre, a group founded by African American theater professionals that would operate out of the building from 1939 to 1940.

The Rose McClendon Players was founded in the spring of 1937 by Dick Campbell and his wife Muriel Rahn as a drama study group and by the time of its disbanding at the start of World War II had become a prominent community theater company in Harlem. Dick Campbell, actor and director, had been an associate of Rose McClendon, one of the most prominent African American dramatic actresses on Broadway, in the formation of the "Negro People's Theatre" in 1934 which later was merged into the WPA's "Negro Theatre Unit" which she headed.[41] Campbell dedicated the new company in memory of Ms. McClendon who had died in 1936 and to her dream of establishing a permanent theater by and for African Americans.

From the outset, the Rose McClendon Players offered theatrical training as well as public performances which in the early years were held in

different venues in Harlem before the Rose McClendon Workshop Theatre was established at the Harlem Library in 1939.[42] That year the company's educational program, "carefully planned to appeal to all persons interested in the theatre and the little theatre movement" [43] began. The Players hosted presentations by Broadway producer Guthrie McClintic and by Dr. Alain Locke, professor of literature and drama at Howard University and author of the *New Negro*,[44] followed by a series of seven-week seminars in acting, speech and singing, and play analysis.[45]

The company's 1939-40 season offered four plays by African American playwrights: "Joy Exceeding Glory" by George Norford of Columbia University, "On Striver's Row" by Abram Hill,[46] "Booker T. Washington" by William Ashby, and "Harlem Trilogy," a trio of one-act plays.[47] Audiences from all walks of life in the Black community from maids and laborers to lawyers, doctors, and teachers as well as social organizations and clubs attended the performances at the library, often selling them out.[48] African American actor, writer, and activist Ossie Davis, an alumnus of the company, noted the importance of the library's role in the development of the company recalling it as "the only home I had…the very temple of my existence, my craft, the place that trained me, the first institution to welcome me."[49]

The company continued to grow and, in the fall of 1940, Campbell announced that it was moving to a newly constructed little theater in St. Martin's Church at Lenox Avenue and West 122nd Street for the 1940-41 season.[50] The McClendon Players disbanded at the outset of World War II when Dick Campbell was recruited to head the USO's Black entertainment unit.[51]

Later History

The Harlem Branch continued to provide the community with a range of educational and cultural programs including a brief period, beginning in 1941, when it became the temporary home of the famed Schomburg Collection of materials on Black culture, and its lectures and forums featuring Black authors and publishers.[52]

In addition to traditional programs such as children's story hours, the Harlem Library has sponsored numerous exhibits ranging from a collection of portraits by James L. Allen of outstanding African Americans in the arts and sciences, information on nutrition and health, the history of Harlem since the Dutch, and an Anti-Apartheid poster competition. Cultural events have included musical programs featuring the work of African American composers and artists, poetry readings and workshops for adults and children led by African American poets, and films on the Black experience and important African American personages such as Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Jesse Owens, and Malcolm X. Since the 1980s it has also served as one of the New York Public Library Centers for Reading and Writing to help English-speaking residents improve their reading and writing skills through one-on-one and small group classes.[53]

Conclusion

Made possible by the financial support of Andrew Carnegie at the turn of the 20th century, the New York Public Library, Harlem Branch has served the residents of its South Central Harlem neighborhood for more than 110 years. In addition to providing adults and children with free access to books and other materials, its mission as a "people's university" has included educational and cultural enrichment in the form of civic discussions, lectures, exhibits, films, classes, and live performances, such as those

presented by the Rose McClendon Players and Workshop Theatre, that have reflected community identity throughout its history. Designed by the prominent firm of McKim, Mead & White, the Classical Revival style Harlem Branch with its elegant limestone facade featuring subtle classical decorative elements is an outstanding example of the firm's work for the New York Public Library.

Endnotes

[1] Details for ramp and early 21st century renovations from Series 5777, exhibit I-contract drawings [ramp], approved by the Art Commission of the City of New York, Certificate number 20337, November 15, 1999; Series 5777, exhibit M-contract drawings [window replacements], approved by the Art Commission of the City of New York, Certificate number 21486, May 19, 2003; and Series 6334, exhibit D-contract drawings [interior and entrance], approved by the Art Commission of the City of New York, Certificate 21038, February 18, 2002. Collection of the Public Design Commission of the City of New York.

[2] Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-23. Upper Manhattan and the western half of the Bronx was occupied by the Reckgawawanc, who were a sub-group of the Weckquaesgeek of Dobbs Ferry. Reginald Pelham Bolton, *New York City in Indian Possession,* 2d ed. (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1920; reprint 1975), 15.

[3] Robert Steven Grumet, *Native American Place Names in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1981), 68.

[4] The boundary between the City of New York and Harlem, a diagonal line running from the East River at 74th Street to the Hudson River at 129th Street, was officially established in 1772. I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1922) 4: 186, 827.

[5] Although not named in the Dongan Patent issued in 1686, Johannes Benson attained all rights of a patentee by purchasing the Bogart farm. James Riker, *Harlem (City of New York): Its Origin and Early Annals,* rev. by Henry Pennington Toler (New York: New Harlem Publishing Co., 1904), 426.

[6] Like many large landowners, Lawrence Benson was a slaveowner. In 1790 there were four enslaved persons in his household, in 1810 there was one, and in 1820 the household only included one free woman of "color." At the time of his death in 1822 there was no record of a slave or slaves in his household. Riker, 438; *Maps of Farms Commonly Called the Blue Book, 1815* (New York: Otto Sackersdorff, 1868), pl. 19; U.S. Census Records, 1790, 1810, and 1820; Ancestry.com, *New York, Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999* [database online] Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations, 2015.

[7] *Plan of the City of New York from the Battery to Spuyten Duyvil Creek*. (New York: Matthew Dripps, 1867).

[8] Information based on Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), 785-795; Federal Writers Project, *The WPA Guide to New York City* (New York: Random House, 1939, reprinted Pantheon Books, 1982), 253-265.

[9] U. S. Census Records, 1880-1930.

[10] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017); National Public Radio's, Fresh Air, "A 'Forgotten History' of How the U.S. Government Segregated America" Terry Gross, May 3, 2017,12:47, http://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526655831/a-forgottenhistory-of-how-the-u-s-government-segregated-america.

[11] *WPA Guide to New York City*, 257-258.

[12] Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America (dsl.richmond.edu/redlining/#loc=10/40.794/-74.124&city=Manhattan-ny, accessed November 10, 2020); U. S. Census Records, 1940.

[13] This section on Manhattan libraries is taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch Designation Report (LP-1998)* prepared by Mary B. Dierickx (New York: City of New York, 1999), 2-3 and is based on Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy, The Carnegie Libraries of New York* City (New York: Cooper Union and New York City Department of General Services, 1996), 21-24; Phyllis Dain, "Libraries," *The Encyclopedia of New York City,* ed. by Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 667-670; LPC, *New York Public Library, Aguilar Branch Designation Report (LP-1837)* prepared by Joseph Brooks (New York: City of New York, 1996).

[14] Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1973), 19-20.

[15] Ibid., 17-18.

[16] Ibid., 254.

[17] This section is taken from LPC, *New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch*, and is adapted from Mary Dierickx, 19-43 with additional information from Dain, 209-247; Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1917); LPC, *The New York Public Library, Tottenville Branch Designation Report (LP-1867),* prepared by David M. Breiner (New York : City of New York, 1991) and LPC, *The New York Public Library, Morrisania Branch Designation Report (LP-1996),* prepared by Donald G. Presa (New York: City of New York, 1998).

[18] The Carnegie grant was solely to be used for construction. The New York Public Library covering Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island received $3.36 million; Brooklyn, $1.6 million; and Queens, $240,000. The City was responsible for the purchase of the land and for the support of the libraries in perpetuity. The New York Public Library spent $1.6 million on land. The original 1901 agreement called for 65 libraries but in 1902 the estimated cost per branch was lowered and the total number re-established at a maximum of 73. Because of rising costs, the total number of new branches was only 67. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy,* 25-31, 39.

[19] Carrère & Hastings designed 14 of the 39 Carnegie Branches for the New York Public Library; McKim, Mead & White designed 12; and Babb, Cook & Willard designed eight with three more designed by their successor firms. James Brown Lord designed the Yorkville Branch, but it was designed before the grant was awarded and Herts & Tallant who designed the original Aguilar Branch in 1899 were responsible for a major renovation in 1905. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy,* 125, 206.

[20] LPC, "Architects' Appendix," *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP-1051)* (New York: City of New York, 1981); Leland Roth, "McKim, Mead & White" in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects,* Adolf K. Placzek, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1982); LPC, *(Former) James Hampden and Cornelia Van Rensselaer Robb House Designation Report (LP-2026)* by Gale Harris, (New York: City of New York, 1998); Leland Roth, ed., *McKim, Mead & White 1879-1915* (New York: Arno Press, 1977); Leland Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); and Mosette

Broderick, "McKim, Mead & White," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City.*

[21] I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1926), 5: 1650.

[22] "Growth of Harlem's Library," *New York Times*, March 24, 1895, 29; "The Harlem Library," *New York Times,* June 28, 1875, 8; "Lectures: The Harlem Library and Reading-Room," *New York Times,* January 22, 1875, 11.

[23] "To Have a New Home," *New York Times,* April 21, 1891, 2. Both buildings are now owned and operated as churches, no. 32 by Bethel AME Church and the former Harlem Club as the ATLAH World Missionary Church.

[24] "Harlem's Unused Library," *New York Times*, September 2, 1891, 8; "Growth of Harlem's Library," *New York Times*, March 24, 1895, 29.

[25] The competition referred to was likely from the Harlem Branch of the New York Free Circulating Library which opened in 1892 at Lexington Avenue and East 125th Street, the first of five locations in Harlem. "They Read 38,000 Books," *New York Times,* September 23, 1896, 9; "New York Free Circulating Library," *Wikipedia,* (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Free_Circulating_Library, accessed December 4, 2020).

[26] "A New Free Library," *New York Times,* August 28, 1897, 13.

[27] Dain, 258.

[28] The land that was purchased was the former home of, Charles W. Dayton (1846-1910) a lawyer. Active in democratic politics, he served as New York State Postmaster and was later elected as justice of the New York Supreme Court Among his many civic interests he was a trustee of the Harlem Library. "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times,* July 26, 1906, 12; "Justice C. W. Dayton Dies After Lingering Illness," *Standard Union* (Brooklyn) December 7, 1910, 2. The Harlem Branch Carnegie library was preceded by the 125th Branch (1904), 115th Street Branch (now Harry Belafonte 115th Street Branch) (1908), 135th Street Branch (now housing part of the Schomburg Collection) (1905) and the Hamilton Grange Branch (1907). All these libraries are designated New York City Landmarks.

[29] The term which relates to the role of public libraries in adult education is from Alvin Johnson, *The Public Library – A People's University* (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1938). John Chancellor, [Book Review], *Library Quarterly* 8 (October 1938), 542. (https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/614346, accessed February 25, 2021)

[30] See tables entitled "Complete List of Meetings Held at the Various Branches" later "List of Meetings Held at the Branch Libraries" in the 1914 to 1922 volumes of New York Public Library, *Report of the New York Public Library* (New York: The Library, 1915-1923); Sarah Addington Reid, "Teaching the New Voter How to Vote," *New-York Tribune,* February 17, 1918, 43.

[31] U. S. Census Report, 1930; Dain, 293. This collection may have been moved to the 125th Street Branch at some time. In 1953, during the renovation of the 125th Branch, the collection was temporarily housed at the Harlem Branch. "Library Schedules Emerson Exhibition," *New York Amsterdam News,* May 23, 1953, 17.

[32] "Plans on Foot for Librarians to Move About," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 30, 1937, 6; "Leaders Laud Library Shifts," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 9, 1938, 2. Caroline Thorne had started with the old Harlem Library in the 1890s and remained as head librarian of the branch until her retirement in 1941. "Caroline G. Thorne," *Daily News*, March 1, 1958, 16.

[33] "Harlem Public Libraries to Have Special Exhibits for Vocational Campaign," *New York Age,* March 26, 1938, 3; "Doctor's Office Assistants Course Being Given by WPA; 75 Harlem Women Enrolled," *The New York Age,* May 27, 1939, 2.

[34] Constance D'Arcy MacKay. *The Little Theatre in the United* States (New York: Henry Holt, 1917), 1-2; American Association of Community Theatre, "History of Community Theatre in America," (acct.org/community-theatre-history, accessed April 21, 2021); "Little Theatre Movement," *Wikipedia* (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Theatre_Movement, accessed April 21, 2021).

[35] "Drama Stage Built at Harlem Library," *New York Amsterdam News,* September 22, 1934, 16; "Reports on Accomplishment on WPA Projects in Harlem," *New York Age*, February 13, 1937, 2.

[36] LPC, *Central Harlem-West 130th-132nd Streets Historic District Designation Report (LP-2607)* prepared by Theresa Noonan and Barrett Reiter (New York: City of New York, 2018), 22.

[37] "Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre," *The Crisis*, 32(1926), 134 as quoted in Freda L. Scott, "Black Drama and the Harlem Renaissance, *Theatre Journal* 37 (December 1985), 433.

[38] As quoted in "140 Jobs Opened by WPA Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 23, 1935, 1-2.

[39] Ibid.

[40] "Course in Amateur Dramatics at Library," *New York Age,* March 5, 1938, 7; "Two Amateur Plays at Harlem Library," *New York Age,* April 16, 1938, 7.

[41] "140 Jobs Opened by WPA Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News,* November 23, 1935, 1; "Dramatic Group to Present Play," *New York Amsterdam News,* December 19, 1937, 18.

[42] The early productions were performed at the Harlem Y.W.C.A. and the auditorium of P.S. 136. "Dramatic Group to Present Play," *New York Amsterdam News,* December 19, 1937, 18; "Rose McClendon Players Starting Fall Season," *New York Amsterdam News,* August 20, 1938, A7.

[43] "Players Announce Seminar Courses," *New York Amsterdam News,* March 18, 1939, 20.

[44] "Guthrie McClintoc [sic] and Alain Locke to Address Rose McClendon Players," *New York Age,* February 4, 1939, 7; "Alain LeRoy Locke," *Wikipedia* (en.wikipedia.org//wiki/alain_leroy_locke, accessed February 25, 2021).

[45] "Players Announce Seminar Courses," *New York Amsterdam News,* March 18, 1939, 20. Because of its nature scenic design was opened only to advanced art students and people in design-oriented professions.

[46] In 1940 Hill founded the American Negro Theater which performed in the basement of the 135th Street Branch Library and whose alumni included Ruby Dee, Harry Belafonte, and Sidney Poitier. "Abram Hill, 76, the Founder of a Black Theater in Harlem," *New York Times,* October 11, 1986, 37.

[47] "'Joy Exceeding Glory' New Play Given by McClendon Workshop," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 23, 1939, 17; "Satire, Surprise, Truth Are in 'Harlem Trilogy,'" *New York Amsterdam News,* June 1, 1940, 12; "Clubs Support Little Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 23, 1939, 9; Dick Campbell, "McClendon Players Continue Their Fight for Establishing of Harlem Peoples' Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News,* July 6, 1940, 20.

[48] Dick Campbell, "McClendon Players Continue Their Fight for Establishing of Harlem Peoples' Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News,* July 6, 1940, 20.

[49] Ossie Davis was told by Alain Locke, his professor at Howard University, to go to Harlem and join Campbell's company. Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, *With Ossie & Ruby: In This Life Together* (New York: William Morrow, 1998), 84; "Satire, Surprise, Truth Are in 'Harlem Trilogy'," *New York Amsterdam News,* June 1, 1940, 12; as quoted in "About the Harlem Library" (nypl.org/about/locations/harlem, accessed August 14, 2020).

[50] "Dick Campbell Gets Brand New Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News,* September 14, 1940, 16. Saint Martin's Episcopal Church (1887-88, William A. Potter) is an individually designated New York City landmark within the Mount Morris Park Historic District.

[51] "Dick Campbell, 91, Producer Active in Causes," *New York Times,* December 23, 1994, A30.

[52] "Schomburg Collection Opens in New Quarters," *New York Age,* August 9, 1941, 7; "William Attaway to Tell All," *New York Age,* November 29, 1941, 2; "Editors to Debate Negro News in Daily and Weekly Papers," *New York Age,* March 21, 1942, 2.

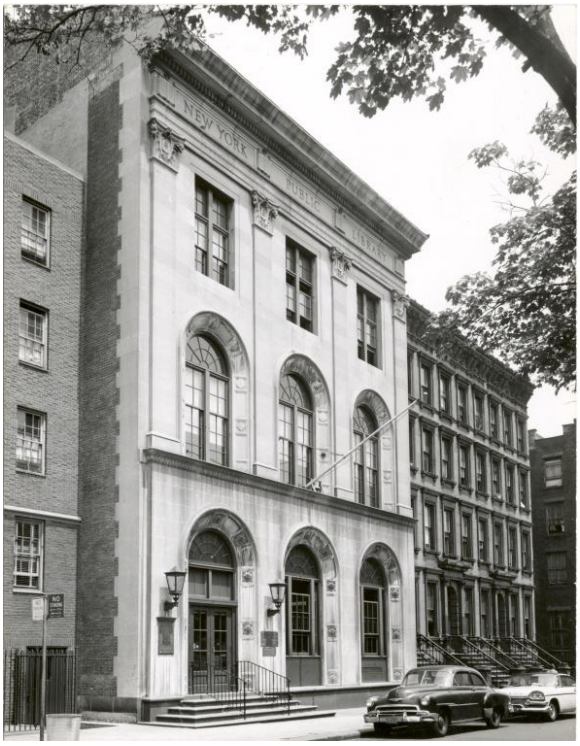
[53] "Harlem Library Exhibits Group of Photographs," *New York Amsterdam News,* February 11, 1939, 5; "Select First Week of May to Stress Food and Health," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 29, 1950, 36; "Apartheid Posters on Exhibition," *New York Amsterdam News,* July 16, 1977, D9; "Harlem: from Dutch Village to Harlem Metropolis," *Daily News,* February 7, 1984, 83; "Feather Jazz at Library," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 2, 1943, 23; "Swing Concert at Library," *New York Age,* March 4, 1944, 10; "Poetry Reading for children," *New York Amsterdam News,* August 17, 1974, D4; "Poetry Workshops Set for Kids in 4 Branch Libraries," *New York Amsterdam News,* May 21, 1977, D13; "Harlem Library Writers Workshop Led by CAPS Winner Fatisha," *New York Amsterdam News,* October 24,1981, 46; "'Root Juice,' Poetry Reading," *New York Amsterdam News,* December 10, 1983, 8; "Harlem Poets Alive," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 14, 1990, 32; "Black Film at Harlem Library," *New York Amsterdam News,* October 13, 1973, A8; "Malcolm X Film," *Daily News*, June 5, 1986, 129; "Library Cites Students Remedial Program," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 19, 1986; "Harlem Library Center for Reading and Writing," *Daily News,* August 18, 2011.

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

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 New York Public Library, Harlem Branch and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1722, Lot 30 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.

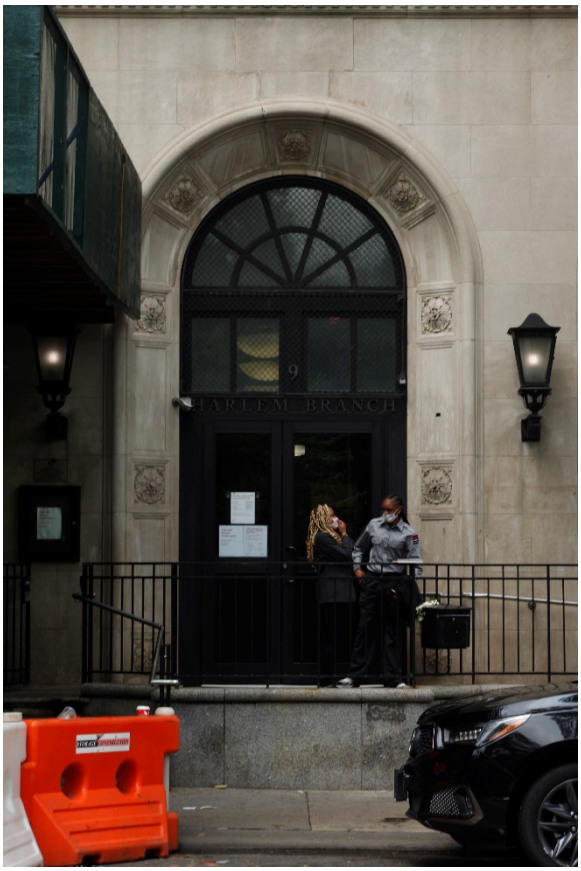
New York Public Library, Harlem Branch
9 West 124th Street (aka 9-11 West 124th Street)
Jessica Baldwin, June 2021

Harlem Branch, Exterior, West 124th Street [c.1910]
New York Public Library



Harlem Library Exterior [c.1950]
New York Public Library

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch, Third Story Detail
Jessica Baldwin, June 2021



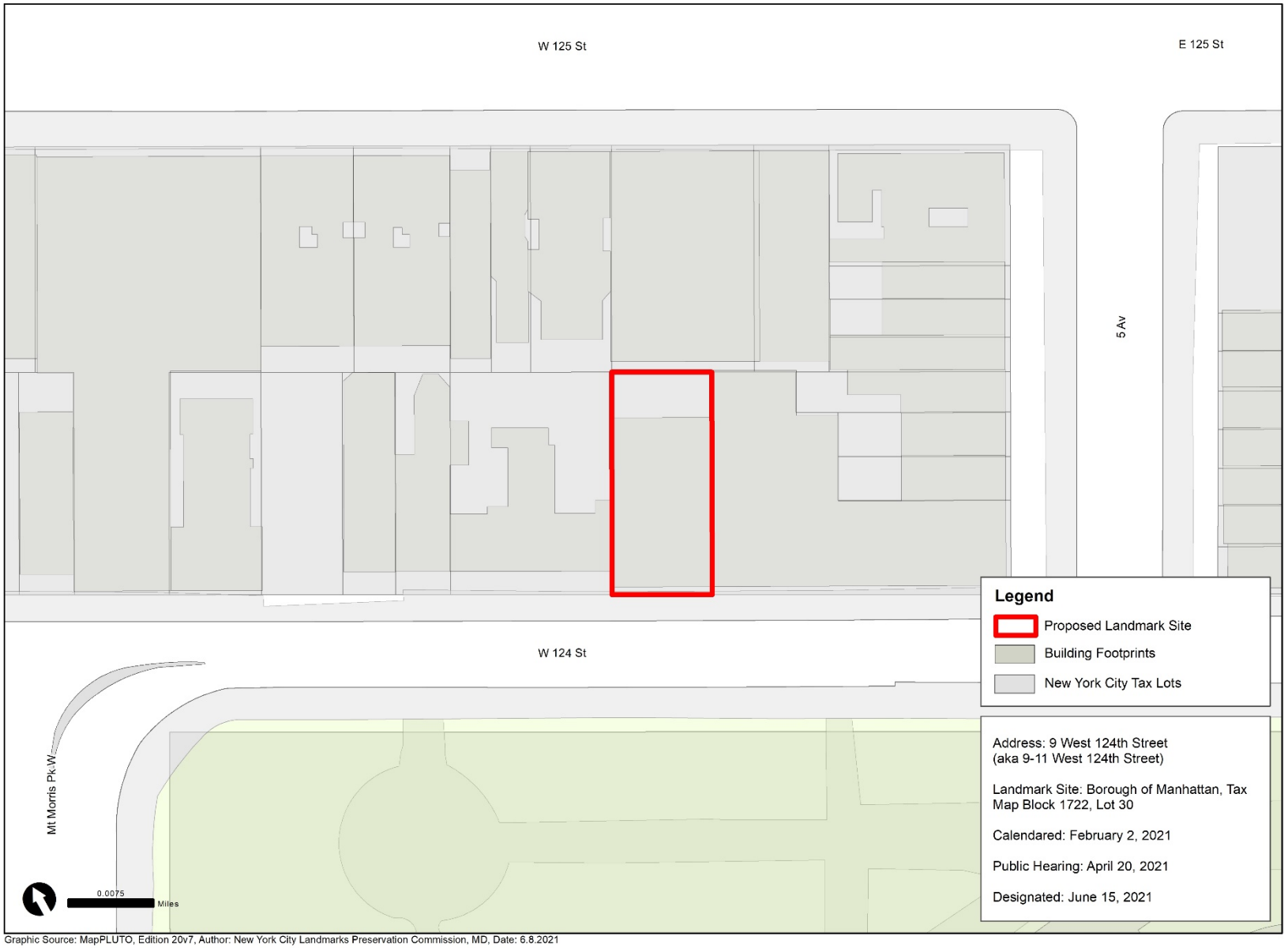
New York Public Library, Harlem Branch, Entrance Detail
Jessica Baldwin, June 2021

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch, First Story Detail
Marianne Percival, May 2021

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch, Second Story Detail
Marianne Percival, May 2021

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch | LP-2652

NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 20v7, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, MD, Date: 6.8.2021