

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

THEME: Education

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC The New York Public Library

AND/OR COMMON The New York Public Library

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street

CITY, TOWN New York VICINITY OF CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 17

STATE New York CODE 36 COUNTY New York CODE 61

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
☐ DISTRICT	☒ PUBLIC	☒ OCCUPIED	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ MUSEUM
☒ BUILDING(S)	☐ PRIVATE	☐ UNOCCUPIED	☐ COMMERCIAL	☐ PARK
☐ STRUCTURE	☐ BOTH	☐ WORK IN PROGRESS	☒ EDUCATIONAL	☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
☐ SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	☐ ENTERTAINMENT	☐ RELIGIOUS
☐ OBJECT	☐ IN PROCESS	☐ YES: RESTRICTED	☐ GOVERNMENT	☐ SCIENTIFIC
	☐ BEING CONSIDERED	☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED	☐ INDUSTRIAL	☐ TRANSPORTATION
		☐ NO	☐ MILITARY	☒ OTHER: Library

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Board of Trustees, New York Public Library

STREET & NUMBER Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street

CITY, TOWN New York VICINITY OF STATE New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER 31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN New York, STATE New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE None

DATE ☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

__EXCELLENT

☒GOOD

__FAIR

__DETERIORATED

__RUINS

__UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

__UNALTERED

☒ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ORIGINAL SITE

__MOVED

DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The New York Public Library at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street is a handsome example of Beaux Arts classicism. Designed and built by the firm of Carrère and Hastings from 1902-1909, the Library is characterized by its wealth of ornamentation, sculpture, and monumental scale. Rectangular in shape, with two symmetrical interior courtyards, the three story structure is dominated by its entrance portico on Fifth Avenue, and the two stone lions (sculpted by Edward Clark Potter) which flank the entrance steps. The portico is supported by six Corinthian columns, four of which are paired, which frame the three arches which give way into the main lobby. On Forty-second Street there is a less ornate ground floor entrance. The south and west facades of the building are characterized by their rhythmic fenestration and the heavy cornice.

The core of the building is formed by the stacks, which occupy the central rear of the building from the cellar to the second floor, in seven levels. Above the stacks area, on the third floor, is the main reading room which is entered through a wood-panelled hallway. The room, which contains sufficient table space to accommodate 800 people, is divided into symmetrical halves by the central delivery and return desk. The walls are lined with open shelves of reference works. The ceiling is 50 feet high and still contains vacant areas for murals which were never painted for monetary reasons. The library contains twenty-one specialized reading rooms which supplement the main room. Most noteworthy of these is the ground floor reading room which has perhaps the only cast iron ceiling in a public building in the city.

The front half of the building is traversed by a main corridor which is set one room's depth away from the front wall and which ends at one room's depth from the side walls. Off of this corridor are the various reading rooms and Library offices. In the southeast corner of the second floor is the Trustees' Room, a wood-panelled conference room with parquet floors and a white marble fireplace. Directly below this room is the original Director's Office, now the periodical room, which has wood panelling on the ceiling and walls.

The cellar of the Library presently houses the mechanical plant of the building. At this level one can see the stone foundations of Croton Reservoir, which formerly spanned the entire block. These foundations were incorporated into the Library upon its construction.

Too numerous to mention here are the various details of interior decoration which ornament the Library, except for the large cluster-shaped electric chandeliers which provide the rather dim light in the reading rooms and halls. The marble walls have recently been cleaned, and aside from the various partitions which have been installed in the main lobby and the periodical room, among other places, the Library has remained essentially unchanged.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
—PREHISTORIC	—ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	—COMMUNITY PLANNING	—LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	—RELIGION	
—1400-1499	—ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	—CONSERVATION	—LAW	—SCIENCE	
—1500-1599	—AGRICULTURE	—ECONOMICS	—LITERATURE	—SCULPTURE	
—1600-1699	—ARCHITECTURE	☒ EDUCATION	—MILITARY	—SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
—1700-1799	—ART	—ENGINEERING	—MUSIC	—THEATER	
—1800-1899	—COMMERCE	—EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	—PHILOSOPHY	—TRANSPORTATION	
☒ 1900-	—COMMUNICATIONS	—INDUSTRY	—POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	—OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		—INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1895, 1911 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Carrère and Hastings

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The New York Public Library, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, is one of the Nation's major libraries. Its extensive and invaluable manuscript and rare book collections, plus some 7 million volumes for general use, make it an almost unrivalled center of study and research in the United States.

The Library's reference department was formed in 1895 by the consolidation of three existing endowed libraries. They were the Astor Library, opened in 1854 with nearly 90,000 volumes and a \$400,000 trust funds; the Lenox Library, opened in 1877 with \$7 million and a valuable collection of rare books; and the Tilden Library of 20,000 volumes and a \$2 million endowment (though prolonged litigation substantially reduced that amount). In 1901, as the result of a gift by Andrew Carnegie, the New York Public Library consolidated with ten independent circulation libraries to form the Circulation Department. Negotiations with the City resulted in an agreement on December 8, 1897, whereby the City would erect a library building and the Library would establish a free circulating library and branch. The completed building was opened on May 23, 1911.

The monumental building sits well back from Fifth Avenue. Two flights of steps lead from the sidewalk to the triple-arched and Corinthian-columned main entrance. A spacious hallway with two stairways lies behind the entrance. Two flights up is the main reading room, two blocks long and one-half acre in extent. It is one of the most heavily used rooms in America. The public catalog, just outside the main reading room, holds 10 million index cards. Twenty-one specialized reading rooms supplement the main reading room. The manuscript room contains some of the great existing collections of Americana.

In the succeeding decades, the Astor Library greatly expanded, but remained difficult to use. Apropos of its growth, the building had two additions by 1879 and 225,477 volumes by 1895. Its books made the Astor one of America's major libraries, but the library so restricted readers that the institution alienated the public. No book could be borrowed; and the librarians discouraged any but well-to-do individuals from visiting the library.

While the Astor Library grew and discouraged the general reader, another rich New York citizen, James Lenox, created a new library. Lenox's affluence enabled him to retire from business in 1845 and to devote himself to book collecting. A shrewd bookman, he gathered up the works of Milton, Shakespeare, and Bunyan. He also specialized in Americana, and bought, among other things, the famous Bay Psalm Book. Ten years before

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

S. Sydney Bradford, "The New York Public Library," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Form 10-317, October 20, 1965.
Alan Burnham, New York Landmarks (Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn. 1963).
Harry Miller Lydenburg, History of the New York Public Library (New York, 1923).
New York Public Library, "After One Hundred Years," (New York, 1948).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 9.5 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 585910 4511660
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet.

(see Continuation Sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard E. Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

5/30/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW

TELEPHONE

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

10/12/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

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his death in February 1880, Lenox founded the Lenox Library, conveying to its trustees \$7,000,000 worth of stocks and bonds and a plot of ground on Fifth Avenue, between 70th and 71st Streets. When the building was opened on January 15, 1877, most of Lenox's collections had been transferred to it.

New York City had a magnificent new library, but admission, as at the Astor Library, was difficult to obtain. Even after admission tickets had been abandoned in 1887, only scholars could use the institution's books. That restrictive policy did not go unnoticed. A cartoon that appeared in Life, January 17, 1884, shows the library as a beleaguered fortress, with bodies of would-be users lying around the building.

The public benefactions of Astor and Lenox were duplicated by Samuel Jones Tilden, an eminent politician, in his creation of the Tilden Trust. Upon his death in August 1886, he left the city a library of about 20,000 volumes and an endowment of some \$2,000,000. The sum of money became involved in litigation, which only ended in March 1892, and resulted in a substantial decrease concerning the amount finally received by the city.

Even before litigation over the Tilden Trust had been concluded, a movement had developed that contemplated the consolidation of the Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Trusts. Although ample when given, neither the Astor nor Lenox Trusts provided sufficient income for their respective libraries by the 1890's. New York had grown within fifty years from 500,000 to 20,000,000 people, and neither library, even as restrictive as they were, could properly serve their users. Supported by prominent men in the city, the consolidation movement rapidly advanced. On May 23, 1895, the consolidation of the trusts occurred, which resulted in the creation of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations--The Reference Department. In 1901, as the result of a gift by Andrew Carnegie, the New York Public Library consolidated with ten independent circulation libraries to form the Circulation Department.

The consolidation was a ~~major~~ achievement, but the new library needed a building. Negotiations with the city resulted in an agreement on December 8, 1897, whereby the City agreed to erect a library building and the library agreed to establish a free circulating library and a free circulating branch.

Little time was lost after the agreement with the city in beginning work on the new building. A design by the firm of Carrère and Hastings was accepted on November 11, 1897, and the demolition of the Croton Reservoir, the site for the library, began on June 2, 1899. The completed building was formally opened on May 23, 1911, having cost \$9,002, 523.09, or about eighty-seven cents a cubic foot.

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Since the New York Public Library's opening in 1911, it has become one of America's leading cultural institutions. Open to all, general readers and scholars from throughout the United States have benefited from the generosity of Astor, Lenox, Tilden, and the City of New York.

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Beginning at a point formed by the easterly line of Sixth Avenue and the southerly line of West 42 Street, proceed easterly along the southerly line of West 42 Street a distance of 919.73 feet to a point formed by the southerly line of West 42 Street and the westerly line of 5th Avenue; thence proceed southerly along the westerly line of 5th Avenue a distance of 454.85 feet to a point formed by the westerly line of 5th avenue and the northerly line of West 40th Street; thence proceed westerly along the northerly line of West 40th Street a distance of 919.76 feet to a point formed by the northerly line of West 40th Street and the easterly line of 6th Avenue; thence northerly along the easterly line of 6th Avenue a distance of 454.76 feet to the place of beginning.

These boundaries were drawn to include Bryant Park which is important in maintaining the historic vista. Bryant Park, with its central lawn and peripheral walks, is a prime example of an axial park in the French classical tradition. Located west of the library, it creates a harmonious environment and complimentary setting for the library building.