

New York Public Library, Harlem Branch

9 West 124th Street (aka 9-11 West 124th Street), Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1722 Lot 30

Built: 1907-09

Architect: McKim, Mead & White

Style: Classical Revival

Proposed Action: Calendared February 2, 2020; Public Hearing April 20, 2021



New York Public Library, Harlem Branch LPC, 2021

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. Originally established as a subscription library in 1825, the Harlem Library as it was then known was housed in a four-story building at 32 West 123rd Street (Edgar K. Bourne, 1891-92, located within the Mount Morris Park Historic District), when it merged with the New York Public Library's circulating branch system in 1903. In 1907, McKim, Mead & White designed a new building for the Harlem Branch at 9 West 124th Street, one of twelve Carnegie libraries designed by the firm for the New York Public Library, including five in Harlem. The library opened to the public in 1909.

The 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 theater performances, that have reflected community identity throughout its history. This has been especially so since the 1930s as the area was incorporated into the heart of Black Harlem. The actor and 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. Following the installation of an access ramp in the 1990s that entailed reconfiguring the stone stoop, 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.

E 125 St




W 125 St

5 Av

W 124 St

Mt Morris Pk W

Legend

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

Address: 9 West 124th Street
(aka 9-11 West 124th Street)

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

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