



Landmarks Preservation  
Commission

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES  
REGARDING DESIGNATION of the NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY INTERIORS  
October 24, 2017**

Good morning Chairs Koo, Greenfield and Committee Members. My name is Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and I am joined today by Ali Rasoulinejad, our Director of Community and Intergovernmental Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Commission's designation of the New York Public Library Interiors, specifically the Main Reading Room and Catalog Room, a part of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building located at 476 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan, Block 1257, Lot 1.

During a public hearing on July 18, 2017, the Commission heard from representatives of the New York Public Library, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Municipal Art Society, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the Committee to Save the New York Public Library, all who testified in support of this designation. Some also expressed the desire for the designation of additional rooms within the library, and the Commission received a petition with approximately 1,950 signatures in support of designating the Main Reading Room, among several other spaces. The Commission also received letters in support of the designation of these two spaces from New York State Senators Brad Hoylman, Liz Krueger, and the Preservation League of New York.

Following the public hearing, the Commission met on August 8, 2017 and voted to designate the Main Reading Room and Catalog Room as the City's 120<sup>th</sup> interior landmark. . These spaces, (known as the Rose Main Reading Room and the Bill Blass Public Catalog Room) are masterpieces of Beaux-Arts design and are the library's principal public research spaces. They culminate the ceremonial route that leads to the Main Reading Room from Fifth Avenue—through Astor Hall, up the grand stairs to the third floor landing—which was designated in 1974 as the City's first interior landmark.

The general plan for the building, including the placement of the Main Reading Room on the third floor atop the library stacks and elevated above the city streets, was conceived as a simple sketch by John Shaw Billings, the library's first director. An architectural competition for the design of the building was held in 1897 and won by Carrere & Hastings Architects, who realized Billing's vision with their elegant Beaux Arts plan.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

1 Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> FL, New York, NY 10007 ♦ 212-669-7855 ♦ [www.nyc.gov/landmarks](http://www.nyc.gov/landmarks)



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Today, the Public Catalog Room and Main Reading Room are a primary destination for scholars and visitors to the library and central to the institution's civic and intellectual role. They are functionally connected in the process of searching for, retrieving, and studying books and other materials in the library's collections, and share similar ornamental features and materials. Some of the notable features in the rooms include their red quarry tile floors, oak millwork, tiered circular chandeliers, monumental arched windows, and 52-foot tall molded plaster ceilings.

The Catalog Room measures 81 feet long and 67 feet wide, while the Main Reading Room is nearly two-blocks long at 297 feet by 78 feet wide. Above those utilizing the library's world-renowned research collections are sky murals that were originally painted by the artist James Wall Finn, since restored in a major project that saw the rooms reopen to visitors in 2016.

The New York Public Library first opened in May 1911 and has held a special place in the hearts of countless New Yorkers and tourists alike for over a century. Through this time the magnificent public spaces that are the Main Reading Room and Catalog Room have endured relatively few changes and continue to honor the spirit of their original design. These cherished places are notable for their architectural, civic and cultural significance and, accordingly, the Landmarks Preservation Commission urges the Council to affirm their designation.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

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**New York Public Library  
(Stephen A. Schwarzman Building) Interiors,  
Main Reading Room and Catalog Room  
(now Rose Main Reading Room and Bill Blass  
Public Catalog Room)**

476 Fifth Avenue (aka 460-476 Fifth Avenue,  
1 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 11 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street,  
2 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street), third floor

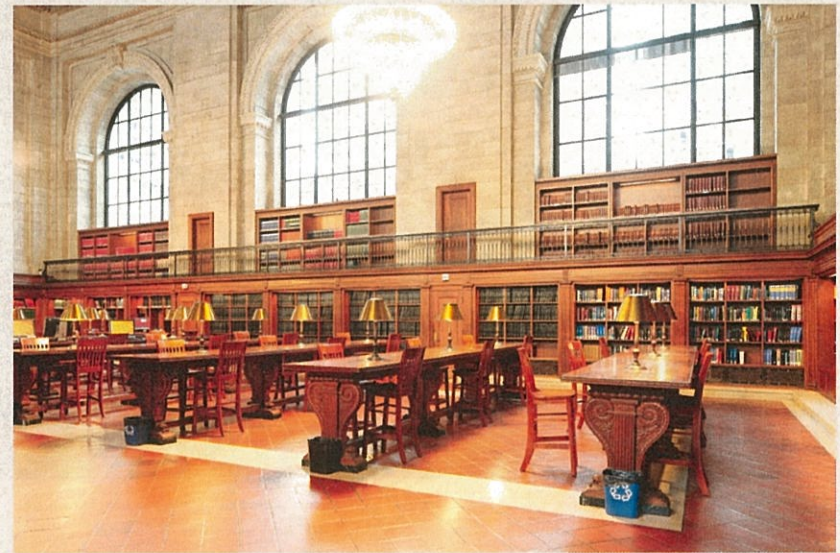
Borough of Manhattan  
Tax Map Block 1257, Lot 1

Built: 1900-1911  
Architects: Carrere & Hastings

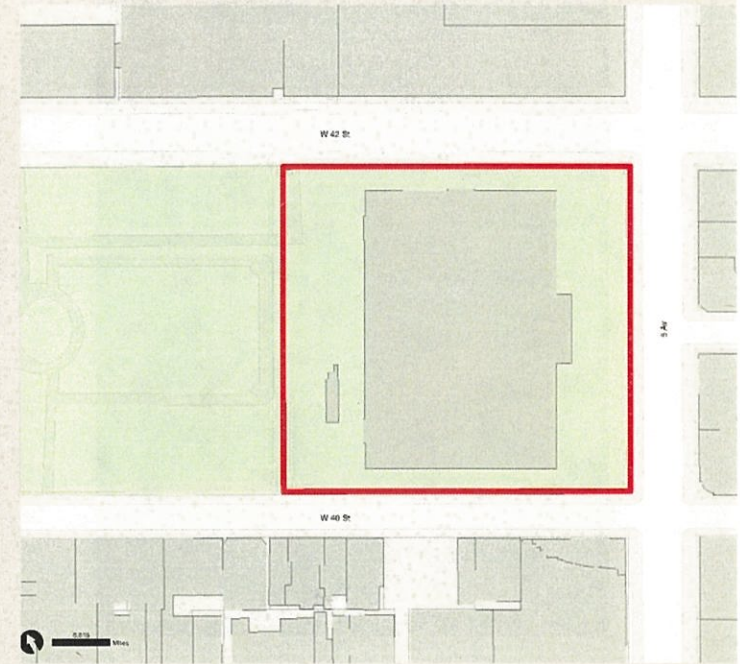


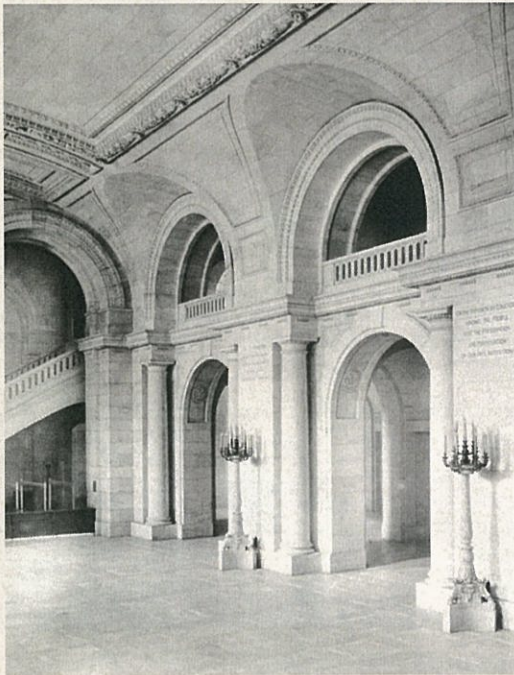


Main Reading Room, view south



Catalog Room, south side

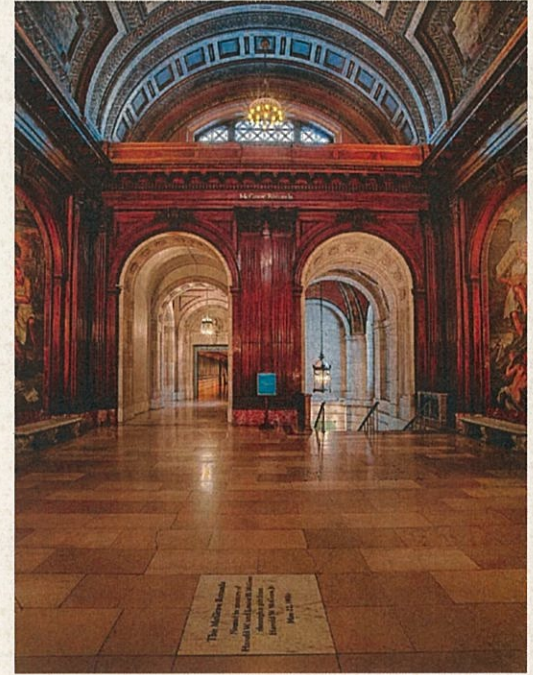




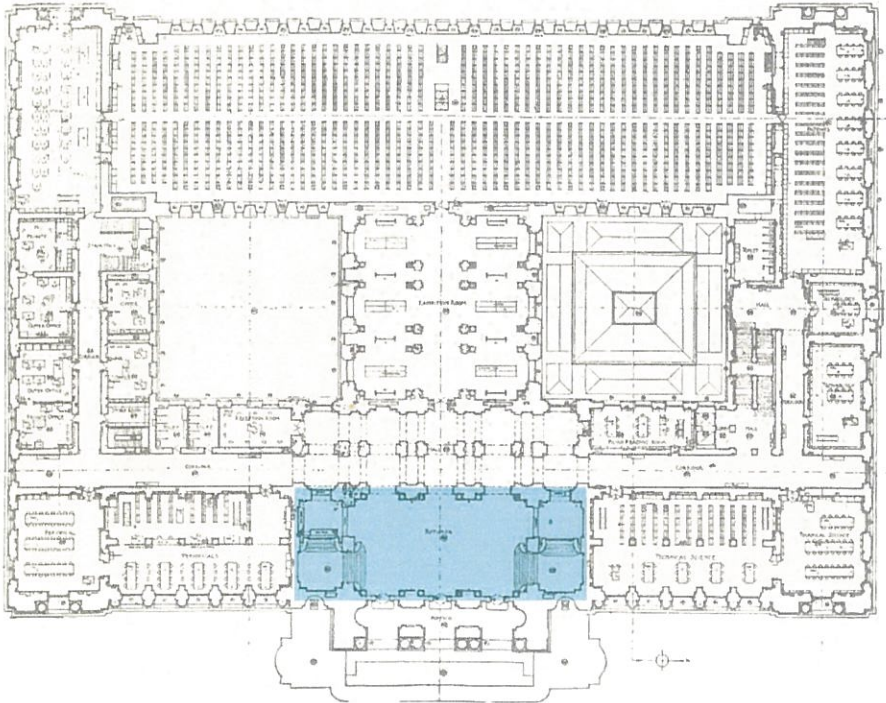
Astor Hall, first floor



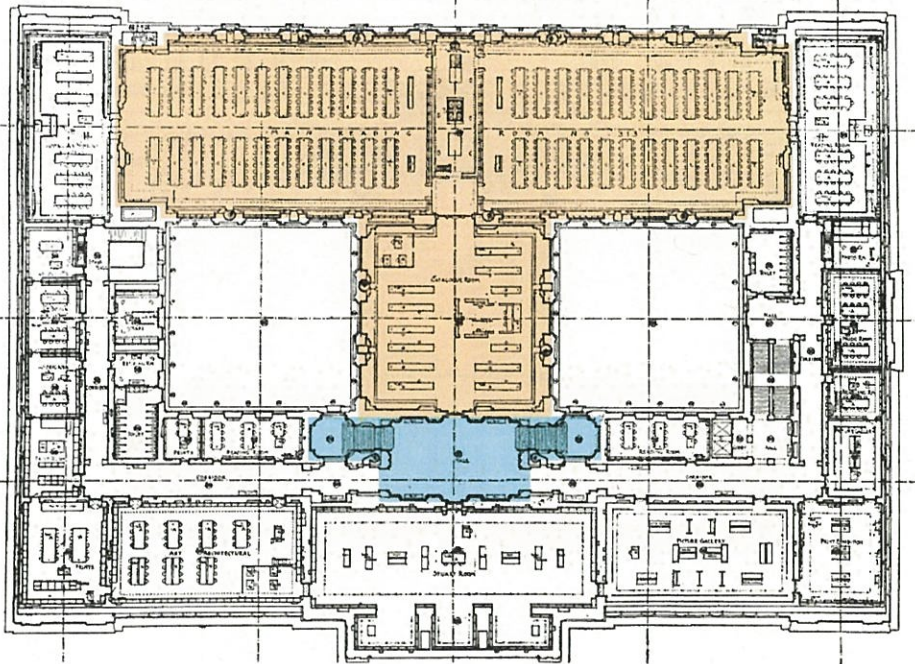
Central Stairs, north side



McGraw Rotunda, third floor, view south

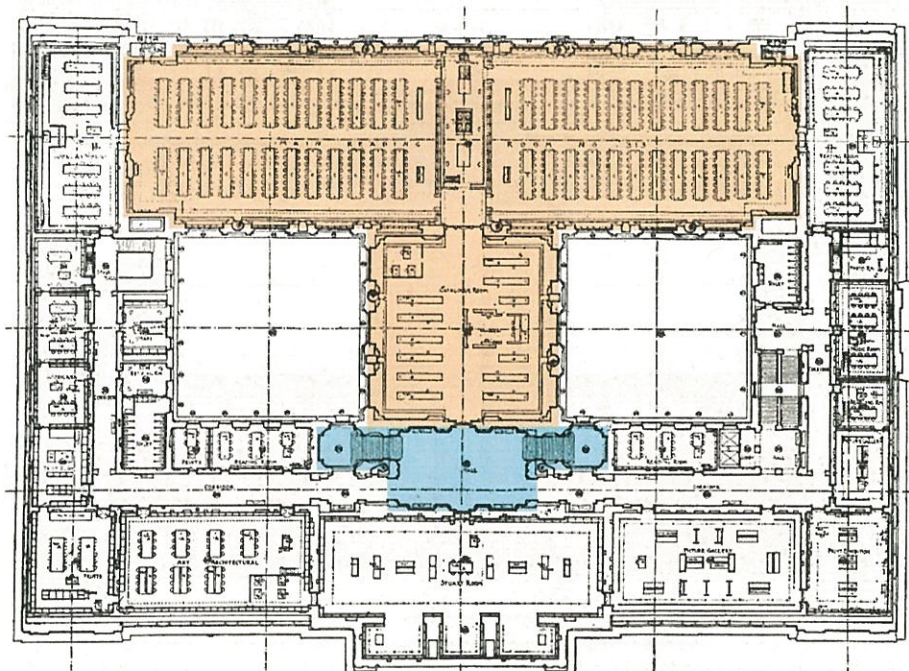
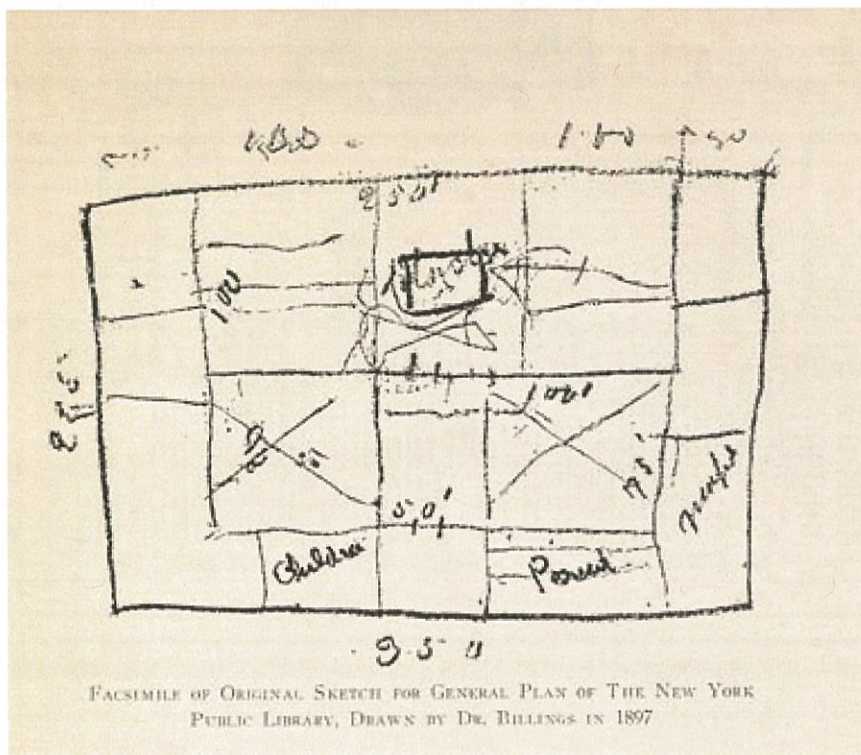


FIRST FLOOR PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

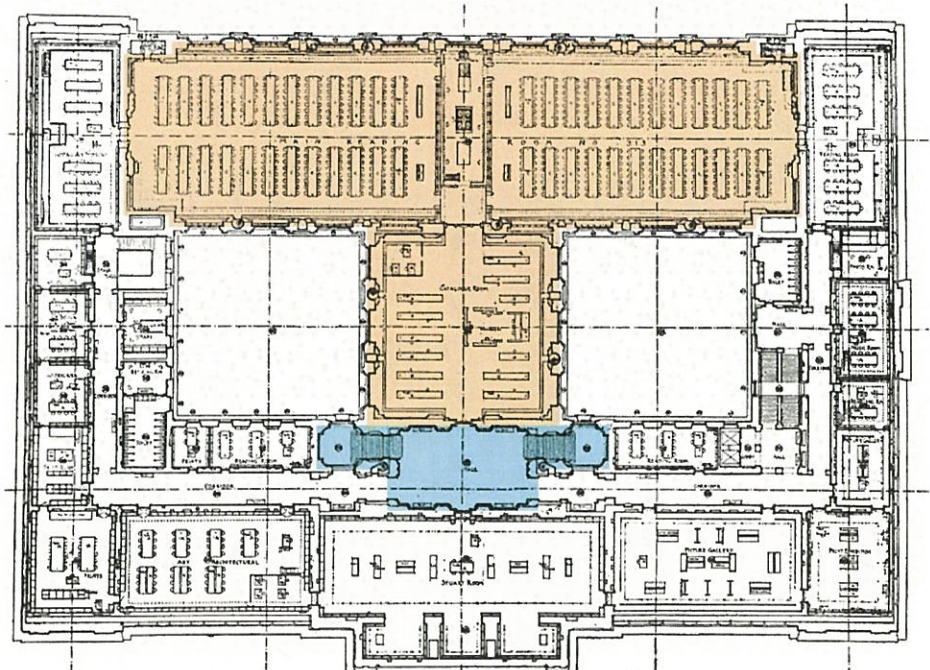
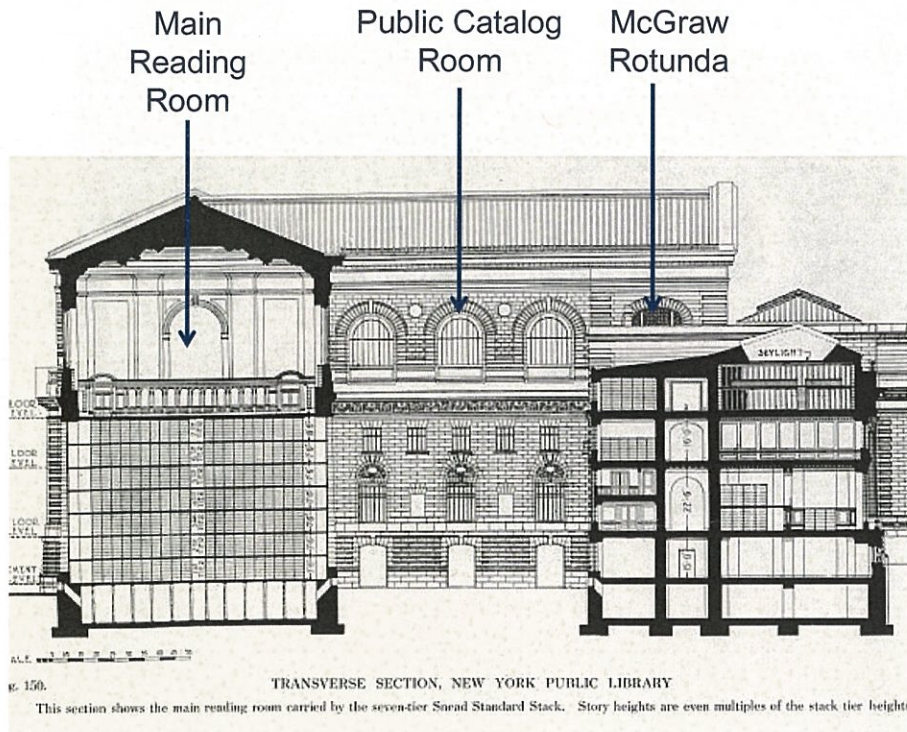
-  Designated Interior Landmark Site: Astor Hall, Central Stairs, McGraw Rotunda
-  Proposed Interior Landmark Site: Catalog Room, Main Reading Room



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

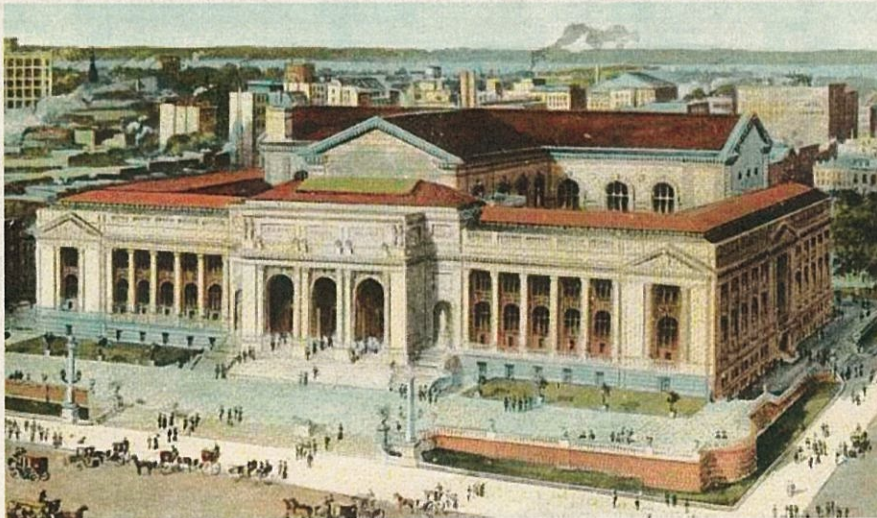
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THIRD FLOOR PLAN

- Designated Interior Landmark Site: Astor Hall, Central Stairs, McGraw Rotunda
- Proposed Interior Landmark Site: Catalog Room, Main Reading Room



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1910 Postcard



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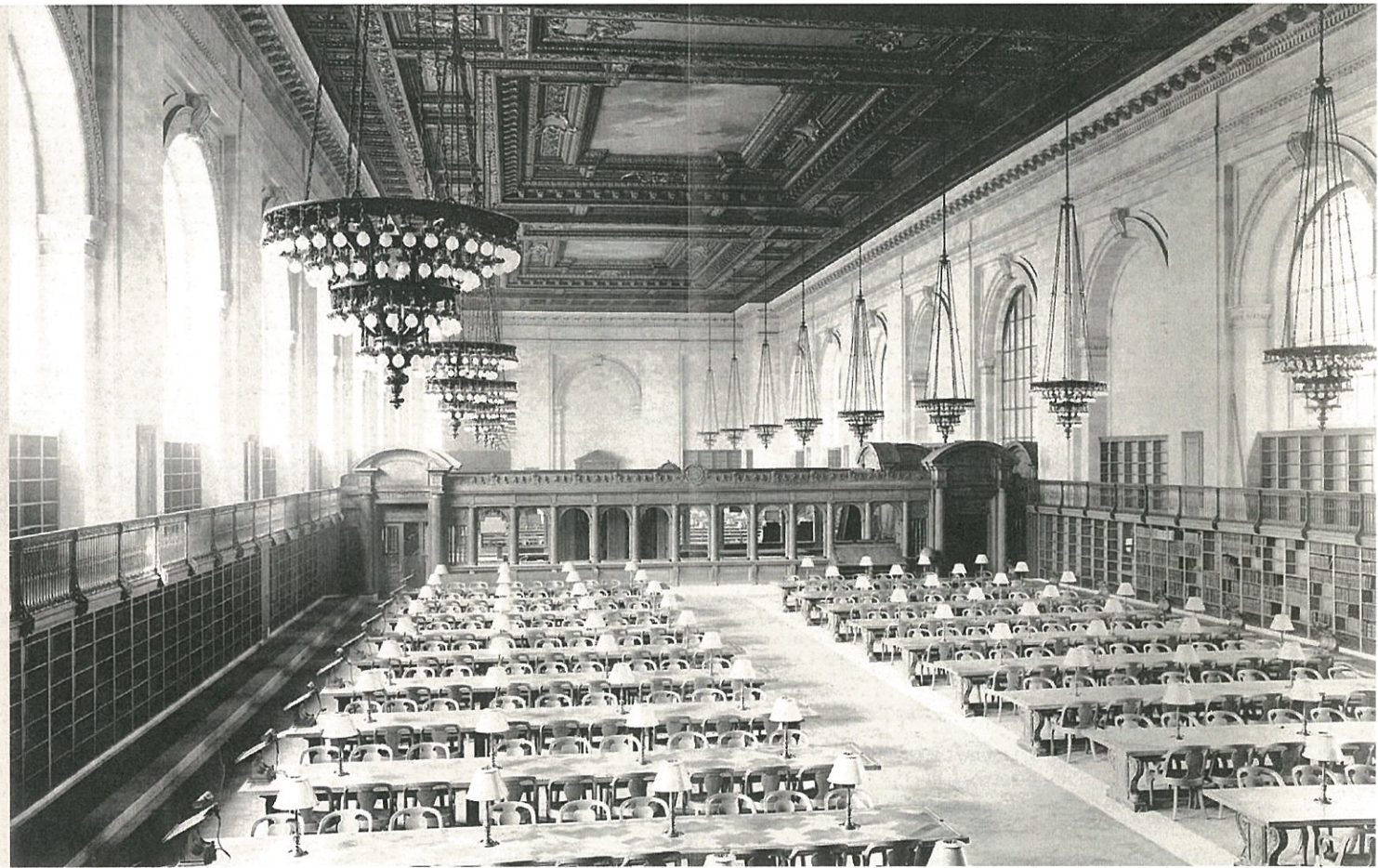
Bryant Park facade 1931



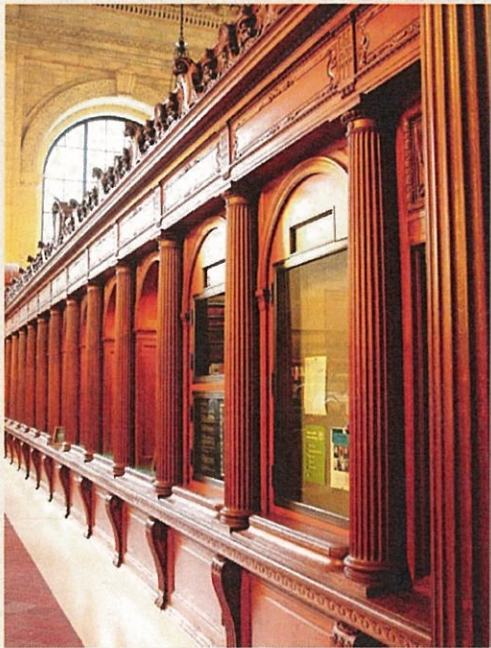
Catalog Room, c. 1915



Catalog Room, view north



Main Reading Room, c. 1911

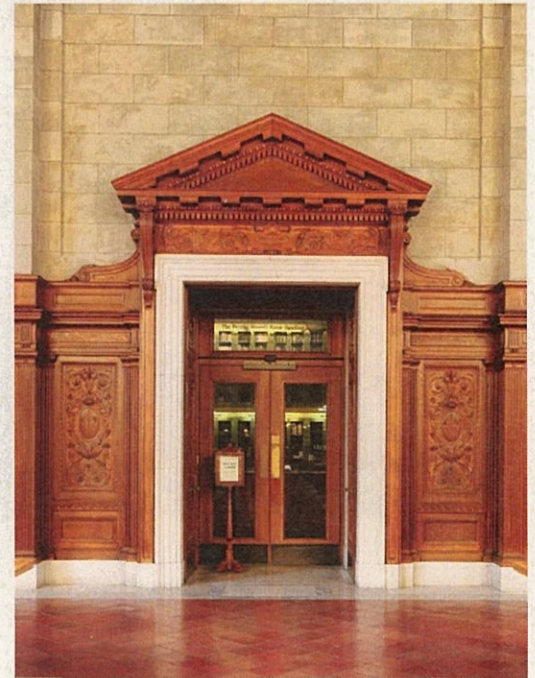
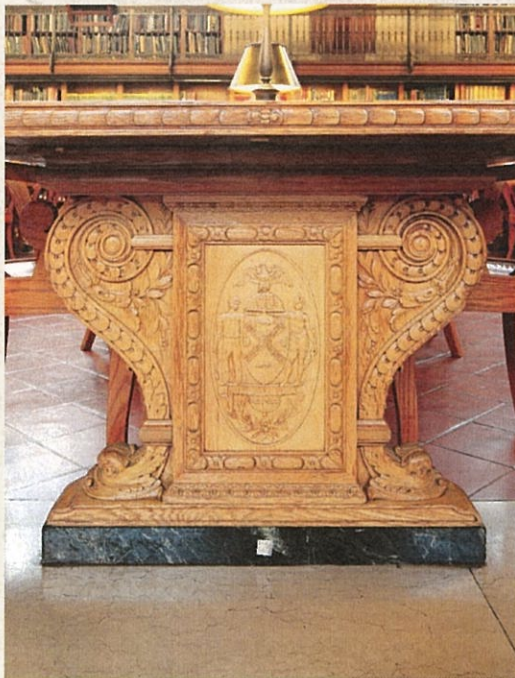


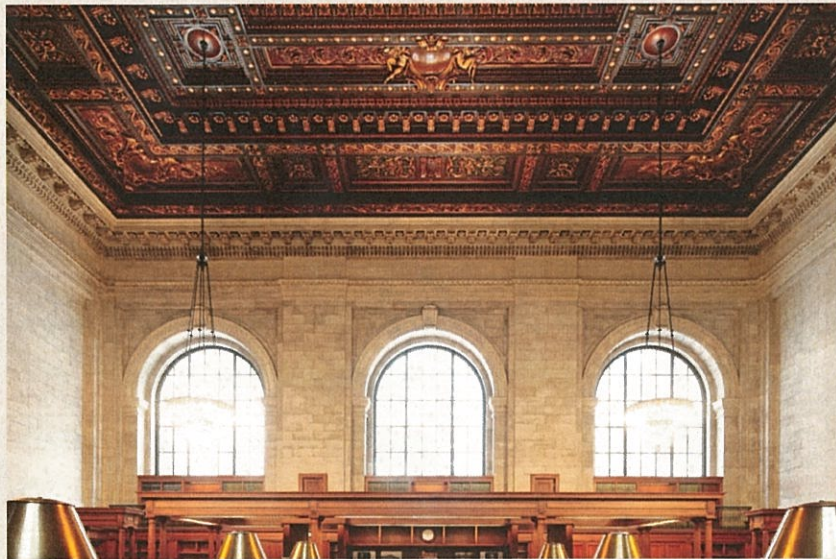
Delivery Desk, Main Reading Room



Delivery Desk, Main Reading Room, c. 1911







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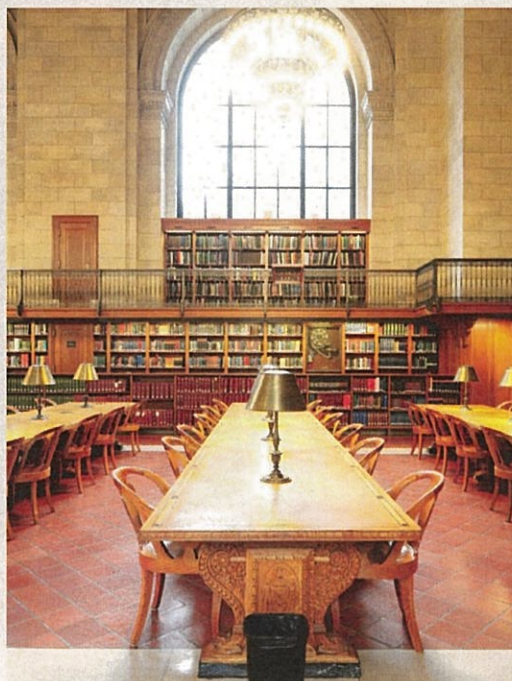
Catalog Room, north side



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Main Reading Room, north hall

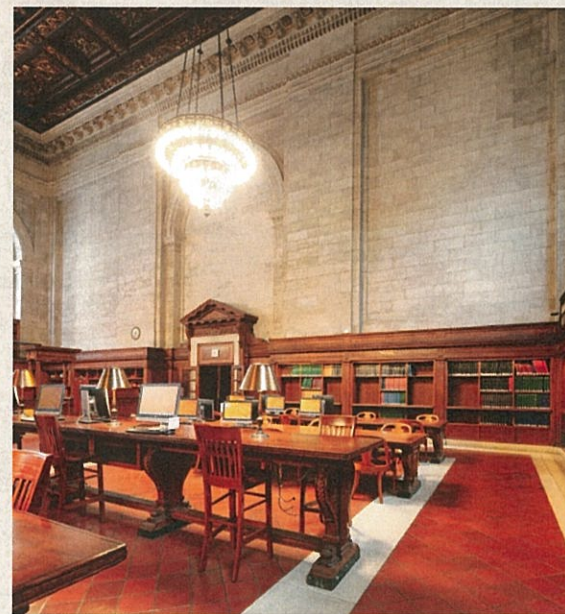






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Main Reading Room, north hall, view south



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Catalog Room, east side



**New York City Council**

**Proposed Designation of the New York Public Library (Stephen A. Schwarzman Building) Interiors – Rose Main reading Room and Bill Blass Public Catalog Room**

**Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses**

**Tuesday, October 24, 2017**

Good Morning, I am Risa Honig, Vice President for Capital Planning and Construction at The New York Public Library. I would like to thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Land Use Chair David Greenfield, Subcommittee Chair Peter Koo and the members of the committee for inviting the Library to testify today.

The New York Public Library supports The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's proposal to landmark the iconic Rose Main Reading Room and the adjacent Bill Blass Public Catalog Room. For over a century, the Library and its staff have acted as proud, caring and dedicated stewards of these two architectural treasures, and we are now pleased to endorse their designation as New York City interior landmarks.

The two rooms – masterpieces of Beaux-Arts design located on the third floor of the Library's historic Stephen A. Schwarzman Building – opened in 1911 as its principal public spaces. These rooms are distinguished by the grandeur of their scale and design which includes monumental chandeliers and arched windows, richly molded plaster work, carved wood reliefs, and vast ceiling murals.

The building itself was designated an individual landmark in 1968. Several interior spaces were also landmarked later: Astor Hall, the central stairs, and the third-floor McGraw Rotunda.

Designating the Reading Room and Public Catalog Room will rightly complete a sequence of landmarked spaces which were conceived as parts of a single experience. For its part, the Library has always treated these rooms with the respect and reverence that they deserve. In 1997, with a generous gift from Library Trustee Sandra Priest Rose, the Library completely renovated the Reading Room, cleaning the ceilings, refinishing the wood, removing various partitions, and restoring three ceiling murals. In 2014, after a decorative rosette fell from the over 100-year-old Rose Main Reading Room ceiling, the Library did not simply repair that one element, but proactively inspected the ceilings of both the Reading Room and the Public Catalog Room. While the ceilings were deemed to be in good condition, the Library decided to launch a full restoration of the ceilings and the room, reinforcing all of the ceilings' plaster



elements with steel cables, to ensure their integrity for many years to come, refurbishing the chandeliers, and restoring a mural in the Public Catalog Room.

The Library is proud of its work to preserve and protect these two rooms, and welcomes landmark designation.

Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

NYPL

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. NYPL Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/24/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Lemos McHale

Address: One Centre Street

I represent: Landmarks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please complete* **THE COUNCIL** *Sergeant-at-Arms*  
**THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. NYPL Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/24/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ali Rasoulnejad

Address: 1 Centre St

I represent: Landmarks

Address: NYPL

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**THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Henry Jackson

Address: 165 Calman Plz F, Brooklyn

I represent: NYLEM

Address: 165 CPE, Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Questions  
only*

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

*NYEM*  in favor  in opposition  
*930 Flushing Warehouse* Date: *24 Oct 2017*

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: *James McConnell*

Address: *845 West End Ave NY 10025*

I represent: *NYC Emergency Management*

Address: *165 Cadman Plaza East, BK*

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

*NYCEM*  in favor  in opposition  
*warehouse (questions only)* Date: *10/24/17*

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: *Craig Bonney*

Address: *165 Cadman Plaza East*

I represent: *NYC Emergency Mgmt (for questions only)*

Address: *165 Cadman Plaza East BK, NY*

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. NYPL Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor     in opposition

Date: 10/24/2017

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Risa Honig

Address: New York Public Library

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. NYCEM / 93076 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor     in opposition

Date: 10.24.17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dale Lazerson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DCAS, Real Estate Services

Address: (For Questions Only)

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆