Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 25, 2013, Designation List 465
LP-2531

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, SEWARD PARK BRANCH, 192 East Broadway (aka 192-194 East Broadway), Manhattan. Built 1908-09; architect, Babb, Cook & Welch

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 311, Lot 31

On April 2, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York Public Library, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A total of 13 witnesses, including representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Bowery Alliance of Neighbors, the Friends of the Lower East Side, the Historic Districts Council, the Seward Park Coop Preservation & History Club, and the Society for the Architecture of the City, spoke in favor of the designation. There were no speakers in opposition to the designation. The Commission has received three letters of support for the designation, including a letter from Anthony W. Marx, President and CEO of the New York Public Library.

Summary

The Seward Park Branch of the New York Public Library has served the immigrant community of the Lower East Side since it opened its doors on November 11, 1909. This building was one of 20 branch libraries in Manhattan and one of 67 total in the five boroughs funded by steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's 1901 donation of 5.2 million dollars to the New York Public Library. It was built as a permanent home for the growing needs of the branch, which had originally been the downtown branch of the Aguilar Library (established 1886) and was located across the street in the Educational Alliance Building.

The Seward Park library was designed by the firm of Babb, Cook & Welch, a leading architectural firm of the day and one of a handful of firms chosen to carry out designs for the Carnegie libraries. The three-story brick and limestone-trimmed Italian Renaissance Revival style building features a rusticated limestone base, arched window and door openings with keystones and console brackets, molded window surrounds; rusticated quoining at the building corners, a limestone frieze with the "New York Public Library" inscribed below a modillioned cornice, a limestone balustrade with piers capped by finials, and a copper railing of anthemia running between each pier. The railing supported the canvas awning for an "open-air" reading room on the roof. It was one of five such roof-top reading rooms constructed on branch library buildings in the early 1900s and is the only one to survive on a building still in active use as a library. Other key features of the design included the large first-story windows intended to allow passersby to glimpse the readers in the main reading room; the dignified simplicity of the design reflecting "public and municipal character" of the building; and the incorporation of small fenced gardens to provide a visual link with Seward Park, which was originally separated from the library by Jefferson Street.

The Seward Park Branch housed book collections for adults, young adults, and children, as well as foreign-language collections, including an extensive Yiddish language collection. It offered classes in English for immigrants and worked in conjunction with the Educational Alliance, the Henry Street Settlement, the leading Yiddish-language newspapers and cultural organizations to provide programs that

made it one of the most heavily used of the branches within the New York Public Library system and a major cultural force in the Lower East Side. Writers Nella Larsen and Pura Teresa Belpré worked as librarians and storytellers in the Children's Room during the 1920s; and over the years artists Abbo Ostrowsky, Jay Van Everen, Elias Grossman, and Saul Raskin lent works of art for display in the library. Long after the Jewish population of the Lower East Side began to disperse, the library's collections of Hebrew and Yiddish literature, lectures by leading Jewish intellectuals, and groups like the Yiddish Mothers Club, which met at the library for almost 50 years, made it a center for Jewish intellectual life, drawing participants from throughout the city. By the mid-20th century, the neighborhood around the library had begun to change, with major urban renewal projects like the Seward Park Cooperative housing development, completed in 1960, reshaping the physical and social landscape. By the 1960s, the ethnic character of neighborhood had shifted and the Seward Park Branch was serving an expanding population of Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, and Chinese and Asian immigrants and young artists. Responding to these changes, the library became a center for Civil Rights and anti-poverty programs, added materials in Chinese, Spanish, and other languages, and began hosting a Lower East Side film festival. Renovated in 2002-2004, the Seward Park Branch continues to serve a diverse population and is a significant reminder of the Lower East Side's rich heritage.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Manhattan's Lower East Side[1]

The Lower East Side of Manhattan is one of New York's, and the country's, most storied neighborhoods. Historically defined as the area east of Broadway, extending from the vicinity of the Brooklyn Bridge north to 14th Street, its name is synonymous with the American immigrant experience. The neighborhood is most strongly associated with Jewish history and culture: from the 1880s to the 1920s, it was the country's center of Jewish life and "the single largest Jewish community in the world, unrivaled … in terms of the sheer number of Jews who lived in close proximity to each other."[2] However, immigrants from around the world, from East Asia to Western Europe, and the Americas, have settled on the Lower East Side since the mid-nineteenth century. The historic core of this community was present-day Straus Square, located at the intersection of Canal Street, Essex Street, and East Broadway, just west of the Seward Park Branch of the New York Public Library.

Today's Lower East Side began developing as an urban neighborhood towards the beginning of the 19th century. Through the 1820s and 1830s it was a desirable area containing commercial buildings and residences for craftsmen and laborers. By the 1840s, affluent residents had started moving out of the area south of Houston Street and the neighborhood's first purpose-built tenements were constructed as increasing numbers of immigrants settled on the Lower East Side. Many of these newcomers were Irish; Irish immigration to New York—and the settlement of Irish immigrants on the Lower East Side—rapidly increased following the beginning of Ireland's Great Famine in 1845. Soon afterward, German immigrants, fleeing unemployment, religious oppression, famine, and the European Revolutions of 1848, also moved into the area. The city's German population grew from about 24,000 in the mid-1840s to over 400,000 by 1880; by then, almost the entire Lower East Side was known as *Kleindeutschland*, or "Little Germany." Many German immigrants, including German Jews, prospered in the manufacture and wholesaling of textiles and apparel, setting up businesses on Canal Street that served the department stores and other retailers of nearby Grand Street, which was then one of the city's major shopping streets.[3] Many of these newcomers were Irish-Americans; Irish immigration to

New York—and the settlement of Irish immigrants on the Lower East Side—rapidly increased following the beginning of Ireland's Great Famine in 1845. Soon afterward, German immigrants, fleeing unemployment, religious oppression, famine, and the European Revolutions of 1848, also moved into the area. The city's German population grew from about 24,000 in the mid-1840s to over 400,000 by 1880; by then, almost the entire Lower East Side was known as *Kleindeutschland*, or "Little Germany."

Up to the 1870s, no distinctly Jewish neighborhood existed in New York; German Jews, who accounted for most of the city's Jewish population, generally settled within the larger *Kleindeutschland* community. That would soon change, as hundreds of thousands of Jews, primarily from Russia and Poland, started fleeing pogroms and poverty in their homelands in the early 1880s. From 1881 to 1924, the year in which the so-called "Quota Law" drastically cut U.S. immigration from Eastern Europe, one-third of Eastern Europe's Jews left their homes, with most seeking refuge in the United States. Between 1880 and 1910, approximately 1.1 million Jews moved to New York City, and between 1880 and 1890, three-quarters of these newcomers settled on the "East Side," as the Lower East Side was commonly called at that time. Within the neighborhood, Jewish immigrants typically lived within defined ethnic quarters with others from their home regions; the Seward Park Branch was within the largest of these enclaves, which housed Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Lithuanian Jews, and covered most of the area east of the Bowery and south of Grand Street. Although late -19th- and early-20th century transportation improvements efficiently dispersed the Lower East Side's Jewish population to Yorkville, Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, more than 300,000 Jews still filled the neighborhood's tenements at the dawn of World War I, with some living at densities of more than 1,000 persons per acre.

The core of the community was Rutgers Square (present-day Straus Square), at the intersection of Canal Street, Essex Street, and East Broadway, just west of the Seward Park and the Seward Park Branch of the New York Public Library. Rutgers Square was the favored site for political rallies, mass demonstrations, and labor rallies. East Broadway was the home of the city's Yiddish newspapers – 20 were established between 1885 and the mid-1920s, the most prominent, the *Yiddisher Tageblatt* (*Yiddish Daily News),* founded 1885, and the *Forverts* (*Jewish Daily Forward*), established 1897.

Other important features of life on the Lower East Side were the community and educational organizations aimed at aiding immigrants assimilate into American society and providing support for those in need. These included settlement houses, such as the University Settlement, founded as the Neighborhood Guild in 1886, and the Henry Street Settlement House, which began as a visiting nurse service, established by Lillian Wald in 1889. The Hebrew Free School Association (founded 1864) held classes in Hebrew, religion, and bible history at a number of Lower East Side locations including Avenue C and 5th Street, Chrystie Street, Bayard Street, and East Broadway.

<u>The Aguilar Library and the Hebrew Institute/Educational Alliance Building</u>

In March 1886, New York State adopted a law that allowed local governments to use tax dollars to fund free circulating libraries.[4] A few months later, a group of affluent philanthropic Jews who believed that there was a need for the "free circulation of carefully selected literature" in localities of the city "where the Jewish population was dense," organized the Aguilar Free Library Society, named for Grace Aguilar (1816-47), a popular English novelist and advocate for English translations of Hebrew holy texts.[5] The new law required libraries to own real estate

worth $20,000 and to hold at least 10,000 volumes to qualify for public funding and to that end the Hebrew Free School Association and the Young Men's Hebrew Association turned over their libraries to the Aguilar Free Library Society. Circulation in the name of the Aguilar Library began at the YMHA's building at 721 Lexington Avenue and at the Hebrew Free School Association's building at 206 East Broadway in November 1886. On January 1, 1887, a small branch was opened at the Hebrew Free School Association's building at 624 East Fifth Street. By November 1887, the Aguilar Library Society had raised enough money to purchase 206 East Broadway from the Hebrew Free School Association. In June 1889, the Hebrew Free School Association, the YMHA, and the Aguilar Free Library entered into an agreement to form the Educational Alliance to jointly raise money to erect a large building, containing rooms "suitable for classes, lectures, and entertainment" to be occupied by the three organizations. In December 1890, the Aguilar Free Library Society purchased 197 East Broadway at the southeast corner of East Broadway and Jefferson Street. The library leased the premises to the Alliance, which constructed the Hebrew Institute Building (Brunner & Tryon, architects, 1889-91). The three organizations transferred their downtown operations to the new building in September 1891. After a year, the YMHA withdrew from partnership in the building. In 1893, the Education Alliance was reorganized to take on the functions of the YMHA and the Hebrew Institute Building gradually came to be known as the Educational Alliance Building. The downtown branch of the Aguilar Library continued to flourish at the Educational Alliance Building, circulating about 200,000 books per year in the late 1890s and taking over additional rooms in the Educational Alliance Building for a Children's Reading Room and Reference Room.[6]

The New York Public Library and Andrew Carnegie[7]

The New York Public Library was established in 1895 as a private corporation, which received limited public funds. Formed initially by the merger of the Astor and Lenox Libraries and the Tilden Trust, it was primarily concerned with building a major reference library on the site of the old Croton Reservoir at Fifth Avenue on 42nd Street. The consolidation of New York City in 1898 inspired the growth and unification of the library institutions in the City, including the New York Public Library. New York was one of the largest cities in the world with a population of three million in 1898 and growing rapidly. It trailed behind other cities in public library support, ranking ninth in per capita spending.[8] A public branch library system was established in 1901 when the New York Free Circulating Library merged with The New York Public Library. Most of the small independent lending libraries, such as the Aguilar, Webster, Kingsbridge, and Tottenville, joined the New York Public Library, increasing the size of the still inadequate branch network. The promise of a large grant from Andrew Carnegie in 1901 spurred these library mergers. The New York Public Library is still organized into the separate reference and branch systems that were created during this consolidation. Andrew Carnegie and John Shaw Billings, Director of the New York Public Library, strongly supported the amalgamation of all the library systems, including Brooklyn and Queens libraries, which ultimately chose to remain independent. Today, New York City still has three separate library corporations, The New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and the Queens Borough Public Library.

In 1901, when the library institutions were large and cohesive enough to suit him, Andrew Carnegie donated $5.2 million to New York City to build a system of branch libraries in all five boroughs. The grant was divided among the three library systems, with the New York Public Library receiving $3.36 million, and Brooklyn and Queens allocated $1.6 million and $240,000 respectively. The grant bought 67 libraries in all five boroughs, two more than

originally envisioned.[9] In a 1901 letter to John Shaw Billings, Carnegie said that "sixty-five libraries at one stroke probably breaks the record, but this is the day of big operations and New York is soon to be the biggest of Cities."[10]

Andrew Carnegie rose 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. He began donating to libraries in 1881, but with the grant to New York City he started the vast, worldwide operation which made him unique in the world of philanthropy. Andrew Carnegie based his donations on a philosophy of giving he developed in the 1870s and 1880s. He believed that the wealthy should live modestly and, while still living, give away their funds for the good of humanity. He considered seven areas worthy of his philanthropy: universities, libraries, medical centers, parks, meeting and concert halls, public baths, and churches. Like other wealthy New Yorkers involved in the social reform movement, he understood the problems facing New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century: the overcrowding from massive immigration, poverty, lack of education and absence of such facilities as baths, playgrounds and libraries. Andrew Carnegie gave away about 90 per cent of his wealth by the time he died in 1911. More than 2,500 Carnegie libraries were built worldwide and over 1,680 in the United States. The library program ended in 1917 but the Carnegie Corporation and twenty other foundations and funds have carried on his aspirations.[11]

The inventor of cost accounting, Carnegie gave away his money with great efficiency. His grant provided for the construction of the buildings, but New York City had to contribute the cost of the land as well as the books, the upkeep and the operation of the libraries in perpetuity. The acquisition of sites alone cost the New York Public Library over $1.6 million, just under half the cost of the buildings.

In 1901, the New York Public Library Board Executive Committee appointed a temporary architects' advisory committee consisting of Charles F. McKim of the firm McKim, Mead & White, John M. Carrère of Carrère & Hastings, and Walter Cook of Babb, Cook & Willard, to advise them on how to proceed with construction. The committee advised that the branches be uniform and recognizable in materials, style, plan and scale and that differences in site requirements would provide variety. 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 selected for the permanent committee, and their firms designed most of The New York Public Library Carnegie branches.

Design and Construction of the New York Public Library Seward Park Branch

After the Aguilar Free Library was absorbed into the New York Public Library system in 1903, the downtown branch remained in the Educational Alliance Building, renting space from the Alliance. In July 1906 the Board of Estimate approved the purchase of a site on the northeast corner of East Broadway and Jefferson Street opposite the Educational Alliance for a new library building to be erected under the Carnegie gift. Two lots at 190 and 192 East Broadway, which extended through the block to Division Street, were purchased in 1907 and 1908.[12]

The commission for the new library was awarded to Babb, Cook & Welch, the successor firm to Babb, Cook & Willard. The plans for the new building were filed with the New York City Department of Buildings in April 1908 and it was constructed between July 1908 and

August 1909.[13] In reviewing the design of the Seward Park Branch library, the *Architect's & Builder's Magazine* observed that the project presented three difficulties for the architects:

> Firstly, the difficulty of meeting all the requirements for the limited amount of money at the architects' disposal; secondly, the necessity of designing a structure which, while typifying all that a library stands for, should yet be not too incongruous for its surroundings (those to be found in the heart of the Ghetto); thirdly the desirability of establishing an idea of connection and relation between the library and the park facing it.[14]

The architects addressed these concerns by creating a simple but dignified Renaissance Revival design featuring a granite-faced basement, rusticated limestone first story, brick-faced second and third stories enriched with rusticated limestone corner piers and molded window surrounds, and a limestone crowning cornice topped by a limestone balustrade, which originally supported the metal superstructure for an awning over a rooftop terrace that functioned as an "open air reading room." Unlike most Manhattan Carnegie branch libraries, which were located on mid-block sites, the Seward Park Branch had a relatively generous lot, measuring 52 feet by 117 feet, with frontages on East Broadway, Division Street, and Jefferson Street. (The last two streets have been incorporated into Seward Park.). This allowed Babb, Cook & Welch to adopt a T-shaped plan with projecting entrance pavilions at the eastern end of the East Broadway and Division Street facades. The library's service functions (the accessions room, work room, staff room, etc.) were located in these side wings while the staircases were ranged along the east wall next to corridors that provided internal circulation. A penthouse on the east side of the roof provided a spacious apartment for the janitor and his family. This plan left the main portion of the library unobstructed for use as reading rooms and was typical of Carnegie libraries, which usually restricted circulation and service functions to one-third of each floor. The library also conformed to another programmatic requirement for Carnegie libraries in that the main adult reading room was located on the first story with a wide expanse of arched windows on the building's primary Jefferson Street façade. (The present Jefferson Street entrance was created as part of the 2002-2004 alterations.) At a meeting of the New York Library Club, architect Walter Cook explained that the trustees had imposed this condition so that every library building "should advertise itself as such, by having a reading room near enough to the sidewalk level for passersby to look as it were into a shop window and see the readers."[15]

The design also reflected a recommendation by the architects' advisory committee and library trustees that all the Manhattan libraries follow "in a broad general way certain Italian precedents."[16] This was reflected in the use of a rusticated arcade at the first story, the handsomely detailed bracketed window frames at the second story, eared enframements at the third story, rusticated pilasters, full entablature, and balustraded parapet. Certain aspects of the design, for example the treatment of the arcades and windows, are closely related to earlier libraries by Babb, Cook & Willard, notably the 67th Street Branch (328 East 67th Street, 1905), the Webster Branch (1465 York Avenue, 1906), and the St. Agnes Branch (444-446 Amsterdam Avenue, 1906, in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District).[17] There is also a close relationship to branch library designs by several other firms, including McKim, Mead & White's Chatham Square Branch (33 East Broadway, 1903, a designated New York City Landmark), Carrere & Hastings' 58th Street Branch (121-27 East 58th Street, 1907, demolished), and James Brown Lord's Yorkville Branch (222 East 79th Street, 1902, a designated New York

City Landmark). These affinities grew out of the early Carnegie library architects' concern that "the branches be recognizable as having some kinship, and as belonging to the same parent stock."[18] One unusual feature of the Seward Park design for a Manhattan library – the use of brick with limestone rather than just limestone for the facade, was likely an economy measure, mixing less costly brick with stone for one of the largest of the branch libraries with three freestanding facades. In addition, the use of brick and the lack of flamboyance in the ornament may be the result of a conscious attempt to create a relatively austere design appropriate to a low income area. Nevertheless, as the critic for *Architecture & Building* noted, the architects were very successful in imparting a "public and municipal character" to the building "in harmony with the great gift of Mr. Carnegie, and the great liberality of the City of New York."[19]

Another aspect of the Seward Park Branch design mentioned by *Architecture & Building* but now less apparent because of changes in the streetscape and landscaping around the library was the effort to visually link the library with Seward Park. Thus, with "absolutely no land at their disposal,"[20] the architects suggested a connection between the library and park by creating gardens set out with plantings in the small sunken areaways between the wings and Jefferson Street. For *Architecture & Building*, "this touch, slight as it is, goes far to bring about the desired effect."[21]

Also noteworthy was the roof terrace reading room.[22] This feature had been first introduced at the Rivington Street Branch, which was located near the University Settlement House, where the roof garden was a popular attraction during the hot summer months. "The lesson was not lost on the librarians,"[23] who proposed incorporating an open-air reading room on the roof of the Rivington Branch to be used by children during the day and lit for adult readers at night. The facility was so popular that open air reading rooms were incorporated into the plans for four more branch libraries: the St. Gabriel's Park Branch at 303 East 36th Street (McKim Mead & White, 1908, demolished); the Hamilton Fish Park Branch at 388-92 East Houston Street (Carrere & Hastings, 1906, demolished); the Columbus Branch at 742 Tenth Avenue (Babb, Cook & Willard, 1909, top story and roof garden removed); and the Seward Park Branch. Today only the Rivington Street Branch (which has been decommissioned as a library) and the Seward Park Branch retain visible evidence of their rooftop reading rooms and of the two the Seward Park Branch's is the more architecturally elaborate, featuring paneled limestone posts capped by finials, limestone balustrades, and copper rails decorated with acroteria that originally supported the metal framing for a canvas awning.

Babb, Cook & Welch[24]

Babb, Cook & Welch, the successor firm to Babb, Cook & Willard, was established in 1908 when Winthrop A. Welch, an architect and engineer at the firm, was taken into the partnership. In 1912 the firm became Cook & Welch.

Senior partner, George Fletcher Babb (1843-1916) was born in New York City and spent his early childhood in New Jersey. He began his architectural career in 1858 in the New York office of Thomas R. Jackson, worked in partnership with Nathaniel G. Foster from 1859 to 1865, and by 1868 was the senior draftsman in the office of Russell Sturgis. Babb was a fellow of the American Institute of Architects and a member of its New York Chapter.

Walter Cook (1846-1916) was born in New York and was a Harvard graduate (1869) who also studied architecture at the Royal Polytechnical School in Munich and at the atelier of Joseph Auguste Emile Vaudremer in Paris. He was one of the first Americans to study architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. In 1877, Babb and Cook formed a partnership, initially

sharing office space with McKim, Mead & Bigelow. By the 1890s, Cook was the principal designer of the firm. Cook was an early member and Fellow of American Institute of Architects and served as president of the AIA in 1911-12. He was a member of the Architectural League of New York and the Beaux-Arts Society of Architects, and was active in civic affairs.

Daniel W. Willard (1849-?) was born in Massachusetts and graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1870. He joined Babb and Cook in 1884 to form the firm of Babb, Cook & Willard, using his engineering skills to enable the firm to take on a number of challenging commercial commissions, notably the Romanesque Revival style DeVinne Press Building at 393 Lafayette Street (1885-86, a designated New York City Landmark). Willard relocated to Redlands, California, around 1904 and ceased to be a partner in the firm in 1908.

Winthrop A. Welch (1871-1914) was born in Chenango County, New York, and earned a degree in architecture from Pratt Institute in 1894, where he taught mechanical drawing for a year before entering into private practice. He began working for Babb, Cook & Willard around 1899 and by 1902 was a "superintendent and engineer of construction" for the firm. When Daniel Willard moved to California, Welch assumed responsibility for the engineering aspects of the firm's work. In 1910 Welch designed and built a Colonial Revival House at 202 Grosvenor Street for his own use, which is now in Douglaston Historic District. He was a member of the New York chapter of American Institute of Architects.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, with Walter Cook serving as chief design partner and George Babb designing exquisite interiors, Babb, Cook & Willard was responsible for several important city mansions and country houses including the mansions of Andrew Carnegie (now the Cooper-Hewitt Museum) at 2 East 91st Street (1899-1903, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Frederick B. and George DuPont Pratt Houses at 229 and 245 Clinton Avenue (1895 and 1901, both within the Clinton Hill Historic District), "Poplar Hall," the Frederick B. Pratt residence in Glen Cove (1898)); "Dunstable," the Winslow S. Pierce residence in Bayville (1903). Noteworthy, later works by the Babb, Cook & Welch or Cook & Welch include "Welwyn," the Harold I. Pratt Estate in Glenn Cove (1904-16), the Dodd, Mead & Co. Building at Park Avenue and 30th Street (1909); the Choir School, located on the grounds of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine (1912-13), and the Henry Hudson Memorial in Riverdale (1912).

As one of the three architects on the Architects Advisory Committee for the Carnegie Libraries, Walter Cook was responsible for making recommendations to the trustees "regarding design or construction or other matters of common import relating to the buildings to be erected."[25] Cook also acted as the spokesman for the Committee, giving lectures and granting interviews about its aims. Babb, Cook & Willard were responsible for eight Carnegie branches in Manhattan and the Bronx between 1905 and 1909.[26] Babb, Cook & Welch and Cook & Welch designed three additional branches between 1909 and 1913.

The Seward Park Branch

During its first month of operation the Seward Park Branch lent over 12,000 volumes, achieving the highest circulation of any branch library in the New York Public Library system. It continued to break circulation records during its first few years of operation, lending 425,571 books in 1912, according to the New York Times, which noted that the Seward Park Branch alone supplied "more books than do the majority of whole libraries in lesser cities."[27] Moreover, the *Times* noted only 51% of the books borrowed were fiction, and those chiefly classics, with a

strong demand for American history, science, math, and "Easy English" books for recent immigrants. The Seward Park Branch also offered classes in "English for foreigners" at both the elementary and advanced levels under the auspices of the YMCA. In addition, the library fostered English fluency by hosting meetings of the East Side Debating Club aimed both at young men and young women.[28]

In 1915, the pioneering librarian and social activist Ernestine Rose became head of the Seward Park Branch. She remained for two years and established policies that "had more than a little to do with the legendary status this library attained in Jewish cultural memory."[29] Under Rose's leadership, the library continued to add to its collection of books in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as volumes in Russian, Polish, Rumanian, and other Eastern European Languages.[30] Librarians at Seward Park were expected to familiarize themselves with Jewish literature, customs, and holidays. Welcoming letters in Yiddish were sent to local residents and library staff often made visits to the homes of children who had applied for library cards. Community organizations, such as the boy scouts and girl scouts, were invited to use the library facilities and the library itself organized a number of groups that celebrated ethnic identity, notably the Yiddish Mothers Club, a discussion group for young mothers, and the Yiddish Forum, a lecture series featuring prominent speakers and dramatic readings by Jewish authors, which drew an audience of "Yiddish intellectuals from the Bronx and Brooklyn" as well as residents of the neighborhood.[31] Among the children growing up in the neighborhood during this period, who found the library a place of inspiration and refuge, was author-playwright Bella Spewack.[32] Some sources also suggest that Leon Trotsky, a contributor to the *Daily Forward* while he was living in New York City in 1917, frequented the library.[33]

Ernestine Rose left the Seward Park Branch for war work in Europe and then returned to the Public Library system to head the 135th Street Branch, where she began compiling materials for what became the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Annual reports by the directors of the Seward Park Branch show that most of the policies established by Rose remained in place.[34] During the 1920s, the Yiddish Forum and Yiddish Mothers Club continued to meet and other groups such the Incognito Club, a group to promote the ideals of citizenship, were formed. The library's collection of literature in foreign languages continued to grow – new titles included paperback editions of Russian plays, purchased in anticipation of the Moscow Art Theater's appearance in New York City in 1923, and Hebrew translations of modern works. The library also exhibited works of art of interest to its patrons, including watercolors and drawings of Palestine by Saul Raskin, etchings by Elias Grossman, paintings by Abbo Ostrowsky and Jay Van Everen, and Ukrainian needlework lent by the Educational Alliance. Two of Ernestine Rose's protégés, Nella Larsen in 1923-24 and Pura Teresa Belpré, c 1927-1929, served as assistant librarians in the Children's Department, where their duties included story-telling and making presentations at neighborhood schools and institutions, such as the Educational Alliance and University Settlement House.[35] Larsen, the daughter of a Danish mother and a West Indian man of color, was the first black woman to graduate from the NYPL Library School and in later years became a novelist and an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Pura Belpré, also a graduate of the NYPL Library School, was the first Puerto Rican librarian in New York City. During her years at Seward Park, she began her pioneering work in bilingual education and developed skills that served her well in her distinguished career as a librarian and writer.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s population began declining on the Lower East Side as quotas slowed immigration and improvements in transportation made it easier for workers to move to more modern apartments in the outer boroughs. As Italians, Poles, Greeks, and blacks

began to fill empty apartments in the neighborhood, Seward Park's readership became much more diverse, so that by 1932 it was supplying books in 13 languages, including Dutch and Roumanian. Interest in the library's Hebrew and Yiddish holdings remained high, with Jews from throughout the city availing themselves of the branch's books and cultural programs. After 1936, persecutions in Europe created an increasing demand for religious books and books on Zionism and Palestine.

During the 1940s, the construction of a new subway line (opened 1936), improvements to Seward Park (completed in 1940), the opening of Essex Market, and the beginnings of slum clearance projects, aimed at providing modern subsidized housing for workers, brought changes to the neighborhood. The Seward Park library staff met the challenges of the day, assembling materials on the war, war-work, readjustment to civilian life, and the atomic bomb, and serving as the Lower East Side catchment center for civil service manuals and college catalogs. The Yiddish Mothers' Club celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 1941, having met weekly to discuss "every kind of subject from the origins of Jewish law [to] the Declaration of Independence."[36] The branch continued its work with Lower East Side organizations, notably the Henry Street Settlement House and Educational Alliance.

Following the war, the Seward Park area once again became a melting pot, as refugees from all parts of Europe flooded the neighborhood. At the library this created a demand for books in Polish, Hungarian, French, and Yiddish and programs for bilingual children. Many Puerto Ricans also began settling on the Lower East Side and the Seward Park Branch began acquiring books in Spanish to accommodate their needs.

As part of a post-war effort to upgrade a number of branch libraries, the Seward Park Branch closed for renovations in November 1948.[37] The renovations included improvements to the building's heating and plumbing systems, new lighting, and changes to the stacks and check-out desk.

The Seward Park Branch reopened in January 1950. During the 1950s much of the Lower East Side was transformed by government-owned or –financed urban renewal projects that resulted in the demolition of hundreds of buildings, the demapping of countless streets and the creation of large "superblocks," and the displacement of thousands of residents. The blocks immediately surrounding the Seward Park Branch were redeveloped in the late 1950s as part of the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA).[38] This project was a private undertaking sponsored by Abraham Kazan and the United Housing Federation under the federal Title I program.[39] The initial urban renewal plan was published in August 1956 and it received city approval in 1957. The removal of 1,481 families began in early 1958—half of these residents were Jewish and a third Puerto Rican—and construction on the Seward Park Houses took place in 1958-60.[40] As happened in several other urban renewal projects, some institutional buildings were allowed to remain including the Seward Park Branch and the Bialystoker Center and Home for the Aged.[41] In conjunction with the Seward Park Houses project the buildings immediately to the east of the library were demolished, leaving a former party wall exposed to view.

The changing demography of the Lower East Side was reflected in the library's readership. Refugees continued to settle in the neighborhood in large numbers keeping the demand high for books in foreign languages. Additionally, a steady influx of Puerto Ricans and blacks created a demand for books "about and by them."[42] Overall the neighborhood was "not nearly as Jewish" but the demand for the branch's Judaica collection remained strong since it drew readers from throughout the city and was used in particular by the Jewish institutions and newspapers such as the *Daily Forward* that continued to be headquartered in the neighborhood.[43]

According to Seward Park Branch head clerk Lillian Israel, *Daily Forward* contributor Isaac Bashevis Singer frequented the library during this period.[44] Artists, who found themselves priced out of Greenwich Village, also began moving to the neighborhood and the Seward Park Branch began to acquire art books and inaugurated a Film Forum in 1952 focusing first on films about artists and Israel. In 1959, in celebration of the branch's 50th anniversary, a film was prepared depicting its history and activities.

In the 1960s the branch's director reported that the Seward Park neighborhood continued to retain its "liberal interests."[45] Young people put their "energy into civil rights and anti-poverty programs."[46] The branch was used for Head Start and elder programs, often operated in conjunction with the Educational Alliance and Henry Street Settlement. A "Significant Modern Books" discussion group dealt with the works of Camus, Sartre, Albee, Pinter, Updike, and Hermann Hesse. Bilingual story hours in the Children's Room served the community's Spanish-speaking population. By the late 1960s the Jewish population of the Lower East Side had begun to decline as older Jewish residents died and younger people moved to different neighborhoods. At the same time there was a steady increase in the number of Chinese readers, so that by 1971 the branch began cutting back on its purchase of Jewish material to build up its Chinese collection.

These trends continued in the 1970s. By the mid-1970s the library had also noted an increase in Indian-owned stores in the neighborhood and began acquiring books in Hindi. In 1984 it presented a film and lecture series on the "Chinese Diaspora."[47] The branch continued its rich program of public lectures and children's story hours in the 1980s and 1990s and housed an adult literacy program for recent immigrants.

Between 2002 and 2004 the Seward Park Branch underwent a major interior and exterior renovations to the designs of Kevin Hom + Andrew Goldman Associates with funds provided primarily by City Council Member Margarita Lopez, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, and the Starr Foundation.[48] The renovations included the creation of a new main entry in the center window of the long façade, which formerly faced on to Jefferson Street and had been incorporated into Seward Park. The new entry was accessed by a new staircase and a metal entrance ramp running along the north side of the facade. Other exterior changes included façade repairs, new doors replicating the old doors on East Broadway, and a new roof. Inside the building the literacy center was relocated to the lower level and a new reference room was created on the third floor. There were upgrades of the heating cooling and ventilation systems, new electrical and telecommunications wiring, new lighting, new restrooms for public use, an elevator, new furniture, and new electronic equipment. The Seward Park Branch continues to serve a diverse population and is a significant reminder of the Lower East Side's rich heritage.

Description

The New York Public Library, Seward Park Branch is a three-story-plus-basement T-shaped building, with projecting entrance pavilions at the eastern end of the East Broadway and former Division Street facades and a U-shaped fourth-story penthouse on the eastern half of the building. Located on a rectangular lot at the eastern edge of Seward Park, the building extends for about 52 feet along East Broadway and is about 116 feet deep. Designed in Italian Renaissance Revival style, it has a rusticated limestone base and is clad with red brick laid in Flemish bond and stone trim on the upper stories. The East Broadway façade and the former Jefferson Street and Division Street fronts (the latter two streets have been subsumed into Seward Park) are designed facades; the eastern elevation was originally a party wall and its two

original fourth story windows have been sealed. At the fourth story a stone balustrade with bronze supports survive from a rooftop terrace "reading room."

Western (former Jefferson Street) facade:

Historic: Rusticated limestone cladding at basement and first story; arched windows with projected keystones at first story; original brick moldings and large one-over-one wood windows with lunette transoms; projecting stone sill course beneath second-story windows; upper stories, brick cladding, corner quoins; tall second story windows with bracketed stone enframements; arched openings at first story; original mullions and transoms and paired wood windows; third-story eared stone window surrounds with projecting sills; original paired wood windows and mullions; stone entablature with NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY inscribed on frieze, molded cornice enriched with consoles and dentils; limestone balustrade with piers capped by finials and a copper railing decorated with anthemia.

Alterations: Metal window grates at basement and first story; center window converted to entry; concrete staircase with iron railings; metal ramp with metal railings; light fixtures flanking entrance; iron railings at second-story window; metal brackets for horizontal flag pole to support banners above entrance; framing for original canopy above roof terrace removed.

East Broadway façade:

Historic: Rusticated limestone cladding at basement and first story; stone stoop; console bracket above arched entrance surround; wood brick moldings, transom and lunette above entry; paired metal (calomine?)-and-glass doors; bronze Carnegie Library plaque to west of entry; paired wood windows with transoms in bays to west of entry; second story − tall windows with stone enframements; eastern window on entrance pavilion has console brackets supporting strongly projecting cornice; other second story windows have simpler stone frames with shallower cornices; original paired one-over-one wood windows with transoms; third-story eared stone window surrounds with projecting sills; original paired one-over-one wood windows; projecting east bay has fourth story; paired windows with simple molded surround; original paired one-over-one wood window sash; simple molded stone entablature and parapet; two recessed bays third story capped by limestone balustrade with piers and copper railing decorated with anthemia.

Alterations: Railings replaced on front stoop; metal lanterns flanking entry based on historic fixtures but installed c. 2004; metal window grates at basement and first story; paired metal doors; light fixture on soffit beneath arched entry, iron railings at base of second-story windows on west side of pavilion and in western two bays; western two bays framing for original canopy above roof terrace removed.

North (former Division Street) façade

Historic: Articulation matches East Broadway façade.

Alterations: First-floor entry screened off by chainlink enclosure; metal grates at basement and first-story windows; metal railings at base of second-story windows.

East Wall

Brick wall, originally adjoined other buildings to third story level; portions of wall parged and painted; fourth-floor penthouse windows on south side of the wall sealed and parged; north and south wings terminate in parapets with historic stone coping. At the center of the east wall

the wing sets back above the third story to create a light court. It is clad with standing seam metal and is lit by paired windows. The roof is edged with non-historic metal railings.

Roof

The roof was resurfaced in 2002-2004. There are several penthouses on the roof for mechanical equipment, air conditioners, and the elevator installed in 2002-2004. For the most part these are set well back from the designed facades, where they are screened from view by the balustrades running along the roofline. However some penthouses located near the east wall and are visible from East Broadway or Seward Park.

Landscape features

Historic: Original limestone and iron fence; sunken garden plots set between east pavilions and west (former Jefferson Street) front.

Alterations: Free-standing brick-and-concrete piers with light stanchions flanking staircase on west facade; brick and concrete walls for seating extending in front on north side of west façade; iron railing screening off basement entry south garden; metal conduits for electrical conduits and light fixtures attached to rear of fence; metal pipe supported by thin metal brackets extending from base of the south façade across the areaway to the east wall of the southern garden fence and then to outlet on the south side of the fence; gravel paving in northern garden; chainlink fence around storage area in north yard.

Report researched and written by
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NOTES

[1] Portions of this section were adapted from LPC, *511 Grand Street House Designation Report* (LP-2269) (New York: City of New York, 2007) and LPC, *513 Grand Street House Designation Report* (LP-2270) (New York: City of New York, 2007), both prepared by Marianne S. Percival. Sources for this section include Andrew S. Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Center for American Places, 2007); Joyce Mendelsohn, *The Lower East Side Remembered and Revisited* (New York: The Lower East Side Press, 2001); Ronald Saunders, *The Lower East Side: A Guide to Its Jewish Past in 99 New Photographs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979); Marc D. Angel and Jeffrey S. Gurock, "Jews," in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 620-23; Marion R. Casey, "Irish," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 598- 602; Hasia Diner, "American Jewishness on the Lower East Side," in *The Lower East Side Historic District: A Request for Evaluation by the Lower East Side Preservation Coalition for the Landmarks Preservation Commission* (LPC files, August 2006); Andrew Dolkart, "A History of the Lower East Side," in *The Lower East Side Historic District: A Request for Evaluation by the Lower East Side Preservation Coalition for the Landmarks Preservation Commission*; Leslie Harris, "African-Americans and the Lower East Side," in *The Lower East Side Historic District: A Request for Evaluation by the Lower East Side Preservation Coalition for the Landmarks Preservation Commission*; and Graham Hodges, "Lower East Side," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 696-97.

[2] Diner, "American Jewishness on the Lower East Side."

[3] One of the large stores on Grand Street was Lord & Taylor, which opened there in 1853; this store remained open until 1902. See LPC, *Lord & Taylor Building Designation Report* (LP-2271) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Marianne S. Percival.

[4] This section on the Aguilar Library and the Educational Alliance is based on LPC, *New York Public Library, Aguilar Branch Designation Report* (LP-1837) (New York: City of New York, 1996), prepared by Joseph C. Brooks; Aguilar Free Library Society of the City of New York, *Annual Reports,* 1886-1903; Harry Miller Lydenberg, "History of the New York Public Library," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 24 (Dec. 1920), 678-681.

[5] Lydenberg, 678.

[6] The Aguilar Library Society continued to operate its three branches during the 1890s and in 1896 opened its fourth branch in an old building at 176 East 110th Street. In 1898-99, it constructed a new building at 174 East 110th Street, which was enlarged with a new façade in 1904-05 (Herts & Tallant, a designated New York City Landmark).

[7] This section was adapted from LPC, *New York Public Library, Chatham Square Branch Designation Report* (LP-2098) (New York: City of New York, 2001), prepared by Mary B. Dierickx.

[8] In 1901, before the Carnegie bequest, New York City spent nine cents per capita on libraries, comparing poorly with Boston, which spent 50 cents per capita and Buffalo, at 41 cents per capita. Phyllis Dain, *The New York Public Library: a History of Its Founding and Early Years* (New York: New York Public Library, 1973), 215.

[9] The original 1901 agreement called for 65 libraries but in 1902 the estimated cost per branch was lowered and the total number was optimistically established as a maximum of 73. Because of rising costs the number of branches totaled just two more than the original 65. See Mary B. Dierickx, *The Architecture of Literacy: The Carnegie Libraries of New York City* (New York: Cooper Union and NYC Dept. of General Services, 1996), for more details.

[10] Andrew Carnegie to John Shaw Billings, 1901, Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, NY.

[11] No new grants were given after 1917. Abigail Van Slyck, *Free for All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 217.

[12] New York City Bureau of Municipal Investigation and Statistics, *Real Estate Owned by the City of New York Used for Public Libraries* (New York: City of New York, 1908), 109.

[13] New York City Department of Buildings, New Building Docket 126-1908. The Block and Lot Folder for the building could not be located at the New York City Municipal Archives.

[14] "The Seward Park Branch of the New York Public Library," *Architects' & Builders' Magazine* 42 (March 1911), 221. For plans of the library see also New York Public Library, *Report of the Director for the Year Ending December 31, 1909* (Jan 1910), 175-178.

[15] Walter Cook, "The Architecture of the Manhattan Branches," Address to the New York Library Club, May 12, 1904, quoted in Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (White Plains, NY: H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 37.

[16] Ibid, 36.

[17] For these and the other libraries cited see Dierickx, *Architecture of Literacy.*

[18] Cook, 36.

[19] "The Seward Park Branch," 221.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] On rooftop reading rooms see Van Slyck, 179-180; Koch, 55-56; "Libraries on the Roof," *The Sun*, July 24,1910, 6; "Roof Reading-Rooms," in New York Public Library, *Report of the Director for the Year Ending December 31,*

1909 (Jan 1910), 103; "An Open-Air Reading Room," *World's Work*, 12 (Sept. 1906), 8025;"Roof Reading-Rooms," New York Public Library *Branch Library News* , n. 6 (June 1918), aa-82.

[23] "An Open-Air Reading Room," 8025.

[24] This section on Babb, Cook & Welch is based on Mosette Broderick "Babb & Cook, 1877-1884 …," in *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940* ed. Robert B. Mackay, Anthony K. Baker, Carole A. Traynor (New York: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities: W.W. Norton, 1997), 58-61; *New York Public Library, Morrisania Branch (originally McKinley Square Branch) Designation Report* (LP-1996) (New York: City of New York, 1996), prepared by Donald Presa, 3-4; "Babb, Cook & Willard," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects,* ed. Adolph K Placzek (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 1, 121-122.

[25]Cook, 34.

[26] These include the Columbus Branch, the 67th Street Branch, the Webster Branch, the St. Agnes Branch, and the 96th Street Branch, 112-114 East 96th Street, in Manhattan and the Mott Haven Branch, 821 East 140th Street (1905, within the Mott Haven Historic District) and the Morrisania Branch, 610 East 169th Street, Bronx (1907-08, a designated New York City Landmark) in the Bronx. Cook & Welch were responsible for the West 40th Street Branch, 457 West 40th Street (1913) and Fort Washington Branch, 535 West 179th Street (1914).

[27] "East Side Leads in Book Reading, "*New York Times*, Mar. 9, 1913, 65. On the early readership at the Seward Park Branch see also "The Book-worms of New York," *The Independent*, Jan. 23, 1913, 199; "New Immigrants Studious," *New York Times*, Mar. 1, 1914. C4. New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Seward Park Branch Records, 1890-1989, Box 1, Annual Reports, 1915-21.

[28] The Seward Park Branch's importance for the Jewish immigrants of the Lower East Side is reflected in writings of the Russian immigrant poet Alter Brody, who set two poems "In the Circulating Library: Seward Park" and "In the Children's Reading Room," at the library. See Alter Brody, *A Family Album and Other Poems* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1918. The Landmarks Preservation Commission is grateful to Joyce Mendelsohn for this reference.

[29] George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 133.

[30] Rose wrote about her theories and experiences at the Seward Park Branch in a pamphlet, *Bridging the Gulf: Work with the Russian Jews and Other New Comers* (New York: Immigrant Publication Society, Inc., 1917). For Rose see also Celeste Tibbets, *Ernestine Rose and the Origins of the Schomburg Center* (New York: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1989).

[31] Annual Report, 1922.

[32] Bella Spewack, *Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1995), 68.

[33] Mendelsohn, 63; Lawrence Epstein, *At the Edge of a Dream: The Story of Jewish Immigrants on New York's Lower East Side, 1880-1920* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 195.

[34] For the library during the 1920s see Annual Reports, 1921-1930; "Learning Our Language," *The Evening World*, Jan. 27, 1921, 22;"Starving the Library," *New York Tribune*, Sept. 2, 1922, 6; "Book Shortage at Libraries Hinders Youth," *New York Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1922, 5; "More Liberal Appropriations Asked for Maintenance of N.Y. Public Library," *New Amsterdam News,* 12 Aug. 1925, 16; "Reading Habits of the City Show Wide Variety of Taste," *New York Times*, June 20, 1926, XX4.

[35] For Nella Larsen's work at the library see Hutchinson, 153-159; Thelma E. Berlack, "New Author Unearthed Right Here in Harlem," *New Amsterdam News* May 23, 1928, 16; "135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library is Interesting Activity Center," *New York Age*, Dec. 22, 1923, 8. For Pura Teresa Belpré see Lisa Sánchez González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 71-85; Julio L. Hernández-Delgado, "Pura Teresa Belpré, Storyteller and Pioneer Puerto Rican Librarian," *The Library Quarterly* 62. N. 4 (Oct. 1992), 425-440.

[36] Donald W. Fowle, "The New York Public Library, Seward Park Branch and the Neighborhood It Serves," film script, http://www.nypl.org/sits/default/files/seward_park_script_complete.pdf.

[37] "$483,000 Is Voted to Repair Libraries," *New York Times*, Apr. 9, 1948. 20; "Library Expansion Nears Realization," *New York Times*, May 7, 1949. 15; Seward Park Library to Reopen," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1950. 23; Annual Reports, July 1948-June 1949, July 1950; New York City Department of Buildings, Alt. 709-46, Building Notice 1798-49.

[38] Ballon and Jackson, 289-91.

[39] Kazan had already been involved in the creation of several private, middle-income cooperatives on the Lower East Side including the Amalgamated Dwellings (1930), the Hillman Houses (1947-50), and the East River Housing (1954-56), the latter also a Title I project. He also developed several other cooperatives throughout Greater New York including Co-Op City in the Bronx and Rochdale Village in Queens. The architect of the Seward Park Houses was Herman J. Jessor.

[40] The Seward Park Houses were so popular that "during construction Kazan conceived of an addition, called Seward Park Extension, for a site to the immediate north, bounded by Willett, Grand, Essex, Broome, and Delancey streets." The Seward Park Extension Urban Renewal Area (SPEURA) was officially created in 1965, but by that time there was substantial organized opposition to urban renewal projects and the plan was never fully realized. A portion of the site was cleared in 1967 and several large blocks have remained undeveloped since. The SPEURA plan expired in 2005, forty years after its adoption. Ballon and Jackson, 290-91; New York City Economic Development Corporation.

[41] The Bialystoker Center itself later filed plans to demolish its Home for the Aged and replace it with a 14-story tower. The proposed building, to be designed by W.N. Berger (NB 156-76), was never built.

[42] "Annual Report," 1951.

[43] "Not nearly as Jewish," quote from Annual Report, 1953-54. On the demand for Judaica see also Annual Reports, 1954-55, 1956-57, 1960-61.

[44] Robert Fox, *Greatest Hits*, 4.

[45] Annual Report, 1964-65.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "Chinese Diaspora Series," *New York Times*, Sept. 3, 1984, 11.

[48] New York Public Library, "Opening a New Door at the Lower East Side's Historic Seward Park Library," http://www.nypl.org/node/65945, accessed Apr. 15, 2013; DB, "Seward Park Library [NYPL] http://askanewyorker.com/phorum/read.php?12,1731, posted, Feb. 1, 2003, accessed Apr. 15, 2013.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

The Commission further finds that, among their important qualities, the New York Public Library, Seward Park Branch, built in 1909 to the designs of Babb, Cook & Welch, is an architecturally distinguished building that has played a significant role in the cultural history of the Lower East Side and has had particular importance for the Jewish community of New York City; that it was one of 20 branch libraries in Manhattan and one of 67 total in the five boroughs funded by steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's 1901 donation of 5.2 million dollars to the New York Public Library; that it continued the work and inherited the collection of the East Broadway Branch, which had originally been the downtown branch of the Aguilar Library (established 1886) and was located in the Educational Alliance Building; that the Seward Park Branch housed book collections for adults, young adults, and children, as well as foreign-language collections, including an extensive Yiddish language collection; that it offered classes in English for immigrants and worked in conjunction with the Educational Alliance, the Henry Street Settlement, the leading Yiddish-language newspapers and cultural organizations to provide programs that made it one of the most heavily used of the branches within the New York Public Library system and a major cultural force in the Lower East Side; that long after the Jewish population of the Lower East Side began to disperse, the library's collections of Hebrew and Yiddish literature, lectures by leading Jewish intellectuals, and groups like the Yiddish Mothers Club made it a center for Jewish intellectual life, drawing participants from throughout the city; that by the mid-20th century, the neighborhood around the library had begun to change, with major urban renewal projects like the Seward Park Cooperative housing development, completed in 1960, reshaping the physical and social landscape; that the Seward Park Branch responded to an expanding population of Puerto Ricans, African-Americans, and Chinese and Asian immigrants and young artists by becoming a center for Civil Rights and anti-poverty programs, adding materials in Chinese, Spanish, and other languages, and hosting cultural events including an annual film festival; that Babb, Cook & Welch, was one of the leading architectural firms in late-19th and early-20th century New York and was one of a handful of firms chosen to carry out designs for the Carnegie libraries; that this three-story brick and limestone-trimmed Italian Renaissance Revival style building features a rusticated limestone base, arched window and door openings with keystones and console brackets, molded window surrounds; rusticated quoining at the building corners, a limestone frieze with the "New York Public Library" inscribed below a modillioned cornice, a limestone balustrade with piers capped by finials, and a copper railing of anthemia running between each pier; that the railing supported the canvas awning for an "open-air" reading room on the roof; that it was one of five such roof-top reading rooms constructed on branch library buildings in the early 1900s and is the only one to survive on a building still in active use as a library; that other key features of the design included the large first-story windows intended to allow passersby to glimpse the readers in the main reading room; the dignified simplicity of the design reflecting "public and municipal character" of the building; and the

incorporation of small fenced gardens to provide a visual link with Seward Park; that renovated in 2002-2004, the Seward Park Branch continues to serve a diverse population and is a significant reminder of the Lower East Side's rich heritage.

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, Seward Park Branch, 192 East Broadway (aka 192-194 East Broadway, Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 311, Lot 31 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Frederick Bland, Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, Christopher Moore,
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners

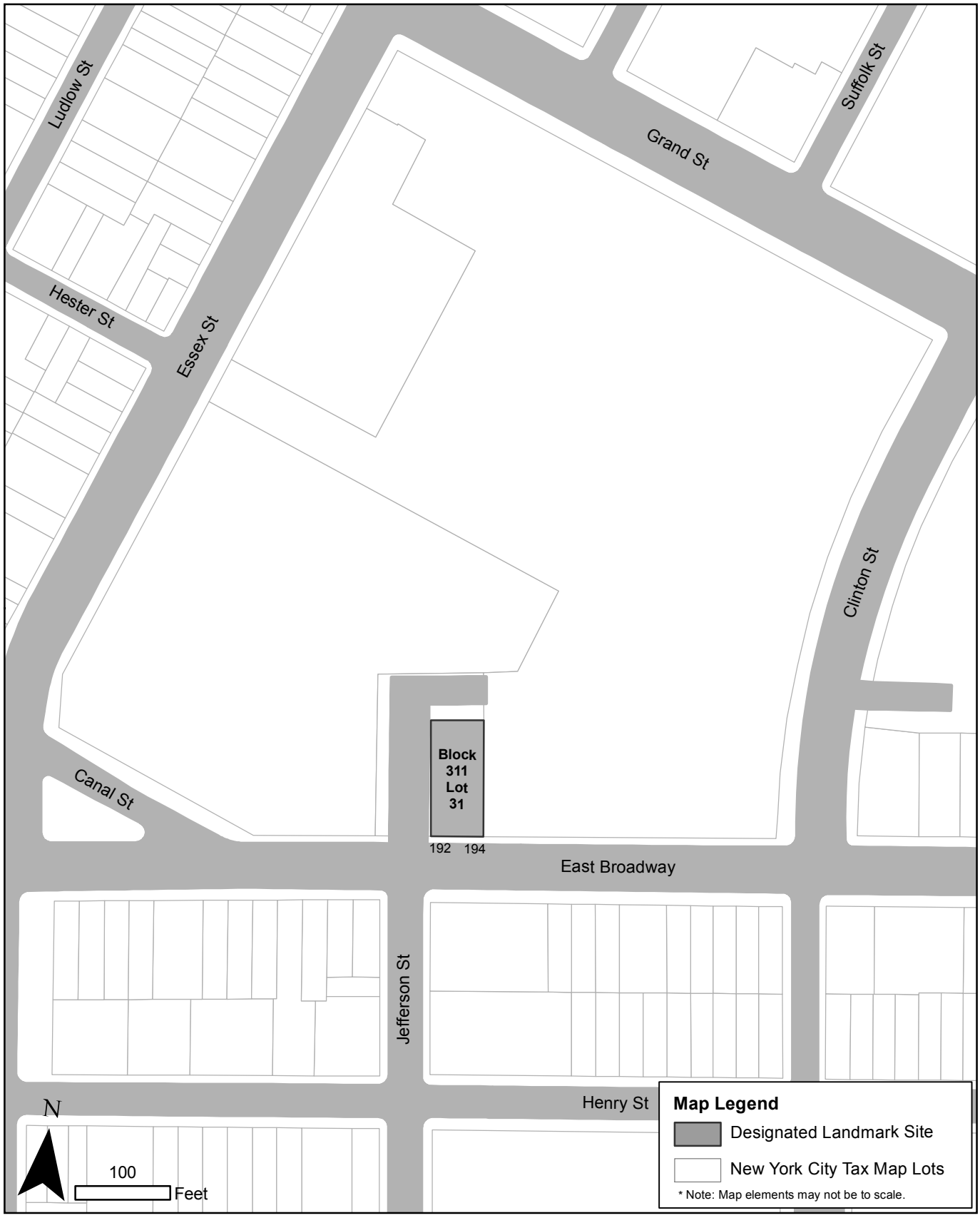
New York Public Library, Seward Park Branch
192 East Broadway (aka 192-194 East Broadway), Manhattan
Borough of Manhattan Tax Map 311, Lot 31
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2013)

New York Public Library, Seward Park Branch
Top: Christopher D. Brazee (2013)
Bottom: New York Public Library (1910)

East Broadway façade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2013)

Photos: Christopher D. Brazee (2013)

The Rooftop Reading Room
Top: Amanda Davis (2007)
Middle and Bottom: New York Public Library



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, SEWARD PARK BRANCH (LP-2531), 192 East Broadway (aka 192-194 East Broadway). Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 311, Lot 31

Designated: June 25, 2013

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM. Date: June 25, 2013