



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

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March 28, 2013

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York City, New York 10007

Dear Commissioner Tierney:

The Historic Districts Council submits for your consideration Requests for Evaluation for twelve magnificent, public spaces in one of the city's most beloved individual landmarks, the main branch building of the New York Public Library. The rooms – the South-North Gallery, the D. Samuel and Jeane H. Gottesman Exhibition Hall, the Sue and Edward Wachenheim III Gallery, the DeWitt Wallace Periodicals Room, the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, the Celeste Bartos Forum, the 42nd Street Staircases, the Edna B. Salomon Room, the Bill Blass Public Catalog Room, the Deborah, Jonathan F.P., Samuel Priest, and Adam Raphael Rose Main Reading Room, the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art & Architecture Room, and the Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room for Rare Books and Manuscripts– are all important pieces that add up to the memorable experience of visiting the library.

As the 1974 LPC designation report for interior spaces of the library stated, “The interior of this great building is as magnificent as its exterior”. Only the main lobby, north and south staircases, and the McGraw Rotunda were landmarked at that time. We feel that other public spaces of the building are equally magnificent and are due equal protection. The progression to the Rose Main Reading Room - from the street, up the monumental steps of the exterior landmark, through Astor Hall, up the sweeping stairs, and through the McGraw Rotunda – has been aptly described by architectural historian Kate Lemos as like “an unfolding book, with anticipation mounting at every turn.” It seems strange that the climax of the book, of the experience of the library – the Bill Blass Public Catalog Room and the Rose Main Reading Room – are not part of the landmarked story.

These spectacular, soaring rooms, which many people have automatically assumed were already designated, along with the special collections and reading rooms, having the more intimate scale of private libraries or clubrooms, provide dignified spaces for learning and work for all. They certainly fit the bill for possessing a special sense of place and include the “monumental scale and outstanding quality, ... some of the finest stonework and vaulting in the City,... ornamental plaster ceilings ... of great elegance, ... [and] murals and decorative objects [that] are among the best of their kind” lauded in the 1974 report.

The following RFEs are but brief overviews of the library's highly ornate interiors. Much more in depth descriptions can be found in Mark Allan Hewitt, Kate Lemos, William Morrison and Charles D. Warren's *Carrère & Hastings: Architects* (Acanthus Press, 2006) and Henry Hope Reed and Francis Morrone's *The*



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New York Public Library: The Architecture and Decoration of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
(W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

As always, we thank you for your attention and work to preserve and protect our city's architectural and cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

Simeon Bankoff
Executive Director