

ASTOR LIBRARY (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Building), 425 Lafayette Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1849, Completed 1881. South wing architect Alexander Saeltzer 1849-1853, center section architect Griffith Thomas 1856-1859, north wing architect Thomas Stent 1879-1881.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 544, Lot 16.

On September 21, 1965, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Astor Library and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Calendar No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven witnesses spoke in favor of designation including the representative of the Borough President's Community Planning Board No. 2. The representative of the building's present owner and the attorney for the contract purchaser of the property both opposed designation. In a letter to the Commission, the Deputy Borough President of Manhattan supported the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Astor Library is one of the most important Victorian public buildings remaining today in New York City. It is a key building in recording the continuum of New York City architecture. This building records in an expressive way that phase of early Victorian architecture when architects re-interpreted classic academic forms to promote original experimentation in their design.

The Library is a three-story brick and stone building with basement and attic story. This structure has special value because each of the three portions of its development has been carefully maintained and constituted a source of stylistic influence over a wide area. Modifications for the most part have been few. The Library is developed in a symmetrical plan in an early Renaissance manner. Most of the architectural details of the building stem from North Italian Renaissance work of the first half of the 15th century.

The building has important historical associations. It was built as a major contribution to the City by a family which has been an important factor in New York's development. The Library was the first great classical library broadly accessible to the public and set the example for such institutions as the Morgan Library and the Huntington Library. In this century this building has been the place where thousands of persons have been helped by another leading private charitable organization.

At the public hearing, the representative of The Washington Square Association said, "This sturdy building, a dignified example of mid-19th century architecture, can have many years of useful life ahead and, if kept up, will continue to form an anchor in the anticipated renewal of an otherwise rundown section at the edge of our neighborhood."

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Astor Library 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 its important qualities, the Astor Library is an outstanding Early Victorian public building, that it was specially designed to house the first great classical library made available to the general public, that it is a rare example of a very significant New York City building which has been continuously maintained with its original architectural character preserved and that because of this it has great documentary value to historians.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Astor Library (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Building), 425 Lafayette Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 544, Lot 16, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.