

LOW MEMORIAL LIBRARY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, north of the College Walk (West 116th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue), Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1895, completed 1897, architects McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1973, Lot 1 in part, consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On June 14, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Low Memorial Library, Columbia University and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 36). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. In a letter to the Commission, Grayson Kirk, President of Columbia University, said that the University was "happy to accept this designation."

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Low Memorial Library is a majestic building of truly monumental proportions. It is situated on a slight rise overlooking the south campus of Columbia University. This Roman stone building, designed in the form of a Greek cross, displays great classic grandeur. One of its chief features is an imposing Ionic portico (porch), consisting of ten superb fluted columns, supporting a simple cornice and high attic story, inscribed with references to the original King's College charter. An octagonal shaped drum, containing large semi-circular (lunette) windows, rises above the central portion of the building. Crowning the whole is a round low dome. Modelled on the Pantheon in Rome, the library building exhibits but little ornamental decoration and relies for its beauty on the strength of its pure classic form.

This remarkable building occupies an important site on the campus and in this setting plays a major role in the academic life of the University. Centrally located on the long axis of the campus, north of College Walk (116th Street), the building is separated from the street, by several flights of steps, two landings and a wide esplanade which terminates in landscaped areas. Located midway up the steps is the world renowned statue of Alma Mater, by Daniel Chester French, her outstretched arms welcoming all who come on campus. At the annual commencement ceremonies, weather permitting, the impressive graduation ceremony is held here in this dramatic setting with the library in the background.

Columbia University, chartered by George II in 1754 as Kings College, is the oldest college in New York State. Columbia came to Morningside Heights in 1897 and Low Library was the first major building erected on the present university site. The gift of Columbia president Seth Low, it was dedicated to the memory of his father Abiel A. Low. Once the main library of the University, it now serves as the administrative center where major academic gatherings and convocations are held. The interior rotunda, surrounded with magnificent Ionic columns, is especially well adapted to receptions. Among the noted guests that the University has received under the domed rotunda, have been King George VI of England and his wife, Queen Elizabeth, Sir Winston Churchill, President Auriol of France and Nehru of India.

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 Low Memorial Library, Columbia University 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, Low Memorial Library is a majestic example of Roman architecture, that it is monumental in scale with an impressive Ionic portico, that the building is dramatically sited at a central location on the college campus, that it has served for the entertainment of visitors of world-renown, and that it has always been a rallying point in the cultural life of this great University.

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 Low Memorial Library, Columbia University, located north of the College Walk (West 116th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue), Borough of Manhattan and designates as its related Landmark Site that part of Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1973, Lot 1, which contains the land on which the described building is situated.