

CENTRAL LIBRARY HISTORY

When Central Library first opened to the public on February 1, 1941 it already had a long history of planning, design and construction. Originally designed as a Beaux-Arts building by Raymond Almirall when ground was broken in 1912, it was completed in the Deco Moderne style by architects Alfred Morton Githens and Francis Keally. In the seventy-five years since its opening, Central Library has adapted to changes in public use, library collections and technology. Today, Central Library is as popular and relevant a landmark as it has ever been. In 2015, the Central Library received over 1.3 million visits, and items from its collections were circulated over 1.7 million times.

1889 The Brooklyn Park Commission is authorized to select a site for Central Library.

1905 Legislature legalizes the choice of the plot at Prospect Park Plaza (Grand Army Plaza).

1912 Ground is broken for architect Raymond F. Almirall's Beaux-Arts building. The cornerstone of the building is laid with elaborate ceremonies.

1915 TO 1927

Construction slows down and eventually ceases as the nation is hit with economic difficulties due to World War I and the Depression. Mayor John F. Hylan refuses to support further appropriations for the building's construction.

1930 A new Library president and chief librarian are appointed. With the help of Brooklyn Borough President Raymond V. Ingersoll, they decide to change Central Library's design. The purpose of the revised design is to cut costs, create a more modern look and meet contemporary library needs.

1935 Architects Alfred Morton Githens and Francis Keally are selected for the project. Sculptors Carl P. Jennewein and Thomas Hudson Jones are commissioned to create the entranceway's bronze screen and sculpted columns.

1937 The Board of Estimate approves plans for a \$1.88 million structure after much public and critical praise of the Githens and Keally model, with construction to begin

FEBRUARY 1, 1941

The Children's Room and Central Circulation Room are briefly opened to the public. More than 2,500 people visit, and two days later, the Library begins regular service.

MARCH 29, 1941

A ceremony, attended by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, is held dedicating the building to former Borough President Raymond Ingersoll.

1955 The second floor reading rooms open and public space nearly doubles.

- 1957** The Library gains possession of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* "morgue" (clippings) files and records from the newspaper's last publisher, Frank D. Schroth.
- 1960S** Further expansions include the creation of new and larger reading rooms by extending the central portion of the first and second floors into what were once the courtyard and garden. These changes mask the original rear façade.
- 1973** After four years of renovations (including installation of escalators and air conditioning) and completion of the Flatbush Avenue wing, Central Library resumes normal operations. The renovation provides for an expanded Audio-Visual Division.
- 1987** Five new computer catalog terminals are installed. The terminals are part of a guide to materials called an On-Line Cataloging System owned by Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library and Queens Borough Public Library.
- 1990S** A two-floor addition is built on top of the curving, windowless extension that houses the library's original Branch Distribution Room and loading docks.
- 1997** Renovations of Central Library's Grand Lobby remove the card catalogues, replacing them with the library's OPAC which can access the entire library's holdings.

MAY 6, 1997

The Landmarks Preservation Commission grants the library exterior landmark status.

- 1999** After a "virtual" groundbreaking ceremony, renovation begins on Central Library's new 10,500-square-foot Youth Wing. The architectural plans include restoring the wing's ceiling to its original height and refurbishing wooden window seats and oak bookcases around the room's perimeter.

MAY 4, 2000

The \$2.5 million renovation and expansion of the Eastern Parkway wing is completed. The new Youth Wing officially opens, creating a contemporary space for state-of-the-art technology, expanded book collections, new programs and exclusively designed areas for children and teens. The Technology Loft in the Youth Wing adds 36 iMac computers.

- 2002** Central Library is added to the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places.
- 2003** Central Library's Brooklyn Collection digitizes the first sixty-one years of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. The world-renowned *Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online 1841-1902*, becomes the Library's most important electronic resource.
- 2006** A major renovation of the second floor balcony results in a number of new spaces, the most striking of which is the beautiful new Brooklyn Collection and reading room.
- 2007** The S. Stevan Dweck Center for Contemporary Culture, a 189-seat auditorium, opens and quickly establishes itself as a premier Brooklyn destination for free lectures, musical performances, and other cultural events. At the same time, the beautifully renovated plaza reopens and hosts seasonal music concerts and becomes the borough's largest and favorite access point for free wireless internet.
- 2012** The Passport Service Center opens on the Central Library's first floor. In the first year of operation the service raised over \$500,000 for the Library.
- 2013** The Shelby White and Leon Levy Information Commons opens on January 15, 2013 on the first floor of the Central Library thanks to a \$3.5 million gift from the Leon Levy Foundation—the largest in BPL history. The new space features six public meeting rooms, a recording studio, 25 advanced computer workstations, and a training lab.
- 2014** With assistance from Newspapers.com the remainder of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* is digitized, along with 63 other local newspapers, which then can be accessed as part of the Brooklyn Newsstand.
- 2015** An IDNYC office opens on Central Library's first floor. In its first year over 40,000 municipal IDs are issued through the Central Library office.

CENTRAL LIBRARY

10 Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238
718.230.2100

HOURS

Mon-Thu 9 am – 9 pm
Fri, Sat 9 am – 6 pm
Sun 1 pm – 5 pm

