

YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YMCA) BUILDING, 135th STREET (later HARLEM) BRANCH (now Harlem YMCA), 180 West 135th Street (aka 174-184 West 135th Street), Manhattan. Built 1931-32; plans by the Architectural Bureau of the National Council of the YMCA; James C. Mackenzie, Jr., architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1919, Lot 53.

On September 16, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch (now Harlem YMCA), and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9).¹ The hearing was continued to October 21, 1997 (Item No. 5), and to December 9, 1997 (Item No. 2). The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Representatives of the Harlem YMCA, Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, and State Senator David A. Paterson spoke in favor of designation.

Summary

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street Branch, was constructed in 1931-32 according to plans prepared by the Architectural Bureau of the National Council of the YMCA and to the design and under the supervision of architect James C. Mackenzie, Jr. This branch was the successor to the "Colored Men's Branch" of the YMCA, located on West 53rd Street between 1901 and 1919, and the West 135th Street Branch YMCA, built in 1918-19 at No. 181, across the street from the later building. African-American YMCAs were the result of the YMCA's official policy of racial segregation, from the organization's beginnings in the United States in 1851 until 1946. Though excluded from white YMCAs, African-Americans were encouraged to form separate branches, which became autonomous community centers. The 135th Street Branch YMCA, partially funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Julius Rosenwald, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund, was called at the time of its completion the largest such facility for African-American men and boys, as well as one of the best-equipped YMCA buildings, in the United States. Eleven stories and clad in brick with neo-Georgian style details, the YMCA is C-shaped in plan above the four-story base, has setbacks, and is dominated by a tower that continues to be a major presence on the Harlem skyline. In 1936, the name of the 135th Street Branch was officially changed to the Harlem Branch YMCA. It has served as one of Harlem's most important recreational and cultural centers, and has been a significant purveyor of safe and affordable accommodations. Over the years the "Y" has had associations with many notable figures in the Harlem and African-American communities. The facility is known today as the Harlem YMCA.



C. 1932

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its African-American Branches²

The first Young Men's Christian Association [hereafter YMCA] in the United States was established in Boston in 1851, seven years after the organization's founding in London. Interdenominational and dedicated to the spiritual, social, intellectual, and physical improvement of boys and young men, the YMCA eventually provided libraries and reading rooms, lectures and educational programs, recreational and residential facilities, and summer camps. Racial segregation remained the official policy of the American YMCA from its beginnings until 1946. African-Americans were excluded from white YMCAs,³ but were encouraged to form separate branches after the Civil War, and particularly during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. African-American communities were faced, however, with the difficult task of funding their own YMCAs. In 1889, William A. Hunton, the first paid African-American YMCA official (who was appointed international secretary of the YMCA's Colored Work Department in 1890) stressed that "not one of our forty-one [African-American] Associations has a building of its own, or a gymnasium, or baths, or a lecture-hall capable of seating over 200 people."⁴ Hunton was joined by Jesse E. Moorland in 1898, and the two men promoted YMCA work and fundraising among African-Americans. As African-American leaders, particularly in the cities, embraced the missions and programs of the YMCA as a means for racial advancement, African-American branches of the YMCA grew steadily in the early twentieth century, forming an autonomous organization. As stated in a recent study, "Ironically, jim crowism not only excluded African Americans from white YMCAs but also provided for the emergence of black-controlled community agencies and the development of African-American leadership."⁵

Among cities having African-American YMCAs at the turn of the century, only those in Norfolk, Richmond, Baltimore, New Haven, and Springfield, Ohio, owned their buildings, the others meeting mostly in inadequate rented quarters. The campaign to purchase existing buildings and to construct new African-American YMCA buildings attracted a number of white philanthropists. George Foster Peabody was the first to fund a new facility, located in his hometown of Columbus, Ga., and finished in 1907. John D. Rockefeller, Sr., pledged financial support in 1906 for a new YMCA for Washington, D.C., which was completed in 1912. The most significant figure in the construction of African-American YMCAs was Julius Rosenwald, the president (1910-25) and later chairman of the board (to 1932) of Sears, Roebuck & Co., who in 1910 offered \$25,000 for

an African-American YMCA in each community that could raise \$75,000. Rosenwald's philanthropy resulted in twenty-six YMCA, and two YWCA, buildings.⁶ While W.E.B. DuBois, editor of *Crisis*, praised Rosenwald's generosity, he admonished the organization: "It is an unchristian and unjust and dangerous procedure which segregates colored people in the Y.M.C.A. . . . We may be glad of the colored Y.M.C.A. movement on the one hand, on the other hand we must never for a single moment fail to recognize the injustice which made it an unfortunate necessity."⁷

The African-American YMCAs formed an important national network of community centers that "provided programs and facilities previously unavailable to most African Americans," including gymnasiums, swimming pools, cafeterias, reading rooms, night schools, and dormitories, the latter particularly significant as they were "practically the only places where black male travelers could find comfortable and safe sleeping accommodations outside the homes of relatives and friends."⁸ As educational, religious, cultural, and social centers, they served as meeting places for various community organizations such as choirs, clubs, theater groups, and professional, fraternal, and civil rights groups. Funding was a continual problem for these facilities, and survival of African-American YMCAs was uncertain during the Depression; programs continued with the assistance of the federal government through the Works Progress and National Youth Administrations.

The Colored Men's Branch of the YMCA in New York City, 1901-1919⁹

The YMCA in New York City was organized in 1852, with a meeting and reading room at 659 Broadway. The "Colored Young Men's Christian Association," which had formed in 1867 but was independent of the YMCA organization, met at 97 Wooster Street, called "the only free reading-room and place of social resort of a healthful moral character for colored young men in the city" in the YMCA's *Annual Report* of 1867-68. This was the third "Colored YMCA" in the United States¹⁰ and the first group to send a black delegate to an annual YMCA convention (1867). Needing "more commodious and accessible rooms,"¹¹ it moved to the Freedman's Bank building on Bleeker Street in Greenwich Village in 1870, but apparently disbanded the next year.

A later group began meeting in 1900 through the Mount Olivet Baptist Church, 159-161 West 53rd Street, in the "Negro Tenderloin" neighborhood of midtown Manhattan. This "Colored Men's Branch" was accepted as an official member of the YMCA in February 1901,

though it was considered a "special" branch as compared to the six regular branches in Manhattan.¹² Charles T. Walker, pastor of Mount Olivet, stating that "So much trouble is made by the poor fellows having no place to go when they come here. What we need is a place that shall be known to every young man in the South as a home where he can come and find friends...",¹³ helped to raise money in the black community to lease a building at 132 West 53rd Street. In 1903, two rowhouses at 252-254 West 53rd Street were purchased. Called "the center of intellectual and social life of New York Negroes in the first decade of the twentieth century,"¹⁴ the Colored Men's Branch, with an office, reading room, a small gymnasium, and dormitory rooms, became one of the leading large-city African-American YMCAs.

The West 135th Street Branch YMCA, 1919-1932¹⁵

As Harlem emerged as the heart of the African-American community in Manhattan in the early twentieth century, most of the major African-American institutions relocated to Harlem. One, the Colored Branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (founded in 1905), moved from a location on 53rd Street to West 132nd Street in 1913. A Joint Campaign Committee of the YMCA and YWCA, under Jesse Moorland (then international secretary of the YMCA Colored Men's Department), assisted in raising funds for new buildings for both groups. Henry C. Parker, of the noted African-American real estate firm of Nail & Parker,¹⁶ was chairman of the committee to select a property in Harlem for the Colored Men's Branch of the YMCA. A lot at 181 West 135th Street was purchased in 1916, and a six-story YMCA building, the West 135th Street Branch, was constructed in 1918-19 to the neo-Renaissance style design of John F. Jackson. Of the total cost of \$375,000, Julius Rosenwald contributed \$25,000. By the mid-1920s, the vicinity of West 135th Street and Seventh Avenue became the hub of African-American social and intellectual life in Harlem. Among the institutions that were located near the YMCA were the New York Public Library (and Schomburg Collection), 103 West 135th Street; the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People offices, 224 West 135th Street; the New York Urban League, 202 West 136th Street; *N.Y. Amsterdam News* offices, 2271 Seventh Avenue; and St. Philip's P.E. Church, 210-216 West 134th Street.¹⁷

Due to the rapid increase in the African-American population of Harlem, the West 135th Street Branch YMCA was already inadequate and overcrowded by the 1920s, although the building was also considered one of only three "modern" YMCA facilities in Manhattan. Discussion of larger quarters began in 1927. The New York City YMCA, embarking on an extensive new building program, conducted a study over the question of

a new building versus an addition for the West 135th Street Branch. A committee under Dr. Channing H. Tobias, senior secretary of the Colored Work Department of the National Council of the YMCA, made recommendations on the occupational, recreational, and educational needs of Harlem residents, emphasizing the serious need for housing for single men, and observed that "because of the social, cultural, and economic restrictions that are found in the Negro's life, the institution [of the YMCA] assumes a significance that is far reaching, and possessed of great possibilities."¹⁸ Action on the West 135th Street Branch YMCA, however, was delayed for several years.

The 135th Street Branch YMCA¹⁹

The New York City YMCA finally resolved in March 1930 to construct a new building for the West 135th Street Branch. A wide area of central Harlem was canvassed for a site, but the state's Multiple Dwellings Law (1929) was found to restrict much of the area to lower-scale residential usage. In July, the YMCA acquired a group of dwellings on the south side of West 135th Street (Nos. 174-184), opposite the existing branch, for a building site. The Building Committee of the New York City YMCA's Board of Directors authorized a contract with the Architectural Bureau of the National Council of the YMCA for "its full architectural and furnishing services in connection with the plans for the building and furnishings," and made recommendations on an architect.²⁰ It was announced in September that James C. Mackenzie, Jr., had been selected as architect, the YMCA expecting "that in collaboration with the Architectural Bureau of the National Council, the new architect will be able to produce a building which will not only be satisfactory from an operating standpoint, but an ornament to the community in which it is located."²¹ Work on preparing plans was suspended at the end of 1930 as the YMCA solicited subscriptions, unsuccessfully, to enable construction of a building larger than that originally considered. In March 1931, however, the Board of Directors appropriated \$1.05 million dollars for the proposed building, so that twenty-five additional dormitory rooms and other facilities could be included in the project. After the Building Committee approved floor plans, elevations, and a model of the building, plans were filed in June. The *New York Times* noted that the upper seven stories of the eleven-story building would "be given over to sleeping quarters to fill a need that has outgrown the facilities of the present building."²² Edward P. Corning Co., Inc., recently general contractor for the YMCA's William Sloane House, was given the construction contract.

Ground was broken in November 1931, at a ceremony attended by several hundred people. The *Times* reported that "the plans for the building were prepared by the Architectural Bureau of the National Council of the Y.M.C.A., with the general work under the supervision of James Mackenzie, Jr."²³ The building's cornerstone was laid in May 1932, at another larger ceremony that was preceded by a parade, at which time the *Times* stated that the structure would be "the largest building in the world for Negro young men and boys and one of the most completely equipped Y.M.C.A. buildings in the country" and that speakers "paid tribute to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the late Julius Rosenwald and the Phelps-Stokes foundation, whose contributions were largely responsible for making the new structure possible."²⁴ Though work was delayed nearly six weeks due to a building trade workers strike, the structure was completed in December and was dedicated and opened on January 1, 1933, launching an eight-day festival during which there were some 15,000 visitors, 2000 members joined, and 70 percent of the dormitory rooms were filled. The question of a name for the new branch had been raised in 1931, and it was decided in October 1932 by the New York City YMCA to officially shorten the previously used name to "135th Street Branch." Cleveland E. Dodge, president of the New York City YMCA, announced that this was the final unit of the YMCA's six-year, twelve-million-dollar building program.

An eleven-story institutional building, clad in brick with neo-Georgian style details, the 135th Street Branch YMCA is C-shaped above the four-story base and has setbacks, a form influenced by the Multiple Dwellings Law. The two main entrances (originally to separate boys' and men's sections) feature brick and cast-stone enframements with broken-scroll pediments embellished with the YMCA symbol, a triangle. Dominated by a tower having a pyramidal roof, prominent chimney, and large YMCA signs, the building continues to be a major presence on the Harlem skyline. Planned to accommodate 4000 men and 1000 boys, amenities of the building originally included a kitchen and cafeteria, dining rooms, club rooms, a music/hobby room, and a theater in the basement; separate social rooms for boys and men, a chapel, a billiard room, a "log cabin room," and offices on the first floor; a swimming pool, showers, lockers, a banquet hall, and offices on the second floor; two gymnasiums and handball court on the third floor; and 254 dormitory rooms. Paintings and murals by Alfred Floegel, William E. Scott, and Aaron Douglas, the latter two African-American artists, adorned interior spaces.

The Architect²⁵

Born in Lawrenceville, N.J., and educated at Columbia University and the *École des Beaux-Arts*, James Cameron Mackenzie, Jr. (1887-1963) began his professional career working as a draftsman in the office of McKim, Mead & White between 1913 and 1916. During World War I, he served on the Mexican border and with the Field Artillery of the American Expeditionary Forces, rising to the rank of major. Remaining active in the military, Mackenzie helped to organize the 17th Regiment of the New York State Guard during World War II, and in 1949 achieved the rank of Brigadier General. Mackenzie began his architectural practice in 1919, and was briefly partnered with Henry M. Polhemus in Polhemus & Mackenzie (1917) and with Lewis A. Coffin, Jr., in Polhemus, Mackenzie & Coffin (1920-21). Among his principal designs were the neo-Georgian style Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church (1926), 834 Morris Avenue (Concourse Village East), the Bronx; Union Apartments (1926), 250 East 105th Street, for the Union Settlement Association; the neo-Regency style John Sloane House (1931-32), 48-50 East 92nd Street;²⁶ the 135th Street Branch YMCA (1931-32); the neo-Georgian style Reader's Digest Administration Building (1937), Chappaqua, N.Y.; Sheepshead Bay Houses (1937), Brooklyn, and Jacob Riis Houses (1949), Manhattan, two low-income projects for the New York Housing Authority; the Naval Training Center (1942), Memphis, Tennessee; the redevelopment of Liberty Island (1950); the Naval Air Base (1953), Port Lyautey, Morocco; and the Animal Husbandry Building (1958), New York State College of Agriculture, Cornell University. Mackenzie authored, with Richard V.N. Gambrill, *Sporting Stables and Kennels* (1935).

Later History: Harlem Branch YMCA²⁷

Henry K. Craft, the first executive director (1932-46)²⁸ of the 135th Street Branch YMCA, stated after its opening that he was optimistic about its future, but expressed worries about financing. An observer noted in 1936 that "Harlem looks to the 'Y' as one of its most prominent cultural centers. . . This \$1,050,000 building which costs \$156,000 per year to maintain, has a staff of sixty members. But an additional voluntary group of over 250, has much to do with the cultural advancement of the Harlemiter. . . This is the only high-class club house for men in the community. . ."²⁹ Serving an estimated 2500 daily visitors, the branch was further assisted in the late 1930s by 55 employees from the National Youth Administration.³⁰ The name of the 135th Street Branch was officially changed to the "Harlem Branch"³¹ on January 1, 1936. Due to the popularity of the YMCA and the growth of the African-American community in Harlem, the older YMCA building on the

north side of 135th Street returned to YMCA use that year, as the Harlem Branch Annex, housing additional dormitory rooms and the Boys' Department.³²

The Harlem Branch YMCA served a variety of functions in the community, aside from its role as a recreational center. A YMCA publication in 1934 boasted that "as a community center it surpasses in the number of community activities carried on within the Association building any of the New York Y.M.C.A.'s or any other organization located in the Borough of Manhattan."³³ It has been a significant purveyor of safe and affordable accommodations for black men (and, after 1964, women)³⁴ in New York. (It was said in 1936 that "many of the best known (unmarried) men of the section live at the 'Y.' And when some out-of-towner is in the city, one can be sure of locating him there.")³⁵ As an educational, cultural, and religious center, it has provided a meeting place for numerous groups, including several with literary and political import in earlier years, such as the Harlem Writers' Workshop (founded 1945), the Negro Technical Association's New York chapter, and the National Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights (1940s). The Little Theater performed in the basement theater. Over the years the West 135th Street and 135th Street (later Harlem) Branches of the YMCA have had associations with many notable figures in the Harlem and African-American communities, who lived or stayed at the YMCA, participated in its programs, served as a director, or supported it financially. These have included writers Claude McKay, Langston Hughes (who began as a feature editor on the staff of the branch's newsletter *The New Sign* in 1931), Richard Wright, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, John Henrik Clarke, and Ralph Ellison; civil rights champions Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King; diplomat Ralph J. Bunche; U.S. Army Colonel (later General) Benjamin O. Davis; scientist/educator George Washington Carver; Walter White, NAACP secretary; bibliophile/curator Arthur A. Schomburg; Matt Henson, North Pole explorer; photographer Gordon Parks; artists Aaron Douglas, William E. Scott, and Romare Bearden; athletes Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella (star Brooklyn Dodgers players, who coached boys in athletics and calisthenics after 1948), Joe Louis, "Sugar" Ray Robinson, Jesse Owens, Willie Mays, Mel Walker, Ben Johnson, Johnny Woodruff, Cornelius Johnson, John Henry Lewis, and Wilt Chamberlain; and, from the realm of theater and music, Paul Robeson, Will Marion Cook, Jules Bledsoe, Roland Hayes, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Jimmy Lunceford, Lucky Roberts, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, W.C. Handy, Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Don Redmond, Vinnette Carroll, Cicely Tyson, Canada Lee, Sidney Poitier, Diana Sands, Roscoe Lee Brown, Frances Foster, Danny Glover, and Eartha Kitt.

Even after official desegregation of the American YMCA after 1946, the Harlem Branch YMCA continued to serve the largest African-American membership in the United States. Programs were opened to girls and women in 1955. The YMCA was noted for its "Salute to the Stars" fundraisers, its educational, counseling, veterans', and job programs, and "Black Achievers in Industry" awards dinners. Financial difficulties during the 1960s resulted in the curtailment of certain programs and the renting of space to other entities, including HARYOU (Harlem Youth Unlimited). The Harlem Branch YMCA was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1976 as the "Claude McKay Residence."³⁶ The facility is known today as the Harlem YMCA.

Description³⁷

The 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch YMCA is an eleven-story (plus cellar, basement, and tower) institutional building, faced in red brick set in Flemish bond, with neo-Georgian style details and brick spandrel panels. Located on the south side of West 135th Street between Lenox Avenue and A.C. Powell Jr. Blvd., it is C-shaped in plan above a four-story base. There is a small two-story extension on each side, and a three- and four-story rear extension. Windows, originally multi-pane steel sash (double hung on the lower two stories; top-hinged in the central section of the third and fourth stories; and casement), were replaced by anodized aluminum sash. Sills are slate. The building was repointed c. 1986-91, in a manner inconsistent with the original.

West 135th Street Facade The cast-stone watertable bears the date "1931" at the east end. Two main entrances have neo-Georgian style brick and cast-stone enframements with keys and broken scroll pediments, the latter embellished with the YMCA symbol (a triangle), placed within a ring, and a ribbon. The double entrance doors (replaced by anodized aluminum and glass doors, surmounted by an aluminum panel), are approached through a recessed porch with cast-stone steps, flanked by original metal handrails and windows with iron grilles; the coffered west porch ceiling survives (that on the east side was altered by parging). Both entrances are flanked by sconces (post-1951) and original bronze signboards with the inscription "Young Men's Christian Association One Hundred Thirty-Fifth Street Branch." Round fixed awnings have been placed above the entrances. Ground-story windows have keyed enframements, and iron grilles at the base. The side extensions have service entrances with cast-stone surrounds with keystones, and iron gates. Several banner poles have been placed on the center section of the

building's base. Second-story windows have brick enframements with keystones. A vertical neon "YMCA" sign was placed on the center of the second story in 1950. The inscription "Young Men's Christian Association" appears in the brick above the second story. The windows of the central section of the third and fourth stories are double-height, and have brick enframements with keystones, and metal grilles at the base. Two original, large flagpoles set into brick holders are located above the central portion of the fourth story. Setbacks occur on the end wings above the ninth and eleventh stories. The parapets above the eleventh story have pierced panels.

The Tower above the east end has a pyramidal tile roof; a large chimney on the north side; original multi-pane windows on the lower portion; three round windows atop

the east and south sides, and two round windows atop the north and south sides; and original, large neon signs ("YMCA" on the east, west, and south sides; and "Y" flanked by triangles on the north side).

The **West and East Elevations** are largely unarticulated, except for brick spandrel panels and pierced parapet panels, and three round windows atop the West Facade. The **Rear Elevation**, visible from West 134th Street, is unarticulated.

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NOTES

1. This item had been previously heard on July 15, 1991.
2. George R. Arthur, *Life on the Negro Frontier* (New York: Assn. Press, 1934); Jesse E. Moorland, "The Young Men's Christian Association Among Negroes," *Journal of Negro History* (1924), 127-138; Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Ky.: Univ. Press of Ky., 1994); "Young Men's Christian Association," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, William Bridgewater and Elizabeth Sherwood, eds. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), 2188-2189; "YMCA," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 1284.
3. According to Moorland (1924), p. 137-138, a few YMCAs, such as Cleveland and Chicago, allowed some "mixed" usage.
4. Cited in Mjagkij, 37.
5. *Ibid.*, 66.
6. The "Rosenwald YMCAs" were in Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Indianapolis; Kansas City; Cincinnati; St. Louis; Philadelphia; Baltimore; Columbus; New York City (Brooklyn, and two in Harlem); Atlanta; Pittsburgh; Denver; Detroit; Los Angeles; Buffalo; Dayton; Montclair, N.J.; Toledo; Dallas; Youngstown; Orange, N.J.; Harrisburg; and Evanston. After Rosenwald's initial five-year offer, an extension was granted in 1916-18, at which time a community was required to raise \$125,000. A second offer was made in 1920, with a further extension. The 1920 offer stipulated that each new YMCA had to contain separate sections for boys and men, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, club and class rooms, a restaurant, and at least fifty dormitory rooms. Funding was contributed both by the African-American (14%) and white (86%) communities. *Ibid.*, 83.
7. *Crisis* (Dec. 1914), cited in *Ibid.*, 78.
8. *Ibid.*, 82.
9. Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971); Mjagkij; Julius J. Adams, "Fifty Years of Christian Service to American Youth," in *Harlem Branch's 50 Years of Progress, 1901-1951, in the North American YMCA Century, 1851-1951* (New York: YMCA, [1951]); YMCA of Greater New York, Archives.

10. A "Colored YMCA" had been organized in 1853 by Anthony Bowen in Washington, D.C., and one was formed in Charleston, S.C., in 1866.
11. YMCA, Committee on Colored Association, *Report* (Jan. 1871).
12. The YMCAs were 23rd Street (1852/1887); Harlem (1868); East Side (1884); Institute (1885); Washington Heights (1891); and West Side (1896). The special branches of the YMCA were Bowery, Railroad, Intercollegiate, French, Army, Colored Men, Pennsylvania Railroad, and Merchant Seamen's. YMCA, *Men of New York*, Jan. 1922.
13. Cited in Osofsky, 15.
14. Ibid.
15. Osofsky; Mjagkij; Adams; YMCA, *Men of New York* (Jan. 1922 - June 1930); Judith Weisenfeld, *"The More Abundant Life": The Harlem Branch of the New York City Young Women's Christian Association, 1905-1945* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Univ., 1992); "Two Branches to Get \$250,000," *N.Y. Age*, Oct 30, 1913, 1, 7; "Board Votes \$750,000 to Improve Harlem Y.M.C.A.," *Chicago Defender*, Mar. 26, 1927.
16. Nail & Parker in 1911 had negotiated the real estate deal for St. Philip's Church to purchase the apartment houses at Nos. 107-145 West 135th Street for one million dollars; their office was located at No. 145.
17. The Library (1903-05, McKim, Mead & White) and St. Philip's (1910-11, Vertner W. Tandy & George W. Foster, Jr.) are designated NYC Landmarks.
18. "Needs of Negroes Brought Up to Date," *Men of New York*, Feb. 1930, 27.
19. "New Y.M.C.A. Buildings Planned on 135th and 63rd Sts.," *New York Times* [hereafter *NYT*], Apr. 8, 1931, 42; "Plans Filed," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, June 20, 1931; "New Y.M.C.A. for Harlem," *NYT*, Aug. 30, 1931, 21; "New West 135th Street Branch Building," *Men of New York*, Sept. 1930, 109; "Progress on West 135th Street Y Structure," *Men of New York*, Sept. 1931, 68; "New Harlem Y.M.C.A. to be Started Today," *NYT*, Nov. 10, 1931, 21; "Y.M.C.A. Turns Soil for Harlem Branch," *NYT*, Nov. 11, 1931, 21; "New Y Building Started in Harlem," *Men of New York*, Dec. 1931, 75; "West 135th Street Y Honors Julius Rosenwald," *Men of New York*, Mar. 1932, 7; "Y.M.C.A. Lays Stone for Negro Centre," *NYT*, May 23, 1932, 34; "Thousands Attend Cornerstone Laying of New \$1,000,000 13-Story Y.M.C.A. Building," *N.Y. Age*, May 28, 1932; "Cornerstone Laid in World's Largest Y.M.C.A. for Negroes," *Men of New York*, June 1932, 4-5; "To Dedicate 'Y' in Harlem Area," *N.Y. World Telegram*, Dec. 31, 1932; "Harlem to Dedicate New Y.M.C.A. Today," *NYT*, Jan. 1, 1933, II, 2; "Y.M.C.A. Dedicates its Negro Branch," *NYT*, Jan 2, 1933, 25; "Thousands Visit Harlem Negro Y.M.C.A. Home," *N.Y. Herald Tribune*, Jan. 8, 1933; "Y.M.C.A. Building, New York City, West 135th Branch," *Architectural Record*, Feb. 1934, 161-167; Adams; New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC YMCA, Building Committee, *Minutes* (1930-32), and Board of Directors, *Minutes* (1932).
20. NYC YMCA, Bdg. Commit., *Minutes*, June 9, 1930, 3. The Building Committee recommended Henry C. Pelton, William H. [Walter H.] Jackson, or James C. Mackenzie, Jr., while the Architectural Bureau recommended Mackenzie, Gehron & Ross, Walker & Gillette, or Clifford C. Wendehack. The Building Committee then resolved to hire Mackenzie or Gehron & Ross. *Minutes*, July 21, 1930, 1.
21. *Men of New York*, Sept. 1930.
22. *NYT*, Aug. 30, 1931.
23. Nov. 10, 1931.
24. May 23, 1932. The Rosenwald Fund gave \$25,000, the Phelps-Stokes Fund contributed \$75,000, and Rockefeller funds totalled \$375,000: Adams. Rockefeller had donated \$900,000 to the YMCA under the condition that part of the money be used for the 135th Street Branch. "Benefactor and Scenes in \$1,000,000 'Y'," *N.Y. Amsterdam News*, Jan. 4, 1933.
25. Mackenzie obit., *NYT*, Apr. 1, 1963, 36; LPC, *Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1834) (New York: City of New York, 1993); James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940*

(New York: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989); Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (New York: Rizzoli Intl. Publics., 1987), 397; "James C[ameron] Mackenzie," *American Architects Directory* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1962), 449.

26. Located in the Carnegie Hill Historic District, it was one of the last large town houses to be erected in the area. John Sloane was part of the third generation of Sloane men to head the W. & J. Sloane furnishing business (established 1843). His brother William, his predecessor at the firm, was the chairman of the War Work Council of the YMCA during World War I. The YMCA's William Sloane House (c. 1928-30, Cross & Cross), 356 West 34th Street, was a memorial to him.
27. Adams; *Manhattan Address Directory* (1933-1986); "To Coach Harlem Youth Clubs Between Sessions," *NYT*, Sept. 8, 1948, 41; "2 Dodger Players Coach in Harlem," *NYT*, Nov. 16, 1948, 31; YMCA, Harlem Branch, *The New Sign* (1948-1962); YMCA, *The Harlem Y at 75* (New York: YMCA, c. 1976), and "Harlem Branch Y.M.C.A. Fact Sheet" (Jan. 1983); James Arnold, list of "prominent persons who have lived at this Branch" (June 1940); Rita Wilkins, list of "artists who have been associated with the Harlem Branch" (Oct. 1951); "Over Half Century of Service to the Youth," *N.Y. Age Defender*, Sept. 3, 1955, 22; Jose Ananias, "The Founding of the Harlem YMCA," YMCA pamphlet (n.d.).
28. Rudolph J. Thomas was another longterm executive director, from 1947 to 1964.
29. Myrtle E. Pollard, "Harlem As Is" (Thesis, City College, 1936), v. 1, 279, and v. 2, 98.
30. Mjagkij, 118.
31. The original Harlem Branch YMCA, New York's second YMCA (for whites), had been established in 1868. It met in several locations until a new building was constructed at 5 West 125th Street in 1887-88. This became the "Uptown Branch" in 1936.
32. The former West 135th Street Branch was originally to be abandoned by the YMCA and sold, but was used in 1934-36 by the NYC Welfare Department. It returned to YMCA use, as the Harlem Branch Annex, in July 1936. The two lower floors were renovated for a larger Boys' Department, and the four upper floors for dormitory rooms in 1936-38. Together with the Harlem Branch, 435 dormitory rooms were provided, according to an ad in *Crisis* in June 1939. The building was again renovated in 1948-49, and dedicated to Peyton F. Anderson, chairman of the branch's Board of Managers (1930-45). It became the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center [c. 1976-83].
33. Arthur, 145.
34. After the Harlem YWCA was closed in 1962 due to financial hardship, the eleventh floor of the Harlem Branch YMCA was renovated and opened in 1964 for women.
35. Pollard, v.2, 98.
36. See Lynne Gomez-Graves, *Claude McKay Residence National Register of Historic Places (National Historic Landmark) Inventory -- Nomination Form*, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Dec. 8, 1976.
37. NYC, Dept. of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets (NB 122-1931).

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch, has a special character and a 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 Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street Branch, was constructed in 1931-32 according to plans prepared by the Architectural Bureau of the National Council of the YMCA and to the design and under the supervision of architect James C. Mackenzie, Jr.; that the 135th Street Branch YMCA was the successor to the "Colored Men's Branch" of the YMCA, located on West 53rd Street between 1901 and 1919, and the West 135th Street Branch YMCA, built in 1918-19 at No. 181, across the street from the later building; that the 135th Street Branch YMCA, partially funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Julius Rosenwald, and the Phelps-Stokes Fund, was called at the time of its completion the largest such facility for African-American men and boys, as well as one of the best-equipped YMCA buildings, in the United States; that the eleven-story institutional building, clad in brick with neo-Georgian style details, including the two main entrances that have brick and cast-stone enframements with broken-scroll pediments embellished with the YMCA symbol (a triangle), is C-shaped in plan above the four-story base and has setbacks; that, dominated by a tower having a pyramidal roof, prominent chimney, and large YMCA signs, the YMCA building continues to be a major presence on the Harlem skyline; that the Harlem Branch YMCA (as it was named in 1936) has served as one of Harlem's most important and popular recreational and cultural centers, has been a significant purveyor of safe and affordable accommodations for black men (and, after 1964, women) in New York, and has had associations over the years with many notable figures in the Harlem and African-American communities; and that the facility, known today as the Harlem YMCA, has also admitted girls and women since 1955, and has remained in continual use for its original purpose.

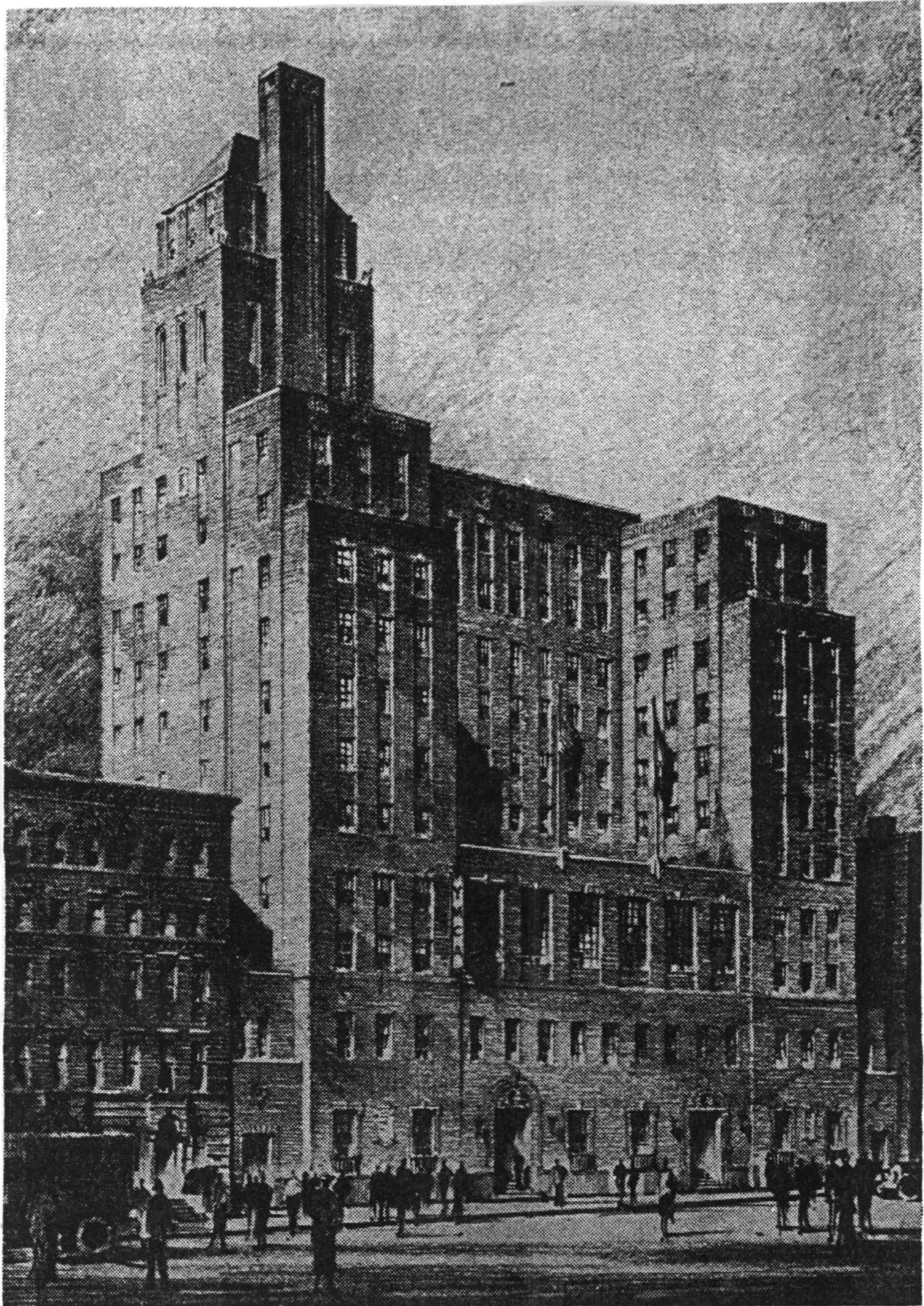
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch, 180 West 135th Street (aka 174-184 West 135th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1919, Lot 53, as its Landmark Site.



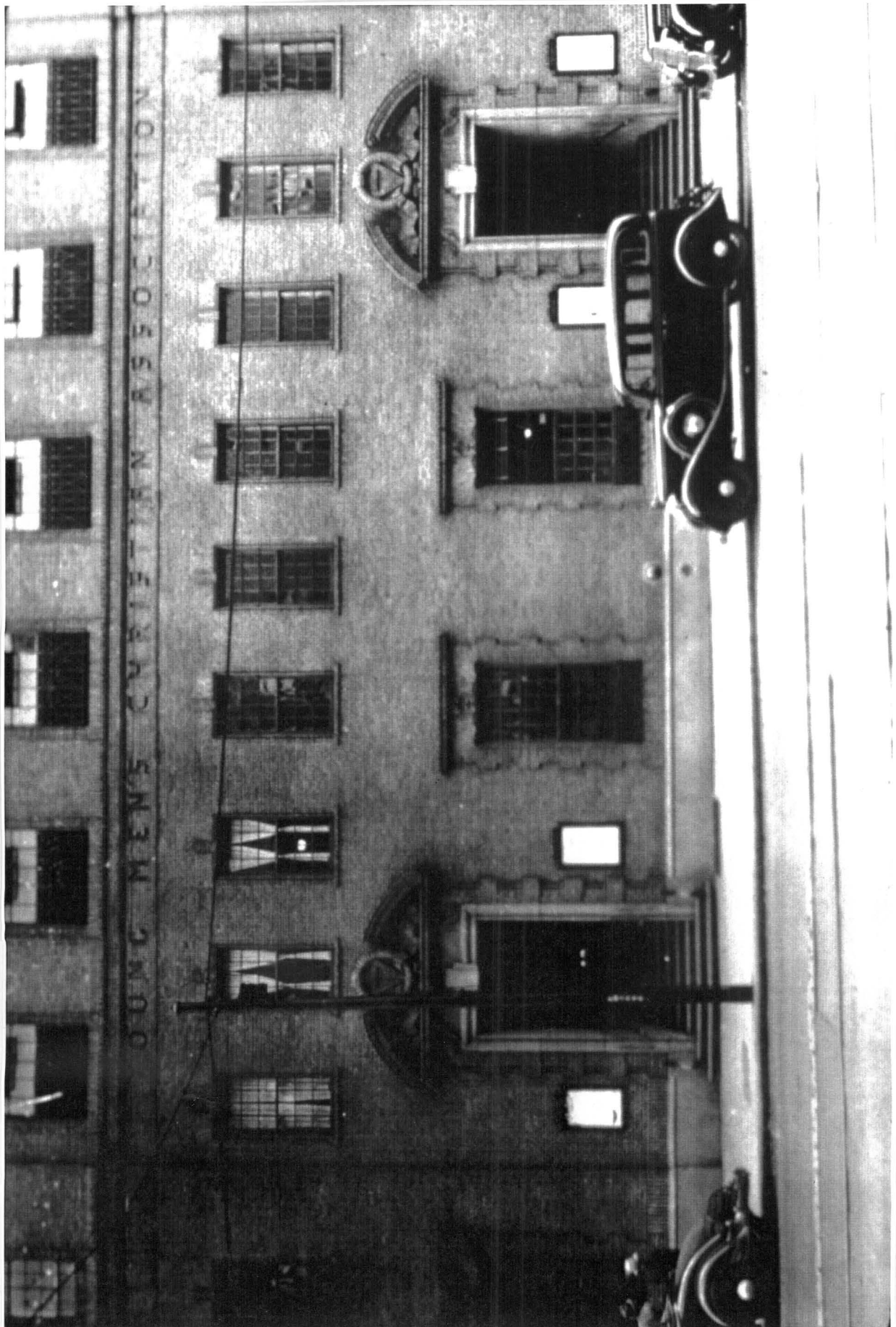
Colored Men's Branch YMCA (1901-1919), 252-254 West 53rd Street
Source: YMCA of Greater New York Archives



West 135th Street Branch YMCA (built 1918-19), 181 West 135th Street
Source: YMCA of Greater New York Archives



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street Branch
Rendering (c. 1931) Source: YMCA of Greater New York Archives



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street Branch (c. 1932)
Source: YMCA of Greater New York Archives



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street Branch (c. 1932)
Source: YMCA of Greater New York Archives



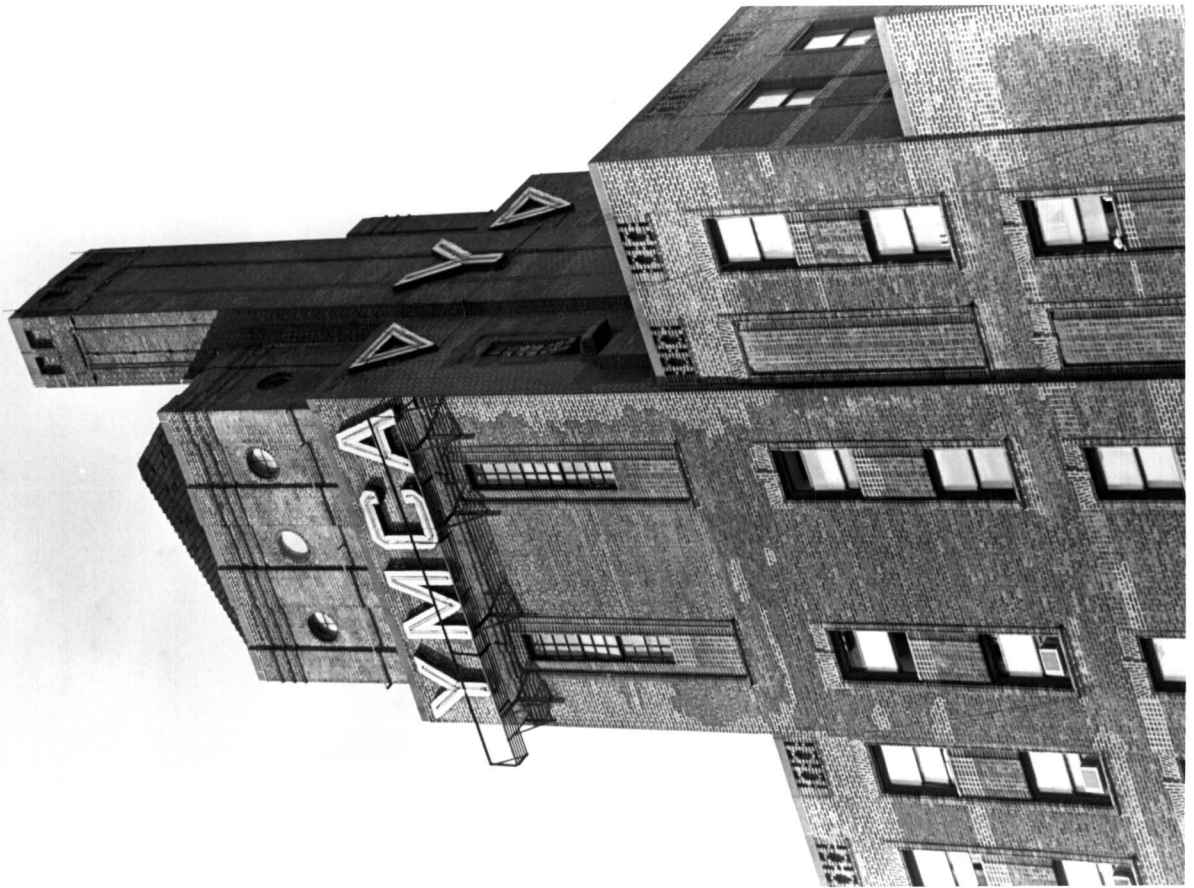
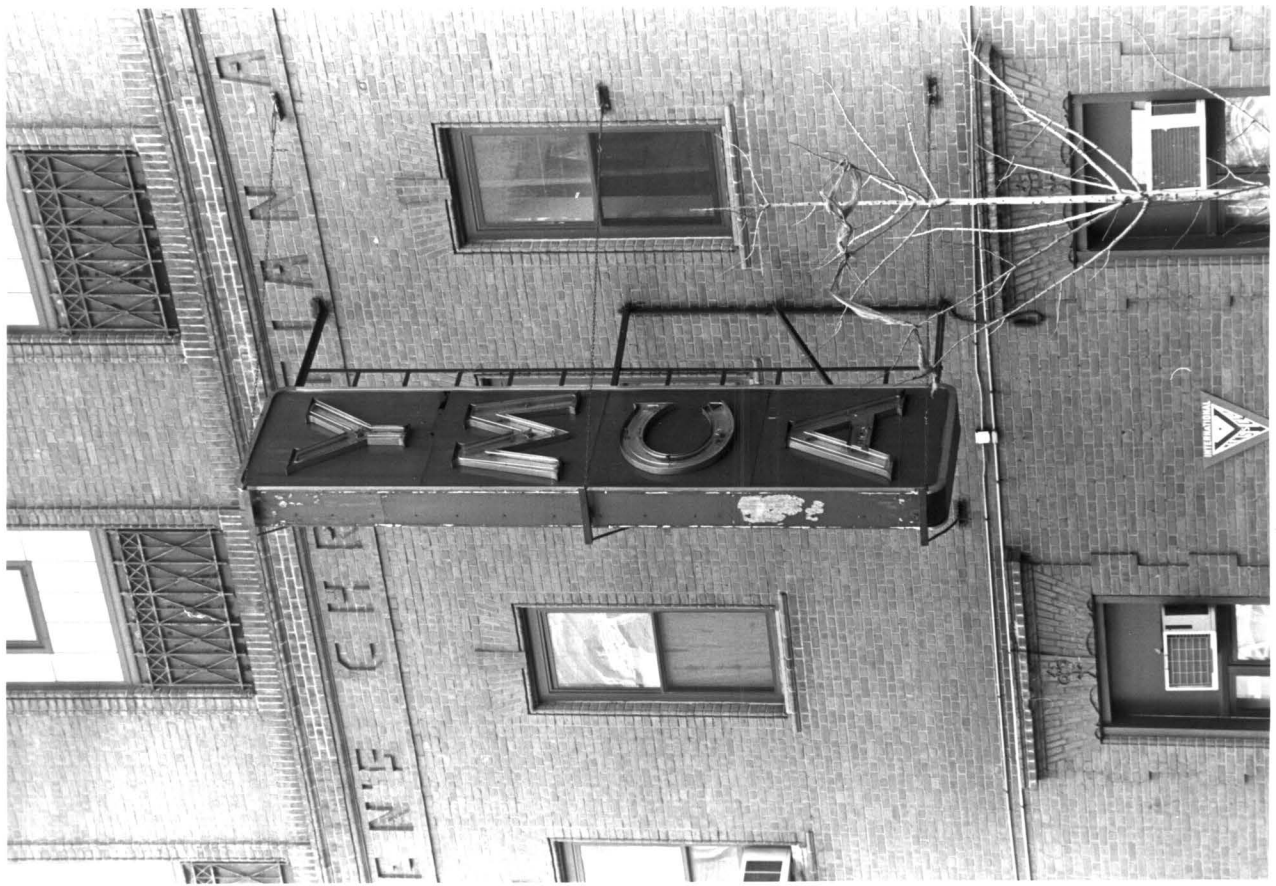
Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch
Source: YMCA of Greater New York Archives (c. 1950s)



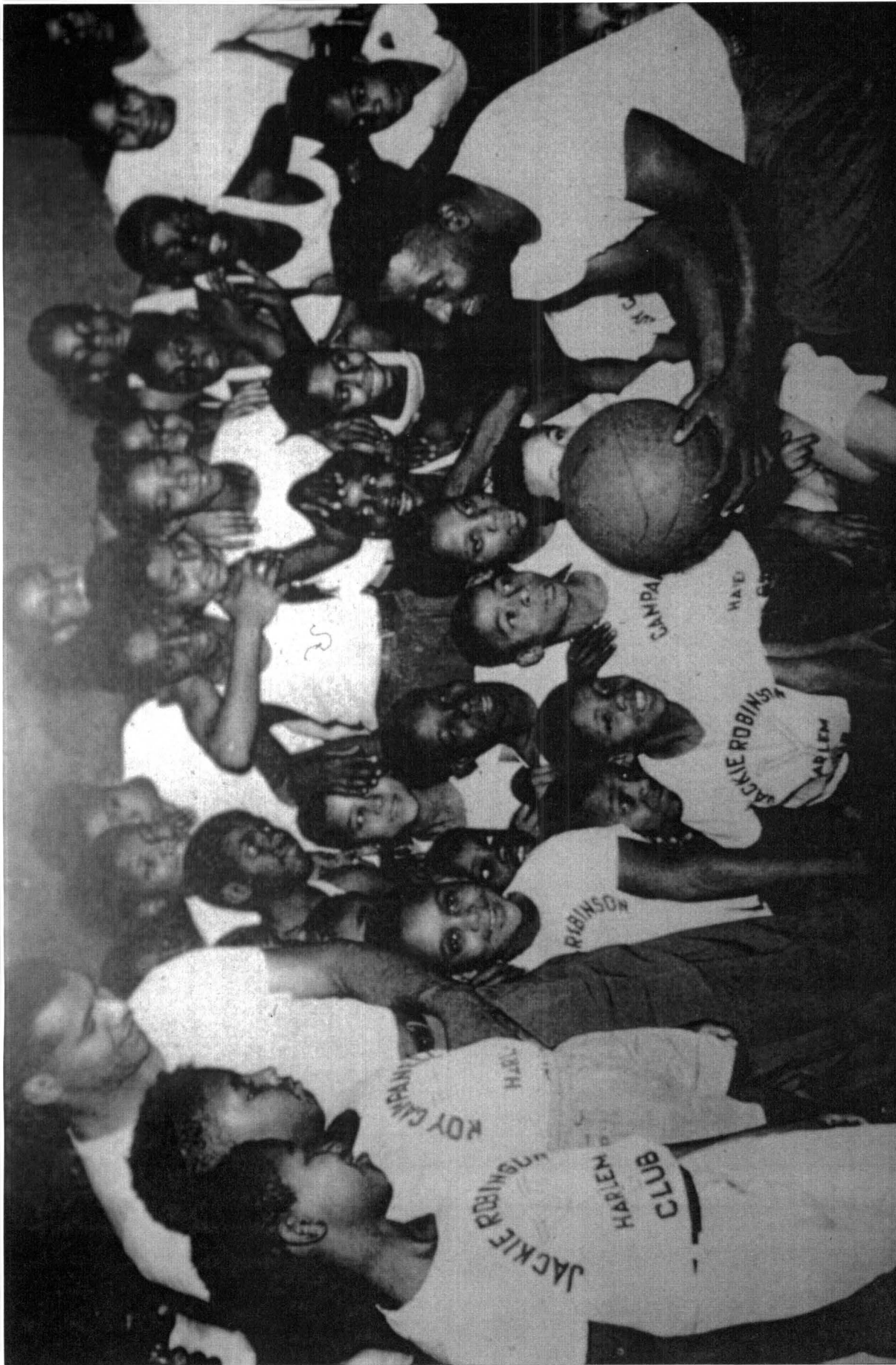
Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch
Photo: Carl Forster



Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch
Entrance details
Photo: Carl Forster

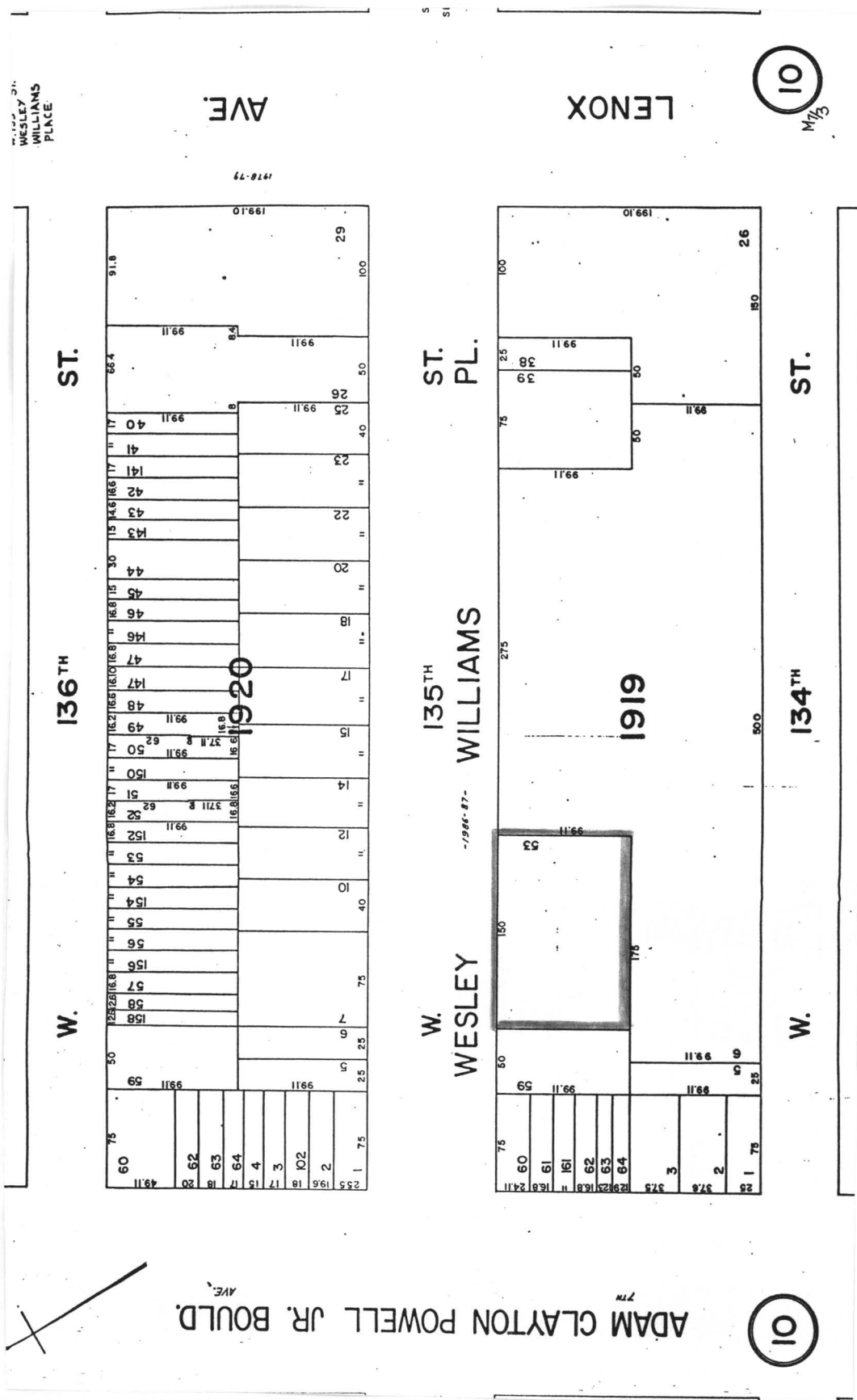


Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch
Tower and second-story sign (1950)
Photo: Carl Forster



Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella at the Harlem Branch YMCA (1955)
Source: *Harlem on My Mind*

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, 135th Street (later Harlem) Branch
 Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Block 1919, Lot 53
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map



ADAM CLAYTON POWELL JR. BOULD. 7^M AVE.

