

MANHATTAN

Schomburg Center in Harlem gets \$22 million facelift

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New York Daily News

Dec 18, 2015 at 6:55 pm



The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is one of the world's leading research and cultural institutions devoted to the black experience. (Courtesy NYPL)

A \$22 million facelift for Harlem's Schomburg Center got started Friday with a ceremonial groundbreaking.

Part of the New York Public Library system, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is one of the world's leading research and cultural institutions devoted to the black experience.

The buildings along Lenox Ave. at 135th St. contain millions of archives holding documents, recordings, films and memorabilia.

The collection was started 90 years ago — and the overhaul will help preserve and expand it.

"Today we break ground on this \$20 million project ... We need the next generation to (come) into this great research center so that they can be inspired by their history so they can aspire to learn how to shape the future," said NYPL President Tony Marx.

"We are so thankful to those who made this possible, and are excited to get started," he added.



The upgrades to the Schomburg Center are expected to cost \$22 million. (Courtesy NYPL)

The multi-year renovation project — led by Marble Fairbanks Architects, Westerman Construction Company, and the City Department of Design and Construction — will involve a series of improvements to the Schomburg.

These include:

I A complete renovation of the Schomburg's second floor reading room and an expansion of its Rare Book Collection vault. A new conference room connected to the reading room and improved staff spaces will also be added.

I The 9,000 square-foot interior of the Schomburg's landmark building, built in 1905, will receive exterior renovations and have its interior reconfigured to provide improved public areas, a new interactive gallery space for youth and teens, and compact storage for Schomburg's Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division and the Art and Artifacts Division.

I The addition of a high-definition LED signage system in the Schomburg lobby that will be visible on the street, bringing Schomburg's programming and collections into the Harlem community.



The Schomburg center features upgrades to its reading room. (Courtesy NYPL)

I Video displays and artifact vitrines will be added to the building's east façade, allowing for outdoor digital exhibitions.

I Streetscape and landscape improvements — sidewalk paving, benches, and vegetated landscaping — to give New Yorkers a quiet space to congregate and view the screens and outdoor exhibitions.

The current project is actually the second phase of a broader renovation of the Schomburg Center that was completed in 2007.

It included a new lobby and scholars center, and a refurbished main reading room.

The Schomburg was also awarded the prestigious 2015 National Medal for Museum and Library Service, presented by First Lady Michelle Obama in Washington in May.