

Historic Morningside Heights

Issue No. 1

September 2020

Presenting our Inaugural Issue

Since its founding in the early 1990s, the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee has worked to raise awareness of our neighborhood's major historical significance. Our primary objective has been the designation of Morningside Heights as a NYC Historic District, which was largely accomplished in 2017. However, significant portions of our neighborhood lie outside of the designation area. We are embarking on a Phase II effort to ensure more of our community is protected.

Following are updates on our programs and priorities. There is much to share. Please keep in touch with us via [email](#) or through our updated [website](#).

Unfortunately, we begin our reporting on a rather urgent note.

Endangered: McGiffert Hall



Readers of this publication will know all too well about the out-of-scale and mostly luxury residential development occurring in Morningside Heights.

Because of this trend, we are deeply concerned over the fate of [McGiffert Hall](#), at 122nd Street and Claremont Avenue.

There are indications this striking 1931 Allen & Collens building, which has served as housing for Union Theological Seminary, will be razed and replaced by a high-rise.

McGiffert Hall was [purchased](#) in 2018 by Riverside Church, which has retained developer Savills to consult on potential uses of the structure. With a 42-story, all-luxury tower going up across the street through the sale of land and air rights by UTS, a similar structure at the McGiffert site would deliver a massive blow to local preservation efforts.

MHHDC has filed a [Request for Evaluation](#) for Landmark Designation of the building with the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Mobilization to support this objective is being planned now. In the meantime, we have developed this online [petition](#). Please participate...**WE MUST SAVE MCGIFFERT.**

Updates



***Here are some ways we
continue to mobilize in
Morningside Heights:***

Social Media: Our Facebook [page](#) now has 552 followers. This is our main platform for sharing content and we'll increasingly engage through photos, event listings, and trivia.

Webinars: Our inaugural webinar featured local historian Jim Mackin, speaking on his upcoming [book](#), "Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side, Bloomingdale-Morningside Heights." We had 132 viewers and much positive feedback. You can view the recorded session [here](#). We'll soon be announcing our next webinar. Please join us!

Phase II Planning: While the 2017 Historic District designation was a big win for our community, we need to accomplish much more in the coming months (and years?) to secure additional protections for Morningside Heights. You can see our application for the proposed additional areas [here](#). We propose six additional sections, located in the eastern and northern portions of our neighborhood. Committed neighbors are the best means of influencing policy in the right direction. We are grateful for the ongoing commitment of our members. More to follow, including ways of playing a hands-on role.



Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, Inc.

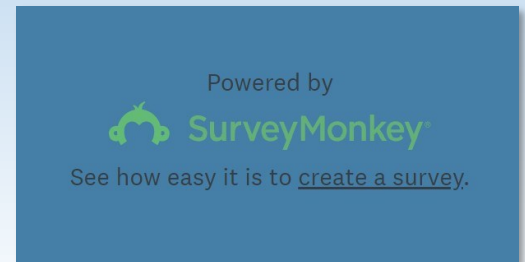
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Email:	mhhistoricdistrict@gmail.com		Website:	historicmorningsideheights.nyc
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Engage



Petition to Designate McGiffert Hall as a NYC Landmark: Please sign our petition [here](#). We will continue to raise awareness on the potential threats to this important Morningside Heights structure. Too much of our historic architecture is under threat from local real estate development and we must turn the tide.

Survey: It's a good time to check in with our members and the broader Morningside Heights community. If 2020 has presented complex challenges, it has also re-inforced local civic engagement. Please help us better understand your views through this brief online [survey](#). We'll share the results in our next issue of *Historic Morningside Heights* and during our next webinar.



Collaboration: Leveraging existing relationships and establishing new ones is an important way to enhance efficiency and develop greater local unity and cooperation. Our sister organization, the [Morningside Heights Community Coalition](#), has been making major strides on a number of fronts. We look forward to continued synergies with MHCC.

Friends, Funds, and Fun: Our traditional annual event to raise awareness and funds for MHHDC must take a different form this year. We'd like to [hear](#) from you on how best to continue our tradition of gathering to share news and recognize local individuals and groups that embody MHHDC's spirit of preservation and community engagement.



Present & Past

CATCHING UP WITH: Gregory Dietrich

Gregory's contributions as MHHDC's preservation consultant have been invaluable. Our efforts have been greatly advanced by his thorough and passionate approach.



How did you get involved in Preservation work?

While working as a research assistant for a biographer, I learned about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' involvement in this field. Not long after that, I saw a copy of *Preservation* magazine, which listed a number of graduate programs in Historic Preservation. That set me on a path to earning my master's degree at Columbia and becoming a consultant.

What motivates your work with MHHDC?

I'm largely motivated by the fact that I live here and want to see it preserved for future generations. Morningside Heights is a jewel in the crown of New York City, but many New Yorkers do not realize the extent of its wonders, from its two Olmsted-designed parks, to its historic institutions and profusion of early-20th-century apartment houses.

Why should local community members get involved?

We see rapid and substantial change all over New York City, sometimes for the better; sometimes for the worse. Preservation allows for change to happen in a way that is sensitive to accommodating new needs while maintaining historic character. This is a win-win and promotes economic development by attracting visitors to the area.

History in Brief

The [Leake & Watts Orphan Asylum](#) was the second major institution to arrive in what is now Morningside Heights (1843). The orphanage housed generations of children and offered them training in various trades. Its founder, John Watts, was the last City Recorder under British rule and went on to serve in the State Assembly and U.S. Congress. The asylum building, designed by [Ithiel Town](#), still stands adjacent to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, as the oldest building in Morningside Heights.

