

Historic Morningside Heights

Issue No. 2

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Have you heard?

Our Zoom presentation, *The Case for McGiffert Hall*, will occur on Wednesday, 11/18, 5:30pm. Please register [here](#).

Greetings, Morningsiders!

As we approach Thanksgiving, MHHDC continues to pursue objectives for which we are uniquely positioned. We are remembering our local history and working to instill an appreciation of it in those who share our community today.

In practical terms, we seek two broad outcomes:

- Impacting policies and regulations to safeguard historic structures in Morningside Heights,
- Promoting robust local engagement today and in the future to preserve the unique character of our neighborhood.

We are grateful for the ongoing support we receive from our members and friends and will be suggesting simple and effective ways to ensure MHHDC's continued growth and impacts. In the meantime, please read on to learn about latest developments.

Updates



Here is the Phaeton, on 112th Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. Learn more about this wonderful building from our featured expert, Professor Andrew Dolkart, on page 4.

McGiffert Hall and its uncertain future remain our most pressing issue. MHHDC is very concerned about potential redevelopment of the site. Talks with The Riverside Church continue, with an eye toward better understanding plans for this historic building.

Historic District “Phase II” planning continues, in order to have five additional areas of Morningside Heights designated. Stakeholders include Council Member Mark Levine, Borough President Gale Brewer, and the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Expanded outreach to community members has been occurring through email updates, online presentations, and production of short [videos](#) that present historical themes and MHHDC priorities. Stay tuned for announcements on upcoming events.

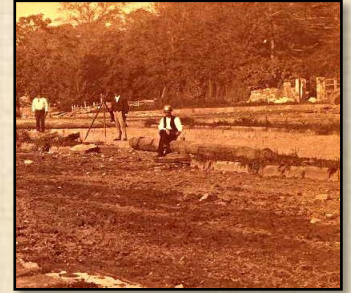


Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, Inc.

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Engagement

Survey: Have you responded to our member survey yet? It is quick and easy to complete [here](#). Your responses will help us better understand how to engage with existing and potential members.



Petition to Save McGiffert Hall: Our online petition in support of this historic structure has over 400 signatures. Please sign it [here](#).

Riverside Drive, 1870s

Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution. We depend on donations from our community to cover administrative costs. Please support the effort.

Would you please donate? [\\$25 here](#) [\\$50 here](#) [\\$100 here](#) [Other amount here](#).

Historic District “Phase II”: Though many members of our community are aware of MHHDC’s work to secure Historic District designation for Morningside Heights, some may not know all the details. Here’s an overview:

- A large portion of our neighborhood received this designation in 2017, after 25 years of effort by MHHDC and other stakeholders. The existing Historic District consists mainly of the southern and western portions of Morningside Heights.
- Five additional areas of our neighborhood are being proposed for Historic District designation in an effort led by MHHDC and for which considerable planning and preparatory work have already occurred.
- You can see maps of the existing and proposed Historic District boundaries on our webpage [here](#).
- Historic Districts in New York City go a long way toward preserving the culture, character, and quality of life in our neighborhoods, along with providing economic incentives for properties in them. MHHDC is committed to pursuing this designation for additional areas of our community, in light of recent overdevelopment in our area and the growing presence of out-of-scale construction that is impacting our architectural context, threatening local affordable housing, and placing strains on our infrastructure.

To learn more about Historic Districts and other MHHDC efforts, please visit our [website](#). We seek the involvement of community members to maximize our impacts.

Present & Past

CATCHING UP WITH: Andrew Dolkart

Andrew Dolkart serves as Professor of Historic Preservation at Columbia's School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. His 1998 book, [*Morningside Heights, a History of its Architecture and Development*](#), has been a major influence for local practitioners and advocates.



What distinguishes Morningside Heights and informs its Historic District designation?

Two things distinguish Morningside Heights. The area has the largest concentration of institutional buildings in the city and, although they are quite varied in their architectural design, each is individually distinguished, and together they form an extraordinary complex of major buildings, significant architecturally and culturally. Second is the residential neighborhood which grew up around and quite separate from the institutions. It reflects the impact of the subway, as the area was largely created over about eight years. This was the first apartment house neighborhood in New York City and it has a complete social spectrum of multiple dwellings, from tenements, to luxurious apartment houses.

Do you have any favorite sites in the neighborhood and why are they special to you?

Perhaps my favorite building is one that is often overlooked. This is the Phaeton, at 539 West 112th Street. It was the first building designed by George & Edward Blum (about whom I have co-authored a book). Despite the loss of the two rooftop loggias, it retains brilliant mosaic roundels and diaper-pattern brickwork and has a relief of Phaeton and his horses in the lobby. I also am a great fan of the magnificent Bancroft at 509 West 121st Street.

How did you initially become interested in history, architecture, and preservation?

I first became passionate about architecture when studying in London during my junior year in college. When I returned, I discovered the first edition of the AIA Guide to New York City and the brilliant criticism of Ada Louise Huxtable, especially her advocacy for preservation. I started a PhD program in art history, but soon switched to Columbia's Historic Preservation Program because I felt that preservation had the ability to have a positive impact on people's lives. I have never looked back.

