



October 2023

***AN OPEN LETTER TO THE LANDMARKS
PRESERVATION COMMISSION:***

**PLEASE PRESERVE MCGIFFERT HALL
NOW!**



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In August 2023, MHHDC wrote the following letter to LPC Chair Sarah Carroll:

Dear Commissioner Carroll

[The Morningside Heights Historic District Committee \(MHHDC\)](#) is requesting that LPC inquire as to Riverside Church's plan for the impending sale of McGiffert Hall to a real estate developer. We are prompted by our late June meeting at the Church with Senior Minister Reverend Adriene Thorne who stated that McGiffert was being sold to meet the Church's debt obligations, having purchased the building for \$46.5 Million from Union Theological Seminary in October 2018. As you are aware, MHHDC has been advocating for landmark designation of McGiffert for many years, and filed with LPC a Request for Evaluation in March 2018 (See Attached).

Rev. Thorne stated at the meeting that the Church needs to seek the maximum possible sale price from the developer. Therefore, we are concerned that McGiffert is at risk of gross non-contextual development, or even demolition to accommodate the purchaser's financial development objectives and expected return on investment.

At this time, despite our inquiries, we have not yet been informed of a McGiffert sale, or learned of any specific announcements by the Church.

Community support for McGiffert's historic designation is strong with over 1100 petition signatures collected to date. Through our Newsletters, Webinars, meetings, and articles, MHHDC has continued to highlight to our local community the overall benefits of historic designation, and the particular risks currently posed to a non-landmarked McGiffert Hall. During our February 2022 neighborhood "walk around" with Kate Lemos-McHale and Sonia Guior, where we advocated for the Morningside Heights Historic District extension and expansion, we raised our concerns regarding McGiffert.

We are hoping that LPC recognizes the urgency of our request, and will communicate with MHHDC and the Church to help reach the best possible outcome for all.

Here is Reverend Thorne's contact information:

Senior Minister Adriene Thorne
The Riverside Church in the City of New York
490 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10027
athorne@trcnyc.org
212 870 6754

Sincerely,

Laura Friedman, President MHHDC
Robert Stern, Vice-President MHHDC

WE NEED TO MAKE MCGIFFERT A PRIORITY!

Please sign the PETITION and join the over 1100 Morningside Heights residents who support the preservation of McGiffert Hall.

As we noted in our letter to LPC, the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee has long advocated for designating McGiffert as an individual historic landmark.

Here is the Statement of Significance -- an excerpt from our formal Request for Evaluation (RFE) -- filed with LPC in 2018. [You can read the entire RFE on our MHHDC website.](#)

5. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Please provide a statement explaining why you think this building or site should be considered for designation as an Individual, Interior, or Scenic Landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

McGiffert Hall is significant as a distinct yet contextual work of architecture that bridged two period revival styles by a firm that was a notable pioneer of Collegiate Gothic design. Located on the southwest corner of Claremont Avenue and West 122nd Street next to Riverside Church, it was designed as an apartment building for Union Theological Seminary by Allen & Collens in 1931, which was wholly responsible for the design of the seminary to the east, and partially responsible for the design of the adjacent church to the west in association with Henry C. Pelton (1867-1935). Despite these two institutions' association with a single design firm, each one embodied a different period revival style, with the seminary characterized by the English Perpendicular Gothic Revival style, reminiscent of Oxbridge, and the church characterized by the French Gothic Revival style, reminiscent of Chartres Cathedral. Situated between these two complexes, Allen & Collens produced a contextual design that referenced the materials, massing, and detailing of both styles.



Figure 2. McGiffert Hall, c.1931.
Source: Museum of the City of New York
www.collections.mcny.org

Figure 3. McGiffert Hall main entry detail, c.1931.
Source: Museum of the City of New York
www.collections.mcny.org



Additionally, see [the OP-ED, “Save McGiffert Hall” published in the Columbia Spectator](#), excerpted below:



The high-rise luxury developments that have come from other institutions within the neighborhood, as well as the ambiguity of Riverside Church’s plans for the McGiffert Hall, are alarming. We ask that the church issue its real estate development plans for public review to alleviate significant worry for McGiffert’s future.

We cannot risk allowing yet another non-landmark building worthy of preservation being destroyed as part of a real estate mega-deal. Furthermore, we hope that institutions in our community, like Columbia, begin to see the importance of preserving or repurposing historic buildings to aid the community. We greatly look forward to productive discussions with The Riverside Church leaders as they share plans for McGiffert Hall.



And for more detailed insights, please join our historic preservationist, [Gregory Dietrich](#), for a fascinating recorded video presentation, [“The Case for McGiffert Hall.”](#)



Special Notice: Please Join Us For a Ceremony At Muhlenberg Chapel Honoring the Historic Service Provided by St. Luke's Hospital to the Morningside Heights Community. MHHDC joins Dr. Norma Braun *and her team who together advocated for the creation and installation of a special plaque at the site's garden.*

When: **October 18**

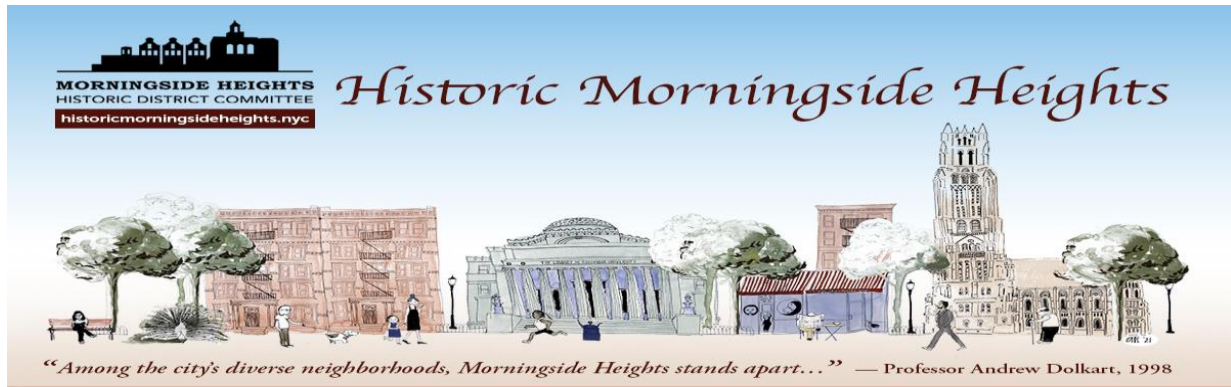
Time: **4 PM**

Place: **Muhlenberg Chapel**

113th Street between Amsterdam Avenue & Morningside Drive

We hope to see you at the Chapel for this special commemoration!

MHHDC Mugs for sale!



Celebrate Morningside Heights with your favorite tea, coffee or whatever your choice. MHHDC mugs, displaying our charming MHHDC illustrated Logo, are now available for purchase at the following locations: Columbia Hardware at 2906 Broadway, Riverside Church Gift Shop, 91 Claremont Avenue, Between 120th & 122nd Streets; Janoff's Stationery, 2870 Broadway

between 111th & 112th Streets; The Shop at St. John the Divine, 1047 Amsterdam Avenue at 112th Street; and Book Culture, 536 W. 112th Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenues. Each purchase helps to promote and fund MHHDC.

PLEASE DONATE TO MHHDC

We are an all-volunteer organization that depends on donations to cover our costs. Please donate today and visit our [website](#) for more info. THANK YOU!

[DONATE HERE.](#)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!