



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

March 30, 2021

Sarah Carroll, Chair
Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: 50 West 13th Street, Manhattan

Dear Chair Carroll and Ms. Lemos McHale,

The Historic Districts Council stands with Village Preservation in their efforts to illuminate the hidden histories of 50 West 13th Street and secure its protection as an Individual Landmark. While the building was host to numerous personalities and uses during its history, none are arguably more valuable than its significance as being the primary residence of Mr. Jacob Day.

The research of Sarah Bean Apmann of Village Preservation extensively constructs a portrait of Mr. Day's contributions to New York City society in the nineteenth century. An iconoclastic free Black man, Day owned a successful catering business and several properties. His affiliation with the house, from 1858-1884, was a period during which our City and Nation witnessed tremendous change. These turbulent three decades include the time when the United States still had a substantial number of slave-owning states; the outbreak of the Civil War; the Emancipation Proclamation; and Reconstruction. Closer to home, the Underground Railroad and then the Draft Riots happened. Jacob Day, his family, business—and his house at 50 West 13th Street survived all of it. Day did not just bear witness to these movements, he was directly involved in them: a short list includes his leadership and direct involvement in Abolitionist, Underground Railroad and Black voting rights movements. Each of these historical events dealt with challenges that we still face as a society today, and the house is an embodiment of that history, Black leadership and struggle.

It is important for New York City to preserve sites of Black wealth. Black property ownership was a route to independence and the quest for property ownership for most Blacks in the United States did not commence until after the Civil War. In Manhattan, Jacob Day purchased this house during the antebellum period. The significance and rarity of this cannot be overstated, given the illegality of Black property ownership in most of the country as well as the racist barriers to property acquisition Blacks would face in the years to come, including in the twentieth century in New York City with the advent of red lining.

The self-made wealth of Mr. Day's businesses facilitated his ability to self-determine a future that was extremely rare for Black people during this time and afforded him leadership positions and involvement in

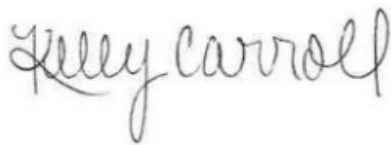
Abolitionism. While NYC has preserved residences of White Abolitionists like the Truesdell and Hopper-Gibbons' houses, it is essential for a known and documented site of an African American Abolitionist to be landmarked as well.

The Landmarks Commission's story map: "NYC and the Path to Freedom: Landmarks Associated with Abolitionist and Underground Railroad History" notes that:

"Historians have established that most of the prominent abolitionists in New York, both white and black, housed enslaved individuals at one point or another."

The property has clear ties to the Underground Railroad but further research of it as a place of harboring and concealing refugee slaves is still needed. We hope that your Research Department considers the gravity of the importance of this house's history in the context of your laudable Equity Framework. We appreciate the Commission's recent work to preserve the Education Building, the New York Public Library Branch in Harlem, and the Dorrance Brooks Square Historic District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly Carroll". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Kelly Carroll
Director of Advocacy & Community Outreach

CC: NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio
Corey Johnson, Speaker, NYC Council
Village Preservation
Manhattan Community Board 2