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Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair
NYC Landmarks Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Support for the landmark designation of 50 West 13th Street, home of the prominent African American businessman, abolitionist, and Abyssinian Baptist Church supporter Jacob Day

Dear Chair Carroll,

As a historian of the African Diaspora and curator of the “Black New Yorkers” digital exhibition at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, I am writing to express my strong support for the effort by Village Preservation to secure landmark status for 50 West 13th Street. Between 1858 and 1884, Jacob Day owned and resided at this address. Day was one of New York’s most successful African American businessmen, a prominent abolitionist, and a dedicated supporter of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church, then located nearby in Greenwich Village.

Jacob Day made his money running a catering business, and invested his profits in real estate, which in 1860 was valued \$30,000. By the time of his passing in 1884, he had properties in Brooklyn on Prosect Place; Jamaica, Queens; Fishkill, New York; and at 50 West 13th Street. While living here, Day was a prominent member of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York’s second oldest African American church. Located nearby at 164-166 Waverly Place, the church moved to this site in 1864, not long after Day purchased his home. Additionally, Day was involved with the Freedman’s Bank, established after the Civil War to help formerly enslaved people economically, and run, for a time, by Frederick Douglass. The bank was located nearby in Greenwich Village, to be in close proximity to the substantial African American community in the southern part of the neighborhood known as “Little Africa,” which included a significant number of formerly enslaved people who moved to New York from the South.

However, Day’s prominence extended beyond his success in business or even his involvement with the Abyssinian Baptist Church or the Freedman’s Bank. As early as 1840, Jacob Day was listed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* as a member of a group that called for a “National Reform Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the United States of America.” This rallying cry was issued in response to the American Society for Colonization, whose purpose was to re-settle African Americans in Africa. In 1866, Jacob Day was part of a group, also identified in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, which sought to end discriminatory practices limiting the franchise for Black men in New York. Day and his compatriots called for a State Convention for the purpose of revising the New York State Constitution to remove the requirement that Black men own property worth \$250 — a substantial sum at the time, which most Black New Yorkers did not possess, and a requirement which had not been similarly imposed upon white men since 1821.

Jacob Day was also likely a supporter of the Underground Railroad — quite possibly assisting from this very surviving home. This possibility further emphasizes the significance of 50 West 13th Street: one of few sites remaining in Greenwich Village connected to the African American leaders and institutions located here in the 19th century, a time when this neighborhood was the center of African American life in New York and home to its largest African American community. For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to move ahead with consideration of landmark designation of 50 West 13th Street.

Sincerely,

Sylviane A. Diouf

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