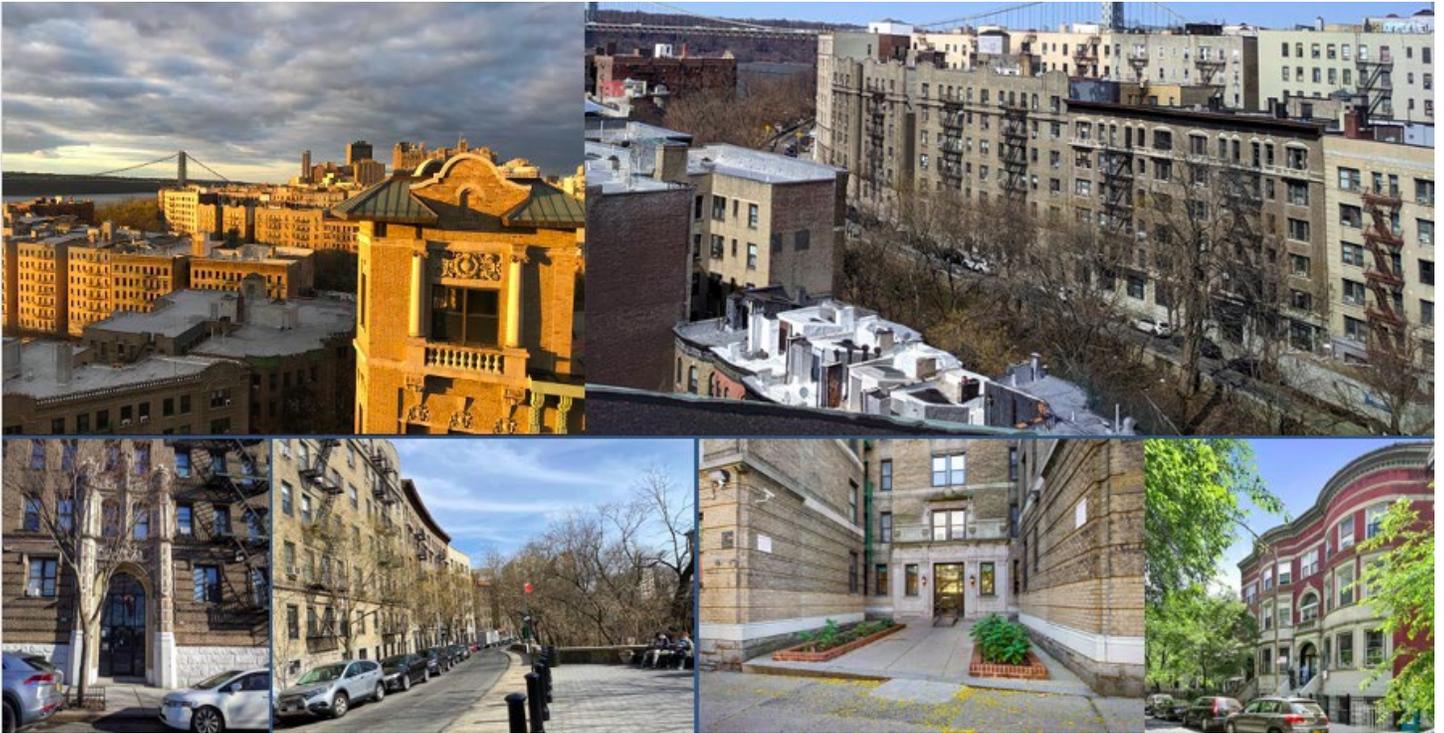


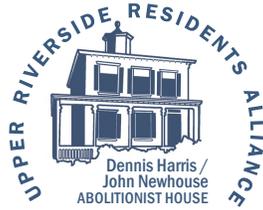
**THE UPPER RIVERSIDE
RESIDENTS ALLIANCE'S
ADVOCACY**



SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy



The Upper Riverside Residents Alliance (URRA) formed in the summer of 2020 to prevent demolition of the Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist House at 857 Riverside Drive, but quickly expanded its mission to include protecting, preserving, and celebrating the architecture, culture and history of Riverside Drive and its adjacent areas in Northern Manhattan. Since forming, the URRA has focused on landmarking 857 Riverside Drive and 12 row houses on 158th Street west of Riverside Drive, as well as adding 41 buildings to the current Audubon Park Historic District (designated 2009), which is currently among the smallest in the city.



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

OUR MISSION AND GOALS

Thursday, June 9, 2022

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Josette Bailey

Vivian Ducat

Peter Green

Matthew Spady

Mitch Mondello

Joseph V. Amodio

David Freeland

The Upper Riverside Residents Alliance (Save Riverside) is a grassroots organization dedicated to preserving our architectural, historical, and cultural heritage in Washington Heights.

Our priorities are to:

ADVOCATE for protecting and preserving the special culture and character of buildings, landscapes, and other aspects of northern Manhattan through landmark designations and contextual zoning.

COMMEMORATE the work of Dennis Harris, John Newhouse, and the abolitionist community working and living in northern Manhattan prior to the Civil War.

ACKNOWLEDGE and CELEBRATE the neighborhood's racial diversity and the contributions that all people have made to the community.

EDUCATE about the area's rich history, the possibility of cultural and historic preservation, and the impact of real estate development, the lack of affordable housing, and other issues affecting the quality of life in northern Manhattan.

COLLABORATE with local organizations, elected officials, Community Board 12, neighbors, and other stakeholders to increase landmark protections in northern Manhattan.

DEVELOP programming, educational material, a social media presence, and media engagements to further these goals.

Upper Riverside Residents Alliance
P.O. Box 321709
556 West 158th Street
New York, NY 10032
URRA@SaveRiverside.org
www.SaveRiverside.org

**DENNIS HARRIS/
JOHN NEWHOUSE
ABOLITIONIST HOUSE AT
857 RIVERSIDE DRIVE**



SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

The Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist House at 857 Riverside Drive, in Washington Heights, is a significant asset for New York City. Architecturally, it is the sole remaining structure representing a building format prevalent in the vicinity in the mid nineteenth-century. Historically, the house and the land on which it sits are a reminder of the area’s multi-layered relationship with enslavement and racial exclusion. Culturally, it reminds us of present-day inequities in social justice and the unequal attention city agencies have afforded northern Manhattan’s large African-American and Latinx populations. This is abundantly clear in the landmarking process, with only 20 designations in this area: 16 individual, one institutional historic district, and three residential historic districts, each of them among the smallest in the city.

Developers Sigmund Freund and Michael Petrokansky bought 857 Riverside Drive in October 2019, and in August 2020 announced plans to replace it with a 13-story concrete-based, luxury residential tower that would be out of context with the surrounding buildings and severely stress the existing neighborhood infrastructure. The 46 residences in the proposed 135-foot-tall tower would likely be unaffordable for members in the existing community and would eradicate the last known physical link to Dennis Harris and the little-known abolitionist community that was active in northern Manhattan in the decade prior to the American Civil War.

As other portions of this presentation package demonstrate, the URRRA is working with multiple community, organizational, and political stakeholders to save and preserve the Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist House as a cultural center, which would house permanent and temporary art installations reflecting its own history, as well as the history of neighborhood inequity and the fight for social justice.



TWO SIMILAR BUILDINGS. ONE IS STILL WAITING TO BE LANDMARKED



BOTH ARE SURVIVORS.

227 Duffield is a “*rare survivor*” of the abolitionist era in Brooklyn, says LPC.

857 Riverside is the *only survivor* in Manhattan north of 29th Street.

BOTH WERE OWNED BY ABOLITIONISTS.

Thomas & Harriet Truesdell *lived in 227 Duffield* for 12 years.

Dennis Harris built and *owned 857 Riverside* for 3 years, then sold to his ally **John Newhouse**, who lived there for 23 years.

BOTH ARE IN POOR CONDITION.

227 Duffield lost its front porch and had a 2-story deli built in front, but half of the original façade, window surrounds and cornice remain.

857 Riverside lost porches and a cupola, and had siding applied in front, but the home is not obscured, and its original transoms, fanlight, rear/side porches and cornice remain, making restoration possible.

ONLY ONE IS LINKED TO THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

The Truesdells *may have* worked on the Underground Railroad (no proof has been found).

Dennis Harris *actually* worked on the Underground Railroad (well documented).

**WHEN
YOU SAVE
THE HOUSE,
YOU SAVE
THE HISTORY**

857 RIVERSIDE DRIVE is the oldest, continuously occupied home in Upper Manhattan, and the **LAST** remnant of a little-known abolitionist community in Washington Heights — now threatened with demolition by one of NYC’s “worst landlords,” according to Public Advocate Jumaane Williams.

TELL MAYOR ADAMS THAT **BLACK LANDMARKS MATTER**



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Jumaane D. Williams

August 16, 2021

Sarah Carroll
Chair and Commissioner
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Carroll,

I write in support of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) extending the Audubon Park Historic District northward along Riverside Drive in Washington Heights. This extension would safeguard a number of historical and culturally significant structures, including the Harris-Newhouse Home, also known as 857 Riverside Drive.

857 Riverside Drive has substantial historical significance as one of the oldest buildings in Upper Manhattan, as well as direct ties to the Underground Railroad. The history of African Americans has continually been underrepresented in New York City, and we must preserve and uplift it through sites like the Harris-Newhouse Home. It is vital that we protect these places of cultural, architectural, and historical importance from the risks of demolition.

I believe the designation of an extended Audubon Park Historic District, as outlined by numerous resolutions from Community Board 12, is both logically sound and culturally necessary. I am grateful for your consideration of this matter. Please direct any questions or further discussion toward First Deputy Public Advocate Nick E. Smith, at nsmith@advocate.nyc.gov, and Deputy Public Advocate for Housing Equity Delsenia Glover, at dglover@advocate.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,

Jumaane D. Williams
Public Advocate for the City of New York





JOHN LEO HOUSES ON WEST 158TH STREET

SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

The twelve residences numbered 626-648 West 158th Street comprise a cohesive group of row houses that share an architectural, cultural, and historical connection with the buildings designated as the Audubon Park Historic District in 2009. Constructed in two stages between June 1896 and June 1898, to designs by architect-builder-developer John P. Leo, the twelve houses represent a first wave of residential construction in response to the expanding population that developers anticipated New York City's rapid transit system would bring to northern Manhattan.

Members of the URRA have been working to preserve these houses since 2016 (before founding the URRA), when they learned that a developer was interested in buying them and an undeveloped lot lying behind six of the twelve. In July 2021, the URRA included these 12 houses in its sweeping proposal to extend the Audubon Park Historic District.

In November 2021, a developer who now owns six of the 12 houses and the undeveloped lot behind them announced plans to demolish them and erect a 17-story mixed-use development that, like the planned tower for 857 Riverside Drive, would be out of context with the existing neighborhood and put stress on the existing infrastructure, particularly traffic on Riverside Drive and West 158th Street, which flows into the Henry Hudson Parkway.

With the URRA's urging and leadership, owners and residents of adjacent buildings have joined in the fight to prevent this construction and are hiring a zoning and preservation specialist to advise them on the best tactics to delay and prevent demolition of the current houses or construction of a residential tower on the block.



EXPANDING THE AUDUBON PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT



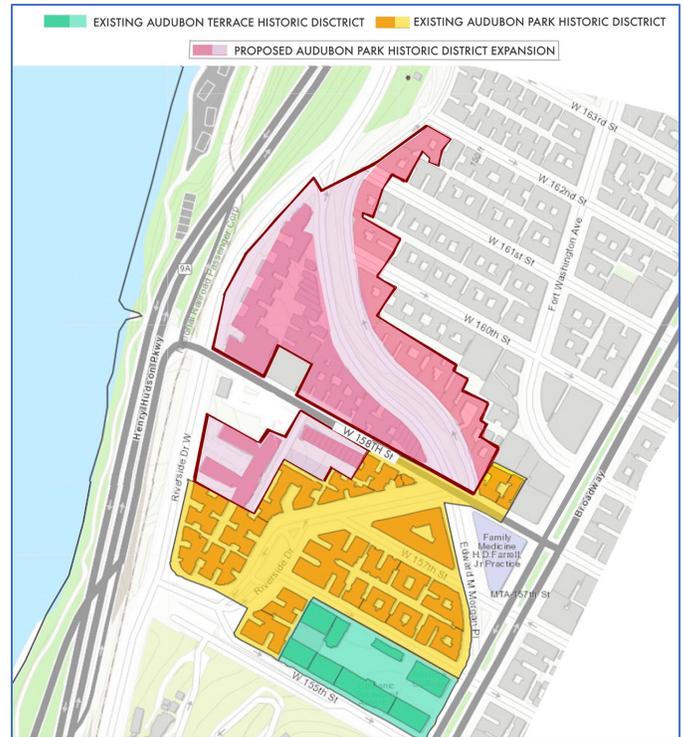
SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

In conjunction with attempts to save and preserve the Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist House and the row houses on West 158th Street, the URRRA proposed expanding the Audubon Park Historic District to include those properties as well as other houses and apartment buildings on Riverside Drive and Riverside Drive West.

The buildings in the existing district and proposed extension share a complementary developmental history. Neither area's narrative is complete without the other's. Through a variety of distinct, but overlapping, architectural styles from the late 19th century into the middle of the 20th century, the highly intact group of buildings in the extension area illustrates typologies present in lower Washington Heights as it passed through its stages of urbanization.

Culturally, these buildings—and more importantly, the people who have lived in them—tell of northern Manhattan's long history of diversity, and represent this neighborhood's complex layers of racial history as it evolved from a homogeneous Eurocentric neighborhood to a fully integrated one in the second half of the 20th century. Significantly, the River Terrace Mitchell Lama building was home to the late David Dinkins, New York City's first Black mayor.

More than 500 community members, historians, preservation groups, and elected officials submitted letters of support for the URRRA's proposed extension of the Audubon Historic District.



**REQUEST FOR
EVALUATION
857 RIVERSIDE DRIVE
NOVEMBER 2020**



SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

The Harris-Newhouse home—the only surviving link to activist and local businessman Dennis Harris—reflects the great period of transition that the nation and neighborhood were about to undergo. Architecturally, it straddles both the fading Greek Revival and burgeoning Italianate periods, and bears characteristic features of those styles despite some cosmetic alterations to the front façade, and the removal of two wooden features—a porch and a cupola—which the previous owner had plans to restore.



Despite its age and having passed through numerous owners in its 171 years, the Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist home at 857 Riverside Drive remains remarkably intact.



In an architectural survey the URRA commissioned in 2021, preservation specialist Benjamin Marcus determined that the house retains its “original form and massing,” and much of the original fabric, including wooden clapboard, roof brackets, window openings, stained glass transoms, and the base for the roof lantern.

Architectural elements preserved on the northern side of the house could provide a template for reproducing elements missing on its other façades.

Set into the hillside, a natural feature recalling the neighborhood's earlier topography, the house is four stories tall on its river-facing side. Marking the edge of the property is a dry-laid stone wall, possibly dating back to colonial times. Many such walls appear in early deeds as coordinates for delineating property.

Visit www.SaveRiverside.org to access the full RFE.

**REQUEST FOR
EVALUATION
EXPANDING THE
AUDUBON PARK
HISTORIC DISTRICT
JULY 2021**



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

Riverside Drive, between West 155th and 162nd Streets, flows eastward away from the river and then westward back to it, a unique and symmetrical pattern that opens from West 158th Street like two halves of a book. The Audubon Park Historic District, designated in 2009, covers only half of that book. And it tells only half of its story—architecturally, culturally, and historically. With the Request for Evaluation, which echoes Community Board 12’s 2007 request, the Upper Riverside Residents Alliance proposes an extension of the Audubon Park Historic District that will finally complete the tale.



Figure 8: John P. Leo Houses on West 158th Street Circa 1898 ⁴³

Through a variety of distinct but overlapping architectural styles, the highly intact group of buildings in the extension area illustrates typologies present in lower Washington Heights as it passed through its stages of urbanization, some of which are absent from the designated district. As the table of buildings in the RFE illustrates, the neighborhood’s evolution from suburb to urban landscape began at the northern end of the extension area, spread south into the designated district, and then alternated between the two for nearly two decades. Neither area’s narrative is complete without the other’s.



Figure 9: Audubon Park in 1899, with the Francis J. Schnugg Houses in the Foreground. ⁴⁶

Culturally, these buildings—and equally important, the people who have lived in them—tell of northern Manhattan’s long history of diversity. At the same time, they represent this neighborhood’s complex layers of racial history as it evolved from a homogeneous Eurocentric neighborhood to a fully integrated one in the second half of the 20th century.



Figure 12: Architectural Renderings for the Romaine and Loyal Apartment Houses from the New York Tribune, June 20, 1915

Visit www.SaveRiverside.org to access the full RFE.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

Over the last two years, the Upper Riverside Residents Alliance (URRA) has engaged the surrounding community, preservation advocates, and residents in greater New York through a series of events, social media interactions, and personal engagement, all with the intention of furthering its mission of protecting, preserving, and celebrating the architecture, culture and history of Riverside Drive and its adjacent areas in Northern Manhattan. These activities have included press conferences, rallies, and a Juneteenth Celebration at the Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist House, an Instagram Series promoting local history, a virtual walk focused on Dennis Harris and the abolitionist community in northern Manhattan, and numerous Zoom meetings with elected officials and local stakeholders to plan strategy for preserving the neighborhood's architectural, cultural, and historical assets.

In recognition of this work, during its very first year as an organization, the URRA received a coveted Grassroots Award from the Historic Districts Council.

In 2022, the URRA will be expanding its mission by identifying additional individual landmarks and districts for submission to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, creating a virtual Abolitionist Trail walking tour, and engaging the community with preservationPICTURED, an online photographic catalog of interesting and unusual architectural features that individuals photograph and submit.



2021 GRASSROOTS PRESERVATION AWARD



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

In a Zoom ceremony in May 2021, **The Historic Districts Council**, a New York City advocacy group for historic neighborhoods, honored the work of **Save Riverside/Upper Riverside Residents Alliance** with a 2021 Grassroots Preservation Award.

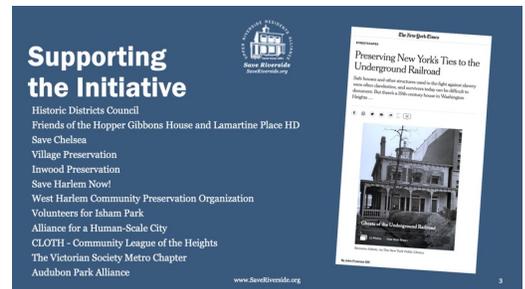
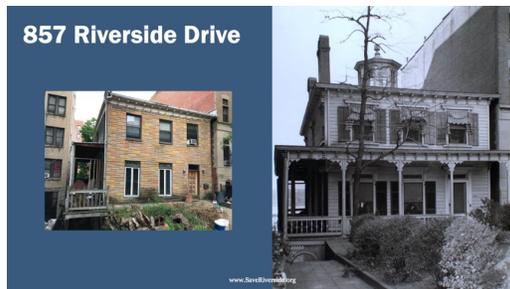
The Award is in recognition of the Upper Manhattan group’s efforts to preserve **857 RIVERSIDE DRIVE**, a house once owned by a noted abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor, Dennis Harris, and for the group’s ongoing efforts to educate people about the long-forgotten history of abolitionism in northern Manhattan.

HDC has presented the **Grassroots Preservation Awards** every year since 1998 to highlight groups that have “worked tirelessly for their neighborhoods and communities and have striven to better our city through their efforts.”

Past winners have included **Save Harlem Now!**, **New Yorkers for a Human-scale City**, and **Friends of Hopper Gibbons U.G.G.R. Site and Lamartine Place**, which became an historic district a few months later.

The **227 Duffield Street Coalition** also received a Grassroots Preservation Award in 2008 for its protracted campaign to preserve 227 Duffield Street, a house which, like 857 Riverside Drive, had once belonged to abolitionists. In early February 2021, 227 Duffield Street was landmarked, and subsequently purchased by New York City.

857 Riverside Drive, which has a greater degree of architectural integrity than 227 Duffield Street and closer ties to the U.G.R.R., has twice been turned down by the Landmarks Preservation Commission for potential designation. The Grassroots award has, however, given hope to members of the Upper Riverside Residents Alliance, that, like 227 Duffield Street, 857 Riverside Drive will be preserved one day, because it is the sole remaining structure related to a previously unknown abolitionist community at work in Upper Manhattan in the decade before the Civil War.



Vivian Ducat
 Director, Upper Riverside Residents Alliance

**UPPER RIVERSIDE
RESIDENTS ALLIANCE
FIRST ANNUAL
JUNETEENTH
COMMUNITY EVENT
JUNE 19, 2021**



SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

**CELEBRATE
JUNETEENTH!**

A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION
ON ITS FIRST OBSERVANCE
AS A NATIONAL HOLIDAY
SATURDAY, JUNE 19
(rain or shine)
10:00 am to 1:00 pm
857 RIVERSIDE DRIVE
(on West 159TH Street)
Refreshments Will Be Served

GUEST SPEAKER
**HISTORIAN & AUTHOR
Michael Henry Adams**
SPONSORED BY
Save Riverside
Riverside Oval Association
Audubon Park Alliance
**SAVE
THE HOUSE
AND SAVE
THE HISTORY**
SaveRiverside.org

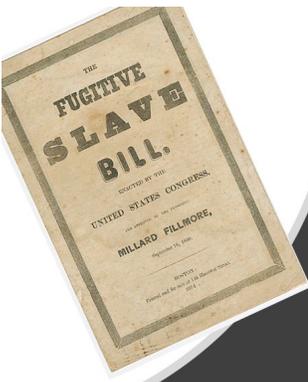
Juneteenth was originally celebrated in Texas, on June 19, 1866. It marked the first anniversary of the day that African Americans there first learned of the Emancipation Proclamation, more than two years after it was initially issued.

Often known as America’s second “Independence Day,” Juneteenth also seemed a perfect opportunity to commemorate the brave men and women of conscience who enabled enslaved people to obtain freedom during the decades before the Civil War. This includes ardent abolitionist Dennis Harris, a documented Underground Railroad agent who once owned the 1851 house still standing at 857 Riverside Drive – the site where the Juneteenth celebration took place. The URRA and many others are dedicated to saving and preserving this important building, currently under threat of demolition.

Beginning with a 19-day long Instagram Countdown series focusing on the life and legacy of Dennis Harris, the URRA, collaborating with two other area organizations, held the first annual Juneteenth community event. 2021 also marked the first celebration of Juneteenth as both a New York State and Federal Holiday.

The three-hour celebration was enthusiastically attended by numerous neighborhood residents, elected officials, preservation activists, and began with an introductory talk by noted historian Michael Henry Adams, author of the seminal book, *Harlem: Lost and Found*. Elected officials, including Senator Robert Jackson, also spoke, and special Juneteenth badges and preservation related materials were distributed.

Next year’s collaborative Juneteenth event is planned for Sunday, June 19, 2022.

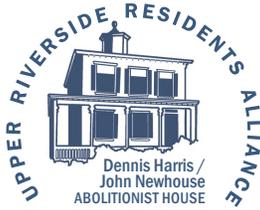


JUNETEENTH COUNTDOWN!
The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 increased the weight of federal power behind the rendition process, provided additional administrative facilities to slaveholders for reclamation, and stiffened penalties for harboring, concealing, aiding and abetting fugitive slaves, or in any way obstructing the law.
Lower Manhattan was densely populated, and it became increasingly dangerous to help and harbor freedom seekers. Dennis Harris cast his gaze northward. In 1851, Upper Manhattan was far outside the “city” and mostly countryside.
Save the house & Save the history
Saveriverside.org



Juneteenth promo/Mitch Mondello
Instagram Countdown- Day 12/Nick Fritsch
Juneteenth crowd with Sen. Robert Jackson/Lesley Doyel

FERRY TO FREEDOM: JANE'S WALKS FESTIVAL



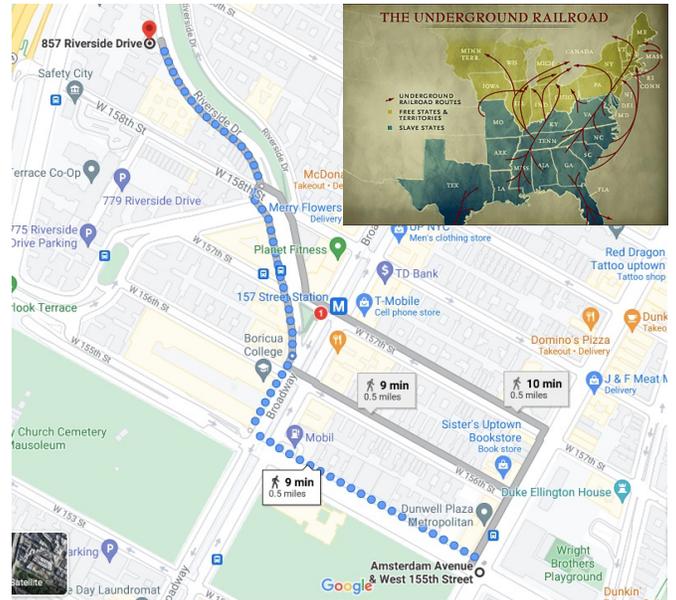
SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

In May 2021, as part of the global Jane's Walks festival, URRRA directors Joe Amodio and Matthew Spady led a virtual walk of the neighborhood surrounding the Dennis Harris/John Newhouse Abolitionist house at 857 Riverside Drive, entitled "Ferry to Freedom." In it, they focused on sites related to the people, places, and history of a little-known colony of abolitionists who helped develop Washington Heights in the middle of the 19th century.

Combining historic images with contemporary photographs, Joe and Matthew led the virtual "walkers" (who joined from as far away as England and Australia) from the site of Dennis Harris's sugar refinery and ferry dock on the Hudson River, to the locations where he and his family once lived on Riverside Drive and West 158th Street.

They then made their way up 158th Street to Amsterdam Avenue, where Harris established a church on the edge of the village then known as Carmansville.

The walk ended at the Harris/Newhouse Abolitionist house, the last remnant of this colony still standing—and threatened today with demolition.



A SLAVE HUNT IN NEW-YORK. AND A RESCUE BY THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

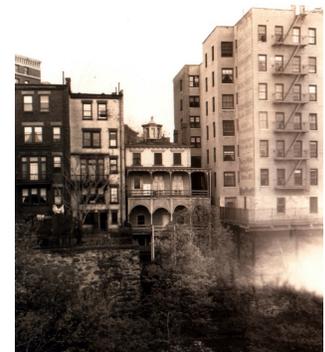
REMINISCENCES OF A VETERAN ABOLITIONIST—A NEGRO IN A BOX FOR HIS OWN GOOD.

"I have seen a slave-hunt within the very shadow of the New-York City Hall."

The subject had been suggested by the fiftieth anniversary, last Wednesday, of the irrobbing of William Lloyd Garrison in the streets of Boston. The speaker, Mr. William Johnson, was formerly an abolitionist and builder in this city, and in the days "before the war" divided his energies between the prosecution of his business and the furthering of the anti-slavery cause. He now lives in retirement in New-Jersey.

"The decade of years from about 1842 to 1852," he continued, "saw New-York abounding in sensations of every conceivable kind. Memorian and Millerism were studied with equal earnestness. Sylvester Graham deplored the eating of bolted flour, as well as flesh, while Carlyle ridiculed Alcott's utterances as a 'potato gospel.' The universal ferment of that period has never been better characterized than by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his

236	Dennis Harris	385	John Newhouse	44 m		New York	1
			Ann Gage	24 f	Wife	"	1
			John J. Tomelle	22 m	Son	"	1
			Catherine	21 f	daughter	"	1
			Mary Newhouse	17 f	"	"	1
			Emma	11 f	"	"	1
			Peter Tomelle	12 m	Boarder	Pennsylvania	
			John N.	3 m	Grandchild	New York	
			Cornelius Newhouse	19 m	Son	New York	
			Jarak Stewart	18 f	servant	Ireland	
236	Continued	385	Margaret Madden	20 f	servant	Ireland	
			Continued Sarah Newhouse	68 f	mother	Germany	



SAVE RIVERSIDE'S SERIES ON INSTAGRAM

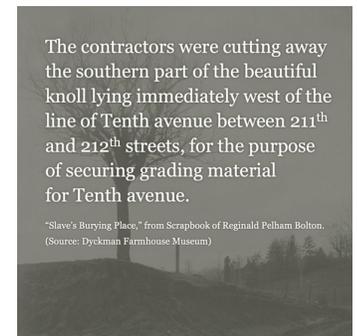
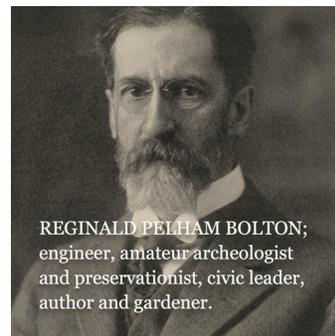
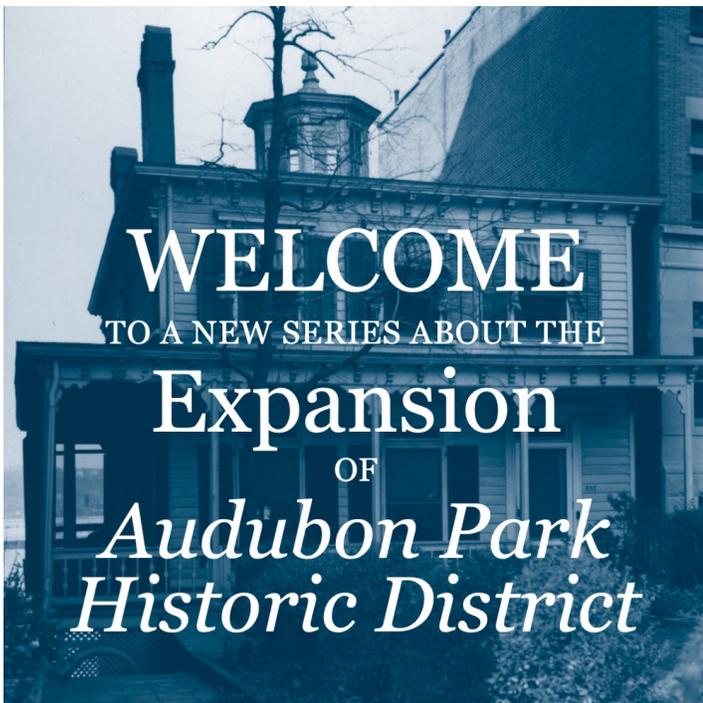
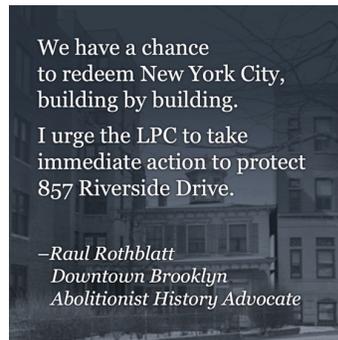


SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

As part of its mission to protect, preserve, and celebrate northern Manhattan's history, the URRA has created several Instagram series that elaborate on the lives of some of the fascinating people and families who have lived in Washington Heights, and the buildings they occupied.

Building off of the first series about Dennis Harris and the abolitionist house at 857 Riverside Drive, additional series have focused on Reginald Pelham Bolton, who once lived at 638 West 158th Street, and the Bailey family, who lived at 634.

These Instagram "brief histories" will continue in 2022.





SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

preservationPICTURED A COMMUNITY PROJECT

The buildings in our neighborhoods reflect our rich historical, cultural, and architectural heritage, but each of us notices different details as we go on our daily journeys through our neighborhoods.

With preservationPICTURED, we ask the community to help the URRRA create a visual history of our neighborhoods by submitting their photos.

The idea behind this project is to encourage people to observe the built details where they live and make participation in preservation easily accessible to anyone.

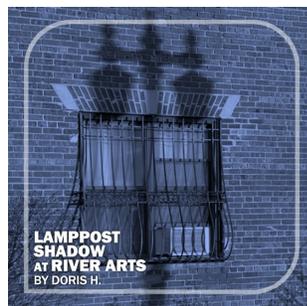
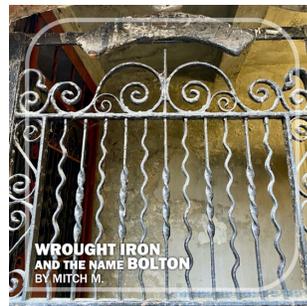
preservationPICTURED is intended to inspire people of all ages to learn more about the history and architecture that are present all around them and to pause and consider that they, too, are a part of the history of this place we consider home.

In the summer we plan to produce a series of banners or signs for display in the community that will include captions describing the pictures, as a way of expressing our mission and promoting awareness.

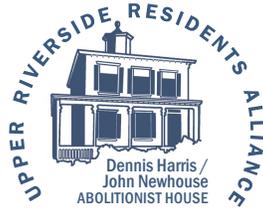
preservationPICTURED A COMMUNITY PROJECT

The buildings in our neighborhoods reflect our rich historical, cultural, and architectural heritage, but each of us notices different details as we go on our daily journeys through our neighborhoods.

Please help the URRRA create a visual history of our neighborhoods by submitting your photos.



WHAT PROMINENT HISTORIANS ARE SAYING ABOUT AN EXPANDED DISTRICT



SAVE RIVERSIDE
Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

“Few sites directly connected to the Underground Railroad still exist in New York City. I urge you to use your authority to preserve this house and area with an expanded Audubon Park Historic District.” ERIC FONER

Bancroft- and Pulitzer Prize-winning professor emeritus of history, Columbia University, author of *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*

“While the use of his Washington Heights properties as [Underground Railroad] sites has not yet been proven, very strong circumstantial evidence suggests that they were. Destruction of the surviving building would be a travesty, and an irreparable loss to a city which has a very poor record of preserving sites related to Black and abolitionist history.” FERGUS BORDEWICH

Nationally recognized Underground Railroad expert, author of *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*

“For historians such as myself, [these] findings are revealing and offer important new insights into the journeys enslaved people made to freedom, apart from the well-known sites in the business district.” GRAHAM RUSSELL HODGES

History professor, Colgate University, author of *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City*

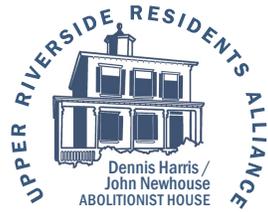
“Every effort should be made to preserve the relics and landmarks of this history so it will not vanish from the earth, as Lincoln said. It will go a long way towards keeping the American dream alive.” TOM CALARCO

Co-author of *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City*

“In communities of color throughout New York, only tiny fractions of buildings are protected. This is wrong because our history, our heritage, our culture, is valuable, too.” MICHAEL HENRY ADAMS

Author of *Harlem Lost and Found: An Architectural and Social History, 1765-1915*

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE SAYING ABOUT AN EXPANDED DISTRICT



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

“Black history matters—and not just speaking those things but doing those things, and not finding excuses every time these things come up in communities [of color].” **JUMAANE WILLIAMS**

New York City Public Advocate

“There are so few landmarks in New York that link to the anti-slavery movement, and they’re all below 96th Street.” **GALE BREWER**

Manhattan Borough President

“The history of Black New Yorkers, and the history of all New Yorkers, deserves to be preserved. This is a rare opportunity to come down on the right side of history. I urge you to seize it.” **REV. DR. CALVIN O. BUTTS, III**

Pastor, The Abyssinian Baptist Church in the City of New York

“This shows the role our neighborhood played in the abolitionist movement. This should be in the history books, and it should be taught at PS 28 where I went to school right up the street.” **ADRIANO ESPAILLAT**

U.S. Representative (NY-13)

“We are demanding that the Audubon Park Historic District be expanded to encompass the full area: [Riverside’s] historic structures, 158th Street down the hill, with a dozen row houses—structures that are unique, that tell our history, that are part of the fabric of this neighborhood, and that are vulnerable.” **MARK LEVINE**

Manhattan Borough President

“We should not have to demand this. If you want to be a better and brighter progressive city, then it starts by acknowledging every culture. Mr. Mayor, let’s make this happen!” **AL TAYLOR**

New York State Assembly Member

WHAT LEADING PRESERVATIONISTS ARE SAYING ABOUT AN EXPANDED DISTRICT



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

*“Under existing law, **historic preservation is not limited to the preservation of architectural ornament**: damage to its decoration does not preclude landmark designation of an historic building, especially one emblematic of the long struggle for civil rights.”* **CHRISTABEL GOUGH**

Society for the Architecture of the City

*“An extant 1851 wood frame house is, in and of itself, **such a rarity in Manhattan**, but one that was built by a known abolitionist, Dennis Harris, occupies a special place in New York City history and should not be demolished.”* **FERN LUSKIN**

Architectural historian, co-chair of Friends of the Hopper-Gibbons House

Underground Railroad Site, Lamartine Place Historic District, NYC

*“Documented extant **sites connected to prominent abolitionists** and the abolitionist movement in New York City deserve special recognition....”* **ANDREW BERMAN**

Executive Director, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation

*“Its **embodiment of the abolitionist movement** and role in the Underground Railroad rise to national significance.”* **LAURENCE FROMMER**

President, Save Chelsea

*“If the LPC gave landmark protection to 227 Duffield, I find it hard to understand why it would contradict that decision and fail to give the same protection to 857 Riverside. I am inspired by the story of 857 Riverside Drive, and **it is a powerful message that the Abolitionist spirit in New York was not confined to my borough of Brooklyn.**”* **RAUL ROTHBLATT**

227 Duffield and Downtown Brooklyn abolitionist history advocate

*“[This is] **a historically significant area** for which CB12-M has repeatedly requested historic designation.”* **GEORGE CALDERARO**

Preservation committee chair, The Victorian Society of New York

WHAT STAKEHOLDERS ARE SAYING ABOUT AN EXPANDED DISTRICT



*“Community Board 12-M urges the City Council and Department of City Planning to approve, once it is made, the Landmarks Preservation Commission’s recommendation to **extend the boundaries** of the Audubon Park Historic District.”*

LAND USE COMMITTEE

Community Board 12-Manhattan, June 2, 2021

*“The Audubon Park area, including the [expansion]...is precisely the sort of neighborhood that—if included in the expanded district—would **help to ensure diversity and inclusion** and help to tell the stories of all New Yorkers.”*

JEFFREY BUCARI President **SHIRLEY LONG** Treasurer **MARTHA ACKELSBURG** Secretary
Crillon Court Board Of Directors

*“Virtually all of Riverside Drive and West End Avenue between 72nd and 110th St. has been [landmarked]. The same consideration should be given the entire Audubon Park historic area...whose **unique history spans an era not reflected in most of Northern Manhattan or lower Riverside Drive.**” **JOY GRAMOLINI***

Treasurer, 790 Riverside Drive Owners Inc.

*“We need to **continue educating our communities** and the future generations about [their] historic impact.” **MARIA LUNA***

Democratic District Leader

*“Mayor de Blasio, I also encourage you to **move beyond your verbalized support of the ‘Equity Framework’ with the budget support** that ensures all relevant City resources are mobilized to help this effort succeed.” **JOHN T. REDDICK***

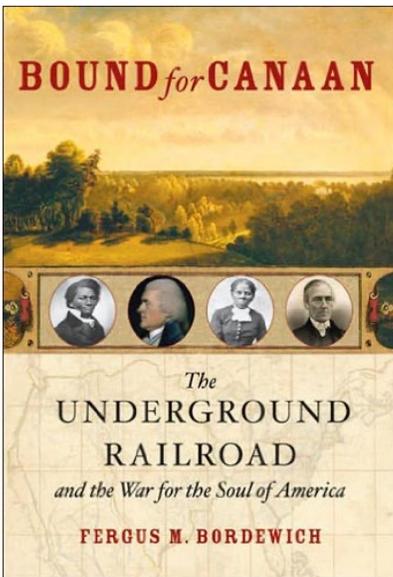
Architectural Historian and Harlem PRIDE co-founder

**IMPORTANT NEWS:
SAVE RIVERSIDE
RECEIVES KEY
SUPPORT
FROM RENOWNED
UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD EXPERT
FERGUS M.
BORDEWICH**



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy



FERGUS M. BORDEWICH, a nationally recognized expert on America's Underground Railroad, is extending his full support to save the 1851 home of abolitionists Dennis Harris and John Newhouse at 857 Riverside Drive, currently under threat of demolition. He writes:

Harris's involvement in the Underground Railroad is well-documented.

While the use of his Washington Heights properties as underground sites has not yet been proven, very strong circumstantial evidence suggests that they were.

At the very least, further historical study is urgently called for.

Destruction of the surviving building would be a travesty, and an irreparable loss to a city which has a very poor record of preserving sites related to Black and abolitionist history.

The comparative isolation of Harris's Washington Heights properties argues for their utility as a protected, easily guarded waystation for fugitives who needed to be gotten quickly out of lower Manhattan.

Harris's ownership of a steamboat strongly suggests that this vessel could well have been used, as others were, to ferry fugitive slaves, since river boats were the primary means to move freedom-seekers northward.

At a time when the nation is being called to account for its implication in the long history of slavery, and when the Underground Railroad is increasingly being recognized as a rare, sterling example of antebellum Americans bridging the color line on behalf of human rights, the Harris house deserves serious attention from preservationists and historians, not demolition.

Visit SaveRiverside.org to read *Preserving New York's Ties to the Underground Railroad* by John Freeman Gill, The New York Times, January 10, 2021.

It features additional insights by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian **Eric Foner** and Underground Railroad expert **Tom Calarco**, substantiating the importance of Dennis Harris as an abolitionist, and the great likelihood that his home and Washington Heights properties were indeed tied to NYC's Underground Railroad.

**HOW COULD
THE NEW YORK CITY
LANDMARKS
PRESERVATION
COMMISSION MISS
— AND DISMISS —
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
857 RIVERSIDE DRIVE?**



SAVE RIVERSIDE

Protecting Our Enduring Legacy

THESE EXPERTS DISAGREE WITH THE LPC!

“...under existing law, historic preservation is not limited to the preservation of architectural ornament: damage to its decoration does not preclude landmark designation of an historic building, especially one emblematic of the long struggle for civil rights.”



CHRISTABEL GOUGH
Society for the Architecture
of the City

“An extant 1851 wood frame house is, in and of itself, such a rarity in Manhattan, but one that was built by a known abolitionist, Dennis Harris, occupies a special place in New York City history and should not be demolished.”



FERN LUSKIN
Architectural Historian,
Co-Chair: Friends of the
Hopper-Gibbons House
Underground Railroad Site,
Lamartine Place Historic District,
West 29th Street in Manhattan

On November 27, 2020, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission rejected Save Riverside’s 36-page Request For Evaluation to landmark 857 Riverside Drive, while promising:

“We will continue to study the history of abolitionism and the Underground Railroad in Washington Heights, and the contributions of Dennis Harris and John Newhouse to the movement.”

But how will they keep this promise, and when?

The Landmarks Preservation Commission’s rejection also says:

“LPC is committed to recognizing the important role New York City played in the effort to abolish slavery nationwide, and to assist those seeking to escape it.

We seek to recognize this history through designations of buildings as landmarks with good integrity to embody their important history...

857 Riverside Drive retains neither the historic appearance nor adequate historic fabric from the 19th century abolitionist era, and therefore does not possess integrity of historic association, design or materials.”

NOTE: The Landmark Preservation Commission rejected the Request For Evaluation knowing the new owner had *already* applied for a demolition permit.

If there is to be continuing study, why not Calendar the house for consideration?

This would have protected the last physical link to Harris and Newhouse for up to 40 days, allowing more time to actually visit and research the property.

The Abyssinian Baptist Church

in the City of New York

Founded 1808

Reverend
Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III
Pastor

Gerald Barbour
Chair, Diaconate Board

Eleanor E. Olive
Chair, Diaconate Board

Alexis E. Thomas
Chair, Trustee Board

Sheila Boston Robinson
Church Clerk

132 Odell Clark Place
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VIA FEDERAL EXPRESS

July 3, 2021

Commissioner Sarah Carroll
Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Carroll and Mayor de Blasio,

I am writing you to support the request by the Upper Riverside Residents Alliance to expand the Audubon Park Historic District to include areas of importance to Black heritage in New York City, including 857 Riverside Drive, a house built in 1851 by the Abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor, Dennis Harris, and which is in imminent danger of demolition.

The expanded district would also include a row of 12 houses along West 158th Street west of Riverside Drive that were bought and restored by Black families in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the River Terrace Mitchell-Lama co-operative, where many prominent Black New Yorkers have made their home, including our first Black Mayor, David Dinkins.

What is at stake here is not only architecture, but a cultural and historical legacy of supreme importance to Black New Yorkers. The Abolitionist movement was the first great civil rights struggle in this country, and it remains its most momentous, culminating as it did with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 and six years later, the ratification of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

As any New Yorker can see from a look at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's own map of New York City, far fewer buildings and districts have been landmarked in neighborhoods of color and lower income than in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods. This is despite the fact that there are many worthy buildings in these neighborhoods, buildings that tell the history and reflect the culture of millions of New Yorkers of color.

Almost all of Riverside Drive and West End Avenue between 72nd and 110th streets have been incorporated into several historic districts in recognition of the area's contribution to the history and development of New York City. The same consideration should be given to the entire Audubon Park historic area, whose residents included New York City's first Black mayor, and whose unique history spans an era not reflected in most of northern Manhattan or lower Riverside Drive.

The house at 857 Riverside Drive is of particular historical and cultural importance, as the last remnant of a vibrant Abolitionist community in upper Manhattan, established after its founders were forced from their places of worship and business in the heart of New York City for voicing their anti-slavery views. The leading historian of the Underground Railroad, Fergus Bordewich, says the house certainly served as part of the Underground Railroad, helping those who had escaped slavery make their way to freedom in Canada.

Mayor de Blasio, you have pledged to dismantle the "structural and institutional racism" that is still so present in our city. Chair Carroll, you said in your recently published essay on the Landmarks commission's new "Equity Framework," that your agency would "ensure diversity and inclusion in designations, to make sure that we are telling the stories of all New Yorkers."

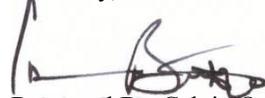
I urge you to take this opportunity to turn those words into actions. For too long, this city has ignored the history, the culture and the stories of New Yorkers of color. These buildings tell that story and deserve to be saved.

While I realize that the Landmarks Preservation Commission doesn't consider development when setting boundaries of historic districts, the proposed out-of-scale development of the areas we ask to include in the expanded Audubon Historic District will have an irreparable adverse effect on the livability and composition of the existing district. This corner of Washington Heights is an affordable, racially and culturally diverse, working-middle-class neighborhood. Historic properties don't need to be destroyed to make way for condos that will sell for millions, especially when many units in new buildings farther downtown remain unsold.

Mr. Mayor, given the uncertainty about how many people will choose to live in New York City in a post-pandemic, less office-centered job market, city leadership and the LPC should consider what types of housing will be needed and the role preservation should play in maintaining the cohesion of neighborhoods. And if the LPC is serious about sustainability and carrying out its plan to correct the imbalance in landmark designations across the city, it should recognize that the vital cultural importance of Audubon Park extends beyond the existing district, listen to neighborhood leaders and elected officials, and approve the Upper Riverside Residents Alliance's request to expand the Audubon Park Historic District without delay.

Mr. Mayor, Chair Carroll, the history of Black New Yorkers, and the history of all New Yorkers, deserves to be preserved. These stories deserve to be told to generations of New Yorkers not yet born. This is a rare opportunity to come down on the right side of history. I urge you to seize it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Calvin O. Butts, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Reverend Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III
Pastor, The Abyssinian Baptist Church in the City of New York

FROM THE DESK OF
FERGUS M. BORDEWICH

May 24, 2021

As you know, I am the author of the standard national history of the Underground Railroad, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*. I am writing to you to lend my full support to the effort to save the Dennis Harris house at 857 Riverside Drive. This property is of potentially great importance in preserving the history of the Underground Railroad, all the more so since scarcely any traces of the underground still remain in the city, which was once a key transshipment point for northbound fugitives.

Harris's involvement in the Underground Railroad is well-documented. While the use of his Washington Heights properties as underground sites has not yet been proven, very strong circumstantial evidence suggests that they were. At the very least, further historical study is urgently called for. Destruction of the surviving building would be a travesty, and an irreparable loss to a city which has a very poor record of preserving sites related to Black and abolitionist history.

Although antebellum New York City was home to important abolitionists and a sizeable antebellum African-American population, it was also a hotbed of anti-abolitionist activity, and not a secure refuge for fugitives. There was urgent pressure to move newly arrived fugitives to safe havens upstate. Just how many fugitives passed through the city is unknowable, given the paucity of records. A reasonable estimate would be at least several hundred or perhaps as many as one thousand per year from the 1830s through the 1850s. While some continued up the coast to New England, the great majority were sent up the Hudson River to Albany and on to abolitionist strongholds in central New York or Canada.

The comparative isolation of Harris's Washington Heights properties argues for their utility as a protected, easily guarded waystation for fugitives who needed to be gotten quickly out of lower Manhattan. Harris's ownership of a steamboat strongly suggests that this vessel could well have been used, as others were, to ferry fugitive slaves, since river boats were the primary means to move freedom-seekers northward.

At a time when the nation is being called to account for its implication in the long history of slavery, and when the Underground Railroad is increasingly being recognized as a rare, sterling example of antebellum Americans bridging the color line on behalf of human rights, the Harris house deserves serious attention from preservationists and historians, not demolition.



Fergus M. Bordewich