

Jacob Day Residence

50 West 13th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Tax Map Block 576 Lot 15

Built: c. 1845

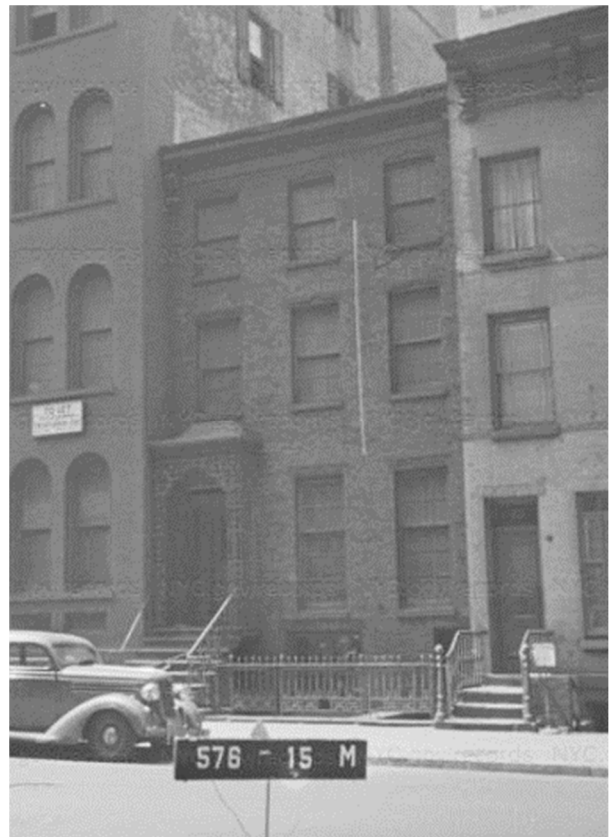
Architect: Not determined

Style: Greek Revival

Action: Calendared June 18, 2024; Public Hearing September 10, 2024; Proposed for Designation October 22, 2024



50 West 13th Street, LPC



c. 1940 Tax Photo

The former Jacob Day Residence is a three-story Greek Revival Style brick row house located in Greenwich Village, built c. 1845. From 1857 to 1884, the building was owned and used as a residence and place of business by Jacob Day (1817-1884), a prominent African American businessman and property owner. Day was an advocate for the abolition of slavery and later for voting rights and economic opportunities for African Americans in the second half of the 19th century.

Before the Civil War, abolitionism was a dangerous activity for Black individuals, and could result in loss of business, loss of family, and even loss of life. Despite the risks, Jacob Day was a member of the National Anti-Slavery Society and a contemporary of other distinguished abolitionists, including Reverend Henry Highland Garnet and Professor Charles L. Reason, principal of the 42nd Street Colored School. Day was a prominent member of Abyssinian Baptist Church, which throughout its history supported abolition and African American civil rights. Day was also a member of the Freedman's Bank, founded after the Civil War to help improve the economic prospects of African Americans.

The building at 50 West 13th Street was Jacob Day's residence and housed his catering business on the ground floor and basement level, with additional rooms rented out to boarders on the upper floors. Tenants included prominent educator, abolitionist, and later suffragist, Sarah J. Tompkins Garnet, who resided here from the 1860s to 1874. After Day's death in 1884, his sons Charles Day and Jacob Day, Jr. carried on the catering business at this address until 1896.

Day owned a successful catering business at a time when catering was one of the few business opportunities Black men could pursue, and he was a member of the Caterers' Club, along with other renowned African American caterers in New York City. At the time of his death in 1884, Day was worth an estimated \$200,000 (approximately \$6 million in 2024), and he owned property in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Long Island.

In 1959, 50 West 13th Street was renovated to house a theater at the basement level, a school on the first story, and residences on the remaining upper two stories. Among other tenants, the ground-breaking four-member Afro-American Folklore Troupe had a residency at the theater in 1968, performing poetry, folklore and works by well-known Black writers James Weldon Johnson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Leroi Jones and Langston Hughes. From 1972 to 2020, the building was the home of the 13th Street Repertory Company, one of New York's longest-operating "Off-Off-Broadway" theaters, founded by Edith O'Hara.

The row house at 50 West 13th Street is a characteristic example of 19th-century Greek Revival style architecture and is significant for its nearly 40-year association with prominent African American entrepreneur and abolitionist Jacob Day.

