



Testimony from the Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) regarding 227 Duffield Street

July 14, 2020

MAS supports the designation of the home of Harriet and Thomas Truesdell at 227 Duffield Street, a rare artifact of abolitionist history in Downtown Brooklyn. The former Greek-Revival row house was built c. 1847-50, and the Truesdells made it their home from 1851-63. Although it has since been altered, it is the only physical remnant of anti-slavery activism along “Abolitionist Place.”

In the mid-19th Century, the Brooklyn waterfront was a bustling port, where the shipment of goods from Southern states brought many stowaways. With a large population of free African Americans already living in the neighborhood, area residents were known to shelter enslaved people seeking freedom. This was a particularly dangerous time to engage in abolitionist activity due to the recent passage of the Fugitive Slave Law.

Before moving to Brooklyn from Rhode Island, Mrs. Truesdell was a member of the 1838 Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women’s organizing committee and the treasurer of the Providence Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, and Mr. Truesdell was a founding member of the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society. The couple were known acquaintances of William Lloyd Garrison, a celebrated journalist and abolitionist.

This year in particular, we recognize our role in telling the stories of those who struggled against slavery and oppression. It is important that the historic preservation profession embrace not just the history of architecture, but of people. 227 Duffield Street deserves to become an individual New York City landmark, indeed, it is long overdue for such protection.