

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

DRAFT

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Morris Park Senior Citizens Home

other names/site number _____

name of related multiple property listing N/A

Location

street & number 17 E. 124th Street

city or town New York

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10035-2715

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

not for publication

vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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Name of Property

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Brick

roof: Synthetic

other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Morris Park Senior Citizens Home at 17 East 124th Street was originally developed by a church-led community group between 1961 and 1963 as senior housing and was later acquired by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) in 1977 as a rehabilitated “turnkey” project.¹ The nomination recognizes its significance in its original context and not its later acquisition by NYCHA. The complex consists of a nine-story reinforced concrete building with brick and block walls. The building is T-shaped in plan with a flat roof. Upon its acquisition by NYCHA, the complex contained ninety-seven units, all intended for continued use as senior housing.²

Site: The building is situated on a roughly 0.23-acre site on the north side of 124th Street in the middle of a densely developed block bounded by 5th Avenue and Madison Avenue. Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is located directly across 124th Street from Marcus Garvey Park, previously Mount Morris Park, a large community park that has served the neighborhood since the early nineteenth century.³ There are few site features or landscaping, as the building sits directly along the sidewalk. Street trees line the sidewalk along the facade. The rear of the building to the north features concrete-paved lightwell areas, which provide egress. At the wings, the rear area drops down to the basement level, providing access to the upper lightwell area via a ladder on each side. Egress is created via a tunnel at the basement level beneath the east wing, leading from the basement exit to 124th Street.

Setting: Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is located in a largely urban setting in Manhattan, New York. The site sits at the western edge of East Harlem, sometimes considered to be within Central Harlem. Just north along 125th Street is the historic commercial corridor of the area. To the west of the site are residential brownstone row houses. To the east is The Oxford, an equally tall seven-story pre-WWII apartment building. The site is directly adjacent to the Mount Morris Park Historic District (Boundary Increase), as the boundary for the district ends at 13 East 124th Street, the property directly to the west, and directly across the street from Marcus Garvey Park.

Exterior: The exterior of the subject building consists primarily of brick with no ornamentation. Only two elevations are visible as the building abuts adjacent buildings on its east and west sides.

Facade (South Elevation): The facade along 124th Street faces south and is eight bays wide. It features a slightly recessed central entrance beneath a cantilevered aluminum awning. The entrance is a single-leaf aluminum door flanked by multilight fixed windows with aluminum framing accessible directly from street level. Additional doors exit the building at the east and west sides of the rear lightwells. The outermost bays and the bay adjacent to the entrance to the west contain pairs of double-hung, one-over-one replacement aluminum windows that match the original one-over-one configuration. All other windows are tripartite or paired groupings of double-hung, one-over-one replacement aluminum windows that match the original one-over-one configuration. These windows have an original through-wall air conditioning unit installed in the spandrel below the windowsill, which was advertised as an “air conditioning sleeve” in a promotional brochure released prior to the building’s opening. Responding to budget restrictions, not all facade elements featured in the brochure, such as a ground

¹ Clarence Robinson, “Acquisition of Additional Properties,” January 13, 1977, NYCHA Archives.

² “Morris Park Development Plan,” 1977, NYCHA Archives.

³ Marcus Garvey Park is also proposed for nomination.

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level metal screen across windows and multi-light windows, were integrated into construction. A non-historic flagpole projects from the facade over the entrance at the second story. A two-story mechanical penthouse exists on the roof.

North (Rear) Elevation: The brick-clad rear elevation faces north and is located along the paved rear open area described in the Site section above. Each wing features one bay, with pairs of double-hung, one-over-one windows at each level. The basement level is exposed at the wings at this elevation and is clad in concrete. The central block of the building features four bays with a ribbon of three double-hung, one-over-one windows in each bay at each level. Basement windows along the raised portion of the rear area are enclosed with metal security cages.

Interior: The interior of the building is served on all floors by a centrally located I-shaped corridor, where the stem of the I organizes the vertical circulation, and the arms of the I organize the apartments. Vertical access throughout the building is provided by a bank of two elevators and a stairway, both centered in the building across from one another. The stairs are primarily utilitarian, with painted concrete treads and original metal handrails.

First Floor: At the first floor, the corridors are accessed by a central vestibule and lobby to the south. Off the lobby to the east is the mail room and management office. The primary public space in the building originally included the first-floor lobby, mail room, and waiting room. There are apartment units around the perimeter of the building.

Upper Floors: At the upper stories, the I-shaped corridor plan remains consistent, with units around the perimeter of the plan. The complex includes efficiency studio units, one-bedroom units, and two-bedroom units, largely in the state which they were originally designed. The layout of units is original to the design of the building; however, as is typical with NYCHA properties, the units feature some modern fixtures and finishes. The remaining public space in the building includes the corridors at each floor. Most upper-floor corridors feature original safety handrails or grab bars designed for senior living.

Roof: The roof of the building is a flat, synthetic roof with a central stair/elevator tower. The elevator tower features two chimneys and a wood water tower. The brick elevator tower is two stories, housing elevator mechanicals at the second story. Multi-light windows adorn the elevator tower in select locations. A brick wall with concrete coping runs along the perimeter of the roof. The roof is otherwise unadorned.

Basement: The basement of the building is laid out similarly to the other floors, with the same central corridor, elevator bank, and stairwell, and rooms located around the exterior. Originally housing some public space for tenants, such as a sewing room and a hobby room, the basement is now dedicated primarily to maintenance space. Along the south side of the building from west to east is a breakroom for staff, two storage rooms, a valve control room, electrical room, and, finally, the laundry room: the only public space in the basement. At the east side of the basement plan is the boiler room and what was originally the tenant's recreation room, now dedicated to maintenance. At the west side of the plan are the former tenants' sewing room and hobby room, a toilet, and a kitchen, no longer used by tenants.

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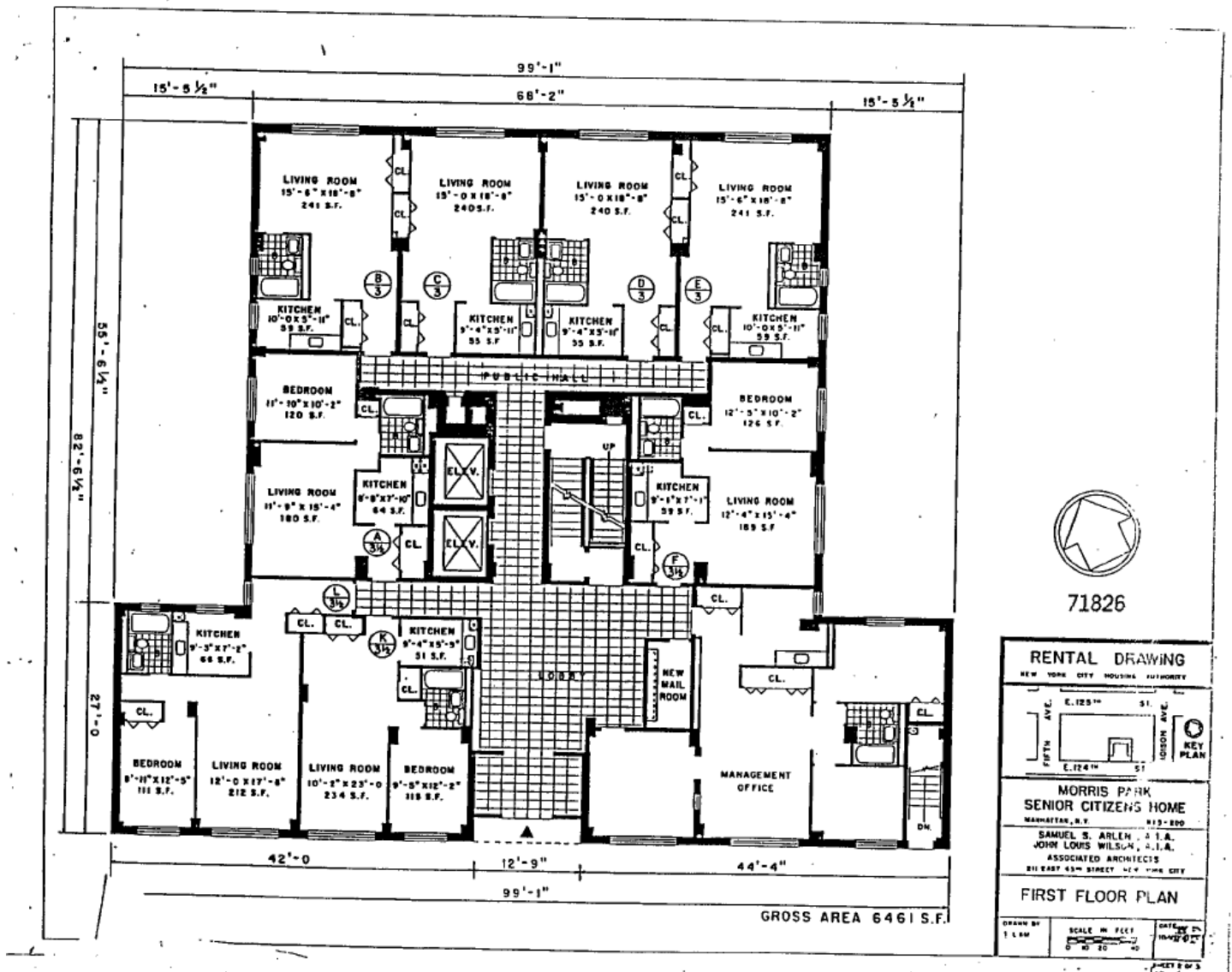


Figure 1, Original Rental Plans, Arlen and Wilson, ca. 1960. (Source: NYCHA Archives)

Integrity

Location: Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is in its original location. As such, the building retains integrity of location.

Setting: When the subject building was constructed, it was in a primarily residential area of East Harlem along Morris Park (Marcus Garvey Park), consisting of a mixture of turn-of-the-century apartment buildings and rowhouses. The setting has remained largely the same, with some instances of recladding or new residential buildings. Overall, the setting has minimally changed since the mid-twentieth century.

Design: Morris Park Senior Citizens Home has undergone minimal exterior alterations since initial construction in 1963. The complex retains its original massing and form. The building retains its exterior design. A historic real estate pamphlet depicts the windows as picture windows with a multi-pane sash, but it is impossible to determine if those windows were actually installed upon the original completion. NYCHA replaced the windows soon after its acquisition in 1977 and again in 1995 and both the existing and new replacement

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windows were one over one windows. Based on the current documentation and discrepancies with the pamphlet, it is assumed that the original window was a one-over-one configuration as part of the cost cutting measures during the original design and construction. The pamphlet also shows through-wall air conditioning units, which exist beneath the right side of the tripartite windows rather than in the center as depicted on the pamphlet. No other historic images of the building were discovered during research; however, upon reviewing documents pertaining to building contracts and alterations, the only changes to the exterior are the replacement of windows and doors and the installation of a new entry and aluminum canopy.

During a second building campaign in the 1970s in preparation for NYCHA's acquisition of the property, a management office was converted to an apartment on the east side of the first floor and the original waiting room off the lobby was converted to the new management office.

According to a 1980 field survey of the building, a series of renovation projects was undertaken as well, including the installation of a new roof membrane, new aluminum windows, new apartment entrance and closet doors, new mailboxes, and the conversion of a first-floor apartment into a management office, which moved the management office into what was previously a waiting room.⁴ The survey noted that the building was in overall good condition, aside from water infiltration at the windows causing damage to mortar joints, which likely necessitated the replacement of some of the brickwork, now visible on the facade.⁵

In 1993, finishes were updated alongside other minor alterations in apartment units, including the replacement of entry saddles, plumbing fixtures, and other superficial repairs. Most replacements were of similar materials.⁶ In 1995, the existing one-over-one aluminum windows were replaced with matching windows.⁷ During this campaign, the building was altered minimally to better accommodate handicap features within the units, with additional finishes and fixtures replaced, and some entries were widened to accommodate wheelchairs.⁸ The 1995 plans utilize the original plans for reference, showing the general layout had not changed since construction.

A recent survey of the building confirmed that the original layout of the units remains. The conversion of the first-floor management office to an apartment unit and the waiting room to a new management office has not severely impacted the public space in the building. Though they have been replaced, electric kitchen appliances have also continuously been used as a safety feature. Some doors have been widened to accommodate wheelchairs, and bathroom grab bars are likely replacements. The facade of the building and general distribution of apartments and shared spaces is much the same as its original conception, with ninety-seven total units ranging from studio apartments to two-bedroom apartments. Morris Park Senior Citizens Home retains high degree of integrity of function and design.

Workmanship and Materials: Though there is little ornamentation present at the building, the materials and simple workmanship at the exterior, including its brick face, have been largely retained, maintaining the building's association with the utilitarian design common among mid-century affordable housing complexes in East Harlem; however, a few areas of damage have been patched with replacement brick. The facade features minimal ornamentation as originally designed. During a second building campaign in the 1970s in preparation for NYCHA's acquisition of the property, the interior was renovated with updated finishes. In 2004, a complete

⁴ Anthony Palermo, "Letter - Field Surveys of Rutland Towers and Morris Park Senior Citizens Home," New York, January 19, 1981).

⁵ Palermo.

⁶ "Mt. Morris Park SCC Miscellaneous Detail Drawings," New York, March 10, 1993, NYCHA Archives.

⁷ "Mt. Morris Park SCC Miscellaneous Detail Drawings," New York, April 4, 1995, NYCHA Archives.

⁸ "Handicap Useable Apartment Conversion Plans," May 1993.

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kitchen and bath renovation was completed as well. Some finishes have been replaced or repaired due to deteriorated or asbestos containing materials.

Feeling and Association: Morris Park Senior Citizens Home was designed as an affordable senior housing complex. While there have been alterations to interior finishes and fixtures and replacement of certain exterior features, such as windows and doors, there have been relatively few alterations to the overall massing, form, and appearance of the building, as well as to the layout and site. Any changes have minimally impacted the feeling and association of the site as a private housing development. As it stands today, the feeling and association of the complex within the history of affordable senior housing in East Harlem is well preserved .

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1963-----?

Significant Dates

1963

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arlen, Samuel S. and Wilson, John Louis

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the building is 1963, the date of the building's construction. This conveys the building's construction and its association with the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Constructed in 1963, the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of SOCIAL HISTORY. In contrast to public housing, the nominated high rise apartment building in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood of Harlem is an important example of church-led community development of senior housing using the Section 202 direct loan program of the Community Facilities Administration, a part of the US Housing and Home Finance Agency. This program differed from other private development subsidies, such as the Mitchell-Lama state funding program, in that it targeted housing specifically for the elderly, at below market rate; the program also allowed faith-based communities to lead the development of this housing. Churches had long been providers of social services; however, responding to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950-60s, religious organizations, particularly Black churches in New York City, were inspired to pursue community development in the form of housing, feeling it was their responsibility to impact the socio-political landscape of the city with the contribution of housing. The Abyssinian Baptist Church, one of the largest Black churches in New York City, became a major social and political force, especially in Harlem, and did not shy from the opportunity to begin developing housing for citizens within its community. In the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, the growing aging population in Harlem required attention, inspiring the church to pursue the development of a senior housing facility in one of the most desirable locations in this section of the city. Famed pastors Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Oberia D. Dempsey, two leaders of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, established the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council to lead the development, a local nonprofit corporation functioning as an affiliate of their church. The development of this project testifies to the complex link between the New York City Housing Authority's stated goals of providing housing for underserved communities and its failure to understand the needs and wants of the members of those communities because Powell, Dempsey, and the Abyssinian Baptist Church undertook this development in direct reaction to the perceived shortfalls of the public housing developments produced by NYCHA. The community blamed NYCHA's projects for driving families out, demolishing tenements and brownstones, and constructing high-rise towers and superblocks in their place. Though these complexes increased housing units, they were often unattainable and/or undesirable for poor and minority citizens due to long waiting periods, convoluted government processes, and the displacement of their supporting community. The realization of the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home aligned with the goals of the Civil Rights era by providing ninety-seven new housing units for senior citizens, most of whom were Black, in Harlem. The senior housing tower was one of two properties developed in Harlem by Powell and the Abyssinian Baptist Church, the other, the Clayton Apartments, housed middle-income residents without age restrictions. The development of Morris Park also followed the trend of faith-based organizations in the 1950s-60s meeting a need for housing vulnerable citizens within their communities. The period of significance for Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is based on the date of construction, 1963.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Elderly Housing in the Mid-Twentieth Century

Constructed in 1963, the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home represents the efforts of a faith-based organization to house senior citizens within their community. The origins of elderly housing in the United States date to seventeenth century, when the first "almshouses" were opened in New York by the Dutch. These so-called poorhouses were public institutions for homeless, older people with limited to no income. These facilities were often established as part of church efforts, or by other charitable organizations. Still, as resolving the need for

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housing for the elderly became a task of these types of organizations, family support, where it existed, remained the biggest support for the aging community.⁹ One of the first efforts of the federal government to support the aging population was the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935. This act addressed the financial situation of the elderly by creating a collaboration between the national and state governments where both parties would contribute to a supplemental workers' retirement fund, to be distributed after the age of 65.¹⁰

In 1942, New York State began its first program of housing for seniors, requiring that a percentage of its state-aided projects be designed and reserved for aged persons. In response to the growing population of isolated elderly in the city, nonprofit groups also sought the development of senior supportive housing. Union Settlement, a Manhattan settlement house, initiated one of the first old age programs in New York City. This became a precursor to their long-standing senior services program, consisting of recreation, meals and literacy programs.¹¹ New York's confrontation of the senior housing situation in the 1940s was followed by Congress taking action in the 1950s. Congress directly addressed the need for senior housing at a nationwide level in the United States Housing Act of 1956, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the Federal-State Council on Aging and signed housing act amendments that made single elderly people eligible to live in public housing, increased funding for projects associated with public housing for the elderly and granted loans to the elderly under the Federal Housing Administration program. The actions of the federal government in the pursuit of housing the elderly increased national awareness of the issue, spurring affordable housing project development by city and state governments. In addition to spurring new nationwide construction and public visibility, the changes in public policy also had the effect of attracting the interest of architectural thinkers and practitioners.¹²

Architectural historian and critic Lewis Mumford wrote in *Architectural Record* about the need to integrate older people into urban settings. In August 1958, Jane Jacobs, famed writer and urban design critic, called for more public housing for the elderly.¹³ Additionally, architectural competitions began to address the concept of senior housing, such as the one held by *Architectural Record* that was sponsored by the National Committee on Aging of the National Social Welfare Assembly. Senior housing was being discussed at a national level.¹⁴ While the government considered potential funding opportunities and programs, private developers too, began to consider their options as new opportunities arose.

The 1959 housing act expanded housing programs under the HHFA, responding to the increased discourse surrounding senior housing, to particularly encourage private development for older citizens. While the public housing program expanded to include senior housing, privately developed senior housing led by community groups with the help of government funding were constructed as well, particularly sponsored by church nonprofits.¹⁵ Beginning in Chicago in 1959, churches began to take advantage of Section 202 of the United States Housing Act of 1959, which provided loans to nonprofit organizations to develop low-income senior

⁹ *The Senior Living Field: Background, History, and Its Current and Future State* (Springer Publishing Company, 2023), <https://connect.springerpub.com/content/book/978-0-8261-7733-9/part/part01/chapter/ch01>.

¹⁰ *The Senior Living Field*.

¹¹ "History | Union Settlement," April 4, 2018, <https://www.unionsettlement.org/history/>.

¹² Cindy Hamilton, Caitlin Hernstadt, and Linda Santoro, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Metro North Plaza" (National Park Service, March 23, 2024).

¹³ Lewis Mumford, "For Older People - Not Segregation but Integration," *Architectural Record*, Housing for the Independent Aged, 109, no. 119 (1956): 86-91.

¹⁴ Hamilton, Hernstadt, and Santoro, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Metro North Plaza."

¹⁵ Brochure for Park Morris Apartments, New York Real Estate Brochure Collection, Columbia University, New York, New York.

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housing. In Manhattan, the Saint Philips Episcopal Church and the Abyssinian Baptist Church, both located in Harlem, became some of the first churches to develop large-scale senior and low-income housing.¹⁶

In the early 1960s, increased discussion amongst government and private agencies continued to examine the proper design of elderly housing. The 1961 White House Conference on Aging's *Basic Policy Statements and Recommendations* stipulated that elderly housing complexes should "avoid isolation from the rest of the community or an institutionalized feeling."¹⁷ The conference delegates believed that elderly housing—whether public or private— should be more entwined with the surrounding neighborhood, providing ease of access to public amenities, such as hospitals, food, shopping, and public transportation.¹⁸ For Morris Park Senior Citizens Home, the proximity to the park, as well as all of the aforementioned amenities, proved ideal.

The following year, in 1962, the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) circulated an internal memo that emphasized the importance of independence for elderly residents. The memo, however, also emphasized the physical safety requirements that must be met in elderly housing. These requirements included: the avoidance of steps and thresholds, easy-to-reach kitchen equipment, sit-down sinks, non-skid floors, sit-down tubs and showers, wider doors and corridors, safety and grab bars in bathrooms, higher heat control, waist-level ovens and safety shut-offs on stoves, accessible wall plugs, and dwelling units whose size and design permit easy maintenance.¹⁹ As described in Section 7, many of these elements would be integrated into the design of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home, such as grab bars, electric stoves (which were safer than gas), non-skid floors, and conveniently placed electrical outlets.²⁰

In the post-World War II period, high-rise construction became one of the more prominent building types associated with affordable senior housing, especially in city settings. High-rises were considered to be an ideal form for senior housing. They were economical and housed large numbers of tenants within a small footprint; this was particularly necessary in densely populated New York City. *Progressive Architecture* magazine, for instance, published an article in its March 1961 issue titled "Public Housing for the Elderly," in which the authors concluded that only two types of buildings were appropriate for elderly housing: one-story cottages and high-rise buildings.²¹

Opened in 1963, Morris Park Senior Citizens Home was privately developed under the Section 202 program by the Abyssinian Baptist Church. The mid-rise design of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home perhaps speaks to the shift in design thinking concerning senior housing outlined in *Progressive Architecture*. Here at Morris Park, it seems the architects found a middle ground between the low-rise design of a place like the Harlem River Houses, also designed by John Louis Wilson, and the increasingly preferred (for the elderly) high-rise tower. It

¹⁶ Richard N. Hayes and Jeffrey A. Robinson, "A Research Note on Institutional Logics and Entrepreneurial Action: The Case of Black Church Organizations," *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship* 16, no. 4 (September 2011): 499–515, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1084946711001963> 499.

¹⁷ "The 1961 White House Conference on Aging, Basic Policy Statements and Recommendations," May 15, 1961, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961, p. 67.

¹⁸ "The 1961 White House Conference on Aging, Basic Policy Statements and Recommendations," May 15, 1961, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961, p. 70.

¹⁹ Lee Riccetti and Cindy Hamilton, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: High Rise Apartments" (Great Bend, Kansas: National Park Service, September 23, 2020), Library of Congress, https://khri.kansasgis.org/photos_docs/009-202_28.pdf, p. 16.

²⁰ "Park Morris Apartments, 17 E. 124 Street," The New York real estate brochure collection, 197 192AD, <https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/nyre/cul:gb5mkkwj3>.

²¹ "Public Housing for the Elderly," in *Progressive Architecture*, March 1961, p. 144-152.

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also speaks to the development of this building by a nonprofit organization, whose developments were restricted by the minimal funding of the associated community sponsors. The height of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is also a context sensitive choice, considering the building's site and setting among an overall low-to-mid-rise neighborhood. The building to the east, The Cambridge, would have been one of the largest buildings in the neighborhood, providing some level of density of housing, prior to the construction of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home. Morris Park aimed to pull from the design of The Cambridge, matching the overall height of the building as well as its levels. Morris Park translated elements of what would have been a beloved building, with its stone ornamentation and high-quality construction, into an affordable, senior housing building design.

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The Community Facilities Administration & Section 202

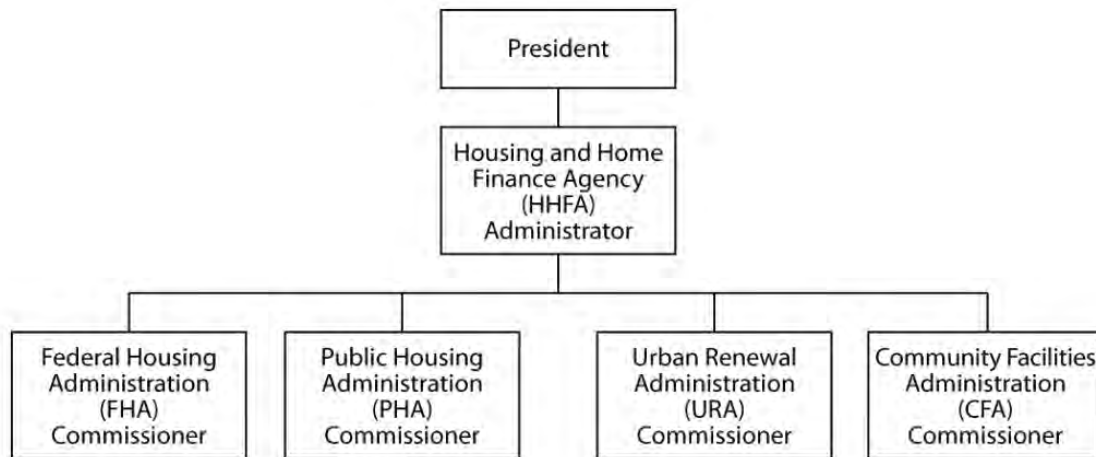


Figure 2: Pre-HUD configuration of HHFA programs from 1954–1965. (Source: HUD Archives)²²

The developers of the subject building applied for a federal Section 202 direct loan through the Community Facilities Administration (CFA) of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) to fund a senior housing project, the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home. This loan program came into existence under the Housing Act of 1959 and specifically targeted the private development of housing for senior citizens.²³ The Community Facilities Administration (established 1954) of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (established 1947) oversaw the program.²⁴

The Section 202 program would be defined by the CFA's direct loan program, which provided federal, long-term, low-interest, below-market-rate direct loans or capital advances from the federal government to enable private, not-for-profit sponsors to finance the construction of secure, barrier-free, and supportive housing for lower middle-income elderly households.²⁵ As administered, the loan program was limited to the construction of rental housing units which were fully equipped for independent living in contrast to assisted living or nursing facilities. A central dining hall with a kitchen was prohibited under this program, as were integrated supportive services such as health services, meal prep services, and incidental personal care, limiting the viability of housing in these developments strictly to independent seniors requiring little in-home care. Should that care be needed, it was to be acquired individually by the tenant utilizing their own funding sources.²⁶ This differentiated the type of housing it enabled from assisted living complexes.²⁷

The below-market interest rates and nonprofit sponsorship meant that rents were affordable to persons unable to afford market rate apartments but whose income was too high to qualify for public housing, one of the major roadblocks for seniors in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood. Individual developments for senior housing

²² Laurence L. Thompson, "A History of HUD," 2006, <https://monarchhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/hud-history.pdf>. p. 32.

²³ Alayna Waldrum, "Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly" (LeadingAge, May 2, 2014), 202, <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2014AG-145.pdf>.

²⁴ "Housing Problems of the Elderly" (U.S. Government Printing Office, January 9, 1964).

²⁵ https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/AG-2021/04-13_Section-202.pdf

²⁶ "Hearings before the Subcommittee on Housing For The Elderly" (U.S. Government Printing Office, January 9, 1964), <https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/publications/191964.pdf>, p. 32.

²⁷ "Hearings before the Subcommittee on Housing For The Elderly," p. 32.

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were large, averaging 153 units. Most of the units were efficiency apartments, and the projects tended to be located in large cities. Morris Park, though located in a major urban area and offering housing to the aforementioned income group, proved to be relatively small considering the average size of comparably funded developments. This was likely due to the limited funding available to the Abyssinian Baptist Church, as well as the limited selection of viable sites. As previously mentioned, most buildings in the immediate area surrounding the park were of masonry construction, but those where Morris Park now stands were of wood-frame construction. This opened up a cheaper alternative that impacted the community minimally, with a shorter demolition period, and the removal of smaller, less permanent structures that would not have had the same longevity as those buildings constructed with stone or brick. While its location across from the park was ideal, the site was also small and limited, sandwiched between older, masonry buildings.²⁸

The Section 202 direct loan program laid out four items necessary to consider prior to applying for federal assistance. First, the applying organization needed to analyze the market, polling its nonprofit board to determine how necessary the project was. This involved determining how much of the intended population was indeed considered elderly and assessing the existing housing facilities available in the proposed neighborhood, ultimately establishing a viable area that the project was intended to serve. The second step was to select a site location within the proposed area, which was a particularly important factor. The site was expected to have good access to public transportation, health facilities, cultural and religious institutions, social and recreational opportunities, and commercial facilities. It was also preferred by the CFA if the site was free of "objectionable features," such as smoke, noxious odors, and excess noises.²⁹ The third step was obtaining community support. The applying organizations were urged to gain the cooperation of the agencies in the community which dealt with serving the needs of elderly people. If the proposed development lacked its own recreational facilities, welfare and home care/nursing agencies, etc., it needed to ensure that they were immediately available near the site. Lastly, sponsoring organizations, such as churches, local community agencies, civic organizations, labor unions, fraternal organizations, etc., needed to create a separate nonprofit corporation to be considered eligible applicants under the Section 202 direct loan program. These nonprofit corporations had to have the strong backing of their sponsoring organization, such as the Abyssinian Baptist Church, to ensure continuity in its operation and management. The governing body of the application had to contain a cross-section of community interest, having a range of local leaders on its board, representing an array of public interest groups. Such a governing body was considered to be beneficial, being able to provide expert advice in all areas required in developing a successful project.³⁰

In addition to showing that there was sufficient demand for the housing that applicants intended to build, sponsoring groups were also required to show that they were unable to secure a private loan with an equally favorable interest rate. In 1961, that meant 3-3/8 percent or lower. Loans could run for as long as fifty years, and project plans, which included costs and estimates, were developed by an architect, who was also responsible for filing the application with the CFA.³¹

²⁸ Barbara A. Haley and Robert W. Gray, "Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly: Program Status and Performance Measurement" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, June 2008), HUD Archives, https://www.huduser.gov/Publications/pdf/sec_202_1.pdf. p. 5.

²⁹ Eone Harger et al., "Local Planning for Housing the Elderly" (New Jersey Division on Aging, March 19, 1964), Institute of Industrial Relations Library, <https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/irle/ucb/text/lb001549.pdf>. Pg. 30-32.

³⁰ Harger et al. pg. 30-32.

³¹ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Aging," *Aging*, January 1961.

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The CFA expected developments to include a “reasonable balance” of types and sizes of apartment units, and construction had to be planned as economically as possible. Total project costs were developed and evaluated based on how they affected future rental charges. The loans were intended to cover the total development cost, including construction, land acquisition, and site improvements. Loans were expected to be repaid with rents, which needed to be approved by the CFA. The primary objective of the program was to keep rents as low as possible without sacrificing design, construction, or necessary facilities.³²

As of September 1963, twenty-four projects had been completed under CFA programs nationwide, and twenty-four more were under construction. Funds had also been reserved for seventy-six additional projects. In total, by the termination of the CFA and its associated loan program in 1965, investment for the housing of seniors under Section 202 amounted to more than \$150 million.³³ This was specifically afforded to private developers and nonprofits and not utilized for public housing.³⁴

When established in 1965, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) absorbed the CFA and its programs. The CFA remains emblematic of the first chapter of private senior housing development under Section 202.³⁵ The efforts of the federal government to provide assistance to private developers of affordable housing, particularly seniors, became more well known with the Section 8 program, authorized by Congress in 1974 under HUD. This program provided rental subsidies for eligible tenant families residing in newly constructed, rehabilitated, and cooperative apartment developments.³⁶

Morris Park Neighborhood

Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is located on the border of Central Harlem and East Harlem, which are divided by Marcus Garvey Park (originally Mount Morris Park). The site is adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Mount Morris Park Historic District Boundary Expansion. The history of the area goes back initially to the Lenape Nation, and then to 1658, when Dutch settlers founded the town of Neuw Haerlem. Mount Morris was originally a wooded promontory among the Round Hills. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Harlem remained sparsely settled, primarily consisting of farmland. The area was acquired by New York City in 1839. By this time, the park became known as Mount Morris Square. By the late 1870s, the square had become a popular place for city folk looking for weekend excursions and country walks.³⁷

³² U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

³³ “Housing Problems of the Elderly” (U.S. Government Printing Office, December 11, 1963).

³⁴ “Housing Act Expands Existing Programs,” in *CQ Almanac 1964*, vol. 20, CQ Almanac Online Edition (United States: Congressional Quarterly, 1965), <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal64-1304358>.

³⁵ Thompson, “A History of HUD.”

³⁶ “Multifamily Housing - Program Description: Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program,” HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), accessed October 3, 2023, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/housing/mfh/progdesc/eld202.

³⁷ Theresa C. Noonan and Tara Harrison, “Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension Designation Report” (City of New York, September 22, 2015).

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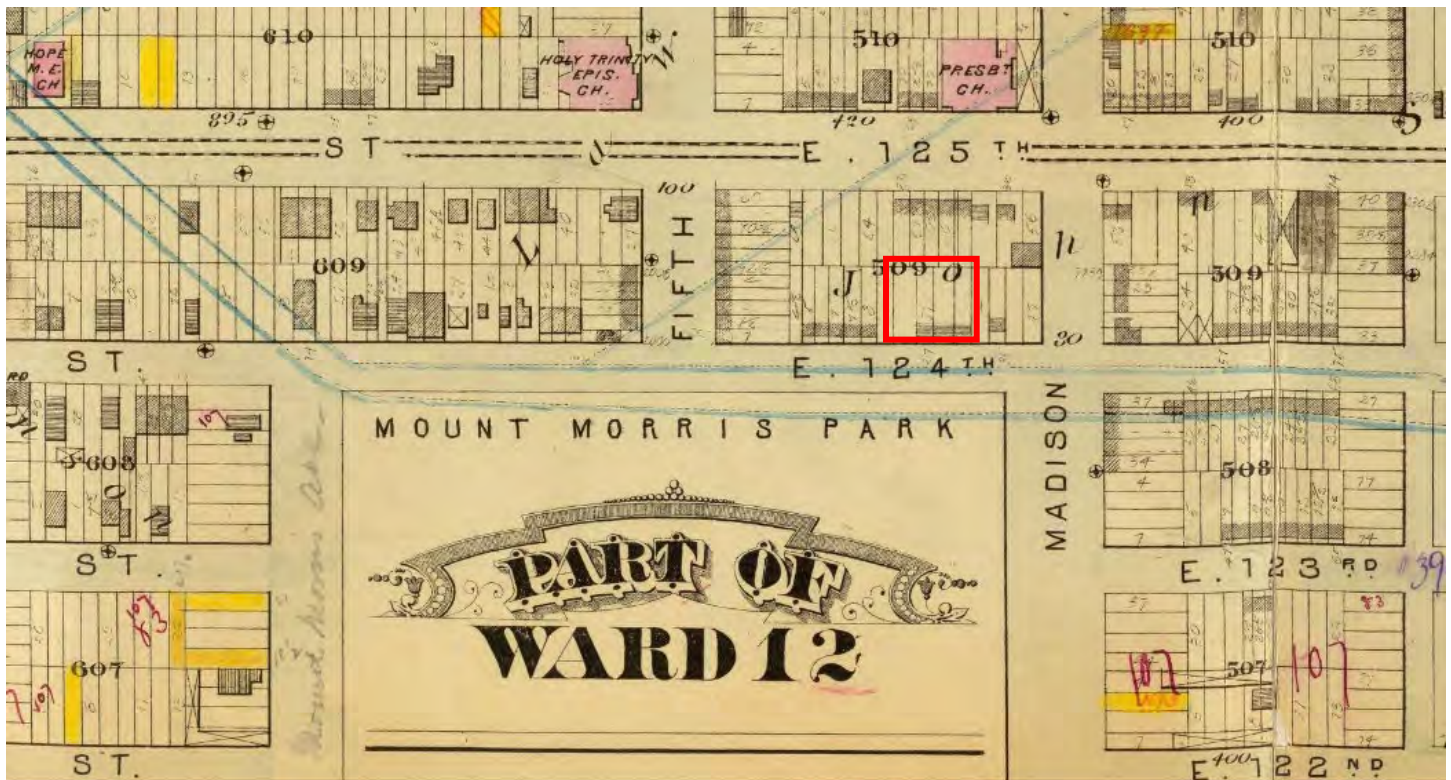


Figure 3: 1879, G.W. Bromley & Co.³⁸ Future site of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home outlined in red.

Speculative building in Harlem, particularly in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, began in 1878 and continued into the early twentieth century (Figure 2). The prospective plans for the East Side Subway line further increased interest in the area, and the park provided free recreational space.³⁹ In the last decades of the nineteenth century, developers across New York City began moving away from the construction of brownstones and towards the construction of mid-rise brick tenement houses. This shift accommodated the city's rapidly growing immigrant population.⁴⁰ By the early 1900s, the southern area of East Harlem, below Morris Park, became a dense neighborhood dominated by brick tenements.⁴¹ In the Mount Morris Park area, which was a particularly desirable location due to the park, developers constructed elegant rowhouses, along with a few apartment houses, such as The Cambridge and The Oxford (completed in 1901 and designed by George F. Pelham), which are still located adjacent to the subject building.⁴² In 1903, the *New York Herald* compared the houses along Mount Morris Park West with the well-known mansions along 5th Avenue. Overall, the area around Mount Morris Park where Morris Park Senior Citizens Home now exists was considered to be very attractive and retained a quality of housing and a middle-class population for a longer period than the surrounding neighborhoods. The population during this time was primarily white, ranging from working-to-upper class.⁴³

³⁸ "Part of Ward 12," 1879, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

³⁹ Noonan and Harrison, "Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension Designation Report."

⁴⁰ Marissa Marvelli, "East Harlem South / El Barrio: Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey," July 2021, 33

⁴¹ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, "Plate 32" (G.W. Bromley & Co., 1879), 32, New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/96d64220-0b66-0132-db4f-58d385a7bbd0>.

⁴² *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (F. W. Dodge Corporation, 1901).

⁴³ Noonan and Harrison, "Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension Designation Report."

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Between 1904-1905, the real estate bubble in Harlem burst. The subway had yet to be completed, and too many apartment buildings had been constructed without the appropriate demand. Alongside that, rents were too high for most people to afford. In an effort to avoid losing their investments, some landlords began to allow Black tenants to move into their properties. The renting of units to the African American community caused panic in Harlem, initiating the first period of white flight from the area. Owners began selling their properties; however, there were few prospective buyers willing to consider these properties as their value had depreciated. Some white landlords continued to resist renting to Black tenants; however, they eventually became unable to sustain the economic losses, choosing money over exclusion.⁴⁴ Middle-class Black families who were able to pay above the depressed market-rate were accepted into Harlem.⁴⁵

Though Harlem began to grow into a center for Black life in the early twentieth century, Midtown Manhattan, known as “Black Bohemia,” remained the primary core of the community. Conditions in this Midtown neighborhood were poor, resulting from red-lining (in the 1930s), restrictive covenants, racist violence, and segregation. The white population had successfully segregated the growing Black community into an area which was already tightly packed and overcrowded, with tenants in boarding houses and tenements.⁴⁶ In contrast to Midtown, Harlem at this time was clean, with well-cared for and new buildings developed with white tenants and buyers in mind. Considering that many houses and apartments were vacant, resulting from the failure of developers and landlords to accurately predict the value of their real estate ventures, this provided an opportunity for African Americans in Midtown to escape their living conditions. Philip A. Payton Jr. recognized the desperation of developers, and offered to manage vacant properties in Harlem, further opening the door to a Black migration from “Black Bohemia.”⁴⁷

This migration was not received well by white Harlem residents. In reaction, the Hudson Realty Company was founded with the sole purpose of purchasing buildings that housed Black tenants and evicting them. They also established an organization called the Property Owners Protective Association Inc., which planned to prevent African Americans from moving to Harlem. The Black community resisted, organizing the Afro American Realty Company to buy and lease housing specifically to African American tenants. This occurred alongside the more well-to-do Black landlords who purchased buildings in the area also with the sole purpose of renting to Black tenants. Soon, however, the pressure from the Property Owners Protective Association Inc influenced local banks to bar African Americans from acquiring mortgages. Still, the migration of African Americans from Midtown to Harlem continued, followed by a continued period of White Flight.⁴⁸ This initiated the transformation of Harlem into a diverse neighborhood defined by the subsections of Jewish Harlem, located west of Lexington Avenue, Black Harlem, located on the northwest side of the neighborhood, and Italian Harlem, located east of Third Avenue.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ “How Harlem Became Black,” Black New York, accessed September 24, 2024,

https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/seminars/henken08/articles/h/o/w/How_Harlem_Became_Black_d205.html.

⁴⁵ “Everyday Black History - How Harlem Became a Black Cultural Mecca,” One Mic: Black History, accessed September 24, 2024, <https://www.onemichistory.com/blog/how-harlem-became-a-black-cultural-mecca/>.

⁴⁶ “Everyday Black History - How Harlem Became a Black Cultural Mecca.”

⁴⁷ “Everyday Black History - How Harlem Became a Black Cultural Mecca.”

⁴⁸ “Everyday Black History - How Harlem Became a Black Cultural Mecca.”

⁴⁹ Hamilton, Hernstadt, and Santoro, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Metro North Plaza.”

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Figure 4: The 1914, Lionel Pincus Map. Future site of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home outlined in red. Yellow buildings are frame construction while pink are masonry.⁵⁰

As a result of the stock market crash in 1929 and the resulting Great Depression, the early 1930s and 1940s were marked by decreased consumerism and the closing of factories, two things which had previously offered stable job opportunities. While few tenement buildings had been constructed around the direct perimeter of Mount Morris Park, in the immediate surrounding areas, high-density tenements were common in Harlem, built to accommodate both an influx of immigrants as well as factory workers. The nearby areas to the north, south, west, and east were defined by industrial activity in the earlier portion of the century.⁵¹ Tenements sprung up in almost all directions from the Mount Morris Park neighborhood; however, the core surrounding the park seems to have not been a focus for this type of development.

New construction in Harlem had effectively ceased at the beginning of World War I; however, a substantial increase in vacancies opened up the Mount Morris Park neighborhood as it transitioned into a diverse, largely Black neighborhood. During the 1930s, multiple interracial families lived in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, and many successful Black families owned and lived in the single-family homes surrounding the park.⁵²

Following World War I, many Jewish families left East Harlem for more affluent areas, and Italian Harlem expanded west into what had previously been occupied by the Jewish community. The Great Migration, a period (from about 1910-1970) in which Black people moved from the American South to Northern,

⁵⁰ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, "Bounded by W. 127th Street, E. 127th Street, Park Avenue, E. 124th Street (Mount Morris Park), W. 124th Street and Lenox Avenue," 1914, New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-1350-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

⁵¹ "Industrial Map of New York City Showing Manufacturing Industries" (New York, New York, 1922), <https://www.6sqft.com/historic-map-shows-the-manufacturing-industries-of-1919-nyc/>.

⁵² Noonan and Harrison, "Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension Designation Report."

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Midwestern, and Western states to escape racial violence, pursue economic and educational opportunities, and obtain freedom from the oppression of Jim Crow, impacted Harlem greatly. The population of the Black community in New York City increased significantly during this period.⁵³ Harlem, having recently emerged as a Black community in the early nineteenth century, proved an attractive choice. From about 110th to 151st Street, Harlem became a center of Black American culture. Puerto Ricans began to arrive during this period as well, seeking opportunity after being forced off their homeland by large U.S farming monopolies.⁵⁴ The population of Harlem grew from 83,000 in 1920 to 204,000 in 1934. Based on reports from the 1960 Population Census, between 1930 and 1960, the Black population in East Harlem more than doubled over a period of thirty years, notably increasing in Central Harlem as well.⁵⁵ With the increase of these minority populations came increased racism, segregation, and white flight.⁵⁶

With the Great Depression in the late 1930s, conditions in East Harlem worsened. Like in Midtown, overcrowding and deterioration of housing became dire due to poverty and an overall dearth of social services.⁵⁷ Economic hardship drove many to convert their single-family homes to rooming houses and apartments, or simply to neglect their properties.⁵⁸ The combination of overcrowding in tenements, poor living conditions, and high rents made the improvement of housing conditions impossible. It was then that local civic leaders, including state representatives, called on the city, which established the New York City Housing Authority in 1934.⁵⁹

The Great Depression of the 1930s impacted Harlem's Black community immensely. Unemployment became dire, with 50 percent of African Americans in Manhattan unemployed. Tensions between the Black community and white shop owners during the Great Depression increased substantially, leading to the racially charged "riots" of 1935. This moment mobilized the Black community of Harlem, further establishing the neighborhood as a center for political activism and Black leadership. Harlem's churches were particularly influenced by the incident, with many church leaders cementing their duty to become involved in the political and economic affairs of their community. Leaders demanded better and more plentiful housing, as well as more job opportunities and other social and educational services for African Americans. Having been excluded from decent housing and job opportunities, the Black activism of 1930s and 1940s focused on economic opportunity. This produced many of the neighborhood's most important leaders who would later impact the nationwide Civil Rights Movement of the coming decades.⁶⁰ An early example is A. Philip Randolph, a Black labor leader and civil rights activist who moved to New York City during the Great Migration. In the spring of 1941, Randolph threatened a mass march on Washington unless African Americans were hired equally for war-effort jobs. His efforts paid off. Shortly after, Franklin Roosevelt issued an executive order banning discrimination in the

⁵³ "African American Heritage - The Great Migration (1910-1970)," National Archives, n.d., [https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration#:~:text=Approximately%20six%20million%20Black%20people%20moved%20from,roughly%20from%20the%201910s%20until%20the%201970s.&text=The%20First%20Great%20Migration%20\(1910%2D1940\)%20had%20Black,including:%20New%20York%2C%20Chicago%2C%20Detroit%2C%20and%20Pittsburgh.](https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration#:~:text=Approximately%20six%20million%20Black%20people%20moved%20from,roughly%20from%20the%201910s%20until%20the%201970s.&text=The%20First%20Great%20Migration%20(1910%2D1940)%20had%20Black,including:%20New%20York%2C%20Chicago%2C%20Detroit%2C%20and%20Pittsburgh.)

⁵⁴ Marvelli, "East Harlem South / El Barrio: Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey." 40.

⁵⁵ "Harlem - Upper Manhattan Church and Community Study Fact Book" (New York, New York, September 1962).

⁵⁶ Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), <https://www.pennpress.org/9780812201321/public-housing-that-worked/>. 32.

⁵⁷ Marvelli, "East Harlem South / El Barrio: Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey." 41.

⁵⁸ Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century*. 143.

⁵⁹ Luis Ferré-Sadurní, "The Rise and Fall of New York Public Housing: An Oral History," *New York Times*, June 25, 2018, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/25/nyregion/new-york-city-public-housing-history.html>, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/25/nyregion/new-york-city-public-housing-history.html>.

⁶⁰ Noonan and Harrison, "Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension Designation Report." 15-17.

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defense industries.⁶¹ In New York, the city outlawed workplace discrimination in 1945, meaning that African Americans were finally able to secure service jobs such as drivers, elevator operators, and cleaners.⁶²

As factory work began to decrease between 1952 and 1965, the city lost almost 90,000 manufacturing jobs, which been a key source of economic stability in Harlem. Though New York had outlawed workplace discrimination, the service jobs that were available to them paid very little and had no union protection. Through the late 1950s and early 1960s, the difficulties of the Depression era persisted. Low wages, poor housing conditions, and general racism led Harlem to be in an increased state of unrest. Coordinated protests, boycotts and rent strikes highlighted, once again, the inadequate housing, poor schools, sanitary issues, and low wages, issues the community had been advocating to improve since the 1930s.⁶³

In the late 1950s, Mount Morris Park was indeed experiencing overcrowding; however, it remained a particularly unique area of Harlem. When Black families had moved to Harlem around Lenox Avenue and 135th Street, less than a mile away to the northwest, during and after World War I, the Mount Morris Park area remained a largely middle-class white enclave until the Depression. Census records do show, however, that a small number of well-to-do or middle-class Black families remained around the park.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Congress of Racial Equality et al., “World War II and Post War (1940–1949) - The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom | Exhibitions - Library of Congress,” October 10, 2014, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/world-war-ii-and-post-war.html>.

⁶² “Agency History,” New York State - Division of Human Rights, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://dhr.ny.gov/agency-history>.

⁶³ “Harlem Seething With Unrest: Housing Fight Revolt Spreads,” *Amsterdam News*, July 11, 1959.

⁶⁴ Noonan and Harrison, “Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension Designation Report.” Pg. 14.

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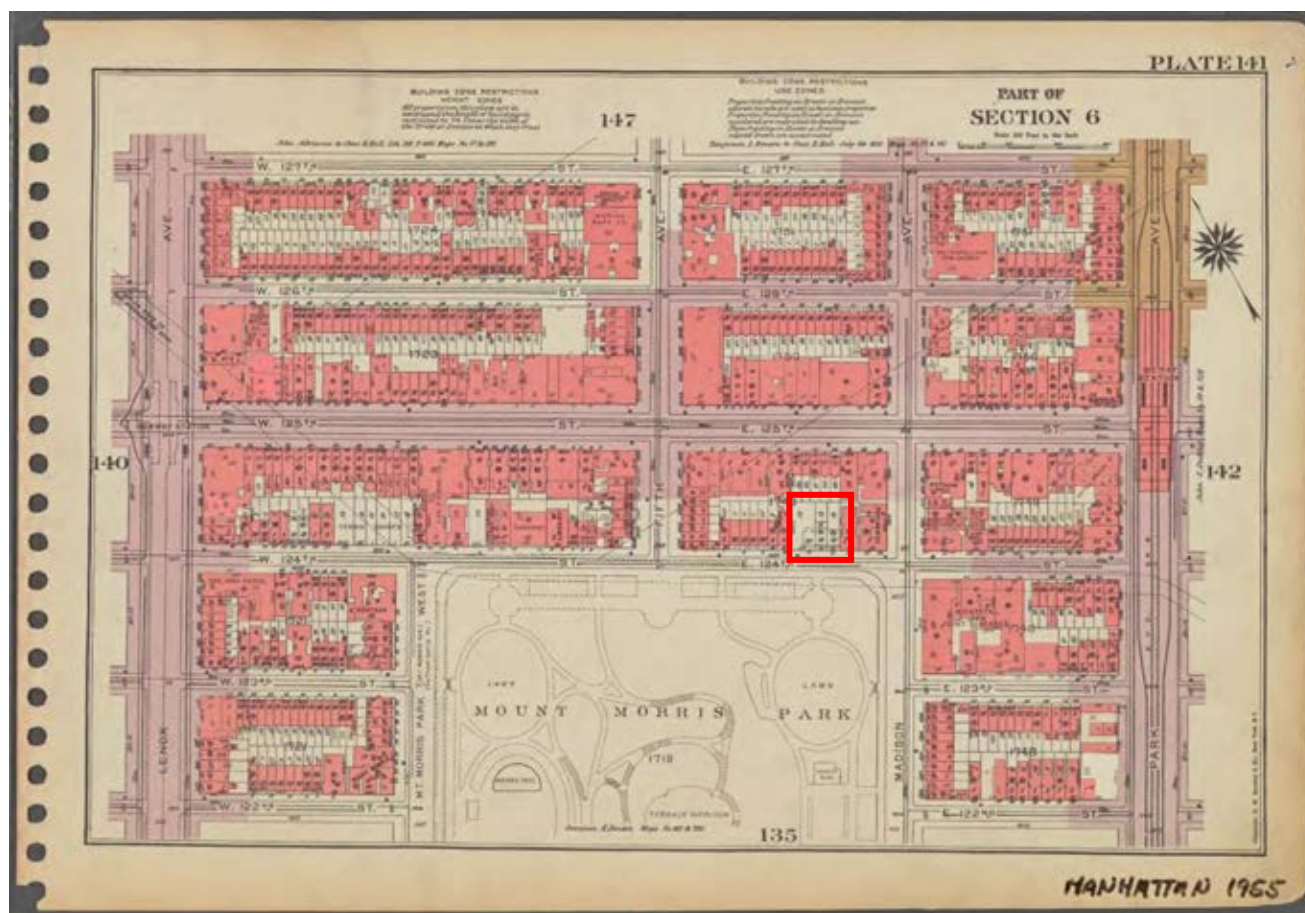


Figure 5, The 1955, Lionel Pincus Map. Future site of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home outlined in red.



Figure 6, A selection of 1940s Tax Survey Photos depicting the low-mid-rise housing stock. Larger buildings existed; however, they did not dominate the landscape.

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The photographs from the 1940 tax surveys in comparison with the G.W. Bromley atlases from 1955 reveal a relatively high number of low-rise (see above), aging residential buildings, with a few larger tenements and apartment buildings. With the increase in population in Harlem, the Mount Morris Park neighborhood would have had little to offer in the way of available, quality housing.⁶⁵ While the population had become notably denser, the built environment and available housing units remained largely the same in Morris Park. Other areas of Harlem saw new large developments, increasing the number of units in those areas substantially. In 1955, however, these developments were not in the immediate vicinity of Morris Park. The Robert F. Wagner Houses and General Grant Houses were located about a mile to the west, and the Thomas Jefferson Houses a mile to the southeast, among others. In Morris Park, there was no available high-density housing, and little efforts to resolve the noted poor housing conditions.⁶⁶

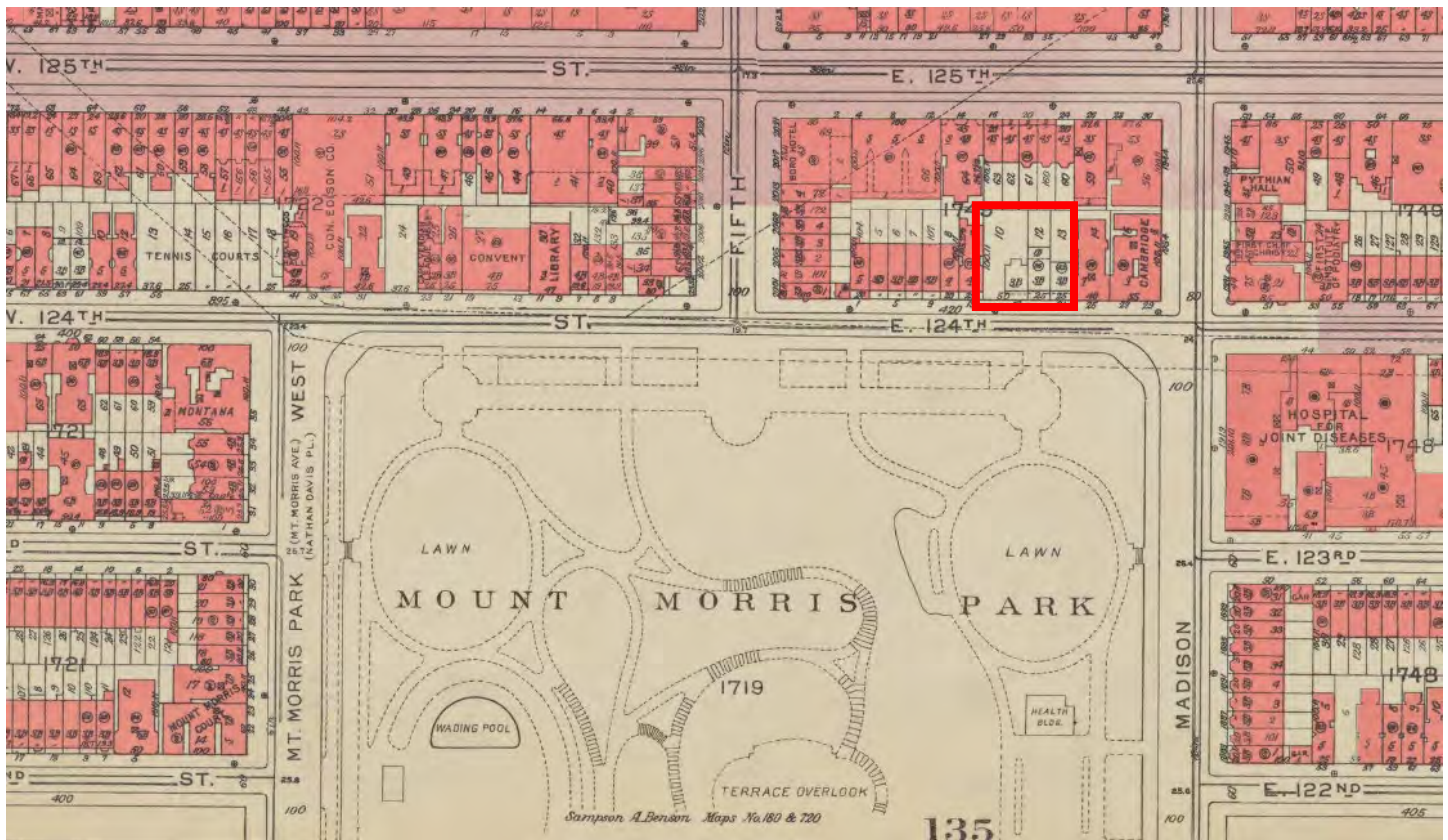


Figure 7: The 1955, Lionel Pincus Map.⁶⁷ Future site of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home outlined in red.
(Source: New York City Public Library)

The 1960 Population Census gives us an idea about the overall population of the census tract in which Morris Park Senior Citizens Home was constructed. Of the total census tract population, the report showed that the

⁶⁵ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, "Plate 135, Part of Section 6: [Bounded by W. 122nd Street, Mount Morris Park, E. 122nd Street, Park Avenue, E. 116th Street, W. 116th Street and Lenox Avenue]" (G.W. Bromley & Co., 1955), New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/95f717d0-4755-0132-27e0-58d385a7bbd0>.

⁶⁶ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, "Plates 135-142, Part of Section 6 and 7" (G.W. Bromley & Co., 1955), New York Public Library Digital Collections.

⁶⁷ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, "Plate 141, Part of Section 6," 1955, New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/95f717d0-4755-0132-27e0-58d385a7bbd0>.

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population in the census tract was about 80 percent non-white.⁶⁸ It also reveals that seniors (persons over 65 years of age), composed about 5 percent of the population. While these numbers do describe the general context of the greater census tract, this particular neighborhood is unusual. Mount Morris Park is located at the northernmost part of the tract, with the core of the neighborhood being the park itself. It is important to consider that this neighborhood remained relatively more affluent and racially mixed for a longer period of time. This differed from other nearby areas of Harlem, making Mount Morris Park particularly desirable. The overcrowding at this time in Harlem also suggests that there would have likely been more competition for housing in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood. These two factors would have made it difficult for seniors with limited incomes to secure housing in this area. The census data including the Mount Morris Park area is also skewed by the tenements and larger buildings in the related census tract. The overall percentage of senior citizens in the tract may seem low, but considering the surrounding population, which composes much of the tract data, combined with the history of the development of Mount Morris Park, the census data speaks more to an opportunity for seniors in greater Harlem to live in a desirable location with public amenities, rather than an immediate need for seniors already living in Mount Morris Park.

Regarding housing, the 1960 census reported that a large majority of housing units in greater Harlem were in deteriorating condition. With the formerly grand single-family homes now largely subdivided, many units had only one room, and the overwhelming majority were built before 1939.⁶⁹ The brownstones and rowhouses once known for their quality and beauty upon construction became abandoned and dilapidated by 1960, correlating with the developing socio-economic issues in east and central Harlem. The commercial corridor along 125th Street, one block north of Mount Morris Park, was suffering, and available, adequate housing, meaning housing that was not overcrowded and that had been maintained with sanitary and safe conditions, was becoming a rare resource. In terms of affordable housing, there had been minimal new construction in the area since the initial building boom prior to the Great Depression.⁷⁰

The site at 17 East 124th Street, where the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home would be constructed, was adjacent to a number of brownstones on the block to the west, which remain today. The neighborhood remained a good, quiet choice, with the potential for community activity and interaction with neighbors of all kinds who lived around the park. The three three-and-a-half story wood-frame rowhouses were some of the only ones of their construction type around the park. Considering their lighter-weight construction and age, these three rowhouses were the ideal site along the park for future construction and redevelopment, especially considering the many nearby churches, which remained the lifeblood of the Black community in Harlem.

Neighborhood Churches, Community-Based Development, and the Civil Rights Movement

While the neighborhood lacked quality housing in the 1950s, it did have plenty of churches. These institutions were historically a primary resource for the Mount Morris Park area.⁷¹ During the 1930s and 1940s, Harlem became extremely overcrowded. The population had tripled between 1920 and 1930, with the majority of area residents living in aging tenement buildings which had been constructed at the turn of the twentieth century. East and Central Harlem, including the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, were considered by the city to be one of the most dilapidated and underserved areas in New York, driving local civic leaders to demand that the city take action to improve the neighborhood's conditions. The *New York Times* predicted that in East Harlem, the

⁶⁸ "Harlem - Upper Manhattan Church and Community Study Fact Book."

⁶⁹ "Censuses of Population and Housing" (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960).

⁷⁰ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, "Plates 135-142, Part of Section 6 and 7."

⁷¹ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division.

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combination of “large-scale public and private housing developments” with new parks, highways, and schools would “eradicate the slum areas and transform Harlem into one of the most attractive neighborhoods of the city” by 1946.⁷² The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) became a strong force in Harlem, constructing and coordinating the funding of numerous public housing complexes during this period; however, localized groups such as churches and other faith-based organizations and nonprofits also mobilized, taking advantage of new federal programs that sought to provide subsidies and loans to community groups who understood the particular needs of their immediate neighborhoods.⁷³ Faith-based organizations, such as the Abyssinian Baptist Church and its related nonprofits, became a strong force in community development.

The role of churches and other nonprofits in addressing the nation’s housing issues has a long history in New York City, dating back more than a century to industrialization, during a period of rapid city building. First beginning with temporary shelter, shelter subsidy, and advocacy, participation in this type of assistance speaks to a legacy of localized, community-based urban social reform. The faith motivations of early settlement houses, churches, and other charitable organizations in New York are critical in understanding their missions related to housing. Poverty and overcrowding are woven into the fabric of New York City’s history, often related to long-term attitudes about immigrants and racial and religious minorities. In Harlem, the Black Church in particular played a particularly significant role in addressing the social problems of their immediate neighborhoods.⁷⁴ The “Black Church,” as defined by Lincoln and Mamiya, refers to “those independent, historic, and totally Black controlled denominations, which were founded after the Free African Society of 1787 and which constituted the core of black Christians.”⁷⁵ As Kimberly Hardy outlined in her work *Which Way Did They Go?*, the Black Church provided “a literal haven from relentless oppression, abject poverty, and their attendant consequences.”⁷⁶

The Civil Rights activism of the late 1950s and early 1960s anticipated the evolution of the community-based development movement within the Black Church. The twentieth century saw the national movement for equal rights for African Americans and for an end to racial segregation and exclusion. The movement took many forms, and its participants and leaders utilized a range of means to make progress towards their goals. This included sit-ins, boycotts, protest marches, freedom rides, and lobbying government officials of legislative action. There are many defining moments of the Civil Rights Movement; however, the *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the U.S Supreme Court ruled that “separate education facilities are inherently unequal,” legally ending racial segregation in public schools, is perhaps one of the most important. In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested after refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger, leading to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in which Martin Luther King Jr. participated. His arrest and imprisonment as the boycott’s leader propelled King, previously the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Alabama, to the national stage. These defining moments and figures put the movement on the map and proved that there was work to be done in the socio-political realm.

The Black Church and its leaders created and maintained institutions which functioned as centers of the Civil Rights Movement. Churches provided a powerful starting point, one with an organized mass base, built-in

⁷² Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century*. 128.

⁷³ Bloom.

⁷⁴ Kenneth Westhues, “The Roman Catholic Church and the Field of Social Welfare,” *Social Work* 16, no. 3 (1971): 60–65.

⁷⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University Press, 1990), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv125jv2p>. 1.

⁷⁶ Kimberly Hardy, “Which Way Did They Go? Uncovering the Preferred Source of Help-Seeking Among African-American Christians,” *Social Work and Christianity* 41, no. 1 (March 1, 2014): 3–15.

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leadership, and resources. The Black church offered an institutionalized financial base through which protest and action could be financed. The physical churches also provided meeting places for planning and strategizing. The Black Church preached that the oppression of Black Americans was sinful, ultimately applying religious teachings with politics. The teachings of the church connected the purpose of the Civil Rights Movement to the spiritual teachings of Christianity, something which was already at the core of Black American culture. As a civil rights leader, Dr. King echoed the message of the church in his work. As a result, when the call for participating in the realization of their rights came, they not only listened to church leaders, but also gathered around churches as an entity for political education and participation as part of their religious practice. Black leaders during this time were often associated with local churches, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Alabama and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in Harlem, among others. These leaders asked questions about the value of voting rights, integration, economic opportunity, decent housing and medical services, and safe neighborhoods. The charisma of pastors and faith-based activists helped establish the Civil Rights Movement as the defining social movement of the midcentury.

As part of the general involvement of the Black church in the Civil Rights Movement, William W. Biddle, a social analyst of the mid-twentieth century affiliated with the National Council of Churches, urged congregations nationwide to join the community development movement as part of the community reality.⁷⁷ Churches or parishes began to support community-based development entities established as freestanding, not-for-profit corporations. Based on the earlier efforts of the Black church, the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of community-based development groups and nonprofits as a way of revitalizing neighborhoods and helping residents escape poverty through community action.⁷⁸ Action was taken not only by churches themselves, but by other affiliated groups as well.⁷⁹

The term “faith-based organization” (FBO), which encompasses many entities related to religious groups such as early settlement houses, church associated nonprofits, and more, have historically provided an array of social services. These types of groups began rapidly diversifying and expanding in the 1960s, after the period of significance, following federal community action and the War on Poverty, which officially began with the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, a reaction to much of the unrest in poor communities in the United States.⁸⁰ FBOs became a powerful tool for community-based development in the mid-twentieth century, providing a way for representatives and leaders within poor urban communities such as Harlem to address problems such as redlining, deteriorated housing, and the lack of economic development and jobs. The realities of poverty, poor housing and high unemployment among the Black community were representative of problems that were not generally addressed by the traditional role of church clergy. Historically, the responsibilities of church clergy included, but were not limited to, managing church operations, ensuring the word of God was spread through preaching and teaching, providing spiritual counseling, and more. Community outreach was often embraced; however, the involvement of clergy in politics was not a typical expectation.⁸¹ However, in communities like Harlem, church ministry became focused on addressing the urban social and political realities that resulted from racial inequalities and political realities, with the churches feeling it was their duty to fight for the equality they

⁷⁷ William W. Biddle and Loureide J. Biddle, *The Community Development Process: The Rediscovery of Local Initiative* (Holt, 1965).

⁷⁸ Dean Meminger, “The History of Harlem’s Oldest Black Churches,” *Spectrum News NY1*, February 26, 2024, <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2024/02/26/the-history-of-harlem-s-historic-black-churches>.

⁷⁹ Roland V. Anglin, “Building the Organizations That Building Communities: Strengthening the Capacity of Faith and Community-Based Development Organizations,” 2004, <https://www.huduser.gov/publications/pdf/buldorgcommunities.pdf#page=50>.

⁸⁰ Anglin.

⁸¹ “Chapter 2 - Pastoral Responsibilities,” Archdiocese of Los Angeles: Administrative Handbook, February 24, 2021, <https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-2/section-2-3/topic-2-3-3>.

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preached.⁸² Considering the red-tape of governmental applications for public housing opportunities, the slow approval times, as well as the restrictions on income for applicants, the efforts of NYCHA could not answer the immense need for housing in many areas. As an alternative, church officials got into the business of development, in large part because they felt no one else was making satisfactory progress in upgrading local housing.⁸³

In mid-twentieth century Harlem and other areas of New York City, the Black Church and other FBOs played an integral role in serving an otherwise poorly served community during the Civil Rights era, playing an important part in the development of community-based social services and affordable housing. In the Mount Morris neighborhood in 1955, some of the church-related social services that were available include soup kitchens, shelters, and counseling. Churches within a half-mile radius that provided community support at this time included the Metropolitan Community Church and the Bethel Holy Church, both about two blocks northeast of the subject site, and the Moriah Baptist Church, three blocks north. To the east was the First Church of Christ just across Madison Avenue. To the west was the Harlem Presbyterian Church, Saint Martin's Church and City Mission Society, and Mount Olivet Baptist Church. To the south was the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church. Others slightly further away would have impacted the neighborhood as well. Located to the northwest of Mount Morris Park by about a mile, between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Frederick Douglass Boulevard, was St. Philip's Episcopal Church. One of the most influential of all churches in Harlem—religiously, socially, and politically—was the Abyssinian Baptist Church, located about a mile north of Mount Morris Park at Odell Clark Place and Malcolm X Boulevard. Collectively, these churches served as the backbone of the Black community in Mount Morris Park.

Many of the churches in Harlem, including the Abyssinian Baptist Church, organized as faith-based nonprofits, and pursued the development of subsidized housing projects as part of their congregational social work.⁸⁴ The Abyssinian Baptist Church greatly impacted the efforts of church-based community development in Harlem in the early 1960s, kicking off a trend of housing development in the following decade. This is perhaps best embodied in the Harlem Interfaith Housing Council, a domestic not-for-profit corporation, a coalition of eight churches of different denominations established in 1967 for the purpose of community housing development (research did not uncover which churches were involved).⁸⁵ In Harlem, Saint Philips Episcopal Church developed its own 200 seniors-only apartment building on 133rd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, about a mile north of Mount Morris Park. As noted by the rector in a 1979 *New York Times* article, “The resurrection of the community has to start with housing. When you have good housing, then it's possible to move on to a stable family life.”⁸⁶ According to the Council of Churches of the City of New York, by 1979, 133 congregations had formed eighty-four nonprofit housing corporations, constructing over than 33,000 apartment units between 1974 and 1979. Church-sponsored projects were being developed across New York, with instances in the South Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn.⁸⁷

⁸² Anglin, “Building the Organizations That Building Communities: Strengthening the Capacity of Faith and Community-Based Development Organizations.”

⁸³ James Barron, “When Churches Get Into The Business Of Housing,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1979, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/13/archives/when-churches-get-into-the-business-of-housing-when-churches-go.html>. P.1

⁸⁴ Richard F. Burns, “Faith-Based Affordable Housing” (The NHP Foundation, n.d.), https://nhpfoundation.org/documents/NHPF_FaithBasedAffordableHousing_Articles.pdf.

⁸⁵ “THE BETHLEHEM ART FUND - New York Company,” The New York Company Directory, accessed September 13, 2024, <https://newyork-company.com/co/the-bethlehem-art-fund>.

⁸⁶ Barron, “When Churches Get Into The Business Of Housing.” P. 1.

⁸⁷ Barron. 1.

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One church official noted that “they [affordable housing complexes] are our gift to the community in terms of meeting a desperate need and demonstrating that in this community there are the resources, commitments and skills to analyze our needs and do something.”⁸⁸ Another group of churches, known as the Ministry of Interfaith Associations, felt there was a need not just to build, but also to impact the job market. This meant training builders, electricians, roofers, and plumbers, preparing them to apply for apprenticeships with building trades unions.⁸⁹ The addition of new housing and employment opportunities were of primary importance in Harlem. Private development such as that created by these faith-based organizations, became a good alternative to the housing also being constructed by NYCHA.

Churches, being some of the largest and wealthiest community institutions, provided the best route to successful funding. Though the mid-century saw few privately developed buildings in Harlem and only one (the subject building) in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, the efforts of church-leaders and organizations in Harlem in the mid-twentieth century illustrate one reaction of the Black Church to the Civil Rights movement, and the power of Black church leaders to change their communities in a meaningful way, driven by local leaders, rather than city government.

The Abyssinian Baptist Church

The Abyssinian Baptist Church was originally organized by a group of Black members from the First Baptist Church in June 1808. The First Baptist Church was segregated by race, forcing its Black members to remain in a loft, separated from the white portion of the congregation.⁹⁰ With the help of a visiting pastor, the Reverend Thomas Paul of the African Baptist Church in Boston, Black members of the First Baptist Church mobilized to create a church of their own. First known as the African Baptist Church, an extension of Thomas Paul’s congregation in Boston, the first iteration of the Abyssinian Baptist Church was founded in 1808. Throughout the nineteenth century, the church struggled both socially and economically, grappling with segregationist laws, racist practices, and white supremacy. Still, it grew and persevered. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the church found a permanent home at 164-166 Waverly Place between 6th and Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, about seven miles south of its present location. Here, the Abyssinian Baptist Church became one of the wealthiest Black congregations in the country, with 1,000 members by 1900.⁹¹

Increased immigration and the construction of the subway began to change the fabric of New York City in the early twentieth century. New housing opportunities led to the migration of the Black community out of Greenwich Village to the north. In 1903, the church moved to the Tenderloin District, occupying a building at 242 West 40th Street, five miles south of its current location.⁹² In 1923, the church made its final relocation to West 138th Street in Harlem, where it is located today.⁹³

The Abyssinian Baptist Church has had many influential and politically powerful pastors over the years who combined religion with social activism.⁹⁴ Of particular note are the Powells, who led the church for much of the twentieth century. Adam Clayton Powell Sr. served as minister in the early twentieth century. In the 1930s,

⁸⁸ Barron. 1.

⁸⁹ Barron. 1.

⁹⁰ Louisa Mitchell, “Beyond the Village and Back: Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church - Village Preservation,” Village Preservation, February 20, 2020, <https://www.villagepreservation.org/2020/02/20/beyond-the-village-and-back-harlems-abyssinian-baptist-church/>.

⁹¹ Mitchell.

⁹² Mitchell.

⁹³ Meminger, “The History of Harlem’s Oldest Black Churches.”

⁹⁴ Meminger.

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Powell Sr. employed his son, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., who had just received a master's degree in religious education from Columbia University. Powell Jr. worked as assistant minister and business manager under the leadership of his father for almost a decade. During the Depression, the Powells led relief programs utilizing the success and power of their church that provided food, clothing, and temporary jobs to Harlem residents, as well as directing meetings and leading rent strikes. In 1937, Powell Jr. succeeded his father as pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, a position he held as he pursued politics over the next twenty years.⁹⁵ Under Adam Clayton Powell, the Abyssinian Baptist Church organized and participated in civil rights activism to highlight discrimination in jobs and housing.⁹⁶

Political and social activism continued to be a primary focus for the church in the mid-century, whose gospel was spread not only by its many devotees, but in its community development work as well. During Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s years as pastor, the church's membership grew to nearly 14,000. With membership came a greater ability to provide social services. The church continued to offer programs and amenities for those who needed it throughout the Great Depression, extending its religious and social programs to include international outreach.⁹⁷

In 1955, Oberia D. Dempsey, who assisted in the realization of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home, was appointed assistant minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church by Adam Clayton Powell Jr. After just seven weeks of working as assistant minister, Dempsey was promoted to associate minister. The two men became trusted confidants and partners, with Dempsey also working as a political aide for Powell.⁹⁸ In 1962, Dempsey left the church to found the Upper Park Avenue Baptist Church, which was originally located at 85 East 125th Street, just two blocks northeast of Mount Morris Park. Though now leading his own church in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, he remained connected to the Abyssinian Baptist Church and his friend Powell, together realizing their dream of bettering Mount Morris Park and Harlem at large.⁹⁹

Dempsey carved out his own legacy in church-related social work during Harlem's mid-century drug epidemic. Narcotics was a serious problem in East Harlem, drawing the attention of many community organizers. Dempsey, now a major community leader in his own right, was devoted to working for a better life for people in Harlem and was an officer of the Anti-Crime and Anti-Narcotic Committee of Harlem. The *Daily News* noted him as being "among the first drug-fighters in the Harlem area."¹⁰⁰ As an activist, Reverend Dempsey's primary focus was to provide support and tools for locals, reacting to the needs he observed around him.

In 1961, Powell founded the Adam Clayton Powell Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation, with the dream of building a nationwide string of apartment houses for the elderly Black community.¹⁰¹ The nationwide discussion of the need for senior housing, combined with the 1960s Civil Rights movement, likely inspired

⁹⁵ "POWELL, Adam Clayton, Jr. | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives," accessed October 24, 2023, [https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/P/POWELL,-Adam-Clayton,-Jr--\(P000477\)/](https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/P/POWELL,-Adam-Clayton,-Jr--(P000477)/).

⁹⁶ Felicia Mack, "Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York City, New York (1808-) •," January 21, 2014, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/abyssinian-baptist-church-1808/>.

⁹⁷ Mack.

⁹⁸ Alfred E. Clark, "REV. OBERIA DEMPSEY IS DEAD; FOUGHT DRUG ABUSE IN HARLEM," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1982, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/04/obituaries/rev-oberia-dempsey-is-dead-fought-drug-abuse-in-harlem.html>.

⁹⁹ "Addicts Poisoned in Mob Rivalry: Pastor," *Daily News*, January 12, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Benes, "Is the Methadone Program Just a Heroin Replay," *Daily News*, December 3, 1972.

¹⁰¹ "Adam Clayton Powell Foundation, Inc. Public Records" (New York Department of State, 1961), <https://www.corporationwiki.com/p/2na7ry/adam-clayton-powell-foundation-inc.>

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Powell to pursue this. He was committed to activism and equality in his neighborhood and had the means and influence to organize people, navigate government processes, and take action. The first subsidized development to be constructed under Powell was a circa 1962 cooperative apartment house known as the Clayton Apartments, which was open to all ages. Powell teamed up with J. Raymond Jones, a mentor of Powell's and Harlem's first Black congressman, to establish Clayton Apartments, Inc., a private, limited profit housing company, and the sponsor of Clayton Apartments.¹⁰² The Clayton Apartments was constructed at 135th and Lenox Avenue in Harlem, about a mile north of the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home site near the Abyssinian Baptist Church's location. This development marked Powell's first venture in providing subsidized housing in Harlem and marked Harlem's first city-aided middle income housing development.¹⁰³

In the early 1960s, working alongside other leaders from the Abyssinian Baptist Church, which by this time had become one of the largest Baptist churches in the world, Powell pursued several housing development opportunities for the elderly and beyond in outside of New York through a range of nonprofits related to the Abyssinian Baptist Church. In Washington D.C., Powell sought to purchase the Hotel 2400 on 16th Street, proposing to convert it into senior housing as a memorial to his father. Powell and his foundation pursued a loan from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to fund the conversion. However, the FHA required the foundation to have 2 percent of the money necessary to develop these projects on hand, which in 1962, it did not, bringing the project to a halt.¹⁰⁴ The consideration and planning regarding these properties illustrates the wide-reaching vision of Adam Clayton Powell and his particular evolving interest in creating senior housing serving the Black community.

Morris Park Senior Citizens Home – Construction & Operation

At the same time Powell planned the aforementioned projects, he and Oberia Dempsey considered building senior housing in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood in East Harlem. The pair considered a few sites in the neighborhood, but the site on 124th Street proved the most viable. Powell and Dempsey formed a new nonprofit, the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council, Inc., an affiliated organization of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, to undertake the new development.

In November of 1960, the Abyssinian Baptist Church made the preliminary application to the Community Facilities Administration (CFA) for Powell and Dempsey's senior housing project on 124th Street. A year later, the newly formed Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council, Inc. submitted a revised application. This council, associated with the Abyssinian Baptist Church, was the necessary nonprofit to apply for CFA loans.¹⁰⁵

Powell intended to function as the management supervisor on the project, however, his level of involvement soon changed as Dempsey became the leader of the council. The shift of leadership from Powell to Dempsey occurred during a period in which Adam Clayton Powell had become a topic of controversy. His attempts at developing government subsidized senior housing in Washington D.C, as well as accusations of misusing the community space of his first housing project in Harlem (Clayton Apartments), had given him a reputation as a problematic individual. Rumors swirled concerning his possible misuse of tax-payer dollars. Sensing the

¹⁰² "Jones Denies Hanky-Panky In Club House," *Daily News*, January 5, 1962.

¹⁰³ "Jones Denies Hanky-Panky In Club House."

¹⁰⁴ Drew Pearson, "D.C. Merry-Go-Round," *Concord Monitor*, September 14, 1962.

¹⁰⁵ Congress, United States. Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 88th Congress, First Session. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963.

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potential controversy implied by his involvement in the project, Powell resigned from the Morris Park Senior Citizens Council, leaving his friend and colleague, Oberia Dempsey, to lead the group.¹⁰⁶

The application for the approval of structural plans for the new building were submitted to the CFA in October 1961, signed by Oberia Dempsey. The design was completed by local architects Samuel S. Arlen and John Louis Wilson, both important Black architects in the New York City area. In 1928, John Louis Wilson had become the first Black graduate from the School of Architecture of Columbia University and committed his life and career to diversity in the field of architecture and beyond.¹⁰⁷ Prior to his work on Morris Park Senior Citizens Home, Wilson was an associate architect for the Harlem River Houses, one of American's early "low-rent" housing projects, completed in 1939 on Manhattan's west side about two miles southeast of Morris Park.¹⁰⁸ The team for the project originally did not include any Black architects, but Wilson was added as an intervention of the federal government considering the high-profile nature of the project. The project itself was considered a statement of commitment to the Black community in a time of segregated housing, with Wilson's contributions furthering that objective.¹⁰⁹ Wilson also helped co-found the Council for Advancement of Negroes in Architecture in 1957.¹¹⁰ John Louis Wilson's resume proves that his values were in line with the efforts of the Abyssinian Baptist Church and its leaders. Not only that, but at the time Morris Park was designed, John Louis Wilson was a Harlem local, with his office located just a few blocks away from the site at 166 West 125th Street in Central Harlem, making him an ideal, local choice.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ William Steif, "Powell Plans For Negroes Cracking Up," *Evansville Press*, February 6, 1963.

¹⁰⁷ La Guardia and Wagner Archives, "LaGuardia and Wagner Archives: Black History Month: The Story of John Louis Wilson, Jr. and the Harlem River Houses," *LaGuardia and Wagner Archives* (blog), February 17, 2016, <http://laguardiawagnerarchives.blogspot.com/2016/02/black-history-month-story-of-john-louis.html>.

¹⁰⁸ "Brother John Louis Wilson, FAIA," *The SPHINX*, Fall 1973.

¹⁰⁹ Archives, "LaGuardia and Wagner Archives."

¹¹⁰ "Architects of Black Harlem - Urban Omnibus," accessed October 2, 2023, <https://urbanomnibus.net/2021/01/architects-of-black-harlem/?printpage=true>.

¹¹¹ American Institute of Architects, *Empire State Architect* - ESA, 196

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Figure, Harlem River Houses, designed by John Louis Wilson, 1939. (Source: Library of Congress.)¹¹²

In 1961, an Authorization of Ownership for multiple dwellings was submitted to the federal government by Dempsey, noting him as the sole owner of the lot and land at 17-21 East 124th Street.¹¹³ The council's leadership change from Powell to Dempsey likely occurred prior to the 1961 Authorization of Ownership submission.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council, under the direction of Oberia Dempsey, completed the project.¹¹⁵

Aging, a monthly publication created by the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, wrote in its 1961 publication that as of August 8, the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) had approved direct loans or made fund reservations for twenty-nine projects across the country under section 202. Among those in New York City were the Hudson Guild, a settlement house which provided senior facilities, and Morris Park Senior Citizens Council. Morris Park was approved for \$1,321,040 and, at the time, was the third biggest project on the list nationally and the biggest in New York.¹¹⁶ The Hudson Guild's building at 436 West 27th Street is no longer extant, and research uncovered no historic photos.

In 1962, a newspaper article from the *New York Daily News* reported that the Morris Park Senior Citizens Council had obtained the title to the building's future site.¹¹⁷ Deeds confirm that the first mortgage was paid by

¹¹² Archibald Manning Brown, *Harlem River Houses, 7th Ave. and 151 St., New York City. Exterior X*, January 1, 1940, graphic, *Gottsocho-Schleisner Collection (Library of Congress)*, January 1, 1940, LC-G612- 39012 [P&P], Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gsc.5a06066/>.

¹¹³ "Authorization of Owner - Multiple Dwellings - 17-21 East 124th Street" (City of New York: October 11, 1961, n.d.).

¹¹⁴ William Steif, "Powell Plans For Negroes Cracking Up," *Evansville Press*, February 6, 1963.

¹¹⁵ "Housing Problems of the Elderly," January 9, 1964.

¹¹⁶ "Prequel to PD&R | HUD USER," accessed October 2, 2023, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-pdrat50-032123.html>.

¹¹⁷ "Project Sponsor Gets Title to Site," *Daily News*, February 27, 1962.

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the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council the same year.¹¹⁸ While progress was being made, it occurred slowly. *Aging's* coverage of the project noted that construction had not begun as of May 31, 1962.¹¹⁹ During the hearings of the Senior Citizens Housing Act of 1962, it was revealed that Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council had struggled to meet financing requirements, inevitably negotiating a slightly larger loan agreement through the direct loan program of the CFA for \$1,348,000 with ninety-seven units promised.¹²⁰

In January of 1963, construction bids resulted in an unexpected increase in the budget, which the CFA rejected on the grounds that it would cause an increase in rents and prospective tax expenses. These increases would be incompatible with the purpose of the program, which was to provide affordable housing for the elderly. The sponsors responded that they would adjust plans to reduce construction costs, which likely simplified the design of the building. The new senior housing building was finally completed by 1963, as noted by the NYC Parcel Data in NYCityMap and confirmed by its listing in a resource book for veterans.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ "Deed 129 1235 between Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council Inc and Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Development Fund Corp" (New York, New York, January 25, 1969).

¹¹⁹ "The Senior Citizens Housing Act of 1962 - Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Housing" (Committee on Banking and Currency, July 1962). 21.

¹²⁰ "Powell's Housing Plan Falters." *Pittsburgh Press*. February 6, 1965.

¹²¹ "Intermediate Care for Veterans: 88th Congress" (U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1963).

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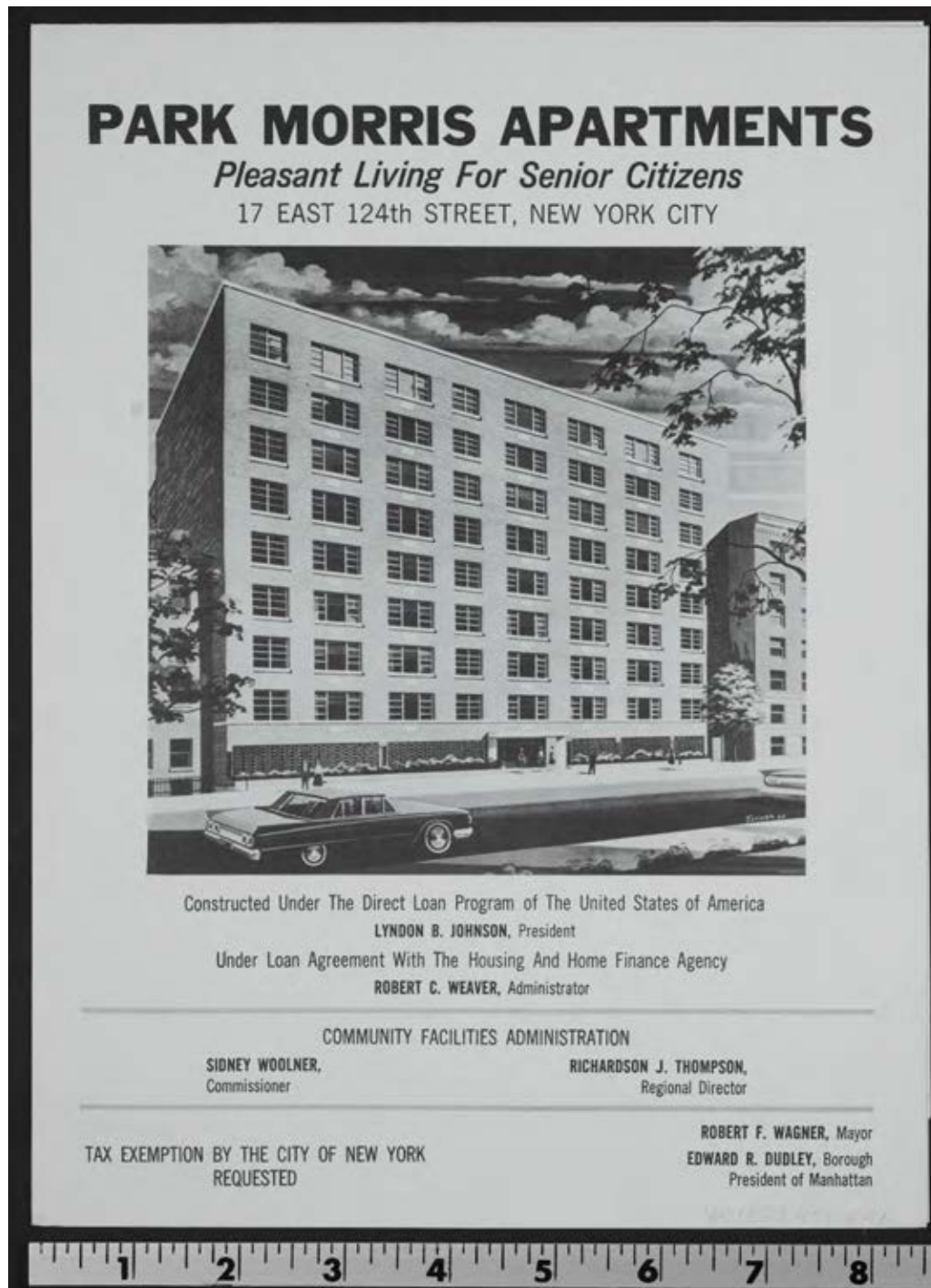


Figure 8, New York Real Estate Brochure, ca. 1960. Note design features that were not executed, such as the decorative grate and window configurations.¹²²

The aforementioned promotional real estate brochure for Morris Park (see above), though undated, was likely published in preparation for the opening of the building, but before construction was complete. Due to the funding restraints, simplifications were made to the initial design portrayed in the brochure, likely to lower costs and gain approval of the CFA. In addition to Dempsey, the brochure listed the builder, Adson Industries, Inc,

¹²² "Park Morris Apartments, 17 E. 124 Street."

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and the management agency, Harlemco Development Corporation.¹²³ Harlemco Development Corporation acted on behalf of the Adam Clayton Powell Foundation, allowing Powell to remain tangentially involved in the project.¹²⁴

Morris Park Senior Citizens Home had taken advantage of a parcel which had previously included old wood frame buildings, which would have been more easily demolished than their masonry neighbors (see Figure 17). These low-rise buildings would have required the relocation of only a few families, making demolition less disruptive to the local population than it would have been with a larger building. The phenomenon of displacement had been seen with NYCHA's typical "Tower in the Park" and superblock plans. The site selection for this non-NYCHA development was able to avoid mass displacement, likely strengthening the case for this particular site. In addition, the site, though small, did not require landscaping or outdoor spaces because there was a large, popular park just across the street, which offered additional amenities and opportunities for recreation. It was an ideal location, which could take advantage of its setting and minimize costs while remaining appealing to seniors. The building offered elevators, a community room with a kitchen, a hobby room, and tenant's meeting room for activities like crafts and sewing, a laundry room, and safety features designed specifically for seniors, such as grab bars, all electric kitchens, and non-skid floors.¹²⁵

The 1963 Morris Park Senior Citizens Home was the product of a faith-based organization related to the Abyssinian Baptist Church pursuing community development based on the needs of the immediate neighborhood. The Morris Park Senior Citizens Council successfully navigated the Community Facilities Administration's Section 202 direct loan program, and the building has served the community ever since. Ultimately brought to fruition by Oberia D. Dempsey, local community leader and friend of Adam Clayton Powell, who first conceptualized the project, Morris Park Senior Citizens Home served the local elderly Black population and responded to the socio-political landscape of Harlem during the Civil Rights Movement. Morris Park Senior Citizens Home reflects the efforts of the urban Black Church and Black community leaders in the mid-twentieth century to take things into their own hands, impacting community development and politics, and representing an otherwise underrepresented minority group. The Abyssinian Baptist Church thereby joined the history of faith-based organizations in providing housing for the elderly with the construction of Morris Park Senior Citizens Home.

Post Period of Significance

Acquisition by NYCHA

In an apparent effort to reorganize in the late 1960s, the subject building was transferred from the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council to the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Development Fund Corporation on January 29, 1969.¹²⁶ At some point shortly after the conversion of the area to an NPD project, the property was transferred to HUD. The building remained in use as affordable senior housing for almost a decade under management by HUD, from 1969 to 1977.

¹²³ "Park Morris Apartments, 17 E. 124 Street."

¹²⁴ "Powell's 'Wonderful World.'" *The Columbia Record*. July 21, 1965.

¹²⁵ "Park Morris Apartments, 17 E. 124 Street."

¹²⁶ "Deed 129 1235 between Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council Inc and Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Development Fund Corp" (New York, New York, January 25, 1969).

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HUD's budget for the Morris Park Senior Citizens Home rehabilitation totaled \$1,990,000. Of this budget, \$330,000 went to rehabilitating the building. The architect who designed the plans for the renovations was not uncovered in research.¹²⁷ Records show that the interior was renovated and updated; however, research did not uncover the full extent of alterations. It is clear, however, that the number of units and general plan of the building remained largely the same. After NYCHA's acquisition, general updates continued to be made, including the addition of the replacement aluminum entrance and canopy, the replacement of interior apartment doors, and general repairs in the units, lobby, and management offices.¹²⁸

The Abyssinian Development Corporation

Adam Clayton Powell died in 1972 before fully realizing his dream of developing subsidized senior housing developments in Black communities across New York and beyond.¹²⁹ Morris Park was his only subsidized senior housing facility completed in New York City. However, based on his legacy and vision of developing housing with the purpose of bettering life for the Black community, the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in the late 1980s, the Reverend Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, rallied parishioners once again to work to pursue community development through the construction of housing. The Abyssinian Baptist Church thereby resumed Powell's dream in 1989 with the founding of the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC), a not-for-profit community and economic development corporation "dedicated to building the human, social, and physical capital in Harlem." ADC has since become a nationally known entity.¹³⁰

Housing and Faith-Based Organizations in New York City: A Comparative Analysis

The Clayton Apartments, David Podell House, Meadow Manor, St. Philip's Senior House, and E.M Moore Housing are all mid-twentieth century developments that provide an expanded context of affordable senior housing developed by faith-based organizations in the era that Morris Park Senior Citizens Home was constructed. Though the David Podell House and Meadow Manor are located in different parts of New York City, and the St. Philip's Senior House is located outside of Mount Morris Park in Central Harlem, these developments illustrate the role of the faith-based organization as a sponsor in the development of affordable senior housing and in community development. Faith-based organizations' interest in localized community development provided an alternative, more grassroots and accessible solution to the housing crisis, which was otherwise often tackled through massively scaled urban renewal and public housing efforts.

The development of Morris Park was the product of a local neighborhood nonprofit corporation related to the Abyssinian Baptist Church, which sought to provide what its immediate community desperately lacked. By way of direct loans provided by the Community Facilities Administration under Section 202, Morris Park Senior Citizens Home was born. The other comparable examples described here were also developed by faith-based and church-related nonprofit sponsors that enabled churches to apply for government subsidies. Though there were certainly others, the David Podell House is the only example still standing (the previously mentioned Hudson Guild building is no longer extant) that was uncovered by research to have been funded identically to Morris Park, through the Community Facilities Administration's direct loan program.

¹²⁷ "Project Financing Plan" (New York, New York, May 23, 1977), NYCHA Archives.

¹²⁸ "Letters Concerning Planning & Contracting" (New York, New York, 1977), NYCHA Archives.

¹²⁹ Dwayne Mack, "Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (1908-1972)" *BlackPast* (blog), January 18, 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/powell-adam-clayton-jr-1908-1972/>.

¹³⁰ "History," Abyssinian Development Corporation, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://www.adcorp.org/history>.

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The Mitchell-Lama program, a contrasting state/city funded program providing for middle-income communities, enabled the funding for two examples: the Clayton Apartments and the Saint Philip's Senior House. Mitchell-Lama was signed into law in 1955 in response to the red-tape involved with NYCHA developments and low-income public housing, providing an additional option for funding for private development.¹³¹ Like the CFA, Mitchell-Lama offered an alternative to public housing, something that private community groups could take advantage of. Like those buildings developed under the CFA, the design of Mitchell-Lama buildings was often reminiscent of public housing projects: boxy, high-rise towers with minimal ornamentation. Like the CFA program, all Mitchell-Lama developed housing required sponsorship by not-for-profit organizations.

In mid-twentieth century New York City, the influence and power of local churches provided an ideal and motivated sponsor for community development. The following developments are representative of the range of buildings and locations in the city which faith-based organizations related to the church were able to provide for their communities at a time when housing remained a primary issue. As an extension of their faith-based work, churches like the Abyssinian Baptist Church were inspired by the Civil Rights movement, becoming involved in many aspects of bettering their communities through politics and planning, focusing on everything from job creation and social services to the development of housing where it was most needed.

¹³¹ "Mitchell-Lama Program - HPD," accessed May 16, 2024, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/mitchell-lama-program.page>.

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Clayton Apartments (ca. 1962)



Figure 9, Clayton Apartments, ca. 1962 (Google, 2023).

The seventeen-story Clayton Apartments was the first subsidized housing complex completed by a nonprofit associated with the Abyssinian Baptist Church, in this case, the Adam Clayton Powell Foundation. Funded by the Mitchell-Lama program, the complex was a middle-income, non-age-restricted, cooperative apartment house, ca. 1962, in Central Harlem, less than a mile north of Morris Park and just half-a-mile south of the church. As done at Morris Park, Powell and the church established a private, limited profit housing company, the Clayton Apartments, Inc., to pursue government funding.¹³² This high-rise building features minimal design details, reminiscent of those public housing developments constructed by NYCHA. The balconies, which NYCHA typically does not prioritize, represent one difference in design compared with public housing in New York City. Having been designed as a middle-income co-op, without a focus on senior housing, this building is not located near a park and is set directly on a major thoroughfare, Malcolm X Boulevard. The requirements of senior housing under the CFA program, including nearby recreational opportunities and quieter streets, likely would have rendered this site inappropriate; however, for a co-op in Harlem, this site offered necessary expanded housing options for a wide range of people.

¹³² “Jones Denies Hanky-Panky In Club House.”

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David Podell House (1965)



Figure 10, David Podell House, 179 Henry Street, const. 1965. (Google, 2023)

The David Podell House is a standalone affordable senior housing development constructed in 1965. The building was developed under Section 202 with the CFA direct loan program.¹³³ Like Morris Park, it was sponsored by a faith-based nonprofit, however in this case, the nonprofit was a settlement house founded to assist eastern European Jewish immigrants called the Education Alliance.¹³⁴ The thirteen-story David Podell House is located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.¹³⁵ Unlike Morris Park Senior Citizens Center, this building includes a community center, as well as a recreation center, with residential units in a tower set back from a two-story block containing amenity space. These facilities were likely integrated into the design to accommodate its location further from a neighborhood park than Morris Park. The David Podell House is an early example of senior housing including a community center.¹³⁶ In terms of design, the building is similar to Morris Park in that it features a simple design, brick construction, and is more of a mid-rise building. It is also in proximity of the East Broadway subway stop, a multitude of bus lines, medical facilities, schools which may have provided after-hours activities, and Seward Park a couple blocks away. Like Morris Park Senior Citizens Home, David Podell House does not include any on-site landscaping and occupies the majority of its site.

¹³⁷ "City to Weigh Corona Co-Op," *Daily News*, March 25, 1970.

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Meadow Manor 3412 113th St, Corona, NY (ca. 1971)



Figure 11, Meadow Manor, 3412 113th Street, const. 1971. (Google, 2023)

Meadow Manor was constructed circa 1971 in Queens and financed through the Mitchell-Lama program, similarly to the Clayton Apartments.¹³⁷ This complex was sponsored by the Corona Congregational Church, a Black Church founded in 1915.¹³⁸ In 1939, members of the church organized housing for families visiting the World's Fair who were denied accommodation in segregated hotels. Like the Abyssinian Baptist Church, in the 1950s and 60s, the Corona Congregational Church played a local leadership role during the Civil Rights Movement.¹³⁹ Most of the tenants in this building were not members of the congregation; however, a church leader at the time noted that most churchgoers already owned homes in good repair. The complex was instead planned to predominantly serve those Black families from the community who needed it, "with a sprinkling of white and Spanish families as well."¹⁴⁰

Though located outside of Harlem, this complex represents a similar senior-housing development sponsored by a Black Church in the mid-twentieth century in New York. Planning began in 1966, not so long after Morris Park was completed, however it nearly slowed to a halt due to the red tape of government funding – a trend seen with Morris Park. The neighborhood, much like Morris Park, was in desperate need of senior housing. The building, designed by Wechsler & Schment, Manhattan architects seasoned in affordable housing design, features a twelve-story rectangular mid-rise tower, like Morris Park, with 132 efficiency and one-bedroom

¹³⁷ "City to Weigh Corona Co-Op," *Daily News*, March 25, 1970.

¹³⁸ "Housing Is Climax of a Church's Dream," *New York Times*, October 21, 1973, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/21/archives/housing-is-climax-of-a-churchs-dream-federal-and-state-aid-rents.html>.

¹³⁹ "Corona Congregational Church - Historic Districts Council's Six to Celebrate," August 28, 2019, <https://6tocelebrate.org/site/corona-congregational-church/>.

¹⁴⁰ "Housing Is Climax of a Church's Dream."

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apartments for the elderly. Also comparable to Morris Park, it occupies the vast majority of its parcel and is located directly across the street from a major neighborhood park. The design, however, has a few more features than Morris Park, featuring balconies and a wider range of window types and configurations, which add a level of decoration. After the project was completed, the sponsors selected a private company, approved by the federal government, to run the housing project.

St. Philip's Senior House (1974)



Figure 12, St Philips Senior House, 1973 (Google, 2023)

The St. Philip's Senior House, located at 220 W. 134th Street in Harlem, is a senior-only affordable housing complex opened in 1974. The complex consists of one twelve-story tower, with 200 apartment units, featuring minimal ornamentation aside from a colonnade at ground level. The building is otherwise unadorned, with a simple brick façade. St. Philip's Senior House also features a brick courtyard with furniture in the rear, a feature typical of affordable housing both public and private, however one not present at Morris Park Senior Citizens Home due to its proximity to its park.¹⁴¹ Like Morris Park, St. Philip's Senior House was originally established by a nonprofit corporation composed of church vestry members, with the Reverend of St. Philip's serving as president, called the St. Philip's Church Housing Corporation. The development was financed by the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal through the Mitchell-Lama program and subsidized in part by

¹⁴¹ Mifflin Lawrie, "Harlem Life Is Beautiful Here," *Daily News*, June 17, 1974.

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both the city and federal governments.¹⁴² Tax abatements and other rent subsidies enabled residents to pay a substantially lower rent.¹⁴³

St. Philip's Episcopal Church was established in 1819 by a group of free African Americans in New York City.¹⁴⁴ The church found its place on 134th Street in 1911, when the main church building was constructed. Like the Abyssinian Baptist Church, St. Philip's took strong stances on inadequate city services and quality of life issues. Leaders of the church committed the institution to serving the Harlem community. Over time, the church acquired property around its church building, including the site on which St. Philip's Senior House was constructed in the 1970s.¹⁴⁵ This differs from the Abyssinian Baptist Church, which looked to other parts of the greater neighborhood (and country), alongside those in direct proximity to their church. The two developments share a goal of bettering Harlem while avoiding the red-tape and perceived threat of development and displacement by NYCHA, particularly in their immediate neighborhoods.

Though constructed almost a decade later than Morris Park, St. Philip's Senior House served an almost identical purpose and had a predominantly Black church-related sponsor. Though funded by the more common Mitchell-Lama program, this development represents later chapters of church-sponsored senior housing and concern over community needs. Each of these designs displays utilitarian features and has a specifically selected location within their sponsor's direct communities.

¹⁴² "Central Harlem Senior Building Gets \$38.9 Million Renovation," DNAinfo New York, accessed April 11, 2024, <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20140729/central-harlem/central-harlem-senior-building-gets-389-million-renovation>.

¹⁴³ "Central Harlem Senior Building Gets \$38.9 Million Renovation."

¹⁴⁴ "Archives.Nypl.Org -- St. Philip's Church Records," accessed April 11, 2024, <https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21156>.

¹⁴⁵ "Archives.Nypl.Org -- St. Philip's Church Records."

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E.M. Moore Housing (ca. 1976)



Figure 13, E.M. Moore Housing, 160 West 116th Street, const. ca. 1976. (Google, 2023)

Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, now located in the Mount Morris Park neighborhood, developed and operated the 1976 E.M. Moore complex for the elderly at 160 West 116th Street utilizing a HUD grant.¹⁴⁶ Though representing this later chapter of church-developed affordable housing like the St. Philip's Senior House, long after the CFA was terminated in 1965, the eighty-eight-unit complex remains representative of a mid-century instance of an affordable mid-rise tower developed by a local Black church. The building was designed by Harry Simmons Jr, another notable Black architect based in New York and the founder of the New York Coalition of Black Architects.¹⁴⁷ The building is nine stories tall and features little-to-no outdoor space in the design, comparable to Morris Park. This site, however, is not located in the immediate proximity of a park as Morris Park is. The simple design of the building, with a brick façade and rectangular footprint, is reminiscent of the subject building.

Having been developed outside the scope of NYCHA by leaders of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Morris Park Senior Citizens Home can be compared to other affordable senior housing complexes which were privately developed by faith-based organizations and church nonprofits during this era. Like Morris Park Senior Citizens

¹⁴⁶ Richard D. Lyons, "POSTINGS: Building in Harlem; Housing the Aged," *New York Times*, May 28, 1989, sec. Real Estate, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/28/realestate/postings-building-in-harlem-housing-the-aged.html>.

¹⁴⁷ "Harry Simmons Jr.," accessed September 13, 2024, <http://nocache.docomomo-us.org/designer/harry-simmons>.

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Home, the examples constructed in the 1960s and 1970s are not so different, with a range of minimally ornamented, simple, mid-to-high-rise buildings designed to offer efficiency apartments at a low rate. Unlike NYCHA-commissioned construction, these examples often fit more appropriately into their neighborhoods than NYCHA's high-rise superblock model. Developed directly by a board of community leaders, these complexes responded to the needs of their immediate neighborhood.

Morris Park Senior Citizens Home and these comparable examples were not developed by NYCHA, and therefore did not have to comply with procedures typical of NYCHA developments. However, the developments were often restricted by funding. Local groups, such as churches, despite the red-tape of government funding, took it upon themselves to answer affordable housing needs in their communities. In the case of Morris Park, the Clayton Apartments, David Podell Houses, Meadow Manor, and St. Philip's Senior House, these projects were led by faith-based organizations who understood their community and its needs, generating senior housing developments that responded to their direct environment and the input of their nonprofit boards. Though their design was restricted by minimal funding, resulting in relatively simple building designs and lack of ornamentation, these examples display a number of contrasting design elements by their private sponsors including mid-rise towers and balconies. The strict nature of design standards within public housing development controlled even these small details, instead producing high-rises towers and superblock complexes.

Conclusion

The Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History. The need for housing for the elderly in the mid-twentieth century resulted in numerous changes in legislation at the local and federal level in a struggle to successfully rehabilitate the most vulnerable and overcrowded areas in the United States, resulting in Section 202 of the Housing Act of 1959. Under this act, new options for direct loans under the Community Facilities Administration provided new opportunities for private development, an alternative to the already robust public housing programs in many cities. In reaction to the realities of public housing, private faith-based organizations began to act as sponsors for government housing subsidy programs, often on behalf of large community churches. Church initiated community development was seen as a way to supplement the need for affordable senior housing as part of their ongoing responsibility to their otherwise underserved community. Private nonprofit sponsors, such as the Morris Park Senior Citizens Housing Council, composed of church and neighborhood stakeholders and leaders, answered the call. Their efforts produced complexes which not only answered community deficits, but also blended their buildings in with the streetscape, utilizing what the area had to offer. Morris Park Senior Citizens Home is an excellent example of a privately developed affordable senior housing within East Harlem that provided senior housing in areas which had few options.

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Morris Park Senior Citizens Home

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

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Morris Park Senior Citizens Home

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.24 Acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	_____	_____	_____	3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the attached map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries correspond with those of the original legal parcel.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nika Faulkner, Linda Santoro, and Scott Doyle Contact: Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO

organization Heritage Consulting Group date February 2025

street & number 15 W. Highland Ave telephone (215) 248-1260

city or town Philadelphia State PA zip code 19118

e-mail sdoyle@heritage-consulting.com; projects@heritage-consulting.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Morris Park Senior Citizens Home

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of ____.

Morris Park Senior Citizens Home

Name of Property

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



MORRIS PARK
SENIORS

RESIDENT ASSOCIATION OFFICE



FIRE HOSE
IN THE CHAMBER
EXIT

TRIDOR
481
482
483
484
485

























17 MORRIS PARK SENIOR CITIZEN BUILDING 17

17
124th ST.

[illegible]

**NYCHA IS
SMOKE-FREE**

NO SMOKING

NYCHA is a smoke-free organization. Smoking is prohibited in all NYCHA buildings, including common areas, and on all NYCHA property. This policy applies to all NYCHA employees, tenants, and visitors. Violations of this policy may result in fines or other disciplinary action.

For more information, please contact your local NYCHA office or visit www.nycha.org/smoke-free.

FDC
STANDPIPE

FDNY
STANDPIPE
CONNECTION









NOTICE
PIMS OFFICE
10000 10000 10000

PIMS OFFICE
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1 FLOOR
A-B-L
E-F
G-H-J-K



NOTICE
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