

# THE TANNER HOUSE

*Annunciating  
a Community  
Cultural Platform  
with Holistic  
Preservation*



**Weitzman**  
SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

Center for the  
Preservation of  
Civil Rights Sites





A collaboration between the **Friends of the Tanner House** and  
**Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites (CPCRS)**



Funding made possible by the Mellon Foundation  
Humanities-in-Place Grant Program

(Cover Image) Facade of the Henry Ossawa Tanner House at 2908 W. Diamond Street, Philadelphia, PA 19121. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Billy Kyle.

Report Design by Steph Garcia with support from Khayla "Khai" Saunders and Lia Schifitto.



**Dedicated to the life-work of Lewis Tanner Moore**

"My collection focuses on work by African-American artists... I collect this work because it speaks to me...I collect this work because, with a few notable exceptions, Black artists have been and, to a great extent, are still systematically and consistently underrepresented....All of us are robbed and diminished by this process that tries to create a rainbow without embracing all of the colors. Most of all, I collect because these are voices that need to be heard, and because they are voices 'we' need to hear."

— *Lewis Tanner Moore*  
(1954-2024)



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Jack E. Boucher, photographer. ca. 1980.  
Library of Congress. Historic American  
Buildings Survey.

### **THE TANNER FAMILY LEGACY AT 2908 WEST DIAMOND STREET, PHILADELPHIA, PA**

We are more than grateful to include the words of Tanner Family descendant Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter to intro our report. Her role as a family representative and advisor has grown, to acting as a substantive interlocutor about how a revitalized Tanner House can serve the Black working-class neighborhoods of North Philadelphia. With that in mind, we present her forward in full, which details Tanner family history and a call for more action to support life-affirming interventions into many threatened historical Black neighborhoods. We intend to answer the call, in community. Please let us know if you'd like to join us.

— *Friends of the Tanner House*





Standing (back row): Henry Ossawa Tanner (1858-1937), Carlton Miller Tanner (1870-1933), Sarah Elizabeth Tanner (later Moore) (1873-1901). Seated (middle row): Isabelle "Bell" Tanner (later Temple) (1867-1956), Halle Tanner (later Dillon, Johnson) (1864-1901), Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner (1835-1923), Sara Elizabeth (Miller) Tanner (1841-1914), Mary Louise Tanner (later Mossell) (1866-1935). Children in front: first grandchild Sadie Dillon (later Harrison, Fulford) (1888-1949), Bertha Tanner (later Stafford) (1878-1962). Tanner Family, Group Portrait. Photograph, 1890. JSTOR, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.22108847>.

# FOREWORD

*Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter*

*Edited by Dr. Amber N. Wiley*



Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859-1937). *Bust of Benjamin Tucker Tanner*. Painted or patinated plaster, 1894. Courtesy of The Walters Art Museum.

**Dear Colleagues, Friends of the  
Tanner House, and Devotees of North  
Philadelphia’s Sustainability,**

Your successful endeavor in securing the structure of the landmarked family home of Henry Ossawa Tanner, the renowned 19th-century artist, previously slated for demolition, was a victory, a transformation, and a source of inspiration for all who value our shared history. The Tanner family, with patriarch Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner as a distinguished member, has left an indelible mark on African American history and culture. His purchase of the Tanner home in 1872 marked the beginning of a legacy that continues to inspire us today.



Benjamin Tucker Tanner served as editor of *The Christian Recorder*, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church newspaper that published information about national politics and church news. He was consecrated as a bishop of the AME church in 1888. Additionally, Bishop

Tanner was the author of seven books on ecclesiastical topics and a strong advocate for racial solidarity and educational equity. His dedication to these causes and his ability to speak and read Hebrew inspired many. My mother, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, often told me that rabbis and the Jewish lay ministry would visit Bishop Tanner at his Diamond Street home and engage in lengthy discussions on religious and racial issues. The formidable historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson described Bishop Tanner's home as "the center of the African American intellectual community of Philadelphia and the Northeast United States."

In 1893, Bishop and Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Tanner's son, the artist Henry Ossawa Tanner, returned home from Paris, France, where he lived and studied art after leaving Philadelphia, in 1891. For one year, 2908 W. Diamond Street became his studio. Henry Ossawa Tanner completed his iconic painting, *The Banjo Lesson*, in this legendary home.

*The Banjo Lesson* demonstrates the unsentimental affection and tenderness between an elderly African American man and a Black youth whom he teaches to play the banjo. The banjo is a significant musical instrument in American history and folklore; it is not a prop for Tanner. It is a symbol, a metaphor, for passing on traditions, one's heritage, and education from one generation to another.



Bishop Tanner's granddaughter - my



Henry Ossawa Tanner. *The Banjo Lesson*. Oil on canvas, 1893. Courtesy of Hampton University Museum.

mother Sadie - lived in this residence as she pursued her graduate studies in economics at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1921, Sadie Tanner Mossell was awarded the Ph.D. degree in Economics by the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Mossell was the first African American, regardless of gender, to receive a Ph.D. in Economics in the United States. However, she was denied a career in her field of choice because she was Black and a woman.

Sadie Tanner Mossell was the first national president of the venerable organization Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,

Inc., which locally held its business meetings in the Tanner house. As I research and study my mother's history, I have learned to appreciate her dedication to the mission and the members of this sorority throughout her life. Sadie Tanner Mossell experienced severe racial isolation as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. Delta Sigma Theta served as her North Star; she cherished her friendships and found comfort in the stimulating, welcoming environment. My mother maintained these friendships with her sorors throughout her life.

In 1923, Sadie Tanner Mossell married Raymond Pace Alexander, who had just graduated from Harvard Law School. The wedding took place in the home of Bishop and Mrs. Tanner, 2908 W. Diamond Street.

Upon graduating from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1927, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander became the first African American woman to pass the Pennsylvania bar exam and practice law in the Commonwealth. Sadie T. M. Alexander joined her husband Raymond in partnership with the Alexander Law Firm, located at 1900 Chestnut Street and later 40 South 19th Street. The firm was an impactful provider of civil rights and civil liberties to all people, particularly those denied constitutional rights because of race, gender, and economic status. In addition to the firm's founder, Raymond Pace Alexander, there were five male attorneys, each a graduate of a distinguished law school and admitted by the Pennsylvania

Bar Association to practice law in the Commonwealth.

The Alexander Law Firm was the **first** law firm in Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania dedicated to civil rights. I stress the Alexander Law Firm's locations because they reflect the first presence of Black businesses and property ownership in the all-white, highly commercial Center City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These properties demonstrated Raymond Pace Alexander's commitment and that of the firm to providing outstanding legal redress to their clients in a setting that showed respect and a sanctuary for those seeking help. As a teenager, I remember the legions of clients who could not leave their workplace during the day and to go to the Center City offices, were welcomed to our home in North Philadelphia to discuss legal issues with either Sadie T. M. Alexander or Raymond Pace Alexander.

In the late 1930s, the Alexander Firm took two Chester County school districts in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, to court after they tried to establish racially segregated school systems. In this case, Raymond Pace Alexander's victory marked an end to *de jure* segregation in Pennsylvania's public schools. The Alexander Law Firm's clients represented a large, economically, and racially diverse cross-section of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the nation.

Harvard Law School professor Kenneth W. Mack, in his book *Representing the Race: The Creation of the Civil Rights*

Lawyer, described Raymond Pace Alexander “as one of the best trial lawyers in Philadelphia, regardless of race.” These legal skills and acumen were more than evident in the Trenton Six Case of 1948, where Alexander won a case that cleared Black defendants falsely accused of killing a white shopkeeper.

Sadie T. M. Alexander's negotiation skills and growing fame positioned her as the recipient of “the most desirable client for a law firm, the Black Church.” She was designated the lawyer for the AME church, which W. E. B. Du Bois described as “the greatest social institution of American Negroes.” Sadie subverted the bastion of male dominance through her committed practice.

In December 1958, Raymond Pace Alexander received a telephone call from the term-limited Governor of Pennsylvania, George Leader. I took the call from the Governor; my mother was abroad in India on a speaking engagement. In a “midnight decision,” Governor Leader appointed Mr. Alexander to the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia, the first African American to hold this position. The weeks and months following the announcement of this appointment were fraught with acrimony, charges of racism, and death threats.

The Alexander Law Firm was dissolved in 1959 when my father Raymond Pace Alexander assumed his judicial appointment on the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. During his 15-year career with the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas,

Judge Alexander sought to sustain human rights and justice for all defendants in his decisions.

After 1959, Sadie T. M. Alexander continued her law practice in new quarters near City Hall, Philadelphia's political and judicial epic center. Her thriving law practice of Black, white, and brown clients emphasized family law, protecting and safeguarding the rights of women, children, and older people most subjected to inequities. Mrs. Alexander, grounded in the law and economics, addressed in her practice and wrote of the need for equity for all, particularly women, who suffered from the indignity of low wages, inadequate child care and health care, and the devaluation of their constitutional rights. Sadie T. M. Alexander remained civically and politically engaged throughout her lifetime. She maintained her board membership on the Commission on Human Relations, which she chaired from 1962 to 1968 and was one of two Pennsylvania founders of the American Civil Rights Union (ACLU). She spoke worldwide on the “sting of racial prejudice,” writing and publishing position papers to end this pernicious practice.

Judge Alexander died in his judicial chambers at age 76 from a cerebral hemorrhage on November 25, 1974. On November 1, 1989, Sadie T.M. Alexander died after a long illness of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. She was 91 years old. In 2007, the Law School of the University of Pennsylvania established a Chair in

Civil Rights named in honor of Raymond Pace Alexander and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander. Dean Michael A. Fitts of the Law School described the two-decade quest as a “landmarked decision.”



My own interest in the evolution of Black communities in the United States began as a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education in 1974. My doctoral dissertation was an ethnographic/ethnohistoric study of Frankford, a 19th-century African American community in a predominantly white ethnic enclave in Northeast Philadelphia. The grants I obtained allowed me to hire graduate students to train Philadelphia Public School junior high school students, Black, brown, and white, as “junior historians,” steeped in the techniques and traditions of oral history to interview the elders of this community.

The Frankford Project was Penn’s GSE’s first collaboration with Philadelphia Public Schools. Before Frankford, the GSE worked only with suburban public schools. My doctoral committee included the then-Dean of GSE, the anthropologist and linguist Dr. Dell Hymes, the folklorist Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the anthropologist Dr. Peggy Reeves Sanday, and the educator Dr. Morton Botel. I was awarded my doctorate in 1981.

In a private conversation some time ago with the then-Dean John L. Jackson, Jr. of the Annenberg School of Communications, now Provost of the

University of Pennsylvania, he told me that my dissertation influenced Penn’s GSE’s decision to broaden its curricula, including anthropological research. Dr. Christopher Rogers, co-founder and current director of the Friends of the Tanner House, is a recent graduate of this program.



Today, the United States is in crisis. The moral fabric that binds us together has shattered—perhaps it never was there. We have lost our compass in a cacophony of lies and untruths, resulting in the race replacement theory. Books by noted Black writers and LGBTQIA authors are banned. Affirmative action is dead. In many states, women’s gynecological concerns are now determined not by medical professionals but by legislators and the judicial system. Historic African American communities are facing demolition from voracious developers who **see gold in the black soil**.

The Friends of the Tanner House efforts sit on the precipice of this momentous historic moment. They have valiantly awakened our knowledge of the material culture of North Philadelphia in the restoration of the home of the Tanner family. However, the Tanners and their progeny were not an anomaly in 19th and 20th century North Philadelphia. Many more Black families and individuals whose history needs recognition and rigorous study contributed to a warm, welcoming, and cohesive community of doctors, nurses, teachers, secretaries, administrators, law enforcement officials,

domestics, judges, municipal employees, laborers, and public assistance recipients.

What happened to North Philadelphia over time? Social scientists, municipalities, public policy analysts, and demographers, among others, must answer that question. The scholarship of Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson is central to our understanding of this vexing phenomenon, which is visible throughout the United States. I would use Wilson's analytical demographic and economic template to undergird an ethnographic/ethnohistoric study of North Philadelphia. In addition, I would garner the oral history of residents and the descendants of residents now deceased. Of course, much more work needs to take place, i.e., the history of North Philadelphia, demographics over time, census data, housing stock analysis, transportation routes, public schools, libraries, religious institutions, medical facilities, politics, etc. I hope that this research will occur.

African American urban communities, rich in history are worthy of studying and documenting to further our understanding of Black Americans' cultural history and evolution over time. However, they most often do not attract the attention of academics and municipal leaders because they do not appear necessary.

Herewith are the names of seven historic Black enclaves whose futures are threatened by the influx of gentrification and rapacious developers:

- Boston's Roxbury

- Chicago's Bronzeville
- Detroit's Arden/Boston district
- Harlem's legendary community of Sugar Hill
- North Philadelphia
- the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina
- Washington, D.C.'s Shaw Community

The project conceived by the Friends of the Tanner House has skillfully unearthed the evolution of a potent, stable, Black community whose residents once comprised doctors, lawyers, clergy, teachers, school administrators, domestics, industry workers, and public assistance recipients. What you have done so far in acknowledging and protecting the Tanner House's material culture is profound and transformative.

You have highlighted the historic riches within the so-called Black ghetto of North Philadelphia and in Black communities nationwide. Within the material culture of these historic Black communities, we find Black residents' vibrant strength, resilience, and copious intellectual pursuits, often not comprehended by mainstream culture as valuable.

I view the Friends of the Tanner House as a beacon to further the ancestors' work. They are **transforming** the prevalent misunderstanding of the Black communities as pathological wastelands and their residents as vacuous and void of intellect and creativity. The Friends of the Tanner

House have widened the social science threshold and moved the ancestors' scholarship into the 21st Century. In so doing, they pay homage to the prophetic words W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in his seminal treatise, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): " ... the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." North Philadelphia is a pivotal community in understanding the dissolution of a strong, economically pluralistic urban Black community over time. I leave the analysis of this heart-wrenching phenomenon to the Friends of the Tanner House to research the answers. May I suggest that

the demographic/economic scholarship of Harvard University sociologist William Julius Wilson serve as a helpful model for answering these questions?

**I was born in North Philadelphia; I know its significance. We must ensure that its history, our history, is preserved. What would it mean for schoolchildren to see that they lived in such a historic community and were its future for survival?**

— *Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter*  
July 23, 2024



Lewis Tanner Moore (left) and Rae Alexander-Minter (right) at a fundraiser for the Tanner House hosted at PAFA. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.



## **APPENDIX: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**By Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter**

The following is a short list of books the ancestors and their disciples wrote. Each book addresses the issues I have delineated in this position paper. Please find these treasures and engage with them.

- Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*, 1965
- Oliver C. Cox, *One Caste Class & Race*, 1948
- Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*, 1941
- Thulani Davis, *The Emancipation Circuit: Black Activism Forging a Culture of Freedom*, 2022
- St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 1945
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, 1899
- Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, The History of An Idea*, 2016
- Sadie Mossell, *The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1921
- Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: The Portrait of a Community in the Deep South*, 1939
- William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, 1987

The Henry Ossawa Tanner House in Philadelphia, PA. Photograph, 2024. Photo courtesy of Christian Hayden.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Friends of the Tanner House*

HENRY O. TANNER  
(1859-1937)

While living here, Tanner studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His earlier works portrayed the ordinary lives of African-Americans. After moving to Paris, Tanner painted religious subjects and won international acclaim.



Friends of the Tanner House outside of 2908 W. Diamond Street. Photograph, 2022. Courtesy of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*/ Alejandro A. Alvarez

Awarded in May 2023, our Mellon-funded collaborative grant project, entitled **Henry Ossawa Tanner House: Announcing a Community Cultural Platform with Holistic Preservation**, supported localized, multigenerational community arts and cultural programming meant to inform a holistic preservation planning process for the Henry Ossawa Tanner House. An emerging non-profit committed to preservation stewardship, the Friends of the Tanner House has been active at the endangered National Historic Landmark site since December 2021, coordinating fundraising, outreach, and project planning to realize the house’s second-life revitalization as a neighborhood arts-and-culture anchor institution. In collaboration

with the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, the project sought to awaken strategies and visions to support Black communities already doing the daily work of cultural preservation through our creative storytelling and artistic engagement practices. We hoped to uplift a multigenerational coalition of local residents, recognizing how Black heritage preservation organizing can inform equitable, sustainable neighborhood development.

The project consisted of three concentric circles of programmatic offerings united around a community-based survey inquiry: **(1)** the Artist Partnership Series; **(2)** the Community Collaboration Series; and **(3)** the Design & Preservation Series.

## **Program Series**

**Artist Partnership** - After an open submission selection process, Friends of the Tanner House partnered with local artist Qiaira Riley to organize a series of multigenerational, interactive, arts and culture activities that drew upon Tanner family legacies, spread awareness of our preservation goals, and invited rich community wisdom to inform the ongoing revitalization of the Tanner House.

**Community Collaboration** - Extending from our emerging Friends of the Tanner House Community Partner Network, this platform supported collaborations with community-centered groups, organizations, and collectives across themes of faith, family, freedom, health, arts, and education in the 19121/19132 zip codes of North Philadelphia to cultivate an integrated, neighborhood-rooted, expansive vision for Tanner House programming.

**Design & Preservation** - Recruiting an advisory roundtable of heritage preservation professionals, the Friends of the Tanner House hosted workshops exploring concepts, ideas, and experiments to further Black heritage preservation and outline a preservation philosophy and design approach for the Tanner House.

We hosted close to a dozen community events, with over 345 registered attendees, and more than 30 local artistic and community collaborators.

## **Capacity Building**

Capacity-building outcomes from this year-long effort included:

**Friends of the Tanner House Community Partner Network** - The Friends of the Tanner House Community Partner Network invited formal and informal groups, organizations, and collectives for shared opportunities for resource development, skillsharing, and programmatic collaborations. As of July 2024, we note more than 30 member organizations who are engaged in the 19121/19132 neighborhoods around areas of uplifting faith, family, freedom, health, arts, and/or education.

**For Love to Thrive Survey Analysis** - Friends of the Tanner House drew inspiration from poet and activist June Jordan's process for a Harlem housing and community redesign project in the 1960s to invite local community voices to document, strategize, and determine opportunities for enriching community cultural organizing. In short, we offered stakeholders the prompt: "What does it take for love to thrive in our neighborhood?" Thematics from the survey will inform the vision for future Tanner House programming and building infrastructure plans.

**Tanner Family House Revitalization Timeline** - Friends of the Tanner House were able to use our professional advisory workshops to sketch out an in-depth



Aerial view of the Tanner House with the Philadelphia skyline in the background. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Billy Kyle.

preservation project timeline as well as necessary structural, architectural, and historical documentation to make the most of future organizational development opportunities. We recommend renaming the National Historic Landmark the Tanner Family House - rather than the Henry O. Tanner House - to note the extended Tanner family accomplishments.



This project would have not been possible without the support of the Center for Preservation of Civil Rights Sites and the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. We give special thanks to previous CPCRS Director Randall F.

Mason, current CPCRS Director Amber N. Wiley, and especially Stephanie Garcia — our CPCRS project collaborator who anticipated our daily needs, bottom-lined supply orders, and reached back to follow-up with our vendors throughout the length of our engagement.

— *Christopher R. Rogers*  
*Board President / CEO*  
*Friends of the Tanner House, Inc.*



**Friends of the Tanner House, Inc.  
ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES**

1. The Friends of the Tanner House strive to be accountable to the historical contributions, contemporary experiences, and future visions surrounding the preservation of Black cultural heritage in North Central Philadelphia, with an emphasis on the 19121 and 19132 zip codes. We center appreciative inquiry approaches that uncover and highlight existing assets, strengths, advantages, and/or opportunities to further community self-determination.
2. The Friends of the Tanner House strive for an ethic of authentic engagement that moves at the speed of trust and nurtures relationships that may well extend beyond the life of any single collaboration. We strive for outcomes that are fueled by intentional and iterative processes. We balance urgency and timeliness with purposeful reflection.
3. The Friends of the Tanner House are committed to working with individuals, organizations, and institutions, yet emphasize maintaining enduring relationships with those that share our values and honor a sense of reciprocity. We intend for our words and actions to be aligned in pursuit of a culture of collective care, repair, and safety for all.
4. The Friends of the Tanner House are informed by anti-oppressive practices, recognizing a responsibility to support community-led movements against systemic injustice. We begin from where we are in North Central Philadelphia and extend to reflect upon our global interconnectedness with other communities, land(s), and life itself.

*The Friends of the Tanner House, Inc. is an organization dedicated to preserving and revitalizing the historic Tanner family property at 2908 W. Diamond St. Through our heritage stewardship, the Friends of the Tanner House honors the growth, development and sustenance of the rich Black cultural life of North Philadelphia with family-centered artistic, intellectual, and cultural programming.*

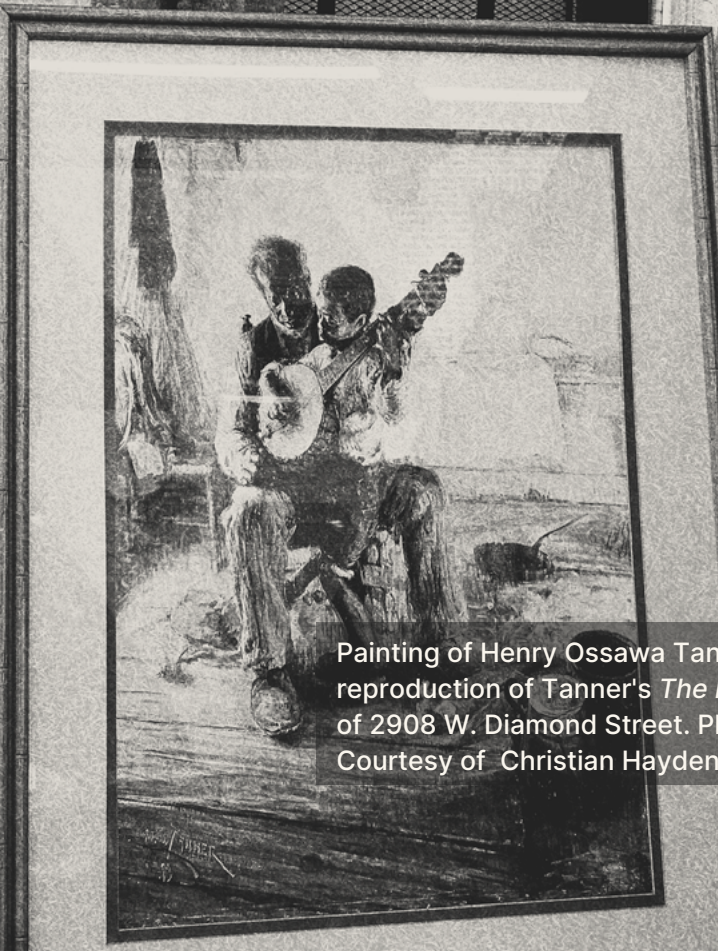
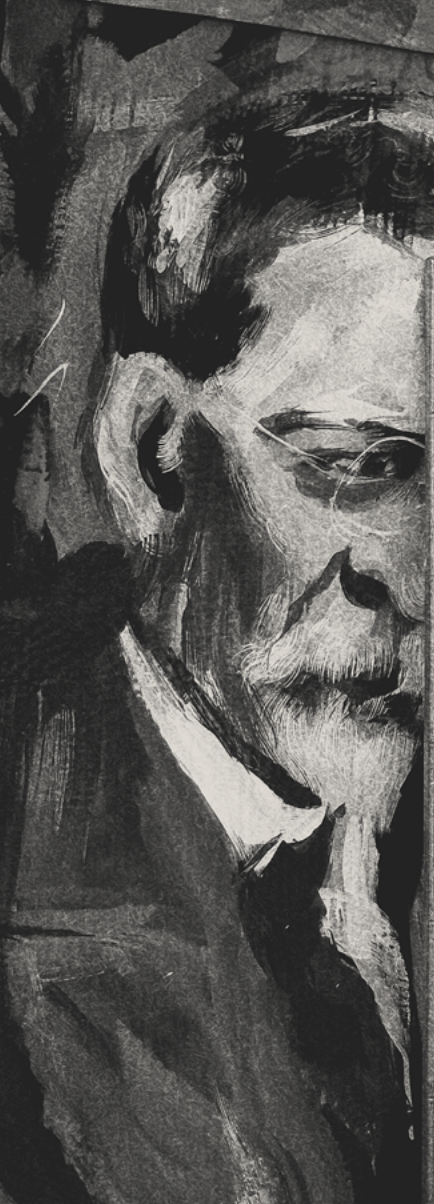
savethetannerhouse.org | info@savethetannerhouse.org

(Above) Friends of the Tanner House, Inc. Organizational Values (Adopted by Board in March 2023). This document served to reinforce our shared values that we seek to embed throughout our stewardship journey, noting some of its influence from our Philadelphia heritage preservation peers at Monument Lab.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Friends of the  
Tanner House*



Painting of Henry Ossawa Tanner and framed reproduction of Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson* outside of 2908 W. Diamond Street. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

Overall, the Friends of the Tanner House capacity-building vision, within this year-long effort of community cultural organizing, ushered in the privilege of gathering with our local neighbors and fellow cultural workers about the righteous and worthy work of Black heritage preservation ahead of us all. The convergence of the Artist Partner, Community Collaboration, and Design & Preservation series provided us a blueprint for exemplifying the mustard seeds of the Friends of Tanner House vision. It is a vision in pursuit of achieving substantive reparative spatial justice for North Philadelphia — in which Black heritage preservation is instrumentalized toward rectifying past wrongs and shaping inclusive, equitable spatial futures, with a focus on communities' active participation and agency in creating their own spatial environments.<sup>1</sup> This introduction serves as an example of the texture of storying that we hope to bring alive in a revitalized Tanner Family House for North Philadelphia and the further world to be enriched. God willing.

We thank you for contributing your attention and making another aware, whosoever shall be reading this right now. Please drop something in the tip jar on the way out.

## On the Lesson of the Banjo & the Dream for Reparative Spatial Futures

*I was born in North Philadelphia; I know its significance. We must ensure that its history, our history, is preserved. What would it mean for Black schoolchildren to see that they live in such a historic community and were its future for survival?*

— Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter  
July 23, 2024

It would mean the world. It would truly mean the world.

**Faith. Family. Freedom. Arts. Health. Education.** Since December 2021, these six legacy spheres of Black social life have become standard fare of the welcoming to the work of the Friends of the Tanner House. When we consider the diverse, intertwined familial accomplishments of the Tanners as traced through their time at 2908 W. Diamond Street, we recognize that their passionate pursuits across those spheres made a way for them and so many others to envision a thriving future for themselves and their communities. The work we commit ourselves to follows in this hopeful blueprint, recognizing the trailblazing Tanner family as humble possibility models reflecting the vast ambitions of current and future generations of North Philadelphia to grasp that we hold what's necessary inside of us to transform the world.

Yes, we commit to being specific about



our primary audience. We will of course be a venue open to all, yet it is important for us to note that our subversive effort prioritizes reorienting GLAM institutions to fully honor the social fabric and cultural wealth (present and subterranean) that is found within Black working-class communities. Neighborhoods like Strawberry Mansion continue to organize themselves for something more than simply their survival, something worth more than a realtor-debated “neighborhood of choice;” we are talking about the realization of an emancipatory social foundation for our Black families culturally rooted in what writer Kiese Laymon once described as “good love, healthy choices, and second chances.” We are *annunciating* those sort of worldmaking possibilities into existence.

As our survey project entailed, inspired by the architectural vision of poet June Jordan, the Friends of the Tanner House are enraptured by the pursuit of the shared community life-work inquiry of “**What does it take for love to thrive?**” Ideally, we know that we must answer through the first example of how we choose to live our everyday lives. Preserving our peoples’ glorious past and ongoing, unfinished struggle is a serious starting point to show us all who we have been, all we must stand to become, all we must struggle to sustain. We remember we are destined to become our ancestors, too. It is a reminder of our inheritance of the Sankɔfa principle, a principle at work within Henry Ossawa Tanner’s *The Banjo Lesson* (1893).



Abena Ampofoa Asare writes on the meaning of Sankɔfa, the Akan (approximately current Ghana/Côte d’Ivoire/Togo) wisdom image of a bird facing backward with feet pointing forward, holding a precious seed/egg in its mouth. The term Sankɔfa itself has been roughly translated to connote “We must reach back to move forward.” Asare offers:

*Within transatlantic slavery’s scattering and gathering, this translation of sankɔfa flourishes as an authentic cultural insight aligned with Black diasporic experiences. For peoples surviving the denigration of their ancestral names, language, cosmologies, foods, and folkways, the directive to retrieve from the past is a message of self-regard, political power, and wholeness.<sup>2</sup>*

The sankɔfa bird is also a visual guide to history’s push and pull. It offers a vision of how to deal with all — both the painful and the transcendent — that has been bequeathed to us. Sankɔfa’s head and gaze are famously turned backward toward the past, while its feet face forward toward the future...The sankɔfa bird encourages us to recognize that there is still a seed to be chosen, a step to be taken. There is power in our swiveling, and facing, and picking.

Sankɔfa offers us an ancestral platform for recognizing the power and futurities of stewarding our longform beautiful struggle as a people. It must be a truthful

Akan. *Gold Weight in Form of Sankofa Bird*. Brass. Brooklyn Museum.



endeavor, inclusive of both the painful and the transcendent, all the more beautiful and more terrible as James Baldwin explored with us. We need not make over the Tanner family into infallible idols to carry out this mission. Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter agreed. It is most important we refuse the perceived exceptionalism ascribed to an illusory Black excellence that by its very definition will never stand to include us all.



Claiming otherwise, how do we look at the lives of the Tanners to recognize the dream seeds they chose to nurture, the steps they found to take, those everyday mundane gestures that just might get any

of us going, the lasting life messages, the enduring ambitious visions, the other meandering pursuits, the hidden conflicts, the closeted yearnings, and all of every Black life's always already remaining discontents? Our lives are ever complex and chock full of tenuous contradictions — if anywhere, our real value must derive somewhere from roun' there.

And we must not forget that our history often shows us that we do win sometimes in spite of it all but yet we may never fully arrive at the horizon of all the abundant Black freedoms we desire. We must believe now as we believe the Tanners did then, that regardless we are all already deserving

of love, care, and liberation. It remains spelled out in our names like Ossawa and Osawatomie, Kansas. It is through the dynamism of culture work for how we incitefully practice turning our present freedom dreams into an abiding material reality, beginning for us in Strawberry Mansion and spiraling out to everyone else who is down to search for a sturdy way up, over, and out.

As Henry Ossawa Tanner's grandniece Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter shared with us in her foreword, *The Banjo Lesson* may have very well been completed during Henry Ossawa Tanner's homestay at 2908 W. Diamond Street in 1893–94 while he recovered from typhoid fever and built up his dwindling savings as a fledgling, striving artist. This is a time before his global acclaim arrived. He had to sell whatever he was going to attempt in Philadelphia to even afford returning to Paris, to even eventually earn the chance to fall in love with Jessie Olson and raise their son Jesse. *The Banjo Lesson* is considered a major early feat of African-American genre paintings, traditionally described as depicting aspects of everyday life by portraying ordinary people engaged in common activities.

Everyday. Ordinary. Common. The scene showcases what we perceive to be a grandfather showing his descendant generation embodied in the form of a young male child how to play the banjo. For art critics, there's much ado about this image Tanner crafted as countering the racist stereotypes of mainstream African

American representation of its time. In my reading, that feels like a secondary motivation at best. It certainly remains white folks' art-world hangup (and unfortunately some of ours too) that require the production of incredibly rendered Black-led masterwork paintings to simply "see us." As if we ain't been standing here and fighting to remain upright the whole time since they forced us over this way.

I've seen us so many everyday, ordinary, and common times that I even happen to know a couple struggling-but-still-striving Black artists. I'm not so sure that such a shallow commodified counter-narrative holds you through the slow, painstaking process of elevated creation. Especially when you, yes you Henry, are just about broke. No way you wanna call it quits at the end of a very long and stressful day to explain to your Black family that you were only seeking to defend their honor and your sacred inheritance from a people who have willingly refused to be accountable to our essence. That can't be it. There has to be something more worthy of your Grandma's plantation garden plot in the secret sauce to hold on to, just in case the investment of all this precious inspired time for image-making don't work out. When you ain't got that much money left, and you know this could be it, you gotta fall back on family. You gotta come all the way back home to find a means forward.

My fan fiction of *The Banjo Lesson* is more tied to the secretive Black interior meaningfulness of the banjo, the West

African derived instrument rebirthed on this side of the Atlantic in our time of need and the intergenerational transfer of a Black creative praxis that very well may just be how the souls of Black folk survive on these stolen lands.

*The story of the banjo goes back centuries, to West Africa, where folk lute instruments like the Senegambian akonting have long been in use. In recent decades, scholars and master musicians such as Daniel Laemouahuma Jatta have kept alive the traditions of these instruments, which ethnomusicologists worldwide are finally recognizing as living ancestors of the banjo.*

*Those African instruments never made the journey on slave ships bound for the Americas, but the technology for building them was carried in the heads of the passengers along with their memories of the music.<sup>3</sup>*

We have to reckon with the fact that there simply may never be an ordinary day in the life of Black folk, my people. That is, if you are willing to look and listen closely enough. What could be rendered commonplace in the mainstream, can disguise both the marvelous and the miraculous. The banjo at the center of this painting, shared between the old and the young, suggests the continuance of an abundant Black blues tradition, of

recognizing how the everyday creative power of Black music, often maligned by outsiders and overseers as simply “noise,” served as a communicative platform of secretive histories and ancestral survival guidance. As the banjo was reconstructed and adapted throughout the Mississippi Delta, it reincarnated as a vehicle of an emergent and evolving culture, derived of what the beloved Clyde Woods described as the Blues epistemology, whereas the music we create from a site of suffering carries a message our ancestors wrote and the message writes “a faith in the ultimate justice of all things” as W.E.B. Du Bois most famously phrased. I heard Du Bois too may have visited 2908 W. Diamond Street. Whether he did or not, I know his presence was certainly felt; these were *Philadelphia Negroes*, even if they had arrived from Pittsburgh.

*The Banjo Lesson* read in the key of Sankofa just might be otherwise rendered for us as a metaphorical tribute to the sharing of ancestrally rooted creative practices from one generation to the next that may help us all get over, get by, and get clear, once and for all, that we as a people are unavailable for servitude. First, we noticed Henry Ossawa Tanner returning home from Paris to Strawberry Mansion, teaching us about striving and surviving as whole thankful poor folks. Now, the Friends of the Tanner House seeks to renew this tradition in the 21st century through the Tanner family home at 2908 W. Diamond St. where Tanner envisioned and realized

this ethereal, enduring masterwork. From retrieving our past, we just might be able to collectively take a step forward into thriving Black futures. If only we sit together and commit to rehearsing the banjo blues our ancestors sent for us.



As you move through this summative report of our year-long engagement with the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, we hope you notice the expansive collaborative multigenerational relationships that made possible what we have been able to achieve up to this moment. A Luo proverb goes “Alone a youth runs fast, with an elder slow, but together they go far.” We are still just in the very beginning, and as Tanner family descendant Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter often reminds us: “We are sitting on a gold mine.”

<sup>1</sup> Tram Hoang, Rasheedah Phillips, Jasmine Rangel, *Grounding Justice: Grounding Justice: Toward Reparative Spatial Futures in Land and Housing*, <https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/grounding-justice>

<sup>2</sup> Abena Ampofoa Asare, *Sankofa Time*, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/sankofa-time/>

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ruta, "Black Musicians' Quest to Return the Banjo to Its African Roots", <https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/black-banjo-reclamation-project-african-roots>



# ARTIST PARTNERSHIP SERIES

Ceramic altar building at the Cecil  
B. Moore Library. Photograph, 2024.  
Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

2023-'24 Artist-in-Residence



*Qiaira Riley*

Qiaira Riley is a community-based artist, educator, guerilla theorist, and event curator, raised on Chicago's South Side and based in Philadelphia. She holds a dual B.A. in Black Studies and Studio Art from Lake Forest College, as well as an M.F.A in Socially Engaged Studio Art from Moore College of Art and Design.

She is a founding member of 2.0, a collective that collaborates with artists and organizations to curate free, experimental offerings that are exclusive to or center Black femmes, women, and genderqueer folks. She is also the host of "Something You Can Feel," a Black art history podcast.

Her arts practice work shifts between painting, ceramics, video, and transfer techniques. Her work explores and is inspired by Black American memorabilia, food-ways, vernacular interiors, collective memory, and reality television.

## Honoring Socially Engaged Black Creative and Care Practices

From October 2023 through May 2024, I collaborated with the Friends of the Tanner House and the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites to curate a series of multigenerational arts programming uplifting the legacy of the Tanner family and the urgent stabilization efforts of their historic home. This Community Artist Partnership Series sought to envision the future creative potential of the home by exploring narratives of religion, health, civil rights, and domesticity as related to the accomplishments of individual members of the Tanner family. The community-centered narratives of the Tanner family inspired my curation strategy, as I utilized my own local artistic networks to find facilitators for our events, while honoring socially engaged Black creative and care practices.

Our first event in October 2023, the *People's Dispensary*, was inspired by the life of Dr. Halle Tanner Dillon Johnson. The day was filled with creative, holistic-care workshops and activities, honoring black femme health care workers through explorations of farming, birthwork, herbal medicine, and family genealogy.

Later that month, we hosted *Plastic on the Sofa*, an artist talk and collage workshop inspired by Henry Ossawa Tanner's depictions of Black domestic life in works like *The Banjo Lesson*. This event featured 3 Black cultural workers and artists whose work honored Black domestic

spaces. After each artist shared a bit about the influence of Black vernacular interiors in their work, attendees created collages inspired by their own homes and memories of Black domestic spaces that brought comfort and joy.

In December, we hosted a ceramic altar building workshop exploring the relationship between Black spirituality and religious practices in searches for liberation, as inspired by the work of Bishop Benjamin Tucker and Sarah Tanner. After a conversation exploring Black spirituality, folks made their own ceramic altars, and herbal head washes.

We hosted *A House is Not A Home*, in February, a family portrait and oral history day where participants had opportunities to get free tintypes and portraits made, and be interviewed about the stories of their homes.

*Civic Inspirations*, took place in March. It was a social justice centered printmaking

event inspired by the work of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander. We collaborated with two abolitionist groups to host a workshop outside the Tanner House on preserving Black spaces. Participants had the opportunity to screen-print their own t-shirts and tote bags supporting contemporary social issues.

For the future, I hope the Friends of the Tanner House Artist Partnership Series will continue to support community-centered artists of color, while building expansive opportunities to engage with residents around the issues and blessings in the Strawberry Mansion community. I look forward to seeing the Tanner House act as an accessible gathering space that centers socially engaged arts programming at the intersections of faith, family, health, civil rights, and education.

— *Qiaira Riley*

*2023-24 Friends of the Tanner House  
Artist Partner*



# The People's Dispensary

October 8, 2023

Hatfield House

Philadelphia, PA

The Friends of the Tanner House, CPCRS, and Artist-in-Residence Qiaira Riley hosted the *People's Dispensary* at the Hatfield House in the Strawberry Mansion area of North Philadelphia. The *People's Dispensary*, inspired by the life of Dr. Halle Tanner Dillon Johnson, was a day of creative, holistic-care workshops and activities, honoring black femme health care workers.

Offerings included workshops exploring farming, birthwork, herbal medicine, family genealogy, as well art activities and experiences including floral arrangement, aromatherapy, and poetry. Food was provided by [Honeysuckle Provisions](#), with on-site food vending by [Ginja Snap](#). This event was in partnership with the Strawberry Mansion Civic Association and Fairmount Park Conservancy.



Drum circle welcome for neighborhood seniors. Hatfield House in Strawberry Mansion. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

Opening welcome and family genealogy during the *People's Dispensary* event. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.



Art activities and oral histories during the *People's Dispensary* event. Photographs, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.



# Plastic on the Sofa • Plastic on the Sofa •

October 14, 2023  
Tree House Books  
Philadelphia, PA

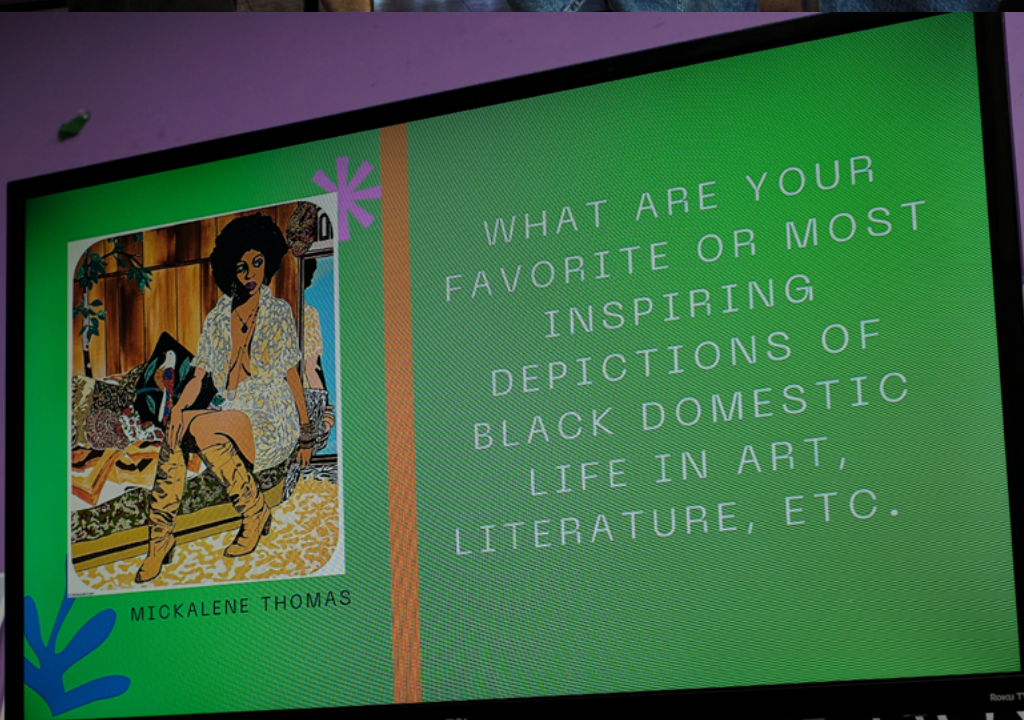
*Plastic on the Sofa* was an artist talk and collage workshop, honoring and exploring the role of the Black home in contemporary art.

This event was inspired by Henry Ossawa Tanner, the first Black painter to gain international recognition. Collage artists and cultural workers [Doriana Diaz](#) & [Destiny Crockett](#) alongside Vashti DuBois, founder of [The Colored Girls Museum](#), discussed how Black domesticity influences their creative practices.

Following the conversation, there was a workshop where participants created their own collages inspired by Henry Ossawa Tanner's depiction of Black vernacular interiors, as seen in *The Banjo Lesson*. Food was provided by local [Down North Pizza](#), the James Beard award-winning pizza restaurant which exclusively employs formerly incarcerated individuals while providing culinary career opportunities at a fair wage within an equitable workplace.



Panel discussion during *Plastic on the Sofa*. Philadelphia. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.



(Top L to R) Doriana Díaz, Vashti DuBois, Destiny Crockett during the panel conversation. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

(Bottom) Slide from the panel discussion. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.



(All) Collage activity during *Plastic on the Sofa*. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.



# *Ceramic Altar Building: Exploring Black Liberation Through Clay*

December 15, 2023

Cecil B. Moore Free Library

Philadelphia, PA


The *Ceramic Altar Building* workshop intertwined Black liberation and spirituality practices. The event was inspired by the lives of Sarah Elizabeth and Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner. Participants engaged in a conversation centering the role of Black religious and spirituality practices across the diaspora in fights for freedom. They also created their own hand-built ceramic altars. The workshop was led by [Robin Williams-Turnage](#), with sounds curated by [Play Cousins Philly](#).



*A House Is Not  
A Home*

*Family Portrait + Oral  
History Day*





Family portrait day at Our House Culture Center.  
Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Monique "Mo" Perry.

February 17, 2024  
Our House Culture Center  
Philadelphia, PA

*A House is Not a Home: A Family Portrait and Oral History Day* offered participants free family portraits by photographer Cassidy Arrington, tintypes by artist Elizabeth Kelly, and an opportunity for North Philadelphia families to orally document the stories of their homes and families with audio producer Danya AbdelHamied. Participants also viewed community artist partner Qiara Riley's Beauty of the Week exhibition, an exploration of collective and individual Black aesthetic memory and familial heritage.



(All) *A House is Not A Home* event at Our House Cultural Center in Germantown. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Monique "Mo" Perry.



(All) A House is Not A Home event at Our House Cultural Center in Germantown. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Monique "Mo" Perry.

# *Exhibition at the Cecil B. Moore Library*

February 24, 2024  
Cecil B. Moore Free Library  
Philadelphia, PA

This event was a closing reception of an exhibition showcasing works created by Philadelphia residents during our Community Artist Partnership Series. Attendees had an opportunity to walk through the exhibition and learn more about the future of the Tanner House.



(All) Ceramics Exhibition with pieces made by participants in the December 2023 altar building workshop. Photographs, 2024. Courtesy of Monique "Mo" Perry.

(All) Ceramics Exhibition with pieces made by participants in the December 2023 altar building workshop. Photographs, 2024. Courtesy of Monique "Mo" Perry.

These ceramic pieces were created during an altar building clay workshop connecting Black spiritual practices and liberation, led by Robin Turnage at the Cecil B Moore Library in December 2023. The collage was created by artist Isabella Akhtarshenas during an artist talk and collage workshop exploring the role of Black vernacular interiors in art history, hosted at Treehouse Books in October of 2023.



# Civic Inspirations

## A Social Justice Printmaking Workshop



March 17, 2024

The Henry Ossawa Tanner House  
Philadelphia, PA

Hosted in collaboration with the [Abolition School](#) and [Decolonize Philly](#), the event was a social-justice printmaking workshop inspired by the work of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, a civil rights activist and the first Black woman to graduate from University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. The day included an opportunity for participants to screen print their own totes and T-shirts uplifting contemporary social justice issues and activities.



(Previous and current page) Print screening event outside of the Tanner House. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

Close-up of printscreen during *Civic Inspirations*. Photograph, 2024.  
Courtesy of Christian Hayden.







# *Addressing the Future of the Tanner House: A Letter Writing and Collage Workshop*

**@ NO ORDINARY HOUSE: A NEIGHBORHOOD CELEBRATION OF HENRY OSSAWA TANNER HOUSE EFFORTS**

**May 18, 2024**

**Strawberry Mansion CDC  
Philadelphia, PA**

*Addressing the Future of the Tanner House* was a chance for the Friends of the Tanner House to reveal a new mailbox installation in collaboration with artist Yannick Lowery. Yannick and Qiaira Riley led a letter writing and collage workshop, where participants envisioned the future possibilities for the Tanner house.

These activities coincided with a neighborhood celebration of our collective efforts to revitalize the National Historic Landmark with the support of the Strawberry Mansion CDC / Strawberry Mansion NAC. The outdoor celebration was held at the pocket park beside their current office.

(All) Celebration at the Strawberry Mansion CDC in North Philadelphia. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Christopher R. Rogers.



Clean-up day outside the Tanner House.  
Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Christian  
Hayden.

**FREE  
BOOKS**

**COMMUNITY  
COLLABORATION  
SERIES**

## Launching the Friends of the Tanner House Community Partner Network

The Friends of the Tanner House invited formal and informal groups, organizations, and collectives to join together as part of the development of a Community Partner Network as we seek to revitalize the Henry Ossawa Tanner House as a heritage-driven community cultural asset. In order to be eligible for the network, an organization must:

- Maintain a presence (site and/or major audience) in the 19121 and/or 19132 zip code. City-wide organizations with projects in 19121 and/or 19132 are also eligible.
- Engage community around areas of uplifting faith, family, freedom, health, arts, and/or education.

Benefits of network membership included direct communication about Friends of the Tanner House programming, opportunities to support and table at Friends of the Tanner House events, as well as access to limited funded collaboration opportunities that were decided by member collective vote. It was important for the Friends of the Tanner House to consider ways we could be supportive of ongoing programming and pursuits as they already existed in the Strawberry Mansion arts and cultural ecosystem.

As of July 2024, we have 30 members of the Community Partner Network. Wingspan Humanities funding led by Spring Point Partners and PA Humanities Council have allowed us to make our first hire, Dayona Evans, who will take on the part-time role of Community Engagement Coordinator to build further outreach and support of the growing network.



Clean-up day outside the Tanner House. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

## Friends of the Tanner House Community Partner Network Membership | July 2024

- Block by Block Philly
- Bloody Bitches
- Blues Babe Foundation
- Brewerytown Sharswood Community Civic Association
- Carver High School of Engineering and Science
- Cecil B. Moore Free Library Branch
- Cecil B. Moore Recreation Center
- Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church [30th & Diamond]
- Citizens Planning Institute
- East Coast Black Age of Comics Convention (ECBACC Philly)
- Gibson Temple Baptist Church
- Global Philadelphia Association
- Healing Through the Land
- Heritage Community Development Corporation
- Historic Jones Tabernacle AME Church
- In Color Birding Club
- journeying barefoot
- Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania
- Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church
- Naomi Wood Trust of Woodford Mansion
- North Philly Peace Park
- Philadelphia Chapter of the Pierians
- Philadelphia Register of Wills
- Philly Experiences
- Pink Ladies Youth Mentorship Program / Boutique & Tea Party Shop
- Society to Preserve Philadelphia's African-American Assets (SPPAAA)
- Strawberry Mansion Neighborhood Action Center, Inc.
- Strawberry Mansion Neighborhood and Homeowners Association
- TechCORE2 Nonprofit Corporation
- Victoria's Urban Outreach Tutoring Service

# *Friends of the Tanner House 2023-24 Community Collaboration Series Events*

The Friends of the Tanner House was able to support five community collaboration events, which allowed community groups to lead on an event idea that aligned with overall project goals uplifting faith, family, freedom, health, arts, and/or education. These events allowed us to tap into audiences that are already doing great things in the neighborhood so that we could learn more about how the future of Tanner House could serve their current work and larger neighborhood visions for progress.



Genealogy workshop at the Hatfield House.  
Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Steph Garcia.

## **FAMILY GATHERING: FINDING OUR ROOTS WITH THE STRAWBERRY MANSION CIVIC ASSOCIATION**

**July 30, 2023**

**Hatfield House**

**Philadelphia, PA**

The Strawberry Mansion Civic Association led a community day at the Hatfield House that featured workshops on researching and discovering family genealogical records alongside an artistic workshop led by Jihan Thomas that focused on visualizing your family tree. Tanner family descendant Lewis Tanner Moore donated a poster honoring the accomplishments of the Tanner family for inspiration. This event served as a pilot/planning opportunity for the Friends of the Tanner House to test the efficacy of our community survey and invite community arts and culture organizers to learn more about opportunities to join the Community Partner Network.

Strawberry Mansion  
Neighborhood  
Civic  
Homeowners Association  
Here every resident's voice matters

presents

Unsung Sheros  
In the  
Black Community  
Part #1  
Anne Lowe



The Winterthur Museum celebrates American fashion designer, Ann Cole Lowe, high society's "Best-Kept Secret", unnamed for her couture-quality gowns for America's most prominent. Best known for designing the ivory silk taffeta wedding dress worn by Jacqueline Bouvier when she wed John F. Kennedy. (Wikipedia)

Let's Gather, Learn & and Speak Her Name!

JANUARY 6, 2024

10am - 4pm

\$55.00



Friends of Tanner House sponsors a "Tanner Ticket" if you cannot afford the \$55.00 cost. Please see registration form for details. Only 20 "Tanner Tickets", so register quickly!

Cost includes Museum Entrance, Breakfast Snack, \$20 Lunch Stipend, & Transportation

From Mander Recreation 33rd and Diamond Streets to Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library  
5105 Kennett Pike Winterthur, Delaware 19735

Contact Us

philaneighborsunite@gmail.com to register

https://phillyneighborsunite.weebly.com/

By Invitation Only. Due to Limited Space

Cost Subsidized by

Friends of Tanner House

Inspired Therapeutic Solutions, Inc.

## "UNsung SHEROS OF BLACK CULTURE" EXHIBITION TOUR & COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

January 6, 2024 | April 13, 2024

Winterthur Museum & Historic  
Strawberry Mansion  
Philadelphia, PA

The Strawberry Mansion Neighbors & Homeowners Association invited families to travel to the Winterthur Museum for an exhibition in honor of American fashion designer, Ann Cole Lowe. The Friends of the Tanner House sponsored tickets for neighborhood residents. In a follow-up community conversation, participants re-gathered to discuss how fashion and career choices impacted sense of identity and belonging in our communities and to the proverbial "American Dream."

## HERITAGE HANGOUT @ "THE IN-BETWEEN SPACES" / MEET & GREET FOR PHILLY'S BLACK HERITAGE COMMUNITY

January 25, 2024

Parkway Central Library

Philadelphia, PA

Ahead of Black History Month 2024, Heritage Hangout was a convening of those interested in Black memory work, archive development, and heritage preservation to celebrate one another and steward the multigenerational community to move forward our collective work. Promotional co-sponsors for the event included Friends of the Tanner House, Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, Black Lives Matter Week of Action, Memory Workers Guild, Black + Local 215, State Representative Donna Bullock (195th District), and State Senator Vincent Hughes (Senate District 7).

During this event, attendees were encouraged to walk through the exhibition on view at the Parkway Central Library, entitled "The In-Between Spaces." This exhibition, curated by archivist and memory worker Doriana Diaz was envisioned as exploring "the skeletal architecture for which all forms of creation manifest themselves into archival distinction." The work of all 10 Black Philadelphia based contributing artists was on view in the Free Library's West Gallery One.

(Next page) Heritage Hangout @ "The In-Between Spaces" / Meet & Greet for Philly's Black Heritage Community. Photographs, 2024. [Courtesy of Melissa Simpson.](#)





**THE BLUES BABE FOUNDATION  
PRESENTS: COMMUNITY CLEANUP &  
LEGACY LUNCHEON**

**February 3, 2024**

**2900 Block of W. Diamond Street & Blues  
Babe Foundation HQ  
Philadelphia, PA**

Supported by the Friends of the Tanner House, the Blues Babe Foundation hosted a community-led clean-up of the 2900 Block of W. Diamond Street. Gloves, tools, and hot beverages were provided. The Tree House Books bookmobile was on site to give away children's books to local families. The cleanup was followed by a soul food Legacy Luncheon with invited guests including visual artist Misty Sol and WURD radio host Brother Shomari to talk about the importance of culture in uplifting the community.

**HEALING THROUGH THE LAND  
STEM DAY/FAMILY BUILD-A-DRONE  
WORKSHOP W/ DRONEVERSIY**

**March 28, 2024**

**Martin Luther King Recreation Center  
Philadelphia, PA**

At this STEM workshop future aviators learned about and built drones together that participants were able to take home. The event was led by Ashlee Cooper, MLS(ASCP), the President of Droneversity. Cooper continues the underrepresented Black woman aviation legacy by expanding participation in the drone revolution with excellent skill-building strategies, tools and fun.

**"STAMP YOUR ART OUT:" BECOME AN  
ARTIST LIKE HENRY OSSAWA TANNER  
W/ SPPAAA AT THE PHILADELPHIA  
JUNETEENTH FESTIVAL**

**June 15, 2024**

**6300 Block of Germantown Ave,  
Philadelphia, PA**

The Society to Preserve Philadelphia's African American Assets (SPPAAA) led a family-friendly resource table activity that honored Henry Ossawa Tanner. Festival-goers were encouraged to learn some history about Philadelphia's Black heritage sites, engage in rubber stamping and take home a rubber stamp and ink pad. The event was also in honor of Mrs. Pauline Hill, a locally beloved rubber stamp artist.

(Next page) The Blues Babe Foundation Presents: Community Cleanup & Legacy Luncheon. Photographs, 2024. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.





*Dayona Evans*

Hi, my name is Dayona Evans and I am honored to be on board with the Friends of the Tanner House as their Community Engagement Coordinator. I have a strong background in Early Childhood Education, having been involved with this work for the past 12 years. I hold a Bachelor's Degree in Science in Early Childhood Education from Chestnut Hill College. This very work experience has prepared me for my role with the Friends of the Tanner House and taught me how to be in a community with different communities.

The first thing you learn as an educator, for me I learned this quickly, is that you can't teach and the children can't learn if you don't understand where these children are coming from and figure out the best way to build trust and partnerships with their families. Sometimes we are under the impression that we simply come into these children's lives to teach them but,

the lessons they learn from us early on, help to shape who they can become in the future. You can't understand a child without understanding their family dynamic, and once you understand where they are coming from you can understand what supports they require to reach their next level.

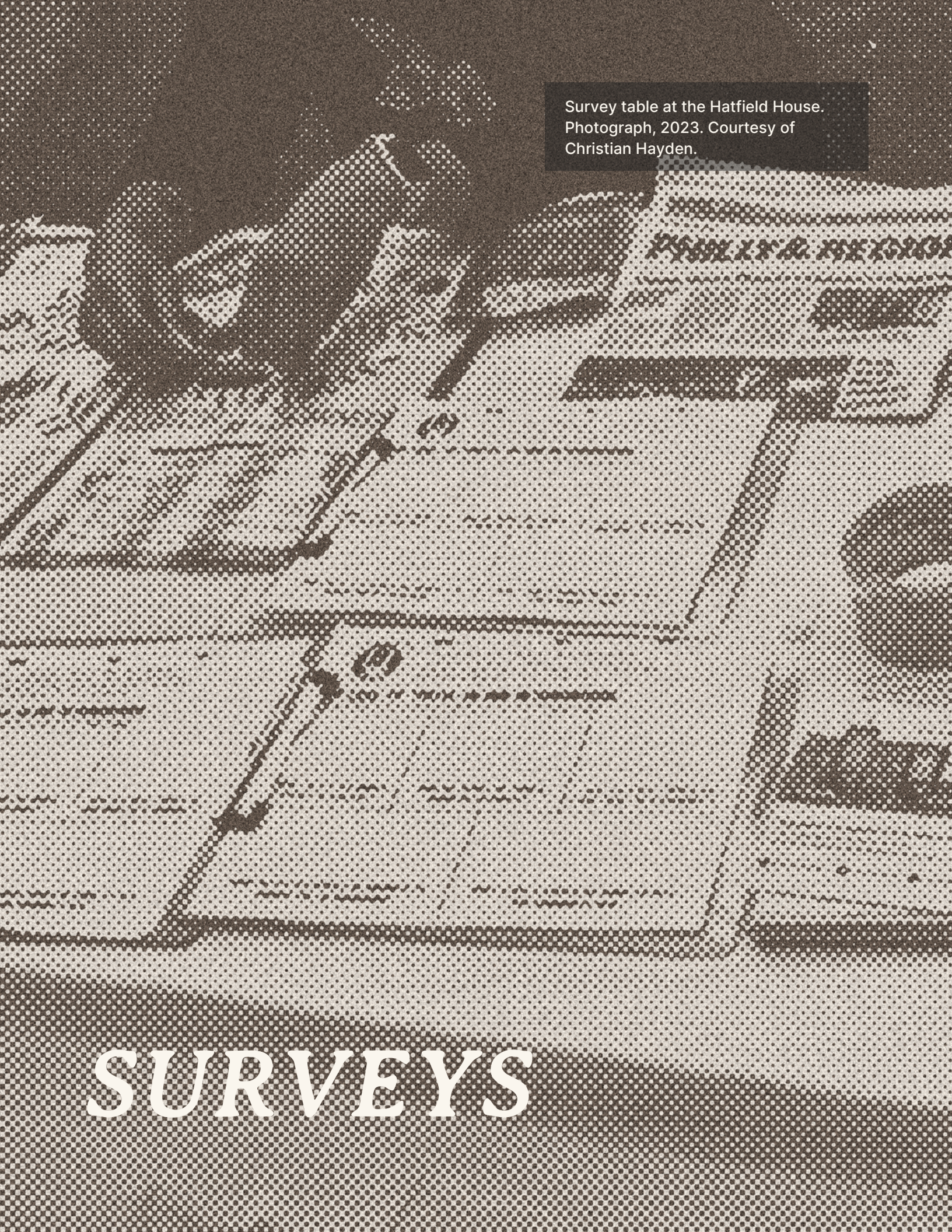
I took on this role because it is very important to me that as a community we understand our history. Knowing our history helps us to understand how far we can go together as a community. It helps to develop pride in where you live. I am a proud community member of Strawberry Mansion and my greatest hope is to work with members of the community, organizations, and ordinary everyday people to re-imagine our neighborhood by honoring its richest, mostly hidden history and using that history to fuel the future of hope in tomorrows. There is an African

proverb that says, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” I believe in our children and I believe we can create the community they need to thrive in, together.

I want to end this with some final thoughts regarding how I intend to serve as a community resource and earn your trust and support as we try our best to accomplish the many goals I know we can only tackle together. First I want to express my deep love and value for our community, its rich history, and its unique members. I think of our community as a bridge, it takes hard work to build a bridge however once a bridge is built, it is there for everyone to utilize. I know, in partnership, we can utilize each other and share resources to keep our bridge strong and intact. If I see you struggling with your load on the way to build this bridge I am here to help ease that load, because the materials you carry will help everyone

involved. I hope that you don't feel alone in the important work that you do and if you need any sort of assistance feel free to reach out. No need is too big or small with our strengths combined. I hope we get to the point where everyone has a deep sense of pride because they get to be a part of this special community that we continue to build together. When we mention where we live, work, go to school, or socialize we can say it with a sense of dignity because we have taken the time to create the community we know we deserve to have. I look forward to doing this work, and I am thankful to be here. I am always just a phone call or email away. Thank you for taking the time to read this and I look forward to meeting you all soon.

— *Dayona Evans*  
*Community Engagement Coordinator*  
*Friends of the Tanner House, Inc.*



Survey table at the Hatfield House.  
Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of  
Christian Hayden.

# SURVEYS

# Collective Visioning

## Surveys Overview

For our neighborhood visioning prompt, the Friends of the Tanner House drew inspiration from poet and activist June Jordan's process for a Harlem housing and community redesign project in the 1960s.

As a way of eliciting community opinion, Jordan asked:

*"What kind of schools and what kind of streets and what kind of parks and what kind of privacy and what kind of beauty and what kind of music and what kind of options would make love a reasonable, easy response?"*

We've remixed this insightful inquiry to reflect our contemporary desires for community cultural organizing in North Philadelphia:

*"What kind of community invitations (to collectively gather) and what kind of heritage preservation practices (to collectively reflect) and what kind of educational spaces (to collectively study) and what kind of healing narratives (to collectively spread) and what kind of beautiful experiments (to collectively organize) make love an easy, reasonable public response?"*

In distilling down the question for more accessible points of entry for our community, we decided upon these five questions to support the resident-based inquiry centering the pursuit for love to



Poster and shirts outside of the Tanner House. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

thrive in our neighborhood:

- What activities should gather us together?
- Who are people we should honor or celebrate?
- What histories should we learn about as a community?
- What activities should we organize to improve our neighborhood?
- What stories should we share to help our community heal?

The survey was made available for all Friends of the Tanner House events, and all attendees were encouraged to submit responses. The next page represents a

nonexhaustive thematic analysis that was completed in a survey workshop at the Center for Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, based on the submitted surveys that had been collected up to June 24, 2024.

CPCRS research assistant Khayla Saunders transcribed the surveys that grounded our analysis. We're grateful for her additional offering to showcase reflection in multiple voices. We are always in need of additional perspectives.

### **Revealing Community Ties**

The survey responses offer us a glimpse of the kinds of opportunities and invitations that we believe are the building blocks for a beloved community. From block parties and cookouts to supporting emerging youth leaders and honoring unsung ancestors, the voices here present an everyday-realized vision for cherishing urban Black social life.

It's important to note that much of what has been shared reflects already-existing resources, wisdom, and culture organizing

present in the neighborhood, assuredly to be matched with a call for more public and private investment to sustain them.

We wholeheartedly believe that a revitalized Tanner House rises from the understanding that making a "home" doesn't have to rely upon the enclosing of four physical walls with adorned interiors, but the caring presence of life-affirming, people-centered relationships that expands out to welcome each other.

The themes presented inspire us to dedicate ourselves to bringing many of the private ideas presented here into surfacing public realities, including multigenerational coalitions of neighborhood-based organizing to ensure they will endure for a lasting while.

— *Christopher R. Rogers*  
*Board President / CEO*  
*Friends of the Tanner House, Inc.*

.....

**"Making a 'home' doesn't have to rely upon the enclosing of four physical walls with adorned interiors. But the caring presence of life-affirming, people-centered relationships..."**

**— CHRISTOPHER R. ROGERS  
BOARD PRESIDENT/CEO,  
FRIENDS OF THE TANNER HOUSE, INC.**

2023-'24 Research Assistant



*Khayla "Khai" Saunders*

As a research assistant for the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, specifically assigned to the Tanner House, I have discovered my niche in preservation. As a fourth-generation Philadelphian, returning home from my HBCU (The Illustrious Mother Tuskegee) and pivoting from the art field, I sought to connect my learning with a way to give back to my community.

Coming to Penn allowed me to engage in diverse and sometimes challenging conversations with people from all over the world, often using my hometown as a case study. Despite being a conservation science student typically focused on lab work, I constantly sought answers to questions like: How can we meaningfully preserve Black spaces? How can I practice social justice and inspire others to do the same, even those in the lab? What does it mean to bring healing to spaces? How can

I honor both existing community members and our ancestors?

Then I found the Tanner House.

Through events and surveys, I have learned that preservation can and should work alongside creativity to facilitate inclusive conversations within our community. It has also become evident that we, the Friends of the Tanner House, are catalysts for change not only for our neighborhood but for the future of our communities. Step by step, we are creating space for dialogues rooted in healing and creativity, demonstrating that we are our ancestors' wildest dreams.

My role as a research assistant for the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites, specifically at the Tanner House, has solidified my passion for preservation and taught me to delve deeper into this field. I am incredibly thankful to the CPCRS team for their guidance.



# *For the Love of Connection: Survey Methods & Approach*

These surveys are the first step in understanding the desires of community members and how they want Friends of the Tanner House to remain rooted in the community. Over the past year, we have collected survey data to guide our next steps. We intentionally did not focus on metrics like race or gender identity because that is not our primary concern. By not limiting ourselves to tracking buzzwords, we can make a more significant impact and have a more realistic understanding of our community. Our neighbors are people, and that should be our primary focus.

Instead, we have focused on gathering data based on zip code and age to understand who attends our events. In our first year, we were eager to delve beneath the surface, so we decided on our survey design (see pg 68) after trial and error with survey mocks. We made an effort to be present at the front of each event to welcome and encourage community members of all ages to answer some, if not all, of our five brief open-ended questions. Some members wrote a single word, while others shared detailed information about other organizations or organizers we should collaborate with. In total, we collected seventy-seven surveys.

Our key performance indicators (KPI)

were zip code and age, as we aimed to prioritize North Philadelphians due to the location of the Tanner House. We successfully met our primary KPI by holding most of our events in the area. As we advance, we will continue prioritizing North Philly and using the open-ended survey data to guide our future programs, which aim to promote community building, truthful histories, and continuous healing.

Over the next three to five years, we aim

**"[We should do] a neighborhood wide call for projects that can collect stories and archive memories of how Strawberry Mansion developed and changed over the years."**

**— JIM**

**SURVEY PARTICIPANT**

to expand our team to enhance our data collection and analysis. This expansion will help us fill data gaps and tailor our needs to increase engagement for funders and ourselves. While we will continue to use open-ended style surveys, we are also interested in obtaining quantitative answers to questions such as:

### 1. How many people are attending our events?

Create a system to measure event attendance and duration.

### 2. How well did we do?

Assess which types of events have the highest attendance as we integrate more community-suggested events with existing programs.

### 3. Who is benefiting?

Implement pre-survey screening questions to assess participants' comfort-level, sense of belonging, and connection to our programming and compare them with feelings of post-participation.

Our goal is always to use our surveys to build connections. However, we acknowledge the need to collect more quantitative data to seek intentional and intuitive growth in harmony with our neighborhood.

These metrics will guide our future decisions. By consistently implementing these systems for cross-tabulation, we can identify relevant outreach data and overcome existing barriers. Our work is not limited to traditional preservation, community outreach, or art. As an organization, we recognize the importance of individualized metric plans for each program, from artist partnerships to organizing meetings. The three questions above will serve as a great starting point as we continue to expand our support staff.

Implementing these metrics will make us better than we were yesterday.

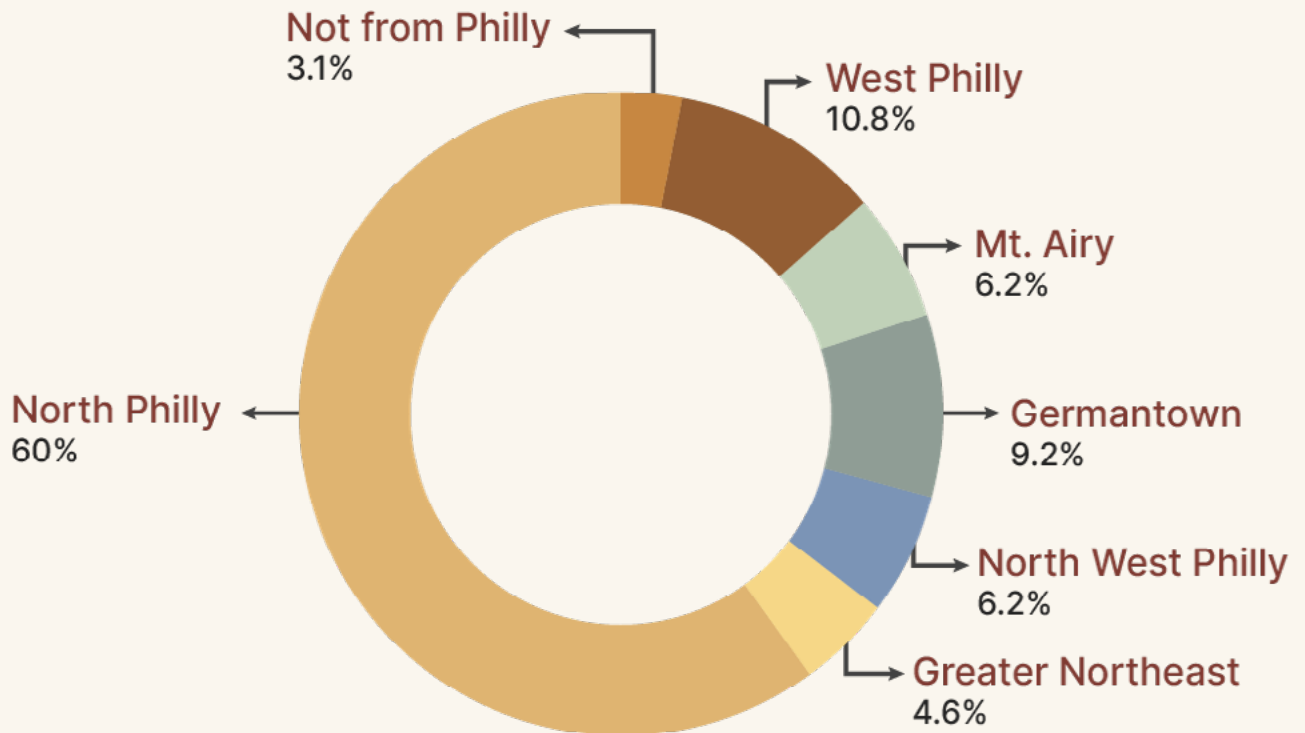
— Khayla "Khai" Saunders  
2023-'24 Research Assistant  
Friends of the Tanner House, Inc./  
Center for the Preservation of Civil  
Rights Sites



(Above) Artist map of Philadelphia neighborhoods. Drawing, 2024. Courtesy of Khai Saunders.

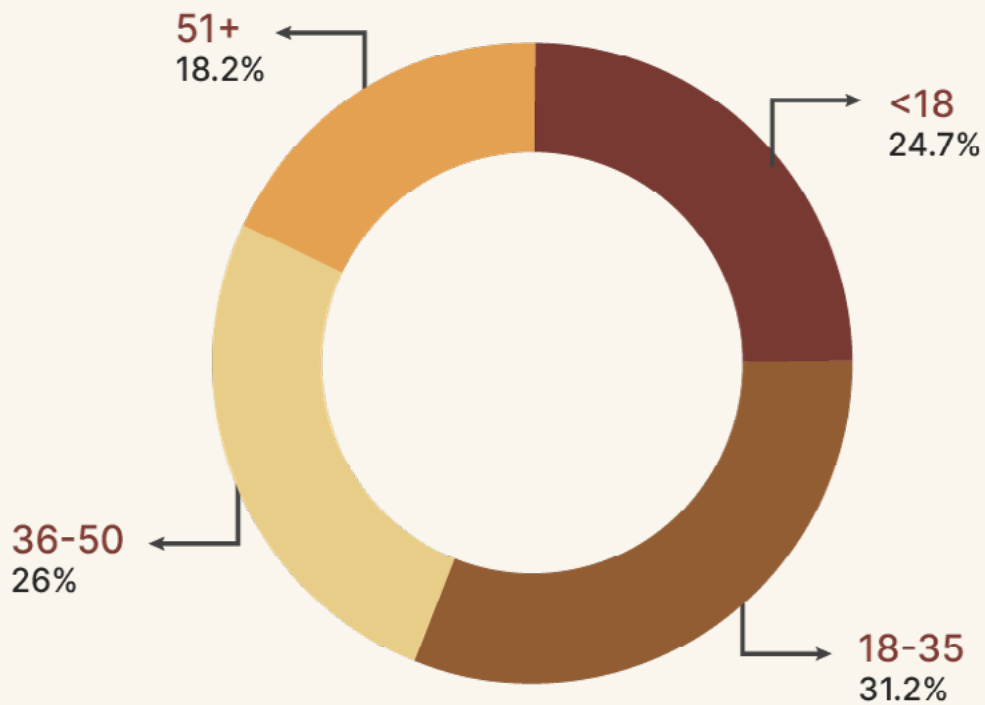
## NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOGRAPHICS

Percentage of neighborhoods represented based on zipcodes from surveys.



## AGE DEMOGRAPHICS

Percentage of participants represented based on age from surveys.





**NAME:**

**AGE:**

**ZIP:**

This survey project helps us collect and preserve community wisdom to inspire future renovations and programming for the Henry Ossawa Tanner House. We thank you endlessly for your contribution.

**FOR LOVE TO THRIVE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD...**

"Love as a force of connection, drawing us together into more dense and full and honest and joyful relationships with one another, with other creatures, with the earth." - Ashon Crawley

<p>Storytelling Block Parties Cookouts Sports Art</p> <p><b>WHAT ACTIVITIES SHOULD GATHER US TOGETHER?</b></p>	<p>Emerging youth leaders Unsung elders + ancestors Artists + Athletes Local neighborhood heroes</p> <p><b>WHO ARE PEOPLE WE SHOULD HONOR OR CELEBRATE?</b></p>	<p>"The <u>TRUE</u> history of our people" Queer Histories → Expanding <u>who</u> we honor Organizing Histories Neighborhood Histories → Knowing the land we stand on</p> <p><b>WHAT HISTORIES SHOULD WE LEARN ABOUT AS A COMMUNITY?</b></p>
<p>Clean-ups + beautification Enhancing Safety + wellbeing Intergenerational Exchange Investing in our shared Spaces Mutual Aid</p> <p><b>WHAT ACTIVITIES SHOULD WE ORGANIZE TO IMPROVE OUR NEIGHBORHOOD?</b></p>	<p>Faith, Care, + fellowship Healing + commemoration Redemption + overcoming Truthful Histories Legacy + Imagined futures</p> <p><b>WHAT STORIES SHOULD WE SHARE TO HELP OUR COMMUNITY HEAL?</b></p>	

(Above) Resonant themes synthesized from "For Love to Thrive" survey results during the June 2024 Workshop, laid out by CPCRS Research Fellow Khayla Saunders

**FOR THE LOVE OF PEOPLE WE SHOULD HONOR...**

Responses from survey participants

"Ordinary neighbors, children, elders, community workers, crossing guards, healthcare workers, parents, grandparents"

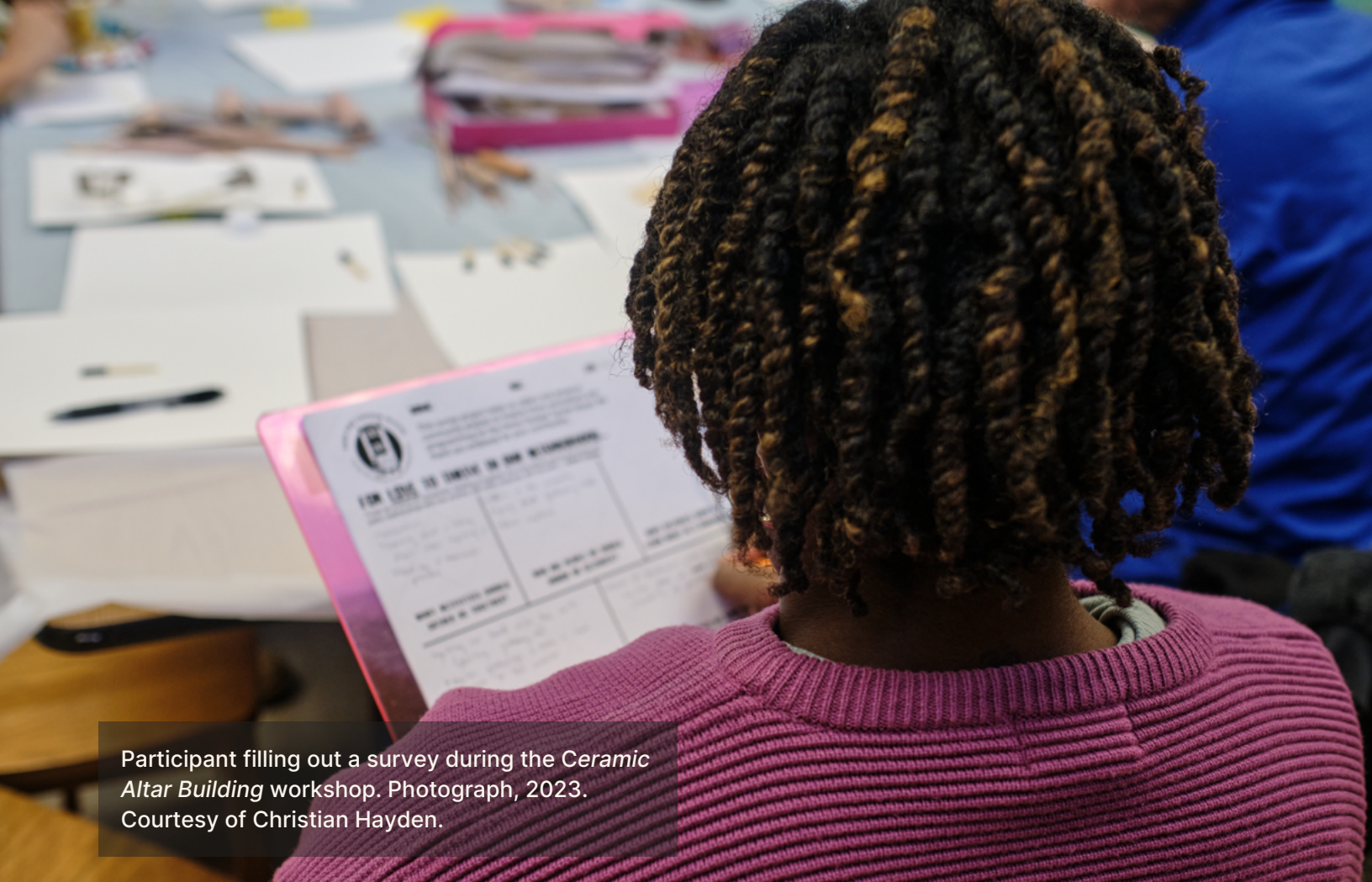
— Vashti

"Black poets; organizers; elders; tired black people who need to know they're valued"

— Omi

"Black mothers"

— Deandra



Participant filling out a survey during the *Ceramic Altar Building* workshop. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christian Hayden.

### FOR THE LOVE OF SHARING STORIES MADE FOR HEALING...

*"Stories of those that show hurt but inspire hope. The ones that are hard to hear but important to tell"*

— Noel

*"[Stories that] honor the people who came before us and made sacrifices or weren't able to live their full authentic lives"*

— KJ

*"A time when having little to nothing didn't define us. We Still had happiness and most of us did not know how poor we were"*

— Andrea

*"The rich history of Strawberry Mansion, childhood memories of a thriving caring community, knowing that nothing is impossible for those who care, and we can attitude"*

— KJ

# DESIGN AND PRESERVATION SERIES



In addition to the Artist Partnership and Community Collaboration series, the Design & Preservation series explored concepts, ideas, and experiments to further Black heritage preservation in partnership with architecture, design, and preservation professionals. Emphasizing design justice principles and community-centered inquiries, a major outcome of these workshops was to inform the development of a preservation philosophy and design approach for the Tanner House.

Preservation workshop at the Tanner House. Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Randy Mason.

# Henry Ossawa Tanner House Preservation Planning

**IN-PERSON WORKSHOP**  
**STRAWBERRY MANSION CDC**  
**November 10, 2023**  
**Philadelphia, PA**

Friends of the Tanner House and CPCRS hosted a day-long convening of design professionals to provide technical assistance for the Tanner House. The day began with a tour of the Henry Ossawa Tanner House, followed by a walking tour of the surrounding neighborhood. The walking tour was led by local resident and Tanner House advocate Judith Robinson. The day concluded at the Strawberry Mansion Community Development Corporation, where attendees drafted a preliminary timeline for the technical preservation planning process. The final product was a tentative roadmap for the assessment, stabilization, documentation, capital campaigns, request for proposals, and design of the Tanner House renovations.

Attendees included:

- **Brandon Bibby**, National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, Senior Preservation Architect (Boston, MA)
- **Steph Garcia**, CPCRS, Project Manager (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Tonetta Graham**, Strawberry Mansion Community Development Corporation, President and Executive Director (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Randall F. Mason**, CPCRS, Senior Fellow (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Nakita Reed**, Quinn Evans, Senior Associate (Baltimore, MD)
- **Qiaira Riley**, 23-24 Friends of the Tanner House Artist Partner (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Christopher R. Rogers**, Friends of the Tanner House, Co-Coordinator (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Shirley Slaughter**, Hatfield House, Site Manager, (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Justin Spivey**, Axiom Project Development Services, Project Director (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Amber N. Wiley**, CPCRS, Matt & Erika Nord Director (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Tya Winn**, Community Design Collaborative, Executive Director (Philadelphia, PA)



(All) Tour of the Tanner House and surrounding area followed by a planning session. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Randy Mason.



# *Building Blocks for Black Heritage Preservation*

## **SYMPOSIUM AT THE COMMUNITY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE**

**April 27, 2024**

**Philadelphia, PA**

Utilizing the year-long efforts at the Henry Ossawa Tanner House as a case study, *Building Blocks for Black Heritage Preservation* was a half-day workshop that brought together Greater Philadelphia area Black heritage advocates and projects to:

- (1) explore preservation project storytelling that articulates cultural and/or architectural significance;
- (2) form tactics/ideas for envisioning community-driven function/re-use, and;
- (3) strategize preservation project planning and design to inform fundraising and resource development.

## **Workshop One: Storytelling for Significance**

Explore project storytelling that articulates cultural and/or architectural significance

*Moderator: Christopher R. Rogers*

*Panelists: Brandon Bibby, Justin Spivey, Amber N. Wiley*

## **Workshop Two: Project Management for Preservation**

Strategizing preservation project planning and design / resources and funding

*Moderator: Tya Winn*

*Panelists: Randy Mason, Monica Rhodes*

## **Workshop Three: Cultivating a Participatory Practice**

Imagining strategies/ideas for community-informed function/re-use

*Moderator: Amber N. Wiley*

*Panelists: Qiaira Riley, Christopher R. Rogers, Tya Winn*

## **BUILDING BLOCKS FOR BLACK HERITAGE PRESERVATION PARTICIPANTS**

### **Primary Attendee & Project Title**

- Gregory J. Allen, Ph.D., Overbrook West Neighbors, Inc.
- Rev. Carol Anthony, The Church of the Advocate
- Ars Nova Workshop, John Coltrane House / Sun Ra House
- Eric Battle, BLAM! Black Lives Always Mattered! Hidden African American Philadelphians of the Twentieth Century
- Chaneal Conway, Blu Flame City Tours
- Derek Davis, New Jersey Black Heritage Foundation
- Wynn Eakins, Anita Cornwell Papers at the William Way LGBT Archives
- Sandra Gilliard, Untold Histories of Black Women Philadelphians
- Glenn Griffin, Gibson Temple Baptist Church
- Valerie Harris, Historic Eden Cemetery - Audio History Project
- Duwenvue Santé Johnson, Cherry Street Pier
- Tanya Latortue, Of Black Wombhood
- Dolly L. Marshall, Mount Peace Cemetery Association
- Carol McDuffy, Pentridge Children's Garden and Farm
- Tafari Robertson, Black Historians' Department
- Twyla Simpkins, Friends of Green Lawn Cemetery
- Misty Sol, Bloomsdale Community Center/House of Prayer Church/Tiny Farm Wagon
- Michelle Strongfields, MD, The Philly Salon Series
- Torian Ugworji, Living Archive / Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage
- Regina Vaughn, ASALH Philadelphia Heritage- Branch History 1927-2027
- Hannah Wallace, Charles L. Blockson Collections (Temple, Penn State & Centre Theater)
- Richard White, Black Docents Collective



(Top) Welcoming remarks by Christopher R. Rogers and Tyler Ray from Friends of the Tanner House. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Steph Garcia.



(Bottom) Presentation by Brandon Bibby from the National Trust for Historic Places. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Amber N. Wiley.

# A Word From Our Project Advisors

I was honored to be a small part of this community visioning work which centered collaboration with local residents to create a shared vision for the future of this property. The desire to transform the vacant building into a vibrant place that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community is not only a unique approach to redevelopment but a powerful way to tell stories of impactful members from a community that can inspire future generations.

— **NAKITA REED, SENIOR ASSOCIATE AT QUINN EVANS**

This project surfaces the rich and expansive history of Black communities, showcasing a multi-generational commitment to shaping and sharing stories. By preserving these stories, we all inherit a greater understanding and appreciation of Black visionaries -both past and present. This work has the potential to inspire similar initiatives, emphasizing the importance of inclusive and thoughtful heritage practices that are necessary to help create a more informed and equitable world.

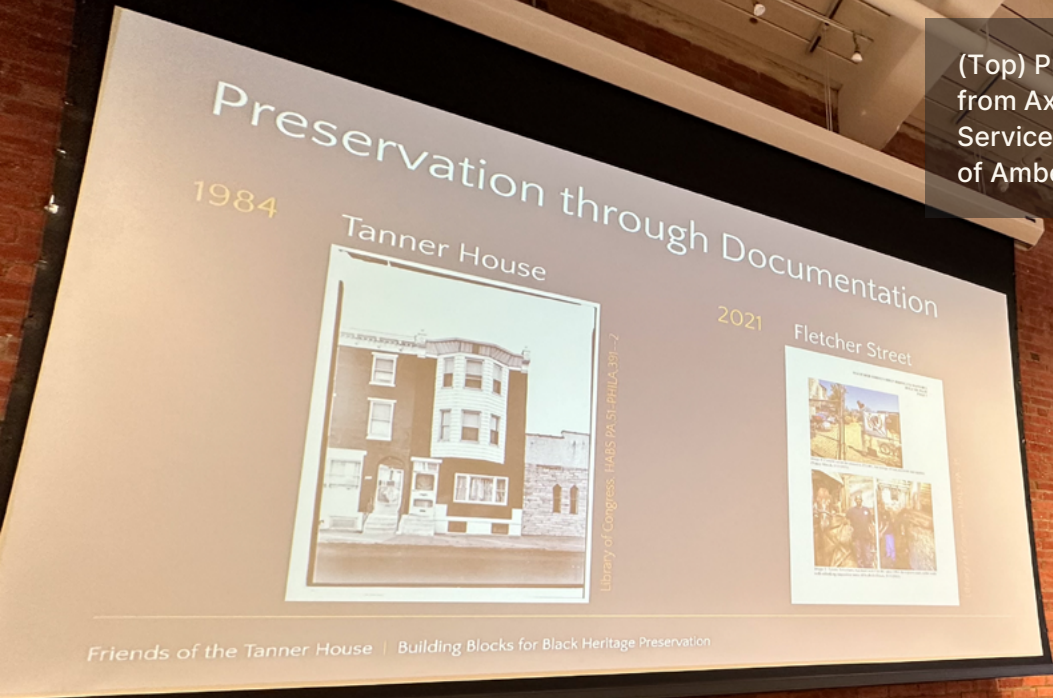
— **MONICA RHODES, PRESIDENT, RHODES HERITAGE GROUP**

We have to recognize first that the home of the Tanner family carries enormous cultural significance for communities nearby and faraway. The family's contributions to Philadelphia and American history are of surpassing value.

The Tanner House effort points to a new direction and new future for the historic preservation field. Projects guided fundamentally by the power, concerns, intelligence, historical interpretations, and creativity of contemporary communities – which are then served by the material conservation, preservation design, and sustainability expertise of (often out-of-community) professionals – should be the rule, not the exception. The greater Tanner House team is showing the way, and I'm grateful to be part of it.

— **RANDALL F. MASON, PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA WEITZMAN SCHOOL OF DESIGN; FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF CENTER FOR THE PRESERVATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS SITES**

(Top) Presentation by Justin Spivey from Axiom Project Development Services. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Amber N. Wiley.



(Bottom) Group photo for *Building Blocks for Black Heritage Preservation*. Photograph, 2024. Courtesy of Amber N. Wiley.



# Henry Ossawa Tanner House Timeline

## Preservation Planning

At the November 2023 workshop, Friends of the Tanner House began work on a preservation project timeline, detailing a roadmap for the site's revitalization, for organizational and community transparency. The following pages contain a sample of this timeline.

### RESEARCH & PRE-DEVELOPMENT PHASE

#### ① Project Start Varies

- Identify/form team & create organizational system
- Planning of overall project identify funding sources, key dates (if any), identify key stakeholders, etc.
- Establish preliminary project philosophy

#### ② Research ~18 weeks to 1 year

- Research site - historical context, current history, etc.
- Begin preliminary outreach to create awareness of project (in-person, printed flyers, digital media, word-of-mouth)

#### ③ Workshops ~12 weeks to 1 year

- Focused community design engagement
- Further develop project philosophy with community members

#### ④ RFP #1\* : Program & Building Concept ~12 weeks

- 4 weeks RFP development
- 4 weeks RFP publicized
- 4 weeks interviews and firm selection

#### ⑤ Program Concept ~12 weeks

- Zoning Assessment\*

#### ⑥ Building History and Assessment ~4 to 8 weeks

- Historic Structure Report (HSR)
- Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)

\* = see next page for term definitions

## DESIGN & DOCUMENTATION PHASE

- ⑦ **RFP #2: Design Concept**  
~12 weeks
  - 4 weeks RFP development
  - 4 weeks RFP publicized
  - 4 weeks interviews and firm selection
- ⑧ **Design & Documentation**  
~20 to 32 weeks
  - Schematic Design (4-8 weeks)
  - Design Development (8-12 weeks)
  - Construction Documents (8-12 weeks)
  - Historic Compliance
- ⑨ **Building Permits**  
~12 to 24 weeks
  - Acquire permit from city/jurisdiction
  - Undergo design and/or historic district review
- ⑩ **Bidding & Negotiation**  
~3 to 6 weeks
  - Hiring a contractor

## CONSTRUCTION PHASE

- ⑪ **Construction**  
~1 to 3 years
  - Groundbreaking
  - Site visits with builder
  - Final punch list
- ⑫ **Project End**  
~4 to 8 weeks
  - Project Celebration
  - Site Opening (or re-opening)
  - Final Report

## \* DEFINITIONS:

Terms that may be of help in understanding the planning process.

- **Request for Proposals (RFP):** A call that announces the project and scope of work (SOW) needed. Qualified contractors are encouraged to submit proposals and a budget that details how they would achieve the SOW. Project team selects their top contractor through this process.
- **Zoning:** Division of city into different areas with regulations dictating land use. Example, a certain zone may only allow for residential buildings to be constructed.

# HENRY OSSAWA TANNER HOUSE CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

In May 2024, Friends of the Tanner House contracted sbk + partners, LLC, led by Suzanna Barucco, to complete a conditions assessment of the Henry Ossawa Tanner House within a phased strategy for the development of a Master Plan / Historic Structure Report that remains in development at the time of this publication. We included excerpts from the report to provide the most thorough engagement with the structural and architectural character of the 2908 W. Diamond Street property. This conditions assessment will be revised after the conclusion of the Phase II Stabilization effort that was commenced in July 2024.

The following pages are excerpts from the conditions assessment report conducted by sbk + partners, LLC. A full report will be released in the future.



(Right) Front (North) facade elevation rendering of the Tanner House. Drawing, 2024. Courtesy of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc.

## FRONT (NORTH) ELEVATION

FOR REFERENCE ONLY, NO FACADE WORK PROPOSED  
SCALE: NOT TO SCALE



## INTRODUCTION

The H.O. Tanner House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976; National Historic Landmark listing is the highest level of recognition bestowed upon significant historic sites by the Department of the Interior in the US. The house was listed in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 1970, and recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1984.<sup>3</sup> The site's significance rests on Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937), "one of the best known of Black American artists," although he lived in the house for less than two decades, 1871-1885; Tanner lived most of his adult life in Paris, France. The house was occupied by members of H.O. Tanner's family until 1950, when Henry's sister Sadie Tanner Mossell sold the house to Barney Blatt. Additional research into the achievements of Tanner's family, including both parents and sisters Halle and Sadie, holds the promise of expanding the historical significance of the site.

2908 West Diamond Street was built in 1871 by Daniel Bry and sold to Benjamin Tucker Tanner, Henry's father, in 1872. It is a typical three story, red brick (now painted) rowhouse, located on the south side of West Diamond Street east of the intersection of West Diamond Street and Ridge Avenue in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood of Philadelphia. The east party wall is shared with another three story brick rowhouse. To the west is the one-and-a-half story wing of Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church.

The building is a rectangle in plan with a three story main block including a one-bay-by-two-bay ell extension which leaves an exposed window bay at each story at the west end of the south elevation of the main block; a two-story ell the rear (south); and a one story frame addition at the very rear. The two story ell was added to the south (rear) circa 1875-1894. The one story frame addition was added by 1918 (possibly as early as 1908?).

The primary (north) façade is distinguished by a two story canted (three-sided) wood framed bay sheathed in aluminum siding, added to the building by 1908. The cornice is also sheathed in aluminum siding, possibly obscuring original cornice materials underneath. Of the cornice, only decorative (galvanized?) metal finial blocks are visible at each end. The west (side) and south (rear) walls of the main block two story ell are stucco on expanded metal lath over brick. The two story frame addition is stucco over asphalt shingles on wood framing. The one story addition is also wood frame construction with a mix of exterior materials. At the main block, wood framing sheathed with vinyl siding is a recent addition as part of structural

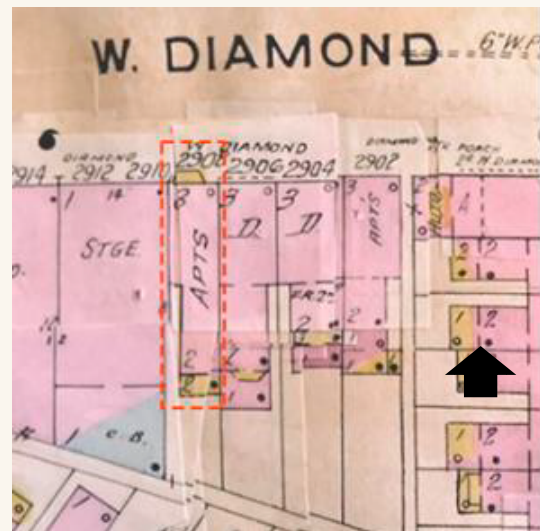


Fig. 2. This 1918 Sanborn Map shows the Tanner House with the addition of the frame three-sided bay on the north elevation (top) and the two story frame addition on the rear (south). On the map, pink indicates brick masonry construction, yellow indicates wood frame construction. HSPV 7010 Preservation Studio, "The Tanner House, 2908 West Diamond Street, Philadelphia," 2022, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documents achievements in architecture and engineering in the United States and its territories, and has been administered since 1933 through cooperative agreements with the National Park Service, the Library of Congress, and the private sector. HABS collections are held by the Library of Congress and are available online at, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

stabilization.<sup>4</sup> Roofs are low slope (nearly flat), and have recently by replaced with a granulated modified bitumen sheet roofing system.



Fig. 3. H.O. Tanner House Key Plan.



Fig. 4. The H.O. Tanner House, view of the west (side) elevation. The 1 ½ story wing of the Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church is in the foreground. Atmos Imagery, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Friends of the Tanner House has been overseeing structural stabilization projects to resolve Philadelphia Licenses and Inspections violations per designs drawings by Wiss Janney Elstner Associates, Inc. Wiss Janney Elstner Associates, Inc., *West and South Wall Replacement, Henry Ossawa Tanner House*, 5 sheets, 3/27/2024.

# NEXT STEPS

*For Tanner House*

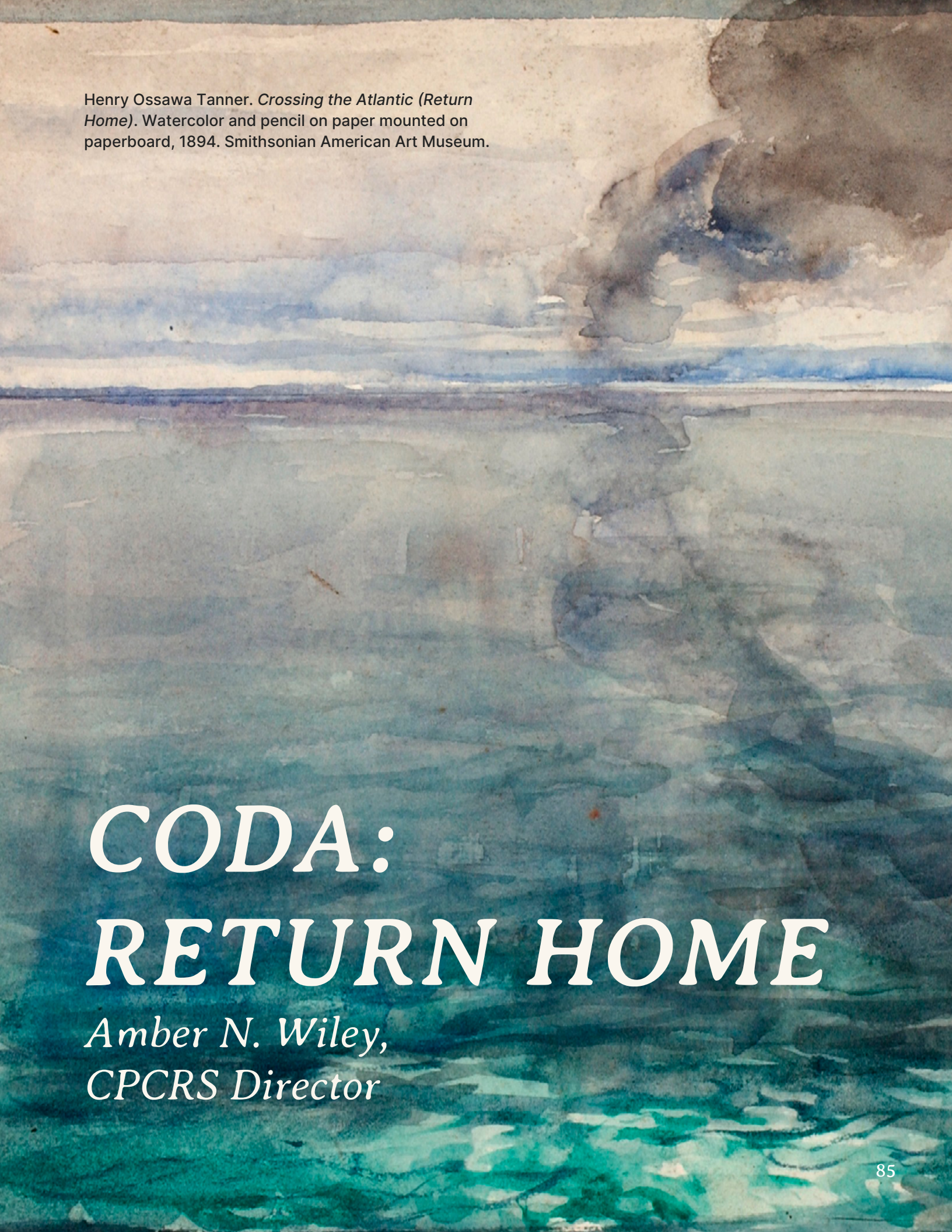
Original front porch steps of 2908 W. Diamond Street.  
Photograph, 2023. Courtesy of Christopher R. Rogers.

The work of the Friends of the Tanner House is just beginning. This Mellon-funded community-immersed visioning process in partnership with the Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites provided a platform for us to grow stronger clarity about our mission and vision, and to reach out to an already existing ecosystem of artists, cultural institutions, and community groups in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood where the Tanner House resides. Ahead of us, we are excited to grow the team, continue to build governance systems that reflect our values, and nurture mutually-beneficial community partnerships toward the blossoming of a revitalized National Historic Landmark and neighborhood cultural anchor.

#### **On The Horizon:**

- **Capacity Building** - Convened since December 2021, the Friends of the Tanner House evolved from a grassroots community advocacy group into a registered non-profit in November 2023. Currently fiscally sponsored by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, our 2024-25 goals involve capacity-building for long-term non-profit governance and historic site stewardship. Immediate next steps involve the expansion of the Board of Directors and nurturing our organizational values, vision, and administrative management systems.

- **Infrastructure Revitalization Goals**
  - At the time of concluding this report, the Henry Ossawa Tanner House is finalizing a Phase II Stabilization needed to establish the safest conditions for its upcoming re-design. The Friends of the Tanner House are fundraising for the resources needed to recruit an architecture/design group, preferably BIPOC-led, to envision and clarify its second life as a neighborhood-rooted cultural asset.
- **Community-Oriented Programming**
  - The Friends of the Tanner House has achieved new dedicated programmatic funding from Spring Point Partners and the PA Humanities Council to support continued local humanities-rich offerings, as well as hiring a part-time Community Engagement Coordinator. Opportunities for the next year will emphasize our Community Partner Network and community-rooted sites such as libraries and recreation centers, extending from the thematic of the *For Love to Thrive* survey results.



Henry Ossawa Tanner. *Crossing the Atlantic (Return Home)*. Watercolor and pencil on paper mounted on paperboard, 1894. Smithsonian American Art Museum.

# CODA: RETURN HOME

*Amber N. Wiley,  
CPCRS Director*

The work presented in this publication is the product of countless seeds planted that are starting to come to fruition. The coalition, conversations, and community convened by the Friends of the Tanner House (FOTH) in such a short period of time is truly remarkable. Part of this is a reflection of their approach – building on pre-existing networks, being expansive, collaborative, and communal. This success is also a testament to their nuanced approach to the stories we tell about the Tanner House, and more specifically, the Tanner family.

I offer a little backstory for context. The Henry Ossawa Tanner National Historic Landmark (NHL) was designated as such in May 1976, just two months before the Bicentennial celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. This was accomplished through the advocacy of the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation (ABC), an organization founded by brothers Robert deForrest and Vincent DeForest to increase participation of Black Americans in the Bicentennial and to direct projects that highlighted Black history, but most importantly to be a “‘vehicle’ for improving the lives of Black Americans.” The group worked to “continue the revolution” through the “process of decolonization, a movement toward self-realization and self-government by people determined not to be kept in a subject status.” Their work was by and large radical – suggesting Black historic sites for inclusion to the

NHL program of the National Park Service (NPS). NHL’s are determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant in American history and culture. Yet in the early 1970s, of the 1,200 NHLs recognized by the NPS, only 4 had been nominated for their association with Black history. ABC leaned on the social, political, and intellectual capital of an advisory board composed of Black academics, politicians, librarians, celebrities, and community leaders to conduct a broad survey of Black history sites to propose to the NPS for greater representation of Black achievement in the first two hundred years of the country’s founding.

Despite their Black revolutionary preservation aspirations at the time, ABC historians’ approach to storytelling fell in line with certain contemporary proclivities – pinpointing key actors and events to lift up in solitary celebrity. Granted, these were the unsung heroes of Black history, and American history more broadly, yet they were propped up on pedestals in ways that reflected mainstream historical approaches within the NPS. Figures like Carter G. Woodson, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., served as avatars of Black excellence for all of the Black community. Thus, the NHL nominations to safeguard their respective homes were written as such.

Henry Ossawa Tanner, in his international success, represented the long overdue recognition of Black artistic genius in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century

art world that was dominated by Parisian standards and tastes. Long expatriated to Paris due to American racial prejudice that hampered his career, Tanner's Philadelphia childhood home would stand in for him and his accomplishments. The ABC successfully put forth the Tanner site (as well as the Frances Ellen Watkins Harper House and Mother Bethel AME) as NHL nominations in the city of Philadelphia. In all, ABC managed to nominate over 70 NHLs across the country related to Black history ahead of the Bicentennial. Their enshrinement of the Tanner House with this status was indeed a way of returning Tanner's global legacy home from across the Atlantic to the United States, to Philadelphia, and to his own Strawberry Mansion neighborhood.

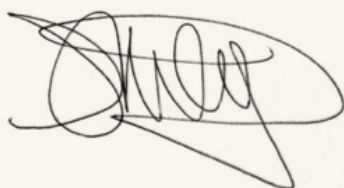
These Bicentennial gains were truly a feat Black preservation strategies. ABC's initiative remains the single most impactful strategy to designate Black NHLs in this country. But almost fifty years later, we must assess the conditions of these sites and ask ourselves, to what end?

In some cases, like the aforementioned homes of Woodson, Bethune, and King, ABC-nominated NHLs eventually became National Historic Sites – park units acquired, financed, and supported by the NPS. This condition guarantees a level of capital (both private and public) visibility and patronage that other privately held or locally managed NHLs simply do not have. For sites like the Tanner House, upkeep, repairs, and tangled title issues present multiple challenges. Additionally, Black

historic sites sit in neighborhoods that have suffered from decades of systemic disinvestment, yet live with the very real threat of gentrification today. These sites face a myriad of complex challenges that Black communities have to respond to, in order to protect the long, rich legacies that are quickly disappearing from the physical landscape.

Moreover, contemporary preservation storytelling methods have turned away from our single narratives about solitary achievements, to underscore the ways that the Black community supported success through a network of relationships built and sustained over generations. That is why this second phase in the preservation and revitalization of the Tanner House is so important. Call this Black revolutionary preservation aspirations – part two. We pay homage to ABC who laid the foundation, and today we build on that foundation – brick by brick, beam by beam. The FOTH have recognized the depth and breadth of the Tanner family legacy, choosing to start their narrative with Henry Ossawa Tanner's parents – Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner and Sarah Elizabeth Miller Tanner. Moving through the generations to include Tanner siblings, nieces, nephews, and in-laws, the FOTH have expanded our understanding of how kinship within the home safeguarded against indignities outside, and how those whose lives were nurtured within the walls of 2908 W. Diamond Street – including, but not limited to Henry Ossawa Tanner – in turn nurtured other lives from without. This

is the bedrock of the Friends of the Tanner House approach, and this philosophy of expansion, communion, and fellowship will continue to guarantee the project's success moving forward. We invite you to be a part of our return home.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amber N. Wiley', enclosed within a large, loopy oval shape.

*Amber N. Wiley, PhD  
Matt and Erika Nord Director  
Center for the Preservation of  
Civil Rights Sites  
University of Pennsylvania Weitzman  
School of Design*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Dayona Evans** holds beloved distinction as the first employee of Friends of the Tanner House where she serves as our grant-funded Community Engagement Coordinator. She has a strong background in Early Childhood Education, having been involved with this work for the past 12 years. Dayona is a proud community member of Strawberry Mansion and notes her greatest hope is to work with organizations and ordinary everyday people to re-imagine our neighborhood by honoring its rich, mostly hidden history and using that history to fuel the future of hope in tomorrow.

**Steph Garcia** (she/her/ella) strives to create more just spaces by leveraging art, design, and community engagement to give power to underrepresented communities in historically inequitable processes. Garcia has previously held roles with Monument Lab, a nonprofit public art, history, and design studio dedicated to advancing justice by reimagining monuments, and Make The World Better, a nonprofit that connects people and inspires stewardship through public space revitalization projects. She is a 2018 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her B.A in Fine Arts.

**Tyler A. Ray** serves as CFO / Treasurer with the Friends of the Tanner House. He is a planner, historic preservationist, and public historian based in Philadelphia, PA. His call to historic preservation and public history was deeply inspired by his life growing up in North Central Philly and attending his familial house of worship, Church of the Advocate. Much like the Advocate, Tyler began to witness that many historic properties in his marginalized community were in disrepair. This led him to tackle the disparity between race, socio-economic status, and what is considered worthy of preservation.

**Qiara Riley** is an interdisciplinary artist, educator, guerilla art theorist and Sagittarius, raised on Chicago's south-side and based in Philadelphia. She holds a dual B.A. in Black Studies and Studio Art from Lake Forest College, as well as an M.F.A in Socially Engaged Studio Art from Moore College of Art & Design. Her arts practice work shifts between painting, ceramics, video, and printmaking. Her work explores and is inspired by Black archival practices, foodways and vernacular interiors, collective memory, virtual diasporic identity, and reality television.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Christopher R. Rogers, Ph.D** serves as Board President / CEO of the Friends of the Tanner House. He is an educator and cultural worker from Chester, PA with more than a decade of experience in supporting justice-oriented arts, culture, and community in the Greater Philadelphia area. He has previously served in key roles with National Black Lives Matter At School, Paul Robeson House & Museum / West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, Philadelphia Student Union, Teacher Action Group Philadelphia, and more.

**Khayla "Khai" Saunders** is deeply committed to preserving history through inclusive and collaborative efforts. Saunders is a 2024 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a Master's in Historic Preservation and Conservation. She was one of three students to receive *The Elizabeth Greene Wiley Award for Outstanding Promise* from the Historic Preservation Department. Saunders is also a 2021 graduate of Tuskegee University, where she received her Bachelor in Fine Arts.

**Amber N. Wiley** is the Matt and Erika Nord Director of CPCRS and Presidential Associate Professor in Historic Preservation at the Weitzman School of Design. She has dedicated her professional career to advancing the history and narrative of design and preservation in Black communities, as well as advocating for theoretically rigorous, thoughtful, and inclusive expansions of preservation policy and practice. Her publications cover African American and African diasporic cultural heritage, urbanism in New Orleans, school design, urban renewal and preservation methods. Wiley's forthcoming book *Model Schools in the Model City: Race, Planning, and Education in the Nation's Capital*, will be published in 2025 with the University of Pittsburgh Press: Culture, Politics, and the Built Environment Series.



*The formidable historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson described Bishop Tanner's home [2908 W. Diamond St.] as "the center of the African American intellectual community of Philadelphia and the Northeast United States."*

*The Friends of the Tanner House sits on the precipice of a momentous historic moment. They have valiantly awakened our knowledge of the material culture of North Philadelphia in the restoration of the home of the Tanner Family...I view the Friends of the Tanner House as a beacon to further the ancestors' work.*

*— Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter*