Monumental Lodge No. 3, Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World

1528 Madison Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland
This designation report is subject to additions and alterations, and welcomes contributions of Elks members and others.
Significance Summary

Established in 1900, Monumental Lodge No. 3 is the oldest fraternal lodge of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World in Baltimore, Maryland. This African American fraternal organization was founded in 1898 in Cincinnati, Ohio, based on the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks (BPOE), which excluded non-white members. The IBPOEW was a strong political force in the early 20th century nationally, empowering African Americans to vote, fighting for African American equality on constitutional grounds, and fostering strong black leaders that furthered this cause in other organizations, such as the NAACP. The political activism of fraternal organizations such as the IBPOEW in the early 20th century helped create the foundation of the Civil Right Movement. Baltimore’s Monumental Lodge No. 3 is one of the oldest and strongest lodges of the order, and both the Monumental Lodge No. 3 and its sister Great Southern Temple No. 30, were very active locally and nationally. The Monumental Lodge No. 3 was home to many prominent Elks and leaders, such as George W.F. McMechen, William H. Smith, Ray R. Bond, and Pearl Brown.

Property History

The building located at 1528 Madison Ave, at the southwest corner of Madison and McMechen Streets, has served as the home of the Elks of the Monumental Lodge No. 3, Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World from 1927 to today. The building was originally constructed in 1859-1860 as a residence, and was home to several prominent white families prior to its purchase by the Elks. The home was originally constructed for Jacob Burrough, a Quaker who was a lime dealer and wholesale lumber merchant. His faith is notable because Quakers were strong abolitionists in the 19th century, and therefore his home was not constructed by enslaved African Americans. He was formerly a partner in Griscom & Burrough, which ran a limestone quarry in Texas, Maryland. In 1860, the home was described in the Sun as a free-standing “fine double three-story brick dwelling of the modern style, with brown stone door frames and window sills.” The Burrough family lived in the home until 1871, when it was sold at auction to John Bolgiano. John Bolgiano was the head of Bolgiano’s Seed House, an internationally prominent seed firm founded in 1818, which existed for over 100 years. John Bolgiano also served as a member of City Council, was treasurer of the Baltimore City Passenger Railway Company, and was president of the YMCA. He died in 1892, and upon the death of his wife, Hannah Ault Bolgiano, in 1898, the property passed to their daughter, Mary Washington Taylor and her husband, Charles J. Taylor. Taylor was a very prominent businessman, philanthropist, and banker with far-reaching interests. He was the president of the Taylor-McCoy Coal and Coke Company, senior member of Charles J. Taylor & Co., a paper box manufacturing company, president of the Essex Land Company, and a director of the Maryland Casualty Company, to name but a few of his business interests. He was also very involved in other organizations, such as the YMCA and fraternal organizations. Charles Taylor died in 1921 at his home. Following the death of his widow, Mary Washington Taylor, in 1924, the property passed to Mary’s niece, Flora Bolgiano Joyce.
On April 9, 1925, Flora Joyce and her husband sold the property to Robert J. Young, an African American realtor. Young immediately took out two mortgages on the property, and seven weeks later, on May 29th, 1925, Young sold the property to Monumental Lodge No. 3 Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World. The Elks moved into the building following an extensive renovation and rear addition to the property in 1926. This three-story addition cost $40,000. J.D. Broom was the contractor, and “practically all” of the work was done by African American contractors. The original home was also upgraded, and the cost of the entire project was reported to be $100,000. When the work was completed in January 1927, the Afro-American called the lodge “one of the finest in the entire country.” This building has served as the home of the Monumental Elks since.

The property is listed on the National Register as a contributing property to the Old West Baltimore National Historic District. It is also a contributing property to the local Upton’s Marble Hill Historic District.

**Contextual History**

*The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World*

The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World (IBPOEW) was founded in 1897 in Cincinnati, Ohio by Arthur J. Riggs and Benjamin Franklin Howard, and the first meeting was held in 1898. This organization was based off the white fraternal organization, the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, which was not open to African American members. Riggs had found a copy of the BPOE’s ritual book, which he copyrighted and used for the IBPOEW. This parallel fraternal organization was created to show that African Americans could not only live up to the fraternal codes of morality and dignity, but they could also embody the ideals of brotherhood and equity better than the white fraternal order.

The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World was established as a mutual aid society. This fraternal organization played many important social roles for African Americans in Baltimore and nationally. At the turn of the 20th century, fraternal organizations were the most popular secular groups joined by African Americans. Membership in these fraternal orders provided African American men with self-worth and respectability denied them in the white-run world. The organization quickly drew prominent and ambitious African American professionals – doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and politicians, creating vast and close-knit professional and personal networks. The IBPOEW, as well as other black fraternal organizations, provided men with leadership opportunities denied them elsewhere, leading these organizations to function like a “shadow government,” which proved to be powerful and tenacious in many battles regarding civil and legal rights.
energy. However, these legal battles also gave young African American lawyers, like Baltimore’s own George W.F. McMechen, a significant amount of work representing fraternal orders, and led to the creation of a national African American legal network that pre-dated the NAACP. Ultimately, a Supreme Court ruling in 1929 upholding the constitutional rights of African Americans put an end to the endless litigation on the part of white Elks.

A core role played by the IBPOEW was as a mutual aid society. The organization helped members find employment and housing, assisted families with medical, burial, and educational expenses. This was particularly important for African Americans, who did not have equitable access to financial institutions. The Elks also offered scholarships and competitions to African American youth. In 1927, Rev. English declared that “the I.B.P.O. Elks has established a record for charity and helpfulness that no other church can equal.” The Black Elks shared the same core values as other African American fraternities, but were different in some key ways, such as the group’s inclusivity of membership, robust political activism, and equitable relationship with its women’s auxiliary. These differences account for the strength and socio-political influence wielded by the group in the early-to-mid 20th century.

In 1922, J. Findley Wilson was elected as the grand exalted leader of IBPOEW (the leader of the national organization) and he remained in this position for over twenty years. He was from Washington, D.C., but had strong ties to Monumental Lodge No. 3. During his long tenure as the national leader of the organization, it grew into a national powerhouse. The organization opened up to working-class men, a much larger sector which grew the size and political clout of the organization significantly.

The IBPOEW quickly became a powerful advocacy organization, deeply engaged in political activism. The Eastern part of the United States was referred to as the “hot bed of Elkdom” in the early-to-mid 20th century. The Elks were unique among the African American fraternal organizations in terms of the leadership role that it played in political activism. The Elks made it clear that their rights as citizens afforded them the right to equitable employment and compensation. The Elks created departments that carried out the goal of achieving full citizenship rights for African Americans. The Elks sought the participation of non-Elks in these endeavors, opening membership into the Civil Liberties Leagues to non-Elks. The Elks participated in mass protests, boycotts, lobbying campaigns, and voter registration drives. The Monumental Lodge No. 3 played a role in Baltimore’s 1933-1934 “Buy Where You Can Work” boycott, along with the Pride of Baltimore lodge, and the Knights of Pythias.

The IBPOEW gained a reputation as a powerful civil rights organization, whose support was sought by a wide variety of leaders and organizations alike. Beginning after WWI and gaining strength during the Great Depression and WWII, the IBPOEW pushed for labor rights and fair employment practices federally and locally. As reported in the Afro-American about the Daughter Elks’ role at the national 1954 Convention, “The Elks also place a great deal of emphasis on registration and voting. According to one member, the ground work for many outside political campaigns are started within the
Black Fraternal organizations were leaders in civil rights activism, and the Elks were at the forefront of this movement.

The Daughters of the IBPOEW was independently established in 1902. While they were called “daughters”, these women were equals to the men, unlike in other women’s auxiliaries, where the women served only in an assistance role. The women ran separate and autonomous Temples. At the 1954 Annual Convention, it was stated that the “opinions, beliefs, and program” of the Daughter Elks would “be given as much, if not more, attention as that afforded to the male portion of the Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World.” The Afro-American reported that one Daughter Elk made it clear that “We play second fiddle to no one.” Baltimore’s Great Southern Temple No. 30 was very active locally and nationally, with the Temple’s own Pearl Brown serving as the Grand Daughter Treasurer at the national level. The Daughter Elks played crucial roles in the community, establishing education and public health programs. They were also very involved in the Civil Liberties Department, playing a significant role in the Elks’ political activism.

During World War II, Elks and Junior Elks joined the military, and members of the I.B.P.O.E.W. purchased over $3 million in war bonds, demonstrating their loyalty to the country. The Elks believed it was their duty as loyal and patriotic Americans to defend their country, “even when they were experiencing lynching, disenfranchisement, and economic and social inequity.” The political activism of the Elks in the early 20th century set the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement of the mid-20th century.

**Monumental Lodge No. 3**

William H. Lewis and Silas Jones established Monumental Lodge No. 3 in Baltimore in 1900, only two years after the IBPOEW was founded in Cincinnati. During the early 20th century, Monumental Lodge No. 3 was considered “one of the strongest and oldest lodges for the order.” The Lodge incorporated for benevolent purposes in 1907 with $5,000 of stock. A few other Lodges of the IBPOEW were established in Baltimore, including Pride of Baltimore, and East Enterprise Lodge, No. 52, both of which were established after Monumental Lodge No. 3.

In 1908, the Elks purchased 414 W. Hoffman St to serve as their Lodge, which no longer stands today. That same year, the Southern Temple of Daughters of Elks No. 30 was organized to serve as an auxiliary of the Monumental Lodge No. 3. By 1916, the Lodge had grown to over 300 members. The Emma Williams Temple No. 358 was founded in 1925.

When the new lodge opened at 1528 Madison Ave. in 1927, it was celebrated with a week of ceremonies, dances, and banquets. The Lodge was identified as the largest individual lodge in the city, with a membership of 1,600, and hundreds more clamored for membership, with a waiting list for admission. A 1929 annual celebration of the Monumental Lodge No. 3, with a cornerstone-laying ceremony for the Lodge drew
thousands of people, including Grand Exalted Ruler J. Finley Wilson. The celebration of the event stopped traffic for hours.\textsuperscript{50}

This large base, however, was unable to sustain their memberships during the Great Depression, during which time African Americans lost their jobs at vastly higher rates than whites across the employment spectrum.\textsuperscript{51} In 1933, at the height of the Depression, the Monumental Lodge was suspended from the national organization due to non-payment of Grand Lodge taxes.\textsuperscript{52} Through hard work, the Lodge paid off the debt and was reinstated, saving “one of the strongest and oldest lodges for the order.”\textsuperscript{53} It is a tremendous testament to the fortitude of the Elks membership that they were able to pay their back dues at a time when the majority of the community was unemployed, and the Elks were mobilized in the “Buy Where you Can Work” boycott. Even more impressive was the fact that in 1933, Monumental Lodge No. 3 was the second place winner of a national contest of Elks lodges in getting new and returning members.\textsuperscript{54}

The political activism that made the IBPOEW such a powerful organization at the national level was demonstrated by the Monumental Elks at the local level. Many of the prominent leaders of the Elks were also leaders in partner organizations, such as the NAACP, of which Baltimore’s chapter was one of the strongest nationally. The Monumental Elks participated in voter registration drives, and the 1933-1934 “Buy Where You Can Work” boycott of stores on Pennsylvania Avenue that wouldn’t hire African American workers. The Elks also hosted events for organizations that were like-minded in promoting racial equality, such as the Community Party. The Communist Party hosted several popular interracial dances at the Monumental Lodge, including one in 1929 that drew over 400 people.\textsuperscript{55} In 1945, the Communist Party held an event at the Elks’ Home celebrating the 26\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the Communist Party in the United States.\textsuperscript{56}

The Elks Lodge also provided social opportunities for its members, holding numerous social events both at their lodge, and excursions to other places in the Baltimore/ D.C. area, including many events at parks in surrounding counties, like Greenwood Electric Park in Catonsville.\textsuperscript{57} Over the years, the Elks have had many associated musical groups, including a choir, and the Commonwealth Band served as the official band for the Elks for fifteen years.\textsuperscript{58}

The membership roles of the Monumental Lodge throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century read like a “Who’s who” of important Baltimore African Americans. In the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, fraternal organizations were the most popular secular organizations to which African Americans belonged. During that period, the “fraternal orders and churches remained as the only large-scale, translocal organizations available” to African Americans.\textsuperscript{59} The Monumental Lodge No. 3 peaked during the 1920s with the highest number of members. The quick increase in membership was due in large part to the fact that the Elks expanded their membership base beyond the professional-class members that formed its early base, to include members from all classes and backgrounds.
The Baltimore Elks were strongly represented at the national level, with Monumental Lodge No. 3 members serving in national positions. The Lodge also hosted the national IBPOE&W annual convention three times, in 1918, 1938, and 1989. Members of the Monumental Lodge No. 3 were also responsible for establishing other lodges in Maryland and Delaware. Even into the mid 20th century, the Lodge continued to play a large role in regional Elks activities. In 1957, the Monumental Lodge hosted the Tri-State Convention of Elks.

William H. Lewis, founder of the Baltimore chapter of the IBPOE&W played a tremendously important role in growing the order in its earliest days locally and nationally. William Lewis was one of the men who initiated J. Finley Wilson into the Elks, and later received the national organization’s highest honor: the title of past grand exalter ruler. Dr. Carl Murphy, publisher of the Afro-American newspaper in Baltimore was the second person from Maryland to receive that same honor. George W.F. McMechen was a proud Elk and member of Monumental Lodge No. 3, and served as the national leader of the Elks, as the Grand Exalted Ruler, for two terms beginning in 1919. Other prominent members of Monumental Lodge No. 3 who rose to positions in national leadership of the IBPOE&W include Brothers William Smith, Samuel T. Hemsley, Jeremiah Hill, Marion Polett, Ray R. Bond (Grand Esteemed Loyal Knight and Grand Esteemed Leading Knight), Charles E. Dorsey (Grand District Deputy), Loyal Randolph (Grand Trustee and Chairman of the Board), Truly Hatchett (Regional Director and Assistant Commissioner of Education), William H. Hall (Grand Esteemed Leading Knight), Harry Henry (Grand Trustee and Credentials Committee, and Daughter Pearl Brown (Grand treasurer Daughter).

**Architectural Description**

The Monumental Lodge No. 3 is a large three-story five-bay brick rowhouse at the corner of McMechen and Madison Streets. It was constructed in two stages in 1859/1860 and 1926. The three-story five bay portion of the building, fronting on Madison Ave. was constructed in 1859/1860. The Madison Street façade is covered in formstone, but retains a simple cornice (an alteration from an ornate cornice visible in early 20th century photos) and elaborate Italianate hoods over the second-story windows. There is a central door on the first floor, flanked by two windows on either side. The first floor windows (which were once very large, with elliptical stained glass transoms above) were shrunk into a smaller polygonal opening with formstone, and further bricked in with two glassblock windows in each opening. With the exception of these first floor windows, the windows are all one over one sash windows. On the left (south) portion of the Madison Ave façade is a one story addition with a double door entrance that abuts the adjoining rowhouse, added in the 1926 addition. There is a cornerstone on the building that was not covered by formstone on the northern corner of the building.

On the McMechen Street elevation of the 1859/1860 portion of the building, the building is four bays wide, with fenestration on all three floors. There is a small semi-circular window above the third floor, and window wells at the basement level. There is a two-
story bay window with Italianate details, and the remaining fenestration is very simple. The first floor is covered with formstone, but the remainder of the building is brick. The rear addition was constructed in 1926, and is visible from McMechen Street. The addition is six bays wide, with visible fenestration for two stories, at a different height from the original structure. The windows in this portion of the building are paired one over one sash windows. The third story windows have stained glass transoms.

**Staff Recommendations**

The property meets CHAP Landmark Designation Standards:

B. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object which:

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;

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Locator Map

Historic Maps

1890 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, depicting the building when it was a single family home (Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1890, Vol. 3, 1890, Sheet 106b)

Images

1938 photograph of the Lodge, decorated in bunting for the 39th Annual Elks Convention, which was held in Baltimore. “SCENES AS ELKS OPENED 39TH ANNUAL CONVENTION IN BALTIMORE, SUNDAY”, Afro-American (1893-1988); Aug 27, 1938; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 8

Current Photographs
1 LOCAL MATTERS, *The Sun* (1837-1987); Jan 31, 1860; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987) pg. 1; *Woods’ Baltimore City Directory* (1865-1866), (Baltimore, MD: John W. Woods), pg. 70; 1870 Federal Census, Baltimore, Maryland, 12th District, Series M593, Roll 576, Page 280, Accessible through HeritageQuest Online.

2 “LOCAL MATTERS” *The Sun* (1837-1987); Feb 1, 1860; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 1
25 Liazos and Ganz, pg. 518.
27 Joel Shrock, pg. 231.
29 Green, pg. 359.
30 Green, pg. 536.
32 Green, pg. 355.
33 Green, pg. 356.
34 Green, pg. 355.
35 "Daughter Elks will play major convention roles"
37 "Daughter Elks will play major convention roles"
38 Venus Green, pg. 357.
39 Venus Green, pg. 358.
40 Green, pg. 355.
41 Green, pg. 355.
43 “BOND IS IN LONE FIGHT FOR POST AS ELKS MEET: Only Grand Lodge Office ...”
44 “New Lodge Of Elks Formed” The Sun (1837-1987); Feb 27, 1907; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 7
49 “MONUMENTAL ELKS CLOSE BIG JUBILEE: More Than 1,600 Members Join In ...”
51 Andor Skotne, pg. 740.
53 “BOND IS IN LONE FIGHT FOR POST AS ELKS MEET: Only Grand Lodge Office ...”


L. Jolly “DANCE HALLS”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Jun 8, 1929; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 9;

“Elks’ Choir Scores In Recital Here” *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Oct 6, 1928; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 5

“Elks’ Choir Scores In Recital Here” *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Aug 20, 1927; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 9

Liazos and Ganz, 486-487.

“ELKS PREPARE FOR BIG SESSION: Ten Thousand Visitors Exuected When ...”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Jul 12, 1918; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 1;


“Annual Fishing Rodeo Is Today” *The Sun* (1837-1987); Jun 22, 1957; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Baltimore Sun, The (1837-1987), pg. 4

J Wilson, “Finley Wilson: His Own Story Of Life: How He Increased Membership From 30,000 To Half Million”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Mar 1, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 6

“Every Elk In NAACP”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Sep 8, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 8

“Every Elk In NAACP”, *Afro-American* (1893-1988); Sep 8, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-American (1893-1988), pg. 8