

**The Arch Social Club City of Baltimore
Historic Landmark Designation Report.
Prepared for the Baltimore City Commission
For Historical and Architectural Preservation
Hearing July 9, 2002**



Located at 2426 Pennsylvania Avenue

Baltimore City Landmark Historical Significance

The Arch Social Club located at 2426 Pennsylvania Avenue is eligible as a Baltimore City Historic Landmark by meeting Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation Standards for designation **one, two, and five**:

1. Dates from a particular period having a significant character, interest, or value, as part of the development, heritage, or culture of the City of Baltimore;
2. Is associated with the life of an outstanding historical person or persons;
5. Contributes information of historical, cultural, or social importance relating to the heritage of the Community.

The Arch Social Club is the oldest known continuously operating African American social club in the United States, and the oldest predominantly African American Social Club in Baltimore. The Club was incorporated on March 15, 1912. As stated in its constitution, the purpose of the club was "for social, moral and intellectual uplift of its members and in order that charity may be practiced in a Christian-like spirit and true friendship and brotherly love promoted and maintained." By the 1910s, Baltimore City found itself more segregated physically than anytime before. By 1904 more than one half of Baltimore's African American Population was living in Old West Baltimore. Segregation limited the social, economic, and cultural activities of all Baltimoreans. Therefore, the African American community created and built economic, social and cultural networks throughout the City. In many ways the economic, social and cultural networks could not be separated. The Arch Social Club was the outcome of several African Americans whose determination created an organization that could lend respite and recreation to the African American Community with no regard to class distinction. The club was the space for the economic, social and cultural networks to come together. The Arch Social Club along with several others institutions such as churches and fraternity organizations played a key role in creating, and maintaining a social network that was extremely important to Baltimore. Dances, Card games, informal lively debates and music were all part of the social and cultural aspects of the club. Charitable activities included sick and death benefits for club members, as well as require attendance at funerals, sit with sick members. Also, the club held annual Christmas parties for the under privileged children. As a club with a diverse class base, an informal network of education could take place. The educated members often taught the uneducated members how to read, understand and negotiate contracts, public speaking and how to finesse complicated financial contracts. Thus, the social club was not just a place to relax and socialize, but also a place to help and be helped.

Thus, the Arch social club **meets criteria one** by embodying the oldest known African American social Club in the United States and the oldest African American Social club

in Baltimore. The club's history embodies the importance of social institutions for segregated Baltimore during the 20th Century. The club meets **criteria two** by being associated with the founding members of the club especially Raymond Coates, Jeremiah Hill and Samuel Barney. The Club meets **criteria five** because it contributes an unbroken chain of historical information on the lives and culture of Baltimore African Americans. Together, the club is highly significant to the heritage of Baltimore.

Building History and Description:

The building was designed and built in 1912 by Paul Emmart for Dr. Frederick Schanze at a cost of \$26,000 (Headley Exit page 121). It was built next to Schanze Pharmacy and acted as a moving picture, vaudeville and dance hall. In 1930 the building was remodeled and sold in 1938 to the Rime Circuit. In 1938 it reopened as the Morgan. By 1940 it was referred to as the Uptown and began showing Yiddish films. By the mid 1950s it stopped being a movie theater and sometime shortly thereafter became Wilson's Restaurant. In 1972 the Arch Social Club bought it.

The building itself was designed in an ostentatious display associated with theaters. Wilson's Restaurant and then the Arch Social Club has altered the first floor portion of the front façade. Nonetheless, the second story still catches the eye with its Theater Baroque Style. Here is a three-tiered front façade with a full frontal pediment. The pediment sits on two story high Corinthian pilasters. The pediment caps or frames two human figure sculptures that flank a large arch, which could be two stories high. The human figures are holding Greek theater masks. Above the full width pediment is a dentilled cornice flanked by less ornamented pilasters. On top of the cornice is baluster wall.



2426 Pennsylvania Avenue

The inside has been remodeled several times and few details of the original movie vaudeville era are left. The upstairs, which was originally the dance hall, still has its stage, lights and plaster ornamentation. Downstairs is a typical Baltimore Bar and dance floor. The reuse of the theater as a restaurant and then the Arch Social Club also illustrates the historical significance of the club and the building. Together, they are a prominent and important institution that anchors the northern end of Historic Pennsylvania Avenue.



Ornamental Light



Second Floor stage and dancing area



First floor bar area

History and Support

THE ARCH SOCIAL CLUB

By Donna Tyler Hollie , written for Flower of the Forest Black Genealogical Journal 1986 Agnes Kane Callum Founder and Editor

"Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chicken," "Caldonia," "Satin Doll," "The Hucklebuck," "Every Day I Have The Blues," "Honky Tonk," "Havin' A Party," "C. C. Rider," ---it is 1986 in Baltimore, Maryland but you can still enjoy Black American music from the 1920's, '40's, and '50's. At the Arch Social at North And Pennsylvania Avenues on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, Lawrence McNeil and his band, the Korvettes, will play your requests. At the Arch Social Club you can, as Bessie Smith sang, have "A Pig Foot and a Bottle of Beer." The bar- maids will serve you drinks, plain or fancy and the waitresses will bring sandwiches or soul food dinners. At the Arch Social Club, gentlemen ask ladies 'to dance, escort them to their tables and thank them for the privilege. At the Arch Social Club, a good time is had by all.

Historically the Arch Social Club was about more than good times. Baltimore in 1912 was by law a racially segregated city with little personal inter- action between the races. As a result, Blacks had their own churches, fraternal groups, schools and businesses. Medical, legal and financial services were obtained from Black professionals. Mandatory racial segregation resulted in a Black community that was economically integrated and united without regard to class distinctions. With this spirit of commonality of purpose in mind, Raymond A. Coates,

Jeremiah S. Hill, and Samuel L. Barney founded the Arch Social Club. The club was established "for the social, moral and intellectual uplift of its members and in order that charity may be practiced in a Christian like spirit and true friendship and brotherly love promoted and maintained."

The members of Arch Social Club originally gathered at Stokes Restaurant, which was on the corner of Arch and Josephine Streets.) They established a clubhouse in a rented building at 635 Josephine Street and in 1922 purchased a building at 676 Saratoga Street. The building was purchased for \$500.00 with an annual ground rent of \$50.00. The club moved to its present location, 2426 Pennsylvania Avenue in 1972.

The clubhouse was used to hold weekly meetings and was the center of social activities for the members as well as for the surrounding community. Members used keys to admit themselves and their guests to the club, where the activities included card games

as well as conversation and lively debate. On weekends, live music was provided by a band led by John Kier, who played piano and "slide horn" and who was at one time a member of Duke Ellington's band. Local musicians would frequently sit in with the band for impromptu jam sessions.

During prohibition, bootleg whiskey and near beer were sold. On September 6, 1934; the Arch Social Club was issued a liquor license and legally sold pitchers of beer for \$.15.

In the early days, women were admitted to the clubhouse only on Tuesdays, ladies night. Dues at that time were minimal and the majority of the club's income was derived from the sale of liquor. Receipts from the bar were larger on ladies night as a result of members buying drinks to impress their guests. The decision was made to admit women on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in order to increase revenue.

Women have always been treated with respect at the Arch Social Club. The use of profanity was prohibited as were fighting and "conduct unbecoming a member." Violators were fined and/or suspended from the club or if non-members had their guest privileges revoked. Female employees (waitresses and barmaids) were hired and supervised by the Chairman of the House Committee but could only be fired after deliberation and recommendation from the Board of Trustees. This regulation was the results of an accusation by a waitress that she was terminated for resisting the sexual advances of a member.

Charity, friendship and brotherly love were cornerstones of the club. The club provided sick benefits to members and death benefits to the family members. In addition, members were required to "sit with" sick members, attend funerals, visit houses of mourning and offer moral and emotional support to widows and orphans. Those who were unable to fulfill these obligations could pay other members to act in their stead or they were required to pay a substantial fine.

The club hosted an annual Christmas party for underprivileged children. They rented a hall at 655 W. Lexington Street, which belonged to another fraternal organization, The Order of Good Hopes. A band was hired and toys and clothing, such as, gloves, scarves and socks were distributed. Donations were solicited from merchants in nearby Lexington Market and from local businesses, such as, Armhein Bakery and Hendler's Ice Cream Company, so that refreshments could be served. The club also made substantial donations to the Heart Fund, the Cancer Society, the Community Chest and various churches.

Most members professed Christianity and were active church members. In October, a memorial service for deceased members was held and in March, the club's anniversary

was celebrated. It was constitutionally mandated that both activities be held in church and that members be fined for non-attendance.

The members of Arch Social came from varied backgrounds. There were professionals such as Dr. W. F. Norvelle, Dr. Cooper, and attorneys Roy Barnes and Josiah Henry. There were businessmen such as morticians George Kelson, Elroy Wilson and George Holland. Thomas Smith owned a hotel, William Harrod, a florist, Robert and Richard Morsell were barbers, while Walter Batson was one of the organizers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The members also included waiters, chauffeurs, porters, clerks, and laborers.

The educated members handled the club's business affairs and served as teachers to the less educated members. A member with little formal education was given the opportunity to learn to read, understand and negotiate contracts, to chair meetings according to parliamentary procedure, to speak extemporaneously in public and to understand complicated financial transactions.

The majority of the members were Black men from Baltimore City and county. There were also members who lived in the District of Columbia, Virginia, New Jersey, Kingston, Jamaica and Puerto Rico. There have been three White members, one of who, Henry Croup, was an active participant during the 1950's.

Membership was open to men between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-five, who were of sound health and good character: who had recommendations from two members. A prospective member was subject to an investigation into his character and was required to submit medical documentation of good health. A prospective member could be rejected with three negative votes. Members were recruited through business and neighborhood relationships and through family connections. There are presently several members who joined because their fathers or brothers recruited them. One member, Raymond Johnson, represents the third generation of his family to belong to the club.

After one year of membership, men were eligible to hold office. In addition to the offices of President, Vice, Financial, Assistant and Recording Secretaries, Treasure and Master of Arms, the Arch Social Club elected a Chaplain, Legal Advisor and a seven member Board of Trustees. The Chaplain led the club in devotional exercises at the beginning and end of each meeting. It was the Legal Officer's duty to advise the club in the proper application or interpretation of the Constitution and to act as prosecutor in cases in which a member was charged -with a Constitutional violation. The Board of Trustees was responsible for the execution of leases and contracts.

The term of office was one year but most men were consistently re-elected and served until physically unable to continue. Current members remember with love and respect the following: George Chapman Treasurer John Kier Recording & Financial Sec.

Lawrence Dorsey president

Albert Butler President, Secretary,

Treasurer, Legal Advisor

Henry Marshall Vice-president, President Howard Mason president

Charles Tibbs Master of Arms

Wesley Wallace President

Raymond Morsell Financial Secretary Charles Cooper President

George Robinson Recording Secretary Financial Secretary

Henry Bass (aka soldier) Chairman of House Committee

In 1986 in Baltimore, Maryland the survival of Black institutions is in question. Provident Hospital no longer exists. Historically Black schools suffered from under-enrollment and the loss of the most capable students to more prestigious schools. The YWCA, which traditionally served Blacks, has closed its doors. Neighborhoods segregated by race and by class no longer serve as a source of positive role models for the young. Pennsylvania Avenue is no longer a haven for well-known entertainers or a training ground for those with dreams of stardom. The Arch Social Club, however, has survived and prospered. In 1986 in Baltimore, Maryland, the men of the Arch Social are planning a celebration of their diamond jubilee, seventy-five years of "true friendship and brotherly love."

Arch Social Club Members 1920-1921

<u>Names</u> <u>Held</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Occupation, or Business Adress</u>	<u>Office</u>
Edward Austin	368 Forrest St.	laborer	
Dr. Clarence Bailey	736 W. Franklin St.	Dentist	
George Bailey	Eutaw-Mt. Winans	Soft drinks, Annapolis Ave. nr B & O RR	President of Club
Horace Banks	617 Cider Alley	Porter	
Walter E. Batson Secretary	118 N. Schroeder St.	Porter	Financial
Clarence Booze	927 W. Fayette St.	Soft drinks	
James Boone	607 George St.	Laborer	
John Brooks	1813 McCulloh St.	Waiter	
Bernard Brown	767 Bradley St.	Driver	
Dr. Harry Brown	1501 Presstman St.	Physician, medical examiner	
Joseph Brown	1309 Argyle Ave.	Waiter	
Wellington Brown	540 Robert St.	Laborer	
Wilbert Brown	114 S. Schroeder St.	Undertaker	
Edward Bryant	764 Waesche St.	Laborer	
Thomas Buckingham	1802 Druid Hill Ave.,	Barber	
Frank Burns	1341 Carey St.	Laborer	
John Butler	642 W. Saratoga St.	Waiter	
William Butler	703 Raborg St.	Printer 1938 White St., near Payson St.	
Edward Carpenter	52 W. Lafayette Ave.		
Raymond Carter	922 Argyle Ave.	Laborer	
George Chapman	635 Vine St.		Financial Sec.
Phillip Chapman	1902 White St.		
Winfield Chester	1136 Druid Hill Ave.	Chaffeur	
Frank Clark	821 W. Saratoga St.	Clerk	
Raymond Coates	636 Josephine St.		Chairman of House Committee
Walter Coates	909 Argyle Ave.	Laborer	
William Cook	645 Josephine St.		
Thomas Cornish	1208 Harlem Ave.	Waiter	
Fred Crosby	635 Josephine St.	Laborer	
Walter Curtis	225 Arch St.	Driver	Master of Arms
Rev. J.A. Davis	648 Josephine St.		
Louis Davis	689 Mulberry St.	Laborer	
William Davis	235 Arch St.		
Robert Dent	911 Born Alley	Driver	
Charles Douglass	Camden Stock Farm		
Herman Douglass	558 Presstman St.	Waiter	
Dr. Charles Fowler	1201 Druid Hill Ave.	Physician 712 S. Sharp St., and 1065 W. Lexington St.	
Charles Garner	605 George St.	Clerk	
Joseph Garner	692 W. Mulberry St.	Chaffeur	
Richard Garrett	120 Dover St.	Organist, waiter	

Arch Social Club Members 1920-1921

<u>Names</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Occupation, or Business Address</u>	<u>Office Held</u>
Robert Goodlow	1330 Druid Hill Ave.	Soft drinks	
Walter Gough	403 N. Pine St.	Laborer	
Henry Green	605 Jasper St.		
Eugene Greenleaf	738 Pierce St.	Laborer	
Lewis Hall	638 W. Mulberry St.		
R. E. Hall	1619 Division St.		
William Harris	1114 W. Lexington St.	Laborer	
William Harrod.	520 N. Pine St.	florist 831 Druid Hill Ave.	
John Hayes	1113 W. Lexington St.	Laborer	
John W. Hawkins	500 Druid Hill Ave.	Pool hall	
Samuel T. Hemsley	578 W. Biddle St.	Funeral director/mortician	
Robert Hendley	650 W. Saratoga St.	Porter	
Alex Henry	638 W. Mulberry St.		
Samuel Henson	1205 Upton St.		
Jeremiah Hill Treasurer	737 George St.		Manager,
William Hill	576 St. Mary's St.	Driver	
George Holland	650 Josephine St.	Undertaker	Druid Hill Ave. & Wilson St.
George Hudgins	660 Raborg St.		
Charles Hunt	226 N. Pine St.	Laborer	
George Johnson	763 Vine St.	Laborer	
Edward Jones	225 Arch St.	Porter	
Samuel Jones	721 W. Franklin St.		
William A. Jones Secretary	1332 N. Stricker St.	Porter	Recording
William Liggins	436 Fremont Ave.	Porter	
Henry Lockman	1015 Shields Alley		
William F. Long	818 McCulloh St.		
John Matthews	415 St. Mary's St.		
William McCard	1940 Druid Hill Ave.	Lawyer	14 E. Pleasant St. Legal Advisor
Robert Morsell	624 Raborg St.	Barber	
Richard Morsell	642 Josephine St.	Barber	
Dennis Moore	1914 Division St.		
Albert Morris	318 Diamond St.		
William O. Maker	938 Argyle Ave.	Chauffeur	
Louis Nicholson	205 N. Pine St.		
Moulton Oram	819 George St.	Waiter	
Robert J. Overton	522 Brune St.		
William C. Palmer	936 Leadenhall St.		
Fred Pinder	704 W. Franklin St.		
John Powell	222 N. Pine St.		
Frank Pratt	1703 Druid Hill Ave.		
William Purvis	701 Raborg St.		
John R. Ray	1940 White St.		
Samuel Ray	627 Penn Alley	Laborer	

Arch Social Club Members 1920-1921

<u>Names</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Occupation, or Business Address</u>	<u>Office</u>
<u>Held</u>			
Henry Randolph	1522 Artic Ave., Atlantic City, New Jersey		
Walter Rice	223 Arlington Ave.		
Charles Riley	1311 Argyle Ave.		
Charles Ringgold	534 N. Caroline St.	Waiter	
Charles Robinson	644 Raborg St.		
Isaac Russell	110 N. Amity St.	Laborer	
Edward Satchell	1426 Riggs Ave.	Driver	
Joseph Satterwhite	635 Josephine St.		
E. L. W. Scott	647 Lee St.	Chaplain	
Edward Simms	226 N. Pine St.		
Thomas H. Smith	665 Sarah Ann St.		
Thomas R. Smith	2035 Druid Hill Ave.	Hotel owner 437 1/2 Druid Hill Ave.	
William Smith	1220 Druid Hill Ave.	Bartender	
William Snowden	222 N. Pine St.		
George Summerville	653 Josephine St.		
Henry Steward	1230 Pennsylvania Ave.	Confectioner	
John Taylor	256 Arlington Ave.	Waiter	
Henry Thomas	735 George St.		
Charles Tibbs	621 Penn Alley		Master of Arms
Perry Tolson	848 W. Lafayette Ave.	Laborer	
Robert Towles	729 Pierce St.		
Clarence Tinson	638 Josephine St.	Driver	
James H. Wade	311 N. Stricker St.	Waiter	
Albert Washington	433 Henrietta St.	Pool hall, 435 Henrietta St.	
James Washington	640 Josephine St.	Waiter	
John S. Washington	449 E. 23rd. St.	Chauffeur	
Harvey Waters			Vice President
Harrison Watts	1607 Riggs Ave.	Barber, 27 E. Lee Highway	
Asbury White	425 Conaway St.	Laborer	
Patrick White	635 Vine St.		
Walter Wiley	730 Dolphin St.	Soft drinks, 511 Claggett Alley	
Basiel Williams	769 Bradley St.		
Howard Williams	768 George St.	Porter	
Nathaniel Wilson	2010 Division St.	Manager	
Edward Wise	1507 Orleans St.	Bootblack 4014 1/2 Lombard St.	
Raphael Wright	764 Pierce St.	Waiter	
Ellis Young	1821 Druid Hill Ave.	Laborer	

Sources: Names, addresses and office held - The First Colored Professional Clerical- Skilled and Business Directory of Baltimore City, 1920-1921.

Occupations and Business addresses - Baltimore City Directories. 1920, 1921, and 1922.

George Bailey, President of the Arch Social Club of Baltimore City; a member of the Monumental Lodge of Elks No. 3 and of the Progressive Club of Mt. Winans; also a member of the Royal Pleasure Club of Baltimore. He is one of the leading citizens of Mt. Winans, now the 25th. Ward of Baltimore City. Mr. Bailey is interested in the uplift of his people; and is one of the leaders politically among the colored voters in the section where he resides.

Raymond Coates organizer of Arch Social Club, member of Hannibal Lodge No. 11, K. of P; first member initiated in Monumental Lodge No. 3, I. B. P. O. E. W. Master of Social sessions of Elks. Members of Holy St. John No. 4 Free A. A. Y. Masons (National Compact). He is a public-spirited citizen.

Donna Tyler Hollie is a native Baltimorean, a researcher and a genealogist. She is a graduate of Morgan State University.