

36671



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas  
Other name/site number: Union Bankers Building; Pythian Temple; Knights of Pythias Building  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 2551 Elm St  
City or town: Dallas State: Texas County: Dallas  
Not for publication:  Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:  
 national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

[Signature] State Historic Preservation Officer 1/2/17  
Signature of certifying official / Title Date  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register
- other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 2/21/17  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** Social: meeting hall  
 Commerce/Trade: business, professional

**Current Functions:** WORK IN PROGRESS

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Beaux Arts

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick, Stone, Cast Stone, Terra Cotta

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7 through 10)

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Social History and Ethnic Heritage/Black

**Period of Significance:** 1915-1944

**Significant Dates:** 1915, 1940, 1944

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Pittman, William Sydney

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 11 through 21)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 22 and 23)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. (#32,887, approved 10/27/15)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Preservation Dallas, Dallas Public Library

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Approximately 1.14 acres

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 32.784246° Longitude: -96.787112°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** BLK 280 LTS 11-13 LESS ROW

**Boundary Justification:** The nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Carol Roark and Gary Skotnicki, with assistance from NR Coordinator Gregory Smith  
Organization: Skotnicki Studio, LLC  
Street & number: 4310 University Blvd  
City or Town: Dallas State: Texas Zip Code: 75205  
Email: garyskotnicki@gmail.com  
Telephone: 214-868-8442  
Date: June 3, 2016

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 24 through 27)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 28 through 35)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 5 through 6, and 36 through 45)

## Photograph Log

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas  
2551 Elm Street, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas  
Photographed by Gary Skotnicki

Photo 1  
Southeast oblique, camera facing northwest  
February 13, 2016

Photo 2  
North exterior facade, camera facing southeast  
May 3, 2016

Photo 3  
East exterior façade, camera facing west  
February 13, 2016

Photo 4  
Northwest oblique, camera facing southeast  
March 29, 2016

Photo 5  
West exterior façade, camera facing east  
March 29, 2016

Photo 6  
Southwest cornice detail  
May 3, 2016

Photo 7  
Elm St façade storefront, camera facing north  
May 3, 2016

Photo 8  
East cornice detail, camera facing west  
October 24, 2014

Photo 9  
Interior looking north, ground floor  
May 14, 2015

Photo 10  
Interior looking east, ground floor, elevator and stairwell wall  
May 14, 2015

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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Photo 11

Interior looking southeast, ground floor, original stairwell  
May 14, 2015

Photo 12

Interior looking west, second floor, added loading door and original window trim  
May 14, 2015

Photo 13

Interior looking east, third floor, added dumbwaiter  
May 14, 2015

Photo 14

Interior looking west, third floor, original window openings  
May 14, 2015

Photo 15

Interior looking northeast, third floor, landing of original stairwell  
May 14, 2015

Photo 16

Interior looking north, fourth floor  
May 14, 2015

Photo 17

Interior looking west, fourth floor, stage and steps  
May 14, 2015

Photo 18

Interior looking southeast, fourth floor, elevator and stairwell  
May 14, 2015

Photo 19

Interior looking north, fifth floor  
May 14, 2015

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

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

## **Description**

The Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas Building (hereafter “Pythian Temple” or “Knights of Pythias Building”) in central Dallas, Texas, is a four-story Beaux Arts fraternal lodge and office building. Designed by William Sidney Pittman, the first African American architect in the State of Texas, and completed in 1916, the building has a load-bearing brick and steel frame structural system, and a brick exterior accented with cast stone and stone detailing. The original double-height fourth floor auditorium was truncated vertically when a full fifth floor was inserted c.1960. The building was designated a City of Dallas historic landmark in 1989. It has since been stripped of the interior partitions and has been vacant for two decades. Despite the loss of the ground floor storefronts, the original windows, and most interior features, the building retains enough integrity to be listed in the National Register.

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## **Setting**

The Pythian Temple is on the northwest corner of Elm Street and Good Latimer Expressway, a prominent location in the heart of the Deep Ellum neighborhood, the historically black commercial and cultural center of Dallas. The Elm Street block of mostly one and two-story commercial and warehouse structures between N. Hawkins and Good Streets were built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and abutted the Texas & Pacific Railway Salvage Freight Warehouse and rail yard to the north and east. Most of the historic structures on the south side of Elm Street remain and are in use as office or service facilities, as do similar buildings along both sides of Elm Street in the blocks east of the Pythian Temple. The old rail yard contains the Marquis on Gaston (formerly Gaston Yard) apartments, constructed in 1995. The block containing the Pythian Temple has no other remaining historic structures, but a Grainger Industrial Supply facility occupies the northwest corner facing onto Pacific Ave.

Central Expressway (formerly Central Avenue or “Central Track,” and the line of the old Houston & Texas Central Railroad) curves north at the west end of the block containing the Pythian Temple. It is the physical and symbolic connection to the State-Thomas neighborhood, or Freedmen’s town, a short distance north of Deep Ellum. The Pythian Temple dominated the skyline of Deep Ellum as the tallest and most important social and commercial building in the black community and served as its cultural heart and primary meeting place during its period of significance, 1916-1944. It still rises above the historic fabric of Deep Ellum, and is recognized as a community landmark.

## **Structure**

The exterior was designed in the traditional Beaux Arts style with classical Greek and Roman ornamental forms on the primary front (south) facade, composed in a rectilinear plan, approximately 60’ x 132’ with a midpoint eastern side wing extension of 16’ x 58’ that contained the “fire-proof” stairwells. A dramatic four-story front elevation composition relates to the intersection of the streets with the formal façade wrapping around the inside corner created on the east side where the main mass meets the stairwell extension. It is composed vertically of a classical base, shaft and capital arrangement. This frontal formality is expressed in a deep maroon colored brick trimmed with stone that is bounded with quoins on the corners where the build changes to a simplified terra cotta-colored common brick.

The primary Elm St. façade has five window bays fronting the irregular plan with a main block that has three east-west structural bays in an ABA pattern and ten north-south structural bays extending through the building, the first seven equal bays on the southern  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the main block and three shorter equal bays terminating the north end. A wing centered on the east façade extends one east-west structural bay and three north-south bays that housed the staircases. The floor sections between the steel beams are 2’ x 12” wood joists on wood ledgers and are predominantly sound. The foundation and first floor are of reinforced concrete that supports steel wide-flange columns and beams to the fourth floor. The roof above the fifth level is supported by open-web, 4-to-6 feet deep riveted steel trusses spanning east-west along the same structural bays as below. The centered crown creates a low-sloped roof behind the parapets, draining

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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the rainfall to the sides of the building delivered to the ground in metal scuppers and downspouts at each of the four corners of the building.

The vertical floor heights above the first floor are 15 feet, 12 feet, 15½ feet, 11 feet and 14 feet, though originally the fourth floor was a 25-foot-tall auditorium. The third floor at the rear third of the floor plate was likely a secondary assembly room for the women's auxiliary organization due to the placement of there of monumental roman arched windows and a higher ceiling due to the stage above. The exterior brick walls are 12 inches thick from top to bottom, finished on the interior with plaster and have no offsets.

### *Exterior*

The building today stands with roughly 90% of the masonry exterior intact but painted a light grey. The cast-stone and probable terra cotta trim is still in place but in need of various levels of restoration. The windows have been replaced in their original masonry openings primarily with metal-framed windows and spandrel panels and some have been filled in with brick and metal louvers. A one-story addition was added on the southeast corner as well as a five-story outboard elevator shaft on the northwest corner. The parapet has been made level around the perimeter of the building. The full width of the ground floor original storefront has been removed as well as the southeast corner return wall to the east wing.

The original ground floor storefront shown in the architect's rendering had a central roman-arched stone entry vestibule opening flanked by twin half-columns that supported a pediment proud of the wall with finials. On either side was a wood-framed and trimmed storefront system with wood spandrel panels, beneath large single-pane windows below leaded-glass operable transom windows.

The original wood windows varied across the facades in fifteen opening sizes and were typically single or double-hung operable frames and sashes, with the sashes painted a contrasting dark color. There were originally approximately 145 window openings and 4 door openings. The taller third floor had transom windows with additional roman arches in the rear third of the building. The auditorium windows were monumental compound windows with roman arched tops across the front façade and turned the corners with 3 openings on the east side and 7 on the west. The 4 exterior door openings on the front, rear and east sides have been modified or removed and no original doors exist.

The building has two frontal formal facades that have a heavy stone belt course that forms the base of the monumental windows at the sills of the fourth floor windows. Above these windows at the top of the keystones is an entablature, consisting of an architrave and fascia below a bed molding of dentils and egg and dart. On the fascia are incised serif font letters that spell out "KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS". The soffit and corona are capped by a cavetto cornice molding. Above the entablature, the solid parapets are formalized with baluster boxes with Roman arched baluster panels in-between, capped with a compound but simple parapet cap of stone. It is believed the cornice assembly is of terra cotta (to be determined). The center of the front façade parapet was crowned with a semi-circular stone lunette likely with an incised or raised Knights of Pythias symbol with a flagpole mounted behind the lunette.

The sides and rear of the building exterior has a continuous, simplified sheet metal cornice that matches the ornamental forms on the front. The facades have raked mortar joints on the comb-textured brick formal front and flush joints in the side and rear common brick facades. They appear to be in good condition from the ground level and may need some minor repointing once the paint is carefully removed.

### *Interior*

The interior overall consists of the steel and wood structural elements within the masonry walls and the elements are very sound with very little rust and there are few cracks in the undisturbed masonry walls. The original upper



Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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hardwood finish floors are on a ¾-inch wood subfloor and are in fair condition, and some areas have rotted through but otherwise they appear very level.

One of two monumental staircases crafted of cast iron and steel with checker-plate treads still remains in the southeast corner of the building. A companion staircase to the north was demolished, probably during the c.1960 renovation. The staircase goes to the top floor. Although it is missing the bottom stringer railing, the staircase retains its historic newel post and is in restorable condition. The interior masonry walls that formed the “fireproof” stairwell shaft on the east side of the building have been partially demolished. The flooring in this area has been infilled with corrugated steel decking topped by concrete to span the area left by the demolished north stairwell shaft.

The original stage platform and a set of wood steps on the fourth floor still exist, but there are no remnants of a proscenium arch, wings or backstage elements. There remain several places in the building where the exterior wall plaster is still in place and several typical office interior window trim assemblies still exist on the second floor west wall. There appears to be no significant hazardous materials in the building today except for the older lead-based paint and perhaps the small amount of remaining wall plaster.

### *Site*

The existing site is currently paved in asphalt and concrete on the east and north sides, the north side rising three feet from the Elm St. sidewalk elevation. There are several mature trees along Good Latimer opposite the east façade. The southern front concrete sidewalk exists but has no storefront to abut and the sidewalk is to be replaced. The west façade overlooks a concrete slab foundation from the recently demolished J.W. Lawther building.

### *Alterations*

Some original window and door openings were plugged with masonry shortly after the temple was completed. The west first and second floor wall abutted the adjoining J.W. Lawther building, which was built two feet away from the façade presumably to allow ventilation in the adjacent temple’s second floor office windows. Several of the original first and second floor window openings along the west wall have been plugged. First and second floor overhead coiling loading doors were installed in the seventh bay to connect the two buildings, possibly when the buildings were used as furniture stores in the 1940s and 1950s.

The temple building was converted to office use for the Union Bankers about 1960. The original interiors were gutted and it is presumed the second stair was then removed to make space for mechanical equipment rooms. The entire exterior brick and stone area was painted a light grey. An exterior plaster wall stud-framed elevator shaft was installed and exists at the northwest corner of the exterior and put into service when the fifth office floor was inserted into the building. To do this, the original auditorium was demolished and the columns were vertically extended over the entire fourth floor auditorium and stage area. A dumbwaiter shaft was also installed in the former stage area.

A small flat-roofed ground floor addition exists on the front, southeastern, inside corner with a shallow flat-roofed awning, built during the ca.1960 renovation. This addition expanded the ground floor at the original southeast inside corner masonry wall and this section of original wall was demolished on the first floor to open into this new addition.

All of the original windows were replaced with thin steel frames with single-pane glazing units. They were designed in simplified modern horizontal muntin patterns, and opaque spandrel panels were used when the building was air-conditioned. Dropped ceilings were installed behind them in many of the original masonry openings. Some original openings on the upper northeast stairwell wall were filled with louvers for ventilation, adjacent to where an elevator shaft was installed in between the stairwells at an unknown date.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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The original decorative parapet lunette centered over the front façade was removed along with the flagpole behind it, presumably during the ca. 1960 renovation. On the rear of the building, a small twelve-foot wide parapet pediment over the center bay was also removed. The architrave and cornice originally wrapped around the entire building in sheet metal to approximate the front profile, but the architrave element has been entirely removed and the remaining cornice form is generally in poor condition. The original storefront exterior frieze stone exists over the missing flanking storefronts and have been in-filled below with temporary plywood panels.

Large metal channel letters with argon tube lighting that spell “UNION BANKERS” were placed in front of the balustrade and parapet on top of the cornice at the front and rear of the building and still exist. The upper portions of the original steel fire escape on the rear façade remain in place but the roof ladder was removed to accommodate the signage. Fire escape sections below the third floor were removed at an unknown date to deter access from the ground.

A bronze historical plaque from the Deep Ellum Foundation was installed in the late 1980’s and exists on a post under the awning area at the southeast corner. Some mid-century modern entry stone planters exist there as well.

### *Deterioration*

In the late 1980s, the Union Bankers began to fill in the “Knights of Pythias” incised frieze lettering with plaster infill material to make it flush and disappear but the work was halted midway by the City of Dallas. It was this work incident that precipitated the designation of the building as a local historic landmark over the objections of the owner on October 23, 1989. The building was sold to Southwest Properties Group in August of 1995 for future redevelopment. Several significant adaptive use proposals were proposed but were never acted upon.

The site and building was then resold to Westdale Properties America 1, Ltd. in April 1998 for redevelopment. The Union Bankers interiors and mechanical systems were demolished and a new single-ply membrane roof was installed to protect the interior from further water infiltration. The vacant building has been considered for several redevelopment schemes in the interim, none of which have come to fruition. Deterioration of the building in the ensuing 18 years has been minimal with only a few incidents of minor vandalism and graffiti.

The adjoining J.W. Lawther building to the west was demolished in the spring of 2016 with the unanimous consent of the Dallas Landmark Commission due to the hazardous conditions and partial collapse of the roof along the center axis of the building. Current mixed-use redevelopment plans for the entire block are underway.

In summary, the building retains the majority of the design integrity of the original design and still commands the corner site at Elm and Good Latimer. The monumental window openings, decorative entablature and original brick and stone facades are substantial as an overall composition and it still visually anchors the Deep Ellum district. Despite the various losses of some of the historic original material, a full restoration of the exterior and adaptive use of the interior is fully warranted and long overdue. It remains a notable landmark building that is worthy of being listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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## Statement of Significance

The Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias Temple, Texas (hereafter “Knights of Pythias Building” or “Pythian Temple”), designed by noted African American architect William Sidney Pittman and completed in 1916 served as a center for civic, business, and social life in Dallas at a time when segregation offered few other alternatives. Located in the historic African American Deep Ellum neighborhood at the corner of Elm and Good (now Good-Latimer Expressway) streets, the building housed the state headquarters and grand lodge for the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas. There, the Knights had office space, hosted both local and grand lodge meetings, and operated a life insurance business that provided people of limited means the ability to cover funeral expenses for loved ones. In addition, as was typical for many fraternal orders, the four-story building also provided office space for many prominent African American professionals including Marcellus Cooper (first African American dentist in Texas), Benjamin R. Bluitt (first African American surgeon in Texas), Ammon S. Wells (attorney and civil rights leader), John O. Chisum (optometrist and civic leader), and Phillip M. Sunday (physician and civic leader). The temple’s fourth-floor auditorium also served as a convention or meeting site for a variety of secular organizations at a time when segregation often prevented African Americans from using municipal or privately owned facilities, and churches were the only other option available. The Knights of Pythias Temple was the first commercial building in Dallas built by and for African Americans and was, as such, celebrated as an example of what the people of a race with limited opportunities could accomplish. The building served as the state headquarters of a significant African-American fraternal organization, which in many ways supported African-American businesses, including providing office space for a variety of tenants. The building has suffered alterations over time but retains sufficient integrity, and is nominated under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage/Black, at the local and state levels of significance.

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Between 1900 and 1920, the population of Dallas boomed, growing from 42,639 to 158,976.<sup>1</sup> The African American population grew as well, with about 24,000 people living in the city in 1920, although much of the growth had taken place between 1900 and 1910 before the trend towards northern migration began.<sup>2</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, both Texas and Dallas began to enact a new series of laws, more rigidly enforcing segregation that had previously been left to custom. Texas passed a number of laws regulating how African Americans could use railroads and other transit systems, and Dallas enacted ordinances covering streetcar segregation and, in 1916, a housing ordinance that prohibited whites and African Americans from living on the same block.<sup>3</sup> Segregation forced African Americans to step up their efforts to provide not only businesses where they could receive good customer service, but outlets for civic and social engagement. Early African American residential neighborhoods in Dallas included State-Thomas (also called Short North Dallas), Deep Ellum, and Tenth Street, and most of the business activity was concentrated in Deep Ellum and State-Thomas.

The Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas was established in 1884-85 as a fraternal order that provided both social activities and life insurance.<sup>4</sup> The Pythian organization grew rapidly, incorporating in 1898, and by 1921 had 800 lodges in Texas with 35,000 members. This made it the largest African American fraternal

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<sup>1</sup> “Texas Almanac: City Population History from 1850-2000,” accessed April 23, 2016, <https://texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf>; “Number and Distribution of Inhabitants,” 1920 Census, accessed April 23, 2016, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41084484v1ch1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth York Enstam. *Women and the Creation of Urban Life Dallas, Texas, 1843-1920*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1998) 168; Karl E. and Alma F. Taeuber, “The Negro Population of the United States,” Published in John F. Davis, ed., *The American Negro Reference Book* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), ERIC, ED 015 962, 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud, “Jim Crow’s Emergence in Texas.” *American Studies*, 15:1 (1974), 54-55; “Race Segregation Law Now in Effect,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 1916, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Alwyn Barr, *Black Texas, A History of Negroes in Texas, 1528-1995*, 2d ed., (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 107. WorldCat also cites a broadside titled “The Grand Lodge of Colored Knights of Pythias of Texas,” (OCLC number 51875376) which contains text stating that the lodge was, “Organized 1884.”

organization in the state, surpassing the Masons who had 30,000 members. Texas also had the largest number of Pythian lodges of any state.<sup>5</sup> Their large membership meant that the lodge was able to operate a profitable insurance business, it was estimated that they had policies totaling over a million dollars in Texas.<sup>6</sup> Grand Chancellor William S. Willis remarked in a January 1919 address given at the Pythian Temple that the organization initially, “knew nothing of insurance, but observing the poor white man as beneficiary, thereby first sought to join the companies organized by white men and, being refused, at once began the great work of endowment of lodge insurance.”<sup>7</sup>

The Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias Texas held an annual meeting, giving representatives from the various lodges throughout the state an opportunity to discuss their accomplishments and take care of business. The first formal indication of plans to build a Pythian Temple in Dallas came in June 1912, when the Grand Lodge, meeting in San Antonio approved a resolution authorizing the construction of a Pythian Temple in Dallas at a cost of \$100,000. William S. Willis, of Waco, who later became Grand Chancellor of the Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias Texas, was mentioned as the likely person to raise the money needed to fund construction of the temple building.<sup>8</sup> A report from the 1914 meeting of the Grand Lodge in Galveston indicated that the building site for the Pythian Temple had been paid for and \$20,000 had been raised towards construction costs. The Pythians wanted to raise an additional \$30,000 before starting construction work.<sup>9</sup> Indications are that the additional \$30,000 was provided in the form of a loan from the Grand Court Order of Calanthe of Texas, originally formed as the women’s auxiliary of the Colored Knights of Pythias, but still operating today as a fraternal benefit society.<sup>10</sup>

The site chosen for the Pythian Temple was located in an African American neighborhood east of downtown Dallas and the Houston and Texas Central Railroad tracks, known as Deep Ellum. The land had previously been part of former Dallas Mayor John Good’s farm. At the turn of the twentieth century, Deep Ellum had a substantial number of residences, although the area closer to Central Avenue and downtown Dallas had a higher concentration of businesses. Many of the businesses – dry goods, furniture, saloons, and groceries – were owned and operated by Jewish merchants, but there were also a handful of African American-owned businesses including a restaurant, drug store, barber shop, and a Penny Savings Bank. Even though not all of the stores in Deep Ellum were owned by African Americans, the area was a main shopping and entertainment district where African Americans could do business, find a good meal in a cafe, or listen to music. East of Good Street, Deep Ellum was more residential than commercial, a pattern that held through the early teens. During the late teens, commercial development pushed further east, bringing an eclectic and fascinating mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Wood-frame houses stood next to auto repair and parts shops, food products manufacturers, warehouses, lumber yards, feed companies, a brick yard, and an assortment of grocery and drug stores. Night clubs, cafes, and domino parlors provided a venue for good jazz or blues music.<sup>11</sup> Blind Lemon Jefferson, Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins, and Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter were among the now well-known musicians who played in Deep Ellum.<sup>12</sup>

The Texas & Pacific Railway had a rail yard just to the east (Block 487) of the proposed temple site, a factor that had both advantages and disadvantages. Noise and soot from trains was problematic, but a short spur line that ran onto the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>7</sup> “Local Knights Hear Grand Chancellor,” *Dallas Express*, January 25, 1919, 1.

<sup>8</sup> “Negro K of P’s to Build Here,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 16, 1912, 10.

<sup>9</sup> “Negro Knights of Pythias to Erect Temple at Dallas,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 10, 1914, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Shennette Garrett-Scott, “Grand Court Order of Calanthe of Texas,” accessed April 27, 2016, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vng02>.

<sup>11</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Dallas, Texas, 1916, Vol. 1, p. 42, Dallas Public Library, Texas/Dallas History & Archives Division; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Dallas, Texas, 1921, Vol. 1, Maps, 18, 19, and 22. accessed May 28, 2016, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-dallas-1921-18.jpg>; <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-dallas-1921-19.jpg>; <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-dallas-1921-22.jpg>.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa C. Maxwell, “Deep Ellum,” accessed April 27, 2016, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hpd01>.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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block where the temple was planned also offered an easy way for both travelers and supplies to reach the site.<sup>13</sup> In 1905, the site of the Knights of Pythias Temple held an “ironclad” frame coal storage warehouse.<sup>14</sup> On June 1, 1910, William M. Earnest sold two tracts of land in Block 280, one of them the parcel where the Pythian Temple would be built, to Tom Angus and Joe E. Lawther for \$33,500, secured by three promissory notes bearing six percent interest.<sup>15</sup>

Only thirteen months later, on June 21, 1911, Angus sold the first tract of land he had purchased from Earnest to the Grand Lodge of Colored Knights of Pythias Texas, for \$36,000. The Pythians agreed to take over the second and third promissory notes that were part of Earnest’s sale to Angus and Lawther, with the interest rate raised to eight percent.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the Pythians were paying more for one tract than Angus and Lawther had paid for two, with the notes at a higher interest rate. The Pythians paid both notes in full only six months later, receiving full title to the property on January 8, 1912.<sup>17</sup> A few months later, the Pythians agreed to sell a tract of land previously purchased for and deeded to the Grand Lodge by five Dallas lodges for use as a building site for the Pythian Temple. It was agreed that this site, at the southwest corner of Main and Preston – just west of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad tracks, was “deemed too small and not suitable” for the construction of a temple for the state organization.<sup>18</sup> This resolution became significant when legal skirmishes over title to the Pythian Temple arose in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The City of Dallas issued a building permit for a “4 story brick lodge building” to the Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias Texas on April 16, 1915. William Sidney Pittman, the first African American architect to practice in Dallas and the son-in-law of Booker T. Washington designed the temple building.<sup>19</sup> Walton Construction Company is listed as the building contractor.<sup>20</sup> The company is not listed in Dallas city directories, but was almost certainly an African American firm, as Pittman prided himself on using African American contractors and workmen whenever possible.

### **William Sydney Pittman, Architect**

William Sydney Pittman was born on April 21, 1875 in Montgomery, Alabama. He attended the segregated public schools in his home town and enrolled in the Tuskegee Institute, graduating in 1897 after completing studies in architectural drawing and structural work. While at Tuskegee his talents were recognized by the institute’s director,

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<sup>13</sup> “Want Spur Track Changed,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 4, 1912, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Dallas, Texas, 1905, Vol. 1, Map 42. <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-dallas-1905-42.jpg>.

<sup>15</sup> Deed of Sale from William M. Earnest to Tom Angus, et. al., June 1, 1910 (filed June 7, 1910), Dallas County, Texas, Vol. 481, pp. 402-203, Dallas County Deed Records, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>16</sup> Deed of Sale from Tom and Martha Angus to Grand Lodge of Colored Knights of Pythias, of the Jurisdiction of the State of Texas, June 21, 1911 (filed June 21, 1911), Dallas County, Texas, Vol. 521, pp. 572-574, Dallas County Deed Records, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>17</sup> Conveyance from Tom Angus to Endowment Dept Grand Lodge Colored K. of P., January 8, 1912 (filed February 5, 1912), Dallas County, Texas, Vol. 538, pp. 671-672, Dallas County, Texas. See also, Endowment Department of Grand Lodge of Colored K. of P. to Release of Vendor’s Lien Grand Lodge of Colored K. of P. of Texas, May 28, 1913 (filed June 23, 1913), Dallas County, Texas, Vol. 586, pp. 529-530, Dallas County Deed Records, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>18</sup> Resolution – Col. K. of P. Grand Lodge, June 29, 1912 (filed November 13, 1912), Dallas County, Texas, Vol. 563, pp. 337-339, Dallas County Deed Records, Dallas, Texas. See also, a second resolution filed in Vol. 585, pp. 486-487, which deals with the same issue.

<sup>19</sup> “The First Architect of the Race Lives in Dallas,” *Dallas Express*, August 4, 1923, 4. This article lists several of Pittman’s architectural designs for Dallas buildings, and a companion article on page two shows photographs or drawings of several of them.

<sup>20</sup> “City of Dallas Building Permits, December 1912 – December 1915,” Texas/Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library, Permit No. 376, 119. It should be noted that the block number given in the permit is incorrect. The Pythian Temple stands on Block 280, not Block 256, which lies slightly to the east.

Booker T. Washington, who made it financially possible for Pittman to continue his studies at the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia, where he earned a diploma in architectural drawing in 1900.<sup>21</sup> Pittman then returned to Tuskegee, where he taught architectural drawing between 1901 and 1905, and drew plans for several campus buildings including Rockefeller Hall (1903) and Carnegie Hall (1901), which was originally built as a library.<sup>22</sup> After working for a short time in the office of the Washington, D. C. architect John Anderson Lankford, Pittman left to set up his own architectural practice. He won a competition in 1906 to design the Negro Building at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial Exposition, a building that brought Pittman immediate recognition and launched his career as an architect. After marrying Booker T. Washington's daughter, Portia, in 1907, the Pittman family settled in Fairmount Heights, Maryland, immediately adjacent to the District of Columbia. His commissions in the DC area included schools, a town hall, and a YMCA building. Pittman and his family moved to Dallas in 1912 to oversee the construction of several of his design projects including the Knights of Pythias Temple.<sup>23</sup> Among the other identified Pittman-designed structures in Texas are:

- Colored Carnegie Branch Library, Houston, 1913 (demolished)
- Allen Chapel AME Church, Fort Worth, 1914 (still a church; NR 1984)
- United Brothers of Friendship Lodge, San Antonio, 1915 (demolished)
- Joshua Chapel AME Church, Waxahachie, 1917 (still a church; NR 1986)
- St. James AME Church, Dallas, 1918 (now an office building)
- John P. Starks Residence, Dallas, c. 1918-1919 (demolished)
- Paul Quinn College Grant Hall Dormitory, Waco, 1921 (destroyed by fire)
- Riverside Park Auditorium, Dallas, 1923 (destroyed by fire, 1930)
- West Texas Manufacturing Co., Dallas, 1923 (demolished)
- United Order of Odd Fellows Lodge//Atlanta Life Building, Houston, 1924 (demolished)
- Wesley Chapel AME Church, Houston, 1926 (altered)<sup>24</sup>

### **Pythian Temple, 1916-1938**

The new Pythian Temple hosted the thirty-second annual session of the Grand Lodge on June 12, 1916, with 2,000 Pythians and members of the Grand Court Order of Calanthe in attendance, and the building was formally dedicated on the evening of July 13, 1916.<sup>25</sup> Later reports indicated that the building cost \$157,000 to build.<sup>26</sup> The temple immediately became a landmark for Dallas's African American community as a symbol of what African Americans could achieve.<sup>27</sup> Even white Dallas recognized the building's significance, and the *WPA Dallas Guide and History* written and compiled between 1936 and 1942 noted that the Pythian Temple is, "the most imposing edifice in the [Deep Ellum] district."<sup>28</sup> The building was used not only for meetings of the Grand and local lodge groups, but as a conference center for professional associations, a site for concerts, school graduations, political meetings, speeches,

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<sup>21</sup> Dreck Spurlock Wilson, ed. *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary 1865-1945*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 319.

<sup>22</sup> Alissa Falcone, "Meet Drexel's First African American Male Graduate: William Sidney Pittman." *Drexel Now*, Last modified February 5, 2016, <http://drexel.edu/now/archive/2016/February/William-Sidney-Pittman/>.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, 319-320.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 321; "First Architect," 4; Stephen Fox, e-mail message to Carol Roark, May 4, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> "Negro Pythians Meet." *Dallas Morning News*, June 13, 1916, 9.

<sup>26</sup> "The Pythian Temple, One of Dallas' Show Places." *Dallas Express*, June 7, 1924, 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Gerald D. Saxon, ed., *The WPA Dallas Guide and History: Written and compiled from 1936 to 1942 by the workers of the Writers Program of the Works Progress Administration in the City of Dallas*. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1992), 295.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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and offices for social service organizations. Among the organizations that held conventions or met in the temple are the Lone Star State Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, the Black and Tan faction of the Republican Party – where leader William Madison McDonald spoke, and the Negro Voters League.<sup>29</sup> Other notable events hosted in the Temple's fourth-floor auditorium were a March 1919 concert by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who toured the country popularizing African American sacred music, a speech in October 1919 by Sargent Neatham Roberts, an African American World War I hero, and George Washington Carver who, in January 1923, demonstrated sweet potato products for an audience of 800 people.<sup>30</sup>

The Knights of Pythias, as did many other fraternal organizations, built a multi-story building so that their meetings and associated rituals could be carried out on upper floors, out of public view. Rentable space on the ground floor, and in the case of the Pythian Temple two other floors, helped defray the cost of maintaining and operating the building. When the Temple building opened, the ground floor held a restaurant called George & Prescott, operated by William George and Jerry Prescott, a barber shop operated by M. M. Rodgers (who also served as Secretary for the Pythian Grand Lodge when the Temple first opened, but left after a protracted legal battle with Grand Chancellor W. S. Willis), and Hooper's Drug Store owned and managed by Dennis V. Hooper. Offices provided space for three physicians (Dr. Philip M. Sunday, Dr. M. Patrick Penn, and Texas' first African American surgeon, Dr. Benjamin R. Bluit), three dentists (Dr. Marcellus C. Cooper – the first African American dentist in Texas, Dr. F. J. Hawkins, and Dr. George W. White), two attorneys (D. M. Mason and civil rights leader Ammon S. Wells), four realtors (William P. Wallick, E. Thomas, Thomas B. Madison, and W. W. Canton), two insurance agents/companies (L. A. Marshall and the American Mutual Benefit Association – which has been called the largest African American business west of the Mississippi), and grocer H. W. Scott.<sup>31</sup>

Tenants changed over the years – Temple Drug Store replaced Hooper's – but those who had offices in the Temple building were often community leaders whose work extended far beyond their profession. Among the other notable tenants were Dr. Edgar E. Ward, a physician who also served as the "Negro mayor of Dallas" and Dr. Albert Homer Dyson, a dentist who helped found the Moorland YMCA, the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, the *Dallas Express* and *Dallas Star Post* newspapers, and Hamilton Park a post-World War II African American middle-class residential neighborhood. Also, Dr. Richard T. Hamilton, the physician and surgeon for whom Hamilton Park was named, optometrist John O. Chisum who helped found the Moorland YMCA and led Love Field area residents in a fight opposing the expansion of the airfield, and William H. Griggs, an attorney and trustee for the Freedmen's Cemetery. The Pythian Temple Red Cross Auxiliary and the state and local headquarters for the African American arm of the YMCA also had offices in the Temple for several years.<sup>32</sup>

The Pythians also made extensive use of the Temple building to carry out their own work. A June 14, 1919, *Dallas Express* article covered the 35<sup>th</sup> annual session of the Grand Knights, reporting that 174 lodges in Texas were, "in good and regular standing." Separate endowment receipts (insurance premium payments) stood at \$78,828.15, with payments to beneficiaries totaling \$61,550.42. Regular annual receipts of \$58,667.78 included \$3,534.80 from rents in the Pythian Temple.<sup>33</sup> Reports from the 1920 meeting indicated that the Grand Lodge had 13,000 members state-wide,

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<sup>29</sup> "Negro Doctors Meeting Here." *Dallas Morning News*, October 18, 1917, 13. The Lone Star State Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, founded in 1886, was a professional association for African American medical practitioners. Reportedly almost all of the association's 150 members attended the 1917 conference at the Pythian Temple. "Black and Tans Argue Principle." *Dallas Morning News*, 16; "Local Notes." *Dallas Morning News*, March 29, 1923, 2.

<sup>30</sup> "Coming! The Celebrated Fisk Jubilee Singers." Advertisement. *Dallas Express*, March 8, 1919, 1; "Tuskegee Wizard Astounds Dallas Audience with Discoveries." *Dallas Express*, February 3, 1923, 1; [http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMN7HM\\_Knights\\_of\\_Pythias\\_Temple\\_Dallas\\_TX](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMN7HM_Knights_of_Pythias_Temple_Dallas_TX).

<sup>31</sup> Dallas City Directory. (Dallas: John F. Worley Directory Co., 1917), 1000.

<sup>32</sup> Dallas City Directory. (Dallas: John F. Worley Directory Co., 1922), 1557; Dallas City Directory. (Dallas: John F. Worley Directory Co., 1927), 2024.

<sup>33</sup> "Grand Lodge, Colored K. of P. of Texas in Convention Assembled." *Dallas Express*, June 14, 1919, 1, 4.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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and that 3,000 of those were attending the annual session.<sup>34</sup> Meetings of both the state (or grand) lodge were held at regular intervals, and the *Dallas Express* published many articles about these events, supplying detailed lists of standing committees, officers, meeting agenda, and financial statements. The Pythians also let groups use the building for civic purposes, including go-to-school campaigns, a place to pay poll taxes, and – during the Great Depression – an employment bureau for African Americans.<sup>35</sup>

The Great Depression dealt the Colored Knights of Pythias Texas a harsh blow. They depended on many small insurance contract payments from people who bought policies because they did not have enough money to cover death and burial expenses on their own. Without jobs, many customers let their policies lapse. Both white and black-owned private insurance companies were also taking their clients. The Temple was built just before the “golden age” of fraternalism in the 1920s, when membership was at its peak. During the Depression, many members lapsed, unable to pay their dues.<sup>36</sup> The Pythians suffered a great loss when their leader, Grand Chancellor William S. Willis who had led the Grand Lodge since the Temple was built, died on August 28, 1929, at the age of 52.<sup>37</sup> The organization struggled through the 1930s, fighting to keep the Temple offices leased. For example, the Dallas City Directory lists nineteen building tenants (not counting the Pythians themselves) for the Pythian Temple in 1927, but only eight by 1938. Programs were still offered, for example: an annual “Dallas County Meat Show” which offered prize ribbons for the best exhibits, was held at the Temple in 1935 and 1936, and a Dallas Negro Charity Center which helped distribute aide to African American children and the aged from their Temple office between 1938 and at least 1940.<sup>38</sup>

The Pythian’s difficult situation began to collapse completely when Mahaley Beverley, a widow in Robertson County, filed suit to get a \$575 death and burial benefit owed to her. Her case caught the attention of Texas Attorney General Gerald C. Mann, who intervened in the original suit seeking to close down the organization. Mann’s petition stated that the Grand Lodge Colored Knights of Pythias Texas organization was insolvent, with unpaid death claims of between \$80,000 and \$90,000. In November 1939, Mann sought to revoke the organization’s charter and appoint a receiver to manage and close down the organization.<sup>39</sup> Determined to keep control of the building, five Dallas Pythian lodges sought a restraining order to prevent the court-appointed receiver from “appropriating” the building. The Dallas lodges’ suit said that the Grand Lodge had only used the building under a trust agreement, and that they, in fact, owned the building.<sup>40</sup> The suit was heard in the 101<sup>st</sup> District Court on Tuesday, July 30, 1940, and Judge Claude McCallum awarded title to the Pythian Temple building, valued at \$52,000, to the five Dallas lodges.<sup>41</sup> The building continued to function and offer office space – including a Dallas County office where “Negro juvenile delinquency” cases were handled -- but faced a problem with \$12,000 due in back property taxes.<sup>42</sup> After extensive legal wrangling, the building was finally placed in receivership and sold to Ben Ackerman on November 15, 1944 for \$6,500.<sup>43</sup> The final mention of

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<sup>34</sup> “Three Thousand Pythians Meeting in Grand Session,” *Dallas Express*, June 12, 1920, 1.

<sup>35</sup> “Negroes of Dallas Plan Go-to-School Campaign,” *Dallas Morning News*, December 17, 1921, 12; “Saturday Last Day for Payment of Poll Taxes,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 31, 1925, 13; “Negro Employment Bureau,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 10, 1931, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 59.

<sup>37</sup> “Negro Leader Dies,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 8, 1929, 13.

<sup>38</sup> “Dallas Negroes Plan Meat Show,” *Dallas Morning News*, March 22, 1936, 2; “Negro Charity Center Opens Offices Here,” *Dallas Morning News*, December 2, 1938, 16.

<sup>39</sup> “Receiver to Be Asked for Negro Lodge,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 23, 1939, 9; “Colored Knights of Pythias,” Texas Department of Insurance, accessed April 29, 2016,

[https://apps.tdi.state.tx.us/pcci/pcci\\_show\\_profile.jsp?tdiNum=754&companyName=Colored%20Knights%20of%20Pythias&sysTypeCode=CL](https://apps.tdi.state.tx.us/pcci/pcci_show_profile.jsp?tdiNum=754&companyName=Colored%20Knights%20of%20Pythias&sysTypeCode=CL).

<sup>40</sup> “Negro Pythians Get Writ to Oust Their Grand Lodge,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 29, 1939, 8.

<sup>41</sup> “Negro K.P. Lodges Win \$52,000 Suit Over Old Building,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1940, 1.

<sup>42</sup> “Negro Juvenile Office to be Opened Shortly to Handle Delinquents,” *Dallas Morning News*, March 28, 1941, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Deed of sale from Will G. Knox, Receiver for Grand Lodge Colored Knights of Pythias of Texas, in Receivership to Ben



Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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a program held in the Pythian Temple in the white press was an announcement in the *Dallas Morning News* that a meeting to explain the benefits due African American veterans under the GI Bill of Rights would be held at the Temple on May 20, 1945.<sup>44</sup>

### Post-Knights of Pythias Era, 1945-Present

By at least December 1945, Winters Furniture had moved into the building.<sup>45</sup> In August 1946, a midnight fire broke out in the fourth floor of the building formerly used by the Pythians as a ballroom. That level was being used by a leather goods manufacturing company, and various office machine and furniture companies occupied the other three floors.<sup>46</sup> Those and similar companies remained until 1956 when the Physicians Life and Accident Insurance Company of Texas purchased the building from Ackerman for \$100,000.<sup>47</sup> Union Bankers Insurance Company acquired the building in 1959 when it was sold by the receiver for Physicians Life.<sup>48</sup> Union Bankers, chartered in 1953, grew rapidly during the 1950s, moving to larger and larger office spaces in or around downtown Dallas every few years. The firm began a remodeling project shortly after acquiring the former Pythian Temple, and work on the building accelerated after Margaret Brand Smith was named president of the company in 1960. By 1965, the company had purchased the southern half of the block bounded by Elm, Good-Latimer, Gaston, and Hawkins with plans to erect a new company headquarters on the site, a project that was never undertaken.<sup>49</sup>

Union Bankers operated out of the former Temple building without much notice until 1984 when the structure was nominated for City of Dallas landmark status because of its significance to Dallas's African American community and because it had been designed by William Sidney Pittman. Union Bankers opposed the designation, and the Dallas City Council, unable to reach the three-fourths majority needed to designate the building, refused to designate the building over owner objections.<sup>50</sup> Strong support for the Pythian Temple still existed in the African American and historic preservation communities and, in 1989, the City of Dallas landmark designation was again brought to the table. Union Bankers still objected to having the building designated as a landmark, but decided not to put up a fight because those advocating for landmark status had secured support from Council members. The vote still required a three-fourths majority, but this time the vote to designate the Knights of Pythias Temple as a city landmark was unanimous. The Pythian Temple was the first building in Dallas designated as a city landmark over owner objections.<sup>51</sup>

Union Bankers moved out of the building in the mid-1990s, as the financial health of their parent holding company, Southwestern Life, faltered. The vacant building was sold to Southwest Properties Group in 1995, with plans for redevelopment that never came to fruition.<sup>52</sup> Three years later, it was sold to the building's current owner, Westdale Properties America 1, Ltd.<sup>53</sup> The building has remained vacant for over twenty years, awaiting redevelopment. Current

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Ackerman, November 15, 1944 (filed January 20, 1945), Dallas County, Texas, Vol. 2523, pp. 518-519, Dallas County Deed Records, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>44</sup> "Negro Vets Session," *Dallas Morning News*, May 3, 1945, 14.

<sup>45</sup> "Winters Furniture advertisement," *Dallas Morning News*, December 27, 1945, 8B.

<sup>46</sup> "Fire Damages Dallas Plant," *Dallas Morning News*, August 7, 1946, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Deed of Sale from Ben and Ruth Ackerman to Physicians Life and Accident Insurance Company of America, May 28, 1956 (filed June 7, 1956), Vol. 4512, pp. 528-529, Dallas County Deed Records, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>48</sup> "Notice of Receivers Sale C. H. Langdeau, Receiver Physicians Life and Accident Insurance Company of America," *Dallas Morning News*, February 15, 1959, 21C.

<sup>49</sup> "Elm Street Purchase Gives Union Bankers Entire Block," *Dallas Morning News*, November 29, 1965, 23.

<sup>50</sup> James T. Bratton, "We Should 'Preserve' Dallas," *Dallas Morning News*, January 4, 1985, 13A; David Dillon, "Four for the Wrecking Ball? – Dallas May Still Have a Chance to Save its Past," *Dallas Morning News*, May 25, 1986, 1C.

<sup>51</sup> James Ragland, "Black Architect's Hall Designated a City Landmark," *Dallas Morning News*, October 26, 1989, 28A.

<sup>52</sup> Steve Brown, "Project Planned in Deep Ellum – Developer Acquires 2 Blocks," *Dallas Morning News*, September 1, 1995, 1D.

<sup>53</sup> Steve Brown, "Deep Ellum Developer Takes on Historic Site," *Dallas Morning News*, April 29, 1998, 1D.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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plans, by Westdale and its partners, KDC Real Estate Development & Investments and StreetLights Residential, call for the Pythian Temple to be redeveloped as a boutique hotel as part of a mixed-use project.<sup>54</sup>

## Summary

The 1916 Grand Temple of the Black Knights of Pythias was designed by William Sidney Pittman, one of the foremost African-American Architects of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and stands as one of his most prominent works. In addition to serving as the state headquarters for the Knights, the building held offices of black doctors, dentists, and lawyers. It was the first major commercial building built for and by African Americans in Dallas. An auditorium-ballroom on the top floor was used for dances, assemblies, parties, conferences, lectures, and other types of social gatherings. At one time the *Dallas Express*, a weekly black newspaper, was published in the Temple. The temple served as the state headquarters of a significant African-American fraternal organization, which wrote insurance policies and in many ways supported African-American businesses, including providing office space for a variety of tenants in the building. The building retains enough integrity to be listed under Criterion A in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage/Black, at the local and state levels of significance.

### State Headquarters of an Important African-American Fraternal Organization

As the headquarters of a state fraternal organization that promoted the business, education, and welfare of African Americans statewide, the building represents a significant investment within the state's Black population, a remarkable achievement during the Jim Crow era. The Knights of Pythias organization followed the principles of other fraternal organizations, offering an opportunity for business leaders to meet and work together to support Black enterprises in the city and state. Members were leaders in the community including Fort Worth Businessman William McDonald, founder of Fraternal Bank and Trust.

### Most Prominent Black-owned Office Building and Public Venue in the City of Dallas

At the local level, the building housed offices of Black professionals who had limited opportunities to rent office space elsewhere in Dallas. The building was a key address for commerce, as it was the most prominent Black-owned office building in the city. The auditorium allowed the building to serve as a significant cultural center, as a venue for notable speakers, including the nationally-renowned George Washington Carver. The building also offered meeting space for numerous organizations.

### Comparison to similar properties; Rare example of a type

The only other large-scale early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Texas associated with African-Americans in Texas are churches, schools, and colleges. The Knights of Pythias building, however, as the home of a private African American secular organization, and as a major office building, is without peer in the state. Other early 20<sup>th</sup> buildings associated Black organizations in Texas include a few small fraternal lodges, which are significant at the local level. Due to the loss of similar building statewide through demolition, no other building in the city or state compares to the Knights of Pythias Building, which stands as the:

- Largest extant Black fraternal building in the city and state.
- Only known early 20<sup>th</sup> century statewide Black fraternal headquarters in the state.

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Wilonsky, "Your First Look at the Epic Office Complex and Hotel Planned at the Entrance to Deep Ellum," Dallas Morning News City Hall Blog, accessed May 3, 2016, <http://cityhallblog.dallasnews.com/2015/10/your-first-look-at-the-epic-office-complex-and-hotel-planned-at-the-entrance-to-deep-ellum.html/>.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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- Largest early 20<sup>th</sup> century building associated with the African American business community in Texas.
- Rare example of a large early 20<sup>th</sup>-century building commissioned and owned by an African-American organization other than a church or college.

**Appendix:** Knights of Pythias Building Tenants (selected years, per Dallas City Directory)

**1917**

- Dennis V. Hooper, Mgr., Hooper's Drug Store
- William George and Jerry Prescott , George & Prescott (restaurant),
- M. M. Rodgers, barber, Sec: Black Baptist State Convention and. State Grand Lodge, Knights of Pythias
- Marcellus C. Cooper, dentist, First African-American dentist in Texas
- L. A. Marshall, insurance
- William P. Wallick, real estate, Office in Pythian Temple, 1917-27
- E. Thomas, real estate
- H. W. Scott, grocer
- Thomas B. Madison, real estate
- American Mutual Benefit Assn., insurance
- F. J. Hawkins, dentist, Office in Pythian Temple, 1917-20
- D. M. Mason, attorney/politician, Early African American attorney; A. S. Wells studied under Mason; active with Wm. Madison McDonald in Republican politics
- Dr. Phillip M. Sunday, physician, Physician and civic leader; office in Pythian Temple 1917-29
- Dr. M. Patrick Penn, physician
- W. W. Canton, real estate
- Ammon S. Wells , lawyer, civil rights leader; office in Pythian Temple 1917-34
- Benjamin R. Bluitt, physician, First African-American surgeon in Texas
- George W. White, dentist

**1922**

- Temple Drug Store (Samuel T. Williamson, Jr., mgr.)
- Dr. Marcellus C. Cooper, dentist
- World Wonder Oil & Gas Co. (c) J. J. Allen (c), mgr. , "... largest company of its kind owned and controlled by colored people and has producing wells in Oklahoma and Texas." *The Afro American*, Baltimore, MD., September 21, 1923.<sup>55</sup>
- Excelsior Mutual Benefit Assn. (Henry Strickland, pres.)
- Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge. W. S. Willis (Waco, Texas), grand chancellor
- Ammon S. Wells, lawyer
- William P. Wallick, real estate
- Dr. Edgar E. Ward, physician; also served as "Negro Mayor of Dallas" for 1938<sup>56</sup>
- Eagle Mutual Benefit Assn. (Dallas branch) (Wash A. Russell, pres.)
- Superior Benefit Assn. (Jesse G. McDonald, mgr.)
- Golden Chain of the World, Fraternal organization – (Thomas E. Tolan, Supreme Knight)
- Dr. Philip M. Sunday, physician
- William H. Griggs, attorney; trustee for the Freedmen's Cemetery
- Y. M. C. A. Headquarters State and Local (Edward L. Gordon, sec.)

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<sup>55</sup><https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2211&dat=19230921&id=NismAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=Uf4FAAAAIBAJ&pg=3072,4422661&hl=en>

<sup>56</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, "Dallas Negro Mayor gets Cushion, Gavel, Bible at Installation." 2-4-1938, p. 2.

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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- Dr. Albert Homer Dyson, dentist; helped found Moorland YMCA, Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, Dallas Express and Dallas Star Post newspapers; helped establish Hamilton Park, a middle-class residential area for African Americans.
- Dr. Richard T. Hamilton, physician & surgeon; Hamilton Park named for him; helped found Rescue Normal Industrial Institute which provided vocational training and undertook many health initiatives in the African American community.<sup>57</sup>
- Dr. George W. White, dentist

### **1927**

- Temple Drug Store (Wayman E. Johnson, manager)
- Marcellus C. Cooper, dentist
- Dr. Hobart W. Reid, dentist
- Excelsior Mutual Benefit Association (Henry Strickland, pres.)
- Kaaba Temple (C. T. Bracken, general manager)
- Russell H. Trotter, physician
- John O. Chisum, optometrist<sup>58</sup>
- Ammon S. Wells, attorney
- William P. Wallick, real estate
- Edgar E. Ward, physician
- Eagle Mutual Benefit Association (Wash A. Russell, president)
- American Mutual Benefit Association (William E. C. Matthews, superintendent)
- William H. Griggs, lawyer
- Royal Cross Benevolent Assn. (Olin B. Claiborne, supervisor)
- Dickson Colored Orphans Home (William L. Dickson, superintendent)
- Philip M. Sunday, physician
- Albert Homer Dyson, dentist
- Dr. Richard T. Hamilton, physician
- Standard Life Insurance Co. (Lynn H. Williams, supervisor)

### **1938**

- The Dallas Gazette (shop) (Joseph H. Owens, editor & mgr.)
- Gazette Print Shop (Joseph H. Owens)
- Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge (colored) (James E. Smith, sec-treas.)
- Charles T. Brackins, insurance agent
- Cedar A. Walton, county agricultural agent
- Hattie R. Green, county home demonstration agent
- Albert Homer Dyson, dentist
- Richard T. Hamilton, physician
- American Bible Society, Dallas Division (Rev. Marcus L. Vaughters, mgr.)

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<sup>57</sup> DMN, 1-6-1957 Sec. 4, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Chisum was involved in Dallas civic life, was a founders of Moorland YMCA, and in 1952 led Love Field area residents in a fight against enlargement of the airfield. <http://dallaslibrary2.org/texas/archives/MA83-5.html>

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Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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Source: Google Earth, accessed June 3, 2016.

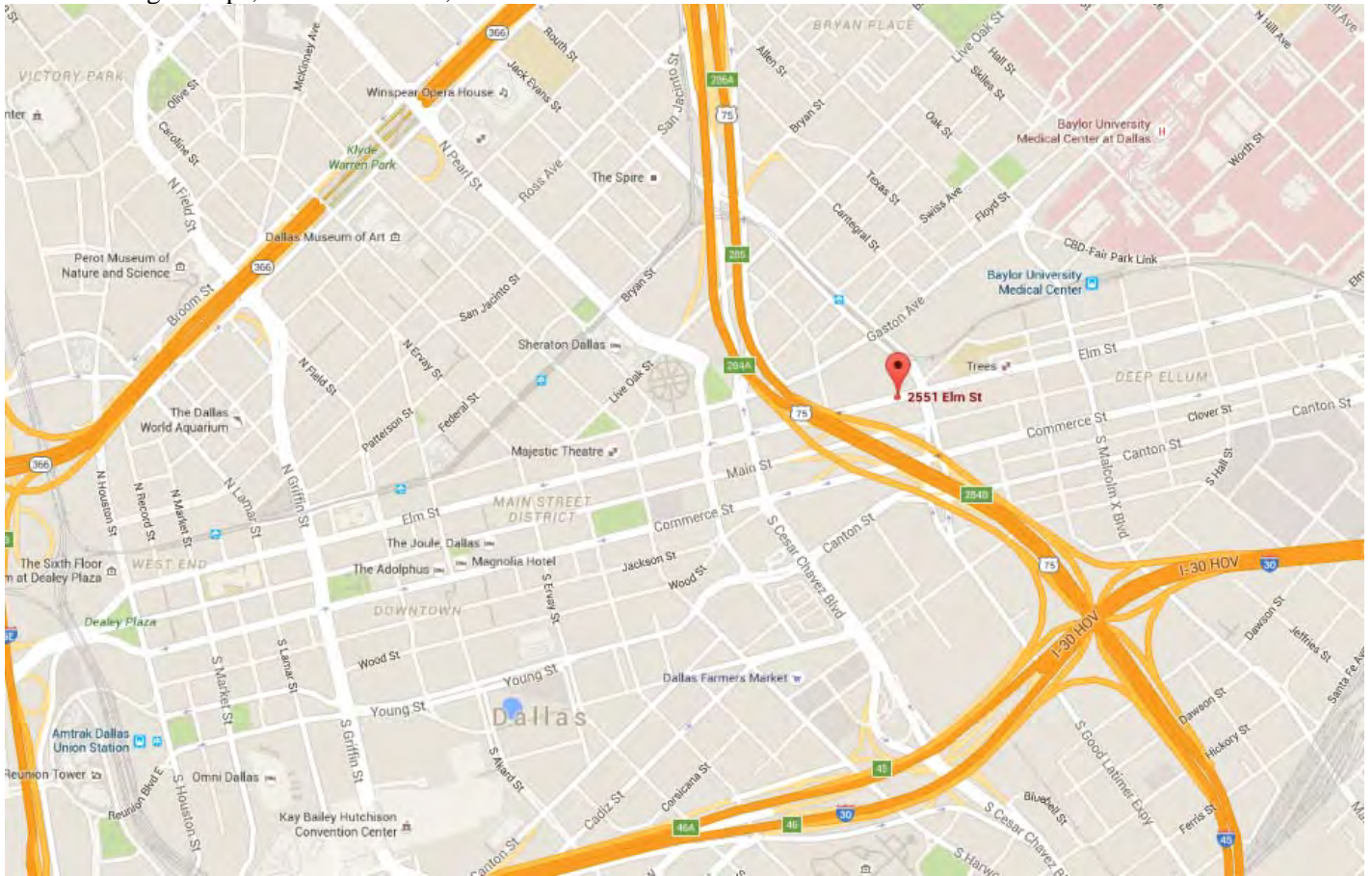




Dallas County, Texas

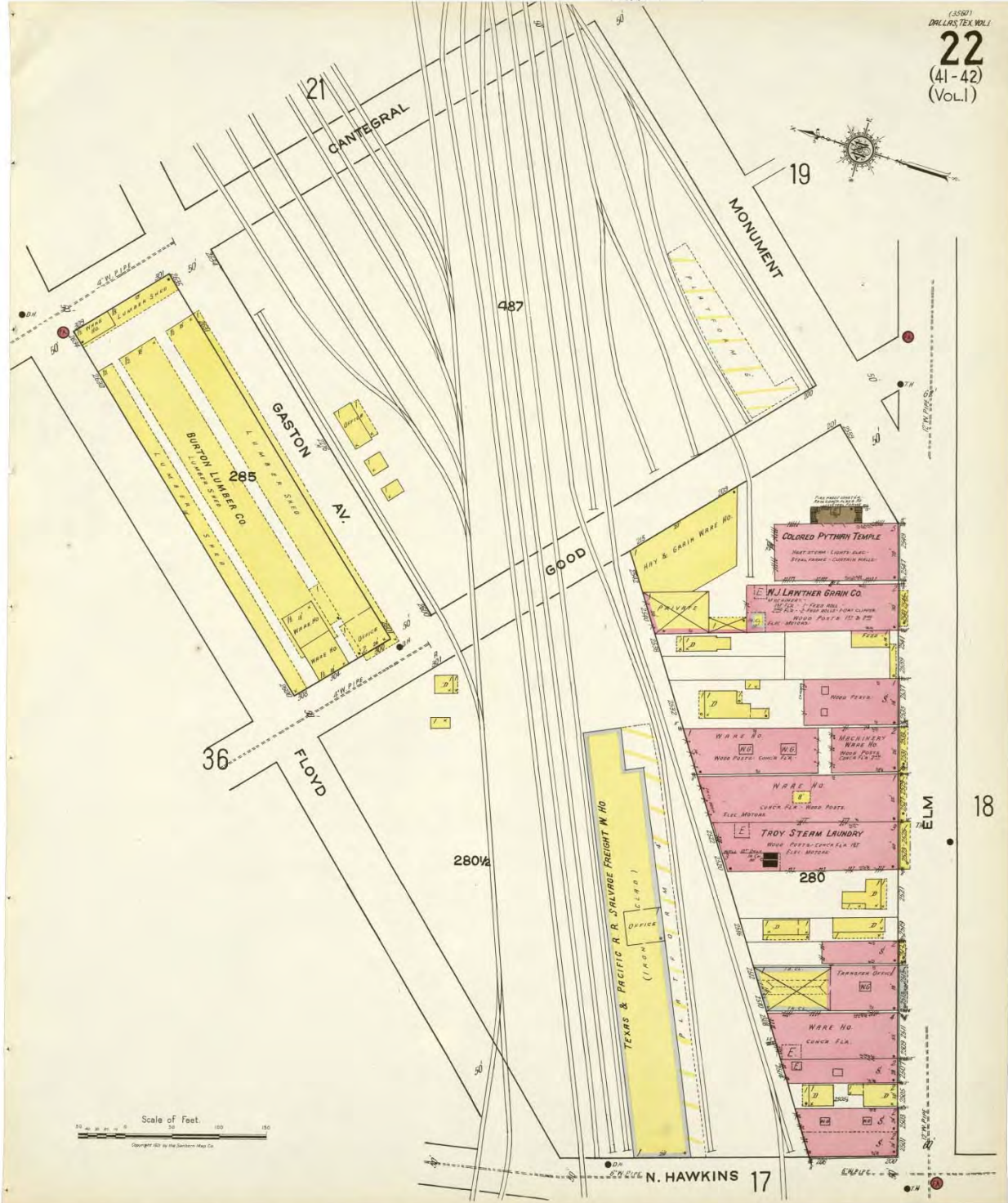


Source: Google Maps, accessed June 3, 2016



Sanborn Map, 1921

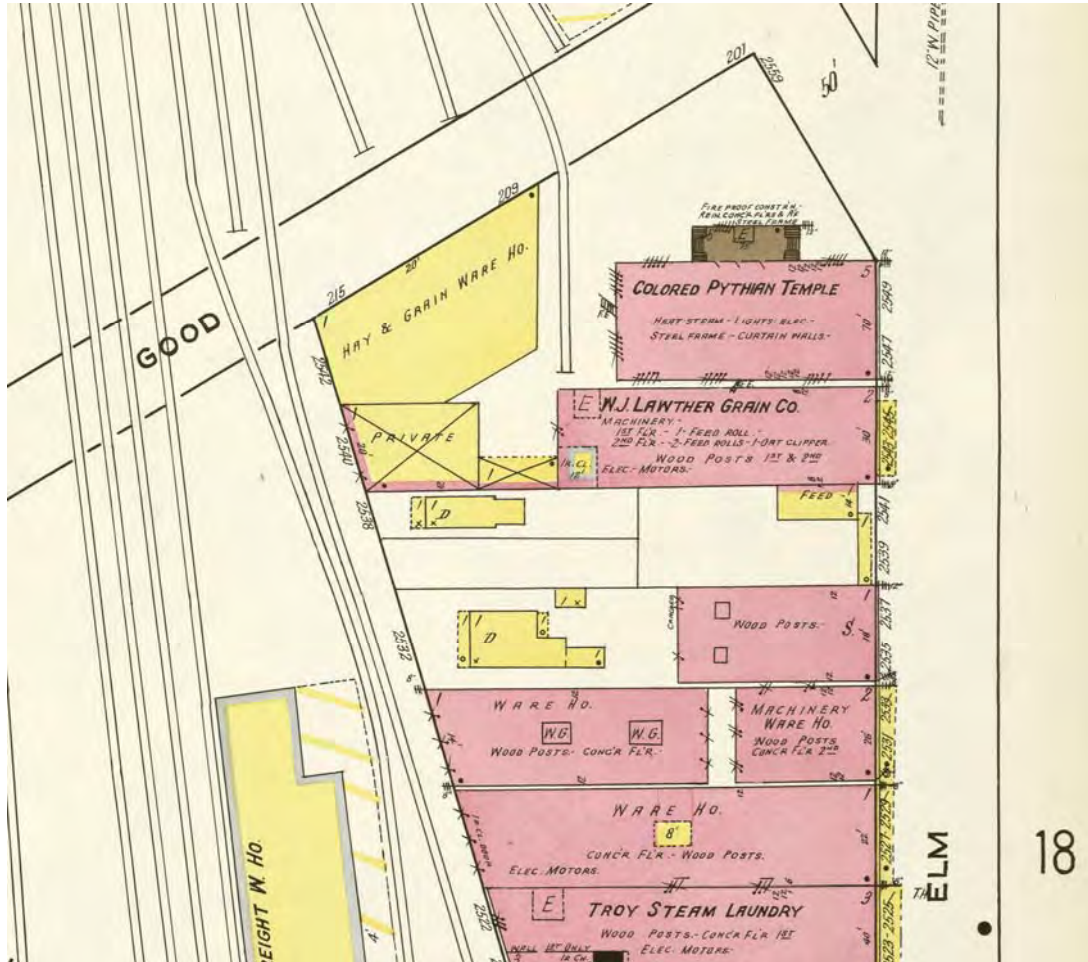
Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-dallas-1921-22.jpg>



Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

Sanborn Map, 1921 (detail)

Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/sanborn/d-f/txu-sanborn-dallas-1921-22.jpg>



Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Line Drawing of the Pythian Temple, c. 1923-24.

Source: Various issues of the *Dallas Express*. See, for example, *Dallas Express*, June 2, 1923, p. 2.



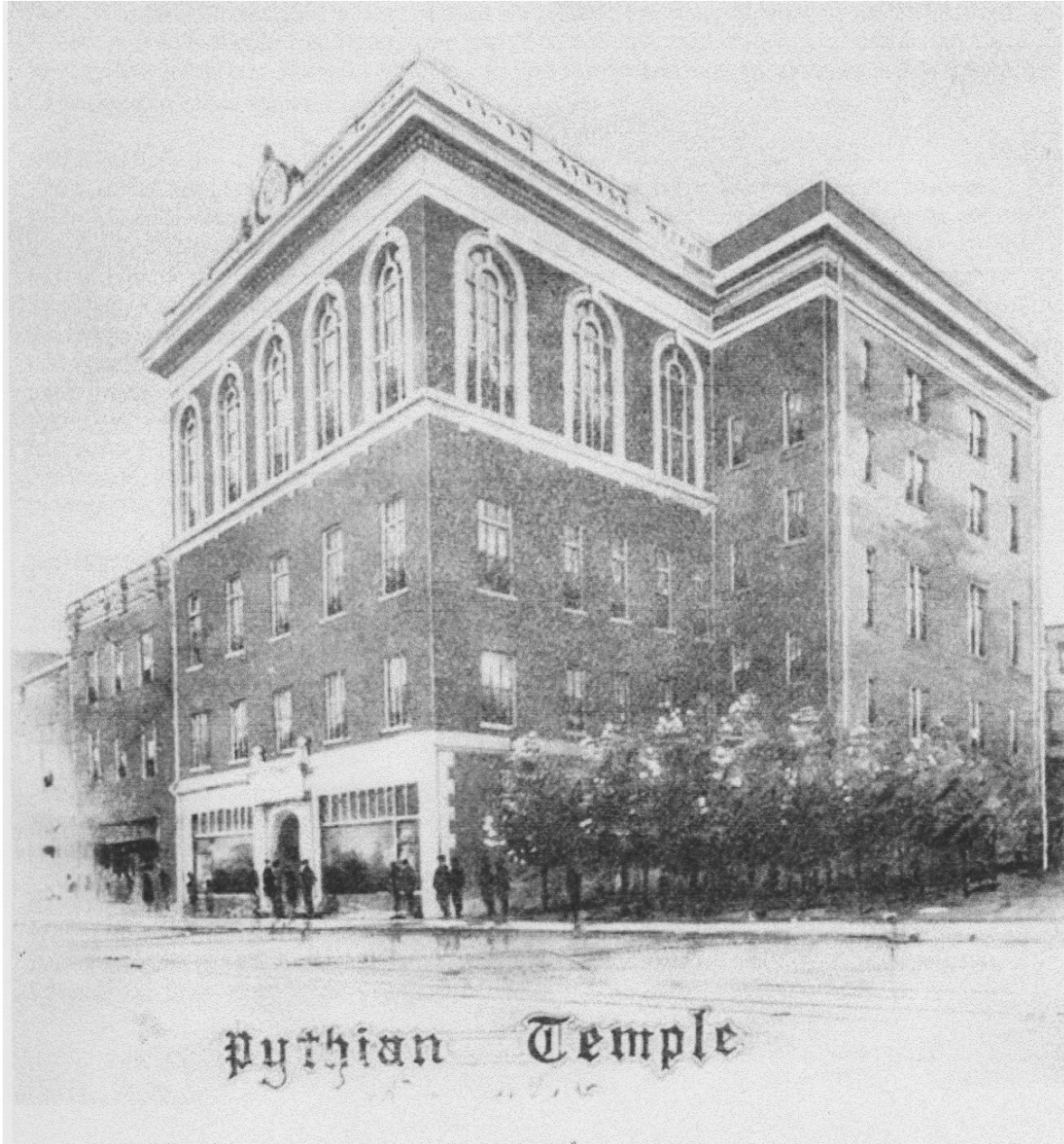
Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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Pythian Temple, 1919.

Bedford Family Collection, as reproduced in Robert Wilonsky, "Knights' Tale," *Dallas Observer*, December 20, 2007.



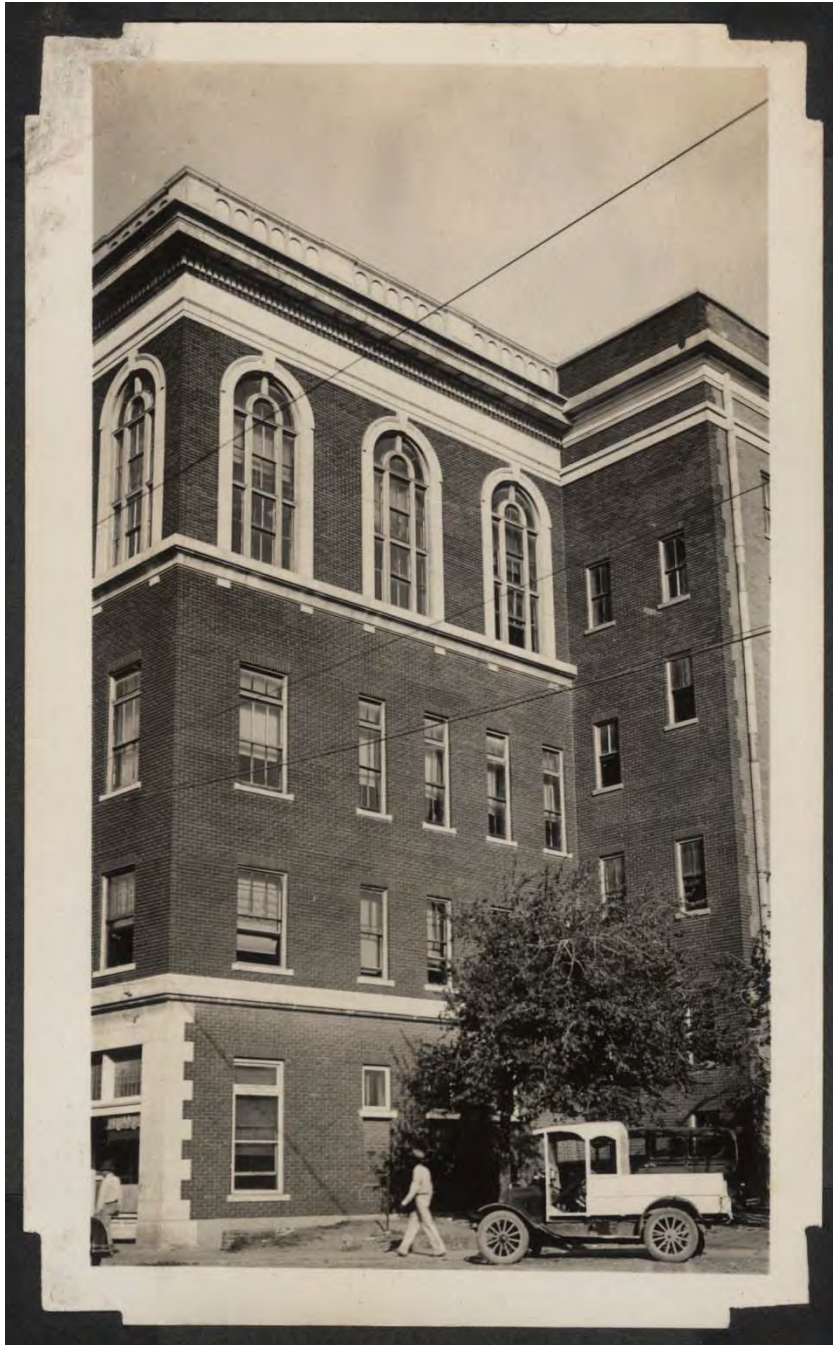
Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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Pythian Temple, c. 1932

Source: "Graphic History of Negro Dallas - Compiled by Priscilla Art Club 1932," George W. Cook Dallas/Texas Image Collection, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/gcd/id/95>.



Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Rear elevation of the Pythian Temple and W. J. Lawther Grain Co., c. 1930-38

Source: Frank Rogers Photograph Collection (PA78-2/746), Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library.



Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

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Squire Haskins photograph of an April 17, 1951, fire at Wheat Furniture Co.; former Pythian Temple on right (east).  
Source: "2 Fires Blamed on Carelessness," *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1951, Section 3, p. 1.





Wheat Furniture Store fire at 2545 Elm Street, showing the Pythian Temple on the right, 1951.  
Source: Hayes Brothers Photography Collection (PA76.1/1827.2), Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library



[www.dallaslibrary.org](http://www.dallaslibrary.org)

Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas

Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Knights of Pythias, 1985.

Source: Marion Butts Photography Collection (PA2005-4/12955-1.1), Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library



Ground Floor Plan

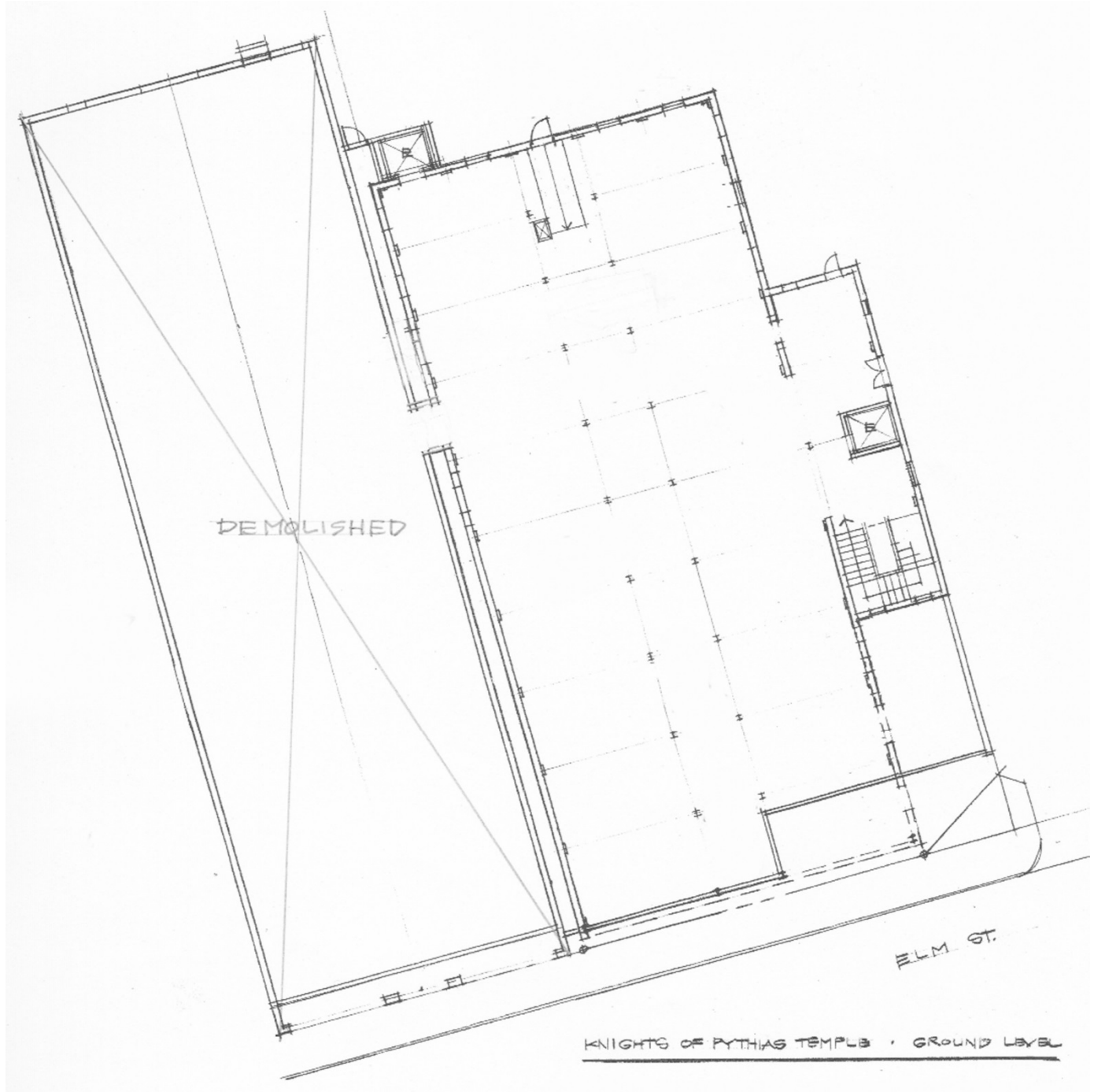


Photo 1, southeast exterior facades, February 13, 2016



Photo 2, north exterior facades, Good Latimer view, May 3, 2016



Photo 3, east exterior façade, Good Latimer view, February 13, 2016



Photo 4, northwest oblique, March 29, 2016



Photo 5, west exterior façade, March 29, 2016



Photo 6, southwest cornice detail, May 3, 2016



Photo 7, south view, Elm Street storefront, May 3, 2016



Photo 8, east cornice detail, October 24, 2014



Photo 9, interior looking north, ground floor, May 14, 2015



Photo 10, interior looking east, ground floor, elevator and stairwell wall, May 14, 2015





Photo 11, interior looking southeast, ground floor, original stairwell, May 14, 2015



Photo 12, interior looking west, second floor, added loading door and original window trim, May 14, 2015



Photo 13, interior looking east, third floor, added dumbwaiter, May 14, 2015



Photo 14, interior looking west, third floor, original window openings, May 14, 2015



Photo 15, interior looking northeast, third floor, landing of original stairwell, May 14, 2015

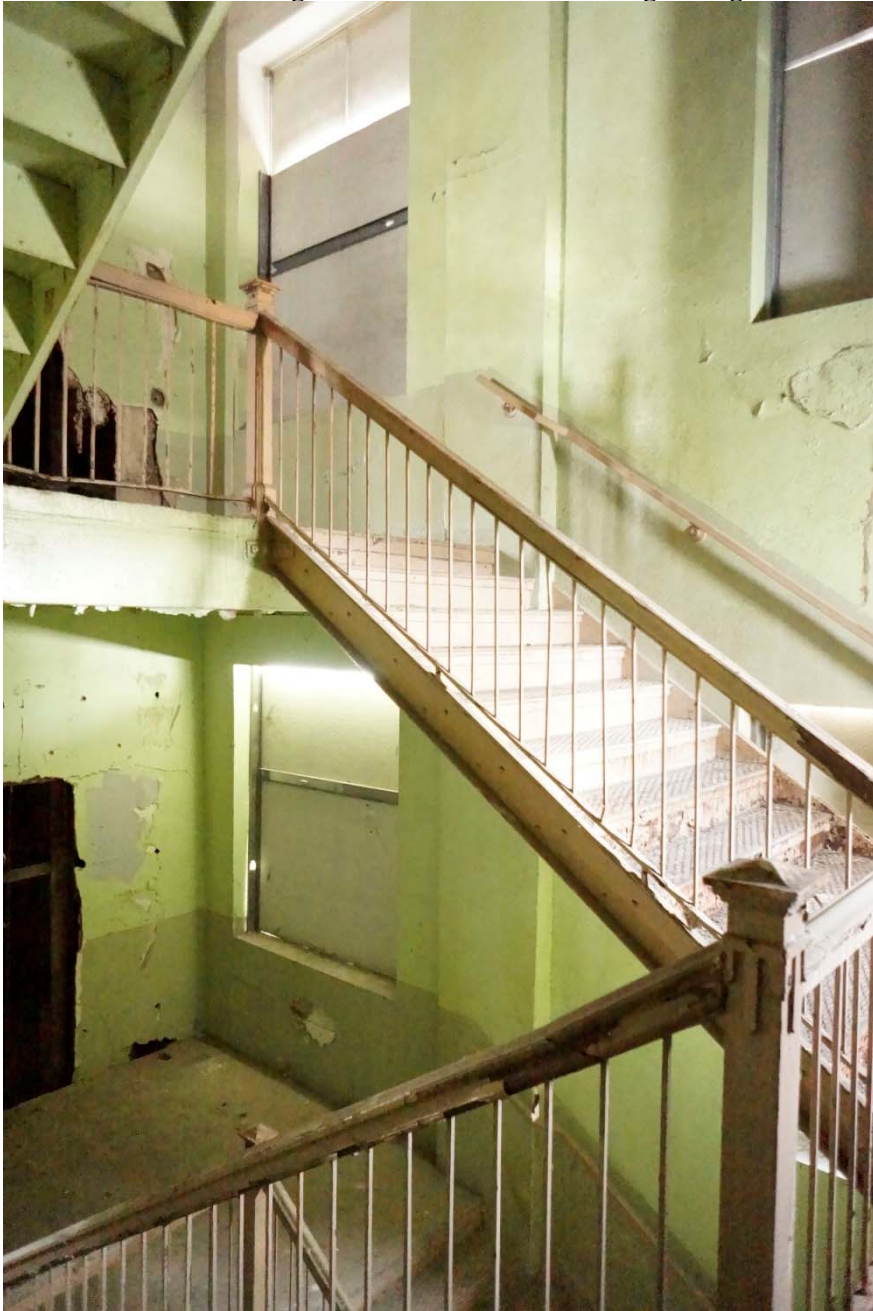


Photo 16, interior looking north, fourth floor, May 14, 2015



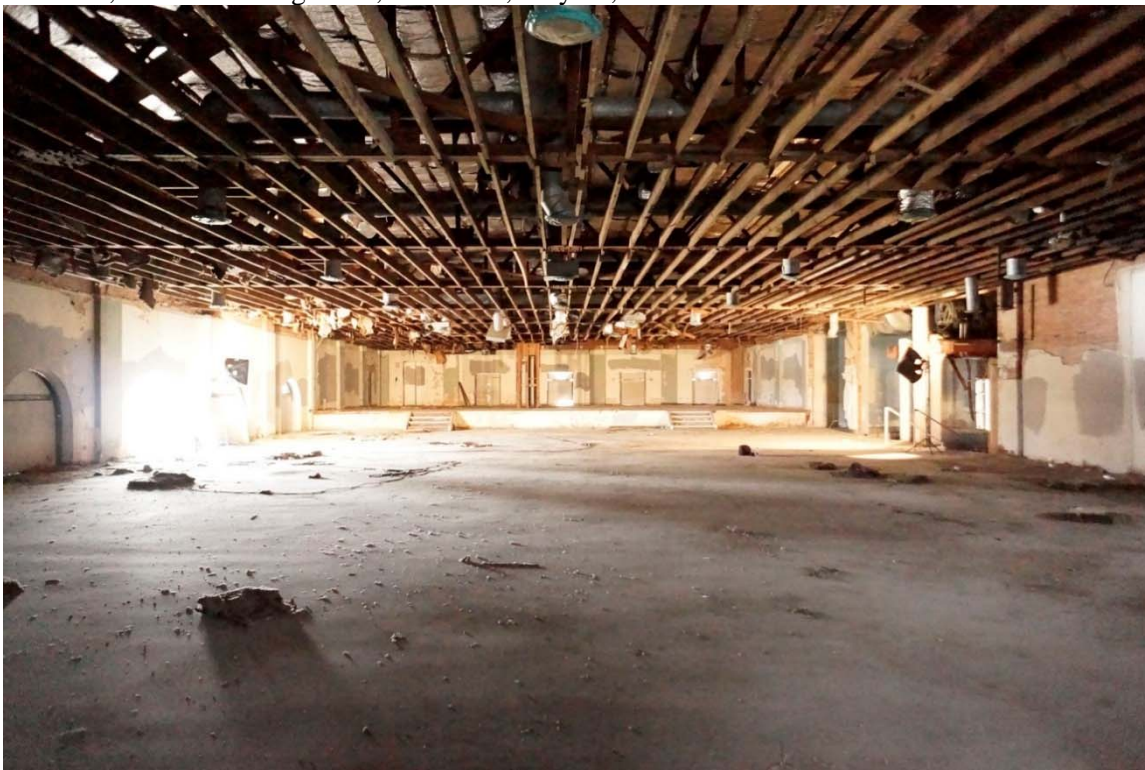
Photo 17, interior looking west, fourth floor, stage and steps, May 14, 2015



Photo 18, interior looking southeast, fourth floor, elevator and stairwell, May 14, 2015



Photo 19, interior looking north, fifth floor, May 14, 2015



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias

Multiple Name:

State & County: TEXAS, Dallas

Date Received:  
1/6/2017

Date of Pending List:

Date of 16th Day:

Date of 45th Day:  
2/21/2017

Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100000671

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

<i>Submission Type</i>	<i>Property Type</i>	<i>Problem Type</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other		<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years

Accept     Return     Reject    2/21/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias meets National Register Criterion A at the state and local levels in the areas of Social History and Ethnic Heritage-Black. Located on a prominent corner in the heart of Dallas' historic Deep Ellum African American neighborhood, the four-story, Beaux Arts-style, combined fraternal lodge and commercial building (1916) served as the home to the state headquarters and grand lodge of the Colored Knight of Phythias organization (the state's largest African American fraternal group). The lodge building was an important cultural institution and served as a significant social and commercial space for the local African American community during the early twentieth century. The building housed not only the lodge's important fraternal and insurance operations, but also provided professional office space to local African American businessmen. Despite unsympathetic alterations, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic character and significance.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept NR Criterion A

Reviewer: Paul Lusignan

Discipline: Historian

Telephone: (202)354-2229

Date: 2/21/17

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments Y/N    see attached SLR Y/N

**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
*real places telling real stories*



TO: Edson Beall  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)  
Washington, DC 20005

From: Mark Wolfe, SHPO  
Texas Historical Commission

RE: Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas (Dallas, Dallas County, Texas)

DATE: December 27, 2016

The following materials are submitted:

X	Original National Register of Historic Places form on disk. The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the National Register of Historic Places nomination of the Grand Lodge of the Colored Knights of Pythias, Texas (Dallas, Dallas County, Texas)
	Resubmitted nomination.
X	Original NRHP signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
	Multiple Property Documentation form on disk.
	Resubmitted form.
	Original MPDF signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
X	CD with TIFF photograph files, KMZ files, and nomination PDF
	Correspondence.

COMMENTS:

- SHPO requests substantive review (cover letter from SHPO attached)
- The enclosed owner objections (do\_\_\_) (do not\_\_\_) constitute a majority of property owners
- Other:

