

ADDRESS: 905-07 S 20TH ST

Name of Resource: Calanthe Hall

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Jerome Whack

Nominator: Nika Faulkner, Historical Commission Intern

Staff Contact: Heather Hendrickson, Heather.Hendrickson@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 905-07 S. 20th Street and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the two former brick rowhouses which have been combined into one property satisfy Criterion for Designation J. The nomination argues that Calanthe Hall's connection to the history of Philadelphia's Black fraternal organizations, especially Black female fraternal organizations, make it eligible for designation under Criterion J, as exemplifying the cultural, political, economic, social, and historical heritage of the community. The period of significance spans from 1941, when the property was sold to the Black female fraternal auxiliary of the Knights of Pythias called the Grand Court of Calanthe, to 2004 when the property was purchased by the current owner to ensure continued support of the fraternal organization and its community members in the Southwest Center City/Graduate Hospital neighborhood.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 905-07 S. 20th Street satisfies Criterion for Designation J and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.



NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 905-07 S. 20th St, Philadelphia, PA

Postal code: 19146

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Grand Court of Calanthe

Current/Common Name: Calanthe Hall

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☒ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Meeting/Dance Hall on 1st floor; residential units above

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1941 to 2004

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: c. 1870

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Unknown

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Unknown

Original owner: James Boal

Other significant persons: Edward & Joseph Galen, the Grand Court of Calanthe

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 8/18/2022

Name with Title Nika Faulkner, PHC intern Email nikafaulkner@gmail.com

Street Address 1515 Arch St. Telephone 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 18 August 2022

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 14 December 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: 15 December 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Jerome Whack

Address: 1947 Christian St.

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19146

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

NOMINATION

FOR THE

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Calanthe Hall - 905-07 S. 20th Street

Built Ca. 1870

Graduate Hospital / Southwest Center City
Philadelphia, PA



Figure 1, Aerial view of 905-07 S 20th St at the corner of S 20th and Montrose St., looking northwest. Source: Pictometry

5. Boundary Description

From the most recent deed transfer made on June 8th, 2004.

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the messuage or tenement thereon erected, situate on the East side of Twentieth Street at the distance of 94 feet Southward from the South side of Christian Street, in the Thirtieth Ward of the City of Philadelphia, Count of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Containing in front or breadth on the said Twentieth Street, 18 feet and extending of that with in length or depth Eastward between lines parallel with said Christian Street, 66 feet to a certain 4 feet wide alley, leading Southward into Montrose Street. Bounded Northwardly and Southwardly by ground granted to James Boal on ground rent, Eastwardly by said 4 feet wide alley and Westwardly by Twentieth Street aforesaid. Being known as 905 S. 20th Street, Philadelphia, PA.

AND ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the messuage or tenement thereon erected, situate at the Northwest corner of Twentieth and Montrose Streets in the Thirtieth Ward of the City of Philadelphia, County of Philadelphia, and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Containing in front or breadth of the said Twentieth Street, 18 feet and extending of that width in length or depth Eastward or that width along the North side of Montrose Street, 66 feet to a certain 4 feet wide alley which leads Southward into said Montrose Street. Bounded northward but ground now or late of James Boal, Southward by said Montrose Street, Eastward by said 4 feet wide alley and Westwardly by Twentieth Street aforesaid. Being known as 907 S. 20th Street, Philadelphia, PA.

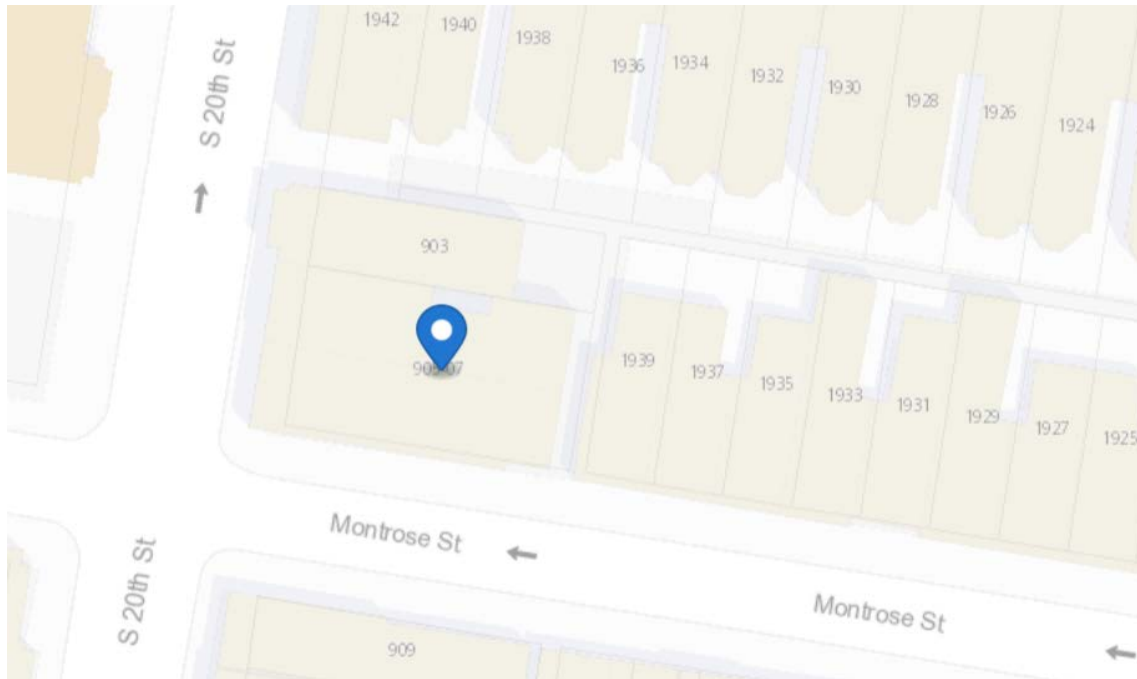


Figure 2, <https://atlas.phila.gov/905-07%20S%2020TH%20ST/property>.

6. Building Description

General

Originally two brick rowhouses at the corner of S. 20th Street and Montrose Street in South Philadelphia, Calanthe Hall is located primarily in the Southwest Center City neighborhood of Philadelphia, just one block south of the Christian Street/Black Doctor's Row Historic District. This area of Philadelphia is on the edge of two neighborhoods commonly known as Graduate Hospital (to the west) and Southwest Center City. There are a mix of building types nearby, from historic rowhouses, apartment buildings, and storefronts, to a few modern and contemporary builds. Directly across the street from Calanthe Hall is the Saint Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church. This brownstone Baroque church, designed by Edwin Durang, has been a pillar of the community since its construction in 1876.¹

The primary façade along S. 20th Street is veneered with a faux-brownstone cement at the first level. The upper stories are stucco over brick. The effect creates a more unified appearance between the originally separate structures. The original brick structure is still visible on the south elevation. The resulting

¹ *Church of St. Charles Borromeo. Twentieth and Christian Streets Philadelphia. [Graphic]: Rev. J. O'Reilly, Pastor / Edwin F. Durang, Architect; on Stone by A.B. McCloughlin.* Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections. Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A63634>.

combined building is three stories tall and deeper than it is wide. The roof is flat, crowned with an overhanging pressed metal cornice.



Figure 3, Primary façade of 905-07 S. 20th Street, Calanthe Hall.

Primary Façade (S. 20th Street, West Elevation)

The primary elevation of Calanthe Hall is four bays wide. The ground level composition is only three bays, the central of which contains the primary entrance. The bays on either side of the front entrance contain each a unified composition of three double-hung, one-over-one contemporary windows. In the grouped ribbon of three windows, the central window is more standard with square lights, while the two flanking sidelights are about half as wide. Below each ribbon is a basement level window infilled with glass block. They are both the same height. The faux brownstone is detailed to resemble red sandstone masonry blocks. Above each window and door on the first level, the faux brownstone has been designed to resemble a splayed lintel with a keystone. Whether this reflects the structure behind is

unknown, but unlikely considering the first story seems to have been altered more recently. At waist-height, a belt course is included in the design of the faux brownstone veneer. Close to the front entry, a horizontal metal handrail sits below the belt course on each side, both ends attached to the façade.

A small concrete threshold exists a step up from the sidewalk leading to the property's primary entrance. The doors are comprised of dark, warm-hued, wood panels, arranged in a diagonal design, each mirroring the other. Above is a transom with two narrow horizontal lights, one-over-one, the bottom one being very thin, the top being thicker. The transom looks to be a contemporary addition. On either side of the transom are a set of brass lamps. Matching brass hardware adorns the door.

The upper levels of the two northernmost bays, originally 905 S. 20th Street, differ from the southernmost, originally 907 S. 20th Street. The windows at 905 S. 20th Street, though now replaced, have rectangular openings with noticeable matching sills and lintels, which are potentially concrete or brick. At 907 S. 20th Street, the window openings have segmented arches at the top. The lintels at these windows have been obscured with stucco, but stone sills remain. Also, at this side of the building, between the second and third stories, are two diamond-shaped anchor bolts likely added to secure the façade to the building as it pulled away over time.



Figure 4, south façade along Montrose Street. First westernmost block in orange, second in yellow, third easternmost in green.

South Façade (Montrose Street Elevation)

The secondary façade along Montrose Street is seven bays wide with what we will refer to as three differing blocks. The entirety of the first level on this elevation is red painted brick. The first westernmost block closest to S. 20th Street shares materiality with the second. The first is two bays wide, while the middle block is three bays wide. The blocks are stuccoed on the second and third floors, matching the top two stories of the primary façade on S. 20th Street. The last, easternmost block is red painted brick on all three floors. All window openings on this façade are rectangular.

The first block (closest S. 20th Street) includes a double-hung one-over-one window in each bay on the bottom and top levels. While the sills are still visible at the second floor, the windows have been infilled and stuccoed. The glass block filled basement windows present on the primary façade can again be found in each bay at street level.

The second block flows from the first seamlessly, with matching materials and finishes. This block differs from the first in that it is three bays wide. At the first level, there is a secondary entrance in the easternmost bay for accessing the apartments above the meeting spaces of the first floor. The door sits atop three steps that look to be made of stone. The remaining two bays of this block include a window,

the same as the other windows on the building. At the second and third levels, the same windows exist in each bay, but a brick lintel is visible over the window above the entry.

The last block, furthest to the east, is entirely painted brick. It is two bays wide, with two garage doors at ground level, and windows in each bay above, resembling those on the rest of the building. A single-story projection exists to the east, containing a metal door for rear egress. On the roof of this projection is an exterior fire escape. The west wall of Calanthe Hall is free from any windows aside from a transom above the fire escape door.



Figure 5, view of the easternmost final bay on the southern façade including fire escape and exit, added later.



Figure 6, Smedley Atlas showing the lack of development in this area by 1862. North of this, heading towards Center City, more development is present. Samuel L. Smedley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, 1862, J.B. Lippincott & Co. Map Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA.

7.

Period of Significance: 1941-2004

Statement of Significance:

Calanthe Hall's connection to the history of Philadelphia's Black fraternal organizations, especially Black female fraternal organizations, make it eligible for designation under Criterion J, exemplifying the cultural, political, economic, social, and historical heritage of the community. Sold to the Black female fraternal auxiliary of the Knights of Pythias called the Grand Court of Calanthe in 1941, the modest property at 905-07 S. 20th Street can be seen as a physical testament to a history of African American organization and community involvement in the Southwest Center City/ Graduate Hospital neighborhood. As a mixed-use residential and commercial space (first as two separate entities, and then as one), the building has a long history of providing necessary resources to the community such as funerary services, grocery goods, and a cobbler. This property transitioned to a gathering place during the 19th century as a saloon, and most recently as a Black fraternal meeting space in the 20th and 21st centuries, offering space to both male and female fraternal groups. When owned by the fraternal group

of the Grand Court of Calanthe, the space was open to an array of event types, including receptions, political meetings, and even polling, all fostering economic, social, and political engagement. As Southwest Center City began gentrifying in the late 20th century, community member Jerome Whack purchased the property from the Grand Court of Calanthe in 2004 to ensure continued support of its fraternal organizations and community members. It remains a community resource to this day.

Historical Context

905-07 S. 20th Street – Representing the Shifting Culture of the 19th and 20th Centuries

Throughout Philadelphia, Irish immigration reached its height in the mid-19th century, alongside industrialization. The new Irish community supplied a large workforce and fed booming industries. The area surrounding 905-07 S. 20th Street primarily developed for the purpose of housing mill employees along Washington Ave, Grays Ferry Ave, and Passyunk Ave. Of the rowhouses that were built, some were completely residential while others had storefronts at ground level, like that at 905-07 S. 20th Street.²

The two rowhouses at 905-07 S. 20th Street were constructed sometime between 1862 and 1870 (Figure 6). The exact construction date of the property could not be determined, but the rowhouses were likely built by 1870 when James Boal purchased the land (along with multiple surrounding properties), from Isaiah Williamson.³ This range coincides with a period of development around industrial areas in Philadelphia.⁴ Likely at the time of their construction, Montrose Street was being extended to intersect with S. 20th Street (Figures 6 & 10, 10a).

James Boal's exact role in the evolution of this area is unclear. His 1899 obituary states that he had been a tailor, a farmer, and at one time, he had owned "considerable property" (Figure 8). In 1871, Boal sold 905 S. 20th Street to an Irish grocer named Francis Starrs.⁵ In 1877, Starrs sold the property to a John J. Fox. While Fox's background is unclear, the surname implies he too was of Irish descent.⁶

² Bobbye J. Burke, "St. Charles Borromeo Parish South Philadelphia 1868-1993." P 92.

³ City of Philadelphia, *JAH Deed Book 82*, p 234. Sept 24, 1870. Department of Records, City Archives.

⁴ Bobbye J. Burke, *St. Charles Borromeo Parish South Philadelphia 1868-1993*, P 92.

⁵ Year: 1900; Census Place: Philadelphia Ward 34, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Roll: 1476; Page: 10; Enumeration District: 0880; FHL microfilm: 1241476.

⁶ Padriag Mac Giolla-Domhnaigh, *Fox - Anglicized Surnames in Ireland - Library Ireland*, Library Ireland. Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://www.libraryireland.com/AnglicisedSurnames/Fox.php>.

U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995 for Francis Stars

Pennsylvania > Philadelphia > 1874 > Boyd's Philadelphia Directory, 1874

73		GRO	
Front	Seidel Gottlieb 236 Union	Stanley George 1241 e Cumberland	
	Selser Charles M 1100 Girard av	Starr Jeremiah 16th cor Summer	
	Senseman Sylvester 1212 n 28th	Starr John H 3307 Woodland	
	Setner Conrad 157 Poplar	Stars Francis 905 s 20th	
	Sharky Eliza 1644 Ridge av	Steen Thomas 9th & McKean	
	Snarp Thomas 4900 Kershaw av	Steinhart Herman 312 s 6th	
	Shaw Alexander Otis cor Blair	Steinhart Robert 114 s 6th	

Figure 7, 1874, Boyd's Philadelphia City Directory, Francis Stars at 905 S. 20th Street.

JAMES BOAL DROWNED
Supposed to Have Fallen Accident-
ally Into the Schuylkill

The body of James Boal, 77 years of age, of 4853 Chestnut street, was found yesterday morning floating in the Schuylkill River near the Lombard street wharf. It was taken to the Morgue, where it was identified in the afternoon by a friend of Mr. Boal.

At the residence, a son, Charles Boal, said that his father left home on Thursday morning to attend to some property down town. No trace of him was found afterward until the identification of the body. He had made the remark at home that he intended to order some wood and coal, and his son thinks that he might have visited one of the yards near the wharf for that purpose and accidentally fallen into the river.

Mr. Boal had many friends. His son said that he had no business or domestic troubles, and that he did not believe that he carried much money with him.

He came to this country from Belfast, Ireland, and was a tailor on South street at the time of the Civil War. Afterwards he took up farming in Burlington county, New Jersey. At one time he owned considerable property. He retired from business several years ago.

Besides the son with whom he lived, he leaves a widow and five sons and daughters, who are married.

Figure 8, James Boal Obituary, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 5, 1899, P 3.

While Southwest Center City was largely Irish-Catholic, Philadelphia's free Black community was centered east of Broad Street. In nearby South Philadelphia, the establishment of the Bethel and St. Thomas churches in the early 19th century attracted free Black families to the surrounding neighborhoods. By 1820, 75 percent of Black households in Philadelphia lived in the city's southern neighborhoods.⁷ Even if they found a developer or landlord willing to sell or rent to them, poor Black families had little choice over the homes and neighborhoods in which they lived.⁸

Many working-class whites became increasingly antagonistic in the first decades of the 19th century concerning economic competition with free Black Philadelphians.⁹ Black men were often excluded from industrial work. African Americans often found work as coachmen,

⁷ Dana Dorman, *Philadelphia's African American Heritage: A Brief Historic Context Statement for the Preservation Alliance's Inventory of African American Historic Sites* (Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. October 03, 2009.)

⁸ Du Bois, W.E.B. "Houses and Rent." In *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, 287–99. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899.

⁹ Dana Dorman, *Philadelphia's African American Heritage: A Brief Historic Context Statement for the Preservation Alliance's Inventory of African American Historic Sites* (Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. October 03, 2009.)

carters, barbers, cooks, craftspeople, washerwomen, and more. Whites considered these jobs low status, but still resented Black individuals who managed to find work in hard times. Through the 1830s and 1840s, racial tensions in the city continued to escalate while Philadelphia itself continued to grow. With the 1854 Act of Consolidation, many neighborhoods originally on the periphery of the city became an official part of Philadelphia.¹⁰ Prior to this, what is now Southwest Center City/ Graduate Hospital was considered part of Moyamensing.¹¹

In 1861, the Civil War prompted Black Philadelphians to rally to the Union cause and, when given the freedom to serve in the Union Army, many signed up to fight. The Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 freed the slaves in the Confederate South, and shortly after, Congress approved the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and officially abolished slavery nationwide. With a new, large, free Black population, demographic boundaries began to shift.

¹⁰ For more information on the Consolidation Act of 1854, please visit <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/consolidation-act-of-1854/>.

¹¹ Sally F, *Blog: A History Minute: Neighborhood Beginnings - Moyamensing (Aka Evergreen, Schuylkill, Graduate Hospital, South of South)*, Free Library of Philadelphia. Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/blog/post/3086>.



Figure 9, St. Charles Borromeo at 900 S 20th St, Philadelphia, PA. Across the street from 905-07 S 20th St (Court of Calanthe). Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church, 900 South Twentieth Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, PA. Pennsylvania Philadelphia County Philadelphia, 1933. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/pa0795/>.

By the later 19th century, the Irish community in Southwest Center City/Graduate Hospital had grown roots, establishing businesses and cultural institutions alongside new housing. Across the street from 905-07 S. 20th Street, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church opened its doors in 1876 (Figure 6).¹² With many Irish-Catholic parishioners ready to attend services, it provided a cornerstone of the community

¹² Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections, *Church of St. Charles Borromeo. Twentieth and Christian Streets Philadelphia*.

and confirmed that the corner of S. 20th and Montrose Streets, which was not far from the bustling Christian Street, was an important intersection.



Figure 10 & 10a, Showing immense development since 1895. The area around and including 905-907 S. 20th Street has become largely residential aside from a handful of cultural institutions. Note the factories on Washington Ave. Source: George W. & Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1895*, G.W. Bromley and Co. Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA.

The Irish community was thriving, buying and selling properties, opening businesses, and supporting its cultural institutions. For over ten years, John J. Fox lived at 905 S. 20th Street, selling it in 1888 to a local Irish undertaker by the name of Edward Galen. Galen's undertaking business had previously been located down the street at 901 S. 20th Street, at the corner of S. 20th and Christian Streets, directly across the street from St. Charles Borromeo Church. Likely, having his establishments near the church was mutually beneficial, with religious services and funerary services available in close proximity. Obituaries show that services would often be connected between the two, with some at either location for the same event (Figure 16). Edward Galen's undertaking business was a family operation, and when his son Joseph L. Galen came of age, he too joined his father. In 1888, Edward Galen made the choice to move

their business to 905 S. 20th Street. The Galens practiced their undertaking business here for years, offering their services until at least 1939 according to newspaper obituaries from that year.

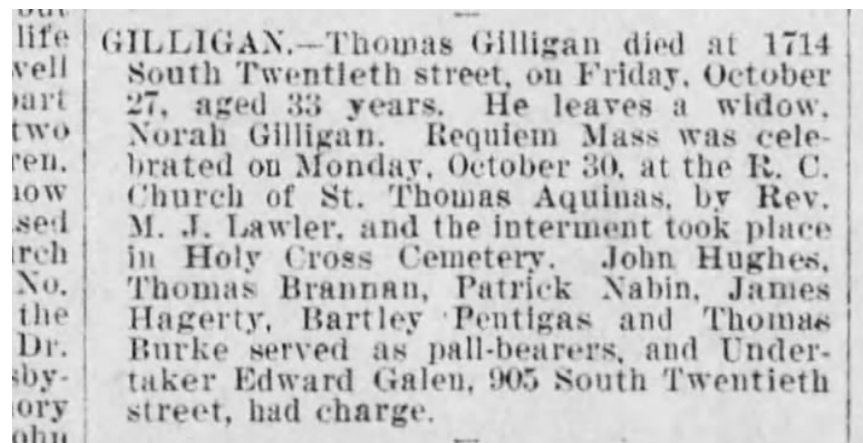


Figure 11, 1899 funeral listing in the Philadelphia Inquirer mentioning the Galen's undertaking business at 905 S. 20th Street.

Over the years, 905-07 S. 20th Street provided ground level storefronts that contained a range of services, offering many necessary amenities to the otherwise residential neighborhood. It is not known whether the storefronts were original to the property or added later. Edward Galen's undertaking business would have required some sort of commercial space. Additionally, a 1906 real estate listing in the Philadelphia Inquirer for the storefront at 907 S. 20th Street (the building at the corner of Montrose Street), reveals that there had indeed been a corner space which was used as an "oyster saloon" for 20 years, bringing the beginning of a commercial establishment at this address to 1886. This storefront would go on to house a corner grocery store, which was for sale in 1911, and by the year 1916, a shoemaking business (Figures 13-15).

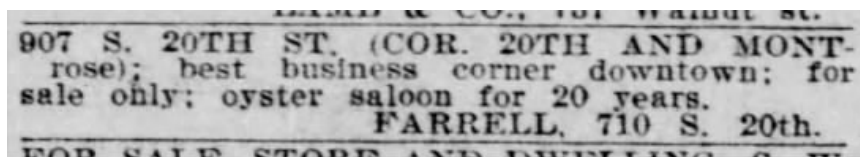


Figure 12, Philadelphia Inquirer, Sep 30, 1906, p 22.

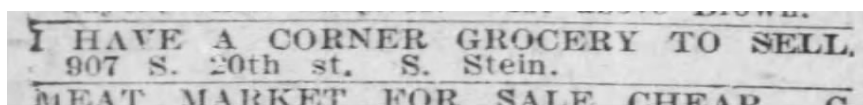


Figure 13, Business Opportunities, Inquirer, Sep 21, 1911, p 14.

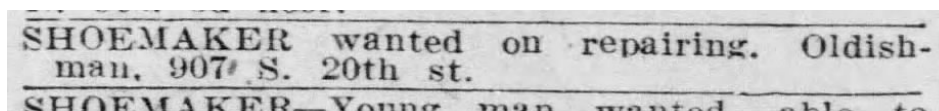


Figure 14, Shoemaker wanted Inquirer, May 6, 1916, p 16.

GERMANTOWN. Int. Private.
DONNELLY.—April 13, **BRIDGET DONNELLY**, wife of late Joseph Donnelly. Relatives and friends invited to funeral, Mon., 7.30 A. M., 905 S. 20th st. Mass St. Charles' Church, 9 A. M. Int. New Cathedral Cem. Auto service. Friends may call Sun., 7 to 10 P. M.

Figure 15, 1917, Obituary for Bridget Donnelly, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr 15, 1917. P 21.

CRAWFORD.—On April 18, **JOHN J.**, son of Agnes C. and the late John J. Crawford, of 2217 Fernon st. Relatives and friends are invited to attend funeral, on Thurs., 8.30 A. M., from Apartments of Joseph L. Galen, 905 S. 20th st. Solemn Requiem Mass at St. Edmond's Church at 10 A. M. Int. Cathedral Cem. Friends may call Wed. after 7 P. M.

Figure 16, 1938, Obituary for Crawford, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 20, 1938. P 26.

A Shift in Demographics – Southwest Center City/ Graduate Hospital in the 20th Century

By the early 20th century, Southwest Center City was an established neighborhood in Philadelphia. The neighborhood had weathered the socio-economic changes of the greater city and nation, including those caused by the First World War and the Great Migration. The Great Migration refers to the large northward migration of African Americans from the South which expanded Philadelphia's Black population substantially. Between 1900 and 1920, Philadelphia's Black population more than doubled as tens of thousands of these migrants arrived.¹³ By the 1920 census, the 30th Ward which included the neighborhood surrounding Calanthe Hall, was the first ward in the city to have a majority Black community. South Street, which had previously been the Irish residents' local shopping area, was increasingly occupied by business serving Black residents.¹⁴

By now, the brick row houses at 905-07 S. 20th Street were nearly half-a-century old. The demographics of the area were beginning to shift. By the mid-20th century, the children born in this neighborhood were growing up and starting families of their own. Many young people were getting married and

¹³ *Historical Overview | the Great Migration - A City Transformed*, The Great Migration. Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://greatmigrationphl.org/node/24>.

¹⁴ Bobbye J. Burke, *St. Charles Borromeo Parish South Philadelphia 1868-1993*. P 102.

settling in other parts of the city. The number of parishioners at St. Charles dwindled.¹⁵ While some improvements to the local housing stock had been made, the buildings were aging.

The dwindling Irish Catholic population no doubt affected St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, which in the early 20th century owned the corner property at 907 S. 20th Street.¹⁶ According to current owner, Jerome Whack, 907 S. 20th Street was used by the church for “overflow for seminarians” as an extension of the convent.¹⁷ In 1930, it was sold to the son of their neighbor Edward Galen, a man by the name of Joseph Galen, thereby combining the ownership of 905 and 907 S. 20th Street under the same family name. At this time, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church had become a primarily Black parish.¹⁸ While Catholicism in the Black community in Philadelphia was less common, St. Charles’ remained a pillar of the neighborhood.¹⁹

905 S. 20th Street belonged to the Edward and Julia Galen until 1933 when it was left to Joseph Galen by will.²⁰ Joseph Galen owned 905 and 907 S. 20th Street for over a decade, renting the storefront at 907 S. 20th Street out to a handful of individuals, and continuing the family undertaking business until at least 1939. As he aged and the neighborhood continued to evolve, he was motivated to sell in 1941 to a female Black fraternal auxiliary of the Knights of Pythias called the Grand Court of Calanthe, starting the period of significance for this historic property.²¹ While they legally owned the property, many similar female orders, as well as some male would be allowed to share their space - a situation quite commonplace among fraternal spaces. Based on official historic charters still held at Calanthe Hall, others who are confirmed to have met here include the Knights of Pythias themselves, a group called the Honorable Sons of Virginia, and the Household of Ruth, the female offshoot of the Odd Fellows (Figures 23-26). Though these are the few confirmed, it’s quite possible they kept their doors open to more as well.²²

¹⁵ Bobbye J. Burke, *St. Charles Borromeo Parish South Philadelphia 1868-1993*. Pp. 101-102.

¹⁶ City of Philadelphia, *JMH Deed Book 3698*, p 363. February 20, 1934. Department of Records, City Archives. This deed mentions that it is the same premises that was previous owned by St. Charles.

¹⁷ Jerome Whack, *Interview with Philadelphia Historical Commission Intern Nika Faulkner, 905-07 S 20th St.* August 10, 2022.

¹⁸ Mark Zimmaro, *Street Renamed 'Father John Van De Paer Way*, South Philly Review, May 16, 2022. <https://southphillyreview.com/2022/05/16/street-renamed-father-john-van-de-paer-way/>.

¹⁹ Bobbye J. Burke, *St. Charles Borromeo Parish South Philadelphia 1868-1993*. P 114

²⁰ City of Philadelphia, *JMH Deed Book 3674*, p 452. August 25, 1933. Department of Records, City Archives.

²¹ City of Philadelphia, *DWH Deed Book 1356*, p 181. September 1, 1941. Department of Records, City Archives.

²² Please see photos of the charters at the end of this document, provided by the present owner.

Early Black Fraternal Organizations & The Contemporary Calanthe Hall

Black involvement in American fraternal societies dates to the late 18th century - it is a history as old as that of the United States. The founder of Black Masons in America was Prince Hall, a Barbadian man who emigrated to Boston in 1765. Previously enslaved, Hall found success in the states, becoming a clergyman, and serving a large church in Cambridge, Massachusetts.²³ The values of Freemasonry were appealing to Hall, that of liberty, equality, and peace. In 1775, Prince Hall approached the British military lodge of Masons in Boston, asked to be apprenticed, and was accepted. Fourteen other Black men were soon admitted as well. During the Revolutionary War, Hall fought for the American colonies, and later met with the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety advocating for the freedom of slaves. His position on this was rejected, and he was met with general opposition. Hall and the other fourteen Black Masons then requested their own charter from the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, a request they were denied. Undeterred, they pressed forward, instead requesting a charter 1782 from the Grand Lodge of England. Their request was granted, and their charter delivered in 1787, launching the history of independent Black mutual aid and fraternal societies in the United States.²⁴

Much like their white counterparts, Black Masons saw themselves as community leaders. Their aim was to inspire, train, and support new members as they joined. Members had to show their commitment to a middle-class morality, and the related values and behavior were expected of them. They were to be men of "real worth and personal merit only," as stated the Freemasons bylaws.²⁵

²³ Susanna Seymour, *Black Order of Eastern Star Proud of its Accomplishments: [ALL Edition]*. Telegram & Gazette, Apr 07, 1991. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/black-order-eastern-star-proud-accomplishments/docview/268418143/se-2>.

²⁴ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (2004): Pp 367-437.

²⁵ Susanna Seymour, *Black Order of Eastern Star Proud of its Accomplishments*.

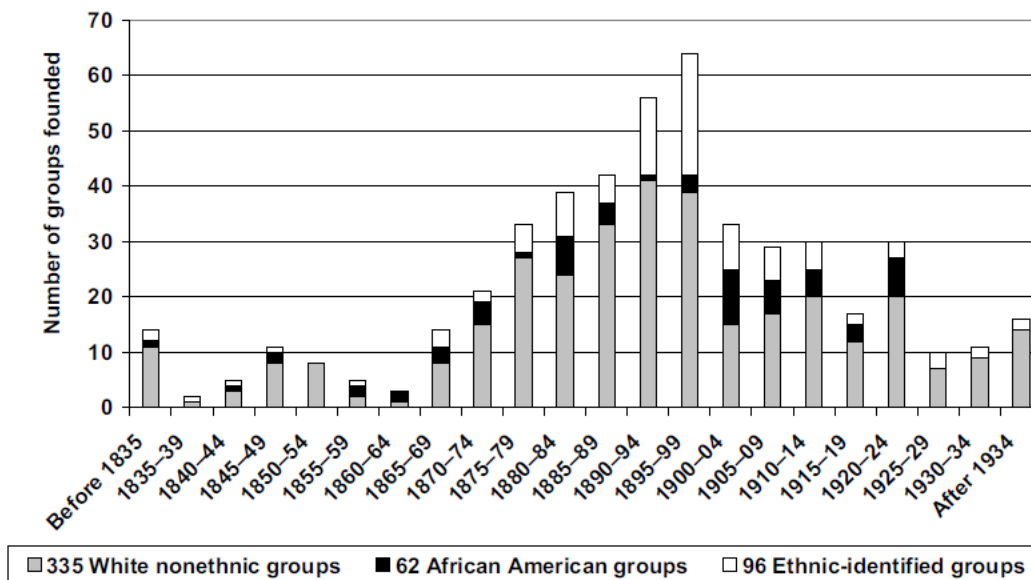


Figure 17, *Foundings of white, African American, and ethnic-identified translocal U.S. fraternal federations*. Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (2004): P 381.

Black Masonry only grew from this point, as did other Black offshoots of differing white fraternal organizations. The Odd Fellows, founded in 1819, established their African American auxiliary in 1843. The Knights of Pythias, founded in 1864, founded theirs in 1880.²⁶ As did many white groups, Black groups developed their own female partner organizations as well. To name a few, the Prince Hall Masons welcomed the Order of the Eastern Star in 1874, the Odd Fellows established the Household of Ruth in 1857, and in 1883 the Knights of Pythias founded the Order of Calanthe.²⁷

Typically, these groups were only open to the close female relatives of male members. One major element that drove the strong female presence in Black fraternal groups were the economic difficulties for Black families of the time. The job opportunities for both Black men and women paid little and options were slim, but often Black women would have had equal opportunities as Black men. African American families in this era often struggled financially, meaning women couldn't pass up the

²⁶ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, P 381.

²⁷ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, P 384.

opportunity of employment. African American women could find jobs in domestic service, agriculture, and sometimes even teaching. The fact that women could work meant they had a responsibility to provide. Insurance became a responsibility left to the matriarch, a service that many fraternal groups offered. Mutual aid was common, as well as health and life insurance and funerary benefits.²⁸ The undertaker Joseph Galen may have first encountered the Knights of Pythias in this very capacity, providing funeral benefits for their members.

Another benefit of women in Black fraternalism was the role they played in Black churches, which were the pillars of many Black communities in Philadelphia. It is no coincidence that Calanthe Hall is located directly across the street from a prominent Black church. Social connections were powerful, and the transference of knowledge from one Black community to another, especially when their ideologies were similar, was of great value.²⁹ The female auxiliaries of fraternal orders had their own sisterly moral code as well. One member of the Order of the Eastern Star said that the group would “give you friendships that last forever... this order teaches kindness, charity, truth, faith, wisdom: it’s just a beautiful order. It gives you a place to go and know that everybody likes you. You’re not going to meet any kind of adversity.”³⁰

Fraternal lodges offered an important space for Black political thought and activity during times of change and difficulty. There were few spaces for Black communities to organize and gather, but fraternal organizations and mutual aid societies provided that. They offered an organized institutional and supportive framework that, due to the racism at the time, they didn’t have access to. In these spaces, Black communities were able to build relationships, discuss community issues, and foster leadership. They offered a framework guided by principles; principles that could inform real change once people worked together to apply them to the political realm. African American fraternal organization offered community ties across the lines of geography and denomination and promoted a “universal brotherhood” (or sisterhood).³¹

²⁸ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, Pp 415-416.

²⁹ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, Pp 417.

³⁰ Susanna Seymour, *Black Order of Eastern Star Proud of its Accomplishments*, Telegram & Gazette, Apr 07, 1991.

³¹ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Intended for the Better Government of Man: The Political History of African American Freemasonry in the Era of Emancipation*, The Journal of American History 96, no. 4 (03, 2010): 1001-1026, 977. P 1004.

While some, like Frederick Douglas, disapproved,³² many early Black leaders in Philadelphia, including Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, supported Freemasonry.³³ They saw it as an additional satellite of political life that could foster real change and provide a space for Black discourse.³⁴ The leadership and partnership opportunities fraternal orders offered to African Americans were extremely beneficial. On the civic and political side, participation in fraternal groups gave African Americans an opportunity to become publicly active. By the 20th century, fraternalism had shifted away from the mutual economic aid and insurance benefits of the previous century and toward community service and political involvement.

The Great Depression in the early 20th century hit fraternal groups across the board, Black and white, male, and female. At this point in history, Black fraternal groups were more vulnerable than white groups because they had smaller lodges and poorer members. Although Black fraternal lodges were usually smaller than white lodges, the high density of Black chapters did offer them some security. In the south, membership suffered due to the Great Migration, losing many members to the brighter futures promised by the north. This does perhaps explain the founding of Calanthe Hall. Those who had been affiliated with southern groups moved northward, bringing their fraternal associations with them.³⁵

³² Frederick Douglas saw fraternalism as a distraction from Black political activity.

³³ Absalom Jones and Richard Allen founded the Free African Society in Philadelphia in 1787.
<https://hsp.org/history-online/exhibits/richard-allen-apostle-of-freedom/the-free-african-society>

³⁴ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Intended for the Better Government of Man: The Political History of African American Freemasonry in the Era of Emancipation*, Pp 1005-1007.

³⁵ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, Pp 421-422.

30TH WARD—POLLING PLACES	
1st Div.	Vote 1636 South St.
2nd Div.	Vote 711 S. 15th St.
3rd Div.	Vote 724 South 16th St.
4th Div.	Vote N. E. cor, 15th & Carpenter St.
5th Div.	Vote 1724 Christian St.
6th Div.	Vote S. W. cor, 18th & Fitzwater St.
7th Div.	Vote 705 S. 19th St.
8th Div.	Vote 747 S. 20th St.
9th Div.	Vote 20th & Catherine St. (School).
10th Div.	Vote 1019 S. 20th St.
11 Div.	Vote 905 S. 20th St.
12th Div.	Vote 917 S. 23rd St.
13th Div.	Vote 2250 Catherine St.
14th Div.	Vote 757 S. 22nd St.
15th Div.	Vote 720 S. 22nd St.
16th Div.	Vote 2221 Grays Ferry Rd.
17th Div.	Vote 2514 Grays Ferry Rd.
18th Div.	Vote 2549 Grays Ferry.

Figure 18, 1956 newspaper clipping showing 11th Division polling place as 905 S. 20th Street.

Until the 1960s, African Americans faced barriers in participating in U.S. electoral politics. Virtually all Black fraternal groups promoted public education and provided scholarship funds to young people. As civil rights became a national struggle, many Black communities united by fraternal traditions, and their lodges became important places of political meetings and events. Becoming more politically motivated, many lodges found ways to participate in public life. Some fraternal groups became involved in legislative lobbying, while others offered their buildings as political meeting spaces and voting locations (Figures 20-21).³⁶ The Grand Court of Calanthe offered just that, among other things. From at least 1956 to 1985, they offered Calanthe Hall as a polling location, giving their neighbors a convenient opportunity for political action (Figure 20). In this capacity, fraternal organizations remained important as Black organizations until the mid-1970's.³⁷

³⁶ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, P 420-422.

³⁷ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, *Organization Despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations*, P 422.

Gaudiosi a Loner

Shuns City Committee's Endorsement

By MARK MANOFF

When the Democratic City Committee's policy group meets tonight to consider mayoral candidates, Albert Gaudiosi will not be there.

In a letter delivered to City Committee Chairman Martin Weinberg's office yesterday, the former city representative wrote that he supported an open primary and would not seek an endorsement.

Mayor Rizzo has said he will stay neutral in the Democratic mayoral primary, and the City Committee is expected to follow his lead.

Gaudiosi, along with three other mayoral hopefuls, did attend yesterday's meeting of black Democratic ward leaders. Leaders of the group have said they will endorse a candidate for mayor.

At the meeting, former Deputy Mayor Charles Bowser said he might form a slate of City Council and row office candidates to run with him.

"I might run at least a partial tick-

et," Bowser told the gathering in the tiny meeting room of the Grand Court Calanthe, S. 20th St. near Montrose. "I ought to present a profile of what my team would look like."

THE OTHER candidates have shied away from running on a ticket. Former U.S. Rep. William Green told the ward leaders he would watch City Committee's decisions on candidates.

"I will tell City Committee there should be an open primary for the mayoral and City Council and the row offices," Green said. Former City Controller William Klenk also attended the meeting.

The black ward leaders say they are angry with City Committee because Weinberg was unwilling to slate enough black candidates for their satisfaction. They expect to announce endorsements soon.

The black ward leaders have seldom strayed from City Committee, and their leaders hope this signals a new independence and power for the city's black politicians.

Figure 19, *Gaudiosi a Loner*, Philadelphia Daily News March 1, 1979. P 14.

Contemporary Graduate Hospital & Calanthe Hall: The Mid-20th Century to Today

In 1952, Father John Van der Paer began serving St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church as parochial vicar and pastor. Father John, as he was known, wanted the church to function as a social hub for the neighborhood. He embraced the Black community. It is said that he often attended court hearings for young men in the neighborhood, and he was known to be a powerful agent against the school expulsions of young Black students. He acted as a community leader, making space at St. Charles Borromeo for all his neighbors, and fundraising for youth programs at the grade school.³⁸ Current owner of Calanthe Hall Jerome Whack remembers him fondly and spoke of his warm relationship with the women of the Grand Order of Calanthe. During this period the Grand Order of Calanthe added the fire escape and extra exit at the easternmost bay along Montrose Street circa 1948, and in 1977 stuccoed

³⁸ Mark Zimmaro, *Street Renamed 'Father John Van De Paer Way*, South Philly Review, May 16, 2022. <https://southphillyreview.com/2022/05/16/street-renamed-father-john-van-de-paer-way/>.

the primary and secondary façades. Two windows along Montrose Street were infilled at this time.³⁹ In a 1964 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, it is mentioned that dozens of folks gathered at Calanthe Hall, then referred to as the Grand Court of Calanthe, for a wedding reception.⁴⁰ Later in 1979, the Democratic City Committee held a meeting here (Figure 21).⁴¹ While these are just some of the examples documented in historic newspapers, many more were sure to have occurred under the Grand Court's ownership. Offering space for the community to connect was their primary goal, financial hardship aside. In 1995, Father John retired, and that chapter of St. Charles Borromeo ended.⁴²

After the departure of Father John, there were fewer spaces for the Black community to gather in the immediate neighborhood. The Grand Order of Calanthe struggled to make ends meet and update their building per city regulation but had improved the property as they could. Calanthe Hall continued to host meetings, dances, and other events even as fraternal activity dwindled.

By the late 20th century, the Southwest Center City/Graduate Hospital neighborhood began to gentrify, and 905-07 S. 20th Street was prime for development. To avoid the same fate that other buildings in the area had suffered, and to continue to support the ladies of the Grand Order of Calanthe, fellow community member Jerome Whack offered to purchase the property in 2004. Mr. Whack is a self-taught carpenter, having apprenticed with his father, and helped the women get 905-07 S. 20th Street up to code. Today, the women still associated with the fraternal societies that historically called this address home continue to meet here, thanks to Mr. Whack. In the tradition of those who came before him, he offers Calanthe Hall as a community space, one that supports its neighbors, and celebrates its history.⁴³

³⁹ City of Philadelphia, *Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit, 1948 & 1977*, Department of Licenses, and Inspections. Philadelphia Atlas, accessed August 1, 2022.

⁴⁰ Newlyweds, 50 Sickened Philadelphia Inquirer June 21, 1964

⁴¹ Gaudiosi a Loner (Meeting at Calanthe Court) Philadelphia Daily News March 1, 1979, pg 14

⁴² Jerome Whack, *Interview with Philadelphia Historical Commission Intern Nika Faulkner, 905-07 S. 20th Street*. August 10, 2022.

⁴³ Jerome Whack, *Interview with Philadelphia Historical Commission Intern Nika Faulkner, 905-07 S. 20th Street*. August 10, 2022.

Conclusion

The combined properties at 905-07 S. 20th Street, known as Calanthe Hall, have a long history of offering both community space and a home for neighborhood services since their original construction in the late 19th century. Calanthe Hall represents the social and demographic changes in Southwest Center City, and the related needs of the neighborhood's residents over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. As the neighborhood shifted from primarily Irish to majority Black, the building at 905-07 S. 20th Street remained deeply connected to the community. The founding of Calanthe Hall in 1945, and the Hall's connection to the history of Black female fraternal organizations is particularly significant. The story of these organizations is not well documented and deserves further research. Much of the history lives in the memories of the organizations' members, many of whom are aging and no longer live in the immediate neighborhood. The building is a physical testament to these women's history. A modest, but important marker of their existence and contributions to the neighborhood which history so often undervalues, overlooks, and erases. Calanthe Hall is a vessel where these women's stories may still live on.

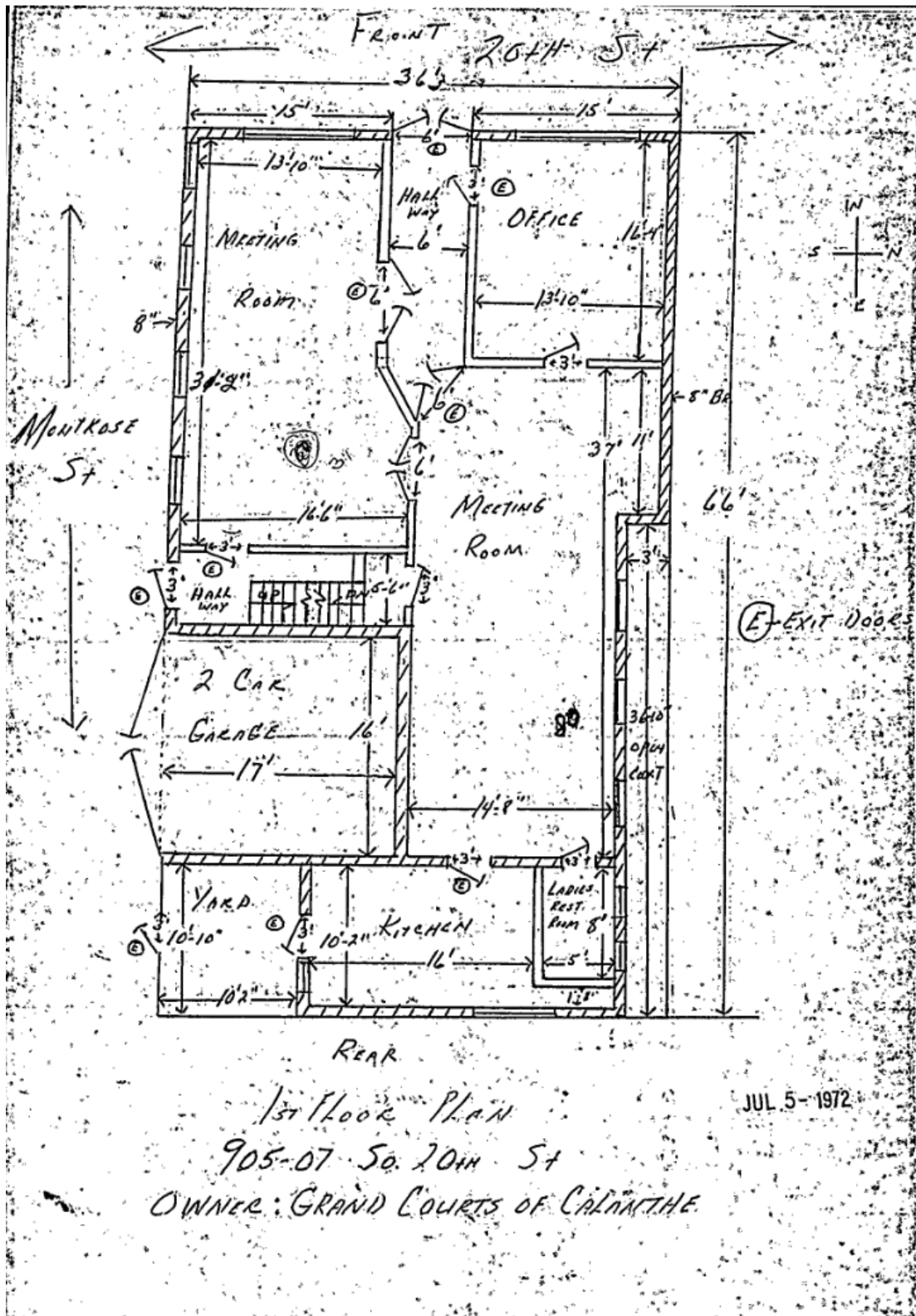




Figure 21, Charter for the Household of Ruth, the Black female auxiliary of the Odd Fellows. Photo provided by Jerome Whack.

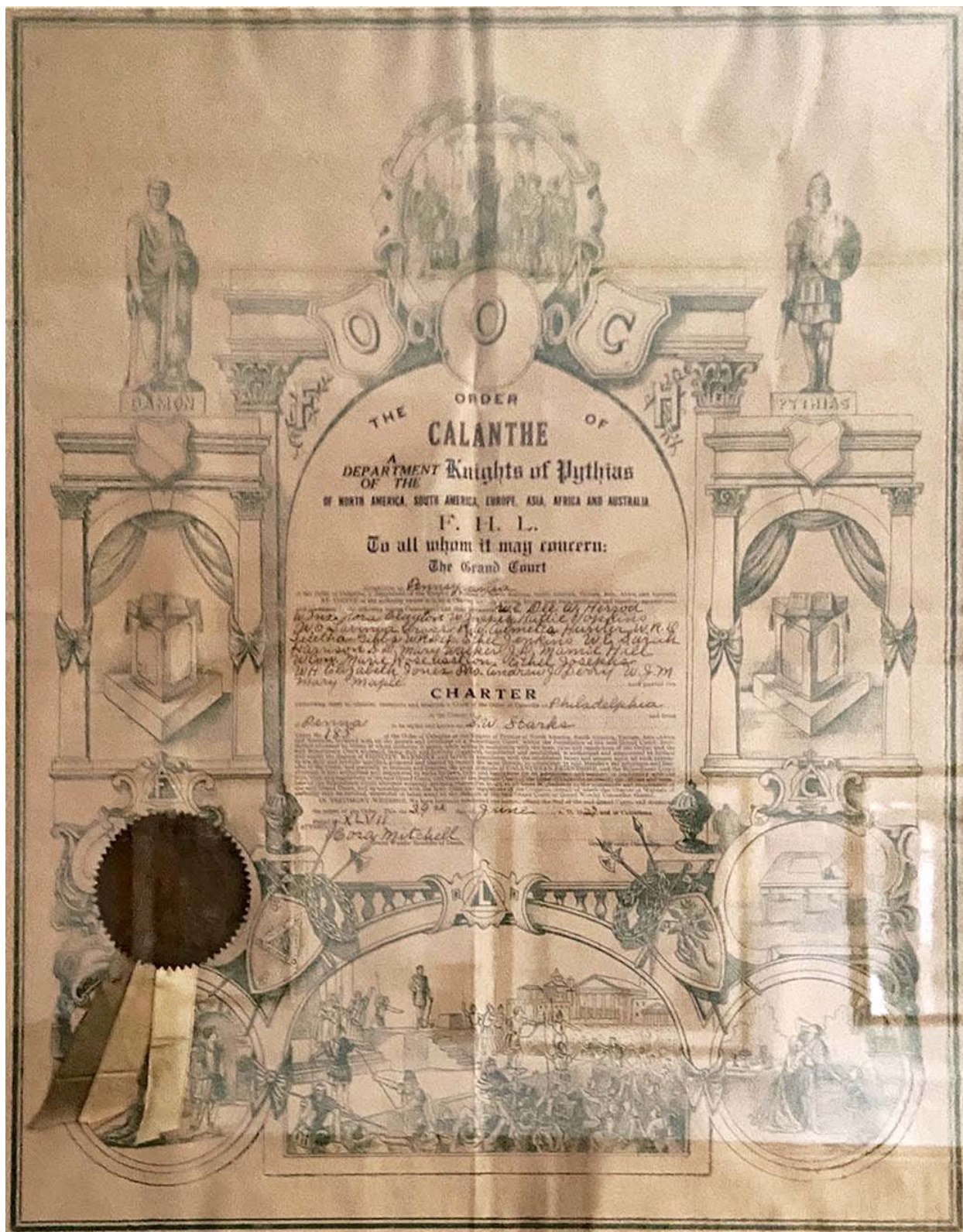




Figure 23, Charter for the Knights of Pythias. Photo provided by Jerome Whack.

Joseph G. Patterson
Notary Public
COMMISSION EXPIRES
April 13, 1917

W. M. Richards
Judge.
T. Foster Thomas,
Attorney at Law
1229 Arch Street, Philadelphia.

James M. Cullen
Recorder of
Deeds.

Figure 24, Charter for the Honorable Songs of Virginia. Photo provided by Jerome Whack.

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