

**ADDRESS: 1402-04 W OXFORD ST**

Name of Resource: Barber's Hall

Review: Designation

Property Owner: 1402 West Oxford Street Realty Holding Company

Nominator: Drew Barnhart, Society for the Preservation of Philadelphia African American Assets, Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites

Staff Contact: Ted Maust, [theodore.maust@phila.gov](mailto:theodore.maust@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1402-04 W. Oxford Street as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the building, constructed as an Italianate rowhouse between 1863 and 1868, and then renovated into a clubhouse for the Quaker City Wheelmen in 1895, satisfies Criteria for Designation A, D, and J. The nomination argues that the façade, which dates from the 1895 renovation, embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Renaissance Revival style, satisfying Criterion D. The nomination further argues that the building's use by a wide variety of social clubs including several cycling clubs, the Philadelphia Section of the National Council of Jewish Women, the Arion Gesang Verein, and the National Barber's Sunshine Club makes it eligible for designation under Criterion J. Finally, the nomination argues that the history of musical performances at the building by acts including Boyz II Men satisfies Criterion A.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 1402-04 W. Oxford Street satisfies Criteria for Designation A, D, and J.



Figure 1: The north elevation of New Barber's Hall

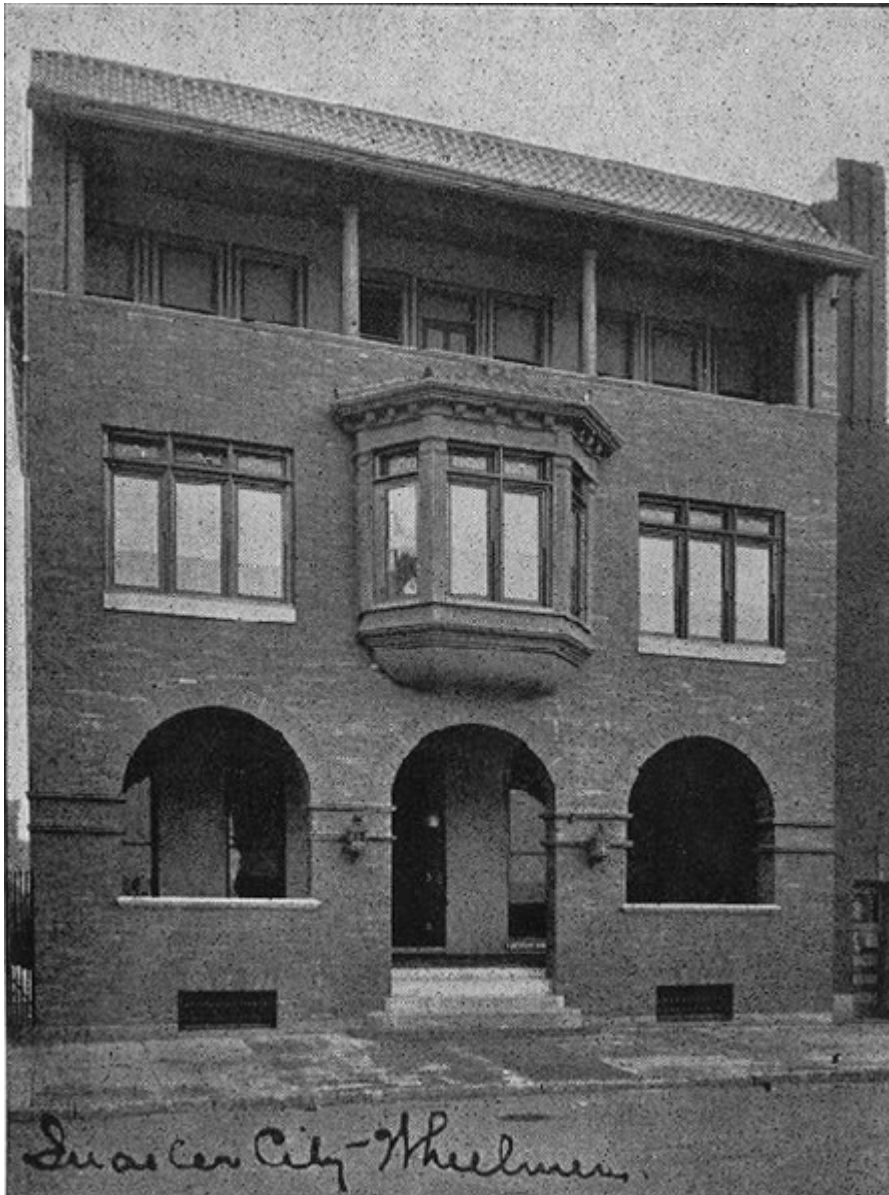


Figure 2: 1402-04 West Oxford Street in 1897. Many of the façade's features are still extant today. Source: *League of American Wheelmen Souvenir Programme*, 1897, 59, accessed through *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings* (<https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org>)

**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: 1402-04 West Oxford Street

Postal code: 19121

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: Quaker City Wheelmen Clubhouse, Americus Clubhouse, Arion Hall, Barber's Hall

Current/Common Name: New Barber's 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: Bar and event venue

**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 1895 to 1990

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Constructed c. 1865; major renovation in 1895

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Schermerhorn and Reinhold (1895 renovation)

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: \_\_\_\_\_

Original owner: Cyrus Cadwallader

Other significant persons: \_\_\_\_\_

**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** Society for the Preservation of Philadelphia African American Assets; Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites

Organization (University of Pennsylvania) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name with Title Drew Barnhart, Nomination Writer Email barnhartdrew@gmail.com

Street Address 301 Duhring Wing, 236 S. 34th St. Telephone (724) 504-4447

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia PA, 19104-6311

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: 10/10/2023

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 10/25/2023

Date of Notice Issuance: 10/27/2023

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: 1402 WEST OXFORD STREET REALTY HOLDING COMPANY

Address: 1241 CAMBRIDGE CT

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19123

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

# Barber's Hall

1402-04 W. Oxford St.

Nomination to the  
Philadelphia Register of Historic Places



## **5. Boundary Description**



*Figure 5.1: Aerial view of 1402-04 West Oxford Street. Source: Atlas.phila.gov.*

This nomination proposes to designate the entire parcel located at 1402-04 West Oxford Street. The parcel boundaries are as follows:

SITUATE on the South side of Oxford Street at the distance of 120 feet Westward from the West Side of Broad Street in the 47<sup>th</sup> Ward of the City of Philadelphia. CONTAINING in front or breadth on the said Oxford Street 40 feet and extending in length or depth Southward of that width 120 feet. Being known as 1402-04 West Oxford Street.”

OPA Account Number: 882006650

Map Registry Number: 012N070170

## **6. Property Description**

Situated on the south side of North Oxford Street between North Carlisle Street and North Broad Street, New Barber's Hall is a three-story bar and event space with a Renaissance Revival façade. New Barber's Hall was originally constructed as a single-family Italianate rowhouse between 1863 and 1868 under the ownership of Cyrus Cadwallader.<sup>1</sup> Its current appearance, however, dates from 1895 when the Quaker City Wheelmen, a bicycling organization, converted the building into a clubhouse. Architects Schermerhorn and Reinhold were responsible for the conversion project, which entailed modifications to both the front and the rear of the structure. The front was extended twelve feet to the parcel's building line. On the first and third stories, this resulted in the creation of a recessed porch and loggia, respectively. On the second story, the front addition was enclosed. The back portion of the building, which jutted out from the building's front section, was largely rebuilt. The second and third stories of the back section were demolished, as were its west and south walls. The back section was then extended to the west and south and its second story was rebuilt.<sup>2</sup> The areas of the building affected by this renovation project are referred to as the "1895 front addition" and "1895 rear addition" in this nomination.

From 1895 to 1979, 1402-04 West Oxford Street was home to multiple social organizations: the Quaker City Wheelmen (1895-1900), the Americus Club and National Council of Jewish Women (1900-1908), the Arion Singing Society (1909-1954), and the National Barber's Sunshine Club (1954-1979). In 1979, brothers Jake and Sidney Adams purchased the property. They opened a bar on the first floor of the building and began renting out rooms on the second and third floors for private events.

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<sup>1</sup> An 1863 atlas of Philadelphia shows no building at 1402-1404 West Oxford Street. In 1868, the Cadwalladers moved into a residence at the address. See Samuel L. Smedley. *Smedley's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, Section 17. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1863; "The Franklin Savings Fund." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 9, 1874. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Warren v. Freeman 187 Pa. 455 (1898).

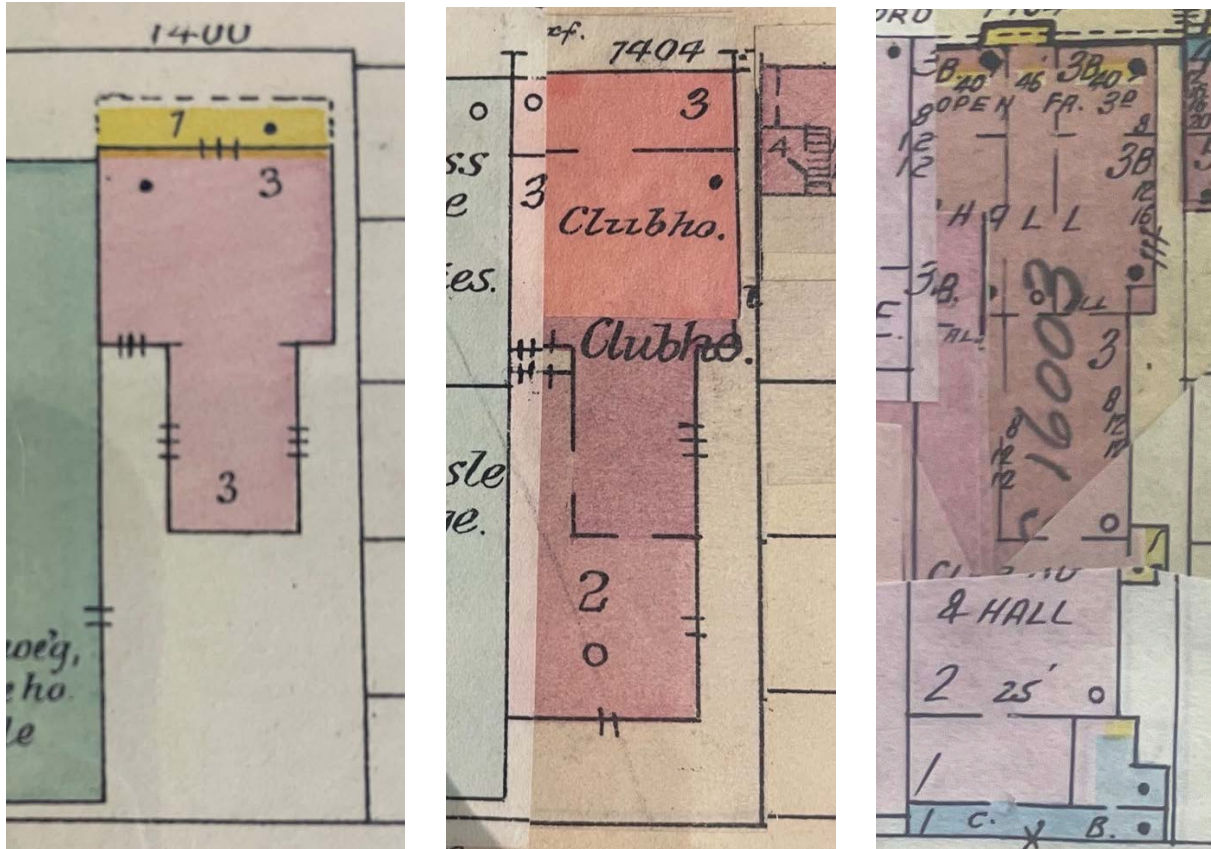


Figure 6.1 (left): 1402-04 West Oxford Street in 1890.

Figure 6.2 (middle): 1402-04 West Oxford Street in 1917, illustrating the extent of the 1895 addition. While the map suggests that an addition was simply built around the existing building, legal documents describe the demolition of large portions of the original rear section of the building.

Figure 6.3: (right): 1402-04 West Oxford Street in 1967. Note the enclosure of the recessed porch and smaller additions from throughout the twentieth century. The walls dividing the 1895 rear addition were likely already demolished by 1967. They were certainly demolished by the time Mr. Adams purchased the building in 1979 and are shown erroneously on Sanborn maps published as recently as 2006.

Sources: Ernest Hexamer and Son, Insurance Maps of the City of Philadelphia. (Philadelphia: Ernest Hexamer & Son, 1890) plate 253; Ernest Hexamer and Son, Insurance Maps of the City of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Ernest Hexamer & Son, 1917) plate 253; Insurance Maps of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1979) volume 7, plate 628.

## **Urban Context**

While the neighborhood was originally developed in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the immediate surroundings of New Barber's Hall are now largely shaped by more recent development, spurred in part by the proximity of Temple University. Early twenty-first century mid-rise buildings owned by the university feature prominently in the built landscape around New Barber's Hall, and there are many private low-rise commercial and residential structures that cater to students and other university affiliates.

The buildings on either side of New Barber's Hall are older than those on surrounding blocks. A heavily altered mid-twentieth-century commercial space—formerly a Rite-Aid, now vacant—is New Barber's Hall direct neighbor to the east. Abutting the building's west façade is an early twentieth-century stable, which was later converted into a garage. The garage currently appears vacant, but a permit to convert it into a mixed-use restaurant and apartment building was issued in March 2023. To the rear of New Barber's Hall are several vacant grassy lots and across the street from the building's primary façade is a parking lot.



*Figure 6.4: The north elevation of New Barber's Hall*

### **North Elevation (Front Façade)**

The building's front façade (north elevation) is characteristic of the Renaissance Revival style (Figure 6.4). Constructed of Pompeian brick, the façade is symmetrical with three bays, measuring approximately thirty-six feet in width. The first story features three large arched openings, partially concealed behind a vinyl awning that extends across the width of the building. Six tiled steps lead to the central opening, which serves as the building's main entrance. On either side of these steps are two basement-level windows each underneath a jack arch—one filled with glass block, the other with a black-painted metal. The entrance is flanked on either side by large fixed windows, which are modern in nature and consist of a semicircular light over a rectangular light to accommodate the arched opening. Originally, these windows were not enclosed and opened onto a full-length porch. Two terra-cotta belt courses run through the masonry between the fenestration on the first floor.

Above the entrance, a cantered oriel window marks the center of the building's second story. It consists of four sections—two of which extend from the façade at approximately forty-five-degree angles and two in the center that are parallel with the façade. Each section features a modern, single-light window below a fixed transom light. Originally, the wooden frames supporting these windows were largely concealed behind ornamentation in the form of partially-fluted pilasters. Today, only two of these pilasters remain, specifically those that border the Pompeian brick façade on either side of the window. This central bay is flanked on both sides by a trio of windows underneath a jack arch. As with the oriel window, each consists of a single light underneath a fixed transom light, which feature stained glass original to the 1895 renovation.

A covered loggia runs the full width of the third story. Its side-gabled roof is supported by four widely-spaced wooden Tuscan columns. In keeping with the Renaissance Revival style, the roof originally featured tile but is now covered with asphalt shingles. The loggia's back wall is clad in beige vinyl siding and features six windows in two groups of three on either side of a windowless central door that leads to the building's interior. A black steel picket fence encloses the loggia without obscuring the façade behind it.

### **East Elevation**

The building's east elevation is separated from its neighbor by a narrow alley (Figure 6.5). The portion of this elevation that is visible from West Oxford Street is clad in tan stucco, under which the outlines of old fenestration patterns are visible. The wooden bracketed cornice of original Italianate row house is still visible on this elevation, demonstrating the extent of the 1895 front addition, which extended the front of the structure to the parcel's building line.

### **West Elevation**

The west elevation abuts the neighboring two-story garage (Figure 6.6). The third story of this elevation, as visible from street level, appears to be clad in white stucco with traces of yellow paint. A lone window protected by a white metal grate is located towards the center of this elevation, only partially visible from the ground. Unlike the west elevation, the nineteenth-century wooden cornice is no longer extant.



*Figure 6.5: The north and east elevations of New Barber's Hall*



*Figure 6.6: The north and west elevations of New Barber's Hall*

## Interior

Despite alterations that have taken place over the years, many of the interior spaces mentioned in historic accounts of Barber's Hall are still recognizable today. While the specific use of these spaces has evolved to suit the needs of each owner, they have retained the function of hosting or facilitating social gatherings. Following is a brief description of some of the spaces in the building that are mentioned in historical accounts and some of their notable features.

### *First Floor*

The first-floor entrance hall is flanked on either side by two rooms. To the left is a kitchen, which originally served as the Quaker City Wheelmen's reading and smoking room. To the right is a bar, which was once a club parlor (Figure 6.7). By 1918, these front rooms had been enlarged by enclosing the full-length front porch constructed during the 1895 renovation.



*Figure 6.7: The front bar on the first floor was previously the Quaker City Wheelmen's Club parlor. In the background, towards the front of the building, one can observe the opening to what was once the building's recessed front porch, now enclosed.*

Towards the back of the first floor, in the 1895 rear addition, is a larger bar and dining area furnished with a small stage (Figures 6.8 and 6.9). Originally, this space was divided into two rooms. One was the “wheel room” where the Quaker City Wheelmen stored their bicycles. The other may have corresponded with their showering facilities. Later clubs used the “wheel room” as a reception area, and eventually the dividing wall was demolished. This likely occurred under the ownership of the Arion Singing Society, which conducted numerous construction projects to accommodate the growing number of German-Americans who spent time at their clubhouse. Today, this room still hosts musical performances and private events. Historical details including the pressed metal ceiling and metal columns evoke the numerous renovation and redecorating campaigns carried out by the various clubs that owned the building around the turn of the twentieth century. Other features, such as the mirrors running along the central beam, reflect the interior’s evolution during its continuing use as a venue for jazz, rhythm and blues, and soul performances, which began in the mid-twentieth century.



*Figure 6.8: The back bar and dining room on the first floor, facing the stage.*



*Figure 6.9: The back bar and dining room on the first floor, facing the bar.*

### ***Second Floor***

The stairs to the second story mark the boundary between the remaining portion of the 1860s structure and the 1895 rear addition. They lead to a larger banquet hall, a space central to the history of the building and the various entities that have occupied it (Figure 6.10). The room's floor is suggestive of its original use as a gymnasium. According to the current owner, Mr. Jake Adams, the slanted stage at the center back wall was installed by a singing group that previously occupied the building, almost certainly the Arion Singing Society.<sup>3</sup> Large mirrors flanked by sconce lights line the walls. These were installed by Mr. Adams in the 1980s, as his bar was growing in popularity.

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<sup>3</sup> Jake Adams, interview by Drew Barnhart, Stephanie Garcia, and Sarah Lerner, April 18, 2023. Unless otherwise cited, all future references to information supplied by Mr. Adams are from this interview.



*Figure 6.10: The second-story banquet hall, located in the 1895 rear addition.*

There are two bar and buffet areas towards the front of the building, in an area composed of the original 1860s structure and the 1895 front addition. They are slightly elevated from the large banquet hall on either side of the stairs to the first floor (Figure 6.11). Under the ownership of the Quaker City Wheelmen, these served as a ladies' parlor and a billiards room. Mr. Adams added bars and buffet lines to these rooms in the 1990s to accommodate the increasing number of guests visiting his bar (Figures 6.12-6.15). From the interior, stained glass in the second-story transom lights from the 1895 renovation is clearly visible (Figure 6.16).



*Figure 6.11: View from the performance hall to stairs to the first story (center) and the two bar and buffet areas (left and right).*



*Figure 6.12: View from the banquet hall into the bar and buffet area on the eastern side of the building.*



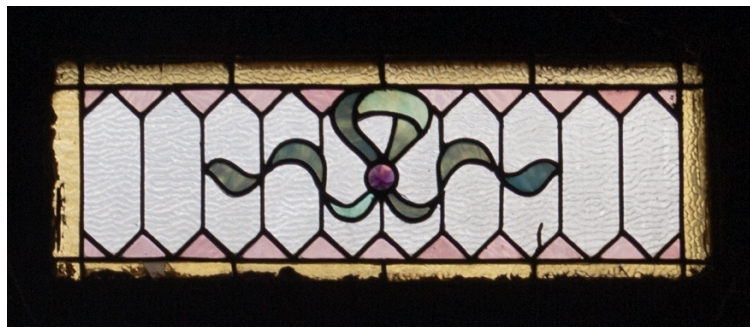
*Figure 6.13: The bar and buffet area on the eastern side of the building.*



*Figure 6.14: The bar and buffet area on the western side of the building*



*Figure 6.15: The bar and buffet area on the western side of the building. One can see the interior of the central oriel window and the stained glass in the transom lights above the trio of windows on the right.*



*Figure 6.16: Detail showing the transom light stained glass.*

### *Third Floor*

The third story, located entirely within the original 1860s structure, consists of a series of three small rooms, one of which was converted into a bar by Mr. Adams in the 1990s (Figures 6.17 and 6.18). From this floor, one can access the loggia added during the 1895 renovation (Figures 6.19 and 6.20). The Quaker City Wheelmen intended these spaces to house their card rooms and janitor's quarters, which may account for the full bathroom found on this story. Some newspaper articles suggest that the Americus Club later converted the space into a café, and according to Mr. Adams, the National Barber's Sunshine Club installed a sauna on this floor.



*Figure 6.17: The third-story bar installed by Mr. Adams in the 1990s.*



*Figure 6.18: The other rooms on the third story were previously used for card tournaments. Now, they're largely empty but can be rented for private events.*



*Figures 6.19 and 6.20: Views of the third story loggia facing east (left) and west (right).*

### *Basement*

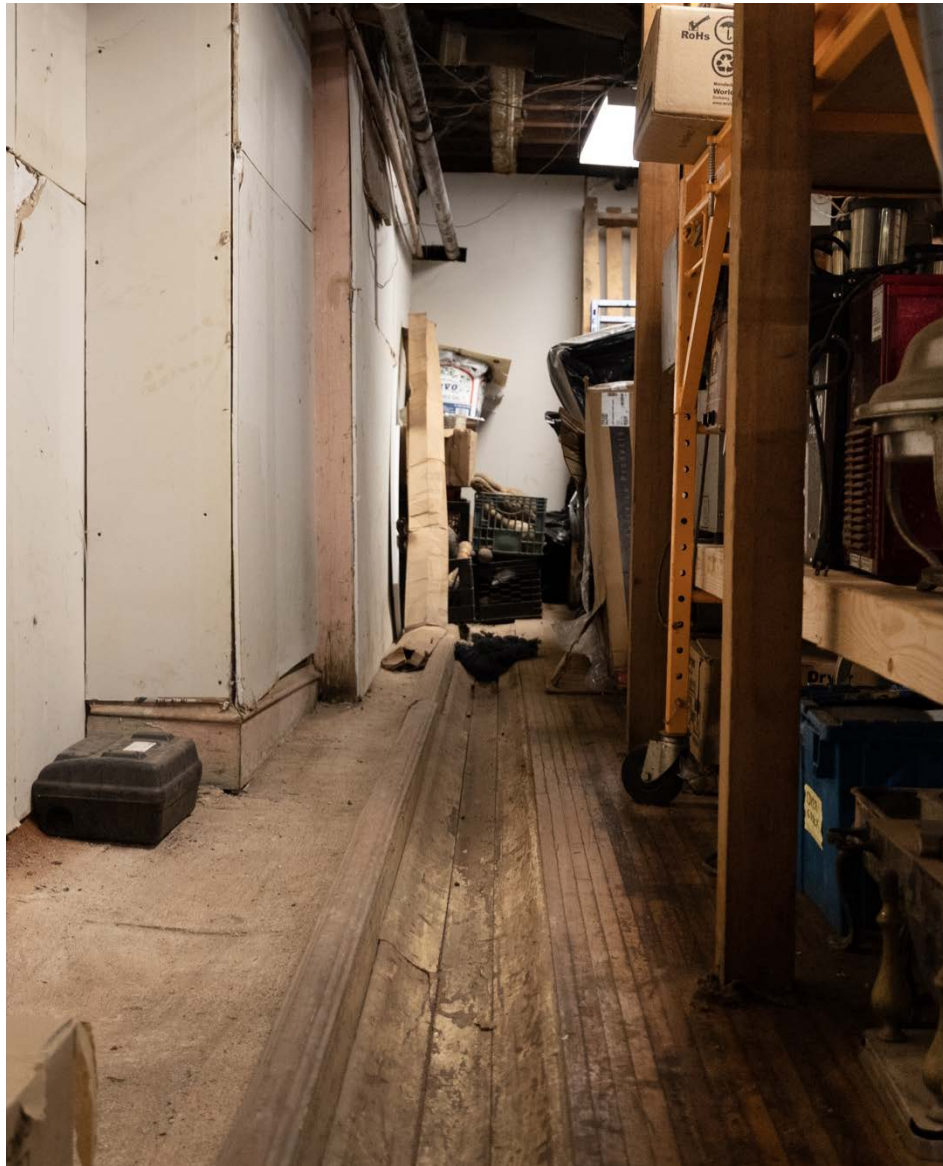
Now used for storage, the basement once housed a bowling alley, which is largely still intact. The bowling alley was originally installed by the Americus Club in 1903 and was refurbished by the Arion Singing Society in 1922 (Figures 6.21 and 6.22).<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 6.21: There are two largely-intact bowling lanes in the basement of 1402-04 West Oxford Street. Oriented strand board covers the uneven space between the two lanes, likely concealing additional surviving features from the bowling alley.*

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<sup>4</sup> “Americus Club: Officers Elected at Annual Meeting” *The Jewish Exponent* (Philadelphia), January 23, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3; Arion Singing Society, Brochure, 1932, *Arion Singing Society: 75th Anniversary*.



*Figure 6.22: Wooden gutters for bowling balls, such as the one shown here, flank both lanes.*

## **7. Significance**

The period of significance begins with the 1895 renovation of 1402-04 West Oxford Street and ends in 1990, when Boyz II Men celebrated signing with Motown Records at the venue. This celebration is the most recent known example of an event illustrating the venue's significance in the careers of nationally-acclaimed musicians.

### **Introduction**

New Barber's Hall, located at 1402-04 West Oxford Street, merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places for its significance under the following Criteria for Designation:

- *Criterion A. Have significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation or be associated with the life of a person significant in the past;*
- *Criterion D. Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; and*
- *Criterion J. Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.*

The structure at 1402-04 West Oxford Street was originally constructed as a single-family Italianate residential building in the 1860s. In 1895, a bicycling organization called the Quaker City Wheelmen hired the architectural firm Schermerhorn and Reinhold to convert the structure into a clubhouse. This project entailed the extensive alteration the expansion of the back section of the building as well as an addition to the front of the building, including the construction of a distinctive Renaissance Revival façade, a popular architectural style among nineteenth century clubhouses.<sup>5</sup> Today, this Renaissance Revival façade is remarkably intact and components of the post-renovation interior spatial layout are still clearly legible (Criterion B).

From 1895 to 1979, the renovated clubhouse served as a community gathering place for social groups organized around a variety of shared identities and interests. These include the following:

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<sup>5</sup> Warren v. Freeman 187 Pa. 455 (1898).

- The Quaker City Wheelmen, a local chapter of the League of American Wheelmen (LAW) that was one of the largest of many bicycling clubs based in Philadelphia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1895–1900);
- the Americus Wheelmen/Americus Club, social club organized by and for Jewish men that began as a LAW chapter (1900 – 1908);
- the Philadelphia Section of the National Council of Jewish Women, a progressive organization which, among their many activities, advocated for women’s rights, provided aid to recent immigrants and members of the working class, and organized adult study groups (1900 – 1908);
- the Arion Gesang Verein, one the many German singing societies in Philadelphia that served as a social outlet and support network for German-speaking immigrants (1909 – 1954);
- and the National Barber’s Sunshine Club, a social group for Black barbers that established the site’s reputation as an intimate venue for jazz performances (1954 – 1979).

Together, these organizations constitute a rich cross-section of civil society in Philadelphia, illustrating some of the myriad ways in which the city’s citizens have organized themselves and reflecting changes in the neighborhood’s demographics (Criterion J). These groups served not only as social outlets for their members, but also as platforms for broader social and political engagement, facilitating, to varying degrees, community service initiatives and advocacy efforts. Many also entailed participation in broader regional and national networks, connecting Philadelphians with larger trends and movements. Notably, many of these clubs were specifically organized by and for ethnic and racial groups that were excluded from “mainstream” civil society, either officially or in practice. Furthermore, groups like the National Council of Jewish Women and the Arion Singing Society helped their members navigate assimilation into broader American society while retaining their distinct cultural identities.

In addition to its rich history of hosting social organizations, New Barber’s Hall is also significant within the realm of Philadelphia’s music history, which has produced locally and nationally famous musicians (Criterion A). Beginning during the National Barber’s Sunshine Club’s occupation of the building from 1954 to 1979 and continuing after its conversion into a bar in 1979, the venue has hosted numerous notable jazz, rhythm and blues, and soul musicians. The

role of New Barber's Hall in the careers of these musicians has varied greatly. For some well-established musicians, it was a venue that, as a private club, enabled them to give Sunday performances that were otherwise limited by Pennsylvania's blue laws. For new musicians, the venue provided opportunities to jump-start their careers, gain exposure to talent scouts, and rehearse. In all cases, New Barber's Hall, as both a private club and a bar, has garnered a reputation as a musical forum that has attracted musicians, music-industry insiders, and community members. In 1990, award-winning Philadelphia-based vocal group Boyz II Men celebrated signing with Motown Records at the venue, demonstrating the site's significance for Philadelphia's music scene through 1990.

The following narrative describes the history of the site prior to the period of significance. It then addresses each of the entities that have occupied the property since the Quaker City Wheelmen remodeled the building in 1895, summarizing the organizations' histories, the historical trends and contexts that shaped them, and their activities at 1402-04 West Oxford Street.

### **History of 1402-04 West Oxford Street prior to 1895**

The original structure at 1402-04 West Oxford Street was constructed in the mid-1860s as a single-family Italianate residence for the owner Cyrus Cadwallader, who worked as the treasurer of the Franklin Savings Fund Society.<sup>6</sup> During the mid-nineteenth century, neighborhoods along North Broad Street were fashionable among the city's newly-wealthy elite, especially industrialists.<sup>7</sup> Cadwallader, his wife and three children moved into the house in 1868. Cadwallader conveyed the property to his eldest son Thomas Cadwallader in 1873, although the entire family continued to reside there. In 1874, a legal investigation into the mismanagement of funds at the then-bankrupt Franklin Savings Fund Society revealed that Cyrus Cadwallader had committed extensive real estate fraud, aided by his son.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, numerous properties

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<sup>6</sup> An 1863 atlas of Philadelphia shows no building at 1400-1402 West Oxford Street. In 1868, the Cadwalladers moved into a residence at the address. See Samuel L. Smedley. *Smedley's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, Section 17. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1863; "The Franklin Savings Fund." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 9, 1874. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 2.

<sup>7</sup> David Amott, "North Philadelphia," *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, 2014, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/north-philadelphia-essay/>.

<sup>8</sup> "The Franklin Savings Fund Swindle: A Model Treasurer—Cyrus Cadwallader and his Operations—Poor People Cheated out of their Savings," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 5, 1874. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 1; "The Franklin Savings Fund," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 19, 1874. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3.

owned by Cyrus and Thomas Cadwallader were turned over the assignees of the Franklin Savings Fund, including their home at 1402-04 West Oxford Street.<sup>9</sup>

In 1875, George R. Rittenhouse of Baltimore, Maryland purchased 1402-04 West Oxford Street through a sheriff's auction, and in 1878, he sold the property to Nicholas Rittenhouse of Philadelphia (no known relation).<sup>10</sup> The Cadwalladers continued to live at the address as renters until at least 1880. By then, they shared the building with four other boarders and two servants.<sup>11</sup> Newspaper articles published between 1880 and 1890 mention other residents, suggesting that the building continued to host various boarders throughout the decade.<sup>12</sup> In 1890, the Quaker City Wheelmen began renting the building as their clubhouse, and in 1892, Nicholas Rittenhouse sold the property to Henry G. Freeman, a Philadelphia-based lawyer and property developer.<sup>13</sup> The extensive 1895 renovation project that marks the beginning of the period of significance occurred while the building was under Freeman's ownership; however, there is no evidence to suggest that he played a major role in the project.

### **Quaker City Wheelmen (1895-1900)**

The Quaker City Wheelmen, a Philadelphia-based chapter of the League of American Wheelmen (LAW), were the first social organization to occupy 1402-04 West Oxford Street.<sup>14</sup> Their extensive renovations of the building reflect their status as one of Philadelphia's largest bicycling associations at a time when such clubs were booming in the city. While these clubs united members around a common interest in bicycling, their activities were diverse and far

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<sup>9</sup> The building's address appeared as 1400 Oxford Street in deed abstracts and newspapers as recent as 1892.

"Franklin Savings Fund Case," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 16, 1874. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 2; City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive. Deed Abstract for Lots 107-113. August 29, 1874.

<sup>10</sup> City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive, Deed to 1400-1402 West Oxford Street, July 21, 1875, Book CP 37, 239-241; City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive, Deed to 1400-1402 West Oxford Street, March 20, 1878, Book GGP 184, 170-172.

<sup>11</sup> 1880 U.S. census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania enumeration district (ED) 615, page 33, dwelling 219, family 219, Cyrus Cadwallader.

<sup>12</sup> Death Notice for Mary Elizabeth Jones, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 13, 1881, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 4; "Jottings About the City," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 25, 1980. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 2.

<sup>13</sup> "Cycling Progress," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 5, 1890, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 7; City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive, Deed to 1400-1402 West Oxford Street, December 10, 1892, Book TG 264, 107-110.

<sup>14</sup> The name "Quaker City Wheelmen" seems to refer to Philadelphia's nickname the "Quaker City." There is no evidence that links the club with Quakerism or any Quaker community.

reaching, including participation in other organized sports, dances, musical performances, and even political advocacy.

### ***The LAW and Bicycling Clubs in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia***

The LAW was a nationwide association of bicycling clubs that responded to and encouraged Victorian Americans' growing interest in the modern bicycle, which was at that time a new technology. The League was formed in 1880 to consolidate the efforts of approximately forty previously-independent bicycle clubs across the country. These clubs originally aimed to create a community among early adopters of the bicycle, advocate for their use of public roads, and discourage harassment from skeptical carriage drivers.<sup>15</sup> In the following decades, the LAW gained significance as the governing body for bicycle racing and a founding organization of the Good Roads Movement, a national advocacy effort for the improvement of roads associated with Progressive Era politics.<sup>16</sup>

Membership grew quickly during the first eighteen years of the organization's existence, peaking in 1898 at more than 102,000 members nation-wide.<sup>17</sup> This rapid growth was attributable in part to the LAW's relatively inclusive membership policies. Unlike many turn-of-the-century clubs, the LAW was not organized around a specific ethnic, religious, or professional identity, and both men and women were permitted to join.<sup>18</sup> The organization was also inclusive of individuals from varying economic backgrounds. While LAW membership was initially limited to the wealthy due to the prohibitive cost of early bicycles, the organization began actively cultivating membership among the middle- and working-classes after design and manufacturing improvements lowered cost of bicycles in the late 1880s.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Cycling Handbook* (Illinois: League of American Wheelmen Incorporated, 1947), 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Stanford Braff, "The Perfect Time to Ride: A History of the League of American Wheelmen," *American Bicyclist*, November/December 2007, 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Cycling Handbook* (Illinois: League of American Wheelmen Incorporated, 1947), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Braff, "The Perfect Time to Ride," 20. Initially, there were also no race-based restrictions to LAW membership. However, in 1894, delegates to a nation-wide LAW conference voted to extend membership exclusively to white bicyclists. While individual chapters had the power to overrule this restriction, no evidence regarding the Quaker City Wheelmen's stance on the issue has yet been found. Many Pennsylvania-based chapters were against the exclusion of Black bicyclists, as evidence by their attempt to have the "whites-only" membership amendment repealed at LAW's 1897 convention in Philadelphia. See Andrew Ritchie, "The League of American Wheelmen, Major Taylor and the 'Color Question' in the United States in the 1890s," in *Ethnicity, Sport, Identity*, ed. J. A. Mangan and Andrew Ritchie (New York: Routledge), 15-16, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Braff, "The Perfect Time to Ride," 20.

The popularity and influence of the bicycling clubs in Philadelphia is evident in city newspapers published around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, entire columns in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* were devoted to bicycling clubs and reported on activities ranging from race outcomes to upcoming social events, from the construction of new clubhouses to the organization of affiliated sports leagues. Some columns offer illuminating quantitative insights into these clubs' popularity. In 1892, for example, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* quoted a source estimating the presence of ten to fifteen thousand Wheelmen in the city. This article emphasized the political nature of such a large association, describing the number of members as enough to "make themselves felt in municipal matters" regarding the pavement of city streets.<sup>20</sup> As another testament to the scale of this trend in late nineteenth-century Philadelphia, a 1898 contest held by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* asked participants to identify the clubhouses of one hundred bicycling clubs, seventy-six of which were LAW chapters, on a map of Philadelphia.<sup>21</sup>

These bicycling clubs were located throughout the city, but there was a relatively higher concentration in North Philadelphia than in other areas of the city—approximately one-third of the bicycling clubs shown on the 1898 map used for the Philadelphia Inquirer contest were located between Girard Avenue and York Street (Figure 7.1).<sup>22</sup> This was likely due to the area's rapid development during the second half of the nineteenth century and high concentration of paved roads.<sup>23</sup>

Reports on late-nineteenth-century bicycling clubs in Philadelphia paint a picture of a rich social network engaged in a wide range of activities including the organization of races and leisure rides, basketball leagues, golf competitions, dances, card tournaments, vaudeville performances, and boxing matches. Invitations to LAW events frequently extended beyond the individual chapters that organized them to include Wheelmen from all clubs, as well as their guests, establishing the Wheelmen as a hub of social exchange for many Philadelphians.

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<sup>20</sup> "Bicycling," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 3, 1892, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 14.

<sup>21</sup> "Alphabetical List of the One Hundred Cycle Clubs," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 2, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 23.

<sup>22</sup> "Our Cycle Map No. 37," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 12, 1897, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 36.

<sup>23</sup> "A Bird's-Eye View of Philadelphia's Asphalted Streets: The Latter Indicated by Stroke Lines," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 2, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 23.

individual members of different clubs only, but among different clubs as organized bodies. The narrow-minded barriers that once edged in our puny coterie have disappeared along with the stiff and starched quasi-military uniform of bygone velocipedists, and our wearing different badges as wheel interferences no more with our interchange of club courtesies and sociability than the possibility of our worshipping at different shrines on Sunday or of our voting at opposite booths on election day.

The thought of this pleasurable fact suggested to the present writer the issuing of a bird's-eye view of the location of Philadelphia's cycling clubs, each club being indicated on the map by a number, and said number referring to the name of the club in an alphabetical list by the side of the map.

The alphabetical list is not published herewith, however; nor will it be issued until two weeks from to-day, the writer's original intention having been modified as follows, thanks to the liberality of the proprietor of this paper.

Twelve prizes—one of \$10, one of \$5 and ten of \$1—are hereby offered for the fullest lists of names of cycle clubs corresponding to the figures on the map herewith.

You may not be able to make out all the 102 clubs whose addresses are here indicated; indeed, it is not expected

that any one complete list will be received; do the best you can and send it along as soon as possible, for in case of a tie the earlier postmark will get the preference.

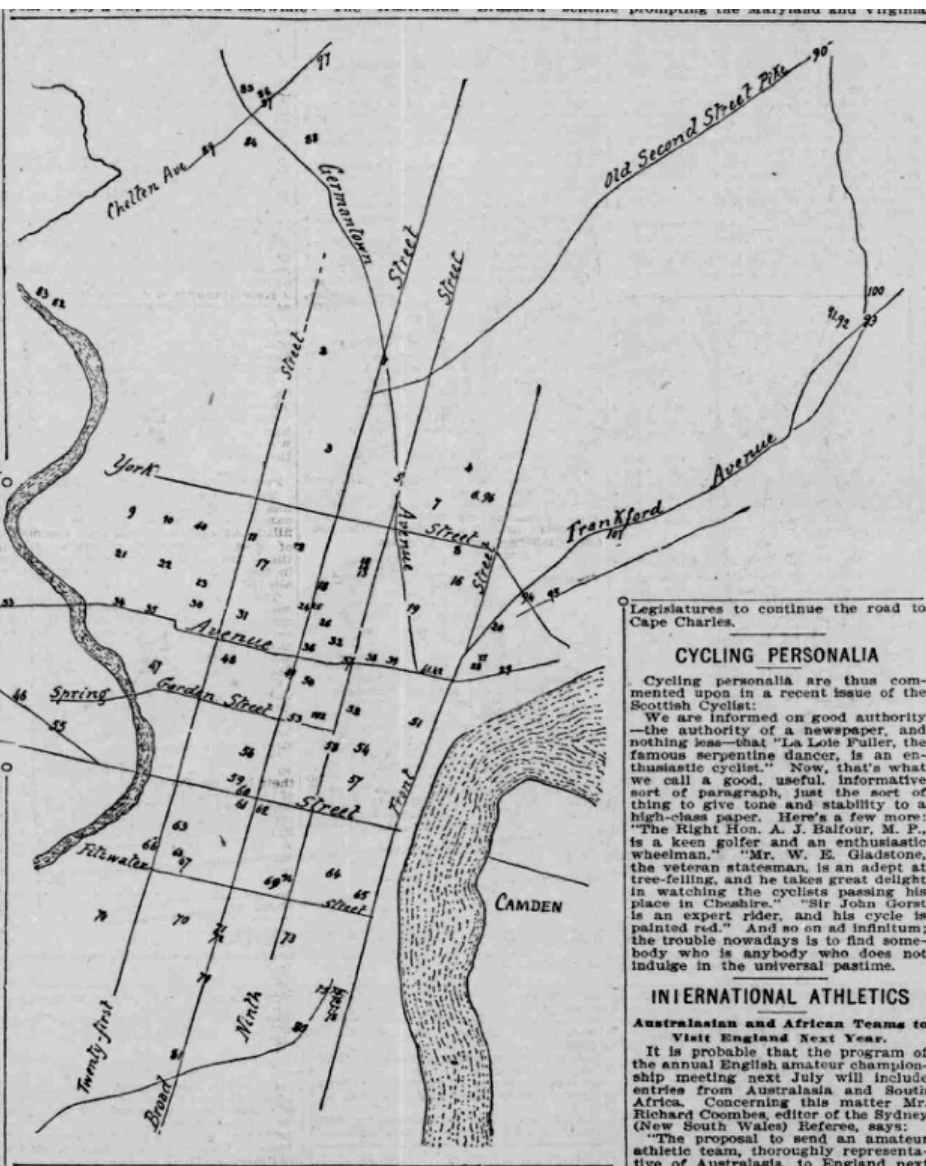
After forwarding one list you may send a second or a third if you can improve upon your previous efforts; but each list must be accompanied by the coupon herewith, and the last must reach this office not later than by first mail on Thursday, December 23.

It is needless to impress it upon competitors that the position indicated by the figures is merely approximative and only as accurate as the dimensions of the map permits.

#### TO MAKE TRAVELING SAFE

##### Set Tramps to Road Building.

W. K. Thomas, the well-known manufacturer of Middletown, O., has written an open letter to the L. A. W., as the outcome of certain efforts made to induce him to join the League, and as his answer to a quantity of "Do you know" printed matter received by him, in which the League's object, benefits, protection, privileges and in-



Legislatures to continue the road to Cape Charles.

#### CYCLING PERSONALIA

Cycling personalia are thus commented upon in a recent issue of the Scottish Cyclist:

We are informed on good authority—the authority of a newspaper, and nothing less—that "La Lole Fuller, the famous serpentine dancer, is an enthusiastic cyclist." Now, that's what we call a good, useful, informative sort of paragraph, just the sort of thing to give tone and stability to a high-class paper. Here's a few more: "The Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, M. P., is a keen golfer and an enthusiastic wheelman." "Mr. W. E. Gladstone, the veteran statesman, is an adept at tree-felling, and he takes great delight in watching the cyclists passing his place in Cheshire." "Sir John Gorst is an expert rider, and his cycle is painted red." And so on ad infinitum; the trouble nowadays is to find somebody who is anybody who does not indulge in the universal pastime.

#### INTERNATIONAL ATHLETICS

Australasian and African Teams to Visit England Next Year.

It is probable that the program of the annual English amateur championship meeting next July will include entries from Australasia and South Africa. Concerning this matter Mr. Richard Coombes, editor of the Sydney (New South Wales) Referee, says:

"The proposal to send an amateur athletic team, thoroughly representative of Australasia, to England next

Figure 7.1: A 1898 map of one-hundred bicycling clubhouses in the city of Philadelphia.

Source: "Alphabetical List of the One Hundred Cycle Clubs," Source: The Philadelphia Inquirer, January 2, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 23.

### The Quaker City Wheelmen and their Activities at 1402-04 West Oxford Street

The Quaker City Wheelmen were founded on January 20 1890.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after the club's establishment, they experienced "phenomenal growth," with membership increasing from the

<sup>24</sup> Originally called the Edgeley Wheelmen, or Edgely Wheelmen depending on the source, the organization changed their name to the Quaker City Wheelmen in February 1890, less than a month after their founding. See "The Wheeling World," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1891, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3; "Hum of the Wheel," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 2, 1890. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 6.

original seventeen members to over 150 members by October 1890.<sup>25</sup> In 1891, the chapter was recognized for “obtaining the largest number of League members among Philadelphia [bicycling] clubs.”<sup>26</sup> The organization was also specifically praised for attracting more female members than any other club in the city.<sup>27</sup> As a result of this success, the organization began planning the construction of a clubhouse that would rival that of other LAW chapters.<sup>28</sup>

The club moved into 1402-04 West Oxford Street in 1890, leasing the building first from Nicholas Rittenhouse and later from Henry G. Freeman.<sup>29</sup> In the mid-to-late nineteenth century clubs frequently moved into mansions rather than constructing a purpose-built clubhouse.<sup>30</sup> As wealthy industrialists gradually left North Broad Street for the suburbs, many cultural and civic institutions moved to the area, repurposing former residences.<sup>31</sup> At the time that the Quaker City Wheelmen moved into 1402-04 West Oxford Street, it was already considered “the largest among Philadelphia’s cycling club houses.”<sup>32</sup> For years, however, the club had ambitious plans to renovate the site. An 1895 issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* discusses the much-anticipated, and recently completed, construction project:

Not so very long ago when one happened to mention the new club house of the Quaker City Wheelmen to any person thoroughly conversant with cycling affairs, he was greeted by a knowing wink and a smile of generous proportions. The Quakers for years had talked about the new building they were going to have, but no move was ever made which gave any indication that the club intended to carry out its threat and build a house thoroughly up to date and in keeping with an organization of its influence and size.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “City Cycling Clubs,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 13, 1890, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 12; “Our City Cycles,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 12, 1890, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 7.

<sup>26</sup> “Coming City Cycling Events,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1891, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 7.

<sup>27</sup> “The Cycling Run,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 15, 1890, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 2.

<sup>28</sup> “City Cycling Clubs,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 13, 1890, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 12.

<sup>29</sup> “Cycling Progress,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 5, 1890, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Paula Rachel Lupkin, “YMCA Architecture: Building Character in the American City, 1869-1930,” PhD diss., (University of Pennsylvania, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, Nomination of 1430 North Broad Street to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, March 9, 2018, <https://www.phila.gov/media/20190401093015/1430-N-Broad-St-nomination.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> “Cycling Progress,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 5, 1890, 7.

<sup>33</sup> “Quaker’s New Home,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 22, 1893, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 11.

The same article describes the 1895 renovation project at length, praising the club's updated facilities as being "one of the finest houses occupied by a bicycling club in the city," and offers further insight into the building's post-renovation configuration and appearance:

The front is very imposing, there being a wide, open porch on the first floor and another on the third. The material used is Pompeian bricks. The style of architecture is unique.

On either side of the hall as you enter are two large rooms. These are the only ones that remain from the old building, but they have been so artistically touched up by the painter and paper hanger that they seem almost as new as the rest of the house. The room to the right is the parlor, which is finished in white, while to the left is the reading room, finished in red, the combination forming the club colors. Back on this floor are the immense wheel room, the lockers and the shower baths.

Up one flight of stairs will be found two of the rooms which are the Quaker's pride. These are the gymnasium and the billiard room. The former is situated in the rear of the building over the wheel room and is of very nice size. It is equipped with a complete set of apparatus, while the floor is of polished maple and will be found very fine, no doubt, at the numerous dances scheduled for this winter by the Entertainment Committee. . .

The billiard and pool room [is] at the front of the house on the Broad Street side [on the second floor]. It is also of very large size, being big enough to comfortably contain the two pool and one billiard table that have been set up without the use of the short cue being necessary. On the second floor are also situate[d] the lounging room and the secretary's office.

At the top of the house there is the front porch and immediately back of it three card rooms, which will be made use of often, as euchre parties are among the Quaker's favorite entertainments during the winter. There are also on this floor the café and the quarters of the janitor.<sup>34</sup>

The "unique" and "imposing" façade achieved through the renovation is characteristic of the Renaissance Revival style. Renaissance Revival buildings are usually impressive in size and scale and feature a symmetrical façade that incorporates classical details such as columns, round arches, and balustrades. They are almost always of masonry construction, frequently with a rusticated first floor, and usually have either a flat roof with a crowning balustrade or a low-pitched hipped roof of clay tiles. They commonly feature porch arcades and porticos.<sup>35</sup> The post-

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, "Italian Renaissance Revival Style, 1890 – 1930," *Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide*,

renovation façade of 1402-04 West Oxford Street incorporates many of these attributes. Most notably, the symmetrical façade features three large arched openings on the ground floor. These originally opened onto a recessed porch, creating a space reminiscent of an arcade. The second story oriel window is framed with classically-inspired ornamentation, including fluted pilasters and a dentil cornice. The third-story loggia is supported by Tuscan columns and is covered by a low-pitched roof, originally of clay tile. The use of Pompeiian bricks is also evocative of historic Italian architecture. Today, the Renaissance Revival nature of the façade is still clearly legible.

The appearance of the Quaker City Wheelmen's post-renovation clubhouse reflected prevailing ideals regarding clubhouse architecture in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. The Renaissance Revival style had been established an appropriate model for clubhouses in mid-nineteenth-century England by Sir Charles Barry through his designs for the Traveller's Club (1829-1832) and Reform Club (1837-1841).<sup>36</sup> McKim, Mead, and White are credited with popularizing Renaissance Revival architecture in the United States in the late nineteenth century and designed numerous clubs in the style, including the Century Association Building (1891), the Metropolitan Club (1893), and the University Club of New York (1899).<sup>37</sup> The Quaker City Wheelmen's clubhouse is more modest than those designed by McKim, Mead, and White for Manhattan's elite, which is reflective of the comparably egalitarian nature of late nineteenth-century bicycling clubs.

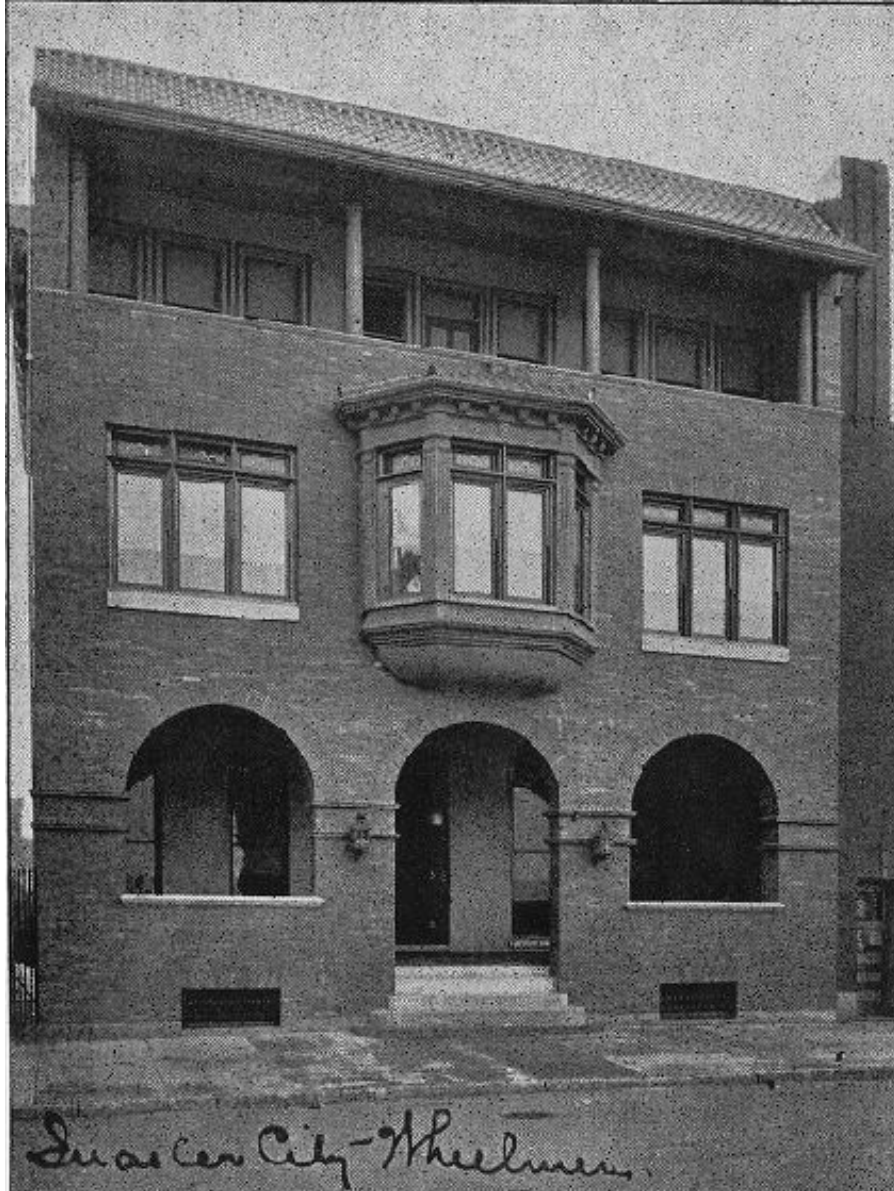
The interior of the building has also retained an impressive degree of integrity. Although the use of the rooms has evolved over time, the basic spatial layout described in the 1895 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article is still recognizable in the building today. The former wheel room, parlor, billiard and pool room, and third-floor card rooms are now outfitted to serve as bars and dining areas, retaining their function as social spaces. The former reading room now serves as a kitchen. Notably, the second-story gymnasium still serves as a hall for dances and musical performances, its original maple floor still intact.

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<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/Portal/Communities/Architecture/styles/italian-renaissance.html>, accessed 19 July 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Lupkin, "YMCA Architecture: Building Character in the American City, 1869-1930."

<sup>37</sup> Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, "Italian Renaissance Revival Style, 1890 – 1930."



*Figure 7.2: 1402-04 West Oxford Street in 1897. Many of the façade's features are still extant today.*  
*Source: League of American Wheelmen Souvenir Programme, 1897, 59, accessed through Philadelphia Architects and Buildings ([https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/image\\_gallery.cfm/883136](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/image_gallery.cfm/883136)).*

During the Quaker City Wheelmen's time at 1402-04 West Oxford Street, they hosted frequent events at their renovated clubhouse, especially in the winter months when they couldn't organize bicycling excursions. Many of these events took place in the gymnasium, including boxing tournaments, basketball games, vaudeville performances, and dances.<sup>38</sup> Some of

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<sup>38</sup> Numerous *Philadelphia Inquirer* articles on the city's bicycling clubs mention these activities. See, for example, "The World Awheel," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 14, 1899, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 9; "The Wheeling World," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1891, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3; "Cycling" *The*

Philadelphia's first professional basketball players even practiced in this space. According to an 1897 edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a group including Walter Thompson and Al Geddes, who both normally played for the Germantown Y.M.C.A. team, trained there every Monday.<sup>39</sup> When the National Basketball League, the world's first professional basketball association, formed in 1898, Thompson and Geddes were recruited for one of Philadelphia's new professional teams, the Clover Wheelmen.

The Quaker City Wheelmen disbanded unexpectedly in June of 1900, much to the shock of the bicycling community. Even newspapers in Pittsburgh reported on the event.<sup>40</sup> As surprising as the disbandment may have been, the club's dissolution corresponded with broader trends in the bicycling world. After 1900, LAW experienced a precipitous decline in membership as the popularity of the automobile overtook that of the bicycle, and the organization was dissolved in 1924.<sup>41</sup>

Ultimately, the Quaker City Wheelmen enjoyed their renovated clubhouse for only five years. However, during that time, they were one of the largest bicycling organizations in the city, representing a trend that took Victorian America by storm. Their activities extended far beyond the realm of bicycling to encompass a variety of activities, serving as an important social outlet for the community in general. Finally, through their renovation of 1402-04 West Oxford Street, the Quaker City Wheelmen converted it from a residential building to clubhouse that was functionally (through a spatial layout designed to accommodate various social activities) and aesthetically (through the use of the Renaissance Revival style) appropriate for a modern club. These alterations facilitated the activities of future organizations that would occupy the building and are still legible today.

### **Americus Club (1900-1908)**

After the Quaker City Wheelmen dissolved, another organization—the Americus Club—moved into 1402-04 West Oxford Street, which then became known as the Americus Clubhouse.

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*Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 21, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 4; "Basket Ball Notes," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 4; "Gymnastics at the 'Q.C.W.'," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 24, 1898, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 4; and "World Awheel," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 1899, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 10.

<sup>39</sup> "Basket Ball News," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 8, 1897, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 4.

<sup>40</sup> "Cycling," *The Pittsburgh Press*, June 7, 1900. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Cycling Handbook* (Illinois: League of American Wheelmen Incorporated, 1947), 20-21. The organization was later revived several times during the twentieth century.

Originally founded in 1891 as the Americus Wheelmen, an all-Jewish LAW chapter, the club's social activities were similar to those of the Quaker City Wheelmen, including vaudeville performances, card tournaments, semi-weekly dances, and—after the installation of a bowling alley in the clubhouse basement in 1903—bowling parties.<sup>42</sup> Like the Quaker City Wheelmen, the club also boasted a large membership: In 1902, 195 members were enrolled in the club. With membership capped at 200, one newspaper speculated that a waitlist would soon be necessary.<sup>43</sup>

By 1903, the organization had dropped their affiliation with LAW to become a purely social club with no ties to any specific sport or activity, a development which correlated with the general decline of the late nineteenth-century bicycling boom. While the organization separated themselves from Philadelphia's bicycling community, they maintained strong ties to the city's Jewish, specifically German-Jewish community. Throughout the Americus Club's time in 1402-04 West Oxford Street, the club's facilities were made available to numerous other Jewish organizations and individuals, including the National Council of Jewish Women, whose relationship with the building is detailed below. The Americus Club dissolved in 1908, when it merged with the Mercantile Club, a similar social organization for Jewish men, moving to the latter's facilities and abandoning 1402-04 West Oxford Street.

### ***Increasing Anti-Semitism and the Rise of Jewish Social Clubs***

The Americus Club's founding and growth reflected broader trends in American Jewish communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period of change in the scale and nature of anti-Semitism in the United States. While anti-Semitism had always been present in the United States, American-Jewish populations experienced relatively many opportunities for integration in non-Jewish circles. Social clubs including athletic associations, singing societies, and fraternal organizations widely welcomed Jewish—particularly German Jewish—members until the mid-nineteenth century.

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<sup>42</sup> "Americus Club," *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, January 23, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3; For examples of the club's social activities, see "Night at Monte Carlo: Unique Entertainment Given by Americus Wheelmen," *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, January 25, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3. "Americus Wheelmen Entertain," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 30, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 15. "The Americus Club's Prosperous Year," *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, February 5, 1904. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 10.

<sup>43</sup> "Americus Club: Annual Meeting and Election of Officers," *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, January 31, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3.

Beginning around the 1870s, however, discrimination against Jewish people became more pronounced in American civil society. This was attributable in part to a perception among wealthy non-Jewish Americans that growing prosperity among established German-Jewish communities was a threat to their status. As more Jewish Americans could afford entry into upper-class clubs and establishments, these institutions responded by barring them outright. Less exclusive organizations followed suit, and Jewish Americans were consequently excluded from many organizations they had once been free to join. Anti-immigrant sentiments further fueled this increasing discrimination, as large numbers of Jewish immigrants arrived from Eastern Europe between 1882 and 1914. Formally excluded from clubs that had once served as important social outlets, Jewish communities formed their own parallel clubs.<sup>44</sup>

In Philadelphia, distain for growing German-Jewish prosperity also shaped neighborhood demographics. North Broad Street, which was known for its population of *nouveaux riches* industrialists, also became popular among wealthy German-Jewish families. Neither the city's newly-wealthy industrialists nor its Jewish population were generally accepted among Philadelphia's established elite, who lived around Rittenhouse Square. North Broad Street, including the area around 1402-04 West Oxford Street, offered them the alternative of building their own upper-class neighborhood.<sup>45</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that any of Philadelphia's LAW chapters had overtly anti-Semitic membership restrictions. However, the existence of the Americus Club, and the other organizations that used its clubhouse, reflect a larger historical trend regarding the creation of Jewish-specific social associations necessitated by increasing discrimination. Their location at 1402-04 West Oxford Street, near North Broad Street, reflects the area's popularity among Philadelphia's wealthy German-Jewish population.

### ***National Council of Jewish Women (1900-1908)***

One of the most notable organizations to regularly meet at the Americus Clubhouse was the Philadelphia Section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). The NCJW was

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<sup>44</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 2006), 13-14; Steven A Riss, "Antisemitism and Sport in Central Europe and the United States c. 1870-1932." in *Jews in the Gym: Judaism, Sports, and Athletics*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2012), 110-111.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Ujifusa, "The Lost World of North Broad Street," *PhillyHistory Blog*, June 08, 2010, <https://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/2010/06/the-lost-world-of-north-broad-street/>.

founded in 1893 and grew out of founder Hannah Greenbaum Solomon's experiences of discrimination as a member of the Women's Committee for the World's Parliament of Religions at the 1890 World's Fair in Chicago. Firmly rooted in the politics of the Progressive Era, the organization became a platform through which Jewish-American women could negotiate multifaceted aspects of their identities while contributing to turn-of-the-century social reform efforts. The organization also helped form a uniquely female voice within Reform Judaism in America, promoting both deeper connections with Jewish values and increased female involvement in the public arena. In doing so, it helped generations of Jewish women navigate the challenges of assimilation.<sup>46</sup> As author Dr. Faith Rogow writes in her history of the organization, "the Council supplied both a Jewish voice in the world of women's clubs and a way to Americanize without sacrificing Jewish identity."<sup>47</sup> The NCJW is still active today, and according to their website, they have more than 210,000 members across the country.

The Philadelphia Section of the NCJW was founded in 1894 and grew quickly. At the time of its founding, it had only 74 members; ten years later, its enrollment had reached 626.<sup>48</sup> In 1901, this rapidly expanding organization began meeting in the gymnasium at the Americus Clubhouse.<sup>49</sup> Their meetings followed a consistent format and included presentations on a range of academic topics, updates from the organization's committees, and musical performances by members. Almost invariably, they were concluded with an hour-long reception in the "grotto" of the clubhouse, which today serves as the first-floor bar and dining room.<sup>50</sup> Descriptions from these meetings published in the Philadelphia newspaper *The Jewish Exponent* illustrate the group's commitment to social work within the city and their progressive approach to a range of political and cultural topics.

The organization's initiatives were remarkable for their direct impact on Philadelphia's Jewish working-class and immigrant communities. For example, in 1904 the NCJW established

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<sup>46</sup> Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> "Philadelphia City News: Council of Jewish Women, Tenth Annual Meeting – Industrial Home to be Ready this Month," *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, May 6, 1904; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 10.

<sup>49</sup> *The First Fifty Years: A History of the National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1943*. National Council of Jewish Women, 1943. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania), 90.

<sup>50</sup> While the word "grotto" is used to describe the space in newspaper articles from the time, it's unclear if the area in any way took on the appearance of a grotto.

the Industrial Home for Jewish Working Girls.<sup>51</sup> This institution housed girls aged eight to eighteen while also offering them “economical and industrial training” that could be translated into employment opportunities while “elevating them morally” and “preparing them to become self-supporting and useful members of society.”<sup>52</sup> In 1907, the NCJW’s Industrial Home Committee reported that the institution was home to 20 residents.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the organization’s Immigrant Aid Committee assisted female immigrants in locating relatives and finding employment upon their arrival in Philadelphia. This program assisted as many as eighty-two new arrivals in the city over the course of a year.<sup>54</sup>

Another example of the NCJW’s turn-of-the-century social work in Philadelphia was the organization’s Sewing School. This organization not only provided training opportunities for working-class children but also organized outings and entertainment for them. In 1904, for example, the program reached a total of 160 students from American, Russian, English and Romanian backgrounds. An average of sixty-three students attended the school each day, with sometimes as many as ninety pupils in attendance.<sup>55</sup> These initiatives—The Industrial Home for Jewish Working Girls, the Immigrant Aid Committee, and the Sewing School—demonstrate the direct effects of the NCJW’s outreach efforts in Philadelphia during the years they held meetings at the Americus Club.

In addition to these social work initiatives, meeting reports from the *Jewish Exponent* indicate that the organization also encouraged members to engage with a variety of political, social, and intellectual topics through lectures delivered both by members and guests. Some of these presentations intersected directly with the organization’s outreach efforts, including content on the improvement of charitable efforts towards women and children, effective immigration aid work, the history and value of the juvenile court system, and the need for women’s clubs to be self-

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<sup>51</sup> From 1904 until 1915, the Industrial Home for Jewish Working Girls was located at 6003 Lombard Street. In 1915, it moved to the corner of Penn Street and Magnolia Avenue in Germantown, Philadelphia. See “Philadelphia City News: Industrial Home Dedicated,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, June 10, 1904, ProQuest Historic Newspapers, 10, and “Council of Jewish Women: Address by Mrs. Marian Booth Kelly,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, April 16, 1915, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3.

<sup>52</sup> “Philadelphia City News: Council of Jewish Women, Tenth Annual Meeting,” 10.

<sup>53</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Interesting Annual Meeting Last Monday,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, May 10, 1907, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> “Philadelphia City News: Council of Jewish Women, Tenth Annual Meeting,” 10.

governing.<sup>56</sup> Other lectures addressed Jewish-American and women-centric topics. This included, for example, a lecture on Emma Lazarus, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish-American writer, and the portrayal of Jewish identity in her works.<sup>57</sup> Another lecture highlighted the impact of American institutions on Russian-Jewish communities in New York City.<sup>58</sup> To name a final example, a presentation entitled “Women in Literature” discussed the depiction of Jewish and non-Jewish women in the works of authors such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russel Lowell, Sir Walter Scott, and George Eliot.<sup>59</sup>

The Philadelphia Section of the NCJW also engaged with a variety of efforts that extended beyond Philadelphia’s Jewish community. Newspapers indicate that the Council collaborated with other organizations such as the United Labor League and the National League of Women’s Clubs to advocate for safe labor practices and trade education for women.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, they regularly sent delegates to a variety of conferences across the United States. These included national NCJW meetings as well as non-NCJW conferences such as a “Peace Conference” in 1902 and a 1906 conference on immigration in New York City.<sup>61</sup> These delegates not only represented the Philadelphia Section of the NCJW but also delivered reports on conference proceedings upon their return, ensuring that the Philadelphia members of the NCJW could learn about and contribute to conversations and movements beyond the scope of their city.

The last known NCJW meeting at 1402-04 West Oxford Street took place in 1908.<sup>62</sup> During the organization’s eight-year affiliation with the building, the NCJW meetings held there resulted in social work that had a direct impact on Philadelphia’s Jewish community, primarily women, children, and recent immigrants. Descriptions of meetings also indicate that the space

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<sup>56</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Interesting Paper on Emma Lazarus by Miss Mabel Lyon,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, March 15, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 8; “Lines of Local News,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 11, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 8. “Council of Jewish Women: Reverend Elmaleh Decries Sectarianism in Schools,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, March 15, 1907, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 3.

<sup>57</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Interesting Paper on Emma Lazarus,” 8.

<sup>58</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Hanucca Entertainment,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, October 17, 1902.

<sup>59</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Miss Goldberg Reads Paper,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, December 13, 1907, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 11.

<sup>60</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Interesting Paper on Emma Lazarus by Miss Mabel Lyon,” 8.

<sup>61</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Hanucca Entertainment,” 9; “Philadelphia City News: Council of Jewish Women Aid Industrial Home,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, February 16, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 9.

<sup>62</sup> “Council of Jewish Women: Delightful Paper Read by Mrs. J.H. Landau,” *The Jewish Exponent (Philadelphia)*, March 13, 1908, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 9.

hosted lectures, reports, and discussions that facilitated engagement with a wide range of social and political topics, many of which connected this specific community to larger networks.

### **Arion Singing Society (1909-1954)**

In 1909, Henry Freeman Jr., who had owned 1402-04 West Oxford Street since 1892, sold the building. The new owner, the Arion Singing Society (also known by their German name, the *Arion Gesangverein*), were one of several German-language choirs with a long history in Philadelphia.<sup>63</sup>

### ***German Immigration and German-Language Associations in Philadelphia***

German-language singing groups have existed across the United States since the mid-nineteenth century, and Philadelphia played a central role their history as the home of the first such association to exist in the United States. This pioneering group, the Philadelphia *Männerchor* (Men's Choir), was founded in 1835, and over the next fifteen years, an additional four German singing groups were established in Philadelphia (*Liedertafel*, *Sängerbund*, *Eintracht*, and *Caecilia*). During the same period, similar organizations also were founded across the country in cities including Baltimore, Cincinnati, Boston, Charleston, New York, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Louisville, Madison, Saginaw, and Milwaukee. This rapid rise of German singing groups correlated with national immigration trends. Between 1815 and 1848, the first mass emigration of Germans to the United States took place, with approximately 540,000 Germans entering the country.<sup>64</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, these numbers continued to increase, culminating in the 1880s with 1.5 million Germans arriving in the United States during the decade.<sup>65</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century, German immigrants in Philadelphia settled largely in the northern section of the city, where they found employment in the area's numerous industrial sites. They exerted a strong cultural influence on this part of the city, founding over six hundred voluntary associations, among them mutual aid institutions, singing societies

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<sup>63</sup> The club's name was inspired by the ancient Greek poet Arion.

<sup>64</sup> Deutsch Historisches Museum, "Mass Emigration to the New World," Google Arts and Culture, 2018, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/mass-emigration-to-the-new-world-deutsches-historisches-museum/UQUB2zoZoSHFIA?hl=en>.

<sup>65</sup> "The Germans in America." European Reading Room, Library of Congress, April 23, 2014. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/imde/germchro.html#:~:text=1950s%20%2D%20Between%201951%20and%201960,immigrated%20to%20the%20United%20States.&text=1970s%20%2D%20Between%201971%20and%201980,i mmigrated%20to%20the%20United%20States>.

gymnastics associations, and marksmanship clubs<sup>66</sup> Such organizations not only provided important assistance to immigrants adjusting to an unfamiliar new country but also fostered a common identity among the German-American population. Additionally, by orchestrating large-scale cultural events that attracted Philadelphians of all backgrounds, these organizations effectively advocated for wide-spread acceptance of German culture among America's middle class.<sup>67</sup> The influence of this immigrant group was long-lasting. German-speaking enclaves continued to exist in North Philadelphia into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>68</sup>

### ***History of the Arion Singing Society and their Activities at 1402-04 West Oxford Street***

When the Arion Singing Society was founded in 1857, it was one of twelve German choirs based in Philadelphia.<sup>69</sup> The Society's activities were typical for German singing associations. They visited parks and nearby cities; threw social events, most notably an annual masked ball; coordinated with other singing groups to hold charity concerts for causes in the United States and Germany; and, most importantly, participated in local, regional, and national singing festivals. These festivals, organized by associations of German-language choirs, were noteworthy events, sometimes involving over 1500 performers and attracting a large audience.<sup>70</sup> While the Arion Singing Society was an all-male choir, in 1890 a women's auxiliary group, called the *Arion Damen Verein* (Arion Women's Association) was formed. By 1907, the club included sixty-six active members who participated in the choir and 112 passive members who paid dues and attended social events. That same year, forty-two women were enrolled in the *Arion Damen Verein*.

In 1909, the Arion Singing Society and the *Arion Damen Verein* moved to 1402-04 West Oxford Street from their old clubhouse at 310 North 4<sup>th</sup> Street. By the club's own account, the building was highly sought after among Philadelphia's social organizations, and the Arion Singing

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<sup>66</sup> Martha Crary Halpern, "German Singing Societies of Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," prepared for the German Society of Pennsylvania, 1968, (Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collections), 16; Birte Pflieger, "German Immigration to Philadelphia from the Colonial Period through the Twentieth Century," in *Global Philadelphia: Immigrant Communities Old and New*, eds. Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 128.

<sup>67</sup> Heike Bungert, "The Singing Festivals of German Americans, 1849-1914," *American Music* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 148.

<sup>68</sup> Pflieger, "German Immigration to Philadelphia from the Colonial Period through the Twentieth Century," 128.

<sup>69</sup> Halpern, "German Singing Societies of Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," 29

<sup>70</sup> Bungert, "The Singing Festivals of German Americans, 1849-1914," 143.

Society had to act quickly to had to compete with offers from several other clubs.<sup>71</sup> Christened “Arion Hall,” the site was opened to the public in March of 1909. Visitors from over 60 associations attended the event.<sup>72</sup> While many of the club’s larger performances took place in other venues across Philadelphia and the United States, as the club’s headquarters, Arion Hall facilitated the group’s participation in these events, serving as a rehearsal space and small-scale concert venue. Equally important, it was a bustling gathering spot where both singers and “passive members” met to eat, drink, and socialize.

Arion Hall also served as a hub for Philadelphia’s German community in a broader sense. For nearly two decades, the *Arion Gesangverein* shared the hall with two other German-language choirs. A group called *Harmonie*, began meeting at Arion Hall in 1915, and the Philadelphia *Männerchor*, the nation’s first German singing association, moved its headquarters to Arion Hall in 1920.<sup>73</sup> Both groups left the building in 1934 due to economic pressures caused by the Great Depression.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, Arion Hall was an important location during singing festivals held in Philadelphia for both local and non-local clubs alike. During the 1912 National Singers Festival in Philadelphia, an event so significant that President Taft delivered an address to the singers, Arion Hall hosted clubs from Baltimore, Delaware, and New York.<sup>75</sup> During a 1926 regional singing festival, Arion Hall served as the event’s primary information point and the temporary headquarters for numerous clubs traveling to Philadelphia from other cities.<sup>76</sup>

The *Arion Gesangverein* carried out several building projects to accommodate the increasing use of their hall as a meeting place for Philadelphia’s German-American community. In 1921, the group transformed one of the building’s spaces into a *Ratskeller*, a type of tavern traditionally located on the lower levels of the city hall. Given the word’s connotation, this space likely correlated with the bar and dining area on the first floor. In 1922, the association renovated the basement bowling alley and replaced a brick wall that had previously divided the space with

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<sup>71</sup> Arion Singing Society, Brochure, 1932, *Arion Singing Society: 75th Anniversary*. Ms.Coll.55, Folder 10, American Collection, Joseph Horner Memorial Library, German Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>72</sup> “The Arion in New Home,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 2, 1909, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Arion Singing Society, Brochure, 1957, *Arion Gesang Verein 100th anniversary, 1857-1957, Banquet and Dance: Friday, April 5, 1957, Philadelphia Rifle Club, 8th and Tabor Road, Philadelphia, Pa*, AG 491, American Collection, Joseph Horner Memorial Library, German Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>75</sup> Arion Singing Society, Brochure, 1932, *Arion Singing Society: 75th Anniversary*.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

steel columns and girders.<sup>77</sup> According to pamphlets issued by the club in honor of landmark anniversaries, there was another round of significant alterations in 1923, but neither building permits nor fire insurance maps provide definitive insight into these changes.

By 1950, some association members began voicing their desire to move to a new location, asserting that “the neighborhood [wasn’t] good enough anymore.”<sup>78</sup> This was almost certainly a reaction to the growing African American population in North Philadelphia, which had begun to gradually move from other parts of North Philadelphia West towards 1402-04 West Oxford Street in the 1930s (changes in the racial demographics of North Philadelphia are further described below).<sup>79</sup> In 1954, the club hosted their last event at 1402-04 West Oxford Street. They subsequently moved their headquarters to the facilities of the Franklinville Quartet Club, another German-language men’s choral group.<sup>80</sup>

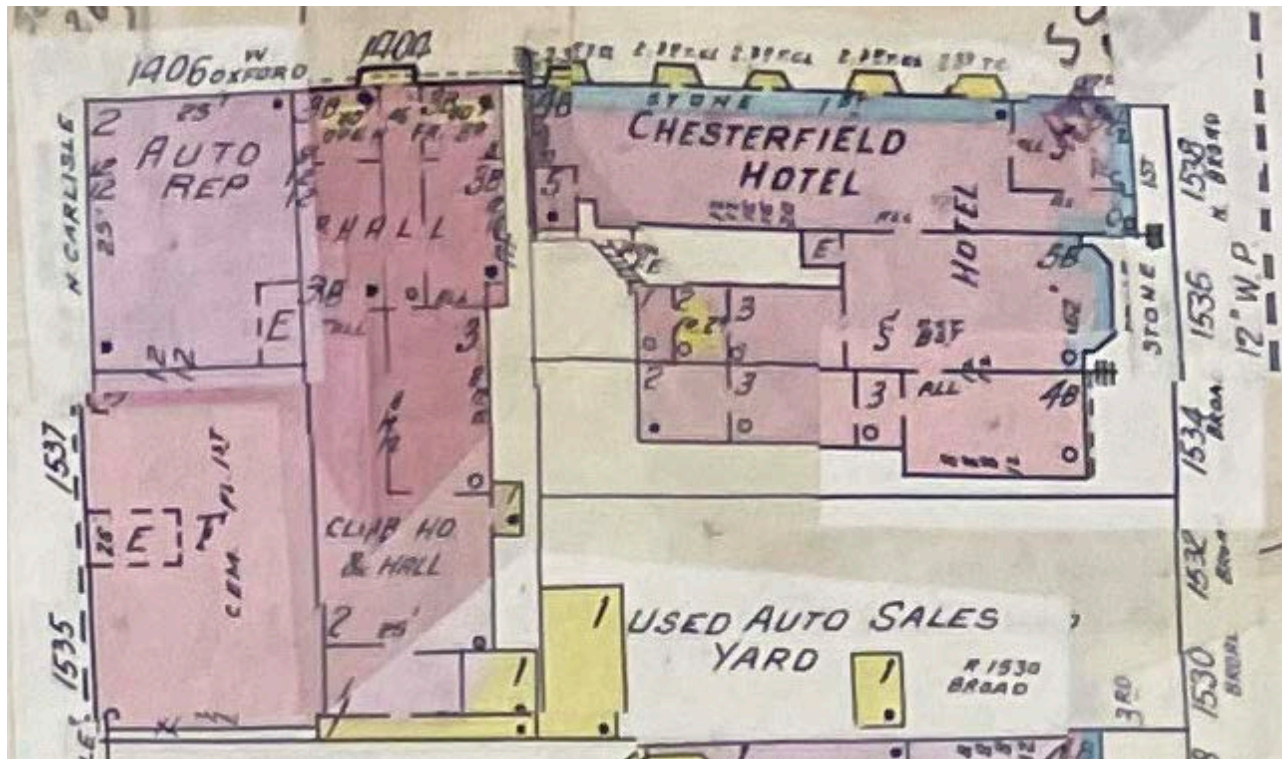


Figure 7.3 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing Barber’s Hall as altered by the Arion Singing Society in 1958. Note the building’s proximity to the Chesterfield Hotel.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.; City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive, Building Permit for 1402-04 West Oxford Street, Permit no. 9433, August 18, 1922.

<sup>78</sup> Arion Singing Society, Brochure, 1957, *Arion Gesang Verein 100th anniversary, 1857-1957*.

<sup>79</sup> City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive, Racial Map for the City of Philadelphia, January 4, 1944, FF-MISC-04.

<sup>80</sup> Arion Singing Society, Brochure, 1957, *Arion Gesang Verein 100th anniversary, 1857-1957*.

### **National Barbers' Sunshine Club (1954-1979)**

In 1954, 1402-04 West Oxford Street was purchased on behalf of the newly-founded National Barber's Sunshine Club, a fraternal organization of Black barbers, by the National Barbers Investment Corporation. There was considerable, if not complete, overlap between these two entities, the primary difference being that the club was incorporated as a non-profit and the investment corporation as a business.



*Figure 7.4: The first-floor rear bar and dining room of Barber's Hall in 1958, shortly after the building had been purchased by the National Barber's Sunshine Club. Source: Brandon T. Harden, "The North Philly Bar Has Made its Mark on the City's Vibrant Music and Cultural History," The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 4, 2019 (Digital Edition).*

### ***Mid-Twentieth-Century Demographic Changes in North Philadelphia***

The establishment of the National Barber's Sunshine Club was reflective of demographic changes in North Philadelphia during the mid-twentieth century. During the early twentieth century, much of North Philadelphia had been characterized by European immigrant communities, including those from Germany, Ireland, Russia, Poland, and Latvia. The areas around North Broad Street, previously home to the wealthy industrialists, had become a popular location for cultural and civic institutions. During the mid-twentieth century, however, the neighborhood gradually emerged as a center of Philadelphia's Black population. Several historical trends contributed to this demographic change. First, during the Great Migration, large numbers of African Americans left the South for northern industrial cities. The same industrial jobs that had attracted European immigrants to North Philadelphia were also attractive to Black migrants from the South.<sup>81</sup> Second, discriminatory real estate practices and federal mortgage policies enabled an increasing number of white Americans from middle and working-class backgrounds to purchase their own suburban homes. The resulting "white flight" from Philadelphia opened up neighborhoods that were previously inaccessible to the city's African American residents. However, racial discrimination within the housing market still limited most Black Philadelphians to "inner-city, high-density neighborhoods with aging and blighted housing stocks."<sup>82</sup> City-wide surveys show that African American communities, already well-established in many areas of North Philadelphia West, gradually moved towards 1402-04 West Oxford Street between 1932 and 1943.<sup>83</sup> Between 1940 and 1960, North Philadelphia became the "largest and most densely-populated black neighborhood" in the city with the African American percentage of the neighborhood's population growing from twenty-eight to sixty-nine percent.<sup>84</sup>

As North Philadelphia became a center of Black culture in the city, several notable jazz corridors developed in the area. This included a section of Columbia Avenue, now Cecil B. Moore Avenue, between 8<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets known as the "Golden Strip." Just one block north of Oxford

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<sup>81</sup> Amott, "North Philadelphia."

<sup>82</sup> "Why Philadelphia," *Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia*, Temple University.  
<http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-a-northern-city/historical-perspective/why-philadelphia->

<sup>83</sup> City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archive, Racial Map for the City of Philadelphia, January 4, 1944, FF-MISC-04.

<sup>84</sup> Why Philadelphia," *Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia*, Temple University.

Street, this stretch was home to more than fifteen jazz clubs.<sup>85</sup> Nearby, the span of Ridge Avenue between 15<sup>th</sup> Street and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street was also a notable jazz corridor.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Fraternal Organizations and the Profession of Barbering in Black Communities***

It is significant that the National Barber's Sunshine Club was a fraternal order for Black barbers, as both fraternal orders and the profession of barbering have historically been both socially and politically relevant for Black communities in the United States. Black fraternal associations thrived between the mid-nineteenth and late-twentieth centuries, and African Americans even joined fraternal organizations at higher rates than their white counterparts during this period. The importance of such organizations for a population whose civil rights, access to education, and opportunities to amass wealth were systemically limited are multifaceted. Black fraternal organizations anchored communities, supporting community service, educational opportunities, and the development of leadership skills among their members. Like Black religious institutions, they also provided platforms for cooperation and solidarity across demographic lines within African American communities, fashioning networks and modeling patterns of organization that contributed to the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>87</sup>

Importantly, the National Barber's Sunshine Club was not just a Black fraternal association, but one that specifically served Black barbers. The profession of barbering has long history of racialization in the United States. Especially in the antebellum South, barbering had a "stigma of servility" that dissuaded many white Americans from practicing the profession.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, it was a learned trade that had the potential to offer free Black men an entrepreneurial outlet and economic advancement in a society that limited such opportunities.<sup>89</sup>

While Black barbers in the nineteenth century served a primarily white clientele, in the early twentieth century, their businesses became increasingly based in Black communities. By 1940, Black barber shops functioned not only as commercial enterprises, but also public forums

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<sup>85</sup> Faye Anderson, "The Golden Strip," *All That Philly Jazz*, January 5, 2015, <https://phillyjazz.us/2015/01/05/the-golden-strip/>.

<sup>86</sup> Faye Anderson, "Ridge Avenue Stroll Through Philly's Jazz History," April 29, 2017, *All That Philly Jazz*, <https://phillyjazz.us/2017/04/29/ridge-avenue-stroll-through-phillys-jazz-history/>.

<sup>87</sup> See Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser. "Organizations despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations," *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (Fall, 2004): 367-437.

<sup>88</sup> Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-27.

where community members met to socialize and discuss current, frequently political, issues, even if they did not require the service of a barber. Black barbers played a significant role as facilitators in the conversations that took place in their shops. This position offered barbers unique opportunities to engage in activism, and there are notable examples of barbers using their shops to promote causes such as voter registration and membership in the NAACP.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, because their clientele was based almost exclusively within Black communities, these barbers were relatively financially independent from the White establishment, which made them less vulnerable to economic retaliation spurred by their activism or political engagement.<sup>91</sup>

According to various sources, the National Barber's Sunshine Club saw their organization as a platform to "create an ethical level for the profession of barbering" and as a "remedy to segregation" through fellowship.<sup>92</sup> At a time when the Black barbers had unique opportunities to serve as community leaders through the facilitation of discourse within their shops and engagement in activism, it's not surprising that observers ascribed both of these purposes to the club. The National Barber's Sunshine Club was an outlet for Black barbers to share in the unique challenges and opportunities that came with their profession.

### ***Barber's Hall as a Community Center and Jazz Venue***

By 1970, the National Barber's Sunshine Club had fifty-one active members and an estimated 3,000 "associate members" in Philadelphia.<sup>93</sup> While it's not clear what qualified someone to be an associate member, these numbers illustrate that the club had an outreach that extended far beyond its core group of barbers. The club's relevance to the community is also demonstrated by the range of events that occurred at 1402-04 West Oxford Street, then called Barber's Hall. The National Barber's Sunshine Club made their home available to a wide range of organizations. Some were directly affiliated with the National Barber's Sunshine Club, such as the Help Mate Club, a group organized by the barbers' wives.<sup>94</sup> Others were completely unaffiliated with the organization. Examples of these include the Bright Hope Community Fellowship

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 226

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 223, 227.

<sup>92</sup> "Barbers' Wives Form 'Help Mate Club,'" *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 8, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 6; Brandon T. Harden, "The North Philly Bar Has Made its Mark on the City's Vibrant Music and Cultural History," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 4, 2019, C3.

<sup>93</sup> "Progress in Business and Government Areas," *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 29, 1970, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 8.

<sup>94</sup> "Barbers' Wives Form 'Help Mate Club,'" *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 8, 1955.

organization, a youth mentoring program established by the Bright Hope Baptist Church as well as the Philadelphia chapter of the American Woodmen and the Daughters of Isis, two nation-wide Black fraternal organizations that paralleled still-segregated white clubs.<sup>95</sup> The space hosted professional development events, such as a wig manufacturing course held by the Philadelphia Beauticians Association in 1966 and a business management course taught by the Associated Barbers and Beauticians of America in 1977.<sup>96</sup> Barber's Hall was also the location for many events conducted by the Miss Black Teenage World of Pennsylvania organization, including training programs and fundraising events.<sup>97</sup> These examples illustrate that, under the ownership of the National Barber's Sunshine Club, Barber's Hall provided a venue for diverse public events, professional development opportunities, and community service.

Equally as important, the building hosted many private events, including birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and wedding receptions, and the venue still holds significance for community members who celebrated important life milestones there. Sam Hill fondly remembers his wedding reception at Barber's Hall in September 1971. In an email to Ms. Deborah Gary, president of The Society to Protect Philadelphia African American Assets, Mr. Hill wrote, "Neighbors and guests of ours packed the hall and we partied all night long. Yes, Barber's Hall will [always] have a special place in our hearts."<sup>98</sup> Some of the events held at Barber's Hall even celebrated notable public figures, including a 200-person surprise birthday party for civil rights activist and politician Cecil B. Moore in 1958 and the ninetieth birthday party of James H. Dolsen, founding member of the Communist Party USA, in 1976.<sup>99</sup>

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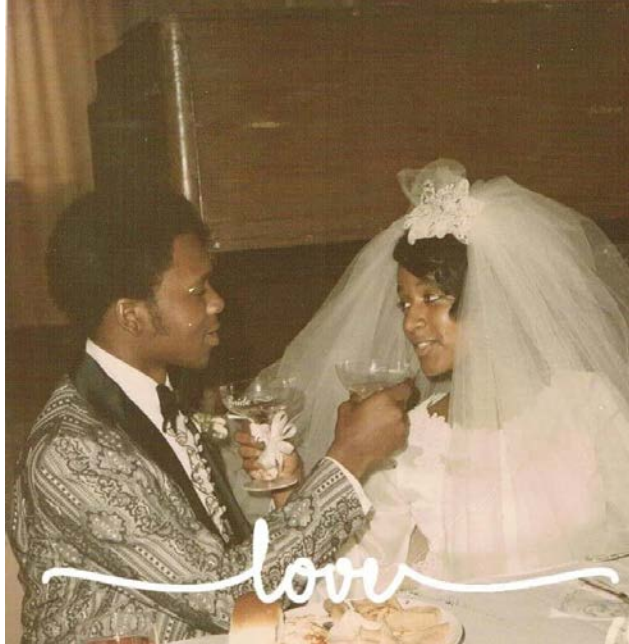
<sup>95</sup> "Church Fellowship Starts Community Youth Program," *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 24, 1957, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 10.

<sup>96</sup> "Beauticians Chapter 64 Hold Wig Making Class," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 12, 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 10; Associated Barbers and Beauticians of America Advertisement (Display Ad 10). *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 3, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Deborah Gary, email message to the author, September 8, 2023. Ms. Gray's aunt Dorothy Brown owned the Miss Black Teenage World of Pennsylvania organization, which was established in 1971. The family assisted the nonprofit's city-wide and state-wide pageants, which emphasized the development of participants' skills including modeling instruction and charm classes.

<sup>98</sup> Deborah Gary, email message to the author, September 8, 2023.

<sup>99</sup> "GOPs Fete Cecil Moore at Barber's Hall Dinner," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 8, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 9; Jeanne Woods, "Birthday Tribute January 18 in Philly for Jim Dolsen, 90," *The Daily World New York*, January 16, 1976, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 11.



*Figure 7.5 Sam Hill and Martha (Peay) Hill at their wedding reception, second floor Barber's Hall, September 4, 1971. Source: Deborah Gary*



*Figure 7.6 Sam and Martha (Peay) Hill's wedding reception, second floor Barber's Hall, September 4, 1971. Source: Deborah Gary*

Today, Barber's Hall is most well-known for its musical history and the many notable performers who have played there. While musical performances have taken place at the building since the late nineteenth century, it was undoubtedly the National Barber's Sunshine Club that established the venue's reputation as a hub for jazz, rhythm and blues, and soul music. According to the current owner, Mr. Jake Adams, Barber's Hall became a popular venue for concerts in part due to Pennsylvania's blue laws, which prohibited a range of activities on Sundays, including the sale of alcohol and many forms of public entertainment. This legislation was complex and changed periodically, with the legality of a performance sometimes depending on the time of day and type of entertainment. Furthermore, the interpretation and enforcement of these laws were inconsistent, resulting in instances of overt discrimination. However, as a private club, Barber's Hall was able to circumvent much of this legislation, allowing the owners to serve alcohol and host performances on Sundays. In the late 1950s, Philadelphia Mayor Richard Dilworth lamented the fact that the Philadelphia Convention Hall was prohibited from hosting performances on Sunday afternoons.<sup>100</sup> During that same decade, Barber's Hall was advertising regular concerts beginning at four o'clock on Sundays.<sup>101</sup>

Surviving newspaper advertisements for Sunday performances at Barber's Hall mention acts such as the Jamaica Gents, the Ravens Drum and Bugle Corp with the Ravenettes, Miss DeLores E. Williams, and Mr. Archie F. Lytle.<sup>102</sup> However, according to Mr. Adams, the venue attracted many well-known performers due to its proximity to the Chesterfield Hotel, located at the corner of North Broad Street and West Oxford Street. The Chesterfield Hotel, which burnt down in 1973, was a high-end hotel in Philadelphia that appeared in the Green Book, a publication listing businesses that accommodated Black travelers prior to desegregation.<sup>103</sup> As such, the Chesterfield Hotel was popular among prominent Black musicians who, despite their fame, were prohibited from staying at most hotels in the city. The combination of Barber's Hall's status as a private club and its proximity to the Chesterfield Hotel meant that musicians on tour could easily stop by the club on Sunday afternoons, when performances at public venues were prohibited.

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<sup>100</sup> "A Blow at Blue Laws." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 26, 1957, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>101</sup> Barber's Hall Advertisement (Display Ad 7), *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 19, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Barber's Hall Advertisement (Display Ad 7), *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 19, 1955, 8.

<sup>103</sup> "500 Attend Dedication of Chesterfield Hotel," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 15, 1944, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 15.

According to Mr. Adams, Miles Davis is an example of a musician who performed at Barber's Hall under such circumstances.

Other well-known musicians are known to have performed at Barber's Hall early in their careers, prior to catching their big break. The Sharmeurs, a female quartet from Philadelphia, were regulars at Barber's Hall and even wrote their most famous song, "A School Girl in Love," there in 1958.<sup>104</sup> Odean Pope, a saxophonist famous both in his own right and for his collaborations with artists including James Brown, Marvin Gaye, and Stevie Wonder, also frequented Barber's Hall early in his career. A 2019 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article on New Barber's Hall describes Pope's recollections of performing at the venue:

"People would come dressed with nice fur coats and nice suits. And there was no talking" during performances, Pope recalled. Barber's Hall clientele was "dedicated and committed to the music." Pope said that the energy in the Banquet Hall, where shows were held, could be spiritual or mystical when performers took the stage.

He pointed to community and spontaneity as characteristics that made Philadelphia's jazz scene special. For as long as he can remember, musicians have congregated in bars, on street corners, and in their mothers' basements "just to be able to play."<sup>105</sup>

Pope's description of Barber's Hall illustrates the special nature of the performances that took place there and offers insight as to why so many musicians and music-lovers have gravitated to the venue. Furthermore, his description of Philadelphia's jazz scene as spontaneous may explain the lack of advertisements for some of the legendary performers who came to Barber's Hall from the Chesterfield Hotel.

According to Mr. Adams, the National Barber's Sunshine Club gradually declined as the members grew older. As many of them surpassed the age of seventy, they no longer wished to run the club or maintain the clubhouse. The National Barber's Investment Corporation sold the building in 1979.

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<sup>104</sup> John Clemente, *Girl Groups: Fabulous Females Who Rocked The World*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2013), 438-439.

<sup>105</sup> Harden, "The North Philly Bar Has Made its Mark on the City's Vibrant Music and Cultural History," C3.



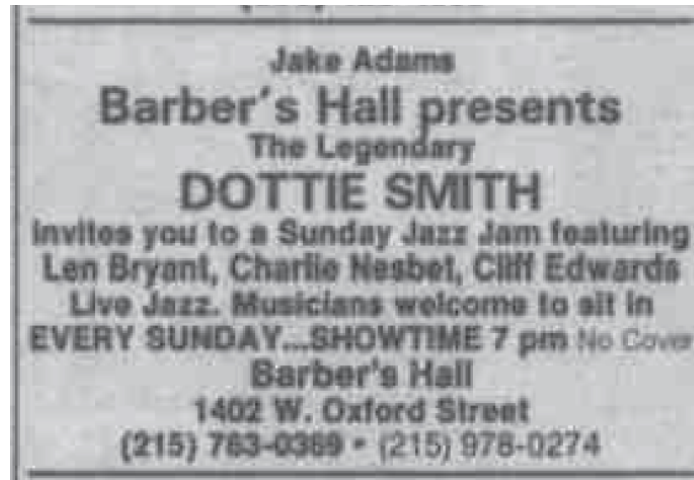
*Figure 7.7: New Barber's Hall in 1985. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Historical Commission.*

### **New Barber's Hall (1979-present)**

In 1979, brothers Jake and Sidney Adams purchased 1402-04 West Oxford Street from the National Barber's Investment Corporation and opened a bar in the former clubhouse, eventually renaming it New Barber's Hall. Despite the building's transition from a clubhouse to a private business, it continued to serve as a popular event space and maintained its reputation for outstanding jazz and soul performances and still served its community in many of the same ways that it had in the past. Mr. Jake Adams, who became the sole owner of the building in 1984, has a wealth of stories to share about the musicians who have visited his bar. Among those he mentions are nationally-recognized Grammy-winning musicians including Billy Paul, Isaac Hayes, Patti LaBelle, and the Temptations as well as jazz legends from Philadelphia such as Robert "Bootsie" Barns.<sup>106</sup> Philadelphia-based vocalist Dottie Smith, who was best known for singing with the Harlemaires and Louis Jordan's Tympany Five throughout the 1950s and 1960s, even hosted performances at New Barber's Hall in the 1990s.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Harden, "The North Philly Bar Has Made its Mark on the City's Vibrant Music and Cultural History," C1, C3.

<sup>107</sup> Barber's Hall Advertisement (Guide to the Lively Arts), *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 24, 1999, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 23.



*Figure 7.8: A 1999 advertisement for a jazz event hosted by celebrated vocalist Dottie Smith. Source: The Philadelphia Inquirer, September 24, 1999, 23.*



*Figure 7.9: Dottie Smith performing at New Barber's Hall. Source: Brandon T. Harden, "The North Philly Bar Has Made its Mark on the City's Vibrant Music and Cultural History," The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 4, 2019 (Digital Edition).*

Like its predecessor, New Barber's Hall not only hosted established musicians, but also served as a venue where up-and-comers could refine their skills, grow their reputation, and gain

exposure to industry insiders. According to Mr. Adams, scouts would visit his business on weekends, looking for talented performers. He specifically recalls scouts who visited the venue searching for—and finding—a drummer to back up Patti LaBelle. Mr. Adams also remembers Kenny Gamble visiting New Barber’s Hall.<sup>108</sup> Gamble is a celebrated songwriter and producer who, along with Leon Huff, established Philadelphia International Records in 1971. Together, they developed the distinctive musical subgenre called Philadelphia Soul or the Sound of Philadelphia, which took advantage of string and horn arrangements to create a sound that was deeper and smoother than other styles of soul. This popular genre also proved to be influential in the development of disco later in the 1970s.<sup>109</sup> The Philadelphia-based vocal group Boyz II Men, regularly rehearsed on the third floor of New Barber’s Hall before becoming famous, and when the group signed with Motown Records in 1990, they celebrated at the venue.



*Figure 7.10: Boyz II Men in 1990. From left to right: Shawn Stockman, Wanyá Morris, Michael McCary and Nathan Morris. Source: Patrick Rapa, “Why, 30 Years Later, the World Still Loves Boyz II Men,” Philadelphia (magazine), August 28, 2021. Credit: Al Pereira/Getty Images.*

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<sup>108</sup> Jake Adams, interview, April 18, 2023.

<sup>109</sup> David Ritz, "Soul Music," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 9, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/art/soul-music>.

The relevance of New Barber's Hall has also been recognized by politicians looking to garner community support. Politicians including Mayor Michael A. Nutter, Governor Bob Casey Sr., and Senator Arlen Specter have hosted outreach events there. As the owner of the New Barber's Hall, Mr. Adams was even invited to dine with Mayor Frank Rizzo at the Union League.<sup>110</sup> These events illustrate a broad recognition of the significance of New Barber's Hall for its central role in the history of North Philadelphia. More than just a bar, performance space, or event venue, it has served as a neighborhood institution and community gathering space across its history.



*Figure 7.11: Celebrated boxer Joe Frazier (left) with Mr. Jake Adams, owner of New Barber's Hall (right). Frazier was a regular at New Barber's Hall. Source: Brandon T. Harden, "The North Philly Bar Has Made its Mark on the City's Vibrant Music and Cultural History," The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 4, 2019 (Digital Edition).*

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<sup>110</sup> Jake Adams, interview, April 18, 2023.

## **Conclusion**

Since 1895, 1402-04 West Oxford Street has been the home of organizations that have represented various communities within the city of Philadelphia, reflecting demographic and social trends within the neighborhood, city, and country. These clubs demonstrate the agency of Philadelphians to organize, support to their respective communities, maintain communal gathering spaces. 1402-04 West Oxford Street is a testament to the many communities that have organized at the building, often as a response to racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination, and it illustrates the importance and diversity of voluntary associations in the history of Philadelphia and the United States.

Furthermore, as an intimate venue for jazz, rhythm and blues, and soul performances, New Barber's Hall occupies a unique niche in Philadelphia's music scene—particularly the city's Black music scene—which has produced nationally-acclaimed musicians and music genres. As a venue where musicians, producers, and audience members could mingle, it served as a musical forum and provided a space for new artists to refine their skills and gain exposure. While the venue has ties to many nationally-famous musicians, New Barber's Hall has remained accessible to average Philadelphians and continues to host exceptional jazz performance and community events.

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