

Preliminary Designation Report

Liberty City Elks Lodge

6515-6525 NW 18 Avenue
Miami-Dade County, Florida
Built: c. 1956



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June 16, 2021

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

NAME: **Liberty City Elks Lodge**

LOCATION: 6515-6525 NW 18 Avenue
Miami, FL 33147
Township: 53
Range: 41
Section: 15

ARCHITECT: Unknown

CONSTRUCTION: c.1956

PROPERTY OWNERS: Elks Lodge #1052 Liberty City

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: LIBERTY CITY PB 7-79
LOTS 3 THRU 9 BLK 8
PR ADD 6511-25 NW 18 AVE
LOT SIZE 140.000 x 70

TAX FOLIO NUMBER: 30-3115-005-1980

SIGNIFICANCE: **History/Context:** The Liberty City Elks Lodge is a local representation of a nationally significant African American fraternal organization that was instrumental in African American community life, including social events, the economy, and politics, and continues as one of the remaining active IBPOEW Lodges in Miami-Dade County. The Liberty City Elks Lodge fulfills Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(a), *Associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric, paleontological and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history in the community, Miami-Dade County, south Florida, the State or the nation.*

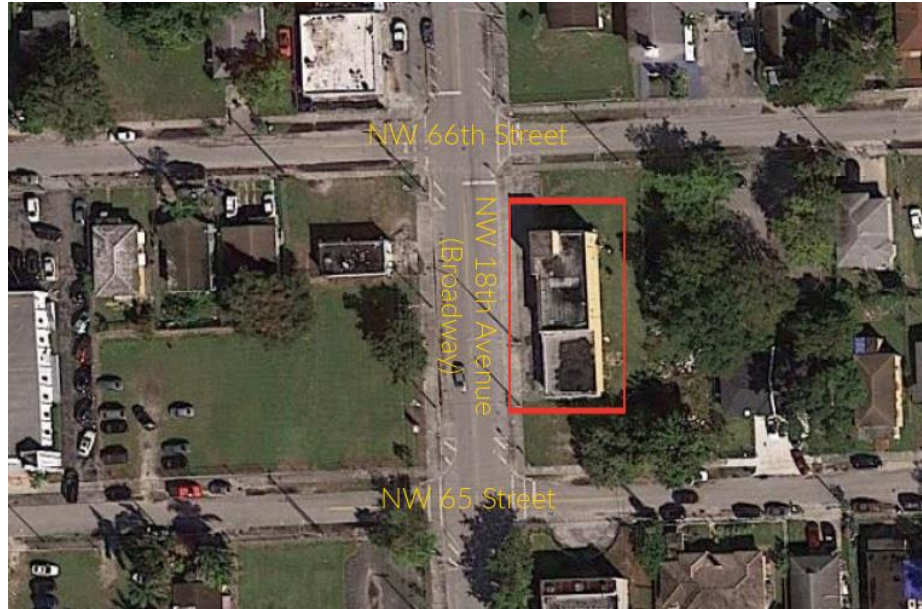
People: The Lodge is connected to the lives of persons significant to the history of Miami-Dade County and the Liberty City neighborhood including Harold Sandilands, W.O. Perry, and elected officials such as Audrey Edmonson. The Liberty City Elks Lodge fulfills Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(b), *be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.*

IMPACTS: The Miami-Dade County Office of Historic Preservation is required to approve any exterior changes and/or additions, demolition, or new construction to the designated resource. Most approvals are handled in-house directly by the staff of the Office of Historic Preservation. Major alterations require approval by the County Historic Preservation Board. Additional details are included in *Section VI: Standards for Certificates of Appropriateness.*

Designated resources are eligible to take part in the County's Ad Valorem Tax Exemption program. As a nonprofit, this would not apply to the Liberty Lodge.

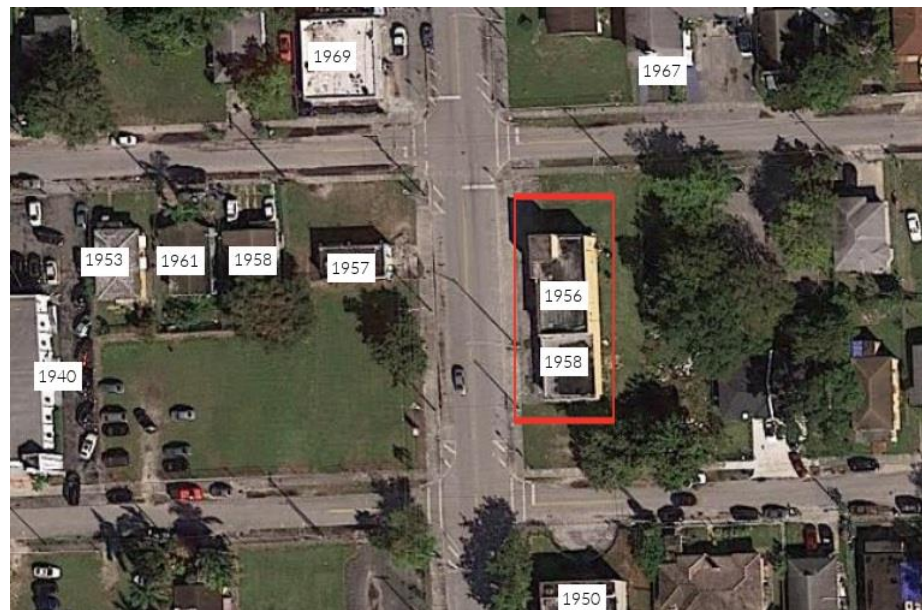
II. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION / SETTING

The Liberty City Elks Lodge (Liberty Lodge #1052) at 6515-6525 NW 18 Avenue is located in the Liberty City neighborhood between NW 65 and NW 66 Streets in unincorporated Miami-Dade County.



c.2021 aerial photo illustrating Elks Lodge (outlined in red).

Buildings surrounding the Liberty Lodge were built primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. Other buildings existed in the vicinity that were also built around the same time, but have since been demolished, and today are vacant lots.



c.2021 aerial photo illustrating Liberty Lodge (outlined in red) and surrounding properties, with year of construction.



Church of God property to the north of the Liberty Lodge.



Commercial properties to the northwest of the Liberty Lodge.



Commercial property to the south of the Liberty Lodge.



St. James AME Church to the west of the Liberty Lodge, visible across vacant property.



Commercial property directly west of the Elks Lodge.

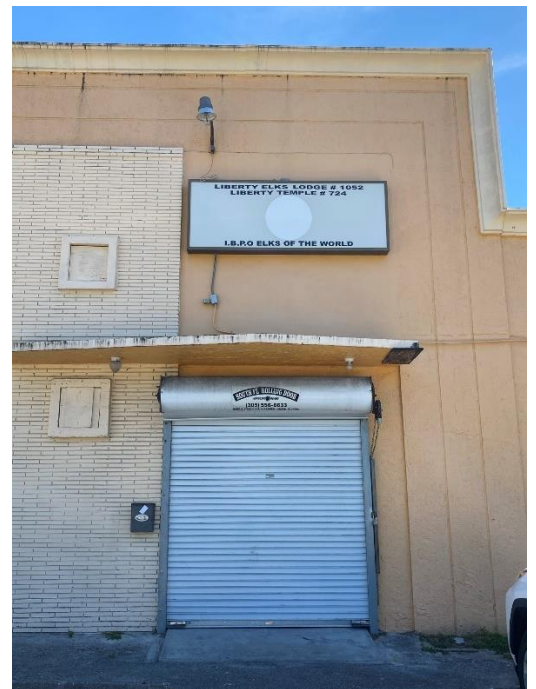
Two churches are in the immediate vicinity of the Liberty Lodge: the Liberty City Church of God on NW 66 Street, and the Saint James African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church on NW 65th Street. Commercial properties exist across the street to both the south and west, as well as northwest of the Lodge. The style of most of the structures in the area could be described as masonry vernacular. The commercial structures are primarily one-story structures.

The building could be described as a masonry vernacular structure with mid-century architectural elements. The main portion of the Liberty Lodge was built in 1956, with a one-story addition on the south that was constructed in 1958. When constructed, the building had a concrete block foundation, concrete block stucco exterior, terrazzo floors, jalousie windows, built up roof, and plaster furred interior. Exterior features included a neon sign and integrated planters on the façade. The building has been altered since construction as evidenced in photos from the Property Appraiser, included in Section III: Historic Significance and Context. Specifically, the façade has been altered to cover windows, and the addition (which originally served as two separate commercial spaces) has had windows and doors covered and changed. The neon sign and planters have been removed.

However, some of these elements are still in place. The terrazzo floors are covered by vinyl flooring. Exterior elements remaining from the c.1956 construction that are unique to the property include the façade entry area including the decorative brick, four decorative squares, cornerstone, signage area, decorative fascia along the roofline, stucco scoring, and entryway/door area including the flat roof overhang. The cornerstone that was placed in 1976 is also a unique element. Although the signage has changed, the area in which signage is located has remained the same.



Façade/west entry of the Lodge (2021) illustrating decorative brick, four squares, fascia, entryway and signage area. The façade has been altered to enclose windows that were historically on the c.1956 building, and to enclose windows and doors on the c.1958 addition.



Façade/west entry of the Lodge (2021), illustrating signage area, entryway, fascia and scored stucco.



Rear/east elevation showing c.1956 structure.



Rear/east elevation showing c.1958 addition, since altered from original construction that included windows and two exterior doors.



North elevation of c.1956 structure.



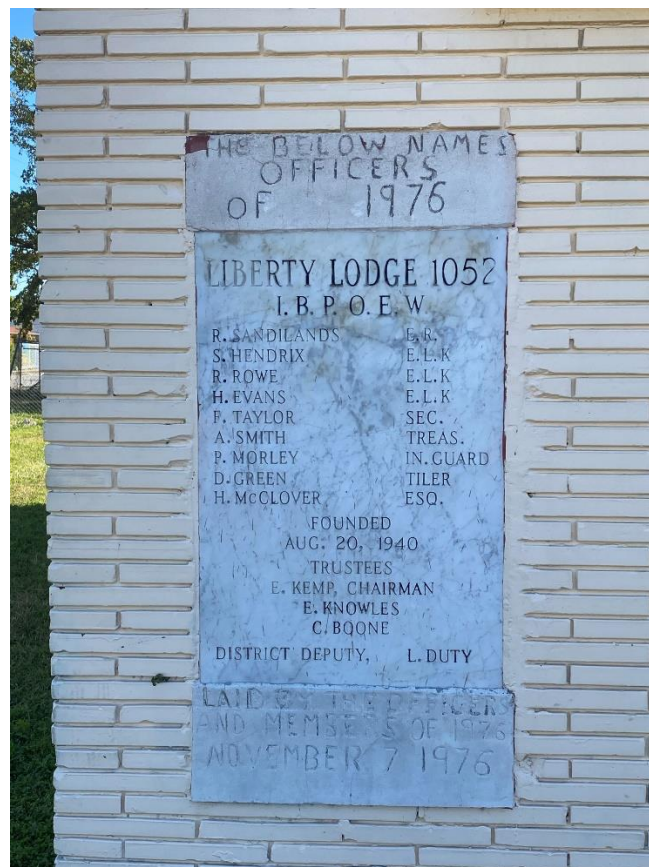
Northeast corner showing north and east elevations.



South elevation of c.1958 addition with portion of rear/east elevation illustrated at right.



Southwest corner of c.1958 addition showing south elevation and showing façade of what was the c.1958 addition.



Cornerstone for Liberty Lodge, laid c.1976.

III. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE & CONTEXT

Fraternal Organizations

Liberty Lodge #1052 is an example of a fraternal association. "Fraternal associations are self-selecting brotherhoods and sisterhoods that provide mutual aid to members, enact group rituals and engage in community service."¹ Historically, in the African American community, fraternal organizations, along with churches, were the dominant community institutions. "Fraternal groups -especially those organized by African Americans – have also performed genuinely 'civic' functions in that they participate in parades and other public occasions, support education and community service, maintain halls that are also used by other groups, and from time to time get involved in legislative or policy campaigns."²

Many African American fraternal organizations organized in the late 19th century as Reconstruction was coming to an end and political advancements for African Americans were being taken away by Whites. As Jim Crow restrictions grew, more organizations sprang up.³ African American fraternal organizations typically fell into two categories: 1) parallel or those that corresponded to leading White fraternal orders, or 2) distinctive, those that were unique and did not resemble any White groups.⁴ The leading American fraternal organizations – Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and Elks – had explicit racial exclusion clauses in their constitutions or practiced racial exclusion.⁵

Fraternal organizations served a significant purpose in Black communities, providing financial, spiritual, social, and emotional support. The earliest African American fraternal orgs were formed before the Civil War and provided an unique opportunity for African Americans to find economic and personal advancement.⁶ African American fraternal organizations provided opportunities for developing organizational leadership skills, as lodges had multiple elected offices and committee posts available.⁷ These organizations also provided economic opportunity, encouraging entrepreneurship, paying employees, and amassing real estate; by the early 1920s, more than 60 African American fraternal organizations had about 2.2 million members and owned \$20 million worth of property including lodges, banks, hospitals and social welfare organizations.⁸

History of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World

The Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World (IBPOEW) was one of several African American organizations formed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to segregation of traditional White American fraternal organizations. The IBPOEW was a parallel organization modeled after the White-only organization, the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks (BPOE). The IBPOEW was founded in Cincinnati by Benjamin Franklin Howard and Arthur J. Riggs in 1897.⁹

Riggs was a Pullman Porter who had been born into slavery. He obtained a copy of the BPOE rituals and finding that it was not copyrighted, Howard and Riggs obtained a copyright through the Library of Congress¹⁰ and held their first meeting as Alpha Lodge #1 in late 1898. After organizing, the BPOE aggressively challenged the IBPOEW, threatening litigation and violence. Riggs was threatened with lynching and forced into hiding with his family, changing his name and moving. It was not until 1918 that the BPOE stopped their racist campaigns against the IBPOEW.¹¹ However, the BPOE was not integrated until the 1970s.

In spite of the threats of violence and litigation, Black Pullman Porters who were members of the IBPOEW assisted with the spread of the new organization and by 1899, the IBPOEW was in eight states (Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Maryland, and Pennsylvania) and in Washington DC.¹² By 1906, there were over 100 lodges in 20 states.¹³ The IBPOEW conducted a range of programs within the African American community. Social events and charitable causes were included, but so were programs around patriotism,

citizenship, and economics and business. These programs were of interest to a growing African American professional class.¹⁴

The organization was popular “given its secularism, tolerance toward moderate use of alcohol, and emphasis on educational programs, community service, and agitation for Black civil rights.”¹⁵ The purpose of the IBPOEW is that the welfare and happiness of its members be promoted and enhanced; the nobleness of soul and goodness of heart be cultivated so that the principles of Charity, Justice, Brotherly and Sisterly Love be inculcated; that its members and families be assisted and protected; and that the spirit of patriotism be enlivened and exalted.¹⁶

Even as other fraternal organizations’ growth stalled during the era of Great Migration (when many African Americans left the South for the North), the Elks continued to attract elite professionals as well as working-class men.¹⁷ Fraternal organizations in fact assisted in this migration, offering connections between cities as African Americans migrated from the rural South to Northeastern cities during the first half of the 20th century.¹⁸ By the 1970s, more than 6% of Black men were members of the IBPOEW meeting in over 700 lodges.¹⁹ Also of note, it was not uncommon for African Americans to be a member of more than one fraternal organization.²⁰

In 1902, Emma Virginia Kelley started the Daughters of Elks in Norfolk, Virginia as the women’s auxiliary to the IBPOEW. The White Elks organization never developed a female auxiliary.²¹ To be a Daughter, a woman had to have a male connection in the IBPOEW. The organization favored father/daughter connections, but would sometimes include brother/sister or mother/son, and eventually the Daughters did not limit their membership to only relatives of male Elks.²² Daughters meet as a “Temple.” The Daughters were not as large a percentage of African American women as compared to the percentage of African American men in the Elks, but the Daughters were a “massive and confident organizational presence throughout the United States in the middle decades of the twentieth century.”²³

Sometimes the men and women’s groups met in the same lodge, and sometimes they had separate facilities with close coordination between the affiliated groups.²⁴ African American women were a significant part of local lodges, comprising from 1/3 to up to 65% of all regularly meeting local lodges, where their White female counterparts only made up from 1/10 to 1/3 of White fraternal lodges.²⁵ Reasons suggested for this strength of female membership are that women were interested in the insurance options provided by fraternal organizations, and that women had strong connections with local churches that often crossed over into association with fraternal organizations.²⁶

Besides the Masons, Elks were the most prestigious fraternal organization of the 20th century among Whites and Blacks. Prominent statesmen, businessmen, professionals and civic figures were members of both White and Black Elks organizations. Black Elks achieved twice the membership rates of the White Elk counterparts.²⁷ In 1922, J. Finley Wilson was elected Grand Exalted Ruler. He founded and edited the *Washington Eagle*, the publication of the Elks Grand Lodge. During his tenure from 1922-1948, Wilson increased the fraternal society’s national membership from 30,000 to 500,000 and oversaw the creation of approximately 900 new lodges.²⁸



Early leaders of the I.B.P.O.E.W.: Arthur J. Riggs, Emma Virginia Kelley, J. Finley Wilson (left to right). From ibpoew.org.

The Black Elks believed in the themes of patriotism and democracy, even at a time when they faced disenfranchisement, inequality and violence at home.²⁹ Over 1500 Black Elks served in World War I, and the Elks as a group purchased \$60,000 in Liberty Bonds and over \$100,000 in thrift stamps, as well as making significant contributions to the Red Cross. The Grand Lodge sent a resolution to President Woodrow Wilson pledging their unconditional support during the war.³⁰ During World War II, Black Elks were commended by the US Treasury Department for purchasing over three million dollars in war bonds. Elks again served in the military, and carried Elks banners alongside the American flag, while Daughters participated in first-aid classes for preparation as nurses.³¹

One of the benefits to Elks membership was that the Elks offered insurance benefits to eligible members. (They also offered “social” membership for those not utilizing the insurance offerings.) However, Black fraternal organizations started facing competition from private insurance companies (Black and White) by the 1920’s, and were also hit hard by the Great Depression.³² Although Black lodges were numerous in comparison to White lodges, they were usually smaller in size and membership, and had members with less wealth, making them more vulnerable to economic pressures.³³ However, the Elks were one of the organizations who thrived after the 1930s and World War II, in part with more emphasis on politics and social activism.³⁴ This was a distinct difference from White Elks, who publicly avoided politics except for general demonstrations of patriotism.³⁵

Virtually all African American fraternal organizations promoted public education and typically offered scholarship funds. Some, like the Elks, were overtly political and supported the activities of organizations like the NAACP. Prior to the 1930s, Black Elks would participate in Republican Party politics, and later, Democratic politics.³⁶ The Elks in particular benefitted from connections with their peers in other countries like the Bahamas, Bermuda, the West Indies and Central America, being the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks *of the World*. These connections outside of the United States enabled their advocacy for civil rights to be part of a larger universal mission.³⁷

The IBPOEW did not shy away from taking activist stances and sharing political messages. In 1941, J. Finley Wilson stated:

“No true American, whether he be the humblest citizen or in the highest position in our country, has a right to claim that he is fighting for democracy unless he is willing to fight to win full democratic rights for Black America. Those who speak of fighting against Hitler while at the same time they desire or approve of semi-slave conditions for Colored people, are not fighting for democracy at all. They are the blood relations of the early slaveholders, who vowed democracy would never gain a foothold in this country. They give aid and

comfort to Hitlerism. Our Country's first step in the fight against Hitlerism must be to keep the fires of democracy burning in our own land for all the American people. Now is the time for leaders in America to prove to the world that Democracy can work!"³⁸

Because of their status as one of the largest Black fraternal organizations with a reputation for advocacy and activism, organizations ranging from the NAACP to the Communist Party sought to form coalitions with the Elks.³⁹ The Elks were known for fighting for the rights of Black workers, in particular.⁴⁰ This was important in an era when unions often excluded Black workers and the membership of the Elks was made up of many working-class men.

Throughout the 20th century, the IBPOEW continued to be activists for civil and voting rights. Walter White, head of the NAACP, made an appearance at the 1953 national IBPOEW convention in Atlanta decrying continued segregation and discrimination, and the Elks adopted a resolution on segregation at the same event.⁴¹ At their national convention in 1964, an Elks Leader proudly announced that IBPOEW scholarships had planted the seeds of the "Negro Revolution," stating, "In the last 29 years, the Elks have awarded more than two million dollars in 987 college scholarships....Some of today's civil rights leaders who were recipients of Elks scholarships include James Farmer, the President of CORE, the Rev. Martin Luther King of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Joseph Waddy, municipal judge of the District of Columbia, and many more."⁴² In 1968, the IBPOEW posthumously granted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his widow, Coretta Scott King, the Nettie Smith Gold Medallion of Honor for their contributions to Black causes.⁴³

Florida IBPOEW History

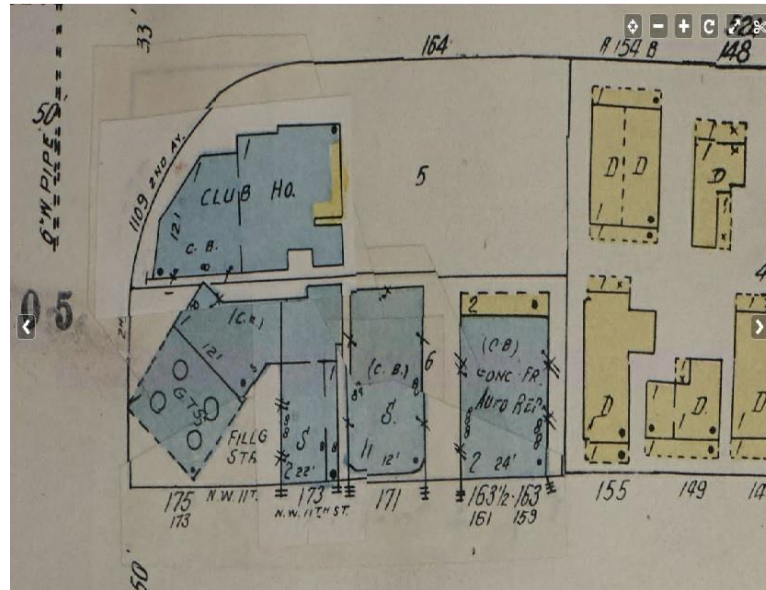
The Maceo Elks Lodge #8 in Jacksonville was approved on December 7, 1898, making it the seventh oldest lodge in the country and the first in Florida.⁴⁴ The lodge later became part of the Florida State Association of IBPOEW, which dates to 1924 and was formed in Jacksonville.⁴⁵ Consistent with the larger national organization, the Florida State Association was also politically active. Articles from the 1940s describe efforts by the Florida State Association to register upwards of 150,000 "Negro" voters ahead of Democratic primaries.⁴⁶



Maceo Elks Lodge #8 Jacksonville, c.1940s, courtesy of University of North Florida Digital Commons.⁴⁷

Miami IBPOEW History

The Elks were established in Miami in 1911, with the Atlas Lodge #308 in Overtown (that later moved to 4949 NW 7 Avenue in 1967).⁴⁸ Sanborn maps c.1950 show a "Club Ho." at the corner of NW 11th and 2nd Avenue, that was opened in 1948, but the lodge was established in 1944.⁴⁹ Clyde Killens, famous in Overtown history, was manager of this club, the Miami Elks Lodge #1113, and operated the Filling Station next door.⁵⁰



c.1950 Sanborn map illustrating likely location of Overtown Elks Lodge "Club Ho.", managed by Clyde Killens. Killens also owned and operated the Filling Station on the corner.



c.1974 image of the Elks Lodge (formerly Atlas Lodge #308 in Overtown) at 4935-4949 NW 7 Avenue, Miami-Dade Property Appraiser.



c.1974 image of the Elks Lodge at 4935-4949 NW 7 Avenue, Miami-Dade Property Appraiser. W.O. Perry, Sr. was a leader of the campaign to build this auditorium.



c.2020 image of the Elks Lodge at 4935-4949 NW 7 Avenue, Google Maps.

Under the leadership of William O. Perry, Sr., a Grand Exalted Ruler with the Atlas Lodge, membership in area Elks Lodges grew. Perry was instrumental in an Elks home that was built on NW 16 Terrace, with Lodge members providing the construction labor, and in the campaign to build the auditorium at the Elk Lodge on NW 7 Avenue.⁵¹ Unique to Miami, Lodges drew membership from Caribbean arrivals. Said one member originally from the Bahamas, “I remember coming in here, smelling the food, listening to the music, and feeling in heaven...[t]hey had pigeon peas, rice and fried fish. It was like home.”⁵² Other Lodge locations in Miami were the Greater Miami Temple of Elks #769 with an address in Coconut Grove at 701 Thomas Avenue, and the Coral City Lodge.⁵³ The Liberty Lodge #1052 was established in 1940.⁵⁴

Like the national and state organizations, the Miami Elks were also supporters of the military and politically active around civil rights. In 1943, Miami IBPOEW members held a parade and bond rally in efforts to raise \$60,000 to buy a tank for the war effort.⁵⁵ In 1944, J. Finley Wilson of the national IBPOEW, dedicated a “negro USO unit” at 525 NW 3 Avenue.⁵⁶ A member who served in Korea remembered coming home from service to be greeted by a parade thrown by the Elks for military members, and during the 1950s, Elks members petitioned elected officials in Miami to end segregation of bus stops around the Courthouse.⁵⁷

Miami was frequently the site of both state and national meetings of the IBPOEW. As early as 1930, the Florida State Association held their annual convention in Miami (as referenced in a *Miami Herald* article promoting a boxing match to be held at the “negro baseball park” with funds raised dedicated to the local Elks Lodge, likely the Atlas Lodge given the date).⁵⁸ The national IBPOEW made Miami their annual convention home multiple times.

In 1964, the *Miami Herald* noted that the IBPOEW was the biggest convention group in Miami for the entire summer with over 20,000 IBPOEW members attending.⁵⁹ That year’s convention included a speech by then U.S. Circuit Court Judge Thurgood Marshall, as well as a parade, military ball, and grand ball. W.O.Perry, Sr. recalled that despite the influx of visitors, hotels were segregated and would not permit Black guests; but staying true to their activism, “[w]e pushed for it and pretty soon, a half-dozen hotels opened up for us.”⁶⁰

IBPOEW conventions continued to be huge draws and some of the biggest convention events in Miami and Miami Beach. During a 1976 national convention in Miami Beach, the national Grand Exalter Ruler Hobson R. Reynolds reflected on changing times: “I remember the first time I came on Miami Beach in 1919...I was told I couldn’t come

on the beach without police papers...Times have certainly been a-changing."⁶¹ He went on to say that after 1960, cities realized how much money IBPOEW conventions brought, and that they "found out we spend so much money and that our money is just as good. Now we get invitations by the hundreds."⁶²



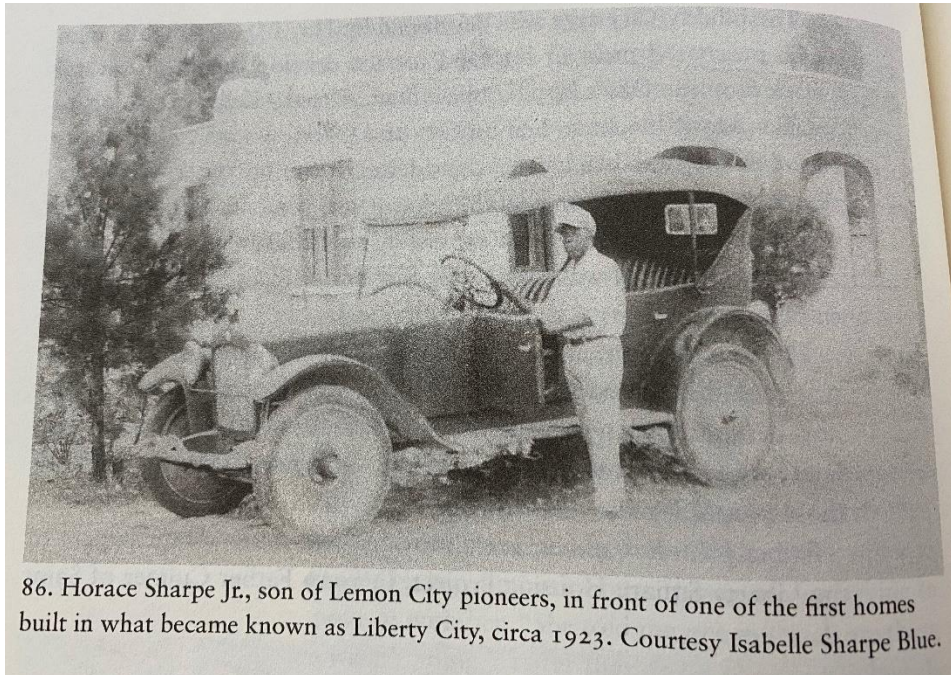
Miami Herald photo of the International Negro Elks Parade in 1964 during the IBPOEW annual national convention.

In 2014, the following lodges were still in existence in the Fifth District of the Florida State Association, which covers Greater Miami, Key West and Liberty City: Antler Temple #39, Coral City Lodge #610/Coral City Temple #400, Greater Miami Lodge #1113/Greater Miami Temple #769, Liberty Lodge #1052/Liberty Temple #724, and Overseas Lodge #1078/Overseas Temple #745.⁶³ As of the writing of this report, Liberty City Lodge is one of the only remaining active lodges in Miami.

Decline in Fraternal Organizations

Since the 1960s, there has been a decline in participation in fraternal organizations in general. Changes in American social habits including other social opportunities, increasing online interactions, and the "bowling alone" phenomenon have contributed to this decline.⁶⁴ External factors that have lead to this decline include: the marketplace and governments meet needs that these organizations previously provided, the rise of nonprofit organizations with more professionalized operations, changes in government relative to civil and women's rights, and the nature of the workforce with more work and more women working.⁶⁵ Internal factors include: membership challenges where members are aging and not recruiting younger people, less feeling of "family" or bonding than in the past, lack of responsiveness to societal changes and demands, focus on existing members versus recruitment of new members, and lack of membership diversity.⁶⁶

The IBPOEW website states that it is the largest Black fraternal organization in the world and that it has grown to over 500,000 members in over 1500 lodges worldwide.⁶⁷ It is not clear if these reflect current membership numbers. Other Elks Lodges have experienced the decline of membership seen in other organizations and have either closed lodges or seen lodges with much less activity.⁶⁸ The Liberty Lodge is one of the last active Elks Lodges in Miami.



86. Horace Sharpe Jr., son of Lemon City pioneers, in front of one of the first homes built in what became known as Liberty City, circa 1923. Courtesy Isabelle Sharpe Blue.

c.1923 image of early Liberty City resident, from *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century* by Marvin Dunn.

Alonzo Kelly, or A.O. Kelly, was born in Key West and moved to Miami in 1898. He became associated with Floyd Davis, and was the first to build a small wooden home in the new subdivision. He then became the sole land agent there for many years, and sold his last lot in 1950 before retiring. He passed away in 1970, and was himself a former Exalted Ruler of the Elks and was a member of the Masons and the Lily White Lodge.⁷⁶ The Lily White Lodge was another fraternal organization established to provide burial benefits and health care, also known as the Lily White Security Benefit Association.⁷⁷

After an outcry about living conditions in Overtown, including involvement by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of the first public housing projects in the country funded by the federal government was built in Liberty City and was known as Liberty Square. The community had a community center and reception hall, a nursery for children, a doctor's office, consumer cooperative store, federal credit union and classrooms for tenant education. Each family had space for a garden. James E. Scott was the first administrator.⁷⁸ (The James E. Scott Homes became a later public housing project in Miami, and the remaining structure from this development is a Miami-Dade County historic site.)

Over time, the Liberty City neighborhood expanded and consists largely of single-family homes and apartments. Residents from Overtown and Allapattah moved north due to overcrowding or being forced from their homes during urban renewal. Residents forced to move out of the Railroad Shop Addition also found their way to Liberty City.⁷⁹ Several of the north-south corridors in the neighborhood developed as commercial corridors to serve the needs of the surrounding residential neighborhood. These corridors include NW 15 Avenue, NW 18 Avenue, and NW 22 Avenue. "NW 15 Avenue jumped with sounds from juke boxes", showcased entertainers like Willis Jackson and the Rhythm Kings, and was home to the Liberty Theater and "The Pool" nightclub that had a pool and a bar. Other clubs were Shaddy's Club, Dennis Club and Ebony Club. People would come from Coconut Grove and Overtown for the clubs.⁸⁰ Several grocery stores and Troy's Restaurant were also on NW 15 Avenue.

History of the NW 18 Ave Corridor /Broadway Avenue

NW 18 Avenue, home to the Liberty Lodge, was one of the active commercial corridors in Liberty City and was also known as Broadway Avenue, based on the 1922 Davis plat. During the mid-20th century, NW 18 Avenue from

62 Street to 70 Street was home to a variety of commercial uses, including food stores, beer gardens, a pool hall, taverns, restaurants, barber shops, grocery stores, beauty shops, tailor, fish markets, shoe shops, and churches.⁸¹ A restaurant, Georgia's Café, at 6690 NW 18 Avenue, was included in the Miami section of the Green Book, a guide for Black travelers in the 20th century during the segregation era.⁸²

The Liberty Lodge was roughly in the middle of all of the commercial activity along the corridor. Today, many of the buildings along the corridor have been demolished and there are many vacant lots. However, businesses continue to operate, and the Lodge maintains its presence.

An initiative in 2015 sought to draw attention to the historic nature of the once bustling corridor. Visual artist Marving Weeks worked with community groups, artists, business leaders and County Commissioner Audrey Edmonson to envision a Broadway Arts District. Today, signs announce the effort and new murals are found on various buildings.⁸³



Recent mural in the Broadway Art District.



Recent mural in the Broadway Art District.

History of the Liberty Lodge

Historically, the land where the Liberty Lodge sits today is the land of the Tequesta and Seminole people. After forced removal of the indigenous people, the land was in part portioned off by the United States government to various homesteaders through a series of land grants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. No land grant information is available for the particular area of the Elks Lodge.

The Liberty Lodge was established in August 1940.⁸⁴ Liberty Temple #724 (the Daughters associated with the Lodge) was granted a charter from the Grand Lodge of the IBPOEW on March 19, 1941 with leadership from Jessie Fauekner and 20 other women.⁸⁵ A frame vernacular building housing the Liberty Lodge was on the site of the existing lodge in June 1955 and was demolished for the current structure.⁸⁶ The current structure was built in 1956, with a one story addition to the south added in 1958. At the time, the addition was two separate commercial spaces that housed separate businesses. The building next door to the Lodge on the south, currently a vacant lot owned by the Lodge, was demolished in 1984.⁸⁷ This building was home to Winnie's Place Tavern, owned by Robert Colston.⁸⁸

Activities at the Liberty Lodge were and are consistent with the service activities and political nature of the larger IBPOEW organization that serve the African American community. The Lodge was home to the Antler Guard – Flamingo Company "B" and the Progressive Coronet Band.⁸⁹ The Lodge has served as a polling place in local

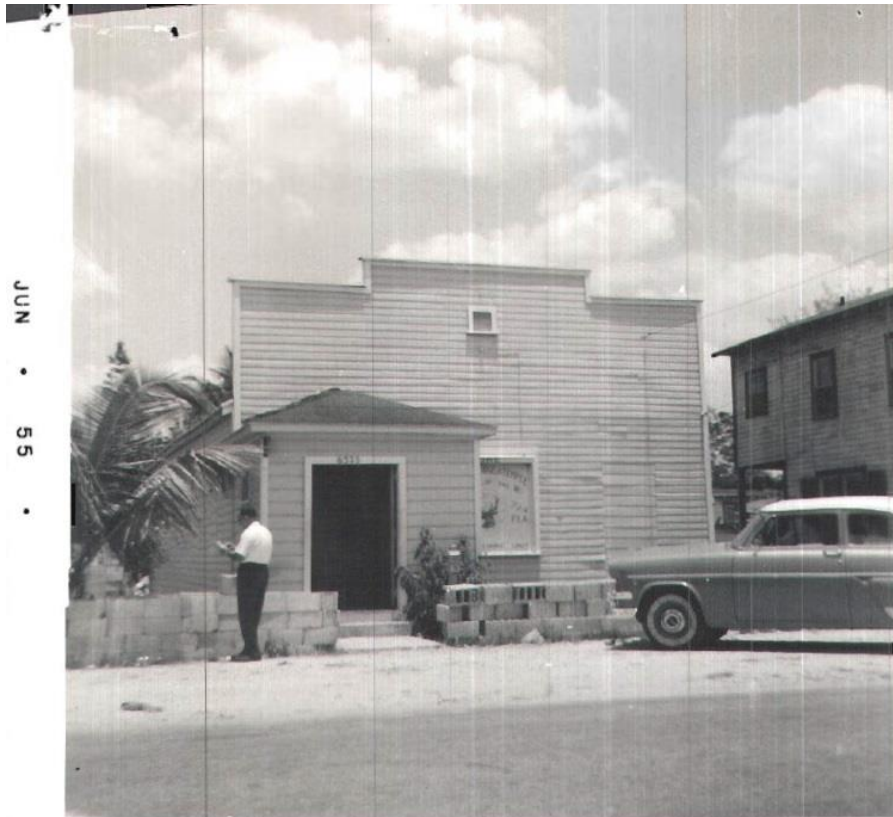
elections, emblematic of the larger dedication of Elks to the democratic process in the United States.⁹⁰ In 1980, the Liberty Lodge established a trust fund for Shanreka Perry, the 12 year old Liberty City child who lost her leg after she was struck by a car during what has been deemed rioting after the acquittal of police officers who beat Arthur McDuffie to death.⁹¹ The Lodge historically held weekend food drives and supported the Northwestern Senior High School Marching Band field trips.⁹²

Recent community service activities of the Liberty Temple 724 and the Lodge include: donations to a lupus research foundation, a Veterans Day Community Food and Clothes Giveaway, Thanksgiving Dinner and Turkey Giveaway, a Christmas Toy giveaway, and Senior Citizens Food Giveaway. Politically, members of the Lodge continue to be active. In 2014, Daughter Bertha Lankford attended the National Action Network conference, with President Obama speaking, and that same year, representatives of the Temple attended the "Amend Stand Your Ground Law" march in Tallahassee.⁹³

Social activities at the Lodge of late have included a Sports Day, Western Dance, Christmas celebrations, and Easter Egg hunt for children. In March 2014, during Elk Day Celebration Weekend, the Liberty Lodge received a County proclamation in their honor, and hosted Mrs. Lou Alyce W. Dean, the Florida State President of Temples. Commissioner Audrey Edmonson was on hand to present the proclamation and provide Mrs. Dean with a County key. Commissioner Edmonson was also frequently in attendance at many of the Liberty Lodge community service activities. In 2012, the Liberty Lodge was recognized worldwide as the most improved and with the most members amongst Elks, and in 2013, Temple #724 was Temple of the Year in the State of Florida.⁹⁴

People associated with the Lodge include Harold Sandilands, whose journey tells a story of Black life in early to mid 20th-century Miami, and he is representative of Caribbean arrivals to Miami attracted to Elks membership. Arriving to Miami in 1919 from the Bahamas, Mr. Sandilands settled in Overtown, and initially worked as a cement worker at a block factory, later working in fish delivery. His son Reginald was born here, and in time, by the 1950s, the Sandilands had moved from Overtown to Liberty City. Mr. Sandilands was an Exalted Ruler of Liberty Lodge, and also a founding member of the Christian Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church. In 2014, NW 66 Street from NW 17 Avenue to NW 19 Avenue was designated "Harold L. Sandilands Street" by Miami-Dade County.⁹⁵ Mr. Sandilands shared the Elks connection with his son, who is listed on the 1976 cornerstone of the Liberty Lodge as the Exalted Ruler at the time, and his daughter Bertha Lankford, of Liberty Temple.

W.O. Perry, while not a member of Liberty Lodge, is tangentially associated with the Lodge, as local Lodge creation and membership, including Liberty Lodge, grew during and after his term as a regional Elks leader. Commissioner Audrey Edmonson, as mentioned above, is a recent person associated with the Lodge.



Liberty City Elks Lodge, June 1955, before construction of the current building. Another frame structure, demolished prior to the 1958 addition, is visible at right.



Lodge under construction, Dec. 1955. The two-story building is seen at right on the lot that would soon house the c.1958 addition.



Lodge shortly after construction was complete, Sep. 1956.



C.1958 addition shortly after construction. The structure originally was not utilized for Lodge activities and housed two commercial spaces.



Rear of the c.1958 addition.



Liberty City Elks Lodge, c.1972.



c.1937 Building (6501 NW 18 Ave) next to the Liberty Lodge (visible at left). Today the lot is vacant, but owned by the Elks.

V. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Sec. 16A-10(4) regarding the designation process requires that, to the extent applicable, designation reports shall address the following:

- any projected, proposed, or existing public improvements and developmental or renewal plans;
- any private plans for development or redevelopment of the property or area under consideration, including any new architecture or features proposed for the same location;
- any applicable neighborhood or community revitalization goals, plans, or objectives, including any existing policies in the local government's comprehensive plan or other planning initiatives pertaining to, among other things, economic development, transportation, and housing;
- any impacts on the availability of affordable or workforce housing in the community due to historic designation or proposed redevelopment of the property or area under consideration; and
- the possible adaptive use of the property after designation, based on applicable local government zoning regulations and other building code requirements.

No current zoning or Comprehensive Master Development Plan applications exist in the immediate vicinity of the property. The property is still in use as the Lodge, as constructed, so adaptive reuse is not applicable. The historic designation of this individual property would not impact availability of affordable or workforce housing. There are no current pending public improvements in the area. The County had a Broadway Corridor Small Business Façade Improvement Program available through Community Development Block Grant funding at one time, but the program no longer appears active.

VI. PROPERTY VULNERABILITY

As Miami-Dade County works to address the impending challenges of increased flooding, sea level rise, and more frequent severe weather events, it becomes increasingly important to assess the vulnerability of historic and cultural resources to these threats. Utilizing the matrix developed in association with the County's Historic Site Vulnerability Assessment, historic properties can be evaluated for their level of vulnerability. Factors related to a property's flood zone, elevation, storm surge, sea level rise, king tides, and proximity to water are a sampling of the environmental factors that are included in determining a site's vulnerability. Property use is also included.

Utilizing information in the County's Flooding Vulnerability GIS-based mapping system, 6515-6525 NW 18 Avenue is in a X flood zone, and has a parcel mean elevation of 10.34'. The property does not show vulnerability to storm surge inundation or king tide flooding, nor does it have predicted vulnerability to sea level rise. As such, this property is not a highly vulnerable property. Standard mitigation options for protecting the property from storm events are recommended.

VII. FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE

At the time of designation, no Florida Master Site Form exists for this property and a new form will need to be submitted to the Florida Division of Historical Resources.

VIII. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

The Liberty City Elks Lodge is significant under the following criteria, as set forth in Section 16A-10 of the Miami-Dade Historic Preservation Ordinance:

Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(a), Is associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric, paleontological and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history in the community, Miami-Dade County, south Florida, the State or the nation.

Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(b), Be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

IX. STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Only the following would be subject to a Certificate of Appropriateness and review under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, as detailed in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* as developed in 1992 and codified as 36CFR Part 68 in the July 12, 1995, *Federal Register* (Vol. 60, No. 133):

- alterations to contributing features as outlined in Section X on page 23 of this report,
- significant exterior rehabilitation that deviates from the structure's original form and massing in 1956 and 1958,
- demolition, and
- new construction.

Ordinary maintenance and minor repairs/alterations that do not materially change the structure's exterior will not be subject to COA review.

X. CONTRIBUTING FEATURES

As a result of designation, proposed alterations to the Liberty City Elks Lodge require submittal of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the items outlined in Section IX. The recommendation of staff is to designate the entire structure, but because the property has been altered over time and the recommendation for designation is primarily based on historic and cultural significance, the following are the only features recommended for contributing status and therefore require a COA:

- the overall form and massing of the structure as originally constructed in 1956 and 1958;
- the façade entry area including the decorative brick, four decorative squares, cornerstone, signage area, decorative fascia along the roofline, stucco scoring, and entryway/door area including the flat roof overhang;
- the cornerstone placed in 1976;
- the signage area on the façade. Although the signage has changed, the area in which signage is located should be retained for signage, even if the specific signage itself changes; and
- the entryway door may change, but the opening itself should be retained as is.

It is encouraged in the future to return the structure to its appearance in 1956 and 1958, if feasible.

The interior spaces of the Liberty City Elks Lodge have not been evaluated for purposes of this designation. As such, alterations to these interior spaces would not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Alterations, modifications, repairs, and replacement of features not identified as contributing do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness. This includes features like exterior windows and doors, roof material, and paint color.

XI. STAFF EVALUATION & RECOMMENDATION

Staff has performed a site visit to document the Liberty City Elks Lodge, as well as performed research into the historic context of the building. Staff has determined that the Liberty City Elks Lodge meets the objective criteria for designation. As demonstrated in the historic context section of this report, the Liberty City Elks Lodge is associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, economic, and political elements of history that contribute to the pattern of history in the community, Miami-Dade County, South Florida, the state and nation. The Liberty City Elks Lodge is a local representation of a nationally significant African American fraternal organization that was instrumental in African American community life, including social events, the economy, and politics, and continues as one of the remaining active IBPOEW Lodges in Miami-Dade County.

In addition, the Lodge is connected to the lives of persons significant to the history of Miami-Dade County and the Liberty City neighborhood including Harold Sandilands, W.O. Perry, and elected officials such as Audrey Edmonson.

Based on its historic context, and the application of objective criteria for designation, Staff recommends that the Liberty City Elks Lodge be designated as a Miami-Dade County Historic Site.

XII. ENDNOTES

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