

1403-1411 LAURENS STREET (Commercial Buildings)
Baltimore
Baltimore ~~County~~ City
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1019

HABS
MD
4-BALT,
200-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

1403 - 1411 LAURENS STREET (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)

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Location: 1403-1411 Laurens Street (near southwest corner of Laurens and North Calhoun Streets), Baltimore (City), Maryland

USGS Baltimore West, Maryland Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
18.358520.4351480

Last Owner: First United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic)
3400 Copley Road, Baltimore, Maryland 21215

Last Occupant: Hawks Garage

Significance: The buildings at 1403-1411 Laurens Street are representative of the early 20th century commercialization of Baltimore's late 19th century neighborhoods and of the concurrent racial change from white to black as the inner city black population moved outward, following the move of white residents to new suburbs. The row of shops with an automobile garage was built about 1921, with various small services such as a tailor and shoe repair shop fronting the car repair shop. The first occupant was the Frisby Service Garage, a black-owned enterprise, which indicates the increasing dominance of black residency in the area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1921. Land records show that James G. Martin leased the property in 1921 from the surviving heir of Edward Patterson, the 19th century estate owner from whose land the area was subdivided and sold. The city directory for 1922 lists the Frisby Service Garage at 1405 Laurens and the 1923 directory showed Page Johnson, tailor, at 1411 Laurens. The directories also indicate that Martin, John Frisby, the garage operator, and Johnson were black. The garage and shops were the original buildings on the lot.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title to the land upon which the buildings stand refers to the Land Records of the Baltimore City Superior Court, Clarence Mitchell City Courthouse, Calvert and Fayette Streets, Baltimore, Maryland.

Legal Description: Beginning for the same at a point on the south side of Laurens Street (formerly Patterson Avenue) distant twenty feet westerly from the intersection of the south side of Laurens Street with the west side of Calhoun Street and at the corner of a lot of ground leased by Laura Patterson et al, to Leo M. Chenoweth by Lease dated November 15, 1911, and recorded among the Land Records of Baltimore City in Liber S.C.L. No. 2700, folio 492, and running thence westerly on the south side of Laurens Street sixty-nine feet one inch, thence southerly one hundred feet to the north side of a ten foot alley, thence easterly binding on the north side of said ten foot alley with the use thereof in common seventy-three feet one inch to the southwest corner of said lot leased by Laura Patterson et al, to the said Chenoweth, thence northerly binding on the westernmost outline of said Chenoweth's lot and parallel with Calhoun Street one hundred feet to the place of beginning. The improvements thereon being known as Nos. 1403, 1405, 1407, 1409, 1411 Laurens Street.

1921 Lease, October 31, 1921, recorded in Volume SCL 3796, p. 609. Sidney T. Dyer, widow, to James G. Martin and wife. (Dyer is surviving heir of estate of Edward Patterson, her grandfather. Laura Patterson, last surviving child of Edward Patterson and aunt of Dyer, died April 29, 1918.)

- 1930 Deed, May 20, 1930, recorded in Volume SCL 5120, p. 411. Harry T. Kellman, trustee, to Max and Louis Weiss. Sale resulting from Circuit Court decree dated February 1, 1930 in case of Bonded Mortgage Co. and Harry T. Kellman, assignee, vs. James G. Martin and Rose J. Martin, his wife.
- 1939 Deed, June 15, 1939, recorded in Volume 5929, p. 250. Max Weiss to Max and Louis Weiss (merger).
- 1978 Deed, February 21, 1978, recorded in Volume RHB 3580, p. 808. Max and Louis Weiss to First United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic).

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known.
5. Original plans and construction: No drawings, plans or documents relative to construction have been located. Building permits for the probable years of construction are not available.
6. Alterations and additions: None known other than replaced or boarded doors and windows.

B. Historical Context:

The west Baltimore neighborhood surrounding the Northwest (later Lafayette) Market was developed from estate lands beginning about 1870, with the street grid plan adopted in 1822 being extended into new sections. Laurens Street, originally Cooke Street and later Patterson Avenue, was one of the east-west main streets and led directly to the market vicinity from the undeveloped outskirts. Residential rowhouses were built in small groups with commercial buildings or combined commercial-residential storefront buildings located at strategic intersections. By the early 20th century, most of the area around the Lafayette Market was fully developed except three city blocks between Fremont Avenue, Whatcoat, Laurens, and Winchester Streets, which included the future site of 1403-1411 Laurens. The reasons for this lag in development are unclear, but may be partially due to the presence of a railroad tunnel under Winchester Street. The first building erected on the northeast quadrant of the block between Laurens, Calhoun, Winchester, and Whatcoat Streets was 1401 Laurens, a commercial storefront built about 1912 for Leo M. Chenoweth, a butter, cheese, and egg dealer whose previous location was a block west at the southeast corner of Laurens and Stricker Streets. Chenoweth's store remained the only building on the east end of the block until about 1921, when Reverend James G. Martin, a black minister, leased the

rest of the undeveloped section of the 1400 block and erected the commercial block at 1403-1411 Laurens. This was apparently an investment venture, with an auto repair garage fronted by small shops. It was indicative of the changing racial character of the area, where blacks had historically been the minority but had begun increasing in number at a rapid rate, especially after 1918. The garage was operated by John Frisby, also black, and the first shopkeeper of record was a black tailor, Page Johnson. The Frisby Service Garage became the Laurens Service Garage in 1924-25 and expanded from its original address at 1405 to include 1407 Laurens. In 1929-30, it became the Weiss Brothers Motor Sales Company and by 1936 had taken in 1409 and 1411 Laurens. Under various names and fluctuating addresses within the block, the auto service facility was operated until 1950. The space was then used by a store fixtures supplier and a chemical company until 1956, when the Penn Upholstering Company leased the shop up to the mid-1960's. It then was returned to auto service which it remains at the date of documentation. The shops were used by a variety of small businesses, including a beauty shop, umbrella repair shop, shoe shine stand, radio repair shop, and a social club. The second story contained living quarters intermittently occupied by the shopkeepers or individual tenants up to the mid-1970's. The shop areas are now used as storage space for the garage.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The buildings at 1403-1411 Laurens Street compose a typical commercial row of the late period of development in the Sandtown-Winchester area (1914-1930). The row is functional in appearance, with little decoration, suggesting its speculative nature.
2. Condition of fabric: The brick exterior walls of the buildings are in generally good condition. The exterior is partially concealed with sections of old signs. The window openings on both first and second stories are boarded and the sash is presumed to be missing. The repair shop interior is filled with car bodies, parts, tires, and equipment. The shop interiors are also filled with old tires and trash. The aspect of the entire group is one of general neglect and haphazard repair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The buildings as a group are rectilinear, measuring about 69 feet wide and 100 feet deep. There are two bays to each address. The building as a whole had two stories and is 24 feet in height, based on the 1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance volume for the area.
2. Foundations: The foundation material and thickness are unknown; no basement exists under the buildings.
3. Walls: The building is constructed in running bond brick. The facade is painted white on the first story and beige on the second story.
4. Structural system: The front shop areas of 1403-1411 Laurens are load-bearing brick; the repair shop has an interior framework of steel columns and beams.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: None.
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The central garage entrance has no surround and the current doors are panels made of mismatched parts. The shop fronts each had transoms over the doorways. 1405 Laurens still has a possibly original door, wood with a six-light glazed upper panel. The other doorways have recent solid wood replacement doors and the transoms are either covered or contain an air conditioning unit. Wire screens cover the door and transom at 1407 Laurens. Most hardware is missing except for hinges. The door surrounds are plain wood with bullnose edges.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The shop windows have wood paneled bases. Most of the display windows are boarded. The upper story windows have segmental arches and are boarded. No shutters or hardware are visible.
8. Roof: The building has a flat roof sloping toward the rear and has a pressed metal cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The plan consists of four single space shops flanking the entrance to the garage in the center of the block. Each shop had a stairway to the second floor at the rear of the shop. The second floors of the

shops were inaccessible for documentation. The garage is a single story open area with a rear auto entrance on the alley bordering the south lot lines of the entire group. See floor plan.

2. Stairways: The stairways in 1403-1411 Laurens were probably all in the same location; only that of 1411 was seen and was at the rear of the shop space.
3. Flooring: The floors of the shops were not visible due to debris and tires. The floor of the garage area is concrete.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The shop walls and ceilings appeared to be wallboard or plaster. The open steel framework is visible supporting the wood underside of the garage roof in the repair shop. The walls of the garage are white painted brick.
5. Openings: The typical shop entry and window is represented best by 1405 Laurens: a simple doorway with a glazed transom and a paneled door with a glazed upper section. The doors to the garage are composites of available parts, probably not original, and the rear door on the alley has a roll-up steel door. The garage has six skylights and two large windows in the rear wall. One is barred and the other is filled with concrete block.
6. Decorative features and trim: No decorative interior features were observed.
7. Hardware: None notable.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: No mechanical systems were observed. The garage has gas heating units suspended from the ceiling, but they are undoubtedly non-working, as a coal and wood-fired oil drum heater was in use. No mechanical systems were observed in the shops.
 - b. Lighting: No lighting fixtures were present in the shops. The garage is lit by fluorescent fixtures hanging from the ceiling.
 - c. Plumbing: No plumbing fixtures were observed.
9. Original furnishings: No original furnishings were seen.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The facade of 1403-1411 Laurens is oriented toward the north. The opposite or north side of Laurens Street contains a row of one- and two-story brick commercial buildings erected generally during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They display various states of alteration and those nearest the corner of Laurens and Calhoun are extremely deteriorated, with evidence of collapsed roofs and fire damage on the upper stories of the corner building. Next to 1403-1411 Laurens is 1401 Laurens Street (HABS No. MD-1009), a two-story brick storefront building erected in about 1912. Adjoining the site on the west is a small alley street, Whatcoat Street, with open land on its west side where brick rowhouses once stood, now demolished. South of the site across the ten-foot wide alley mentioned in the legal description is a fenced area which once contained an ice and coal building. No structure remains on the site, but the ice and coal supply business is still in operation on or near the corner. Directly east of the site across Calhoun Street are the buildings of the Schmidt Baking Company, the largest industrial complex in the neighborhood, now vacant. Surrounding streets are generally occupied by residential rowhouses, with some gaps caused by demolition. The topography of the area is generally flat with a slight northern rise.
2. Landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: None located.
- B. Historic views: None located.
- C. Interviews: None.
- D. Bibliography:

Baltimore City Directories, 1911-1964. Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Room, Baltimore, Maryland.

Bromley's Atlas of Baltimore City, 1896. Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, Baltimore, Maryland.

Land Records of Baltimore City, Clarence Mitchell Courthouse,

Baltimore, Maryland.

Sanborn's Fire Insurance Map of Baltimore, 1914. Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, Baltimore, Maryland.

Topographical Survey Commission Map of Baltimore, 1914. Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, Baltimore, Maryland.

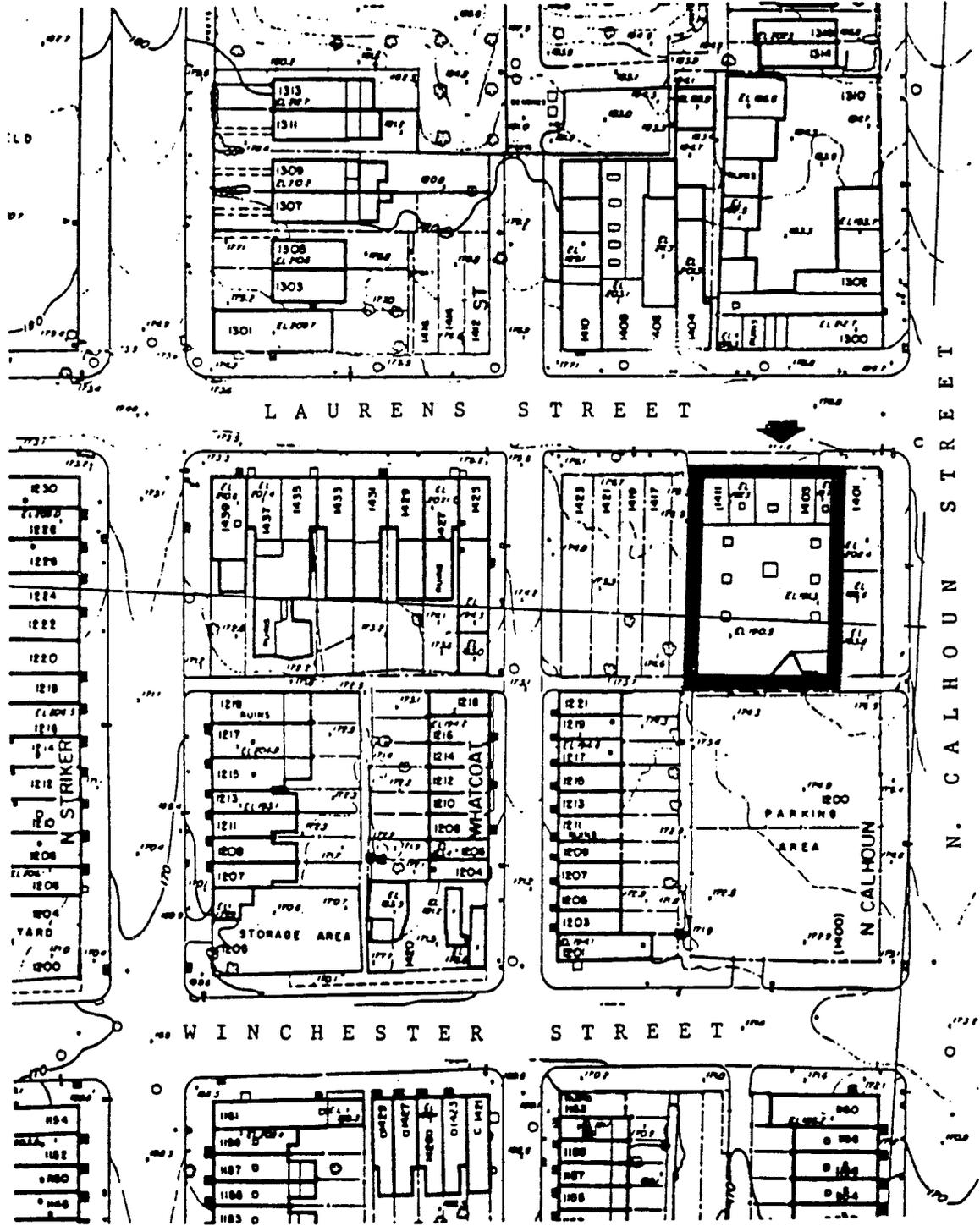
- E. Sources not yet investigated: Baltimore Sun, Baltimore Daily Record, Baltimore News, and Baltimore American are contemporary newspapers which might list building information such as building permits, architects, land transfers, etc. Oral histories of neighborhood residents may reveal more about the black businesses which occupied the buildings.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Nehemiah Housing Opportunity Program is sponsored by Enterprise Nehemiah, Inc., a joint venture of the Enterprise Foundation and BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development), a coalition of 46 church and community organizations. The purpose is to construct affordable housing for low-income families using a combination of state, city, federal, and community resources. Named after a biblical prophet who rebuilt Jerusalem's walls in the 5th century B.C., the project is aimed at rebuilding the most blighted areas in American cities. The first Nehemiah project was in Brooklyn, New York in the Brownsville section. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development is providing \$4.2 million in grant funds, while the state and city are contributing \$11 million each. BUILD funds total \$2.2 million. The Baltimore city element is providing the properties involved, site clearance, and public service improvements. The project area in Sandtown-Winchester covers approximately 5 city blocks, some of which is already vacant land. The demolition of three groups of buildings, including 1403-1411 Laurens Street, is scheduled for June 1990.

Prepared by: Janet L. Davis
Title: Historic Preservation Analyst
Affiliation: Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation
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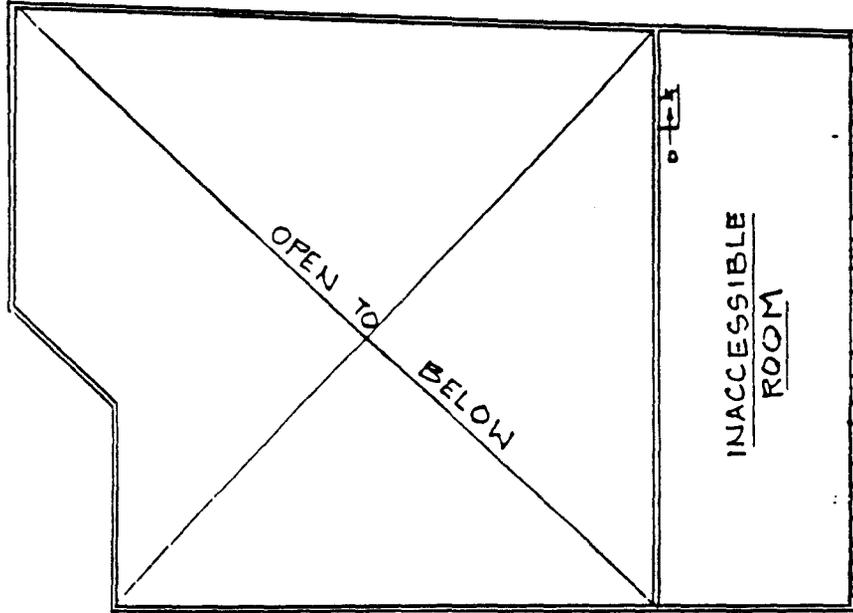
LAURENS STREET

WINCHESTER STREET

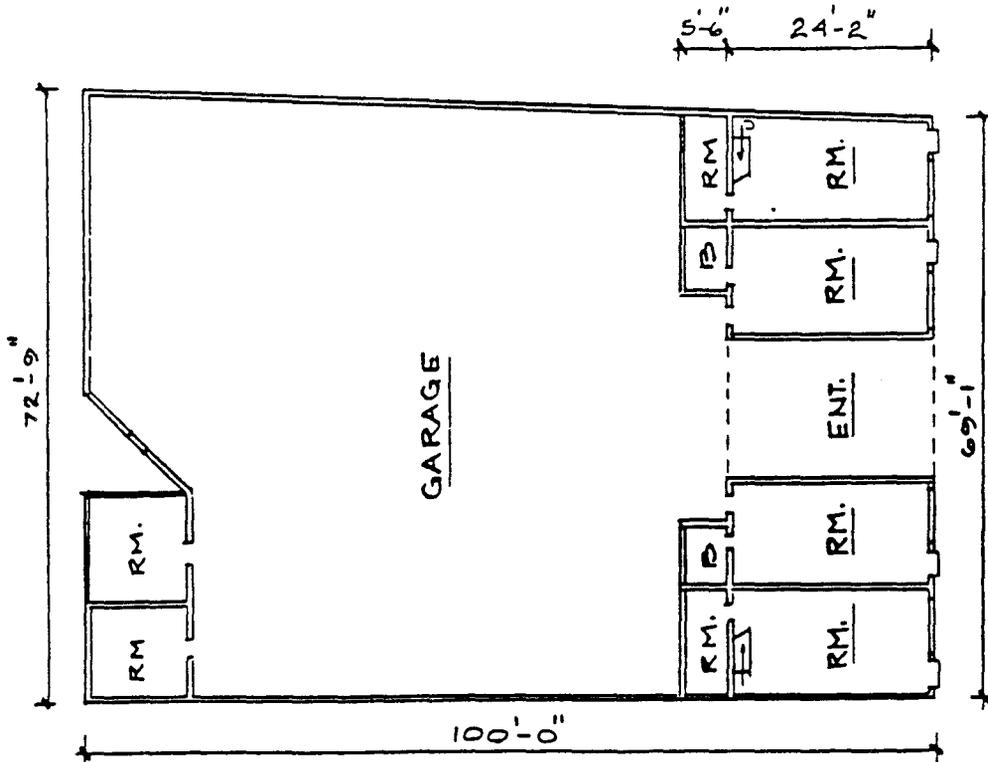
N. CALHOUN STREET



1403-1411 LAURENS STREET



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

1403 - 1411 LAURENS ST.