**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS

**NAME**

HISTORIC

Arkansas Valley Lodge # 21, Prince Hall Masons

AND/OR COMMON

Black Masonic Lodge

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

615 North Main

CITY, TOWN

Wichita

STATE

Kansas

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

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_PRIVATE

_OCCUPIED

_AGRI

_PUBLIC

_UNOCCUPIED

_COMMER

_PUBLIC ACQUISITION

_WORK IN PROGRESS

_EDUCATION

_IN PROCESS

_ACCESSIBLE

_ENTERTAIN

_BEING CONSIDERED

_RESTR

_ENTERTAINMENT

_YES: RESTRICTED

_GOVERNMENT

_YES: UNRESTRICTED

_INDUSTRIAL

_NO

_MILITARY

_SCIENTIFIC

_THEMATIC

_storage

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Urban Renewal Agency

STREET & NUMBER

104 South Broadway

CITY, TOWN

Wichita

STATE

Kansas

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Sedgwick County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Wichita

STATE

Kansas

**REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic Wichita Board

DATE

1975

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Wichita Board

CITY, TOWN

Wichita

STATE

Kansas
The Arkansas Valley Lodge was originally part of a row of business buildings which faced east on the 600 block of North Main street. The building now stands alone surrounded by a parking lot on the north, south, and west sides. A newspaper article describes the lodge hall at the time of the dedicatory service as a brick and mortar structure with three full floors, tin ceilings and a skylight. At that time the first floor, which was one large room, was to be rented out, the second floor was to be used by the community for recreation, and the third floor was the lodge’s meeting room. A small photograph of the building was published in the Wichita Searchlight on November 25, 1911. It shows a three story structure with large store front windows on the first story and four windows across on both the second and third stories. The building to the south appears to be one story, while the lot to the north was vacant.

The roof was repaired in 1913 and in 1915 signs were painted on the exterior for additional income. A steel beam was installed in 1919 below the second story windows to help support the weight of the building. In 1920 a fire escape was built and the skylight remodeled to prevent leaks. Wind storms in the 1930’s and 1940’s inflicted a good deal of damage to the structure and the third floor was damaged so badly that it had to be removed late in 1948.

It is believed that the building presently appears much as it did after the renovation in 1948. It is now a two story structure with large store front windows and a recessed entrance on the south side of the east facade. Board and batten has been applied over the wall surface below the store front windows and in the space separating the two stories directly above the windows. The exterior walls have been painted a deep red on the first floor up to the sills on the second story windows. There are four windows on the second story. The outer two windows are rectangular with stone lintels and sills, the inner two windows though rectangular have brick arches with a stone key. There is an iron fire escape outside the outer window on the north side of the facade. Centered above the inner two windows is a stone plaque with masonic symbols carved in relief. This insignia was originally set near the cornice line of the third story, but was relaid after the upper floor was removed. There are brick piers on either end of the facade. The building’s cornice has been simply treated with a row of brick corbelling. There is a parapet that extends around three facades varying from two and one-half to four feet in height. The upper courses of the parapet are of a lighter color brick on the east facade. The north, south and west facades have been used as party walls and have notches where floor joists have tied into the wall.
The old Masonic Hall at 615 North Main is the last surviving commercial building of the Black business community which was located on Wichita's North Main street for many years.

In the 1880's and 1890's rival developers were seeking to promote Douglas avenue and Main street as the city's principal commercial district. Eventually the Douglas avenue promoters triumphed, and the white merchants and professional men who had been on North Main street moved out. Black businessmen and professional men moved into some of the vacated buildings and soon there was a thriving Black business district.

The Arkansas Valley Lodge # 21, Prince Hall Masons, was chartered in July, 1885. The lodge met in rented facilities for many years, but in the early 1900's the members began thinking of building their own hall. On November 10, 1905, the lodge purchased a lot at 615 North Main, from a Black grocer named G.W. Young. In 1909 a building committee recommended construction of a two story building with the option of adding a third story later.

The building may have been designed by a Black architect, Josiah Walker, who had designed other buildings in the Black community. Walker was present at the cornerstone laying ceremonies, but so far no specific evidence has been found that he designed it. A man named Isenhart was the general contractor and evidently some of the lodge brothers held subcontracts. The cost of the building was estimated at $6,000. The lodge held various money-raising activities but had to borrow a substantial portion of the funds needed. Construction was underway in the spring of 1910. There was much other construction taking place in Wichita at the same time as 1910 brought a building boom to the city.

A cornerstone laying ceremony was held Sunday, April 3, 1910. In attendance and participating in the ceremonies were various dignitaries of the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge, including the Grand Master C.H. Milton Collins from Kansas City. Also speaking to the crowd were two city officials, Mayor Charles L. Davidson and Postmaster W.C. Edwards.

Construction continued through the summer, and the three-story brick structure was completed by September. (No explanation has been found for the change from a two-story to a three-story building.) The hall was publicly opened by a gala banquet on September 7, 1910. The building was described by the local Black newspaper as one of the finest owned by a Black lodge.
The building quickly became a social center of the Black community. Other organizations, such as the Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Tabor, rented the hall for their meetings. Many groups used the facilities for their banquets, dances, bazaars, plays, musical shows and other recreational activities. From 1911 to 1915 the first floor was used by the Black Y.M.C.A. At times the first floor as well as the second floor office space was rented to Black businessmen.

In many respects the Arkansas Valley Lodge # 21 was a rallying force in the Black community. Its members were the spokesmen for the community early in the 20th century, before the civil rights movements. They served their community, assisting those who needed help, and provided a common meeting ground for Black men, whatever their role in society, whether professional, businessman or laborer.

The nondescript brick building stands today as the lone survivor of a once flourishing Black business district. (The rest has been cleared by Urban Renewal, and the lodge hall also faces the threat of demolition.) It has taken on a symbolic importance in addition to its historic value for the role it had in serving the social needs of the Black community.

Rutledge, Carol, "History of Ark Valley Lodge # 21, Prince Hall Masons" (unpublished manuscript, 1975).

"To Open Their New Lodge Hall," Wichita Searchlight, September 3, 1910.
Wichita Searchlight, July 10, 1909; September 24, 1910; November 25, 1911.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"A Gala Day for the Masons," Wichita Searchlight, April 9, 1910.


"Masons Will Lay Cornerstone," Wichita Searchlight, April 2, 1910.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE 14A 14B 14C 14D
EASTING 4 17 3 4
NORTHING 3 1 4 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Richard Pankratz, Director, Historic Sites Survey
Cornelia Wyma, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION Kansas State Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER 120 West 10th Street

CITY OR TOWN Topeka

DATE August 6, 1976

TELEPHONE 913-296-3251

STATE Kansas

12. STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL __ STATE __ LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

DATE September 3, 1976

TITLE Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society

FOR NPS USE ONLY:

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE
Arkansas Valley Lodge #21, Prince Hall Masons
Wichita, Kansas

UTM Reference
14 646530 4173140