

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (1)

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common
Hill Grocery and Thomas Residence

(2) Historic (if applicable)
Douglass Beneficial Hall,
St. Paul A.M.E. Church parsonage

II. Location

(1) Street Address 120 N. Blount St.
(649-653 East Dayton Street)

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)
27th Ward, 2nd District

III. Classification

(1) Type of Property (building, monument, park, etc.)
2 connected buildings

(2) Zoning District
C3

(3) Present Use
Commercial/shop & apartment

IV. Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Name(s) Mrs. Charlyne Hill

(2) Street Address
114 North Blount, Madison, WI 53703

(3) Telephone Number
255-6551

V. Legal Description (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Parcel Number
0709-133-0940-1

(2) Legal Description
Northwest 1/4 of Lot 9,
Block 135, Original plat

VI. Condition of Property

(1) Physical Condition (excellent, good, fair, deteriorated, ruins)
Good

(2) Altered or Unaltered?
Slightly altered

(3) Moved or Original Site?
Moved

(4) Wall Construction
Frame/clapboard

(5) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the present and original physical construction and appearance (limit 500 words).

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

VI.(5) Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance:

This property comprises two buildings connected by a low, one-story wing: a two-story commercial building at 649 E. Dayton and a two-story T-plan house at 653 E. Dayton.

649 E. Dayton

The western section, 649 E. Dayton, was built c. 1850s in downtown Madison and moved onto this site in 1901.¹ It is a two-story commercial vernacular structure clad in clapboard. The foundation is concrete and the roofing material is asphalt. The steeply-pitched gable roof faces northwest towards Dayton Street. A one-story shed addition projects to the rear (southeast). On the street facade are two large shop windows, one on each side of a small projecting central entrance vestibule with a shed roof. There is another shop window on the northeast side of the building.

On the second-story facade are two six-over-six windows, with a smaller six-over-six window at the attic level. An open stairway along the east side of the building gives access to an entrance vestibule constructed of vertical boards. The vestibule jetties out over the ground floor.

Now vacant, the building housed a grocery store from the 1910s to the early 1980s.

653 E. Dayton

This vernacular house was moved from its original site in downtown Madison in 1912.² It features a shallow-pitched gable roof with returned eaves and a T-shaped floor plan, with the top of the "T" paralleling Blount Street.

Faced with clapboards, the building has a concrete foundation and asphalt shingled roof. Large, simple porches without decorative details project from each of the two street facades. Six-over-one double-hung windows light the ground floor. Second-story fenestration features six-light single-sash frieze lights.

On the Blount Street facade, a window is located on each side of the central doorway, with a corresponding frieze light above. The porch in this side of the house has a gable roof and two-by-two balusters on its railing.

On the Dayton Street (northwest) facade, a porch is located in the corner where the two main blocks of the "T" meet. A doubled window flanks the entrance from this porch, which is covered by a shed roof. The porch railings are solid wood panels.

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

VII. Significance

(1) Original Owner

John and Martha Turner

(2) Original Use

649 E. Dayton: Douglass Beneficial Hall.
653 E. Dayton: A.M.E. church parsonage

(3) Architect or Builder

Unknown

(4) Architectural Style

Vernacular

(5) Date of Construction

Moved to site in 1901 (649 E. Dayton) and
in 1912 (653 E. Dayton)

(6) Indigenous Materials Used

N/A

(7) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the significance of the nominated property and its conformance to the designation criteria of the Landmarks Commission Ordinance (33.01), limit of 500 words.

VIII. List of Bibliographical References Used

1. (see attached sheet)
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

IX. Form Prepared By:

(1) Name and Title

Susan O. Haswell

(2) Organization Represented (if any)

Madison Trust for Historic Preservation

(3) Address (Susan Haswell)

202 S. Whitney Way, Madison, WI 53705

(4) Telephone Number

231-6880

(5) Date Nomination Form Was Prepared

7 May 1991

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

VII.(7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria:

As one of the last vestiges of Madison's original African-American enclave, the Hill Grocery site represents a highly significant cultural resource. The two buildings on the site have been associated with several prominent people and events in the history of Madison's African-American community, including John Turner, an early civic leader; the Douglass Beneficial Society, the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, and, most recently, the Hill Grocery. The property thus conforms to Criterion 2 of the City of Madison Landmarks Designation Criteria.

The property was owned by John Turner (1849-1909), a former slave from Kentucky, and his wife, Martha. Turner organized the Douglass Beneficial Society, a self-help organization based on the teachings of Frederick Douglass. Turner also founded the community's first Sunday school. He provided a meeting place for the Beneficial Society by moving a two-story building from downtown Madison to its current site at 649 E. Dayton.³

In 1902, Turner helped establish another institution that became central to the life of the black community, the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴ When their pastor could not find housing, the congregation acquired a frame house, also moving it from its original downtown Madison site to the Turner property in 1912.⁵

Turner died 31 March 1909.⁶ In August 1912, his widow, Martha, sold the property to Caroline Thomas, wife of the Rev. C. H. Thomas, pastor of the M.M.E. Church.⁷ The Thomases lived in the house and opened a grocery store in the former meeting hall. John W. Hill (1885-1983) and his wife Amanda (1887-1969) bought the property in 1917. It functioned as a store almost until Hill's death.⁸

Before the turn of the century, the homes of Madison's few black families were scattered throughout the city. The area that was to become the city's first black neighborhood was marshland near the intersection of Dayton and Blount Streets, about six blocks northeast of the Capitol Square.⁹

In 1898, John Turner purchased a house at 118 N. Blount (gone). Soon after he arrived in Madison, Turner organized the Douglass Beneficial Society and provided additional support to new arrivals in the black community by running a boarding house.¹⁰

In 1901, Turner acquired a two-story frame building and moved it from its site in downtown Madison to his lot at 649 E. Dayton. This building became the meeting hall for the Douglass Beneficial Society.¹¹

Around the same time, Turner was renting a room to newcomer William Miller (1872-1920), a college-educated man who had been appointed to a messenger's job by Gov. Robert M. LaFollette, Sr.¹² Though of differing backgrounds, Turner and Miller held in common a strong sense of civic duty which compelled them to take on many leadership positions in the black community in subsequent years.

By the fall of 1901, Turner was holding Sunday school classes in his home.¹³ In April of the following year, Turner, Miller and Albert Roberts became the first trustees of the newly-organized African Methodist Episcopal Church (later known as St. Paul A.M.E. Church). Established in 1816 by Richard Allen and a group of northern free blacks in Philadelphia, the A.M.E. Church was a strong advocate of black rights and provided leadership in moral reform, education, self-help, temperance and economic cooperation.

To house its congregation, Madison's new A.M.E. Church acquired the former Norwegian Lutheran church building and moved it from the corner of Butler, Hamilton and Johnson Streets to a lot at 631 E. Dayton, a few doors west of the Douglass Beneficial Hall (church building now gone).

(continued)

VII. (7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria: (continued)

The congregation gained access to the church across the marshy landscape via boardwalks. The building was to serve St. Paul's until the early 1960s. In 1965, the congregation moved to the former Messiah Lutheran building at 402 E. Mifflin Street.¹⁴

In the first two decades of the century, more black families moved into the East Dayton neighborhood. William Miller and his wife, Anna Mae Stewart Miller, bought two cottages, living in one and renting the other. In 1906, the Capital City Lodge #2 of the Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons was organized by local residents, along with a women's auxiliary. The groups probably met in the beneficial hall or the church. In 1908, the Millers moved a large, substantial house onto their lot at 647 E. Dayton (extant, listed on National Register of Historic Places in 1979) and rented rooms.¹⁵

Census records indicate that the East Dayton neighborhood had become an African-American enclave by 1910. Of Madison's six black homeowners, three lived near the corner of Dayton and Blount. There were 39 black households in Madison in 1910, and 19 (49 percent) were located in the neighborhood.¹⁶

The A.M.E. Church also continued to grow--from a charter membership of 20, to about 50 members by 1914--despite the high turnover rate of its pastoral staff. A church historian conjectures that several pastors left due to inadequate living quarters.¹⁷

In 1911, following the Rev. Charles H. Thomas' fruitless search for a rental home, the congregation appealed "to a generous public" for assistance: "Madison has closed its doors to the Rev. C. H. Thomas....Because of the race prejudice in this city, the trustees of the church have been unable to secure a suitable residence for their paster....We have purchased a house which we are planning to move on a lot which we have leased for a term of years. It will cost \$500 to \$600 to move the house and fix it up...."¹⁸

Apparently, the appeal was successful, as the two-story frame house soon thereafter was moved from its site in downtown Madison to the south side of the Dayton and Blount intersection (653 E. Dayton). The St. Paul congregation owned the house only briefly, however, losing it in a legal dispute between the trustees and the Rev. Thomas.¹⁹

Thomas and his wife, Caroline, also acquired the former Douglass Beneficial Hall and opened a grocery store there.²⁰ In the 1916 Madison city directory, Thomas is listed as "retired," and the Rev. Levi J. Phillips is listed as St. Paul's pastor.²¹

In 1917, John W. Hill and his wife Amanda bought the grocery. Hill continued to run the business almost until his death at the age of 98. He supplemented his income by shining shoes in a downtown office building, eventually sending all three of his children through college.²² The Hills also were prominent members of the St. Paul's congregation.²³

Their daughter-in-law, Charlyne Hill (widow of Edwin Hill), currently owns the house and store buildings, living in an adjacent home at 114 N. Blount.

Footnotes

City of Madison Landmark nomination for Hill Grocery

¹Rankin, Katherine Hundt. National Register of Historic Places registration form for East Dayton Street Historic District, 1987.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., citing City of Madison tax records and city directories.

⁴"Colored Church Fully Organized," Wisconsin State Journal, 9 April 1902, p. 1.

⁵"Madison Closes Door to Pastor," Wisconsin State Journal, 25 October 1911, p. 3.

⁶Obituary of John Turner, Wisconsin State Journal, 31 March 1909, p.2; Death certificate, Dane County Register of Deeds office.

⁷Dane County Register of Deeds, Volume M [Miscellaneous], p. 158: Document No. 321298.

⁸Rankin; Obituary of John Hill, Wisconsin State Journal, 1 November 1983, sec. 4, p. 2; Death certificate of Amanda Hill, Dane County Register of Deeds, Volume 325, p. 191.

⁹Rankin.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Tipler, Gary. National Register of Historic Places nomination form for Miller House, 647 E. Dayton St., Madison, 1979.

¹³"Colored Sunday School," Wisconsin State Journal, 8 October 1901, p. 2.

¹⁴Thomas, Shirley Artilla. "History," in St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church 85th Anniversary, 1902-1987. (Madison: St. Paul A.M.E. Church, 1987), 1.

¹⁵Rankin.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Thomas, 1.

¹⁸"Madison Closes Door to Pastor."

¹⁹Thomas, 1.

²⁰Tipler, Gary. "A Summary," and "Significance Outline," ms. in possession of City of Madison, Department of Planning and Development, [n.d.]

²¹Madison city directory, 1916.

²²Rankin.

²³Thomas, 1.

Bibliography

City of Madison Landmark nomination for Hill Grocery

Angell, G. R. & Co. Madison City Directory. Madison: G.R. Angell & Co., 1914 and 1916 editions.

Efird, Kim. A History of the Blacks in Madison. Paper written for Afro-American history class at Carthage College, Kenosha, 1970; on file at City of Madison Municipal Reference Service.

Hamilton, Velma. Flecks of Soul in Madison...A History, (n.d.) Manuscript on file at City of Madison Municipal Reference Service.

Mollenhoff, David V. Madison: A History of the Formative Years. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1982.

Rankin, Katherine Hundt. National Register of Historic Places registration form for East Dayton Street Historic District, 1987.

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Tipler, Gary. National Register of Historic Places nomination form for William and Anna Mae Miller House, 647 E. Dayton, Madison, 1979.

_____. Significance Outline, (n.d.) Manuscript on file at office of preservation planner, City of Madison Department of Planning and Development.

Wisconsin State Journal, Madison, Wisconsin:

1 November 1983. Obituary of John Hill. (Section 4, p. 2)

25 October 1911. "Madison Closes Door to Pastor," p. 3.

31 March 1909. Obituary of John Turner, p. 2.

9 April 1902. "Colored Church Fully Organized," p. 1.

8 October 1901. "Colored Sunday School." p. 2.