

For Immediate Release

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Wisconsin Historical Society placed the Jones-Hill House on the State Register of Historic Places

Milwaukee, Wis. - The Wisconsin Historical Society placed the Jones-Hill House (Milwaukee, Milwaukee County) on the State Register of Historic Places in May.

The Jones-Hill House is significant in the area of Social History, illustrative of the African American experience in Milwaukee between the 1950s and into the 1970s. This was a period that saw an increase in segregation, the effects of housing redlining, and the impact of urban renewal projects, all of which contributed to the marginalization of Milwaukee's African American residents. The home's history demonstrates how Milwaukee's African American community adapted to the conditions imposed on it through the impacts listed above, and how a separate black social culture evolved in racially segregated Milwaukee both during the property's period of significance and in the preceding decades.

The story of the home's significance is told through the experiences of two of its African American owners: Willie and Fostoria Jones (owners from 1953 to 1967) and Eva Hill (owner from 1967 to 1982). Eva, an Arkansas native, moved from Chicago to Milwaukee in 1940. She initially searched for work as a domestic (maid); however, she recognized a need for transient lodgings in her largely African American neighborhood and began to rent out her apartment. Eventually, she co-owned and managed a rooming/boarding house, known as the Casablanca Hotel. Her establishment is confirmed to have provided lodgings for black entertainers—including Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday and Lena Horne—none of whom was welcome to stay in downtown hotels because of their skin color. From 1945 and into the early 1950s, the "hotel" also included a bar in the basement, which provided after-hours music (performed by the big-name entertainment acts) and general socialization for the portion of the African American community that sought it. Eva continued to successfully operate the rooming house until the city's urban renewal program reached her block in 1967, at which time her property was taken for redevelopment. With the money that she received from the city, Eva was able to purchase the subject house at 2463 North Palmer Street and continue her boarding house operations until her death in 1982. The rarity of Eva's situation as a black woman running her own

business in 1940s Milwaukee, as well as her ability to continue even after her livelihood was taken by the wrecking ball, is notable.

Also illustrating the African American experience in Milwaukee is the story of Tennessee native William "Willie" Jones, who arrived in Milwaukee in 1914, and eventually opened small businesses serving the black residents of the neighborhood. His success led him to become the owner of a number of residential properties, one of which was the subject house at 2463 North Palmer Street. Following the home's 1955 conversion from single-family to that of a three-family home, a bar was also installed in the basement and the lower level served as an after-hours venue which continued until 1967.

The Jones-Hill House is among the few known remaining locations of 1950s to early 1970s-era socialization and entertainment establishments for the black community. Of course the church was certainly central to many, and a number of African American churches still remain throughout the city. As well, a few social institutions, including the Mary Church Terrell Clubhouse (of the National Association of Colored Women) provided many black women a place to meet and socialize; it too remains extant. However, the Jones-Hill House represents the less-recorded recreational history associated with a part of Milwaukee's black community.

The State Register is Wisconsin's official list of state properties determined to be significant to Wisconsin's heritage. The State Historic Preservation Office at the Wisconsin Historical Society administers both the State Register and National Register in Wisconsin.

To learn more about the State and National Register programs in Wisconsin, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.

About Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.

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