

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

812-816 NORTH BRICE STREET (ROWHOUSES) (MIDTOWN EDMONDSON HISTORIC DISTRICT)

HABS No. MD-1448

Location: 812-816 North Brice Street, Baltimore, Maryland

The rowhouses at 812-816 North Brice Street are located at latitude: 39.298172, longitude: -76.650037. The coordinates represent the front entry steps of 814 North Brice Street and were obtained in 2022 using Google Earth (WGS84).

There is no restriction on their release to the public.

Significance: Constructed ca. 1915, the rowhouses located at 812-816 North Brice Street reflect West Baltimore's early twentieth century growth as a streetcar community that developed in close proximity to the Edmondson Avenue streetcar line. Architecturally, the houses are representative of the many two-story day light Italianate houses that developers constructed in West Baltimore for working-class families. In addition, the properties are representative of the mid-twentieth century racial transition of West Baltimore. The 812-816 North Brice Street rowhouses are significant as contributing elements of the National Register-eligible Midtown Edmondson Historic District.

Description: The rowhouses at 812-816 North Brice Street are located on the west side of the block located between West Lafayette Avenue to the north and West Lanvale Street to the south. They are two-story three-bay side-hall-entry Italianate rowhouses with identical façade configurations. Each house has two basement-level windows (some boarded over), and a raised first story accessed by painted concrete steps. The first story contains a door with a transom (infilled with aluminum siding) in the southern bay and two windows that match the height of the door. Painted stone lintels are above all openings, and each window has a painted stone sill. The façades retain their original red brick laid in a running bond pattern. The rowhouses have flat roofs that slope from east to west. Each of the three rowhouses has an identical simple projecting painted wood cornice separated from its neighboring dwelling by a brick parapet rising approximately 18" above the top of the cornice. These parapets are approximately 40" wide and are capped by a stone coping.

The south elevation of 812 consists of a two-bay parged windowless masonry wall that is structurally reinforced by three equally spaced masonry block pilasters and a masonry block water table. The eastern pilaster wraps the southeast corner of 812 and has red brick on its east and south sides. The parged wall has a silver metal coping.

The west (rear) elevation walls of 812 and 814 are painted brick laid in a running bond pattern. The rear wall of 816 is mostly painted smooth stucco with sections of painted brick. The masonry openings for all windows and doors on 812 and 814 are topped with segmental brick arches and the windows have brick sills. The arches and sills of 816 have been parged over with smooth painted stucco. The west elevation walls of 812 and 814 are topped by a simple brick cornice that is mostly obscured by a metal rain gutter; the top of the wall of 816 was completely obscured by vegetation at the time of the survey. The basement level of the 812-816 west elevations is only fully visible on the 812 unit. The basement level of 812 has two boarded-up masonry openings with segmental brick arches. The differing heights of the arched headers indicate that the northern opening once contained a basement window while the southern opening was a basement doorway.

Because the basement level rear walls of 814 and 816 are mostly concealed from view by a lower porch structure and vegetation, the architectural elements could not be observed. The upper stories of the three units are nearly identical; therefore, it is likely that the basement-level walls of all three units are identical as well. The first-story level has a single one-over-one window on the northern side of the first story and a door on the southern side that is combined with a small one-over-one window set within a single-arched masonry opening. Each rear doorway is accessed via a modern set of wooden stairs and a wood porch landing. The porch landings of 814 and 816 have asphalt-shingled shed roofs; the porch at 812 has no roof. The porch at 814 is fully screened and has a screen door; the roofed porch of 816 is open on three sides. The second story has two symmetrically arranged one-over-one windows. The north elevation of 816 consists of a two-bay parged windowless masonry wall that is structurally reinforced by three equally spaced masonry block pilasters and a masonry block water table. The eastern pilaster wraps the northeast corner of 812 and has red brick on its east and north sides. A parged chimney rises adjacent to the middle pilaster toward the center of the wall. The north wall has a silver metal coping.

The interior plan layouts of 812-816 North Brice Street are virtually identical and have windows in every room, qualifying them as the "daylight rowhouse" type. They all have unfinished basements, and first stories located approximately 40" above grade. A typical rowhouse is entered through an exterior swing door leading to a small vestibule. After passing the vestibule door, one enters a foyer with a wooden staircase to the second story. North of the foyer is the living room, which has large archways located on the south and west walls. Two windows penetrate the south wall overlooking the street. The dining room is west of the living room and can be entered via archways connecting it to the living room. A single window centered in the west dining room wall overlooks the backyard. The kitchen is south of the dining room and has an archway shared with the dining room in the kitchen's north wall. The east wall has an archway opening to the foyer. A small, angled wall in the southeast corner has a swing door leading to the

basement stairs. The west kitchen wall has a small window on the south end and a swing door on the north end, which accesses the backyard. The location of counters, cabinets, sink and appliances varies among the three rowhouse units.

The second story is accessed from the entry foyer via a wooden staircase attached to the south wall. The stairs exit onto the L-shaped second-story landing and hallway. Entered through swing doorways, bedrooms 1 and 2 are situated side-by-side in the west (rear) half of the second story. Each bedroom has a closet and a west-facing window that overlooks the backyard. Bedroom 3 is the largest and is on the north end of the eastern half of the second story. Bedroom 3 also has a closet and features two east-facing windows overlooking North Brice Street. A full bathroom with sink, toilet, and bathtub is in the southeast corner of the second story and has an east-facing window overlooking North Brice Street. 814 and 816 retained their original clawfoot bathtubs. Original architectural details remaining in some of the rowhouses indicate that most of the interior doorways, archways and windows were once framed with simple decorative wood moldings and most interior swing doors were wood with five inset rectangular panels. Second-story doorways opening to the hallway also featured transoms with wood or glass panels.

All three properties have backyards that are separated from a common service alley by fencing. The rowhouses at 812-816 North Brice Street were vacant and in fair condition at the time of the survey.

History: Residential development of the Midtown Edmondson Historic District began around 1887 with the construction of rowhouses and cottages initially built as summer homes for city residents.¹ Major development of the area as a thriving mixed-use neighborhood soon followed with the western expansion of the city's boundary in 1888 and the extension of the Edmondson Avenue Electric Streetcar Line in 1900.

Along with the streetcar line extension, development of the Western Maryland and Baltimore and Potomac Railroads helped to bring about the area's transition from isolated pre-Civil War country estates to the densely developed mix of industrial and residential buildings erected in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This growth led to the development of modest, two-story rowhouses that were built for middle class residents.²

The three rowhouses at 812-816 North Brice Street were originally part of a ten-unit block of rowhouses. The 1901 Sanborn map shows no houses on either the east or west sides of the block. By the time of the 1914 map, the east side of the

¹ Eli Pousson, "Midtown Edmondson Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (draft), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2015, 8-1.

² Mary Ellen Hayward and Charles Belfoure, *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 85.

block had been developed. Houses at 800 – 818 North Brice Street are first shown on the 1914 map that was updated in 1950.³ By the time this survey was conducted, the six rowhouses at 800-810 had been demolished.

At the turn of the twentieth century, rowhouses such as 812, 814, and 816 North Brice Street were constructed to address the need for working-class housing. West Baltimore provided land at lower cost, nearby industries for employment opportunities, and close proximity to streetcar transportation. To accommodate working-class families, developers built smaller two-story Italianate houses that had exterior decorative features to emulate the larger houses built for wealthier owners.⁴

While the community remained primarily residential, commercial and industrial uses became interspersed, including commercial use in some of the rowhouses' end units. For example, the 1914 Sanborn map shows four end-unit stores within 2-3 blocks of the 800 block of North Brice Street, i.e., a wallpaper store, paint store, bakery, and cobbler.⁵ Industrial development near the railroad tracks in close proximity to 812-816 North Brice Street included the Lafayette Mill and Lumber Company, H.G. Von Heine Coal Yard, Arrow Laundry, the industrial building at 813 North Pulaski Street, and the warehouses at 740 North Pulaski Street and 2020 Mosher Street.

In the early twentieth century, this block of rowhouses was primarily occupied by blue-collar, Caucasian homeowners. Census records from 1930 to 1950 reveal that residents of the 800-827 block of North Brice Street held a variety of working-class occupations. In 1930, the occupations included a salesman, baker, chauffeur, railroad conductor, sheet cutter, butcher, auto mechanic, interior decorator, railroad machinist, stationary engineer, laborer, blacksmith, and janitress. In the 1940 census, occupations in these rowhouses were akin to those of ten years prior, with the addition of waiter, truck driver, electrician, laundress, laundry checker, printing pressman, car operator, machine operator, watchman, taxi driver, barmaid, and salesgirl. At the time of the 1950 census, three African American households resided on the block, representing occupations including a longshoreman, bricklayer helper, packer and seamstress.⁶

³ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland. Sanborn Map Company, Volume 2, 1901, Image 49 of 123, Map 153, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573190102/?sp=49&r=-0.651,0.818,1.866,0.932,0; Volume 2; 1914, Image 63 of 124, Map 159, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573191402/?sp=63&r=-0.019,0.658,0.877,0.438,0; Volume 2, 1914 – Dec. 1950, Image 65 of 126, Map 159, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573195002, accessed 01 October 2023.

⁴ Hayward and Belfoure, *The Baltimore Rowhouse*, 73.

⁵ Baltimore Sanborn Map 1914, Image 63, Map 159.

⁶ United States Census Data, 1930-1950.

Even at the time these rowhouses were constructed, racial tensions had already developed in Baltimore. Racial tensions of the area were discussed in the media of the time. According to a 1907 study of housing conditions by Janet Kemp, a housing shortage existed in the city, with overcrowding and unhealthy conditions in areas where African Americans and foreign-born immigrants lived.⁷ The overcrowding led to efforts intended to exclude people of color from white neighborhoods. A 1911 British report entitled “The Cost of Living in American Towns” discussed housing in Baltimore:

In those areas of the city which are inhabited by the wage-earning classes a general segregation by race or by color is discernible... It often happens, especially in the better parts of the city, that when a colored family is able to secure a house in the center of a row hitherto exclusively occupied by whites, the latter will remove at the earliest moment, even at a pecuniary loss.⁸

During the 1910s, Baltimore’s City Council passed three residential segregation ordinances, but the U.S. Supreme Court ruled these laws unconstitutional in 1917. In January 1924, 200 people who represented several neighborhood associations met to coordinate resistance to African Americans moving into Baltimore’s western neighborhoods. Subsequently, 1,600 property owners in the area bounded by North Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, and Bentalou Street signed a commitment to not sell their houses to African Americans.⁹

Like many other areas of Baltimore, the Midtown Edmondson Historic District experienced “white flight” between 1955 and 1960 as people of color moved into the district’s dwellings and white occupants moved out of the area to the suburbs further from the city. Beginning in the late 1940s, neighborhoods in the Midtown Edmondson area began transitioning from white to African American. The change was driven by several factors including: the rapid growth of Baltimore’s African American population during the 1940s and 1950s, the intense overcrowding and deterioration of housing conditions in segregated African American neighborhoods, and the movement of white households out of the center city to the areas of new development in the suburbs.¹⁰ During the transition period, evidence of formalized segregation can be found in newspaper listings. For example, real estate offerings for nearby

⁷ Janet E. Kemp, *Housing Conditions in Baltimore* (Baltimore: Baltimore Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, 1907), cited in Edward W. Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore, The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 30.

⁸ *The Cost of Living in American Towns: Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into Working Class Rents, Housing and Retail Prices, Together with the Rates of Wages in Certain Occupations in the Principal Industrial Towns of the United States of America* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911), 80, cited in Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore*, 19.

⁹ Eli Pousson, “Midtown Edmondson Historic District,” 8-21.

¹⁰ Eli Pousson, “Midtown Edmondson Historic District,” 8-29 - 8-30.

North Payson Street were listed under the category of “COLORED HOMES” in the June 9, 1946, edition of *The Sun*.¹¹

By the time of the 1950 census, three of the houses in the 800 block of North Brice Street were occupied by African Americans.¹² By the late twentieth century, the area had transitioned to primarily African Americans residents. The area also saw some evolution in the commercial and industrial uses of properties. By 1975, the neighborhood had a large Super Pride supermarket on the former site of the Lafayette Mill and Lumber Company.¹³

From the date of their construction in 1915 to the present, the rowhouses at 812-816 North Brice Street were used as single-family dwellings.

Sources: “Colored Homes Low Down Payments.” Classified Advertisement. *The Sun* (Baltimore), 9 June 1946, 38. <https://www.newspapers.com>, accessed 17 July 2022.

The Cost of Living in American Towns: Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into Working Class Rents, Housing and Retail Prices, Together with the Rates of Wages in Certain Occupations in the Principal Industrial Towns of the United States of America. (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911), 80, cited in Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore*, 19.

Hayward, Mary Ellen and Charles Belfoure. *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

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¹¹ “Colored Homes Low Down Payments,” Classified Advertisement, *The Sun* (Baltimore), 9 June 1946, 38, <https://www.newspapers.com/>, accessed 17 July 2022.

¹² United States Census data, 1950.

¹³ Eli Pousson, “Midtown Edmondson Historic District,” 7-3, 8-30, 8-32; Sanborn Map Company, Baltimore Maryland, 1971, 1974, and 1982, Collection of Environmental Data Resources, Inc.

Ordinances of 1910-1913,” *Maryland Law Review* 42 (1983): 2. Cited in Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore*, 18.

“Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Baltimore, Independent Cities, Maryland.”

_____. Sanborn Map Company, Volume 2, 1901, Image 49 of 123, Map 153, https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3844bm.g3844bm_g03573190102/?sp=49&r=-0.651,0.818,1.866,0.932,0.

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Sanborn Map Company. Baltimore, Maryland, 1971, 1974 and 1982. “Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.” Collection of Environmental Data Resources, Inc.

United States Census data, 1930-1950.

Historians: Nancy L. Zerbe; Steven Patrick, ARCH², Inc., 2024

Project

Information: Documentation of 812-816 North Brice Street was undertaken in 2021-2024 as mitigation in accordance with the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement for the Baltimore & Potomac (B&P) Tunnel Replacement Program. 812-816 North Brice Street will be demolished to make way for realignment of the Northeast Corridor associated with a new 1.9-mile-long tunnel north of the existing tunnel alignment. The documentation project was sponsored by the United States Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), in coordination with the Maryland Historical Trust. Renee Bieretz prepared large-format photography. Christopher H. Marston, HAER Architect, advised the project.

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Renee Bieretz, photographer, November 2022 (views 1-4); September 2024 (views 5-6)

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MD-1448-3	Perspective view looking northwest, with the ACME Warehouse in the background.
MD-1448-4	Perspective view looking northeast.
MD-1448-5	Interior view of first floor of 814 North Brice Street, looking southeast.
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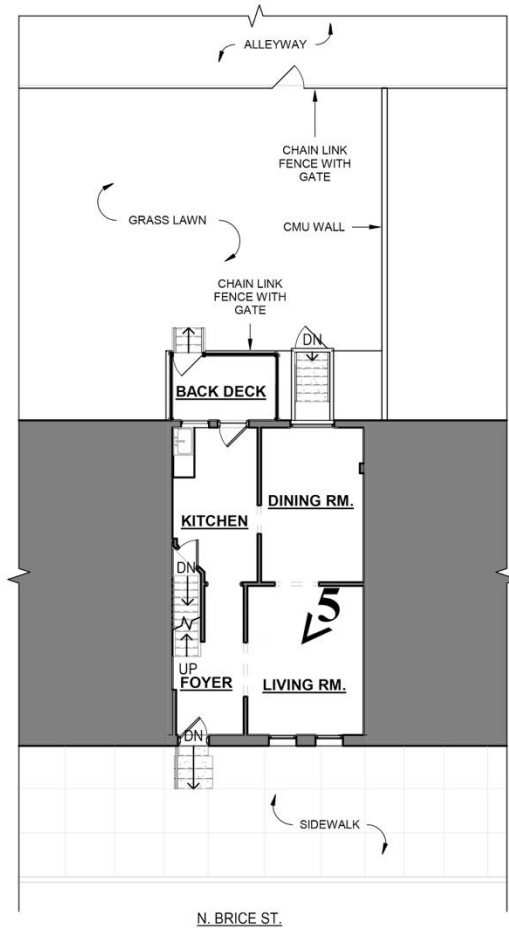
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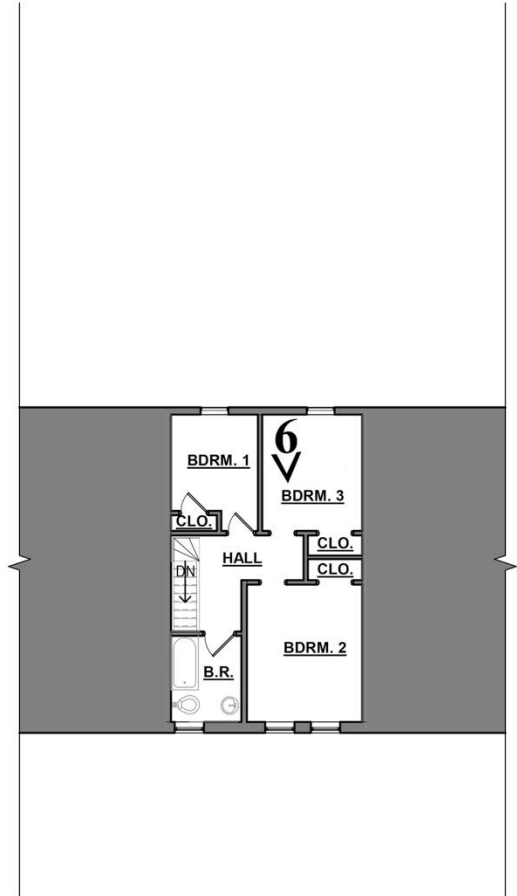
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Brice Street

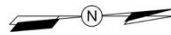
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for
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EXISTING CONDITON SKETCH
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