

## Dorsey Sporting House 1890, 1920, 1996

Built in 1890, this Romanesque Revival building is the last of the brothels built for that purpose in the newly established Eleventh Avenue red-light district of Minneapolis. The red-light district in another area of downtown was being closed, necessitating the move by Dorsey and others to Eleventh Avenue South. The building was built for and run by Ida Dorsey, a successful African American entrepreneur.



*Image representative only and not of Ida Dorsey. Courtesy of masters-of-photography.com*

Ida Dorsey was born Ida Mary Callahan in Kentucky on March 7, 1866. Little is known about her life prior to moving to the Twin Cities, although it is assumed that her mother had been enslaved and her father was white. By 1886 she had changed her name to Dorsey and had established herself as a madam in St. Paul.

Ida Dorsey soon proved herself to be one of the Twin Cities' most successful madams, running multiple brothels between the 1880s and the 1910s. As a woman of color in an industry dominated by white women, she was an adept

entrepreneur and real estate owner.

Prior to opening her business on Eleventh Avenue, Dorsey had been sentenced to ninety days in Stillwater State Prison in 1886 for running a house of prostitution and selling liquor without a license. Although other madams were caught in the raid with Dorsey, they were white and received fines. Dorsey was one of two madams put in prison during the decade.

Dorsey was one of the first to populate the new Eleventh Avenue Red Light District, a shift planned and established by the city's madams. An immigrant community had lived in the area but lacked the political influence to resist the building of a new red-light district. The building's purpose was not hidden. "Sporting House," as a term of use, was listed on a number of city permits for such businesses. The permits for Ida Dorsey's building reference both "Sporting Hse" and "Hse of Ill Fame." Dorsey built the new bordello for \$12,000 and spent another \$15,000 on furnishings.

### **Ida Dorsey is Sentenced and Faints in Court.**

Another large crowd assembled in the circuit court yesterday morning to hear the conclusion of the case against Ida Dorsey, the colored woman charged with keeping a house of ill fame at 125 Second street north. The county attorney did not dwell long in summing up the case, but what he did say, cut like a knife. Mr. Arcander followed and spoke for nearly two hours. Judge Young then charged the jury in a strong manner, and after he had finished speaking the case looked very black indeed for the woman. The jury went out about noon and returned about 2 o'clock. As they filed in the prisoner moved uneasily in her seat and gazed steadily at the judge. Not a muscle of her face moved as the verdict of guilty was pronounced. The woman seemed turned to stone. Five minutes later

*Star Tribune, July 9, 1886*

The geographic containment of the red-light districts demonstrated an agreement between city officials and the madams: vice was sequestered, while the madams became some of the biggest property owners in the area. The new red-light neighborhood had obvious logistical advantages: it was within a Liquor Patrol District (liquor was not allowed to be sold outside of designated areas), close to flour mills and railroads that would generate walk-in customers, and on the Washington Avenue streetcar line.

(Over) CARD #1 INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS 16R BR X

LOCATION 212-14 11th Ave. S.  
 LOT 6 BLOCK 113 ADD. Town of Minneapolis  
 6612 1389 0105 1347

PERMIT NO.	CONSTRUCTION	DATE	CONTRACTOR	COST	O. K.
A 2214	42x80 Br. & Sbc.Flats	12-16-90	L. Anderson	12000.	
D 5784	Plbg. Flat	3-14-91	C.A.Bricks	1000.	6-18-91
A 3267	Alt.	10-31-92	E.O.Tronered	50.	
A 6650	Alt.	10-28-97	John Erickson	75.	
F 3401	Elec. Sporting Hse.	5-13-99	Minn. Elec. Co.	30.	
F 3425	Elec. Hse. of Ill Fame	5-17-99	Minn Elec. Co.	2.	
D 20108	Plbg. Dwlg.	2-13-03	G.A.Kelly	225.	3-11-03
F 5744	Elec.Dwlg.	6-25-04	Mpls. Gen.Elec.Co.	20.	
F 5839	Elec. Dwlg.	7-11-04	C.F.Chidester	50.	
F 15652	Elec. Dwlg.	1-3-06	Minn Elec. Co.	110.	
D 35528	Plbg. Dwlg.	7-30-07	Ejorkman Bros.	110.	8-18-07
F 22132	Elec. Dwlg.	8-14-07	Hortig & Hellier	200.	
F 22139	Elec. Hotel	8-14-07	Pike Elec. Co.	225.	
F 22270	Elec Dwlg.	8-26-07	John Trevor	310.	
G 885	Steam Htg. Plt.	9-14-07	Ejorkman Bros.	1600.	
A 14665	Alt.	2-21-20	Bert Thompson	700.	
F 23557	Elec. Km. Hse.	11-19-29	I.C.Jensen	150.	12-18-29
A 18690	Alt. Br.Flat to Fac.	11-22-29	Ruhen Blumberg	300.	
F 245928	Elec. Cafe	2-24-31	A. Ingebratson	25.	2-26-31
A 20667	Alt. Cafe	9-17-32	E.Samble	200.	

City Permits for 212 Eleventh Avenue South

Like other brothels in the city, the land at 212 Eleventh Avenue South transferred through arrangements to conceal actual ownership. Andrew Haugan (who had served on the city council) and his wife, Louise, sold the property to Carolina Anderson, who took out a building permit with the city for a three-story, \$12,000 apartment structure. Anderson's husband, Zacharias, became the general contractor. Another party, John L. Anderson, owned the building in trust for Carolina Anderson and Ida Dorsey. A former alderman and park commissioner supplied the lumber. The final transfer occurred in 1906 when Dorsey gained the title, using the name Callahan.

Dorsey sent announcements of the opening of her establishment to many, including to pastors who were primarily interested in closing her business. Due to the influence of her clients, Dorsey was not subject to frequent raids at her new location.

Dorsey had a publicly acknowledged affair with Carleton Pillsbury, the nephew of flour miller Charles A. Pillsbury and the grandson of Minneapolis mayor George A. Pillsbury. After Pillsbury died, she would occasionally refer to herself as Mrs. Ida Pillsbury.

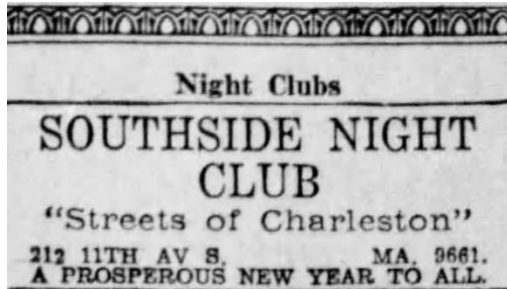
In 1907, opposition to the toleration of prostitution increased in Minneapolis. Dorsey was subject to a vice raid and arrested in 1911.



Star Tribune, December 13, 1911

On March 7, 1913, Dorsey relocated her brothel to St. Paul.

After the Eleventh Avenue brothel was shut down, Bert Thompson, another African American entrepreneur, moved his barber business to the building and in 1920 received a permit for alterations of the building into a rooming house for the many African American porters in the area. He later added a café and gradually added permits for tobacco and alcohol.



Star Tribune, January 1, 1932

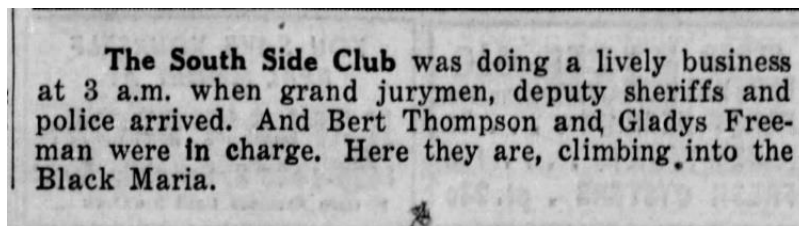
Eventually the space became the Southside Night Club.

When Prohibition ended, legal bars were opened again in Minneapolis. The legal bars had strict opening and closing laws. Prohibition-era speakeasies could be open as late as 7 am. Normal closing hours for illegal bars, such as the Southside Night Club, continued after the closing time set for legally run bars.

In 1935, an article in the *Minneapolis Spokesman* reported that an order had been issued requiring nightclub owners to cater to only one race. In the article, the owner of the Southside Night Club was listed as Bert "Dutch" Thompson.

The club was in the news again in January of 1938, when Thompson and two employees were jailed following a raid at the club. Thompson was charged with "keeping a disorderly house," and employees, Nick Carter and Gladys Freeman, were charged with being "found in" a disorderly house.

The January 6, 1938, *Minneapolis Star* featured a photo of Thompson and Freeman getting into a Black Maria (reference to a closed police van). Thompson was found guilty of operating a "disorderly house," and the club's licenses were revoked for four weeks, putting twenty-two employees out of work.



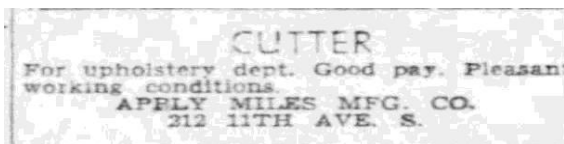
Minneapolis Star, January 6, 1938

The license was transferred to Otis Sheldon.

Sheldon's business was not successful, and by 1939, the famed Southside Night Club was

no longer in operation.

In 1948, 212 Eleventh Avenue South was home to Miles Manufacturing, an upholstery business.



Star Tribune, August 14, 1948

An advertisement for Otis Sheldon. The headline reads "NEW APPLICANT ASKS LICENSES". The text below says: "Issuance of restaurant, soft drink and cigaret licenses to a new applicant at the premises of the South Side club, 212 Eleventh avenue S., was recommended by the city council health and hospitals committee Wednesday. The club recently was raided by members of the grand jury and licenses were revoked after Bert Thompson, the licensee, paid \$75 fine in municipal court. The new applicant, Otis Sheldon, also seeks a dance hall license. This was referred to the health and hospitals committee."

Minneapolis Star, February 2, 1938



*Hennepin County Library*

In the 1950s, 212 Eleventh Avenue South housed New Hope Center, a homeless shelter and drug and recovery program serving men, women, and mothers with children.

In the 1950s, Manor House, a wholesale furniture store, also occupied 212 Eleventh Avenue South. Manor House served five hundred Upper Midwest furniture dealers who referred customers to the business.

A *Minneapolis Star Tribune* article on September 27, 1959, reported that Manor House was founded eight years previously on the Eleventh Avenue site. Manor House had expanded its operations from one-third of the building to the full 15,000 square feet. Because it had outgrown the space, the business was expanding elsewhere.

In the mid-1990s a new owner, Robert Leonard, renovated 212 Eleventh Avenue South into its current iteration of apartments and small businesses.

As the Mill District developed into a revitalized mixed-use neighborhood, many buildings were torn down to make room for new condominium buildings. It was at this time that an agreement was made to save 212 Eleventh Avenue South. The Bridgewater Condominiums were built around this historic Minneapolis building. Ida Dorsey's Sporting House continues to quietly provide shelter and commerce in the Mill District of Minneapolis.



*Star Tribune, October 18, 1959*