Architect Frank C. Miller directed the construction of 490 Central Street in 1886 and 1887. The Victorian Gothic style building, initially used as a firehouse, utilized lots of brick due to the city’s increasing concerns over fires. The building received a substantial renovation in 1910 and held Hose Companies 6, 7 and 13 before its decommission in the 1930s.²

The story of the Lowell Fire Department, created by an 1830 legislative act, and the building are intertwined. The 490 Central Street hose company appeared in the Lowell city directory in 1898. In 1920 the building housed Lowell Fire Department Hose Company #7. The company then consisted of: Captain James A. Shea; Lieutenant Thomas H. Welch; Clerk and Driver Timothy J. Dewire; and Hosemen William J. Lane, James H. Tracy and Patrick J. Mooney. The six were married and lived in Lowell, five in the Back Central and Belvidere neighborhoods, within easy walking distance of the station. Captain Shea lived the furthest by a bit, in the area of the Lowell Bleachery, a couple blocks south of Back Central, only .8 mile away from the station and walking distance still.³

In 1920, Company #7 was entirely of Irish ancestry. Shea, Lane, and Tracy were born in the U.S., with one parent born in Ireland. Mooney and Welch were also born in America, with both parents born in Ireland, while Dewire and his wife were themselves born in Ireland. All except Tracy had children. Mooney lived with his wife and three children, two of his wife’s sisters, and two of his wife’s nieces.⁴

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1 Photographed by Craig Thomas and Yingchan Zhang.

This research was made possible by a grant from the Lowell National Historical Park.
Neighborhood demographics for Central Street, demonstrate a complex urban ethnic landscape in 1920. Despite the all-Irish Hose Company in their midst, the neighborhood contained numerous Armenian families (Paroigian, Chotchian, Minassian, Stephanian), along with Italian, Yankee, Scottish, French-Canadian, and Greek families.

Businesses also reflected the mixed nature of the neighborhood. They included a confectioner, two grocery stores, one variety store, a billiard hall and a real estate office, suggesting a lower-middle class neighborhood. Pietro Millinarzio operated a furniture store at 394 Central Street. Vincente Silva, a fish and oyster dealer, had a business at 452 Central Street and Manuel Ferreira, born in Portugal, operated a shoe repair shop at that same address. Nearby, Antoine Antebelian, born in Armenia in 1882, owned a tailor shop at 512 Central Street. Antebelian’s wife Anna was also born in Armenia. Firefighters might have had their uniforms tailored at their shop. Also in the neighborhood were an Armenian social club and a Portuguese social club at 404 and 448 Central Street respectively.

The membership of the company at 490 Central Street was fairly stable from 1901 to 1910, with three of five continuing but none of the 1910 company worked there in 1920 and, by 1930, the only fireman that remained from 1920 was Thomas H Welch (at 71 years old!), though others were still with the Fire Department. More importantly, 1930 witnessed the citywide shift from a nearly all-Irish fire department. The station had seven firefighters and also served as the district office, consisting of the district chief and his chauffeur. None were born in Ireland but six of the nine had Irish heritage. The district chief, Richard E. Burns wanted himself and his family to be considered ‘American,’ reporting his parents in the census of 1930 as born in Massachusetts and his wife’s parents in New Jersey. However every previous census and his marriage record show his parents were born in Ireland, as was his wife’s father. The local captain, William F. Christie, had Irish-born parents; his wife had a Portuguese father and Irish mother. The holdover Lieutenant Welch and his wife were born in Massachusetts while both sets of parents were born in Ireland. One hoseman, John J. Kane, was born in Massachusetts of Irish-born parents. The other two hosemen, William T. Caveney and Thomas J. Burke, had British parentage but each had three grandparents from Ireland and Burke married a second generation Irish woman. Interestingly, the non-Irish at the station were all chauffeurs (drivers of the fire equipment) from Canada, two from English-speaking provinces and one from French. The chief’s chauffeur, Charles H. Cogswell was born in New Brunswick, as was John J. Rinehardt (whose wife was from Nova Scotia). Henry D. Carpentier and his wife were from French Canada. Three of nine men at the station were not Irish, a definite change.

By the late 1930s, 490 Central Street no longer served as a firehouse. Vacant in 1938 and in 1939 it became Recreation Center #1. In 1940 Recreation Center #2 appeared at 209 Lincoln Street. Little is known of the origins, sponsors or activities of these centers. From 1944 to 1947 the building was home to the Teamsters, Chauffeurs & Helpers Union Local 49. Phillip McCarron, the local’s secretary, lived at 119 Liberty Street with his wife Madelyn and his son, Phillip A. McCarron was the son of Anthony and Cassie (Teague) McCarron, Irish immigrants. Anthony himself was a teamster in 1891 when he married, in days when the word “teamster” meant handling horses. For years Anthony ran a successful grocery store on Concord Street, employing his son, Philip, as a young man.

In 1947 the White Eagle Polish Club occupied 490 Central Street. That year, Waclaw Taraszkiewicz Jr. was the White Eagle Club’s secretary. He came to America in 1908 as a one year old with his parents, Waclaw Senior and Leonora (Terouri). They came from what is now Vilnius, Lithuania, an area that had three different identities that they reported in the censuses of 1910-1930: Russia, Lithuania, and Poland. With his name and club association, it is clear Waclaw (later called Walter) thought of himself as Polish. Both he and his father worked most of their lives in the mills. The number of Polish social clubs in the city shows the strength of the Polish population in Lowell. In 1938, for example, there were four: the Polish National Home Association (commonly called Dom Polski) at 10 Coburn Street in Centralville; just a half block away, the Polish Falcon Club at 133 Lakeview Avenue; the Polish-American Women’s Citizen Club at 20 Middle Street; and, almost next door, the Pulaski Political Club at 32 Middle Street.

7 Hengen, Neighborhoods, Form 280, pg. 1-2; Polk’s Lowell City Directory, 1910, 1905, 1932, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1944, 1947. U.S. Census 1910, 1920, 1930. The Lowell City Directory 1910 onward. Tracing the Taraszkiewicz family in the city directory is complicated by the presence of two Waclaws (not including Junior) and a Wladislaw, the vagaries of English speakers spelling Polish names, and the partial use of the anglicized first name of Walter. It’s clear the directory confused them occasionally.
In 1970 the club at 39 Central Street was the Pulaski Club. There had been a Pulaski Political Club at 32 Middle Street from 1938 until the late 1940’s and then simply a Pulaski Club at 99 Market Street (just around the block) in the sixties. It is unclear whether this was a merger with the White Eagle Club or just a move into a vacant spot.

Stanley W. Forys, the president of the Pulaski Club, lived with his wife Viola at 77 Fort Hill Avenue from 1956 to 1970. Stanley’s parents were Poland-born Szymon and Tekala Forys. They married in Lowell in 1906 but were in Canada when Stanley was born in July 1909. They returned with him across the border just five months later. Tekala, a widow in 1970, lived in the apartment upstairs from her son, who worked as a truck driver at Fort Devens in nearby Ayer, Massachusetts.8

The other listed representative of the Club was its treasurer Fred Bobola, who lived in Dracut, Massachusetts in 1970 but in Lowell when younger. Fred was born in 1927 to parents Stanley and Victoria Bobola, both born in Poland. Stanley’s own father, Pawel, came to America in 1909 and sent for his sixteen year-old son in 1912. The club seemed to be in the family. In 1964 Stanley was its maintenance man at its Market Street address, likely a less stressful job than working in the mills the previous fifty years. Fred’s daytime job was a guard for the Massachusetts Correctional facility in Concord, where he achieved his fifteen minutes of fame during an attempted prison break in 1959.9

In 2000 and 2004 the Lowell directories do not list the club. It is likely that it was merely a problem of verification as personal observation (and the photograph above) revealed that the Pulaski Club is indeed still in operation in 2008.

Surname analysis for Central Street in the Back Central neighborhood demonstrates the ethnic transformation taking place around the Pulaski Club. In 1950, shortly after the White Eagle Polish Club formed, the neighborhood contained a handful of Portuguese immigrants (Correia, Freitas). By 2000, Portuguese and Brazilians (Santos, Souza, Sousa, Rebeiro, Dasilva, Machado, Leandro, Inacio) lived on Central Street near the Pulaski Club.10

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