

PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE AT NIGHT — This is the way the avenue looked when the lights and decorations for the holidays were in place. Photo taken in 1957 shows the avenue south from Laurens St.

## Pennsylvania Ave.: business thoroughfare

By Helen Glover Cook AFRO Staff Reporter

In 1947 Jim Dorsey's Baltimore hometown was representative of many east coast cities whose black population was newly charged with the adrenalin of victory created by the ending of World War II.

ding feats and accomplishments won by their people. The multi-sportstalented Jackie Robinson had finally become the first black to play in a professional baseball league, signing as a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Winston Salem, North Carolina elected its first black City Councilman.

Harry H. Truman entered the White House on a platform which promised his constituents an opportunity for wealth and prosperity synonymous with America's position as a leader in the World's economy.

The Supreme Court had just submitted a decision which ruled segregation on interstate buses unconstitutional.

These events coupled with a can-do attitude were reflected in the dreams of many aspiring black entrepreneurs, signaling for them the emergence of a new day.

For Jim Dorsey this new day was May 8, 1947, when he opened his newly purchased gas station on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Mosher street.

Slowly, the nation began to break down the many barriers of racism but the pro-

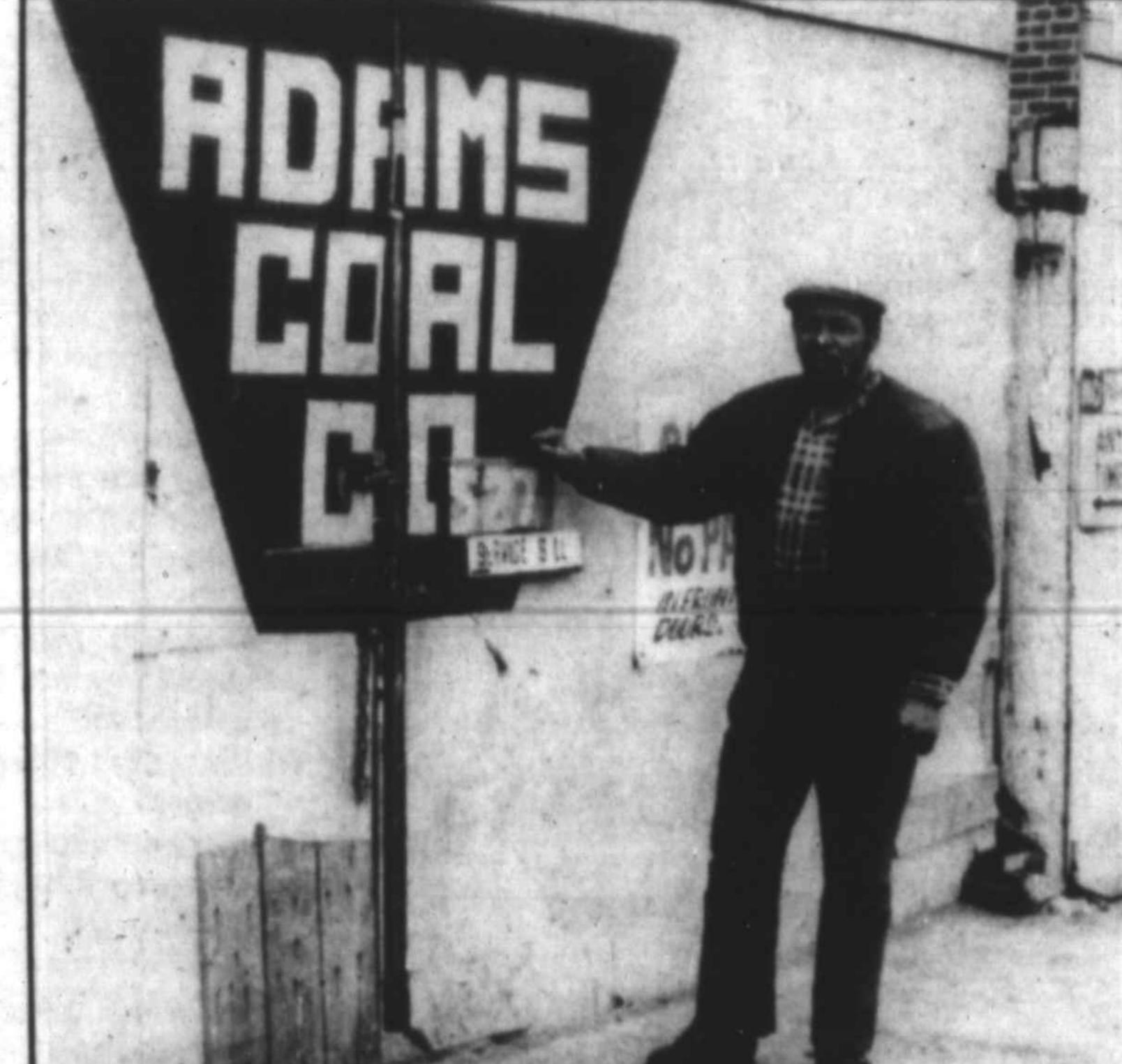
cess was slow and painful, there were casualties on both sides. Many of the old prejudices against blacks were still ingrained in the fabric of American life.

Although black solders had risked their lives to win a war, they were still relegated to the back seat of American culture. They were not allowed to cross that line in play or business.

Any black who was fortunate enough to acquire money to start a business knew that business would be in the ghetto specifically designated for him —



in the ghetto specifically designated for him — AVENUE BUSINESS included this gasoline filling station which was owned by James Dorsey (left).



HARD AND SOFT COAL was used to heat many of the homes in the West Baltimore area, and the Adams Coal Co. supplied the need in many cases. Another black business on the avenue.

Pennsylvania Avenue.

Pennsylvania Avenue was the hub of West Baltimore black city life. All the family's shopping needs were to be found among the diverse businesses on "The Avenue."

Jim Dorsey opened his station amid this atmosphere and thrived there for thirty-one years. The station was named Dorsey's Service Station and originally was serviced by gas from the Continental Oil Company. Later Dorsey changed to the City Service Oil Company who changed their company's

perfect for starting a new business venture, a jacket was all anyone needed to wear outdoors. In those days men usually wore suits or they wore slacks and a white shirt, colors were not popular for everyday wear."

"Women usually dressed in dresses or suits and always

gloves when they were out in public," said Dorsey.

Dorsey says "I started the station with only \$864, which doesn't seem like a lot of money these days but that amount was sufficient for me to buy three one thousand gallon tanks."

"The company set my gasoline quota at 6,000 gallons. They thought that meeting such a large quota would be difficult if not impossible for me.

"I surprised them by selling over 10,000 gallons that first month. My station attracted patrons from all over Baltimore, East, West, North and South of town, along with all types of people including those who drove Caddies and those who drove Chevys.

Avenue was mentioned not only did the speaker include the actual strip but also many of the businesses located on the periphery of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Avenue was also known as a center for disseminating information and business tips through word of mouth and advertisements on the uses and where-abouts of all types of merchandise.

Business owners reinforced the standards of a clique or bandleaders

community whose reputation depended on each member adhering to a code of ethical business practices.

Lloyal Randolph one of

owner of the York Hotel, an

establishment whose clientele (Continued on Page 9)

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-Pa. Avenue

time go out with that special

(Continued from Page 8)

often included the celebrities of the era and whose owner Lloyal Randolph was a local celebrity in his own right.

Lloyal Randolph was a veteran political leader whose hotel restaurant; The Blue Room became a popular congregating spot for state politicians and businessmen

The hotel bar was one of the best stacked in the city. During World War II the popularity of the hotel forced the enactment of a rule that restricted guests to a three day period of stay.

The dining room was open 24 hours a day and the hotel maintained a staff of over 30 employees.

As Lloyal Randolph expanded his hotel business so did the City of Baltimore's urban renewal plan extend its boundaries.

The York Hotel original site was Preston and Dolphin Avenues, later the "York" moved to the West side of Pennsylvania Avenue and last to its location across the street on the East side of the street, in the 1500 block of Pennsylvania Avenue, where it became the York Bar because it no longer had a hotel on its premises.

Business life included night life and Pennsylvania Avenue nightclubs headlined the era's top entertainers. Every night there was somewhere to go.

The Sphinx Club was the hangout of a selected group of men and women who belonged to the "in crowd." Pictures from the Sphinx's early days include the "Brown Bomber" Joe Louis along with successful Baltimore businessmen.

In the twenties and thirties like Dixon was playing with his band, a combo known as like Dixon and the Original Jazz Demons through his combo, he was able to make contacts in the entertainment world.

In the midst of Jim-crow blacks packed the New Albert Hall to dance to the rhythm of big name white bands accompanied by singers like Lena Horne and Ella Fitzgerald. Well known black bandleaders such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong also played at the New Albert Hall.

In 1934 Ike Dixon brought the Comedy Club and upon his death it became the legacy which he left to his sons, Ike, Jr. and Howard. When it was and provided sleeping accommodations for them in the hotel portion upstairs.

For 42 years Clyde K Adams had owned an managed the Adams Coal an Fuel Company at 527 Gol Street. Adams started the business after saving mone he earned as a long distance truck driver of surplus Arm trucks.

Avenue were heated by coal and used kerosene for lamps.someone had to supply those products, so it looked like a good business pro-

Adams acquired enough money to finally purchase a

truck for himself and returned home to Baltimore to scout the business community searching for prospects. He settled on opening his coal and fuel company.

Dorsey's Service Station,
The York Hotel, The New
Albert Hall and The Comedy
Club are no longer in



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