



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 121-5669

1. General Property Information

Property name: Pearlie's/Grant's Restaurant

Property address: 2108 Jefferson Ave

City or Town: Newport News

Zip code: 23607

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Newport News

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building Site Structure Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: .06

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban Suburban Town Village Hamlet Rural

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

Pearlie's/Grant's Restaurant stands on the east side of Jefferson Avenue in Newport News between Hampton Avenue and 21st Street. It is part of an attached commercial block with another single-story building to the north and a two-story building to the south. Census data shows that it is a majority African American neighborhood. The immediate area is primarily commercial, and the sidewalk is decorated with city-owned planting beds and light posts. The Jefferson Avenue Commercial Corridor has undergone a great degree of change since at least the 1980s, including demolition and the development of new multi-family residential and educational buildings to the south. Built in c. 1920, the restaurant building is demonstrative of the ongoing campaigns of demolition, new building, and extensive renovation of buildings in the area. Some other buildings dating from the first half of the 20th century remain, including the Moton Theater. Located across Jefferson Avenue, the Moton is another significant site of local African American history.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Commercial: Main Street

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: N/A

If the builder is known, please list here: Unkown

Date of construction (can be approximate): c. 1920

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

Pearlie's/Grant's is a single-story commercial building that is and has historically been a restaurant. The restaurant has cinderblock walls clad in brick on the facade and rear elevation. The central front double door is recessed from the sidewalk and two storefront windows angle away from it. A red awning stretches across the façade. The bottom third of the façade (below the windows) is tiled and the recessed entrance area is paved with stone.

The interior has undergone extensive renovations in recent years that have affected the floor plan as well as finishes. Since 2000 a rear addition was added, allowing for a full commercial kitchen to be installed as well as additional bathrooms and storage. There is an acoustic tiled drop-ceiling in the dining room; it retains the original cement flooring, recently revealed after modern faux wood flooring was removed.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- N/A

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property.

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Built in c.1920, the site of Pearlie's in Newport News has been home to African American-owned restaurants since the opening of Carrington's Café in the 1920s (further research to confirm all restaurants on site African American-owned). From 1939 -1950, The Tavern Rest or Tavern Restaurant is listed in the Green Book at the same address. In 1952, Pearlie B. Rice opened Pearlie's Grill, where the soul food menu was popular with workers from the nearby harbor and railyards as well as local residents. From 1962-1967, the site was listed as Grant's Restaurant in the Green Book. Other restaurants identified at the location include Blue Goose Cafe, Wm. Ford's Restaurant, Ajax Restaurant, Tavern, Nannie's Grill, Cozy Inn Dinette, and E & F Restaurant.

Pearlie's is one of only five extant Green Book buildings in Newport News identified through the 2024 MPD survey, and the only site used today for the same purpose listed in the Green Book (commercial: restaurant).

The building demonstrates significance under Criteria A for Ethnic Heritage: African American and possibly also Commerce and Social History. Although physical changes have been made to the building, they have contributed to the continued use of the building as a commercial restaurant space. The building demonstrates a high degree of integrity in location, setting, feeling, and association.

For additional information about the Green Book and evaluating the significance and integrity of Green Book sites, see the following excerpt from the 2024 Multi-Property Listing: *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* in Virginia: Race, Space, and Mobility. Some of the most relevant sections are in bold.

The word-of-mouth network that began to grow as more Black people could travel by automobile soon metamorphosed into an assortment of published travel guides...

The Negro Traveler's Green Book

Among the best-known of these guides today was *The Negro Traveler's Green Book*, which debuted in 1936; over the course of its 30-year existence, the guide also was published as *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and *The Travelers' Green Book*. Among the guide's slogans were "Assured Protection for the Negro Traveler" and "Vacation Without Aggravation." [148] Published by Victor Hugo Green and his wife, Alma Green, the guide included listings of tourist homes, guest houses, hotels, motels, restaurants, night clubs, tailors, vacation resorts, stores, and beauty parlors and barber shops, broken down by state. The Greens lived in Harlem but, because they traveled South to visit Alma Green's relatives during the summer, they had firsthand experience with the hazards that Black travelers faced. [149] "That Victor Green chose to include businesses such as golf courses, country clubs, state and national parks, and other recreational pursuits also celebrated activities beyond just basic survival. [He] tried to elevate the traveling experience from survival to enjoyment, and eventually to social action." [150]

A White-owned publisher, Gibraltar Printing & Publishing, printed *The Green Book* and the Greens managed its sales. The guide could be purchased via mail order and was sold to the public by businesses, particularly service stations, restaurants, and other places that served Black

customers. The guide quickly found success through word-of-mouth advertising. Victor Green worked for the U.S. Postal Service and he conceived the idea of tapping the national network of postal employees to help with the guide's marketing. Mail carriers solicited advertising opportunities from Black-owned businesses along their routes and informed the business owners how to order multiple copies of *The Green Book* for distribution to their customer base. Green also struck a deal with James A. Jackson, a Black marketing executives at Esso, a gas station chained owned by Standard Oil (today's Exxon). Jackson coordinated the distribution of the guides to Esso gas stations, many of which were owned by Black entrepreneurs. [151] By the 1930s, "Esso was becoming increasingly well known as one of the most progressive large companies when it came to the treatment of Black customers and employees. Not only were African-American motorists welcome at nearly all Esso stations, but Esso also employed Black men as mail clerks, pipeline workers, and even gas station franchise owners." [152]

The Greens saw their new travel guide quickly become popular, with distribution in every state east of the Mississippi River within just a couple of years. *The Green Book* soon was available nationwide. **An important aspect of the guide's importance to Black Americans was that it helped them to identify in advance businesses that welcomed their patronage, rather than those that merely tolerated African American customers** by, for example, selling a sandwich from a rear kitchen window. In places where Jim Crow segregation was not rigidly enforced, the availability of *The Green Book* at a restaurant, night club, gas station, or other business also created opportunities for other Americans to see the breadth of Black-owned businesses and, if they chose, to patronize those businesses, too. **Especially due to the effects of residential segregation (discussed further below) and discriminatory employment practices, opportunities for White people, especially in smaller cities and towns, to interact with other races and ethnicities were limited during the mid-20th century. *The Green Book* provided a way for such interactions to occur.** The Greens assured their guide's continuing relevancy, too, by adjusting its content to fit changing travel trends and the post-World War II political atmosphere, as well as expanding the range of businesses and other places included in the guide. Over the thirty years of its publication, *The Green Book* included over 10,000 listings for privately owned business, as well as colleges, parks and other recreational facilities, and social improvement clubs. [153]

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3) Commercial Resources (Restaurants, Beauty Parlors/Barber Shops, Pharmacies, etc.)

Description: Commercial Resources are property types that are directly associated with African American businesses listed in *The Green Book*. Property types typically include commercial buildings; however, they may also include residential or other building types that were converted for use for or shared with a business. To date, the following commercial subtypes have been identified: restaurants, beauty parlors/barber shops, and pharmacies. Commercial Resources are typically, but not always, located in town or urban areas. Due to the variety of activities associated with Commercial Resources, they have a range of sizes, characteristics, materials, and styles

Significance: Commercial Resources have direct links to African American businesses that were listed in *The Green Book* throughout Virginia. **These resources represent the commercial success of African American business owners, as well as places that Black travelers recognized as providing safe access to various business types in segregation-era Virginia.** Some commercial resources may have also provided safe locations for civic and social activists to gather or hold events. **Resources will typically be eligible under Criterion A in the areas of**

Ethnic Heritage: African American, Commerce, and Social History; additional areas of significance may be identified for individual resources. Select resources may also be eligible under Criterion B for association with notable African American business owners who made significant contributions in one or more of the above areas of significance, and/or Criterion C for Architecture.

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Aspects of Integrity

Location and Setting: **The Commercial Resource type often was situated within a segregated Black neighborhood or community during its period of significance.** The type typically remains in its original location. Due to urban renewal and highway construction, however, the resource may have been relocated either within its original parcel or to a new site. Relocation that occurred during the property's period of significance will not affect integrity of setting. The circumstances of the building's relocation after its period of significance are to be evaluated on an individual basis when evaluating if its integrity of location affects its ability to convey its significant associations.

With regard to setting, in rural areas Commercial Resources often stood in or near a residential area situated along the outskirts of a town or within the unincorporated boundary of a Black community with roots that extended back to the Reconstruction Era or earlier. **In urban areas, Commercial Resources were located within a segregated Black neighborhood, where the setting may have been entirely commercial in character or have included a mix of commercial and other uses, such as residential, recreational, educational, religious, and social.** Because many Black neighborhoods experienced extensive demolitions due to 1940s-c.1980 highway construction, urban renewal projects, and/or local zoning for land uses and activities incompatible with a neighborhood's or individual resource's historic character, the original setting of a Commercial Resource may have been altered. In such cases, these alterations are part of the resource's integrity of setting rather than a negative effect because the consequences are part of the significance of surviving resources associated with The Green Book. The incompatible activities and uses are illustrative of the many challenges overcome by Black individuals and communities prior to and during the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation and establishment of civil rights for African Americans at a level unprecedented in the nation's history.

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Feeling and Association: **Location of a Commercial Resource within or adjacent to a historically segregated area of commercial resources, or mixed with commercial, residential, recreational, educational, religious, and social uses, will contribute to the resource's integrity of feeling and association.** The retention of associated historic-age properties in proximity to the Commercial Resource contributes to its integrity of setting and, therefore, integrity of feeling and association. It will not be atypical, however, for a Commercial Resource to be in a location affected by the types of extensive demolition, displacement, new construction, and/or incompatible land uses and activities noted above with regard to integrity of location. A resource affected by such activities will have changes to its location, setting, feeling, and association. Analysis of these four aspects of a property's integrity, therefore, must take into account the effects of such alterations on an individual property and should be understood as contributing to that property's integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. With regard to integrity of association, to be nominated under this MPD, the Commercial Resource must have been listed in The Green Book at least once during the guide's publication between 1936-1966.

Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

- Halberg, Kayla, Ashlen Stump, and Lena McDonald. DRAFT National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: *The Negro Traveler's Green Book* in Virginia: Race, Space, and Mobility. Commonwealth Preservation Group, 2024.
- Commonwealth Preservation Group, Ashlen Stump, et al. *The Green Book in Virginia Survey and MPD*, (DHR ID 121-5669). 2024. [VCRIS database]. <https://vcris.dhr.virginia.gov/>.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Newport News, Independent Cities, Virginia. Sanborn Map Company, 1926; Republished 1955. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09049_013/.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Newport News, Independent Cities, Virginia. Sanborn Map Company, Jan 1919. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09049_010/.
- Corporation of Newport News. "Pearlie's Restaurant, 2108 Jefferson Avenue." Newport News Historical Marker. Newport News, VA.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: x Public\Local Public\State Public\Federal

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: _____
organization: _____
street & number: _____
city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____
e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____
Date: _____

•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____
Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Joanna Hejl, Grant Coordinator
organization: VDHR
street & number: 2801 Kensington Ave
city or town: Richmond state: VA zip code: 23221
e-mail: joanna.hejl@dhr.virginia.gov telephone: 804-482-8098
Date: 5/20/2025

PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!

PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Pearlie's Restaurant
City of Newport News, VA
DHR ID# 121-5669

 Proposed Boundary



PIF AERIAL-VICINITY MAP

Pearlie's Restaurant
City of Newport News, VA
DHR ID# 121-5669

 Proposed Boundary







PEARLIE'S RESTAURANT 2108 JEFFERSON AVENUE

Over a dozen retail food enterprises have operated at this location, the first being Carrington's Café in the 1920s. The most long lived and well known – Pearl's Grill – was established in 1952 by Pearl B. Rice. It was the first restaurant in Newport News that provided full service, full course meals for African Americans. Open from 6 am to midnight, this Uptown eatery located near the boat harbor was popular with longshoremen, railroad employees and shipyard workers who required nourishing meals to sustain their labors. Pearl's was a hub for residents as well, and considered the best soul food kitchen in town. Under successive management, Pearl's continued its tradition of offering tasty southern fare to patrons into the 21st century.















