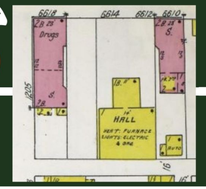
A BRIEF HISTORY OF
FITZGERALDS

(special thanks to The Berwyn Public Library, Berwyn Historical Society, and our FITZGERALDS fam for helping pull this together!

1919
SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP

First KNOWN appearance of the club. Still searching for the original title/construction date! Built as a "Hall".



"Halls" (or dancehalls) were popular spots for dancing and gathering, most likely with a live-music element involved. Popular American music of the early 20th century included ballroom, big-band, and jazz. Halls were also a known predecessor of what were later called nightclubs. Working-class people frequented halls as they enjoyed financial freedoms that their predecessors did not.

1920's BERWYN

Photo courtesy of the Berwyn Historical Society

JANUARY 17TH, 1920 - 1933
PROHIBITION ERA SO LIKE, WHO KNOWS MAN

The identity of the "Hall" was somewhat lost during the 1920's, (or at least we can't seem to find any record of it yet) and was said to have been known as the "Oakwyn Athletic Club" (the name being a combination of Berwyn, and the city across the street from it, Oak Park, Ill).

OCTOBER 25TH, 1933
CLUB RITZ

Near the end of the prohibition era, there is evidence of 6613 W. Roosevelt (the building that is currently BABYGOLD BARBECUE and part of the FITZGERALDS property) being known as "Club Ritz". In an ad in Berwyn Life dated October 25, 1933, a Halloween party at the location can be seen along with live music provided by "Jack Lyon and his Club Ritz Orchestra". (See Figure A) There is also an ad in the August 16th, 1934 edition of the Oak Leaves, naming Club Ritz "Berwyn's Brightest Nite Club" featuring Johnny Martin's Orchestra. (See Figure B)

FIGURE A

Father Joe Travels to the Formal Opening and Halloween Party
Saturday, Oct. 28th
at the
CLUB RITZ
6614 W. ROOSEVELT ROAD
Women wear an A Costume and
Dance to the Gay Tunes of JACK LYON and his
CLUB RITZ ORCHESTRA.
No Cover Charge at Any Time. Open Daily and Sun Dail 7 Pm Saturdays Open Noon Till.
RUDY MAWUSE, Prop.

FIGURE B

CLUB RITZ
6613 W. Roosevelt Road
"Berwyn's Brightest Nite Club"
Featuring Johnny Martin's Orchestra
PHONE BERWYN 112

"The Club Ritz is in Berwyn, but its dark booths and the sensual temptations they offer draw girls and boys from Austin and west suburban high schools. Gin fizzes and beer steins littered the tables. The reporters returned, guided by two Austin students, 16 and 15. The interior of this saloon is so dark that the reporters at first could not find their way to tables. It was late afternoon, and there were no other students in the place. But the waiter recognized the two girls as steady patrons. He carelessly pushed their school books aside and served them with gin bucks. Drinking at tables were eight unescorted young girls. This is how Chicago is heeding the solemn injunction to "safeguard our citizens everywhere from the return of the saloon and attendant abuses."

MARCH 11TH, 1934
CLUB RITZ AQUIRES AN UNSAVORY REPUTATION IN A SENATE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD ON THE REPEAL OF PROHIBITION

Evidence of Club Ritz's unappealing reputation can be found in an article from The Chicago Herald and Examiner dated March 11, 1934 titled, "West Side Pupils Pack Dens; Children revel in Darkness; Brag of Liquor As They Fall" (ABOVE):

AUGUST 16TH, 1934
MOB TIES; WELL WELL, YOU DON'T SAY!

Not surprisingly, the negative attention and increase of eyes on Berwyn, and Club Ritz in particular, cast a negative light on the business. Furthermore, after being targeted by local authorities at the time as being connected with the mob, Club Ritz's doors were forcibly closed in 1934. An article from the Chicago Daily Tribune dated August 16th, 1934 titled, "Berwyn Mayor Aids to Block Old Capone Gang" details the closing of Club Ritz:

BERWYN MAYOR ACTS TO BLOCK OLD CAPONE GANG

Reports Hoodlums Are Invading Town.

JACK MCGURN
"MACHINE GUN JACK"
Sicilian-American boxer, mobster, and eventually a made man and caporegime in Al Capone's Chicago Outfit.

The club opened for a few days before a license had been applied for. Mayor Shay said when he learned "Machine Gun Jack" McGurn, Capone gunner, and Louis (Doc) Stacey, another well known hoodlum, were reported to be interested in it he closed the club immediately. Recently it was reopened under reputable management, he declared.

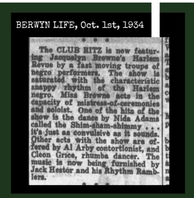
Also associated with planning the St. Valentine's Day Massacre!

1934 - 1935
CLUB RITZ

Genre's: Jazz / Rag-time / Big-Band / Blues
Dixieland / Orchestra
A.) Jack Lyon & his Club Ritz Orchestra
B.) Johnny Martin's Orchestra
C.) Bill Jordan's Orchestra
D.) Jacquelyn Browne's Harlem Revue

Under New Management
Dick Whitehead
Offers New Life—New Pep and
Dancing Every Night
to Club Ritz Orchestra
No Cover Charge
CLUB RITZ
6613-15 Roosevelt Road

CLUB RITZ
6615 W. Roosevelt
BERWYN, ILL.
An All-Star Revue
Featuring
NELSON AND HIS FAMED BOXING CATS
DIRECT FROM COLLEGE INN
BILLY OWEN, M. C.
NORMAN & McKAY
BETTY WILLS
All Mixed Drinks, 35c—Beer 10c
Reservations: Berwyn 5795


BERWYN LIFE, Oct. 1st, 1934

The CLUB RITZ is now featuring Jacquelyn Browne's Harlem Revue by a fast moving troupe of negro performers. The show is saturated with the characteristic snappy rhythm of the Harlem negro. Miss Browne acts in the capacity of mistress-of-ceremonies and soloist. One of the hits of the show is the dance by Nida Adams called the Shim-sham-shimmy . . . It's just as convulsive as it sounds. Other acts with the show are offered by Al Arby contortionist, and Cleon Grice, rumba dancer. The music is now being furnished by Jack Hester and his Rhythm Ramblers.

DINE—DANCE
AND
RELAX
CLUB WHITEHALL
SMART :: :: DIFFERENT
6615 Roosevelt Road
AT CLARENCE AVE.
"Clar" Wybran, Mgr. Berwyn 5795

1935
CLUB WHITEHALL

1930s: As the United States reeled from the Great Depression, big band music became increasingly popular. Led by bandleaders like Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, and Chick Webb, the big band era thrived throughout the 1930s, inspiring new popular swing dances like the jitterbug and the jive.

CICERO LIFE
Friday, March 31st, 1944

1944
RANUCCI'S NIGHT SPOT

FUN FACT!
Nicolas and Marcus Ranucci (pictured left) are grandsons of the former Ranucci's Night Spot and currently play every month at FITZGERLADS with their band, Groove Witness!

1948
HUNT CLUB

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, DEC. 12 IS THE DATE!
THE HUNT CLUB
6613 W. ROOSEVELT RD.
BERWYN
IS THE PLACE
And
"THE SALTY DOGS"
ARE THE BAIT
So Attend Our Pre-Xmas Party
And Enjoy An Afternoon Of Xmas
Music Salty Dog Style.
SUNDAY AFTERNOON FROM 4:00 TO 8:00
YOUR HOSTS
ROSE AND MARTY HETZEL
PROMOTED BY HANK MAGNER
A FEW MORE ALBUMS MAY BE AVAILABLE
GOOD FOOD ● FINE LIQUORS
Phone GUnderson 4-9803

In addition to music at Hunt Club, Psychic Reader Betty Turner and Hypnotist Edmund Andrew were regular acts.

Edmund Andre'
Every Saturday Night
THE HUNT CLUB

BRITE SPOTS

THE ORIGINAL SALTY DOGS

1962
DEER LODGE

OTTO & LOU KUBIK
INVITE YOU TO THE
GRAND OPENING
TODAY—TOMORROW—SUNDAY
OF THE DEER LODGE
6615 W. ROOSEVELT RD. BERWYN
SMORGASBORD ● JOHN MONTI TRIO

DEER LODGE
15 YEARS AT RED ARROW!
6613-15 W. Roosevelt Rd.
NOW FRI & SAT — THE
TONE TOPPERS
This Sunday
JOE KOVICH
AND HIS ORCHESTRA
LOU KUBIK your hostess
TRY OUR DELICIOUS PIZZA

DEER LODGE
Formerly Mark Club
6613-15 W. Roosevelt Rd.
NOW FRI & SAT — THE
MOON-LITERS
This Sunday
RONNY LEE AND THE
JOLLY RAVENS
LOU KUBIK your hostess
TRY OUR JUMBO SANDWICHES

1980
FitzGerald's Nightclub

MARCH 2020
FitzGeralds family retires and property changes hands to new ownership

Sonny Landreth

seen here playing on the stage pre-"A League Of Their Own" stage background change

FitzGerald's Nightclub

Bill FitzGerald with Clifton Chenier

people lined up!

BUCKWHEAT ZYDECO in the greenroom

1982
1st Annual
FitzGerald's American Music Festival

CLIFTON CHENIER ("KING OF ZYDECO") AND HIS RED HOT LOUISIANA BAND, THE FAMOUS POTATOES, THE SALTY DOGS, JAZZ MEMBERS BIG BAND