Beverly Victor Baranco, Sr.

Beverly V. Baranco, Sr., a Baton Rouge native and a member of the well-known and established Baranco family of Baton Rouge was born on March 20, 1869 to Beverly V. Baranco and Sarah Ann Gordon, a school teacher. His paternal grandfather, Captain Vincent B. Baranco, was reportedly a Louisiana native of Italian descent. He was a steamboat captain for several decades and ventured to California for a long time during the Gold Rush to work as a merchant. He died on December 11, 1874. B.V. Baranco was educated in the public schools of Baton Rouge and he received a Law degree from Straight College in New Orleans. He became a Notary Public in East Baton Rouge Parish. As a young man, he became active in civic and political affairs of his race and community. Earlier in his career, he worked at the United States Mint in New Orleans and owned a barbershop in Baton Rouge. He also served as a manager for the Progressive Undertaking Company.¹ In 1889, he married Anna Miranda, the daughter of Raymond and Sidonie Miranda. They had eight children: Raymond Michael (MD); Sarah; Inez; Ruth; Beverly Victor, Jr. (D.D.S); Vera; Anna; and Noei. He was also Instrumental in getting the first black high school in Baton Rouge and the first Rosenwald² School in Louisiana.

B.V. Baranco stood at the helm of one of the largest fraternal organizations in Louisiana. District Grand Lodge No. 21 of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows.² In 1915, Baranco was elected Deputy Grand Master of the District Grand Lodge. When Baranco assumed the office of Grand Master, the Odd Fellows of Louisiana had seven thousand members and a debt in death benefits of over eighteen thousand dollars. He traveled across the state organizing new lodges; and handled the affairs of the order himself, even refusing to hire a clerk. Within four years’ time, the membership in Louisiana stood at twenty-one thousand with assets of two hundred thousand dollars. On September 30, 1925, the $175,000.00 Odd Fellows Temple at 1335 North Boulevard was turned over to B.V. Baranco on behalf of the Grand Lodge, in Baton Rouge, on a cash basis, without extra taxation or assessment on the membership.

¹ Progressive Undertaking Company, a privately held company (Funeral Home) in New Orleans, LA and is a Single Location business. It was established in 1948 and incorporated in Louisiana.

² The Rosenwald School – Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee University (formerly Tuskegee Institute) and Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and president of Sears Roebuck, built the state-of-the-art schools for African-American children across the South. This effort has been called the most important initiative to advance black education in the early 20th century. Despite the schools’ historical significance, only a small percentage of Americans are familiar with the structures and their impact on our nation’s history. While some schools are being preserved for community use, lack of resources and neglect still threaten many others. When a 1954 Supreme Court ruling declared segregation in education unconstitutional, Rosenwald Schools became obsolete. Once the pride of their communities, many were abandoned or demolished. In 2002, the National Trust joined forces with grassroots activists, local officials, and preservationists to help raise awareness of this important but little-known segment of our nation’s history, placing Rosenwald Schools on its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. Of the 3,537 schools, shops, and teacher homes constructed between 1917 and 1932, only 10–12 percent are estimated to survive today. The National Trust is providing technical assistance, grants, workshops, and conferences to help save these icons of progressive architecture for community use.

³ The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was created in Europe and is a fraternal brotherhood group that includes mutual benefits. Lodges modeled after their European counterparts spread among white communities in the United States during the early 19th century, but they were not officially incorporated in the Grand United Odd Fellows. Blacks who were interested in starting their own branch had discussions with whites in these unincorporated lodges. While these efforts were unsuccessful, they were able to secure incorporation with the Order through a lodge in England. They officially started activities in 1843, and the early membership drew from two established black groups which lacked mutual benefit components: The Philomethan Literary Society and the Philadelphia Company and Debating Society.

One of the key players in the development of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America was Peter Ogden. He was a person of color who traveled between New York and Liverpool, England through his service as a steward on a ship. While in England, he became an Odd Fellow and was a member long before the idea of an American lodge for non-whites was considered.

Peter Ogden was born in the West Indies and served on the S.S. Patrick Henry as a steward. He was the founder of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America. He reportedly swayed American blacks interested in the Odd Fellows to focus their attention on gaining affiliation with an English lodge rather than lodges in the United States. Ogden presented the admission application in person to the appropriate committee during one of his voyages while in England.
In 1948, the Temple was sold to the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free & Accepted Masons of Louisiana. The Prince Hall Masons continue to maintain the Temple as a fraternal meeting place and a venue for social affairs.

Baranco followed in the footsteps of his father, as a ranking member of the Louisiana Republican State Central Committee and frequent delegate to the Republican National Conventions. He also served as an officer of the Peoples Industrial Life Insurance Company of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Beverly V. Baranco, Sr., died in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on October 30, 1933. At the time of his death, he was serving as President of the Peoples Industrial Life Insurance Company, having succeeded his close friend and colleague, Walter L. Cohen.