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Sites Seen and Unseen: Mapping African American Women's Public Memorialization

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SITES SEEN AND UNSEEN:
MAPPING AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S PUBLIC MEMORIALIZATION

by

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DEDICATION

For Samantha.

ABSTRACT

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, black clubwomen began naming organizations after formerly enslaved women like Phillis Wheatley to keep their public memory alive. In doing so, they created a culture of recognition that acknowledged the organizational namesake as well as the contributions of members. Named memorialization celebrated the very best of African American women and continued to expand as Jim Crow laws encroached on black citizenship. Catalyzed by African American women while also supported by black journalists and local bureaucracies, named memorialization was the primary public history medium used to honor the legacies of African American women in the early twentieth century. In the 1960s, the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Studies Movements ushered in the golden age of new traditional public history memorials centered around black women. The Mary McLeod Bethune statue and historic site in the National Park Service signaled a significant shift in how African American women's legacies could be memorialized. Innovative and persistent, African Americans and organizations like the National Council of Negro Women and the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historical Foundation collaborated with national, state, and local governments to create historic sites, house museums, statues, and historic markers. African American memorializers and public memory crafters have been integral to the process of erecting, saving, and maintaining memorials to black women. In the twenty-first century, new technologies and social media have

transformed public commemorations while traditional public history memorials continue to flourish and have expanded to celebrate new aspects of African American women's history.

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INTRODUCTION

Chilled air whipped through the air on a cold February 1984 morning in Denver, Colorado as the construction crew came ready to move Justina Laurena Ford's two-story house. In the days before, they spent considerable time excavating surrounding dirt, using metal jacks to crank the house up from its foundation, and place thick beams underneath. On this day, the home was erected from its original resting place, 2335 Arapahoe Street, and placed on an oversized wheeled platform. For thirteen blocks, the home traveled through the streets of Five Points neighborhood. Upon arrival, the crew removed the home from the wheeled platform and placed it on a concrete slab at 3091 California Street.¹ Since that day, Justina Ford's home has been the site of the Black American West Museum.

Justina Laurena Ford was the first African American woman licensed as a medical doctor in the state of Colorado. Born in 1871 in Knoxville, Illinois, Justina's mother, who worked as a nurse, greatly influenced Justina's desire to work in the medical field. After graduating high school in 1890, she moved to Chicago to attend Hering Medical College. While there she met and married Reverend John L. Ford in 1892 and by 1899 she had obtained her degree. She began her career as a doctor in Chicago, but in 1902 she and John relocated to Denver, Colorado. While applying for her license to practice

¹ Lane Ittelson, "Justina Ford House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Historic Denver, Inc., October 24, 1984, 2, 4; Betsy Wade, "Tourist sites trace triumphs, tragedies of black Americans," *Fairbanks Daily News*, July 14, 1991.

medicine in Colorado, a snarky clerk proclaimed that as a black woman Ford had “two strikes” against her. Though he assumed a black woman would or could never receive state authorized licensing, Ford prevailed making her the first African American woman licensed doctor in the state. The realities of raced and gendered discrimination made practicing in Denver’s hospitals impossible and she was unable to join the Colorado Medical Association. In addition to dealing with the structural confines of embedded racism in society, black women doctors like Ford, “were forced to battle not only sexism, including that of black men, but also racism, including that of white women.”²

Ford overcame the setbacks and complexities of the “two strikes” against her.

She set up a successful medical practice in her home in the heart of the Five Points African American neighborhood. A thriving neighborhood in downtown Denver, Five Points was filled with black professionals, musicians, artists, and writers. Because of its vibrant reputation for black culture and professional achievement, it was known as the Harlem of the West. As part of the African American professional elite, Ford felt obliged to meet the needs of those in Denver with limited access to health care, health disparities, and limited money to pay for medical services. She extended her medical care to both poor whites and immigrants as the “go-to” for anyone in need. By the time that she died in 1952, she was widely known as “The Lady Doctor” and had delivered over 7,000 babies. Generations of children proudly proclaimed they were “Ford Babies” or members of the “Justina Baby Club.”

² Vanessa Northington Gamble, “Physicians,” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2; 489; Brittany Huner, “Justina Ford,” Colorado Encyclopedia, last modified August 09, 2018, <http://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/justina-ford>.

Her generosity and inclusivity made her a beloved physician that spread beyond Five Points. Denver resident, Dr. Oswaldo Grenardo remarked that

Dr. Justina Ford to us, to African Americans here in Colorado, was as big or as important as Dr. King, as Rosa Parks, as Jackie Robinson in terms of breaking down barriers and overcoming incredible hardship to get what she wanted, to do what she wanted, which was to serve and to be an inspiration.³

Her status as a physician made her a trailblazer in Colorado and the West. Her philanthropy, leadership, and steadfast desire to service the medical needs of her community embedded her in the hearts of Coloradans. Almost a century after it was built in 1890, her home was preserved by African American public history pioneer, Paul Stewart.

Fascinated by his encounter with a *real* black cowboy, Stewart became enthralled with western African American culture and history. He fueled his passion for the aesthetic and artifacts by creating the most prominent memorialization of an African American woman in Colorado and a regional moniker of African Americans in the West. However, Stewart didn't begin his public history journey with publicly commemorating Justina Ford. He began in a barbershop.

In the 1960s, Stewart moved to Denver, Colorado and opened a barbershop. Though he had seen a host of white cowboys in his favorite westerns growing up, he realized after seeing a black cowboy for the first time as an adult that the "history books had deliberately left black people out."⁴ As a deliberate act of recovery he began

³ Public Broadcasting Service, "Colorado Experience: Justina Ford, M.D.," Rocky Mountain PBS, <http://video.rmpbs.org/video/2349544027/> (accessed April 5, 2016).

⁴ Evelyn C. White, "How Paul Stewart mines lost 'gold' with a tape recorder," *Smithsonian*, August 1989, 62-63.

collecting artifacts from his customers and community members and placing them around his barbershop. He was also known to press record on his tape recorder and conduct oral history interviews while giving a haircut. As more and more people brought in family heirlooms and stories, the barbershop became a de facto heritage center. In the midst of clippers, razors, and treasured memories, the Black American West Museum (BAWM) was born.

Stewart transitioned from his career as a barber and made the BAWM his full-time focus in 1975.⁵ A 1977 feature in *Black Enterprise* proclaimed “What began as a hobby has become his life’s work.” Indeed, in his roles as “curator, founder, head of research, fieldworker, administrator, spiritual mentor, janitor, art director and tour guide” required his full attention.⁶ Like other African American public historians, he was able to turn his personal passion into a lasting project that commemorated African American history in the West. Stewart garnered public financial support from the state of Denver and the Colorado Centennial-Bicentennial Commission as well as private donations to operate the museum.⁷

Donned in his traditional cowboy attire, Stewart lectured at universities across the nation. His presentations to children in public schools centered around educating and empowering them with history. He explained, “Black children often don’t want to go to school because they don’t see themselves in the books... This way [through his presentations], they know that black people lived as something other than slaves.”

⁵ Eileen Ogintz, “Historian of the Western Blacks: Paul Stewart, Uncovering a Rich, Forgotten Heritage in Denver,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1989

⁶ John Wideman, “West of the Rockies: The Brief Saga of Deadwood Dick, Aunt Clara Brown, and Today’s Black Pioneers Who’ve Sought Greater Horizons and Found Them,” *Black Enterprise* 7, June 1977, 161.

⁷ “Clayton’s Museum: Black In West,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, July 23, 1977.

Stewart's reflection illustrates the type of intentional activism public historians have used to empower African Americans through teaching them about their history and heritage. He also intentionally incorporated and often centered black women's history into his public presentations. He met his wife, gospel singer Jonnie Mae Davis, at a presentation on black women pioneers.⁸

Although the Black American West Museum became "the foremost source of historical materials and oral histories of blacks in the West," it did not maintain a permanent home. In 1971, the museum outgrew the barbershop and Stewart made it a priority to find a permanent space to display his vast collections and for people to access it. He moved his collection first to an "old Denver saloon," but urban renewal efforts destroyed the site and he was forced to move again.⁹ Clayton College donated a room for the collection, but it was cramped and difficult for the public to access on a regular basis.¹⁰ Next, the collection moved to a larger and more accessible building in Five Points. This location functioned well throughout most of the 1980s, but it was a rented space and came with monthly expenses. It was not until Stewart catalyzed the preservation of Justina Ford's home that Black American West Museum finally had a permanent location.

Paul Stewart's and Justina Ford's intertwined legacies are a part of the larger narrative of the evolution of African American women's memorialization. The origin of African American women's public memorialization began in the early 19th century, when free black communities in the North organized festivals and parades to celebrate

⁸ White, "How Paul Stewart mines lost 'gold' with a tape recorder," 59.

⁹ White, "How Paul Stewart mines lost 'gold' with a tape recorder," 60.

¹⁰ "Clayton's Museum: Black In West," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, July 23, 1977.

emancipation, promote abolitionism, and commemorate black history. They used these public venues to herald the contributions of black women through commemorative oratory. After the Civil War, these public festivals and parades spread to the South. Commemorative texts like Sarah Bradford's *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869) and memorial books like *In Memoriam: Catherine S. Campbell-Beckett* (1888) were also used as memorials to African American women. Though African American women's public commemorations continued to expand from the early to mid-nineteenth century, it was not transformed significantly until the 1880s.

Beginning in the late 1880s, African American clubwomen began naming organizations after formerly enslaved black women like Phillis Wheatley. Named memorialization continued to expand as Jim Crow laws increasingly created restricted parameters of black citizenship. African American clubwomen developed a *culture of recognition* which acknowledged their organizational namesake as well as the contributions of the women who were members. Public namings were ways to celebrate the very best of African American women through the simultaneous recognition of both well-known and everyday heroines that worked to make their families and communities better places. This dynamic duality permeated this era as the primary public history medium to honor the legacies of African American women. Spurred by African American women, promoted by black journalists, and authorized by local governments, named memorialization spanned across the United States and manifested in domestic and Pan-African organizations, public libraries, public housing, and even businesses.

By the 1960s, named memorials began to fade as traditional public history sites were erected. The Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Studies Movements helped to

usher in a new era of memorials to African American women. On the national level, Mary McLeod Bethune's legacy was commemorated with a statue and historic site through the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. Bethune's memorialization signaled a significant shift in the ways in which African American women could be commemorated. African American preservationist, public historians, and organizations began creating and saving memorials to African American women. They collaborated with federal, state and local governments to garner funding they needed to create traditional public history sites. In the twenty-first century, new technologies like web-based platforms and social media, have once again transformed how African American women are commemorated as traditional public history memorials continue to flourish.

As memorializers and public memory crafters, African Americans have always been at the forefront of these memorials. Paul Stewart, a pioneer of African American public history, is no exception. As a memorializer, Stewart developed the skills needed to preserve and promote African American history to the public. With no rule book or academic training, Stewart and other African American memorializers, collaborated with private and public entities to garner money and influence. These memorializers were self-taught and acquired the skills that are now taught in public history programs in academic institutions and government entities. Decades before Stewart, African American club women were also keen memorializers. Without access to traditional public history mediums, they promoted the legacies of African American women by simply saying their names. They were astute in celebrating the legacies of African American women by naming their organizations after them. As public memory crafters, they transmitted knowledge of African American women's history to their communities.

Their memorializing efforts were so successful that they were adopted by the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and businesses like the Phyllis Wheatley Bread Company.

Mediums and venues of memorialization are varied and have changed with each era of African American women's public commemorations. Memorial books, commemorative oratory, and named memorials were popular mediums during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. By the mid to late twentieth century, traditional mediums expanded significantly to include statues, public plaques, historical markers, house museums, monuments, and National Park Service Historic Sites. Venues of memorializations depended on the medium, change over time, and were, occasionally, abstract. Commemorative oratory took place most often at black festivals, public celebrations, and churches. Named memorials were often abstract because the namings were of organizations without a particular venue to visit. However, named memorials were at times attached to public buildings or physical objects, like the UNIA's SS Phyllis Wheatley. Traditional memorials are the most recognizable and celebrated mediums and their venues are attached to physical objects, including houses and designated sites. In the twenty-first century, these venues have expanded to the Internet.

Sites Seen and Unseen uses an intersectional lens to highlight the raced, gendered, classed, and regional experiences of African American women. Intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberlee Crenshaw, is the simultaneous expression of multiple categories of analysis. Race, gender, class, and region work in concert to create distinct experiences for African American women in their lives and public memorialization.

Sites Seen and Unseen is the first-full length study to situate African American women's public memorials within the larger historiographies of African American history, African American Women's history, Public History and Preservation, Urban History, and American History. Scholars in these fields have previously focused on African American public memory, African American collective commemorative activities, and white women's preservation contributions to memorials and tourism. Fath Davis Ruffins' "Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990," (1992) is a seminal overview of the ways in which African American communities have preserved black history over time in archives and museums.¹¹ However, the specific historical dimensions of African American women's public history and memorialization have gone unexamined.

Recently, historians have begun to analyze significant aspects of African American public history. Kenneth Hamilton's *Booker T. Washington in American Memory* (2017) and Ian Rocksborough-Smith's *Black Public History in Chicago* (2018) offer new insight into how public memory is translated into African American memorialization. Mabel Wilson's *Negro Building: Black Americans in the Worlds of Fairs and Museums* (2012) and dissertations like, Ashely Bouknight's "Black Museology," (2016) are significant in examining African American museum development and traditions.¹² These new studies represent a new generation of scholars

¹¹ Fath Davis Ruffins, "Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven Levine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 506—611.

¹² Kenneth Hamilton, *Booker T. Washington in American Memory* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Ian Rocksborough-Smith, *Black Public History in Chicago: Civil Rights Activism from World War II Into the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the Worlds of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Ashley Bouknight, "Black Museology: Reevaluating African American Material Culture," PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2016.

who are connecting major themes of African American and American history to public history and memory. *Sites Seen and Unseen* is an important addition to this new scholarship because it centers African American women in multiple eras across the entire nation in the discourse.

The expansive nature of this national study, reveals both the representation and underrepresentation of African American women's public memorials. These memorials have and do exist in the North, South, West, and Mid-West. Each region has a significant place but the South contains the most African American women memorials by far, including the first National Park Service Historic Site. One might expect major urban metropolises, like New York City, Los Angeles, or Chicago to contain numerous public memorials of African American women. However, southern cities and towns, led by African American public historians, have been the most dynamic in creating named and traditional memorials. In fact, Richland County, South Carolina, has the most concentrated traditional memorials of African American women in the nation. Celia Mann, Modjeska Simkins, and Harriet Barber house museums celebrate the legacies of African American women from the antebellum era to the late twentieth century. Other memorials have regional significance to African American women's public history, like the Black American West Museum in Denver, Colorado and the Madam C.J. Walker Theater in Indianapolis, Indiana. Washington, D.C. has also played a significant role in African American women commemorations as an indicator of national trends from named to traditional memorials.

Despite all of the regional representation of African American women memorials, there still remains significant underrepresentation. The National Park Service's incorporation of the Maggie Lena Walker Home in Richmond, Virginia and the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House in Washington, D.C. were significant additions that signaled a major evolution in African American women memorials. Yet, they remain the only two NPS historic sites centered around black women, less than 1% of all NPS units. The addition of the Harriet Tubman NPS National Park in 2009 was another significant moment, but also highlighted the lack of inclusion of other prominent African American women. Walker, Bethune, and Tubman are the only three African American women with sites dedicated to them in the NPS, and still account for less than 1% of all units. Even on a local level the underrepresentation is glaring. In *Black Heritage Sites: An African American Odyssey and Finder's Guide* (1996) Nancy Curtis examines over 600 pages of local sites in the United States. Approximately 30 of the sites were centered around black women, with over half of them (18) located in the South. Barbara Tagger's 1997 analysis of over 800 sites in African American Historic Places revealed only three were created around the legacies of African American women.¹³

While underrepresentation and *unseen* memorials exists, the journeys of the represented and *seen* memorials illustrate the evolution of African American women's public commemorations. The work of African American organizations and community leaders have established a vast legacy of public commemoration that spans from the

¹³ Barbara A. Tagger, "Interpreting African American Women's History through Historic Landscapes, Structures, and Commemorative Sites." *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 12 (1997): 17; Nancy C. Curtis, *Black Heritage Sites: An African American Odyssey and Finder's Guide* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996).

nineteenth century to the present. From black clubwomen to preservation organizations, African Americans have been at the forefront of these memorials. *Sites Seen and Unseen* reveals that as the pioneers of African American public history, these organizations and community leaders operated with unprecedented savvy. Each chapter contributes to illustrating the overall evolution of African American women's memorialization.

Part One, "Creating Their Own World: Named Memorialization of African American Women During Jim Crow," contains chapters one through four. Chapter one illustrates that Phillis Wheatley was the most memorialized African American woman in the early twentieth century. Beginning in the 1880s, Wheatley's memorialization spanned across the nation and catalyzed a wave of organizations, homes, businesses, and even Universal Negro Improvement Association namings. Wheatley's wide spread named memorialization changed over time and mirrored larger trends in African American women's public history. Chapter two describes how formerly enslaved African American women were memorialized by examining Sojourner Truth's and Harriet Tubman's public commemorations. Sojourner Truth Homes provided safe havens for young, unmarried, or single black women in large cities across the United States. Harriet Tubman's memorialization in Auburn, New York was significant in establishing the first traditional public history memorial of an African American woman. Their named memorials were ways for local and national communities to celebrate and teach about women's contributions to African American history.

Chapter three illustrates the named memorialization of Mary Church Terrell, Mary Burnett Talbert, and Mary McCleod Bethune. All three women were national presidents of the National Association of Colored Women and were celebrated by black

clubwomen for their leadership. The organizations named in their honor established a culture of recognition among the black clubwomen that acknowledged and celebrated their and the contributions of individual members. Chapter four highlights the significance of named memorialization of public buildings during the Jim Crow Era. The Ella Reid Public Library in Tyler, Texas, the Ida B. Wells Homes in Chicago, Illinois, and the Celia Saxon Homes in Columbia, South Carolina are demonstrative of African American communities' collaboration with local governments to celebrate the legacies of African American women through namings. As the Jim Crow Era came to a close, the prominence and significance of named memorials attached to public buildings shifted. In the twenty-first century, only the Celia Saxon named memorial remains.

Part Two, "The National, State, & Local Stage: Ushering in the Golden Age of African American Women's Public Memorialization," illustrates the creation of traditional memorials centered around African American women's legacies. Chapter five examines Mary McLeod Bethune's incorporation into the National Park Service (NPS). The National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), led by president Dorothy Height, was instrumental in erecting Bethune Statue in Lincoln Park during the 1960s and 1970s. It is the first and only statue of a woman in the NPS Washington, D.C. jurisdiction to date. In the 1980s, Bethune became the second African American woman to receive a NPS Historic Site designation. The Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, which also operates the National Archive for Black Women's History, celebrates both Bethune's and the NCNW's legacies.

Chapter six points to the public memory and commemoration of Mary Ellen Pleasant. To combat the derisive dismissal of Pleasant's historical legacy, pioneering

African American public historians reclaimed her legacy as the “Mother of Civil Rights in California.” African American public historians recast her public memory and ultimately established a public history site of her in San Francisco. Chapter seven illustrates the memorialization of economic powerhouse Madam C.J. Walker through the Walker Theater in Indianapolis, Indiana. As the first woman millionaire in the United States, Walker’s economic legacy was used to preserve the cultural heritage on Indiana Avenue, the headquarters of her successful business. Spearheaded by African American community leaders, the Walker Theatre remains the only memorial to an African American woman that houses a museum, theater, and office space for black businesses.

Chapter eight examines the role of state governments in creating traditional public history memorials through the lens of the Charlotte Hawkins Brown site in North Carolina. The Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historical Foundation established successful partnerships with state representatives to secure the support needed to preserve the legacies of Brown and her school, Palmer Memorial Institute. The site is the first and only historic site of an African American woman fully operated by the North Carolina state government. Chapter nine illustrates the memorialization of African American women through local preservation organizations with public-private funding partnerships. In Columbia, South Carolina, Celia Mann and Modjeska Simkins legacies are celebrated in two house museums operated by Historic Columbia. As a local preservation organization, Historic Columbia teamed up with African American leaders to successfully save both homes from disrepair and demolition.

The conclusion examines new developments in African American women’s memorialization in the twenty-first century, including the Harriet Barber home. Twelve

miles south of Columbia, South Carolina, Harriet Barber's legacy is intertwined with environmentalism and the agricultural history of African Americans outside of plantations. The close partnership of the family operated site with the Congaree National Park demonstrates the significance of incorporating environmental narratives through African American women's public history. African American public history pioneers were essential in establishing lasting traditional memorials for African American women across the nation. Their advocacy on the national, state, and local levels ushered in the most fruitful age of African American women's memorials to date.

PART ONE
CREATING THEIR OWN WORLD:
NAMED MEMORIALS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN DURING JIM CROW

CHAPTER 1

THE PHILLIS WHEATLEY BRAND

Phyllis Wheatley was the most prevalent African American woman honored through naming memorialization in the early twentieth century. One of the most widely acclaimed African American poets of the eighteenth century and in American history, she was born around 1753 near the Gambia River in West Africa. Kidnapped, enslaved, and bound on a slave ship as a child, the *Phillis*, she was purchased directly from the Boston, Massachusetts docks by John Wheatley. John Wheatley's daughter, Mary, taught her how to read the bible, and within sixteen months she had mastered the English language. She also learned Latin, which she later incorporated into her writings and poetry. Wheatley's poetry was first published in 1767, and her first volume of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was published in 1773. It was the first book published by an African American in the United States. One of Wheatley's most famous poems was written in 1775 about George Washington, which she mailed to him herself. Washington was so moved by her words he invited Wheatly to a private meeting with him at his headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Several years later, Wheatley was given her freedom and married a free black man, John Peters, in 1778.

Despite international fame, Wheatley had a difficult life because she was unable to profit from her poetry. Ultimately, she lived the rest of her life in poverty.¹ Her writings, however, maintained their relevancy long after her death in 1784 and were instrumental in establishing the black literary tradition. The *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* boasts “No single writer has contributed more to the founding of African American literature.”²

Wheatley’s life experiences, through the colonial era and the formation of the United States as an independent nation, were reflected prominently in her poetry. Black women recognized that Wheatley’s intellectual literary pursuit in the midst of the dissonance of democracy, freedom, and sovereignty represented in the new nation, also represented the dissonance of American democracy for them in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By honoring Wheatley and commemorating her historical narrative, black women symbolically linked their experiences in Jim Crow America with Wheatley’s triumph over enslavement and illiteracy in a society that heralded *liberty and justice for all*. In this context, Wheatley clubs, society’s, literary clubs, homes, Y.W.C.A.s and community centers dominated the organizations named after black women in the Jim Crow era.³

¹ Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); John C. Shields, “Wheatley, Phillis,” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3;345-347; Angeline Jamison, “Analysis of Selected Poetry of Phillis Wheatley,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 43, no. 3 (1974), 408—416.

² Henry Louis Gates, Jr. et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 167.

³ Phillis, Phyllis, Philis, Phylis, and Phyliss were all common spellings used in newspapers and organizational records. Phillis and Phyllis were the two most common spellings of them all. Spellings did not have any specific significance and may have been misspelled by journalists and newspaper editors. There is no evidence to suggest that one spelling was more or less prevalent in different regions of the U.S. Rather, the spellings were a matter of preference for each organization, journalist, and newspaper. Here, I use the specific spellings used by organizational records, newspapers, or other sources. I do not characterize the spellings as correct or incorrect, but as a matter of preference for those involved in the namings.

The naming of Wheatley organizations is unique not only because of the wide scope of memorialization across the United States, but also because of the depth and range of activities each organization created. For black women in the twentieth century, naming an organization after Wheatley meant attaching to her a larger legacy of black womanhood. These namings extended beyond traditional black women's clubs to commercial enterprises and pan-African liberation causes. The abundance of namings in every geographical region of the country branded Phyllis Wheatley's name and formerly integrated her public commemoration.

The expansiveness of the *Wheatley Brand* and the *culture of recognition* developed by black women cannot be concentrated in one area of analysis. Many of these records don't date back past the early twentieth century, so the internal structures of the earliest Wheatley organizations are mostly unknown. However, the club records that do exist provide a pathway to understanding the earlier iterations of Wheatley organizations that operated in the late 1880s and 1890s. Newspaper records that have been digitized on web-based platforms offer the deepest insight into the Wheatley Brand. They document meetings, officer elections, special events, community collaborations, and at times ideological and political views of the club women. They also are essential in documenting the locations of where each Wheatley organization functioned. Newspaper records locate Wheatley organizations from small towns to major cities. In some instances, they illustrate the establishment of organizations, their activities, and their decline. In other instances, just one or two articles or references to the organization are documented, and are used as a way to indicate the existence of an organization in a specific locale. This chapter utilizes a combination of club records and newspaper

sources to demonstrate the wide range of locations of organizational, building, and other namings of Wheatley in the Jim Crow Era.

Wheatley organizations existed as early as 1880s, but the Phillis Wheatley Club in St. Paul, Minnesota, founded in 1892, was one of the earliest documented organizations named after Wheatley. “Why Phillis Wheatley?” asked the *St. Paul Daily Globe* in reference to the naming. As an enslaved “negro poetess of the last century,” Wheatley’s life accomplishments were admired by the black women of St. Paul.⁴ In August 1892, they held a successful concert fundraiser for the children’s building at the World’s Fair. Like at many public events sponsored by Wheatley organizations, “Ode to General Washington,” one of her most famous poems, was recited.⁵ While the scope of their activities is unknown, it is clear that they were dedicated to memorializing and educating the public about their namesake. There were also schools named after Wheatley in the late nineteenth century. One of the earliest school namings of Wheatley was in Oregon, Missouri in 1895. Suggested by local teacher, Professor P.J. Robinson, the “colored school” was renamed the Phillis Wheatley School.⁶ This may have been among the very first of segregated spaces that attached a black woman’s name to a public buildings during the Jim Crow Era.

The most documented Wheatley namings of the late nineteenth century were the organization of Wheatley Clubs in New Orleans, Chicago, and Nashville. The founding of the Wheatley club in New Orleans in 1895 garnered national attention and was

⁴ “In Woman’s Realm,” *The St Paul Daily Globe*, July 29, 1892.

⁵ “Phillis Wheatley Club. A concert for the Benefit of the Children’s Building,” *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 31, 1892; “A Charming Concert. The Phillis Wheatley Concert and Fete,” *St. Paul Daily Globe*, August 4, 1892.

⁶ *The Holt County Sentinel*, March 29, 1895.

reported in newspapers all over the United States.⁷ Led by Sylvia Williams, the club established the Phillis Wheatley Sanitarium and started a nursing school for black women in 1897.⁸

In Chicago, the Phillis Wheatley Club, sometimes referred to as League, was established in 1896 by Elizabeth Lindsay Davis. The Wheatley Club was dedicated to community service projects and was a venue for social activities, “but also served as a marker of social class, status, and prestige.”⁹ Between 1906 and 1908, the club worked with the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs to establish and open the Phillis Wheatley Home for Girls and was “the longest running Black settlement on Chicago’s South Side during the early twentieth century.”¹⁰ Prominent club woman Fannie Barrier Williams proclaimed that

The most important undertaking among colored women is the establishment of the Phillis Wheatley home. It was organized some years ago for the purpose of giving shelter and protection to the young colored women who wander into Chicago unacquainted with the snares and pitfalls of a great city.¹¹

⁷ A selection of the wide-spread newspaper coverage throughout 1895: A President of Color. An Afro-American Club of Clever Negro Women,” *The Anaconda Standard*, February 8, 1895; “A Colored Woman’s Club,” *The Madisonian*, May 18, 1895; “A Colored Woman’s Club,” *The Topeka State Journal*, February 20, 1895; “Negro Women. The Members are Ambitious and Untiring Workers. Well Organized In New Orleans. An Afro-American Club That is Devoted to the Cause of Elevating the Negro Race.,” *The Pioche Weekly Record*, March 7, 1895; Beverly W. Jones, “Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women, 1896 to 1901,” *The Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 1 (1982), 28.

⁸ Jones, “Mary Church Terrell,” 28.

⁹ “A McKinley Club Organized,” *Cleveland Gazette*, April 25, 1896; Gerda Lerner, “Early Community Work of Black Club Women,” *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (1974), pg. 161; Anne Meis Knupfer, “If You Can’t Push, Pull, if You Can’t Pull, Please Get Out of the Way”: The Phillis Wheatley Club and Home in Chicago, 1896 to 1920” *Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 2 (1997), pg. 222; Abraham Cater Kimani, Sr., “Mothers of the City: The Phillis Wheatley Club and Home, The Great Migration, and Communal Family in Black Chicago, 1910—1930,” PhD diss, University of California Los Angeles, 2012.

¹⁰ Knupfer, “If You Can’t Push,” 222; Kimani, “Mothers of the City,” 5; Jones, “Mary Church Terrell,” 29.

¹¹ “Progress Among Colored Women: How They Are Solving Economic In Chicago. Improvement in Home Life,” *The Denver Star*, December 12, 1914.

Providing a safe haven for black female migrants was certainly an important undertaking and made a top priority for black women's clubs all over the nation. Wheatley Homes were established by black women who sought to fill the needs of vulnerable black populations in their communities. Many of the Wheatley homes were a place for young, single mothers or unmarried black women. They often operated as settlement houses in Northern and Mid-Western cities, designed for African American female migrants from the South and sometimes West. In other instances, homes were established for the elderly and disabled. These homes were essential since local governments and philanthropists often neglected to include African American women, senior citizens and the disabled in their causes.

In Nashville, the Phyllis Wheatley Club was the oldest black women's club in the city. Organized in 1897 by Mrs. C.S. Smith at the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, the Wheatley Club embraced the NACW's motto of self-help "to lift as we climb and to help in every way we can for the betterment of our people, especially womanhood."¹² By 1907, they were raising money to build the Phyllis Wheatley Charity Home, which functioned much like the Wheatley Home in Chicago.¹³

Like other organizations named after black women, there was not one central hub. While the earliest Wheatley organizations may have been inspired by the women of New Orleans, they were formed and named organically based on the intentions of the founding members. However, a couple of sources indicate collaborations amongst Wheatley

¹² "Call of the Phyllis Wheatly Club," *The Nashville Globe*, September 20, 1907; "Phyllis Wheatley Club," *The Nashville Globe*, September 18, 1908; "Phyllis Wheatley Club's Record Cannot be Excelled and is Seldom Equalled. Thirteen Years of Continued Efforts for the Poor.," *The Nashville Globe*, January 31, 1908.

¹³ "Phyllis Wheatley Club," *The Nashville Globe*, June 21, 1907.

organizations as well as collective meetings. For example, The Phyllis Wheatley Home Association of Detroit, Michigan stated in their 1904 annual report that they received donations from the Phyllis Wheatley Circle of Grand Rapids.¹⁴ In 1901, the *Colored American* reported that the National Association of the Phillis Wheatley Clubs met in Buffalo, New York and were hosted by the local Wheatley club at the Michigan Street Baptist Church. The Buffalo Wheatley Club had been founded in 1899 by several black women including Mary B. Talbert who served as the organization's first secretary. By 1901, the club boasted of approximately 200 members.¹⁵ At the National Association of the Phillis Wheatley Clubs, meeting speakers ranged from Mary Church Terrell to local club representatives like "Mrs. Coleman" of Atlanta, Georgia. Coleman presented, "Life in the Southland," where she talked about the distinctive challenges faced by southern black clubwomen.

Pastor J.E. Nash commended the women of the Wheatley Clubs, noting "that the clubs stood for the elevation of the people...especially for the higher development of our young women." Nash ended his comments by proclaiming "We need more clean, trustworthy and God-fearing women, just as these women, Phyllis Wheatleys."¹⁶ Nash's remarks demonstrated that African Americans like Nash held the work of black clubwomen in high regard. It also aligned with standards of respectability, which historian Evelyn Higginbotham explains was a staple of black clubwomen's culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁷ They saw their club work as important for

¹⁴ "Phyllis Wheatley Annual Report," *The Broad Ax*, January 21, 1905.

¹⁵ Sarah Ruth Offhaus, "Mary Talbert and the Phyllis Wheatley Club," *Buffalo Rising*, June 19, 2010.

¹⁶ "The City of Conventions," *The Colored American*, July 13, 1901.

¹⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

their present circumstances, as well as for upbuilding future generations. At the turn of the century “Phyllis Wheatleys” were beginning to make a national name for themselves, prompting the expansion of the Wheatley brand to all parts of the nation over the next few decades. It remains unclear if the National Association of Phyllis Wheatley Clubs was responsible for organizing local branches or if members held annual conferences after the 1901 meeting in Buffalo. What is evident is the naming memorialization of Phyllis Wheatley by black clubwomen increased steadily throughout the early to mid-twentieth century.

Beyond the initial naming memorialization in the late nineteenth century, organizations promoted the public memory of Wheatley through discussing her body of work, reciting poems, and teaching about her life. The Nashville Wheatley Home designated “Phyllis Wheatley Day” as a day to collect and solicit donations for the sick and impoverished in their community.¹⁸ Mrs. Rev. Tillman of the Phyllis Wheatley Club in Chicago recited “an original poem from her own pen, in memorium of Phyllis Wheatley” at a club event.¹⁹ President Annabel Harris of the Phyllis Wheatley Club in St. Paul “read a short sketch and delineation of the life and character of Phyllis Wheatley...”²⁰ Sometimes special guests were invited to give presentations on Wheatley, like when the Washington, D.C. Wheatley Club invited “a man of excellent literary tastes [to] read of the life and work of Phyllis Wheatley.”²¹

¹⁸ “Phyllis Wheatley Club’s Record Cannot be Excelled and is Seldom Equalled. Thirteen Years of Continued Efforts for the Poor.,” *The Nashville Globe*, January 31, 1908.

¹⁹ *The Broad Ax*, Feb 3, 1900.

²⁰ *The Saint Paul Globe*, March 20, 1905.

²¹ *The Colored American*, November 17, 1900.

Even clubs named after other African American women embraced the promotion of Wheatley's public memory. At a meeting in March of 1899, the Ida B. Wells Club discussed "Our Afro-American Women in Literature," a paper presented by Agnes Moody. Afterwards, a dramatic reenactment of Wheatley was performed. *The Appeal* reported, "Mrs. Fannie Hall Clint characterized Phillis Wheatley, and in the garb [clothing] of the eighteenth century, looked the part, reciting Miss Wheatley's poem to the Earl of Dartmouth and George Washington's letter in reply to a poem sent him by Miss Wheatley."²² Wheatley's literary genius as an enslaved woman was a legacy that black clubwomen clung to and promoted in public memory. Reenactments, like Fannie Hall Clint's, may not have been as common as history lessons on Wheatley and recitations of her poems, but is demonstrative of how significant Wheatley was as a historical figure and a positive representation of black womanhood.

Lifelong memorializer Sue Wilson Brown helped to organize the Philis Wheatley Club in Des Moines, Iowa in 1913.²³ Brown was active in the founding of Mary Church Terrell and Mary B. Talbert Clubs in Des Moines, as well. Her appreciation for honoring the living and past legacies of African Americans were an integral part of her long career of public service. Her enthusiasm for public memory crafting was shared by other local black clubwomen. She was involved with the Intellectual Improvement Club of Des Moines, Iowa that had "a very interesting discussion on the life and character of Phillis Wheatley" during one of their regular meetings.²⁴ Another local organization in Des Moines had a guest speaker present a paper "on the life and character" of Wheatley,

²² *The Appeal*, March 4, 1899.

²³ "Another Iowa Girl Makes Good.," *Iowa Bystander*, June 6, 1913.

²⁴ *Iowa Bystander*, March 15, 1907.

followed by a discussion of “all present with much enthusiasm in which Mrs. Wheatley was paid high tribute.”²⁵

Decades later, Mary Church Terrell’s 1932 “Historical Pageant-Play Based on the Life of Phyllis Wheatley” crafted Wheatley’s public memory as an integral part of the founding of the nation. Terrell, a master public memory crafter and memorialized black woman herself, understood the significance of promoting the public legacies of African American women. The pageant was geared toward black children as an educational tool to “increase their pride in their racial group and thus strengthen their self respect.”²⁶ Terrell used the story of Wheatley’s interactions with George Washington to demonstrate African Americans, and specifically African American women, were active agents in advocating for their freedom based on the founding principles of the United States. By linking Wheatley to George Washington, Terrell’s pageant constructed Wheatley’s public memory as an educational tool designed to highlight both her historical narrative and incorporate black women into American history.

Newspapers also promoted the public memory of Wheatley. Their mini biographies were integral to the burgeoning strength of the Wheatley brand in the early twentieth century. Wheatley was commonly attached to discussions about the history of colonial America and the American Revolution during national holidays, like the Fourth of July. Reports of new organizations named after Wheatley often were printed with brief biographical sketches of her life. These biographies helped to cultivate a public

²⁵ *Iowa Bystander*, “Lyceum Pays Tribute to Phillis Wheatley,” February 4, 1910.

²⁶ “Historical Pageant-Play Based on the Life of Phyllis Wheatley,” March Church Terrell Papers, Box 102-6, Folder 159 Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, pg. 1-2; Katharine Capshaw Smith, “Constructing a Shared History: Black Pageantry for Children During the Harlem Renaissance,” *Children’s Literature* 27, 1999, pg. 43; Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), pg. 237.

memory of Wheatley. In 1887, Osceola F. Gordon of the *Christian Recorder* encouraged “Young ladies, remember Miss Phillis Wheatley, the colored poetess, whose ambition for reading and studying should be emulated by every colored woman.”²⁷ In February 1901, *The Colored American* published a speech given by Harry W. Bass at an event held at the Bethel A.M.E. church in Philadelphia. Wheatley organizations, like other black women’s clubs, often collaborated with local churches. Bass discussed the black liberation struggle in the U.S. from the writing of the Constitution to the Civil War. He read some of Wheatley’s poetry in his presentation and cited her as a central figure to understanding the complexity of African American freedom. He explained that “Phyllis Wheatley represented a mentality peculiar to her race which slavery could not longer subdue [sic].”²⁸ The public memory of African American women was often kept alive through commemorative oratory, like in Bass’ presentation. These types of public commemorations educated African Americans about Wheatley’s life and the overall significance of her role in American History.

Wheatley was a symbol of the intellectualism African Americans possessed, despite being enslaved and categorized as subhuman. Eugenists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth insisted that scientific evidence proved that blacks had diminished intellectual capacity, while Jim Crow laws relegated African Americans to second class citizenry. Wheatley’s accomplishments as a published poet and having met founding father George Washington defied white supremacists conceptions of African Americans capabilities. For African American women, Wheatley represented the very best of black womanhood in the most dire of circumstances.

²⁷ Osceola F. Gordon, “Alabama’s Appreciation of Literature,” *Christian Recorder*, June 16, 1887.

²⁸ “The Day of Freedom,” *The Colored American*, February 2, 1901.

In 1910, R.R. Wright, Jr. in collaboration with the A.M.E. Book Concern, published a book of 39 of Wheatley's poems. Wright, who was also an editor of the *Christian Recorder*, sought to provide tangible connections with Wheatley's public memory and her body of work.²⁹ An article promoting the book explained that early publications of Wheatley's work "are hidden behind lock and key" in the British Museum, Boston Public Library, Harvard University Library and the Library of Congress. Sometimes Wheatley's poems' were published in local newspapers or were acquired through personal libraries. Wright's 1910 publication, along with Arthur Schomburg's of the Negro Society for Historical Research collaboration with Charles Red Heartmann in 1915, suggests that there was an increased demand for Wheatley's work. *The Statesmen*, however, opined that though "Phillis Wheatley is known by name to thousands of Americans today...she is to most people...only a name."³⁰

For black clubwomen across the nation Wheatley was certainly more than a name. She had become their generational symbol. In 1909, the Phyllis Wheatley Club Incorporated of New York City opened a home in order "to provide a place for the many young women of the race who come to New York from the south and other sections of the country, where they may prepare themselves for paying positions along the lines of domestic work and at the same time enjoy the privileges of home comforts."³¹ In Cleveland, the Phillis Wheatley Association was founded in 1911 by Jane Edna Hunter.³² The Wheatley Home in Cleveland also provided a safe place for young African American

²⁹ "Poems of First Negro Author," *The Statesmen*, May 21, 1910.

³⁰ "Story of Phillis Wheatley Poems: Learned Critics Discuss Slave Girl's Literary Work. Views of Many Notables.," *The Denver Star*, October 16, 1915; "Poems of First Negro Author," *The Statesmen*, May 21, 1910.

³¹ "Phyllis Wheatley Club Incorporated," *Franklin's Paper The Statesman*, September 4, 1909.

³² Lerner, "Early Community Work of Black Club Women," 162; Hazel V. Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992), 738—755.

women. In Detroit, Michigan, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was founded in 1897 and incorporated in 1901. By 1935, the home was still operating and housing 14 women.³³ Other homes included the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, Phillis Wheatley Children's Home in Wichita, Kansas, and the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House in Minneapolis, Minnesota.³⁴ In some cases, Wheatley Clubs expanded their services/missions to include young black boys, like the Phyllis Wheatley Center in Greenville, South Carolina. They established a "Boys Club" in 1928.³⁵

In the 1920s, Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association's use of Wheatley's name in their organization made her naming memorialization an international moniker of freedom. Founded by Marcus Garvey in Jamaica in 1914 and brought to the United States in 1917, the UNIA was a Pan-Africanist organization that promoted black economic and social liberation and unity. Black women were the "backbone" of the UNIA, comprising "at least half of its membership and serving in leadership positions on the local, national, and international levels."³⁶ Garvey embraced black women's contributions to his grassroots organization and made sure to highlight their contributions to black history in his public commemorations.

The Black Star Line Steamship Corporation of the UNIA was launched in October 1919 with the SS Frederick Douglass, the first of three ships that were scheduled

³³ "Annual Shower Planned for Phyllis Wheatley Home," *The Detroit Tribune*, November 16, 1935.

³⁴ "Weatherly To Speak," *Lincoln Star*, January 13, 1934; *The Negro Star*, May 27, 1921; *The Nashville Globe* June 21, 1908; *The Greenville News*, November 14, 1923; *The Detroit Tribune*, June 8, 1940.

³⁵ Carter Julian Savage, "'In the Interest of the Colored Boys': Christopher J. Atkinson, William T. Coleman, and the Extension of Boys' Clubs Services to African-American Communities, 1906—1931," *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2011), pg. 515.

³⁶ Barbara Bair, "Universal Negro Improvement Association," in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed. in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 273.

to launch. The other two were named the SS Phillis Wheatley and SS Booker Washington. Garvey explained that

The names chosen for the three ships are a happy expression of the pride in success without which no race can hope to advance in the path of progress. Frederick Douglass, Booker Washington, and Phillis Wheatley will live forever in the history of the American Negro, as a testimony to that which the race has accomplished in diplomacy, in education and in the realm of letters.³⁷

Named after “illustrious Negroes,” these ships invoked black history through the legacy of black heroes.³⁸ Their memorialization embraced and expanded their historical narratives in public memory and inserted them prominently in the overall history of the United States. Once bonded and enslaved, Douglass, Washington, and Wheatley obtained their freedom and went on to lead extraordinary lives. Their naming memorialization represented a unique nexus of the black past and future. They were the historical figures that would lead blacks to freedom and economic independence in the present.

The SS Phillis Wheatley was also known as “the Africa ship” because its main route would be to and from West Africa.³⁹ Ultimately, the SS Wheatley and Washington never came into fruition. The Black Star Line solicited and sold stock for the SS Wheatley through advertisements sent using the United States Postal Service. Because the SS Wheatley was not purchased before the UNIA asked for and received investments

³⁷ Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 11; 440-441.

³⁸ Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, 11; 442.

³⁹ Ramla M. Bandele, *Black Star: African American Activism in the International Political Economy*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 117.

in the ship, the Federal Bureau of Investigation used this as a strategy to discredit and indict Garvey on mail fraud charges. Still, Wheatley's significance as a historical representation of black womanhood was ever growing as not only an American brand, but as an international symbol. While the SS Phillis Wheatley never materialized, the UNIA memorialized her through other significant namings. The UNIA named its official headquarters in honor of Wheatley. The Phyllis Wheatley Hotel at 3-13 West 136th Street in NYC was opened in the summer of 1922.⁴⁰ The UNIA's Booker T. Washington University was housed in the Wheatley Hotel.

In the late 1930s The Phillis Wheatley Bread Company, the Detroit Branch of the New York Bell Bakeries, Incorporated, was launched. Available in seven varieties (rye, whole wheat, raisin, rolls, white sesame, branix, and tea biscuits), a 16 oz loaf sold for ten cents.⁴¹ Lillie Brooks, mother of heavyweight champion Joe Louis, was a spokesperson for the new brand. In a lengthy add Brooks appealed to mothers about the nutritional and sociological value of Phillis Wheatley Bread. Not only was it the "Finest Quality of Loaf of Bread on the Market" for "any mother who desires to keep her children strong and healthy," it was also "named after a great Negro woman and is an all race product."⁴² Wheatley Bread was marketed specifically to black women and their race consciousness. The powerful resonance of Wheatley's name symbolized black excellence and an acknowledgment of the great deeds black women were doing in their communities. The Wheatley Home had existed in Detroit since 1897 and was still a

⁴⁰ Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, 4; 719, 942; WM. H. Ferris, "Garvey's Meteoric Rise To Fame and Power; And the Trial That Led to the Gates of Atlanta," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 21, 1925.

⁴¹ *The Detroit Tribune*, July 2, 1938.

⁴² *The Detroit Tribune*, August 6, 1938.

vibrant philanthropic and social center for black women in the 1930s. Wheatley Bread sought to capitalize on the deep appreciation of Wheatley in order to target black female consumers.

The Bread Company also represented career advancement for educated black women. The Lewis Business College lauded the employment and promotion of graduate Mary Ellen Payne at the Phillis Wheatley Bread Company in 1939. Payne's position at Wheatley Bread exemplified the type of high profile careers that Lewis Business College Graduates could look forward to in the business world.⁴³ The Bread Company was a capitalist venture and it demonstrated the economic symbolism attached to Wheatley's naming memorialization.

By the 1940s, Wheatley organizations existed in every region of the United States and in 37 states. From large cities and metropolises to small and rural towns, the Wheatley name was continuously used as a brand to memorialize and signify an association with the work that was being done by black women all over the country. Beyond clubs, guilds, unions, and associations, there were a wide variety of organizations that black women named after Wheatley. These specialty clubs and organizations formed across the U.S. in Wheatley's honor throughout the early 20th century.

Some of these specialty organizations were art clubs, dramatic clubs, and literary clubs or reading circles. They were centered around presenting literature, plays, operas, to members and the general public. In 1893, the *Cleveland Gazette* reported that the Wheatley Literary Club comprised of "a bevy of the most popular young ladies that Steubenville [Ohio] can afford, treated a well filled house to one of the most interesting

⁴³ *The Detroit Tribune*, September 9, 1939; *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 19, 1939.

programmes [sic] that have been rendered in this city for a season." They presented a "Head handkerchief [sic] jubilee concert," which payed homage to enslaved black women through Negro spiritual selections in order to purchase a new communion set for Quinn Memorial A.M.E. Church.⁴⁴ The Wheatley Dramatic Club in Davenport, Iowa also performed plays at a local church.⁴⁵ In Charleston, South Carolina the Wheatley Literary and Social Club was one of the most prestigious African American organizations in the city. It's meetings were restricted to members of the organization except in 1921 when W.E.B. DuBois attended a special birthday celebration. In 1928, they sponsored a Marian Anderson concert for an audience of both whites and blacks.⁴⁶ In other instances, organizations, like the Wheatley Art Clubs in Winslow, Arizona and Kansas City, Missouri, held programs and meetings in member homes.⁴⁷

In rare cases, fraternal organizations named individual chapters in honor of Wheatley. In Charleston, West Virginia there was the Phyllis Wheatley Court No. 1 of the Order of Calanthe, while the Phyllis Wheatley Temple of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World existed in Red Bank, New Jersey.⁴⁸ The Wheatley Rescue Club in Keokuk, Iowa and the Ladies' Tinney Philis Wheatley Immediate Relief Association in Washington, D.C. were philanthropic organizations, and did community service work similar to many of the other Wheatley Clubs.⁴⁹ There was

⁴⁴ "Philis Wheatley Club Concerts Successfully.," *Cleveland Gazette*, May 6, 1893

⁴⁵ *Iowa State Bystander*, March 28, 1913.

⁴⁶ Joan Marie Johnson, "'Drill into us...the Rebel Tradition': The Contest over Southern Identity in Black and White Women's Clubs, South Carolina, 1898—1930," *The Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 3 (2000), 533, 558.

⁴⁷ *Chicago Defender*, April 3, 1932; "Phyllis Wheatley Art Club," *Kansas City Sun*, January 30, 1915.

⁴⁸ *The Daily Standard*, November 2, 1928; *The Advocate*, December 12, 1907; *The Advocate*, May 30, 1901.

⁴⁹ *The Washington Post*, June 14, 1906; "Good Club of Colored Women," *The Daily Gate and Constitution*, April 2, 1919; *The Bystander*, August 15, 1919.

even a chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union named after Wheatley in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.⁵⁰ While the Wheatley branches of the WCTU were incredibly rare, branches of the YWCA named after Wheatley became a standard moniker of the African American portion of the “Y.”

Unlike the other organizations named for Wheatley, the YWCA had a national organizational hub from which structure and resources were given to local branches. Though founded in the mid nineteenth century, African American women were not officially incorporated into the YWCA until the early twentieth century. Under the “supervision” of white women, African American branches of the “Y” (as it was commonly referred to) were founded in the 1910s. Sometimes the branches were named after their locations, either cities or street addresses. However, more than any other affiliation, colored YWCA branches were named after Phillis Wheatley. Journalist Rita Robbins explained that “Phyllis Wheatley lives on, however, not only to honor with her name many YWCA branches in this country but also as a personality, a poet and notable woman in American history.”⁵¹

Most African American Y.W.C.A. branches were formed from existing black women’s clubs that were seeking resources to provide much needed community and social welfare services. According to Rosa Loving, she worked with a small group of black women beginning in 1909 to help young black women and girls who were new to the Richmond area and in need of adequate housing. After the women were unable to house all those who needed help in a rented six room building and Loving’s own home,

⁵⁰ “W.C.T.U. Meeting,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, November 26, 1906.

⁵¹ “YWCA Observes Its 33rd Anniversary: Phillis Wheatley Branch Here Started on ‘Shoestring,’” Newspaper Clipping in Scrapbook, Box 114, Richmond YWCA Archives, M 177, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

“it was finally decided to ask the help and co-operation of the white YWCA.” From that collaboration the first colored YWCA branch in Richmond was formed and named after Wheatley.⁵² By December 1914, the Central YWCA officially “accepted responsibility for the Phyllis Wheatley branch.” Loving and others were able to expand to “a more spacious residence” to fill the growing needs of black women and girls in transit.⁵³

In Asheville, Tennessee the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA was birthed out of the Employment Club. Established in 1913, the Employment Club was “committed to finding jobs and providing support for hard-working Negro women.” By 1921, the women of Employment Club became the Phyllis Wheatley branch and were operating under the supervision of the Asheville Central YWCA . They continued their work “as an informal employment referral agency for Negro girls.”⁵⁴

In 1919, the Seattle Phyllis Wheatley Branch was “the first of its kind in the Northwest,” and grew out of the already established Culture Club.⁵⁵ The Indianapolis Phyllis Wheatley Branch was preceded by a group of black women offering boarding and programming for black women and girls. The process of development began in 1895 “in a rented house, with a lounge for working girls and religious programs in factories.” By 1900, the women purchased a house and in 1909 dedicated a new building at the same location. In 1922, they began a “membership campaign for negro branch,” but didn’t

⁵² “Who Is Founder?,” Newspaper Clipping in 1952 Scrapbook, Box 177, Richmond YWCA Archives, M 177, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁵³ “YWCA Observes Its 33rd Anniversary: Phyllis Wheatley Branch Here Started on ‘Shoestring,’” Newspaper Clipping in Scrapbook, Box 114, Richmond YWCA Archives, M 177, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁵⁴ Exhibition Panels: “Empowering Women,” “Phyllis Wheatley Branch,” “Eliminating Racism at the YWCA,” YWCA of Asheville, accessed April 27, 2018, <http://www.ywcaofasheville.org/site/c.7oIEJQPXGeISF/b.8083977/k.C677/History.htm>.

⁵⁵ “History: A Journey to Empowering Women, Eliminating Racism,” YWCA Seattle, King, Snohomish, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.ywcaworks.org/history>.

dedicate the Phyllis Wheatley Branch until 1929. Becoming a part of the YWCA meant a steady allocation of resources and an alignment of Christian and philanthropic values that they already subscribed to in their club activities.⁵⁶

Rather than finding and financing the purchase of land for a home and local headquarters like many of the Wheatley Clubs, local African American branches were also assisted by the national organization. For instance in Washington, D.C., “the national association gave the local body both the land and the commodious new building which now occupies it.” The women of the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A. did their part to furnish and maintain the home with a “successful campaign for \$25,000.”⁵⁷ Even though black clubwomen continued to raise money for programs and philanthropic causes, their affiliation with the national body of YWCA meant that the entire financial burden was not on them alone.

In addition to social work and community service outreach, programing for young girls was an important aspect of Y.W.C.A. activities. Black clubwomen were dedicated to educational programs, workshops, and socials that created a safe space for young black girls. The Y.W.C.A. provided an existing organization structure to work with young girls. The Brownies, Blue Triangle Girls (which evolved into the Girl Reserves and finally the Y-Teens), and Industrial Girls were a part of the central YWCA youth outreach. Black clubwomen took the Y.W.C.A. structure and provided programming that was beneficial to the developmental needs of young black girls. They stimulated “pleasure cultures” by providing a safe space for dances, camp in the summer,

⁵⁶ “Indianapolis YWCA,” Newspaper Clipping, Box 4, Folder 21, Bernice Walker Papers, William H. Smith Library, Indiana Historical Society.

⁵⁷ “Colored Y.W.C.A. Home Dedication: Exercises Open Next Sunday at New Building for Girls and Women,” *Evening Star*, December 12, 1920.

babysitting classes, citizenship conferences, and a host of rich programming each month.⁵⁸ In turn, they created their own world in which young African American girls (and on occasion boys) could flourish and experience joy. Historian LaKisha Michele Simmons in *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* argues that despite segregated communities being “organized a geography that reinforced and recreated dominant ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality...the worlds created by the YWCA, and in similar spaces inside of the black community, created different, often positive and hopeful, conversation.”⁵⁹ These safe spaces were intentionally designed by black women and supported by the black community.

African American branches of the YWCA also promoted African American women’s public history, by educating young girls and celebrating the legacies of black women like Wheatley. For young black girls Wheatley was a powerful symbol of admirable accomplishments in the face of a white dominated society. Many Wheatley branches incorporated public memorialization into their activities with young people. The Girl Reserves Dramatic Club of the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A. in Washington, D.C. planted a white oak tree dedicated to Wheatley in 1922.⁶⁰ The Richmond Wheatley YWCA annually crowned a young black girl, “Miss Phillis Wheatley.”⁶¹ The young women who participated in the highly anticipated pageant were celebrated for their participation in the Y’s programming. Just as black women celebrated the symbol of Wheatley as a model for black womanhood, they taught black girls that in becoming

⁵⁸ LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), pg. 178.

⁵⁹ Simmons, *Crescent City Girls*, 191

⁶⁰ “Memorial Tree Planted: Y.W.C.A. Exercise Do Honor Phyllis Wheatley, Poet.,” *Evening Star*, April 23, 1922.

⁶¹ 1952 Scrapbook, Box 177, Richmond YWCA Archives, M 177, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

“Miss Phillis Wheatley” that they were a part of a long legacy of black women’s achievement.

In the mid-twentieth century, African American YWCA branches named after Wheatley began to dwindle because they were being integrated into the white branches. The integration process meant increased opportunities for equality within the institutional structure, along with the erasure of naming memorialization. The process of integration in Asheville, Tennessee began in 1954 with the first African American, Lucille Burton, elected to the Central YWCA board. In 1965 Thelma Caldwell was hired as Executive Director of both the Wheatley and Central YWCAs which developed into combined membership rolls in 1967. In 1971 both branches moved into the same building and were fully integrated. The Wheatley name was dropped, and they became known as the *YWCA of Asheville*.⁶² While some branches, like the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A. in Knoxville, Tennessee, have retained their name memorialization into the twenty-first century many more merged together effectively erasing Wheatley’s naming on scores of African American YWCA branches all over the country.

The decreased presence of Wheatley in naming memorializations did not diminish black women’s appreciation for her public legacy. In the 1970s, the emergence of the Black Arts and Black Studies Movements set the stage for the increased circulation and analysis of Wheatley’s poetry. African American women maintained their admiration of her life and work and continued to be at the forefront of her public commemoration. In November 4—7, 1973, Margaret Walker [Alexander] organized a four-day symposium to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the publication of Wheatley’s first book,

⁶² YWCA of Asheville, “Eliminating Racism in the YWCA”; Hannah Frisch, “Tuesday History: Thelma Caldwell calls out the YWCA’s shortcomings,” *Mountain Express*, August 1, 2017.

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, the first book to be published by an African American. Walker, as a pioneer of the Black Studies Movement, “established one of the first black studies programs in the country.” In 1968, she founded *The Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People* at Jackson State College in Mississippi.⁶³

Walker, along with over 20 widely acclaimed black women intellectuals and writers, celebrated Wheatley’s legacy as their literary predecessor. Notable black women authors, including Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, June Jordan, Paula Giddings, Alice Walker, and Lucille Clifton, participated in the prominent symposium. The festival included poetry and prose recitations, panel discussions, a dramatization of Wheatley, and a bronze sculpture of Wheatley created by Elizabeth Catlett was unveiled. *Jet* reported that the highlight of the festival was a one-woman show, “the presentation of stage portrait in nine scenes of Miss Wheatley, staged by Broadway star Vinie Burrows.”⁶⁴ After the festival ended Walker wrote in her journal that it was a “tremendous success.”⁶⁵

The black press saw the festival as a monumental moment for the black studies movement. *Ebony* informed readers that the festival was “an obvious result of the revived interest in Miss Wheatley and her writings.” The *Black World* heralded it as “one

⁶³ “20 Black Women Poets To Honor Phillis Wheatley,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1973; “Wheatley: Women poets honor America’s first black woman of letters at Mississippi festival,” *Ebony*, March 1974, 94-96; “Wheatley Festival Honors First Published US Black: JSC Event November 4-7 Features 20 Women Poets,” *Clarion-Ledger*, September 30, 1973; *The Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People* at Jackson State College in Mississippi is now named the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center in honor of Walker’s extraordinary commitment to black studies and her exemplary career as an author.

⁶⁴ “Jackson State Honors Poetess With Festival,” *Jet*, November 29, 1973.

⁶⁵ Margaret Walker, Journal 093, Margaret Walker Personal Papers, Series II, Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center, Jackson State University.

of the most important literary festivals organized in this country.”⁶⁶ *Freedomways* printed the most detailed article, “Ancestral Memories,” of the festival with an explanation and insightful commentary of each presentation. Authors Charles H. Rowell and Jerry W. Ward declared assuredly that the “festival will be recorded as an occasion of great distinction in the annals of Afro-American literature and culture.” Rowell and Ward also agreed that “the festival recognized the creative endurance and historical contribution of the black American woman... Each of the women poets was in her own way a Phillis Wheatley, or at least a spiritual daughter of Phillis Wheatley, who expresses herself against the odds.”⁶⁷ Just as black clubwomen had been called “Phillis Wheatleys” decades before for their dedication to black communities, a new generation of “Wheatleys” was redefining public memorialization for black women. The Poetry Festival represented a marked shift in the public commemoration of Wheatley. Black clubwomen, as public memory crafters, kept Wheatley’s memory alive and relevant through their namings and programs with recitation of her work.

Although it changed, black women’s admiration for Wheatley as a symbol of black intellectualism, black womanhood, and black excellence did not waver in the last few decades of the twentieth century. What did change was their ability to maintain the permanency of naming memorialization whether attached to clubs, YWCAs, and public buildings. Changes in the physical landscape of segregation significantly shifted the ways in which black women were publicly memorialized.

⁶⁶ Charles H. Rowell, “Poetry, History, and Humanism: An Interview With Margaret Walker,” *The Black World*, December 1975, 5; Carolyn J. Brown, *Song of My Life: A Biography of Margaret Walker* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

⁶⁷ Charles H. Rowell and Jerry W. Ward, “Ancestral Memories: The Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival,” *Freedomways* 14, no. 2 (1974), 128; 145.

The festival of 1973 shifted Wheatly's public legacy as just a symbol of the best of black womanhood to also embracing her as a symbol of the best of black women writers and intellectuals. Wheatley's memorialization throughout the twentieth century demonstrates the commitment black women had to creating their own worlds and realities in which to celebrate their historical icons. Margaret Walker noted at the festival that "America is like this—the horror is here, the corruption is here, the evil is here. But there is also some love and some beauty as we see in this festive atmosphere."⁶⁸ The love and beauty that Walker references was intentionally created by memorializers like her. Wheatley's memorialization continuously illustrated the capabilities of black women through both her own historical narrative as well as the women who crafted her public persona. Her commemorations, more than any other black woman, were a beacon that expressed black women's capacity to treasure the *love* and *beauty* found in creative endeavors despite the *horror*, *corruption*, and *evil* that subjected African Americans to second class citizenship in the nation they were integral in conceiving and building.

A decade before the explosion of black women's history and black women's literature in the 1980s, the Wheatley Poetry Festival was a statement about the significance of black women as adept architects of creativity. Wheatley represented the birth of the African American literary tradition and celebrating her emphasized the importance of black women intellectuals in the emerging black studies movement. Walker intentionally selected a wide range of black women writers, scholars, artists, and dramatists to headline the festival to underscore their significance in the discipline. Nikki

⁶⁸ Charlayne Hunter, "Poets Extol a Sister's Unfettered Soul," *New York Times*, November 9, 1973; Lelia Gaston Rhodes, *Jackson State University: The First Hundred Years, 1877-1977* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979), 1974.

Giovanni heralded Walker as “the living personification of the spirit of Phillis Wheatley,” which was high praise indeed. Beyond her highly acclaimed career as a writer, Walker’s role as a pioneer of the black studies movement and a black woman memorializer made a substantial impact on public commemorations of black women beyond the Jim Crow era.

Looking back, Walker reflected that the Wheatley Poetry Festival “was only the beginning of things to come,” particularly for black women writers, who she explained “are simply continuing a tradition begun by Phillis over two hundred years ago.”⁶⁹ She was conscious of the obvious parallels between Wheatley’s struggle to be a successful and published poet and the obstacles black women writers faced in modern day society. The decision to end the festival with an insightful discussion of the absence of black women in textbooks echoed the criticisms about the absence of black women in positions of power in academia. “I think that our coming together in 1973, ostensibly to honor and celebrate the first among us to raise her voice within mainstream America,” Walker noted, “challenged us to give shape and form to a movement which permitted even more voices to be heard.”⁷⁰ The dissonance between the new configurations of expression of black arts movement and Wheatley’s poetic conformity was not lost on the emerging cohort of black women writers. Wheatley’s public persona was grounded in her published poetry, but also encompassed her ability to defy and endure societal expectations of black women.

Alice Walker’s eloquent explanation is the most revealing in measuring the attitudes of black women towards Wheatley’s body of work. Her essay “In Our Mother’s

⁶⁹ Margaret Walker “Phillis Wheatley and Black Women Writers, 1773—1973,” in *On Being Female, Black and Free: Essays by Margaret Walker, 1932-1992*, Maryemma Graham, ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 37.

⁷⁰ Walker, “Phillis Wheatley and Black Women Writers, 1773—1973,” 39.

Gardens” was one of the most recognizable publication that was derived from the festival. In it she argues,

But at last, Phillis, we understand. No more snickers when your stiff, struggling, ambivalent lines are forced on us. We know that you were not an idiot nor a traitor; only a sickly little Black girl, snatched from your home and country and made a slave; a woman who still struggled to sing the song that was your gift, although in a land of barbarians who praised you for your bewildered tongue. It is not so much what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, the notion of song.⁷¹

Alice Walker’s words are particularly poignant because they illustrate the continuous admiration black women had for Wheatley. Coupled with Wheatley’s unmatched naming memorialization and public memory crafting that black women catalyzed and maintained, Alice Walker’s summation of black women’s sentiments towards her defies the notion that she was relentlessly criticized and undervalued by black scholars, as Henry Louis Gates suggests in *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*.⁷²


It was their dedication to their communities that anchored the activities of hundreds of organizations across the nation named after Wheatley and kept her public memory alive. Through recitations, lectures, pageants, and namings, they intentionally created a world that exalted a heroine in the black past and present. They evoked Wheatley’s name and image to demonstrate their own creative capabilities. The world that black clubwomen created to commemorate their icons was transformed drastically in

⁷¹ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harvest, 1984), 96.

⁷² Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America’s First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003).

the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, they remained dedicated to expanding the extensive malleability of the Phillis Wheatley Brand that made her the most memorialized black woman of the early twentieth century.

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Figure 1.1
Lillie Brooks Wheatley Bread Advertisement

The Detroit Tribune, August 6, 1938, *Chronicling America*,
Library of Congress



Figure 1.2
Wheatley Bread Advertisement

The Detroit Tribune July 2, 1938, *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress



Figure 1.3
Bethune at Wheatley Y, 1943

Mary McLeod Bethune visiting children at the Phyllis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association on Rhode Island Avenue in Washington, D.C.

Farm Security Administration Photograph Collection, Library of Congress

CHAPTER 2

MEMORIALIZING THE 'SYMBOL' & THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman represented the very best of African American women's ingenuity in the very worst circumstances. African American women public memory crafters used named memorialization to commemorate them as heroines of the black freedom struggle. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Truth and Tubman's public commemorations promoted the inclusion of black women into American history narratives and well into the twentieth century their named memorials remain a significant aspect of African American women's public memorialization.

Sojourner Truth is one of the most celebrated antislavery and women's rights activists of the nineteenth century. Isabella was born and enslaved around 1797 in Ulster County, New York, which had a significant community of Dutch immigrants and their descendants. Her community was so heavily dominated by the culture that her first language was Dutch. At fourteen, she was married to an enslaved man, Thomas, and had five children. In 1827, she was emancipated by state law and moved to New York City. Pentecostal religion became a central tenant of Isabella's life, and on June 1, 1843 she changed her name to Sojourner Truth "itinerant preacher." Truth felt compelled to journey throughout the northeast to preach the gospel. In Florence, Massachusetts, Truth joined the Northampton Associations which connected her to prominent abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. By 1849 she began lecturing

about the abolition of slavery, temperance, suffrage and women's rights. Her speeches and witty remarks paired with her tall stature and captivating voice made her a popular speaker for some thirty years. She also worked to implement tangible civil rights for blacks, including an employment agency that assisted escaped slaves with finding jobs in the late 1860s. However, much of what is known and celebrated about Truth was never written or spoken by her. She has been credited with giving her most famous public address, "Ar'n't I a Woman?," in 1851 at a Woman's Rights Meeting in Akron, Ohio. The popular question she posed has defined Truth's public image for more than 150 years. Historian Nell Painter has separated the public image of Truth from reality in *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*. Her groundbreaking research revealed that the public persona of Truth was carefully crafted as a symbol of resistance, and she did not write or publish the works attributed to her. Painter argues that it was actually Francis Dana Gage, a white women's rights activist, who constructed the famous, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" speech and fictionalized the Ohio Woman's Rights Conference.¹

The black clubwomen who heralded and memorialized her had no idea that Truth was not the author of her life story. They based their admiration of her on what they knew. They embraced the notion that Truth was able to defy societal norms and speak publicly about her experiences and the contradictions of slavery in a free society. Her advocacy for equal treatment for black women echoed the desires of black clubwomen to be fairly treated as both African Americans and women. No other historical voice so forcefully articulated the distinct realities of facing raced and gendered discrimination

¹ Nell Painter, "Truth, Sojourner," in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 259-262; Nell Painter, *Sojourner: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996).

simultaneously. For the African American women that memorialized Truth “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” embodied defiance of the simultaneous racism and sexism they faced on a daily basis. As historian Deborah Gray White posits, “black women can take pride in the fact that Truth’s real remarks and life history obviously inspired the question “Ar’n’t I a Woman?””² Truth was a historical symbol that black women rallied behind because they personally understood and could relate to her public persona.

In 1916, Margaret Black used her regular “Woman’s Department” column in the *Baltimore Afro-American* to publish “Sojourner Truth by Eloise Bibb Thompson.” Thompson, a distinguished guest columnist and vibrant part of the “literary life of Los Angeles” opened her column by noting that though Truth was, “A slave from her birth until her mature womanhood, she rose after that by her own unaided efforts to a position commanding respect and esteem from all those familiar with her life work [sic].” Moreover, she noted “Her impulsive nature, overflowing with affection, her enthusiasm, perseverance, the courage of her convictions and true self-respect were marked traits which, together with her distinctive personality, helped to win her great success.” An apt description of Truth’s major life moments, Thompson ended by calling her “a phenomenal production of the days of slavery.” Margaret Black commented that she was pleased to use her regular space to inform readers about Truth, “a good woman of our race,” and proclaimed that “There should be a Sojourner Truth Club among us in every

² Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 12.

city, town and village.”³ Black women all over the country inspired by Truth’s biography had already begun the march toward honoring and memorializing her.

When Julia Hanson died in 1902, the mainstream white national newspaper *The Washington Post* published the article, “Leader of Her Race: Sojourner Truth Was A Power Among Negroes” as a tribute to one of the most prominent black citizens in the city. Hanson, a member of the Truth Club, had helped establish the Truth Home for Working Girls.⁴ *The Chicago Defender* celebrated the life of Mrs. George M. Warner by highlighting her ties to the Sojourner Truth Home in Los Angeles. Eloise Bibb Thompson noted the “Sojourner Truth Home is another monument to the charitable work of Mrs. Warner...”⁵ This duality of the *culture of recognition* embraced the historical legacies of black women as significant to the history of African Americans, while also acknowledging the women who comprised these organizations.

The Sojourner Truth Club in Richmond, Indiana and Los Angeles, California illustrate two examples of how organizations named in honor of historical African American women functioned. The Truth Club in Richmond, Indiana was founded on October 14, 1921 with twelve members for the purpose of “social and moral uplift” and “visit and report all sick of our community.” It was the first and oldest club in Richmond to be a part of the Indiana Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs. The ladies decided to name the club in honor of Sojourner Truth as a living memorial to her contributions to

³ Margaret Black, “Woman’s Department,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 16, 1916; Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Printing and Binding House, 1919), 254.

⁴ “Leader of Her Race: Sojourner Truth Was A Power Among Negroes. NOTED AS PLATFORM ORATOR Familiar Character in Washington During the Sixties -- Born a Slave and Without Education, but Possessed of Keen Wit and Common Sense -- Knew Many of Our Famous Public Men,” *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1902.

⁵ “Los Angeles Club Woman and Social Worker, Noted for Her Work Among the Needy, Makes Many Hearts Glad on Christmas -- Societies and Friends Assist,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 9, 1915.

African Americans. The Truth Club was proud of its contribution to creating a public history site in honor of Frederick Douglass. Several commemorative speeches in the Truth Club's organizational records proudly highlighted the donations made to the Frederick Douglass home in D.C., which demonstrated the significance of black public history to the club's founders. With no such site in existence for Sojourner Truth, members inserted her into the black public history narrative through all the works they did in their local community, including providing scholarships to college bound young men and women.

The most central activity of the Truth Club was its dedication to the sick and the families of the recently deceased. The Truth Club prided itself on visiting sick women in the community. All "members were urged to visit the sick," but it was the specific purpose of the members of the sick committee. They provided "gowns that was donated by the club and... a nice basket of fruit [sic]" to ailing women. A significant portion of meeting time and club resources were designated to be spent on organizing flowers, sprays, and cards for these often overlooked members of their community. Truth Club members also took care of their own. When founding member "Mother Robinson," became ill, 50 cents was allocated to send her fruit. In appreciation, families and those recovered from illness regularly sent thank-you cards that were read at meetings.⁶ In 1938, the Truth Club participated in National Negro Health Week in April. They hosted Dr. Beatrice Keemer at a bi-weekly meeting, who was the guest speaker at the Townsend

⁶ Sojourner Truth Club Minutes, November 21, 1923, Sojourner Truth Club Records, 1922-1975, Box 1, Folder 2, M 540, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society; Sojourner Truth Club Minutes, July 15, 1925, Sojourner Truth Club Records; "History & Constitution of the Truth Club," Sojourner Truth Club Records, 1922-1975, Box 1, Folder 1; Thank you Cards and Correspondence, Sojourner Truth Club Records, 1922-1975, Box 2, Folder 4; "Receipts," Sojourner Truth Club Records, 1922-1975, Box 2, Folder 6.

Community Center's weeklong programming which included cash prizes for the top three essays on Tuberculosis.⁷ During the Great Depression, "Greens Supper", "Rabbit Supper," and "Chittling-Chicken Suppers" provided funding for the Truth Club's activities, philanthropy, and collaborations with other organizations. As an active part of the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, members often worked with other black women's clubs. For example, in July 1942 Lena Harris, Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Club President, visited Richmond for her "annual visit." She attended a series of events planned and attended by both the Sojourner Truth Club and the Mary B. Talbert Club.⁸

Each local club had its own mission and focused attention to issues specific to the area and community. The Sojourner Truth Club in Los Angeles, California was centered on creating a home for African American unmarried women and single mothers. Founded in 1904 with the central purpose of creating a home for impoverished, orphaned, and elderly black women, Californian historian Delilah Beasley argues, "The object of this club was to...build a home for self-sustaining women."⁹ Margaret "Maggie" Johnson Scott was a founder and served as the President in the early 1910s and again in the late 1920s.¹⁰ In order to learn about how to develop and operate the home, Scott gathered information on a research tour to New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. She met with black clubwomen in each city and collected information and resources for the Truth Club's endeavor. Scott came back to Los Angeles with a clear plan, and she

⁷ "Richmond," *The Chicago Defender*, April 16, 1938.

⁸ "Richmond," *The Chicago Defender*, July 25, 1942.

⁹ Beasley, *The Negro Trailblazers of California*, 226.

¹⁰ "Sojourner Club Elects President," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1928.

assisted the ladies of the Truth Club with planning and raising money for the creation of the home.

With contributions from the California Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (CWC), local churches, African American men's clubs, and interracial support from white clubwomen in Los Angeles they raised just under \$14,000 to purchase a plot of land for the home. One of Scott's most inventive fundraisers was her plan for the "mile of pennies" which would raise 20 cents per foot to total \$1000 for their treasury.¹¹ The Sojourner Truth Industrial Home was "considered the first monument to the efforts of Race women in California." The CWC held Sojourner Truth in such high regard as a historical representation of black women that as part of their 1915 annual convention, they named one day's activities "Sojourner Truth Day."¹² The CWC embraced the home as its southern California project, while the Oakland Orphanage was its focus in Northern California.¹³ By 1913, The Sojourner Truth Industrial Home was opened complete with "nine bedrooms, two bathrooms, kitchen, dining-room, reception hall and library." The Truth Home was fully furnished with community donations.¹⁴ The two-story home could

¹¹ *The Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1909.

¹² "Colored Clubs Open Convention: California Federation Gathers at First A. M. Church for Annual Session," *Oakland Tribune*, July 27, 1915.

¹³ Beasley, *The Negro Trailblazers of California*, 228; Douglas Flammig, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 139; "Los Angeles Society," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 13, 1927; Lawrence B. de Graaf, "Race, Sex, and Region: Black Women in the American West, 1850—1920," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49, no 2 (1980), 307.

¹⁴ Historian Douglas Flammig notes that the home was referred to as the Sojourner Truth Home, Sojourner Truth Industrial Home, Sojourner Industrial Home, Sojourner Truth Home for Working Girls, by the press. Flammig, *Bound for Freedom*, 400; "Sojourner Truth Industrial Home," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1913; "Sojourner Truth Home," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1913; "Colored Girls' Home: Sojourners' Women's Club Makes Provision For Workers and House Is Purchased, With Every Comfort," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1911; Beasley, *The Negro Trailblazers of California*, 227.

house up to twenty women and “was the first home of its kind in California entirely operated by black women.”¹⁵

The Truth Club and Home became a state-wide and regional moniker for the club work of black women. While providing housing to single women, the home also served as a meeting space for the CWC Federation meetings, community workshops, and special event programming.¹⁶ The Los Angeles Truth Club was the most prominent organization in California named in honor of Truth and was regularly reported in local and national newspapers.¹⁷ It represented African American women’s club work and historical contributions simultaneously. It no doubt inspired the formation of the Truth Clubs all across California. In Needles, California, the Sojourner Truth Literary and Art Club hosted their second annual banquet in 1930, which the *Chicago Defender* described as “one of the most important affairs of the club season.” While it was indeed a socialite’s affair, the event also served as a forum for discussions on the U.S. Constitution and historical readings about Truth.¹⁸

The Los Angeles Truth club and the home were also a part of a national cadre of homes established for black women and girls in honor of Truth. Among the first was the Truth Home for Working Girls in Washington, D.C. established in 1896 by the Sojourner

¹⁵ Kaitlin Therese Boyd, “The Criminalization of Black Angeleno Women: Institutionalized Racism and Sexism in Los Angeles, 1928—1938,” PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2012, 71-72.

¹⁶ Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*; Cheryl Tillman, “First African American Teacher in Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 3, 2011.

¹⁷ “Calif. Federation’s Landmark,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 10, 1938; Eloise Bibb Thompson, “CLUB WOMEN AID REFORM; 45,000 IN NATIONAL BODY: Splendid Work of National Association of Colored Women's Clubs Shown at Ninth Biennial Meeting of Wilberforce, Ohio.,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 24, 1914.

¹⁸ “Brilliant Banquet Given by Sojourner Truth Club,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1930.

Truth Mission.¹⁹ In 1915, the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (National Urban League) established the Sojourner Truth House, for black girls age 16 and under in New York City.²⁰ In 1918, the Sojourner Truth Club in Seattle was also formed with the central purpose of establishing a home for single and unwed black women. By 1920, the club purchased and opened the Sojourner Truth Home.²¹ Like in Los Angeles, the home was used for club meetings and events, state federated meetings, and served as “a monument to the pioneers who had sufficient faith and courage to found it.” In 1939, the Truth Club hosted the Washington State Federated Women’s Clubs annual conference at the home.²²

The Truth Homes played central roles in politics and education in the black community. In Los Angeles, the Truth Home hosted local political candidates to address African American concerns. For example, in August 1914 the Truth Club hosted District Attorney Candidate Vincent Morgan at the home where he “was introduced to hundreds of his Afro-American supporters.”²³ In 1916, the Home hosted the NAACP of Los Angeles’ annual dinner with Mayor Frederick Worman expected to be in attendance.²⁴ Guests from out of town were also hosted with teas and special parties or featured as speakers and performers for a program.²⁵ Educational Day was a meeting held every

¹⁹ “An Appeal to Colored People: Contributions Much Needed to Support the Sojourner Truth Home,” *The Washington Post*, August 4, 1896.

²⁰ “Former House of Noted Woman To House Girls: Urban League to Open Home for Delinquent Girls in October,” *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 7, 1915; Cheryl Hicks, *Talk With You Like A Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 191-192.

²¹ *Cayton’s Weekly*, December 14, 1918; *Cayton’s Weekly*, February 7, 1920; *Cayton’s Weekly*, May 22, 1920.

²² Mrs. J.B. Sammuels, “Sojourner Truth Home, Washington,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 11, 1937.

²³ “Pleasing Signs of the Times Los Angeles Women In Politics,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 22, 1914.

²⁴ “For Racial Advancement,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1916.

²⁵ Marie Dorothy Rout, “Los Angeles Society,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 8, 1927.

fourth Monday where members discussed the work of African American intellectuals like Alain Locke's "The New Negro" or featured special guests like probation officer Alva L. Pulliam's talk on "The Work of the Juvenile Court."²⁶

The Harriet Tubman Club in New York City and Guild in Pittsburgh recognized Tubman as the most significant freedom fighter in American history. As the fifth of nine children, Tubman was born around 1820 on a plantation on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. She and her family were enslaved by Anthony Thompson, his second wife, Mary Pattison Brodess, and eventually her son Edward Brodess. When Edward reached his early twenties, he forced Tubman and her family to move to his farm in nearby Bucktown. Tubman was frequently hired out to work for "temporary masters," who neglected her and treated her cruelly. The most brutal treatment happened in the early 1930s, when an overseer threw an iron weight that struck Tubman so hard it that fractured her skull and nearly took her life. Her injury remained with her and for the rest of her life she endured debilitating headaches, seizures, and epilepsy. Though Tubman suffered greatly from having her labor hired out, she was eventually able to gain an in depth knowledge of communication and infrastructure networks in the area, including those of black mariners. By September 1849, she felt confident enough in her knowledge to flee to freedom. She was able to connect with an existing network of blacks and whites helping the enslaved escape to freedom called the Underground Railroad. With the help of "conductors" and the North Star as her guide, she reached Philadelphia where she tasted her freedom for the first time. Tubman wanted to give the gift of freedom to

²⁶ Marie Dorothy Bout, "Los Angeles Society," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 4, 1928; Thelma G. Hardon, "California News: Los Angeles," *The Chicago Defender*, July 9, 1932.

others. She began leading her family members and other enslaved black to freedom in December 1850 and for ten years kept going back until her last “mission” in December 1860. Tubman used disguises, clever ploys, different escape routes, and famously carried a revolver to deter any weary escapees. She was so successful in freeing more than 300 people that there was a sizable bounty on her head. In 1859, she moved with her family to Auburn, New York to property sold to her by William Henry Seward, President Lincoln’s Secretary of State.

Tubman became deeply enveloped in the abolitionist movement. John Brown, so impressed with her abilities, dubbed her “General Tubman”. While she never was promoted to the rank of general, her work with the Union army during the Civil War was unprecedented for a black woman. Tubman worked as a nurse, a spy, and led over 700 enslaved African Americans to freedom in South Carolina as “the first woman to command an armed military raid when she guided Colonel James Montgomery and his Second South Black regiment up the Combahee River, routing Confederate outposts, destroying stockpiles of cotton, food, and weapons.” While all of Tubman’s experiences weren’t as triumphant (she witnessed the massacre of the all black Massachusetts 54th Regiment in July 1863), her contributions to the war effort were simply astonishing. Her freedom fighting did not end with the Confederacy’s defeat in the Civil War. She continued to work as a philanthropist, suffragist, and civil rights activist as she lived out her final years in Auburn, New York. One of her most notable philanthropic endeavors was the creation of the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged, which she opened in the early 20th century. In March 1913, Harriet Tubman died at ninety years old.²⁷

²⁷ Kate Clifford Larson, “Tubman, Harriet,” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 266, 3; 262—267; Catherine Clinton, *Harriet*

Tubman's death in 1913 hit the community of Auburn hard. Auburnites were proud to have Tubman as a part of their community because they understood her national significance to American history as an extraordinary African American woman. As a community, they decided to raise the money to create a public memorial and placed it in one of the most prominent spaces in the city, the courthouse. White Auburn citizens organized to erect a monumental tablet in the local courthouse, but Tubman's gravesite remained "unmarked by even a piece of wood." Despite participation from Mary B. Talbert and Booker T. Washington in the momentous unveiling ceremony for the Harriet Tubman tablet in Auburn, it was understood that African Americans had no active roles in its creation. Talbert, who was the President of the Empire State Federation of Women's Clubs at the time, was reported to have said "the white people of Auburn have erected a tablet in the courthouse in honor of Harriet Tubman. They are asking if the colored people are going to place anything at the grave." The tablet was not embraced as an official African American tribute created by and from the black community. It was important for African Americans, particularly black women, to have a monument to Tubman of their own creation.

Talbert decided that the Empire Federation would collaborate with the Harriet Tubman Club to create a public monument. In March 1915, *The New York Age* reported on a difference of opinion about the best way to memorialize Tubman and more importantly where a lasting public monument should stand. The Tubman Club, led by Marie Jackson Stuart, wanted to place a stone marker at Tubman's gravesite and a public

Tubman: Road to Freedom (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004); Milton Sernett, *Myth, Memory, and History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Beverly Lowry, *Harriet Tubman: Imagining a Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

monument in New York City “to serve as an inspiration to the generations coming up.” Talbert, and not surprisingly, Auburn citizens, thought that Auburn was the best place for the monument.²⁸ Ultimately, Stuart and the Tubman Club agreed to raise funds for a memorial grave marker and monument in Auburn. While there may have been some disagreement about location, both Talbert and Stuart were memorializers and deeply invested in crafting Tubman’s public memorialization. Talbert, who’d been by Tubman’s bedside just a month before her death and delivered an eulogy at Tubman’s funeral, had a long track record of African American public memorials. Both Talbert and Stuart participated in the memorial service program to celebrate Tubman at the Michigan Street Baptist Church in New York.²⁹ So, the Tubman Club and Empire Federation raised money through the Harriet Tubman Monument Fund in collaboration with other African American clubs throughout the state of New York.³⁰

In the first decade of the 20th century, Stuart was a very active ambassador in the New York area. She was a founding member of the Empire State Federation of Women’s Clubs, the White Rose Home for Working Girls, and the Y.W.C.A. She also sometimes represented the state at NACW annual meetings.³¹ Madam Stuart, as she was often called, was also an acclaimed actress and soloist. In 1913, she had established the School of Expression, Music and Dramatic Art in New York. She used her talent in the theatre to present black public history, often playing stirring roles of older black women. Stuart

²⁸ “Harriet Tubman Monument Benefit.,” *The New York Age*, September 3, 1914; “The Tubman Monument Question of Location,” *The New York Age*, March 25, 1915; Lydia J. Rosell, *Auburn’s Fort Hill Cemetery* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 106.

²⁹ “Tubman Memorial,” *Buffalo Courier*, July 5, 1913; Sernett, *Harriet Tubman: Myth, Memory, and History*, 179.

³⁰ *The New York Age*, November 5, 1914.

³¹ “The White Rose Industrial Association Presents,” *The New York Age*, March 28, 1907; “Afro-American Notes.,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1911; *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 25, 1911; “Marie Jackson Stuart Dies in Hospital,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 16, 1925.

also worked with Charles Burroughs to present an “emancipation exposition” to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Written by W.E.B. DuBois, “The Historical Pageant of the Negro Race” had a 350 person ensemble and was described as “a great scenic production of the history of the black race.”³² In 1920, Stuart collaborated with the Manhattan Y.W.C.A. to celebrate “Harriet Tubman Day,” where “a most inspirational address on the life of Harriet Tubman” was given in commemoration of her life.³³

When twelve African American women, in solidarity with the twelve disciples of the Bible, organized the Harriet Tubman Guild in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on July 22, 1915 their central purpose was providing “food and other household necessities for the Aged Minister’s and Layman’s Home.” With the motto, “Deeds Not Words,” the organizers chose to memorialize Harriet Tubman through naming because of her “courageous and untiring deeds as a conductor on the Underground Railroad,” her “love for her race and her activities during the Civil War.”³⁴ Though the aid given to the elderly and ill evolved over the Guild’s existence, members have maintained philanthropic support to this particular cause for over 100 years. Pamela Smoot explains that “These black club women worked relentlessly to provide the black community with a comfortable first-class facility to confront the problem of black convalescent care head on.” In addition to obtaining several buildings (for the use of the elderly and ill), the

³² *The Crisis*, September 1913; Joshua Berrett, “The Golden Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 16, no. 1 (1988), 75-78; “Directors For Exposition Features,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, October 11, 1913; *New York Tribune*, May 6, 1917.

³³ “Manhattan Y.W.C.A. Notes,” *The Chicago Defender*, March 6, 1920.

³⁴ Bettie Cole and Autumn Redcross. *The African Americans of Sewickley Valley* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 56; Smoot, “Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburg,” 128, 130; Pamela Arnett Smoot, “Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1830-1945,” PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1999; Debbie Norrell, “100 Years of the Harriet Tubman Guild,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 28, 2015.

Guild also paid for operations for black patients at local hospitals and dispatched members to visit. Visits to hospitals often included “reading to patients; washing of face and hands; combing the hair; assist in giving baths; filling water pitchers;” and some members went so far as to sing Christmas Carols. The club also donated baby clothes and towels to hospitals, and encouraged black women to go into nursing by providing nursing scholarship to its members.³⁵

Another of the Guild’s major achievements was the establishment of the Harriett Tubman Terrace House for Convalescent Colored Women and Girls in 1931. The House served as the central meeting space for Guild programs, philanthropic outreach, and club activity. In 1965, the House was closed due to “unsafe” conditions and rebuilt in 1967 as an integrated 4-story nursing home with 56 units. While the ladies of the Guild raised \$15,000 for the home, it was the \$640,000 FHA (Federal Housing Authority) funding that allowed them to build a state of the art handicap assessible facility, where residents only had to pay rent based on 25% of their income.³⁶ The revamped Terrace House was an integrated facility open to white and black low income and disabled senior citizens. It retained its name because of the involvement of the Guild and the meaningfulness of Tubman’s legacy to the work that continued to be central to their purpose.³⁷

In 1934, the Guild branch expanded significantly past its initial twelve member limit, by creating a nonprofit corporation with six chapters. Within two years, the Guild

³⁵ Smoot, “Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburg,” 137; “Tubman Guild Keeps Up Busy Schedule Despite Hot Days,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 13, 1935; “Harriett Tubman Guild Holds Board Meeting,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 7, 1935; “Tubman Guild Holds Interesting Meeting,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 12, 1935; Jane Shaw, “Harriet Tubman guild Shows Its Love in Service to Others,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 1, 1972.

³⁶ Jane Shaw, “Harriet Tubman Guild Shows Its Love in Service to Others,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 1, 1972.

³⁷ Alma Polk, “Ruth L. Bennett Principal Speaker for Tubmans,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 22, 1941.

expanded to fifteen chapters. Chapters convened at annual conferences called “solidarity sessions.” The Pittsburgh Courier reported in 1935, “With new chapters steadily coming in, and with all members, new and old, working for the comfort and the uplift of the unfortunate, the Harriet Tubman guild is a decided asset to the state of Pennsylvania.”³⁸ Indeed, they were because they were creating and garnering resources for those who would have surely been overlooked if their wellbeing was solely up to the state. Their work saved and extended lives of African Americans who were desolate and impoverished. Some chapters were named “Achievement, Congress of Negro Women, Pen and Pencil, and Tri-Boro.” In honor of their exceptional dedication and philanthropy, other chapters were named after Guild Founders, Winona Idell, Anna Douglass, and Laura A. Brown.³⁹ Chapters were often named in honor of meaningful black women leaders. For example, the young ladies of the original Guild were called the Hallie Q. Brown Chapter and there was also the Winona Idell Jr. Chapter.⁴⁰

Founder and President Winona Idell Lincoln was a dynamic leader and memory crafter of the Guild which was founded in her home. Under Lincoln’s leadership, the Guild created the Frederick Douglass Literary Club for local high school students. The students helped present a Frederick Douglass Memorial Program in February of 1930

³⁸ ““Brown & Jones,” *Pittsburgh Press*, February 8, 1934; “Harriett-Tubman Charter Unites City-Co. Chapters,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1934; Smoot, “Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburg,” 145; J.H. Roy, Harriett Tubman Board Meets,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 12, 1935; “Guild Conducts All-Day Session,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 23, 1934.

³⁹ “Frances Harpers Have Glorious President’s Day,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 16, 1939; Smoot, “Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburg,” 128.

⁴⁰ Smoot, “Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburg,” 130; “Explanation!,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 12, 1934; “Tubman Guild Planning Solidarity,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 23, 1962.

(black history week) on five local radio stations.⁴¹ By 1934 a weekly show that reflected the club's motto, "Deeds not Words," aired on Wednesday nights.⁴²

An active effort to create black public history opportunities for the local African American community and general public was a part of the Guild's social welfare activities. The Guild often sponsored memorial programs honoring the legacies of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Naming their organization after Harriet Tubman was an effort to promote African American women public history, particularly their roles in the Civil War and black freedom struggle. The members themselves, were the living embodiment of Tubman's spirit of tenacity and selflessness in the midst of social and political constraints.⁴³

Memorializing Tubman's legacy was always on Winonna Lincoln's mind through the activities the Guild catalyzed and participated in, as well as through practical public history celebrations. For instance, Lincoln urged all Guild members to "arrange with their pastors to have a short memorial service" on March 10th, the day that Tubman died. *The Pittsburgh Courier* often referred to Guild members as "Harriet Tubmans" or "Tubmans" in celebrating their community service work in Pittsburgh and surrounding areas.⁴⁴

Lincoln was highly respected for her contributions by her fellow clubwomen and celebrated in *The Pittsburgh Courier* often. While the office of President rotated from Lincoln to other founding members, she always remained a leader among her peers in the

⁴¹ Smoot, "Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburg," 130.

⁴² "Harriett-Tubman Charter Unites City-Co. Chapters," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 24, 1934; "Harriett Tubman Guild Holds Board Meeting," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 7, 1935.

⁴³ "Founder's Chapter Tubman Guild," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 11, 1941.

⁴⁴ Margaret Yeats, "The Harriett Tubmans Keep Up Welfare Work: Monthly Meeting Reveals Much Good in the Interest of the Unfortunate," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 16, 1935.

“Founding Chapter,” and a revered guest in other chapters. She established an appreciation for the preservation and the promotion of Tubman’s legacy that permeated throughout the Guild chapters throughout the rest of the 20th century. The Guild commemorated Tubman through presentations like “Influence of the American Women on Emancipation” at the 28th annual solidarity session in 1962.⁴⁵ To date, the Harriet Tubman Guild is one of the oldest black women’s clubs in existence and remains active in the Pittsburgh community.

While new Harriet Tubman clubs were not developed after the 1930s, black women still heralded Tubman’s public memory. In 1944, the National Council of Negro Women successfully lobbied for the first Liberty Ship named for an African American woman. On June 3, 1944, the *SS Harriet Tubman* was initiated in South Portland, Maine.⁴⁶ In 2009, the first African American United States President designated her home in Auburn, New York and the plantation she grew up on in Eastern Shore, Maryland an official National Park as part of the National Park Service.

Both Tubman’s and Truth’s legacies remain relevant in the twenty-first century, as African American communities continue to celebrate the triumph of formerly enslaved women as an essential element of the black past. As historical figures, they represented the very best of African American women’s ingenuity in dire circumstances. Their named memorialization were intentional celebrations of African American women’s history.

⁴⁵ “Tubman Guild Planning Solidarity,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 23, 1962.

⁴⁶ Kate Clifford Larson, “Tubman, Harriet,” 3; 266.



Figure 2.1
Sojourner Truth, 1883

MSS Collection, Library of Congress



Figure 2.2
Harriet Tubman, 1895

Emily Howland Photograph Collection, Library of Congress

CHAPTER 3

MEMORIALIZING THE THREE MARYS & THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN

In the absence of traditional public history mediums, like historical sites, monuments, or statues, named memorials were central to commemorating the black past through African American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. African American memorializers and memory crafters understood that recognizing black women leaders was also an acknowledgment of each woman's lived experiences, activism, and achievements. African American clubwomen established named memorials for women such as Mary Church Terrell, Mary B. Talbert, and Mary McCleod Bethune to simultaneously honor the legacies of leaders and less prominent women who worked in their communities to meet the needs of its most vulnerable members.

Self-help, Christian morality, and the embodiment of the National Association of Colored Women's motto of "Lifting As We Climb" were all central to black women's clubs during the Jim Crow Era. Yet, another foundational principal of black clubwomen was establishing a *culture of recognition*. The *culture of recognition* was a system of first recognizing the women within their groups for whom their organization was founded. At meetings organizational minutes individually recognized black women for their work within their organizations as meeting hosts, committee members, and community philanthropists. Every single contribution that club members made was noted and appreciated. Black newspapers, like *The Chicago Defender* and *The Pittsburgh*

Courier, and *The Baltimore Afro-American*, were instrumental in cultivating a public presence for the activities and achievements of black clubwomen. They reported on everything from weekly meetings and fundraising drives to organization history and biographies of those memorialized through naming.

Another form of recognition was in naming clubs after living members. In the Midwest, the Ida B. Wells Club recognized her innovative political organizing and community building in Chicago. While Wells was a national figure, her public memorialization began in Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the Ida B. Wells Museum in Holly Springs, Mississippi wasn't founded until the late twentieth century. The catalyst for her public memorialization was linked closely to her work in Chicago. Local communities also honored black women who made a difference in their neighborhoods and daily lives. Celia Saxon in Columbia, SC and Ella Reid in Tyler, Texas were both women who garnered so much admiration from local black communities that they collaborated with local government entities to name public buildings after them. To name an organization or public building after an African American woman was one of the highest honors one could receive.

Leaders of national organizations like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and later the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) were honored through clubs named in their honor. For example, the *Mary Clubs* honored presidents of the NACW—Mary Church Terrell, Mary B. Talbert, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Mary Eliza Church Terrell was born in Memphis, Tennessee in the middle of the Civil War in 1863. She came of age in a city that was filled with the pitfalls and triumphs of the Reconstruction Era. As part of a wealthy, elite African American family,

Terrell was able to attend Antioch College and Oberlin College, where she graduated in 1884. She became a teacher and worked at Wilberforce University and M Street High School in Washington, D.C. It was at M Street, later renamed Dunbar, that she met Robert H. Terrell, who she later married. Beyond her career as an educator, Terrell was heavily involved with black clubwomen, including her founding role in the Colored Woman's League of Washington, D.C. in 1892. As an intellectual, writer, and philanthropist, Terrell was committed to creating spaces for African American women to organize, socialize, and contribute to their local communities.

In 1896, she was elected the first president of the newly formed National Association of Colored Women (NACW). During her tenure from 1896 to 1901, Terrell oversaw the establishment of new black women's clubs, settlement homes, social welfare programs, kindergartens and child care facilities under the central organizational umbrella of the NACW. By the turn of twentieth century, the NACW was the largest African American organization in the nation. It provided a central umbrella for the work of African American women's clubs and significantly expanded their roles in the public sphere.¹ While whites and immigrants benefitted from Progressive Era reforms through government advocacy and expansion, many of these advances were unavailable to African American communities because of racism. Black clubwomen worked ardently to provide social welfare services to their local communities and organized nationally through the NACW to advance the interests of African Americans. Beverly Jones suggests that "the very existence of the NACW embodied the major strategy of Mary

¹ Wanda Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 22.

Church Terrell: an organization of black women, young and educated, organized for the avowed purpose of race elevation.”²

Terrell was an exceptional leader and established an important precedent as president of one of the Progressive Era’s most important organizations. As an international representative of black womanhood, Terrell addressed audiences abroad at the 1904 International Congress of Women in Berlin, Germany. She continued to be a race leader and philanthropist through both World War I and World War II. Towards the end of her life she was a vocal advocate for civil rights, leading a legal resistance to dismantle Jim Crow in public facilities. Just two months after the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, she died. Terrell embodied the epitome of black clubwomen’s work, and her memorialization illustrates the high regard in which African American women held her.³

Mary Church Terrell Clubs (Terrell Clubs) existed in the West (Berkeley, California), South (Shreveport, Louisiana), and North (Philadelphia, PA) during the early to mid-twentieth century.⁴ However, two of the most prominent and most documented Terrell Clubs were located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Des Moines, Iowa. The Mary Church Terrell Political Club was organized in 1933 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with the a

² Beverly W. Jones, “Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women, 1896 to 1901,” *The Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 1 (1982), 30.

³ Beverly Jones, “Terrell, Mary Eliza Church,” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 233-234; Joan Quigley, *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation’s Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Dorothy Salem, “National Association of Colored Women,” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2; 429-436.

⁴ In Berkeley, the Terrell club was socially oriented with a focus on music and put on special programs for enlisted African American men and veterans in World War II. *The Chicago Defender*, November 30, 1940; Shreveport, Louisiana was also home to a Terrell Club, which was founded in April of 1922 and stayed active throughout the 1940s. *The Chicago Defender*, April 8, 1922; *The Chicago Defender*, March 2, 1940; *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 22, 1913.

central focus on providing a platform to discuss African American issues. The Terrell Club created the “Three-R school” an adult school to teach literacy and to “help adult newcomers from the south, mainly in adjusting to northern city life.”⁵ The Three-R School, race relations symposiums, and active collaboration with other black clubwomen through the Wisconsin State Association of Colored Women were all significant facets of the Terrell Club activities.⁶

The most popular program was their annual “Mayor of Bronzeville” competition that was organized under the leadership of club president and founder Bernice N. Copeland. “Bronzeville” was a term popularized in the early twentieth century Midwest to describe the segregated, African American neighborhoods.⁷ While the “mayor” was not the official elected public servant of Milwaukee, they were the official political representative of African American interests. In highly gerrymandered voting districts, designed to divide the African American voting bloc, the *Mayor of Bronzeville* gave African Americans an opportunity to “elect” their own leaders.⁸ It also gave African American women a prominent role in the political process and a public platform to address issues important to them. The women of the Terrell club organized and presided over the program in collaboration with local churches and the *Chicago Defender*.

Terrell President Bernice Copeland presided over the 1937 competition with six candidates at Mount Calvary Baptist Church.⁹ She wrote in an open letter published in

⁵ “Women’s Clubs Really Do Things That Are Worth While,” *Holland Evening Sentinel*, July 23, 1960.

⁶ “Milwaukee News,” *The Chicago Defender*, February 16, 1946.

⁷ In addition to Milwaukee, Indianapolis and Chicago also had “Bronzeville” neighborhoods. Chicago’s “Bronzeville” is probably the most documented and well-known.

⁸ Genevieve McBride and Stephen Byers, “First Mayor of Black Milwaukee: J. Anthony Josey,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 91, no. 2, 2, 3.

⁹ Copeland was lauded for her contributions to the black community in Milwaukee, particularly for her work with the Terrell Club, Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, and the North Side YWCA. In 1967, a

the *Chicago Defender*, “many people there came away with a new enthusiasm and realization of the power within them for Race betterment.” Thousands of voters cast their ballots to elect Richard E. Lewis “as the first mayor of Bronzeville by a margin of 1,587 votes over his nearest opponent.” Though unofficial in the city, the *Mayor of Bronzeville* was a widely attended and extremely important designation given to black leaders.¹⁰ These positions were taken seriously and held in great regard, and the Terrell club provided the foundation for black political representation until blacks were able to be elected to city and state offices.

Mayors were presented with a “key of Bronzeville” by the Terrell Club and often worked closely with club members as part of their “cabinet.” While the early competition candidates were always black men, cabinet members were both men and women. Women of the Terrell Club were always a part of the cabinet, which consisted of “all the officials usually found in an American metropolis,” including “chief of police, commissioner of health, school board, corporation counsels, and others.” In 1945, an African American woman, Helen Reid, was among the candidates for the prized honor.¹¹ By 1956, Terrell Club member, Mary Ellen Shadd, was running for a city council position. Shadd’s brother, Lawrence Brady, was the current “Mayor of Bronzeville” and

street was named in her honor. Subsequently, Lindsay Park was named in her honor. The memorialization of national figures often prompted the memorialization of local figures, as part of the culture of recognition black women promoted.

¹⁰ “Milwaukee Bronzeville Contest Gets Under Way,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 27, 1937; “Milwaukee Club Lauds Bob Miller,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 4, 1937; “Richard E. Lewis Is Bronzeville Mayor,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 25, 1937.

¹¹ “Milwaukee’s ‘Mayor’ Picks His Cabinet,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1941; “Lewis Now at Helm As Mayor Over ‘City,’” *The Chicago Defender*, January 15, 1938; “Milwaukee News,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1945.

her campaign manager. The political infrastructure the Terrell club put in place empowered African American women, like Reid and Shadd, to run for office.¹²

In Des Moines, Iowa the Terrell Club was not centered around politics but literature. The Mary Terrell Literary Club was founded in March of 1907 and was the only literary club in the city named after a black woman.¹³ Meetings hosted in member homes consisted of “lessons” where members read and discussed the writings of black intellectual leaders like Booker T. Washington or classical literature like “Enid and Geraint.” Some meetings were spent listening to music on a Victrola. Others were focused on recognizing individual women, such as the one at “The home of Mrs. Coleen Jones” that was “the scene of an evening company...in honor of Mrs. Edyth Strawthers.” Strawthers was a well-known member of the Terrell Club who “won honors” for her participation in the declamatory contest in the Des Moines Oratorical Contest in 1913.¹⁴ Other meetings were musical performances or had special presentations for members like “Benefits of Manual Training” or “Interior decoration, ‘Lamps and Lighting.’” For larger meetings with special guests or performances, larger venues, like the local drug store, were used to accommodate all the attendees. No matter the theme, all meetings ended with a social reception, hosted by different members each week.¹⁵ In the early 1910s, the Terrell Club members presented poems, songs, and orations at the annual City Literary Convention, like “Evolution of Progress” by founding member Gertrude Hyde.¹⁶ Hyde

¹² Audrey Weaver, “Milwaukee Mother In Race For City Council Seat,” *The Chicago Defender*, February 11, 1956.

¹³ “City News,” *Iowa State Bystander*, March 29, 1907.

¹⁴ *Iowa State Bystander*, June 4, 1915; “Negro Cop Wins City Oratorical Honors,” *Des Moines Daily News* July 1, 1913.

¹⁵ “The City Convention,” *Iowa State Bystander*, June 2, 1911; *Iowa State Bystander*, June 11, 1915; *Iowa State Bystander*, August 4, 1916; *Iowa State Bystander*, November 18, 1920.

¹⁶ “The City Convention,” *Iowa State Bystander*, June 2, 1911.

became so proficient in her craft that in 1913 she had secured a second place win in the oratorical contest with her paper “The Negro Soldier.”¹⁷

The utmost honor for a club named after an African American woman was to have their namesake visit them. Terrell visited Des Moines in 1915. During her first visit to the city, she was regarded as a celebrity and participated in a small tour of speaking engagements, dinners, and receptions. The highlight of Terrell’s tour was the “splendid program” that the Terrell Club presented at a reception hosted by the Iowa State Federated Women’s Clubs. The evening culminated with a presentation to Terrell of a gift of “a beautiful bouquet of American Beauty roses.”¹⁸

Ten years after its founding the Terrell Club was known as one of the most prominent clubs in Des Moines. While most of their activities centered around social and literary programs, African American men’s participation in World War I prompted them to become involved with helping to entertain soldiers at Fort Des Moines (later Camp Dodge) at the only Officers Training School in the country for African Americans. Men from all over the country came to Des Moines and participated in the Officers Training School to become “the first group of colored commissioned officers in the United States army ever issued by our government.” Hosting special events during the summer of 1918, the women of the Mary Church Terrell club were heralded by the *Iowa Bystander* for being “very active in making it pleasant during the summer for the students at the Officers Training School” and “foremost in cheering the sick boys at Fort Des Moines.”¹⁹ Even after the war ended, the Terrell Club was still involved with raising money for

¹⁷ “Negro Cop Wins City Oratorical Honors,” *Des Moines Daily News*, July 1, 1913.

¹⁸ *Iowa State Bystander*, June 11, 1915.

¹⁹ *Iowa State Bystander*, December 20, 1918.

soldiers. In 1919, for example, they held their War Camp Community Service swimming class.²⁰

Des Moines was also home to another club named for an African American national club woman—Mary B. Talbert. Mary Morris Burnett Talbert was born on September 17, 1866 in Oberlin, Ohio. By the time she was 16, she had graduated from Oberlin High School and was enrolled in Oberlin College at the same time as Mary Church Terrell, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Anna Julia Cooper, with whom she stayed connected throughout her life. In 1886 she graduated from Oberlin College and began her career as a teacher in Little Rock, Arkansas. By 1887, she was the principle of Union High School until her marriage in 1891 to William Herbert Talbert. The couple moved to Buffalo, New York. In Buffalo, Mary and William founded the Michigan Avenue Baptist Church, where she trained Sunday School teachers, played the organ, and founded the Christian Culture Club. Talbert thrived as an adept collaborator with black women within and outside of the church. She helped found the Phyllis Wheatley Club in 1899 which was the first club to become a part of the National Association of Colored Women. She was also a founding member of the Empire Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1911, which operated as the state representative body under the NACW. She served as the Empire Federation of Women’s Clubs’ president from 1912 to 1916, followed by a two term presidency in the NACW from 1916 to 1920.

During her presidency, Talbert was instrumental in preserving Frederick Douglass’ D.C. home as one of the first African American public history sites in the nation. As president of the NACW during WWI, she also established herself as an

²⁰ *Iowa State Bystander*, April 25, 1919.

international voice of African American issues through her work with the International Council of Women, Young Men's Christian Association, and the Red Cross. Beyond her presidency, Talbert worked as a founding member and organizational leader and board member in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She was most noted for her anti-lynching crusade. After losing a battle with coronary thrombosis (the formation of a blood clot in the heart), Talbert died at fifty-seven in 1923.²¹

Two years after Terrell's visit to Des Moines, Mary B. Talbert came to the city. Talbert's visit was a major event and leaders of both the state and African American political and social organizations hosted several events and receptions in her honor. Talbert was treated with such prestige that the *Iowa Bystander* in 1917 described her visit as a "royal reception." Talbert was hosted and escorted around the city by attorney Sam Brown, the first president of the Des Moines branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and his wife, Sue Brown, who was a founder of Talbert Club in Des Moines.

An active clubwoman and member of Iowan elite black society, Sue Brown served as the business manager of the NACW, a national office. She was also founder and editor of the *Iowa Colored Woman*. Brown had a close working relationship with Margaret Murray Washington, former NACW President and wife of Booker T. Washington. After Booker T. Washington's death in 1915, Brown commissioned a portrait of him from acclaimed African American artist Henry Tanner. She then worked

²¹ Lillian Serece Williams, "Talbert, Mary Morris Burnett," in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3;209-211; Lillian Serece Williams, *Strangers in the Land of Paradise: The Creation of an African American Community in Buffalo, New York, 1900-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Anita Nahal and Lopez D. Matthews, Jr., "African American Women and the Niagara Movement, 1905—1909," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 32, no. 2 (2008).

with Iowan black clubwomen to raise money for the prestigious commission. Today, the portrait is one of the most recognizable images of Washington and is heralded as one of Tanner's greatest works of art. A week before Talbert's visit to Des Moines, the portrait was unveiled for the first time at the sixteenth annual Iowa State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs convention. A week later, Joe and Sue Brown, escorted Talbert to an exclusive reception hosted by Iowa Governor W.L. Harding. Following the reception, the second unveiling of Henry Tanner's portrait of Washington took place in the Iowa Hall of History portrait gallery. Talbert continued her tour of the city with several public appearances, luncheons, and dinners. On one evening, she delivered a speech at the St. Paul's A.M.E. church and was given a special reception in her honor by the Mary B. Talbert Club. It was a special moment indeed for the African Americans of Des Moines to see the woman for whom this organization was named. As a living memorial, the Talbert Club reception gave its members an opportunity to celebrate their namesake and show her all their work.²²

Talbert came back to Des Moines on several other occasions and was very well received each time. In 1920, the *Iowa Bystander* reported she gave "one of the most forceful lectures ever given in the city" to an enthusiastic crowd of 300. Talbert's "lecture tour" was hosted and entertained by the Talbert Club and a slew of receptions, luncheons and dinners.

²² "Mrs. Talbert Given Royal Reception By Des Moines Citizens," *Iowa Bystander*, June 1, 1917; Jack Lufkin, "Brown, Samuel Joe and Sue M. Brown," in *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*, Marvin Bergman, David Hudson, and Loren Horton, eds. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), 61-63; "Henry Tanner and Booker T. Washington: Iowa Story Behind the Portrait," *Palimpsest* Vol 72, no 1 (Spring 1991), 18-19)

Sue Brown understood the value of memorializing African American history in public spaces and the power of public commemoration. Brown, heralded for her clubwork, community organizing, and being the first woman president of the Des Moines NAACP, was also a pioneer of African American public history. In addition to her central role in commissioning Tanner's Booker T. Washington portrait, Brown had an entire catalogue of publicly commemorating African Americans throughout the early 20th century. As an active memorializer and memory crafter, she served as an organizer, fundraiser, and trustee of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Home.

Moreover, for Brown, the founding, presence, and community service of the Talbert Club was a statement about the significance of Talbert's continued work as a national leader on behalf of African American women all over the country. Brown often held and led Talbert Club meetings at her home, where members participated in citizenship classes and discussed "the political questions as they affect women today." In one citizenship class they discussed "New Citizenship." These classes demonstrate that the Talbert Club grappled with understanding how the activism of black women could expand the citizenship rights for all African Americans during Jim Crow.²³

Talbert embraced the black public history inspired by Talbert club members that had spread across the nation. When the Mary Talbert Art Club in Helena, Montana hosted a "Frederick Douglass and Lincoln Memorial Program" in February 1923, the program consisted of a memorial song written and sung by club members, "Fathers of the Negro Race and Club Movement Among Negro Women" presentation, and the

²³ "Mrs. Brown Thanks Contributors," *Iowa Bystander*, July 30, 1920; "Locals," *Iowa Bystander*, July 30, 1920; "Who's Who in Des Moines Locals," *Iowa Bystander*, November 18, 1920; "Mrs. Talbert Delivers Forceful Address to Enthusiastic Audience," *Iowa Bystander*, January 23, 1920.

reading of the “Frederick Douglas Memorial Proclamation issued by Mrs. Mary B. Talbert.”²⁴ In the 1920s and 1930s, Talbert Clubs existed in Portsmouth, Ohio, Gary Indiana, and Lincoln, Nebraska.²⁵ One of the most documented Talbert clubs was in Richmond, Indiana. The Mary B. Talbert Club in Richmond was founded in 1922 for women who wanted to do something in their “leisure time.” Having worked with Mary Talbert when she was President of the NACW, founder Gertrude Carter and the twelve original members chose to name this new club after her. Carter, like Sue Brown of Des Moines, was inspired from her work with Talbert and was instrumental in memorializing her through naming on a local level. Talbert club secretary Lucille Richardson was also co-chairman of the Historian Committee and most likely wrote a brief history included in a 1925 program book. The history ended with a declaration that the Talbert Club was “Happy in its work of “Lifting As we Climb,” the motto of the NACW. The Talbert Club Slogan was “Read, Study and Be Informed” and green and white were official club colors. In alignment with the NACW, the Talbert Club motto was

“O Step by Step we reach the heights,

Our forces to combine.

We’ll work for right with all our might,

Lifting as we climb.”

Black clubwomen felt a tangible connection with the NACW based on their activities in their local communities and participation in State Federations of Colored Women’s Club. The connection was even more pronounced for clubs named after

²⁴ “Memorial Program St. James Church,” *The Helena Daily Independent*, February 11, 1923.

²⁵ “Lincoln Club Honored,” *Lincoln State Journal*, June 29, 1928; “To Present Prizes To Local Students,” *Portsmouth Times*, June 13, 1931; Dharathula Millender, *Gary’s Central Business Community* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003).

current and former NACW Presidents.²⁶ Talbert Club members were aware of Talbert's contributions to the Frederick Douglass Home and made sure that they helped keep the public history site going. They often donated money to support the operation of the home as a national African American public history site. Locally, they celebrated "Douglass Day" each February.²⁷

Typical meetings in the Talbert club were held the home of a member, who was deemed the hostess of the meeting. Meetings were opened by "Devotional Leaders", who read bible passages or scriptures, "Club Prayers," like the one written by member Beatrice Tommie Holland, and lead the singing of hymns, like "A Closer Walk With Thee." Previous meeting minutes were read and approved and would be read from the last meeting and approved, perhaps with some amendments. Then, correspondence for those seeking funds for community projects, those thanking the Talbert ladies for their visits to the sick, or flowers sent was reported.²⁸ The ladies of the Richmond Talbert club made visiting the sick, taking them care packages, sending cards, notes, and providing bouquet and sprays flowers a central tenant of their clubwork. The Sick Cards and Flowers Committee often gave reports in meetings, like "Mrs. Boner is improving" and "Mrs. Edna Hamlet and Mrs. Bertha Garrete in Reid Memorial Hospital".²⁹ Members then discussed how they would help meet the needs of those who needed a bright smile, company in the hospital, fresh flowers, and financial support.

²⁶ Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 1, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, 290; Mary B. Talbert Club Booklet, 1963-1964, Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 2, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

²⁷ Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 275-276.

²⁸ Mary B. Talbert Club Booklet, 1966-1967, Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 2, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

²⁹ Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 203.

Other reports came from members who attended community events at the Townsend Community Center, a central space for African American activities in Richmond. Community events at the Townsend Community Center were often in collaboration with other organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association. It was also common for reports and correspondence from other organizations and local churches. For example, the Sojourner Truth club invited the members to attend their 40th anniversary celebration, while "Mrs. Richardson reported that she ask the Phyllis Wheatley Jr. girls to appear in the program for Womans day [sic]."30

Financial reports and accounting were essential aspect of club meetings. Each member paid annual dues, gave additional contributions for different causes, and raised money through events, like a "Pancake Breakfast." Every cent spent had be accounted for because it dictated how much the club was able to give to the community. Club members always discussed and voted on how to spend club funds. Funds were also used to send Talbert Club officers to the Indiana State Federation of Women's Clubs annual meetings. After attending the state convention in Burlington, Indiana as the Talbert Club delegate Mrs. Ada Ware gave "a very splendid report." With expenditures totaling \$34.21, she suggested "ways of raising money." Ware was cognizant of the sacrifice it took to provide funds for her to represent the Talbert Club at the state convention and made sure to bring back all the exciting details for those who were unable to attend.³¹

³⁰ Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 1, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, 285, 287.

³¹ Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 1, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, 204.

Talbert Club meeting minutes also provided a deeper understanding of the *culture of recognition* developed by black clubwomen. While the recording of club officers like the President, Vice President, and Treasurer were typical of meeting minutes, the Talbert Club listed every person's name who participated in club meeting. Hosts were always listed and thanked for providing delicious refreshments or meals. Opening up their homes to their friends was an honor for each hostess. Special consideration was given to provide a comfortable atmosphere for fellow club members and guests. These meetings were events where black women could discuss important community service projects and causally socialize in a safe space, which made the hostess role essential to the success of the meeting.

Occasionally, meeting attendees also could look forward to special recognitions, such as a "mystery box" to be won. Serving as a club officers were prized positions and respected service contribution to both the club and community. Mrs. Lucile Richardson served as Talbert Club secretary for almost 50 years and not only was "rising vote of thanks" given to her for her service a "tax" of 50 cents was collected to give her an appreciation gift. Out of town guests, often attended meetings and were recognized for their accomplishments in their hometowns. For example, in one meeting "Mr. McConnell" was celebrated for being invited to speak to the Richmond High School Social Studies class as a recipient of the Mary B. Talbert Scholarship. The Talbert Scholarship enabled him to be the "first and youngest Negro to be hired in the state of Michigan as a parole officer..."³²

³² Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 1, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, 161-163.

One of the most important projects the Talbert Club developed and established was the Mary B. Talbert Junior Girls (Junior Girls). The Junior Girls was an opportunity for seasoned clubwomen to involve children and young women into club activities. It also helped serve as a launchpad for political engagement. The Junior Girls, for example, participated in a local Civil Rights March on May 17, 1964.³³ While some Talbert Junior Girls operated out of established Talbert Clubs, others were created independently like the Mary Talbert Jr. Women's Club organized in 1946 in Raleigh, North Carolina.³⁴

Another NACW leader that black women were inspired to honor was Mary McLeod Bethune. Born in 1875 as the fifteenth of seventeen children to formerly-enclaved parents in rural Mayesville, South Carolina, Bethune's life was transformed after she received a scholarship to attend the Scotia Seminary for Negro Girls. She understood the power of an education for African Americans in the Jim Crow South and made it her life's mission to provide opportunities for young people. In 1904, she founded the Daytona Literacy and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls with just a \$1.50. Bethune worked tirelessly to maintain the school and obtain the money needed to keep it growing. She was successful in both securing the finances needed to keep the school running and expanding the school into a co-ed high school and then a junior college. By 1924, the school merged with Cookman Institute and was renamed Bethune-Cookman College.

³³ Mary B. Talbert Record Book 1953-1961, "Oct 1, 1959, Minutes", Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 1, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, 203-206.

³⁴ "Fiftieth Anniversary Convention of the North Carolina Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, Program Booklet, 1959," Alta M. Jett Collection, 1916-1986, Box 2, Folder 2, M 495, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

While working to build up her school, Bethune gained a national reputation as an admired educator of black youth. She also became a respected clubwoman. She became integrated into the National Association of Colored Women through her work with local black women's clubs in Daytona and then as president of the Florida Federation of Colored Women's Clubs from 1917 to 1925. In 1925, she was elected president of the NACW. As a visionary, Bethune oversaw the purchase of the NACW's first building headquarters, which was "the first time that a national black organization was designed to function in Washington, D.C."³⁵ Bethune was one of the most influential and beloved presidents in the NACW's history. Her strong will for justice and desire to create platforms for the distinct issues black women faced made her the "acknowledged representative of America's black women."³⁶

The NACW's organizational structure during the Great Depression shifted to focus on the inner workings of the organization and promote traditional values for women. Bethune saw a need for a national political body. She launched her vision into the creation of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), which became one of the most important political African American organizations of the twentieth century. The NCNW purpose was to advocate and facilitate African American women's political connections with the federal government. Bethune's national prominence also facilitated the life-long friendship and political alliance with Eleanor Roosevelt. When African Americans were suffering immensely during the Great Depression, Bethune's position as the Director of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration and the only

³⁵ Elaine M. Smith, "Bethune, Mary McLeod," in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1;99.

³⁶ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 251-252.

woman on President Franklin Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet" ensured that African Americans would receive federal assistance and relief from New Deal programs. Bethune went on to be the advisor to four United States Presidents, and maintained her relationship with African American organizations locally and nationally. She was the first female President of the Association of the Study of Negro Life, and helped establish the World Center for Women's Archives in 1939 and the National Archives of Black Women's History in 1939. At the time of her death from a heart attack in 1955, she was one of the most influential African Americans in the nation. Historian Joyce Hanson argues that the "depth and breadth of her political activities" was focused on "changing social, economic, and political institutions that shaped collective opinion."³⁷ Bethune's momentous leadership spanned five decades and her life illustrated the triumphs and achievement possible for African American women in the midst of racism, discrimination, and sexism.

While there is sporadic evidence suggesting that Bethune Clubs were in existence as early as the 1920s, the majority of available documented sources, including newspapers and club records, indicate they began forming in the early 1930s. In 1932, Bethune Clubs existed in Marked Tree, Arkansas and Fort Wayne, Indiana.³⁸ By the 1940s, organizations named after Mary McLeod Bethune were national in scope. The black women who established Bethune clubs were inspired by Bethune's dynamic leadership in founding Bethune-Cookman College, her election as president of the NACW and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, her influence with

³⁷ Joyce A. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune & Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 3.

³⁸ "Bethune Club Celebrates 2d Anniversary [sic]," *The Chicago Defender*, December 16, 1933; "Fort Wayne, Ind.," *The Chicago Defender*, August 13, 1932.

Franklin Roosevelt's Presidential Administration, and her creation of most influential black women's political organization of the 20th century, the National Council of Negro Women.³⁹ In Wilson, North Carolina black women renamed their organization in honor of Bethune. The Federated Club of Wilson was founded in 1917 and became the Mary McLeod Bethune Civic Club in 1937. Club member Norma Darden, who became friends with Bethune when she worked as a teacher in the early days of the Bethune Training School, led the campaign for renaming. Because club members were so impressed with a speech Bethune delivered at the North Carolina Federation of Colored Women's Clubs annual conference years before, Darden had few dissenters when the idea was proposed.⁴⁰

Like the women in Wilson, black women in Phoenix were inspired by hearing Bethune speak in person. The Mary Bethune Club in Phoenix, Arizona was established in December 1938 when "a group of wide-awake [socially conscious] young matrons...decided to organize themselves into a club." They joined the Phoenix City Federation of Colored Women and were embraced by seasoned black clubwomen of the city. Bethune Club member and journalist Hazel Farmer reported in the *Chicago Defender* that "All federated club women are delighted with the forward move on the part of these talented young women and welcome them into the fold."⁴¹

In Detroit, Michigan, the Mary Bethune Club was established in February of 1940 with the purpose of raising "the standards of Negro Womanhood in America—

³⁹ The National Council of Negro Women served as the political arm of black women's activism. Though some of the older generation of black clubwomen thought it was a slight to the National Association of Colored Women, many more were proud of Bethune's ever climbing achievements as a one of the most prominent African American leaders in the nation.

⁴⁰ "Federated Club Started in 1917," *The Wilson Daily Times*, July 2, 1976.

⁴¹ Hazel Farmer, "The May Bethune Club Becomes A Member of Phoenix Federation," *The Chicago Defender*, December 17, 1938; Rebecca Stiles Taylor, "Activities of Women's National Organizations," *The Chicago Defender*, June 24, 1939.

educationally, morally and socially.” Members included local women and could boast of having international members from across the Great Lakes in Windsor, Ontario. This Bethune Club may have also been organized to help in planning the “Seventy-Five Years of Negro Progress Exposition” and arrangements for Bethune’s visit to Detroit for the event.⁴² It was not uncommon for the clubs to be established to help organize large events. The Bethune Club in Des Moines, Iowa began in 1938 to assist with the planning of the Central Association of Colored Women conference. In tune with the new wave of black clubwomen’s activities and an active memorializer herself, Sue Brown was instrumental in the creation and “was made honorary president.”⁴³

Bethune also inspired clubs named in her honor because of her work in the National Youth Administration (NYA). In November 1936, Bethune was hosted at a reception in Washington, D.C. where she spoke about her official duties as NYA Federal Advisor as well as the club work of the National Association of Colored Women. So inspired by Bethune’s words Mrs. Rhodes suggested that the women present form a new club named after Bethune. Before the end of the reception, officers were chosen and the Bethune Club was officially established.⁴⁴ Bethune’s ties to the NYA also encouraged young men to memorialize her. In Quoddy, Maine young men being trained through the NYA formed the Dr. Bethune Technical Club “in honor of the outstanding and distinguished work...being done by Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune.” They hoped their club would be the first of many formed by NYA youth in honor of Bethune.⁴⁵

⁴² “Women Organize Mary Bethune Club,” *The Detroit Tribune*, March 2, 1940; “Didja Know?.....” *The Detroit Tribune*, April 20, 1940.

⁴³ “Iowa Women Form a Mary Bethune Club,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 7, 1938.

⁴⁴ Jeanette Carter, “News of the Heart of the Nation: Washington, D.C.,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 7, 1936.

⁴⁵ “NYA Youths Form First Bethune Club,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 14, 1941; “Quoddy Village Spreads Democracy Under ‘VV,’” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 4, 1942; For more on Quoddy

Bethune naming memorialization had a significant connection to the branches of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). In Summit, New Jersey and Altoona, Pennsylvania Bethune Clubs were organized in the 1940s and described as being a part of local Young Women's Christian Association branches.⁴⁶ In Altoona, the Mary Bethune Study Club was organized in 1945. It had 30 members by 1952. Organizational meeting events took place at the Y.W.C.A. building, and they also hosted cultural events such as a 1948 art exhibit featuring a "series of water colors illustrating 12 Negro spirituals" by African American artist Ann Sawyer Berkley.⁴⁷ In High Point, North Carolina, the Y.W.C.A. was named after Bethune.⁴⁸ The Mary Bethune Business and Professional Women's Club, comprised of members from East St. Louis, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri, helped to reestablish the African American branch of the Y.W.C.A. in 1941.⁴⁹

Unlike Terrell and Talbert Clubs that were organized in the late 19th and early 20th century, Bethune Clubs continued to form well after the death of Bethune in 1955. In Morganton, North Carolina the Mary Bethune Woman's Civic Club was organized in 1964 with the motto, "Continuing to Lift as We Climb."⁵⁰ The NCNW did an excellent

National Youth Administration projects see, Federal Security Agency: War Manpower Commission, "Final Report of the National Youth Administration Fiscal Years 1936—1943," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944).

⁴⁶ "A Typical Month at Summit Y.W.C.A. Shows Full Program," *The Summit Herald*, May 16, 1946; "YWCA to Hear of Work in China at Twilight Tea," *The Summit Herald*, November 22, 1945.

⁴⁷ Barbara Pendleton, "Altoona," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 18, 1952; "Noted Artist to Exhibit Works Here Under Auspices of Y Club," *The Altoona Mirror*, October 13, 1948.

⁴⁸ High Point Enterprise, "High Point United Appeal: Give... The United Way," 1960, 5.

⁴⁹ "Mary Bethune Club Pledges YWCA Support," *The Chicago Defender*, March 8, 1941; "Mary Gladden Head of Mary Bethune Club," *The Chicago Defender*, October 5, 1940.

⁵⁰ North Carolina Federation of Negro Women Clubs, Young Adult & Youth Clubs, Incorporated, "Celebrating 100 Years: A Century of a Legacy that We Can Believe In!!!" Program Booklet, 2009

job of keeping Bethune's legacy alive and relevant, which helped inspire a new generation of black women invested in memorializing Bethune through naming.

Black clubwomen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century prided themselves on recognizing African American women that embodied the best ideals of black womanhood. National club leaders and philanthropists, Mary Church Terrell, Mary B. Talbert, and Mary McCleod Bethune represented the work that black women were doing all over the nation. In recognizing their great deeds through naming memorialization, black women were also recognizing themselves.

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC BUILDING NAMED MEMORIALIZATION

Segregated neighborhoods afforded African Americans an insulated sphere of influence with local governments during the Jim Crow area. One of the most significant areas of influence was in naming memorials, particularly public buildings such as schools, libraries, public housing, and community centers honoring black women. As Jim Crow ended, however, their influence became more tenuous and named memorials on some public buildings began to fade. The named memorials of Ella Reid, Ida B. Wells, and Celia Dial Saxon demonstrate how successful and how tenuous the public building commemorations of black women were as Jim Crow gave way to integration.

Though the Tyler, Texas community had a history of naming memorialization dating as far back to the 1890s, it was primarily of black men. Some examples include Emmet Scott High School, T.J. Austin Elementary School and Dunbar School. Out of seven schools named after African Americans from the 1890s to the 1950s, only one was named in honor of an African American woman. Mamie G. Griffin Elementary School was named in honor of the longtime educator and principal in 1959 for her 47 years of service.¹ Two years later, the community chose to honor another black woman through the 1961 naming of Ella Reid Public Library.

¹ Rodney Lamar Atkins, *Remembering When We Were Colored in Tyler, Texas: Volume 1* (Self Published, 2007), 23.

In a November 8, 1961 letter to Tyler City Manager Casey Fannin, P.R. Robinett and Willie Mae Kelly requested on behalf of the Negro Public Library Board that its name be changed. Speaking on behalf of “the entire Negro population,” of Tyler, Robinett and Kelly explained that though Reid “has pass on some years ago, yet her life work cannot be forgotton by those whom she served and gave a ray of sunshine and hope as she spent her days with us here on earth [sic].”² Kelly, the head librarian at the Negro Public Library (NPL) since 1947, recorded in her circulation report that many “calls and Congradulations [sic]” were given in support of the library name change.³ Reid, who worked as a nurse, was a prominent African American member of the Tyler community. She and her family were well-known because of her profession and one of her two daughters was a beloved principal at Emmet Scott Jr. High School. At the time of her death in 1955, she was the oldest living member of the St. John Episcopal Church, having taken her first communion in 1893. Her memorialization over 5 years after her death illustrates her personal significance to the African American community.

Black women librarians like Kelly, worked at the NPL from its inception in the basement of Bethlehem Baptist Church. In 1950, the NPL was given a permanent building in an African American segregated space. Kelly worked diligently to secure new books and host programs. Black clubwomen assisted in giving and soliciting book donations. Others donated decorative items, like “the mirror given the library for use in the ladies rest room.”⁴ Kelley was so engaged with and attuned to the needs of young and

² P.R. Robinett and Willie Mae Kelly to Casey Fannin, November 8, 1961, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

³ “Circulation Report,” November 1961, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 2, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

⁴ “Report for March, 1952,” March 1952, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

old patrons that she requested materials from libraries from near and far, including Northwestern University.⁵

The NPL became a central community space that African American women's club utilized for organizational meetings, special events, and to celebrate their achievements. One event featured Willie Burk Anderson, a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School in Dallas, Texas. In October 1951, the "charming" Toki Johnson, a reporter of the Pittsburgh Courier, was a guest of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority's annual festival with more than 150 guests in attendance.⁶ Kelly also planned special programs like "Children Book Week," story hours, "Summer Reading Program," and Negro History Week.⁷ Black teachers like Mattye Van Potter brought their elementary students to learn about the function of the library and get their own personal library cards. Kelley provided the latest books to students for "summer study" such as *Young People of West Africa* (1961) by Charles Roy and *Careers in Research Science* (1961) by Theodore Wachs, Jr.⁸ Yearlong programs were provided internally from Kelley as head librarian and externally by black women in sororities and clubs.

Because the NPL also served as a community center for black women's activities, it seemed fitting that it be named in honor of a black woman. While the records available do not indicate exactly why Reid was chosen to be memorialized, she obviously was

⁵ Willie Mae Kelley to Mary L. Hilton, November 10, 1952, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 2, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

⁶ "Report for October 1951," October 1951, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 10, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

⁷ "Annual Report of Circulations 1961," Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 3, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia; "Circulation Report February 1963," February 1963, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

⁸ "Report for May 1962," May 1962, Ella Reid Public Library Records, 1941-1969, Box 1, Folder 1, Historic Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.

heralded as a significant community member. Perhaps Reid was an active participant and organizer of the events held at the NPL. Perhaps she represented the best of black womanhood of Tyler. Whatever the reason, it was clear that she was beloved and a representative of black women of her community.

Kelley was a keenly innovative librarian, but also a public historian in her own right. She helped cultivate a space for black women to celebrate themselves and through the *culture of recognition* established a memorial to both them and Ella Reid through naming memorialization. Kelley worked as a memory crafter by providing opportunities for young and old alike to learn about black history and the means for them to see the good deeds of those living in their own communities. Kelly served as NPL librarian almost another decade and would ultimately see its closure. Kelly's hard work, however, could not stop the changes that came with integration.

The City Commission funded the library from its earliest days, but the request for relocation to a central location had an unexpected result. The Carnegie Library, funded by the Carnegie Foundation, was notoriously racist in its policies as African American teachers were reportedly forced to check out books through the janitor and pick them up at the back door of the library. Despite being told of these segregated policies in 1945, the Carnegie Foundation dismissed the issue saying it was a local matter. As the sun begin to set on Jim Crow public policies twenty years later, the Carnegie Library slowly integrated. By 1968, the City Commission decided to no longer fund the Ella Reid Library since most patrons were taking advantage of the newly integrated Carnegie Library. In 1968, the Ella Reid Library was closed with its staff and board incorporated

into the Carnegie Board and Library structure.⁹ The integration of Carnegie was no doubt symbolic of African American progress and access to better facilities and materials. It was also symbolic of the erosion of African American public facilities controlled by and catering specifically to African American patrons. As the public domain of libraries and schools became more integrated, the public commemorations of African American women displayed on public buildings diminished or were completely erased, as in the case of the Ella Reid Public Library.

In spite of the changing landscape of African American communities following the Civil Rights Movement, some memorials of black women endured. The housing projects named after Ida B. Wells and Celia D. Saxon in Chicago, IL and Columbia, SC respectively are two examples. The decision to name these public housing projects after black women was precipitated by grass roots efforts to publicly commemorate their legacies. Though public perception and physical conditions of both public housing facilities would drastically change over the course of the twentieth century, their named memorialization served as some of the most prominent and permanent commemorations of African American women.

Ida Bell Wells was born on July 16, 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi and became the most famous anti-lynching advocate in American history. Though Wells was born enslaved on a plantation, by age three she was emancipated. Wells came of age during the Reconstruction Era and benefited from the first public schools established to educate African Americans in the South. She and her siblings, sometimes accompanied by her mother, attended Shaw University (Rust College). At just sixteen she lost both her

⁹ Atkins, , *Remembering When We Were Colored in Tyler, Texas*, 53-55.

parents to a yellow fever epidemic in 1878. A year later she moved to Memphis, Tennessee, earned her teacher certification, and began teaching in the Shelby county school district. In Memphis, Wells became a vocal advocate of African American civil rights. Refusing to move from the first class ladies' coach car to the segregated car for African Americans, she sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad after she was forced off of the train in 1884. She won her case, but the decision was overturned by the Tennessee State Supreme Court as Jim Crow laws began encroaching on the citizenship rights of African Americans across the nation. Wells also expressed her civil rights activism through writing articles published in local and national African American newspapers. By 1899, she was an owner and editor of Memphis' *Free Speech and Headlight* and, eventually, was able to support herself financially as a journalist.¹⁰

In March 1892, Wells' life trajectory changed forever when three of her friends were lynched. Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Steward were successful African American grocers with a thriving business. Jealous of their success, a competing white grocer led the state sanctioned charge to jail, shoot, and hang all three black men. Wells was so incensed by the brutal and unjust nature of the lynchings of her friends and other African Americans across the nation that she wrote an editorial that eventually became "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases." "Southern Horrors" gained Wells a national and international audience but whites in Memphis were not at all impressed. After receiving death threats, she moved to New York and then Chicago.

¹⁰ Wanda A. Hendricks, "Wells-Barnett, Ida B.," in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 337—340. Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wand, 2009); Paula Giddings, *Ida A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Amistad, 2008); Patricia Ann Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2001); Mildred Thompson, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman, 1893-1930* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990).

There she married Ferdinand Barnett in 1895. Wells-Barnett left an indelible mark on the city through her pioneering suffrage advocacy, community organizing, and unrelenting activism toward gaining equality and justice for African Americans. She helped established, the Ida B. Wells Club, the Negro Fellowship League, and the Alpha Suffrage Club, the first suffrage club for African American women in Illinois and among the first in the nation.

Her popularity continued to grow as a nationally renowned activist. She helped establish the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the 1910s, and in the 1920s was a featured speaker at Universal Negro Improvement Association meetings. Wells-Barnett was well connected with prominent African Americans and liberal whites across the country, but her outspoken and bold personality made her unpopular at times within these elite circles. Yet, she never stopped being a “crusader for justice.” She explained in her autobiography, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and it does seem to me that notwithstanding all these social agencies and activities there is not that vigilance which should be exercised in the preservation of our rights.”¹¹ It was her vigilance that made her one of the most admired women of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. After her death in 1931, Chicagoans embraced her as one of their most important leaders and have kept her public memory alive.¹²

In the mid-1930s, the Chicago Housing Authority was scheduled to build the South Parkway Garden Apartments public housing project “diagonally across the street,” from where Ida B. Wells-Barnett lived at 3624 Grand [Martin Luther King] Boulevard.

¹¹ Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, Alreda M. Duster, ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 415.

¹² Wanda A. Hendricks, “Wells-Barnett, Ida B.,” 3; 337—340. .

However, a unanimous vote in an Ida B. Wells Club meeting led the black clubwomen to launch an “intensive campaign” to change the name to the Ida B. Wells Homes. They formally petitioned the Chicago Housing Authority to change the name in January of 1939, and by April 1939, it was renamed. The Wells Club was founded by Wells-Barnett in 1893 and it was the first black women’s club in Chicago. Historian Wanda A. Hendricks argues that “Known as the mother of the women’s clubs in Illinois, it placed African American women squarely in the reform movement in the Midwest and served as a model for many newly created associations.”¹³ By the 1930s when the Wells Homes were being built, the Wells Club had good working relationships with African American leaders and was one of the most prominent organizations of the city. They were able to wield their influence to create a namesake of their beloved founder. Wells-Barnett’s daughter, Alfreda Duster, recalled the process that led up to the naming: “the Ida B. Wells Club and the Federation [of Women’s Clubs], the YMCA and other groups, somehow got this idea that it should not be named just for anything, but it should have a name that was significant in the community. Several names were proposed and the overwhelming response in letters to the Chicago Housing Authority was that it be named the Ida B. Wells Homes.”¹⁴

Once the decision was made, Chicago Housing Authority Commissioner Robert Tayler proclaimed, “It is singularly appropriate...to name this project as a memorial to a woman who more than half a century ago began to wage an uncompromising fight for these

¹³ Wanda Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 17.

¹⁴ Marcia Greenle, “Alfreda Duster: Oral History Interview,” in *The Black Women Oral History Project*, vol. 1, ed. Ruth Edmonds Hill (Westport: Meckler, 1991), 133; Duster went on to explain that despite her mother being Ida B. Wells-Barnett at the time of her death in 1931, the naming committee decided to condense her name without the hyphen.

principles [sic].”¹⁵ Because of their influence, Wells Club members were included in all phases of the housing development from groundbreaking ceremonies to the dedication. Club President, Ida K. Brown, represented club members and other community organizations that banded together behind the naming at these events.¹⁶

The Wells Homes represented African American progress and recognition by the federal government for quality housing. The public housing was designed to house African Americans who lived in an area described as “one of the worst slum areas of the country.” The *New York Star & Amsterdam News* proclaimed the Wells Homes to be the “Largest of Its Kind for Negroes In the World.” It was indeed a moment of national pride for African Americans because it demonstrated an intentional effort on behalf of the federal government to invest in the well-being of African Americans living in poverty. Built on 47 acres with 1,662 units, the Wells Homes was the first and largest for African Americans in Chicago in the 1940s and cost over \$8.7 million to construct.¹⁷ The attachment of Wells-Barnett’s name to this feat bolstered the magnitude of the moment because she was such a well-known national African American figure that represented the best of black womanhood, tenacity, activism, and fearless journalism in the ongoing fight for black liberation. Meredith Johns of *The Chicago Defender* boasted that the

¹⁵ “‘City In City’ Honors Ida B. Wells,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 9, 1954; Dorothy Sterling, afterword to *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*, by Ida B. Wells-Barnett, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 196; “Want Project Named After Ida B. Wells,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 28, 1939; “South Park Housing Project Named For Ida B. Wells, Noted Journalist,” *The Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1939; “Gerda Lerner, ‘Early Community Work of Black Club Women,’” *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (1974), 161.

¹⁶ “Lay Ida B. Wells Homes Cornerstone,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 21, 1941; “Picket Line Mars Housing Project’s Dedication: Strife Hounds Wells Unit Up To Very Last,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 2, 1940.

¹⁷ The total cost was \$8,769,000; The estimated total cost per unit was \$5,305 versus \$6350 for Jane Addams Houses, \$5645 for Julia Lathrop Homes and \$5728 for the Trumbull Park Homes; Wayne McMillen, “Public Housing in Chicago, 1946,” *Social Service Review* 20, no. 2 (1946), 152, 153; The University of Chicago Law Review, “Public Housing in Illinois,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 8, no 2 (1941), 306.

Wells Homes “commemorate a leader who walked most of her way alone and who braved countless threats and jeers—many of them hurled by her own people—in order that the American Negro might also be served justice [sic].”¹⁸

Wells-Barnett’s legacy was intertwined with the public housing project and was celebrated with milestone events. For example, the 25th Year Anniversary was celebrated with a 2-day festival in July designated as “Wells Day” through an official proclamation from Mayor Richard Daley. The 2-day festival was a momentous celebration for Chicagoans from city government officials to current and former residents of what some fondly referred to as “Wellstown.” The jam packed schedule of events included a parade, craft displays, a swimming exhibition, a talent show, a fashion show, vendor booths, historical presentations and an essay contest. Wells Day was a moment to celebrate the progress of African Americans, along with the success of the Chicago Housing Authority’s investment in the thriving Wells Homes. As a central theme of both festival events, Wells-Barnett’s legacy was celebrated for her contributions to both Chicago and African Americans all over the nation.¹⁹

By the late 20th century, the Wells Homes were synonymous with poverty, violence, gangs, dilapidation, and urban blight. The very “slums” the Wells Homes were built to eradicate from black neighborhoods had become the living quarters for some of the city’s poorest and most underemployed residents. Journalists Bill Granger’s father had helped build the Wells Homes in the 1930s. Six decades later, he and two homicide

¹⁸ “Chicago Home Project Open: Development Largest of Its Kind for Negroes In the World,” *New York Star and Amsterdam News*, January 25, 1941; “‘City In City’ Honors Ida B. Wells,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 9, 1954.

¹⁹ “2-Day Fete Will Mark 25th Year of Wells Homes,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1966; “A Nostalgic Look at Ida Wells Homes,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 12, 1966.

detectives investigated a murder in the dilapidated structure whose elevators Granger called “death traps” and graffitied hallways “smelled of urine and human waste.” Despite it being a typical windy winter in Chicago, the residents they visited sat in the living room with the windows open and very little clothing. Because residents were unable to regulate the temperature in their individual units, they could become extremely overheated.²⁰ What once represented the very pinnacle of African American public housing was now one of the most uninhabitable and unsafe places to live in the nation. Certainly, the Wells Club could not have imagined this to be the future of an enterprise they had championed and supported. In 1989, journalist Daniel Ruth described the Homes as “a landmark representing the hopes and fears of its namesake...What would Ida B. Wells think of the Ida B. Wells Homes?” A haunting question indeed. The changing symbolism of the Wells homes illustrated the enduring inequality and systemic injustice towards African Americans in the United States. The Wells Homes represented the very best and worst of federal funding for the benefit of African American families.²¹

In 2002, the last of the Wells Homes were demolished, effectively ending its six decades as one of the longest public naming memorializations of an African American woman from the Jim Crow era. A new and mixed income housing development called Oakwood Shores was built in its place. The closing of the Wells Homes provided a new pathway to memorialize Wells’ legacy akin to other public memorials of African American women. While Wells’ home in Chicago had been listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1974 and residents of her hometown of Holly Springs, Mississippi opening

²⁰ Bill Granger, “Much has changed since projects were built,” *Daily Herald*, June 6, 1995.

²¹ Daniel Ruth, “Wells’ on PBS tells life story of Chicago hero,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 19, 1989.

the building of the Ida B. Wells-Barnett Museum in 2005, her legacy was most prominently attached to the Wells Homes. The tearing down of the homes jeopardized Wells' public history presence in Chicago. The Ida B. Wells Commemorative Art Committee were organized and launched in 2008 with the goal of erecting a sculpture of Wells in the historic African American neighborhood Bronzeville in south Chicago. With Wells' great-granddaughter as an active memorializer on the committee, the sculpture memorial is significant to both Wells-Barnett's enduring legacy and all those connected to the Wells Homes for over half a century. Michelle Duster noted, "I want people to remember Ida B. Wells the woman, not Ida B. Wells the housing community...I think who she was as a woman got lost when it was attached to the housing projects."²²

The naming memorialization of Celia Dial Saxon in Columbia, South Carolina had elements similar to the public memorials of Ella Reid and Ida B. Wells. Like Ella Reid, Saxon's naming memorialization was attached to a public building in the segregated African American community that did not survive the changing community after the fall of Jim Crow. Like Ida. B. Wells, Saxon's legacy was memorialized through the naming of a public housing project for African Americans. However, in this case Saxon's naming remained a part of the transformed public housing in the 21st Century.

²² Angela Terrell, "Black Landmarks," *The Washington Post*, August 3, 1974; Caryn Rousseau, "Sculpture honoring Wells to be built in Chicago," *Associated Press*, December 28, 2011; Amanda Murphy, "Ida B. Wells monument to come to Bronzeville," *The Columbia Chronicle*, November 21, 2011; Ida B. Wells Monument, "About: The Monument," accessed March 21, 2018, http://www.idabwellsmonument.org/?page_id=109; Ida B. Wells-Barnett Museum: Cultural Center of African American History, "About the Museum: Spires Bolling House," accessed March 21, 2018, <http://idabwellsmuseum.org/spires-bolling-house/>; Belinda Stewart Architects, PA, "Preservation: Ida B. Wells-Barnett Museum & Cultural Center of African American History Renovation," accessed March 21, 2018, <https://belindastewartarchitects.com/preservation/ida-b-wells-barnett-museum-cultural-center-of-african-american-history-renovation/>.

Although Saxon's naming didn't carry the national significance of the Wells Homes, she was a national figure. Celia Dial was born in 1857 during slavery. During Reconstruction she was able to benefit from the first public schools in the South. At twelve she began attending Howard School and by seventeen she became one of the first African Americans to attend and graduate from the University of South Carolina. She earned her teaching certificate from the University's Normal School in 1874 and went back to teach at Howard School. She remained at Howard School for over thirty years. She later went to teach social studies at the cities' first African American high school, Booker T. Washington. In 1890, she married Thomas Saxon and they had two daughters together.

Saxon was one of South Carolina's most active clubwomen and had national ties to prominent figures like Mary McLeod Bethune. In Columbia, Saxon helped establish the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in 1909, the first African American library in the city, and served as president for the Phyllis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association. Saxon was so savvy in her collaborations with white philanthropists and local government officials that she successfully garnered money for projects benefiting African Americans in the city. In 1917, she was instrumental in raising money to establish the Fairwold Home for Delinquent Girls, which was the first and only facility in the city that served young black girls who were more often orphaned than delinquent.

Saxon was admired for her long running teaching career, and helped train African American teachers across the state during her summers. As the treasurer of the Palmetto Teacher Association for almost a decade, she had the respect of her professional

colleagues. The *Palmetto Leader* proclaimed that she was “the best master of exchequer in our state... Money in her hands is as safe as a ‘New York Exchange’ placed in a vault.”²³ As one of the most respected African American women in South Carolina, Saxon continued to teach and invest in the lives of young people until her unexpected death in 1935. Her body lay in state at Booker T. Washington as hundreds came to pay their respects to beloved “Mother Saxon.”

In 1930, the Columbia School Board made the decision to rename the Blossom Street Elementary School. Led by Education Superintendent A.C. Flora, the Columbia School Board decided to transfer the use of the elementary school from white students to black students. At seventy-three years old, Saxon received “the highest honor the city school board can confer” in the renaming of the Blossom Street school to Celia D. Saxon Elementary. Flora explained that Saxon was “an exceptional teacher in many respects...and has an attendance record that has not been equalled [sic]” Indeed, her commitment to African American education in Columbia and South Carolina was unparalleled.²⁴

Her professional career was admired by white and black Columbians and the naming of the elementary school was uncontested. National African American newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the local white mainstream press reported that Saxon “set an example of dependability and devotion to duty worthy of emulation not only by members of her own race, but to white people as well...white and colored

²³ “Welcome! Teachers of the Palmetto Association: State Teachers in Annual Session,” *The Palmetto Leader*, March 28 1925.

²⁴ “Five Thousand Negroes Enrolled,” *The State*, September 7, 1930.

citizens alike should view with approval the action of the school board.”²⁵ While it is unknown if a grass roots campaign petitioned the Columbia School Board to rename the school after Saxon, it is evident that the decision was met with swift approval from local government officials and citizens alike that stretched across the color line.

The naming of Saxon Elementary was a great memorial, but it would not survive the changing landscape of the post-Jim Crow South. In 1968, Saxon Elementary closed and students were moved to a newer building without the Saxon name. The “Ward One” African American community where Saxon Elementary once stood was restructured by Urban renewal, the expansion of the University of South Carolina, and integration of public schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The dismantling of Jim Crow segregation coupled with the redevelopment plans for downtown Columbia, also meant dismantling the named memorial of an African American woman.

Unlike the Ida B. Wells Homes in Chicago, however, Celia Dial Saxon’s memorialization remained a visible entity in Columbia. In 1952, seventeen years after Saxon’s death, the Columbia Housing Authority named a four million dollar public housing project for African Americans in her honor. The Saxon Homes public housing was built to replace “slums [and] back alleys of Columbia” with modern living space. Each of the 400 garden style apartments were fitted with “a gas range, gas water, and space heater, electric refrigerator, electric light, and modern bathrooms.” As they headed into the second half of the 20th century, many African American families were able to

²⁵ “School Named for Negro Woman: Celia Saxon Honored by City Board,” *The State*, September 11, 1930; “South Carolina Teacher Honored,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 20, 1930.

live with indoor plumbing and electricity for the first time in their lives in Saxon Homes.²⁶

Founded in 1934, the Columbia Housing Authority collaborated with its African American Advisory Committee to bestow the named memorial. Comprised of African American male leaders and professionals in Columbia, the Advisory Committee had been working to help provide safe and fair housing for impoverished black communities. C.A. Johnson wielded substantial influence as a member of the Advisory Committee. He worked with Saxon for much of his career as a principal at Booker T. Washington High School, the Palmetto Teacher Association, and as the first African American Supervisor of Schools in Columbia. Saxon was heralded by the African American *Palmetto Leader* as “one of Columbia’s best and most beloved teachers” and an innovator in “many Columbia enterprises, especially as it relates to the Negro race.”²⁷

At the 1954 dedication ceremony, an interracial cadre of city and state leaders came together to mark the momentous occasion. C.A. Johnson gave the “Dedicatory Tribute,” noting that beyond her impeccable teaching record, Saxon’s most “outstanding virtue...was her interest in people, especially the underprivileged.”²⁸ Memory crafters like Johnson understood the significance of recognizing the accomplishments and contributions of African American women like Saxon before the political elite of the city and state. Saxon’s extraordinary life demonstrated the very best of African American educational, professional, and philanthropic excellence despite the harsh realities of the

²⁶ W.R. Bowman, “Saxon Homes Opened Wednesday; Adm. Chase Makes Statements,” *The Palmetto Leader*, April 18, 1953.

²⁷ W.R. Bowman, “Saxon Homes Opened Wednesday; Adm. Chase Makes Statements,” *The Palmetto Leader*, April 18, 1953.

²⁸ “Saxon Homes, 400-Unit Project For Negroes, Is Dedicated Here,” *The State*, May 17, 1954.

segregated South. Attaching Saxon's name to public housing designed to help some of Columbia's most underprivileged echoed her own life's work and embodied the symbolic fervor of African American resilience. In addition to the naming, Saxon's two daughters, Mary Ray Saxon Jackson and Julia Saxon Woodbury, unveiled a large bronze plaque.

The plaque read,

Saxon Homes, erected A.D. 1952 by the Housing Authority of the City of Columbia, S.C...Named in honor of Celia D. Saxon, leader in education, social work and religion.²⁹

Over the next 50 years, Saxon homes were transformed from a symbol of African American progress to a symbol of African American cyclical poverty and crime. Saxon Homes, which once housed new and modern amenities, were dilapidated structures by the end of the twentieth century. In 2000, the Columbia Housing Authority began demolishing Saxon Homes to make way for a new housing development. Yet, unlike the Wells Homes in Chicago, the Columbia Housing Authority decided to keep Saxon's name attached to the revitalized housing. With \$25 million in federal funding, the Columbia Housing Authority created the Celia Saxon Neighborhood, a "mixed community of owner-occupied, single-family homes, rental town houses and apartments for low-income families, and senior cottages."³⁰ The memorial to Celia Saxon survived the Jim Crow Era and was revitalized in the twenty-first century to include her first *and* last name. Not only is the neighborhood named after her, Celia Saxon Street, Celia Saxon Health Center and Celia Saxon [Shopping] Center also bear her name. In addition,

²⁹ "Saxon Homes, 400-Unit Project For Negroes, Is Dedicated Here," *The State*, May 17, 1954.

³⁰ "Water Fun Coming to Celia Saxon Community—Federal Grant Will Pay for Spray Pool, Educational Area at Harden Street Development," *The State*, May 4, 2007.

a 2008 historical marker commemorates both Saxon’s life and Saxon Elementary School. Saxon’s memorialization is unique not only because her naming memorialization endures, but also because it has evolved into a traditional public history memorial. The legacies of Saxon and her memorials live on as a relevant part of the public history of Columbia, South Carolina.³¹

³¹ City of Columbia, Richland County, Resolution R-2007-067, City of Columbia Utilities and Engineering Department, January 9, 2008; Columbia Housing Authority, “Transformation Plan Draft,” City of Columbia, 2012; “‘A Grand and Noble Woman’- Saxon Was One of Few Black Women to Graduate USC After Civil War,” *The State*, October 12, 2008; Historic Columbia Foundation, “Celia Saxon School Honored,” *The Columbia Star*, September 19, 2008; “A List of the New Historic Markers,” *The State*, February 8, 2009; Joey Holleman, “Black History Markers to Spread Knowledge—Little-known Facts are ‘Eye-Opening,’ Columbia Official Says,” *The State*, February 8, 2009.



Figure 4.1
Ida B. Wells Homes, 1942

Farm Security Administration Photograph Collection, Library of Congress



Figure 4.2
Ida B. Wells Homes Dedication Ceremony Flyer, 1940

Works Progress Administration Poster Collection, Library of Congress



Figure 4.3
Celia Dial Saxon

Palmetto Leader, March 28, 1925, South Carolina Historical Newspapers

PART TWO
THE NATIONAL, STATE, & LOCAL STAGE:
USHERING IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S MEMORIALIZATION

CHAPTER 5

MARY McLEOD BETHUNE & THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

On July 10, 1974, the National Park Service marked a tremendous moment in its history as the National Council of Negro Women unveiled the statue of the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C. Fourteen long years of congressional lobbying, extensive fundraising, creative collaborations, and meticulous planning by the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) finally culminated in the memorial of the prominent educator and leader. This was a moment of great significance. Not only was the Bethune Memorial the first and only statue of an African American, it was also the first and only statue of a woman to be erected in Washington, D.C.

On the morning of July 10, Bethune's birthday, an enthusiastic crowd of "more than 18,000" listened to national and local dignitaries deliver inspirational remarks.¹ Robert Berks, the sculptor, was publicly thanked for his creativity and steadfastness. Walter Washington, the first African American mayor of Washington, D.C., presented a city proclamation declaring July 10th Mary McLeod Bethune Day. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress, commended Dorothy Height, President of the NCNW, for her "stick-to-itiveness" in her leadership to

¹ "Bethune Memorial is First Black Statue in the U.S. Capital," *Jet* August 1, 1974, 12.

create the memorial.² Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton expressed his personal “gratitude” to the NCNW for the organization’s “contribution to the National Park system” and delivered an official message on behalf of President Richard Nixon, who stated “it is highly appropriate...that we memorialize the life and achievements of Mary McLeod Bethune.”³

Actress Cicely Tyson then delivered a powerfully moving rendition of Bethune’s *Last Will and Testament*. Bethune’s *Last Will and Testament* was published after her death in 1955 in the national African American magazine *Ebony*. The crowd watched with awe as Tyson brought Bethune’s words to life, eloquently explaining that although Bethune had little to leave in “worldly possessions,” her desire was to leave “distilled principles and policies” that were representative of the essence of her “life’s work.”⁴

Actor Roscoe Lee Brown read from Frederick Douglass’ address at the unveiling of the Freedmen’s Monument dedicated in Lincoln Park over 100 years earlier. Brown replaced Abraham Lincoln’s name with Bethune’s in Douglass’ speech declaring, “on this day in this place in this speech, man becomes woman.”⁵ The Freedmen’s Monument, often referred to as the kneeling slave statue, was for some a display of blacks in subjugation. Bethune being exalted as a national treasure represented liberation and progress through the sacrifice and dedication of African Americans and not white saviors.⁶ Height echoed Brown’s sentiments in her remarks at the unveiling. She proclaimed,

² “Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Dedication Schedule of Events,” July 10—12, 1974, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 84, NCNW Records; “Mary McLeod Bethune—Dedication—Lincoln Park,” Audio Recording Transcription, July 10, 1974, Series 15, Box 5, Folder 86, NCNW Records, 15.

³ Mary McLeod Bethune—Dedication—Lincoln Park,” Audio Recording Transcription, 25.

⁴ Mary McLeod Bethune, “My Last Will and Testament,” *Ebony* August 1955; Mary McLeod Bethune—Dedication—Lincoln Park,” Audio Recording Transcription, 11.

⁵ Mary McLeod Bethune—Dedication—Lincoln Park,” Audio Recording Transcription, 7.

⁶ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 89-128.

this memorial converges two very important streams in American life; a long overdue recognition that black people, brown people, red people, yellow people, have problems, but that there is a Black heritage and contribution that has been made. And the second stream is a tremendous new awakening and recognition of the contribution of women in society. Who could bring them better together than a woman who is also Black, knowing the meaning of double jeopardy?⁷

Height's comments highlighted the distinctive experience and contributions of African Americans to the nation and articulated the intersectional contours of African American women's raced and gendered identity. Though Height was Bethune's "handpicked successor," she was not alone in recognizing the significance of memorializing her amazing life as a tribute to black women everywhere.⁸

As the light blue fabric was pulled away from the gigantic memorial by Height, Secretary Norton, and Mayor Washington exuberant applause and cheers thundered throughout Lincoln Park. The jubilation in the atmosphere as the Bethune-Cookman College choir led the singing of "Lift Every Voice," was as momentous as the large statue. Weighing almost 4,000 pounds on a pedestal six feet from the ground, the Bethune Memorial features Bethune at the glorious height of twelve feet passing her "legacy" to nine feet tall boy and girl statues.⁹ In addition to an engraved plaque mounted on the front of the memorial that credits the NCNW for erecting the monument,

⁷ Mary McLeod Bethune—Dedication—Lincoln Park," Audio Recording Transcription, 19.

⁸ Joyce Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 201.

⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *A Monument to a Monument* from the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House Student Packet, 10-11; Ellen Kathleen Daugherty, "Lifting the Veil of Ignorance: The Visual Culture of African American Racial Uplift," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2004), 259-263; Jenny Woodley, "'Ma is in the Park': Memory, Identity, and the Bethune Memorial," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2017): 21-22.

portions of Bethune's *Last Will and Testament* surround the colossal structure, including "I Leave You Love," "I Leave You Hope," "I Leave You Faith," and "I Leave You, Finally, A Responsibility to Our Young People."

After taking in the breadth of the Bethune Monument, thousands walked from Lincoln Park to the steps of Capitol Hill in the "People's Parade of Dedication," organized in collaboration with Bayard Rustin, who coordinated the seminal March on Washington a decade earlier.¹⁰ This "Celebration March" involved African American organizations from all over the nation "to inspire rededication to the legacy of Mary Bethune and the highest principles of a democratic society." Young and old gathered to mark the momentous occasion of African American pride, as the commemorative celebrations continued with receptions all over the city and culminated in "A Salute to Women Banquet."¹¹ The celebrations continued for two more days with symposiums, concerts, and African American heritage festivals. The three days of star-studded festivities embodied sheer joy from the passionate persistence of the NCNW efforts to create the first and only African American memorial statue in the nation's capital. The Bethune statue symbolized African American excellence and progress, as it ushered in the *golden age* of African American women's memorialization on the national stage.

The process for erecting the Bethune memorial began in 1959. To mark the occasion of the 1963 centennial celebration of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the National Council of Negro Women decided to honor its founder, Mary McLeod Bethune, with a statue in the nation's capital. Led by Height, the NCNW began

¹⁰ Roger Baldwin to Bayard Rustin, December 1, 1970, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 2, NCNW Records.

¹¹ "Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Dedication Schedule of Events," NCNW Records.

conceptualizing the plans to permanently link the two by commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation through the memorialization of Bethune.

The early planning stages of the Emancipation Proclamation centennial was twofold. The first aspect of the memorialization of Bethune was the creation of an educational center that encouraged scholarly research in African American history in a “Negro Historical Archives and Museum,” a training center “for the community leadership of women,” adult continuing education, and a multipurpose room used for meetings, receptions, and community collaborations.¹² The second aspect was the Bethune Statue, which was sanctioned by the federal government to be erected in Lincoln Park. The NCNW explained that “The unfinished tasks of American democracy remain,” and the statue represented “the significant contribution to all that is finest and best in America made by such a distinguished Negro American as Marcy McLeod Bethune...”¹³

With Congressional approval in a Joint Resolution and the support of President Eisenhower to erect a memorial statue in Lincoln Park in June of 1960 the NCNW was off to promising start.¹⁴ They used their momentum to select one of the nation’s most celebrated sculpture artists, Robert Berks, and began a nationwide fundraising campaign.¹⁵ Members also held a number of commemorative events to solicit funds for their vision. The first of these was the “Art Exhibition in Commemoration of Mary

¹² “Summary Of The Proposed Bethune Memorial Educational Center,” Internal Memo, August 3, 1962, Series 8, Box 7, Folder 13, NCNW Records.

¹³ “Summary Of The Proposed Bethune Memorial Educational Center,” NCNW Records.

¹⁴ “*Authorizing the erection in the District of Columbia of a Memorial to Mary McLeod Bethune*,” Public Law 86-464, 86th Cong., 2nd sess. (June 1, 1960); “Congressional Resolution For Memorial To Mary McLeod Bethune,” *The Atlanta Daily World*, June 4, 1960; “Ike Signs Bill Authorizing a ‘Mary Bethune’ Memorial,” *New York Recorder*, June 11, 1960.

¹⁵ Robert Berks was a celebrated national artist of the time, who also sculpted a bust of Abraham Lincoln that still resides in the Ford Theater; Daugherty, “Lifting the Veil of Ignorance: The Visual Culture of African American Racial Uplift,” 258.

McLeod Bethune held at New York University (NYU) in June 1962. Sales from the art of Mordechai Avniel and Sol Nodel at the NYU exhibition were to go to the Bethune Memorial Fund.¹⁶ Additionally, the art exhibition also marked the debut of “‘This Is Our Day’: The Story of Mary McLeod Bethune,” a record created by acapella octet Voices, Inc. “This is Our Day,” a memorial record, contained gospel, negro spirituals, poetry, comedy, and a historical narrative. With the assistance of NCNW coordinators and the work of celebrities like James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Voices, Inc. created a one of a kind tribute “in words and music” to be sold from the NYU exhibition to the local NCNW chapters across the nation for a profit of “70 cents per record.”¹⁷ “This is Our Day” showcased Bethune’s favorite songs and uplifting words to encapsulate her life’s work. By utilizing the support of popular African American celebrities, the NCNW appropriated Bethune’s memory to promote the significance of the national memorial in a widely accessible entertainment medium.

Even with successful events like the art exhibition, local chapters sending in money, and philanthropic donations, raising \$350,000 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement proved to be too cumbersome a task to be done in three years. Dorothy Height reflected in official correspondence that “NCNW’s involvement in the movement for civil and human rights took precedence [because the] temper of the times left no other course.”¹⁸ Indeed, NCNW’s collaboration with civil rights organizations, such as the

¹⁶ “Art Exhibition in Commemoration of Mary McLeod Bethune,” Press Release, 1962, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 3, NCNW Records; “Donor Premiere,” Program, June 10, 1962, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 3, NCNW Records.

¹⁷ “Donor Premiere,” Program, June 10, 1962, Series 8, Box 1, Folder 3, NCNW Records; “This Is Our Day” Undated Brochure, Series 8, Box 15, Folder 3, NCNW Records; “Voices, Inc. Vocal/Dramatic Theatre presented by National Council of Negro Women, Inc.,” Series 8, Box 15, Folder 3, NCNW Records.

¹⁸ Dorothy Height to Mary Knox, February 17, 1971, Series 8, Box 5, Folder 5.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and their support of protests like the March on Washington in August of 1963 became the primary focus of the organization's time and resources.

Competing interests and the escalating energy of the Civil Rights Movement caused the NCNW to reevaluate their memorial plans. The NCNW missed their fundraising deadline in 1963 and began rethinking their memorialization strategy. Members conceptualized an innovative plan to continue to promote the ideals of the educational center, while shifting all their financial resources to erecting the Bethune Statue. While building the physical structure of the educational center was no longer a part of the memorialization plans, the spirit of the center thrived and was embodied in symposiums that accompanied groundbreaking and unveiling ceremonies. "The Bethune Legacy—NCNW Program Priorities in the 70's" in 1971 and the "1974 Black Women's Institute: Bethune Memorial Symposia," along with the "Youth Symposia" in 1974 featured scholars, celebrities, and government officials that reflected the scholarship, research, political activism, and community outreach that the Bethune educational center was supposed to foster.¹⁹

Over the next decade, the NCNW used every opportunity they could to keep Bethune's memory relevant throughout the nation. In 1965, New York mayor Robert Wagner commemorated "the tenth anniversary of the death of Mrs. Bethune," May 18 through June 17, Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Month. The NCNW chapters all over the country used this memorial month to bring national awareness to their continued

¹⁹ "1974 Black Women's Institute—Bethune Memorial Symposia," Planning Memo, Series 8, Box 14, Folder 1; "Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Dedication Schedule of Events," NCNW Records; Program, Mary McLeod Bethune Commemoration Celebration, 1971.

fundraising.²⁰ The Summer Art Festival in Harlem at Blumstein’s Department Store exhibited art from “distinguished artists from around the world” and students to be sold for the benefit of the Bethune memorial fund.²¹ Even though Washington, D.C. was the official national headquarters of the NCNW, Bethune had founded the NCNW in New York. As a result, the local government, universities and businesses were very receptive to organizing to memorialize her nationally.

Over the next five years, the NCNW continued to raise money and awareness about the Bethune memorial. By 1971, they had enough to break ground at Lincoln Park. While some NCNW members traveled to Washington, D.C. for the groundbreaking ceremony, other chapters recognized the moment through local celebrations. In Houston, Mayor Louie Welch issued a proclamation to declare May 30, 1971 as Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Fund Day as he “urge[d] all citizens to join...in supporting the Houston Section of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc., in its efforts to raise \$2,000 toward the cost of building the memorial monument to Dr. Bethune.”²²

The groundbreaking ceremony on June 19, 1971 added a new momentum to the decade long fundraising and energized people all over the country. Even organizations outside of the NCNW banded together to raise money for the Bethune Memorial. The chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority at Stetson University and Bethune-Cookman College held a “Silver Tea” to “honor a great lady” and send proceeds to the NCNW.²³

²⁰ “Bethune Commemoration Month Proclaimed,” Undated Press Release, Series 8, Box 3, Folder 10, NCNW Records.

²¹ “Special Preview of a Summer Art Festival in Harlem Sponsored by The National Council of Negro Women, Inc.,” Program, June 1965, Series 8, Box 3, Folder 10, NCNW Records.

²² “Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Fund Day,” Proclamation, May 18, 1971, Series 8, Box 3, Folder 13, NCNW Records.

²³ Sophie Pinkney, et al. to National Council of Negro Women, December 1, 1971, Series 8, Box 2, Folder 1, NCNW Records; “Silver Tea” Invitation, November 21, 1971, Series 8, Box 2, Folder 1,

The young men of the Howard D. Woodson High School Choir of Washington, D.C. decided to embark on a concert tour through D.C., Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina to raise funds for the memorial, as well. The Woodson Choir embodied Bethune's lifelong commitment to young people and education.²⁴ The Pan African Foundation in Seattle, Washington asked to collaborate with the Seattle chapter of the NCNW to prominently display a replica of the Bethune statue in the state funded Black Pavilion dedicated to showcase the contributions of African Americans to the nation.²⁵

As fundraising efforts reached a national audience, so did concern about the money being used for the memorial. Few members were in complete opposition to the memorial, but many wrote into the NCNW headquarters to express their discontent. In a letter to Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the Honorary Chair of the Bethune Memorial Fund Committee, Kaaren Klingol [sic] thought it was "gross hypocrisy for the Nixon administration and Congress to 'authorize a plan' to build the memorial, but refuse to help with the costs," especially "at this time, when so many black children are undernourished and starving and black youths in ghettos are desperately in need of better education, jobs, and hope."²⁶ Other women who wrote to Dorothy Height agreed that a more tangible use of money in "a living monument dedicated to the teachings and ideals of Mary Bethune would be far more fitting."²⁷ Most of those who wrote into the NCNW suggested different uses for the raised funds, such as to "help feed people in Mississippi,"

NCNW Records; "Tea Will Benefit Memorial Fund," Undated Newspaper Clipping, Series 8, Box 2, Folder 1.

²⁴ Ruth Sykes to Mable Jordan, April 26, 1974, Series 8, Box 15, Folder 6.; "Howard D. Woodson Choir Tour" Program, 1974, Series 8, Box 15, Folder 6; Howard D. Woodson Choir Singing For Mary McLeod Bethune," Itinerary, May 9—13, 1974, Series 8, Box 15, Folder 6.

²⁵ Annie M. Hall to Ruth Sykes, February 27, 1974, Series 29, Box 14, Folder 14.

²⁶ Karen and David Klingol to Shirley Chisholm, May 8, 1969, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 5.

²⁷ Hymie Cutter to National Council of Negro Women, December 31, 1970, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 5.

establishing “cooperative farms,” or “building a hospital.” Agnus Maucher understood the memorial would be “no doubt a beautiful statue, but what good will that do for the folks who need bread, medical assistance, learning, etc?”²⁸ David M. Sherr of Santa Monica, California wrote that he was “appalled to think that you [NCNW] are in the process of wasting good money on a “monument” when people are ill fed – ill housed and ill clothed.”²⁹ Still others, like Mary Isabel Knox, felt that Bethune’s legacy was being misappropriated: “Anybody who knows who she was, and what she did for sufferers, knows that she is a memorial in herself.”³⁰

In spite of the outcry, the organization persisted in the efforts. Many African Americans across the nation agreed with Height and the NCNW and had been raising pennies and dollars through countless projects for years because they believed in the symbolic power of Bethune. For the first time, African American women were being recognized on a national scale through the legacy of Bethune. Memorializers like the NCNW were adept in conceptualizing traditional memorials and raising the money needed to establish them. Their leadership provided the foundation for the emergence of traditional public history mediums centered on the distinct history of African American women. Height and the leadership of the NCNW understood the larger implications of having the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation commemorated through an African American woman. The Bethune memorial posited an African American woman as the central figure to connect the past, present, and future histories of black people in America. Height explained that “The memorial to come is not simply a statue, but

²⁸ Agnus W. Maucher to Dorothy Height, January 6, 1971, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 5.

²⁹ David M. Sherr to National Council of Negro Women, January 14, 1971, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 5.

³⁰ Mary Knox to Dorothy Height, January 25, 1971, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 5.

tangible evidence that black people have achieved greatness and that our government recognizes this truth—the black child needs this as well as the necessities of life.”³¹ Bethune was an exemplary American citizen who defied all the odds of societal roles prescribed to both women and African Americans to become a successful educator, savvy philanthropist, and one of the most powerful political women in United States history. Yet, just as fascinating as her remarkable life was the trajectory of her memorialization as the first and only African American woman to be incorporated into the National Park Service through a statue and historic site.

Public interest in black history was fueled by the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, the writer Alex Haley and the emergence of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s. In the mid-1970s Alex Haley’s autobiography and subsequent mini-series of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* invigorated the public’s interests in black history. Stephanie Athey explains, “*Roots* knowingly draws on the scholarly currents of the 1970s, and by popularizing academic work in revisionist history, the novel fueled a large-scale, non academic quest for “roots.”³² Historian Nancy Curtis recalled that in her family Haley’s *Roots* “stirred old memories and impelled the asking anew of old questions. Families that previously had been silent about their heritage began to talk about the subject.”³³ The Black Studies Movement emerged and led to the institutionalization of programs and departments on college campuses dedicated to the

³¹ Dorothy Height to H. Natalie McKenzie, January 15, 1971, Series 8, Box 6, Folder 73.

³² Stephanie Athey, “Poisonous Roots and the New World Blues: Rereading Seventies Narration and Nation in Alex Haley and Gayl Jones,” *Narrative* 7, no. 2 (1999): 173.

³³ Nancy Curtis, *Black Heritage Sites: An African American Odyssey and Finder’s Guide* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), x.

scholarly and intellectual exploration of the black experience which fueled the growth of African American public history.³⁴

African American organizations and communities leveraged the popularity of *Roots* and the examination of ancestry and slavery with local, state, and federal government agencies to create lasting memorials in museums, statues, historic sites, and memorial parks for African American heroes and heroines. The institutionalization of Black Studies programs and departments in the 1970s helped facilitate the growth of African American public history. The publication of books and articles, along with presentations at scholarly conferences like the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the Organization of American Historians opened up new avenues to learn about emerging African American research and preservation. Between 1971 and 1972, the National Organization for Black Studies was conceptualized and established. Grants from the National Endowment for Humanities and Ford Foundation sponsored a cadre of symposiums and conferences, including the 1973 Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival.³⁵ Historical societies and public history sites had a wide variety of new material on African American history to incorporate into their organizational projects. While access to the reading of new publications may have been limiting for most people, public history sites were accessible to a wide variety of audiences in the general public.

³⁴ For more on the Black Studies Movement see, Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007); Pero Dagbovie, *African American History Reconsidered* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Martha Biondi, *Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

³⁵ Delores P. Aldridge and Carlene Young, eds., *Out of the Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000); Nick Aaron Ford, *Black Studies: Threat-or-Challenge* (Port Washington, Kennikat Press, 1973).

While the erection of the Bethune Memorial marked a defining moment in African American women's public history, the incorporation of her legacy in the National Park Service revealed obstacles of memorializing African American women through the federal government. Shortly after the statue was unveiled in the summer of 1974, NCNW members turned their efforts to the next phase of Bethune's memorialization by establishing the Bethune Museum and National Archives of Black Women's History. The NCNW had long been collecting documents to create an archive of black women's history. Members initially turned to collaborate with the World Center for Women's Archives in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but that effort failed. Organizational archivists and historians collected materials throughout the twentieth century, and the Bethune Memorial Fund Committee used symposiums at the groundbreaking and statue dedication ceremonies to sustain their earlier visions for an educational center.³⁶

The townhouse at 1318 Vermont Avenue Northwest in the Logan Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C. was Bethune's home and the official headquarters of the NCNW from 1941 to 1966. Less than two years after Bethune acquired the property, the NCNW raised the money needed to purchase their headquarters outright, including a \$10,000 on-the-spot contribution procured by Bethune.³⁷ A basement fire in 1966 forced the NCNW to relocate and Bethune's home on Vermont Avenue remained unused for eleven years. When Bethune's Home was listed on the Register of Historic Sites in Washington, D.C. in 1975, the NCNW began to raise money to open and operate it as a

³⁶ Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Towards a New Feminism: The Creation of the Bethune Museum-Archives," *Special Collections* 3, no. 3-4 (1985); Linda J. Henry, "Promoting Historical Consciousness: The Early Archives Committee of the National Council of Negro Women," *Signs* 7, no.1 (1981).

³⁷ Rackham Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune: A Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 181-183; Philanthropist Marshall Field III, donated \$10,000 from his \$11 million endowment for the Field Foundation for the Council House Headquarters after a bold and persuasive request from Bethune.

museum.³⁸ On November 11, 1979, the National Council of Negro Women opened the Bethune Memorial Museum and National Archives of Black Women's History at the former home of their founding mother in Logan Circle, Washington, D.C.

The memorialization effort of the Bethune Museum and Archives (BMA) was three-fold. First, Bethune, as the founder of NCNW and symbol of African American excellence, was to be commemorated in museum exhibitions. While the 1965 World Fair in New York and the National Portrait Gallery in 1971 had featured exhibits chronicling Bethune's life and philanthropy, enshrining her home was the basis for a permanent recognition. Second, as the headquarters for the NCNW, the BMA was a symbol of African American women's history through the lens of the NCNW. Third, the National Archives of Black Women's History (NABWH) provided a scholarly aspect to the histories of African American women. Fueled by the emergence of the field of African American women's history in the 1980s, the establishment of the NABWH solidified its place among scholars because it opened a repository of primary sources and a means to collaborate with other intellectuals. Bettye Collier-Thomas, first Executive Director of the BMA, noted that "The achievements and contributions of black women in America have been ignored by scholars, and the council [NCNW] is determined to remedy that neglect."³⁹ By memorializing Bethune, African American women, and their history, the NCNW created a national public history site like no other before or after. Collier-Thomas also noted that the BMA operated as a "functional, alive institution" where "we

³⁸ May McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site, National Park Service, "Places: About the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House," accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.nps.gov/mamc/learn/historyculture/places.htm>.

³⁹ "Museum Of Black Women's History Grows In Capital Town House: Lecturers, Writers And A Bank," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1980.

not only seek to honor Mrs. Bethune...we're honoring black women and black people also."⁴⁰

Collier-Thomas and "a small group of historians and archivists" worked in the first years of the BMA to process the NABWH collections and use them to curate exhibits. Many African American women were inspired by the First National Scholarly Research Conference on Black Women reportedly attended by "2,000 historians and scholars" during the opening of the BMA in 1979.⁴¹ Grants, volunteers, and the NCNW budget, however, were not enough to sustain and expand the vision of the BMA. So, the NCNW looked to collaborate again with the National Park Service and government officials in the Department of the Interior as they had done with the erection of the Bethune Memorial. However, not everyone in the NPS saw the merit in designating Bethune's home as national historic site.

The first African American Deputy Director of the National Park Service, Ira Hutchinson, was one of the most vocal opponents to Bethune's inclusion in the NPS.⁴² At a House Subcommittee on Public Lands and National Parks Hearing on April 22, 1982, Hutchinson represented the Department of the Interior. He urged Representatives to vote "no" to establishing the BMA as a national historic site, because the NPS "recommend[ed] against the enactment of this legislation." In addition to "overall budgetary restraint" in the federal agency, Hutchinson testified that "the National Park has done no study of this particular site to determine if indeed it is nationally significant.

⁴⁰ Leah Y. Latimer, "Bethune Home Is Center Of Historical Site Debate," *The Washington Post*, May 26, 1982.

⁴¹ Barbara Gamarekian, "Interest grows in Afro-American women's history," *Alton Telegraph*, March 7, 1985.

⁴² Hutchinson went on to become a specialist in minority and women's affairs in the Office of the Secretary of the Interior.

In addition, we cannot commit limited National Park Service funds and staff to complete such a study in the near future.”⁴³ Hutchinson’s comments were unexpected and “set off a barrage of questioning from subcommittee members... followed by passionate testimony in favor of the measure by private citizens and public officials.”⁴⁴ NCNW President Dorothy Height and Vincent de Forest of the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation, Planning and Development Corporation were among the private citizens that testified in favor of the bill. California Representative Phillip Burton reflected the collective sentiment of supporters when he exclaimed, “There can be no doubt in the world that Mary McLeod Bethune qualifies on all counts to be commemorated in the national park system.”⁴⁵

Supporters of the designations prevailed because the subcommittee went against Hutchinson’s recommendation and on October 15, 1982 Congress established the Mary McLeod Bethune National Council House as a national historic site. The Secretary of the Interior “acting through the National Park Service” was authorized to enter into a cooperative agreement with the NCNW to run the site.⁴⁶ This collaboration gave the BMA national recognition from the federal government as well as eased the financial burdens. During this process, the Bethune Memorial Museum was renamed the Mary McLeod Bethune National Council House (Council House), while the National Archives of Black Women’s History retained its name. Because the Council House was only partially ran by the NPS, the organization still had control over the day-to-day operations

⁴³ House Subcommittee on Public Lands and National Parks of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Public Land Management Policy (H.R. 6091)*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., May 20, 1982, 55.

⁴⁴ Leah Latimer, “Bethune Home is Center of Historical Site Debate,” *The Washington Post*, May 26, 1982.

⁴⁵ House Subcommittee, *Public Land Management Policy (H.R. 6091)*, 68.

⁴⁶ *Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, D.C. National Historic Site, Designation*, Public Law 97-329, 97th Congress (October 15, 1982).

and received \$100,000 in 1983 for expenditures.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the NCNW was still tasked with raising operating funds to compliment the contributions of the NPS on a “fifty-fifty matching basis.” Neither Collier-Thomas nor the NCNW anticipated the continued financial struggle to operate the Council House.

In 1985, the leadership of the NPS questioned the legitimacy of continuing to fund the Council House and Bethune as a figure of national significance again. Mary Lou Grier, the first woman appointed as Deputy Director in the NPS, testified at July 18, 1985 House Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation Hearing that the federal agency did not support the bill requesting an appropriation to fund the Council House annually. Grier acknowledged that the 1982 legislation made the Council House a national historic site but disagreed that the cooperative agreement between the NPS and NCNW should be a “vehicle for funding.” She pointed out that “when the initial bill was introduced, the Park Service testified in opposition to it from the history side of it—the significance.”⁴⁸ As Ira Hutchinson had three years prior, Grier maintained the Council House was a drain on the agency’s budget and Bethune was an understudied person of uncertain historical importance. She also agreed that, “the achievements of black women throughout our history” were already a part of the NPS in the Women’s Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York, the Maggie Lena Walker Home NPSHS, and “a number of sites that are dedicated to black women and men.”⁴⁹ Grier’s testimony indicated the NPS saw the Council House as a repetitive addition to the work that they

⁴⁷ *Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, D.C. National Historic Site, Designation*, Public Law 97-329, 97th Congress (October 15, 1982).

⁴⁸ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Authorizing Funds for the Mary McLeod Bethune National Historic Site and Land Conveyances in the State of Maryland*, 99th Cong., 1st sess., July 18, 1985, 16-17; 27.

⁴⁹ House Subcommittee, *Authorizing Funds for the Mary McLeod Bethune National Historic Site*, 23, 48.

were already doing and didn't see the need for any more historic sites centered around African American women's history.

Executive Director Bettye Collier-Thomas vehemently disagreed with Grier's mangled facts and assertions. "First of all," Collier-Thomas declared, "the Bethune Council House is a national historic site, unless we have all misunderstood the legislation... There are eight black historic sites in this nation and one other one honors a black woman." In regards to Grier's comments on the Women's Rights NHP, Collier-Thomas insisted that "They do not do any in-depth interpretation on black women" on the site.⁵⁰ Indeed, out of 200 historic sites in the NPS, less than five percent were sites "dedicated to memorializing the black experience in America" since 1954. As the only two NPSHS honoring African American women, the Council House and Walker Home represented less than one percent of all NPS units in 1985—a percentage that has not changed even in 2018.⁵¹

Grier's comments indicating that the NPS was "unable to validate her [Bethune's] achievements... touched off a national letter-writing campaign to press lawmakers to support the subsidy legislation currently in the House." The response to Grier's testimony revealed that there was wide-spread support for memorializing Bethune and African American women in the Council House, along with the antipathy toward the NPS and Ronald Regan's Administration for attempting to derail the commemoration. Fervently against the expansion of the NPS, political scientist John Freemuth argues that the Reagan Administration was a "politicizing" force in the NPS by its use of

⁵⁰ House Subcommittee, *Authorizing Funds for the Mary McLeod Bethune National Historic Site*, 49.

⁵¹ House Subcommittee, *Authorizing Funds for the Mary McLeod Bethune National Historic Site*, 64.

“presidential appointment to locate key park policy decisions in the hands of Assistant Secretaries and Secretaries of Interior.”⁵² Grier, as a “Washington outsider” was directly appointed to her position by Secretary of the Interior James Watt in 1982 and tasked with representing the larger policies of Reaganomics. Yet, beyond fiscal conservatism the NPS’s uncertainty surrounding Bethune’s validity as a worthy figure of American commemoration offers insight into how they perceived memorializing African American women.

The pushback to Grier’s testimony from elected officials and the general public was not enough to obtain the full \$200,000 annual appropriation requested by Collier-Thomas on behalf of the Council House. Congress did pass an amendment to the 1982 Public Law that appropriated up to \$100,000 for 1987 with an incremental \$10,000 added to that for the next two years.⁵³ In 1989, when it was time for a reauthorization of appropriation Collier-Thomas and Height held a Community Mobilization Day event to proactively “gather support for the reauthorization of congressional funding.”⁵⁴ However, their funding reauthorization bill was amended to “authorize the National Park Service to acquire and manage” the Council House. For the third time the NPS testimony to Congress remained in firm opposition to the Council House funding, and for the third time, both Houses voted against the NPS’s recommendations.⁵⁵ The Council House was fully incorporated into the NPS in 1991. The cooperative agreement that was authorized

⁵² John Freemuth, “The National Parks: Political versus Professional Determinants of Policy,” *Public Administration Review* 49, no. 3 (1989): 281.

⁵³ *Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, D.C. National Historic Site Designation Amended*, Public Law 99-187, 99th Congress (December 18, 1985).

⁵⁴ Charles Elder, “Funds Sought to Keep Bethune’s Legacy Alive,” *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1989.

⁵⁵ House Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources United States Senate, *Miscellaneous National Parks Measures*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., September 20, 1990, 66.

in 1982 was amended to have the NPS take care of the financial obligations, maintenance, and interpretation of the site. The NCNW continued to be an active partner but was no longer responsible for matching financial contributions “fifty-fifty.” While the journey for the Council House to be fully financed and maintained by the National Park Service was arduous, the public support for Bethune’s legacy was unrelenting. Over twenty-five years later, the Council House remains one of only two National Park Service Historic Sites centered around the legacy of an African American woman.

National public history sites like the George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington National Monuments established in 1943 and 1956 respectively, were centered around men prior to the 1970s. Even the first African American commemorated on U.S. postage stamps was of a man. Beginning with Booker T. Washington in 1940, the first five U.S. postage stamps commemorating African Americans were all of men. It was not until 1978 that the first African American woman was memorialized on a stamp. The Harriet Tubman stamp was unveiled in the 1978 Black Heritage Series more than forty years after the Booker T. Washington stamp. Tubman was the first African American woman to be featured on a U.S. postage stamp, and the first African American to be depicted in the Black Heritage Series that began in 1978.⁵⁶

The Bethune Memorial marked a national shift in the way that black women were being memorialized. The inclusion of the Bethune Memorial Statue and the Council House in the National Park Service coincided with national interests in African

⁵⁶ American Philatelic Society, *Black Heritage Series* (Sidney: Amos Press, Inc., 2017); United States Postal Service, *African Americans On Stamps: A Celebration of African American Heritage* (Washington: USPS Publication 354, 2004).

American history and represented a peak in the evolution of African American women's memorialization. While remaining grossly underrepresented among the public history sites of women and African American men, African American women's public history flourished in the last decades of the 20th century. African American women and their raced and gendered history were legitimized through the federal government as figures of national importance and noteworthy contributors to America. Hurdling seemingly insurmountable odds, Bethune symbolized African American women's character, activism, service, and history. Her national commemoration inspired a wave of memorialization in local communities, created memorial parks, house museums, and historical markers highlighting African American women across the nation.



Figure 5.1

Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial, Washington, D.C

Located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood Lincoln Park, the Bethune statue platform is surrounded by text from Bethune's Last Will and Testament.

Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress

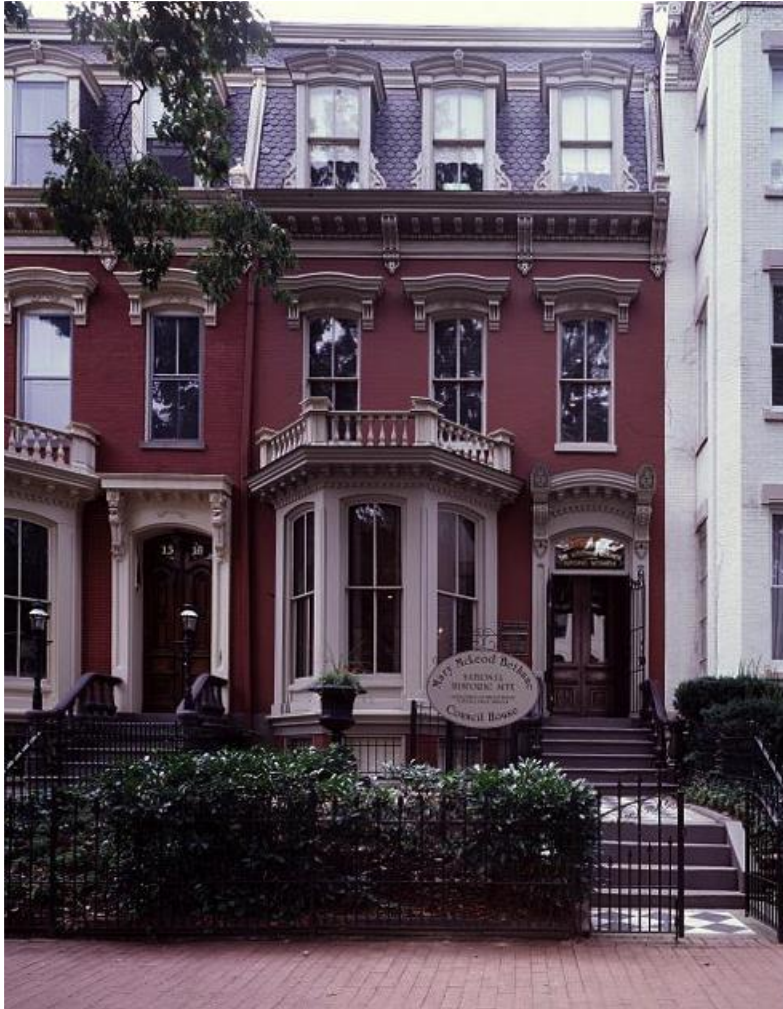


Figure 5.2

Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Park Service Historic Site

Located at 1318 Vermont Avenue Northwest in Washington, D.C. the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House was Bethune's home and the headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women.

Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress

CHAPTER 6

FROM MURDERING VOODOO MADAME TO THE MOTHER OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The emergence of the Black Studies Movement and the Black Panther Party in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s made a significant contribution to the evolution of African American women's memorialization. Home to some of the first protests on college campuses demanding black studies department, San Francisco State College inspired interest for African American history. College students and community organizers worked in concert to facilitate the establishment of educational programs that explored the black past. Historian Peniel Joseph argues that "San Francisco State would become a launching pad for Black Power on college campuses."¹ As Black Student Unions galvanized college students across the county, memorializers embraced the empowering rhetoric of the Black Panther Power in order to promote African American public history. Members of the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society were a part of the Black Studies and Black Power Movements and collaborated with community activists and faculty members from San Francisco State. They used the momentum of the social movements to establish some of the first traditional African American public history sites in the nation. Perry A. Hall argues that "the Black Studies movement was the instrumental mission to link processes of knowledge construction to

¹ Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 215.

processes of social change.” A key element of that social change was to provide education spaces for the general public to learn about African American history. Public history sites were ideal settings for educating the masses about the heritage, culture, and history of African Americans.²

The San Francisco Negro Historical and Cultural Society developed in the community as a result of the merging of the Negro Historical Society and Negro Cultural Society. The societies joined forces in the late 1960s to pool their resources to provide heritage programs, concerts, reading groups, and lectures. The San Francisco Negro Historical and Cultural Society (SFNHCS) was created to “correct distortions about Negro life and history. To present an accurate account of the contribution of the Negro people to world culture and history. To instill pride in Negro youth for their heritage.” The organization celebrated African American cultural heritage through literary readings, lectures, art exhibits, and preserving local public history. Creating public history that was accessible to a wide audience through visiting a site or taking a tour was an intentional part of the Society’s activist agenda.³

While cultural programs, reading groups, research projects and lectures were a valuable part of their activities, the society also desired to create more tangible and permanent recognition of some of the most significant black San Franciscans. Mary Ellen Pleasant was certainly one of the most prominent and interesting African Americans in all of California. Despite the flurry of rumors surrounding her legacy, she

² Perry A. Hall, *In the Vineyard: Working in African American Studies* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 169-170.

³ Mildred Hamilton, “How the Blacks See History,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 9, 1972; Elaine Dorfman Class Project, “San Francisco Negro Historical and Cultural Society: Purposes” in “Oral History of the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1945—1986,” The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley; “Mary Ellen Pleasant: Mother of Civil Rights in California,” *The Praisesinger*, July 28, 1983.

amassed an astonishing amount of wealth, power, and influence as an African American woman. As one of the most visible African American historical figures in the western region of the U.S., her legacy represented the pinnacle of black achievement, mobility and social status in a diverse, multicultural West. In the 1970s, the society's commitment to memorialize Pleasant was re-energized by the momentum of the intersection of the civil rights, black power, and black studies movements.

Mary Ellen Pleasant was born on August 19, 1814. The details of her early life remain obscure. It is known that she came of age in the northeast, and was educated in Nantucket, Massachusetts by the Hussey family. There she learned invaluable business skills and an education while working with Quaker Mary Hussey's dry goods store. She met William Lloyd Garrison while in Boston and she married abolitionist and Cuban planter Alexander Smith. The couple worked together to help free enslaved blacks on the Underground Railroad. After his death, her estimated worth was \$45,000. She used that money to continue to support abolitionist causes. In the late 1840s, she married John James Pleasant. By 1852, the couple had moved to San Francisco, California. In the 1850s and 1860s, Pleasant flourished as a savvy entrepreneur, and was successful in opening several restaurants, laundries, and boarding houses. Her businesses catered to the growing population of miners and migrants coming to San Francisco. Her entrepreneurship allowed her to employ African American men and women in her businesses, and eventually, act as a de facto employment agency. She supplied San Francisco business owners with employees, while also providing consistent opportunities for the city's growing African American population. Her profits helped to establish the Bank of California and build an elaborate mansion of the corner of Octavia and Bush

streets. Pleasant's ever growing business portfolio meant that she wielded considerable influence among the political and business elite of the city.⁴

Pleasant remained committed to the abolitionist movement and securing equal rights for African Americans throughout her life. She worked with other black abolitionists, like Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Martin Delaney, and helped fund John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in the late 1850s. In 1863, she advocated for the legal right for African Americans to testify in court. In 1868, long before Ida B. Wells won her case in Tennessee, she sued the North Beach Railroad Company for their discrimination against her when she was refused entry onto a streetcar. She was awarded a \$500 settlement but her verdict was eventually overturned. For the remainder of her life, she remained vigilant in the fight for African American freedom and civil rights. Yet, it wouldn't be until after her death in 1904 that she was celebrated as the "Mother of California Civil Rights."

The widow of former business partner Thomas Bell used her influence to publicly shame and dismantle Pleasant's reputation. National and local newspapers in the 1880s published reports of Pleasant who they mockingly referred to as "mammy," as a voodoo queen and madam. Despite her refutations of these reports, Pleasant's reputation was tarnished and she was unable to recover financially or socially. By the time of her death, she was virtually penniless.⁵

⁴ Lynn Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth Century San Francisco* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 22-23.

⁵ Lynn Hudson, "Pleasant, Mary Ellen," in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2; 507-508; Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant."*

Public memory crafters Elena Albert and Sue Bailey Thurman helped to transform Pleasant's reputation, effectively making her into a moniker of African American contributions to San Francisco and California. Albert, known as a local aficionado on Black history, served as the Society's historical researcher and program assistant and made African American women's memorialization in public spaces a priority. So when the Women's Club of St. James AME Zion Church, the San Francisco YWCA, and a local scholarship fundraiser all sought a keynote lecturer for their events, it was Albert that they chose.⁶ One of her earliest public exhibitions for the Society was a collaboration with several local priests, the San Francisco State College of Women and Black Cultural Arts School for a Black Madonna art exhibit and lecture series.⁷ Albert's interest in Mary Ellen Pleasant began in the 1960s when she "collect[ed] historical objects from the wrecked building" that once belonged to her because she saw the value in archiving them. She even collected the marble slab that once rested above Pleasant's front door to create a headstone for Pleasant decades after her death.. Albert noted that although Pleasant "may have made a great deal of money...she used it in 'good causes,'" like John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry.⁸ Despite the controversial public memory of Pleasant, Albert's comments were an intentional strategy to help craft her legacy.

⁶ "California Negro History To Be Topic" *San Mateo Times*, September 12, 1968; "YWCA Plans Series on Influence Of Black Culture On Music and Art" *San Rafael Daily Independent Journal*, September 12, 1969; "'Yours For The Cause'" *San Mateo Times*, May 24, 1969; Elaine Dorfman Class Project, "James Herndon Interview by Charles F. Hampton" in "Oral History of the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1945—1986," The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 39; Bob Blauner, *Black Lives, White Lives: Three Decades of Race Relations in America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 310.

⁷ "California Negro History To Be Topic" *San Mateo Times*, September 12, 1968.

⁸ "History Vanishes in Wreck of Mammy Pleasant's Old San Francisco Home" *The Humbolt Times*, October 10, 1964.

Often a spokeswoman for the Society, Albert remarked in 1972 that “Black is definitely in” and “interest in black history is indeed growing...”⁹ Influenced by the local and national activism of the black power and black studies movements, she embraced identity politics to support the Society’s mantra of creating and correcting positive public images and representations of African Americans. Her motivation for preservation was also based on earlier iterations of black power rhetoric spoken by Marcus Garvey. She recalled Garvey’s declaration, “Up ye mighty race, you could do what ye will,” because “that made us look at ourself. And we are handsome, we are pretty, we are beautiful, we are lovely.”¹⁰ Empowered, Albert used this worldview to fuel her public lectures, exhibits, and began crafting public history tours. By 1974, she was taking Society members on a local walking tour to teach them about local black San Franciscans, including Pleasant.

Though she was called an “amateur historian,” by oral interviewer Bob Blauner, Albert was any and everything except amateur. The work she did to craft the public memory of Pleasant was integral to her public memorialization. Her colleagues at the Society, revered and respected her immense contributions. Society member Ethel Nance recalled Albert, “was such a hard worker.” James Herdon noted that “She never had much money, but I can think of no one who made a greater contribution to the society than Mrs. Albert...She developed a series of programs around the Black Madonnas, around the California pioneers, Mary Ellen Pleasant...She just opened up so many

⁹ “Outstanding Blacks Contributed To Early History of California” *San Mateo Times*, Monday August 7, 1972.

¹⁰ Blauner, *Black Lives, White Lives*, 313.

doors.”¹¹ As a memorializers and public memory crafters, Albert and Thurman became the liaisons between developing a traditional preservation world of African American history and the general public interested in accessing the black past through public venues. The two women not only created spaces for black women to be celebrated, they also generated public excitement around their history by using black women as the lens to access a deeper connection with the past. Additionally, they successfully gained access to financial and scholarly resources through both government agencies and non-profit organizations in order to preserve, restore, and build physical spaces that commemorated black women’s contributions to their local, state, and national communities. As pioneer African American public historians, they utilized the historical society as a vehicle of African American women’s memorialization.

Unlike Albert, Sue Bailey Thurman received a college education at both Spelman College and Oberlin College. Though Thurman is most noted for being the first editor of the *Afro-American Women’s Journal* of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), she too is a pioneer of African American public history. Before moving to San Francisco in the 1940s, Thurman was the Chair of the NCNW’s archive and museum departments. She was also a founder of the Museum of Afro-American History in the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill in Boston, Massachusetts.¹² Her most significant contributions to the memorialization of Mary Ellen Pleasant was through her *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* and contributions to *A Walking Tour of the Black Presence in San Francisco*.

¹¹ Elaine Dorfman Class Project, “James Herndon Interview by Charles F. Hampton” in “Oral History of the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1945—1986,” The Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 17, 37.

¹² “Sue Bailey Thurman, Pioneering Activist, Dies at 93,” *Jet*, January 20, 1997, 17; Albert Broussard, “Strange Territory Familiar Leadership: The Impact of World War II on San Francisco’s Black Community,” *California History* 65, no. 1 (1986).

During a time where the only published works about Pleasant relegated her to a voodoo murdering madam, Thurman shifted that historical narrative by calling her the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement” in California.¹³ Thurman also contributed to *A Walking Tour of the Black Presence in San Francisco* where Pleasant is described as using “her influence to champion the cause of Black civil rights in California.”¹⁴ This shift helped to reconstruct Pleasant’s public legacy on a local level, as well as recognize overlooked contributions of African Americans in the West.

Thurman worked closely with the Society on programs and projects and was a Life Member and helped nurture an appreciation for Pleasant’s life and legacy. In 1965, Thurman led the campaign to honor one of Pleasant’s last requests before her death by erecting a headstone sixty-one years after her death that read “SHE WAS A FRIEND OF JOHN BROWN.” Eleven years later in 1976, the Society dedicated the Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial Park donning it with a marble historical marker. Comprised of a row of five towering eucalyptus trees in front of the mansion Pleasant built and lived in, the Park is the smallest in the state.

In 1979, Jesse Warr, III of the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society took a brief break from the “Oral History Project: Afro-Americans in San Francisco Prior to World War II,” to help the Society and the San Francisco Public Library launch a couple years earlier. Warr, as lead organizer, interviewer, and transcriber of the project was appalled to read “Black Madam: Prostitution, intrigue,

¹³ Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* (San Francisco: Acme Publishing Company, 1952).

¹⁴ Elizabeth L. Parker and James Abajian, *A Walking Tour of the Black Presence in San Francisco During the Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1974), 2.

blackmail and murder helped Mammy Pleasant gain control of San Francisco during rough boisterous days in 1880s” by Clotye Murdock in *Ebony*.¹⁵ First printed in April of 1954 and reprinted in November of 1978, Murdock characterized Pleasant as “America’s most fabulous Black madam.”¹⁶ Working “above the law,” Murdock claimed that Pleasant “forced the most influential men in the west to dance to her evil tune or be wrecked.” Murdock also reduced San Francisco in the mid to late nineteenth century to a wild west caricature with men and women seeking their fortunes and leaving morality behind with their past lives. Relying heavily on Helen Holdredges’s *Mammy Pleasant’s Partner* (1954) as his main source, Murdock distinguishes Pleasants style of madaming, by highlighting the “quadroon girls” and “watered-down version of voodoo” she used to lure elite clientele, ranging from wealthy businessmen to local politicians.¹⁷ Murdock argued that she used voodoo and “black magic” to bewitch enslaved African Americans on the New Orleans plantation she was born on, as well as to black mail and manipulate benefactors, as well as to sell newborn babies to amass a fortune she used to help John Brown in his raid on Harper’s Ferry. Of all of Murdock’s salacious descriptions of Pleasant’s life, murder was by far the most egregious. He suggests that as an accomplice and perpetrator, Pleasant was involved with several murders and died with her reputation and finances in ruin only to be buried in “an untended grave” surrounded by weeds and decay. As a conniving and bewitching black women, this fate seems like an inevitable end to Murdock’s spicy historical account of Pleasant’s life.

¹⁵ Clotye Murdock, “Black Madam: Prostitution, intrigue, blackmail and murder helped Mammy Pleasant gain control of San Francisco during rough boisterous days in 1880s,” *Ebony*, November 1978, 53.

¹⁶ Murdock, “Black Madam,” 53.

¹⁷ Murdock, “Black Madam,” 53; Helen Holdrege, *Mammy Pleasant’s Partner* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954).

Warr sprang into action as the “Acting Chair” of the Mary Ellen Pleasant Defense Committee and wrote to *Ebony* expressing his disbelief and disappointment of Murdock’s article. The February 1979 issue published Warr’s letter to the editor condemning Murdock’s “Black Madam,” which he argued “slanders not only the long-dead Mrs. Pleasant but San Francisco’s early Black pioneers as well.” He chided *Ebony* for publishing the story without checking its validity and asked the editors, “Do we need our own press to join a chorus that distorts and demeans our heritage?”¹⁸ Warr’s outcry certainly got the editor’s attention. In response to Warr the editor noted that he had “called our attention to some of the pitfalls of printing old stories.” They promised to investigate Pleasant’s life with thorough research and sources and to commit to a future historical narrative of Pleasants life written by Lerone Bennett Jr., an *Ebony* editor and historian who was also “upset by the racist sources of the original story.”¹⁹

Lerone Bennett Jr. published a two-part series just one month after Warr’s letter in April and May of 1979. Using more than Holdredges’s questionable biography of Pleasant, Bennett researched and documented the most scholarly account of her life at that time. Adding depth and complexity to her life, Bennett, refused to “speak patronizingly of “Mammy” or “Mammy Pleasant.” Bennet noted Pleasant “was a mother to thousands...but she was nobody’s mammy...her name was Mary Ellen Pleasant. Mrs. Mary Ellen Pleasant [sic].”²⁰ Often disrespected by racist whites with Aunt and Mammy prefixes, Bennet paid homage to the nameless black women who endured these insults

¹⁸ Warr, “Mammy Pleasant,” *Ebony*, February 1979, 22.

¹⁹ Warr, “Mammy Pleasant,” 22.

²⁰ Lerone Bennett, Jr., “A Historical Detective Story: Part I, The Mystery of Mary Ellen Pleasant: Was She a public benefactor or a public menace?,” *Ebony*, April 1979, 90; Lerone Bennet, Jr., A Historical Detective Story: Part II, Mystery of Mary Ellen Pleasant,” 71.

before and after their death. He was actively setting the tone for a respectful and accurate portrayal of Pleasant, unlike Murdock's "Black Madam."

Bennett became an integral part of the memorialization of Pleasant because he had a national audience to read about her life story. His articles about Pleasant were a part of long trajectory of his writing and rewriting African American history for a general audience. His tone and language reflected the deep respect he had for correcting false histories of black women. While others made their careers in history in academia, Bennett used his position as Senior Editor at *Ebony*, one of the most popular African American publications of the twentieth century, to engage the public in the black past. *Before the Mayflower* (1969) was his first and "most famous" book, followed by a series of books and encyclopedias on the span of African American history from Africa to the twentieth century.²¹ Fascinated with the overarching stories of African Americans, which he referred to as "the odyssey of a people," Bennett was committed to researching and documenting African American history in a way that anyone and everyone could understand and access.²² Historian Pero Dagbovie characterizes Bennett as a "Philosopher and Popularizer of Black History." Indeed, Bennett through his continuous publications with *Ebony* "popularized African American history" in the "formative years of the "Black Studies Movement."²³ His commitment to making black history accessible to the masses made him a pioneer in African American traditional and public history.

²¹ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1969); Pero Dagbovie, "History as a Core Subject Area of African American Studies: Self-Taught and Self-Proclaimed African American Historians, 1960s-1980s," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 5 (2007), 621.

²² Lerone Bennett, Jr., ed., *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1971), 1;1.

²³ Dagbovie, "History as a Core Subject Area of African American Studies," 621.

The collective works of Albert, Thurman, Warr, and Bennet laid the foundation to Pleasant's public commemoration in the twenty-first century. In 2005, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution declaring February 10, 2005 "Mary Ellen Pleasant Day." Lauded for her achievements as one of California's "first freedom fighters" and as a civil rights and women's rights advocate, she was also declared "an important entrepreneur and institution" that helped to build the city of San Francisco.²⁴ There is no mention of voodoo, her being a madam or murderer. The declaration of "Mary Ellen Pleasant Day" is truly a full circle moment in her public recognition. While African Americans in San Francisco knew and understood how significant Pleasant was over half a century earlier, her public memorialization helped to make her a relevant national figure and arguably the most prominently memorialized African American woman in San Francisco and California.

²⁴ City and County of San Francisco, "Resolution 103-05," File no. 050159, approved February 11, 2005.



Figure 6.1
Mary Ellen Pleasant at 87.

San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

CHAPTER 7

ECONOMIC MEMORIALIZATION THROUGH THE WALKER THEATER

Indiana Avenue was *the* vibrant gathering space for African Americans in Indianapolis. On any given Saturday night, one could stroll down *the Avenue* and hear the melodic harmony of horns and voices bellowing out blues and scatting jazz. The floors of the Sunset Terrace dance hall and Walker ballroom held sturdy beneath the feet of dancers moving swiftly for the Jitterbug, Lindy Hop and Big Apple, and then, slow and steady for the Walker Sway. There might be a group of young people dressed in their finest clothes “looking and preening” to “see and be seen” in front of the Walker Theater. Once satisfied with their observations, they might have decided to go into the theater to see a stage show and a movie for just twenty five cents. Or, maybe they’d meet up with some schoolmates from Crispus Attucks High School at the CoffeePot, where they could eat, socialize, and maybe catch a glimpse Paul Robeson or Ethel Waters in between sets. As jazz musicians, like Duke Ellington and Count Basie, went in to rest after a night full of fun, another set of musicians were rising to fill the Avenue with the sweet sounds of black voices.¹

¹ Thomas Howard Ridlye, Jr., *From the Avenue: A Memoir, 2nd Edition Life Experiences and Indiana Avenue History Told From the Perspective of One Who Was There* (Self Published, 2014); “Madame Walker’s aide remembering for others,” Newspaper Clipping, April 8, 1984, Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 10, Folder 26, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

Since its opening in 1927, the Walker Building has pulsated the heartbeat of black culture in Indianapolis. Named after Madam C.J. Walker, the Walker Theater is the most prominent memorialization of an African American woman in Indiana. Born Sarah Breedlove on December 23, 1867, she became the first self-made woman millionaire in the United States. Her parents, Owen and Minerva Breedlove, had been enslaved on a plantation down in the Louisiana Delta. Four of their six children were enslaved, and Sarah was their first of two children born into freedom. By the age of seven, Sarah and her siblings were orphaned. At the age of fourteen, Sarah married her first husband, Moses McWilliams, with whom she had daughter A'Lelia. After the death of Moses in the late 1880s, she moved to St. Louis with A'Lelia and worked as a laundress. African American laundresses often had the ability to work on their own schedule and in their own space compared to domestic workers who were relegated to rigid schedules inside the homes of whites. Though working as a laundry woman gave Sarah autonomy over her labor, she struggled to survive.²

She began selling Annie Turnbo Malone's hair care products to increase her monthly income. Annie Turnbo Malone was one of the most successful African American women entrepreneurs of the twentieth century. She developed her products, which she sold under the name Poro, in the 1890s. By the early 1900s she expanded her business by giving women like Sarah opportunities to sell her products and earn money for themselves. Sarah continued selling Malone's products after she moved to Denver, Colorado in 1905. Less than a year later, she married Charles Joseph Walker and added

² For more on African American women laundresses, see Elizabeth Clark Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domesticity in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2010); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

the prefix “Madam” to her name. Charles, who worked in the newspaper industry, was a skilled public relations guru. He and Sarah collaborated to market and sell a new line of hair care products under her new name, Madam C.J. Walker.³

Walker’s elegant new name appeared in bold and persuasive advertisements in “farm journals, and religious periodicals” as well as with popular national African American newspapers, including *The Chicago Defender* and the *New York Age*.⁴ In one advertisement, Walker appeared with short, coiled, natural hair depicting her before she used her Wonderful Hair Grower. Her “before” image was placed in the middle of a profile and side image of her with full, flowing, and bountiful hair—the result of using her hair care products. Walker’s image of her long and straightened hair often appeared on her products, including the Madam Walker’s Vegetable Shampoo and Wonderful Hair Grower, which was the highest selling product throughout the 1920s.⁵ Though Malone sold a similar product by the same name beginning in 1900, Walker claimed she’d been working on her formula since she lived in St. Louis after receiving instructions in a dream.⁶

Regardless of how Walker developed her formula, African American women all over the country embraced her products. They began selling and purchasing them as part of the growing beauty culture among American women in the early twentieth century. Like Annie Malone, her products were designed to meet the needs of black women

³ A’Lelia Bundles *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Scribners, 2001); A’Lelia Perry Bundles, “Walker, Madam C.J. (Sarah Breedlove),” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 308—313; Tiffany Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company).

⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 112.

⁵ Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 96.; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 225.

⁶ Bundles, “Walker, Madam C.J.,” 3; 309.

suffering from damaged hair that was consistently breaking or falling out. Walker's products grew so popular through her meticulous and clever marketing that they quickly rivaled Malone's Poro hair care line. By the end of 1910, she had earned almost \$11,000, or \$200,000 in the modern day.⁷ In 1912, she "employed 1,600 agents and was making \$1,000 per week."⁸

The Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company (Walker Manufacturing Company) grew even larger after her move to Indianapolis in 1910. National Negro Business League organizer Ralph Waldo Tyler boasted that in 1910 Indianapolis had more Negro establishments than any other Northern city.⁹ Walker was recognized as a vibrant addition to the National Negro Business League (NNBL). Formed in 1900 by Booker T. Washington, the NNBL provided a space for business owners to organize and foster a "buy-black" policy to empower African Americans economically. NNBL annual conventions were so dominated by men that few women had opportunities to present their ideas in public forums.¹⁰ That all changed at the 1912 NNBL convention when Madam Walker proclaimed to the crowd, "I am in a business that is a credit to the womanhood of our race." Walker understood that her position as an African American woman entrepreneur was valuable and she used her public platform to represent the ingenuity and economic power of black women all over the nation. She became so important in the NNBL, the organization passed a unanimous resolution heralding her as "the foremost business woman of our race" in 1914.¹¹

⁷ Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 107.

⁸ Darlene Clark Hine, "Booker T. Washington and Madam C.J. Walker," in *Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States History* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1996), 100.

⁹ Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 105.

¹⁰ Hine, "Booker T. Washington and Madame C.J. Walker," 135.

¹¹ Bundles, *On Her Own Ground*, 135, 153.

Not only was she known as a savvy business woman, she also made a name for herself as a philanthropist. Walker, the business woman, empowered other African American women by hiring “former maids, farm laborers, and school teachers to fill jobs at all levels, from factory worker to national sales agent.”¹² In a segregated society with limited employment opportunities, economic autonomy from whites meant a great deal to African American families. Walker, the philanthropist, regularly donated to African American causes ranging from African American Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. branches to historically black colleges and universities to orphanages. She was also deeply invested in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and contributed to the organization financially and through speaking engagements. Walker died in 1919 due to complications with her blood pressure. She was fifty-one years old.¹³

While her Villa Lewaro mansion located in Irvington, New York is the best expression of her material wealth, her legacy has mostly been commemorated at the Walker Theater in Indianapolis, Indiana. Located at 617 Indiana Avenue, the Walker Theater is a triangle shaped (similar to New York’s Flat Iron Building), four-story, 48,000 square foot building. With just over 13,000 square feet dedicated to it on the main floor, the 950 seat mid-sized theater is the largest part of the building. On the fourth floor, the famous Walker Ballroom doubles as a multi-purpose event space and is surrounded by dressing rooms, a bar, restrooms, and the office space for the Madam Walker Urban Life Center. The second and third floors contain commercial and office space for small businesses. Lastly, the Madam C.J. Walker Memorial Room is a

¹² Bundles, “Walker, Madam C.J 3; 311.

¹³ Bundles, “Walker, Madam C.J.,” 3; 312.

dedicated museum honoring the building's namesake with a separate entrance on Indiana Avenue steps away from the theatre marquee and box office.¹⁴

Walker made Indianapolis the headquarters of her business in 1910 because she was attracted to the duality of a thriving African American community and the impressive transportation infrastructure. Known as the "Crossroads of America," Indianapolis had one of the nation's newest highway systems and eight major railways that connected to every region of the nation. Walker soon became invested in the social and economic life in Indianapolis. She was a member of the local chapter of the Negro Business League, the historic Bethel A.M.E Church, and regularly donated to black women's clubs, like the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A.¹⁵ Following her death, the Walker Theater became an economic powerhouse of black entrepreneurship because it provided a venue for the legacy of Walker's business endeavors, as well as those of other black professionals. As the first building in Indianapolis owned and operated by African Americans, the Walker Theater was a beacon of black economic empowerment throughout the Mid-West. Violet Reynolds, Walker's personal assistant recalled, "In those days, it [Indiana Avenue] was about the only place in town where black professionals could set up shop." Another local remembered, "It was very difficult in 1927 for blacks to get office space in this city. This building helped give rise to black professionalism in Indianapolis."¹⁶

¹⁴ The Walker Building Restoration Project," Information Sheet, Roselyn Comer Richardson Papers, 1900-1993, Box 22, Folder 4, M0649, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

¹⁵ A'Lelia Bundles, *Madame Walker Theatre Center: An Indianapolis Treasure* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), 7, 14.

¹⁶ "Madame Walker's aide remembering for others," Newspaper Clipping, April 8, 1984, Ransom Family Papers.

Unlike other memorials centered around African American women in the 1970s, Walker actually conceptualized the idea for the Walker Theater during her lifetime. After being over charged for a movie ticket at a white operated theater because of her race, she vowed to create a space where African Americans could enjoy entertainment “without the insult of rear entrances and dirty balconies.”¹⁷ Violet Reynolds remembered that “One time we went to the old Isis Theatre on Illinois Street. The sign on the window said tickets were 25 cents apiece, but the woman told us we’d have to pay 60 cents apiece. Madame lost her temper.”¹⁸

Though Walker didn’t live to see her vision materialize, her daughter A’Lelia Walker carried out her wishes. A’Lelia Walker worked with her mother’s longtime lawyer and family friend Freeman B. Ransom to purchase the land and build the Walker Theater in the 1920s. Upon completion the Walker Building resembled “today’s shopping malls with a drugstore, a beauty salon, a beauty school, a restaurant, professional offices, a ballroom, and a 1,500-seat theater.”¹⁹ From its conception, the Walker Building demonstrated the ingenuity of African American entrepreneurs despite the constraints of institutionalized race, gender, and class barriers. It also represented the commitment of African American women’s investments back into the communities that supported their success. It was a living memorial to the extraordinary accomplishments and meaningful contributions of Madam Walker.

The blocks of Indiana Avenue were lined with business storefronts and brick buildings from doctor and lawyer offices, funeral homes, tailors, night clubs, restaurants,

¹⁷ Bundles, *Madame Walker Theatre Center*, 8.

¹⁸ “Madame Walker’s aide remembering for others,” Newspaper Clipping, April 8, 1984, Ransom Family Papers.

¹⁹ Bundles, *Madame Walker Theatre Center*, 7.

grocery stores, and the iconic Madam Walker Theater. Black owned businesses drew African American consumers from all over the city. Despite living in segregated pockets all over the Indianapolis, the magnetic vibrancy of Indiana Avenue was the nexus of black culture for much of the twentieth century. From 1927 to the late 1970s, the Walker Theater thrived as a central space for African American gatherings, performances, and small businesses.²⁰ As integration began opening up opportunities for African Americans to move their families and businesses to other parts of the city, so did their dollars. By the late 1970s the building was in disrepair, along with other African American businesses on Indiana Avenue. Many of them closed or moved to other locations. The economic vibrancy of the Avenue was reflected in the concentrated living and buying power of the African American community. The central cultural and economic heartbeat of Indianapolis that had lasted nearly a century slowly dismantled.

African American memorializers, however, refused to let the Walker Theater die. They formed the Madam Walker Urban Life Center (MWULC) in 1979. Historian Gloria Gibson-Hudson characterized the revitalization efforts of the MWULC as “The Walker Theatre renaissance,” which endeavored “to revive the tradition of excellence established by Madam C. J. Walker and thereby help restore ‘the Avenue’ to its former brilliance.”²¹ The MWULC was focused on preserving the legacy of Walker and black Indianapolis as integration and federally sponsored urban renewal threatened to erase the history of the city’s most important cultural icon. Urban renewal in city centers and African American neighborhoods (often one in the same) during the mid to late twentieth

²⁰ Bundles, *Madame Walker Theatre Center*, 27.

²¹ Gloria J. Gibson-Hudson, “To All Classes; to All Races; This House is Dedicated: The Walker Theatre Revisited,” in *Indiana’s African-American Heritage: Essays from Black History News and Notes* edited by Wilma L. Gibbs (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1993), 63.

century meant a reconceptualization of the use of space. Federal, state, and local governments poured funding into modernizing cities beginning in the 1950s. This restructuring of cityscapes brought new economic innovations, expanded university and college campuses, and better infrastructures to urban centers across the nation. It also brought the displacement and dismantlement of African American communities which were often concentrated in areas with an embedded pattern of redlined or segregated housing. African American communities, like the one around Indiana Avenue, were most vulnerable to being demolished or restructured.²²

Beyond the symbolic significance of their memorialization, they also understood their efforts as a “catalyst for generating temporary and permanent employment opportunities for the revitalizing of a deteriorating neighborhood.”²³ The restoration of the Walker Theater spurred the revitalization of Indiana Ave throughout the 1980s. As “the last standing architectural remnant of the Avenue’s once-bustling nightlife culture,” it represents the past prosperity and history of the area, while also maintaining modern day relevance.²⁴ It remains a relevant building of community organizing, cultural heritage, and economic empowerment for African Americans.

The timing of their preservation efforts was critical because they were able to garner the support of a wide variety of grants and government funding that was simply

²² Mary E. Triage, *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-First Century* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016); James Robert Saunders and Renae Nadine Sackelford, *Urban Renewal and the End of Black Culture in Charlottesville, Virginia: An Oral History of Vinegar Hill* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998); Nicholas Wise and Julie Clark, ed., *Urban Transformations: Geographies of Renewal and Creative Change* (London: Routledge, 2017).

²³ “The Walker Building Restoration Project,” Information Sheet, Roselyn Comer Richardson Papers; “Executive Director’s Report For The Month of September 1988,” Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 16, Folder 6, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

²⁴ Kyle Long, “Madame Walker’s Legacy,” *Nuvo*, February 4, 2015.

unavailable to African American memorializers just a decade earlier. It took the MWULC seven years to restore and reopen the Walker Theater and to garner \$3.5 million dollars for restorations. They kicked off their seven year journey with a \$300,000 grant from the non-profit the Lilly Endowment, Inc in 1979. One of the Lilly Endowment's major reasons for investing in the Walker Theater's restoration was for the economic redevelopment of the surrounding area.

Founded in 1937, the Lilly Endowment, Inc. is headquartered in Indianapolis and is one of the largest private philanthropic foundations in the United States. Like other African American memorializers, the MWULC's leaders recognized that they needed to forge meaningful partnerships with philanthropic organizations like Lilly if they were ever going to finance their vision of reopening the Walker Theater. They solicited reports and evaluations from several consultants and firms to show the value of investing in their multi-year project. They honed in on the fact that a major tenant of urban renewal across the nation was to boost local economies. The MWULC was pushing to boost the local economy through preservation of an African American woman's legacy. So in the Lilly Endowment grant application, the group emphasized that renovating the Walker Theater was not only significant to Walker's legacy and Indianapolis' black public history, but integral to the growth of the local economy.

Independent reports included in the grant application highlighted the building's historical significance and were used as support to determine their financial commitment to the MWULC. James Browning, a consultant with Browning Day Pollak Associates, Inc. wrote to Charles Blair, Lilly's Senior Program Officer, in October 1978 that "It is my sincere belief that if the Walker Building is restored and appropriate uses identified, it

can once again serve the entire community and provide a significant beginning for other quality development in the area.”²⁵ Another independent consultant, Carl Anderson of Media Associates, Inc., concluded that the “The significance of Madame Walker’s pioneering business efforts reaches far beyond Indianapolis and impacts on the lives of all 30 million Black citizens of this nation.” Anderson also compared Indiana Avenue to other “main stems” of African American communities, such as Lenox Avenue in Harlem, U Street in Washington, D.C., and Central Avenue in Los Angeles.²⁶ His report illustrated that the Walker Theater’s revitalization as the black cultural and economic mecca of Indianapolis was similar to other black urban centers across the nation.

Another consultant was Avery F. Brooks, an actor and Professor of Theater Arts at Rutgers University. Brooks wrote to Blair in January 1979 that “Its important historical significance, its physical structure, and its attractive geographical location are, in my mind, three of the more powerful reasons for its restoration/rehabilitation/rebirth as an influential institution of the Indianapolis community.”²⁷ The Lilly Endowment approved the grant request and has been an enthusiastic philanthropic partner to the Walker Theater ever since.

Beyond the Lilly Endowment’s initial \$300,000 grant, the MWULC was able to acquire over \$2 million in local, state, and federal grants. By the grand reopening in 1988, the MWULC received funding from the Economic Development Administration in the U.S. Department of Commerce, the City of Indianapolis Community Development

²⁵ James Browning to Charles Blair, October 30, 1978, Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 15, Folder 15, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

²⁶ Carl D. Anderson to Charles Blair, Memorandum, January 24, 1979, Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 15, Folder 15, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

²⁷ Avery F. Brooks to Charles Blair, January 15, 1979, Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 15, Folder 15, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

Block Grant, the Division of Historic Preservation in the Indiana Department of National Resources, and a host of local charities like the Junior League of Indianapolis and The Coalition of 100 Black Women.²⁸ By the fall of 1988, they were ready to show the nation what the organization had accomplished in honor of Walker's public legacy.

The Rededication Ceremony of the Walker Theater on October 14, 1988 was truly a star studded event. *Jet* reported that "search lights crisscrossed the sky, celebrities in stretch limousines pulled up for the grand reopening as hundreds outside craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the stars."²⁹ Celebrities Alex Haley, Gregory Hines, Roscoe Lee Brown, and Isaac Hayes attended and participated in the opening gala. Many of the celebrities had personal ties to the Walker Theater as former performers. Others, like Gregory Hines, had family who performed at the Walker Theater. Isaac Hayes remarked, "It's hard to describe the feeling you get when you think about all the greats who have performed here... And the fact that it was founded by a black woman is just the greatest thing in the world."³⁰ While celebrating the legacy of the Walker Theater as a safe haven for black entertainers, Hayes' remarks also highlight the simultaneous public memorialization of Walker's legacy as an African American woman. This unique duality is expressed in the vast programming at the Walker Theater, which is primarily what makes it a one of a kind memorial to an African American woman.

Following the gala, the Walker Theater launched a weeklong Film Festival, "Freedom: A Lens on Black America and the Third World." The Film Festival

²⁸ "The Walker Building Restoration Project," Information Sheet, Roselyn Comer Richardson Papers.

²⁹ "Madame C.J. Walker Honored: The Rebirth of Walker Theatre Brings Celebs To Indianapolis," *Jet*, October 31, 1988, 53.

³⁰ Lynn Ford, "Memories come alive at Walker reopening," *Indianapolis Star*, October 15, 1988.

incorporated a wide variety of themes in African American history, such as Pan Africanism, the western black experience, African Americans in the military, and African American women. By including films, like “Buck and the Preacher,” “Mandela,” “Men of Bronze,” “Cry Freedom,” and Julie Dash’s “Four Women” and “Illusions” followed by the panel, “Black Women Filmmakers Explore Artistic Freedom,” the week-long festival highlighted the wide scope of African American history, as well as the importance of having a public history site as a safe space to explore the black past. In addition, Stanley Nelson’s “Two Dollars and A Dream” documentary about Walker debuted, and A’Lelia Bundles interviewed Alex Haley, who was scheduled to write a biography and screenplay about Walker’s life. His presence was significant because *Roots* had sparked national interest in African American genealogy and public history. Haley died before he could complete his writings on Madam Walker’s life. However, as one of the most recognizable faces of black history in the nation, his involvement with Walker’s public memorialization in Indianapolis underscored the national significance to African American history.³¹

Indianapolis was the ideal location for Walker’s business headquarters and her public memorialization. The Walker Manufacturing Company thrived in Indianapolis, annually grossed over \$100,000 and was a part of over 150 black owned businesses on Indiana Avenue in the 1910s. Historian Emma Lou Thornbrough argues the “Walker Manufacturing Company of Indianapolis [was] by far the most widely known and

³¹ “1988 Film Series Invitation,” Roselyn Comer Richardson Papers, 1900-1993, Box 22, Folder 4, M0649, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society; Gibson-Hudson, “To All Classes; to All Races; This House is Dedicated,” 61-63.

financially successful black-owned business in Indiana.”³² Walker’s business and philanthropic endeavors made her a nationally known figure and Indianapolis did not have to be the central space for her public memorialization. Walker purchased and renovated brownstones in Harlem around 1915. Walker’s brownstone in Harlem was the fusion of two existing townhouses into one described as having “a double-size living room stretching the full width of the second (main) floor,” as well as three bathrooms, a billiard room, and even a retail store-front on the ground that Walker owned and operated. After her death, Walker’s daughter A’Lelia Walker created a “literary salon” in the 1920s and leased it to New York City in the 1930s to create health clinics. A decade after her death in 1931, the city demolished the town homes.³³ Perhaps, if the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission had been established, or African Americans in Harlem had the opportunity to partner with local, state, and national preservation organizations like the MWULC, the brownstone would not have been demolished. Perhaps, if the Walker Theater had needed to be preserved in the 1940s as opposed to the 1970s it would have suffered the same fate of site erasure because philanthropic organizations like the Lilly Endowment played prominent roles in African American memorializers’ ability to preserve and creating lasting memorials.

Her elaborate mansion, Villa Lewaro, was not preserved as a public history site until the twenty-first century. In 1977, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated 33 new African American historic sites and districts as National Historic Landmarks.

³² Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 14-15.

³³ Christopher Gray, “The Grand Mansion of an Early Black Entrepreneur,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 1994.

Walker's mansion, Villa Lewaro in New York was among the designated sites. However, it was not until 2014 that Villa Lewaro began being conceived as a public history site.³⁴

The Walker Theater provided an intimate connection with black culture. As the only remaining black owned business on Indiana Avenue, the Walker Theater represents a distinct economic, social, and cultural center that was born out of a raced and gendered history. From the Great Depression through the Civil Rights Movement, the Walker Theater was "an oasis for escape" for generations of black patrons. Walker's, personal success story, business acumen, and her ingenuity in providing a leisure space for African American joy and pleasure embedded her into Indianapolis community irrevocably.³⁵

Walker's memory was kept alive by not only her family, but those who worked closely with her. Her memorialization was notable because she was the first African American millionaire and because of all the lives she touched. Walker's daughter A'Leia Walker created the iconic focal point of Indiana Avenue, which has been an economic and cultural embodiment of her public legacy for much of the twentieth century. Her great granddaughter A'Leia Bundles has been an instrumental memorializer and public memory crafter as well. Through her published biographies of Walker and public history efforts, she has kept her public memory alive and relevant.

The Ransom Family also worked to memorialize Walker through a variety of endeavors. Freeman B. Ransom, general counsel and manager of the Walker Manufacturing Company, had a dynamic working relationship with Walker during her

³⁴ The National Trust began working to develop Villa Lewaro as a public history site in 2014; "Black Hoosier's Home Named Landmark," *The Indianapolis Star*, March 18, 1977; Of the 33 designations in 1977, only 6 (18%) were centered around African American Women. Despite the significant gains made during the "golden age," Madame Walker's public memorialization also highlights the underrepresentation of African American women centered public history sites.

³⁵ Gloria J. Gibson-Hudson, "To All Classes; to All Races; This House is Dedicated," 57.

lifetime, and he continued to work for the Walker Manufacturing Company for almost forty years. His son, Willard B. Ransom, followed in his footsteps and worked for the Walker Manufacturing Company as a lawyer. Willard Ransom had a substantial role in revitalizing the Walker Theater through his work with the MWULC as a board member. Freeman Ransom's grandchildren, acclaimed writer Jill Nelson and award-winning documentarian Stanley Nelson, produced a documentary to commemorate Walker's life. "Two Dollars and a Shoe?" debuted at the 1988 Film Festival following the grand reopening gala of the Walker Theater.³⁶ The close working relationship of the Walker and Ransom families has held strong for generations and are the foundation for Walker's public memorialization, which has lasted for nearly one hundred years.

Violet Reynolds played a vital role in keeping Walker's public memory alive too. Reynolds began working for Walker as her personal assistant at the age of sixteen in 1914. After Walker's death in 1919, she continued to work for the Walker Manufacturing Company for sixty-eight years. After her retirement in 1982, she helped conceptualize the revitalization of the Walker Theater with the MWULC. It was her idea to include a memorial museum of Walker and space for beauty salons to lease office space in the renovation plans. The memorial museum transitioned the Walker Theater from a named memorial to a traditional public history site. In addition, Reynolds was often asked to recall memories of working with Walker. Her oral history experiences and vignettes were recorded, published, and made into public presentations. For example, Reynolds was a featured speaker in the Indiana State Museum's 1984 lecture series,

³⁶ A'Lelia P. Bundles, "Lost Women: Madam C.J. Walker—Cosmetics Tycoon," *Ms*, July 1983, 93.

“Achievers Against the Odds: Storytellers of the Black Experience.”³⁷ As an active public memory crafter, Reynolds became a part of Walker’s legacy.

The Walker Theater and Madam C.J. Walker’s public memory has remained relevant as a national representation of African American history, African American women’s history, and business history. The preservation community of Indiana embraced the efforts of the Madam Walker Urban Life Center by awarding the organization a Historic Preservation Award for Adaptive Use. Presented in 1985 by the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, Historic Indianapolis, Inc., the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, the Central Indiana Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians and the Indianapolis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the award demonstrated the significance of MWULC’s emerging role in public history and preservation.³⁸ In 1992, Madam Walker was inducted into the Junior Achievement National Business Hall of Fame by the board of directors for *Fortune* magazine.³⁹ She was the only African American woman inducted alongside business giants Sam Walton, Steve Jobs, Julius Rosenwald and Richard Warren Sears. Walker’s legacy is uniquely tied to the economic history of the United States. Her success and her ability to create autonomous employment opportunities for black women during Jim Crow defies all preconceived conceptions of black entrepreneurship and labor. Her successful business model allowed her to build the elaborate Villa Lewaro and simultaneously become one of the most important black female philanthropists of the

³⁷ “Madame Walker’s aide remembering for others,” Newspaper Clipping, April 8, 1984, Ransom Family Papers.

³⁸ “The Walker Building Restoration Project,” Information Sheet, Roselyn Comer Richardson Papers.

³⁹ “Madame Walker inducted into Business Hall of Fame,” *Indianapolis Business Journal*, March 23—29, 1992, Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 10, Folder 26, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

twentieth century. Heralded as “The Greatest Benefactress of Her Race,” Walker’s legacy is one of interconnected duality and success that surpassed expectations and institutional barriers of black women’s abilities. Her legacy has resonated nationally because of her dedication to empowering African American communities, particularly black women.⁴⁰

Because of the pioneering public history work of Walker’s family and the Madame Walker Urban Life Center, her legacy and the Walker Theater have remained relevant in the twenty-first century. As a performing arts center, the Walker Theater carries on the musical legacy of jazz on Indiana Ave which at one time had “25 jazz clubs in a four-block area.”⁴¹ While the changing economy and urban renewal led to a significant decrease in dance halls and jazz clubs along Indiana Avenue, the Walker Theater keeps the tradition alive. Since its reopening, the Walker Theater regularly hosts “Jazz on the Avenue,” Friday night live shows and annual Jazz Festivals. Before closing in the summer of 2018 for renovations and rebranding, the Walker Theater held one last “Jazz on the Avenue” concert in the famed ballroom. It is clear that the Walker Theater has maintained a strong presence throughout its existence and has plans to continue for many years to come. It is the only public history site in the United States centered around an African American woman that simultaneously promotes economic empowerment, performing arts, community organizing, and African American heritage. Mary McLeod Bethune proclaimed Walker “was the clearest demonstration I know of Negro woman’s

⁴⁰ “Madam C.J. Walker to be Inducted into National Business Hall of Fame,” Junior Achievement Inc. News Release, March 4, 1992, Ransom Family Papers, 1912-2011, Box 10, Folder 26, M1200, William H. Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society; Emma Lou Thornbrough, “The History of Black Women in Indiana,” in *Indiana’s African-American Heritage: Essays from Black History News and Notes* edited by Wilma L. Gibbs (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1993), 69.

⁴¹ “A Heritage Rediscovered,” *Black Enterprise* 17, no. 12, July 1987, 84.

ability recorded in history...She has gone, but her work still lives, and shall live as an inspiration, to not only her race, but to the world.”⁴² Almost one hundred years after Walker’s death, Bethune’s words remain true.

⁴² Bundles, “Lost Women: Madam C.J. Walker—Cosmetics Tycoon,” 93.

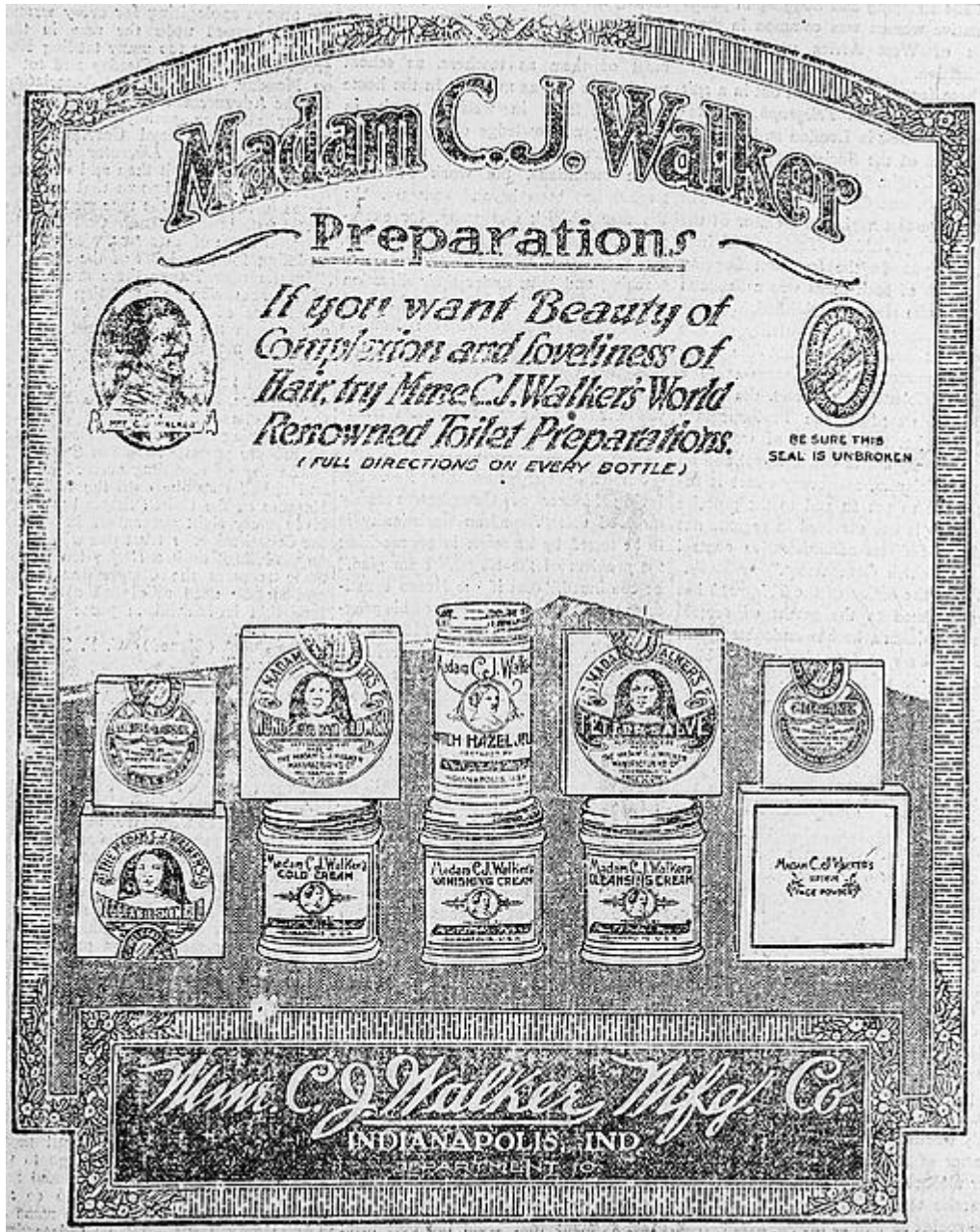


Figure 7.1
Madam Walker Advertisement

This ad appeared in the *New York Age* on January 17, 1920.

American Women Guide, Library of Congress

CHAPTER 8

CHARLOTTE HAWKINS BROWN & STATE SPONSORED MEMORIALIZATION

There are more public history sites centered around the legacies of black women in the South than any other region in the United States. This was primarily because memorializers of African American women recognized the opportunity to preserve historic sites in the midst of the changing status of named memorials in the 1960s and 1970s. Civil rights laws may have resulted in substantial changes in the 1960s in the lives of African Americans, but segregated neighborhoods after Jim Crow remained. Segregation provided an environment conducive to transforming public commemorations into more traditional public history sites. Like the Madam Walker Urban Life Center discovered, timing is everything. African American organizations had access to local, state, and federal preservation funding that fueled their efforts. In many instances, African American women became the primary lens through which the public accessed black history. The Charlotte Hawkins Brown State Historic Site in North Carolina is an example of how traditional public memorials were developed in honor of African American women in the late twentieth century.

Charlotte Eugenia Hawkins Brown was born on June 11, 1883 in Henderson, North Carolina.¹ At seven she moved with her family to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and continued her education through the State Normal School in Salem. Upon graduating in

¹ She changed her name from Lottie to Charlotte Eugenia after graduating high school.

1901, Brown began teaching African American children in rural Sedalia, North Carolina through a job with the American Missionary Association (AMA). There fifty children from all over Guilford County packed in a tiny, dilapidated church house to attend school. Brown made an indelible mark on the lives of her students, often spending her salary on school supplies and clothing for them. When the AMA decided to defund Brown's school, local parents and community members convinced her to remain in Sedalia and open another school. Her decision to stay transformed her life and generations of African American students and families impacted by her life-long commitment to education.

In 1902, Brown opened the Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Institute with fifteen acres of community donated land and a building. The school's namesake had funded her education at the State Normal School and Brown was able to garner donations in her honor after her death. Brown was exceedingly adept at raising money for Palmer over her fifty year career as an educator and administrator. She modeled and publicized Palmer as a vocational school like Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute in order to receive white philanthropic donations to keep it operational. Funding was always an issue, but Brown managed to maintain and expand Palmer's campus from just one building in 1902 to an entire campus by the 1940s filled with a dining hall, boy and girl dormitories, teacher cottages, an athletic field, and several classrooms.

Brown was well-known for her impeccable style and insistence on good manners. Her etiquette book, *The Correct Thing To Do—To Say—To Wear* (1941) reflected her expectations for behavior in social and formal settings. Instilling these behavioral expectations was a means of helping students navigate through the social and class

barriers of Jim Crow. Carolyn Denard suggests that *The Correct Thing* “became the bible of manners for generations of students at Palmer Institute and became the primer for African American youth at other schools who wanted to behave properly.”² Through a modern and historical lens, *The Correct Thing* seems stringent and restrictive. For Brown good manners and respectable behavioral norms for African American youth was a way to protect young women and men from the violent realities of Jim Crow, including lynchings, child executions, and carceral labor.

Though Brown was married in 1911 to Edward Brown and in 1923 to John W. Moses, she lived most of her life a single woman. She had no children of her own, but raised several nieces and nephews. Her dedication to the African American community also extended into club work. She helped to establish the North Carolina State Federation of Negro Women’s Clubs in 1909 and was president from 1915 to 1937. She often collaborated with other prominent black clubwomen, including Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune, as she toured the country giving lectures and raising money for black philanthropic causes. Like Bethune, Brown’s life had been transformed through her education and they both dedicated their lives to providing the same educational opportunities to scores of African Americans. Throughout much of the twentieth century, she was one of the most influential African American women in the nation. In January 1961, Brown died of diabetes and was buried under a cedar tree next to her home, Canary Cottage, on Palmer Institute’s campus.³

² Carolyn Denard, introduction to “Mammy,” *Appeal to the South; And, The Correct Thing To Do—To Say—To Wear*, by Charlotte Hawkins Brown (New York: G.K. Hall, 1995), xxx.

³ Diane Silcox-Jarrett, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown: One Woman’s Dream* (Winston-Salem: Bandit Books, 1995); Charles W. Wadelington and Richard F. Knapp, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown & Palmer Memorial Institute: What One Young African-American Woman Could Do* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

The memorialization process of Charlotte Hawkins Brown began with her niece Maria Cole and alumna Marie Gibbs. Maria Cole, the wife of pioneering African American entertainer Nat King Cole, was raised by Brown at Palmer Memorial Institute (PMI). She and Gibbs became friends when they were students at PMI. When Cole and Gibbs visited PMI to pay their respects at Brown's grave in 1982, they were dismayed to see the site surrounded by overgrown "crabgrass and weeds." Cole in particular "became very intent that something should be done to make Dr. Hawkins' grave and homeplace a historic site" and she and Gibbs "were determined not to let Dr. Brown's accomplishments go unrecognized."⁴

The public memory legacies of Brown and Palmer Memorial Institute are intertwined. Brown lived on the PMI campus, along with her students and faculty. After PMI closed in 1971, alumni and locals alike were dismayed to see the school in ruins. Alumnus Elworth Smith attributed the school's closing as "ultimately a casualty of integration" after "more and more educational opportunities became available to blacks" in the second half of the 20th century. PMI's last President, Charles W. Bundridge, expressed "deep sadness" at seeing the once thriving school, where he spent 17 years of his career, "vacant, idle, useless and a magnet for vandals who seem intent on tearing it down." Attempts by Bundridge or Bennet College President, Isaac Miller to secure state or federal funds to maintain the property and use it for other educational purposes were unsuccessful.⁵ Like Cole and Gibbs, PMI alumni and former faculty often visited CHB's gravesite to commemorate her legacy throughout the 1970s when the school was no

⁴ "Cover Story," *African American Monthly*, January 1995, 8; Stan Swofford, "Palmer Falling Into Ruin," *Greensboro Daily News*, May 11, 1975.

⁵ Stan Swofford, "Palmer Falling Into Ruin," *Greensboro Daily News*, May 11, 1975.

longer operational. They hosted a “special program” celebrating her birthday at Bethany United Church of Christ (across the street from PMI) where they would “recount memories...and listen to music that she [Brown] enjoyed.” The programs were often comprised of “the reading of different excerpts from old activity books, singing of the Palmer alma mater, scripture readings, two solo songs and placing of wreaths on Brown’s grave,” followed by fellowship and refreshments.⁶ These gravesite ceremonies continued well after the site was established.

Gibbs, in solidarity with Cole, began to garner local support from PMI alumni which led to the formation of the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historical Foundation (CHBHF). Founded in 1983, the CHBHF was incorporated as a non-profit and tax exempt organization in 1984. It operated as “a memorial to the dreams, the life, and the works of Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown.”⁷ Prominent African Americans were a part of the CHBHF Advisory Council, including John Hope Franklin, Maya Angelou, Lerone Bennett, Jr., and A’Lelia Bundles.⁸ With the assistance of these pioneers in African American history, the CHBHF became an integral part of discussion about black heritage sites. In 1985, the organization sponsored the 1985 Black History Awareness Conference, in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources.⁹

⁶ “Sedalia set for Palmer celebration” *The Daily Times-News*, June 12, 1986; Jim Schollosser, “Palmer Institute founder is honored,” *Greensboro News and Record*, June 11, 1986; Kim Weaver, “Service to honor Palmer Institute founder,” *The Daily Times-News*, June 10, 1989.

⁷ “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation Black History Banquet Program 1991,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 3, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

⁸ “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation Black History Banquet Program 1991,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers; “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation Fact Sheet Brochure circa 1985,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 2, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

⁹ “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation Fact Sheet Brochure circa 1985,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers.

There was so much enthusiasm that Gibbs proclaimed that “we are really excited about what’s happening now.”¹⁰

Ruth Totton, once a teacher at Palmer Memorial Institute, worked to help restore the features of the campus to their former glory. She served as “Historian” on the Board of Directors of the CHBHF from the earliest days of the organization’s existence.¹¹ Her oral histories were used as sources to learn about Brown, her home, and PMI. Her most lasting contribution was to Brown’s home, Canary Cottage, where Brown hosted guests from her students and surrogate children, to Mary McLeod Bethune and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Totten recalled the “lamps, the piano, the paint schemes of the walls,” and “the mirror” that Brown used to check her appearance before leaving the house. She also remembered Brown’s personal room on the second story of the home where Brown beckoned her friends and colleagues to “come in and sit and talk to her.”¹² Since many of Brown’s furnishings had been distributed to family and friends after her death, Totten’s recollections were essential to recreating the house as it was during Brown’s life. Her enthusiastic involvement in the restoration process illustrates the significance of the vast networks of locals, alumni, and teachers in reconstructing a historical site that simultaneously represented Brown’s personality and style, along with the institutional significance of PMI.

¹⁰ Jim Schollosser, “Friends of Palmer move closer to goal of Brown memorial,” *Greensboro News and Record*, July 28, 1983; Newspaper Clippings, Bennet College Scrapbook 1987-1989, Bennet College Scrapbook Collection, North Carolina Memory Digital Collection, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennet College for Women, Greensboro, North Carolina.

¹¹ “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Site Dedication Ceremony Program Book 1987,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers; “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation Fact Sheet Brochure circa 1985,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers.

¹² Alice Thrasher, “Tribute to a Leader,” *The Fayetteville Observer*, Feb 7, 1988; Jim Schlosser “Oral History Restoration” *Greensboro News and Record*, July 9, 1992.

Memorializers Cole, Gibbs, and others knew they needed major financial support in order to restore the large campus and fulfill their larger goals of commemorating black history as a tribute to Brown. Their first step was to get PMI alumni on board and excited about their vision, which they did through the CHBHF. Their next step was to garner state support, which they gained by 1983.¹³ North Carolina Senator William “Bill” Martin was an important ally in garnering state support and funding. As the only African American in the Senate, the freshman senator made supporting the creation of the CHBM site a priority and was able to get the political support he needed to make obtaining the site a reality.¹⁴ Martin’s advocacy of the project in the state senate helped it gain support and momentum very early in the process. Because of his efforts, a year after Cole vowed to preserve her aunt’s legacy, the North Carolina General Assembly appropriated \$67,377 to research and document the history of Brown, PMI, and to begin planning the site.¹⁵ Martin also worked with North Carolina Representative Henry McKinley “Mickey” Michaux, Jr., a PMI alum to garner support for appropriations for the site.¹⁶ Both Martin and Michaux continued to be the primary advocates for appropriations for the site throughout the rest of their tenure in the North Carolina General Assembly.¹⁷

¹³ Charlotte Hawkins Brown Advisory Council Meeting Outline, Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 2, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

¹⁴ Jim Schlosser, “Memorial to Brown Probable” *Greensboro News and Record*, July 13, 1983; Newspaper Clippings, Bennet College Scrapbook 1987-1989, Bennet College Scrapbook Collection, North Carolina Memory Digital Collection, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennet College for Women, Greensboro, North Carolina.

¹⁵ Jim Schollosser, “Friends of Palmer move closer to goal of Brown memorial,” *Greensboro News & Record*, July 28, 1983.

¹⁶ Tracey Burns-Vann and Andre D. Vann, *Sedalia and the Palmer Memorial Institute* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 122.

¹⁷ “Daniel” *Daily Times-News*, February 7, 1989.

In 1985 and 1986, the North Carolina General Assembly appropriated an additional \$250,000 and \$417,000 respectively for “site acquisition and initial stabilization”¹⁸ The state, through the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources purchased Palmer Memorial Institute campus, which included over forty acres of eighteen buildings: classrooms, boy and girl student dorms, Canary Cottage, faculty housing, the athletic field, and several other campus areas.¹⁹ The state continued to make improvements on the CHB site throughout the rest of the 20th century. The CHBHF was elated to receive the support of the NC state government, but this support meant that they were beholden to the ebbs and flows of the political system. One member explained, “We have always been a little uncertain about when it [additional funding] would happen.”²⁰ Their initial plans conceived for the site were outlined in a \$1.5 million budget had to be readjusted to the funding they received from the North Carolina General Assembly. Despite the fact that their plans were scaled back, the CHBHF understood the larger significance of receiving several hundred thousand dollars to support the public memorialization of an African American woman. Annette Gibbs expressed the organization’s sentiments when she noted “We’re glad to get what we can and every penny will go to good use.”²¹

Even though timing was an issue for the CHBHF, by 1991 the organization had surpassed the initial goal of \$1.5 million from both state and private funds (Tables One

¹⁸ North Carolina Office of Archives and History, “Forty-First Biennial Report: The North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1984—1986,” North Carolina State Documents Collections, State Library of North Carolina, 35, 219.

¹⁹ “Old Palmer Institute plan snagged,” *The Daily Times-News*, April 20, 1987; Eddie Huffman, “Legislature approves Palmer Institute funds,” *Daily Times-News*, July 17, 1986.

²⁰ Eddie Huffman, “Palmer Institute historic site behind schedule,” *Daily Times-News*, July 15, 1986.

²¹ “State’s plans are trimmed for Charlotte Brown museum,” *Daily Times-News*, September 12, 1985.

and Two). The NC General Assembly appropriated \$1,424,377 for site acquisition, maintenance, and operation. The organization also garnered another \$107,000 from mostly private individual and corporate contributors for programming, marketing, and fundraising expenses. When the state government had a budget surplus in 1994, the site benefited by receiving almost \$750,000 in additional funding for restorations and renovations for the site.²²

Fundraising campaigns had always been a part of the history of Brown's legacy. As an all black school in the Jim Crow South, Brown was constantly raising money to maintain PMI. Vina Wadlington Webb recalled praying for Dr. Brown when she went on fundraising trips. Moreover, Webb and her classmates remembered that Brown enlisted the aid of her students. Webb reminisced that they "would write letters and pray over them. Oh, how we would pray!...I remember how proud I was when I got my first five dollars."²³ The nationwide network of PMI alumni fueled the private funding of the site, by initiating and participating fundraising efforts. They understood that Brown's legacy was connected to the larger history of African Americans in and outside of NC. One alum noted, "The support groups want to raise funds for the development of the site but we also want to celebrate black history."²⁴ For example, PMI alumni also contributed to

²² Jay Eubank, "Budget Windfall Doesn't Mean Everyone Wins \$1 Billion Extra," *Greensboro News and Record*, May 26, 1994; Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation, Inc., *Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1991), Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 3, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

²³ Stan Swofford, "Palmer Falling Into Ruin," *Greensboro Daily-News*, May 11, 1975.

²⁴ Bev Smith, "Honors For First Black Historic Site Scheduled," *Carolinian*, January 31, 1985, Newspaper Clippings, Bennet College Scrapbook 1987-1989, Bennet College Scrapbook Collection, North Carolina Memory Digital Collection, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennet College for Women, Greensboro, North Carolina.

the maintaining of the site like their 1989 restoration of the bell tower, one of the oldest parts of the campus.²⁵

The Black History Commemorative Banquet was an annual event CHBHF began in 1984 to provide additional support for the creation of the memorial site. They commemorated Brown's life in a display exhibition at the banquet and throughout the official program booklet.²⁶ The site was seen from the very beginning as representing larger themes of black history and encompassing the state, region, and nation in its historical interpretation. Project Director Annette Gibbs explained, "We plan to tell the overall history of North Carolina's black cities; to cover all geographical areas as it pertains to that story"²⁷ In addition to fundraising efforts supported by PMI alumni, the CHBHF leaders also garnered sizable donations from corporations and their foundations, including Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, and RJR-Nabisco. In fact, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and RJR-Nabisco, Inc. gave \$50,000 to the site in 1988.²⁸ On a smaller scale, the local community in North Carolina also contributed money to the site. Elementary school students, teachers and parents from Sedalia Elementary School and Greensboro Day School raised

²⁵ "Black History Observances Set," *Daily Times-News*, February 5, 1989.

²⁶ "Charlotte Hawkins Brown Banquet," Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 2, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

²⁷ Wadelington and Knapp, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown & Palmer Memorial Institute*, 267; "Historic Site To Highlight State's Black History," *Carolina Peacemaker*, Feb 16, 1985, Newspaper Clipping, Bennet College Scrapbook 1990-1999, Bennet College Scrapbook Collection, North Carolina Memory Digital Collection, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennet College for Women, Greensboro, North Carolina; Bernie Woodall, "Black heritage celebrated," *Greensboro News and Record*, November 5, 1989, Newspaper Clippings, Bennet College Scrapbook 1987-1989, Bennet College Scrapbook Collection, North Carolina Memory Digital Collection, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennet College for Women, Greensboro, North Carolina.

²⁸ Alva Stewart, "The Heritage of Charlotte Hawkins Brown," *The State*, February 1988; Charlotte Hawkins Brown Advisory Council Meeting Outline, Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 2, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

\$150 and \$342.50 respectively to give to the site in 1988.²⁹ The local community remained committed to supporting Brown in death as they had when she was alive. It was their advocacy in 1904 that kept Brown in Sedalia and their initial support of land and property that started Palmer Memorial Institute.

Brown's nieces Maria Cole and Charlotte Hawkins Sullivan were named Honorary Chairpersons of the CHBHF.³⁰ Unfortunately, Gibbs died a year before the site opened in October 1986. The CHBHF payed tribute to her by including a resolution in her honor in the official Dedication Ceremony Program Booklet. As an "outstanding American," the CHBHF lauded Gibbs for setting "in motion a movement and endeavor, which will forever serve to enlighten all peoples...of the accomplishments and contributions of black Americans in the State of North Carolina." Gibbs was so dedicated to the creation of the CHBHF that for her "The hours were never too long, the personal sacrifices were never too great, the obstacles were never believed to be insurmountable." CHBHF members noted "because of her efforts, North Carolina is a better State, America will be a better nation, and the world will become more saturated with goodness."³¹ Gibbs legacy as a memorializer lived on within the CHBHF through her daughter, Annette Gibbs, who worked as a project director and media spokesperson throughout the 1990s.

Catalyzed by the work of memorializers in the CHBHF and PMI alumni, public commemoration extended beyond the Charlotte Hawkins Brown State Memorial Site

²⁹ Eddie Huffman, "Highway dedicated to founder of school," *The Daily Times-News*, April 23, 1988.

³⁰ "Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Site Dedication Ceremony Program Book 1987," Abraham H. Peeler Papers, Series 6, Folder 3, #142, Greensboro History Museum Archives, North Carolina.

³¹ "Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Site Dedication Ceremony Program Book 1987," Abraham H. Peeler Papers.

throughout the 1980s. “Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown Day” was proclaimed on June 11, 1984, Brown’s birthday, by North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt, Jr.³² In November 1987, the dedication ceremony was held on the front lawn of Palmer Memorial Institute with a “standing-room only crowd” that included the CHBHF, state and national political dignitaries, and enthusiastic PMI alumni. North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Bob Jordan proclaimed “The one thing that’s certain is Charlotte Hawkins Brown is smiling down at the proceedings here today.”³³ Renowned African American historian John Hope Franklin served as the keynote speaker, and celebrities like Alex Haley attended the momentous occasion.³⁴ As Rep. Mickey Michaux recited the “Palmer Creed” during his speech, the audience filled with “the well-dressed crowd of Palmerites” joined in with nostalgic vibrancy in their voices.³⁵ The dedication celebration included a program of remarks, the official ribbon cutting for the site, a reception, a tour through the visitor center opening, and lastly a banquet at nearby Bennett College. The opening of the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Memorial State Historic Site was a major event that caught the attention of the national black press. *Jet*’s “Society World: Cocktail Chitchat” featured the opening and dedication of the site, proudly noting “This is North Carolina’s first state-owned and state-operated site devoted to a Black and a female.”³⁶

³² James B. Hunt, Jr., State of North Carolina Proclamation “Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown Day,” June 11, 1984, Governor’s Office.

³³ “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Site Dedication Ceremony Program Book 1987,” Abraham H. Peeler Papers; Eddie Huffman, “State historic site dedicated at Sedalia,” *Daily Times-News*, November 8, 1987.

³⁴ “Saturday ceremonies will open Palmer historic site,” *Daily Times-News*, November 6, 1987.

³⁵ Eddie Huffman, “State historic site dedicated at Sedalia,” *Daily Times-News*, November 8, 1987.

³⁶ “Society World: Cocktail Chitchat,” *Jet*, Oct 12, 1987, 34.

The CHBHF was also successful in lobbying for the renaming of the highway that stretches in front of the site.³⁷ At the 1988 highway dedication ceremony, Governor James G. Martin proclaimed Brown to be a “Leader. Champion of the disadvantaged. Mentor. Inspirer of youth. Visionary. A woman of undaunted faith.” He announced to the crowd that “Indeed, it is fitting and proper that this section of U.S. 70, from Birch Creek Road to N.C. 100, now be named the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Memorial Highway.”³⁸ President Ronald Regan sent a letter to be read in his absence at the ceremony, which read, “This is a truly fitting tribute [of Brown’s] lifelong dedication and devotion to educating black children of Sedalia and eastern Guilford County.” Not only was Brown’s public memory being honored through the naming, it was also being recognized and supported by the highest ranking state and federal government officials.

The memorial site was used to celebrate the larger history of African Americans in North Carolina and in the United States through Brown’s life and contributions. The CHBHF maintained that “The preservation and celebration of African-American heritage is central to the purpose of the Foundation.”³⁹ They began an annual African-American Heritage Festival in the November 1988, and subsequently in June in honor of Brown’s birthday.⁴⁰ The first festival “Preserving Black History in North Carolina” included exhibits from 14 regions of NC that were designed to “showcase their local preservation

³⁷ Charlotte Hawkins Brown Advisory Council Meeting Outline, Abraham H. Peeler Papers.

³⁸ Jan-Michael Poff, ed., *Addresses and Public Papers of James Grubbs Martin, Governor of North Carolina, Volume 1, 1985-1989* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History Department of Cultural Resources, 1992), 809; Eddie Huffman, “Highway dedicated to founder of school,” *The Daily Times-News*, April 23, 1988.

³⁹ Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation, Inc., *Newsletter*, 1.

⁴⁰ “African-American Heritage Festival To Be Held June 13,” *Greensboro News & Record*, May 18, 1998; “Sedalia set for Palmer celebration,” *The Daily Times-News*, June 12, 1986; The festival was held on the second Saturday in June, but if it did not fall on Brown’s birthday, (June 11) a separate celebration was held at the site. It also continued the tradition of PMI alumni annual birthday celebration.

centers of black history.” It also included a “Seminar for Minority Teen Women” for high school girls to teach them leadership skills.⁴¹ The Minority Teen Women seminar also focused on teaching girls about educational opportunities and possible career paths, while their parents attended a workshop on college admissions and obtaining financial aid.⁴² Providing a space for African American youth to expand their educational horizons was an unmistakable homage to Brown’s legacy.

In addition, teaching the general public about the black past was a mainstay of the festival, which meant giving the public access to prominent African American historians like John Hope Franklin. Franklin continued to support the site through public presentations, including his keynote address at the opening dedication ceremonies.⁴³ Featured entertainment included African American heritage groups such as Fruit of the Spirit Gospel Choir, Mickey Mills Steel Drums, and the Snow Camp Historical Society. The site’s Black History Month festival and programs drew crowds from school, church, senior, and tour groups from all around the state including Raleigh, Durham, Winston-Salem, and nearby Greensboro. In many ways the site became the hub of activity during Black History Month. Family reunions used the site for gatherings in the picnic area. Programming consisted of black crafts, a seminar on black business, a symposium on “Blacks in Politics,” a literary reading, a black history essay contest, and a concert by

⁴¹ “African-American festival scheduled Nov. 5” *The Daily Times-News*, October 12, 1988.

⁴² Susan Ladd, “Charlotte Hawkins Brown Memorial celebration scheduled,” *Greensboro News and Record*, November 2, 1988.

⁴³ “Briefing: Heritage Festival,” *The Daily Times-News*, November 3, 1988.

Savannah State Concert Chorus.⁴⁴ As a tribute to Brown's *The Correct Thing*, etiquette classes were also offered.⁴⁵

As Brown's public legacy continued to expand, some hurled criticism about her educational methods. An article written by reporter Robin Adams in April of 1993 asserted that "In the early part of the 20th century, Sedalia's Palmer Institute denied admission to dark-skinned black people. Founder Charlotte Hawkins Brown thought it best if her students had a white ancestor or two in the family." Outraged former students sent letters to the *Greensboro News and Record* to refute the claim. Frances Anne Darden Crump explained that she herself was "dark-skinned" and never faced discrimination at Palmer. She invited Adams to come to the site in order to see that all shades of African Americans would be present at the annual Alumni weekend. Jeanne Lanier Rudd called Adams' assertions degrading and devastating. She noted that Charles W. Wadelington, the historian of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources "found no historical evidence to support Adams' unfortunate statement."⁴⁶ Richard Skeete, Jr. explained that the students of PMI "came from the islands, Africa, and at least 23 states." Empowered with her "blackness," Skeete wrote that Brown used her race as a platform "to motivate, mold and challenge those with whom she came in contact."⁴⁷ The denunciation of Robin Adams' assertion demonstrated how invested African American alumni and community members were in Brown's public memorialization. They also

⁴⁴ "Alamance Scene: Sedalia black history," *The Daily Times-News*, February 3, 1988.

⁴⁵ "The Correct Thing," *Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum Newsletter* 6, no. 6 (undated), North Carolina State Documents Collection, State Library of North Carolina; "Black History Observances Set," *The Daily Times-News*, February 5, 1989.

⁴⁶ "Palmer Institute Didn't Discriminate Against Some Blacks," *Greensboro News and Record*, May 15, 1993.

⁴⁷ "Palmer Institute Didn't Discriminate Against Some Blacks," *Greensboro News and Record*, May 15, 1993.

demonstrated their support of Brown's legacy by visiting the site. Only a few years after opening, the memorial site was the largest and most visited African American site in North Carolina.⁴⁸

Brown's public memory has remained relevant and vibrant throughout the twenty-first century, as well. In 2002, a newly renovated Canary Cottage was re-opened at the centennial celebration of PMI as the ultimate tribute to Brown. It also emphasized the public history element of the traditional house museum at the site. The centennial celebration began during Black History Month and included, etiquette workshops, a living history program featuring living Tuskegee Airman, a "Slavery and the Law" presentation, an African American genealogy workshop, a concert featuring the Brown Memorial Singers, and a regional history bowl quiz completion. Additionally, a three-day conference, "Origins of Excellence: African American Education in North Carolina: Past, Perspectives, and Prospects" was held in March of 2002 featuring scholars across the nation to commemorate CHB's educational contributions. The conference culminated in a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) roundtable discussion regarding the difficulties they face in the new millennium.⁴⁹

Today, the site remains the only African American public history site not centered around the antebellum and enslaved history of African Americans in North Carolina. It is also the first state sponsored site of a woman in the state, and is used to celebrate the legacies of North Carolina women.⁵⁰ More importantly, the Charlotte Hawkins Brown

⁴⁸ Melissa Manware, "Book Offers A Guided Tour of N.C. Black Historic Sites," *Greensboro News and Record*, July 26, 1992.

⁴⁹ "Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum to Observe Centennial" *Carolina Comments* 50, no. 2 (2002), 21, 23-24.

⁵⁰ "Women's Herstory Celebration," "Women's History Month," *Greensboro News and Record*, March 1, 1998.

Memorial State Historic Site is still the only state sponsored site that represents African American history in North Carolina.⁵¹

⁵¹ Mark Price, "Crumbling Heritage- As African American Historical Sites Decay, Movements Emerge to Preserve Them," *Charlotte Observer*, November 26, 1995.

Table 8.1

North Carolina General Assembly Appropriations for the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Site from 1983 to 1991

Year	Description of Appropriation Use	Amount (U.S. \$)
1983	Original Planning	67,377
1985	Operating Expenses	250,000
1986	Land Purchase	417,000
1988	Capital Improvement Planning	50,000
1989	Site Improvement Funds	482,000
1991	Annual Operating Budget	158,000
TOTAL		1,424,377

Source: Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historical Foundation, Inc. Newsletter
Vol 1, no. 1, (August 1991)

Table 8.2
Private and Additional State Funding for the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Site
as of 1991

Organization	Description of Funding Uses	Amount (U.S. \$)
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation	Operations	50,000
A.J. Fletcher Foundation	Marketing	10,000
NC General Assembly	At Risk Youth Program	11,000
RJR – Nabisco	Annual Banquet Support	5,000
PMI National Alumni	Canary Cottage	1,000
Fund Raising and Small Grants		30,000
TOTAL		107,000

Source: Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historical Foundation, Inc. Newsletter
Vol 1, no. 1, (August 1991)

CHAPTER 9

CELIA MANN, MODJESKA SIMKINS, & HISTORIC COLUMBIA

Mired in a controversial past as the first state to secede from the Union sparking the Civil War and home to one of the most oppressive Jim Crow regimes in the nation, Columbia has a physical landscape littered with Confederate statues, monuments, and historical markers of the Lost Cause and was enlisted in a half-century debate over the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina State House grounds. Yet, Columbia is the only city in the United States that commemorates African American public history through two public history sites centered around the legacies of African American women. These two sites commemorate the black past from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, focusing on the black liberation struggle through slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement. Centering black women in these sites not only highlights the distinctiveness of their raced and gendered experiences, but also provides a unique lens to understand African American history in a larger context.

While Charleston, South Carolina, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, is noted for its historical tourism of plantation sites, walking tours, and museums, the city has no public history site centered around the legacy of black women. Other sites in Charleston, including the highly anticipated opening of the International Slave Museum and the Old Slave Mart, commemorate African American history and

slavery. Columbia, the state capital, on the other hand commemorates the history of the African Americans through the lens of black women, and extends its scope to include the Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights Movement. This makes Columbia unique because there is no other city in the United States that contains as many public history sites centered around black women.

The continued and renewed efforts of local African American preservation groups and Historic Columbia Foundation's commitment to African American public history propelled the memorialization of African American women in Columbia. One of the first was Celia Mann's home, which was under threat of being destroyed by urban renewal in the 1970s. Family oral histories provide much of what is known about Celia Mann's early life and much of the details of her enslavement and emancipation remain unknown. Born in 1799, Celia Mann reportedly walked herself out of enslavement in Charleston, South Carolina to freedom in Columbia by the 1830s. The matriarch of her family, she journeyed on foot for over a hundred miles to create a new life for herself and her descendants. She married Ben Delane and lived with him in Columbia as early as 1837. The couple acquired property at 1901 Richland Street and had four daughters. Three of their daughters moved to Boston, while one, Agnes, remained in Columbia. Celia Mann worked as a midwife and was a founding member of one of the first African American churches in the city, Calvary Baptist Church. Her daughter, Agnes Jackson, inherited the land and property assets on Richland Street she and Ben acquired during their lives after her death in 1867. *The Daily Phoenix* described her as a "respected colored woman" that "was present at the birth of many of our citizens."¹ Mann's life as a health care provider

¹ *The Daily Phoenix*, September 9, 1867.

and property owner in the antebellum era made her a part of the small free black, middle-class population in South Carolina and demonstrates the possibilities of black social and economic mobility within a society built on the enslaved labor of millions of blacks.²

Bernice Conners, who was raised by her uncle, Charles Mann, Celia Mann's grandson, was the last person to live in the home. In 1970 the home was purchased by the Columbia Housing Authority (CHA) for \$20,000. After the CHA acquired the home, it stood unused and in disrepair. Conners recalled the home was ransacked and marble was taken from the parlor fireplace. An oak tree her uncle Charles planted in front of the home was removed in the early 1970s. Aware of its historic value, the CHA partnered with the SC Department of Archives and History to place the property on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 and transferred the deed over to the SC Historic Preservation Commission.³

Mann's life story was inspiring and a widely untold aspect of African American history. As the central figure of the home, visitors were able to connect her life with the history of slavery, free blacks, urbanization and black entrepreneurs. One article described her as a "tough" woman who was "resourceful" and that her "home stands as a monument and inspiration for those who believe in the rights of individuals."⁴ Mann's ability to free herself, become a mid-wife and property owner in the slave south

² Jakob D. Crockett, "A Democracy of Goods": An Archaeology of Commodity Landscapes in Columbia, South Carolina, 1870—1930", Ph.d diss., University of South Carolina, 2011; Jakob D. Crockett, "History and Archaeology at the Mann-Simons Site," *Historic Columbia Foundation*, 2012.

³ Karin Burchstead, "Good As New: Mann-Simons Cottage Represents Columbia's Free Black Community," *The Columbia Record*, May 18, 1978; Clark Surratt, "Home is History—Mann-Simons Cottage Vital to Story of Bernice Conners, S.C.," *The State*, February 1, 1993; Bernard V. Kearsse, "The Mann-Simons House," National Register Form, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, March 16, 1973.

⁴ Francois Pierre Nel, "Free At Last, She Bought Home Celia Mann's Cottage Open For Columbia," *Charlotte Observer*, December 7, 1989.

distinguished her historical narrative from popular understandings of the black woman's past in South Carolina. Definitively, "The life and legacy of Celia Mann shows how one woman went from Charleston slave to Columbia landowner," and reshaped the public discourse about the raced and gendered contours of the state's history.⁵

Mann's descendant Bernice Conners and African American community advocates came together in 1975 to form The Center for the Study and Preservation of Black History, Art and Folklore to save her home. They collaborated with the local preservation organization Richland County Historic Preservation Commission (later renamed Historic Columbia) to discuss fund raising efforts.⁶ The Center's President, Reverend I. DeQuincey Newman, represented the interests of African Americans at the meetings.⁷

Much like the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Foundation, Center members knew they needed a combination of partnerships, as well as private and public funding to raise the initial \$120,000 needed to make the Mann-Simons Cottage a center of black

⁵ "Black History Month," *The State*, February 9, 2006

⁶ "Agenda and Attachments, August 10, 1977, Richland County Historic Preservation Committee," Isaiah DeQuincey Newman Papers, General 1976-1977, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina; Dawn Hinshaw, "Rivals Unite to Preserve Houses Old Feud Waning as Groups Pull Together For 4 Columbia Sites," *The State*, May 15, 1994; The Richland County Historic Preservation Commission began as a public entity designed to save historic sites in Columbia/Richland County and eventually merged/developed into Historic Columbia Foundation (HCF) in 1994. HCF was private and garnered private funds, as well as continued support from the county/local and state government. While the public funds from the Commission supported the acquisition and large scale renovations of the historic homes, the HCF helped furnish, maintain, and develop education programming. "The commission owns and operates the four historic houses, while the foundation owns most of the furnishings." In 1994, the Commission disbanded, and the HCF took over the properties. In 2017, HCF renamed itself Historic Columbia.

⁷ CeCe Byers-Johnson to I. DeQuincey Newman, April 7, 1983, Isaiah DeQuincey Newman Papers, General 1983, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina; Correspondence from Frank L. Taylor and I.D. Newman, March 1975, Isaiah DeQuincey Newman Papers, General 1974-1975, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina; Reverend Newman's contributions as a memorializer were so instrumental, he was recognized for his work to saving the site in the early 1980s with a donor plaque placed prominently in the home.

history for the state.⁸ They were successful in acquiring funding from the public and from federal, state, and local governments. Small fundraiser events were held to raise money for the site, such as a scrabble tournament hosted by the “The Friends of Mann-Simons Historical Cottage” in 1978.⁹ In 1995, the Wisteria Garden Club assisted with the creation of a “medicinal and culinary herb garden in honor of the cottage’s famous resident and midwife, Celia Mann” and other landscaping.¹⁰ First Calvary Baptist Church, one of the oldest black churches in Columbia, also contributed money to the site. First Calvary Baptist Church, Second Calvary Baptist Church, and Zion Baptist Church, which all grew out of the religious meetings in Celia Mann’s basement, donated \$1,500 in 2003 to erect the historical marker that now rests on the front lawn of the site. Larger donations came from government grants and non-profit organizations, including the South Carolina Humanities Council, the United Black Fund of the Midlands, the U.S. Department of the Interior, the City of Columbia Community Development Department, and the South Carolina Bicentennial Commission. In the end the group raised \$90,000, but failed to reach their goal of \$120,000 which was necessary to completely renovate the site.¹¹

In spite of their \$30,000 deficit, the Mann-Simons Cottage opened to the public in 1978. Bernice Conner’s oral histories and recollections of her uncle Charles’ stories,

⁸ Joe Logan, “Funds Are Sought to Restore Home,” *The State*, March 7, 1975

⁹ “Mann-Simons Benefit Today At Prince Hall,” *The State*, March 29, 1978.

¹⁰ “Herbal Essence,” *The State*, May 31, 1995; Chuck Crumbo, “Timeless Beauty: Historical Gardens Growing in Popularity,” *The State*, March 22, 1998; Resolution R-2006-035, City of Columbia, Aug 16, 2006.

¹¹ Dawn Hinshaw, “Downtown Dig Reveals Abundance of Artifacts,” *The State*, May 7, 1998; Dawn Hinshaw, “Mann-Simons Cottage to Get Historic Marker,” *The State*, January 9, 2009; Karin Burchstead, “Good As New: Mann-Simons Cottage Represents Columbia’s Free Black Community,” *The Columbia Record*, May 18, 1978.

became the foundation of the public narrative of the home.¹² While archeological evidence necessitated a new site interpretative plan decades later, Conner's memories became essential to crafting the foundational narrative of the home and Celia Mann's legacy. At only 27, CeCe Byers became the site's first Executive Director and was the only full-time employee. Byers previously worked with the National Archives and was President of the City Museum Project in Washington, D.C. She worked closely with the Center for the Study and Preservation of Black History, Art, and Folklore, Inc. in order to establish the Mann-Simons Cottage as a major source of black history. As a pioneer African American public historian, Byers was among the first black museum professionals. She was determined to establish the Mann-Simons Cottage as "a center for black history" in South Carolina and the nation.¹³ As the only full-time staff, Byers had a large undertaking. She depended on volunteers to help give tours and programs, while she struggled to meet budgetary demands. However, Byers' efforts were not in vain. Much like the Madame Walker Theater Center and the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Memorial State Historic Site, the Mann-Simons Cottage became the destination to commemorate black history and cultural heritage.

The annual Jubilee Festival made it the moniker for black public history in Columbia. The first annual Jubilee Festival was held during the opening of the home to the public in May of 1978, just two years after The Center for the Study and Preservation of Black History, Art and Folklore was formed.¹⁴ The festival opened with a performance from the U.S. Command 282nd Army Band followed by performances from

¹² Clark Surratt, "Home is History—Mann-Simons Cottage Vital to Story of Bernice Conners, S.C.," *The State*, February 1, 1993

¹³ "Preserving The Past," *The Columbia Record*, December 28, 1978.

¹⁴ "Landmark Restored: Cottage-Opening Jubilee Planned," *The Columbia Record*, May 11, 1978.

folk band, Sweet Desolation String Band, and the Ebenezer First Baptist Church Mass Choir. In addition, children were able to get a free silk screening of animals by the Riverbanks Zoo, make crafts ranging from quilting to Catawba pottery, and tour the home.¹⁵

By the 1980s, the site stopped operating autonomously as The Center for the Study and Preservation of Black History, Art and Folklore and was fully incorporated into the Historic Columbia Foundation (HCF) house museum cluster. It became one of four historic house museums under HCF's management, and was used to represent African American culture. Other historic sites, included the Robert Mills House and Park, the Hampton-Preston Mansion and garden, and the Woodrow Wilson Home.¹⁶ The Mann-Simons site became the de facto African American public history location as a "shrine of freedom to the African American community."¹⁷

The HCF prominently advertised the Jubilee Festival that celebrated a wide variety of black history and "to honor the memory of Celia Mann and her family."¹⁸ In the 1990s, the Jubilee Festival celebrations expanded and included presentations on "African Traditions in Childbirth" and "Auset African Sisterhood," a free screening of the movie *Glory* accompanied by a re-enactment of the African American 54th

¹⁵ Karin Burchstead, "Good As New: Mann-Simons Cottage Represents Columbia's Free Black Community," *The Columbia Record*, May 18, 1978.

¹⁶ Historic Columbia has done an admirable job of revising their historical narratives in the twenty-first century to include a multi-dimensional depiction of history that includes, and at times, centers African American history at each of their sites, particularly the Woodrow Wilson House and the Hampton-Preston Mansion.

¹⁷ Jon Bream, "Columbia, S.C.—Architecture tells a piece of the story," *Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities*, March 30, 1997; Danny Flanders, "Tours Cast Soft Glow of Christmases Past," *The State*, December 6, 1992; Douglass Steimle, "Mann-Simons Cottage: an African-American shrine," *The Columbia Examiner*, May 9, 2009.

¹⁸ Michael Miller, "Jubilee to Explore Influence of African-American Culture," *The State*, August 20, 1999; "Jubilee celebrates the life of Celia Mann"; "Festivals Bloom in July and August," *The State*, June 29, 2001.

Massachusetts Infantry, performances from the World Champions Double Dutch Forces, and a wide array of jazz, African, and gospel music performances.¹⁹ Some years the festival was so elaborate it was held over two or three days.²⁰ In 1999, the Jubilee began on a Friday night with a gala “Ragtime, Blues, Jazz: A Progression.”²¹ In 2000, African-American Heritage Sites Tour was developed as an activity for the Jubilee Festival and expanded into an established tour of Historic Columbia.²² During its 30th year celebration, the Jubilee Festival honored the “30 Most Significant African Americans in Columbia and Richland County.”²³ By 2009, the home of civil rights activists Modjeska Simkins had been added to the Jubilee festival celebration as an attraction for tours and events during the day, including an oral history contest.²⁴ In 2012, the festival included the panel Presentation, “Preservation Matters: the Future of Historic African American Sites in Columbia.” The Jubilee Festival became so popular it gained national acclaim and was featured in *Ebony’s Travel Guide* as a notable African American event.²⁵

In addition to the Jubilee Festival, other black heritage events were celebrated at the Mann-Simons Cottage. During Black History Month, free tours were given of the site in the 1980s. In 1995, the ladies of Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority hosted a Juneteenth festival at the Mann-Simons cottage. Celebrating the emancipation of African Americans was the central focus of the festival, and a health fair and a voter registration drive were

¹⁹ Dawn Hinshaw, “Jubilee Festival Looks Back On Columbia’s Black History,” *The State* September 17, 1994; Dawn Hinshaw, “Black Culture Focus of Jubilee,” *The State*, October 1, 1994.

²⁰ Tanya Fogg Young, “Event Showcases African Culture,” *The State*, August 31, 2003.

²¹ “Annual Festival Celebrates Black Heritage,” *The Sun News*, August 20, 1999.

²² Bill Starr, “Historic Sites Tour Highlights Black History,” *The State*, February 6, 2000.

²³ “Jubilee Celebrates life of Celia Mann,” *The State*, August 18, 2008; Warner Montgomery, “Standing on the Shoulders of Many,” *The Columbia Star*, August 29, 2008.

²⁴ Douglas Steimle, “Historic Columbia Foundation to hold Oral History Contest,” *The Columbia Examiner*, July 20, 2009.

²⁵ “Ebony Travel Guide: What’s Happening Where!,” *Ebony*, August 2006.

prominently included, as well. The Mann-Simons site and Celia Mann's legacy became intertwined with community uplift and celebration of heritage. The organizers were commemorating the black past through Celia Mann's legacy while also addressing modern day issues of health disparities and politics in the African American community.²⁶

In 2002, the Mann-Simon's site received a historical marker. The designation made it one of the 5% of historical markers memorializing African Americans in Columbia. Celia Mann was the first black woman in Columbia to have one erected in her honor.²⁷ The Celia Mann Award was also introduced in the early 2000s by the Historic Columbia Foundation in order to recognize the preservation efforts of individuals, neighborhood associations, and community organizations, like The Center for the Study and Preservation of Black History, Art and Folklore.²⁸

Archaeology studies created a new historical narrative for the site for the twenty-first century. Beginning in 1998, archeologists Chris Clement and Mona Grunden began an archeological dig to prevent overlooking or damaging any artifacts in a new landscaping project. They couldn't have imagined how drastically their work would change the historical interpretation of the site.²⁹ As more evidence of the property's past

²⁶ Michelle McCullers, "Festival to Share Art, Culture African-American Creations, Performances Highlight Area's Let's Share Celebration," *The State*, September 1, 1996; Bill McDonald, "Juneteenth Festival Full of Soul," *The State*, June 21, 1998; B.J. Ellis, "Black History Month February Is Time To Celebrate," *The State*, January 28, 1988.

²⁷ Donald Wood, "Coming Up—Historic Foundation Sets Two Events," *The State*, September 9, 2002; "Close to Home," *The State*, September 12, 2002; Dawn Hinshaw, "Festival Kicks Off Fund Raising for Marker," *The State*, September 19, 2002.

²⁸ "Historic Projects Honored," *The State*, May 21, 2004; Shalama Jackson, "Awards to Recognize Preservation Efforts," *The State*, May 7, 2005; Warner Montgomery, "Historic Columbia awards preservation," *The Columbia Star*, June 2, 2006

²⁹ Dawn Hinshaw, "'Dig' Might Unearth Clues to Early Black Life in Columbia," *The State*, April 17, 1998.

was *dug up*, the narrative of Celia Mann began to change. By 2011, the archeologists and Historic Columbia’s research team revealed that the cottage was built three years *after* Mann’s death. This meant that Mann did not build or live in the Mann-Simons Cottage, but rather another structure on the property. Instead, Agnes Jackson, Mann’s daughter, built the home that is now known as the Mann-Simons Cottage.³⁰

In order to incorporate the additional buildings and history the archeology study unearthed, the Historic Columbia Foundation erected “ghost structures” outlining a lunch counter, grocery store, outhouse, and two houses that were built by Mann’s descendants. While the additional history shifted the narrative of the site from Mann’s entrepreneurial pursuits to those of her family, the site remains centered in her legacy.³¹ The ghost structures were turned into an *outdoor museum*, making it the first in South Carolina and one of the first in the nation.³² The additional structures necessitated a name change from the Mann-Simons Cottage to the Mann-Simons Site. Between 2015 and 2016, the interior of the home was redone with new exhibits and a new interpretive plan was developed.³³ Historic Columbia Director Robin Waites remarked that the cottage “used to be set up as a traditional historic house museum... We’ve really flipped that around, so it’s really more of a 21st century museum.”³⁴ This type of ongoing transformation to the

³⁰ Douglas Steimle, “Celia Mann and the Mann-Simons Cottage,” *The Columbia Examiner*, January 7, 2011; Dawn Hinshaw, “Rewriting History of Mann-Simons Cottage—Black History Month,” *The State*, February 27, 2011; Crockett, “A Democracy of Goods”; Jakob D. Crockett, “History and Archaeology at the Mann-Simons Site,” *Historic Columbia Foundation*, 2012.

³¹ Douglas Steimle, “Ghost structures at Mann-Simons Site,” *The Columbia Examiner*, May 8, 2012.

³² “Historic Columbia Foundation announces the completion of the Mann-Simons Outdoor Museum,” *The Columbia Star*, February 15, 2013.

³³ Lois Carlisle, “As Yet Untold: The Reinterpretation of the Mann-Simons Site,” *Garnet & Black*, Fall 2016.

³⁴ Matt Long, “Refurbished Mann-Simons Cottage will reopen to public this weekend,” *South Carolina Radio Network*, September 16, 2016.

interpretive narrative and the site has made it a significant aspect of national conversations around public history and preservation. It also has made Celia Mann's legacy relevant in the twenty-first century. Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin stated that

The Mann-Simons family story is the story of so many chapters in Columbia's history: free blacks' lives before the Civil War, African American prospering and building a community after the Civil War, family members leaving Columbia to go north in search of a better future, Columbia's black leaders challenging racism in the Jim Crow era, landed African-Americans being forced to sell their family property and even the beginnings of the historic preservation movement in our African-American community.³⁵

The city has continued to embrace and support the site and herald the legacy of Celia Mann and her descendants. Incorporating Mann's husband, Ben Delane, and daughter, Agnes Jackson, and several other descendants into the interpretive site narrative only expands the site's meaning. As the anchor of the narrative, Mann is not only the moniker of this site as a beacon of black history, but she remains central to the site's overall public history.

The memorialization of Modjeska Simkins highlights another layer of the commemoration of African American women in Columbia. Just one block away from the Mann-Simons Site, the Simkins house that is located on Marion Street in downtown Columbia provides a historical narrative of the Civil Rights Movement in Columbia. Mary Modjeska Monteith Simkins was born on December 5, 1899 the first child of Rachel and Henry Monteith in Columbia, South Carolina. Her mother instilled a deep

³⁵ Steve Benjamin, "What one family's adversity and perseverance teach us," *The State*, September 12, 2016.

passion for education in her daughter at an early age, teaching and encouraging her to soak up knowledge. She excelled in mathematics and upon graduating from Benedict College (a historically black college in Columbia) in 1921, she began teaching at Booker T. Washington High School. She worked there with an accomplished black faculty, including Celia Dial Saxon, until she married Andrew Whitfield Simkins in 1929. From 1931 to 1942, Simkins worked with the South Carolina Tuberculosis Association as the first Director of Negro Work. She embraced access to adequate health care as a fundamental human and civil right and began her lifelong dedication to obtaining social justice for African Americans. In the 1930s, Simkins began working with the Civil Welfare League, a group that advocated for fair treatment from the government and law enforcement. She also began working with Columbia's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People local branch as a public relations and state meeting organizer. Displeased with her fervent public advocacy for social justice and civil rights, the South Carolina Tuberculosis Association terminated her position in 1942.

Undeterred, Simkins became more active in civil rights. She was elected state secretary of the South Carolina NAACP and became heavily involved in civil rights legal cases in the state throughout the 1940s. In the 1950s, the most prominent case Simkins assisted with was *Briggs v. Elliot*, the first of five cases in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education*, which legally ended segregation in public schools. Simkins regularly housed Thurgood Marshall, the head NAACP lawyer working the case, on his visits to South Carolina and helped organize community members in Clarendon County that were a part of the case. In addition to the NAACP, she worked with “more than fifty progressive reform organizations over a period of six decades,” including the Southern

Negro Youth Congress, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the National Negro Congress. Her unrelenting advocacy for justice, led to her being known as the “Matriarch of the South Carolina civil rights movement.” Simkins’ bold personality and unrelenting tenacity made her a valuable asset to civil rights causes on the local, state, regional, and national levels, but did not always make her popular among other black leaders. Still her biographer, Barbara Woods argues that Simkins “was a steadfast, persistent, and courageous activist in the struggle for human rights in the United States,” and continued to be one until her death in 1992.³⁶

Among the first public commemorations surrounding Simkins’ legacy was her official portrait commissioned by the South Carolina Legislative Black Caucus and prominently placed in the State House.³⁷ In 1992, Catherine Bruce Fleming began a documentary project, “A Perfect Equality: Conflicts and Achievements of Historic Black Columbia,” which focused on the rich and marginalized history of African Americans. She interviewed Simkins for the project and began talking to her about the legacy of her home as a human rights center. Simkins remarked, “I’m not worrying about that. That’s for future generations to think about.”³⁸ Though Simkins didn’t live to see the Bruce’s

³⁶ Catherine Fleming Bruce, *The Sustainers: Being, Building and Doing Good Through Activism in the Sacred Spaces of Civil Rights, Human Rights and Social Movements* (Charleston: Quality Books, Inc., 2016), 84; Barbara Woods, “Simkins, Mary Modjeska Monteith,” in *Black Women in America*, 2nd ed., Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; 115-117; Barbara Woods, “Black woman activist in twentieth century South Carolina: Modjeska Monteith Simkins,” PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 1978.

³⁷ Lee Bandy, “‘She Showed Us How to Live’—Simkins’ Spirit Lives, Mourners Say,” *The State*, April 10, 1992; “Richland House Members Will Lead To Caucuses,” *The State*, November 21, 1992; Nina Brook and Cindi Ross Scoppe, “Meetings to Set Tone of Session Impact of New Lawmakers to Be Tested in Both Houses,” *The State*, December 6, 1992; Michelle Davis, “Artist Lifts First Black Justice from the Shadows of History,” *The State*, February 26, 1996.

³⁸ Bruce, *The Sustainers*, 88; Ernest Wiggins, “Blacks’ Role in Columbia Chronicled Videos Seek to Capture History Before It’s Lost,” *The State*, February 2, 1992.

documentary, she left an indelible mark on the preservationist that led to the establishment of her home as a public history site and a human rights center.

Several years before Simkins died, she began to be publicly acknowledged and celebrated as a civil rights hero. In 1990, she was a featured speaker in Columbia area schools and was included as one of two black women in the South Carolina Role Models Calendar.³⁹ She also was the subject of an hour-long documentary about her civil rights activism produced by South Carolina's Public Broadcasting Station (ETV). The documentary, "Making a Way Out of No Way," aired nationwide during Black History Month in 1990 and proclaimed that "The name Modjeska Monteith Simkins evokes images of a fearless, aggressive soldier fighting on the front lines of the civil rights movement."⁴⁰ Her public memory became irrevocably tied to the legacy of the African American liberation struggle throughout much of the twentieth century. Columbia City Councilman E.W. Cromartie declared December 5th as "Mary Modjeska Monteith Simkins Day," in 1991 in honor of her 92nd birthday. The same year the South Carolina Women's Consortium began giving the Modjeska Simkins Award in honor of "an outstanding citizen who has worked to improve the quality of life for all people in South Carolina."⁴¹ Simkins' life story became a part of the cannon of South Carolina history of women, African Americans, Columbians, and social justice.⁴²

³⁹ Diane Lore, "Blacks Set Examples of Success 12 To Be Featured As Role Models For Youths," *The State* November 29, 1989; Vicki Shealy, "School Districts to Celebrate – Triumphs of Black Americans," *The State* Feb 1, 1990.

⁴⁰ Bhakti Larry Hough, "S.C. ETV Focuses Lens on Civil Rights Warrior," *The State*, February 19, 1990.

⁴¹ Lori Roberts, "'Stand Up' For Her 92nd Birthday, Simkins Gets Honors," *The State*, December 5, 1991; POINT, "Do Something," last modified October 11, 1995, <http://www.scpronet.com/point/9510/doi.html>.

⁴² Idella Bodie's *South Carolina Women* 2nd volume included Simkins' biography, as part of her inclusion of black women left out of the first volume; William Starr, "Just in Time—New Edition Expands

The establishment of her home as a public history site began several years after her death in 1995. Listed on the National Register in 1994, the home remained empty and unused after her passing. Bruce found that Simkins' home was overrun with garbage and homeless squatters, in the years following her death.⁴³ Deeply disturbed by what she saw, Bruce established the Modjeska Monteith Simkins House Restoration Project and through her role as Director of the Collaborative for Community Trust (CCT) stopped the home from being demolished by the City of Columbia.⁴⁴ CCT Board Members ranged from South Carolina Representative Alma Byrd to University of South Carolina professors, including African American Studies Department Chair Cleveland Sellars.⁴⁵ They worked under Bruce's leadership to create a lasting public history site that was to be a living embodiment of Simkins' activist spirit. Bruce and the CCT maintained that Simkins' home was "more than a house and more than a place of history... We envision the collaborative working here."⁴⁶ They also intended "to use the home as a center for social change activities and a place to display Simkins memorabilia."⁴⁷

With their vision in place, the CCT began fundraising to save, restore and renovate the home. The organization raised \$20,000 of the \$180,000 goal in several months. With the help of the Columbia Housing Authority, Historic Columbia Foundation, Historic Charleston Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation,

on S.C. Women," *The State* March 17, 1991; Idella Bodie, *South Carolina Women* (Orangeburg: Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1990).

⁴³ Joseph Stroud, "Center a Doorway to Civil-Rights History," *The State*, December 15, 2002.

⁴⁴ Bertram Rantin, "Group Plans to Restore Simkins' House," *The State*, May 22, 1996; Jill Hanson, "The Modjeska Monteith Simkins Home," *OAH Magazine of History* 12, no. 1 (1997), 19; Bruce, *The Sustainers*, 94-97.

⁴⁵ Dawn Hinshaw, "Capturing History Preservation of Home Allows Civil Rights Legacy To Live On," *The State*, May 26, 1997.

⁴⁶ Bertram Rantin, "Group Plans to Restore Simkins' House," *The State*, May 22, 1996

⁴⁷ "Home Nears Third of Goal," *The State*, December 6, 1996.

SC State Historic Preservation Office and the City of Columbia the CCT raised \$60,000 and had conducted several small tours of the home.⁴⁸ The CCT revamped their proposal plan in the spring of 1997 by increasing their goal to \$325,000, but funding stalled. Dismayed at their slowed progress, at least one CCT member blamed it on the political climate in South Carolina. Board Member Ernest Wiggins stated, “I think that to hold up and want to memorialize the efforts of a civil rights worker may strike some people as being a little too hot right now to pursue.”⁴⁹ Other groups, however, continued to see the value in the memorial and assisted. In October 1997, the Women in Law organization of the USC Law School held a yard sale fundraiser for the Simkins Home. The group’s advisor, Pam Robinson noted that no other project in the organizations history “galvanized the group as much as this one...Modjeska Simkins did so much to influence civil rights legislation and equality of opportunity for women, so all this fund raising is truly a labor of love for us.”⁵⁰ While the money was being raised and incremental renovations were being made, the CCT opened the home up to the public for special events and tours.⁵¹

The site officially opened in April 2001 as the “Modjeska Monteith Simkins Center for Justice, Ethics and Human Rights.”⁵² The home functioned as both a museum

⁴⁸ “\$20,000 Raised in Effort To Restore Simkins Home,” *The State*, October 16, 1996; “Home Nears Third of Goal,” *The State*, December 6, 1996; Hanson, “The Modjeska Monteith Simkins Home,” 19.

⁴⁹ Dawn Hinshaw, “Capturing History Preservation of Home Allows Civil Rights Legacy To Live On,” *The State*, May 26, 1997.

⁵⁰ Bill McDonald, “Yard Sale Funds To Restore Home Simkins Residence To Become a Center,” *The State*, October 11, 1997.

⁵¹ Allison Askins, “Pilgrims to Retrace Slave Trade Route to Group To Arrive in Columbia Friday, March To Simkins House,” *The State*, August 12, 1998.

⁵² Warren Bolton, “Simkins Center a Worthy Tribute to Feisty, Dedicated Activist,” *The State*, April 3, 2001; Dawn Hinshaw, “Ceremony Marks Renovation of Civil Rights Leader’s Home,” *The State*, April 5, 2001.

and public forum for civil rights and political advocacy, fulfilling the CCT's vision for honoring Simkins' public legacy. One of the first national political candidates to recognize the home's value was Joe Lieberman when he ran for President on the Democratic Party Ticket in 2004. He unveiled his anti-poverty program as part of his political platform at the Simkins Home to symbolize his commitment and recognition of civil rights issues.⁵³ When Albert E. Jabs remarked in an op-ed in *The State* that "When the national political parties descend on our beautiful South Carolina, they need to see the singular respect and dignity we repose on our distinguished civil rights leaders," he centered her in civil rights history.⁵⁴ Moreover, the "Six Who Dared" was an exhibition installed at the home in 2004 about six people from South Carolina, who played integral roles in the Brown v. Board of Education case.⁵⁵ The same year, the fortieth year anniversary of the Freedom Riders was commemorated at the Simkins House by registering African American voters in conjunction with the James Earl Chaney Foundation.⁵⁶

Despite the national recognition as a civil rights public history site, funding remained an issue. Bruce and the CCT had raised over \$300,000, but still struggled to maintain the site.⁵⁷ Bruce noted that "Historic preservation funds aren't what we wish they were. We're calling on the public to help." City officials like Mayor Bob Coble publicly stated that "African American historic buildings are a very strong part of our

⁵³ Lee Bandy, "Lieberman Stumps in S.C., Hints Bush on Jobs, Poverty," *The State*, January 19, 2004.

⁵⁴ "Refurbish Simkins' Home, Tell Her Story," *The State*, April 12, 2007.

⁵⁵ Gina Smith, "Medal To Commemorate Briggs' Part in Decision," *The State*, May 7, 2004.

⁵⁶ "Richland County: About Town," *The State*, June 7, 2004; Williesha Lakin, "'Freedom' Bus to Stop in Columbia," *The State*, June 11, 2004.

⁵⁷ Katrina Goggins, "Home of S.C. civil rights matriarch could face demolition," *The Union Daily Times*, December 15, 2006.

historic community and tourist venues,” but failed to provide the continuous stream of funds necessary to maintain the site.⁵⁸ Ultimately, issues with funding led to the transition of the site management. Bruce and the CCT were behind in payments on a \$51,000 bank loan received in 2003 and were in jeopardy of losing the site to foreclosure.⁵⁹ To explain the situation the group faced, Bruce noted that “The purchase, restoration and operation of a historic site is a gargantuan task, even more so with a paucity of staff support and resources.”⁶⁰ While the CCT was successful in securing the foundational funding it needed to acquire and open the home as a functioning public history site and community activist center, it was a much more difficult task to operate on a daily and annual basis without a steady stream of income.

In an op-ed, local resident Kevin Fisher accused Bruce of mishandling the money she received to restore the home, and the Columbia City Council of mishandling taxpayer dollars. Fisher was not the only person dissatisfied with Bruce’s performance. Dissatisfaction from community stakeholders and local government catalyzed the transition of the site from the CCT to the HCF.⁶¹ Bruce responded to Fisher’s accusations by first noting, “had the Collaborative [CCT] not stepped up 12 years ago, the Simkins House would not be here today.” She explained that no financial decisions were made without the guidance and consent of the Board of Directors. In the absence of “developers or well-financed institution,” Bruce expressed her “hope that other ordinary

⁵⁸ Gina Smith, “Repairs Urged For Civil Rights Site,” *The State*, December 15, 2006.

⁵⁹ Gina Smith, “Saving a Part of History—BlueCross Comes to Home’s Rescue,” *The State*, August 7, 2007.

⁶⁰ Catherine Fleming Bruce, “Simkins House Will Be Center Piece of Civil Rights Movement in Columbia,” *The State* September 1, 2007.

⁶¹ Kevin Fisher, “Modjeska Simkins Deserves Better,” *Free Times*, June 17, 2010.

people will continue to step out on faith to preserve history in their communities.”⁶²

Indeed, without any formal training or major financial backing, Bruce and the Collaborative saved the Simkins home in the carriage house.

In 2007, Bruce and the CCT made the decision to transition the site management to the Historic Columbia Foundation. The HCF had the institutional and financial stream to better operate and maintain the home and its functions. BlueCross BlueShield paid the overdue bank loan, purchased the home outright, and renovated the carriage house where Thurgood Marshall stayed during his work on the *Briggs v. Elliot* case. Historic Columbia Foundation agreed to incorporate the home into its organizational structure and run it along with its other sites, including Mann-Simons. Additionally, the City of Columbia pledged an annual \$60,000 for the site for maintenance, staff and programming.⁶³ The Historic Columbia Foundation was able to secure funding from the federal government as well for projects at the home. In 2010, Congressman James E. Clyburn garnered a \$150,000 appropriation for restoration work.⁶⁴

Even though the site’s operation shifted from the CCT to HCF, the purpose and function of the site did not. The South Carolina Progressive Network, headquartered out of the Simkins home since 2009, launched the Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights in 2015 to teach “Modjeska-style” community organizing and strategies for local activism. The group also honors Simkins legacy by celebrating her birthday every Dec 5th.⁶⁵ Other community organizations, like the “Midlands Transit Riders Association,”

⁶² Andrew Moore, “Simkins Restoration Requires Public-Private Partnership,” *Free Times*, July 25, 2007.

⁶³ “Columbia to help restore Modjeska Simkins house,” *The State*, August 17, 2007.

⁶⁴ “Jim Clyburn’s earmarks,” *The State*, August 9, 2010.

⁶⁵ *ABC Columbia Site Staff*, “Modjeska Simkins Birthday Party!,” *ABC Columbia*, November 23, 2015.

used the space to advocate for local issues of inequity and democracy. Historic Columbia used the space for a wide variety of public history programs from Jubilee to Archaeology Day to guided tours.⁶⁶ The award winning “Scholar-in-Residence” program provided housing for a doctoral student doing research on Richland County Reconstruction History in 2013.⁶⁷

Within the last decade, the Historic Columbia Foundation has highlighted the significance of African American women in Columbia through a bus tour, “Walking in the Footsteps of Entrepreneurs, Activists, and Educators,” which illustrates “200 years of history and influence of African-American women” in Columbia focusing specifically on the Mann-Simons Cottage and Modjeska Simkins House.⁶⁸ These sites work in unison to illustrate unique and underrepresented aspects of African American history through the lens of black women. Though Columbia’s preservation efforts of African American women are like no other city in the nation, a consistent stream of funding threatened to hinder the development of these sites. However, memorializers like I. DeQuincey Newman, Bernice Conners, and Catherine Fleming Bruce held fast to their visions of African American public history. Their visions have manifested and evolved to remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

⁶⁶ Dy Lucas, “New group aims to join talks on transit—Midlands Buses,” *The State*, April 4, 2013; “Historic Columbia sponsors Public Archaeology Days at Modjeska Simkins Site,” *Columbia Examiner*, November 13, 2012; “Historic Columbia offers Early Adventures: Celebrating African-American Heritage,” *Columbia Examiner*, January 22, 2013.

⁶⁷ “Local & State,” *The Post and Courier*, June 16, 2013; “Historic Columbia Foundation receives 2013 Preservation Service Award,” *Carolina Panorama*, June 20, 2013; “Life of noted Civil Rights warrior Modjeska Simkins to Be celebrated,” *Carolina Panorama*, November 28, 2013; South Carolina Progressive Network, “Modjeska Simkins School: About,” accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.scpronet.com/modjeskaschool/>.

⁶⁸ Douglas Steimle, “Historic Columbia Foundation presents ‘Walking in the Footsteps,’” *The Columbia Examiner*, February 11, 2011.

CONCLUSION

In the twenty-first century a new generation of memorializers and public memory crafters are signaling another shift in African American women's memorialization.

Fannie Lou Hamer's memorialization in Mississippi is one notable example. A working class civil rights activist, Hamer began to be memorialized in the early 2000s and now has a statue and memorial park dedicated to her legacy. Another example is The Colored Girls Museum. In 2015, Vashti DuBois founded The Colored Girls Museum in her own home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to celebrate the *ordinary extraordinary* black woman. DuBois proudly proclaims,

In spite of everything, the Colored Girl continues to demonstrate her connectedness her willingness to create from a place of love, to use that love to sustain others, to bind family and community together, to use our bodies to imagine, to protect, to comfort, to grieve and to fight.¹

The Colored Girls Museum is representative of all the nameless African American women whose history has not been documented or celebrated in public spaces. Black women artists fill the museum with unique and extraordinary art pieces, installations, and exhibits to highlight under explored aspects of African American women's lived experiences. The Colored Girls Museum is a bold statement about new ways to commemorate less prominent African American women.

¹ This statement appears on a wall in the foyer of The Colored Girls Museum.

Museum exhibits, such as “Fashioning the Women of Weeksville” (2017) at the Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, New York are demonstrative of new areas of focus in African American women’s public history. When the Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, D.C. opened the “Black Women: Achievement Against the Odds” exhibit in 1976, it was among the first centered on African American women in the United States. The profiles of over forty black women from Phillis Wheatley to Eleanor Holmes Norton were displayed as visitors learned about their amazing feats. These profile exhibits were important and necessary to educate the public about how African American women contributed to American history. Decades later, “Fashioning the Women of Weeksville” is an exhibit that illustrates how museums are engaging the public in different aspects of African American women’s public history.

While historic sites and museums are central traditional mediums of public history, social media and other web-based platforms have transformed how people learn about African American women’s history. FaceBook, Twitter, and Google Doodles have become significant fixtures in commemorating African American women’s legacies. Memorializers of all backgrounds have a free platform to celebrate the lives of African American women, and the Internet is now one of the most significant new mediums in public history.

African American public history is also beginning to center women in environmental history. Plantations have been the primary venue of memorialization in commemorating African American women’s contributions and connections to nature and agriculture. In the twenty first century, memorializers are transforming how African American women are understood in relation to environmental history. The Harriet

Barber Home in Hopkins, South Carolina is one of the only public history sites in the nation that commemorates African American women's environmental history on black owned land.

Much of what is known about Harriet Barber happened during the Reconstruction era. Barber was born enslaved in Lower Richland, South Carolina. After being emancipated at the end of the Civil War, she and her husband, Samuel Barber, used their agricultural skills to run a farm in the same area. In 1872, the Barbers participated in the South Carolina Land Commission land redistribution program. This program was designed to provide opportunities for land ownership and economic empowerment to formerly enslaved African Americans in South Carolina. Their lot was comprised of forty-two and a half acres, which they used for multi-crop production of cotton and corn. The Barbers built a house and well on their land. They were so successful in cultivating crops they were able to own their land outright in just seven years. In 1879, Harriet made the final payment to the Land Commission and received the title for their lot. The legacy of the Barbers lived beyond their deaths in the 1890s and their descendants have lived on their land for almost 150 years. The Barber land is the only surviving African American owned property from the Land Commission in South Carolina.²

Located in rural Hopkins, South Carolina at 116 Barberville Loop, the Harriet Barber home is about fourteen miles south of downtown Columbia. Though built and owned by both Harriet and Samuel Barber, the site was named the Harriet Barber House. This was an intentional decision to memorialize an African American woman because descendant Ulysses Barber explained, "She really was the one who did the business of

² Harriet Barber House, "Our History," April 1, 2006, <http://www.harrietbarberhouse.org/2006/04/01/our-history/>.

the place.”³ Like Bernice Conners, family oral histories passed down several generations were used as the foundational basis of the site’s interpretive narrative. Additionally, a wide host of “yellowed documents, handwritten notes and pictures that document four generations of preachers, teachers and farmers” have been carefully preserved by family members, like Ulysses. Though he didn’t have the financial resources to restore the home, he was able to publicize its history and make the site a moniker for rural and agricultural African American history distinct from familiar plantation narratives. He told *The State* in 1990, “The future of the house is uncertain. Ragged and uninhabited, it would take a grant or some other special funding to restore it.” He then established the Harriet Barber House Restoration Foundation and began working with the African American Heritage Council, which collaborated with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History to recognize sites of historical significance to black South Carolinians. The Barber House was listed on the national register in 1986 and integrated in tours of the Lower Richland area as early as 1990. However, it was not until the twenty-first century that the home became a fully operational public history site.⁴

After Ulysses’ death in 2004, his daughters, Marie Adams, Mary Kirkland and Carrie White, and his niece, Deborah Scott Brooks, made his dream a reality. Carrie White explained, “It’s just so important as blacks to know, to have a sense of history of themselves...I think that’s what we’ve lost because of our ancestors being taken from their homes.”⁵ As African American memorializers, these women understood the need

³ Michael Sponhour, “A Home For History Time Has Worn Away,” *The State*, February 6, 1994.

⁴ Michael Sponhour, “A Home For History Time Has Worn Away,” *The State*, February 6, 1994.

⁵ Joy Woodson, “‘This is Our Heritage’—Freed Slaves’ Home Saved Richland County Funds Will Help in Restoration of 1880s Homestead in Hopkins,” *The State*, December 24, 2006; “Metro & State Briefly,” *The State*, June 6, 2007.

for collaborative partnerships to provide funding for their preservation efforts. In 2006, they secured a \$25,000 grant from the Richland County Conservation Commission, followed by an additional \$37,500 in 2007.⁶ Marie Adams became a founder and Chairwoman of the South East Rural Community Outreach which also received funding from Richland County to preserve and promote Lower Richland county's historical tourism. Richland County Councilwoman Bernice Scott was an important ally in garnering local and state appropriations for the site, including \$167,250 in 2007 and \$250,000 in 2008.⁷

The women were also adept in obtaining support from the Columbia preservation community through Historic Columbia Foundation (HCF). The Barber House has received several grants and awards from HCF and was incorporated in their "Historic Homes Tour of Lower Richland" in 1990.⁸ Like the Mann-Simons site, the Barber House became the representative of African American history amongst a host of plantations and grand homes of former planters and slave owners. It also represented an unconventional aspect of American history through Harriet and Samuel's land ownership during Reconstruction. The family began sharing their families' story through inventive programming that has increasingly made the site more significant in the Columbia and Lower Richland communities. They began in 2007 with an African American Heritage Day Celebration at the site.⁹ By 2008, they were able to open the home for guided tours

⁶ "Grants to Help Restore Landmark Schoolhouses," *The State*, June 15, 2006.

⁷ "'We're All Connected': Group to Promote Lower Richland's Heritage Corridor," *The State*, July 19, 2007; Dawn Hinshaw, "Tourism funds flowing to Lower Richland area—Plan will push historic sites," *The State*, July 9, 2008.

⁸ Loretta Neal, "Home Tour Demonstrates Life In Lower Richland of the Past," *The State*, May 17, 1990.

⁹ "Almanac: Events, People, Schools & Organizations in your Neighborhood," *The State*, May 24, 2007.

during a Heritage and Memorial Day celebration that featured jazz and African music, carnival rides and local vendors.¹⁰ In 2010, they erected a historical marker in front of the home.¹¹ Their participation in the Strong Threads Program, “an annual celebration of African American history and culture,” also began in 2010.¹² In 2011, the Columbia International Festival hosted the “Richland’s International Flavors” event highlighting German, Israeli, West African, Filipino, and Thai cultures.¹³ They began an annual Juneteenth Celebration in 2014 with three days of exciting programming, including a community barbeque, African American historical reenactments, and tours of the home.¹⁴

With annual Memorial Day celebrations at the Barber Home, the site has become the primary public history site to commemorate the holiday in Lower Richland. In fact, the “Moving Wall” replica of the national Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. was featured at the Barber Home in 2016.¹⁵ Programming has been expanded further by partnering with the annual *Swampfest*, sponsored by Congaree National Park of the National Park Service, twelve miles east of the home. Several family members appear in the Congaree National Park’s visitor video and regular programming that truly accentuates the rural and agricultural history of the site and African Americans in the region. The African American environmental history of the Barber site makes it so unique that the Barber Home has been recognized by the Columbia Tree and Appearance Commission for the Dawn Redwoods located on the property.¹⁶ Ultimately, the historical

¹⁰ “You are invited to eat sweet potato pie,” *The Columbia Star*, May 9, 2008; “Celebrate Memorial Day in Lower Richland,” *The Times and Democrat*, May 15, 2008.

¹¹ Joey Holleman, “New markers tell story of Lower Richland,” *The State*, September 10, 2010.

¹² “Cook’s Calendar,” *The State*, February 10, 2010.

¹³ Dawn Hinshaw, “Briefly: Richland County,” *The State*, June 25, 2011.

¹⁴ “Juneteenth Celebration June 19-21,” *The Columbia Star*, June 6, 2014.

¹⁵ South Eastern Rural Outreach, “Lower Richland Memorial Day Celebration 2016: The Moving Wall,” *One Columbia*, May 30, 2016.

¹⁶ Megan Sexton, “Treasured Trees,” *The State*, December 6, 2009.

narrative of the Barber House has become a dynamic hybrid of African American reconstruction, agricultural, environmental, and women's history.

Maggie Lena Walker's memorialization has important lessons to teach about the past, present, and perhaps, future trajectories of African American women's memorialization. Her public memorization began on a local level with naming memorialization in the early 1930s. The local government in Richmond named a segregated Negro vocational high school after her in 1936. In 1938, Maggie Walker High School was opened to "relieve the crowded conditions" at Armstrong High School which had been the only high school for African Americans in Richmond since 1865 when it was established by the Freedman's Bureau.¹⁷ As a Public Works Administration (PWA) funded school, it became the first named after an African American woman and also the first school led by an African American principal in the city.¹⁸ The naming of Maggie Walker High School was a transformative moment for African Americans in Richmond.¹⁹ By the 1970s her home was turned into a traditional public history site as a local house museum and subsequently incorporated into the National Park Service. She was the first African American woman to have a historic site centered around her legacy in the National Park Service. In 2018, her home remains one of three African American women National Park Service units. The trajectory of Walker's public commemorations is still expanding in the twenty-first century.

¹⁷ "Negro to Head School For First Time," *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, February 10, 1936.

¹⁸ "Negro to Head School For First Time," *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, February 10, 1936; "1, 115,900 Spent by PWA in Richmond," *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, September 18, 1937.

¹⁹ Armstrong was also the founder of Hampton Institute in Virginia; "About Armstrong: History Overview," *Armstrong High School, Richland Public Schools*, <https://www.rvaschools.net/Page/668>.

Maggie Lena Walker was the first woman to be president of a bank in the United States. Born in 1867, she was a central African American activist in the both the Jackson Ward community in Richmond and nationally through her work with Mary McLeod Bethune, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, and a host of other prominent leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰ Walker's neighborhood, Jackson Ward in Richmond, Virginia, was a place where African Americans could thrive economically as middle class professionals and property owners. Referred to as "Little Africa," "Harlem of the South," and "Black Wall Street," Jackson Ward offered a space of refuge and opportunities for collective resistance to the social, economic, and political constraints of the oppressive Jim Crow regime.²¹

With a strong background in "accounting and sales," Walker gradually became very involved in the Independent Order of St. Luke (IOSL), a fraternal organization and mutual benefit society.²² By 1899, she had become its President and worked with black women to significantly increase IOSL philanthropic and economic activities in Richmond. Among her many contributions, Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson argue that she and "her followers helped to found a school for delinquent girls, raised money for scholarships, supported women's suffrage, denounced the theft of the vote from black men, and spoke out against lynching."²³ Walker was guided by what Elsa Barkley Brown, the foremost scholar of Walker, describes as "womanist consciousness," a combination of activism and ideology used to build institutions in

²⁰ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Constructing a Life and a Community: A Partial Story of Maggie Lena Walker," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 7 (1993): 1.

²¹ Gertrude Woodruff Marlowe, *A Right Worthy Grand Mission: Maggie Lena Walker and the Quest for Black Economic Empowerment* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 2004), xv.

²² Brown, "Constructing Life and Community," 1-2

²³ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 202.

black communities, while recognizing the distinct circumstances that intersections of race and gender created for black women.²⁴ Under her leadership IOSL expanded its mission and propelled Walker to becoming both the President of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank and Chairman of the Board of the St. Luke Bank and Trust Company. As the first woman of any race in the United States to be a president of bank, Walker championed African American financial empowerment in the midst of Jim Crow oppression. Her mantra was “Let us put our money together; let us use our money; Let us put our money out as usury among ourselves, and reap the benefit ourselves.”²⁵ Walker’s 1934 obituary in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* highlighted that she was “honored by Governors” and “was as much respected by the white race as she was venerated by her own.”²⁶

The Maggie Lena Walker Historical Foundation (MLWHF) was founded in 1974 to preserve the history and culture of neighborhoods like Jackson Ward that were being destroyed and reshaped by urban renewal with the leadership of memorializer Mozelle Sallee.²⁷ Less than a year after the MLWHF was founded, it was successful in having the Virginia state government through the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission designate Walker’s neighborhood as the Jackson Ward Historic District and her home as a state landmark.²⁸ By 1976, the Jackson Ward Historic District and Walker’s home were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, the Richmond City

²⁴ Elsa Barkley Brown, “Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke,” *Signs* 14: 1989.

²⁵ “History & Culture: Who Was Maggie Lena Walker?,” *Maggie L Walker National Historic Site Virginia, National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/learn/historyculture/index.htm>.

²⁶ “Maggie L. Walker, Negro Leader, Dies,” *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, December 16, 1934.

²⁷ “Walker Site Considered For Museum,” *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, October 17, 1975.

²⁸ “8 Places Named State Landmarks,” *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, April 27, 1975; “Area Given Designation,” *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, April 21, 1976; Raymond P. Rinehart, “Black Historic Area Gets Official Status; New Challenge Faced: A Richmond Subdivision,” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 1976.

Council provided grants for the MLWHF to help preserve and restore Walker's home.²⁹ On November 10, 1978, President Carter signed the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 into law, officially making the Maggie Lena Walker Home an entity of the NPS. As a national site, Walker's home continued the tradition of preserving black history through an African American woman.

In the twenty-first century, Walker's legacy continues to be a trailblazer in the memorialization of African American women. The removal of Confederate statues in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 sparked a national debate about the validity of continuing to commemorate controversial historical figures. Yet, less than 100 miles from Charlottesville in Richmond, a bronze statue of Maggie Lena Walker was unveiled to an enthusiastic crowd of family, preservationists, and community members on what would have been Walker's 153rd birthday, July 17, 2017.³⁰ In the midst of the removal of memorials to the lost cause and infamous historical figures, black women like Walker are being added to these public spaces. The memorial represents only one of three black women with National Park Service units centered around their lives, highlighting the underrepresentation that continues to exist for African American women. Perhaps Walker's public commemoration is signaling another phase in the evolution of black women's memorializations and the *unseen sites* will be clearly *seen*.

²⁹ Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 228-229.

³⁰ CBS 6 News Web Staff, "Statue of Richmond icon Maggie Walker unveiled: 'Awesome and beautiful,'" July 16, 2017, (last updated July 16, 2017), <https://wtvr.com/2017/07/15/maggie-walker-monument-broad-street-richmond/>.



Figure C.1
Maggie Lena Walker

Maggie Lena Walker Image Collection, Library of Congress

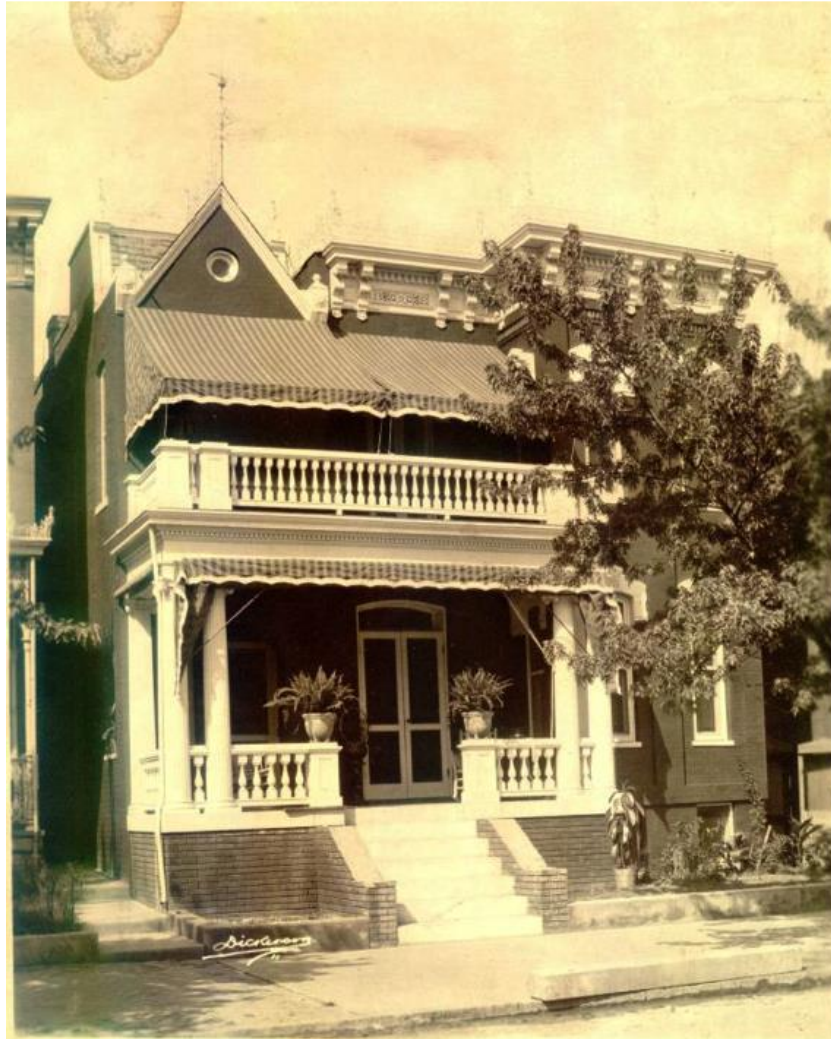


Figure C.2
110 ½ E. Leigh Street, c. 1923

Walker's Home in Jackson Ward operates as central feature in the Maggie Lena Walker National Historic Site in the National Park Service.

Maggie Lena Walker Image Collection, Library of Congress

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