

Documentation for Pennsylvania Historical Marker
Centre Avenue YWCA & Alpha Alpha Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,
Incorporated

The YWCA in Pittsburgh served as an essential hub for nationally significant African American organizations, including but not limited to, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, which utilized the space to convene, organize, and advance civil rights initiatives. The chartering of the first Pittsburgh chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated® at this site connects the location to one of the nation's oldest and most influential African American women's organizations. Through these affiliations, the site contributed to broader national movements focused on racial equity, labor advocacy, and community advancement. Its role in fostering leadership and activism places it within a wider network of institutions that provided a foundation for racial equity across the United States.

The site of the former YWCA's in Pittsburgh is deeply tied to Pennsylvania's history of African American advancement, education, and community development. It was at this location that Dr. Jean Hamilton Walls, a pioneering figure in the state, was connected to the chartering of Alpha Kappa Alpha's first Pittsburgh graduate chapter, reflecting her broader legacy as the first Black woman to enroll at the University of Pittsburgh in 1910 and later earn a doctorate in 1938, which focused on the educational advancement opportunities for African-Americans. The site functioned as a central gathering place for African American residents, supporting welfare, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement during a critical period in the state's history. Its use by key civil rights organizations further underscores its importance as a cornerstone of service and progress for African-Americans within the state of Pennsylvania.

Although the Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA) provided a safe structure for African-Americans to meet, the significance of this site is grounded in the service and programs that were founded at this location. Most notably, the chartering of the Alpha Alpha Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated®. Organizations such as the National Urban League and the NAACP also utilized this space to convene and organize. Several organizations are supportive of this recommendation.

*Notes the significance of the YWCA to the Hill District and the African-American Community. Bamberg, Angelique. "Building strength in the African American community: Pittsburgh's Centre Avenue YMCA." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 91.3 (2024): 300-320. <https://scholarlypublishingcollective.org/psup/pa-history/articleabstract/91/3/300/390217/Building-Strength-in-the-AfricanAmerican?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

*Spratt, Margaret A. "The Pittsburgh YWCA and Industrial Democracy in the 1920s." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 59.1 (1992): 5-20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27773500>

*Notes the significance of the YWCA to the welfare and culture of African-Americans in the Pittsburgh area. National organizations such as the Urban League organized Worker's Councils through the YWCA. Glasco, Laurence A. *The WPA history of the Negro in Pittsburgh*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.

*Notes Jean Hamilton Walls as the first black woman to enroll at the university of Pittsburgh and her doctoral dissertation, which examined the class of black students at Pitt and the professionals

of their parents. This article captures to details and importance of her Glasco, Laurence. "The Black Experience in Pittsburgh." City at the point: Essays on the social history of Pittsburgh (1989): 69.

*Notes the Jean Hamilton Walls was the first black woman to graduate from the University of Pittsburgh, majoring in mathematics and physics and was a founder member of the Council of Negro Women.