

Phyllis Wheatley Branch Y.W.C.A.
Historical Highlights

The history of Phyllis Wheatley Branch, Y.W.C.A. is too picturesque, and the contributions made by a large number of civic-minded women are too extenuating in endeavor and accomplishments to be condensed and written in five hundred words, therefore, I am presenting at this time not a history, but a few highlights along the way.

During the hectic and thrilling years of 1917-1918 when tragedy and heart-ache were breaking down barriers of class prejudice and life-customs and the YWCA was rendering its most glorious service, the National War Work Council sent two secretaries to Atlanta to work with the Negro soldiers and their families. Because of her valuable aid and constructive work, Miss Ruffin was asked to remain after the war and make a survey of conditions among Negroes; contacting those who had helped during the war.

In the latter part of August 1919, the president of the Atlanta Y.W.C.A. called together a committee of management to formulate plans for organizing a branch Y.W.C.A. to serve the Negro girls and women. Suffice it to say plans were "managed" enthusiastically, and formal opening was held September 4, 1919 when 400 people called and registered their approval and pleasure. It was called the "Blue Triangle Center" at first, but later, at the suggestion of a worker, the name was changed to Phyllis Wheatley Branch, without even knowing that other branches throughout the country bore this same name.

It was decided that the Branch should be self-sustaining from the beginning except for the salaries of the secretaries. An Executive Secretary and a girls' work secretary were employed ---almost overnight, Phyllis Wheatley began to grow.

Regular programs were sponsored and membership soared to 300. The House was full and boasted of a long waiting list. This was fortunate, for the only source of income was from membership and room rent. Girls were charged \$1.25 per week in the summer and \$1.50 in winter. Housing at 128 Piedmont Avenue, N.E. accommodated fourteen girls.

In 1922, the first campaign was launched, with the goal set at 2,000. Imagine the delight and encouragement when the amount was over-subscribed. According to records, the Branch received the whole-hearted support and unanimous approval of Atlantans. This was not surprising, when statistics show that in 1921 over 350 girls were enrolled in clubs and classes; 1000 girls were enjoying parties, picnics, hikes, etc. One hundred attended Vesper Services and six delegates were present at the first City Convention for colored girls ever held in this country.

After the Central, Y.W.C.A. became affiliated with the Community Chest, Phyllis Wheatley received the greater portion of its support from this channel. Phyllis Wheatley Branch has for thirty-four years served thousands of women and girls of this city plus a sizable number of young women away from home.

Supplementing the work of the church, home and school, this organization specializes in a sound program of group work. Nineteen different committees are at work continuously on problems of home women, working girls and girls in school; economic, religious and social conditions; education (formal and informal); racial problems, health and recreation. There are organized clubs and interest groups. Some for Industrial, Business and Professional women and others for younger girls.

The Extension Department is putting concentrated effort into work of the Association in both the building centered program and decentralized areas. During the months of June and July, nine Summer Vacation Schools are operated in different sections of the city where young girls spend their mornings in profitable creative and translatiive leisure.

For two years we have operated in our new building - enlarged facilities and staff have made it possible for us to broaden our program and to render a larger service. On the second floor there are dormitory rooms for twenty girls and four beds for transient guests. These are filled to capacity at all times and many are placed in approved homes in the city.

Efforts are being made to develop a camp site on a 118 acre tract now owned by the Branch.

The Phyllis Wheatley Branch was organized to fill a great expressed need. And today---as down through the years it contributes to the cultural, religious and recreational life of Atlanta by giving women and girls of all classes and cultural backgrounds opportunities for thinking and action.