Auroran Club, Phyllis Wheatley Branch, YWCA Scrapbooks (S0391)

Collection Number: S0391

Collection Title: Auroran Club, Phyllis Wheatley Branch, YWCA Scrapbooks


Creator: Murray, Willie Mae

Abstract: The Auroran Club, Phyllis Wheatley Branch, YWCA Scrapbooks collection contains programs, histories, photographs, newspaper clippings, and invitations of the Auroran Club of the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Metro St. Louis.

Collection Size: 0.25 cubic foot
(3 folders)

Language: Collection materials are in English.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis. If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org.

Restrictions on Use: The Donor has given and assigned to the Society all rights of copyright, which the Donor has in the Materials and in such of the Donor’s works as may be found among any collections of Materials received by the University from others.

Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] Auroran Club, Phyllis Wheatley Branch, YWCA Scrapbooks (S0391); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

Donor Information: The papers were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Willie Mae Murray on November 14, 1978 (Accession No. SA2087). Additions were made on January 15, 1980 by Willie Mae Murry (Accession No. SA2258); and on April 9, 1981 by Willie Mae Murry (Accession No. SA2389).

Processed by: Processed by AJ Medlock and Isaac Alexander, November 2023.

Historical Note:
The first Ladies Christian Association in the U.S. was founded in New York City in 1858. A
Boston group first used the name Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1866, and
the organization expanded throughout the United States. In its early days, the non-profit agency
provided health programming and self-government training to girls and women. The YWCA also
advocated for desegregation and the equal treatment of women in the workforce. The YWCA has
since continued to work to eliminate racism nationally and abroad. In 2001, the YWCA shifted
to become a grassroots organization.

Founded in 1905, the YWCA Metro St. Louis initially provided safe housing to women who
worked at the World's Fair. In 1911, Arsenia Williams and Mrs. Frank L. Williams formed
the Chapman Branch--named after Ada Chapman, who held the group's meetings in her home--to
serve Black girls and women in St. Louis. May B. Belcher served as the first executive secretary
of the Branch in 1912. That same year, the Branch renamed itself after Phyllis Wheatley (1753-
1784), a noted Black poet. By 1915, donations from the local Black community allowed the
Branch to buy and renovate two buildings at Garrison and Lucas Avenues. However, in 1937, the
Branch's buildings were condemned. The Branch operated out of local churches until 1941.
Under the leadership of Executive Director Anna Lee Scott, the Branch moved to 2709 Locust
Street. In 1946, the Phyllis Wheatley Branch merged organizationally with YWCA Metro St.
Louis and racially integrated.

The Phyllis Wheatley Branch founded the Auroran Club in 1940 for employers of Black women.
St. Louis businessman David Portney helped found the club, and the women working in his dress
shop joined and chose the name Auroran for its meaning of "outstanding." The club participated
in social events and volunteer work at the United Service Organizations (USO) events. As of the
1970s, the Auroran Club was the only club sponsored by the Employed Women's Committee at
the YWCA to remain intact.

Arrangement:

The collection is arranged chronologically.

Scope and Content Note:

The Auroran Club, Phyllis Wheatley Branch, YWCA Scrapbooks contain programs, histories,
photographs, news clippings, and invitations of the Auroran Club of the Phyllis Wheatley branch
of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Metro St. Louis. The collection
primarily chronicles club-sponsored events, such as teas, dinners, holiday parties, fashion shows,
and award ceremonies. Also featured in the scrapbooks are a copy of the Auroran club's
constitution, and flyers and programs commemorating the YWCA Metro St. Louis's 75th
anniversary. The materials in this collection are arranged chronologically, dating from 1958 to
1981.

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