

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

TWELFTH STREET YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION BUILDING

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: TWELFTH STREET YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION BUILDING

Other Name/Site Number: Anthony Bowen Young Men's Christian Association Building

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 1816 Twelfth Street, NW Not for publication: \_\_\_
City/Town: Washington Vicinity: \_\_\_
State: DC County: District of Columbia Code: 001 Zip Code: 20009

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local: \_\_\_
Public-State: \_\_\_
Public-Federal: \_\_\_

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District: \_\_\_
Site: \_\_\_
Structure: \_\_\_
Object: \_\_\_

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
1

Noncontributing
0 buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

**TWELFTH STREET YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION BUILDING**

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_\_ Entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: Social  
Recreation & Culture

Sub: Civic  
Sub: Sports Facility

Current: Vacant

Sub: Not in Use

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late Victorian/Renaissance

**MATERIALS:**

Foundation: Concrete, Brick  
Walls: Brick  
Roof: Slag  
Other: Limestone (Portico, Sills, String Course)

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The Anthony Bowen Young Men's Christian Association Building, located at 1816 Twelfth Street, NW, is a four-story brick masonry structure built between 1908 and 1912. District of Columbia Building Permit #1392, dated September 24, 1908, records the construction of this building on Lot 16 in Square 275. Specifically constructed as the "Colored Men's Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association," the building was designed by African American architect William Sidney Pittman of Washington, D.C. In plan, the imposing brick structure is a large box with a projecting rear wing. It was designed to include reception rooms, meeting rooms, offices, 54 sleeping rooms, a heated swimming pool, and gymnasium. Designed in the Second Renaissance Revival style, the Twelfth Street YMCA (now Anthony Bowen YMCA) was the first "\$100,000 campaign"<sup>1</sup> facility constructed by the Association, serving as a prototype for African American branches across the country.

**THE LOCATION**

Prominently located in Washington's premier, early twentieth-century African American community, the Twelfth Street YMCA is sited on the western side of Twelfth Street, between S and T Streets, NW. The four-story brick building stands as the tallest non-residential structure on the block. The property is bordered by brick-paved alleys on the south and west sides. A small yard enclosed by a wrought-iron fence fronts on Twelfth Street. Currently, a vacant lot adjoins the property to the north.

**THE STYLE**

The Twelfth Street YMCA is designed in the Second Renaissance Revival style. The building reflects the massing, architectural embellishments, and tri-partite vertical divisions associated with Italian Renaissance palazzi. In the early twentieth century, many clubs, organizations, and associations across the United States constructed facilities that would accommodate their social, academic, and athletic activities in a single, multi-purpose building. The design for these clubhouses was often derived from Italian Renaissance palazzi, which was considered to provide a form and architectural statement befitting their philosophical purposes and social aspirations. As a style, it presented an association with the Renaissance, a period particularly rich in intellectual investigation and invention. Consequently, through all its historical and intellectual associations the Renaissance Revival style was an ideal choice for the Twelfth Street YMCA. The Renaissance Revival style was an architectural statement befitting a prominent African American social institution in Washington, and was equal in stature and monumentality to any white institution across the country.

The use of rusticated limestone on the first floor, brick banding to mimic stone rustication on the upper floors, the strong horizontal divisions marked by brick string course and watertable, the large dentils on the projecting cornice, single light sash, and the balustraded cornice are character defining features of buildings designed in the Renaissance Revival style. Other characteristics of the style include the enlarged molded string courses with a frieze and cornice, and the projecting portico with pilasters and columns.

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<sup>1</sup> The Twelfth Street YMCA became known as a \$100,000 YMCA after Julius Rosenwald contributed an additional \$25,000 needed for the construction of the building. To that point, the Washington fund-raising campaign had already raised \$75,000.

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**THE BUILDING**

The building, tightly configured into a rectangle in both plan and bulk, comprises load-bearing brick walls and a steel skeletal frame. Four stories in height with a partially raised English basement, the building is three bays wide and extends ten bays deep along the southern elevation. The overall structure is divided into three adjoining sections, each varying in its ornamentation and exterior veneer. Fronting 63'9" along Twelfth Street, the facade features a rusticated pressed brick basement and first-story, topped with three upper stories of Flemish bond brick with glazed headers. The body of the structure, measuring 150'1-1/4" in depth, is constructed of five-course American bond brick. The evenly proportioned exterior walls are pierced by paired window openings with jack-arched lintels. Although not presently visible from the exterior, the openings contain 2/2 double-hung wood sash windows. The pronounced string course, sills, and portico are made of Indiana limestone while the quoins consist of five courses of pressed grey-colored brick. According to the original building permits, the slightly-pitched side gable roof is covered with slag, a product used as a surfacing material on built-up roofing. An overhanging entablature, located on the facade and southeastern corner, consists of three parts: the galvanized iron ovolo cornice, modillions, and bull-header brick dentils. Historically ornamented by three balustraded openings and a galvanized iron rail, the brick parapet is currently finished with five recessed brick panels. The main chimney for the furnace is located at the southwest corner of the building. The substantial interior corbel capped chimney is of five-course American bond brick. A smaller corbel capped brick chimney is sited on the north elevation of the building, serving the fireplaces located on the first and second floors.

The facade (east elevation), which measures 63'9" x 22'4", is four stories in height with a partially exposed English basement. Its balanced symmetry is organized around the central bay with the emphasis on a projecting portico. Accessed by a straight-flight of nine granite steps, the portico is of paired Tuscan columns, brick pilasters, and an overhanging eave. The highly polished columns, set upon a limestone foundation, are formed of Indiana limestone. The paired pressed-brick pilasters have limestone capitols and bases. A projecting limestone entablature is ornamented with square modillions, an ogee cornice, and recessed panels. A limestone balustrade is set upon the portico, ornamented with recessed panels and turned balusters. The words "Young Men's Christian Association" are carved in the architrave. The flush, wooden, double-leaf replacement doors, topped by a large transom opening, have a small square window opening. The rusticated first story is pierced by two large window openings visible from the interior as triple 1/1 double-hung wood sash windows with transoms. The second, third, and fourth stories of the facade are pierced by three sets of paired window openings, decreasing in size. Although all of the window openings are finished with projecting limestone sills, only the second and third stories have a jack-arch lintel and keystone of Indiana limestone. The basement contains two sets of paired window openings, recessed within the brick foundation and covered with wrought-iron security bars.

The southeastern corner of the building is framed by pressed, grey-colored brick quoining. This one-bay deep "pier" has the same configuration and ornamentation as the facade. The side walls of the building (north and south elevations) are characterized by the lack of a limestone cornice and architectural embellishments. The south elevation is six-bays deep, while the north elevation extends only to five-bays. Both elevations contain paired window openings with segmentally arched lintels and thin stone sills. Several of the openings retain the 2/2 double-hung, wood sash windows. Both elevations are accentuated by a projecting brick string course and corbelled brick cornice hidden from view by a drainage pipe.

A gymnasium wing projects from the rear of the main block of the building. This wing is two stories in height set on an English basement. It's south and north elevations are three bays wide. The brick treatment marks these bays with recessed brick panels with corbelling at the top. The segmentally arched window openings presently contain no window sash or

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glass. The entablature is composed of corbelled brick brackets, a projecting ovolo limestone cornice, and a brick parapet. The large chimney, which serves the furnace, is located at the southwest corner. The first and second stories of the west elevation of the wing are set back approximately four feet from the English basement and the furnace chimney. The segmentally arched window and door openings are set within the five recessed brick panels.

## THE INTERIOR

The interior of the Twelfth Street YMCA retains much of its integrity of design and material, although some alteration has occurred. The first floor is entered through a small vestibule with three steps that lead into a large lobby. The lobby is finished in oak with four-foot high tongue-and-groove wainscoting, recessed panels, and Tuscan pilasters. The ceiling is ornamented by an entablature with beaded crown molding, architrave, and frieze. The door and window openings are surrounded with square-edged casing. The hollow-newel stair, constructed of oak, is ornamented with open stringer brackets, square landing newels, and railing with goosenecks and half-cylinder crooks supported by square balusters. Two anti-dust paneled newels are located on the circle-end starting steps.

The social room, located at the northeast corner of the first floor, and the two private offices to the south, contains the same wainscoting, entablature, and casements as the lobby. A projecting chimney breast of the social room is finished with a wood mantel. The mantel consists of Tuscan-style pilasters supporting a plain frieze and projecting shelf. The fireplace opening has been infilled with brick. Located above the mantel is a mural painted on canvas by Howard Mackey.<sup>2</sup>

An eight-foot wide corridor provides access to the kitchen and public dining room, located beyond the lobby to the northwest. To the southwest of the lobby are four offices and a stair hall. At the rear of the corridor are double doors that lead into the gymnasium.

The two-story gymnasium is surrounded by two metal balconies, the upper one narrower than the lower. The exposed brick walls are painted. The ceiling of the gymnasium is made up of square-in-square pressed tin, while the ceiling of the balconies is beaded board.

The second floor generally has the same plan as the first floor. The front portion contains five rooms, three of which face Twelfth Street. A large meeting room is located in the northwest corner. Six sleeping rooms are located along the corridor that runs east and west. At the end of the corridor are steps leading to the gymnasium balconies. The window and door casings of the second floor are the same as that found on the first floor. The entries contain five panelled wood doors, base blocks, and awning transoms. The six-inch baseboard is finished with ovolo and quadrant beading.

The third and fourth floors are identical to each other. Each floor has 24 single sleeping rooms, 18 of which are along both sides of the long east-west corridor while the remaining six rooms face Twelfth Street. Each floor also contains bathing and toilet facilities, storage rooms, and linen closets. The window and door casings are the same as that found on the second floor. Picture molding still remains in several of the sleeping rooms.

The basement originally included a bowling alley that extended along the south side of the building. The "Log Cabin" room is located in the northeast corner of the basement. Dating from the 1930s, the finishes include a large composition stone fireplace with an arched

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<sup>2</sup> Mackey, born in Philadelphia in 1898 and a graduate of the architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania, painted the mural displaying the YMCA theme and symbol in the 1930s.

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opening, exposed joists, and false log walls. A long passageway leads to the rear portion of the building where the locker and shower facilities are located. The boiler room is found in the rear southwest corner. The concrete swimming pool is located in the center of the basement. Although the room contained a low ceiling, the pool originally received natural light by means of the skylight windows on the north side of the roof. The openings for the skylights are still evident, although the windows have been removed. The basement is accessible by a straight-flight stair, with a square newel and balusters, located under the main hollow-newel stair.

The building has been vacant since 1982. Although secured, the interior is suffering from neglect, lack of climate control, and exposure to the elements. Interior walls are showing signs of this exposure with spalling and crumbling plaster, and water damage around several openings. The exterior remains in good condition, with minor graffiti in several locations on the brick walls. The brick and stonework are in excellent condition, and the structure overall is sound.



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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

The Twelfth Street YMCA Building, constructed 1908-12, is the earliest surviving "Y" built by and expressly for African Americans. Its existence in the nation's capital helped to stimulate such projects elsewhere in the country. The building was undertaken by the first African American branch of the "Y" movement in the United States, the one founded by Anthony Bowen in 1853.

The Bowen "Y", as it came to be known, attracted financial support from Julius Rosenwald who, as president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., contributed one-third the cost for the building of 5,000 African American schools throughout the south. The building is a strong reminder of an era in which African Americans were encouraged and supported to create and maintain their institutions on a segregated basis. As an organization the African American YMCA offered character building programs and facilities not available to African Americans through any other association. The construction of the Twelfth Street YMCA resulted in the first full-service YMCA facility in the nation built expressly for African Americans and the programs inaugurated and fostered by the Twelfth Street YMCA were designed to promote the growth and development of Washington's African American community.

**HISTORY OF THE YMCA (WHITE) MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES**

The Young Men's Christian Association was founded in England by a young department-store clerk, George Williams (1821-1905). Williams attempted to improve the morals of his fellow employees by conducting prayer meetings in his room. In 1844, the group adopted a charter establishing the Young Men's Christian Association.<sup>1</sup> Americans were first exposed to the ideas of the British YMCA movement during the Crystal Palace Exposition. Many Americans returned to the United States charged with the enthusiasm of this new association, and began to nurture the idea, and, eventually, established similar clubs.

In the beginning, the universal appeal of the YMCA as a movement was its fourfold plan offering mental, physical, social, and religious development. The YMCA filled a void left by home, work, and religious environments "claiming to control and strengthen boys in ways these institutions did not."<sup>2</sup> In the 1850s and 1860s, American and European cities experienced an increasing urbanization, and the "moral hazards" and temptations gave cause for concern. The YMCA appeared as a "viable urban alternative for the web of supportive institutions the young men from the countryside had left behind."<sup>3</sup> From the onset, the work of the YMCA was limited to a small segment of the population, predominantly white, middle class Protestants. Large segments of the population, particularly farm and rural young men, men of other faiths, and African Americans, were largely ignored.

In the United States, the YMCA movement came to the attention of Thomas V. Sullivan, who promoted the formation of the country's first Young Men's Christian Association in

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<sup>1</sup> Paul S. Boyer. *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> David I. MacLeod. *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Boyer, pp. 111, 113-114.

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Boston, on December 29, 1851.<sup>4</sup> Washington, D.C., followed Boston by only one month in establishing a chapter. Both Associations were instrumental in advertising the mandates of the YMCA to religious and civic leaders throughout the nation, hoping to spread the concept to other cities.<sup>5</sup> The New York YMCA, the third American association, was founded one day after the establishment of the Washington, D.C. association.<sup>6</sup> By 1860, over 200 YMCA's were serving some 25,000 members.<sup>7</sup>

In the formative years of the YMCA, the association had no buildings of their own in the United States. After the Civil War, they began to purchase and construct facilities. The YMCA increasingly felt the need for modern accommodations to address the needs of a growing YMCA program. Several building programs were initiated in the decades to follow and, by 1900, the association owned 359 buildings.<sup>8</sup> In 1912, there were 756 association buildings and the number of buildings had doubled by 1922.<sup>9</sup> Within this third building program, the "Colored Men's Department" began to construct buildings specifically for use by the African American YMCA.

The first YMCA buildings were constructed in Baltimore and Chicago. The Baltimore Branch constructed the first building in 1859, and the Chicago Branch erected the first building with its own gymnasium.<sup>10</sup> The distinction between a building and a building with facilities is important to the development of the full-service YMCA building. The "Old 23rd Street Building," which New York City erected in 1869, embodied most of the building features the YMCA wished to offer its members. The dormitory first appeared in 1886 and was a standard building feature by 1900.<sup>11</sup> Even when an Association did not own its own building, it became increasingly likely that it would provide an on-site gymnasium. Consequently, the YMCA emerged as a full-service facility offering educational, recreational, and spiritual guidance to America's youth.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas B. Hargrave, Jr. *Private Differences-General Good: A History of the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington*. (Washington, DC: YMCA of Metropolitan Washington, 1985), pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Hargrave, p. 4; James M. Goode. *Capital Losses* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> Goode, p. 230.

<sup>7</sup> Boyer, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> Mayer N. Zald. *Organizational Change: The Political Economy of the YMCA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Super. *What is the YMCA?* (New York: Association Press, 1922), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; Andrea Hinding. *Proud Heritage, A History in Pictures of the YMCA in the United States*. (Norfolk, VA: The Donning Company, 1988), p. 216.

<sup>11</sup> Super, p. 16.

## BEGINNINGS OF THE YMCA (AFRICAN AMERICAN) MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Founded in 1853 by Anthony Bowen, the African American YMCA in Washington, D.C., is the earliest African American YMCA organized in the United States, just two years after the Association's initial founding in Boston in 1851. Reverend Anthony Bowen was a respected African American leader and political activist in the nation's capital during the mid-nineteenth century. He bought his own freedom in 1826, moved to the nation's capital, and was employed by the federal government, becoming the first African American clerk in the United States Patent Office. Recognized in both white and African American communities as an accomplished leader, Bowen was able to obtain permits to conduct meetings at the "Colored People's Meeting House" for free African Americans.<sup>12</sup> These permits were significant in affording Bowen the freedom to conduct social, spiritual, and educational meetings.

Through his work at the United States Patent Office, Bowen met William Chauncey Langdon, one of the original founders of the District's white branch of the YMCA. Langdon shared with Bowen his experiences and efforts in establishing a Young Men's Christian Association in Washington, D.C. in 1852. Both men were compelled by the YMCA mandate and firmly believed in the benefits of the YMCA program for all Americans both black and white. In 1853, only a year after Langdon had successfully established the Washington City YMCA, Anthony Bowen organized and became president of the first "Colored Young Men's Christian Association."<sup>13</sup> Bowen conducted the first meetings for the African American YMCA in his house at 85 E Street, S.W. Washington, D.C.<sup>14</sup>

No records of Bowen's YMCA survive from the Civil War era. Lack of financial support from the national YMCA or any other sponsors limited the efforts of all the YMCA's from this period. Bowen's efforts during the 1860s and 1870s were largely self-directed, self-promoted, and personally financed. Bowen continued to hold meetings, direct educational efforts, and hold social functions throughout the Civil War years. He was tireless in his commitment to the advancement of African Americans and the protection and assurance of their freedom. He provided a safe haven in the District for African Americans seeking their freedom. Consequently, he continued to encourage younger men to develop a YMCA based on the principles of equality and freedom for all.

In 1866, Rev. James A. Handy, using Bowen's original constitution, re-formed the "Colored" YMCA. District of Columbia records indicate that the "Colored" YMCA was incorporated in 1892 and received its charter from Congress that same year under the title "Young Men's Christian Association of the District of Columbia." The colored YMCA managed to exist independent of the Washington City YMCA as African Americans were permitted neither to join nor use the facilities at Lincoln Hall. (Designed by Starkweather and Plowman at the corner of 9th and D Streets, NW, Lincoln Hall was the first permanent home of the Washington City YMCA.) For 38 years, from 1853 to 1891, the "Colored" YMCA used rented rooms or donated space for its religious and social activities.

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<sup>12</sup> Hargrave, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis K. McMillian, Jr. "Anthony Bowen and the YMCA." *The Negro History Bulletin*. (April 1958), p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> Sandra Fitzpatrick and Maria R. Goodwin. *The Guide to Black Washington*. (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990), pp. 48-49.

## EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN YMCA MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

In 1867, the first connection between the African American YMCA movement and that of whites was made when a delegate from the New York African American Association was sent to the National YMCA Conference. A resolution was passed that set the stage for the YMCA policy throughout the nineteenth century in which the White YMCA encouraged African Americans to establish their own association and join the brotherhood of the YMCA on "separate-but-equal" terms.<sup>15</sup> The African American YMCA was critical to African Americans in providing facilities and programs not available to them through other sources. The African American YMCA leaders fostered a climate of racial unity and worked to initiate regional and national conferences, produced their own publications, and established a training program for African American YMCA officials. These activities led to the evolution of a distinct African American YMCA under the umbrella of the larger association.

In 1888, William A. Hunton was appointed secretary of the African American association in Norfolk, Virginia. Hunton was the first salaried officer of any race for an African American association. As Secretary, Hunton worked to establish and maintain African American city and student associations throughout the country. With the guidance of Hunton, the Colored Men's Department flourished from one association in 1853 to 21 city associations in 1900, with an additional sixty-two student associations.<sup>16</sup> In 1901, the Colored Men's Department had more than 5,000 members with two international and eight general secretaries.<sup>17</sup> Hunton's appointment was significant as the turning point from White supervision to Black leadership. As late as 1914, editorials and social commentary continued to focus on the inequalities and injustices of the YMCA movement toward African Americans.<sup>18</sup> The construction of full-service, well-equipped YMCA's, such as the Twelfth Street YMCA in Washington, D.C., did much to dispel the feelings of injustice, and helped to instill new pride and commitment in the YMCA movement among the African American community. For the first time, African Americans experienced the benefits of a modern, fully equipped facility equal to any YMCA constructed in the United States.

Additionally, through the enlightened efforts of men like Julius Rosenwald, the inequalities, although not entirely dispelled, were at least challenged through the construction of beautifully appointed, modern, African American YMCA buildings. In his address at the opening of the Chicago YMCA in 1913, Rosenwald outlined his earnest desire to "bring about a universal acceptance that it is the individual and not the race that counts."<sup>19</sup> With the realization of the efforts sponsored by individuals such as Rosenwald, the Twelfth Street YMCA stood as a paradigm African American YMCA, and was advocated that "this

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<sup>15</sup> Nina Mjagkij. "History of the Black YMCA in America, 1853-1946." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> *Year Book of the YMCA*. (New York: Association Press, 1900), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> W.A. Hunton. "Colored Men's Department." *Year Book of the YMCA*. (New York: Association Press, 1901), p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> Editorial in the *Crisis*. December, 1914. Vol. 9 #2. pp. 79-80.

<sup>19</sup> George R. Arthur. "The Young Men's Christian Association Movement Among Negroes." *Opportunity*. March, 1923. pp. 16-17.

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building be duplicated where large numbers of colored men are centered."<sup>20</sup> During the construction of the building, the association produced a pamphlet containing perspectives and plans "representing a good type of association building... that it is the purpose of the management to erect similar buildings...."<sup>21</sup>

**THE AFRICAN AMERICAN YMCA IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Initially, the activities of the YMCA in Washington, D.C., were carried on at different localities throughout the city. In 1891, following a long period of fund raising, African American YMCA leaders of Washington, D.C., purchased a modest building at 1609 11th Street, NW. Formerly known as the "Forest City House," the building provided the association with space for a reading room for its 400 volume library collection and a lecture/gathering room. The addition of a brick gymnasium and modern restrooms was completed in 1893. Of the twelve association buildings identified in 1892, the Washington branch was one of three that provided a gymnasium. (This building was demolished by 1903.)<sup>22</sup>

The following years were difficult for the YMCA with decreasing participation and membership. By 1897, the membership had declined 75 percent, causing the association to sell the building and relocate to smaller spaces.<sup>23</sup> The YMCA relocated to the True Reformers Hall at 1200 U Street, NW, where they remained for fourteen years. Although the True Reformers Building is extant, it is currently vacant and in poor condition. Samuel W. Woodward, founder of the Woodward and Lothrop Department Store, became president of the Washington City YMCA in 1898, and instilled new life into the YMCA movement in the District of Columbia. After reviewing the accomplishments of the association, Woodward began the laborious task of rebuilding the White and Colored YMCAs. William A. Hunton and James D. Moorland, national secretaries of the Colored Work Department, concluded that hope for new generations of African American men lay in development of the YMCAs in urban African American communities.<sup>24</sup> The first 50 years of an independent African American association had proved to be difficult and Moorland and Hunton began an expansion program focusing their efforts initially on the reorganization of the Twelfth Street Branch. A temporary secretary was hired to conduct a membership campaign, and to test the commitment of the African American community.<sup>25</sup> By October 1905, there were over 600 members.

**THE TWELFTH STREET YMCA BUILDING**

The first task was to develop plans for a new African American association building. Great attention was given "to the movement in Washington, D.C., where the outlook seems

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<sup>20</sup> "For a \$50,000 Colored Association Building." *Association Men*. November, 1906. pp. 71-72.

<sup>21</sup> YMCA, "A Model Building for Colored Men at the Nation's Capital." Volume 26, No. 6. (Washington, DC: Murray Pamphlets, 1909), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Baist Maps of Washington, DC* 1885-1903.

<sup>23</sup> *YearBooks of the YMCA*, 1892 through 1897.

<sup>24</sup> Hargrave, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Speech given by Campbell C. Johnson. "Early History of the Twelfth Street YMCA.," (unpublished, 1953).

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favorable for the building up of a model association among the 20,000 young colored men of the capital."<sup>26</sup> Working in close cooperation with Moorland and Lewis, Woodward approached philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, Sr. in 1906 and requested a gift for the new branch building, estimated to cost \$50,000.<sup>27</sup> Rockefeller agreed to contribute \$25,000, provided that an additional \$25,000 be raised on or before July 1, 1907. The pledge made by Rockefeller was rooted in the fact that he "had favorably considered the request because of the unique relationship which the Washington Young Men's Christian Association bears to the country at large in that it is national in its scope and not, as is the case with Young Men's Christian Associations in all other cities, wholly or largely local."<sup>28</sup> A fund raising committee was organized to solicit throughout the city of Washington for the additional \$25,000. Between April 8th and May 7th, 1907, \$31,024 was received in the form of signed pledges from the African American community, "which is unparalleled by the colored people anywhere for any purpose."<sup>29</sup> This campaign was the first united fund-raising effort of its kind for any African American community in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

On June 27, 1907, property was secured in the 1800 block of Twelfth Street, NW.<sup>31</sup> The location in Square 275 in the heart of Washington's preeminent African American neighborhood helped serve as an anchor in the community and was considered to be "not only a Christian organization, an educational institution and a health resort, but it is a civic center of the most generous proportions."<sup>32</sup>

With funding secured, African American architect William Sidney Pittman of Washington, D.C., was unanimously chosen by the Board of Managers to design the new building. The contractor was J.L. Marshall, who had underbid "A.H. Bolling, the lowest colored contractor by \$5,000, but turned over to the latter the brick work of the structure."<sup>33</sup>

William Sidney Pittman had established a reputation as a talented architect, comfortable with commissions for both public and private structures across the nation. In selecting Pittman, the Board of Managers chose a young and prominent African American architect whose reputation and architectural prowess would provide the noted design the managers desired, and illicit the exposure and publicity warranted by such an important social undertaking.

William Sidney Pittman, born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1875, was the son of ex-slave Henry Pittman. Pittman entered the Industrial Department of the Tuskegee Institute, the

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<sup>26</sup> *Year Book of the YMCA*, 1904-1905, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel W. Woodward to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., n.d. Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, NY.

<sup>28</sup> John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Samuel W. Woodward, September 7, 1906. Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, NY.

<sup>29</sup> *YMCA Year Book*, 1906-1907, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Hargrave, p. 70.

<sup>31</sup> George Otis Smith to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., August 3, 1909. Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, NY.

<sup>32</sup> "YMCA to Celebrate Anniversary." *Washington Bee*. May 17, 1913. p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> "Colored YMCA." *The Washington Bee*, October 3, 1908, p. 8.

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premier vocational school for African Americans. He completed the three-year curriculum in just two years and received a certificate of completion in 1897. Pittman continued his education at Drexel Institute of Art and Science in Philadelphia. He graduated in 1900 as one of the "honored" students of the class, receiving special mention by the president at the awarding of diplomas.<sup>34</sup>

Pittman returned to Tuskegee in 1902, where he met Portia Washington, the daughter of Booker T. Washington. The two were married on October 31, 1907, a marriage that facilitated Pittman's career.<sup>35</sup> During his tenure at Tuskegee, Pittman served as the institute's architect in residence and produced designs or assisted in designing over \$250,000 worth of campus structures.

Pittman relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1906. He was the second African American architect to start an architectural firm in the city, succeeding John Anderson Lankford. In October 1906, Pittman was selected as the architect for one of his most important commissions, the Negro Building at the Jamestown Ter-Centennial in Norfolk, Virginia. Although money was budgeted to preserve the Beaux-Arts style building it was demolished after the exposition. The exposure Pittman received from this commission helped catapult his career.

In 1908, Pittman received two important commissions in Washington, D.C. (Pittman was the first African American architect to receive a commission from the District of Columbia Board of Commissioners.) He designed the Second Renaissance Revival Twelfth Street YMCA building and the Garfield School. The 12-room Garfield School cost \$90,000 and is located at 25th Street and Alabama Avenue, S.W. Pittman relocated to Dallas, Texas, in 1913, and was appointed architect for the Negro Library and the Lyceum Association of

Houston. Pittman continued to design university and trade school buildings throughout the late 1910s. His career and personal life suffered during the 1920s and 1930s, and after many years of seclusion and a long illness, he died on February 19, 1958 at the age of 83.

## **GROUND BREAKING AND DEDICATION**

The ground breaking ceremony for the Twelfth Street YMCA took place on November 26, 1907, and was attended by hundreds of white and African American people. Within a year of the ground breaking, President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone on November 26, 1908. Located at the northeast corner of the building, the tin box contained a Bible, a copy of the President's speech, copies of the local newspapers containing the advance notices of the cornerstone laying, literature of the African American Men's Department of the Association, and a YMCA button. Speakers at the ceremony, including Roosevelt, called the work of the Y "a monument to the advancement of the city of Washington."

Shortly after the laying of the cornerstone, it became clear that the total cost of the building would increase from the original estimate of \$50,000 to \$100,000, making it the most expensive building constructed for the African American branch of the YMCA to date. In 1911, work on the building was halted with only the outer shell completed. Local YMCA President S.W. Woodward approached President William H. Taft and discussed the

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<sup>34</sup> W.N. Hartshorn, editor. "W. Sidney Pittman, Washington, DC." *An Era of Progress and Promise, 1863-1910*. (Boston: Priscilla Publishing Co., 1910), p. 447.

<sup>35</sup> Ruth Ann Stewart. *Portia: The Life of Portia Washington Pittman, the daughter of Booker T. Washington*. (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 75.

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feasibility of requesting a \$25,000 gift from Rosenwald to complete the building. Rosenwald agreed to pay \$25,000 if another \$25,000 could be raised. It was, and construction resumed.<sup>36</sup> Upon its opening, the Twelfth Street YMCA offered African American men a new, fully-equipped building, where for the first time they were able to experience all the amenities of a full-service YMCA facility.

### **AFRICAN AMERICAN YMCA BUILDINGS**

In 1900, 21 cities had African American YMCA branches, but only six owned their own buildings—Norfolk, Lynchburg, and Richmond, Virginia; Baltimore, Maryland; New Haven, Connecticut; and Springfield, Ohio.<sup>37</sup> Records of the NAACP report that, although "there were buildings in New York, Louisville, Kentucky, Norfolk, Virginia, Asheville, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia and Orange, New Jersey, and other places, they were, with the possible exception of Norfolk and Asheville, old residences turned into association buildings."<sup>38</sup>

The Richmond YMCA, purchased in 1889, was the first building owned by the Colored Men's Department. From 1889 to 1965, it was located on the northeast corner of Third and Leigh Streets in Jackson Ward. The East Leigh Street Branch was demolished sometime between 1971 and 1976.<sup>39</sup> In 1901, the first building constructed for the Colored Men's Department was located in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>40</sup> That building was demolished prior to the 1970s.<sup>41</sup>

As the African American branches expanded their memberships, they increasingly launched fund raising campaigns to acquire buildings. Philanthropists, such as George Foster Peabody (1852-1938), John D. Rockefeller, Sr. (1839-1937), and Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932), began to contribute funds for the construction of African American YMCA buildings across the United States. In 1909, George Foster Peabody contributed \$20,000 for an African American YMCA building in Columbus, Georgia. Peabody provided the money on the condition that \$5,000 be raised by the white citizens as a maintenance fund for the first five years, and that the African American citizens raise \$1,000 for the furnishings.<sup>42</sup> The Peabody-funded branch was the first building in the United States to be planned and erected for African American YMCA activities with white-funding. The building collapsed under the weight of a freezing rain in 1963, and was subsequently demolished.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Stewart, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> YMCA. *The Book of YMCA Buildings*, p. 111; Hunton, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> C.H. Tobias. "The Colored YMCA." *Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, Vol. 9, No. 1, November, 1914, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Hopkins. *History of the YMCA in North America*. (New York: Association Press, 1951), p. 156.

<sup>40</sup> *Year Book of the YMCA*, 1901, p. 62; Tobias, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Norfolk, Virginia City Directory*. 1955-1975.

<sup>42</sup> Jesse Moorland to L.G. Myers, Washington, DC, July 13, 1908. (George Foster Peabody Papers, Library of Congress), Box 73, YMCA.

<sup>43</sup> Fact Sheet provided by the Columbus Historical Society, Columbus, Georgia.

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Washington, D.C.'s Twelfth Street Branch was the only African American YMCA building constructed with funding authorized by John D. Rockefeller, Sr., and administered by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Additionally, it was the first of 25 YMCA's to be constructed with a Rosenwald contribution, serving as a fund raising model for other Associations.<sup>44</sup> In 1911-12, the \$100,000 Washington, D.C. building was completed and dedicated. Subsequently, Rosenwald contributed funds for YMCA's in Chicago, Indianapolis, and Philadelphia.<sup>45</sup> The Southwest YMCA Branch in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was the second Rosenwald-funded building dedicated (1912), although it was not completed until 1914. The Wabash Avenue Branch in Chicago, Illinois, and the Senate Avenue Branch in Indianapolis, Indiana, were opened in 1913, while the Paseo Branch in Kansas City, Missouri, opened in 1914. Of the six earliest colored YMCA buildings constructed between the years 1907 and 1914, only the Anthony Bowen Branch exists today. The Columbus Ninth Street YMCA was demolished in 1963 and the Christian Street YMCA of Philadelphia was demolished in the 1970s; the Indianapolis Senate Street YMCA was demolished in 1962; the Chicago Wabash Avenue YMCA was demolished in 1982. The Twelfth Street YMCA is the oldest surviving Rosenwald-funded African American YMCA building.

**RECENT HISTORY**

After years of successful operation, the building was rededicated in 1973 on the 120th anniversary of the founding of the organization. The name of the Twelfth Street branch was officially changed to the Anthony J. Bowen branch, in honor of the founder. The Twelfth Street YMCA was closed in 1982 due to mounting operational costs, declining membership, an accumulated deficit, and concern for the safety of the children.<sup>46</sup> The closing and subsequent sale of the building to the Anthony Bowen Landmark Building Trust prompted additional concerns for the building's survival and maintenance. However, in 1989, plans were devised for the restoration of the building and a scheme formulated for the building's use as a multi-purpose community and family support center. As of March 1994, these plans have taken on new life and are currently moving forward, although still in the early programming stage.

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<sup>44</sup> Booker T. Washington. "A Remarkable Triple Alliance: How a Jew is Helping the Negro Through the YMCA." *The Outlook*. October 28, 1914, p. 485.

<sup>45</sup> *YMCA*, 1912-1913, p. 326. (Also see *Year Book*, 1913-1914).

<sup>46</sup> Hargrave, p. 177.

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**CITY DIRECTORIES**

Chicago, Illinois  
Columbus, Georgia  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
Norfolk, Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia  
Washington, District of Columbia

**NEWSPAPERS**

*Baltimore Afro-American*

*Colored American*

*Daily National Intelligencer*

"Notice-The Young Men of the Different Protestant Denominations...."  
(June 9, 1852), p. 3.

*Harper's Weekly*

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"At 90, He Recalls Feats of Blacks." (August 1, 1976).

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"Popular Subscription Fund." (January 14, 1893).

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"YMCA." (March 16, 1907).

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"Pittman Wins Again." (June 22, 1907).

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 "YMCA." (April 16, 1910).  
 "Negro YMCA Holds Rally." (May 14, 1910).  
 "Mr. W. Sidney Pittman." (July 2, 1910).  
 "Architect Pittman in the South." (September 24, 1910).  
 "Mr. Pittman Here." (October 1, 1910).  
 "President Taft to address YMCA." (May 20, 1911).  
 "YMCA receives \$25,000 from Julius Rosenwald." (December 30, 1911).  
 "Pittman in South." (April 13, 1912).  
 "YMCA Dedication." (May 18, 1912).  
 "Pittmans in Texas." (September 7, 1912).  
 "YMCA to Celebrate Anniversary." (May 17, 1913).

*Washington Star*

"Tribute to a Pioneer Negro Leader." (January 23, 1953)

*Washington Tribune***LIBRARIES AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Historic Columbus Foundation, Columbus, Georgia  
 Indianapolis Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana  
 Library of Congress, Washington, District of Columbia  
 Martin Luther King Library, Washington, D.C.  
 Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, New York  
 Washington, D.C. Historical Society  
 YMCA of USA Archives, University of Minnesota Library

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
 Previously Listed in the National Register.  
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.  
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.  
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #DC-361  
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State Agency  
 Federal Agency  
 Local Government  
 University  
 Other (Specify Repository):

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: .395 Acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing  
A 18 323100 4309090

## Verbal Boundary Description:

The Twelfth Street YMCA occupies lot 16 (827) in Square 275 in the northwest quadrant of the District of Columbia. The irregularly-shaped lot is 17,225 square feet in area, has a 127.50-foot frontage on the west side of Twelfth Street, NW, and a maximum depth of 155.12 feet.

## Boundary Justification:

Lot 16 in Square 275 has historically been associated with the property since its construction in 1908-1912.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**Name/Title: Ms. Laura Harris Hughes and Ms. Laura V. Trieschmann, Architectural Historians  
Traceries  
5420 Western Avenue  
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815

Telephone: (301) 656-5283

Date: March, 1994

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**Photographs**

The following information is the same for all the photographs.

- (1) Twelfth Street YMCA Building,
- (2) 1816 12th Street, N.W. Washington, D.C.
- (3) Traceries, Laura Harris Hughes and Laura Trieschmann
- (4) May, 1994
- (5) Traceries, 5420 Western Avenue, NW. Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815.

1. (6) Facade, View Looking Northwest  
(7) Photograph #1 of 9
2. (6) Facade, Detail of Portico, View Looking West  
(7) Photograph #2 of 9
3. (6) Facade, Detail of Upper Stories, View looking West  
(7) Photograph #3 of 9
4. (6) South Elevation, View Looking Northeast  
(7) Photograph #4 of 9
5. (6) West Elevation of Gymnasium, View Looking Southeast  
(7) Photograph #5 of 9
6. (6) North Elevation, View Looking Southwest  
(7) Photograph #6 of 9
7. (6) Interior, Vestibule, View Looking East from Lobby  
(7) Photograph #7 of 9
8. (6) Interior, Lobby and Main Stair, View Looking Northwest  
(7) Photograph #8 of 9
9. (6) Interior, Gymnasium, View Looking North  
(7) Photograph #9 of 9

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**Elevations and Plans**

1. East and West Elevation  
Baranes/Mackie/Christie Joint Venture, July 1993
2. North and South Elevation  
Baranes/Mackie/Christie Joint Venture, July 1993
3. Ground Floor Plan and First Floor Plan  
Baranes/Mackie/Christie Joint Venture, July 1993
4. Second Floor Plan and Third Floor Plan  
Baranes/Mackie/Christie Joint Venture, July 1993
5. Fourth Floor Plan and Roof Plan  
Baranes/Mackie/Christie Joint Venture, July 1993

**TWELFTH STREET YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION BUILDING**

**TWELFTH STREET YMCA, 1816 12TH STREET, NW  
SQUARE 275, LOT 16  
SOURCE: 1919 BAIST MAP**