

Statement of Significance

Ohio Historical Marker Application, Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs

The Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs should receive an Ohio Historical Marker because of its contributions for over a century to African American education and social welfare.

At a meeting called by Mrs. I. N. Ross in 1904 at the Allen Temple A.M.E. Church at the corner of Sixth and Broadway, the Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (CFCWC) was organized by eight existing African-American women's clubs.¹ Its first president, Mrs. Arizona Miller later recalled that the Federation "has been active in all problems confronting our race and has made itself felt as a power in obtaining civil and constitutional rights for our people as a group."² The CFCWC soon blossomed into a vibrant organization composed of dozens of clubs and more than 1000 members throughout much of the 20th century. Their activities aimed to uplift their community through cooperation, mutual aid, and community service.

Historian Stephanie Shaw has argued that African-American women's voluntary organizations are part of a "historical process of encouraging and supporting self-determination, self-improvement, and community development" beginning during enslavement and continuing through creation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), of which the CFCWC was a member.³ Geographic mobility, particularly the Great Migration from the South to the North (ca. 1916 to 1970), made traditional patterns of organizing in the Black community national in scope. The CFCWC is but one example of a mutual organization arising out of a long-held spirit of community consciousness among African Americans; it had national ties to other similar organizations through their membership in the National Association of Colored Women.⁴ Historian William Giffin writes that local organizations were "associated with the Ohio Federation of Women's Clubs (African American) established in 1901. Most black women's clubs in Ohio were designed to attain public goals and lend welfare assistance to the needy."⁵ In the period of rapid urbanization, government responsibility for social and educational needs was only beginning, and white charities did not support African-American individuals or institutions. This made the contributions of clubs such as the CFCWC especially important for Blacks in Cincinnati. As historians Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Martha Jones have shown, the NACW advocated voting rights not merely as a right for individual women but rather as a way to empower the African American community as a whole.⁶

The first project of the CFCWC was creating a free kindergarten at Brown Chapel AME Church in Walnut Hills.⁷ This endeavor closely mirrored the program of NACW founder Mary Church Terrell who said, "the establishment of kindergartens is the special mission which [the NACW] are called to fulfill. . . . we [are keenly alive] to the necessity of rescuing our little ones, whose noble qualities are deadened and dwarfed by the very atmosphere which they breathe."⁸ The success of the Walnut Hills kindergarten and another founded for Black children in the West End by Federation member Jennie Porter⁹ encouraged adoption of kindergartens in Cincinnati public schools.¹⁰ Another early project of the Federation aided African-American children and youth in the Juvenile Court system in order "to lift the stigma of being juvenile offenders and

give them the chance to live as a deserving child should live.” This work, too, was later taken over by the city.¹¹

In the early twentieth century, the CFCWC donated funds to the Home for Aged Colored Women (HACW), the first institution in Cincinnati to be entirely founded and supported by Black women. Before government support provided even a modicum of security for the elderly, CFCWC clubs donated money for roof maintenance and later helped pay for a new location for the Home at 1334 ½ Lincoln Ave until 1926. There was significant overlap in leadership between the two organizations, suggesting they worked closely together.¹² Four of the eleven members of the board of directors of the HACW and six of fifteen HACW trustees were also members of the Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Evidence suggests that CFCWC members utilized facilities of the Home for Aged Colored Women themselves in their older years; in 1920 at least two members of the Federation lived as “inmates” of the Home.

In 1924, the CFCWC purchased a mansion in Walnut Hills to serve as their clubhouse. The house, built by architect Samuel Hannaford in 1888 for C. H. Burroughs, was listed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1980. It is a two and half story brick building with Romanesque and Queen Anne stylistic influences. CFCWC members planned to use the house to provide a temporary home for “young women, strangers who came to Cincinnati seeking work.”¹³ This was especially important during the Great Migration when segregation severely limited housing for African Americans. The first floor was used for internal club meetings and public meetings. Rooms on the third floor were rented to migrants, many of whom came to Cincinnati as part of the Great Migration. Over more than 20 years, the CFCWC actively fundraised to pay off the mortgage and kept current on payments even through the Great Depression. They paid off the house in 1946 and celebrated the achievement by burning the mortgage at a Thanksgiving Service full of speeches, prayer, and song.

For well over a century, members of the Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs have served their community in myriad ways that have often been overlooked in formal histories of the city. In addition to their work with kindergartens, the juvenile court, and the Home for Aged Colored Women, they also contributed to the Home for Aged Colored Men, the Colored Orphan Asylum, and Longview Hospital; offered scholarships to African-American students; and actively participated in the West End YWCA as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass schools.¹⁴ Initiating services that were otherwise unavailable, some of the work of the Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, is now provided by public agencies. The ways the CFCWC benefited African Americans in Cincinnati stretched beyond a single issue: the Federation supported social services, education, safety for migrants new to the city, and expanded civil rights.

Endnotes

¹ *History of the Federation of Cincinnati Colored Women's Clubs, 1904-1952* [pamphlet; hereafter, *History*, 1904-1952] ,7.

² Arizona Miller, "Preface," *History, 1904-1952*; Articles of Incorporation, "CFCWC Box 01 0003 - Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women's Clubs - Digital Library." n.d. Accessed July 15, 2020. <https://digital.cincinnatilibrary.org/digital/collection/p16998coll77/id/71/rec/3>.

³ Stephanie J. Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women." *Journal of Women's History* 3 (1991): 11.

⁴ In 1914 the National Association of Colored Women changed its name to the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. It will be referred to in this paper as the National Association of Colored Women or NACW.

⁵ William W. Giffin, *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 108.

⁶ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, ACLS Humanities E-Book, 1998; Martha S. Jones. n.d. "Black Women's 200 Year Fight for the Vote, American Experience, PBS." Accessed June 7, 2020. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbhamericanexperience/features/vote-black-women-200-year-fight-for-vote/>.

⁷ *History*, 1904-1952, 8. Tullia Hamilton notes the importance of kindergartens in local chapters of the NACW throughout the country; "The National Association of Colored Women, 1896-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1978), 60, 70-71.

<https://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/302903864/citation/7CFAC128D0BC4912PQ/3>

⁸ Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women." Accessed March 20, 2020. <http://www.expo98.msu.edu/people/Terrell.htm>.

⁹ Delores Thompson and Lyle Koehler, "Educated Pioneers: Black Women at the University of Cincinnati, 1897-1940." *Queen City Heritage*, 1985, 26. <http://library.cincymuseum.org/aag/documents/qch-v43-n4-edu-021.pdf>. Lesley Robinson, "Jennie Davis Porter: A Leader of Black Education in Cincinnati" *Journal of the Alpha Beta Phi Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta: Perspectives in History* 4, no. 1 (1988): 13–18. https://inside.nku.edu/content/dam/hisgeo/docs/archives/Vol4_1_F1988perspectives.pdf.

¹⁰ *History*, 1904-1952, 8.

¹¹ Giffin, *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio*, 108.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *History*, 1904-1952, 10-16.

¹⁴ Giffin, 108, points out the work of Mrs. Mamie Trotter with the CFWC and orphans as well as Mrs. Estelle Rickman Davis, president of the CFWC in the early 1920s, who also worked with the YWCA and the Home for Aged Colored Women. Jennie Porter, also a CFCWC president, founded and served as principal of Harriet Beecher Stowe School; she created a scholarship for African-American children in the Cincinnati Public Schools. Dan Hurley, “Reflections on Leadership.” *Cincinnati Magazine*, August 2014,
http://cincymagazine.com/Main/Articles/Reflections_on_Leadership_4186.aspx.
Thompson, Delores, and Lyle Koehler. “Educated Pioneers: Black Women at the University of Cincinnati, 1897-1940.” Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information from “AncestryLibrary™.” n.d. Accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>.