

germantown CARRIER

A Publication of the Germantown Historical Society

\$10.00

Negro Achievement Week 1928

Negro Achievement Week

April 15-22, 1928

To be held in

GERMANTOWN

Under the Auspices of the

The Inter-Racial Committee

of the

Germantown Y. W. C. A.



Exhibit

ART—MUSIC—LITERATURE
Lecture Room of Germantown Public
Library

Vernon Park and Germantown Avenue

APRIL, 16-21

Afternoon and Evening
Staton's Art Store Window

Mount Airy Integration 1950s

WHEN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE CAME TO GERMANTOWN: NEGRO ACHIEVEMENT WEEK APRIL 1928

by David W. Young

"The Biggest Event of Its Kind Ever Held in Germantown"

"Never in the history of this community have Germantown residents been so stirred up as they were during the past seven days when Negro Achievement Week took place," so reported the *Philadelphia Tribune*.¹ The week after Easter 1928 marks the time when the Harlem Renaissance came to Germantown to celebrate African American contributions to American arts and letters. Coordinated under the auspices of a joint, interracial committee of the Germantown YWCA and its Colored Branch, with institutional support provided by the

Germantown Friends School and the Germantown Public Library, "Negro Achievement Week" involved cultural and educational institutions locally and regionally, including Cheyney State College (at the time called "The Cheyney Normal School"), and put national issues out for local consumption. While it followed the model of Germantown history celebrations before and after, with a week-long celebration and several business tie-ins involved in a community-wide educational effort, the historical community of Germantown was not prominently

SUNDAY, APRIL 15th

Opening Meeting

Germantown Theatre, 4 P. M.

Dr. J. S. LADD THOMAS, *Presiding*

Speaker—DR. ALAIN LOCKE

Organist—S. VAN WHITTED

Chorus—RUSSELL JOHNSON, *Director*

MONDAY, APRIL 16th, 7:45-9 P. M.

Broadcasted Concert

Radio Station WOO
WANAMAKER STORE

Under the Auspices of the Robert Curtis Ogden
Association
The organization of Negro employees for educational,
musical and social uplift

Soloist, HARRY T. BURLEIGH

ROBERT C. OGDEN ASSO. BAND

Directed by Vernon Cuffee

ROBERT C. OGDEN ASSO. CHORUS

Directed by a noted Indian musician, Fred Cardin
Violin Soloist—LEON WISDOM

This Concert may be heard in
Germantown Public Library

TUESDAY, APRIL 17th, 8 P. M.

Art Night

In Germantown Public Library

MR. ALLAN FREELON, *Presiding*

Speakers—

LAURA WHEELER WARING,

Winner of 1927 Harmon Award

WILLIAM L. HANSBERRY,

*Professor of African History, Howard
University*

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18th, 8 P. M.

Literature Night

In Germantown Public Library
ARTHUR H. FAUSET, *Presiding*

Speakers—

DR. ALAIN LOCKE,

Rhodes Scholar and Author

MR. LESLIE PINCKNEY HILL,

Principal Cheyney Normal School

THURSDAY, APRIL 19th, 8 P. M.

Community Meeting

Y. M. C. A.

5849 Germantown Avenue

DR. ROGER S. FORBES, *presiding*

DR. W. E. B. DU BOIS "Contributions by the
Negro to American Life"

Cheyney Choir

FRIDAY, APRIL 20th, 8 P. M.

Germantown Friends School
Coulter, Street and Germantown Avenue

ADMISSION 75c

STANLEY R. YARNALL, *Presiding*

Speaker, JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

"The Negro in Music, Art and Literature"

Violinist, CLARENCE CAMERON WHITE

THE WORK CHORUS

*Tickets at offices of Friends School
and Y. W. C. A.*

SATURDAY

Special Exhibit Day For School Children

in the Germantown Public Library

The program for Negro Achievement Week combined community meetings, the arts, and exhibits. Courtesy Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pa.

¹ "Germantown Women Organize to Study Political Situation; Celebrate Achievement Week," *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 19, 1928, 12.

involved. But, given its scale and success, and the stunning array of nationally known talent it attracted to various locations on Germantown Avenue, "Negro Achievement Week" was indeed one of the most historic events to take place in Germantown during the 20th century.

The Germantown "Negro Achievement Week" in 1928 has been curiously little remembered.² Like other week-long celebrations promoting an understanding of the past and of contributions to the present, this one involved various institutions across education, social service, religious, and business sectors of the community. Like the previous year's 150th anniversary of the Battle of Germantown, "Negro Achievement Week" attempted to bring the community together in a coordinated way, with lots of promotion and commercial tie-ins.³ But quite unlike anything before or since in Germantown, Negro Achievement Week, April 15–22, 1928 reached beyond a narrow community focus toward a larger understanding of what had not been discussed at many levels of the community. It forced participating organizations to consider their roles in something larger than a celebration of Germantown, namely a consideration of another race. The importance of this event transcended even the ambition of the program or the merits of its execution, for it represented an ambitious program about race at a moment of tremendous racial volatility in Germantown. Germantown in 1928 was not exactly the place where one would expect to find a dazzling assembly of African American artistic and cultural talent for the broad public.

1928: Coming Together or Growing Apart?

The year 1928 proved to be an interesting watershed for Germantown and represented the high point for the community in several ways. The historical community had had its great success the year before with the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Germantown, with many descendants of colonial-era families dressing up in colonial garb. Meanwhile, the business community was trumpeting a newly transformed neo-classical Town Hall, reopened as a business center for the bustling community and its grow-

ing population. The Germantown Businessmen's Association celebrated its 30th anniversary in April 1928 with a rally and a banquet, including a speech by Philadelphia Mayor Mackey. The outward signs were good. As the headline of *The Beehive*, the publication of the Germantown business community would declare two years later, "Germantown Presses Forward: No Business Depression Here." The reason for the rosy outlook was the growth in population recorded in the 1930 census, which recorded an increase of nearly 31,000 people in ten years, resulting in over 116,000 inhabitants of the 22nd ward.⁴

During the 1920s Germantown was living up to what Stephanie Wolf described about early times as the community's "constant influences of mobility and heterogeneity of population."⁵ With the growth in Germantown a community emerged that was very different from the white suburb it had been only a few decades previously. Among the "outsiders" moving in were many Jewish, Catholic, and Italian residents, as well as a growing number of African Americans.⁶ A reason for the influx was economic opportunity. As described in Robert Gregg's history of churches in the Philadelphia black community during this period (1920 to 1930), 7 percent of the total black population in the South moved north (about 554,000 black Southerners). In Philadelphia it occurred when it did because of economic developments—which took the form of lower European immigration due to World War I and increases in northern production, creating a shortage of labor in the north. Hostile conditions in the south were also a factor in bringing blacks northward in ways different from before.⁷ After the war the labor shortage continued because of increased productivity but also quotas on European immigration. Between 1922 and 1924, nearly 10,000 migrants moved to Philadelphia each year.⁸ The population of African Americans in the Germantown Township numbered approximately 4,000 in 1880 and grew to 20,000 in 1920 and an estimated 33,000 by 1949.⁹ Social agencies like the YWCA and the rest of the community began to find ways to cope with these rapid changes in population. One of the ways it did was the cre-

2 The only references to it are in the local press of the time and very brief mentions (with incorrect placement of the date in March 1928) in the booklet by Lucy P. Carner, *YWCA The First 100 Years in Germantown 1870–1970* (Philadelphia 1970), 57, and Stephanie Yvette Felix, "Committed to Their Own, African American Women Leaders in the YWCA of Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1870–1970." Ph.D. dissertation (Temple University, 1999), 128–129.

3 Program for Negro Achievement Week, in "Negro Achievement Week Report," Temple University Urban Archives, YWCA Germantown records, Box 24, Folder 27 "Integration, 1928–1950."

4 *The Beehive: A Publication of the Germantown Businessmen's Association*, "Published in the interests of the Business, Civic, Patriotic, and Historical Societies of Germantown," XVII: 3 (July 1930), 1–3.

5 Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683–1800* (Princeton University Press: 1976), 16.

6 For an excellent summary of the ethnic composition of Germantown during this period see Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 226–230.

7 Robert Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890–1940* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 13–14.

8 Gregg, 14.

9 Estimates come from the entire 22nd Ward (the entire Germantown Township) and are quoted by Gladys Taylor, executive director of the YWCA of Germantown, in "Experiences in neighborhood building through the YWCA," May 16, 1949. Temple University Urban Archives, YWCA Germantown records, Box 24, Folder 27.

KU KLUX KLAN STARTS ORGANIZATION HERE

Largely Attended Meetings
Held in Old Odd Fellows'
Hall on Wister Street

NO HOODED PARADE YET

Meetings in the interest of the Ku Klux Klan are being held weekly in the hall of Philomathean Lodge of Odd Fellows, on Wister street.

A strong Germantown branch is being organized. Those conversant with the affairs of this secret and hooded order say it is the largest branch of the Klan in Philadelphia.

Monday night is the regular meeting night, and on that night Wister street has been thronged with motorcars.

Philomathean Hall, built in 1847, has been used but little in late years. Now it is the scene of busy activities, for in addition to the Monday night meetings of the Klan numerous other committee sessions and conferences are held there.

Many Germantown citizens have received invitations to attend the Klan meetings in Philomathean Hall, but otherwise there has been no public manifestation of the purposes of the Klan. Curious citizens are eagerly awaiting the first outdoor demonstration of the hooded fraternity.

The Ku Klux Klan held a public lecture and naturalization last Saturday night on a farm on Church road, west of Willow Grove avenue, Wyndmoor. The ceremonies were open to the general public and announcement was made that there would be "plenty of free parking space."

The Klan has had numerous adherents for more than a year in White-marsh, Springfield and other nearby townships of Montgomery county.

The KKK was quite active in Germantown in the 1920s.
GHS Archives.

ation of more agencies, associations, and organizations. But amid some of the high-minded approaches to working on issues of race, there were extreme factions present as well.

Unlike the YWCA, many organizations attempted to shore up the identity of their own people in the face of changes and threats to a way of life. Among the many already established descendant-based groups were nativist lodges and hereditary societies, such as the Colonial Dames, the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, and the Patriotic Order Sons of America. Some of them delved into history, such as the Junior Order using the old Concord School for meetings, and the Dames establishing Stenton as a museum in 1900. But there were some extreme elements, such as the Germantown klavern, the largest branch of the Ku Klux Klan in the city of Philadelphia in the mid-1920s. It numbered nearly 1,200 Klan members and was active in the Germantown section into World War II.¹⁰ As historian Russell Kazal described in his history of German-American identity, "most Germantowners did not burn crosses, but the views expressed in their most extreme form by the Klan—the fear of new immigrants and African Americans as racial threats to America" created long-standing tension.¹¹ Extreme views like those of the KKK were not often in evidence. Many movie theaters were segregated, however, and there had been "separate but equal" elementary schools since 1901. Even though many blacks were employed in restaurants or as caterers, few of them would have been able to eat in establishments on Germantown Avenue. There were different clubs and churches for blacks and whites even within the same denomination or faith.¹² The more venerable institutions, such as the Germantown Cricket Club and the Germantown Historical Society, were closed to minorities.¹³ Germantown Friends Meeting did not permit blacks until 1947. But the racial aspect of patriotic groups and organizations spilled over to larger, city-wide divisions that threatened that sectional differences might become a norm.

Throughout Philadelphia there had been concerns about each area of the city pursuing goals separate from the city as a whole. The concern at the time was called "Sectionalism." Sectionalism and its tendency to

10 Kazal, 230–231. Philip Jenkins, *Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania, 1925–1950* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 72, 76. See also James Wolfinger, *Divided Philadelphia: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 187.

11 Kazal, 231.

12 This aspect of Germantown history remains to be explored fully. See, J. Gordon Baugh, Jr. *A Souvenir of Germantown—Issued during the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation at Philadelphia, PA. September 1913*. (Philadelphia: Baugh Press, 1913), Germantown Historical Society. There is a version annotated by Louise L. Strawbridge, with the assistance of John E. Jones, Jr., and reproduced in the *Germantown Crier* vol. 36, no. 1 (winter, 1983–84) and vol. 36, no. 2 (spring 1984); as well as Strawbridge's collections of African American responses to her research, African American PAM box, Germantown Historical Society.

13 David Contosta, "Philadelphia's 'Miniature Williamsburg': The Colonial Revival and Germantown's Market Square," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 120 (October 1996), 285–290.

create an overabundance of community organizations has certainly been true in Germantown, but it was recognized as a threat as early as the 1920s. Germantown Businessmen's Association secretary, George Bodine, a banker, cautioned, " 'Tis hard to realize just how many organizations there are in Germantown."¹⁴ A call for a more centralized body to manage the many divergent organizations, societies, and clubs was becoming more frequent. The *Beehive's* editors proclaimed:

Let Germantown learn the lessons of greater co-operation. We shall not advertise other parts of our great country by quoting what they are accomplishing by working together. We do not mean to imply that the various sections of Germantown are in any way antagonistic to each other, but does a spirit of the closest cooperation prevail among the representatives of Germantown's districts?

It seems that the many appeals for a central organization to work in the interest of the entire Germantown community do not bear fruit. We shall not discuss the accomplishments of such a body, but rather ask this question—*If the sections of Germantown have developed to such a great degree by working independently, how much greater would that development be if all the various business and civic organizations had added to the many movements necessary to the advancement of Germantown?* (Emphasis in original).

But if the issue for Germantown was no coordination of the intra-neighborhood organizations, this mirrored a growing concern in the city of Philadelphia as a whole, for whom "co-operation" had been a chief concern among municipal reformers and planners and for whom the many divisions within the city were a growing threat.¹⁵ Mayor Mackey's address to the 30th anniversary of the Germantown Businessmen's Association had preached the importance of working together, particularly because of the fear of growing exodus of people and business to the suburbs. "United support of transportation plans will avoid sectionalism. Even though there are transportation improvements planned for certain sections, they are not for the sections of the city alone, but as part of a defensive program for the good of Philadelphia."¹⁶ The businesses were on the alert that the good of the city was the aim of working together and that the work of bringing the disparate groups together, similar to keeping the sections of the city together, was important for the greater good. But was this something that could be sustained?

Working together within this context of multiple and separatist organizations in an ethnically divided community, was something that did not take place often in Philadelphia, much less Germantown. The late 1920s began to show the tendency for people who did not like the newcomers to their section of Philadelphia to move out of the city and into the suburbs. One exception, and a sign that indicated it might be possible to make systematic working together across sectors and institutions, was the very ambitious Negro Achievement Week of April 1928.



Carter G. Woodson. He organized the first Negro Achievement Week in 1926. Courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁴ The *Beehive*: XVII: 2 (March 1930), 19.

¹⁵ On this, see Wolfinger, *Divided Philadelphia*, 2 and 14–80. About the issue of cooperation in Philadelphia, see Jonathan Farnham, "A Bridge Game: Constructing a Co-operative Commonwealth in Philadelphia, 1900–1926" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2000).

¹⁶ "Mayor Would Stop Exodus to Suburbs; United Support of Transit Plans will do it he tells Germantown Businessmen, A Plea for the Avoidance of Sectionalism," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, April 17, 1928, p. 22.

"Through Artistic Achievement the Negro has Found a Means..."

"Negro Achievement Week" celebrations were the brainchild of Carter Woodson, professor of history at Howard University, who had begun producing them in 1925 as a way to celebrate African Americans and were the forerunner to what is now black History Month.¹⁷ Using the press and coordinated events to bring together different disciplines to commemorate one theme, Woodson, particularly in the urban areas of the eastern United States, helped promote the story of the involvement of blacks in the development of American life, industry, and culture. Words like "contribution" and "accomplishment" were used often, but even mainstream white newspapers frequently published articles on African art and culture. In her examination of the Negro Achievement Week in Chicago the year before Germantown's, historian Lisa Meyerowitz observed, "Both blacks and whites supported the Harlem Renaissance in an effort to promote the advancement of blacks in America."¹⁸ According to Meyerowitz, the effort to highlight the Harlem Renaissance brought about a broad combination of examples of what its leading proponent, Dr. Alain Leroy Locke, did by publicizing the emergence of the "New Negro." "I do not think it too much to say that through artistic achievement the Negro has found a means of getting at the very core of the prejudice against him, by challenging the Nordic superiority complex," wrote Locke.¹⁹

Such views emphasized the racial, rather than the class component, of African Americans in the 20th century. Bringing a variety of contributions to the public would be a beginning to describing African Americans as distinctly American, but would also make known the elements that were uniquely African about their ethnic heritage. Such was the case in cities with substantial black populations, and particularly a solid middle-class African American population. This population was beginning to see obstacles from white Americans, particularly over jobs, but also from increasing migration from southern blacks, further diminishing what little cohesiveness lay among the black community as a whole. Historian Charles P. T. Banner-Haley has written about Philadelphia during this period, emphasizing the way that Locke and DuBois tried to use these subjects as unifiers within the community as well as promotion outside it. "After the First World War, the rigid



Alain L. Locke, author of *The New Negro*. Courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia.

caste system in black middle and upper classes did little to help black migrants. With the mass movement to northern cities, black intellectuals shifted the focus of their thinking about the condition. 'Race Men' such as Carter Woodson and W.E.B. DuBois hailed the historical and literary achievements of certain black thinkers, especially the writers in the Harlem Renaissance."²⁰ This group deemphasized the lack of rights and economic equality for the time being, in order to demonstrate the value of the race within American society. The group of so-called "race men" also included Locke and saw presenting the achievements and contributions by blacks as a way of presenting a black man who was an American yet one with a rich cultural heritage. But only during this period did such high-minded approaches fully hold sway. Soon thereafter, in the Great Depression, new ideas were generated and debates deep-

17 For the development of Woodson's reasoning, see C. G. Woodson, "The Celebration of Negro History Week, 1927," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Apr., 1927), pp. 103-109; and "Negro History Week—the Fourth Year" in *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Apr., 1929), pp. 109-115.

18 See Lisa Meyerowitz, "The 'Negro in Art Week': defining the 'New Negro' through art exhibition," in *The African American Studies Journal* 1997.

19 Locke is quoted in James Weldon Johnson, "Race Prejudice and the Negro Artist," *Harper's* 157 (1928), 669-76.

20 From Charles P. T. Banner-Haley's study of Philadelphia, *To Do Good and To Do Well: Middle-Class Blacks and the Depression, Philadelphia 1929-1941* (New York: Garland, 1993), 5-6. On this period, also see H. Viscount Nelson, *Black Leadership's Response to the Great Depression in Philadelphia* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen press, 2006), 25-28.

ened among black intellectuals, ultimately splitting the intelligentsia into two divisions around race and class during the period of greatest economic hardship.

In the late 1920s, Philadelphia newspapers were often filled with articles about black history, particularly in February, a month when history was frequently used in the 20th century to remember Lincoln and Washington in the month of their births. But in the late 1920s it was very common to see published articles by Dr. Albert Barnes about African art or printed orations by DuBois about race in America in mainstream newspapers, or to mention the birth date of Frederick Douglass in February as well as Lincoln's. Alain Locke was a frequent contributor to such publications, and both he and DuBois had significant Philadelphia roots. DuBois had published his famous study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, while living in Philadelphia, and Locke grew up in Philadelphia, attended Central High School, and was a descendant of Ishmael Locke, one of the early teachers of the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth (the forerunner of Cheyney Normal School teachers college).²¹ Both of them published often during this period about the ways to provide "uplift" to African Americans.

That this approach to race in the late 1920s was supported by media and intellectual circles may not be surprising, but there was a base of financial support as well. One facet of this promotion of African American culture was the development of philanthropic means to support budding African American artists. Of the philanthropic organizations devoted to the cause of the "New Negro," the Harmon Foundation, founded in 1922 by real estate tycoon William E. Harmon, was one of the more significant. In 1925 it established awards for achievement in literature, music, the fine arts, industry and business, science and invention, education, and religion, carrying a \$400 first-place award and a \$500 award for race relations. Its first art exhibition was held in New York in 1926 at the International House.²² One year later an "achievement week" was held in Chicago, and a year after that in Germantown, both with considerable support from the Harmon Foundation. Indeed the Germantown event included several Harmon Foundation award winners in art and in music on the program..²³

MRS. WILLIAM ELLIS SHIPLEY, *Chairman*

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MRS. JOSEPH HAROLD WATSON

MR. H. NORMAN PERKINS, *Treasurer*

Organizers of the event from the YWCA. Courtesy Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pa.

The Germantown YWCA

Planning for the Germantown event began in earnest in 1925, but had been discussed as early as five years before.²⁴ The YWCA administration was creative in providing such openness to heritage. It actually stemmed from organizational philosophy. Maggie Kuhn, who became famous later in her life as a senior citizen activist, worked at the Germantown Y in 1930, training women in business and professional skills. According to Kuhn, the Y mission believed that its strength was its sense of association, employing a method called "group work" which emphasized group association.²⁵ The planning committee was made up predominately of women of the YWCA, but

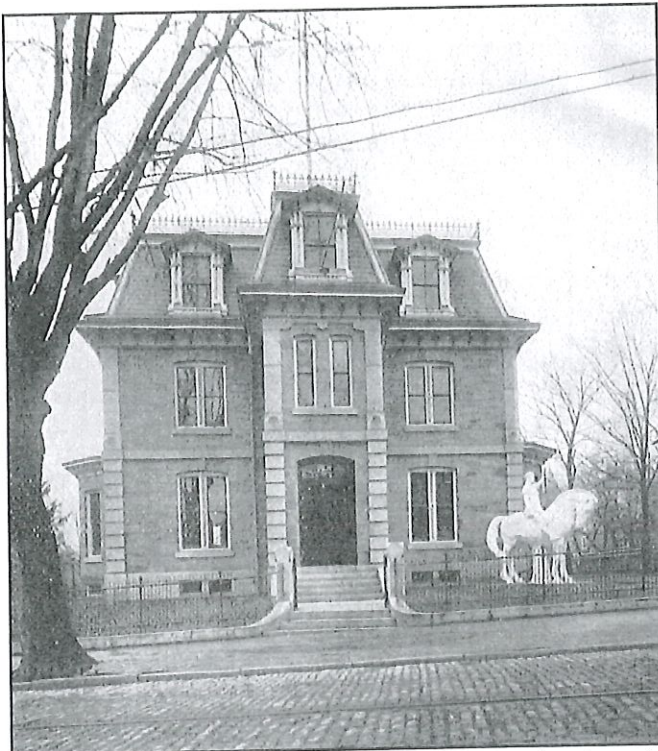
21 On Ishmael Locke, see David W. Young, "The South Jersey Influences on a Great African American," *Salem Sunbeam*, February 24, 2003.

22 Meyerowitz, "The Negro in Art" Week, *The African American Studies Journal*, 1997. The Harmon Foundation, which underwrote several major art exhibitions, lasted until 1967.

23 Program flyer for Negro Achievement Week, YWCA Germantown records, Box 24, Folder 27 "Integration, 1928-1950."

24 From the report by Miss Beulah McNeill, one of the charter members of the interracial committee and a member of the Negro branch of the YWCA. "Negro Achievement Week Report," Temple University Urban Archives, YWCA Germantown records, Box 24, Folder 27 "Integration, 1928-1950."

25 Maggie Kuhn (1905-1995), who became famous as an activist for senior citizens, founding a group known as the Gray Panthers, worked at the Germantown YWCA. She ran the Professional Department of business girls. See Christina Long, Laura Quinn, *No Stone Unturned: The Life and Times of Maggie Kuhn* (Ballantine Books, 1991).



Home of the "Colored Y," offshoot of the YWCA. At various times it was the home of Charles Magarge (1871), the Franklin School (1889), and The Young Republican Club House (as seen here in 1906). GHS Archives.

included three members of the African American branch of the YWCA, known at the time as the "Colored Y." The committee's composition reflected some of the individuals who had made the creation of the black branch of the YWCA possible, namely Mrs. William Shipley and Eva Bowles. Shipley was the wife of a prominent Germantown banker, and, though white, she served as chair of the board of the Colored Branch for five years. In that capacity she worked closely with Eva Bowles, a noted social worker who was appointed director of the Colored Work Committee of the Young Women's Christian Association. She believed that the YWCA was "the pioneer in interracial experimentation."²⁶

Bowles' close supervision of the Germantown Y branch work was essential to that organization getting off of the ground. Shipley and Mrs. Norman Perkins, whose husband was treasurer of the 1928 event in his capacity as vice-president of the Germantown Trust,

drew other members of the committee from the social service community who served on the boards of the relief agencies in Germantown.²⁷ Meanwhile, African American heritage was emphasized in some of the branch's programming. After Shipley's direction of the Colored Branch passed to its first black chair, Mrs. Olivia Yancy Taylor, the black branch of the Y had held a variety of African American heritage events during the 1920s. Many of them showed a decidedly political content, but these were coordinated by the black branch of the Y solely for its membership, with little fanfare, unlike the 1928 event.²⁸ Local groups using the black branch of the Y were encouraged to name their clubs after notable black women, such as the "Phyllis Wheatley Club" and the "Fannie Coppin Grace School Girl Reserves."

It is important to consider how new this was for Germantown. Yet it also revealed the neighborhood's identity crisis, which was rooted in tensions among ethnic groups, class divisions, and a preponderance of heritage groups—much of it played out in the realm of historical memory. One interesting example showed the historical consciousness at the time, namely a photograph of the Hospitality Committee of the Negro Branch of the YWC showing African American women dressed for a George



Olivia Yancy Taylor teaching at the Wissahickon Boys Club. She became the first African American chair of the Colored Y. GHS Archives.

²⁶ Eva D. Bowles was born in Ohio and attended both Ohio State University and Columbia University. She worked in New York after being appointed to direct a project for black women under the Young Women's Christian Association. She returned to NYC in 1913 to become the secretary of the subcommittee on colored work for The National Board of the YWCA. In 1917, she was appointed director of the Colored Work Committee of the Young Women's Christian Association. Eva Bowles died in 1943. On the level of professional leadership in the YWCA in Germantown, see Stephanie Yvette Felix, "Committed to their Own: African American women leaders in the YWCA of Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1870-1970." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Temple University, 1999), 78-80.

²⁷ From the program flyer, "Negro Achievement Week," YWCA Germantown records, Temple Urban Archives, Box 24, Folder 27.

²⁸ For instance there had been programs involving speakers from Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1920 and a Pan-African Bazaar in 1920. See Felix, 127-129.



Although this image is reproduced poorly, it shows African American women dressed in Colonial garb. These members of the Hospitality Committee were hostesses at the George Washington Tea at the YWCA in February 1928. From left to right are: Mrs. Cosby, Miss Beulah MacNeil, Mrs. Freeman, Mrs. A. Wilson, Mrs. Cora Hall, who impersonated George Washington, Miss Anette Nelson, Miss Evelyn Jones, Mrs. Ruth Brinkley, who took the part of Martha Washington, and Mrs. Beulah Henry. Courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia.

Washington Tea in February 1928, a few weeks before Negro Achievement Week.²⁹ In the image and adjoining report, ten prominent black women, including Bill Cosby's mother, were dressed as George and Martha Washington, complete with wigs and colonial-era breeches, in front of an American flag. The image is important and complex for it shows how deeply ingrained the Colonial Revival was among Germantowners. Dressing up in Colonial clothing signified status in Germantown. It also indicates the degree to which the version of American history that was popular and most often promoted in Germantown was of only one variety, Colonial.

²⁹ Philadelphia *Tribune*, March 1, 1928, p. 12.

A Souvenir of Germantown

Issued during the

Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration

of the

Emancipation Proclamation

At Philadelphia, Pa., September, 1913



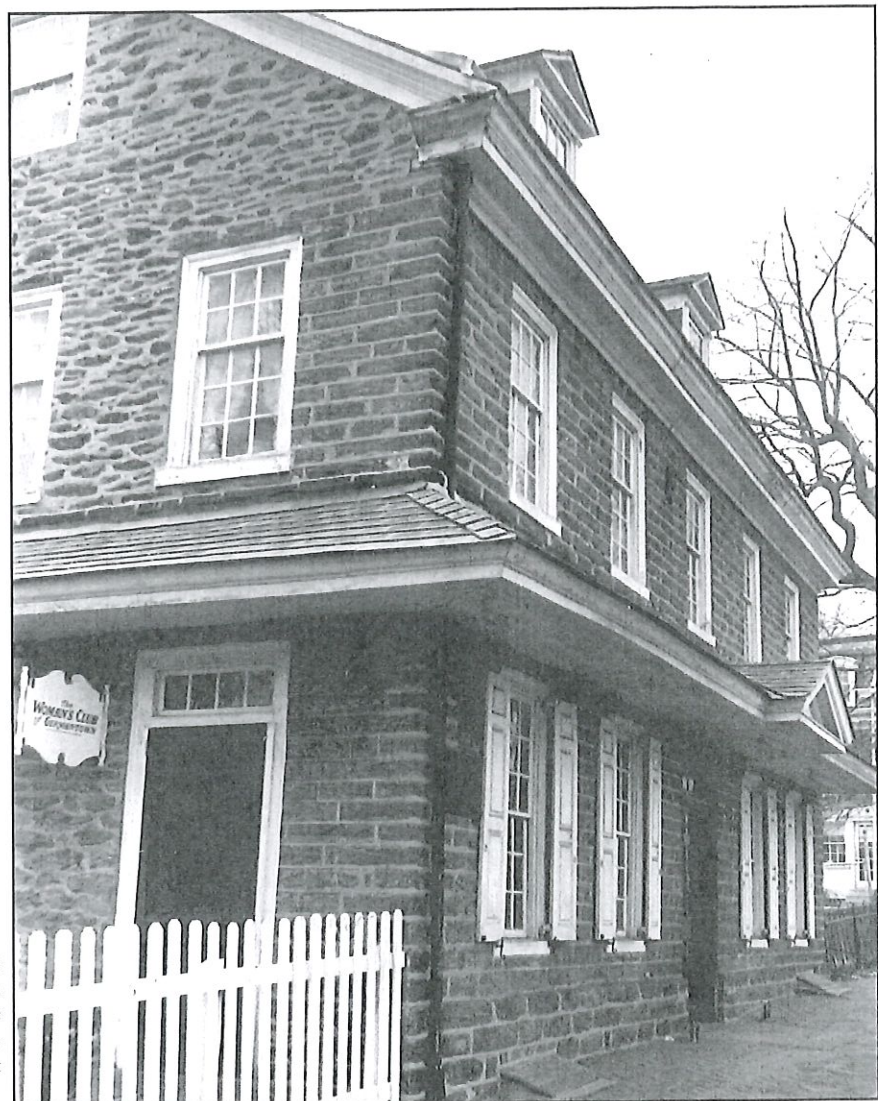
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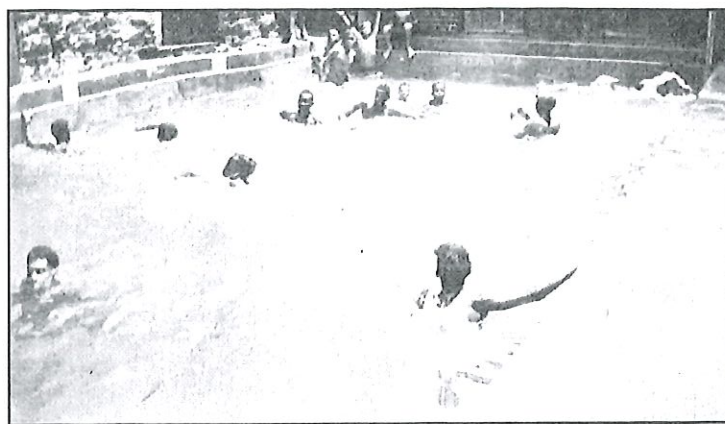
In 1913 J. Gordon Baugh, Jr. published *A Souvenir of Germantown* to show the achievements of African Americans in Germantown. GHS Archives.



The *Beehive*, magazine of the businesses in Germantown, featured extensive coverage of Negro Achievement Week in its April 1928 issue, and featured other local successes. This shows the "Colored YMCA," at its new home on Rittenhouse Street. GHS Archives.



The Johnson House, where slaves were helped to freedom, is seen here when it housed The Woman's Club of Germantown. The Club participated in Negro Achievement Week activities. GHS Archives.



Another success was the opening of a new swimming pool at the Wissahickon Boys Club. GHS Archives.

These African American women may not have been descendants of the founders, but they were promoting their citizenship not their ethnic identity. They did not typify the independent strain of African American heritage displayed in J. Gordon Baugh, Jr.'s 1913 commemorative booklet, a survey of black life in the neighborhood.³⁰ The ladies of the Y represented a type of appropriation of the way the Germantown elite showed off their upper class status, suggesting an effort to claim their own primacy within the changing African American community; dressing in the way of the Germantown elite would establish the women of the Negro branch of the Y as more established than the new African Americans in Germantown. Such an approach was not uncommon among African Americans after World War One.³¹ The ladies in effect put upon themselves the trappings of what the elite would do. They had settled into a comfortable existence in Germantown. From that they could showcase their own American patriotic sensibilities. It might also be understood as the women expressing a desire and a willingness to participate in a shared history not available to them.

So while some African American women were trying, perhaps, to be like the descendant re-enactors, some white women at the YWCA were trying to reach a new level of understanding of African history and culture. Nor was this a narrow bastion of individuals only associated with the YWCA. Even the staid Woman's Club of Germantown hosted a program on the "Negro in American Literature," during Negro Achievement Week.³² They were an exclusive group who used the historic Johnson House as their club headquarters and employed blackball policies regarding membership well into the middle of the century. The Woman's Club made very little about the role of its

own building in African American history, since the Johnson House would decades later be shown to be a station on the Underground Railroad, a subject that was little known nor widely discussed in Germantown in the 1920s. Perhaps the inclusion of the Woman's Club of Germantown into the Negro Achievement Week programming was born of proximity, since the Johnson House was located but a block and a half from the black branch of the YWCA. If so, the proximity was part of the slow integration of middle-class African Americans into that section of town, since the Duval Street block was one of Germantown's most integrated and stable neighborhoods with both white and black residents, and several of the leaders of the black branch of the Y lived there for many years, no doubt walking right past the Woman's Club on the way to the Y.³³ But this was as close as the historical community would get to Negro Achievement Week in Germantown.

Negro Achievement Week

The media coverage on the event was relatively light in the local papers, with one exception. The Germantown Businessmen's Association newspaper, *The Beehive*, featured a remarkable cover story on Negro Achievement Week. But unlike the few bits of coverage in the downtown papers like the *Philadelphia Tribune* (Philadelphia's African American newspaper) or the *Inquirer*—both of which had parroted the press releases of the Y—the coverage in *The Beehive* kept in the true spirit of the week's program. The article promoted the program events in a limited way, but presented a complete profile of the state of Germantown's African American community, with coverage of the progress made at some of the social relief agencies getting more press than the events of the

30 J. Gordon Baugh, *Souvenir of Germantown*, 1913, Germantown Historical Society.

31 On the rifts between African Americans during the Great Migration in Philadelphia, see Charles P. T. Banner-Haley, *To Do Good and To Do Well: Middle-Class Blacks and the Depression, Philadelphia 1929–1941* (New York: Garland, 1993): 6, 48–50, the subject is also covered in Gregg, 13–14.

32 *The Beehive*, April 1928.

33 Felix, "Committed to Their Own," 99–100.



The Joseph Hill School was a well-established school for African American students on Rittenhouse Street. GHS Archives.



A member of the Wissahickon Boys Club. GHS Archives.



Laura Wheeler Waring (1887–1948) was a portraitist and teacher. Courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia.

intellectuals and artists coming to town. The cover story featured the completion of an ambitious project, the building of a new swimming pool for the Wissahickon Boys Club—a thriving Germantown youth club founded for African Americans in 1903. The opening page of the *Beehive* story remarked on the “New Negro”: “Since the World War full significance of the New Negro Movement has dawned upon those who think racially. ... And during recent years, has given evidence of this arrival by his expression, noticed especially along the lines of music, art, and literature.”³⁴ The article described many of the schools in Germantown that served the African American community and, though these were segregated, there were several, like the Hill School, that were well-established institutions in Germantown. The Joseph Hill School had grown out of a tradition of educating African American children since 1842.³⁵ If the business community’s organ, *The Beehive*, could present the work of the African American community in glowing terms, it was a signal of the flowering of this community in the first three decades of the century.

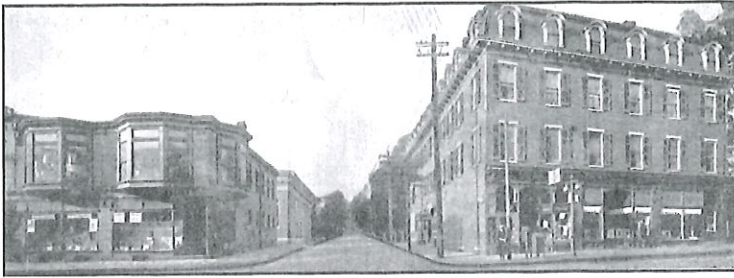
The events of the week were hosted at different venues throughout central Germantown. The first day’s feature, titled “Opening Meeting,” was an address by Alain

Locke, and as with several of the week’s programs, involved a music portion. The event was held at the Germantown Theatre, near Cheltenham Avenue on Germantown Avenue, the neighborhood’s main commercial district. The following evening, Monday, featured music as the main event, including a live radio simulcast from Wanamaker’s Department Store in Center City on station *WOO*, so that the famous Wanamaker organ could be used by Harry T. Burleigh, a nationally noted organ soloist, as well as the Robert Curtis Ogden Association Band, which was listed as “an organization of Negro employees for educational, musical and spiritual uplift.” The concert was simulcast in Germantown at the Germantown Public Library and featured on *WOO*’s weekly broadcast.

The following evening featured “Art Night,” with a program that featured William L. Hansberry, a professor of African history at Howard University and special guest Laura Wheeler Waring, a nationally known artist who was the winner of the 1927 Harmon Foundation Award. As part of the artistic features of the week, at least one business along Germantown Avenue, Staton’s Art Store, featured posters and prints of African American artists, such as Henry O. Tanner and Laura Wheeler Waring. Staton’s was

³⁴ “Negro Achievement Week in Germantown,” in *The Beehive*, Vol. XIII: 1 (April 1928), 1–2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. Also see Shirley Turpin-Parham, “A History of Black Public Education in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1864–1914,” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation Temple University, 1986), 240–247.



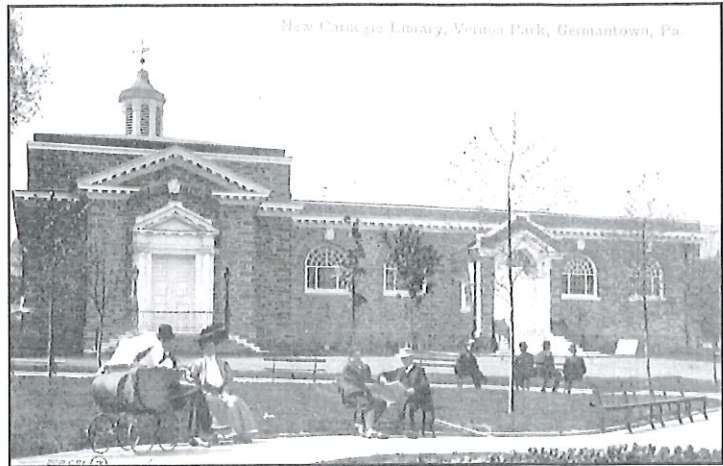
Staton's Galleries at Coulter Street and Germantown Avenue featured a display of African American art. GHS Archives.



James Weldon Johnson, president of the NAACP, spoke on the topic, "The Negro in Music, Art, and Literature." Courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia.

a picture gallery that dated from 1893, located at the corner of Coulter Street and Germantown Avenue, not far from Market Square. And all week long there was an exhibition at the Germantown Public Library on the contributions of African Americans to art, literature, and music.³⁶

The program continued on Wednesday at the Germantown Library with another presentation by Locke as well as a lecture on African American literature by the head of the Cheyney Normal School, Leslie Pinckney Hill. Thursday's evening was a big event, titled "Community Meeting" and was held at the Y.M.C.A. It featured Dr. W.E.B. DuBois lecturing on "Contributions by the Negro to American Life," followed by a performance of the Cheyney school choir. The week concluded Friday evening with the only event with paid admission (seventy-five cents) to attend a concert performance and lecture by Locke colleague and philosopher James Weldon Johnson on the "The Negro in Music, Art and Literature." James Weldon Johnson was the president of the N.A.A.C.P. at the time. The event was held at the Germantown Friends School, whose head of school, Stanley R. Yarnall, presided that evening. Yarnall served on the board of the Y.M.C.A. as well as the committee for Negro Achievement Week. An extra feature for the closing evening's program was the per-



The Carnegie library in Vernon Park hosted some of the Negro Achievement Week events. Courtesy Judith Callard.

formance of Clarence Cameron White, the nation's most prominent African American classical musician.³⁷

Negro Achievement Week was ambitious in depth and breadth. And judging from the reports of the committee that hosted it, it was considered a success. The final report by Beulah McNeill, one of the charter members of the interracial committee and a member of the Colored Branch of the Y, indicated that planners considered it successful both in attendance and in raising awareness. 3592 people were registered to attend any or all of the meetings, though actual attendance has been shrouded in glowing coverage of the event.³⁸ According to the report to the event committee, there were high expectations that this would lead to a "new heaven and new earth" for those who live in Germantown. "It set the Negro community ahead 25 years!" one of the survey responses claimed.

There were, however, concerns about the event from the black community. One observer, Miss Nellie R. Bright, voiced hers to the committee as a member of the Negro branch of the YWCA. She described some of the impressions of a general observer, and not a member of the committee, thereby reflecting a bit less optimism about the events of the week. "It was a feast long to be remembered by all well-thinking people of both groups. I did wish,

³⁶ "Colored Artists Show Their Work: Paintings, Manuscripts, and Rare Documents in Negro Achievement Work Exhibition, Ogden Chorus Heard." *Philadelphia Bulletin*, April 17, 1928. The article reads in part that "art and historical documents pertaining to the colored race are on exhibition this week in the auditorium of the free library, Vernon Park, Germantown," and described work of Tanner, Waring, as well as William Edwin Scott and J.W. Hardrick.

³⁷ Clarence Cameron White (1880–1960) was an Oberlin College-trained violinist and composer born in Tennessee. See *The Encyclopedia of Black Musicians*.

³⁸ McNeill, "Negro Achievement Week Report," Temple University Urban Archives, YWCA Germantown Box 24, Folder 27 "Integration, 1928–1950."



W.E.B. DuBois spoke at the YMCA on "Contributions by the Negro to American Life." Courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia.

however, that the opening meeting had been held in more cheerful surroundings, that there had been standing room only, and that all of the music rendered at that time had been of the same rich beauty as that of the singing of the chorus. [As] I stood looking into a shop window on Germantown Avenue, entranced by the mystic blues in Tanner's paintings, a voice at my elbow gasped 'look, they're colored people. I wonder who painted them.'" When informed the painters were black, the retort was, 'Gee I didn't know niggers could paint like that.'"³⁹ She went on to describe how people passed by, some taking in the art, others just passing, and the observer was hopeful that people might look upon Negroes that they would pass with a greater sense of sympathy.

"I have heard many comments on both sides concerning Dr. DuBois' speech at the YMCA, favorable and otherwise. Some Negroes as well as whites felt that he was too caustic in addressing such an audience; that he reminded the whites too often of their injustice to the Negro. To me, Dr. DuBois' talk was a fitting close to the previous discussions of the week. The facts that he gave are some of the very facts that both groups need to know in order that they may work together intelligently." Another observer also indicated that the community was divided into two groups and programs like the achievement week might bridge the gaps. Mrs. J.S. Francis offered her view that "most of these

speakers gave a good deal of attention to what is known as the Negro Renaissance, and talked at length of the growing group of young writers, particularly the poets." It was "most interesting to the white people."⁴⁰

Cooperation and Contradictions

While the actual impact of the Negro Achievement Week in Germantown in meeting its goal of uplift might be difficult to ascertain, the imagination captured by the events make this one week in 1928 remarkable in Germantown's history. There is still much that has to be learned about the event, such as the contents of DuBois's speech during the program and what it had to say about the condition of blacks at the time; or whether the presence of the KKK in Germantown was a motivating factor for having it here; or whether other local businesses were involved, and how the event was covered by local newspapers such as the Germantown *Telegraph*. The collection of top-drawer artistic, musical, and intellectual firepower, and attempts at broad appeal with community tie-ins and wide-ranging institutional partnership made this event unique just by virtue of it being held. But another aspect of its significance has to be considered, namely how much it said about the African American community in Germantown, and of Germantown as a whole, that it would be held in this one neighborhood of the city at all. The fact that it was held in Germantown raises several contradictions, for the fact that something so progressive could be held in such a conservative community is remarkable.

Unlike in Chicago, where Negro Achievement Week was held downtown under the auspices of city-wide progressive groups, the Germantown achievement week was held in a neighborhood that had had the reputation of being rather staid and conservative. But with the neighborhood changing, some of the very things that made it seemingly conservative—preponderance of traditional churches, divided ethnic groups, a strong Quaker influence—were some of the things that allowed the community's leadership to work together to attract notable speakers and supporters (such as the bankers and the Friends school). But the paradoxes are many. The fact that Germantown Friends School was an integral collaborative partner in the week's programming seemed at odds with the fact that blacks were not allowed at meeting until after World War II. The growth of the African American community in the six decades since the Civil War (when the population had grown so quickly among African Americans) showed that its elite could convince leaders both locally and nationally that Germantown was a place where the message of uplift would land on fertile ground, even if there were groups like

³⁹ Quoted in McNeill, "Negro Achievement Week Report."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the KKK decidedly against blacks. The long legacy of social service agencies, including the interracial vision of the YWCA and innovative educational institutions like Germantown Friends School and Cheney State, were part of the Negro Achievement Week. The national influence on the YWCA to incorporate more programming for black heritage pushed the institution to work with others.

While it is not clear if the 1688 Germantown Protest was among the notable papers and documents that had been on exhibition, it is worth wondering if Germantown's place in history was part of the reasoning for the event. Nor was it clear if activities of Germantown's nativist groups or the presence of the KKK motivated the institutions to hold the event in Germantown, as opposed to more established black neighborhoods like North Philadelphia or West Philadelphia. But with institutions like the Germantown Friends School and Cheyney College, as well as leading black activists, committing to the Germantown event it would suggest that there was concern for Germantown. A neighborhood where nativist groups and the KKK could exist in the same place as a large and growing African American community propelled the organizers to produce the event in the belief that it could foster greater cooperation. It was the kind of liberal approach to race relations that was relatively popular in the 1920s but would be seen as inconsequential by a subsequent generation of Germantown's black activists in the 1960s.⁴¹ Nonetheless it was an attempt by the community's institutions to work together in an era when that was not common.

Whatever the case, Germantown achieved a level of accomplishment in one week in 1928 that provided a model for cooperation and goodwill in a community that was still very segregated on class and ethnic lines. It reveals there was more to Germantown than the history community was willing to present and there was more to Germantown than simply the colonial past. The same forces that produced Negro Achievement Week were considered part of the community's establishment—institutions like the Friends School and the Library—and these were willing to work with other groups, showing a progressive streak that the community was willing to support in 1928. At various times the progressive streak would be highly evident in Germantown, embodied by a willingness to collaborate and for larger institutions to take active parts in stepping outside of their traditional roles for the sake of a larger public.

As important a program as Negro Achievement Week was, however, it was not repeated. The events of the

1930s and 1940s would put race relations in a less positive light during economic downturns, competition for jobs, and housing discrimination. An overriding reason why Negro Achievement Week took place where it did and when it did is that the social service sector of Germantown had the tremendous ability to put on an event that mattered. The fact that the YWCA took the initiative to produce the Negro Achievement Week indicated the degree to which that social relief agency had a progressive, integrationist approach born of a national vision for its organization's work in American cities. It also indicated the ways that a professionally led organization, acting in the interests of its community for agreed upon community needs, could make a difference. The key factor seemed to be that having a national level of oversight would assist the work of the professionals working with community volunteers and members. The extent to which the YWCA would lead the way in Germantown, including the integration of its leadership and even of its swimming pool in the early 1940s, comes as less of a surprise considering the track record established by the stellar events of 1928's Negro Achievement Week. But other heritage events on the size and scale of the 1928 event did not take place again.

The event's anonymity in the annals of Germantown history makes sense, considering that the Germantown Historical Society at the time was among many inwardly focused heritage societies. But the lack of attention to it explains a lot about the high level of complexity and contradiction at work in Germantown's community—it was difficult to make sense of an event at such odds with so much of what Germantown's press, history, and business communities understood about themselves. The event revealed a depth to Germantown among the African American community much earlier than it is given credit for, a depth revealed not only in the Achievement Week, but also in the continual work of the YWCA to bring to a level of human understanding the changes that were taking place in the community. The events of 1928 reflected not only significant demographic shifts in the census, but also economic and social transformations that signaled more changes, such as in employment and residential patterns and loss of manufacturing. In many ways it revealed the living, breathing, changing section of the city that Germantown was, no part of which could be preserved in isolation from any other.

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⁴¹ Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 7–8 and 34–47.