

**The Manhattan Casino
642 22nd Street South
HPC #94-05, Designated December 1994**



Built in 1925, the Manhattan Casino is significant for its contribution to entertainment and the culture in the African American community for more than forty years. The property is also significant for its association with Elder Jordan, a local African-American entrepreneur whose business interests were broadly varied. Elder Jordan and his five sons settled in St. Petersburg in 1904 and were prominent African American builders and developers. They owned acres of real estate, Jordan Beach, the Jordan Bus line and several nightclubs. The Jordan Bus Line carried African American passengers to Tampa, Clearwater, Bradenton and Sarasota long before there were bridges. Both the former Jordan Elementary School (located on 9th Avenue South and 24th Street South) and the Jordan Park Housing Project (located between 22nd Street and 25th Street from 9th Avenue South to 13th Avenue) are named after Elder Jordan Sr., the patriarch of the family.

The Manhattan Casino is located along 22nd Street South in what was once a thriving "main street" of the City's African American community. The main corridor, 22nd Street South, was home of the Seaboard Coastline Building (designated a local landmark in 1992), the Manhattan Casino (the African American community's dance hall) and the Mercy Hospital, the primary medical facility for the City's African American community. The neighborhood was one of several to which African-Americans were confined as part of the City's "Jim Crow" laws which required segregated accommodations of everything in the community from swimming pools and restaurants to schools and residential areas. There were four major areas formed as African American communities in St. Petersburg with the first, "Pepper Town," formed in 1889 by African American men who worked on the Orange Belt Railroad. Pepper Town's location was approximately 2nd Avenue South between 7th and 9th Streets. In the 1890's as additional African Americans settled in St. Petersburg, the area was expanded to include Cooper's Quarters, a cluster of shacks named after their owner Leon Cooper. Two large influxes of African Americans into St. Petersburg between 1912 and 1914, and 1921 and 1926 respectively, opened development in the 22nd Street South and Methodist Town neighborhoods (located between 9th Street N and 12th Street N and 2nd Avenue to 5th Avenue).

Elder Jordan and his sons contracted in 1925 with R.L. Sharpe to build a 12,000 sq. ft. two-story Manhattan Casino, which first opened as an entertainment facility named the Jordan Dance Hall in 1931. Later the dance hall became known as the Manhattan Casino; during segregation the Manhattan was the place for cultural and social entertainment similar to what the Coliseum provided to the white community. The Manhattan Casino was a showcase for local African American artists as well as a haven for traveling African American entertainers who would stop in St. Petersburg during their tours. Some of American music's most legendary performers played at the Manhattan including James Brown, Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Cab Calloway, Ray Charles, Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughn, Fats Domino and the Ink Spots.

After the era of the big bands, the Manhattan Casino hosted dances featuring local artists; rock and roll and blues singers popular in the 1960's also performed at the Casino. Goldie Thompson, local minister and radio personality, booked religious programs at the Casino, as did Father Divine, a spiritualist. The Manhattan Casino