

Melrose Clubhouse
1801 Melrose Avenue South
HPC #93-05 - Designated in September 1993



The Melrose Clubhouse constructed in 1942 was born of both necessity and civic philanthropy from the efforts of the City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Like the rest of the South, St. Petersburg did not integrate service, health, civic or social activities or organizations until the 1960s or after. The clubhouse not only served as a meeting house for women's clubs but also served the community as the Lauffer branch of the YWCA, a recreation center for boys and girls, and as a social meeting place. During World War II, it was designated along with Jordan Elementary School as a war nursery for African-American children. Much of the planning for local chapters of organizations such as the NAACP and the National Council of Negro Women occurred in the clubhouse.

The development of the clubhouse was instrumental in forging communication between the black and white communities, with both groups working together to provide funding and services to make the meeting place a reality. Dr. Charles A. Lauffer, a retired white physician from Pittsburgh, donated three acres of land and \$5000 towards the construction of the clubhouse. Drs. Maxye Ponder and G.H. Leggett, local physicians in the community, led fund raising drives. Fannye A. Ponder, a civic activist and socialite, and Mary McRae and Olive B. McLin made presentations to sympathetic organizations and churches in the white community. Their efforts were rewarded with the dedication of the clubhouse.

Designed by Henry Kohler, a local architect, the clubhouse is a masonry vernacular structure with simplified, classical style proportioning and fenestration patterns. The building consists of three distinct parts: a two-story front section which houses the entry way, an upper balcony and service functions; a one-story auditorium area; and a two-story stage area to the rear of the building. The two-story portion of the building features a flat roof concealed behind a parapet wall, while the auditorium is covered by a gabled roof constructed with heavy wooden trusses.