

HONORING OUR PAST

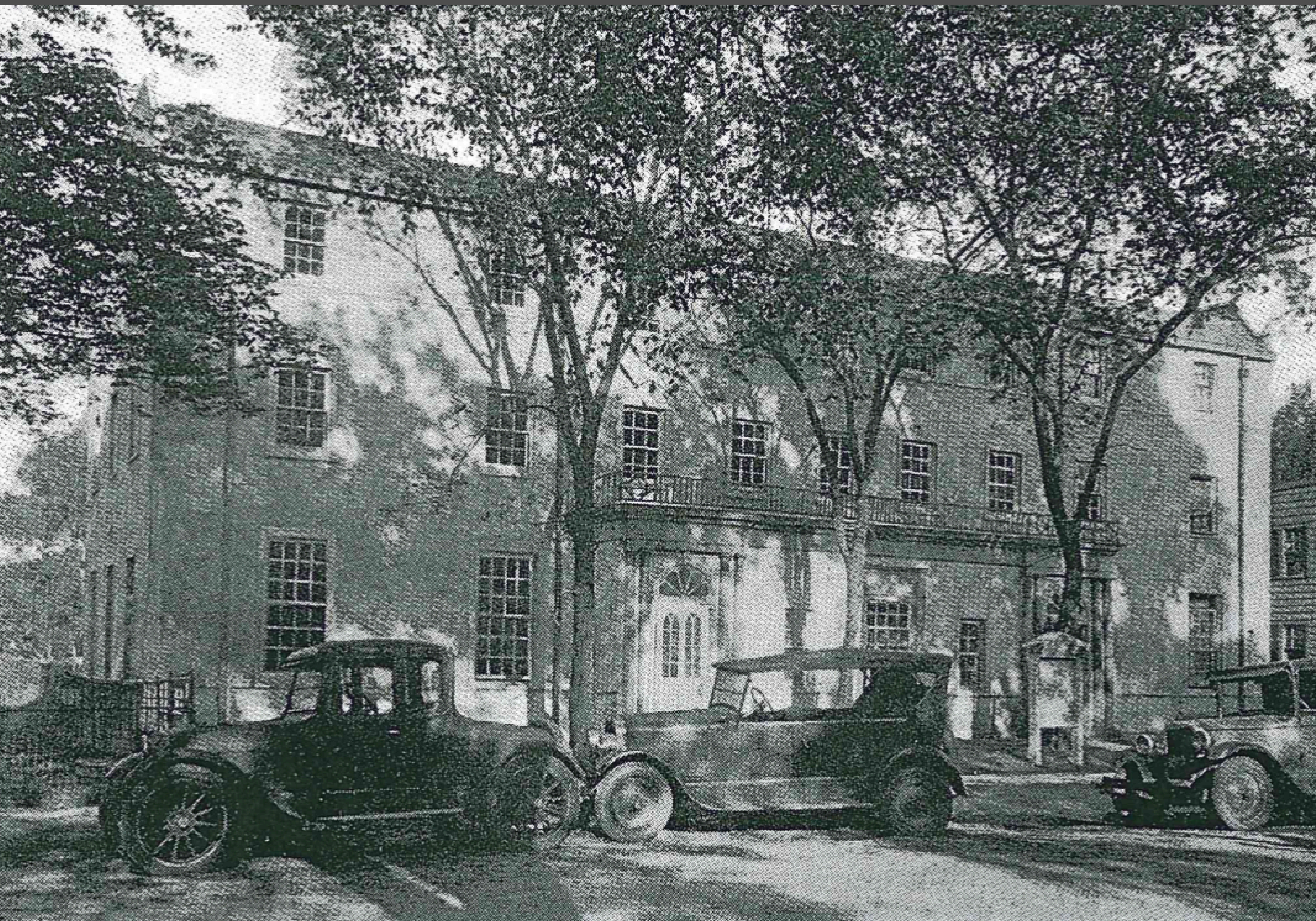
INSPIRE. REMEMBER. SHARE



WASHINGTON STREET BRANCH

1926-2005

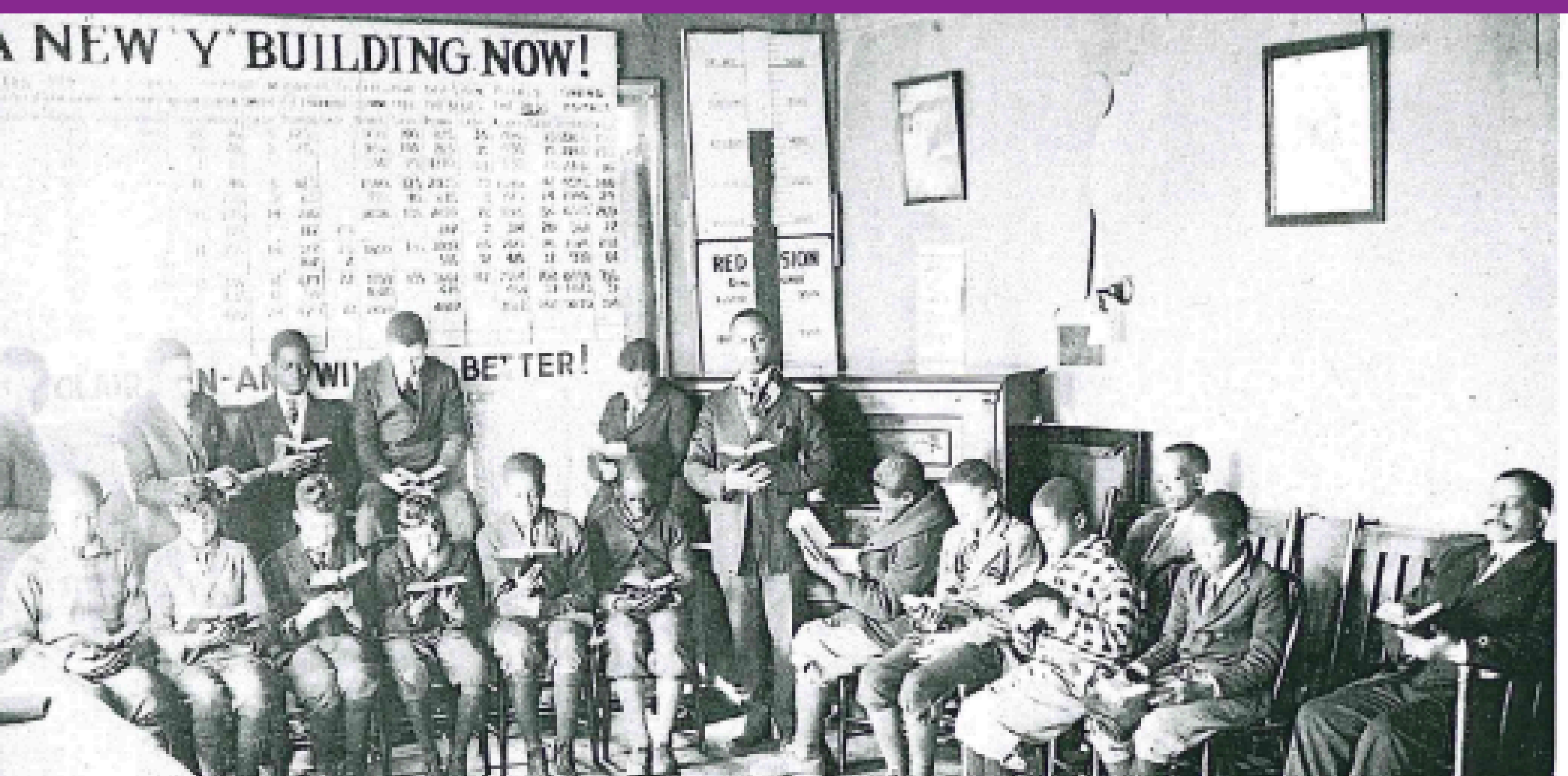
A cornerstone for Montclair's African American community, the Washington Street Y was home to the early days of aftercare, recreational sports and games, vocational training programs, and true fellowship. The Washington Street Branch was one of the few complete buildings for Black youth in New Jersey at the time and served as a model and inspiration for other communities.



The Washington Street Branch circa 1927

THE FOUNDING

In 1890, the national YMCA established a "Colored Men's Department" to support the creation of African American-led YMCAs across the country. These facilities offered temporary housing, lending libraries, swimming pools and gyms, and spiritual and educational training for Black men. During a time when public facilities for Black people were often inadequate and cultural and civic amenities were scarce, African American-led YMCAs provided vital educational and cultural resources in racially segregated communities across the country.



CHARLES H. BULLOCK, SR.

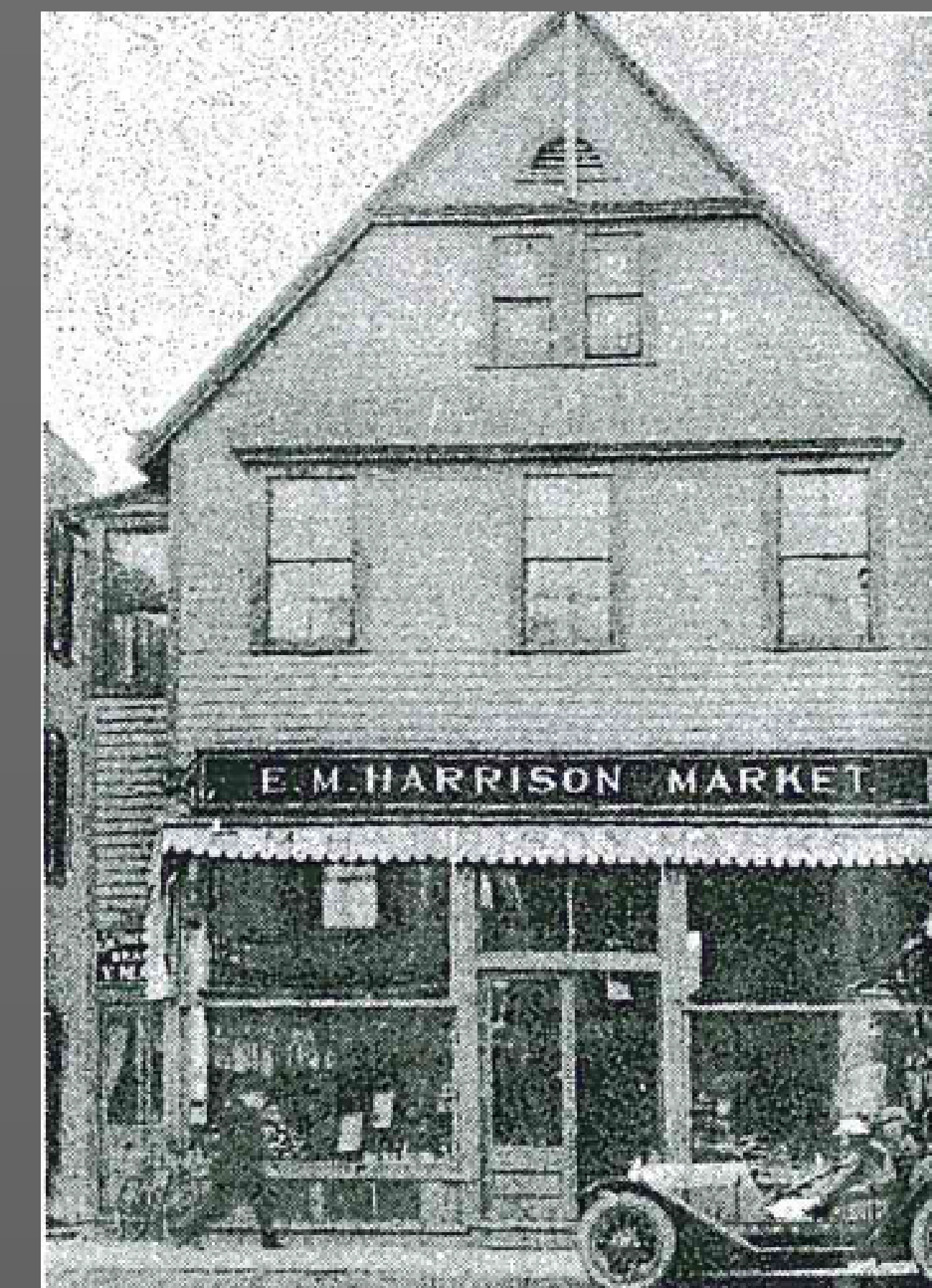
Charles H. Bullock Sr., born in Charlottesville, Virginia, was a prominent leader in the early 20th-century African American YMCA Movement. After working as a teacher and newspaper correspondent, he organized one of the first African American YMCAs in Charlottesville and later became General Secretary for the YMCA of Montclair's first African American Branch in 1916. Under his leadership, an independent African American Branch building was erected on Washington Street in 1926. He served as Executive Director of the Washington Street Y until his retirement in 1935.

Photo Left: Sunday Bible Study with General Secretary Charles H. Bullock Sr.

1903 – 1924

1903: Preliminary plans for a Colored Branch in the Town of Montclair were discussed at a YMCA Board of Directors meeting.

1904: A small room is rented at 381 Bloomfield Ave., in the Old Rink Building near the corner of North Willow Street for Sunday Bible classes which expanded to 4 days a week. The Rink was destroyed by fire, and the classes moved to a new location over the old Harrison Market on Bloomfield Avenue opposite Park Street, where South Park Street is located today.



1905: Authority was granted by the YMCA Board of Directors for the organizing of a Colored Branch in the Town of Montclair. The effort was led by the first chairman of the Committee of Management, Rev. John H. Blake of St. Mark's Church. W.F. DeBardelaben was hired as the first full-time executive director of the new branch.

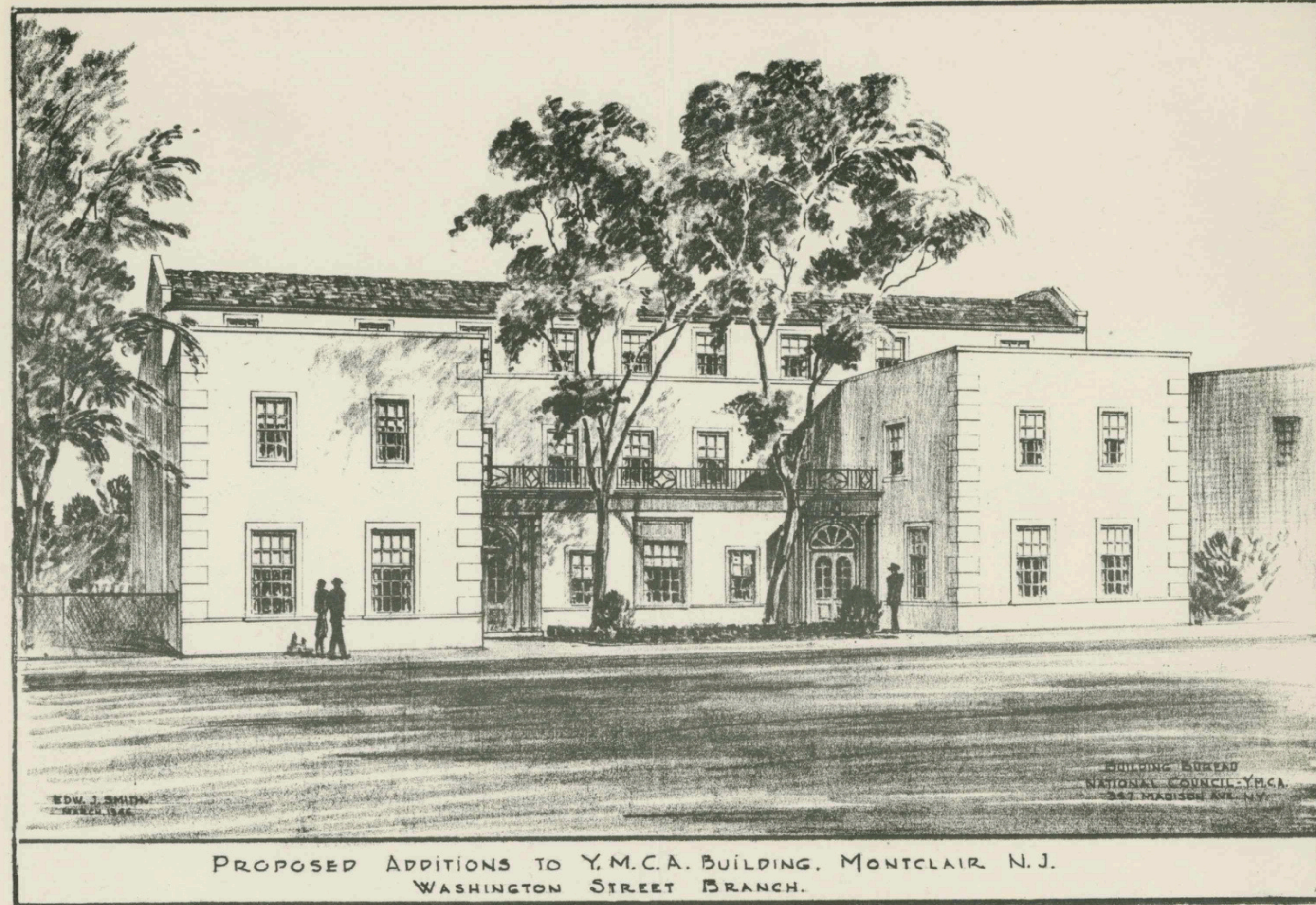
1905 : Women's Auxiliary was established. Alice Hooe Foster is named its first chairwoman.

1908: Walter Howard Foster becomes executive director and establishes first boys' work program using the St. Luke's Church gymnasium for activities.

1916: Charles H. Bullock became executive director; the Branch was located at the corner of Bloomfield Ave. and Maple Pl.

1924: A proposal was submitted to the YMCA Board to erect a Colored Branch building.

39 WASHINGTON STREET



1925: A site on Washington Street, owned by the First Methodist Church in Montclair, was approved for the new building.

1926: A contract was signed with the Architectural Bureau of the National Council YMCA. James Mccutchen and Company, was hired as the builders. Ground-breaking ceremonies for the new building were held in St. Mark's M E Church. Dyer Hardware Company donated the spade used for the Ground-breaking.

1927: A large meeting to raise additional funds for the new building was held at St. Mark's Methodist Church. The Cornerstone-Laying Ceremony was held on April 10. The principal speaker was Channing H. Tobias, senior director for colored work, National Council YMCA, New York City. The Washington Street Branch, a \$164,000 building, was made possible through the generosity of local citizens, and especially with the aid of the Julius Rosenwald Fund which contributed \$25,000.



Champion Basketball team 1926-27, practical in a church hall located behind Hillside School. First row: Archie Fitzgerald, James Austen, Kenneth Hampton, Elwood Tucker, Lewis Alexander, Teddy Robertson. Second row: Benjamin Jackson, Richard Robinson, William James, Wesley Page, Bucky Harris, Jack Hughes, Auburn Peterson, William Smith.

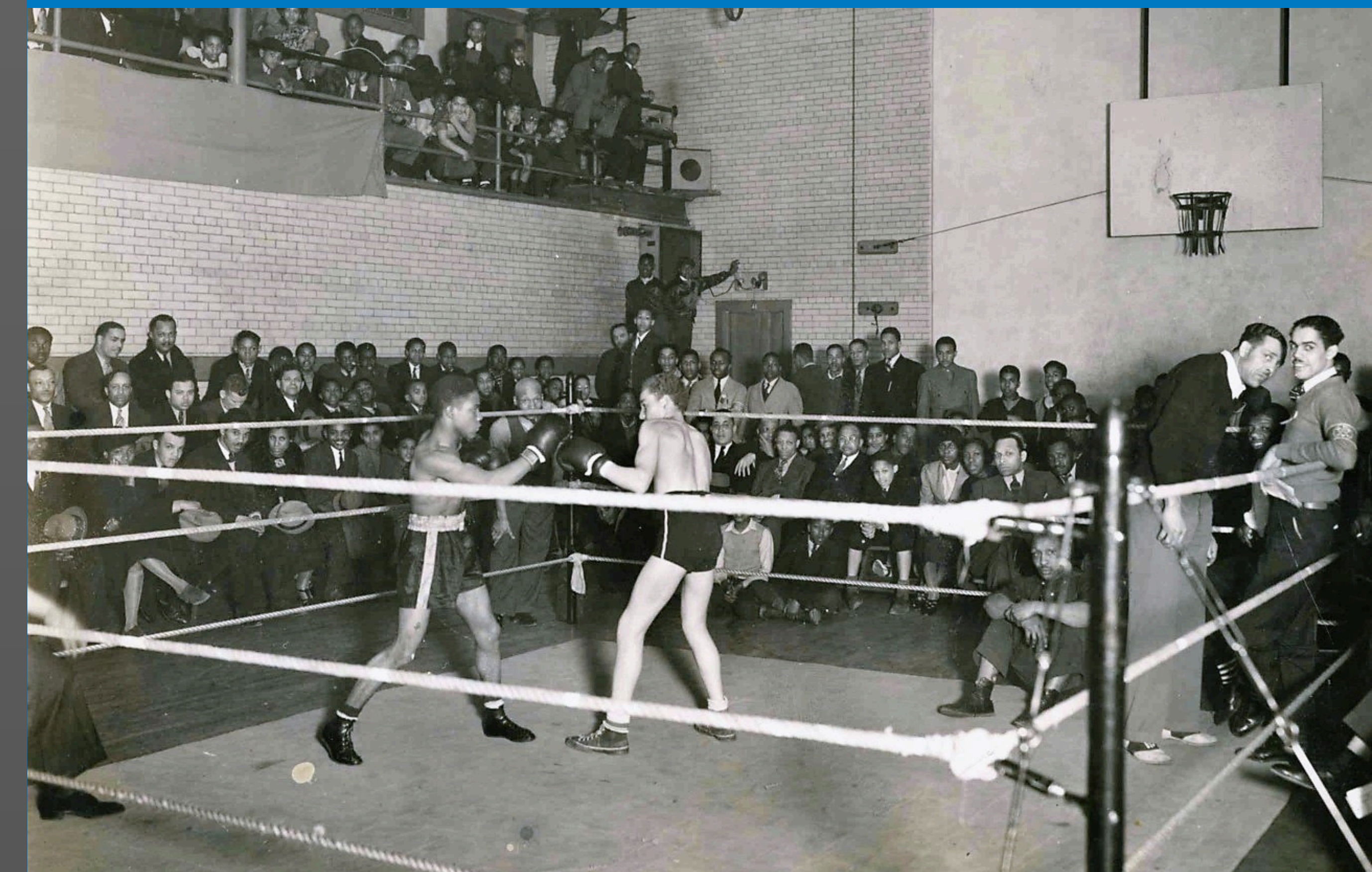


Camp swim instructors take a respite from swim and water safety instruction at the YMCA camp.

1925 - 1958



Boy Scouts Troop No. 20



Learning the art of self defense at Washington Street Branch.

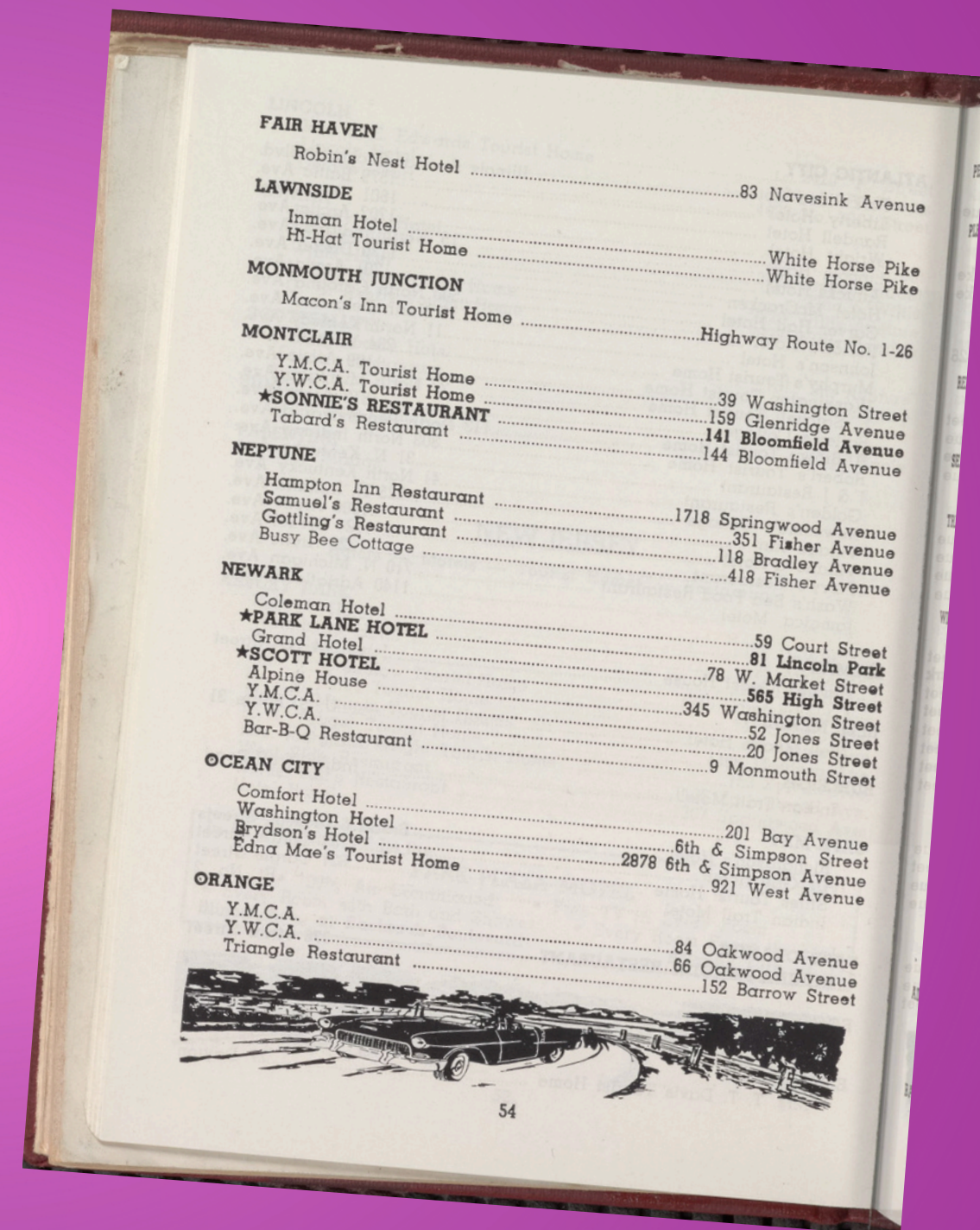
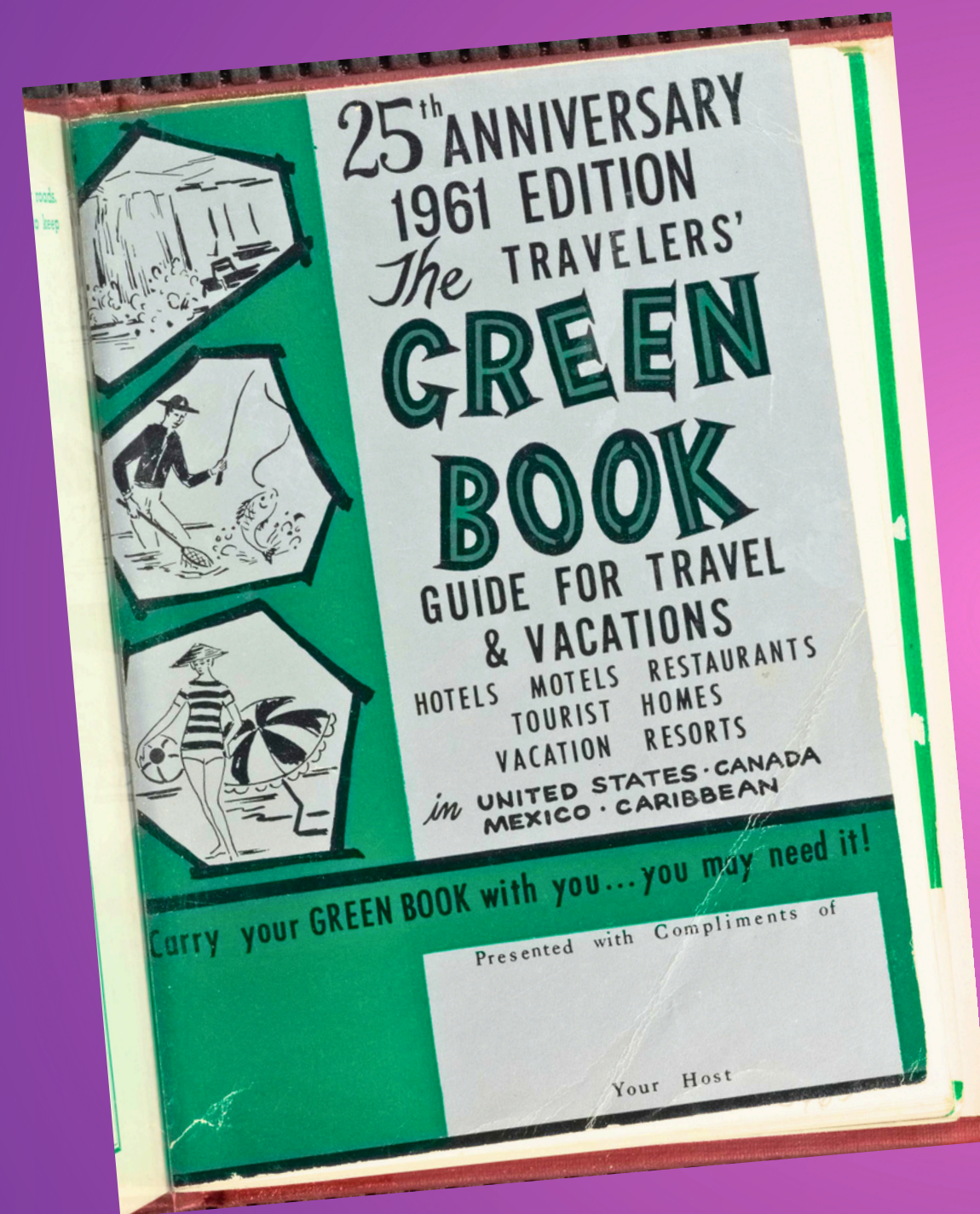


In 1943 General Secretary John Redmond made plans for children to come to the Washington Street YMCA while their parents worked.

DESEGREGATION MERCER WITH PARK STREET

"It is a little-known fact that for five cents, a non-member could get a clean towel and a shower. This was significant because most Black families did not have showers in their homes. The WSY also had the only local pool where Black people could swim, and it is believed that as many as 700 Black soldiers learned to swim there before going off to World War II."

Remarks at Bullock School WSY
Dedication Ceremony May 18, 2019



A LEGACY REALIZED

1964 - 2005

The Washington Street Branch was renovated to accommodate new programs and uses. Over the years, the Washington Street Branch became known as "The Little Y". The branch taught thousands of children to swim, play sports, and have a safe place to grow and thrive.

Ultimately, the building was purchased by the town of Montclair for a new elementary school. Classes at the branch ceased in October 2005. The building was demolished in 2008. In 2010 the Charles H. Bullock Elementary School opened on the site.

In November 1959, the Committee of Management of the Washington Street Branch, voted to integrate the Washington Street Branch in all phases of activity and programming. It voted for integration of staff on all levels, programs and camp activities as well as participation on the Board and committees of the Montclair YMCA. It also voted to have all women's and girl's swim classes held at the Park Street facility until adequate space was provided at Washington Street.

Assisting in the merger and reorganization were personnel from the National Council and the Central Atlantic Area Council. On January 28, 1964 the reorganization became official.

