

Our History

The YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), emphasizing mind, body, spirit, was founded in London in 1844. The first associations in North America were organized in 1851. Five years later, the YMCA came to Columbus, GA on November 18, 1856.

The YMCA began in Columbus when a committee consisting of P.H. Colquitt, William Gesner, and S. Boykin, calling themselves "the Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association," invited young men of Columbus to an organizational meeting. Two months later, the association had 30 members and grew to 70 members by July 1857. The meetings were held in various churches and around Columbus. The first president was W.C. Hodges.

By May 1859, the YMCA activities were conducted at 89 Broad St. above the Redd-Johnson Dry Goods Company in the central part of the city. J.S. Pemberton, the inventor of the Coca-Cola formula, was president. The outbreak of the Civil War disrupted the work of the YMCA. The association was re-established in 1883 with R. J. Clark as president. At that time, the YMCA was located at 1011 Broad St. above the Max Cohn Store.

In 1888, the "Hock Strausser" corner, later known as the Ralph Howard Drug Store corner, 11th and Broad St., became the scene of the YMCA activities. While at this location, the physical department was added to the religious and social activities.

In a letter dated September 20, 1901, philanthropist George Foster Peabody makes the following proposal to then YMCA President J.A. Kirven:

...."I beg now, upon behalf of my brothers (Roy Confield Peabody and Charles Jones Peabody) and myself to formally

confirm our offer to erect a building to cost not less than \$35,000 suitable for occupancy by the YMCA and to be placed upon a lot of ground to be provided and deeded to the association by other friends, free of lien. This offer is conditioned upon the purchase and payment for this land, and upon the raising of as much as \$10,000 in cash to be invested and held by the trustees of the association for an endowment fund."

The Central YMCA

The original marble YMCA building located at 118 E. 11th St. was dedicated on December 2-4, 1903. The construction was completed in 1907. According to Johnny Sharp, former YMCA Metropolitan Executive Director (1975), the building was modeled after the YMCA in London. "Columbus on the Chattahoochee" (1951), Etta Blanchard wrote, "Georgia Foster Peabody gave to Columbus the only marble YMCA in America."

The adjacent brick building used by the Central YMCA was added in 1952. The handsome three-story and basement addition cost \$578,000. The building was dedicated in January 1954 "to the glory of God" By Frederick S. Porter, then Chaplain at City Hospital (now known as the Medical Center). Dr. Porter was the former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Columbus.

Today, the Central YMCA building is owned by First Presbyterian Church of Columbus, GA. The walls of the 1952 addition came down June 2010 while the historic marble building still stands. We are excited to see the preservation and changes to come on this site.

John P Thayer

The John P. Thayer YMCA opened February 1, 2010. Thank you to the community and all of the donors who made the project possible. The formal Grand Opening Ceremony was held on April 25, 2010 where the building was dedicated to John P. Thayer. We are excited to

make history and impact our community with the use of our new facility.

Don Abbott Turner

Don Abbott Turner was born on October 24, 1892 in Macon, GA. He was raised in Thomasville, GA. He came to Columbus at the age of 21. Turner worked as secretary to the manager of the local electric power plant. While he lived at the Central YMCA in Columbus, Turner became an athlete with amateur acrobatic troops and sporting teams.

In 1917, he married Elizabeth Bradley, the only daughter of one of Columbus' most wealthy families at that time. Turner inherited by marriage the W.C. Bradley industrials, banking, and agricultural legacy. Turner retired as Chairman of the Board of the CB&T Bankshares, Columbus Bank and Trust Company's parent company, remaining the Chairman of the W.C. Bradley Company.

After suffering from a stroke, Turner died at St. Francis Hospital on Wednesday, August 11, 1982. In his Last Will and Testament, he left money to several charitable foundations and organizations including the YMCA of Metropolitan Columbus.

In 1983, the D.A.Turner YMCA was named in his honor.

Sources: Greg Gardner and Nolan Walters, Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, Columbus, GA, August 1982.

A. J. McClung

The Ninth Street Branch YMCA had its beginning through the efforts of a small prayer bank group in 1901. The first home was a small frame building. In its infancy, the destiny of the work was guided by a committee of Negro Citizens of the community. Among this group were W.E. Clark, S.R. Marshall, S.W. Yarbrough, and Dr. R.H. Cobb.

Under the direction of this group with the aid of citizens of the community, activities as a small institution were carried on the

organization for boys and young men in the city. From 1907- 1925, the Ninth Street Branch carried on valuable services for men, young and old, in the community.

In 1907, George Foster Peabody and his brothers, Royal Confield Peabody and Charles Jones Peabody, donated a sizable monetary gift that resulted in the first constructed and fully equipped Negro YMCA in the country.

During the year of 1925, additional improvements were made to the building through funds contributed by the Army and Navy Board of the YMCA and local citizens. At that time, E.E. Farley, Executive Secretary of the Army and Navy Board at Fort Benning, was associated with the branch. Mr. Farley's assistance was very profitable for all departments for the work of the association.

On Tuesday morning, December 31, 1963 at approximately 10:30 a.m., the gymnasium roof of the YMCA collapsed due to the weak condition of the building, snow, and ice. The Ninth Street Branch closed its doors three months later and was subsequently demolished. For the next two years, the YMCA provided programs from a building owned by Dr. S.P. Charleston on Shepherd Drive in Columbus.

On Sunday, November 21, 1965 at 4:00 p.m., a new YMCA facility was dedicated as the Brookhaven Boulevard Branch YMCA. In 1978, the YMCA was renamed the A.J. McClung YMCA in honor of former director Arthur J. McClung for his service to the YMCA and the community. In 1986, the board of directors elected to break away from the Metropolitan Association and become an independent association. On June 2, 1986, the A.J. McClung Young Men's Christian Association became incorporated.

In January of 2001, the A.J. McClung YMCA merged with the YMCAs of Metropolitan Columbus to become a branch under the one umbrella of the YMCA association. Under the leadership of David Steele, Executive Director, and Ernestine Ramsey, Branch Director, the YMCA

has continued to move forward. The YMCA has outreach programs in two Columbus Housing Authority complexes as well as in Smiths, AL.

Sources: Ernestine Ramsey, A.J. McClung Branch Director; Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, Columbus, GA; Brian McClure, Meteorologist, WTVM-TV, Columbus, GA.