Sewickley Black History Self-Guided Tour
It is unknown to many that Sewickley has had a prominent and thriving Black community for many generations. The first African Americans arrived in Sewickley in the 1820s. With opportunity to work in construction, building the town, and in wealthy homes as domestic workers, many migrated here, and a large community of African Americans was quickly formed.

As the community grew, Sewickley's first African American mission, the historic St. Matthews A.M.E. Zion Church, was founded in 1857 and became a safe house for those escaping slavery in the Underground Railroad. Sewickley had many Black owned businesses in the early 1900's, the community founded their own "colored" YMCA when they were denied entrance to the local facility, and eight of the famous Tuskegee Airmen called Sewickley home. This is just a taste of the rich history you will find as you follow this self-guided tour.

The Sewickley Black History Tour offers a view into the past, highlighting the accomplishments and adversities of the Sewickley African American community, intertwined with historical and personal accounts of the times and places. The African American community of Sewickley was one of strength and determination. When faced with challenges, they time after time, joined together to overcome those obstacles. When told they were not welcome, they created their own spaces, often establishing organizations that typically only Black communities in large cities were able to support. The African Americans in the Sewickley Valley were able to create a life for themselves and their families that cherished community, love, success, and respect.

In partnership with Sweetwater Center for the Arts, the Sewickley Public Library is showcasing a collection of titles featuring local Black authors, items related to the history of African Americans in the Sewickley Valley, and works highlighting African American art & culture.

As a companion program to self-guided local tours, The Tull Family Theater will screen Pittsburgh's Underground Railroad on Tuesday, Oct. 20, through Saturday, Oct. 24, at 1 p.m. This 30-minute documentary is offered with free admission on a first-come, first-served basis, courtesy of the Theater and the film's local producer, Sarah (Jameela) Martin, M. Ed., and director Jay White, Digital Media.

While going on the tour make a post/story on Facebook or Instagram and tag Sweetwater! At the end of the tour, stop by Sewickley Confectionery, show them the post and get a FREE ice cream cone!

The tour can be viewed by

1) following along this brochure,

2) on our Mavuno event post on our website (sweetwaterartcenter.org/sewickley-black-history-tour/)

3) and on the app “PocketSights” Once downloaded, search “Sewickley”

Bibliography:

Thank you to our 2020 MAVUNO community partners, The Sewickley Community Center, The Sewickley Valley Historical Society, Tull Family Theater, Sewickley Confectionery and the Sewickley Public Library.

Thank you to our 2020 MAVUNO sponsors The Sewickley Eye Group and Ameriprise.

Follow along on the PocketSights App to view videos of local residents. Provided by the Sewickley Community Center.
Tu s k e g e e
A ir m e n M e m o r ia l
Se w ic k le y  C e m e t e r y,  5 0 1  H o p k i n s  S t r e e t

ABOUT
The Tuskegee Airmen were an elite squadron of African Americans in the U.S. Army Air Corps, a precursor to the Air Force, who fought during WWII. They were the first Black military aviators with 992 pilots, including single-engine fighter pilots, twin-engine bomber pilots, and liaison and service pilots, as well as more than 14,000 ground personnel. Flying more than 1,800 missions in Northern Africa and Europe during WWII, they gained a reputation for excellence as their average for successful missions surpassed all other units. Also called the “Red Tails” referring to the red-tailed P-51 Mustangs they often flew, their extraordinary achievements earned them more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses. Dedicated in 2013, this Tuskegee Airmen Memorial is the largest of its kind in America. It honors the nearly 100 Tuskegee Airmen from Western Pennsylvania, eight of which are from Sewickley; Jim Addison, Curtis Branch, William Curtis Jr., William Gilliam, Frank Hailstock Jr., Mitchell Higginbotham, Robert Higginbotham, and William Johnston Jr.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME
(1941-1945) During WWII the United States Military was racially segregated, and in much of the country African Americans were subject to Jim Crow Laws. African Americans had served in every major U.S. conflict since the Revolutionary War, yet they continued to be held at lower ranks and segregated. Black soldiers endured extreme racism within the military ranks, as well as from the civilian populace. The bases where Black soldiers were trained were all located in the south, furthering the instances of harassment and assault these soldiers endured when venturing into surrounding towns. The notion of allowing African Americans to train as fighter pilots began as a response to Republican presidential nominee Wendell Willkie’s election promise to desegregate the military in 1940. That forced President Franklin D. Roosevelt to authorize limited civil rights concessions in an effort to keep the Black vote. One year later the allowance of an all-Black aviation unit was announced, and the first group of men underwent the extreme vetting process to join the unit. Racist beliefs that Black soldiers were inferior to whites prompted the military to adopt very strict requirements and testing for the Tuskegee program. Because of these restrictions, which were far narrower than those imposed on white soldiers, the Tuskegee Airmen became the elite unit they are praised for today. Their accomplishments helped change the views of multiple high-ranking officials and encouraged the eventual desegregation of the military in 1948. The Tuskegee Airmen also included non-Black people of color from Haiti, Trinidad, and the Dominican Republic.
At one time Sewickley supported five predominantly Black congregations, Antioch Freewill Baptist Church is one of the three that is still in operation today. Organized in 1890 with the leadership of Rev. C.W. Frazer, it was the first African American Baptist church in Sewickley. The church began meetings in small dwellings around town, and after a devastating fire to one of those locations, the church purchased the land they occupy today. Originally two houses stood here and in 1918-19 the church you see today was built. In the early days of this congregation, baptisms were held in the Ohio river at Chestnut Street. A vital part of the community, as all the churches are, Antioch has offered more than worship and ministry through the years. A place to gather, celebrate, and enjoy friendship and family, this congregation is thriving today with the leadership of Rev. Travis C. Coon.

**ABOUT**

(1890-present) Around the time that community members were gathering to form the Antioch Freewill Baptist Church here in Sewickley, the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America was organizing. This time period, soon after Reconstruction, ushered in a large number of Black churches being formed across the north and south. Many churches began with meetings in homes and parks, with the members eventually funding the purchase of a property or building on donated land. Black churches are integral to their community, being not only a place to worship, but an important ingredient in the social lives of their members. Congregations across America offered social opportunities and events, locations to meet and organize for political issues, social welfare and humanitarian programs, fundraising for education or healthcare, in some cases even becoming a school or missionary. Often the Black church would be the only place to offer refuge and support to African Americans dealing with daily instances of oppression and racism.

**HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE IN OUR REGION**

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968)

Fuller spent the late 19th century studying art at the Pennsylvania Museum School of the Industrial Arts. Notable for celebrating Afrocentric themes, Fuller was known for being a poet, painter, and sculptor of the black American experience. Described as "one of the most imaginative Black artists of her generation," Fuller was a protégée of August Rodin and used her platform to address the societal traumas of African Americans.
ABOUT

In this prominent corner of town, before Wolcott Park, there once stood buildings with small businesses. This was the location of one of the first two Black owned businesses in Sewickley. Both were barber shops, opened circa 1885, and were the only two Black businesses in town for quite a few years. John Howard’s shop was on Chestnut Street and the Fleming Brothers had their shop here in the heart of the village. Both barber shops only cut white patrons’ hair in the beginning of their time in business, which was common of Black barbers in the late 1800s and had roots in the long held status of being in service to white people. After a time, this building was sold, and the Fleming Brother’s Barber Shop moved into their home on Thorn Street. At that time, the brothers started cutting the hair of African Americans in town.

HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE IN OUR REGION

Walt Harper (1926-2006)

Walt Harper, famed Pittsburgh jazz artist, was part of the burgeoning jazz scene in Pittsburgh during the 1940s and 1950s, which produced some of the world’s greatest jazz innovators. Harper played valve trombone in the all-city band, but soon after switched to piano. He also was a member of the Swinging Five, a jazz group he founded with bassist Ray Brown. After graduating from high school in 1944, Harper attended the Pittsburgh Musical Institute and the University of Pittsburgh.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME

(1885-1890s) The history of Black owned businesses began before the end of slavery in 1865, but Emancipation allowed Black business owners to operate within the legal structure, offering more opportunity and greater prosperity. Throughout the Reconstruction Era and afterwards the number of Black owned small businesses expanded dramatically. This is the period that Sewickley saw its first Black business owners as well. Barber shops were among the most common types of businesses owned by Black Americans during this time, along with insurance companies, banks, retail stores, funeral homes, and restaurants.
Butler's Valley Catering Company
The Flatiron Building, 514 Beaver Street

ABOUT
John D. Butler came to Sewickley in 1890. While working as a chef at one of the local hotels, he soon became an entrepreneur, founding the Butler Brothers ice-cream store and caterer, also known as Butler’s Valley Catering Company. Run by his two sons, James and Carroll, the store operated for 29 years in the uniquely triangular building. Patterned after a New York structure of the same name, Sewickley’s Flatiron Building has been identified as a historic landmark by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. The building was not only home to Butler’s Valley Catering Company, but the large Butler family lived in the top floors as well. Only fresh cream sent in daily from Caughey Farm in Lyonsville was used for the Butler’s ice cream, which was delivered to Sewickley and Ambridge. Goodies, including hot chocolate, hot coffee, soda from the fountain and sandwiches, oysters, taffy, peanut brittle, homemade Saratoga, and potato chips were available there as well. The small restaurant provided foods and ice cream for eating in, delivery, and catering services to affairs such as weddings. Black friends and family, however, were not permitted in the dining room. Instead the proprietor’s wife, Hattie, would invite them as guests upstairs, where the family lived, to enjoy their ice cream there.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME
(1890-1930) During Reconstruction, Americans lived through a short period of integration. Soon the Long Depression, deep racism and white resentment towards African Americans who were becoming successful brought on the Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws in the south and similar practices throughout the north. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in Plessy v. Ferguson that segregation was constitutional, declaring that the 14th amendment applied only to political and civil rights, not to ‘social rights’. This ruling established the idea of ‘separate but equal,’ which plagued American society for decades. Black owned businesses in these early days often would serve white customers and therefore were not permitted to serve African Americans. This was common until the early 1900s when white customers began to no longer patronize Black business.
Smitty’s Bar
428 Walnut Street

ABOUT
Smitty’s Bar was one of the two beer gardens located on Walnut Street. Beer Gardens like Smitty’s during the 1960s and 70s provided an adult social atmosphere for local folks from Sewickley and their distant neighbors from Pittsburgh. Smitty’s was a happening spot and always jumping! There was loud music and plenty of people talking and laughing. An exciting and fun hangout in the heart of Sewickley that produced great times for its patrons, it was a place to relax and enjoy friends. Clarence E. Smith Jr, also known as Smitty, was the owner of both beer gardens and the only Black tavern owner in Sewickley. He was the brother of Larry Smith of Larry’s Auto Repair Shop on Ohio River Boulevard, and the oldest of 9 siblings. All were raised in Sewickley by Pauline and Clarence Smith Sr. The Smith family lived on Frederick Street and since Larry was a mechanic, there were always lush cars and motorcycles parked around the house.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME
(1960s-1980s) A century after the Emancipation Proclamation, Black Americans were still subject to discrimination in many facets of their lives. By the 1960s the Civil Rights movement was at its peak, with the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the passage of the Civil Rights and the Voting Rights Acts. These turbulent times saw violence, protests, assassinations, and young men being drafted into war. The great accomplishments and new laws of the Civil Rights movement did not end racism and many problems facing African Americans did not improve. There was a turn in ideology toward a broad embrace of Black culture and identity. The Black Power movement fought with a focus on Black Americans creating their own economic, social and political powers. The Black is Beautiful movement inspired pride and honor in one’s Blackness and an embrace of Black culture and identity. The Black Aesthetic movement encouraged Black artists to centralize Black life and culture in to their work, influencing visual art, poetry, literature, music and theater of the time.

HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE IN OUR REGION
August Wilson (1945-2005)
August Wilson was an American playwright whose work included a series of ten plays, The Pittsburgh Cycle, for which he received two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Each work in the series is set in a different decade, and depicts comic and tragic aspects of the African American experience in the 20th century. Wilson grew up in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, a lively but poor neighborhood that became the setting for most of his plays. In 1968 he became the co-founder and director of Black Horizons Theater in Pittsburgh.
Walnut Street Veteran Flags
400 Block of Walnut Street

ABOUT

The veteran banners gracing the 400 block of Walnut Street all depict African American members of the armed forces. These are William "Butch" Randolph, Army; Calvin William Massie, Army; Calvin L Massie, Air Force; Francis Ivan Smith, Army; James O. Smith, Army; Robert M. Rucker Sr., Army; Thomas E. Brannon Jr., Army; Walter Jacob Brannon, Army; James E. Lee Jr., Army; James E. Lee Sr., Army; Floyd L. Blair, Army; Floyd Blair III, Army; Michael P.D. Shannon, Army; and Edgar Grey, Air Force. The Black portraits that are hanging on the flags are a representation of the much greater number of Black members of the military in the village of Sewickley and the Quaker Valley. Other Black discharged service people’s flags hang around the village and are among those of the general population. But those on Walnut Street are hung as a testament to the patriotic spirit, and willingness to serve among the Black community in Sewickley Valley and the surrounding area.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME

(Ongoing Service) African Americans have been fighting for this country, and many making the ultimate sacrifice, since the American Revolution. Their stories are made famous through Black fighters such as the Buffalo Soldiers, the Harlem Hellfighters, and the Tuskegee Airmen, but all men and women of color who fought were heroes, often sacrificing for a country that did not offer them equality and respect. Through the years these soldiers have been recipients of all of the highest military honors including the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, the Air Force Cross, and the Purple Heart. The current highest-ranking officer who is African American is the Air Force Chief of Staff General Charles Q. Brown. The highest-ranking African Americans ever were former Secretary of State Colin Powell serving as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, of course, the former Commander in Chief President Barack Obama.
ABOUT

Though there were Black owned businesses throughout Sewickley and the region, this strip of Walnut Street between Broad and Thorn was a hub for Black businesses from the early 1900s to about the 1940s. The majority of the buildings at the time were wood frame, unpainted and only one story tall, but they are remembered fondly and with pride by those who patronized them. Some of the businesses included: Diggs’ Barbershop and Pool Room, Dr. Randolph’s dentist office, Dave Starr’s restaurant, Campbell’s Barbershop, Mrs. Harris’ cleaning and alterations shop, Mr. Higgenbotham’s shoe shine and hat cleaning parlor, A & A plumbing, and Smitty’s, which had two locations of beer gardens. Other Black owned businesses of note that were located in other parts of town were C. G. Wallace Garage and H. W. Blockson and Son Hauling. Cleve Wallace ran a variety of businesses but was most known for fixing and selling bicycles and motorcycles and offering car rentals and a taxi service. Horace Blockson founded his business in 1907 with a horse and wagon and through the years, with his sons, built it into the most consistent African American employer in Sewickley with 51 men on payroll by 1945.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME

(1900-1940s) In this time period that saw thriving Black owned businesses in Sewickley, throughout the country similar Black business districts were forming, along with entire neighborhoods and towns that were predominantly Black and very successful. The economic security and success of these businesses was fueled by segregation and a growing African American population. At this time, white owned businesses would not serve Black customers or even allow entrance to their businesses. Harsh and racist Jim Crow Laws were dangerously enforced in the South, but Northern states were also imposing strict segregation policies. This created business opportunities for Black entrepreneurs to serve their Black communities. Many white Americans resented the successes that African Americans were gaining, especially in the south, where tragedies like the massacres in Rosewood, FL and the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, OK were carried out. Eventually, the Great Depression and the end of segregation aided in the slow decline of the number of Black owned businesses in the 1930s and 40s. The rate of Black business creation went up and down throughout the years since and has seen a strong increase in the last decade.
“Colored” YMCA
411 Walnut Street

ABOUT
Though the Sewickley Valley YMCA offered recreational activities since the late 1800s, Black residents were not allowed to use the facilities. After the Black community opened their own YMCA on Walnut Street, known as the “Colored” YMCA or the Walnut Street YMCA, in 1913. The dedication and opening was a distinguished celebration complete with three days of activities: programming, services and speakers. The “Colored” YMCA was among the first organized recreational sites for the Black community in Sewickley and was conveniently located one block from the Sewickley Public School that once stood on Broad and Thorn Streets. Children could safely walk from school to the “Colored” YMCA to participate in after school activities and programming. The Public School Pavilion, behind the school building at the edge of the playground, was an extension of the recreational activities of the Black community as well, as it was the only gymnasium facility for African Americans until around 1960 when the Sewickley Community Center built it’s annex. The “Colored” Y continued in service to the Black community until 1924, when it was damaged by storm and flooding. Now occupied by Norman’s Cut N Edge Barbershop, the two adjacent buildings were the original home of the St. Matthews A.M.E. Zion Church and its parsonage.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME
(1913-1924) The first African American YMCA was established in 1853 by Anthony Bowen. Though it was popular with the Black community early on, financial and social stresses stalled memberships to the organization. But by the late 1800s, the movement grew and there were chapters in many major cities. The Center Avenue YMCA in the Hill District started in 1883, was officially chartered in 1910, and was the only other YMCA serving African American Men in Western Pennsylvania at the time that Sewickley’s “Colored” YMCA was founded. By the mid-1920s the African American YMCA had 28,000 members nationwide.
The oldest African American church in Sewickley, St. Matthews African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church began as a mission with six members in 1857. The Rev. Daniel B. Matthews initially held services in a log cabin on Centennial Avenue, then on Walnut Street, before this plot of land was purchased through community donations in 1868 and a small frame structure built. In the 1880s a house was donated and moved to this location for use as a parsonage. Then in 1911 the original frame church was moved to 411 Walnut Street and work began on building the present brick church you see today, which was dedicated on March 3, 1912. During its early years as a mission and through the civil war, the church served as an operator on the underground railroad. Church members and other abolitionists often posed as hunters bringing food and supplies to fleeing slaves in game bags. They aided as much as they could for the long journey north or helped newly freed people settle in the area. St. Matthews A.M.E. Zion church is as integral to the community today as it was during its founding, offering ministry, safety, solace, and joy in community for 163 years. Today the congregation is led by Reverend William Rankin.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME

(1857) At this time in America, slavery was still practiced widely throughout the southern states. It began over 400 years ago and did not end as a legal institution until the passage of the 13th amendment in 1865. And indeed, the first African Americans in Sewickley arrived as slaves, servants, and freed slaves. Many Pennsylvania slave owners freed their slaves in the two decades after the revolutionary war, pushed by the state's Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery passed in 1780. The large Quaker population, along with others who moved to abolitionism by their religious beliefs, and the lessened economic need in the region, were the foundation of a movement in the state toward ending slavery. The last record of a person held as a slave in Pennsylvania was in 1847. By the mid-1800s, Pennsylvania became a state with an established free African American community. Black activists, along with Quakers and other white abolitionists, organized against slavery, distributed anti-slavery pamphlets, and contributed to the operations of the Underground Railroad. Pennsylvania became known as a welcome relocation state for freed slaves, but the largest groups who fled through the Underground Railroad settled in Canada. The numbers are unknown, but maybe as many as 100,000 enslaved people found their freedom through the Underground Railroad.
Triumph Baptist Church
201 Federick Avenue

ABOUT

Born at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Anderson, Triumph Baptist Church of Sewickley resulted from meetings of community members to organize a Missionary Baptist Church. Leadership and laymen from the Allegheny General Baptist Association joined to worship and organize beginning in 1905. The church then met in a small frame building on leased property on Centennial Avenue. After the purchase of the lot at Frederick and Ferry Streets in 1908, another small frame building was erected in 1911. The congregation continued to grow and the Triumph Baptist Church building you see today went up in 1924. The present edifice was completed and the prior, smaller building demolished. The church did important missionary work through the years and was a generous community supporter. The Triumph Baptist Church congregation has once again outgrown its edifice. Triumph Church built a new building and moved to Mt. Nebo Road outside of Sewickley proper in 2013. Triumph Church is now led by Pastor Craig Giles.

HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE IN OUR REGION

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859 - 1937)

Tanner was born in 1859 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and was the first African-American painter to gain international acclaim, largely through his depictions of landscapes and biblical themes. Their deep spirituality reflects Tanner's upbringing as a minister's son as well as the influence of his visits to the Holy Land. His body of work varies from meticulous attention to detail to loose, expressive brushstrokes; often employing both methods. Tanner was a political activist. His mother Sarah Tanner was born into slavery in Virginia but escaped to the North via the Underground Railroad.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME

(1905-2013) As stated earlier in this tour, Sewickley's Black community once supported five predominantly Black congregations. Most were founded in the beginning of the 20th century. The creation of a Missionary Baptist Church presented another organization that would offer strong support for the entire community. With a focus on local and foreign missionary ministries, education, health care, literacy, social justice and economic development, Missionary Baptist Churches create strong connections with their communities through a variety of programs and welcoming ideals. Triumph offered many auxiliaries, clubs, missions, programs and outreach to the community. All of Sewickley's churches, their support and love, offer a glimpse into the importance of the Black church to communities of color.
About

The Sewickley Community Center has played a vital role in Sewickley and surrounding boroughs for more than 80 years. After the flood closed the "Colored" YMCA, members of the Black community were in need of a recreational facility that would admit African Americans. In 1935, a local group of young Black men organized and formed The Young Men's Club. This group, with the support of the Sewickley Valley Ministerial Association and a group of prominent local citizens, joined together and established the Sewickley Colored Community Center. In 1937 the SCCC, which was meeting temporarily at the Triumph Baptist Church, opened its doors with recreational programs for African Americans in the Sewickley Valley region. In 1955 the SCCC moved to its current location. On Chadwick Street, the Center became a neighbor to the American Legion Post 450 and the Y-Field baseball park. The dead-end street became a haven for Blacks and a safe place for African Americans in Sewickley. At its inception, the Center primarily served African Americans, but has always been open to ALL people. For decades it has served as the focal point for the African American community offering instructional and recreational athletics, martial arts training, crafts, a bridge club, Girl and Boy Scout Troops, and early childhood education and development programs; as well as social gatherings and activities including parties, bus trips, a bowling league, the annual "Come on Home" reunion, and performances by Diana Ross and the Supremes, Jr. Walker and the All-Stars, and other headliners from the Motown Era.

Black History of the Time

(1935-present) The depression hit the African American community hard and as America began recovery in the late 1930s and early 1940s, African Americans were left behind in many ways. The New Deal offered a series of programs and reforms to aid in America’s financial recovery, but most were entrenched with discrimination. Denial of mortgages to Black families and redlining, the CCC segregated camps, the Social Security Act excluding jobs traditionally held by African Americans, the AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Administration) acreage reduction program that put over 100,000 Black farmers off the land they worked, as well as the NRA (National Recovery Administration) employing whites first and authorizing lower pay scales for Black workers, are all examples of how the New Deal did not work for African Americans. Another important program for the financial recovery in this time was the GI Bill. While there were many Black veterans who served this country, they were unable to benefit from this legislation because of vast inequalities in the bill’s implementation, leaving Black veterans out of most benefits. The racism and discrimination that was entrenched in these programs fueled the racial wealth gap and the institutional racism America is still dealing with today.
Walter Robinson American Legion Post 450
20 Chadwick Street

ABOUT

Named for Sewickley’s first Black man to die as a result of a WWI injury, the Walter Raleigh Robinson American Legion, Post 450 was founded in 1922. The U.S. American Legions War Veterans’ organization provided respite for members of the armed forces and for those coming home from conflict and war. Its founding is attributed to Valley Col. Robert Way and senior commander of Sewickley Post No. 4 and comrade Harry Winston of Coraopolis. The legionnaires first held meetings in homes and churches, then in 1944 acquired this historic building. This was the old Sewickley Railroad Station built in 1887. In 1929 the railroad tracks were moved to make way for Ohio River Boulevard and the building was loaded onto flatcars and moved to its present location. The Legion became a social hub for Blacks in the area, as well as Pittsburgh. The Pavilion added to the back of the Legion was first used for boxing tournaments. In the 1940’s through the 1960’s it was the place where big named bands played, Dizzy Gillespie, Cab Calloway, Buddy and Ella Johnson, Ruth Brown, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Gene Amons, Bill Doggett, “Bull Moose” Jackson, Wood Herman, Count Basie, Dinah Washington, Louis Jordan, Stan Getz, Jackie Wilson, Ahmad Jamal, Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Lloyd Price.

HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE IN OUR REGION

Teenie Harris (1908-1998)
Charles “Teenie” Harris was the preeminent photographer for the Pittsburgh Courier, one of the nation’s prominent black newspapers photographing Pittsburgh’s historic African American community from 1935 to 1975. His archive of over 70,000 images is one of the most detailed and intimate records of the black urban experience known today.

BLACK HISTORY OF THE TIME

(1922-2013) The American Legion organization was founded in 1919. Posts began forming all over the country quickly and the first posts dedicated to serving Black veterans began in that same year. With segregation practiced throughout the country, the American Legion left it up to each state to decide if they would allow African Americans to join the existing posts. We did not find evidence of one that was integrated. In turn, Black veterans chartered their own posts throughout Black neighborhoods across the country. These posts often became integral parts of the Black communities where they were located. The story of Walter Robinson American Legion post 450 is a familiar one. Often being the only location in town where Blacks could gather safely for large events, the posts became the centers for social activities in the communities.
24TH ANNUAL MAVUNO
CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART & CULTURE
OCTOBER 10 - NOVEMBER 7

24 years ago, Black artists and educators from our community approached Sweetwater with the idea to host the MAVUNO Festival of African American Art & Culture. It was a great success and we have been celebrating together every year since! Each fall, MAVUNO offers a variety of events, exhibitions, classes and workshops that focus on visual art, music, poetry and dance. For 2020, we have moved our MAVUNO celebration outside and online. We can't wait to meet up with you again in person! Until then, be safe. We hope to see you when we celebrate our 25th Anniversary in fall 2021!

Don’t Be Afraid To Shine by Rachel Saad was included in the LISTEN exhibition in 2019

Gullah Dancers by Ann Tanksley was included in the First Fruit XVI: Tending Our Mother’s Gardens exhibition in 2012

SEWICKLEY BLACK HISTORY SELF-GUIDED TOUR

You may also view this tour on the Pocketsights app. Download the free app and search Sewickley. Through the app you can view interviews with local community members discussing locations in Sewickley and sharing memories. We welcome you to leave your own memories in the comments of each location.

Black Art Matters: Revisiting 10 Years of MAVUNO Exhibitions

Through the years, Sweetwater has been honored to present amazing artworks created by some of the most talented Black artists in our region for our annual MAVUNO Festival of African American Art and Culture. Because our gallery is currently closed, we are taking this opportunity to look back at the history of MAVUNO with the virtual exhibition, *Black Art Matters: Revisiting 10 Years of MAVUNO Exhibitions*. This gathering of exceptional and poignant artworks will give you the chance to revisit, or see for the first time, the amazing talent of Black artists in our community.

Artworks are on view at SweetwaterArtCenter.org on our See The Art page.

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Celebrating Black Artists and Educators from Our Community, Together! Congratulations on 24 Years!