

HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Winston-Salem Chapter of Black Panther Party

N. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive & E. Fifth Street

Established in 1969, the Winston-Salem Chapter of the Black Panther Party was the first to be created in the southeastern United States, and the vestiges of its influence still permeate the local African-American community.



The national Black Panther Party was founded in Oakland, California in 1966, calling for the protection of African-American communities from police brutality.

The Winston-Salem chapter faced many issues—most notably, negative press coverage, conflict with local law enforcement officers, and a poor public reputation. Indeed, in the party's early years, activists carried firearms into the streets and used them to intimidate residents and police. Though its intent was admirable,

the group's behavior often resulted in its persistent alienation from those it professed to serve.

Nevertheless, until 1977, when the group of activists ceased to function as an official arm of the national organization, the Winston-Salem Chapter of the Black Panther Party did a lot of good in its target community by launching several "survival programs." These programs served to advance the



group's mission to "put shoes on the people's feet, put food in the people's stomachs, and put clothes on the people's backs." They included providing free breakfasts for poor children before school, giving away clothes and shoes to those that needed them, spraying homes for pest control, screening for sickle cell anemia, registering people to vote, and operating a free around-the-clock ambulance service for residents who could not afford to pay the County's fee.



Many services were discontinued by 1976, as the organization simply could not afford to provide them. Despite their improved reputation and commitment to a more non-violent approach, the Panthers lacked sufficient community support to maintain its programs. Eventually, its leaders resigned from the Party and entered the realm of public service as teachers, politicians, and community organizers. Many of them are still active in those roles today.



This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission's web site: <http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>