Pythian Hall

Pythian Hall served as an economic, social and cultural hub for African-American residents of Winston (and later, Winston-Salem). The original three-story building was constructed in 1902 and located within the Depot Street neighborhood, a prominent African-American community at the time. The first floor housed offices and commercial uses, while the second and third floors were utilized by the Prince Hall Masons, the Knights of Pythias, and other fraternal organizations. The fraternal organizations served the community by helping rural migrant African-Americans acclimate to more urban lifestyles. They assisted with housing and employment and also provided a support system for entrepreneurs.

The building’s first floor was home to a printing business owned by J.R. Gleaves, which produced a newspaper for African-American residents. That floor was shared with Fraternal Funeral Home, operated by Clark S. Brown. Other space in the building was used by the organizations mentioned above, as well as by other organizations that catered to the African-American community. For example, a branch of the local YWCA was formed by a group of African-American women who registered their first members at Pythian Hall in 1918.

Pythian Hall was destroyed by fire in 1994, and the home of the Prince Hall Masons was moved to E. 14th Street.

Clark S. Brown, the operator of the funeral home that was located on the first floor of Pythian Hall, was a prominent member of the Prince Hall Masons, becoming the Most Worshipful Grand Master for North Carolina and serving on numerous advisory boards. He also bought the funeral home he operated; his family still owns and operates a number of funeral homes within the city today. Brown remains one of the most distinguished members of the local organization, and his family’s business is well-known throughout the African-American community.