



Residents of the Iowa Federation Home

## Preserving Black History in Iowa City: Tate Arms and the Iowa Federation Home



Historic photo of the Iowa Federation Home, ca. 1919.

IOWA CITY HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

### The Need for Safe and Decent Housing for Students of Color

Although the University of Iowa had accepted Black students since the 1870s, Black students were excluded from campus dormitories until the 1940s. During this period of segregated housing, members of Iowa City's small Black community, along with a state-wide organization of Black women, took it upon themselves to provide places for Black students to live.

### Iowa Federation Home

The Iowa Federation Home, located at 942 Iowa Avenue, was a dormitory for Black female students. In 1919, a group of students sought help from the Iowa Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. The organization responded by conducting an ambitious fundraising campaign that raised enough to purchase a house. The Federation Home opened in 1920. Prior to its establishment, these students struggled to find housing in Iowa City. Many property owners refused to rent or sell to persons of color and housing was hard to come by for Black university students. Some served as live-in domestic workers as they pursued their education and others found housing with members of Iowa City's small Black community. At its peak, the Federation Home provided housing for 17 women and acted as a social center for Black students housed elsewhere. The dormitory was home to many trailblazers; residents included some of the first Black women to graduate from the University of Iowa's College of Law and College of Pharmacy. The Federation Home closed in 1950, four years after campus dormitories integrated.



Sue M. Brown served as the chair of the Federation Home, 942 Iowa Avenue, from 1920-1941

Photo 2016





Photo 2017

#### Tate Arms

From 1940 through the mid-1960s, many Black male students lived at the Tate Arms, located at 914 S. Dubuque Street. Tate Arms was a private boarding house owned and operated by Elizabeth “Bettye” Crawford Tate and Junious “Bud” Tate. Bettye worked at the University of Iowa’s cardiovascular laboratory and Bud owned a janitorial service. The Tates were one of several Black families who provided housing to students. Today, both the Federation Home and Tate Arms are privately owned apartment buildings.

#### National Register of Historic Places

Iowa City received a grant from the National Park Service to help preserve these two homes and develop educational material about their history. The Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission is currently working towards getting these properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This will solidify their importance as historic landmarks associated with the struggle for housing equality for Black students in Iowa City. Grant money will also be used to install plaques in front of each building, conveying their historical significance to passersby.

*Information drawn from “‘Maintaining a Home for Girls’: The Iowa Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs at the University of Iowa, 1919-1950” and “Facing Hostility, Finding Housing: African American Students at the University of Iowa, 1920s-1950s” by Richard M. Breaux and “Sowing Seeds of Kindness—and Change: A History of the Iowa Association of Colored Women’s Clubs” by Anne Beiser Allen.*

*“On that front porch, we talked of our dreams, laid out future plans, told each other how many kids we wanted to have. I won’t ever forget that house.”*

*-Barbara Brown James,  
speaking about her memories  
of living at the Iowa Federation Home*

From an article in the Daily Iowan



Photo of the Tate Arms prior to the recent renovation, December 2014.

**For more information, visit [www.icgov.org/hpc](http://www.icgov.org/hpc)**

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Pamphlet created by Sylvia Bochner

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