

Amsterdam News Building

Individual Landmark

2340 Frederick Douglass Boulevard



Amsterdam News Building. Photo by Lorraine Colbert

On December 4, 1909, James H. Anderson put out the first edition of the Amsterdam News, with only six sheets of paper, a lead pencil, a dressmaker's table and a \$10 investment. Copies were sold for two cents from his home at 132 West 65th Street, and the paper was named after the avenue he lived on in the San Juan Hill section of Manhattan. At the time, the Amsterdam News was one of 50 black-owned and operated newspapers in the country, but it became and remains one of the most influential black media businesses in the nation, if not the world.

In 1910, as blacks moved from the South to big cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, and Harlem in New York, the Amsterdam News became more successful and moved uptown to 17 West 135th Street. It moved several more times: next to 2293 Seventh Avenue, now Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, in 1916, then to 2271 Seventh Avenue in 1938, and finally to 2340 Eighth Avenue, now Frederick Douglass Boulevard, in the early 1940s.

During this time, the paper was bought by two of the nation's foremost Black entrepreneurs, Dr. Cielan Bethan Powell and Dr. Phillip M.H. Savory of the Powell Savory Corporation. Powell assumed the role of publisher and the Amsterdam News expanded its reach to report both local and national stories about the black community. Stories covered the fight for equality during the Jim Crow era, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Freedom Riders. The Amsterdam News was one of the first publications to report on Malcolm X, and to publish his "God's Angry Man" column.

On May 1, 1971, publisher Powell retired and sold the paper to Amnews Corporation. In August 1982, Amnews chairman and publisher, Wilbert A. Tatum, expanded the Amsterdam News coverage to international affairs, and in July 1996, he gained complete ownership of the paper. A year later, he handed the roles of publisher and editor-in-chief to his daughter, Elinor Ruth Tatum, who remains in those positions today. In October 1930, the Amsterdam News became the second black newspaper to be admitted to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, and in 1936 it became the first, and remains the only, black newspaper to be unionized in all departments by the Newspaper Guild of New York Local 3.