

Unity Funeral Chapels Inc.

Individual Landmark

2352 Frederick Douglass Boulevard



Unity Funeral Chapels Inc. Photo: Melanie Nanez

Unity Funeral Chapels Inc. was established by Dr. Clilan B. Powell in 1953, and designed by the nation's first black female architect, Beverly Greene. Before it became a funeral chapel, the site was a private school.

Dr. C.B. Powell was born in Newport News, Virginia, in 1894 to parents who were ex-slaves. He would later obtain his medical degree from the School of Medicine at Howard University in 1920, and specialize in radiologic technology, becoming the nation's first African American x-ray specialist. Dr. C.B. Powell then opened an x-ray laboratory in Harlem, where he met his well-known business partner, Dr. Phillip H.M. Savory. Together, Dr. Powell and Dr. Savory created the Powell Savory Corporation and became esteemed African American entrepreneurs in the 1930s. They eventually purchased the Victory Life Insurance Company in Chicago, and the Amsterdam News.

Unity Funeral Chapels is the first location of three; the others are in Brooklyn and the Bronx. All are still in operation today. Dr. C.B Powell is considered to have been one of the richest African Americans in the country during the 1960s and 1970s. When Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, Unity Funeral Chapels provided his end of life services, even though they faced threats for doing so. An estimated 30,000 people came to view Malcolm X's body as he laid in repose at Unity. Unity Funeral Chapel also provided the services for Malcolm X's wife, Dr. Betty Shabazz, and his first grandson, Malcolm Latif.