



D.C. History Minute

September 2008

Colorado Building

Every day thousands of people pass by the Colorado Building at 1341 G Street, NW, unaware that it was the epicenter of one of the most significant civil rights battles in the history of the District of Columbia. From 1950 to 1953, a small, determined, interracial band of activists waged a struggle to desegregate the John R. Thompson Restaurant in the Colorado Building. This cafeteria was part of a chain that had come to the city in the 1920s.

The most famous warrior in this campaign was a black woman in her 80's named Mary Church Terrell. The activists' lawsuit argued that anti-discrimination laws originally passed in the 1870s were still valid and should be enforced. In June, 1953 the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the old Equal Service Acts and African Americans were no longer excluded from restaurants in the nation's capital.



“Can’t Eat Here”
Picketing a downtown store, May 1952
From the HSW Collections MS 0404 FL24

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