

## Toward a more evolved presence: the black history collection of the Indiana Historical Society

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The Black History Program of the Indiana Historical Society was established in 1979 to address the concern for the paucity of records available for doing research on the history of blacks in Indiana. The mission of the program is to collect, process, preserve, and disseminate information related to the history of black Hoosiers. Moreover, the program identifies the following major collections goals of its mission:

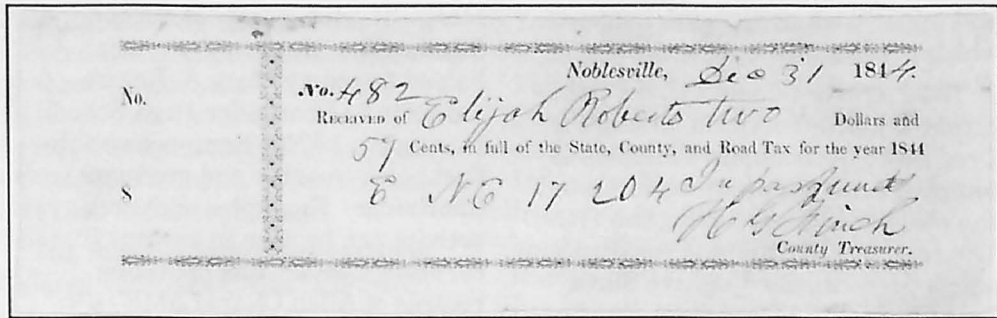
- (1) collect materials related to blacks in Indiana or the Northwest Territory as it has relevance to Indiana.
- (2) collect predominantly primary and secondary source materials including, but not limited to, letters, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, and church records. Also collect monographs and maintain a basic reference collection.
- (3) collect material, having general historical value, other than genealogical history.
- (4) publicize and make collections accessible to the public.

The manuscript and archival collections of the Indiana Historical Society come in a variety of sizes. They may range from one small item to scores of boxes. There are series

designations for all manuscript collection shelf numbers. These letter codes give clues to the size and/or format of the collection and are represented by the following: "M" for collections consisting of at least one manuscript (ms.) box; "SC" for collections of less than one manuscript (ms.) box; "BV" for bound volumes and "OM" for oversize collections.

Many of the 19th-century collections suggest the conditions for blacks in the Hoosier state during the time period, but few depict their daily lives. Concentrating on the years from statehood to the outbreak of the Civil War, there are several collections that document the activities involving and affecting blacks during antebellum Indiana.

A deed (SC 437) witnessed, acknowledged, attested to, and recorded at Warrick County, Indiana, in 1816 registered the sale of property and slaves. The sales included three slaves, four feather beds, one cart, one horse, and one house with a lot. Deeds and other sources document the existence of slavery in the state which was prohibited by the Northwest Ordinance and later by the 1816 constitution. Deeds often represented the free or slave status of blacks.



*Elijah Roberts' 1844 road tax receipt. Indiana Historical Society Library.*

They listed sales, indentures, manumissions, and certification of emancipation. (The latter was usually in the form of an individual or document vouching for the free status of a black person.)

Indiana made active overtures toward the development of a colonization movement. An 1825 Indiana General Assembly resolution directed toward blacks provided for the gradual emancipation of slaves and foreign colonization. The Negro Convention Movement which peaked nationally during the 1830s and resurged during the 1850s, was popular among many Hoosier blacks. The movement, a form of self-determinism, and a forerunner of Garveyism, Pan Africanism, and the Black Muslim and Black Power organizations called upon blacks to devise ways to improve their own conditions. It was a direct response to the efforts of colonization.

Records of the Economy Anti-Slavery Society (SC 21) speak to that organization's efforts to thwart the practice of slavery and the racial exclusion laws. The collection contains the constitution and minutes of the organization, established as an auxiliary to the Indiana Anti-Slavery Society by Wayne County Quakers in 1840. The more extensive Cabin Creek Society of Anti-Slavery Friends records (BV 401a-d and 402) document that organization's monthly meetings held in Randolph County,

Indiana.

There were more than two dozen substantial black rural communities in Indiana before the Civil War. When Matthew Becks arrived at Weaver Settlement after the war, he brought his emancipation record (SC 1750) or freedom papers with him. Brothers Elijah and Hansel Roberts, came to Rush County, Indiana from North Carolina, later settling in Hamilton County, Indiana. The Elijah Roberts Collection (M 325) primarily contains material related to Elijah, a farmer, and his descendants. Also included are documents pertaining to the ownership of land (deeds, tax receipts, and property assessments); promissory notes; newspaper clippings; Elijah Roberts's will; and a handwritten history of Cabin Creek African Methodist Episcopal Church. The significance of a public library in one early rural community can be ascertained from the Mount Pleasant Library Collection (M 215). The library was located at Beech Settlement in Rush County. The two-notebook collection contains a constitution and minutes of the library board. Records of library transactions including names are also included. "Free Rural Communities in Indiana: A Selected Bibliography," by Xenia Cord (SC 1883) suggests sources which depict life at Weaver in Grant County; the Beech in Rush County; Roberts in Hamilton County;

and other black settlements, most of which predate 1860.

The Fugitive Slave Law, the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Dred Scott Decision are examples of national occurrences which impacted the mood of Indiana during the 1850s. The revised 1851 Indiana constitution, which preceded the Fugitive Slave Law, prevented blacks from entering or settling in the state. Article 13 of the constitution empowered the General Assembly to pass laws to enforce its provisions. An 1852 act provided for the enforcement of Article 13 with the establishment of the "Register of Negroes and Mulattoes" to be maintained by county clerks. The discretion counties used in registering blacks was often determined by the sentiments of the residents. A copy of the Register of Negroes and Mulattoes for Orange County can be found in SC 1756.

The black population in Indiana increased dramatically after the Civil War. By 1870, it had reached 24,560 people, doubling the count from the previous decade. A view of Indianapolis during the 1870s can be seen through Gwen Crenshaw's research for Freetown Village (SC 1981), a project designed to recreate a black community during that post-war decade. The Freetown Village actors regularly give historical reenactments at the Indiana State Museum.

Churches served a variety of functions in 19th-century Indiana. When schools were not readily available to blacks, the African Methodist Episcopal Conference, established in Indiana at Blue River in 1840, took an active role in delivering educational opportunities to Indiana black communities. The minister as activist in all denominations helped expand the role of the church to incorporate political, social, and religious concerns. The political influence of Rev.

Moses Broyles, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Indianapolis, helped to secure Mary A. Rann's entrance to Shortridge High School. During the 1870s, Rann became the first black to enter and graduate from Shortridge. Examples of church activity can be seen in several Historical society collections including records of Allen Chapel AME (BV 2337), New Bethel Baptist Church (M450), and Second Baptist Church (M524) in Indianapolis and Bethel AME Church (SC 1624) in Richmond. Information about various churches in Indianapolis and Richmond are subsumed in the collections of Virtea Downey (M511) and Alta Jet (M495), respectively. Both of these collections were gathered under the auspices of the Black Women in the Middle West Project (BWMWP), an effort that enlisted the help of lay persons to identify materials pertinent to black women in Illinois and Indiana. The materials collected from the 1984-85 project are stored at the Indiana Historical Society and four other repositories within the two states including the Chicago Historical Society, the Illinois State Historical Society in Springfield, the Northern Indiana Historical Society in South Bend, and the Calumet Regional Archives in Gary.

In the spirit of self-help and volunteerism several agencies and clubs developed throughout Indiana to address a rapid increase in population after the Civil War. The Flanner Guild (later Flanner House) in Indianapolis and the Stewart House in Gary were established to help alleviate the stress of a black, rural, and migrant population moving to the urban North. Information pertaining to Flanner House can be found in the papers of several individuals. The Flanner House Collection (M513) contains the records of the self-help division of the organization. The

Indianapolis Asylum for Friendless Colored Children, established in 1869 by Quakers eventually accepted children from the entire state. The agency's records (M165) consist of the admission records and the administrative files of the orphanage.

The Indiana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (ISFCWC) organized in 1904. It was an umbrella organization for various black women's clubs. These organizations generally characterized by their efforts toward moral uplift, emotional and physical health, and cultural enhancement developed in many communities statewide. The Woman's Improvement Club (WIC) founded as a literary circle in Indianapolis in 1903 was a charter member of the ISFCWC. Within two years of its founding, the club broadened its goals to include community assistance and improvement. The club was very active in the treatment of black tuberculosis patients. The WIC records (M 432) include minutes books, account books, club constitutions, and correspondence. The records of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club (F990) in South Bend and the Sojourner Truth Club (M540) in Richmond speak to the activities of other federation members. The Federation of Associated Clubs (FAC), also an umbrella organization, included women's and men's clubs in its membership. The FAC actively participated in the educational, social, civic, and economic issues of the black community. FAC records (M 420) at the Historical Society reflect the social thrust of the organization.

The Masons and the Knights of Pythias formed chapters in black communities statewide. These organizations held annual state meetings in Princeton, Terre Haute, French Lick, and Indianapolis, etc. Separate black chapters of the Young Women's Christian Association and/or the

Young Men's Christian Association were formed in a few Indiana cities. The Senate Avenue YMCA and the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA (M494) were examples of this phenomenon in Indianapolis. They formally became branches in 1910 and 1922, respectively. Businesswoman, Madam C. J. (Sarah Breedlove) Walker, who moved her beauty culture business to Indianapolis in 1910 supported both of these institutions. She made her building available for preliminary meetings of the YMCA. Along with Booker T. Washington, newspaper publishers George Knox and Alexander Manning, Dr. Joseph Ward, et al., she attended the dedication of a new building for the YMCA in 1913. Listed in her will, it was one of the many organizations that received the benefit of her philanthropy. The Madam C. J. Walker Collection (M399) on deposit at the Historical Society is divided into three major divisions. It includes the records and correspondence of the company's principal officers; the company's business records; and the records of businesses associated with the company. Correspondents in the collection include Mary McLeod Bethune, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Walter White. The collection is restricted pending the publication of a book on Walker's life.

Rather than the development of separate chapters within given organizations, the trend among black professionals at the turn of the century appeared to be the formation of distinct organizations. In Indiana, there were state affiliations to a national black bar association, medical society, and musicians' group. As its name suggests, the National Association of Negro Musicians Collection (M379) contains records of that group, along with those of the Indianapolis Music Promoters.

The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana during the 1920s had a visible

impact on the opportunity for integrated secondary education in the state. Between the rise of the Klan and 1931, three cities that boasted large black populations constructed separate high schools. Evansville Lincoln, Indianapolis Crispus Attucks, and Gary Roosevelt were built for black students. The Russell L. Lane Collection (M522) gives a brief look at Lane's tenure as principal (1920-1947) at Crispus Attucks.

In 1932 Henry J. Richardson, Jr. (Marion County) and dentist Robert Stanton (Lake County) became the first blacks elected to the state legislature during the 20th century. Richardson was an attorney and a founder of the Indianapolis Urban League. His legal expertise addressed school desegregation, housing, and public accommodations issues. His collection (M472) gives an excellent overview of state civil rights strides. It consists principally of correspondence, with smaller amounts of printed matter, legal opinions, programs, clippings, and scrapbooks. Of particular note is the amount of

correspondence to and from prominent individuals. The collections of two other active legislators, Jesse L. Dickinson, St. Joseph County (M532) and the first black state senator, Robert Brokenburr, Marion County (M492) help document the middle third of the 20th century.

There are several collections at the Historical Society that provide a glimpse of the recent history of blacks in Indiana. Many of these collections were acquired through the Black Women in the Middle West Project. The family papers of Frances Patterson (M470) and Jean Spears (M488) document the activities of two families who have been in Indianapolis since the late 1800s. Like many collections of prominent individuals, the Harvey N. Middleton Papers (M441) and the Walter Maddux Papers (M510) contain information about several local organizations. Both men were Indianapolis doctors who were active in the community. Other BWMWP collections include the papers of nurse Pauline Eans, minister Hester Greer, and Lyric soprano Luvenia Dethridge

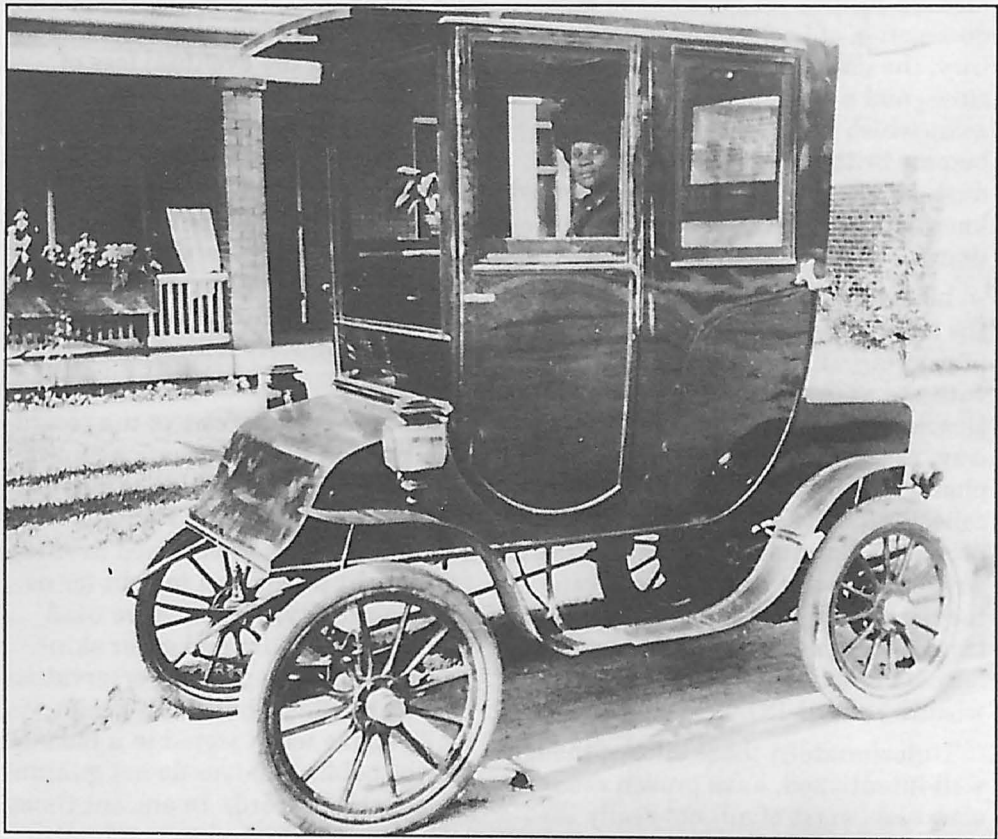


*Henry J. Richardson, Jr. Henry J. Richardson, Jr. Collection, Indiana Historical Society Library.*

and the organizational records of Citizen Forum, Sisters of Charity and the Indianapolis Urban League.

The Black History Program celebrates its 11th anniversary this year. The presence of the program has afforded the community the opportunity to perceive the collecting of primary and secondary source materials related to black history in a much more comprehensive vein—a pulling together of all the parts to make for a more total historical viewpoint. The

efforts of the program have garnered an impressive foundation of collections. When I examine these collections, I listen. As I comb through the correspondence and scrapbooks of Attorney Henry J. Richardson; while I review the records of the Indianapolis Urban League; and as I peruse the letters and pictures of Madam C. J. Walker; I smile, because I can hear the poet, Langston Hughes saying, "If anyone's going to tell my story, I guess it will be me, myself."



*Sarah Breedlove Walker was founder of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company. Madam Walker moved to Indianapolis in 1910. Madam C. J. Walker Collection, Indiana Historical Society Library.*