



IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Time Line

Who Came to Indiana?

By the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of immigrants in Indiana were from northern Europe, including Great Britain. As the data from the 1860 census from Marion County, Indiana, (shown on page two) suggests, the greatest majority of settlers in Indianapolis were German immigrants. The German American community remains the largest ethnic group in the state.

Although the majority of Indiana citizens had arrived in the state only a few decades earlier, response to immigration grew increasingly ambivalent by the mid-nineteenth century. Certain ethnic groups—especially people of African descent—were not equally welcome. After the American Revolution, northern states began abolishing slavery. It was outlawed in Indiana by 1808. Arriving from the southern states, hundreds of free black families established several small, dynamic communities such as Lick Creek in Orange County. This village, founded in 1817, had its population peak in 1855 with sixteen families living on more than fifteen hundred acres. Wayne County also had a very large black population that was not settled into segregated communities. Instead, they lived for the most part on land owned by sponsoring or sympathetic Quakers.

In 1831 new legislation stated that free blacks (African Americans who were not slaves) entering

Indiana had to post a bond of five hundred dollars with local authorities to guarantee that they would not “become a burden upon the public treasury.” This was an enormous amount of money in that era. The bond was forfeited should the person be convicted of a crime, and authorities could expel blacks who failed to pay the bond. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 provided that anyone harboring a slave was subject to a fine up to a thousand dollars and imprisonment of six months. Fugitive slaves were denied the right to a jury trial. Article 13 of the Indiana Constitution of 1851 imposed other restrictions on free blacks living in or arriving in the state:

No negro or mulatto shall come into or settle in the State, after the adoption of this Constitution. All contracts made with any Negro or Mulatto coming into the state, contrary to the provisions of the foregoing section, shall be void, and any person who shall employ such Negro or Mulatto, or otherwise encourage him to remain in the State, shall be fined in any sum not less than ten dollars, nor more than five hundred dollars.

Robert Dale Owen, a delegate to the convention that drafted the 1851 constitution, asserted: “They can never obtain social rights here. We ought not to have them amongst us. They are

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daily increasing in number but of necessity must remain disenfranchised, a class of people to be taxed without being represented.”

Prior to the Civil War, these policies were countered by abolitionists who took an active role in Indiana’s legendary Underground Railroad, the stops of freedom for slaves traveling to Canada and America’s free states in the North. For more than twenty years (in the 1830s and 1840s), Levi and Catherine Coffin of Fountain City, Indiana, assisted more the three thousand men and women to make their escape. The Coffins were Quakers originally from North Carolina. They later moved to Ohio.

The 1851 constitutional provision against black immigration was not removed until 1881, although it became obsolete in 1868 when the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, guaranteeing civil rights to African Americans in all states. In 1869 the Indiana legislature legalized entry by black students into the public education system. During the 1860s, the African American population in Indiana more than doubled.

WARD	TOTAL POP	United States	%	German	%	Irish	%	Other Non-U.S.	%
1	2,458	1,283	52	863	35	154	6	158	6
2	1,259	908	72	177	14	129	10	45	4
3	1,304	983	75	123	9	141	11	57	4
4	1,075	804	75	113	11	116	11	42	4
5	1,058	629	59	190	18	171	16	68	6
6	1,369	619	45	469	34	185	14	96	7
7	2,015	993	49	553	27	323	16	146	7

Source: Indiana Historical Society, “Computerized 1860 Census of Indiana, (Marion County)”