Collection #
M 1276
DVD 1071

EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN SETTLEMENT HERITAGE INITIATIVE COLLECTION, 2014

Collection Information

Historical Sketch

Scope and Content Note

Series Contents

Processed by

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May 2017

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
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Indiana Historical Society
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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	7 manuscript boxes; 3 color photograph folders; 1 DVD
COLLECTION DATES:	All materials gathered in 2014
PROVENANCE:	Early African American Settlement Heritage Initiative (grant project)
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2014.0301X
NOTES:	Materials in this collection were compiled through a grant project undertaken by the Indiana Historical Society in 2014.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

During the summer of 2014, the Indiana Historical Society (IHS) embarked upon a journey to identify African American rural settlements that existed in Indiana by 1870. Earlier in the year, Maxine Brown, a descendant of the Mitchems of Harrison County, one of the state's earliest black families and a consultant with the Southern Indiana Minority Enterprise Initiative (SIMEI), had approached the Eli Lilly Endowment about support for extending the southern leg of an Indiana Heritage Trail throughout the state. As a possible foundational step for statewide research, she worked with the IHS to develop the Early African American Settlement Heritage Initiative (EAASHI), an effort to identify agrarian communities that had dotted the Hoosier landscape. EAASHI sought input from representatives of the rural communities. (Although these settlements no longer exist as self-sustained communities, some of them such as the Beech (Rush County), Roberts Settlement (Hamilton), and Greenville/Longtown (shared state border—Randolph County, Indiana and Darke County, Ohio) have annual reunions and/or advocacy groups.) Lyles Station (Gibson County) is still an active community and served as a rural community prototype for the new African American Museum in Washington, D. C. EAASHI also sought input from statewide heritage organizations including the Indiana State Museum, Indiana Landmarks, Indiana Humanities, Indiana State Archives, and the Indiana State Library.

An Eli Lilly grant enabled the hiring of five researchers and a database manager/researcher for the project. The state was divided into five regional areas with researchers assigned to counties. Contract researchers Andrea Sowle covered the northern tier of the state; Dona Stokes-Lucas and Georgia Cravey shared the central portion of the state, and Lishawna Taylor and Martina Kunnecke' were assigned the southern counties. William Gillispie, a Tulane University student, home in Indiana for the summer, was the database manager/researcher. The regional area researchers fanned out around the state visiting with county historians and others; exploring courthouses, libraries, and various repositories; and, when appropriate, they examined former settlement sites. Researchers built upon the scholarship of Xenia Cord, Jacqueline Cortez, Anna Lisa Cox, Coy Robbins, Stephen Vincent, and others. They also benefitted from projects previously sponsored by various institutions including Audrey Werle's indexing of the 1870 census—research that she expanded from her work with the Indiana State Library; a cemetery database developed by the Department of Natural Resources; Indiana Landmarks' county Interim reports and Indiana African American Historic Sites and Structures survey; and a 1987 Survey of County Black History Information, sent out to all counties by IHS. Other broadly useful resources included federal population and Indiana county agricultural censuses and Newspaper Archives.

The project identified sixty-one black rural communities in forty-three Indiana counties with roots from pre-statehood through 1870. You can access the results of the project's research on the Indiana Historical Society website at http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/reference/early-black-settlements. [There you can find a map and a description

of the presence of African Americans in each county. It includes information about population, nativity of residents, extant historic properties, family names, and if applicable, settlement names, etc.] This brief historical sketch is followed by a bibliography of primary and secondary sources useful for researching African American history in that given county. By highlighting the counties that included the settlements identified by the research, the map suggests geographical patterns for African American settlement in Indiana.

Though the research focuses on settlement development by 1870, there are a few counties where the findings may inform black population numbers today. These were sites where researchers found population clusters and evidence of community, as represented by different variables including land ownership, schools, churches, and cemeteries, etc. Although there were early black settlements in Indiana towns and cities, most notably, Georgetown in Madison, Jefferson County, the emphasis of this project was on rural communities. These were areas that existed away from more urban population centers. There was land ownership in many of these communities; however, it was not a prerequisite to classify an area as a settlement. It should be understood that the research done for this project was preliminary. There are many unnamed settlements—communities where there is reasonable evidence that they existed, but no name was found. It should also be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of Indiana black rural settlements. Evidence suggests that additional settlements may have existed in many of these counties. Further study is needed.

There were several trends that emerged between counties from the research. By 1820, the first federal decennial recorded 1230 African Americans, fifty or more in ten counties within the state. With the exception of Wayne, these counties were located in the southern tier of the state, mostly in the southeast. Prior to the Civil War, most blacks settled in the southern, and west central and east central part of Indiana. They formed population clusters in towns, cities, and rural areas. They shared nativity most often with people from North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio. There were many familial relationships and family names across rural settlements.

The 1850 harsh federal fugitive slave law and Article 13 of the 1851 Indiana constitution, followed by an 1852 provision to enforce it, curved the influx of blacks entering the state. There were several counties that experienced population drops during this decade. Conversely, after the Civil War, the federal census showed dramatic population increases, especially in those counties that bordered the Ohio River. For example, Spencer County that had recorded two blacks in 1860 listed 949 in 1870.

Settlements tended to be in counties that contained higher population numbers of blacks. The documented settlements' population numbers at peak ranged, generally, from twenty-five to several hundred residents. There were a couple of exceptions that had closer to twenty residents. These communities that had mostly family members were multi generational. Many of the settlements had a building that was used as a church and as a school.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

Wilma L. Moore, “A Treasure Hunt: Black Rural Settlements in Indiana before 1870.” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History,* Winter 2015.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The materials in this collection were gathered during the Early African American Settlement Heritage Initiative, a 2014 Eli Lilly Foundation grant project administered by the Indiana Historical Society.

Series I encompasses general materials useful to the project researchers. It includes bibliographies, census information, definition of settlement, and news articles pertaining to Indiana black rural communities.

Materials that were collected by researchers as part of their effort to identify African American rural communities that were in Indiana counties by 1870 are in the county folders in Series II. The folders contain copies of documents, news articles, census information, research notes, surveys, and photographs. A few of the folders have an overview of the county's black history written by local residents. County folders also contain the brief overview history of black settlement for each county written by the EAASHI researchers in 2014. The EAASHI county histories can also be found online on the Indiana Historical Society website at http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/reference/early-black-settlements.

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"Defining African American Settlements: Beyond Names to Geographic and Temporal Boundaries," Stephen A. Vincent	Box 1 , Folder 3
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Indiana County and County Assignments for EAASHI	Box 1, Folder 7
List of Selected Indiana Cemeteries	Box 1, Folder 8
Article: "Black History: African American Settlements," *Indianapolis Star* (online), 2-1-2013	Box 1, Folder 9
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