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Black History Month: 5 places where black history was made

Today begins Black History Month. The Indianapolis Star is highlighting historical moments and contributions of African-American Hoosiers. Here are five Indianapolis-area black heritage sites.

1. Roberts Settlement/Roberts Chapel

3102 E. 276th St., Atlanta, Ind.

Elijah Roberts, a freed black man from North Carolina, bought and tamed thousands of acres into farmland in northern Hamilton County in 1835. As farmers, Roberts and his Cherokee wife thrived. At his death, each of his 10 children received 150 acres of land. The community grew and then dwindled. Now, Roberts' descendants own just 150 acres. Roberts Chapel, built in 1865, and a cemetery are the only remnants of a community that vanished after black farm families left to seek work in cities. In 1924, family members started the "homecoming," and now 100 to 200 descendants return to Roberts Chapel each Fourth of July. The Roberts Settlement was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

2. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park

17th and Broadway streets

Named for civil rights leader the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., this park is where, on April 4, 1968, presidential candidate Sen. Robert Kennedy told a crowd that had gathered for a campaign appearance that King had been assassinated in Memphis, Tenn.

Kennedy's speech, along with the actions of civic leaders, is credited with helping to spare Indianapolis from the violence that engulfed other cities at word of King's death. The park is home to the Peace Memorial, which honors the contributions of both slain leaders.

3. Crispus Attucks High School

1140 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. St.

Crispus Attucks High School opened in 1927 as the city's first and only all-black

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school. Named for a black man who was the first casualty in the Revolutionary War, the school would become a source of black pride, but its origins were cruel: It was schemed up by white segregationists.

Archie Greathouse, who owned a tavern on Indiana Avenue, sued to stop the school's construction.

The suit failed, but because Greathouse and others stood up and opposed segregated education, the school was built with features that many white schools did not have, including instructional shops and an ornate entryway.

The new principal, Matthias Nolcox, recruited a black teaching staff from across the country.

The school has many distinguished alumni, including the late Rep. Julia Carson, who was first elected to the U.S. House in 1996; basketball legend Oscar Robertson, who led Attucks to state basketball championships in 1955 and 1956; and 102-year-old Nora Taylor Hart, a Butler University graduate, former Indianapolis Public Schools teacher and the only living member of the school's first graduating class in 1928.

The school, now Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989.

4. Madame Walker Theatre Center

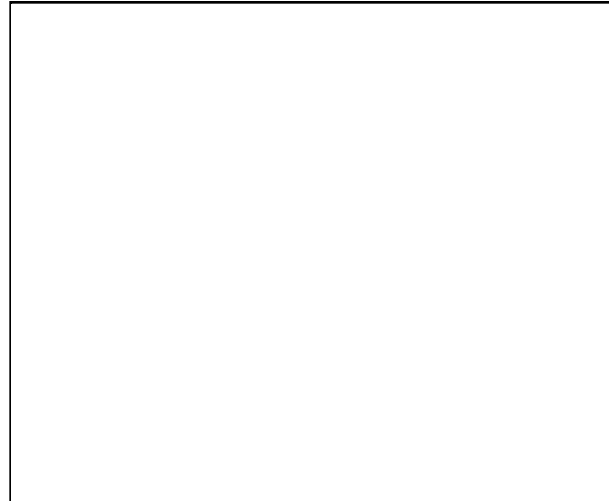
617 Indiana Ave.

Madam C.J. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 in Delta, La., to former slaves and became the first American woman of any race to achieve great wealth on her own. Walker went through three marriages and two business relocations before moving to West Street in Indianapolis. She filed articles of incorporation in 1911, with herself as the sole stockholder. At its height, her company employed 15 workers in its Indianapolis factory. When admission fees at a local theater were raised for blacks only, Walker made arrangements for the construction of the Walker building on Indiana Avenue. It would house not only her manufacturing facilities, but also an African-motif theater, a ballroom, beauty shop, drugstore and offices. Walker died in 1919 at age 52.

5. Bethel AME Church

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Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is the oldest African-American congregation in Indianapolis. Augustus Turner, a barber, and William Paul Quinn, an AME circuit rider, founded it as Indianapolis Station in 1836. Members met in Turner's log cabin until 1841, when a small church was built.

The church harbored fugitive slaves as part of the Underground Railroad, and backers of slavery are suspected of causing a fire that destroyed the church in 1862. It was rebuilt between 1867 and 1869. At left is the main portion that still stands. A tower and east-west gable were added in 1894, and a three-story false facade in 1973. In 1991, Bethel AME was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The church also was key in establishing the Indianapolis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Sources: Star archives, Indiana Historical Bureau, indy.gov

NOTABLE SITES IN BLACK HISTORY

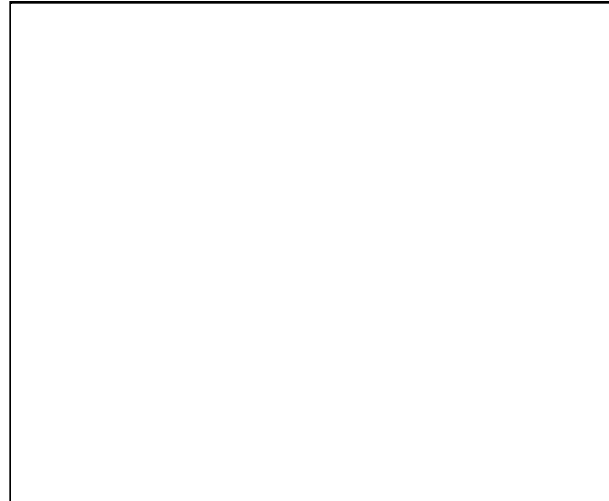


SOURCES: Star archives, Indiana Historical Bureau

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