



# A TREASURE HUNT

## BLACK RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN INDIANA BY 1870

WILMA L. MOORE

*A storm brews near the Union Literary Institute at  
Greenville Settlement in Randolph County, Indiana.*  
COURTESY GEORGIA CRAVEY



During the summer of 2014 the Indiana Historical Society 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 (one of the state's earliest black families) and a consultant with the Southern Indiana Minority Enterprise Initiative, 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, an effort to identify agrarian communities that had dotted the Hoosier landscape. The 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 Coun-

ty), Roberts (Hamilton County), Lyles Station (Gibson County), and Greenville/Longtown (Randolph County, Indiana,

and Darke County, Ohio) have annual reunions and/or advocacy groups. The initiative also sought input from statewide heritage organizations and other related entities. These included the Indiana State Museum, Indiana Historical Bureau, Indiana Landmarks, Indiana Humanities, Indiana State Archives, Indiana State Library, Indiana Tourism, Eleutherian College, and the Georgetown Historic District in Jefferson County, Indiana.

A Lilly grant enabled the hiring of five researchers and a database manager/researcher for the project. Contract researchers Andrea Sowle covered the northern tier of the state, Dona Stokes-Lucas and Georgia Cravey shared the central portion, and Lishawna Taylor and Martina Kunnecke were assigned



*Above: The La Porte County Historical Society Museum in La Porte, Indiana. Right: A contemporary view of the Porter County Courthouse in Valparaiso, Indiana.*

the southern counties. William Gillispie, a Tulane University student, was our database manager/researcher. The state was divided into five regional areas with researchers assigned to counties. The researchers fanned out around the state visiting with county historians and others; exploring courthouses, libraries, and various repositories; and, when appropriate, examining former settlement sites. They built upon the scholarship of Xenia Cord, Jacqueline Cortez, Anna Lisa Cox, Coy Robbins, Stephen Vincent, and others. They also benefited from projects previously sponsored by various institutions, including Audrey Werle's indexing of the 1870 census—research that she expanded from



COURTESY DONA STOKES LUCAS

population and Indiana county agricultural censuses and the international, online Newspaper Archive.

The project identified sixty-one black rural communities in forty-three Indiana counties with roots from prestatehood through 1870. The research is available on the IHS's website at <http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/reference/early-black-settlements>.

By highlighting the counties that included the settlements identified by the research, the map suggests geographical patterns for African American settlement in Indiana for the time period.

her work with the Indiana State Library; a cemetery database developed by the Indiana 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 the IHS. Other broadly useful resources included federal

There researchers can find a map and a description of the presence of African Americans in each county through 1870 that includes information about population, nativity of residents, extant historic properties, family names, and, if applicable, settlement names. 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 for the time period.

Although the research looks at settlement through 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. Many of the settlements had a building that was used as both a church and as a school.

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 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.



*A church and a school were essential parts of the antebellum black rural communities in Indiana. Here, a group of schoolchildren pose with their teacher at Lyles Station in Gibson County.*



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 counties where settlements have been identified, as well as counties where no settlements were listed. Further study is needed.

There were several trends that emerged among counties from the research. In

1820, the first federal decennial census after Indiana became a state, recorded 1,230 African Americans, fifty or more in ten counties within the state. With the exception of Wayne County, 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, west central, and east central part of Indiana, forming 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 harsh federal fugitive slave law and Article 13 of the 1851 Indiana Constitution, followed by an 1852 provision to enforce it, curbed 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, which had recorded two blacks in 1860, listed 949 in 1870.

Settlements tended to be in counties that contained higher population numbers of blacks. Several counties showed evidence of an African American presence, but there was not enough data to document a settlement. 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 were communities that contained multigeneration family members.

SOUTH

Maxine F. Brown, EAASHI senior researcher and Indiana African American Heritage Trail Project founder

The Indiana African American Heritage Trail project was initiated about ten years ago as a heritage tourism initiative and a means of preserving and illuminating Indiana’s early history of African Americans. The project was developed under the auspices of the Southern Indiana Minority Enterprise Initiative Inc., a small Jeffersonville-based nonprofit organization. The trail project is now under the auspices of the Leora Brown School Inc. in Corydon, due to my desire to clarify the scope of the project as a statewide initiative rather than just a southern Indiana project. The EAASHI should be helpful in supplying basic information for any future research and help identify some relevant extant structures.



In July 2005 descendants of the Roberts Settlement in Hamilton County, Indiana, gathered for their annual reunion at Roberts Chapel Church.

Since Indiana was settled from south to north, the trail project was designed as a prototype in southern Indiana that would eventually include any and all of this history in Indiana, county by county, extending the trail throughout all ninety-two counties. In the absence of historic structures or events that may have impacted the lives of African Americans and the state, historic markers will be erected to help tell their stories. The trail project hopes to create a coherent history of African Americans in statewide repositories, as well as within individual counties, to insure that the historic documents are properly preserved.

At the same time, and because slavery exploited many African Americans, the trail project was also designed to encourage the development of tourism-related businesses owned by African Americans—for example, food services, transportation, retail, and lodging. A small historic building that was originally a segregated restroom inside the historic Jeffersonville Quartermaster was secured as a Welcome Center and starting point of the trail in Clark County. The building was named the Depot because of its role in relation to the trail. It now functions as

a historic site and history cafe. There are panels on the walls of the building with old documents and photographs. Also, there is a barbeque food service that is owned by an African American family.

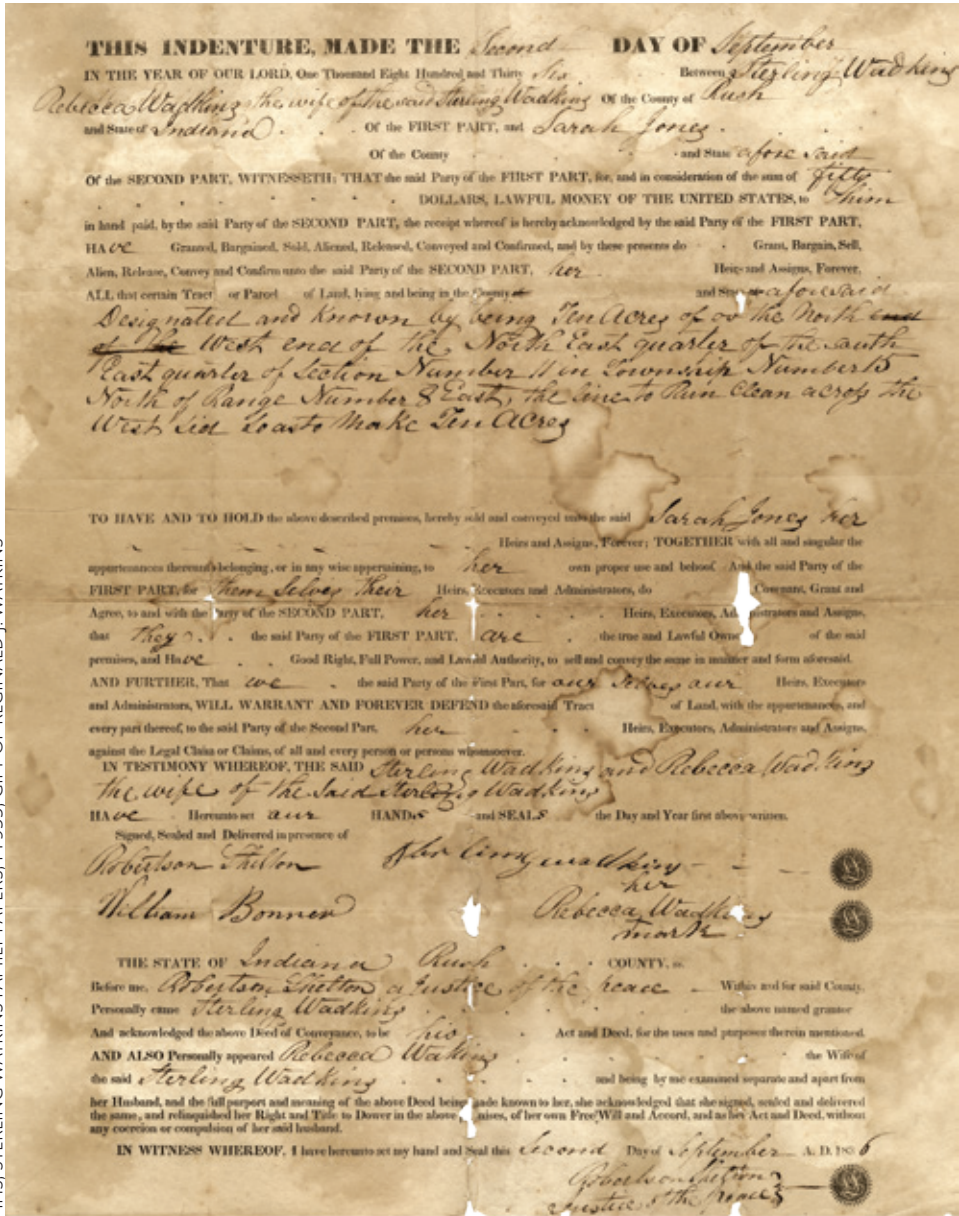
At least two other structures are included on the trail: Taylor High School, an 1891 segregated schoolhouse in Jeffersonville, and the McGee cabin, a reconstructed cabin similar to one lived in by Ben and Venus McGee, ex-slaves of the George

I purchased the 1891 Corydon Colored School in 1987 and donated the school to a newly formed, nonprofit corporation, the Leora Brown School Inc. The school was rehabilitated and completed by 1993. It was named in honor of, Leora Brown, who had attended elementary and secondary grades at the school and later taught there longer than any other teacher. The school is maintained as a historic site and as a cultural/educational center.

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Rogers Clark family. The McGee cabin sits in close proximity to the Clark cabin near the Falls of the Ohio River in Clarksville. Also, at least two historic markers are on the trail in Clark County. One is for Taylor High School (the building is privately owned and in need of rehabilitation). The second marker is for Hannah Toliver, a woman who was arrested and imprisoned for allegedly aiding slaves from Kentucky to escape to Indiana.

In 2006 we were able to save from demolition an 1891 small bungalow that was built by Leonard Carter, a Civil War veteran who served as a member of the Twenty-eighth U.S. Colored Troops. He lived and died in Corydon. The Carter house was donated to the Leora Brown School and moved to a lot behind the school. The house has been stabilized, but much work remains to be done. It is planned to be used as a local Civil War



An 1836 indenture for the sale of land in Rush County, Indiana, made by Sterling and Rebecca Watkins of the Beech Settlement.

IHS, STERLING WATKINS FAMILY PAPERS, M 933, GIFT OF REGINALD J. WATKINS

IHS, ELIJAH ROBERTS COLLECTION, M 325, GIFT OF MILTON BALTIMORE





COURTESY GEORGIA CRAVEY



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COURTESY DONA STOKES-LUCAS

Clockwise from top: Headstone honoring Civil War veteran George W. Peterson, a sergeant with Company F, U.S. Colored Infantry, at Weaver Settlement in Grant County, Indiana; James Gilbert at the gravesite of his wife, Catherine, at Maple Hill Cemetery in Plainfield, Indiana; and descendants of Lick Creek Settlement explore the Roberts and Thomas Cemetery in the Hoosier National Forest in Orange County, Indiana.

learning center. In addition, there are three historic markers in Harrison County specific to African American history. They represent the Leora Brown School, the Saint Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Oswald Wright.

I hope the example that is being set in Harrison County will be followed by other counties across the state. Although a former, conscientious county historian, Frederick P. Griffin, and an interested former principal of the Corydon Central High School and elected official, Earl O. Saulman, as well as Brown family descendant Barbara Shannon, did considerable work collecting and publishing information about the black population in Harrison County, more work needs to be done in order to preserve the historical records and documents.

### WEST CENTRAL

Dona Stokes-Lucas

The African American presence in Indiana's rural landscape may be long forgotten by many, but all is not lost. My journey in search of evidence identifying rural African American settlements in Indiana from 1820 to 1870 focused on nineteen counties in west-central Indiana and two counties in the southeast. My west-central research area was bounded by Vigo County to the west, Boone County and Hendricks County to the east, Benton County and Carroll County to the north, and Monroe County and Bartholomew County to the south. I also researched Jennings and Jefferson Counties along the Ohio River.

To identify individuals, I used early census records, early land records from the Bureau of Land Management, property deeds and plat maps (when available), as well as the valuable resources provided by libraries, genealogical societies, and historical societies. Identifying settlements proved more challenging. I used a variety of primary and secondary resources to determine if people of color had actually resided in any

significant numbers in a county, which could help identify if there had been a settlement (either named or unnamed). African American landmarks, national registers, and Indiana historical markers also proved a good starting point.

To facilitate my research, I consulted the works by some of the experts on this subject: Xenia E. Cord's *Black Rural Settlements in Indiana before 1860*; Audrey Werle's research notes on African Americans

They came from some of the thirteen original colonies, although on occasion I found a settler whose birthplace was listed as Africa, such as Peter Smith who was living in Crawfordsville, Montgomery County, Indiana, according to the 1850 census.

using census data; John W. Lyda's *The Negro in the History of Indiana*; Coy Robbins's vast body of published works; dissertations by Herbert Lynn Heller, Brain L. Hackett, and Mark Furnish; and books by Emma Lou Thornbrough, Stephen A. Vincent, Anna Lisa Cox, and Cheryl Janifer LaRoche.

I discovered that many blacks had migrated to this vast wilderness prior to Indiana becoming a state in 1816. They came from some of the thirteen original colonies, although on occasion I found a settler whose birthplace was listed as Africa, such as Peter Smith who was living in Crawfordsville, Montgomery County, Indiana, according to the 1850 census. Some of those who settled here had fought in the Revolutionary War. William Hood settled in Jefferson County before 1812 and applied for a Revolutionary War pension in 1818. He had run away from his owner in 1769, at the age of sixteen. Others who came here had either been only recently emancipated, or were like Daniel Pierson (Pearson) of Danville, Hendricks County, who had the arduous task during the 1850s

of raising money to purchase the freedom of his children enslaved in Kentucky.

The most rewarding and beneficial part of the settlement research was when I had the opportunity and honor to interview several descendants, such as Carole Guess, a retired schoolteacher. Her Cosby (Crosby) family members were free people who came to the Graysville settlement in Jefferson County around 1821 due to fear of kidnappers who had been stealing

children and selling them down South. In Vigo County, Lost Creek Settlement descendants Dorothy Ross and her daughter, Dee Reed, maintain an impressive archives of the their family history, having helped organize the Lost Creek Community Grove Restoration and Preservation Foundation. Reann Poray from the Plainfield-Guilford Township Public Library in Hendricks County introduced me to octogenarian and longtime resident James Gilbert. Brother Gilbert, as he is affectionately called, has been a member of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church for more than sixty years and served as my energetic tour guide, a docent on wheels as we stepped back in time traveling the dirt roads of the county.

A lot has disappeared from Indiana's rural landscapes. With the increased interest in telling a more diverse history, increased access to collections of organizations and institutions, and family researchers preserving and telling the stories of their ancestors, African Americans and the role they played in Indiana's history will not be forgotten.



## EAST CENTRAL

Georgia Cravey

The call came in May inviting me to join a team whose mission would be to identify and document nineteenth-century rural African American settlements in each of Indiana's ninety-two counties. The opportunity excited me and I agreed to participate. I would spend my summer on the roads of Indiana exploring history that lay right under my feet.

I babbled enthusiastically to my friends and family in person and on social media. I contacted the county historians in each of the counties I was assigned. Many of my contacts had suggestions for research leads. Some responded with mild surprise that there had been an African American presence in rural Indiana in the 1800s. Everyone responded with interest; more often than not, I heard something like, "I'd love to hear what you learn."

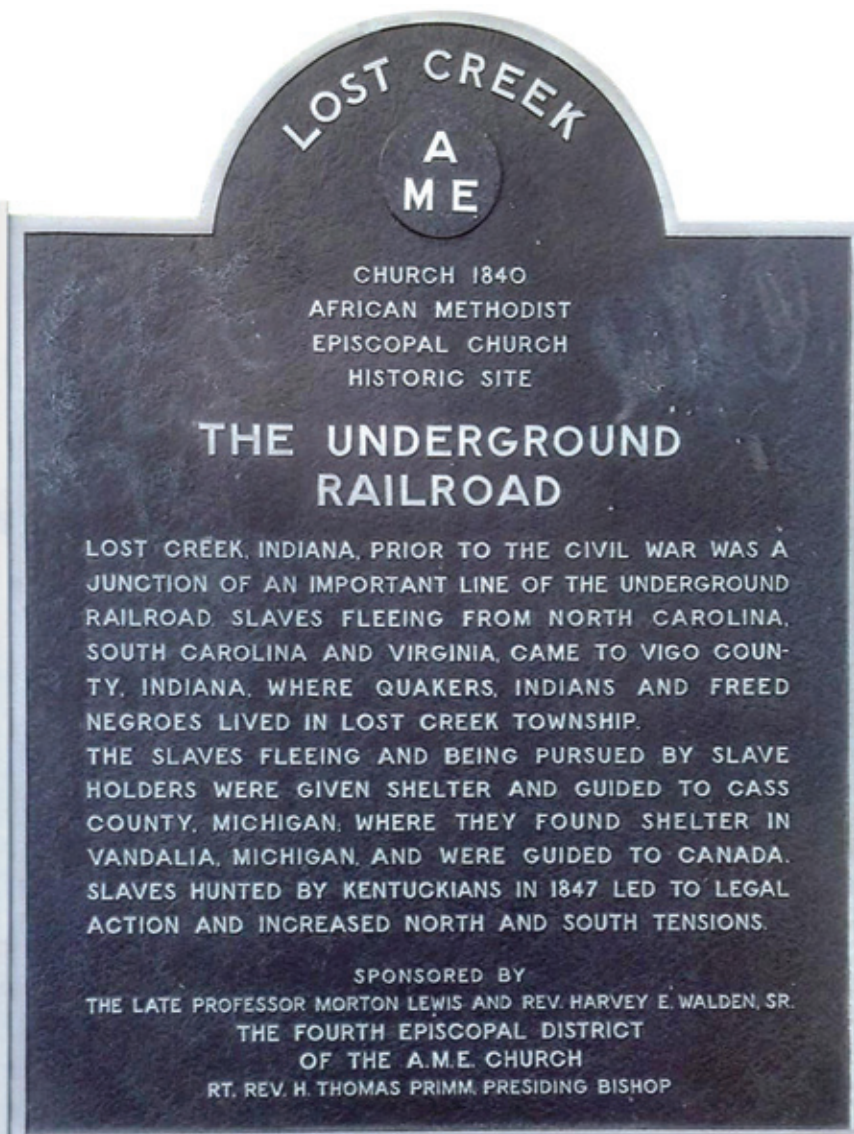
I started my research by compiling population figures from the decennial census reports and tallying those counts by township. Then I recorded the figures on county maps. With this strategy I could begin to see trends in population patterns. The maps gave me a sense of where to focus my attention. I turned to printed sources: individual county histories, atlases, plat books, gazetteers, and clipping files. (Researchers might be living in the best of times right now.) Authors of nineteenth-century county histories seldom gave much notice to the contributions of people of color. However, there is almost always some brief mention of an AME church, of a "colored" lodge, a segregated school, or black soldiers who served in the Civil War. Some counties included individual stories of success, and there were also accounts of tragic injustices. The wealth of online resources now available makes isolating names and keywords in the text of a nineteenth-century county history a much easier task than before. Some counties have been fortunate enough to produce

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updates to these older county histories and contemporary historians have been much better about documenting minorities.

The growing body of digitized newspapers also allows researchers access to another source of information. The

IHS summer team had the good fortune to work with William Gillispie, a young, tech-savvy intern who combed through these sources and fed us great leads. He unearthed one of my favorite discoveries—an 1896 article describing an all-black



*Historical marker honoring the Lost Creek African Methodist Episcopal Church's role in helping slaves flee to freedom on the Underground Railroad.*

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settlement dubbed "Oklahoma" on the east side of Indianapolis centered near the intersection of Seventeenth and Rural Streets. Another productive research tactic was using information extracted from the 1870 census by Audrey Werle, who produced an index to heads of households with African American members. Her work provides a quick snapshot of surnames, age, occupations, nativity, and personal wealth arranged by county and township. Used in tandem with online genealogy databases such as Ancestry.com, it provided a means to follow those families through time and place.

I also relied heavily on the County Interim Reports produced by Historic Landmarks and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources's Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology. These guides had nice maps of backroads useful for locating documented sites and structures that relate to early African American history. One of the most difficult tasks was juggling the figures, facts, and stories of multiple counties at the same time, keeping them organized and meeting tight deadlines. There were late-night phone calls and e-mails exchanged with fellow researchers that had a tinge of hysteria. All summer my house, with its piles of papers and research materials, looked like so many games of giants playing solitaire.

The summer provided a number of gratifying experiences. While making arrangements to visit the Lost Creek Settlement, I learned about a special tour that U.S. Forest Rangers were arranging for a group of descendants who were traveling from California and Florida to visit the site of their ancestors' farms in Orange County. It only took a moment to brashly invite myself to go along. In another instance, while surveying vertical files at one of the public libraries, I opened a folder that contained a sheaf of fragile documents. I could hardly believe my eyes—I was looking at original



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*Dorothy Ross (left) and her daughter, Dee Reed, descendants of Lost Creek Settlement, have been recognized as living on a Hoosier Homestead Farm by the state of Indiana for farms owned by the same family for more than 150 years.*

freedom papers. I took them up to the librarians and suggested that these valuable documents be protected.

My spouse, Jim Lingenfelter, accompanied me to Randolph County. The county was home to three successful and enduring settlements, as well as the Union Literary Institute, one of the first integrated educational institutions in the United States. Jim was of great help to me

over the summer and while one of his gifts is his sense of direction, he is not known for his patience. We also have differing ideas about what constitutes safe driving practices. After tearing through miles of soybeans and corn, we arrived at the field where Union Literary Institute stands. A thunderstorm was threatening and after snapping a few photos, Jim was ready to get back on the road.





(Left to right) Project participants Maxine Brown, William Gillispie, Dona Stokes-Lucas, Andrea Sowle, Georgia Cravey, and Wilma L. Moore.

As we turned back out of the field, a van drove by slowly. For a moment, I thought we might be in trouble for trespassing. I wondered out loud if the occupants of the van might be somebody I should talk to, but Jim was muttering under his breath about how we needed to get back home. Then I invoked the powerful name of one of my fellow researchers saying, “I bet Dona Stokes-Lucas would talk to them.” Jim braked, turned the car around, and we hailed the other vehicle. They turned out to be a couple from Wisconsin and the driver was a descendant of James Clemens, an early settler and farmer in the Greenville/Longtown Settlement and one of the founders of Union Literary Institute. The driver was looking for his ancestor’s home (which stands just across the Indiana line in Ohio) and was not sure how to get there. Dona had shared a map with me that included the Clemens homestead, and I was able to give it to the descendant and inform him about his ancestor’s connection to the Union Literary Institute.

He blew a kiss to the sky and we parted.

While in the process of documenting settlements in Marion County, I missed a deadline to explore Eagle Creek Park. It was for a good reason. I had been following the migration of early settlers from the community of Bridgeport through the movement of different church congregations. One of my contacts put me in touch with Clarence Woods, who grew up in a neighborhood of small African American farms clustered around Reed Road in what is now the park. It was a perfect summer day and Woods, a lively nonagenarian, was our tour guide pointing out where various farms were located as well as the former site of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, now marked with a plaque on a boulder. The summer culminated with a homecoming at the Beech Settlement in Rush County. Organizers invited all those gathered to share “dinner on the grounds.” Attendees reminisced and caught up with acquaintances.

When I entered the old frame church I was transported back in time. A men’s

a cappella choir marched into the church singing traditional songs, family and guests were welcomed, and stirring sermons were preached. After services, I stood in the shade beneath huge sycamore trees in the adjacent cemetery while descendants paid their respect to those pioneers buried there.

I had some great adventures, discovered some good places to eat, and met a lot of wonderful people who were willing to share resources with me. My summer on the road reaffirmed that Indiana has a rich and fascinating history and that from the earliest days African Americans played significant roles in taking our state from farms and fields to factories and halls of government. I hope that my research and discoveries can help the next person who comes along.

## NORTH

*Andrea Sowle*

Over the summer I was responsible for researching in northern Indiana. Because the northern part of the state was settled last, I was worried I would not be able to uncover as much as the other researchers. And while I did not

discover any large, rural African American settlements, I was able to find some very interesting pieces of information.

My surprising discovery was a small settlement in Indiana’s youngest county, Newton. The first evidence of this unnamed settlement is the 1870 federal census for the county, which shows many residents with the surnames Morgan and Porteonus living next to one another, as farmers. All of these families were born in Indiana. Later census data indicates that the Morgans stayed in this area and several black families joined them. The *1916 Atlas of Newton County* shows George Morgan’s wife, Emma, owning ninety acres in section 25, which the 1910 census estimates as having a land value at \$8,600. (No land deed has been found.) This is likely because of the heavy marshes that dominate the land.

This section, known as the Willow Marsh area, borders the Indiana-Illinois line, and today the Morgan-Tracy Cemetery is the only physical evidence indicating that these families once lived on that land. Many of the residents of this settlement are buried here, including some of the later families that joined the Morgans.

Because of the unyielding nature of the land the Morgans owned, it is likely the family worked on a nearby farm. Marriage records reveal that the brothers, James and George, married Elisabeth and Emma Porteonus, who were possibly sisters given their matching, unusual surnames. An archaeological report by Joseph Hiestand noted that this land was part of the “shore lines and sand knobs of the marshes.” This report matches the markings on an 1876 map of Newton County, where section 25 is made up of the marshes surrounding what was Beaver Lake, a body of water that has a well-documented history of being one of the healthiest gaming lakes in all of northern Indiana. While not much is known about these families, Gerald Born, the director of the Beaver Lake Museum and Two Rivers Reference Library, has

recalled what he knows about these black families. Born had a personal experience, remembering that one of the Morgan family members lived and worked on his grandfather’s farm, the Linderholm Farm, in the 1920s and 1930s. He said the individual was treated like a member of the family, as were all of the Morgan family members. He stated that his grandfather had grown up in a Quaker community. Later in life, while Gerald was running an antique store, descendants of the Morgan family, who had moved to Michigan, came back to learn about their family history and he was happy to tell them what he knew. The Morgans lived in this area until 1922, when Emma died and the land was passed on to her daughter, Cora Morgan Tracy, who was later buried there, along with other members of the Tracy family.

Other research discoveries included new information about a mid-sized settle-

ment in Saint Joseph County and another in Whitley County. As a lifelong Indiana resident, I was happy to find that everyone I worked with in the twenty-three northern counties were more than happy to assist me with whatever I needed. Truly, the people working and volunteering in this area of research are some of the best. people at the IHS who helped, beginning with John Herbst, our CEO, who was supportive from the initial planning stages of the grant; Stacy Klinger, who wrote the grant and coordinated the outside meetings; Nicea Yamber, who made sure every bill was paid; and Kim Easton and Luke Smith, who helped with the presentation of the project’s results on the IHS website. I especially smile at the contributions of our students—the very talented Gillispie; Kelsey Bawel and Kelsey Smith, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis graduate interns; and Leah Grynheim, our marketing department’s intern from Herron High School.

The IHS hopes that interest in the settlement research will spur future projects, programs, exhibits, publications, research, and conversations, and unearth more evidence about these communities. Although it is independent of this project,

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This project was fortunate to have great researchers and interested collaborators. I would be remiss not to mention the many

the National Museum of African American History and Culture will include an exhibit on black rural communities in the Midwest. It will use Lyles Station, which continues to have several independent black farmers, as a prototype. (View further information about Lyles Station at <http://www.lylesstation.org/>.) The NMAAHC, part of the Smithsonian complex, is slated to open on the National Mall in 2016.

*Wilma L. Moore is senior archivist, African American history, for the Indiana Historical Society William Henry Smith Memorial Library.* •