

CHAMPIONS for CHANGE

The Geography of Community Leadership

*A Self-Guided Historical Journey – edited by UUA for Black
History Month walks, 2021*



This information was taken from a “Champions for Change” session, the *Washtenaw Historical Journey*. The walk is designed to be completed in-person, on-foot, but it is also easily drivable, and may be completed virtually. The purpose of the Washtenaw Historical Journey is to learn about the racial history of our community as a way to contextualize what we’re striving toward as Champions for Change. It is also an opportunity to reflect on our personal connections to Washtenaw County, and to celebrate stories of resilience that shine through. While we have traditionally visited physical sites together, this year, the experiential component of the Journey is self-directed. When we gather virtually on Saturday, October 17th, local historians Bev Willis and Matthew Countryman will help us make sense of what we’ve seen and experienced already, drawing upon stories of local residents and offering opportunities for dialogue with one another.

A few pointers, before you set out:

- For the Ann Arbor portion of this exercise, our suggested route begins at Wheeler Park (200 Depot St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104), near Kerrytown. There is usually free street parking available in this area. You are also welcome to park at NEW (1100 N. Main St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104), which is a half mile away.
- For the Ypsilanti portion, our suggested route begins at Old Brown Chapel (401 S. Adams St., Ypsilanti, MI 48197). You should be able to find parking in the Old Brown Chapel parking lot.
- You may wish to print this packet and/or the linked maps before setting out.

we ask that you make the following commitments:

- **Commit** to making space for narratives that have been made invisible, and to honoring the lived experiences of our storytellers.
- **Commit** to listening deeply, and to making every effort not to 'gaze' and 'gawk' at communities.
- **Commit** to setting aside your cameras, and to being fully present in this experience.



EXERCISE 1

A Journey Through Black Ann Arbor

The information provided in this exercise is adapted from the Ann Arbor District Library's (AADL) Ann Arbor African American Historical Sites webpage: <https://aadl.org/map>.

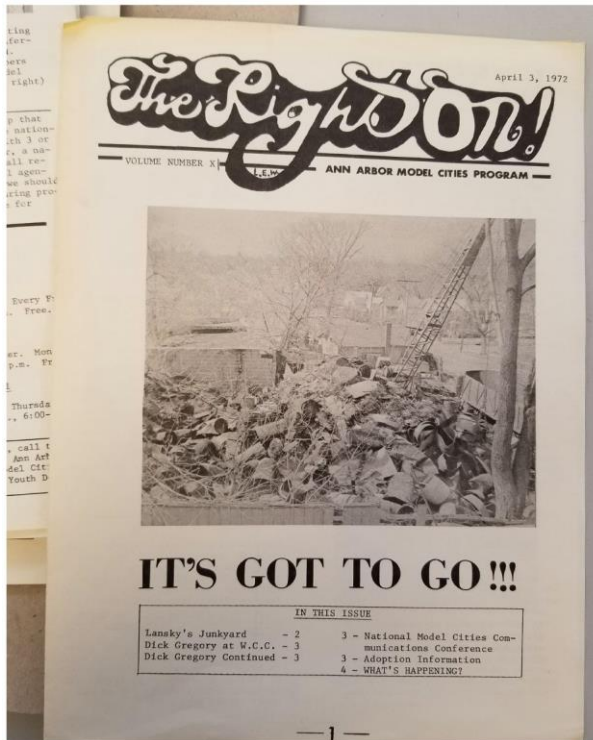
Step 1: Visit the AADL's [Ann Arbor African American Historical Sites](#) web page, and learn about the African American Cultural and Historical Museum's (AACHM) [Living Oral History Digital Collection](#).

Step 2: With [this map](#) and the route below as a guide, visit each of the following sites of historical significance, located near the Kerrytown area of Ann Arbor. Our suggested walking route begins at Wheeler Park (200 Depot St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104).

As you visit each site, consider these questions:

- What do you see now?
- What do you imagine this community was like in the time periods mentioned below?
- What does it feel like to move through this space? What feelings or sensations arise in your body, and where do you feel them?
- What questions are arising for you?





1. Wheeler Park 200 Depot St.

Until the late 1960s, the site of Wheeler Park in this historically African American neighborhood featured Lansky's Junk Yard and Peters Sausage Company. Concerned residents asked the city to buy the lots, which were eventually demolished and converted into Summit Park. In 1987, the Ann Arbor City Council voted to rename it Wheeler Park to honor Ann Arbor's first African American mayor, Albert H. Wheeler, who served 1974-78. Wheeler helped establish Ann Arbor's Fair Housing Ordinance, the Human Relations Commission, and the Ann Arbor chapter of the NAACP.



2. Bethel AME Church 632 N. Fourth St.

Established in 1896, Bethel AME Church was an offshoot of the Union Church, Ann Arbor's first black church. The parishioners, who had among them many skilled laborers, built much of this building. Located in one of the few neighborhoods in Ann Arbor where African Americans were permitted to purchase property, the church was a community anchor. In 1972, the congregation dedicated a new building at 900 Plum Street (now John A. Woods Drive).

Image source: <https://aadl.org/node/350892>

3. Dunbar Community Center 420 N. Fourth Ave.

“During the day, when we got out of school we went to the Dunbar Center. The Dunbar Center was named after Paul Dunbar who was a black poet. And that's where we all went when we got out of school, until our parents got out of work...when we would go there we would go upstairs, and Mrs. Ellis would tutor us. We would do our reading, our writing, and our arithmetic first. And then after that was done, then we would go down in the basement where there was a ping pong table and a pool table. So the girls and boys played ping pong and pool...On Friday nights we'd have dances.” - SHIRLEY BECKLEY



First established in 1923, this community center was a major hub of social life for Ann Arbor's African American community during the era of segregation. Early on, the Dunbar Center rented space from the Colored Welfare League. In 1937, the Center purchased this 4th Avenue site.

Here, director Douglas E. H. Williams and program director Virginia Ellis were able to increase the services and the activities that were offered to the African American community.

Image source: <https://aadl.org/node/314481>

4. Black History Mural at Fourth and Ann St.



Created in 2016 by Community High School students.

5. Black Business District 109-119 E. Ann St.

"Ann Arbor had an area-- Ann Street area-- that was a black business area there, black owned restaurants there. They were small, but-- black-owned bars that also served food. So that was really about it. I don't remember eating in restaurants in Ann Arbor. I don't know if blacks were not allowed in restaurants or just discouraged from going to the white-owned restaurants in Ann Arbor. Ann between Main Street and Fourth Ave. That block...was black businesses. Although, the Derby was white-owned by a Greek gentleman. The pool rooms were black-owned. The gas station was black-owned. Around the corner on Fourth Ave there was another barber shop that was black-owned. Some little apartment building that was black-owned there also." - [FRED ADAMS](#)

Keaton's Recreation Hall (109 E Ann St.) - From 1952 to 1974, David and Mozelle Keaton ran a pool hall next door to their successful tavern Midway Lunch. The Keatons' establishments were fixtures of the mid-20th-century Black business district on Ann Street. Previous owners John Riggs and Samuel Elliot operated Wolverine Barber Shop and Pool Room in the 1930s.

Midway Lunch (111 E Ann St)- In the 1940s and 1950s, Midway Lunch offered African American workers and businessmen good food, drink, and company right in the center of the thriving Ann Street Black business district. Owners David and Mozelle Keaton opened in 1941, and it closed in 1962.



Image source: <https://aadl.org/node/347869>

Easley's Barber Shop (115 E Ann St)- Nicknamed "Papa John," barber John B. Easley was a longtime proprietor on Ann Street. In operation from 1934 until the late 50s, Easley's Barber Shop was a hub for good conversation and, according to some, illegal gambling. Easley mentored many young men, including Johnnie Rush, who apprenticed under him before opening Johnnie Rush Barber Shop in the same location. Rush has been barbering in Ann Arbor for over 55 years.

Sanford's Shoe Repair (117 E Ann St.)- A native of North Carolina and a respected Masonic leader, Sanford McKinney ran his shoe shine and repair shop from 1928 until his death in 1970. Early on, he shared space with Hing Lee Laundry, a Chinese-owned business in operation since 1896. In 1940, he opened his own shop at 117 E Ann. This was the same location that one of Ann Arbor's early African American barbers, Henry Wade Robbins, purchased in 1915.

Whitman's Pool Hall and Myrtle's Beauty Shop (119 E Ann St) - Often seen with a cigar in his mouth, George Whitman ran his pool hall on Ann Street from 1934 until 1953. His wife Myrtle had a beauty shop on the second floor, which employed several other African American women as hairdressers.

6. Jones Elementary School 401 N. Division St.

"Jones School was primarily a black school, because African-Americans attended because that's the way the neighborhood was. That's where they allowed us to live: 5th Avenue, 4th Avenue, Beakes Street. And so, consequently, we went to Jones school, and we walked. Fortunately for me, I lived... just a few blocks away from the school. It was segregation, because we were only allowed to live certain places. But as a young person I never felt like I was being discriminated against.... And we lived in a neighborhood with Greeks and Mexicans, and that was just our-- who our friends were... We had no African-American teachers... That was just the way of life, and that's what we experienced, and didn't think anything about it... you just accepted it... I think some of them did not really encourage you to work to your fullest benefit, to really stretch, and think about college courses or things that were going to help you after you got out of school. So I think that's one of the things that I regret. Even though we lived in a university town, it was like... they had expectations that you would probably go and work in a kitchen someplace or mop floors or do that janitorial kind of work, as opposed to having you stretch your imagination to really feel that you could do other things." - [AUDREY LUCAS](#)



Image source: <https://aadl.org/node/358494>

Established in 1922, Jones Elementary School taught the majority of black students in Ann Arbor. After *Brown v. The Board of Education*, the Ann Arbor Board of Education conducted a racial imbalance study, which found that 3 out of 4 students at Jones School were African American. In 1964, the Board voted to close Jones Elementary School and bus the children to five area elementary schools. Community High School was established at the same site in 1972.

Interested in learning more?

Visit https://aadl.org/aachm_loh_digitalcollection



Look toward State Street and you will see the top of the Romanesque church that our congregation built in 1882 and left in 1946. You might wonder about our congregation's interactions with the neighboring black neighborhood.

EXERCISE 2

A Journey Through Black Ypsilanti

The information provided in this exercise is adapted from [South Adams Street @ 1900](#), a website created by Matthew Siegfried, a historian and resident of Ypsilanti.

Step 1:

Visit the [South Adams Street @ 1900](#) website. Begin at this home tab and learn about how to use the website.

Step 2:

Hover over the “Society & Social Life” tab. Read about the [First Ward School](#), [Good Samaritan Hall](#), and [Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church](#).

Step 3:

Hover over the “Households” tab of the website. Select and read about at least 5 households on the list.

Step 4:

Using [this map](#) as a guide, go to the corner of Buffalo and South Adams St. in Ypsilanti. You can park at Old Brown Chapel (401 S. Adams St., Ypsilanti, MI 48197). At this corner, notice the three sites you read about:

- Old Brown Chapel (401 S. Adams St.)
- First Ward School (405 S. Adams St.)
- Good Samaritan Hall/Saint Andrews #7 Masonic Lodge (327 S. AdamsSt)

Step 5:

Walk up S. Adams St. in either direction, remembering the households you read about. As you walk, consider these questions:

- What do you see now?
- What do you imagine this community was like in 1900?
- What does it feel like to move through this space? What feelings or sensations arise in your body? Where do you feel them?
- What questions are arising for you?

Interested in learning more?

Visit <https://southadamstreet1900.wordpress.com/>

FINAL PROMPTS

Reflections & Artifact

In preparation for our upcoming session, please spend a few minutes writing about your experience of this self-guided journey. When you join us on the morning of October 17th, we also ask that you bring a small artifact from around your home that represents your connection to this community.

