



## Volunteer Handbook for IHPC Historic Area Inventory Initiatives



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# Contents

## The What and Why of Historic Inventories 4

What is a historic inventory? 4

Why are historic inventories important? 4

## Researching Properties for Historic Inventories 5

What information do I need to find or verify? 5

How do I begin? 6

Beginning with an Address 6

Beginning with a Name 6

Beginning with a Theme 6

Where do I research: in-person or online? 7

Which online resources should I try researching? 7

Are all resources reliable? 8

Which in-person collections may be helpful to my research? 8

Underrepresented Narratives 9

What resources should I try when researching underrepresented narratives? 10

Tips and Tricks 12

Do I need to cite my sources? 12

## Documenting Properties for Historic Inventories 13

# The What and Why of Historic Inventories

## What is a historic inventory?

A **historic inventory** is a list of the properties in a historic area. It typically includes basic information about each property, such as its:

- Address,
- Dates of construction,
- Known architects or builders who designed or built the property,
- Architectural styles, and
- Other miscellaneous historic information.

Historic inventories also include photographs of each property in a historic area.

## Why are historic inventories important?

Historic inventories are a critical piece of the IHPC's historic area plans. They account for each property in a designated historic area and, through photographs and descriptive information, provide a brief history of the property and its architecture. This information helps property owners, residents, commercial tenants, and contractors develop appropriate projects for a building. It also helps inform the review of project proposals and serves as a record for change over time in a designated area.



# Researching Properties for Historic Inventories

## What information do I need to find or verify?

There is basic information for each building or property that the IHPC seeks to include in historic inventories:

- Address.
- Year built.
- Known architects, builders, or contractors who designed or constructed buildings or additions.
- Architectural Style.
- Current and historical uses.
- Specific historical or architectural significance.
- If constructed after the area was designated, the case number related to the new development project.

It will be easy to discover information about some properties and very difficult for others. The best practice is to try and find documentation for all the above categories, but if there is no evidence that can be found in the historical record or in physical evidence of the building or property, it is best to note that such information is unknown rather than to guess. When in doubt, leave it out.

In addition to basic identifying information, other stories are encouraged to be recorded for historic properties. This may include:

- Previous owners or occupants of the building/property.
- Connections between owners or occupants and trends in social, political, or economical of the neighborhood or Indianapolis.
- Connections between properties and overall trends in development patterns in the neighborhood or Indianapolis.
- Connections between properties or owners/occupants and significant events.

## How do I begin?

There are several starting points you can choose from to begin your research. Which you choose will depend on any specific research questions you have, information that you already know, and which research resources you plan to use. It may help to write out some questions to help guide your search, such as:

- How long has this building been here?
- When were additions constructed?
- Who designed this building?
- Who lived here?
- Are there any connections between this property and \_\_\_\_\_?
- What information do we already know about this property and what information seems to be missing?

## Beginning with an Address

Street names, street numbers, and even property lines can change over time, so it is common to start property research with the most recently known address for a building or property and tracing it back as far as information is available. Consulting historic maps (like Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps) and directories or phonebooks (like the Indianapolis City Directories) can help you track and confirm street names and numbers for a building. This is a good method when you are unsure of other information about a property.

## Beginning with a Name

In some cases, you may already know the name(s) of past occupants, owners, or significant people associated with your subject property. You may want to learn more about a person or business to provide additional information about your specific property of interest.

## Beginning with a Theme

Different properties and historic areas are associated with different historical themes. A property may be associated with a very important or famous person; it may be an outstanding design by a notable architect; it may be the site of an important event, like a moment in the Civil Rights Movement; or it may represent everyday life from a period in Indianapolis's past. Starting with a theme is a good choice when you are looking for information about development patterns or if you know the subject property has or may have a specific relationship with a theme. For example, researching the development of the automobile industry in Indianapolis would likely lead you to learning about different automobile showrooms and manufacturing buildings around the city.

## Where do I research: in-person or online?

Many archives, databases, and academic research are available online. While some of these digital resources may require subscriptions to access them, there are many that are freely accessible to the public from home computer access. Some archives and collections are only accessible in person at libraries, historical societies, or other archival depositories. Other in-person resources include digital resources available at a physical location (such as subscription-service databases accessible through Indianapolis Public Library computers) or interviews with people of interest.

Your choice of where you research will be driven in part by:

- What information you are trying to find,
- Accessibility and scheduling, and
- Your ability or interest in visiting certain locations.

If you are unsure what kind of source to start with, ask yourself what kind of questions you are looking to answer. “Who?” questions might be answered by sources like city directories, phone books, or personal papers. “Where?” questions are likely to be answered by maps or lists of businesses or residences.

## Which online resources should I try researching?

- **Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps/Baist Atlas/Aerial photographs from the City of Indianapolis:** These resources are available on the City’s website (<http://maps.indy.gov/MapIndy/>). You can find more information about Sanborn Maps and Baist Atlases from IUPUI’s University Library website (<https://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalcollections/sanbornjp2>) or from the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps>).
- **City Directories:** City directories were an early version of modern phone books. You can find historical copies of these directories online from IUPUI (<https://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalcollections/icd>) and Archive.org (<https://archive.org/details/indianapolispubliclibrarycitydirectories>).
- **Newspapers:** Some newspapers are available through the Indiana State Library, such as the *Hoosier Chronicle* (<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/>). You can also access archived copies of the *Indianapolis Star* and other periodical through the Indianapolis Public Library at home with a current library card or at a public computer (<https://www.indypl.org/research>).
- **Digital Collections from the Indiana Historical Society:** <https://indianahistory.org/>

[research/](#)

- **Indiana Historic Architecture Slide Collection:** <http://ulib.iupui.edu/collections/IHAS>
- **Hathi Trust:** <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
- **Internet Archive:** <https://archive.org/>
- **Google Books:** <https://books.google.com/>
- **Indiana Memory:** <https://digital.library.in.gov/>
- **What was There:** <http://www.whatwasthere.com/>
- **History Pin:** <https://www.historypin.org/en/>
- **Indiana Album:** <http://indianaalbum.pastperfectonline.com/>
- **State Historic Architectural and Archaeological Research Database (SHAARD):** <https://www.in.gov/dnr/historic-preservation/help-for-owners/national-and-state-registers/shaard-database/>
- **Encyclopedia of Indianapolis:** <http://ulib.iupuidigital.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/EOI>

### Which in-person collections may be helpful to my research?

- Indiana Historical Society Library & Archive
- Indiana State Library
- IUPUI University Library
- Indianapolis Public Library

### Are all resources reliable?

**No, not all resources are reliable**, and some may provide misleading or unsubstantiated information. You should especially take care when sorting through basic Internet searches. Some general indicators that a source is likely reliable include:

- Secondary sources published by well-known publishers or university-affiliated presses.
- Secondary sources written by well-known authors, historians, or researchers.

- Secondary sources that include citations (such as footnotes, end notes, and/or bibliographies).
- Information published by government agencies.
- Information published by universities, colleges, or research institutes.
- Primary sources, such as historical newspaper articles, images, or maps from the period of time you are researching.

When you read a book or review a primary source, you should look for any bias in the document and be aware of how any biases might affect the information it conveys. An advertisement is trying to sell something. A photograph is trying to tell a story. Ask: “What is missing? What kind of adjectives are being used? What might another perspective on this situation be?”

Biases can be intentional (such as when you are writing an opinion piece to persuade an audience) or unintentional (such as how your personal experience or upbringing have shaped your point of view). When you encounter biases, it helps to look for other sources that discuss the same information to evaluate other opinions and to consider whether the biases are intentional or unintentional and why that might be the case. This kind of exercise helps paint a more in-depth understanding of the past.

## Underrepresented Narratives

Our past is made up of a wide range of people, ideas, places, perspectives, and experiences. But, historically, not all these points of view have been included in official historical narratives. Historical narratives have often been written or presented from the very limited point of view of affluent, white, males. There are many reasons why this pattern developed, some of them intentional and some of them unintentional, but presenting only one experience of the past communicates that only one experience of the past is valid or significant and it hampers our understanding of historical realities.

When updating inventory research, we have an opportunity to reassess what has previously been included in the documentation for designated historic areas. By asking about how past people lived, worked, shaped, and experienced differently brings us closer to a comprehensive picture of the past. The IHPC is committed to researching and documenting inclusive histories of designated historic areas, both to develop greater equity in the preservation of Indianapolis and to better understand the city’s history. When conducting inventory research, look for connections with underrepresented groups, generally including:

- Black, Indigenous, People of Color’s (BIPOC) histories

- LGBTQ+ histories
- Women's histories
- Working class histories

Be especially aware and sensitive with how your research may affect others when working with underrepresented narratives. While there are many stories and people to celebrate, there are also many stories of violence, degradation, and discrimination, some of which occurred in living memory, and care should be taken with how these narratives are shared in our community to avoid causing further trauma or distress to fellow Indianapolis residents. This includes being mindful that not all LGBTQ+ people have come out to their family, friends, or community. Coming out is a personal choice, and for some people may even have been dangerous or may have greatly affected their private or public relationships.

### **What resources should I try when researching underrepresented narratives?**

The following resources are included only as a starting point for further research of underrepresented historic narratives in Indianapolis. Collections and databases can change over time, as can access to them.

#### **African American/Black History Collections available from IUPUI**

[https://ulib.iupui.edu/collections?title=&field\\_collection\\_subject\\_target\\_id=151&field\\_collection\\_format\\_target\\_id=All](https://ulib.iupui.edu/collections?title=&field_collection_subject_target_id=151&field_collection_format_target_id=All)

Subject guide for digital and in-person resources related to African American/Black history at IUPUI.

#### **LGBTQ+ Collections available from the Indiana Historical Society**

- Michael Bohr/Chris Gonzalez/Indy Pride Library [Ca. 1960s-2016]  
M1242 / OMB0162 / DVD0874-0899
- Mark A. Lee LGBT Collection [1981-2014]  
M1157 / OM0585 / DVD0670-0678 / CT2312-2319
- Sheila Kennedy and LGBT Articles Collection [1990s-2015]  
SC3217
- Indy Pride Bag Ladies [1977-2015]  
P0564
- Mark St. John Papers [1992-2015]  
M1217

- GayTV Programs [1985-1995]  
P0571
- Indianapolis Men's Chorus/Crossroads Performing Arts, Inc. [1989-1995, 2005]  
M1198 / OMB0155
- Indianapolis Drag Shows Color Photographs [1982]  
P0691
- Norma Bradway Papers: <https://www.indianahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/norma-bradway-papers.pdf>
- Digitized oral histories

**Indiana History Blog:** <https://blog.history.in.gov/>

Run by the Indiana Historical Bureau of the Indiana State Library, many well-researched articles can be found on a wide variety of topics, including BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and women's history.

**Indianapolis Recorder:** <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=cl&cl=CL1&sp=INR>

One of the nation's leading African-American publications, this newspaper was established in 1897 in Indianapolis. The digital collection provides access to the full run of the newspaper between 1899 and 2005.

**Invisible Indianapolis:** <https://invisibleindianapolis.wordpress.com/>

A blog that researches and posts articles about race, heritage, and community memory in Indianapolis.

## Tips and Tricks

Here are some tips and tricks for searching databases:

- Whenever a database or resource has a research guide, read it over before beginning! Many places have unique search terms or suggestions on how to best navigate their information.
- Use quotation marks to search for terms or names that belong together. (E.g. “James Riley” not James Riley)
- Try common abbreviations when searching for addresses (e.g. S. or S) as well as writing out street directionals and suffixes (e.g. South, Boulevard).
- Consider using subject guides or subject searches in addition to keyword searches. This is especially helpful in finding sources that discuss underrepresented narratives and other specific topics.
- Expect addresses to change:

Street numbers and many street names were renumbered and renamed between 1898 and 1908 in Indianapolis. Most available copies of the 1898 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map show these changes, either through revisions on that map or by comparing it with the 1915 edition of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map. You can also check the common council proceedings if you are unsure about a street name (<https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Indianapolis+%28Ind.%29.+Common+Council%22>).

- Expect terms to change:

The words we use to describe people, ideas, and places change. Terms we use today have evolved over time and may not have been in use during the time period you are researching. Know that this may include names and terms we now consider derogatory. Your choice of search terms will help to find either contemporary results or historical results.

## Do I need to cite my sources?

Yes! When you are conducting historical research, you need to keep good track of the sources you are using. Documenting this information establishes credibility in your work and provides future researchers with a road map for your process.

There are many online tools that can help you record and cite your sources. Some common ones include Zotero, the bibliography function in Microsoft Word, RefWorks, or Mendeley. You can also keep track on your own. The preferred style to use is Chicago.

# Documenting Properties for Historic Inventories

In addition to descriptive and historical information, inventories also include photographs of properties within a historic area. Photos are used to track changes over time, as well as when developing or reviewing a proposed project. With digital cameras and smart phones, it is much easier today to create and update inventory photos than it has been historically. As of 2021, IHPC has been using a free online tool called Epicollect5 to collect inventory photos. While the method of photo collection may vary in later years, the following tips for taking inventory-quality photos apply now and in the future:

- Take photos during times of the year when leaves are gone (winter, early spring, late fall).
- Try to get unobstructed views of the building or lot.
- Include some of the immediate context of the building, such as walkways, driveways, and fencing.
- Center the subject property completely in frame.
- Avoid dramatic angles of the building that will exaggerate height or width.
- Keep an eye on the lighting. (Overcast days have minimal shadows; buildings on the west side of a street are likely to be very shadowed during morning hours.)
- Identify your photographs. (Keep a record of the address or location of your photograph, as well as the date.)



*Good example of an inventory photo. Photo credit: Google Streetview.*



*Poor example of an inventory photo; only part of the building is shown and the height is exaggerated. Photo credit: Google Streetview.*

