

# African American History and the National Register of Historic Places

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MYRTLE HIGHVIEW HISTORIC DISTRICT, CLEVELAND, LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES IN 2019.

**T**his is a call to action to plan for future National Register nominations reflecting the history of African Americans in Ohio by increasing awareness around African American historic sites in Ohio. The goal is to encourage more conversations that reflect Ohio's diversity in historic preservation and shape a strategy to address National Register recognition for other underrepresented groups.

## Importance of African American Historic Sites:

African American history is an important part in the American story. African American historic sites are American history. These historic buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts reflect the fuller picture of American history and historic sites. The Ohio History Connection and Ohio's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) are committed to ensuring African Americans and other underrepresented communities see themselves and their experiences in telling the full story of Ohio history, especially through the National Register of Historic Places.

This National Register strategic plan builds on several successful State Historic Preservation Office-initiated projects and local community efforts to identify and evaluate African American historic properties and establish the next steps towards nominating more properties associated with African American history in Ohio.

## Recent National Register Listings Reflecting African American History in Ohio:

Ohio has been successful in nominating African American properties and neighborhoods to the National Register of Historic Places as part of a National Park Service grant project that funded the Civil Rights Multiple Property Document (MPD). The Ohio SHPO nominated two properties to the National Register of Historic Places utilizing the MPD, the Eugene McKinley Memorial Swimming Pool in Portsmouth and the Manse Hotel and Annex in Cincinnati, a historic Black-owned hotel and Green Book listing.

Additional properties recently listed under the Civil Rights MPD include:

- Dayton YWCA, an early Y serving the needs of Black women,
- Ohio Baptist General Association Headquarters in Columbus,
- Euclid Avenue Christian Church, Cleveland,
- Sidaway Bridge, Cleveland.

Other recent National Register listings include:

- Park Medical Building in Columbus, a medical office for a group of Black physicians denied practicing privileges at local hospitals,
- Tawawa Chimney Corner in Wilberforce, home to national and state African American leaders,
- Evanston Historic District, a historically Black urban commercial corridor, and the
- Regent Theater, a historic theater serving the west side African American neighborhood, both in Cincinnati.
- The Myrtle-Highview Historic District in Cleveland, a postwar suburb of homes, was built by African American contractors and developers and the
- Dayton View Triangle Historic District, Dayton, which reflects the transformation of a segregated urban neighborhood into a racially diverse one during the mid-twentieth century. Both historic districts tell the "hard history" of discriminatory real estate and city planning practices.
- The State Historic Preservation Office is working with the Cleveland Restoration Society through the National Park Service grant-funded "Pathways to National Register Recognition for Cleveland's Black Churches" project to nominate historic Black churches representing a variety of significant themes in African American History.

These are only a few examples of recent nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for African American significance.

### Proposed Strategies & Action Steps:

The African American National Register Strategic Plan supports the statewide goal of addressing the historic preservation needs of a diverse audience and identifying historic resources that convey the diversity in the history of Ohio, as identified in the recently released statewide historic preservation plan, *Reconciliation, Recovery, and Resilience, Historic Preservation Plan for Ohio, 2023-2030*.

Goal 4: The diversity of voices represented in Ohio's historic resources is expanded by increasing inclusion of underrepresented groups in both historic documentation and policy making. The State Plan further states, We seek to have Ohio's historic properties represent and tell the stories of all Ohioans.

The state has stories of all types. We seek to expand the representation of all Ohioans in Ohio's historic preservation program. Whether an archaeological site, a building, or a cultural legacy, we seek to commemorate and support that memory. This includes increasing participation by underrepresented groups and striving to make our programs and policies more inclusive. No matter ones race, background, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability status, Ohio's historic places help tell our collective story, good, bad, or neutral. Action relating to this goal is to expand diversity within historic preservation programs and practices, specifically through more National Register nominations and surveys to identify resources related to underrepresented communities, ensuring diverse stories are told.

The African American National Register Strategic Plan will aid in achieving



SIDAWAY BRIDGE, CLEVELAND, LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES IN 2022.

these statewide historic preservation goals through the strategies listed below created by State Historic

Preservation Office staff and an advisory board. This National Register strategic plan demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing the underrepresentation of African American properties in statewide survey and the National Register. To ensure underrepresented communities are nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, the State Historic Preservation Office created an advisory group to discuss matters around awareness.

### Advisory Group and Community Engagement:

During the summer of 2023, Ohio's State Historic Preservation Office held a meeting with an advisory group of local stakeholders to help facilitate and generate key ideas and tips to build awareness in Ohio for Underrepresented Communities, especially, African American

communities. The members of advisory group were Jerolyn Barbee, National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center, Reita Smith, community member, Dr. Eric Jackson, Northern Kentucky University, and David Hughes II, Pastor, Fellowship Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio and community member, Susan Keeney, Columbus Landmarks, Beth Johnson, Cincinnati Preservation Association, Kathleen Crowther, Anne Doten, and Jamie Miles from Cleveland Restoration Society, Matt Wiederhold, Heritage Ohio. At the meeting two questions were posed to the group:

1. What should SHPO be nominating to National Register and why? How should SHPO prioritize their National Register emphasis?
2. How can SHPO build greater awareness and stronger participation to encourage nominations from African American communities and other underrepresented communities?

Additionally, these questions have been posed to groups through several presentations by Diamond Crowder, Underrepresented Communities Survey & National Register Manager at workshops and additional individual conversations. With these questions in mind this plan was created to encourage more nominations from underrepresented communities.

### Advisory Group Recommendations:

- More emphasis on African American historic districts, social clubs, MPDs: historic black churches in Ohio, themes such as African American political power (i.e., where leaders resided in Ohio).
- Raise awareness and interest in African American historic places, use online mapping tools to highlight National Register properties associated with important themes in African American history, such as the US Civil Rights Trail, while helping with additional mapping and listing of these historic sites. Provide access to interactive maps of these sites on the on the Ohio History Connection website.

- Consistent public engagement meetings to share information about the National Register.
- Prioritize communities with potential for more African American-related National Register nominations and identify local contacts to begin to develop relationships.
- Visit priority communities and schedule meetings with city officials, religious leaders, non-profit and for-profit organizations. Work toward understanding barriers to National Register participation for underrepresented communities and identify needs to removing those barriers.
- Build relationships with outreach organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Urban League, and Community Development Corporations; continue to network with existing partners such as Cleveland Restoration Society, Cincinnati Preservation Association, Columbus Landmarks and other local historic preservation organizations.
- Create a Workshop series; how to create a successful National Register Nomination — explore partnering with Ohio History Connection site, the National African American Museum Center, to co-sponsor and host workshops.
- Sharing information and examples of nominations on website: //www.ohiohistory.org/nationalregister
- Continue to meet with advisory group. Encourage advisory group to reach out to additional contacts and share State Historic Preservation Office National Register Strategic Plan.
- Sponsor or participate in programs and events where people from different communities can share their experiences and stories about historic places.
- Advocacy and education: webinars and conferences with Heritage

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Ohio, Ohio’s Statewide Historic Preservation Organization and the Ohio Local History Alliance.

**SHPO Commitment to Diversity in the National Register:**

The State Historic Preservation Office will take a proactive approach to preparing National Register nominations for key/pivotal properties associated with African American history, many with a statewide or national level of significance, and Multiple Property Documentation covers for important themes in African American history to promote and facilitate the preparation of National Register nominations at the local level. Priorities for these are Ohio’s Green Book Properties, Rosenwald YMCAs and their impact for African American urban youth, Historic Black Churches and Fraternal Organizations and their role in Ohio’s small-to-mid-size communities.

**State Historic Preservation Office 2023-2025 Action Plan:**

- Prepare and submit two new nominations to the National

Register of Historic Places: The West Federal YMCA in Youngstown, Ohio and the Fellowship Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio.

- Prepare and submit an amended nomination to the National Register for the C.H. Burroughs House in Cincinnati, Ohio to include the African American significance of the house, the Cincinnati Federation of Colored Women’s Club and its history.
- Continue building awareness about the importance of recognizing African American history through specific education opportunities, e.g. African American History and Nominating Properties to the National Register, Heritage Ohio Annual Conference and other statewide conferences.
- Plan National Register Workshop in partnership with NAAMC for Summer 2024.
- Outreach — Identify key local groups associated with new National Register nominations in Youngstown, Cleveland, and Cincinnati. Reach out to these groups to share information about the National Register nominations and process.
- Update State Historic Preservation Office website with sample nominations and additional guidance for successfully completing National Register nominations.
- Prepare grant applications for NPS Underrepresented Communities Grant.

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