Bridges Not Walls: Connecting Community Archives with Cultural Institutions

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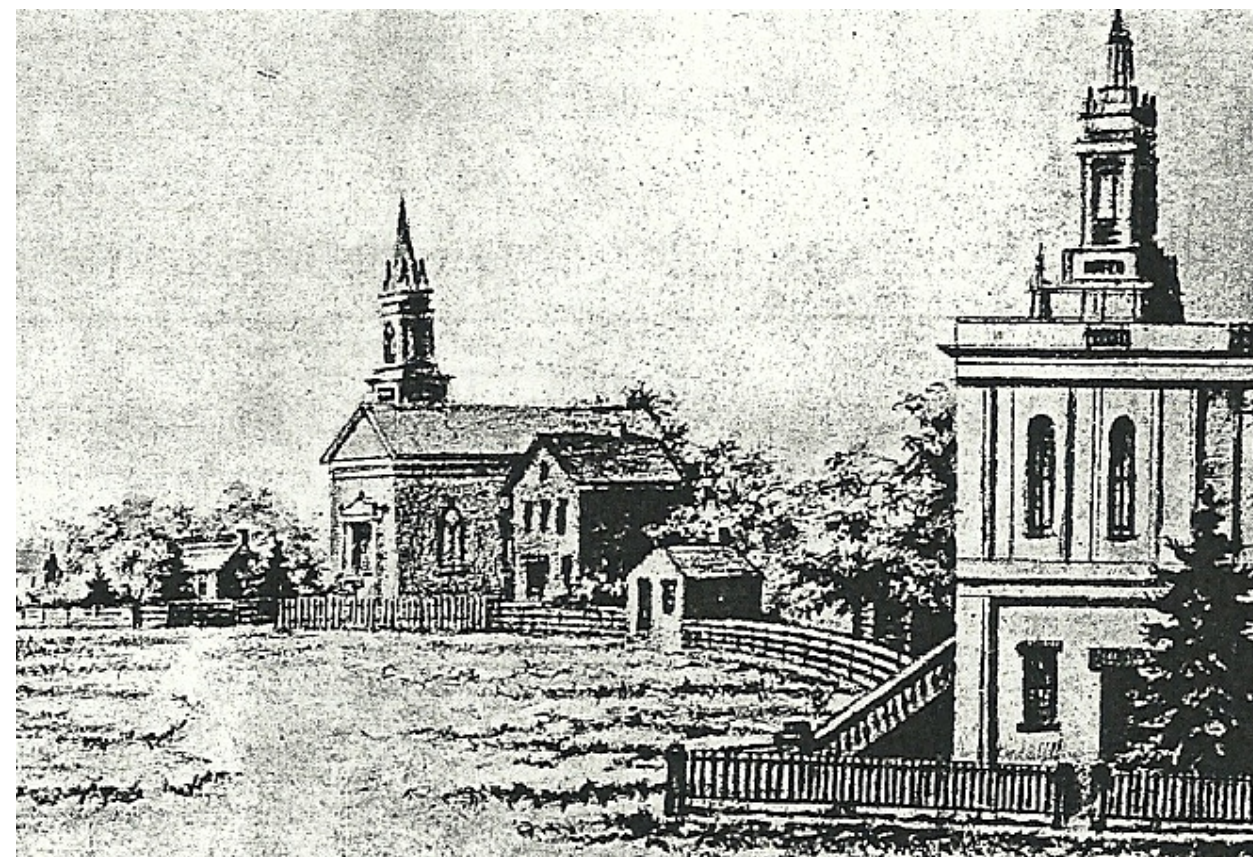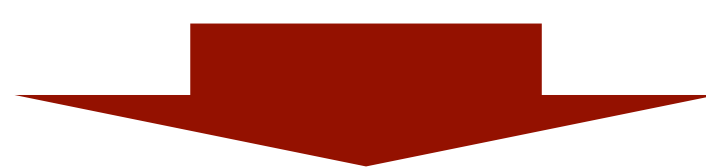IAHI — IUPUI ARTS & HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

IUPUI

Study Motivation: Bethel AME

- First African American church in Indianapolis (1836-)
- Played a vital role in the Underground Railroad
- Funded the Indiana Chapter of the NAACP
- Started the first school for African American children before public schools were available
- The only remaining building in the city that Madame C.J. Walker was actually in
- **Extensive archive spanning 162 years**
- **Being sold for 5 million dollars to become a hotel and the building destroyed**

Lack of expertise in and capacity for preservation, as well as the technical and financial sustainability needed for long term use.

Study Purpose & Significance

Exploring how bridges can be constructed between existing cultural institutions and community archives (or community groups).

A mutually beneficial solution for both: Cultural institutions can be exposed to a broader scope of topics to build more inclusive and culturally relevant collections; community archives can rely on cultural institutions' professional expertise and existing preservation infrastructure

Connecting Dots: Discovering successful methods

Step 1 ⟷ **Step 2** ⟶ **Step 3** ⟶ **Step 4** ⟶ **Connecting**

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Interview participants in successful collaborations between community groups and heritage institutions	Explore existing **3rd party organizations*** and effort — International Coalition of SITES of CONSCIENCE; Chicago Cultural Alliance; JustIndy	Digital, arts, and community engagement projects – evidenced/ archival based	Design implications for the **Center for Personal and Community Heritage Informatics** (IUPUI)

*Why 3rd party organization?

- Archivists, librarians and curators are bound by institutional policies foremost
- Create venues for archivists to engage in activities that fall outside of their institutional mandates
- Create pathways for community groups and individuals to be connected to the right institutions, professionals, technology, tools, knowledge resources etc.
- Advocate and fundraise for access, preservation, and social action

Capacity Building, Creating Connections: Lesson Learned

- Continue to Diversify the heritage/memory/information fields
- Institutions can be inflexible and prefer dead things: advocate, educate, inspire
- Cannot not leave things to chance – need framework for connectivity and inclusivity
- Utilize public libraries as part of framework – community-focused and located organizations, need public archivists and public librarians
- Create partnerships with leaders of community groups/organizations to connect with community members
- Partnerships should benefit all equally – what's in it for them?
- Write, research, talk about these projects
- Possible need for Third Party Organization/s