

Architectural Survey of
African American
Civil Rights Resources
Muskegon County, Michigan



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Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, 1943-1995, 1943-1922. Box 17. Image with no title,
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architectural survey of
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Volume 1: Survey Report

Prepared for

Michigan State Historic Preservation Office

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Table of Contents

Volume 1: Survey Report

List of Images	i
List of Maps	v
List of Tables	vi
Executive Summary	1
Project Objectives and Methodology	3
Project Background and Objectives	3
Methodology	3
Maps of Project Study Area	7
Historic Context	9
Introduction	9
Settlement of Muskegon – 1700s to 1890	9
Context 1: Muskegon County’s Early African American Community – 1890 to 1940	12
The Transition from Lumber to Diversified Industry – 1890 to 1920	12
Growth and Depression – 1920 to 1940	14
Context 2: African Americans and “the Arsenal of Democracy” – 1940 to 1965	17
Wartime Manufacturing in Muskegon County	17
Muskegon’s Great Migration	18
Context 3: The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1970	26
Racial Discrimination in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1960	26
The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1960 to 1975	33
The Beginning of a National Movement	33
Local Response to National Events	35
Equal Employment Opportunity	37
Housing Equality	42
Equal Opportunity in Education	46
Context 4: The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1964 to 2000	48
Black-Owned Businesses	48
Lingering Discrimination	50
Black Representation	51
Conclusion: Loss of Muskegon’s Black History and Civil Rights Resources – 1960 to Present	53
Urban Renewal and Highway Construction	53
Decline of Industry	55
Impact of Downtown Revitalization	56

Muskegon Heights School District Challenges.....	57
Ongoing Preservation Efforts.....	59
Architecture Context	61
Property Type 1: Places Related to Black Community.....	61
Descriptive Overview.....	61
Subtype A: Schools.....	61
Subtype B: Churches.....	63
Subtype C: Businesses	64
Subtype D: Recreation	65
Subtype E: Neighborhoods	66
Property Type 2: Places Related to Black Leadership	67
Descriptive Overview.....	67
Places Related to Black Leadership	67
Property Type 3: Places Related to the Civil Rights Movement	68
Descriptive Overview.....	68
Subtype A: Equal Education	68
Subtype B: Public Accommodation	69
Subtype C: Equal Housing	70
Subtype D: Equal Employment.....	71
Findings	73
Evaluation Results	73
Significance and National Register Eligibility for Property Type 1: Places Related to Black Community	73
Subtype A: Schools.....	73
Steele Junior High School (1150 Amity Avenue, Muskegon) – 1959	73
Charles A. Lindbergh School (160 East Barney Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – 1929.....	74
Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School (600 East Barney Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – 1951-1952.....	74
Edgewood Elementary School (3028 Howden Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1955.....	75
Central Elementary School (2603 Leahy Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1964	75
Central School/Muskegon Heights Middle School (55 East Sherman Boulevard, Muskegon Heights) – 1926, c.1945, c.1965	76
Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School (2301 Sixth Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1961.....	76
Subtype B: Churches.....	77
Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church (575 South Getty Street, Muskegon) – 1969, 1988....	77
Jackson Avenue Congregational Church (521 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon) – 1889.....	78

Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ (188 West Muskegon Avenue, Muskegon) – 1929, c.1960	78
John Wesley AME Zion Church and Parsonage (886 Wood Street, Muskegon) – 1909-1911, c.1955	79
Phillip Chapel AME Church (2145 Dyson Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1964	80
Beulah Baptist Church (2601 Manz Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1951, 1955, 1981	80
Subtype C: Businesses	81
East Sherman Boulevard Commercial District (McIlwraith and East Sherman Boulevard)	81
Subtype D: Recreation	82
Marsh Field (1800 Peck Street, Muskegon) – 1916.....	82
Subtype E: Neighborhoods	82
Jackson Hill Neighborhood (Muskegon)	82
Significance and National Register Eligibility for Property Type 2: Places Related to Black Leadership.....	83
Dr. James Jackson Office (2416 Peck Street) – 1960.....	84
Dr. Frank Howell House (377 West Lane, Norton Shores) – 1965	84
Significance and National Register Eligibility for Property Type 3: Places Related to the Civil Rights Movement.....	85
Subtype A: Equal Education	86
Froebel School (417 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon) – 1930, 1970.....	86
Subtype B: Public Accommodation	86
Rowan City Park (2801 Baker Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1937	86
Greater Harvest Missionary Baptist Church (2435 Riordan Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1981, 1986	87
Subtype C: Equal Housing	87
East Park Manor (615 East Hovey Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – 1964, c.1969	87
Oak Terrace (2818 Woodcliffe Drive, Muskegon Heights) – 1973	88
Subtype D: Equal Employment.....	89
Sanitary Dairy Company (1788 Terrace Street, Muskegon) – c.1920	89
Beneficial Finance Company (350 West Western Avenue, Muskegon) – c.1898, c.1960.....	89
Reynolds Funeral Home (2211 Jarman Street) – 1948	90
Recommendations for Further Study and Evaluation	90
Additional Significant Properties.....	90
Ruby Brown House (464 Monroe Avenue, Muskegon) – c.1911, c.1955.....	90
Pine Street Tavern (978 Pine Street, Muskegon) – c.1900.....	91
James Jackson Museum of African American History (7 East Center Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1945.....	91
Patterson’s Drug Store (2144 Hoyt Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1927	92
Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House (2305 Fifth Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1952.....	92

Robert Warren House (2135 Peck Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1905.....	93
Ciggzree’s Real Estate (2528 Peck Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1945	93
Dr. James Jackson House (5885 Lake Harbor Road, Norton Shores) – 1963.....	94
Properties Significant in Other Areas.....	95
YWCA (430 West Clay Avenue, Muskegon) – 1952	95
Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry Company	96
Hackley Park (350 West Western Avenue, Muskegon) – 1890	96
Properties that Warrant Additional Research and Evaluation	98
Unknown Fruitport Entertainment Venue.....	98
House (8899 Park Street, Montague) – c.1865.....	98
Central Storage Garage (880 First Street, Muskegon).....	99
Continental Motors (76 South Getty Street) – 1940-1945.....	99
Paul S. Moon Elementary School (1826 Hoyt Street, Muskegon) – 1921, c.1962	99
Freddie Townsend Neighborhood Center (301-313 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon) – 1924 ..	100
Toonerville Tavern (772 Pine Street, Muskegon) – c.1900	101
Zion Baptist Church (375 School Street, Muskegon)	101
Green Acres Park (600 Block Wood Street, Muskegon) – c.1942, 1949.....	101
Reverend Fowler Tourist Home (2437 McIlwraith Street, Muskegon Heights)	102
Reeths-Puffer Neighborhood & Community Center (75 East River Road, North Muskegon) – 1972	102
Goose Egg Lake (Pine Road, Twin Lake)	103
Historic Contexts that Warrant Further Research.....	103
Demolished Properties	104
Educational Materials	111
Objectives	111
Chat Stations.....	111
People and Protest in Muskegon	113
Michigan Social Studies Standards	113
Objectives and Materials.....	113
Lesson Part 1: Context.....	114
Lesson Part 2: Chat Stations.....	119
Civil Rights in Our Backyard	124
Michigan Social Studies Standards	124
Objectives and Materials.....	124
Introduction to the Lesson	124
Lesson Beginning.....	125

A Timeline of Protests in Our Community	132
Michigan Social Studies Standards	132
Objectives and Materials	132
Introduction to the Lesson	132
Lesson Beginning.....	133
Pre-Teaching Resources for High School Chat Stations.....	140
Identifying Racist and Dehumanizing Language.....	140
Addressing Racist and Dehumanizing Language.....	140
Teaching the Hard Histories of Racism	140
Additional Resources	141
Bibliography.....	143
Appendix A: Informal Oral History Interviews	148
Melvin Burns, Jr.....	148
Robert Dowson.....	148
Jim Heethaius.....	148
Jerry Lottie	148
William Muhammad	149
Reverend Charles Poole	149
Rillastine Wilkins.....	149
John Workman and Marti Workman	149

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List of Images

Image 1: Bird's Eye View of the City of Muskegon, 1868.....	10
Image 2: Mary and Abner Bennett, c.1860.....	11
Image 3: Logs Floating on the Muskegon River, 1887	11
Image 4: Standard Malleable Iron Company, date unknown.....	12
Image 5: Amazon Knitting Mill, 1911.....	13
Image 6: Aerial View of Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company, date unknown.....	13
Image 7: Continental Motors, 1915	14
Image 8: Sketch of Beulah Missionary Baptist Church, destroyed 1949	15
Image 9: Continental Motors, c.1950	17
Image 10: Steel Tank Treads Leaving Furnace at Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon, c.1945	18
Image 11: African American Workers Pour Cylinder Blocks at Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon, c.1945	18
Image 12: 1944 Trade Magazine Advertisement for Sealed Power.....	19
Image 13: War Production Advertisement for Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry	19
Image 14: Lakey Foundry, c.1972.....	20
Image 15: Fairview Homes, date unknown.....	22
Image 16: African American Workers Clean a Crankshaft at Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry, c.1945	22
Image 17: Phillip Chapel AME Church	23
Image 18: New Hope Baptist Church, 1953	24
Image 19: Central Junior High School (Muskegon Heights Middle School), 1976.....	24
Image 20: Glendale School, 2018.....	25
Image 21: RedLining Map of Greater Muskegon Area	27
Image 22: West Western Avenue, Muskegon, 1960s.....	29
Image 23: Sepia Club, date unknown	30
Image 24: Elks Charity Lodge 1397 on West Western Avenue, c.1985	31
Image 25: Marsh Field, 1926	32
Image 26: Sanitary Dairy Company, c.1944	34
Image 27: Mass Meeting at Greater Harvest Baptist Church, March 1961.....	35
Image 28: Demonstrators March Toward Rowan City Park	36
Image 29: The Square Clothing Company, 1939	38
Image 30: Picketing at Beneficial Finance Company, 1964.....	39
Image 31: Walgreens Drug Company on West Western Avenue, date unknown	41
Image 32: Equal Housing Meeting at YWCA.....	43

Image 33: Dr. Frank Howell at his home, 1987.....	45
Image 34: Smitty's Furniture, c.1970.....	49
Image 35: Zale's Jewelers, 1974.....	51
Image 36: Mayor Rillastine Wilkins, 2006.....	52
Image 37: 2024 Aerial Image of Southeast Jackson Hill.....	54
Image 38: 1950 Sanborn Map of Southeast Jackson Hill.....	54
Image 39: Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Plant No 6 (left) and Plant No 3 (right), date unknown	55
Image 40: 2024 Aerial Image of Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Site of Plant Nos 3, 5, 6, and 7.....	56
Image 41: Downtown Muskegon c.1930.....	56
Image 42: The Muskegon Mall, c.1980.....	57
Image 43: Muskegon Mall Site c.2005.....	57
Image 44: Glendale School, c.2019.....	58
Image 45: Roosevelt Apartments.....	58
Image 46: Central School, 1926 Wing.....	61
Image 47: Central School, c.1964 Addition.....	61
Image 48: Edgewood Elementary School Entrance.....	62
Image 49: Edgewood Elementary School.....	62
Image 50: Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School.....	62
Image 51: Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School.....	62
Image 52: John Wesley AME Zion Church.....	63
Image 53: John Wesley AME Zion Church,.....	63
Image 54: Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church Education Wing.....	63
Image 55: Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church.....	63
Image 56: Phillip Chapel AME Church.....	64
Image 57: Beard's Bonding and Insurance.....	64
Image 58: White's Beauty and Barber Shop.....	64
Image 59: Muskegon Heights Community Center and Latson's Grocery.....	65
Image 60: Beal & Son Produce.....	65
Image 61: Cheeks Mobil Service Station.....	65
Image 62: Starlight Lounge.....	65
Image 63: Smith-Ryerson Park Community Center.....	66
Image 64: Smith-Ryerson Park Picnic Shelter.....	66
Image 65: Marsh Field Historic Playing Field.....	66
Image 66: 1980s Grandstands at Marsh Field.....	66
Image 67: Houses on the North Side of Marquette Avenue and Vacant Lots on the South Side	67

Image 68: Craftsman Style Homes on Marquette Avenue.....	67
Image 69: Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House.....	67
Image 70: Flossie and Dr. Frank Howell House.....	68
Image 71: Froebel School Entrance Detail.....	69
Image 72: Froebel School	69
Image 73: Rowan City Park Green Space.....	69
Image 74: Rowan City Park Stage and Seating	69
Image 75: East Park Manor Two-Story Residential Building.....	70
Image 76: East Park Manor One-Story Residential Building.....	70
Image 77: Oak Terrace Leasing Office and Community Center.....	70
Image 78: Oak Terrace Residential Buildings.....	70
Image 79: Beneficial Finance Company.....	71
Image 80: Sanitary Dairy Company	71
Image 81: Steele Junior High School Entrance.....	74
Image 82: Charles A. Lindbergh School	74
Image 83: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School.....	75
Image 84: Edgewood Elementary School.....	75
Image 85: Central Elementary School.....	75
Image 86: Central School c.1965 Wing	76
Image 87: Central School 1929 Wing	76
Image 88: Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School.....	77
Image 89: Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church.....	77
Image 90: Interior of Church (courtesy of Coldwell Banker Realty).....	78
Image 91: Jackson Avenue Congregational Church	78
Image 92: Former Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden, now Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ ..	79
Image 93: Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ Modernist Addition	79
Image 94: John Wesley AME Zion Church.....	80
Image 95: Phillip Chapel AME Church	80
Image 96: Beulah Baptist Church.....	81
Image 97: Muskegon Heights Community Center and Latson's Grocery on McIlwraith Street	81
Image 98: Beal & Son Grocery (Cheeks Mobil Service Station and Starlight Club in Background)	81
Image 99: Marsh Field.....	82
Image 100: Marsh Field c.1938.....	82
Image 101: Craftsman-style and Vernacular Homes on Marquette Avenue	83
Image 102: Picnic Facilities at Smith-Reyerson Park.....	83

Image 103: Dr. James Jackson Museum	84
Image 104: Dr. Frank Howell House.....	85
Image 105: Froebel School	86
Image 106: Rowan City Park.....	87
Image 107: Greater Harvest Baptist Church.....	87
Image 108: Two-story Residential Building at East Park Manor.....	88
Image 109: One-story Residential Building at East Park Manor.....	88
Image 110: Oak Terrace.....	88
Image 111: Sanitary Dairy Company	89
Image 112: Beneficial Finance Company	89
Image 113: Reynolds Funeral Home	90
Image 114: Ruby Brown House	90
Image 115: Pine Street Tavern	91
Image 116: James Jackson Museum of African American History.....	91
Image 117: Patterson's Drug Store	92
Image 118: Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House.....	92
Image 119: Robert Warren House.....	93
Image 120: Ciggzree's Real Estate	93
Image 121: Dr. James Jackson House	94
Image 122: Former YWCA Building.....	95
Image 123: Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry Plant No 4	96
Image 124: Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry Plant No 5	96
Image 125: Abraham Lincoln Statue in Hackley Park.....	97
Image 126: Civil War Soldiers & Sailors Obelisk at Hackley Park	97
Image 127: West Western Avenue Looking West from Second Street	98
Image 128: West Western Avenue Looking West from First Street	98
Image 129: 8899 Park Street, Montague.....	98
Image 130: Continental Motors Getty Street Plant, c.1950	99
Image 131: Paul S. Moon Elementary School.....	100
Image 132: Neighborhood Youth Visit the Freddie Townsend Neighborhood Center.....	100
Image 133: Zion Baptist Church	101
Image 134: Children Play Sandlot Baseball at Green Acres Park c.1950	101
Image 135: Rebecca Lenoir Community Center in the Reeths-Puffer Neighborhood.....	102

List of Maps

Map 1: Map of Study Area 7

Map 2: Map of Surveyed Properties in the City of Muskegon 8

Map 3: Properties Surveyed in Muskegon Heights and Norton Shores 8

Map 4: Map of Properties Warranting Further Research 103

Map 5: Demolished Properties 109

List of Tables

Table 1: Demolished Properties Related to Black History and Civil Rights.....	105
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Executive Summary

In 2019, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) received a National Park Service Civil Rights Grant. SHPO contracted with Firefly Preservation Consulting, LLC, a qualified historic preservation consulting firm, to undertake a Muskegon County African American Civil Rights historic resource survey and public education project. Muskegon County encompasses approximately 1,460 square miles in the western lower peninsula on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Although African American residents make up a substantial percentage of urban populations in Muskegon County, in particular in the cities of Muskegon and Muskegon Heights, historic resources related to the African American experience have not been well-documented in the county. There have been local efforts to identify, interpret, and preserve places related to African American history, however there has been no comprehensive, substantive effort to identify and document African American resources in the county to a professional preservation standard.

Therefore this project had three primary objectives. The first objective was to conduct research and oral history interviews to develop appropriate historic context related to African American history in Muskegon County, especially the Civil Rights Movement. The second objective was to identify sites related to the Civil Rights Movement, and the African American experience more broadly, to be surveyed at the intensive level. The third objective was to develop educational materials based on the project to include in outreach kits housed at the Lakeshore Museum Center in Muskegon.

Research was conducted at libraries and archives throughout southern Michigan, and nine informal oral history interviews were conducted. Based on this research, four historic contexts were identified: *Context 1: Muskegon County's Early African American Community – 1890 to 1940*, *Context 2: African Americans and the "Arsenal of Democracy" – 1940 to 1960*, *Context 3: The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1970*, and *Context 4: The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1964 to 2000*. Based on primary source research, oral history interviews, and the guidance of an Advisory Committee of local stakeholders, fifty-six properties were identified for survey. An inventory of properties, including physical description, known history, and current photographs, is included in Volumes 2 and 3 of this report. An additional forty-three resources related to Muskegon County's African American communities and the Civil Rights Movement were identified as demolished. Additional research is recommended for twelve resources that were identified but could not be surveyed within the timeframe of this project.

One of the primary goals of this project is to help the public understand and make personal connections to the many ways the Muskegon community participated in the national Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century. To achieve this goal, educational materials were developed based on the findings of the projects, to be included in existing outreach kits for K-12 students housed at the Lakeshore Museum Center, with the assistance of an Education Element Task Force. A series of Chat Stations with corresponding lesson plans were developed for inclusion in the outreach kits.

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Project Objectives and Methodology

Project Background and Objectives

Though Muskegon County's population of over 175,800 people is only about fifteen percent African American, approximately thirty-one percent of residents in the City of Muskegon and seventy-six percent of residents in the City of Muskegon Heights are African American.¹ In spite of the demographic representation of African American residents in these urban areas, previous survey projects in the county have focused on European settlement and the region's lumbering era, and there are no properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places in Muskegon County that reflect the county's African American history. Though there have been some local efforts to document, recognize, and interpret African American history, especially in the cities of Muskegon and Muskegon Heights, overall there has been no comprehensive, substantive effort to identify and document places of importance to African American history in Muskegon County.

Therefore, in 2019 the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), in cooperation with local partners, sought a National Park Service (NPS) Civil Rights Grant to document resources related to the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County. Since 2016, NPS has made a concerted effort to increase diversity in National Register of Historic Places nominations and architectural surveys. This has been achieved primarily through the establishment of grant programs to fund projects focused on communities and resources that are currently underrepresented in National Register and survey records. One of these is the Civil Rights Grant program, established in 2017 to assist local communities with the documentation, interpretation, and preservation of sites and stories related to the African American Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century.

SHPO applied for and was awarded a 2019 Civil Rights Grant for the Muskegon County African American Civil Rights Historic Resource Survey and Public Education Project. Cheri LaFlamme Szcodronski of Firefly Preservation Consulting, LLC, was selected to complete the project, supported by Katie Randall of Afore Preservation Consulting and Dr. Scott Farver of the Michigan State University College of Education. The project included three primary objectives: develop historic contexts related to the twentieth-century African American Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County; conduct an architectural survey of sites related to the Civil Rights Movement and African American experience in Muskegon County; and create educational materials for K-12 students based on the project for inclusion in Educational Loan Kits at the Lakeshore Museum Center in Muskegon.

Methodology

The project began with a series of meetings to solidify local support for the project and spread awareness of the project within the local community. Though SHPO had not previously partnered with the African American community in Muskegon County, SHPO staff did provide the consultant team with a list of contacts made during the grant application process, as well as a list of additional contacts recommended by local partners. On September 2, 2021, a public information meeting was held virtually due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic limitations. During this meeting, SHPO staff and the consultant team introduced the project background and objectives and invited participation from the public during the project.

¹ US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts," 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>.

Using the initial contact lists and information gathered during the public information meeting, the consulting team established an Advisory Committee to provide ongoing advice and guidance throughout the project. An Advisory Committee meeting was held September 29, 2021, to discuss the project objectives, outline the role of the committee, and gather information about civil rights history and sites in the county. The following volunteers accepted invitations to participate on the Advisory Committee:

- **Reatha Anderson**, 1st Vice President, NAACP Muskegon County Chapter
- **Jeff Bessinger**, Archivist, Lakeshore Museum Center
- **Melvin Burns**, Planner, City of Muskegon Heights
- **Tom Hinken**, Social Studies Consultant, Muskegon Area Intermediate School District
- **Ken James**, Chief Diversity Officer, Muskegon Community College
- **Liz Keegan**, Director of Education & Outreach, Muskegon Fair Housing Authority
- **Cathy Mott**, Assistant Director, Muskegon Art Museum
- **William Muhammad**, President & Board Chair, Jackson Museum of African American History
- **Jamie Pesch**, Planner, City of Muskegon
- **Jennifer Reeths**, Assistant Program Manager, Lakeshore Museum Center
- **Kristen Renes**, Social Studies Consultant, Muskegon Area Intermediate School District
- **Kerri VanderHoff**, Executive Director, Coalition for Community Development
- **Rillastine Wilkins**, former Commissioner, Muskegon County Board of Commissioners
- **Steven Winston**, Independent Researcher, Muskegon Heights

Efforts were made to hire a member of the local African American community to the consultant team. Based on recommendations from members of the Advisory Committee, candidates were identified, interviewed, and offered contractor positions on the project. However, these offers were not accepted.

Research was conducted starting in October 2021. Initial research visits were made during the fall of 2021 to the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; State Library of Michigan, Michigan History Center, Lansing; State Archives of Michigan, Michigan History Center, Lansing; Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Hackley Public Library, Muskegon; Muskegon Community College, Muskegon; and the James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights. Research continued throughout 2022 and 2023 at the Torrent House and Michigan History Center, including additional historic context research, research on individual resources documented during the project, and in-depth review of local newspaper records.

In addition to primary and secondary source research at libraries and archives, nine informal oral history interviews were conducted with local residents and leaders in the African American community. Details about these interviews may be found in Appendix A.

Four historic contexts were identified during the project and are included in the following report. Context 1 explores the shift from lumber to diversified industry that facilitated the establishment and growth of African American communities in Muskegon County. Context 2 explores the rapid expansion of African American communities in Muskegon County during the Great Migration of the early twentieth century when African American laborers relocated from the South to northern cities for industrial jobs. Context 3 explores systemic and de facto discrimination in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights, and the resulting events of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s through the 1970s, especially in the areas of employment, housing, public access, and education. Context 4 acknowledges the ongoing struggle for Civil Rights and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, demonstrated through the establishment of Black-owned businesses and increased Black representation in local government.

Based on primary source research, oral history interviews, and the guidance of the Advisory Committee, fifty-six properties were identified for comprehensive survey. African American communities were historically concentrated in the county's urban areas, therefore most Civil Rights-related activity took place in the cities of Muskegon and Muskegon Heights and correspondingly, the architectural survey focused on resources in these two cities. The consultant team, with support from SHPO staff, surveyed these properties in the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023. Documentation included digital photographs and field sketches, in-depth research on the history of each property, and compilation of an inventory of properties, which has been included as Volumes 2 and 3 of this report.

Of the properties identified for documentation, twelve properties were found to require further research to clarify relevance to Civil Rights and Black Ethnic Heritage in Muskegon or to locate the property and determine if it remains extant. These properties were either identified without adequate time to conduct survey or adequate research could not be located to determine if the properties remain extant, however, these properties appear to merit further investigation and documentation. In addition, forty-three properties were found to have been demolished. Properties that warrant further research or have been demolished are listed in the Project Findings.

The second Advisory Committee meeting was offered in-person on November 30, 2022, at the Muskegon Heights Branch of the Muskegon Area District Library, as well as virtually December 15, 2022. These meetings provided an informal update on the project progress, including research, interviews, and survey conducted to date, as well as discussion of remaining work to be completed.

One of the primary goals of this project is to help the public understand and make personal connections to the many ways the Muskegon community participated in the national Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century. To make sure the events, stories, people, and places from the local Muskegon community are not forgotten, and to help make connections to the national movement towards equality, educational materials were developed to share findings and insights of this project with teachers and students in local schools, as well as to develop a sense of pride among students towards their community as they connect historical events in their own neighborhoods to national Civil Rights narratives. These materials will be added to existing outreach kits for K-12 students housed at the Lakeshore Museum Center and initially developed through a partnership between the Coalition for Community Development, the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District, the Muskegon Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the museum.

An Education Element Task Force was formed to offer an opportunity for members of the community to participate in this specific aspect of the project. The Task Force included the following members:

- **Rebecca Bush**, Social Studies Specialist, Muskegon Public Schools
- **Tom Hinken**, Social Studies Consultant, Muskegon Area Intermediate School District
- **Jamie Pesch**, Planner, City of Muskegon
- **Jennifer Reeths**, Assistant Program Manager, Lakeshore Museum Center
- **Kristen Renes**, Social Studies Consultant, Muskegon Area Intermediate School District
- **Fatima Roberson**, Teacher, Muskegon High School
- **Kerri VanderHoff**, Executive Director Coalition for Community Development

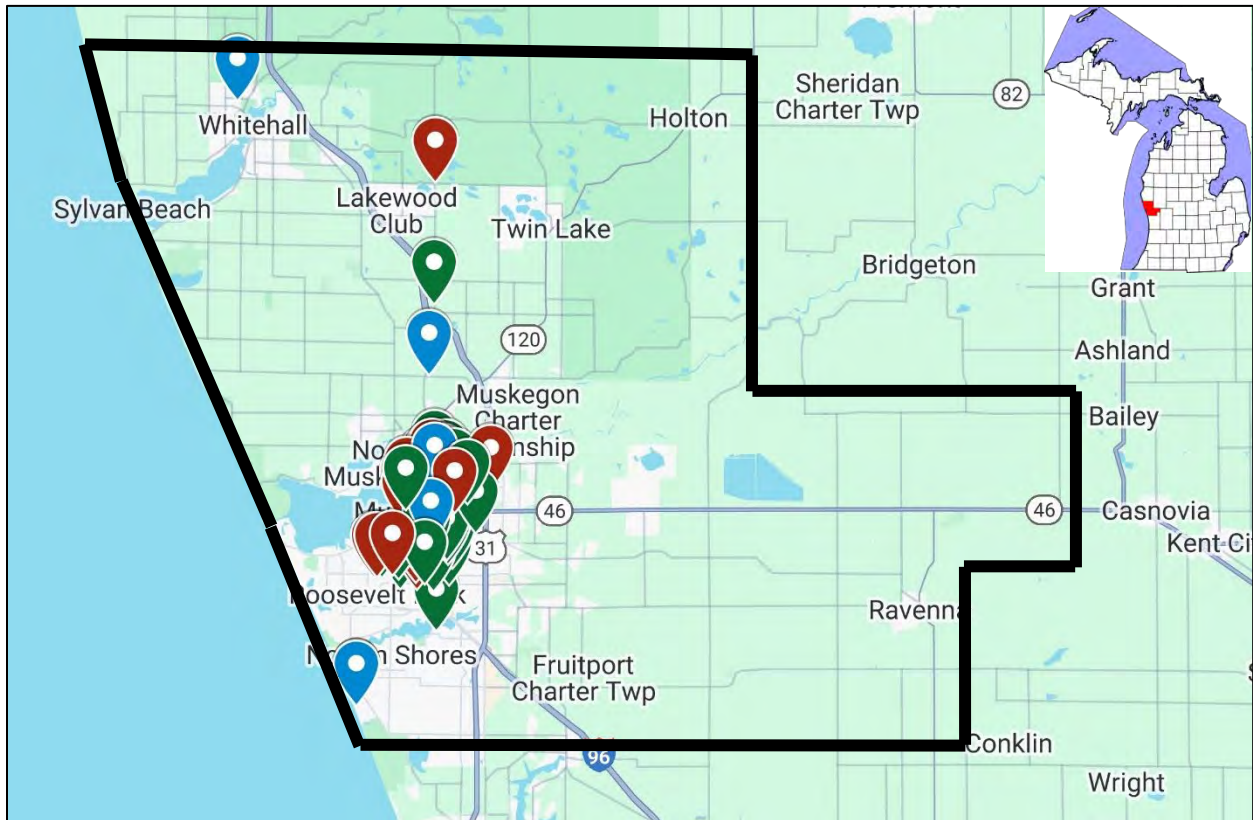
The Task Force had an initial virtual meeting on December 15, 2022, with a follow-up meeting on March 22, 2023, to discuss the format of the Education Element, supplementary materials, and methods to obtain feedback from teachers and students. A third meeting was held May 9, 2023, to begin to implement development of these materials. However, during this meeting, it was discovered that the selected education element format, a StoryMap, did not meet school district access policies. Instead, a series of Chat Stations, with corresponding lesson plans, have been developed for inclusion

in the outreach kits. Each set of Chat Stations is connected to Michigan Social Study Standards and will allow students to explore and critically engage with some of the primary source materials uncovered during this project. However, the unexpected change to the format of these materials and the short period of time remaining to complete project deliverables did not allow for a test group of students and teachers to offer feedback. However, select staff did review the materials and provide feedback.

A final virtual meeting with the Advisory Committee, Education Element Task Force, general public, and other stakeholders was held on February 26, 2024, to review the findings of the project, including historic contexts identified, surveyed properties, demolished properties, and opportunities for future projects. Staff at the State Historic Preservation Office led the meeting with support from the consultant, and additional public meetings to review the findings of the project are planned for the Muskegon and Muskegon Heights city councils.

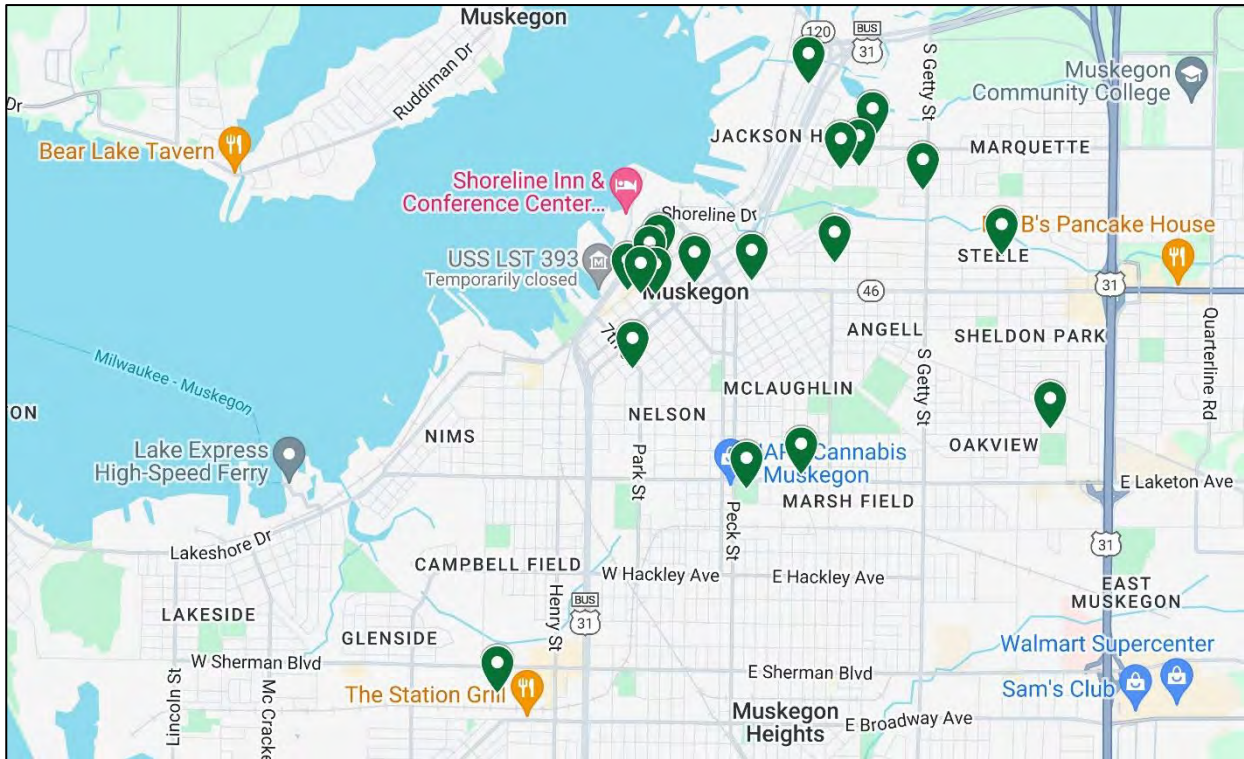
Maps of Project Study Area

Map 1: Map of Study Area



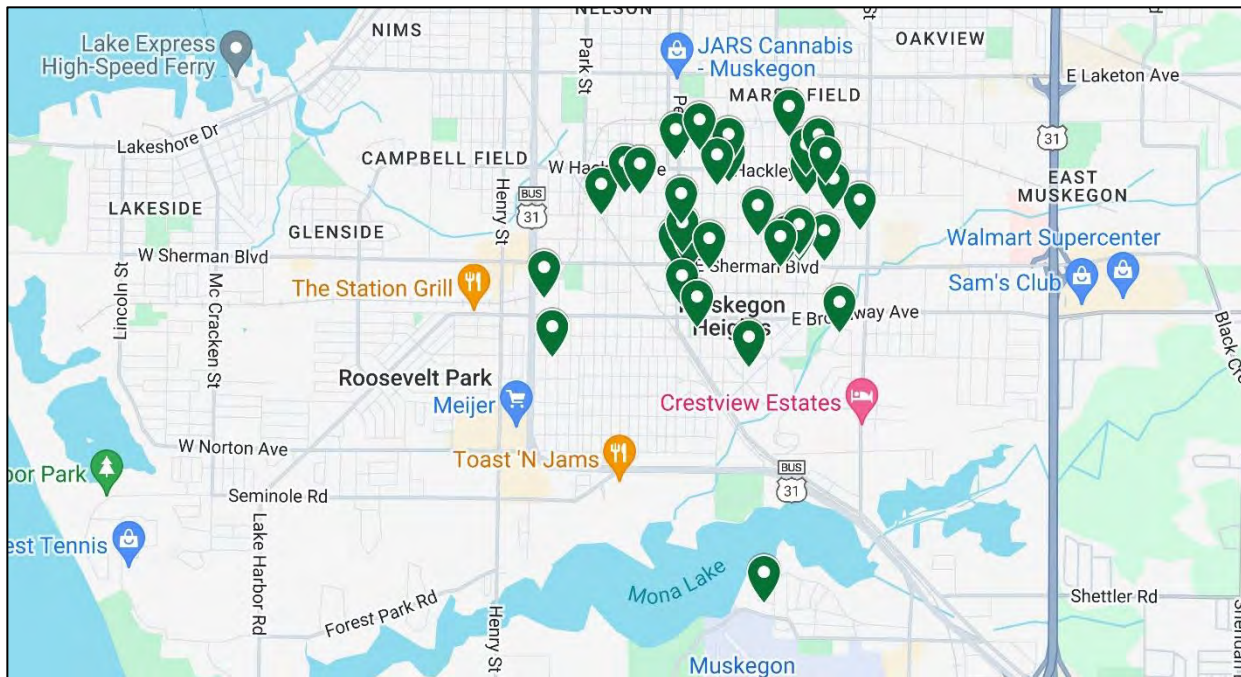
Green Markers – Surveyed Properties
Red Markets – Demolished Properties
Blue Markers – Properties Warranting Further Research and Survey
(Base Map from Google Maps 2024)

Map 2: Map of Surveyed Properties in the City of Muskegon



(Base Map from Google Maps 2024)

Map 3: Properties Surveyed in Muskegon Heights and Norton Shores



(Base Map from Google Maps 2024)

Historic Context

Introduction

Settlement of Muskegon – 1700s to 1890

Muskegon County is located in western Michigan on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. In the western half of the county, the cities of Muskegon (the county seat), Muskegon Heights, and Norton Shores form an urban core on the lakeshore, which is surrounded by smaller municipalities including North Muskegon, Roosevelt Park, Montague, and Whitehall. The eastern half of the county is primarily rural, including the villages of Casnovia, Fruitport, and Ravenna. The county population as of 2020 totaled over 175,800 people.

Established in 1859, the county was named for the Muskegon River, which flows southwest from Houghton Lake in Rosecommon County to the City of Muskegon. There it forms Muskegon Lake, a drowned river mouth estuary, before flowing into Lake Michigan. Known by Indigenous peoples as *maskigong*, meaning swamp or marsh place, the name was later anglicized to Muskegon.² Throughout the county there are a number of smaller rivers, streams, and glacial lakes. Of the approximately 1,460 square miles making up Muskegon County, about 960 square miles – comprising over sixty-five percent – is water. The remaining 500 square miles is a relatively flat or rolling topography.

Though there is evidence of prehistoric peoples living along the Muskegon River as early as the Woodland Period (3000 BC to 1000 AD), the earliest known Indigenous peoples were the Ottawa. In the eighteenth century, Ottawa bands moved south from the Straits of Mackinac to establish villages along Little Traverse Bay. They were successful corn farmers, fur traders, and fishermen, and their population increased rapidly. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, they continued to establish new villages southward along the Lake Michigan shoreline, including the village of Muskegon near the present-day city.³

Relationships between Indigenous peoples and European settlers appears to have been relatively cordial during the early years of White settlement. However, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the fur trade had gone into decline, Europeans encroached on tribal lands, and disease and hard winters threatened Indigenous people and European settlers alike.⁴ Present-day Michigan was originally part of the Northwest Territory, ceded by Great Britain to the United States with present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and eastern Minnesota following the Revolutionary War. The Michigan Territory was carved out of this larger region in 1805. However, before allowing White settlement, the federal government began displacing the Indigenous peoples so the land could be surveyed, documented, and subdivided for sale, further straining relations between Indigenous and European people.

In addition, the Ottawa in the northern regions of Michigan had amassed great debts to traders who began to demand payment as the fur trade dwindled. The Ottawa sent representatives to Washington, D.C., to negotiate the cession of undesirable land to raise money to pay the debts. The resulting Treaty of Washington between the Ottawa and Ojibwa peoples and the United States government ceded over

² Virgil J. Vogel, *Indian Names in Michigan*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), 136-137.

³ Charles E. Cleland, *Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan's Native Americans* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992), 19-22, 147; Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed., *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 133.

⁴ Cleland, *Rites of Conquest*, 225.

thirteen million acres of land in the southeastern lower peninsula, northwestern lower peninsula, and eastern upper peninsula of Michigan – approximately thirty-seven percent of the state’s present-day land area.⁵

In exchange, the Ottawa and Ojibwa were to receive fourteen reservations scattered throughout the ceded lands, as well as annuities for education, health care, religious missions, agricultural equipment, and other provisions. The treaty was signed in 1836 and Indigenous leaders were pleased to have secured permanent homes and the right to continue hunting and fishing on the ceded lands. However, the United States senate altered the treaty, without consent from the Ottawa and Ojibwa tribes, limiting use of the reservations to only five years. Though the revisions included the option to extend this period, by the time Michigan gained statehood in 1837, White Michiganders were already clamoring for the removal of the Ottawa and Ojibwa peoples from the reservations.⁶

By that time, however, settlement of the United States was progressing into the western frontier faster than its northern reaches, making removal of Indigenous peoples into the west impractical. In addition, Indian agents and missionaries in northern Michigan reported the Ottawa and Ojibwa peoples were becoming “civilized,” citing their use of American clothing, attendance at schools, conversion to Christianity, and agricultural production. In truth, as anthropologist and archaeologist Charles Cleland notes, the tribes “gave the illusion of ‘progress’... [but] remained fundamentally true to their own cultural traditions.”⁷ Their efforts to satisfy government agents were rewarded – though imperfectly – by the July 1855 Treaty of Detroit, which granted permanent allotments of land to the Ottawa and Ojibwa tribes. Of the twelve federally recognized sovereign tribal governments in the state of Michigan, six remain on their ancestral Ottawa and Ojibwa lands in the northwestern lower peninsula and eastern upper peninsula, though no Indigenous communities remain in the immediate area near Muskegon.⁸

European settlement in the Muskegon area began immediately after statehood in the late 1830s. At that time, what is now present-day Muskegon County was located partially in Ottawa County to its south and partially in Oceana County to its north. When Muskegon County was formally established in 1859, Muskegon had grown to a bustling village of about 1,400 people, and the 1863 directory listed a variety of businesses and industries in Muskegon, including hotels, grocery stores, general stores, pharmacies, bakeries, cobbler shops, banks, millinery shops, saloons, tailor shops, blacksmith shops, carriage and



Image 1: Bird's Eye View of the City of Muskegon, 1868
(Library of Congress)

⁵ Cleland, *Rites of Conquest*, 225-227.

⁶ Cleland, *Rites of Conquest*, 227-229.

⁷ Cleland, *Rites of Conquest*, 229-230.

⁸ Michigan State University, Native American Institute, “Michigan Tribal Governments,” <https://nai.msu.edu/about/michigan-tribal-governments>.

harness shops, foundries, and sawmills, as well as lawyers, physicians, daguerreotypists, gunsmiths, carpenters, and masons.⁹



*Image 2: Mary and Abner Bennett, c.1860
(Eyler, Muskegon County)*

One of the first African American families to arrive in the region was Methodist Deacon Abner Bennett and his wife Mary. Abner Bennett had escaped enslavement in the South, settling in Canada before coming with Mary to establish a farm on the White River at 7925 Old Channel Trail near Montague (no longer extant) in the 1840s. The Bennetts are credited with bringing organized religion to the Whitehall-Montague area, where Abner Bennett served as a Methodist preacher. In the 1850s, the Bennetts traveled the seventeen miles to Muskegon each Sunday to preach, and they helped start a number of Methodist churches in western Michigan. It is also believed their home may have been a stop on the Underground Railroad, though this has not been confirmed.¹⁰

Many newcomers came to Muskegon County from the New England region, drawn to the area by large stands of timber, especially White Pine. Cut timber was sent down the Muskegon River to Muskegon Lake, where three mills had begun operations in 1838. Within two years, these mills were cutting 13,000 board feet daily, and by the lumbering peak in the 1880s, thirty-seven mills produced over 5.5 million board feet daily.¹¹

By the turn of the twentieth century, timber in the region had been overharvested and the lumber industry was in steep decline. Only one mill, Gow and Campbell Sawmill, remained in operation by 1896, the last timber harvest was sent down the Muskegon River in 1905, and the Gow and Campbell mill closed in 1910. Muskegon's population declined as the lumbering jobs disappeared, with the population dropping from about 24,000 people in 1888 to about 18,000 people in 1896. As James Glasgow noted in his 1939 doctoral dissertation, "Muskegon was threatened with the fate that had overtaken many other lumbering towns – a nearly complete collapse of industry and commerce."¹²



*Image 3: Logs Floating on the Muskegon River, 1887
(Hackley Public Library)*

⁹ Charles F. Clark, *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1863-4* (Detroit: Office of City Directory and Commercial Advertiser, 1893), 413-414.

¹⁰ Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church, "Road-Trip Through Michigan Methodist History, Part 1," <https://michiganumc.org/road-trip-through-methodist-history-part-1>, updated August 23, 2022; Jonathan Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise* (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, 1986), 75; Jim Schaub and Rod Schaub, "Up From the Bottoms: The Search for the American Dream," documentary film narrated by Cicely Tyson, 2009, www.upfromthebottoms.com.

¹¹ Daniel J. Yakes, "History of Muskegon," *Muskegon County*, <https://www.co.muskegon.mi.us/770/History-of-Muskegon>; James Glasgow, "Muskegon Michigan: The Evolution of a Lake Port," Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, Department of Geography, 1939, 13.

¹² Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 49; Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 78.

Context 1: Muskegon County's Early African American Community – 1890 to 1940

The Transition from Lumber to Diversified Industry – 1890 to 1920

With the end of lumbering, local leaders began efforts to entice new industries to Muskegon County. Industrial development typically followed the rail lines, and since railroad service extended south of the village of Muskegon, development took place in this area in the late nineteenth century. A group of local businessmen formed the Muskegon Improvement Company in 1888 and within two years had accumulated about one thousand acres along the Pere Marquette Railroad. The land was subdivided to allot ten acres for public parks, 110 acres for industrial plants, and the rest for residential neighborhoods. This area became Muskegon Heights, initially a suburb of the village of Muskegon.¹³

The first land sale in Muskegon Heights took place in May 1890, during which 2,800 lots were sold. Within a year, about three hundred people had moved to the area. The next sale took place in September 1891, during which another two thousand lots were sold. Within another year, the population of Muskegon Heights had grown to about 1,300 people and four hundred new houses had been constructed. Seven industries had committed to building plants in Muskegon Heights: Alaska Refrigeration Company, Morton Manufacturing Company, Standard Malleable Iron Works, Kelley Brothers Manufacturing Company, Nelson Piano Company, Gray Brothers Manufacturing Company, and Shaw Crane Works, with the payroll of the factories totaling about \$20,000 monthly.¹⁴



Image 4: Standard Malleable Iron Company, date unknown (MLive)

Even more effective were the efforts of lumbermen Charles Hackley, Thomas Hume, Newcomb McGraft, and others, as well as the Chamber of Commerce and civic leaders, who worked together to establish a bonus fund for new industries. Bonuses were typically equivalent to \$100 per person the company expected to employ, offered in exchange for a mortgage on the factory. If the company's employment figures averaged the anticipated number over the first seven years of operation, the debt was canceled. Inability to maintain the average employment resulted in prorated repayment of the bonus. Failed companies were acquired and resold by the Chamber of Commerce. In addition to the bonus fund, Muskegon County was an attractive location for industry because unemployed lumbermen made a skilled workforce readily available, lumber barons reinvested their capital to support new industry in the village, and the village was well-connected by railroads and ferries to major markets.¹⁵

¹³ Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 52-54.

¹⁴ Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 54-57; Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 87.

¹⁵ Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 57-60; Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 81-85.

These factors proved successful in attracting new industry to Muskegon County. Amazon Hosiery Mill, founded in Michigan City, Indiana, accepted a \$50,000 bonus to relocate to Muskegon in 1895, building a facility at 530-550 West Western Avenue (extant). When the company failed to employ the anticipated 500-600 workers, Hackley and Hume invested in its reorganization, renaming the company Amazon Knitting Mill and employing six hundred workers, mostly women, in producing mittens, stockings, socks, and other cotton



*Image 5: Amazon Knitting Mill, 1911
(Community Archives of Belleville & Hastings County)*

knit items in high demand in western Michigan.¹⁶ Continental Motors Manufacturing Company had been established in Chicago in 1902. It had grown rapidly, and needing space for expansion, the company accepted a bonus and came to Muskegon in 1905. By the end of its first seven years, the company had exceeded the employment requirements of the bonus and in 1919 the village released the mortgage.¹⁷ Founded in 1846 in Chicago, Brunswick-Balke-Collendar (later known as Brunswick Billiards and Bowling Company) also came to the village during this time. Hackley and Hume personally visited the company's president to entice him to build the next plant in Muskegon, which he did in 1906, accepting a \$50,000 bonus for employing five hundred people. The company produced billiard cues and bowling balls at its plant on Messler Street, adjacent to the railroad tracks (no longer

extant).¹⁸ Central Paper Company accepted a \$10,000 bonus to relocate to Muskegon, building a factory on a former sawmill site on Muskegon Lake and producing kraft and gift-wrapping paper.¹⁹



*Image 6: Aerial View of Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company, date unknown
(Hackley Public Library)*

Some of the existing industries in the area shifted production to manufacture supplies for these new companies, while other companies relocated to Muskegon for the same reason. The Shaw-Walker Company was founded in Muskegon in 1899, producing wooden file boxes and later expanding to manufacture office furniture as well. Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company (CWC) was established in Muskegon in 1908 to produce castings for the Racine Boat Manufacturing Company and soon after began producing engine blocks for

¹⁶ Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 76-77; Charles C. Cotman, "Amazon Hosiery Mill," Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, 1982.

¹⁷ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 87, 144-145.

¹⁸ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 87, 180; Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 75.

¹⁹ Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 77.

Continental Motors. These were so successful that the company also began producing castings for Reo Motors, International Harvester, Dodge Brothers, and Fordson Tractors, expanding to build new facilities in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights.²⁰ Sealed Power Corporation was founded in 1911 and produced engine parts, primarily piston rings for Continental Motors.²¹ The E.H. Sheldon Manufacturing Company opened in Muskegon in 1912, producing laboratory equipment for industrial plants and schools.²²

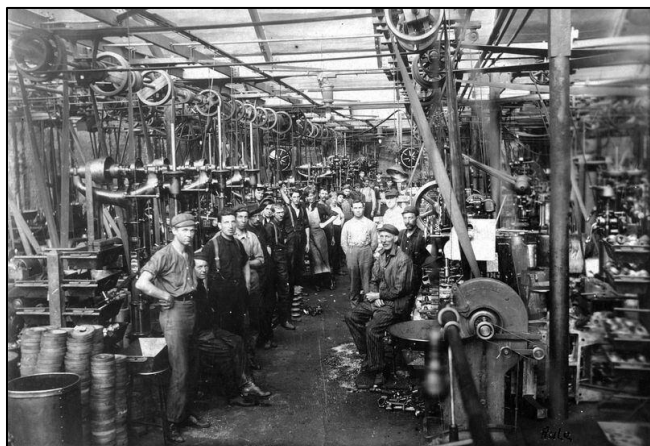


Image 7: Continental Motors, 1915
(Lakeshore Museum)

Industrial jobs were relatively stable and well-paying, but job opportunities for African American residents in Muskegon in the early twentieth century were generally limited to low-paying labor or service jobs. Men often worked as porters, bellboys, teamsters, barbers, day laborers, janitors, or chauffeurs, while women worked as nannies, laundresses, or cooks.²³ As a result, the African American population was relatively small during this time and their homes were scattered throughout the villages of Muskegon and Muskegon Heights.

In spite of these challenges, African American residents began to establish their own distinct community institutions in the early twentieth century. The most important of these was the

church, which is “the single most significant institution in African-American life.”²⁴ Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church is the oldest African American congregation in Muskegon County, founded in 1910. Reverend J.W. Crushon was elected to serve as the first pastor, and for many years, they met in temporary locations, including members’ homes, vacant churches, and local businesses. Though they received advice and financial support from White Baptist congregations in the village, White neighbors complained that their Sunday services were too loud, forcing them to relocate frequently. By 1920 the congregation had acquired a house at 567 Ottawa Street to serve as the church and parsonage (no longer extant).²⁵

Growth and Depression – 1920 to 1940

Industry continued to boom in Muskegon County through the 1920s as the rapidly rising popularity of personal automobiles resulted in increased demand for automobile-related manufacturing. Glasgow noted that by the 1930s, “practically every automobile manufactured in the United States [had] one or more parts produced [in Muskegon].”²⁶ As industry in Muskegon County expanded, residential neighborhoods also expanded. In the 1920s, east Muskegon saw much growth, with about eight hundred new homes constructed. Glasgow notes these homes were of poor quality, commenting that “the addition of hundreds of low-quality houses has not enhanced the appearance of certain residential districts. Inasmuch as Greater Muskegon is preeminently industrial, the districts in which

²⁰ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 98, 160, 176-178.

²¹ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 160.

²² Glasgow, “Muskegon, Michigan,” 75-76.

²³ US Census Bureau, *United States Federal Census*, 1900, 1910, www.ancestry.com.

²⁴ West, “Historic Rural African-American Churches,” Section E, 2.

²⁵ “The Bethesda Journey,” *History of the African American Churches in Muskegon County* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

²⁶ Glasgow, “Muskegon, Michigan,” 74.

factory workers live comprise a large portion of the total residential area. Only in Glenside and in North Muskegon are there districts that contain, for the most part, homes of professional people and 'white-collar' workers."²⁷ Neighborhoods were built so quickly it was difficult for city amenities to keep pace. Muskegon Heights, for example, was still largely without city water or modern plumbing until well into the 1930s. Many of the neighborhoods in Muskegon Heights were home to African American factory workers, and redlining practices would later reinforce and perpetuate the housing disparities Glasgow observed.

On the other hand, job opportunities for African American workers began to improve in the 1920s. Some African American residents still found work as porters, bellboys, teamsters, janitors, laborers, chauffeurs, nannies, housekeepers, and laundresses. But others obtained jobs at foundries, motor companies, or other industrial plants where they worked as machinists, cement finishers, testers, molders, inspectors, and smelters. An African American professional class also began to emerge by this time, and the 1920 census shows the first African American physicians, business owners, and full-time ministers.²⁸

With better job prospects, the African American population was growing, and this growth is reflected in the establishment of several African American churches in the 1920s. Beulah Missionary Baptist Church was founded at 2601 Manz Street in Muskegon Heights in 1922. The congregation first met under a brush arbor at this location, soon building a small frame church for which CWC had donated the lumber. Construction on a new church began in 1928 and was completed in 1940, but it was destroyed by fire in 1949. The current building, designed by Frank Bergatrom, was completed in 1951.²⁹ John Wesley AME Zion Church was formed in 1923 by Reverend O. Stearns of Grand Rapids. The congregation built a church at 23 East Webster Avenue (no longer extant) in the Jackson Hill neighborhood, where they worshipped until around 1970.³⁰



Image 8: Sketch of Beulah Missionary Baptist Church, destroyed 1949
(Jackson Museum of African American History)

The "Roaring Twenties" came to an abrupt halt with the stock market crash in 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression. Though banks fared relatively well in Muskegon – two banks failed in 1931 but the other three survived the Depression – the challenges faced by local industries severely impacted both White and Black residents. In July 1929, there were over 18,000 people employed in Muskegon County, and by the end of the year, that number had dropped to about 12,600 people. By the end of 1932, only about 6,300 people were employed in the county. The number of people dependent on welfare in the City of Muskegon became so high that the city required one person on each residential block to be employed doing odd jobs for his neighbors, each of whom contributed fifty cents per day to his wages, known as the "man-a-block" program.³¹ Likewise, industries worked together to establish a "share-the-work" program, devised by Shaw-Walker

²⁷ Glasgow, "Muskegon, Michigan," 70-71.

²⁸ US Census Bureau, *United States Federal Census*, 1920, www.ancestry.com.

²⁹ "Beulah Missionary Baptist Church: Her History," *History of the African American Churches in Muskegon County* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

³⁰ Susan E. Harrison, "Rev. Jones – he followed God and led the way," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, March 9, 1986, Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, Box 13, Folder 430: Printed Material, Newspaper Clippings, 1961-1962, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

³¹ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 109.

Company co-founder Louis C. Walker. Walker described the goal of program: “to spread the available work, not only in industrial plants but also in offices, stores, banks, and other service institutions and community administration activities.”³² This program helped alleviate the strain on the welfare program but did little to improve workers’ economic situations as they worked only part-time hours for just half of their pre-Depression wages. Churches, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, Welfare Mission, and other local service organizations filled the gaps to ensure residents had food and other basic needs.³³ These challenges continued until the United States’ entry into World War II brought economic recovery.

³² Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 162-165.

³³ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 109, 162-165.

Context 2: African Americans and “the Arsenal of Democracy” – 1940 to 1965

Wartime Manufacturing in Muskegon County

The Great Depression ended in Muskegon County when war-related manufacturing reignited the local economy. Funding for the United States military had decreased in the 1930s as the federal government focused funding on government assistant programs. As a result, the U.S. military was a much smaller force, there was no substantial munitions industry in the country, and the vehicles and weapons were, for the most part, technologically obsolete. Meanwhile, Germany was demonstrating its superior military power as it heavily recruited soldiers, mass produced military vehicles and weapons, and utilized advanced technology, especially warplanes.³⁴

By 1940, the United States could no longer avoid the war as the threat of a German attack on the United States increased. That December, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a fireside chat during which he told listeners, “Guns, planes, ships, and many other things have to be built in the factories and the arsenals of America. They have to be produced by workers and managers and engineers with the aid of machines which in turn have to be built by hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the land... We must be the great arsenal of democracy.”³⁵

Muskegon answered this national call to action as several local industrial plants converted to manufacturing war-related products. By this time Continental Motors had shifted production from automobile engines to primarily engines for farm equipment, heavy construction machinery, and aircraft. In 1942, the company began producing engines for pursuit and bomber planes, tanks, trucks, and other military vehicles, increasing employment from 700 workers to 5,000 workers. By 1944, the company employed 11,000 people, about a quarter of whom were women.³⁶ Buehrle Engineering Company, founded in Muskegon in 1940, produced tools, dies, and fixtures for appliances. By the following year, the company had turned to wartime production, manufacturing landing struts for Army gliders and increasing employment from six people to sixty people.³⁷ Other industries were established specifically for wartime production, such as the Kaydon Corporation, which manufactured bearings for Bofors gun mounts on U.S. Navy warships.³⁸ Even Brunswick Bowling and Billiards Corporation participated in wartime manufacturing, producing plywood airplanes, gliders, and landing craft; bombing flares; and tent frames.³⁹



Image 9: Continental Motors, c.1950
(The Muskegon Chronicle)

³⁴ A.J. Baime, *The Arsenal of Democracy* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2015), xvii-xix.

³⁵ Baime, *The Arsenal of Democracy*, xvii-xix.

³⁶ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 110, 144-145.

³⁷ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 172-173.

³⁸ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 151.

³⁹ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 110, 180.

One of the largest wartime manufacturers was Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company, which operated four plants in the area by the start of World War II: the Hercules Plant (formerly Racine Boat Works Foundry) on Sanford Street at the waterfront of Muskegon Lake, Plant No 1 (formerly Enterprise Iron Works) at West Broadway Avenue and Sanford Street in Muskegon Heights, Plant No 2 (formerly



*Image 10: Steel Tank Treads Leaving Furnace at Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon, c.1945
(CWC-Textron)*

Pyle Pattern and Manufacturing Company) across Sanford Street from Plant No 1, and Plant No 3, built on Henry Street near West Sherman Boulevard (none extant). The company began wartime production in 1941 making track links for British Army tanks, diesel engine blocks for US Navy ships and landing craft, crankshafts for submarine engines, and cylinder sleeves for a variety of military engines. To accommodate the increased production for war-related materials, the company opened Plant No 4 (formerly Shaw Crane Works) at 500 West Broadway Avenue in Muskegon Heights, Plant No 5 at 1085 West Sherman Boulevard (both extant), and Plant No 6 on West Sherman Boulevard next to Plant No 5 (no longer extant).⁴⁰

Muskegon's Great Migration

Muskegon's war-time manufacturing required a substantially larger workforce, and as a result, new doors for employment were opened to African Americans during this time. This was true not just in Muskegon, but in many cities with increased war-related industry. In an effort to ensure uninterrupted production of materials needed for the war effort, and under pressure by Civil Rights organizations, President Roosevelt signed an executive order in 1941 that banned racial discrimination in companies that were awarded defense contracts or manufactured war-related products.⁴¹ This had the additional effect of bringing some measure of open employment opportunities, and, as historian Sydney Fine notes, "fair employment occupied the central place in the national struggle for civil rights" at that time.⁴²



*Image 11: African American Workers Pour Cylinder Blocks at Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon, c.1945
(CWC-Textron)*

The federal government often funded the purchase of machinery necessary for local

⁴⁰ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 110, 176-178; Wally E. George, *That First Casting Must Be Good* (Muskegon, MI: George W. Cannon Company, 1964) 47, 49-50, 58, 72-74, 127-132, 145; Personal Communication with Jim Heethuis (former General Manager) by Cheri Szcodronski, April 7, 2023, at CWC-Textron, Muskegon; 1911 Sanborn Map; 1923 Sanborn Map; 1950 Sanborn Map.

⁴¹ Sydney Fine, *"Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights": Michigan, 1948-1968* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 12.

⁴² Fine, *"Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,"* 12.



Image 12: 1944 Trade Magazine Advertisement for Sealed Power

draft board was taking our people, and so we had to go out recruiting.”⁴⁶

At CWC, most employees in the business office took on recruiting duties under Workman's supervision, including Workman himself. His children recall that he traveled by train throughout Alabama, usually utilizing federal employment offices to interview candidates, but on occasion visiting the local tavern to recruit and interview candidates.⁴⁷ "I'd have photos of the plant and the area and I would emphasize the fact that they were helping the war effort," Workman recalled.⁴⁸ Those who accepted the positions offered received a train ticket and \$2.00 for a meal during the journey.⁴⁹ Esple Sargent recalled that in 1942 the draft board in his hometown of Magnolia, Arkansas, gave him the option of working in a war defense plant or being drafted into the military. He chose to leave his job at a Magnolia sawmill and relocate to Muskegon – a city he had never even heard of – where he was immediately hired by CWC. After the war, he and his wife,

foundries to meet wartime production needs.⁴³ In addition to the pressure this put on industries to produce materials required by the military, Muskegon's foundries were also faced with the reality that the city's White population could not support the area's labor needs. Walter M. Brooks, a personnel manager at Sealed Power Corporation, appealed to the War Manpower Commission (WMC), appointed by President Roosevelt to organize the war effort and enforce the 1941 executive order preventing labor discrimination. "We at the Sealed Power Corp. have a vital need for thirty-five men to adequately man our foundry," he wrote. "We have information that the southwestern district of Arkansas has a surplus of manpower..."⁴⁴ Soon, under the supervision and control of the WMC, Sealed Power Corporation, Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company, Lakey Foundry, Continental Motors, and others began sending recruiters to Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, and even New Mexico, enticing Black laborers to come north for jobs.⁴⁵ CWC recruiting coordinator Harold Workman recalled, "We needed some more help. The



Image 13: War Production Advertisement
for Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry
(CWC-Textron)

⁴³ Personal Communication with John Workman (foundry employee and son of foundry recruiter) and Marti Workman (daughter of foundry recruiter) by Cheri Szcodronski, May 10, 2023, at Eagle Alloy Administrative Offices, Muskegon.

⁴⁴ John Swartley, "Recruiting: Southern Blacks Answer 'Vital Need,'" *The Muskegon Chronicle*, date unknown, Lakeshore Museum Center, Muskegon.

⁴⁵ Swartley, "Recruiting"; Kim Jordan and Clayton Hardiman, "Blacks rode rails, roads north to join in Muskegon's war boom," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, date unknown, *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁴⁶ Schaub, "Up From the Bottoms."

⁴⁷ Personal Communication with John Workman and Marti Workman.

⁴⁸ Swartley, "Recruiting."

⁴⁹ Swartley, "Recruiting."

Ruby, decided to stay in Muskegon, and he continued to work at the foundry until his retirement in 1963.⁵⁰

Lakey Foundry's recruiters had a similar system to that of their counterparts at CWC, though they more frequently visited country bars to recruit new workers, who they sent north on buses. They also recruited Black preachers to assist them, offering a \$3.00-5.00 finder's fee for any recruit they sent north, followed by an additional bonus if the recruit remained on the job for at least three months.⁵¹ Magnolia, Arkansas, resident C.Z. Payne remembers workers leaving town by the busloads in the early 1940s, many recruited by Reverend Edward Furlough who recruited for Lakey Foundry from 1943 until 1947. "[Reverend Furlough] went up to Muskegon pretty early and he went to coming down here sending people back up there. He'd come down here and the company up there would send him the money to get so many men," Payne recalled.⁵² "They were one of our best sources," recalled Lakey personnel manager H.J. Mackay. Mackay later estimated that Lakey brought four to five thousand men to Muskegon between 1942 and 1945.⁵³



Image 14: Lakey Foundry, c.1972
(*The Muskegon Chronicle*)

There was some controversy over the recruiting of Southern Black laborers, with recruiters sometimes run out of town and branded "man catchers." Still an agricultural-based economy, Southern landowners "didn't want their people taken away because then they couldn't get enough farm hands," explained CWC recruiter Dan Connell. "They thought we were stealing their best help and, in reality, we were."⁵⁴

Those who chose to migrate north did so hoping to escape the discrimination and poverty they experienced in the South. Jerry Lottie was born in Arkansas, where he recalled, "We had very little to say about our conditions." He came to Muskegon seeking better opportunities and better quality of life, taking a job at Sealed Power.⁵⁵ Robert Dowson, originally from Mississippi, had a similar experience: "[We] were looking for a better place. Segregation in the South was ridiculous... [We were] coming here looking for jobs and freedom... A man hates it with a passion when he's not treated as a man." Rillastine Wilkins recalls that in her hometown in Oklahoma, "segregation was really, really

⁵⁰ Wilma Randle, "Crossing Paths Lead to Muskegon," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, date unknown, *African Americans in Muskegon Exhibit*, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁵¹ Swartley, "Recruiting."

⁵² Jonesetta Lassiter, "C.Z. Payne: Glad to be breathing 'the good air,'" *The Muskegon Chronicle*, date unknown (December 1979 assumed), "African American" Vertical File, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon; Swartley, "Recruiting."

⁵³ Swartley, "Recruiting."

⁵⁴ John Swartley, "Recruiting: Southern Blacks Answer 'Vital Need,'" *The Muskegon Chronicle*, date unknown, Lakeshore Museum Center, Muskegon.

⁵⁵ Personal Communication with Jerry Lottie (Civil Rights activist) by Cheri Szcodronski, August 2, 2023, via Zoom.

enforced.” She left to live with family in Ohio, returning to Oklahoma after graduating high school. “The mistake I made, I went back,” she recalls. “I went back to where I started from, the same little Black town that offered me nothing.” She then came to Muskegon to seek better opportunities. However, many Black newcomers found Muskegon to be much like the Southern states they had left behind. Dowson recalled that when he arrived, “Michigan was just about as bad [as Mississippi].”⁵⁶ Wilkins had a similar experience: “When I got here I was shocked,” she recalls. “I thought when you got up north, ‘here’s the freedom land.’ But they were all prejudiced. They were all Black and White. I made \$15 [a week] in Oklahoma and I made \$15 [a week] here. And that was it. It was Black and White and you were separated.”⁵⁷ Reverend Charles W. Poole, who came to lead Bethesda Baptist Church in the early 1960s, summed up the experiences of many in his congregation: “People found when they came here that the picture was not really like the [employment] recruiter had painted it to be.”⁵⁸

Housing was one of the primary challenges for newcomers, especially in the 1940s. Though companies typically provided housing for new recruits upon their arrival to Muskegon and Muskegon Heights, the cities were simply unprepared for the influx of workers and a desperate housing shortage resulted. African Americans lived in segregated housing, when they could find any housing at all. It was common for boarding houses to rent the same bed to multiple laborers who took shifts sleeping in what became known as “hot beds” because they were said to never get cold.⁵⁹ Some workers rented beds in basements or garages or utilized cots in the City Rescue Mission, but some were left to find shelter as best they could, sleeping in boxcars, parking lots, alleys, or even on the courthouse lawn.⁶⁰ Walter Brooks from Sealed Power recalled, “I sometimes hated to send some of my guys [to the boarding houses].”⁶¹ However, Harold Workman from CWC explained, “I didn’t [feel guilty] because I could see the conditions they were coming from.”⁶² Gladys Givans, who later became the director of the Muskegon Heights Housing Commission, described, “People were living in deplorable circumstances here in Muskegon Heights. There just was no housing for them.”⁶³ By 1943, the situation had become so dire that the War Manpower Commission refused to approve further recruitment of African American laborers from Southern states until adequate housing could be provided.⁶⁴

In an effort to alleviate the housing crisis for African American workers, the Federal Public Housing Agency built temporary housing projects in Muskegon County.⁶⁵ The Green Acres trailer camp (no longer extant), on the west side of Wood Street in the Jackson Hill neighborhood of Muskegon, was specifically designated for single African American men. It is unclear when the camp was established or how many people it housed.⁶⁶ In Muskegon Heights, Fairview Homes was completed in 1943 on East Hovey Street (no longer extant) for African American factory workers. It included over one hundred prefabricated units with two, three, or four bedrooms, a community center with recreational

⁵⁶ Personal Communication with Melvin Burns, Jr., and Robert Dowson (Civil Rights Activists) by Cheri Szcodronski, March 1, 2023, at Dowson Home, Muskegon Heights.

⁵⁷ Personal Communication with Rillastine Wilkins (Civil Rights activist) by Cheri Szcodronski, February 9, 2023, at Wilkins Home, Muskegon Heights.

⁵⁸ Personal Communication with Reverend Charles W. Poole by Cheri Szcodronski, April 20, 2022, at Bethesda Baptist Church, Muskegon.

⁵⁹ Jordan and Hardiman, “Blacks rode rails, roads north”; *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights; Swartley, “Recruiting”; Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁶⁰ Jordan and Hardiman, “Blacks rode rails, roads north”; *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights; Swartley, “Recruiting”; Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁶¹ Swartley, “Recruiting.”

⁶² Swartley, “Recruiting.”

⁶³ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁶⁴ Jordan and Hardiman, “Blacks rode rails, roads north”; *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights; Swartley, “Recruiting.”

⁶⁵ “Fairview Projects in the 40s,” *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁶⁶ “Asks Removal of Green Acres Trailer Housing,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, September 29, 1948, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

opportunities, and space for a preschool. Though the development was segregated, “It was quite an improvement over what was available in Muskegon Heights at the time,” recalled Givans.⁶⁷ The development was occupied to capacity within days of opening, but so many workers needed housing that the complex ultimately had little effect on the housing shortage overall.⁶⁸

Further housing challenges were caused by significant opposition from White officials in both Muskegon and Muskegon Heights, as well as residents of the predominantly White neighborhoods of Muskegon Heights in which these developments were located.⁶⁹ Following complaints from the surrounding community, the Green Acres trailers were sold to the public and removed from the site in 1949. It is unclear where the displaced residents relocated, and soon after, the property was purchased for use as a public park.⁷⁰ Over a year after the completion of Fairview Homes, city officials had still failed to connect the development to city utilities, until forced to do so by a federal court order.⁷¹ In addition, Fairview Homes residents were not aware the development was intended to be temporary. It was replaced by East Park Manor at 615 East Hovey Street (extant), which was built across Ray Street from Fairview Homes in 1964, with many residents simply relocating from one to the other.⁷²



Image 15: Fairview Homes, date unknown
(Jackson Museum of African American History)



Image 16: African American Workers
Clean a Crankshaft at Campbell, Wyant,
& Cannon Foundry, c.1945
(CWC-Textron)

Additional housing proposals during the 1940s population influx included the suggested conversion of vacant factory buildings into dormitories for African American workers and a one-hundred-unit housing development near the Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry. However, White opposition resulted in the abandonment of these projects. Eventually, White housing developments were integrated, starting with Forest Homes at Marquette Avenue and Harvey Street (no longer extant) in 1951, and the housing shortage began to ease.⁷³

A small number of recruits left Muskegon and returned to the South. Some left due to the physical shock of Midwestern winters, others because the work itself was

⁶⁷ Shaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁶⁸ “Fairview Projects in the 40s,” *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁶⁹ Jordan and Hardiman, “Blacks rode rails, roads north”; “Fairview Projects in the 40s,” James Jackson Museum of African American History.

⁷⁰ “Asks Removal of Green Acres Trailer Housing.”

⁷¹ Clayton Hardiman and Kim Jordan, “War Years Bad Years for Blacks,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, date unknown, *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁷² “Housing,” *African Americans in Muskegon* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁷³ Hardiman and Jordan, “War Years Bad Years for Blacks.”

difficult. Newcomers were typically offered hard labor positions on the foundry floor or cleaning room, while White employees typically worked in the core room or management positions. Lifelong resident Spencer Norman recalled, “No matter how talented you were, no matter what you could do, it didn’t make any difference because you were the wrong color.” Similarly, resident Fred Woods recalled, “There was no, or very little, advancement on the job. No matter how good you were at a job, this was your job for life, as far as the Blacks went. For life.”⁷⁴ Other recruits left because they were simply unable to find adequate housing. Dewey Hildreth came to Muskegon in 1946 after many men from his Magnolia, Arkansas, neighborhood had done so during the early 1940s. He immediately found work at CWC, but when he was unable to purchase a home after a year in the city, he returned to Magnolia.⁷⁵

In spite of the difficult work and challenges in housing, the majority of Southern Black recruits, nearly all of whom were men, chose to remain. Givans observed, “It was not a good life, but they made the most of it. They worked hard to better themselves and get better housing.”⁷⁶ Once settled, they sent for their families to join them, and the Black population increased from just over 1,700 people in 1940 to over 7,000 people by the end of World War II.⁷⁷ Bernice Sydnor, who arrived in Muskegon with her family in 1944, explains that “when these men were brought in here from the South, [White residents] thought ‘bring them up and let them work in the factories, and then they’re going to go back after the war.’ But that didn’t happen. They stayed around, and they brought their families up, and that wasn’t supposed to happen.”⁷⁸ Walter Brooks at Sealed Power later recalled there was animosity among White residents, and many “blamed the foundries for bringing Blacks to Muskegon.”⁷⁹

Churches remained the center of African American community life, and several new churches were formed in the 1940s and 1950s to support the growing Black population. In Muskegon Heights, Friendship Missionary Baptist Church was established in the 1940s by Reverend Fred Tucker, who had been a member of Bethesda Baptist Church, though the details of its organization are not clear. The current church at 2428 Ray Street was built in 1944 under the leadership of Reverend Richard Hogue.⁸⁰ Phillip Chapel AME Church formed in the early 1950s and first met at 580 Hackley Avenue (no longer extant). The current church at 2145 Dyson Street was constructed in 1964.⁸¹ In 1953, a group met at the home of Tyree and Emma Jones to establish the Greater Harvest Missionary Baptist Church. The congregation met briefly at the Reynolds Funeral Home and the Phillip Chapel AME



Image 17: Phillip Chapel AME Church

⁷⁴ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁷⁵ Randle, “Crossing Paths Lead to Muskegon.”

⁷⁶ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁷⁷ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁷⁸ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁷⁹ Swartley, “Recruiting.”

⁸⁰ Friendship Baptist Church cornerstone; “The Bethesda Journey,” *History of the African American Churches in Muskegon County* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁸¹ Phillip Chapel AME Church cornerstone; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1951, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1955, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

Church, acquiring its own church building on Riordan Street later that year (no longer extant). The present church building was completed in 1981 and built on the same lot at 2435 Riordan Street in Muskegon Heights. A fellowship hall was added in 1986 and named in memory of the church's founder and first pastor, Reverend Clayborne C. Casey, who served from 1953 until 1982.⁸²

New Black churches formed in Muskegon as well. Led by Elder D.L. Sanders, Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ was established in 1945, first worshipping in Deacon Lewis Hinton's home at 439 Ottawa Street in Muskegon (no longer extant). The congregation grew quickly and purchased a church building at 9 East Muskegon Avenue in 1947 (no longer extant). In 1963, led by Elder George M. Bennett, the congregation purchased the former Jackson Avenue Congregational Church building at 521 Jackson Avenue (extant). The congregation

outgrew this building by the 1980s and in 1982 purchased the former Evangelical Covenant Church at 188 West Muskegon Avenue, where it remains today.⁸³ New Hope Baptist Church was established in 1949 and originally located at 341 Ottawa Street in a residential area of the Jackson Hill



Image 18: New Hope Baptist Church, 1953
(*The Muskegon Chronicle*)

Neighborhood. This building is no longer extant, and most of the surrounding homes have also been demolished, a result of the construction of Business 31/Moses Jones Parkway. In 1953, the New Hope Baptist congregation purchased the former First Lutheran Church, a larger building with a greater seating capacity than the Ottawa Street building, as well as basement spaces for religious education and community events.⁸⁴



Image 19: Central Junior High School (Muskegon Heights Middle School), 1976
(*The Muskegon Chronicle*)

In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a rapid increase in the population in Muskegon Heights, especially children, as many African Americans who had come to Muskegon County for jobs in wartime manufacturing chose to remain in the city

⁸² "The Early History of Greater Harvest Missionary Baptist Church," *History of the African American Churches in Muskegon County* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁸³ "History of Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ," *History of the African American Churches in Muskegon County* Exhibit, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

⁸⁴ "First Lutheran to Build Larger Church; Baptists to Take Possession Next April," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 22, 1953, Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, Box 13, Folder 417: Newspaper Clippings, 1951-1953, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; "Re-Dedication Souvenir Program of the New Hope Baptist Church," No date, Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, Box 13, Folder 383: Michigan, undated, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

with their families. As a result, several new schools were built in Muskegon Heights in the 1950s and 1960s, while older schools were expanded during that time. Muskegon Heights High School at 2441 Sanford Street (recently rebuilt), Central Junior High School at 55 East Sherman Boulevard, and Central Elementary School at 2603 Leahy Street were all located in relatively central locations. Central School was built in 1926 and expanded in 1964, while Central Elementary School was built in 1964 and replaced an earlier, smaller school. Three elementary schools served the northern section of the city: Charles A. Lindbergh School at 160 East Barney Street was built in 1929 and expanded in the 1960s; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School at 600 East Barney Avenue was built in 1951-1952; and Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School at 2301 Sixth Street was built in 1961. Likewise, in the southern section of the city, Theodore Roosevelt School at 525 West Summit Avenue was built in 1929; Edgewood Elementary School at 3028 Howden Street was built around 1955, replacing an earlier, smaller school; and Glendale School at 3001 Jefferson Street was built in the 1960s, also replacing an earlier building (no longer extant).



*Image 20: Glendale School, 2018
(MLive)*

As the African American population increased, racial discrimination also increased, and the late 1940s and early 1950s were a difficult time for Michigan's African American population. Employment discrimination continued, with Black employees almost completely excluded from management positions, skilled jobs, and professional training. Housing remained largely segregated, especially as increasing urban Black populations resulted in widespread White flight to the suburbs. The Michigan Committee on Civil Rights (MCCR) reported there was a prevalence of mass demonstrations in protest of Black housing in White neighborhoods, "an unfortunate chapter" in Michigan history. There were also challenges to equal opportunities in education, as the MCCR reported that it was "the practice of public schools throughout the state to place Black teachers only in schools with large Black enrollments," as well as hiring Black teachers only as substitutes in predominantly White schools and failing to promote Black educators to positions of leadership. The MCCR also reported that limitations on access to public places, including restaurants, stores, entertainment venues, and hospitals, was "one of the most degrading aspects of discrimination... [a] daily humiliation."⁸⁵ These conditions set the stage for the resistance and conflict to come in 1960s Muskegon County.

⁸⁵ Fine, *Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*, 28-30.

Context 3: The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1970

Racial Discrimination in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1960

During the Reconstruction Era, the State of Michigan made several advances in civil rights legislation, including banning racial segregation in education in 1867, prohibiting life insurance companies from discriminating on the basis of race in 1869, and removing the state ban on interracial relationships, prohibiting racial discrimination in public places, and prohibiting racial discrimination in jury selection in 1885. But there was little progress over the next sixty years, and by the 1940s when many African Americans were relocating to Muskegon for wartime manufacturing jobs, civil rights legislation for housing and employment in Michigan were notably absent.⁸⁶ The Michigan Committee on Civil Rights (MCCR) concluded in 1948 that civil rights in the state was “an ugly picture” and that minorities were “constantly humiliated, their livelihood menaced, and their welfare endangered.”⁸⁷

Housing discrimination was one of the most widespread examples of systemic discrimination in Muskegon County, as with much of the country. Between 1935 and 1940, the federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation assigned grades to neighborhoods based on evaluations by local lenders, developers, and real estate appraisers. Using this data, color-coded maps were created to identify the risk level for mortgage lenders. Notoriously discriminatory, these maps almost always identified non-White neighborhoods as the highest risk, discouraging banks from giving home loans to non-White clients and ultimately preventing people of color from accumulating generational wealth.⁸⁸

In the greater Muskegon area, only a portion of North Muskegon was identified as green, or “best,” and a small number of neighborhoods in Muskegon were identified as blue, or “still desirable” – all of which were completely White neighborhoods, allowing no African American or foreign-born residents through a general expectation of de facto segregation. The remainder of the region, encompassing the vast majority of the cities of Muskegon, North Muskegon, and Muskegon Heights, was identified yellow, or “definitely declining,” and red, or “hazardous.” These areas were noted to be primarily working-class, often with predominantly African American or immigrant residents, an increasing population of African American people, or other “detrimental influences.” The Jackson Hill neighborhood in northeast Muskegon, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city and a predominantly immigrant and African American community, was identified red and described as having an “infiltration of Negroes,” increasing African American population, many relief families, and a downward trend of desirability. The Nelson neighborhood in south Muskegon and the East Muskegon Heights neighborhood, also predominantly African American, were similarly described.⁸⁹

Another neighborhood affected by redlining was the West Side neighborhood of Muskegon Heights. Located at the northwestern edge of the city, the neighborhood formed in the 1920s extending west from Peck Street and between West Hackley and West Summit Avenues. It was home to predominantly Black residents who built modest houses, churches, social halls, and a neighborhood school.⁹⁰ By 1938, the neighborhood had been designated red, or “hazardous,” on the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation redlining maps, described as “low class American labor – Aliens and negroes. Negroes increasing in numbers rapidly.”⁹¹ By 1950, the area had begun to shift toward industrialization, with

⁸⁶ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 11-12.

⁸⁷ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 28.

⁸⁸ University of Richmond, Virginia Tech, University of Maryland, and Johns Hopkins University, *Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America*, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>.

⁸⁹ *Mapping Inequality*.

⁹⁰ 1923 Sanborn Map.

⁹¹ *Mapping Inequality*; Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

many of the homes and churches nearest the railroad tracks demolished to make way for large manufacturing facilities and a freight depot.⁹² Some displaced residents moved to predominantly White neighborhoods in the southwest corner of the city, between West Summit Avenue and Norton Township, resulting in the last area of Muskegon Heights with integrated neighborhoods.⁹³

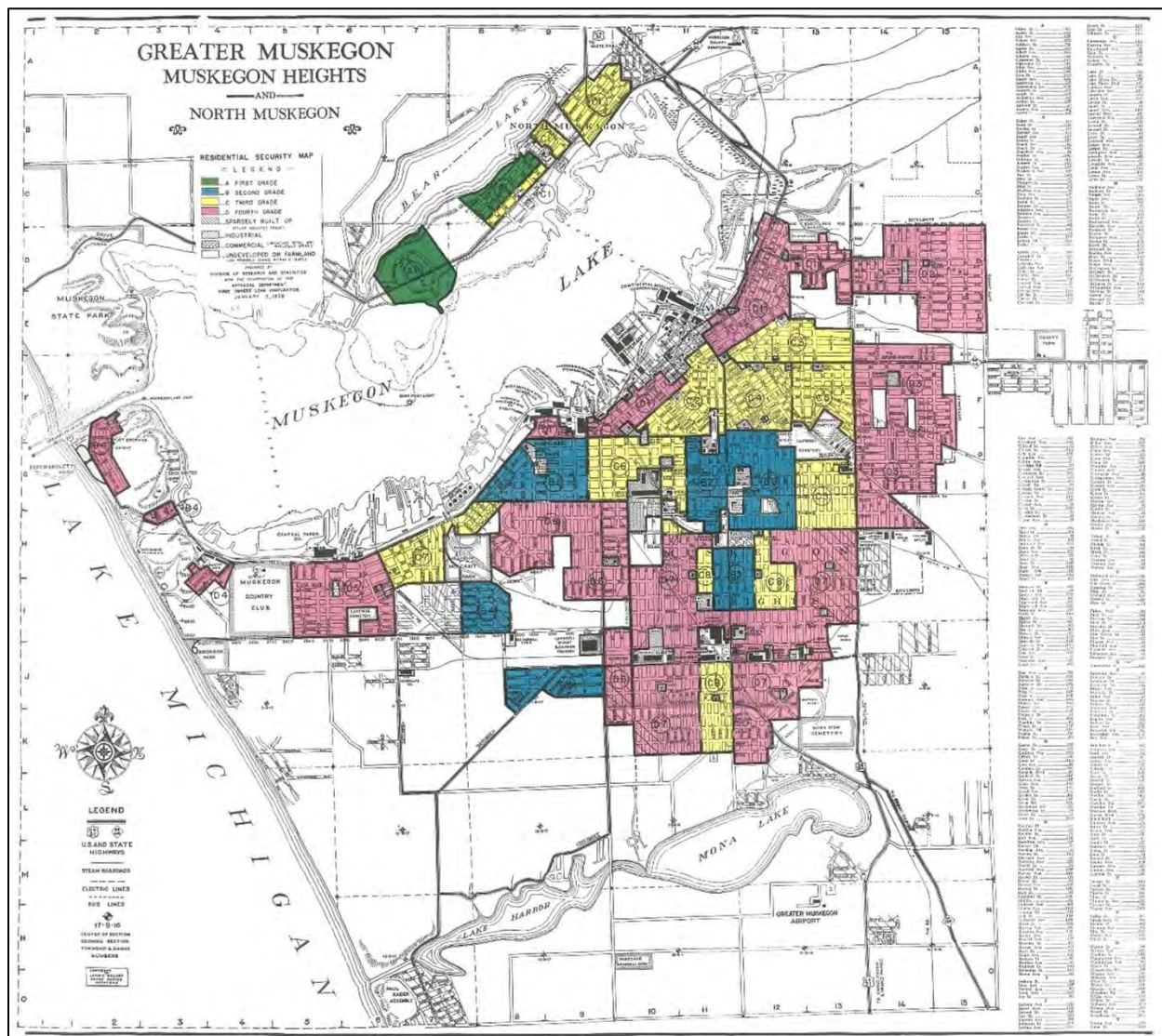


Image 21: RedLining Map of Greater Muskegon Area
(Mapping Inequality)

Real estate agents, brokers, and property appraisers were greatly responsible for continued inequities in housing. These professionals were licensed in Michigan by the Michigan Corporation and Securities Commission, which enforced the National Association of Real Estate Boards Code of Ethics that perpetuated segregated neighborhoods: “A realtor shall never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood.”⁹⁴ These rules were abandoned in 1948 when the U.S. Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer* determined

⁹² 1950 Sanborn Map; Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

⁹³ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

⁹⁴ Fine, “Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,” 117.

racially restrictive covenants could no longer be enforced and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) could no longer use race as a criterion in approving home loans. In 1962, a Presidential executive order prohibited FHA loans to builders who refused to sell homes to African Americans, and the Michigan Corporation and Securities Commission adopted a new rule that allowed the organization to revoke real estate licenses from those who practiced racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination.⁹⁵

In addition to segregated housing and widespread redlining, employment discrimination was prevalent nationwide during this time. In Michigan, the MCCR noted that as of the late 1940s, many jobs in banking, department stores, utilities, and management positions were not open to African American applicants. The problem was widespread, with the MCCR reporting that African Americans were not employed at any stores, offices, banks, restaurants, or theaters in Lansing, and that the city only employed African Americans as janitors or maintenance workers; no African Americans in Saginaw held skilled jobs; African Americans were excluded from employment at paper and chemical plants in Kalamazoo; and though there was a labor shortage in Detroit, qualified African American applicants were not being hired. The MCCR concluded that employment discrimination was “the foremost civil rights problem in the state.”⁹⁶

Under the urging of Michigan Governor G. Mennen Williams, and in spite of substantial legislative pushback, the Michigan Fair Employment Practices Act was signed into law in 1955. The measure prohibited employers of eight or more people from racial discrimination in hiring practices, employment conditions, or selection of management. One hundred people filled the room to capacity when the law was signed, and Governor Williams commented, “We have written the dignity of man into the law of the state.”⁹⁷

The new law did little to prevent ongoing discrimination, however, even when African Americans did secure skilled positions, especially among Black women. Bernice Sydnor, the first Black woman hired as a bank teller, recalls asking a White customer to sign a withdrawal slip. When Sydnor pointed to the signature line, the customer looked up at her and said, “You look like you might be colored.” Sydnor responded tartly, “I am. Sign here.” Ciggzree Morris was the first Black woman hired as a clerk at the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company’s Muskegon office, and she recalls the White women working there “wouldn’t have anything to do with me,” going so far as to leave the restroom if she entered. And Rillastine Wilkins recalls traveling the state as a supervisor and trainer for the General Telephone and Electronics company. “Many times, they were not familiar with seeing a Black face in management,” she remembers of the local offices. “Many of them just rebelled and said, ‘I’m not going to it’ or ‘Why do I have to do it?’ It was because I’m the supervisor here. Either you learn it, or you don’t.”⁹⁸

In the years following the new law, African American employment increased primarily in laborer, operator, and service jobs. As with elsewhere in the state, employment discrimination continued to take place in Muskegon.⁹⁹ Sanitary Dairy Company at 1788 Terrace Street (extant) sold milk to African American customers and Black-owned markets, but refused to hire African American employees.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the Beneficial Finance Company at 350 West Western Avenue (extant) offered loans to African American homeowners but refused to hire African American employees.¹⁰¹ Zeb Pettis, a foreman at Continental Motors, was tasked with training new employees how to operate the machinery. “But some of them walked out before they would let a colored [sic] man show them how

⁹⁵ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 116-118, 128-129, 135.

⁹⁶ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 28-31.

⁹⁷ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 59.

⁹⁸ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

⁹⁹ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 95-96.

¹⁰⁰ “Negroes Open Dairy Boycott,” *The Holland [MI] Evening Sentinel*, March 10, 1961, www.newspapers.com.

¹⁰¹ *Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, 1943-1995, 1943-1922. Box 17. Image with no title depicting pickets at Beneficial Finance Company, May 1, 1964. Bentley Historical Library. University of Michigan. Ann Arbor.*

to operate a machine,” he recalled.¹⁰² At Muskegon Heights High School, although the student body was predominantly African American, all the teachers were White.¹⁰³



Image 22: West Western Avenue, Muskegon, 1960s
(Actors' Colony at Bluffton)

African Americans faced discrimination as customers at local businesses as well. Reverend Poole, who came to Muskegon in 1963, commented that at that time, “Downtown [Muskegon] was not really a place to be... If you went into one store and stayed around one counter too long, and [the staff] didn’t like it, you could tell they didn’t like it – someone would come up and ask you in a negative way, ‘What do you want? What are you looking for?’ As if you were going to rob them.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Robert Dowson recalls that African Americans were not served at

any restaurants or bars on West Western Avenue in downtown Muskegon or on Broadway Avenue in Muskegon Heights until the mid-1960s. Until that time, many businesses “had a sign in the window that said ‘we reserve the right to [not] serve you.’” “So instead of saying ‘No Blacks,’ that was their way of saying that,” agrees Melvin Burns, Jr.¹⁰⁵ Rillastine Wilkins recalls going to a restaurant and waiting for service, but no server came to take her order.¹⁰⁶ Many Black residents recall that Greek restaurants in downtown Muskegon refused to serve Black patrons, and if they purchased a carry-out order, White patrons would stare until they left the restaurant.¹⁰⁷ Outside of the downtown commercial districts, access to restaurants and bars was limited for Black patrons, but with a few exceptions. Ruby Brown, well known locally as the first Black student to attend Muskegon Heights High School, became a co-owner of the Pine Street Tavern at 978 Pine Street (extant) in the mid-1930s.¹⁰⁸ The Toonerville Tavern at 772 Pine Street in Muskegon was a White-owned bar that served Black patrons in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰⁹

Local drug stores were also notoriously discriminatory. Pearson Drug Store at 2146 Hoyt Street (extant) was owned and operated by Wilbert S. Pearson, a pharmacist, and his wife Agnes Pearson. The pharmacy included an old-fashioned dairy bar, and although African American patrons were served there, they were not permitted to sit at the counter. The owners were so determined to ensure Black patrons left the store after making their purchases that they removed the stools at the dairy bar.¹¹⁰ Pearson Drug Store closed in the early 1960s, replaced by Whitt Pharmacy, though the building was

¹⁰² Hardiman and Jordan, “War Years Bad Years for Blacks.”

¹⁰³ Muskegon Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, “100 Years of the NAACP in Muskegon County,” Lakeshore Museum Center, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOyv8ZdEXPI>.

¹⁰⁴ Personal Communication with Reverend Charles W. Poole.

¹⁰⁵ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr; 1936 City Directory; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1951, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; 1950 Sanborn Map.

¹⁰⁶ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

¹⁰⁷ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

¹⁰⁸ Lee Lupo, “Heights to honor Ruby W. Brown, its own ‘Jackie Robinson,’” *The Muskegon Chronicle* via MLive, October 16, 2008, https://www.mlive.com/chronicle/2008/10/heights_to_honor_its_own_jacki.html; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1944, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1936, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com.

¹⁰⁹ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr; 1936 City Directory; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1951, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; 1950 Sanborn Map.

¹¹⁰ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

vacant by 1965.¹¹¹ “When the Civil Rights Movement [began], you had drug stores on [nearly] every corner in the Heights,” recalls Robert Dowson. “And they had a fountain in there where you [could] get an ice cream and so forth. They all closed up because they didn’t want to sell to Black people.”¹¹²

Although Jim Crow segregation was typically less obvious in most northern states than in the South, discriminatory practices limited the movement of African American residents and travelers in Muskegon. Sundown towns, or towns that prohibited African American people from doing business or even being in the town limits after daytime business hours, enforced through local law or unwritten practice, were actually more common in the North.¹¹³ One of the results of these practices was the creation of *The Green Book* by Victor Green. Published from 1936 until the 1960s, *The Green Book* contained tourist homes, motels, restaurants, social clubs, and other businesses that served African Americans, which were listed by state and compiled by information gathered from the book’s users.¹¹⁴ Although there were no known sundown towns in Muskegon County, the MCCR noted that statewide, African Americans could only book overnight accommodation at hotels in Detroit and Grand Rapids.¹¹⁵ As a result, there were several tourist homes listed in *The Green Book* for Muskegon: the R.C. Merrick Tourist Home at 65 East Muskegon Avenue (no longer extant), the Reverend Fowler Tourist Home at 2437 McIlwraith Street (extant), and the R.A. Swift Tourist Home at 472 Monroe Avenue (extant).¹¹⁶



Image 23: Sepia Club, date unknown
(Up From the Bottoms)

Participation in entertainment and social activities was also limited for Muskegon County African Americans. The Roller Club skating rink in Muskegon permitted Black patrons only one night each week. A patrol officer scolded Ed Sanford, saying “You folk got a night. Be happy,” he recalls. “I won’t forget that as long as I live.”¹¹⁷ Ruby Brown purchased the Sepia Café on Spring Street (no longer extant) from Dave Sepia in the early 1940s and opened the first Black nightclub in the area. Sepia was best

known for live music and dancing. Resident Spencer Norman recalled that “every name in rhythm and blues that you could think of came to Muskegon,” many on their way to perform at nearby Idlewild.¹¹⁸ The club also offered gambling, fashion shows, and Victory parties for soldiers leaving for service. Resident Bernice Sydnor remembers that both Black and White patrons visited the Sepia Club. “Black businesses,” she recalls, “they don’t disallow people to come in because of your color or anything like

¹¹¹ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms”; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1960, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

¹¹² Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

¹¹³ James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The News Press, 2018), 3-23; Tougaloo College, *Sundown Towns*, <https://justice.tougaloo.edu/sundown-towns>.

¹¹⁴ Nat Gertler, comp., *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, Compendium including 1938, 1947, 1954, 1963 (About Comics, 2019).

¹¹⁵ Fine, “Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,” 29.

¹¹⁶ Gertler, *The Negro Motorist Green Book*.

¹¹⁷ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

¹¹⁸ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms”; Lee Lupo, “Heights to honor Ruby W. Brown”; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1944, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1936, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com.

that. Everybody's welcome."¹¹⁹ Resident Rillastine Wilkins agrees, saying "Sepia Club was the place to be."¹²⁰

Additional clubs and entertainment venues followed through the mid-twentieth century, including the Moroccan Club at 500 Ottawa Street (no longer extant) around 1955, the Rainbow Café (later the Starlite Club, Apollo Lounge, and Nubby's Lounge) at 604 East Sherman Boulevard (extant) in 1948, and the Ebony Club in Twin Lake (no longer extant).¹²¹ A music pavilion that drew popular Black bands was also opened in Fruitport, though the details of this venue are not clear and it is not believed to remain extant.¹²² Black fraternal organizations, such as the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks Lodge 1397, originally located at 545 West Western Avenue, provided social opportunities. After that building was destroyed by fire, the lodge moved to its current location at 149 Ottawa Street (extant).¹²³



Image 24: Elks Charity Lodge 1397 on West Western Avenue, c.1985

Recreation was also somewhat limited, especially outside of school athletics programs. Parks like Smith-Reyerson Park and Green Acres Park on Wood Street in the Jackson Hill neighborhood and Rowan City Park in downtown Muskegon Heights had few amenities and primarily served as open green space for sports (all extant). The most significant recreational facility was Marsh Field, an amateur baseball stadium between Muskegon and Muskegon Heights. Charles W. Marsh established the stadium for White minor league teams, which was completed at 1800 Peck Street in 1916. Opening Day was anticipated with excitement through the Muskegon area, and was celebrated with a parade and the early closure of many schools, factories, and stores. A newspaper contest determined the team name, the Muskegon Reds. Marsh donated the park to the City of Muskegon in 1919, and for the next several decades, though there was nearly continuous baseball in Muskegon, the leagues, teams, and even team names changed frequently, commonly plagued by financial and administrative problems.¹²⁴

In 1926, the Muskegon Colored Athletics, the first Black amateur team in Muskegon, was formed by Robert E. Glover. Little is known about Glover, except that he was a White ballplayer who appears to have arrived in Muskegon in 1925 or 1926 and left again by 1928.¹²⁵ There is also little known about the team, but a small number of newspaper clippings in the *Lansing State Journal* covered a double-header between the Athletics and Lansing Dairy, one of the Lansing Baseball League amateur teams, as part of a three-day Fourth of July Celebration at Lansing's Pine Lake Park. The newspaper advertised, "The Muskegon team is one of the best aggregations around Muskegon. Its lineup includes many former stars from the National Colored baseball league and the visitors should be able to give

¹¹⁹ Schaub, "Up From the Bottoms."

¹²⁰ Schaub, "Up From the Bottoms."

¹²¹ *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1955, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

¹²² Personal Communication with Melvin Burns, Jr., and Robert Dowson (Civil Rights Activists) by Cheri Szcodronski, March 1, 2023, at Dowson Home, Muskegon Heights.

¹²³ Lisa Medendorp, "Fire destroys downtown Elks Lodge, adjacent bar," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, December 14, 1987.

¹²⁴ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 104; Marc Okkonen, *Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan: Adrian to Ypsilanti* (Grand Rapids: Dickinson Press, 1997), 21-25.

¹²⁵ *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1924; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1926; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1928; Okkonen, *Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan*, 132.

the Lansing Dairy boys a busy day.” Lansing won the first game, while Muskegon took the second.¹²⁶ (*Lansing State Journal*)

In 1930, night baseball was introduced to Muskegon courtesy of the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro League. That April, the Monarchs and the Benton Harbor House of David Baseball Team made baseball history when they played what is believed to be the first night game under electric lights – five years before the first night game in the major leagues. The Monarchs later loaned this portable lighting system to other semi-professional teams, including the Grand Rapids Ramonas for their July 9, 1930, game against the Muskegon Reds at Marsh Field (both White teams), which was won by Muskegon.¹²⁷



Image 25: Marsh Field, 1926
(MLive)

By 1948, the Reds team had been dissolved and the Muskegon Clippers had been formed in their place. In 1950, the Clippers, signed the first African American players to the formerly all-White team, Elston Howard and Frank Barnes. The Clippers was an amateur team for the New York Yankees at that

time, and Howard and Barnes were the first Black players in the Yankee system.¹²⁸ Howard was from St. Louis and had previously played for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro League. He later played for the Yankees as a catcher and left fielder, the first Black player to make the Yankees roster. Howard was a twelve-time All-Star during his tenure with the Yankees from 1955 until 1967, and his jersey was retired in 1984.¹²⁹ Frank Barnes was from Mississippi and also played for the Kansas City Monarchs before coming to Muskegon. He was a right-handed pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals 1957-1958 and 1960.¹³⁰

Marsh Field remained in use until 1952 when minor league baseball left the Muskegon area. Though the original grandstands have been replaced, the field remains extant under ownership of the City of Muskegon and is utilized for community sports leagues.¹³¹

Many of Muskegon County’s Black residents came from the South anticipating better social conditions. However, “Discrimination, it was there,” recalls Ed Sanford. “You could cut it with a knife.” Ciggzree Morris shares similar sentiments, “I’ve experienced racism right here in Muskegon. They don’t kill you, but they kill your spirit, if you let them.”¹³² These discriminatory practices of the 1940s and 1950s resulted in Muskegon joining the national Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

¹²⁶ “Lansing Dairy to Play Muskies Team,” *Lansing State Journal*, July 3, 1926, Newspapers.com.

¹²⁷ P.J. Dragseth, *Baseball and the House of David: The Legendary Barnstorming Teams, 1915-1956* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2021), 90-91; Okkonen, *Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan*, 133.

¹²⁸ Okkonen, *Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan*, 141-142.

¹²⁹ Baseball Reference, “Elston Howard,” https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Elston_Howard.

¹³⁰ Baseball Reference, “Frank Barnes,” [https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Frank_Barnes_\(barnefr02\)](https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/Frank_Barnes_(barnefr02)).

¹³¹ Eyler, *Muskegon County: Harbor of Promise*, 104; Okkonen, *Minor League Baseball Towns of Michigan*, 136-147.

¹³² Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1960 to 1975

The Beginning of a National Movement

A number of demonstrations in protest of racial discrimination took place prior to the 1960s. Sit-ins took place at Jack Spratt Coffee House in Chicago, Illinois, in 1942; Royal Ice Cream in Durham, North Carolina, in 1957; Dockum Drug Store in Wichita, Kansas, in 1958; Katz Drug Store in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1958; and a number of other cities in both the North and South.¹³³ As parents of Black students fought for the enforcement of the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and the full integration of all schools, Little Rock's Central High School became the scene of violent demonstrations by White protestors in opposition to the admission of nine Black students, known as the Little Rock Nine, to the all-White school.¹³⁴ The Montgomery Bus Boycott took place starting in December 1955 and lasted until the following December. Sparked by Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat, around 50,000 African Americans refused to utilize the public transportation system in the city for thirteen months, ultimately forcing its desegregation.¹³⁵ In 1959, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Detroit began a boycott of the River Rouge Savings Bank for discriminatory employment practices; Rosa Parks, who had relocated to Detroit two years earlier, participated in the boycott.¹³⁶

Though most of these demonstrations achieved some success, they were fairly isolated events that did not spark similar action outside the affected communities. It was the sit-in of four Black students from North Carolina A&T University at the Woolworth's lunch counter in February 1960 that set in motion a nationwide movement to end racial segregation and discriminatory practices. Historian William Chafe assessed the Greensboro sit-ins as "a watershed in the history of America," noting that, "Although similar demonstrations had occurred before, never in the past had they prompted such a volcanic response."¹³⁷ Chafe goes on to explain that, "from a white point of view, the message [in Greensboro] was different, because for the first time, whites could not avoid hearing it."¹³⁸ As news coverage of the sit-ins spread beyond the borders of North Carolina, so did the sit-ins themselves. Within another week – about mid-February – sit-ins were happening across the South.¹³⁹

Meanwhile, people in northern cities, including Detroit, had begun picketing Woolworth's and other chain stores with segregationist policies at their southern locations.¹⁴⁰ The Detroit NAACP declared that "nothing will give the Southern student a greater moral lift than the knowledge that they know throughout America the people; both Black and white are behind them."¹⁴¹ The organization also organized a demonstration at the Michigan State Capitol to further show support for Southern

¹³³ "James Farmer: A Chicago Lunch Counter Sit-In," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1496.html>; Dennis Daniels, "Royal Ice Cream Sit-In," *NCpedia*, <https://www.ncpedia.org/royal-ice-cream-sit-in>; Kansas Historical Society, "Dockum Drug Store Sit-In," *Kansapedia*, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/dockum-drug-store-sit-in/17048>; Oklahoma Historical Society, "Luper, Clara Shepard (1923-2011)," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=LU005>; Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1990), 53.

¹³⁴ Lee Sentell, *The Official United States Civil Rights Trail* (Birmingham, AL: Alabama Media Group, 2021), 48-55.

¹³⁵ Sentell, *Civil Rights Trail*, 40-42; J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 53-96.

¹³⁶ Ruth E. Mills and Sandra Little, "The Civil Rights Movement and the African American Experience in 20th Century Detroit, Michigan: Part 1: Historic Context," Quinn Evans, April 2021, 67.

¹³⁷ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 71.

¹³⁸ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 99.

¹³⁹ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 84-86.

¹⁴⁰ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 84-86.

¹⁴¹ "Local Picketing Will Continue NAACP Declares," *Michigan Chronicle*, March 26, 1960, in Mills and Little, "The Civil Rights Movement," 67.

protestors and to encourage legislative action on civil rights issues.¹⁴² The Raleigh News and Observer perceived, “the picket line now extends from the dime store to the United States Supreme Court and beyond that to national and world opinion.”¹⁴³ By mid-April, about fifty thousand demonstrators had staged sit-ins in seventy-eight cities throughout the South.¹⁴⁴ And the movement continued to grow.

The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon began in 1961 with a boycott of Sanitary Dairy Company at 1788 Terrace Street (extant), the first organized Civil Rights demonstration in Muskegon County. Though the company sold products to Black-owned retailers and ran rural delivery routes to Black customers, employment at the company was not open to Black workers. Reverend Henry Reynolds and his wife, Bessie, who owned and operated the Reynolds Funeral Home at 2211 Jarman Street (extant), hosted planning meetings for the boycott, for which they received “many anonymous intimidations” from White antagonists.¹⁴⁵ The boycott began in early March 1961 with Black businesses and rural delivery customers refusing to purchase Sanitary Dairy products. They also placed signs in the windows of stores and homes announcing the boycott.¹⁴⁶ The boycott was led by Alfred P. Williams and the Muskegon Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Williams was born and raised in Chicago, coming to southern Michigan to work as a traveling insurance salesman before settling in the predominantly African American Jackson Hill neighborhood of Muskegon, where he became a leader in the local Civil Rights Movement.¹⁴⁷



Image 26: Sanitary Dairy Company, c.1944
(Lakeshore Museum Center)

After about a week of the boycott, local and regional newspapers began to pick up the story. The *Holland Evening Sentinel* reported on March 9, 1961, “The company hasn’t been picketed, but its Negro [sic] customers on route delivery service have stopped taking the milk from Sanitary and Negroes [sic] aren’t buying Sanitary milk at retailers.” J.B. Gillette, the president of Sanitary Dairy, told the newspaper that the company “has never discriminated in its hiring practice,” however, the newspaper also reported “the dairy has never employed a Negro [sic].”¹⁴⁸

By March 10, 1961, the boycott had extended to Tourre’s Grocery at 354 Ottawa Street (no longer extant) in the predominantly African American Jackson Hill neighborhood. The

grocery was owned and operated by Josephine Tourre, an Italian immigrant who had been actively supportive of her African American neighbors but continued to sell Sanitary Dairy milk and refused to hang an NAACP sign about the boycott in the store window. NAACP members picketed the store each

¹⁴² “Mass Demonstration Capital Steps Slated Wednesday,” *Michigan Chronicle*, March 12, 1960, in Mill and Little, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 67.

¹⁴³ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 86.

¹⁴⁴ Hampton and Fayer, *Voices of Freedom*, 61.

¹⁴⁵ “Sanitary Boycott Continues,” *The Grand Rapids Times*, March 25, 1961, Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, Box 13, Folder 390: Printed Material, 1961, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

¹⁴⁶ “Muskegon Negroes Boycott Big Dairy,” *The Holland [MI] Evening Sentinel*, March 9, 1961, www.newspapers.com; “Negroes Open Dairy Boycott,” *The Holland [MI] Evening Sentinel*, March 10, 1961, www.newspapers.com; Alfred Perry Williams Obituary, Stark Funeral Homes, June 20, 2012, <https://www.starkfuneral.com/obituary/6270889>.

¹⁴⁷ “Muskegon Negroes Boycott Big Dairy,” *The Holland [MI] Evening Sentinel*, March 9, 1961, www.newspapers.com; “Negroes Open Dairy Boycott,” *The Holland [MI] Evening Sentinel*, March 10, 1961, www.newspapers.com; Alfred Perry Williams Obituary, Stark Funeral Homes, June 20, 2012, <https://www.starkfuneral.com/obituary/6270889>.

¹⁴⁸ “Negroes Open Dairy Boycott,” *The Holland [MI] Evening Sentinel*, March 10, 1961, www.newspapers.com;

day starting around 5:00 pm, though Tourre told them, “Your fight is with the dairy, not with me!”¹⁴⁹ When an NAACP committee went to Tourre’s store to request a recently vacated position be filled by an African American employee, Tourre told them to get out of her store.¹⁵⁰

On March 19, 1961, a mass meeting of about five hundred people was held at Greater Harvest Baptist Church to discuss the boycott of Sanitary Dairy, the picketing at Tourre’s Grocery Store, and other civil rights issues in the community.

Reverend Reynolds was the first speaker, describing the threats he and his wife had received for their involvement in the boycott and reasserting his willingness to fight for what he believed to be right.

Bessie Reynolds also spoke and encouraged the crowd’s participation in the boycott, saying “if men, women and children in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, can stand up for their rights, we can do it here.”¹⁵¹ Williams reported that Gillette “would do nothing at present for fear that his white customers would refuse to buy any more milk in reprisal for the hiring of Negro [sic] drivers.”¹⁵² The group unanimously agreed they would no longer picket, however, they would continue the boycott by refusing to purchase Sanitary Dairy products.¹⁵³



Image 27: Mass Meeting at Greater Harvest Baptist Church, March 1961
(*The Grand Rapids Times*)

Ultimately, the Sanitary Dairy Company boycott was successful, ending with the hiring of an African American employee as a delivery driver to run routes to African American customers. Robert Dowson, an NAACP member who participated in the boycott, explained its success: “You keep your dollar, and your dollar will speak.”¹⁵⁴

Local Response to National Events

As the local Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, a number of organizations came together with the local NAACP chapter to plan and execute demonstrations and boycotts, with local unions among the most important. Though many unions did not offer membership to African American workers before the mid-1930s, including the American Federation of Labor, the establishment of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1935 paved the way for union organizing without regard to race.¹⁵⁵ Unions greatly benefited Black workers through collective bargaining practices that equalized pay among Black and White workers.¹⁵⁶ By the 1950s, the United Auto Workers (UAW) Union, a member

¹⁴⁹ “Mama Tourre Finds Herself Caught in Boycott Crossfire,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, March 14, 1961, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon (hereafter Torrent House).

¹⁵⁰ “Sanitary Boycott Continues.”

¹⁵¹ “Sanitary Boycott Continues.”

¹⁵² “Sanitary Boycott Continues.”

¹⁵³ “Sanitary Boycott Continues.”

¹⁵⁴ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

¹⁵⁵ James Gilbert Cassidy, “African Americans and the American Labor Movement,” *National Archives*, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/american-labor-movement.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Josh Bivens et al., “Unions Promote Racial Equity,” Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-promote-racial-equity>.

of the AFL-CIO, headquartered at 486 West Western Avenue (extant), was one of the primary supporters of these activities in Muskegon County, with membership in the union, the NAACP, and other Civil Rights organizations often overlapping. The local UAW also traveled to other states to organize new unions for the benefit of Black workers. Melvin Burns, Sr., president of the local UAW, recalled traveling to an industrial plant in Kentucky to organize a local UAW, but when the management of the company discovered his intentions, he was warned “he had twenty-four hours to get out of town.” His son Melvin Burns, Jr., recalls cars sitting outside their home when he was a child, and later discovered the Michigan State Police were keeping Burns under surveillance because union activities were feared to be subversive and pro-Communist during the Cold War.¹⁵⁷

The local UAW’s efforts in supporting employment equality and other Civil Rights initiatives mirrored similar efforts by the UAW nationwide. The organization supported the Montgomery Bus Boycott from December 1955 until December 1956, the Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro in February 1960, the Freedom Rides across the South from May until December 1961, and Dr. Martin Luther King’s 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.¹⁵⁸

By 1963, the national Civil Rights Movement had gained significant strength and support, and supporters in Muskegon County remained apprised of demonstrations across the country. Several local demonstrations that year were inspired by national events. On June 23, 1963, a group of approximately two thousand African American demonstrators met at Greater Harvest Baptist Church and marched eight blocks along Riordan Street and East Broadway Avenue to Rowan City Park at 2800 Maffett Street in Muskegon Heights (extant). Organized by the NAACP, the demonstration was in mourning for Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi. Evers was murdered on June 12 by Byron De La Beckwith, a member of the White Citizens’ Council, which opposed integration and rights for African Americans. Beckwith was tried twice following the murder, but the all-White juries failed to convict; he was finally convicted in 1994 based on new evidence.¹⁵⁹



*Image 28: Demonstrators March Toward Rowan City Park
(The Muskegon Chronicle)*

The crowd of mourners in Muskegon was primarily made up of African American families, most wearing black arm bands or carrying black flags. At Rowan City Park, a number of speakers addressed the crowd, which included about twenty-five White observers. Reverend Wyatt L. Stewart opened the program denouncing Evers’ murder and ongoing violence and racism against African Americans. “We are tired of empty promises, tired of being second-class citizens... and whether we live or die, the end is here,” he

said. Reverend Henry Reynolds told the crowd “we are called here to bear witness to the death of one man for the dignity of all men,” and local businessman Al Williams said, “the real assassin of Medgar Evers is social injustice.” Dr. Frank Howell described Muskegon as “one of the worst of the discriminating cities in the United States” and praised the demonstration, saying “it takes a crowd

¹⁵⁷ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

¹⁵⁸ Labor Commission on Racial and Economic Justice, “A Brief History of Labor, Race, and Solidarity,” AFL-CIO, <https://racial-justice.aflcio.org/blog/est-aliquid-se-ipsum-flagitiosum-etiamsi-nulla>.

¹⁵⁹ James P. Marshall, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 49, 51, 56-57, 59, 64, 79, 81.

such as this to emphasize our fight for rights. We'll take nothing more or less than equal rights, and from this day on, Greater Muskegon will be a better place for everyone."¹⁶⁰ Similar demonstrations took place in Battle Creek, Benton Harbor, Flint, and other Michigan cities, with Governor George Romney attending the event in Flint with Evers' brother, Charles.¹⁶¹

The following September in Birmingham, Alabama, members of the Ku Klux Klan detonated a bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church during Sunday services, killing four young girls.¹⁶² On August 9, 1964, three hundred protestors marched along Western Avenue through downtown Muskegon to Hackley Park, where about 1,000 people gathered to hear local and guest speakers. Retired Reverend Albert A. Kehren called on the crowd to "remove the madness and insaneness of the segregationists. These men have lost all touch with reality. They need our prayers." Reverend John Sheehy observed, "If we do not struggle for the forces of good, the forces of evil will take over. Not enough people are doing something." Local Civil Rights leader Dr. Frank Howell stated, "What we want is a policy of integration in Muskegon, not non-discrimination." And the main speaker at the event, Reverend Kenneth Anderson of Saginaw, told the crowd, "We cannot wait for a massive change of heart. We must take other measures."¹⁶³ A similar event took place in Muskegon Heights when demonstrators gathered again at the Greater Harvest Baptist Church and marched to Rowan City Park for a memorial service on September 22. Similar demonstrations took place throughout Michigan, including Albion, Battle Creek, Benton Harbor, Detroit, and Grand Rapids.¹⁶⁴

Equal Employment Opportunity

The success of the Sanitary Dairy Company boycott in 1961 and the growing momentum of the Civil Rights Movement nationwide likely led to further efforts to change the racial status quo in Muskegon through demonstrations against discriminatory hiring practices. In June 1963, Dr. Frank Howell, president of the Urban League; Dr. James Jackson, physician and NAACP member; local businessman James Tate; Father John F. Sheehy; and Reverend Robert Cunningham formed the biracial Council on Equal Opportunity (COEO). The group contacted thirty-six businesses to demand they hire at least one African American employee within thirty days. Though most businesses agreed to do so, and indeed followed through, five business refused, complaining the committee was "pushing too hard." The COEO did not organize protest demonstrations, that responsibility fell to the NAACP, and Dr. Jackson recommended the NAACP consider a boycott of those who refused to end discriminatory hiring practices.¹⁶⁵ The Square Clothing Company at 325 West Western Avenue, Friend's Friendly Clothiers at 349 West Western Avenue, and Vandervelde's Furniture Company at 139 W Broadway Avenue in Muskegon Heights (all no longer extant) were among the five businesses who refused.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ "Mourning March Impressive, Orderly," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, June 24, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁶¹ "Governor Joins in Memorial," *The Lansing State Journal*, July 13, 1963, www.newspapers.com; "'March of Mourning' is Held Here," *The Battle Creek Enquirer and News*, June 24, 1963, www.newspapers.com; Ben Nottingham, "B.H. Negroes Stage Peaceful March," *The News-Palladium [Benton Harbor]*, June 24, 1963, www.newspapers.com.

¹⁶² Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 346-347.

¹⁶³ Jess Soltess, "Only 300 March But Close to 1,000 Hear Civil Rights Backers Call for Greater Support, Unity in Campaign," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 10, 1964, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

¹⁶⁴ "Marchers to Mourn Bomb Victims, NAACP Memorial Parade Set Sunday," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, September 20, 1963, Torrent House; "Memorials Held for 4 Victims," *The Hillsdale Daily News*, September 23, 1963, www.newspapers.com; "Bombing Victims Mourned," *Detroit Free Press*, September 23, 1963, www.newspapers.com; "Solemn Group Prays Here for Church Bombing Victims," *The Battle Creek Enquirer and News*, September 23, 1963, www.newspapers.com; "Albion March of Mourning for Bombing Victims Held Sunday," *Battle Creek Enquirer and News*, September 30, 1963, www.newspapers.com; "Silent Marches are Held in G.R., Muskegon Heights," *The Ludington Daily News*, September 23, 1963, www.newspapers.com.

¹⁶⁵ "Merchant Responding to Demand," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, June 18, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁶⁶ "Won't Yield to Pickets, Store President Says," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 25, 1963, Torrent House.

Within weeks the boycott came to fruition as The Square Clothing Company continued to refuse open hiring practices. The NAACP organized the boycott, which included picketing in front of the store and distribution of a pamphlet stating, “businesses readily accept the Negro [sic] dollar without discrimination. They must also accept Negro [sic] job applicants without discrimination.” The pamphlet went on to say that The Square was the only business of those contacted that “has no Negro [sic] employee and will not hire a Negro [sic]. Vague promises or a do-nothing attitude is not acceptable. This store has refused to negotiate this critical problem with the C.E.O. Therefore we are now taking over the task of ending its discriminatory employment practices.” Picketers’ signs carried statements including “don’t buy here if you can’t work here” and “this store is not fair to qualified Negro [sic] workers.”¹⁶⁷

Benjamin Loeb, the store president and head of the Muskegon Chamber of Commerce, responded to the picketing saying that the store was not in a position to hire additional employees and he was not willing to lay off a White employee in order to hire an African American in their place, stating, “if and when the Square Clothing Co. needs additional help, in either its office or on the sales floor, applicants will be judged for hiring strictly on the basis of their qualifications; not on their race or color.”¹⁶⁸ “We all want it (Negro [sic] employment) but we want it to come about in a free and voluntary way,” he said, going on to report that “public reaction has been very positive... very much in our favor.”¹⁶⁹



Image 29: The Square Clothing Company, 1939
(Lakeshore Museum Center)

On the first day of picketing, as a city employee entered the store to shop, he allegedly kicked one of the picketers as he passed, sixteen-year-old William E. McCrary. A complaint was filed by the NAACP to the prosecutor’s office following the incident, which was then reviewed over the next several days.¹⁷⁰ When no warrant had been issued after a week, the NAACP “charged favoritism and discrimination in the prosecutor’s office,” claiming the prosecutor’s office failed to take action because the alleged offender was a city employee. The prosecutor’s office responded by denying the request for a warrant, stating “No marks, bruises, or injuries were incurred, whatsoever; there was no violence... the prosecutor’s office is not convinced any alleged physical contact was intentional.”¹⁷¹ The NAACP then filed a complaint with the State Attorney General’s office, though the result is not known.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ “Open Negro Boycott at Store Here,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 24, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁶⁸ “Won’t Yield to Pickets, Store President Says,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 25, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁶⁹ “Picketing Continues at Store,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 26, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁷⁰ “Charge Picket was Kicked,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 25, 1963, Torrent House; “Picketing Continues at Store,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 26, 1963, Torrent House; “Joint Meet Set on Racial Problem,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 29, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁷¹ “Prosecutor Rejects Warrant,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 31, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁷² “Pickets Withdrawn by NAACP; Appeal Prosecutor’s Move,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 1, 1963, Torrent House.

The picketing ended on July 31, 1963, with the NAACP voluntarily withdrawing the picket line. NAACP President Charles Vaughn explained that the board “felt the main purposes for which we were picketing have been accomplished.”¹⁷³

Equal employment opportunities in Muskegon remained a Civil Rights priority through the mid-1960s. Dr. Howell told the local newspaper in March 1964, “I’m quite sure there will be quite a bit of direct action [picketing, boycotting, and sit-ins] this summer... It seems that after an employer hired one or two Negroes [sic] he thinks he has it made and won’t move any further until he has to. We can’t rest until these employers hire Negroes [sic] as a matter of general policy.”¹⁷⁴ Dr. Jackson agreed, saying “demonstrations will occur in Muskegon and they will occur soon.” He described plans for the COEO to take more direct action than the organization had the previous summer, including efforts to disrupt businesses by forcing bank tellers to count rolled pennies, keeping store sales staff busy but not purchasing any merchandise, and repeatedly telephoning businesses.¹⁷⁵



Image 30: Picketing at Beneficial Finance Company, 1964
(Bentley Historical Library)

On May 1, 1964, picketing began at Beneficial Finance Company at 350 West Western Avenue (extant) led by COEO members Reverend John Sheehy, Dr. Howell, and Dr. Jackson, along with NAACP youth group state president Dural Nesbary. They carried signs with slogans such as “Beneficial Loans to Negroes... why not HIRE one?” The company had never employed an African American worker, and the manager, H.L. Mann claimed the company did not discriminate, but that there had never been a Black applicant. The demonstrations ended a week later when an African American woman was hired to work as a secretary.¹⁷⁶ In May 1965, the NAACP picketed the Muskegon Consolidated Gas Company at 372 Morris Street (no longer extant) for failing to follow through on previous negotiations for open hiring policies. “And they sent two vice presidents here from Detroit to meet with us,” Dr. Howell explained, “The meeting solved the problem.”¹⁷⁷ Picketing continued that June at Grossman’s Department Store at 203-211 West Western Avenue (no longer extant). The store had been one of the first downtown retailers to hire African Americans, opening employment to all races in 1951 and employing six or seven African American workers by the mid-1960s. However, the local NAACP chapter felt that the store had failed to follow through on 1963 negotiations; the company had agreed to hire on a merit basis but

¹⁷³ “Pickets Withdrawn by NAACP; Appeal Prosecutor’s Move,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 1, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Ryan, “Civil Rights Demonstrations May be Continued Here,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, March 21, 1964, Torrent House.

¹⁷⁵ Richard Ryan, “Civil Rights Pot to Boil, Jackson Says,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 1, 1963, Torrent House.

¹⁷⁶ “Demonstrators,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 1, 1964, Torrent House; *Urban League of Greater Muskegon Records, 1943-1995, 1943-1922*. Box 17. Image with no title depicting pickets at Beneficial Finance Company, May 1, 1964. Bentley Historical Library. University of Michigan. Ann Arbor; “Halt Picketing As Loan Firm Hires Negro,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 8, 1964.

¹⁷⁷ “NAACP Defend Picketing; Denied Federation Charge,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, June 10, 1965, Torrent House.

had re-hired White employees who had been laid off, as required by union contracts. Picketing ended after ten days when an agreement was reached for the company to hire new personnel on a merit basis with all new employees conforming to the existing union contract.¹⁷⁸

Reflecting on his involvement in these demonstrations, Dr. James Jackson explained their goal was to bring awareness to White residents. Dr. Jackson, and other NAACP activists, received threats as a result of these demonstrations. “Anything that was discriminatory, we brought to the public... and the town had a hard time. At times, I would get calls, ‘I’m coming over to kill you,’ he recalls. Undaunted, Dr. Jackson would tell them, “Well make sure you bring the undertaker.” Though it was difficult, he felt their efforts were effective. “The community had a fit. We took picket signs and walked downtown. And the paper blew it up like we were here with an army or something,” he recalled. “Then the town started being aware of the way it was.”¹⁷⁹

As the Civil Rights Movement continued to gain momentum nationwide, the Federal Bureau of Investigation prepared a report on “Racial Violence Potential in the United States this Summer” in May 1967, which was then shared with the Central Intelligence Agency, Mildred Stegall (aide to President Lyndon B. Johnson), Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Secretary of State David Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and Attorney General Ramsey Clark. The report stated, “All signs point toward recurrent racial strife throughout the Nation this summer.” The report is both racist in tone and highly contradictory in its conclusions. Though the report points to generations of racial inequality as the cause of ongoing racial tension and notes that funding for summer programs and employment training in African American communities was cut to support the Vietnam War, the report goes on to dismiss these genuine issues in favor of racial stereotyping and blaming Communism for racial disturbances, stating that young African Americans are most likely to respond to “some trivial incident” with violence:

The innumerable racial riots and disturbances which have plagued the United States since 1964 have had their genesis primarily in the long-smoldering discontent and resentment of Negroes [sic] over unequal job, school, and housing opportunities and their deep-seated antipathy toward the police. However, constant agitation and propaganda on the part of communists and other subversive and extremist elements have done much to aggravate tension in the ghettos of the Nation’s big cities.

The report then assessed the potential for racial violence in major cities in the east, Midwest, west, and South, including Muskegon:

A number of informed sources in this area state that employment is high; schools are both good and integrated; and no racial antagonisms exist at present. Civil Rights demonstrations are peaceful and aimed primarily at better housing and fair treatment for Negroes [sic].

Although overall race relations in the area are considered good... Sheriff [Marion] Calkins is watching for evidence of organizational activities and, together with community leaders, feels that there is a growing potential for racial violence in this area among irresponsible Negro [sic] youths.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ “Picketing Accents Rights Split,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, June 8, 1965, Torrent House; “NAACP Defend Picketing; Denied Federation Charge,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, June 10, 1965, Torrent House; “Grossman Dispute Settled,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, June 18, 1965, Torrent House.

¹⁷⁹ Oral History Interview with Dr. James Jackson, May 14, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Racial Violence Potential in the United States this Summer,” May 23, 1967, National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/104-10125-10157.pdf>.

A report by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission (CRC) also indicated racial disturbances were likely in 1967.¹⁸¹

That summer, these predictions proved accurate as NAACP members put into action the strategies for the disruption of businesses Dr. Howell had described in 1963. On Saturday, May 20, 1967, a group of about seventy-five NAACP members went to Ar-Jer's Clothing at 296 West Western Avenue (no longer extant) where they "employed harassment techniques, removing garments from racks and shelves on both floors of the building. They unfolded them, tried them on and piled clothes on counters, then repeated the procedure with fresh garments."¹⁸² The purpose of the demonstration was to protest discriminatory employment practices at the store, though the owners denied those charges, referring to the employment of two African American workers. The next day, NAACP members staged a sit-in at the Walgreens Drug Company at 293 West Western Avenue (no longer extant) where groups occupied booths and seats at the lunch counter for an extended period of time by ordering food then swapping seats with other groups to order again. This demonstration was also in protest over hiring discrimination, though the store owner reported the staff was twenty-eight percent African American workers at that time.¹⁸³



Image 31: Walgreens Drug Company on West Western Avenue, date unknown
(Actor's Colony of Bluffton)

White opposition to the weekend's demonstrations was clear; Monday's headline read "NAACP Gangs Harass Stores."¹⁸⁴ A few days later, leaflets were scattered on utility poles, mailboxes, automobile windshields, and doors of local businesses in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights that read, "Traitors Beware! Even now the cross-hairs are on the backs of your necks!" The leaflets went on to specifically target Dr. Jackson, head of the regional Michigan Civil Rights Commission office Joseph Adler, and a Black Muslim organization in Muskegon Heights. The leaflets were signed "KKK," though local police insisted there were no active Ku Klux Klan groups in Michigan at that time.¹⁸⁵ "On my office there were signs by the Ku Klux Klan that 'we're going to get you and your family.' We had a cross put out where we lived," Dr. Jackson later recalled. "But we kept working. The more we got a reaction, the more we knew people were thinking about it... we wanted people to begin to search their souls."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Fine, "Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights," 320.

¹⁸² "NAACP Gangs Harass Stores," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 22, 1967, Torrent House.

¹⁸³ "NAACP Gangs Harass Stores," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 22, 1967, Torrent House.

¹⁸⁴ "NAACP Gangs Harass Stores," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 22, 1967, Torrent House.

¹⁸⁵ "'KKK' Leaflets in Racial Attack," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 27, 1967, Torrent House.

¹⁸⁶ Oral History Interview with Dr. James Jackson by Dr. Willi B. Burrell, May 14, 2013, James Jackson Museum of African American History, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi9ZX0sXHfM>.

Substantial disturbances in downtown Muskegon and Muskegon Heights took place in the summers of 1966, 1967, and 1968, however the details of these events are unclear. The local newspaper reported on these events from a biased perspective, typical of Civil Rights Movement coverage, and included little explanation about the motives behind the disturbances. The newspaper coverage does note that the young African Americans involved in these disturbances shouted slogans related to equality and civil rights, and several civil rights-related organizations were involved in the meetings and negotiations that followed each disturbance, suggesting that the underlying cause of the disturbances was triggered by racial discrimination. The demonstrations in 1966 appear to have been sparked by a street confrontation that resulted in damage to several downtown jewelry stores, including Budd Jewelry Company at 227 West Western Avenue, Ingalls Jewelry at 1082 Getty Street, Krauthelm Jewelers at 329 West Western Avenue, and Zale's Jewelry at 338 West Western Avenue in Muskegon (none extant).¹⁸⁷ Demonstrations in 1967 may be linked to the deadly riots that took place in Detroit that July, as similar events followed not only in Muskegon, but also in Grand Rapids, Flint, Kalamazoo, Mount Clemens, Benton Harbor, Saginaw, and Albion.¹⁸⁸ The 1968 event appears to have started as a confrontation between Black youths leaving a dance and White police officers.¹⁸⁹ More research is needed to fully understand and contextualize these events.

Demonstrations appear to have been largely peaceful in Muskegon, and Robert Dowson recalls that was by design. "We were told, 'you can't win by violence,'" he recalls. "'They got the guns. They got the government. They got the police force. How are you going to win with violence.'"¹⁹⁰ Therefore, also significant is that each of these disturbances between 1966 and 1968 was followed by accusations of police brutality, sometimes leading to additional protests at the Muskegon or Muskegon Heights police stations.¹⁹¹ This issue was certainly not unique to Muskegon County. Following riots in Detroit and other Michigan cities in 1967, the Michigan State Advisory Committee reported that police-community relations were "the greatest threat to racial peace in Michigan."¹⁹² Additional research is needed to understand and contextualize the difficult relationships between African American protestors, other residents and observers, community leaders, and local police during this time.

Housing Equality

In addition to equal opportunity employment, housing equality remained a high priority for Civil Rights leaders through the mid-1960s. Realtors played a major role in perpetuating housing discrimination in Muskegon County, as well as other communities in Michigan. In January 1964, NAACP member Dr. James Jackson; COEO members Dr. Frank Howell, Reverend John Sheehy, Reverend Robert W. Cunningham, and Reverend Wyatt Stewart; African American real estate broker Henry Jordan; and attorneys James J. Kobza and Thomas J. O'Toole to form Home Equity, Inc. The new nonprofit focused specifically on integrating neighborhoods in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights by recruiting White homeowners willing to sell to African American buyers and African American buyers willing to move

¹⁸⁷ "19 Are Arrested as Disorderly in Downtown Incident," "Race Woes in Heights Cut Short," "Downtown Riot Halted," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 13, 1966, Torrent House; "Community Relations Meet Set," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 18, 1966, Torrent House.

¹⁸⁸ "Halt Minor Outbreaks Swiftly, Youths Blamed for Incidents, Eight Arrested," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 26, 1967, Torrent House; "Police Reject Apology Call," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 3, 1967, Torrent House; "Race Troubles: 109 U.S. Cities Faced Violence in 1967," *U.S. News*, July 12, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2017-07-12/race-troubles-109-us-cities-faced-violence-in-1967>.

¹⁸⁹ "Police Probing Outbreak Here," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 12, 1968, Torrent House.

¹⁹⁰ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

¹⁹¹ "NAACP Charges Police Brutality," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 19, 1966, Torrent House; "Police Reject Apology Call," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 3, 1967, Torrent House; "Heights is Probing Police Brutality Allegations," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 15, 1967; "Prosecutor is Probing 'Police Abuse' Charges," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, August 19, 1968.

¹⁹² Fine, "Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights," 269, 323, 328-329.

into all-White neighborhoods. Dr. Howell explained the need for the organization: “The basic reason we came together is because, to all intents and purposes, Greater Muskegon is totally segregated. The Negro [sic] cannot escape the ghetto regardless of his financial, social, or professional standing.” The group hoped that once neighborhoods began to be integrated, other realtors would be more willing to continue the trend. The organization’s office was in the Michigan Theatre Building (now the Frauenthal Center) at 401 West Western Avenue (extant).¹⁹³



Image 32: Equal Housing Meeting at YWCA
(*The Muskegon Chronicle*)

The following April, DeHart Hubbard, minority housing specialist for the Federal Housing Administration, spoke at the YWCA at 430 West Clay Avenue (now the Lakeshore Museum Center). Hubbard reiterated the importance of cooperation between White sellers and African American buyers, as well as the importance of support for African Americans who chose to move into all-White neighborhoods. “We can’t leave him alone out

there,” he told those assembled.¹⁹⁴ Although the organization held the option on several homes, they struggled to find African American buyers willing to be the first to move into an all-White neighborhood, and when they did, opposition from White residents caused buyers to abandon the purchase. In spite of these challenges, the establishment of Home Equity, Inc., brought new awareness to the de facto segregation in Muskegon County. A few months after the organization’s creation, the newspaper reported “some of the people who belittled the venture when it was first announced have now taken up the banner of Home Equity and publicly endorsed its efforts.”¹⁹⁵

Housing discrimination was not limited to Muskegon County. In 1965, the Michigan CRC director of Community Services commented, “I do not know of one white community or white section of a city where a Negro [sic] citizen visiting a realtor chosen at random or a home advertised for sale will get the fair and equitable treatment that is theoretically required by the law and this Commission.”¹⁹⁶ Governor George Romney encouraged realtors to create “a completely free and open housing market” at the 1965 Michigan real estate convention. But two years later, the Michigan CRC reported that ninety percent of non-White Michiganders still lived in segregated neighborhoods, stating that “Negroes [sic] have been forced to live apart in urban ghettos and, in some cases, rural ghettos.”¹⁹⁷ This conclusion was, in part, the result of a series of community housing hearings held 1966 and 1967 in cities throughout the state, including Saginaw, Jackson, Flint, and Muskegon.¹⁹⁸

The hearings in Muskegon took place over a three-day period in April 1967 and the Michigan CRC reported its findings the following August. The group firmly concluded that housing discrimination and segregation existed in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights and recommended each city enact fair housing ordinances. The commission reported “the Muskegon area has a tightly controlled pattern of

¹⁹³ “Move to Spur Housing Integration, Negro Effort Opened,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, January 4, 1964, Torrent House.

¹⁹⁴ “Cities 5-Point Program to Crack Racial Housing Barriers,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, April 2, 1964, Torrent House.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Ryan, “Improved Housing Sought,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, May 22, 1964, Torrent House.

¹⁹⁶ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 257-258.

¹⁹⁷ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 116.

¹⁹⁸ Fine, “*Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights*,” 257-261.

residential segregation which appears to be maintained by discriminatory practices of real estate brokers, builders, and landlords who are supported by sentiments against housing integration in the white communities.”¹⁹⁹ The report revealed that urban renewal was exacerbating housing problems by displacing non-White residents who then were at the mercy of realtors and a discriminatory housing market to find new homes.²⁰⁰ The CRC also reported that African American residents were concentrated in specific areas of Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, and Goose Egg Lake, an area north of Muskegon described by the CRC as “deplorable.”²⁰¹ The results were reported in newspapers across the state, including Detroit, Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, Port Huron, and Traverse City.²⁰² Muskegon enacted a fair housing ordinance soon afterward, followed by Muskegon Heights. By October 1967, Lansing, East Lansing, Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Port Huron, and Ypsilanti had also done so, and Governor Romney was calling for state fair housing legislation. However, it would be another decade before statewide civil rights legislation was passed.²⁰³

In the meantime, challenges to open housing continued. *The Muskegon Chronicle* interviewed an African American Army veteran who attempted to purchase a mobile home for herself and her two children. She and the seller met with the mobile home park manager, who she recalled “just kept mumbling... saying that I would have to move [the mobile home] out of the park. Then I asked him point-blank if it was because I was black [sic]. He just kept on talking as if I had never spoken... I had tears in my eyes.” About a week later, she called the office and asked if she would have to move a mobile home out of the park if she purchased it, and the staff told her that she would not. When she asked if there were any African American residents in the park, the staff replied, “Oh no, we had a problem with [an African American] girl trying to move in, but we took care of that.” She filed a complaint with the local office of the Michigan CRC, but ultimately dropped the case and moved into an African American neighborhood in Muskegon Heights.²⁰⁴

In rare cases, the local government intervened. In 1963, seventeen acres on East Summit Avenue had been purchased by White real estate developer George Vigeant, who began developing a neighborhood with racially restrictive covenants. Eventually the property was seized by the City of Muskegon Heights. It was purchased by the NAACP Non Profit Housing Corporation, of which Jerry Lottie served as chair. The group was later separated from the NAACP to avoid mixing NAACP funds with federal housing funding and was renamed the Oak Terrace Non Profit Housing Corporation. In 1971-1972, the new organization, with Jerry Lottie serving as president, purchased ten acres of the property and in 1973 built an open housing development with 102 townhomes and apartments known as Oak Terrace.²⁰⁵ Lottie later recalled that racially restrictive covenants were uncommon in Muskegon, though there were “closed communities” where it was generally understood Black residents would not be accepted.²⁰⁶ In order to circumvent this de facto housing segregation, some African American buyers were helped by third-party intermediaries or through other personal connections when purchasing land

¹⁹⁹ “State Says Muskegon Segregated,” *The [Benton Harbor] News-Palladium*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com.

²⁰⁰ Fine, “Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,” 257-261.

²⁰¹ “State Says Muskegon Segregated,” *The [Benton Harbor] News-Palladium*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com.

²⁰² “State Says Muskegon Segregated,” *The [St. Joseph] Herald-Press*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com; “State Says Muskegon Segregated,” *The [Benton Harbor] Herald-Palladium*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com; “Call Muskegon Housing Segregated,” *The Battle Creek Enquirer and News*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com; “Housing Bias in Two State Cities,” *The [Port Huron] Times Herald*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com; “Fair Housing Ordinance Asked,” *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, August 30, 1967, www.newspapers.com;

²⁰³ “Open Housing Action a Matter of Justice,” *The Lansing State Journal*, October 4, 1967, www.newspapers.com; “Romney Expected to Put Open Housing on Agenda,” *The [Benton Harbor] News-Palladium*, October 13, 1967, www.newspapers.com.

²⁰⁴ “Discrimination in Housing Still Explosive Area,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 12, 1977, Torrent House.

²⁰⁵ Personal Communication with Jerry Lottie; Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.; Muskegon County Register of Deeds, Deed Book 976, Page 886, December 27, 1971; Muskegon County Register of Deeds, Deed Book 976, Page 886, December 27, 1971; Muskegon County Register of Deeds, Deed Book 1000, Page 773, November 20, 1972.

²⁰⁶ Personal Communication with Jerry Lottie.

or homes in all-White neighborhoods. In 1961, Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins purchased a home at 2305 Fifth Street (extant), which was located in a White neighborhood of Muskegon Heights. Clarence Wilkins was hired as the real estate broker by the previous owners, and only through this role were they able to buy the house, as there was “an unwritten rule that Black folks couldn’t live west of Peck Street” at that time. “Shortly after we moved here, it hadn’t been two weeks I think, we were sitting in the living room,” Rillastine recalls. “It was in the evening, probably four or five o’clock, and all of a sudden there was a brick that came through [the front] window. Like a bomb. We went out there, but we didn’t see anybody.” They did not confront any of their neighbors about the incident, which appears to have been an isolated event.²⁰⁷

Dr. James Jackson recalled that when he arrived in Muskegon in 1960, it was “the most segregated community of all the northern cities I’ve ever lived in.” He and his wife, Barbria, were “taken with Lake Michigan,” and decided to build a home in Norton Shores overlooking the lake. Ten builders refused to build for them because they, “weren’t supposed to live up there. That was a place for White folks,” Dr. Jackson recalled. Eventually, they did hire a willing builder, though Barbria Jackson later recalled “we went through some very bad experiences” in the process of building the home, which remains extant at 5885 Lake Harbor Road.²⁰⁸



Image 33: Dr. Frank Howell at his home, 1987
(*The Muskegon Chronicle*)

Flossie and Dr. Frank Howell had a similar experience when building their home at 377 West Lane in Norton Shores (extant). When the Howells attempted to purchase property in the all-White Roodmont neighborhood, they had difficulty with realtors who would “make appointments to show a lot and then wouldn’t show; then later they’d say ‘I missed you.’ It was one run-around after another,” Dr. Howell recalled. The Howells eventually were able to

purchase a lot with the help of Catholic priest John F. Sheehy, who arranged for a third party from Grand Rapids to purchase the lot and sell it to the Howells. When their new neighbors discovered who would actually be living on the property, one of them called Dr. Howell and offered to purchase the lot from him. “He told me, well, that he didn’t want me next door,” Dr. Howell recalled. The Howells also had difficulty in hiring a builder to construct the house. “When I showed them where my lot was, they either never responded or said they wouldn’t do it,” Dr. Howell recalled. The Howells ultimately hired a builder from Grand Rapids – one who was not familiar with the racial makeup of Muskegon neighborhoods. Dr. Howell later recalled that in spite of the less than warm welcome, and though some new fences were built after they moved in, “the neighbors didn’t speak, but they weren’t overtly hostile.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Personal Communication with Rillastine Wilkins.

²⁰⁸ Oral History Interview with Dr. James Jackson; “Moving into all-white areas, no easy task,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 10, 1977, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

²⁰⁹ “Moving into all-white areas, no easy task,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 10, 1977, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

Equal Opportunity in Education

Following Michigan's Constitutional Convention in 1961-1962, chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights John A. Hannah commented, "Of all the Constitutions in the fifty states, the new proposed Constitution of Michigan does more in the field of civil rights than has been done in any state Constitution."²¹⁰ The new document included equal rights and nondiscrimination sections in the Declaration of rights, established a civil rights commission in the state's executive branch, included civil rights in the constitution's education section, and strengthened protection against discrimination for those employed in state government.²¹¹ It was ratified in 1963, and the new Michigan Civil Rights Commission met the following year to begin assessing the challenges still facing the state's African American residents. By 1966, the commission had concluded that racial inequality remained despite the gains made in the state over the preceding decades. Among lingering problems was the de facto school segregation of both students and faculty.²¹²

A 1967 racial census of schools by the Michigan Board of Education confirmed these findings, reporting that de facto segregation within the student bodies was still firmly in place, and that teachers and principals throughout the state were predominantly White.²¹³ The study found that about 75% of African American students in the state attended predominantly African American schools, and that almost 60% of White students attended all-White schools. Reflecting on these findings, a Board member commented, "We knew the situation was bad, but now we have the cold statistics in the racial census." Because the segregation in education was tied to segregation in housing, the Board advocated for fair housing legislation to help achieve equality in the schools.²¹⁴

These statewide patterns appear to have been demonstrated in Muskegon County. As the Black population increased in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights in the 1950s and 1960s, a period of White flight began during which White residents left the cities for the suburbs, especially North Muskegon and Norton Shores. As a result, in Muskegon, a small number of schools had predominantly non-White enrollment, while in Muskegon Heights, these demographic changes were even more dramatic, with nearly all Black enrollment at all schools in the city's district. Meanwhile, the student enrollment at rural schools in the county was almost White. Melvin Burns, Jr., recalls that by the end of the 1960s, Muskegon Heights "became the Black district... when you say Muskegon Heights, it means Black."²¹⁵

This shift in demographics and concentration of Black students was viewed by some as negative. Burns recalls, "Nobody growing up in the 60s in a Black city and Black school, nobody sees that as a negative... We never saw it as that. It was like, we'll show them we'll do this as well as anybody else... Even as it was changing, we never saw it as we're less than anybody else." Part of the success of the district during this time was due to exceptional Black leadership. When John Sydnor became the first Black superintendent of Muskegon Heights schools, "That changed the game," recalls Burns. "Not only was he from here, he was from a family that valued education, he went to an HBCU – he went to Hampton [University]. So he understood Black college education. He understood the community. And he understood the importance of having Black teachers." As a result, he recruited Black teachers to come to Muskegon Heights as the district expanded throughout the 1960s. "It meant a lot to have Black teachers," Burns explains, "it made the school represent and support Black culture."²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Fine, "Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights," 191.

²¹¹ Fine, "Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights," 211-212.

²¹² Fine, "Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights," 229-232, 249.

²¹³ Fine, "Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights," 250.

²¹⁴ "Education Board Asks Housing Bill," *The Battle Creek Enquirer and News*, October 13, 1967, www.newspapers.com.

²¹⁵ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

²¹⁶ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

The community also contributed to efforts to secure equality in the school system. In 1968, a new civil rights organization known as Black People for Immediate Action formed to tackle de facto segregation and discriminatory practices in Muskegon Heights schools. The group made a list of requests to the school board that included appointing an African American superintendent, principals, and athletics director; removing police officers from the high school; including a World and American Black History curriculum for all grade levels; establishing a beautification program for each school; creating an advisory committee of African American community members to work with the school board on hiring and firing teachers; requiring a 2.0 grade point average for graduation; and improving athletics, social, and cultural programs. School officials were reluctant to negotiate with the group, however, and it does not appear that the requested changes were made.²¹⁷

Tensions escalated in 1971 when about five hundred African American and White students staged walkouts at Steele School, a K-8 school at 1150 Amity Avenue (extant). On April 2, a group of several hundred African American students walked out of school and gathered at Orchard Avenue and Wood Street, protesting unequal enforcement of school policies, though the details of their concerns were not expounded upon in local news coverage. At the same time, hundreds of White students walked out and met with Superintendent William Austin and Assistant Superintendent James Perry. The White students expressed concerns about student safety, though again the details of their complaints are not clear. The school addressed concerns of White students by instituting a hall monitor program to ensure student safety, however, there does not appear to have been any response to the concerns of African American students.²¹⁸

The integration of schools remained a challenge into the 1970s. In 1977, a study by Ralph Armour of the Educational Research Council of American revealed only the City of Muskegon schools had made progress toward integration, with African American students making up about one-third of enrollment, though only six percent of teachers were African American. The Muskegon Heights district enrolled about 85% African American students, in part because even in integrated neighborhoods, many White parents refused to send their children to schools in the district.²¹⁹ “Whites have shown us by their actions that they have no desire to integrate,” observed Superintendent John Sydnor. School counselor James Sikkenga agreed, saying that because the school was predominantly African American, “Many whites think the school can’t be any good,” even though he noted the curriculum was the same as other nearby districts.²²⁰

²¹⁷ “Heights School Officials Cool to ‘Black Ultimatum,’” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, July 4, 1968, Torrent House.

²¹⁸ Bill Hill and Frank Turco, “Steele Students Stage Walkout,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, April 3, 1971, Torrent House.

²¹⁹ “School Desegregation Rated Incomplete in Area,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 15, 1977, Torrent House.

²²⁰ “Do Blacks Get a Good Education in Muskegon County’s Schools?” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 16, 1977, Torrent House.

Context 4: The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1964 to 2000

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964, authorizing the federal government to prevent discrimination in voting, employment, education, and access to public places based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Though some aspects of the law were controversial, notably the forced busing of students to achieve racial quotas, it remains a landmark achievement of the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century.

Governor William Milliken further ensconced expectations for equal opportunities in Michigan when he signed the Michigan Civil Rights Act, known as the Elliot-Larsen Act, in 1976. The act prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status in employment, housing, education, and access to public accommodations.²²¹ Historian Sidney Fine concluded that Michigan “initially lagged behind some of the other states in its adoption of civil rights measures. By the end of 1968, however, Michigan was ahead of most states in the scope and effectiveness of its civil rights measures.”²²² Fine goes on to note that, “there had been significant civil rights gains in Michigan with regard to access to public accommodations, government contracting, and the membership of the state civil service, and lesser gains in the areas of private employment, housing, education, law enforcement, and sex and age discrimination.”²²³

Though both the federal and state laws had limitations, they opened new doors for many African Americans in Muskegon County.

Black-Owned Businesses

One of the gains of civil rights activism in Muskegon County was increased opportunities for Black business ownership, especially in Muskegon Heights. Up to this point, most Black-owned businesses had been located within predominantly Black neighborhoods; many business owners worked at a foundry or other local industry in addition to operating their own businesses; and many operated their business out of their homes.²²⁴ Nancy and Everett Beard operated a number of businesses from their home at 2008 Manz Street, including a beauty salon in the 1950s and a bonding and insurance businesses in the 1960s, which was later moved to their new home at 2032 Manz Street (extant).²²⁵ White’s Beauty and Barber Shop at 2301 Jarman Street (extant) opened in 1952 on a prominent residential corner just a few doors down from the owners’ home.²²⁶

²²¹ Fine, “Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,” 336.

²²² Fine, “Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,” 11.

²²³ Fine, “Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights,” 335.

²²⁴ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms”; White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”

²²⁵ *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1951, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1952, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1970, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon; Rose White, “History of Black-owned businesses in Muskegon highlights ‘entrepreneurial gene,’” *MLive*, February 15, 2021, <https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2021/02/history-of-black-owned-businesses-in-muskegon-highlights-entrepreneurial-gene.html>.

²²⁶ *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1951, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1952, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”



Image 34: Smitty's Furniture, c.1970
(Lakeshore Museum Center)

In the 1960s, with the support of the local Black businessowners association, the number of Black-owned businesses increased and were established in more prominent locations, especially existing commercial areas of Muskegon Heights.²²⁷ “There was an excitement for entrepreneurship,” recalls Muskegon Community College professor Pamela Smith.²²⁸ Clarence Wilkins’ bonding and real estate company was originally run out of his home in the Jackson Hill neighborhood, but in the 1960s his office was moved to a prominent location at 425 West Western Avenue in downtown Muskegon.²²⁹ In 1967, John Harris opened a Shell Service Station at the corner of West Sherman Boulevard and Peck Street (extant), one of the primary intersections in Muskegon Heights.²³⁰ Smitty’s Furniture and Carpeting opened in 1968 at 2760 Peck Street (no longer extant), the first Black-owned business in downtown Muskegon Heights, and Hi-Style

opened in 1978, the first Black-owned business in downtown Muskegon (location unknown).²³¹ Burt’s Barber and Beauty Shop at 2230 Hoyt Street (extant) was established in 1969 in a high traffic area near the Lindbergh School and the former Pearson Drug Store.²³² Black professionals also opened offices during this time, including Dr. Frank Howell’s dentistry office, which opened in the late 1950s at 2545 Baker Street (no longer extant); Dr. James Jackson’s osteopathic medical office, which opened in 1960 at 2416 Peck Street (extant); and Patterson’s Drug Store, opened in 1976 at 2144 Hoyt Street (extant) by Carolyn Patterson, the first Black woman pharmacist in Muskegon County.²³³

A small business district formed at the intersection of East Sherman Boulevard and McIlwraith Street in Muskegon Heights during this time. The earliest business in this area was the Rainbow Café, which opened in 1948 at 604 East Sherman Boulevard (extant), and by 1965 was the Starlite Club.²³⁴ Latson’s Grocery opened at 2532 McIlwraith Street (extant) and was operated by Henry Latson from around 1950 until the late 1960s.²³⁵ Mack’s Dry Cleaners at 2530 McIlwraith Street (extant) was

²²⁷ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms”; White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”

²²⁸ White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”

²²⁹ Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1960; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1965; Personal Communication with Rillastine Wilkins.

²³⁰ “50 Years of Entrepreneurship: Black Business in Muskegon/Muskegon Heights,” Muskegon Heritage Museum of Business and Industry; Muskegon County Tax Records, via BS&A Online, www.bsaonline.com; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1960; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1965; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1970; White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”

²³¹ “50 Years of Entrepreneurship”; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1970; White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”

²³² Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1965; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1970.

²³³ “50 Years of Entrepreneurship”; White, “History of Black-owned businesses”; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1955; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1960; Cynthia Price, “A Tribute to Dr. James Jackson,” *The Norton-Lakeshore Examiner*, July 4, 2018, <https://legalnews.com/muskegon/1461453>; Personal Communication with William Muhammad by Cheri Szcodronski, March 22, 2022, James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

²³⁴ “50 Years of Entrepreneurship”; Lee Lupo, “A local legacy of history, faith, and music,” *The Muskegon Chronicle* via MLive, February 5, 2008, https://www.mlive.com/muskegon_chronicle_extra/2008/02/local_culture_reveals_legacy_of_history_faith_and_music.html; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1965; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1970; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1975, Library of Michigan, Michigan History Center, Lansing; White, “History of Black-owned businesses.”

²³⁵ “50 Years of Entrepreneurship”; Oakwood Cemetery, Muskegon. Find a Grave. <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/1297/oakwood-cemetery>; Polk’s Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1955; Polk’s

owned and operated by Margaret Hansen Johnson and her son Fred Hansen, African American businessowners who were originally from Alabama. The Muskegon Heights Community Center occupied that building in the 1970s, though the building is currently vacant.²³⁶ Just around the corner, Cheeks Mobile Service Station opened at 508 East Sherman Boulevard in 1965, and Beal & Son Produce opened at 480 East Sherman Boulevard in 1970 (both extant).²³⁷

Lingering Discrimination

Even with the passage of civil rights legislation and expanding opportunities for Muskegon County's African American residents, discrimination in some areas, especially employment and housing, continued. In April 1975, Muskegon Heights resident Ciggzree Morris began working as a realtor for Wartz & Galy Realtors, a White realty firm. She focused on integrating neighborhoods in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights by selling homes in predominantly White neighborhoods to African American buyers, and was met with great animosity from White colleagues and community members. She recounts receiving death threats at her home; a man called her mother and told her to "tell Ciggzree that we're going to blow her brains out. We're going to kill her." The threats were ineffective, however. "If they were going to kill me, they would do it. That's somebody trying to frighten us," she told her mother, "And I'm not afraid."²³⁸

By November, Morris had been dismissed from the firm. She filed a discrimination suit against the company with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, whose offices were at 2542 Peck Street in Muskegon Heights (no longer extant). Though the firm's partners responded that she was laid off during a slow time for real estate, many in the community believed she was fired because of backlash from White homeowners in neighborhoods where she had sold property to African American buyers. Though Morris had some concern about backlash, she had "no intention of dropping the case. It's too important for other blacks [sic] working in real estate. This case is going to set a precedent for other cases in Muskegon." Ultimately the CRC found in her favor, but Morris was unable to find another position at a real estate firm.²³⁹

Morris's experience was not uncommon as African American women in particular struggled to obtain equal employment opportunities. Jeanette Hill was dismissed from her position at Zale's Jewelers at 338 West Western Avenue (no longer extant) and filed a discrimination complaint with the Michigan CRC. Describing employment for African American women in Muskegon, she explained, "There's just no room for us. They've given us meager, token jobs or government jobs. That's how blacks [sic] have gotten in."²⁴⁰ Theodore Williams, Muskegon County Human Resources Director, commented that "you see more black [sic] faces in visible places, but you see them all in the same places. Behind typewriters

Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory, 1960; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1970; U.S. Census Bureau, 1950; White, "History of Black-owned businesses."

²³⁶ "50 Years of Entrepreneurship"; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1955; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1960; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1970; White, "History of Black-owned businesses."

²³⁷ "50 Years of Entrepreneurship"; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1970; White, "History of Black-owned businesses."

²³⁸ Schaub, "Up From the Bottoms."

²³⁹ Ciggzree Morris Obituary, Fountain Funeral Homes, August 26, 2022, <https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/25786012/ciggzree-morris>; Robert Burns, "Muskegon realty firm charged with race bias," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, February 24, 1977, Torrent House; Muskegon NAACP, "100 Years of the NAACP in Muskegon County."

²⁴⁰ Kim Jordan et al, "Black Life in Muskegon County: Recession Never Seems to End for Many Black Workers Here," *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 10, 1977, Torrent House.

or dustmops. But not in decision making positions.”²⁴¹ The Michigan Economic Security Commission (MESCC) predicted the trend would continue and that 1978 would see a little over 7% unemployment among White workers, 12.7% unemployment among African American workers, and over 13% unemployment for African American women specifically.²⁴²

Unlike many others, Ciggzree Morris was able to overcome these challenges. When she was unable to secure a new position at a real estate firm, she instead obtained her own broker’s license - the first African American woman in Western Michigan to do so - and established Ciggzree’s Real Estate at 2528 Peck Street (extant). She also obtained a building contractor license and real estate appraiser license, and with her husband Richard, who was an electrician, she purchased, rehabbed, and rented or sold over forty properties, eventually adding a property division to her real estate firm.²⁴³



Image 35: Zale's Jewelers, 1974
(*The Muskegon Chronicle*)

Still, discriminatory practices remained in Muskegon County’s housing market. Morris observed in 1977, “Real Estate is still a very explosive and extremely sensitive area where dealing with minorities is concerned. There seems to be more of an undercurrent, maybe because of open housing laws.” She emphasized the importance of people having the option to live wherever they could afford to, regardless of integration or segregation, but that it was difficult to achieve. “Whites react through ignorance and fear, but by the same token, some blacks [sic] don’t want to live in white neighborhoods. Some people don’t like going into a hostile community,” she observed.²⁴⁴

Black Representation

While efforts for equality in housing and employment continued through the 1970s, African American residents in Muskegon County continued to make progress in business ownership and also experienced new opportunities for representation in local government. This was especially true in Muskegon Heights where population demographics shifted from primarily White in the early twentieth century to predominantly Black by the late twentieth century.

Reverend Charles Poole of Bethesda Baptist Church was the first Black elected official in Muskegon, serving on the school board from 1970 until 1978, and again from 1997 until 2011, including serving as chairman from 1999 until he stepped down in 2011.²⁴⁵ In 1972, at the urging of local Civil Rights leaders including Dr. James Jackson and Reverend Melvin Burns, Sr., Robert Dowson, a prominent

²⁴¹ Kim Jordan et al, “Black Life in Muskegon County: Recession Never Seems to End for Many Black Workers Here,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 10, 1977, Torrent House.

²⁴² Kim Jordan et al, “Black Life in Muskegon County: Recession Never Seems to End for Many Black Workers Here,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 10, 1977, Torrent House.

²⁴³ Ciggzree Morris Obituary, Fountain Funeral Homes, August 26, 2022, <https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/25786012/ciggzree-morris>; Robert Burns, “Muskegon realty firm charged with race bias,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, February 24, 1977, Torrent House; Muskegon NAACP, “100 Years of the NAACP in Muskegon County.”

²⁴⁴ “Discrimination in Housing Still Explosive Area,” *The Muskegon Chronicle*, October 12, 1977, Torrent House.

²⁴⁵ Lynn Moore, “Rev. Charles Poole ends historical run as Muskegon’s first elected Black official,” *MLive*, https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2011/11/rev_charles_poole_ends_histori.html.

Civil Rights activist in Muskegon Heights, was appointed the first Black office manager of the city's Secretary of State License Bureau. While Dowson was given a seven-day overlap period to learn the job from the previous manager, the existing staff at the office refused to train or assist him in any way and the entire staff resigned when he took over the role. He spent the week reading policies and hiring staff. He served in the position until he resigned in 1977, and he later recalled, "The regional manager said to me when I resigned in '77, 'Bob, we didn't think you'd make it.' [Dowson responded,] 'You're right. You didn't intend for me to make it, because you didn't help.'"²⁴⁶

Opportunities for roles as elected officials expanded through the late twentieth century. In 1983, Robert Warren was elected the first Black mayor of Muskegon Heights. Originally from Mississippi, Warren served as Muskegon Heights school teacher and superintendent prior to his election, and he was well-known in the community for his Civil Rights activism. Warren served as mayor until 1999 when he lost a bid for re-election. Upon his unexpected death the following year, his body lay in state at the Muskegon Heights City Hall at the urging of Rillastine Wilkins. Wilkins had run against Warren in 1991 and lost, but then defeated him in 1999 to become the first Black woman elected mayor of Muskegon Heights. "They were chauvinistic," she says of the city staff and council. "They didn't want to accept a woman." But she was known as a community representative who wanted to help people and worked to improve quality of life, tackling issues like job opportunities, eviction protection, and interventions for high-risk children. She recalls, "It was just getting jobs and integrating, making sure that Black people were represented, and they worked for the city." She continued to serve as mayor until 2007.²⁴⁷



Image 36: Mayor Rillastine Wilkins, 2006

Although the efforts of the 1960s and early 1970s had resulted in some positive change in the social and economic status of African American residents in Muskegon, and African Americans saw advancements in business and leadership, the struggle for civil rights remains ongoing.

²⁴⁶ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson (Civil Rights activist) and Melvin Burns, Jr., (Muskegon Heights City Manager) by Cheri Szcodronski, March 1, 2023, at Dowson Home, Muskegon Heights.

²⁴⁷ Lynn Moore, "Helping others the highlight of Rillastine Wilkins' remarkable 45 years in Muskegon politics," *MLive*, January 2, 2023, <https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2023/01/helping-others-the-highlight-of-rillastine-wilkins-remarkable-45-years-in-muskegon-politics.html>; Cory Morse, "Rillastine Wilkins," *MLive*, <https://www.mlive.com/galleries/UXM5IFC6LNBjDQVT2EXTHYUKQ>; Andy O'Riley, "Professional Women Making a Difference with Michelle Tyson - Rillastine Wilkins," *MuskegonChannel.com*, February 20, 2022, <https://muskegonchannel.com/muskegon-metro-area/1925-professional-women-making-a-difference-with-michelle-tyson-rillastine-wilkins>; Personal Communication with Rillastine Wilkins; Jamie Sherrod, "90-year-old Muskegon County commissioner reflects on milestone birthday and decades of service," *Fox 17 West Michigan*, August 15, 2022, <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/90-year-old-muskegon-county-commissioner-reflects-on-milestone-birthday-and-decades-of-service>; Jamie Sherrod, "Long-serving Muskegon County commissioner retires at the age of 90," *Fox 17 West Michigan*, November 15, 2022, <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/long-serving-muskegon-county-commissioner-retires-at-the-age-of-90>; Robert A. Warren Obituary, *The Greenwood Commonwealth*, June 10, 2000, <https://www.gwcommonwealth.com/archives/robert-warren>.

Conclusion: Loss of Muskegon's Black History and Civil Rights Resources – 1960 to Present

Since the late twentieth century, resources related to Black history and the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights have been demolished at an alarming rate. Urban renewal projects and highway construction starting in the 1960s have greatly impacted Black neighborhoods, especially the Jackson Hill community. The late-twentieth-century decline of industry in the county has resulted in the loss of many of the businesses that recruited Black laborers to come to Muskegon in the 1940s. Efforts to revitalize the downtown Muskegon economy in the 1970s resulted in the demolition of many of the key locations related to the city's Civil Rights Movement. And financial challenges in the Muskegon Heights Public Schools have resulted in demolition, alteration, and vacancy among the city's historic school buildings.

Urban Renewal and Highway Construction

The Jackson Hill Neighborhood, home to a predominantly Black population, was severely impacted by urban renewal efforts in the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s, all buildings on Prospect Street were condemned and taken by eminent domain, while the street itself and its cross streets were removed to make way for the construction of the Business US 31 Expressway. Ottawa Street, the primary Black business district in Muskegon, was located on the west side of the expressway and became cut off from the rest of the neighborhood to the east.²⁴⁸ This area had been “the liveliest street in town” according to resident Spencer Norman, with retail stores and a bustling night life.²⁴⁹ However, many of the businesses that made up the neighborhood's commercial core, including Tourre's Grocery, Sepia Café, and the Moroccan Club, closed as a result of the separation of Ottawa Street from the rest of the neighborhood.²⁵⁰

Black churches were especially affected by the construction of Business US 31 and later Shoreline and Seaway Drives. The Deacon Lewis Hinton Home at 439 Ottawa Street, the first location of the Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ; a house at 567 Ottawa Street used as the Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church and Parsonage; New Hope Baptist Church at 341 Ottawa Street; and the John Wesley AME Zion Church at 23 East Webster Avenue were all demolished for road construction projects. This was particularly devastating to the Jackson Hill neighborhood due to the great importance of churches as the center of Black communities. Only New Hope Baptist and John Wesley AME Zion relocated within the neighborhood.

By 1979, approximately \$4 million had been spent in the neighborhood by the Muskegon Office of Urban Development, about 75% of which included federal grants. Though these funds were utilized to build the playground at Smith-Ryerson Park at 650 Wood Street (extant), make a number of infrastructure improvements, and refurbish about 175-200 homes, they were also used for the demolition of 250 buildings, mostly homes. Only fifteen new single-family homes were constructed to replace those lost. The resulting vacant lots further fractured the neighborhood's landscape and caused a steep decline in the neighborhood's population, ultimately leading to the closure of the

²⁴⁸ Trygg Lodge No. 536, Vasa Order of America, ed, “Jackson Hill Area: A Historical Sketch,” City of Muskegon Planning Department, 26.

²⁴⁹ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

²⁵⁰ Trygg Lodge No. 536, Vasa Order of America, ed, “Jackson Hill Area: A Historical Sketch,” City of Muskegon Planning Department, 26.

Froebel School and other community institutions in the late twentieth century.²⁵¹ Jerry Lottie, chair of the NAACP Housing Committee and Director of the Muskegon Housing Commission, recalled “They didn’t always give us the opportunity to rebuild. They didn’t teach us how to rebuild our neighborhood.”²⁵²

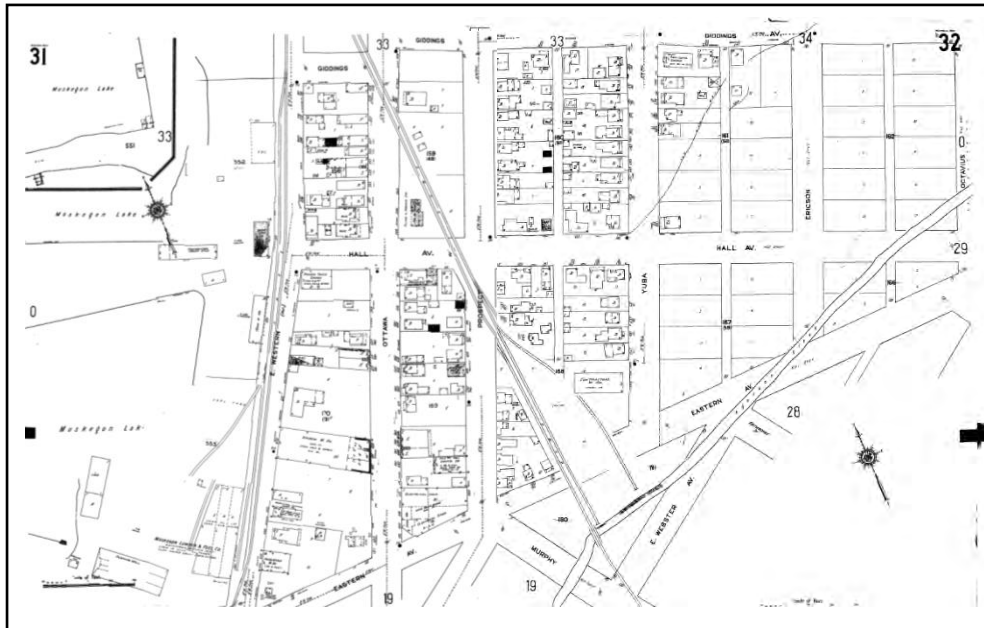


Image 38: 1950 Sanborn Map of Southeast Jackson Hill
(University of Michigan)



Image 37: 2024 Aerial Image of Southeast Jackson Hill
(Muskegon County Property Information Viewer)

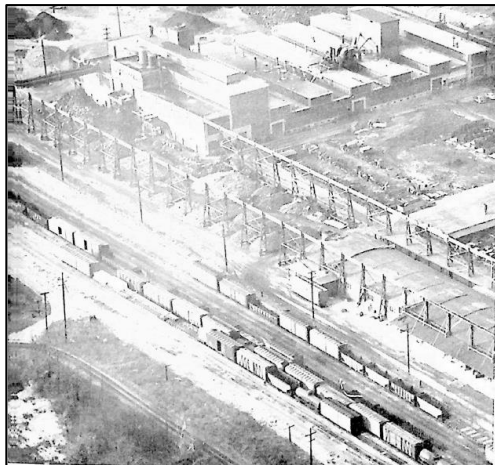
²⁵¹ Trygg Lodge No 536, “Jackson Hill Area,” 26.

²⁵² Personal Communication with Jerry Lottie.

Decline of Industry

Muskegon County's industries, especially its foundries, were the primary economic driver through most of the twentieth century. Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company, Lakey Foundry, Sealed Power Corporation, and Continental Motors were founded in the early twentieth century and became the county's largest employers, especially with increased in production during World War I and World War II. However, the end of war-related production, the deregulation of the trucking industry, and the increase in global competition, all contributed to a decrease in the demand for engine parts, and these industries began to downsize and close.²⁵³ Once these companies went into decline, most of the buildings were razed. As a result, many of the companies that offered Southern Black laborers new job opportunities during the early and mid-twentieth century, resulting in the dramatic growth of the Black population from the 1940s through the at least the 1960s, are no longer present on the Muskegon County landscape.

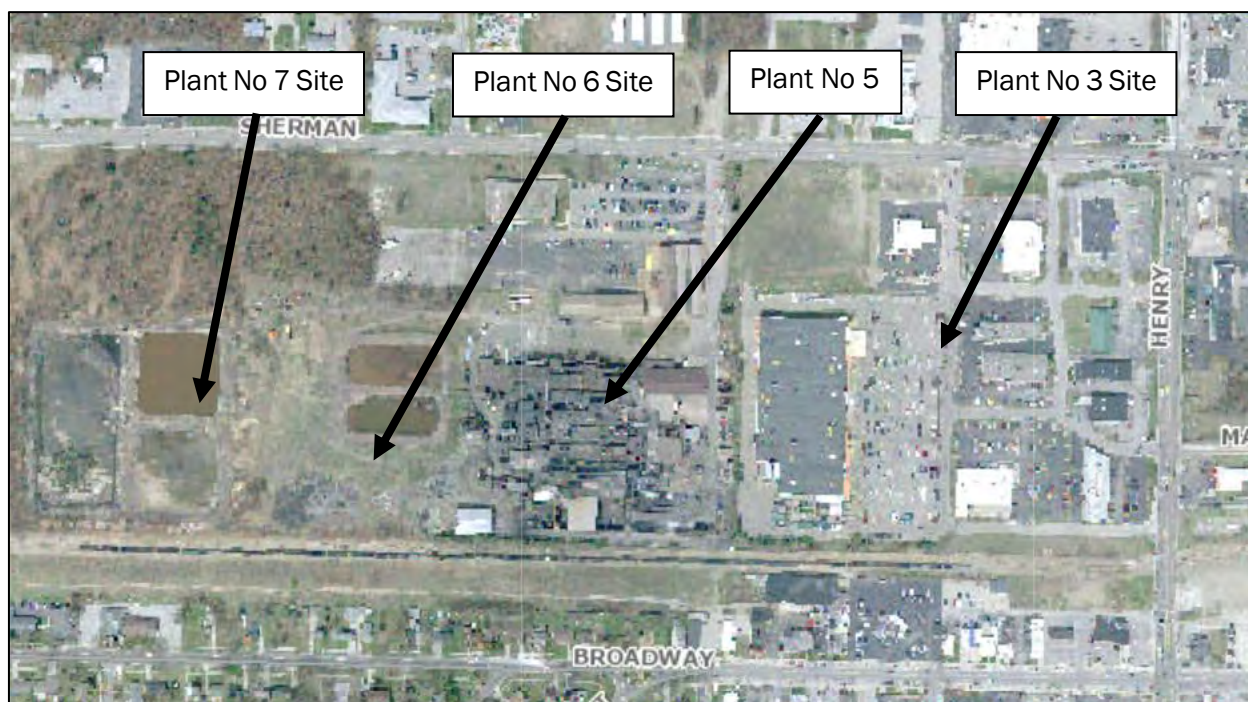
CWC, for example, operated seven plants at its peak production in the 1960s, but throughout the late twentieth century downsized significantly. Plant No 3 closed in the mid-1980s when it was consolidated with a related facility in Columbus, Indiana; Plant No 6 and Plant No 7 closed in the 1990s; and Plant No 1 and Plant No 4 were also closed by the turn of the twenty-first century. Only Plant No 4 at 500 West Broadway Avenue in Muskegon Heights and Plant No 5 at 1085 West Sherman Boulevard in Muskegon remain extant. The sites of Plant No 6 and No 7 remain vacant, while the Plant No 3 site is now a large shopping center. Lakey Foundry experienced a similar decline when it went bankrupt and closed in 1972, and Sealed Power, closed around 2005 (neither extant). The Continental Motors plant closed and was sold to Teledyne Technologies in the 1960s. The facility remains extant at 76 South Getty Street, and now houses General Dynamics Land Systems, a manufacturer of tracked and wheeled military equipment.²⁵⁴



*Image 39: Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Plant No 6 (left) and Plant No 3 (right), date unknown
(That First Casting Must Be Good)*

²⁵³ Personal Communication with Jim Heethuis; Personal Communication with John Workman and Marti Workman.

²⁵⁴ Personal Communication with Jim Heethuis; Dave Alexander, "Major piece of Muskegon's history joining scrapheap," *MLive*, December 7, 2008, https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2008/12/sun_major_piece_of_muskegons_h.html; Mary Franklyn, "Looking Back: Lakey Foundry bankruptcy stuns Muskegon area," *The Muskegon Chronicle* via *MLive*, February 8, 2010, https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2010/02/looking_back_lakey_foundry_ban.html; Dave LeMieux, "Lookback: Plane powered by engine from Continental Motors in Muskegon sets flying speed record," *The Muskegon Chronicle* via *MLive*, March 4, 2013, https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2013/03/lookback_plane_powered_by_engi_1.html.



*Image 40: 2024 Aerial Image of Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Site of Plant Nos 3, 5, 6, and 7
(Muskegon County Property Information Viewer)*

Impact of Downtown Revitalization

Resources related to the City of Muskegon's Black history have been disproportionately affected by downtown revitalization efforts in the late twentieth century. Starting in the late 1950s and early 1960s, business owners, faced with a dramatic decline in the downtown economy, began seeking redevelopment options. In response, city leaders proposed a downtown revitalization project that would convert eight blocks of the historic storefronts into a downtown mall. Modeled after similar projects in Kalamazoo, Jackson, and other Michigan cities, the goal of the project was to attract shoppers back to downtown. By 1972, much of the needed acreage had been acquired and a portion of it had been cleared in preparation for building the mall, but the city was struggling to secure anchor businesses due to the severely depressed economy in Muskegon at that time. City leaders ultimately attracted Sears, Roebuck & Co., and Paul Steketee & Sons to open large department stores on each end of the mall. Construction began in 1974 and the mall opened in 1976.²⁵⁵



*Image 41: Downtown Muskegon c.1930
(City of Muskegon)*

²⁵⁵ Duane Kenyon, "State's Downtown Areas at Crossroads," *The News-Palladium [Benton Harbor]*, June 29, 1972, Newspapers.com; Zhumin Xu and Brandon Bartoszek, "Western Avenue: Past, Present, and Future," City of Muskegon, <https://www.muskegon-mi.gov/cresources/downtown-history/downtown-history.pdf>.

The Muskegon Mall encompassed eight blocks of the central business district along West Western Avenue, bounded by Third Street, Morris Avenue, Terrace Street, and West Clay Avenue. To build the mall, West Western Avenue was removed from Third Street to Terrace Street, and the shops, restaurants, offices, and other buildings on those blocks were demolished. As a result, many of the places related to Black history and the Civil Rights Movement have been lost, including Ciggzree's Women's Clothing Boutique, Budd Jewelry Company, Walgreens Drug Company, Ar-Jer's Clothing, The Square Clothing Company, Krauthelm Jewelers, Zale's Jewelry, Friend's Friendly Clothiers, Grossman's Department Store, and the Occidental Hotel, all once located on West Western Avenue.²⁵⁶



Image 42: The Muskegon Mall, c.1980
(City of Muskegon)



Image 43: Muskegon Mall Site c.2005
(City of Muskegon)

During the groundbreaking ceremonies in 1974, Marvin Lovett from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Detroit Office compared the mall to a "heart transplant operation," saying "the project will revitalize the economy of the Muskegon area."²⁵⁷ Initially, this optimistic prediction appeared to come to fruition. In 1989, the Muskegon Mall was the top retail destination in Muskegon County. However, in 2001, The Lakes Mall opened, located in Fruitport Township south of the city and easily accessed by both I-96 and US Highway 31. Sears and Steketee left the downtown Muskegon Mall and relocated to The Lakes, followed by a number of other smaller stores. As a result, the Muskegon Mall

closed in 2001 and was demolished in 2003. West Western Avenue was rebuilt through the former mall site in 2006, and redevelopment of the area continues.²⁵⁸

Muskegon Heights School District Challenges

School buildings are perhaps the most threatened Black resource in Muskegon Heights. The school district built or expanded its schools in the 1950s and 1960s to accommodate the rapidly growing Black population in the city during that time. Early twentieth century schools were expanded, including Central School at 55 East Sherman Boulevard and Charles A. Lindbergh School at 160 East Barney Street, or rebuilt, as with Glendale School at 3001 Jefferson Street, Central Elementary School at 2603

²⁵⁶ Xu and Bartoszek, "Western Avenue"; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1960, US City Directories, 1822-1995, Ancestry.com; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1965, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon; *Polk's Muskegon (Michigan) City Directory*, 1970, Hackley Public Library, Torrent House Local History and Genealogy Department, Muskegon.

²⁵⁷ Mary Franklyn, "Looking Back: Muskegon Mall transformed downtown," *The Muskegon Chronicle* via MLive, November 2, 2009, https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2009/11/looking_back_muskegon_mall_tra.html.

²⁵⁸ Franklyn, "Muskegon Mall transformed downtown."

Leahy Street, and Edgewood Elementary School at 3028 Howden Street. New schools were also constructed, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School at 600 East Barney Street and Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School at 2301 Sixth Street.

By the early twenty-first century, the district had fallen deep into debt, a result of low median income in the city, falling property values, and a decreasing student population. In 2012, an emergency manager was appointed in an effort to avoid bankruptcy, and the decision was made to turn over the school district to a private management company that began consolidating, closing, and selling historic school buildings. Glendale School, Lindbergh School, and Dr. King School were closed and scheduled for demolition by 2019. Glendale School has been replaced by a housing development, while the Lindbergh and Dr. King schools remain extant though vacant. Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School at 525 West Summit Avenue was not razed, but instead the building was converted to apartments and a large, modern addition that nearly doubled the size of the building was constructed.²⁵⁹



Image 44: Glendale School, c.2019
(MLive)



Image 45: Roosevelt Apartments

The remaining schools continue to operate, though as charter or private schools. Edgewood Elementary School is now Edgewood Elementary Academy; Central Elementary School now houses the Muskegon Heights Board of Education and Pathfinders of Muskegon after school programs; Central School is now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Academy; and Loftis Elementary School is now the Westshore Christian Academy. In late 2023, the State of Michigan forgave the district's \$30 million debt, and the school system is expected to return to a traditional public school system, though the future of its school buildings remains uncertain.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Lindsey Smith, "Muskegon Heights schools 3rd district with emergency manager," *Michigan Public* (NPR), April 19, 2012, <https://www.michiganpublic.org/education/2012-04-19/muskegon-heights-schools-3rd-district-with-emergency-manager>; Lindsey Smith, "Muskegon Heights schools handed over to charter school company," *Michigan Public* (NPR), July 11, 2012, <https://www.michiganpublic.org/education/2012-07-11/muskegon-heights-schools-handed-over-to-charter-school-company>; Justine Lofton, "Muskegon Heights school to be demolished, replaced with housing," *MLive*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2019/04/muskegon-heights-school-to-be-demolished-replaced-with-housing.html>; Megan Hart, "After 81 years, it's 'Goodbye, Muskegon Heights Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School,'" *MLive*, June 12, 2010, https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2010/06/goodbye_muskegon_heights_roose.html; Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

²⁶⁰ Julie Dunmire, "Debt forgiveness in Muskegon Heights school district means tax break for residents," *Fox 17 West Michigan*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/lakeshore/muskegon/debt-forgiveness-in-muskegon-heights-school-district-means-tax-break-for-residents>; Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

Ongoing Preservation Efforts

In spite of changes to the physical landscape and the loss of buildings related to the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County, a number of local organizations are working to preserve Black history and culture. One of the most notable is the James Jackson Museum of African American History at 7 East Center Street, Muskegon Heights (extant). Dr. Jackson had a personal collection of artifacts he housed at his medical office at 2416 Peck Street (extant) until it became too large for the space. Museum board member William Muhammad explained, “The museum was an attempt to establish an institution that would allow and help people to get in touch with their history as black [sic] people, not just here in Muskegon, but around the world.”²⁶¹ The museum opened in 2008 and has exhibits about local Black leaders, the history of Black residents in Muskegon, and the local Civil Rights Movement, as well as a community meeting space. Museum volunteers have also conducted several oral history interviews with local Black leaders that are available on the museum YouTube channel. An addition was constructed onto the original building around 2010 to house an education wing with additional space for meetings, events, and exhibits.²⁶² In 2012, the museum was renamed in honor of Dr. Jackson.²⁶³

A number of other local organizations are doing similar work to preserve Black history in Muskegon County. The Muskegon Branch of the NAACP celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019 with a documentary celebrating Black history in the county and the organization’s role in the local Civil Rights Movement. The film included a number of oral history interviews with Black community leaders. The Lakeshore Museum Center offers educational kits that contain primary source materials related to the Black experience in Muskegon County for teachers to check-out for use in the classroom. The museum has also offered exhibits about Black businesses, the Civil Rights Movement, and other topics relevant to Black history in the county. A number of photos and histories related to these exhibits remain available on the museum’s website. The Muskegon Art Museum has hosted exhibits related to Black history and culture; the Coalition for Community Development promotes healthy families through partnerships with schools in Muskegon Heights; and the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District offers high school coursework specific to local and national Black history.

When reflecting on his experiences as a Civil Rights activist, Robert Dowson says, “You didn’t think you would see [the results] in your own time. There’s a bunch of people my age in this community whose parents grew up in the South... We know what it took them to get here. [They came] to try and get a better life. And we just tried to take the next step.”²⁶⁴ “Muskegon has come a long way,” reflects Ciggzree Morris, “but it still has a long way to go.”²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Lisha Arino, “Muskegon County Museum of African American History to be renamed after local civil rights activist,” *MLive*, November 2, 2012, https://www.mlive.com/entertainment/muskegon/2012/11/muskegon_county_museum_of_afri.html.

²⁶² Oral History Interview with Dr. James Jackson.

²⁶³ Arino, “Muskegon County Museum of African American History to be renamed.”

²⁶⁴ Personal Communication with Robert Dowson and Melvin Burns, Jr.

²⁶⁵ Schaub, “Up From the Bottoms.”

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Architecture Context

Property Type 1: Places Related to Black Community

Descriptive Overview

As Southern Black laborers migrated to Muskegon seeking higher paying jobs, they discovered many of the same discriminatory practices they experienced in the South were also in effect in the North. Among these was de facto housing, employment, and social segregation. As a result, newcomers formed Black communities that provided safety and support for residents through the establishment of separate schools, churches, businesses, and other institutions. This settlement pattern remains visible on today's landscape, especially in Muskegon Heights, where many Black institutions were established in the mid-twentieth century to accommodate the city's growing Black population.

Subtype A: Schools

Many Black laborers chose to remain in Muskegon County following their migration North for jobs in World War II-related manufacturing. As a result, the number of Black families with children had grown dramatically by the 1960s, necessitating the expansion of existing schools or construction of new schools. Therefore, schools generally fall into two architecture patterns, those constructed in the early twentieth century in Classical styles and expanded in the mid-twentieth century with Modernist-style additions, and Modernist-style schools constructed in the mid-twentieth century.

Central School at 55 East Sherman Boulevard, Muskegon Heights, illustrates the first type. Built in 1926 in a predominantly White neighborhood of Muskegon Heights, this two-story, brick and limestone building is a fine example of an early twentieth century Classical Revival-style school. The main entrance, facing Peck Street, is set in a recessed bay within an arched opening with a carved limestone surround with keystone and springers flanked by paired Classical pilasters and topped with a triglyph entablature. Windows are generally set in pairs, with limestone window surrounds, and limestone sill and lintel courses.



Image 46: Central School, 1926 Wing



Image 47: Central School, c.1964 Addition

Around 1964, a one-story, brick veneer Modernist addition with a flat roof and deep eaves was constructed on the east end of the building. This wing features three-part tall, narrow, fixed aluminum windows set in groups of three to form an inverted polygonal bay, with projecting canted walls and an

integrated triangular planter. Remaining window openings feature tall, narrow, casement windows, each with a single-light transom and metal spandrel panel below.

Edgewood Elementary School at 3028 Howden Street, Muskegon Heights, was constructed around 1955 in the Modernist style, replacing a smaller 1919 school building. This one-story, brick veneer school has a flat roof and a wide, metal paneled cornice. The central section of the façade projects to a point and contains six aluminum-framed casement windows with single-light transoms and metal spandrel panels with slightly projecting stone veneer walls on each end. This section is flanked by entrances, each containing two metal doors with fixed narrow lights, one-light-over-one-panel sidelights, and topped with a five-light transom. Wings extending to the north and south angle slightly to the west to create a bow shape. These wings, as well as the side and rear elevations, contain aluminum-framed casement windows with single-light transoms and metal spandrel panels, set within slightly projecting brick surrounds.



Image 48: Edgewood Elementary School Entrance



Image 49: Edgewood Elementary School

Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School at 2301 Sixth Street, Muskegon Heights, was built in 1961 during a period of rapid population growth in Muskegon Heights. This one-story, flat-roof school is a long, low building forming an L-shape. A narrow metal awning supported by round metal posts shelters paired one-light metal doors flanked by aluminum-framed windows with transoms. Classrooms feature banks of five fixed aluminum windows with awning windows below and metal panels above and below the windows.



Image 50: Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School



Image 51: Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School

Subtype B: Churches

As with schools, Black churches also were commonly built or expanded in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights during the 1960s to accommodate the increasing population. As a result, churches generally fall into two architectural patterns, those built in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century by White denominations and later occupied by Black congregations, and those built in the mid-twentieth century by Black congregations.

John Wesley AME Zion Church at 886 Wood Street, Muskegon, was built in 1909-1911 as the First Netherlands Reformed Church for Dutch immigrants living in the Jackson Hill neighborhood. As church membership dwindled, the building was sold to the John Wesley AME Zion Church in 1970 after the congregation was displaced from its building on Webster Avenue to make way for the Moses J. Jones Parkway and Shoreline Drive/Business 31. A fine example of Gothic Revival-style religious architecture, the church features pointed arch windows with drip molding and tracery, brick and limestone buttresses, roof finials, and asymmetrical corner towers.



Image 52: John Wesley AME Zion Church



Image 53: John Wesley AME Zion Church, Window Detail

Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church is the oldest congregation in Muskegon, founded in 1910. The church met in a number of other locations, each outgrown as the congregation increased. In 1969, the congregation constructed the current brick-veneer, Modernist-style church at 575 South Getty Street, Muskegon. The main entrance is centered on the façade, and a polygonal overhang shelters a slightly recessed entrance containing a pair of aluminum-framed doors flanked by full height, multi-pane, aluminum-framed windows. The metal casement windows are paired on the sanctuary wing, feature metal spandrel panels, and are sheltered by slightly projecting polygonal lintels. The flat roof



Image 55: Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church



Image 54: Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church Education Wing

features two projecting hexagonal vaults, one topped with a metal cross. As the congregation continued to grow, the church was enlarged in 1988 with the construction of an education wing, featuring Modernist-style detailing compatible with the sanctuary wing.

Phillip Chapel AME Church at 2145 Dyson Street, Muskegon Heights, was built in 1964 for what appears to have been a newly formed Black congregation. The brick-veneer church is an intact Modernist-style building, featuring a tall, narrow, stained glass window that extends into the gable end, an open bell tower, and multi-light awning windows set high on the walls, just under the roofline.



Image 56: Phillip Chapel AME Church

Subtype C: Businesses

In the 1940s and 1950s, when Muskegon Heights neighborhoods were still largely segregated, Black-owned businesses providing necessary goods and services were located throughout Black neighborhoods. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many of the barriers to Black entrepreneurship were removed and more Black-owned businesses formed throughout the city. Earlier Black businesses were typically operated out of the business owner's home, while those established in the late 1960s and later were located in vernacular buildings or commercial storefronts.



Image 57: Beard's Bonding and Insurance

Beard's Bonding and Insurance, located at 2032 Manz Street, Muskegon Heights, in a residential neighborhood, is an example of a Black-owned business operated out of the owner's home. Opened at this location in 1970, the business was operated out of Nancy and Everett Beard's 1951 Ranch-style home. The house retains the form and detailing characteristic of the Ranch style, including a long, low, one-story, hip-roof form; an off-center entrance accessed by a small, uncovered stoop; and a picture window flanked by one-over-one windows.

White's Beauty and Barber Shop at 2301 Jarman Street, Muskegon Heights, is a vernacular commercial building prominently located on a corner lot within a residential neighborhood. The shop was established by Catherine and Corner White, whose home is on the same block. Built in 1952, the building features elements and materials common to the mid-twentieth century, including a front-gable form with a pent parapet on the façade, aluminum sliding windows, vertical wood sheathing, and integrated brick and concrete planters.



Image 58: White's Beauty and Barber Shop

A small Black business district on McIlwraith Street and East Sherman Boulevard in Muskegon Heights contains vernacular commercial storefronts built during the mid-twentieth-century period of population growth in the city. These buildings are one or two stories, constructed of brick or concrete block, feature storefronts with large display windows, and have little ornamentation. The district includes the c.1950 Latson's Grocery at 2532 McIlwraith Street; the c.1951 Cheeks Mobil Service Station at 508 East Sherman Avenue; the c.1960 Muskegon Heights Community Center at 2530 McIlwraith Street; the 1965 Starlight Club at 604 East Sherman Boulevard; and the 1970 Beal & Son Produce at 480 East Sherman Avenue.



Image 59: Muskegon Heights Community Center and Latson's Grocery



Image 60: Beal & Son Produce



Image 61: Cheeks Mobil Service Station



Image 62: Starlight Lounge

Subtype D: Recreation

Segregation had a substantial impact on recreation and sports in Muskegon County. Local recreational facilities, such as parks or community centers, were often located in segregated neighborhoods. In Black neighborhoods, some recreational facilities were established through the benevolence of White benefactors, though many had no recreational spaces outside those associated with the schools. The impact of segregation in Muskegon County's semi-professional sports was affected by the racial status quo of the cities and states Muskegon teams visited; since the teams and facilities of competitors were segregated, those in Muskegon were segregated as well.

Smith-Ryerson Park at 650 Wood Street in the Jackson Hill neighborhood of Muskegon was established in 1963 with funding from Central Paper Company president C.W. Smith. An existing building on the site served as a community center and the playground was constructed in the early 1970s using urban renewal funding, but no other historic features of the park remain. Improvements made in 2011 included the construction of new picnic shelter and restroom buildings, improvements to the basketball courts and football fields, construction of a new walking trail, and installation of updated playground equipment.



Image 63: Smith-Ryerson Park Community Center



Image 64: Smith-Ryerson Park Picnic Shelter

Marsh Field at 1800 Peck Street also includes both historic and recent features. Built in 1916, the field was home to semi-professional, Negro League, and All-American Girls League baseball through 1953. The historic playing field remains intact, however, once semi-professional baseball ended at Marsh Field in 1951, the grandstands were demolished and new grandstands were constructed in the 1980s to accommodate local recreational teams.



Image 65: Marsh Field Historic Playing Field



Image 66: 1980s Grandstands at Marsh Field

Subtype E: Neighborhoods

Though many Black residents of Muskegon and Muskegon Heights formed cohesive Black neighborhoods with their own separate schools, churches, and other institutions, many of these neighborhoods were later fragmented by urban renewal projects, highway construction, “White flight,” and overall disinvestment in the mid- to late twentieth century. Black neighborhoods generally formed either as early twentieth century White neighborhoods that became predominantly Black due to White flight, or that developed as a distinct Black neighborhood during population growth in the mid-twentieth century. The first were primarily made up of early twentieth century architectural styles; the

latter were made up of Minimal Traditional, Ranch, or Modernist styles, though none of these mid-twentieth-century Black neighborhoods were surveyed during this project.

The Jackson Hill neighborhood in northwestern Muskegon, though settled by European immigrants, had shifted to a predominantly Black neighborhood by the mid-twentieth century. The neighborhood was the subject of an urban renewal project that demolished hundreds of homes; a highway project that separated the western portion of the neighborhood, including its commercial district, from the rest of the community; and was further affected by the resultant White flight and disinvestment. The neighborhood is now largely fragmented with numerous vacant lots, but does retain pockets of early twentieth century housing, predominantly vernacular and Craftsman-style buildings, as well as stylish institutions including two Gothic Revival-style churches and a Spanish Colonial Revival-style school building.



Image 67: Houses on the North Side of Marquette Avenue and Vacant Lots on the South Side



Image 68: Craftsman Style Homes on Marquette Avenue

Property Type 2: Places Related to Black Leadership

Descriptive Overview

Places related to Black leadership include the homes, workplaces, and other buildings directly related to Muskegon County's Black leaders. Some of these properties were constructed in the early twentieth century for White owners, but they derive their significance from later Black occupants. Others were built for Black occupants in the mid- or late twentieth century and represent styles popular nationwide during that period.

Places Related to Black Leadership

The Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House at 2305 Fifth Street, Muskegon Heights, was built in 1952 in a White neighborhood for a White owner. This one-and-one-half-story, brick veneer Period Cottage features Colonial Revival detailing, including grouped multi-light windows and dormers on the front and rear elevations, and elements common to the mid-twentieth century, including casement windows. It is significant for its association with Rillastine Wilkins, a prominent Civil Rights activist, politician, and community leader, who began her political



Image 69: Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House

career in 1974. The Wilkins moved into the house in 1961, becoming the first African Americans to live in this neighborhood.



Image 70: Flossie and Dr. Frank Howell House

The Flossie and Dr. Frank Howell House at 377 West Lane, Norton Shores was built by the Howells in 1965. This brick house features Modernist detailing common to that period, including an asymmetrical form with deep eaves and a six-part bowed casement window. The house is significant for its association with Dr. Frank Howell, a prominent Civil Rights activist and community leader. The Howells were the first African Americans to live in this neighborhood.

Property Type 3: Places Related to the Civil Rights Movement

Descriptive Overview

In 2018, the National Park Service published *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*. The goal of the document is to provide guidance for identifying and prioritizing those areas of history that illustrate the Civil Rights story and to evaluate national significance or eligibility for inclusion in the National Park System. Though the known Civil Rights-related properties in Muskegon are locally, not nationally, significant, this framework was applied to identify, document, and assess the properties included in this project. The following subtypes and descriptions are summarized from that document.

Subtype A: Equal Education

While equal education in the South was focused on the integration of schools following the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, northern efforts for equality in schools focused on the commonly substantial disparities between the funding for teachers, equipment, and school buildings for predominantly White versus predominantly Black schools. As a result, conflict over school integration was relatively minimal in Muskegon County. Instead, properties related to equal education were sites of protests or other demonstrations among the student body, parents, or broader community. Places related to equal education typically date to the early or mid-twentieth century and represent a number of architectural styles popular during that time.

The 1930 Froebel School at 417 Jackson Avenue in the Jackson Hill neighborhood of Muskegon was built to educate the children of the Scandinavian immigrants who established the neighborhood. This two-story brick school is an example of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style, which is characterized by the terra cotta detailing, round terra cotta roof tiles, elaborately carved door surrounds, pilasters, and dog-tooth courses. By the 1960s, it served one of the only predominantly Black student populations in Muskegon. Efforts to consolidate some grades from the Froebel School with schools in nearby neighborhoods were met with protest by parents who felt the safety of Black students and the school's connections to the surrounding community were not being adequately considered, and ultimately the consolidation plans were abandoned.



Image 72: Froebel School



Image 71: Froebel School Entrance Detail

Subtype B: Public Accommodation

As with schools, the fight for equal access to stores, restaurants, theaters, parks, and other public places was a greater issue in the South where segregation policies were often written into local legislation. Though Muskegon experienced segregation in education and housing, in general Black residents were accepted in public places throughout the county. Therefore, places related to public accommodation represent sites where marches, protests, and other gatherings took place to show solidarity with Southern African Americans who suffered racially motivated violence in public places.

Rowan City Park at 2801 Baker Street, Muskegon Heights, was the site of at least two marches related to Civil Rights events in the South. In June 1963, a march to the park where prominent Black leaders gave speeches decrying the murder of Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi. In September 1963, a similar event was held following the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. As a recreational green space, the elements of the park have been changed and updated over time, and the current playground equipment, stage and seating, and clocktower are recent construction, though the park green space remains intact.



Image 74: Rowan City Park Stage and Seating



Image 73: Rowan City Park Green Space

Subtype C: Equal Housing

Unlike equal education and public accommodation, which were both a greater struggle in the South, equal housing was a primary focus of Civil Rights activities in both South and North, including in Muskegon. Problems with housing for Black residents were exacerbated by the influx of Southern Black laborers to Muskegon during World War II for manufacturing jobs. Neither Muskegon nor Muskegon Heights had enough housing for all the newcomers, who shared beds in boarding houses, lived on the street, or lived in substandard temporary housing. Civil Rights leaders in Muskegon County worked to improve living conditions for Black residents. Housing developments of the 1960s, generally Modernist in detail, were the result of successful Civil Rights efforts.

East Park Manor at 615 East Hovey Avenue, Muskegon Heights, was built in 1964 to replace the adjacent substandard temporary housing development, Fairview Homes. Comprised of brick one- and two-story residential buildings, an office building, and a convalescent home, the complex is distinctively Modernist in appearance. Buildings feature flat or low-pitch gable roofs with deep eaves; recessed entrances, some with stone veneer; and tall, narrow fixed windows above awning windows.



Image 75: East Park Manor Two-Story Residential Building



Image 76: East Park Manor One-Story Residential Building

The property at 2818 Woodcliffe Drive, Muskegon Heights, was originally owned by a White developer who attempted to impose racially restrictive covenants. The property was seized by the City of Muskegon Heights and sold to the NAACP Non Profit Housing Corporation, which later separated to become the Oak Terrace Non Profit Housing Corporation and constructed the Oak Terrace housing



Image 77: Oak Terrace Leasing Office and Community Center



Image 78: Oak Terrace Residential Buildings

complex in 1973. The complex includes two-story brick and vinyl residential buildings and a one-story brick and vinyl leasing office/community center, all built with Modernist detailing including projecting walls on each side of window bays and covered by a shed roof; fixed windows in the stairwells; and sliding or awning windows.

Subtype D: Equal Employment

Equal employment was another major focus of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon. Most boycotts and pickets in Muskegon were focused on businesses with discriminatory employment practices. Though many of the buildings associated with these demonstrations have been demolished over time, those that remain extant exhibit a variety of architectural styles from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, and most remain commercial in use.



Image 79: Beneficial Finance Company

Buildings in downtown Muskegon, especially in or near the commercial core along West Western Avenue, were typically high style buildings. Beneficial Finance Company at 350 West Western Avenue, Muskegon, was the target of picketing in 1964 for its policies of offering loans to Black customers but refusing to hire Black employees. The bank building was constructed around 1898 in the Classical Revival style, an elaborate and imposing style often preferred by financial institutions desiring to convey stability and permanence. The building is highly symmetrical and built of blond brick with limestone detailing, including projecting limestone cornices with dentil detailing. The entrance is located within a

slightly projecting, pedimented central bay and is set within a limestone surround with a keystone and floral motifs under a limestone lintel with a recessed panel. Full-height brick pilasters flanking the entrance and at the corners of the building feature limestone bases and capitals and serve to emphasize the verticality and monumental aesthetic of the bank building.

Other targets of boycotts were located outside of downtown in vernacular commercial buildings. Sanitary Dairy Company at 1788 Terrace Street, Muskegon, was the subject of boycotts in 1961, with protestors refusing to purchase milk or other dairy products from the company, either directly from delivery drivers or indirectly from local grocery stores. This brick building was constructed around 1920, and features elements common to vernacular commercial buildings, including decorative stonework above the storefront and a parapet roof. The original storefront, featuring characteristic display windows, has been infilled, though the current storefront also features large display windows.



Image 80: Sanitary Dairy Company

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Findings

Evaluation Results

The resources surveyed during this project were evaluated for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places based on known history and exterior architectural integrity. Properties were evaluated primarily for significance in the areas of Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, Education, Community Development/Planning, and Civil Rights. Though the availability of research materials and access to the buildings varied for each property, the following properties may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register and as such warrant further study and evaluation. Architectural significance is evaluated as secondary to areas directly related to Black history. In addition, interior access was not provided during the project, unless otherwise noted; therefore, architectural significance is based on exterior evaluation only.

Significance and National Register Eligibility for Property Type 1: Places Related to Black Community

Places related to Black community include schools, churches, businesses, recreational facilities, and neighborhoods. These properties are the result of de facto segregation and illustrate the need for Black residents to form distinct communities to provide mutual support and safety. These properties are eligible under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage in the areas of Education, Social History, Commerce, and Recreation. They may also be eligible under Criterion C for Architecture. Churches meet Criteria Consideration A for Religious Properties, deriving their primary significance in the areas of Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Architecture.

In order to qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the property must be at least fifty years of age, or the events from which significance is derived must have occurred more than fifty years in the past. Properties must retain sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association. Due to the general disinvestment in Black resources in the mid- to late twentieth century, physical integrity is secondary to historical significance. Therefore, common material changes, such as the application of synthetic siding or removal of original windows, do not preclude a property's eligibility. Although not evaluated during this project, interiors should also retain sufficient integrity to convey significance.

The following properties may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and warrant further study and evaluation. *Context 1: Muskegon County's Early African American Community – 1890 to 1940, Context 2: African Americans and “the Arsenal of Democracy” – 1940 to 1960, Context 3: The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1970, and Context 4: The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1964 to 2000* are applicable to places related to Black community.

Subtype A: Schools

Steele Junior High School (1150 Amity Avenue, Muskegon) – 1959

Located in the Jackson Hill neighborhood of Muskegon, Steele Junior High School originally served a predominantly African American student population in grades 6-8. The school was built in 1959, necessitated by the influx of African American laborers who relocated from the Deep South seeking

jobs in manufacturing in the city's foundries during World War II. Following the war, many workers settled in the Jackson Hill neighborhood with their families, resulting in a rapid increase in the African American population in that area, especially among children, resulting in a need for more schools in the mid-twentieth century.

The school is likely eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Education as a school built in response to the growing Black population in Muskegon Heights and serving a predominantly Black student population. Steele Junior High School is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C as an intact Modernist-style school building.



Image 81: Steele Junior High School Entrance

Charles A. Lindbergh School (160 East Barney Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – 1929

The Charles A. Lindbergh School was built in 1929 in a predominantly White neighborhood of Muskegon Heights. By 1938, the neighborhood had been designated yellow, or “definitely declining,” on the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation redlining maps, described as “mediocre homes for factory labor... badly mixed... bordered by ‘D’ or ‘red’ areas.” As a result, the neighborhood demographics shifted from predominantly White to predominantly Black as a result of the influx of African American laborers from the South to work in local industries during World War II. As the Black population of the neighborhood continued to increase, remaining White residents relocated outside of Muskegon Heights.



Image 82: Charles A. Lindbergh School

The school is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Education as one of several schools built to educate White children but later serving a predominantly Black student population as a result of neighborhood redlining practices. The school is also likely eligible under Criterion C as an intact example of a Classical Revival-style school building.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School (600 East Barney Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – 1951-1952

First known as the East Park School, the cornerstone was laid for the Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School in 1951 and the building was completed in 1952. The school opened that September to serve the elementary grades. The school included eleven classrooms, each equipped with “its own drinking fountain, wash basin, storage space, and movie screen,” as well as principal’s office, nurse’s room, and teachers’ lounge. There was also a gymnasium with a stage, basketball backboards, tables and benches that folded into the walls, storage rooms, and a kitchen. Like many schools in Muskegon Heights, the school was built during a period of rapid growth in the Black population resulting from the availability of higher paying jobs in wartime manufacturing in Muskegon



Image 83: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School

and Muskegon Heights. Following World War II, many workers chose to reside in Muskegon Heights with their families.

Despite the physical changes to the building, including removal of the original windows, the school is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Education as one of several schools built in Muskegon Heights in the mid-twentieth century to educate the growing population of Black children.

Edgewood Elementary School (3028 Howden Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1955

The first Edgewood School building was a relatively small brick building constructed on this site in 1919 to serve a predominantly African American student population. The current, larger building was constructed around 1955 when the student population outgrew the existing school building. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Black population of Muskegon Heights increased rapidly when Black southerners relocated to Muskegon County for wartime manufacturing jobs, then chose to remain in Muskegon Heights following the war.



Image 84: Edgewood Elementary School

The school is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Education as a school built in response to the growing Black population in Muskegon Heights and serving a predominantly Black student population. Edgewood Elementary School is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of a mid-twentieth-century Modernist-style school building.

Central Elementary School (2603 Leahy Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1964



Image 85: Central Elementary School

The first Central Elementary School included two small buildings adjacent to Central (junior high) School. The current building was constructed across Baker Street from that location when Central School was expanded. Equipped with modern classrooms, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium, the school served a predominantly Black student population, many of whom were from families who had migrated north during World War II seeking manufacturing jobs in Muskegon County's foundries. The school is one of several built in Muskegon Heights in the mid-

twentieth century to serve the rapidly growing Black population.

The building is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Education as a school built in response to the growing Black population in Muskegon Heights and serving a predominantly Black student population. The school is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of a Modernist-style school building in Muskegon Heights.

Central School/Muskegon Heights Middle School (55 East Sherman Boulevard, Muskegon Heights) – 1926, c.1945, c.1965

The Central School was built in 1926 in a predominantly White neighborhood of Muskegon Heights. It is unclear what grades attended the school during the early years of its operation, but it likely served elementary and junior high grades. By 1938, the neighborhood had been designated red, or “hazardous,” on the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation redlining maps, described as “low class American labor – Aliens and negroes. Negroes increasing in numbers rapidly.” As a result, the neighborhood demographics shifted from predominantly White in the 1920s to predominantly Black by the 1950s. As the Black population of the neighborhood continued to increase, an addition was constructed to accommodate the growing student body.

The school is likely eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Education as one of several schools built to educate White children but later serving a predominantly Black student population as a result of neighborhood redlining practices. Central School is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C as an intact school building representing its early twentieth century construction in the Classical Revival style with a Modernist addition constructed during a period of dramatic growth of the school system in the mid-twentieth century.



Image 87: Central School 1929 Wing



Image 86: Central School c.1965 Wing

Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School (2301 Sixth Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1961

Substantial numbers of southern Black workers relocated to Muskegon County for wartime manufacturing jobs, and many workers chose to reside in Muskegon Heights with their families. As a result of the growing population of Black children, several new schools were constructed in Muskegon Heights during the 1950s and 1960s. The Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School was constructed in 1961, during this period of rapid population growth.

The school is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Education as a school built in response to the growing Black population in Muskegon Heights and serving a predominantly Black student population. The Loftis School is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of a Modernist-style school.



Image 88: Ellen Grace Loftis Elementary School

Subtype B: Churches

Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church (575 South Getty Street, Muskegon) – 1969, 1988

The Bethesda congregation was organized June 8, 1910, and worshipped in several locations over the first few decades. During the Great Migration of the 1940s, the influx of African American factory workers to Muskegon resulted in the growth of the Bethesda congregation during that time and Building, Finance, Pledge, and Rally Committees were appointed. An African American contractor from Kalamazoo was hired to build a new building, though the contractor's name and firm are not known. The workforce included a combination of skilled laborers and volunteers, and the building was completed in December 1941 and dedicated in 1943. The building was expanded and renovated in 1954, but was soon too small for the rapidly growing congregation.



Image 89: Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church

A larger property was purchased and groundbreaking for the current church at 575 Getty Street took place in 1967. The previous property was sold and the building demolished. The congregation met at Froebel School until the new building was completed in 1969. It was designed by Vander Meiden and Koteles of Grand Haven with Alstrom Construction Company serving as the general contractor. During its dedication on May 17, 1969, the congregation processed from Froebel School to the new church before holding the dedication services. A house adjacent to the church was purchased for use as a classroom building. By the 1980s, more space was needed and the congregation planned the construction of an educational wing. Groundbreaking took place in 1986, and White Lake Construction Company served as the contractor. The addition was completed in 1988. In the 1990s, the congregation purchased the house at 1336 Forest Street, which serves as a parsonage.

Members of Bethesda went on to establish and lead other African American churches in the community. These included Reverend R.E. Gooch and New Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church at 2117 Baker Street; Reverend Fred Tucker and Friendship Baptist Church at 2428 Ray Street; Reverend W.R. Stewart and Queen Esther Baptist Church at 2220 Superior Street; and Reverend Eddie Larkin and New Jerusalem Baptist Church at 2200 Manz Street, all in Muskegon Heights. The church also had relationships with several sister churches in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights, including John Wesley AME Church at 886 Wood Street in Muskegon, Shiloh Baptist Church at 1964 Russell

Road in Muskegon, Spring Street Baptist Church at 912 Spring Street in Muskegon, West Side Grace Church at 414 West Oakwood Avenue in Muskegon Heights, and Phillip Chapel AME Church at 2145 Dyson Street in Muskegon Heights.

Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as the home of the oldest Black congregation in Muskegon and a center of the Black community throughout its history. It is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as a Modernist-style church building.

Jackson Avenue Congregational Church (521 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon) – 1889

The Jackson Avenue Congregational Church had its beginnings in a Sunday School for local children. In the late nineteenth century, children gathered to learn Bible stories at the home of William Trafford (location not known), a Jackson Hill resident. The group quickly outgrew Trafford's home, and sought the aid of his downtown church, the First Congregational Church of Muskegon, to build the Jackson Avenue Congregation Church and establish a Sunday School. Though the original congregation moved to a new building in 1963, the building remained in use into the twenty-first century, housing a number of Black congregations during those years.

The church is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of Gothic Revival-style religious architecture. The church would also likely be a contributing building within a Jackson Hill historic district.



Image 91: Jackson Avenue Congregational Church

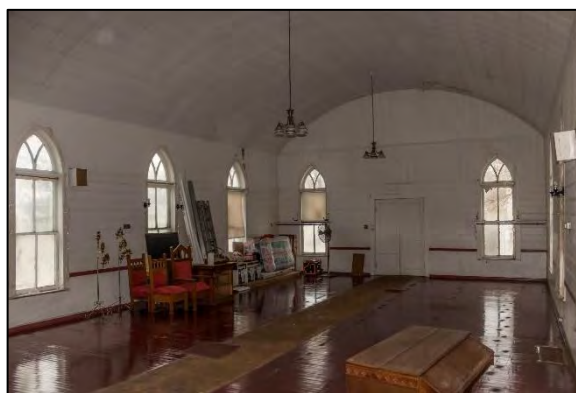


Image 90: Interior of Church (courtesy of Coldwell Banker Realty)

Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ (188 West Muskegon Avenue, Muskegon) – 1929, c.1960

In the late nineteenth century, the Episcopal Diocese of West Michigan and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden worked together to bring Swedish immigrants to Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and other cities in western Michigan. According to the cornerstone and city directories, the building was constructed in 1929 for the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, serving Swedish immigrants in the city and holding services in their native language. City directories show that by 1940, the church was the Swedish Mission Church, and the 1950 Sanborn map indicates it was known as the Mission Covenant Church at that time. The congregation built an addition to the church around 1960. Though the history of the congregation and its departure from this location is not known, it is possible the church merged with the nearby Samuel Lutheran Church, which also was founded by Swedish

immigrants. In 1982, the church building was purchased by the Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ. The congregation formed in 1945 and held services in a number of locations before purchasing the former Evangelical Church of Sweden. The success and rapid growth of the church reflects the increasing African American population in Muskegon during and following World War II as southern laborers, and later their families, moved to the city for jobs in wartime manufacturing.

The church is likely eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion A for Social History and Black Ethnic Heritage as the home of a post-World War II African American congregation that demonstrates the rapidly increasing Black population in the city at that time. The building is likely also eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Social History and Swedish Ethnic Heritage as a haven and community center for Swedish immigrants in Muskegon in the early twentieth century. The building is likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of an early-twentieth-century Classical Revival-style religious building with a Modernist-style addition that illustrates its continued growth, use, and relevance to the surrounding community through the mid- and late twentieth century.

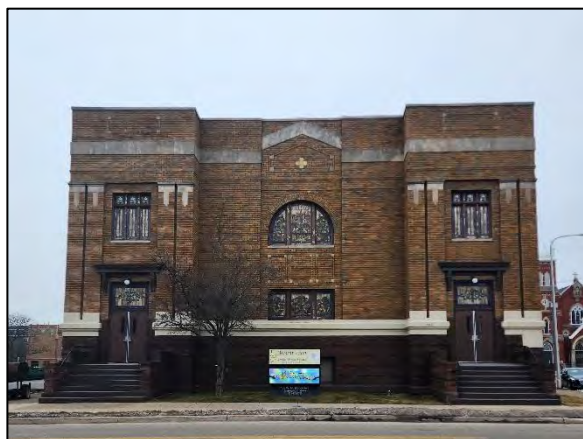


Image 92: Former Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden, now Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ



Image 93: Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ Modernist Addition

John Wesley AME Zion Church and Parsonage (886 Wood Street, Muskegon) – 1909-1911, c.1955

The church was built for the First Netherlands Reformed Church, which formed in 1907 with about twenty families. Construction began in 1909 and the church and parsonage were dedicated in 1911. Services were initially held in Dutch. As new Reformed Church congregations formed in other areas of Muskegon, the membership began to drop at this church. John Wesley AME Zion Church purchased this building in 1970. The third African American congregation to form in Muskegon County, the church was founded in 1923 by O. Stearns of Grand Rapids. The church was formerly located at 23 East Webster Avenue in the Jackson Hill neighborhood, but the building was demolished, likely due to the construction of Shoreline Drive/Business 31 and Moses J. Jones Parkway (named for the long-time pastor of the church), which intersect near the former church site.

Reverend Moses J. Jones, an early leader in fighting racial discrimination, led the church from 1936 until his retirement in 1972. He hosted interracial “good will dinners” to feed the needy, and often visited White churches, recalling “White churches loved to hear Negro [sic] music, but it was funny, there was never no Negro [sic] speaker invited. I used to say, ‘Have my choir, but you’ve got to have me, too.’ I would interpret the spirituals for them... tell them we sang them when things were so dark,

the only thing we could see was the hand of God.” In 1946, he became the first African American elected president of the Greater Muskegon Pastors Fellowship, and an organization he started at the church later grew into the Great Muskegon Urban League. He also established the first community recreation center for African American youth in Muskegon, hosting young people in the church basement where they could play table tennis or join basketball and baseball teams.



Image 94: John Wesley AME Zion Church

The church is likely eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as the only extant building associated with the John Wesley AME Zion Church congregation, which was the second African American congregation established in Muskegon and home to early leaders in anti-discrimination and Civil Rights, especially under the leadership of Reverend Moses J. Jones from 1936 to 1972. The church may also be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A for European Ethnic Heritage and Social History as an important community institution for the Dutch immigrant population in the Jackson Hill neighborhood. The church is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of Gothic Revival-style religious architecture.

Phillip Chapel AME Church (2145 Dyson Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1964



Image 95: Phillip Chapel AME Church

The Phillip Chapel AME Church was formed in the 1950s and the current building was completed in 1964. The church was established during a period of rapid growth in Muskegon Heights in the mid-twentieth century, largely the result of the availability of wartime manufacturing jobs that attracted southern Black workers seeking better employment opportunities than were available to them in the Jim Crow South. New Black churches were constructed in Muskegon Heights to serve the growing Black population.

It is likely individually eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as one of several churches built in Muskegon Heights to serve the growing Black population in the mid-twentieth century. It is also likely eligible under Criterion C as an intact example of Modernist-style religious architecture.

Beulah Baptist Church (2601 Manz Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1951, 1955, 1981

The second Black congregation to form in Muskegon County, the Beulah Baptist Church was organized in May 1922 and first met under a brush arbor on this site. Construction of the first church building was started in 1928 and completed in 1940, though it was destroyed by fire in 1949. The congregation

rebuilt as soon as possible, and the basement of the current building was completed in 1951, with the remainder of the building completed in 1955. Beulah Baptist Church is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as the building associated with one of the oldest Black congregations in Muskegon County, the church serving as an important community institution for support and uplift during the Jim Crow era. It is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as a Modernist-style church building.



Image 96: Beulah Baptist Church

Subtype C: Businesses

East Sherman Boulevard Commercial District (McIlwraith and East Sherman Boulevard)

In the 1940s and 1950s, when Muskegon Heights residential neighborhoods were still largely segregated, Black-owned businesses providing necessary goods and services were located throughout Black neighborhoods. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many of the barriers to Black entrepreneurship were removed and more Black-owned businesses formed throughout the city. The recommended historic district includes five contiguous Black-owned businesses opened during a period of rapid growth in Muskegon Heights from 1950 through the 1970s. These include the Muskegon Heights Community Center at 2530 McIlwraith Street; Latson's Grocery at 2532 McIlwraith Street; Cheeks Mobil Service Station at 508 East Sherman Avenue; Beal & Son Produce at 480 East Sherman Avenue; and the Starlight Club at 604 East Sherman Boulevard. The proposed historic district is likely eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Commerce, and Social History as a core of Black-owned businesses within a predominantly Black neighborhood.



Image 97: Muskegon Heights Community Center and Latson's Grocery on McIlwraith Street



Image 98: Beal & Son Grocery (Cheeks Mobil Service Station and Starlight Club in Background)

Subtype D: Recreation

Marsh Field (1800 Peck Street, Muskegon) – 1916

Marsh Field was constructed in 1916, an effort led by Charles W. Marsh, a local industrialist and baseball fan for whom the park is named. Though the park was built for and primarily used by White teams, in 1926, the Muskegon Colored Athletics, an all-Black amateur team, was formed by Robert E. Glover. Little is known about the team, but that July, the *Lansing State Journal* reported, “The Muskegon team is one of the best aggregations around Muskegon. Its lineup includes many former stars from the National Colored baseball league and the visitors should be able to give the Lansing Dairy boys a busy day.” After World War II, John “Jake” Outwin, a local factory worker and baseball player, organized the Outwin Zephyrs, a group of local players who formed an semi-professional team. The Zephyrs drew exciting exhibition competition and played several Negro League teams, including the Kansas City Monarchs and the Pittsburgh Crawfords. Marsh Field was also home to the Muskegon Lassies of the All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBL) from 1946 to 1950. The last season of semi-professional baseball was played in Muskegon in 1951, though Marsh Field remained in use as the home of the Factory Leagues, served as the home field for Muskegon High School, and hosted a summertime collegiate wooden bat team.

Though the grandstands were demolished in 1957 and the current grandstands built in the 1980s, the historic playing field remains intact. Marsh Field is likely individually eligible to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Recreation and Social History for its association with minor league baseball, Negro League baseball, and women’s baseball in the early twentieth century.



Image 99: Marsh Field



Image 100: Marsh Field c.1938
(MLive)

Subtype E: Neighborhoods

Jackson Hill Neighborhood (Muskegon)

The Jackson Hill Neighborhood, originally known as the First Ward, is generally bounded by Ryerson Creek to the south, Getty Street to the east, the Muskegon River to the north, and Lake Michigan to the west, though a smaller area on Jackson, Leonard, and Marquette Avenues and Wood and Yuba Streets is recommended as a historic district. The homes on Marquette and Leonard Avenues are generally intact examples of early twentieth century architecture, predominantly vernacular and Craftsman-style buildings, reflecting the growth of the neighborhood during that time. In addition to housing, the neighborhood retains community institutions, including schools, churches, and public

parks. Jackson Avenue includes the former Freddie Townsend Neighborhood Center, the Jackson Avenue Congregational Church, and the Froebel School, where significant race-related demonstrations took place in the 1960s and early 1970s. On Wood Street, the Smith-Reyerson Park, which includes recreational facilities and a community center, and Green Acres Park, formerly a temporary housing development for laborers in war-related manufacturing, are important community resources. The New Hope Baptist Church on Yuba Street is one of Muskegon's most prominent Black congregations and a central Black institution in the Jackson Hill neighborhood. Vacant lots throughout the neighborhood reflect the fracturing of the neighborhood by highway construction in the 1960s, devastating urban renewal policies of the 1970s, and the resultant disinvestment in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is likely eligible as a National Register Historic District with significance at the local level under Criterion A for Social History, Ethnic History, and Education as a neighborhood of primarily Scandinavian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that shifted to a predominantly African American neighborhood in the mid-twentieth century. The proposed district retains important community institutions, and community members were involved in the local Civil Rights Movement, with demonstrations taking place within the proposed district boundary. The Jackson Hill Neighborhood is also likely significant at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture with buildings reflecting the late nineteenth century establishment of the community and early twentieth century growth. Buildings include a Gothic Revival-style religious building, a Spanish Colonial Revival-style educational building, vernacular and Craftsman-style residential buildings, and mid-twentieth-century recreation buildings.



Image 101: Craftsman-style and Vernacular Homes on Marquette Avenue



Image 102: Picnic Facilities at Smith-Reyerson Park

Significance and National Register Eligibility for Property Type 2: Places Related to Black Leadership

Places related to Black leadership include the homes, workplaces, and other buildings directly related to Muskegon County's Black leaders. These properties are representative of the effort and agency of the Black community in seeking equal rights during the Civil Rights Era, and of the impact of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on Black representation in local government. These properties are eligible under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History and/or Criterion B for association with a specific Black leader in the community. Additional areas of significance may apply and are noted as applicable.

In order to qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the property must be at least fifty years of age, or the events from which significance is derived must have occurred more than fifty years in the past. Properties must retain sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association. Due to disinvestment in Black communities in the mid-

to late twentieth century, physical integrity is secondary to historical significance. Therefore, common material changes, such as application of synthetic siding or removal of original windows, do not preclude a property's eligibility. Although not evaluated during this project, interiors should also retain appropriate integrity to convey significance.

The following properties may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and warrant further study and evaluation. *Context 3: The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1970* and *Context 4: The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1964 to 2000* are applicable to places related to Black leadership.

Dr. James Jackson Office (2416 Peck Street) – 1960



Image 103: Dr. James Jackson Museum

This building was constructed to serve as Dr. James Jackson's osteopathic medicine office. Dr. Jackson was born in Massachusetts; attended Wayne State University and Des Moines University College of Osteopathic Medicine; and remained in Muskegon after his internship at the Muskegon Osteopathic Hospital. He opened his medical practice at this location in 1960. Dr. Jackson was a prominent local Civil Rights leader, advocating for and demonstrating on behalf of African American residents of Muskegon and Muskegon Heights with the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP, Home Equity Inc., and other local organizations. He founded the James Jackson Museum of African American History

in Muskegon Heights in 2006.

The building is likely eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History and at the local level under Criterion B for association with Dr. James Jackson, a local leader in the Civil Rights Movement. The building is also likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact Modernist-style office building.

Dr. Frank Howell House (377 West Lane, Norton Shores) – 1965

Dr. Howell was born in Muskegon Heights in 1930, the seventh of ten siblings. He attended Muskegon Heights public schools, was a star football and baseball player, and graduated in 1949. He attended the University of Michigan on a football scholarship and was a member of the winning Rose Bowl team in 1950. He also played baseball for Michigan and was a member of the 1953 College World Series Championship Team. He graduated with a degree in Sociology in 1953 and Dentistry in 1957. He married Flossie Calloway in 1952 and they had four children. Upon returning to Muskegon Heights in 1957, Dr. Howell became an important leader in the African American community and the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County. He became the first African American member of the Muskegon County Dental Association and served as the dentist for the Muskegon County Health Department, caring for children living in poverty. He was a member of the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP, serving as its president for six years in the 1960s and leading efforts to obtain equality in housing, employment, and education. He was also a member of the Urban League of Muskegon, serving as

board member and president. He was the first African American elected to the Muskegon Heights City Council and later served as its chairman.



Image 104: Dr. Frank Howell House

Dr. Howell was a founder and member of Home Equity, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to integrating neighborhoods in the Greater Muskegon area. When the Howells attempted to purchase property in the all-White Roodmont neighborhood of Norton Shores, they had difficulty with realtors who refused to show or sell them properties in the area. The Howells eventually were able to purchase a lot with the help of Catholic priest John F. Sheehy, another founder and member of Home Equity, Inc. Father Sheehy arranged for a third party from Grand Rapids to purchase the lot and sell it to the Howells. When their new neighbors discovered who would actually be living on the property, one of them called

Dr. Howell and offered to purchase the lot from him in an effort to prevent integration of the neighborhood. The Howells also had difficulty in hiring a builder to construct the house, and they eventually hired a builder from Grand Rapids – one who was not familiar with the racial makeup of Muskegon neighborhoods.

The Dr. Frank Howell House is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Civil Rights and at the local level under Criterion B for association with Dr. Frank Howell, a prominent Civil Rights activist and the first African American resident in the Roodmont neighborhood. The Howell House is also likely eligible under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact Modernist-style house.

Significance and National Register Eligibility for Property Type 3: Places Related to the Civil Rights Movement

Places related to the Civil Rights Movement include properties where planning or conflict took place in the effort to gain equal education, public accommodation, equal housing, or equal employment. These properties are representative of the effort, agency, and legacy of the Black community in seeking equal rights during the Civil Rights Movement, prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Michigan Civil Rights Act of 1976. These properties are eligible under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage in the areas of Social History and/or Civil Rights. Additional areas of significance may apply and are noted as applicable.

In order to qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the property must be at least fifty years of age, or the events from which significance is derived must have occurred more than fifty years in the past. Properties must retain sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association. Due to the disinvestment in Black neighborhoods in the mid- to late twentieth century, physical integrity is secondary to historical significance. Therefore, common material changes, such as application of synthetic siding or removal of original windows, do not preclude a property's eligibility. Although not evaluated during this project, interiors should also retain appropriate integrity to convey significance.

The following properties may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and warrant further study and evaluation. *Context 3: The Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County – 1935 to 1970* is applicable to places related to the Civil Rights Movement.

Subtype A: Equal Education

Froebel School (417 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon) – 1930, 1970



Image 105: Froebel School

Completed in 1930, Froebel School is located in the Jackson Hill neighborhood, also known as the First Ward, an area of northeastern Muskegon that was settled initially by Scandinavian immigrants. Jackson Hill had shifted to a predominantly Black neighborhood by the mid-twentieth century, largely the result of the rapidly growing Black population attracted to the area by the availability of jobs in the local foundries.

When the district announced plans to move fifth and sixth grade students from Froebel School to the vacant Vanderlaan School for the 1969-1970 school year, parents voiced concerns over student safety and disconnection from the community surrounding the school. Parents formed picket lines at Froebel School and after the first week under the new plan it was abandoned. The school became a casualty of urban renewal when a Department of Housing and Urban Development grant funded the demolition of 225 houses in the Jackson Hill neighborhood from 1971 to 1976. Very few homes were rebuilt, causing enrollment at Froebel School to drop from over 650 students and staff in the mid-1960s to less than 100 students and staff by 1986. The school was closed and teachers were moved to McLaughlin and Marsh Schools while their students were transferred to Marquette School.

Froebel School is likely eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Education and Black Ethnic Heritage for its history of race-related conflict, including picketing and demonstrations during the 1960s and early 1970s. The school may also be eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Education and Scandinavian Ethnic Heritage as a school established for the children of Swedish immigrants who settled the Jackson Hill area to receive an American education. The building is likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of a Spanish Colonial Revival-style school building. The school would also likely be a contributing building within a Jackson Hill historic district.

Subtype B: Public Accommodation

Rowan City Park (2801 Baker Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1937

Established in the late 1930s as a green space in downtown Muskegon Heights, Rowan City Park features an open green space with a stage and seating, a clocktower, picnic tables, benches, and concrete sidewalks. As a public gathering space in downtown Muskegon Heights, the park was utilized for community Civil Rights demonstrations in the 1960s. On June 23, 1963, a group of approximately 2,000 African American demonstrators met at Greater Harvest Baptist Church and marched to Rowan City Park in mourning for Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi, who had been

murdered by White supremacists. At Rowan City Park, a number of speakers addressed the crowd to urge continued efforts in support of equal rights. The following September in Birmingham, Alabama, members of the Ku Klux Klan detonated a bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church during Sunday services, killing four young girls. In Muskegon, demonstrators gathered again at the Greater Harvest Baptist church and marched to Rowan City Park for a memorial service on September 22.

Rowan City Park is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as the gathering place for demonstrations related to national events in the Civil Rights Movement in 1963.



Image 106: Rowan City Park

Greater Harvest Missionary Baptist Church (2435 Riordan Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1981, 1986

Though the church building was recently constructed, the congregation of Greater Harvest Missionary Baptist Church have been leaders in the local Civil Rights Movement and hosted Civil Rights-related events at this location. On March 19, 1961, a mass meeting of about five hundred people was held at Greater Harvest Baptist Church to discuss the boycott of Sanitary Dairy and the company's discriminatory hiring practices. Meeting participants agreed to end the boycott and enter negotiations with the company owner, which resulted in the hiring of a Black delivery driver. The church property also served as the starting point of marches in 1963 in solidarity with Southern Black following the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi and the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Alabama.



Image 107: Greater Harvest Baptist Church

The site is likely eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as the gathering place for planning and the starting point for marches related to the Civil Rights Movement.

Subtype C: Equal Housing

East Park Manor (615 East Hovey Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – 1964, c.1969

As World War II-related manufacturing increased at Muskegon industries, especially its numerous foundries, Black laborers from the South were recruited to come to the city. However, there was not adequate housing in the area to accommodate the influx of new residents, with Black newcomers crowded into boarding houses and makeshift housing throughout Muskegon and Muskegon Heights. In 1964, East Park Manor was constructed to replace the adjacent, and badly substandard, Fairview

Homes complex. The new complex could house two hundred families and provided a dramatic improvement in quality of life to its residents, who were primarily African American laborers.

East Park Manor is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Social History and Community Planning & Development as a public housing development built for and occupied by primarily Black laborers and their families. The complex is also likely eligible at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact, high integrity public housing complex constructed of low-maintenance masonry.



Image 108: Two-story Residential Building at East Park Manor



Image 109: One-story Residential Building at East Park Manor

Oak Terrace (2818 Woodcliffe Drive, Muskegon Heights) – 1973

This property on which Oak Terrace stands was first owned by real estate developer George Vigeant, who began to develop a housing complex under racially restrictive covenants. The property was seized by the City of Muskegon Heights and purchased by the NAACP Non Profit Housing Corporation, which was later split from the NAACP to become the Oak Terrace Non Profit Housing Corporation. Led by chairman Jerry Lottie, the group met with Howard Sims, a Black architect from Ann Arbor, as well as attorneys and other professionals to advise on building a development open to Black residents to improve housing opportunities and quality of life. In 1973, they built an open housing development with 102 townhomes and apartments.



Image 110: Oak Terrace

Oak Terrace is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Civil Rights as the complex is the result of legal action against housing discrimination.

Subtype D: Equal Employment

Sanitary Dairy Company (1788 Terrace Street, Muskegon) – c.1920



Image 111: Sanitary Dairy Company

The Sanitary Dairy Company was the first businesses in Muskegon to be the target of Civil Rights boycotts. The company sold its products to African American businesses and customers, but refused to employ African American employees. In early March 1961, local resident and Civil Rights activist Alfred P. Williams and the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP organized a boycott of the company's products. The newspaper reported, "The company hasn't been picketed, but its Negro [sic] customers on route delivery service have stopped taking the milk from Sanitary and Negroes [sic] aren't buying Sanitary milk at retailers." J.B. Gillette, the president of the company, told the newspaper that the company "has

never discriminated in its hiring practice," however, the newspaper also reported that, "the dairy has never employed a Negro [sic]." The boycott was successful and resulted in the Sanitary Dairy Company hiring an African American employee as a driver, as well as opening management positions to African American applicants.

Sanitary Dairy Company is likely eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Civil Rights as the subject of a successful Civil Rights boycott in 1961.

Beneficial Finance Company (350 West Western Avenue, Muskegon) – c.1898, c.1960

This building was constructed for the Muskegon Savings Bank around 1898, and was home to several other banks through the first half of the twentieth century. By 1964, Beneficial Finance Company was operating a bank at this location. The bank came under the scrutiny of a local civil rights group known as the Council on Equal Opportunity, which led a picket protesting hiring practices at the bank. The demonstration ended a week later when an African American woman was hired as a secretary.



Image 112: Beneficial Finance Company

The building is likely eligible to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Civil Rights as the subject of a successful picketing demonstration in protest of hiring practices during the Civil Rights Movement in 1964. The bank is also likely eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact example of a Classical Revival-style bank building.

Reynolds Funeral Home (2211 Jarman Street) – 1948



Image 113: Reynolds Funeral Home

The Civil Rights Movement began in Muskegon in 1961 with a boycott of the Sanitary Dairy Company, which sold products to Black-owned retailers and ran rural delivery routes to Black customers, but did not employ Black workers. Members of the NAACP led efforts to organize a boycott of the company. Among them was Reverend Henry G. and Bessie Reynolds, who hosted planning meetings for the boycott at the Reynolds Funeral Home. For their participation, they received “many anonymous intimidations” from White antagonists. The boycott began in early March 1961 with Black businesses and rural delivery customers refusing to purchase Sanitary Dairy Company products. It was the first

organized Civil Rights demonstration in Muskegon County and was ultimately successful, coming to an end when the company hired a Black delivery driver to run routes to Black businesses.

The Reynolds Funeral Home is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights as a foundational institution in the Black community of Muskegon Heights and for its role in the planning and implementation of a successful boycott of the Sanitary Dairy Company.

Recommendations for Further Study and Evaluation

Additional Significant Properties

A number of properties surveyed during this project appear to be significant, though their eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places could not be determined within the project timeline. In some cases, the property’s history is incomplete, therefore additional research is needed to fully understand the property’s history and significance. In other cases, the property’s significance is known, though the events with which they are associated are not yet fifty years old. The following properties should be further evaluated or reevaluated in the future to determine eligibility.

Ruby Brown House (464 Monroe Avenue, Muskegon) – c.1911, c.1955

Ruby Brown was born in Missouri and came to Muskegon County as a child in 1922 when his father took a job in one of the local foundries. He was the first African American student to attend Muskegon Heights High School and the first African American student athlete, playing on the football team. Brown was also an important Black business owner; he operated several apartment complexes and Central Storage Garage, co-owned the Pine Street Tavern, and opened the first Black nightclub in the area, the Sepia Café. Brown and his wife, Glenetta, purchased this house in 1936.



Image 114: Ruby Brown House

Though the house has been altered with an enclosed porch and is likely not eligible under Criterion C for Architecture, it may be eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History and at the local level under Criterion B for its association with Ruby Brown. Further research and comparison to other extant properties associated with Ruby Brown is needed to fully evaluate eligibility.

Pine Street Tavern (978 Pine Street, Muskegon) – c.1900

The Pine Street Tavern, an African American bar and restaurant, opened at this location by 1934. It was operated by partners Ruby Brown and Henry Perlas until at least 1944 when Brown established the Sepia Café. The Pine Street Tavern remained in operation until at least 1970. Though the building has been altered and is likely not eligible under Criterion C for Architecture, it may be eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History as an early Black-owned business and entertainment venue in Muskegon. It may also be eligible at the local level under Criterion B for its association with Black business owner Ruby Brown. Further research and comparison to other extant properties associated with Ruby Brown is needed to fully evaluate eligibility.



Image 115: Pine Street Tavern

James Jackson Museum of African American History (7 East Center Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1945



Image 116: James Jackson Museum of African American History

In 2006, Dr. James Jackson purchased the building to house a museum dedicated to African American history and culture. Dr. Jackson had a personal collection of artifacts he housed at his medical office at 2416 Peck Street until it became too large for the space. Museum board member William Muhammad explained, “The museum was an attempt to establish an institution that would allow and help people to get in touch with their history as black [sic] people, not just here in Muskegon, but around the world.” The museum opened in 2008 and an addition was constructed around 2010 to house an education wing with additional space for meetings, events, and exhibits. In 2012, the museum was renamed in honor of Dr. Jackson.

The building derives its primary significance from its association with Dr. James Jackson and its function as a local museum of Black history and culture. However, due to the age of the museum, it is likely not eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places and is not located within a historic district. This building should be reevaluated for eligibility in the future, once the museum has achieved the fifty-year age requirement.

Patterson's Drug Store (2144 Hoyt Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1927



Image 117: Patterson's Drug Store

In 1976, Carolyn Patterson, the first Black female pharmacist in Muskegon County, opened Patterson's Drug Store at 2144 Hoyt Street, which remained in operation until 2020. The property derives its primary significance from its association with Carolyn Patterson. Additional research about Patterson and her experiences as a Black woman pharmacist is needed to evaluate potential eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights, and under Criterion B for association with Carolyn Patterson.

Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House (2305 Fifth Street, Muskegon Heights) – 1952

Real Estate broker Clarence Wilkins and Civil Rights activist Rillastine Wilkins purchased this house in 1961. They were the first Black residents to live in the neighborhood, as there was “an unwritten rule that Black folks couldn't live west of Peck Street” at that time. An unidentified person threw a brick through their living room window soon after they moved in, but it appeared to be an isolated event. Rillastine Wilkins later served as the first Black employee in the business office of General Telephone & Electronics, traveling the state to train new employees. She was the first woman elected to the Muskegon Heights City Council, serving from 1974 until 1999; the first Black women mayor of Muskegon Heights, serving from 1999 until 2007; and a member of the Muskegon County Board of Commissioners, the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP, the Black Women's Political Caucus, and the National Conference of Black Mayors.



Image 118: Rillastine and Clarence Wilkins House

The house is likely significant at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights, and under Criterion B for association with Civil Rights activist Rillastine Wilkins, a local leader in the Civil Rights Movement and first Black female mayor of Muskegon Heights. Though the house was built in 1951, the period of significance should likely correspond to Rillastine Wilkins' occupation during her Civil Rights activities, starting in 1961, when she and her husband purchased the house, and ending in 2007, when she left her position as mayor of Muskegon Heights. The significance of the property is therefore less than fifty years old and does not meet Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty years. This property should be assessed for eligibility in the future.

Robert Warren House (2135 Peck Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1905

Robert and Edna Warren purchased this house in 1982 during the shift in Muskegon Heights from predominantly White residents to predominantly Black residents in the mid- to late twentieth century. Originally from Mississippi, Robert Warren was a teacher in the Muskegon Heights Public Schools and also served as Assistant Superintendent. He was elected the first Black mayor of Muskegon Heights in 1983 and served until losing a bid for re-election in 1999. He was a member of Beulah Baptist Church and was involved in Civil Rights activities in Muskegon Heights. At the urging of City Council member Rillastine Wilkins, his body lay in state at the Muskegon Heights City Hall when he died unexpectedly in 2000.



Image 119: Robert Warren House

The house is likely eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights and under Criterion B as the home of Robert Warren, a local leader in the Civil Rights Movement and first Black mayor of Muskegon Heights. Additional research in these areas is needed to fully evaluate eligibility. The period of significance would likely begin in 1982, when Robert and Edna Warren purchased the house, and should encompass his service as the first Black mayor of Muskegon Heights from 1983 to 1999. Since this does not meet the fifty-year age requirement, this property should be assessed for eligibility in the future.

Ciggzree's Real Estate (2528 Peck Street, Muskegon Heights) – c.1945

Ciggzree Morris was born in Benton Harbor and moved to Chicago then Muskegon with her family. She graduated from Muskegon High School in 1948, the only African American female in her graduating class. She married Richard Morris in 1949. In the 1960s, she started her own business, Cigg's Wigs, at her home. The business was so successful that she expanded, opening Ciggzree's Women's Clothing, a boutique and hair salon, at 212 West Western Avenue. The boutique offered clothing, custom designs, wigs, and an integrated hair salon – the first in Muskegon.



Image 120: Ciggzree's Real Estate

In April 1975, Morris began working as a realtor for Wartz & Galy Realtors. She focused on integrating neighborhoods in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights by selling homes in predominantly White neighborhoods to African American buyers, and by November had over \$500,000 in sales. She was dismissed from the firm in November 1975 and filed a discrimination suit against the company with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. Though the firm's partners claimed she was laid off during a slow time for real estate, others believed she was fired because of backlash from White homeowners. Though she had some concern about retaliation, she had "no intention of dropping the case. It's too

important for other blacks [sic] working in real estate. This case is going to set a precedent for other cases in Muskegon.” The CRC found in her favor.

When she was unable to find another position at a different real estate firm, she received her broker’s license - becoming the first African American woman in Western Michigan to do so – and established Ciggzree’s Real Estate. She also obtained a building contractor license and real estate appraiser license, and with her husband, an electrician, she purchased, rehabbed, and rented or sold over forty properties, eventually adding a property division to her real estate firm.

Prior to establishing Ciggzree’s Real Estate, Morris was the first African American woman hired by the United Way of Muskegon County and the first African American clerk for Michcon Gas Company’s Muskegon office. She worked with the Urban League, served as the youth advisory for the Muskegon Chapter of the NAACP, and served on the boards of the NAACP, Urban League, Board of Realtors, and Black Women’s Political Caucus.

As the only property associated with Ciggzree Morris known to remain extant, Ciggzree’s Real Estate is significant under Criterion A for African American Ethnic Heritage and Civil Rights and Criterion B for its association with local Civil Rights activist Ciggzree Morris. Though the building was constructed in the 1940s, the period of significance would begin in the late 1970s when Ciggzree’s Real Estate was established at this location following her racial discrimination case against a previous employer. Since this does not meet the fifty-year age requirement, this property should be monitored for future eligibility.

Dr. James Jackson House (5885 Lake Harbor Road, Norton Shores) – 1963



Image 121: Dr. James Jackson House

Dr. James Jackson was an important Civil Rights leader in the Greater Muskegon area. When he came to Muskegon in 1960 to pursue a career in osteopathic medicine, he recalled it was “the most segregated community of all the northern cities I’ve ever lived in.” He and his wife, Barbria, were “taken with Lake Michigan,” and decided to build a home in Norton Shores overlooking the lake. Ten builders refused to build for them because they, “weren’t supposed to live up there. That was a place for White folks,” he recalled. Eventually, they did hire a willing builder, though Barbria Jackson later recalled “we went through some very bad experiences” in the process of building the home.

Dr. Jackson soon became involved in the local Civil Rights Movement, joining a number of organizations and leading Civil Rights activities. He was a member of the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP and a co-founder of the biracial Council on Equal Opportunity, for which he led a series of pickets and protests against discriminatory hiring practices.

Originally a Modernist-style house, the building has been substantially altered and does not appear to retain any original Modernist elements. However, it may be eligible at the local level under Criterion A for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights, and Criterion B for association with prominent Civil Rights activist Dr. James Jackson. Further research is needed to fully evaluate eligibility.

Properties Significant in Other Areas

A small number of properties have histories that intersect with Black Ethnic Heritage and Civil Rights in Muskegon, but appear to derive their significance from other areas and are therefore outside the scope of this project. These properties also warrant further study and evaluation.

YWCA (430 West Clay Avenue, Muskegon) – 1952

Dr. Lucy Eames, one of the first female physicians in the Muskegon area and a pathologist at Muskegon's Hackley Hospital, began efforts to establish the first YWCA chapter in Muskegon in 1908, which was recognized by the national YWCA in 1911. The organization was first housed in a storefront on West Clay Avenue near First Street, though the exact location or status of this building is not known. Construction of the current building at this location began in 1951 and was completed in 1952. The building includes a gymnasium/auditorium, kitchen facilities, game rooms, club rooms, and recreational facilities. The Lakeshore Museum notes, "Throughout the twentieth century, the Muskegon YWCA provided young women and girls opportunities for character building, employment services, athletic and health programs, and for a safe place to stay the night."



Image 122: Former YWCA Building

The evening of March 31, 1964, at an event sponsored by the Urban League of Greater Muskegon, the YWCA hosted DeHart Hubbard, minority housing specialist for the Federal Housing Administration. Hubbard spoke to an interracial audience of about sixty people about the importance of desegregated housing and successful efforts in other communities. He advocated cracking the housing barrier by encouraging "freedom of residence" through a "favorable community climate," and he called on churches to lead this community education through sermons, panels, and forums. Hubbard also encouraged obtaining cooperation from real estate brokers, identifying what housing was available for African Americans to buy, and finding willing African American buyers, noting, "[The buyer has] got to have the courage to move into a white neighborhood even though he knows the atmosphere will be hostile."

In 1972, the YWCA merged with the Muskegon YMCA and in 1979 the YWCA moved to 900 West Western Avenue. In 1982 the building was purchased by the Muskegon County Museum, now the Lakeshore Museum Center. The exterior of the building remains intact, however it is unclear if the interior floor plan remains representative of the building's use as the YWCA.

The building appears to derive its primary significance as an important community institution in Muskegon and should be further evaluated to eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Social History and Recreation. These contexts should include the property's association with Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights. The building also appears to be significant under Criterion C for Architecture as an intact Colonial Revival-style civic building.

Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry Company

Plant No 4 (500 West Broadway Avenue, Muskegon Heights) – c.1920, 1941

Plant No 5 (1085 West Sherman Boulevard, Muskegon) – c.1950

Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company (CWC) was founded in 1908 by foundrymen and partners Donald J. Campbell, Ira A. Wyant, and George W. Cannon. The company produced engine castings and grew quickly as automobile manufacturing became increasingly important to the Michigan industrial economy, soon occupying three facilities in Muskegon. Like most of Muskegon's industries, CWC participated in war-related manufacturing during World War II. To meet the increased wartime demand, CWC opened Plant No 4 in 1941 in a vacant foundry on the north side of West Broadway Street between Seaway Drive and Temple Street, and Plant No 5 was constructed around 1945 on West Sherman Boulevard. These were followed by three new plants in the 1960s. Only Plant No 4 in Muskegon Heights and Plant No 5 in Muskegon remain extant.

The properties appear to derive their primary significance from their importance to the industrial history of Muskegon County and should be further evaluated for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Industry. The Industry context should also include the properties' association with Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights.



*Image 123: Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry
Plant No 4*



*Image 124: Campbell, Wyant, & Cannon Foundry
Plant No 5*

Hackley Park (350 West Western Avenue, Muskegon) – 1890

Hackley Park is a 2.3-acre park in the heart of downtown Muskegon situated on land donated by local industrialist and philanthropist Charles Hackley. The park was established in 1890 to honor Civil War soldiers. Throughout its history, the park has served not only as green space in the downtown, but also as a public gathering space for festivals, holiday events, ceremonies, performances, and demonstrations.

Following the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1964, demonstrations took place in Muskegon as both protest and in memorial to the four African American girls killed in the bombing. On August 9, 1964, three hundred protestors marched along Western Avenue through downtown Muskegon to Hackley Park, where about 1,000 people gathered to hear local and guest speakers. Retired Reverend Albert A. Kehren called on the crowd to “remove the madness and insaneness of the segregationists. These men have lost all touch with reality. They need our prayers.” Reverend John Sheehy observed, “If we do not struggle for the forces of good, the forces of evil will take over. Not enough people are doing something.” Local Civil Rights leader Dr. Frank Howell stated, “What we want is a policy of integration in Muskegon, not non-discrimination.” And the

main speaker at the event, Reverend Kenneth Anderson of Saginaw, told the crowd, “We cannot wait for a massive change of heart. We must take other measures.”

The property appears to derive its primary significance as a planned landscape characterized by prominent commemorative statues and should be further evaluated for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Landscape Architecture and under Criteria Consideration F for Commemorative Properties. These contexts should also include the property’s association with Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights.



Image 125: Abraham Lincoln Statue in Hackley Park



Image 126: Civil War Soldiers & Sailors Obelisk at Hackley Park

West Western Avenue (Muskegon)

Portions of the 200-400 blocks of West Western Avenue represent a three-block area of what was once the commercial core of downtown Muskegon. Several stores in this area were the target of equal employment Civil Rights demonstrations in the 1960s, however, none of these buildings remain extant. In addition, marches related to Civil Rights events in other states took place along West Western Avenue, though the area has been substantially altered since that time. Throughout at least the 1960s, several Black professionals maintained offices on West Western Avenue at the Michigan Theater/Frauenthal Center building.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, downtown business owners, faced with a dramatic decline in the downtown economy, began seeking downtown redevelopment options. In response, city leaders began plans for a downtown revitalization project that would convert eight blocks of the historic storefronts on West Western Avenue into a downtown mall. By 1972, much of the needed acreage had been acquired and city leaders attracted Sears, Roebuck & Co., and Paul Steketee & Sons to open large department stores on each end of the mall. Construction began in 1974 and the mall opened in 1976. In 1989, the Muskegon Mall was the top retail destination in Muskegon County. However, in 2001, The Lakes Mall opened, located in Fruitport Township south of the city and easily accessed by both I-96 and US Highway 31. Sears and Steketee left the downtown Muskegon Mall and relocated to The Lakes, followed by a number of other smaller stores. As a result, the Muskegon Mall closed in 2001 and was demolished in 2003, leaving behind blocks of sandy vacant lots where historic storefronts once were. Therefore, rather than a cohesive commercial district, the area is fragmented with buildings of varying ages, materials, heights, and setbacks.

The proposed district appears to derive its primary significance as the city’s commercial core and as the subject of a substantial downtown revitalization project resulting in the demolition of historic storefronts to construct a modern mall in the 1970s. It should be further evaluated for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for Commerce and Community

Development/Planning. The Commerce context should also include the proposed district's association with Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Civil Rights.



Image 127: West Western Avenue Looking West from Second Street



Image 128: West Western Avenue Looking West from First Street

Properties that Warrant Additional Research and Evaluation

Further research and evaluation is needed for a number of properties and historic contexts. The following properties were identified but without sufficient time remaining in the project or sufficient research materials. The following properties could not be located for field survey and evaluation and/or could not be placed within historic contexts in order to evaluate significance.

Unknown Fruitport Entertainment Venue

Oral histories suggest there was an important Black-owned entertainment venue in Fruitport that was well-known for bringing in the top Black bands in the country. Though the venue is believed to no longer be extant, further research on this property is warranted.

House (8899 Park Street, Montague) – c.1865



Image 129: 8899 Park Street, Montague

This vernacular house, located just north of downtown Montague, is believed to be associated with Mary Bennett, the wife of Methodist Deacon Abner Bennett. Following Abner Bennett's death in 1879, Mary Bennett may have moved from rural Muskegon County to the village of Montague and lived in this house. A search of county deed records could not confirm her occupancy, but it is possible she lived in this house until her death in 1899. Tax records show the house was built around 1865, though it is not known who the house was originally built for.

Abner Bennett had escaped enslavement in the South, settling in Canada before coming with Mary to establish a farm on the White River, at 7925 Old Channel Trail near Montague, though that house was demolished around 2010. The Bennetts are credited with bringing organized religion to the Whitehall-Montague area, where Abner Bennett served as a Methodist preacher. The Bennetts traveled the seventeen miles to Muskegon each Sunday to preach, and they helped start a number of Methodist churches in western Michigan. It is also believed their home may have been a stop on the Underground Railroad, though this has not been confirmed.

Central Storage Garage (880 First Street, Muskegon)

Prominent Black businessman Ruby Brown operated the Central Storage Garage from the mid-1930s through the 1940s, in addition to the Pine Street Tavern, Sepia Club, and other businesses. The building remains extant, but appears to have been completely renovated recently. Though the building does not retain architectural integrity, it appears to derive significance from its association with Ruby Brown. Additional research, documentation, and evaluation of this property is recommended.

Continental Motors (76 South Getty Street) – 1940-1945

Founded in 1905, Continental Motors operated a 16,000 square foot facility at the corner of Market and Water Streets in downtown Muskegon, (demolished 1993), where the company produced automobile engines. The company next began to manufacture airplane engines, building a company airport on Getty Street in 1925. A test facility was built at the Getty Street property in 1940, which grew into an 800,000 square foot facility by the end of World War II. The company was sold in the 1960s, but the Getty Street plant remains extant.



Image 130: Continental Motors Getty Street Plant, c.1950 (MLive)

The company had a dramatic increase in production during World War II and may have recruited Black laborers from the South for wartime manufacturing jobs at the Getty Street plant. Additional research is needed to determine the company's role in the establishment and growth of the Black population in Muskegon from the 1940s through the 1960s and to evaluate significance for Black Ethnic Heritage, Social History, and Industry.

Paul S. Moon Elementary School (1826 Hoyt Street, Muskegon) – 1921, c.1962

The Paul S. Moon Elementary School was built in 1921, part of a post-World War I expansion of public schools in Muskegon. It was designed by H.H. Turner, a well-known school architect from Grand Rapids. The school originally included ten classrooms, with kindergarten classrooms, restrooms, gymnasium, library, nurse's room, sewing room, and industrial arts room on the first floor and



Image 131: Paul S. Moon Elementary School

classrooms and restrooms for older grades on the second floor. Industrial expansion continued to fuel population growth, and as a result, the school, built to accommodate 437 students, was outgrown almost immediately. A frame wing was added onto the south end of the school in the early 1930s.

In the early 1960s, this wing was removed and the present south wing was constructed, which at that time contained six classrooms and gymnasium. It is unclear whether this expansion was related to the growth of the African American population in Muskegon following World War II, but the school served a predominantly Black student population by

the late twentieth century. Further research is needed to determine the school's history and significance related to Black Ethnic Heritage and Education.

Freddie Townsend Neighborhood Center (301-313 Jackson Avenue, Muskegon) – 1924

This building was constructed in 1924 to house a grocery store owned by Martin E.A. Aamodt. A Norwegian immigrant, Aamodt came to the United States in 1885 at 21 years of age. He worked for the Pere Marquette Railroad, followed by the Muskegon Booming Company, and then took a position as a clerk in a grocery store. In 1893, he established his own grocery store at this location, and in 1924 he demolished that building to construct the current building, which contained several storefronts and was known as the Aamodt Building. Aamodt lived in the Jackson Hill neighborhood and was a member of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church. He was elected to the school board in 1925 and served until his death in 1934.

After Aamodt's death in 1934, his grocery store became Engle's Market, which sold groceries and meats, and his daughter, Edith, used one of the storefronts for teaching music lessons. From the 1920s through the 1960s, the building housed a number of additional businesses, including a pharmacy, post office, barber shop, bakery, physician's office, and general store, which appear to have been operated by Scandinavian and Baltic immigrants.



Image 132: Neighborhood Youth Visit the Freddie Townsend Neighborhood Center

In 1966, the Froebel Neighborhood Center for Community Action Against Poverty (CAAP) opened at this location. It was one of four such centers planned for Muskegon and Oceana Counties, though it is unclear if additional centers were constructed as planned. The center offered legal aid, social services, public health services, planned parenthood, homemaking services, and job placement. In 1967, the center was renamed the Freddie Townsend Neighborhood Center in honor of a fifteen-year-old boy from the neighborhood who was killed in a shooting accident. By 1985, the center helped about 3,800 people each month, most of whom benefited from a government-sponsored surplus food program operated through the center.

This property was identified too late in the project to be surveyed or adequately researched. However, the building is likely significant for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History and would likely be a contributing building within a Jackson Hill historic district. Therefore, this property warrants further study and evaluation.

Toonerville Tavern (772 Pine Street, Muskegon) – c.1900

The Toonerville Tavern was opened in the mid-1930s by White businessman Fred M. Wallsted and remained in operation until about 1950. Located in an area of Muskegon that was completely destroyed in an 1891 fire, the building appears on the 1911 Sanborn Map. Oral histories suggest the business was an early integrated tavern in Muskegon, serving White and Black patrons equally. The building is no longer extant and does not appear on the 1950 Sanborn map, however, additional research about the business is warranted.

Zion Baptist Church (375 School Street, Muskegon)



Image 133: Zion Baptist Church

The history of this predominantly Black congregation is not clear. It appears the congregation formed in the mid- or late twentieth century, though the current building appears to be older and constructed by an earlier congregation. Further research is needed to determine if the current congregation formed prior to and played a role in the Civil Rights Movement, or if the church was established after the Civil Rights Movement as a result of expanded opportunities for African Americans in the late twentieth century.

Green Acres Park (600 Block Wood Street, Muskegon) – c.1942, 1949

The site that now comprises Green Acres Park served as a trailer camp housing project during the housing crisis in Muskegon during the 1940s. As African American laborers came to Muskegon seeking World War II manufacturing jobs, the housing market was unable to keep pace with the influx of new residents. Temporary housing was constructed in multiple locations in the city by the Federal Housing Administration, among these a trailer camp at Green Acres specifically for African American men. By the end of 1948, residents of the surrounding Jackson Hill Neighborhood and the Muskegon City Council asserted the housing crisis had passed and the temporary housing was detrimental to the neighborhood. In January of 1949, sixty-nine trailers from the Green Acres and



*Image 134: Children Play Sandlot Baseball at Green Acres Park c.1950
(courtesy of City of Muskegon)*

Sherman View camps were sold to the public and removed from the site. Displaced occupants of Green Acres, primarily single men, generally sought rooms to rent in the city, while families displaced from Sherman View were relocated to the Fairview Homes public housing development.

After the removal of the trailer camp by the spring of 1949, the site was sold to the city for recreational use. A playground was constructed, soccer goals set up in grassy fields, and children played sandlot baseball and other games and sports in the park's open spaces. Green Acres remains an undeveloped park set aside as a Natural Resource Area within the Muskegon Parks and Recreation system.

This property was identified too late in the project to be surveyed or adequately researched. However, it is likely significant for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History, and would likely be a contributing site within a Jackson Hill historic district. Therefore, this property warrants further study and evaluation.

Reverend Fowler Tourist Home (2437 McIlwraith Street, Muskegon Heights)

This home appears in the *Negro Motorist Green Book* from at least 1939 until at least 1952 with the address 937 McIlwraith Street. Initially the house could not be located and was believed to have been demolished. However, it was discovered that nearly all north-south oriented streets in eastern Muskegon Heights were renumbered in the late 1950s. The house remains extant, now with the address 2437 McIlwraith Street, but was identified too late in the project to be surveyed or adequately researched. The building is likely significant for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History, warranting further study and evaluation.

Reeths-Puffer Neighborhood & Community Center (75 East River Road, North Muskegon) – 1972

The Reeths-Puffer Neighborhood was established in the mid-twentieth century by Black residents affected by redlining and urban renewal in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights. The Reeths-Puffer Neighborhood Improvement Association was established in 1967 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 1968. The organization built a community center in 1972 to serve as a community gathering space with the goal to improve communication and build relationships among neighbors. The center offered a variety of programs and activities, including a Head Start preschool program; community picnics with food, vendors, and organizations; a back-to-school homecoming celebration, during which school supplies are distributed to neighborhood children free of charge; gifts for seniors in December; workshops on topics like money management and healthy eating; and an annual community dinner.



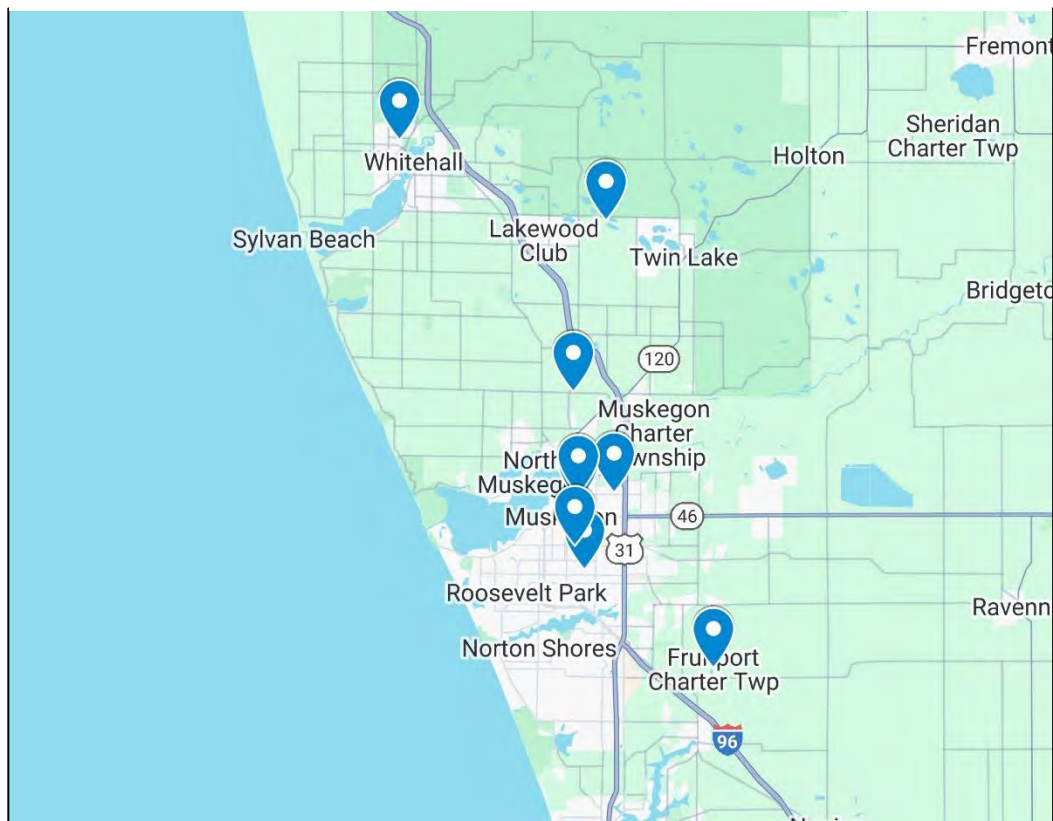
Image 135: Rebecca Lenoir Community Center in the Reeths-Puffer Neighborhood

The neighborhood and community center were identified too late in the project to be surveyed or adequately researched. However, they are likely significant for Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History, and may also be significant as a historic district. Therefore, this neighborhood warrants further study and evaluation.

Goose Egg Lake (Pine Road, Twin Lake)

Newspaper clippings from *The Muskegon Chronicle* indicate Goose Egg Lake was the subject of a substandard housing conflict. It appears the community was comprised of predominantly Black residents whose housing was eventually demolished, though it is unclear who was involved in the conflict and where displaced residents moved.

Map 4: Map of Properties Warranting Further Research



(Base Map from Google Maps 2024)

Historic Contexts that Warrant Further Research

Local repositories in Muskegon County contain extensive research and artifact collections, especially primary source materials. Among these institutions are the Hackley Public Library and its Torrent House local history and genealogy branch, as well as the Muskegon Museum of History and Science, and the Muskegon Heritage Museum of Business and Industry, both of which operate as branches of the Lakeshore Museum Center. The project timeline did not allow complete review of the collections at these repositories. Therefore, additional research on the following historic contexts is recommended.

Foundries in Muskegon and Muskegon Heights were an important factor in the growth of the Black population in Muskegon County, especially in the 1940s, though nearly all of these manufacturing facilities have been demolished. Therefore, additional research on the histories of these companies and associated plants, as well as further research about the companies' recruitment of Black laborers

from the South, is recommended. Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company acquired land around the West Sherman Boulevard and Henry Street complex for worker housing, now present-day Roosevelt Park. Oral histories suggest Lakey Foundry and other local industries may also have owned worker housing. Further research about the location and condition of the housing, racial restrictions placed on housing, the terms of occupancy, and additional industries that may have owned housing is recommended.

Additional research on Black communities, including recreational facilities, organizations, churches, and Black-owned businesses is recommended. Though the Jackson Hill and West Side neighborhoods were documented in this project, further research about these communities is recommended. Additional predominantly Black neighborhoods should also be identified and researched, including the impacts of urban renewal and highway construction on these communities. Little is known about recreational facilities that permitted Black patrons, including parks, beaches, and entertainment venues, nor about Black social clubs and fraternal organizations, therefore additional research in these areas is recommended. Many Black church congregations moved buildings frequently due to population growth, fire, urban renewal, highway construction, and other factors. It was common for members of churches to leave to lead new congregations, especially during the population growth of the 1960s. Additional research about Black church leaders congregations, their church buildings, and their roles in the Civil Rights Movement should be further explored, as well as the role of White congregations in supporting Black churches and the Civil Rights Movement. Though a number of Black-owned businesses were identified during this project, additional businesses have been identified by the Lakeshore Museum Center and warrant further research.

Newspaper clippings from *The Muskegon Chronicle* suggest that there were race-related disturbances in downtown Muskegon and downtown Muskegon Heights in 1966, 1967, and 1968. Due to the apparent biases of White journalists, it is not clear what motivated these events or what the results may have been, though the 1967 disturbances may have been in relation to events taking place in Detroit at that time. Further research to understand this aspect of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County is recommended.

Since a large number of properties related to Black history and the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County have been demolished, additional research on these properties, including histories and archival photographs, is recommended to gain a fuller understanding of the Black experience in twentieth century Muskegon County.

Though this project included nine oral history interviews, these were informal interviews audio recorded only for the consultant's use. Previous interviews with Black leaders in Muskegon County were audio and video recorded for the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP anniversary documentary; however, these recordings are not publicly available. Therefore, interviews with important Black leaders, many of whom are over eighty years old, should be conducted and made publicly available. Additional research about Black leaders not included in this report is also recommended, beginning with the Lakeshore Museum Center's "Muskegon 1st and Notable List." Efforts to locate properties associated with these leaders is also recommended.

Demolished Properties

Forty-three properties related to the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon County were identified but determined to have been demolished. Some were lost to urban renewal or highway construction projects, others to disinvestment and deterioration. The table below includes the properties known to have been demolished. The address and reason for demolition are included if known.

Table 1: Demolished Properties Related to Black History and Civil Rights

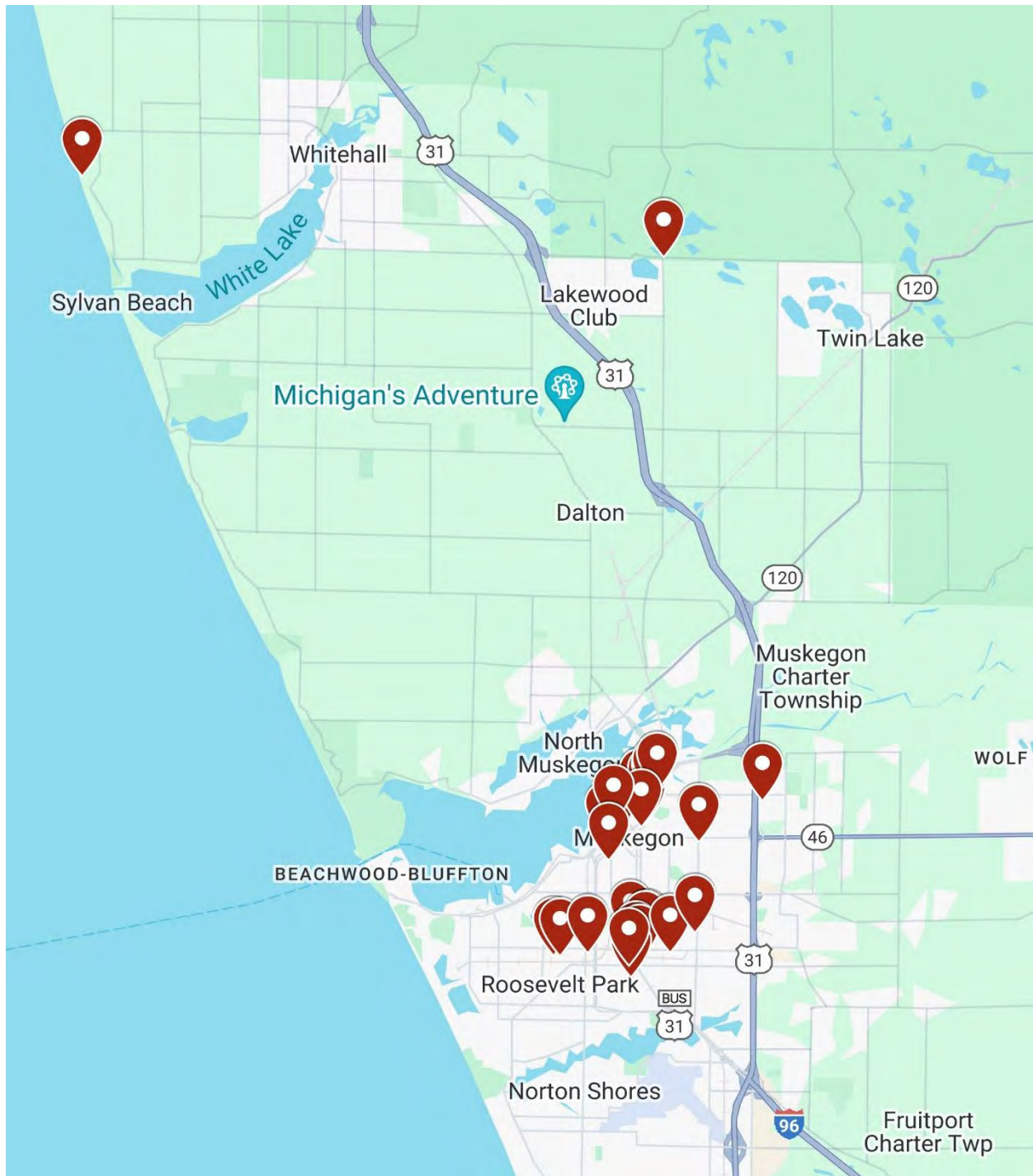
	Name	Address	Notes
1	Reverend Abner & Mary Bennett House	7925 Old Channel Trail Montague	first African Americans known to live in Muskegon County, early Methodist preacher and church founders demolished c.2010
2	Ingalls Jewelry	1082 South Getty Street Muskegon	involved in 1966 disturbance
3	CWC Plant No 3	Henry Street Muskegon	was located east of Plant No 5 at Henry Street and West Sherman Boulevard demolished for shopping center
4	Forest Homes	Marquette Ave & Harvey St Muskegon	integrated in 1951 for worker housing and became first previously all-White development to accept Black residents demolished in 1980s for new housing development
5	R.A. Swift Tourist Home	472 Monrow Avenue Muskegon	listed in the <i>Negro Motorist Green Book</i> from 1939 through the early 1950s demolished around 1960 for a new house on this site
6	Muskegon Consolidated Gas Company	372 Morris Avenue Muskegon	picketed in 1965 for employment discrimination
7	Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ	9 E Muskegon Avenue Muskegon	second location for this church
8	New Hope Baptist Church	341 Ottawa Street Muskegon	first location for this church
9	Tourre's Grocery	354 Ottawa Street Muskegon	subject of 1961 boycott of Sanitary Dairy Company products
10	Deacon Lewis Hinton Home	439 Ottawa Street Muskegon	first location for Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ
11	Moroccan Club	500 Ottawa Street Muskegon	entertainment club for African American patrons and musicians demolished by 1960
12	Bethesda Baptist Church & Parsonage	567 Ottawa Street Muskegon	house used as church and parsonage, purchased with financial assistance from local White churches
13	Toonerville Tavern	772 Pine Street Muskegon	possibly an early integrated White-owned tavern demolished by 1950

14	CWC Hercules Plant	Sanford Street Muskegon	first plant location at Racine Boat Works on the waterfront
15	CWC Plant No 6	West Sherman Boulevard Muskegon	built west of Plant No 5 in 1946, closed in 1990s
16	CWC Plant No 7	West Sherman Boulevard Muskegon	built west of Plant No 6 in 1960s, closed in 1990s
17	Lakey Foundry	158 Water Street Muskegon	recruited African American laborers from the South
18	Bethesda Baptist Church	8 East Webster Avenue Muskegon	built by this church in 1927, worshipped here until 1968
19	John Wesley AME Zion Church	23 East Webster Avenue Muskegon	former church location demolished c.1965 for highway construction projects
20	Elks Lodge	545 West Western Avenue Muskegon	original location of the Elks Charity Lodge (Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks 1397) destroyed by fire in 1987, now Heritage Memorial Garden
21	Occidental Hotel	West Western Avenue Muskegon	initially did not serve African Americans demolished in 1975 for Muskegon Mall
22	Ciggzree's Women's Clothing Boutique	212 West Western Avenue Muskegon	offered women's clothing, custom designs, wigs, and was the first Black-owned, interracial salon in the area
23	Budd Jewelry Co	227 West Western Avenue Muskegon	involved in 1966 downtown disturbance
24	Walgreens Drug Co	293 West Western Avenue Muskegon	subject of 1967 demonstrations against employment discrimination demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall
25	Ar-Jer's Clothing	296 West Western Avenue Muskegon	subject of 1967 demonstrations against employment discrimination demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall
26	The Square Clothing Company	325 West Western Avenue Muskegon	subject of 1963 demonstrations against employment discrimination demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall

27	Krauthelm Jewelers	329 West Western Avenue Muskegon	Involved in 1966 downtown disturbance demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall
28	Zale's Jewelry	338 West Western Avenue Muskegon	involved in 1966 downtown disturbance and 1967 discrimination complaint demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall
29	Friend's Friendly Clothiers	349 West Western Avenue Muskegon	subject of 1963 demonstrations against employment discrimination demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall
30	Grossman's Department Store	203-211 West Western Avenue Muskegon	subject of 1965 demonstrations against employment discrimination demolished in 1970s for Muskegon Mall
31	RC Merrick Tourist Home	65 East Muskegon Avenue Muskegon	listed in the <i>Negro Motorist Green Book</i>
32	Sepia Café	768 Spring Street, Muskegon	first entertainment club for African American patrons in the area, operated by Ruby Brown
33	Vandervelde's Furniture Company	139 West Broadway Avenue Muskegon Heights	subject of 1963 demonstrations against employment discrimination
34	Fairview Homes	600 Block Ray Street Muskegon Heights	Federal housing project built for African American laborers in 1943 demolished in 1960s after East Park Manor was built to replace it
35	Phillip Chapel AME Church	580 Hackley Avenue Muskegon Heights	first location for this church
36	Glendale School	3001 Jefferson Street Muskegon Heights	mid-twentieth-century Modernist school built during Black population growth demolished 2019 for housing
37	Cigg's Wigs	2615 Manz Street Muskegon Heights	Ciggzree Morris home and first business location
38	Smitty's Furniture & Carpeting	2760 Peck Street Muskegon Heights	first Black-owned business in downtown Muskegon Heights and first Black-owned furniture store in the area, closed in 2003

39	CWC Plant No 1	2718 Sanford Street Muskegon Heights	established in 1910 and recruited Black laborers from the South in the 1940s
40	Dr. Frank Howell Dentistry Office	2545 Baker Street Muskegon Heights	dental office for Civil Rights activist Dr. Frank Howell
41	MI Civil Rights Commission Muskegon Office	2542 Peck Street Muskegon Heights	MI Civil Rights Commission was established in 1965, this office closed in 1969 demolished in 2022
42	Muskegon Heights High School	2441 Sanford Street Muskegon Heights	predominantly Black high school recently rebuilt, none of historic building extant
43	Ebony Club (Colony Club)	East White Lake Drive and Russell Road Twin Lake	entertainment club for African American patrons and musicians

Map 5: Demolished Properties



Base Map from Google Maps 2024)

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Educational Materials

Objectives

One of the primary goals of this project is to help the public understand and make personal connections to the many ways the Muskegon community participated in the national Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century. Local stories are often not systematically recorded, making it difficult to make personal connections to national narratives. To make sure the events, stories, people, and places from the Muskegon County community are not forgotten, and to help make connections between local and national events of Civil Rights Era, the following educational materials aim to share findings and insights of this project with teachers and students in local schools, as well as to develop a sense of pride among students towards their community.

Chat Stations

The following lesson plans align with Michigan Academic Standards for K-12 Social Studies and have been developed to engage students with primary source research utilized during this project. Teachers have the option to use these materials with little preparation, however, pre-teaching resources are provided to assist teachers with connecting the findings of this project to additional themes covered in the state curriculum standards.

Select research materials have been organized into “chat stations” to facilitate student exploration, engagement, and discussion. Teachers will set up small stations around the classroom, each equipped with a set of primary sources and associated questions. Students will explore these materials in small groups, then participate in a class discussion. *Cult of Pedagogy* Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Gonzalez shares that this type of engagement allows teachers to implement strategies that improve student learning:

- It helps engage students who might not be comfortable sharing in large groups
- It allows students to move around the classroom
- It gives students a chance to engage with a variety of materials quickly²⁶⁶

Challenges to the chat station format include the potential for student reluctance to move around the classroom, as well as forming student groups; groups of 4-5 students are recommended, which may be difficult to achieve with larger class sizes. In these situations, an alternative format is for the teacher to use a projector to show each station, with all students simultaneously exploring the same station at their own desks.

Access to Materials

A partnership between the Coalition for Community Development, the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District, the Muskegon Branch of the NAACP, and the Lakeshore Museum Center has resulted in the development of outreach kits for use by teachers and educators of K-12 students. *The African American Experience in Muskegon County* kit contains primary and secondary source material, such

²⁶⁶ Jennifer Gonzalez, “Students sitting around too much? Try chat stations,” *Cult of Pedagogy*, 2013, <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/chat-stations>.

as documentaries, oral history interviews, African American newspapers, artifacts, and books covering a variety of Black History topics. The following materials have been developed for inclusion in this kit.

These materials are intended to be a starting place for incorporating the information from this project into the classroom and should not be considered static. As additional information is gathered, such as archival images, newspaper clippings, oral history interviews, or historic maps, new chat stations can be developed and incorporated into the education kit and these lesson plans.

People and Protest in Muskegon

Grade Level: 2

Lesson Time: 60-120 minutes

Michigan Social Studies Standards

History

H2.0.5 Describe how community members responded to a problem in the past

H2.0.6 Construct a historical narrative about the history of the local community from a variety of sources

H2.0.3 Explain how individuals and groups have made significant historical changes

Civics and Government

C5.0.1 Identify ways in which people participate in community decisions

Public Discourse, Decision Making, and Civic Participation

P3.1.1 Identify public issues in the local community that influence people's daily lives

Objectives and Materials

The goal of this lesson is to get students to better understand:

1. The reasons why people protest
2. How and why people protested in the past nationwide
3. How and why people protested in our community

Materials needed for this lesson:

1. Digital copies of the following to show on the projector:
 - Image 1: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963
 - Image 2: Anti-War March in Minneapolis, February 15, 2003
 - Image 3: Dakota Access Pipeline Protests, December 2016
 - Image 4: Black Lives Matter Protest in Washington D.C., June 3, 2020
 - Image 6: Sanitary Dairy Company Delivery Wagon, 1929
2. Printed images to hand out to student groups:
 - Image 5: Sanitary Dairy Company Interior, c.1945
 - Image 7: Shirt box from The Square Clothing Company, c.1950s
 - Image 8: Beneficial Loan Finance Company Protest, May 1964
3. Paper
4. Pencil
5. Markers/Crayons/Colored Pencils (optional)

Lesson Part 1: Context

Show Image 1 on board (30 seconds)



Image 1: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963

(image courtesy of Getty Images)

Civil rights leaders hold hands as they lead a crowd of hundreds of thousands at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington on August 28, 1963. Those in attendance include James Meredith and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the front row.

THINK

Ask students to look at the image independently and **think** about what they are seeing without saying or writing anything (30 seconds)

WRITE

Have students independently **write** or **draw** some things they notice in the image (2 minutes)

PAIR

Have students **pair** with a student near them and talk about what they were thinking about or what they wrote/drew (2 minutes)

SHARE

In whole group, offers prompts such as, “What did you notice?” or “What did you and your partner talk about?” Some answers might be about signs they see, that the photo is black and white, some may recognize Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the lower left corner, maybe they notice that there are mostly African Americans in the picture, etc. (2-5 minutes)

Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered near the United Nations in New York City on February 15, 2003, to rally against the Iraq War. Similar protests (as well as counter-protests) took place in major U.S. cities and around the world. The protests failed to prevent the war, but did demonstrate widespread disapproval of the President George W. Bush administration's plan, helped avoid a war in Iran "and inspired a generation of activists," according to Phyllis Bennis, author of "Challenging Empire: How People, Governments and the U.N. Defy U.S. Power."

In pairs, ask students:

- What do you notice that's similar or different about this image from the last one we saw? (2 minutes)
- This is a **protest**. What do you think people are protesting? (1 minute)
- How do we know it's a **protest**? (signs, seem to be marching, police presence, on road, etc.) (1 minute)

Share out in whole group (2-5 minutes)

Show **Image 3** on board (30 seconds)



Image 3: Dakota Access Pipeline Protests, December 2016

(image courtesy of Getty Images)

Thousands of Native Americans and their allies gathered in rural Cannon Ball, North Dakota, to protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline in early 2016. Activists feared that the oil pipeline would contaminate the Missouri River water supply and threaten sacred native land. The demonstrations motivated President Barack Obama's administration to deny an easement for pipeline construction, which was reversed by President Donald Trump weeks later. In this image, flood lights from the North Dakota National Guard light up the night sky amid the teepees, tents, RVs, and cars at Oceti Sakowin Camp on the edge of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation on December 1, 2016, outside Cannon Ball.

In pairs, ask students:

- What do you notice about this image? (2 minutes)
- How is this **protest** similar and different to the other images we have seen? (2 minutes)
- What do you think they are protesting? How do you know that? (1-2 minutes)

Share out in whole group (2-5 minutes)

Show **Image 4** on board (30 seconds)



Image 4: Black Lives Matter Protest in Washington D.C., June 3, 2020

(image courtesy of Getty Images)

More than 450 protests against police brutality and systemic racism happened throughout the United States in late May and June after the death of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed when a White Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, kneeled on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Solidarity protests erupted around the world, as well. The demonstrations sparked widespread dialogue about defunding or reforming the police. In this image, demonstrators march down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C. during a protest against police brutality and the death of George Floyd.

In pairs, ask students:

- What do you notice? (1-2 minutes)
- How is this protest similar and different to the ones we saw earlier? (1-2 minutes)
- Prompt questions such as, what is the building in the background, where is the building, why do many of these events take place by the Capitol, how do we know this is the Capitol, what is a Capitol building for, etc. (1-2 minutes)

Share out in whole group (2-5 minutes)

Write student answers to these questions on board:

- Why do people protest? (to make change, frustrated, government isn't listening to people, bad things are happening, etc.)
- What are some ways they protest? (marching, make signs, camp outs)

Lesson Part 2: Chat Stations

Divide class into small groups of 3-5 students spread apart around the room (3 minutes)

Hand out **Image 5** to each group (1 minute)



Image 5: Sanitary Dairy Company Interior, c.1945

(image courtesy of Lakeshore Museum Center)

The Civil Rights Movement came to Muskegon in 1961 with a boycott of Sanitary Dairy Company. Though the company sold products to Black-owned retailers and ran rural delivery routes to Black customers, employment at the company was not open to Black workers. The boycott began in early March 1961 with Black businesses and rural delivery customers refusing to purchase Sanitary Dairy products. They also placed signs in the windows of stores and homes announcing the boycott. This was the first organized Civil Rights demonstration in Muskegon County, and successfully ended after a few weeks when a Black delivery driver was hired.

In **small groups** ask students:

- What do you notice? (1-2 minutes)
- What could this place be? Why do you think that? (1-2 minutes)
- Where could this place be? (1 minute)

Share out in **whole group** (2-5 minutes)

Show **Image 6** on board (30 seconds)



Image 6: Sanitary Dairy Company Delivery Truck, date unknown

(image courtesy of Lakeshore Museum Center)

The Sanitary Dairy Company building is an important site to the Civil Rights history of Muskegon as a site of resistance. In March 1961, members of the African American community in Muskegon boycotted the company, refusing to purchase its product, in response to its discriminatory employment practices. This was the first organized boycott of its kind in Muskegon. Employment by the company was racially segregated, and African Americans were only allowed to work in the plant, not in delivery where they would interact with white customers. The boycott was successful in opening employment opportunities, including management, to African Americans who were previously denied.

Whole group:

- What do you notice about this? (1 minute)
- What are **dairy** products? (1-2 minutes)
- How is this similar or different to how we get dairy products now? (1-2 minutes)

In small groups ask students:

- Can you please come up with 2 or 3 reasons why you think African Americans might have protested this company? (students talk in their groups and write down their reasons.) (2-3 minutes)
- Share out in whole group. (2-5 minutes)

Teacher tells students that this type of protest was called a **boycott**, where a group decides not to purchase a product for certain reasons in order to create change.

- Has anyone ever heard of a boycott before? (30 seconds) if so, where?
- What are some things we might boycott? (1-2 minutes)
- Why might people boycott things in the past? (1-2 minutes)
- Why might people boycott things now? (1-2 minutes)

Hand out **Image 7** to each group (1 minute)



Image 7: Shirt Box from The Square Clothing Company, c.1950s

(image courtesy of Lakeshore Museum Center)

*The Square Clothing Company site is significant to the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon as a site of protest where local activists initiated one of many **protests** against employment inequality in 1963. Though African Americans were allowed to shop in the department store, they were not hired to work there. The demonstrations, sponsored by the local chapter of the NAACP and the Council on Equal Opportunity (CEO), resulted in a joint meeting of the two groups with the Urban League, the Minister's Fellowship, and the Muskegon Area Economic Planning and Development Association (MAEPDA). The MAEPDA presented a three-point plan to address employment discrimination in Muskegon.*

In small groups ask:

- What do you think this is? (shirt box) (1 minute)
- Where is this from? (The Square)
- What are some reasons people might protest against this store? (1-2 minutes)
- What does it mean for Black men and boys to be allowed to shop there, but not work there? (1-2 minutes)

Hand out **Image 8** to each group (1 minute)



Image 8: Beneficial Loan Finance Company Protest, May 1964

(image courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan)

The Beneficial Loan Finance Company building is significant to the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon as a site of protest in 1964. The business was picketed for discriminatory hiring practices, and following peaceful demonstrations, hired an African American woman in May 1964.

In small groups ask:

- What do you notice about this picture? (1-2 minutes)
- How are people protesting? (1 minute)
- Why do you think they are protesting? (1-2 minutes)
- Share out in whole group (2-4 minutes)
- How do you think can peaceful protests bring about change? (2-4 minutes)

Wrap up (can discuss, write, or draw answers here)

- What are two ways we can cause change in our community? (protest, boycott)
- How do people protest?
- How do people boycott?
- Why are both ways helpful in creating change?
- What might be some things you would like to see changed in your community?
- Would a boycott or protest be helpful? Why or why not?

Civil Rights in Our Backyard

Grade Level: 9-12

Michigan Social Studies Standards

US History and Geography Era 8: Post-World War II United States (1945-1989)

8.3.1 Civil Rights Movement – analyze key events, ideals, documents, and organizations in the struggle for African American Civil Rights including:

- the impact of World War II and the Cold War
- responses to Supreme Court decisions and governmental actions
- The Civil Rights Act (1964)
- protest movements
- rights
- organizations
- civil actions

Objectives and Materials

The goal of this lesson is to get students to better understand:

1. The ways people in Muskegon protested during the Civil Rights era
2. The ways newspapers communicated messages of protest

Materials needed for this lesson:

1. Dry erase markers
2. Laminated copies of all newspaper articles (for students to write on)
3. 5 pieces of Butcher paper
4. Markers at each station
5. Digital devices with internet connection for Station 5

Introduction to the Lesson

We are going to look at newspapers of the past to help us figure out what was going on during the Civil Rights movement nationally, and how people in our community responded.

Have students break into 5 groups to form the chat stations. Each chat station will have a document for students to examine and think about.

Students will spend time at each chat station to explore and learn about the connections between national Civil Rights events and local ones. Students should spend 5-7 minutes at each chat station, then rotate. Each group should visit all five chat stations, so adjust time according to your class length.

Lesson Beginning

Show **Image 1** on board (30 seconds)



Image 1: Birmingham Post-Herald, Monday, September 16, 1963
(image courtesy of the National Park Service)

LOOK

Ask students to look at the image for 30 seconds (no writing or talking). What do you see? What do you notice? What do you know? What do you wonder? (30 seconds)

WRITE

Have students write their thoughts and what they notice. (1 minute)

PAIR

Have students pair with another student near them and talk about what they were thinking or noticing, or what they wrote down. (2 minutes)

SHARE

In whole group, teacher can ask, "What did you notice" or "what did you and your partner talk about?" (students might notice the date, the headline, the cost of the paper, the place of the paper, or they might know of the event) (3-5 minutes)

Greater Muskegon News, Features

The Muskegon Chronicle

Section Two
Pages 17 to 32

Muskegon, Michigan, Monday, September 23, 1963

Mourning March

As estimated 2,000 Negroes marched and prayed Sunday afternoon in tribute to four Birmingham, Ala., girls killed in a bombing.

Four young Negro girls who "died in the light for freedom" were honored Sunday afternoon in a "march of mourning" staged in Muskegon Heights.

An estimated 2,000 Negroes took part in the orderly two-hour demonstration that included an eight-block march from the Greater Harvest Baptist Church to Rowlett Park and there speeches there by ministers and civil rights leaders.

Sunday's demonstration was the latest in Muskegon Heights in the last three months. A similar march June 21 and others in also throughout Greater Muskegon.

The march formed at the Muskegon Heights church and led to 13 blocks away, ending at Rowlett Park. As the marchers moved to the park, they sang songs of praise, including "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

At the park 13 leaders in the civil rights movement in Greater Muskegon took part in the state girls and held services in the last three months. A similar march June 21 and others in also throughout Greater Muskegon.

The march formed at the Muskegon Heights church and led to 13 blocks away, ending at Rowlett Park. As the marchers moved to the park, they sang songs of praise, including "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

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2,000 in Mourning March Laud Young Bomb Victims as Martyrs

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Sunday's demonstration was the latest in Muskegon Heights in the last three months. A similar march June 21 and others in also throughout Greater Muskegon.

The march formed at the Muskegon Heights church and led to 13 blocks away, ending at Rowlett Park. As the marchers moved to the park, they sang songs of praise, including "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

At the park 13 leaders in the civil rights movement in Greater Muskegon took part in the state girls and held services in the last three months. A similar march June 21 and others in also throughout Greater Muskegon.

Only Four Hurt On Area Roads

The Muskegon area got through the weekend with no serious injuries in traffic accidents with only four persons requiring hospital treatment.

James Conrad, 33, of Hart, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Shirley A. Gault, 20, of Hart, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Shirley A. Gault, 20, of Hart, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Expect Hot Session on Water Rates

The Muskegon Heights City Council will spend a full hour in a session on the water rates which has had the council in session for the last several months.

Mr. James W. Smith, 48, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Gets Jail Term for Shoe Theft

A 16-year-old Detroit man was sentenced to a 30-day term in the Muskegon County Jail for stealing a pair of shoes.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Second Merger Meet Set For Tonight

The second in a series of meetings between the Muskegon Heights and the City of Muskegon will be held tonight.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Mr. Thorne, 72, Dies in Crash

James Thorne, 72, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Hearing Conclave Held Big Success

The third annual hearing of the Muskegon Heights and the City of Muskegon was held last night.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Lip Reading Champs

Five new lip reading champions were crowned at the Muskegon Heights and the City of Muskegon.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Threaten Trio With Jail Stay For Tower Climb

Three young men who threatened to climb the tower of the Muskegon Heights and the City of Muskegon were threatened with jail.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Sonic Booms To Come From North This Week

The Muskegon Heights and the City of Muskegon will have sonic booms from the north this week.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

Gulps Clip, Boy Lands In Hospital

A boy who gulped a clip of the Muskegon Heights and the City of Muskegon was hospitalized.

John W. Smith, 16, of 1001 E. Grand, was treated at Hackley Hospital for some and wrist injuries following a one-car crash at Maple and Grand streets about midnight Sunday.

(article courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Directions:

1. Read the article "2000 in Mourning March Laud Young Bomb Victims as Martyrs."
2. Circle 4 things that stick out to you - people, places, events, etc.
3. Ask questions:
 - Why were people marching? (you may need to look this up)
 - What was the four-point plan outlined by Dr. Jackson?
 - How well do you think we have done since 1963 to address Dr. Jackson's four-point plan?
4. Write all your thoughts on the piece of paper at your station. Add to what other groups have shared by circling, starring, underlining, or making connections.

Greater Muskegon
News, Features

The Muskegon Chronicle

Muskegon, Michigan, Monday, June 24, 1964

Section Two
Pages 17 to 30

Muskegon Wins VFW Convention for '64

Expect 6,500 Here For Record City Meeting, Parade

Muskegon will host the biggest convention in its history in 1964.

An estimated 6,500 Michigan Veterans of Foreign Wars and their auxiliaries are expected to jam into the Port City and the area for the VFW's 45th Annual State Convention next June 18 to 21.

Featuring the longest and probably the most colorful parade in the city's history, the convention promises to be the biggest and liveliest ever to come to Muskegon.

And in This Corner . . . A New Lane

The Kenny Lane fan club got a new member today . . .

Muskegon's top ranking world lightweight contender is the proud father of a 7-month, 4-ounce boy, born at 7:38 a.m. today at Mackle Hospital. Kenny's wife, Ruth, is suffering from nothing worse than a healthy case of pride.

The addition brings the Lane family in five with dad, mother, Kenny Jr., 5, and Lori, 3.

There's no news as yet but the betting is heavy against one like Carlos Ortiz.

Baker Area Vote Slated On Merger

Baker School District voters will go in the polls Tuesday to decide whether or not to become a part of the Bertha Puffer School District.

The special election will be held in the Baker School, 322 E. Reed Road, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. The district has about 300 registered voters.

TUESDAY'S election will vote on several years of negotiations between the two districts concerning annexation.

The Bertha Puffer school board approved the merger by resolution April 1 after six district residents indicated their approval of the consolidation in an advisory vote.

The first meeting of the

Time Ran Out!

Any way you look at it, it's kind of embarrassing.

Muskegon Heights police today were investigating the theft of a \$150 time clock from a watchman at Brown-Murphy, Inc.

The watchman told officers he left the clock hanging on a door and when he returned it was gone.

Ask Funds For Arena Kitchen Unit

Claiming chances of renting Convention Hall have been dulled by lack of basic kitchen facilities, Wesley Arena Director George S. Dellinger is asking a \$5,000 grant from Muskegon City Commission to set the stage for a \$20,000 loan.

Commissioners were to consider the request today when they meet in service committee.

The \$5,000 sum is needed, Mr. Dellinger said, to finish basic work in the kitchen of the building flanking the modern arena.

IMPROVEMENT possible if the money is advanced are a certain floor (15,000), electricity (10,000), roofing and wall improvements, and plumbing installations.

Receipts of the \$5,000, it was indicated, would pave the way for a \$20,000 loan (at 4% interest) from Greater Muskegon Progress and Development Fund. The loan would be used to purchase refrigerators and dish washers.

The grant coupled with the loan would permit progress means that, according to arena officials, would enhance chances of being convention business to the Port City.

"WE FEEL this will definitely help the needs of the Convention Hall," Mr. Dellinger said in his letter to the commission. "We have had many requests for the use of Convention Hall for banquets but have been unable to rent it because of the lack of kitchen facilities."

The anticipated loan from the Development Fund, the director pointed out, would be repaid from rental profits at the



On the March . . . Approaching Bowen Park in the heart of Muskegon Heights is the procession of 2,000 Negroes who took part Sunday in a mourner's march for slain integration leader Medgar Evers. The impressive and orderly demonstration closed with a program accenting the fight for civil rights. (Photo by Bill Trap)

Mourning March Impressive, Orderly

The NAACP-sponsored event was called the most successful, orderly demonstration ever staged here. Leaders said most Negro churches turned out parishioners for the 4-block march from the Greater Harvest Baptist Church, 2420 Howard St., to Bowen Park in the heart of the Heights business district. Neatly dressed family groups, including many children, paraded, wearing black armbands and carrying small black flags as symbols of mourning. The throng reached the park at 1:30 p.m. moving behind a Heights police cruiser, and gathered around a microphone.

Most militant note of the program was sounded by Dr. Frank Howell, Heights dentist and businessman, who termed Greater Muskegon "one of the most of the discrimination cities in the United States." Dr. Howell said he felt that "it takes a crowd such as this to emphasize our fight for rights. We'll take nothing more or nothing less than equal rights and from this day on Greater Muskegon will be a better place for everyone," he said.

The program had religious overtones, with several pastors participating in prayers and remarks. The Rev. Wyatt L. Stewart, in opening remarks called the assassination of Medgar Evers a "disgrace to the Constitution and a desecration of the flag."

Other speakers included Heights attorney Charles Waugh, NAACP chapter president, who said Negro leaders are encouraged by orders being made. He cited out the new East Park housing project, increased hiring of Negro teachers and churches and homes.

The program ended about 2:30 p.m. and the crowd broke into small groups to return to their hall employees. "We're proud, but we're not satisfied," he said.

The Rev. Henry Reynolds, of the park.

Thieves Steal Flowers From Lakeside Grave

The first meeting of the

Child May Lose Eye

Weekend Injuries Take Heavy Toll

It was an accident-packed weekend in Greater Muskegon, Vannoy of Pearl Beach, whose daughter of 10, was hospitalized for a skull fracture when she fell.

There were seven fractures, most of them from tackles.

One child lost a finger, one boy lost an eye, and another slipped in his oval.

Treated at Mackle Hospital

Muskegon Man Gets Top Herpolsheimer Post at GR Store

Robert L. Bud Dinger, 36, managing director of Muskegon's Herpolsheimer Co. the past two years, has been named general merchandising manager of the firm.

"We are tired of

(article courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Directions:

1. Read the article "Mourning March Impressive, Orderly."
2. Circle 4 things that stick out to you - people, places, events, etc.
3. Ask questions:
 - Who was Medgar Evers? (you may need to look him up)
 - Why do you think the articles use the word "orderly" so many times?
 - Did Dr. Frank Howell sound "militant" to you? Why or why not?
4. Write all your thoughts on the piece of paper at your station. Add to what other groups have shared by circling, starring, underlining, or making connections.

Directions:

1. Read the article “Muskegon Freedom Marcher Tells of Her Joy.”
2. Circle 4 things that stick out to you – people, places, events, etc.
3. Ask questions:
 - What event did Mrs. Mentie Bell attend?
 - Who was Walter Reuther? (you may have to look him up)
 - What do you think of the quote “You don’t have to fight a man to change his heart”? How does that resonate with you?
4. Write all your thoughts on the piece of paper at your station. Add to what other groups have shared by circling, starring, underlining, or making connection.

Chat Station 4



(article courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Directions:

1. Read the article "Only 300 March but close to 1,000 hear Civil Rights Backers Call for Greater Support, Unity in Campaign."
2. Circle 4 things that stick out to you – people, places, events, etc.
3. Ask questions:
 - What do you think of this quote from Reverend Anderson: "We cannot wait for a massive change of heart. We must take other measures."?
 - What do you think of the rest of the quote: "The solution is easy. We could save \$30 billion a year if white people could lose their fear and find the power to love."?
 - Reverend Sheehy said, "at this rate, the problem will not be solved in 50 years."
 - What was the "problem" he was talking about?
 - Fifty years would have been 2014. Do you think it has been solved? Why or why not?
4. Write all your thoughts on the piece of paper at your station. Add to what other groups have shared by circling, starring, underlining, or making connections.

Chat Station 5

The other stations are dealing with marches and organizing in Muskegon after three major events of the Civil Rights Movement.

- The assassination of Medgar Evers on June 12, 1963
- The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963
- The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, on September 15, 1963

As you are learning about these events, think about:

- Something you already know
- Something that is information
- Something that you are not fully understanding
- Something that you have questions about

As you are reading and learning, look at the messaging from the different sources and think about:

- How is the information between different sources similar?
- How is it different?
- Why is it important to look at the source of the information?

The Assassination of Medgar Evers

- “June 12, 1963: Medgar Evers Murdered in Mississippi,” Zinn Education Project
<https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/medgar-evers-murdered>
- “Medgar Evers,” NAACP
<https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/civil-rights-leaders/medgar-evers>
- “Medgar Evers,” SPLC Learning for Justice
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/medgar-evers>

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

- “The 1963 March on Washington: A Quarter Million People and Dream,” NAACP
<https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/1963-march-washington>
- “1963 March on Washington,” Smithsonian
<https://www.si.edu/spotlight/1963-march-on-washington>
- “The Historical Legacy of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” National Museum of African American History and Culture
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/historical-legacy-march-washington>

The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, Alabama

- “Lessons from Birmingham: 60 Years After the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing,” NPR
<https://www.npr.org/2023/09/14/1199312953/16th-street-baptist-church-bombing-60th-anniversary>
- “America Sees the Truth,” National Museum of African American History and Culture
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/america-sees-truth>
- “16th Street Baptist Church Bombing (1963),” National Park Service
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/16thstreetbaptist.htm>

Write all your thoughts on the piece of paper at your station. Add to what other groups have shared by circling, starring, underlining, or making connections.

Lesson Debrief

After going through each station, students should return to their first station and look at their butcher paper. In their small groups, ask:

- What did other groups add?
- What connections did they make?
- What else would you add now that you've completed the stations?

In the whole group, ask:

- What were you noticing?
- What were you wondering?
- Did you know about Muskegon's connection to the Civil Rights Era?
 - If yes, why is it important to revisit that?
 - If not, why do you think that is?
- How much of this did you already know?
- What else would you like to learn now that we've done this?

A Timeline of Protests in Our Community

Grade Level: 9-12

Michigan Social Studies Standards

US History and Geography Era 8: Post-World War II United States (1945-1989)

8.3.1 Civil Rights Movement – analyze key events, ideals, documents, and organizations in the struggle for African American Civil Rights including:

- the impact of World War II and the Cold War
- responses to Supreme Court decisions and governmental actions
- The Civil Rights Act (1964)
- protest movements
- rights
- organizations
- civil actions

Civic Inquiry, Public Policy, Civic Action, and Public Discourse

C – 6.4.2 Identify, discuss, and analyze methods individuals and/or groups have chosen to attempt social and legal change. Assess the effects of civil disobedience, social movements, demonstrations, protests on society and law.

Objectives and Materials

The goal of this lesson is to get students to better understand:

- Local protests against injustice in Muskegon
- Their own views about how to address injustice in their community

Materials needed for this lesson:

- Dry erase markers
- Laminated copies of all newspaper articles (for students to write on)
- Butcher paper for each station (to make posters)
- Markers for each station
- Tape (to hang posters)

Introduction to the Lesson

In this lesson, students will read a number of newspaper articles written in Muskegon about the incident and create a shared timeline of the events. One of the purposes of this activity will be for students to think about their own feelings and how and why communities should protest against injustice.

Have students break into 5 groups to form the chat stations. They will become experts on the material at their chat station. Each group will have about 10 minutes to read and understand the newspaper clipping(s) at their station, and prepare a poster outline of what the articles are about.

Lesson Beginning

Show **Image 1** on the board



Image 1: Shirt Box from The Square Clothing Company, c.1950s

(image courtesy of Lakeshore Museum Center)

The Square Clothing Company site is significant to the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon as a site of protest where local activists initiated one of many protests against employment inequality in 1963. Though African Americans were allowed to shop in the department store, they were not hired to work there. The demonstrations, sponsored by the local chapter of the NAACP and the Council on Equal Opportunity (CEO), resulted in a joint meeting of the two groups with the Urban League, the Minister's Fellowship, and the Muskegon Area Economic Planning and Development Association (MAEPDA). The MAEPDA presented a three-point plan to address employment discrimination in Muskegon.

In whole group, ask:

- What do you think this is? (shirt box)
- Where is this from? (The Square Clothing Company)
- Has anyone ever heard of this store? (if so, how? If not, what might be some reasons why not?)
- The Black community protested against this store in the summer of 1963. What might be some reasons for the protests? (discriminatory employment practices)
- The shirt box says, "Muskegon's Finest Store for Men and Boys." What does it mean for Black men and boys to be allowed to shop there, but not work there?
- Does this resonate with anyone or any current events? What events? Why?

Chat Station 1 (June 18, 1963)

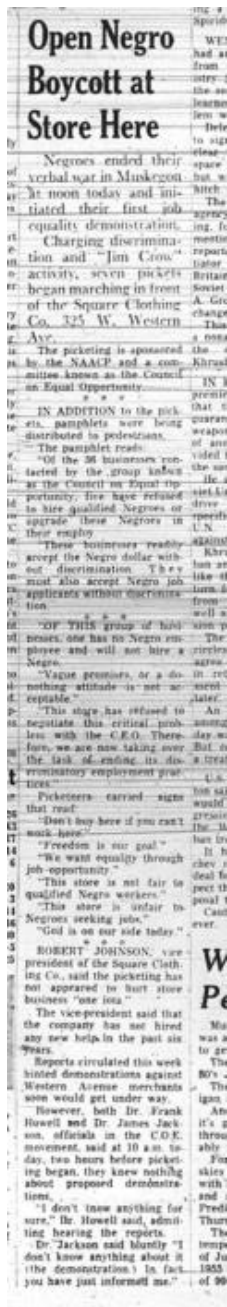


(article courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Read the article and ask:

1. What is going on here?
2. Who is mentioned in the article and what was their role?
3. What are the demands and who is making them?
4. Do you think the merchants are responding to the demands appropriately? Why or why not?

Chat Station 2 (July 24, 1963)



(article courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Read the article and ask:

1. What is going on here?
2. Who is mentioned in the article and what was their role?
3. What is written on the protest signs?
4. Do you think the signs used in the protest are effective in getting the message across? Why or why not?

Won't Yield to Pickets, Store President Says

NAACP-backed picketing of the Square Clothing Co. resumed at noon today with plans calling for demonstrations lasting through Saturday.

The Negro picketing is aimed at what the NAACP terms "discrimination" policies in employment practices of the Western Avenue clothing store.

Demonstrations began Wednesday noon with seven young Negro marchers picketing with signs protesting the store refuses to hire a Negro employee. Benjamin L. Loeb, Square president, called the picketing "unjustified" and said "it is not economically feasible for us to hire anyone, white or colored."

Mr. Loeb, also president of the Greater Muskegon Chamber of Commerce, said a delegation representing the Council on Equal Opportunity called on the basis of their qualifications, on weeks ago and asked him to hire a Negro within 30 days.

"We have only 11 employees and practically no personnel turnover," Mr. Loeb said. "It has been six or seven years since we hired anyone. I told the delegation I would not discharge any of our present employees to make room for new ones and that we weren't in a position to expand our staff."

"I also told them," Mr. Loeb continued, "that I requested what appeared to be an effort to hire additional employees on claim 'of the 36 businesses' or store when none was needed by the group known as the Council on Equal Opportunity."

weeks later and I told them my position had not changed."

Mr. Loeb is an executive committee member of the Muskegon Area Economic Planning and Development Association (MAEPDA), which has initiated its own program for improving employment opportunities for the Negro.

"I am wholeheartedly in sympathy with the MAEPDA approach," Mr. Loeb said, "and long ago signed our store's pledge of equal employment opportunities for members of all races."

But the MAEPDA approach is a long-range plan, calling not only for equal opportunities but equal qualifications on the part of applicants. A portion of the program is to provide training opportunities for the Negro so he can become equally qualified.

"My only comment at this point," Mr. Loeb said, "has to be that when and if the Square Co. needs additional help, in either its office or on the sales floor, applicants will be judged for hiring strictly on the basis of their qualifications, on weeks ago and asked him to hire a Negro within 30 days."

CHARLES M. WAUGH, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, said the picketing resulted in what he termed "a breakdown in negotiations" between Square Clothing Co. and the Council on Equal Opportunity.

The seven-member council has conducted negotiations with 36 Muskegon area businesses asking them to hire Negro employees.

Leaflets being passed out appeared to be an effort to hire additional employees on claim "of the 36 businesses" or store when none was needed by the group known as the Council on Equal Opportunity.

He called the Wednesday picketing orderly and said the "con-

fronted picketing was peaceful and orderly. The NAACP pickets, who range in age from 13-20, will remain there until the store closes at 8 p.m. today.

Today was the third consecutive day the NAACP demonstrators have picketed the downtown men's clothing store in protest over what the NAACP terms "discrimination" in employment practices.

At Williams, NAACP director of picket activities, said Thursday's demonstrations were orderly and there were no incidents.

MEANWHILE, the prosecutor's office is marking time on the question of whether a subpoena and warrant will be issued in connection with the alleged kicking of a picketer on Wednesday. A decision probably will be made Monday.

Mr. Williams said the demonstrators, mostly high school and Community College students, are members of the NAACP, the Youth Movement and volunteer groups.

Charles M. Waugh, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, declined to make further statements today. Both Mr. Waugh and Mr. Williams said a formal statement is being prepared by the NAACP as the picketing continues.

BENJAMIN L. LOEB, Square president, said he will continue to oppose what he terms the "forceful approach" being made by the NAACP.

"My stand has nothing to do with opposition to the Negro," Mr. Loeb said. "We all want it (Negro employment) but we want it to come about in a free and voluntary way."

Mr. Loeb, who is also president of the Muskegon Chamber of Commerce, said "public reaction has been very positive."

The president said he has received numerous letters and telephone calls from persons who think they're doing the right thing.

Picketing Continues At Store

Despite temperature near 90, seven young Negro pickets resumed their march in front of the Square Clothing Co. today. The picketers, who range in age from 13-20, will remain there until the store closes at 8 p.m. today.

Today was the third consecutive day the NAACP demonstrators have picketed the downtown men's clothing store in protest over what the NAACP terms "discrimination" in employment practices.

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The president said he has received numerous letters and telephone calls from persons who think they're doing the right thing.

(articles courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Read the articles and ask:

1. What is going on here?
2. Who is mentioned in the article and what was their role?
3. In the first article, the president of The Square Clothing Company, Mr. Benjamin Loeb, called the picketing "unjustified." Do you agree with that? Why or why not?
4. In the second article, Mr. Loeb calls the protests a "forceful approach." What do you think about that term?
5. Mr. Loeb also says the "public reaction has been very positive...very much in our favor." Whose side do you think you would have been on? Why?



(article courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Read the article and ask:

1. What is going on here?
2. Who is mentioned in the article and what was their role?
3. According to the article, what are the goal of the NAACP members picketing?
4. What do you think about the prosecutor's office not taking action on the city employee who allegedly kicked a 16-year-old picketer?
5. How do you think this issue should be resolved?

Chat Station 5 (July 31 & August 1, 1963)

Pickets Withdrawn By NAACP; Appeal Prosecutor's Move

Demonstrators in front of the Square Clothing Co. were called off Wednesday by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Charles M. Waugh, local NAACP chapter president, said the NAACP board "felt the main purposes for which we were picketing have been accomplished."

Nah 11 Youth

Prosecutor Rejects Warrant

The Muskegon County prosecutor's office fired back at NAACP charges of "discrimination" today, at the same time declining to issue a warrant against a man accused of kicking a Negro picket.

The alleged incident occurred a week ago in front of the Square Clothing Co. store and Charles M. Waugh, president of the NAACP, asked the prosecutor's office to issue a criminal warrant.

When none had been issued Tuesday, Mr. Waugh charged favoritism and discrimination in the prosecutor's office, citing the alleged offender's employment at Muskegon City Hall as reason for the inaction.

In a statement today, Assistant Prosecutor Paul M. Lades said:

"This office received a complaint that a picketer in front of the Square Clothing Co. was kicked in the ankle by a person attempting to enter the store. A thorough investigation has been made.

"NO MARKS, bruises, or injuries were incurred, whatever; there was no violence. The person accused suffers from a deformed leg which causes him to limp. In order to gain entrance to the store, he was required to walk between two pickets walking closely together, one of whom was the alleged victim. For at least 20 minutes after the incident, no accusation was made by the complainants to the accused.

"THIS decision is based solely on legal grounds and exhaustive investigation. Investigation was hampered due to the absence, until today, of the accused person from Muskegon since Monday when his mother suffered a paralytic stroke, of which the complainants have been aware.

"The prosecutor's office has never allowed its policies to be governed by bias or discrimination, nor will the conduct of this office be influenced by any organization or municipality. Any unlawful and intentional interference with a peaceful picket line will be prosecuted.

"The complainants always have recourse to criminal processes aside from the prosecutor's office. By posting security for costs they may obtain a complaint and warrant in any justice or municipal court, if they disagree with the prosecutor's decision."

Picketing was halted the day following a joint meeting of MAEPDA, the NAACP, the Council on Equal Opportunities, the Urban League and the Minister's Fellowship, at which MAEPDA presented a three-point plan designed to solve the problem of equal job opportunities for Negroes.

MR. WAUGH emphasized that the withdrawal of pickets in no way indicative of an acceptance of the proposals outlined by MAEPDA.

He added, "We feel that sitting down and discussing the problems with responsible members of the community was one of the objectives of the picketing of the Square."

The chapter president declined to say if new demonstrations are planned. He said the NAACP board will meet tonight to "review the picketing program and to consider whether or not to picket another place," adding that the picketing program "has not been abandoned."

Mr. Waugh said he "disgusted" by the County Prosecutor's decision not to issue a warrant against a white man who allegedly kicked a Negro picket.

WHEN HE heard the decision Wednesday, Mr. Waugh said, he immediately filed a complaint with the State Attorney General. He said he has two witnesses who actually saw the reported assault.

"It was a very bad decision," Mr. Waugh said, and he reiterated his charge that a warrant was not issued because the accused man is a city hall employee.

(articles courtesy of Hackley Public Library)

Read the article and ask:

1. What is going on here?
2. Who is mentioned in the article and what was their role?
3. In the first article, what are the reasons the prosecutor's office decided not to press charges against the person who allegedly kicked a protester? Do you believe them? Why or why not?
4. Why was the NAACP president "disgusted" by the prosecutor's decision to not press charges? How do you feel about this decision? Why?
5. Why did the NAACP decide to stop picketing? Do you agree with that decision? Why or why not?

Lesson Debrief

The stations are numbered in chronological order. Student groups should present each article and hang their poster in this order.

As students present, have groups make connections between the articles by asking:

- What are the main events?
- Who are the main people involved in these events? Are any of the people involved in multiple events?
- Were the protests successful? If yes, why? If no, what would that have looked like?

Students should also be thinking about what they would do (or would have done!) in the face of injustice in their community. Notice that many of the protestors in these events were in high school.

Ask students:

- Do you think you would have joined the protests? Why or why not?
- Should high school students be a part of protests? Why or why not?

Suggest students talk to their families about connections to these (or other) protests in the community. Offer a future opportunity to share what they learn from family members.

Pre-Teaching Resources for High School Chat Stations

The lesson plans included in this kit are designed to help students engage with primary source materials from the Civil Rights Era and to make connections between national and local events during the Civil Rights Movement. While the lessons may be used independently, the following resources provide opportunities to extend the lessons and further explore the historic context of the Civil Rights Era in Muskegon County.

Identifying Racist and Dehumanizing Language

Explain that prior to the Civil Rights Movement, newspaper articles used the terms “Negro” or “colored” instead of “Black” or “African American.”

Questions to ask:

- How has the language used to describe people changed over time?
- Why is it important to change language?

Further reading:

- Hansi Lo Wang, “‘Negro’ Not Allowed On Federal Forms? White House To Decide,” *NPR*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/13/568317026/negro-not-allowed-on-federal-forms-white-house-to-decide>

Addressing Racist and Dehumanizing Language

Facing History Ourselves is an organization based in the United Kingdom supporting teachers and students. “Through rigorous historical analysis combined with the study of human behavior, Facing History’s pedagogy heightens students’ understanding of racism, religious intolerance, and prejudice; increases students’ ability to relate the lessons of history and literature to their own lives; and promotes greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities in a democracy.”

Facing History offers a lesson plan designed to aid students in confronting racist or dehumanizing language, especially when engaging with primary source materials. The lesson covers two 50-minute class periods and though developed for classrooms in the UK, may also be applied to American social studies courses.

Facing History Ourselves, “Addressing Racist and Dehumanizing Language,” <https://www.facinghistory.org/en-gb/resource-library/addressing-racist-dehumanising-language>

Teaching the Hard Histories of Racism

The Harvard Graduate School of Education identifies principles that teachers can employ in the classroom, for students of all ages, to discuss difficult histories effectively, honestly, and with empathy.

Emily Boudreau, “Teaching the Hard Histories of Racism: Five Principles to Guide Educators as They Broach Difficult Topics in their Classrooms – with Students of All Ages,” *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/21/02/teaching-hard-histories-racism>.

Additional Resources

Black-Owned Businesses in Muskegon County

- “50 Years of Entrepreneurship: From Segregated to Integrated, 1968-2018”
List of Black Business in Muskegon/Muskegon Heights available from the Muskegon Heritage Museum of Business and Industry of the Lakeshore Museum Center
- “It Runs in the Family”
Online exhibit at Muskegon Heritage Museum of Business and Industry of the Lakeshore Museum Center: <https://lakeshoremuseum.org/it-runs-in-the-family>.
- “History of Black Owned-Businesses in Muskegon Highlights ‘Entrepreneurial Gene’”
MLive article by Rose White, February 15, 2021 (account required):
<https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2021/02/history-of-black-owned-businesses-in-muskegon-highlights-entrepreneurial-gene.html&subscribed=google-oauth2%7C105889877230338778218>

Other Muskegon County Topics

- “A Local Legacy of History, Faith, and Music”
MLive article by Lee Lupo, February 5, 2008 (no account required):
https://www.mlive.com/muskegon_chronicle_extra/2008/02/local_culture_reveals_legacy_of_history_faith_and_music.html
- “Michigan Freedom Trail: Follow the Underground Railroad Through Michigan”
StoryMap by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0974649774ec43c7884fb8e8ac16a397>
- “February Celebrates African American History. So Does Muskegon County!”
Visit Muskegon article, February 1, 2024:
<https://www.visitmuskegon.org/blog/post/blackhistorymonth>

The Negro Motorist Green Book, 1955

- Michigan locations:
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3c85ba30-9374-0132-9292-58d385a7b928/book#page/37/mode/2up>
- “A Chat with the Editor,” Victor H. Green
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3c85ba30-9374-0132-9292-58d385a7b928/book#page/3/mode/2up>
- “*The Green Book* Motel Guide”
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3c85ba30-9374-0132-9292-58d385a7b928/book#page/7/mode/2up>
- “Explanation” [of limitations of *The Green Book*]
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3c85ba30-9374-0132-9292-58d385a7b928/book#page/9/mode/2up>

Redlining and Its Legacy

- “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America”
<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>
- “Muskegon,” *Redlining in Michigan*, Michigan State University:
<https://www.canr.msu.edu/redlining/muskegon>

- “Census Study: Racial Segregation Persists in Muskegon-Norton Shores Metro Area”
MLive article by Brian McVicar, April 3, 2011:
https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/2011/04/post_77.html
- “Imagined Boundaries and Lived Geographies: How past patterns of inequality observed in present Land Bank Authority data can inform the future of community redevelopment”
StoryMap by Brian Woodin, June 16, 2021:
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4e76b26cf849475ebd6c67136663ffc3>

Idlewild Community

- “Black Eden,” The Town That Segregation Built
Three-minute audio with transcript, NPR, July 5, 2012:
<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/156089624>

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Personal Communication with Melvin Burns, Jr., and Robert Dowson (Civil Rights Activists) by Cheri Szcodronski. March 1, 2023. Dowson Home, Muskegon Heights.

Personal Communication with Jim Heethuis (former CWC General Manager) by Cheri Szcodronski. April 7, 2023. CWC-Extron, Muskegon.

Personal Communication with Jerry Lottie (Civil Rights activist) by Cheri Szcodronski. August 2, 2023. Via Zoom.

Personal Communication with William Muhammad by Cheri Szcodronski. March 22, 2022. James Jackson Museum of African American History, Muskegon Heights.

Personal Communication with William Muhammad by Cheri Szcodronski. April 20, 2022. West Western Avenue, Muskegon.

Personal Communication with Reverend Charles W. Poole (pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church) by Cheri Szcodronski. April 20, 2022. Bethesda Baptist Church, Muskegon.

Personal Communication with Rillastine Wilkins (Civil Rights activist) by Cheri Szcodronski. February 9, 2023. Wilkins Home, Muskegon Heights.

Personal Communication with John Workman (foundry employee and son of foundry recruiter) and Marti Workman (daughter of foundry recruiter) by Cheri Szcodronski. May 10, 2023. Eagle Alloy Administrative Offices, Muskegon.

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Appendix A: Informal Oral History Interviews

The following nine subjects participated in informal oral history interviews. Interviews were audio recorded for consultant use only and have not been transcribed in full. Most interviews were conducted with a single subject, however, two were group interviews. In addition, two subjects participated in two interviews. All subjects were interviewed by Cheri Szcodronski.

Melvin Burns, Jr.

November 30, 2022

Muskegon Area District Library, Muskegon Heights Branch, 2808 Sanford Street, Muskegon Heights

March 1, 2023

Home of Robert Dowson, 246 Catherine Street, Muskegon

Melvin Burns, Jr., is a lifetime resident of Muskegon County and City Manager of Muskegon Heights. Mr. Burns is the son of Melvin Burns, Sr., an important figure in the Black history of Muskegon County, primarily for his role in union organizing and for training with Olympic boxer Phil Baldwin.

Robert Dowson

March 1, 2023

Home of Robert Dowson, 246 Catherine Street, Muskegon

Robert Dowson was born in Mississippi and came to Muskegon in the late 1960s. He was active in the Muskegon Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and participated in demonstrations in downtown Muskegon.

Jim Heethaius

April 7, 2023

CWC Textron Administrative Offices, 1085 West Sherman Boulevard, Muskegon

Jim Heethaius is the former General Manager of Cannon, Wyant, & Campbell Foundry Company Plant No. 5, now CWC Textron.

Jerry Lottie

August 2, 2023

Interviewed virtually via Zoom with daughter Trynette Lottie Harps

Jerry Lottie was born in Arkansas and came to Muskegon in the 1950s. He was an active member of the Muskegon Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, serving as its Housing Chair. He later served as the president of the Oak Terrace Non Profit Corporation, Director of the Muskegon Housing Commission, and Directory of the Muskegon Affirmative Action Commission.

William Muhammad

March 22, 2022

James Jackson Museum of African American History, 7 East Center Street, Muskegon Heights

April 20, 2022

West Western Avenue, Muskegon

William Muhammad is a lifetime resident of Muskegon County and a board member and volunteer at the James Jackson Museum of African American History. Mr. Muhammad experienced much of the Civil Rights Movement in Muskegon and participated in Civil Rights demonstrations.

Reverend Charles Poole

April 20, 2022

Bethesda Baptist Church, 575 South Getty Street, Muskegon

Reverend Charles Poole came to Muskegon to pastor Bethesda Baptist Church in the early 1960s. He was the first African American elected to the Muskegon School Board and served as its president for over a decade. Reverend Poole was born and raised in Detroit and participated in numerous important Civil Rights demonstrations there before coming to Muskegon.

Rillastine Wilkins

February 9, 2023

Home of Rillastine Wilkins, 2305 Fifth Street, Muskegon Heights

Rillastine Wilkins was born in Oklahoma and came to Muskegon in the early 1950s. She and her husband, Clarence, were the first African American residents to live west of Peck Street. She worked for General Telephone & Electronics, where she was the first African American to work in the business office. After retirement, Ms. Wilkins began a career in local politics, serving as the first woman elected to the Muskegon Heights City Council, the first Black woman elected mayor of Muskegon Heights, and serving on the Muskegon County Board of Commissioners.

John Workman and Marti Workman

May 10, 2023

Eagle Alloy Administrative Offices, 5142 Evanston Avenue, Muskegon

John Workman and Marti Workman are the children of Harold Workman, Sr., who worked in the business office at Campbell, Wyant, and Cannon Foundry Company and traveled to southern states to recruit African American workers during World War II.