Norwood Research Notes
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While some Indianapolis residents may be familiar with the southeast neighborhood known as Norwood, few are aware that its origins date to the early 1870s and the formation of a Freetown primarily populated by formerly enslaved African Americans who migrated from Kentucky in the years immediately after the Civil War.

Located less than three miles from the center of Indianapolis (Monument Circle), Norwood's commonly accepted boundaries are Prospect Street to the north, Sherman Drive to the east, Terrace Avenue to the south, and the crossroads of the former "Big Four" railroad tracks to the west.

Prior to being absorbed into the city of Indianapolis in 1912, Norwood existed as an independent and predominantly Black settlement dating back to the early 1870s. Historical evidence of Norwood's Black community during those years is scant. However, from the late 1880s through the 1960s, there are a tremendous number of local newspaper articles and public records documenting the town of Norwood and life for its Black residents.

EARLIEST REFERENCES AND RESIDENTS

Research thus far indicates Norwood coalesced into an independent Black suburb of Indianapolis in 1888 with the creation of *Hosbrook's Prospect Addition* on what was previously a 10-acre farm owned by the Denny [Denney] family.

From that point forward, there is a demonstrable Black settlement with its own school, post office, law enforcement, library, community center, park, churches, social and political organizations, as well as dozens of Black-owned businesses.

For nearly 20 years prior to the creation of *Hosbrook's Prospect Addition* in 1888, a steady stream of Black families were already settling in the area.

U.S. Federal Census records from 1870 and 1880 show approximately 20-40 Black households (150+ individuals) living southeast of the city, in Center township, in the vicinity of what will come to be the Norwood settlement.

[*Note: because Norwood is outside city limits, there are no street names or house numbers associated with the population in this area on either the 1870 or 1880 census. Therefore, for this discussion, the Black population in each census was determined by identifying all-Black households within two to three miles of the Denny farm*].

The overwhelming majority of the adult Black residents indicated as living in/near Norwood at this time were born in Kentucky prior to 1860, indicating they were most likely enslaved prior to the Civil War.

About half the men on each census are employed as farmers or farm laborers. The others are working as "common laborers" or laborers in the rail or brickyards. Most of these Black households are multi-generational and many indicate couples with children or elders raising children of relatives.

All of these census patterns are consistent with other known and well-documented Black settlements in Indiana at the time: Lyles settlement in Gibson County, Cabin Creek in Randolph County, Beech in Henry County, Roberts in Hamilton County, Weaver in Grant County, and Bassett and Rush in Howard County. [See *Since Emancipation: A Short History of Indiana Negroes 1863-1963*; Emma Lou Thornbrough; Indiana Division American Negro Emancipation Centennial Authority, 1963].

The first reference to Norwood as a Black community found thus far is an 1872 newspaper reference to the Norwood "colored school" where one of the state's first African American politicians, James S. Hinton, makes a weekend campaign stop at a rally hosted by residents [*Indiana Journal*, September 28, 1872].

Prior to 1869, Indiana law prohibited tax dollars being spent to educate Black children — meaning only white students could attend public schools. While some rural areas allowed Black students to attend, especially in and around Quaker settlements, most did not. After a group of Black residents challenged the law as unconstitutional and won their case, the law was changed.

The mention of a Norwood school in 1872 indicates a significant enough Black population to warrant locating one of the three new "colored schools" in Center Township built since 1870.

It was also a significant enough Black community to warrant a campaign stop by **James Sidney Hinton (1834-1892)** a Civil War veteran who was the first African American to hold state office in Indiana and the first African American to serve in the Indiana state legislature. Hinton's 1872 campaign stop "at Norwood's school house" was part of his successful effort to be elected as an at-large delegate of the Republican National Convention — one of only two Black men in the United States elected.

The Black population around Norwood was also significant enough in the 1870s and 1880s to give rise to a racist nickname that would last for more than five decades. As early as 1873, the *Indianapolis News* reports on events at "Nigger Hill" located on the outskirts of the city, east of Prospect and Keystone, near the railroad crossings of the "Big Four."

A search of the state's digital newspaper archives returns more than 75 instances between 1870 and 1920 where the Black community in and around Norwood is referred to by this name in local papers. In 1901, the *Indianapolis News* even wrote a small article about how widely known and used the nickname was around the country:

> "There is not a railroad man from New York to San Francisco — Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine —but heard of 'Nigger Hill,'" says John Q. Hicks yardmaster of the Big Four. "You may

> go anywhere the country and talk to train or yardmen about 'Nigger Hill' and they all know it. I do not know of any spot of ground in the country that is better known among railroad men." [*Indianapolis News*, March 23, 1901; p 9].

The notoriety and name lasted for at least another 25 years, with the *Indianapolis Times* writing about "Queer Names" in Indianapolis in 1926:

> "South of Norwood lays Lovetown, another Negro district, and the territory in Norwood around the railroad yards is known as Nigger Hill." (*Indianapolis Times* January 27, 1926).

NORWOOD: EST. 1888

The creation of *Hosbrook's Prospect Addition* in 1888 and the sale of the 200 resulting lots to Black families can, in many ways, be used as the starting point of Norwood as a town.

In prior years, records show clusters of Black households dotted around the area, with a larger group living around the railroad tracks. While one or two owned property, this was by far the exception on the 1870 and 1880 censuses.

John Hosbrook received final approval from the county to subdivide and sell the former Denny farm in April 1888. According to newspaper reports, the 200 lot residential area was the biggest "addition" created in Marion County that year.

Still known as "*Hosbrook's Prospect Addition*" in 2021, this first section of Norwood residential lots is bordered by Prospect to the north, Vandeman to the west, Terrace to the south, and Earhart to the east.

[Note: There were two more farms to the east of this Addition, stretching to Sherman Avenue. Eventually, those farms will become individual home lots and Norwood will expand to what we know to be its current boundaries.]

Hosbrook sold the original lots along Prospect to merchants and makers for $150. To the south, the lots sold for $50-75 depending on how much clearing had been done to the land. [In March 1888, the *Indianapolis News* lamented the loss of "the forests of Norwood" into building lots under the headline "Last of the Primeval Forests" *Indianapolis News,* March 1, 1888]

Land sales were reported in the *Indianapolis News* during these years, and thus far more than 80 records for the original lot sales between 1888-1892 have been found. Preliminary research indicates at least 50 were sold to Black families. The second largest group of buyers were first generation German immigrants.

It's important to note that these lots were being sold far cheaper than all other residential property of the same size in Marion County during the same time period. No example of a residential lot in the county selling for less than the lots in Norwood in these years has been found.

There are several factors that could explain why Hosbrook was selling the land so cheaply. At the top of the list would be the addition of a second rail line crossing Denny's old farm — this is the creation of the "Big Four" that began operating in 1889. Here, the North-South line from Chicago to Cincinnati crossed with the North-South line from Cleveland to St. Louis. This crossroads created a Norwood train depot and one of the largest freight and switchyards in the city.

While there were many farmers in the area since the city's founding, by 1888 their numbers were fast dwindling. A good number of farms are now dairy, some are sold to developers like Hosbrook, while others are sold to manufacturers who built brickyards, gravel pits and sand quarries. This is also the time when the city constructs the first large Citizen's Gas facility in Norwood, hiring dozens of Black laborers known as "heavers" to constantly feed its giant coal furnaces.

It isn't hard to conclude that white residents of Indianapolis viewed Norwood as

1. An "undesirable" location [near the freight yards and many factories]
2. On "undesirable" land [bad for agriculture — soil is sand, clay, gravel]
3. Populated by "undesirable" people ["N— Hill" as the local nickname]

For the Black residents moving to Indianapolis in the 1880s and 1890s, however, living in Norwood was anything but undesirable.

Here these men and women of color were able to establish family units and family homes for the first time since their African ancestors had been enslaved.

Here, Black men were paid wages for their labor. They could buy or rent a home for their family — a family that could not be deemed someone else's property.

Here, Black women were not forced into physical or sexual servitude; they could choose their husband, keep their own house and raise their own children.

And those children could legally go to school, be taught to read and write — skills virtually none of the first adults living in Norwood were taught or afforded as enslaved people in the South.

COMMUNITY GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Though Norwood never officially incorporated, the community did have means for self governance. Newspaper accounts from the 1890s through 1912 mention Norwood residents electing a town marshal, the establishment of the Norwood post office and hiring of U.S. Postmasters, as well as town meetings to organize community building and improvements.

Church and school quickly emerged as central to life for the Black community in Norwood, and the efforts of Rev. Sidney Penick and educator Ada B. Harris are central to the town's growth and history.

Rev. Sidney Penick [c1850-1912] was born into slavery around 1850 — he, his two brothers, his father Jordan, and mother Jane can all be found on slave schedules from 1860 recording the "property' of W.S. Penick in Springfield, Kentucky.

Penick lied about his age and joined the Union Army in 1865 [men had to be 18 to enlist, Penick was most likely 15 or 16. He continued to give various birthdates for the remainder of his life]. In addition to government records, there are several Indianapolis newspaper articles listing Civil War veterans receiving pensions, and Penick is among them.

[Note: There were at least four other households headed by Black Civil War veterans living in Norwood in the 1890s, all former slaves].

After the war, Penick lived briefly in Louisville before finding his way to Indianapolis. He is listed in the 1880 Indianapolis City Directory as a servant living with H. P. Wetzel and family at 739 N. Delaware [Wetzel works for the railroad].

The following year, Penick married Mary L. Cannon, who lived nearby on Meridian Street. The couple eventually bought property in Norwood where they raised their five children and lived until their deaths. For the remainder of his life, Penick's main occupation was preaching, but he found work where he could as a hotel porter, rail yard worker, and various labor jobs.

Penick was active in the AME Zion Church almost immediately upon arriving in the city and, as his 1912 *Indianapolis Star* obituary reports, he was instrumental in the organization and founding of three new AME churches, all of which continue to hold services in 2021: Lovely Lane Church (first on Virginia Avenue; name changed to St. Mark Temple when the building was relocated to Shelby Street); Caldwell Temple on the city's west side; and Penick Chapel in Norwood. The *Star* also describes Penick as a "well-meaning, old colored clergyman" who "cleaned up…the colored village" of Norwood.

Rev. Penick began holding church services in Norwood in 1885. When lots in Hosbrook's Property Addition went on sale, the community raised $100 to purchase lot #40 on the corner of Earhart and Madeira — by 1895 they had erected a beautiful church with additional funds raised by the local community. As of 2021, that building still stands and direct descendants of Sidney and Mary Penick continue to live in Norwood.

Ada B. Harris (1872-1927) was the daughter of two former slaves who came to Indianapolis not long after her birth. She grew up in the Ransom Place neighborhood and graduated Shortridge High School in February 1888. She was assigned as the new teacher at the Norwood Colored School in October of the same year.

Prior to Miss Harris' arrival, operation of the school had been sporadic since the early 1870s. The township would/could only open the "colored" school if there were enough students [no hard number; seems to be 5 or more] and if they had a "colored" female teacher available. Otherwise, the Norwood students would have to go to one of the "colored" schools further in town.

In later newspaper interviews, Harris states that she had 15 students enrolled in the fall of 1888 and classes were held in a one room wooden structure that contained nothing but a coal stove. At that time, the Norwood School was also known as School #5 — indicating it was now the fifth "colored" primary school in Center Township.

Under Harris' tutelage, the Norwood School continued to grow. Three years after her arrival, a new two-room school was built to accommodate the increased enrollment. In 1899, the township was forced to rent a separate location to house the first year students.

Finally, in 1903, Norwood received its first proper school building — a three room structure that could accommodate its now average enrollment of 150 students per term. At this time, the school was renamed the Harriet Beecher Stowe School.

According to the *Indianapolis News*, "Colored School #5, Norwood, the largest colored school in the county" was located "near the Big Four railroad… on a knoll overlooking the city." (September 7, 1903)

The growth of the school reflects the growing Black population in Norwood. In 1890, there were an estimated 400 residents. In 1912, nearly 1,800.

In 1909, the Norwood Colored School burned to the ground. Newspaper reports indicate arson was suspected, but no follow up reports of arrests have been located.

When the new building was constructed, the school was moved to the other side of the railroad tracks — on the corner of Golay and Cottage, in "Lovetown." The Harriet Beecher School continues to exist in this neighborhood.

In addition to her success as an educator, Ada Harris is also responsible for organizing the efforts that created the first Community Center in Norwood and the first library.

Over the course of several years, she and her students held multiple fundraisers and eventually were able to purchase a plot of land and an old dairy barn. Black residents from all over Indianapolis helped with the fundraising, as well as the efforts to improve the center. Newspaper reports (primarily in the *Indianapolis Recorder*) tell of men spending the weekend building a gazebo and lawn seats for outdoor concerts; women holding "penny parties" to raise funds for new paint, sports equipment and a sign.

When the center opened in 1903, it quickly became central to the lives of Norwood residents and lasted for decades hosting dances, dinners, concerts, skating parties, political rallies, graduation ceremonies, and every other community event you could possibly think of. [Social and community events are reported regularly in the *Recorder's* "Norwood Notes" column beginning in 1899].

In 1912, Harris created Norwood's first library, in addition to Indianapolis newspapers, its opening was also reported in W.E.B. DuBois' Magazine *Crisis* (Vol 5 page 8):

> "*A colored community named Norwood, near Indianapolis, is to have a public library with about 1,000 books. Miss Ada B. Harris, principal of the local school, has been chief promoter of the project, and the citizens of Norwood themselves have cleaned and remodeled the building, while local firms have given much of the furniture.*"

Ada Harris continued to lead the Norwood school until 1915. After Norwood became part of the city of Indianapolis, and the Harriet Beecher Stowe School was absorbed into the IPS system, it was determined that after 27 years her teaching credentials were inadequate.

Harris then attended Butler University, earning the required teaching certificate, but was not hired back. She took a teaching job in Shelbyville for several years, before suffering multiple strokes and passing away at her Norwood home in 1927.

NORWOOD'S BRIGHTEST STAR: ARTIST JOHN HARDRICK

While many of Harris' students went on to be successful in a variety of fields, perhaps the most famous is artist **John Hardrick (1891-1968)**.

[*Note: More research needed, most of the following pulled from Hardrick's Wikipedia page and Indianapolis Recorder article]*

John Hardrick was born in Indianapolis, the grandson of a former slave named Shepherd Hardrick who fled to Indianapolis in 1871. The artist's parents, Shepherd Jr. and Georgia West, married in Indianapolis in 1888 and moved to Norwood where they owned and operated a successful trucking business on the site of a former dairy farm, located on Prospect just west of Vandeman. Here, John and his siblings grew up attending the Norwood School.

When Hardrick was 13, Miss Harris organized his first exhibition at the 1904 Negro Business League convention. After graduating primary school the following year, Hardrick attended Manual High School where he studied art under Otto Stark. As a teen, Hardrick began submitting paintings and drawings in annual Indiana State Fair competitions and won multiple awards.

Based on Stark's recommendation and on the early notoriety of his work, Hardrick was accepted to Herron School of Art in October 1910 — the first Black student accepted at the Indianapolis art college. He financed his art education by working at the Indianapolis Stove foundry in Norwood and by delivering newspapers.

Over the next few decades, Hardrick earned tremendous success in Indiana and elsewhere. In 1917, Herron included his work in its 10th Annual Exhibition of Works by Indiana Artists; the Art Institute of Chicago included Hardrick in its exhibition of African-American artists in 1927, the same year he received a bronze medal and $100 from the Harmon Foundation honoring his achievements as an African American artist.

Through the years, Hardrick held exhibitions in local AME churches, including Penick chapel; he also painted a mural at a local AME church entitled "Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well."

In 1928, his work was displayed at the Smithsonian Institute, and he was included in the Second Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Negro Art in San Diego. In 1933, he received a blue ribbon at the Indiana State Fair; his work was included at the Hoosier Salon in 1929, 1931, and 1934.

In 1934, Hardrick was awarded a WPA commission to paint a mural for Crispus Attucks High School. The mural, titled *Workers*, portrayed three African American men pouring molten metal in a foundry — a job Hardrick had held himself. The principal of the school, however, found the mural too realistic and depressing — he feared it would dampen the spirits of his Black students and asked that the mural be painted over.

By 1940, Hardrick's declining health and finances led him to move in with his children in their Norwood home, where he used their attic as his studio. He continued to paint until his death in 1968 from complications due to Parkinson's disease.

Both the Indianapolis Museum of Art and Indiana State Museum hold multiple works by Hardrick.

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STILL TO ADD:

- Norwood's early business community
- 1900: First attempt to absorb Norwood into Indianapolis (fails)
- 1912: Second attempt succeeds