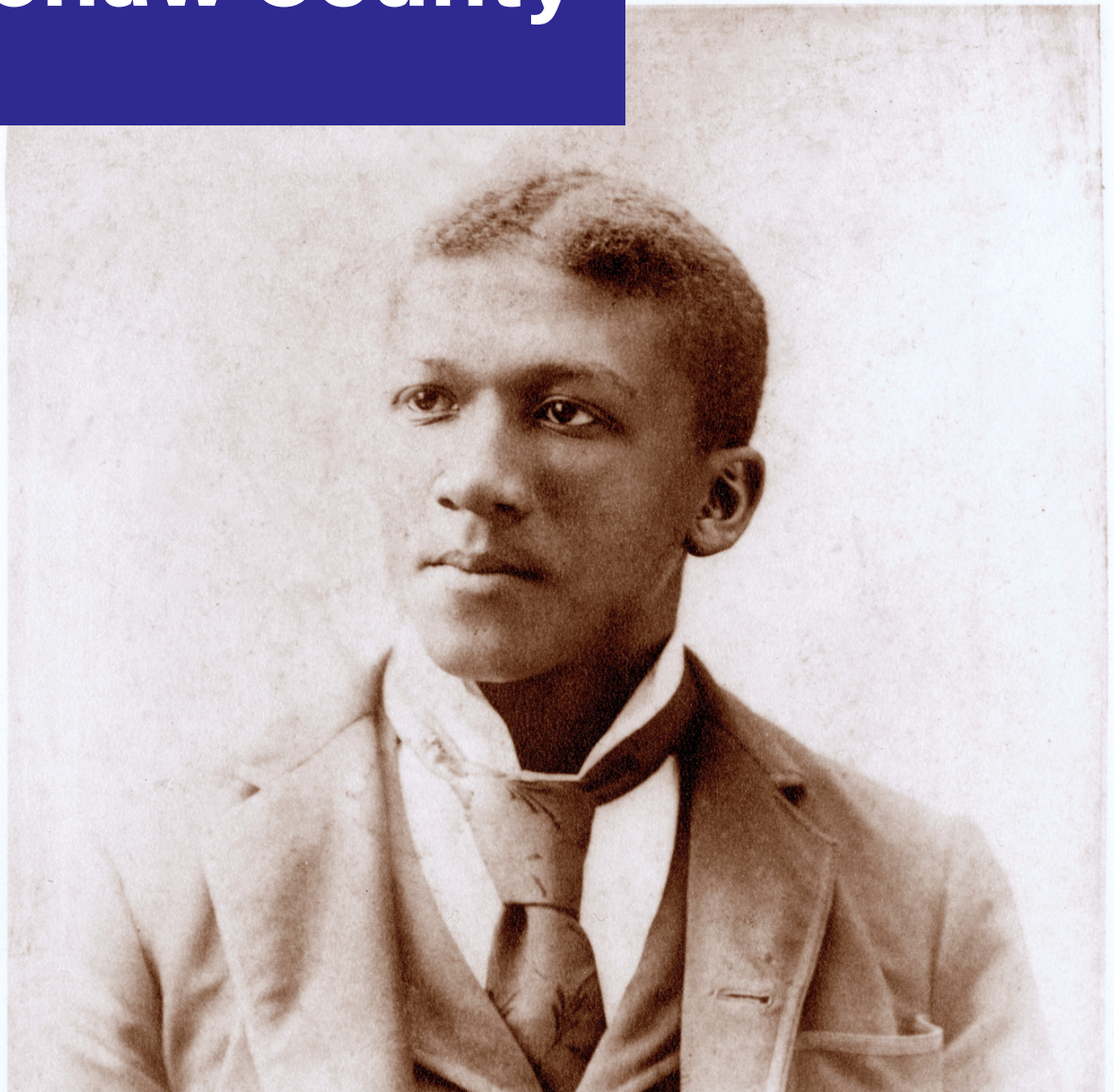


# A Guide to Black History in Washtenaw County



George Jewett (c. 1895). Photo courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library.

<https://blackwashtenawcounty.org/>

This guide was created by Jack Schmitt and Delaney Jorgensen, Master's students at the University of Michigan School of Information, as a capstone project in partnership with the Bentley Historical Library and Michelle McClellan, Johanna Meijer Magoon Principal Archivist. The work of this project is in support of the Black Washtenaw County Collaboratory.

Learn more about the Collaboratory at:

<https://blackwashtenawcounty.org/>

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# Welcome to the Washtenaw County Black History Resource Guide

The history of Black residency in Washtenaw County is a long and storied past that dates back centuries. While Michigan's Constitution banned the practice of slavery, discrimination and segregation were significant concerns for the state's Black community.

Nevertheless, Black Michiganders created vibrant communities across our state that ought to be celebrated. Despite harsh adversity, the materials of the past survive to teach us about Black history in the region. By engaging with these traces of life in historical Washtenaw County, we can learn from community elders, place ourselves in a lineage, hear from Black leaders on their experiences; in short, we can forge connections and discover inspirational stories when we look into the past.

This resource guide is only a **fraction** of the available collections related to Black history in Washtenaw County. To learn more, we encourage you to visit these institutions, in person or online. Think of this guide as a starting point into the robust and fascinating collections that comprise Washtenaw County's Black history.



# Visiting an Archive

Archives contain materials such as letters, photographs, administrative documents, notes, memos, and more. They have a catalog to search for these materials, but often require advanced reservations or appointments.

## Before you visit:

- Many archives require appointments prior to viewing materials to ensure there is space available for you to research comfortably.
- Even when appointments aren't required, archives have "closed stacks," which means an archivist must retrieve materials for you. Usually, you should request these materials in advance using online tools, such as finding aids, which will give an overview of the collection's contents.
  - For example, at the Bentley Historical Library, you can make a free research account to find and request materials:  
<https://aeon.bentley.umich.edu/login>
  - Or, you can call for further assistance: **734-764-3482**

## During your visit:

- Phones, laptops, paper & pencil are all typically allowed in reading rooms.
- Make sure you check in at the archive's welcome desk so they can retrieve materials for you and ensure a valuable experience!

**Archives are excited to work with you and assist you in your research needs. Interested community members, regardless of whether they are connected to a university, are encouraged to visit and engage with the materials of history!**

# Visiting a Library or Museum

## Before you visit:

- Check out the website of the institution you're interested in visiting to confirm their hours and location(s). While museums usually have one location only, libraries often have multiple branches with different services and hours.
- Consult the website also to find materials you may wish to view in-person.
  - **Museums** often have exhibits with specific date ranges in addition to their permanent collection. Be sure to visit during the time exhibits of interest are on display!
  - **Libraries** have an online catalog available so you can find materials that interest you, and their location, prior to your visit.

## During your visit:

- Ask questions! Reference librarians and museum staff are always happy to help make your experience engaging and informative.
- At **libraries**, sign up for a library card if you're a resident of the district you're visiting. At **museums**, ask staff about free or paid membership opportunities.

# Featured Collections

## Bentley Historical Library



### **African American Student Project**

This project website houses a database listing all African American students who attended the University from 1853 until 1980, collecting a selection of their stories through biographies and autobiographies, and visualizing where they found housing in the face of segregation.

[Link to website](#)



### **David R. Byrd Papers**

David R. Byrd was an African American architect of churches, homes, offices, and schools in Washington, D.C. and Ann Arbor, MI. His papers include drawings, reports, photographs, and letters.

[Finding aid](#)



### **Marian Carr Papers**

Marian Carr was a member of the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission and ACLU. Her papers include meeting minutes, letters, and more related to problems with race relations, housing discrimination, and employment in Ann Arbor.

[Finding aid](#)

# African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County



The following collections were developed in partnership with the Ann Arbor District Library.



## **Living Oral History Project**

This oral history project highlights the experiences of African Americans in shaping the Washtenaw County community. Topics include community centers, education, housing, unemployment, entrepreneurship, and faith.

[Link to website](#)



## **Living Oral History Digital Collection**

An extension of the oral history project, this digital collection includes over 2,500 photographs and news articles from AADL's Community Collections.

[Link to website](#)



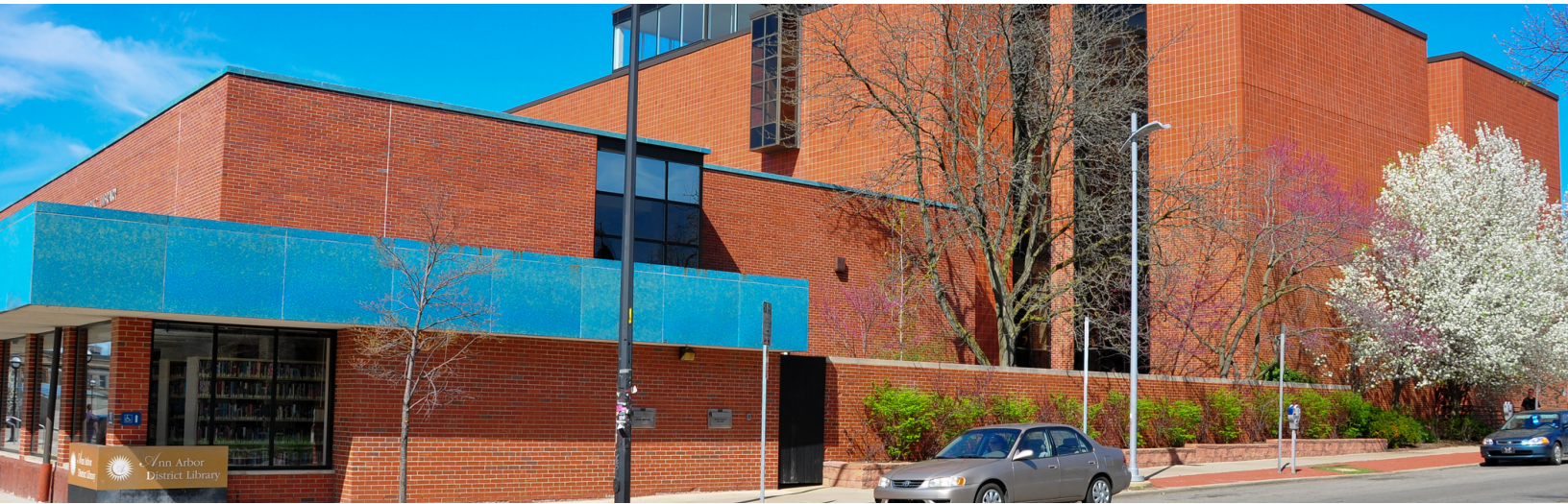
## **Living Oral History Walking Tour**

Another way to experience the stories shared in the Living Oral History Project, the LOH Walking Tour allows you to see the sights mentioned in the project's interviews through a self-guided tour.

[Link to website](#)



# Ann Arbor District Library



## **Ann Arbor News Archive**

Browse digitized versions of the Ann Arbor News from 1927 to 2009. You can search by people, topic, or using keywords to find relevant articles.

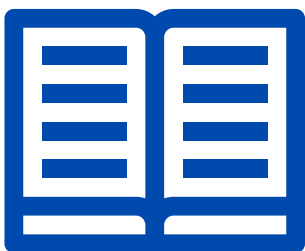
[Link to website](#)



## **Signal of Liberty**

Read digitized issues of Ann Arbor's abolitionist newspaper, with articles, minutes from anti-slavery meetings, poems, and more from the nineteenth century.

[Link to website](#)



## **Relevant Reads**

Both public libraries featured (AADL and YDL) have titles on local Black history in their collections, such as *Another Ann Arbor* by Carol Gibson and *Unconquered Souls: the History of the African American in Ypsilanti* by A.P. Marshall.

[Link to website](#)



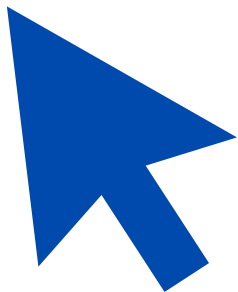
# Washtenaw County Historical Society



## **Impressions**

The official publication of the Washtenaw County Historical Society, browse digitized versions of the newsletter from 1941 to today. Stories are written by local historians and feature narratives on figures such as Henry "Hank" Griffin, a Black boxer and business owner in Ann Arbor.

[Link to website](#)



## **"Ask A Historian"**

An online feature where people can ask questions about Washtenaw County history from people to homes, buildings, neighborhoods, events and organizations. Questions about local Black history are fielded by local historians and either answered, referred or directed for individual research.

[Link to website](#)

# Ypsilanti District Library



## **A.P. Marshall African American Oral History Archive**

This project chronicles the lives and struggles of Black Ypsilantians in their own words. Recorded in the 1980s, these interviews span several generations of Black experience in Ypsilanti. Developed in partnership with the African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County.

[Link to website](#)



## **Ypsi Genealogy: The Ypsilanti Commercial**

This newspaper archive documents births, marriages, and deaths as reported in the Ypsilanti Commercial. Records included in the database range from the 1880s to the 2010s.

[Link to website](#)



## **Ypsi Farmers & Gardeners Oral History Project**

A digital archive sharing the stories of Ypsi's Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and/or working class food growers. Based on community input, the project collects oral histories from elders and includes portrait photographs of each farmer or gardener.

[Link to website](#)



# Ypsilanti Historical Society



## **Ypsilanti Gleanings**

The official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, the Ypsilanti Gleanings include historical articles related to Ypsilanti life. All issues are available, with high-quality PDF access from 2005 on.

[Link to website](#)



## **Archives Master Database**

Browse all of the Ypsilanti Historical Society's collections by accessing their master database. The spreadsheet includes a tab devoted to Black history materials.

[Link to website](#)



## **Asher Aray Family Collection**

Asher Aray was a free black man and staunch abolitionist. He and his wife, Catherine, served as conductors on the Underground Railroad, sheltering 28 enslaved people on their way to freedom in Canada.

[Link to website](#)

# Donating materials

Your stories matter to preserving local history. If you would like to donate your historical materials so that they can be preserved and shared with others into the future, consider the best place to store these items depending on their format:

## Paper materials & photographs

It is best for paper materials to be stored in an **archive** where they can be best preserved. If you have materials of interest, consider donating to an archive such as the Bentley Historical Library, who can help determine the best next steps for your materials:

<https://bentley.umich.edu/giving/donate-your-archives/>

## Artifacts & objects

3D objects are best suited to **museum** collections. We recommend contacting [aachmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:aachmuseum@gmail.com) OR [wchs-1000@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-1000@ameritech.net) to start a donation conversation with the African American Cultural and Historical Museum or the Washtenaw Historical Society's Museum on Main Street, respectively.

## Digital materials

We recommend reaching out to an **archive** first when donating digital materials. Digital files require specific care to preserve, but are very valuable to archival collections. Consider reaching out to an archive such as the Bentley Historical Library for a consultation.

### A note on donations:

Archives and museums are institutions with limited budgets and resources. While all materials are valuable to historical memory, institutions cannot guarantee that they will accept all donations. Consider ways you can preserve your own materials using folders and boxes to store papers and objects in a cool, dark environment.

# Get Involved

If you're interested in learning more about Black history in Washtenaw County, or wish to help in efforts to make this history more open and accessible to all, we invite you to contact organizations actively working on this topic.

<b>Bentley Historical Library</b>	<a href="http://bentley.umich.edu">bentley.umich.edu</a> bentley.ref@umich.edu 734-764-3482
<b>African American Cultural and Historical Museum</b>	<a href="http://aachm.org">aachm.org</a>   aachmwc@gmail.com 734-761-1717
<b>Ann Arbor District Library</b>	<a href="http://aadl.org">aadl.org</a>   oldnews@aadl.org 734-327-4200
<b>Washtenaw County Historical Society</b>	<a href="http://washtenawhistory.org">washtenawhistory.org</a> wchs-500@ameritech.net 734-662-9092
<b>Ypsilanti District Library</b>	<a href="http://ypsilibrary.org/about/connect/contact-us">ypsilibrary.org/about/connect/contact-us</a> 734-482-4110
<b>Ypsilanti Historical Society</b>	<a href="http://ypsihistory.org">ypsihistory.org</a> yhs.archives@gmail.com 734-217-8236



# References

African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County. <https://aachm.org>.

Ann Arbor District Library. <https://aadl.org>.

University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library. <https://bentley.umich.edu>.

Washtenaw County Historical Society and the Museum on Main Street.  
<https://washtenawhistory.org>.

Ypsilanti District Library. <https://ypsilibrary.org>.

Ypsilanti Historical Society. <https://ypsihistory.org>.

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Photo of the African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County provided by Bev Willis.

Photo of the Ann Arbor District Library by Andrew Horne, CC BY-SA 3.0.  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>.

Photo of the Bentley Historical Library. From U-M Student Life.  
<https://maps.studentlife.umich.edu/building/alvin-m-arvella-d-bentley-historical-library>.

Photo of the Washtenaw County Historical Society and the Museum on Main Street by Amy Cantu, CC BY-SA 4.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

Photo of the Ypsilanti District Library by Dwight Burdette, CC BY 3.0.  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

Photo of the Ypsilanti Historical Society by Joel Seewald, April 16, 2016. From HMdb.org.  
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=96994>.

**Cover photo of George Jewett courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library.**

George Jewett was a Michigander, athlete, and practitioner of medicine throughout the Midwest in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He was the first African American football player to letter at the University of Michigan. He later transferred to Northwestern University, where he became their first African American football player, graduating with a degree in medicine. After practicing in the Chicago area, Jewett returned to Ann Arbor, remaining in his hometown until his death in 1908.

In football games between the University of Michigan and Northwestern University, winners have been awarded the George Jewett Trophy since 2021.