

Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History presents ...

the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)



Marion County CHAMP Report: Marion City & Suburbs

Communities: City of Marion, Marion Suburbs, & Pleasant Twp.
For more: marionvoices.org/CHAMP



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Session Summary & Participants: Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP -- Marion, Ohio

Our Marion City & Suburbs Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Session was held in June 2024 in Marion, Ohio at McKinley Park. This moderately-attended but vibrant session drew a total group of five participants -- all of whom were African-American women born between 1940 and 1965 -- alongside two Marion Voices team members. Participants lived in Marion City; most participants had been born here; but two were born in the South & had been a part of the tail end of the Great Migration to Marion. Two participants had also grown up or partially grown up in Marion, then moved away & lived & worked in other communities, only to retire back to Marion City. This session's participants mapped cultural assets & fostered a discussion emphasizing the significant changes the City of Marion & its Suburbs have gone through since their youth in the 1960s and 1970s: including the wide-sweeping consolidation of commercial, community, & educational resources out of Marion City's vibrant neighborhoods & to the suburbs or outer ring of the city, in ways that have negatively impacted the experiences of youth of color who remain in the urban core.

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Cultural heritage assets mapping projects lead to lists // directories of cultural assets organized by community, as well as lots of good ideas about how to better activate, network, & build on our resources. They often also surface projects & demands for funding: community needs that Marion Voices can bring to municipal, non-profit, & philanthropic leaders as a part of our advocacy efforts to grow arts- & culture-based economies for Marion County.

In short: your ideas & contributions will help us build more just, more abundant futures for everyone in Marion County ... starting with our diverse local heritages! **Let's goooo!**

Cultural Assets Mapping Resources, Thank-Yous, & Citations

We are grateful to a number of municipal, non-profit, & community Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Projects across the country for sharing resources, guides, & materials, which helped our Marion Voices team develop our folklife & cultural arts-based Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project kit, facilitation plan, & materials! We are especially grateful to the City of Austin's Cultural Assets Mapping Project (CAMP) & CAMP Kit, which served as a model for this packet!

Thank you to our funders, the **Ohio Arts Council**, **Ohio Humanities**, **National Endowment for the Arts**, & private Marion Voices donors, for helping to make the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process possible for Marion County! Additional thanks to the **America-250 Ohio Semiquincentennial Commission** for support for the project's next phase: the North-Central Ohio Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project, helping bridge this work with our regional neighbors!

Project Team -- Credits & Acknowledgements: Jess Lamar Reece Holler -- Project Director, Lead Facilitator & Analyst, Graphic Design; Jeff Nagle -- Maps, Session Notes, Graphic Design, & Research; Johnnie Jackson -- Outreach & Strategic Lead; Danlaly Pavón -- Translation, Interpretation, & Language Justice; CHAMP Community Liaisons -- Irene Tron (Western Marion County), Danlaly Pavón & Evelyn Olivios Lisecki (Latine Communities); Ms. Linda Sims & Ms. Katie Reese-Hairston (Marion City & Suburbs); Ms. Jessie Thompson (African-American Communities); Shannon Pegg & the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition (Queer/Trans* Communities); April Morrison & Cody Higley (Eastern Marion County); Tim Gorenflo & Susan Ann Rhodes (Southern Marion County).

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Thank you for being CHAMPs for Marion County Culture!



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🏆 What is cultural heritage assets mapping? 🏆

Cultural heritage assets mapping is a tried-&-true participatory process used in communities across the United States & world to guide communities in identifying our cultural, historic, arts, natural, & community resources; & making plans for their protection. Cultural heritage assets mapping projects can surface what we have in our community -- cultural heritage assets. Knowing what we have is the first step in organizing & advocating together to better invest in these resources. Cultural heritage assets mapping can also identify resources we used to have, & lost -- & can lead to important discuss about why those losses occurred, how we can repair them, & how we can build different futures that reflect all histories & meet the needs of all community members. **Our goal is to set a blueprint for our county's cultural futures!**

🏆 What is a cultural heritage asset? 🏆

Cultural heritage assets are resources related to arts, culture, or heritage that are present in our communities & on the landscape. Some cultural heritage assets can be mapped -- physical locations, for example. Others -- what folklorists call "intangible cultural heritages" -- may be connected to a place in a more abstract or general way: like a regional foodways dish that is present across multiple restaurants or dairy bars, or an association (Marion & popcorn; Bucyrus & bratwurst.)

Some general categories of cultural assets we invite you to consider in our Marion County CHAMP process include:

- Organizations
- Performance Venues
- Galleries & Museums
- Foodways Establishments
- Businesses
- Religious Spaces

Tip: See our Marion Voices CHAMP Packet for more details on how to lead your own Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project!

Ultimately, there is no "right or wrong" or when it comes to identifying cultural heritage assets in our communities. You are the expert. If you think a resource is important to your community, say so ... & we'll include it!

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🏆 Historic Contexts: 🏆 Marion City & Suburbs

Marion, Ohio has long been the county seat & manufacturing & railroad hub for a thriving agricultural hinterland. Marion rose to prominence in the late 19th-century with the development of several key railroads & the rise of local heavy manufacturing industry like Marion Steam (then Power) Shovel, Huber Machinery, & others; by the mid-20th century, Marion was hailed as the advertising capital of America, with as many graphic designers & ad men per capita as in New York City. In the 1970s & 1980s, the combined force of suburbanization/white flight, strip & indoor mall development, de-industrialization & the loss of major manufacturers like Tecumseh & Marion Power Shovel, & the farm crisis emptied out Marion's downtown. Today, thanks to concerted community efforts, downtown Marion is making a comeback, with "shop local" options & attitudes once again in vogue. Today, Marion also serves as a bedroom community for Columbus & Delaware.

🏆 Cultural Contexts: 🏆 Marion City & Suburbs

The following major Marion City community cultural contexts & traditions were identified by participants in the Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP session:

- **African-American Communities & Neighborhoods in Marion County:** Due to the way that anti-Black racism, in the U.S., in Ohio, & in Marion City, was also very much a geographic phenomenon, Black people, across Marion's history, have been concentrated in two neighborhoods: Marion's West Side, & South Side, due to redlining & restrictive covenants. Infrastructural racism -- like the train lines that cut off the West Side -- continue to shape inequitable futures & unequal outcomes for those communities, even though they are more multi-racial now. Similarly, many of Marion's suburbs have been shaped by histories of white flight in the 1950s-1980s.

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Community Trends: Marion City & Suburbs

Participants in our Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP session overwhelmingly mourned the loss of accessible downtown recreation, entertainment, commercial, & educational options that characterized their youth; & called out the relocation of schools, essential businesses, & recreational opportunities to the suburb or Highway 95/425 -- a move that made those resources inaccessible to young people of color (& all young people) in the urban core without access to vehicles or transportation. Participants also noted the fading of fraternal & cultural service & advocacy organizations since their 1960s and 1970s prime: including the loss of the Elks Lodge, CIO Hall, Cadet Hall, & other spaces for social, recreational, & cultural gathering: like spaces to dance & listen to music. Participants also amplified the historic & cultural importance of Marion City's historic Black churches; but feared the atomization & potential closure of Black churches amidst a trend of seeding more churches. Participants also identified the growth of multi-racial & multi-cultural identity as a defining feature of Marion City's cultural landscapes today; & emphasized the need for physically & financially accessible forms of recreation, entertainment, & programming for young people.



Cultural Resources: Marion City & Suburbs

Participants named the following cultural heritage assets as important to the cultural landscape of Marion City & Suburbs:

- **Marion's Old YMCA Building:** Participants celebrated the role the historic YMCA Building on E. Church Street played for youth & families in Marion; & strongly criticized the move of the New YMCA to Barks Road; the perception is that the YMCA sacrificed its downtown constituents for easy access for white people in the suburbs; & noted that prices are not affordable for working families.
- **The Black Elks Lodge, & Marion N.A.A.C.P.:** Participants celebrated the lost landscape of Black fraternal organizations, social clubs, racial justice advocacy & legal aide organizations & mutual aide societies.
- **Attaboy's Comfort Cuisine:** Participants gave love to the growing landscape of Marion Black-owned businesses downtown, sharing Black foodways traditions
- **The Old CIO & Cadet Halls:** Participants, likewise, mourned the loss of "third space" social halls where families, schools, & community could hold dances, discos, musical & other performances, etc., as ways to transmit musical, recreational, cultural, & dance heritage.
- **Buildings at Sawyer-Ludwig Park:** Participants likewise noted the loss of shelterhouses & buildings at some Marion City Parks, like Sawyer-Ludwig -- an especially significant park in the Black community in Marion
- **Underground Railroad & Black History Historic Sites:** Participants want to see more preservation, interpretation, & investment in Marion City's Black History!

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Future Community Cultural Assets

Speculation, scheming, & dreaming from our CHAMP session on what Marion City & Suburbs could use; or ways to creatively re-imagine existing cultural heritage & community resources!



Rebuild Neighborhood Rec Centers, & Social Clubs

Participants noted the stark loss of neighborhood schools, recreation spaces, fraternal organizations, & social clubs in Marion since the 1960s; & expressed the clear need for "third spaces" (beyond home, work, or church) for recreation, socialization, & arts & culture transmission, in Marion City today.

Participatory Community Development & Planning

Participants expressed frustration at the lack of consultation of Marion's diverse communities in the planning & design of infrastructural improvements, such as the recent re-design of the playground at MLK Park. Participatory community charette processes ensure equitable representation & that tax dollars build resources that actually express community need & desire.



Launch a Youth Arts & Culture Conservatory

Participants identified a clear need for engaging, culturally-relevant, arts-enriched programming for youth: beyond the mere baseline of accessible childcare. One participant -- who spent a career as an educator & cultural worker in another state -- suggested developing a "Conservatory for Youth," which would include lessons & programs in the performing arts: dance, theatre, music, so that youth could come in for lessons (individual or group), & access scholarship support. Other participants concurred: we need youth classes!



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Spotlight on Key Community Cultural Assets

Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP session participants overwhelming describe these three cultural assets as defining features of their region.

Hoops Classic Tournament

Participants celebrated the endurance of a few key Marion County cultural traditions & festivals: such as the Hoops Classic basketball tournament, which developed at Mayes Community Temple, & was historically held on Marion's West Side at MLK Park. Participants expressed the importance of preserving & where needed, revitalizing these heritage traditions, to keep Marion City culture alive.



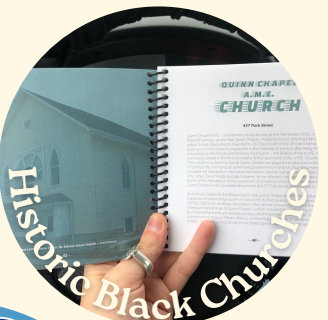
Marion City Parks

Participants highlighted Marion City's network of parks as critical remaining "third spaces" for community cultural & social traditions. Participants praised recent reinvestment in accessible playground equipment & infrastructure; but wanted to be consulted about their neighborhood park redesigns. Participants also mourned the loss of functional kitchens at parks like Sawyer-Ludwig.



Historic Black Churches

While participants noted that much of the landscape of the neighborhoods of their youth has been demolished, Marion's historic Black churches have been critical community anchors: preserving culture, tradition, & providing a lifeline of remaining neighborhood-based social service & spiritual support, in an era in which most schools, recreation centers, jobs, & other community amenities have been moved out of neighborhoods to the outside of Marion's urban core. Participants worry about the future of Marion's many historic Black churches in an era where new churches are growing: resulting in spread-out memberships.



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Discussions & Major Themes: Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session

Participants in our Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP session both celebrated the revitalization of downtown Marion after a long period of under-investment & loss of manufacturing & industry, & called out what they felt to be a very selective & exclusionary process of revitalization. Participants -- including those who had just relocated back to Marion after careers spent working elsewhere -- noted that, despite significant commercial revitalization downtown, the accessible neighborhood resources that once defined Marion City's landscapes have been decimated: gone are the neighborhood schools, social clubs, dance halls, downtown recreation centers, park kitchen buildings, community bulletin boards, fraternal organizations, and cultural advocacy groups that made Marion feel like a functioning, vibrant city for all. Instead, participants saw key resources still concentrated out on 95 and 423: a reflection of the "white flight" mentality that moved key community resources for easy access to wealthy suburbanites in the 1970s and 1980s. Community members, instead, called for equitable, participatory reinvestment in Marion's neighborhoods: with community design charrettes for park improvements, protection of historic resources (like Marion's historic Black churches), programs to support the mental & cultural health of Boomers aging in place, & classes & programming -- including the idea of a Conservatory for arts programming -- for young people beyond just basic childcare. Participants also noted the importance of cultivating technology-based industries for young people, who they perceive as not wanting to work in manufacturing like past generations; & the importance of cultural education & heritage for a growing generation of multi-racial young people who need to know their roots.

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Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session
Participants annotate a Marion Voices CHAMP Map of Marion City to highlight the change in downtown & neighborhood cultural resources like recreation centers, social spaces, & fraternal organizations.

Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session
Participants annotate a Marion Voices CHAMP Map to show the relocation of key neighborhood & downtown amenities to the outer ring of Marion City -- a move largely benefitting white suburban populations -- beginning from the 1970s-2000s.



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Key Takeaways: Marion City & Suburbs

Here, we summarize key takeaways to each of the eight discussion questions which formed the heart of our Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping session, with participant recommendations for community investment & action.

- Question 1:** What important cultural, arts, & heritage resources did we used to have in our community; & what happened to them? Participants were stark in their assessment of the loss of resources in Marion's downtown & neighborhoods; one participant, who moved back after decades in another state, noted that her old neighborhood "looks like a bomb was dropped." Participants noted that they see Marion City as failing to grow a new technological industry to replace older manufacturing; which has resulted in fewer financial resources available in the community than in the manufacturing heyday of the mid-20th century. Participants also discussed the difficulty & exhaustion that comes with long-term maintenance of cultural & heritage resources, noting that burnout, difficulties in succession planning, & changing times marked the loss of Marion's N.A.A.C.P., Elks Club, & CIO Hall Dance Club, & even, recently, the loss of the Black Heritage Council Banquet.
- Question 2:** What cultural heritage assets in our community are currently threatened; & what would protecting them look like? Participants expressed concern about protecting the Hoops Classic Basketball Tournament -- which recently passed to new organizers -- alongside Marion's historically Black churches; & growing opportunities for both retired people & young people in the arts & culture.
- Question 4:** What cultural assets define our sense of place & help make our community & local landscape distinct from other communities? For this question, participants emphatically noted that Marion City has a rising generation of multi-racial kids -- many of them with African-American heritage -- who need to be connected to their Black heritage.
- Question 5:** What cultural assets in our community need to be invested in? What investments are needed? By whom? Participants want to see reinvestment in Marion City's Parks -- such as bringing back the diverse array of rentable community buildings (kitchen; reunion space, etc.) that used to exist at Sawyer-Ludwig Park. Importantly, however, participants want these processes to be community-driven & participatory. They noted frustration at recent plans to "improve" the playground structure at MLK Park which results in what many West Side residents feel to be a smaller, inferior, & dull-colored park. Participants felt that participatory sessions & governance that involves residents in neighborhood improvements would prevent these sorts of gaffes, & foster local pride.
- Question 8:** In the future, how would you like to see this map look different? Participants want to see an undoing of infrastructural racism -- like an overpass to the West Side! -- & a reinvestment in local neighborhoods & cultural, recreational, & social resources for young & old people alike downtown: like bringing back the YMCA or a Rec Center downtown. Participants would also love to see foodways or other cultural events as ways to bring the community together, & to support multi-racial youth in connecting to their diverse heritages.

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Recommendations for Cultural Investment: Marion City & Suburbs

Based on community Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping, discussion, & recommendations at our CHAMP session, Marion Voices makes the following top three recommendations for investment in the cultural heritage landscape of Marion City & Suburbs, with additional recommendations below:

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #1	Rebuild Downtown & Neighborhood "Third Spaces"		
	Description: Grow "third spaces" -- different than home, work, & church -- for community members to come together, downtown & in neighborhoods. Many of Marion's most beloved third spaces shuttered or were relocated outside the urban core; community members want to see dance halls, music spaces, recreation centers, & spaces to build community downtown.		
	Resources or Policy Change Needed:	Adaptive reuse of existing vacant structures; collaborative community planning for Third Spaces	Potential Changemakers:
			City of Marion; Marion YMCA; Marion Area Arts & Culture Non-Profits; Arts/Entertainment Visionaries
Cultural Heritage Recommendation #2	Fight Infrastructural Racism w/ Participatory Planning		
	Description: Work to proactively identify, address, & undo legacies of infrastructural racism -- such as railroads that cut off the West Side -- through participatory community planning; & use participatory planning processes like community design charrettes to ensure that investments in Marion neighborhoods actually reflect the needs, desires, & culture of local residents; & feel equitable across neighborhoods.		
	Resources or Policy Change Needed:	Training in community outreach, engagement, & participatory design processes for non-profit & governmental officials & departments.	Potential Changemakers:
			Marion City Government; Marion City Parks; ODOT; Local Non-Profits
Cultural Heritage Recommendation #3	Foster Downtown Enrichment Programs for Youth & Elders		
	Description: Accessible & affordable childcare & eldercare limited to assisted living facilities is not enough! Invest in, build, & grow arts, culture, history, recreation, & social enrichment programs to support youth in imagining futures in Marion County, & elders aging in place, in their creative, social, community, & cultural development. Enrichment programs could include classes in arts & culture, a new Arts Conservatory, or new centers & spaces.		
	Resources or Policy Change Needed:	Funding for programs & spaces for young people & elders, based either downtown or available directly in neighborhoods, no transport required.	Potential Changemakers:
			Marion City Government; Marion YMCA; Local Arts + Culture Non-Profits; Youth & Elder Service Providers

Additional Recommendations: Marion City & Suburbs

- Recommendation #4 -- Support Succession Planning for Non-Profits & Groups:** Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session participants noted the loss or perceived atrophy of several staple community organizations that provided space for African-American intergenerational community-building: including the Marion NAACP, Marion's Medgar Evers Elks Lodge, & Black Heritage Council. Participants attributed the loss or quieting of these essential organizations to burnout amongst organization founders, a small pool of organizers being centrally involved in multiple organizations, & problems with intergenerational transfer of power & institutional knowledge. Local non-profit capacity-building organizations & foundations should support succession planning & intergenerational capacity-building for grassroots non-profits -- helping proactively plan for & ease transitions to new generations of leadership & vision, while strategizing to prevent burnout -- to preserve these essential organizations ensure they continue to serve the community in the future.

the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)



Marion County CHAMP Report: Marion City & Suburbs

For more information or to get involved: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 15th, 2024 Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session, held at McKinley Park. Report findings are ultimately reflective of the participants at each session; but provide a useful starting place for thinking about future investments in arts, culture, & community in each geographic or identity community!

Thank you to all who participated in the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process!



Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session Participants discuss the neighborhood educational, recreational, cultural, & commercial resources that existed in Marion City's individual neighborhoods in their youth in the 1960s & 1970s, including opportunities like skating & horseback riding.

Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP Session Participants Ms. Jessie Thompson (L, Front), Ms. Linda Sims (L, Rear); Ms. Katie Reese-Hairston (R, Rear), & Ms. Maxine Thomas (R, Front) pose for a photograph with clean maps & markers before the Marion City & Suburbs CHAMP session begins.



Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History presents ...

Marion County CHAMP Map: Marion City & Suburbs

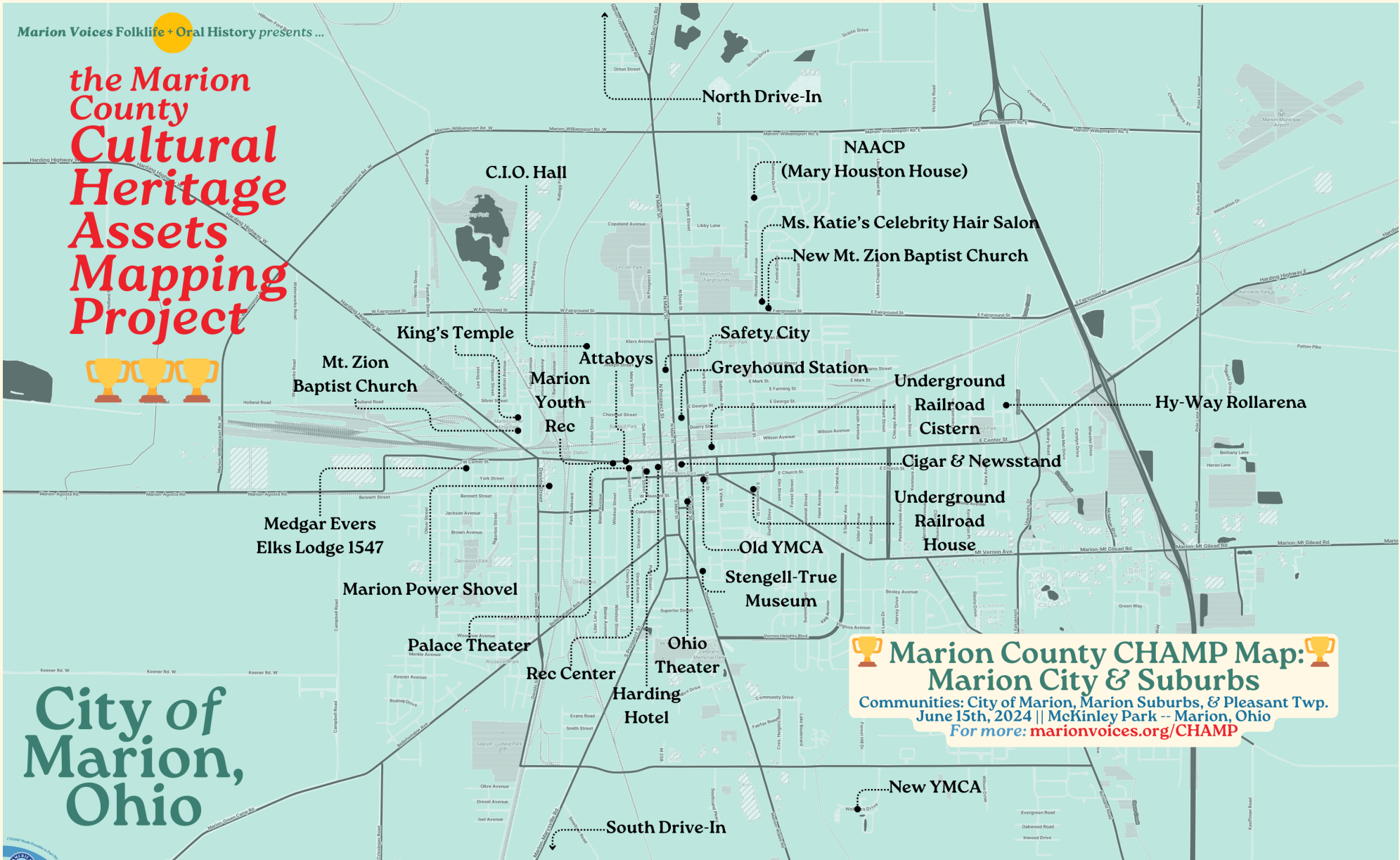
For more information or to get involved: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

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the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project



City of
Marion,
Ohio



Marion County CHAMP Map:
Marion City & Suburbs
Communities: City of Marion, Marion Suburbs, & Pleasant Twp.
June 15th, 2024 || McKinley Park -- Marion, Ohio
For more: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

About Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History:

North-Central Ohio's Folklife, Cultural Arts, & Heritage Non-Profit

Champions of Arts, Culture, & Heritage-Based Economic Development for North-Central Ohio!

Founded in 2017, Marion Voices amplifies the diverse cultural heritages & traditional arts forms of Marion County & North-Central Ohio to build more just, more abundant futures for everyone: connecting communities & building solidarities across difference, growing arts-based economies, & nourishing pride-in-place in North-Central Ohio. Our core programs include exhibits, festivals, historic preservation, & advocacy & training for regional artists through paid performance opportunities, a folk arts apprenticeship program, & our popular Marion Voices in the Schools K-12 arts residency program: bringing community cultural artists across genres into our local schools. Our Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP) takes us back to our roots: partnering directly with communities across Marion County to survey our cultural, arts, & heritage resources, share stories, & collectively imagine more just, more abundant futures for all. In late Summer/Fall 2024, we're excited to take this work rational with the launch of our North-Central Ohio CHAMP process & a new folklife survey in twelve neighboring North-Central Ohio counties. Join us!

