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Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History's

the Marion County
Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)

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Marion County CHAMP Report: Queer & Trans* Communities

Community Focus: LGBTQIA+ Communities Across Marion Co.

For more: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 15th, 2024 Marion County Queer & Trans* Communities CHAMP Session, held at McKinley Park in Marion City in collaboration with the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition and their annual Pride Picnic. Report findings are ultimately only reflective of the participants at each session; but provide a useful starting place for thinking about future investments in arts, culture, & community in Marion County!

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marionvoicesfolklife@gmail.com
marionvoices.org | tel. 614.273.5907
Director: Jess Lamar Reece Haller

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Session Summary & Participants: Marion Co. LGBTQIA+ Communities -- Marion, Ohio

Our **Marion County LGBTQIA+ (Queer/Trans*) Communities** Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Session was held in June 2024 in **Marion, Ohio** at **McKinley Park**. This unique session was designed & planned in collaboration with the **Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition**, & was held as a part of their annual **Pride Picnic** event at **McKinley Park**. This well-attended session drew a truly intergenerational gathering of **fifteen participants** -- representing different parts of the LGBTQIA+ experience, & including allies -- alongside **two *Marion Voices* team members**. Participants lived mostly in Marion City but also across the County & region. Notably, some participants were from, grew up in, or had lived in Marion County; but had recently relocated elsewhere due to feeling unsafe or being unable to produce queer-associated art forms, such as drag, within the city. Participants ranged in age from 10 years old to 70 years old, & represented a range of eras of experience with queer culture, visibility, & organizing in Marion County. This session's participants mapped cultural assets & fostered a discussion about the difficulties of surfacing & mapping queer/trans* histories & heritage in Marion County; & the importance of growing new spaces, festivals, & traditions to bring visibility, understanding, safety, & advocacy around queer & trans* experience in Marion County.

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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; Danllaly Pavón -- Translation, Interpretation, & Language Justice; CHAMP Community Liaisons -- Irene Tron (Western Marion County), Danllaly Pavón & Evelyn Olivos Lisiecki (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!

the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)

Marion County CHAMP Report: LGBTQIA+ Communities

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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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Marion County CHAMP Report: LGBTQIA+ Communities

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Historic Contexts: Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities

Queer, trans*, & gender non-conforming communities have always been present in Marion County; however, histories of homophobia & transphobia in the community -- often enforced by violence, or threats thereof-- has impacted how LGBTQIA+ history & heritage has been documented & recorded in Marion County. While Marion City sported several bars & dance clubs, across the 20th century, that came to be associated with underground queer & trans* culture, or affiliated heritage arts forms like drag performance, Marion County did not have an organized queer/trans* advocacy organization or presence until the formation of the **Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition** by Shannon Pegg, following the expression of homophobic remarks by an invited graduation speaker at River Valley High School, in Spring of 2022. The Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition has worked diligently since then to survey the needs of Marion County's queer/trans communities, to advocate for LGBTQ+ peoples, & to provide ongoing & annual events: like Marion's annual Pride Picnic.

Cultural Contexts: Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities

The following major community cultural contexts & traditions were identified by participants in the Marion County Queer/Trans Communities CHAMP session:*

- ***Challenges to visibility of LGBTQIA+ spaces due to persistent threats to the safety & security of queer/trans* Marionites***
- ***Lack of supportive venues for traditionally queer- & trans-associated cultural arts forms, like drag performance***
- ***"Gentrification" of commercial districts has pushed out historically queer-identified spaces; but also has brought in new opportunities for LGBTQIA+-owned venues & shops***
- ***Strong need for more LGBTQIA+ history of Marion County, & annotation of queer & trans* history on the county landscape***

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Community Trends: Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities

Participants in our Marion County Queer & Trans* Communities sessions noted the difficulty of tracking & mapping LGBTQIA+-affiliated & -affirming spaces, both historically, & now, due to the very real threats to the safety, health, & visibility of queer & trans* people in Marion County. This has caused much of queer & trans* culture to transpire underground -- or in unconventional "third space" meeting areas like the Marion County Parks. Participants note that, until the formation of the Marion Area LGBTQIA+ Coalition, no official organization representing, advocating for, & providing space for fellowship & community of queer people existed in Marion County. The organization is now working diligently to not only provide resources within the county, but to network with allied non-profits & organizations in neighboring counties, such as Union, Crawford, & Wyandot. Uniquely among our CHAMP sessions, participants in our LGBTQIA+ session mentioned health, mental health, domestic violence support as key cultural assets, & lifted up local businesses & churches that welcome & affirm queer & trans* neighbors with open arms.

Cultural Resources: Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities

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

- ***Community Health, Mental Health, & Domestic Violence Support Centers:*** *including Marion General, Marion Public Health, Marion Medical Center, the YMCA, & Turning Point, offer refuge & resources for LGBTQIA+ Marionites, & essential lifelines for surviving & thriving under ongoing homophobia & transphobia in the Marion County community*
- ***LGBTQIA+-Owned & -Allied Small Businesses:*** *...provide safe spaces, support, & allyship for LGBTQIA+ Marionites. Participant favorites include Stitch & Skein, local art gallery & studio space The Guild, the Brickyard, Marion Brewing Company, & the former A Taste of Memphis.*
- ***Former LGBTQIA+-Friendly Bars:*** *... nourished & helped maintain queer community in Marion. Participant picks included the former Sundance Lounge, which featured drag performances, & Gotham City downtown.*
- ***Marion City Parks*** *provide meeting, gathering, recreation, & relaxation space; & were cited as highly important to LGBTQIA+ participants in Marion County. Participants mentioned affection for Lincoln Park -- where the 1st meeting of the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition took place -- as well as Founders Park & McKinley Park, site of the annual Pride Picnic.*
- ***Marion Area Affirming Churches:*** *Participants praised local churches that welcomed & affirmed queer & trans* residents with open arms, like Emmanuel Lutheran Church.*

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Future Community Cultural Assets

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

Community Art Show, Art Spaces, & Art Supply Library

Participants -- the overwhelming majority of whom were either professional or amateur artists & performers -- discussed the clear need for a centralized space for artists (including queer/trans*) artists in Marion County. This space could be an event (art show, festival), a teaching/performance space, or a gallery. Participants also expressed interest in an "art supply" exchange library: building on the concept of tool libraries popular in some communities.

LGBTQIA+-Friendly Performance Venues & Events

Participants reflected on the strong relationship between queer/trans* culture & performing arts genres: including dance, spoken word poetry, and especially, drag performance. Participants expressed a strong desire not only for more smaller-scale, accessible, & intimate performance venues for grassroots performance, but for more events like open mics to foster these traditions.

Reimagine Vacant Spaces as Queer/Trans Safe Havens*

Permanent, safe space for LGBTQIA+ culture & community was a running theme at this CHAMP session. Historically, queer & trans* spaces have been ephemeral, & threatened. New LGBTQIA+-owned & -allied spaces have expanded local queer public landscapes. As Dowtown Marion & Marion County's Village developers, community leaders & queer/trans* entrepreneurs should reimagine vacant spaces as safe havens for LGBTQIA+ entrepreneurship!

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Spotlight on Key Community Cultural Assets

Marion County LBTQUA+ Communities CHAMP session participants describe these three cultural assets as defining features of their community:

Queer-Friendly Bars

While the nature of rampant homophobia & transphobia in Marion County -- then & now -- meant that participants struggled to explicitly name & map sites of LGBTQIA+ heritage significance compared to sessions focused on other marginalized identity groups, participants overwhelmingly remembered & identified several bars -- all now shuttered -- from an earlier era of Marion's downtown as key touchstones in Marion County cultural life, & as transmission venues for important queer & trans*-affiliated traditional arts genres such as drag performance.

LGBTQIA+-Owned Businesses

Participants celebrated the few openly queer/trans*-&-proud local businesses in Marion County: including a handful in downtown Marion. Participants noted that these places not only cultivated understanding & acceptance of queer/trans* identity; but formed links in a chain of safe public spaces, which expands the possibilities of queer/trans* public life in Marion.

Marion City Parks

Participants -- many of whom were also members or officers of the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition -- celebrated the role that Marion City's Parks & open spaces have played in the maintenance of queer/trans* community in Marion County: especially since the formation of the Coalition. Parks provide affordable, safe outdoor meeting locations of Coalition activities: including artmaking activities, craft events, & the LGBTQ+ Coalition's beloved annual Pride Picnic.

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Discussions & Major Themes: LGBTQIA+ Communities CHAMP Session

Our Marion County LGBTQIA+ CHAMP Session was unique among our seven CHAMP sessions, in that participants had difficulty both mapping queer/trans* heritage in Marion County, & the contemporary landscape of LGBTQIA+ community practice, due to pervasive threats to queer & trans* people's safety in our county & region. Participants expressed the desire to reclaim underground Marion County queer & trans history, but also acknowledged the challenges of surfacing queer history in a county that often forced queer & trans* expression underground, or into informal community venues without lasting security. In today's contemporary landscape, participants found that safe/allied shops & venues outnumbered explicitly queer/trans-owned & operated venues. Participants also expressed a fracture in their relationship with Marion County: some participants, while *from* Marion County, had chosen to relocate away from Marion County to more progressive neighboring counties to be able to be a more out & visible part of queer life; or to find communities around historically queer-associated cultural arts forms like drag performance. Participants' overwhelming need & desire was for recognition, safety, & support in Marion County; and *then* to establish projects & spaces to recognize, celebrate, & preserve queer & trans* heritage. The overwhelming majority of participants were also artists & creative practitioners -- arts is a strong focus for the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition -- & participants also expressed the clear need for accessible, welcoming spaces for artists to connect, sell their wares, & make a name for themselves: whether through artist aggregator marketplaces, galleries, or festivals & art fairs.

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Marion Voices' Marion County LGBTQIA+ CHAMP Session table as a part of the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition's annual Pride Picnic, held on June 15th, 2024 at McKinley Park.

Marion Voices' CHAMP Designer Jeff Nagle completed a scratch-reveal artwork project -- depicting McKinley Park's Erickson Pavillion decked out for the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition's annual Pride Picnic, on June 15th, 2024, following our Marion Voices Marion County Queer/Trans Communities CHAMP Session.*

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Key Takeaways: Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities

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 mourned the relative lack of open queer/trans* establishments in Marion County, as compared to in larger cities & communities like Columbus. Multiple participants cited the existence of organized anti-queer/trans* hate groups in Marion County, a lack of solidarity & support from mainstream Marion County organizations, & active fear for safety in being visibly out & queer. These dynamics have greatly hampered the flourishing of queer/trans* cultural life in Marion County; & have created a culture whereby many queer/trans* establishments are short-term, temporary, or necessarily underground: making documenting & analyzing the health & fate of queer/trans* history in the county difficult.

- ***Question 2:*** **What cultural heritage assets in our community are currently *threatened*; & what would protecting them look like?** Participants expressed concern about limitations on public performance of long-standing queer-associated performance arts genres like drag, due to both a lack of venue spaces, & open hatred in the community. Protecting these art forms would look like intentionally organizing a network of supportive & safe performance spaces & venues.

- ***Question 4:*** **What cultural assets define our sense of place & help make our community & local landscape distinct from other communities?** Unique to this session, participants noted a marked lack of defining aspects of local queer/trans* community life in Marion County, noting that historically queer/trans*-friendly spaces were often temporary, underground, or could not safely advertise being welcoming. Participants in this session noted having to travel to larger cities like Columbus, Toledo, or Akron to access queer/trans* culture, feel safe, & to perform queer-associated genres like drag.

- ***Question 5:*** **What cultural assets in our community *need to be invested in*? What investments are needed? By whom?** Participants want to see a flourishing of safe spaces for queer/trans* people & artforms. Many session participants were also working artists, & wanted to see the cultivation of new spaces to perform, share, & display artwork: including open mics, drag venues, galleries, & arts festivals.

- ***Question 8:*** ***In the future, how would you like to see this map look different?*** Participants want to be a part of collaborative queer/trans* community history projects that can establish a more comprehensive record & understanding of LGBTQIA+ history in Marion County: including documentation of queer/trans* establishments & venues. Participants also want to see the establishment of safe venues for queer public life: including spaces for music, drag performance, dancing, open mic poetry, & space for queer/trans* artists to exhibit & sell their work. Because the safety & lives of LGBTQIA+ Marion County residents are often threatened, participants emphasized rooting out hate as an essential first step.

the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)

Marion County CHAMP Report: LGBTQIA+ Communities

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

This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 15th, 2024 Queer/Trans* Communities CHAMP Session, held at McKinley Park in collaboration with the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition, as a part of their annual Pride Picnic. Report findings are reflective of participants at each session; but provide a starting place for 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!

Recommendations for Cultural Investment: Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities

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 County Queer/Trans* Communities , with extra recommendations below:

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #1

Ensure the Safety of Marion County LGBTQIA+ People

Description:	Build coalitions to ensure the safety, health, & security of queer & trans* people in Marion County; & the community as a whole. If our CHAMP session was any indication, Marion County remains a highly unsafe & unwelcoming place for queer & trans* community members; safety is a fundamental right; & is essential to community health & thriving.
Resources or Policy Change Needed:	Community conversations; pledges of allyship; safe space declarations; grassroots organizing
Potential Changemakers:	the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition; City of Marion; Marion County Non-Profits; Mental Health Organizations

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #2

Investigate Queer/Trans* History in Marion County

Description:	Understanding, documenting, & amplifying queer/trans* history in Marion County is a critical need. There have long been queer & trans* people in Marion County; but without understanding their histories & experiences in earlier eras of LGBTQIA+ experience, intergenerational experience will remain fragmented, & critical developments in Marion County LGBTQIA+ heritage will be lost. Oral history projects, exhibits, & community scanning days could help kickstart a Marion County Queer/Trans* History Project.
Resources or Policy Change Needed:	Project funding & project team; community conversations to ensure the safety of potential participants
Potential Changemakers:	Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition; *Marion Voices*; funders interested in underheard histories + futures

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #3

Support Queer/Trans* Artists thru Supportive/Safe Venues

Description:	Queer & trans* people deserve safe, supportive venues to share, practice, & sell artwork -- including both art forms specific to queer community, like drag performance; & other genres & media that just happen to be practiced by queer/trans* community in Marion County. Participants noted a need for more galleries, open mic performance nights, accessible intimate community performance venues, arts festivals, & marketplaces.
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: LGBTQIA+ Communities of Marion County

- ***Recommendation #4 -- Affirming Spaces, Show Up!*** Participants in our LGBTQIA+ CHAMP session lavished praise upon the Marion County venues -- including health spaces, affirming churches, & LGBTIQIA+-owned or -friendly shops & galleries -- that provided conscious safe space for queer & trans* Marionites. Affirming spaces in Marion could display "safe space" markers, pride flags, or otherwise make themselves known to the Marion Area LGBTQIA+ Coalition, to signal their welcome & support of Marion County queer & trans* residents & workers.
- ***Recommendation #5 -- Queer & Trans* Healthcare:*** Queer, trans*, non-binary, & gender-nonconforming people may have unique health needs: including mental health & primary care. Marion should prioritize codifying healthcare resources familiar with or specializing in LGTBQIA+ health, mental health, & community care.

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

Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities CHAMP Session Participants discuss opportunities for growing the arts & culture landscape for queer & trans artists in Marion County, including the need for performance, exhibition, & gallery venues in our local community.*

Gabriel Rosvanis, a local student & accomplished musician, creates an artwork entitled "Night & Day" as a part of Marion Voices' Marion County LGBTQIA+ Communities CHAMP Session. Gabriel's mother brought him to the session so he is familiar with the diverse identities, & communities that make up Marion County.

Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History *presents ...*

Marion County CHAMP Map: Marion Area LGBTQIA+ Communities

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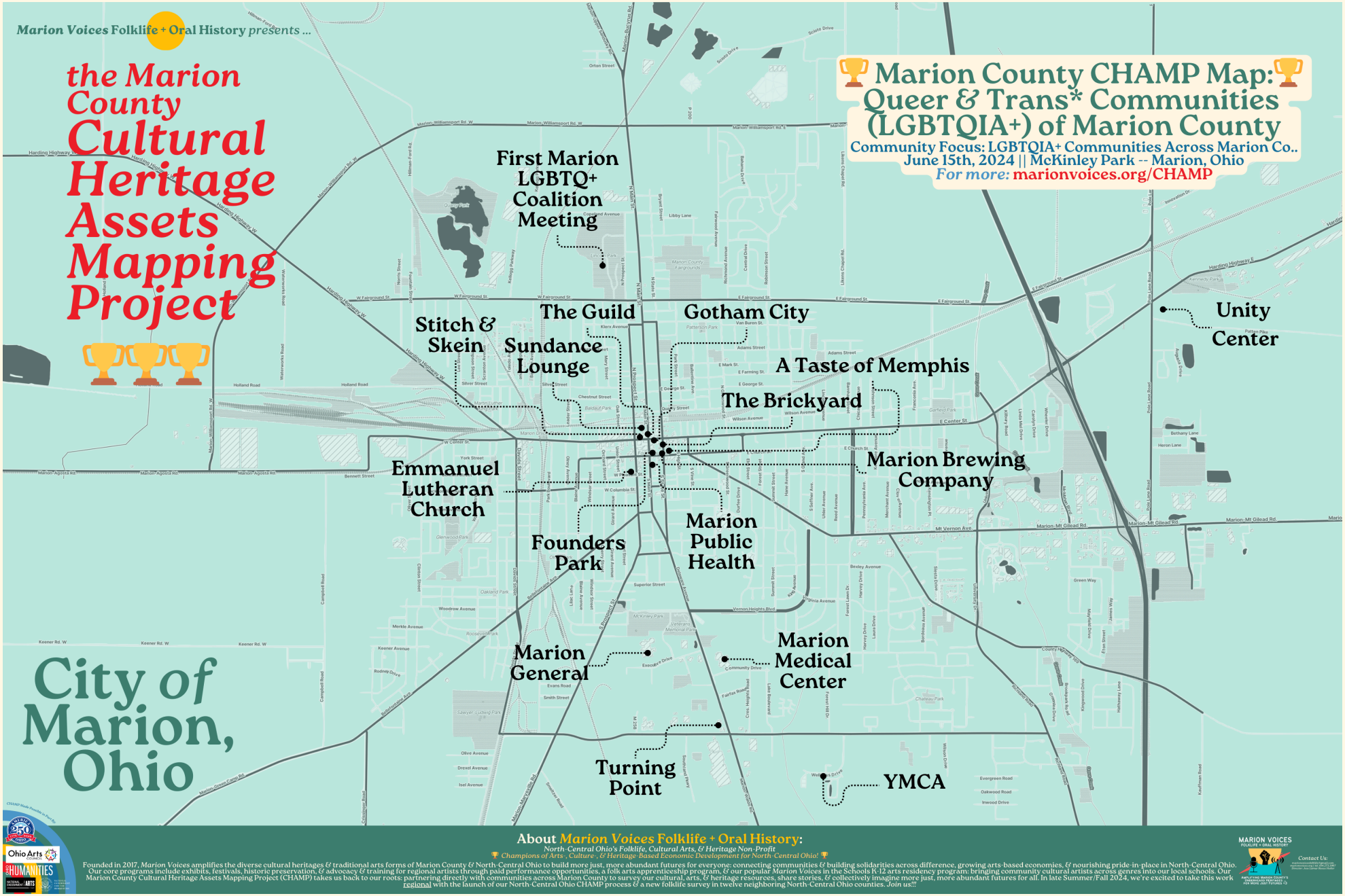

About *Marion Voices* Folklife + Oral History:

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 regional with the launch of our North-Central Ohio CHAMP process & a new folklife survey in twelve neighboring North-Central Ohio counties. *Join us!*

Contact Us: