

# Green Book: A Glimpse into Central Marion County

By Rachel Bayler, Intern

Indiana DNR, Division of Historic Preservation & Archaeology



Since 2024 the DHPA has been surveying Indiana sites listed in the *Green Book*, a travel guide published by Victor Hugo Green for African Americans from 1936 to 1967. Funded by an Underrepresented Communities (URC) Grant through the National Park Service, one of the main goals of this project is to find extant sites eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places and the Indiana Register of Historic Sites and Structures. Indiana Green Book sites include a wide variety of businesses: hotels, motels, tourist homes, and resorts; taverns, restaurants, and night clubs; gas stations, body shops, garages; beauty parlors, barbers, drug stores, tailors, and liquor stores. Of the around 200 Green Book sites located in Indiana, 115 are in Marion County.

A challenge in creating the Green Book ArcGIS Story Map lies in the lack of extant buildings. Over 85 percent of all Indiana Green Book sites no longer exist. Marion County has a worse rate: only 12 of the 115 Marion County sites advertised in the Green Book during its 30-year tenure still stand, around 10 percent.

Researching and preserving the history of mid-century African American businesses helps reconstruct aspects of the communities that have shifted, faded, or been erased in the last 60 years. Deep dives into Indianapolis's Green Book sites reveal individual and collective histories of Black business owners, local leaders, and ordinary people living and working in community. Two entries centered around one location on Indiana Avenue demonstrate the rich history behind an address and a business name in the Green Book.



## Andrew Perkins Tavern (GB 1951-1955) &

## Perkins Restaurant (GB 1950-1967)

*793 Indiana Ave.*

Two sites, Andrew Perkins Tavern (GB 1951-1955) and Perkins Restaurant (GB 1950-1963) are listed in the Green Book at the same address, 793 Indiana Ave. Both were owned by businessman Andrew Green Perkins, known locally as "Big Perk." Perkins owned several businesses from the 1930s through 1950s, including two on the 700 block of Indiana Avenue: a grocery store at 787-791 Indiana Ave and a restaurant at 793 Indiana Ave. Newspapers, Sanborn Insurance Company maps, city directories, and historic photos reveal the deeper story of the Andrew Perkins Tavern, Perkins Restaurant, and one man who made a big impact on Indiana Avenue in the mid-twentieth century.

Born in Mississippi in 1907, Andrew Perkins moved to Indianapolis around 1917 in the early years of the Great Migration. He entered the business world during the Great Depression, operating a cigar store out of a basement at 326 W. 26<sup>th</sup> St. before opening the LINCO Service Station at Michigan and Senate in the mid-1930s and the Monte Grill at 601 N. West St. in 1938.

**Left Photo:** "Andrew (Big Perk) Perkins." Photo from *Indianapolis Recorder*, November 19, 1949, page 1.



Business was booming, and Perkins quickly rose in local prominence, adopting the nickname "Big Perk" in reference to his large stature and success. In 1938, he threw his name in the hat for the "Mayor of Bronzeville" race, a political initiative by the city council to create a committee of African American community consultants; he was not elected. In 1941, he expanded his business once again, opening a cigar store known as Tia Juana at 787 Indiana Avenue and the Monte Grill Liquor Store at 534 N. West St. Perkins also owned a local baseball/softball team known as the Monte Grill All-Stars in the early 1940s.

**Left Photo, Top:** LINCO Service Station advertisement. From *Indianapolis Recorder*, November 6, 1937, page 15.



**Left Photo, Bottom:** Advertisement for Tia Juana cigar store. From *Indianapolis Recorder*, May 24, 1941, page 15.

Somewhat of a notorious figure, it was widely circulated in local news that Perkins's businesses were associated with gambling, especially baseball pool lotteries. Newspapers frequently wrote of Perkins's brushes with the law over gambling and alcohol sales. In 1943, Perkins was sentenced to federal prison for purchasing six cases of stolen cigarettes in 1942 that were illegally trafficked over state lines; he served about two years in Terre Haute before being released. The *Indianapolis Recorder* reported that at the time of his arrest, Perkins was one of the largest purchasers and sellers of tobacco products in Indianapolis, a lucrative position that enabled him to purchase a home at 360 West Fall Creek Parkway, drive nice cars, and buy expensive jewelry (IR Mar 27, 1943, p.3). His sentencing ended his association with Monte Grill, but his wife Emma Gordon Perkins maintained his other businesses while he was incarcerated.



**Above Right Photo, Top:** Monte Grill Cigar Store Advertisement, from *Indianapolis Recorder*, December 23, 1939, page 16.



**Above Right Photo, Bottom:** "Police Raid Monte Grill, Shine Parlor," from *Indianapolis Recorder*, January 25, 1941, page 3.



**Left Photo:** "Andrew Perkins Makes Rapid Strides In Grocery Business." *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 26, 1944, page 3.

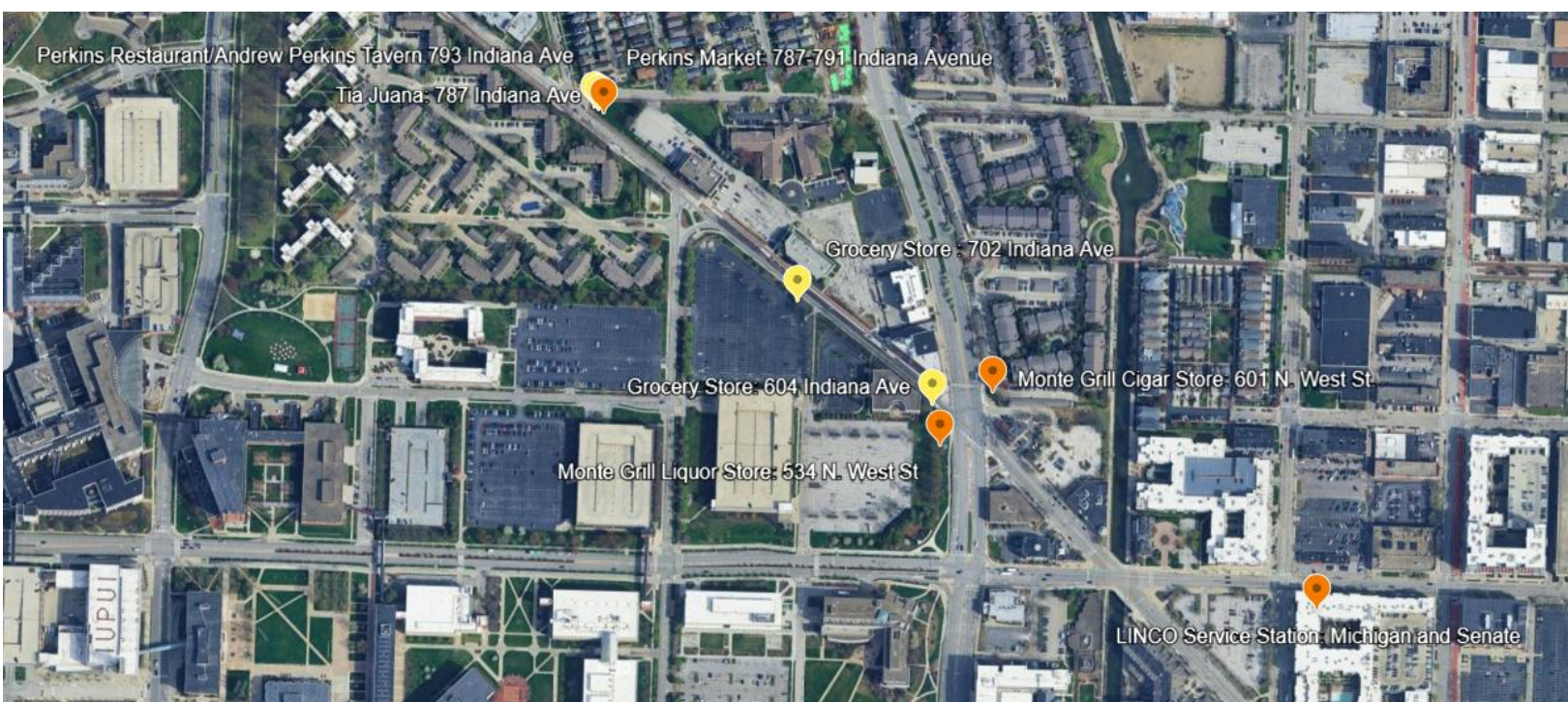
After his return from prison in 1945, newspaper articles indicate that Perkins expanded his property holdings. Using money loaned from another prominent businessman, Joe Mitchell, Perkins opened a grocery at 604 Indiana Ave, purchased and later leased out another grocery at 702 Indiana Ave, and turned the Monte Grill Cigar Store at 787 Indiana Ave into a grocery. He bought the building next door at 793 Indiana Ave sometime before 1947. This location would later become Perkins Restaurant, also known as Perkins Grill.





**Left Photo:** Advertisement for Perkins Grill, from *Indianapolis Recorder*, January 24, 1953, page 16.

**Below Map:** Satellite image of the 600-700 blocks of Indiana Avenue overlaid with yellow and orange digital place markers showing sites of Perkins's businesses. Orange markers show pre-1943 businesses, yellow markers indicate post-1945 businesses.



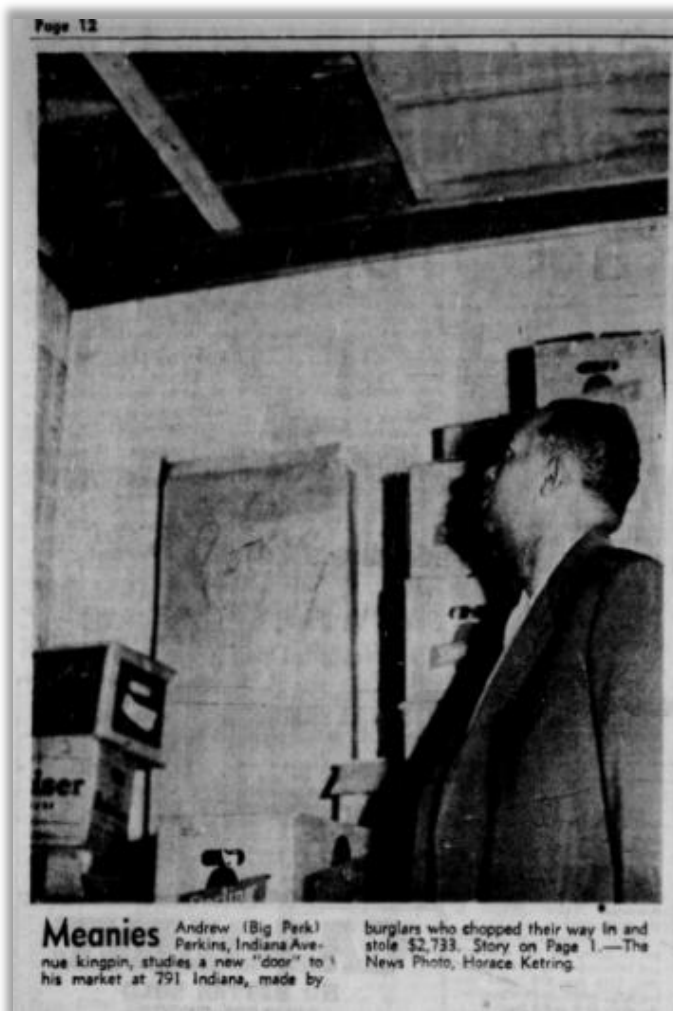
But it also appears that Perkins faced some challenges in reestablishing what newspapers described as a “miniature financial empire” (IR Mar 27, 1942, p3). A feature profile on Perkins published in the *Indianapolis Recorder* on November 19, 1949, paints Perkins as a man who embraced his success, epitomized by the monogrammed “P” diamond ring and pin he liked to wear, even as he faced over 14 arrests, two gambling convictions, significant health issues, and mounting loan and tax debt (IR November 19, 1949, page 1). The *Indianapolis Recorder* and *Indianapolis News* are rife with reports of police busts, court appearances, and local rivalries. The *Indianapolis Star* was particularly intent on keeping tabs on Perkins’s exploits, often in the form of outraged, even derogatory, coverage of his arrests and dropped charges. Local criminals blackmailed, robbed,



**Above Photo:** Advertisement from *Indianapolis News*, February 10, 1949, page 31.



and even kidnapped Perkins on several separate occasions from 1947-1952. In March 1948, he was driven into the country, held at gunpoint, and robbed of his watch, Lincoln sedan, and \$800 (IS, April 1, 1948). In 1952, some thieves carved a makeshift door into the roof of Perkins Market at 791 Indiana Ave, stealing over \$2,700 (IN May 29, 1952, p1) while Perkins was out of office recovering from a heart attack.



## King Of The Avenue

*"I'm Big Perk, and I don't work; I live off of them what do;  
It's illegal, but I inveigle; I'm king of the Avenue."*

Big Perk will be strutting up and down the Avenue again today, flashing opulence, well-being and the confidence that the law can't touch him. Big Perk, whose real name is Andrew Green Perkins, is a big shot racketeer in this man's town. Pool ticket selling is Big Perk's game. He runs what is euphemistically known as a "smoker" over on Indiana Avenue.

Ten times now the police have tried to prove in court that Big Perk sells pool tickets in his "smoker." Once back in 1941 he got a measly \$25 fine. Eight other times he has strutted out of court unscathed. One case is still pending. He also has beat the rap on vagrancy and profanity charges. Indeed, one of the most familiar headlines to newspaper readers hereabouts is "Big Perk Goes Free Again."

Big Perk's most recent joust with the law came after police raided his joint and found hundreds of baseball pool tickets. But no one could prove a sale had been made, so the judge had to dismiss him. You see, possession of pool tickets is not illegal under the present state law. That is why the City Council passed an ordinance making manufacture and possession of the tickets illegal. But this ordinance has just been ruled invalid.

If the incoming powers can't convict the Big Perks who are running the cancerous \$9,000,000 lottery racket in this city, then the law must be changed. It is an offensive thing to see men like Big Perk smile cynically as they walk out of court after beating another rap. And we wonder why some kids grow up without any respect for the law.

**Left Photo:** Captioned "Meanies." Indianapolis News, May 29, 1952, page 12.

**Right Photo:** "King of the Avenue." A particularly scathing and derogatory article published in the Indianapolis Star about Perkins. Indianapolis Star, December 17, 1947, page 18.

**Below Photos:** Entries in 1952 Green Book for Perkins Restaurant and Andrew Perkins Tavern at 793 Indiana Avenue

**TAVERNS**  
M. C.—344 W. Maryland St.  
Midway—736 Indiana  
Panama—306 Indiana  
Dick Shaw's—451 Indiana Ave.  
Downbeat—1005 Indiana Ave.  
Andrew Perkins—793 Indiana Ave.  
Glenn's Place—1771 Boulevard Pl.  
Sunset—875 Indiana Ave.  
Ranell's Casa De Amor Cafe—952 N. W.  
Down Beat—1005 Indiana Ave.

**RESTAURANTS**  
Lasley's—510 Indiana Ave.  
Parkview—321 N. California Ave.  
Lor Cabin—524 Indiana Ave.  
DeLuxe Diner—805 Blake St.  
Taylor's—427 W. Mich. St.  
Westmorland—1309 E. 15th St.  
Blue Eagle—648 Indiana Ave.  
Courter—1217 Senate St.  
Perkins—793 Indiana Ave.

Perkins Restaurant appeared in the Green Book beginning from 1950-1967, but a second restaurant, Andrew Perkins Tavern, was also listed at the same address from 1951-1955. Sanborn maps from 1950 show that the frame and stone buildings at 787-793 Indiana Ave were connected and that the two-story frame building at 793 Indiana had a restaurant, storefront, and backroom. It is unknown whether Perkins had two restaurants at the same location, or if he chose to advertise the same restaurant twice under different headings. There are no advertisements for either a “Perkins’s Restaurant” or an “Andrew Perkins Tavern” in local newspapers, only for Perkins Grill.



**Above Left Map:** 1950 Sanborn Insurance Co. map, showing 787-799, 787-789, and 791-793 Indiana Avenue

**Above Right Map:** Satellite image of aerial view over 787-799 Indiana Avenue today. Orange and yellow markers labeled with business names and locations. Orange indicates pre-1943 business, yellow is post-1945 business.

Perkins died of a heart attack in his car on March 2, 1953, at age 45. After his death, his wife Emma assumed ownership of his businesses. According to newspaper notices, she closed or sold much of his property and real estate soon after his death, including the grocery store at 702 Indiana Ave in December 1953 and the grocery store at 787-791 Indiana Ave by 1954. The restaurant at 793 Indiana Ave is listed in city directories as vacant from 1954 until 1959, when Perkins Grill reopened after Emma Perkins’s remarriage. According to city directories and advertisements, it closed in 1962, and the Keyless restaurant later took over that location. In 1975, 789-799 Indiana Ave was photographed by the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. The buildings at 789-793 Indiana Ave were demolished sometime before 1992, and today their location is a green space off of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail.

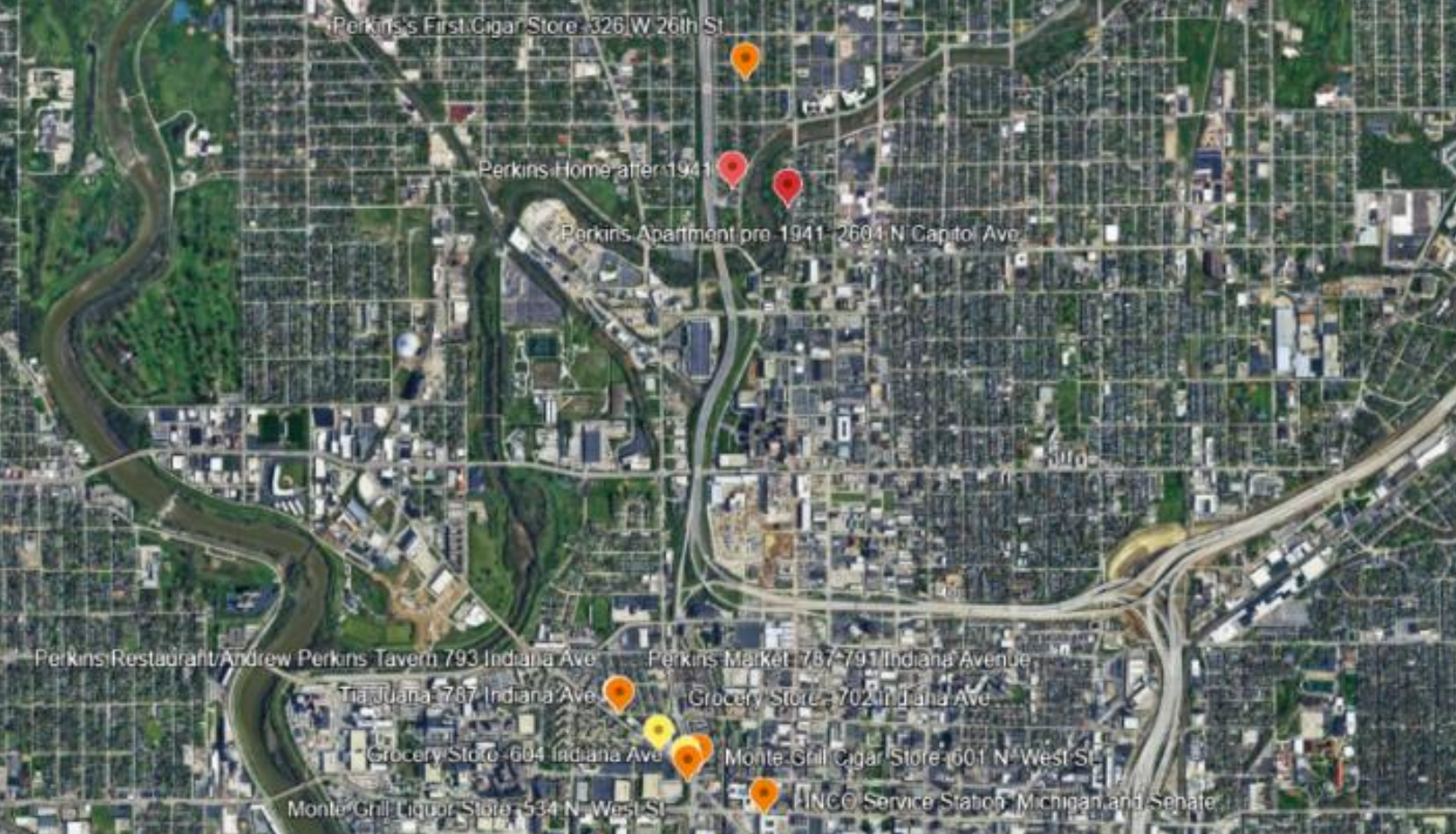


**Top Right Photo:** "Big Perk' Passes. Avenue Loses Its 'Colossus.'" From Indianapolis News, March 6, 1953, page 1.

**Bottom Right Photo:** 789-793 Indiana Avenue (right to left) in 1975, Photo from Indiana Landmarks Central Canal & IU Indianapolis Image Collection







**Above Map:** Red, orange, and yellow markers indicate locations related to Andrew Perkins' life and business in Indianapolis. Red markers denote his residences, orange markers show pre-1943 businesses, yellow markers indicate post-1945 businesses.