This brochure highlights the contributions of African Americans to the history of Independence.

This tour begins at the former Jackson County Courthouse, at the center of the Independence Square. It leads the sites vital to the history of Independence’s African-American community and ends at the Harry S. Truman Home.

For additional information about historic sites and additional tourism information contact the Independence Tourism Department

1. Former Jackson County Courthouse
2. Independence Square Inn
3. Harry Truman Home and Library
4. Jabez Smith
5. Hiram Young
6. Jabez Smith High School
7. Hiram Young Home & Wagonon and Ox Yoke Factory Sites
8. African-American Historic Sites of Independence

Since the early nineteenth century, African Americans have played a vital role in the history and development of Jackson County and Independence. On December 15, 1826, Jackson County was organized and on July 2, 1827, the first county court was held in Independence. By 1830, Independence was poised to play an important role in the settlement of the west. The Santa Fe Trail was already established and by the 1840s and 1850s the city served as a prominent place that cattle settlers who prepared to travel into the west over the Oregon and California trails. In the 1840s and 1850s the city’s population became increasingly diverse and attracted more and more people, including large slaveholders, like Jabez Smith, and free blacks, including Emily Fisher and Hiram Young. They all were drawn to Independence and participated in the provisioning and outfitting of those who traveled to and settled in the West.

As the trails traffic of the early to mid-nineteenth century gave way to the railroads traffic in the 1870s, African Americans remained a visible and important part of Independence’s history and, in the post Civil War era, they established civic organizations, built several churches, and advocated for the establishment of public schools for African American students. Hiram Young donated money to construct a school for African American students.

The former Jackson County Courthouse (Intersection of Main Street and Maple Avenue) Although it has been renovated and expanded numerous times since its construction, this courthouse building is quite significant. William Tolson, who went on to become a noted African American poet, called Independence home. It was at this time that a politician, Hiram Young, began serving on the county court and a young African American named, Viatta Gar, began working at the Wallace/Truman home.

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Friedas and Lindsays at St. Paul AME Church in 1915
partner was another free black, Dan Smith. Both men owned personal gardens until 1833. William McCoy, the city's first mayor, served as Young's business partner.

In 1861, “Hiram Young and Company” was one of the largest African American neighborhood businesses in Independence. During the Civil War, the company continued to operate as a large agricultural enterprise. In 1860, “Hiram Young and Company” was one of the largest wagon factories in the state, employing over 200 workers. In 1861, the company was commanded by Hiram Young, who served as an officer in the Union Army.

In 1865, after the war, the company resumed its operations and continued to serve the community. Hiram Young's daughter, Amanda, became active in local philanthropic efforts, and the company was known for its contributions to the community.

The company was also involved in civic affairs, and Hiram Young served as a member of the City Council. In 1870, the company was one of the largest employers in the city, with over 500 workers. The company continued to operate until the early 1900s, when it was acquired by the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Independence.

In 1907, the bank closed, and the property was sold to a local real estate developer. The property was then purchased by a local family, who restored the building to its original condition. The building was later purchased by the City of Independence, which restored it to its original condition.

The building is now used as a community center, and the company's history is preserved in a museum on the second floor.