

Looking at the legacy of I-81 through the lens of the recently digitized “Green Book”

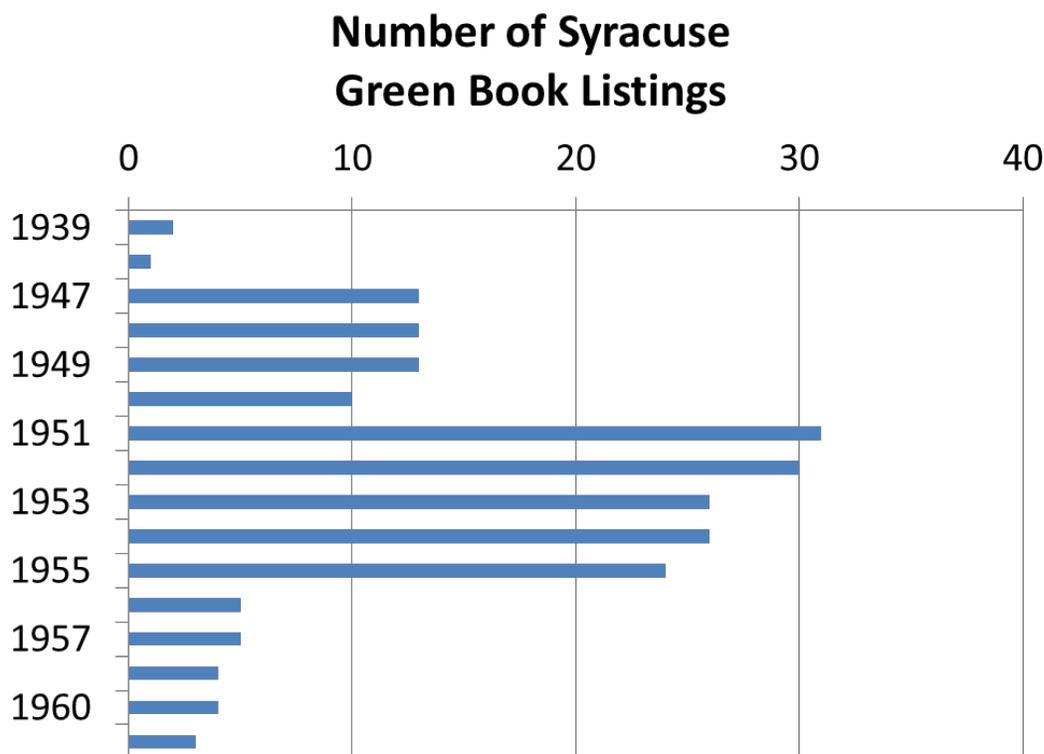
By Mike Stanton, Preservation Association of Central New York

I wanted to take another look at the [Negro Motorist Green Book](#), to see what it could tell us about the 15th Ward.

The "Green Book" was published from 1936 to 1966 by Victor Hugo Green, a New York City mailman. It provided a list of businesses in cities across the country where African-American travelers would be welcomed. At that time African Americans faced a variety of inconveniences and dangers along the road, from white-owned businesses refusing food or accommodations, to threats of physical violence, to forcible expulsion from whites-only towns.

The [New York Public Library](#) has now digitized most of the Green Book volumes and made them available online.

The chart below shows how the number of Green Book listing for Syracuse grew over the years, as Green expanded the focus of this publication from the New York City area to the entire nation. The number of listings for Syracuse peaked at 31 in 1951.

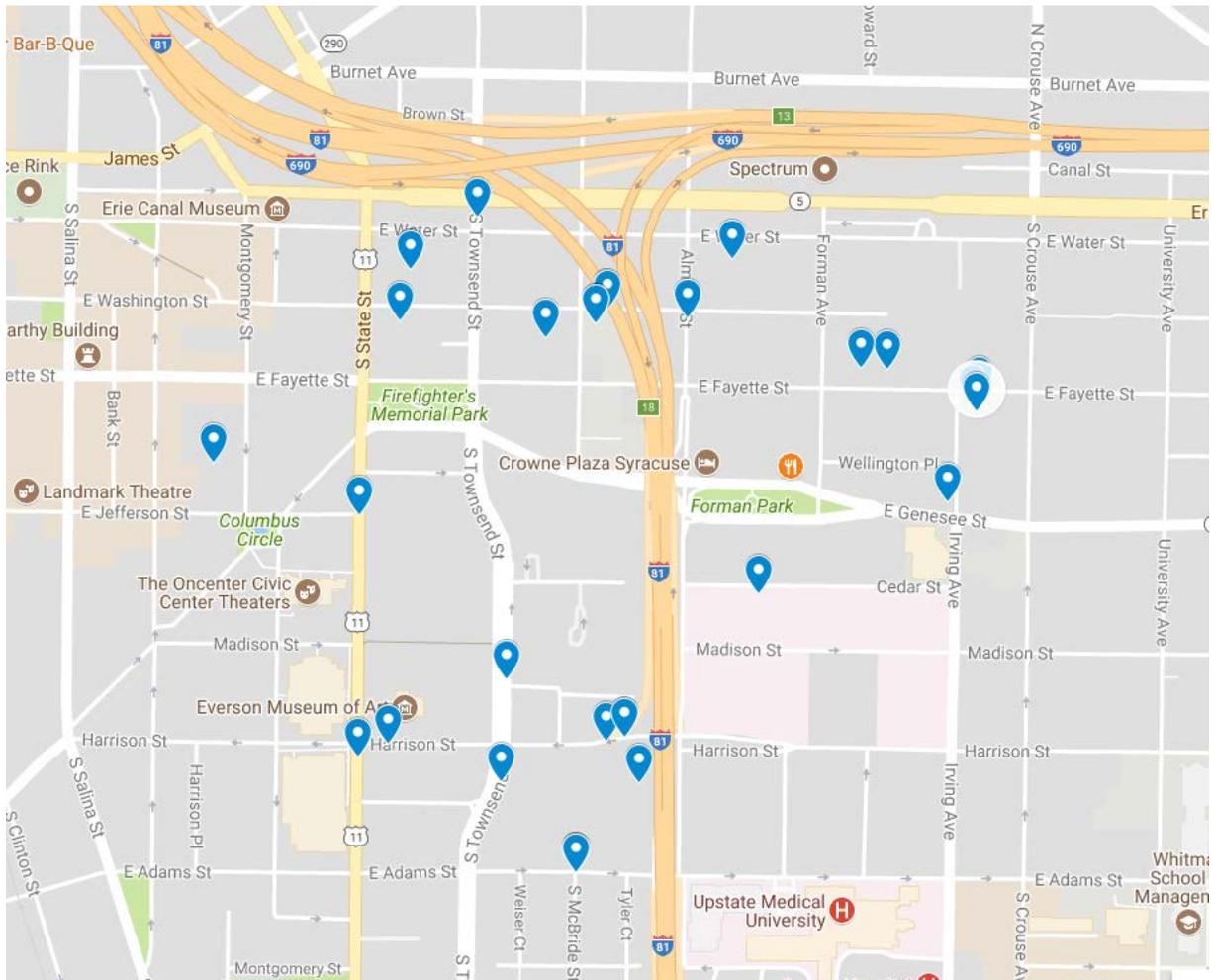


But the number of listing started to drop off after 1951, then fell off abruptly after 1955...

Why the sudden decline after 1955? In 1956 the state of New York approved a [\\$500 million bond for a project that would raze the 15th Ward and erect I-81](#). The city was beginning to acquire and demolish these safe havens for African-American travelers. They were even more important, of course, to the local African American community.

In the map below you can see the 31 locations listed in the 1951 edition of the Green Book. Notice how they cluster in an area about seven by seven blocks, at the center of what was then the 15th Ward. You can also see how I-81 today flows right through the center of that clustering.

(If you click on the map below it will take you to an interactive version of the map where you can click on each of the locations to see what was there.)



It's hard to imagine today how dense and lively those streets must have been, especially given how barren most are today.

Below is a photo taken in front of Aunt Edith's Luncheonette, one of the listings from the 1951 Green Book. It stood at 601 Harrison Street:



Below is that same location today:

