

# An Empire Built on Racial Prejudice: Tracking the Spread of Walter B. Perkins' Racial Covenants Throughout the United States

## Background

### Who was Walter B. Perkins?

- Walter B. Perkins was a realtor from Massachusetts operating primarily in the Northeastern United States at the turn of the 20th century.
- Perkins was responsible for the sale of **Racially Restrictive Covenants** across numerous US cities, including **Binghamton, NY**, via the company "Walter B. Perkins & co."

### What are Racially Restrictive Covenants?

- Also known as racial covenants, these were clauses written into **property deeds** which **prohibited the sale**, rental, or even use of property by **racial minorities**, almost always targeting people of color.

## An example of Perkins' Racial Covenant:

manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquors. **FIFTH**, grantee in accepting this Deed agrees for himself, his heirs, and assigns not to sell to Italians or colored people.

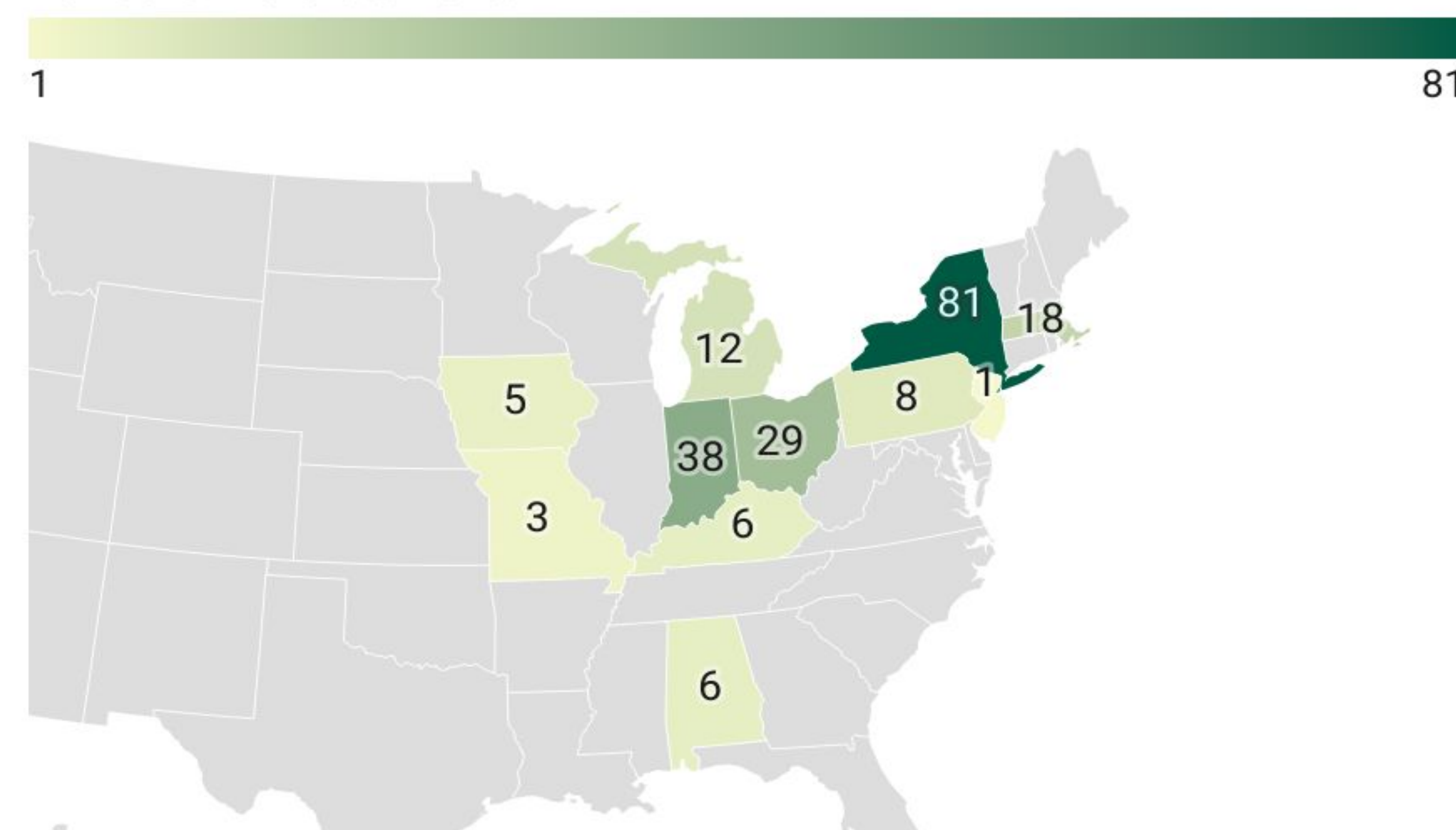
## Methodology

- Ancestry's "Newspaper.com" provides a database to search for "Walter B. Perkins & co." **advertisements** (graph 1), as well as **records of property transfers** (graph 2).
- Though Perkins did not *explicitly* mention racial covenants in his advertisements, by cross-referencing the locations where property was sold with **county clerk records of property deeds**, Perkins' deeds can be located
- Due to a lack of resources, deeds outside Broome County that have not been digitized cannot be checked. As this leaves some deeds that cannot be checked, the results of this study are to some extent theoretical, but still important.

## Walter B. Perkins & co. Advertisements by State

From 1898 - 1920

Number of Advertisements

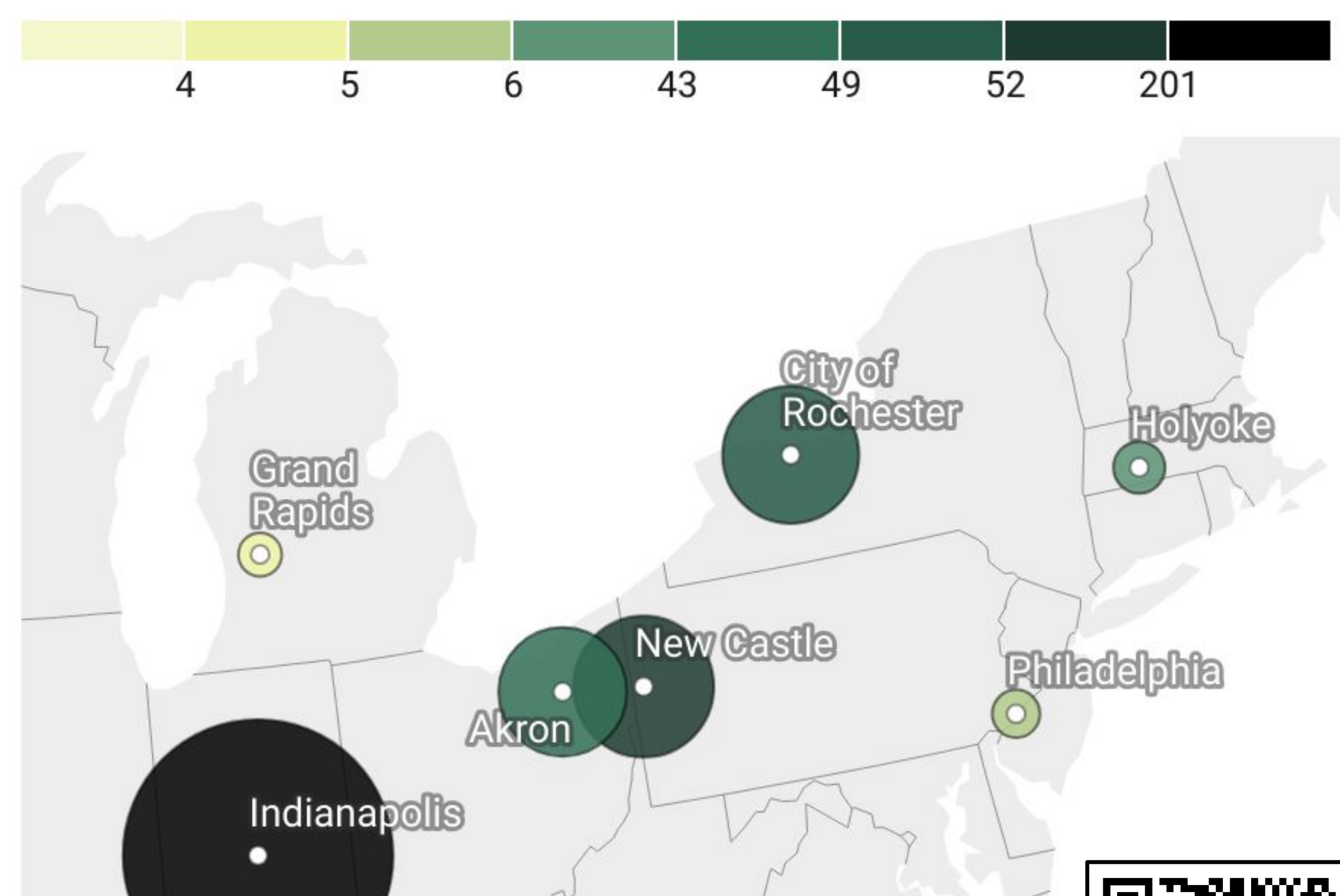


Data is based on the advertisements that have been found thus far, not necessarily all advertisements that Walter B. Perkins ever created

Source: Ancestry • Created with Datawrapper

## Recorded Sales Per City

Number of Property Transfers Recorded in Newspapers from 1898-1920



Source: Newspapers.com • Created with Datawrapper

Scan QR Code for full datasheet:



## Research Questions

- Just how extensive was the real estate "empire" that Walter B. Perkins created?
- How did the racial covenants grow within the cities to which Perkins brought deeds? Were they well received by the communities?
- Was Perkins responsible for introducing racial covenants to cities, or was he just one of many already selling racial covenants in these cities?

## Results

- A search of Ancestry's Newspaper.com revealed 127 advertisements in which Perkins was selling property, 78 advertisements in which Perkins was attempting to purchase property, and 354 records of property transfers. In every location Perkins sold property to, it appears he first attempted to purchase property, likely to **develop the land and introduce racial covenants**.
- Racial covenants have confidently been found in the cities of **Binghamton, NY**, **Akron, OH**, and **South Hadley, MA**. Additionally, newspaper wording suggests that **Elizabeth, NJ** "is a section where people of discrimination and taste make their homes", suggesting the existence of racial covenants.
- The **majority** of Perkins' deeds that have been found **contained racial covenants**. Thus, it is likely that he sold racial covenants in most locations, though this is only *suggested* by the data.
- All covenants that Perkins sold specifically prohibit **people of color and Italians** from purchasing property.
- In at least Binghamton NY, **Perkins was the first** to sell racial covenants. Long-time realtors in Binghamton only started selling covenants quickly *after* Perkins began doing so.
- Perkins' covenants appear to have been extremely well received. Perkins received thank-you notes in Akron and Indianapolis newspapers, and even received a letter of **endorsement from the mayor of Binghamton, NY**.