Kami Cai

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Chinese American history in the Midwest, immigrant enterprise, and urban history. My proposed doctoral research examines the provisioning networks behind Chinese restaurants in Indiana: the capital, labor, and supply relationships that kept them running. Building on a case study of the Bamboo Inn in Indianapolis, I ask how these businesses were tied to one another through partners, workers, and suppliers, and how they moved with the city through downtown development, urban renewal, and highway construction, in a place that never had a Chinatown with clear edges.

EDUCATION

Cornell University, Ithaca, NY *August 2022 – August 2024*

M.A. in Historic Preservation Planning, Concentration in Public Garden Leadership · GPA 4.04/4.30

Thesis: Examining the Evolution and Intersections of Gardening Practices in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century New York State. Kitchen gardening across New York State from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, traced through suburbanization and the school garden movement, and read against social class, pedagogy, religion, and the Country Life and Nature Study movements.

Committee: Michael A. Tomlan (chair), Sonja Skelly. doi.org/10.7298/w41d-pb71

Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN *August 2017 – May 2022*

B.S. in Landscape Architecture · GPA 3.65/4.00, Major GPA 3.78/4.00

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

The Bamboo Inn and the Chinese Restaurant Network in Indianapolis

Reconstructs the partnership structure and the labor and supply relationships behind one restaurant across three addresses, from maps, city directories, newspapers, and obituaries. The proposed dissertation would extend this work to federal immigration case files.

RESEARCH LANGUAGES

Fluent English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Elementary Japanese and Thai.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Indiana Green Book Sites: Mapping African American Heritage *December 2024 – April 2026*

Indiana State Historic Preservation Office · National Park Service Underrepresented Communities Grant

- Conducted archival research for 40+ sites, cross-referencing Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, city directories, U.S. Census records, and historic aerial imagery; authored public interpretive narratives for each site.
- Traced social and institutional ties among Green Book proprietors in Kokomo, Evansville, Indianapolis, and other Indiana cities through shared records, congregations, and clubs.
- Led end-to-end development of an ArcGIS Experience Builder platform with pages for nearly 200 extant and demolished sites.

St. James AME Zion Church: Underground Railroad Network in Ithaca *September – October 2023*

Cornell University

- Produced an interactive StoryMap reconstructing the network of historic safe houses in Ithaca from deed research, church records, historic newspapers, and local histories.

Selected Graduate Research *2022 – 2024*

Cornell University

- The Ever-Evolving Spectrum of Waithood: housing, employment, and delayed adulthood among young women in China, read through everyday practice and the shifting vocabulary used to name it.
- South Hill Residences Documentation and Field Survey: full architectural documentation, deed research, and statements of significance.

PUBLIC WRITING

Bamboo Inn 竹園: A Look Back at a Chinese Restaurant's Flourishing Period in Indianapolis *May 2026*

Preservation at the Crossroads, Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology newsletter

Banking on Wheels: Stories of Indiana's Drive-In Banks *Forthcoming*

Preservation at the Crossroads, Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology newsletter

Bush Stadium: A Unique Renovation that Links the Community and the Sports Field *August 2026*

Preservation at the Crossroads, Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology newsletter

Emerson School – A Model American School *November 2025*

Preservation at the Crossroads, Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology newsletter

PRESENTATIONS

Mapping the Margins: Building a Digital Record of Indiana's Green Book Sites *June 2026*

Cornell Historic Preservation Planning Alumni Symposium

Gardening Practices in New York State, 1850–1950 *June 2024*

Cornell Historic Preservation Planning Alumni Symposium

TEACHING

Teaching Assistant *2023 – 2024*

Cornell University · CRP 6640 Economics and Financing of Neighborhood Conservation and Preservation

- Mentored graduate students in coursework including site selection and financial feasibility analysis.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Historic Structures Reviewer *October 2024 – present*

Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, Indianapolis, IN

- Reviewed 1350+ Section 106 and state environmental compliance submissions; coordinated consultation with federal agencies, state agencies, local governments, and consulting parties.
- Managed complex and politically sensitive cases, conducting effects analyses and recommending avoidance, minimization, and mitigation; drafted and reviewed Memoranda of Agreement resolving adverse effects.
- Designed and built EnReview (enreviewtool.pages.dev), an independent web tool for historic property identification in Section 106 review, and its companion Indiana Consulting Parties Finder (consultingpartieschecker.pages.dev), which identifies county-level preservation and tribal contacts for consultation.
- Authored public features on Section 106 outcomes and under-documented Indiana heritage.

Project Manager, Hammondsport Historic Park Rehabilitation *January – May 2024*

Cornell University · Design Connect

- Led an 11-member interdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate team on a client-based historic preservation and landscape architecture project; designed and ran a community engagement strategy gathering input from 40+ residents and artists.

Cultural Landscape Preservation Intern *June – July 2023*

Cayuga Museum of History and Art, Auburn, NY

- Independently produced a full Cultural Landscape Report: archival research, existing conditions documentation, and treatment and interpretation recommendations.

Research Assistant *August 2021 – May 2022*

Purdue University Center for Community and Environmental Design, West Lafayette, IN

- Supported the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program with GIS mapping and demographic analysis for conservation, recreation planning, and community engagement.

Landscape Architecture Intern *September 2020 – May 2021*

AKO Studio, Guangzhou, China

- Produced graphics, 3D models, and construction documents for 15+ urban and landscape projects.

AWARDS

Planning and Analysis Honor Award, INASLA Student Awards · Grassy Creek Corridor Plan *October 2022*

SKILLS

Research and preservation practice: archival research, oral history, Cultural Landscape and Historic Structure Reports, Section 106 review and effects analysis, National Register evaluation, Memorandum of Agreement writing, Secretary of the Interior's Standards, real estate financial feasibility analysis.

Mapping and tools: ArcGIS Pro and Online, ArcGIS Experience Builder, StoryMaps, Adobe Creative Suite, AutoCAD, SketchUp.