

Collection #  
M 0745

**IRVEN ARMSTRONG (1892-1996)  
COLLECTION, 1918-1996 (BULK, 1918-1992)**

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Processed by

Wilma L. Gibbs  
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Manuscripts and Archives Department  
William Henry Smith Memorial Library  
Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box  
1 artifact

COLLECTION DATES: Inclusive, 1918-1996; bulk, 1918; 1992

PROVENANCE: R.A.M. Quality Auctions, 3225 Randy Rd., Joliet, IL 60431

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: Coy Robbins. *Black Heritage in Westfield, Indiana*.  
Bloomington, Ind.: C.D. Robbins, 1984. (F534.W54R6 1984)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2000.0433

NOTES:

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Irven Armstrong (7 March 1892-10 May 1996) was born in Westfield, Hamilton County, Indiana. He was the second son of Edward "Ned" Armstrong (1844-1924) and Sarah Roberts Armstrong (1856-1939). Four other sons were born to this union including Isaac, Ezekial "Zeek," Charles, and Lindzey. Edward Armstrong was married previously to Laura Bell Hord. Their children were Orvid Woody Armstrong and Harvey L. Armstrong. Irven Armstrong and his brothers were educated in the Westfield schools.

Before graduating from Indiana University in 1915, Irven Armstrong was a schoolteacher in Westfield and Indianapolis. After he received his degree, he taught at Indianapolis Public School #17 before serving in the United States Army during World War I. All five sons of Edward and Sarah Armstrong served during World War I. (A photograph of the parents flanked by their five sons in uniform appears in Coy D. Robbins's *Black Heritage in Westfield, Indiana* [page 8]). After the War, Armstrong returned to Indianapolis to teach. In 1921, he went to work for the Liberty Life Insurance Company (later Supreme Life Insurance). Armstrong returned to Indianapolis to teach in 1928. He taught history at Crispus Attucks High School. He retired as the head of the History Department in 1959. Following his retirement, he taught veterans of the Vietnam War.

Armstrong married Alberta Parham in 1938 after meeting her at a dance at the Madam Walker building in Indianapolis. They were married until her death in 1995.

Irven Armstrong, a lifelong educator, was an active member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. Prior to his death, he was the oldest living member of the organization. He was the fraternity's second grand polemarch. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Indianapolis Alumni chapter of the Kappas. He served as the polemarch for the Alpha chapter (Indiana University) and the alumni chapters in Baltimore, Chicago, and Indianapolis. He was an early advertising manager of the *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal*. In 1911 he was elected Grand Keeper of Exchequer and he was elected to the Grand Board of Directors in 1921. Armstrong received the fraternity's prestigious Laurel Wreath Award at the Diamond Jubilee conclave, celebrated in Indianapolis in 1986.

Sources: Materials in the collection; Kim Hooper, "Birthday for a Fraternity Brother," *Indianapolis Star*, B1, 8 March 1995; Irven Armstrong obituary, *Indianapolis Star*, C8, 16 May 1996; Coy Robbins, *Black Heritage in Westfield, Indiana*, Bloomington: the author, 1984 (F534 .W54 R6 1984); E-mail from Coy Robbins indicating that there is pertinent family information in Edward Armstrong's Civil War pension application filed in 1915, 29 March 2000.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is contained in one manuscript box. Most of the materials relate to Irven Armstrong's experience in World War I and to his membership in Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity.

Irven Armstrong and four of his brothers served in the United States Army during World War I. He was a sergeant in the 351<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery in France. Folder 1 contains letters written to Sergeant Armstrong by students of Indianapolis Public Schools #17. (Prior to the war, Armstrong had taught at the junior high school.) In general, the letters wish him well, commend his war service, express homefront support of American soldiers, comment on the effects of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic, thank him for keeping America safe for Democracy, and bid him a safe return. The letters, executed with good penmanship, contain the signatures and addresses of the students, all who lived within blocks of the near westside school. (Before its demolition, School #17 was located adjacent to Crispus Attucks High School.) The letters appear to be in response to a class assignment. All letters are dated 7 November 1918. A synopsis of each letter follows:

Mildred Carpenter, 930 N. Miley Ave. Parents are buying Liberty Bonds; students purchasing Thrift and War Saving Bonds. Also saving pits of fruit and nuts to furnish carbon for gas masks. She misses him even though she was not one of his pupils.

Earlee A. Griffin, 719 N. Roanoke St. The Spanish Influenza has caused a four-week vacation from school. A successful Liberty Loan drive during October--all counties in Indiana reached their quota. She is in the 8B and is glad that Armstrong is thinking of Old Seventeen. Election Day was the 5<sup>th</sup> of November.

Minnie Hooks, 538 W. 16<sup>th</sup> St. Students are still buying Thrift Stamps. They are bringing peach, apricot, and plum seeds to school for carbon to make gas masks. The fourth Liberty Bond is out and everyone is urged to buy one to help the soldiers during the winter.

Elnora Landes, 930 N. Senate Ave. Glad to get your interesting letter read to us. You make Seventeen proud. The Influenza Epidemic had kept students out of school. Indiana went "over the top" in the fourth Liberty Loan drive.

Ruth McBain, 920 Fayette St. France must be a very interesting place. We are doing our bit to help the soldiers that are sacrificing their lives for democracy. Our school is 100% in Thrift Stamp buyers. We miss you much since you left last year.

Margarette Martin, 347 W. 12<sup>th</sup> St. Buying Thrift Stamps. Am willing to sacrifice a little food and money over here because the men and boys are sacrificing there (sic) lives that we may have better privileges and have Democracy and not Autocracy. Have been out of school due to the Spanish Influenza.

Velma Pearl Pritchett, 1034 Fayette St. Hope you can return and see Seventeen once more. I am sorry school closed for four weeks, but would much rather stay at home than to come to school while the Epidemic was raging. Would like to see France and its inhabitants. Studied the country in 7B. Visited the War Exhibit in October. Saw German helmets and French shells and bullets. The shells were very prodigious. Hope you will be promoted to Lieutenant.

Catherine Waldon, 1061 N. Belmont We pupils at No. 17 glad to know you are in France making the world safe for Democracy. We are backing you here in America. The fourth Liberty Loan drive started 28 September and lasted until 19 October. Marion County went over the top. Most 17 students are members of the Thrift Army. We have a service flag at school. There was a War Exhibit in the city in September. Everything was immensely interesting. There were cannons, time fuses, the Red Cross, war literature, medals of honor, and war shoes and boots.

Mary Eliza Wells, 229 W. 12<sup>th</sup> St. Went to the War Exposition in Chicago. Saved my own money and bought one War Saving Stamp and four Thrift Stamps. I will help put you and Perishing (sic) somewhere in Germany, instead of somewhere in France.

Beatrice Williams, 934 Fayette St. You were once my mathematics teacher. Miss Walker read your letter. We still have our airplane races. The colored people did their bit for the war effort. The teachers give buttons to show where we rank in the Thrift Army. I am a corporal but hope to be a sergeant by the time you receive this letter. I was a victim of the Influenza Epidemic, but I am all right now.

The Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, founded at Indiana University in 1911, observed its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Indianapolis from 10-15 August 1986. A 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal* (folder 2) celebrated the occasion. The journal has a cover photograph of Irven Armstrong. The issue contains the names and pictures of the ten founders of the Alpha chapter. (Armstrong's cousin, Byron K. Armstrong was a founder. Irven Armstrong was an early member of the fraternity.) The journal also includes a detailed article about the fraternity's 25 men who served as grand polemarch from 1911 to 1986. Irven Armstrong followed Elder Watson Diggs, founder of the Kappas and the first grand polemarch. The journal also contains articles about Kappa men in sports and the media.

Folders 3-7 contain a scrapbook. Most of the letters and cards are dated 1991 and 1992. The majority of the greetings are from members of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity acknowledging Armstrong's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. A French fireman's helmet is in folder 8.

Irven Armstrong was eulogized on 18 May 1996 at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Indianapolis. A funeral service program is contained in folder 9.

## **SERIES CONTENTS**

### **Series 1: Correspondence and Journal**

#### CONTENTS

IPS #17 Student Letters to Irven Armstrong, 7 November 1918

#### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 1

*Kappa Alpha Psi Journal* (Diamond Jubilee Issue, 1986)

Box 1, Folder 2

### **Series 2: Scrapbooks**

#### CONTENTS

Scrapbook

#### CONTAINER

Box 1, Folder 3

Scrapbook

Box 1, Folder 4

Scrapbook

Box 1, Folder 5

Scrapbook

Box 1, Folder 6

Scrapbook

Box 1, Folder 7

### **Series 3: Miscellaneous**

#### CONTENTS

French Fireman's Helmet "Sapeurs, Pompiers, Pont-A-Mousson" used in WWI, France, by Irven Armstrong

#### CONTAINER

Artifact:  
R2630

Irven Armstrong Funeral Service Program, 18 May 1996

Box 1, Folder 8