

Collection #
P 0417

BILLY SUNDAY COLLECTION 1883–CA. 1935

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Processed by

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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 2 folders, 1 OVA folder, 1 artifact

COLLECTION
DATES: 1883–ca. 1935

PROVENANCE: Poster from Joan E. Hostetler, Heritage Photo Services, Indianapolis, Ind., received 28 October 1998. Photographs, postcards, and pin from MastroNet, Inc., Oak Brook, Ill., received 23 January 2003.

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1999.0067, 2003.0175

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In the early twentieth century Billy Sunday was one of the most popular evangelists in America. He preached revivals all over the country, reportedly converting over 300,000 people to Christianity over the course of his career.

He was born William Ashley Sunday, on 18 November 1862 in Ames, Iowa. His father was a Union soldier who died of pneumonia a month after Billy's birth, and even though his mother, Mary Jane, tried to keep the Sunday family together, Billy was eventually sent to a series of orphanages. In 1874 Billy went to live at the Soldiers' Orphan Home in Glenwood, Iowa. In his teen years he held numerous jobs including the janitorial position at a high school that he took so he could attend classes there. While he was working as a clerk in Marshalltown, Iowa, Billy joined the local baseball team. In 1883 his playing skills caught the eye of the captain of the Chicago Whitestockings, who invited Billy to play for his team. Billy did join the team, beginning a career as a professional baseball player. He played in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia.

Billy's life changed dramatically in 1886 when he met a group of evangelists from the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. The evangelists invited Billy to attend services and he did so, converting to Christianity shortly thereafter and joining Jefferson Park Presbyterian Church. He married Helen A. Thompson on 5 September 1888, with whom he had four children: Helen Edith, George Marquis, William Ashley, and Paul Thompson. After his conversion Billy became famous in the baseball community for his strong faith and moral lifestyle in a sport that promoted drinking, gambling, and hard living.

He gave up his baseball career in 1891 to work for the Young Men's Christian Association in Chicago. Two years later he became the advance man for Presbyterian evangelist John Wilbur Chapman's revival meetings. Chapman was unable to attend a scheduled revival in 1896 and asked Billy to lead it for him. Billy received license to preach in 1898, and the Chicago Presbytery ordained him on 15 April 1903.

Sunday led revivals all over the country, bringing a rural camp-meeting style to the cities, speaking to between one and five thousand people per month. His wife picked the cities that he would preach in and arranged the details of the tours. He preached from a wooden platform, urging sinners to "hit the sawdust trail," by walking down the sawdust

aisle and repenting of their wickedness and turning to Christ. Billy used an energetic preaching style, performing acrobatic feats and throwing imaginary baseballs to convince his audience to “pitch over the plate for Christ.” Sunday denounced the evils of the day: drinking, gambling, swearing, and Sabbath-breaking. The revivals combined Billy’s sermons with lively music and large choirs, and they worked, converting upwards of 300,000 to Christianity. By the end of his career, Sunday had preached to over eighty million people, more than any American until Billy Graham started his own revivals.

Sunday was also involved in numerous social issues of the day. He participated in the prohibitionist movement and his influence was instrumental in getting the 18th amendment passed in 1919. Conservatives disliked his support of women’s rights and his efforts to reach out to the African American community. He wrote numerous books including *Burning Truths from Billy’s Bat* (1914), *Great Love Stories of the Bible and Their Lessons for Today* (1917), and *Billy Sunday’s Sermons in Omaha* (1915). Sunday moved to Winona Lake, Indiana, late in life. The peak years of his ministry were 1910–1920, but he continued to hold meetings until his death in 1935. He died of a heart attack on 16 November 1935 and was buried in Forest Hills Cemetery in Chicago.

Sources:

“Billy Sunday.” *Religious Leaders of America*, 2nd edition. Gale Group, 1999. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: The Gale Group, 2004. http://galenet.galegroup.com/servelet/BioRC_25. Accessed 24 March 2004.

“Billy Sunday.” *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*. St. James Press, 2000. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: The Gale Group, 2004. http://galenet.galegroup.com/servelet/BioRC_25. Accessed 24 March 2004.

“Sunday, William (Billy) Ashley.” *The American Heritage Encyclopedia of American History*, 904. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

“William Ashley Sunday.” *Dictionary of American Biography, Supplements 1-2: To 1940*. American Council of Learned Societies, 1944-1958. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: The Gale Group, 2004. http://galenet.galegroup.com/servelet/BioRC_25. Accessed 24 March 2004.

“William Ashley Sunday.” *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2nd edition. 17 Volumes. Gale Research, 1998. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: The Gale Group, 2004. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servelet/BioRC>. Accessed 24 March 2004.

The Billy Sunday collection dates from about 1883 to 1935. The collection is comprised of nine postcards featuring Billy Sunday during his years of ministry, three cabinet cards depicting both his baseball-playing years and his career as an evangelist, and one poster depicting the Billy Sunday Tabernacle. The collection also contains a pin button showing portraits of Billy Sunday and his wife, Helen "Ma" Sunday.

The collection is divided into two series, the first of which is visual images, including the postcards, cabinet cards, and the poster. The postcards depict Billy in various poses during his preaching campaigns, as well as a portrait of him and his wife Helen, and a portrait of him as the "Baseball Evangelist" from his years in Winona Lake, Indiana. The first cabinet card is from Chicago in 1883 and shows a portrait of Billy when he played for the Chicago Whitestockings. The second cabinet card is from the publisher of the *Police Gazette* and is a reproduction of the image taken of Billy in 1883. The third card shows a portrait of Billy during his ministry career in 1917. The poster shows a picture of the Billy Sunday Tabernacle and calls people to come to Sunday school at the tabernacle at 9:30 and 10:30.

The second series is comprised of one artifact, the pin button. The button has portraits of Billy and his wife Helen, and has red, white, and blue ribbons attached to it.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Visual Images

CONTENTS

Billy Sunday – 9 postcards

Billy Sunday – 3 cabinet cards

Poster: Sunday School invitation

CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 2

OVA Graphics, Folder 1

Series 2: Artifacts

CONTENTS

Pin Button

CONTAINER

Artifacts: R 2218

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0417).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.