

Collection #  
M 0849  
OM 0429

## FALL CREEK YMCA COLLECTION, 1923–2002

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Processed by

Emily Comstock  
Volunteer: Barbara Zimmer  
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Manuscript and Visual Collections 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:

**Manuscript Materials:** 3 manuscript boxes, 4 oversize manuscript folders

**Visual Materials:** 3 boxes of photographs, 6 boxes of color photographs, 1 box OVA photographs, 2 folders OVA color photographs, 1 OVB photograph folder, 1 OVC photograph folder, 1 oversize graphic, 4 Cirkut photographs, 6 bins of 35 mm. slides

**Printed Materials:** 3 books

**Artifacts:** 10 artifacts

COLLECTION DATES: 1923–2002

PROVENANCE: YMCA of Greater Indianapolis, 615 N. Alabama St., Indianapolis, IN 46204

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Henry Lytle Hummons Papers (SC 2317); Harvey N. Middleton Papers (M 0441); Senate Avenue YMCA Hi-Y Spring Conference Photographs (P 0394)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1999.0522; 2005.0209

NOTES:

## **HISTORICAL SKETCH**

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was created on June 6, 1844 in London, England. The first YMCA in the United States was founded in Boston on December 29, 1851. Anthony Bowen, a freed slave, established the first African American YMCA in Washington, D.C., in 1853. The YMCA came to Indianapolis in 1895; however, it was a primarily white organization at that time.

Early in 1900, white officials of the Indianapolis YMCA asked the national association to assist in the establishment of a separate branch for the city's black population. Later that year, a preliminary organization called the "Young Men's Prayer Band" was created by a group led by Henry L. Hummons and Dan H. Brown; this was formally recognized by the local YMCA in March 1902. In 1910 this preliminary organization became the Black YMCA of Indianapolis, although it initially met in private homes, churches, and an abandoned house (the Flanner Guild). Meanwhile, Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Company, offered to contribute \$25,000 to every African-American YMCA able to raise \$75,000 for a building fund. The campaign was launched in October 1911, and pledges exceeded \$100,000 within only 10 days.

Construction of the Senate Avenue YMCA in Indianapolis began October 20, 1912 at the intersection of Michigan Street and Senate Avenue. Booker T. Washington dedicated the building on July 13, 1913. For nearly half a century, the Senate Avenue YMCA held the largest membership of any African-American branch in the United States. This important facility provided cultural and recreational activities as well as vocational guidance for young men.

The Monster Meeting was a large, public forum that gave a platform to local and nationally recognized speakers. Meetings were sponsored by and usually held at the Senate Avenue YMCA. Larger venues were identified when speakers with national reputations were scheduled to speak. In 1953 Eleanor Roosevelt spoke at the Murat Temple, and Martin Luther King, Jr., attracted an audience of more than 1100 people when he spoke at Cadle Tabernacle in December 1958. Beginning 1926, Mordecai Johnson, the first African American president of Howard University

opened the series annually. The forums generally galvanized the community around various issues.

Although the process of integration began within the national association as early as 1946, the Senate Avenue branch's clientele remained predominantly black. The center closed in 1959 following the opening of the Fall Creek YMCA, its replacement facility which was located at West 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Fall Creek Parkway.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for the Fall Creek YMCA building were held on April 13, 1958. The new building was dedicated on September 13, 1959 and began operation the same year. Despite some financial difficulties, it continued the tradition of its predecessor by providing exemplary programs throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. During this period, desegregation provided the black community new opportunities, which only added to the financial stresses the new branch had been experiencing. The branch's membership base deteriorated further by the late 1970s as a result of factors such as natural obstructions like White River, the development of Interstate-65, the closing of Lockefield Gardens, and suburban migration.

Realizing the grave situation of the institution, the community regenerated support for the Fall Creek branch. It was remodeled and expanded in the early 1990s. With its renewed facilities, the Fall Creek YMCA, along with the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis, resolved to preserve the history of the African American YMCA movement in Indianapolis while serving a broader scope of members in the downtown community. Unfortunately, the branch never managed to overcome its financial obstacles. This, along with controversies concerning racial discrimination and the desire of the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis to profit from the sale of the property, caused the Fall Creek YMCA to officially close on September 30, 2003.

Sources: Materials in the collection

"A Brief History of the YMCA Movement" <http://www.ymca.net/about/cont/history.htm>. accessed on September 7, 2005.

*Indianapolis Recorder* (various issues between February through May, 1958)

Mjagkij, Nina. "Senate Avenue YMCA." *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, edited by David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, 1249–1250. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Warren, Stanley. "The Monster Meetings at the Negro YMCA in Indianapolis." *Indiana Magazine of History* XCI (March 1995): 57–80.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The collection is divided into three major parts: Senate Avenue YMCA, Fall Creek YMCA, and other YMCAs and organizations. Developed during an era characterized by intense segregation in Indianapolis and throughout the country, the Senate Avenue YMCA was an organization that encouraged racial uplift. It thrived during the first half of the twentieth century. The materials in the collection reflect the institution's organizational structure, mission, and its many activities. Some of the clubs that were part of the Y included the Older Boys, Pioneers, Hi-Y Congress, and the Life Builders. Items representing those club activities, especially photographs, are contained in the first series of the collection. Some of the photographs in the collection, dating from 1923, speak to activities and programs at the Senate Avenue YMCA including membership and capital fund campaigns, Father/Son banquets, art exhibitions, and summer camps. A Turkey Day Race (n.d.) and Gander Strut (1937) are two unique activities depicted by photographs.

The Fall Creek YMCA replaced the Senate Avenue YMCA in 1959. This was an effort by administrators and directors to establish a larger and more modern facility for community use. The collection contains correspondence

and minutes from the organization, as well as several items related to the business of the institution. There are materials that relate to the institution's annual meetings, conferences, various clubs, fundraisers, and programs.

During the late 1980s, the Fall Creek YMCA staff established a history committee. Former DePauw University professor and administrator, Stanley Warren, was commissioned to write a history of the Senate Avenue YMCA. In the same vein, the institution looked forward by identifying renovation needs for the building. Several folders in Box 2 pertain to the history project and the building renovation.

The Fall Creek YMCA offered classes, training, and opportunities in several sports, health and physical activities, games, and arts and crafts. The collection includes photographs of individuals engaging in ballet, baseball, basketball, boxing, chess, dodge ball, football, four square, gymnastics, martial arts, tennis, volleyball, and weight training. There are numerous images of camp scenes and photographs that pertain to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the Indy Jazz Fest. Most of the photographs throughout the collection are undated. They are unidentified or partially identified.

The Monster Meetings started at the Senate Avenue YMCA and continued at Fall Creek. These meetings featured local and nationally recognized individuals as speakers. Programs and photographs from some of the meetings are contained within the collection. There are several issues of the *Y's Man*, the news organ of the Senate Avenue, and later, the Fall Creek YMCA, in the collection. They date from 1938 through 1962.

The last series of the collection pertain to organizations related to the Fall Creek YMCA including the Inner City Y's Men Club, International Association of Y's Men's Clubs, Y's Men's International, and the YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit.

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Charles Howard Hopkins, <i>History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America</i> , 1951	General Collection: BV1030 .H6 1951
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## 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://opac.indianahistory.org/>
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, M 0849).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.