

Collection #  
M 0513  
OM 0435  
OMB 0035  
R 2378

**FLANNER HOUSE RECORDS, CA. 1906–1979  
(BULK 1940–1960)**

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Processed by

Kathryn M. Wilmot  
August 2006

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Indiana Historical Society  
450 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: Manuscript Materials: 2 boxes, 2 oversized boxes, 1 oversized folder  
Visual Materials: 4 photograph boxes, 2 oversize photograph boxes, 2 bins of 35mm polyester negatives  
Artifacts: 1 artifact

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1906–1979 (bulk 1940–1960)

PROVENANCE: Norma Reeve Searly, Bogart, Georgia, 10 June 1987

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: SC 2543 (Indianapolis Independent Friends Meeting Records); SC 2692 (Flanner House Laundry Instructions); M 0441 (Harvey N. Middleton Papers); M 0447 (Lillian Marie Goens Papers); M 0508 (Rowland Allen Papers); M 0634 (Dora Atkins Blackburn Papers); M 0704 (Remembering Indiana in the Twentieth Century); M 0845 (John A. Patton Papers); M 0510 (Walter H. Maddux Papers); P 0266 (O. James Fox Collection); M 0399 (Madam C. J. Walker Papers); P 0303 (Indianapolis Recorder Collection); Flanner House clippings file

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1988.0599

NOTES:

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

In 1898, during the settlement movement of the Progressive Era, Flanner Guild (later Flanner House) was established by the Charity Organization Society of Indianapolis, a white settlement house. The original property located on Rhode Island Street was donated by reformer and businessman Frank W. Flanner. The organization initially operated under the direction of social worker Sarah Colton Smith and Dr. W.T.B. Williams, with Dr. Harold Morgan assuming responsibility around 1899.

Flanner House provided social services to Indianapolis's large African American population; many residents having migrated from southern states. Racial prejudice and discriminatory practices resulted in a lack of economic opportunity for African Americans in Indianapolis. In response to this, Flanner House stressed practical, self-reliant solutions to problems of unemployment, poor housing, and lack of health care. Upon its incorporation in 1903, the organization's constitution emphasized "training and moral improvement" as well as the "promotion of social, spiritual, moral and physical welfare" of African Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Early Flanner House programs were often limited by a lack of funding and confined to a children's playground and domestic training classes in millinery, sewing, and cooking skills. In 1908, the Flanner Guild Rescue Home for unmarried mothers and children opened. In 1909 with additional property contributed by Frank Flanner and increased donations, services to the community began to grow. An orchestra was established and new programs emphasized thrift and savings and the prevention of juvenile crime. Children's services included boys' and girls' clubs, a day care nursery, and a Child Development Center. Financial difficulties eased again around 1911 when Flanner House became associated with the Christian Women's Board of Missions (CWBM). In 1912 after the death of Frank Flanner, the CWBM changed the name of the organization from Flanner Guild to Flanner House. At this time, Robert L. Brokenburr became administrator of Flanner House, succeeded by Charles Otis Lee in 1914.

In 1918, Flanner House relocated from the worn-out structures on Colton Street (formerly Rhode Island Street) to a series of buildings at 802–814 North West Street. Expanded programs at this central location included a tuberculosis clinic, desperately needed due to the prevalence of the disease in poor neighborhoods and the exclusion of African Americans from hospitals. An employment bureau provided help for the many African American women working as domestics, oftentimes the only employment available in a white-dominated society. Increased local financial support in the early 1920s provided for the opening of a laundry school to train black women, followed by programs offering training in home economics (including the "Make-Over Shop") and maid service. Reverend Henry L. Herod assumed management of these programs from Lee in 1925.

In 1935, Flanner House was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization. That same year, Cleo W. Blackburn began his 40 year tenure as director of Flanner House, replacing

Reverend Herod. In conjunction with Blackburn's new leadership, a group of African American women established the Flanner House Guild in 1936. The Guild helped further develop Flanner House programs through fundraising events such as the Guild teas. Plans were revealed for a new Flanner House location at 16<sup>th</sup> and Missouri Streets in 1941. In 1942, work camp volunteers from the American Friends Service Committee helped clear the new property and assisted with other neighborhood improvements. In 1944, the new Flanner House headquarters, designed by prominent African American architect Hilyard R. Robinson, opened at 333 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

With Blackburn's leadership and the results from the 1939 *Indianapolis Study* which analyzed the socio-economic situation of the city's African American residents, Flanner House tailored its programs to target key community issues. By 1944, the organization consisted of Social Services, Vocational Aids, Self-Help Services, Health, and Housing divisions. New services included dental, well-baby, and maternity clinics; the establishment of the Herman G. Morgan Health Center in 1947, headed by Dr. Walter H. Maddux; continued education in domestic arts, nutrition, nursing, and job training; and self-help projects such as garden cultivation, food preparation and preservation, and carpentry. A new cannery and shop opened in 1949, providing local residents with a way to save on their food bills. Families could cultivate land set aside for growing produce, can their own food, and purchase ready-to-serve food through the co-op store. The programs in all of these divisions fell under the category of "fundamental education," defined as "the attempt to apply the educational process to community needs and resources." Cleo Blackburn eventually established a Board of Fundamental Education, chartered by Congress in 1954.

The housing division of Flanner House homes grew exponentially in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1945, the Indiana Redevelopment Act established a plan for ridding cities of blighted or slum areas and redeveloping those areas. In conjunction with this act, the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission (IRC) designated certain areas of Indianapolis for improvement. The IRC's first project (Project A) included razing 178 acres on the city's west side bordered by 10<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, West, and Milburn Streets. This plan was not without controversy due to the protests of some neighborhood residents claiming their houses were not substandard. These residents also worried that dislocation would leave them homeless. Their protests were eventually overruled and demolition of the first slum house in the redevelopment area took place in the summer of 1948.

In accordance with its self-help ideology, the Flanner House organization helped found Flanner House Homes, Inc. and the accompanying self-help home building program, purchasing newly cleared Project A land from the IRC. Established to provide low-cost housing to lower-income families, Flanner House Homes, Inc., hoped to build a stronger community through this program of "sweat equity." Initially focusing on veterans of the armed services, the self-help program enabled selected families to pool their labor and work 20 hours per week building homes, including their own, in the new neighborhoods. The first group of 21 families (mostly veterans) organized themselves into a group called "Fall Creek Homes." Trained in all aspects of the construction process, the team worked under the guidance of Fred Reeve, director of Flanner House's Self-Help Services

Division. Work campers from various organizations also participated in the program. Groundbreaking on the first self-help home, that of veteran John I. White, took place on 24 August 1950. The program resulted in the building of approximately 181 homes. Flanner House Homes, Inc. also participated in the construction of apartment buildings in the various IRC redevelopment areas.

Throughout the next decades, Flanner House continued to emphasize programs for community improvement and self-initiative through improved health, social service, employment, better education, community development, and recreation. Services established included a Catering Service and Cooking School, Social Hygiene Clinic, Urban Life Services, Job Mobile, Residential Youth Center, Veterans Service Center, Northwest Multi-Service Center, Library, Senior Citizens Center, Community Athletic/Recreation Program, Legal Service Outreach, Healthy Baby Program, Homemaker Service Program, Guardianship Assessment Program, and many other community outreach programs. In 1975, Flanner House headquarters relocated to 2110 N. Illinois Street. They moved again in 1979 to the present location at 2424 Northwestern Avenue (later named Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street).

Sources:

Crocker, Ruth. *Sympathy and Science: The Settlement Movement in Gary and Indianapolis, to 1930*, pg. 184.

Flanner House clippings file

Flanner House website: [www.flannerhouse.com](http://www.flannerhouse.com)

Information in the collection

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Flanner House collection is divided into five series: Flanner House history, Flanner House programs, Division of Self-Help Services, Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission, and Flanner House Homes, Inc. Photographs are listed under the series to which they pertain. However, photographs removed from photo albums and scrapbooks have been kept in their original order and have not been separated into the different series. Since these photographs contain a variety of subject matters, they have been placed in the Flanner House History series. Photographs included in the monthly reports for the Self-Help Services Division have been kept with these manuscript materials, rather than separated.

Series 1: Flanner House History contains background information on the establishment of Flanner House. The “Historical Information and Commemorative Literature” folder contains programs from the 46<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Founder’s Days, a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary brochure listing important events and programs, a 54<sup>th</sup> Anniversary program, and a 1967 Founder’s Day Observance program for Flanner House and the Board for Fundamental Education.

The Flanner House scrapbook contains newspaper clippings describing various Flanner House programs such as the cannery and garden plots, daycare center, work camps, the Herman G. Morgan Health Center, and anniversary events. In relation to the redevelopment of the west side slum area, clippings describe the slum clearance project and neighborhood opposition, the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission, and Flanner House Homes, Inc. new construction. Articles also include information on Freeman B. Ransom, Cleo Blackburn, Robert Lee Brokenburr, as well as issues of segregation, race relations, and Jim Crow laws.

Photographs in this series relate to sponsored activities, various individuals associated with Flanner House, Flanner House buildings and locations, and neighborhood scenes. Individual and group activity photos include Cleo Blackburn, mothers posing with their children, neighborhood children posing in their Sunday clothes, playing games, and praying, and School 23 pupils. Neighborhood scenes consist of photographs of neighborhood houses, streets, yards, and businesses such as the Sunset Café, Sunset Terrace, and the Jack Morris Stainless Steel Restaurant Equipment building. Also included are buses, views of downtown Indianapolis, Indiana Avenue, aerial views of the west side neighborhood, the People’s Revolution Spiritual Temple, and firemen.

Photos removed from photo albums have been kept in their original order and document a variety of topics including aerial views of the west side, children playing, and Flanner House Guild gatherings. In relation to the redevelopment of the west side, photographs document the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission hearings, slum areas and residents, slum clearance, surveying of land, photographs of the old and new residences of members

of the self-help program, new Flanner House homes and apartments, the development of Brooks Street, and some interior shots of families in their new homes.

Photos removed from the scrapbook have been kept in their original order and document topics such as the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) work camp volunteers and their activities repairing the interiors of slum area homes, neighborhood children and children performing in costumes, mothers with children, the Flanner House cannery and garden plots, track and field meets including events such as the shot-put, long jump, pole vault, hurdles, and foot races. These photographs also document the area around the Herman G. Morgan Health Center, Flanner House, and Methodist Hospital.

Series 2: Flanner House Programs consists entirely of photographs. Topics covered include various Christmas scenes and celebrations; children attending the daycare and nursery school; Flanner House Guild socials, teas, luncheons, and costume parties; and health services such as the early tuberculosis clinic, the Herman G. Morgan Health Center, and images of Dr. Walter Maddux.

Social activities, events, and clubs include a Garfield Baptist Church baptism in 1921, Birthday Club, Mother's Club, award presentations, a carnival, boarding a bus to the circus, children's dance recitals, the Witherspoon Church group, Miss Flanner House and Flanner House Queen contestants, PTA members, and various gatherings and visitors to Flanner House.

Sports and outdoor activities include baseball, basketball, Little League, the annual track meet, volleyball, and children playing outside.

Work camp group photos represent volunteers from the Indiana University Protestant Student Council, First Friends Church and Western Yearly Meeting, Sugar Plain Monthly Meeting, Plainfield Friends Meeting, and Antioch and DePauw colleges, painting houses, landscaping, repairing sidewalks and homes, loading coal, and picnicking at Riverside Park.

Workshop, meeting, and conference photographs show unemployment meetings, board of directors' members including Cleo Blackburn, University of Illinois students touring Flanner House, and gatherings of unidentified community members. A separate folder includes images from the Seminar on Race, whose attendees included Cleo Blackburn, Fred Reeve, Western Yearly Meeting ministers, Grover Hartman, and Willard Ransom.

Series 3: Division of Self-Help Services provides information on programs relating specifically to this division of Flanner House. The "Generalized Report on Activities" contains a budget for the division as well as photographs and captions discussing families utilizing the Flanner House garden plots, nutrition program, Credit Union, Project A of the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission, public hearings, and Mayor Al Feeney, Paul McCord, and Otto Jensen tearing down the first house in the slum clearance area.

The monthly reports cover the period from June 1948–June 1952, except for gaps from November 1949–February 1950 and October 1950–December 1951. These reports provide information on various aspects of the Self-Help Services division such as financial reports and budgets, marketing campaigns, educational programs, cannery, work camps, gardens, People’s Co-Op Store, Flanner House Federal Credit Union, Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission, Flanner House Homes, Inc. and the Self-Help Housing Program. The 1949 annual reports include meeting notes from the initial self-help housing group members calling themselves “Boulevard Heights,” “Fall Creek Homes,” and “Casa Unit.” Although the Self-Help Program was under the auspices of the Self-Help Division, the photographs relating to this program are housed under the Flanner House Homes, Inc. series, as the primary concern of the program was home-building.

Photographs in this series show the garden plots, cannery with residents preparing fruits and vegetables, dairy, co-op store, and residents cutting down neighborhood trees to use as fuel due to a coal strike. Other images focus on training and education including a visit to the cannery from a Crispus Attucks High School home economics class, and residents sewing, weaving, and working in the upholstery and make-over shop.

Series 4: Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission focuses on the proposal and implementation of the program to clear the blighted slum areas. The 1946 *Study of 454 Negro Households in the Redevelopment Area* was prepared for the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission by Flanner House in an attempt to understand the make-up of families living in the area bounded by 16<sup>th</sup> Street, West Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street, and Milburn Street. This study provides statistical information on the residents such as marital status, number of children, birthplace, employment and earnings, education, rent, appearance of homes and yards, sickness and disability, membership in churches and labor and fraternal organizations, and experiences with health services and social service agencies.

The annual and progress reports for the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission define the program and how it operated, the areas it affected, Projects A–I, its accomplishments, financial information, the Self-Help Program, and the Neighborhood Conservation Program. The cost analysis report prepared by the Indiana University School of Business focuses on the cost of redeveloping the land included in Project A.

Photographs in this series show the slum areas, run-down houses, alleys, streets, outhouses, yards, and neighborhoods before redevelopment. These photographs also document the progressive demolition of these houses, neighborhoods, and factories by construction workers, beginning with the first house demolished at 856 West 11<sup>th</sup> Street on 20 July 1948. Paul McCord, Otto Jensen, and Mayor Al Feeney participated in the demolition.

Series 5: Flanner House Homes, Inc. details the construction of new homes in the areas cleared by the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission. The policies and procedures folder contains information on the relationship between Flanner House Homes, Inc. and the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission, various committees established and their functions, questionnaires, the selection and organization of families for participation, and home specifications and equipment. Loose photographs previously filed within these



folders have been separated, kept in their original order, and are now housed with the visual materials. These photographs contain images of slum areas, demolition, a train yard, neighborhood scenes, billboards, and new construction including framing and putting up walls.

The Self-Help Program folders contain a short history of the first group of twenty-one African American families chosen to participate in the program, entitled the Fall Creek Homes organization, and brochures detailing the Self-Help and Fundamental Education training programs. Information on this program also includes typewritten notes on the housing conditions of the twenty-one families before the construction of their new homes. The Radio Corporation of America (RCA) newsletter contains an article entitled "Labor of Loving Hands Builds RCA's Homes: Flanner House Helps Those Who Help Themselves." This article focuses on Leroy Marshall and Roscoe Fanning, two RCA employees involved in the Self-Help Program. It describes the program, building procedures, and the new homes.

Self-Help Program photographs show meetings of the members of the self-help groups Boulevard Heights, Casa Unit, and Fall Creek Homes, including John White and his family at the ground-breaking of their new home. The Whites were the owners of the first completed self-help house.

New housing development photographs show meetings between Flanner House Homes, Inc. and the Indianapolis Redevelopment Commission, people reviewing elevations and designs, floor plans, surveying of land, aerial photographs of the redevelopment area, new neighborhoods and Flanner House homes in progress and completed, interiors, landscaping, construction work (carpentry, framing, raising walls, unloading supplies, landscaping), teamwork and cooperation, and families enjoying their new homes. The Flanner House apartment home photographs include images of the River House project.

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Eleanor Roosevelt and Cleo Blackburn, 1957

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Black and white negatives taken of original  
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Artifacts: R 2378

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New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (6 of 11)	OVA Photographs, Box 1, Folder 26
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (7 of 11)	OVA Photographs, Box 1, Folder 27
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (8 of 11)	OVA Photographs, Box 1, Folder 28

New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (9 of 11)	OVA Photographs, Box 1, Folder 29
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (10 of 11)	OVA Photographs, Box 1, Folder 30
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (11 of 11)	OVA Photographs, Box 1, Folder 31
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (1 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 25
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (2 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 26
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (3 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 27
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (4 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 28
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (5 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 29
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (6 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 30
New Housing Development, ca. 1950s (7 of 7)	OVC Photographs, Box 1, Folder 31