

Collection #  
M 0344  
BV 2079-2085

## INDIANA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES RECORDS, 1827–1980 (BULK 1888–1975)

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26 May 1998  
Updated 16 December 2004

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 15 manuscript boxes and 7 bound volumes, 1 folder of photographs

COLLECTION DATES: Inclusive dates, 1827-1980; bulk dates 1888-1975

PROVENANCE: Indiana Council of Churches, Indianapolis, Indiana

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Becker, Edwin, *The Story of the Indiana Interchurch Center* (SC 2351); Institute on Religion & Aging Records (M 0421); Smith, Pamela, *Ecumenical Remembrances: A Scrapbook of the Indiana Council of Churches* (BV, 626, .I6, S54, 1994).

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1980.0911, 1982.1209

NOTES:

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The records of the Indiana Council of Churches consist of general files of the Council, formed in 1943, and of its predecessors: the Indiana Sunday School Union (1888-1901), Indiana Sunday School Association (1901-1922), Indiana Council of Religious Education (1922-1934), and the Indiana Council of Christian Education (1934-1943). Included are minutes of the Executive Committees, Boards of Directors, and various committees; reports; general secretary's correspondence files; scrapbooks; pamphlets and printed reports; publications; and photographs.

The bulk of the records in this collection date from 1888, when the State Executive Committee chose Rev. J.E. Gilbert to be the first paid superintendent of state work. However, the Sunday school movement in Indiana dates to the second decade of the nineteenth century. Current interpretation credits the establishment of Sunday schools in Indiana to the citizens themselves, rather than to eastern missionaries. Yet the impetus for their formation was related to the vision of the American Sunday School Union and the American Home Missionary Society, whose object was to carry the idea of the Sunday or Sabbath school to the frontier.

As a means of exerting a moral influence and of overcoming illiteracy, the Sunday schools often preceded churches and public schools and thus performed an important function in frontier society. The Sabbath schools were distinguished by their interdenominational character, method of teaching Scripture through selected questions, and inclusion of adults as well as children. In 1825, the Sabbath School Union Society, intended as a statewide body, was organized in Charlestown, Clark County, Indiana. One of its early actions was to issue instructions to the public on the organization, procedures, and rules of Indiana Sunday Schools. The involvement of the Sabbath schools in public education in Indiana was strong during the first half of the century and remained so even after the establishment of free public schools under the second Indiana constitution of 1851. The role of the churches and Sunday schools in general education waned, though, following the passage of the Local School Tax Law of 1867.

Among these papers is a typed transcript of the first annual report of the Indiana Sabbath School Union, but this is the only document concerning its early history present in the collection. The American Home Missionary Society papers in the Manuscripts Division of the Indiana State Library and Isaac Reed's *The Christian Traveller* are good sources for accounts of the activities of Sabbath schools in early nineteenth century Indiana.

After the Civil War a revival and reaffirmation of the Sunday school organization took place. At the founding convention in May 1865, the Union's goals were defined as "to unite all Christians throughout the state, to promote the cause of Sabbath schools and formation of county and township Sabbath school unions to cooperate". A manifestation of the new vitality of the Indiana Sunday schools was the adoption of the Uniform Lesson System in 1872, which standardized the Bible studies being taught at any given time throughout the state. The Indiana model was eventually adopted nationwide.

The Indiana Sunday School Union was a purely voluntary organization until 1888. With the advent of a paid administrator, its goal continued to be cooperation between denominations and district, township, and county Sunday schools. The minutes of the Union's governing bodies and its publication, known as *The Awakener* after 1893, contain notices of the activities of the organization. Conventions were held on an annual basis to discuss and formulate policy and to inspire and motivate Sunday school workers. At the 1901 convention, the name of the organization was officially changed to the Indiana Sunday School Association. In 1918, a constitutional convention was held to change its structure to reflect a greater diversity of programs and concerns.

Following the proposals of the Indiana Survey of Religious Education completed during 1920, the Indiana denominations and county Sunday school organizations met to form the Indiana Sunday School Council of Religious Education in December, 1923. Its name was shortened to the Indiana Council of Religious Education in 1925. After March 1934, the body was known as the Indiana Council of Christian Education. The Council of Christian Education in consultation with the State Pastors Conference, the Indiana Council of Church Women, and eleven church denominations formed the Indiana Council of Churches in 1943. The Council of Christian Education's functional successor was the Division of Education of the Indiana Council of Churches.

The basic structure of the organization consisted of the Annual Assembly, the Board of Directors, and the Executive Committee. The Annual Assembly met annually in January. Its members were elected by the denominations and the two affiliated interdenominational agencies. The Board of Directors was elected by the Assembly, met quarterly, and included two or more representatives from the denominations and affiliates. The Executive Committee was appointed by the Board of Directors and met monthly. The various departments and divisions of the Council - Administration, Christian Education (became Educational Ministries in 1967), Christian Life and Work, Missions and Service, Research and Development - were responsible to the Executive Committee. The Executive or General Secretary was the chief administrator of the organization. The files of executive secretaries E.T. Albertson, R.L. Holland, and Walter F. Horlander are included in these papers.

Source: Hartman, Grover L., *A School for God's People: A History of the Sunday School Movement in Indiana* (Indianapolis: Central Publishing Co., Inc., 1980).

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