

Collection #s:  
M 0071  
OMB 0071

**INDIANAPOLIS FLOWER MISSION  
RECORDS, ca. 1884-1987**

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 7 manuscript boxes, 1 oversized manuscript box, 1 photograph folder

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1884-1987

PROVENANCE: Indianapolis Flower Mission, 1976; Esther Tharp, 8888 Pickurck Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46260, 16 December 1996

RESTRICTIONS: Use reproductions only

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: This collection is scheduled to be microfilmed and will be available in that format.

RELATED HOLDINGS: M 102, Family Service Association of Indianapolis Records; M 430, Marion County General Hospital Collection; M 673, Julia Graydon Sharpe Papers; See card catalog under: Indianapolis Flower Mission

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1976.0206, 1997.0125

NOTES:

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Indianapolis Flower Mission originated in 1876 when a group of local women, following an idea said to have originated in Boston, began to meet every two weeks to take flowers to the patients in the Indianapolis City Hospital. Jams and jellies were soon added to the gifts. In 1879, the women of the Flower Mission extended their activities to set up a boarding house for homeless boys. It was located in the Judah Block on South Delaware Street. This institution continued for some years and was the genesis of the English Avenue and Lauter Boys' Clubs.

The boarding house created a need for fund-raising, and the Flower Mission found various ways to combine social activities with philanthropy. They started with a lawn fete on the grounds of Mr. J. K. Sharpe at Tenth and Pennsylvania Streets; held a railway excursion around the city on the newly constructed Belt Railway; had a series of successful Dolls' Fairs; and ran an Authors' Carnival in which, among others, James Whitcomb Riley and the young Booth Tarkington both took part.

In 1883, the Flower Mission approached Dr. William Niles Wishard, director of City Hospital, with the idea of founding a hospital for women and children, for which they wanted him to train the nurses. Persuaded that the funds at hand, \$12,000, were insufficient for a hospital, the Mission agreed instead to set up a nurses' training school, the second in the country, which they ran until it was taken over by the city in 1896.

In 1885, the Flower Mission hired a visiting nurse, a practice that continued for over half a century. Mission activity began to specialize in tuberculosis patients, who were provided with healthful foods like milk, bread, and vegetables. After Sunnyside Sanitarium was founded in 1917, the visiting nurse worked in cooperation, and part of her function was to recommend patients for entrance to Sunnyside. The Flower Mission was incorporated in 1892. In addition to its female officers and members, it had an advisory board of men, which included some of the most influential names in the city.

In 1895, Col. Eli Lilly and his wife presented the Mission with a residence at 18th and Capitol, which became the Eleanor Hospital for sick children. This was operated until 1909, when it was given up partly for lack of funds, partly because of an unsuitable building. It was a forerunner of Riley Memorial Hospital (built 1922-1924). The Flower Mission's energies were channeled into the building of a home for incurables near City Hospital. This institution opened in 1904. It was torn down in 1923 to make room for a new wing of City Hospital.

Raising funds to support all these activities was a major focus of the Mission's members. They put out a special women's edition of the *Indianapolis Sentinel* in 1895, then settled on an annual ball which for over a decade was one of the biggest social events of the season. There was a May Day pageant in 1914. Along the way the Mission began to receive bequests which provided a steady source of income, so that these annual affairs became

unnecessary. The Community Chest, after its foundation following World War I, provided limited support also.

Circumstances provided a new major objective to work for. When the Mission's home for incurables was torn down in 1923, the patients were moved into a small frame house on Coe Street near City Hospital. In 1930, the city fire marshal condemned this building and gave the Mission ten days to move out. This crisis caused a new spurt of activity by the Flower Mission, which engaged a publicity chairman to work up both financial support and public endorsement of the project to build a new hospital. Dozens of organizations supported construction of the hospital, and there were many donations, of which the largest was \$2100 from Sunnyside Guild.

In 1934 the Flower Mission offered Mayor John W. Kern \$62,000 for a hospital, a sum to which the city would be expected to add about \$250,000. The plans were cut down somewhat, from 150 beds to 100, and to a total cost of about \$180,000. Other funds were obtained by the city, including \$51,000 from the Public Works Administration and another large sum from the Butler-Snow Foundation. The Flower Mission Hospital, with 100 beds, segregated by both race and sex, opened in 1936. Its first patients, admitted even before dedication, were some of the victims of a disastrous flood in New Albany, Indiana.

From this time on, the Flower Mission was somewhat less active. The Mission's visitor continued to be employed, serving between thirty and sixty families and providing milk, other food, and sometimes clothing. Additions and improvements were made to the Flower Mission Hospital. The organization, the average age of whose members had moved from youth to middle age, became mainly an advisory body, providing some beyond-budget items to patients and staff.

Due to the increasing age of its members and membership attrition, the Indianapolis Flower Mission ceased as an active volunteer organization in 1996.

Sources: Materials in the collection, especially historical articles by Dr. Thurman B. Rice (1947) and by Harriet Smith (1955).

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection, filling seven manuscript boxes and covering the period 1884-1987, contains minutes, reports, correspondence, clippings, and printed material. It is arranged chronologically.

The collection was extensively damaged by moisture before donation. All material has been surface-cleaned, and especially fragile items have been photocopied and disposed of. The bound volumes of minutes in Boxes 6 and 7 are too fragile and soiled to be handled by patrons. The volumes have been unbound due to conservation concerns, but their original grouping and page order have been maintained. They are scheduled to be microfilmed and will be available in that format.

Historical sketches written by Dr. Thurman Rice (1947) and Harriet Smith (1955), bylaws, and annual reports (1884-85, 1886-87, 1890, and 1894) begin the collection. The majority of the collection consists of minutes and reports (1901-1985). Most of the earliest records, up to 1931, are in the minute books referred to in the preceding paragraph. Box 1 contains notes and transcripts of some of those early records, but full records begin in 1931.

The records are fairly complete. Typically, each month is represented by meeting minutes and a treasurer's report. Also present for some months are reports by the Mission's visitor, which include statistics of milk and other foods supplied and anecdotal records of visits, reports of the publicity chairman, and hospital/doctor's reports listing admissions and discharges.

Other material includes newspaper/magazine clippings for each decade; information regarding the Marion County Tuberculosis Association; correspondence, printed items, a scrapbook and photographs. Some of the minutes and reports contain correspondence that was read at monthly meetings. Other correspondence is arranged in individual folders beginning with 1959. Printed items include *Life in General* (1963-1970, n.d.) and *Health Capsule* (1976), publications of the Health and Hospital Corporation of Marion County, and the Indiana Tuberculosis Association's *Hoosier Health Herald* (1964, 1966, 1968). The scrapbook's cover reads "National Hospital Day, May 12, 1937, City Hospital, Indianapolis, IN." It contains publicity materials, newspaper clippings, and photographs. Visual materials, including photographs of the Flower Mission Hospital (ca. 1937) and a photographic postcard of Indianapolis City Hospital (n.d.) complete the collection.

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