

Collection #
M 0711

JOSEPH E. BELL PAPERS, 1914–1918

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Processed by

Chris Harter

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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

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box

COLLECTION
DATES: 1914–18

PROVENANCE: Wanda Willis, 423 St. Paul St., Indianapolis, IN 46201, 24

November 1997

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: M 0069, City of Indianapolis Records, 1942–46: Mayor Robert H. Tyndall

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1998.0074

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph E. Bell (1865–1923) was the Democratic mayor of Indianapolis from 1914 to 1918. Raised in Union County, Indiana, Bell came to Indianapolis in August 1888 to begin a legal practice and a career in politics. He soon began an association with Thomas Taggart, who was the county chairman at the time (see also: OMB 0030–0031, Thomas Taggart Scrapbooks).

Bell was appointed an assistant to the city attorney in 1893, and continued his position during Taggart's three mayoral administrations, 1895–1901. Bell held various political positions, including precinct committeeman, ward and county chairman, and delegate to county, state, and national party conventions. His law partners included future U.S. senator John W. Kern, future Indiana House speaker Walter D. Myers, and Thomas L. Sullivan (see also: OM 0203, Thomas L. Sullivan Circuit Judge Appointment, and SC 2084, Thomas L. Sullivan Papers).

Bell won the 1914 mayoral election with thirty-seven percent of the vote. Election irregularities led to the indictment of Bell, Taggart, and others on charges of conspiracy to commit a felony. However, the mayor was acquitted.

Bell established the first vice squad in Indianapolis and oversaw many public improvements. During his administration, 281 miles of streets, sidewalks and sewers were built. Notable projects involved Pogue's Run, a flood levee along White River, Garfield Park, and the extension of the city's boulevard system (Fall Creek, Maple Road (38th Street, Pleasant Run and Burdsal).

A founder of the Indiana Democratic Club and a deacon of Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, Bell died in 1923 from an accidental, self-inflicted shotgun wound suffered at the Indianapolis Gun Club.

Source: *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, p. 316-317.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of records relating to Joseph E. Bell's administration as mayor of Indianapolis. The majority of the collection is in the form of correspondence relating to Bell's authorization of city ordinances, most of which involve public improvements. A letter dated 16 April 1917 calls for the formation of the Patriotic Gardeners' Association, which sought to convert vacant lots into garden plots. Correspondence of August 1917 concerns an

"ordinance relating to conduct of persons towards the government of the United States of America."

Also present are reports from Bell to the Indianapolis Common Council, including a report on the reorganization of the city's Department of Public Works (1914) and annual reports of 1915, 1916, and 1918. Each lists summaries of city finances and reviews of city departments. They also highlight the administration's accomplishments for the previous year, which include:

1915 - Pogue's Run, street improvements, public lighting

1916 - traffic regulation, labor relations, the city market, public lighting, street improvements

1918 - labor relations, the moral condition of Indianapolis, Pogue's Run, flood control, street signs, and the Indianapolis Water Company

The 1918 report also provides Bell's recommendations for the incoming administration, which involve a city hospital unit for contagious diseases, Crown Hill Cemetery, sewage disposal, and street improvements.

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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://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, M 0711).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.