

Collection #  
M 1147  
OM 0575

## SHORTRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS REUNION OF 1931

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November, 2014

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box, 1 OM folder, 1 color photograph folder

COLLECTION DATES: 1981

PROVENANCE:

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Shortridge High School Collection (M 0482); Shortridge High School Alumni Materials (SC 3034); *Shortridge High School 1864–1981: In Retrospect* by Laura Sheerin Gaus (in both General Collection and Reference Room Collection, LD 7501 .I4647 G38 1985)

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2006.0314

NOTES:

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

Shortridge High School had an alumni association, which was active primarily from the 1940s through the 1960s. In 1981, Shortridge High School was closed for several years before reopening as a middle school in 1984 and a magnet high school in 2009. In 2002, a grassroots alumni group called the Shortridge High School All Ways began trying to reunite alumni through class reunions. These efforts eventually led to the successful reorganization of the Shortridge High School Alumni Association (SHSAA) in 2007, and in 2011 the organization was granted 501c 3 status.

Shortridge High School was founded in 1864 as Indianapolis High School and was Indiana's first free high school. The school's name was changed to Shortridge in 1898 at the request of the Indianapolis school board. The school was, at least in part, the product of the persistence of Indiana educator Caleb Mills. Mills had doggedly lobbied the state legislature for free public schools throughout the 1840s and 1850s.

Abram C. Shortridge, the man for whom the school was named, was elected as school superintendent in 1863. Shortridge became known for his high standards and his reliance upon rigorous testing. In spite of the fact that the school was founded in 1864, superintendent Shortridge would not allow students to attempt high school level work until 1865. In subsequent years errant faculty, as well as students, were subjected to weekly drills until a subject was mastered to his satisfaction.

Some of Shortridge's other policies also had a profound effect on the nature and the quality of education at the high school. One of his most important decisions involved the hiring of female teachers. Because of the low salaries offered, he recommended that women rather than men be hired to teach. For the next several decades, these women would serve as the main providers of low cost, high quality education in the city of Indianapolis. In 1878, without any recorded discussion, the female teachers began earning as much as their male counterparts.

One of Shortridge High School's most enduring legacies was the *Daily Echo*, a daily newspaper for the school started by student Fletcher Wagner. It was the first known daily high school newspaper in America, and the publication lasted for seventy-two years.

The high school opened with one principal, one assistant, and twenty-eight students. By 1878--only fourteen years later--the school served 502 students with a faculty of eleven. The students were almost exclusively white and were, for the most part, the children of laborers, mechanics, and merchants. The first African American student permitted to attend the high school was Mary Ann Rann. She enrolled in 1872 and graduated with a full diploma in 1876.

Because Indianapolis had no high schools for black students, the school act of 1877 allowed black students ready for higher grade placement to attend white high schools. Between 1910 and 1920 the racial composition of the Shortridge community changed. The number of black students in Indianapolis high schools rose to approximately 800 by 1920. These students attended Shortridge, Emerich Manual, and Arsenal Technical High Schools. At Shortridge they comprised 15 percent of the student population. By the late

1920s Shortridge had ceased to be a neighborhood school. Its students and faculty now commuted to school from various parts of the city. This marked the beginning of the urban migration, which would eventually contribute to Shortridge's demise. Throughout the following years Shortridge continued to maintain established traditions and to create new ones. The Shortridge chapter of the National Honor Society was established in 1921. Junior Vaudeville and the school mascot, Felix the Cat, became popular parts of Shortridge in 1927. The increased number of clubs and organizations corresponded to the size of the school; there were more students now than ever before. Shortridge had grown beyond its capacity in a short period of time. Faculty and students moved into the new building on 34th Street in the fall of 1928.

The 1930s brought several new problems. Almost as soon as the new building was opened, it was too small for the student body. Depression-era unemployment contributed to the large class size; graduates stayed in school simply because they had no place else to go. Students often did not have enough money to pay for textbooks and school supplies. The PTA became very active, stepping in to provide emergency funds for these students. They also purchased new band uniforms and sponsored the Family Frolic, a community fundraiser featuring booths, games and a dance. Athletic teams flourished with championship football and basketball teams. The forbidden social clubs--"secret" fraternities and sororities--were finally sanctioned by the school administration, although they were not encouraged.

The student and community concerns of the 1940s were, with few exceptions, identical to those of the 1930s. More social clubs and extracurricular activities were established. The Wireless Club became the public school radio station, WIAN. Students became actively involved in the war effort, rolling bandages and preparing surgical dressings, raising money for medical installations, and selling enough war bonds to purchase a pursuit plane and two B-17 Flying Fortresses. The band had the privilege of performing at the launching of the USS Indiana. The 1940s also saw the acquisition and loss of two principals. Dr. J. Dan Hull, hired in 1942, resigned and accepted a post with the Department of Education after only five years as principal. His replacement, Joel Hadley, was a Shortridge alumnus who quickly became one of its most popular principals. When segregation was legally ended in 1949, his leadership was tested.

Suburban flight became a major problem for Shortridge during the 1950s. Competition with newer schools aggravated the situation. Because of its many merits, students, faculty, and parents took great pride in their associations with Shortridge. This was interpreted as arrogance by other schools and the communities that they served. The Shortridge PTA and the administration responded by launching an extensive public relations campaign. They attempted to prove that the school deserved the respect they gave it. Shortridge was rated as one of the country's top high schools by a researcher in Chicago in 1957. Articles in national magazines and journals followed. Shortridge also sponsored the first American Field Study exchanges in Indianapolis high schools-- a program that continued until the school was closed.

In spite of all the positive publicity, Shortridge's problems grew worse in the 1960s. More and more good students were going to other schools. The *Echo* began to lose money at the rate of ten dollars a day because of the loss of student interest and support. When Robert Schultz, a Shortridge alumnus, took over for the retired Hadley, he discovered that

freshman reading scores were below average. He immediately set up a tutoring program. At the suggestion of community leader Roselyn Richardson, wife of lawyer Henry J. Richardson, business leaders were brought in to inform students of the value of a high school diploma in the job market. "Career Days" and a "Job Fair" were established. The number of triple "F" report cards fell by 50 percent.

During the 1960s the school's future was in serious jeopardy. The school board's response to declining enrollment was to make Shortridge Indianapolis' "academic high school," requiring entrance examinations for incoming freshmen. This decision aggravated the school's poor community relations. Racial tensions erupted over the continued use of an ancient history textbook that suggested that "Negro and Mongol peoples" had not contributed anything to the "rise of civilization." Somehow, Shortridge still managed some successes, including 80 National Merit Finalists in seven years.

A great deal of student and faculty energy was spent on defending the school in the 1970s. Beginning with its reinstatement as a standard, comprehensive high school in 1970, its existence was constantly in question. Security and truancy became problems. The *Echo* became a weekly, not a daily newspaper. Questions arose about the so-called "racial balance" of the school. At one point the ratio was as high as 89 percent black students. Because of the uncertainty of its future, both the enrollment and the condition of the building continued to decline throughout the 1970s. The continued growth of the suburbs had brought about the growth and improvement of suburban schools. The problems of urban education and disuse were too great to overcome.

In 1981 the Coalition of Indianapolis Task groups for Youth (C.I.T.Y.) was formed to help save Shortridge High School from being closed by the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners. A subgroup of this group was the Alumni Committee, which was meant to help form a Shortridge Alumni Association that in turn would fight the decision of the School Board, advocate for Indianapolis public schools, and act as the central clearinghouse for information on all alumni. The closing of Shortridge especially effected the class of 1931 since 1981 was the year of their 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion. The class of 1931 gathered papers on the importance of Shortridge as a school of performing arts and donated money to the Alumni Committee. After several attempts by parents, alumni, and students to save Shortridge the school was closed in 1981.

Due to public pressure, the Indianapolis Public School system reopened Shortridge as a middle school in 1984. In 2009, it became the Shortridge Magnet High School for Law and Public Policy.

Students who went on to develop distinguished careers after leaving Shortridge High School include: historian and feminist scholar Mary Ritter Beard; politicians, Dan Burton, [Andrew Jacobs, Jr.](#), and Richard Lugar; Egyptologist George Reisner; civil rights activist and lawyer Henry J. Richardson; musician and composer, [Noble Sissle](#), novelist and writers, [Wallace Terry](#), Kurt Vonnegut and Dan Wakefield; journalist Claude Bowers; and Admiral Raymond A. Spruance.

Sources: Most of this historical sketch was taken from collection guides, M 0482 Shortridge High School Collection and SC 3034 Shortridge High School Alumni Collection Guide.

Shortridge High School Alumni Association. "About Us"  
<http://www.shortridgealumni.com/aboutus.php?rl=0> Accessed 28 June 2014.

Shortridge Magnet High School for Law and Public Policy. "History"  
<http://414.ips.k12.in.us/2012/07/12/history/> Accessed 28 June 2014.

*Shortridge High School 1864–1981: In Retrospect* by Laura Sheerin Gaus (in both General Collection and Reference Room Collection, LD 7501 .I4647 G38 1985).

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

This collection contains the planning materials for the Class of 1931's 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion. The event was mostly planned by Bob Sutherlin and Martha Rose Scott, members of the Class of '31. Included in this are reminder papers, letters, and directions for the event. Some of the materials sent out about the reunion were formatted to look like Shortridge's school newspaper, the *Shortridge Daily Echo*. There are also forms that the alumni returned. The first are dinner reservation forms that state who is coming to the reunion and who is unable to attend. The other forms returned are a short biography of the former students' lives, which asks about hobbies, highlights of their lives, and family.

There are also materials from the actual event day: an attendance sheet, a magazine with photographs from the reunion, and a speech by Kathryn Frost Rowan. Rowan also included postcards from their home at Walnut Creek near San Francisco and a photograph of her husband and her.

The year of the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion, 1981, was also the year that Shortridge High School was closed. Within this collection are papers for an organization called the Coalition of Indianapolis Task groups for Youth (C.I.T.Y.), which was formed to help save Shortridge High School from being closed by the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners. There are newsletters and newspaper articles calling for alumni to support the school and prevent its closing.

Besides the 1931 Class Reunion papers, there are papers from the Class of 1929 and 1930 reunion papers for that same year. There are lists of student names and newsletters, as well as other planning materials.

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Class of 1931, List of Deceased Alumni

Box 1, Folder 20

C.I.T.Y Papers

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Class of 1929 Reunion Papers

Box 1, Folder 22

Class of 1930 Reunion Papers

Box 1, Folder 23



## 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 1147).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.