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**The Indianapolis Foundation Records,  
1916-2000**

**Mss 49**

**Indianapolis Foundation Records, 1916-2000**

**Mss 049**

**60.0 c.f. (25 cartons, 50 document boxes, 20 flat boxes, 1 videocassette)**

**ABSTRACT**

The Indianapolis Foundation was created in 1916 by the resolution of three financial institutions, the Fletcher Trust Company, Indiana Trust Company, and Union Trust Company. It was officially introduced as one of the first community foundations in the United States in the January 5, 1916, edition of the *Indianapolis Star*. According to the resolution, income from the Indianapolis Foundation would “be dispersed by said companies on the written order of a board of trustees for such charitable uses as well in its judgment promote the welfare of persons now or hereafter residing in Indianapolis, Indiana.” The foundation began making grants in 1924 and today continues to give to Indianapolis organizations to help improve the quality of life in the city.

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**ACQUISITION**

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## HISTORICAL NOTE

The idea of the community foundation originated in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1914. F.H. Goff, president of the Cleveland Trust Company, noticed a trend developing in the area of charitable trusts. Often in the case of a bequest, the donor designated a specific use for the trust. This led to tightly restrained funds and difficulties when the purposes of the funds became impossible to fulfill. Goff's plan, now known as the "Cleveland Plan," called for the donor to agree to the establishment of a charitable trust while authorizing a group of citizens acting as a distribution committee to determine the disbursement of the funds for the good of the community if the original purpose proved obsolete. The funds themselves would be protected and invested by a professional entity, the bank, while the distribution of the funds would be placed in the hands of responsible citizens to distribute for the benefit of the community. When the trustee institution or institutions create a resolution of trust governing the funds, a community foundation is formed. Funds are contributed either to a general foundation fund where they are combined with other gifts or to a specific fund designated by the donor.

Community foundations play a vital role in the community they serve. Directors and trustees of community foundations bear the responsibility of distributing funds to organizations for the overall benefit of the community and are responsible to the community for those funds. Donors, as citizens, have a vested interest in the activities of the foundation and often share in the benefits of foundation grants with their neighbors. Their gifts when added to other foundation gifts allow the foundation to make larger grants with greater impact. Since community foundations' activities are limited by geographic area, donors have the added assurance that their money will be used to better the place where they live.

A resolution of trust of three financial institutions created the Indianapolis Foundation in 1916 just two years after the Cleveland Foundation formed. According to the resolution, income from the Indianapolis Foundation would be dispersed on the written order by its board of trustees for charitable uses that would promote the welfare of the citizens of Indianapolis, Indiana. The Fletcher Trust Company, Indiana Trust Company, and Union Trust Company officially introduced one of the first community foundations in the United States on January 5, 1916, in the *Indianapolis Star*. Appointed as the first Board of Trustees of the foundation were Henry W. Bennett, postmaster; Charles Warren Fairbanks, attorney and former Vice President of the United States; Monsignor Francis H. Gavisk, a community religious leader; Henry H. Hornbrook, attorney and civic leader; Louis H. Levey; and Josiah K. Lilly, Sr., President of Eli Lilly and Company. As was the case with foundations formed using the Cleveland Plan, the positions are appointed by public officials. The Judge of the United States District Court, the Judge of the Circuit Court, and the Mayor of Indianapolis each appoints two trustees for six-year terms for a total of six board members. Although there are no specific qualifications for the board positions, "these private citizens are chosen for their knowledge about the community and their ability to represent the public interest" (*Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 780). The board members are ultimately responsible for the grant distribution decisions of the foundation.

Alphonso P. Pettis, a former owner of a dry goods store in Indianapolis, made the first gift to the Indianapolis Foundation in 1920. His gift totaled more than \$300,000 and was closely followed by others including Delavan Smith, James E. Roberts, and James E. Lilly these donations secured the financial stability of the foundation and allowed the foundation to begin distributing grants. The board hired Eugene Foster in 1924 as the first executive director of the foundation. His job included managing the daily operations of the office as well as preparing the financial reports for the board. The other aspect of his job included correspondence with those requesting funds and bringing those requests before the Board of Trustees for action. With the appointment of the first executive director, came the first grant. The Public Health Nursing Association received the foundation's first gift that provided for a visiting nurse to care for crippled children at home. Grant requests were originally submitted in writing to the director of the foundation in the form of a proposal letter including detailed information about the request, the use for the funds, and the intended impact of the grant. The proposal then went before the board for approval and the approval amount. Site visits and further correspondence often came prior to the board's approval of a grant.

Today grant requests come to the foundation through a three-step process. First an application is filled out that gives information about the requestor and briefly describes what the grant will fund. The application will then be reviewed to determine if the request fits the guidelines and available resources. The requests that do fit will be asked to meet with a foundation staff member for a site visit, to obtain more information, and to talk about submitting a proposal to the foundation. The final step is to attend a proposal preparation workshop and submit the proposal to the board.

From the beginning, the foundation devoted its grant-making activity to organizations in the specific areas of civic, educational, and benevolent work. Citizens of all ages reaped the benefits of the foundation's grants. As the foundation continued to give in these areas, it expanded its boundaries to include civic organizations such as the opera, theatre, and museums, as well as community service organizations such as Meals on Wheels, settlement homes, and the YMCA. Hundreds of organizations and agencies in Indianapolis have received funding from the foundation making practically every citizen a beneficiary of the foundation in some way whether a researcher at the Marion County Public Library, a visitor to the Indianapolis Children's Museum, or a pedestrian on Monument Circle. Its significance reaches beyond that of grant making to community involvement and support. The foundation grew and matured alongside the organizations it has supported giving it a strong voice and vital place in the community. By 2003 the foundation awarded \$3.5 million in grants annually with the average grant being \$35,000.

The Indianapolis Foundation continues to adapt to the changing nature of the city while keeping its earliest principle of community leadership and service. The growth of Indianapolis and the communities surrounding it inspired a new way of looking at collaboration among the community funds in the region. Originally under the Cleveland Plan for creating a community foundation, the Indianapolis Foundation organized as a trust. In 1997 the Indianapolis Foundation partnered with the Legacy Fund of Hamilton

County to form the Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF). The trust side of the foundation continues to be governed by the Amended Resolution of Trust originally created in 1916 while the corporate activities of the foundation are now governed by the articles of incorporation and bylaws of CICF.

Although the community foundations affiliated with CICF operate separately, CICF combines the knowledge of these foundations to provide leadership to local organizations and allow a more regional focus in giving and community service. CICF is active in assisting community programs like the Indianapolis Cultural Trail that supports the city's goal of becoming a cultural destination, Family Strengthening that develops resources for the welfare of the family, and Philanthropy Day that encourages residents to become involved in giving. CICF has its own endowment and awards over \$20 million in grants annually. Today the Central Indiana Community Foundation and its affiliates embrace these seven vision priorities within the central Indiana region: to respond to basic needs, to develop productive citizens, to build strong neighborhoods, to embrace inclusiveness, to promote community amenities, to promote philanthropy, and to promote the community. The CICF historical timeline can be viewed at <http://www.cicf.org/AboutCICF/History.cfm>.

## REFERENCES

“A Firm Foundation.” *Indianapolis Star*, April 28, 1998, sec. A, p. 06.

*A Glance Back...A Look at the Present: The Indianapolis Foundation 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Yearbook, 1916-1981*, Indianapolis Foundation, 1981.

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The Central Indiana Community Foundation Website, <http://www.cicf.org/>.

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## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Indianapolis Foundation Records are an excellent example of the growth and development of an early community foundation. Materials in the collection cover the entirety of the organization's history and familiarize the researcher with its evolution of giving since it includes both the grants given and grants denied. This collection is also important to the history of Indianapolis and central Indiana. The foundation played key roles in the creation of programs and places that are still a major part of today's Indianapolis such as the Children's Museum, the Indianapolis Zoo, the Marion County Public Library, and a host of other educational, civic, social, and cultural organizations.

**Board of Trustees Files, 1916-2000**, contain meeting packets from the Board of Trustees. These packets, 1916-1989, contain information vital to understanding every series in this collection and include details on the entirety of the foundation's operations. They are comprised of board minutes, information related to grants, annual reports, and financial records. The minutes cover the development of the foundation, administration, and the evolution of its giving patterns. Grant information in the meeting files generally consists of proposals, reports, and items related to the administration of the grant.

Annual reports for the Indianapolis Foundation are located in two separate places. The years 1933-1967, 1970-1971, 1973, 1977-1982, 1985-1986 are located in the board packets, while the years 1924-1927, 1946-1971, and 1973-1998 are catalogued in IUCAT (call number HV99.I42 I0001). Annual Reports for the Central Indiana Community Foundation are also catalogued in IUCAT (call number HV99.I632 C001) and cover the years 1998-2001.

The financial information included in the board files consists of official audits and informal board reports. All of the meeting packets contain either a formal or informal report of finances. Official audits in the board packets are available for the years 1936-1967, 1969-1980, 1982-1989. Official audits after 1989 are located in the financial records of the Administration Files.

**Administration Files, 1923-1998**, document the daily functions of the organization. The administration files are divided into four areas: correspondence, executive directors, financial records, and public relations. The correspondence files include administrative correspondence pertinent to the operation of the foundation and is not grant related. Correspondence on grants is found in the grant files under the name of the requesting organization. The correspondence also includes research conducted by the foundation similar to that contained in the scrapbooks. This research includes correspondence and news clippings about organizations and individuals collected by the directors of the foundation to provide background for grants and measure impact on the city. The executive directors' files contain biographical information, but not the records of the director's tenure in office. The financial records contain an incomplete set of Form 990s, 1944-1984, for the organization and audits after 1989. Audits prior to 1989 are located in the Board of Trustees minutes. The public relations files contain an almost complete set of clippings and press releases for the Indianapolis Foundation, Legacy Fund of Hamilton

County, and the Central Indiana Community Foundation documenting grants awarded, staff changes, and major endeavors sponsored by these organizations.

**Grant Requests, 1924-1986**, is the most extensive series of the collection containing information about every request made to the foundation. This series contains correspondence, reports, and financial statements from organizations and individuals requesting grants from the Indianapolis Foundation. These files, arranged alphabetically by the name of the requestor, generally contain the proposal, grant reports, and correspondence about the grant. Because an organization often made more than one proposal, both accepted and rejected proposals along with supporting information and board recommendations are filed together. The annual reports also contain a list of grants given and official letters concerning the grant status are located in the Board of Trustees minutes. Since all of the foundation's grants are to Indianapolis organizations, the records in this series also have a significant amount of historical information on medical, social, and civic programs and organizations in the city during the twentieth century.

**Publication Files, 1950-2000**, contain brochures, newsletters, and a short history. The brochures cover the decades of the 1980s and 1990 and offer good insight to the more recent programs or initiatives of the organization. There are two short histories, one from the 1950s and the other from the 1980s. Both offer a brief look into the past giving trends of the foundation. There are four newsletters that include the Indianapolis Foundation as well as the Central Indiana Community Foundation and the Legacy Fund of Hamilton County. Although missing an occasional volume within a year, the newsletters offer a concise look at the initiatives of the groups individually and collaboratively. The video, made in 1995, is a general service announcement for the foundation.

**Scrapbooks, 1917-1945**, include 19 scrapbooks of newspaper articles on varying subject areas of importance to the overall mission of the Indianapolis Foundation. They were created during the early development of the foundation to help determine what other community foundations were doing and to help evaluate the specific needs of Indianapolis. These articles are mainly of local interest documenting local activities and events, but also include some articles of national interest. The articles are organized chronologically by subject.

**Photographs, 1916-1996**, are divided into three areas: Director and Trustees, Public Relations, and Grants. The director and trustees photographs are mostly of the executive directors and a few trustees. The public relations photographs include images used in publications such as annual reports and newspaper articles. Photographs from the grant files contain images that reflect either the need for or result of funds given by the Indianapolis Foundation.

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