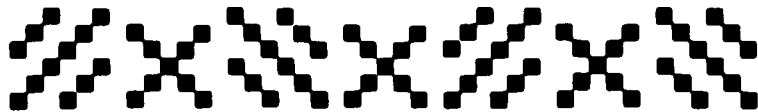


The Hoosier Sunday School: A Potent Religious/Cultural Force

*Grover L. Hartman**



In 1980 the worldwide bicentennial of the Sunday school movement commemorated the establishment of a Sabbath school in Gloucester, England, by the newspaper publisher Robert Raikes. Raikes did not create the Sunday school—there were such schools in both Britain and the British colonies in North America before he became interested in the idea—but he gave the movement focus and launched it into the orbit of eighteenth-century life as a potent social force. It was thus the socially conscious and religiously committed Raikes who bore the derision of his contemporaries in church and state in regard to Sunday schools. They called him “Bobby Wild Goose” and the children he brought together his “ragged regiment.”¹ These early critics failed to recognize that the Sabbath school brought elements of fundamental education to the children of Britain’s factories and helped to instill in those youngsters discipline and moral values based upon teaching of the Bible. Indeed, many students of the Sunday school movement contend that it deserves to stand beside the work of John Wesley in the compilation of factors which prevented Britain from indulging in the violent upheavals of the French Revolution. Still others believe that the Sunday school is the most distinctive contribution of Protestant Christianity to the worldwide church.²

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¹ Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York, 1971), 4-6; Gerald E. Knoff, “Robert Raikes, You Can Try,” *Church School* (October, 1979), 7-9.

² Lynn and Wright, *Big Little School*, 15ff.

The English Sunday school movement spread quickly to the new nation on the eastern coast of North America. Indeed, the American Sunday school soon outshone its British forerunner. Like the transplanted English sparrow, the Sunday school thrived in the United States. As Dr. D. Campbell Wyckoff of Princeton Seminary declared, the Sunday school became "as American as crab grass."³ Societies in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were quickly organized to propagate the new movement, and the Sunday school concept spread rapidly to the western frontier. Among the earliest established Sunday schools in the nation—and the first in Ohio—was that held by Mary Lake in a blockhouse in Marietta from 1791 to 1795.⁴

It has long been a widely held assumption that the Sunday school movement in Indiana and the Middle West was rooted in the eastern missionary societies and Sunday school organizations. William H. Levering of Lafayette, foremost Indiana Sunday school man of the last half of the nineteenth century, declared in his *Historical Sketches of Sunday School Work* in 1906: "The first Indiana Sunday schools were not the product of the religious enthusiasm of the pioneers. Rather they were a field for Christian missionaries from the churches of the East." Levering and others generally accepted that the first Hoosier Sunday school was established at New Albany in 1819 by the Reverend Isaac Reed, who was sent to Indiana by the Connecticut Missionary Society.⁵

Current research raises reasonable doubts with respect both to the New Albany "first" with its eastern missionary founder and the Levering thesis of exclusive eastern influence. The Philadelphia-based American Sunday School Union, organized in 1824; the American Bible Society, founded in 1821; and the American Tract Society, chartered in 1825, did play a vital fostering role in the spread of Sunday schools in the West and effectively serviced the new movement, but all of these organizations followed chronologically the founding of the first Sunday schools in Ohio and Indiana. Mary Lake's project in Marietta, for example, points to the fact that almost without

³ Crabgrass, like the Sunday school a native of Europe, became widely naturalized in North America. Rooting at the joints, even in the face of constant mowing, it, according to Wyckoff, "makes thickset patches, and mowing merely induces new flowering and fruiting spikes that shed their prolific seed." D. Campbell Wyckoff, "As American as Crab Grass: The Protestant Sunday School," *Religious Education*, LXXV (January-February, 1980), 27.

⁴ William H. Levering, *Historical Sketches of Sunday School Work in Indiana, North America, and beyond the Seas* (Indianapolis, 1906), 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

exception the pioneer Indiana Sunday schools were initially the result of consecrated effort on the part of Hoosier citizens—mostly lay men and lay women who saw a need and caught a vision of what Sunday schools could mean in the frontier setting. In addition, a large majority of the early settlers in the Hoosier state were of southern, not eastern, origin. They came from Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and western Virginia or from southern Ohio and southwestern Pennsylvania.⁶

John George Pfrimmer, a medical doctor and preacher, came to Indiana from Ohio, and evidence exists to support the assertion that he set up the first Hoosier Sunday school in Corydon in 1814.⁷ Dr. Henry Little, for more than sixty years connected with Sunday schools in Indiana, declared that there was a thriving Sunday school in Madison in 1816. Little cites the founders of this school simply as certain "Godly women" who "went around among the poor and friendless little boys and girls, got them to promise to come to school and then provided them with decent clothing so they might come together."⁸ It is likely also that Jesse L. Holman, a Kentucky lawyer and one of the original justices of the Indiana Supreme Court, organized the first Sunday school in Dearborn County (Aurora) prior to the one established by Reed in New Albany. By 1830 Holman's efforts in southeastern Indiana had produced a Sunday school union with twenty schools, 1,200 scholars, and 200 teachers.⁹ Tribute is, of course, due Reed, who created the Sunday school in New Albany—Indiana's largest pioneer town—under adverse circumstances in April, 1819.¹⁰ Reed was an eastern missionary, but he stands alone in this category among the founders of Indiana's first five Sunday schools. The pioneer Sunday school in Indianapolis was instituted by Isaac Coe, M.D., a well-trained physician and surgeon, who came from Virginia to the soon-to-be Hoosier capital in 1821 and formed an adult Bible study group in 1822 and a union Sunday school in "Mr. C. Scudder's shop" in April, 1823.¹¹

⁶ Donald F. Carmony, "Hoosiers and Their Heritage," *Indiana: A Self-Appraisal*, ed. Donald F. Carmony (Bloomington, 1966), 5-6.

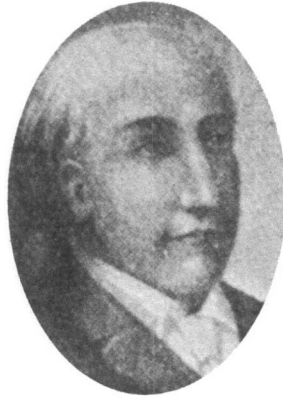
⁷ Adam B. Condo, *History of the Indiana Conference of the United Brethren in Christ* . . . (n.p., [1926]), 15-17.

⁸ *Fifteenth Annual Session of the Indiana State Sunday School Association* . . . (Chicago, 1879), 5-7.

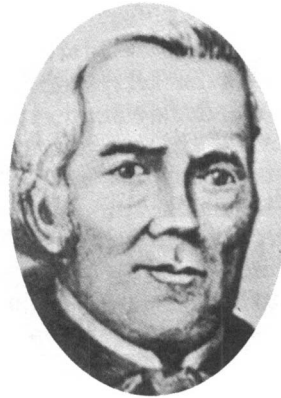
⁹ I. George Blake, *The Holmans of Veraestau* (Oxford, Ohio, 1943), 37-39, *passim*; John F. Cady, *Origin and Development of the Missionary Baptist Church in Indiana* ([Franklin, Ind.], 1942), 96.

¹⁰ Isaac Reed, *The Christian Traveller* (New York, 1828), 89.

¹¹ Indianapolis Union Sabbath School, "One Hundredth Anniversary of the Union Sabbath School in Indianapolis, April 6, 1823, through April 1, 1923," broadside (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).

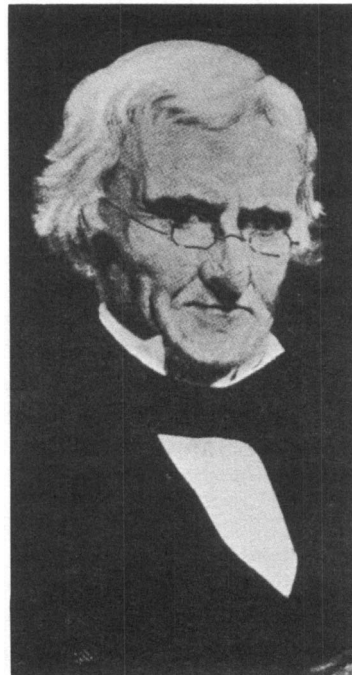


JOHN GEORGE PFRIMMER



JESSE L. HOLMAN

Reproduced from Grover L. Hartman, *A School for God's People: A History of the Sunday School Movement in Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1980), opposite 8.



ISAAC COE

Reproduced from L. C. Rudolph, *Hoosier Zion: The Presbyterians in Early Indiana* (New Haven, Conn., 1963), following 110.

If the initial impetus in the Sunday school movement in Indiana came from southern-oriented Hoosier lay workers, the spread of Sunday schools across the state and the "staying power" of the movement do owe a decisive debt to the missionaries of the eastern societies and the field workers of the American Sunday School Union. The annual reports and other communications of these groups attest to the vigor and dedication with which they prosecuted the campaign to bring Christian education to the Indiana frontier. As early as 1830 Holman brought his twenty-unit Sunday school union in Dearborn County into the American Sunday School Union, and he became a trustee of the ASSU, the first from Indiana and one of the first in the West.¹² Also in 1830 the ASSU adopted the landmark Valley Resolution that "with reliance on divine aid" determined "to establish within two years a Sunday school in every destitute place where it is practicable in the valley of the Mississippi."¹³ The resulting program had tremendous impact on the spread of Sunday schools in the West. Generally, too, the eastern organizations serviced the Indiana schools with instructional materials, such as the American Sunday School Union's libraries, which became the first significant collection of books in many Indiana communities.

The pattern of Sunday school organization and propagation in Indiana reflects both the Hoosier philosophy of independence and self-reliance and the spirit of cooperation prevalent on the frontier. Hoosiers accepted encouragement and aid from the eastern societies, but Sunday schools were predominantly lay led, a fact which also, in part, illustrates the genius of the movement.¹⁴ The "union" principle was fundamental too. Sunday schools often preceded churches and were interdenominational in character. In Indianapolis, for example, the organizing committee consisted of two Presbyterians, a Methodist, a Baptist, and a "Disciple" follower of Alexander Campbell. The curriculum was both secular and religious with spellers and readers in addition to the Bible. Printed materials (largely from the American Sunday School Union in Philadelphia though in part produced locally for the Indianapolis school and provisioned partially by a publishing enterprise in Cincinnati in

¹² *Sixth Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union*, 1830 (Philadelphia, 1830), 37, 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ Often at the beginning of the movement ministers rejected Sunday schools, declaring that the lay teachers were presumptuous interlopers on the preacher's role.

which Holman was a leader) were nonsectarian and noncontroversial. Widely representative committees reviewed books and tracts to be sure they were not offensive to any related church body. Since supporters of the Sunday school movement were split on the slavery issue, they ignored it, thus in part avoiding the schisms that occurred in many other elements of society.¹⁵

Sunday schools developed rapidly in Indiana. The fifth annual report of the American Sunday School Union in 1829 recorded one hundred Sabbath schools in the Hoosier state with 741 teachers and 5,651 scholars.¹⁶ When the first Indiana Sabbath School Convention was held in Indianapolis from October 27 to 29, 1857, 166 schools were represented by the 341 delegates. J. W. McIntyre, head of the American Sunday School Union's field staff in Indiana, reported 145 new schools organized within the year, 99 visited and aided, 906 teachers enlisted, 6,424 new scholars enrolled, \$348.00 given in libraries and text books, \$3,355.85 worth of books sold, 11,464 miles traveled, and 251 addresses given.¹⁷

Sunday schools often drew top community leadership. One influential "Sunday school man" was Calvin Fletcher, generally regarded as the "first citizen" of early Indianapolis and certainly by record the top taxpayer in the young city. In 1840 the Reverend Allen Wiley recruited Fletcher as a teacher in the Methodist Sabbath school, and in 1842 the business leader was elected one of five superintendents of the school. For seventeen years thereafter Fletcher recorded in his diary accounts of many Sunday school activities, including colorful parades, musical concerts by the children, and the first Sabbath School Convention, which he helped to organize.¹⁸ Before Fletcher laid down his responsibilities, another noted man, Benjamin Harrison, had entered the Indianapolis Sunday school scene. When the future president of the United States arrived in Indianapolis in 1854 with his young bride, he quickly affiliated with the First Presbyterian Church; and before he went off to service in the Civil War, Harrison was the Sunday school superintendent and Mrs. Harrison head of the infants' department.¹⁹ With

¹⁵ Lynn and Wright, *Big Little School*, *passim*.

¹⁶ *Fifth Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union*, 1829 (Philadelphia, 1829), 17, 18.

¹⁷ *Journal of the First Sabbath School Convention* (Indianapolis, 1858), 16.

¹⁸ Gayle Thornbrough, Dorothy Riker, and Paula Corpuz, eds., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher* (8 vols. to date, Indianapolis, 1972-), *passim*.

¹⁹ Harry J. Sievers, *Benjamin Harrison*. Volume I, *Hoosier Warrior, 1833-1865* (Chicago, 1952), 113.

this background it is easy to understand President Harrison's affirmative response to Philadelphia merchant John Wanamaker, who, on being asked to become postmaster general, accepted with the proviso that he might return on week-ends to the superintendency of his Bethany Sunday school, widely regarded as the greatest in the land.²⁰ Justice Holman led the Sunday school movement in southeastern Indiana, and Judge John Scott, author of the epoch-making article on education in the Indiana constitution of 1816, became the first president of the Indiana Sunday School Union.²¹ In Richmond the foremost Sunday school leader was Elijah Coffin, cashier of the national bank, a memorable record of whose "First Day School" in the Friends Meeting has been left by an Englishman, William Tallack, in his *Friendly Sketches in America*.²²

The Hoosier Sunday school in its first half-century contributed positively to the moral climate of frontier communities where drinking and boisterous recreation were the order of the day on the Sabbath. John J. Funk, one of the leaders in the development of Sunday schools among the Mennonites, believed that such schools were the best means of overcoming the religious illiteracy and indifference threatening society, eliminating Sabbath desecration, fostering worship and reverence, facilitating evangelism, and nurturing the spiritual life.²³ A story by Isaac Reed illustrates the negative quality of the environment to which the Sunday schools addressed themselves. An upright farmer, approached by Reed to join in the call to worship services and a Sabbath school, said he could not afford to sign a notice but would put it up at the neighborhood still where everybody would see it.²⁴ The mobilization of spiritual resources in the Sunday schools carried over to the facing of other concerns and generally advanced the total moral and religious enterprise.

Considerable evidence also points to a significant contribution by the Sunday schools to public education.²⁵ Certainly

²⁰ Lynn and Wright, *Big Little School*, 71.

²¹ *Centennial Memorial: First Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1925), 213-14.

²² William Tallack, *Friendly Sketches in America* (London, 1861), 233-37.

²³ Milo F. Kauffmann, "The Rise and Development of the Sunday Schools in the Mennonite Church in Indiana" (M.A. thesis, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago, 1931), 12.

²⁴ Reed, *Christian Traveller*, 71.

²⁵ The best discussion of the relationship of the Sunday school movement to public education is David M. McCord, "Sunday School and Public School: An

the relationship between the two evolving movements in pre-Civil War Indiana was a close one. The forward-looking Article IX of Indiana's first constitution in 1816—unique among the constitutions in the states of the Northwest Territory—called for a general system of education and established means to implement a public school fund and create public libraries. This dream was slow of realization. In 1840 George H. Dunn, state superintendent of common schools, reported that 1,521 primary schools were giving instruction to only 48,189 children out of 273,784 between the ages of five and twenty in the state.²⁶ An Indiana Sunday school missionary's report in 1837 perhaps typifies the Hoosier educational situation: "In 23 counties of the Wabash country there are, as we are informed, only 61 common schools. Several of the 23 counties have but a single school and there are five or six which have no schools at all."²⁷ Such conditions provided incentive for funding Sunday schools, and these schools often preceded the public schools, bringing the first opportunity for formal education to the children in many communities. In addition, Sunday school libraries frequently constituted the only collection of books in a pioneer community. In many instances Sunday schools also supported, encouraged, and, on occasion, provided standards of teaching for the emerging public schools. In its first annual report of 1826 the Indiana Sunday School Union enunciated as policy: "Let Sabbath schools be established wherever practicable. They will answer the double purpose of paving the way for common schools, and serving as a substitute until they are generally formed. Parents and children, becoming sensible to the sweets and benefits of learning, will unite in one loud and determined call for the permanent means of education."²⁸ Holman believed that the best teachers in the public schools were also in the Sunday schools, "one school complementary to the other."²⁹ Indeed, at least one spokesman for the American Home Missionary Society felt that deficiencies in the salaries of pious school teachers should be paid by the society as were the salaries of missionaries.³⁰

Exploration of Their Relationship with Special Reference to Indiana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1976).

²⁶ "Report of George H. Dunn, Esq., Superintendent of Common Schools," in Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1843-1844), 327.

²⁷ *Thirteenth Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia, 1837).

²⁸ Quoted in Rudolph, *Hoosier Zion*, 165.

²⁹ Blake, *Holmans of Veraestau*, 38.

³⁰ Theron Baldwin to Absalom Peters, April 12, 1836, American Home Missionary Society Collection (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library).

Black churches in particular were important in providing educational opportunities for black youth. The inevitable pattern of black settlement in Indiana included the establishment of an African Methodist Episcopal church and an accompanying school.³¹ Pastor-missionaries of the AME church moved out boldly toward the realization of the declaration of the Indiana Annual Conference of 1854: "it shall be the duty of each of our traveling preachers to establish and encourage, day and Sabbath schools in their charges, and to preach two or more sermons on the subject of education during the conference year."³²

The importance of the Sunday school as a factor in the general education of the public ended in Indiana during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Due in part to the influence of Caleb Mills, the Constitution of 1851 recognized the need for a statewide system of public schools, and subsequent legislation—though not without serious setbacks—eventually provided a financial base for such a system.³³ By the late 1800s the Indiana public school system was developing rapidly, and the involvement of the churches, whether through Sunday schools or church-sponsored weekday schools, diminished accordingly.

The second era of the Hoosier Sunday school, which represented its flowering as a force for religious education, began with the founding of the Indiana Sunday School Association in 1865. The impetus for this new thrust came from the "Illinois Band," a group of younger leaders who took control of the Illinois Sunday School Convention in 1864. Included among them were Dwight L. Moody, destined to become one of the foremost American evangelists in the latter half of the nineteenth century; Benjamin F. Jacobs, a Baptist layman who was a produce dealer and realtor in Chicago; a young Methodist clergyman, John H. Vincent; William Reynolds, a Peoria businessman; and Edward Eggleston, a Sunday school editor who later became most famous for his book *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*.³⁴ These young movers and shakers branded the old state association stodgy and inept. They went after its reformation

³¹ Herbert Lynn Heller, "Negro Education in Indiana from 1816 to 1869" (Ed.D. dissertation, School of Education, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1951), 138.

³² *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, for the District of Indiana, 1854* (Indianapolis, 1854), 16-17. See also Heller, "Negro Education in Indiana," 138-39.

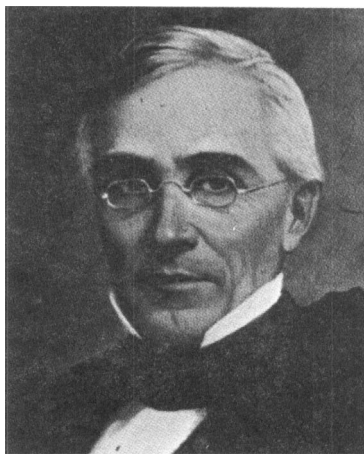
³³ Charles W. Moores, *Caleb Mills and the Indiana School System* (Indiana Historical Society Publications, Vol. III; Indianapolis, 1905), 363.

³⁴ Lynn and Wright, *Big Little School*, 56-59.



CALVIN FLETCHER

Reproduced from Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *Diary of Calvin Fletcher*. Volume I, 1817-1838 . . . (Indianapolis, 1972), frontispiece.



CALEB MILLS

Reproduced from L. C. Rudolph, *Hoosier Zion: The Presbyterians in Early Indiana* (New Haven, Conn., 1963), opposite 110.

with zest. Possessed of a genius for organization and a rare ability to attract like-minded leaders, they produced educational innovations that captured public imagination. Within a year their missionary zeal had penetrated Indiana where their recruits formed a state Sunday school association at an organizing convention in Indianapolis on May 30, 1865. The new organization built upon and preserved the corporate name of the forty-year-old State Sunday School Union.

The Indiana association grew rapidly. The second convention, held in New Albany on June 5-7, 1866, provided a preview of Indiana conventions for the rest of the century and was typical of the assemblies of the faithful in other states. Featured was a mass meeting of all the Sunday schools in the area, which meeting was opened with a rousing rendition of the song, "The Sunday School Army." A Committee on Permanent Organization was set up, and Colonel John W. Ray, an Indianapolis leader, was elected president. A lengthy discussion of the relationship of the Sunday school to the church resulted in the declaration that "The Sabbath school is the Nursery of the Lord and it shall be used as a means of replenishing the church." Another resolution called for the organization of a teachers' institute in each congressional district. Indications of an emerging social conscience also appeared in the 1866 convention. A resolution demanded that more strenuous efforts be made "to bring poor and destitute children under influence of Sabbath school instruction and culture." There was feeling that the Sunday school was becoming a middle-class institution. On the first day convention delegates received and tabled a resolution asking the schools to seek signers of temperance and anti-tobacco pledges. The next day convention delegates adopted a more general statement supporting a "great temperance reformation."³⁵

The third convention at Lafayette on June 4-7, 1867, was considered one of the best in the first decade of the Indiana Sunday School Association. The meeting place in the opera house overflowed. A combined choir of one thousand children charmed the convention, which also witnessed a lengthy procession of Sunday school scholars headed by the Star City Band. Leaders were pleased with the high level of enthusiasm in evidence. The Honorable Will Cumbach, a wartime adminis-

³⁵ The Indiana State Library and the Indiana Historical Society Library both have collections of the Indiana Sunday School Convention proceedings from which information in the following paragraphs was gleaned.

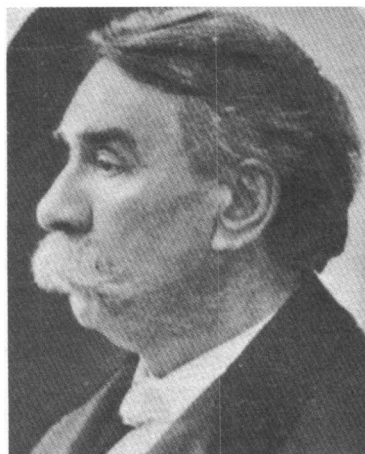
trative leader and close friend of General Lew Wallace, took over the presidency from Ray, who successfully sponsored a resolution advising each school to organize a "normal class" composed of persons willing to teach. From such trained persons teachers for the Sunday school classes could be selected.

The 1868 convention in Fort Wayne marked the appearance of the comprehensive statistical report, a characteristic of all later conventions. This first report recorded 580 schools; 46,791 scholars; an average attendance of 32,369; 2,243 scholars professing religion during the year; 80,780 volumes in libraries; 240,196 papers and pamphlets distributed; and \$13,092.84 in benevolent contributions. Noteworthy on the program was Edward Eggleston, who had yet to write *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*. Born at Vevay, Indiana, but in 1868 a Sunday school publisher in Illinois, Eggleston used this homecoming to declare his conviction that the pulpit could not be depended upon for teaching; that full periods should be given to teachers freed from the interruption of librarians bringing round the books for loan; that time should not be "wasted on the geography of Bible lands"; that memorization was being over-emphasized; that no child "should read more than he can be taught to understand"; that conditions for rewards should be such that "they can be attained by any scholar in the school"; and that the prime objective was "to lead children to Christ."

The proceedings of the Fort Wayne convention played up some of the drama and color always attached to these annual gatherings. On the second day the agenda was interrupted to hear a concert by two thousand Sunday school children. The children, in gala dress, met in their churches, then marched two abreast, led by the "splendid Jones Cornet Band," to the assembly point at Wayne Street Methodist Church, largest in the city. The lively account of the day noted that, with their teachers beside them, the children "fluttered along in white dresses and gay ribbons with beautiful flags and appropriate banners floating overall." Children of the host church sang "Glory Be to God"; those from Second Presbyterian Church offered "The Volunteer Song"; from the English Lutheran Church "Land Without a Storm"; and from Centenary Methodist "My House Upon a Rock." The boys and girls from the German Reformed school, singing in German, "maintained the most excellent perfect time and won a merited applause." The other selections were "Sing Jesus' Name" by the combined choruses of the Third and Fourth Presbyterian churches; "In a Manger Laid" by the Baptist Sunday school; "Won't You Volun-



COLONEL JOHN W. RAY



WILL CUMBACK

Reproduced from Grover L. Hartman, *A School for God's People: A History of the Sunday School Movement in Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1980), 55, 57.

teer?" by the Evans Mission and Bloomingdale schools; "O Christian Awake" by the Berry Street Methodist youth; and "Shall We Gather?" by the children of First Presbyterian Church. The program closed with all present singing the Long Meter Doxology.

In 1873 William Levering of Lafayette, who was destined to become the inspiring and effective guiding spirit of the Sunday school movement in Indiana, became for the first time an officer of the association. Appointed to collect statewide statistics, Levering went after his job with characteristic vigor and in 1874 reported 3,116 schools with 32,643 officers and teachers and 252,000 scholars. Shortly thereafter the Tippecanoe County leader was elected to the presidency of the association and with "entire consecration and consummate generalship devoted time and his great physical, mental and spiritual powers" to the full organization of the Sunday school movement in Indiana.³⁶ In the next three years President Levering traveled the length and breadth of the state, addressed hundreds of meetings, wrote over one thousand letters, prayed, prodded, and cajoled. By 1877 he could report to the convention that the Hoosier state had achieved complete standard organization. Indiana was a "Banner State," one of only three in the nation having all of its counties organized and a county convention in every one during the year. Levering proclaimed a "Year of Jubilee" and called for thanks to God for "the thousands of children gathered in and for those who spoke His name in a whisper or with a blush but now proclaim their faith unabashed." In his presidential address in 1877 Levering asserted that these grand results had been accomplished "without the expense of one dollar to anyone connected with the association." Indiana's secret, he declared, lay in the fact that "her sons and daughters have rendered all unto God as a thank offering for Jesus' sake." To keep things going the president called for the creation of an executive board "with discrimination between emotional gas and consecrated grit." The statistics for 1877 indicated 3,965 reporting schools; 39,357 teachers and officers; 310,936 scholars; an average attendance of 217,782; 7,350 received into church membership; and \$15,434.79 in benevolent contributions.³⁷

³⁶ Timothy Michelson, "Sunday Schools in Indiana," *32nd General Convention of the Ohio Sunday School Association, Marietta, Ohio, June 2-4, 1891* (Columbus, Ohio, 1891), 171ff.

³⁷ The basic account of Levering's life is "William Hagy Levering" in the book by his twin brother, Colonel John Levering, *Levering Family: History and Genealogy* (Indianapolis, 1897), 891-93.

In 1872 Indiana and its Sunday school association played a major role in one of the most significant developments in the Sunday school movement nationwide—the establishment of the International or Uniform Sunday School Lesson System. At its convention in 1867 the Indiana Sunday School Union had adopted a resolution calling for the resumption of the national conventions, which had lapsed after 1859. The first convention in the renewed series was held at Newark, New Jersey, in 1869. To it John Ray of Indianapolis carried an Indiana resolution advocating that the whole Sunday school have the same lesson at the same time. The idea met with considerable favor but was held over until the 1872 convention, which was set for Indianapolis in response to Ray's invitation. The historic 1872 conclave was held at Second Presbyterian Church, April 16 to 19. After considerable debate the convention adopted the following enabling resolution:

Resolved, That this Convention appoint a committee to consist of five clergymen and five laymen to select a course of Bible lessons for a series of years not exceeding seven, which shall, so far as they may decide possible, embrace a general study of the whole Bible, alternating between the Old and New Testaments semiannually or quarterly, as they shall deem best, and to publish a list of such lessons as fully as possible, and at least for the two years next ensuing, as early as the first of August, 1872; and that this Convention recommend their adoption by the Sunday schools of the whole country.³⁸

Thus the most audacious development in the history of the Sunday schools was launched—and on Indiana soil. Before long one could go to a Sunday school almost anywhere in the United States—and in many other countries as well—and enter into the same series of Bible studies with which he was familiar at home.

As the nineteenth century wound down, the Indiana Sunday School Association in 1888 acquired its first salaried executive, the Reverend J. E. Gilbert, D.D. As pastor of the Meridian Street Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Gilbert had developed a Sunday school teacher-training program that appealed to many leaders in Indiana. In part because he concentrated on urban areas in his attempt to develop further the state program, Gilbert was unpopular with the largely rural Sunday school movement. Funding was therefore not forthcoming, and at the Logansport convention in 1891 Gilbert's tenure was terminated. After an interim during which volunteers

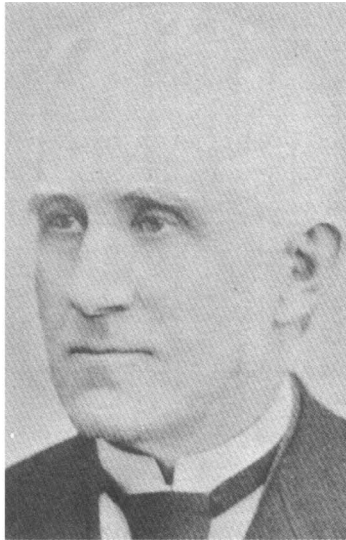
³⁸ The story of this historic convention is detailed in *Centennial Celebration: Our Heritage in Uniform Lessons, 1872-1972* (St. Louis, 1972).

again shouldered the work the association called Charles D. Meigs, Jr., to executive leadership. From 1893 to 1900 Meigs carried the movement forward decisively. One of his innovations was the launching of *The Awakener*, house organ of the Sunday school movement for fifty years.³⁹ Another of Meigs's ideas was the Home Department, a pioneer development among the nation's Sunday schools. This program enrolled persons confined to their homes and provided a curriculum for their study. Under Meigs and his successors Indiana maintained a position of national leadership. State conventions drew upward of three thousand delegates with more than five thousand gathering for the traditional picnics, concerts, and parades. The statistics reported to the convention at Muncie in 1916 indicated a high point in the Hoosier Sunday school movement: 69,958 officers and teachers, 580,231 enrollment in 5,388 schools, and average attendance of 391,957. Significant in these statistics was the listing of 3,895 chartered adult Bible classes. These classes had grown up after 1900. In some churches they not only dominated the Sunday school scene, but attendance in them was often greater than that of the worship services in the churches which fostered them.

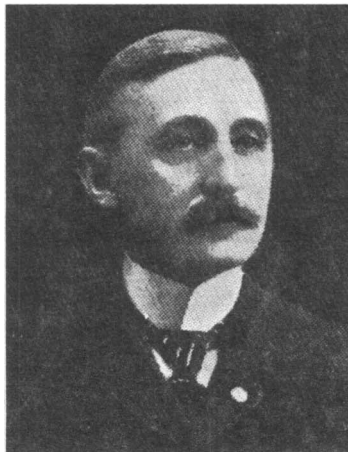
Many significant movements and developments spawned by the Sunday schools during the late nineteenth century exercised tremendous influence with regard to both Christian education and general education in the United States and in Indiana. The first notable innovation was the chautauqua. The guiding light of this development was Methodist Bishop John H. Vincent, longtime chairman of the International Uniform Sunday School Lesson Committee. Having acquired the old camp meeting grounds on Lake Chautauqua in northwestern New York, Bishop Vincent launched the new institution in 1874 as a center where the study of the Bible and Sunday school teaching methods could be refined.⁴⁰ By 1894, stemming from the New York beginning, ten thousand local study circles had been established, 7,590 of them in towns under 3,500 population. One of the six most significant statewide chautauqua assemblies was at Winona Lake, Indiana. Other large ones were begun by Indiana Baptists on Pine Lake near Angola and on the Assembly Grounds of the Northwest Indiana Methodist

³⁹ Volume I, Number 1, of *The Awakener* came out in October, 1893. The numbering continues in *The Indiana Church Councilor*, a publication of the Indiana Council of Churches, which succeeded the Indiana Sunday School Association in 1942.

⁴⁰ "The Chautauqua Centennial," *The Christian*, III (July 15, 1973), 10-11.



WILLIAM H. LEVERING



CHARLES D. MEIGS, JR.

Reproduced from Grover L. Hartman, *A School for God's People: A History of the Sunday School Movement in Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1980), 53, 62.

Conference at Battle Ground. Others sprang up elsewhere, often in tabernacles, sometimes in tents. Only one chautauqua remains in operation in Indiana—a sixteen-day program at Fountain Park near Remington. Not all chautauquas, of course, were religiously sponsored or even religiously oriented, but at the peak of the movement in the early 1920s, thirty million Americans attended such meetings in twelve thousand small towns coast to coast.

Many see the Sunday schools as the first American adult education centers and the inspiration for the adult education movement generally.⁴¹ William Rainey Harper moved from a professorship at Chautauqua to the presidency of the University of Chicago. There he developed, among other noteworthy educational offerings, an impressive program of adult education centered on a widespread network of correspondence courses. At one time 150,000 Americans were reputedly enrolled in such courses in Greek and Hebrew. Harper also founded the Religious Education Association.

Beginning about 1920, Vacation Bible Schools became a concern of the Sunday school forces. In that year Dr. Edward R. Bartlett came from Minneapolis to the Indiana State Convention to speak on "Utilizing Vacation Time for Religious Education." Soon the Children's Division of the Sunday school association assumed responsibility for promoting the vacation schools, and training programs were devised to prepare teachers and administrators of these summer schools of religion.

In the conventions of the early years of the twentieth century resolutions appeared in support of accredited Bible study courses in Indiana high schools. Such a program was instituted through the State Department of Public Instruction, and many Hoosier high school students in the 1920s and 1930s accumulated half-credits toward graduation for a semester's study of the Old or New Testament. The classes were usually taught by pastors or religious educators outside the school faculties, and the state-administered examinations were sent to Indianapolis for grading by members of the State Department of Public Instruction.

Indiana was the location of the pioneer American weekday religious education program. Begun in Gary in 1914 as a result of the vision of William Wirt, superintendent of that city's

⁴¹ C. Hartley Grattan, *In Quest of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Adult Education* (New York, 1955), 71-72, 166-67, *passim*.

schools, the weekday movement spread rapidly across Indiana and over the nation.⁴² Approximately 50,000 children, mostly in the fourth and fifth grades, attended released-time classes at the peak of the program's popularity in Indiana. When legal decisions ruled out weekday classes within the schools themselves, the Christian education forces worked for the legalization of locally sponsored classes outside school buildings in nearby churches or mobile classrooms. In 1943, for example, the state Sunday school convention declared its support for House Bill 195, the Religious Education Bill, which allowed weekday released-time classes up to 120 minutes a week.

Sunday schools even evolved their own particular style of architecture—the famous (or, to some critics, infamous) “Akron Plan.” Developed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the Ohio city from which it took its name, the Akron-style arrangement was chosen by almost all congregations at the end of the Victorian era when they undertook construction of religious education facilities. The plan called for a theater-style central room with a stage from which the superintendent conducted the Sunday school. This central room provided the assembly hall for opening and closing exercises and for plays, concerts, and other events rising out of the Sunday school program. On the stage, also, there was room for the Sunday school orchestra, which often played to welcome the arriving “scholars” and later marched them off to class. The assembly hall might also be the locale for the men’s Bible class (although frequently this class could only be accommodated in the sanctuary or the church dining room in the basement). The Akron design was well adapted to schools using the uniform lessons, for from his lofty pinnacle on the stage the superintendent could actually see into the many classes in alcoves off the central hall and sometimes off the balcony as well when such a feature was included by the architect.⁴³

In 1920 the Interchurch World Movement conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the Indiana Sunday schools, one of five state systems projected to be so surveyed. Only the Indiana study was completed, and the New York-based Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, chaired by Dr. John R. Mott,

⁴² Erwin R. Shaver, *The Weekday Church School: How to Organize and Conduct a Program of Weekday Religious Education on Released Time* (Boston, 1956), 13.

⁴³ One of the best examples of the Akron-style Sunday school facility is at Central Avenue United Methodist Church, 12th Street at Central Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.



AKRON STYLE SUNDAY SCHOOL FACILITY AT CENTRAL AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

Reproduced from Grover L. Hartman, *A School for God's People: A History of the Sunday School Movement in Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1980), 87.

published the findings in 1923.⁴⁴ According to the survey, Indiana's churches had not, for the most part, assumed responsibility for organizing, administering, or planning their church schools, most of which were quite small. Of those studied, the median school was in a one-room church with eight classes, and in 65 percent of the schools the average attendance was under one hundred. Income for the church schools was derived from regular and special offerings and from individual contributions. The schools spent 55.8 percent of their resources on themselves and 44.2 percent on other religious work, with denominational causes—especially missions—placing highest. Teachers were profiled as sincere, devoted Christians of mature years, untrained and unsupervised.

One result of the 1920 survey was increased emphasis on a higher degree of professionalism in the Sunday school movement. In succeeding decades Hoosier Sunday schools reflected this national trend. The International Council of Religious Education, founded in 1920, was itself a product of and in turn promoted the new ideas. Leaders in the movement questioned the International Uniform Lessons and suggested that they be replaced by graded lessons tailored to the maturity level of the students. Denominations at long last became full partners in the educational enterprise. On December 28, 1923, at the old English Hotel in Indianapolis, representatives of the Indiana denominations and of the county Sunday school organizations met to constitute the Indiana Sunday School Council of Religious Education. Half of the board of the new organization was to be elected by the state Sunday school convention and half by the affiliating denominations.⁴⁵ Indiana soon adopted the pattern of a comprehensive council of churches that was being advanced by field staffs of the Federal Council of Churches, representing the Christian life and work aspect of American Protestantism, and of the International Council of Religious Education. The Indiana Council of Churches was organized in January, 1943, with the Indiana Council of Christian Education (successor of the 1923 Sunday School Council of Religious Education) becoming the educational division of a denominationally based structure.⁴⁶

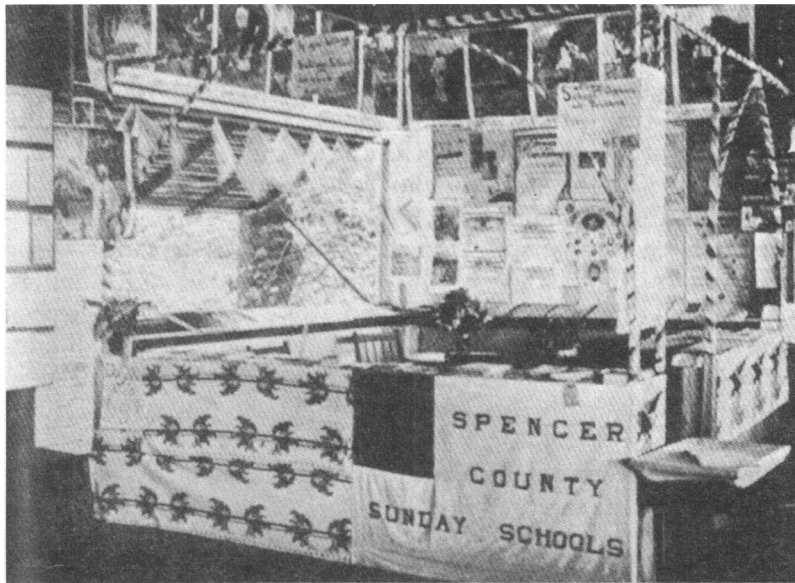
⁴⁴ Walter S. Athearn, *The Religious Education of Protestants in an American Commonwealth* (New York, 1923).

⁴⁵ "Facing the Facts," *The Awakener*, XXXI (January, 1924), 4.

⁴⁶ "The Indiana Council of Churches," *ibid.*, LI (January, 1943), 2.



PINE GROVE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, WHITE COUNTY, INDIANA. TYPICAL HOME OF THE RURAL SUNDAY SCHOOL.



SPENCER COUNTY, INDIANA, SUNDAY SCHOOL EXHIBIT AT COUNTY FAIR, ROCKPORT

Reproduced from Walter S. Athearn *et al.*, *Religious Education of Protestants in an American Commonwealth* (Indiana Survey of Religious Education, Vol. I, New York, 1923), opposite 528.



SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP, c. 1906
UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH, OCKLEY, INDIANA

Reproduced from C. E. Gerard and Michael G. Grif-
fey, *The Carroll County Sesquicentennial Publica-
tions, 1824-1828-1974-1978: A Photographic Por-
trayal of Old Life in a Hoosier Community, the
Pictorial History of Carroll County* (Delphi, Ind.,
1977).



OLIVE BRANCH CHRISTIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL
INDIANAPOLIS, MARCH 13, 1921

Bretzman Collection, Courtesy Indiana Historical
Society Library, Indianapolis.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL
INDIANAPOLIS, JULY 1, 1923

Bretzman Collection, Courtesy Indiana Historical
Society Library, Indianapolis.



MOTHER GOOSE PARTY, PRIMARY DEPARTMENT
CENTRAL AVENUE M. E. CHURCH, INDIANAPOLIS, APRIL 9, 1915

Bretzman Collection, Courtesy Indiana Historical
Society Library, Indianapolis.

In the past twenty years Sunday schools in the mainline Protestant churches have declined. As an example, average attendance in Sunday schools of the Indiana Baptist Convention (American Baptist) fell from 48,928 in 1958 to 34,375 in 1975 (a 30 percent drop). For the United Methodist churches enrollment went from 335,033 in 1960 to 183,656 in 1978 (a 45 percent loss) and average attendance dropped from 169,562 to 90,349 (47 percent). The Southern Baptists, the Assemblies of God, and the independent, fundamental Baptists and Christians maintain the largest Sunday schools in Indiana today. These churches are reviving the Indiana Sunday School Convention, which lapsed in the 1950s, and are quick to assert that they now carry the revered Sunday school banner. Mainline Protestant churches, in which the number of Sunday schools, enrollment, and attendance have declined during the last twenty years, continue to evaluate their place in the Sunday school movement and the place of the Sunday school overall as a means of nurturing Christian faith and practice.