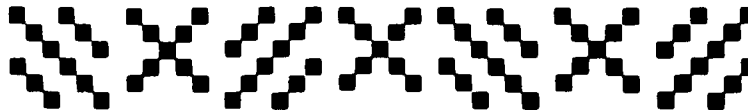


The Light of Reason: Hoosier Freethought
and the Indiana Rationalist Association,
1909-1913

*Robert M. Taylor, Jr.**



In 1909 Indiana freethinkers launched their first statewide organization, the Indiana Rationalist Association. At its fifth convention, in 1913, the membership dissolved the state body and re-formed as the National Rationalist Association. In shaping these two societies, Hoosiers shared in the leadership of the country's freethought movement and its efforts to combat religion's influence in American life. A description of the Indiana organization sheds light on a little-known aspect of the history of Indiana and of American freethought.

The term "freethinker" refers to persons who view institutional religion and its theology, doctrines, clergy, and scriptures as expressions of superstition and irrationality. Trusting in the superiority of natural law and scientific inquiry, freethinkers historically have organized, published, lectured, and debated in an attempt to persuade individuals to cast off the yoke of other-worldly concerns. Freethought in the United States has waxed and waned over the past two centuries. It emerged from the late-eighteenth-century American enlightenment, itself a stepchild of the European "Age of Reason." In the nineteenth century freethought initially was voiced by such radical deists as Ethan Allen, Elihu Palmer, and Thomas Paine. The immigration of rationalists from Europe, along with public displeasure with blasphemy trials, swelled freethought ranks. Unitarianism, Universalism, and Transcendentalism paved the way into freethought for some persons.¹

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¹ Practically all of the work on American freethought has focused on the nineteenth century. The two basic volumes on the subject are Albert Post, *Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850* (New York, 1943), and Sidney

After the Civil War the popularization of ideas concerning evolution, the beginning of studies in comparative religion, the subjection of scripture to literary criticism, and the development of a scientific positivism created an atmosphere of skepticism concerning religion. This "Golden Age" of freethought corresponded to the life of the "archscoffer," Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), America's premier orator and rationalist.² Three events that occurred in the 1870s had long-range significance for freethought. With the publication of the Nine Demands of Liberalism in 1872, freethinkers put forth a basic platform, the core of which has never been abandoned. The Demands called for taxing church properties, excluding chaplains from legislatures and military units, withholding public funds from sectarian educational and charitable institutions, and abolishing Bible readings in schools, judicial oaths, and Sunday observance laws. The second event was the establishment in 1873 of the *Truth Seeker*, the most influential and durable of freethought papers. Still in publication, the *Truth Seeker* "was almost an organization in itself, for it served as a focal point around which gathered several thousand loyal partisans."³ Lastly, the creation in 1876 of the National Liberal League, subsequently the American Secular Union, furnished freethinkers an often weak but nonetheless essential rallying point for almost fifty years.⁴

Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (New York, 1943). A survey of freethought up to the present and the most comprehensive bibliography published to date are in Marshall G. Brown and Gordon Stein, *Freethought in the United States: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Westport, Conn., 1978). A major source for pre-twentieth-century personalities is Samuel Porter Putnam's *Four Hundred Years of Freethought* (New York, 1894). George E. Macdonald's *Fifty Years of Freethought; Being the Story of the Truth Seeker, with the Natural History of its Third Editor* (2 vols., New York, 1929), is a year-by-year summary of freethought news; only Macdonald's book makes reference to the Indiana society. Of related interest is Martin Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland, 1961). Among the various histories of Indiana, only Emma Lou Thornbrough's *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis, 1965) touches on freethought.

² To gain an appreciation of the scope of Ingersoll's work see Gordon Stein, *Robert G. Ingersoll: A Checklist* (Kent, Ohio, 1969). Biographies of Ingersoll include Orvin Larson, *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* (New York, 1962), and Clarence H. Cramer, *Royal Bob* (Indianapolis, 1952).

³ Warren, *American Freethought*, 26, 161-62. The Nine Demands of Liberalism appeared April 6, 1872, in *The Index*, the official organ of the Free Religious Association, founded in 1867 by a group of radical Unitarians.

⁴ For the turbulent history of the National Liberal League and its transformation to the American Secular Union, see Warren, *American Freethought*, 162ff; Stow Parsons, *Free Religion: An American Faith* (New Haven, 1947), 118-29; and Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, II, 360-62.

A vigorous, if amorphous, freethought existed in nineteenth-century Indiana. To churchmen in the early 1800s frontier life bred infectious godlessness because of its isolation, feverish business speculation, and intemperance. In attempting to plant Christianity throughout the West the embattled home missionary discovered infertile soil, and Indiana "always had the name of being the hardest to cultivate."⁵ The minister confronted the pervasive influence of antireligious views emanating from the New Harmony, Indiana, communal experiment of Robert Owen. The *New Harmony Gazette*, later the *Free Inquirer*, ranked first among the nation's freethought papers from 1825 to 1835. Pockets of freethought centered in the Switzerland County town of Patriot and Union County's Philomath. In the latter the Universalist pioneer Jonathan Kidwell published the *Philomath Encyclopedia* to voice his heretical beliefs. To his conservative brethren and the rest of Hoosier Christendom, Kidwell was an infidel and Philomath was "the city of refuge for outcasts of the Universalist ministry."⁶ The flourishing foreign language freethought press had its *Freie Presse von Indiana*, brought out in Indianapolis from 1853 to 1866.⁷

Noteworthy Indiana rationalists included Clemens Vonnegut, Sr., proprietor of Vonnegut Hardware Company in Indianapolis and an architect of that city's German Association of Freethinkers, which was founded in 1870.⁸ Kersey Graves, of Wayne County, authored *The World's Sixteen Saviors; or, Christianity Before Christ*, one of the best-selling freethought books ever published.⁹ The *Ironclad Age*, an Indianapolis weekly edited by Dr. Jasper Roland Monroe, claimed three thousand subscribers in the late 1880s. Subtitled "A Paper with Few Principles," it was touted as "the only straight atheistic

⁵ *Home Missionary*, IX (April, 1837), 210.

⁶ Quoted in Elmo Arnold Robinson, "Universalism in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XIII (March, 1917), 17. See Robinson's two-part article for details of Kidwell's career and his intradenominational problems.

⁷ John W. Miller, *Indiana Newspaper Bibliography* (Indianapolis, 1982), 268, and Brown and Stein, *Freethought in the United States*, 97.

⁸ Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 633. Upon retirement in 1896 Vonnegut devoted his time to study and writing. He authored a German translation of Ingersoll's "Open Letter to Indianapolis Clergymen" and *A Proposed Guide for Instruction in Morals from the Standpoint of a Freethinker for Adult Persons, Offered by a Dilettante* (Indianapolis, 1900).

⁹ Kersey Graves, *The World's Sixteen Saviors; or, Christianity Before Christ* (Boston, 1874); Brown and Stein, *Freethought in the United States*, 55. Graves's *Sixteen Saviors* prompted an exchange of arguments in the Richmond (Ind.) *Telegram* between the author and John T. Perry, subsequently reprinted as John T. Perry, *Sixteen Saviors, or One? The Gospels Not Brahmanic* (Cincinnati, 1879).

paper now or ever published in the world or out of it."¹⁰ Another capital city paper, the *Iconoclast*, claimed it would "owe no allegiance whatever to gods or priests, angels or devils."¹¹ George Washington Julian, United States senator from Centerville, appeared at several freethought encampments, and the *Truth Seeker* made numerous positive references to the antireligious speeches of David Starr Jordan, president of Indiana University.¹²

Except for the German freethinkers, organizational efforts came to naught. Apparently, the American Secular Union did not establish an auxiliary in Indiana, although Graves may have had this in mind in 1880 when he noted that a few acquaintances were trying to organize.¹³ Monroe, of the *Ironclad Age*, proposed in 1882 a society called the Legion of Honor.¹⁴ He received some memberships following his announcement, but the plan failed to jell. Despite the absence of organizations Indiana freethinkers often joined associations in other states.¹⁵

Freethinkers generally failed to build harmonious, long-lasting, and effective organizations, as they held widely diverse viewpoints. How could freethought, a writer wondered in 1890, encompass everyone from anarchists to spiritualists, "every Mother's soul of whom considers his own ism as the particular point at issue, and make them tow a line and work in unison . . . ?"¹⁶ Rationalism's commitment to total liberty of expression and to decentralized societies, and its incorporation of a broad range of ideas, clashed repeatedly with its essential need for a unified front. Thus, when freethinkers formed associations and held meetings, the unquestioned ideal of dechristianizing the world often gave way to ideological tangents,

¹⁰ *Ironclad Age*, March 24, 1894. Monroe founded the *Rockford Herald* in Jackson County in 1855, moving the paper to Seymour in 1857 and renaming it the *Seymour Times*. In 1882 the publication came to Indianapolis as the *Age*, subsequently the *Ironclad Age*. Monroe's presses in Seymour and Indianapolis cranked out scores of freethought pamphlets and books authored by the doctor and others. On Monroe's life see especially his obituary and acknowledgments in the *Ironclad Age*, November 4, 1891.

¹¹ *Iconoclast*, March 4, 1882. This paper, begun at Noblesville, Indiana, in 1881 by W.H. LaMaster, was banned from the mails a year after its debut.

¹² Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, I, 266, II, 143, 337.

¹³ Warren, *American Freethought*, 203.

¹⁴ *The Age*, September 9, 1882.

¹⁵ For instance, the New York State Freethinkers' Association counted fifteen members from Indiana in 1882 (Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Free-Thought*, I, 204n).

¹⁶ Quoted in Warren, *American Freethought*, 33n.

tactical quarrels, and personality parades. Occasionally the sheer bravura or reputation of leaders controlled the proceedings. If the strong hand of an able leader was removed, however, intrinsic conflicts surfaced and jeopardized any group's existence. By and large, freethought's difficulties with freedom and order in structuring its crusade resulted in short-lived organizations, an inordinate amount of discussion of organizational questions, and little immediate social impact.

The twentieth century opened with freethought at low ebb. Death was taking its toll of a number of the old guard.¹⁷ The American Secular Union had declined by 1900, and it did not meet several years in the next decade.¹⁸ This period was, in fact, the beginning of the end for the one national body that had been involved with most freethought happenings for about twenty years. In reference to the languishing freethought movement, an editor of the *Truth Seeker* observed in 1904 "a falling away" of the country's freethought presses, and in 1907 he remarked that "One looking for a record of organized activity . . . will find little of it."¹⁹ These kinds of sentiments inevitably gave rise to organizational considerations. No direct evidence links the establishment of the Indiana Rationalist Association with these concerns; yet it is reasonable to assume that to some extent its creation and subsequent transformation into a national society were rooted in the prevailing anxiety about the circumstances and future of freethought.

For the most part the behind-the-scenes activity leading to the formation of the Indiana Rationalist Association remains hidden, but several significant preliminary events have come to light. On Sunday afternoon, January 3, 1909, sixty-seven persons met in Muncie, Indiana, to establish the Humanitarian Society. The society's main purpose was to inaugurate a series of free public weekly lectures on subjects of general interest. The organizers adopted a constitution and elected officers. The cost of defraying speakers' expenses and auditorium rental came from membership dues of twenty-five cents monthly and from voluntary collections at the door.²⁰ Each Sunday, from

¹⁷ Between 1898 and 1907 the deceased included Ingersoll; Richard B. Westbrook, past president of the American Secular Union; George J. Holyoake, the British "father of secularism"; and Moncure Conway, the biographer of Thomas Paine. Gone too were such favored theorists as Herbert Spencer and Frederick Nietzsche.

¹⁸ Brown and Stein, *Freethought in the United States*, 53, 74.

¹⁹ Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, II, 252, 296.

²⁰ Muncie *Morning Star*, January 4, 1909; *Truth Seeker*, January 23, 1909.

January through May of 1909, audiences at Muncie's Royal Theatre or the Vaudelle Theatre heard talks on subjects ranging from "Life and Its Mysteries" to "The Origin and Evolution of the Horse," from "Crimes and Criminals" to "The World's Saviors." On occasion, the Vaterland Quartette presented musical selections.²¹ Though it resembled the typical social and educational forum found in communities throughout the nation, the Humanitarian Society possessed a freethought bias. The society descended from a line of Muncie organizations catering to liberals, beginning with the Scientific and Literary Association established in 1878. This association's stated object was "scientific investigation and promotion of literary culture," but some persons charged that it pushed "infidelity as the prevailing sentiment."²²

George H. Koons (1848-1919), a charter member of the Scientific and Literary Association, assumed the presidency of Muncie's Humanitarian Society in 1909. Koons, a Universalist and a native of Henry County, Indiana, graduated from Indiana University's law department and practiced in Middletown before removing to Muncie in 1874. From 1892 to 1898 he served as a Delaware County judge.²³ Minos Winfield Lee (1853-1919), another Universalist, was vice-president of the society. Reared in Randolph County, Indiana, Lee was a graduate of Winchester High School, and later an attorney in Muncie and Bluffton. He appears to have been a candidate for Congress in 1878 and for state attorney general in 1882 on the Greenback party ticket. In 1909 he worked for the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company in Muncie. Lee so valued the work of the Humanitarian Society that he could predict its effects "would be infinitely better for Muncie than the location of forty of the best factories in the country."²⁴ The secretary of the organiza-

²¹ Speakers, as listed in the *Muncie Morning Star* and *Muncie Sunday Star*, included, from Indianapolis, Dr. James A. Houser, a physician; Flavius J. Van Vohris and Willets A. Bastian, attorneys; Felix T. McWhirter, president of the People's State Bank; and Leroy Snyder. From Bluffton came W.W. Walbert and Levi Mock, attorneys. Florence Wattles of Elwood and her father, Wallace D. Wattles, pastor of the People's Church at Marion, spoke also, as did C.X. Smith of Muncie and Joseph T. Day of Dunkirk.

²² Quoted in Frank D. Haimbaugh, ed., *History of Delaware County, Indiana* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1924), I, 376-77.

²³ Charles W. Taylor, *Biographical Sketches and Review of the Bench and Bar of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1895), 493; *Muncie Morning Star*, October 18, 1919; *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Indiana State Bar Association* . . . (Indianapolis, 1920), 164-66.

²⁴ Quote from *Muncie Morning Star*, March 1, 1909. For information on Lee, see *Biographical and Historical Record of Adams and Wells Counties, Indiana* . . . (Chicago, 1887), 733; *Muncie Morning Star*, October 24, 1919.

tion was Dr. Herbert D. Fair (1868-1962), the third Universalist among the leaders. Born in New York, Fair received his medical training in Milwaukee and Chicago and participated in the Spanish-American War before settling in Muncie in 1900. Fair, while secretary, contributed lengthy articles to the *Truth Seeker*, including the cleverly titled "Curious Capers of Christian Converts, with Critical Comments of a Contemporary Contemplator."²⁵

The most ardent freethinker among the society's officers and the founder and leading force of the organization was its treasurer, Dr. Thomas J. Bowles (1836-1924). The seventy-three-year-old Muncie physician, born in Milroy, Rush County, and brought up by his mother in the Christian church, followed his father's agnostic leanings. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century Bowles contributed articles and subscribed to freethought papers, including the *Ironclad Age*. Active in Muncie's liberal groups, he is credited with organizing the Scientific and Literary Association. In 1901, when a small number of dissidents bolted the American Secular Union and began a short-lived political unit named the National Liberty party, Bowles was its president. A county history portrayed Bowles as "a bitter opponent of dogmatic theology, believing it to be an enemy to human progress; an agnostic in belief, the doctor is an evolutionist and endorses Darwin's theory to the letter."²⁶

Hardly the proverbial village atheists, these four community stalwarts guided the Humanitarian Society for the five months of its existence. Members of the society spoke out at times on social issues, in particular decrying intolerance shown the Irish and condemning the "fanatical liquor prohibitionists" as threats to civil liberty.²⁷ At one point, Muncie's ministers fought back and offered their own lecture series at the same

²⁵ *Truth Seeker*, February 20, 27, March 6, 1909; *Journal of the Indiana State Medical Association*, LV (May, 1962), 698; *Muncie Morning Star*, March 3, 1962.

²⁶ Quote from *A Portrait and Biographical Record of Delaware County, Indiana* . . . (Chicago, 1894), 205. For information on Bowles, see also *Truth Seeker*, September 1, 1923; G.W.H. Kemper, ed., *A Twentieth Century History of Delaware County* (2 vols., Chicago, 1908), 650-51; Haimbaugh, *History of Delaware County*, I, 376-77; *Muncie Morning Star*, April 20, 1924; *Indianapolis News*, April 21, 1924.

²⁷ *Muncie Morning Star*, March 6, April 2, 1909. Muncie's contest on the local option question of liquor prohibition angered the liberals, especially when they thought the churches favored a delay in the election to allow time for the revivalist Billy Sunday to rally more of the citizens to the "dry" cause. Minos Lee, who doubted the legality of the local option law, called Sunday "an emotional sensational, religious hypocrite and blackguard"; *ibid.*, March 21, 1909.

time on Sunday afternoons, a ploy one member of the Humanitarian Society characterized as the "ministerial hypocritical union."²⁸ The significance of the Humanitarian Society lies in its inclusion of persons and principles destined to play prominent parts in subsequent freethought endeavors. Perhaps the society also gave its leaders a chance to assess local support for rationalist ideas and to gauge one another's willingness to attempt to broaden organizational freethought in the state.

A model for an association of Indiana freethinkers existed in neighboring Ohio. The Buckeye Secular Union held its seventh annual meeting September 10-11, 1909, in Columbus, Ohio. A sprinkling of Hoosiers mingled with the 150 men and women attending the conference. On the program was New Yorker Libby Culbertson Macdonald, widow of Eugene M. Macdonald, past editor of the *Truth Seeker* and a former president of the American Secular Union. Libby Macdonald would play a critical role in the Indiana Rationalist Association. Bowles attended and lectured on "The Decay of Orthodoxy." His comment that "we have no national freethought association" was misleading considering the existing, but woefully weak, American Secular Union. George Roberts, president of the Ohio society, had a tongue-in-cheek response to Bowles: "Freethinkers don't get together because they don't believe in hell and there is nothing to worry about."²⁹

Another Hoosier rationalist at the Ohio conclave was David W. Sanders (1872-1912) of Covington, Fountain County. Raised in Wallace in a Lutheran family, Sanders attended Wabash College and Indiana University, taught school, and became the first principal of Wallace's high school in 1895. In 1902 he founded and edited the *Fountain County Citizen* in Covington. His Democratic party organ lasted one year, during which time Sanders finished a controversial text on Indiana civil government, published in 1903. He lived in Indianapolis in 1909, supervising the publication of various editions of his book. An announcement by Sanders at the Ohio convention furnishes the first solid evidence of an impending freethought organization in Indiana. The *Truth Seeker* quotes Sanders as telling his audience that "steps were taken this morning for an Indiana Organization with Dr. Bowles as chairman. I invite

²⁸ *Truth Seeker*, March 13, 1909.

²⁹ *Ohio State Journal*, September 11, 12, 1909; *Truth Seeker*, October 2, 1909.

you to Indianapolis, Sunday, November 21, to the first convention of the Indiana Secular Association."³⁰

Presumably, a group of Hoosiers caucused in Ohio and hammered out a state organization. While it is impossible to determine the members of this group, it is probable that the six men later designated as founders of the Indiana Rationalist Association were present. Bowles and Sanders were two of the organizers. The others included J. Wesley Whicker (born 1863) of Attica, Fountain County. Whicker (also spelled Whickar, Whickcar) attended the Indiana State Normal School at Terre Haute prior to launching a career as a prominent farmer and lawyer in Attica. His father was a Spiritualist. Whicker perhaps is best known as the author of *Historical Sketches of the Wabash Valley*.³¹ Another founder was seventy-five-year-old Schuyler LaTourette (1834-1926), who like Sanders and Whicker lived in Fountain County. LaTourette farmed near Covington all his life. His parents, among the first settlers in the county, were weavers whose coverlets ranked among the finest in Indiana. LaTourette earned the rank of captain in the Civil War. Sometimes referred to as the "grand old man" of Fountain County, LaTourette lived out his days farming, raising livestock, and caring for five orphans.³² Another founder, Isaiah M. Miller (1851-1941), farmed at Upland in Grant County. A bachelor who claimed descent from a long line of rationalists, Miller traveled widely and frequented freethought gatherings. Largely self-educated, he sent letters and articles to various freethought publications, farm journals, and newspapers, especially the Cincinnati *Enquirer*. He wrote several small books of verse. A line in his *Fundamentals of Holiness*

³⁰ *Truth Seeker*, October 2, 1909. Apparently the initial designation, Indiana Secular Association, was changed after the Ohio meeting. Sanders used the words Indiana Rationalist Association in the *Truth Seeker*, October 23, 1909. Sanders's major writings include: D.W. Sanders, *A Manual of Civil Government of the Township and County, Town and City* . . . (Covington, Ind., 1903); and *Church Creeds and Party Platforms; A Comparison of Catholic Preachers, Campbellite Priests, and Ministers of Other "Christian" Churches* . . . (Indianapolis, 1907).

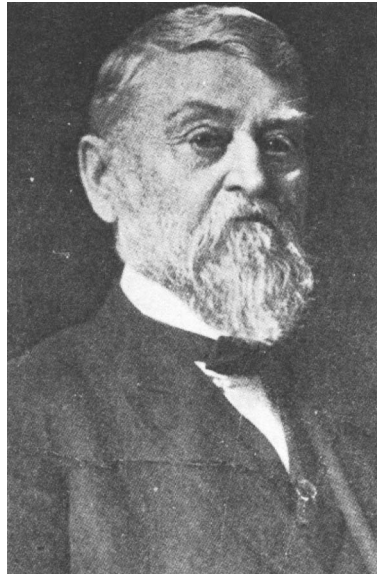
³¹ Brief biographical notes accompany the pictures of the six founders in David Sanders, ed., *The Light of Reason* (Indianapolis, [1911]), 1-3. On Whicker see the "foreword" (by Harry F. Ross) of his *Historical Sketches of the Wabash Valley* (Attica, 1916); also Thomas A. Clifton, ed., *Past and Present of Fountain and Warren Counties, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1913), 562-63. Whicker set forth his freethought stance in the *Fountain-Warren Democrat*, December 9, 1909.

³² H.W. Beckwith, *History of Fountain County, Together with Historic Notes on the Wabash Valley* . . . (Chicago, 1881), 387-88; Clifton, *Past and Present*, 472-74; *Covington Republican*, March 26, 1926; *Indianapolis Star*, April 15, 1926; Pauline Montgomery, *Indiana Coverlet Weavers and Their Coverlets* (Indianapolis, 1974), 67-69.

LEADERS OF INDIANA RATIONALISM



DAVID W. SANDERS



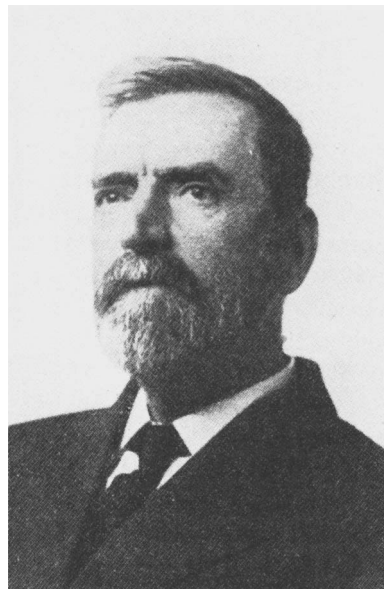
DR. T.J. BOWLES



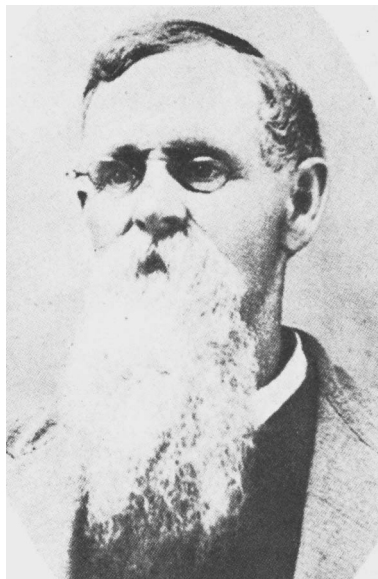
WILLIAM Y. BUCK



JOHN WESLEY WHICKER



I.M. MILLER



SCHUYLER LATOURETTE

Reproduced from David Sanders, ed., *The Light of Reason* (Indianapolis, [1911]), 1-3.

goes: "But for the system of graft/ there would be little preaching/ for there's few don't get a draft/ in a Sunday's fleecing." In 1938 Miller deeded seven hundred acres to Purdue University, which now operates it as the Miller Purdue Experimental Farm.³³ About Muncie's William Y. Buck, the sixth founder, little is known. He served as a correspondent to the *Truth Seeker* for Muncie's Humanitarian Society. In 1909 the *Light of Reason* identified him as supervisor of the plating department of the Ontario Silver Company (now the Ontario Company). He reportedly invented a silver-plating process called "Buck's Silver Deposit System," which to the hardly unbiased writer in the *Light of Reason* (probably Sanders) made Buck "probably the most widely known electro-plater in the country."³⁴

These men were part of the network of freethinkers who provided the leadership for midwestern rationalism. Members of this informal directory joined one another's societies, exchanged platforms at yearly meetings, contributed material to each other's publications, and held offices in several organizations simultaneously. A St. Louis, Missouri, assembly of freethinkers, which took place a few weeks before the initial meeting of the Indiana Rationalist Association, illustrates this web of authority. Bowles, Sanders, and other Hoosiers traveled to St. Louis in early November, 1909, to participate in the creation of a national society called the American Rationalist Association. Sanders was chosen secretary-treasurer, and Bowles was appointed one of the honorary state vice-presidents. John R. Charlesworth, the president, a veteran of the freethought lectern, had served as secretary of the Freethought Federation of America in 1892. In 1909 he worked as editor of the *Blue Grass Blade*, a libertarian paper out of Lexington, Kentucky.³⁵ Hoosier subscribers to the *Blue Grass Blade* included Bowles, I.M. Miller, and Albert P. Johnson, a railroad watchman from Vincennes. Johnson attended the St. Louis

³³ Miller's writings include *Memoirs of Millerton by I.M. Miller, August Eighth, 1925* (n.p., n.d.). Millerton was the name of his farm. He also wrote *Fundamentals of Holiness* (n.p., n.d.), and *Hoosier Halos in Hocus Pocus on Genus Homo's of Facts and Follies by I.M. Miller of Millerton, 1838-1928* (n.p., n.d.). On his life see the Sunday Marion *Chronicle-Tribune*, March 22, 1941, December 7, 1958. There are biographical allusions throughout Miller's poems.

³⁴ *Light of Reason*, 2, 32.

³⁵ Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, II, 64. The *Blue Grass Blade* was founded in 1894 by Charles C. Moore, who had been a Campbellite preacher before embracing rationalism. Between 1894 and his death in 1906, Moore served jail terms for libeling a church, fighting, and advocating free love. He was acquitted on other charges of mailing obscene literature and blasphemy. *Ibid.*, II, 80, 147, 185, 198, 282.

meeting and helped draw up its order of business.³⁶ Earlier in 1909 Charlesworth had informed readers of the *Blade* of his invitations to speak in Covington and Muncie, Indiana.³⁷

The vice-presidents were William Maple of Chicago and Dr. J.B. Wilson of Cincinnati. Maple edited the *Ingersoll Beacon*, an important freethought newspaper, for which in 1909 or shortly thereafter Sanders labored as a contributing editor. Wilson engineered the formation of the National Liberty party in 1901, an organization over which Bowles presided. Wilson was vice-president, also, of the Buckeye Secular Union, having been elected in 1909 at the Columbus meeting which witnessed the birth of the Indiana Rationalist Association.

The ties of friendship among the leaders of the St. Louis meeting could not, however, guarantee a harmonious beginning for the national association. Its inauguration was rife with controversy. The headlines of the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* blared: "Freethinkers Meet to Unite, Wrangle." Charlesworth wanted the Monistic philosophy (unity of mind and matter) of Ernst Haeckel, a contemporary European zoologist, to be the ideological framework of the association. A group of socialists attempted to capture the convention and have it go on record for Karl Marx or Henry George. Most delegates registered disapproval of Haeckel, Marx, and George, arguing instead that freethought could not tolerate having any one theorist as a guide. Next, the assembly ruled out a constitutional plank calling for "good moral character and honorable deportment" as a qualification for membership because they could not decide on a definition of moral character. In other matters, the phrase "we believe" was scuttled from the constitution's introduction because a majority thought it presupposed fixed attitudes and implied lack of knowledge. One effort gained approval: the adoption of the initiative and referendum to forestall possible "tyranny" by the general officers and board of directors.³⁸

The almost concurrent establishment of similarly named national and state leagues by a cadre of acquaintances suggests an arrangement whereby the larger body would act as the parent organization and Indiana's forthcoming society would be its first state auxiliary. If this was the design, the contentious St. Louis meeting put a kink in it. It appears that the Amer-

³⁶ W.C. Daly, a grocer from Princeton, Indiana, also helped with the organizational format of the St. Louis meeting; St. Louis *Daily Globe-Democrat*, November 14, 1909.

³⁷ *Blue Grass Blade*, March 7, 1909.

³⁸ St. Louis *Daily Globe-Democrat*, November 14, 15, 1909.

ican Rationalist Association held its first and last convention in St. Louis. The Missouri affair nevertheless points up the strategic place of Hoosiers in freethought's ongoing struggle to institute a viable national organization. Bowles, Sanders, and the others from Indiana could have had few illusions about the problems they might confront as they rushed home to prepare for the establishment of the Indiana Rationalist Association.

The first meeting of the Indiana Rationalist Association began on December 4, 1909, rather than November 21, as Sanders had announced previously. Perhaps the freethinkers desired to follow rather than precede the annual observance of a week of prayer in Indianapolis's Protestant churches. The timing permitted Sanders, in a letter to the *Indianapolis News*, December 3, to attack the exclusiveness of the Protestant churches in not tendering offers to all faiths to participate in the prayer week. He could then follow with an announcement of the upcoming sessions of the Indiana Rationalist Association at which speakers would "expose the fallacy, follies and vices of all so-called revealed religions and will urge that the real infidels and blasphemers are the priests and preachers of orthodoxy."³⁹

More than one hundred persons congregated in the Palm Room of Indianapolis's Claypool Hotel on Saturday, December 4, for the opening of the convention. John B. Glover (1833-1911), a seventy-six-year-old Orange County native, delivered the welcoming address. Glover, treasurer of Indiana in the early 1870s, characterized his listeners as the "pioneers of human progress." He denounced religion as the child of ignorance and fear, theology as the "lash of the priest," worship as the "folly of the feeble," prayer as "the last resort of the foolish," and the Bible as no more sacred than Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays.⁴⁰

Sanders delivered the keynote address and, perhaps recalling his St. Louis experience, urged decency and order in the deliberations. It appears his request was heeded. Other speakers included the *Blue Grass Blade*'s Charlesworth, who was president of the ill-fated American Rationalist Association; Roberts, president of the Buckeye Secular Union; Maple, editor of the *Ingersoll Beacon*; and E.C. Reichold, secretary of the

³⁹ *Indianapolis News*, December 3, 1909.

⁴⁰ *Truth Seeker*, December 25, 1909; John H.B. Nowland, *Sketches of Prominent Citizens of 1876 with a few of the Pioneers of the City and County Who have Passed Away* (Indianapolis, 1877), 454-55; *Indianapolis Star*, November 13, 1903, March 26, 1911.

American Secular Union. Philip Rappaport, an Indianapolis attorney, newspaperman, and lecturer on socialism spoke on "God, Man, and Morality."⁴¹ Libby Macdonald entertained the audience with a musical rendition of "Thomas Paine." John Whicker of Attica, whom the *Truth Seeker* designated as one of the real discoveries of the convention, gave what the Indianapolis *News* called a "sarcastic address" on the text "For God so Loved the World." At one point, Whicker noted that he had no money to help Christianize the heathen, but he "always had something for a fund to civilize the Christian."⁴²

The delegates adopted a resolution deploring the October 15, 1909, execution of Francisco Ferrer Guardia, the Spanish revolutionary who founded the antireligious, anarchistic Escuela Moderna (Modern School). His trial for participating in an antigovernment uprising in Barcelona created a sensation in the United States and raised antagonisms against Spain and Catholicism. Sanders called it a "governmental murder . . . instigated by the fanatical clergy as a part of their campaign to oppose all intellectual progress and freedom from church domination."⁴³

Bowles assumed the presidency of the executive committee of the new organization. John C. Beck, an ex-Roman Catholic and a traveling salesman from Indianapolis, served as first vice-president. LaTourette, second vice-president, and Sanders, secretary-treasurer, rounded out the slate of officers. The constitution of the Indiana Rationalist Association set forth the organization's four major aims: to promote fellowship among rationalists through an annual convention, to expose the fallacies of revealed religion, to oppose the union of church and state under any guise, and to disseminate the truth of the nonexistence of the supernatural. Membership dues were set at one dollar per year.⁴⁴

What little is known about the affairs of the Indiana association is confined largely to reports of its annual conventions in the popular and freethought press. Organization records, if kept, have not been discovered, nor have diaries, correspondence, or related documents. Formal business between conventions, if such occurred, can only be surmised. If the concerns and interests expressed by the nation's freethinkers in the

⁴¹ On Rappaport, see the Indianapolis *Star* and the Indianapolis *News* for December 8, 1913.

⁴² *Truth Seeker*, December 25, 1909; Indianapolis *News*, December 6, 1909.

⁴³ *Truth Seeker*, December 25, 1909.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; *Light of Reason*, 11.

Truth Seeker are any indication, Indiana's leaders monitored churches and legislatures by sniffing out encroachments of the line separating church and state. Following the practice of other freethought societies, they probably sent in news regarding clergymen's immoralities and crimes. Details of America's wayward clergy appeared yearly in the *Truth Seeker's* usually lengthy "Annual Roundup" of ministerial misfits.⁴⁵ In addition, the spokesmen for the society probably traveled and lectured, recruited members, published tracts, and submitted letters to the media. Much of the effort and expense, it seems, went into planning and conducting the conventions.

The Claypool Hotel in Indianapolis was the setting again for the gathering in 1910. Bowles, Beck, LaTourette, and Sanders retained their offices. With some notable exceptions, the list of speakers remained much the same, again including Bowles, Sanders, Reichold, Maple, and Whicker. Among the new faces were J.F. Carney, a Unitarian minister from Martinsville, and Dr. James A. Houser, an Indianapolis physician. Houser welcomed the guests and members by surveying the history of protest against orthodox religion. A well-traveled lecturer, Houser had developed what he termed the New Science of Life: "I teach," wrote Houser, "that life is an ethereal, sublimated, intelligent energy in atomic form, and has the wisdom and power to create animated forms to body forth the ideal of life such as we see."⁴⁶

The high point of the sessions was the appearance of Elbert Hubbard. Hubbard had founded the Roycroft (King's Craft) community at East Aurora, New York, in 1895. By 1910 the handmade copper, silver, and leather items, expertly designed books, and mission-style furniture had achieved worldwide renown. The Roycroft Inn became a gathering place for the eminent figures of the day. Hubbard, though considered a freethinker, rarely participated in organized freethought. His magazines, *The Fra* and *The Philistine*, contained his essays and epigrams on a broad range of issues and interests. Fra Albertus, as Hubbard was commonly called, was introduced to

⁴⁵ Of great interest to freethinkers, for example, were the scandals involving four Kokomo ministers within the brief space of several weeks between late May and early June, 1912. See Macdonald, *Fifty Years of Freethought*, II, 389.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Indiana and Indianans: A History of Aboriginal and Territorial Indiana and the Century of Statehood* (3 vols., Chicago, 1919), III, 1292. See, in addition, *Political and Biographical Memoirs: Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1893), 226-27; and *Indianapolis Star*, July 30, 1919. *Memoir of Dr. J.A. Houser* (Indianapolis, 1920) samples his poetry, essays, and sayings but tells little about his life.

the convention as the "sage of East Aurora" and one of the "most practical philosophers of the world." Hubbard cautioned his audience not to expect too much too soon, but he predicted the "ultimate triumph of truth and reason and the annihilation of orthodoxy."⁴⁷

Freethought's fringe long has been populated by an assortment of single-issue advocates, ascetics, and a few visionaries who have managed to combine primitivism with commercial success. Another speaker at the convention, Bruce Calvert (1866-1940), fit the latter mold. Calvert, an admirer and frequent guest of Hubbard, lived in Lake County on an acre of land now a part of Gary. Born in Jackson County, Calvert attended the state normal school at Terre Haute, taught, and worked for publishing houses in Philadelphia and Chicago prior to removing in 1902 to his forest paradise. He called his rustic habitat Pigeon Roost in-the-Woods. From here in 1908 he launched a small magazine entitled *The Open Road, Journal of the Society of the Universal Brotherhood of Man*, a good imitation of Hubbard's *Philistine*. Calvert was not a recluse. He wrote advertising copy for firms in Chicago and New York and lectured for pay in chatauquas, lyceums, and clubs. He expounded on nature, human kinship, and good health—the latter meaning, among other things, vegetarian diet, cold showers, correct chewing of food, proper breathing, and nudism. He also wrote essays on socialism, science and health, rational education, and shorthand. In 1911 the Indianapolis *Star* characterized Calvert as "Indiana's Prize Crank."⁴⁸ When Gary and its steel mills threatened to overrun Calvert's asylum, he moved in 1912 to similar environs in New York and subsequently to New Jersey. He published *The Open Road* until a few months before his death in 1940. The New York *Times* obituary noted Calvert's twenty-year membership on the board of directors of the American Sunbathing Association and referred to him as a pioneer in the nation's nudist movement.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Truth Seeker*, November 26, 1910. Hubbard's most recent visit to Indianapolis had been in November, 1909, when he spoke at the Propylaeum; Indianapolis *News*, November 3, 1909.

⁴⁸ Indianapolis *Star*, April 9, 1911.

⁴⁹ *Truth Seeker*, November 26, 1910; New York *Times*, June 1, 1940. Much of the Calvert material, including scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and his published articles, is housed in the Gary, Indiana, Public Library. *The Open Road* was produced in the years 1908-1915 and 1926-1940. Selections from *The Open Road* are reprinted in *Thirty Years on the Open Road with Bruce Calvert* (New York, 1941). The author is preparing a biography of Calvert.

Calvert's message to the convention dealt with America's education system, which he thought had become narrow, intolerant, and inflexible. He called for the establishment of rational schools that would use nature as the setting for learning, individualize instruction, develop spontaneity in teachers and pupils, and make textbooks secondary.

At this convention Sanders proposed and received approval from the membership to edit and publish *The Light of Reason*, a volume comprised of portraits and writings of prominent men and women in the Indiana body and in freethought, past and present. Many of the addresses given at the 1910 meeting are printed in full in this compilation. An Indianapolis *News* reviewer thought the rancor and narrowness directed toward ministers and churches in *The Light of Reason* made a lie of freethought and its professed love for humanity.⁵⁰

The third meeting of the association, in early November, 1911, would be its largest. More than three hundred persons attended the two-day affair. Thusnelda Peemoller, a widowed Indianapolis teacher, greeted the convention. She compared the assembled truthseekers to scientists: although their work must often be destructive, this was only because it was necessary to destroy error so truth might prevail. Mrs. Sarah Philobaum of Lafayette, Indiana, told of her conversion from the Friends to freethought. Other new lecturers included D.E. Kenyon, a Chicago lawyer, and Frank Midway, of Dayton, Ohio; the latter argued that despite the absence of God, capitalists like John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan kept alive a "god-idea" in order to keep the masses meek and submissive. Calvert spoke on the topic of rational living. Bowles, Whicker, and Sanders filled out the speaker rostrum. Sanders, having in mind freethought's aversion to an afterlife, described his fellow rationalists as a "bunch of people who would rob man of his fond hopes of hell for his neighbor." The previous year's officers were elected for another term. The convention passed resolutions against teaching religion, singing religious songs, and reading scripture in the public school. It also went on record as opposing the appointment of Edward D. White, a Catholic, as chief justice of the Supreme Court.⁵¹

The freethinkers' unbridled condemnations of Christianity

⁵⁰ Indianapolis *News*, January 6, 1912.

⁵¹ *Truth Seeker*, December 2, 1911; Indianapolis *Sun*, November 6, 1911; Muncie *Evening Press*, November 9, 1911. Rollyn Hawkins of Indianapolis and Ben Lukens of Anderson were prominently mentioned as active in the preparation and organization of the meeting.

did not go unchallenged this year. Harry G. Hill, pastor of the Third Christian Church in Indianapolis, argued that the Christian, too, is free to think. "The real Christian is bound to believe only the truths which through facts are revealed to him. Neither is the real Christian bound to doubt anything, and the rationalists, as I understand it, are bound to doubt some things." Hill, nevertheless, expressed sympathy with the rationalist position and moved even closer to it when, in 1912, he became pastor of the People's Union, a new nonsectarian religious organization in the state capital.⁵²

The 1911 conclave would be Sanders's last, for he died of Brights disease in the spring of 1912, at age thirty-nine. His death deprived the Indiana society of one of its key figures and may have hastened its breakup. In any case, Sanders's death created a leadership void in the association that the convention of 1912 had to fill. This meeting, however, went far beyond replacing the secretary-treasurer: it unveiled a totally new slate of officers. Bowles turned over the presidential chair to Libby Macdonald of New York City. Macdonald, who had served the society in various capacities, was assisted by Vice-president Thusnelda Peemoller, the Indianapolis schoolteacher. William Barrett, also of Indianapolis, took Sanders's office. Bowles reported approval of this new arrangement, and he predicted a bright future for Hoosier freethought under the women's charge. He added, significantly, that the time was ripe for all freethinkers to join in a compact organization and "march in solid phalanx against the hosts of superstition."⁵³

Possibly Bowles knew more about the future of the organization than he was willing or able to reveal at the time. When the 1913 convention met at the Hotel Severin in Indianapolis, the delegates voted to erase state boundaries and encompass the entire country within a new society, the National Rationalist Association. The *Truth Seeker* enthusiastically endorsed the changeover, calling the meeting "an epoch in the progress

⁵² Indianapolis *News*, November 6, 1911; Indianapolis *Star*, November 11, 1912.

⁵³ Covington *Republican*, April 5, 1912. Sanders anticipated his approaching death and released a statement from Indianapolis telling of his plans for his cremation and care of his family. He reaffirmed his rationalism and requested that the *Freethought Beacon*, the *Ingersoll Beacon*, the *Truth Seeker*, and the Indiana Rationalist Association each receive fifty dollars; see *The Open Road*, X (June, 1912), 178-81. On the 1912 convention see the *Truth Seeker*, November 22, 1913; Indianapolis *News*, November 25, 1912. Convention speakers included J.A. Houser, William Barrett, William Maple, and Philip Rappaport.

of the organized rationalist movement in the United States.”⁵⁴ The freethought press described the move as the natural evolution of the Indiana society from small beginnings to a body of wide influence and efficiency. Its old name, with its local connotations, did not fit present realities. The shift elevated the onetime Indiana association to an equal footing with the American Secular Union, but readers were assured that corrosive competition would not be the result. The National Rationalist Association would concentrate on establishing lecture centers and a speakers’ bureau. The American Secular Union would continue to lobby for freethought goals in judicial and legislative quarters.⁵⁵

The membership, after rejecting a communication urging that the convention embrace socialism in its creed, consented to a revised platform that Bowles had helped draft. It enunciated a positive rationalism, stressing freethought as a constructive movement “with a soul, an invigorating principle of life.”⁵⁶ Macdonald, president of the defunct Indiana body, held the same position in the new national organization. The vice-presidents were Marshall J. Gauvin, a Canadian; William Plotts, a Californian; Bowles; and Maple. Charles F. Sprading, president of the Los Angeles Liberal Club, occupied the offices of secretary-treasurer and national lecturer. The National Rationalist Association immediately affiliated with the International Freethought Federation.⁵⁷

At the time of the 1913 reorganization, Indiana, Ohio, and South Carolina had the only state leagues in the country, and each enrolled persons from outside the state. The geographically broad membership coupled with freethought’s historical predilection for national alliances encouraged such regional

⁵⁴ *Truth Seeker*, November 22, 1913; *Indianapolis Star*, November 9, 1913; *Indianapolis News*, November 25, 1912.

⁵⁵ *Truth Seeker*, November 22, 1913.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The organizers of the 1913 meeting apparently had settled on the name International Rationalist Association for the new society but modified their vision before convention time; *Truth Seeker*, November 1, 1913. The platform of the National Rationalist Association affirmed “equal freedom . . . equal rights for man, woman, and child.” Among the participants at the 1913 convention was Harriet Noble, a leading Indiana suffragette from Indianapolis, who taught at Butler University from 1883 to 1893. The welcoming address was given by Ollah P. Toph, also of Indianapolis, a Spiritualist minister, poet, musician, and lecturer. Other Hoosiers identified at the meeting, which comprised representatives from eight states, included William Winston, an Indianapolis real estate dealer, Eli Reese of Greenfield, A.J. Hornung of Greensburg, and A.B. Cookerly of South Milford.

societies to work toward a united rationalism. In Indiana's case considerations other than its distended membership may have accelerated the quest for an all-encompassing freethought organization. For one thing, the failure of the American Rationalist Association probably shifted much responsibility to the Indiana contingent and its state society. In all likelihood Bowles and Sanders anticipated leading the Indiana association into the national arena eventually. This goal may have been reached earlier than expected for unforeseen reasons. The death of Sanders in 1912 robbed the budding society of a youthful, vigorous leader and an intrepid disseminator of freethought convictions. More important, evidence suggests that prior to the fourth convention, in 1912, the Indiana body was on the verge of collapse. A retrospective report in the *Truth Seeker* in 1915 states that in 1912 Libby Macdonald had been called to Indianapolis to shore up the flagging society, which then had a membership of fewer than fifty and an excess of debts.⁵⁸ Presumably, the well-attended meetings of the first several years had not produced enough dues-paying members. The membership fees and the sale of *The Light of Reason*, plus gratuities, were insufficient to meet society expenses. Thus, far from being a body of marked efficiency and progressive influence, it had declined to a point where decisive action was essential.

That a set of conditions existed that rendered improbable the society's continuance in its present form seemed axiomatic to Macdonald, and probably to Bowles also. To others, the situation may not have looked so clear-cut. It is suggestive of an underlying resistance to the change that one correspondent felt it necessary to report that the new national association "could not have been prevented by any individual. It sprang from a settled and increasing demand of Freethinkers throughout the land for such an organization, and not from the impetuosity or private ambitions of any individual or group of persons."⁵⁹ Perhaps the intrusion of Macdonald into local affairs ruffled some rank and file. The problem may have been aggravated by her success in persuading Marshall Gauvin, the young "Canadian Ingersoll," to join her in Indianapolis before the 1913 meeting and help her shape a new society.⁶⁰ Even if there was a consensus on the necessity of converting to a nationwide society, the nature of the new organization most certainly pro-

⁵⁸ *Truth Seeker*, August 28, 1915.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, November 22, 1913.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, April 6, 1918.

voked sharp disagreement. According to the Indianapolis *Evening Sun*, the purpose of the 1913 gathering was the founding of a "national political party" to be named the Free party.⁶¹ The *Truth Seeker* avoided specifics, but it did note that the convention's opening session had considered "certain propositions for political activity and similar matters, which were voted down."⁶²

There is, then, at least some evidence that the transition was not smooth and harmonious. Perhaps making matters worse, Hoosiers were not awarded any chief offices except Bowles's vice-presidency, typically an honorary position. Furthermore, the National Rationalist Association did not have its headquarters in the state. Macdonald initially directed the society from New York City; by the fall of 1914 the address had changed to San Francisco and subsequently to Los Angeles. On the West Coast the association had moderate success in placing lecturers in the field and winning affiliations from established groups, including some German leagues. In August, 1915, its first and only known convention took place in San Francisco. The war intervened, and apparently antagonisms between American and German members split the organization. Martin Bunge, a leader of the German societies, took on the presidency, but it is unclear if the association survived after 1915. Macdonald left the National Rationalist Association in 1915 and launched the Rationalist Association of North America, another transient body. By 1918 she had shifted to the East Coast as an official with the newly formed Boston Rationalist Society.⁶³

In any event, from 1913 until at least the mid-1920s, organized freethought practically disappeared in Indiana, and what organization existed was of little consequence. In early 1914 a club calling itself the Truth Seekers met on Tuesdays in the Chamber of Commerce Building in Indianapolis. James A. Dart, an accountant, was president.⁶⁴ By 1918 Isaiah Miller, a founder of the former Indiana Rationalist Association, informed freethinkers that "today your humble servant stands alone as the one oak in the forest to receive the jolts for his principles."⁶⁵ In the same year Maurice M. Hollingsworth, an Indianapolis real estate agent, could discover no rationalist society in

⁶¹ Indianapolis *Evening Sun*, November 9, 1913.

⁶² *Truth Seeker*, November 22, 1913.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, March 13, 1915, July 21, 1917.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, January 3, 1914.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1918.

the city, but he along with eight "young lawyers, doctors, and college grads" wished to start one. Whatever the outcome of his efforts, Hollingsworth wrote the *Truth Seeker* in 1920 to say he had joined the Guardians of Liberty, a secret anti-Catholic society, which he perceived as rationalistic.⁶⁶ Benjamin H. Cortney advertised a new freethought association named the Scientific Educational Society of Indianapolis in 1921, but the papers carried no further information on this effort.⁶⁷ Finally, in 1921, Miller once again reported a conversation with M.A. Boulden of Frankfort, Indiana, a member of the old Indiana society, and R.W. Jones of Whiteland on the need for a new state organization of freethinkers.⁶⁸

Indiana's freethought may have been organizationally weak after 1913, but several of the leaders of the Indiana Rationalist Association went on to hold important posts at the national level. Both Bowles and John Wesley Whicker played significant roles in efforts to stabilize the decaying American Secular Union. On several occasions between 1914 and 1924 the men assumed responsibilities as vice-president or acting president. Whicker functioned as president in 1923 and 1924.⁶⁹ Neither man, however, could revive an organization that had been declining for a quarter of a century. In 1924 Whicker resigned the presidency and moved to California. In the same year Bowles died at the age of eighty-seven. The *Truth Seeker* eulogized the old war horse as a nationally prominent freethinker and "almost a son of thunder with his pen."⁷⁰ A new body, the American Rationalist Association, began in 1924 in Chicago precisely because, the proponents argued, the American Secular Union had failed to do full justice to the cause of freethought.⁷¹ These developments effectively ended the American Secular Union, which expired within a year or two. These events also closed the period in American freethought when Hoosiers played a key role in rationalism's organizational endeavors.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1918, August 28, 1920.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, December 17, 1921. Cortney related in early 1922 that the Guardians of Liberty had been organized in 1911 and that his involvement in the clandestine group dated from 1913; *ibid.*, January 14, 1922.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, October 8, 1921.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, December 13, 1919. In 1920, when Marshall Gauvin was president and Libby Macdonald and Whicker were vice-presidents of the American Secular Union, Edward Morgan, a native of Noblesville, Indiana, was secretary. Morgan died in the middle of his term; *ibid.*, July 31, 1920.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1924.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, March 29, 1924.

Indiana had experimented with, and experienced the frustrations of, organizational freethought. The Indiana Rationalist Association did inject new leadership and interest into a lackluster freethought movement. Bowles, Sanders, Whicker, and others brought to their project a heritage of Hoosier skepticism. Doubtless they hoped that their society would lead to the fielding of that one great army of like-minded and self-sacrificing freethinkers. Co-workers from surrounding states made common cause with the Indiana group, but the initial enthusiasm and support, as measured by convention attendance, dried up rapidly. Then, instead of disbanding, the organization enlisted new administrators and a strategy for recovery. The tactic involved promoting the old state league to one of national proportions under directors more representative of the country's freethought constituency. The outcome of this maneuver, touted as opening a new epoch in American freethought, instead ended rationalist organization in Indiana and led to a thwarted venture in guiding national freethought. Notwithstanding these organizational failures, Indiana's leaders achieved distinction within the movement far beyond their state activities. When the history of twentieth-century freethought is written, the brief course of the Indiana Rationalist Association, along with the men and women who managed its affairs, should be accorded due notice.