From 1939 until her retirement in 1973, Caroline Dunn helped guide the collection of rare volumes and other material as librarian for the Indiana Historical Society's William Henry Smith Memorial Library. Dunn's death on August 22, 1994, at her Greenwood, Indiana, residence ends a long association between the Society and the Dunn family. In 1886 Caroline Dunn's father, Jacob Piatt Dunn, Jr., along with William H. English and Daniel W. Howe, reorganized and revitalized what had been a moribund institution—the IHS. For the next forty years, until his death on June 7, 1924, Dunn served the Society as its secretary and during that time used his bookish skills both to edit and produce publications for the statewide membership organization. The Dunn family's service to Indiana's history is witnessed daily at the Society. "The depth of the collection that was acquired by Miss Dunn for the IHS continues to surprise people even today," said current Society library director Bruce L. Johnson. "In most major areas of IHS collecting interest, such as travel literature related to Indiana and the Old Northwest, her ability resulted in a collection that has few, if any, significant gaps."

Caroline Dunn was born in Indianapolis on January 21, 1903, the eldest of two daughters raised by Jacob Piatt and Charlotte Elliott (Jones) Dunn. Caroline, along with her sister Eleanor, was brought up in a house at 915 North Pennsylvania Street that had been built in 1868 by her mother's father, Aquilla Jones, a part owner of the Indianapolis wholesale firm of Jones, McKee & Company. Nearly four years older than her sister, Caroline looked fondly upon her younger sibling. In a paper she wrote for an English class assignment while a student at Butler University, Caroline Dunn confessed that while growing up she preferred the companionship of an imaginary friend, a "comrade in life" she dubbed Josephine, over that of her baby sister. When the younger sister

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was no longer a baby, "Eleanor took Josephine's place, and she has kept it ever since," noted Dunn.2

At an early age the sisters inherited from their father, a versatile writer on numerous historical subjects, an interest in the state's past. "Father had such an intense interest in the Indiana history that my sister and I just grew up with it," said Caroline Dunn. "I can remember him working on his books . . . but the thing that interested me most was his study of the Indian languages." Her interest in her father's work on the language of the Miami Indians might have been piqued by Jacob Dunn's anointing each of his daughters with Miami names. Eleanor's Miami name, Caroline Dunn recalled, was Pa-pin-djun-wa, which meant "always falling down."3 Caroline also fondly remembered her father's habit of taking her and other children on walks in the country, during which Jacob Dunn often would indulge in his hobby of mushroom collecting.

Along with a love of Indiana history, Caroline Dunn inherited from her family an introduction to the workings of libraries. Jacob Dunn served as state librarian from 1889 to 1893 and was an original member of the Indiana Public Library Commission. Florence L. Jones, Caroline Dunn's aunt who lived with the family for many years, was head of the school reference department for the Indianapolis Public Library; Caroline Dunn followed in both their footsteps by also working at the two institutions. After graduating from Shortridge High School, Dunn attended Butler University in Indianapolis, receiving her bachelor of arts degree in 1923. For the next four years she was employed at the Indianapolis Public Library as an assistant in the children's division.

Dunn furthered her library career by obtaining in 1928 a bachelor of science degree in library service from Columbia University's School of Library Service. While attending school in New York during the winter of 1927–1928, Dunn looked to her future after graduation by writing the president of the Connersville Public Library board for a job. Returning to her home state in June, Dunn interviewed with the Connersville library board and was hired as a librarian. After finding suitable lodging in the eastern Indiana town, Dunn settled into a job she would hold for the next eight years. Reminiscing about her years in Connersville, Dunn noted that a librarian in a town that size or smaller enjoys "a certain assured standing and position in the eyes of the community; she is

2 Caroline Dunn Papers, Unprocessed Collection (Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis).
4 Caroline Dunn, Jacob Piatt Dunn: His Miami Language Studies and Indian Manuscript Collection (Prehistory Research Series, Vol. 1, no. 2; Indianapolis, 1937), 35.
accounted much more of a personage than in a larger place. I fear I enjoyed the sensation of being a bigger frog in that smaller pond!" Through her work she was able to know, and was known by, everyone in town—from factory executive to plumber. "I realized that I lived in a glass house, people knew a lot about me and undoubtedly discussed me," said Dunn. "I never felt oppressed by it, however, as one hears of many teachers in small towns."

In December, 1936, Dunn left Connersville and returned to Indianapolis to take a position as reference librarian with the Indiana State Library's Indiana Division. Although Dunn was one of only two nonpatronage employees at the ISL, a political connection from her days in Connersville did aid her in gaining her new post; she later learned that a leading Democrat in Fayette County had written a letter touting Dunn for the job.6 After three years at the state library, Dunn was hired by an organization very well known to her and her family. With the death of the William Henry Smith Memorial Library's first librarian, Florence Venn, in August, 1939, the IHS hired Dunn to take over at an initial annual salary of $2,000. In giving Dunn the job Christopher Coleman, director of both the IHS and the Indiana Historical Bureau, offered the hope that the Society library "will be of constantly increasing importance and value and that its development may well be regarded as a worthy life work." Dunn fully lived up to Coleman's high expectations, expending much effort over the next thirty-four years to make the IHS library a gem among nonprofit research institutions.

Dunn's tenure at the Society, according to Johnson, benefited from the "fortunate convergence" of having an IHS library committee and board of trustees willing to support significant library acquisitions and a rare books and manuscripts market regularly offering for sale material of importance in documenting the history of Indiana and the Old Northwest. Of course the library also possessed in Dunn a woman of "rare intelligence and energy who, to her eternal credit and for the benefit of the IHS, took full advantage of these circumstances to help create a remarkable library," Johnson added.7 Along with browsing through catalogues and talking with rare book dealers in hopes of finding rare volumes for the library's collection, Dunn discovered that many of the library's "choicest" materials came as gifts. "Sometimes we search them out," she said, "sometimes they come to us. People will write and say they have an ancestor who lived here and they feel something should come back for Indiana." These same people often visited the

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5 Caroline Dunn Papers.
7 Ibid., 249.
8 Bruce L. Johnson, letter to author, December 27, 1994.
library many years after their donations in order to "see what use we've made of the materials they sent us," Dunn noted.9

Besides working to strengthen the IHS library's collection, Dunn corresponded with a wide range of scholars, students, and others interested in the state's history. Ruth Dorrel, who worked to catalog the Society library collection from 1969 to 1971 and who is now an IHS editor, remembered that Dunn spent much of her time helping library patrons who wrote or came to do their own research. It was not surprising that people who wanted to know about some aspect of Indiana's past turned to Dunn, noted Dorrel, since she knew the whereabouts of almost every item in the collection.10 During Dunn's years at the Society, countless writers of scholarly works on the history of Indiana and the Old Northwest relied on her for assistance. "One grateful author," recalled Gayle Thornbrough, former Society director, "remarked on the unusual help she had received, calling Miss Dunn a heroine of the first order for her zeal in digging out relevant references."11 On October 10, 1970, at the dedication of the Indiana University Library in Bloomington, Dunn was rewarded for her knowledge of Hoosier heritage with an honorary degree from the university.

Although she retired from her work at the Society in January, 1973, Dunn maintained a strong presence in the state's history circles by holding the position of secretary of the Society of Indiana Pioneers (a post she held from 1940 to 1990), visiting the IHS and state library, and attending Society conferences. In 1992 she donated back to the IHS an onyx clock and candelabra—wedding presents given to her father and mother by the IHS more than a century ago. After Dunn's death, the Society learned that the former librarian had left the nonprofit, membership organization a substantial bequest. On January 26, 1995, the Society's board of trustees decided that the bequest should be used for constructing a new headquarters building now in its early planning stages. "It is most appropriate that the first major gift toward the building comes from this source," said Peter T. Harstad, IHS executive director. "Both Caroline and her father played positive roles in the growth and development of the Society. Now, through this marvelous gift, the Dunns are also part of the institution's future."12 Throughout her life, and even after her death, Caroline Dunn attempted to convey the strong feelings she held for her native state. As she once told a reporter from the Indianapolis Star, "The more you know about the state, the more you want to know and see."13

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11 Quoted in Lennis, "Indiana's Miss History."
13 Quoted in Stewart, "They Achieve."