
A Truly Midwestern City: Indianapolis on the Eve of the Great Depression

*Bradford Sample**

In her assessment of emergency relief in several cities, Joanna Colcord of the Russell Sage Foundation observed that “A distinguishing feature of the work-relief program in Indianapolis is that it was preceded by several months of deliberation and planning.”¹ What separated Indianapolis’s program from the ill-conceived and poorly executed efforts that were typical elsewhere was its united community that drew upon the resources and leadership available in both the public and private sectors. The success of the work relief project undertaken in Indianapolis, while neither bold nor original, can be traced, at least in part, to strong leadership and cooperation.

Scholars have long chronicled the unsuccessful attempts of local governments to address the devastating social problems brought on by the Depression. Local relief projects proliferated after the stock market crash in October 1929, but they quickly depleted local resources, and most folded soon after they were begun. By the summer of 1931 local governments and charities could no longer shoulder the responsibility for the unemployed.² Cities with high unemployment and limited funding sought state and federal intervention. Most often, historians have concentrated on the largest cities, where in 1930 fewer than 19 percent of the nation lived but where demands for relief were the heaviest. Scholarly studies have rarely focused on local projects in medium-sized communities.³

In 1929, Indianapolis was in one of the most productive and industrialized regions in the United States. Ranked twenty-first in population among the nation’s urban areas, its 364,000 people placed it in a group of cities that included Rochester, New Orleans, Birm-

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¹Joanna C. Colcord, William C. Koplovitz, and Russell H. Kurtz, *Emergency Work Relief; As Carried Out in Twenty-Six American Communities, 1930–1931* (New York, 1932), 99.

²George E. Mowry and Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Nation, 1920–1980* (rev. ed., New York, 1981), 65–68.

³U.S. *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. I, *Population*, 4; John J. Wallis, “Employment in the Great Depression: New Data and Hypothesis,” *Explorations in Economic History*, XXVI (January 1989), 45–72.



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ingham, Atlanta, Cincinnati, and Seattle.⁴ It lagged behind the largest cities of the region—Chicago (3,376,000), Detroit (1,568,662)—and the nation (New York City, 6,930,446).

Population mobility and growth characterized Indianapolis during the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1930 the city's population increased 15.9 percent.⁵ Indianapolis, however, departed significantly from the demographic pattern of other urban areas, especially in the Midwest and the Northeast. Only 3.8 percent of the city's population was foreign-born. Comparatively, Chicago, Detroit, and New York averaged between 24 and 34 percent while Cincinnati claimed a foreign population almost double that of Indianapolis.⁶ The Jewish population of Indianapolis, about six thousand by 1929, was also significantly smaller than other cities in the East and Midwest.⁷ However, the city had one of the largest black communities in the North, numbering 44,000 persons. The black population, buoyed by southern migration, grew by 28.6 percent during the 1920s, accounting for 12 percent of the population in 1930.⁸

⁴U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. I, *Population*, 14.

⁵*Ibid.*, 330.

⁶*Ibid.*, Vol. III, *Population*, 14.

⁷Judith E. Endelman, *The Jewish Community of Indianapolis, 1849 to the Present* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 112, 119.

⁸Other cities reported similar increases, however, Indianapolis's black population, as a percentage of the whole, was comparatively very large. U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. III, *Population*, 61.

Indianapolis resembled the smaller towns that dotted the Midwest, mostly white and largely native-born. City leaders claimed this homogeneity as a strength, touting the city's "American" character. Editors of the *Book of Indiana*, published in 1929, emphasized that over 94 percent of Indianapolis's workforce was "thoroughly American."⁹ Leaders attributed the city's increasing wealth to its nonethnic character. In its political structure, Indianapolis resembled other large cities. Citizens elected a mayor and a city council, two active political parties vied for votes, and newspapers engaged in debates. Its most powerful interest group, the Chamber of Commerce, was, in effect, local government's most trusted outside advisor.¹⁰ What Indianapolis did not have, at least on most questions, was any real disagreement by the two parties. Both parties were pledged to fiscal restraint and social conservatism, policies valued by the populace.¹¹

Indianapolis remained largely the same cautious, practical, and generally conservative Midwestern town it had been in the late nineteenth century. Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf describe the culture of the early twentieth-century Midwest as exalting personal independence, hard work, and equality of opportunity. Its sense of community ran deep and tended to foster participation in voluntary associations. Individualism, moral self-restraint, and economic self-reliance marked the values of the business culture shared by blacks and whites alike.¹²

Mass immigration had dented the middle-class cultural consensus in other cities. New immigrants embraced the capitalism of their new country but did not always agree with American bourgeois standards of conduct.¹³ Because of its lack of ethnic diversity, Indianapolis had kept the insular and clannish instincts lost in many other large cities in the Midwest. Its leadership group was small and closely tied together. The elite accepted a probusiness outlook that approved of the community it had helped to build. Because its residents were mostly native-born, the city avoided much of the nativist passion usually associated with Indiana in the 1920s. Some local

⁹Kin Hubbard, ed., *Book of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1929).

¹⁰In the 1920s the Chamber of Commerce became a semi-official advisor to the city council finance committee. "Monthly Reports—Report of the Civic Affairs Committee, December 9, 1929, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce," Folder 21, Papers of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce (Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis), hereafter cited as Chamber of Commerce Papers.

¹¹Both parties in the 1929 race for mayor pledged to balance the city's budget but made no promises concerning major social questions.

¹²The city's first black newspaper, the *Indianapolis Leader*, encouraged free enterprise and moral rectitude. See under "Indianapolis Leader," in *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, eds. David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 787-88. See also Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

¹³See Cayton and Onuf, *Midwest and the Nation*, 25.

leaders worked to build bridges to minority groups, and several members of the elite were of the Jewish or Catholic faiths.¹⁴

Individual accounts confirm that a business sense pervaded the city. Lawrence S. Connor, a resident of Indianapolis during the 1930s and later a reporter and editor for the Indianapolis *Star*, characterized Indianapolis residents as “generally hard working, conservative and isolationist.”¹⁵ People were expected to be responsible for themselves and their families. Citizens consistently supported politicians and plans that emphasized a moderate course of action.

Reginald Sullivan, who served as the Democratic mayor of Indianapolis during much of the Depression, illustrates the moderate, businesslike character of the city’s politics and people. Elected in 1929, he captured almost every election district, many of which had, four years earlier, voted Republican. Sullivan garnered high praise from the Republican-leaning Indianapolis *Star*, and many prominent Republicans later supported him for a second term.¹⁶ Sullivan balanced the city’s budget and did not challenge its social arrangements, such as segregation in public education. During the Depression, like the Republican governor, he refused to authorize bonds for relief. Elected twice to office, his popularity reflected, in part, the general values of city residents.

The mayor was not the only one to subscribe to a pro-business philosophy. All of the city’s major newspapers approved of a general business approach to government and society, as did many citizens. In the late 1920s, residents desired increased efficiency and less political influence in government decision-making. Voters overwhelmingly passed a referendum adopting a city-manager style of government, widely regarded at the time as more efficient, less political, and more businesslike than a mayor/city council structure.¹⁷ Although the Indiana Supreme Court struck down the measure in 1930, the referendum made clear that residents wanted a government run on business principles.

Indianapolis experienced solid economic growth during the 1920s. By 1929, industrial production in the city accounted for 17 percent of Indiana’s total value of products.¹⁸ Although nationally

¹⁴Endelman does not find any reports of physical abuse to Jews in the 1920s in Indianapolis, although there were some threats and an attempted KKK boycott of Jewish stores. Endelman, *Jewish Community of Indianapolis*, 112.

¹⁵For a look at Indianapolis during the Depression, see Lawrence S. Connor, *Hampton Court: Growing Up Catholic in Indianapolis Between the Wars* (Indianapolis, 1995), 43.

¹⁶For opinions of Sullivan see Indianapolis *Star*, October 2, 1929; Ray Boomhower, “Reginald H. Sullivan,” in *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1308-1309; *The Sullivan Record*, copy in the Indiana Division (Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).

¹⁷Residents of Indianapolis voted 53,912 to 9,954 in favor of the city manager plan. Harrison C. Neal, III, and Jeffrey Duvall, “City Manager Proposal (1920s),” in *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 431.

¹⁸Industrial production figures can be found in U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. VIII, *Manufactures*, 1929, 169-170. The percentage of Indiana’s production

Indianapolis ranked twenty-first in population, it stood thirteenth in retail sales.¹⁹ Indianapolis was in good economic health before the Depression. Its economic base was fairly diverse, and some boasted that the city was “practically shock-proof in periods of depression.”²⁰ The nearly 8 percent increase in home ownership during the 1920s demonstrates the city’s prosperity.²¹

City	Economic Values 1929		
	Industrial Sales	Retail & Wholesale Sales	Total*
Indianapolis	\$428,362,004	\$681,709,711	\$1,114,382,078
Atlanta	\$214,785,945	\$683,990,822	\$899,946,002
Birmingham	\$241,279,545	\$388,926,863	\$634,101,778
Cincinnati	\$729,019,086	\$1,026,795,651	\$1,761,217,193
New Orleans	\$148,388,315	\$764,929,050	\$913,914,368
Rochester	\$380,701,903	\$436,616,138	\$829,405,135
Seattle	\$228,354,787	\$829,426,652	\$1,073,125,419

*total includes agriculture sales.

U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. III, *Manufactures*, 124, 162, 398, 539, 44, 352, 204; *ibid.*: Vol. II, *Distribution*, 16-33.

Unemployment was not a serious problem in the Circle City before the stock market crash. In March of 1929 over 3,000 help-wanted ads appeared in the Indianapolis *Star*, and the general industrial production index, an indicator of general economic health, stood at 110.1, its highest level since 1917.²² Workers attracted to Indianapolis were as well paid as their counterparts in other medium-sized cities. Average family income in Indianapolis was above the national average.²³ The typical worker earned \$1474 per year, slightly less than the national average of \$1540.²⁴

contributed by Indianapolis firms is found in James H. Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920-1945* (Indianapolis, 1982), 229.

¹⁹George W. Geib and Miriam Geib, *Indianapolis First* (Indianapolis, 1990), 53.

²⁰Logan Esarey, *History of Indiana: From Its Exploration to 1922*, eds., Kate Milner Rabb and William Herschell (4 vols., Dayton, Ohio, 1924), III, 255.

²¹U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. VI, *Population*, 61.

²²Indianapolis Commission for the Stabilization of Employment, “Problems of Unemployment in Indianapolis,” November 1930, p. 8, typescript copy in Indiana Division. See also Jo Ann E. Argersinger, *Toward A New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), 3, and Bernard Sternsher, *Hitting Home: The Great Depression in Town and Country*, (rev. ed., Chicago, 1989), 64.

²³An average of 44.7 percent of Indianapolis families earned more than \$2,000 annually, slightly more than the national average, and 24 percent earned more than \$3,000. Indianapolis *Star*, July 18, 1929; Winifred D. W. Bolin, “The Economics of Middle Income Family Life: Working Women During the Great Depression,” *Journal of American History*, LXV (June 1978), 62.

²⁴Gene Smiley, “Did Incomes for Most of the Population Fall from 1923 through 1929?” *Journal of Economic History*, XLIII (March 1983), 209.

Average Wages by Trade Type 1929-1930

City	Industrial	Wholesale	Retail
Indianapolis	\$1324.66	\$1884.97	\$1211.93
Atlanta	\$991.74	\$1824.84	\$1153.33
Birmingham	\$1178.06	\$1784.41	\$1214.68
Cincinnati	\$1349.05	\$1974.04	\$1379.70
New Orleans	\$934.84	\$1798.53	\$1028.43
Rochester	\$1405.54	\$1788.04	\$1505.89
Seattle	\$1432.63	\$1969.83	\$1393.82

U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930: Distribution*, Vol. I, 67, 583, 729, 967, 315, 557, 1305, Vol. II, 16-37; *ibid.*: Vol. III, *Manufactures*, 44, 124, 102, 353, 398, 204, 539

Despite good economic times, wages were insufficient to provide for savings. A 1929 Brookings Institution report estimated that the average family of four required \$2,000 in income for its basic needs and \$3,000 a year to permit modest saving.²⁵ Reports from the Dime Savings & Loan, an organization set up by the Family Welfare Society (FWS) to help working families set aside money, confirm that workers had a difficult time doing so.²⁶ Most Indianapolis families fell below the \$3,000 threshold needed to save money and provide for a better life, but this was also true of their counterparts in other second-tier cities.²⁷

Low tax rates helped to alleviate the problems of low wages. State taxes actually fell between 1926 and 1928, rising nominally in 1929.²⁸ Among comparable cities only those in the South taxed their citizens less.²⁹ Additionally, the Civic Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Commerce found that among twenty-six cities with a population of over 300,000, only two had lower per capita debt than Indianapolis. The low debt burden was one of the reasons the Mowry Company, a large manufacturing concern, cited for moving to the city in 1929.³⁰ Thus, Indianapolis could offer businesses the lowest taxes per capita for a city of its size in the north central region, an "American" workforce, and low city debt.

²⁵Milton Meltzer, *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?: The Great Depression, 1929-1933* (New York, 1969), 10-11.

²⁶In both January and August of 1929 total withdrawals made by customers surpassed total deposits by almost \$1000. "Monthly Reports—Report of the Dime Savings & Loan Association January 1929, August 1929, Family Welfare Society, November 1927–November 1930," typescript, Box 6, Folder 2, Papers of the Family Services Association (Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis), hereafter cited as Family Services Papers.

²⁷U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. I, *Manufactures*, 1929, 169.

²⁸"Report of Indiana's Auditor for the period ending June 30, 1934, Division of Accounting and Statistics" in Indiana Legislative Reference Bureau, *Year Book . . . 1933* (Indianapolis, 1934), 42.

²⁹U. S., Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract . . . 1929* (Washington, D.C., 1929), 232; *Ibid.*, 1931, 232.

³⁰"Minutes of the Civic Affairs Committee, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, 1929," Box 3, file 21, p. 23, Chamber of Commerce Papers.

The
College Settlement
Association

Christamore



1806 COLUMBIA AVENUE

INDIANAPOLIS

CHRISTAMORE HOUSE

In Indianapolis, as well as nationally, African Americans suffered economically due to discrimination and poor educational opportunities.³¹ In a survey of leisure published by the Indianapolis Foundation the authors acknowledged problems and tried to alert their fellow citizens:

Death rates for "colored" wherever given is [sic] always higher than those for "white," due largely, we believe, to the unfortunate housing and neighborhood conditions under which so many are forced to live. In certain sections of Indianapolis these conditions are so bad as to form a serious menace to the whole community and at the same time they point a finger of shame toward the municipality, which allows them to exist. Yes, Indianapolis has slums!³²

Although mortality rates were generally lower in Indianapolis than they were in Kansas City or Cincinnati, they were higher for African Americans than for whites.³³ Newspapers suggested some reasons for the discrepancy. The Indianapolis *Star* and the Indianapolis *Recorder*, the city's largest black newspaper, cited unsatisfactory conditions in the city hospital's segregated ward and in some of the city's worst neighborhoods. While African Americans in Indianapolis fared economically as well as their counterparts in other cities, all was not well, and the city's leaders acknowledged as much.³⁴

For over a century political and civic leaders had built a structure of private philanthropy and public charity to aid those who were in need, both black and white. Before Indiana was granted statehood, structured public charity existed in the form of an overseer of the poor.³⁵ As a territory, Indiana adopted Elizabethan poor laws so that those not covered by private charity would not starve. After statehood, the township trustee, an elected official of the county, was responsible for administering public aid. Trustees, in conjunction with advisory committees, gave out public aid to the needy. They managed budgets, oversaw social work, and were the county's primary public welfare officers. The trustee for Center Township of Marion County, within which most of Indianapolis was located, eased the burdens of private philanthropy by spending \$100,000 annually for relief and allowed it to experiment and plan for the future.

³¹See Lois R. Helmbold, "Downward Occupational Mobility During the Great Depression: Urban Black and White Working-Class Women" *Labor History*, XXIX (Spring 1988), 135-72. See also William A. Sundstrom, "Last Hired, First Fired?: Unemployment and Urban Black Workers During the Great Depression," *Journal of Economic History*, LII (June 1992), 415-29.

³²Council of Social Agencies, *Leisure of a People: Report of a Recreation Survey of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis, 1929), 40.

³³*Ibid.*, 41.

³⁴Besides having lower mortality rates, African Americans in Indianapolis paid less for housing than their counterparts in comparable cities. Indianapolis *Recorder*, March 2, 30, 1929; Indianapolis *Star*, April 7, 1929.

³⁵Alice Shaffer, Mary Wysor Keefer, Sophonisba P. Breckenridge, *The Indiana Poor Law: Its Development and Administration with Special Reference to the Provision of State Care for the Sick Poor* (Chicago, 1936).

In the Midwest during the nineteenth century, voluntary associations were the most active force pushing for social change.³⁶ Organized private charity in the city began with the creation of the Indianapolis Benevolent Society in 1835. By the end of the nineteenth century it had become the Charity Organization Society (COS), a well-organized and -financed effort to aid the deserving poor. By 1929 the philanthropic sector included the Indianapolis Foundation, Community Fund agencies, and other groups including churches and settlement houses. Almost every private group was controlled by a board of directors and managed by a paid executive, who was usually a trained social worker. Many Protestant churches handed out charity through a deacons board, while the Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis aided the poor through a centralized community center.

The primary private agency responsible for experimentation in nonrelief measures of philanthropy was the Indianapolis Foundation. Its vision provided a path for other agencies and even other cities to follow. It facilitated the introduction of new techniques and technology to older agencies and created new organizations to solve new ailments. Grants were not given to individuals; instead, money was allocated to groups for experimentation and education or given to agencies that needed additional money to make up deficits in their budgets. Created in 1916, the Foundation was one of the nation's few community trusts in 1929. Three banks held funds donated by individuals to use for the general welfare of Indianapolis. Its six-member board of directors was chosen by the mayor, the circuit court judge, and the judge of the Southern District of Indiana.³⁷

Funding for relief and character-building agencies fell primarily to the Community Fund, the predecessor of the United Way.³⁸ The Community Fund succeeded the War Chest, organized during the First World War to raise funds both for relief and the war effort. Organizers hoped such a fund would alleviate monetary shortages, reduce duplication of services, and limit the number of solicitations by agencies to city residents.

By 1929 thirty-nine agencies belonged to the Community Fund, with most of the emphasis on character-building efforts. Social workers viewed character-building organizations as places where social work, as an effort to change the individual for the better, could do the most good.³⁹ The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) provided for adult

³⁶Cayton and Onuf, *Midwest and the Nation*, 55.

³⁷Gregory E. Lynn, "Indianapolis Foundation," in *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 780.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹This can be seen in the shifting priorities of the Community Fund budget before the crash. The Family Welfare Society, essentially a relief organization, garnered 28.5 percent of the budget for 1929, a much smaller amount than the 41 percent it received in 1924.

character-building programs and granted a small amount of relief. The Girl Scouts and the Boy's Club addressed the needs of children and youth. Settlement houses, such as Flanner House, dispensed relief and sponsored similar programs. Relief was increasingly seen as a responsibility of the public sector. The FWS dispensed most of the relief given to families, while Wheeler Mission, the Salvation Army, and Volunteers of America took care of the largest number of transients and vagrants.

In fiscal year 1929 (November 1, 1928–October 31, 1929) Community Fund agencies shared over \$700,000, with most receiving close to what they requested. The Indianapolis Community Fund mirrored national trends as both the number of community organizations and donations to them increased throughout the 1920s.⁴⁰ Since its inception in 1921, the Fund had become more popular with the public and more beneficial for its member agencies. From 1922 to 1928 overall contributions increased from \$445,000 to \$762,000, while the number of donors increased from 16,000 to 52,000.⁴¹ The Fund awarded nonrelief agencies 53 percent of the 1929 Community Fund budget, a percentage that had been increasing during the later part of the 1920s.⁴²

The 1920s had not prepared the Fund for any catastrophe. The Community Fund did not envision the possibility of an economic calamity and therefore did not give attention to the capacity of relief organizations. While the Fund successfully provided its member agencies with money, it did not seriously try to use its economic power to coerce agencies to streamline their operations or consolidate their functions. Many "character-building" agencies still had sizable "relief" departments. Efficiency remained a goal of the Fund but not one that it was willing to enforce.

Some agencies, including several church-based organizations, created relief-giving community centers that were not part of the Community Fund. Mayer Chapel, a southside mission of the Second Presbyterian Church, provided both relief and character-building programs. Religious organizations of all stripes tended to give only short-term relief, relying on the other agencies for persisting needs.⁴³

⁴⁰John R. Seeley *et al.*, *Community Chest: A Case Study in Philanthropy* (Toronto, Ont., 1957), 21.

⁴¹*Indianapolis Star*, April 19, 1929.

⁴²Only ten agencies were described as "relief-giving." They were the following: the Catholic Community Center, Family Welfare Society, Indianapolis Day Nursery, Jewish Federation, Red Cross, Thedora Home, Volunteers of America, Wheeler Mission, Salvation Army, and Traveler's Aid Society. "Minutes of the Board of Directors, Indianapolis Community Fund, 1930–1934," December 31, 1930, Budget Committee Memo, Papers of the United Way of Central Indiana (Offices of the United Way of Central Indiana, Indianapolis).

⁴³See George W. Geib, *Lives Touched by Faith: Second Presbyterian Church, 150 Years* (Indianapolis, 1988), 122–25.

Philanthropic organizations expressed concern for problems facing African Americans by promoting self-help organizations. Several philanthropic organizations worked in the black community giving both relief and advice. Local philanthropist Frank Flanner and the COS created Flanner House to allow African Americans to help themselves to a better economic position. Interracial committees were created by the YWCA, the Church Federation, and the Council of Social Agencies. The Church Federation sponsored an annual interracial banquet that aided in the airing of problems. These groups worked within the segregated system to aid individuals and families in the black community who needed help, and at times they challenged local opinions on social issues.⁴⁴

No single coordinating agency directed all philanthropic work. The Community Fund raised money for its agencies and in some ways constrained those agencies or allowed them to develop various avenues of action, but control was loose. The Indianapolis Foundation and non-Community Fund agencies were independent of the Community Fund board, but many times board members from the various organizations were connected through informal ties of friendship, mutual interests, or religious affiliation. Board members often enjoyed long tenures and could therefore establish contacts over a long period of time, but this did not lead to a centralized controlling mechanism. The agency that came nearest to being a centralizing force by gathering information on all others was the Council on Social Agencies. It only collected information, however, and never directed philanthropic endeavors.

Philanthropic funding and leadership came predominantly from businessmen. Since the seventeenth century, merchants had dominated philanthropy, both in England and the United States.⁴⁵ Businessmen continued to be at the forefront of philanthropic giving and leadership in the 1920s, so that the business elite also comprised the philanthropic elite. In 1929, the Community Fund depended on rich benefactors for most giving. The Special Gifts Division of the Community Fund's annual campaign, which targeted those who could give \$250 or more, accounted for 74 percent of funds raised for use in 1930. Perhaps more revealing is that those giving \$10,000 or more accounted for 22 percent of all gifts.⁴⁶

The elite presided over the philanthropic boards, giving the organizations the benefit of their experience, connections, and wealth.

⁴⁴Seeley, *Community Chest*, 52.

⁴⁵W. K. Jordan, "The English Background of Modern Philanthropy," *American Historical Review*, LXVI (January 1961), 403. In seventeenth-century England a small group of London businessmen gave 43 percent of the total funds received for charitable causes in England.

⁴⁶"Fund Board Minutes September 6, 1923–December 31, 1930," Papers of the Community Fund (United Way of Central Indiana Archives, Indianapolis).

An analysis of seventy-nine board members from the most prominent boards reveals a very dense network. The average board member interacted on a regular basis with sixty-four other board members from approximately two other agencies. In 1929 there was a single network in Indianapolis. Most everyone in leadership positions knew and interacted with everyone else, and a core group of powerful people, which included pharmaceutical manufacturer J. K. Lilly, Sr., dominated most boards. Since organizations were centralized and many people were active in at least two agencies together, information gathered by one board was easily transferred to other groups. From this tightly-knit network stemmed a large degree of information and resource sharing with little friction. In addition, because of the cohesiveness of the network, a consensus emerged among philanthropists.⁴⁷

Philanthropic leaders were strikingly similar in their backgrounds and activities. Of the seventy-nine directors of the boards of Indianapolis's most prominent philanthropic agencies, most were born either in Indiana or the surrounding states.⁴⁸ All were white and more than three-quarters were men. More than a third belonged to the Columbia Club, the Athletic Club, or the Woodstock Country Club, with most belonging to at least two of the three. Almost half of the seventy-nine were Masons; more than half were members of the Chamber of Commerce. At a time when fewer than 15 percent of the population attended college, more than two-thirds of the board members had graduated and many had earned higher academic honors. The average age of the leaders in 1930 was 52, almost a decade older than the city's average. In addition most were Republicans and lived among the city's wealthiest citizens in its most prestigious real estate districts.⁴⁹

Few divisions existed between religious, philanthropic, and business leaders. J. K. Lilly, chairman of the board of Eli Lilly and Company, chaired the Indianapolis Foundation and served as an officer in Christ Episcopal Church. Francis H. Gavisk, pastor of St. John's Catholic Church, sat on the boards of several public and private social agencies, was a member of the Chamber of Commerce,

⁴⁷For information on group consensus building and agreement formation, see John Scott *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook* (Newberry Park, Calif., 1991), 12-26. For data on the transfer of information and goods see Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (New York, 1994), 293-97.

⁴⁸Source information on the various leaders can be found in the following sources: Hubbard, *Book of Indiana*; the Indiana Biographical Service located in the Indiana Division of the Indiana State Library; Paul Donald Brown, ed., *Indianapolis Men of Affairs, 1923* (Indianapolis, 1923); and Charles Roll, *Indiana: One Hundred and Fifty Years of American Development* (Chicago, 1931).

⁴⁹*Indianapolis City Directory* (Indianapolis, 1929). For family income see the Real Estate Board Survey results published by the Indianapolis *Star*, July 18, 1929. For another view of board members in this period, see Robert K. Taylor "Characteristics of 200 Board Members of Private Social Agencies in Indianapolis, 1930-1940" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1941).

and served as vice-president in one of the local savings and loan organizations. Eugene C. Foster, a social worker employed by the Indianapolis Foundation as its executive director, sat on several public and private philanthropic boards of directors and was later elected president of the Church Federation. In addition, Foster and Lilly both belonged to the Columbia Club, and all three men sat on the board of the Indianapolis Chapter of the American Red Cross.

In pre-Depression Indianapolis, the city's civic leaders knew one another intimately, attended the same social functions, had similar educational backgrounds, and interacted with one another frequently in philanthropic activities. The names of Allison, Atkins, Ayres, Efroymsen, Jordan, and Lilly carried much weight due to their economic importance and social prominence.⁵⁰ The local economy and local charity depended upon such men and women for support and guidance. The social importance of these people related not only to their economic power, but also to their prominence in almost every facet of life.

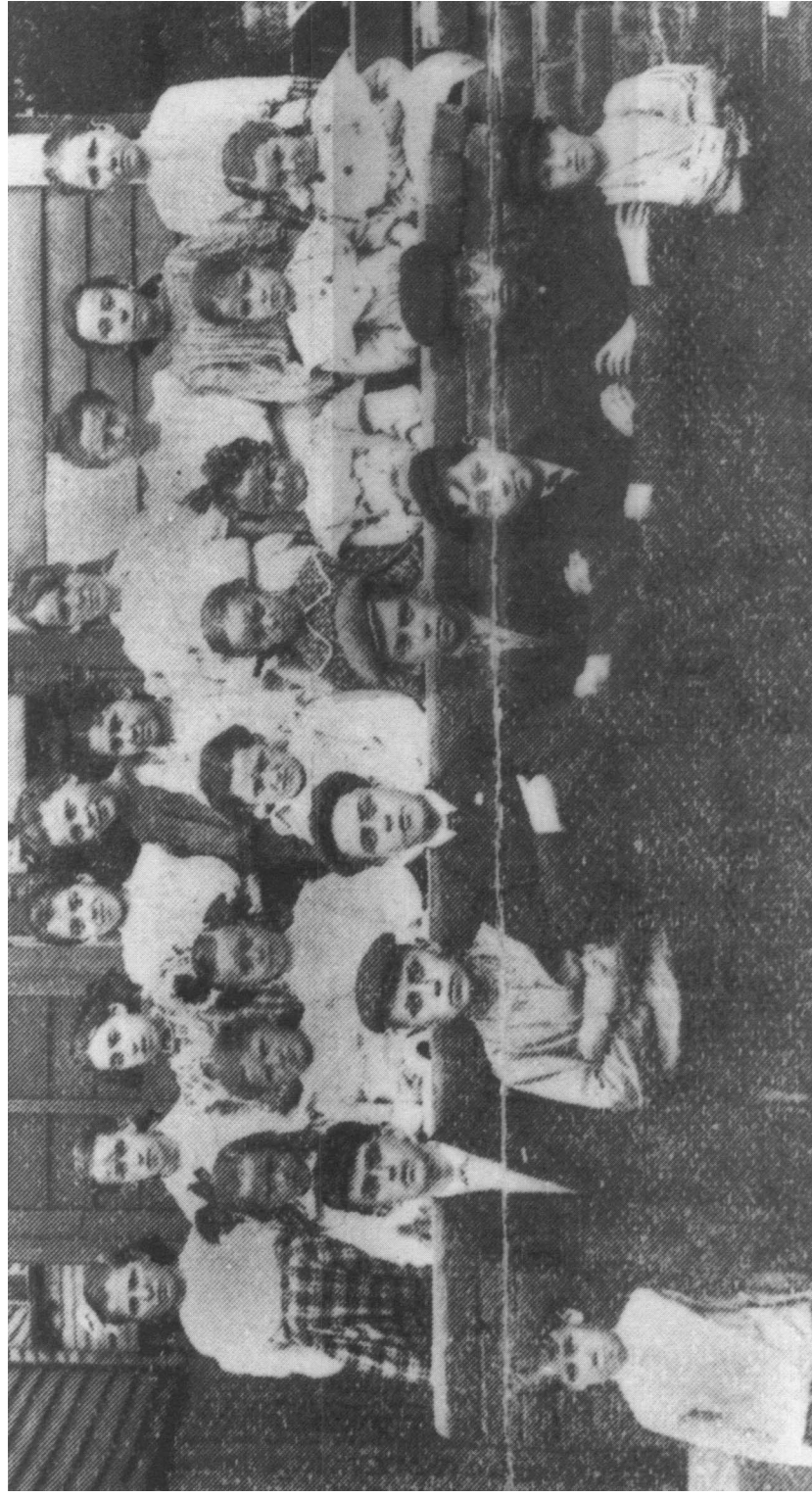
Naturally this group reflected Indianapolis's respect for business principles, since most board members were themselves businessmen. Rather than coordinating agencies, they placed an emphasis on the elimination of competing agencies to achieve optimum efficiency. Throughout the late 1920s and into the early 1930s the Community Fund pressured the FWS to transfer its children's department to the public Marion County Children's Guardian Home, and at one time they even withheld funds for five months until FWS agreed to do so.⁵¹

The board members' careful and studious approach helped create conservative and efficient arrangements. Indianapolis leaders took no bold moves, instead preferring proven methods and sure financing. This was, in many ways, more a reflection of community values than of individual choice. Evolution rather than innovation was the hallmark of Indianapolis philanthropy. The Indianapolis Foundation, for example, was formed after several prominent citizens observed the successful community trust invented in Cleveland. Indianapolis leaders prudently improved on Cleveland's model by spreading its donated funds among several banks.

Social workers in Indianapolis, at least those in charge of directing social work, were also hesitant to embrace new, untested ideas. Nationally, most social workers agreed that work relief was better than a dole and that private case work was better than that done by the

⁵⁰1929 *Indianapolis City Directory*. National economic integration in the 1920s and early 1930s is often overemphasized. Most businesses were still local or regional and were dependent upon other local and regional businesses. Few truly national chains of stores or industries existed. U.S., *Fifteenth Census, 1930*: Vol. I, *Distribution*, 28-30, 710; Mowry and Brownell, *The Urban Nation*, 5-11.

⁵¹Ruby Little, "History of the Family Service Association of Indianapolis, Indiana, 1835-1950" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1951), 69-70.



GROUP OF SETTLEMENT CHILDREN, CHRISTAMORE HOUSE

public sector.⁵² However, even after the National Social Work Conference in 1929 dismissed the idea of an “unworthy” relief recipient, Indianapolis social workers and the board members who hired them continued to speak of “unemployables” and those of “low character.” While work relief allowed an individual to keep his dignity and strengthen moral reserve, a lack of will to work and a flawed character marked one as “unworthy” of relief and “unemployable” by industry. Board members and social work executives praised self-sufficiency, thrift, and hard work. Further, they believed that case work and character building could instill these virtues in others. In a 1929 letter to Foster, the Indianapolis Foundation’s executive director, George Gill, the executive director of the Indianapolis Free Employment Bureau, reported that one mission of the bureau was to discourage those not “employable.”

Frequent remarks made by both social work professionals and board members contended that private social work was superior to work in the public sector. In March 1928, the Service and Relief Committee of the FWS was concerned about both the low number of social workers in the public township trustee offices and the inadequate training they received. Ten years later, the general secretary of the society still questioned the “rigid” policies and “inadequate” relief being given by the township offices.⁵³

Perhaps nothing illustrates the similarities between social workers and business leaders better than the backgrounds of four businessmen and social workers who were at the center of decision-making during the early years of the Depression. Businessmen Arthur Brown and Leo Rappaport and social work professionals Foster and Gill had all been raised and received their primary education in the Indianapolis area. All attended college and graduated before World War I. They conformed to the model of the average philanthropic board member in the city. They were white men over age thirty-nine who were born in Indiana and who had spent a long period of time in Indianapolis.

Brown served as president of the Union Trust Company, sat as a member of the board of directors for several businesses including the Indianapolis Gas Company, Indianapolis Power and Light, Kingan & Company, and Real Silk, and was active in the Meridian Street Methodist Episcopal Church. Fearing radical agitation, Brown insist-

⁵²See C. M. Bookman, “The Place of the Community Chest in Human Relations,” and John Brown, “The Organization of State and County Welfare Departments” in National Conference of Social Work, *Proceedings . . . 1929* (Chicago, 1930), 523-30; “Minutes of the Case Committee, Family Welfare Society, 1923-1954,” Box 7, Folder 3 and Box 3, Folder 2, page 3, Family Services Papers.

⁵³George Gill to the board of directors of the Indianapolis Foundation, May 16, 1929, in Minutes, 1928-1932, Book 3, Papers of the Indianapolis Foundation (Offices of the Indianapolis Foundation, Indianapolis), hereafter cited as Indianapolis Foundation Papers.

ed on a traditional philanthropic response to the economic emergency.⁵⁴ He trusted in the ability of private philanthropy to meet the needs of the populace in a time of economic adjustment, in part because he served on many of the boards of directors for philanthropic agencies, namely the Salvation Army, the Flower Mission Society, Christamore House, and Methodist Hospital among others.

Rappaport shared Brown's social standing but held different views on the ability of private philanthropy to meet the needs of the populace during an economic emergency. He believed in private philanthropy but realized that public funding for emergencies and basic aid were necessary and even obligatory. A local social work executive confidentially described Rappaport as a man who "realized the part which social problems play in the breakdown of individual families in a manner which some of the other board members are not willing to accept."⁵⁵ Sixteen years younger than Brown, Rappaport served on the board of directors of Fletcher American National Bank, Aetna Savings and Trust Company, Lewis Mier & Company, and the Republic Finance and Investment Company. He was also involved heavily in the city's philanthropic organizations. He sat on the board of directors for the Community Fund and Circle Theatre and served as president of the FWS.

Similarly, the executives chosen to manage the daily operations of philanthropic groups interacted with one another and shared similar backgrounds. Their close involvement with one another was due to both professional and personal interests. Several prominent social workers organized a local chapter of the American Association of Social Workers in 1923.⁵⁶ They met monthly to hear speakers on the future of social work and to discuss common problems and concerns. They could also greet one another at state social work conferences.

Foster fit the model of the more conservative wing of the social work community. He was both a social worker and a board member and mixed both roles easily. As a member of the prestigious Columbia Club he socialized with Brown and Rappaport. He served as a deacon at the First Baptist Church, one of the largest churches in Indianapolis. He sat on the board of directors of Christamore House, Wheeler Mission, the American Red Cross, and the Flower Mission Society.⁵⁷ By 1930 he had served as executive director of the Indianapolis Foundation for six years and had maintained ties to the FWS where he had been employed as director before 1917.

⁵⁴Indianapolis *Star*, September 20, 1930.

⁵⁵Memo from Mrs. Blythe W. Francis to her successor, July 30, 1939, p. 23, in "Miscellaneous Papers of the Family Welfare Society, 1932-ca. 1960," Box 3, Folder 2, Family Services papers.

⁵⁶National Conference of Social Work, *Proceedings . . . 1930* (Chicago, 1931), 14; Indianapolis Foundation Papers.

⁵⁷Gill relates that Foster was a man who mixed easily with businessmen. George Gill, interview by Dr. Richard Gemmecke, October 23, 1969, transcript p. 3, Oral History Project, 1972 (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library).

Gill, more socially liberal and the youngest of the four men at age forty in 1930, became the secretary-manager for the Indianapolis Free Employment Bureau the same year that Foster assumed the reins of the Indianapolis Foundation. He supported socially liberal programs such as publicly funded old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. Like Foster, Gill actively participated in his church, the Downey Avenue Christian Church. He did not serve on any prestigious boards, but did belong to the Service Club, the American Legion, and was a Mason. Gill graduated from Indiana University and Columbia and served in World War I.⁵⁸

A sense of moderation generally guided the dialogue between businessmen and social workers. Conservative and prominent men such as Lilly and William Fortune agreed with Rappaport and Gill that relief should be publicly funded. Rhoda Morrow, executive secretary of the FWS, argued that the best social work was done by private groups, giving voice to the thoughts of Foster and Brown.⁵⁹ All the men discussed above accepted the necessity for local public relief, but several viewed private philanthropy as superior to public relief.

Men dominated the boards of philanthropic groups in the late 1920s, but women oversaw most of the day-to-day operations of charities and had done so for quite some time. During the Progressive Era, women's groups embraced issues of child welfare, the health and safety of families, and poverty. A board of women managers, for example, ran the Indianapolis Asylum for Friendless Colored Children. Likewise Anna Stover and Edith Surbey founded Christamore House in 1905. Black women joined together to fight tuberculosis in their community. As with nursing and teaching, social work was seen as an acceptable expansion of the woman's "natural" responsibilities during the Progressive Era.⁶⁰

As the COS and other private groups collaborated with public officials in their efforts to aid the poor, they built an unofficial partnership.⁶¹ Indiana's State Board of Health, for example, existed as a private entity for three years before it became public. Women and

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁹Barry D. Karl and Stanley N. Katz, "The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere, 1890-1930," *Minerva*, XIX (Spring 1981), 236-70. See also Edward Berkowitz and Kim McQuaid, "Businessman and Bureaucrat: The Evolution of the American Social Welfare System, 1900-1940," *Journal of Economic History*, XXXVIII (March 1978), 120-47.

⁶⁰For a discussion of some of the activities of women in Indianapolis charities see Earline Rae Ferguson, "The Woman's Improvement Club of Indianapolis: Black Women Pioneers in Tuberculosis Work, 1903-1938," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXIV (September 1988), 237-61; Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, "Christamore: An Indiana Settlement House from Private Dream to Public Agency," *ibid.*, LXXXIII (June 1987), 113-40; and Thomas J. Cowger, "Custodians of Social Justice: The Indianapolis Asylum for Friendless Colored Children, 1870-1922," *ibid.*, LXXXVIII (June 1992), 93-110. See also Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929* (Chicago, 1982).

⁶¹See Seeley, *Community Chest*, 74-94. See also Shaffer *et al.*, *Indiana Poor Law*, 43-86.

children were some of the first to come under the umbrella of public funding for private agencies. In 1875 the General Assembly authorized counties to subsidize private orphanages, and from 1870 to 1900 city and county officials heavily subsidized the Indianapolis Home for Friendless Women, which had been created in 1866 with private funds. The Indianapolis Free Kindergarten Society furnished an education for children before it was incorporated into the public school system. During the depression of 1893 the newly created Indianapolis Commercial Club gave food and fuel to public employees whom the city could not afford to pay.

The informal yet strong partnership involved the sharing of personnel and information. The FWS, successor to the Indianapolis Benevolent Society and the COS, frequently loaned social workers to the Center Township Trustee, who carried the heaviest relief burden. Social workers in private agencies normally worked closely with the public township trustee's office. Public agencies also used the FWS's registration service, a registry containing the names of all past relief recipients. The officers of each agency knew one another well, and contact between agencies was frequent as employees shared information concerning clients and attended the same social work conferences.

Board members and social workers alike had good reason to be ebullient in the fall of 1929. Philanthropic agencies were doing well. The Indianapolis Foundation ranked second nationally in philanthropic expenditures by community trusts for 1929. The Foundation spent over \$100,000 annually. That same year, the Foundation supported both the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA and the Wheeler Mission, seeing them as social investments in the community. Other allocations included scholarships to high school, college, and graduate students and the furnishing of a free employment bureau to the citizens of the city.⁶²

Indianapolis experienced a placid 1929. The city's economic strength and diversity allowed relief organizations an extra year relatively free of hardship compared to several cities throughout the nation. There were more potential donors for the 1930 Community Fund campaign and fewer people who needed relief in Indianapolis than in other cities. The township trustees met the minimal relief needs of the citizens of Indiana, giving other social agencies the opportunity to provide both short-term and long-term care.

Until late 1929 board minutes of the philanthropic institutions reveal few major problems. Transfers of money from one account to another, the choosing of a campaign chairman, assigning campaign dates, and casual afternoon luncheons dominate the agenda of the Com-

⁶²"Annual Report-Recapitulation of Receipts and Expenditures for 1928-1929, 1929-1930" in "Minutes 1928-1932," Book 3, Indianapolis Foundation Papers.

munity Fund. A look at particular agencies that depended on Community Fund support likewise suggests few serious issues. The annual support letter, sent in early 1929, by the Wheeler Mission stressed its religious work, not relief. In fact, the number of meals served by the mission for the entire fiscal year of 1928 did not equal what it would serve in one month in 1930.⁶³

By October of 1929 Indianapolis was economically strong and its business community diverse. Its leaders, especially of business, were active in civic affairs. The city's philanthropic concerns were popular and well funded. When the stock market crashed in late October, Indianapolis was as ready to test the adequacy of local responsibility as any city of its size.

Indianapolis would not suffer a massive depletion of resources as did many other cities between 1929 and 1933. The city had a clear philanthropic tradition that reminded civic leaders of past achievements and present responsibilities. Strong and consistent leadership provided by the economic and social elite of the city alleviated the problems of unemployment. The network of elites positioned in the city's philanthropic sector was ready to strengthen the public-private partnership. Individual leaders were in contact with almost every other philanthropic agency and with local government officials. In the next several years the partnership would lead to more formal, centralized ties than those of the 1920s.

⁶³"Monthly Reports of Wheeler City Rescue Mission," Box 50, Folders 3 and 4, Papers of Wheeler Mission Ministries (Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, Archives, Indianapolis).