

Collection #
P 0583

ELIZA A. BLAKER COLLECTION CA. 1920S

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Processed by

Barbara Quigley
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: Two photographs, one newspaper article

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1920s

PROVENANCE: Gift from Barbara J. Dirks, 2015

RESTRICTIONS: None

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RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2015.0150

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eliza A. Blaker was superintendent of the Indianapolis Free Kindergarten Society and trained numerous teachers by establishing the Kindergarten Normal Training School, commonly known to the community as "Mrs. Blaker's College."

Eliza A. Cooper Blaker was born 5 March 1854 in Philadelphia to Jacob and Mary Jane Core Cooper. She was already a teacher when, in 1876 at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, she attended a demonstration of kindergarten teaching. This led her to her life's work. She enrolled in the new Centennial Training School for Kindergartners offered through the Friends' Society of Philadelphia. She graduated in 1880, and on 15 September of that year she married Louis J. Blaker, a childhood friend.

She then taught at the Vine Street Kindergarten in Philadelphia, until 1882 when she accepted an invitation to organize a kindergarten at the Hadley Roberts Academy, a private school in Indianapolis. She taught these children from well-do-do families for only a few months before accepting an offer from the Indianapolis Free Kindergarten Society to work with children from poorer families. In September 1882 a kindergarten was opened at an inn on West Market Street, in one of the neediest districts of the city.

Blaker had a vision of kindergartens that would serve all the needy children of Indianapolis. She set up a school in her home to train young women to teach kindergarten. By 1884 there were three kindergartens in the city, with Blaker as superintendent.

In 1883 Blaker established the Kindergarten Normal Training School, which a few years later became the Indiana Kindergarten and Primary Normal Training School. In 1905 it was renamed the Teachers College of Indianapolis, and it eventually became part of the teacher education program of Butler University. In the beginning the school had twelve students, and in the early years classes were held in a variety of locations. In 1903 the college moved into permanent quarters at Twenty-third and Alabama streets with an enrollment of 344 students.

Twenty-five years after the first kindergarten had opened in Indianapolis, a total of 49,252 children had been enrolled in the kindergartens, and 5,574 women had been enrolled in the normal college. A kindergarten for African American children, held in the African Methodist Episcopal Church on West Vermont Street, had opened in 1884 as one of the first three kindergartens in the city. In 1910 a kindergarten was opened for new immigrants from Italy. Kindergartens for other immigrants soon followed. Kindergartens were also opened in the Indianapolis Orphans Home and in hospitals, including the Riley Hospital for Children.

In 1901 Blaker led a victorious fight for local tax support for kindergartens. She instituted training meetings for mothers and was instrumental in founding and supervising Indianapolis' first playground with directed activities, which was opened in Military Park.

By the last year of Blaker's life, enrollment in the college had grown to 1,442. In 1926 diplomas or degrees were awarded to 318 people. During her lifetime, a total of about 20 thousand students had been enrolled in the college. Students came from all over Indiana, with a few from other states and occasionally other countries. Most girls were recent high school graduates, but they came from varied backgrounds. Lack of money never prevented a girl whom Blaker regarded as worthy from enrolling in the college. At the other end of the spectrum, many girls attended who would never need to earn a living but their parents sent them to the college to become well-rounded women and to receive training that would serve them well as wives and mothers. All students were subjected to a course of training to instill in them an understanding of human problems, particularly the problems of those financially less fortunate than themselves.

During Blaker's lifetime, all the regular students of the college were women, although a few men were sometimes admitted as auditors. All of the full-time faculty members were women, while special courses and lectures were frequently given by men. In addition to her work in Indianapolis, Blaker helped organize kindergartens in other cities throughout Indiana.

Blaker was one of the founders of the Indianapolis Council of Women and served as its president in 1901–1902. In 1913, when Indianapolis was devastated by the worst flood in its history, she was made chair of the Women's Committee for the Relief of Flood Sufferers, appointed by the mayor. During the First World War she served on several local committees pertaining to the war effort. The first Red Cross War Kitchen in the United States was opened in the domestic science kitchen of Mrs. Blaker's college.

In June 1926, a few months before her death, Blaker agreed to an affiliation between her college and Butler University. Blaker died in December of that year. The Indianapolis Teachers College continued for a time, but in 1930 the property and operations of the college were transferred entirely to Butler. The free kindergartens continued until 1952, at which time they were incorporated into the Indianapolis school system.

Blaker died on 4 December 1926 and was buried at Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis, beside her husband, who had died in 1913. She had received several honors for her pioneering kindergarten work, including an honorary doctorate from Hanover College in 1917. In 1958 the Indianapolis Public Schools named an elementary school in her honor. The Eliza A. Blaker Memorial Scholarship is awarded annually to students enrolled in the College of Education at Butler University.

Sources:

Boomhower, Ray E. "Eliza Blaker." In *Indiana's 200: The People Who Shaped the Hoosier State*, edited by Linda C. Gugin and James E. St. Clair. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2015: 24–26. General Collection: F525 .I59 2015

Boomhower, Ray E. "The Thing is Right! Eliza Blaker and the Free Kindergarten Movement." In *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*, Winter 2004: 28–37. Reference Room: F521 .I48

Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *Eliza A. Blaker: Her Life and Work*. Indianapolis: The Eliza A. Blaker Club, Inc. and the Indiana Historical Society, 1956. Reference Room: LA 2317
.B52 T4 1956

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of two small black-and-white photographs of Eliza A. Blaker, ca. 1920 and a photocopy of a newspaper obituary for her from 1926.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Photographs

CONTENTS

Two small black-and-white photographs show Eliza A. Blaker standing outside what is likely the Teachers College of Indianapolis. [ca. 1920]

CONTAINER

Folder 1 of 1

Series 2: Newspaper Article

CONTENTS

Photocopy of article about Blaker, titled "Eliza A. Blaker, 72, Leader in Education, Dies," which appeared in the *Indianapolis Star* on 5 December 1926.

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Folder 1 of 1