

# WILLIAM FORTUNE PAPERS, 1877-1938

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Collection #  
M 0462  
OMB 0005  
BV 2859-2863

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Processed by  
Charles Latham  
19 December 1994

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## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	11 manuscript boxes, 1 oversize box (5 linear feet)
COLLECTION DATES:	1877-1938
PROVENANCE:	Mrs Bowman Elder, Indianapolis, IN, 29 April 1980 and 26 June 1986; William L. Elder, Chamber of Commerce Building, Indianapolis IN 46204, 16 June 1994
RESTRICTIONS:	None
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
RELATED HOLDINGS:	M 0422, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce; SC 2254, William Fortune Project; SC 2303, William Fortune Project II; M 0551, F 1090-1108 American Red Cross
ACCESSION NUMBERS:	1980.0404, 1986.425, 1994.0797

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Fortune (1863-1942) was born in Boonville, Indiana, the son of William Harrison and Mary (St. Clair) Fortune. After rudimentary schooling, he became an apprentice on the Boonville *Standard* at the age of thirteen. In 1881 he published a history of Warrick County. Later the same year he accompanied General James Veatch on a trip to Spencer County to interview people who had known Abraham Lincoln during his Indiana years (1815-1830). This began a lifelong interest in Lincoln.

In 1882 Fortune moved to Indianapolis. He took a job at the Indianapolis *Journal*, and soon became city editor. Resigning because of ill health in 1888, he served as local correspondent for several eastern papers during Benjamin Harrison's presidential campaign, then briefly edited a weekly paper, then worked for two years at the Indianapolis *News*.

In the early 1890s he became involved with civic improvement. In 1890, working with Colonel Eli Lilly, he helped found the Commercial Club, which in 1911 became the Chamber of Commerce. He pushed for paving the city's streets, and in early 1890 organized a Paving Exposition. With Lilly, he got the city its first big convention, the 1893 27th Encampment of the GAR. From 1898 to the early 1920s, he was chairman of the Commercial Club's Elevated Track Commission. During the winter of 1893-1894, the Club under his direction operated a made-work program which helped two thousand families through the winter's depression.

Though he never learned to drive, Fortune was an enthusiastic advocate of automobiles, heading an early automobile club and working for good roads. In 1904 he took a lead in hosting a visit to Indianapolis by Prince Pu Lun of China. He became a good friend of two of the prince's entourage, Wong Kai Kah and Kee Owyang, and maintained an interest in China for some years.

For twenty years Fortune operated a trade magazine for the paving industry, *Municipal Engineering*. From 1908 to 1924 he was president of a group of independent telephone companies which provided stout competition to the local Bell companies.

Invited to buy some stock in Eli Lilly and Company in 1916, Fortune served as a director of the company from 1916 to 1927, and as head of the company's finance committee from 1917 to 1921. Through most of his life he was a close friend of J. K. Lilly. He was a member of Lilly's group of "Rowdy Revelers," and went on a world cruise with Lilly in 1923. When Lilly's son Eli was divorced from Fortune's daughter Evelyn in 1926, the fathers disagreed. Fortune kept his lawyer, William H. Thompson, busy for some years scrutinizing every action taken by the Lilly company's board.

In 1916 Fortune organized the Indianapolis area chapter of the American Red Cross. He raised large amounts of money and organized hundreds of volunteers. He also organized the local War Chest and raised over \$3 million in a week. He continued to head the Red Cross chapter until his death.

In the 1920s, Fortune was active in the national Red Cross and in the national Chamber of Commerce, to which he made in 1925 a proposal for tax reduction which received national attention. In 1928-1930 he headed the American Peace Society, which sought to make practical application of the principles of the Briand-Kellogg pact.

On the death of his friend James Whitcomb Riley in 1916, Fortune bought the poet's Lockerbie Street home, and held it until it could be taken over by an association. In 1931, to make sure that a Veterans Administration hospital would be built in Indianapolis, he bought and donated a \$16,000 site on Cold Spring Road.

In 1926-1927 Fortune headed a commission to erect a memorial to George Rogers Clark, but resigned before the project was completed. In 1927 he was active in organizing a Nancy Hanks Lincoln memorial in Spencer County. He wrote several papers about Lincoln's Indiana boyhood, and corresponded with several Lincoln biographers, notably Ida M. Tarbell and Albert J. Beveridge.

After his wife's death in 1898 and the marriage of his children in the early 1900s, Fortune was essentially a public man. He enjoyed the limelight, and used his prominence to promote what seemed to him worthwhile causes.

Sources: Materials in collection

Latham, Charles, *William Fortune (1863-1942) A Hoosier Biography* (Indianapolis: Guild Press of Indiana, 1994)

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## SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection, filling eleven manuscript boxes and one oversize box, contains correspondence, speeches, pamphlets, photographs, and drawings, dated 1877 to 1938. The material was received in three installments, the first two of which were originally separate collections, M 0350 and M 0462. The second group, containing correspondence 1922-1936, came arranged alphabetically by correspondent in two date groups, 1922-1932 and 1933-1936; this order has been retained, in Boxes 6-11. In Boxes 1-5, material in the other two groups has been arranged by category, the categories being arranged chronologically as they occurred in Fortune's life.

In Box 1 are biographical materials including portraits; correspondence 1881-1918; and material on Fortune's early activities, including Century Club, Commercial Club, paving, and the 1893 GAR Encampment.

In Box 2, Folders 1-9 contain material about track elevations. In Folders 2-4 are responses to a questionnaire Fortune sent out to other cities about the effect of track elevation. Folders 5-7 contain petitions circulated by the Public Safety League in 1899, demanding action about elevation. Folders 10-11 contain material about a loving cup given to Fortune in 1899 by Indianapolis citizens when his morale was very low after his wife's death. In Folders 12-15 is material about Prince Pu Lun's visit to Indianapolis in 1904. Other activities covered are J. K. Lilly's "Rowdy Revelers" (Folder 16); the Indiana Society of Chicago (Folder 17); the American Red Cross (Folders 18-19); and Fortune's world cruise (Folders 20-21). Folder 22 contains a Cirkut photograph by N. H. Losey of T.R. Roosevelt addressing a crowd on the Circle from the English Hotel, 13 October 1910.

Box 3 contains material on Fortune's 1929 homecoming at Boonville (Folder 1); his gift of land for a VA hospital (Folders 2-5); and his work on the U. S. Chamber of Commerce (Folders 6-9). Invitations, programs, and clippings are in Folders 11-14, and photographs are listed in Folders 19-28. Scrapbooks about Fortune's activities are in Folder 29, BV 2859-1863, and OMB 0005.

Box 4 contains material documenting Fortune's interest in Abraham Lincoln's Indiana years, 1815-1830. In Folders 2-6 are notes of his 1881 interviews with people who had known Lincoln, and in Folder 7 affidavits about the Lincoln family's route in Indiana. Fortune's correspondence about Lincoln, and about a Lincoln memorial in Boonville, is in Folders 9-18. Folder 32 contains a photograph album of Lincoln's Last Journey. The album is of copy photographs of originals by Ira M. Hough, and is the sixth of six sets made (ca. 1934)

Box 5 contains more material about Lincoln (Folders 1-2). Folders 3-7 contain material about Fortune's friend James Whitcomb Riley, and letters written to Riley, 1903-1917, by Young E. Allison, a friend of Fortune.

Newspaperman Anselm Chomel got to know Fortune about 1918 when he and his sister wrote a book about the World War I activities of the local chapter of the Red Cross (*A Red Cross Chapter at Work* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1920)). He later, apparently hoping for a patron, wrote draft biographies of Fortune (Folders 8-9) and Colonel Eli Lilly (Folders 10-14). Neither was published.

Boxes 6-8 contain Fortune's correspondence, 1922-1932, arranged alphabetically by correspondent. In Boxes 9-10 is Fortune's correspondence 1933-1936. Prominent correspondents: H. W. Austin, William L. Barker, Albert J. Beveridge, Ernest P. Bicknell, Mabel T. Boardman, Scott C. Bone, Hilton U. Brown, Arthur Deerin Call, D. Laurance Chambers, Charles E. Coffin, Marcus Dickey, John J. Esch, James L. Fieser, Eugene C. Foster, William Dudley Foulke, Cary T. Grayson, Myron R. Green, Thomas F. Green, Herbert Hoover, Louis C. Huesmann, John C. Iglehart, Haute Tarkington Jameson, Roscoe Kiper, John Uri Lloyd, Louis Ludlow, Philip Lutz, Jr, James K. McClintock, J. Franklin McFadden, Nellie Simmons Meier, Meredith Nicholson, John J. O'Connor, Ernest N. Owen, John Barton Payne, Kate Milner Rabb, James E. Watson.

Box 11 contains correspondence 1927-1937 with Fortune's lawyer, William H. Thompson, about the operation of Eli

Lilly and Company. Having disagreed with J. K. Lilly in 1926, Fortune questioned almost every action taken by the company, objecting especially to incentive bonuses paid to the top executives and to what he considered a low rate of dividend .

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## **BOX AND FOLDER LISTING**

### **BOX 1: Biographical: Correspondence, 1881-1918; Activitie,1890-1893**

FOLDER	CONTENTS
1	Biographical
2	Reprint, Cyclopaedia of American Biography
3	Obituaries
4	(VC) Portraits
5	(VC) Oversize portraits (OVB and OVC storage)
6	Boonville <i>Standard</i> carrier's greeting 1878
7	Correspondence-- 1881-1882
8	Correspondence-- 1886-1890
9	Correspondence-- 1892-1894
10	Correspondence-- 1896-1902
11	Correspondence-- 1904-1905
12	Correspondence-- 1906-1909
13	Correspondence-- 1911-1914
14	Correspondence-- 1915-1918
15	Century Club 1890-1894
16	Commercial Club 1890, 1897
17	Articles about Paving
18	(VC) Photos-- GAR Encampment 1892; USS Kearsarge on State House lawn 1893
19	GAR Encampment 1893-- programs
20	GAR Encampment 1893-- correspondence
21	GAR Encampment 1893-- "Fortune's Five Thousand"
22	Encampment 1894 at Pittsburgh

## **BOX 2: Activities, 1894-1923**

FOLDER	CONTENTS
1	Material on track elevations 1894-1903
2-4	Responses to questionnaires about elevation
5-7	Petitions-- Public Safety League 1899
8	Speech by William Fortune about track elevation 1905
9	Clippings re track elevation
10	Loving Cup 1899
11	(VC) Photo of Loving Cup
12	Wong Kai Kah-- Banking in China
13	(VC) Photos of Pu Lun visit 1904
14	(OMB 5) Chinese print ca 1905 (Folder 1)
15	(OMB 5) Chinese proclamation (ffF-13, Folder 5)
16	"Rowdy Revellers" ca 1910
17	Indiana Society of Chicago 1911-1924
18	American Red Cross
19	(VC) Photos-- American Red Cross (see also OVC-folders 1 & 2)
20	Log of world cruise 1923
21	(VC) Album of world cruise
22	(VC) T.R. Roosevelt at Indianapolis, October 13, 1910 (VC-Cirkut)

## **BOX 3: Activities 1929-1934; Invitations and programs; Photographs**

FOLDER	CONTENTS
1	Boonville homecoming 1929
2	VA Hospital gift 1931-- correspondence Jan.-Mar.
3	VA Hospital gift 1931-- correspondence Apr.-Dec.
4	VA Hospital gift 1931-- construction of additional facility 1932
5	VA Hospital gift 1931-- clippings
6	U. S. Chamber of Commerce-- correspondence (see also, VC-Cirkuts: 1933 Dinner)

7	U. S. Chamber of Commerce-- printed material
8	Address on taxation 1926
9	(OMB 0005) Memorial about taxes 1924 (Folder 6)
10	United States Society 1932; Thrift and Security Foundation 1934
11	Invitations
12	Programs
13-14	Clippings
15	Printed material
16	Reports of Star Savings and Loan Association 1892-1894
17	Woodruff Place school enumeration 1896
18	Typescript-- Daniel Webster at Madison 6-1-1837
19	(VC) Photos-- George Rogers Clark Memorial Commission 1927; (OMB 0005) Plans for G. R. Clark Memorial (Folder 3)
20	(VC) Photos-- WF memorial in Boonville 1938
21	(VC) Photos -- Welcome of Paul V. McNutt from Philippines 1940
22-23	(VC) Photos -- Illustrations for biography
24	(VC) Photos -- Copy negatives for illustrations
25	(VC) Photos -- Portrait of Col. Eli Lilly
26	(VC) Photos -- John Uri Lloyd
27	(VC) Photos -- Portraits-- J. L. Hoggatt, Ben D. House, Nathan Morris, Prince Pu Lun, Tsai Ting Kan
28	(VC) Album-- unidentified
29	Scrapbook #1
30	(BV 2859-2863) Scrapbooks #2, 3, 6, 7, 8
31	(OMB 0005) Scrapbooks #4, 5 (folder 7 & 8)

**BOX 4: Lincoln material**

FOLDER	CONTENTS
1	(VC) Portraits of Lincoln
2	(VC) Lincoln family cabin
3	Evidence re; Lincoln-- Gen. Veatch, Gentry family

- 4 Transcript of WF's notes taken in 1881
- 5 WF interview with Mrs. Joseph Crawford 1881
- 6 WF trip with Ida M. Tarbell 1923
- 7 1916 affidavits re: Lincoln family route
- 8 Resolution re: Lincoln memorial 1932
- 9 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial--Wm. L. Barker, J. Christian Bay
- 10-12 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial-- George Honig
- 13 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial -- John E. Iglehart
- 14-15 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial -- Roscoe Kiper
- 16 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial -- Philip Lutz, Jr.
- 17 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial -- Ernest W. Owen
- 18 Correspondence re: Lincoln and memorial -- miscellaneous
- 19 (OMB 0005) Plans for Lincoln memorial (Folder 3 & Flat File: FF 11-k, Folder 4)
- 20 (VC) Photos-- Lincoln memorial and Lincoln route
- 21 Publicity-- Lincoln memorial
- 22 (OMB 0005) Publicity -- oversize (Folder 2)
- 23 Miscellaneous material on Lincoln
- 24 Nancy Hanks Lincoln memorial
- 25 *Lincoln Lore* #1-38
- 26 WF speeches before SW Indiana Hist. Soc. 1925, 1926, 1930
- 27 WF speech at Boonville 1932
- 28 Speeches and papers by others about Lincoln
- 29 Roscoe Kiper-- "Lincoln in Indiana"
- 30 Abraham Lincoln in Illinois
- 31 Booklets about Lincoln
- 32 (VC) Copy photographs of Lincolns Last Journey (see VC Album Storage)

**BOX 5: Lincoln continued; Young E. Allison- J. W. Riley; Anselm Chomel biographies of WF and Col. Eli Lilly  
FOLDER**

- 1 Lincoln route-- booklets
- 2 Lincoln-- clippings
- 3 Material on James Whitcomb Riley
- 4 Young E. Allison to Riley-- 1903-1906
- 5 Young E. Allison to Riley -- 1907-1908
- 6 Young E. Allison to Riley -- 1915
- 7 Young E. Allison to Edmund Eitel-- 1916-1917
- 8 Chomel-- *Pro Bono Publico*-- pp. 1-70
- 9 Chomel-- *Pro Bono Publico* -- pp. 71-140
- 10 Chomel-- *Lilly-- Founder*-- pp. 1-50
- 11 Chomel-- *Lilly-- Founder* -- pp. 51-100
- 12 Chomel-- *Lilly-- Founder* -- pp. 101-150
- 13 Chomel-- *Lilly-- Founder* -- pp. 151-200
- 14 Chomel-- *Lilly-- Founder* -- pp. 201-267

**BOX 6: Correspondence 1922-1932, A to E  
FOLDER**

- 1-2 A
- 3-6 B
- 7-9 C
- 10 D
- 11-12 E

**BOX 7: Correspondence 1922-1932, F to L  
FOLDER**

- 1 F
- 2-4 G
- 5 H
- 6 I - J
- 7-9 K
- 10 L
- 11 J. K. Lilly-- 1922-1923

12 J. K. Lilly -- 1924-- January-June

13 J. K. Lilly -- 1924-- July-December

14 J. K. Lilly -- 1925

15 J. K. Lilly -- 1926

**BOX 8: Correspondence 1922-1932, L to Z  
FOLDER**

1 L continued

2-5 M

6 N

7-10 O

11 P

12 Q to Z

**BOX 9: Correspondence 1933-1936, A to L  
FOLDER**

1 A

2-4 B

5 C

6 D

7 E

8-9 F

10-11 G

12 H

13 I

14 J-K

15 L

**BOX 10: Correspondence 1933-1936, L to Z  
FOLDER**

1-2 L continued

3-5 M

6 N

7-8 O

9 P

10 R

11-12 S

13-14 T

15 U-V-W

**BOX 11: Correspondence with William H. Thompson re: Lilly Company  
FOLDER**

1 1925-1927

2 1928

3 1929

4 1930

5 1931

6 1932

7 1933

8 1934

9 1935

10 1936

11 1937

**OMB 5  
FOLDER**

1 Chinese print ca. 1905

2 Lincoln clippings

3 Plans for memorials at Boonville and Vincennes

4 Plans for memorials at Boonville and Vincennes (Flat File: FF 11-k)

5 Chinese proclamation ca. 1905 (Flat File: FF 11-k)

6 Memorial about taxes ca. 1924

7-8 Scrapbooks #4 and 5

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## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's [online catalog](#)
2. Click on the "Local Catalog" icon.
3. Search for the collection by its call number, using the letter or letters designation and **four** digits (e.g., M 0715, SC 2234).
4. When you find the collection, go to the "Holdings" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.

END