

## Indianapolis *Recorder*

Founded: 1895

Location: 122 West New York Street, Indianapolis (1895–1900); 414 Indiana Avenue (1900); Knights of Pythias Building, 236–240 West Walnut Street ( – 1918); 518–520 Indiana Avenue (1918–75); 2901 North Tacoma Avenue (1975– )

George Pheldon Stewart and Will Porter founded what has become the third oldest extant African-American newspaper in the United States. The Indianapolis *Recorder* is the longest continuously operated African-American newspaper in Indiana. Award-winning journalists, such as William Raspberry, have contributed to the paper's deep tradition of journalistic excellence and service to the Indianapolis African-American community.

The first appellation given to the weekly was the *Directory*, a one-page sheet filled with advertisements and church news. Within two years the number of pages expanded to four and the designation had changed to the *Recorder*. As with most journals of its time, the *Recorder* affiliated with a political party, specifically the party of abolition and Lincoln, the Republican party. In 1899 George Stewart bought out his partner for \$300. The Stewart family retained control of the paper until 1988, giving the newspaper a continuity of ownership that was unusual for the period. Marcus C. Stewart, Sr., assumed the duties of editor, while his mother, Fannie Caldwell Stewart, acted as publisher after the death of George in 1924. Marcus continued to act as editor until 1983.

The *Recorder* differentiated itself from other black weeklies by focusing on local rather than national news. In many respects the paper was more of a community paper than a big-city tabloid. The *Recorder* reported national and international news, but most of its four pages of print related reports on people in the community, marriages, deaths, and local church activities.

In 1916 the weekly doubled the number of pages it offered to its subscribers. In its expanded pages the *Recorder* urged blacks to be proud of their heritage, to fight stereotypes, and to lead moral lives. Excerpts from sermons were printed, and biographical sketches added to the moral tone of the paper. The paper ran a series of articles on the black experience in Indiana, informing readers of their heritage and imbuing them with confidence concerning their future.

In the 1920s and 1930s the paper continually tried to uplift its patrons and encourage economic activity and relief. The weekly also pressed for the end of discrimination in hiring, warred against the influence of the Ku Klux Klan, and publicly endorsed the anti-Klan ticket of the early 1920s. During the Roaring Twenties editors focused on the need for black-owned businesses and greater economic opportunities for the black community. Indianapolis was a hub of activity for the national African-American community in the 1920s and 1930s. Indiana Avenue became synonymous with jazz, a Fourth of July 100-mile race featuring African-American drivers, in addition to another course in Speedway, connected the Circle City to auto racing, and prominent speakers, such as W. E. B. DuBois and James Weldon, spoke at the Senate Avenue YWCA. The *Recorder* gave readers front-row seats to each event.

When the depression hit, the focus slowly shifted from economic opportunity to adequate relief measures, as the publishers of the *Recorder* endeavored to find ways to help those ravaged by the economic catastrophe. During his lifetime George Stewart established a tradition of helping charitable institutions, both black and white. After the Stock Market Crash, the paper followed in the tradition by creating the “Good Fellows” organization to collect money for food baskets and toys during the Christmas season. In the 1940s the organization became the *Recorder* Charities.

During World War II the paper supported the war effort and saluted individuals from the community who served under the nation's banner. It followed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's drive to integrate the armed services and proudly reported on the success of the Fighting 99th, the airmen trained at Tuskegee, Alabama. At the end of the conflict the paper produced its "Victory Edition," a six-section celebration of American triumph. The 1940s attested to the paper's tremendous influence in the community as its circulation reached forty thousand homes.

In the 1950s and 1960s the *Recorder* pressed for action on civil rights and desegregation. It could report some successes. On 17 January 1953 the Indiana Hospital Development Association assured the paper that its hospitals would not practice racial discrimination. The paper supported measures introduced in the state legislature to strengthen the effectiveness of the Fair Employment Practice Act and chronicled the careers of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Beyond civil rights, however, the weekly continued to report on local church activities, marriages, lectures, and, by the late 1960s, the economic drift of urban neighborhoods. It was during this troubling period that William Raspberry came to work for the *Recorder*. In 1966 he left for the *Washington Post*, to launch a successful national career.

Since 1970 the *Recorder* has continued to support civil rights initiatives, and although it is no longer party-affiliated, it has sided with the Democratic party for more than thirty years. The paper continues to be delivered weekly and is regularly divided into six sections including general news, arts and entertainment, people, religion, sports, and business. The end of the Stewart era came in 1988. Eunice M. Trotter, a journalist for the *Indianapolis Star*, bought the weekly.

Trotter brought a new management style to the formerly family-operated paper. She introduced an internship program, brought in computers, and revived both the *Recorder's* picnic and parade and its charity program. She challenged city hall to answer questions concerning several unusual police actions. Unfortunately, circulation dropped to near ten thousand, and the paper tottered near insolvency. Within two years Trotter was forced to sell the paper to William G. Mays, an Indianapolis chemical company executive.

Mays infused the weekly with new capital, increased the number of staff, and further updated equipment. Mays wanted a more positive viewpoint established and an increase in subscriptions. Within six years the paper was up to a base of 15,000 subscribers and was earning a profit. In 1992 the paper won a coveted CASPER award for general reporting. By 1998 the African-American journal boasted of an estimated readership of 83,000, a staff of 24, and secure profits.