



## Text

Organized 1904 by Lillian Thomas Fox with 14 clubs. Affiliated with National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, founded 1896. Objectives include improvement of education, health, living standards, inter-racial understanding. Clubhouse at 2034 N. Capitol since 1927. Listed in National Register of Historic Places, 1987.

## Report

The marker text is accurate except for the number of local clubs that formed the “permanent” State Federation.<sup>1</sup> This review uses primary sources to clarify the series of events leading up to the founding of the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (IFCWC). The review also offers context for the black women's club movement in Indiana and the U.S. in the early years of the twentieth century.

According to historian Anne Firor Scott, women's clubs and organizations have been involved with issues of community welfare in the U.S. for over two hundred years. In their separate communities, white women and black women (enslaved and free) organized themselves to achieve important goals, becoming “prolific builders of vital community institutions” well before they had gained the right to vote.<sup>2</sup> Black churches provided the earliest environments for black women to assume leadership responsibilities; they organized to support and sustain local missions, Sunday schools, and health care. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, black women expanded their activities into secular clubs hoping to bring more knowledge and resources to solve a wide array of social problems and confront racial hostility. These associations were critical partners in helping to support black communities within larger white urban centers.<sup>3</sup>

In July 1896, the National League of Colored Women and the National Federation of Afro-American Women joined together in Washington, D.C. to become the [National Association of Colored Women](#) (NACW). Led in its early years by women such as Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell, Margaret Murray Washington, Ida Wells Barnett, and Mary McCleod Bethune, the NACW grew to be “the first cohesive national communications network among black women.”<sup>4</sup> According to historian Stephanie Shaw, its goals were to aid and promote black women and their activities for community well-being and racial advancement.<sup>5</sup>

The Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (IFCWC) played a similar role in communicating about and promoting the work of Indiana's black women's clubs. The club gave visibility to the local women's clubs throughout the state and provided a network and a common forum for discussion of racism, discrimination, housing, employment, education, and healthcare. IFCWC promoted to the public the necessity of “a united effort of women to meet the changing needs of a rapidly increasing [industrialized nation](#).”<sup>6</sup> The IFCWC's affiliation with the National



Association of Colored Women brought national attention to the issues and gave a more powerful voice to the activities of the women's clubs.<sup>7</sup>

On February 12, 1904, [Lillian Thomas Fox](#), Indiana State Organizer for the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), convened a meeting at the [Flanner Guild](#), Indianapolis, to take the first steps toward organizing a state federation of colored women's clubs. Representatives of fourteen clubs from Indianapolis and other Indiana towns attended this *preliminary* meeting.<sup>8</sup>

The Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was formally organized on Wednesday, April 27, 1904; nineteen clubs and sixty delegates from around the state met at [Bethel AME Church](#) in Indianapolis, April 26-27. Ella Harrell, Muncie, was elected president; Marion, Indiana was selected as the site of the April 1905 meeting of the State Federation.<sup>9</sup> At the close of this Indianapolis meeting, the State Federation Committee on Resolutions recognized "the spread of lynchings, the increase of prejudice and disfranchisement." They pledged to bring the influence of the new organization to "improve existing conditions and to ask for racial fair-play."<sup>10</sup>

Historian Darlene Clark Hine described the growth of black women's clubs throughout Indiana in the 1920s: "Black women on all socio-economic levels participated in the upsurge of club-founding and organization-building."<sup>11</sup> Many of these individual clubs became members of the IFCWC. By 1914, the State Federation comprised 97 clubs and 1568 individual members; by 1927, the Federation's growth and success enabled its members to file incorporation papers for the organization and to purchase a state club house located at 2034 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis.<sup>12</sup> By the summer of 1945, the IFCWC club house was paid for; at the August annual meeting, Federation members burned the headquarters' mortgage in a ceremony on the front lawn on North Capitol. The National Park Service recognized this club house with a 1987 listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Today, the club remains an incorporated non-profit organization; and it continues to own and maintain the club home, now surrounded by the sprawling Indiana University Health/Methodist Hospital complex.<sup>13</sup>

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NOTE: In the 1980s, members of the [National Council of Negro Women, Indianapolis Section](#) with direction from historian Darlene Clark Hine began to collect and preserve the records of black women's organizations and the personal papers of many of the members themselves. A major part of this collection, [the Black Women in the Middle West Collection](#), is housed at the Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. Other collections are located at Calumet Regional Archives, IU-Northwest in Gary and Northern Indiana Historical Society, South Bend.

See: Darlene Clark Hine and Patrick Kay Bidelman, *The Black Women in the Middle West Project: A Comprehensive Resource Guide Illinois and Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1986).



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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenir Booklet containing Historical Sketches of Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Gary, Indiana, August 1924), 5; Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (National Association of Colored Women, 1933), 145-49; Earline Rae Ferguson, "Lillian Thomas Fox: Indianapolis Journalist and Community Leader," in *Indiana's African American Heritage: Essays from Black History News & Notes*, ed. Wilma L. Gibbs (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1993), 139-150; "Colored Womens Clubs," *Indianapolis Recorder*, February 13, 1904.

The information in the secondary sources listed in this footnote about the establishment of the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs conflicts with information reported at the time of the founding of the IFCWC, 1904, in the *Indianapolis Recorder* (a black newspaper still publishing today). The earliest secondary source located about the Federation's founding is the *Souvenir Booklet*. It states that 42 delegates representing 14 clubs were present and became members. Lillian Thomas Fox "was made president." Officers were elected for the coming year: Mrs. Ella Herrold, president; Mrs. Arsenath Artes and Mrs. Raglan, vice-presidents; Mrs. Roxie Bell, corresponding secretary; Mrs. Mary Thomas, recording secretary; Mrs. Ada Goins, treasurer; Mrs. Lillian Fox, state organizer.

See footnotes 8 and 9 below for the sequence of events as reported in the 1904 *Indianapolis Recorder*. Additional primary sources may be located in collections at the Indiana Historical Society: Black Women in the Middle West #M499 OM301; National Council of Negro Women, Indianapolis Section, #M539 OM 280. That additional research is outside the scope of the Indiana Historical Bureau's review project.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 2, 3, 13, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Earline Rae Ferguson, *A Community Affair: African American Women's Club Work in Indianapolis, 1879-1917* (PhD. dissertation, Indiana University, 1997), Indiana State Library, microfilm, 46-47, 94-101; Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 2, 3, 13, 14; Anne Firor Scott, "Most Invisible of All: Black Women's Voluntary Associations," *Journal of Southern History*, 56, no. 1 (February 1990): 3-6, 9, 18; Stephanie J. Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," *Journal of Women's History*, 3, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 11-13, 18; Darlene Clark Hine, *When the Truth is Told: A History of Black Women's Culture and Community in Indiana, 1875-1950* (National Council of Negro Women, Indianapolis Section, 1981), 17-27, 40-43; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2000), 19-21, 27-28, 40-43; Gerda Lerner, "Early Community Work of Black Club Women," *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (April 1974): 159-60; Carmen V. Walker, *An Analysis of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs 1896-1935* (PhD diss., Clark Atlanta University, 2008), 34, 36-38 accessed [Digital Commons](#).

In her dissertation, Earline Rae Ferguson used Indianapolis African-American newspapers between 1879 and 1917 to identify approximately 3,000 black women and 500 clubs and lodges in Indianapolis alone. By 1900, almost every city and small town in Indiana offered club activities to black women.

<sup>4</sup> Hine, *When the Truth is Told*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> Gerda Lerner, "Early Community Work of Black Club Women," 158; Hine, *When the Truth is Told*, 33-35, 55, 63; Stephanie J. Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," *Journal of Women's History*, 3, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 12, 13, 19-20; [Mary Church Terrell, "What the National Association \[of Colored Women\] Has Meant to Colored Women" \(undated\), \[2, 7\]](#); Walker, 10, 41-42, 86; Lillian



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Serece Williams, ed., "Records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, 1895-1992," in John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Black Studies Research Sources*, Part 1 (University Publications of America, 1993), xii accessed

[http://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/academic/upa\\_cis/1555\\_recsnatlassocolwmsclubpt1.pdf](http://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/academic/upa_cis/1555_recsnatlassocolwmsclubpt1.pdf); Dorothy Salem, "National Association of Colored Women," vol. 2 of *Black Women in America*, Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), 842-851; Bettye Collier Thomas, "National Council for Negro Women," vol. 2 of *Black Women in America*, Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), 853-64.

Attempts to organize black women's clubs on a national level did not occur until the 1890s. According to historian Dorothy Salem, "It was during the period of the club movement's greatest growth, 1890-1920s, that the [NACW](#) achieved its legacy—shaping the leadership, the institutions, and the identity of a people through its women." The NACW was established to link and to promote the activities of the clubs at local, state, and national levels, and to provide a national platform for discussion of racism, segregation, and discrimination. In 1904, the NACW membership included about 600 clubs; by 1924, its individual membership was over 100,000.

The growth of new national black organizations such as the [NAACP](#) and the [National Urban League](#) began to duplicate some of the activities of the NACW. In 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune founded the [National Council of Negro Women](#) to unite the growing number of national black women's organizations; and the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs turned its attention back to working women and family.

Most of the records of the National Association of Colored Women are located at the headquarters of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. The guide to those records by Lillian Williams cites records and papers from other institutions as well. (Note that the original name of the organization was National Association of Colored Women; over time the organization was generally referred to as the [National Association of Colored Women's Clubs](#).)

NOTE: Sally Wyatt Stewart of Evansville, Indiana, served as president of the IFCWC from 1921-1928. She became president of the NACW from 1928 through 1933 and began the reorganization and refocus of the national organization during her term.

<sup>6</sup> *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 8, 1916 accessed <http://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/IREcorder>; *Indianapolis Recorder*, September 3, 1927; "Extended Health Campaign Reached 25,000 People. . .," *Indianapolis Recorder*, May 20, 1933, 1; "Women's Federation Holds Convention," *Indianapolis Recorder*, August 5, 1933; *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 15, 1944; Jack Blocker, "[Building Networks: Cooperation and Communication Among African Americans in the Urban Midwest, 1860-1910](#)," *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no. 4 (December 2003): 370, 379-80, 383; Jack S. Blocker, *A Little More Freedom: African Americans enter the Urban Midwest, 1860-1930* (The Ohio State University, 2008), 219; Ferguson, *A Community Affair*, 94, 98-99; Scott, *Invisible*, 16; Erlene Stetson, "Black Feminism in Indiana, 1893-1933," *Phylon* 44, no. 4 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 1983): 295-96 accessed [JSTOR](#); Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2000), 6-7, 27-28, 37-39; Carmen V. Walker, 41, 86-88.

The IFCWC sought to: demonstrate the accomplishments of black women; serve the less fortunate; and give strength to each other by cooperation. Examples of the Federation's work can be gleaned from newspaper reports (cited above) of their annual conventions. At the Thirteenth (1916) Annual Indiana Federation Convention at Anderson, local club members heard programs on women's place in history, patriotism, and the "sociological status



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of the Negro.” Attendees at the 1927 annual convention were urged to give their club reports to the Federation president “in order that all women of the state may be inspired by what others are doing.”

The State Federation reported a Junior Department as early as 1916. By 1927, Indianapolis had nine junior clubs, most of which were auxiliary to Federation club members. One of the 1927 activities for the children was a penny drive to aid in obtaining a state club home in Indianapolis. During national Negro Health Week, 1933, Indiana Federation club members throughout the state hosted at least one health talk for their communities. The 1933 State Federation meeting, held in Gary, adopted a resolution making the *Indianapolis Recorder* “the organ for official publication of state federation news. . . .” At the 1944 Annual Convention, club representatives called for sending multiple telegrams to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of War Henry Stimson protesting the mistreatment of black soldiers in the U.S. Army. They demanded that “black soldiers be treated at least as well as Nazi prisoners of war.”

Indiana black women and their organizations have been linked to other black communities by railroads, telegraphs, and black newspapers since the failure of Reconstruction. Black women’s clubs, present in almost every community north and south challenged their hostile environments and helped produce a national race consciousness.

<sup>7</sup> “Colored Women Call on Governor McCray,” *Indianapolis News*, May 19, 1921, Indiana State Library, microfilm; “Many of Nation’s Prominent Women Meet in Chicago for Leadership Battle,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 15, 1933, 1.

For example, during the 1920s, the [Ku Klux Klan](#) was at its greatest strength in Indiana. And, in 1921, a committee of black women from the “American Citizenship Department” of the NACW, met with Indiana Governor Warren McCray to ask for a statewide committee of white and black women that would work with other state committees toward “a better understanding between the races” and “for economic and civic advancement of race.”

<sup>8</sup> *Indianapolis Recorder*, January 30, 1904 accessed <http://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/IRecorder>; *Indianapolis Recorder*, February 6, 1904; *Indianapolis Recorder*, February 13, 1904; Earline Rae Ferguson, “Lillian Thomas Fox,” in vol. 1 *Black Women in America*, 449; Earline Rae Ferguson, *A Community Affair*, 99-101; [Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame, Lillian Thomas Fox 2014](#); Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 2000), 21-24.

A “Mass Meeting especially for women” was held on February 4, 1904 at Bethel AME Church, Indianapolis. Mrs. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, National Organizer of the National Association of Colored Women spoke to the large audience about the activities of colored women’s clubs throughout the U.S. And, on February 12, 1904, Lillian Thomas Fox met with 14 clubs; temporary officers were elected. The *Indianapolis Recorder* reported that “A permanent organization will be affected at another meeting. . . . A number of additional clubs will be represented at the next meeting.”

For additional information on the Flanner House, see [Encyclopedia of Indianapolis](#), p. 577.

<sup>9</sup> *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 9, 1904 accessed <http://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/IRecorder>; *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 30, 1904; *Indianapolis Recorder*, May 5, 1905.

On April 9, 1904, the *Indianapolis Recorder* reported that a “State Convention of Colored Women’s clubs will be held at Bethel church, in this city, Tuesday and Wednesday, April 26-27. The meeting . . . is for the purpose of forming a permanent State Federation. . . . All clubs working on religious, moral, educational or charitable line, desiring to write in a Federation are requested to send delegates.” As reported in the *Recorder*, April 30, 1904,





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nineteen clubs from around the state and Indianapolis were present; "...the object of the State organization is to foster and promote such work."

<sup>10</sup> "Lynching in Indiana," *Richmond (Vir.) Dispatch*, November 21, 1902, 1; *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 30, 1904; Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153, 189; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 34-36; Blocker, *A Little More Freedom*, 2, 104-34, 214-215; Stetson, 296; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana Before 1900* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957), 276-287; Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View," *North American Review* vol. DLXXI (June 1904), 853, 861, 865 accessed <https://archive.org/details/jstor-25150991>.

Though the Civil War brought an end to legal slavery, the failure of [Reconstruction](#) soon restored blatant racism and discrimination against African Americans throughout the U.S. including Indiana. Tens of thousands of southern blacks migrated to midwestern cities such as Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, and Gary in search of better opportunities. As the nineteenth century came to a close, this movement coupled with the growing problems of industrialization and urbanization only heightened the discrimination and violence against blacks. [Lynching](#) increasingly served as a system of justice inflicted on blacks in the north and the south.

Mary Church Terrell, first president of the National Association of Negro Women described the hostile environment of blacks in 1904 for the *North American Review*: "Hanging, shooting and burning black men, women and children in the United States have become so common that such occurrences create but little sensation and evoke but slight comment now."

Indiana was not immune to this terrible violence. Emma Lou Thornbrough in *Negro in Indiana Before 1900* describes several violent incidents, including this one: In November 1902, a black man accused of assaulting two white Indiana women was reported taken by "a mob of forty or fifty farmers, heavily armed...." Before the local militia ordered by Indiana Governor Winfield Durbin arrived, he was hung from a telephone pole. Thornbrough's research on violence and lynchings in Indiana is covered in her two books cited above. Blocker's more recent work, *African Americans in the Urban Midwest, 1860-1930*, traces the migrations of blacks to Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. His research also presents statistics on incidents of mob violence in the region during that time period.

Based on the study of IFCWC publications over time, historian Erlene Stetson found that the organization changed its focus to better contend with the changing times. The clubs' early twentieth century activities now included "suffrage, anti-lynching committees, domestic work and women in industry."

<sup>11</sup> Hine, *When Truth is Told*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> "Report of Woman's Club," *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 9, 1904; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *The Crisis* (July 1912), [1]; "Colored Women Plan for State Convention," *Indianapolis News*, August 29, 1914; *Indianapolis Recorder*, September 12, 1914; *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 8, 1916; Frances Berry Coston, "Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 30, 1927; Frances Berry Coston, "Women's Clubs Hold State Convention," *Indianapolis Recorder*, September 3, 1927; *Polk's Indianapolis (Marion Co., Ind.) City Directory* (1928), 1574, accessed [Archive.org](#); *Polk's Indianapolis (Marion Co., Ind.) City Directory* (1929), 1601, accessed [Archive.org](#); *Indianapolis Recorder*, October 22, 1932, 7; "California Passes Anti-Lynch Bill," *Indianapolis Recorder*, June 17, 1933, 1; Hine, *When Truth is Told*, 49; Walker, 87.

The studies of Indianapolis black women's clubs by Darlene Clark Hine and Earline Rae Ferguson (full citations in footnote 2) provide a quick survey of clubs and their efforts to provide for the welfare of their



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community. Carmen Walker concludes that the work of local women's clubs and organizations "formed the foundation" of the National Association of Colored Women during the period of its greatest growth and success. Further study of black women's clubs here in Indiana may demonstrate that the same is true for the Indiana Federation as well.

Newspapers and periodicals provide glimpses of club activities. For example, in 1904, the Indianapolis Women's Club gave food to the Orphan's Home and gave money to the Alpha Home for Aged Colored Women and the National Association of Colored Women. The Colored Women's Civic Club hosted a presentation by representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in May 1912.

Club women reported on their activities at the Federation meeting in August 1914: the Women's Improvement Club directed their efforts toward maintaining a fresh air tuberculosis camp; the Women's Council raised more than \$1000 for Lincoln Hospital; and the Christian Women's Association supported the House Maid's Exchange. "The clubs all over the state are making a strenuous effort to organize more substantially, to centralize their efforts and give more definite purpose to their work."

The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Shelbyville reported the largest attendance ever. The Federation reported income of \$2,088.03 for the year; \$1,500 was intended for the new club home on North Capitol. The *Indianapolis Recorder* on September 3, 1927 reported that the Federation filed articles of incorporation with the Indiana Secretary of State. By 1929, the *Indianapolis City Directory* listed the Federation of Colored Clubs at 2034 N. Capitol Ave.

In 1932, the Indianapolis Women's Improvement Club hosted a speaker from the State Federation whose topic was "Negro Women in Politics." This club still supported medical care for black tuberculosis patients. And, in 1933, the City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in Indianapolis was one of the many clubs nation-wide to endorse the California anti-lynching law passed in June 1933.

<sup>13</sup> "State Federation Of Women's Clubs Holds Annual Board Meeting," *Indianapolis Recorder*, July 21, 1945 accessed <http://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalscholarship/collections/IREcorder>; Indiana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form 1987, photocopy from Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology; Indiana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, [National Register of Historic Places](#); [Indiana Secretary of State](#), Business Entity Search; [Marion County Indiana, Treasurer, Property Report](#).

Note: The Indiana Secretary of State maintains an online Business Records search of incorporations. Currently, that information lists 1875 as the incorporation date for the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. IHB research clearly disproves 1875 as the date for the organization of the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Explanation of this error is beyond the scope of this project.