

# HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

## STUDIES IN INDIANA WOMEN'S HISTORY

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### Woman with a Mission: The Superintendent's Wife at an Indianapolis Rescue Mission

**Amanda Koch\***

Since 1893, the Wheeler City Rescue Mission has fed and sheltered homeless men; provided food, clothing, and furniture to families; and conducted religious services and classes. All these efforts revolved around its nightly gospel services that sought to convert lost sinners with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although led by a male superintendent, one of the Wheeler Mission's most essential workers was someone without official employee status: the superintendent's wife. Using primary sources from Wheeler Mission's records, this paper will explore the lives and roles of two superintendents' wives, Mabel Eberhardt and Lynn Hunt, whose work spanned five decades from the 1920s through the 1970s. These skilled and educated women were integral to the mission's daily operations. Mabel Eberhardt provided musical accompaniment at the mission's nightly gospel services and on its local weekly radio broadcast. She also helped run the mission's children's classes. Lynn Hunt's ministry centered on children and in addition to supervising the weekly children's classes, she helped start Mission's girls' home and founded a summer camp for youth.

Examining Eberhardt's and Hunt's lives illustrates how profoundly religion shaped the work Indiana women did and how they did it, especially for those who volunteered in churches and religious charities. Their embrace of evangelical Christianity's emphasis on the mother's vital role at home meant that Hunt and Eberhardt in some seasons of life prioritized caring for their young children over work outside the home, and when they did work at the mission, they claimed to follow their husbands' leadership. But their evangelical Christian beliefs also imbued Eberhardt and Hunt with a deep sense of their own calling to evangelize the lost and assist the poor, so they believed that ministry beyond their homes was imperative. Consequently, they were active as volunteers and sometimes employees of the rescue mission, especially as their children grew up. Eberhardt and Hunt dedicated themselves to rescue work out of a deep sense of their own personal religious callings, not simply because it was their husbands' job. Additionally, their belief in the religious value of Christian servanthood made them willing to work unassumingly as volunteers or for modest pay. As these women's lives illustrate, evangelicalism has profoundly shaped Hoosier women's labors, whether paid or unpaid, in the home or beyond it.

\* Amanda Koch is Assistant Editor of *Diplomatic History*.