

FRIENDS OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES, INDIANA ORIGINS AND OUTLOOK

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INTRODUCTION

"Where there are friends, there is wealth," wrote Titus Maccius Plautus more than 2,000 years ago ([An Invitation](#)). An advocacy group in Syracuse, N.Y, whose interest lay in the promotion of the welfare of its community's branch libraries and main libraries, took this sentiment to heart when they established their organization in 1922. They called themselves the Friends of Reading of Onondaga County, Inc. (Butler 21), and in the process started a Friends of Libraries movement that has resulted in the strengthening of libraries nationwide. Friends of Libraries are very much an influential presence today, providing support for public, university, and special libraries at local, state and national levels.

The purpose of a Friends group typically reads:

[T]o focus attention on the needs of the Library, to stimulate gifts of books and desirable collections, and to raise funds for the purchase of material not otherwise procurable.

It is not intended that the Friends should assume obligations which now rest upon the university and the state in maintaining and improving the Library. Rather it is hoped that, through the interest stimulated by this association, private donors may be induced to supplement the work of the state.

Through such an organization it is hoped that the needs of the...library may become known to a wider public than is at present acquainted with them ([Friends of the University Library](#)).

Just as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) groups are viewed as vital to the functioning of schools, so are Friends of Library groups in their promotion of libraries (Butler 21). Sentiment from Christopher Morley in 1937 portrays libraries and librarians as a network in need of advocacy by nature. "Nassau County [New York] has the largest jail and the smallest library I have ever seen in a town of its size," he states, in addition, "Librarians themselves are very modest people; too much so" (Morley 7). Thus the role of Friends groups was established as a provision of assistance in both obtaining increased funding and vocally announcing library needs. "More interest, more books, more shelf space, more borrowers, more money—to help secure

all these fall within the area of operation of the Friends of Libraries—and there cannot be too many librarians or too many of their friends" (Butler 3).

The focus of this exploration of the origins and outlook of Friends of Libraries groups in Indiana is on public libraries, whose Friends groups have frequently been formed by librarians and civic leaders ([Friends of the Library Survey](#)). Accordingly, activities of these public libraries Friends groups are quite community-centered in their event programming, their outreach, and their advocacy ([Friends of the Library Groups 2-3](#)). All organize regular publications, meetings, lectures, social events and book sales with the intended goals of fund raising, development of support for their respective libraries, and advisory to their respective libraries' administration ([Survey](#)). Edwardsville, for their antique shows – which are on average attended by 1,900 people and attract much publicity (Herring 67).

ORIGINS OF FRIENDS IN INDIANA

It is difficult to determine when the first Friends of the Library organization was founded in Indiana as there is a lack of definitive sources on this topic. It is known, however, that in the spring of 1941, a group of concerned citizens met in Logansport, Indiana and conceived the idea for the Friends of the Logansport-Cass County Public Library. The idea, which was born out of a tragedy, would have a long-term impact on the citizens of Logansport, Indiana.

In the early morning hours of March 17, 1941, the Logansport Public Library was ravaged by fire. Approximately twenty-five thousand books were destroyed and \$25,000 worth of physical equipment was lost. Total loss of property exceeded \$100,000. One quarter of this community library ceased to exist in just a few short hours and the community was heartbroken.

A few days after the fire, a group of concerned citizens met in the City Court Room with members of the Library and School Boards. Those assembled quickly decided that some form of organization needed to be created to help library officials "solve what then seemed to be well-nigh insurmountable problems" ([Announcing](#)). What was to be done with the library?

Another meeting was held a few days later "in the Assembly Room of the City Building. Numbers of scores

more of those whose hearts were heavy with the realization of the loss which had been suffered, came-to learn and to determine what to do about the library” (Announcing). It was at that meeting that the idea for a Friends group was born.

The founding members wanted to form “a group of citizens-men, women, and children-who are friends of the library and who, when informed of its needs, will help to supply them” (Announcing). They wanted to encourage all community members to join, regardless of their means, but they wanted their members to show support for the library by paying annual dues to join the organization. Thus it was decided to offer a variety of memberships. The different memberships were as follows: Associate, designed for school-age children, 10 cents; Contributing, \$1; Buy-a-Book, \$2; Supporting, \$5; Sustaining, \$10; Patron, \$25; Life, \$500; and Foundation, \$1000. The founders intended to use the monies obtained through membership to rebuild the Logansport Library “and as the years roll on, it is hoped and truly expected that there will be those who may care to provide, by gift or endowment or bequest, other volumes or collections or works of culture, or the funds with which they may be obtained” (Announcing).

In addition to their fund raising efforts for rebuilding the library, the Friends group also organized study clubs, author visits, art exhibits, displays of rare manuscripts and collections, and hosted open houses. The group was quick to give credit where credit was due. Individuals who purchased a book for the library through the “buy a book” campaign were recognized with a bookplate bearing their name in the book they purchased. Benefactors who made substantial contributions to the library were given public recognition.

The group was governed by a nine person Board of Directors. The Board of Directors was chosen by vote of the members at large. Its officers included a president, vice-president, and a treasurer. The officers were appointed by the board of directors. The secretary of this group was the acting librarian of the Logansport library.

The Friends of the Logansport-Cass County Public Library was granted a non-profit Indiana corporation charter in perpetuity on May 12, 1941. Its first Board of Directors included: Caroline N. McNitt, Reverend D. K. Finch, Nora Medland, Merrill D. Miller, Mae M. Barnett, Millicent R. Condon, M. L. Butler, Ann Morgan, and Robert J. Arthur.

FRIENDS OF INDIANA LIBRARIES

The founder of Friends of Indiana Libraries (FOIL) is Sophie Thanos Misner. An untiring activist and promoter of libraries and Friends groups, Sophie also helped found the national Friends of Libraries USA (FOLUSA) in 1979. [For information about FOLUSA, see <http://www.folusa.com>]. In an interview, Sophie stated that she began her career as a library advocate in 1957 in her own public library, the Gary Public Library. In 1958, Sophie joined the newly formed Friends of the

Gary Public Library whose primary objective was to initiate a “friendly lawsuit” against the Gary Public Library Board of Trustees’ proposed two million-dollar bond issue to finance a new library. The suit was filed to test the constitutionality of a 1947 Indiana law that allows libraries to issue bonds. The Gary Friends raised \$500, and along with other libraries in the state interested in this case, underwrote the legal costs (Friends of Gary Public Library).

As the Friends of the Gary Public Library and other similar organizations around the state became more active, it became evident that there was a need to unite these local organization under one umbrella organization at the state level. So the idea of a state organization was born. But how does one start such an organization? Others in Indiana and other states were also struggling with the same issue. In late 1979, a group of interested people from around the United States, including Sophie Misner and Bruce Kirkham of Ball State University’s Friends of Braken Library gathered in Dallas, Texas at the American Library Association’s annual conference to start a national organization, to be named Friends of the Library USA or FOLUSA. With the knowledge gained in starting FOLUSA, Sophie, Bruce and others created Friends of Indiana Libraries in 1980.

Friends of Indiana Libraries (FOIL) was formed in 1980 following the first White House Conference on Libraries (Letters). FOIL is a non-profit organization governed by a Board of Directors. According to FOIL Bylaws, the organization has four purposes:

1. To assist and aid those individuals and groups dedicated to developing citizens interest, support, and understanding of library services and needs in Indiana.
2. To encourage the organizing of Friends of the Library groups and to recommend ways of correlating and developing their interest in Indiana libraries.
3. To encourage the development of adequate library services to all citizens of Indiana and to cooperate with educational, professional, and civic organizations to this end.
4. To include any and all matters within the Articles of Incorporation which are hereby incorporated by reference.

During it first decade, FOIL focused largely on developing Friends groups. One of the most important contributions of FOIL in the early days was educating library Trustees as to the role of library Friends groups. According to Sophie, many Trustees were initially apprehensive that the Friends would undermine their power. The Friends worked diligently and eventually were able to demonstrate to the Trustees that they were not adversaries, but partners in the cause to promote and support the library.

Over the years some of the important contributions FOIL has made include being a resource for local

groups, helping local Friends groups get organized by creating a treasurers and presidential handbook, organizing Friends programs at the Indiana Library Federation Annual Conference and district conferences, creating an annual library book sale calendar and the *Library Friends Planning Calendar*.

In 1995, after the publisher of the first two editions of the *Directory of Indiana Children's Authors Illustrators*, Stone Hills Library Network, dissolved, FOIL took on the updating of the *Directory* as a service to local Friends groups. This project is also supported by other groups such as the Indiana Center for the Book, Indiana Historical Society, Indiana Historical Bureau and Only Reading Makes it Real.

The *WordStruck* program, coordinated by FOIL, is an offshoot from the *Directory*, which connects children with Indiana authors and illustrators and their books by co-sponsoring visits from Indiana children's authors and illustrators to public libraries and schools.

FOIL publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Between Friends*, to announce educational opportunities, news from local Friends groups, share feature stories about members, and update subscribers on state legislative issues. Information about the organization is also available on their web page at <http://birch.palni.edu/~foil> or <http://web.incolsa.net/~foil>.

In the spring of 1993, the FOIL Board was approached by the White House Conference of Libraries delegation. Sixteen individuals, including four laypeople, four government officials, four library supporters, and four library professionals who had been elected at the Indiana Governor's Conference on Libraries, went to Washington, D.C. to meet with the delegation. Upon their return, the representatives determined that there were three areas where they could make a difference:

1. Building information networks through technology
2. Strengthening children's and youth literacy, and
3. Marketing library services.

To involve a larger audience to work on these priorities, the representatives formed a partnership with FOIL. The agreement was based on an action plan that included:

- Offering each of the 200 delegates to the Indiana Governor's Conference a free first-time membership in FOIL.
- Designing a new letterhead and graphic "identity" for FOIL, and
- Submitting Articles of Incorporation for not-for-profit status in order to receive grant and foundation funding. (FOLUSA Awards to Friends Groups Application)

As a result of this partnership, a very active state and regional education program, and regular communication with members, FOIL ended the year with a record membership of 130 individuals and over 60

Friends groups representing more than 5,000 local Friends members. In 1994, the Friends of Indiana Libraries received the State Friends Award from the Friends of Libraries USA. The \$1,000 award, sponsored by Baker & Taylor, recognized the outstanding efforts in innovation, planning, community involvement, implementation, and evaluation of Friends programming. In addition, Microsoft, Inc. donated \$250 worth of software.

FOIL success has surpassed Sophie's wildest dreams. Support and information from FOIL was directly responsible for many of the local Friends groups now in existence. In 1997, FOIL established the Sophie Thanos Misner Award to honor the efforts of its namesake. Sophie was the first recipient of this award. This lifetime achievement award is presented annually to a Friends member who has demonstrated superior achievement in his or her activities with the Friends of the Library on the local and state levels. These achievements may include such activities as membership recruitment, fundraising, organizational development, board service, and the general promotion of library Friends. In addition, this person will have shown an exemplary commitment to representing the interests of his or her local library, libraries in general, throughout the community.

CURRENT STATUS OF FRIENDS IN INDIANA: SURVEY RESULTS

A short survey was posted to the Friends listserv and the public libraries listserv to gather information on the existence and strength of local Friends groups in Indiana. A total of 37 libraries responded to our survey, 31 of which do have Friends organizations, representing a 28% return rate based on 130 Friends organizations in public libraries in Indiana. Several Friends groups have been in existence for over 25 years. The groups range in size from 10 to over 700 members. Typical membership dues are \$1 for students, \$5 or \$10 for individuals, and \$8-\$15 for families. Other levels of contribution, such as Patron, Supporter, Contributor, Benefactor, Corporate, and Life Memberships are available for almost every Friends organization. One library uses more creative categories of Reader, Author, Publisher, and Scholar to classify its members. Friends meetings are generally attended by Board members only and, on average, are held monthly or every other month.

Almost every Friends group reported that they hold book sales on a regular basis to raise money. Funds are used to purchase equipment such as computers, display cases, and microfilm readers. A variety of programs, lectures, and special events for children, young adult and adult are also funded. Promotion for the Friends groups are through Friends or library newsletters, brochures, web sites, bulletin boards, fliers, mailings, or in the local Chamber of Commerce book.

Most Friends reported steady or growing membership. The importance of continuous promotion was identified as a crucial element to maintain support and

energy of the organization. Some groups reported periods of little activity and low energy. As in almost every organization of volunteers, it is usually a few members who do the bulk of the work.

CURRENT STATUS OF FRIENDS IN INDIANA: CASE STUDIES

The Fayette County Public Library is located in Connersville, the county seat in the heart of a rural community. The Fayette County Public Library is a medium-sized library serving a population of approximately 26,000. The library mission is to provide "library services for individuals from infants to senior citizens. As a community institution, the library provides materials and services to meet the cultural, informational, educational, and recreational needs of all the residents of Connersville and Fayette County and surrounding areas" (*Fayette County*).

The Fayette County Public Library is rich in history. In 1893, a petition was presented to the Connersville City Council to form a public library and in 1894 the Connersville Public Library was opened. The library was first housed in a small rented room in downtown Connersville. In 1909, the library was moved into its own building at the corner of 9th Street and Grand Avenue using funds from Andrew Carnegie. In 1967, the Fayette County Contractual Library was started and in 1974, this library merged with the Connersville City Library to form the Fayette County Public Library. The current building was opened in April 1981.

The Fayette County Public Library is growing and in an effort to prepare for possible future expansion is currently purchasing property. The library has added technology to the building with the help of grants and by using funds allocated in the regular operating budget. The library also offers a bookmobile service that runs three days a week to other towns, schools and nursing homes.

The Fayette County Friends of the Library was formed in 1978 and is an important partner of the library. During the year, the Friends hold an annual book sale, a mini romance book sale, and six travelogues. They also sponsor children and adult programs and provide prizes and supplies for the summer reading programs. Over the years the Friends have helped microfilm the *Connersville News-Examiner* and purchased a variety of items such as a microfilm reader/printer, dies for letter machine, chairs for staff and patrons, folding tables, and paperback book racks. The Friends of the Library continually help the library purchase needed items that do not fall into the regular library budget.

The Friends are promoted through fliers distributed to new patrons, a yearly mailing, by word of mouth, and on the library's web page at <http://www.fcplibrary.com>.

Membership drives are held during other Friends activities such as the book sales. The Friends of the Library has grown to over 500 members since its beginnings in 1978 and membership has remained steady in the past few years. The membership dues are as follows: \$0.50 for Junior Member (holder of children's cards), \$1 for adult, \$3 for family, \$5 for Business or Organization, and \$10 and up for Patron. The Friends Board meets several times a year. The Friends are also members of FOIL.

Tippecanoe County Public Library was established in 1983. However, the first public library in Lafayette, Indiana began in 1927 through the philanthropic donations of Dr. Albert A. Wells, a local pharmacist. Dr. Wells donated a building for the use of a public library and the Albert A. Wells Memorial Public Library was dedicated on August 27, 1927. A Tippecanoe County Contractual Library was established in 1971 to serve county residents through a contract with the Albert A. Wells Memorial Public Library. In 1983, these two libraries merged to form a single library district, known as the Tippecanoe County Public Library. The Library District covers all areas of Tippecanoe County except for the majority of West Lafayette. Due to the lack of space in the Wells Library, the Library Board decided to acquire a new site to build a larger library. Through a bond issue in 1988, the present facility was constructed and the library opened in October of 1989. The libraries mission statement is "To be the leader in information resources for the residents of Tippecanoe County" (Tippecanoe County Public Library Mission Statement)

The organizational meeting of the Friends of Wells Memorial Library (now The Tippecanoe County Public Library) was held April 22, 1964 at the library in Lafayette, Indiana. Ten individuals attended this first meeting and an election of officers was held.

A form of constitution and by-laws was adopted as the constitution of this organization. Annual dues were set at \$1 for individuals, \$2 for contributing members, and a minimum of \$25 for patron memberships. The aims of the organization were discussed, particularly the placing of a book cart in each hospital for the benefit of patients incapacitated for a long period of time, and a book and coffee program.

During this time, a book delivery committee was formed to start delivering books to shut-ins. The Friends were also very involved with National Library Week, presenting afternoon movies, sponsoring book talks, and even providing childcare for parents attending library programs.

As of June 5, 1964 the organization had grown to a total of 32 members. In 1972 membership surpassed 100. In 1982 the Friends of Wells Memorial Library changed its name to the Friends of the Tippecanoe County Public Library. In 1989, the Tippecanoe County Public Library moved to its current location of 627

South Street, Lafayette. The Friends of Tippecanoe County Public Library received approval for the Articles of Incorporation as a not-for-profit corporation in June of 1992, allowing contributions to the Friends to be tax deductible. By 1995, membership had grown to 413. In that same year, the Gold Card Campaign was initiated and proved to be a turning point for the Friends. For \$35, members received a special gold library card. By January of 1996, the Friends reported 336 Gold Card members and total membership of 669. At the end of 1999 the Friends of the Tippecanoe County Public Library had 725 members.

During the 1970s and 1980s, several annual book sales were canceled due to lack of books. However, since the early 1990's the Friends of the Tippecanoe County Public Library's biggest success has been its book sales. To accommodate the large quantity of books donated for the sales, the Friends paid for the construction of a two-story storage building adjacent to the library to house and store books prior to the book sales. The Friends currently sponsor four book sales per year. The estimated book sale income for the year 2000 is \$40,000.

Over the years, the Friends role has changed to more of a financial supporter than service supporter. However, their role as an advocate for the library is stronger than ever. Currently, the Friends fund almost all library programs, which includes \$8,000 the 2000 Summer Reading Club only, and an additional \$10,000 for other library programs such as author visits throughout the year. The Friends fund all staff recognition activities, volunteer recognition awards and luncheon, and staff scholarships, which were \$3,500 for 2000, they also have a \$15,000 budget to purchase needed equipment for the library in 2000. The Friends 2000 budget exceeds \$57,000. Current membership fees are \$5 for Friends and \$10 for Family. Gold Card memberships are \$35 for Sustaining, \$75 for Benefactor, and \$150 for Patron. Information about the Friends group is available on the library's web page at <http://www.tcpl.lib.in.us>.

CONCLUSION

The Friends of the Library movement has a rich and varied history. Groups at the national, state, and local level have had a tremendous impact on libraries and library services across the country providing both financial and advocacy support to the library.

Our research shows that Indiana public libraries big and small have active Friends of Libraries groups. The contribution that these groups make to their libraries is invaluable. The exploratory research we did for this article appears to be the first of its kind. Most Friends organizations do not preserve their documentation and history in any organized or formal way. In addition, there is no centralized group that has preserved the history of the Friends organizations at the state or local level in any formal manner.

Dedicated individuals have donated and continue to donate countless hours helping libraries complete their missions by becoming Friends of the Library. Theirs is a story worth telling and one that should be preserved for future generations.

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