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Guide for

Flanner House (Indianapolis, Ind.)

Records, 1936-1992

Mss 004

Flanner House (Indianapolis, Ind.) Records, 1936-1992
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3.2 c.f. (2 cartons, 7 flat boxes)

ABSTRACT

Flanner House, a social service center for the Indianapolis, Indiana African-American community, promotes the social, moral, and physical welfare of African-Americans, particularly youth. It was established in 1903 by Frank Flanner, a local mortician, under the name of Flanner Guild and was the first settlement house for African-Americans in the city. Programs and activities have included a day nursery, training for men and women, self-help projects such as housing construction, and public health programs including preventive medicine. Its current mission offers area residents a variety of direct and decentralized social services, child care, youth and senior citizen programs, and cultural and recreational activities.

The records consist of board and committee records, correspondence, financial records, various programs and project records including reports and project descriptions offered by Flanner House, publications, photographs, slides and audio programs.

ACCESS

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ACQUISITION

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SUBJECT TERMS

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Blackburn, Cleo W. (Cleo Walter), 1909-1978
Flanner House (Indianapolis, Ind.)
Social settlements—Indiana--Indianapolis

HISTORICAL NOTE

Flanner House, a social service center for the Indianapolis African-American community, was named after Frank Flanner (1854-1912), a local mortician. In 1898 he donated a piece of property containing two buildings to the Charity Organization Society, a group operating a social settlement for the city's white population. The purpose of this gift was to create an African-American community service center. This became the first settlement house, called Flanner Guild, for African-Americans in the city. The organization was incorporated in 1903 and within a short time the main building was built in the heart of what is presently Lockfield Gardens.

The purpose of the organization was to promote the social, moral, and physical welfare of the African-American community through the establishment and maintenance of academic and vocational education and self-help programs benefiting the surrounding community. Flanner Guild began operations in a small building on Colton Street under the direction of Sarah Colton Smith. The early programs of the organization were divided into several departments and included Employment, Recreation, Vocational Aids, Music, and a Day Nursery. One of Flanner Guild's first projects was the creation of a rescue home for unwed mothers and their children in 1908.

After Mr. Flanner's death in 1912, the agency faced financial difficulties that caused the Board of Directors to turn to the Christian Women's Board of Missions for support. The Board was reorganized and the name of the organization was changed from Flanner Guild to Flanner House. Support received from the Board of Missions allowed Flanner House to continue operations and purchase a new facility by 1918. The new location at the corner of West and St. Clair Streets was purchased, remodeled and equipped with four buildings allowing for the creation of additional services including health clinics for tuberculosis and child care, a make over shop for clothing and furniture, and training classes through the Red Cross.

In 1936, Cleo Blackburn began his tenure as Superintendent of Flanner House. Blackburn's primary goals included teaching individuals to help themselves, to develop the best elements in their own culture, and to achieve economic and social progress. Under his leadership as Superintendent (1936-1975), a new facility was built and opened in 1944 at 16th and Missouri Streets (333 West 16th Street) as a result of the "Indianapolis Study." This study, an analysis of the city's black population, began in 1937 with a grant from the Indianapolis Foundation. Completed in 1939, the study gave the city's first complete survey of the financial, educational, cultural, and medical background of its black population.

Cleo Blackburn developed several dynamic programs that gave Flanner House national attention. Among those was his self-help housing project that began in 1946 called Flanner Homes, Inc. The project became a national model for providing local and federal funding to help low-income black war veterans (the first project participants) build their own homes. Developed with the support of the American Friends Service Committee, the Marshall Field Foundation, and Rosenwald Fund Support Division of

Self-Help the project helped revitalize the homes of the area while participants received free training house construction.

Also developed in 1946, was the Herman G. Morgan Health Center. This center was constructed with support from the Indianapolis Foundation and Indianapolis Board of Health and Hospitals. The program was unique because it was the only structure in the state of Indiana designed and constructed to provide preventive medicine and a public health program to the community it served. The services of the Health Center included annual physical examinations and immunizations as well as consultation and instruction in proper nutrition.

Organized by Cleo Blackburn in 1954, the Board of Fundamental Education was a nationally recognized experiment that built responsible citizens by teaching and encouraging their pride and initiative. Flanner House, in cooperation with other agencies (including Indiana University and Purdue University), improved and extended its services and became a national demonstration center of the Fundamental Education program. As a result Blackburn received a congressional charter and obtained several large federal grants for the educational and health needs of the underprivileged.

In 1967 Flanner House moved to 2110 North Illinois Street and in 1979 to its present location at 2424 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Street. During the 1960s, the employment placement services were discontinued since this service fell under the jurisdiction of Marion County. Flanner House did continue employment classes and added programs through Family Services and the Marion County Welfare Department.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Flanner House continued to add programs targeted at the specific needs of the community it served. New programs included assistance to homebound senior citizens, a residential youth center with case referrals from the juvenile courts, and the addition of a branch of the Marion County Public Library in 1979. In 1987 Flanner House became a member of Community Centers of Indianapolis, Inc. (CCI), a federation of neighborhood multi-service centers located in Indianapolis.

Today, Flanner House continues its mission of service and self-help through the operation of two charter schools, senior citizen services, assistance programs for those in financial need, and programs that help parents care for infants and children. The agency also provides counseling services and administers federal and state welfare programs.

RELATED MATERIALS

A Study of 454 Negro Households in the Redevelopment Area, Indianapolis: Flanner House, 1946. (call number: E185.89.H6 I4)

Artis, Lionel Franklin. *A Comparison of Similar Programs of Flanner House, the Senate Avenue Branch YMCA and the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA of Indianapolis, Indiana.* Thesis (M.A.)--Indiana University, 1941. (call number: HV3185.I4 A785 1941)

Flanner House Annual Reports, 1919, 1922-1923. (call number: HV3185.I6 1919 and HV3185.I6 1922-1923)

Flanner House Records, 1946-1954, Collection # M513, OMB 35, Indiana Historical Society.

Flanner House Website: <http://www.flannerhouse.com/>.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Flanner House Records consist of a variety of materials related to the development of the organization's programs and activities. Although much of the information is incomplete, the variety of the materials provides a good overview of the history of the organization.

Board of Directors Records, 1936-1989, contain the records of the decision-making branch of the organization. The materials in this series include committee files, director reports, board member lists, and board minutes. Most of this material is incomplete and is heavily represented by materials from 1936-1940, the tenure of Cleo Blackburn, and the 1980s. The exception to this is the board minutes. The minutes, although incomplete, cover a larger period of time (1930s-1980s) and provide a more comprehensive look at the organization throughout its history. Another valuable source of information in this series is the reports of the superintendent and executive director.

Administration Records, 1936-1992, consist of the daily business files of the organization. The records include information about Flanner House divisions and centers, finances, and publicity. Much of the information in this series is incomplete. The financial information is more comprehensive and provides an excellent look at the organization's program emphasis over time by the allocation of funds.

Program Records, 1939-1985, include information about the projects and programs at Flanner House. Two of the most important portions of this series are the Housing Project files and the Project/Activity Reports. The Reports are heavily concentrated in the periods, 1936-1940 and the 1980s, but contain valuable information about what Flanner House was doing for the community. The Housing Project records include projects/programs description and copies of documents related to a proposed housing project (1982-1984) designed to serve elderly and handicapped. The records do not include the funded and completed housing projects.

Publications, 1940s-1980s, include a study of area households, a history, brochures, and newsletters from Flanner House. This series also contains information about Cleo Blackburn's Board for Fundamental Education project, an educational system developed by Blackburn to educate individuals both vocationally and intellectually. The history includes brochures and newsletters from the 1950s, a typed history of Flanner House from 1946, and some program information from the 1980s. The publication of note is *A Study of 454 Negro Households in the Redevelopment Area*, (call number: E185.89.H6

I4) completed in 1946, which contains the analysis of the families residing in the area under consideration for redevelopment. The study reflects the structure of families, their background, occupational and economic status, their housing and living situation including health. This study helped set the direction and programs of Flanner House and provided documentation of the needs met by Flanner House.

Photographs and Slides, 1940s-1980s, document the history of Flanner House by reflecting various institution and community activities, special events, and programs (cannery, loom weaving, housing, Day Care, dance class, etc.), as well as Flanner House staff and visitors. The photographs include minimal identification such as event, date, or individual names. The slides are not identified, but reflect the wide range of activities at Flanner House. The images offer a valuable look at how Flanner House affects the community and individuals it serves. All images are searchable online at <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu/Flanner/>

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