TRACES
of Indiana and Midwestern History

THE EASTER FLOOD OF 1913
INDIANA'S RAINBOW SOLDIER
THE BILLY SUNDAY HOME
COMEDIAN OLE OLSEN
The Basile History Market

ONE-OF-A-KIND GIFTS The Indiana Historical Society's Basile History Market boasts a variety of new products made in Indiana and related to the Hoosier State. From hand-blown glass to Amish-made products and books from the IHS Press and other publishers, the market can satisfy all of your gift-giving needs.

Hours:
Tuesday through Saturday,
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Phone: (800) 447-1830
Online orders go to:
shop.indianahistory.org
Front Cover: The Easter Flood of 1913 wrecked havoc in communities across the Midwest, including several in the Hoosier State. The raging floodwaters destroyed bridges, inundated city streets, and damaged homes.
The charismatic Sunday became one of America's best-known preachers, earning the nickname the "Baseball Evangelist."
SANDLOT BASEBALL IS ONE OF THE GREAT JOYS IN A BOY'S LIFE, AT LEAST TO FANS OF THE GAME.

Growing up, I had the privilege of living just a stone's throw away from my elementary school, which had a large, open area perfect for my friends and I to spend summer days playing ball for hours on end. Few things in life are more satisfying than hearing the crack of the bat and knowing that you've connected for a long home run. For days after hitting my first round-tripper, I bragged about it to whoever would listen, pointing to the spot where the baseball had barely cleared the fence.

Although hitting the baseball seemed to be, if not easy, at least attainable, there were other aspects of the game that eluded me. My chubby frame meant that I progressed at glacial speed on the base paths. When I progressed from sandlot games to the more organized activity of Little League baseball, I found myself assigned to the position usually reserved for those who had yet to lose their baby fat—catcher. Squatting behind the plate waiting for the next pitch did nothing to help my legs when it came to running the bases.

Watching professional games on television, I sat enthralled by the abilities of such noted base stealers as Lou Brock of the Saint Louis Cardinals and Maury Wills of the Los Angeles Dodgers. Fascinated by these speedsters' exploits, I later came across the names of past ballplayers who earned their livings by getting a jump on the pitcher and catcher and sliding safely under the tag of the fielder. One name—Billy Sunday—stood out. Born in Iowa and sent to an orphanage at an early age by his mother, Sunday eked out a living with a variety of odd jobs before winning the attention of Adrian "Cap" Anson of the Chicago White Stockings professional baseball team for his speed and defensive ability.

Although a weak hitter, with a lifetime average of only .248, Sunday earned a reputation as one of baseball's fastest players during his eight-year career with teams in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. Out carousing with his teammates in Chicago, Sunday came across an evangelist trying to win converts to Christ by inviting them to attend services at the Pacific Gardens Mission. "I'm through," Sunday told his friends. "We've come to a parting of the ways." He eventually gave up his successful and highly paid career as a ballplayer to work at the Chicago Young Men's Christian Association for $83.33 per month.

The charismatic Sunday became one of America's best-known preachers, earning the nickname the "Baseball Evangelist." From 1896 to 1935, he preached to an estimated one hundred million people at revivals held in cities and towns throughout the country. "Trying to run a church without revivals can be done—when you can run a gasoline engine on buttermilk," Sunday claimed. Nearly a million people responded to his call to "walk the sawdust trail," the empty aisles lined with sawdust at the revivals, and accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior.

At his revivals, Sunday sold a wide array of promotional products, including Bibles, postcards, and photographs, as well as accepting donations from those attending. A wealthy man who counseled presidents, wrote best-selling books, and campaigned on behalf of Prohibition, Sunday lived in Chicago with his family for twenty-three years before deciding to leave the metropolis for life in the small town of Winona Lake, Indiana. In this issue of Traces, W. A. Firstenberger, curator at the Billy Sunday Historic Site Museum in Winona Lake, examines what drew the evangelist to build his home, known as Mount Hood, in the Hoosier community.

Although he had left stealing bases for winning souls for Christ, Sunday, like many former athletes, never forgot his days as a player. He preached with the same energy he once used to stymie the opposing team at the ballpark. "When you finally reach home plate," Sunday exhorted to the crowds enraptured by his sermons, "the Great Umpire will call you either 'Safe' or 'Out.' Which will it be, boys?"


RAY E. BOOMHOWER

OPPOSITE: Billy Sunday preaches to a rapt audience as part of a revival held on February 16, 1908, in Decatur, Illinois.
On Saturday, the winds abated and the ice melted. The night was graced with a total eclipse of the moon. But on Easter Sunday came Terre Haute's tornado and the pouring rains.

Cadets from the Culver Military Academy aid in search-and-rescue operations following the 1913 Easter flood in Logansport, Indiana.
TERRE HAUTE HAD NO WARNING. AT ABOUT 9:45 P.M. ON EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 1913, THROUGH RUMBLING THUNDER AND FLASHING LIGHTNING FROM UNSEASONABLY EARLY THUNDERSTORMS, THERE CAME A ROAR OUT OF THE SOUTHWEST LIKE AN ANGRY EXPRESS TRAIN. HOUSES FELL, CRUSHING PEOPLE IN THEIR BEDS. FACTORIES EXPLODED. THE FEED MILL AND POWER PLANT WERE SET ABLAZE.

Only days later did a regional weather forecaster declare it a tornado. It demolished 330 homes; wrecked several important industries, including Root Glass Company and Gartland Iron Works; and caused an estimated $1 million to $2 million in damage (in 1913 dollars). More heartrending, it injured 150 to 250 people and killed 21. At that time, it was the deadliest twister ever to have struck Indiana.

The worst, however, was yet to come. The rains didn’t stop. Instead, they intensified. The Wabash River began rising, overspreading the northern part of Terre Haute. By midday Tuesday, West Terre Haute (Taylorville) was three-quarters under water. Houses were being lifted bodily from their foundations and carried away. In the south part of town where the tornado had struck, the churning, icy waters rose through city streets until they were lapping at the wheels of boxcars that had been converted into impromptu infirmaries for the wounded and suddenly homeless. Phone and telegraph lines were dead. Train tracks and roads were submerged. Electricity was out.

Only gradually did Terre Haute learn that it and the rest of Indiana were in the middle of the United States’ most widespread natural disaster, the Easter flood of 1913. To the extent that the flood is remembered at all today, it’s usually called the Great Dayton Flood, for the Ohio city that essentially functioned as the 1913 equivalent of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

As with New Orleans, the focus on the one city personalized the tragedy and challenges faced by all flood sufferers: the misplaced faith in protective levees, the death-dealing ironies of no potable drinking water and of fires consuming buildings surrounded by acres of water, the sudden homelessness and destitution, the panic of separation from family, the subsequent spread of disease, and the determination to rebuild and to prevent similar future disasters. In 1913 Dayton’s flood served as the prime focus of newspaper stories, national sympathies, and relief, and has since been the topic of several books, television documentaries, and even a stage play.

But also as with New Orleans, the spotlight on Dayton obscured the breathtaking interstate scale of the devastation. The Easter flood of 1913 was not only Ohio’s worst flood, but also Indiana’s. Nor was the devastation confined just to those two states. At its peak, the deluge spread across lowland regions of a dozen states from Missouri to Pennsylvania and down into Tennessee. The flood crests surging down the Mississippi River in April set new height records all the way to New Orleans. The same storm system spread record rains up across New York and into New England, setting record river heights on the Mohawk, Connecticut, and Hudson rivers. For a day and a half, the flooding completely severed all communications between New York City and Chicago, including the stock and commodity markets; its devastation disrupted freight and passenger rail service and the mails for weeks.

The week after Easter 1913, the Midwest suffered property damage greater than that during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, and its death toll exceeded that of the 1871 Chicago fire. Five hundred bridges and railroad trestles, 12,000 telephone and telegraph poles, and more than 38,000 homes and other buildings were swept away, and thousands of schools, businesses, utilities, and city streets were damaged. Direct losses to the Midwest were estimated—probably underestimated—to top a third of a billion dollars.
The Easter flood of 1913 was not only Ohio’s worst flood, but also Indiana’s. Nor was the devastation confined just to those two states. At its peak, the deluge spread across lowland regions of a dozen states from Missouri to Pennsylvania and down into Tennessee.

The destruction began on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, March 20 and 21. The winter of 1913 had been unusually warm and wet, and March was particularly so, (today equivalent to more than $6 billion), most of which was not covered by the business or homeowner’s insurance of the day. Most tragic, more than 700 people were dead, some 200 in Indiana alone. A quarter of a million people more were suddenly homeless and bereft of their life’s savings.

The destruction began on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, March 20 and 21. The winter of 1913 had been unusually warm and wet, and March was particularly so, topping an oppressively sultry 80 degrees in some locations. But as an unusually strong Canadian high-pressure region moved east on Thursday night, temperatures plunged. Hurricane-force winds began mounting across the Midwest, sweeping from Alabama to Ontario. All over Indiana, record winds sustained speeds of up to sixty miles per hour. The windstorm uprooted trees, blew down billboards and barns, unroofed buildings, blew out windows, toppled chimneys and smokestacks, tore bricks from the corners of buildings, tumbled horse-drawn wagons, sank boats, and downed power lines. Flying debris caused injuries and at least two fatalities (in Lafayette and
the churning waters began spreading wide with the speed and power of a flash flood

A parade of rowboats makes its way through the floodwaters on East Fifth Street in Peru, Indiana. The Wabash and Mississinewa rivers both flooded their banks, causing chaos for the Hoosier community.
Frankfort). In Fort Wayne, winds were so strong that frame houses shook enough to move beds, waking their occupants, who feared they were in an earthquake. Most importantly for the days following, the windstorm splintered hundreds of telephone and telegraph poles and blew down several thousand miles of wires, crippling communications. To ensure destruction was complete, sleet moved in, encasing every surface and tree branch with glittering ice, its weight pulling down more wires and poles.

On Saturday, the winds abated and the ice melted. The night was graced with a total eclipse of the moon. But on Easter Sunday came Terre Haute's tornado and the pouring rains. With tropical fury but in icy temperatures, downpours beat incessantly over Indiana. In just four days, literally three months of rainfall fell, topping nine inches in the southern half of the state. Worse, more than half that water fell in just one twenty-four-hour period: Tuesday, March 25. In Indianapolis, 3.4 inches fell on Tuesday, while that same day Elliston and Shoals in the southern part of the state were deluged with more than six inches.

Because the rain was so intense and so widespread, even the smallest of Indiana's rivulets and creeks overflowed their banks, and modest rivers normally only a few tens or hundreds of feet wide spread more than a mile, flooding cities all along their courses. Indiana's major rivers became fearful torrents. In places, the Wabash River swelled wider than thirty-five miles; at Evansville the Ohio River reached fully fifty miles wide.

Indeed, late in the week, as the floodwaters from both Ohio and Indiana poured into the Ohio River, hundreds of families in New Albany and Evansville were driven from their homes as the Ohio River began rising at the alarming rate of two inches an hour, eventually cresting at record heights.

But what also counted for flooding in Indiana was where rain was falling in Ohio. Most of Ohio's record rains that same four days—topping eleven inches in some places—fell over the unnamed continental divide that extends east-west across the northern quarter of the state, dividing the waters that flow into Lake Erie from those that flow into the Ohio River. That divide includes the headwaters of the Wabash River, chief tributary to the Ohio River. As a result, some of Ohio's deluge added to Indiana's, setting new flood stage records all along the Wabash River from its source in Ohio to its mouth at Illinois.

Because the rain was so intense and so widespread, even the smallest of Indiana's rivulets and creeks overflowed their banks, and modest rivers normally only a few tens or hundreds of feet wide spread more than a mile, flooding cities all along their courses. Indiana's major rivers became fearful torrents.

Because the winter of 1913 had already been unusually warm and wet, by March the clayey soils were already saturated. Most of the heavy rainfall simply cascaded off the hillsides, swelling even streams and creeks not known for flooding. Rivers began rising fast—faster than two feet per hour in some places. When they topped their banks, as most did on Tuesday, March 25, the churning waters began spreading wide with the speed and power of a flash flood. With so many telegraph and telephone poles downed across both Indiana and Ohio, almost no warnings were sent or received.

Along the Wabash River, the cities of Bluffton, Wabash, Logansport, Lafayette, Terre Haute, and Vincennes were more than half inundated and bridges were swept away. Tragedy was especially poignant in Peru, the winter quarters for several major circuses. As a major crossroads for railroads serving Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Denver, Peru became the perfect location for many traveling circuses' winter quarters, where animals and performers could rest and train. Colonel Benjamin E. Wallace, a major Indiana landowner and financier who owned the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, which by 1913 was second in fame only to the Ringling...
TOP ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT: Spectators in Indianapolis gaze upon the ruins of the Washington Street Bridge, the Ell River surges around the Tenth Street dam in Peru, and an aerial view of the flooding at Indianapolis's Riverside Park. SECOND ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT: Scenes of the flood damage in Indianapolis, including a destroyed railroad bridge, wreckage left on the front lawns of homes, and an engorged White River. THIRD ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT: A member of the Indiana National Guard stands watch over homes in Indianapolis, a streetcar is stopped by floodwaters in Nashville, and a view of the flooded Saint Mary's River in Fort Wayne. FOURTH ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT: Water rises to almost the top of homes near Till's Hill in Vevay; a lifeboat plies the floodwaters on Third Street in Logansport; and three men survey the situation at the U.S. Post Office building in Peru. BOTTOM ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT: Debris left behind in Indianapolis following the flood, including a break in a canal.
Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, devised the idea for winter quarters. In 1891 Wallace bought 220 acres of low-lying land between the Wabash and the Mississinewa rivers. Although he had tried to buy higher property to the east, farmers refused to sell their fertile lands. Had Wallace been able to complete his transaction, fate might have been kind.

On Tuesday, March 25, the two rivers rose. The Wabash River—normally four hundred yards wide near Peru—grew to four miles in width. As its waters merged with the swollen Mississinewa River, they engulfed the circus winter quarters. Rescuers heard the frantic neighing of horses and the roaring of caged lions and tigers, which did not stop until the raging waters closed above their heads. Although the elephants managed to escape, the disoriented beasts—used to turning to humans in times of trouble—did not seek higher ground. Instead, they waited outside the homes of their trainers, who were themselves trapped on upper floors by the rising waters. Although the trainers fed them hay and offered comforting words through upper windows, the pachyderms eventually succumbed to hypothermia in the chill waters. By the next day, nearly five hundred animals had perished.

Meanwhile, as soon as the Wabash River spread over its embankments and began pouring into Peru, fisherman Edward Mack ran through the streets shouting for people to run for their lives. His brave action was later credited for saving six hundred lives. People began racing for the higher land of the business section. Within hours, many homes in Peru were flooded to within two feet of their roofs. Most of the city’s residents huddled in the upper stories of the business blocks near the Miami County Courthouse, which was made the center of relief work as the two blocks around it were the only parts of town not submerged. Between three thousand and five thousand of the instantly homeless—a quarter of the city’s 1913 population of sixteen thousand—crowded around and inside the courthouse, those inside packed so tightly that half a dozen people suffocated. Those who could not get inside spent an awful night standing in the driving rain on the grounds around the courthouse, wedged shoulder to shoulder and anxiously watching the sullen waters that lapped ever closer to their toes.

Eight hours before downtown Dayton, Ohio, was ravaged by ten-foot walls of water loosed when the rivers through town breached the levees at 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday, a tragedy fully equal in scale befell Indiana’s state capital. On the evening of March 25, the western portion of Indianapolis was swept by a wall of water more than two stories high when the White River levee burst at Morris Street.

Actually, Indianapolis’s destruction began on the night of March 24, when Eagle Creek rose above its banks. The normally sixty-foot-wide creek spread to an angry gush half a mile wide. Some time later, the White River tore through its levees at many points. Around noon on Tuesday, Fall Creek leaped its banks, flooding a large part of the city’s north side residential district, ending streetcar service, putting the water works out of commission, and threatening other public service corporations.

Those living in the endangered area packed possessions into wagons and carried pianos and larger furniture up to the second floors of their homes. At about 3 p.m. water started to seep through the levees. Everywhere the seeps appeared, a force of more than a hundred men hurried to stop them with bags of sand and bales of straw held in place by telephone poles. But by 4 p.m., when the men were concentrating on reinforcing the levee north of the Morris Street bridge, water unexpectedly broke through the barriers at the west end of the bridge. In an instant, families were picked up and swirled around to their destruction. People ran to the barricades, dug through sandbags, and broke through to see the waves cut through the top of the wall near the bridge, the unexpected happened. Water burst through the base of the levee about four hundred feet upriver of the bridge. In an instant, tons of rock caved in and a twenty-five-foot wall of water half a mile wide cascaded through the opening with the power of a bursting dam. As the column of water shot out to Drover Street into the flooded district, the last faint hopes of saving the homes disappeared. Part of the White River’s main current funneled into the residential district at Kentucky Avenue and Morris Street. Houses simply crumpled before the gush, and smaller buildings were picked up and whirled around to their destruction. Factories and other businesses were submerged, and tens of thousands were suddenly homeless.

Indianapolis was not alone that fateful Easter week. Levees burst all around the state—on the Mississinewa River in Marion, on the White River in Muncie, and on the Wabash River in Lafayette, and on the Ohio River in Lawrenceburg—flood-
President Woodrow Wilson—who on March 19, just two days before the windstorm, had accepted the supposedly ceremonial title as honorary president of the Red Cross—declared the Red Cross to be the official disaster-relief agency for the federal government.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM, LEFT: A husband and wife in Peru, Indiana, calmly watch the flood from the front porch of their home; a meat delivery wagon is caught by the current in Rushville; supplies stand ready at a flood relief station at Wolf Hall in Indianapolis; and an Indianapolis child clutches what possessions she could save from her destroyed home.
part of Kokomo, Wildcat Creek simply overtopped its levee to inundate city streets with eight feet of water.

The statewide lack of communications from the thousands of telephone and telegraph poles and wires downed by the windstorm, tornado, and flood made orchestrating relief nearly impossible. Governor Samuel M. Ralston immediately appealed to the Bell Telephone Company, asking the firm to use every effort to put him in contact with the stricken districts. The company assigned Frank Wampler, the district commercial manager of Bell's Central Union Telephone Company in Indianapolis and a personal friend of Ralston, to the governor's office to work magic with routing emergency circuits around the state to patch lines into different cities. Because Wampler was often working well after the exhausted Ralston had retired about 1 a.m. each night, the newspaper reporters at the Indiana Statehouse nicknamed Wampler the “Night Governor.”

To obtain the necessary food, shelter, and medical supplies for the injured and suddenly homeless, Ralston appealed for help to cities around Indiana as well as to other states. He sought donations of money, blankets, food, and even coffins. The governor appointed a trustee to receive all funds and to arrange for train cars of supplies to be dispatched. Although the various railroads—notably the Big Four, the Pennsylvania Lines, and the Vandalia—were reeling from their own huge losses of bridges, tracks, and locomotives, they put their rolling stock at Ralston’s disposal and dispatched thousands of men in work crews to reconstruct the network around Indiana.

Ralston also contacted the American Red Cross, which sent Henry Stewart of Chicago to establish a temporary headquarters in Indianapolis. In 1913 the Red Cross was still relatively unknown in the field of disaster relief. Although founded by Clara Barton in 1881, it had been reconstituted with a congressional charter in 1905 and had already shown its mettle in providing relief to the victims of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. But in 1913 the Red Cross was still relatively small, with only a handful of fulltime employees in Washington, D.C., and only about sixty volunteer chapters around the nation, and never had it faced such a geographically widespread disaster as the interstate flood.

Nonetheless, newly inaugurated President Woodrow Wilson—who on March 19, just two days before the windstorm, had accepted the supposedly ceremonial title as honorary president of the Red Cross—declared the Red Cross to be the official disaster-relief agency for the federal government. Ralston put the Red Cross in charge of the six hardest-hit Indiana counties, and the state of Indiana took charge of the rest.

With most communications and transportation paralyzed, independent local organizations did not wait for instructions from Indianapolis or Washington, D.C. Instead, they took on the tasks they saw needed to be done. One of those organizations was the Rotary Club of Indianapolis. In February 1905 the world’s first organization dedicated to
CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM, LEFT: Advertising messages on billboards in Indianapolis are obscured by the flood; a horse and carriage carefully makes its way through wet streets in Rushville; workers cart off dead cattle caught and consumed by the flood; mud and debris line an Indianapolis street as the floodwaters begin to subside; curious onlookers gaze at the raging White River from the safety of the Meridian Street bridge in Indianapolis; and a man and woman pose before a set of twisted railroad tracks near Rushville.
community service was founded by four businessmen on Dearborn Street in Chicago. Called Rotary, within five years there were sixteen clubs around the nation (and one in Canada), and by 1913 there were more than fifty. In February 1913 Indianapolis business leaders met to found a Rotary Club in the state capital. On March 1 Rotary Club Number 58 received a charter in Indianapolis, with a membership of seventy-five, one of the largest in existence at the time. Within a month, the disastrous Easter flood was testing its purpose and resolve. Collectively, Rotarians nationwide raised $25,000 (today the equivalent of half a million dollars) for the midwestern flood sufferers.

Indiana was not only the geographical center of the Midwest’s monumental winter storm system; it was also a virtual microcosm of events that unfolded in the nationwide disaster. Earlier the same evening that the tornado barreled through Terre Haute, a family of tornados five hundred miles west devastated Omaha, Nebraska, leaving 103 dead and hundreds more injured. With Terre Haute’s telephone and telegraph wires downed by the windstorm two days earlier, Omaha’s tragedy was the first news to be flashed nationwide. Its magnitude swamped the delayed news about Indiana’s tragedy in Terre Haute, as well as about eight other tornados that same night that together claimed another eighty-nine lives in Nebraska, Iowa, Louisiana, and Missouri—all associated with the same monumental winter storm system.

Moreover, Indianapolis—wth a 1910 population of 233,000, double that of Dayton—was the single largest city so badly devastated by the 1913 flood. Had news about the breaking of the huge levees in Indianapolis gotten out before that of the breaking of the Dayton levees, the 1913 flood might have been remembered as the Great Indianapolis Flood, instead of the Great Dayton Flood.

So what kind of storm caused the catastrophe? As nearly as the meteorologists of the day could later reconstruct from their charts and readings, it began following the normal pattern of midwestern winter storms, but developed some special characteristics conducive to flooding. The strong Canadian high that had brought the widespread windstorm stalled off Bermuda, also stalling the normal eastward travel of the trailing low with all the rain. Then another Canadian high moved in from the west, squeezing the low into a long, low-pressure trough between the two highs, its center stretching diagonally from southern Illinois, across southern and middle Indiana, and across northern Ohio. Up that diagonal path, at least two lows moved in fast succession, the rain of one merging into the next. But nothing in the weather observations or theories of the day prepared the U.S. Weather Service, or any other body, for the unprecedented volume of water that fell out of the sky during those four days of March 1913.

Could it happen again? Absolutely. That pattern of stalled highs that delay rain-bearing lows, which recurs occasionally over the Midwest, is now known to create ideal conditions for major flooding, especially if the soils are saturated or covered with ice. Indeed, that weather pattern has occurred since, notably for the major Ohio River-Mississippi River flood in January 1937, which mostly affected the southern third of Indiana. More recent Indiana floods, such that of January 2005, have locally exceeded a few high-water marks set in 1913. However, because levees and other manmade developments have constricted the flow of many rivers in places, new record heights can be set with a lower volume of water. In short, 2005 was no repetition of 1913.

Trudy E. Bell, whose master’s degree is in American intellectual history, is a science and technology journalist who also writes frequently about history. She is the author of ten books on astronomy, engineering, and bicycling for both adults and children. Her articles have appeared in such magazines as Air & Space, Astronomy, Sky & Telescope, Family Circle, and Travel & Leisure.

Vernon Kn iptash takes careful aim with his Springfield rifle during his training as part of the American army’s famed Rainbow Division during World War I.
VERNON KNIPTASH AND
WORLD WAR I

On April 25, 1917, Vernon Kniptash, a twenty-year-old from Indianapolis, enlisted in the First Indiana Field Artillery, a National Guard unit that was soon to be activated for service in World War I. The son and grandson of German immigrants, Kniptash volunteered for military service out of a patriotic desire to serve his country at a critical time in its history. At the time of his enlistment, Vernon lived a comfortable, relaxed life with his parents, Wilhelm and Ollie Kniptash, and his younger brother Robert, at the family home on Orange Street in southeast Indianapolis. He also worked as a draftsman with Vonnegut and Bohn, one of Indianapolis’s premier architectural firms.

E. Bruce Geelhoed
Rainbow Soldier

A view of the Moselle and Rhine rivers taken by Kniptrash during his service with occupation forces in Germany following World War I.

Three weeks earlier, on April 6, 1917, Congress had declared war on Germany and America entered the conflict on the side of Great Britain, France, and Russia. Aware that America's entry into World War I meant that military service soon would be required of most young men, Kniptrash decided to enlist. "I firmly believe[d]," he later wrote, "that every full-blooded American ought to offer his services right off the bat and not wait 'til the government gave him a number and dragged him into the thing, so I kept my eyes open, waiting for some opening."

Kniptrash's decision to enlist in the armed forces did not reflect the sympathies of many German American families. Nevertheless, the Kniptrash family firmly opposed the German government under the rule of Kaiser Wilhelm I and Kaiser Wilhelm II. The family had no doubt as to where its loyalties lay with respect to the military conflict that had begun in 1914. Prior to his son's enlistment, Wilhelm Kniptrash reminded him that opposition to the autocratic nature of the kaiser's regime, and Prussian domination of the German government, constituted the reasons why the family left Germany from the small town of Uckerath for the United States in 1881. "Go ahead, sign up," Wilhelm told his son.

Beginning with the date of his enlistment, Kniptrash began keeping a set of diaries that recorded his service in World War I. He kept this record until he received his honorable discharge from the army at Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, on May 9, 1919. Army regulations prohibited soldiers from writing diaries, but this restriction was conveniently ignored or overlooked throughout the American armed forces in World War I.

Throughout this two-year period from April 1917 to May 1919, Kniptrash recounted in two red-clothed diaries the multifaceted experience of being a soldier in The Great War. He wrote of the surge of enthusiasm that accompanied his enlistment. He wrote emotionally of the horrors, and occasionally of the humor, of military combat on the Western Front and its effects on ordinary soldiers. Kniptrash described the daily routine and drudgery of military life and the discomfort of living a thoroughly regimented existence, and drew unforgettable profiles of his fellow soldiers, both American and French, and the officers who commanded them. He also detailed the reaction of the soldiers to the armistice in November 1918 and the subsequent occupation of Germany in the winter and spring of 1919.

The military unit in which Kniptrash eventually served was the Forty-second Division, the celebrated Rainbow Division that included twenty-six National Guard units from across the United States and the District of Columbia. The Rainbow Division was created during the summer of 1917 in response to pressure from state politicians and state commanders of the National Guard. As a result, U.S. Secretary of War Newton Baker supported the concept advanced by Major Douglas MacArthur of the army's General Staff that a rapid utilization of National Guard units would enable the United States to raise a fighting force more rapidly than by relying on a regular army comprised of draftees and enlistments.

Unlike other American military forces at the time, the National Guard units were already organized, and many had seen active duty in the border clashes with Mexico in 1916.

Baker and MacArthur also undertook the ambitious scheme of forming an entire division of the state National Guard units instead of assigning them to regular army commands. "It will stretch over the whole country like a rainbow," Baker and MacArthur said of the plan, thereby giving the division its celebrated name.

During the summer of 1917, the Forty-second Division became organized into a fighting force. The principal units of the Rainbow Division were the Eighty-third Infantry Brigade, the Eighty-fourth Infantry Brigade, and the Sixty-seventh Field Artillery Brigade. Initially commanded by Brigadier General Charles P. Summerall, the Sixty-seventh Field Artillery Brigade consisted of the 150th Field Artillery Regiment (formerly the First Indiana Field Artillery), under the command of Colonel Robert S. Tyndall, as well as National Guard units from Illinois, Minnesota, and Maryland.

Kniptrash became a member of
the 150th Field Artillery, which, by the end of its initial training period in the summer of 1917, consisted of three battalions under the overall command of Colonel Tyndall. Major Guy A. Wainwright commanded the First Battalion, Major Solon J. Carter led the Second Battalion, and Major Marlin A. Prather headed the Third Battalion.

During the summer, Kniptash completed his pre-deployment training with the rest of the troops in the First Indiana Field Artillery in Indianapolis until the unit was activated for service. In September, he left Indianapolis for Camp Alvord L. Mills in Mineola, New York, where the entire division received its final training prior for departure to France. On October 18 Kniptash and six thousand other members of the division boarded the USS President Lincoln for the fourteen-day voyage to France. The crossing of the Atlantic was a chaotic and disorganized affair, although Kniptash's diary entries do not convey an unreasonable sense of frustration with the experience.

Once Kniptash landed in France, the artillery units of the Sixty-seventh Brigade marched from the seaport town of Saint-Nazaire to Camp Coetquidan, the primary training camp for artillery units. Knipash hated Saint-Nazaire, calling it “one of the rottenest towns in France. Full of lewd women and infested with German spies.” During his three months of training at the camp, Kniptash learned of his assignment to the Headquarters Company, where he became a wireless operator.

By mid-February 1918 the Forty-second Division received orders to report for action near the front. On February 20 Kniptash and the 150th Field Artillery unit departed Camp Coëtquidan and headed for the Lunéville sector of the Western Front, where it provided support for the French Army in that area. After arriving at Lunéville (nicknamed “Looneyville” by the American troops), the soldiers of the Forty-second Division soon became involved in combat with the Germans, although their actions were initially limited to raiding and some minor skirmishes.

Nevertheless, Kniptash soon discovered that greater military conflict lay ahead. On March 6 he confided to his diary, “There’s going to be something stirring. I can feel it in my bones. We’ve had two very fine days, and each one of them was marked by raids. The mayor of Dombasle [the nearest French town] has posted bulletins all over town and one of my buddies who understands a little French says that the bulletins tell the French people just what to do in case they get a hurry up call to evacuate. On every corner you see small groups of excited women. Old women shaking their heads very solemnly, and all told there’s a certain tenseness in town that can be seen and felt, but can not be described. These poor people are sure sick of the war.”

The long anticipated German offensive began on March 21, 1918. In a devastating display of artillery bombardment, air raids, and offensive movement, the Germans pushed back French and British troops from their entrenched positions along the entire Western Front. But while their offensive succeeded in driving the Allied forces southward, the Germans’ took enormous casualties in the process, a circumstance repeated numerous times over the course of the next five months.

The months between March and July were a period of combat testing for Kniptash and the entire Rainbow Division, and almost certainly the most violent period in human warfare to that point in history. The division’s soldiers were in combat at literally every major encounter between the Allies and the Germans, from the fighting around Lunéville in March and April, the combat around Baccarat in May, and finally to Château-Thierry and Champagne for the bloody days of mid-July when the Germans made their
The military unit in which Kniptash eventually served was the Forty-second Division, the celebrated Rainbow Division that included twenty-six National Guard units from across the United States and the District of Columbia. The Rainbow Division was created during the summer of 1917 in response to pressure from state politicians and state commanders of the National Guard.

Kniphtash uses one of the horses that pulled his outfit's artillery pieces as a backdrop for a souvenir photo during his days in the army. Horses were used extensively by both the Allied and German armies for transport during the war.

ABOVE: Returning Hoosier soldiers from World War I march in formation past Christ Church Cathedral on Monument Circle in Indianapolis during the Welcome Home celebration held on May 7, 1919. RIGHT: Charles Robinson, a boy from Madison, Indiana, admires a captured German helmet on a small boy at Military Park in Indianapolis.

By the end of July, the troops were exhausted. Yet, rest was not in the offing until the Allies had successfully pushed back the German forces to the point where an armistice was declared on November 11 and fighting came to a stop. Between August and November, bitter fighting occurred between the Germans and the Allies, especially in the Meuse-Argonne counteroffensive that took place in October.

During this four-month period, Kniptash revealed a variety of emotions in his diary. He recorded moments of great exhilaration, as when he understood that the Allies had forced the Germans into retreat. He betrayed moods of skepticism when he learned about the prospect that Germany's allies—Austria, Turkey, and Bulgaria—were about to leave the war. Kniptash wrote of the fear that enveloped him when his unit came under intense German artillery fire and aerial bombardment, and he described with pride the skill he acquired with communication equipment. He wrote movingly of the wretched conditions faced by the soldiers as they battled not only the German enemy but also mud, rain, lice,
Between July and November 1918, Knipash continued to encounter the death and destruction caused by the war. During periods of low morale, however, he was sustained by the knowledge that the Allies were poised to end the war victoriously and that the fighting would not last indefinitely.

The end to the fighting in World War I on the Western Front occurred at the now-celebrated time of 11 a.m. on November 11, 1918. At this time, Knipash and his fellow Rainbow Hoosiers occupied a sector of a line near the French city of Sedan. In his capacity as a wireless operator, Knipash recognized, as early as November 9, that an end to the fighting was imminent. "Copied an English communiqué which said that Prince Max of Baden [Germany's principal negotiator in the armistice talks with the Allies] resigned and told about his farewell speech to the German people," Knipash wrote in his diary on November 9. "He said that it was only a question of hours before the armistice would be signed now. Said the German Army could not hold off the whole Allied Army by itself... The people in Germany are clamoring for peace, and the higher-ups are pleading with them not to start internal troubles now that bloodshed is about to cease on the front. They increased the bread allowance to appease the crowds. The Frenchies are running around, hog wild, yelling, 'Finis la guerre, toute suite!' They are crazy with joy. I am saving my outburst until Monday morning at 11 a.m. Want to know for sure before I cut loose. There's a remote possibility of the Germans not signing the armistice, but it's some remote. Would like to know what the terms are. Bet they don't leave Germany very much."

Once the armistice took effect, Knipash and his fellow soldiers felt almost a sense of anticlimax. Although relieved that the fighting and killing had come to a halt, Knipash remained uncertain as to what lay ahead. As he wrote in his diary on November 11, "There was an intense barrage up 'til 10:55 this morning. Then all guns ceased. This was the hour set for all firing to stop. The Froggies and Americans certainly used up what ammunition they had on hand. Everything is quiet now. Copied the communiqué today, and it said that the Armistice had been signed. The end of the war didn't turn out as I thought it would. The boys did very little carrying on. Just took it as a matter of course. Paper said that Paris celebrated elaborately. Wonder how long it'll be until peace is finally declared."

Despite the nonchalant attitude that Knipash apparently took toward the signing of the armistice, the significance of the moment was not lost on him and remained a part of his consciousness for the next few weeks. On December 14 he wrote, "The thing we did to celebrate [the armistice] would sound curious to the folks back home. One was to build huge bon fires (more to keep warm than to celebrate.) And the other was when a big, yellow moon came out on the night of Nov. 11 to say, 'What a wonderful moon.' During the war a full moon was the soldier's enemy because it meant planes and bombs. Never saw it to fail. And if there's anything worse than the drone of a Bosche [German] motor and the crump of exploding bombs, I've yet to hear it."

The paramount concern of the American armed forces with the armistice focused on a prompt, speedy return home. The conclusion to World War I was a complicated undertaking, however. For the entire Rainbow Division, as well as tens of thousands of other American troops, the return to America took time. A few days before the armistice, the Forty-second Division, along with several other divisions, had been reconstituted into the American Third Army. This new force subsequently became the U.S. Army of Occupation and, by November 15, had received its orders to prepare for an extensive march to Germany, where it took up positions to enforce the armistice's terms. While the occupation of Germany remained in effect,
ABOVE: Kniptash takes a break following a tough six-mile hike to help prepare him for the rigors of combat service in the trenches of France and Belgium.

LEFT: Members of the 150th Field Artillery Band pose with their instruments during occupation duty in Germany at the war's end.
the negotiations to end the war began at Versailles in January 1919.

In mid-November 1918, therefore, Kniptash and other members of his division set out on their celebrated “March to the Rhine” as the first American military force to occupy the territory of an enemy in Europe. The Rainbows marched through war-devastated France, receiving a hero’s welcome along the way. A similar situation repeated itself in Belgium where throngs of Belgians came out to embrace the Americans, who they considered responsible for the defeat of their German oppressors. When the troops marched into Luxembourg, the Americans received a more subdued response from a citizenry whose loyalties had been divided during the war. Finally, in early December, the Rainbows marched into Germany proper, with their final destination being the town of Koblenz along the Rhine River. The divisional established its headquarters in the neighboring city of Bad Neuenahr, and Kniptash arrived there on December 16.

Once in Bad Neuenahr, Kniptash received a pleasant surprise in the form of some totally unexpected creature comforts. A resort town in peacetime, Bad Neuenahr catered to an affluent clientele of European vacationers. As Kniptash wrote on December 16, “We are quartered in a big hotel and have set up station. Feather beds, running water, electric lights, and, in fact, all modern conveniences. It’s too much. I just naturally yelled when I saw what we would have to put up with. After sleeping in hog pens, gutters, etc., for a year and then finally [to] be billeted in a place like this. Again, I say, it’s too much... There is one bathhouse in town that’s a marvel. It’s so spic and span that it will be a shame to dirty the water with our bodies. This town is sure worth coming over 300 kil. [o]meters to see. Hope we ‘occupy’ this place for a month.”

From mid-December 1918 to the first week of April 1919, Kniptash and his fellow Hoosiers carried out their duties as members of the Army of Occupation. The daily existence was often curious, however, especially since many of the troops were assigned to live in the homes of German families, at least temporarily. As a result, large numbers of the troops formed close, even friendly, relationships with the German citizens whose country they were occupying.

Lacking the discipline of a force that was constantly preparing for combat, the Army of Occupation nevertheless found a variety of activities to keep itself busy. In addition to the normal routine of drill and training, the army developed a wide range of recreational pursuits, including baseball and football contests between various units. Kniptash and several of his friends, however, found a different pursuit to occupy their leisure time. Along with fellow Indianapolis Rainbows Bill Skinner, Hank Wells, and Bill Hall, Kniptash formed a string quartet that performed jazz music for the troops. The quartet’s routine was known as “The Hoosier Follies,” and Kniptash and his fellow musicians played for the division’s benefit throughout the winter of 1918-19. The quartet became so much in demand that it played weekly throughout most of January and February 1919.

For much of the winter, Kniptash’s thoughts focused on his departure from Europe and his return to the United States. Rumors about a possible departure date circulated freely within the Army of Occupation. In the weeks immediately after the armistice, the Rainbows thought they would be leaving as early as January 10, 1919. Once January 10 passed with no orders to leave, however, the soldiers picked up a rumor that their departure was to begin around February 12. Once again, no orders came to confirm the rumor. Finally, on February 26, Kniptash read in the army newspaper Stars and Stripes that the 150th Field Artillery was due to leave Germany in the first week of April.

During the first three months of 1919, the monotony and tedium of life without combat or conflict took its toll on the Rainbow Division’s morale, leading to considerable anxiety and restlessness among the troops. Kniptash wrote openly of tensions between soldiers and their officers, between units of the National Guard and the regular army, and between the civilian soldiers and their West Point counterparts. As the occupation wore on, the soldiers also became disenchanted with the work of the Young Men’s Christian Association (charged with providing recreation for the troops in the field), and with the chilly treatment they frequently received from the YMCA’s personnel.

Throughout the occupation period, Kniptash experienced a variety of emotions. He expressed confusion and uncertainty immediately after the armistice when it seemed unclear whether hostilities might possibly resume between the Germans and the Allies. For example, on December 1, 1918, he wrote in his diary, “Tomorrow we take a man-killing hike. Said to cover 40 kil. [o]meters and will land us at the German border. This old man tells me that three Americans were killed up here last Monday. It was the work of some narrow-minded sniper. We carry our pistols at all times from now on.”

Alternating with the confusion and uncertainty was the sense of curiosity and amazement that accompanied the extensive travel the troops experienced while they were stationed in Germany. Travel in Germany was especially poignant for Kniptash, since he wanted to visit Cologne, near the site of his family’s ancestral
As they marched, the troops were greeted with singing, shouting, and flowers tossed to them by the spectators. Many of the soldiers picked up the flowers and attached them to their cartridge belts as they made their way along the parade route.
homeland. For example, after passing through the town of Bitburg on December 5, Kniptash confided to his diary, “All road signs read ‘Cologne,’ out of this town. Haven’t seen any place where Coblenz was mentioned. Maybe we’ll go to Cologne after all. Sure hope so. Maybe I’ll get to see some Knips if I do.” Then, on December 16, Kniptash wrote, “The Rhine is only 10 kil. [meters] from here. I’m going to that river if I have to go A.W.O.L. Wish I could get a pass to Cologne. It’s only about 40 kil. [meters] from here.” Finally, on February 1, Kniptash got his wish and visited Cologne as part of a boat ride sponsored by the YMCA. “The Y.M.C.A. threw a boat ride on the Rhine for the boys, and I rated a ticket,” Kniptash wrote. “Went up as far as Cologne. Beautiful scenery and that Cologne Cathedral is all that it’s said to be.”

After Kniptash received the news that the 150th Field Artillery was scheduled to leave Germany for France and then depart for the United States, he spent a few anxious weeks before beginning his final preparations for the end of his service in World War I. The imminent departure and the end of his soldiering brought forth mixed emotions. Kniptash was anxious to return to Indianapolis, rejoin his family and friends, return to his job with Vonnegut and Bohn, and resume life as a civilian without the regimentation of military life. On the other hand, he was somewhat saddened to see his adventure in Europe draw to an end. “Sure hate it that I’m leaving this country,” he confided to his diary on April 8.

Kniptash left Koblenz on April 8, 1919, aboard a “40 and 8,” a railroad boxcar that held either forty men or eight horses. His destination was the seaport town of Brest, France, where the troops were scheduled to board a transport ship for the return voyage to the United States. The train ride from Koblenz to Brest lasted the better part of four days and was a physically bruising experience. The troops found little time for sleep as they rode in the cramped, uncomfortable boxcar. The ride also took the men through areas of war-torn France where the troops saw, for a final time, the destruction and devastation that the war had inflicted upon the French countryside.

Once the troops arrived at Brest, they spent the next five days, from April 12 to 17, in preparation for their departure for America. Days were occupied with the dreary monotony of military routine as the troops waited, with considerable expectation, for the time when they were to board a streetcar in Louisville for the train station and the train. Kniptash spent the next day tending to the duties leading up to the parade route, before re-boarding his train for Camp Taylor.

From April 25 to May 5, Kniptash served at Camp Merritt in New Jersey. He took advantage of his off-duty time to make several visits to New York, where he attended the theatre, shopped, and took in the sights. On May 5 Kniptash boarded a train in New York bound for the Midwest. Interestingly, Kniptash did not know the destination of the camp in the Midwest where he was to receive his honorable discharge from the army. He suspected that he and his fellow Rainbow Hoosiers would be assigned either to Camp Sherman in Ohio or Camp Taylor in Kentucky.

The train carried Kniptash through upstate New York and Ohio before reaching Indiana on May 6. The troops marched in parades, in Bluffton, Ohio, and Lima, Ohio, on May 5, and then Portland, Indiana, on May 6. From Portland, the train made its way across Indiana before it stopped in Noblesville, just north of Indianapolis. The troops then waited for their grand entry into Indianapolis, scheduled for May 7.

The welcome home celebration for Indiana’s soldiers returning from World War I was an unprecedented event in the history of Indianapolis. Hundreds of thousands of people turned out for the parade and celebration that began at 12:30 p.m. in the center of the city. Included among the celebrants were sixty thousand people from various regions of Indiana who rode into the city aboard specially-reserved trains. Indiana’s governor James P. Goodrich and Indianapolis’s mayor Charles W. Jewett presided over the day’s events.

The highlight of the celebration occurred when the returning troops paraded around the southeast segment of Monument Circle, after passing through the newly completed Victory Arch. As they marched, the troops were greeted with singing, shouting, and flowers tossed to them by the spectators. Many of the soldiers picked up the flowers and attached them to their cartridge belts as they made their way along the parade route.

Following the parade, Kniptash spent some brief moments with his family and friends at Military Park, three blocks west of the parade route, before re-boarding his train for Camp Taylor. Kniptash spent the next day tending to the duties leading up to his honorable discharge. On May 9, he signed all the necessary papers, saluted his commanding officer for the last time, and boarded a streetcar in Louisville for the train station and the train that was to take him back to Indianapolis.

After slightly more than two years, Vernon Kniptash was once again a civilian—but he was now a civilian who had witnessed the worst of World War I and survived. As the soldiers said frequently in Germany, for Kniptash, the guerre (war) was sure finis (finished), and finis was the last word entered in his diary.

Bruce Geelhoed is professor of history and chair of the history department at Ball State University. His research focuses primarily on the United States in the twentieth century, particularly the political history of the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. He thanks William R. Kniptash for his assistance in the preparation of this article.

E. Bruce Geelhoed is professor of history and chair of the history department at Ball State University. His research focuses primarily on the United States in the twentieth century, particularly the political history of the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. He thanks William R. Kniptash for his assistance in the preparation of this article.

TOP: The first home owned by the Sundays in Winona Lake was the Illinois, shown here circa 1908. MIDDLE: Nell Sunday in the dining room at Mount Hood, circa 1945.
BOTTOM: The living room, shown here about 1922, features an inglenook, a prized feature of bungalow architecture.
Born from poor rural stock in central Iowa, William Ashley "Billy" Sunday grew to national prominence twice—first during an eight-year career in professional baseball from 1883 to 1890, and then again from 1896 to 1935, when the flamboyant and controversial Sunday preached his version of the gospel to millions of people across the country.

The role that Indiana played in the Sunday story is significant, as was Sunday’s effect upon the Hoosier landscape, as he led forty-eight revivals or speaking engagements throughout the state. His largest revival in Indiana took place in 1913 in South Bend. At the conclusion of this seven-week campaign that produced 6,098 converts, newspapers across the state hailed it as “Indiana’s Greatest Revival.” His last sermon, delivered only ten days prior to his death, also occurred on Hoosier soil, before a packed crowd at a Mishawaka church.

Sunday and his wife Nell had established their household and reared their family of four children in Chicago for nearly twenty-three years when they decided to relocate their primary home to Winona Lake, Indiana. Nell had lived her entire life in or near the Chicago area, and most of her large family remained there still in 1911. The Moody Bible Institute, founded by nineteenth-century evangelist Dwight L. Moody, was also located in Chicago. Many people viewed Billy as the new evangelical Christian torchbearer, carrying on Moody’s work; it therefore made sense for Sunday to establish his ministry in Chicago. By 1911 the Sundays had amassed a substantial sum of money and were certainly in a position to afford a new home in one of the many affluent Chicago suburbs. Yet, despite the logical reasons for the Sundays to remain in Chicago, they packed up their family and moved to Winona Lake.

For almost fifteen years the Sunday family had visited Winona Lake during the summer to enjoy the natural retreat environment, buying a cottage there in 1900. While Billy annually participated in the Winona Bible Conference activities, he cherished his time at Winona, where he was free to be an average citizen and, if he desired, dress down in old clothes to do yard work. With the Sundays living largely out of trunks and suitcases as they traveled from place to place, the family welcomed a slower pace during their breaks from the revival campaigns. Winona, with its vacationland atmosphere and convenient proximity to a major railway, provided an attractive retreat.

The Sundays gave up life in bustling Chicago so that they might enjoy a wonderful sprawling park of a front yard with natural springs, tall oaks, and one of Indiana’s finest lakes on the horizon. The Winona Christian Assembly’s Bible Conference grounds, adjacent to the Sundays’ bungalow, included these features as well as manicured flower beds, decorative fountains, swan ponds, and ornamental statuary of all kinds.

Ten years prior to the establishment of the Winona Christian Assembly’s Bible Conference grounds in 1896, this same property was known to the public as Spring Fountain Park. The natural springs that feed into the lake from a steep bluff to the east provided the inspiration for a health spa resort, much in the same tradition as West Baden Springs, Indiana, or Hot Springs, Arkansas. By 1896 Spring Fountain Park was sold to the Winona Christian Assembly, whose first conference director, J. Wilbur Chapman, had hired Sunday in 1894 as an advance man for his revival circuit. It’s no wonder that the Sundays gladly traded the inconvenient journey back to Chicago for this gated relaxing paradise in the bosom of nature and old friends.

The specific location of the Sunday’s new home in the town of Winona also reflects their distinct family values. The first house that the Sundays owned in town was known as the Illinois. The custom of naming one’s home dated back to the Spring Fountain Park days and was a tradition the Sunday family wholeheartedly embraced. The Illinois, so named by the Sundays because they hailed from
The sender of this postcard picturing Billy Sunday remarked that at the time, Nell had been in Winona Lake "building new houses tennis courts etc. most of the winter & spring."

Chicago, was a Victorian-style lake cottage that sported decorative shingles and gingerbread as well as two stories of porches.

At the urging of the Winona Christian Assembly's founder, Solomon Dickey, the Sundays bought the cottage complete with furnishings from a recently widowed preacher for $875. Though the cottage was less than twenty-five years old when the Sundays decided to move to Winona permanently, the cottage could not be used as a year-round residence. It had been built as a summer home and required refitting with heating and ventilation ducts, as well as insulation to weather the cold northern Indiana winters.

Their full-scale relocation to Winona in 1911 gave Billy and Nell the opportunity to make their own statement by building a home to their specifications, something they had never before attempted. While plenty of land was available for building on the east side of town, the Illinois lot commanded a prime location on the bluff overlooking the park and lake and was just five hundred feet from the Winona Auditorium, the central focus of the town. Instead of demolishing the Illinois, the Sundays decided to move the cottage to an adjacent lot, sell it, and build a new Arts and Crafts-style bungalow in its place.

The new home that the Sundays commissioned is undoubtedly the single most important artifact in providing a useful material culture perspective on the Sunday family. The home and its furnishings are in every way a reflection not only of the Sundays'...
Many furnishings in the Sunday home demonstrate an appreciation for nature and handicraft. **TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** Nell’s needlework graced the family’s study; even common objects, such as this lamp with Rookwood base and art glass shade and an umbrella stand, echoed natural forms in shape or decoration. **MIDDLE ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** Walls were hung with Nell’s needlework and adorned with stylized stenciling, while the kitchen, unusually, was painted forest green. **BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A curved Murphy bed with built-in mirror provided both function and beauty; many of Nell’s paintings portrayed an idealized farm life distinct from her city childhood; the family’s collections included art pottery and this lamp with art glass shade.
personal tastes but also of the times in which they lived. The Sundays named their new bungalow Mount Hood, presumably a reference to the Hood River valley region of Oregon, where the Sundays also owned a rustic cabin retreat and fruit orchard farm nestled in the foothills of the real Mount Hood.

The Sundays’ home, both from a purely architectural standpoint and its interior designs and furnishings, is a prime example of the American Arts and Crafts style, also known as the Craftsman style or Mission Revival style. The origins of the movement began in mid-nineteenth-century England, largely as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution.

In America, the Arts and Crafts movement was never quite so intertwined with the political upheaval brought about by the Industrial Revolution as it was in England. Instead of being a rather expensive alternative to mass-produced goods, as was the case in England, many patrons of the Craftsman style in the United States preferred it because it used economical construction techniques and local building materials. Thus it became known as the “blue-collar architecture” of the early twentieth century. Key aspects of the Arts and Crafts movement in America were the emphasis on simplicity of design, handmade crafts, a blending with the natural environment, and a general humility of lifestyle.

The Sundays’ selection of this style for the only home they ever had built for themselves validates the interpretation that from an outward appearance, they espoused an antimaterialistic view of life. Architecturally, Mount Hood falls squarely into the building type known as the bungalow. With its exposed frame timbers and rafter tails, unadorned gables, and wide porches, the bungalow was the epitome of the Arts and Crafts home in America.

On the inside, bungalows severely broke with the tradition of small rooms for specific functions, such as the vestibule, reception room, parlor, library, den, and music room of the Victorian home, and reintroduced the old notion of a “great room,” or oversized living room, which could serve a multitude of functions in a more efficient manner. Gustav Stickley, a leader of the Arts and Crafts movement in America, wrote of the bungalow: “It is a house reduced to its simplest form where life can be carried on with the greatest amount of freedom. It never fails to harmonize with its surroundings. It is never expensive because it is built of local materials and labor; and it is beautiful as it is planned to meet the simplest needs in the simplest way.”

One of the chief assets of bungalow architecture was its flexibility. Most bungalows featured a broad, sloping roof to the front of the house, with the gables running the length of the sides. The broad roof often created a large overhang in the front, allowing for a sizable front porch. However, with the lot shapes in Winona running narrow and deep, the Sundays were forced to design a bungalow with the exposed gables creating the overhang for the front porch and the broad, sloping roof running the length of the sides. The southern exposure along this long side employed banded windows to make the best use of natural light. These windows, which wrapped around to the west porch, provided the Sundays with an unbroken vista of the surrounding landscape.

The three porches, one open porch on the first floor and two enclosed sleeping porches on the second floor, also brought the outdoors into the everyday living environment. Porches, an integral element of bungalow architecture, exemplified the Sundays’ closeness with nature, especially the sleeping porch. Sleeping porches, similar in function to a contemporary three-season porch, were usually built off upper-level bedrooms so that occupants could take advantage of the natural surroundings in an intimate setting.

At Mount Hood, a small sleeping porch was off the boys’ bedroom, and a rather large one was directly off the study, both on the second floor. For these sleeping porches, the Sundays employed a color scheme with the walls and ceiling an earthly, semi-opaque, pea green, and the window and door trim a dark-chocolate-brown stained cedar. The porches and the exterior are the only places in the entire home that utilize these two colors, and it is obvious to even the casual observer that the earth-toned brown and green highlight a space specifically set aside for communing with nature.

With the exception of one room, the original color palette used at Mount Hood is consistent with colors traditionally associated with the Arts and Crafts movement. Earth tones dominate this palette, with dark chocolate brown, forest green, raffia gold, rust, pea green, corn-husk yellow, and peanut-shell tan. Only one room in the home stands out as being decorated outside this Arts and Crafts palette—the bedroom for the two youngest boys, Billy Jr. and Paul. A brilliant scarlet red adorned the walls of this room, along with the oft-used peanut-shell tan on the ceiling. These two boys were ten and four, respectively, when the home was built in 1911.

Beyond the mere physical architecture of the bungalow and the color palette, Mount Hood’s interior design contained several splendid examples of Arts and Crafts design. Built-in furnishings, such as bedroom closets, library bookcases, the butler’s pantry cupboard and countertop, and the inglenook in the living room, revealed

Decorative art pieces in the home’s collection also exhibit exemplary Craftsman style... with these objects, the homeowner and artisan became one.
The Billy Sunday Home

Gustav Stickley wrote of the bungalow, "It is a house reduced to its simplest form where life can be carried on with the greatest amount of freedom. It never fails to harmonize with its surroundings."

the rigid control of the designer's intent for the space's use. The inglenook, a Swedish term that literally means "cozy place by the fire," comprised built-in benches flanking the fireplace, thus forcing the occupants to use the area in a specifically prescribed manner.Reportedly Nell Sunday's favorite place in the home, the inglenook was the site of many momentous events in the family's history.

Burlap wall treatments covered the walls in the living room, dining room, and below the chair rail in the halls and stairways. The burlap was treated with multiple layers of varnish and pigments to create a blotchy, organic texture that blends various hues of brown, gold, rust, and green. The stencil patterns on the burlap suggest a compromise between the ultrafloral expressions of the Art Nouveau movement and the strict geometric designs associated with other Arts and Crafts designers such as Frank Lloyd Wright.

While the use of earth-toned colors in the high-profile public areas and the porches was carried out in superb fashion at Mount Hood, such use of color in the public spaces was common for an Arts and Crafts home. Much more unusual, however, was the employment of the natural color palette in the service areas of the Sundays' home. Typically, service areas such as kitchens, pantries, laundries, and servants' quarters were finished with much simpler, inexpensive techniques because these spaces were not meant to be seen by guests.

An Arts and Crafts home exhibiting naturalistic wall treatments and stencil designs in the public areas very often would have a plain white kitchen, a cultural phenomenon exemplifying antiseptic cleanliness as part of the modern technological improvements of indoor plumbing and gas cooking. Yet the walls and ceilings of the kitchen and butler's pantry at Mount Hood were originally painted a dark forest green, and the pine woodwork in these areas was stained a rich translucent green. The kitchen and pantry doors, built-in cupboards, and utensil cabinets make use of heavy burnished copper hardware for handle pulls, hinges, and latches. The green-stained woodwork coupled with copper hardware is an unmistakable hallmark of "Stickley green," a stylistic line of furniture pieces produced by Stickley.

The extension of the sophisticated Stickley green style into these service areas tells us not only that Nell Sunday was well versed in the techniques of the latest designers but also that she wholeheartedly believed in the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement. There would be no logical reason to bear the expense of time, materials, and effort to elaborately decorate a kitchen and pantry that would not be seen by guests unless the family members themselves desired this style of decoration.

A number of decorative art pieces in the home's collection also exhibit exemplary Craftsman style. Nell Sunday's wonderful needlepoint pieces are perhaps the purest manifestation of the Arts and Crafts values in the home's collection. With these objects, the home-owner and artisan became one. The largest of Nell's pieces is a five-by-three-foot wall hanging in the dining room of a red macaw parrot on a floral background. The Sundays had a macaw as a pet, and this 1927 wall hanging was likely a tribute to their beloved bird.

Several of Nell's needlepoints were used for purely utilitarian purposes. A navy blue, white, and pink onion vine design covers the seat and back to a chair. Floral needlepoint covers two footstools, the seat of a side chair, and the insert top of an end table. The pattern of an urn with flowers adorns a fire screen that Nell made as a gift for her youngest son, Paul. A stylized reindeer is the central motif to the cover for a small bench.

Of all the pieces, however, one example far surpasses the others, both in technical skill and exhibition of Arts and Crafts significance. A large three-by-four-foot naturalistic forest scene wall hanging has exquisite detail, with a broad variety of brown and green hues that highlight the features in the nature scene, and the central figures of two deer executed in petit-point.

Besides Nell's own works, the Sundays supported the Arts and Crafts movement by purchasing furnishings made by other artisans producing this style. Several naturalistic prints hung on the walls of the home. A Wallace Nutting colorized photograph of a nature scene served as a Christmas greeting card worthy of keeping well after the holidays. A large settle, similar in function to a sofa, and a massive library table complemented the living room. The settle and table are both made of solid quarter-sawn oak, a favorite construction material of Craftsman-style artisans because of the rich "tiger stripe" pattern obtained in the grain. Two freestanding bookcases from the study also exhibit elements of this style, the larger of the two having heavy brass hinge flanges in the shape of dragons' heads, while the smaller bookcase features a decorative heart-shaped hole at the top of the case.

The Sundays purchased or received as gifts several art pottery pieces of this era made by Rookwood, Weller, Nyloak, Stellmacher, and Rhodian Gouda. Weller vases and wall pockets of the woodcraft or silvertone design accented the butler's pantry. Examples of Rookwood pottery include candlesticks, a large flower bowl complete with frog, and several small vases and bowls. Many of the Rookwood pieces bear an inscribed "X" on the base, indicating that they were flawed "factory seconds" and most likely purchased by Nell rather than given as gifts. A mottled brown and
TOP LEFT: With its brilliant red walls, the bedroom of the Sunday's youngest son was the only room decorated outside the typical Arts and Crafts palette.  

TOP RIGHT: In the 1880s Billy and Nell courted on this Eastlake settee, originally from her parents' home.  

MIDDLE LEFT: Bedrooms in the home were furnished simply but comfortably.  

MIDDLE RIGHT: Nell's needlework designs, shown here in the master bedroom, were influenced by designer William Morris.  

BOTTOM LEFT: The green-stained woodwork in the kitchen was a hallmark of the "Stickley green" style.  

BOTTOM RIGHT: Nell's vivid red mosiac needlepoint is a focal point in the dining room.
gold ceramic umbrella stand grooved with a dark patina finish gives the illusion of growing directly from the floor.

Of all the decorative arts in the home, the lighting devices most dramatically demonstrate the Craftsman style. The glass globes covering the ceiling light fixtures in the living room and dining room exhibit severely geometric rectangle and diamond patterns and seem to have been influenced heavily by Wright. Several ceiling light fixtures and wall sconces make use of heavy rectangular link brass chains and feature etched glass or end-of-day glass shades typical of the era. A large four-bulb table lamp with Hood rests slopes dramatically from the top of the bluff (overlooking the lake) down nearly forty feet to the park floor. Rising from the Winona Christian Assembly grounds park boundary approximately a third of the way up the hill is an imposing forty-step concrete staircase leading to the west side and “front door” of the house.

The hill provided the Sundays with ample opportunities to develop the landscape in creative ways. A bank of perennial plantings extended down the length of the hill along the north property line, and several photographs in the home’s collection show Sunday weeding and raking leaves to maintain this planting bed. Biographical accounts also mention his use of the yard rake and shovel, which still survive end-of-day glass panels, similar in style to a Tiffany Company product, adorned the library table in the center of the living room. An unusually shaped cut-glass lamp with an oval dome shade, possibly produced by Warsaw Cut Glass Company, located just two miles from the Winona Lake home, joined other gifts of cut glass on the Sundays’ sideboard in the dining room.

Perhaps the most stunning example of the Arts and Crafts style in the home is a table lamp in the shape of a mushroom. The cocoa brown Rookwood base is topped with a Handel Company art glass shade that yields exquisite textural patterns when lit. Produced in 1918, the mushroom lamp was placed in several locations of the home over the years, but its original location was in the study on the second floor.

In addition to the rich materials found inside Mount Hood, the immediate surroundings of the outdoor landscape also provide many clues into the minds of the family. The lot on which Mount Hood rests provides ample opportunities to develop the landscape creating a small pond in which she raised goldfish.

By far the most enterprising modification of the landscape was the terraced garden on the south side of the house. A design plan from Peterson Nursery in Chicago exhibits a three-terrace garden, with a substantial portion of the middle terrace covered by a large pergola extending from the south side of the house approximately thirty feet. Historic photographs also confirm a large bed of hollyhocks, concrete benches, shrubbery, and a statueary birdbath on the top terrace.

Farther to the south of the terraced garden is the grotto springs, a circular cobble and masonry structure that confined the flow of the town’s largest natural spring, previously known as “mammoth spring.” The grotto springs feature was originally built in the 1890s by the landowner adjacent to the Illinois. By the late 1920s, however, the Sunday family was maintaining and using the grotto springs, and at one point Nell even dammed the outlet of the free-flowing spring to create a pond in which she raised goldfish.
The outdoor terrain was, for the Sundays, merely an extension of the home's interior. From the informal interior with natural textured burlap walls, through the open-air sleeping porches, onto the terraced landscape, the Sunday property functioned as a continuous spectrum of the natural environment.

The plan of the rooms and pattern of the space usage for Mount Hood bear silent witness to the values of the Sunday family. According to one newspaper account, Billy stated that Nell designed and planned the home herself. Such a revelation should not be too surprising since she regularly reviewed blueprints and site plans for the numerous tabernacles that were constructed across the country for the revivals. In an interview three years prior to her death, she matter-of-factly recalled the precise size of rooms, hallways, and floor coverings in Mount Hood, as if she were still sitting at the drafting table.

Typical for the era, the home contains a clear separation between public and private space. The home is not particularly grand in size—about 2,500 square feet—and not intended for large-scale entertaining. Only 27 percent of the home's space is formal in decor; the remaining 73 percent contains private areas for family members or household maintenance. Yet the Sundays were certainly aware of the dictum for providing pleasing formal spaces in the living-room and dining-room areas, while keeping the purely functional spaces hidden away from guests' vantage points.

Perhaps most telling is the layout of the family's sleeping quarters: two bedrooms on the first floor and three on the second. Predictably, the master bedroom, located on the first floor, is the largest of the bedrooms. But with the only full bathroom on the second floor, the layout creates the unusual situation of requiring Billy and Nell to climb the staircase to take a bath.

By contrast, the children's bedrooms, all of which are on the second floor, provided prime access to that valuable commodity of indoor plumbing. A half bath on the first floor across the hall from the housekeeper's bedroom certainly eased the strain of this design, but it still seems unlikely that a master bedroom would be so far removed from the main bath. Perhaps it was this oversight that led to the renovation of the second-floor study nearly ten years after the home was built, so that it might serve as a master bedroom; the old first-floor master bedroom was converted into the study. By the time of this switch, however, most of the children were grown and out of the home, so the precise reason for these changes remain unknown.

The room designated for the housekeeper and nanny, Nora Lynn, was logically located on the first floor near the kitchen and back door, areas where she would spend a great deal of time. Nora Lynn was for all practical purposes a member of the Sunday family. In the Sundays' employment for twenty years, she had a large hand in raising the children, especially Billy Jr. and Paul. She remained in the Sundays' employment until her death in 1930 at the Sunday home. Curiously, her quarters were located the greatest distance possible from the children's bedrooms upstairs.

The Sundays' master bedroom was somewhat closer to the children but still removed by a flight of stairs. There clearly existed a separation in living space between the children and the adults, which provides cause for speculation regarding the strained relationships between Billy and Nell and the Sunday children when they became adults.

A wave of unforeseen tragedies struck the Sunday family beginning in 1930, and by 1944 all four children—Helen, George, Billy Jr., and Paul—had died. On November 6, 1935, Billy Sunday succumbed to a heart attack at his brother-in-law's Chicago home. After her husband's death, Nell Sunday began her own tour of speaking engagements. She carried on the only way she knew how, strongly determined to let God lead her path. After Nell died on February 20, 1957, she was buried alongside Billy and their three sons in Forest Home Cemetery on the outskirts of Chicago. She had outlived everyone in the Mount Hood household.

Twenty years prior to her death, Nell Sunday began opening up her home to Bible conference groups and leading personal tours through the home of "the famous baseball evangelist Billy Sunday." In her will, she donated the home intact, complete with all of its contents to the Winona Christian Assembly so that it could continue to be a place where people could come to hear the Sunday story.

Through a cooperative effort between the current landowner, Grace College, and the artisan community the Village at Winona, the Billy Sunday Historic Site Museum was opened to the public in May of 2000 as a full-time attraction, returning it to the service Nell had envisioned fifty years prior. Today's visitor is just as likely to be an Arts and Crafts buff or a baseball fanatic as a conservative Christian. Not every interpretation in the museum is a glowing review of Billy Sunday's work, but true to Nell's last wish, the Sunday name lives on.

W. A. Firstenbarger has served as site curator at the Billy Sunday Historic Site Museum in Winona Lake, Indiana, since 1998. He is the author of In Rare Form: A Pictorial History of Baseball Evangelist Billy Sunday, published by the University of Iowa Press in 2005. His article is drawn from his work on the book. The Sunday Museum is open year-round from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. For admission rates and other information, please call (574) 268-0660 or visit the museum's Web site at http://www.villageatwinona.com.


TRACES | Spring 2006 | 35
"Eugene Field, like James Whitcomb Riley," Debs wrote, "was the poet of the common life. He dignified the homely virtues and idealized the everyday things that make up the sum of earthly existence."

Eugene Field consults his watch as his friends James Whitcomb Riley (standing) and Edgar Wilson "Bill" Nye look on. Nye and Riley appeared together on a lecture tour of the United States during the nineteenth century.
Focus

HIDDEN TREASURES

Suzanne Hahn

James Whitcomb Riley and Eugene Field
AS A BOOK TRAVELS THROUGH LIFE, each copy of the same title can share a different story. This was discovered recently at the Indiana Historical Society’s William Henry Smith Memorial Library. While preparing for an upcoming exhibition featuring Indiana authors, library staff sorted through several books by James Whitcomb Riley. The Smith Library is fortunate to have an extensive collection of books by Riley, with duplicate copies of titles. Included in the collection are such famous Riley works as *The Old Swimmin’-Hole* and *When the Frost Is on the Punkin*.

Among the popular Riley titles in the library’s collection is one that might not be as recognizable, *Sketches in Prose and Occasional Verse*. Published by Bowen-Merrill Company of Indianapolis in 1891, *Sketches in Prose and Occasional Verse* is a compilation of several of Riley’s works. The book is a reissue of a previous Riley work titled *The Boss Girl*, originally published in 1886. No new material was added to the reissue. The main difference between the two publications is the title of the prose sketch “The Boss Girl” is changed to “Jamesy” in the reissue. With poems such as “The Elf-Child,” “Old Fashioned Roses,” and “The Orchard Lands of Long Ago,” the material in the book reflects many of Riley’s favorite topics, including nature, memories of childhood, and the common man.

The IHS library has several copies of *Sketches in Prose and Occasional Verse*. However, one particular copy stands out, not for the published poems printed in the book, but for the unpublished “treasures” written on the pages. The book is a presentation copy given by Riley to his friend and fellow poet, Eugene Field. It contains Riley’s handwritten note: “To Eugene Field Very Truly Yours, James Whitcomb Riley. Kansas City 1892.” The book also contains a two-line note: “To Eugene Field Very Truly Yours, James Whitcomb Riley. Kansas City 1892.” The book also contains a two-line note: “To Eugene Field Very Truly Yours, James Whitcomb Riley. Kansas City 1892.”

The IHS library has several copies of *Sketches in Prose and Occasional Verse*. However, one particular copy stands out, not for the published poems printed in the book, but for the unpublished “treasures” written on the pages. The book is a presentation copy given by Riley to his friend and fellow poet, Eugene Field. It contains Riley’s handwritten note: “To Eugene Field Very Truly Yours, James Whitcomb Riley. Kansas City 1892.” The book also contains a two-line note: “To Eugene Field Very Truly Yours, James Whitcomb Riley. Kansas City 1892.”
unpublished poem displaying Riley’s characteristic dialect and humor. The verse states, “Doc’ says can’t tell which is worse/His blame prose—truck er his verse!” The book also includes a handwritten note from Eugene Field stating the book was presented to his father by Riley. The hidden treasures in the book help share the story of the professional and personal relationship between these two popular literary figures. Riley and Field began their association on the lecture circuit. The two men not only worked together, but often entertained together and were known for playing pranks on each other and everyone around them. As Field biographer Jeannette Covert Nolan states, “Eugene knew Riley well, was genuinely fond of him, and often visited him in Indianapolis, which was a favorite meeting place for western authors.”

Along with humorist Edgar Wilson “Bill” Nye, Riley and Field appeared together at the Grand Opera House in Indianapolis in February 1886. It was said Riley was so nervous about the appearance that Field literally had to push him onto the stage. Despite the nerves, the evening was a complete success. The Indianapolis Sentinel said of the show, “The feast of fat things spread by the delicious hands of the three humorists was fully enjoyed by the large and appreciative audience.” The rapport between the men was obvious. As the Sentinel goes on to describe, “We do not care to make any comparisons where these three humorists seemed so evenly matched. They looked, talked, and moved much alike, so that if another Shakespeare writes another ‘Comedy of Errors’ he can provide for three Dromios, provided these gentlemen are open to the engagement.” In fact such a bond was made between these men that Riley and Nye became lecture partners for the next several years. When Riley later recalled the evening, he described it as the “pleasantest” memory of his life.

Socialist and labor leader Eugene Debs was a mutual friend of both Riley and Field. In his article “Riley, Nye, and Field: Personal Notes and Recollections,” Debs states the two men resembled each other in many ways. “Eugene Field, like James Whitcomb Riley,” Debs wrote, “was the poet of the common life. He dignified the homely virtues and idealized the everyday things that make up the sum of earthly existence.”

Riley and Field shared many similarities. Both men were known for their poems for children. Riley penned such childhood classics as “The Raggedy Man” and “Little Orphant Annie.” Field has often been referred to as the “Poet of Childhood” for creating such childhood favorites as “Little Boy Blue,” “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod,” and “The Sugar-Plum Tree.” Both men also began their professional literary careers in the newspaper business. Riley began at the Greenfield News and eventually landed a position at the Indianapolis Journal, where he wrote book reviews, humorous editorials, and poetry. Many of Riley’s poems first appeared in the Journal before being published in later books. Field’s work in the newspaper field began at the Galesburg Register while attending school at Knox College in Illinois. After various positions at several newspapers in the Midwest, he joined the staff of the Chicago Daily News (later renamed the Record) in 1883. Field became the author of the popular column “Sharps and Flats” and remained at the newspaper until the time of his death in 1895.

Upon Field’s death, Riley prepared an introduction for a compilation of his friend’s works, titled The Writings in Prose and Verse of Eugene Field. This was for volume four of the series, appropriately covering poems of childhood. In a letter to Field’s wife, Riley explained that he felt more comfortable sending poetry than prose. “Instead, I send a sonnet—which tribute, I feel assured, would better please ‘Gene’ than anything in prose I might attempt, for however poor my verse, my prose is far inferior—as he knew, and knew moreover, that I knew it,” Riley wrote. It is a sentiment similar to the verse he wrote to Field in the presentation copy of Sketches in Prose and Occasional Verse.

No matter what Riley’s estimation of his own prose, his estimation of Field, both the man and his work, is evident in the tribute he wrote. It speaks of respect and fondness for his fellow literary friend:

Eugene Field
With gentlest tears, no less than jubilee
Of blithest joy, we heard him, and still hear
Him singing on, with full voice, pure and clear,
Uplifted, as some classic melody
In sweetest legends of old minstrelsy;
Or, swarming Elfin-like upon the ear,
His airy notes make all the atmosphere
One blur of bird and bee and lullaby.
His tribute:—Luster in the faded bloom
Of checks of old, old mothers; and the fall
Of gracious dews in eyes long dry and dim;
And hope in lover’s pathways midst perfume
Of woodland haunts; and—meed exceeding all,—
The love of little children laurels him.

The copy of Sketches in Prose and Occasional Verse is part of the IHS library’s John Martin Smith Collection of Indiana authors. The book, and other Riley material, is available for viewing at the library from 10 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

Suzanne Hahn is director, reference services, at the Indiana Historical Society’s William Henry Smith Memorial Library.
A portrait of Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson from their early vaudeville days, circa 1920. This was one of the few serious, formal portraits they had taken.
Unless you are a fan of live performances from the 1920s to the 1940s or are old enough to remember them, probably not, for unlike some of those great golden age of comedy teams they did not become well known in film. The freewheeling, zany, ad-lib style of Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, so appreciated by the packed houses at their Broadway shows, did not translate into a motion picture script. When asked to describe their approach to humor, Olsen said, “nothing we ever do makes sense... that’s our business, not making sense.”

PAUL BROCKMAN
Olsen and Johnson achieved their greatest performance success in 1938, when they opened in Hellzapoppin at the Forty-sixth Street Theater in New York. The two-act, twenty-five-scene production allowed them to engage audiences in their participatory style of unrehearsed, spontaneous slapstick comedy.

The two-act, twenty-five-scene production allowed them to engage audiences in their participatory style of unrehearsed, spontaneous slapstick comedy. The show set a Broadway record of 1,404 straight performances. Although the show's reviews were mixed, the audiences, looking for laughs near the end of the Great Depression, loved the chaotic performance and kept the show going.

In addition to their movie careers, Olsen and Johnson appeared in two moderately received films, Country Gentlemen (1936) and All Over Town (1937).

In addition to their movie careers, Olsen and Johnson appeared in two moderately received films, Country Gentlemen (1936) and All Over Town (1937).
CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM, LEFT: In honor of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's production of Hellzapoppin, Indiana's Studebaker Corporation sent the comedy team this unique singing telegram; an Olsen-designed postcard advertising his Northwestern University band, The College Four (Olsen is on the far right); and Peru, Indiana, welcomes home Olsen and his mother in the 1950s.
coming back. One of the show's first scenes involved film of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, and Benito Mussolini with dubbed voices endorsing Olsen and Johnson's new revue. Cast members were planted in the audience, and one cast member posed as a ticket scalper selling tickets to other more traditional Broadway shows. The cast also threw eggs and bananas into the audience. Later in the shows, the lights were turned off and the audience found themselves under assault by rubber spiders and snakes.

*Hellzapoppin* was also more vulgar than most of the traditional shows of the time and was criticized for being such. Overall, this was like most of Olsen and Johnson's shows, described as a combination of vaudeville and burlesque, and also compared with being at Times Square on New Year's Eve. Walter Winchell echoed this sentiment in his column of September 23, 1938: "The slapstickiest and slaphappiest troupe of maniacs ever assembled on any stage is to be hilariously enjoyed at the 46th Street Theater where the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson brought this revusical, 'Hellz-a-Poppin,' last night . . . . My conferences on the aisles can take 'Candida,' 'Taming of the Shrew,' 'Our Town,' and 'I Married an Angel.' Just so long as they leave 'Hellz-a-poppin' to me and the rest of New York. It hasn't a dull moment, unless it's the Intermission."

The show's success attracted the attention of Universal Pictures, which released a movie version in December 1941. Unlike their moderately successful earlier attempts at translating the Olsen and Johnson brand of comedy onto the screen, *Hellzapoppin* received warm reviews. "Here is good escapist comedy, and, as such, probably a boxoffice mopup everywhere," said a report in *Variety*. "The title is a natural in itself, and the laughs are plentiful enough in the madcap helter-skelter of corny hoke to rate the picture extended runs." The team made several other films for Universal in the 1940s that were well received and showcased their stage gags, including *Crazy House* (1943) and *Ghost Catchers* (1944).

In addition to their movie making, Olsen and Johnson continued their New York stage revues with great success. A second Broadway show, *Sons O' Fun*, debuted on December 1, 1941, at the Winter Garden Theater and featured flamboyant South American songstress Carmen Miranda. The show ran through August 29, 1943, and was received with equal audience enthusiasm and mixed critical reviews. Richard Watts Jr. of the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "There are those who fear that the American people have gone soft and are no longer hardy enough to stand up before the alarums and excursions of modern warfare. After attendance at the local premiere of 'Sons o' Fun,' the Olsen and Johnson successor to 'Hellzapoppin,' I am in a position to dispute any such melancholy contention. If the men and women of the United States cannot only endure the barrage of sound and fury, the bombardment of noise and missile [sic] and personal assault, of this new bedlam carnival, but even give every sign of loving it, then I have no doubt that ours is still a strong and fearless populace, to whom an air raid is a quiet evening."

The duo produced two other Broadway shows: *Laffing Room Only* (December 23, 1944, to July 14, 1945), featuring Betty Garrett; and *Pardon Our French* (October 5, 1950, to January 6, 1951), with Denise Darcel.

Olsen and Johnson enjoyed their greatest success during the 1940s. Their lunatic style blended in well with the country's need for escaping the horrors of World War II and its aftermath. The duo managed to poke fun and make light of events and people who threatened to destroy the world. Despite their busy movie and theatrical schedule, they tirelessly did numerous shows for soldiers and factory workers, as well as performing at war-bond rallies.

One of Olsen and Johnson's biggest performances occurred in June 1945 when they entertained President Harry S. Truman at the White House with some of their *Laffing Room Only* cast members. The duo had performed for Truman when he was a U.S. senator in November 1943, and Truman had been impressed enough to bring them to the White House. Approximately thirty-five senators and 150 members of the White House staff attended the event. It proved to be a wild evening, as a cast member pulled the toupee off one of the senators and Olsen and Johnson arrived...
Olsen and Johnson enjoyed their greatest success during the 1940s. Their lunatic style blended in well with the country’s need for escaping the horrors of World War II and its aftermath. The duo managed to poke fun and make light of events and people who threatened to destroy the world.

Clockwise from bottom, left: The Winter Garden Theater in New York, where Hellzapoppin set the record for the longest running production at that time; Olsen and Johnson during the height of the duo’s revue days in California, 1936; Louis Armstrong and Olsen share a lighthearted moment during a show; and Olsen and Johnson with their names in lights, circa 1920s.
as delivery boys with a cash-on-delivery package for the president from his bankrupt Kansas City haberdashery.

The advent of affordable television gave new life to Olsen and Johnson’s career. The new medium, which was performed live, proved a perfect fit for the duo’s spontaneous nature. In June 1949 they premiered as a summer replacement for Milton Berle on the Texaco Star Theater with their own show titled Fireball Fun for All. Variety said of the program: “Olsen and Johnson have certainly run the gamut. The zanies have been in every branch of the amusement industry during their approximately 35 years as a team, and now they’re a cinch to carve a new career for themselves in television. Their opening show for Buick . . . gave plenty of indication that they will make a place for themselves when they get their own spot in the fall for the same sponsor.”

In addition to Olsen and Johnson, the cast included their own children, June Johnson and J. C. Olsen. The show proved to be short lived and ended in October 1949, with a lack of fresh material being blamed for one of the causes. The duo’s run of successes had come to an end. As good as the 1940s had been to them, the 1950s would prove to be just the opposite.

Olsen and Johnson continued to perform in small nightclubs and Las Vegas casinos in the 1950s, but both their national popularity and health were declining. In 1950 Olsen was involved in a serious traffic accident that left him partially crippled, and both he and Johnson suffered from kidney problems. Olsen, who by that time was divorced from his first wife, Lillian, went to live with his daughter, Moya, who had married aircraft production magnet William P. Lear in 1942, while he recovered. Olsen suffered another setback when his son, J. C., committed suicide. Despite their health problems, the comedy team continued to perform in a variety of venues ranging from circuses to ice shows and even with the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team. Their work was in their blood and retirement was out of the question even though they were financially well off. By the end of the 1950s, Olsen and Johnson were no longer performing together on a regular basis and were basically limiting themselves to personal appearances on programs such as This is Your Life. In 1961 Olsen married Eileen Maria Osthoff, a dancer and choreographer he had known for eight years. Tragedy struck on February 28, 1962, when Johnson died in Las Vegas from kidney problems. Appearing in Berlin at the time, Olsen tried to pay tribute to his friend and partner of nearly fifty years by ending with their trademark line: “May you live as long as you laugh and may you laugh as long as you live,” but emotion overcame him. Despite the loss, Olsen appeared to be in good physical health, having recovered from another accident a year earlier, but died on January 26, 1963, twelve days after he entered an Albuquerque, New Mexico, hospital for a seemingly routine operation for the removal of kidney stones.

Olsen was initially buried in Wichita, Kansas, the home of his daughter, Moya, but children of both comedians agreed that it was only fitting that the two be buried side by side, so two years later Olsen’s body was moved to Las Vegas and buried to the left of Johnson, thus reuniting the famous duo in proper order—Olsen and Johnson. On his headstone is inscribed the duo’s trademark line cited above.

The spontaneous style of what may be termed lowbrow humor may have appeared to the untrained observer to be unrehearsed, but in reality Olsen was a student of comedy and collected a library of books, scripts, periodicals, sheet music, playbills, and newspapers. At the time of his death, it amounted to 175 boxes of material, which was donated to the University of Southern California in 1973.

Olsen never lost his connection with his Indiana roots. He returned to Peru on numerous occasions and was willing to perform benefits to promote the arts in his home town. Olsen’s mother, Catherine, or “Mother Olsen” as she was billed, made numerous appearances with her son and his partner.

In 1946 Olsen returned to Peru for a special celebration featuring famous sons such as him and Cole Porter. In true Olsen fashion, he first introduced Kate Porter, then his own mother, who pulled out a pistol from her purse and fired it into the air, causing the famed composer’s mother to jump in astonishment. At an Indianapolis Press Club function in 1951, Olsen and Johnson made their entrance at the organization’s fourth floor Monument Circle location by coming through the window with the aid of a fire truck. In 1957 Indiana governor Harold W. Handley honored Olsen with a Sagamore of the Wabash award. Olsen’s legacy continues in Peru with the Ole Olsen Memorial Theater, founded in 1964 as a nonprofit organization promoting local live performances.

Paul Brockman is director, manuscripts and visual collections, for the Indiana Historical Society’s William Henry Smith Memorial Library. The library has in its collection the Ole Olsen Papers (M0803), which includes the personal and professional papers of Olsen and materials and photographs relating to the team of Olsen and Johnson and their shows.
Many Hoosiers have fond memories of picnics on a spring or summer day. Often these meals included a side dish made of Van Camp's Pork and Beans. Gilbert Van Camp first started his canning business on the near south side of Indianapolis in 1861. His first major contract was with the Union Army. Twenty years later, his company produced eight million cans of pork and beans a year. These can labels are part of a collection in the Indiana Historical Society's William Henry Smith Memorial Library. Images submitted by Susan L. S. Sulton, IHS coordinator of visual reference services.
Who knew that Hollywood's coolest man alive in the 1950s, James Dean, and the coolest man alive during the 1960s and 1970s, Steve McQueen, both hailed from the nineteenth state?

In Hoosiers in Hollywood, David L. Smith, professor of telecommunications at Ball State University for twenty-three years and professor emeritus since 1998, presents native Hoosiers, as well as those who spent much of their formative years in the state, who have contributed in some fashion to the motion picture industry.

These individuals' contributions began with the invention of the first motion picture projector, continued through the silent era and the advent of sound, and represent an important presence in the industry today. The reader will find many stories about Hoosiers working together to showcase their remarkable talents and helping to change the face of the entertainment industry.

The book includes Oscar winners and nominees, soap opera Hoosiers, movies shot in or about Indiana, and Hoosiers on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. It also includes more than three hundred illustrations, including promotional shots from Hollywood studios and movie posters.

To order your copy of Hoosiers in Hollywood, call the IHS History Market at (800) 447-1830. Online orders can be made at http://shop.indianahistory.org. The book costs $59.95. Indiana residents should include 6 percent sales tax with all orders.
“TO THE RETURNING HEROES OF THE GREAT WAR WE EXTEND THIS WELCOME IN DEEPEST APPRECIATION.”