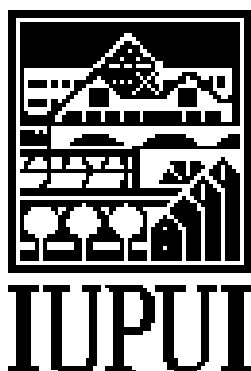


**INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
PURDUE UNIVERSITY  
INDIANAPOLIS**



**RUTH LILLY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
AND ARCHIVES**

**Indianapolis Maennerchor**

**Records, 1866-1990**

**Mss 040**

## **Indianapolis Maennerchor Records, 1866-1990**

**Mss 040**

**5.0 c.f (3 cartons, 2 document boxes, 3 flat boxes)**

### **ABSTRACT**

The Indianapolis Maennerchor (men's choir) emerged from a circle of young men who were part of a wave of immigration that followed the failed European revolutions of 1848. From its formal organization in June 1854 and first performance in May 1855, the Maennerchor provided a cultural focus for the "48ers" that was as important as the "sound mind and body" activities of the Turners. After the American Civil War the Maennerchor emerged as one of the most significant German organizations in Indianapolis. By 1900 the apparent cohesiveness of the German community began to fragment when the Maennerchor, and their main patron, John P. Frenzel, began to distance themselves from the new Deutches Haus (German House) constructed by the Socialer Turnverein. This split was emphasized by the construction of Maennerchor Hall in 1907. World War I hurt the German community as a whole, and in combination with the death of Frenzel, the Maennerchor began to struggle. The Depression forced the Maennerchor to leave their hall in the early 1930s and become affiliated with the Athenaeum (Deutches Haus). In 1943 the Maennerchor joined with the Knights of Columbus and Murat Shrine to present a mixed chorus performance known as the Triad Concert that helped to revive awareness and interest in the group. The decline of German societies in Indianapolis during the 1960s led to strains which prompted a break with the Athenaeum in 1973. An attempt to return to the Maennerchor Hall failed when the building was razed in 1974. Through the 1990s they have struggled with membership and financial constraints, but have continued to perform regularly.

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### **ACQUISITION**

Presented by the Indianapolis Maennerchor, with some materials contributed by the Athenaeum Turners, and individual members of both societies, October 1978-March 2000.  
A78-11, A85-7, A88-45, M40 (A90-41), M44 (A91-41), M55 (A92-3), A93-80

Processed by Erik L. Lindseth and Gregory H. Mobley, January 2003.

## HISTORICAL NOTE

The Indianapolis Maennerchor was formally established in June of 1854 after developing from a small group of young men who had gathered informally in the evenings to sing songs which reflected contemporary nationalist feelings in Germany. They were all recent immigrants to the United States and part of the wave of immigrants often described as “the 48ers,” even though many had not been directly involved in the failed European revolutions of 1848. Meeting originally in a room rented by Eduard Longerich, Adolph Schnellschmidt, and Hubert and Gottfried Recher, and under the direction of Longerich, the first “unconstrained assemblages” soon evolved into more formal rehearsals. For many of the young German-speaking immigrants, the preservation of their musical traditions was an important aspect of their ethnic identity and an crucial part of the German nationalism that had developed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed the foundation of the first German singing club for male voices in 1808 by Carl Friedrich Zelter (at the suggestion of Goethe) established an association with the German Romantic movement. This movement, typified by the music of Carl Maria von Weber, Richard Wagner, Robert Schumann and others, championed an ideal of Germanic culture and ethnic identity.

The first public concert was organized by Longerich, Nicolaus Jose and Georg Bauer and held in Washington Hall on May 28, 1855. After performing at the eighth national Saengerfest (song festival) in Cincinnati the next year, the Indianapolis Maennerchor went on to host the first state chorus festival in 1858. When Eduard Longerich returned to Germany in 1858 to recover from a bout with malaria (a common occurrence in Indianapolis before the local swamps were drained), Ernst Despa became the new director of this increasingly prominent society. Despa, a house painter who later became a prominent member of the Freethinker Society, provides an early link with the liberal activists who were beginning to emerge as leaders in the German community of Indianapolis.

After the Civil War the Maennerchor benefitted from the professional training and musicianship of Professor Carl H. Weegmann, who was widely acclaimed regionally for his production of a successful mixed-chorus operetta in 1869. Under the direction of Prof. Weegmann, the Indianapolis Maennerchor hosted the national Saengerfest of the North American Saengerbund in September of 1867. The construction of an impressive temporary Saengerfest Hall and the festivities associated with the arrival of nearly 800 delegates from 41 societies on the cultural environment of the city provides one of the most significant markers for the rising importance of German societies in Indianapolis.

During the 1870s the Maennerchor experienced continued success with Max Lechner as director. Notable during this period was the foundation of a music school by Director Lechner to train the children of members for future involvement with area choirs, and the concert given at Roberts’ Park Church in September 1878 for the benefit of victims of yellow fever in the South. This era peaked with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the society which was celebrated in 1880. Director Lechner resigned soon after and was replaced by Alexander Ernestinoff for two years before he too

resigned and became associated with the Liederkranz singing society, the Musikverein, and eventually helped establish the Indianapolis Orchestra, and served as its first director.

Ernestinoff was succeeded as director of the Maennerchor by Professor Karl Barus of Cincinnati, who led the group until 1896. During the Barus era Indianapolis enjoyed numerous operas produced under his directorship and starring members of the Maennerchor. Professor Barus was also involved in producing a series of great May Festivals in which he conducted a massed choir of approximately 600 singers, and it was during this period that the Maennerchor established a tradition of holding masked balls which soon became one of the highlights of the social season.

By 1878 the Maennerchor had outgrown the Turnhalle and Union Hall facilities they had been using and decided to rent the old City Hall on East Washington Street for rehearsals and performances. They raised the substantial sum of \$10,000 to renovate the building in 1897 and continued to occupy that location until March 1907 when they moved to the specially built Maennerchor Hall on the northwest corner of Michigan and Illinois Streets. The pinnacle of the Maennerchor was probably the Golden Jubilee of 1904 which was marked by a wide variety of festivities and even recognition from the Emperor of Germany who sent a gold memorial medal.

This was followed by the 1908 National Saengerfest of the North American Saengerbund. Described as “the most brilliant musical festival ever to be held” in Indiana, it brought 75,000 visitors to Indianapolis and helped to establish the city as a national center for German culture in America. The Maennerchor Artist Concert series became a regular venue for some of the most prominent European and American performers of the day (including Alma Gluck, Efreim Zimbalist, Pablo Casals, and Vladimir Horowitz) during the early decades of the century.

Under the patronage of John P. Frenzel, president of Merchants National Bank, the Maennerchor achieved sufficient local importance that the dedication of the new Maennerchor Hall in 1907 was attended by Charles Fairbanks, Vice President of the United States, Charles Bookwalter, mayor of Indianapolis (both are listed as members of the Maennerchor in 1904), and a number of other leading lights of the day, including James Whitcomb Riley. Frenzel eventually became something of an obstacle to its long-term prosperity, however, since in exchange for his financial support he personally controlled membership in the society.

The death of John P. Frenzel in 1933 and the cancelling of his will, which had made provisions for the continued support of the Maennerchor, proved disastrous for the society in the midst of the Great Depression. Within months they were forced to relinquish their hall (which became a nightclub for a few years until it was purchased by Indiana University from the Maennerchor Hall Association in 1946 to house the IU Law School) and form an association with the Athenaeum in 1936.

The association with the Athenaeum may have helped to save the Maennerchor during the 1940s since its proximity to the Murat Shrine building led to an annual Triad concert with the Murat

Shrine “Chanters” and the Knights of Columbus “Columbians”. Under the leadership of Clarence Elbert from 1936 to 1954, the Maennerchor grew in numbers and in cultural prominence so that “at times they were receiving equal billing with the Indianapolis Symphony”. (Duncan 1987 history)

During the 1960s all of the German clubs began to decline in membership, and financial problems soon followed. The stress and uncertainty which characterized the Athenaeum during the 1970s helped to cause the the Maennerchor to withdraw from its association with that group in January 1973. The Maennerchor then attempted, with the help of the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, to return to the old Maennerchor Hall. However in the midst of public discussion with several musical and historical groups, the building was abruptly demolished by American States Insurance in October of 1974. Without a permanent home, and with an aging membership, the Maennerchor has struggled at times during the 1980s and 1990s, however they continue to present two to three performances per year.

## REFERENCES

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- Keller, Josef, *Festschrift zur feier des Fuenfzigjahrigen Stiftungsfest des Indianapolis Maennerchor*. Indianapolis, 1904.
- Probst, George Theodore. *The Germans in Indianapolis: 1840-1918*. Revised and illustrated edition by Eberhard Reichman. Indianapolis, IN: German-American Center, IUPUI & Indiana German Heritage Society, 1989.
- Snyder, Suzanne Gail. *The Männerchor tradition in the United States: A historical analysis of its contribution to the American musical culture*. University of Iowa PhD thesis: 1991.
- Snyder, Suzanne Gail. “The Indianapolis Männerchor : contributions to a new musicality in midwestern life” in *Music and culture in America, 1861-1918*. Edited by Michael Saffle, New York : Garland Pub., 1998. Pp. 111-140.

## RELATED MATERIALS

- Athenaeum Turners Records, 1880-1999, Mss 032, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, IUPUI University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
- Oscar Frenzel Collection, 1876-1904, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, IUPUI University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

Small German Collections, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, IUPUI University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

- Liederkrantz
- Musikverein und Deutsche Klub
- Indiana German Heritage Society

The Maennerchor Society of Indianapolis website URL: <http://www.maennerchor.org/>.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Typical of many German-American organizations of this period, the Maennerchor functioned through an elaborate system of committees, with 12 separate committees listed for the 1904 Golden Jubilee alone. The dozens of committees which appear in this collection have been grouped together by function even though the continuity of the committee record series listed is not always clear. The 21 series in the collection are Constitutions and Bylaws, Executive Committee Records, Correspondence, Attendance Committee Records, Entertainment Committee Records, Financial Committee Records, History Records, Librarian Records, Membership Committee Records, Outside Events Committee Records, Production and Stage Committee Records, Program/Music Committee Records, Publicity Committee Records, Recording Committee Records, Ticket Committee Records, Triad Concert Committee Records, Ways and Means Committee Records, Women's Auxiliary Records, Related Organizations, Photographs, and Audio Materials. Photographs and audiovisual materials are listed both in the appropriate series and in photograph and audiovisual inventories at the end of the series list.

**Constitutions and Bylaws, 1897-1988** contain a printed copy of the constitution of the society dated 1897 detailing the structure and organization of the Turnverein, and several typewritten revisions from 1947, 1976, and 1988.

**Executive Committee Records, 1904-1990**, contain minutes of executive meetings and the annual general meetings with reports from the President and choir Director and legal documents. The Executive Committee absorbed the responsibilities of the Nominating Committee in 1987. The legal documents include a statement of anti-Nazi and Non-profit status, the 1947 sale of Maennerchor Hall to IU, Choir Director employment contracts, and a proposed Maennerchor and Athenaeum association agreement from 1975. Also included in these records are lists of members of the Standing Committees. These records provide perhaps the clearest description of the activities of the Maennerchor after World War II. See also the Athenaeum Turners Collection for reports of the Chorus Committee to the Athenaeum Turner annual meetings, which are especially useful for the 1950s.

**Correspondence, 1903-1990**, includes correspondence from the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1904, a letter from director Reckzeh to Assistant Director Elbert in 1937, and general correspondence from 1942-1990. There are also general mailings to the membership, including a newsletter from 1973. See also the Athenaeum Turners collection for correspondence from the Athenaeum Presidents, and the *Athenaeum News* and *Newsletters* during the period of the Maennerchor's affiliation with the Athenaeum (1936-1973).

Notable in this series is an exchange of letters in 1980-1981 with Norman L. Merrifield, music instructor at Crispus Attucks High School, that contain biographical information and references to Merrifield's musical background. Merrifield has been cited as a significant influence in the musical education of jazz trombonist J.J. Johnson, and other jazz greats from Indianapolis.

**Attendance Committee Records, 1940-1972**, contain annual reports and lists of members attending practices. While relatively few records survive, there was significant emphasis placed on attendance of both practices and performances. An interesting aspect of these records are the collections for the "Bummelkasse", which seems to have been an entertainment slush fund.

**Entertainment Committee Records, 1879-1976**, contain a few annual reports from the post-World War II era, and invitations to balls and parties around the turn of the century. This committee was supposed to provide a social environment for members of the choir. Also included in this series are two Maennerchor humor newspapers produced in 1900 and 1914.

**Financial Committee Records, 1943-1988** contain reports and records from the Financial Secretary and the Treasurer. These offices occasionally combine and duties seem to overlap.

**History Records, 1908-1990**, include unpublished notes from the histories of Joseph Keller and Kenneth Duncan, various photocopies assembled by Kenneth Duncan, and a few select newspaper articles. There are also handwritten histories from 1904 and the mid-1960s and an inventory list of the Maennerchor rooms from 1947.

**Librarian Records, ca. 1940-1976**, include annual reports from 1961, 1971, 1976, and listings of music held in the music library, as well as a selection of music and lyrics.

**Membership Committee Records, 1894-1989**, include a few committee reports, a good set of rosters from 1894 to 1989, and recruitment materials from the 1960s

**Outside Events Committee Records, 1964-1972**, include annual reports, and contracts for performances not held in the Athenaeum building, most notably the "Evening of Song with Donald Neuen" presented annually with the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir. This series also contains information and correspondence relating to a short-lived musical scholarship program with Indianapolis area high-schools, 1967-1972.

**Production and Stage Committee Records, 1970-1971**, contain reports on remodeling of stage facilities.

**Program / Music Committee Records, 1866-1990**, contain programs from performances, a list of guest artists and correspondence relating to appearances, handbills, and a few examples of committee reports to the President or Board of Directors. The Music Committee annual reports list performances during the previous year (1944-1975), and there is some correspondence regarding changes in the format of programs.

**Publicity Committee Records, 1942-1980**, contain annual reports from the Publicity Committee and examples of publicity notices and mailings. The records from this period correspond to the period of affiliation with the Athenaeum Turners so that there is also a significant overlap with Athenaeum events.

**Recording Committee Records, 1951-1975**, contain annual reports regarding the recording and radio broadcast of performances during the early 1970s. Also included in this series are audio (vinyl) recordings produced for the centennial celebrations in 1954, four reel-to-reel tapes from the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert in 1979, and some materials from the 1970s related to custom recording.

**Ticket Committee Records, 1959-1972**, are an incomplete series of 8 reports on the number of tickets sold for individual performances.

**Triad Concert Committee Records, 1969-1989**, contain annual reports and minutes from meetings with the Knights of Columbus and Murat Shrine to organize the Triad Concerts. Financial information and some correspondence are also included in this series. See also the Program Records for Triad performance programs.

**Ways and Means Committee Records, 1989-1990**, contain a series of monthly reports and a grant application addressed to the Indianapolis Foundation, as part of an attempt to find funding to underwrite the appearance of guest artists for the 1990 season.

**Women's Auxiliary Records, 1900-1973** contain a printed constitution and by-laws from 1900, early programs from a lecture and recital series, roll books from the 1940s and 1950s, documents from the financial dispersal of the group in 1961, and some later newspaper clippings. A curious item, given the activism of the Feminist Movement during the 1970s, is a newspaper reference to the Ladies Society as the "Maennerfrauen" or Men's Wives.

**Related Organizations, 1899-1947**, contain records from the Nordamerikanischen Saengerbundes (North American Singers' Union) and the Saengerbund Freiheit of Chicago. The Nordamerikanischen Saengerbundes was a national organization of German-American singing societies. Its records include constitutions and programs and songbooks for Saengerfests (singing festivals) the organization sponsored. The Indianapolis Maennerchor belonged to the Nordamerikanischen Saengerbundes, and John P. Frenzel served as national treasurer.

The Saengerbund Freiheit was a German-American singing organization in Chicago. Karl Reckzeh was the group's director from 1905 to 1947. Between 1920 and 1939 he split his time between Chicago and Indianapolis while serving as the director of the Indianapolis Maennerchor. The Freiheit scrapbook, which contains mainly concert programs, allows for comparisons of the music performed by the two men's choirs.

**Photographs, 1899-1982**, contain portraits and concert photographs of the Indianapolis Maennerchor and of the Triad chorus, photographs of individual members of the Maennerchor, portraits of guest artists (often autographed for the Maennerchor or individual members),



pictures of various Maennerchor social activities, pictures of members of the Maennerchor Women's Auxiliary, and picture post cards relating to the Nordamerikanischen Saengerbundes' 1908 Saengerfest.

**Audio Materials, 1954-1979**, include two 45 rpm vinyl records issued in conjunction with the Maennerchor's centennial and four reel-to-reel audiotapes of the Maennerchor's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert.

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