

# THE PAST IN SERVICE TO THE PRESENT

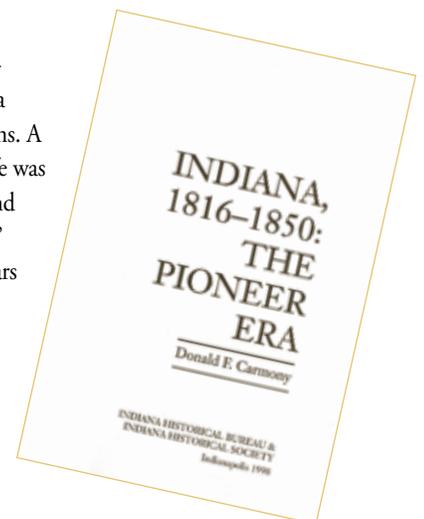
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with the assistance of Lowell Carmony & Frederick D. Hill



## *Don Carmony '29*

As the publicly-acclaimed dean of Indiana history, Dr. Donald Carmony's role as a public scholar and teacher at Indiana University allowed him to influence a generation of historians. A graduate of the Indiana Central class of 1929, Carmony's life was dedicated to the study of the past as well as to the present and future lives of his students. Known as "Mr. Indiana History" for much of his life, during his 51 years of teaching—10 years at Indiana Central College and 41 at Indiana University—Donald began teaching at age 19. Don Carmony exemplified the best characteristics of what it means to be a teacher, guiding and encouraging others to share his passion for history and to learn its lessons for use in their own lives.





B

Born in 1910 in Shelby County, Indiana, Carmony's parents, Bert and Golda, wanted all four of their children to have a formal education, because they realized the value of education. Although not formally educated, in addition to serving as a farmer and undertaker, Bert Carmony taught grades 1–8 for 33 years in a one-room schoolhouse and read avidly. Bert Carmony taught many subjects that were controversial in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in rural Indiana such as the “roundness” of the earth, that the earth orbits the sun, and Darwin's Theory of Evolution, for example. Donald's parents encouraged him to study, planning for him and his three siblings to go to college someday. According to University historian Fred Hill, the elder Carmony ensured that his son grew up seeking an “adventure in learning.”<sup>1</sup> Donald's only teacher for grades 1–8, which he completed in 7 years, was his own father. He began school at age 4, entered high school at age 11, and came to ICC at age 15. He never missed a single day of school from grade 1 through grade 12.

When Donald graduated from high school in Rush County at age fifteen, his parents took him to visit three different colleges. Together with his folks, he chose Indiana Central, a school with a warm, friendly atmosphere that was close to home. In the years to come, Donald's siblings—Lucy Carmony Irons '29, Irene Carmony Ross '31, and Gerald Carmony '38—would also attend Indiana Central. As Fred Hill tells the story, the college particularly impressed Carmony's father since he shared the college administration's “distaste for



C

the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>2</sup> Carmony's father had opened the Carmony Funeral Home by the time of the rise of the Klan in Indiana in the 1920s. Because Bert Carmony refused to join, the Klan cost him business, so his dislike for the Klan was deeply principled and helps to explain Donald's deep devotion to the cause of better race relations.

According to a much-loved story from the 1920s at Indiana Central College, Donald Carmony arrived on campus in knee pants—a matter of historical fact that has been verified by eyewitness accounts. This story underscores his tender age, even in an era when students commonly entered college at a younger age than did later generations. The fifteen-year-old performed well, working in the college dining room, excelling in his studies, and participating in campus social life. He graduated *cum laude* in 1929, intent of finding a job as a high school teacher.

In August, with the academic year rapidly approaching, Carmony still searched for employment. Meeting President I. J. Good's son, Lowell, a friend from campus, Lowell explained that his father had sent him to tell Carmony that the president wanted to see him. When Carmony arrived for the meeting, President Good offered him a job teaching history and supervising a dormitory at the college and suggested that Carmony begin graduate school at Indiana University (Indianapolis campus) in his spare time. As a result of this brief interview, the nineteen-year-old had become a college professor. Thankfully for Carmony, his reputation for intelligence in the current student body aided his first semesters in the classroom, since his students had only recently been his college

classmates, and most were older than he. Their respect and appreciation for his knowledge and teaching style earned him a devoted student following. Of this group, one female student in particular—Edith Hagelskamp of Indianapolis—attracted his attention, and in 1934, he ended up marrying the pretty sophomore co-ed a year and a half following her graduation. They would be married for 57 years before Edith's death in 1991.

In addition to teaching at ICC, Carmony continued his studies in the graduate program at Indiana University during the mid-1930s, earning his PhD in 1940. Financially pressured as a result of the Great Depression, the young professor and his wife struggled to make ends meet and, in 1938–39, he took a leave of absence from teaching at the college. Though he planned to return to the Indiana Central campus in the subsequent academic year, Carmony instead received an offer to teach at the Indiana University extension campus in Fort Wayne. This position included a higher salary and lighter teaching load. Clearly, it was a smart move for him to make, yet Carmony and his wife, Edith, agonized over what to do. As they struggled with the decision, Carmony discussed this prospect with several colleagues, commenting that President Good's rather autocratic leadership style constituted one factor in his decision. Apparently one of his friends shared this appraisal with the college president.

As Fred Hill details it in his history of the University, Good wrote to Professor Carmony, advising him as follows: “I certainly do not want you to feel under restraint to take your place here at Indiana Central, nor do I want you to do so unless you can come with some enthusiasm and reasonable confidence in the management of the college.”<sup>3</sup> Carmony's trust in at least one of his colleagues appears to have been unwarranted, demonstrating for him a useful lesson of academe. Moreover, the tone of President Good's response reveals Carmony's insightfulness concerning the College's leader. Despite the lure of a better offer, the young couple decided that they should stay at ICC. Their roots in the area and their loyalty to the College trumped the

Indiana University position and the haughty suspicions of the college president.<sup>4</sup>

But before they could make their decision official, Good, as was characteristic, made it for them. The president called Carmony and told him that since the professor was dissatisfied with the state of affairs at Central, he should take the job in Fort Wayne. Face-to-face with Good's bitter attitude, Carmony reversed his decision on the spot, and Indiana Central's loss became Indiana University's gain. Over the following decade, Dr. Carmony taught history courses at the Fort Wayne and South Bend-Mishawaka state university's extension campuses, moving to the main campus in Bloomington in 1950.

For nearly thirty years, he worked as a professor of history, writing and teaching United States and Indiana history. During twenty-one of those years, beginning in 1955, he edited the State Historical Society's journal, the *Indiana Magazine of History*, which is owned by Indiana University and published by the IU Department of History in cooperation with the Indiana Historical Society. Fascinated with the history and culture of Indiana's pioneer settlers, Carmony embarked on exhaustive historical research of this era, producing two excellent texts regarded as the standards in the field, *Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth*, coauthored with John Barnhart in 1954 and *Indiana, 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era*, published in 1998. Moreover, his perpetually over-enrolled courses on Indiana history at both the undergraduate and graduate levels contributed to his students' greater understanding of the place in which they lived, and thus, of their own identities.

Dr. Carmony's teaching even spilled over into the community, as he often lectured to service clubs, community groups, and teachers' workshops. Indiana Univer-

sity professor James Madison notes that Carmony "became a 'public historian' long before the label was created,"<sup>5</sup> articulating the state's history to thousands of Hoosiers in disparate contexts. For example, he chaired the Indiana sesquicentennial committee, served on the state's committee for the national bicentennial in 1976, and led the campaign to assemble a definitive history of the Indiana General Assembly.

True to his father's example, Don Carmony used his scholarly and public forum to advance the cause of civil rights. At the start of his professional career, he spoke at the 1930 conference of the Indiana NAACP chapter held in French Lick, the only white speaker on the program during the era in Indiana of popular adherence to the Ku Klux Klan for their anti-immigrant, isolationist views. Lowell Carmony recalls: "Donald was also called on the carpet by the ICC administration for making this talk. Speaking at the state NAACP chapter in 1930 was more radical than one can imagine. But, then, this was nearly 25 years before *Brown vs. Board of Education*." He continued to advocate for such progressive social and cultural issues throughout his life, addressing the crucial role of public education in the formation of a knowledgeable, responsible citizenry.

Professor Carmony also took up issues of equality in the IU campus community, chairing a controversial 1970 committee to redefine the status of Indiana University librarians as professionals with some sort of faculty status. This issue had been debated informally on the Bloomington campus since 1950. A decade later, Chancellor Byrum Carter and the Faculty Council deemed the issue ready for formal action. Though the Faculty Council had formally proposed that librarians be recognized as faculty, the Carmony Committee could not reach such unanimous resolution. Their report, aimed toward an equitable solution, recommended a status system parallel to the teaching/research faculty ranking system.



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While this recommendation, implemented by President Ryan in 1972, appeared constrictive to the librarians at the time, it served to affirm their status as professionals in the field and open the way to continuing discussion of library science as a vital academic discipline and librarians as scholars of the discipline. In this sense, the debates contained in the Carmony Report progressively chart new ground. Carmony's role in this high-profile issue also led, quite unexpectedly, to his seriously being considered for a college presidency at Otterbein College in Ohio. He declined the invitation, preferring his role as a full-time teacher and historian, observing that the demands of college administration did not fit his personality well.

In both his professional and personal life, Dr. Carmony maintained a rigorous schedule, writing numerous articles and essays on Indiana history, lecturing in the public arena, and advising students, all while traveling frequently to care for his parents in Shelby County and devoting his attention to Edith and his own growing family. (Several years after Edith's death, Donald married Mary Hiatt '29 to whom he was married for more than eleven years. Fred Hill, who studied history under Carmony at Indiana University, presided at Edith's funeral and celebrated the marriage of Don and Mary.)

Dr. Carmony was also well-known for the way he cared for his graduate students, a crucial constituency at Indiana University, a leading institution for historical research. He taught a host of the brightest minds in the field, the majority of whom entered the profession themselves as scholars and professors. Beyond mentoring graduate students individually, he fostered a community of history graduate students, inviting them to his home, where he fired up the grill to cook dinner for these hungry scholars.

On top of these responsibilities, he often helped Indiana Central College, serving as an alumni member of various college committees, including the accreditation committee in addition to his service as a member of the board of trustees from 1943 to 1981. His legacy in the History Department has been acknowledged with the creation of the Carmony Award, presented annually to the best student in the History and Political Science Department. He also established awards in honor of his parents as well as Mary Hiatt Carmony, '29, his second wife, whom he first met as a student at Indiana Central where they attended their senior prom together in 1929.

Moreover, Carmony's contributions to the historical community at large have garnered several awards as well. In 1994, Indiana University presented him with the Distinguished Alumni Service award. An endowed faculty chair in his name has also been established in the Indiana University History Department. Dr. Carmony has also twice been included in that special roll of outstanding Hoosiers designated as Sagamores of the Wabash, and in 2000, he was given the Distinguished Service award by the Indiana Pioneer Society, a recognition that has only been given on six occasions in the history of that group.



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By the time of his retirement in 1980, Don Carmony was widely recognized as the ultimate authority on Indiana History. Yet, he remained modest about his accomplishments, preferring a love of learning to a love of acclaim. At age 95, Dr. Carmony passed away on February 14, 2005. Two of Carmony's former graduate students, Dr. Fred Hill, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Indianapolis as well as Dr. James H. Madison, Thomas and Kathryn Miller Professor of History at Indiana University, paid tribute to their teacher, colleague, and friend. As Fred Hill observed at the memorial service, Donald Carmony "would not be labeled a 'self-made man.' Those around him, such as his wife and his father, whom he looked to for wisdom, were those whom he gave credit to."<sup>6</sup>

University of Indianapolis President Jerry Israel, who presided at the service, also expressed Carmony's deep relationship with his alma mater. Noted Israel, "Don was a student, alumnus and benefactor of the U of I. He was special to it, because of his love for humanity."<sup>7</sup> At the close of the memorial service, Carmony's two granddaughters read the poem, "Indiana," by

Arthur Franklin Mapes. One line from this work aptly sums up Dr. Donald Carmony's lifelong passion for service in his home state: "I must learn more of my homeland/For it is paradise for me."

Over the course of his long and distinguished life, Donald Carmony made significant contributions to his alma mater. At times he offered his perspectives, including—on those occasions that required such action—straightforward criticism intended to strengthen the University. At other times, he contributed his own remarkable gifts as a leader and scholar. As Carmony's son Lowell would later remark, "The Indiana Central College/UIIndy connection ran through out Donald's life, four years as a student, ten years as a professor, thirty-eight years as a trustee, and seventy-six years as a devoted alumnus." In all these capacities, Donald Carmony displayed a historian's wisdom, discerning how to interpret the past in service to the present.

— *Distinguished Alumnus Award* 1969

— *Sease Award*<sup>8</sup> 1999

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- B (p. 131) Donald Carmony and fellow graduates in procession at Indiana Central College in 1929. Photograph from Alumni Files, used with permission of Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.
- C (p. 131) Donald Carmony and fellow students at Indiana Central College. Photograph from Alumni Files, used with permission of Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.
- D (p. 133) Donald Carmony during the time that he served on the faculty of Indiana University–South Bend (ca. 1940s). Photograph by Andros Photography Company, Mishawaka, IN; used with permission of Jane McKenzie.
- E (p. 133) Donald Carmony and his first wife, Edith (ca. 1935). Photograph from Alumni Files, used with permission of Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.
- F (p. 133) Donald Carmony and his second wife, Mary Hiatt Carmony, in the late 1990s. Photograph from Alumni Files, used with permission of Frederick D. Hill Archives, University of Indianapolis.