

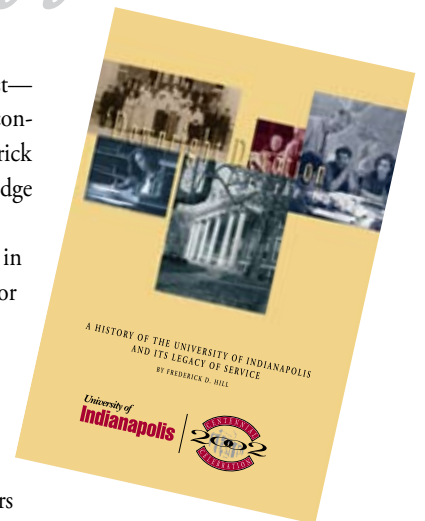
DOWNRIGHT DEVOTED TO SERVICE

By A. James Fuller and Rebecca Blair '80



Frederick D. Hill

A natural storyteller recounting the tales of generations past—complete with names, dates, and a plethora of interesting contextual details that mark the historian—the Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Hill warms quickly to the task as he imparts his knowledge of the topic at hand. Engaged by his gentlemanly manner complimented with a ready laugh, one can't help but share in his inner joy as he recalls another story of Indiana Central or the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Not surprisingly, Dr. Hill has formally served as the University's historian since 1988, publishing the fascinating history in 2002, *'Downright Devotion to the Cause': A History of the University of Indianapolis and Its Legacy of Service*, a text likely to remain the definitive institutional study for many years to come. In his capacity as a history professor at Indiana Central, beginning



in 1958, he experienced and recorded thirty years of institutional history firsthand. Hill's sharp mind has even catalogued the names, desk assignments, and personal histories of virtually all of his students over these three decades. In his extensive career as a professor and beyond, Hill has personified the very spirit that he identified as the theme unifying the University's history: he has been "downright devoted to the cause" of service.

Born in 1922, the fourth son of Josiah and Stella Hill, Fred Hill was raised on a farm in Miami County, Ohio. His father gave up on farming during the Great Depression to take a job with the Ohio State Highway Department in 1930. In the constrained economic climate, he lost that job after only a couple of years and could not find another one until 1939. During the intervening seven years, he worked at day labor jobs as the family struggled along. Those early years of financial crisis shaped young Fred's life view, as he directly observed how a family could overcome difficulties only through sacrifice. Moreover, he learned the value of education in those childhood years, walking one mile each day to attend a one-room elementary school. As his education progressed, he moved on to attend the larger schools in nearby towns. As evidenced by his earning the spot as eighth grade valedictorian, Hill dedicated himself to his studies. His efforts helped him to win a college scholarship by placing second in the county on a state test.

In 1940, Hill entered Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where he became a pre-engineering student. He chose that major because his oldest brother had been an engineering student at Ohio State University, and the profession seemed glamorous. In the spring of 1941, he began searching for a job for the upcoming summer break. Like most college students at the time, Hill confidently assumed he would find a summer job because of the booming economic climate, due in large part to the still-neutral United States supplying arms and goods to countries engaged in World War II.



But the war also brought a steel shortage and, instead of flush times, that summer brought an increasing number of layoffs, particularly at factories in the Midwest. Suddenly, the young man looking for a summer job found himself out of luck. So, he traveled to Pleasant Hill, Ohio, to stay with his brother, Joe, and his wife, who provided Hill a job tearing down an old shed in their backyard and building a garage, a surprisingly crucial event in his life since their home was located just around the corner from that of a young woman studying to be a nurse. Her name was Vesta, and the two soon began a courtship.

The idyllic autumn days soon ended with the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, prompting the entry of the United States into the war. Hill left Miami University in 1942 to enlist in the U.S. Army Air Force at Dayton, Ohio. Dispatched almost immediately to bombsight school in Colorado, he was trained to repair bombsights, though he never saw another bombsight until he visited the American Legion Museum in downtown Indianapolis more than forty years later. Instead, he spent his time in the military as a certified instrument mechanic, working on B-25, B-17, and B-24 bombers. While on furlough in 1943, he spent as much time with Vesta as possible, then shipped out to Sydney, Australia, before being transferred to New Guinea, the East Indies, and the Philippines during the war. When the conflict formally ended in 1945, Hill traveled to Japan, eventually returning

to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, for discharge from military service. In another fortuitous turn of events, Vesta, then serving in the Army Nurse Corps, was stationed at Camp Atterbury. After Hill's official discharge on November 21, 1945, he and Vesta were married on November 26, in a small, private ceremony at her parents' home in Ohio.

After traveling to Fort Sheridan to obtain Vesta's discharge from the nursing corps, the couple returned to Ohio and spent several months settling into married life. Hill enrolled at Ohio State University, where after one semester, he changed his major from pre-engineering to teacher education with a major in history and minors in mathematics and physical sciences. With the aid of the G. I. Bill, he earned his degree in education, graduating in 1948, and started teaching. He spent his summers working on his master's degree in history at Ohio State University. After a couple of years, he returned to Columbus as newspaper librarian at the Ohio State Museum where he had worked part-time as an undergraduate. Then he was able to pursue his master's degree year round, one course per quarter. When he met historian Dwight Smith, a graduate of Indiana Central College who was doing research in the library, it was the first time Hill learned of the college where he would eventually come to work.



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During this same time period, he experienced a religious conversion. Though his family had baptized and raised the children in the Presbyterian Church, Hill had not developed a devout faith of his own. Rededicating himself to Christ during an altar call at the North Linden Evangelical United Brethren Church that he and Vesta attended marked the moment of Hill's deep spiritual commitment. After three years at the museum, he gave up that position in favor of teaching mathematics at a biracial junior high school in the inner city of Columbus. A few years later, he experienced another religious turning point at that same altar in the little EUB Church on the north side of Columbus. The pastor of the church sometimes invited the congregation to "go home by way of the altar," which meant that everyone would gather around the front of the sanctuary for prayer at the close of the

service. Hill had been pondering whether to continue teaching in the inner city, look for something in a mission field, or perhaps go to seminary, and he had been praying for guidance in making his decision. As he knelt at the altar that Sunday, he distinctly heard the Lord urging him to "go to seminary." Following further prayer and discussions with Vesta, he readied himself to pursue God's call to the ministry.

After completing his master's thesis while teaching one more year at Everette Junior High School and working with the Youth for Christ Club there, he enrolled at United Theological Seminary (formerly Bonebrake Seminary) in Dayton in 1955 at the age of 33. By this time, the couple had two daughters, whom Fred cared for in the evenings while Vesta worked as an evening shift nurse at a local hospital. He earned his master of divinity degree in three years, receiving ordination as a minister in the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the summer of 1958. During his time in seminary, Fred discerned that, while he was called to "go to seminary" and serve God in some sort of ministry, he was not meant to be a church pastor. His seminary professors helped him apprehend his vocational calling to teach. Upon his graduation from seminary, he accepted a faculty position in the Department of History and Political Science at Indiana Central College, where he remained for thirty years as a full-time professor.

"I was teaching at a Christian Liberal Arts College," he remembers, which meant that professors had to be versatile. In the History Department alone, Dr. Hill taught Western Civilization, Non-Western Civilizations, American National Government, State and Local Government, Concepts of the Liberal Arts, 20th-Century Russian History, History of Indiana, and Church History, along with several graduate courses. Yet, Hill often taught non-history courses, such as Old and New Testament, while also leading classes on various religious topics. Such a schedule required many hours in the classroom, since faculty were required to teach 15 credit hours per semester. In addition, Hill often taught an overload of evening classes to supplement the low faculty salary.

Despite his full professional life, Hill prioritized family and church commitments. He and his wife became charter members of Rosedale Hills EUB Church where he sang in the choir, taught Sunday school, and frequently preached as a substitute. He also temporarily filled pulpits in other EUB churches around the state and sometimes in Illinois as he was needed. Somehow, Hill also found time to start working on a PhD at Indiana University in 1960, where he studied under Dr. Don Carmony, a highly respected historian who also was an Indiana Central alumnus. Juggling professional and personal responsibilities, Hill earned his degree in twelve years. When he defended his dissertation—a study of a leading political figure in early Indiana history—he was just two weeks shy of his fiftieth birthday. Finishing the degree demonstrated his tenacity and determination, but the way the process unfolded also reflected his conception of his professorial role. Fred saw himself as a teacher first, a scholar second.

His three decades of teaching brought many memorable experiences, as he taught classes, served on college committees, and witnessed the college transform over time into a university. In each course he taught, Hill mentored his students in non-intrusive ways, as he explains, "being available" and "intentional about it" in little ways, such as "always being the last person out of the classroom." Such measures were small and probably not significant to the casual observer, but they allowed students to have access to him when they needed it. And they often responded to his availability. Obviously, there were those who wanted help with the course or a particular assignment. But, over the years, Dr. Hill found that there were many who just needed someone to listen to them as they recounted their problems.

His mentoring role also included involvement with student organizations on campus, such as serving as the faculty advisor for the Student Christian Association and freshman class and working with the Sunday evening college youth group at the University Heights Evangelical United Brethren Church. The history professor was actively involved with convocation, which was held three days

a week in the early years of his tenure at the school. He preached in chapel and served as chair of the Chapel and Convocation Committee for a time, scheduling speakers and programs, all on a shoestring budget of \$1,200 for the year.

Hill also represented the University in a variety of ways. For awhile he represented the University in the United Campus Christian Fellowship, a four-denomination consortium created to promote cooperative campus ministries aimed at their college students. At the same time he chaired the Council of Campus Christian Life, which was supported by both Indiana area Evangelical United Brethren Conferences and was charged with allocating funds to churches near colleges and thus facilitating their ministries to Evangelical United Brethren students. In the 1970s, he also made himself available for television interviews and spoke to various church groups about his travels to China and Europe, and in these ways contributed to the effort to raise the profile of Indiana Central University.

Other institutional service included working on and chairing various standing and ad hoc faculty committees, including the committee that created the first formal faculty evaluation system, the International-Intercultural Studies Committee, and the Affirmative Action Committee. One area of service that gives him the greatest sense of satisfaction now was serving on search committees. Hill reflects proudly on this work since it resulted in the hiring of new faculty



and administrators who brought positive changes to the campus community while retaining and strengthening its heritage.

From 1981 until his retirement in 1988, Hill served as chair of the Department of History and Political Science. Yet, despite his administrative talents, teaching remained his primary emphasis. It is as a professor inside and outside of the classroom that Dr. Hill served best. Even in retirement, he joyfully accepted the invitation to create a new faculty handbook and then to compile the history of the University, a service commitment that still allowed him to teach, this time as a scholar and writer. When his history of the school was published in 2002, it was his first book. About two months later, he celebrated his eightieth birthday. While not a prolific scholar, his devotion to teaching reflected both his own calling to the ministry and the context of the institution when he was in his prime.

But the faculty handbook and the centennial history of the University did not exhaust Fred's commitment to service. In the spring of 1989, during his first year in retirement, he joined Dr. Charles Guthrie's spring term class for a work project in Sierra

Leone, West Africa. For the next ten years, he and Vesta worked each year as United Methodist Volunteers in Mission. Typically during the winter months, they worked one or two three-week projects in the Southern USA; more often than not, they served as team leaders. While on their last assignment in 1999, which was at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, team members and students helped Fred celebrate his seventy-seventh birthday.

Fred Hill harbors a wealth of carefully researched stories about the University and its past. Some are contained in his book, others he has related in lectures and conversations, and still more have been included in the notes compiled during interviews for this piece. He has debunked persistent institutional myths; a quick read of an appendix to his book reveals Hill's scholarly analysis of many of the untrue stories about President I. J. Good, for example. Conversely, he has also created legends—one comes away from his book with a renewed respect for the men and women whom Hill portrays as giants towering over the campus, casting long legacies into the present.

A thorough incisiveness and comprehensive synthetic process mark the generation of historians to which Dr. Hill belongs. These scholars aim to contextualize and explain our human and cultural past in order to inform the present with rich meaning.

Not only has he provided such a reading of the University's institutional past, but also, as a teacher, mentor, and guiding presence, Hill has identified this same rich context for living for his students and colleagues. Truly meaningful service requires a persistent dedication to what matters—the people, the ideas, and the histories of how they relate. In this respect, Dr. Frederick Hill's life of service has reflected a “down-right devotion to the cause.”



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