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1902-2002

Indiana Business College

INDIANA BUSINESS COLLEGE
100th
Anniversary
1902-2002



Chapter 1

The Individual Progress Method of Education

Charles C. Cring



Charles C. Cring was an Ohio schoolteacher who came to Indiana at the turn of the 20th century to found Indiana Business College. Higher education 100 years ago was a much more entrepreneurial activity than it is today, and Cring combined the attributes that would have made him a success in either an educational or a business career.

Born in Condit, Ohio in 1868, three years after the Civil War ended, Cring was educated in the public schools of his hometown.¹

At the turn of the century, after teaching for several years in public schools in northwestern Ohio, Cring moved to north central Indiana.² He brought with him his dream of establishing a school where students could receive specialized business training.

In 1902, the year the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was dedicated in downtown Indianapolis, Cring established his first business schools in Marion, Logansport, Kokomo and Elkhart.³ Cring bought Central Business College in Indianapolis in 1906 and kept its name after adding it to his chain of schools.⁴

Realizing that not all students learn at the same rate, Cring adhered to the Individual Progress Method of teaching. Many of the classes offered by Indiana Business College allowed students to progress through a

In 1902, Indiana was undergoing an economic change perhaps unparalleled in the state's history. Indiana Business College was there to help prepare the first of five generations of Hoosier young people for good jobs in the new economy.

For nearly a century, Indiana's economic mainstay had been agriculture. The settlers who moved into the wilderness of what was then the Northwest Territory in the late 1700s and early 1800s discovered early on that the fertile, well-drained soil of Indiana was perfect for raising corn and small grains. By the time of the Civil War in the 1860s, Indiana was a breadbasket of the Union, shipping its agricultural produce east to feed a hungry nation.

Agriculture's domination continued throughout the 1870s and 1880s, but by the 1890s, Indiana was beginning to diversify its economy. America was industrializing at the end of the century, and Indiana boasted abundant natural resources that allowed it to participate in the new industrial revolution.

In 1902, almost 40 percent of the state's population made their living from farming, but that percentage had dropped from a high of 80 percent in the 1870s. The percentage of the population engaged in farming was well below 5 percent in Indiana counties that contained major cities.⁵

Indiana enjoyed the nation's first natural gas boom in the 1880s and 1890s when substantial gas fields were opened and developed around Marion and Muncie.⁶ Both communities would boast Indiana Business College campuses before the new century was five years old. Between 1900 and 1920, Lake County in the state's northwest corner would emerge as one of the primary steel-producing regions in the United States.

Hoosier Elwood Haynes is reputed to have been one of the first manufacturers of an American automobile, at Kokomo in 1894. During the next 20 years, central Indiana would become home to such well-known automotive manufacturers as Stutz, Duesenberg, and Marmon. By 1910, Indiana would claim nearly 100 manufacturers of automobiles and motorcycles. Nearly 30 automotive manufacturers were doing business in Indianapolis alone.⁷ IBC would be serving both Kokomo and Indianapolis with business colleges by 1906.

Indianapolis in 1902 was fast establishing a reputation as a major wholesale distribution center for the entire Midwest. The Hoosier capital was also well known nationally for its printing and publishing industry. Insurance companies found Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, and Evansville to be excellent places to be located.⁸ Indiana Business College would train a significant portion of the state's insurance work force during the first quarter of the 20th century.

The transition from agriculture to industry was dependent upon the development of a trained, urban pool of workers that could master the skills of the office and the factory floor. By the early 1900s, Indiana housed an increasing number of business schools that promised to educate and train the next generation of Hoosier workers for an increasingly diverse and complex workplace.

Charles C. Cring and the Roots of IBC

Charles Cring knew an opportunity when he saw one.

The 34-year-old Cring came to north central Indiana shortly after the turn of the 20th century and began purchasing and consolidating the small, under-funded business schools that had sprung up in such communities as Marion, Muncie, Kokomo and Logansport between 1895 and 1902.

An Ohio native, Cring had taught high school and in business schools in the Buckeye State before coming to Indiana in 1901. Cring understood that the

diversifying Indiana economy needed trained workers. And the school system of the time wasn't necessarily meeting that need.

Indiana had passed a compulsory school attendance law in 1897, which mandated that all children in the state between the ages of eight and 14 attend school for at least 12 consecutive weeks each year. In 1900, 81 percent of Indiana school-age children were in school each year, but the vast majority of students at the time completed their education with the eighth grade.v

For those students who did progress on to high school, educational opportunities were limited to a college preparatory curriculum. Until 1897, the only high school in Indianapolis was Shortridge High School, which was located downtown at Michigan and Pennsylvania streets. Smaller Indiana cities at the time, such as Marion, Muncie, and Kokomo, had only one small high school apiece.

In 1897, the Indianapolis school superintendent opened the Manual Training High School on the city's near south side. Manual High School's mission was to educate children for skilled factory work in the city's booming manufacturing economy.

The niche market that Charles Cring identified in 1902 involved educating young people who didn't have the money or inclination to attend college, but who didn't necessarily want to train for a career on the factory floor as a manual laborer. As a public school teacher in Ohio, Cring had extensively studied the growing business college model that had originated in England in the 1880s and crossed the Atlantic to New England in the 1890s.vi

Cring's planned schools would train young Hoosiers for a career in the offices of the business world. Cring's schools would stress training in shorthand, typing, penmanship, English, bookkeeping, and accounting, preparing the first of five generations of Indiana residents for satisfying and secure careers in offices across Indiana and the Midwest.

From Marion to Incorporation

In the spring of 1902, Charles Cring purchased an existing small business college and established the Marion Business College at 209 South Washington Street in downtown Marion.vii Cring's choice of Marion had been well thought out. Marion was one of the fastest-growing cities in the state at the time. The population had doubled from 1880 to 1890, and doubled again to more than 17,000 people in 1900.viii The city was surrounded by natural gas fields, and the cheap fuel had attracted glass plants, automotive factories, cardboard box mills and furniture manufacturers.

Marion Business College was a model for the Indiana Business College schools that were to follow in close succession. Marion Business College was located on the second floor of a downtown commercial building. There was one large room with desks for students, all illuminated by hanging gas jets overhead. A small office adjacent to the large open classroom served as a combination business office and teachers' lounge.

From the very beginning, Cring emphasized the Individual Progress Method of education. Cring recognized that not all people learned at the same rate of speed. Instead of structuring Marion Business College on a rigid semester or quarter system, he permitted each student enrolled to progress through a course at his or her own pace, taking into account previous education, ability and home study.ix

course at their own pace, according to their skills and previous education. This unique method of teaching provided individualized career training in a short period of time and at a reasonable cost.' In Cring's day, it took an average of six months for



a student to complete a program such as bookkeeping, with a tuition of \$60 plus book costs.'

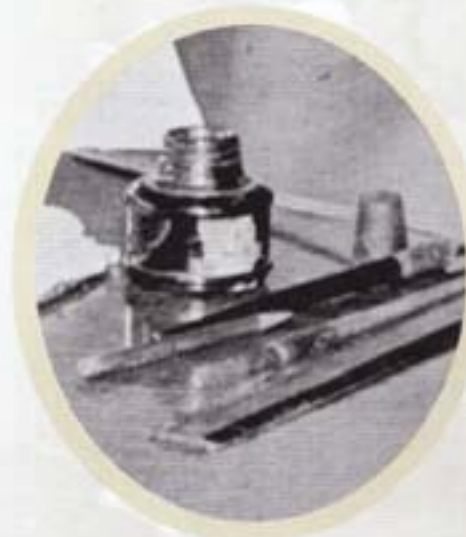
During Cring's lifetime, Indiana Business College grew to include schools in Logansport, Kokomo, Marion, Muncie, Anderson, Lafayette, Indianapolis, Richmond, Columbus and Vincennes.' The need for well-trained businessmen and women in the workplace kept Indiana Business College expanding even after the founder's death in 1926.

The board of directors adopted a resolution shortly after Cring passed away that showed the respect and admiration that was felt for him:

""Resolved; that the untimely death of our Founder and President, Charles C. Cring, has come as a terrific shock, not only to every member of the Indiana Business College organization, but also to thousands throughout the State of Indiana. Mr. Cring was one of the most substantial men of the United States in his chosen field, and will be greatly missed by all who enjoyed his close acquaintance. The remaining directors will feel keenly the absence of his wise counsel, leadership and companionship.""

When Cring died at the age of 58, he was known as the founder of the then largest chain of business schools in the United States.¹

- 1 "Charles C. Cring Funeral Wednesday," Indianapolis News, February 11, 1926
- 2 "The Story of Indiana Business College," p. 2
- 3 Ibid., p. 4
- 4 "Charles C. Cring Funeral Wednesday," Indianapolis News, February 11, 1926
- 5 "The Story of Indiana Business College," p. 4
- 6 Prgomct, Kelly, "The History of Indiana Business College," p. 3
- 7 "Charles C. Cring Funeral Wednesday," Indianapolis News, February 11, 1926
- 8 "The Story of Indiana Business College," p. 7
- 9 "Charles C. Cring Funeral Wednesday," Indianapolis News, February 11, 1926



The school established an estimated length of time for each course of study. If students got too far behind their classmates, they could be tutored by instructors after school for an extra fee. Students could start a course of study every Monday morning, and some students graduated almost every Friday afternoon. School was year-round, with only the month of August for vacation, and that more for teachers than for students.x

Cring's initial venture with the Marion Business College was an immediate success, with employers eagerly awaiting the first group of graduates for positions as stenographers, bookkeepers, secretaries, accountants, payroll clerks, machine operators, auditors and general business assistants.xi

No sooner was Marion Business College established than Cring purchased a second business college in Logansport. Just northwest of Marion and with a slightly smaller population, Logansport was also enjoying an industrial boom in 1902. The city also boasted one of the oldest business colleges in the state.

E.A. Hall came to Logansport from Ashtabula, Ohio in 1867 and founded the Hall's Business College downtown at Market and Third streets. The college was noted for penmanship courses. It moved several times before Hall purchased the Keystone Building at Sixth and Broadway streets in 1892 and installed the school on the building's third floor.xii

Hall's Business College remained in the Keystone Building until early 1902 when he retired and moved to Pittsburgh. Michael W. Murphy, a Logansport accountant who had founded the Logansport Business College in 1898, bought Hall's Business College and changed the name of the merged entities to Logansport Commercial High School.xiii In June 1902, Cring purchased the assets of the Commercial High School and renamed it Logansport Business College.

Later in the summer of 1902, Cring organized business colleges in Kokomo and Elkhart. The rapid growth of Cring's business college enterprises necessitated forming a holding company to oversee operations of the increasingly far-flung schools. In February 1903, Cring drew up and filed articles of association with the Indiana secretary of state. On February 28, 1903, the secretary of state issued a certificate of incorporation for Indiana Business College.xiv

The new company was just beginning to grow.

- i Bill Beck, Milestones 2000: A 20th Century Retrospective Indianapolis: Indianapolis Business Journal, 2000, p.96
- ii "Natural Gas: The Indiana Field - Interesting Facts About This New Source of Comfort and Wealth," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Supplement, January 19, 1889, p.394
- iii Beck, Milestones 2000, p.33B
- iv Beck, Milestones 2000, p.11B
- v Clifton J. Phillips, Indiana In Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920 Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society Press, 1968, pp.389-390
- vi "The Story of Indiana Business College," Indianapolis: Indiana Business College, 1982, n.p.
- vii "Marion Business College Moves," Marion News-Herald, August 20, 1971
- viii Phillips, Indiana In Transition, p.367
- ix "The Story of Indiana Business College"
- x Tape-Recorded Oral History Interview with Charles T. "Chic" Butz, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 15, 2001, p.9
- xi "The Story of Indiana Business College"
- xii "C.L. Dilley Recalls Early Days as Hall School Tutor," Logansport Press, September 25, 1949
- xiii "Accountant Passes Away," Logansport Press, March 7, 1941
- xiv "Indiana Business College," Undated Draft Manuscript in History Files, Indiana Business College, Indianapolis, Indiana, p.1