

Independent Order of St. Luke collection

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1961-1975



Title Statement

Independent Order of St. Luke collectionIndependent Order of St. Luke collection MSS 16931

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MSS 16931

Unit ID

[Archival Resource Key](#)

Unit ID

/repositories/3/resources/1843

Unit Date

1961-1975

Mixed Materials [X032762785]

1 (folder)

Language

English

Creator

Independent Order of St. Luke

Extent

0.03 Cubic Feet One letter-sized file folder

Condition Description

Good

Repository

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was a gift from Caroliniana Rare Books to the Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia Library on 12 August 2025.

Preferred Citation

MSS 16931, Independent Order of St. Luke collection, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library.

Biographical / Historical

Independent Order of St. Luke was an African American fraternal order founded to promote Black economic independence. It was founded after the Civil War (1861–1865) in Baltimore, Maryland by Mary Ann Prout.[1] [2] It was first called the United Order of St. Luke.[1] It published the St. Luke Herald newspaper (1902–1931),[3][4] established the St. Luke Penny Saver Bank (1903–1930),[5] and also founded and operated the department store St. Luke Emporium (1905–1912) in Richmond, Virginia.[6]

Black fraternal orders provided a means for Black community members to create resources to promote independence, self-reliance, and success that was not available to them by white businesses due to segregation. Members of the African American community also supported and were employed and serviced by Black businesses, like retail stores, insurance companies, banks, newspapers, and homes for the elderly. [1]

In 1869, the organization split into two factions. The new organization Independent Order of St. Luke was operated from Richmond, Virginia by William M. T. Forrester. He ran the organization for thirty years, until the late 1890s, when membership had fallen to 1,000 members.[1]

Maggie L. Walker had led the development of a juvenile department and rose through the ranks of the organization until she became the leader of the organization in 1899. In two years, she doubled its membership. New headquarters were established at the St. Luke Building in 1903. St. Luke Building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.[1] Under her leadership, the organization supported 100,000 members in 26 states. Her policy of "cooperative economics" resulted in Black businesses employing Black workers, which were patronized by the community. She oversaw the founding of the St. Luke Herald newspaper, a department store, and the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank.[1][2] The Consolidated Bank and Trust was the longest-running, independently owned Black-owned bank in the country. It was sold in 2005.[1]

Hattie N. F. Walker, Maggie Walker's daughter-in-law, became leader of the organization after Maggie died in 1934. She ran the organization until 1957. The fraternal order was disbanded in 1988.[1]

With other Black fraternal orders, the Independent Order of St. Luke helped Richmond being named as the "Birthplace of Black Capitalism," "Black Wall Street," and "Harlem of the South." [1]

Source: "Independent Order of St. Luke" Wikipedia. Accessed 12/16/25
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_Order_of_St._Luke

Content Description

This collection contains two letters and three pamphlets related to the Independent Order of St. Luke, an African American fraternal order founded after the Civil War to promote Black economic independence. The Order was headquartered on St. James Street in Richmond, where the two included letters dating from 1961 were postmarked. The letters were sent by Dorothy V. Turner, the recording secretary of the Order, to Alvis Pinnix of Burlington, North Carolina, a member of the Order. The February 6, 1961, letter invites Pinnix to an

initiation of a new council, while the August 18, 1961, letter discusses an Order membership drive. An undated folded pamphlet titled "Juvenile Catechism" offers questions and answers about the "Juvenile Circles" within the Order of St. Luke. A 1968 "Certificateholders' Report" outlines the policyholder rating of The Right Worthy Grand Council, Independent Order of St. Luke, published by Dunne's Insurance Reports of Louisville, Kentucky. The third pamphlet is a program for a "Testimonial Dinner," celebrating Dorothy E. Turner, an Order member, on October 10, 1975.

Related Materials

This collection is related to other chapters of the Independent Order of St. Luke including MSS 16129 and MSS 14777-a/

Keywords

African American fraternal organizations

pamphlets

Independent Order of St. Luke