
Indiana Bicentennial:
Archives from Oldest College, Oldest City, Join Indiana Memory
By Richard L. King

Abstract

In celebration of Indiana's Bicentennial, three rare and fragile collections pertaining to early Indiana history and housed at Vincennes University's Byron R. Lewis Historical Library have been digitized and are being made available at the Indiana Memory site. The collections are early (1806-) Board of Trustees Minutes of Indiana's first college, Vincennes University; correspondence in French and English of early Vincennes land office register John Badollet and his family (1780-1878), and Knox County Commissioners Records (1814-1820). The project is titled *Indiana Bicentennial: Archives from Oldest College, Oldest City*.

Keywords: Vincennes, Indiana; Indiana History; Indiana Bicentennial; Indiana correspondence, Indiana colleges; Government; Law; William Henry Harrison; Vincennes University; John Badollet.

Three rare and fragile early Indiana historical collections housed at Vincennes University's (VU) Byron R. Lewis Historical Library have been digitized for inclusion with Indiana Memory, made possible by a \$9845 grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, administered by the Indiana State Library. The project is titled *Indiana Bicentennial: Archives from Oldest College, Oldest City*, and the project is a way for VU to honor Indiana's 200th birthday.

Much of this material should be of interest for scholarly and genealogy research about Indiana's rich, unique history and the importance of Vincennes and VU to early Indiana statehood. These items will be made available for linking to the Indiana Memory site (<https://digital.library.in.gov/>) hosted by the Indiana State Library. The VU collections will be available for searching beginning in Summer 2016. The project falls within the mission of Lewis Historical Library to focus on Vincennes University Archives and Regional History of the old Northwest Territory. The library features collections pertinent to Indiana's rich historical past.

The project focuses on three collections totaling approximately 1,418 pages. The first is the early years (1806-) of the *VU Board of Trustees Minutes*.

This material reveals the origins of higher education in Indiana, including meetings presided over by Territorial Governor and future U.S. President William Henry Harrison. VU is Indiana's oldest college and one of the first two-year colleges in America, though several baccalaureates are presently offered as well. VU's heritage begins with the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which states, "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and to the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Harrison was the founder of the college and first chair of the Board of Trustees of VU. In 1801 Jefferson Academy, the direct forerunner of VU, was founded in Vincennes. The Indiana territorial legislature, at its first session in 1806, passed an act to incorporate the first university in the Indiana Territory, "to be called and known by the name and style of Vincennes University."

The second collection is the **Badollet Family Papers** (1780-1878), representing an important early Vincennes family when the city was a frontier town. This includes correspondence of John Badollet (1757-1837), a Swiss-born scholar who became the first officer of the territorial land office based in Vincennes. Documents from the French period of Indiana are not plentiful, and especially covering the early years of Vincennes, established by the French about 1732. The correspondence includes letters written in the French and English languages and covers far-ranging topics from Badollet's personal life, friends and family concerning a variety of legal and historical topics people were interested in at the time. Many subjects mentioned in these letters should be of interest to historians desiring to learn about day-to-day events of concern to a learned frontier government official both before and after Indiana's statehood period. Many names are mentioned in the correspondence and will be sought after by genealogists accessing the Indiana Memory site.

There has been much scholarly interest in John Badollet. A search for his name in the *Indiana Magazine of History Online* discovers 29 articles, for instance. A 1963 book titled *Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin, 1804-1836*, edited by Gayle Thornbrough and published by the Indiana Historical Society, reproduces letters archived in the New York Historical Society.

Librarians decided it is time to make digitally available the Badollet correspondence archived in Lewis Library.

The third collection is the *Knox County (Ind.) Commissioners Records and Vincennes: Early Documents from 1814-1823*. One of the oldest and largest counties of the 92 Indiana counties, Knox County at one time encompassed land ranging from the Ohio River to Michigan, before being eventually reduced to its current borders as Indiana became established as a state in 1816.

Early Knox County records, such as the Commissioners documents, should be of interest to researchers, genealogists, and historians everywhere. Largely unknown and fragile, these unique records should be digitally shared with the historical community on Indiana Memory, especially due to their early time coverage of pre-statehood through post-statehood periods.

The digitization adheres to State Library Digitization standards and is being conducted by Wabash Valley Visions and Voices, an Indiana State University-based project with extensive past service in digitizing important historical documents and photos for southwest Indiana. The Knox County Public Library (KCPL), a long-time collaborator with the Lewis Historical Library, has been a Visions and Voices and contributor for many years. Instrumental in providing advice and support for this project are Emily Cooper-Bunyan, Knox County Public Library (KCPL) Director; Brian Spangle, Historical Collection Administrator at KCPL; Cinda May, Project Director of Wabash Valley Voices and Visions (Indiana State University); Connie Rendfeld, Digital Initiatives Librarian (Indiana Memory, Indiana State Library); Dr. David M. Peter, Dean of VU's Shake Learning Resources and Technology, and Allen Like, long-time Lewis Library volunteer.



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