

Magdalene Laundries

Sources:

- Scott, Kate (2019). "Airing Our Dirty Laundry," (<https://indianahistory.org/blog/airing-our-dirty-laundry/>)
- Jones, Michelle and Lori Record (2017). "Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States." *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*. (<https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1043&context=jiass>)

Photo Courtesy: Wisconsin Historical Society

At the southeast corner of Raymond Street and Bluff Rd sat the Convent of the Good Shepherd. This was also the site of a Magdalene Laundry that operated in Indianapolis for over seventy years.

In the 18th century, Magdalene Laundries were established across Western Europe. Overseen by female religious orders, they said "fallen women" could find refuge and "metaphorically wash their sins away" while "scrubbing society's dirty laundry."

In reality, Magdalene Laundries became the first known prisons for women where girls and women were incarcerated for moral crimes such as prostitution and adultery. In addition, orphans and young unmarried and pregnant women were taken to these laundries. Conditions were harsh and children were forcibly taken away from women who gave birth in the laundries and were placed for adoption.

The first American Magdalene Laundry opened in Louisville in 1843 and others followed, including the Indianapolis Convent of the Good Shepherd and St. Joseph Laundry in 1873. Women were frequently sent to work at these laundry in lieu of prison. In 2013, when students in the Indiana Women's Prison higher education program were researching the history of their own institution, they discovered that for the first 24 years of the Women's Prison's operation, women who were convicted of a "sex crime" were sentenced to work at the laundry. Tales of abuse were told by those who were able to escape. One such story was about Minnie Morrison who was tricked into entering this system at age 10. While there, she recounted how she was beaten and lost four fingers after being burned as punishment for an alleged theft.

This convent and laundry remained open for more than seven decades, and last appeared in the Indianapolis city directory in 1955. Eventually, the complex was demolished and nothing of the site remains.

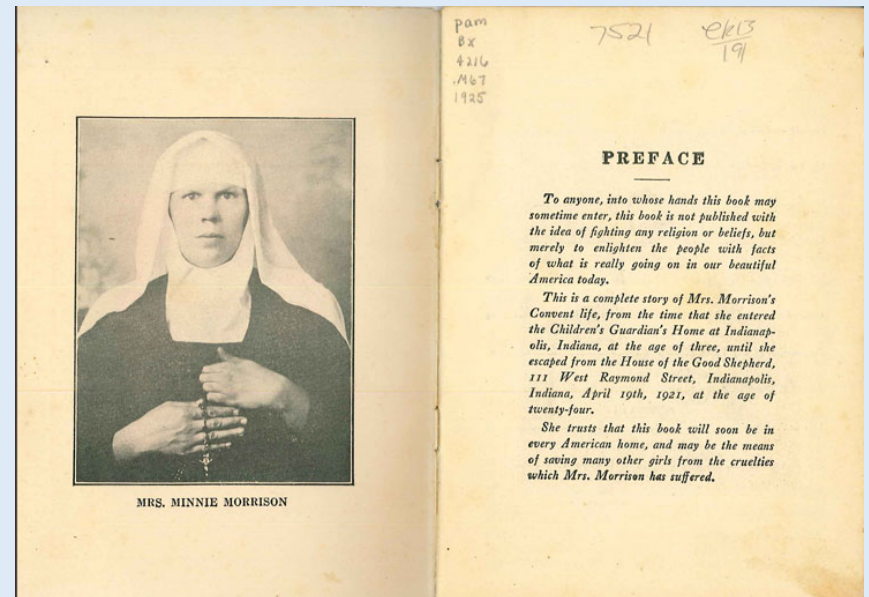


Photo Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society. Pages from the Life Story of Mrs. Minnie Morrison: *Awful Revelations of Life in Convent of Good Shepherd, Indianapolis, Ind. (A True Story)*, 1925, in which Morrison contends that she was held unjustly for years and abused by convent staff