

# Emma Christy Baker

*Salem, Washington County*

February 10, 1865 – September 23, 1955



Photo: Hoosier History Live

Emma was born on February 10, 1865 in Salem, in Washington County, Indiana to William W. and Hester Christy, Free African Americans who settled there in the 1830's from the Newberry District, South Carolina. Her family moved to Indianapolis when she was an infant. Emma graduated from Public School Number 17 and Shortridge High School. Her family was well known in the African-American community in Indianapolis. Her father owned a successful laundry where Emma worked for many years. On June 15, 1918, Emma Baker became the first woman and the first African-American woman to be a police officer for the Indianapolis Police Department.

Based on the recommendations in a 1917 report of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research that Indianapolis should employ policewomen to work outside the police station, thirteen policewomen (including two African-Americans) and a woman police sergeant were appointed to the Indianapolis Police Department at a special meeting of the Board of Public Safety on June 16, 1918. During World War I, Emma and Clara Burnside became the first women to work outside the station, patrolling public places Downtown. Her primary duties were performing undercover shoplift and petty theft details.

She wore a badge and earned the same rate of pay as male officers. The African-American community appreciated Emma for her police work. From 1922-1938 Officer Baker was assigned to the Juvenile Court in the probation department. She was the only African-American assigned there in 1931. In 1938, due to a new chief of police's dislike for policewomen and economic influences from the Great Depression, Emma was assigned to be a matron in the jail. She retired from the department in August 1939.

- For more information about Emma Christy Baker, go to: [http://crownhillhf.org/inmemoryof\\_baker.html](http://crownhillhf.org/inmemoryof_baker.html).
- For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

*Additional and more detailed references available at the end of Women's History Month*

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