

A NEW STATE FLAG FOR INDIANA

Take yourself back in time. It's October of 1916, and you are seated in a grandstand specially erected in Riverside Park for a great outdoor event. It's the culmination of the state's centennial celebration. It features a cast of hundreds of local citizens, modern electrical effects, and one sample of every brand of automobile assembled in the state. It's the Pageant of Indiana, and you know it's ours because the spirit of Indiana, mounted upon a fine horse, is taking center stage. She's bearing the pageant's most important symbol: a new state flag, specially designed for the celebration. It's a striking green and blue tricolor, embellished with nineteen bright golden stars. It's asking you to think about a question that is still with us today: what does it mean to be a Hoosier?

All good celebrations have a story of their own to tell. This year, 2011, marks the centennial of the formation of one of the most important celebratory committees in our state's history. Brought into being in 1911 by an act of the General Assembly, and styled the "Indiana Centennial Celebration Committee," it was formed in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of Indiana's 1816 statehood.

Their ranks would grow with time, but the committee originally numbered fifteen members representing the state's thirteen Congressional districts. The chair was

Frank Barbour Wynn, a prominent Indianapolis physician and the first city Sanitarian. The member best known to us today, if only for his illustrious descendants, was Lew O'Bannon, Editor of the Corydon Democrat. They were joined by the presidents of IU and Purdue, four judges, three businessmen, an ex-Congressman, another editor (from the Marion Daily Chronicle), a self-styled "farmer and lecturer on agricultural topics", and two additional physicians, one of them the superintendent of the Eastern Indiana Hospital for the Insane. (p 2) The committee secretary was one of my predecessors in history at Butler, Professor Demarchus Brown.

They came together, as all such committees do, with an agenda. The state legislature desired to commemorate the centennial by erecting an elegant new state library and museum, decorating its reading rooms with murals depicting Hoosier achievement, and expanding its collections and exhibitions "for the instruction of present and future generations." (p 11) The exhibitions were to document the scientific, artistic, agricultural, and industrial progress of the state, and were to be shown at the State Fair and other public venues before reaching their final home in the new building. Citizens were to be invited to participate in public programs; communities were to be encouraged to develop additional projects.

A series of public meetings quickly followed, culminating in a black-tie banquet where a number of experts were invited to offer suggestions from within their area of expertise. Drawing upon this, in 1912 the commission published a 153 page

hardbound volume of “Suggestive Plans.” Twenty-six contributors, in essays of somewhat uneven length and detail, put forth proposals for everything from a new Indianapolis convention hall to a statewide sports Olympic. Meredith Nicholson contributed the section showing how they might both involve and document the state’s literary and artistic giants. Indiana’s economic and cultural advantages predominated; its new public buildings (such as the 1903 Indianapolis Court House and Post Office, p 15) were heavily favored in the book’s hundred-plus illustrations.

Most interesting of the proposals was a desire, best summarized by Demarchus Brown, that “There should be a historical pageant which would bring before the eye of the people the development and growth of Indiana. . . . A worthy celebration carried out in a dignified manner [that] will not only be instructive but a source of inspiration for the future.” (p 18) That pageant is my particular focus this evening.

A word about the general topic and its statewide context is probably first in order. A dictionary definition reminds us that a pageant is an elaborate representation of scenes from history, usually involving a parade with rich costumes, and often supported by a stirring musical accompaniment. It’s an old art form, with roots extending back to at least the Middle Ages, and it was an extremely popular entertainment a century ago. Remember that in 1916 there were no broadcast radio stations, the first modern full length feature film – the silent Birth of a Nation – was one year in the past, and other modern entertainments such as television were the province of H. G. Wells and other science-fantasy authors. The stage, in all its forms, was dominant – and many

men and women involved themselves with a passion that rivals that of contemporary music, videos, and other electronic arts.

If you would like to see that widespread involvement in historical pageants, visit the Indiana State Library's Indiana Centennial Web site. I recommend their coverage, which identifies and illustrates thirty-one local pageants that were held just in connection with the Centennial: 20 sponsored by counties, 8 by cities, one a joint city-county event (at Connersville), another a joint city-university event (at Bloomington), and one an exclusively college celebration (at Earlham). Since most of the county events were held in the courthouse town, and welcomed all local students, it might better just be said that they were all local community celebrations. The earliest was at Bloomington on May 16, perhaps to meet student schedules. The last was the Decatur County program at Greensburg on October 22, no doubt to enjoy the fall color.

Each of the thirty-one pageants produced a souvenir program, and every program provided a list of the historical scenes that the audience would experience. Other pageants were almost surely held – and it's a reminder to all of us that documenting your success with an attractive program, donated to a good library, is a sure way of improving long term recognition of your efforts. Certainly the thirty-one programs that we have offer a good way to find out what Hoosier celebrants, or at least Indiana organizers, thought were historical scenes worthy of representation.

Being a person who likes to count, I set up some categories that I thought might allow us to capture those priorities. I then assigned each named scene in a program to the category it seemed to most clearly belong. My Web source is clear that content of a particular scene was up to the local community, so let's treat this like the vote in Chicago: a rough approximation. For what it's worth,

--From the Native American presence (where, by the way, the word Indian was seldom used; usually the local tribe or famous leader is named): 26.

--From the French colonial period: 15.

--From the English colonial period, American Revolution included: 7.

--From the American settlement period, many featuring pioneer life: 53.

--From the Founding of a particular county, town, or institution (such as a school or Masonic Lodge): 44.

--From the states Political history : 2 (in both cases the election of 1840).

--From the Transportation Revolution (roads, rails, canals and the like): 6.

--From the Civil War Era (anti-slavery and the Underground Railroad included): 30.

--From any specific event after 1865 (such as the 1872 Mishawaka fire): 12.

--From some kind of concluding modern tableau (such as Bartholomew County's "Tribute to Modern Schools," Goshen's "Uncle Sam helping Indiana receive the people of Europe," or Michigan City's "Triumph of Beauty and Utility"): 12.

Put in other words, the years from 1800 to 1840 when early pioneers arrived, when Indians were removed, and when counties, towns, schools, and local institutions were created, dominated the programming. Except at Vincennes, George Rogers Clark was a non-starter; except for Tippecanoe the elder Harrison commanded little attention. Politics outside the Civil War was beyond the pale, and Indiana history essentially stopped at the Civil War. Remember, of course, that 1916 audiences were closer in time to that war than we are to the Korean conflict.

Several of the programs tell us that the local pageants were often part of a larger entertainment package. Interpretive, and often improvisational, dancing was popular. Decatur County was entertained by two dances entitled Natural Resources and The Forest Primeval; DuBois County had 350 people dance The Gifts of Nature; Goshen incorporated a dance representing the Natural Beauty of Indiana into their opening parade; Irvington (here in Marion County) focused more generally upon "color, movement, and grouping;" Montgomery County's dancers evoked the Birth of the Indian

Race; while Parke County's troupe performed as the Spirits of Trees, Coal, Clay, and Corn.

Other program features might be added. Franklin County included an Honor Roll of the distinguished men born in the county; Miami County started off with a dedication of Peru's new Broadway Light System; New Albany held a masque symbolizing the growth of the state; the Pageant of Troy was incorporated into its August Chautauqua program; Montgomery County (which alone among the celebrants honored modern local authors) had two sketches: one for Lew Wallace and Ben Hur , the other for Maurice Thompson and Alice of Old Vincennes.

The dances, the masque, and the opening public processions remind us that there were many opportunities to parade on, off, or around the grounds in rich costume. We can reasonably assume that many of the Civil War scenes concluded with boys in blue marching off to patriotic airs; it's a good bet that the red man withdrew in colorful robe and blanket to the sound of drum and flute. Cass County's "march of the states" must surely have been a flag bearer's dream; and Decatur county's 1840 Harrison rally was tailor made for a torchlight parade.

The culminating Pageant of Indiana, held in Indianapolis from October 2 through 7, 1916, would clearly be judged by the standards set in those many community events. By now, we should note, the original organizing committee had morphed into a separate nine member Indiana Historical

Commission, chaired by Governor Samuel Ralston, and assisted by an Indiana State Advisory Committee of 119 members. Although intended to be statewide in character, the pageant arrangements rested locally with a sixteen member Indianapolis Celebration Committee, chaired by Charles Bookwalter, and with a fourteen member Pageant Committee, chaired by Hugh McK Landon. They, in turn, had assigned the Pageant Direction to five officers: a Master of the Pageant; a Composer of the Music; a Designer of the Costumes; a Director of the Field; and a Leaders of the Dances.

The key personality was clearly the Pageant Master, William Chauncey Langdon. Born in 1871, he had made pageants his passion. The New York Times wrote a complementary piece in 1913 when he became president of the American Pageant Association, and communities from New England to the South had employed his talents to write and produce affirmations of their community. Langdon was first employed to do the pageants in Bloomington and Corydon (I suspect, but as yet cannot document, that Lew O'Bannon was an important figure in those decisions). Thanks to the wonders of Google Books, you can read the full texts of those earlier programs on the Web, and watch Langdon working out some of the bugs before he brought his talents to Indianapolis.

We know his efforts through his detailed and entertaining eighty page script, which he subtitled “The drama of the development of the state as a community from its exploration by La Salle to the centennial of its admission to the union.” He provided the spoken texts of each of principal players,

stage (or, more properly, field) directions for the movement and the pantomime of the performers (including the dancers), descriptions of the sets, properties, and costumes, and seven musical motifs for the background and interludes.

His book opens with a detailed description for the pageant's unique symbol: its new state flag for Indiana. Langdon observed that Indiana lacked an official state flag, and proposed to provide one for the centennial that was simple, beautiful, harmonious with the national flag, of accepted flag dimensions, and – above all – significant. His design contained three vertical sections: blue in the center as the color of statehood, green to the left embodying the “primeval luxuriance of the wilderness,” and green again to the right representing the “present fertility and productiveness of the state.” In the central blue field he placed nineteen golden stars, Indiana's understandably larger than those representing the eighteen states that preceded it.

Langdon assured his readers that the Indianapolis show was “worked together for the sole purpose of producing in the sequence of its various scenes a clear, beautiful and inspiring drama and a truthful impression of the development of the State of Indiana.” He also reminded his audience “the modern pageant is a distinct and individual art-form, having its own laws and its own technique.” Everything, he assured them, was specially designed, including the dramatic treatments, the costumes, the music, and the “light effects.” There would, of course, be a “certain freedom” taken with the

historical materials “for the sake of dramatic clarity and effectiveness.” Held in Riverside Park along the bank of White River with the audience seated on a special grandstand, each day’s show would “begin at four o’clock in the afternoon and continue through sunset and twilight into the night, closing with electric effects.” Even nature was going to cooperate. During the 1779 Vincennes episode, he assured us “the White River, in playing the part of the Wabash, has kindly consented to flow in the opposite direction.” I have not found a cast list for Indianapolis, but his Bloomington program credits 213 dancers and singers, 15 Indians, and 44 musicians, plus as many as 35 named actors and 100 extras per dramatic episode. Bloomington’s population in the 1910 census was about 8800. Indianapolis had a quarter of a million people to draw upon.

The program featured four dramatic segments, each introduced by singers, dancers, and symbolic performers in a controlled series of dances, songs and hymns, parades, and dramatic pantomimes (but with almost no dialogue). The show contained ten interspersed episodes in which actors played out significant moments of debate or decision in Hoosier history, and the pageant ended with a grand celebratory finale and choral accompaniment – a total of fifteen acts. Langdon was clear in his plan for the evening. He felt that Indiana development had “followed the lines of transportation,” first the rivers that flow to the port and market of New Orleans and then the railroads that flow to the port and market of New York. With breaks for refreshment, the pageant must have lasted at least five hours, so some summary is probably in order.

Let's start with content. The pageant opened with A Centennial Spirit segment that set the stage for episodes on LaSalle's 1669 visit, the taking of Vincennes by Clark in 1779, and Harrison's Tippecanoe Campaign of 1811. A State of Indiana segment led to episodes titled the Center of the State (describing the founding of Indianapolis) and the Days of the Flatboats (built around the pioneer's ties to New Orleans). Next a St Francis of the Orchards segment (Johnny Appleseed if you are wondering) contained episodes on Canals and Railroads (1836-1847) featuring a spirited debate on the merits of canals, road, railroads and their funding; an Underground Railroad episode that allowed Levi Coffin to face down a southern slave catcher, and a Civil War (1861-1863) episode that saw Benjamin Harrison recruit the 70th Indiana and Governor Morton chase off Morgan's raiders. Finally, a Torch of Art and Literature segment set the stage for episodes on the Wagon and the Plow (1885), where pioneer farming yields to modern machinery, and The Binding Ties (1900) which affirmed the progress inherent in natural gas, the automobile, and other light industry. The Finale was titled Indiana, 1916! (with an exclamation mark a valuable indicator of its tone).

The difference from the content of most county pageants is striking. Yes, there are the usual sections on the French explorer, the vanishing Indian, the energetic pioneer, the founding of the sponsoring city, and the heroism of the Civil War Union soldier. But there is also a lengthy treatment of Clark at Vincennes, a spirited debate on the politically charged issues of internal improvements, an appreciation of a folk hero, a specific acknowledgement of

the younger Harrison, and a full quarter of the show devoted to events since the Civil War. It actually carries the story to the present day in 1916.

Some of the touches that go with this shifted focus are quite entertaining. In the 1880 episode, the Indianapolis city police are watching a field full of modern entertainments, with tennis, croquet and cycling. Suddenly a murmur moves across the field as a group of Indians and pioneers from earlier episodes walk onstage to watch. The 1880s folk become agitated, and race to the police to insist the new arrivals be arrested and returned to their earlier episodes. The visitors of course see nothing wrong with being there. The police appear dumbfounded, until one of their number cleverly notes that the pioneer era is dead – and thus a matter only for the county coroner. This permits the constables to withdraw, and allows the two sets of actors to debate whether the pioneer spirit has really perished – or merely taken new form in a progressive state. You can imagine the answer.

Another moment of charming entertainment is the St. Francis of the Orchards segment, a rich two page description. The music, mainly harps and strings, soars as an elderly figure clutching a bouquet of apple blossoms enters from the forest on stage right. A spotlight follows his slow steps as he moves to center stage to plant his apple seeds. A flight of Angels appear out of the darkness to bless him. A prayerful hymn is sounded, and the angels withdraw as a procession enters of pioneers and Quakers, men, women, and children – some walking, some riding, some sitting in a Conestoga wagon. The procession surrounds the feeble old man, who has enough strength to

hand red apples to the children, provide seeds to the pioneers, act out the growth cycle of the orchard, and bestow a blessing upon the state. “Again the Prayer Music rises, simple in form and spirit as before, but richer in harmony and content, increasingly more and more glorious . . . as again the Angels appear behind the old man and pour out in numbers here and there through all the woodside.” As the pioneers act out a tree planting, the old man passes away and is borne off the stage in the wagon while the Angels disappear back into the forest as heavenly music echoes across the field.

There is, I fear, a natural tendency, especially when children are expected to be part of the audience, to “clean it up and dumb it down.” – and it’s worth asking if Langdon succumbed. You can make a case that he did not. I grant you that the consciousness of 1916 was not the consciousness of 2011. As an example, Black characters in the pageant are never demeaned, but they are often portrayed as dependent upon White characters – most notably in the Levi Coffin Underground Railroad episode where his courage in facing down a Kentucky slave hunter, and not the courage of the fugitives who have risked their lives to escape slavery, is the focus.

But having noted that, there are some surprising moments in the script. I’ve already noted that Langdon departed from most community scripts by including the confrontation of Clark and Hamilton at Vincennes. But I was also struck by the fact that the script not only allows democratic Americans to triumph over aristocratic Brits, it also includes the graphic moment in the

siege when Clark executed prisoners in full view of the British garrison.

Here's the scene:

“ . . . four Indiana prisoners are brought up to Clark.

CLARK: Tomahawk the reptiles and throw them in the river.

One of the Indians stretches out his arm to Hamilton in appeal to save them.

He, however, can do nothing. Other Indians standing about are much impressed by his inability to help them.

CLARK: Tomahawk the reptiles, I say, and throw them in the river.

The Indiana prisoners are led over to the river bank, tomahawked in sight of the Governor and their bodies thrown into the river. Hamilton forthwith agrees to terms”

The portions of the script that I found most intriguing in this regard were the three symbolic figures that gave direction to the pageant's field and players. Two you might expect. One was the Centennial Spirit, “with high spirit and challenging demeanor . . . clothed in soft rose over shining armor.” She appeared with her escorts, the Community Arts: History, Music, Sculpture, Mural Painting, the Dance, Recreation, Pageantry, City Planning, and Electricity. Joining her was the State of Indiana, “robed in royal blue and green, superbly riding, and bearing her green and blue shield and banner,” attended by representatives of the state's population – initially thirteen pioneers in buckskin clothes and coonskin caps (who represented the 13 counties at the time of statehood).

Their counterweight in the pageant was somewhat different. He appeared on a great horse, heavily draped, his ample garment streaming behind, the colors of which are “strange, mysterious, unearthly yet enthrallingly beautiful . . . he is Death.” Joining him, in contrast to the Community Arts, “shrouded as it were with mystery,” are the forms of Oblivion. Again and again as the afternoon and evening proceed, the spirits of state and community are challenged by Death and Oblivion, who often cause others players to lost sight of Indiana’s past. LaSalle, Henry Hamilton, Elskwatawa, Samuel Merrill, and each of the succeeding subjects and their companions will be swept off the stage, and often down White River, without a vestige left behind as the Hoosier state progresses toward 1916.

Even the present day is put on alert. The modern section on The Torch of Art and Literature opens with a grand parade of each of the state’s major cultural figures – all carrying their book, canvas or model, and many accompanied by their best known characters. The script carefully identifies by name fifteen authors, five historians, thirteen painters, six illustrators, and three sculptors; named characters include the Hoosier Schoolmaster, Ben Hur, and Penrod. Following them “there comes in James Whitcomb Riley, “ accompanied by Little Orphant Annie and happy children carrying well worn copies of his books. Riley will kneel before Indiana, who will place a laurel wreath on his brow, the Centennial Spirit will raise him up – and Death and Oblivion will then conduct him to a black barge with a single oar that will carry him away.

I see no evidence that it's designed to be a downer. Death himself will end the evening with a new wardrobe, a "resplendent raiment, from which all shadow of gloom has disappeared," and will ultimately represent the realms of mystery and the unknown, while his sister spirits will point the path to the future in a grand, electrically enhanced, finale of movement, color, and music. You may walk away remembering the closing verses of the specially composed Hymn to Indiana:

**Arise! Firm! True!
Thy strength renew!
God prosper thy gages
To serve the coming ages!
To Heaven raise thy star-crowned head,
Superb Indiana!
Thy future to glory wed
Through toil! Praise God! Hosanna!**

The overall Centennial was intended to be something special, and we should note that beyond striking public programming, it produced achievements that we can still encounter. Many of us have used the collections, and enjoyed the decorations, of the State Library. Most have visited Indiana' state park and forest systems, that owed much of their initial impetus to publicity and planning conducted in the name of the Centennial. All of us have been touched by the powerful spirit of boosterism that helped to create the event, and undoubtedly drew added strength from it. I wish I could have watched

the closing Pageant segment during which an automobile from every manufacturer active in the state in that year had driven across the pageant grounds. Most important, the centennial told a story about Hoosiers that has played a powerful role in shaping the way we study, teach, and present the state. Our state flag is somewhat different from the new state flag of 1916, but like so many features of 1916, the past is recognizable in the present.

Being trained as an academic historian, I am always encouraged to try to put events into their larger contexts. We can certainly do so here. Back away just a step or two, and you see yourself in 1916 in the middle of what we now call the Progressive Era. Citizens of all stripes saw an improved material world powered by electricity and providing greater consumer choices, an improved medical world attentive to public health and sanitation, an improved social world driven by city planning and humane public policy, and an improved cultural world with better schools teaching a curriculum that enriched as well as informed. No wonder so many politicians of both parties liked to apply the label to themselves. Look at the centennial's target audiences, or the pageant's stories and symbols, and you see progress writ large.

Look more closely at the pageant's performers and audiences and you see another likely context. Clearly, Hoosiers enjoyed both attending and participating in those highly visible community events. They enjoyed, understood, and expected theatrical effects – and many communities were experiencing those expectations – sometimes in unexpected, and even troubling, ways. Consider one of the most theatrical of all local movements of that , the Ku Klux Klan. Today, of course, we see it mainly

through the eyes of the civil rights movement of the 1960s: men motivated by racism. Many in the 1920s would have objected: not because they thought more highly of the Klan's motives, but because they would also see men motivated by anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and hostility to just about every hyphenated group (such as German-Americans) that you can mention. The Klan, as I tell my students, was an equal opportunity hater. But what sets the Klan apart in the 1920s is their success. Not a fringe crowd of redneck reactionaries, they entered the political mainstream and for a time came close to their boast of being the law in Indiana. Where did that support come from? Many say it arose from voters alarmed by the appearance of "the other," and portray those target groups as recent immigrants who spurred the fear. But if we look for a specific moment of creation, we know that the modern Klan owed its 1915 resuscitation to a popular entertainment, the movie: Birth of a Nation.

And if you look at the 1916 centennial, who are the voices of progress triumphing over if not the "other:" red men, English men, southern men, drinking men. George Gallup didn't perfect public opinion polling until the 1930s, but I suspect that if we could have measured the effect of the great pageants we would find that they pointed to attitudes of community solidarity that the Klan effectively tapped for its own, very different purposes.

If you look at the pageant, what do we see repeatedly if not heavily costumed figures, often in flowing robes creating dramatic night time effects. You might even

carry it a step further, and think about that robed figure of death -- making harsh judgments of reward, punishment, and oblivion before an appreciative audience. I know it may trouble some to think of cross burning or lynching as a form of community theater, but anyone who has seen the expressions on the faces of community audience that Jim Madison has given us access to in his recent book on the 1930 Marion lynching might wonder if it, like the very different theater along White River, tapped a powerful chord of culture. Looking at public theatricality may, I am suggesting, give us tools to better look at that Hoosier world.

We may soon have additional opportunities to do that. In 2016 we'll experience an Indiana statehood bicentennial – there are already web pages filled with the suggestive plans of a new century. Many community organizers are about to ask for our involvement, distinguishing their celebratory programming from among a multitude of alternative activities vying for our attention. Let me close tonight with some advice – completely unsolicited -- for them.

I suggest they will want to include modern tales in their mix. The wonderful pageant I've been describing is as remote from us as the Battle of Tippecanoe or the Alexander Ralston plat of Indianapolis were from them. Pioneers, sadly, lack the popular charm they enjoyed in an earlier century; even many fourth graders find them boring. And, of course, the organizers will need to find new ways to tell the story – ways that excite creative talents of new forms of media in the ways pageants did a century ago.

There is a large support base out there that can be approached. Indiana, especially here in Indianapolis, has developed a rich local arts culture during my lifetime, as you can tell from the pages of our weekly entertainment papers. That arts culture has been a significant factor in ending the sense of boredom and inertia that an earlier generation of Hoosier writers loved to complain about. Finding ways to incorporate those local figures will, however, be more difficult than simply advertising their work – since many see themselves as part of a national, and not a regional, scene.

The same problem will come with financial sponsorship. Many national brand names, or at least their corporate PR departments, stand ready to put their logo on just about anything that isn't openly pornographic. But such sponsors create a real problem for a celebration that is supposed to proclaim the importance of local figures. As an author I have spent my entire career writing local history – and then trying to find a publisher who wasn't concerned about how it would sell in New York City. I'm not sure what would be distinctively Hoosier about a check from Starbucks: The Official Coffee of the Celebration.

Put in other terms, I suggest there will be some real problems with defining state identity. Modern market opinion surveys are very consistent in reminding us that modern consumers give their loyalties to individuals, brands, entertainers, groups, and teams – and not to the particular physical locality in which they currently, and often briefly, reside. Ask most people what they think about “those Hoosiers,” and they will discuss the sports

program at IU. Ask about Indiana, and you'll hear all about the lousy record of the Pacers. Ask about great men of Indiana, and you'll encounter such icons as Bobby Knight, Michael Jackson or John Cougar Mellencamp.

As part of the solution, I'd suggest the organizers take a leaf straight out of the 1916 pageant. Decide what great story, or stories, you are going to tell – and shamelessly use all of the groups I've alluded to above to tell those tales. Include the many achievements we've witnessed in our lifetimes, and like 1916, incorporate projects that would not end with a self-congratulatory program. We, as fans of literary ventures, might even offer our services to endeavors of that quality and vision. At the very least, we could show our flag.

George W. Geib

Indianapolis Literary Club Essay

February 7, 2011