

Looking Back to Look Ahead

As Indiana prepares for its bicentennial in 2016, two very different efforts are helping Hoosiers take stock and celebrate. One is encouraging students to see Indiana's history as part of the American story. The other is preserving forests, trails and wetlands so the people of Indiana can enjoy them in the next century and beyond.

Both projects are reminders that a milestone such as the state bicentennial offers more than commemoration. It's a call to engagement that strengthens communities and builds citizenship, says James H. Madison, a member of the Indiana Bicentennial Commission and the Thomas and Kathryn Miller Professor Emeritus of History at Indiana University.

"The bicentennial is a time to stop and think, to look back over 200 years and consider where we came from and who came before us. What pathways did they create that still bind us? To think about our present. Where are we now?" Madison says, "And how does all of that help us consider another important question: Where do we want to go?"

One answer: Preserve and protect

Indiana's natural wonders for years to come. During his final state of the state address in 2012, former Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels unveiled the Bicentennial



Nature Trust (BNT), seeding the project with \$20 million in state funds. BNT is helping Indiana purchase thousands of acres of forests, prairies, trails and wetlands so that they can become protected public land. In 2012, Lilly Endowment added to the initiative with a \$10 million grant to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Protecting the land

The Department of Natural Resources is using the combined \$30 million fund to

secure lands that will be protected from development in perpetuity for the enjoyment of all Hoosiers, according to Mark Becker, BNT's program director.

As of March 1, 2016, BNT has completed 101 projects in 48 counties, consisting of 9,735 acres. They include trail corridors, forests, river buffers and dune habitats. Some lands were donated. Many properties were acquired through the BNT program below market value. Each purchase required a \$1-for-\$1 match from other donors, including many individuals and local community foundations.

"The match has encouraged partnership and the leveraging of the fund as much as possible, but it also connects to these very strong community foundations," Becker says. "With many of the community foundations, conservation is a top priority."

Several projects are adjacent to existing city or county parks, reflecting a distinctive civic pride, Becker adds. Local citizens identified these places as important to their communities, he says, because they believe preserving them will make their town or county stronger.

A gift to the people

As BNT marks the state bicentennial, it invites appreciation for how Indiana commemorated its centennial in 1916. That's when Indiana's state park system was born. It, too, was a gift to the people of Indiana and has become one of the strongest state park systems in the nation. The first two parks – McCormick's Creek and Turkey Run – were the result of philanthropy. Indianapolis businessman Richard Lieber was inspired by the national parks movement, which led to the creation of the National Park Service, also in 1916. "He approached state officials with the idea of creating a state park," says Becker. "They said, 'Great idea. We will run it, but you have to go buy the land.' He raised private capital to make it happen. And at the bicentennial the people of Indiana are doing it again through the nature trust."

Indiana's commitment to state parks and other natural places – a century ago and today – shows how the state's history can illuminate a larger story that includes a people's hopes for the future, says Madison. It's one of many perspectives he writes about in *Hoosiers and the American Story*, a lively textbook designed for Indiana middle- and high-school students. The book includes the story of Indiana's natural spaces, including the

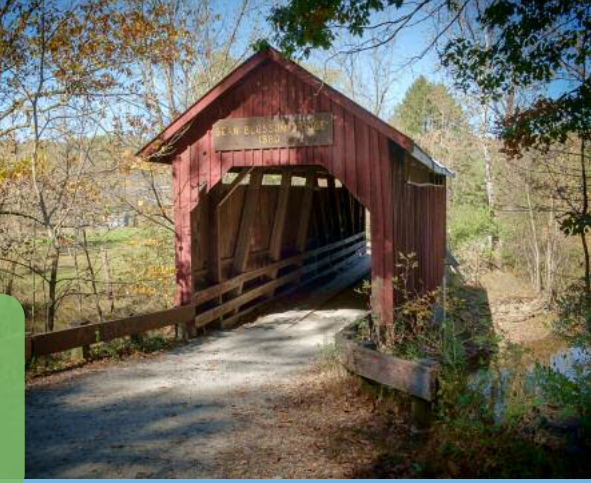
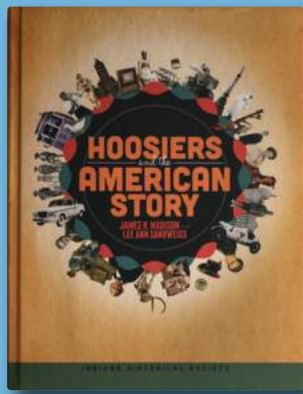
development of the parks system. Madison quotes Lieber in 1928:

"(The parks) are rich storehouses of memories and reveries. They are guides and counsels to the weary and faltering in spirit. They are bearers of wonderful tales to him who will still listen; a solace to the aged and an inspiration to the young."

Funded through a 2013 Endowment grant to the Indiana Historical Society, the book, which includes hundreds of images from the Historical Society's archives, was co-authored by Bloomington writer Lee Ann Sandweiss.

Indiana Historical Society President and CEO John A. Herbst commissioned the book to help teachers include the Indiana story as they teach American history. "That American history happened in their own backyards is a good thing for young Hoosiers to know as they take their place as citizens who must be engaged in the political process and make wise decisions now that will affect their future," Herbst writes in a foreword to the book.

So when an eighth grader is studying 19th century urbanization, she can learn how industrialization and immigration affected Indiana's strong agrarian identity and gave rise to cities such as Indianapolis and Gary. An 11th grader learning about the labor movement in America can see the story unfold in the lives of women workers and child labor in



Indiana at the turn of the 20th century and discover how unions responded.

Fresh take on history

More than 45,000 copies of the book have been distributed to classrooms across the state – free to any teacher of grades 8-12. A free digital version is available through the Historical Society's website. In addition, Indiana teachers are taking part in free workshops about using the book, also funded through the grant, so they can learn fresh ways to make Indiana and U.S. history more vivid to their students. Since November 2015, Madison and staff at the Historical Society have presented the workshops in communities across Indiana. More than 1,000 teachers are expected to be reached through the workshops. "We are striving to make the U.S. story local. When students can identify with something they learn in class and connect personal experience with an event or a place, then they are much more likely to pay attention and follow up and explore," Madison says. "The ultimate objective is to open students' minds and encourage curiosity so they can see that they are agents in the Indiana story and in the American story that is yet to come."



The Bicentennial Nature Trust has preserved nearly 9,800 acres so far, including a parcel along Sugar Creek near Turkey Run State Park in Parke County (opposite) and Trevlac Nature Preserve in Brown County (above). The Trust is celebrating Indiana's bicentennial by preserving natural places for the next century and beyond.