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New Deal Projects in Indiana

Government is competent when all who compose it work as trustees for the whole people.

— Franklin Delano Roosevelt, second presidential Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt responded to the Great Depression by creating major federal programs designed to put unemployed Americans to work, modernize the nation's infrastructure, and revive the economy. For Hoosiers hit hard by the depression, one of the FDR administration's most visible initiatives was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which provided jobs for the unemployed.

The WPA began to operate in Indiana in July 1935. By October, nearly 75,000 Hoosiers were on its employment rolls. Between 1935 and 1940, the percentage of Indiana residents working on WPA projects was considerably higher than the national average. The majority of Hoosiers working for the WPA built infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and sewers. Others worked on public buildings and recreational facilities. Nearly every Indiana community enjoyed some physical evidence of the program. The WPA also hired artists and writers to document and create tributes to Hoosier culture that the general public could enjoy and are still enjoying today.

Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State

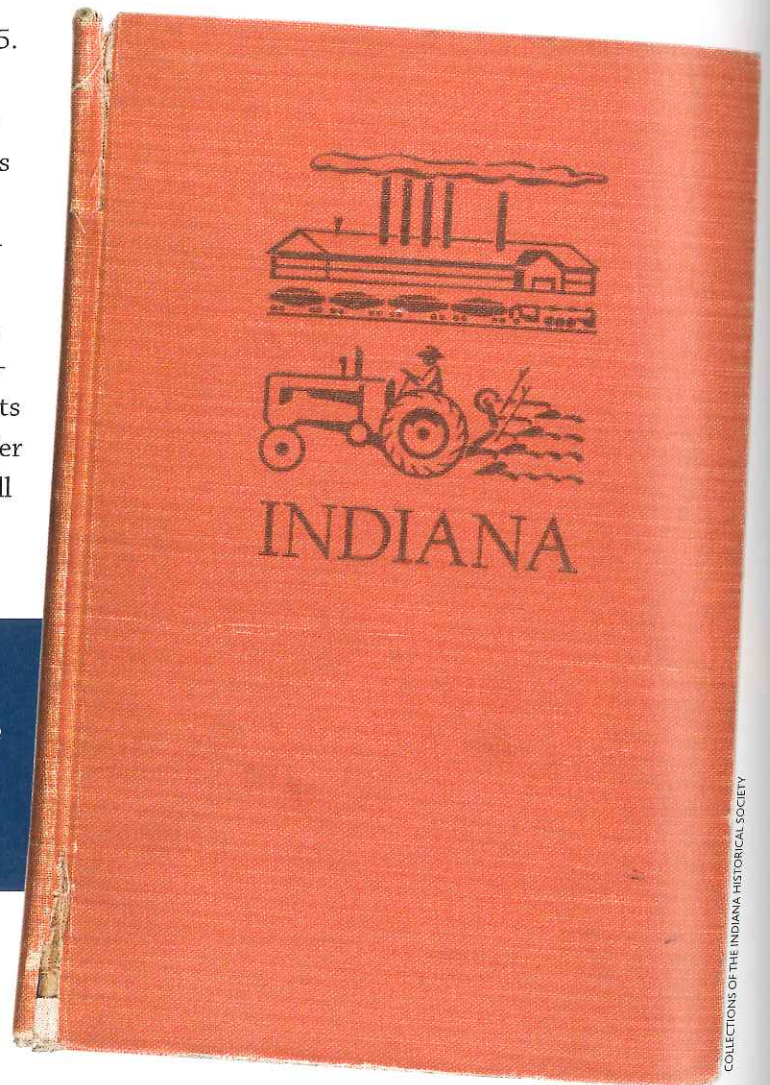
The cover of *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, written by Hoosiers employed in the Federal Writers' Project and published by Oxford University Press in 1941

Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State

Every Hoosier believes that Indiana has made a great contribution to culture in the United States, and that the story of this peculiarly distinctive State is worthy of the closest scrutiny by all Americans.

— Ralph N. Tirey, "Foreword" to *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State* (1941)

One white collar WPA program was the Federal Writers' Project, which employed writers in each state to produce a comprehensive book on that state's unique culture and history. These volumes, produced between 1935 and 1943, became part of the American Guide Series. Hundreds of Hoosiers from all walks of life worked on the book—historians, sociologists, novelists, librarians, naturalists, geographers, photographers, college and university presidents, and public administrators. In 1939 oversight of the Guide Series



shifted from the federal government to the states. Indiana State Teachers College, now Indiana State University in Terre Haute, sponsored *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, which first appeared in 1941.

Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State offers a window through which to view Indiana in the 1930s. It remains an invaluable primary source for today's historians, teachers, students, and the general public. The original edition was about 550 pages long and included dozens of historic and then-contemporary images, as well as a state map. In Part One, "Indiana's Background," the editors provide succinct summaries of general topics, including Indiana's natural setting and archaeology, Indian tribes, history, agriculture, industry and labor, education, media, folklore, and the arts. Part Two covers fourteen "principal cities"—Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, Whiting, Corydon, Evansville, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Muncie, New Albany, New Harmony, South Bend, Terre Haute, and Vincennes. Part Three contains twenty driving tours that cover sites of interest across the entire state.

Interviews with Former Slaves

"I am 110 years old; my birth is recorded in the slave book. I have good health, fairly good eyesight, and a good memory, all of which I say is because of my love for God."

— Rosaline Rogers, Indianapolis resident, December 29, 1937

The WPA Federal Writers' Project saved a remarkable piece of history when fieldworkers interviewed former slaves. The freed slaves who told their stories in the Indiana interviews had been held in slavery in any of eleven other states. While some of the former slaves interviewed had gone on to successful lives in Indiana as ministers or teachers and one as a doctor, many ex-slaves lived in poverty. Writers' Project interviewers spoke with sixty-two former slaves in Indiana between 1936 and 1939; the interview transcripts are located with other Indiana Federal Writers' Project files in the collections of the Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University, and many are published in a recent book by Ronald L. Baker.



Former Slave Mary Crane

When this photo was taken, Mary Crane was 82 years old and living in Mitchell, Indiana. She was born into slavery and was one of many former slaves interviewed as part of the WPA Federal Writers' Project between 1936 and 1939.

New Deal Recreational Landmarks and State Parks

"Our parks and preserves are not mere picnicking places. They 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 listen; a solace to the aged and an inspiration to the young."

— Richard Lieber, director of the Department of Conservation, 1928

Hoosiers love their state parks, which had their origins in Indiana's centennial celebration in 1916. There were twelve state parks by 1933, and in the following decades, the state continued to add new parks to its state park system. In 1930 total state park attendance was nearly half a million people.

A decade later attendance had more than doubled. In the years since, generations have enjoyed the park improvements and recreational facilities created by the New Deal. The parks as we know them today owe a great deal to the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC),

a program that put unemployed young men to work building recreational structures such as cabins, picnic tables, shelters, saddle barns, hiking trails, band shells, and swimming pools at state parks and other public recreational sites. CCC camps, supported by Governor



GIFT OF MAIYA CHUBB, INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



GIFT OF GEORGE THOMAS GIFFORD, INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Civilian Conservation Corps

These photographs depict life at segregated Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps in Worthington and Corydon, Indiana, and come from photo albums of former CCC workers. Young men struggling to find jobs came from across the country to build infrastructure throughout Indiana, often in natural areas such as the Harrison County State Forest. Some could also gain an education and receive high school diplomas if they had not yet graduated. CCC workers constructed the camps they lived in, as well as roads, bridges, and park structures.

Paul V. McNutt and the state's Democratic legislature, emerged in Indiana shortly after Roosevelt instituted the program in 1933.

Indiana's first CCC camp was located in Morgan–Monroe State Forest. Camps soon sprang up in Spring Mill, Lincoln, Turkey Run, McCormick's Creek, and Indiana Dunes State Parks. Each camp had approximately two hundred male workers living in racially segregated accommodations. The workers used native materials such as timber and split rock to build handsome, solid structures, many of which are still in use today. Among the finest are Lower Shelter at Brown County State Park, Pokagon's CCC Shelter, and the saddle barn at Clifty Falls.

CCC projects included protecting and restoring natural resources. Workers planted thousands of native trees, mostly black locust and white pine, to reforest parks such as Pokagon and Shakamak. New dams and spillways aided in flood control and created new bodies of water, especially welcome in southern Indiana where natural lakes were rare.

No new Indiana state parks were created during the New Deal era, but two Recreation Demonstration Areas (RDAs), at Winamac and Versailles, became state parks soon after. The New Deal created RDAs to show

the recreational value of land unsuitable for farming. For example, the Winamac area in Pulaski County was mostly marshy floodplain, and Versailles in Ripley County was primarily stony hills and wetlands. The areas became Tippecanoe River and Versailles State Parks, respectively.

During the New Deal, the state's Department of Conservation educated Hoosiers about responsible stewardship of natural resources and the conscientious enjoyment of state parks. In 1934 the department published the first issue of *Outdoor Indiana*. The magazine proved very popular; it was still in print in 2014 and even had its own Facebook page.

Murals of Indiana

Colonel Lieber's quick understanding of my desire to represent a social progression made it possible for me to transfer my original historical plan from the United States as a whole to the State of Indiana, the context of whose history is symbolical of the entire country.

— Thomas Hart Benton, "A Dream Fulfilled"
in *Indiana: A Hoosier History* (1933)

Starting in 1934 and 1935, respectively, the Section of Painting and Sculpture (a division of the U.S. Treasury renamed the Section of Fine Arts in




Suburban Street

The mural *Suburban Street* by New Deal artist Alan Tompkins, graces the walls of the post office in Broad Ripple, Indiana. Tompkins wrote that the mural depicted "the atmosphere of mutual trust and friendliness, of peace and security, that is the essence of life in a democracy" when he finished it in 1942.



Benton Mural

Thomas Hart Benton painted this mural, *Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press*, for Indiana's exhibit at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Some have objected to depicting the Klan with their burning cross and American flag, but Benton's panel actually condemns the Klan and celebrates, in the foreground, a white nurse tending to an African American child and the press, which played a role in the Klan's downfall.



1938) and the Federal Art Project (FAP) put to work hundreds of artists who applied their talents to beautifying public buildings. Many public buildings, especially post offices in Indiana, contain beautiful murals created by these programs. These remarkable murals depict scenes from Indiana history and Hoosiers engaged in daily activities. Attica's post office mural, *Trek of the Covered Wagons to Indiana* by Reva Jackman, shows pioneers seeking their new home. *Gas City in Boom Days*, painted on the wall of that town's post office by William A. Dolwick in 1939, illustrates a prosperous time during the natural gas boom of the 1890s. In *Indiana Farm—Sunday Afternoon*, painted by Alan Tompkins in 1938 and mounted on the walls of the North Manchester post office, a Hoosier family relaxes outside on their day of rest.

One of the New Deal era public mural projects stirred major controversy—Thomas Hart Benton's Indiana Murals. Not directly part of the FAP, the murals were commissioned by Richard Lieber, director of Indiana's Department of Conservation, for the state's exhibit at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Lieber granted Missouri-born Benton com-

plete artistic control for his ambitious plan to depict "The Social History of Indiana" from "the Savage Indians to the present days of our machine culture"—with one exception. Lieber questioned Benton's inclusion of a Ku Klux Klan rally in a panel titled "Parks, the Circus, the Klan, the Press," which illustrates scenes of Hoosier life in the 1920s. Benton insisted that the Klan's rise and fall was significant and needed to be included. His wishes prevailed. Controversy over the "KKK mural" continues to this day.

In 1938 Governor M. Clifford Townsend presented Benton's Indiana murals as a gift to Indiana University after IU President Herman B Wells expressed an interest in them. Today, they grace the walls of three buildings on the Bloomington campus and are seen daily by the people they represent—the men, women, and children of Indiana.

Many New Deal era works of art have been restored, but sadly others have not. In towns and cities throughout the state, Hoosiers should be on the lookout for amazing work of 1930s public art the next time they go to buy stamps or mail a package.