Book Reviews


The ability of Hoosiers to incorporate contradictory elements into a distinctive regional culture has long fascinated observers. At least since Meredith Nicholson's turn-of-the-century study, *The Hoosiers*, every generation has attempted to place Indiana in its proper contexts. Traditionally, most of these attempts have been literary in character. But recently we have enjoyed a number of fresh insights made possible through the use of non-traditional methods and new sources. Together they have contributed substantially to the current revival of interest in American regionalism.

The Hoover-Rodman volume is an intriguing example of many of the possibilities and some of the problems inherent in one of these approaches, the use of the visual record. With over nine hundred illustrations it attempts to capture the elusive spirit of the nineteenth state from prehistory to the present. Drawing primarily upon a dozen major library and archival collections, while adding a few elements from smaller private holdings, the book explores the range of Indiana's pictorial record.

Compelling individual illustrations abound. A group portrait of pottery workers at Cannelton, where bearded patriarchs mingle with bemused apprentices, speaks eloquently of the transition in lifestyles. Photos of the 1940 and 1953 Indiana University basketball teams say more than many words about the comparative impact of depression and prosperity upon youth. And stark vistas of farms and crossroads allow the isolation of an earlier rural world to emerge forcefully.

The dust jacket blurb presents the volume as a "family portrait," and the illustrations indeed show a preference for group scenes illustrating all manner of work and play. Some examples of Indiana art supplement the early chapters, and a few cartoons are interspersed throughout. But this is primarily a photographic record. Perhaps for budget reasons, almost all of the illustrations are in black and white: that is a bit of a disappointment, especially given the promise held forth by the frontispiece, a color reproduction of Theodore Groll's famous Indianapolis street scene. Reproduction quality is high, although in half a dozen places the battered condition of an original is reflected in its copy.
Hoover complements the illustrations with a narrative text strong in economic and social commentary. Some readers will quarrel with his definition (p. 64) of a Hoosier as a "rough countryman," but most will enjoy his remarkable powers of description and compression. Compression implies selection, and selectivity here is quite good. The most remarkable omission in the text is the history of the visual record itself. By their skill, artists and photographers shaped this pictorial imagery in both conscious and unconscious ways. It would be fascinating to learn more of these people so that we might know how their visions of Hoosiers and the Hoosier experience helped to shape our own. Knowing more of them might also help explain the curious lack of portraits of women, immigrants, and minorities in several chapters.

Hoover's best chapters, as well as the book's greatest emphasis, lie in the years between 1880 and 1925. There, as the state moves from an agrarian to an industrial base, the author offers an excellent definition of the changing sense of "place" within Indiana. Surveys of this type are notoriously prone to minor errors, but (apart from advancing Charlie Halleck's first congressional victory from 1935 to 1932) this book is remarkably free of them. Hoover and Rodman, in short, offer an absorbing introduction to a lively topic, encouraging us to reinterpret our past by viewing it once more.

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George W. Geib


This slender volume, well illustrated and handsome in appearance, is far more than a catalogue for an anniversary exhibit. It does indeed serve to identify and explain the thirty-seven items featured by the Indiana Historical Society in its 150th birthday exhibition and to illustrate twenty-one of them, two in color. More important in a longer view, it demonstrates once again just how rich the Society's holdings are for everyone interested in the history of Indiana and the Old Northwest.

From Samuel de Champlain's Voyages (Paris, 1619) to Thomas Say's American Conchology (New Harmony, 1830-1838)—here are some of the most important books, maps, and