THE WABASH RIVER AT VINCENNES

Book Reviews


Richard S. Simons, vice-president of the Indiana Historical Society and a contributor to the *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, knows his Hoosier waterfronts. In this book he covers all thirty of them more than adequately with accounts of life along the rivershores from prehistoric times until present-day concerns with steel and natural gas and corn.

In the front of the book a map displays Indiana's rivers in their intricate relations to each other. Thereafter the same map is repeated as a preface to each of eleven sections, but with only those rivers on it that are to be immediately discussed. Thus, the reader knows at once where he is and better understands the titles that follow: “Rivers of the Indians,” “Highways of Settlement,” and “Wilderness Rivers,” for example. Thus, too, lesser known rivers are located, as in the case of the Anderson, which probably only its neighbors and Lincoln buffs can identify.

Quite properly, the author begins with the Wabash and gives it its own separate section under the title “The Essence of Indiana.” (Quite justly, however, he later allots the same number of pages to the Ohio River as to the Wabash, although the Ohio belongs to other states as well as to Indiana and even combined with its Hoosier tributaries before it reaches the Wabash—the Anderson, the Blue, and the Whitewater—its valley does not cover Indiana so extensively as the Wabash Valley.) In the first dozen pages of Simons's book is a condensed account of the geology, geography, demography, and history of the rich Wabash Valley from its prehistoric origins in a torrent of Lake Erie waters to its current quieter meanderings through three postglacial areas. From the Wabash River's modern source in western Ohio to its mouth below Mount Vernon, Simons takes readers past the sites of Fort Recovery, Tippecanoe Battlefield, Fort Vincennes, and old New Harmony and briefly tells the story of each, with little histories of the Wabash and Erie Canal, the Wabash “Cannonball,” the world's first electrically lighted streets in the town of Wabash, the circuses of Peru, and the universities along the way.

These things he does also with the other rivers of the book. The story of the Eel (north)—there are two Eels—is largely the story of the Little Turtle. The story of the St. Joseph (of the Maumee)—there are two St. Josephs also, as well as two Blues, the Blue
GEORGE ADE

Courtesy Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
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and the Big Blue—is the story of Johnny Appleseed. To the Mississinewa belong the twentieth-century composer Cole Porter and the eighteenth-century captive of the Indians Frances Slocum, alongside other notables of song and story. Of the Fawn River the author seems to be saying that it belongs to Bill Scifres, outdoors editor of the Indianapolis Star, who knows good fishing bayous in the Fawn that he has never told his best friends about.

Because of the planning of the book’s format and the beautiful photographs taken by several photographers including the author, credit should be given to Sharon Sklar, the book and jacket designer, and to Jane Rodman, the editor.

Indiana University, Bloomington

William E. Wilson


This edition is the first comprehensive collection of George Ade’s work in forty years, and it does a thorough job of displaying Ade’s versatility and range. It includes samplings of Ade’s famous fables in slang, his short stories and plays, his essays and his verses and songs, and a selection of his letters. This collection displays Ade’s sharp consciousness of the centrality of cultural change in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century America and the pressures and pretensions that this change called up. In his famous fables, for example, Ade observes the rise of a new moneyed class. He pokes fun at both the culture of consumption and the consumption of “culture” which defined that class of people whose ambition is matched by their awkwardness as they take advantage of their new leisure to travel and to cultivate the arts. The promise of upward mobility fuels even the doomed, pathetic exertions of the working class, as in “The Fable of Sister Mae, Who Did As Well As Could Be Expected” (1899): “She was determined to break into Society if she had to use an Ax” (p. 4).

In particular, Ade demonstrates the ambiguities of urbanization and urbanism during this transitional period. Stories like “The Alfalfa European Hotel” (1899) and “Effie Whittlesy” (1903) dramatize a Chicago whose population was increasing exponentially while it remained, at the same time, essentially a large village where the line between rural classlessness and urban class consciousness was tenuously drawn. This Chicago felt to Ade still very much in process, as he marvelled at Chicago’s new neighborhoods and diversity and at the extraordinary pace of