

Editor's Note

Across from the desk at which I write these words of introduction there stands a tall bookcase, its shelves nearly filled with ninety-eight volumes—almost four hundred issues—of one of the nation's oldest continuously published historical journals: the *Indiana Magazine of History*.

As the IMH approaches its centennial, its accomplishment of consistently providing readers with interesting historical material at a quarterly pace seems rather historic in itself. That the magazine has done so attests to many things: to its dedicated staff, to the support and cooperation of Indiana University and the Indiana Historical Society, to the fine writers who have shared their work with readers and scholars around the state and across the globe, and to a line of distinguished editors, including most recently Bernard Sheehan, whose historical insight and acute judgment have left their mark on these pages in a way that will not be forgotten.

And yet, as even a glance at the covers of the volumes lining my bookcase makes clear, this consistency has left room for change. Within the boundaries set by its regional focus and its scholarly standards, this journal has, not surprisingly, evolved in its look and content, and it will continue to do so. Some fraction of that change, perhaps, reflects the individuals who have sat in this chair and stared at that tall bookcase before me. Like them, I am the temporary steward of a valued document with a past and future that extend far beyond my own term. But like them, too, I come with preferences and expectations that will color the material that appears on these pages—sometimes in ways that I can anticipate but more often, I suspect, in ways that I cannot.

It may or may not matter, then, that I am a midwesterner—although not an Indianan—and that the history, culture, and politics of this state therefore feel to me familiar in some respects, new in most others. (If nothing else, this means that I will expect each issue to be as instructive to me as it is to any reader.) The fact that I come to this desk from a career divided between university teaching and professional endeavors sometimes lumped together under the rubric of “public history”—historic preservation and, more recently, museum work—may in some way leave its mark on the journal's content, as well: I will confess to bringing with me an interest in the great variety of ways in which people create, acquire, and use historical knowledge in their daily lives.

Yet far more important to the IMH's future character will be the changing times in which it appears. Historical writing arises from the intersection of contemporary concerns with the available record of the past, both of which are forever changing, and therefore reflects the circumstances of its making as much as it does the times on which it focuses.

Our own time seems an exceptionally good one for people interested in rethinking the topics and techniques of history. Recent

research has confirmed the evidence, suggested anecdotally by book sales and museum attendance figures, that Americans today are actively applying and assessing what they learn of the past.¹ In part, this flurry of activity reflects the hard-won opening up of historical practice to new, and sometimes disputed, points of view. The intellectual journey within the historical profession itself, in pursuit of an objective and scientific perspective from which to view the past, has led in the last century not to a stately overlook but onto the platform of a moving train, forever shifting its view of what lies behind and what ahead. Drawing as much from Faulkner and Einstein as from Macaulay or Gibbon, historians have been forced to face what most people already recognized from everyday experience: that past forever shapes present and present inevitably colors past. Like one of Indiana's unlikelier literary heroes, Kurt Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim, we may find the experience of coming "unstuck in time" an unsettling prospect; yet at some level we know that it provides us with the rare moments of clarity and perspective that help us to make sense of our lives.²

The interplay of changing times with changing historical perspectives is especially well represented in the pages of this long-lived journal. When the brilliant and energetic editor George Cottman established the IMH in 1905, he dedicated it simply to "the preservation of local history"—that is, to the task of rescuing from oblivion the facts that seemed to be disappearing under the relentless pressure of modernization in this fast-growing state. Since then, the magazine's steady effort to counter what Cottman later called, in typically blunt fashion, Indianans' "universal stupid indifference"³ to their own past has itself changed with time. The IMH has grown less deferential to the limiting powers of the state's political boundaries, more apt to apply a regional or national perspective to events taking place within Indiana. Articles are, as a rule, more interpretive and less descriptive or antiquarian in their focus. The lives of women, of African Americans, of countless Hoosiers whose existence went little-remarked in their own time have been revealed to a degree that early writers were unwilling or unable to attain. And while the journal has heeded longtime editor Donald Carmony's warning against a "rootless absorption with so-called contemporary history," the problems of the day have, in these and other ways, continued to influence the manner in which IMH contributors and editors frame their study of the past.⁴

¹See David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998).

²Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five, or, the Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death* (New York, 1968), 23.

³George S. Cottman, "The Indiana Magazine of History: A Retrospect," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXV(December 1929), 282.

⁴Donald Carmony, "Editor's Pages," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LI (June 1955), 168.

That act of framing (of choosing a few facts from among many and highlighting their relationship to one another in a way that makes sense in the present) is essential to the historian's craft. Like science or religion, it suggests the possibility of logic within the personalized and seemingly random scale at which we experience life. Yet, as a look at the IMH's transformation from George Cottman's time to our own reveals, the historical frame itself changes from one generation to the next. As an editor, I consider it my responsibility not to suppress but to highlight the complexity of our continually shifting modes of historical explanation. The IMH will therefore examine not only the substance of past events but also the basic questions that arise from our thinking about them: How do we know what we know of the thoughts and intentions of others who came before us? Why do we care so much about what happened on the land, or in the homes, that we occupy today? Such questions, embedded within everything that the journal has ever published, perhaps deserve a fuller airing in their own right as we seek, like Indianans of a century ago, to frame a point of view on the past that also serves to anchor us in a time of tremendous change.

History cannot be forced to be "useful" in this way, but at its best, it often becomes so. The IMH exists to provide readers around the state and beyond not just with new stories of bygone lives, but ultimately with a deeper understanding of what it means to be Indianans, midwesterners, Americans, citizens of the world. In that goal, the journal has much to gain from others considering the same question. Remaining firmly rooted in the practice of history, we may nevertheless find reason in the years ahead to draw more than we have on the work of scientists, artists, journalists, and other writers whose insights—rooted perhaps in different ways of seeing or couched in different modes of expression—still promise to help us understand why this state looks as it does, and how we became who we are.

All of these ideas are meant to suggest a structure for thinking about continuity and change, not a specific agenda for action. While broad ideas can set the journal on a general course, its particular stops along the way will depend just as much on the day-to-day work at hand: articles to read, books to review, letters to answer. This magazine cannot exist without remaining responsive to the interests of the readers for whom it exists. We want to hear from you. The IMH website (<http://www.indiana.edu/~imaghist>), which already offers a partial index of the journal's contents and will be steadily expanded in the coming years, is one venue for increasing the contact between readers, writers, and editors. Like my predecessors, I also hope to travel extensively, learning firsthand about the ways in which historical activity bears itself out in individual communities, museums, and universities, and working to see that that vibrancy is reflected in the pages of this journal.

Through broad direction or particular exigency, the journal will change, as it always has. The bookcase across the room will grow heavier under its quarterly accumulation of new ideas, new discoveries, new inquiries into the history of this complicated, diverse region. Among those inquiries, I hope, will be some that have touched your life. But it will be for someone else, sitting at this desk long in the future, to judge better than I can just how well the IMH succeeded in framing a connection between past and future at the turn of a new and unpredictable century.

Eric Sandweiss