

Comment and News

Much good work has been done in the field of Indiana History, but a vast amount remains to be accomplished. The soil of the State formed a part of the French colonial empire. Falling into British hands, a brief but interesting interval elapsed before the jurisdiction of the new United States was established. It was after 1783, after 1800 indeed, that the geographic area of which Indiana forms a part, was colonized. Except in a political sense, the colonial period of the State's history did not end with the granting of statehood. The process of building a civilization where none had existed before went on from 1816 to 1850. In that period, Indiana was as truly a colony of the older portion of the United States as Virginia and Massachusetts had ever been of Great Britain, save in the matter of government. The colonial era of Indiana is rich in subjects that pertain to the upbuilding of religious, educational and economic life. Opportunities are open to those who have the talent and the patience, and who also are sufficiently interested, to prepare historical papers. There are, in addition, many biographical sketches still to be produced, while State and local party history is yet an inviting field.

The time is now ripe for a number of the older citizens of Indiana to consider the wisdom of giving to the public the history of the events and movements of which they know from personal experience. Museums pay high prices for tools, utensils, furniture and other articles that have become rare, because not collected while yet plentiful though passing out of use. The time to obtain wheat-cradles, dasher-churns and sawbucks is now. Soon these once useful and common things will be as scarce as flails and trundle-beds. For exactly the same reason, recollections or reminiscences falling within the years

from 1865 to 1900, have become very desirable and extremely valuable. Much important and interesting history is locked up in the memories of people who are approaching old age. A citizen who was mature enough to enter college when Lee surrendered at Appomattox is now eighty years of age. Those who were in the prime of life in 1900, at forty years of age, are now to-day nearing three score and ten. A vast amount of water has flowed under the bridge since the Civil War. In behalf of those who now fill up the public schools and the colleges of Indiana, and of those who will follow them, an appeal is here made for a number of narratives of an autobiographical character from the pens of people who helped to make history in the State between 1865 and 1900. If these contributions are not made soon, they will never be forthcoming.

It is not unusual for writers of autobiographies or reminiscences to delay too long. Human memories are treacherous at the best, and in many cases, the recollections of old men and women are very inaccurate. Writings of the character under consideration should by all means be undertaken before the memory becomes impaired. The individual who decides to reveal the valuable knowledge that will go to the grave with him if not written, should avoid telling too much. It is what he knows from personal observation and experience that constitutes the gold in whatever he may produce. The man who fought at Shiloh ought not to bring in the alloy of a vast amount of second hand information concerning all the campaigns of the West. He should tell only what he learned from his own activities and contacts, and record the events in which he had a share. No man when writing the history of his own community during his own life time is under any obligation to begin with the Garden of Eden, the fall of Rome, or the discovery of America.

An excellent and able man of one of the cities of northern Indiana, announced a few years before his death that he contemplated the writing of a history of the State. This was a sad decision. He had played an important part in local affairs for a quarter of a century and more. He knew a great deal about the politics of Indiana in his period, and especially of his own city and the area round about. He knew many men well.

He had sources to which he could go to check his recollections. He had a wonderful opportunity to write a reminiscence and give to the world much accurate information in regard to local and State party history. This he probably could have accomplished readily during his last years. The big treatise which he felt a call to produce, for the greater part of which he was unprepared, was not written. That he did not perform the simpler task, for which he was so well fitted, was a real calamity.

Many reminiscent sketches ought to be written and published by Hoosiers with adequate knowledge in hand, during the next few years. Some well informed Republican who was on the inside should write the story of the campaign of 1888 in Indiana. An honest and intelligent ex-saloon keeper from somewhere would do a real service were he to furnish a true story of the connections between the breweries, distilleries and saloons on the one side and the parties on the other. A frank narrative of the manipulation of the delegates before and during the meeting of the State Democratic Convention of 1908 by a knowing Democrat would be a refreshing contribution. Many interesting tales could be unfolded by experienced members of the General Assembly of past years who have no axes to grind. Former members of the State Board of Education could no doubt write interesting chapters that would throw light on the educational progress of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Newspaper men have unusual opportunities to write narratives that will enrich the history of Indiana. Business men who have achieved things worth while, or who have seen enterprises flourish and decay, have unlimited opportunities to contribute helpful sketches. Authors who recount personal experiences and who give estimates of their friends and rivals can never be expected to throw off all bias. They can, however, be honest and frank, they can avoid unduly eulogizing their friends, and they can refrain from exaggerating the failings of their enemies. To over-praise friendly associates and deny even the virtues of rivals are not the worst faults that can mark personal recollections. The direst possible thing that can befall the author of a reminiscent narrative is to get away from reality, to present a set of contemporaries who never existed and to write as history what he feels ought to have been true, instead of what he knows to have happened.

During the year 1928, the first three issues of the *Indiana Magazine of History* have each been mailed to subscribers some weeks late. For this, we are extremely sorry. The delays have been mainly due to changes in the editorial management. The present Editor indulges a strong hope that the current number may be ready for mailing before the Christmas holidays. The Business Manager invites correspondence from all subscribers who have not received all numbers of the Magazine to which they are entitled. We desire to keep the addresses of subscribers as nearly correct as possible, and ask that changes of address shall be promptly reported.

Dr. A. T. Volwiler of Wittenberg College is at work on a life of Benjamin Harrison. The biography will consist of a single volume which will be the result of several years of careful research. Before writing, Professor Volwiler aims to exhaust the available sources, both printed and manuscript. He plans to follow the biography with several volumes of correspondence. These volumes will be made up of the most significant and interesting letters included in the Harrison Papers in the Library of Congress with some from other important manuscript collections. As much time as the other duties of a college teacher would permit, has been given to the project during the past two years. Perhaps a fifth of the necessary labor has been performed. A preliminary account of the early life of President Harrison was read before the Indiana State Historical Society at the annual meeting of 1927. The work which Doctor Volwiler has under way, will be eagerly awaited in Indiana.

Corrections

My dear Doctor Coleman:

Inasmuch as I note you edited the March issue of the State Historical Magazine which I have just received, I am writing for the purpose of calling attention to an unintentional error which appeared in Mr. Cottman's interesting article on "Lincoln in Indianapolis."

In his preface Mr. Cottman says that "this speech and visit dropped wholly out of sight until last year, no historian or biographer, so far as I can find, making any mention of it."

By reason of the fact that last year my volume on "Lincoln and the Railroads," published by Dodd, Mead & Co., contained a reference to this