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Indiana's Cultural Heritage*

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Since your speaker is a philosopher and not an historian let us begin this discussion by establishing an understanding as to the sense in which we are to use the word history, as well as to what may be considered at least one of the most important functions of the study of history. History is not, as some might think, just records and documents that are stored in our libraries, nor relics that are housed in our museums. These are but the materials of history. Here it suits the purpose best to restrict the term history to that in which we are especially interested on this occasion by qualifying it with the word *living*. What, then, is living history? It is the knowledge or the consciousness which the people of the present generation of a commonwealth have of the total achievements of the generations which preceded them. It begins with an appreciation of the values that have been created and conserved by previous generations, and it reaches its full fruition in an enlightened understanding both of the detailed facts and of the unifying cultural trends which make up the prior stages in the evolution of the societal life in which one shares. History is social or cultural self-consciousness.

What specific uses does such knowledge have? Doubtless it has a number of practical values in addition to the intrinsic value which it shares with all other kinds of knowledge, but there is a highly paradoxical, specific function of historical studies which I wish especially to stress this evening. As citizens of the commonwealth of Indiana we have been buffeted by the boisterous waves of the tempestuous sea

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of events in the wider ocean of the post-war and depression era of human history until we have become nauseated by the shakings and deafened by the uproar of the mighty tumult. And now that we are in this condition, probably there is nothing that could be more restorative and energy-giving for us than the renewal of our vital connections with those past generations of our own people, who carved this great state out of the wilderness of the Old Northwest Territory, and who established here the institutions from which we have drawn our spiritual nourishment. But the only way we can renew these vital connections is by the study of Indiana history. Let us study this living history of our own people in order that we may strengthen ourselves for the arduous task of transmitting our institutions to the oncoming generation in such an unsullied form that our young people will be as grateful to us as we are to the generations from which we have received these cultural treasures. Let us study our past to gain perspective on the difficult situation with which we are confronted in our efforts to maintain and to enhance Indiana's cultural heritage.

How, then, shall we renew our vital connections with these past generations of our own people? What are the chief ways of approaching the previous stages in a genuine historical process? Three methods are well known, and each is of such a comparatively simple nature that any intelligent person can employ it to his own profit and to the benefit of the social order. Your Society (of Indiana Pioneers) is doubtless stimulating the use of all three of these methods, and it should continue so to do. Since each of these methods is individually and socially significant the employment of them should never be disparaged by the professional historian, even though he recognizes their inadequacy and the need of supplementing them with a more rigorous scientific method. Let us, then consider briefly each of these three simple methods as they may be applied to the study of Indiana history.

The genealogical method of studying our history traces the temporal development of a family, by showing how a common parentage branches out through inter-marriages of the children with those of other families, forming what is called a lineage. Much has already been done by individual members of many Indiana families to trace the lines of descent back to pioneer settlers, and then to the progenitors

of these pioneers in southern or eastern states or in foreign lands. Our Hoosier fondness for family reunions is being utilized to encourage genealogical studies of our numerous families. The newspapers of the state have rendered an invaluable service in publishing regular columns of genealogical material. It is of the utmost importance that additional data be gathered before time sweeps us so far beyond the pioneer days that we can no longer obtain the information required for dependable genealogies. The Institute of American Genealogy in Chicago is a clearing house for such data throughout the middle west, and the volumes of the *Compendium of American Genealogy* published by this Institute are a storehouse of information about Indiana families. New volumes will be published as soon as the materials can be assembled, and members of your Society would render a great service by sending the facts about their own family history to this Institute.

The antiquarian method of studying Indiana history is the tracing of the development of a local community from the time of the first white settlements down to the present, or down to the time when it passed out of existence. For unfortunatley modern industrial developments and shifts in population within the state have led to the destruction or to the serious diminishment of many communities which flourished during the early history of the state. The materials collected in connection with the celebration of Indiana's Centennial in 1916 are of almost priceless value in preserving a knowledge of our most interesting communities. The various local centennials, that are being celebrated throughout the state during the period through which we are now living, are especially significant expressions of the antiquarian method of studying history. Bar associations, medical societies, churches, schools, lodges, women's clubs, patriotic societies and other local organizations should be encouraged by your Society to prepare detailed histories of their respective groups in every community or county in the State. Your society should be as active as possible in stimulating the use of this antiquarian method, to the end that the valuable materials which exist in every community may be collected and preserved before they are destroyed by those who do not appreciate their value. Museums should be created in every important center to house antique objects, and all available

documents and manuscripts should be placed in our main libraries.

The chronological method of studying Indiana history records the significant political and economic events in the order in which they have occurred throughout the development of the state, weaving them together so that they tell the story of what has happened as white settlers pushed back the Indians and finally took complete possession of all their lands, gradually building up a new civilization. This method exaggerates conspicuous events and tends to ignore more obscure tendencies which prove later to be of overwhelming importance. However, the chronological record of what happens is significant, and your own Society, as well as the other Associations affiliated with your organization in promoting this annual conference, deserve great credit for the continuous stimulation which you are giving to this method of keeping a knowledge of our past alive in the present generation.

Nevertheless, important as are all of these methods and indispensable as are the materials gathered by them, no historian today would regard any one or all of them together as adequate. They merely provide the foundation for the application of the genuinely scientific historical method to the study of Indiana history, and that is the cultural method. It is now generally recognized that the total cultural development of a people is the true subject-matter of history, and that we do not, properly speaking, have the real history of any commonwealth until living individuals become conscious of the ways in which their cultural heritage has been produced and transmitted to them. Edward Eggleston was one of the first Indiana historians to stress this method. To quote Mr. Brook's account of Edward Eggleston, recently published in the *Indianapolis Star*: "His great ambition was to write a history dealing with life in the United States, to follow his concept of an ideal history, which was a record of the culture of a people, rather than a record of politics and war."¹ This is an especially significant fact in view of the use that has been made of Eggleston's novels to prove that Indiana was culturally backward; a thesis which needs closer examination.

Are we really guilty of begging the question when we

¹ *Indianapolis Star*, Dec. 6, 1937.

assume that Indiana has a cultural heritage? During the first century of her statehood, did she develop a culture of sufficient uniqueness and distinctiveness to have a history? Exactly this has been denied by many writers, some of whom are professional historians, and curiously enough they have used Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* to support this denial. It has actually been argued that the poor soil and the impoverished immigrants of the southern part of the state, and the wet lands and sparse settlements of the northern sector prevented the development of culture in Indiana, and made this State one of the most backward culturally among all the states of the union. Indiana has been condemned for having produced the freakish Hoosier type of individual, the backwoods greenhorn who is entirely lacking in culture. For more than a hundred years the prevailing opinion of Indiana among the citizens of the older states has been that she was decidedly backward culturally during the whole of the nineteenth century. If this is true such culture as she now possesses has been developed during the last thirty-seven years, and that cannot properly be called a cultural heritage because it is the creation of our own generation.

Many of you must at one time or another have met persons who had this low idea of your native State. But for the information of those who have not, let me quote two or three passages which are brutally frank expressions of this opinion. In the *Springfield Republican* of January 31, 1863, Indiana was referred to as "the meanest [state], after all, in the West, and one of the meanest in the whole free union." And the question was asked: "Why should it have more . . . ignorance and bad politics than any of its sisters?" This was the answer given: "Perhaps because it was settled, in a greater degree, by poor small whites and the small slaveholders of the South." It is significant that this blast was caused by Lincoln's appointing a native of Indiana to a lucrative position at Washington. A letter written by a settler to a relative back East defended Indiana against her reputation of being a benighted region, and "a little backwoods State whose inhabitants are green and outlandish." This discrediting idea of Indiana is presented in the famous book of Baynard Hall entitled, *The New Purchase*. In an article in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*,² from which the

²Richard L. Power, "Wet Lands and the Hoosier Stereotype," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (June, 1935), XXII, 33-48.

quotations above were taken, Dr. Richard L. Power argues that the absence of Yankee and foreign elements and the existence in Indiana of a static society produced a "grotesque Hoosier stereotype," such as is portrayed in our realistic literature. In the face of this widely held belief perhaps it is incumbent upon us to prove that Indiana does have a cultural heritage, and that the cultural method of studying history is applicable to the study of her history.

If we go back of the so-called Hoosier stereotype to the territorial period of our history, and inquire what the earliest beginnings of our cultural heritage were—and this we are constrained to do when we apply the cultural method to Indiana—we find an entirely different emphasis from that of Dr. Power. Without going into too much detail let me quote the judicious summary of Dr. Beverly W. Bond, Jr., as printed in the same *Review*.³ In his informative article, he writes:

A population had moved in which represented all the important sections of the Atlantic seaboard, as well as the settlements west of the Alleghenies. Mingling together in the Old Northwest these immigrants had founded an essentially American civilization that was a composite of customs and institutions from New England, from the Middle States, from the South and from the backwaads. . . . Economically . . . the Old Northwest had followed the agricultural and industrial example of the Middle States and New England. Culturally, too, the western settlers had patterned after these same guides, founding schools and universities that were destined to become the nuclei of a notable system of public education. Libraries, the long lists of books for sale, and the local newspapers were further evidence of the finer tastes of these immigrants from diverse sections, and similar ideals were reflected in the popularity of amateur dramatics and in the singing schools. Lastly, a strong religious influence had come into the daily lives of the pioneers as a force for law and order.

If so promising a beginning had been made in the territorial days, are we to believe that the influx of southern immigration, in the decades following the admission of the State to the union completely changed the trend?

Realistic literature, such as is exemplified in Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, instead of proving that Indiana had the kind of a culture depicted therein, really proves the opposite. People as culturally backward as are the characters in that book could not have produced such literature. To argue that all of Indiana's culture during the nineteenth

³ Beverly W. Bond, Jr., "Civilization Comes to the Old Northwest," *ibid.* (June, 1932), XIX, 8-29.

century was like that depicted in such a book is to ignore the author and his purpose in writing the book. Eggleston was a cultured man even though he was largely self-educated. The truth of the matter is that realistic literature is itself a form of cultural self-criticism. There are always two forces at work in every growing culture. One is the backward-pulling force that is a continual drag on progress, and the other is the forward-pushing force that is responsible for all that is genuinely creative. *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* is the description of the backward-pulling force in Indiana's culture, written by an author who was well aware of the presence of the other force. For Eggleston's own writings are the creative achievements of that forward-pushing force as it expressed itself through him as its instrument. And this is true of all realistic literature. In it a retrogressive tendency in a culture is being exposed by the author who always represents, or imagines that he represents, a superior and progressive tendency. The fact that the author is sometimes self-deceived does not nullify the fact that all such literature can rightly be characterized as cultural self-criticism. And only a highly developed culture can criticise itself, since such a culture is alone capable of producing its own critics.

The broad extent of Indiana's cultural heritage can perhaps be indicated best by stating and briefly elaborating three different interpretations of what it is. Even though these necessarily overlap, each emphasizes a somewhat different phase or aspect of the cultural development of the commonwealth.

The biographical interpretation conceives of culture as the possession and the creative achievements of the gifted and cultivated persons who have made their abode in Indiana. The state has had her fair share of this kind of individuals during the span of her existence, as a cursory examination of *Who's Who in America* and of other directories of men of renown, and, more particularly, of the *Dictionary of American Biography*, will show. It would take too long even to mention the names of the distinguished men and women who have made significant contributions to our culture. Many of these were native-born citizens, others came here as traders, missionaries, educators, manufacturers, and settlers. We shall never possess an adequate comprehension of our cul-

tural heritage until authoritative biographies of these gifted persons are readily available. A *Dictionary of Indiana Biography* would be an extremely useful compilation in the furtherance of this goal. I have read with deep interest and with much profit Mr. Charles N. Thompson's recently published *Sons of the Wilderness*. It is a model of the biographical studies we need for every man and woman who has made significant contributions to our culture. What Mr. Thompson has done for the two Conner brothers should be done for any other of the pioneers who gave unstintingly of their time and energy to establish civilization in the wilderness to which they came. The documents are available, thanks to the work of salvaging them in which the federal government has been engaged and to the volumes of the *Indiana Historical Collection*. The time is ripe for such an outpouring of biographies of our leading educated pioneers as will forever silence those who speak or write disparagingly of Indiana's culture during the first century of her existence.

The institutional interpretation of culture thinks of it as embodied in various organizations and institutions rather than as the possession of gifted individuals. In this sense it is never merely imported from elsewhere, it is perforce indigenous. More important from the standpoint of permanence than the cultured persons who have lived in Indiana are the various organizations and forms in which our growing culture has embodied itself. Many of our existing cultural institutions go back to the very earliest settlements, for, as soon as a community was established, they began to germinate. Churches were organized, schools were started, libraries were assembled, literally, musical and art societies were formed, newspapers were published, in fact all kinds of group cultural activities were begun. Some of the organizations that were originally created have disappeared, but even these have left their influence on our culture. We need adequate histories of literature, of science, of religion, of education, of technology, of law, of music, and of fine art in Indiana—histories which will winnow the wheat from the chaff of our achievements in each of these realms of culture, so that our youths may read the story and learn all that our commonwealth has created in the way of cultural institutions. It will then become abundantly clear that Indiana was not quite as mean a commonwealth as the writer in the Spring-

field *Republican* imagined. Valuable informative articles have been contributed to the *Indiana Magazine of History*, to the *Publications of the Indiana Historical Society*, and to other periodical publications, as well as to the feature sections of our metropolitan newspapers, dealing with various aspects of our institutionalized culture. Much more needs to be done to complete this interpretation of Indiana's cultural heritage.

For example, in the preparation of this address, an interesting discovery was made about the institutional aspect of Indiana's culture. When your speaker served as Chairman of the W. T. Harris Centennial Committee of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association, he learned that the first school for infants in the United States was started by a woman who was a primary teacher in the St. Louis schools, of which Mr. Harris was then superintendent. The success of this school led to the spread of kindergartens throughout the United States. Referring to these schools, Harper's *Encyclopedia of United States History* says that only five kindergarten schools existed in the United States prior to 1870. Indeed, this system of education was originated by the German educator F. Froebel in 1837, and such schools were little known in Germany until after 1849. But in reading about Robert Owen's settlement at New Harmony one learns that he had infant schools and that his critics dubbed them "infant prisons." His answer to these critics shows how great a man he was and how far he was in advance of his time. He wrote:

Examination will soon prove that all compassion on this head may be spared; unless it be supposed that a quarrelsome, squalid animal, pining in a garret, or fighting in a street, is in a better condition, moral and physical, than when removed to an airy room, and taught at once to play without dispute or selfishness, and to learn all of good that its tender age is capable of. . . . Can we doubt their being happier—can we doubt their being better under a gentle system of restraint, directed by a person fitted for the employment, and selected because so fitted?⁴

Here is conclusive proof that there were infants schools in New Harmony, Indiana, in 1825, which was at least thirty-five years earlier than the first kindergarten in St. Louis.

⁴ Quoted in the *Orbiston Society Record* (October 1, 1825), Vol. I, No. 9, p. 72, from Robert Owen's weekly newspaper published at New Harmony. The *Orbiston Society Record* is excessively rare, the copy in the Indiana University Library being one of three in the libraries of the entire United States, according to the Union List.

Lastly there is the interpretation of culture in terms of the various cultural groups that have settled in Indiana, the intermarriages among whom has produced the bulk of our present native-born population. Is it really true that we very soon developed a purely static society made up largely of poor white trash and of "hill-billies"? Certainly not. Few of the states of this union have had a more varied collection of pioneers than Indiana. Even before the state was admitted to the union, there were significant groups of French traders in the old French trading posts. Depauw University was founded by a man who came from this stock and so was Notre Dame University. In fact the Roman Catholic Church got its magnificent start in Indiana from the French Jesuit missionaries. Nobody knows how much the original deposit of French blood has meant to the cultural development of Indiana. Moreover it was increased by the settlement of French-speaking Swiss at Vevay.⁵ The first schools there and at Vincennes were conducted in the French language, and the French population was able to control the elections in Vincennes as late as 1850. Dare we minimize the contributions made to Indiana's cultural heritage by French cultural groups in the face of the fact that an unknown number of her very earliest settlers were French-speaking people?

Mr. John E. Iglehart of Evansville wrote a valuable article⁶ in which he sketched the contributions of the English settlers in Vanderburg County and at Princeton in Gibson County to our Indiana culture. In April, 1918, Mr. Morris Birkbeck brought over a ship load of immigrants and with them another ship load of high grade live stock. Other Englishmen followed them. But there were also many other Scotch, Irish, and English settlers besides those in southwestern Indiana. Of course we know more about those in the Evansville vicinity. For example, Mr. Whitewell, who accompanied Robert Owen to New Harmony, on returning to England on special business, in December, 1826, made the following statement:

Five communities were in operation at or near New Harmony in August last, three of these residing in the town, and forming a kind of federation, and two at the respective distances of half a

⁵ See Perret Dufour, *The Swiss Settlement of Switzerland County, Indiana (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XIII)*.

⁶ "The Coming of the English to Indiana and Their Neighbors," *Indiana Magazine of History* (June, 1919), XV, 89-178.

mile and one and a half miles, distinct and independent. There is another at twenty-five miles distance, and another formed by an English settler named Hale.⁷

All seven of these English groups came later than those mentioned by Mr. Igleheart. Dare we minimize the contributions of English settlers to Indiana's cultural heritage in the light of these and of other facts?

The German Rappites sold New Harmony to Robert Owen, but some of those who lived outside the colony remained in Vanderburg County, and Dr. William A. Fritsch, of Evansville, claims that the Germans who immigrated to Southern Indiana were induced to come by letters they received from these original Rappite settlers. Mr. Igleheart implies that the translation of Mr. Birkbeck's books into German and their wide distribution in Germany was the cause of many Germans immigrating to this state. Whatever the causes may have been, we know from the census of 1850 that there were 54,426 Germans living in Indiana at that time. Many of our best citizens today are direct descendants of these German immigrants. Dare we minimize the importance of the German element in our cultural heritage in the light of these statistics from the Census Bureau?⁸

Undoubtedly the early settlers from the South included many shiftless and downright "onery" people. But it is an insult to the southern immigrants into Indiana to judge all of them by the minority of "onery" ones. An impartial study of this wave of Southern immigration will demonstrate beyond a quibble that there were numbered among these sturdy pioneers representatives of some of the best families of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. But it is fallacious to assume that Indiana was settled exclusively by southerners. Numerous families came from Ohio and Pennsylvania and from other eastern states, including the New England States.⁹ Mr. Thompson

⁷ *Orbiston Society Record*, Vol. I, p. 189.

⁸ See William A. Fritsch, *German Settlers and German Settlements in Indiana* (Evansville, 1915).

⁹ Joseph E. Layton's valuable study entitled, "Sources of Population in Indiana, 1816-1850", *Bulletin of the Indiana State Library*, XI, 1916, No. 3, gives the following statistics on the sources of immigration of settlers here during that period: Ohio 42.3; the South 32.9; New York and Pennsylvania 12.6; New England 2; and European Countries 5.5. Of course many who came from Ohio were children of colonists who were originally from New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, and a correction which took this into account would raise the New England percentage considerably.

says in his *Sons of the Wilderness* that the southern settlers worried over the number of immigrants who were coming here from New England, fearing that they would make Indiana into a Yankee commonwealth. In the decades before 1850, Indiana was a part of the real melting-pot of the nation. Adequate histories of the various cultural groups which fused together to create Indiana's cultural heritage would prove this conclusively. Your Society would render a lasting service to the state of Indiana by subsidizing the writing and the publishing of such histories.

Before he became a national figure, Calvin Coolidge won recognition in his own state by a book, entitled *Have Faith in Massachusetts*. This was a collection of public addresses in many of which he appealed to the people of that great commonwealth to have faith enough in their own cultural heritage to work for its preservation. Tonight let us adapt and apply this title to Indiana. In view of the richness of our cultural heritage, of the distinguished men and women of culture who have labored here, of the strong cultural institutions which have developed here, of the varied and interesting cultural groups whose blood has mingled here, let us have faith in Indiana. Members of the Society of Indiana Pioneers, let us rededicate ourselves to the high responsibility of further enriching and of transmitting to a generation properly educated to receive, Indiana's cultural heritage.