

## Indiana Historical Society

CHRISTOPHER B. COLEMAN

In 1934 a committee of the Indiana Historical Society on roadside planting on historic highways was appointed. The committee has been reappointed from year to year; it now consists of R. B. Hull, Lafayette, chairman, Ed J. Hancock, Greensburg, Benjamin Blumberg, Terre Haute, and Mrs. W. W. Garr, Richmond. The point of view of the Society has been that appropriate roadside planting along state highways is generally desirable, and that it is especially appropriate that historic highways should be distinguished by planting, which, in itself, would make them notable.

The two most historic highways in the state, beyond question, are the old National or Cumberland Road (U.S. and State Road 40) and the Michigan Road (State Road 29 in much of its course).

Road 40 is the subject of *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, Volume VII, Number 4, *The National Road in Indiana*, by Lee Burns (1919). Before the railroad era, it was, after the Ohio River, the greatest channel of immigration, commerce and travel into Indiana and the West. In the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century, it was one of the most important, if not the most important, highway in the world. Both its building and its use were full of picturesque associations. With the coming of the automobile, it has again assumed an importance which gives it both state and national significance. The W.P.A. Historic Marker Project is erecting here and there along its course, between the Ohio line east of Richmond and the Illinois line west of Terre Haute, markers, of a rather temporary character, calling attention to its history. To these, effective roadside planting would add a scenic value which at present it does not have, and which would more than repay the expense involved. Parts of the road have already been widened and permanent planting can be put in. After safety, smoothness, and durability, which must be the first considerations, roadside planting should be developed to add another essential element, beauty.

The Michigan Road (in part State Road 29) is pre-eminently the early state road of Indiana. It ranks with the Wabash and Erie Canal as one of the two great works

of internal improvement in the first generation of statehood. It was the subject of special treaties with the Indians. It was, next to the National Road, the greatest entrance into the central part of the state—the avenue by which settlers coming down the Ohio River reached their future homes. For many years, Madison, its southern starting point, was the “gateway” into Indiana. When completed, the Michigan Road was the greatest land link between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes.

Part of the right-of-way of the original road is not now in the State Highway system, but, in a general way, Road 29 between Madison and Logansport and other state roads beyond Logansport to South Bend and Michigan City correspond to the Michigan Road. The name Michigan, which still adheres to certain hills, suburban roads and to one town on Road 29, have come down from the time when the road to Lake Michigan was the goal of tremendous endeavors among Indiana pioneers. It is to be hoped that as soon as portions of the road are built in conformity with the modern standards of safety, smoothness, and durability, effective roadside planting may mark it in keeping with its historic and practical importance.

Roadside planting on these and other state roads is within the province of the State Highway Department. The Historical Society can only call attention to the need for it and urge its importance. Doubtless many individuals will join the Society’s Committee in seeking so desirable an end.