

The Indiana Scene in the 1840's

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Indiana in 1840 was a mixture of similar and dissimilar elements. No general description of population, sources of immigration, soil, climate, agriculture, or attitudes can be applied to the entire state; yet in spite of the fact that Indiana presented a picture of dissimilarities, there were many fundamental conformities which tied the state into a cohesive unit.

Indiana can best be described by treating separately each of its three natural sections: the southern, the central, and the northern portions.

In 1840, more than four-fifths of the people of Indiana lived in the southern half of the state. A belt of counties in the southeastern section had an average of forty-five persons per square mile—a family for about every one hundred acres. Most of the remainder of the southern half of the state had an average of eighteen to forty-five inhabitants per square mile. The relative compactness of population can be shown by the fact that one-half of the settlers lived within seventy-five miles of the Ohio River.¹

Geographically, southern Indiana is bounded on the south by the only natural state boundary of any consequence—the Ohio River. Rather than setting off Indiana as a discrete unit, this great stream merely dissects a large soil region; there is no important difference in the physiography of the region on either side of the river, for southern Indiana is an extension of the soil regions of the Appalachian Uplands.

In southeastern Indiana, the topography is much like that of the Outer Bluegrass Region of Kentucky. The south central part of the state consists of an upland limestone belt, which is part of a greater soil region embracing the Valley of Virginia and extending northward into Pennsylvania and Maryland and westward into Kentucky and central Tennessee. The topography is undulating or strongly rolling. It is

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¹ Stephen S. Visher "Population Changes in Indiana, 1840-1940," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* (Indianapolis, 1891-), LI (1942), 182; *Compendium of the . . . Sixth Census*, 80-81.

a region of caverns, sinkholes, and underground streams, unglaciated for the most part in Indiana.² Southwestern Indiana is made up a rugged section extending away from the river, characterized by a great diversity of surface features. It is an area which has never been able to support a large population.

Collectively, these areas extend side by side like long fingers in a north-south direction away from the river. Into these fingers had gone the bulk of Indiana's population by 1840.

That the settlers wandered here first is not surprising. First, southern Indiana bordered the more heavily populated areas of Kentucky. By 1818, emigrants' handbooks advised their readers that "Kentucky has passed the era of rapid increase from emigration. The best lands are sold and have become expensive." Indiana, on the other hand, was described to the prospective settler with glowing praise. "It may be doubted whether any state of the United States, all things duly considered, can present more advantages than Indiana. Intersected or bounded in all directions by navigable rivers or lakes, enjoying a temperate climate and an immense variety of soil. Near two-thirds of its territorial surface is yet in the hands of the Indians, a temporary evil, that a short time will remedy."³

Second, the natural routes of migration led to southern Indiana. They were varied in character and often were not normal in the sense of direction. By 1818, the National Road was available as far as Wheeling, West Virginia, where water transportation down the Ohio could be used. Other settlers came down the Kanawha River to reach the westward flowing Ohio. Of great importance to Indiana was the old Wilderness Road across Kentucky to Lexington, Bardstons, and Louisville. The Scott Lowland in Clark County, Indiana, formed one prominent funnel through which emigrants passed on their way into the interior of the state.

Third, Indiana was a familiar region to the people from across the Ohio River. The soil, the forests, the valleys away from the river were not foreign to the prospective citizens

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Soils and Men: Yearbook of Agriculture, 1938*, p. 1047; Clyde A. Malott, "The Physiography of Indiana," *Handbook of Indiana Geology* (Indianapolis, 1922), 98-102.

³ William Darby, *The Emigrant's Guide to the Western and Southwestern States and Territories* (New York, 1818), 207, 215.

of the state—he was inclined to look upon the river not as a dividing line but more as an obstacle to be crossed in the search for new opportunities. The physical difficulty of crossing the wide stream was its most stubborn feature. In all else, it was more of a unifying force for the section and at the same time a doorway to the outside world.

By 1850 the rate of immigration in the lower counties of Indiana was declining. The more favorable lands had been taken up in an area having a limited number of acres that could be cultivated successfully. This slowing down of immigration was due, however, not so much to the lack of available land as to the changes which had taken place in the section of the country which had been the source of settlement. Chief among these were the social and economic changes that had occurred in the Upland South itself. The extension of the plantation system to the Piedmont, pushing the yeomen farmers further west and north, had been decelerated. Furthermore, the path of migration for many had shifted to the new Southwest, to the growing and flush cotton kingdom. Soil exhaustion had in part completed its task of sending men out to seek newer and more fertile lands to exploit.⁴ The extension of slavery into the upland areas of the South resulted in migration movements away from the institution; this was illustrated particularly by the Quakers who moved north across the Ohio and on to the West.

A quantitative analysis of the population of Indiana is difficult to accomplish. Sources of information are incomplete and, more important, are of a misleading character. The census reports show merely the birthplace of the residents of any state, disregarding the interim residences between the time of their birth and the year of the census. Nor is the age of the migrant considered in the published reports. For many people, this means that the states which had had the greatest influence in molding the character of the migrants are not indicated—only the place of birth is revealed.

In order to by-pass some of the dangers of the use of census statistics, a study was made by Joseph E. Layton to determine as nearly as possible to what counties in Indiana

⁴John D. Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1914-), XXII (1935-1936), 54-59.

the immigrants came, using as a basis for his information the Land Office Reports and local history sources. The place of last residency, not nativity, was given preference, for it was assumed that the influence of the area from which the settler had migrated had had a greater influence on his social and political attitudes than the factor of nativity, unless the two coincided.⁵

Layton's method was essentially a sampling technique. The total number of persons coming to the various counties from outside sources found in the study was 82,135. According to the United States census reports for 1850, Indiana had 462,684 inhabitants who had been born outside the boundaries of the state.⁶ The fact that this study located settlers according to counties was of great value in the determination of trends of settlement. Layton's chief point of variance with the census statistics was that he credited a higher percentage of Indiana residents as having come from Ohio and Kentucky.⁷ This would conform with the typical emigration patterns of the period, in which newer areas often drew a great portion of their populations from sources close at hand.

Sharply defined areas of distribution of the elements of Indiana's population cannot be drawn. There were Virginians at Michigan City and New Englanders in Evansville. However, certain patterns can be distinguished.⁸

In the upland areas of southern Indiana, which was in many respects a greater Kentucky or North Carolina, opportunity was similar to that which had existed a generation before in the Upper South. The climate and soil were not singularly incongruous to the past experiences of the farmer. The old crops could be grown in the new soil. In

⁵ Joseph E. Layton, "Sources of Population in Indiana, 1816-1850" (Master's thesis, Department of History, The University of Chicago, 1921), 1-3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-42.

⁸ The more important monographs on the sources of Indiana's population are: William O. Lynch, "The Flow of Colonists to and from Indiana before the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, 1905-), XI (1915), 1-7; Visher, "Population Changes in Indiana, 1840-1940," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, LI, 179-193; W. H. Henry, "Some Elements of Indiana's Population: Or Roads West and Their Early Travelers," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* (Indianapolis, 1895-), IV (1908), 375-396; Robert LaFollette, "Interstate Migration and Indiana Culture," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVI (1929-1930), 347-358.

other words, there could be in Indiana a repetition of the experiences of the past in the South.

Life north of the Ohio River had a sameness about it as compared to what it had been back on the old farm. For many settlers, the economy was one of subsistence. The river bottoms and stream terraces produced a variety of products, only a few of which could be harvested in quantities sufficient to provide an easily transportable surplus for marketing or trading. Whisky, corn, and hogs were among these few. Agriculture was not often booming and fruitful, nor was it always progressive, although many unsuccessful efforts were made to find an agricultural bonanza in a new crop. By 1845, the *Vincennes Gazette* had noticed that farming in Knox County in particular had been retreating for thirty years. "The largest portion of our farmers are acquainted with only one rotation of crops, poor corn, poorer corn, poorest corn; then mean oats, then an excuse for wheat, and then poor corn again. But hard times all the while!"⁹

For the most part, agricultural production in the generally rugged area of southern Indiana, especially in the limestone belt, was limited. It did not require years of development to accomplish a maximum expansion. The unglaciated, fertile soil belts hemmed in by rough terrain determined the extent of the clearings. When the hillsides were bared, farmers could label these patches "ten-year soil"—they could be cultivated for that period, but with the approach of the eleventh year, the soil would be depleted by erosion.¹⁰

In many respects, then, the mode of living, the economy, and society were not much unlike what they had been in 1830, nor what they would be in 1850.

The upland farmers who wandered into the newer region north of the Ohio River carried with them the influence of the Democratic corridor that extended from Pennsylvania to Virginia and the Carolinas. Their attitudes were those of a yeoman world.¹¹ Once settled on the new farms in the

⁹ *Vincennes Gazette*, quoted in *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener* (Indianapolis, 1845-1848), I, 96. The name of this periodical was changed to *The Western Farmer and Gardener* in 1846.

¹⁰ Stephen S. Visher, "Indiana Regional Contrasts in Soil Erosion and Their Chief Causes," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XLVI (1937), 158.

¹¹ Barnhart, "Sources of Southern Migration into the Old Northwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII, 54.

Northwest, there were no opportunities to continue old ties which could furnish new threads for the social pattern. Apparently there were no great commercial links back to the older points of departure; rather, the avenues of communication, narrow at their best, were toward newer areas. Since emigration from the Upland South was not a continuing process, there were few new agents from the old home culture.

During this period, the nation was made up of sections within sections, and the South was no exception. There were many Souths. The South with which trade and communication was established was that of New Orleans and the Gulf Plains, although the Upland Piedmont migrants to Indiana had never known this area intimately. The Ohio River as an artery of communication had turned the interests of the Lower Northwest toward new markets, not back to the Valley of Virginia or the Blue Grass Basin. The Wilderness Road and the Kanawha River, for example, served people principally, not goods, and for a one-way journey.¹² One reason for this lack of communication with the older regions was that there was little opportunity to sell and profit in trade with an area that was in a competitive position.

The migrants to Indiana from the South arrived in the greatest numbers at a time when the region from which they had departed also thought of itself as the West—inhabitants of these upland areas considered themselves western men whether they resided in North Carolina, Kentucky, or Indiana. Thus it seemed natural to them to transplant institutions and attitudes from one pioneer settlement to another, with the result that in Indiana there was a repetition of the frontier social and economic processes. Each jump meant a beginning again. Given a somewhat similar environment all along the route of advancement, cultural patterns persisted. That this should occur was more or less a necessity, for the new problems of gaining a foothold in a raw wilderness were in reality old problems which had been met along the road before.

Thus the political, social, and economic attitudes were those of an Upland South which had already lost some of

¹² There was some trade in hogs and cattle which were driven back over the mountains to the Piedmont. The volume of this trade was small and it continued for only a short time.

these concepts through internal change. In a sense, the attitudes of these peoples who had come to Indiana were the attitudes, not of the contemporary mother region, but of the mother region of the past. Isolated in many localities, traditions remained uncontaminated, and the economic needs and desires of these settlers remained nearly constant. Among these needs were: good market outlets, adequate currency, fertile land, equality in taxation, and, in general, new material opportunities. The political demands that resulted had a certain common basis that resembled much older claims expressed years before. In a sense, the stresses and strains had moved westward.

However, although these people had brought with them the traditions and attitudes and problems of the South, it does not necessarily follow that they were *pro* southern, for they had come, not from *the* South, but from an older West. The problems of the contemporary South were not necessarily their problems, and so it was possible for them to be indifferent to many of them. Nor did they feel obliged to agree with all elements in the life of a southerner. Thus Indiana settlers could disagree with southern ways as readily as they could find fault with ways of life that existed in the East or even right in their own vicinity. These immigrant farmers disdained the planter who did not toil with his own hands, observing there was "a difference between *farming* and *planting*. One supports a *family*; the other supports *pride*, until pride gets a fall."¹³ The financial successes of the eastern capitalists were criticized just as vehemently. "Money makes money, and it is by speculation, and not by labor, that men become rich. Society is wrong. Labor instead of money ought to be made the capital," wrote one Hoosier editor.¹⁴ The Indiana farmer could not, by the same token, condone those in his own community who had not acquired material wealth and social status through their own physical exertions. The local press could rant against "the white fingered, and perhaps *light* fingered, fops and dandy lawyers of Indianapolis, many of whom never did an honest days work in all their lives; who are the drones of

¹³ *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener*, I, 72.

¹⁴ Lawrenceburg, *Indiana Register*, April 15, 1848.

the social hive, and live in luxury and laziness on the fruits of the toiling millions."¹⁵

It would seem that his attitude toward the Negro shaped itself in much the same manner. He did not like either slavery or the free Negro. Rather than frowning on the moral aspects of the situation, he looked down from a plateau of unconcern at the political and economic evils of the presence of the Negro unless they impinged upon his well-being.

By 1850, the southern section of Indiana was at the peak of its influence. It was an ideal representation of the culture of the Ohio River world.

The central counties of Indiana underwent the most significant changes during the two decades before the Civil War. By 1850, about one-half of the population of the state lived in this rich interior section.

Most of this region is a part of a fertile plain that stretches west from the Scioto basin in Ohio. Composed of a complex glacial till containing limestones, dolomites, granite, and sandstone, the soils of the area, although not uniformly as fertile as the great prairies to the west, were capable of maintaining their native fertility over a long period of time. The nearly level terrain and the uniformity of rainfall as compared with the ruggedness and the intense rains of southern Indiana, were added benefits to agriculture.¹⁶ All of these elements led to a type of agriculture that could be diversified profitably. Large farms were possible since large areas of fertile land were available. It was a region capable of great expansion and of supporting a stable agrarian economy.¹⁷

In these fertile plains, the land-hungry farmers found new opportunity. Consequently, there was a rush of settlers from adjacent areas, resulting in a somewhat conglomerate population. The Ohioans poured out of the western and southwestern sections of their state into the Upper White-

¹⁵ Indianapolis, *Indiana State Sentinel*, April 4, 1844.

¹⁶ Visher, "Indiana Regional Contrasts in Soil Erosion and Their Chief Causes," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XLVI, 158-159. Visher found one-third greater rainfall in southern Indiana than in the north. However, the contrasts are sharpened by the fact that the south received nearly one-half of its rainfall during the cooler eight months of the year when runoff is more destructive. Furthermore, southern Indiana had more downpours and consecutive days of heavy rain than did northern Indiana.

¹⁷ *Soils and Men*, 960.

water and White River valleys and over to the Upper Wabash. By 1880, Warren, Tippecanoe, Montgomery, and Fountain counties, in particular, were heavily populated by settlers whose last residence had been the Buckeye State. The counties more adjacent to Ohio, surrounding Fort Wayne and the Upper Maumee, were also heavily settled by Ohioans. From the south came many Kentuckians who journeyed up the Wabash and White rivers, fanning out on the central plains to establish farms north of the National Road. Some Quakers moved here from the Whitewater Valley, and there were Pennsylvanians who settled in significant numbers in Carroll, Cass, and Clinton counties.¹⁸

The rapidity of settlement may well have accounted for the heterogeneous origin of the population. When Indiana was admitted to the Union in 1816, the Indians still claimed about two-thirds of the land in the new state. Two years later, they agreed to withdraw north of the Wabash (the ceded land was generally known as the "New Purchase"). In 1820, the Kickapoo abandoned the state. Thus the Wabash country was opened as far north as the present site of Lafayette. By 1825, almost all of the territory south of the Wabash was organized.¹⁹

This great expanse of fertile land which was available for settlement in a relatively short span of years was within easy access of the immigrant farmers. The Wabash offered one doorway to the interior and the Miami-Whitewater gateway another. This latter avenue of travel was of importance to central Indiana because of the natural pattern of the Ohio River. This great stream bends northwestward on its course to the point where the Great Miami joins it. Thence the Ohio turns sharply to the southwest. The result is that this most northern reach of the Ohio offered a convenient approach to the great till plains of the Old Northwest and in particular to central Indiana.²⁰ The National Road which extended across the state by 1834 played its role in making

¹⁸ Layton, "Sources of Population in Indiana, 1816-1850," pp. 40-42.

¹⁹ Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana* (2 vols., Fort Wayne, 1924), I, 260, 271 ff.

²⁰ J. E. Switzer, "Some Observations Concerning the Historical Geography of Indiana," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, LI, 210.

the interior counties more attractive to settlers as well as less difficult to reach.²¹

The filling-in process in central Indiana was relatively unhampered by the speculator. This had also been true, though to a lesser degree, of the settlement of southern Indiana where some large-scale speculating had taken place; however, it is doubtful if it had seriously hampered settlement. In central Indiana, most of the land passed directly from the government to actual settlers.²² Thus, in addition to its easy access, the land-seeking farmer found a more democratic land system which offered to him an added inducement to settle in this rich area.

Another lure to settlement was the prospect of an internal improvements program. Legislative log-rolling resulted in a proposed system of canals, roads, and railroads that would benefit all sections of the state. Indiana, however, was interested primarily in the Wabash and Erie Canal. The proposed route was far north of the bulk of the population; thus there was available land to be taken up by settlers who sensed the possibility of profits in land and in produce.²³

However, as in the peopling of many other areas of the Old Northwest where growth was often sporadic, there were spurts of unusual development with intervening lulls.²⁴ In the period from 1840 to 1845, the rapid progress of the settlement of central Indiana was brought to a near halt in part by the collapse of the internal improvements bubble and in part by the economic stagnation that followed the Panic of 1837.²⁵ The funds for the construction of the canal were being provided by monthly payments on the bonds held by eastern financial groups, notably the Morris Canal and Banking Company. The monies received were used by the canal commissioners to meet their engagements with the canal contractors. In the summer of 1839, these companies

²¹ Lee Burns, "The National Road in Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, VII (1919), 221.

²² Paul Wallace Gates, "Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie Counties of Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXV (1939), 5-6, 7.

²³ Logan Esarey, "Internal Improvements in Early Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, V (1912), 91, 92.

²⁴ Joseph E. Schafer, "Peopling the Middle West," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Madison, 1917-), XXI (1937), 87.

²⁵ Nathaniel Bolton, "Early Indianapolis and Central Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, I (1897), 184.

were unable to fulfill their contracts because of the stringency in the money market on the eve of the second suspension of the United States Bank. The result was the stoppage of all the progress with the exception of the construction of the Madison and Indianapolis Railroad. Much private indebtedness had been created during the progress of the public works; when operations ceased and prices fell at the same time, the contractors demanded payment and the citizenry sought tax reductions.²⁶ National economic distress, added to an internal financial crisis in which the state found itself unable to meet its debts, acted as a barrier to continued growth of central Indiana.

However, in the remaining years of the decade, after these economic crises had been alleviated to a large degree, there was another spurt of migration into central Indiana. Some of the stigma of the near repudiation of the state debt was removed by a compromise agreement between the state and its debtors. The work on the Wabash and Erie Canal was resumed after the canal was deeded to three trustees, and the bondholders advanced more funds to complete the project. By 1847, the new railroad reached Indianapolis, providing an outlet for the interior counties.²⁷

The growth of central Indiana during the latter years of the forties has an added significance when the population is considered in the light of its source. It has often been pointed out that Indiana received more of its population from south of the Ohio River than did the neighboring states of the Old Northwest, and in the light of the census statistics, it does appear that Indiana was outstanding among the states of the Northwest in this respect. However, to approach a more accurate view of the settlement of Indiana, it is necessary to consider the role of Ohio in this process, for by 1850, one-eighth of the citizens of Indiana had been born in the Buckeye State; furthermore, they outnumbered the settlers from the South.²⁸ These Ohioans and the southern elements made up the bulk of the population of central Indiana.

²⁶ Reginald C. McGrane, *Foreign Bondholders and American State Debts* (New York, 1935), 133.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 139; Bolton, "Early Indianapolis and Central Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, I, 184; Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis* (2 vols., Chicago, 1910), I, 148.

²⁸ Stephen S. Visher, "Indiana's Population, 1850-1940: Sources and Dispersal," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXVIII (1942), 51-59.

The label "Ohioan" is a convenient one, yet it can hardly explain the type of settler who moved into the interior counties of Indiana. It must be remembered that Ohio was a political grouping of sections; the growth of the state had been in many respects similar to that of Indiana. The southern hill regions had been filled up early with Pennsylvanians, Virginians, and Kentuckians. The area south of the Western Reserve and west of Pennsylvania, often called the "back-bone" counties, included Pennsylvania Germans and Scots-Irish before 1830, and after that year, large numbers of settlers came from New York, western Pennsylvania, Germany, and Ireland.²⁹ There was also the Western Reserve, ruled by the strong hand of the Connecticut and New England emigrant.

The small trickle of emigrants leaving Ohio in 1828 became a steady stream by 1840. Many went to Indiana. The greatest loss of population by emigration was from the back-bone counties where the farmers were from the same stock as were the farmers who had moved on to the more fertile lands of central Indiana. They were, generally speaking, from the same democratic corridor of western Pennsylvania and Virginia. Their routes of travel had varied considerably, but they both terminated in the same region. The different elements had adopted different customs, perhaps, and the isolation of their respective worlds had made their interests local in nature; yet wherever the settlers came from, there were certain common ideas and purposes—democracy and individualism among them. In the long process of westward movement, certain signs of distinctiveness were taken on by each wave of emigrants. In the forties in central Indiana, the rush of occupation had thrown many of these individuals together within a short period of time, and a man readily identified his neighbor by the fact that he was a "Kentucky" or "Whitewater" man. Political parties began with these geographical labels. However, in a few years, they were able to fuse into one group after the more superficial peculiarities had worn away.³⁰ Basic issues would expose the common

²⁹ Francis P. Weisenberger, *The Passing of the Frontier, 1825-1850* (Columbus, 1941), 46-48; R. E. Chaddock, "Ohio Before 1850: A Study in the Early Influence of Pennsylvania and Southern Populations in Ohio," *Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law* (New York, 1891-), XXXI (1908), 42-43.

³⁰ "Fletcher Papers—Early Indianapolis," *Indiana Magazine of History*, II (1906), 75-78.

fundamental beliefs among these men that local conflicts had not been able to uncover.

The agriculture of central Indiana was as varied as was the character of the population. *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener* in 1845 declared that: "A man must come to the West to see a little of every sort of farming that ever existed; and some sorts, we will affirm, never had an existence before anywhere else—the purely indigenous farming of the great valley."³¹

In this productive soil, high returns were readily achieved. By 1850, more corn and wheat were raised here than in any other section of the state. The stable soils supported a great variety of crops. The counties that led the state in wheat production seem also to have been the leading areas in corn production. It would be difficult to point out great belts of specialized agriculture, although there were tendencies in this direction. Corn seemed to be outdistancing wheat in central Indiana, and by 1850, northern Indiana was producing as much wheat as was the central section; however, the general pattern of agriculture had not yet been changed much.

The bountiful returns of the soil brought the farmer face-to-face with the problem of disposing of a surplus which, unless trade outlets were found, would be wasted. To some editors, the problem of waste was a moral one—the squandering of a hundred bushels of corn was unimportant, but the habit of wasting was a great evil. It was predicted that the time was not far off when these habits would make wastrels of the sons and daughters of the farmer. However, *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener* declared: "We anticipate a great change in the farming operations of this region on the completion of the *rail-road* to Indianapolis."³²

In the drive to dispose of its surplus produce, central Indiana exhibited a somewhat indecisive course of action, quite in line with its other characteristics of diversity. From the first, there seems to have been no one trade channel that offered overwhelming advantages over all the others. The neighbors of Indiana were keenly interested in the problem of selecting the trade route which would become the favored

³¹ *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener*, I, 194.

³² *Ibid.*, 10.

one, for trade offered reciprocal advantages at both ends of the avenue. The *Cincinnati Gazette* asked in 1847: "Who is to have the trade of the central regions of Indiana? What city in the West is to receive the large agricultural surplus of the Wabash valley, and the tier of fertile counties lying between it and Indianapolis, and send back in exchange its dry goods . . . salt?"³³

The bad roads of Indiana made trade with the East difficult. The water route to New Orleans had certain attractions, yet the disadvantages of trade with that gulf port were clearly seen by some interested citizens. Henry W. Ellsworth, the land baron of the Wabash, attempted in 1838 to portray the advantages of eastern trade, pointing out that this was the proper channel for the surplus of the great upper valley. He observed that, judging from the efforts to reach the eastern markets it must be the preferred one.³⁴ The Michigan Road was the result of an attempt to seek a satisfactory route to this eastern market. It was surveyed and construction was begun in the direction of the Great Lakes. In the thirties, it was made a part of the "mammoth" bill of the internal improvements program.³⁵

The Wabash and Erie Canal completed to Lafayette in 1843 drew produce to the northeast. Yet the extension of the canal to Terre Haute by 1849 seemingly did not materially affect a reversal of trade to the south, since freight rates were cheaper to New Orleans.³⁶ The canal did, however, exert its influence on the trade of Indianapolis, directing it northeastward. The *Indiana State Sentinel* declared in 1843: "It is a fact that we are beginning to send produce west to the New York and Boston markets. Large quantities of Hemp and other articles are now being forwarded in wagons to Lafayette, some 65 miles north west, by our enterprising citizens, to be sent on the Wabash and Erie canal to Boston and New York markets."³⁷ Yet later in the same year, the

³³ *Cincinnati Gazette*, August 13, 1847, quoted in the Indianapolis, *Indiana State Sentinel*, August 21, 1847.

³⁴ Henry William Ellsworth, *The Valley of the Upper Wabash, Indiana, with Hints on Its Agricultural Advantages* (New York, 1838), 11-13.

³⁵ Geneal Prather, "The Struggle for the Michigan Road," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXIX (1943), 1-24.

³⁶ A. L. Kohlmeier, *The Old Northwest as the Keystone of the Arch of the American Federal Union* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1938), 89.

³⁷ Wylie J. Daniels, "The Village at the End of the Road," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, XIII (1938), 16.

Sentinel editor commented: "By the prices current published in the *Beacon* (Lawrenceburg), it would appear that produce bears a higher price there than at any other place in the State. Indeed the fact seems to be generally known; for trains of teams pass here constantly for that point. What with Lafayette on one side, and Lawrenceburgh on the other, who can wonder at the stagnation of business here at present?"³⁸

The rivalry for the trade of the interior seems to have been encouraged by the prices offered to the farmer. It was estimated that teams could reach Lafayette in two and one-half days, while to get to the river towns of Cincinnati, Lawrenceburg, and Madison required a round trip of nine to twelve days.³⁹ Yet the differential in time and distance did not rule out competition between the river and the canal. It was estimated that it cost one-third the value of the staple articles to carry them to the Ohio River, but this factor did not halt trade completely.

Lafayette, in the heart of the rich upper Wabash Valley, offers an interesting example of the varied outlets of the section. Some trade went down the Wabash from this enterprising village. After the completion of the Wabash and Erie Canal to Toledo, some staples were sent to the Great Lakes trade route. A third outlet—and perhaps the most difficult to estimate in importance—was the wagon trade with Chicago. One account of early Chicago describes Hoosier wagons loaded with various kinds of produce which was traded for a few bags of coffee and the balance in salt; "this was the invariable return load of all Hoosiers." The same observer claimed to have seen as many as 160 Hoosier wagons at once on the dry ground east of State Street in Chicago.⁴⁰

Wagon trade continued in sizeable proportions in the autumn of each year until Lafayette and Chicago were linked by rail in 1853. The farmers would haul wheat to Chicago and bring back salt and groceries either for their own use or for the merchants of the Wabash.⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁰ Charles Cleaves, *Early-Chicago Reminiscences* (Chicago, 1882), 51-52. The naming of Wabash Avenue in Chicago may have had some significance in view of this trade.

⁴¹ John Ade, *Newton County* (Indianapolis, 1911), 103-104.

Whether by canal, flatboat, or wagon, the Wabash trade routes seemingly presented serious competition to the routes to the southeast. One Whig editor, rejoicing over the completion of the Madison and Indianapolis railroad, shouted: "Hurrah for the rail road . . . We expect our business men will yet head the wheat buyers of the Wabash."⁴²

In the forties, the direction of trade was not yet stabilized. Even Indianapolis, within eighty miles of Madison on the Ohio River, seemed to be seeking out the most profitable outlet, whether it be to the north or to the south. The diversity of the production served to complicate the trade picture, for men sought the most lucrative market that could be found in any direction.

In broad perspective, the central counties of Indiana presented a picture of a potentially rich section inhabited by a mixture of settlers of varied backgrounds who had rushed on to the fertile plains. By 1850, they were becoming powerful in numbers and influence. Economically, their future appeared bright. It might be said that central Indiana was coming of age.

Nearly all of the settlers of the northern third of Indiana arrived after 1830—at that time, only a small area had as many as two people per square mile. Although the population more than doubled in the northernmost eighteen counties in the period from 1840 to 1850, only about twelve per cent of the citizens of Indiana lived in this part of the state. In 1840, one-half of the population lived in La Porte, St. Joseph, Elkhart, and Kosciusko counties, and about one-third of the population of the section was found in these same counties in 1850.⁴³

The departure of the glacier had left a large morainal area with immature and swampy lacustrine plains in northern Indiana. The stream pattern is erratic and in some instances the continental divide is difficult to determine. Much of the land is poorly drained and there are numerous lakes, ponds, and bogs. Yet there were fertile areas in this area. The St.

⁴² Daniels, "The Village at the End of the Road," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, XIII, 41.

⁴³ Visher, "Population Changes in Indiana, 1840-1940," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, LI, 183; Harvey L. Carter, "A Decade of Hoosier History, Indiana, 1850-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1938), 22; *Compendium of the . . . Sixth Census*, 82; *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 755-756.

Joseph Valley and the Door Prairie were attractive lands, but well-drained areas such as these were scattered.

Several explanations have been offered to account for the slow development of northern Indiana. New Englanders on their journeys west avoided the area primarily because their routes of travel skirted the borders of the state. Whether they avoided settlement because of the presence of "shiftless southerners" who were reaching up from the Ohio River is debatable.⁴⁴ It is more likely that they were discouraged by the large amount of wet land in the area. Of almost equal importance was the fact that northern Indiana and the Upper Wabash Valley were blocked from the Northeast by the great Black Swamp of northwestern Ohio. Added to these deterring physical factors was the almost legendary notoriety of the combined areas as the "chief terror of travelers Westward" with their disease-ridden swamps. Settlers were also discouraged by the fact that speculators had gobbled up huge tracts of land particularly in the prairie counties along the northwestern borders of the state. As for wet lands which required co-operative drainage programs for reclamation, the contention follows that if these speculative holdings had been more democratically owned, and had a more equitable land system been operating, individual owners would have solved the problem of reclamation by common effort.⁴⁵

In a contemporary view of the situation, *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener* summed up the attitude of a land-seeking farmer: "We do not suppose that the time has come in Indiana for the general introduction of a system of *Drain-ing*, although there is not, perhaps, another State where so much first rate land might be redeemed by it. Before many years there will be thousands of acres pierced with drains. But the inducements to it which make it wise in England and New England do not yet, generally, exist in Indiana. The expense of draining one acre would buy two. Many farmers have already more arable land than they can till to advantage. Land redeemed from a slough would not pay

⁴⁴ Lois K. Mathews, *The Expansion of New England* (Boston, 1909), 254. This explanation hardly seems valid since New Englanders placed themselves in Ohio and Illinois despite the presence of the competing southerners.

⁴⁵ Richard Lyle Power, "Wet Lands and the Hoosier Stereotype," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXII, 37-39; Gates, "Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie Counties of Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXV, 1-26.

for itself in many years."⁴⁶ Although the emphasis here was on wet land in general, it would also apply to northern Indiana in particular.

The large holdings of nonresidents in this area created a problem of taxation, and bred enmity between the citizens of the state and the speculators. The *Logan Chief* urged the recovery of these lands for the settler through a system of onerous taxation of unimproved lands. As a result of the present situation, it declared, "The upper Wabash country and the Northern part of the State is literally a wilderness. . . . Let the people see to this matter themselves: it can be effected by taxing all lands alike—WILL THEY DO IT."⁴⁷

Collectively all the above factors account for the small population of the 1840's; yet this was a growing section. As was true concerning the other sections of the state, the sources of population were varied, although more of the early settlers were natives of other parts of the state. In the extreme northern tier of counties there was a sizeable number of New Yorkers. In La Porte and Elkhart counties, Pennsylvanians were found in significant proportions. In studying La Porte County, Layton found that slightly over six per cent of the population had come from Virginia.⁴⁸

An agriculture of abundance in this area of Indiana was limited generally to the northern tier of counties. By 1850, these counties were large producers of wheat and hay, with the seven northernmost counties out of the ninety-two in the state producing slightly less than fifteen per cent of all the wheat grown in Indiana for the year.⁴⁹

Thus here was a section that, although it could not yet match the development of central and southern Indiana, was making tremendous strides. This fact is even more illuminating when one considers the example of La Porte County which, prior to 1829, was without a single white inhabitant.⁵⁰

This was a region of extremes. Productive agriculture was localized, there were no broad sweeps of productive

⁴⁶ *The Indiana Farmer and Gardener*, I, 24.

⁴⁷ *Logan Chief*, quoted in the *Indiana State Sentinel*, July 19, 1845.

⁴⁸ Layton, "Sources of Population in Indiana, 1816-1850," 41.

⁴⁹ *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 791-792.

⁵⁰ Jasper Packard, *History of La Porte County, Indiana* (La Porte, 1876), 36.

land, and the search for outlets to market were local problems.

The direction of trade in the northern counties of Indiana was almost exclusively directed to the East. The mode of transportation out of the state was either by canal or by direct lake transportation. The one lake port of any consequence in the state was Michigan City. The canal was inaccessible to northwestern Indiana, but it provided a good outlet for the most northern of the northeastern counties.⁵¹

The St. Joseph River furnished another outlet to the lakes. In 1831 the first keelboat was built at South Bend; later steamboats were used on the St. Joseph River, and until 1852 they supplied South Bend merchants with a great share of their merchandise. A local writer in 1847 reported that there were four steamboats and numerous other craft hauling produce on the St. Joseph. The delegation from South Bend to the famous Rivers and Harbors Convention in Chicago in the same year represented the interests of this river.⁵² However, there were certain limitations of this avenue to market. The winding course and shallow bed of the river entailed a long and treacherous journey, limiting its possibilities.

Lake Michigan also had its disadvantages as an outlet as far as northern Indiana was concerned. The harbor at Michigan City, begun in 1833, amid sand dunes and swamps, was a discouraging enterprise. At first, Michigan City was connected with the outside world by only the lake, for the Michigan Road had not yet been completed. Until a wharf was constructed, lighters were used to reach the anchored vessels out in the deeper waters of the lake. Three years later there were warehouses, and commission merchants as well as twelve dry goods stores. In the same year, appropriations of twenty thousand dollars from the federal government permitted extensive improvement of the harbor to be

⁵¹ Grain was transported to the canal at Wabash, for example, from the surrounding seven counties north and south. Leola Hockett, "The Wabash and Erie Canal in Wabash County," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXIV (1928), 302. However, in northern Indiana there was a division of the trading area of such a nature that it did not seemingly extend more than two counties back from the canal before a competitive outlet was able to influence trade. Prices would also influence the direction of trade.

⁵² Otto M. Knoblock, "Early Navigation on the St. Joseph River," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, VIII (1925), 187-199.

made. By 1840, Michigan City had become a principal grain market for northern Indiana. Wagon loads of wheat were reported to have been brought from areas as far south as Marion County. Yet its newly found prosperity was hampered by the failure to continue improvements to the harbor between 1844 and 1849.⁵³

Despite the comparative proximity of surplus outlets, trade was not always lucrative. Solon Robinson, the agricultural reformer of Lake County, declared that: "The average distance for the raisers of grain in this county to haul it to market, being not less than 40 miles, it is found that nothing but wheat will bear the expense of hauling, and that at the best poorly pays the farmer for his labor."⁵⁴ In La Porte County, discontent over unsatisfactory profits resulted in the drafting of a constitution by a Farmers and Mechanics Association which intended to build warehouses, and purchase or construct lake vessels. The preamble stated broadly the farmer's plight as he saw it. The document read: "In view of the embarrassed and languishing conditions of the Farming community, notwithstanding the unparalleled exertion, labor, and toil, we are led to inquire—is there no system or plan that can be devised, that will secure to us, exclusively, the rewards of our own labor? We discover that we are, to a certain extent, building up towns and cities, and cover our lakes with sails, by an unnecessary sacrifice of produce; and exorbitant prices for merchandise, we therefore, in view of these considerations, in order to sustain ourselves, enter into a compact for the purpose, if possible, of saving the enormous expenditures that are daily made, and which are sapping the very foundations of all agricultural pursuits, exerting not only a prostrating influence on us, but also on the industrious, hard-working mechanic."⁵⁵

These farmers who were actually closer to trade outlets than their neighbors in central Indiana, seemed to be more disgusted with their lot. The narrow funnel through which their surplus passed exacted a greater toll than Solon Robinson and the La Porte farmers thought justified. They were

⁵³ Packard, *History of La Porte County, Indiana*, 83-88, 93.

⁵⁴ Herbert A. Kellar (ed.), *Solon Robinson: Pioneer and Agriculturist* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1936), II, 75. These are volumes XXI and XXII of the *Indiana Historical Collections* (Indianapolis, 1916-).

⁵⁵ *La Porte County Whig*, April 15, 1848.

unable to choose alternate markets as in central Indiana. Further, the dangers of lake commerce raised shipping charges. The merchant and shipper blamed the federal government for the dangers and the added expense of the lake commerce due to the failure to improve lake navigation. But to some farmers, at least, the real culprit was the merchant who was claiming the lion's share of the farmer's labor. Some of these basic antagonisms were later carried into the political arena.

Northern Indiana was the newest section of the state. Much of it was but a few short years away from the raw frontier. Merchants who had managed Indian trading posts at the south bend of the St. Joseph River had shifted their interests to the white trade of the town of South Bend, without changing their location.⁵⁶

Land speculators were still on the scene in the forties. Villages and towns sprang up nearly overnight as the Indians were removed and the land put up for sale.

Yet it must be remembered that close to all this activity were counties that in 1850 were the least populated in the state. Northern Indiana was passing out of the stage of initial thrust. The filling up process was about to take place.

The boundary lines of Indiana had been superimposed upon a portion of the western wilderness by politically minded men in order to create for their constituents a more governable portion of that which they desired most—land. The diversities of the carved portion were imperceptible at first, but as men toiled to convert the raw environment more to their own ends, these differences emerged with greater clarity. As the road to maturity was traveled, new obstacles appeared as life became more complex. In the give and take of existence, certain attitudes on the part of the inhabitants were buffeted about and changed, others maintained. Sectionalism in the physical sense revealed itself. Some men had more in common with their neighbors in other states than with their fellow citizens, since physiographic and economic units extended beyond political boundaries. The state of Indiana was in a sense an intermixture of shreds and patches torn from a greater cloth.

⁵⁶ The evolution of such a business establishment is told by Bert Anson, "L. M. Taylor Store," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLV (1949), 249-264.

It can be seen that the Great Lakes, the Appalachian Plateau, the Ohio River, and the central till plain as they were represented in Indiana were merely segments of the whole, each of which influenced the mode of action in a comparable degree wherever men encountered these physiographic features of the West. Closely tied to these physical influences were the economic interests shaped by them and created out of them. Finally the cultures developed in and near these same plains, rivers, lakes, and hills bred common attitudes which were implanted in men's thoughts and habits. Yet, despite the conglomerate nature of Indiana, there remained a common cement which served to fuse the dissimilar elements. One of the more important of these elements was the predominance of agriculture carried on by the small independent farmer. The great commercial centers of the Old Northwest were outside the boundaries of the state; thus Indiana was in the forties the backdoor neighbor of the surrounding states, a hinterland from which the entrepôts of trade siphoned off the surplus commodities in exchange for consumer goods. It is true that trade channels flowed off in several directions, yet the position of the Indiana farmer did not change greatly in the general pattern of commerce. There was thus a certain back-country flavor to the state to which the Hoosier folk-type, applied promiscuously in the past, became a stereotype of the Indiana resident.⁵⁷

The trading position of Indiana among its neighbors resulted in a concomitant lack of urbanization and commercialization. In 1840, the largest city in Indiana was New Albany, with 4,226 people. Indianapolis had a population of 2,692, Richmond 2,070, and Crawfordsville 1,327. Ten years later the New Albany-Jeffersonville area contained slightly over ten thousand people. The second largest city was Madison with 9,007 people, and third was Indianapolis with a population of 8,091. By 1850, only 4.5 per cent of the population of Indiana lived in cities of 2,500 or more.⁵⁸

Indiana lacked an appreciable urban population to add variety to its composition, and the state had also failed to

⁵⁷ Richard Lyle Power, "The Hoosier as an American Folk-Type," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXVIII, 107-122. Power has stated: "The Hoosier stereotype might be dismissed as a piece of subjectivism were it not for striking parallels to objective fact."

⁵⁸ Visher, "Population Changes in Indiana, 1840-1940," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, LI, 187-189.

attract in important numbers certain other strata of population elements. The general absence of northeastern emigrants has been noted above. There were also very few foreign born. In 1850, Germans, the principal group, made up about four per cent of the total population. These immigrants were found for the most part in the older counties bordering the Ohio River and those near Cincinnati.⁵⁹

The basic homogeneity of the population of Indiana has been discussed above. Collectively, then, there was a surprising degree of common background in the population of the state. It was possible for middle state, Ohio, and southern emigrants in the same environment to find a rather broad area of mutual interest. The predominance of small farmers from upland areas has also been shown. Since most of them remained farmers, their mode of life continued to carry with it agrarian ideals. By 1850, many of these men had resided side by side long enough to rub off some of the cultural layers brought with them to Indiana. In the initial encounter, only the superficial characteristics of strangers are inclined to be noticed. Obviously, there was some of the inheritance that remained but a certain accommodating and blending could occur that would round off some of the sharper surface differences. Part of that which remained could seemingly be vestigial, while some could be active and resistant to change. The Indiana landscape even today is dotted with architectural transplantations represented in homes that have outlasted their builders for more than a hundred years. Is it not feasible to suggest that more pliable entities were unable to resist change and were being moulded anew in the forties?

This then was the broad setting in which the politicians were to act. The relation between political behavior and social and economic forces, as a recent study has pointed out, is not always clear. Political parties are often made up of people of the most diverse interests who for various reasons find satisfaction in a common name.⁶⁰ Yet, according to another recent analysis, parties are limited by the climate of opinion that sustains their cultures. Politicians and political parties often differ bitterly over current issues but they

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 181, 185.

⁶⁰ Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948), ix.

share a common framework of ideas which enables them to co-operate after an election.⁶¹ An attempt has been made to point out some of the unconformities that existed in Indiana on one hand and the fundamental uniformities on the other. The Hoosier politician's assignment was to find the lowest common denominator.

⁶¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1948), ix.