

Richard Lieber and Indiana's Forest Heritage

*Edited by David M. Silver**

Too few Hoosiers in this time of unparalleled emphasis upon preservation of a suitable environment in which to live are adequately acquainted with the distinguished career of Richard Lieber, architect of the state park system of Indiana. Lieber was born in Germany in 1869 and emigrated to the Hoosier State in 1891. He later became a most energetic advocate of conservation and preservation of Indiana's beautiful forest and wild life resources and served as the first director of the Indiana Department of Conservation from 1919 to 1933.¹ He brought an enthusiasm and dedication to his task which influenced his colleagues and associates and ultimately gained him national recognition, including assignments in the crusade to preserve America's national resources as well as those of Indiana.²

Following a White House Conference on conservation called by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, Lieber devoted himself most energetically to the preservation of Indiana's natural resources and beauty. The idea of establishing a system of state parks probably had its origin not long after Lieber's first visit to Brown County on September 24, 1910, when the Liebers were guests at the cabin of Fred Hetherington. Lieber may already have had in mind, too, that the establishment of a state park system might be a suitable project for the celebration of Indiana's centennial in 1916. He remarked: "This whole county [Brown] ought to be bought up by the state and then made into a State Park, so that all of the people of Indiana could enjoy this beauty spot."³

Lieber's activities in behalf of conservation continued unabated, and in October, 1912, he served as chairman of the local board of governors for the Fourth National Conservation Congress held in Indianapolis. Among prominent national leaders who attended the convention were Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson, former Vice President Charles W. Fair-

* David M. Silver is dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and professor of history, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

¹ Indianapolis *Star*, December 26, 1952, cited in John D. Barnhart and Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth* (4 vols., New York, 1954), II, 287.

² A report made by Lieber in 1934 indicates his wide interest in the proper use of America's natural resources. Richard Lieber, *America's Natural Resources* (New York, 1942), 3-8.

³ Emma Lieber, *Richard Lieber by His Wife, Emma* (Indianapolis, 1947), 62-64, 69. Other sources do not corroborate Mrs. Lieber's statement that her husband was a delegate to the White House Conference in 1908. Curiously enough the state park in Brown County was one of the last to be established during the period when Lieber served as director of the Indiana Department of Conservation. Barnhart and Carmony, *Indiana*, II, 287.

banks, and Dr. Henry Wallace, father of the future Vice President Henry A. Wallace.⁴

As the result of discussions with Governor Samuel M. Ralston concerning a suitable celebration of the state's centennial, Lieber was invited in 1916 to serve as chairman of the Committee on the Indiana State Centennial Memorial of the Indiana Historical Commission. As Emma Lieber describes the committee: "It was organized especially for the purpose of establishing the foundation of a 'System of State Parks' as a permanent feature of the Hoosier Centennial Celebration. Each county was to be organized and committees were to be appointed from the Indiana Federation of Clubs, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Hoosier State Motor Club, and other civic organizations, and last but not least the press was asked for its cooperation."⁵ It was hoped that three tracts of land could be acquired for state parks during the centennial year. Since contributions from private citizens were to be solicited, Governor Ralston set aside the week of April 24, 1916, for collecting "subscriptions to the fund to be used in acquiring scenic tracts and historic spots."⁶ Success was almost immediate. Within a very short time the state acquired McCormick's Creek Canyon in Owen County and then Bloomingdale Glen or Turkey Run in Parke County as the foundation of the new state park system.⁷

On November 13, 1932, friends from throughout the United States assembled in Turkey Run State Park to honor Lieber, creator of the Indiana state park system.⁸ The guest speaker, journalist and historian Claude G. Bowers, said that Lieber "through his work for our own and future generations has raised monuments to his public service that will abide as long as the forests spread their branches to the sky, or the stone battlements of the cliffs abide, or the restless sands of the dunes shift on the shores of Michigan, for the history of

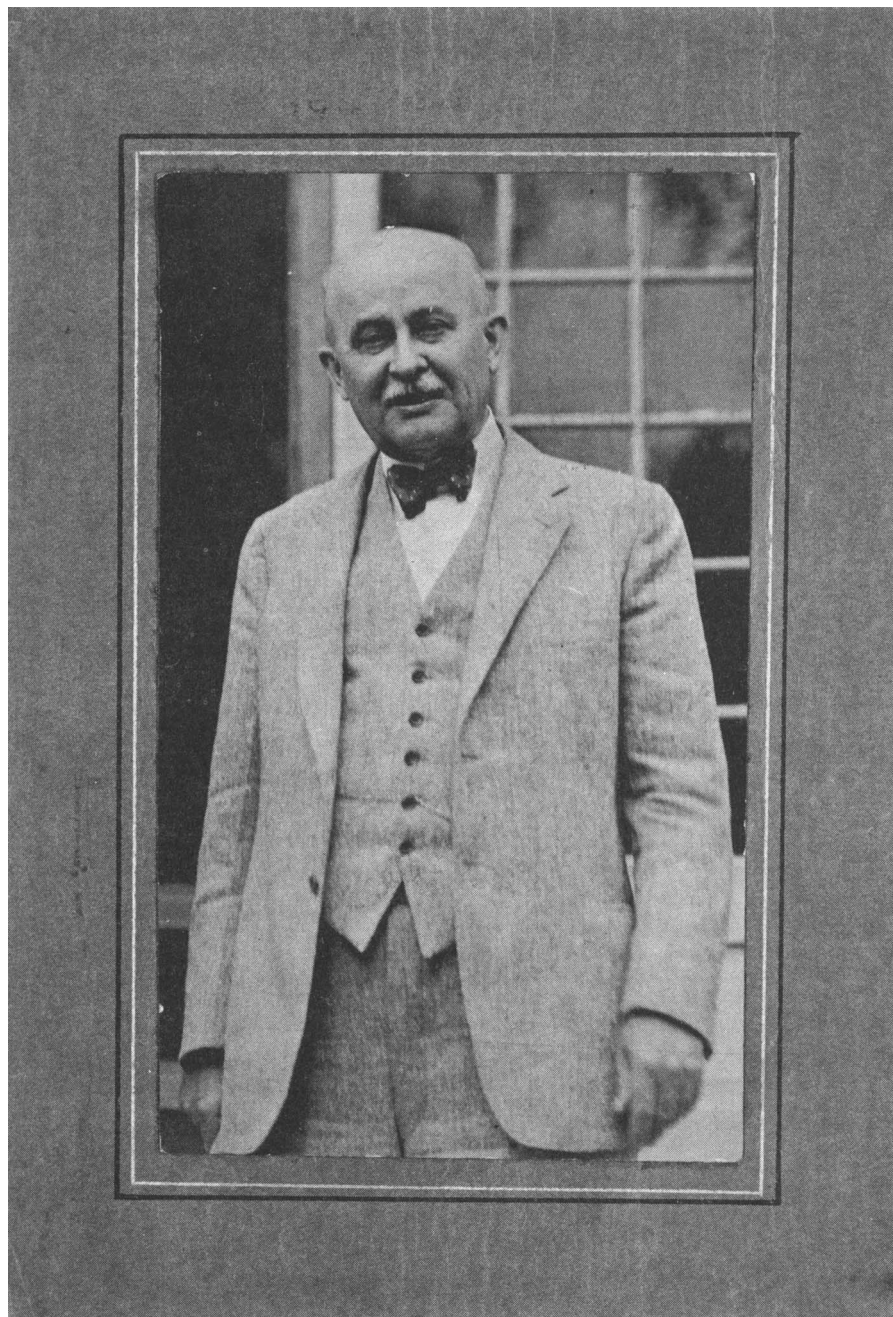
⁴ Emma Lieber, *Richard Lieber*, 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 88. In 1915 as the result of a conversation with Richard Smith, editor of the *Indianapolis News*, Lieber had learned that a magnificent tract of forest known as Turkey Run or Bloomingdale Glen was to be sold for timber. The information had come from Juliet V. Strauss, a newspaperwoman who lived close by the glen. Lieber was immediately interested in saving this virgin forest. *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 129-30. By 1932 the state park system of Indiana had expanded into a vast network of parks including: McCormick's Creek in Owen County, Turkey Run in Parke County, Clifty Falls in Jefferson County, Muscatatuck in Jennings County, the Dunes in Porter County, Pokagon in Steuben County, Spring Mill in Lawrence County, Brown County, Shakamak, which includes parts of Clay, Sullivan, and Greene counties, Mounds in Madison County, Bass Lake Beach in Starke County, and Lincoln in Spencer County. Barnhart and Carmony, *Indiana*, II, 287. For a more complete study of Lieber and the development of Indiana's state park system see Robert A. Frederick, "Colonel Richard Lieber, Conservationist and Park Builder: The Indiana Years" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1960).



RICHARD LIEBER
c. 1919

Courtesy Wayne R. Guthrie, *Indianapolis News*

conservation has written in indelible letters the name Richard Lieber, whose bust we leave beneath the fine old trees of Turkey Run.”⁹

In 1940 Lieber himself wrote in an account for author Louis Adamic:

In 1915 began my life's work, creating state parks, and subsequently I became director of the newly established Department of Conservation. For fourteen years, the happiest of my life, I worked at that task. Today, like an old pensioned fire-department horse, I am still at it (as consultant to the National Park Service and as a member of its Advisory Board), grateful that the government lets me. I have not gathered any riches that 'thieves dig after or the rust eats' nor did I ever care to. No one of the millions who enjoy our state parks or have benefited from better practices in conservation owes me anything, not even thanks. On the contrary, I am in their debt that they have permitted me, a chance immigrant, to do what he wanted to do. Only in these United States could a thing like that have happened.¹⁰

Ray H. Brock of Monee, Illinois, has recently generously donated to the Butler University Library a number of papers and documents relative to Indiana history. Among them is the following report which Lieber made as chairman of the Indiana State Centennial Memorial Committee. Not only does it describe the way in which the state of Indiana acquired Turkey Run to be developed into a state park, but it also demonstrates the dedication this remarkable man had for nature's beauty and his untiring zeal in endeavoring to preserve it for posterity. In a time when preservation of a suitable natural environment has become one of the greatest challenges of modern life, it is appropriate to recall the efforts of the tireless Lieber and to redouble present efforts as his accomplishment serves as an inspiration. Generations of Hoosiers and Americans yet unborn owe Lieber a never ending debt of gratitude.

⁹ Emma Lieber, *Richard Lieber*, 130.

¹⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 14.

Indianapolis, Ind.,
November 25th, 1916.¹

Indiana Historical Commission,²
City.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I herewith beg to submit my report as Chairman of the Committee on Indiana State Centennial Memorial.³

The first meeting of the Committee was held March 18th, 1916, since which time our activity has never lagged. We were spurred on to immediate action by the fact that sixty days later one of the garden spots of Indiana, namely, Turkey Run was to be sold at public auction. Turkey Run is a paradise of rocky gorges, glens, bathing beaches and waterfalls, a retreat for song birds and a garden of wild flowers. It has hundreds of magnificent black walnut, oak, poplar, and other stately trees, all growing in a primeval forest which the Lusk family carefully preserved from the lumberman's axe.⁴

We immediately began an extensive campaign for funds and in

¹ The report which follows is an exact transcription of a photographic copy of the typewritten original. A [sic] has been used to indicate any irregularities. In three instances handwritten corrections, presumably made by Richard Lieber, were added to the original typed copy. These corrections have been incorporated in this reproduction. Minor changes in spacing have been made. This report, which is in the manuscripts division of the Butler University Library, Indianapolis, Indiana, is apparently a revised version from which the final report was copied and submitted by Lieber to the Indiana Historical Commission. The final report was published in Indiana Historical Commission, *Report of the Indiana Historical Commission from Its Organization, April 24, 1915, to December 1, 1916*; Bulletin 7 (Indianapolis, 1916), 28-31; and also in Harlow Lindley, ed., *Indiana Centennial, 1916: A Record of the Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Indiana's Admission to Statehood* (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. V; Indianapolis, 1919), 50-55.

² The members of the Indiana Historical Commission in 1916 were: Governor Samuel M. Ralston, president; Dr. Frank B. Wynn, a prominent physician and Indianapolis civic leader, vice president; Harlow Lindley, a professor at Earlham College, secretary; Professor James A. Woodburn, head of the Department of History at Indiana University; Charles W. Moores, a leading member of the Indianapolis bar; Samuel M. Foster, a business, political, and civic leader of Fort Wayne; Charity Dye, widely known in educational activities in Indianapolis; John Cavanaugh, president of the University of Notre Dame; and Lew M. O'Bannon, editor of the *Corydon Democrat*. Dr. Wynn, as vice president, actively headed the commission in place of the governor. Lindley, *Indiana Centennial*, 23.

³ The members of the Indiana Historical Commission also served as the State Centennial Commission, the responsibility of which was to plan a suitable centennial celebration for the state in 1916. Lieber was the chairman of a special committee set up by Governor Ralston and the Indiana Historical Commission to be known as the Committee on the Indiana State Centennial Memorial. It was also known as the "Park Committee" as its purpose was to begin a state park system for Indiana as a phase of the centennial celebration. Governor Ralston appointed the committee in March, 1916. Its members were Richard Lieber, chairman; Dr. Frank B. Wynn, Sol S. Kiser, who was an Indianapolis banker, and Leo M. Rappaport, an attorney. In addition to the effort to create state parks the State Centennial Commission was to arrange exhibits, pageants, and other suitable celebrations to illustrate the industrial, agricultural, educational, and social life of the state. *Ibid.*, 24, 48.

⁴ In 1826 Captain Salmon Lusk brought his bride to the area which became known as Turkey Run. The Lusks were its original white settlers and owners.



VIEWS OF TURKEY RUN, c. 1919.

Reproduced from Harlow Lindley, ed., *The Indiana Centennial, 1916*
... (*Indiana Historical Collections*, Vol. V; Indianapolis, 1919), 51.



MCCORMICK'S CREEK CANYON

Reproduced from Harlow Lindley, ed., *The Indiana Centennial, 1916*
. . . (*Indiana Historical Collections*, Vol. V; Indianapolis, 1919), 52.

this were materially assisted by the press of the State. We sought the opinions of leading Americans concerning our enterprise and received most encouraging replies from such men as President [Woodrow] Wilson, Governor [Samuel W.] McCall of Massachusetts, Theodore Roosevelt, Vice-President [Thomas R.] Marshall, Senators [John W.] Kern and [Thomas] Taggart, Stewart Edward White, Ellery Sedgwick, Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* [*sic*], Lyman Abbot[t] and others.⁵

The actual work of gathering funds commenced in April. A joint Committee of the Indianapolis Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce was appointed and this Committee held daily meetings during the period of active solicitation. By proclamation of Governor [Samuel M.] Ralston the week beginning April 24th was designated for the purpose of making contributions to the State Park Fund. This resulted in the organization of some volunteer committees in the state at large. I am pained to acknowledge, however, that the citizens of the state generally did not respond in a manner which can possibly be compared to the liberality of the citizens of Indianapolis. Two thirds of all the money subscribed came from Indianapolis. I believe, however, that this is due to the fact that the Committee was in closer contact with Indianapolis than other communities in the State and that with a better knowledge of the facts and circumstances in connection with the Park movement, adequate funds can still be raised throughout the State.

Upon the day of the sale of Turkey Run, the Committee became a bidder and continued to bid until it came to the conclusion that it was useless to compete with a commercial bidder. As a result the property was sold to the Hoosier Veneer Co., of Indianapolis for \$30,200. The Committee, however, did not allow this disappointment to curb its activity and then and there determined to acquire Turkey Run notwithstanding its apparent failure. Negotiations with the Hoosier Veneer Co. continued all summer and fall and finally on the 11th day of November, the property was purchased for the sum of \$40,200. Figuring taxes and interest charges the profit of the Hoosier Veneer Co. was approximately \$9,000. On the other hand, the Committee after making very careful investigations of timber and land values, concluded that the property was worth all they had paid for it.

Turkey Run was later the property of their son, John Lusk, who died in 1915. In 1882 the Indianapolis, Decatur, and Springfield Railroad received a franchise from John Lusk to operate a resort on the site, an operation that continued under various managements until Turkey Run was acquired by the state of Indiana. The name Turkey Run derived from the fact that, according to legend, thousands of wild turkeys gathered there under the protection of the overhanging rocks. Emma Lieber, *Richard Lieber by His Wife, Emma* (Indianapolis, 1947), 84-85.

⁵ Vice President Marshall and national Senators Kern and Taggart were from Indiana. Stewart Edward White was a well known author, many of whose works related to the American West. Lyman Abbott was a prominent Congregational clergyman and editor-in-chief of the *Outlook*.

While the Committee was negotiating for Turkey Run, a Committee of citizens from Owen County informed us that McCormick's Creek Canyon was about to be sold by the Administrator of the Estate of Dr. F. W. Denkewalter,⁶ the latter having spent a lifetime in acquiring the various portions of this scenic tract. The appraisement of the property fixed its value at \$5250 and after viewing this bit of scenery, the Committee determined to buy the same provided that the citizens of Owen County would raise one fourth of the purchase price among themselves and would guarantee that the cost would not exceed the appraisement. Due to the enterprise and civic spirit of the citizens of Owen County, this property was acquired and will go down into history as the first link in the chain of parks to be established. It is due these people to acknowledge that if the citizens of all the counties in Indiana would show an equal interest in this movement, the state would before long be assured of one of the most magnificent systems of state parks in the country.

The failure to acquire Turkey Run at the time of the auction sale interfered with the campaign to gather funds, but we were assured at that time by the gentlemen constituting the Board of Directors of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Association⁷ that if we would persist in our efforts, they would eventually aid us financially. These men more than redeemed their promise, [*sic*] The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Association donated the sum of \$5,065 and Mr. Arthur C. Newby, whose share of that contribution was one fourth, gave us in addition thereto the sum of \$5,000. Furthermore, he has aided the Committee actively in the collection of funds to an extent that would have meant failure except for that assistance.

During all our work we were supported by the active and sustained interest of Governor Ralston and I wish to take this occasion to extend to him the thanks of our Committee. Furthermore, I am particularly pleased to acknowledge the most valuable assistance rendered by your acting chairman, Dr. Frank B. Wynn, who has made the work of our Committee his own and who actively participated in all our activity. Much of our success is due to his great zeal and circumspection.

I feel that this report would be incomplete without giving the views of our Committee on State Parks generally. Established upon a broad and substantial basis, Indiana State Parks would not only

⁶ Dr. Frederick W. Denkewalter was a physician well known in Owen County. McCormick's Creek Canyon is located near Spencer in Owen County.

⁷ The board of directors and officers of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1916 were: Carl G. Fisher, president; Arthur C. Newby, first vice president; Frank H. Wheeler, second vice president; and James A. Allison, secretary-treasurer. They were the owners and builders of the Speedway, as well. Mr. Newby, a leading automobile builder of the time, was a racing enthusiast and president of the National Motor Vehicles Company of Indianapolis. Telephone interview with Al Bloemker, publicity director, Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

memorialize the past but would build for the future by practical conservation. They would distinctly point out the desirability of preserving trees, of protecting birds and animal life. They would constantly be a great public lesson in conservation and show the folly of prodigal waste of Indiana's superb natural resources. They would impress upon the public mind that wastefulness of Nature's beauties and treasures is out of harmony with the spirit of the time, progress and the needs of Indiana's new century.

The United States Government long ago won widespread popular approval in setting aside large scenic tracts, preserving them for all time against commercial vandalism and providing immense recreational grounds. They are on a very generous scale and show what Indiana might do on a smaller scale in the accomplishment of similar ends. National Parks like the Grand Can[y]on, Yellowstone, Yosemite and Glacier National, because of their remoteness, are available only to those Indiana people who have time and means to visit them, but a system of State Parks would bring recreation grounds close home to practically all our people.

While State Parks present a new idea to Indiana, there are successful examples to be found in other States that place the proposed Indiana system beyond experiment. Massachusetts awoke to the importance of State Parks a score of years ago and has since been preserving scenic seashore, river banks and wooded hilltops that had previously been privately owned. Massachusetts now has many parks from six to fifty acres in extent.

Maine has made a beginning in the same direction. A still more notable achievement in State Parks is found in New York, especially in the preservation of Niagara Falls, in the great gorge of the Genesee River, a great reservation in the Adirondack mountains, and the Pallisades along the Hudson River.

Not content with the National Park reservations within her borders, California has invested \$250,000 in ten thousand acres at Boulder Creek to preserve a forest of red wood trees.

But Wisconsin doubtless holds the lead in State Parks. In the beginning park enthusiasts of that State made a systematic examination of Wisconsin's scenic resources with a view to placing the ownership in the public. One of Wisconsin's State Parks is in Door County, including 3,800 acres. The acquisition of five or six thousand acres of forest around Devil's Lake is under way and the Dells of the Wisconsin River, and another tract of some 2,700 acres along the Mississippi River are to be added to the State's system.

In all of these States, as it would be in Indiana, the chief purpose of State Parks is to refresh and strengthen and renew tired people, and fit them for the common round of daily life.

Other States, as doubtless will Indiana, have found that there is also a cash value in scenery, an income to be derived from excur-

sionists, from special commercial privileges and concessions, and from fish and game, an income that can be turned toward the cost of maintenance.

In Boston's elaborate Metropolitan Park system is an example of possibilities within the reach of Indiana cities which they might follow on a small scale. The Boston system includes its own and that of thirty-seven surrounding cities, the system having established both parks and connecting parkways, and highways for motor and other traffic. The Blue Hills reservation, twelve miles from the statehouse, has 4,700 acres; Middlesex Falls, five miles from the statehouse, contains 3,200 acres, this park being bordered by five cities; Mystic Valley Parkway, along Lake and river of the same name, is a third of the larger areas in the Boston system. Many miles of rocky and wooded tracts are included, as well as great stretches of seashore. About \$7,000,000 has been spent for lands for this system and as much more is going into development, the money being raised by state, city and town taxation.

Density of population in Europe does not permit the creation of extensive parks. But every scenic spot, large or small, has been beautified, giving whole provinces the aspect of one large park in which are nestled villages, towns, and even cities themselves.

The European long ago learned the material value of scenery. The ubiquitous red Baedeker is an eloquent testimonial thereof.⁸ Take little Switzerland, for instance. It has 16,000 square miles compared to Colorado's 104,000 square miles. We do not have to read "Tartarin on the Alps"⁹ to know that it is the most superbly ordered and highest dividend paying scenery in the world. It is well enough to speak of Nature's hygienic value, of its recuperative and recreative strength, but when one reflects for a moment that Americans alone,—not to mention all the other nations—have left annually \$50,000,000 in that little country, it is realized that scenery has an inherent cash value and that the so-called "Lungs" of a people have from a given view point a most convincing resemblance to a fat purse.

In conclusion, I hope and trust that the small beginning we have made will have laid the foundation for a comprehensive system of State Parks which will not only stand forever as a token of the past but which will bring health, wealth and happiness to our own generation and the many that will come after us.

Very respectfully yours,

[Signed] Richard Lieber

⁸ The Karl Baedeker publishing firm of Leipzig, Germany, has published many European travel guides which are frequently bound in red. For example, see Karl Baedeker, *Switzerland and the Adjacent Portions of Italy, Savoy, and Tyrol: Handbook for All Travellers* (New York, 1913).

⁹ Alphonse Daudet, *Tartarin of Tarascon and Tartartin on the Alps* (New York, 1910).