Governor Samuel M. Ralston and Indiana's Centennial Celebration

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In 1916 Indiana celebrated the centennial of its statehood. There is always something significant in anniversaries, but for Hoosiers this occasion held special meaning. Individually and collectively they were proud of their state's hundred year growth as well as Indiana's achievements in agriculture, industry, politics, education, literature, and the arts. And Samuel M. Ralston, the state's centennial governor, was determined that “this historic event . . . be given proper recognition . . .”1

Ralston was elected the twenty-seventh governor of Indiana in 1912 after waging a fierce campaign against Albert J. Beveridge, the Progressive party's well known nominee, and against Winfield T. Durbin, the Republican candidate. A competent lawyer and loyal Democrat, Ralston was a modest man who throughout the campaign of 1912 exhibited a strong sense of decency and dedication. Even more important, he was attuned to the spirit of the times. Believing that Indianians were “conservatively progressive,” Ralston made a moderate but successful appeal to the voters'
growing reform sentiment by publicly committing himself to numerous progressive measures.\(^3\)

Ralston, who was born in 1856, had witnessed the transformation of the United States from a predominantly rural-agricultural society to a primarily urban-industrial one. And he, like so many of his contemporaries who exercised political leadership in the early twentieth century, was disturbed by the rapidity and complexity of this change and was anxious about the future of traditional American values and institutions. Ralston was deeply attached to the old social, political, and economic order which had allowed him to advance in both law and politics. But he was not a reactionary who clung obstinately to the past; he realized that unbending resistance in the face of massive change would only be self defeating. As governor, therefore, he not only took the initiative in forwarding a variety of programs which brought Indiana into the forefront among other progressive states, but he served Hoosiers in a manner of which they could be proud as they celebrated their state's hundred year anniversary.\(^4\)

When the sixty-ninth session of the legislature convened on January 7, 1915, Ralston reported on the affairs of state in a message more somber than that delivered before the previous session of the General Assembly in 1913.\(^5\) After reminding his listeners of Indiana's forthcoming anniversary, he asked that during this commemorative period they "jealously guard her fair name and zealously labor to preserve her untarnished glory."\(^6\) The governor also requested that the legislators create a centennial commission and appropriate $25,000 for a public celebration "in keeping with the dignity of the state."

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\(^3\) Suellen M. Hoy, "Samuel M. Ralston: Progressive Governor, 1913-1917" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1975). For quotation see Ralston to Thomas Taggart, February 14, 1914, Ralston Papers.


\(^5\) In 1913 there had been a sense of exhilaration over the recent victory which had given Democrats control of the statehouse and of both legislative chambers. Ralston and his colleagues had looked with anticipation to the future. Indianapolis News, January 10, 1913.

\(^6\) Indiana, House Journal (1915), 20.

\(^7\) Ibid., 53. In 1913 the General Assembly had rejected various proposals concerning Indiana's centennial observance. Finally, a provision was made to appropriate $2,000,000 for a memorial building that would house a state library and other state agencies. In the regular fall election in 1914 this proposal was rejected by the voters. Indiana, Laws (1913), 526-28; Biennial Report of the Secretary of State for the Two Years Ending October 31, 1914 (Indianapolis, 1914), 168-69. Ralston believed that the proposal was rejected not because the people were hostile "to a proper celebration of that historic event" but because they objected "to the amount of money sought to be appropriated therefor." Indiana, House Journal (1915), 53.
In response to Ralston's directives both houses voted unanimously to create a nonsalaried, nonpartisan historical commission and to appropriate $25,000 for its use. The governor; James A. Woodburn, professor of American history and politics and director of the Indiana Historical Survey at Indiana University; and Harlow Lindley, director of the Department of Indiana History and Archives at the state library, were made *ex officio* members; and Ralston was given the authority to appoint six other members. The Indiana Historical Commission received two major assignments. Its immediate task was to prepare and execute plans for the state's centennial celebration in 1916. Its more enduring responsibility was to collect, edit, and publish materials relating to the history of Indiana.

After the commission's first meeting in Ralston's office on April 23 and 24, 1915, an ambitious "campaign of centennial education" was launched. General bulletins setting forth the commission's purpose and plans were widely distributed. Special articles were prepared for newspapers, periodicals, and news agencies. One of the most active members of the commission, Charity Dye of Indianapolis, wrote and edited "The Centennial Story Hour" for children, which series of articles appeared in the Sunday edition of the Indianapolis Star. Many involved and patriotic citizens, as well as commissioners, accepted speaking engagements before commercial and civic organizations, social clubs, historical societies, and church groups. In September, 1915, the commission began the publication of a weekly newsletter designed...

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8 Indiana, *Laws* (1915), 455-57. Of the $25,000 appropriated, $20,000 was for the promotion of centennial celebrations throughout the state; $5,000 was for the collection and publication of historical documents. Ralston appointed Charles W. Moore, Frank B. Wynn, and Charity Dye of Indianapolis; Lew O'Bannon of Corydon; John Cavanaugh of South Bend; and Samuel Foster of Fort Wayne. Ralston was president; Wynn, vice president; Lindley, secretary; Woodburn, chairman of committee on historical publications; Wynn, chairman of committee on ways, means, and plans for celebration; and O'Bannon, chairman of committee on publicity. Ralston's centennial commission appointments, April, 1915, Ralston Papers. The Indiana Historical Survey had been organized in 1913 to collect and publish materials on the history of Indiana, but the survey never received enough funds to become permanently established. Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 538.

9 Indiana, *Laws* (1915), 456-57. See also James A. Woodburn, "The Indiana Historical Commission and Plans for the Centennial," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XI (December, 1915), 339. The Indiana Historical Commission used its $5,000 appropriation to issue the first four volumes of the *Indiana Historical Collections*. 
to serve as a clearing house of information for county chairmen and the press. George Ade, a prominent Indiana playwright from Newton County, undertook a project to bring former Hoosiers back to Indiana during 1916 for a homecoming celebration. And as a salute to the state’s agricultural and industrial diversity, Ralston proclaimed February 22, 1916, “Indiana Products Day.” Banquets and dinners were held in various towns and cities, at which nothing but products grown or manufactured in the state were supposed to be served.\(^{10}\)

Although the commissioners encouraged projects all over the state, they were determined that Indiana’s one hundredth anniversary would not be “marred by the presence of anything of a cheap and tawdry nature.” They warned county chairmen that the centennial celebration was not a “carnival,”\(^{11}\) and when it became clear that the National Patriotic League—a commercial enterprise supposedly emanating from Washington, D. C.—was “masquerading under the guise of patriotism,” it was publicly denounced. Speaking as president of the commission, Ralston declared that the league had “no connection with the duly organized Indiana Historical Commission” and that “all the work and arrangements of such ‘League’ or such persons is hereby repudiated . . . .”\(^{12}\)

The governor personally feared that the National Patriotic League was attempting “to cripple materially the work of the statutory commission, by inaugurating a movement in different cities in the state, out of which the promoters can make some money.”\(^{13}\) He was not mistaken. Before the league’s operation was halted, members of the commission were forced to issue several more statements. They warned those who continued to work with the league that they were doing so

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\(^{11}\) Centennial News Letter, April 24, 1916. County chairmen were appointed by the Indiana Historical Commission. They were “to organize a county committee to co-operate with the Commission in promoting the general State-wide celebration and in arousing local interest and planning for local celebrations.” Woodburn, “Indiana Historical Commission and Plans for the Centennial,” 342.

\(^{12}\) Ralston’s statement on National Patriotic League, September 1, 1915, Ralston Papers.

\(^{13}\) Ralston to Frank V. Guthrie, September 16, 1915, Ralston Papers.
"at their own risk and with the clear understanding that they are in no way co-operating with the spirit and high purposes of the Indiana Centennial observance . . . ."\textsuperscript{14}

Except for this one incident the plans of the Indiana Historical Commission were apparently not thwarted, and the centennial celebration proved to be one "in keeping with the dignity of the state."\textsuperscript{15} Hoosiers appropriately displayed their patriotism, gratitude, and reverence in a variety of ways. In an effort to preserve the sources of Indiana's history, publication of descriptions of early travels and documents related to the state's constitution were commenced under the commission's direct supervision. Commemorative songs and poems were written; markers were placed on historic highway trails; and local ceremonies and pageants were held in communities throughout the state.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the most memorable festivities took place at Corydon, Indiana's first capital, on June 2 and 3, 1916. Ralston, who gave the opening address, observed how fitting it was that "Hoosiers in this the centennial year of their state should come to Corydon . . . to recall something of the state's history . . . and to strengthen their love of and devotion to those principles of free government that were so enably [sic] enunciated in the state's first chart of liberty, the Constitution of 1816."\textsuperscript{17} Thomas J. Wilson, chairman of the committee on program and arrangements for the Corydon celebration, was dedicated to keeping out "all cheap, objectionable shows, so-called entertainments all too common on such occasions [sic]."\textsuperscript{18} Thus, proper memorial speeches and a dignified historical pageant, directed by State Pageant Master William Chauncey Langdon, were presented.\textsuperscript{19} Musical selections were

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, the Indiana Historical Commission's "Statement of Warning," November 7, 1915, Ralston Papers.

\textsuperscript{15} Indiana, \textit{House Journal} (1915), 53.


\textsuperscript{17} Ralston address, June 2, 1916, Ralston Papers. Although it was impossible for Ralston to attend every local celebration, he appeared at many of them. Besides Corydon, the governor went to Bloomington, Lebanon, and Connersville and presided at nearly every centennial event in Indianapolis. Most of Ralston's addresses at these celebrations may be found in the Ralston Papers, 1916.

\textsuperscript{18} Thomas J. Wilson to James A. Woodburn, March 27, 1916, Ralston Papers.

\textsuperscript{19} William Chauncey Langdon, \textit{The Pageant of Indiana: The Drama of the Development of the State as a Community from Its Exploration by LaSalle to the Centennial of Its Admission to the Union} (Indianapolis, 1916).
The Corydon Pageant

Reproduced from Harlow Lindley, ed., The Indiana Centennial, 1916: A Record of the Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Indiana’s Admission to Statehood (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. III; Indianapolis, 1919), 165.
played by the Indiana University orchestra and the Purdue University band. And the old capitol at Corydon was secured as a permanent state memorial.

Another significant consequence of Indiana's anniversary celebration was the emergence of a system of state parks. In April, 1915, Ralston received "an inspiring letter" from Juliet V. Strauss of Rockville, a writer for *Ladies' Home Journal* and "country contributor" to the Indianapolis *News*. Strauss had spent her childhood near Bloomingdale Glens—or Turkey Run as it was known to Parke County residents—and in her letter she appealed to the governor to save this tract of virgin forest from the lumber industry. Exactly one week later, on April 27, Ralston appointed Strauss, William W. Woollen of Indianapolis, and Vida Newsom of Columbus to a Turkey Run Commission. They were given one task: preserve Turkey Run for the state.

Turkey Run, in northern Parke County, was "a paradise of rocky gorges, glens, bathing beaches and waterfalls, a retreat for song birds and a garden of wild flowers." Most impressive were the old and stately trees—poplars, black walnuts, oaks, sycamores, beeches—which covered the canyons as well as the cliffs. Turkey Run's original white occupants were Captain and Mrs. Salmon Lusk who had discovered the land while traveling northward from Fort Harrison in 1826. Lusk, a Vermonter, had served under William Henry Harrison at the Battle of Tippecanoe and was given the tract in recognition of his service. Much later, Turkey Run became the property of the captain's son, John. An eccentric hermit but an ardent admirer of nature, John Lusk refused many attractive offers from lumbermen and

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20 Indiana University President William L. Bryan and Purdue University President William E. Stone offered the services of both groups for no charge except that of "transportation and subsistence." Thomas J. Wilson to James A. Woodburn, March 27, 1916, Ralston Papers.

21 Indiana Department of Conservation, Division of State Parks, Lands and Waters, *The Corydon State Capitol: A State Memorial* (Indianapolis, 1947).

22 Juliet V. Strauss to Ralston, April 19, 1915, Governor Samuel M. Ralston Papers (Archives Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis). See also Indianapolis *News*, August 9, 1924.

23 Ralston's Turkey Run Commission appointments, April 27, 1915, Ralston Papers.

preserved Turkey Run in its primitive state. In 1882 he gave the Indianapolis, Decatur, and Springfield Railroad a franchise to open a summer resort at Turkey Run, which continued to operate under various managements until 1915 when the younger Lusk died.25

Strauss had not appealed only to the governor in April, 1915. She had also contacted Richard Smith, managing editor of the Indianapolis News, whom she knew through her work as the newspaper's country contributor. Although Smith had never heard of Turkey Run, he was willing to promote a good cause, and he promised his help. He recalled that Richard Lieber of Indianapolis—the man who would soon become Indiana's most prominent conservationist—had written an editorial for the News a few years before in which he had protested the removal of some magnificent trees to make way for a thoroughfare. Smith sent for Lieber and told him of Strauss' request. Without a moment's hesitation Lieber committed himself to the preservation of Turkey Run.26

Lieber, German born, came to Indiana in 1891, but he played no role in the state's conservation movement until after 1910. His conversion to the conservation movement was hastened in September, 1910, while visiting a friend, Fred Hetherington, at his cabin in Brown County. Lieber was astonished to find such scenic beauty so near to Indianapolis and suggested that the "whole county 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." In February, 1911, Lieber purchased some land in Brown County on which he built his own Whip-poor-will Lodge. In October, 1912, he served as chairman of the local board of governors for the Fourth National Conservation Congress held in Indianapolis. From that point on, his activities on behalf of conservation never ceased.27

25 Emma Lieber, Richard Lieber by His Wife, Emma (Indianapolis, 1947), 84-85. Emma Lieber explains how Bloomingdale Glens got the name "Turkey Run." Thousands of wild turkeys used to collect in droves under the overhanging rocks for protection. As a result, the settlers began calling the region "Turkey Run." See also Robert Allen Frederick, "Colonel Richard Lieber, Conservationist and Park Builder: The Indiana Years" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1960), 112-14.


27 Emma Lieber, Richard Lieber, 68-71, 77. The quotation is found on page 69.
Lieber called on Ralston in November, 1915, to discuss Indiana's centennial celebration and the movement to save Turkey Run.28 Although there is no known transcription of the conversation, it is nearly certain that Lieber proposed "one solution" to end "the destruction of the forests, the neglect of the historical places and the beauty spots that mean health and happiness to its [Indiana's] people." Lieber's "one solution" was to create a system of state parks as a permanent memorial of the centennial celebration.29 Ralston evidently voiced "no objections."30 As a sign of his approval, the governor appointed Lieber to the Turkey Run Commission in January, 1916.31 And when the Indiana Historical Commission met that same month, it passed a motion to inaugurate a system of state parks. Lieber subsequently accepted the commission's invitation to serve as chairman of the newly created state park memorial committee of which the Turkey Run Commission was to be a part.32

To win support for a system of state parks Lieber and his colleagues initiated an impressive campaign of education and persuasion. They first pointed out to Indiana citizens that the proposed park plan was the only centennial plan that would memorialize the state as a whole in 1916. But more important, they argued that a park system would be a worthwhile and dignified memorial. The state's parks would "refresh and strengthen and renew tired people, and fit them for the common round of daily life." No one, they asserted, could doubt the dignity of such a plan. A comprehensive system of state parks, committee members urged, "would not only memorialize the past but would build for the future . . . ." Indiana's parks would "stand forever as a token of the past," and they would also "bring health, wealth and happiness to our own generation and the many that will come after us."33

28 Ibid., 69.
30 Emma Lieber, Richard Lieber, 80.
Lieber believed that the committee's arguments had been favorably received, but he knew that the real test was yet to come. Turkey Run was to be sold at an auction on May 18, 1916. If Indiana were to purchase it, the money had to be raised by public subscription since the legislature had not appropriated funds for that purpose. The Indiana Historical Commission and the state park memorial committee met jointly and set the goal at $25,000. On April 12 Ralston issued a proclamation designating the week of April 24 "an appropriate time" for giving subscriptions "to acquire scenic tracts and historic spots in various parts of Indiana, and thus lay the foundation for a state-wide park system, and dedicate them to perpetual use of all the people . . . ."34

The park committee published and widely circulated a pamphlet which included among other items a description, a map, and pictures of Turkey Run.35 Committee members approached special interest groups, organizations, and institutions in the state for subscriptions; they sent weekly newsletters to the Indiana press; and they wrote feature articles which appeared regularly in newspapers throughout the state. Lieber successfully secured endorsements of the state park plan from renowned men in public life. When the fund raising was over, the park committee announced that it had collected $20,000.36 The mark had not been reached, but no one seemed disappointed. On the day before the auction the

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34 Ralston's park subscription proclamation, April 12, 1916, Ralston Papers. Ralston acknowledged that Lieber wrote the proclamation and thanked him for doing so. Emma Lieber complimented Ralston for this: "To show you what an unusually fine man Governor Ralston was, I am copying the following item from a newspaper clipping which Governor Ralston had published in our papers. It is rare that any politician in office gives credit to a ghostwriter . . . ." Emma Lieber, Richard Lieber, 82.

35 Indiana State Parks to be Founded by Public Subscriptions Raised Under the Direction of the State Park Memorial Committee of the Indiana Historical Commission (Indianapolis, 1916).

36 Richard Lieber's Report, November 25, 1916, in Silver, "Richard Lieber and Indiana's Forest Heritage," 51–52; Emma Lieber, Richard Lieber, 83–84; Frederick, "Colonel Richard Lieber," 121. It perhaps should be noted that Senator Thomas Taggart sent Richard Lieber a check for $1,000 from Washington, D.C. Indianapolis Star, May 10, 1916. Some of the other prominent persons who endorsed the centennial park plan were President Woodrow Wilson, Vice President Thomas Marshall, former President Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane, Senator John W. Kern, James Whitcomb Riley, Booth Tarkington, George Ade, and Meredith Nicholson. Letters from these persons and others to Lieber can be found in the Lieber Papers, 1916.
Indianapolis News proudly reported: “Attention! SOS means: See Our State Park, Turkey Run.”

On May 18, the day of the auction, over two thousand people gathered in the park to watch Leo M. Rappaport, bidder and secretary of the state park memorial committee, win Turkey Run from the lumber industry. Throughout the fund raising campaign the park committee had heard reports that several timber companies were organizing to bid on the Lusk estate. In an attempt to dissuade them Lieber had asked Charles H. Barnaby, a friend and an influential lumberman, to write an article for the Indianapolis News explaining why timbermen should allow the state to acquire Turkey Run. Although Barnaby had complied, the lumbermen’s threat was never completely removed.

During the beginning stages of the auction, some timbermen gave token bids up to $15,000 and then stopped, while other members of the lumber industry, the Lusk heirs, and Rappaport continued in the contest. When the bidding reached $21,000, Rappaport momentarily withdrew. He hurriedly consulted with members of the park committee and returned quickly to shout out his final bid of $30,100—much more money than the committee had. Just when it appeared as if Indiana had saved Turkey Run, Joseph Gross, a representative of the Hoosier Veneer Company of Indianapolis, cast his bid of $30,200 and secured the park.

The park committee and the governor, disappointed and regretful, continued their efforts to procure Turkey Run. Rappaport, an attorney by profession, opened negotiations with the Hoosier Veneer Company. At one point the company offered a threefold proposal according to which the company would remove many of the choice trees and then donate the land and remaining forest to the state. The committee found this plan unacceptable and refused the offer. Nevertheless,

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optimism ran high, and an Indianapolis News editorial speculated that “Mr. [Henry E.] Dougherty [president of the Hoosier Veneer Company] has shown that he is not without appreciation of the people's wishes in this matter, and it seems probable that a further conference . . . might bring this much perturbed question to a happy solution.”42 It did. On November 11, 1916, Turkey Run was purchased from the Hoosier Veneer Company for the sum of $40,200. The price was met in large part by private donations and by a substantial contribution from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Association.43 Lieber, in his final report to the Indiana Historical Commission, thanked the park benefactors and commended the governor for his “active and sustained interest” during the entire period.44

While the Turkey Run negotiations were underway, a group of Owen County citizens informed the park committee that McCormick's Creek Canyon was soon to be sold by the administrator of the Frederick W. Denkewalter estate. The property was viewed and appraised, and the committee decided to purchase the land if the citizens of Owen County would raise one fourth of the price. Within a very short time these citizens had collected their portion, and Rappaport was once again commissioned to do the state's bidding at the public auction in Spencer. On this occasion the park committee's efforts were not stymied. McCormick's Creek was acquired with a bid of $5,250. Thus, McCormick's Creek

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42 Indianapolis News, May 23, 1916. Juliet V. Strauss wrote the governor: “Can nothing be said to make Mr. Dougherty see what a burning disgrace to Indiana here in our Centennial year this affair is? I suppose Eminent Domain is impossible. If it were possible you would have the opportunity of a life time to popularize your self & your office— for it would be a matter of national interest. Now you can't imagine the feeling that exists throughout the state towards the Hoosier Veneer Co. I believe people would lynch Dougherty if they had a leader. Everybody has been crazy about you taking the part you have.” Juliet V. Strauss to Ralston, May 27, 1916, Ralston Papers. In response, Ralston thanked her for her compliment and promised to work hard “to save Turkey Run.” He closed optimistically: “As a bit of consolation . . . I feel that in some way the state will ultimately come into possession of this beauty spot.” Ralston to Juliet V. Strauss, May 31, 1916, Ralston Papers.


44 Ibid., 63.
Indiana's Centennial Celebration

Canyon—and not Turkey Run—became the “first link in the chain of parks” established by the people of Indiana on the one hundredth anniversary of their statehood.45

In addition to giving birth to a system of state parks, Indiana’s centennial celebration stimulated interest in the good roads movement. The park committee noted that improved highways would “naturally follow” the development of a system of state parks. Better roads, the committee observed, “would soon bring these Parks into ready accessibility for people even of modest means.”46

Much work needed to be done, however, before the park committee’s predictions could be realized, for Indiana in the early twentieth century lagged far behind other states in the area of highway improvement. It had no department of highways nor did it have a uniform policy governing the construction and maintenance of public roads. Because of this lack of organization Indiana on one occasion did not share in funds appropriated by the federal government for the building of new roads.47 As president of Indiana’s Good Roads Association, Clarence A. Kenyon reported in 1914: “each county and each township is a rule unto itself.”48

Ralston was not unaware of these conditions. Yet, as governor of a state with a large farm population, he faced stiff resistance to road reform. Many farmers, bound to a tradition of local building and maintenance of roads, were reluctant to exchange their accustomed practices in favor of a system that would require payment of all road taxes in money. A state financed highway program suggested increased taxation and the loss of local control over roads, and the farmers refused to accept either of these possibilities. They already felt overburdened with taxes, and in many instances they considered the roads that led to and from their

45 Ibid. See also Emma Lieber, Richard Lieber, 88; Frederick, “Colonel Richard Lieber,” 127-30; Charles Sauer, McCormick’s Creek Canyon: A History and Description (Indianapolis, 1923).
47 Jesse Taylor, director of the American Highway Association, spoke in Indianapolis on April 17, 1914. In part he said: “Indiana is far behind the other states in the matter of road improvement. Your state has no highway commission and no state road fund. As a result . . . Indiana was not able to share in the distribution of money appropriated by the government in July, 1912, for the construction of state roads . . .” Indianapolis Star, April 18, 1914. See also Phillips, Indiana in Transition, 266.
48 Indianapolis Star, December 31, 1914.
property as their own. Moreover, they believed that the city—at rural expense—would reap the benefits of improved roads.

Rural residents had to be convinced that through a coordinated and comprehensive system of highway supervision they too would benefit. In 1913, when the Hughes road bill advocating the creation of a state highway department was before the house, road reformers argued that highway improvements increased farm efficiency and lessened rural isolation.\(^{50}\) In a series of conferences with legislative representatives from agricultural areas, Ralston also attempted to assuage their fears and enlist their support,\(^ {51}\) but “the country members . . . were not to be whipped into line.” The Hughes measure was overwhelmingly rejected by a vote of seventy-nine to thirteen.\(^ {52}\)

Ralston never accepted the legislature’s verdict as final. This was hardly a surprise, for the governor was widely acknowledged as a highway enthusiast. Some sources reported that he had become committed to road improvement “when as a young man on an Owen County farm he drove a yoke of oxen over muddy, rough highways in hauling logs to the mill”\(^ {53}\); others believed that he had been converted to the good roads movement during a summer vacation at Senator Thomas Taggart’s seashore home in Massachusetts, where he traveled over the state’s “smooth, well-built roads.”\(^ {54}\) Whatever the case, Ralston was determined to do everything within his power to insure “a revision of the road laws.”\(^ {55}\)

\(^ {49}\) A good indication of farmers’ sentiments appeared in letters to the editor in 1913 when a variety of road bills were before the legislature. For example, D. V. Isenhour of Connersville, Indiana, argued that the road bills were “for the sole benefit of city automobile owners.” He insisted that “if the farmers had to pay their road tax in money you could not get more than half the gravel on the roads as we do with the present system.” Indianapolis Star, February 3, 1913. Another farmer, from Richmond, Indiana, wrote directly to Ralston: “I wish to enter my most vigorous protest against the bill that compels the farmer to pay his road tax in cash . . . . We work out our road tax at a season of the year when our labor can best be spared from the care of our crops and it is that much money saved to the farmer that we can ill spare to pay out at some stranger’s dictation.” George B. Dougan to Ralston, February 3, 1913, Ralston Papers. Indiana’s rural population was not unlike that of other states. See Ballard Campbell, “The Good Roads Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1911,” Wisconsin Magazine of History, XLIX (Summer, 1966), 273-93.

\(^ {50}\) Indianapolis Star, January 29, February 4, 8, 1913.

\(^ {51}\) Ibid., January 30, 1913.

\(^ {52}\) Ibid., February 7, 1913.

\(^ {53}\) Indianapolis Star, June 14, 1914.

\(^ {54}\) Indianapolis News, August 28, 1913.

\(^ {55}\) Indiana, House Journal (1915), 41.
Fully aware of the significance of 1916 as a centennial year and convinced that parks and roads were natural allies, he proclaimed October 12 "Centennial Highway Day."56

In 1916 the Congress of the United States appropriated $75,000,000 for distribution among the states to construct rural post roads. To receive federal assistance it was mandatory that a state have a local highway commission or department authorized to receive and disburse federal funds to the county road building programs.57 Ralston, who was determined to provide for just such a commission, paved the way in 1916 for the action taken by the legislature in 1917. Besides proclaiming October 12 "Centennial Highway Day," he invited President Woodrow Wilson to Indiana to celebrate the occasion.58

After some hesitation the president consented to come to Indianapolis during the state's centennial in the interest of good roads and "not to talk politics."59 In a lengthy address to seven thousand people assembled in the State Fair Grounds Coliseum, Wilson recalled his own concern for improved highways first as governor of New Jersey and secondly as president of the United States. He summarized the material benefits to be derived from good roads, and then in true Wilsonian fashion he emphasized the spiritual values. "Good roads are necessary . . . to draw neighbors together, to create a community of feeling," for the "blood of the nation will not


58 Ralston's letter to President Wilson does not appear in the Wilson Papers. There is, however, a letter from Meredith Nicholson encouraging the president to come to Indiana. In one part Nicholson stated: "I beg to suggest, what the Governor could not mention in his letter, the great opportunity this occasion presents of appearing before a great host of Hoosiers of every political faith. If you do not accept the managers of the affair expect to invite Mr. Hughes." Meredith Nicholson to Woodrow Wilson, August 12, 1916, Woodrow Wilson Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.). Ralston's expressed concern for better roads and highways in 1915 and 1916 seems to have helped pave the way for the establishment of the Indiana State Highway Commission by the legislature in 1917. Indiana, Laws (1917), 253-73.

59 On August 16 President Wilson wrote to Ralston and refused to attend the highway celebration. He said he was "very much engrossed in duties from which I cannot wisely turn away." Woodrow Wilson to Ralston, August 16, 1916, Ralston Papers. Then, in September, Ralston received a telegram in which Wilson accepted "the kind invitation." Vance C. McCormick to Ralston, September 21, 1916, ibid.
flow in harmonious concord unless it can flow in intimate sympathy." Later in the day Wilson was warmly greeted by a gathering of the state's farmers in Indianapolis' Tomlinson Hall on East Market Street. According to a contemporary assessment, the president scored a victory for Indiana's good roads movement.

As the centennial highway celebration drew to a close, Ralston and Wilson certainly must have felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment with the day's successes. Yet it can be imagined that these feelings were in no way commensurate with the gratification they experienced as the Dixie Highway neared completion in the fall of 1916. Two years earlier, in a letter to the Lincoln Highway Association, Wilson had expressed his hope that in the not too distant future a highway, modeled after the Lincoln Highway, might link the North and South together and make "the imaginary Mason and Dixon Line . . . once and for all a thing of the past." Ralston, inspired by Indianans' centennial spirit and aided by the expertise and drive of Indianapolis' Carl G. Fisher, the "father of the Lincoln Highway," converted the president's hope into a reality.

In December, 1914, Fisher suggested to Ralston that he take the initiative in the creation of an interstate highway extending from Chicago, Illinois, to Miami, Florida. Fisher explained that there were many midwestern automobile owners who would like to travel to the South but found it impossible because "there is no chance for them to drive thru.

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60 Woodrow Wilson's address, in Lindley, Indiana Centennial, 303-305. The quotation is found on page 304. Although the president insisted that his visit was only in the interest of good roads and of Indiana, he concluded his Indianapolis address with a "very solemn thought." He stated: "when the great present war is over, it will be the duty of America to join with the other nations of the world in some kind of a league for the maintenance of peace." See ibid., 392, 399.

61 Indianapolis Star, October 13, 1916. Other factors which also contributed to highway improvement were an increase in the number of automobiles and bicycles, the growth of cities and towns, an advance in living standards, and the rise in the density of the rural population. Barnhart and Carmony, Indiana, II, 466.


63 For a detailed description of Carl G. Fisher's efforts on behalf of the Lincoln Highway, see ibid., 79-91. Much of the evidence connecting the good roads movement in general and the Dixie Highway project in particular to the centennial observance is implicit. The author feels, however, that Ralston, by accurately assessing the temper of the times, used the interest in the centennial to promote highway improvement.
The roads in Tennessee and some parts of Georgia are simply Hell . . . .” Arguing in dollars and cents, he contended that if a thoroughfare were built the states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia would all profit. A Dixie Highway, he stated, would “do more good for the South than if they should get ten cents for their cotton,” and it would “mean hundreds of millions of dollars to Indiana in the next twenty-five years.”

Inspired by Fisher’s letter, Ralston acted promptly. He invited the governors of the designated states to meet in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to consider the construction of an interstate highway that would be “an ever strengthening bond of unity” between the North and South. When the conference convened on April 3, 1915, all the governors—as well as numerous representatives of good roads associations and commercial clubs—were present and eager to support the enterprise. President Wilson, for his part, sent a telegram of congratulations “upon the inauguration . . . of the Dixie highway project” and promised to “watch its progress . . . with the greatest interest.”

In the opening session of the conference Ralston welcomed his fellow governors to Chattanooga and applauded the good roads movement for its work on behalf of improved transportation and communication. “A road,” he remarked, “is a tie that binds, and the better and longer the road the more far-reaching is its binding and brother-making power.” He said too that he liked to think of the proposed Dixie Highway “as an advance agent of social intercourse, mutual understanding, and national unity and good will . . . .” In conclusion, he asserted that the Dixie Highway must be built, for only a completed road uniting North and South would “prove a blessing to unborn generations and stand as an epoch in American history.”

Responding to Ralston’s address, the governors pledged their support in a resolution to appoint two representatives from their home states to meet and select the exact route for

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64 Carl G. Fisher to Ralston, December 4, 1914, Ralston Papers.
65 See, for example, Ralston’s invitation to Governor Edward F. Dunne of Illinois, December 11, 1914, Ralston Papers.
66 Indianapolis Star, April 4, 1915.
67 Ralston address, April 3, 1915, Ralston Papers.
the new highway." On April 13, 1915, following Ralston’s appointment of Fisher and Taggart to the board of directors of the Dixie Highway Association, the Republican South Bend Tribune issued a firm protest. Fearful that the new road would bypass South Bend, it criticized the governor for choosing two residents of Indianapolis. Ralston, who was absolutely determined that nothing would jeopardize the construction of “this great highway,” refused to ignore the Tribune’s complaint. In a spirited statement Ralston reiterated his feelings regarding the construction of the Dixie Highway and defended his appointment of Fisher and Taggart. He contended that there was good reason why two Indianapolis men were chosen: “it is conceded by all parties,” he argued, that Indianapolis is “the one Indiana city that the road will certainly touch.” And if anyone doubted the capabilities of either man, the governor testified to their qualifications. He recalled Fisher’s experience as builder of the Lincoln Highway and Taggart’s service as chairman of a 1914 state highway commission appointed by Ralston to study road conditions in Indiana. The governor maintained that both men were “well-poised, broad-gauged businessmen, who have, in more than one instance, shown their willingness to surrender their personal interests to the public welfare.” In conclusion, he rebuked the Tribune for its “premature criticisms” and asked rhetorically if it had objected “to the Republicans, a few years ago, taking both United States senators from Indianapolis?”

Aside from the Tribune and some of its readers, Hoosiers responded enthusiastically to the whole Dixie Highway movement. The Indianapolis Star considered Indiana “fortunate in having two commissioners . . . capable of representing the state with credit” and reported that, while no other good roads scheme had created half as much interest, the Dixie Highway project had “taken like wildfire.” Taggart himself was startled by the excitement that followed him to and from the final directors’ conference in Chattanooga. “It’s a

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68 Indianapolis Star, April 4, 1915.
69 Ralston’s Dixie Highway appointments, April 7, 1915, Ralston Papers.
70 South Bend Tribune, April 13, 1915.
71 Indianapolis Star, April 16, 1915.
72 Ibid., May 14, 1915.
great project," he declared, "and it's bound to succeed. I never attended a meeting—not even a political convention—at which so much enthusiasm was shown." Ralston, however, did not seem surprised. He had accurately judged the temper of the times. In 1915 and 1916 Indianians were exuberant with state pride, and they were not easily influenced by arguments of a parochial or partisan nature.

The Dixie Highway movement received warm support in other states as well. Thus, when the directors met they decided "to run the road everywhere." Instead of one well defined route extending directly from Chicago to Miami, the highway association consented to the creation of two routes diverging and coming together at various points along the way. Road construction was rapid; within a year, one of the last barriers—the Nashville-Chattanooga link—was nearly completed. Then in September, 1916, Ralston and Fisher attended a lively celebration in Martinsville, Indiana, which signaled the opening of the Dixie Highway from Indianapolis to Miami.

Good roads, state parks, ceremonial pageants, memorial markers, and historical publications were all inspired by an "outburst of patriotic interest in Indiana and its history." At the year's end the county chairmen were asked what were "the most helpful and permanent results" of the centennial celebration by the Indiana Historical Commission. They responded that the state's hundredth year anniversary had awakened a sense of community spirit and consciousness and had aroused a new interest in state and local history.

The year 1916 certainly marked a unique occasion in Indiana's history. According to Ralston, "never before . . .

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73 Ibid., May 24, 1915.
74 Ibid., May 23, 1915.
75 Leaving Chicago, the route led to Indianapolis by way of Chicago Heights and Danville, Illinois. The east route from Indianapolis ran through Dayton and Cincinnati, Ohio; Lexington, Kentucky; Cumberland Gap, Knoxville, Kingston, Rockwood, and Dayton, Tennessee. And the west route ran from Indianapolis to Chattanooga by way of Louisville, Kentucky, and Nashville, Tennessee. Ibid.
76 Indianapolis News, June 4, 1916. The Dixie Highway was financed through state taxes, bonds issued by counties through which the highway ran, and contributions from automobile manufacturers and dealers. Carl G. Fisher to Ralston, April 9, 17, 1915, Ralston Papers; Indianapolis Star, April 24, May 14, 1915; Phillips, Indiana in Transition, 264-69.
77 Indianapolis Star, September 16, 1916.
78 Lindley, Indiana Centennial, 63.
was Indiana prouder of . . . its place . . . in the galaxy of American states” than during the centennial year.79 The anniversary celebrations and the permanent memorials were appropriate commemoratives of Hoosier pride in their past achievements and in their future ambitions. As governor, Ralston served the state well. Not only did he preside over a myriad of centennial observances, but he actively encouraged and endorsed the passage of reform legislation, the beginning of a state system of parks, and the construction of improved local and interstate highways. Under Ralston’s leadership and during its hundredth year anniversary, Indiana unquestionably took its place among the nation’s progressive states.

79 Ralston address, October 3, 1916, Ralston Papers.