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Seeking the source of the seal

By MARIE BAKER



The Indiana state seal had more than 200 variations before the design (right) became official in 1963. Above is a 1903 version of the seal.

The exact originator of the seal of Indiana is unknown. Charles R. Brown of Montezuma, who has done extensive research on the subject, feels that the general design now used as the state seal is a legacy from territorial days. Imprints of similar seals are found dating back to 1801.

The Indiana Constitution of 1816 provided for a seal, and \$100 was allowed for expenses, but nothing specified design other than the simple description written in the journal of the House of Representatives of 1816: "A forest and a woodman felling a tree, a buffalo leaving the forest and fleeing through a plain to a distant forest and the sun setting in the west, with the word Indiana."

The seal already had been used on some 1802 slavery petitions. Some said it was ordered in the East and brought to the new territory by either Gov. William Henry Harrison or John Gibson as he conducted the government of the territory before Harrison became governor.

In an attempt to clear up uncertainties, the 1895 General Assembly objected to the number of variations of the seal. Some seals had one or more buffalo, with and without tails, running in different directions. The sun was in some versions, only the rays in others. The mountains varied. So did the number and placement of trees and bushes in the landscape.

The mountains and buffalo were subject to question. Buffalo

had been in Indiana, seen as late as 1823 near New Harmony in Posey County. One writer spoke of the mountains as the Alleghenies, the Rockies or the hills lying east of Vincennes.

"The sun behind the mountains has been explained as the rising and also the setting sun—the symbol of rising prosperity and of an empire gaining a foothold in the West," it was written.

Around the turn of the century the editor of the Rushville Republican wrote that the seal "exhibits a woodsman in short pants and a G.A.R. hat, hacking at a tree, one of his hands grasping the end of the butt, in the way a weak woman splits kindling. A hornless Poland-China buffalo is flying from the awful sight with a despairing gesture from a tail nearly as long as its body, having previously shed one of its horns beside a stump, upon which leans a small but graceful black-handled mop. In the background old Sol, with his hair on end, sinks down behind a sway-back hill to rest."

In 1895, R. S. Hutcher, a clerk in the Senate, was appointed to investigate whether the state had a legalized, authorized seal. He found little was known and recommended legislative action. None was taken.

The seal was not adopted until 68 years later when the 1963 General Assembly acted. Researcher Brown wrote the official description of the seal, including exact dimensions of the objects. He called for two trees in the left background, three hills, 14 rays of the sun and two sycamore trees on the right.

"The woodsman is wearing a hat and holding his ax nearly perpendicular on his right," wrote Brown. "The ax blade is turned away from him and is even with his hat.

"The buffalo is in the foreground, facing to the left of front. His tail is up, front feet on the ground with back feet in the air as he jumps over a log. The ground has shoots of blue grass, in the area of the buffalo and woodsman."

The 1963 General Assembly also adopted the poem *Indiana* by Arthur Franklin Mapes of Kendallville as the state poem.

The action ended much of the confusion over the seal. Until then, more than 200 variations of it had been made. Even now, says Brown, another version shows up sometimes on old official papers. ☆

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