

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

1912 Corn and Coal Exposition



Conceived to promote products produced in Vigo County and to enhance liaisons with neighboring communities, the 1912 Corn and Coal Exposition was heralded as “the classiest agricultural show ever held in Indiana.”

Organized by the Terre Haute Booster Club—a 50-man group founded specifically to underwrite the week-long event—the exposition was free. No carnival-like shows, rides, solicitors, peanut booths or lunch stands were permitted. There were many spectacular displays, including a unique 50-foot “Big Ear” constructed of corn by postmaster Thatcher Parker, Corn Show committee chairman, on Cherry St. between Sixth and Seventh streets. Parker used 180 bushels of corn, consisting of 18,000 individual ears split in half, or 36,000 “half-ears,” to make the exhibit. A U.S. flag created from red, white and blue corn

ears was assembled on Cherry St. while a 50-foot Tower of Coal was erected by the Coal Operators Association on Ohio St., west of Seventh St., amid the business pavilions. Several national magazines sent photographers. Other major periodicals, including *Leslie's Weekly*, secured photos for publication by mail.

According to Purdue University Professor C.A. Brown, chief judge in the corn competition which attracted more than 500 entries, the quality of the event “far exceeded” any similar exhibition ever conducted in the Midwest. The exposition was launched Sunday, Oct. 27, upon the arrival of the 23rd U.S. Infantry commanded by Col. Edwin F. Glenn and ended on Sunday, Nov. 3, with a military dress parade in new Edgewood Grove subdivision across from the Vigo County Fairgrounds. Military drills and parades through downtown streets were a daily feature. A military pageant on Monday—called “the finest ever witnessed in the city”—was attended by a crowd estimated by the *Terre Haute Star* at 40,000. The troops were feted at the Terre Haute House on Wednesday.

The former Levin Brothers building at Sixth and Cherry streets served as “Exposition Hall” and the Indiana Board of Health’s headquarters. Displays by the Indiana Bureau of Weights and Measures were popular, alerting patrons to labeling hoaxes and food and drug adulteration. An Indiana Child Welfare exhibit featured a human skeleton astride a model of a mammoth house fly suspended from the ceiling, sporting a sign reading “Death’s Messenger.” The Booster Club headquarters at 649 Wabash Ave. displayed cotton and peanuts produced in Vigo County and an 88-pound pumpkin grown by J.C. Mankin of North Terre Haute. “Made in Terre Haute” was the primary theme of Manufacturers Row, with nearly 75 pavilions lining Ohio St. Home Packing & Ice Co. displayed a hog frozen in a large cake of ice. Smith-Alsop Co. exhibited each stage of paint manufacturing. Evans Broom Co. fabricated real brooms inside its pavilion. Sparks Milling Co. illustrated every stage of flour-making in 23 glass exhibits. Johnson Brothers Motor Co. flaunted the 1913 model of its monoplane—America’s first—and a 75-horsepower Johnson marine engine at the Courthouse grounds. Wabash Sand & Gravel Co. may have had the catchiest product message: “Made at the North Pole and brought to Terre Haute by an iceberg.”

A five-mile “marathon” race through Terre Haute streets on Friday afternoon and a symbolic “burning of the hammer” above the door at Booster Club headquarters on Saturday, Nov. 2, brought an end to the downtown portion of the grand exposition.



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