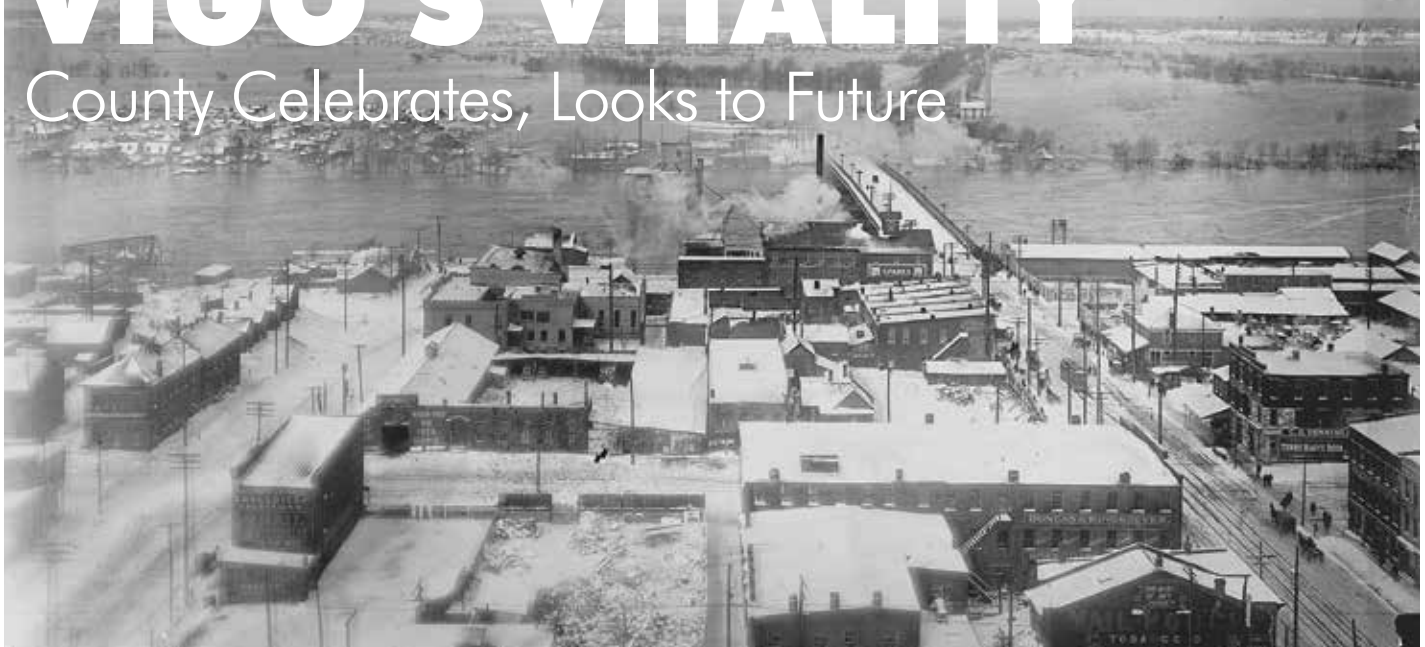


VIGO'S VITALITY

County Celebrates, Looks to Future

By Katie Coffin



Among the significant historic events in Terre Haute was the 1913 flood that destroyed many homes and businesses (*Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society*).

Vigo County is embracing a centennial era.

Terre Haute celebrates its own Bicentennial alongside the state of Indiana this year, and Vigo County will turn 200 in 2018. In 2015, Indiana State University commemorated its 150th anniversary and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College marked 175 years.

Brittany Michaels, community connections coordinator with the Vigo County Public Library, and Fred Nation, president of the Wabash Valley Community Foundation board of directors, are leading the Bicentennial festivities in Terre Haute and Vigo County. Michaels' social media and web abilities and Nation's experience as a community leader complement each other.

"I represent the past, she represents the future; we're both here in the present," Nation jokes about their age difference. "We have a good way to build on what we know and what we believe is best for our state and our community moving forward."

Leaving a legacy

Legacy projects are a way for communities to create new entities that also commemorate the past. The Terre Haute 2016 Steering Committee has several initiatives underway.

Griffin Bike Park is named in memory of Sgt. Dale R. Griffin, who grew up in Terre Haute and joined the military after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. He was killed in a roadside bombing in Afghanistan in 2009. Griffin and his family were avid mountain bike riders.

When completed, the 300-acre park will include 16 miles of riding trails, many for highly skilled off-road cyclists. It will be free and open to the public.

"There is nothing like this in the Midwest, as challenging and diverse as this bike park is going to be," Nation asserts. "This is one of

those projects that's going to have a large future benefit to the state and Vigo County while also honoring the life of Mr. Griffin and what he gave for his country."

Wabashki Fish & Wildlife Area currently encompasses about 2,400 acres of fish and wildlife wetlands area along the west bank of the Wabash River between Terre Haute and West Terre Haute.

The project is a cornerstone of the Healthy Rivers Initiative, a land conservation effort to permanently protect more than 43,000 acres along the Wabash River and Sugar Creek in west-central Indiana.

"It's another great project that not only helps reclaim our river, but helps build a new reputation for Vigo County and Terre Haute in terms of wildlife and eco-tourism as well as our hunters and fishermen," Nation emphasizes.

Furthermore, the Bellwether 2016 documentary will showcase a distinctive political characteristic of Terre Haute and Vigo County. Since 1888, the area has voted for the winner in every presidential election except two. Throughout Indiana's bicentennial year, a film crew will focus on people and places in Vigo County that reflect factors shaping today's American outlook.

There are many other legacy projects in Vigo County that have been funded by the Bicentennial Nature Trust and Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and a number of others are in the pipeline.

"I remember the sesquicentennial celebration of the state in 1966, and I covered a little bit of that for the *Terre Haute Star* at that time," Nation muses. "It's a different era now than it was 50 years ago with different ways of celebrating. Then, one of the big projects was a history pageant at the local stadium where hundreds of people were re-enacting the history of Vigo County.

"With Brittany's leadership and the library's help on social media, there are ways to involve people in different ways than we did 50 years ago. The basics are the same – to celebrate our history and use our history as a springboard into the future. Not only are we talking about the way things used to be, we want to talk about the way things will be and help make that happen in a positive way."

Past and present

Vigo County historian Mike McCormick acknowledges he has a “reputation” as a go-to resource for local history. He served on the Vigo County Historical Society board of directors for more than 10 years and has written a weekly local history column for 21 years. He also penned a comprehensive history of the city – *Terre Haute: Queen City of the Wabash* – published in 2005.

“I still discover something every month or two that no one in recent years has ever written about,” McCormick shares. “That is what has driven me.”

He shares a few nuggets of Vigo County history worthy of celebration, including a number of notable innovations.

Hudnut Hominy Co. introduced corn oil to the American kitchen as the result of Theodore Hudnut’s many inventions between 1867 and 1892 to perfect extracting oil from corn.

V8 juice didn’t take off until the Loudon Packing Co. in Terre Haute acquired the rights and began a national marketing campaign.

One of the most famous Terre Haute legacies is the Coca-Cola contour bottle. The Coca-Cola Company contacted numerous bottle manufacturers to submit distinctive designs for their product. The company needed to separate itself from imitators.

The Root Glass Company of Terre Haute submitted the contour

bottle design. With inspiration from the cocoa bean pod, it produced a bottle with a bulging middle, parallel vertical grooves and tapered ends. The shape was patented and is still one of the most recognized brand symbols in the world. Last year was the bottle’s 100th anniversary.

In the 1800s, Terre Haute seemed to be shaping into the “Pittsburgh of the West,” with its manufacturing and coal industries. The city also prided itself on being a transportation hub – it was one of few U.S. landlocked cities that was located on a navigable river (Wabash), the Cumberland Road (now best known as U.S. 40) and the Wabash & Erie Canal. Additionally, the Terre Haute & Indianapolis Railroad handled all rail traffic between Indianapolis and St. Louis, as well as other important destinations, for many years.

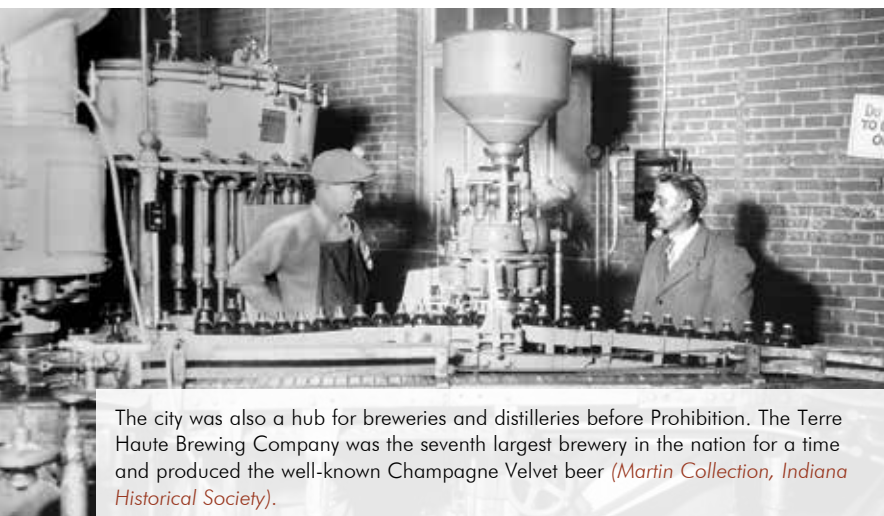
Beer and liquor were also major industries in Terre Haute before Prohibition. Terre Haute Brewing Company, famous for Champagne Velvet (now brewed by Upland Brewing Company), was the seventh largest brewery in the nation in its heyday. Terre Haute also boasted two of the three largest distilleries in the world for a time.

Today, Terre Haute maintains its reputation as an educational center, with institutions like Indiana State University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College producing some of the nation’s top talent.

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Terre Haute’s transportation history includes a car from the Terre Haute, Indianapolis and Eastern Traction Company, pictured here in front of the Indiana Statehouse (*Bass Photo Co. Collection, Indiana Historical Society*).



The city was also a hub for breweries and distilleries before Prohibition. The Terre Haute Brewing Company was the seventh largest brewery in the nation for a time and produced the well-known Champagne Velvet beer (*Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society*).



Last year was the Coca-Cola contour bottle’s 100th anniversary. The Root Glass Company of Terre Haute designed the bottle that is still iconic today (*Vigo County Historical Society & Museum*).

Vigo's Vitality

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Engaging the community

Community participation is what the Bicentennial legacy projects are all about. Michaels says the committee is using social media to post historic photos of Terre Haute to create a buzz surrounding the events and celebration.

"We're noticing that families and people are starting to share those," Michaels notes. "They're sharing those and starting to get some discussion going about how the community has changed."

The Terre Haute 2016 web site is the hub of information about the Bicentennial celebration. It also houses the newspaper digitization project, which makes hundreds of years of historic newspapers available online.

The Indiana Bicentennial Torch Relay is one of the major commemorative statewide events. Hoosiers will symbolically "pass the torch" throughout the state on a 2,300-mile journey to "ignite" the future. Terre Haute's torch relay will be unique as it will be delivered from southern Vigo County via hovercraft. Neoteric Hovercraft, Inc., located in the city, is one of the largest hovercraft producers in the country.

As Indiana rings in the Bicentennial, Nation says he hopes revisiting history will be an inspiration to Terre Haute's younger generations.

"The Terre Haute Walk of Fame inducts a half dozen or so people each year that are from Terre Haute and made notable contributions, whether in our city, in our country or in our world," he concludes.



"We believe we've got a good program lined up; we have more excitement all the time," Fred Nation says about the Bicentennial projects and festivities he and Brittany Michaels have helped coordinate for Vigo County.

"There's all of this going on that instills a sense of pride in where we came from.

"Indiana is a collection of small towns, and sometimes it's hard for kids to believe that 'I can be something' because I'm in a small town – I'm not in Indianapolis or I'm not in Chicago or I'm not in New York. By visiting memories and by visiting historical events, hopefully that will give a sense that anything can be done. It doesn't matter where you're from, anything is possible."

RESOURCES: Terre Haute 2016 at www.terrehaute2016.com | Brittany Michaels, Vigo County Public Library, at www.vigo.lib.in.us | Fred Nation, Wabash Valley Community Foundation, at www.wvcf.com | Mike McCormick, Vigo County historian

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