

## Indiana's Boundaries and Size

STEPHEN S. VISHER, Indiana University

The location of Indiana's boundaries determine the State's shape and size and illustrate the significance of geographic influences.

Indiana's southern boundary is the northern boundary of Kentucky, an older State. Kentucky extends to the north bank of the Ohio River because when it was created in 1792, the Ohio River was so significant as the major transportation route that Indians were excluded from its use.

As the Ohio River is constantly changing its course, by erosion of its banks and shifting, Indiana's southern boundary shifted constantly as long as it was defined as the north bank of the Ohio River. The U. S. Supreme Court later ruled, however, that Indiana's boundary was where the north bank was located when Indiana was admitted as a State, in 1816. As a result of a considerable change in the course of the Ohio River just southeast of Evansville, a few hundred acres of Kentucky is now north of the Ohio River. This tract, over which Indiana has no legal control, and which is little controlled by Kentucky, is the site of a commercial race track and considerable activity which is illegal in Indiana.

The eastern boundary of Indiana is the western boundary of Ohio, which was admitted as a State in 1803. Its location was strongly influenced by the course of the Ohio River; the boundary extends northward from approximately the northernmost point of Kentucky. From that point, the Ohio river turns almost due south for 30 miles. Ohio's western boundary was logically located west of Cincinnati, already a leading Ohio city. It could not have been located more than a few miles west of Cincinnati, however, without including an irregularly shaped, almost detached, southern area resulting from the sharp southward bend of the river already mentioned. To include the mouth of the Miami River, an Ohio stream, in Ohio instead of in Indiana Territory, the boundary was located a couple of miles west of "the top of the big bend" of the river.

The northern boundary first proposed for Indiana was a western prolongation of Ohio's northern boundary. If this parallel of latitude had been used as the boundary, the only natural harbor on the southern end of Lake Michigan, that of Michigan City, would not have been in Indiana. As that harbor was then considered as the "natural outlet" for much of northern Indiana, the State boundary was set at the parallel which is about four miles north of the Ohio boundary.

The western boundary of Indiana prescribed in the Enabling Act was the middle of the Wabash River from its mouth northward to where it last crosses the meridian which passes through a specified point in Vincennes, and "thence along that meridian northward to the end of Lake Michigan." The best map then available indicated that the end of Lake Michigan was almost due north of Vincennes. The Enabling Act specified also, however, that the boundary was to be a line marked with appropriate markers by a pair of surveyors appointed by the governments of Indiana and Illinois. When these surveyors followed the prescribed meridian

northward they found that instead of reaching the south end of Lake Michigan, it reached the lake near the mouth of the Chicago River, bordering the present "loop," or central part of Chicago. Obviously they could not follow the directives of the Enabling Act, "to follow the meridian to the south end of Lake Michigan." They decided privately on a compromise. Starting again on the north bank of the Wabash River near Terre Haute, where the Vincennes meridian leaves the river, they made a new survey departing from true north a little each length of their surveyor's chain, a link of the chain. This brought them to Lake Michigan approximately halfway between the south end of the Lake and the point where the meridian of Vincennes reaches it. This placed all of Chicago in Illinois. The requisite stone boundary markers were erected, and the boundary was established. They did not report that they had compromised because it was impossible to carry out the directives of the Enabling Act. Not until a more accurate map of Lake Michigan and the general area was published years later did "the public" become aware of the fact that Indiana once had a shadowy claim to much of Chicago. Protests did not bear fruit partly because the Enabling Act had also declared that the boundary was to extend to the south end of Lake Michigan. If that directive had been followed, Illinois would have included what is now Gary. Moreover, the Act prescribed that the boundary was that appropriately marked by the joint survey. This boundary had been mutually accepted for years. Undisputed possession for many years establishes a valid claim to real estate, according to the well-recognized "common law."

Let us now consider the size of Indiana, on outgrowth of its boundaries.

Although Indiana is only about half the size of the average State today, it was not small in comparison with most of the States already in existence at the time it was established in 1816. Of the first 13 States, the average size was less than half that of Indiana; only five (New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia) were larger, and they were little larger. Of the five others admitted before Indiana was, Vermont is smaller and Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Ohio a little larger than Indiana. Indiana is thirty-seventh in size among the 48 States, Kentucky is thirty-sixth, and Ohio is thirty-fourth.

However, since Indiana was admitted, only one smaller State has been created, West Virginia. It is 40th in area.

The fact that Indiana's size, according to the boundaries suggested for it by certain natural features to the west and north was "about the right size" in the opinion of Congress in 1815, facilitated the adoption of those boundaries. An official (inaccurate) map of that time depicted the northern boundary of Ohio and of the territory of Indiana as a parallel of latitude extending from the western end of Lake Erie to the southwest tip of Lake Michigan. Indiana's western boundary extended therefrom south along the Vincennes meridian. The northern boundary of Ohio soon was shifted, however, northward a little to include in Ohio all of Toledo, which is at the end of Lake Erie. That shift set the precedent that facilitated a further shift northward of Indiana's preliminary boundary to include the harbor of Michigan City. There was no local demand for a

further northward shift. As to its western boundary, there was no local sentiment in favor of placing the boundary west of the lower course of the Wabash River. Few people lived then near the Wabash River in what is now Illinois. The nearest sizable river west of the lower Wabash is the Kaskaskia. The few people living then between the Wabash and Kaskaskia rivers were not interested in being included in Indiana; their outlook was southward, towards the Mississippi River.

The fact that Indiana is a small State as compared with most other States obscures its richness when comparisons are made which involve total area as for example, agricultural production. Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin each are about 50 per cent larger than Indiana, and Ohio and Kentucky each are about a tenth larger; Missouri is about twice as large, and Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North and South Dakota each about two and a half times as large. Montana and California are 4 to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times, and Texas,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  times as large. When comparison is made per average square mile, however, it is seen that Indiana surpasses many states which produce far larger totals of crops and farm animals.

Although Indiana is a relatively small State, it is larger than several well-known countries. For example, it is more than twice as large as Denmark, Switzerland, Belgium, or Netherlands.

Indiana's area is about 36,300 square miles; its average width is almost 150 miles, and average length about 250 miles. Its land area is about 21,000,000 acres. Only the marginal waters of Lake Michigan (228 square miles) are counted as part of Indiana. Indiana's water-covered area is increasing progressively by the construction of artificial lakes and ponds, the largest two of which (1954) are larger than its largest natural lake.