This Day in History… December 11, 1816

Indiana Becomes 19th U.S. State

On December 11, 1816, Indiana was admitted to the Union.

In 1679, the French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, the Sieur de La Salle, became the first European to explore Indiana. La Salle came to the area from French colonies in Canada in an effort to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean, traveling down the St. Joseph and Kankakee rivers. He returned in 1680, and explored the northern region of Indiana.

At the center of the Indiana flag is a flaming torch, symbolizing liberty and enlightenment.

Soon after La Salle's expeditions, French fur traders came to the area. They traded beads, blankets, knives, paint, and whiskey to the Native Americans in exchange for furs. These exchanges were quite lucrative for the French. During the 1720s, the French built fur trading posts to foster and protect the fur trade in Miami (near today's Fort Wayne) and Ouiatenon (near today's Lafayette). In 1732, the French created the first permanent European settlement in Indiana by building a fort at Vincennes.

83% of Indiana's land is devoted to farms and forests.

The British competed with the French for control of the fur trade. At first, the French were much more successful because they treated the Native Americans as equals. Over time, the British began to pay them higher prices than the French. Plus, the British began trading firearms with them. The battle for control of the fur trade was one of the main factors in the French and Indian War. The British proved victorious in this conflict, and in 1763, France surrendered a great deal of its land claims, including Indiana, to the British.

Stamp pictures a commemorative seal by artist Paul Wehr that was used in the 150th anniversary festivities.

Although British troops moved into Indiana following France's surrender of this territory, Indiana settlers provided most of the region's resistance against the Americans during the Revolutionary War. Virginia troops, under the leadership of George Rogers Clark, occupied Vincennes and its fort, Fort Sackville, in 1778. A British force recaptured the fort, but Clark took it again in 1779. Control of this area helped the American army dominate the Northwest.
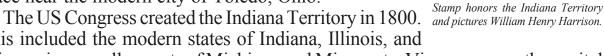
Stamp pictures the state bird and flower, the cardinal and the peony.

In 1787, Indiana became part of the Northwest Territory. At

This Day in History… December 11, 1816 continued

that time, settlers in the region were often attacked by Native Americans. A Miami chief, Little Turtle, led many strikes against the settlers. In 1794, forces under General Anthony Wayne defeated a force of Miami Natives and other tribes at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, which took place near the modern city of Toledo, Ohio.

Stamp honors the Indiana Territory and pictures William Henry Harrison.

The US Congress created the Indiana Territory in 1800. This included the modern states of Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin, as well as parts of Michigan and Minnesota. Vincennes was the capital of the territory. By 1809, Illinois and Michigan had become separate territories.

Indiana bicentennial stamp picturing fertile cornfields at sunset in the northern part of the state.

At this time, Indiana Territory's borders were similar to present-day Indiana. That same year, the territory's governor, future US President William Henry Harrison, negotiated the Treaty of Fort Wayne with several Native American tribes, but not the Shawnee. The treaty gave nearly 30 million acres of land to settlers. The legendary Shawnee Chief Tecumseh claimed the purchase was unfair, claiming the other leaders didn't have the right to sell these lands as they were held in common with groups that were not part of the treaty. He raised an army and purchased guns from the British. In 1811, Harrison defeated the Native Americans at the Battle of Tippecanoe. In 1813, Harrison again claimed victory against Native American forces at the Battle of Thames, in which Tecumseh was killed. With this victory, the Americans were able to colonize the land.

The earliest attempt at statehood came in 1811, when Jonathan Jennings submitted legislation to Congress. But the proposed territory only had 25,000 people, far fewer than was required to be made a state. The War of 1812 interrupted these attempts, but talks of statehood resumed in 1816. Then on December 11, 1816, Indiana achieved statehood.

At first, the state was plagued by a lack of tax revenue. The only source of income for the state government was the land tax, and new settlers did not have to pay that for five years after buying their land from the federal government. Also, farmers made little or no profit on their crops, as transportation to the markets in the east was expensive and risky. In 1818, the federal government purchased land in the center of the state from the Native Americans. The New Purchase, as it was called, opened more land for settlement. The capital was moved to Indianapolis, where it has remained due to its central location.

Greetings from America stamp featuring the Indianapolis skyline and a covered bridge in Parke County.

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