

The past is remembered with markers across the state

You see them along the roadside all across Indiana, 544 of them, to be exact. Stately looking, but executed in type too small to be read from a moving vehicle. They appear sometimes in the most unlikely of places. There is one in Marion, for instance, in the parking lot of what is now a restaurant and another on the courthouse square.

There are 10 in Grant County, and, thanks to the folks in the Grant County Historical Society, an inventory was done during our Hoosier Bicentennial year back in 2016.

It is the Indiana State Historical Marker program, begun in 1946 and perpetuated by folks all over the state with an interest in preserving something of the memory of their past. There are large moments – the Wabash & Erie Canal is commemorated in Huntington County – and there are small moments. A man named Walter Dorwin Teague is so honored down in Madison County. He was an industrial designer, we are informed by the posted plaque. He left for New York in 1903 and “In the 1930s, he began applying his expertise to exhibit de-

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A MOMENT

Ed Breen



sign at the 1939 New York World’s Fair.”

And now a fellow up in Kosciusko County is setting out to give voice and visuals to each of the markers around the state, expanding on the few words that can be included on the heavy cast aluminum plates.

Michael Harris, a 67-year-old native of Syracuse, has selected 26 of the markers from the northeast Indiana area – the territory with which he is most familiar – and has begun making a series to post for all the world to see on

YouTube.

He calls it “Indiana Roadside Markers” and twice a month he’s posting short informational videos on one of the markers. His first was from his neighborhood: Kosciusko County’s Cowen Grove Seminary, which was created by a pioneer couple, Robert and Jane Cowen in 1851.

Next will come Philo Farnsworth, an absolutely fascinating genius with Indiana ties, who, among other things was involved with the Farnsworth Radio Co. in Marion back in the 30s and 40s. The Farnsworth plant out on South Adams Street later became the seed of the RCA television picture tube plant in Marion. And RCA become Thomson and we all know how that turned out a decade or so ago.

The marker for Mr. Farnsworth, however, is in Fort Wayne at the corner of East State and St. Joe boulevards, the site of his Indiana home and the focus is on his contribution to the invention of television.

Harris says he has completed the photography for the first 26 episodes and he has recruited a Kokomo friend of his, musician



Mark McPeak, to compose appropriate music for the series.

Harris is also posting his research as he compiles it at a website, indianaroadsidemarkers.com and is seeking contributions and amplifications from others who might know more about a given subject before he assembles the final version for YouTube.

“I might even say it’s a love letter in some respects,” Harris told reporter Blake Sebring. “When you do as much research as I did on this first subject, you begin to love the subject matter. I really ended up liking the family and wanting to know more about them. This family contributed so much to

Kosciusko County and northern Indiana that they definitely deserved their day.”

The marker program is run by the Indiana Historical Bureau, an agency of state government, but the markers – the research, the proposal, the final language and the raising of the \$3,000 cost for each marker — is in the hands of Hoosiers who want to honor their own.

Got one in mind? Do your research, make your case, go the Historical Bureau and they will make a decision: Yea or nay.

Folks out in southeastern Grant County back in 1995 did just that to recognize the long-gone community of Trask along Wheeling

Pike.

Pause long enough to read it on the drive from Marion to Muncie and you will learn that: “Trask, like other pioneer villages, served an important commercial, social, and educational role for early settlers. The post office, which was here from 1846 to 1901, marked the start and end of Trask’s official existence. As travel improved, such villages disappeared or remained as residential communities like Trask “

So they did, but Trask and 543 other people and places and events in Indiana’s past deserve to be remembered and recalled from time to time. And so they are.



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