You’ve probably heard it before: Indiana has lots more acres of forest today than it did 100 years ago. That true, but it’s only half the story.

Before European settlers — pioneers — moved into the area, what is now Indiana had forests so dense a squirrel could have crossed from Ohio to Illinois without ever touching the ground. American Indians could see sunrise or sunset only from a few tall bluffs, because in the flatland, in the summer, the foliage was too dense, and even in winter, the trunks of huge trees obscured the horizon. Windfall or fire may have poked holes in the forest, but for the most part, the tree canopy was closed for thousands of square miles.

By 1900, Indiana was the leading hardwood producer in the nation. By 1901, forests in Indiana were at their lowest point, and thousands of acres of hardwood forests had been converted to fields and pastures. Forestry experts at the time forecast that there would be little to no forestland remaining by the 1930s.