

# Center goes west, with populace

A recent United Press International news article about the new center of population of the U.S. reports that for the first time the spot is located west of the Mississippi River — at DeSoto, Mo., to be precise.

**THE CENTER** has been moving westward steadily since the first census placed it 23 miles east of Baltimore, Md. Informed of the honor accorded to their city, DeSotoans were more blase than Bloomingtonians were in 1910, when the center of population landed in Monroe County.

Indiana was host to the center for 60 years between 1850 and 1910. You may recall that the original site in the county was described by the nation's newspapers as a snake-infested briar patch in Benton Township — hardly a likely spot for a tourist attraction. A re-calculation placed the center of population on the property of Showers factory on the near west side of Bloomington.

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## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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It seemed appropriate to the city fathers to mark the more convenient spot, and public-spirited W.N. Showers underwrote an impressive flagpole with a cement base. The dedication ceremony was completed with a band, speeches and out-of-town dignitaries.

**AMERICANS** in the first half of the 20th century were heading south and west, taking the center of population with them. In the 60 years that it had remained in Indiana, it held relatively stationary for 20 years in Bartholomew Coun-

ty before arriving in Bloomington. But by 1920 the center shifted westward again to Owen County.

If the discrepancy of sites in Monroe County hadn't already pointed up the problem, Owen Countians also discovered that center-of-population calculating can be a tricky business. The citizens of Whitehall proudly erected a 10-foot wooden monument that soon had to be moved.

According to a contemporary account (1920) in *The Indianapolis Star*, Indiana University astronomy professor W.A. Cogshall spent several nights "star gazing" in the Whitehall area, and his calculations indicated another site. His conclusion: the correct spot was smack-dab under a beech tree on a farm located two and a half miles west of Whitehall.

**UNLIKE ENTERPRISING** Bloomingtonians,

(Page 3, col. 6, this sec.)