

# **Adrian A. Parsons**

## **Indiana's Soybean Pioneer**

The soybean industry in Indiana started on a farm located just a few miles southwest of Avon in Washington Township, Hendricks County. It was there that Adrian A. Parsons (1846 – 1929) started growing soybeans in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century. He was the first farmer of record to engage in the purposeful and sustained experimentation with and production of the crop in the state.

Born in Guilford County, North Carolina, young Adrian immigrated with his family to the Avon area in 1852, and he resided in Washington Township most of the rest of his life. While still a teenager, he enlisted in the 9th Indiana Cavalry of Union volunteers during the Civil War, and was severely wounded in action south of Franklin, Tennessee, in December 1864. After the War he settled into farming, and also taught school, served a term as Hendricks County Recorder, and several terms as Washington Township Trustee.

With diminished robustness from the effects of his war wound, Adrian compensated by closer study of and experimentation with unconventional agricultural crops and methods. Around 1891 he obtained a batch of soybeans imported from Japan, and started growing the exotic legume while grappling with issues of variety adaptability, culture, and utilization. Recognizing early on that soybeans were useful for building soil fertility and as forage for livestock, he urged other farmers, through personal contacts and the farm press, to try the crop. His advocacy of the soybean was at first met with resistance and even derision, but his persistent demonstration of the crop's utility on the average farm helped advance its acceptance in Hoosier agriculture. The development of industrial soybean processing capability in the 1920s compounded the crop's value as a grain commodity, and set the stage for its major economic importance today.

Adrian Parsons lived to see his own community become a leader in soybean production, and he was recognized by the American Soybean Association and the farm press as Indiana's soybean pioneer. As agricultural journalist A. E. Andrews summarized in a 1931 tribute: "Mr. Parsons was like many a man of the best and most practical intentions – he was criticized by those who did not fully understand him; but today his county follows the path he blazed, and who can measure his influence on the nation's agriculture?"