Collection #
M 1235
OM 0617

GENE STRATTON PORTER
COLLECTION, 1843–1999 (BULK 1910S–1930S)

Collection Information
Biographical Sketch
Scope and Content Note
Series Contents

Processed by
Paul Brockman
September, 2016

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 4 manuscript boxes; 2 oversized folders; 3 black and white photograph boxes; 3 photo albums; 1 folder color photos; 1 box postcards; 4 OVA folders of photos; 8 eased images; 5 tintypes; 8 4X5 acetate negatives.

COLLECTION DATES: Inclusive, 1843–1999; bulk, 1910s–1930s


RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2016.0183

NOTES:
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Geneva Grace Stratton was born on a farm in Wabash County on Aug. 17, 1863, the youngest of 12 children. Her father, Mark Stratton, was a licensed Methodist minister and prosperous farmer. Gene’s mother, Mary (Shallenberger) Stratton, became ill when her youngest was 5 and died in 1875.

At an early age, Gene had little formal schooling but developed a lively interest in nature and wildlife. When her family moved to the city of Wabash in 1874, she began to attend school on a regular basis and completed all but the last term of high school.

On April 21, 1886, she married Charles D. Porter, a druggist in Geneva, Ind., who was 13 years her senior. The couple’s only child, Jeannette H., was born in 1887. After oil was discovered on some farmland Mr. Porter owned, Gene Stratton-Porter used the new family wealth to construct a 14-room home, which she designed herself, near the Limberlost Swamp.

The Limberlost Swamp was where Stratton-Porter soon began to photograph birds and animals in their natural habitat. She sent these photographs, with no explanation, to Recreation magazine. Impressed by her efforts, the magazine asked her to write a camera department and paid her with new photographic equipment. A year later, Outing magazine hired her to do similar work.

Encouraged by these accomplishments, she turned to writing fiction. Her first novel, The Song of the Cardinal, met with modest success, but her next book, Freckles, established her tremendous popularity with the reading public. Despite critics’ complaints that her work was overly sentimental and idealistic, Stratton-Porter continued to enjoy popular acclaim with works like A Girl of the Limberlost, Laddie, Michael O’Halloran and A Daughter of the Land.

In 1913, after the Limberlost Swamp had been drained, Stratton-Porter moved to northern Indiana where she built a new home – “The Cabin at Wildflower Woods” – on the shores of Sylvan Lake at Rome City. In 1920, she moved to California where she organized her own movie company and based a number of films on her books. Stratton-Porter died on Dec. 6, 1924, in Los Angeles following a traffic accident and was buried in Hollywood Cemetery. In 1999, Stratton-Porter’s body and that of her daughter were buried on the grounds of the Gene Stratton-Porter Historic Site in Rome City, Ind.

Other individuals figuring prominently in the collection are Mark Stratton, Merlin Wilson, Gladys Wilson Lawshe, and Donald Wilson.

**Mark Stratton**, Gene's father was born in New Jersey in 1812. After several moves with his family, he ended up in Warren County, Ohio. In 1835 he married Mary Shellenbarger, and three years later they moved to Wabash County, Indiana, where he farmed as well as becoming a Methodist Minister in 1857. Stratton also served as a township trustee and county commissioner. The Stratton's had twelve children. Mary Stratton died in 1875 and Mark raised the younger children alone. He died in 1890.

**Merlin Wilson** (1885–1946) was the son of Frank and Ada Stratton Wilson (Gene's sister) and was born and raised in Wabash County but spent most of his life in Fort Wayne, Allen County, Indiana, where he worked as an insurance salesman.

**Gladys Wilson Lawshe** (1887–1970) was also the daughter of Frank and Ada Wilson. She moved to Los Angeles in the 1910s and married James S. Lawshe, from Fort Wayne.

**Donald R. Wilson** (1890–1961) also a son of Frank and Ada Wilson, attended Wabash College from 1909–1912. On 29 July 1917 he enlisted in the United States Army serving in the 82nd and 494th Aero Squadrons in Texas and France. He rose to rank of 2nd Lieutenant and served mainly as an administrative officer until November, 1919. After the war he returned to Wabash where he was employed as a construction worker.

Sources:
Information in Collection
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains items relating to Gene Stratton Porter, Donald Wilson, Merlin Wilson and their families.

Gene Stratton Porter materials include correspondence, photographs, items relating to the Limberlost, and movies based upon her books. Most of Gene's letters are from the time she was residing in California to her sisters, Ada Wilson and Florence Compton in Fort Wayne, Allen County, Indiana, December, 1922–November, 1924, many reaching over ten typed pages regarding family news and information. Stratton Porter writes of her movies and books, as well as relating the scenery and fishing in California. Also included are newspaper clippings and correspondence regarding Gene's death including letters from Frances Foster who was staying with her daughter while straightening up her affairs.

The collection also contains a good deal of information about Porter's Limberlost grounds including the use of the property by the Boy Scouts, 1928–1935; correspondence between Gene's daughter, Jeannette Porter Meehan, and Merlin Wilson, regarding the financial status and upkeep of the property, 1924–1946; and correspondence regarding the transfer of the property to the State of Indiana, 1945–1947.

Mark Stratton materials include financial records, legal papers, correspondence, real estate dealings and sermons, 1843–1890.

A large part of the collection deals with Gene's sister, Ada Stratton Wilson's, family. In addition to Ada's address book and accounts from 1946, there are the financial dealings of her son, Merlin, 1930s–1940s, and the World War I materials from another son, Donald F., 1917–1919.

Among the photographs housed in the collection are private photos of GSP and her family from childhood to her time in California, 1870s–1920s including parents, siblings and trips and outings in California and Indiana; photos of members of the Stratton family, ca. 1860s–1880s; Limberlost related photos, including two albums from around the 1930s entitled "The Thatch;" photo albums from the Lawshe and Wilson families in California and Indiana; and Donald F. Wilson's World War I photo album. Additional items include photographs from movies taken from Porter's novels, Laddie, The Harvester, and The Girl of the Limberlost.
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