

Women in Indiana

Gene Stratton-Porter “Limberlost”, Geneva (Adams County)

Geneva “Gene” Stratton, born in 1863 on a farm near Wabash, to nature-loving parents. It is because of their strong influence that nature was a continuous theme throughout their daughter’s life as an author, naturalist, photographer, and illustrator. She is “one of Indiana’s most widely read authors and one of the world’s first and best nature photographers.” Gene Stratton married Charles Dorwin Porter in 1886 and they lived in Decatur for a few years before building a home near the Limberlost Swamp in 1895. Gene designed the 14-room house herself and named it after the swamp that covered 13,000 acres in Adams and Jay Counties. The couple and their daughter lived at Limberlost for 18 years until the swamp was drained. In 1913 they moved to Sylvan Lake near Rome City in Noble County.



Gene Stratton-Porter’s writing career began with an article published in *Recreation* magazine. She continued to write for them for the next two years. She then moved to *Outing*, a national natural history magazine. She eventually decided to add fictional elements to her nature writing in an effort to attraction a wider audience. Other magazines that she contributed to include *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *McCall’s*, *Century*, and *Good Housekeeping*. While she resided at Limberlost, Gene Stratton-Porter wrote six novels and five nature books--the first, *Song of the Cardinal*, in 1903, followed by *Freckles* the next year.

In 1947 the cabin was given to the State of Indiana by the Limberlost Conservation Association of Geneva. It is maintained by the State as a historic site and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Limberlost State Historic Site
Box 356
200 E. 6th St.
Geneva, IN 46740
Phone: 260/ 368-7428
www.in.gov/ism/HistoricSites/Limberlost/Historic.asp

Open April-November: Call for hours

Gene Stratton-Porter Cabin “The Cabin in Wildflower Woods”, Rome City (Noble County)

In 1913, Gene Stratton-Porter designed the family’s second home near Rome City on Sylvan Lake. She intentionally designed the house to blend in with the natural setting. “The Cabin in the Wildflower Woods” is a two-story log cabin and originally included 150 acres. Gene Stratton-Porter planted over 3000 plants throughout the property. She also created a formal flower garden, orchards, and a small stone pond. In 1920 Gene Stratton-Porter moved to California for health reasons. She continued to write until her death in 1924. Much of the family’s furniture and personal items remain in the cabin, including Gene’s library.

During her career, Gene Stratton-Porter wrote 12 novels, 7 nature books, 2 books of poetry, a children's book, and many magazine articles. Eight of her novels were turned into movies. One, *The Harvester*, was even filmed at "Wildflower Woods."

In 1947 the State of Indiana was presented with 13 acres of property including the cabin, formal flower gardens, orchard, and pond. It is maintained by the State as a historic site and has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site
Box 639
1205 Pleasant Point
Rome City, IN 46784
Phone: 260/ 854.3790
www.in.gov/ism/HistoricSites/GeneStrattonPorter/Historic.asp

Open April-November: Call for hours

Joel Roberts Ninde House, Fort Wayne (Allen County)

Joel Roberts Ninde was a self-taught architect in Fort Wayne. Her first design was the house that she and her husband, Lee J. Ninde, lived in. She refused to live in his family home due to the dark and drafty rooms and they could not find a home that was "small, convenient, comfortable, attractive, and inexpensive". The residential package that she created was a success and, as a result, she and her husband formed a real estate and construction firm in 1910 called Wildwood Builders Company. Joel Roberts Ninde and her business partner, Grace Crosby, were the designers and construction supervisors for the company while Lee Ninde focused on promotion and real estate. Wildwood Builders created houses in the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles with innovative features that appealed to housewives. Ninde's designs were called "pleasing to the eye, economical, convenient, and efficient" and she consequently became one of the most popular architects of the time in Fort Wayne. By 1914 she had designed over 300 houses ranging from small cottages to more substantial brick homes.

In combination with residential architecture, the Wildwood Builders Company also stressed city planning. Prior to the early suburban developments they created, planning in Fort Wayne followed the city grid plan with narrow lots and straight streets. However, the Nindes wanted their neighborhoods to take advantage of the natural features. Houses were placed on larger lots and the roads would curve to follow the topography which not only made the area more picturesque but would discourage speeding. Wildwood developments left established trees in place and created numerous gardens. They also included new infrastructure that had not been considered previously including individual water supply and a "double sewage" system.

Between 1913 and 1917, the Wildwood Company also produced Wildwood Magazine. This nationally known periodical included topics related to architecture, city planning, and interior design.

Joel Roberts Ninde died from a stroke in 1916 at the age of 42. The Wildwood Builders continued to design homes and develop residential neighborhoods into the late 1920s. The work of the Wildwood Builders can be found in a variety of areas around Fort Wayne including the South Wayne Historic District, Shawnee Place, Wildwood Park, and Wildwood Place. For more

information about Joel Roberts Ninde and the houses she designed in Fort Wayne, contact ARCH, Inc or the Fort Wayne Division of Community and Economic Development.

ARCH, Inc
437 E. Berry St.
Fort Wayne, IN 46802
260/ 426-5117
www.archfw.org/

Fort Wayne Division of Community and Economic Development
One Main Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46802
260/ 427-1140

Marie Webster House, Marion (Grant County)

Marie Webster revolutionized quilt making at the beginning of the 20th century. Previously quilt designs were passed down through families by women. These predominantly geometrical designs were pieced together and often had regional similarities. Webster's designs were based on the Arts and Crafts movement and made quilting a true art form. Although she was quite adept at hand sewing, Marie Webster did not design her first quilt until she was 50 years old (1909).



Webster's designs had appliqué pieces in curvilinear forms that had never been seen before. She sent them to *Ladies Home Journal* and the editors decided to print four of her designs. They were such a success that she was selling quilt patterns within a month after the spread in the magazine. She ended up having 14 different quilt patterns printed in *Ladies Home Journal* in less than two years. The quilt designs continued to grow in popularity and she eventually formed Practical Patchwork Company to sell the patterns, quilt kits, and finished quilts. The company operated out of her house with the help of friends and family until 1942.

Her widespread popularity also resulted in a request from publishing company Doubleday, Page and Company. They approached Marie about writing a book on the history of quilting and pattern names. The 1915 book was titled *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*. It was the first book to discuss the history of quilting and to demonstrate how to make a quilt. The book was reprinted six times between 1916 and 1948. In 1990, Marie's granddaughter Rosalind Perry published a new edition of the book.

The house is a National Historic Landmark and is now home to the Quilters Hall of Fame Museum. The house is currently undergoing restoration.

926 South Washington St.
P.O. Box 681
Marion, IN 46952
765/ 664-9333

www.quiltershalloffame.org

Shirk-Edwards House, Peru (Miami County)

Marie Stuart Edwards, a leader in suffrage and other social movements, was born in 1880 in Lafayette. Her youth included many “firsts”. She was the first girl in Lafayette to ride a bike and the first to attend a women’s college. In 1904, she married Richard E. Edwards, the grandson of the original builders of the house. The couple moved into this house in 1914 and Marie Stuart Edwards died there in 1970.



Her first foray into social reform took place in Michigan when she was unable to find safe milk for her son. She organized a platform against infant mortality by abolishing unsanitary dairies and bad milk. The family moved back to Indiana in 1914 and Marie’s activity in the suffrage movement took off. She helped organize the Indiana Women’s Franchise League and served as president of the organization.

1920 was an important year for suffrage and a busy one for Marie Stuart Edwards. She was one of four women who organized the National League of Women Voters. At that time she was appointed the first treasurer of the League and she would later be appointed vice-president. The purpose of the League was to insure the passage of an amendment to enfranchise women, to educate voters on democratic responsibilities, and to push for social reform. Later that same year, Marie helped organize Social Justice Day in Marion, Ohio. Over 13,000 women gathered to meet with Senator Warren Harding, who was running for President. The efforts of Marie and others like her paid off. The 19th Amendment was passed on August 18, 1920.

Marie continued her efforts with women’s rights and social causes. She served on the Indiana State Commission for Mental Defectives, the Department of Government for the League of Women Voters, and the Indiana Board of Public Welfare. In Miami County, she was involved with the County Board of Associated Charities and led the local Works Progress Administration board during the Depression.

Photo from http://www.historicproperties.com/detail.asp?detail_key=ncper001

Shirk-Edwards House
Peru, IN

Emily Kimbrough House, Muncie (Delaware County)

Emily Kimbrough was born in Muncie in 1899. She was the granddaughter of Charles Kimbrough, president of the Indiana Bridge Company and an Indiana state senator. An author, editor, and lecturer, Emily Kimbrough wrote about Muncie’s past, specifically the “East End” neighborhood where she grew up. She graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1921 and then traveled to Paris to attend the Sorbonne.



Kimbrough began her writing career in 1922 when she was an advertising copy writer for

Marshall Field and Co. in Chicago. By the time she left in 1927 she was the editor of Marshall Field's department store publication. After moving to New York City, Emily Kimbrough became the fashion editor and eventually managing editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*. She wrote *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* with fellow author (and actress) Cornelia Otis Skinner. It became a best-seller in 1943 and was made into a movie the following year. She wrote several other books and many of them revealed her Indiana background and humor. It has been said that her light writing style was what the world needed in the aftermath of World War II. Emily Kimbrough died at the age of 89 in New York City.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a part of the historic district that bears her name, the Emily Kimbrough House is a house museum open by appointment. Please call before you visit.

715 E. Washington St.
Muncie, IN 47305
765/ 284-3556

Mary Birdsall House, Richmond (Wayne County)

Mary Thistlewaite Birdsall was a premier suffragist and advocate of women's right in the State of Indiana during the mid-19th century. Mary Thistlewaite married in 1848 (at the age of 19) and she and her husband, Thomas, became actively involved in the vanguard social movements of the period—emancipation, temperance, and suffrage.

The first Indiana Women's Rights Convention was held in Richmond in 1852. Mary Birdsall was elected secretary of that convention and also of the second convention, held the following year in Richmond. After having served at the state level, she served as vice-president for the 4th National Women's Rights Convention held in Cleveland. In 1854, the Indiana Women's Rights Convention moved from Richmond to Indianapolis, where it was regarded with much disdain by the local press. Fortunately for the cause, the Convention was not deterred and continued to hold the meeting in Indianapolis for several more years and attracted national figures in the suffrage movement like Lucretia Mott. However, the Convention returned to Richmond in 1858. During this meeting, a petition to the Indiana State Legislature was composed. It requested that the same rights of property and suffrage be afforded to women as were granted to men. On January 19, 1859, Dr. Mary Thomas, Agnes Cook, and Mary Birdsall were the first women to address the State Legislature of Indiana. Unfortunately the advent of the Civil War pushed suffrage and women's rights out of view and another Convention was not held in Indiana until 1869.

In addition to her many causes, Mary Birdsall was a writer/editor and she often used the publications to advance the social reform that she championed. As the Women's Editor of the Indiana Farmer, she often included pieces on women's rights. She worked for the Indiana Farmer for at least 11 issues and wrote on domestic economy, scientific discussion of superiority of dry firewood, décor of the family home for the holiday season, and proper compensation for women's labor. In 1855, Mary Birdsall purchased The Lily, a nationally distributed magazine. She worked with Dr. Mary F. Thomas to edit and published the magazine. It maintained an editorial focus on temperance, dress reform, suffrage, women's rights, and the repeal of unjust marriage and inheritance laws. Mary Birdsall continued to publish The Lily from Richmond for at least five years after she and Dr. Thomas obtained ownership.

It is unknown when Thomas and Mary Birdsall moved to Philadelphia but she died there in 1894. Her body was returned to Richmond and she was buried in the Earlham Cemetery.

Charles and Laura Moore purchased the home in 1899. In 1927 they sold the property to the Whitewater Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends for use as a retirement home for the elderly and as a temporary meeting place for worship. Although the Friends no longer worship in the parlor, the Lauramoore Friends Home continues to function as a retirement home.

504 NW 5th Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765/ 962-2984

www.quaker.org/lauramoore/welcome.htm

Fauntleroy House, New Harmony (Posey County)

The house itself dates from 1822 when New Harmony was a Harmonist settlement. Robert Owen, a Welsh-born social reformer from Scotland, purchased New Harmony from the Harmonists in 1824 and began his own utopian experiment. His granddaughter Constance Owen Fauntleroy, started the Minerva Society in 1859. It was one of the first women's clubs in the country to have a written constitution. This society was formed for the intellectual enhancement of the young women of New Harmony under the tutelage of Constance. Her uncle, Robert Dale Owen, was interested in women's rights in Indiana and helped the Minerva Society draft their constitution. The Fauntleroy family maintained ownership of the home until 1919 when Mary Emily Fauntleroy sold it to the Indiana Federation of Women's Clubs. They preserved the house until 1939 when they gave it to the State of Indiana who proceeded to restore building to its c1840-1860 appearance in the 1990s.

Fauntleroy House
411 West Street
New Harmony, IN

For information about the Fauntleroy House and New Harmony contact Historic New Harmony at 800.231.2168 or visit <http://www.newharmony.org/>

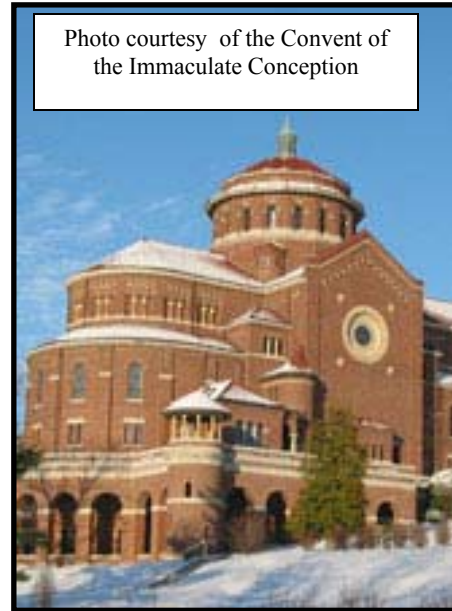
Leora Brown School, Corydon (Harrison County)

Originally known as the Corydon Colored School, the building was constructed in 1891 as an elementary and secondary school for African Americans. It may be the oldest African American school remaining in the state of Indiana. The grade school met in one room of the school, while the high school met in the other. It continued in this capacity until the 1930s when the high school students were integrated into the white school. The elementary students were integrated in the 1950s. The school was renamed the Leora Brown School in 1987 in honor of Leora Brown Farrow who taught at the school from 1924-1950. It currently functions as a community center.

Leora Brown School, Inc
400 East Summit Street
Corydon, IN 47112
812/ 738-8497

Convent of the Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand (Dubois County)

The Convent of the Immaculate Conception, located on a hillside just east of Ferdinand, is the motherhouse of the Sisters of Saint Benedict of Ferdinand. The Convent was founded in 1867 in downtown Ferdinand when four sisters arrived to oversee the schools established by Father Joseph Kundek. The Sisters outgrew that structure by the 1880s. They found the current 190-acre location and built a larger church, house, and school between 1883-1887. This complex, known as the Academy, contained all of the community's activities for almost 50 years. The next building campaign started in 1915 when the chapel and two new Academy buildings were planned. However with the advent of World War I, work was halted and did not resume until 1922. The chapel, designed by St. Louis architect Victor Klutho, was completed in 1924 and features a 400-seat sanctuary adorned with 47 stained glass windows, a cloister hall, colonnades around the centralized dome, a large crypt auditorium, and two small residential wings.



Nearly 1000 sisters have resided at the Convent over the years and the community has reaped the benefit. They first opened a school in 1870 and today operate the Marian Heights Academy, an accredited high school for girls. In the early years, the Convent ran St. Benedict's Normal and St. Benedict's College, although both have ceased operation. The sisters also own and operated St. Joseph's Hospital in nearby Huntingburg. Other social and humanitarian endeavors undertaken by the Sisters of St. Benedict include teaching, nursing, and social work, psychology, caring for the physically and mentally handicapped, and working as medical assistants, hospital administrators, parish workers, and missionaries.

The Convent also reflects the strong German heritage of the community and holds a collection of artifacts that came from the motherland. There are collections of German literature and music and German inscriptions can be found throughout the buildings and the Convent grounds. The sisters also hold a private art collection with a series of works obtained from 19th-century Germany. The chapel itself consists of several decorative elements that were brought over from Germany including the sanctuary screening, pews, confessionals, and lectern. The Stations of the Cross were carved in Munich and the 47 stained glass windows were created there. The sisters also possess a large library and archives with books and documents of German origin.

Guided tours of the convent are available but the church is currently undergoing restoration. Call the Convent for dates and times of tours. Kordes Hall, on the Convent grounds, currently serves as a retreat and enrichment center.

802 E. 10th Street
Ferdinand, IN 47532-9239
812/ 367-1411
Website: www.thedome.org
Email: sisters@thedome.org

Foley Hall at St Mary's of the Woods (Vigo County)

Foley Hall, designed by noted Indianapolis Dietrich A. Bohlen, in 1860 is located on the campus of St. Mary-of-the-Woods outside of Terre Haute. The college is the oldest Catholic women's college in the United States, having been established in 1840. Bohlen also designed the 1897 addition to the building. The building housed a variety of college and congregational offices over the years including classrooms; an art studio and gallery; infirmary; science and art museum; Juniorate, a preparatory school for candidates to the Novitiate of the Sisters of Providence; library (1937-1964); private rooms. A 500-seat dining room was added in 1921.

Vincennes Fortnightly Club, Vincennes (Knox County)

The Fortnightly Club in Vincennes is an educational, social, and humanitarian club for women. Before women were allowed to vote (1917 in Indiana, 1920 nationally), clubs and organizations were the only accepted way for women to take an active role in social reform. Such groups hoped to influence social reform in housing, education, and healthcare. Indiana was home to some of the earliest women's clubs, notably the Minerva Club in New Harmony that was established in 1859. The peak years for club membership nationally were 1915-1925.

Fortnightly clubs were started all over the country but there was no link on the state or national level. The name referred to the fact that meetings were held twice a month ("fortnightly"). Indianapolis founded a Fortnightly Club in 1889 while the early Indianapolis suburb Irvington created one in 1897. The Vincennes Fortnightly Club was founded in 1890 and they met at the public library, city hall, and the YMCA. The focus of the Vincennes club was on the arts of living including literature, art, music, and the home. The Vincennes Fortnightly Club joined the Indiana State Federation of Women's Clubs in hopes of uniting women's clubs in the hope of social betterment for all.

In 1915, the Club purchased a private residence as its clubhouse. When the Club began to outgrow the space they started a fundraising campaign. By 1928 the Fortnightly Club was able to gather the necessary fund and hired Sutton and Routt to construct a new clubhouse. Inside were a reception room, meeting room, restrooms, 420-seat auditorium, and kitchen to serve 150. Originally there was a small apartment for the caretaker but this space is now used for storage and extra kitchen facilities. The Vincennes Fortnightly Club continues to meet twice per month.

421 N. 6th St.
Vincennes, IN 47591
812/ 882-9733

Madame CJ Walker Building, Indianapolis (Marion County)

Designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1991, the Madame CJ Walker Building serves as an anchor for Indiana Avenue. A triangular shaped building, the Walker Building is now known as the Walker Theater. Constructed in 1927 for Madame CJ Walker, the building originally housed Walker's



beauty products company including Walker Beauty College, manufacturing facilities, a pharmacy, restaurant, and ballroom.

Madame Walker was the first African American woman to open the field of cosmetology as a new and lucrative industry for blacks. Her experimentation with hair preparations for African American women eventually led to the establishment of a thriving business that included not only the manufacturing of 75 beauty products, but also clubs, training programs, beauty schools, and shops throughout the United States. She became the first female to become a millionaire in the business world, and was known for her generous philanthropy to African American charities.

For more information on this National Historic Landmark:

Madame Walker Theatre Center
617 Indiana Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46202
317/ 236-2099
www.walkertheatre.org

Propylaeum, Indianapolis (Marion County)

The Propylaeum was founded in 1888 by a group of seven Indianapolis women. The original purpose of the meeting was to find a headquarters for the Indianapolis Woman's Club. However, the chairperson, May Wright Sewall (a nationally-known educator, suffragist, feminist, and peace advocate), suggested that the group reorganize and that is what they proceeded to do. They formed a stock company to construct and eventually own a building that would house various women's clubs in Indianapolis. One of the stipulations was that only women could acquire, purchase, and hold stock in the company. The first home of the Propylaeum was 17 E. North Street and a variety of organizations met within the structure to promote literary, artistic, scientific, industrial, musical, mechanical, and educational purposes. These included the Indianapolis Woman's Club, Fortnightly Literary Club, Indianapolis Literary Club, English Speaking Union, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Portfolio Club. The Propylaeum became the center of cultural, literary, and civic activities for Indianapolis women.



In 1922 the Propylaeum was notified by the city of Indianapolis that the site of the building was to become part of the World War Memorial Plaza. The search began for a new home. In 1923 the Propylaeum moved into a four-story brick residence at 14th and Delaware constructed by German brewer John W. Schmidt. Only minor changes were made to the house when the Propylaeum moved in. The first floor contained sitting and dining areas for members. The second floor, complete with eight bedrooms and seven baths, was used for temporary and permanent lodging for guests and members. The ballroom on the third floor was use for various events and educational services. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Propylaeum continues to function as a women's club and has a tearoom that is open for lunch and dinner. Portions of the building can be rented for functions.

1410 N. Delaware St.
Indianapolis, IN 46202
317/ 638-7881

YWCA in Indiana

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) has its roots in England as early as 1855. Two organizations, the Prayer Union and the General Female Training Institute, formed at the same time to provide a variety of services to young single women who were working outside of the home. Young women were working away from their homes because of opportunities and necessities present due to the industrial revolution and the Crimean War.

The development of the YWCA in America happened under similar circumstances. More women were entering the work force and serving in the Civil War. For the first time young women found themselves living away from their families in the big city. The YWCA offered safe, suitable, and affordable housing combined with a variety of services. The first official YWCA formed in Boston in 1866 and spread to six major cities by 1868. The YWCA provided a good moral environment for young working women to live, gain employment skills, participate in physical exercise, get a good noon meal, fulfill their spiritual needs and have morally accepted social activity.

The YWCA made its way to Indiana in 1885 and the first ones were associated with colleges and universities. The earliest urban YWCAs were in Fort Wayne (1894), Indianapolis (1895), and Terre Haute (1902). Many started out in private buildings until the necessary funds were raised to construct a new building to meet the specific needs of the YWCA. These new buildings had small parlors for receiving guests, reception areas, meeting rooms, a library, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium in addition to sleeping rooms to accommodate large numbers of members. The YWCA in Elkhart could hold 1,104 women while the building in Indianapolis had the first indoor swimming pool in the city.

Prior to World War I, social activities and employment opportunities for women were limited. The YWCA promoted the independence of women by offering classes, social gatherings, and an acceptable place to live. It also introduced an opportunity for personal and professional growth by bringing together the young working women of a community.

As members lost their jobs with the advent of the Depression, they had to leave the YWCA. Some women would work at the facility in return for meals and lodging. In an effort to maintain occupancy, the YWCA eased its requirements and allowed women over 35 and those that were married to move in. They also started income-earning activities like making and selling candy. The YWCA would also offer to rent its meeting space to local businesses and organizations for lower rates or for free. Such actions pushed the YWCA beyond being an organization for women. It became a community center.

Many YWCA buildings were designed by well-known local architects. Rubush and Hunter designed the Residence Building in Indianapolis, E. Hill Turnock designed the YWCA in Elkhart, Thompson and Geary are credited with the building in Evansville, and Kibele and Garard designed the Muncie facility. The YWCA clearly took pride in their organization and, consequently their buildings, to seek out the services of leading architects.

There are a few YWCAs in Indiana that have been recognized by the National Register including buildings in Elkhart, Muncie, Indianapolis, and Evansville. Other YWCA structures exist but only a few have been recognized for their historic value.