



49.1960.2 Sarah T. Bolton (1814-1893)  
Marion County  
Marker Text Review Report  
10/29/2012

### **Marker Text**

A pioneer poet of Indiana, author of "Paddle Your Own Canoe" and "Indiana," crusader for women's rights, lived here at "Beech Bank" from 1871 to 1893.

### **Marker Report**

While the text of the Sarah T. Bolton marker is accurate, it does not adequately explain the significance of this pioneer poet and her contributions to the history of the Hoosier state. The following report provides additional context regarding Bolton's life. In particular, it expands on her literary work, her connection to Indiana, and her efforts to promote women's rights.

Sarah T. Bolton was born Sarah Tittle Barrett<sup>1</sup> in Newport, Kentucky circa 1814.<sup>2</sup> She and her family moved to Indiana when she was very young and settled near Vernon in Jennings County.<sup>3</sup> During this period, much of Indiana was still unsettled.<sup>4</sup> According to Bolton in the *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton*, while growing up on her family's farm near Vernon, she was exposed to the pioneer experience, living in a log house and clearing the fields.<sup>5</sup> The family moved to Madison in Jefferson County, Indiana a few years later, where Bolton and her siblings attended the local schools.<sup>6</sup>

The marker correctly states that she was a poet and author of "Paddle Your Own Canoe" and "Indiana."<sup>7</sup> However, the extent of Bolton's published work and its significance are not explained. The *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton* reports that she published her first poem in the *Madison Banner* when she was not yet fourteen and that she later wrote regularly for the papers of Madison and nearby Cincinnati.<sup>8</sup> Bolton authored over 150 poems during her lifetime. Many of these were featured in newspapers across the country.<sup>9</sup> Her writings were also included in numerous anthologies in the 1800s and continuing well into the 1900s.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, several of the melodic verses were set to music, including Bolton's "Indiana."<sup>11</sup> In 1912, "Indiana" was formally adopted as the Federation song by the Indiana Federation of Clubs.<sup>12</sup>

The marker appropriately states that Bolton was a crusader for women's rights, but it is vague regarding her contribution to the movement. Bolton aided social reformer Robert Dale Owen in his fight for women's rights of personal property in the 1850 State Constitutional Convention. Owen sought to add a provision to the new constitution that would allow women to retain control of their personal property after they entered into the contract of marriage.<sup>13</sup> Bolton wrote letters to women across the state to build support for the movement. Although Owen's measure was voted down, Bolton conducted a campaign to raise funds in his honor, awarding him an engraved silver pitcher in recognition of his efforts.<sup>14</sup> In a letter to Bolton on July 6, 1851, Owen wrote "I think it will always be a pleasant reflection to you, that, by dint of perseverance through many obstacles, you have so efficiently contributed to the good cause of the property rights of your sex."<sup>15</sup> Reflecting on her work in 1882, Bolton wrote, "I am not



a 'woman's rights woman' in the common acceptance of the phrase. I have taken no part in the present crusade, but am proud of my action in that long ago battle for the property rights of my sisters."<sup>16</sup>

Sarah Bolton had already been living in Indianapolis for many years by the time she became involved in the women's rights movement. In 1831, she married newspaper publisher Nathaniel Bolton and the couple moved from Madison to Marion County, Indiana soon after.<sup>17</sup> Between 1836 and 1845, they owned and operated a tavern, "Mt. Jackson," on the [National Road](#).<sup>18</sup> In 1845, they sold their property to the State and it eventually became the site of the Indiana Hospital for the Insane.<sup>19</sup> While in Indianapolis, Sarah's poetry output continued to increase, and she wrote some of her most popular works there.<sup>20</sup> In 1855, Nathaniel was confirmed as Consul to Geneva, Switzerland, and Sarah spent the next three years dividing her time between Indianapolis and Europe.<sup>21</sup> Less is known about Bolton's life after her husband's death in 1858 until her move to "Beech Bank" in 1871, though it is clear that she spent some time in Missouri and in Europe.<sup>22</sup> The marker correctly states that Bolton spent many of her final years from 1871-1893 at her home "Beech Bank" outside of Indianapolis, in the community of Beech Grove.<sup>23</sup> Here she focused on her family and her writing. She died August 4, 1893 and is buried in Crown Hill Cemetery.<sup>24</sup>

Bolton's poetry has remained her most enduring legacy. Newspaper articles in the *Indianapolis Journal* and the *Goshen Daily News* referred to her as the "Hoosier poetess" and referenced the popularity of her work. They reported that "Paddle Your Own Canoe," one of her most famous poems, had been translated into several languages and sung around the world.<sup>25</sup> The Indiana Branch of the National League of American Pen Women commissioned a bronze plaque for Bolton in 1941. It is located in the rotunda of the Indiana State House and reads "in commemoration of her creative work."<sup>26</sup>

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\*All newspaper articles were accessed via NewspaperArchive.com unless otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> 1820 U.S. Federal Census, Jennings County, Indiana, Roll M33\_14, Page 80, n.d., accessed Ancestry.com; Sarah T. Bolton, *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton* (Indianapolis: F.L. Horton, 1880), xiii; "Hoosier Happenings," *Logansport Reporter*, August 5, 1893, n.p.

<sup>2</sup> 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Marion County, Indiana, Roll M432\_159, Page 261B, Line 28, August 9, 1850, accessed Ancestry.com; 1860 U.S. Federal Census, Marion County, Indiana, Roll M653\_279, Page 408, accessed Ancestry.com; *Life and Poems*, xiii; "Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton Dead," *Indianapolis Journal*, August 5, 1893, 4; "Death of Mrs. Bolton," *Newport Hoosier State*, August 9, 1893, 1; "'Hoosier Poetess' Dead," *Perrysburg Journal*, August 12, 1893, n.p., accessed [Chronicling America](#); "Sarah Bolton," [Find A Grave](#); David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G.



Barrows, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 112, 335; James Alvin Huston, ed., *A Hoosier Sampler: An Anthology of Indiana Writers* (Lanham, MD: United Press of America, 2000), 108.

Sources disagree regarding Bolton's birth year. The *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton* reports that she was born in Newport, Kentucky in 1814. Obituaries in the *Newport Hoosier State* and the *Perrysburg Journal* confirm this date, and it is also used in the *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* and *A Hoosier Sampler: An Anthology of Indiana Writers*. A relief of Bolton featured in the rotunda in the Indiana State House also lists the year 1814, as does Bolton's gravestone. However, obituaries in the *Logansport Reporter* and the *Indianapolis Journal* report that Bolton was born in 1811, while both the 1850 and 1860 U.S. census records estimate her birth year as late as 1816. The 1850 census lists her name as "Sarah F. Bolton."

<sup>3</sup> 1820 U.S. Federal Census; 1830 U.S. Federal Census, Jefferson County, Indiana, Roll 28, Page 114, n.d., accessed Ancestry.com ; No Title, *Home Journal*, March 9, 1850; *Life and Poems*, xvii-xxiv; "Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton Dead," *Indianapolis Journal*, August 5, 1893, 4.

The 1820 census lists Jonathan Barrett (Sarah's father) and his family in Jennings County, Indiana, and the 1830 census lists them in Jefferson County, Indiana. According to the *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton*, the family moved to Madison from Jennings County in the early 1820s because, at the time, the city was considered "the chief center of trade and commerce, of education and social refinement in the State."

<sup>4</sup> For information on early settlement in Indiana, see John D. Barnhart and Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1979), 161-180; Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana, 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1998); and "Introducing Indiana: Past and Present," *The Indiana Historian* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1998): 1-16.

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Poems*, xix-xxiii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii-xv.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 277, 380.

<sup>8</sup> "Western Literature," *Home Journal*, March 9, 1850, 3, originally published in *Cincinnati Commercial*, n.p.; *Life and Poems*, xxv.

An 1850 *Home Journal* article describes Bolton as a correspondent for the *Cincinnati Commercial*. Further research outside the scope of this review is needed to confirm the other publications she contributed to in Madison and Cincinnati.

<sup>9</sup> "Awake to Effort," *Jeffersonian [Pennsylvania] Republican*, October 18, 1849; "Western Literature," *Home Journal*, February 9, 1850, 4; "I Cannot Call Her Mother," *Gallipolis [Ohio] Journal*, August 3, 1854; "The Snowflake," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, March 19, 1861, n.p., accessed 19<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Newspapers.



Bolton's works were also collected in at least three volumes in the late 1800s. See *Life and Poems; Songs of a Life-Time* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Co., 1892); *Paddle Your Own Canoe: And Other Poems* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill, 1897).

<sup>10</sup> For early examples see, Richard Grant White, *Poetry, Lyrical, Narrative and Satirical of the Civil War* (New York: The American News Company, 1866), 149-150; Rufus Wilmot Griswold, Richard Henry Stoddard, *Female Poets of America* (New York: James Miller, 1873), 308-309; *The Magazine of Poetry and Literary Review*, Volume 6 (Buffalo, NY, 1894), 535-538. For more recent examples, see Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, Volume 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 191-192; James A. Huston, ed., *A Hoosier Sampler: An Anthology of Indiana Writers* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 108-120; Phillip Greasley, ed., *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature*, Volume 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 75-76.

<sup>11</sup> Fritz [Frederic] Krull and Sarah T. Bolton, "Indiana" (Indianapolis: Wulschner-Stewart Music Company), accessed Indiana Historical Society, pamphlet collection. For examples of her song sheets, see R. Sinclair and Sarah T. Bolton, "I Cannot Call Her Mother, Ballad" (New York: Firth, Pond & Co., 1854), accessed [Library of Congress](#); Charlie L. Ward and Sarah T. Bolton, "The Stepmother or I Cannot Call Her Mother," in *A Collection of Vocal Gems* (John Hopkins University, 1858), Levy Sheet Music Collection, Box 180, Item 089, accessed [JScholarship](#); Sarah T. Bolton, "Dearest Never Love Another" (Indianapolis: Albert E. Jones, 1852), accessed [Library of Congress](#); "Silver Cup Presentation," *Logansport Democratic Press*, June 12, 1850, 1.

<sup>12</sup> "Famous Poem Indorsed as Song by State Federation," *Indianapolis Star*, October 27, 1912, accessed Newspaper Clippings File, Indiana State Library; Frederic Krull and Sarah Bolton, "Indiana, The Federation Song," sheet music (Indianapolis, 1910), accessed [WorldCat](#).

<sup>13</sup> Sarah T. Bolton to William Wesley Woollen, letter, September 16, 1882, in "Sarah Tittle Barrett Bolton Papers, 1832-1893," [Indiana Historical Society](#), SC0108; "From a Woman of the Day," [Indiana Junior Historian](#) (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, March 1993), 7. See also Virginia Dill McCarty, "From Petticoat Slavery to Equality," in David Bodenhamer and Hon. Randall T. Shepard, *The History of Indiana Law* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 177-192, accessed [GoogleBooks](#).

Married women's rights in the United States were based on English Common Law. The American legal system in essence ended the legal existence of a woman when she married, although the restrictions broadened over time. For information on the 1850 Constitutional Convention, see *Journal of the Convention of the People of the State of Indiana to Amend the Constitution, Assembled at Indianapolis, October 1850* (Indianapolis: Austin H. Brown, 1851), accessed [GoogleBooks](#); Jesse P. Boswell, compiler, *Index to the Journal and Debates of the Indiana Constitutional Convention, 1850-1851* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1938). For a discussion of women's property rights, see Richard H. Chused, "Married Women's Property Law: 1800-1850," in Kermit L. Hall, ed., *Women, the Law, and the Constitution: Major Historical Interpretations* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987); Jean V. Matthews, *Women's Struggle for Equality: The First Phase, 1828-1876* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1997); Donald F. Carmony, "The Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850-1851," Master's Thesis, Indiana University, 1931.



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<sup>14</sup> "On Behalf of the Women of Indiana," *Logansport Democratic Press*, December 18, 1850, 2; Sarah T. Bolton to William Wesley Woollen, letter, September 16, 1882, in "Sarah Tittle Barrett Bolton Papers, 1832-1893," [Indiana Historical Society](#), SC0108; "From a Woman of the Day," *Indiana Junior Historian*, 7.

Bolton summarized her involvement in the effort to secure personal property rights for married women in a letter to William Wesley Woollen, stating "I was writing articles setting forth the grievances resulting from women's status, as under the common law, and the necessity of reform and scattering these articles through the newspapers, over the state to make public opinion. At length the measure passed, but was reconsidered and voted down. Then we rallied the few women who were in favor of it and went to the Convention in a body to electioneer with the members. The measure was brought up and passed again, reconsidered the next day & again voted down. This, to the best of my recollection, was repeated five or six times before it was finally lost. Then I wrote a circular setting forth Mr. Owens efforts and asking the women of the state to contribute one dollar each, for the purpose of presenting to Mr. Owen a testimonial to show our appreciation of his endeavor on our behalf... With this money, we procured one of the most elegant antique, silver pitchers I have ever seen in any land and had it engraved with a suitable inscription. Having obtained leave to use the Hall of the House of Representatives, on the occasion of the presentation we decorated it with green garlands & fragrant flowers till it seemed a bower of beauty; and on the evening of the 28th of May 1851 – it was crowded, crammed with the elite of the city to see what had never occurred in Indianapolis before... Mr. Owen's reply on receiving the pitcher was a grand, logical, exhaustive argument in favor of women's rights."

<sup>15</sup> Robert Dale Owen to Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton, letter, July 6, 1851, in "Documents: A New Harmony Letter of 1851," *Indiana Magazine of History* (March 1931): 50-53.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah T. Bolton to William Wesley Woollen, letter, September 16, 1882, in "Sarah Tittle Barrett Bolton Papers, 1832-1893," [Indiana Historical Society](#), SC0108.

<sup>17</sup> *1850 U.S. Federal Census*, "Sarah Barrett & Nathaniel Bolton Marriage," photograph of certificate, accessed [Flickr](#); *Life and Poems*, xxvi.

<sup>18</sup> "Andrew Jackson," *Weekly Ohio Statesman*, May 28, 1845, 1, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Newspapers; "Important Measures," *Vevay Indiana Republican*, January 31, 1846, n.p.; *Life and Poems*, xxvii-xix.

<sup>19</sup> "Important Measures," *Vevay Indiana Republican*, January 31, 1846, n.p.; *Life and Poems*, xxvii-xix; "Medical Center to be Museum," *Terre Haute Star*, October 4, 1971, 2, "Welcome to the Indiana Medical History Museum," [Indiana Medical History Museum](#); "Central State Hospital," [Indiana Medical History Museum](#).

On January 31, 1846, *The Vevay Indiana Palladium* reported "An act has also passed, authorizing the erection of a splendid building, on the site purchased last summer of N. Bolton, two miles from this city, to be known as the "Indiana Hospital for the Insane." The hospital became Central Indiana Hospital and was later renamed Central State Hospital in 1929. The [Indiana Medical History Museum](#) is located in the Old Pathology Building on the grounds of the former hospital.

<sup>20</sup> *U.S. General Land Office Records*, 1796-1907, December 1, 1849, Indianapolis, Document No. 32563 and 32530, accessed Ancestry.com; *Life and Poems*, xxxiv-xlii.



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<sup>21</sup> "The State Sentinel," *Logansport Democratic Pharos*, March 21, 1855, 3; "A Trip Across the Atlantic: Letter from Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton," *New Albany Daily Ledger*, December 2, 1857, n.p., "A Trip Across the Atlantic: Letter from Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton Concluded," *New Albany Daily Ledger*, December 3, 1857, n.p.

<sup>22</sup> "Hon. Addison Reese to Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton," marriage announcement, *Indianapolis Journal*, September 9, 1863, 2, as reported in Indianapolis Newspapers Database, 1848-1991; *U.S. IRS Tax Assessment Lists*, 1862-1918, Missouri, Roll District 1 Special Lists, January-August 1865, NARA Series M776, NARA Roll 10, accessed Ancestry.com; *U.S. IRS Tax Assessment Lists*, 1862-1918, Missouri, Roll District 1 Special Lists, 1866, NARA Series M776, NARA Roll 11, accessed Ancestry.com; "Little Ralph," in *Life and Poems*, 196-198.

Bolton married Judge Addison Reese of Missouri in September 1863 and resided in that state for a short period of time. She moved back to Indiana soon after, but sources suggest that Addison Reese remained in Missouri. According to the *Life and Poems of Sarah T. Bolton*, her poem "Little Ralph" was published in 1866 in Canton, Missouri. Further research outside the scope of this review is needed to determine her relationship with Reese and her work during this time.

Bolton also reportedly took care of her grandson after the death of his mother (her daughter Sarah) and spent time in Europe as part of his education. For details on her travels see Bolton, *Life and Poems*, lxvi-lxxiii. For letters written during her travels see Sarah T. Bolton to Mrs. Brown, letter, September 5, 1872, Dresden, in "Sarah Tittle Barrett Bolton Papers, 1832-1893," [Indiana Historical Society](#), SC0108; Sarah T. Bolton to Mrs. Susan Brown, letter, February 15, 1873, Dresden, in "Sarah Tittle Barrett Bolton Papers, 1832-1893;" "Sarah T. Bolton to Miss Lou M. Rankin., November 30, 1874, Geneva, in "Benjamin Wilson Smith Collection, 1850-1917," Indiana Historical Society, M0253, Folder 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Life and Poems*, lxvi-lxvii; "Old Home of Indiana's First Woman Poet Still Occupied," *Indianapolis Star*, May 12, 1940, 5. For reminiscences of the home by family and friends see Olive Inez Downing, *Indiana Poet of Wildwood* (Marion, IN: News Publishing Company, 1941) and Lloyd Bolton-Mann, "*Beech-Bank*" *Bouquet* (Indianapolis: Galena Press, 1951). See also: "A Brief History of Beech Grove," [City of Beech Grove](#).

<sup>24</sup> "Note and Comment," *Syracuse [New York] Evening Herald*, July 15, 1893, 2; "Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton Dead." *Indianapolis Journal*, August 5, 1893, 4; *Semi-Weekly Interior Journal* (Stanford, KY), Aug. 8, 1893; "'Hoosier Poetess' Dead," *New North* (Rhineland, WI), August 10, 1893, 2; "Personal and Political," *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), August 12, 1893, accessed [Chronicling America](#); "Sarah Bolton," [Find A Grave](#); "Crown Hill Cemetery Notable Persons," [Crown Hill Funeral Home and Cemetery](#).

<sup>25</sup> "Mrs. Sarah T. Bolton Dead." *Indianapolis Journal*, August 5, 1893, 4; "Hoosier Happenings: Information of Especial Interest to Indianians," *Goshen Daily News*, August 5, 1893, n.p.

<sup>26</sup> David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows, ed., *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 335. For an image of the relief, which was completed by Emma Sangernebo, see "Relief of Sarah T. Bolton," Public Art at the Indiana State House, accessed [Flickr](#).