

Gene Stratton-Porter

Essay prepared by IHS staff

Born on Hopewell farm in Wabash County, Indiana, on Aug. 17, 1863, Geneva Grace Stratton was 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 five 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, Indiana, who was 13 years her senior. The couple's only child, Jeannette, 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, Indiana.