

**Collection #
M 1520
OM 0773
BV 5575-5578**

**MEEHAN FAMILY
ARCHIVE**

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Processed by

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August 2023

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 9 manuscript boxes, 2 visuals boxes, 4 bound volumes, 2 oversized manuscript folders, 7 oversized graphics folders, 10 OVA photograph folders, 4 OVB photograph folders, 6 OVB graphics folders, 1 album, 1 folder slides, 1 folder color polaroids, 59 printed items, 5 artifacts

COLLECTION DATES: Circa 1860s-2020

PROVENANCE: Gene Stratton-Porter Society, Inc., 2020

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Gene Stratton Porter Collection (M1235)

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 2020.0172; 1999.0233

NOTES: The previously processed Judith Reick Long Papers, designated M0739, have been incorporated into this collection.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Gene Stratton-Porter

Gene Stratton was born on a farm in Wabash County in 1863. The youngest of twelve children of Mark and Mary Shellenberger Stratton, she developed an interest in nature at a young age. In 1886 she married Charles Dorwin Porter, a druggist from Geneva. The couple's only child, Jeannette Helen, 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 began to photograph birds and animals in their natural habitat. She soon turned to writing fiction with an emphasis on the natural world. 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. Stratton-Porter enjoyed more popular acclaim with works like *A Girl of the Limberlost* and *Laddie*.

In 1913, the Limberlost Swamp was drained, destroying the natural habitat Stratton-Porter had documented. In 1914 she moved north, to Noble County Indiana, where she built a new home – “The Cabin at Wildflower Woods” – on the shores of Sylvan Lake at Rome City. There she continued her work as a naturalist and successful novelist with books like *Michael O'Halloran*, *A Daughter of the Land*, and *Her Father's Daughter*.

In 1920, she moved to California where she organized her own film production company and helped produce films based on her books. Many of these were directed by J. Leo Meehan, who married Stratton-Porter's daughter Jeannette in 1923. She also began writing regularly for *McCall's* magazine.

Gene Stratton-Porter died on Dec. 6, 1924, when her automobile was struck by a streetcar in Los Angeles. Despite her wish to be buried near her home in Indiana, her remains were interred at Hollywood Cemetery. When Jeannette died of natural causes in 1977, she was buried there with her.

The Gene Stratton-Porter Memorial Society

In 1945, some local citizens who wished to see the Cabin at Wildflower Woods turned into a state memorial formed the Gene Stratton-Porter Memorial Association and began raising funds to purchase the home and surrounding 21 acres from Jeannette Porter Meehan. In July of 1946, the deed was turned over to the state.

In 1975, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources provided a full staff for the Cabin at Wildflower Woods. Separately, but in support of the site, the Gene Stratton-Porter Memorial Society was chartered as a nonprofit in 1976. According to an early newsletter, the Society's purpose was “to further and promote the purposes, activities, and programs of the Gene Stratton-Porter Memorial on Sylvan Lake.” Later, fluctuating state budgets led to drastically reduced staff at the site, which broadened the Society's responsibilities.

In 2011, management of Indiana's historic sites was transferred to the newly created Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites (ISMHS) quasi-governmental agency. Under this arrangement, each site received a stipulated budget from the state while still implementing

development programs to make ends meet. However, the Society itself remained a volunteer-based nonprofit outside of this agreement. Around this time the state dropped the word “Memorial” from its historic sites, and the Society did likewise.

One function of the Gene Stratton-Porter Society was to “complete the collections of Mrs. Porter’s writings.” Society board members and volunteers purchased or solicited for Gene Stratton-Porter books and other material related to the author to be kept at the site. The collection was used for research, programs, and small exhibits.

In the 1980s, the author’s grandsons Jim and John Meehan began working with the Society and ISMHS to move the remains of Stratton-Porter and Jeannette Porter Meehan to Indiana. Their efforts were finally successful in 1999, when their mother and grandmother were reinterred on the grounds of the Gene Stratton-Porter Historic Site at Sylvan Lake.

In 2014, the Society began work to restore 99 acres of farmland surrounding the site back to the wetlands and prairies of Gene Stratton-Porter’s time. Late in 2016, the restored habitat was dubbed the Hemingway Wetlands in honor of board president Ted Hemingway and his wife Tedra, who spearheaded the project.

Then in 2020, the Society was unable to hold in-person events due to the coronavirus pandemic. By that time, membership had dwindled, and the Society had no active cooperative agreement with the state. Consequently, the Society’s board made the difficult decision to dissolve. Most of the money in the Society’s reserves went to create an endowment in Noble County that would support other nonprofits. The collection, accumulated over many years, was donated to the Indiana Historical Society.

Sources:

Dave Fox, GSPS, email correspondence with processor, 29 August 2023

“Gene Stratton-Porter site’s new wetland...” <https://www.kpcnews.com>, 29 Nov. 2016

“Gene Stratton-Porter Society launches endowment,” <https://www.kpcnews.com>, 11 April 2021

“Gene Stratton Porter State Historical Site,” <https://visitshipshewana.org/listings/gene-stratton-porter-state-historical-site/>

Materials in the collection

Paul Brockman, Collection Guide for Gene Stratton-Porter Collection (M1235)

“Porter, Gene Stratton,” *Indiana Authors and their Books*, 1949

“State receives ‘Limberlost’ for Gene Porter Memorial,” *Indianapolis Star*, 17 July 1946

Tiffany Parker, ISMHS, email correspondence with processor, 25 August 2023

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of materials donated to or purchased by the Gene Stratton-Porter (Memorial) Society on Sylvan Lake, Rome City, Indiana. Some materials were donated by the author's descendants, including Cosette Lang, Jim Meehan, John Meehan, and Monica Meehan Berg. Other material was purchased or otherwise donated to the GSPS by board members, collectors, neighbors, and other interested parties.

Series 1 contains material related to Gene Stratton-Porter and her immediate family, including her parents, her daughter Jeannette, Jeannette's daughters from her first marriage Gene and Jeannette, Jeannette's second husband J. Leo Meehan, and their children together James (Jim) and John Meehan.

Series 2 contains other material collected by the Gene Stratton-Porter Society not directly related to the family. It includes original dust jackets from Porter's books and lobby cards and posters from film adaptations. Also included in Series 2 are Gene Stratton-Porter Club annuals and Gene Stratton-Porter Memorial Society newsletters.

Series 3 contains material from biographer Judith Reick Long related to her book *Gene Stratton-Porter: Novelist and Naturalist* (IHS Press, 1990). This includes research files about Stratton-Porter and her family, and properties owned. Folder names in quotation marks are taken from Long's own filing system. Also included is correspondence related to the publishing process, which occurred soon after the author's death. Some of the correspondence was donated to IHS in 1999 and had been processed as M0739, the Judith Reick Long Papers. This material is so closely intertwined with the material from the GSP Society, IHS made the decision to integrate it into this collection.

Series 4 is printed material. It is made up of books by Gene Stratton-Porter and her daughter Jeannette Porter Meehan and original magazines containing articles written by Gene Stratton-Porter.

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Gene Stratton-Porter portrait, profile

Gene Stratton-Porter studio portraits

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Box 10?

Box 10?

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