



Gene Stratton Porter



STATE MEMORIAL

THE MEMORIAL

The Gene Stratton Porter State Memorial, located on the shores of Sylvan Lake near Rome City, Indiana, preserves the home where one of Indiana's most widely known woman authors lived and worked from 1914 to 1921.

Mrs. Porter required an unspoiled natural setting for her work, so after the Limberlost Swamp near her former home in Geneva, Indiana, was drained, she decided in 1913 to move to the shore of Sylvan Lake. Here the Porters built a new home amid virgin forest and an endless variety of wildflowers and wildlife. This setting provided a rich source for her nature studies and writing.

Completed in 1914, "The Cabin in Wildflower Woods" is a two-story structure of Wisconsin white cedar logs and native stone. Designed by Mrs. Porter to blend with the natural surroundings, the new home was, nevertheless, elegant.

There are six rooms plus a bath and photographic darkroom downstairs; seven bedrooms, bath, and large cedar-lined closet upstairs. The entrance hall and dining room are paneled in wild cherry, hand-rubbed and waxed, while upstairs rooms are trimmed in maple and hard pine.

One of the most notable features of the home is the living room fireplace, where a number of miniature carved stone Aztec heads, collected by Mr. Porter in Mexico, are set amidst the stone work. Other Indian artifacts collected by Mr. Porter may be seen in the entrance hall cabinets, which he designed to house his collection.

Furnishings are arranged and maintained to reflect, as authentically as possible, the lifestyle of the Porters while they lived in the home. Many of their furnishings and personal memorabilia, including Mrs. Porter's library, are preserved at the Memorial which encompasses thirteen of the property's original one hundred fifty acres. Although a number of trees were lost in the tornadoes of 1974, the grounds still abound in rare trees, shrubs, vines, and wildflowers which were planted by Mrs. Porter. Many of her scenic paths, as well as her formal gardens, arbor, and orchard are still intact for the enjoyment of visitors to the Memorial.

"The Cabin in Wildflower Woods" is open to the public year round, and there is a small admission charge. There is no admission charge to the grounds or the picnic area.

THE WOMAN

Gene Stratton Porter wrote twelve novels, seven nature books, a book for children, two books of essays and numerous articles for *Outing*, *Century*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines.

Mrs. Porter is estimated to have had fifty million readers, and her works were translated into seven foreign languages and braille. Mrs. Porter was born August 17, 1863, on "Hopewell" farm near Wabash, Indiana. Her parents were avid nature enthusiasts who passed on to their daughter a love of the unspoiled out-of-doors.

In 1886 she married Charles Darwin Porter, a druggist and banker. The couple lived for a short time in Decatur, Indiana, until the birth of their daughter Jeannette.

In 1895 they built Limberlost cabin in Geneva near the great Limberlost Swamp, which Mrs. Porter was to immortalize in her books. Here she became a serious student of the local wildlife and wildflowers and in the course of her studies became proficient at producing extremely detailed watercolor illustrations of plants, animals, and insects. She also mastered photography, which she considered the most accurate means of capturing her subjects in their natural state.



In 1903 after writing, photographing, and illustrating several nature studies for national magazines she published her first novel, *Song of the Cardinal*. By 1914 when she moved to her new home on Sylvan Lake, Mrs. Porter was already the nationally known author of six novels and four books of nature studies.

At the "Cabin in Wildflower Woods," she continued to write prolifically, completing three novels – *Michael O'Halloran* (1915), *A Daughter of the Land* (1918), and *Her Father's Daughter* (1921); one book of nature studies – *Homing with the Birds* (1919); and a children's book – *Morning Face* (1916).

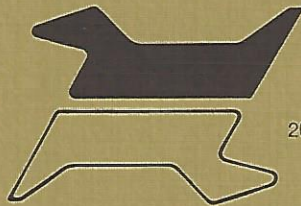
It was also during this period that Hollywood began adapting Mrs. Porter's novels for the screen. *The Harvester*, one of seven films based on her work, was actually filmed in and around the "Cabin in Wildflower Woods."

Mrs. Porter invested a great deal of time in developing the grounds around her home. She hired tree surgeons to cut out dead wood and to fill cavities in damaged trees. At the rear of the home she laid out a garden for "tame" flowers, and by actual count she personally set out more than 3,000 new plants, trees, shrubs, and vines on the grounds.

At the same time Gene Porter continued to study the flora and fauna near her home; to do the makeup, layout, photography, and watercolor illustrations for her books; and to answer the voluminous mail she received.

By the 1920's Mrs. Porter's work was making more and more demands which she found difficult to satisfy from her home in Rome City. She made several long trips to California but in 1920, on the advice of her doctor, decided to establish her permanent residence on the West Coast. She did, however, continue to make regular visits to Wildflower Woods.

On December 6, 1924, at the age of 61, Mrs. Porter died in a Los Angeles traffic accident. Decades later, hundreds of Gene Stratton Porter's readers still enjoy the serenity and beauty of the world she depicted so well in her books and visit her Indiana homes to see for themselves the world which inspired her work.



Division of Museums & Memorials

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