

GENE STRATTON PORTER: A Mind Of Her Own

By SANDI WANNEMACHER



Gene Stratton Porter was in her element for this picture at Limberlost Cabin, garden tool in hand.

GENE Stratton Porter, author of 19 novels, nature books and volumes of poetry, was born in Indiana in 1863, and from a very young age didn't worry about whether she had the right to do as she pleased — she just did it.

As a child, Gene endured school because it had to be, but she much preferred the out-of-doors. Particularly trying to her was mathematics, and she made no secret of it.

Part of the regular weekly program of study was the presentation of "rhetoricals" on Friday afternoons. In order to strengthen her all but nonexistent ability in mathematics, her teacher assigned her a paper on mathematical law.

After spending several days alternately agonizing over the paper and refusing to see its significance, Gene wrote instead a review of one of her favorite books, *Picciola*.

Being almost certain of the reception her paper would receive, she managed to be last to present her work, hoping, no doubt, that time would run out.

Her name was finally called, and she began to read her paper. Gene's teacher asked her to stop reading, and disappeared from the room. When she returned, she had the superintendent in tow and asked Gene to begin again.

The superintendent, the teacher and the students all received the work enthusiastically, and Gene was encouraged to continue with her writing. The result was

Continued on Page 18

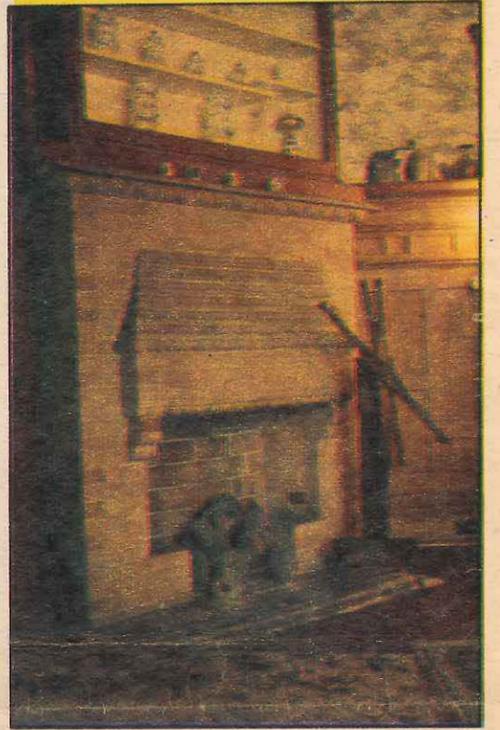


The Limberlost Cabin at Geneva, Ind., (above) is a state memorial, given to Indiana in 1947. The conservatory window (right) at the cabin was Freckles' window in Gene's first novel, "Freckles."





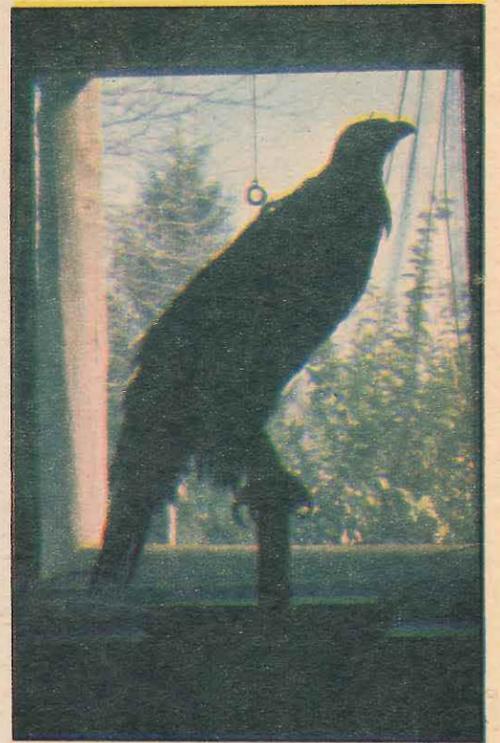
Mrs. Porter wrote about this room, the bedroom of her daughter in the cabin, in the book, "A Girl of the Limberlost."



Harvester's fireplace, in the Limberlost Cabin, is described in "The Harvester."



This was the Limberlost Swamp. Wabash River water was here before the stream was re-routed in 1903.



Gene was a bird expert. This stuffed hawk is in Limberlost Cabin.

PORTER

Continued from Page 15

several attempts at poetry, which Gene herself discarded as unworthy, a move she later said she regretted.

When Gene, as a young lady, made vacation trips to Sylvan Lake, Indiana, she noted in a letter to a friend that she and another girl were the only two girls in the area who regularly "paddled their own canoes." Literally. Quite unladylike at the time.

GENE MET Charles Dorwin Porter on one such trip with her sister and brother-in-law, and after a courtship of more than a year, mostly by correspondence because he was then a Fort Wayne druggist and she lived with her family at Wabash, she agreed to marry him.

Her wedding gown reflected her independent spirit since she rejected the traditional white lace gown and veil in favor of pink lace and satin. Nowhere in her correspondence with friends is there a reference to a veil — something certain to have raised eyebrows aplenty in those times of strict adherence to all the proper symbols of maidenhood.

After the birth of her daughter Jeanette in Decatur, Gene began to feel the itch to live closer to the nature her father had taught her to love. Porter had a cabin built to his wife's specifications in the heart of the Limberlost Swamp in Geneva, about 15 miles south of Decatur in Adams County. The cabin had 14 rooms and a conservatory, and was constructed of cedar logs from Wisconsin.

When Jeanette entered school, Gene began to write, timidly at first. Her first manuscript was sent to a magazine and she began to wait.

Her waiting was done alone. Her husband had opened a drugstore in Geneva, and like most establishments of that type, it had a magazine stand. She was careful not to submit her manuscript to one his store carried.

She went so far as to rent a postoffice box in her own name. She gave as her reason not wanting anyone else to know if she failed, since the family's mail was delivered to the store, but a woman with a less independent

bent would probably not have bothered.

Her secret was out, however, when one day an acquaintance

told her how much he enjoyed reading her article in the magazine. And she hadn't even known it had been published!

CORRESPONDENCE with the publisher revealed that in the processing of her manuscript, her

address had become misplaced. The publisher held up printing the article hoping she would write to inquire about the delay, but when he didn't hear from her, he printed it anyway. Her first check was for a whopping \$16, and her career was launched.

THE \$1,000



\$100,000 in sweepstakes prizes. 100 winners or more in the Greater Indianapolis Area.*

*Includes these counties: INDIANA: BARTHOLOMEW, BENTON, BLACKFORD, BOONE, BROWN, CARROLL, CASS, CLAY, CLINTON, DAVIESS, DECATUR, DELAWARE, DUBOIS, FAYETTE, FOUNTAIN, GIBSON, GRANT, GREENE, HAMILTON, HANCOCK, HENDRICKS, HENRY, HOWARD, JACKSON, JAY, JOHNSON, KNOX, LAWRENCE, MADISON, MARION, MARTIN, MONROE, MONTGOMERY, MORGAN, ORANGE, OWEN, PARKE, PERRY, PIKE, POSEY, PUTNAM, RANDOLPH, RUSH, SHELBY, SPENCER, SULLIVAN, TIPPECANOE, TIPTON, UNION, VANDERBURGH, VERMILLION, VIGO, WARREN, WARRICK, WHITE. KENTUCKY: DAVIESS, HANCOCK, HENDERSON, HOPKINS, McLEAN, MUHLENBERG, UNION, WEBSTER. ILLINOIS: CLARK, CRAWFORD, EDGAR, LAWRENCE, WABASH.

Enter the "Bring Del Monte Home" Sweepstakes and you may be a winner bringing home one of these 4,820 tasty prizes:

20 First Prizes — \$1,000 coupons redeemable for cash to buy groceries.

50 Second Prizes — \$500 coupons redeemable for cash to buy groceries.

75 Third Prizes — \$250 coupons redeemable for cash to buy groceries.

175 Fourth Prizes — \$100 coupons redeemable for cash to buy groceries.

4,500 Fifth Prizes — \$10 coupons redeemable for cash to buy groceries.

To enter, just follow the official sweepstakes rules and use the entry blank in this advertisement. Additional entry blanks are available at participating grocers, and you can enter as often as you like. All entries must be received no later than March 31, 1977.

About this time, she received a camera as a gift and went about learning photography with her customary thoroughness and enthusiasm. Many of her photos were published in magazines along with her articles, and the results were so good a represent-

ative of the manufacturer of the paper she used called to find out how she achieved such quality.

Like most beginning photographers, her darkroom was the family bathroom and her equipment was mostly makeshift. Her answer to the representative

was that the quality of the water in the area must have made the difference.

Having thought about it later, she concluded that care in exposure, mixing of chemicals and the processing of plates and papers had more to do with it

than things over which she had no control — such as the water.

Gene didn't ponder her right to have a career independent of her home and family, even then. Indeed, she didn't have time to ponder it. She had a 14-room home to maintain, a daughter who needed to be dressed and cared for and a husband to attend to. With that and a career to nurture, the question never came up. She took it for granted she would do both. And she had no household help at the time.

HER FIRST book, *A Song of the Cardinal*, was written and published while she lived in Geneva, and it was strictly a nature study. She then turned her interest to novels, but she intended them to be nature studies with fiction thrown in "to sweeten them up," as she later wrote.

Her first novel *Freckles* was such a piece. Three editors told her it wouldn't sell and a fourth told her it might if she would change the ending and leave out some of the nature stuff.

Since the whole idea was to get the nature stuff in, she refused to change it, and for three years it collected dust on bookstore shelves. When it began to move, it ran away, and this encouraged her to do more. She made an agreement with her publisher to alternate her novels with purely nature books and for many years she turned out a book each year, many illustrated with her own photographs.

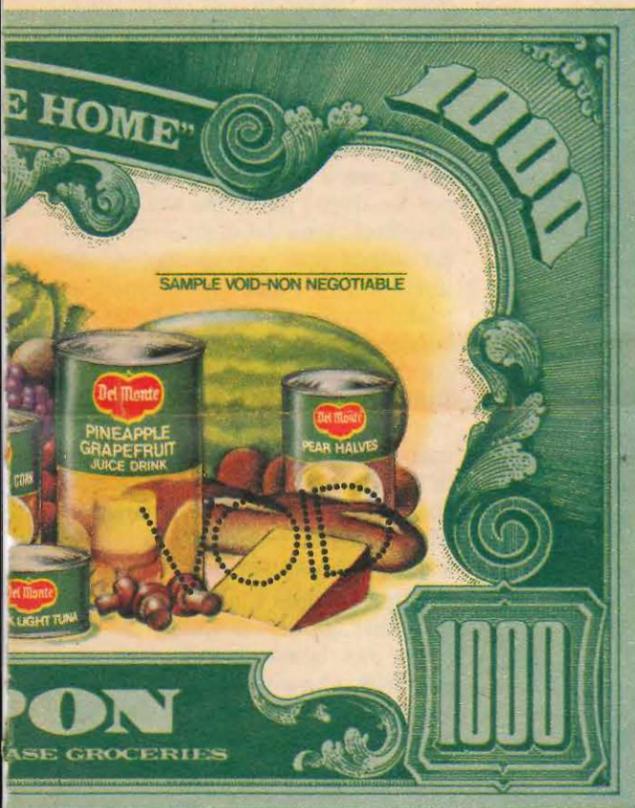
In 1913, the Limberlost Swamp had been drained and Gene decided it was time to move on. She built a second cabin at Rome City on Sylvan Lake in Noble County, where she had met her husband, and continued her study of nature.

Her daughter wrote in *The Lady of the Limberlost* it was not unusual to find moths and butterflies flying about the house or a wounded bird being nursed in the conservatory. Gene had several wildflower gardens and grew hundreds of bulbs indoors each winter. She often slept with a cocoon pinned to her pillow so when it began to open she would wake and be able to watch it.

Her literary style was often criticized as being too sentimental and sweet. To this she answered merely that there were enough works being published that dealt with the seamier facets of the world. If her books were to be inspirations to those who read them, then they would continue to

Continued on Next Page

COUPON



OFFICIAL RULES—NO PURCHASE REQUIRED

1. On an official entry form or plain piece of 3" x 5" paper, hand print your name and address and the name and location of your favorite grocer. Mail your entry to:
"Bring DEL MONTE Home" Sweepstakes,
P.O. Box 8023, Blair, Nebraska 68009.
2. Each entry must be accompanied by three (3) labels from any size DEL MONTE product featured in this sweepstakes—or—three (3) plain pieces of paper on which you have hand printed the words "DEL MONTE"—or any combination of labels and hand printed pieces of paper totaling three (for example, 2 labels and 1 hand printed piece of paper).
3. Enter as often as you wish, but each entry must be hand addressed and mailed separately. Entries must be received by March 31, 1977.
4. Winners will be determined in random drawings conducted by the D. L. Blair Corporation, an independent judging organization whose decisions are final. At least 100 winners will be selected from each of 45 DEL MONTE marketing regions. Limit one (1) prize to a family. Taxes on any prize are the sole responsibility of the winner. No substitution will be made for any prize offered. All prizes will be awarded in coupons immediately redeemable for total cash value.
5. Sweepstakes open to residents of the United States, except employees of Del Monte Corporation, its advertising and sweepstakes agencies, and the families of each. This sweepstakes is void in the state of Missouri and wherever prohibited by law. Sweepstakes participation via entry blanks distributed through retail stores is void in Wisconsin and Maryland. All Federal, State and local laws and regulations apply.
6. For a list of winners, send a separate, stamped, self-addressed envelope to: "Bring DEL MONTE Home" Winners' List, P.O. Box 7079, Blair, Nebraska 68009.

OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

Mail to: "Bring DEL MONTE Home" Sweepstakes,
P.O. Box 8023, Blair, Nebraska 68009.

Enclosed are: (check one) 3 labels from any of the featured DEL MONTE products listed below. 3 pieces of 3" x 5" paper hand printed with the words "DEL MONTE" a combination of the above totaling three.

Featured DEL MONTE Products • Corn • Pineapple
• Catsup • Peas • Green Beans • Pears • Tuna •
Juice Drinks • Tomato Sauce • Fruit Cocktail

Name _____ Please print

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

My favorite grocer is:

Store Name _____

Store Location _____ City _____

Entries must be received by March 31, 1977.



PORTER

Continued from Page 19

be written with a generous helping of molasses.

Inspirations they were, too. She received letters from administrators of prisons and

institutions for wayward youth telling her that copies of her books had to be replaced because they were simply worn out, and that more than one of their charges had been redirected as a result of a hero in one story or another.

SHE WENT against what those who were supposedly in positions to know considered the popular tide and wrote of what she described as gentle, righteous, clean adults and wide-eyed, curious children. Critics commented that the characters were unrealistic, but she said she wrote about people she knew, most often her own family.

Porter's businesses in Geneva prevented him from living full-time at the Rome City cabin. Besides his drugstore, he had founded the Bank of Geneva and served as its president. He spent weekends with his family but, rather than commute, stayed in Geneva during the week.

When motion pictures became popular, Gene discovered them as another medium for her work. After much discussion with several studios, she was told that her stories could not be adapted to the screen.

Not being one to take someone else's word that something could not be done, Gene packed up her daughter, granddaughter and her household staff and moved to California. She was determined to make movies of her novels, so she began her own production company and proceeded to do just that. *Michael O'Halloran*, the story of a little newsboy she had met much earlier, became her first effort at movie-making, and she was hard at work on another when she met her death in 1924 in a car-streetcar accident.

Porter didn't accompany his wife and family to California because his heart was in Indiana. He did, however, visit them several times. He had always encouraged and aided his wife in any way he could, and without his help and understanding, she wrote her career could never have been.

At the time of her death, 17 of her books, including novels, nature studies and volumes of verse, had been published. Two more books, a novel and a nature study, were published posthumously. She was inducted into the Indiana Academy in October, 1971.

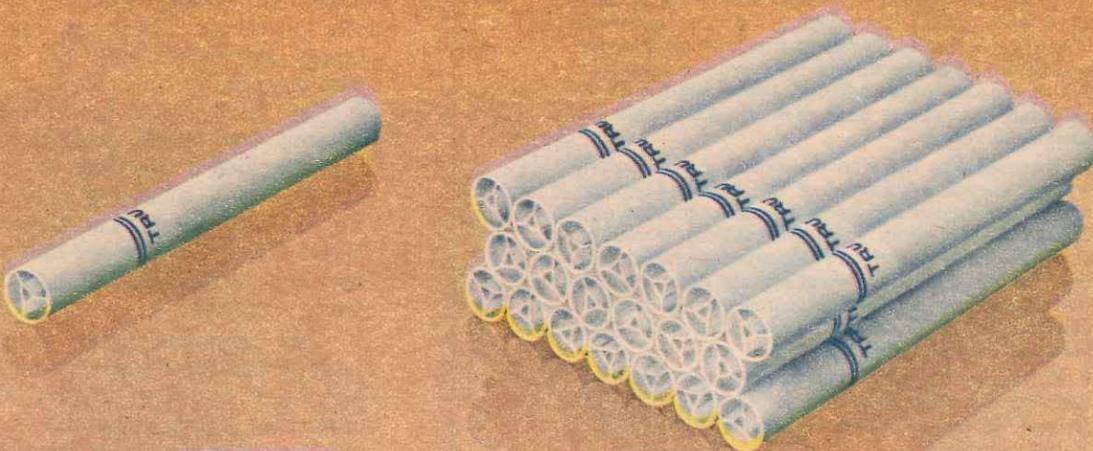
Gene Stratton Porter achieved in her time a degree of liberation to be envied by many women today. She assumed she had the right to have a career of her own so long as she met the responsibilities of wife and mother she had willingly taken on. Neither got in the way of the other, perhaps because she didn't stop to wonder if they would.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

True slashes tar in half!

Down to only
5 mgs. tar per cigarette.

Down to only
100 mgs. tar per pack.



And a taste worth changing to.
Think about it.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

Regular: 5 mgs. "tar", 0.4 mgs. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report-October 1976.