



Friends of the Limberlost

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SATURDAY, SEPT. 27, IS THE ANNUAL MEETING FOR FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST.

ALL MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND, AND ANYONE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER IS ALSO WELCOME TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING.

IT ALL TAKES PLACE AT THE LIMBERLOST STATE HISTORIC SITE VISITOR CENTER IN GENEVA. APPETIZERS AND DRINKS WILL BE SERVED AT 5PM.

THE BUSINESS MEETING BEGINS AT 5:30 P.M. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT TAKES PLACE AT THE ANNUAL MEETING, PLEASE SEE ARTICLE BELOW.

THIS YEAR, THERE IS NO NEED TO RSVP.

THE ANNUAL MEETING FOR THE FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST IS SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 5PM TO APPROXIMATELY 7:30 PM

*All members are invited or anyone interested in becoming a member is also welcome!
If you plan to attend, there is no need to RSVP.
APPETIZERS AND DRINKS WILL BE PROVIDED BY THE FRIENDS*

The business meeting includes:

- Approval of the minutes from last year's 2024 annual meeting. A copy of last year's meeting minutes will be provided to all attendees.
- There will be a meeting of the Limberlost Swamp Remembered Committee, which includes voting on any current business, and highlights of the past fiscal year or any future projects will be presented by Limberlost Regional Ecologist, Ryan Smith.
- The monthly Friends of the Limberlost Board meeting also takes place, which includes voting on any current business, and highlights of the past fiscal year or any future projects will be presented by Limberlost Site Manager, Shaun Payne.
- The Friends monthly Treasurer Report will be presented by Randy Lehman
- Election of eligible candidates to fill any vacancies on the FOL Board of Directors will take place.

BEFORE THE BUSINESS MEETING BEGINS, WE HAVE A SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR ALL THOSE ATTENDING THE ANNUAL MEETING. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS EDUCATIONAL AND TIMELY PROGRAM, PLEASE SEE THE NEXT PAGE:

This picture shows how the Limberlost Visitor Center looks today. The picture below this one shows how it looked when it first opened in 2013. The Visitor Center is currently undergoing a refresh of its exterior, with the goal of bringing back a similar look to the original.





Invite Butterflies to your Community – Plant Natives!

Program for the Annual Meeting of Friends of the Limberlost on Sept. 27, 2025

Presented by Kate Sanders

“There are many reasons why we all plant gardens, and right at the top of the list is for the colorful flowers to enjoy! Butterflies also bring color to the garden, but often their visits are fleeting. Would you like to see more butterflies in your yard? We will discuss how to extend visits and invite butterflies as more permanent residents around us. Learn about host plants and small ways to add the right kind of structure to your natural spaces to support butterflies and other important native pollinators.”

Kate’s background, in part, is in restoration and native plant communities, which has led to finding ways to use native plants in more urban, manicured areas. For Kate, being passionate about native plants has grown to include the native fauna that are connected to our native plant communities. She earned a BS and MS in biology, with an ecology focus. After graduation she worked at a native seed nursery, where she learned about and fostered a passion for native plants, plant communities, and the animals that they support. Part of what she does today is help plan pollinator and wildlife habitat for landowners, and provide technical assistance to help those projects succeed.



Loblolly Marsh Sunset Stroll

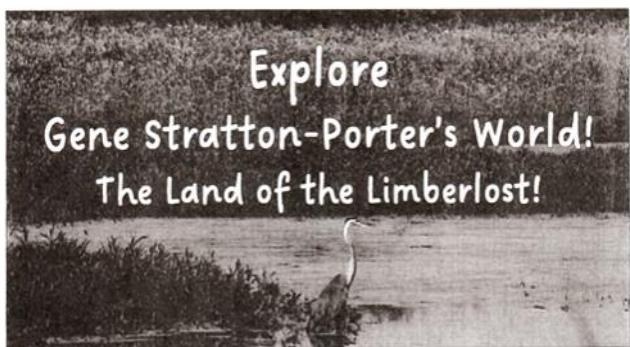
Oct. 24th 6:00-8:00pm

Cost \$5 Adult & \$3 Child: Admission cost is discounted if you are a member of the Indiana State Museum. Enjoy a guided nature hike with the new Limberlost naturalist, Rachel Moorman-Minton, at this 475-acre Nature Preserve, located in Jay County.

Meet at the Loblolly Marsh Nature Preserve parking lot located at 8180N 250W, Bryant, IN 47326. This hike is subject to cancellation in the event of adverse weather conditions. The hike is limited to a maximum of 24 adults and children (typical attendance is 12 to 15 people). For more information call Rachel at 260-368-7428. To pre-register go online: www.indianamuseum.org/limberlost Pre-registration is appreciated,



Photo of 8ft. tall flowering Prairie Dock adjacent to the trail at the Loblolly Marsh



Rent-a-Naturalist Program!

Only \$40 for 90 minutes!

This is a personalized program!



Even though Curt Burnette recently retired, you can still book a guided tour of the Limberlost Conservation Area with Curt. Cost is \$40 for 90 minutes (up to 10 people). You drive your own vehicle and follow the Limberlost naturalist. These are personalized tours. The interests and physical abilities of the group, and the time of year determine areas visited and the details of each tour. A handicap accessible trail is available at one of the locations. You have a choice of five different Limberlost nature preserves. The itinerary can be customized according to

your interests. Pre-registration required. For more information or to make a reservation, contact Curt Burnette, Naturalist/Certified Interpretive Guide, email: burnettecurt@aol.com.

20th ANNUAL FUNDRAISING RESULTS: \$4,434.70 FOR WETLAND RESORTATION



If we are counting correctly, this was the 20th year in a row that Creek Run has conducted a fundraiser for Friends of the Limberlost. Like all their other annual fundraising efforts, the results this year are impressive, and we especially want to thank Abby Michael of Creek Run for all the work she and her staff put into organizing this effort. Without her commitment to organizing this annual event, it would not happen.

Creek Run is an environmental engineering company with offices in Montpelier and Laporte, IN. They are a full service consulting firm that provides environmental and engineering services throughout the Midwest.

Revenue generated by this annual fundraising effort supports Limberlost wetland restoration projects, which today total just over 1800 acres in Jay and Adams Counties in Indiana. Besides benefiting the environment, these wetland properties provide miles of trails that are open to the public for hiking. *The annual donations raised by Creek Run go to Limberlost Swamp Remembered (LSR), a standing committee of Friends of the Limberlost tasked with bringing back the Limberlost Swamp.* LSR works closely with the Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources Division of Nature Preserve to bring back portions of the Limberlost Swamp made famous by Indiana author and naturalist, Gene Stratton-Porter. LSR purchases flood-prone land from willing sellers, or participates in land auctions to acquire flood-prone properties located within the Limberlost Conservation Area.

THE FRIENDS ALSO RAISE MONEY FOR LIMBERLOST STATE HISTORIC SITE (LSHS)

I'm sure you've noticed that when you join the Friends of the Limberlost, you can let us know how you want your contributions to be spent—for the benefit of Limberlost wetland restoration projects, or for the benefit of Limberlost State Historic Site, or your donations can be shared equally between these two. The picture to the right shows Limberlost Site Manager, Shaun Payne, holding a check made out to the Indiana State Museum for \$12,383.86 from the Friends of the Limberlost, presented to Shaun at a Friends of the Limberlost Board meeting held on July 21, 2025. It's an example of how the Friends helped pay for a much needed project at Limberlost State Historic Site. Some of you may remember that in July of this year the state of Indiana made significant budget cuts to all state agencies, including the Indiana State Museum, which had budgeted funds for this much needed fencing project. Rather than have this fencing project cancelled, the Friends were able to keep it on track. It's the ongoing financial support we get from our members that makes this generosity possible.

Because Limberlost State Historic Site wants to expand its "program space" the fence was needed to separate the historic site property from the neighbors. The site had been having various issues with the neighbors and their pets. It's a long and complicated story, but the fence effectively separates three homes from the site and has resolved most of the issues. The fencing also creates the private space needed to build a structure for site programs for school groups and other groups and for site events. The final design for this visitor space & programming area is still a work in progress, but whatever the design of the structure ends up being, it will add another dimension to what Limberlost State Historic Site can offer the public.



The photo above & below shows the completed fence in the backlot of LSHS. You can see Shaun in the middle holding the check that the Friends presented to him. He is surround by FOL Board members.



The "Pollinator" boxes shown above are filled with native plants. The boxes were another eagle scout project done by troop 72, Monroe, IN. Materials to build and fill the pollinator boxes were paid for by a grant from the Adams County Soil & Water Conservation District.

THE LIMBERLOST & THE BOOT-BRUSH STATIONS & THE BOY SCOUTS

It all started in 2007-2008 with a study done in Antarctica: Researchers vacuumed the clothing and gear of over 850 tourists, scientists, and support staff visiting Antarctica during the summer season. They found almost 2,700 "stowaway" seeds. Their study, published in 2012, provided sound evidence for both self-regulation (e.g. taking care of personal equipment) and organization-based regulation (e.g. issuing guidelines and holding regular inspections) to reduce transfer of plant seeds to the Antarctic. This study sparked numerous other studies that came to the same conclusion: boot brush stations are needed if you are serious about stopping or at least reducing the transfer of invasive plant species from one place to another.

Although boot-brush stations are not 100% effective against the spread of invasive species, studies show that they can be an effective tool in preventing the transfer of invasive species to protected areas. A research project done in southern Illinois sampled the dirt mounds created around boot brush stations and found 39 different species, 14 of which were exotic plant species. Visit [PlayCleanGo's website](#) for more information on this research.

So, the research shows that boot-brush stations are needed, but actually finding the time and the money to get them installed at Limberlost trailheads is another matter. Ryan Smith is the IN-DNR-Nature Preserve Regional Ecologist, in charge of the Limberlost properties, and he has a lot of responsibilities. He manages all state dedicated nature preserves located in a 15-county area of east-central Indiana. Today, he has only a couple of seasonal workers to help with all that needs to be done at the preserves in his region. Because of his workload, finding the time and money to install boot-brush stations at any of the Limberlost trailheads was just not going to happen. Obviously, Ryan needed help if boot-brush stations were going to be installed in the Limberlost! Enter the Boy Scouts of Bluffton, Troop 149, and especially one scout in particular, and he will tell the rest of this story....

"Hello, my name is Chayson Brown. My Eagle Scout service project name was the "*Invasive Species Prevention Project*". I worked with regional ecologist, Ryan Smith, and he told me about the need for boot brushes at three of the Limberlost properties: Loblolly Marsh and the Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserves, and the Bird Sanctuary. The boot brushes will help keep invasive species off the trails by catching seeds in the gravel and preserving the native habitat.



On Aug. 18 Chayson updated the Friends on the status of his project



Chayson & Ryan hold interpretation signs to be installed at the 3 stations

After the Boy Scout Council approved my proposal, Ryan ordered the information signs and brushes from the DNR. When the signs came in, I purchased lumber and other materials. We gathered tools that would be needed and set work dates. In April of 2024, The Friends of the Limberlost approved \$300 for my project, and I was able to keep expenses below that limit. Digging post holes proved difficult because there were three different sets of conditions, but after the first day of work, we had all six posts set. We allowed the Sakrete to set for a couple of days before adding the brushes and signs. Gravel was added to the base to fill the box below the brushes. The gravel should provide a graveyard for invasive species that might come onto the properties. I appreciate The Friends of the Limberlost for funding my project, and I appreciate Ryan Smith for his help."



Chayson behind the boot scraping station at Limberlost N.P. Pictured with family and friends who helped install the three stations.



Chayson at the Loblolly Marsh boot station

LIMBERLOST SITE MANAGER, SHAUN PAYNE, REPORTS ON IMPACT OF RECENT STATE BUDGET CUTS TO LIMBERLOST SHS

Like many state agencies, the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites (ISMHS), including Limberlost State Historic Site, were impacted by reduced state revenue projections and associated budget cuts. *For ISMHS, state funding supports staff costs, thus budget cuts resulted in a reduction of force across the system.*

Site operations, with respect to open hours and days remain the same, Wednesday thru Sunday 10:00am to 5:00pm. We have adjusted prescheduled tour times to 11:00am and 2:00pm, while maintaining the flexibility to accommodate tours in between whenever possible. As always, we are grateful to the Friends of the Limberlost for their continued support in our mission to share Gene's legacy with current and future generations.

I've also got some projects that we are looking at that the Friends could help with in the future:

- Children's space with mural and tree in visitors center
- Interpretive Signage in visitors center
- Permanent homes for ambassador animals in the visitor center
- Artifact display in visitors center
- Stone and benches around pollinator garden (if the Adams County Soil & Water Conservation District has no funding available to assist)
- Water supply line to the new pavilion/shelter (I should be getting an estimate on this soon)

The Friends of the Limberlost Report on Recent State Budget Cuts

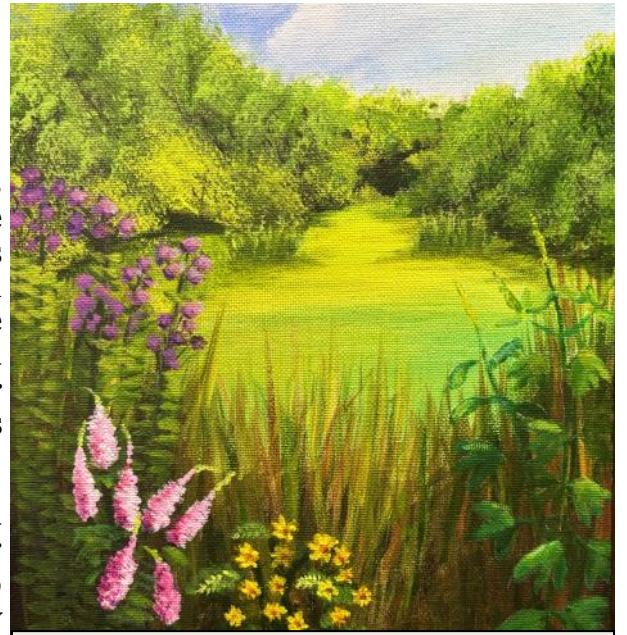
1. Longtime Limberlost interpreter and site naturalist, Curt Burnette, who was still working part-time when the cuts were announced, had his part-time position eliminated. Curt continues to be available for Rent-a-Naturalist tours of the Limberlost wetlands, but he is now a naturalist volunteering for Friends of the Limberlost, and you'll have to contact him directly if you wish to "Rent-a-Naturalist". *Curt's personal email address is burnettecurt@aol.com*. One positive thing regarding Curt's forced retirement, because he is no longer a state employee, he can run for a position on the Friends of the Limberlost Board of Directors, and he has decided to do that.
2. Good news: the person hired fulltime to work with Curt and eventually take over doing Rent-A-Naturalist responsibilities for the site, Rachel Mooreman-Minton, is still working fulltime at Limberlost. Her position was not cut nor were her hours reduced.
3. Hours available for Limberlost intermittents (part-time staff) were cut back, so Bill Hubbard, retired teacher, who has been working as a part-time employee, lost his part-time position with Limberlost, and so did Phyllis Gernhardt. The remaining two intermittent staff members, Jeanne & Teresa, kept their part-time positions but the total number of hours they can work per pay-period have been reduced.
4. The last of the bad news, the Limberlost maintenance person, Art Booth, the guy you could depend on to fix almost anything, had his position eliminated by these cuts. So, we guess the site manager is expected to fix what he can, and call the museum for help when he can't.

It was a hot & humid day for the 2nd annual Plein Air event at Limberlost State Historic Site

Despite the intense heat on Saturday, August 16, five artists from around the area came to Geneva to participate in the **second annual** Limberlost Plein Air event. The artists could choose to paint any subject at any location in the local area. Locations chosen by this year's artists included the Loblolly Marsh, the Rainbow Bend Conservation Area, and the Limberlost Cabin. Just like the 1st Limberlost Plein Air event, this 2nd event was held on Gene Stratton Porter's birthday-her 162nd birthday.

Friends of the Limberlost Board members, Melissa Fey, and Jackie Caffee were both scheduled to host the Plein Air event, but Jackie was called away on a family emergency, so board member, Sean Dedert, substituted for Jackie. They welcomed artists and other visitors at the registration table at Limberlost State Historic Site. In addition to making sure artists would be happily situated at the location they chose to set up, Melissa and Sean passed out snacks and later delivered lunches to the artists. The "lunch option" was again a greatly appreciated feature of our Plein Air event. This year issues caused by the high heat and humidity made painting more difficult, but all the artists were able to complete their paintings. Two of the paintings are still on display at the Limberlost Visitor Center for public viewing and sale.

We would like to recognize and thank the following artists for their participation in this 2nd Plein Air event at Limberlost: Lori Miller of Portland, IN; Michelle Walker of Wapakoneta OH; Kenya Habegger of Berne, IN; Nancy Leitz of Bluffton, IN; Laura Schwartz of Geneva, IN



First Place: "Rainbow Bend"
by Lori Miller



2nd Place "The Cabin"
by Michelle Walker



3rd Place "Death has Beauty"
by Kenya Habegger

We want to be sure to thank Connie Ronald, of Portland, IN, for providing the prize money for the artists. We also want to thank Limberlost Site Manager, Shaun Payne, for allowing this event to be held on Limberlost Cabin grounds and agreeing to let the artists display their paintings inside the visitor center. Once again, positive feedback from the participating artists means we plan to repeat this event next year, although it will be moved to the Fall in order to reduce the likelihood of hot and humid weather conditions.

As an author, photographer, naturalist, and one of the first artists to appreciate the natural beauty of the Limberlost, we think this event represents the essence of what Gene Stratton Porter was about.

The Plein Air event gives us another way to highlight the historic site and the ongoing restoration of 1800 acres of the Limberlost Swamp in southern Adams County and northern Jay County. If you are an artist, who has not participated in our Plein Air event, and you would like to participate next year, email Melissa Fey to get on the contact list for next year: linngrove@live.com

The Incredible “BOOMS” That Came With the Indiana Oil Boom



Oil fields during the oil boom in Indiana in the 1890s and early 1900s could be dangerous and deadly places. Local papers reported men falling from oil derricks, timbers from derricks falling on men, and men being hurt or killed by oil field machinery. The *Decatur Democrat* reported on January 10, 1901, that

“Accidental deaths in the oil fields of Adams county have been quite numerous during the last few months...”

The most horrendous oil field accidents, however, resulted from explosions of nitroglycerin. Nitroglycerin is an oily, colorless liquid that has such disparate uses as the manufacture of dynamite and is prescribed as medicine for angina pectoris, a painful symptom of ischemic heart disease. The explosive power of nitro was also used to “shoot” wells. After drilling a shaft, a large quantity of nitro (up to 1000 quarts) was lowered to the bottom of the shaft and detonated to break up the oil-bearing rock and allow the oil to come up, often resulting in a “gusher.” Men who did this job were known as “shooters.”

Nitro is notoriously volatile and takes very little jarring to set it off. Sometimes, nitroglycerin explosions occurred outside of the well shafts. Even tiny amounts of it could result in disastrous explosions for the person handling it. An experienced shooter of Geneva mistook a small speck of nitro for a piece of slate and, upon striking it with a hammer, blew off his right hand and three fingers of his left hand. If such a minuscule amount could do that, what then could happen when hundreds of quarts exploded?

As might be imagined (or maybe it's beyond our imagination), the damage could be catastrophic. Numerous tremendous explosions took place during the oil boom time period. A list of ten major Indiana nitro explosions was produced by searching on Google. These occurred at well sites, on roads during transport, and at “magazines”

which were buildings that held the supply of the explosive. The *Geneva Herald*, in its July 6, 1894, issue, reported that Geneva had four magazines in its vicinity. This was due to the large number of oil wells being drilled in the Geneva oil field.

Many other places in the Indiana and Ohio oil fields also had magazines. The *Cincinnati Post*, in January of 1895, reported an explosion of a wagon carrying 100 quarts of nitro on a farm near Wapakoneta, Ohio, that killed three men and left a hole 15 feet across and 20 feet deep. In January of 1902, two adjacent magazines exploded south of Marion, Indiana, which shattered nearly every window in that town and was felt 100 miles away. Two miles north of Montpelier, Indiana, a nitro factory exploded in February 1905. The shock wave and sound of the explosion were heard for 40 miles. A well shooting accident that killed two men near West Liberty in Jay County, Indiana, was felt in Decatur in Adams County, a distance of 23 miles.

Newspapers of that time period did not hold back in their description of the bodies of the men killed. In the West Liberty incident, what little could be found of one man's remains were just pieces no larger than a man's hand. The other unfortunate worker's body was found 300 feet away from the well. The entire left side of his body had been blown off. In an explosion that occurred near Geneva in 1906, the *Geneva Herald* reported that when the undertaker gathered up the remains of the two men killed, all he could find was “the men's hearts, kidneys, a piece of rib, shoulder blades, and other portions, combined weights of perhaps fifty pounds were gathered up.” It was also reported that a boy found a throat with a tongue attached near the explosion.

Geneva experienced two tremendous nitro explosions during the years Gene Stratton-Porter lived in town. The first, in November of 1896, happened at the Empire Glycerine Company's magazine located on the Hale farm, about one-half mile northwest of town. The hole left behind was 7 feet deep and 20 feet across. Fortunately, no one was killed. The cause of the explosion could not be determined.

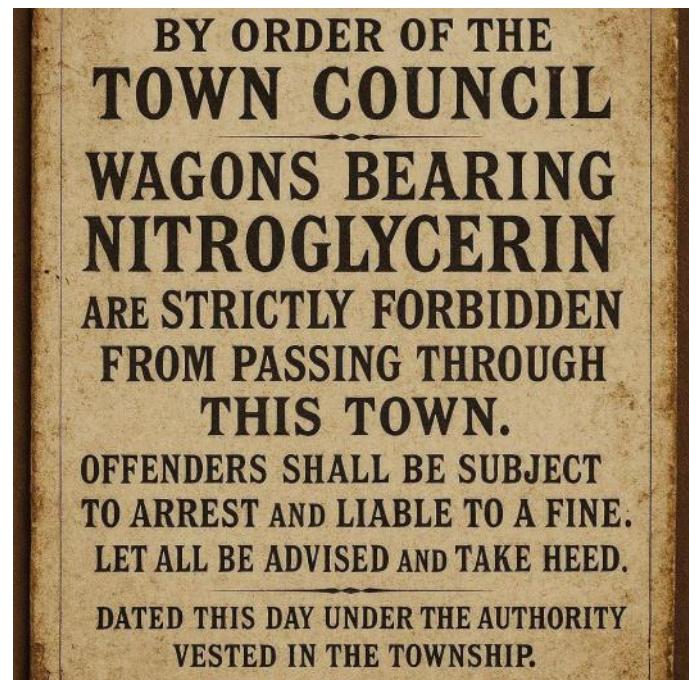
(continued on the next page)

Hundreds of windows were blown out, walls were cracked, and chimneys were knocked down in the area. Plate glass windows in businesses in Geneva and Berne were cracked or shattered. The front windows of the Shamrock Hotel in Geneva, owned by Gene Stratton-Porter's husband Charles, were shattered. The shock was felt in Wapakoneta, Ohio, 70 miles to the east. What was remarkably fortunate was that the Hercules Torpedo Company's magazine, a brick building located on the same farm about 150 feet away, did not explode. The exploded magazine held 750 quarts of nitro, and the unexploded contained nearly 1000.

The second explosion happened to the Hercules magazine ten years later, in February 1906, on the same farm one-half mile northwest of Geneva. This time, two wagonloads went up, killing 2 men, 4 horses, and a dog. Including both wagons and the magazine, nearly 1600 quarts of nitro were involved. The gruesome remains of the men are described above, and people rushing to the scene saw chunks of horse flesh "still quivering." Once again, the damage was amazing. Windows were shattered for miles around, including downtown Geneva. Schoolchildren and teachers rushed to leave the Geneva school building as shattered glass and plaster rained down. The shock was felt as far away as Muncie and Indianapolis. The hole created was 15 feet deep and 25 feet across.

As bad as the damage was from these explosions, it would have been infinitely worse had they occurred within a town or city. Wagons carrying nitro routinely went through towns on their way to job sites. The Town of Geneva passed an ordinance prohibiting wagons carrying nitro from passing through town. Offenders could be arrested and fined. Other municipalities would have been well advised to do the same. When a shooter from Geneva stopped in Decatur on his way to New Haven with 80 quarts of nitro, the *Decatur Democrat* noted that "It is probable if some of our citizens had known that such an amount of this explosive stood so near them Friday night, they would have been quite uneasy." And for good reasons. One year after this very careless behavior of the shooter, he was the

man blown to pieces at the West Liberty explosion.



Editor's Note One: We want to commend Curt Burnette for all the time and effort he's put into researching what life was like back when Gene Stratton-Porter was living first in Decatur and then in Geneva. He's read through hundreds of newspapers from the time period and has gone online to research this article in order to give us a glimpse into that time period.
—newsletter editor, Randy Lehman.

Editors Note Two: The illustrations included in this nitroglycerine article (the nitroglycerine bottle and the warning sign for drivers hauling nitroglycerine) were created by Bing Image Creators—AI Microsoft software. I had tried using AI before to create illustrations for this newsletter, but had little success; however, this time I thought the images were good enough to use in this article, and they made it more visually appealing. Just be aware that they are probably not 100% historically accurate.

FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST
NEW MEMBERSHIP & MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Friends of the Limberlost is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation. We support Limberlost State Historic Site, which is owned and operated by the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. We also support the IDNR—Division of Nature Preserves which manages the restoration of wetlands in the Limberlost Swamp Conservation Area. Your membership dues and extra donations are vital to the many projects honoring the memory and legacy of Indiana author, naturalist, and nature photographer, Gene Stratton-Porter.

You decide how your annual dues will be spent. You choose one of the following:

- Choose the Limberlost Historic Site Friends who support projects and help pay expenses associated with the improvement or the betterment of Limberlost State Historic Site
- Choose Limberlost Swamp Remembered, a committee of the Friends of the Limberlost, which is primarily focused on Limberlost Swamp restoration projects
- Or you can support both missions of the Friends of the Limberlost

As a member you receive our quarterly newsletter. You get one free tour of the Limberlost Cabin, a 10% discount on Limberlost Gift Shop purchases, and you get a 15% discount if you purchase a membership in the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. As a member of the Friends of the Limberlost you help us preserve the legacy of Gene Stratton-Porter and help us restore the environment by bringing back the Limberlost Swamp.

If you have any questions about your membership, please call or text Randy Lehman, membership chairperson, at 260-849-0308 or email randyplehman@comcast.net

Please make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST. Mail both your check and completed membership form to: PO BOX 571, GENEVA IN 46740

STEP ONE

Select which mission of the Friends Group you want to support by checking a box to the right

Limberlost Historic Site Friends—dues and any additional donations you make supports Limberlost State Historic Site and associated events, projects, and programs

Limberlost Swamp Remembered Friends—dues and any additional donation you make supports Limberlost wetland restoration projects managed by the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves

Combination Limberlost Historic Site and Swamp Remembered Friends—dues and any additional donation are equally shared by both groups

Older Adults—\$10

Business—\$50 (Please enter the name of a contact-person below)

Other Individuals—\$20

Family—\$35

Lifetime—\$1,000

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AMOUNT ENCLOSED (additional donation appreciated!): \$ _____

ANY COMMENTS?