



Friends of the Limberlost

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2025, A GREAT SPRING FOR SEEING SANDHILL CRANES IN AND AROUND THE LIMBERLOST: Photo by Troy Straub



SANDHILLS

So graceful looking in the air, and so recognizable even when far away by their flight calls to one another. Who doesn't like watching a flock of sandhills in the air or on the ground, poking around with their long necks and long bills looking for something to eat? We know that one pair nested last year in the Limberlost. We don't have pictures of the nesting site, but did get pictures of a family of three sandhills, which we shared in the previous newsletter.



A farm field near the Limberlost Bird Sanctuary, 2-24-2025. Sandhills looking for left over corn kernels and whatever else they can find to feed on.

Photo by Randy Lehman



Photo by Troy Straub, Loblolly Marsh, 2-20-2025

One continuing concern for the sandhill population in Indiana and surrounding states is Bird Flu. More than 1,500 sandhill cranes died in Indiana from the highly contagious H5N1 strain of bird flu in 2024. This was the first time the flu hit the cranes this hard. An estimated 1500 cranes have already died in Indiana in 2025 from bird flu. It's the same virus that is killing chickens in Indiana and other states.



Rachel Moorman-Minton: New Program Developer for Limberlost SHS

I grew up in Cincinnati. After graduating high school, I attended New York University, starting at their Washington, D.C. location for my freshman year. While in D.C., I was able to intern with the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum. It was there, discovering ways to make postage stamps relevant to Kindergartners, that I found my passion for non-formal, experience-based teaching. My major, Global Liberal Studies, offered interdisciplinary coursework culminating in a thesis about the topic of my choice. The international focus of the major also provided the opportunity to study abroad in Buenos Aires, which in turn supported my second major in Spanish.

While studying at NYU, I became a birder by happenstance after spotting a Great Egret roosting after dark in a tree in a Manhattan park, the white bird seemingly glowing in the city light. From there, I was hooked. I spent my time abroad in Buenos Aires learning everything I could about the birds and ecology of the region. I ultimately chose to

write my thesis in large part about the history of the land and creation of one of the parks I frequented while living there, comparing it to the history of Fresh Kills Park (formerly Fresh Kills Landfill) in Staten Island. I was honored to win an award from the Spanish department for my thesis and graduated as valedictorian.

I then returned to Cincinnati, where I began working as an outdoor educator for the county park system. I love being able to create positive outdoor experiences for children and adults alike. I am eager to join the team at Limberlost and contribute to the memory and legacy of Gene Stratton-Porter and the causes she championed!

Comments from Shaun Payne, Limberlost Site Manager: *Rachel begins her role as the north regional programmer on March 31st. She will be based out of Limberlost SHS in Geneva, but will also spend time at Gene Stratton-Porter SHS in Rome City. She will be responsible for the programming at both sites.*

LIMBERLOST SPRING PROGRAMS

Creatures of the Night, Saturday, April 19, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Join the staff of Limberlost State Historic Site for a night of fun at the Loblolly Marsh Nature Preserve.

- Discover the tiny critters that inhabit the Loblolly Marsh Nature Preserve by looking at water samples dip-netted from the pothole wetland near Veronica's Trail. *Preregistration is required. Program is subject to cancellation in the event of adverse weather conditions.*
- All Ages welcome, some terrain may not be suitable for strollers or wheelchairs.
- Cost: \$5 adults; \$4 children (25% discount for members of the Indiana State Museum)

Spring Loblolly Wildflower Safari, Saturday, May 10, 10:00 a.m to Noon

- Join a Limberlost naturalist for a stroll along the Loblolly Marsh trails focusing on the beautiful and varied spring wildflowers - what they are and how man and animal use them.
- We meet at the Loblolly parking lot on Jay County Rd. 250W (GPS: 8323N 250W, Bryant, IN 47326)
- Event will be held rain or shine. Please dress accordingly and wear proper footwear, as there are areas where there could be mud. *Program is subject to cancellation in the event of adverse weather conditions.*
- All Ages welcome: cost \$3/child, \$5/ adult (25% discount for members of the Indiana State Museum)

The Architecture of Limberlost, Saturday, June 7, 2025, noon to 1:30 p.m.

Learn about the architecture of the Limberlost cabin. We will delve into the Queen Ann style and what makes Gene's cabin unique. Discuss where Gene drew design inspiration and how the Porters paid for such an extravagant home. We'll walk the exterior & interior of the cabin, discussing design features, elements, & materials. This event is for anyone age 16 or older. Cost: \$6/adults, \$5/seniors (25% discount ISM Members)

When the Site is Open: Timed indoor tours of the Limberlost Cabin are available Wed. thru Sun. at 11 a.m., 1 p.m., and 3 pm. Walk up tour tickets are subject to availability. Purchasing online or by calling the site is recommended to ensure tour registration, especially when visiting on a free day or when schools are in session.

Everyday: Self-guided tours of the Limberlost Conservation Area Nature Preserves are available everyday all day. Free Trail Maps are available in a kiosk outside of the Limberlost Visitor Center.

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW WEBSITE ADDRESS: friendsofthelimiterlost.org

The new website was introduced at our annual meeting that took place in September last year, so this is the first newsletter that's been issued with the new website address on the heading. The task of developing a new website started in 2019. Yes, that was a long time ago, but please remember the Limberlost Board of Directors is an all volunteer group of people, and many of us are still working, most of us are retired, and most of us are very active in our communities.

We had a list of items that we wanted to include in the new website. Since none of our board members had much experience with creating a website, we finally agreed that we needed help. In 2022, we hired Sophie Gordon who designed the Robert Cooper Audubon Society website, <https://cooperaudubon.org>. We still get technical assistance from Sophie, when needed, but thankfully, one of our board members, Melissa Fey, has taken on the responsibility to be our own "in-house" website coordinator. So, if you happen to see anything in the current website that needs to be corrected, she would appreciate hearing from you. Her email address: *FOLwebsiteinfo@yahoo.com*

HERON USES BOAT DOCK AS A DIVING PLATFORM by Bill Hubbard

Through the years, my wife and I have spent time watching birds at our house on Lake of the Woods in Geneva, Indiana. Just two miles away there is a Great Blue Heron rookery of over 80 nests. Many of those herons spend a lot of time fishing on our lake. They are fascinating to watch as they stealthily hunt for crayfish, frogs, and fish.

Most of the time the herons wade in shallow water and make their catch. Sometimes they choose to use our dock as a diving platform and launch themselves into the water in pursuit of a fish.

On this particular day, I was filming a heron diving from the dock in the usual manner. However, this time the heron held on to the dock with its claws and plunged its head into the water then righted itself by using its wings. This is the only time I have ever seen a heron do this behavior. Fortunately, I was ready with the camera and was able to capture this very unusual behavior.



Editor's note: I was struck by the rarity of Bill's photo capturing this heron's unusual fish hunting technique. The heron looks so awkward, almost like he could have injured himself, but Bill reported that the heron made it back on the deck successfully, and appeared to be okay, although it looks like he didn't catch a fish or anything else! Thank you to Bill for submitting this special photo of Great Blue Heron acrobatics on your dock in Geneva. RL

Gene Stratton-Porter: A Song of Limberlost

Where woodland whispers weave their spell,
And marshland secrets softly swell,
She walked with grace, with pen in hand,
A voice for nature, bold and grand.

Through fragrant pines and tangled streams,
She shaped the world of childhood dreams,
Her words like wings took flight and soared,
Through tales of love, both lost and stored.

The *Limberlost*, her heart's refrain,
Where orchids bloomed in golden rain,
Where Luna moths in twilight's glow,
Danced softly o'er the pools below.

She saw the song in every tree,
And penned it down for all to see,
That nature's gifts, both wild and free,
Are treasures held in memory.

But more than ferns and silvered dew,
She shaped the lives of women too,
With heroines both fierce and wise,
Who met the world with seeking eyes.

Now time moves on, the marshland fades,
Yet still her voice in green cascades,
A whisper through the rustling trees,
A poet's soul upon the breeze.

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A whisper through the rustling trees,
A poet's soul upon the breeze.

The above poem about Gene Stratton-Porter is a computer generated poem, submitted by Jim Samuelson, a member of the Society of Indiana Pioneers (SIP). Jim and his wife, Lori, live in Auburn, IN. This ChatGPT (artificial intelligence) generated poem was recently sent to Terri Gorney Lehman, President of SIP, and Secretary for Friends of the Limberlost, and Terri forwarded the poem to me.

Jim stated in a note included with the poem that it shows how "*ChatGPT can be utilized to create some amazing pieces*". He also stated that "*he tries to always check anything provided for accuracy and originality. As far as I know, this "poem" is considered original. As a side note, AI also created the sketches in the poem. I asked specifically for a pen and ink sketch which 1) Reflected the essence of the poem and 2) Created a luna moth in detail. I then took the results and created a blurred circular border which, I believe, captures the essence of her work but also the mystical nature of her incredible creativity.*"

As the editor of this newsletter, I was happy that Jim agreed to let me publish this ChatGPT poem in this newsletter. I thought the poem was especially good at capturing the essence of Gene Stratton-Porter and the impact that the Limberlost had on her as a writer and as a naturalist. It's a joyful poem with a good message, but one thing kept getting in the way of my overall enjoyment of this poem. I always think of poetry as a highly personal response between a human being and the life and times they are experiencing. So, I asked a real poet (in this case a former poet laureate of Indiana, Shari Wagner) for her response to this poem, and here's some of what she said.... "*As you have guessed, I'm not a fan of AI generated poetry--or any AI generated art! I think it steals from the hard work that generations of artists have put into their creations. Of course, there's the sense that as a poet I "steal" from those generations, too, but what I gain from reading other poets is over my lifetime, and I "live" with the words of those previous poets. They take root in my heart and mind. Eventually they create a tree that bears fruit--but that fruit is dependent on my interaction with the living, dying, world that I belong to, the world of sunlight and rain, where inspiration comes and goes as wind in the leaves. Why would humanity want to give up something so precious as the Muse to the machinations of a machine?*" For a deeper dive into this subject, Shari recommended this online resource <https://lithub.com/on-the-report-of-poetrys-death-or-what-does-that-ai-poetry-study-really-tell-us/>



A Digital Journey Back in Time to the “Good Old Days” Reveals Them to be Not so Good After All

By Curt Burnette
Naturalist/Tour Guide
Limberlost State Historic Site



We've all heard the expression “the good old days” before. Sometimes it's used as a general blanket term for past times—times we think must have been simpler and therefore happier. But that expression is at best simplistic and at worst very misleading, as I found out in my digital journey into the past.

The purpose of this time-travel was to try to get an intimate look at what community life would have been like for Gene Stratton-Porter in the years she lived in Adams County (1886-1913) and Geneva (1888-1913). The idea for this came about when I discovered there was a site on the internet called Hoosier State Chronicles, Indiana's Digital Historic Newspaper Program, <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/>. This site has 186,601 issues of historic newspapers from across Indiana. You choose the county you want, and every newspaper that has been scanned into the collection is listed by newspaper and year. Not every newspaper ever published in Indiana is listed. Geneva's newspapers were not, but Decatur's were. So, I selected the *Decatur Democrat* from 1880 to 1913 and began going through each weekly issue, page by page.

Wow! I was stunned by what I read. I had some idea of what life was like in those days but reading about it week by week was an eye-opener for me. So many deaths, injuries, sicknesses, and other misery! It was disheartening and sad to read. Daily life may not always be pleasant, and we all have problems, but after reading what I have about life in the late 1800s and early 1900s, I am glad to be living today.

Death was pervasive. Every week the paper listed the deaths, often by disease, of two or three or four infants and toddlers and just as many adults. Diphtheria and smallpox epidemics sometimes broke out. Typhoid fever was very common for all ages. Not only did the little ones succumb to it frequently, but many adults did also. Consumption (tuberculosis) was another big killer of adults. Gene Stratton-Porter's husband, Charles, before she met him, nearly died of it. The *Decatur Democrat*, in its Personals section in 1883, said “Charles Porter, of Geneva, is seriously ill with consumption.” Fortunately for himself and his future wife, he recovered, which was unusual at that time.



Accidents of all types were common. Many led to the deaths of the victims. Horse and buggy or wagon runaways that lead to injury or death were as common as car accidents are now. Industrial accidents often maimed or killed. The safety measures we have in place nowadays have helped reduce these, but there were few, if any, back then to protect workers. It was not unusual for someone's fingers, hand, arm, or leg to be crushed or torn off by machinery. Sometimes, the entire person would be pulled into machinery and “mangled beyond recognition.” I used to think that Gene's reason for having her famous character “Freckles” be missing his right hand was because

she would have seen maimed Civil War veterans as she grew up. But after seeing how many of Adams County's working men lose hands and other body parts to industrial and farming accidents, I lean now towards that as being the inspiration for Freckles lack of hand.

The newspaper's descriptions of the injuries or deceased people were far more graphic than what would be mentioned today. For example, a tinner (worked with tin) in downtown Geneva was leaning over his tinner's stove when it exploded. The explosion was so powerful it blew out a wall of his shop

and eviscerated him. The newspaper's report was horribly gruesome, describing how his internal organs were scattered about the wreckage and hanging from the walls.

Oil field accidents were also common and given graphic descriptions. Falling materials from oil derricks sometimes struck workers, killing or injuring them. Less common, but far more dramatic, were nitroglycerine accidents. This highly explosive fluid was put down oil wells to break rock open and allow oil to rise. But sometimes it went off when it was not supposed to, with disastrous results. One accidental explosion that occurred a few miles west of Bryant was so powerful it was felt in Decatur.

Unfortunately, two men died because of it. Again, the description of what happened to the men was horrifying. They only found the left half of one of the victims and the other victim had been blown to bits, scattering his remains over a huge area.

Railroads were everywhere back in the days before gasoline-powered vehicles. Many deaths and injuries were associated with these. Train wrecks were common and caused a lot of destruction, death, and injury. But there were other ways to die on a railroad. Roads were mos



Typical 1890's Adams Co. oil derrick



all road. Roads were mostly dirt in those days, and it was often easier to walk down the railroad tracks, especially after rain turned the roads into mud. Because of this, many people died when struck by a train while walking down the tracks, sometimes while drunk, but not always.

There were no safety devices at railroad crossings as there are today, so occasionally, a buggy crossing the tracks was struck by a train. This almost always caused the deaths of or serious injury to the occupants. But once, when a young family in a buggy were struck by a train in Decatur on a cold wintery day, a miracle happened.

A young man, his wife, and their two-month-old son were in the buggy when it was struck. The shattered remains of the buggy were thrown over one hundred feet down the track. The man and woman were thrown with the buggy but, somehow, both survived although seriously injured. But the miracle occurred after the braking train came to a stop. When the buggy was hit, its top flew onto the cowcatcher of the train. Witnesses to the wreck at first mistook the crushed buggy top as a person lying across the cowcatcher and rushed to help them. When they realized it was just the buggy top and pulled it from the cowcatcher, they found within, wrapped up securely in blankets and a quilt and still sleeping peacefully, was the tiny baby boy! Good news at last!



And even though Adams County residents had to deal with death and disaster more during Gene Stratton-Porter's time than we do now, they did their best to create and enjoy good times. Whist and pedro card parties were very popular and surprise birthday parties seemed to be all the rage. Mardi Gras style parties and masquerade parties were trendy for a while. Young people often gathered for fun parties and in the winter sleighing get-togethers were common. Programs of all sorts in the local opera houses were almost always well attended. If a circus was in the area, they never lacked good attendance. And when a major outdoor picnic and barbecue was held in Hostetter's Grove just northwest of Geneva in 1898, 5000 people attended to listen to bands play, watch baseball games, eat, dance, ride a merry-go-round, and, best of all, watch a daring balloon ascension.

So, at least, some of the “good old days” were actually good!

It's time to Announce Limberlost Plein Air Paint Out 2.0 Saturday, August 16, 2025

It's early to be announcing an event that is 4 months away, but the artists who came to our 1st Plein Air event last year, encouraged us to get the word out early, so the artists have plenty of time to plan to attend.

The Friends of the Limberlost, along with former Board Member, Connie Ronald, are sponsoring this year's Plein Air Paint Out, which will be held on Saturday, August 16th. Connie's sponsorship is to honor her late husband, Jack Ronald.

Last year seven artists painted at the Historic Site and the Covered Bridge area of Geneva. This year we plan to expand the paint area to include the Limberlost and Loblolly Marsh conservation areas.

Just like last year, artists will need to first register at the Limberlost State Historic Site in Geneva, Indiana. From there they can determine where they would like to paint, if they haven't already made that decision, and then they'll return to the Historic Site in the afternoon, so their creative work can be displayed and judged.

New this year, "prizes" will be awarded for best painting. Paintings will, once again, be displayed at the Historic Site for public viewing, and some will be available for sale. At last year's event, all the paintings done by the artists sold! As August 16 gets closer, you can look at the Friends of the Limberlost Facebook Page, and our new website for updates regarding Plein Air Paint Out 2.0:

www.friendsofthelimberlost.org

The registration form for this event is not available at this time—the details of this event are still a work in progress. One of the most appreciated parts of last year's event for the artists was delivery of lunch to all participating artist. That particular perk will be included again in this year's event.

The 10th annual SANJO CBC was held on January 1, 2025

For all you non-birders, "SANJO" is an abbreviation for all the areas visited by 34 birders on Jan.1.(South Adams & Northern Jay counties & Quabache State Park). CBC = Christmas Bird Count. This CBC count was first created by the Cardinal Audubon Club in 1947, based primarily in southern Adams County. They disbanded in 2015—old birders die or age out, and no younger birders were joining the club .



This year, 3 Audubon chapters participated in the SANJO count: Robert Cooper Audubon, Mississinewa Audubon, and Three Rivers Birding. Birders were assigned specific areas in the SANJO CBC circle that needed to be visited on Jan.1. Birders made notes of all the birds seen and heard within their assigned area, and wrote down their best estimate of the numbers of each type of bird they saw. After a morning of birding everyone returned to Limberlost Historic Site to turn in their "lists" and to have a "pot-luck" lunch provided by the participants. Our youngest counter this year was Piper Gerlach, age 10, who went out with her dad, Matt, and friends. The highlight of the day were large flocks of Lapland longspurs & horned larks found in cornfields along county roads around Geneva. We counted 840 individual longspurs & 337 horned larks. A total of 46 species were counted, which included 19 Bald Eagles and 12 Sandhill Cranes.



"Limberlost Cabin"
by Michelle Walker



Lapland longspurs (left & center) and a horned lark to the right. Photos provided by Randy Lehman

**FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST
NEW MEMBERSHIP & MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM**

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 on your purchase of a membership with the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. As a member 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: Phone: 260-849-0308 or email randyplehman@comcast.net

Make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST

Mail check & 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, & programs

Limberlost Swamp Remembered Friends—dues and any additional donation you make supports Limberlost wetland restorations 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

STEP TWO

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