



Friends of the Limberlost

P.O. Box 571, Geneva, IN 46740

www.friendsofthelimberlost.org

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SPRING & SUMMER EVENTS AT LIMBERLOST STATE HISTORIC SITE

***Paint & Sip—Spring Wildflowers—April 17, 5:30-8:30 pm. Cost:\$30/person**

Learn watercolor techniques from an area artist as you create your own wildflower watercolor greeting cards. Event is for adults 21+ years old. *Pre-registration required—see online link below.*

***Migration at the Marsh: May 9, 8:30-10:00 am. Cost: \$2/person**

We'll go where the birds lead us as we explore Loblolly Marsh during this naturalist-led hike. A small number of binoculars will be available to borrow.

***Marvelous Moths with Jeanette Jaskula: June 27, 8pm-midnight. Cost \$2/person** Join us at the Loblolly Marsh for a fascinating night. Jeanette Jaskula is an Indiana-based moth expert and President of Friends of the Sands, the non-profit friends group for the Kankakee Sands region in Northwest Indiana. Jeanette will guide participants through the fascinating and often overlooked lives of these nocturnal pollinators. Using special lights and natural lures, we'll attract and observe a variety of moth species.

Did you know that your membership dues and donations given to the Friends of the Limberlost are a very important source of revenue for a number of reasons:

- 1) The money has funded a long list of projects and programs over the years. For nearly 30 years the Friends have been volunteering and providing financial support to both Limberlost State Historic Site and DNR-Nature Preserves.
- 2) The Friends are a not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation, which makes donations to the Friends tax exempt, the Friends have helped pay for many site improvements such as the visitor center in Geneva, and have helped purchase acreage to expand the size of the Limberlost Nature Preserves.
- 3) That kind of long term support—the volunteer labor and the money given for a wide range of projects is something to celebrate and be thankful for. Our volunteers, with your support, have been getting things done for years here at the Limberlost, and with your continuing support, we will keep doing what needs to be done and hopefully inspire others to follow in our footsteps. The impact our volunteer make combined with your financial support brings a lot of value to this community and is greatly appreciated.



Hooded Mergansers at the Limberlost Swamp Preserve—Jay County, March 2026

4) The newsletter is a great way to stay informed and up-to-date with what the Friends are doing to assist both the State

Historic Site and Limberlost Nature Preserves.



Curt Burnette doing one of his wildlife shows at the Loblolly Pavilion. The Friends helped pay for the Pavilion.

MANAGING WATER IN THE LIMBERLOST SWAMP WETLAND PRESERVE

By Ryan Smith, East Central Region
Ecologist for DNR Fish, Wildlife, &
Nature Preserves

When the Limberlost Swamp was drained in Gene Stratton Porter's time, deep drainage ditches were dug to facilitate the removal of the water from the area. This allowed the fertile wetland soil to be farmed for nearly 100 years.



However, despite these massive drainage efforts, low-lying areas still flooded, drowning crops, and causing significant financial losses to farmers who owned these flood-prone areas. In the early 2000s, thanks to local advocates and federal programs such as the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), efforts began to restore flood-prone agricultural areas back to wetlands. This involved purchasing property from those farmers who were fed up with repeated crop losses due to flooding. Flood-prone land that qualified was put into NRCS's Wetland Reserve Program, which recognized the value of and important role wetlands play in the environment.

The WRP helped bring back those areas where the flood waters could again gather and slowly percolate into the ground re-charging groundwater systems and creating much needed water-saturated habitat for endangered plants and animals. It was important, however, to keep the drainage ditches functional so that the amount of flooded acreage could be managed and controlled to protect neighboring farmland and roads from unwanted flooding. So, wetland restoration included constructing and maintaining compacted earthen levees along the drainage ditches to prevent water from escaping via these waterways.



The Loblolly Creek is in the background in the middle of this picture.
The breach in the levy you can see in the foreground.

Case in point, over the decades, one of the constructed levees that has been subjected to repeated flooding events and to fast-moving water is in the Loblolly Creek. The Loblolly was one of the waterways that was deepened and straightened in the drainage efforts of the early 1900s. Several years ago, a portion of the levee on the north side of the Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve was breached (picture to the left), allowing water to enter and exit the wetland, which can cause the water management issues mentioned above.



This was the situation when I took the job of Regional Ecologist 2022. Working with NRCS and DNR Engineering, repair plans were created in the fall of 2023 for this site and a few others needing repaired throughout the Limberlost Swamp Conservation Area. Site visits with contractors were held in early 2024, and Stantec was awarded the contract.

Due to various delays with paperwork and weather, work was unable to begin until the fall of 2025. Stantec was able to rebuild the levee with compacted soil with the aid of a small excavator (see picture above).

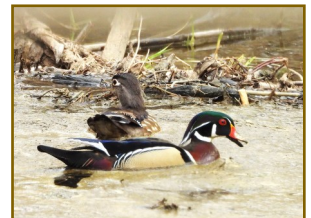


The soil needed for the project was borrowed from the preserve side of the property creating a small shallow wetland (see picture above).

After construction, a native seed mix was planted on the constructed levee, and an erosion control blanket was installed over top (*pictured to the left*). A native seed mix was also installed in the soil borrow pit.

Today, with this section of the levee finally repaired, the Limberlost Swamp Wetland will be better equipped to retain water now. I'm looking forward to seeing this work payoff in the form of a healthier wetland habitat.

Male and female wood ducks at the Loblolly Marsh, April 2026



On Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025, I attended a program at the Geneva, IN, public library on whooping cranes presented by the International Crane Foundation and sponsored by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission. We learned that whooping cranes went from the brink of extinction in 1941 to a conservation success story today. It took much work to increase the numbers from 21 birds in 1941 to over 600 today. So, I knew it would be magnificent and truly awe inspiring to see these 5 ft. tall white birds in person.

I learned that there is a Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas, because this part of Texas is the winter range of the Whooping Crane. When winter ends, the cranes fly 2,500 miles north to Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta, Canada to breed. During the winter, it is possible to see the cranes in Aransas. So, I knew this would be a good place to observe these amazing birds in person. While in Texas, I decided to camp rather than stay at a motel, and I chose Goose Island State Park campground that was about an hour north of Port Aransas. I knew that camping would mean a lot of extra

driving for me, but this turned out to be one of the best decisions that I made. The Whooping Crane Festival took place Feb. 19-22. Next year (2027) the festival takes place Feb. 24-27.

The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge covers 115,000 acres of marshes along the Gulf Coast of Texas. This place is way out in the middle of nowhere, which is obviously why the birds chose it. "Heron Trail" was along the mudflats bordering the bay. I viewed



WHOOPING CRANE FAMILIES GATHERING TOGETHER
AT ARANSAS NWR



ADULT WHOOPING CRANE

Large Egrets, Great Blue Herons, White Ibis, Snowy Egrets, Reddish Egrets and Sandhill Cranes along with numerous smaller shorebirds. There is a large viewing platform at the end of the drive. I climbed to the top and spotted a group of Whooping Cranes off in the distance. I watched as they fished in the bay. I also spotted another small group of cranes fishing in the marsh. Success, I had spotted what I was looking for—Whooping Cranes!

Early Thursday morning I arrived for the boat tour. There were close to 30 people, many with really large cameras ready to make the trip. We started north of Port Aransas and traveled for two hours on Aransas Bay. Along the way we saw Terns, Cormorants, Gulls and even a large flock of Roseate Spoonbills. We finally

arrived at the southern tip of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and the captain put the boat right up to shore where the Whooping Cranes were feeding in the marsh.

After this amazing experience, and before returning to my campsite, I decided to make a drive along Lamar Beach Road. To my surprise there were three Whooping Cranes close to the beach. There was also a large group of Great Egrets that flew in probably to nest for the night near a small lake. This whole area was just teeming with birds! White and Brown Pelicans were as prevalent as sparrows at home.



White Pelicans fly by the Aransas boardwalk



↑ Crested Caracara (*Caracara plancus*)

The Birds in Flight workshop that I attended the next day was at the Leona Turnbull Birding Center at Port Aransas. We walked on the ¼ mile boardwalk over the wetlands to view and photograph the birds. We were treated to large groups of White Pelicans, Northern Shovelers, Blue Wing Teal, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets and White Ibis. Our instructor told us how to set our cameras for optimum shots. We all took shot after shot as the birds took flight and landed. We were also treated to one beautiful Flamingo. We were told this solitary bird has been wintering here for a couple of years.

Saturday morning it was time to leave and head back home to Indiana. I decided to make one more trip to the Lamar Beach Road to see the birds. I went to the end and turned around to make one last pass and was surprised to see three large birds in a tree. They were Crested Caracara. These large raptors stand over 2 feet tall and have a wing span of over 4 feet. They are prevalent in north, south, and central America along with Mexico. In North America, they can only be found along the Gulf coast. I felt very lucky to see these birds.



Immature whooping crane known as a "Colt"

I drove along the beach and saw several cars parked along the road. I parked and grabbed my camera; everyone was looking at a large group of Whooping Cranes in a small pond. I tried to count the number of birds. One of the men said he counted 31 birds, which included several colts (1st year cranes). The birds gather here in the morning and then fly over the bay to the Aransas NWR to fish for the day. I felt very fortunate to see so many whooping cranes at such close range. I thoroughly enjoyed my trip to the Whooping Crane Festival. The Texas Gulf Coast is a great place

to view all kinds of winter birds. For more information about the Aransas National Wildlife Park click here: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/aransas>

Charles Porter's Shamrock Hotel

The Social Heart of Geneva

By Curt Burnette, Board Member
Friends of the Limberlost

Gene Stratton-Porter's husband, Charles Porter, was one of the pre-eminent citizens and businessmen of Geneva for over forty years. Although a Decatur native, Charles began a drug store business in the smaller town of Geneva in his early twenties, years before he wed Gene. From that small start, Charles eventually became one of the wealthiest individuals in Adams County due to his many business ventures, including oil when the boom hit Geneva.

Charles was well known as a druggist and banker by the early 1890s. Although there were other hotels in town at that time, in 1892 he had a brick building, a combination of hotel and bank, built next to his Old Reliable Drug Store in downtown Geneva. The hotel name, "SHAMROCK," was affixed in the front of the building near the top.



The Shamrock Hotel (or Hotel Shamrock) was an immediate success. Within a year of its opening the Geneva Herald reported, "It is exceedingly well patronized by the traveling fraternity and the popularity with all classes of hotel customers bespeaks well for the management." By 1894 the Herald reported that "The Hotel Shamrock is crowded with oil men and commercial travelers. Landlord Ober has been compelled to turn guests away on account of lack of room." Although Charles owned the Shamrock, he hired landlords (managers) to oversee the daily operation. Over the years, as in many businesses, the landlords came and went.

The other hotels that were open during that time catered to the traveling public and businessmen as well. But the Shamrock surpassed them in an additional function it offered the citizens of Geneva and the surrounding area—it was a social gathering place. A wide variety of clubs, organizations, businesses, groups, and individuals took advantage of the Shamrock as a place to hold events, meetings, parties, celebrations, and get together with friends and relatives.

One of the earliest clubs to meet at the Shamrock was the Wednesday Club, a women's literary club that included Charles' wife Gene. The club moved from place to place (often in members' homes) to hold their meetings but on May 23, 1894, Mrs. Black hosted at the hotel. Other social activities at the Shamrock were numerous. Some examples are:

[*Geneva Herald, November 2, 1894*](#)

"The Social Club was pleasantly entertained at the residence of JJ O'Day Wednesday evening, after which followed a banquet and ball at the Hotel Shamrock."

[*The Democratic Press \[Decatur\], November 29, 1894*](#)

"Miss Sue Hartman of Geneva, gave quite a swell reception at the Shamrock last Thursday evening. A musicale, a daintily prepared luncheon followed with dancing and social enjoyment were all given a reception by the many who paid their respects to the occasion."

Geneva Herald, November 30, 1894

SOCIAL EVENTS

“A most enjoyable party was given at the Shamrock last Thursday. During the first part of the evening the guests were entertained by an informal musicale for which they were largely indebted to Mrs. Elma Culbertson of Ft. Wayne. Mrs. Culbertson is a brilliant pianist and possesses a charming voice. After refreshments the guests tripped the light fantastic toe till the wee small hours, and all declared they had a royal good time.”

Geneva Herald, December 14, 1894

“The Ball given by the Bachelors of the Shamrock was a glorious success and judging from the bright countenances worn by all present, it was one of the few occasions when every one had a good time. The first greeting upon entering the door were the strains of harmonious music rendered by the Ft. Wayne Orchestra. At the head of the stairs the guests were courteously received by some of the, we feign to call, bachelors; and at nine o'clock all marched from the parlor down the stairs and entered the gay ball room where all participated in the Grand March. The fore part of the program was nicely carried out, and at 11:30 the music ceased and in a short time the tables were surrounded by a bright merry crowd ready to partake of the bountiful repast. The tables were artistically decorated with beautiful fragrant flowers, the silver ware sparkled in the gas-light, peals of merry laughter could be heard and nothing could be added to make the scene more complete. After refreshments the guests whirled to the soft, sweet music until 3:30 o'clock when the last waltz: “Home Sweet Home” ended, and all prepared to depart declaring they had had a capital time.”

Geneva Herald, February 15, 1895

“The social event of the week is the ball at Shamrock hotel Thursday night. About 100 guests have been invited.”

Geneva Herald, March 1, 1895

“Mrs. WP Black gave a ball at the hotel Shamrock, Tuesday evening. Music was furnished by the Cooper orchestra of Portland.”

In June of 1895, frivolity gave way to disaster. A huge fire destroyed much of downtown Geneva including Charles' Old Reliable Drug Store, which was a wooden frame building like the others that burned. But the Shamrock was brick and vulnerable only on the roof to the spreading flames. Through the heroic efforts of several people, including Gene Stratton-Porter herself, the Shamrock was saved.

After that disastrous fire and a second in November, rebuilding of downtown Geneva commenced and life began to return to normal in the town. The Shamrock was again the site of numerous social affairs over the years. Some of these were:

Geneva Herald, January 3, 1896

“The masked ball given by the Night Hawks at the Shamrock, New Year's eve, was a success throughout.”

Geneva Herald, March 27, 1896

“The elite of Geneva were entertained by a ball at the Shamrock, Saturday evening. The Auditorium Orchestra of Portland, furnished the music.”

Decatur Democrat, January 6, 1898

Berne column

“A party of nineteen young people spent New Years eve at the Shamrock at Geneva, and an all-around good time is reported.”

The Geneva Herald, May 24, 1901

“The Fourth Annual Banquet given by the Alumni in honor of the graduates of the Geneva High School was held at the hotel Shamrock on the evening of May 16, 1901.”

For ten years the Shamrock social heart beat with vigor. But during the early 1900s, like human hearts sometimes do, this heart began to experience some difficulties. Fewer social events were being reported there by the papers. Other places with large halls like the Masons and the International Order of Odd Fellows were hosting social gatherings. And to top it all off, the Shamrock closed for the longest time ever after another landlord moved on. Charles took a lot of criticism at this time, although without being mentioned directly by name.

The Geneva Herald, October 5, 1905

“The Shamrock hotel was vacated last Saturday and for the first time in its history is without a tenant. Mrs. Carpenter who has charge of it moved into the Wegmiller property corner of Railroad and Shackley streets, where she has arranged to cater to the traveling trade in the way of giving rooms and meals. The traveling men are given the use of the sample rooms in the hotel when necessary. Mr. Porter is contemplating installing a steam heating plant for the hotel before it is occupied again. At present Geneva is without a hotel and this certainly a deplorable condition of affairs and we hope it will not be long.”

Decatur Democrat, March 1, 1906
GENEVA NEWS

“There is nothing that is doing quite so much harm to Geneva as that unoccupied hotel. It gives the town a great big black eye that will be long in clearing up. It certainly seems too bad that a town like this, forward as it is in all other respects, must go with a hotel, simply because too high rent is demanded for the building. A person cannot expect city rents here, and especially not for the hotel building now because it has been dark so long that it will take time to build up patronage again and get it back on a paying basis. Let’s have a hotel.”

Decatur Democrat, March 8, 1906
GENEVA NEWS

“There was a town called Geneva, that was jarred by a sort of torpeda;
And now its supposed, th’ jar closed hotel doors,
An’ the people cried, “Shamrock, we need y’u!”

The Shamrock was closed for ten months and did not reopen until the following August. From this time on, the newspapers reported few social events occurring there. It closed again for a while in 1908 and from that time on it seems as if its sole purpose was to host travelers. The social heart of the Shamrock had stopped beating. But the hotel continued in Charles Porter’s brick building until he sold it to the Bank of Geneva (which was already occupying part of the building) in 1913.

The bank began remodeling the entire building. It remained in the space it occupied but the hotel portion was turned into a business room on the first floor and the upstairs portion was rented to the Knights of Pythias as their lodge. The Shamrock Hotel, once the pride of Geneva, was gone, but to this day the building persists in historic downtown Geneva with a financial services company occupying where the bank used to be, and the post office where the hotel was. And the “SHAMROCK” on the front of the building remains as a silent testament to its former glory.



FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST NEW MEMBERSHIP & MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Friends of the Limberlost, a 501(c)3 non-for-profit corporation, supports both Limberlost State Historic Site and Indiana Division of Nature Preserves. Nature Preserves manages the restored wetlands in the Limberlost Territories. Your membership dues and extra donations are vital and support the many projects honoring the memory and legacy of Gene Stratton-Porter

Please fill out the form below to renew your membership or to become a member for the first time.

If you have any questions regarding your membership with Friends of the Limberlost, call or text 260-849-0308 or email randyplehman@comcast.net

You decide how your annual dues will be spent. You direct your donation to one of the following:

- Limberlost State Historic Site to support projects & public programs at the site and at the restored wetlands
- **Limberlost Swamp Remembered**, a committee of the Friends of the Limberlost, primarily focused on the Limberlost Swamp restoration projects.
- Or donate to both groups.

Please make checks payable to FRIENDS OF THE LIMBERLOST and mail your check and completed membership form to: PO Box 571, Geneva, IN 46740

You can also go to www.friendsofthelimberlost.org and make a donation using PAYPAL. *If you use PAYPAL, please fill out the "make a note" section of PayPal letting us know who made the donation and your mailing address! Or send us an email.*

Step One:

Select your desired Friends membership.

Choose where you want your Donation to go.

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

Step Two:

Choose the cost of the membership you want by checking the appropriate box below.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen/Limited Income—\$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family—\$35.00 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual—\$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family—\$35.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Business—\$50 Please include the name of a contact person for your business |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime—\$1,000 | | |

NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

AMOUNT ENCLOSED (Additional donation appreciated): \$ _____