

HISTORICAL HOOSIERS

Meet a Few of Indiana's Legends

By Symone C. Skrzycki

How much do you know about some of Indiana's famous figures? Check out this listing, which spans a range of categories and eras. Many of the names will instantly register, while others may be less well known.

Learn more about five of these inspiring Hoosiers in short essays excerpted from the Indiana Historical Society's web site (www.indianahistory.org).



Levi Coffin *Indiana Historical Society*



James Oliver *Indiana Historical Society*



Juliet Strauss *Bass Photo Co. Collection, Indiana Historical Society*

Levi and Catharine Coffin

Levi Coffin moved to the Indiana town of Newport (Fountain City today) in 1826 and became an important merchant there. From his simple eight-room house in Wayne County and with the help of his devoted wife, Catharine, he – over the next 20 years – offered a safe haven to thousands of African-Americans fleeing slavery on the “Underground Railroad” along major escape routes leading from Cincinnati, Madison and Jeffersonville.

One of the refugees who found shelter in the Coffins' home was later immortalized as the character Eliza, the heroine of Harriet Beecher Stowe's classic novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Levi and Catharine Coffin are supposedly depicted in the book as Simeon and Rachel Halliday.

James Oliver

In 1868, James Oliver helped found the South Bend Iron Works, makers of the Oliver Chilled Plow, among the most successful agricultural implements of the 19th century.

By the turn of the century, Oliver employed more than 1,000 men and boys at one of the nation's largest agricultural equipment factories. In prosperous years, it could turn out as many as 300,000 plows, with specialized models for every purpose from breaking the thick prairie sod of Nebraska to cultivating the cotton fields of Alabama or the sugar plantations of Cuba.

The corporate name was changed to Oliver Chilled Plow Works in 1901, becoming the Oliver Corporation when the family firm went public just before the stock market crash of 1929.

Juliet Strauss

In her writing, Juliet Strauss discussed the superiority of country life over city life. She was also a leader in the establishment of Turkey Run State Park in Parke County.

In 1893, she began writing a column for the *Rockville Tribune* called “Squibs and Sayings.” Additional columns included “The Country Contributor” (*Indianapolis News*) and “The Ideas of a Plain Country Woman” (*Ladies Home Journal*).

Reflecting on her life after her children had grown up and moved away from home, she was proud that she had “never followed anybody's lead. I lived my own life. If I wished to ride a horse, or play a game of cards, or go wading in the creek with the children, I always did it. ... I avoided rivalries and emulations. In short, I lived.”



Gene Stratton-Porter *Indiana Historical Society*

Gene Stratton-Porter

Gene Stratton-Porter and her husband Charles lived in Geneva, near the Limberlost Swamp. After oil was discovered on farmland Charles owned, Stratton-Porter constructed a 14-room home there, where she began to photograph birds and animals in their natural habitat.

Following the success of her photographs, some of which were published in magazines, she began writing fiction novels. She lived for a time in Sylvan Lake near Rome City before relocating to California in 1920. There, Stratton-Porter founded a motion picture company and based a number of films on her books. She was killed in an automobile accident in Los Angeles in 1924.



Portrait of Madam C.J. Walker *Madam C.J. Walker Collection, Indiana Historical Society*

Madam C.J. Walker

Madam C.J. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove in Delta, Louisiana, in 1867. She began to market herself and her beauty products as Madam C.J. Walker after marrying C.J. Walker in 1906 (they later divorced). The “secret formula” in her goods included sulfur and a more frequent cleansing of the hair and scalp.

In 1910, Madam Walker moved to Indianapolis and set up a laboratory and a beauty school.

The company provided two new ways in which black women could make a living – as beauty culturists and as sales agents. Madam Walker served as a spokeswoman, not only for her products, but also as the most successful black businesswoman of her day. She died in 1919 at the age of 51.

Notable Names

Artists

William Forsyth
Michael Graves
John Hardrick
Felrath Hines
Robert Indiana
Nancy Noel
Janet Scudder
Julia Graydon Sharpe
Portia and Ralph Sperry
Otto Stark
T.C. Steele
Marie Webster

Authors

George Ade
Sarah T. Bolton
Jared Carter
Theodore Dreiser
Shirley Graham DuBois
Max Ehrmann
Mari Evans
Annie Fellows Johnston
Etheridge Knight
Ross Lockridge Jr.
Meredith Nicholson
James Whitcomb Riley
Jean Shepard
Gene Stratton-Porter
Booth Tarkington
James Alexander Thom
Kurt Vonnegut
Dan Wakefield
Lew Wallace
Jessamyn West

Aviators and Astronauts

Joseph P. Allen
Frank Borman
Virgil "Gus" Grissom
Charles "Buster" Hall
Jerry Ross
Donald Williams
David Wolf
Wilbur Wright

Business

James Allison
Frank Clayton Ball
George A. Ball
Carl Fisher
Elwood Haynes
Hulman family
Colonel Eli Lilly
Eli Lilly
Orville Redenbacher
Colonel Harland Sanders
Emil Schram
Studebaker family
Madam C.J. Walker

Cartoonist

Norman Bridwell (Clifford)
Jim Davis (Garfield)
Johnny Gruelle (Raggedy Ann)
Kin Hubbard (Abe Martin)
John T. McCutcheon
Dale Messick (Brenda Starr)
Bill Peet (Disney animator)
Tom Ryan (Tumbleweeds)

Early Indiana Legends

John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed)
George Rogers Clark
Catharine and Levi Coffin
John and William Conner
Little Turtle
Chief Menominee
Robert Owen
Robert Dale Owen
Johann George Rapp
Frances Slocum
Tecumseh
The Prophet
Anthony Wayne

Educators

Eliza Blaker
Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh
Alfred Kinsey
Caleb Mills
Herman Wells

Inventors

James Buchanan Eads
Dr. Richard J. Gatling
James Oliver
Dr. William Scholl

Journalists

Margaret C. Anderson
John Bushemi
Janet Flanner
Brian Lamb
Jane Pauley
Ernie Pyle
William Raspberry
Tavis Smiley
Dr. Nancy Snyderman
George Stewart
Juliet Strauss

Medicine/Science

Percy Julian (Chemist)
Mariah Mendenhall (Midwife)
James Mooney (Ethnology/
Anthropology)
Richard Royce Schrock

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