

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

Beebe Booth



Co-publisher of the first book printed in the state of Indiana, Beebe Booth became a prosperous pioneer Terre Haute merchant who helped launch an enduring family legacy.

A direct descendant of Puritan minister Thomas Hooker, Booth was born March 29, 1793, in Woodbridge, Conn., and served in the War of 1812 before migrating to Indiana to locate in Washington County. At Salem, Ind., he united with Ebenezer Patrick to found a printing business in March 1818, editing and distributing *The Tocsin*, one of the first newspapers in the state, and *The Life of Bonaparte*, recognized as the first

book ever published in Indiana. Abandoning the print shop to erect two successful mills with David Campbell, Beebe wed Hannah Pitts, a native of Virginia. Between 1823 and 1838, the couple produced six children: Mary, Walter, Newton, Elizabeth, Lyman and Lucius.

Impressed by the commercial reputation of the village of Terre Haute, the Booths relocated in 1841, acquiring the suburban estate of Capt. John Wasson, east of Sixth St. between Ohio and Walnut. Beebe opened a dry goods store named "B. Booth & Co." on the north side of Wabash near the Court Square. Jonathan Greenough, a West Point graduate employed as paymaster for the Army Corps of Engineers working on the National Road, became his junior partner. Son Walter was involved in the business, eventually opening a store in Paris, Ill., where he later served two terms as mayor. Daughter Mary wed the Rev. George W. Ames of Rockville on Sept. 21, 1842. Newton enrolled at Asbury College, graduating in 1846. Between 1846 and 1849, he studied law with Terre Haute attorney William D. Griswold and was admitted to the Indiana bar.

Elizabeth became an exceptional student at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Institute, one of Booth's best customers. In 1850 Lyman Booth and Greenough launched a dry goods store in Marshall, Ill. After practicing law briefly in Vigo County, Newton located in Sacramento, Cal., founding a wholesale grocery. Returning to Terre Haute in 1856, Newton formed a law partnership with Harvey David Scott. He also attended Elizabeth's wedding to Indianapolis attorney John S. Tarkington on Nov. 17, 1857, one of Terre Haute's top social events. In late 1860 Newton returned to California, where he was elected governor in 1871, and later U.S. Senator. His first niece was Haute Tarkington. Her brother Newton Booth Tarkington—named for his uncle—was a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and chosen "America's most significant contemporary author" in 1923.

When Beebe turned 80 in 1873, the family's Terre Haute real estate was subdivided and Gov. Booth sold it at public auction. The lot at 607 Ohio St. was retained for the Booths' new retirement home. Built around 1876, it survives, now located two doors east of the Star Building. Beebe and Hannah generally spent summers in Terre Haute and winters with their children. Beebe died on March 8, 1888—three weeks before his 95th birthday—at the home of widow Mary Ames in Greencastle. Hannah died 17 months later. The couple is buried at Edgar County Cemetery in Paris.



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