

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

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

Elizabeth Boynton Harbert



While attending Terre Haute Female College, future suffrage leader Elizabeth Boynton lived only a few blocks from the man she would later marry, but the couple did not meet until after William S. Harbert was released from Libby prison during the Civil War.

Born in Crawfordsville on April 15, 1845, “Lizzie” graduated from John Covert’s finishing school at Sixth and Farrington streets in June 1862 and matriculated to Indiana Asbury College (now DePauw University). It was there that she met William, son of respected Terre Haute realtor and land developer Solomon Harbert. William had interrupted his college education in 1862 to enlist in Company C of the 85th Indiana Infantry, serving on the staffs of Gen. John Coburn and Gen. Benjamin Harrison. At the battle of Thompson’s Station, he was among 1200 Union soldiers captured. After two months in the Confederate prison, Harbert was released, weighing only 97 pounds. After being mustered out of the service, Harbert enrolled at Indiana University School of Law. He quit after a few months, returning to Terre Haute to engage in the wholesale footwear business on Wabash Ave. with William T. Stone. During a visit to Greencastle, he met Boynton—already active in the Women’s Suffrage Association of Indiana—and a romance blossomed.

While Elizabeth pursued a writing career, Harbert sold his interest in the Terre Haute shoe business and enrolled at the University of Michigan Law School. Boynton published her first novel, *The Golden Fleece*, in 1867. Meanwhile, Harbert obtained his law degree and located in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1868 to practice. After their marriage on Oct. 17, 1870, Boynton joined him in Des Moines, having earned a Ph.D. from Ohio Wesleyan University. Her second book, *Out of Her Sphere*, was published in 1871. When Elizabeth had the opportunity to write for the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* newspaper in 1874, the couple relocated to Evanston, Ill. Eventually, William founded the law firm of Harbert and Daley.

By 1876, “Women’s Kingdom,” Elizabeth Boynton Harbert’s section in the *Inter-Ocean*, was nationally known. She was a leader in the National Woman Suffrage Association, a co-signer of the “Declaration of Rights for Women” of July 4, 1876, and president of the Illinois Woman’s Suffrage Association. In 1885 she founded and served as editor of *The New Era*, a monthly periodical advocating suffrage. She also wrote another novel, *Amore*, in 1892. The first person to suggest a national observance of Susan B. Anthony’s birthday, she was founder and first president of the Women’s Club of Evanston and an accomplished poet and lecturer.

In 1906 the Harberts retired and moved to Pasadena, Cal. Both were active in California’s woman suffrage movement. William S. Harbert died in Pasadena on March 24, 1919. Elizabeth died Jan. 19, 1925, at age 79, after exercising her right to vote. The Harberts had three children: Arthur, Corinne and Boynton.

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