

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

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

Martha Evans Martin



As a youth, Terre Haute native Martha Evans Martin marveled at nature's mysteries. As an adult, she wrote about them.

The Friendly Stars, written by Martin in 1907, is an American classic. Its engaging but informative style is credited with luring thousands to hobby of astronomy. Updated by esteemed astrophysicist Donald H. Menzel in 1966, it has been reprinted numerous times in hard cover and trade paperback. It remains a Dover Publications best seller.

Martha relished her Indiana roots. "The Hoosier has a rustic quality that helps him succeed," she once wrote. "By rustic, I . . . mean the spirit that comes from growing up in a place where each individual is an individual, not one in millions." Her spirit was harshly tested when she was very young. On Dec. 23, 1856, while she was still in diapers, her father, respected Terre Haute surgeon Dr. John Evans, died at age 36. Two years later, her mother Margaret married Murray Briggs, editor of the *Sullivan Democrat*. In 1866, when Martha was 11 years old, her mother also perished. Briggs, a longtime member of the board of trustees at Indiana State Normal, raised Martha, her sister Elizabeth, three children by his first marriage and four children born of a subsequent marriage.

Upon graduating from DePauw University, Martha accepted employment as Wayne County Circuit Court reporter in Richmond, Ind. She married Edward C. Martin, owner of the *Richmond Daily Telegram*. As associate editor of the *Daily Telegram*, Martha earned statewide notoriety by strongly espousing women's suffrage, education and political involvement. On June 4, 1890, she was elected the inaugural president of the Indiana Union of Literary Clubs, later known as the Indiana Federation of Women's Clubs. The organization's second annual meeting was held in Terre Haute on May 7, 1891.

The Martins sold the newspaper in 1891 and relocated to New York to help Samuel S. McClure found *McClure's Magazine*, a monthly which launched the careers of several reform journalists, including Ida M. Tarbell. From 1896 to 1900, Martha was editor-in-chief of *Demorest's Family Magazine*. Interested in nature since her schooldays, she saw a need for popular books on complex scientific topics. *The Friendly Stars* was an immediate success. In 1912 she wrote *Ways of the Planets*, which earned acclaim from educators. Meanwhile, she maintained a bird banding station at her Watchung, N.J. home.

Martin died in New Jersey on Jan. 5, 1925 at age 68. Tarbell wrote a glowing eulogy to her in *Martha Evans Martin Memorial*, published by Elizabeth Evans. Before her death in 1937, Elizabeth Evans donated \$30,000 to Union Hospital in memory of her father and a smaller sum to Mary Sherman Hospital in Sullivan in grateful appreciation of Briggs, her dedicated stepfather.

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