

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Fannie Blumberg



Author, artist and philanthropist Fannie Burgheim Blumberg energized everyone she knew. Her passion for life was infectious.

Born in Indianapolis on Feb. 11, 1894, Fannie was the only child of traveling watch salesman Louis Burgheim and his wife, the former Rachel Heimes. Usually excused from strenuous exercise due to her frailty, Fannie demonstrated artistic talent as a youth and focused on creative writing. Her grandfather, Rabbi David Burgheim, was acquainted with poet James Whitcomb Riley. Works by noted Indianapolis authors such as Booth Tarkington and Meredith Nicholson were influential.

While attending Madam Blaeker's College for Kindergarten Teachers, later absorbed by Butler University, Fannie submitted work to several children's magazines. "The First Circus" and "The Wishing Well," a serial, were among her stories accepted by the celebrated *John Martin's Magazine*. Ultimately, they became children's classics. So did "The Peace Fiddler," originally donated to Sarah Scott Junior High School for a fundraiser, and her Roweena Series, beginning with "Roweena, Teena & Tot," both published after her August 1916 marriage to Terre Haute lawyer Benjamin Blumberg.

Busy raising four children — Morris, Rachel, Teressa and Gretchen — Fannie had little time to devote to writing in the 1920s and 30s. Beginning in 1936, the Blumbergs also sheltered German Jewish refugee Gerhard Nellhaus as a family member. Meanwhile, Fannie savored the ambience at the Blumberg farm at Fruitridge Ave. and Hulman St., with its brooks, woods and wildlife. Birds, gardens, flowers, horses and ponies nurtured her creativity.

A friendship with May Levan Joyce, a Terre Haute interior decorator, awakened Fannie's latent talent as an artist. An old barn on the Blumberg estate was converted into a studio apartment suitable for a serious painter. Noted Terre Haute muralist Gilbert Wilson became her tutor. Later, "FBB," as she was affectionately known, studied art under Suelo Serisawa of Los Angeles, Byron Newton of New York and Franz Joseph Bolinger. When art dealer Rudolph Fiolic of Woodstock, NY, opened a gallery in Coral Gables, Fla., Fannie's work was featured. Today her watercolors, oils and pseudo-oils are exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States.

In 1956 the Blumbergs endowed DePauw University — Benjamin Blumberg's undergraduate alma mater — with funds to establish an art center. Blumberg Halls at Indiana State University and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology acknowledge the family's unselfish dedication to education and the arts. Ben and Fannie regularly conferred anonymous gifts and scholarships to charitable organizations, including the Girl Scouts of America, an FBB favorite.

Fannie died July 9, 1964. On her studio easel at that time was an unfinished painting of a small woman, like herself, holding a flickering candle outstretched toward a crescent moon.

Son Morris B. Blumberg, retired businessman, lawyer and philanthropist, still resides here.

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