

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

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

Elizabeth Booth



Not yet eight years old when she moved to Terre Haute in 1841, Elizabeth Booth had already survived a cholera epidemic in Salem, Ind. The fourth of Beebe and Hannah (Pitts) Booth's six children, "Lizzie" was born in Salem on Nov. 10, 1833. Her siblings were Mary, Walter, Newton, Lyman and Lucius.

Her father was a jack-of-all-trades: newspaper proprietor, cotton mill operator, wool mill owner and, with Ebenezer Patrick, co-publisher of the first book printed in Indiana, *The Life of Bonaparte*.

As Beebe approached 50, the Booths relocated to Terre Haute, which offered commercial promise and was near Greencastle where Newton Booth intended to enroll in Asbury College (now DePauw University). They bought Capt. John Wasson's country manor between Ohio and Walnut, east of South Sixth St. "B. Booth & Co.," a dry goods store, was opened on Wabash Ave. on Court Square.

The Booth children were raised as Quakers following Hannah's Virginia upbringing, but the family savored a rapport with the Sisters of Providence who visited the store after attending nearby St. Joseph's Church. At age 12, Lizzie was enrolled at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Academy. She excelled in four years there, earning honors in 15 subjects. No one matched her ability in English composition.

As a teen, Lizzie was prominent in social circles. When she announced intentions to wed Indianapolis lawyer John Stevenson Tarkington, it was the talk of the town. The wedding was held at the Booth home on Nov. 17, 1857.

Elizabeth did not adjust easily to life in Indianapolis, returning often to her childhood residence. Her first child, a daughter born in 1858, was named "Haute." The second, born 11 years later, was named Newton Booth Tarkington after her brother, the Terre Haute lawyer who became California's governor in 1871. The Tarkington children spent many months at their maternal grandparents' home.

Elizabeth died in Indianapolis on April 17, 1909, 14 years before son Booth Tarkington was declared "America's most significant contemporary author" by *Publisher's Weekly*, having already earned Pulitzer Prizes for *Alice Adams* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Invariably he credited Elizabeth for kindling his interest in literature. *The Two Van Revels* — Tarkington's novel examining social values during the Mexican War — described his mother's experiences at the Woods, utilizing the real names of teachers. *Penrod and Sam* recounted childhood pranks in Terre Haute and Marshall, Ill., where his uncle Lyman and cousin Fenton lived. After Haute's marriage to Ovid Jameson, she preserved tradition and named her son Newton Booth Tarkington Jameson.

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