

WHO AM I?

By Carl Henn

One aspect of Hoosier personalities is the desire to communicate – especially in writing. This is evident in the fame attained by early Indiana authors. A state-by-state review of best-sellers, beginning in 1895, lists the titles and authors of the ten novels leading in popularity each year for half a century. New York produced the most, with a score of 218. Indiana came second with a total of 213. Among our immediate neighbors, Kentucky scored 94, Ohio 73, and Michigan 70.

Tonight I will present some of the best-known early Hoosier authors of fiction and poetry by giving details of their lives for you to recognize them. If you can identify the author before I do, please raise your hand to summon my trusty assistant, Morton Marcus, who will determine if you are eligible to dip into the goody bag.

No. 1 - I was one of 14 children of a Virginian who moved his family to Kentucky in 1776, while warfare with the Indians was still raging. My father was killed by Indians while attempting to run supplies to the blockhouse in which our family was besieged.

Money was scarce and life was difficult. Born in 1784, I managed to get an education of sorts. I became a schoolteacher, then a lawyer, and from time to time a preacher. In the year 1810 I married Elizabeth Masterson and I published the work that made me the first American novelist from west of the Alleghenies. I became known as a Hoosier writer because in 1811, before the book had become widely distributed, my wife and I moved to the Indiana Territory and settled near Aurora.

Much later, after I had served as a legislator and then a state and Federal judge, I came to believe that the book was a youthful indiscretion, a florid piece of dramatic writing not suitable for young people. So I bought back every copy I could locate.

My name is Jesse Lynch Holman and my novel is entitled: *The Prisoners of Niagara, or Errors of Education*.

No. 2 – It was said of me that I went through a half-dozen professions as an amateur -- albeit a gifted one – and as an incurable romantic, with a love for adventure. Born in 1827 in Crawfordsville, at age 13 I tried to run away to join the Texans in their war for independence. I later participated in the Mexican War, and in 1856, when I saw the Civil War coming, I organized a military company that became known as the Zouaves because of their colorful uniforms. I served with distinction, rose to the rank of major general, and was a member of the court martial that tried Lincoln's assassins.

I read law in my father's office, was admitted to the bar and opened a law office in Covington. After becoming prosecuting attorney there I served for two terms and then resigned to move to Crawfordsville, where I maintained law practice for the greater part of my life. Politically I was a Whig, then a Democrat, but when I heard Lincoln debate Douglas I became a Republican. In that capacity I was appointed governor of New Mexico Territory, then ambassador to Turkey. I also found time to write, play the violin and paint pictures. I am Lewis (Lew) Wallace, author of *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ*.

2.

No. 3 – Even though I was born in Ohio, and my family moved East in 1854 after spending only 18 years in Indiana, I am listed among Indiana authors. I believe this is because the title person featured in much of my enormous literary output became widely known as having a Hoosier environment..

My family arrived in South Bend in 1836, when I was eight years old. I was educated in private schools, became a teacher and even at one point conducted a school of my own. In addition to teaching I wrote newspaper stories and Sunday school books.

During the Civil War, being incapacitated by a back ailment, I began writing the first novel of a number of literary series that continued to make demands on me until four years before my death on Jan. 30, 1909, in Elkton, Maryland. Including the various series and the many single items I wrote, there are at least 90 titles.

In the light of present-day literary criticism I have suffered considerably, owing to several factors: one, the shift in taste from romantic to realistic writing; two, the changing of manners and morals; three, the unfortunate fact that I was not an expert craftsman. I lacked literary style and character development, and my plots were technically faulty. None of these, however, were apparent to the thousands of young readers who devoured my output. My name is Martha Finley, and my best-known creation was *Elsie Dinsmore*.

No. 4 - I am both a novelist and a historian, born Dec. 10, 1837. My father, a lawyer and politician, was from Virginia. He suffered an early death in 1846. My mother was the daughter of Capt. George Craig, a Western frontiersman and Indian fighter who owned a farm outside Vevay, Indiana. There I attended a country school.

While still a lad I was sent for a long visit with relatives in Delaware County, where I learned my knowledge of Hoosier dialect and backwoods manners. When I returned to my home it was now in New Albany, the residence of Williamson Terrell, a Methodist preacher whom my mother had married after my father's death.

I spent six months there before our family moved to New Albany for half a year, to Madison for two years, then back to Vevay in 1853. The next year took me to Virginia and the Amelia Academy, which was the best and last of my formal education. I tried a variety of occupations, frequently interrupted by ill health, in particular becoming a Bible agent and pastor of small churches in various cities before giving up the ministry for journalism in 1866.

Beginning in Chicago, and migrating eastward to New York, I became a correspondent and editor for various publications. That was the beginning of my literary career as novelist and, eventually, historian. From 1881 until my death in 1902 my home was at Lake George, but I spent many winters in New York or on the lecture circuit, interrupted by bouts of bad health. My name is Edward Eggleston, and the novel for which I am best-known is *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*.

3.

No. 5 – I, too, was a journalist and novelist from the same vicinity as the previous writer. Born Nov. 26, 1839, I gained my early education in Madison, followed by higher instruction at Indiana Asbury before it became DePauw University, all of which labeled me forever as a Hoosier. At age 17, however, I inherited my father's plantation in Amelia County, Virginia. There I entered into an aristocratic, genial and leisurely life, studied law at Richmond College and gained friends in the literary group there.

In 1861 the Civil War claimed my attention. I served with the Virginia cavalry and then with field artillery on the South Carolina coast. My battery mates were sharpshooters in the bloody siege of Petersburg, where I was in charge of a mortar fort. A postwar banking stint in Cairo, Illinois, was followed by law practice in Mississippi.

In 1870 I moved with my wife and child to New York. There I began a long newspaper and editorial career that included not only free-lance and magazine writing but an 11-year association with Joseph Pulitzer at the New York World. Eventually my writing moved to the production of boys' stories, history, biography and especially novels. My name is George Cary Eggleston, and perhaps the best-known of those novels is entitled *Dorothy South: A Love Story of Virginia*.

No. 6 – Bestowed upon me at my birth Sept. 9, 1844, was a wide variety of talents which enabled me to shape careers in six different fields..

My family was headed by a Southerner who was pastor of a Baptist church in Fairfield, Indiana. His calling soon after my birth removed the family to Missouri, then into Kentucky. But upon coming into an inheritance of land, he forsook the pulpit and became a successful planter in upper Georgia. This enabled him to hire competent tutors for his two sons in literature, mathematics, French and classical languages.

My brother and I also learned woodcraft and a love of the outdoors, Then our pleasant existence was interrupted by onset of the Civil War. We enlisted in the Confederate Army and thankfully survived, but the war's ending reduced most Georgia planters to a cut above penniless. I studied surveying and engineering, read law, then carried out a botanical, zoological and ornithological survey in Florida's Lake Okeechobee region. all while beginning to do serious writing.

How did I arrive in Indiana? By foot. My brother and I packed our belongings in knapsacks and began walking northward, arriving eventually in Crawfordsville. There, a railroad was coming through and we were hired as engineers. Then I married, gave up engineering, and with my brother opened a law office. I served in the Legislature, as state geologist and as chief of the state Department of Natural History, all while writing essays on outdoor issues and the novels which finally made me widely known as Maurice Thompson, author of *Alice of Old Vincennes*.

4.

No. 7 – Although becoming one of America’s most widely known literary figures of the time, I showed little of what biographers call “early promise”. I was born in Greenfield on Oct. 7, 1849, into a family headed by a prosperous lawyer. I attended local schools, then began a rather aimless life. After reading law in my father’s office I took up sign-painting, which did not rank highly as a profession, This led me to become advance agent and display advertising specialist for a traveling wagon-show.

Topical songs were in vogue, so I began writing song lyrics and from time to time my output got published. Upon returning to Greenfield I was employed by a newspaper there, then moved to a paper in Anderson. I sent some verse to the Kokomo Dispatch, claiming it had been discovered on the flyleaf of an old dictionary, and gave the initials EAP. Many critics accepted it as an unknown production of Edgar Allen Poe. When the deception was uncovered, my employers were horrified by the lapse of literary integrity and fired me. I was promptly hired by the *Indianapolis Journal*, which knew a good newspaperman when it saw one.

At the Journal there was room for entertaining material, and when I began taking a large share of that space, it led to national attention. One item, entitled “A Destiny”, appeared in the April, 1875 issue of “Hearth and Home.” My first book of collected items was published under the name Benjamin F. Johnson of Boone County. After that I was published under my true name, James Whitcomb Riley, Of my many poems, perhaps the best known are “The Ole Swimmin’ Hole,” “The Raggedy Man” and “Little Orphant Annie”

No. 8 – My career proved that writing as a profession could pay a handsome living based on humor, musical comedies and plays. Even after my demise in 1944 I lived on as a “warm-hearted satirist,” a title conferred by my biographer, Fred C. Kelly.

Born Feb. 9, 1866 in Kentland, I had a happy childhood, leading to a graduate degree from Purdue University, where I shone modestly in the literary field. That led to employment with the *Chicago Daily News*. There I wrote a daily column entitled “*Stories of the Streets and of the Town*” which included embryonic plays.

In 1900 my special works were syndicated By this time several books based on my newspaper column had appeared, and I began my playwriting career in earnest. The stage production of these led to their being made into movies.

In 1903 I built a summer home near Brook, Indiana. There I hosted political rallies and community parties and entertained widely. My private golf course became a regional club. From December to May I was usually in residence at Miami Beach. I never married, but I was a champion at maintaining friendships. I may have personally touched more lives than many of my fellow writers, because I was not content to meet people and then pass on; I kept them as friends up to my death. My name is George Ade, and perhaps the best-known work of my profusion of output was entitled *Fables in Slang*.

5.

No. 9 – I, too, was a product of Crawfordsville, born there on Dec. 9. 1866, My father was a substantial farmer, and my mother was the daughter of a pioneer editor and publisher. When I was five my family moved to Indianapolis where I remained, with the exception of three years in Denver as auditor and treasurer of a coal-mining company, and time spent in Central and South America in service with the U. S. State Department.

I had a scanty education, leaving school behind at age 15 to take a succession of jobs. Learning shorthand in a printer's shop led to becoming a court reporter, then to employment in a law firm. At age nineteen I commenced the study of law, using spare time to begin my first serious efforts at writing. This led to 13 years of employment with the *Indianapolis News*, during which I began my literary efforts that blossomed into best-sellerdom in the early Nineteen Hundreds.

I kept up a lively interest in politics as a Jeffersonian Democrat, this leading to the State Department posts. Having a profound belief in democracy I spoke up for self-government and tolerance, and when I retired to private life I contributed many essays and editorials to the Indianapolis newspapers.

My lack of formal education led me to teach myself languages – Latin, Greek, French and Italian. This, combined with literary accomplishments and my contributions to statesmanship, led to honorary degrees from Wabash College, Butler University and Indiana University, and honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa. My name is Meredith Nicholson, and my best-known novel is *The House of a Thousand Candles*.

No. 10 – Born on a farm in Wayne County in 1868 as the youngest of 12 children, I developed an interest in nature that was reflected in my literary output. My early years were not distinguished by any activity or occurrence of note. When I married in 1886 and we moved to a cabin adjacent to a large swamp I continued my interest in wild life – especially in birds -- and began employment related to that field.

For two years I edited the camera department of one magazine called *Recreation*, for two years was on the natural history department of another called *Outing*, and for four years was a specialist in natural history photography for the *Photographic Times Annual Almanac*. My fame, however, was not based on photography but to my extensive published works, many with water color and photographic illustrations. My name is Gene Stratton Porter, and the best-known of my fiction works include *A Girl of the Limberlost*, *Freckles*, and *The Song of the Cardinal*.

6.

No. 11 – I was the last of six children, born to our family on September 1, 1868, in Bellefontaine, Ohio. My father published the *Bellefontaine Examiner*, and the influence of that staunch Democratic newspaper, and of the first circus I saw at age five, endured strongly. I quit school in the seventh grade because I saw no future there, and went to work in a paint shop.

I was regarded as a natural-born artist, and at age 16 a woodcut of mine was published in the *Examiner*, where I learned photography and how to set type. Also, a friend and I originated a home-town talent show in the newly-built Grand Opera Show. There I took part in blackface song and dance routines, which led to becoming a performer and silhouette artist in a traveling medicine show.

In 1891 I joined the *Indianapolis News* as a sketch artist and cub reporter. After three years I left, traveled and did odd jobs, came back and was hired by the *Indianapolis Sun* and, finally, returned for good to the *News*. There I began a column portraying a country fellow with homespun wit and wisdom. His popularity led to publication of a book, then another book, and finally to national syndication in over 200 papers. My name is Frank McKinley Hubbard -- better known as Kin Hubbard -- and my fame is owed to my creation of the Brown County rustic named Abe Martin.

No. 12 – Of all writers, I most nearly interpreted the American scene from 1900 through the Twenties as the average reader saw it. I was born in Indianapolis July 20, 1869, to the sort of background I wrote of best – comfortably prosperous middle class. My parents named me Newton for a distinguished uncle who became governor of California.

My higher education began at Phillips Exeter Academy and ended at Purdue University. I did well in my classes and was active in literary and dramatic affairs. My initial ambition was to be an illustrator; I sold my first effort to the old *Life* magazine, followed by 31 rejections. Then I took up serious writing, first with short stories and then a novel that became an immediate best seller.

One success followed another. In 1919 I was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and in 1922 that honor was repeated. My income enabled me to travel and furnish lavish entertainment, at my home on the North Side and my summer home in Kennebunkport. My first marriage ended in divorce, and our only child died of pneumonia, but my second marriage survived until my demise in 1946 after being plagued by bad health. My name is Newton Booth Tarkington, and among my best-known works are *The Gentleman from Indiana*, *Penrod*, *Alice Adams* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

7.

No. 13 – I was born in Illinois in 1820, but became a Hoosier when the family moved to Indianapolis shortly afterward. I inherited artistic talent from my father, who had a close friendship with James Whitcomb Riley.

As a youth I went to Cleveland on a ‘bumming’ trip with a buddy and took a job playing piano in a saloon. One day, when a policeman named McGinty came in, I was so impressed with his character that I drew his picture on the mirror behind the bar. This impressed him, and he befriended me.

I returned to Indianapolis and became a cartoonist with the *Indianapolis Star*. But Cleveland and McGinty drew me back there to continue employment as a newspaper cartoonist. One day, to pass the time after I had completed my work, I began writing verse about a young Indiana lass and it grew to book size. Then I removed to New York city and, while cartooning there, changed the book’s text from verse to narrative and found a publisher. The resulting book sold three million copies.

I switched from cartoonist to writer and my printed output became copious. Even though I never returned to live in Indiana, my best-known works were laid there, and I became famous as a Hoosier writer. I am John Barton Gruelle, creator of *Raggedy Ann*.

No. 14 – I was destined to become a controversial writer of widely-read novels, of which some being banned only encouraged readership. For my father – a crank obsessed with religion -- I had extreme dislike; for my mother I had admiration amounting to adoration.

My family moved from Sullivan, Indiana, to Terre Haute, where I was born in 1867, after the woolen mill my father owned was destroyed by fire. That left my parents and ten children in poverty, and some of us were ill-destined. Two sisters ran away; one brother got into jail, another died of drunkenness. Of my youthful friends, some became bar-flies, others odd-job men, others women of ill repute.

Difficulties were such that my mother moved with the younger children from Terre Haute, where I had attended a parochial school, back to the town of Sullivan, then to Evansville, then to Warsaw, Indiana. I went to Indiana University, worked for the *Chicago Globe*, then switched to various magazines and eventually attained editorship.

The first novel I wrote, published in 1900, was so frank that the publishers were persuaded to withdraw it; others were both sensational and successful. Public opinion mellowed after my death in 1945, to the point that critic George Jean Nathan called me “the most important Indiana author”. My name is Theodore Dreiser, and of my many novels, the best-known are *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*.

8.

No. 15 -- I was once labeled "a flower child, a century too early", and in another reference, called "a hippie for his time". In 1872 I was born and in, and never left, Terre Haute, a city that gave me scant recognition. My birth site became a parking lot.

I produced 22 books and pamphlets, poems, and plays, one called "Jesus, A Passion Play". Another play, set in ancient Rome, today would be described as a women's lib drama. My works appeared in 33 languages and dialects, but I could not make a living by those efforts.

I was sent to DePauw University, then to Harvard to study philosophy and law. I became a lawyer, first in the prosecutor's office and then for my brother's factory, which I also served as credit manager.

"May I not be ungrateful for the small public that reads and loves my writings," I wrote in 1918. "As time goes on, the number may increase." It did, but not to my knowledge. I died at age 73, never to know that eventually my work would earn international accolades. Those came, ironically, for a 1927 work that for a time was mistakenly attributed to a different origin.

I did while on earth realize some acclaim with a poem entitled "A Prayer". I wrote it in a hotel room at a time of illness and despair. I thought so little of the poem that I tossed it in the wastebasket and a friend later retrieved it.

But I was never miserable for lack of recognition. I lived simply and austere; loneliness was often my companion. I did not marry when young, fearing I could not afford a wife, and much later considered myself too old to wed. But I had long known and admired a woman named Bertha King, and then, when we did wed in 1945, I died only three months later.

In the late 50's, a brief work of mine -- hardly more than a trifle of some 300 words-- was introduced to fame by appropriation. It was mimeographed and distributed by a minister with no mention of authorship. It carried the notation "St. Paul's Church, Baltimore, 1692" the year the church was founded. This led to a myth that the work had been created in that year. It became so popular as to be reprinted widely, even on Christmas cards. My name is Max Ehrmann, and if time allows I would like to end this mystery series by reading the work. I trust you will appreciate its content, as have millions of others.

DESIDERATA

GO placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in the silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly, and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become bitter or vain, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere there is heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of loneliness and fatigue.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.

Whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its shams, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.