

## Remembering Evaleen Stein at the Indiana University Bloomington Libraries

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2023 marks the centenary of the death of Evaleen Stein (1863-1923), an Indiana woman author whose fame, in the words of one commentator, “has not been commensurate with the quality of her output” (Hepburn 1949, 303). The IU Bloomington Libraries’ online exhibit *Pretty Stories, Prettily Told* shines a spotlight on Stein’s fiction for children, as well as highlights the work of lesser-known illustrators during the so-called “Golden Age” of children’s book illustration.

The digital screen ad is divided into two main sections. The left section features the IU Libraries logo at the top, followed by the text 'ONLINE EXHIBIT | Arts & Humanities'. Below this is the exhibit title 'Pretty Stories, Prettily Told: Children's Books by Evaleen Stein (1863-1923)' in a bold, italicized font. A QR code is positioned below the title. At the bottom of this section, a short paragraph describes the exhibit as a new online platform illuminating the literary contributions of a notable Indiana woman author, also highlighting lesser-known illustrators of the 'Golden Age'. The right section of the ad contains a black and white portrait of Evaleen Stein, a young woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a high-collared dress. Below the portrait is a caption: 'Photograph of Evaleen Stein from Frances Elizabeth Willard, *A Woman of the Century*. Internet Archive, via Wikimedia Commons. Public domain in the United States.'

Digital screen ad promoting *Pretty Stories, Prettily Told*.

### Who was Evaleen Stein?

Evaleen Stein was born into an upper-class family in Lafayette, Indiana, in 1863. Her father John A. Stein (1832-1885) was a respected lawyer and author. Her mother Virginia (1840-

1924) became a librarian at Lafayette Public Library after her husband's death. Evaleen trained as an artist and was known for her decorative work, particularly manuscript illumination.

She rose to literary prominence as a poet, publishing her first poems in local newspapers in 1886. In their seminal anthology of Indiana poetry, Benjamin S. Parker and Enos B. Heiney would laud Stein's "love and appreciation of nature, [and] her skill in descriptive verse," describing her as "the peer of the best among the poets of natural scenery and conditions" (Parker and Heiney 1900, 456).

After the turn of the twentieth century, Evaleen Stein specialized in writing fiction for children. Her children's books take their inspiration from their author's knowledge of medieval illuminated manuscripts, from her interests in Western European history, literature, and folklore, as well as from her travels in Europe. Stein's contemporaries praised her books for children as lively and faithful depictions of past times and people, and as valuable introductions to history for young readers.

Despite a reputation for reclusiveness, Evaleen Stein was a well-known society and literary figure. She was the "center of a large circle of cultured persons" in her Lafayette home (Willard 1893, 683). She was an active member of Midwestern literary groups and associations and a regular participant in local literary events and benefits. Four years after Stein's death, a writer in the *Indianapolis Star* (July 30, 1927) would include her as one of three women writers in a list of Indiana authors of whom the state "can be proud": James Whitcomb Riley, Lew Wallace, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, Charles Major, George Barr McCutcheon, George Ade, Sarah T. Bolton, Gene Stratton-Porter, Evaleen Stein.



Color frontispiece to Evaleen Stein's *Troubadour Tales* by Maxfield Parrish. Courtesy of HathiTrust. Public domain in the United States.

### ***Pretty Stories, Prettily Told***

Evaleen Stein's first story for children, "The Page of Count Reynaard," appeared in the popular children's magazine *St. Nicholas* in 1898/99; it was followed a year later by "Félix." Both stories were subsequently included in Stein's first book for children, *Troubadour Tales* (1903). This short story collection would be followed by ten short novels published between 1906 and 1924, as well as three further books of stories, two of which were

published posthumously. The online exhibit *Pretty Stories, Prettily Told* devotes one site page to each of these [fourteen works](#).

With just one exception, Stein's books for children are set in Western Europe, often in the Middle Ages. Their protagonists are brave, spirited children with noble ambitions and high ideals. Stein found inspiration for her fiction in her wide reading of Western European history, literature, and folklore, as well as in her professional knowledge and experience as an illuminator; unfortunately, she rarely identified her sources. *Pretty Stories, Prettily Told* highlights likely sources of inspiration for each of Stein's children's books and includes links to public domain materials where possible.

Evaleen Stein's books for children were charmingly illustrated by artists of her generation. Despite enjoying successful careers as illustrators, most of these artists are unknown to a modern audience. One notable exception is [Maxfield Parrish](#), whose illustration to Stein's "Page of Count Reynaard" for the magazine *St. Nicholas* would subsequently serve as the frontispiece to *Troubadour Tales*. Each illustrator page in *Pretty Stories, Prettily Told* includes a showcase of images of all illustrations contributed by that artist to featured works by Evaldeen Stein, as well as links to a selection of other public domain works illustrated by the featured artist.



"THE STARTLED WONDER GREW IN HER BLUE EYES AS SHE STARED DOWN AT THE THINGS AT HER FEET."  
— ADALAIDE EVERHART

[Black and white frontispiece to Evaldeen Stein's \*The Christmas Porringer\* by Adelaide Everhart](#). Indiana University Digital Library Program. Public domain in the United States.

Omeka as a platform has always been perfect for image-rich projects. In the context of the present project, Omeka S has proven an excellent vehicle for showcasing relationships between works and illustrators, which are not always one-to-one. Three featured artists ([Adelaide Everhart](#), John Goss, and Charles E. Meister) illustrated multiple books by Evaldeen Stein; conversely, one featured book (*Troubadour Tales*) was illustrated by multiple artists. The "Browse item sets" link that has been added to the site navigation allows for rapid access to all illustrations (i.e., Omeka S items) associated with a particular work or artist.

Many of the images used in the exhibit originated with the Indiana University Digital Library Program's project [Indiana Authors and Their Books](#). Thank you to Kara Alexander, Digital Media Specialist in Digital Collections Services, for making the original files available. Page scans for two featured works were retrieved from the Library of Congress and for a further two works from HathiTrust. The works of Evaldeen Stein are now all in the public domain in the United States.

## How to Contribute

*Pretty Stories, Prettily Told: Children's Books by Evaleen Stein (1863-1923)* is the work of Catherine J. Minter, and represents her first expedition into the world of Omeka S. Please get in touch with Catherine if you have any comments on the exhibit, questions, or if you would like to contribute information to the site. Perhaps you can help identify an unknown dedicatee, or suggest further sources that may have inspired Evaleen Stein's books for children?

## References

Hepburn, William Murray. "Evaleen Stein: 1863-1923." 1949. In *Indiana Authors and Their Books*, edited by R. E. Banta, 301-03. Crawfordsville, IN: Wabash College.

Parker, Benjamin S., and Enos B. Heiney, eds. 1900. *Poets and Poetry of Indiana*. New York: Silver, Burdett and Company.

Willard, Frances Elizabeth. 1893. *A Woman of the Century*. Buffalo: Moulton.