



23.1970.1 Esther Test Wallace
Fountain County
Marker Text Review Report
9/9/2013

Marker Text

The 1st wife of Governor David Wallace and mother of General Lew Wallace, soldier, author of Ben Hur, statesman & diplomat, is here buried. She influenced the lives of two important Hoosiers.

Report

Current IHB guidelines require primary source documentation to support all information on a marker. This marker had no sources on file and was flagged for review. Esther Test married [David Wallace](#) in Franklin County, Indiana on November 10, 1824.¹ No earlier marriages were found for David Wallace, so it is reasonable to conclude that Esther Test was his first wife.

Unfortunately, few of the remaining points about Esther Test Wallace in the marker text could be substantiated with primary sources, due in large part to the record-keeping practices of the time. For example, prior to 1850, the U.S. Census recorded the name of only a head-of-household and the number of male and female occupants of a home in each age bracket, so while we know a boy under 5 years of age was resident in the household, the wife and the couple's children are not named.² Lew Wallace identifies "Esther French Test" as his mother in his posthumously-published autobiography, a relatively-reliable early secondary source.³

Further, there is some question as to whether Wallace is in fact "here buried." Lew Wallace, in his autobiography, confirms her resting place as Covington, remarking on his reaction to being presented with a "new mother," Zerelda Sanders, after his father's second marriage: "The poor woman dead in her youth and lying in her lonely grave at Covington crept back into my thoughts. The others might forget her, but I would not. *She* was my mother, and I would have no other—I would die sooner."⁴ There is a possibility, however, that Esther French Test Wallace was reinterred in [Crown Hill Cemetery](#), Indianapolis, in the 1870s. Gov. David Wallace was buried there in 1865 (6 years after his death), and a headstone at Crown Hill marks the burial site of "Esther Test Wallace" and "David Wallace." Cemetery records suggest that only Esther is buried in the plot at present, that the full name of the deceased differs slightly from the name on the headstone (including "French"), and that the deceased was reinterred at Crown Hill in 1871 and moved to the current site in 1899. The current site, Section 36, Lot 3, is far removed from Section 3, Lot 10, where David Wallace is interred near his second wife, [Zerelda](#), and children from his second marriage. It is possible the Esther Wallace in Crown Hill Cemetery is a different woman, but given the birth and death dates recorded and the state of the current burial site in Covington, it is also plausible she was reinterred near her husband after his death and her grave moved near the end of Zerelda Wallace's life.

Biographical information listed on the marker about Lew Wallace is common knowledge, though it bears noting that the text of this marker offers more information about the "two important Hoosiers" than the subject of the marker herself. This marker topic does not meet current IHB guidelines for state or national significance. The Indiana Historical Bureau no longer marks topics that are significant due to their association with famous figures or events, instead requiring that each marker topic have inherent significance of its own. At the time this marker was placed, the focus of the historical marker program followed mainstream historical narratives that generally overlooked women's and minorities' contributions to the history of the state.⁵ Women played a vital role in shaping Indiana. For more on the contributions of women, explore the resources below.



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Learn More

To learn more about the Wallace family, visit [The General Lew Wallace Study and Museum](#) or read Lew Wallace's [Autobiography](#).

Bunkers, Suzanne L. 2001. *Diaries of girls and women: a midwestern American sampler*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Jellison, Katherine. 1993. *Entitled to power: farm women and technology, 1913-1963*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Johnson, Yvonne. 2009. *Feminist frontiers and gendered negotiations: women who shaped the Midwest*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press.

Lapp, Rachel J., and Anita K. Stalter. 2007. *More than petticoats*. Helena, MT: TwoDot.

Murphy, Lucy Eldersveld, and Wendy Hamand Venet. 1997. *Midwestern women: work, community, and leadership at the crossroads*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

¹[Indiana State Library Genealogy Database: Marriages through 1850](#). See also Yates Publishing, *U.S. and International Marriage Records, 1560-1900* database. Provo, UT: Ancestry Operations, Inc., 2004, accessed [AncestryLibrary.com](#).

² *1830 United States Census* (Schedule I), Franklin, IN, Roll 27, page 323, Line 11, accessed [AncestryLibrary.com](#).

³ Wallace, Lew, *Lew Wallace; an autobiography*. New York: Harper & brothers, 1906, p. 32, accessed GoogleBooks.

⁴ Wallace, p. 46.

⁵ This narrative was long-standing. Interestingly, Lew Wallace actually remarked on the practice of framing women's contributions as merely influence on page 34 of his autobiography: "It often happens that women, themselves indifferent to the world and its applause, come to enviable places in it through their children."