

# Mt. Pulaski Girl "World's Fair Wheatheart"

## Eileen Stopher Chosen America's Most Beautiful Farmer's Daughter

Reigned at New York's World Fair In 1939

(July 13, 1939)

Cinderella's shoe opened the way to a wonderful adventure but Miss Eileen Stopher's photograph brought her a more glorious adventure and nationwide prominence.

Miss Stopher, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Stopher, and a very pretty and charming young country Miss of 17 summers, which must have been fair ones indeed, was selected from thousands of other farm girls throughout the United States as Harvest Queen of the New York World's Fair, where she reigned supreme Tuesday of this week.

### A Fairyland Tale

The thrilling experience of being selected as America's most beautiful farm maiden came with such unexpectedness and so quickly, and events have moved so swiftly since, that it has all the intrigue of a fairyland adventure.

### Calls Times-News

A long-distance telephone call from Lee Mack Marshall of New York City to the publisher of the Mount Pulaski Times-News Friday afternoon about 2:00 o'clock, informed him that Eileen was one of four finalists in a nationwide contest of farm girls, one of whom was to be selected as Harvest Queen of the World's Fair in a contest staged by the Continental Baking Co.

The possibility of having a Queen from this community, to rule over the United States, was to a publisher what a fire siren is to a fireman. We grabbed our photographer, Marion Robson, tore up the countryside, getting out to the Stopher home, 7 miles southeast of Mount Pulaski to be ready for any emergency.

### The Story in Brief

When we arrived at the home our young lady was on a shopping trip, but an excited mother told us the story:

Learning that some farm girl in the United States was to be selected as Harvest-Queen of the World's Fair, Eileen, fresh from her rule as May Queen of Mount Pulaski Township high school at the Open House program in June, and remembering her early history lessons about Christopher Columbus, she followed in his footsteps; only she used a picture instead of a ship.

### Noted Artists Make Choice

Four hours later another call came thru from New York to Mrs. Stopher, who was informed that her daughter had been chosen by three famous artists, James Montgomery Flagg, McClelland Barclay and Peter Arno, to rule as Queen of the Harvest at the Fair. She was to leave on Sunday, meet the Continental Baking Co. representatives in Chicago and would be in New York Monday morning.

After that first heartbursting thrill and rejoicing in the household over such a great honor which had been suddenly bestowed upon it, came a realization of the fact that this trip would take the young lady more than a thousand miles from home which was almost like going to the ends of the earth when she had never been more than sixty miles from home.

### Left Sunday Morning

Miss Stopher left Mount Pulaski early Sunday morning accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Harry J. Wible and Mr. and Mrs. Roy Carter, for Chicago, where she was met by Mr. and Mrs. Werthimer, representatives of the Continental Baking Co. They left on the Commodore Vanderbilt, a thru train with 16 Pullmans on which she shared a compartment with her escorts, having her own private bedroom.

Reporters and photographers from Chicago papers were at the station to interview her and take

## New York Papers Carried Stories About Crowning

(July 27, 1939)

Some excerpts from New York newspapers tell something of the fine publicity given Mount Pulaski thru their Harvest Queen.

In "Today at the Fair," the official program of the New York World's Fair, a newspaper published each day, carried the following banner line across the top of the front page: "Fair Crowns Prettiest Farmerette." This was the feature story of the front page and also carried a two column picture of Miss Stopher.

### From New York Times

The New York Times of July 1st, with a four-deck head carried the following: "Fair 'Wheatheart' Crowned at Fete"; Farmer's Daughter, 17, Helps in Harvest of World's Most Expensive Field; Whalen and Artists in Rustic Attire at Continental Baking Company Exhibit."

The story in part carried by the New York Times:

"Flushing Meadows produced wheat yesterday morning, and the World's Fair brought forth America's most beautiful farmer's daughter, who was crowned Wheatheart of the Fair, all in celebration of Continental Baking Day."

"Miss Stopher was greeted by Mr. Whalen, president of the Fair, and received the applause of the crowd. Country airs were played by Zeke Manners and his Cowboy Band and square dances were done to the hillbilly music. Mr. Arno and Mr. Flagg, artists who made the selection of the Queen, also appeared in farm clothes and the whole affair had a rural atmosphere.

A bumper crop of 7 bushels was cut in the wheat field by Hank Breckenridge, who runs the Firestone Farm. Miss Stopher rode the reaper and helped Mr. Whalen and Mr. Marshall shock the wheat. The shock will remain in the field, guarded by Penelope, the scarecrow, until late in the summer, when the wheat will be milled.

### From New York Herald Tribune

"After cutting the wheat, Mr. Whalen greeted and crowned Miss Eileen Stopher, 17 years old, of Mount Pulaski, Illinois, with a coronet of wheat stalks and officially named her 'Wheatheart of the Fair.' Miss Stopher was the winner of a nationwide beauty contest sponsored by the Continental Baking Company, to find the most beautiful farmer's daughter. Photographs were submitted by the contestants, and Miss Stopher was selected by the judges, James Montgomery Flagg, Peter Arno, and McClelland Barclay, noted artists."

### From New York Journal And American

"A pretty, blue-eyed girl of 17 was crowned as Harvest Queen and 'Wheatheart of the Fair' today as the exposition paid homage to the first of two young ladies who were to receive laurels during the day.

The girl who presided over the Harvest was Eileen Stopher, Mt. Pulaski, Ill., who has seen many crops taken in during her life, but who never traveled more than 60 miles from her farm home before.

It was a historic occasion, for the field, located behind the bakery's exhibit at the Fair, is the first on which wheat has grown in New York City in 68 years. The crop was harvested with a modern reaper and binder."

pictures.

On her return trip from New York she was featured on the Dinner Bell program of WLS in a specially arranged interview. Prairie Farmer also carried a special feature story about the young lady.

## "Wheatheart of World's Fair" But Mount Pulaski's Sweetheart



## 3,000 WELCOME 'WHEATHEART' HOME FROM CINDERELLA TRIP

(July 20, 1939)

America's most beautiful farm girl and "Wheatheart of the New York World's Fair", came back home on Thursday evening of last week to complete her nationwide triumph as more than 3,000 cheering friends, neighbors and residents of other communities gave her a welcome that would have been envied by royalty itself.

Arriving on the Illinois Central's crack train, the Green Diamond, which pulled into the station at 7:29 p.m., with the strains of a lively band number in the air, and as she stepped from the train, seeing nothing but a solid mass of smiling and happy faces upturned to greet her, it is little wonder that Queen Eileen weakened. As she remarked afterwards, "I was really scared, and if Mrs. Wible hadn't pushed me I might have run back into the car. I thought there might be a few folks at the station but I never expected a band and that hundreds would be there. It was mighty fine of everyone."

### A Happy Reunion

Mother and Dad Stopher were the first to greet their daughter with feelings that were mingled with pride in the honors that had been paid to their daughter, and with joy over her safe return from a most glamorous trip that had taken her for the first time, hundreds of miles from home. She was then presented the key to the city by Alderman Bertoni.

With mother and dad on either side of her and with her arms linked in theirs, Miss Eileen was escorted thru a milling crowd that at times surged forward to block her path to a waiting car that was to carry her on a triumphal tour to the high school. Arriving at the open car, which was a Cadillac furnished for the occasion by A. R. Staley, of Decatur, and handled by A. W. Schaffnacker, Eileen and her parents entered the car with the "Queen" sitting on top of the back seat so that the hundreds that lined the streets might better see her.

### Streets Lined for Blocks

Led by the band and followed by the Queen's car and a special entourage of neighbors from her home community, the Birks neighborhood, and then many other cars, the procession traveled slowly up Washington street which was solidly lined with cars and cheering crowds, as was the square on the south and west sides and all the way to the high school where hundreds had already entered the capacious auditorium in order to be assured of a seat at the ceremonies that were to follow. Hundreds were unable to gain entrance.

A beautiful and appropriate stage setting for the honoring of Queen Eileen was intermingled with flowers and bundles of wheat with a green carpeting leading up the steps to the stage and covering it.

### WMBD Assists

John Harold Connelly, a graduate of Mount Pulaski Township high school, and now a popular radio announcer with WMBD at Peoria, took charge of the evening as master of ceremonies, at this point, and his splendid handling of the various situations that arose enabled him to share with the honored guest, the thrill of pride that ran through the audience.

Entering the auditorium from the rear to the strains of a march played by Mrs. G. S. Connelly, 13 senior girls, members of this year's graduating class, formed a colorful aisle with their formals, thru which the Queen was soon to pass. This group included Marcella Wilson, Emogene Veech, Hilma Wilham, Ruth Ann Volle, Virginia Foster, Marian Miller, Rosemary Schwoerer, Mildred Harnish, Reva Emery, Ruth Tindick, Laurine Maxheimer, Norma Gulso, and Gladys Stockton.

### Former Queen's Honored

Preceding the Queen's entrance, two girl friends of her neighborhood, Joyce Bowers and Marilyn Mueller, in formals, 7 May Queens of former years at Mount Pulaski high, attired in formal gowns, filled the audience

with pride and admiration as they wended their way to the stage where they were met by the master of ceremonies and presented to the audience. These beauties, with a charming smile and bow of appreciation for the plaudits of the audience, took their station and remained standing until the honored guest was presented. These May Queens who had ruled in previous years were: Mrs. Henry Blackford, the former Miss Lorena McKinney, '30; Mrs. Vincent Ey, formerly Miss Virginia Clear, '32; Miss Virginia Stuart, '33; Miss Barbara Barnes, '34; Miss Geri Wible, '35; Mrs. Herman Dammern, formerly Miss Eloise Lane, '36; Miss Doris Schultz, '37; Miss Virginia Kautz, '38.

Two tiny flower girls, Patsy Ann McCarthy and Phyllis Dittus, were very sweet as they strew flower petals along the pathway over which Queen Eileen was soon to wend her way. Her entrance was the signal for a renewed demonstration coupled with pride for the young lady who had been so highly honored and had brought such favorable publicity to the community.

### In Farmerette Attire

Entering the aisle of pretty young maidens, attired in the costume of a Farmerette in which she had been crowned as Harvest Queen of the New York World's Fair and named the "Wheatheart" of the Fair, with a tremendous ovation greeting her, Queen Eileen, with a demure smile that did its best to still a rapidly beating heart, ascended the throne steps to be formally presented to the audience.

Master of ceremonies Connelly, in his opening sentences paid a very charming tribute to the May Queens of other days by stating that when fellow members of WMBD's staff asked him about the Queen from his hometown, replied, "What Queen are you talking about? Why the town is full of them." Then went on to add that this year Mount Pulaski high had really hit the "jack-

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