



Irene Dunne

Madison, Jefferson County

December 20, 1898 – September 4, 1990

Irene Marie Dunne was born in Louisville, Kentucky, but her family later moved to Madison, Indiana. Her father, Joseph Dunne, inspected steamships, while her mother, Adelaide Henry, was a musician who prompted Irene in the arts. Her first production was in Louisville when she appeared in “A Midsummer Night's Dream” at age five. After graduating from Madison High School in 1916, she studied at a music conservatory in Indianapolis. She then accepted a teaching post as a music and art instructor in East Chicago, Indiana. However, before beginning the position, she saw a newspaper ad for an annual scholarship contest run by the Chicago Music College, which she won, allowing her to study as an opera singer for a year. Afterwards, she went to New York City to pursue opera singing; however, after being rejected she became a singer on Broadway instead.

In 1930, she left New York City for Hollywood, CA. She soon earned the title of “Hollywood’s First Lady.” Her many works include *Cimarron*, *Magnificent Obsession*, *Show Boat*, *My Favorite Wife*, and *Life with Father*. Dunne was nominated for five Academy Awards, but never won. Her last major work was in *It Grows on Trees* (1952). She retired from acting in the 1950s and only appeared as a guest on television.

In 1957 President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Dunne a special US delegate to the United Nations. The remainder of her life was spent on civic causes. She stayed connected to Madison, Indiana, and donated \$10,000 to the restoration of the town fountain in 1976. She died of heart failure on September 4, 1990, in Los Angeles, California. Today, a historical marker in Madison commemorates her Indiana heritage.

For information about Irene Dunne, go to:

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002050/>.

For information about *Writing Her Story*, go to: <http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Photo: Moviesque. Retrieved from: <http://moviesque.me/tag/irene-dunne/>.



Writing Her Story
31 Women in 31 Days

INDIANA
COMMISSION
for women