

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

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Susan Wallace: Eyewitness to Women's Places in the Victorian Era

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Susan Wallace's letters and publications show how her ideas about a woman's role in the family, the working world, and society changed from the time when she was a single, well-educated young woman to the end of her life when she was a mature well-respected, popular author and wife and business partner of the world-famous author, Lew Wallace. As a young mother, already a published author of newspaper articles, Susan admonished other young female prospective authors to put the responsibilities of their home lives before their desire to become published authors, briefly describing how her "career" had interfered with her duties as wife and mother. Through her experiences, aiding Lew as he worked in a Washington D.C. that was fraught with tension over Abraham Lincoln's assassination; in the as yet uncivilized, lawless New Mexico Territory; and in the Ottoman Empire, where women were still enslaved for life in harems, Susan's philosophy about the proper roles of women gradually changed. By the end of her life she was petitioning her congressman, asking him to support women's suffrage.

This paper will discuss the lives of Lew and Susan Wallace, share first-hand accounts of some of their adventures, and show why Susan's writings are important to understanding Victorian-era women's history. Susan's papers and publications may well reveal the reality and the aspirations of thousands of contemporary, well-educated, middle class, American women who lived the domestic lives set out for them while dreaming of more fulfilling lives. Only a few of them, such as Susan, were able to achieve both, but Susan wrote for them all. Her writings throw light on the transformation of women's roles from the mid-nineteenth century through the turn of the twentieth century.

The basis for this paper is the collected body of Susan Wallace's writings—correspondence to and from her—as well as drafts of her articles and book chapters and her published works. While an intern at the Indiana Historical Society in 1996–97, I processed Susan's papers for the microfilm edition of The Lew and Susan Wallace Papers project (which will come out in 2016 as a 10-DVD set from the IHS). It was amazing to witness all extant firsthand accounts of an individual—from all the many places

Susan lived and traveled—throughout the course of her life. It was especially rewarding to learn what she had to teach me about being a woman with dual careers at home and in the world. I'd be pleased to share her stories and insights at this women's history conference, Hoosier Women at Work.

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