An “Awesome” Resource

Alice Robinson ’46

In the Friends’ fall newsletter, Preservation Librarian Steven Smith wrote about the two new databases recently funded by the Friends of the Library. The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals attributes authorship to mostly anonymous articles in 45 leading periodicals and the British Periodicals database gives access to the articles themselves. He also described English Professor Lisa Rodensky’s response to being able to access its articles online: “In the words of my 7-year-old twin boys, Awesome!” This article is a follow-up to that one, focusing on Rodensky’s students’ use of both databases in her seminar on the Victorian novel.

Its focus first, however, is on Lisa Rodensky, ’84. An English major at Wellesley, Rodensky went on to Harvard Law School, getting her JD and then practicing law from 1988–1991. In 1989 she married law school classmate and now practicing lawyer Kerry Timbers. Lisa, however, had formal fine arts training. “We came from nowhere as far as the experts are concerned,” Terry says. “Maybe that’s why we are successful, because we think like beginners and write in plain language.”

Terry was drawn to antiques even as a Wellesley undergraduate. “I used to wander around Charles Street, and I bought Hester Bateman silver sugar tongs,” she says. “I got to know the dealers. Some were the icons of the industry.”

Later, she and Ralph would attempt to decipher the marks on porcelains they had purchased at house sales for their first apartment. From such self-training originated Kovels’ Antiques & Collectibles Price List, an annual fixture since 1968. The 2008 edition...
Dear Friends,

Wintersession at the college is a time for learning both inside and outside of the curriculum for the college community and this year I took advantage of the opportunity. I had the pleasure of participating in an excellent workshop led by Emily Bell, Senior Library Associate, on book conservation and repair. We were a group of twelve: students, librarians, and book lovers. It was fun to learn the difference between repair and restoration, to become aware of forbidden “repairs” with tape and non-archival glues and how to properly shelf books. We actually mended torn pages and weak hinges, and learned to sew signatures together properly. My biggest achievement was making a protective box for one of the books I brought in for repair. I appreciated the opportunity to work in the Conservation Lab that the Friends had such a major role in creating. It is a “work-friendly” facility with excellent equipment and dedicated space for special processes.

While I was enjoying my workshop, Friends’ co-chair and Special Collections Librarian Ruth Rogers and Book Arts Program Director Katherine Ruffin were busy preparing for the spring semester. Their course, “Papyrus to Print to Pixel,” was first taught in 2002 and utilizes many college resources, particularly the rare books collection, the Book Arts Lab, and the Knapp Media Center. Not only do students have the opportunity to study revolutions in the technology of the word, they also have the ‘hands-on’ learning experience of the processes used to produce written and printed communication for the past 5,000 years. That such a course is available to students today is due to the foresight of Wellesley alumnae, who helped establish the Book Arts lab in 1945. No longer just a curious corner of the Library with antique presses and type, this busy, well-equipped studio is now a vital teaching component of the College curriculum.

A forthcoming event that promises to be entertaining and informative is the Friends’ spring fundraiser on Wednesday, April 9th. Teri Kovel ’50 will be center stage at our very own “Antiques Cafe” as she does verbal appraisals of your antiques and collectibles in the Wang center. This is the first time we are holding a fundraiser to benefit the Library, so select your “treasure” to bring and tell your friends. Not only will it be great fun, you will be supporting the Library while learning how the experts make their judgments. (See article on page one of this newsletter for further information.)

Many thanks for all you do in your support of the Wellesley College Libraries. Have a wonderful spring!

Dorothea J. Widmayer ’52
includes hundreds of logo histories and more than 42,000 sales prices gathered from shops, shows, auctions, and eBay.

Today, the Kovels reign as matriarch and patriarch of the antiques’ “middle market” with a syndicated column carried in 150 newspapers, 95 published books, and TV series such as “Flea Market Finds” for HGTV, PBS, and the Discovery Channel. They have authored the collectibles entry for Encyclopedia Britannica and have even been featured as an “answer” on Jeopardy.

So what’s currently hot in the market? “Anything from the fifties,” Terry says. “The stuff I didn’t buy when I got married. The dishes, the furniture, the fabrics.” She’s “very into” fifties jewelry, particularly silver, and hopes some might show up at the Antiques Café.

One of Terry’s exciting finds came on live television when a woman lugged in a massive “hunk of silver” that had been resting on her refrigerator. “It turned out to be the trophy from the second annual New York Yacht Club race, done by Tiffany,” explains Terry. “It sold at auction for $30,000.”

Among Terry’s own collections, a favorite is American textiles—particularly political ones. “America used to put political faces on everything,” she says. “We have the death of George Washington on drapery fabric—he’s going to heaven in a chariot. Then there’s Carter with peanuts on a bandana. I haven’t seen it yet, but I’m sure there will be a Hillary scarf.”

So although you may not own a sales-record-setting collectible like a “Jonah and the whale” mechanical bank ($414,000) or Honus Wagner baseball card ($2,800,000), why not dust off Grandma’s cookie jar, or dig out that vintage RCA Victor 78 record and bring it to Antiques Café? You may be in for a surprise.

For further information, please visit our Web site at: http://www.wellesley.edu/Library/Friends/.

Calendar

April 3, 2008
The Favorite Poem Project:
Sponsored by the Friends of the Library
Featuring Students, Faculty & Staff
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Wang Campus Center
Tishman Commons
Refreshments will be served.

April 9, 2008
Terry Kovel
Antiques Café
Wang Campus Center
Tishman Commons, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Reservation required.
For more details, visit the Friends of the Library web site:
http://www.wellesley.edu/Friends/Library/index.html

Special Collections Exhibition
February - April
“Exploring Elbert: Giving Voice to African-American History”
Margaret Clapp Library, Special Collections, 4th Floor

“Selections from the Grabhorn Collection”
Margaret Clapp Library, Crozier Reference Room, 2nd Floor

April 30, 2008
Ruhlman Conference
Papyrus to Print to Pixel
Book Arts Lab, 4th Floor

May 7, 2008
Authors on Stage
Reeve Lindbergh, Deborah Weisgall
Ticket: $25
Coffee hour 9:45 a.m.
Program 10:30 a.m.
Wellesley College Club
For information call: (781) 237-5519

Two items found in the latest edition of the Kovels’ Antiques & Collectibles Price List 2008


Card table, empire era, mahogany, D-shape top, 4 paw feet, casters, 30 x 36 in., $1,840

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Preservation Fund Brings Queen Elizabeth I Back to Life

Mariana S. Oller, Research and Instruction Specialist, Special Collections

Among the extensive collection of books and manuscripts given to Wellesley College by its founders, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fowle Durant, rests a 1593 manuscript on parchment, issued by Queen Elizabeth I and legalized by her Great Seal of State. Though not nearly as old as many other manuscripts kept in Special Collections, this patent letter of Elizabeth I with her enormous wax seal easily ranks among the most exciting items in the collection.

Written in Latin in an elegant chancery script in black ink, Queen Elizabeth’s document gives John Hungerford, Knight, his wife Mary, and Anthony Hungerford and John Hungerford, Gentlemen, permission to transfer to Jane Smyth, widow, the manor of Compton Dando, in Somersetshire. All important details concerning the manor in question are listed. The document is dated at Westminster, May eighth, “in the thirty-fifth year of our reign,” and signed by the clerk. A heavy round seal of natural beeswax is attached to a slip of parchment woven through a fold at the bottom of the letter. It is an impression of Queen Elizabeth’s second seal, the same one which was used earlier for the death warrant of Mary, Queen of Scots. On one side, the queen appears seated with an orb and a scepter; on the other, she is depicted on horseback.

The document was originally housed in a small 19th-century velvet case with the parchment letter folded and obscured from view under the heavy seal. The latter was cracked in two, held intact only by the thin parchment slip running through the middle of it. In 2007, with the help of the Mary Eddy Klein ’42 and Margaret Kennedy Klein ’72 Library Preservation Fund, the Special Collections staff undertook the much-needed repair of this 16th-century English royal manuscript. Expert parchment conservator Nancy Southworth, assisted by a renowned wax conservator, performed the highly specialized and delicate restoration.

History, Art, and English classes are among the most frequent admirers of Queen Elizabeth’s patent letter. The cleaned and flattened parchment document with its beautifully restored seal is now housed in a custom-designed clamshell box, which provides ideal protection and effectively eliminates any need for direct handling of this historically important manuscript while it is on display.

Digitization and Accessibility: The Open Content Alliance

Micheline Jedrey, Vice President for Information Services and College Librarian

In September 2007, the Wellesley College Library in association with the other 18 libraries of the Boston Library Consortium (BLC) established a partnership with the Open Content Alliance to build a freely accessible library of digital materials. The Open Content Alliance, founded in 2005, provides a non-profit, non-exclusive alternative to digitization efforts promoted by Google, Microsoft, and other for-profit companies. Each BLC library has pledged start-up funds to support the production of high-resolution, downloadable, and reusable digital copies of public domain materials at the recently-created Northeast Regional Scanning Center located at the Boston Public Library.

Wellesley was one of the first BLC libraries to send items to be digitized, contributing an eclectic array of titles published prior to 1923 (the cut-off date for public domain materials) that reflect the strength and breadth of our print collections. Over 100 books have been digitized thus far, with an estimated total of 1,000 to be contributed in 2008. Among the titles initially sent were Women in Industry: A Study in American Economic History by Edith Abbott (1909), Florentine Palaces & their Stories by Janet Ross (1905), and Gems of Chinese Literature by Herbert Allen Giles (1922). The texts are searchable and illustrations are reproduced in full color. Digital “page turning” is accomplished by a simple mouse click, with the added benefit of preventing further wear and tear on the physical object.

Through this collaborative initiative, the substantial investment in building the Library’s collections is yielding new benefits, enriching the intellectual resources available to readers and scholars from around the world. Books that were acquired, many over a century ago, are reaching new audiences, and have already been downloaded multiple times. We are delighted to be part of this collaborative initiative that is directly aligned with our commitment to making our collections freely accessible.

To discover all titles contributed by Wellesley, go to http://www.archive.org and enter the search “Wellesley College Library”.

On the Front Lines: Laura Sherriff

Another in a series of Q&As with people who work in the Wellesley College Libraries

A graduate of UMass Boston, circulation associate Laura Sherriff is on the front lines of Clapp Library, where she helps oversee distribution of materials and supervises some two dozen student workers. Sherriff and her colleagues are often the first point of contact for visitors to the Library. “We’re a bit like cruise directors, where everyone comes to one location to get information about the institution at large,” says the Quincy native, who began working at Clapp in August 2007.

How did you come to this work?
I started as a student worker in the library at UMass Boston and worked my way up to a staff position. I’ve always had an interest in books and would eventually like to study the culture and history of the book as a material object when I go on to library school. Right now we’re in a transition from a print culture to an electronic culture. It’s an exciting time, but as much as I feel we should progress and explore electronic options I don’t think it can ever replace the value of printed material. One of the things that drew me to Wellesley is their Special Collections. Ultimately, I’d like to unite my interest in rare books with conservation. Basically, a librarian is a caretaker of information and knowledge and the way we preserve it and distribute it to subsequent generations.

What is it like to supervise the student workers?
It’s great, because interacting with people is something I enjoy. I never wanted to become a teacher but I do enjoy guiding students towards areas of research and seeing them get as excited about books as I am.

Do you get to see what gets checked out of the library?
Absolutely. There isn’t an item that doesn’t go through mine or my coworkers’ hands. We see the collection as it comes and goes, deal with the distribution of materials, and send items up for conservation or repair. We’re right there on the front lines. Throughout the year we have an ongoing project of going through the stacks to make sure every item in the collection is in the right place and in good condition. It’s very tactile, and sometimes you get dirty, but that’s fun too.

What are some circulation trends you’ve seen?
One that I get a chuckle out of is what my coworkers have dubbed “Blockbuster Night.” On Friday afternoons, the library’s media collections are ransacked by patrons who are in search of movies to entertain them over the weekend. We’re frequently asked to recommend titles. I find myself reading film reviews just so I can be better informed!

What’s a typical day?
I field a lot of questions. Often, I’m asked, “Do you know where my class is?” by a confused and despairing new student. Once, a patron asked me if I could help them find a book they’d borrowed a few months ago. He/She couldn’t remember the title or author but knew it had a red cover. I’m not sure, but sometimes I think people believe library workers are magicians or psychics! It’s amusing, but we take our patron service seriously so we do our best to provide answers to even the most obscure questions posed to us.

A Sampling of Recently Circulated Items at Clapp Library

The View from Nowhere, Thomas Nagel
Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing, Michael Taussig
The Book of Tea, Okakura-Kakuzo
Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature, 1660-71, Nicholas Jose
The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine, Christine Downing
Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation, Amartya Sen
Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality, Mario Barrera
The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck
Roman Law in the Modern World, Charles Phineas Sherman
Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State, Daniel Yergin
Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter’s Son, William Alexander Percy
From the Archives: The Many Faces of Clapp

A few photos of Clapp Library show how the building’s entrance area has changed over the years when compared to the present day, (right). In the photo below, taken in 1959, students stroll through a vast, checkerboard-tiled foyer. Fast-forward a couple of decades to 1971, when visitors to Clapp were greeted by Auguste Rodin’s “The Walking Man.” (These students seem to be observing the statue for an Art History course.) After its installation in the library in 1969, the sculpture moved outside to the Jewett quadrangle in 1974, where for many years it bore the brunt of class pranks and the New England weather. In the fall of 2006, the Walking Man was moved inside for restoration before finding a final home in the Davis Museum.

The undated photo (left) was probably taken sometime in the 1970s. It shows a staircase that ran from the library’s lobby to the lower level. Archivist Wilma Slaight recalls that the staircase ended near the smoking lounge. Much like the staircase, which disappeared in the 1997 renovation that created the Knapp Media and Technology Center, the lounge is no longer a part of Clapp.
Time to Renew?

Please use the form below and make your check payable to: Wellesley College. Mail to: Wellesley College, Friends of the Library, Margaret Clapp Library, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02481. Thank you for your continuing support!

Please check one:  
___Benefactor** $2,500  
___Sponsor $100  
___Endowment Fund  
___Patron* $1000  
___Contributor $50  
___Contributing Life Member  
___Supporter $500  
___Young Alum $15  
____Donor $250  
*Entitles Life Membership  
**Entitles Durant Society Membership

Name: ____________________________ Class: ______________________
Street: ___________________________
City: __________________ State: ______ Zip: __________
Phone: (_____) __________________ Email: ______________________

Visit the FOL Web Site  
for updates on programs and opportunities to support the library  
www.wellesley.edu/Library/Friends/index.html

FLORAL NOTECARDS
Richly colored botanical illustrations from a Special Collections’ book, The Botanic Garden, by Benjamin Maund, adorn these lovely notecards. Each boxed set contains two cards of four flowers, totaling eight cards and envelopes. Blank inside (all cards not pictured).

PRICE: $13.00 per box.

To get an order form or view samples of these and other notecards, visit www.wellesley.edu/Library/Friends/sales.html or call 781-283-2872.

The Wellesley Friends of the Library will benefit each time you make a purchase at Amazon.com by starting your online shopping at our Buy a Book page on the Friends web site. Titles featured at recent programs sponsored by Friends of the Library and Authors on Stage are listed, such as:

A GIFT THAT CAN BE OPENED AGAIN AND AGAIN
- Honor a Graduate  
- Celebrate a Birthday or Anniversary  
- Recognize a Special Occasion  
- Remember a Classmate

For each $100 gift to Honor with Books, the Library will place a bookplate bearing the name of the person you are honoring, as well as your name, in a newly published book.

To request information from Friends of the Library:  
Call 781-283-2872 or visit www.wellesley.edu/Library/Friends

Proceeds to benefit the Wellesley College Library.
judge, and criminal law reformer in both England and India. While in law school Rodensky had come across him as the author of the still highly regarded *History of the Criminal Law of England*. Now she found many of his articles a major focus of her research, along with novels of Dickens and especially George Eliot. Lisa Rodensky’s dissertation in revised form became her book, *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel*, published by Oxford University Press in 2003. She says that when she began her research on Stephen she kept turning to the Wellesley Index for information. Not yet online in the late 1990s, she was using those “big red books to see what Stephen’s contemporaries were saying about the topics Stephen himself took up.” She felt really fortunate to have this indispensable resource, and “as a Wellesley alumna, I particularly enjoyed using something my college had helped to make possible.”

In the meantime, a tenure track position opened in Wellesley’s English department, Lisa Rodensky was able to fill it, and her fine scholarship and teaching led this winter to her receiving tenure and being promoted to Associate Professor.

Now to that seminar last fall, ENGLISH 308, “The Victorian Novel, Inside and Out.” For the course, each student chose a Victorian novel as the focus of her research. Among the choices were Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, Collins’ *The Woman in White*, and Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*. One of the papers they wrote was on the critical reception of their chosen novels, and for that, of course, they used both of the online databases the Friends had funded. Lisa Rodensky said that before taking the seminar none of her students had heard of the Wellesley Index, but once introduced they were impressed with how much information it gave them. She commented that “more than any other resource the Wellesley Index made plain to them that the Victorians were fully invested and involved in periodicals and that periodicals were a central feature of Victorian culture.” The students did not need to go to those well over a hundred-years old, now-wearing-out Victorian periodicals, which still reside in our Library’s stacks, nor to the bulky volumes of the Index. While it is wonderful for students to be able to access all these resources online in the comfort of their dorm rooms, a visit to these primary sources themselves can also evoke the response of “Awesome”!