Beatrix Potter Letter Joins Special Collections

Diane Speare Triant '68

Special Collections Librarian Ruth Rogers is understandably delighted with a singular gift to Wellesley from Nancy Dean Kingman '53: “An entirely handwritten letter by Beatrix Potter, one of the world’s most beloved children’s book illustrators and writers, is a great acquisition for Special Collections! And knowing the provenance of the item makes a huge difference in its significance.”

In fact, the provenance of this generous gift dates back to the 1930s, when nine-year-old Nancy Dean spent vacations in Ashburnham, Massachusetts, with her step-grandmother, Bertha Mahony Miller. “Gran would read to me before I went to bed,” explains Nancy. “One night she read me The Fairy Caravan, one of Beatrix Potter’s longer books.”

It is a volume inspired by Potter’s attendance at Ginnet’s Traveling Circus in 1895, and involves an unlikely family of animals – Tuppenny guinea pig, Xarifa dormouse, Pony Billy – and how they comprise a traveling circus roaming about the British countryside. The engaging animals are invisible to humans, hence The Fairy Caravan title. “I was so enchanted that I wanted to tell Beatrix Potter,” says Nancy. Most grandmothers would have smiled sweetly and let the moment

Sacred Music to be Heard Again

Ruth R. Rogers, Special Collections Librarian

On Saturday, November 6th, for the first time since the massive illuminated gradual was installed on its oak lectern in Special Collections, its sacred music will be heard at Wellesley College. We do not know when it was last performed, but most likely not since it came to this country, over 150 years ago.

The term ‘gradual’ (or ‘graduale’ in Latin) refers to a book encompassing the music of the Latin Mass that is sung between the Epistle and Gospel readings. The name may have come from the association of singing it on the steps of the altar (gradus), or it may derive from the deacon mounting the steps of the altar for the reading of the Gospel. Because of its enormous size, a choral congregation could easily stand around the text and simultaneously sing from it without the need for multiple copies of the music.

Wellesley’s gradual was a gift to the College by its founder, Henry Fowle Durant. A committed bibliophile whose large collection of (then) contemporary books became the foundation of the College Library, Durant also purchased many historic rare books and manuscripts, which are now in Special Collections. Thus it happened that in 1878, when the private library of an internationally known collector, W. G. Medlicott, was sold at auction, this Italian renaissance gradual was among the items that Durant acquired.

The Durant gradual was made in the early 15th century in Italy,
Dear Friends,

It is my delight to be the new co-chair of the Friends of the Library. I served on the steering committee for several years before taking a couple of years off because of too many obligations at work. Now I am working part-time and am pleased to be able to devote some time once again to the library and the college. I became active on the steering committee as a result of meeting Ruth Rogers at a professional conference. My classmate June Milton Stobaugh was co-chair at the time with Ruth; and my offer to Ruth to become a member of the steering committee was accepted quickly. I enjoy the committee work—there is nothing quite like working with a group of smart, talented, informed Wellesley women.

As I write this in late September, we watch in anticipation as the process to select a successor to Micheline Jedrey continues. We look forward to welcoming the new head of Information Services sometime in the fall and to continuing to work together to maintain the strong library collections and services upon which current and future Wellesley students, faculty and staff depend for study, research and life-long learning.

There was a flurry of activity at the end of the academic year. The research awards were announced; there was a party for student library assistants at the end of reading period; and there were sales of postcards during Reunion weekend.

Undoubtedly much important behind-the-scenes work occurred during the summer months. While the summer is a relatively quiet time on the campus, one activity that continues year round is ordering books to support the curriculum. Once again, the Friends of the Library made a grant of $4,000 to the library to support acquisitions of books and other resources needed to support new courses.

Please come to some of the fine programs that are occurring this fall. And, please recognize that the College appreciates all the support you give to the libraries on campus. This help is particularly important during these challenging economic times.

Georgia Brady Barnhill '66
pass. But Gran was not like most grandmothers.

Bertha Mahony Miller was a woman with a strong commitment to children’s literature. After operating Boston’s Bookshop for Boys and Girls for many years, in 1924 she co-founded The Horn Book – the first magazine devoted exclusively to children’s reading. Miller was aware that Beatrix Potter – by then celebrated worldwide as the creator of Peter Rabbit – was notoriously prickly and reclusive, having retired to England’s Lake District. Nonetheless, she wrote to Potter, requesting biographical information to include in her publication. Undeterred at receiving no answer, Miller continued writing until Potter finally responded, avowing “a most intense dislike to advertisement.” It opened the door to a 16-year correspondence between the two feisty women, with Potter eventually contributing four essays to Horn Book.

So when her granddaughter became fascinated with Potter’s Caravan story and curious about the animals’ further adventures, Miller posted a letter to her friend across the sea. Potter answered on July 30, 1940, with updates on the characters:

“My Dear Nancy: So you would like news of The Fairy Caravan? Where is it camping and whither is it wandering? ... I believe I know! Right away amongst the fells – the green and blue hills above my sheep farm in Troutbeck. Such a lonely place, miles along a lovely green road. That was where I first saw the mark of little horse shoes ... where the Caravan sheltered in a very wild rainstorm, and Xarifa made acquaintance with the melancholy Mouse.” After further bucolic descriptions, she concludes, “Good night Nancy. I am going to bed. Yours aff., Beatrix Potter.”

Miller kept the letter safe for young Nancy, letting her enjoy a Xerox copy. As years went by, Miller became a generous donor to Wellesley’s Special Collections, her engraved bookplate appearing on many of its most beautiful and rare books and manuscripts. With her death in 1969, the Potter letter came into Nancy’s possession. Following her grandmother’s precedent, Nancy says, “I can’t think of anything better than to give the letter to Special Collections, where it will be used and seen.” Rogers confirms that the letter will be studied by education and sociology classes, who visit the children’s collections regularly.

While appreciating this primary-source treasure, Wellesley’s students – so accustomed to reading text-only communication – may be a bit confounded by Potter’s handwriting. Variously labeled “forthright, angular, bold, or confident,” it is perhaps best described by Nancy, herself. “It is not the easiest to read,” she says. “But it has a great deal of character.”
Meet your new Alumna Co-Chair

Dorothea Widmayer '52

Georgia Brady Barnhill’s warmth and enthusiasm are at once obvious when you meet her and shine through in her first “Letter from the Co-chairs” found elsewhere in this newsletter. There she introduces herself as an alumna to other alumnae. Here’s a bit more about this vivacious “friend” of the College.

Georgia “Gigi” Barnhill, ’66, is no newcomer to libraries. She recently retired from the American Antiquarian Society (AAS, a research library) in Worcester, MA, where she had been Curator of Graphic Arts since 1969. And since “retirement”, she has continued at the AAS as part-time director of the Center for Historic American Visual Culture, busily engaged in raising endowment.

Gigi spent her younger years in Scarsdale, New York, and Greenwich, Connecticut. Having enjoyed her educational experience at Rosemary Hall, an all-girls school, electing to come to a woman’s college was an easy choice for Gigi. The fact that her mother and aunt were alumnae, Class of ’34, undoubtedly also played a significant role.

A diligent student, Gigi also found time to participate in the choir, to enjoy musical events, and to work backstage for Barnswallows (theater) and her Junior Show. She settled on Art History as a major and enjoyed both the historical and artistic content of her subject matter. She fondly recalls the hours spent in art labs learning about the various media and discovering the mental focus required for creating art as “a great deal of fun”.

Before the years of internships, she had the opportunity to spend a wonderful summer between junior and senior years volunteering in the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. And though job training was not descriptive of Wellesley courses, she’s sure her senior course on the history of prints opened the door for her initial job at the AAS.

Gigi’s work as curator quite naturally led to lecturing and writing. She has published on a range of topics over the years—broadsides, ephemera, prints, and book illustrations. Currently she is editing an anthology of essays on American prints, writing an essay on the introduction of French lithographic technology and expertise to the United States in the early 19th century, and working on a book on illustrations for American literature, 1790-1870.

“Does she have time for other interests?” one asks. Gigi smiles and replies that just as in her college years, she loves to be out-of-doors—walking, hiking, and cycling, cross country skiing or snowshoeing, depending on the season. Active in the Worcester Wellesley Club and Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, she also serves on the board of the American Historical Print Collectors Society. And it’s not surprising that she also regularly serves on 1966’s Class Reunion Committees.

Gigi married Jim Barnhill in 1987, and they live outside of Worcester in a wooded area bordering a 200-acre pond. She says it is an idyllic spot and in many ways reminds her of Lake Waban.

Spring 2010 Student Library Research Awards

Maud H. Chaplin ’56

There were 26 applications for the Student Library Research Awards, 10 at the 300-level, 16 at the 100-200 level. At both levels a wide range of departments were represented, including but not limited to Art, Biological Sciences, History, Religion, Political Science, Psychology, and Women’s Studies. The quality of the papers was excellent, even for the most part at the 100-level. Our first-year level prize was awarded to a student, Rachel Doyle, who wrote of the skills she had learned as a researcher: how to differentiate between good and bad sources, how to use a wide variety of sources, the usefulness of research librarians when one cannot seem to find sources, and the importance of starting a paper early, well before the deadline! The two winners of the awards at the upper level, Joanna Concessao and Lily Wies, used even more sophisticated techniques, including writing to people who were primary sources and traveling to visit special showings or examples of primary materials.
where it once belonged to the Church of San Niccolo in Sacile, north of Venice. Consisting of 297 leaves, it is written in a rotunda script in brown ink with red rubrics. Several of its large historiated initials narrate the story of the section of liturgy that commences on that folio. For instance, the initial pictured here is “R” for Resurrexi, enclosing an image of the risen Christ, to be sung on Easter.

For its historic 21st century debut, the gradual will be moved to the Houghton Chapel for a special performance by members of Blue Heron Renaissance Choir, a renowned early music ensemble under the direction of Scott Metcalfe. Selected members will sing a portion of the gradual as part of their guest concert at Wellesley College. (For more information about the concert, go to: http://web.wellesley.edu/web/Acad/Music/concertseries.psml).

Students of Art 100 visit Special Collections every year with their professors to study the gradual as a prime example of the technique, materials, and design of an Italian renaissance manuscript. When they come this year, they will not only see, but also hear it, thanks to a live recording of the performance on November 6th. The Durant gradual’s delicate art will be fully infused with the sound of its ancient, sacred music — merging its visual and aural beauty once again.

**Concert**

**Saturday, November 6, 2010**

**Blue Heron Renaissance Choir**

**Houghton Chapel**

**8:00 p.m.**

A Boston-based ensemble with an international reputation, Blue Heron Renaissance Choir is a vocal ensemble that combines commitment to vivid live performance with the study of original source materials and historical performance practice.

Talk with Director Scott Metcalfe

**Thursday, November 4, 2010**

**11:00 a.m.**

Pendleton Concert Salon (PNW 220)

**AUTHORS ON STAGE**

**Tuesday, November 9, 2010**

Wellesley College Club

Coffee 9:45 a.m. Program 10:30 a.m.

**Suzanne Berne**, Missing Lucile: Memories of the Grandmother I Never Knew

**Ian Frazier**, Travels in Siberia

**Kathleen Kent**, The Wolves of Andover

QUESTIONS? AOS@wellesleyboston.org 781-237-0030

Celebrating our 30th season of Authors on Stage to benefit the Wellesley College Library.

SAVE THE DATE: Our next program is Tuesday, May 3, 2011
What Are We Reading?

We’ve unearthed the scarves and quilts from the closet shelves, and the chill of fall is in the air, but that doesn’t mean we’ve forgotten what we read this summer. The books we enjoyed on the beach or at the cottage may provide a perfect opportunity for a fellow Friend to curl up in a cozy spot with a hot cup of tea for a good read – an ideal way to spend a Sunday afternoon, or any other time!


Barbara Coburn ’52

Much of my reading occurs because of my work environment. The American Antiquarian Society offers fellowships to scholars and creative writers. One book that has just come out is Ilyon Woo’s The Great Divorce: A Nineteenth-Century Mother’s Extraordinary Fight Against Her Husband, the Shakers, and Her Times (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010). Eunice Chapman’s three young children were taken from her by her estranged husband who joined the Shakers in 1814. This book provides an interesting glimpse into the status of married women in the early nineteenth century and the difficulties of obtaining a divorce, even in the face of abuse and abandonment. Although based in fact, it reads like a novel and it is easy to get swept up by the power of the story.

Georgia Barnhill ’66

The subtitle says it all: “The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present.” Written by New York Times Op-Ed columnist Gail Collins, you will find yourself in When Everything Changed (New York: Little Brown & co., 2009) – yes, even if you lived a good part of your life before 1960. And yes, Wellesley is mentioned several times. I learned a lot from it as well as having a good read – there are plenty of great stories here, and some devastating one-liners.

Maud Chaplin ’56

My job at an overnight camp is naturally most demanding during the summer months, so I tend toward re-reading old favorites, rather than choosing new books. This summer, I re-read Under the Tuscan Sun by Frances Mayes (New York: Broadway, 1997). I read the book for the first time a decade ago, when I received a copy as a Christmas gift, and I estimate that I’ve read it about once a year ever since. It combines several of my greatest pleasures: food, houses, and travel. I so enjoy the author’s rich descriptions of her surroundings, and especially of the delicious food and ingredients she eats and prepares. I inevitably find my mouth watering whenever I close the book. In fact, as I write this, I’m considering going to find a snack!

Amanda Zoellner ’03

What have YOU been reading? Share your favorite book with us! Send the title, author, and publication information, along with a brief description of what you enjoyed to newsletter editor Amanda Zoellner ’03 at: azoellner@alum.wellesley.edu
Time to Renew?

Please use the form below and make your check payable to: Wellesley College.
Mail to: Kristy Grinder, Friends of Wellesley College Library, Wellesley College, Office for Resources, Green Hall 259, 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 (graduated in last 5 years)
___ Donor $250

*Entitles Life Membership  **Entitles Durant Society Membership

Name: ___________________________ Class: ___________________________
(if applies)
Street: ___________________________
City: ___________________ State: _______ Zip: _____________
Phone: (____)_________ Email: ___________________________

POSTCARDS

Vintage photographs from Clapp Library Archives

Set #1 - Photographs from 1880 - 1915
Set #2 - Photographs from the 1920s & 1930s
Set #3 - Photographs from the 1940s & 1950s
Set #4 - Photographs from the 1960s & 1970s
Set #5 - Photographs from the 1980s & 1990s

Each set has two postcards each of eight photos, totaling 16.
Price: $10 per set.

To print an order form and view samples visit www.wellesley.edu/Library/Friends or call 781-283-2872.

Buy A Book at Amazon.com

Wellesley College Library will benefit every time you make a purchase at Amazon.com by simply starting your online shopping at our web site: www.wellesley.edu/Library/Friends

Click on Buy A Book to find our Amazon.com link.

Titles featured at recent programs sponsored by Friends of the Library and Authors on Stage are listed under Buy A Book.

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.
Provost and Dean of the College Andrew Shennan announced to the college community on October 8 that Dr. Ganesan (Ravi) Ravishanker has accepted the position of Chief Information Officer (CIO), succeeding Micheline Jedrey who retired from the College in November 2009. As CIO, Ravi Ravishanker will oversee Wellesley’s libraries and information technology.

Shennan reports, “Ravi brings to the position a deep appreciation for the critical contribution that information services (IS) make to the educational and scholarly work of faculty, students and staff and to the efficient functioning of the College. He is widely admired within the profession as a creative problem solver, someone who combines outstanding technical skills with responsiveness to the needs of IS users. The search committee was deeply impressed by Ravi’s energy and vision and by his demonstrated record of successful innovation within a liberal arts college setting. We are confident that he will help the College to navigate technological change adroitly and successfully and to develop the full potential of a merged organization combining library and information technology. Ravi will take up his position in mid-November, and I am sure that we will all look forward to welcoming him to campus at that time.”

Shennan also thanked the members of the search committee, as well as the IS staff, especially Eileen Hardy and Sandy Roberts, who oversaw the work of IS during the transition.

The Friends of the Library look forward to meeting Ravi and working together in the coming months and years as we continue to support the library.