Summer 1990

Library Notes: Recent Acquisitions [v. 10, no. 2]

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review/vol10/iss2/9

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Recent Acquisitions

Kentuckiana

The University Libraries have recently acquired a copy of William "King" Solomon: 1775-1854 by Lexington historian Burton Milward. This account of a drunken vagrant who became a hero of the town for his initiative during the cholera plague of 1833 is documented by contemporary and subsequent records of Solomon's life. The book is illustrated with Gen. Samuel Woodson Price's portrait of Solomon, which now hangs in the Bodley-Bullock House on Gratz Park. The libraries hold one of twenty-six copies of the book printed on Japanese Iyo paper and hand bound by Carolyn Whitesel with her own decorated papers; it holds also one of the 500 copies printed on Mohawk paper. The books were printed by Gray Zeitz at his Larkspur Press in Monterey, Kentucky. The text was first printed in 1974 at the King Library Press.

Other books recently acquired by the libraries include an 1852 Lexington imprint, The Medical Experience of Thirty Years' Practice, in the Treatment of Certain Acute and Chronic Diseases. The text was printed at the office of the Lexington Observer & Reporter for Dr. John L. Price of Sydenham, Jessamine County, Kentucky. Another recent acquisition is William Sotheby's Oberon; A Poem from the German of Wieland, printed at Newport, Rhode Island in 1810. This two-volume set, still in its original calf binding, contains the small, printed, oval ticket of the early Lexington bookbinder and bookseller William Essex. This set of Oberon, moreover, was once the property of Kentucky's first native historian, Humphrey Marshall. A Kentucky title of more recent vintage is the late Charles Landrum's A Kentucky Family, printed in Lexington in 1990, with an introduction by Dr. Thomas D. Clark, Historian Laureate of Kentucky.

The libraries have also recently obtained an autograph letter of Cassius M. Clay of White Hall, dated 9 August 1851 and addressed to Mrs. E. O. Smith of Brooklyn, New York. In writing to Mrs. Smith, a feminist lecturer, Clay states, "you are right—much remains to be done for women, only by women," and he
discusses questions of women’s apparel. “When you get your newspaper under way,” Clay writes further, “be pleased to consider me a subscriber. I should be exceedingly happy if you carry out your views, or the views of your friends in this respect.” Clay closes sympathetically, encouraging Mrs. Smith to correspond—“your pleasures, your cares, your hopes, designs, and whatever else that may interest you will employ also my thoughts.”

Bell Court Again

Following the appearance in The Kentucky Review, fall 1989, of “Some Muniments of Bell Court, Lexington,” describing the acquisition by the libraries of a group of papers of the Bell family, Mr. Burton Milward discovered and forwarded a transcription of a contemporary newspaper account of the burning of Woodside, the home of David Bell. “A Big Fire. The Elegant Suburban Residence of Mr. D. D. Bell Totally Destroyed” appeared in the Lexington Weekly Press of Wednesday, 2 July 1884, and dates the burning of the Bell House to the evening of Saturday, 28 June. The structure “caught fire in a servant’s room over the kitchen.” “The servant,” explains the report, “had gone away and left her lamp burning and it is supposed that the lamp exploded and fired the room.” In spite of its gallant efforts, the fire department was thwarted by a burst hose, the temporary absence of the engine horses, and the exhausting of the water supply from Woodside’s three wells. The great house was doomed, and “all that could be done was to stand by and see the magnificent mansion reduced to ruins.” About half of the Bell family furniture was saved, as well as Mrs. Bell’s diamonds. Mr. Bell estimated the value of the house at $25,000, although it was insured for only $10,000 according to a news brief, “Mr. Bell’s Insurance,” in the Daily Press of 1 July. The total furnishings were valued at $10,000 but were insured for $2,000. The diamonds were valued at $8,000. The same issue of the Daily Press carried Mr. Bell’s “card” of 29 June: “I take this means of expressing my thanks to my friends and the citizens of Lexington and the Fire Department and Police force for the noble manner in which they labored Saturday night to save my property. I wish to assure them all that I shall always remember their kindness with the sincerest gratitude.”

Following the fire, Woodside was replaced by Bell Place, and after the turn of the century the grounds of Bell Place were
subdivided to form Bell Court. Architectural historian Clay Lancaster, who grew up on Bell Court's Russell Avenue and lived next door to Mayor W. T. Congleton, recalls in his essay "My Father's Bungalow" (The American Bungalow: 1880-1930 [New York: Abbeville Press, 1985], p. 252), "When I came from downtown, along Main Street, with its noise and smell of traffic, a great peace settled over me as I turned into the quiet of Bell Court. Many people walked, in those days, and people sat on their front porches in the late afternoons and evenings, talking and visiting, while the children played together in the yard. Sometimes we could persuade my mother to perform on the piano in the living room, and some of us would sing. It was a friendly, sociable atmosphere. People lived just close enough together and just far enough apart, and the neighborhood was agreeably cloaked in verdancy." The Bell Court neighborhood described here by Clay Lancaster remains almost entirely intact, and on 14 June 1990 was accorded historic zoning protection by the Lexington Fayette Urban County Government.

—James D. Birchfield
The Woodridge Spears Collection
Mrs. Eve Spears has generously contributed to the libraries the personal papers of her late husband, Prof. Woodridge Spears. Dr. Spears was Professor of English at Georgetown College as well as a poet and musician, an artist and linguist. The collection is rich in many ways. The large number of books reflects Dr. Spears's work and his eclectic tastes in literature and the classics. Another portion of the collection is composed of manuscripts, including more than three hundred letters from the celebrated Kentucky author Jesse Stuart, Dr. Spears's boyhood teacher, fellow writer, and life-long friend. Also included is correspondence with the Kentucky writer Elizabeth Madox Roberts. The Woodridge Spears Collection is an important addition to the humanities holdings of the University Libraries.

Letters of Willie Snow Ethridge
Dr. Henry C. Simpson III has contributed thirty-six personal letters written by Kentucky author Willie Snow Ethridge to the libraries. The letters cover the years from 1975 until 1982, the year of Mrs. Ethridge's death. Willie Snow Ethridge was the author of some fifteen books, and came to prominence in the early 1940s with such light-hearted publications as I'll Sing One Song and This Little Pig Stayed Home, which provided a humorous look at a wartime family in Kentucky.

Mrs. Ethridge was a native of Georgia, but her husband, Mark, was the publisher and chairman of the board of the Louisville Courier-Journal and the Louisville Times. His work there made her a Prospect, Kentucky resident. His later work as the U.S. representative in the United Nations' Palestine Commission set her off on a series of humorous travel books, including Going to Jerusalem, Let's Talk Turkey, and It's Greek to Me. The libraries are very pleased to add Dr. Simpson's informative and insightful letters from Mrs. Ethridge to our Kentucky writers holdings.
—Paula Leach Pope