

tures, and the Curti graduate fellowships all make manifest the admiration and affection in which he was so long held by his associates.

Curti's first wife, Margaret Wooster, died in 1961. In 1968 he married Frances Bennett Becker, who predeceased him in 1978. His daughter Nancy Alice Holub died in 1994. He is survived by his daughter Martha (Mother Felicitas Curti, O.S.B.), three grandsons, and a great-granddaughter.

Kathryn Preyer

DOROTHY BURNETT PORTER WESLEY

We met Dorothy Porter Wesley on October 16, 1979, at the Worcester Club dinner preceding the Annual Meeting of the American Antiquarian Society. She had recently married her longtime friend, Charles H. Wesley, and he was with her that evening. We had been eager to meet Charles, the eminent historian and former president of Wilberforce and of Central State universities. He was a wonderful raconteur and repository of information, but it was Dorothy who was the absolute delight of the evening: so much energy and dynamism packed in so small a frame! She was possessed of a keen intelligence, irreverence, wit, and charm. We became instant friends.

Dorothy was elected to membership in the Society in 1970, but she had been a researcher here for years. Librarian Robert W. G. Vail opened the library for her on evenings and weekends in 1932 while she was working on her Master's Thesis for Columbia University's School of Library Science so that she could complete her research in as short a time as possible. Her 1936 article entitled 'Library Sources for the Study of Negro Life and History,' published in the *Journal of Negro Education*, documents her high regard for AAS: 'The writer, a few years ago while trying to locate

imprints written by American Negroes prior to 1835, discovered that the majority of the titles found were in the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Mr. Vail, the Librarian, does not know how many titles there are in the library on the Negro and slavery, but he writes that there are "thousands of them." The only extant issues, as far as is known, of *Rights of All*, a Negro newspaper first issued May 29, 1829, are in this library. It has among other rare volumes the *Colored American* for 1837 and 1838, an early Negro newspaper now rare and important to research workers. The Society has published in its proceedings documents of interest to the Negro. One of the few known diaries giving information on the African Slave trade was edited by George A. Plimpton and reprinted by the Society from its proceedings.' Dorothy's revised thesis, 'Early American Negro Writings: A Bibliographical Study,' was published in 1945 in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*. In this still-unsurpassed bibliography, she remarked on one unique copy of a sermon by John Marrant as follows: 'A separately bound copy of the very sermon seen in the library of the American Antiquarian Society had been valued at ten cents probably by Isaiah Thomas, the early historian of American printing. Today it is worth many dollars.'

Roger Butterfield recommended her for membership in the Society, describing her in a letter to Marcus A. McCorison as 'the leading scholar and bibliographer of Negro literature and historical materials—and the organizer these days of young black librarians and bibliographers across the nation. She is a bookwoman in every sense—and a charming and most attractive lady.' A subsequent letter from Butterfield described her as 'a sparkling personality. . . . Her election would be a great inspiration to the kind of scholarship the Society is most noted for.' She was delighted with the honor of being elected a member, but was also direct in her recommendations and admonitions. When Richard Steele, Chairman of the Society's Committee on Nominations, wrote asking for names of prospective members, she responded: 'Should you need to fill a vacancy on the Council, I would like to

recommend a woman. I will think about one of the not too many women in the AAS.'

Born in Warrenton, Virginia, May 25, 1905, she was raised in Montclair, New Jersey, where her father—an early graduate of Howard University—was a physician. She attended Miner Normal School, about which, she once wrote, 'I will say only that I loved to go into the library and that my best friend was the librarian, Lula Allan, a graduate of Simmons College Library School and a former assistant librarian at Howard University. . . . Miss Allan, realizing my love for books, urged me, upon the receipt of my diploma in June 1925, to go to Columbia University. . . . That fall Miss Allan went on sick leave from her library position for a year and left me in charge of the library. . . . This was my first underpaid library job, but a wonderful one.'

Dorothy graduated from Howard University in 1928 and enrolled at Columbia, spending summers as an assistant at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library. Her professional career was spent at Howard, where she began work in 1930 while still completing her library science degree. As 'Librarian in charge of the Negro Collection,' she promptly began removing many rare items from the general collections and locating them in the research room under her direction. A friend of all the early black bibliophiles and collectors of her day, she worked closely with both Jesse E. Moorland (whose own library had been donated to Howard in 1914) and Arthur B. Spingarn, and was instrumental in arranging the purchase of his collection for what then became known as the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. A faithful reader of the obituary columns, she regularly turned up at the homes of recently-deceased black residents of Washington, to make certain that rare and valuable items were not carelessly discarded by descendants. As her friend Charlotte Price once remarked, 'She was in peoples' houses before the bodies were cold. She was a real go-getter.' Under her direction for more than four decades, the collection grew from 3,000 to 180,000 catalogued items.

The nine-volume published catalogue of the Moorland-

Spingarn Research Library (G. K. Hall, 1970) and the two-volume catalogue of the Arthur B. Spingarn Collection of Negro Authors are enduring monuments to her scholarship. The former contains thousands of added entries and indexed notes from periodical articles, and a marvelous 250-page index to biographical sketches of Afro-Americans found in obscure sources. It was designed with undergraduate and graduate student research needs in mind. Both catalogues are superb bibliographies to the field of Afro-American studies. Equally important as a tribute to her excellence as a librarian are the hundreds of books on Afro-American life and culture whose authors gratefully acknowledge her wise counsel and assistance.

Dorothy's years at Howard spanned the most glorious period in the history of the university, when segregation meant that virtually all Afro-American academics were restricted to teaching at Howard, Fisk, Atlanta, or other historically black institutions. Howard was the pinnacle of this educational establishment and Benjamin Brawley, Sterling Brown, Ralph Bunche, W. Montague Cobb, John Hope Franklin, E. Franklin Frazier, Alain Locke, Arnold Hamilton Maloney, Kelly Miller, James A. Porter, Charles H. Wesley, and many others taught there. She knew them all and ably assisted them in their research. She was early interested in Africa, and recalled sending \$25 in bus fare to a young African student at Lincoln University, Kwame Nkrumah, whom she thought Howard students should hear. (Nkrumah became the first President of the independent nation of Ghana.) She was also a friend of the first President of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikwe, and was invited by him in 1962 to help establish the National Library in Lagos, Nigeria.

In 1988 she was invited to be the Ford Foundation Visiting Senior Scholar in Residence at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University. At age eighty-four she made a profound impact on that institution. She wondered, prior to the first gathering of fellows that year, how well she would fare with a group of Ph.D.-holding colleagues. She was

hardly intimidated, however, and caused general astonishment by reporting that she had the first week written 'only' eighteen pages. Others were still busy unpacking boxes. Colleagues were in awe at the suggestions she offered, offhand, as each described his or her research project for the year. Her own publication record was voluminous; in addition to dozens of bibliographies and nearly one hundred articles and biographical notes, she edited valuable collections of early black writings. Her lecture on the 'Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts,' presented at the October 1985 meeting of the Antiquarian Society, was published in the *Proceedings* in 1986.

We were honored to be her escorts in 1990 when she was one of three women awarded an honorary doctorate by Radcliffe College on the occasion of the inauguration of Linda Wilson as president. She was awarded an honorary degree from Syracuse University in 1989, and over her lifetime she was presented with many medals, plaques, and citations from dozens of organizations. In 1995 she was given the Charles Frankel Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the award presented by President Bill Clinton.

She died 'too soon,' at age ninety-one, on December 17, 1995. Both her first husband, the artist James A. Porter, and Charles H. Wesley predeceased her. She is survived by a daughter, Constance Porter Uzelac.

Nancy and Randall K. Burkett

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