

C. of Holden; Thomas C. of Worcester; and Dr. Ann M. Woodbury of Auburndale—and five grandchildren.

Ronald S. Davis

BETSY BEINECKE SHIRLEY

Betsy Beinecke Shirley was as unique as the rare children's books and related manuscripts and drawings that she collected. Always private in her philanthropy, she never wanted to wave flags but was as fierce and competitive as was necessary in building her library. Her collecting spanned a thirty-five-year period: from 1970 until her death in September 2004, just one month short of her eighty-fifth birthday.

Her father, Walter Beinecke, was the youngest of three brothers (her uncles being Edwin and Frederick) who planned and funded the construction of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Through her mother, Katherine, she was directly related to the Sperry family, of S & H Green Stamps fame. Her brother Walter, Jr. ('Bud'), who spent most of his life developing real estate holdings on Nantucket and who died four months before Betsy, was also a collector and his remarkable collection of James M. Barrie and 'Peter Pan' material is also preserved at the Beinecke. Betsy was also predeceased by her husband of fifty-five years, Carl Shirley. She is survived by their two daughters, Jody Gill and Betsy Michel and their husbands, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Soon after the birth of her first grandchild Betsy began buying American children's books to demonstrate America's historical and literary heritage. She began by visiting Seven Gables Bookshop in New York City, the premier antiquarian dealer for American literature, but insisting on introducing herself only by her married name, few cupboards were opened. Their secretary Alex Schultz finally suggested that she visit me, a young bookseller who

had recently opened a shop in Manhattan specializing in rare and collectible juveniles. Betsy was full of enthusiasm, and I was glad to meet a new customer, not realizing that this would develop into a close relationship over the next four decades. On that first visit she purchased a 1920s American edition of *Pinocchio* illustrated by the great Italian artist Attilio Mussino, and the Domino Press picture book of *Daniel Boone* (Paris, 1931).

At this time there were not many collectors for early American chapbooks and only two or three institutional libraries were interested. Children's literature was on the verge of becoming legitimized as a field of collecting, but with few reliable reference books published, it was still untrodden territory. Some of the great private collections were yet to be dispersed: the estate of Benjamin Tighe, the huge library of Edgar Oppenheimer, and even my own modest assemblage of Oz books by L. Frank Baum with its concentration on original illustration art. All went up for auction during the 1970s and offered a fine variety of quality material from which to select. With the moral support of her husband, Betsy's scope in collecting broadened so that eventually she amassed one of the finest collections of American children's books in private hands.

Gradually her reputation as a serious collector grew and her home in Bernardsville, New Jersey, became a frequent mecca for researchers, librarians, book dealers, and other collectors who wanted to see if her library was as good as it was whispered to be; no one was ever disappointed. Betsy knew what she had and mastered her bibliography, often instigating inquiries whenever in doubt. Besides being a constant lender to major exhibitions (often anonymously), she organized four shows entirely from her own collection: 'Instruction with Delight' at Macculloch Hall Historical Museum, Morristown, New Jersey (Autumn 1985); 'From Witches to Wonder-Land' at the New York Public Library (November 1985-January 1986); 'A Child's Garden of Dreams' at the Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania (November 1989-January 1990); and 'Read Me a Story-Show Me a Book'

at the Beinecke Library, Yale University (October–December 1991). She was elected to membership in the Grolier Club in 1980.

Upon her election to the American Antiquarian Society in 1982, she accepted an invitation to visit and take a tour guided by Marcus A. McCorison. Afterwards, she enthusiastically noted that Antiquarian Hall is ‘such a beautiful building—and so many treasures.’ Writing to McCorison on another occasion, she recalled how she would stand in line at a book dealer’s booth ‘waiting for a rare one-and-only, rare early, rare un-recorded, only to get word: “Sorry, AAS wants it.”’ One of the treasures from her own collection, an edition of *The Tour of Doctor Syntax, In Search of the Picturesque*, was given to AAS. She served for a year as a Councillor in 1984; five years later, she joined with fellow members and children’s book collectors, Ruth Adomeit, Lloyd Cotsen, and Linda Lapidés to organize the Society’s first Collectors’ Weekend, ‘Books for American Children.’

Many of her special treasures, some from the seventeenth century, are now at the Beinecke. Her earliest manuscript, a document in the hand of John Eliot from November 22, 1640, comprises George Alcock’s last will and testament. This account of how he wanted his children educated may be the earliest record of educational theory in colonial America. She owned an unrecorded indenture of April 1692 against Mary English, considered, with her husband Philip, to be the only survivor from the Salem Witch Trials; their home was used by their descendant Nathaniel Hawthorne as the prototype for the *House of Seven Gables*. Another eighteenth-century indenture in her collection was the distribution of property signed by the mother-in-law of Boston printer Thomas Fleet, Elizabeth Vergoose (February 21, 1734)—at one time believed to be the original ‘Madam Goose’ (or Mother Goose) of nursery rhyme lore. Among the earliest imprints in her collection were Cotton Mather’s *Addresses to Old Men, and Young Men, and Little Children* (Boston, 1690); Thomas White’s *A Little Book for Little Children* (Boston, 1702); Benjamin Keach’s *War with the Devil, or the Young Man’s Conflict with the*

Powers of Darkness (New York: William Bradford, 1707); and *The Holy Bible in Verse* (Boston, 1717), which uses woodblocks previously made for *The New-England Primer* (c. 1690, of which the first locatable copies date from 1727).

Betsy's collection of eighteenth-century nursery juveniles included *Tom Thumb's Play-Book* (Boston, 1764); Hugh Gainé's first American printing of *Little Goody Two-Shoes* (New York, 1775); *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas, 1787); *Mother Goose's Melody* (Worcester, 1794); and many illustrated chapbooks that bridged into the nineteenth century with their engraved texts and hand-colored pictures by authors such as William Charles, Solomon King, and Fielding Lucas.

She was especially interested in the German emigrant printer Gustav Peters. She managed to acquire examples of most of his work for children produced during the 1820s and 1830s, both books and broadsides printed with German (or English) letterpress. Other special favorites included *The Children's Friend. No. III. A New Year's Present* (New York: Gilley, 1821), considered the earliest known Christmas book printed in America, predating by one year Clement Clark Moore's familiar narrative poem; Samuel Goodrich's *Tales of Peter Parley about America* (Boston, 1827), the first of its genre; the lithographed picture books of the 1840s and 1850s by Augustus Köllner done chiefly for the American Sunday School Union; Winslow Homer's 1858 chapbook edition of *Three Blind Mice* (Boston: E. O. Libby); a first edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* (1863) inscribed by its author to her sister May Alcott (who illustrated Louisa's *Little Women* and was the prototype for Amy); as well as original American editions of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, and countless others published for the first time on this side of the Atlantic.

The collection grew to include a group of letters with a connection to a child or children autographed by notable figures. For example, in a later dated from Mount Vernon on March 23, 1789, five weeks before his inauguration, George Washington

gave advice about good behavior and discipline to his nephew George Steptoe Washington. Twelve-year-old John Quincy Adams wrote from the Spanish port of Ferrol, where his ship was forced in for repairs, to his younger brother Thomas (December 12, 1779). In a letter to his adopted son, Andrew Jackson appeals to the boy to apply himself more diligently to his lessons and become accustomed to writing letters (April 5, 1824). There were letters from Lewis Carroll to American children, from Beatrix Potter to the editor of *Horn Book* magazine, and between Mark Twain and Eugene Field. The collection even included the only extant manuscript of 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' in the handwriting of its author, Sarah Josepha Hale.

Original art for children's books is a feature of the Shirley collection of twentieth-century material. Thanks to her legacy, the Beinecke Library now has remarkable holdings that include the original illustrations for the first edition of *Toby Tyler*; Palmer Cox's *Brownies*; several Gelett Burgess 'Goop' manuscripts; drawings by illustrators such as Johnny Gruelle, W. W. Denslow, Howard Pyle, and Maxfield Parrish, all the way up to Maurice Sendak and as far back as Felix Darley. In nearly each instance there are also copies of the books in which these pictures appeared, showing how they look in print.

Betsy spent the last dozen years of her life creating a filing system of clipped auction records and bookseller descriptions to help determine current fair market value for her collection, though of course many of the special ones were unique and without compare. This is because during most of the 1990s, Betsy and Carl were confronted with an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) challenge to one of their early donations of children's books to Yale University. The local inspector did not understand the appraised value of some boxes of old books, so the IRS called in its own expert. Cross-examination revealed the difficulties: he did not realize that an octavo-size book can be expressed as '8vo' and so he was expecting to see eight volumes for this one title but could only locate one volume. Likewise, he

thought that Mark Twain and Samuel Clemens were two different authors.

When we helped her obtain details on the IRS appraiser, we found that his chief qualification was membership in a national appraisers' association. He had been listed several years earlier in the Yellow Pages as a general properties house appraiser who also worked with industrial equipment and appliances. At the time, Betsy had a puppy named Captain Hook and, on its behalf, she applied for membership in this appraisers' association, writing as the private secretary for 'Capt. Horatio Hook, Retired.' Several weeks later, a membership card and certificate of registration arrived in the mail, and soon thereafter Captain Hook began receiving dealer catalogues. It was Betsy's plan to frame the membership card, certificate, and a photograph of her dog and present them in tax court as a challenge to the IRS appraiser's credentials. But after her detailed response to the government's original challenge, the IRS dropped the entire complaint without penalty. It was a correct and well-deserved vindication because neither Betsy nor Carl ever tried to influence the value of donated materials, but we all regretted that she never had her day in court when Captain Hook would have taken the witness stand.

More than a dozen years ago Betsy wrote: 'My underlying scheme is to present historically the books American children read—from the beginning to the present day. These books were not always the ones intended for them—but somehow they knew better and from their nursery library came the genesis of the American spirit. There is, in fact, no better guide to the history and development of any country than its literature for children.' This was the original philosophy by which Betsy Shirley first began collecting, and with the loving support of Carl, she maintained this vision to the end, always with a touch of gentleness and humor that matched the twinkle in her eyes whenever she spoke of her library.

Justin G. Schiller

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