



# LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## Messenger magazine. Number 38 Spring 1999

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Wisconsin-Madison Libraries, Spring 1999

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# MESSENGER

MAGAZINE







## From the president

As I leave the Presidency, I feel strongly that the Friends have turned a corner and are headed in the right direction. Much credit must be given to the members of the board I have had the distinct pleasure to work with over the last three years. Thanks to their efforts, we are more visible on campus and in the community, and we are having more fun!

News that an additional \$7.5 million for UW System Libraries is included in Governor Thompson's proposed budget allows me to exit optimistically in the belief that the future of our extraordinary libraries is in good hands. In the past year alone, the Friends have:

- increased our membership to more than 400 Friends;
- initiated a well-attended Performance Series, featuring two events: Sybil Robinson in a spectacular one-woman performance of "The Brontes" and Bill Lutes and Martha Fischer in a very entertaining evening of music from Gilbert & Sullivan;
- funded an additional \$15,000 in direct grants to campus libraries for special projects and purchases not covered by annual budgets;
- continued to sponsor our distinguished lecture series, including a special series held in conjunction with the exhibit *Italian Life Under Fascism*, and assisted in bringing noted Italian historian Emilio Gentile to campus;
- provided grants totaling \$7,000 to allow visiting scholars from around the world to use our collections and to make them better known in the scholarly community; and
- sponsored book sales that have netted nearly \$95,000 from seven semiannual sales.

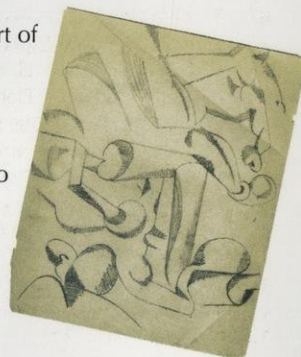
The Friends have benefited from the expert advice of Niki Graham of the UW Foundation and from the hard work of John Tortorice of the General Library System. We are fortunate to have the continued strong support of Ken Frazier, the GLS director, a charming first-rate administrator and a nationally known leader in his profession. We are also indebted to Deb Reilly of the GLS whose wise council has helped the Friends to flourish.

It is with great joy that I leave the presidency of the Friends in the hands of Trudy Barash, a vivacious and talented woman, who is strongly committed to the success of the Friends. I am also very pleased that Ann Nelson, a longtime Friend and benefactor of the libraries, has accepted the vice-presidency.

I extend my sincere thanks to you all for your generosity and support during the course of the last three years.

*ellsworth snyder*  
ellsworth snyder

Pencil sketch by e.e. cummings, part of a gift presented to the UW-Madison libraries by ellsworth snyder, president of the Friends, at a recent Friends board meeting. According to Robin Rider of the Department of Special Collections, "we are delighted by the gift and honored by ellsworth's generosity."



Number 38, Spring 1999

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Jerry Minnich, publisher of the Prairie Oak Press and author of many guidebooks, writes about his first experiences with libraries and gardens when he was growing up in Pennsylvania.



### Honor roll

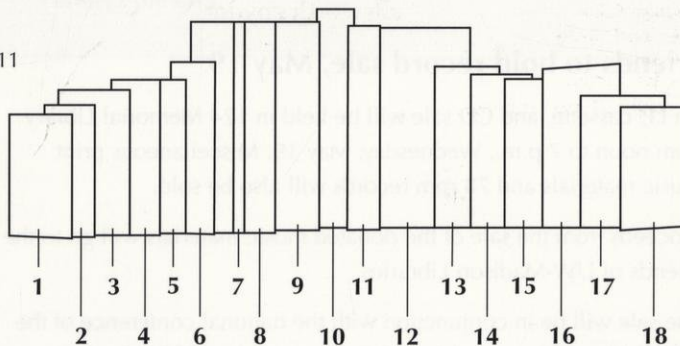
10

The number who count themselves as Friends of the UW-Madison Libraries continues to grow. Nearly 800 people gave money, materials, and time to the UW-Madison libraries last year.

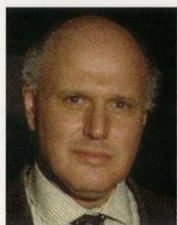
## About the cover

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chemistry books from the William A. Cole Collection appear on the front and back covers of this issue. The gift of 350 books is a significant addition to the library's history of science collections. Photo by Greg Anderson.

- 1 Mark August Pictet. An essay on fire. London, 1791
- 2 Jacob Andreas Weber. Leichtfassliche Chemie. Tübingen, 1793
- 3 Nicolas Lemery. Cours de chymie. Lyon, 1724
- 4 Johann Wolfgang Döbereiner. Lehrbuch der allgemeinen Chemie. Jena, 1811
- 5 Antoine Laurent Lavoisier. Traité élémentaire de chimie. Paris, 1789
- 6 Torbern Bergman. A dissertation on elective attractions. London, 1785
- 7 Henry Cavendish. Experiments on air. London, 1785
- 8 Herman Boerhaave. Elementa chemiae. Vol. 1. Leyden, 1732
- 9 Herman Boerhaave. Elementa chemiae. Vol. 2. Leyden, 1732
- 10 Jean Henri Hassenfratz. La sidérotechnie. Vol. 1. Paris, 1812
- 11 Thomas Thomson. A new system of chemistry. Philadelphia, 1803
- 12 Herman Boerhaave. Elements of chemistry. London, 1735
- 13 Thomas Thomson. The elements of chemistry. Edinburgh, 1810
- 14 Antoine Laurent Lavoisier. Essays physical and chemical. London, 1776
- 15 Claude Louis Berthollet. Eléments de l'art de la teinture. Paris, 1791
- 16 Jons Jacob Berzelius. Essais sur la théorie des proportions chimiques. Paris, 1819
- 17 J. F. John. Handwörterbuch der allgemeinen Chemie. Leipzig, 1817
- 18 William Clarke. The natural history of nitre. London, 1670







## Cambridge scholar to give Friends annual lecture April 21

Cambridge historian Jay Winter will speak at the Friends annual meeting at 5:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 21, in room 160 of the Elvehjem Museum. His lecture is titled "Public History & Historical Scholarship: The Making of the Television Series *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century*."

Winter, a lecturer in history and Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, was chief historian and co-producer of the Emmy-award winning public television series *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century*, first screened on PBS and BBC2 in 1996.

Critics called *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century* "a journey into the intense personal experiences of people trying to make sense of war on a scale the world had never seen."

The television series presented the history of World War I in a new way, interweaving cultural history with well-known political and military events.

Winter has published many books on the First World War, including *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995) and *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919* (1997).

Previous annual speakers for the Friends have included Fannie LeMoine (1996), Nancy Willard (1997), and Marianna De Marco Torgovnick (1998).

The lecture is followed by the Friends annual dinner at the Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street. For information about the Friends and the annual dinner, write the Friends of the UW-Madison Libraries, 976 Memorial Library, 728 State Street, Madison, WI 53706, or call (608) 265-2505 (e-mail: [Friends@macc.wisc.edu](mailto:Friends@macc.wisc.edu)).

## Friends bring Performance Series to libraries

This spring, the Friends of the UW-Madison Libraries added an artistic theme to its well-attended Lecture Series. The Performance Series featured events in February and March.

"Innocent Merriment! An Evening of Songs and Scenes from Gilbert and Sullivan," featured Bill Lutes, formerly of WERN radio, and Martha Fischer, UW-Madison School of Music.



Sybil Robinson

Sybil Robinson, professor emerita of theater and drama at UW-Madison, appeared in a one-woman show "Sybil Robinson Presents the Brontes."

## Friends to hold record sale, May 19

An LP, cassette, and CD sale will be held in 124 Memorial Library from noon to 7 p.m., Wednesday, May 19. Miscellaneous print music materials and 78 rpm records will also be sold.

Proceeds from the sale of the donated music materials will go to the Friends of UW-Madison Libraries.

The sale will be in conjunction with the national conference of the Association of Recorded Sound Collections, hosted by the UW-Madison Mills Music Library, May 19-22.

## KIDS Report now hosted by UW-Madison Libraries

UW-Madison General Library System recently volunteered to host the KIDS Report, a Web site dedicated to educating public school students on how to use information of the World Wide Web.

The site began in 1996 as an Internet project that would respond to the needs of K-12 students and teachers who found the potential for this new communications tool exciting but overwhelming. What emerged was a Web-based project in which students identify, evaluate, and annotate Internet resources relevant and meaningful to the curriculum. Those resources are published on-line twice a month, building a collection of reports available worldwide.

The report represents an ongoing, cooperative effort of



classrooms from eleven school districts around the United States, including four from Wisconsin.

In its short life, the *KIDS* Web site has received awards from *USA Today* and the Global School Network. It was well received in presentations at the Internet Society Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, and at the National Educational Computing Conference in San Diego. Among the agencies linking to the *KIDS* Web site are the United States Department of Justice and the Smithsonian's Arts Edge.



## Hosannas

POEMS BY KATHERINE WHITCOMB

### Parallel Press releases second book

The newly created Parallel Press, an imprint of the UW–Madison General Library System, has published its second book, a collection of poetry by award-winning local poet Katherine Whitcomb titled *Hosannas*.

*Hosannas* is a chapbook of nine of Whitcomb's poems. A chapbook is a small-format literary work, usually of poetry or essays.

The word *hosanna* traditionally refers to a shout of praise or an appeal for deliverance. Whitcomb's poetry addresses both meanings. Informed by her experience driving through the Midwest for 10 years as a traveling sales representative, the poetry reflects her reverence for the region's people and history.

Whitcomb is currently the 1998-99 Halls Poetry Fellow at the UW-Madison's Institute for Creative Writing. From 1996-98 she was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in poetry at Stanford University. She has received the Loft-McKnight Award in Poetry and the Grolier Poetry Prize. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals including: *Kenyon Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

*Hosannas* can be ordered by writing the Silver Buckle Press, 236 Memorial Library, 728 State St., Madison, WI 53706, (608) 263-4929. Each book is \$10 plus \$3 shipping and handling.

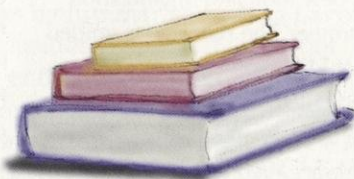
### Friends book sale generates more than \$16,000

The Friends book sale, held in late March, generated more than \$16,000. It is the second time the sales broke the \$16,000 mark. The first was in October 1998.

This four-day event helps fund an annual lecture series, special purchases for the library collections, and a visiting scholar support program. It has also donated \$37,000 to campus libraries through a small-grant program.

The public book sale includes materials donated primarily by UW–Madison faculty, staff, students, and area residents.

Friends board member John Toussaint manages the fund-raiser, which has been held in the spring and fall every year since 1996. The seven sales combined have generated nearly \$95,000 in gross revenues.



## Bookmark

The extensive Bemis/Flaherty Collection of Poetry has been donated to the UW–Madison libraries. It represents nearly 1,600 authors, including poets from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and contemporary America. Some 1,000 separate works plus dozens of anthologies, magazines, and journals are included.

The collection, housed in the Department of Special Collections, provides a permanent record of ephemeral material—limited edition publications that come from small presses and are not widely distributed.

The materials, most of which are by or about gays, were collected during the last three decades by Michael Bemis, himself a librarian in Madison.

"I hope the collection assures a place for these materials in scholarship about gay history and in the history of print culture," he says.



Roy Ortopan and Michael Bemis

According to Yvonne Schofer, humanities bibliographer at Memorial Library, "The collection complements long-standing efforts at the UW–Madison to collect ephemeral materials in its extensive Little Magazine and small press collections."

Roy Ortopan, a cataloger and former librarian from the UW–Madison, is the donor of a sustaining endowment associated with the gift. The endowment was created in honor of James Michael Flaherty (1947-1972).

According to Ortopan, Flaherty was a "remarkable gay person . . . who lived a short, but full life." Ortopan says that he once discussed making a gift to UW-Madison with Flaherty's father in honor of James. "This gift is an opportunity for me to fulfill that commitment."



# NEWS

## Volunteers contribute to the libraries

*Meet new people. Retain your contacts with the university community, and give something back by helping maintain the excellence of a great research library system.*

That is the description that could run in an advertisement calling for volunteers to work for the UW-Madison libraries.

The Friends Volunteer Program continues to rely on a core of committed volunteers who make a crucial difference in ongoing programs. More volunteers are needed, however.

Volunteers assist in a variety of tasks, including installation of exhibits, helping patrons locate materials, repair books in the conservation lab, identify and repair damaged materials, and file photographic images for the University Archives. All volunteers are trained by library staff.

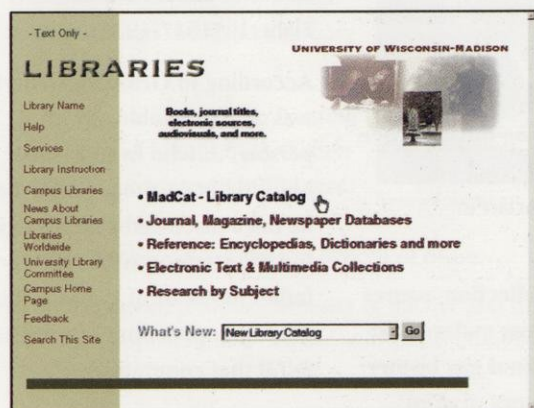
For information on how you can participate in this program, please contact John Tortorice at (608) 265-2505 (e-mail: [tortoric@macc.wisc.edu](mailto:tortoric@macc.wisc.edu)).

## New library catalog and Web site coming this summer

The UW-Madison libraries along with libraries at all UW System campuses will move to a common software for their catalogs this summer. From now until January 2000, libraries system-wide will be installing software under contract with Endeavor Information Systems, Inc.

As part of the migration, the UW-Madison libraries will be introducing a new look and organization in its Web site this summer. The redesign is guided by an extensive user study involving surveys, focus groups, personal interviews, and staff reviews. The site will target novice users in all constituencies who are visiting the library Web site for the first time.

The migration to a new catalog, part of a two-year planning process, was prompted in part by the



need to plan for the new millennium and to upgrade twenty-year-old software.

The new catalog software offers significant improvements. Users will have access to their own circulation records on-line, and individuals eventually will be able to put holds on books in all UW System libraries across the state. The catalog also will be more current, since updated records will be available to users instantaneously.

"It allows us to maximize our resources for the benefit of users and staff alike," says Nolan Pope, associate director for library technology in the General Library System.

Endeavor Voyager was selected after a vigorous review. More than 350 library systems across the country use the software, including Purdue, the state universities in Georgia, and Northwestern.

## Grants program draws scholars from around the world

The Friends of UW-Madison Libraries' grant-in-aid program is entering its eighth year and has provided funds to twenty-seven scholars. Since awarding its first grant in 1992, the program has given a total of \$27,000. The program provides a one-month stipend to support research in any humanities field appropriate to the collections of the UW-Madison libraries. Researchers from as far away as Italy and Germany have used the grants to visit campus libraries and conduct research in areas ranging from African-American women writers to Mediterranean slavery in the Middle Ages.

Two noted Italian scholars from the University of Viterbo have been awarded grants to conduct research in the coming year.

- Fabio Troncarelli, professor of Human Sciences, will research French treatises on witchcraft, magic, and politics. His project will trace changing attitudes towards witchcraft in early modern Europe and how this was used in manipulating public opinion.

- Maria Paula Sacy, lecturer in Early Modern History, will investigate the debate in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries between theologians who portrayed witchcraft as a form of melancholy—the illness that today we could call neurosis or psychosis—and those who firmly believed witches were worshippers of the devil.





# Parting WITH TREASURES

For Bill and Nora Cole, parting with the treasures they had collected through the decades was both difficult and exhilarating. "It was like sending your children off to the university," says Nora.

"We had this great desire to hold them and study them one last time. But we feel so good about them going to Wisconsin."

For nearly a half century, the Coles of Issaquah, Washington, have spent their vacations, and lately their retirement, doing what they love—exploring library collections, searching through used book stores, and visiting book sellers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Their quest? To collect landmark chemistry books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That collection, documented in their book *Chemical literature, 1700-1860*, grew to include works by luminaries such as Lavoisier, Fourcroy, Scheele, and Black. *Chemical literature* is considered an invaluable tool for scholars and collectors.

In December the Coles presented the UW-Madison with hundreds of volumes for its history of science collection. The gift, according to librarian John Neu, is one of the single most important additions to the library's history of science collections in the half century since the Department of Special Collections began.

Bill worked for Shell Development as a physicist. During World War II he served in the U.S. Army. After that he decided to go back to school and do what he wanted, which was teach. He was part of the Los Angeles city school system for twenty-seven years.

Nora, who met Bill on a blind date when both were students at the University of California, Berkeley, became a physical education teacher in the Los Angeles schools. Later, she became supervisor of student teaching at UCLA.

How did they become collectors? "I was interested in books. Period," replies Bill. Their first trip to Europe was a sight-seeing excursion during a sabbatical in 1955. He started out collecting physical sciences. When he realized the category was too big, he concentrated on chemistry, and later just chemistry books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Bill describes Nora as a great partner in their collecting and documenting. She comments, "Now I can recognize some of these old boys when Bill talks about them."

They decided together what items to give to the library, choosing now to say "good-bye" to those treasures to safeguard their safe transfer and to assure their availability to scholars. The books arrived in December, individually wrapped with painstaking care.



## The William A. Cole Collection

by John Neu, History of Science Bibliographer

In December of 1998, the Department of Special Collections received from William and Nora Cole of Issaquah, Washington, some 350 editions of eighteenth and nineteenth century chemistry books. Behind this major gift, probably the most important addition to the library's history of science collections, lies a long friendship with the Coles, one that dates from 1967 with a letter from Bill beginning:

*"Dear Mr. Neu — I am working on a catalog of my collection of history of chemistry books (chiefly eighteenth century) and have run into a problem which I believe you might resolve if it is not too much trouble."*

Bill, who had retired from teaching chemistry in Los Angeles, had been collecting books for some time, both in travels abroad with his wife, Nora, and through the services of such legendary booksellers as the late Emil Offenbacher and Jake Zeitlin. His retirement was devoted not only to adding to his collection but to a bibliographically detailed catalog of the books. That careful attention to the physical makeup of his books—an attempt to determine the contents of a perfect copy—led Bill and Nora on many trips to institutions with especially important collections of early chemistry, where they could compare the Cole copy

with the contents of several other copies. In 1955 Memorial Library acquired the famous Denis Duveen collection of early books in chemistry and alchemy and had for many years been active in adding to that distinguished collection, so the Coles arrived one October day in 1975 to spend four days in the old Rare Book Department on the fourth floor, examining many of our chemistry books. I remember being impressed with how diligently both Bill and Nora worked—hardly breaking for lunch—and with how Bill always knew exactly what he was looking for.

We became good friends from that first of several visits. In 1977, when the library was informed by the university administration that

funds were available for purchase of especially important collections, my first thought was of the Cole collection. Not without some reluctance, Bill agreed to sell those books from his collection that Memorial Library did not already own. Working through Jake Zeitlin, Bill's favorite bookman and close friend, the Library acquired some 700 editions of chemical books from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, including such great rarities as Lavoisier's own copy of the second edition of his seminal *Traité élémentaire de chimie* (Paris, 1793), and the long-sought-after first edition of Nicolas Lemery's *Cour de chymie* (Paris, 1675). Because the Duveen collection consisted predominantly of sixteenth and seventeenth century books and the Cole collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century works, together the two comprised one of the richest sources of chemical texts available to historians.

Bill Cole kept a large part of his collection intact, and continued to add to it as he completed his catalog of the collection. That catalog, *Chemical literature, 1700-1860: A bibliography*, was published by Mansell of London in 1988. Without doubt it is the most bibliographically detailed study available of the contents of chemical books and has become the indispensable standard citation to any of the almost 1,400 titles described, providing a wealth of information on variations of editions, illustrators, translators, and locations.

Bill and Nora Cole continued their contacts with Memorial Library and in 1988 presented the Library with a magnificently bound set of the first American edition of Rees' *Cyclopaedia: or universal dictionary of arts, sciences, and literature* (Philadelphia, 1805-1825). In 1991, a gift of Carl Wilhelm Scheele's *Chemische Abhandlung von der Luft und dem Feuer* (Uppsala und Leipzig, 1777) added to our library the extraordinarily rare first edition of this work, describing Scheele's independent discovery of oxygen.

One day last year, Bill called to say that he and Nora had decided to present most of his remaining collection to Memorial Library. I visited them last November in their retirement condominium in Issaquah, a suburb of Seattle,





to help with arrangements for shipping the books. The books arrived, all carefully wrapped by Nora, in December, to take their place on the shelves in the Department of Special Collections alongside the original Cole purchase.

Two things strike one immediately when looking at these beautiful books. First is their extraordinary condition, most in their original bindings—something especially uncommon for early chemical books as they were often used rather carelessly in laboratories. The first official edition of Boerhaave's lectures, *Elementa chemiae*, Leyden (1732) for example, is a magnificent large-paper copy, uncut, in two quarto volumes in original three-quarters calf over boards. Next to it stands the almost as impressive first unabridged English translation (*Elements of chemistry*, London, 1735), bound in full calf.

These books also illustrate the second important aspect of the Cole collection—the extraordinarily large number of editions of individual works, both in their original language and in various translations. Essential to the research value of a collection, these long runs of editions allow the historian to trace the development of scientific ideas from their original presentation in print through their evolution as they are received and reacted to by the international community of scientists. The present Cole gift adds numerous editions of important texts by Fourcroy, Chaptal, Bergman, Lavoisier, and other less well known chemists to the already extensive number of editions contained in the original Cole purchase.

Since he is still actively working on parts of his collection and on a supplement to his catalog, Bill has retained many works of great interest, including much manuscript material. His interest in chemical lectures led him to purchase manuscripts of courses in chemistry by such influential eighteenth-century figures as Black, Rouelle, and Lemery. An especially important section of Bill's library is devoted to multiple editions of the works of Pierre-Joseph Macquer, including a quarto edition of his famous *Dictionnaire de chimie*, one of only five copies on large, fine paper. Bill also has a large reference library and many artifacts, such as portraits and commemorative

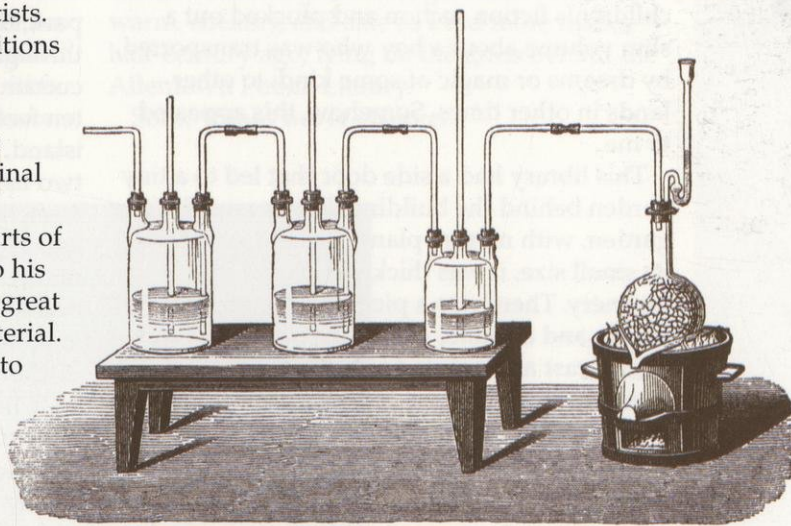
medals of chemists, and examples of chemical apparatus. All of this material, Bill has indicated, will eventually become part of the Cole collection at UW-Madison.

William Cole's immense knowledge of both the contents and the physical makeup of the books in his collection is apparent after only a few moments with him as he describes the circumstances of their purchase or the implications of an almost illegible signature on a fly-leaf. The extent of that knowledge is obvious to anyone who pages through the magnificent catalog of his collection—the record of years of research into the details of the development of chemistry as evidenced in its printed literature. What the printed catalog cannot show, however, is the quiet enthusiasm and the patient determination that enabled the collector to assemble such an impressive array of books. In my many meetings with Bill and Nora Cole over the years, I have been privileged to share that enthusiasm.

The decision by the Coles to present the Cole collection to Memorial Library will now make it readily available to a community of historians. Preserved in the Department of Special Collections, it will remain a record of the skill and knowledge of its collector, and of the great generosity of Bill and Nora Cole.



Nora and Bill Cole



Background image: From Colin MacKenzie, *One thousand experiments in chemistry* (1821).

Above: From H. Debray, *Cours élémentaire de chimie* (1863).



# A Small GARDEN

By Jerry Minnich

I was ten years old when I discovered the sanctuaries of reading and gardens. The discoveries were simultaneous. Writing came later.

This was in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a blue-collar town in the heart of the blue-collar Lehigh Valley (Bethlehem Steel, et al), and we were a blue-collar family, although my mother disapproved of the designation and fought against it, and against my father, with all the stubbornness of her Welsh heritage. We were not exactly a *Leave-It-to-Beaver* family.

The Allentown Public Library was located smack in the heart of downtown, a few doors from the city's busiest intersection, and I was required, in the Indian summer of my fifth-grade year, to search out something or other at the library. It was my first visit.

In the library, it was only moments before I became distracted and forgot completely about the school assignment. I wandered into the children's fiction section and plucked out a slim volume about a boy who was transported, by dreams or magic of some kind, to other lands in other times. Somehow, this appealed to me.

This library had a side door that led to a tiny garden behind the building. It was an old garden, with mature plantings, and so, despite its small size, it was thickly enclosed in greenery. There was a picnic table and one bench, and a round, child-size table and three stools, cast and painted to look like spotted mushrooms, red and white. It was in this garden, lying on the soft, warm grass, that I began to read the book, whose title I cannot remember.

In everyone's life there are defining moments, experiences that function as turning points, for good or for bad. This was a turning point for me. And a good one, occurring on this postage-stamp size piece of urban land.

I returned often to the library garden that autumn, and even more often the following summer, to lie on the grass or sit at the picnic bench and read. Or even not to read. Since the library was only four blocks from my home, I could visit often, and I did just that. On every visit, the soft green walls enveloped me, muffling not only the traffic on the street outside but other matters as well.

As I continued through childhood and into the teen years, I continued to experience gardens as sanctuaries. Oh, sure, there was my father's vegetable and flower garden, but my time spent there was mostly in work, digging out lamb's-quarters and purslane and dandelions, and tapping Japanese beetles into a jar of kerosene. But I sought out other gardens, richly green and private places that became almost mystical to me. When I was twelve, my first bike allowed me to range more widely through town, and it was then that I discovered a secret island garden in a city park, this park quite large. I had to slip through some thick shrubs and through a curtain of trailing willow branches, then wade ten feet through shallow water to reach the island, which was just large enough to hold two large weeping willows, each with slender branches that fell fountain-like to the ground. Secured within the embrace of the willow branches, I knew that this was the very definition of a sanctuary. And I never met anyone else on the island. It was mine.

Gardens are many things to many people. But I believe that sanctuary might be the most treasured gift that any garden provides. I had the privilege recently of visiting the gardens at Versailles, and although I was ambivalent about this study in excess—at once beautiful and obscene—even those grand gardens must have offered sanctuary of a sort to Louis, after he had spent months in the madness of the royal palace in Paris. It's a matter of principle, not of scale.



Detail of elder, or *Sambucus [nigra]*. From Philip Miller, *The gardener's and botanist's dictionary* (London: Printed for F.C. and J. Rivington, 1807). Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library.



A garden also acts as a bridge between mankind and wilderness. It is a benign green space that we create for ourselves, either singly or as a community, to answer some deep need for softening life's sharp edges. I certainly can appreciate John Muir's love of total wildness—I can fairly picture him scrambling in the night down a rocky mountainside, exalting in a thunderstorm, all of God's creation exploding around him—but when the need for solace appears, a quiet green garden is there to answer.

A garden affirms our chosen place in the natural order. We are the only species, after all, that can appreciably influence its environment. And whether this influence is good or bad (and doubtless it is usually and mostly bad), the fact remains that we have this power and we exercise it daily and inexorably. It is not a question of whether we want to change the environment; it is a matter of how. Even pure conservationists have come to believe that active management is necessary to environmental preservation.

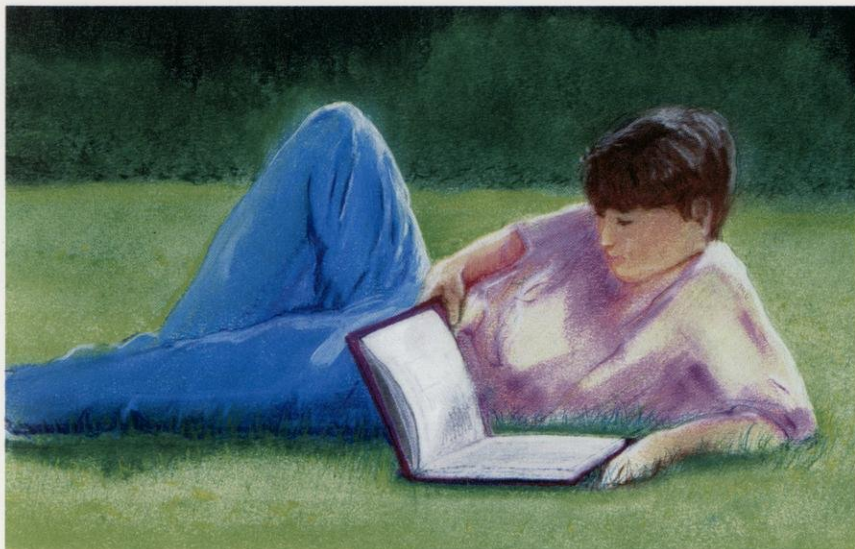
A garden, then—whether it be large and public or small and private—is one reflection of our chosen relationship to the world around us. This considered relationship is a power we have, unique to our species, it cannot be denied. And how we exercise it tells much about who we are, and what kind of world we will leave to future generations.

A garden also represents our accommodation with the natural world. When we choose to be the gardener, we make a deal with nature: we will abide by certain rules in growing plants, and the plants will accede to our shaping them somewhat to our needs and pleasures. We will supply water, loamy soil, a modicum of nutrients, and moderate temperatures, and the impatiens will bloom brightly from May to October. When we hike through the Chequamegon National Forest, we admit to being on foreign turf. When a weeping fig is growing in a pot by the living room window, it is on our turf. But the outdoor garden is a meeting place, where bargains are silently made and kept.

I have kept many gardens in my life, none of them expertly, but all of them with a never-ending sense of wonder and appreciation of the life force that is everywhere in every garden. Today I have a small, urban backyard garden full of flowers and ornamental shrubs. Among the roses, the hollies, the alpine currants, the climbing clematis and bittersweet, I still feel that wonder. And sometimes, when I take a book out to the back deck overlooking the little garden, I feel just as warm, dreamy, and safe as I did more than a half-century ago, lying on the grass behind the Allentown Public Library.

Some things never change.

**Jerry Minnich**  
is publisher of *Prairie Oak Press* and author of many Wisconsin guidebooks. He is a member of the board of directors of the Friends of the UW-Madison Libraries. His essay, "A Small Garden," first appeared in *A Place to Which We Belong: Wisconsin Writers on Wisconsin Landscapes*, published by the 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin Land Use Institute.  
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